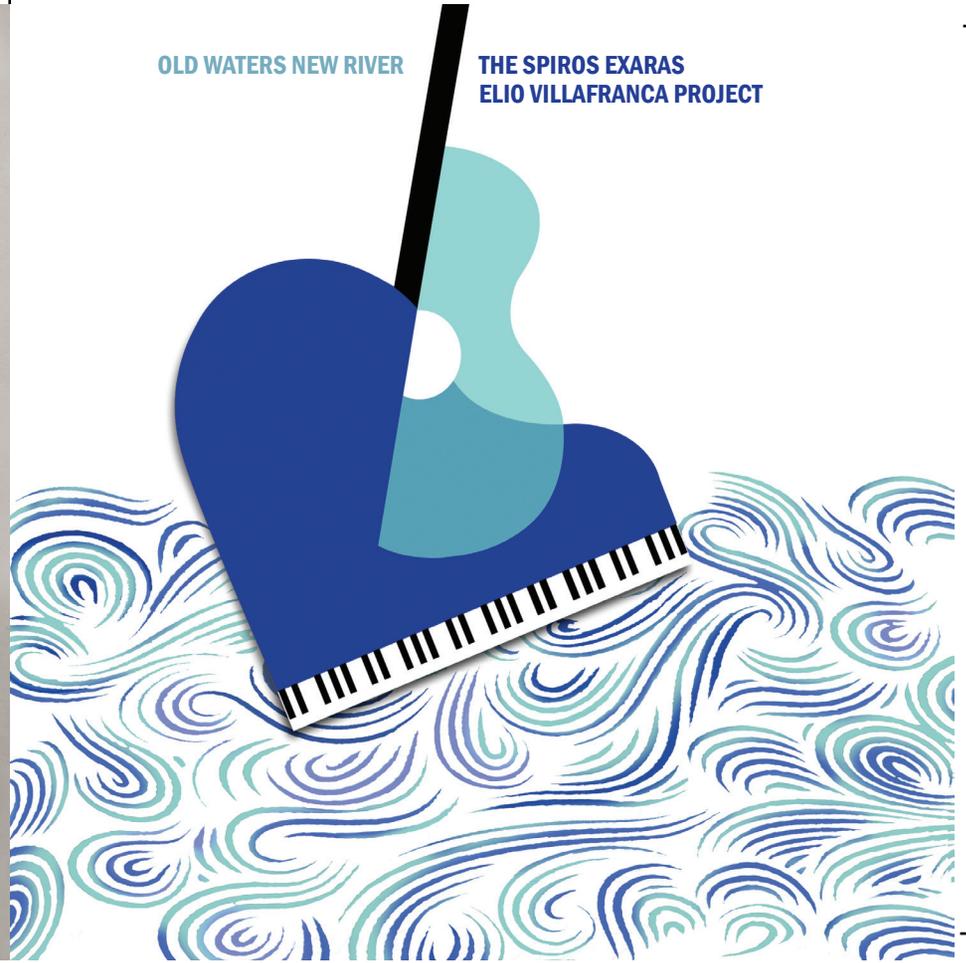


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PAGE 1 COVER

Separated by a distance of 6,000 miles, the nations of Cuba and Greece could not be more different. Cuba floats on the Caribbean and is a poor communist country with a strong national health care system and free education. Greece is located at the southeastern Mediterranean and is a poor capitalist country with crippled financial and health care systems. Over the centuries each has been subject to excessive imperialistic domination and numerous dictatorships. The two nations differ in how they have moved towards and stumbled with democratic ideas and actions. Moreover, the cultural heritage of Cuba and Greece could not be more different. The culture of the former is steeped in the modernismo of the original Latin America states which gave way to revolutionary commitments. The culture of the latter is under the ambivalent influence of its ancient aesthetics which over the centuries weaved their way through Europe and Western values. Despite these and other differences, Cuba and Greece share a deep love of music. But it would be more accurate to write "musics."

The musics are an integral part of Cuban and Greek identity. The musical identity of each is not bound and contained by what the tourist industry insists upon-the easily accessible folkloric compilations. Cuba musics have been influenced by Latin America and Africa. Greek musics have been influenced by the Middle East and the Balkans. Musics of these two countries stir feelings, memories and imagination. They metabolize generations and make for sophisticated sounds.

Enter Spiros Exaras and Elio Villafranca. New Yorkers, of Diaspora Greece and Diaspora Cuba respectively, these two creators and instrumentalists make music that sizzles. At the beginning of the 21st century they have brought something new into the jazz archipelago. Maybe New York City is not quite the melting pot imagined by sociologists in the early 1970s, but it has imbued the cosmopolitan sensibilities of these two. Listen for the sheer beauty of multiplicity and diversity. Exaras and Villafranca have fused their art and co-constructed something original and inspired by their roots. Be prepared to go beyond geography and language when you listen to these tracks. We have here an unconscious effort to shake music from its national categories. We have here a soothing musical fluidity in the improvisations. We have here what artists have always done. We have here the opportunity to discover new waters to swim in.

Spyros D. Orfanos

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Elio Villafranca is a Steinway artist. Spiros Exaras uses La Bella strings.

Spiros and Elio would like to extend their deepest gratitude to Yannis Milios for his generosity, Mike Millius for introducing us to each other, Helene Blue for connecting us with Harbinger and Ken Bloom for releasing this CD.

Spiros : I would like to thank Elio Villafranca for sharing his musical talent and vision with me and for helping me with the Cuban rhythms.

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Elio : First I would like to thanks Spiros Exaras for sharing his talent and passion for music with me. Special thanks to my mother Paula Gomez, my brother Juan Enrique, his wife Ivelty, and their son Alejandro. To my extended family, Ifa, Brian, and Lynda West, and to all of my dear friends Chick Corea, Bill Rooney, Vasso Triantafylloy, Lucas at Beton7, Roberta Brenza, Lewis Nash, Michele Wright, Galit and Avi Sacajiu, Paquito D'Rivera, Ron Berg, Robin Tomchin, Morley, Scott Thompson, Mary Ann Topper, Jana Herzen, Miriam Flores, Yoniel Contreras, and Amarilis Gonzales for their love and amazing support.

“OLD WATERS NEW RIVER”

A Musical Journey. This album connects the two most powerful forces shaping the history of music and Jazz: The cultures of Greece and Cuba. The word ‘music’ comes from the ‘Muses,’ Goddesses of Music in Greek mythology, just as the theory of musical scales in classical and popular music also originated in ancient Greece. In Cuba, the music of the African Diaspora had already been percolating for over 300 years when it found its way to New Orleans in the mid-1800’s on the daily ferry from Havana. Some say this gave birth to a rhythmic motif called ‘Habanera’ but everyone agrees on one thing: They called it Jazz, and it’s now the most popular form of world music since the invention of sound recording. Enter two master practitioners of this musical art form, both renowned and each from one of these arenas of fathomless authenticity: Greek Classical Jazz guitarist, Spiros Exaras and Cuban Jazz pianist, Elio Villafranca. The list of credentials and accolades for either of these acclaimed artists would take more space than available on the back of a CD cover but what it’s really all about is on the CD itself: An honest, seminal recording of nothing more than an acoustic guitar and an acoustic piano being played together by two of the world’s greatest musicians of these instruments. The music they make does well from old waters but the result is definitely a new river that starts flowing with the first track of this album. Enjoy the ride. - Mike Millius

www.eliovillafranca.net

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Habanera “Tu” (Traditional - arranged by Elio Villafranca)

The Habanera was at some point the oldest and most popular style of music coming out of Cuba. It was known in Cuba as a style of contradanza performed in Havana. After its popularity in 1884, the name “habanera” and the musical style it represented, made a huge impact on the musical landscape worldwide, including in the Caribbean, New Orleans, Mexico, Argentina, and Europe. This is Elio’s own version of one of the most famous habaneras.

Old Waters New River (by Spiros Exaras/Elio Villafranca)

The story behind this composition is a bit unusual. Elio already had the melody with the chords, and introduced it to Spiros in an Afro Cuban kind of rhythm. Spiros then suggested to change the original time signature of this song to a 9/8 Greek (karsilama) rhythm. It was great, so they both decided to keep it that way. But it was still missing something in the middle section. Then Spiros came up with the 3/8 bridge—which provided a little break in the middle of the song. The chant that Elio introduced at the end of this song, while playing a traditional Afro Cuban instrument called guataca, comes from the Afro Cuban tradition of Arará. This chant is for the deity of Hevioso, and they sang it in the Arará language.

Cógelo Suave (by Elio Villafranca)

The inspiration for this tune came after Elio revisited the era of Cuba’s most legendary “Descargas,” or jam sessions—led by many great pianists including Frank Emilio, Pedro “Peruchin” Justis, Bebo Valdés, and bassist Orestes “Cachao” López. The art of descargas inspired him to write this tune. Cógelo Suave is a Cuban expression used in many facets of everyday life—a bit like “take it easy” that can be said as a casual good-bye wish, or to remind others not to get too emotional, worked up about things like, for example, waiting long hours for the bus. “Cogelo suave,” take it easy, chill...

Deer’s Leap (by Spiros Exaras)

William Wordsworth said “child is the father of man”; that the child has the ability to guide and inspire. This piece was written when Spiro’s daughter, Ileana, was one-year-old. The way she would leap would resemble the movements of young deer, Spiro’s favorite animal. It was these moments of joy with his daughter that gave Spiros the inspiration to compose this song.

Gitanos (by Elio Villafranca)

Traveling and thereby interacting and learning from different cultures is one of Elio’s favorite things to do as a musician. He composed this piece in the spirit of gypsy music but in a much more contemporary



format. The alternation between different time signatures made this tune very fun to play, while also making it the most challenging piece of the album.

My Sweet Canary (Traditional - arranged by Spiros Exaras)

Originating from Smyrna, this song was very popular during the 1950s in Greece. Always fascinated by the fusion of different musical styles, Spiros kept the original melody, but put a modern jazz harmony to the song, and entirely changed the rhythm starting from Greek and seamlessly switching to Cuban.

Keeping The Promise (by Spiros Exaras)

We all give promises to ourselves. We do this in order to stay focused on our mission. Spiros went through several stages in his life; moving from Greece to New York was one of the most significant. With this composition he reminded himself to remain strong. The piece is also featured in the “Phrygians” CD (Blue Note 2003), but has a completely different approach in this album.

Shalom (by Elio Villafranca)

The meaning of the word Shalom inspired Elio to write this tune. “Shalom” represents a complete peace, a feeling of contentment, completeness, wholeness, well-being and harmony. So with this song he wishes all “Shalom!”

Rareza Del Siglo (by Bebo Valdés - arranged by Elio Villafranca)

Elio brought to the table this version of “Rareza Del Siglo” (“Wizard of the Century”) by the late Cuban pianist Bebo Valdés. This was one of the most innovative songs of the early ‘50s in Cuba. The innovations Bebo introduced in this song were rhythmically as well as harmonically challenging at that time, so in his version, he has maintained the same spirit of innovative rhythms and harmonies, but with a contemporary spin.

Do You Hear Me? (by Spiros Exaras)

Music is a resonance that allows people to connect with their own God or Universe. This song is a melodic call to reconnect with beloved individuals, alive or having passed away. It is not so much about the melody of this piece, but about the mood, atmosphere, and emotion that this song ignites in the receiver.