



Library podcast

Artist Talk: Ira Block & Cuban Baseball

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[00:00:38] Okay. I'm here to introduce trio Q by. Q By bases its repertoire essentially on sonnets scratches and Bolero us with a hint of rumba cha cha cha angry and Latin jazz as a result of the versatility of its members. The trio incorporates other Cuban and Caribbean genres into their music as well goodbye as a musical project founded on May 19 to May 2015 in Seattle by Alfredo Pooley Air Voice and minor percussion and Harvey air Moreau voice in guitar and they were initially a duo. Later on Cuba teamed up with Lalo Bale percussion which resulted in extending the project to a trio. Today goodbye is capable of appearing as a quartet or quintet as well. Goodbye recreates its music on analogies of popular Cuban melodies representing how the roots of the native flavor which originated from the large island of the Antilles their harmonization forms a contrapuntal counterpoint to a game that easily moves from traditional harmonies to modern and back again join me in welcoming trio coup by. Going out of maybe Lucille means that we all know that our core base may have established a following nobility that its

[00:02:36] Not made up as a ruling. We. Get. Self-made I wasn't. That. Bad. Shut. But won't get as good them as any other on the damage based on the idea best man there was a moment though we put it aside as the one allowing. Si. Si. Si. Si

[00:03:24] Novak and Ben has to take and I know that some business go well that by not being as bad at the moment though they put for that that. Now the. Si. Si. Si. Si

[00:03:59] Is I go look up I've got a really down in dammit that little look up my life but I have had a bad day. See

[00:04:10] You off my window. Yes I. See. Yeah I think so. I mean maybe Jamie. Oh. That is. So. Bad. That

[00:04:27] I said No look I love my body. I got a bad apple. Now. I go look out on my body.

[00:04:34] I mean how did you go about it. They told me about baby about maybe maybe maybe a little bit of data at least that I made myself go down on my body.

[00:04:56] I got a bad apple. I mean look I'm not a bad apple but both

[00:05:12] Down there there's a better way out. Let's see. If you look back on that bike. I mean I got nothing. You made me go down by your bare feet but now you look at I look at them and put them in there but I don't

[00:05:43] Well look it as good manners and you know deep down that I made ideology as it a moment ago. Yeah.

[00:05:51] Oh is that down the line. Si. Si. Si. Si. China

[00:06:13] Both get better get anything out of there. So basically what a day by day and it was a moment of a book by a that both sides down the line. Si. Si. Si. Si. Doble those those meet. No last night said

[00:07:35] As it ended up with guys getting down the goal of getting down Syria goes down the lead and the States goal.

[00:07:53] Yes goals. Guys. They said that our goals their own goals one goal stop is get going.

[00:08:04] Goal of being a state sponsor the end goal is one more space on the end goals.

[00:08:12] Cnn asked why we are seeing. Wow. Yeah. Oh yeah.

[00:08:19] So look I don't know. Why don't you see that. So you see

[00:08:25] That seal of approval. We'll see.

[00:08:34] Yeah. Landry smile. Oh I see. No.

[00:08:40] He said yesterday and God is not long gone. Well a little scared but I said it would be the. Day as they still see it in the other corner of Spain Sammy and knows the bad stuff.

[00:09:19] Was he on a bad day. Yeah yeah yeah.

[00:09:24] And we'll get that knowledge. Glenda Randy seemed liberality

[00:09:29] So obviously messed me up that you know so we'll see. Oh

[00:09:39] Yeah. I'm amazed man. See doc

[00:09:44] He said Ghassan got his that gun. Well those good guys that would avoid those would be. So. Many things bad things about you about being

[00:11:23] Gunned down by the school. They saying. They got bad. Alter bald eagle NBN ball. And the. Bad guys must have. Sam. Get me a domain name. A lot of people will get everybody on board. Would. Be mad mad

[00:11:57] Mad. He's. Got. A job. David. Supreme

[00:12:13] About saying I want. Well town found the locals have let off in bulk asking why God wants me in my head. They have loved. You know way I'm not on that. Same Andy and

[00:12:37] No bailout money again. Bill. Daley on. Although I don't think he's gonna be my ball

[00:13:06] Game Man. It doesn't matter okay. There. You. Go with your baby daddy. Oh yeah. Gave my. You. Go to the that. Bag. Get out of here. Get

[00:14:54] Why they let me do it on me man who's I love. We may not see where they wear a tie. Well they may not be. The. Man. He. CEO wearing. When they let him go down they might decide think that. They may not see

[00:15:22] Where. Well they may not be. Those. Way they do it on me Microsoft they found. When they last see where they where they were they may not be. The. Women

[00:15:58] Will it up and go down the mountainside being. Where they may not see a wary eye. They may not see the. Site. Where they lie they do it on me back was I think about. When they lost me way way way way they lost the. Way they may not see. Eye they may not see. My eyes see. My. Can I am standing in my back yard they have both been I lost both go away from both by men and women go to stand on the economy long in the field they men book down the vaccine. Those. Guys. Those three. Men I think they are made of and so they may not go to bed any bad or something. They laugh when they thought they had gone man gone I thought. They. Got their

[00:18:02] Land back in May they may be out to me but we are we raised on radio we'll have some radio Okay now what about my boy. So. God made. The lives of. Those big. MAN Yeah go baby

[00:18:23] Go back. Oh man so they. They laugh when these guys got Beaubien Oh it's my but phone company he may go down but the fact that they moved up here is now being like one of those examples it won't have so many jobs to be. In Louisiana might. Not make. A wise old. MAN Oh my God oh my. God. Those. Men. Both big bad. Man. And a little bit oh man. I'm. Not. Ready to. What. Where. This whole thing. This. Thing. Anyway. I'm gonna. Go. See. This

[00:19:22] In the saddle. They send. Me the. That'll be be. Oh God we've. Been

[00:19:41] Mad about that. Oh. Don't be. Mad. At me. I'm not going to be. A day you to take a man's life so. Oh. Man I'm not gonna my own. Oh. So. Yeah. I want. That. Guy. God. Must. Put aside. I mean. That. Money. Again. No. Doubt. Dummy factory owner like me though I mean my God I mean. Who's

[00:20:52] Gonna get this way. I mean. How long does it take. To make the most of it. Jeff. When. I. Say. That. I don't buy. It. They want me. Getting you'll be in the. To. The man. In. The. Italy's way. And made me. I do mean. Man. I. Up. On. I don't think

[00:21:40] So. I don't. Think. So. Thank you so much. Was

[00:22:01] All right. Is this my gun. Can we give it up one more time for real. Go by. My goodness I couldn't think of a better way to start this evening. My name is Davina Ingram and I am the public engagement programs manager and I have to say you all are a lovely crowd.

[00:22:26] I was nervous. We had a Facebook event up and we had about twelve people who had RSVP and we are many more than 12 tonight. And I also heard the applause when we asked if we had donors in the audience if we have donors library card holders people who check out our public events. We're very happy to see you do you know that this is the first public opening day for baseball in Cuba. Are we excited about IRA block. Yeah

[00:23:00] We wanted to make sure that people I'm supposed to be clicking through slides. We wanted to make sure that people knew that this program was made possible by the Seattle Public Library Foundation and we also wanted this program to start with a very very generous acknowledgement of the beautiful Cuban culture and artists and community that live in Seattle and then to also to have that as something that we use to digest and understand the beauty and majesty of Ira's images. So if you haven't had a chance to check out the exhibit it just opened and we hope you will tell a friend you do not need tickets drop ins are whenever you're here at the library.

[00:23:42] Anytime our regular business hours are when we're open and this show will be up through December 30th. I think this is one of the few times that we will have Ira here in person. So if you didn't bring everybody that you wanted to. Don't worry. In addition to that really beautiful concert that we had from trio combined to open it up we'll have a podcast of the concert and of IRA's top. I'm sure you're bored of listening to me. So are you ready to welcome IRA to the stage.

[00:24:18] All right thank thanks. Is this working. Yeah sounds like it is. Thank you Davida. And I want to thank everyone at the library here who made this possible. It's a great event. The prints look fabulous upstairs. We'll take a look when this is over. I also want to thank. Want to thank Gary Kunis and the Kunis foundation he supported this project and he he's also a big supporter of the library. A little background. I started photography. When I was in high school and I still remember the magic of seeing a print come up and the developer in the darkroom that my dad built for me in my house in Brooklyn. I continue taking pictures. And when I went off to college I couldn't get it out of my system

and I just decided I'm going to be a photographer this is what I'm going to do. Much to my parents regret thinking you're going to be a photographer. What luck. That's not a real job is it. Well there it is a real job it's a real profession and it's to me it's a way of life. I've been working for the National Geographic for over 30 years and it's been a fabulous opportunity opportunity to see the world. And meet all sorts of people many times people will come up to me and say wow I or you've got the greatest job in the world. And I say oh no not really. Thank you very much. But in reality I think I do.

[00:26:13] I can't I can't think of what else I could have done or what else I would do besides being a photographer and traveling my life over these last 30 35 years has been enriched by all the people I've met and by all the various cultures and all the countries that I've that I've just traveled to it's been something it's hard to describe. And hopefully my photos describe the feeling that. I've experienced meeting all these people seeing all these cultures and also experiencing the Earth's natural beauty. In 1997 I first went to Cuba on assignment for the National Geographic The assignment was to do a photo essay on the hundredth anniversary of the sinking of the battleship Maine which started the Spanish American War and when I went in nineteen ninety seven Cuba was a lot different than it is now over the next 15 years I traveled to Cuba on multiple times doing different stories and experiencing different things on the island each visit there was incredible and each visit brought me to see all these different changes going on in the culture and of course you know everyone loves the old cars. That's been one consistent thing in Cuba. From when I started going the cars is still great and it's still a thrill to ride in them although most of the engines are no longer U.S. engines a lot of them are Russian engines that have been retrofitted part of being a photographer is paying attention to people and listening to what they say.

[00:28:42] I was on the island of youth East allowed to move in towed photographing a baseball game and my assistant said to me Hey you want to go out and see where Castro is imprisoned. I said Why not. So I had the opportunity to go to the prison where Castro was I think 1953 to 1955 five right after he and his group bombed the barracks in Mankato so I get out there and I'm looking around and saying this prison looks really familiar to me and I recall when I was first starting out in photography after I got out of school at the University of Wisconsin I had a job working for a newspaper in Chicago and one of my assignments was to go to Joliet State Prison there and I read this looked exactly like Joliet and when I got back to New York I did some research and found that it was the same architect that had built a Joliet prison that had built this back in nineteen twenty six or nineteen twenty seven so all these trips to Cuba were pretty exciting but I was I wanted to focus on something that was special and I had the idea I think in about two thousand and 13 to do something on baseball I knew that baseball would change when Cuba changed so I thought let me document this sport that's so so pure and seemed so innocent compared to the big business that baseball is in the United States and just as a point. How many people

[00:30:55] Watch the world series last night. OK. Quite a number so here you've got these players many of whom are making over four or five million dollars a year but when the Astros won that game and and they all jumped out on the field. It was like little kids again. It didn't matter how much money they were making. This was the love of the game.

[00:31:28] This is why they started playing baseball and this is their MO. Those moments last night were the type of moment that I wanted to capture in Cuba and the Cubans love of playing baseball because in Cuba the baseball is the blood of the Cuban people. It permeates everything that happens there. Well I had been to Cuba a lot and I wanted to do something on baseball and I was trying to figure out my approach what I would do I was in the locker room at my gym at Chelsea Piers it's the gym in New York City and everyone in the gym. If you go to the gym there are people you just nod your head to and say hi you don't really know them but you have little conversations. Hey how you doing. What's going on. And one of the guys in the locker room asked me Hey what do you do and where you. Then where are you going.

[00:32:37] He knew I was a photographer and I said I want to go to Cuba. And I want to do this project on baseball. And the guy says to me while you should speak to my sister and I'm looking at the guy who is about seventy five years old and is from Brooklyn where I'm from by the way. So nothing bad about Brooklyn and I ask. You know I just couldn't figure out what was going on. What could his sister do for me his sister who's about 80 and was a big radical at Brooklyn College in the 50s went to a conference in Paris met an Argentine student. That was another leftist they fell in love she got married and she moved to Argentina. Her husband went to medical school.

[00:33:38] Her husband became a doctor and in 1960 when Castro's taken over the keep the Cuban economy in the Cuban island he lost a lot of doctors and lawyers they all left and went to Miami.

[00:33:55] He was desperate for doctors so this Argentinean medicals teacher student got recruited by the Cuban government and came and came to Cuba to teach at the medical school along with him came his wife from Brooklyn who is a filmmaker this woman later became Castro's personal videographer filmmaker. She did a lot of documentaries about Castro and she still lives in Cuba. She's super well-known.

[00:34:31] So when I got in touch with her within 10 days and every door open for me I could do whatever I wanted oh the other thing which I forgot to mention even though I could do everything I wanted.

[00:34:45] I mean I still met people. You still have to develop a tool trust and confidence. And I would always say to these people and they loved it. The Cuban people just loved this. I said you know I'm not Cuban but I was made in Cuba my parents had their honeymoon at the National Hotel. You could see where it goes remember. And Cuban baseball has been going on since the late 18th 60s. It came to Cuba from some wealthy Spanish kids that went to university in the United States and they started bringing baseball back to Cuba. This stadium Palomar don't go outside of Montana Matanzas Cuba. Is the oldest professional stadium in the world the first pro game there was played in 1874. So it's older than Wrigley Field. It's older than Fenway Park. And it still stands. They don't play pro games but it is being used for interleague and other games while I was there. I started seeing the change in Cuban baseball because major league baseball sent a goodwill group down to Cuba and brought some Cuban players that had defected. There was a big thing to bring them back. So here we have some baseball fans in the audience

[00:36:26] A few.

[00:36:27] All right so here we have Miguel Cabrera Zambrano rose from Cuba.

[00:36:41] Alexi Romero who is Cuban Yasiel Puig best didn't have such a good night last night right. And here's one of your guys. Nelson Cruz though is an opportunity to watch a door that was going to open when Cuba finally does change Major League Baseball.

[00:37:04] Get down to Cuba. It'll be like the Dominican Republic where there are all these academies and systems to bring players in and baseball will lose the purity and innocence it has in Cuba and how do you find out about what it was.

[00:37:24] You know how do I do research. My first. Trip on this Cuban baseball project was in 2013 and then there were very little internet and Cuba we can't do the research. But how did I find things out. You go around and you ask Hey where are they playing ball. I could go to any little town any village and all I do is ask. Where are they playing baseball. Door's open and it's just a matter of picking what you need to shoot the kids in Cuba will do whatever it takes to play ball they can afford the equipment really. But as you can see they'll take PDC piping. Use that for a bat. And I was wondering what the can was. That's what they were hit in any combination to make it appear that they're playing ball to giving them that feeling of hitting something getting that coordination and swing going they will do so. They can't afford equipment. You know what a hard ball cost. I mean when I have an idea and looks close it's probably seven dollars. So when you think about it in a major league baseball game I think they go through about one hundred and fifty balls a game the Cuban Pete know five six seven dollars to a Cuban family it's making thirty dollars a month pretty expensive. Whatever they could do to play ball they will do the fans are fanatics. They go crazy during these games. What does it cost to get into a game. About twenty five cents. And even that's too expensive for a lot of people. So what they do at the stadiums I think is about after the seventh inning they let people in for free.

[00:39:39] And that's it. That was you know that's Fidel up there.

[00:39:45] Who.

[00:39:47] Who had who had a pretty decent career as a player in Cuba. And there were all these rumors that the Washington Senators were looking at him to play for them. Can you imagine what the world would have been like had Fidel become a pro ball player for Washington. Who knows what history would have been like and right outside the big stadium Latino Americano in Havana is a signed we have the victory or will be in the work or of all the people that pretty good. Let's see who's that fairly close.

[00:40:33] Translator future for ways but God Fidel and a baseball there though.

[00:40:40] It's part of just what happens when you have a country that loves the game so much. I was fortunate because I'm not really a sports photographer. I used to be years ago I just. I'm more of a cultural photographer so when I did go to games and I did shoot action I didn't really have to shoot the decisive play in the game that was going to win it.

[00:41:08] I was looking more for the poetry of the game the ballet of baseball that that's the kind of photography I was looking for along with all the grass roots photography of people involved in the game and you know this could have been seen in the 1950s in Brooklyn where I was from. Some kids find an empty lot and they just start playing ball I found kids on the street and made friends with them. And we just follow them around and this group of kids were great and I was. I'd been shooting with them all day and started getting to be late in the afternoon and you could see how fantastic the shadows are. I was shooting on the ground and I just knew I'd have a much better image if I'd gotten a little higher.

[00:42:10] So I talked my way into someone's apartment got on their terrorists and of course there was all this laundry hanging there which I had to push aside to be able to get this photo. And I'm really how many people are photographers in here. Anyone interested in photography. All right so I mean I was really lucky. Here I got the ball in the shadow. And here's a shadow of the ball. So photographically this picture has a lot of different things going for it. And again you just here's here's a fan that's been going to a lot of games smoking a lot of cigars. And I don't think has much in the way of teeth. When I was talking earlier about Wrigley Field and Fenway Park when I saw this this scoreboard it looked just like the scoreboard a little earlier dated one at Fenway Park where they punch in where they had to physically punch in the numbers. Anyone been to Fenway Park.

[00:43:20] Mr. Rae Park. Right.

[00:43:23] And then this young boy is sitting there watching this and I realized he's a part of the picture. He's

[00:43:30] Part of the magic that's happening and this woman floating at the ticket booth another part of the magic the crowds at these games are incredible.

[00:43:45] They really are loyal to their teams and this is in Matanzas stadium there. They don't serve liquor at the stadium. I think the crowds are enthusiastic enough without having beer going on but the teams can bring in all their fans and the fans create their bring have their own little bands and create their own music and they do go wild and they do get upset and if you're really really a loyal fan and you pass on you still get your season ticket though this guy had as you know a statue to him.

[00:44:35] And of course the kids love going outside the stadium getting and getting prepared to meet players as they come out and some of the kids if you're really good you get on a team. If you're not good you're going to be playing using the PDC pipe and tree branches and making your own balls.

[00:45:00] But if you're good you'll get on some team probably just out of junior high school and you'll get a uniform and get some equipment but you have to start early to be good this kid really was into playing baseball.

[00:45:21] He knew all the players on his team and they just continue playing of course. Sometimes you have to stop playing when there's a cattle crossing happening at your field and this guy's got to. This is a pretty good tree branch that he's using for a bat. It's pretty significant and sometimes you'll find that you know instead of cutting the outfield grass. They have a built in lawnmower here that take care of that for you. We've all been to the food concessions at the stadiums here in the US that are big parts of corporations and beer of course 15 dollars and a hotdog costs ten dollars.

[00:46:11] But in Cuba it's a little different all the concessions are sort of local mom and pop places. And for about twenty five cents you get a great pulled pork sandwich and it's fresh because you see where it's coming from and then you get to sit down put some newspaper on your lap

[00:46:34] And have you know have your dinner and if you do have a desire for a beer you can't get one at the stadium but you could always find one right outside the stadium. So what are the kids do. To have you know to have something to hit besides a tin can when they can afford a baseball for seven dollars you make your own what they'll do is they'll take a stone wrap it in some paper and then they'll get adhesive tape and just wrap the tape around the ball until they get something that looks like this and it actually works.

[00:47:24] It's got a little bit of bounce to it. These kids know just the right size wrong to put in.

[00:47:31] These kids know just how much tape to wrap around it. So help me out to make my life easier. I found one of the places that sold all this tape and I bought about 50 or 100 rolls of it. And as I went through the streets of different towns and I met kids I'd hand them the tape so they could make balls because even the tape was too expensive for them to buy. So this way I can make friends and photo. Photograph them doing whatever for the whole day.

[00:48:15] It's a small investment for me but it's a huge investment for them. And you'll find people just playing some form of hitting a ball anywhere. You'll even see crocodiles with bats. This is the team mascot for the Matanzas team. A croc and billions and if you don't have a seat if you can't afford this seat sometimes you can find your own way of viewing a game. And also I guess when you're outside the game you get a. This guy's got an opportunity to consume some ramen and various alcoholic beverages that you can't do in the stadium.

[00:49:07] So everyone's looking at this game everyone's watching baseball they're and during the season you'll go into bars and you'll places and if they're not watching on TV you'll hear the radios going with the game's baseball is again so important to the culture there that if you're good and again when you pass on. We all see what happens if you're a great fan and you pass on but if you're a great player and pass on there's a special section at the cemetery

[00:49:47] For players and umpires. That's how revered these people are.

[00:49:54] And one thing that happened on my last trip right before my last trip I realized I felt there was something missing in my coverage of this or it I said to my wife and I said to my assistant because they'd seen all my pictures up to them. You know what's missing.

[00:50:21] What am I.

[00:50:22] There's something that's missing in this and they said to me you don't have anyone really old playing their you know old play is I thought to myself wow this is what I really need to sort of complete the circle of baseball in Cuba.

[00:50:42] I need to show that even when you're very old you're still going to play and I found a veterans league and so on my final trip I was able to shoot the veterans league some of whom were women and I decided I was going to shoot them in action but I'm watching a game and there's a great play.

[00:51:10] There's a 72 year old guy that's running from second base and slides into third.

[00:51:16] I thought Oh my God this is an incredible play. And it was he was safe at third. It just took him about thirty five minutes to stand up. So I thought portraits showing the faces and the odd ball uniforms that these guys had would be the way to finish this out for me.

[00:51:41] And it was great. They were a great group of guys.

[00:51:45] They had some had played pro ball some had played high school ball but they played ball and they didn't want to stop and they continued playing ball so for me it was very sad.

[00:51:59] This was my last shoot and it was over for me although it really wasn't good. When I got back I started doing exhibitions. I have a book coming out in April on called Cuba loves baseball a photographic journey it's on Amazon. We'll get a little plug in already. But this was a terrific way to end because it really was sad after two and a half years working on this project. And so after one of the games I said I Aw come on let's go for a drink. And I thought we'd be going to a bar. No they can't afford a bar we. We went on some street corner. They pulled out a bottle of rum and some Coca-Cola.

[00:52:44] And we just drank it there and one of the things a cute little thing that happened was they had no cups. So they took water bottles. And cut the bottom off to make a cup they made two cups because they cut the top off and they kept a little lid on. So you had two cups salad

[00:53:24] That's my little trip watching baseball and documenting baseball in Cuba before it's going to change and it will change. It's going to change. But I'm so happy I was able to record this part of history anybody have any questions. In the back

[00:53:50] How much is a pro player make.

[00:53:53] If you're really a good pro player a hundred dollars a month so you can see why if you're really good come to the US and start getting 5 million a year. You know there is some benefit there. The project took me I made five trips to Cuba. Each trip was probably about two weeks and I did it over about two and a half years I started in 2013 because that's when I felt change was going to start coming and my last trip was probably the end of 2015. Cuban and Cuban players come to the U.S. on their own will or they have to escape. We call that defecting

[00:54:50] So you have to defect yeah they're not allowed to come.

[00:54:55] Now the. It's very complicated because the really good players not only does the money look good just playing in the US is the is the high point in baseball and the local Cubans like this year in the world baseball classic the Cuban team did poorly because all the great players are gone so with the Cuban people miss the fact that they're great players of left

[00:55:31] They're also proud that their players Yasiel plague in the world series. It's a very complicated situation. I don't know how it will ever be worked out.

[00:55:44] Another question. Two more questions. Yes. 1. Yeah. We want to go. We want to go to the gallery and look at some French. So we're gonna wrap this up.

[00:55:54] Yeah I would if usually the players play for the team where they're living. It gets complicated like some of them have other jobs in the off season because one hundred dollars a month is not going to you know you're doing better than the average person making 30 but it's not making wealthy one more question anybody. Yes sir.

[00:56:19] If you're interested in baseball in Cuba especially now because when I started going in 1997 there was no Internet. 2013 The Internet was coming in and in about two thousand fifteen sixteen they started having Wi-Fi in the parks although it still is expensive for a local Cuban but they could.

[00:56:40] Once you can get on the Internet they'll follow baseball. All right I think that's it. One last question if it's quick. What's my favorite food in Cuba. Rice and beans I love them. All right thank you.

[00:57:04] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.