



RAUL MIDÓN

Biography
2009-2010

Search for “Raul Midón” on YouTube and you’ll find a clip of the New York-based vocalist, guitarist, and songwriter appearing on *The Late Show With David Letterman* in 2006. Performing “State of Mind,” the title track from his 2005 debut album, Midón unleashes a silky, soulful tenor and dazzling percussive guitar style — a syncopated, flamenco- and jazz-infused approach in which bass, harmony, and melodic lines emanate from the fretboard in one slap-happy storm. If that weren’t enough, Midón busts out his improvisational mouth horn technique, in which he creates a bebop “trumpet” solo entirely with his lips, earning himself a spontaneous burst of mid-song applause from the audience in the process. It’s a virtuosic performance, and one that reveals what has made Midón such an exciting artist to watch over the past few years.

The New Mexico native funnels all that creativity and fiery passion into his third album, *Synthesis*, which he recorded in Los Angeles in June 2009 with legendary producer and bassist Larry Klein, who is noted for his work with such luminaries as Joni Mitchell, Herbie Hancock, and Peter Gabriel. A genre-defying blend of soul, pop, jazz, folk, and Latin elements, *Invisible Chains* showcases Midón’s evolution as an artist as he sets some of his more biting insights about betrayal, fear, loss, and the American Dream to deceptively up-tempo swinging rhythms and deliriously catchy melodies. While “Never Really Gave,” “Don’t Take It That Way,” and “Invisible Chains” crackle with tart observation, songs like “Next Generation,” “Call My Name,” and “Moment to Moment” strike a more uplifting tone.

“Larry encouraged me to write from a different perspective than I have in the past,” Midón says of the lyrics on *Synthesis*. “I’ve written a lot of songs about hope and inspiration and that sort of thing, which is cool, but there are other aspects to life. I’ve tried to expand my repertoire a bit. This is not a record about trying to enhance somebody’s understanding of my woes. It’s more about trying to go deep into just how it is to live life and all the different things you feel. Like how you can be very angry at somebody and still love them, or how you meet people who teach you things, but you don’t want to be like them. I’m talking about how I feel about the world and how I fit into it.”

Midón has always experienced the world differently than most. The son of an Argentinean father and an African-American mother (who died when Midón was young), Raul was born prematurely in a rural hospital in Embudo, New Mexico, where he and his twin brother, Marco, were blinded as infants after spending

time in an incubator without adequate eye protection. “At the time, they didn’t know you have to protect the eyes from the oxygen of the incubator,” Midón says, “so a generation of people were blinded in that way.” Marco now works for NASA as an electrical engineer while Raul followed a musical path inspired by his father, a professional Argentine folkloric dancer with a diverse record collection that included Beethoven and Mozart, progressive composers John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen, and jazz greats Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, and Sonny Rollins.

“We were the kind of family who would put on a record and sit and listen to it, not have it play in the background and go about our business,” Midón recalls. “It was like an event.” Young Raul began playing hand drums at age 4 before shifting his focus to guitar while he and Marco attended a school for the blind from age 5 to 15. “I don’t believe that blindness makes you a better musician,” Midón says. “I think perhaps it focuses you in a very pragmatic way. I knew I had limited job possibilities, but the Midóns don’t believe in backup plans — like ‘Do music, but get your teaching degree in case it doesn’t work out.’ That’s never been our modus operandi. I knew that I had this talent, so blindness focused me on developing that talent. But I don’t think it made me play better. Most of the great musicians I know can see.”

After completing his final two years of high school at a Santa Fe prep school, Midón attended the University of Miami, which he selected for its prestigious jazz curriculum. He remained there after graduating and became an in-demand backup singer, working primarily in the Latin-pop world for such artists as Julio and Enrique Iglesias, Shakira, Ricky Martin, and Alejandro Sanz. He also worked the club circuit, sprinkling the requisite cover songs amid the original tunes he was beginning to write. In 2002, Midón walked away from his lucrative work as a back-up singer to pursue a career as a solo artist in New York City.

“I was making a living as a professional musician, but I wasn’t pursuing art,” Midón says. “In Miami, you played your songs in a seafood restaurant as background music, and at some point you would get the request for ‘Margaritaville.’ It’s very different than playing in New York where people go to hear original music.” Yet Midón’s first year in Manhattan didn’t pan out as he’d expected (a period he chronicles on *State of Mind*). His experience singing back-up on countless Latin-pop records didn’t mean automatic work, so he found a gig playing in between sets by a Top 40 band at a club in the West Village, where he began to develop his show-stopping performance style.

“I took on this warrior approach to playing guitar,” Midón says. “Like a ‘You have to pay attention to this because you’ve never heard or seen anything like it before’ kind of thing.” He began to attract attention and eventually landed a monthly residency at highly regarded downtown club Joe’s Pub. In 2003, he was approached backstage to perform at a show called “The Movie Music of Spike Lee,” at Carnegie Hall, along with Terence Blanchard, Angie Stone, Cassandra

Wilson, and Bruce Hornsby. Midón received a standing ovation, a rave in the *New York Times*, and, eventually, an audience with legendary producer Arif Mardin, who signed him and co-produced *State of Mind*, which garnered critical accolades for its heady fusion of old-school soul, Latin, jazz, and timeless singer/songwriter folk-pop.

For the next several years, Midón made a name for himself touring throughout the U.S., Europe, and Japan, then released his second solo album, *A World Within a World*, in 2007, which, with its uplifting lyrics about social consciousness and insinuating grooves, went a long way toward further establishing Midón as an artist “who contributes something lasting to the musical landscape,” as NPR said of him. *Guitar Player* called Midón “one of those rare musical forces that remind s how strong and deep the connection between man and music can sometimes be.”

Now comes *Synthesis*, which Midón began working on last summer, demoing the songs at his home studio using a PC-based software program called Sonar, which makes Windows accessible to blind people. “The company that makes it is called Dancing Dots,” Midón explains, “and the program allows you to edit audio and have access to the things that everyone uses in recording, like compressors, reverb, effects, MIDI — all on a professional level. So each demo I recorded served as a way to figure out how to do something else in my studio.”

In June 2009, Midón arrived in Los Angeles to begin recording with Klein, whose previous work with so many beloved singer-songwriters Midón credits with making his voice sound more alive than he’d ever heard it recorded. “I wanted to work with someone I can communicate with as a musician, who has that background and vocabulary, particularly harmonically,” he says. “Larry is the kind of producer who is coming from where I’m coming from.”

Midón and Klein agreed that all the elements should be acoustic. “I wanted to get back to organic recording,” Midón says. “We did more programming on the last record, and I wanted the new album to feature real musicians playing. So it’s guitars, bass, drums, vocals, and not a lot of effects.” The band includes session vets Vinnie Colaiuta (drums), Paulinho Da Costa (percussion), Dean Parks (guitar), and Jamie Muhoberac (keyboards), as well as Klein on bass. The result is an intimate, classic-sounding album that is sure to delight newcomers to Midón’s music and those who’ve been following his remarkable talent for years.

“I’ve always been interested in combining elements,” Midón says. “This album has elements of soul and pop. There are some improvisational elements. There are some songs that are perhaps a bit challenging musically, but my hope is that the album appeals to a broad audience. I think there’s something here for everyone.”

Synthesis will be released by Universal in fall 2009 in Europe and Japan and in

Spring 2010 in the United States.

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