

GATO BARBIERI BIOGRAPHY

Gato Barbieri's success lies in his enthralling music, which consists of a perfect blend of instrumental impetuosity, derived from Coltrane lessons and inflamed free jazz, together with his own natural sensibility for melody and charming Latin rhythms.

This Argentine saxophonist has been one of the forerunners of what these days is commonly referred to as World Music. His urgency of expression creates music full of passion, with the power to reach everyone.

Hear just a few notes, and one instantly recognizes that it is the "Cat" playing his tenor.

His legend continues on his most recent and 50th album, called ***New York Meeting*** (Meloepa Discos, 2009), on which he collaborated with renown bassist David Fink and two fellow Argentine Musicians, pianist and composer Carlos Franzetti and drummer Nestor Astarita.

Barbieri began professionally as a teenager playing alto sax in Buenos Aires clubs, and since then his five-decade career has covered virtually the entire jazz landscape, from free jazz (with trumpeter Don Cherry in the mid-60s) and avant garde to film scoring and his ultimate embrace of Latin music throughout the 70's and 80's. He began playing tenor with his own band in the late 50's and moved to Rome with his Italian-born first wife Michelle in 1962, where he began collaborating with Cherry. The two musicians recorded two albums for Blue Note, ***Complete Communion*** and ***Symphony for Improvisers***, which are considered classics of free group improvisations. Look for some never-before-heard Barbieri/Cherry music to be released on the ESP label in the near future.

Barbieri launched his career as a leader with the Latin flavored ***The Third World*** in 1969, and later parlayed his success with the soundtrack for ***Last Tango in Paris*** into a career as a film composer, scoring a dozen international films over the years in Europe, South America and the United States. From 1976 through 1979, Barbieri released four popular albums on A&M Records, the label owned by trumpet great Herb Alpert.

The Shadow of the Cat (Peak/Concord PKD-8509-2), released in September 2002, won Billboard's prestigious 2003 **Latin Jazz Album of the Year** and garnered a Latin Grammy nomination. *The Shadow of the Cat* is a reunion of sorts for Gato and Herb Alpert, with Alpert playing trumpet on three songs.

The Shadow of the Cat features musical friends Peter White, Sheila E, Russ Freeman and others. *Shadow* also includes “El Chico”, dedicated to longtime friend and collaborator Chico O’Farrell. It also contains a re-recording of the theme from 1972’s film *Last Tango In Paris* (celebrating the 30th anniversary of the controversial and ground-breaking Bertolucci-directed classic) for which Gato won his first Grammy for the composing and recording of the score.

Gato Barbieri called his 1999 release ***Che Corazon*** a “musical biography, nostalgic, about friends and family,” and he dedicates *The Shadow of the Cat* to his beloved mother, who passed away in 1991. In his liner notes, he writes, “If not for you and the spark you lit in me, I would not be who I am today. There would be no *[The] Shadow of the Cat*.”

Barbieri grew up poor in Rosario, Argentina, but felt rich in what he learned from his mother about life, love and music. She encouraged him to work with his hands and to play clarinet and alto sax, while his brother became a trumpet player. “She understood me and encouraged my musical dreams,” he says. “She was an incredible woman.”

Barbieri officially took up the clarinet at age 12 when he heard Charlie Parker’s “Now’s The Time”, and even as he continued private music lessons in Buenos Aires, he was playing his first professional gigs with Lalo Schifrin’s orchestra. “During that time, Juan Peron was in power”, he recalls. “We weren’t allowed to play all jazz; we had to include some traditional music, too. So we played tango and other things like carnavalito.” In Buenos Aires, Barbieri also had the opportunity to perform with visiting musicians like Cuban mambo king Perez Prado, Coleman Hawkins, Herbie Mann, Dizzy Gillespie, and João Gilberto.

Barbieri credits his learning of musical discipline to his years working with Don Cherry while living in Europe. While collaborating with Cherry in the mid-60s, the saxophonist also recorded with American expatriate Steve Lacy and South African pianist Abdullah Ibrahim, then known as Dollar Brand. Other associations during Barbieri’s free jazz days included time with Charlie Haden, Carla Bley and the Jazz Composer’s Orchestra, directed by Charlie Haden, as well as dates with Stanley Clarke, Airtó Moreira, Chico O’Farrell, and Lonnie Liston Smith. He had recorded a handful of albums on the Flying Dutchman label in the early 70’s and then signed with *Impulse!* where he recorded his classic Chapter Series (***Latin America, Hasta Siempre, Viva Emiliano Zapata*** and ***Alive in New York***). While at *Impulse!*, *Last Tango* hit, and by the mid-70’s, his coarse, wailing tone began to mellow with ballads like “What A Difference A Day Makes” (known to Barbieri as the vintage bolero “Cuando Vuelva a tu Lado”) and Carlos Santana’s

“Europa”. Many smooth jazz radio stations later adopted “Europa” as their theme song, indicative of the vibe of the “new” format, which launched in the late 80’s. Most of Barbieri’s A&M recordings of the late 70’s—including the brisk selling 1976 opus **Caliente!**—featured this softer jazz approach, but early 80’s dates like the live **Gato...Para Los Amigos** had a more intense, rock-influenced South American sound.

After many years of limited musical activity due to the passing of his first wife Michelle ...and his own triple bypass surgery six weeks later, Barbieri returned stronger than ever with the 1997 Columbia offering **Qué Pasa**, the fourth-highest-selling Contemporary Jazz album of the year.

“It’s the melody,” he continually says. “The melody is the most important thing, and something I very much love. When I play the saxophone, I play life, I play love, I play anger, I play confusion, I play when people scream; all of these aspects of the world I inhabit become naturally important to me. It’s exciting that people are still moved when I play, and I consider myself blessed to have had fans that have listened to me for such a long time. They still do, and I’m still having fun. When I start recording, I am playing for me, but when I play a concert, I play for me and them. It is not a “show”, but it is a musical message. They understand where I am coming from.”

Since *The Shadow of the Cat*, Gato has continued to play festivals, concerts and clubs around the world. One reviewer, who first saw Gato live in 1972, and then reviewed Gato live again in 2004, said of his 2004 performance (May 15, 2004, Washington, PA),

“Gato’s show that night was nothing less than consummate artistry by a true master of the jazz idiom. If this is what his performances are like these days, then everyone should see him while he still has the energy to play like this. He is one of the rarest musicians in any style because he has created a sound unique to himself that is timeless. His music sounds every bit as powerful, vital, and refreshing as it did in 1972,” when this reviewer first saw him perform in Princeton, NJ.

There have been several recent highlights in Gato’s life:

In July of 2003, Long Island University and WLIU combined to give Gato a **Lifetime Achievement Award**. In September of the same year, Boston Symphony Orchestra’s Tanglewood Jazz Festival headlined Gato Barbieri at the Ozawa Concert Hall. The performance was broadcast live by Boston’s WBGH and New York’s WBGO; it was the beginning of the fledgling NPR station network as the concert was simulcast over eight stations from New England to Pennsylvania to Chicago.

The 2004 Puerto Rican Heineken Jazz Festival featured Gato as the **2004 Honoree**.

And late in 2004, Gato was honored by his homeland of Argentina when the Argentine Ambassador presented him with a **Lifetime Achievement Award** at a special function at the Argentine Consulate in New York City.

In late August, 2004, Universal Music released four new compilation CD's in their world renown "20th Century Masters" series: Sarah Vaughn, Charlie Parker, Carmen McRae and Gato Barbieri. This association with other jazz icons only serves to once again confirm Barbieri's legendary status both within the music business community and to the entire world.

Speaking about his latest CD, 2009's ***New York Meeting***, Gato calls it "his first jam session with a couple of fellow argentine musicians, and invited guest David Fink".

Currently Gato is busy touring and collaborating with Director Nancy Savoca on a documentary named ***el Gato: A lifetime contribution to Jazz***.

He is the recipient of the **U.N.I.C.E.F award** in Honor of Celia Cruz, which was presented to him in fall of 2009 at the Argentine Consulate (NYC). He is currently composing a collaborative CD for the ***Niños de Argentina***, for U.N.I.C.E.F.

Mr. Barbieri loves performing live, watching futbol (soccer to American fans) and the Yankees with his 14-year-old son. He is a devotee of Turner Classic Movies.

He currently lives in New York City with his wife Laura and son.