

## Ernie Hammes

### A Torch Bearer For Cuban Bebop

Flugelhorn/trumpet player Ernie Hammes has as many sides to his creativity as Sirius Radio can come up with broadcasting station, and in fact, it is likely that you will hear Hammes' music on a number of different Sirius channels from world music to swing/Big Band/ballroom to Latin jazz. His creativity is an extension of the music and the musicians who have made an impact on him. He tells, "I think being a musician is a constant learning process, you always get to know new musicians you never played with before. You always absorb new things, no matter how little or unimportant they seem."

Hammes latest album *Sanfrancha* was motivated by the cultures he experienced while playing in San Francisco, California in 2010. He expresses, "The connection between the album title and the music is that I wrote, or at least started to write, the tunes while in San Francisco during a US Tour last summer where I was of course influenced by San Francisco, the people, the city." He enumerates, "My major influences for this specific work were Claudio Roditi, my first actual Jazz-teacher, besides Lew Soloff which I met a couple of years later, as well as Arturo Sandoval."



Susan Frances

Hammes cites Arturo Sandoval, Maynard Ferguson, Claudio Roditi, and Lew Soloff as his major mentors, which Hammes tapped into when he was putting the arrangements together. He asserts, "I wanted to have a nice mix of Latin rhythms on the CD so I just started writing what I needed and was familiar with. The listener can find a couple of sambas, slow and fast, a bolero, two cha-chas, a bossa-nova and last but not least a couple of salsa tunes."

He explains, "The name is not new and it comes from Cuban and bebop which becomes CUBOP... This name or style was invented and specialized by Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pozo in the early '50s... So it is a mix of Latin rhythms and bebop."

Accompanying Hammes on the recording are Johannes Muller on saxophone, Sam Happel and Jean-Louis Rassinfosse on bass, Chris Strik on drums, Pierre-Alain Goualch, PAG and Amina Figorova on piano, Eric Durrer on percussion, Bart Platteau on flute, and Claudio Roditi on flugelhorn.. He notes about his band, "Most musicians, I've met over the last couple of years although Pierre-Alain, the piano player, I know and play with for the last 20 years or so. They come from all over Europe like The Netherlands, Germany, France, Belgium and Luxembourg."

He describes about the recording process, "Well, I tried with my still little knowledge of this music to be as traditional as possible. I just put in some of my ideas, call them European or Luxembourgish now to spice things up, for both the musicians in the band and the listeners."

Hammes reveals that he did not need to give his band many instructions. "I did not have to talk much about the music. Due to the short amount of time in the studio, only two days, playing all new music. I put all necessary information on the paper so everybody would know at all times what was going on during the recordings and what I specifically needed from every musician. We had a rehearsal the day before the recording session, went through the music, decided about who is going to solo on what song and so on."

Regarding the tracks that made the cut on *Sanfrancha*, Hammes admits, "Actually I was planning to have these 9 tunes on it, although we had a couple of spare just-in-case tunes, but we finally did not need them."

Hammes is not only a prolific recording artist but also a proven live performer, and he is presently opening concerts for pianist Amina Figarova across Europe. He mentions about the tour, "We've been on the road a lot lately with Amina and new things always happen when you're on the move, funny ones or sometimes also less funny, like trying to fly cancelled planes or dealing with lost baggage! No, but seriously, I think it is still a great thing to tour all over the world and do what you live for, the music."

He observes, "I think people just love Latin music. Most of the time, they dance to it or at least some parts of their body is moving...It's fun to watch."

Sanfrancha took Hammes' creativity in a different direction from his previous recording *Freed & Feier* in 2007. He explores, "The music of course is different first of all, on *Freed & Feier* I was playing most of the time classical trumpet works on the regular trumpet but also on the piccolo trumpet. It's always a pleasure to record with an orchestra, either wind band or symphonic band. For this recording I had of course much more freedom, first because I wrote the tunes, I had to improvise which is not the case when you record classical works by Arban, Fasch etc."

Improvising and writing original material began recently for Hammes as he provides, "I only started composing more seriously about five or six years ago, for my quintet at first, then moved on to big band and finally to concert band writing. I think it's just great and a lot of fun to hear the music you had in your head played by a band or an orchestra. On top of that, I believe I still can write music when I long stopped playing the trumpet."

Born in Esch/Alzette, Luxembourg, Hammes recalls, "I started when I was 8 years old in a conservatory in Luxembourg with the trumpet, and then followed by theory classes, harmony, ear-training/transposing as well as chamber music and orchestra playing."

He reminisces about his family, "I had their support from the beginning...sometimes even too much when I had to practice more trumpet and I thought I was done, or getting me into theory classes, which I thought was not very fun back then."

He beams, "I guess I was pretty lucky, because right after finishing up my studies, there was an opening in the Luxembourg Army Band. I passed the audition and became their principal trumpet in 1987. I still play in the band and I still love it. It was either that, teaching, or a spot in our national symphony orchestra, which was not an option for me back then. The Army Band also gave me the opportunity to continue my studies for more than 4 years while already in the band."

Each year has brought Ernie Hammes closer to where he wants to be from being the principal trumpet player in the Luxembourg Army Band to leading a big band in 1994, becoming the musical director of the Luxembourg Jazz Orchestra, and working on music projects with such notable luminaries as Bob Mintzer, Dave Liebman, and Frank Nimsgern. As an independent artist, Hammes correlates, "It's like having your own business, you have to constantly promote yourself, make phone calls, write emails, go to sessions."

In retrospect, he enthuses, "I think I can be very happy to have toured and shared the stage with so many great musicians, especially for me coming from one of the smallest countries in the world. If someone would have told me twenty years ago, I would have laughed at him. As a teenager, I once was joking with a couple of friends that, if I will play with Maynard or Tina Turner one day, I will probably have made it... Well, Tina Turner hasn't called yet, but...I'll be around."

Ernie Hammes is a musician whose talent is boundless whether as a performer, arranger, composer or music director. His album *Sanfrancha* is another stepping stone that has launched him further into the realm of world music, and exposes him to new cultures along his journey -- a journey that seems endless.