

THE CONGA KINGS

CHESEY RECORDS



CANDIDO

PATATO VALDES

GIOVANNI HIDALGO



1. Tumbando Caña 8:00

(Leonard Julio Blanco, Antonio Castro, Ervin Drake, Eva Santana Ramirez)
Edward B. Marks Music Co. c/o Carlin America Inc. [BMI]

2. Elube Chango 4:24

(traditional)

3. Guaguancó Pa' Las Tumbadoras 7:03

(Ray Santos) • Chesky Productions [ASCAP]

4. Nagüe 7:53

(Chano Pozo) • EMI Robbins Inc. [ASCAP]

5. Avisale A Mi Contrario 7:17

(traditional)

6. Tuna Se Quemó 4:34

(traditional)

7. Descarga De Los Reyes 7:55

(Candido Camero, Giovanni Hidalgo, and Carlos "Patato" Valdes) • Chesky Productions [ASCAP]

8. Duet I: Temporal 3:44

(Rafael Marin Hernandez) arr. by Giovanni Hidalgo and Nelson Gonzalez • APRS c/o Peermusic [BMI]

9. Duet II 5:54

(Carlos "Patato" Valdes and Mauricio Smith) • Chesky Productions [ASCAP]

10. Duet III 4:27

(Candido Camero and Guillermo Edghill) • Chesky Productions [ASCAP]

11. Conga Kings Grand Finale 7:34

(Candido Camero, Giovanni Hidalgo, and Carlos "Patato" Valdes) • Chesky Productions [ASCAP]

I must admit that, when David Chesky approached me about producing a CD featuring three of the greatest conga drum artists in the world, I felt intimidated. But after thinking it over for a few days, I said to myself, "Why not?" I've known Candido for 46 years, ever since we played a one week show together in 1953 at the landmark Apollo Theater with Joe Locho's band. I've known Patato almost as long; we met a couple years later when I was lucky enough to join Machito and his Afro-Cubans, who included Patato in that great percussion section (and also occasionally Candido, for recordings). Giovanni is the youngest of this dream team of congueros, and I remember him as even younger: he was just 15 when I met him in Puerto Rico 20 years ago. We worked together on recordings and stage shows, where I recognized his exceptional talent as a percussionist. So, having a previous working relationship with all three of these outstanding musicians, I was confident that David and I could get some very exciting sounds on tape from this trio of legendary drummers. That's what this album is all about: excitement!

Candido Camero was born in 1921 in Barrio El Cerro, Havana, Cuba. The opening track on this CD, "Tumbando Caña," is the official *comparsa* (Carnival street dance) of Barrio El Cerro. Candido started his musical experience playing the tres, a guitar-like instrument with three double strings that sounds a lot like the more familiar twelve-string guitar. Eventually, he took up the conga and bongo drums, and it is his artistry and showmanship on these



that has made his name. After coming to New York in the early 1950's, he earned a reputation among the leading jazz musicians for his ability to combine his Afro-Cuban rhythms with their contemporary styles, such as bebop and big-band swing. During this period, he could be heard on recordings and in person with Billy Taylor, Stan Kenton, Duke Ellington and Dizzy Gillespie, just to name a few. Naturally, he was equally at home with Machito, Joe Locho, and Tito Puente, frequently appearing and recording with them. As his solos on this CD will prove, he is still as great a master conguero as ever. He is a true Conga King.

Carlos "Patato" Valdes is a native of Havana's Barrio Los Sitios, where he was born in 1926. After a tour to New York in 1953 with Conjunto Casino from Cuba, he came back on his own and has been a permanent resident of the Big Apple since 1954. He joined Machito in 1955, and in 1960, together with fellow Machito percussionist Jose Mangual Jr., he went on tour with jazz flautist Herbie Mann, earning international recognition. He also performed with Quincy Jones, Art Blakey, and Dizzy Gillespie. Patato, along with Candido, is one of the pioneers of the multiple-conga drum style of playing, sometimes using as many as four differently-sized drums. This technique enables him to get all seven pitches of the diatonic scale within an octave, giving his solos interesting melodic combinations along

with his outstanding rhythmic creations. He has elevated performance on the conga drum to an art form. As any aspiring young conguero will tell you, Patato is the man to check out! He is definitely a Conga King.

Giovanni Hidalgo was born in 1963 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. His father, Jose "Mañenge" Hidalgo, is a famous conguero and, at five years of age, Giovanni was already starting his career as a percussionist under his father's tutelage. By the time he was a teenager, Giovanni was gigging with bands in Puerto Rico and earning himself a reputation as an prodigiously talented drummer. His burning ambition to be a great musician motivated him to go to Havana, Cuba to study with Changuito, the father of modern Afro-Cuban percussion. Needless to say, this experience, in combination with his natural-born abilities, made Giovanni the shining star of all the younger congueros. The word soon reached Dizzy Gillespie, who invited him to join his United Nation All-Star Orchestra as a featured soloist. We included the song "Nagüe" as a tribute to Chano Pozo, the first conguero to achieve international fame through his association with Dizzy Gillespie. Similarly, Giovanni quickly earned the world-class reputation he had worked hard for, which led to appearances and recordings with Tito Puente, Carlos Santana, Art Blakey, Ruben Blades, Eddie Palmieri, and countless others. Maestro Hidalgo surely belongs next to his two most ardent admirers, Candido and Patato, on the throne of the Conga Kings.



In order to get the big, spacious sound that was necessary for these three congueros, each playing three drums (and Patato four) for a total of ten, plus auxiliary percussion, David Chesky went to his favorite recording venue at St. Peter's Episcopal Church. Rounding out the percussion, we added a tres, a bass, a flute, a solo singer, and two backup (*coro*) singers. David likes a live performance with no multi-tracking or overdubbing, fed directly to one microphone which feeds into a digital audio recorder. This presents special problems and challenges, all of which took hours to resolve, but the end result is a masterpiece of sound. To my knowledge, this is the first time this technique has been used in recording the specialized genre of Afro-Cuban percussion, which allows each percussionist the freedom to create his own natural dynamics and balance.

Candido, Patato, and Giovanni performed magnificently on all the tracks. Their highly-individualized styles of playing complemented each other so beautifully that everyone at the session was energized, and in the ensuing rhythmic frenzy all three accompanied the call-and-response sections of the singers or each others' conga solos. It is during these solo sections that you will hear why these three masters are truly Conga Kings.

Ray Santos

Candido Camero: Congas, Vocals
Giovanni Hidalgo: Congas, Vocals
Carlos "Patato" Valdes: Congas, Vocals

Joe Gonzalez: Bongos

Guillermo Edghill: Bass

Nelson Gonzalez: Tres

John Benthal: Second Tres

Mauricio Smith: Flute

Jose Francisco Valdes: Claves

Hermengildo Olivera, Jr (solo), Nelson Gonzalez III, Luis Rosa: Coro Singers

Producers: **David Chesky** and **Ray Santos**

Executive Producer: **Norman Chesky**

Musical Director: **Ray Santos**

Recording Engineer: **Barry Wolfson**

Assistant Producer: **Steve Guttenberg**

Second Engineer / Prod. Coordinator: **Sandy Palmer Grassi**

Editing & Mastering Engineer: **Nicholas Prout**

Recording Assistants: **Rick Eckerle, Peter Volpe**

Director of Legal Affairs: **Lisa J. Marks**

Production Manager: **Catherine Kernen**

Artist Development: **Lisa Hershfield**

Art Director: **Aldo Sampieri**

Photography: **Janette Beckman**

Recorded December 6-9, 1999, at **St. Peter's Episcopal Church**, New York, NY.

Audiophile Note: You can hear **Giovanni** in the left speaker, **Candido** in the middle, **Patato** in the right.

Latin percussion instruments provided by **Latin Percussion (LP)**



