



The band gets the crowd in the mood to groove.

Sexed Up Funk

Los Amigos Dock Their Intergalactic Love Boat

“Shake your booty!” shouts Los Amigos Invisibles’ lead singer Julio Briceño over the band’s tight rhythms. “You’re going to forget that it’s raining out there.”

It’s a rainy, cold Monday night in the West Village, and Los Amigos have taken the S.O.B.’s stage with plaid pants on and shirt collars unbuttoned. While the Venezuelan sextet time-travels through a universe of disco, funk, and Latin styles, conjuring images of an intergalactic Love Boat—just imagine George

Clinton on board, playing maracas—the blend of beats on songs like “Ponerte en Cuatro” keeps the crowd dancing.

Three years ago, the band docked in New York to build on previous success. Their last album, “Arepa 3000: A Venezuelan Journey Space”, went double platinum in Venezuela and was nominated for a Latin Grammy in 2001 for best Latin Rock/Alternative album. Briceño notes that the band is not as big here, but on tour they find themselves playing at the same venues as Morcheeba and

Parliament. Although they are committed to making party music, they are serious about having a long-term career.

“All of the huge artists in Venezuela who remain in music and have 30 years in the business, it’s because they moved out of the country—to Miami, to Mexico,” says bassist José Rafael Torres.

While many Latin pop stars move to Miami, Los Amigos didn’t see it as an option. “We don’t like that Gloria Estefan sound,” says guitarist José Luis Pardo.

MARINA CHAVEZ; FRANCESCA NARDA

“Being here in New York you have all the masters, all the teachers around,” adds Torres. “You can see them live, and if you’re lucky you can meet them.”

The band hooked up with New York-based Masters at Work (MAW) deejays Little Louie Vega and Kenny Dope to produce Los Amigos’ next album, “The Venezuelan Zinga Son Vol. 1,” due out in the U.S. in early 2003. The MAW deejays, who have remixed work by artists from Bjork to Donna Summer and produced hit house sessions “Nuyorican Soul”, helped Los Amigos make “Zinga Son”, the album of their dreams.

“We always wanted to make the band sound like a DJ session, and they understood that,” says drummer Juan Manuel Roura.

“Being away, you start to see the stuff that makes you Venezuelan,” Pardo says of the Latin rhythms present in their music. Yet he also stresses that Los Amigos don’t want to be categorized as Latin rock. “Now when we see *Time Out* and we’re not in the Latin section, we’re like, ‘Yeah!’”

A few times a year the band returns to Caracas, where they originally formed in 1991 after a mutual high school friend introduced them to one another. Influenced by American and European music at home and the salsa they heard on the streets, they mixed the two, throwing dance parties to create their own alternative to the Venezuelan rock scene. When it came time to pick a name, they made a pop culture reference to their 80s’ childhood and a Venezuelan history program whose host opened by saying “Hello, my invisible friends” to his empty studio.

After recording their first album in 1995, they left 20 copies for sale in Tower Records while in New York on tour. Former Talking Heads frontman David Byrne came across the CD and signed the band to his Luaka Bop label, helping the band spread their musical gospel: slap on the record, sip some rum, and dance all night.

The band may not write songs about controversial Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, but lyrics are based on real-life experiences. “La Vecina” is about a pretty girl who lived next door. “Mujer Policía” refers to a sexy policewoman who patrolled their Caracas neighborhood. And “Masturbation Session” describes what happens when the band is on a lengthy tour.

If titles mean anything, the new album “Zinga Son”, which is slang for “sex session,” hints at being even more risqué than “Arepa 3000...” whose title joked at the idea of a spaceship made out of a cornbread disc.

However, Pardo describes “Zinga Son” as subtler than previous records.

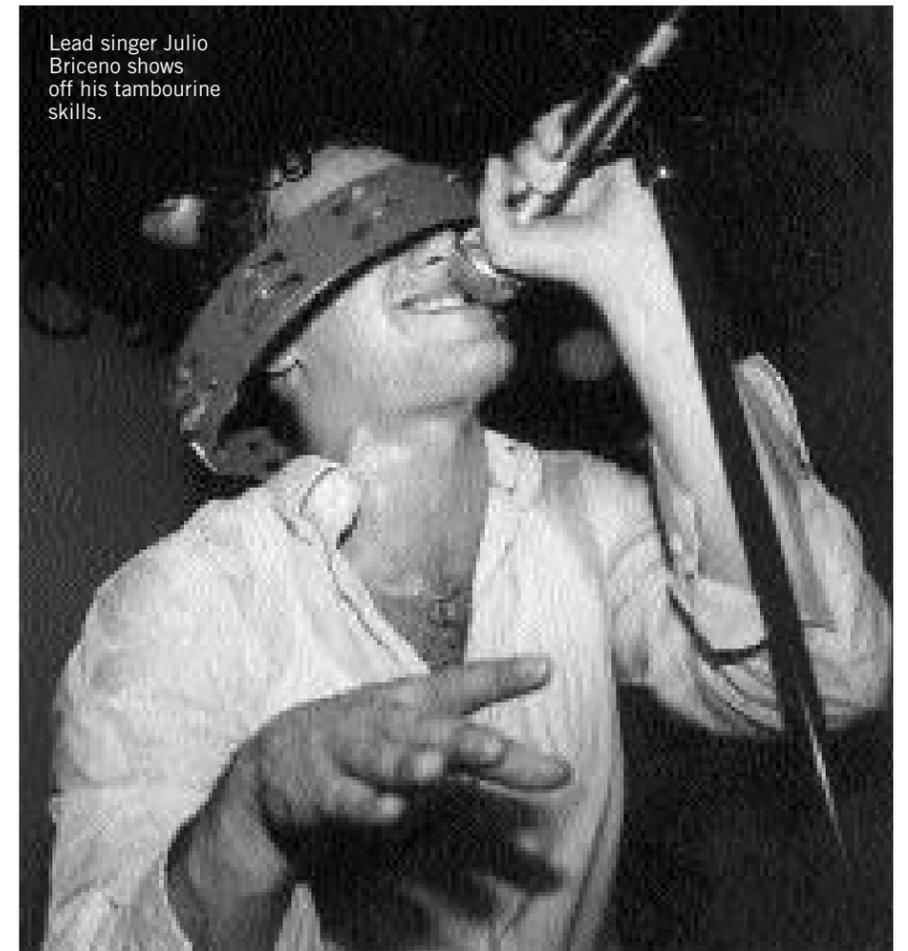
“It’s more mellow. It’s not so ‘AAAH!’” he says, with a tongue-wagging head shake.

Does the fact that half the group is married and most of them have hit their thirties mean the ship full of track suits and testosterone is heading out?

“Don’t worry,” says Pardo, with a glint in his eye, “It’ll come back again.”

by Carin Zissis

For more information go to www.amigosinvisibles.com



Lead singer Julio Briceño shows off his tambourine skills.