

ANDY PALACIO BIOGRAPHY

Andy Palacio is not only the most popular musician in Belize, he is also a serious music and cultural archivist with a deep commitment to preserving his unique Garifuna culture. Long a leading proponent of Garifuna popular music and a tireless advocate for the maintenance of the Garifuna language and traditions, Palacio has recently undertaken a new and ambitious direction with the formation of the **Garifuna Collective**.

Born and raised in the coastal village of Barranco, Palacio grew up listening to traditional Garifuna music as well as imported sounds coming over the radio from neighboring Honduras, Guatemala, the Caribbean and the United States. "Music was always a part of daily life," says Palacio, "It was the soundtrack that we lived to." Along with some of his peers, he joined local bands even while in high school and began developing his own voice, performing covers of popular Caribbean and Top 40 songs.

However, it was while working with a literacy project on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast in 1980 and discovering that the Garifuna language and culture was steadily dying in that country, that a strong cultural awareness took hold and his approach to music became more defined. "I saw what had happened to my people in Nicaragua. The cultural erosion I saw there deeply affected my outlook," he said recently, "and I definitely had to react to that reality." His reaction took the form of diving deeper into the language and rhythms of the Garifuna, a unique cultural blend of West African and Indigenous Carib and Arawak Indian language and heritage. "It was a conscious strategy. I felt that music was an excellent medium to preserve the culture. I saw it as a way of maintaining cultural pride and self esteem, especially in young people."

Palacio became a leading figure in a growing renaissance of young Garifuna intellectuals who were writing poetry and songs in their native language. He saw the emergence of an upbeat, popular dance form based on Garifuna rhythms that became known as *punta rock* and enthusiastically took part in developing the form. Andy began performing his own songs and gained stature as a musician and energetic Garifuna artist. In 1987, he was able to hone his skills after being invited to work in England with Cultural Partnerships Limited, a community arts organization. Returning home to Belize with new skills and a four track recording system, he helped found Sunrise, an organization dedicated to preserving, documenting and distributing Belizean music. While his academic background and self-scholarship allowed for his on-going documentation of Garifuna culture through lyrics and music, it is his exuberance as a performer that has earned him world-wide recognition.

Since 1988, Andy Palacio has gained enormous popularity both in Belize and abroad, having played before audiences in the Caribbean, the Americas and Europe and Asia. These include performances at the Festival Internacional de Cultura del Caribe in Cancun, Carifesta VI in Trinidad and Tobago, Carifesta VII in St. Kitts-Nevis, the Rainforest World Music Festival in Malaysia, Antillanse Feesten in Belgium, the World Traditional Performing Arts Festival in Japan and several others in the United States, Canada, Colombia, France, Germany and the U.K.

About five years ago, Belizean producer **Ivan Duran**, Palacio's longtime collaborator and founder of the local label Stonetree Records, convinced Palacio that he should focus on less commercial forms of Garifuna music and look more deeply into its soul and roots. Duran and Palacio set out to create an all-star, multi-generational ensemble of some of the best Garifuna musicians from Guatemala, Honduras and Belize. The Collective unites elder statesmen such as legendary Garifuna composer **Paul Nabor**, with up-and-coming voices of the new generation such as **Aurelio Martinez** from Honduras. Rather than focusing on danceable styles like *punta rock*, the Collective explores the more soulful side of Garifuna music, such as the Latin-influenced *paranda*, and the sacred *dügü*, *punta* and *gunjei* rhythms.

Wátina, the debut album of Andy Palacio & the Garifuna Collective, will be released in the US and Canada on **February 27th** and the rest of the world on **March 27th** on the new record label **Cumbancha**. The initial recording sessions for this exceptional album took place over a 4-month period in an improvised studio inside a thatch-roofed cabin by the sea in the small village of Hopkins, Belize. It was an informal environment, where the musicians spent many hours playing together late into the night, honing the arrangements of the songs that would eventually end up on this album. While the traditions provided the inspiration, the musicians also added contemporary elements that helped give the songs relevance to their modern context. After the sessions, Ivan Duran worked tirelessly back at his studio to craft what is surely the pinnacle of Garifuna music production to date.

"The idea of the collective has been a long time in the making," says Palacio. "The chemistry of working with different Garifuna artists, not only within Belize but also from Guatemala and Honduras, was quite appealing and very satisfying to the soul."

Andy Palacio lives in Belize where he continues his work in promoting Culture and the Arts. In December 2004, he was appointed Cultural Ambassador and Deputy Administrator of the National Institute of Culture and History. In 2007, Andy Palacio & the Garifuna Collective will be embarking on an ambitious worldwide touring schedule in an effort to bring the beauty and power of Garifuna music to a wide audience.

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