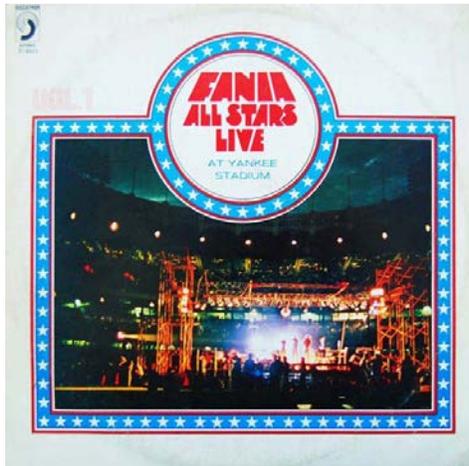


“Live at Yankee Stadium”--The Fania All-Stars (1975)

Added to the National Registry: 2003

Essay by Thomas Muriel (guest post)*



Original album

The date Friday, August 23, 1973, is an historic one for Latin music. That night, Jerry Masucci, the ultimate gambler, was the last man laughing as his most bizarre gambit to date became a total success--his Fania All-Stars poured 40,000 screaming fans into Yankee Stadium for an unforgettable night of superb music. If Fania Records' super-band was already famous at the time (thanks to the famed Cheetah club concert and the 1972 movie "Our Latin Thing"), this is the concert that made them a legend (the famous Cheetah club actually folded in 1974).

That night, the All-Stars were scheduled to play two sets. The first set was a traditional one, with the All-Stars aided by guests Mongo Santamaría, Jan Hammer, Jorge Santana, and Billy Cobham, who quickly proved to the crowd that they could play soul as well as rock. The second set, another daring Masucci gambit, was never completed, as a bloody conga duel battle between Ray Barretto and Santamaría prompted the frenzied audience to bypass the security barriers to make their way into the playing field and onto the stage, triggering the concert's abrupt ending.

The orchestra had already gone through serious changes in personnel—now all the singers were either solo acts or bandleaders (or they were on the way to becoming both as part of the label's expansion plans). But a bitter internal controversy involving three of their main stars provoked one of the most important changes to the band's roster—this was the result of the harsh breakup of Barretto's band, with five of his musicians leaving to form *Típica '73*. As a result, Barretto made it clear he did not want to share the same stage with Orestes Vilató and he threatened to leave the band if the latter remained in the lineup. This forced Masucci and Johnny Pacheco to choose. They had no other option than to release Orestes, replacing him with another famous timbale virtuoso, Nicky Marrero. Adalberto Santiago, another departing Barretto member and *Típica '73* founder, chose to leave the All-Stars in solidarity with Vilato, in spite of having Barretto, Pacheco, and Masucci's green light to stay in the band despite not being a solo act. (This was unlike the other departing members; Adalberto left Barretto's band on good terms).

In another big move, Fania welcomed Ismael Quintana, the perennial Eddie Palmieri singer and, now, officially, a solo act, into the lineup, and he welcomed virtuoso Mongo Santamaría in as an invited guest. The rest of the lineup consisted of stellar bandleaders Willie Colón, Larry Harlow, Roberto Roena, Richie Ray, and Bobby Valentín; singers Cheo Feliciano, Bobby Cruz, Justo Betancourt, Héctor Lavoe, Ismael Miranda, Santos Colón, and Pete "El Conde" Rodríguez; Yomo Toro on cuatro; trumpeters Roberto Rodríguez, Ray Maldonado and the legendary Victor Paz; and trombonists Barry Rogers and Lewis Kahn (the latter one in for Reynaldo Jorge).

In November 1973, Fania reprised this concert in Puerto Rico; the concert opened the new Roberto Clemente Coliseum. There were yet more changes for this concert: Luís “Perico” Ortíz was now aboard replacing Roberto Rodríguez and while this date marked the formal All-Star debut of Celia Cruz, she didn’t perform at Yankee Stadium, actually. Additionally, although the group repeated the same song lineup here as from the Yankee concert, this other date was also filmed and recorded.

Finally, in 1975, Fania released the long-awaited “Live At Yankee Stadium” albums. In spite of the title, material from the Puerto Rico concert, which resulted in better sound quality, was also included on the album. In this first volume, four of the five songs are actually from the Puerto Rican concert, with the exception of “Pueblo Latino,” here only Yankee Stadium version appears.

This album yielded the All-Stars their first Grammy nomination. What’s more, in 2003, the Library of Congress named this double album to their National Recording Registry.

NOTE: This text, by Thomas Muriel, was previously published as part of a 2010 reissue of the All-Stars album.

* The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Library of Congress.