

Buena Vista Social Club Puts on Historic Show at the White House



Washington, October 16 (RHC-Guardian) -- The Buena Vista Social Club has become the first Cuba-based band to play in the White House for more than 50 years.

The band performed at a White House reception on Thursday to mark Hispanic Heritage Month and the 25th anniversary of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics.

"It is wonderful to have you here. I was explaining to them that when the documentary about the Buena Vista Social Club came out, I was told it was around 1998, I bought a CD," said Barack Obama, who asked the audience to warmly welcome the group.

The White House said they were the first Cuba-based musical act to perform under its roof in more than five decades. The appearance came amid better relations between the U.S. and Cuba.

The Buena Vista Social Club started as a members' only venue in the Marianao neighbourhood of the Cuban capital of Havana for musicians and performers based on the island between the 1940s and early 1960s. In its heyday, the club encouraged and continued the development of traditional Afro-Cuban musical styles such as "son," which is the root of salsa.

In the 1990s, after the club had closed, it inspired a recording made by the Cuban musician Juan de Marcos Gonzalez and American guitarist Ry Cooder with traditional Cuban musicians.

After the death of some key members, Cuban singer and dancer Omara Portuondo; guitarist and vocalist Eliades Ochoa; Barbarito Torres, who plays the laud; trumpeter Manuel “Guajiro” Mirabal; and trombonist Jesus “Aguaje” Ramos began spreading Cuban music internationally as The Buena Vista Social Club.

The recording became an international success as the biggest-selling Cuban album in history. The group is on a worldwide farewell tour.

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