

Sergeant Garcia Biography

Sergeant Garcia burst onto the French music scene in the late 1990s with a searing blend of Jamaican reggae and dancehall with Latin grooves that he dubbed "salsamuffin." A veteran of French punk and indie rock, Sergeant Garcia has explored his Spanish roots and passion for Caribbean and Latin music to create a popular sound that earned him fans across the globe and sales of hundreds of thousands of albums.

Bruno Garcia, alias Sergeant Garcia, was born in 1964, the year of the dragon according to the Chinese zodiac, in a small mountain town in France near the Swiss border. The son of a Basque Spanish father and a French mother, and with family connections to Algeria and the Ivory Coast, Bruno's early years took him to live in Bilbao, Spain before his family settled in Paris when he was five years old. Bruno recalls, "It was like a hybrid family with many colors. I spent a lot of time with my little cousin, whose father from was from the Ivory Coast. Their household had a very African flavor: there were always people coming from Africa to visit for weeks on end. They were always listening to African music, to soul music, American music, it exposed me to a lot of different things."

While no one in his family played an instrument, music was an important part of Bruno's childhood and his family had an eclectic and diverse record collection that included African, Latin and Caribbean music, not to mention French and Spanish sounds. At the age of 14, Bruno started playing around on a friend's guitar, later joining this friend's rock band as a bass player. "I used to say that I played with the best musicians in the world because I learned with records." Bruno points out, "I learned with **Bob Marley, Joe Strummer, Bob Dylan**, I learned with a lot of people I liked, I was just copying their styles in the beginning, you know, when I was a kid. From hard rock, Bruno moved on to punk, listening to bands such as **The Clash, The Stranglers, The Ramones** and others. At the same time, Bruno remained a devoted reggae fan and he especially gravitated toward bands that blended punk, reggae and ska.

When he was eighteen years old Bruno moved to Barcelona for a year and a half where he experienced the energy of an emerging country. "It was not the Europe we know now, all the same territory. For Europeans, Spain was basically Africa. There was really a lot of freedom, you know, the end of the dictatorship. Spain was breathing, and taking in a lot of air. They had a hunger for everything, for rock, for art, for sex, for drugs for everything. It was a very crazy time!"

Bruno moved back to Paris in 1984 to start a band called **Ludwig von 88**. The band went on to become one of the most popular groups on the French alternative rock and punk scenes, recording over ten albums and performing together for thirteen years. "It was the years of the alternative rock movement," notes Bruno. "In France it became a very big movement, because there were a lot of bands generating a big audience. These were new things, the heritage of the global punk and alternative rock movement. And then into that punk movement there were also a lot of political things added, and mixed into these political things was a lot of reggae music. The reggae movement, the hip-hop movement; all these things came together in Paris."

By the nineties, the French reggae, hip hop, Arabic and Latin music scenes had started to coalesce into a powerful hybrid music or "musiques metisses" movement. Bruno started a side project of DJing with a Jamaican-style sound system. It was at this time that he started using the stage name Sergeant Garcia. The name was inspired by a character from the Zorro television series that was popular when Bruno was a child. The fat, awkward and drunken Sergeant Garcia was Zorro's bumbling nemesis, and Bruno was often taunted with this nickname in the schoolyard. But Bruno started to like the idea of taking on the name of the anti-hero. "If everyone wants to be Zorro," explains Bruno, "I will be Sergeant Garcia. I think he's the real man of the people, not Zorro. Zorro is just an aristocratic landlord."

Ever since he had come back from Barcelona years earlier Bruno had tried to remain connected with his Latin roots. "I wanted to stay in touch with the Latin community and Spanish language so I was listening to Latin radio, and I began to go the Latin fiestas. I went to see the Cuban band Los Van Van at the New Morning in Paris, it's a big jazz club, and it totally blew my mind. I had never seen such a big band on stage. It made a huge impression on me. I started to listen to Latin music with another ear, with an eye in my ear," jokes Bruno.

As he began making the transformation into Sergeant Garcia, Bruno started investigating other Latin music styles, from Colombian cumbia to Puerto Rican bomba and plena, and of course the fundamentals of Cuban music. Bruno finally got to visit Cuba for the first time in 1998, and he immediately found something he had been searching for his entire life. "When I was in France, I needed more Latin flavor and when I was in Spain I needed more hybrid culture. When I got to Latin America, this was exactly what I was

looking for. It reminded me of my family: the African way, and the Spanish way. A very hybrid culture." Since then, Bruno has visited Latin America and the Caribbean numerous times, traversing the continent in search of new sounds and collaborators.

The first official recording of Sergent Garcia was the song "Salsamania" from the 1996 compilation *Tchatche Attack*. In May 1997, Sergent Garcia released his first full-length album, ***Viva el Sargento***, which introduced French audiences to his unique blend of salsa, raggamuffin, reggae and hip hop that he called *salsamuffin*. Invited to play at a Latin music festival, Sergent Garcia needed to move from a studio project to a band, so Bruno assembled six of the best local musicians to form a backing band that named themselves **Los Locos del Barrio** (The Crazies from the Neighborhood). They rehearsed feverishly for a month and put on an amazing show to rave reviews.

More shows ensued and the buzz began to build, leading Sergent Garcia to be signed to the Virgin Records imprint of EMI France. Sergent Garcia's second album ***Un Poquito Quema'o*** (A Little Burnt) was released in February 1999 and instantly launched Sergent Garcia to new levels of success at home and abroad. Two years later, Sergent Garcia and Los Locos del Barrio began working with French engineer **Renaud Letang** (known for his work with **Manu Chao**) to record ***Sin Fronteras*** (Without Borders), with guests that included the blind Malian couple **Amadou & Mariam**.

In 2003, Bruno traveled to Jamaica and Cuba to record ***La Semilla Escondida*** (The Hidden Seed), an album that explored the musical and cultural connections between these two highly influential Caribbean islands. The record's enticing blend of roots reggae and Afro-Cuban grooves was a huge hit. The band continued to tour across the globe, performing all over Europe, Egypt, Indonesia, Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico and beyond, earning renown for their stunning live shows.

After coming bank from an extensive bout of touring, Bruno settled down in his current home base of Valencia, Spain to begin recording ***Mascara*** (Masks), an album that focused on the urban street sounds he heard on the road, especially the boisterous and brassy music of Mexico. *Mascaras* was produced by **Toy Hernandez**, known for his work with the Mexican rap collective **Control Machete**, and released in 2006.

At the sametime, Bruno started working on **Radio Timbo** (www.radiotimbo.com), an internet radio station based in Valencia, Spain but featuring an international roster of guest hosts from Argentina, Mexico, the US, Paris and elsewhere. Every Monday at 10:00pm Valencia time, Radio Timbo streams some of the world's best reggae, African and Latin grooves, uniting loyal listeners around the globe into a community of *música mestiza*, or mixed-up music, fans.

Bruno had a chance to discover the wealth of Colombia's music scene first hand when he toured there in 2005. "Colombia is incredible. There were very good bands playing every day in the streets, in the bars, every place; a lot of different styles, a lot of people making music, making art, it was all very, very interesting. And the people, the vibration of the people is incredible." While in Colombia, Bruno worked with **Sidestepper's Richard Blair** on a five-track EP entitled ***Cumbiamuffin***. After those electrifying sessions Bruno knew that he must produce an album featuring Colombian musicians and styles, and he began to lay the groundwork the ***Una y Otra Vez*** (Time and Time Again) project.

The album was recorded in different segments and in various locations. First, Bruno and **Ivan Darroman Montoya**, a Cuban percussionist in the Sergent Garcia band and co-producer of the group's albums for the past ten years, began developing the arrangements and structures of the songs in Valencia. They took these tracks to Paris where they recorded the basic tracks with the rest of the Sergent Garcia band.

Finally, Bruno headed to Colombia where he worked with a range of local musicians, including **Jacobo Velez**, clarinetist and director of the cutting-edge band **La Mojarra Eléctrica**, **Erika Muñoz**, one of the lead singers of electro-tropical pioneers **Sidestepper**, musicians from **La-33**, Colombia's top young salsa band, **Li Saumet**, the lead singer of **Bomba Estereo** and many others. "With this record I wanted to play with all these musicians because they are really young all-stars of Colombia," notes Bruno.

The result of these multinational sessions is *Una y Otra Vez*, Sergent Garcia's sixth full-length album. For years, Sergent Garcia was signed to EMI France, but for this special project Bruno decided to return to his independent roots and sign with US-based label **Cumbancha** (www.cumbancha.com). An offshoot of **Putumayo World Music** (www.putumayo.com), which has featured numerous Sergent Garcia tracks on their top-selling compilations, Cumbancha founder **Jacob Edgar** counts himself among Sergent Garcia's biggest fans. "I still pinch myself regularly to make sure I'm not dreaming," exclaims Edgar, an ethnomusicologist, music critic and host of the television program ***Music Voyager*** (www.musicvoyager.com). "Working with Sergent Garcia, one of my favorite artists of all time, is truly an honor, and I am especially excited about the incredible *Una y Otra Vez*, which is the best album he's ever produced."

