

María Rivas: Taking music to the unexpected level

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María Rivas is Venezuela's premier contemporary vocalist and composer

FILE

Not all the time do beauty and musicianship seem to get along. The latter is the main ingredient lacking in today's contemporary music; the first is everywhere, overwhelming the real talent, favoring hot bodies and pretty faces over artistic quality

Fortunately, Venezuelan singer María Rivas blends both in such a natural way that the results are provoking and intriguing. For the past ten years, Rivas has been passionately involved in the production and advancement of music held to high standards.

In her particular expression, she incorporates the best of the traditional elements of South American and Caribbean music with modernistic influences ranging from jazz and pop to blues.

Her current album "Café Negro" is a good story to emerge from the predictable world of Spanish-language pop music. Its eleven tracks are an eclectic sampling that

defines interesting territories in Latin music.

The song "Cecilia," for instance, recreates the life and love affairs of a girl from Guyana who dances ceaselessly. The track draws the calypso's beat and mingles the salsa drive with Rivas' singing in English and Spanish under a seasoned soloing of the saxophone player and jazzy piano chords.

The way the vocalist reinvents the jazz standard, "Night in Tunisia" is very imaginative, with the theme and harmony slightly altered. The track, composed by the late Dizzy Gillespie, receives a Spanish treatment (Noche en Túnez) with simple lyrics (a chat between the sun and the moon) penned by the very Rivas. On the tune, she and the timbales' player exchange spaces. Then, her voice breaks, making the music boil with a brilliant scatting, grounded magically with the guaracha beat. Tunisia, located on the north of Africa, is believed to be the place where coffee and its most ancient worship and rituals originated.

With "Mi mamá no quiere," on the other side, Rivas embraces a traditional folk song from her country with a mid-tempo percussion. Another Latin American standard, "Moliendo café," also fits well invoking the spirit of the album. Coffe (café in Spanish) is the source of inspiration for María Rivas and the catalyst of the album.

Rivas, who also writes her own compositions, started singing professionally in local night clubs in 1985. Then, she moved to Aruba for 2 years, performing a show of jazz standards. Back in Venezuela, she made her mark with the mega hit "Manduco" in the early 90s. Throughout her musical career, Rivas has devoted herself to themes of environment and Latin American unity. "Café Negro," originally released in Venezuela in 1998, is her fifth album and her first with the independent U.S. label Ashe Records.

María's voice might not be greatest one on earth, but what she does, she does quite well. Her voice is gentle enough to polish smooth notes full of vitality to conquer the listener. She is dynamic and emotional, bringing a fresh perspective to Latin American music while revealing in the traditions with a contemporary twist. Café Negro is far from ending up in the pop junk pile.

BRIDGE: Who's afraid of the Big Bad ruff

JULIAN LADERMAN

Defenders usually get a sense of satisfaction when they are able to ruff a trick. Sometimes, however, declarer will not be hurt if the defense gets a ruff. For example, if a defender holds the QJ10 in the trump suit, and if he can only ruff once, he will usually not profit by ruffing, since he has a natural trump trick. Another situation where declarer does not mind a ruff is when a defender is ruffing a loser in declarer's hand.

On the illustrated hand, declarer is quite pleased by the dummy. There appears to be one loser in each suit and declarer will win the nine tricks required of 3 H. But, before declarer plays a card from dummy on the first trick, he must realize that there is a potential threat. The weak two bid by West usually implies a six card suit, since West would probably have opened 3 spades with a seven card suit and have passed with a five card suit. Therefore, declarer should assume that spades are breaking 6-1. Declarer must realize that West may have an entry with the trump ace since West only has three high card points in the spade suit. The potential for a spade ruff is certainly real.

This information must all be digested by declarer on the first trick before he calls for a card from dummy, since that card will decide the fate of the contract. If declarer calls for the spade ace, he will be successful.

NORTH			
♠ A 4 2			
J 3			
7 6 5			
♣ 10 9 7 6 5			
WEST		EAST	
Q J 10 9 7 6		♠ 8	
A 8		7 6 4	
♦ 10 9 8		K Q J 4 2	
♣ 8 3		♣ K Q J 2	
SOUTH			
♠ K 5 3			
K Q 10 9 5 2			
A 3			
♣ A 4			

DEALER : WEST			
NEITHER SIDE IS VULNERABLE			
West	North	East	South
2S	Pass	Pass	3H
Pass	Pass	Pass	
Opening lead: spade queen			

ful. After losing a trump trick to West's ace, the spade jack will probably be led. If East ruffs this trick, declarer will play from his hand the remaining small spade, which is a loser in any case. If East does not ruff, declarer can win this trick with the spade king. Whether East decides to ruff or not, declarer will win nine tricks.

Let us suppose declarer had made the

mistake of winning the first trick with the spade king. Now when the jack is led by West on the second round of spades, declarer would have to play from dummy either the ace or the remaining small spade prior to East's play. If declarer plays the ace, East will ruff, and the defense will eventually win a second spade trick. If declarer plays the small spade East will happily wait to ruff the ace on the third round of spades. Either way the ruff will be painful for declarer, and the contract will be set.

The crucial point of this hand is that declarer must plan the hand and recognize the threat before playing from dummy to the first trick. Since the North-South spade holding does not seem to require much thought, it is easy for declarer to let instinct and habit take control. If he blindly follows principles, such as that it is more natural to win in the fourth seat or it is desirable to keep the spade entry in dummy (dummy's only entry), declarer will be led astray.

When I am dummy and must place my hand on the table, the last suit I place on the table is the led suit. I formed this habit to encourage my partner to look at the rest of my hand before thinking about the led suit.

When you are declarer, particularly on the first trick, don't let the defense rush you by obvious signs of impatience through their body language. Bridge is not a track meet. The rewards go the best players, not the fastest players.

Professor Julian Laderman (Math and Computer Science) is a Life Master of ACBL

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE FROM PAGE A-11

E	T	T	U	E	G	O	S	S	T	S	
L	O	O	P	P	E	R	O	H	I	O	
L	O	R	R	A	I	N	E	L	E	N	O
S	T	O	O	L	S	O	D	D	E	S	T
			A	T	O	P	E	E	R		
A	S	T	R	I	D	E	T	R	E	E	D
C	H	A	T	E	R	S	E	S	T	A	
H	A	I	K	U	S	T	R	E	T	C	H
			L	E	D	E	A	R	N		
H	O	W	L	E	R	T	E	T	O	N	S
A	X	I	S	E	P	I	D	E	M	I	C
R	E	N	E	D	E	N	R	I	C	A	
I	N	D	Y	S	A	G	S	T	E	M	