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LIVE MUSIC REPORT : LADY SON?

Current mood: good?

Category: Music

Our Lady of Son

by Dan Donaldson — Photo by Roger Humbert

For men in Latin Music, there are a hundred heroes to emulate: for women there is one that stands above all others. Lady Son, who took to the Lula Lounge stage Saturday, may be as close as Toronto will get to our own Celia Cruz.

Lady Son started to get noticed when she appeared on Toronto's Latin scene almost a year ago, and since then, she's gone from strength to strength, refining a fluid, driving sound that propels the dance floor and gives props to a long and glorious tradition rooted in Cuba. Her 9-piece band, Articulo Veinte, has been there the whole way, tighter than many bands with many more years of playing behind them.

Articulo Veinte is a horn-driven band, with a sound that veers into NuYorican/Fania territory. Patrick Blanchard is a mainstay on trombone, and Teppei Kamai on trumpet doubles on vocals. Both are players that keep the sound of Lady Son solid, if without high-note fireworks. But in this Lula show, electrified tr s guitarist Ilan Alleson sat in for both the regular guitarist and, by providing the montuno that drives Cuban Son, the regular keyboard player, Joshua Ariz as well. Ariz is a flamboyant player, and a keystone of the band, but Alleson managed to connect both sets to the Cuban vibe.

Yeti Ajasin (Lady Son)

Kicking off with a Puerto Rican standard, "Lloraras", made famous by the great Oscar d'Leon, the band easily shaped this dance floor magnet, with a tr s solo that conjured Nico Saquito setting the tone, and followed by "Kamai". Lady Son's vocals on this song are all about punch and drive, even though the audience seemed happy to sit back and watch.

The band then moved into two Cuban classics that many in the audience no doubt knew from Buena Vista Social Club's great original album: "Candela", followed by "Tula". Here the audience figured out that this is music to mueve la cintura. They filled the floor, which is pretty much where they stayed for the rest of the night.

By now, Lady Son's vocals were in stride. She seems to effortlessly maintain extended improvised vocal lines that build the rhythm of the band. While she may lack the operatic qualities of Celia Cruz, she has the melodic sense that keeps the sweetness of the Cuban sound that La Reina had. At times percussive and driving, as on Celia Cruz's hit "Quimbara", and then sweet and sultry on Cheo Feliciano's "El Raton", the band and Lady Son were even able to shift things to a Cumbia feel with a dash of Calypso in tunes like "Carnaval".

Naomi Jonas, spending most of her time on vocal and rhythm, stepped up on violin on a few tunes. Her style is more gypsy than charanga, but it sounds great, lilting and harmonically expansive.

While it's easy to peg Lady Son as a vocalist, she positions herself behind the congas, and certainly makes a contribution to the drive of the band. The percussive drive comes from its bongo player, Michel De Quevedo, who pulled out a terrific solo. Still, Lady Son answered with a stand-up conga solo that was on the mark. If this band has a weakness, in my opinion it's the use of kit drum