

Giraldo Piloto



Klímax at the Havana Jazz Festival (Julio López on congas) • 2000 • all photos by tom Ehrlich

Family History

Piloto's father, Giraldo Piloto, Sr., was half of one of Cuba's greatest songwriting teams, Piloto y Vera. Their best known composition in the U.S. is *Y deja*, covered by Willie Colón and Rubén Blades on *Canciones del solar de los aburridos*. They also wrote *De noche* (for José Fajardo), *Añorado encuentro*, *Digan lo que digan* and dozens of others. Klímax has engaged in an ongoing project of recording modern arrangements of Piloto y Vera classics, thus far including *Fidelidad*, *Y deja*, *Debí llorar*, *Sólo tú y yo* and *Hay que recordar*. Giraldo Piloto Sr. died in a tragic plane crash in 1967 at the age of 38.

Piloto's uncle was the legendary Guillermo Barreto, who, along with Tata Güines and Walfredo de los Reyes, created much of the vocabulary of modern percussion during the seminal 1950s *descarga* sessions led by Julio Gutiérrez, Niño Rivera and Israel "Cachao" López.

Today's Klímax features Javier Barreto, Piloto's nephew, on piano.

Piloto as Songwriter

Had he never picked up a pair of drumsticks, Giraldo Piloto would still be one of Cuban music's most important figures based solely on his songwriting and arranging. He played a pivotal behind-the-scenes role in the development of several of timba's most important groups.

Piloto wrote three songs for NG la Banda (*Te confunde ser esa mujer*, *Llegará a ti* and *Aunque soy como soy*) and also played a pivotal role in timba's early history as a freelance songwriter. He wrote Charanga Habanera's breakthrough hit, *Me sube la fiebre*, and two songs from their *Hey You Loca* album – *Pelirroja* and one of greatest timba masterpieces of all time, *Mi estrella*. While still in NG La Banda, he wrote or co-wrote four songs for Issac Delgado's debut album, *Dando la hora*. After becoming Delgado's musical director, he wrote a string of hits, including *El 443025*, *Te repetiste*, *El profesor de décimo grado*, *Dos mujeres* and *Sin tu amor no hay amor*. For Issac's collaboration with Adalberto Álvarez, Piloto wrote *Dios mío*, *conviérteme en un mago*. He also wrote most of Delgado's arrangements of that era. Although he

already left to found Klímax by the time Delgado released his pivotal RMM album *El año que viene*, Piloto had already co-written and arranged two more of timba's greatest masterpieces, *Por qué paró* and *No me mires a los ojos*. The latter is particularly famous among the timba cognoscenti for its "hook" piano tumbao, the right hand part of which Piloto had written into the original chart.

His pre-Klímax work would have been sufficient to establish him as one of Cuba's great songwriters but it was after 1995 that Piloto really hit his stride, penning a long series of stunningly original songs: *Mira si te gusta*, *Corazonada*, *Consejo a una amiga*, *Mi vecina*, *Catarro chino*, *Las habaneras son perfectas*, *Lo que me faltó por hacerte*, *Juego de manos*, *Zorreando*, *Aún así*, *Yo no quiero que mi novia sea religiosa*, *El número cien ...* and on and on and on.

In addition to his unprecedented use of sophisticated harmonies in Cuban popular song, Piloto is an extremely original lyricist – a master of the *doble sentido* who frequently found himself in hot water with government censors for controversial songs like *El ventilador* and *Juego de manos*.

Piloto as Drummer



After landing the coveted drum chair in the prestigious Tropicana Cabaret, Piloto was lured away by José Luis "El Tosco" Cortés, who had left Irakere to form what would later be known as the first timba band, NG La Banda. Piloto played on the seminal albums *En la calle*, *No se puede tapar el sol*, and *En la calle otra vez*. In 1991, he left NG to become the drummer and musical director for another NG La Banda alumnus, Issac Delgado. Piloto left Delgado to form Klímax in 1995 and has released seven studio albums, a live DVD and six classic live tracks on the two Concierto Eurotropical albums from 1997 and 1998.

In the 2001 timba.com awards (I personally tabulated the votes of hundreds of readers and confirmed that each was from a unique email and URL), Piloto won the category of "Best Timba Drummer of All Time" by a healthy margin. He also placed in the top 6 in the categories for best songwriter, arranger, timbalero, bandleader, lyricist and best-recorded album (*Oye como va*). [Kevin Moore]

Piloto as an Educator



Piloto is an in-demand clinician as he travels around the world.

Piloto is founder and artistic director of the Havana "Fiesta del tambor". This is an annual event which is programmed in collaboration with Aldo Mazza and KoSA Music. Each year for the past 14 years, KoSA has held a week-long workshop and study program for participants coming from around the world to study with the top Cuban artists. Piloto has been on KoSA faculty over the past 14 years and regularly travels to Canada to give clinics and workshops for KoSA . Piloto has also appeared in soon to be released instructional KoSA DVD entitled " The Amazing Drummers of Cuba."

Aldo Mazza and Piloto have joined forces to create this "two events in one" event-workshop by day and festival concerts at night featuring Cuba's top artists. The festival has now been given a new name – "Havana Rhythm and Dance Festival". During this annual KoSA Cuba & Havana Rhythm and Dance Festival which takes place March 1-8, participants from around the world live one week in an intensive musical environment with many artists of Cuba such as Piloto, Changuito, Enrique Pla, Oliver Valdés, Amadito Valdés, Rodney Barreto, and many others. As well, Cuban musicians and music students participate in clinics, master classes, cultural exchanges with visiting foreign artists and attend the evening festival concerts which are open to the public. During this festival week, Piloto organizes a national competition for drummers and percussionists in 5 categories: congas, timbales, bongo, batá, and drumset. Contest winners receive instruments courtesy of Sabian, Gon Bops and KoSA who are major sponsors of the festival. [Aldo Mazza]

Selected Discography

With NG La Banda:

1989: *En la calle*
1990: *No se puede tapar el sol*
1991: *En la calle otra vez*

With Issac Delgado:

1993: *Con ganas*
1994: *El Chévere de la Salsa y el Caballero del Son*

With Klímax:

1995: *Mira si te gusta*
1997: *Concierto Eurotropical I*
1998: *Juego de manos*
1998: *Concierto Eurotropical II (with El ventilador)*
1999: *Oye como va*
2002: *Piloto and Friends (Latin Jazz)*
2003: *Klímax Light*
2004: *Nadie se parece a ti*
2008: *Sólo tú y yo*
2012: *Todo está bien*
2014: singles on amazon.com: *Aquí estoy, Si te descuidas, La ternerita*

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this week's shows:

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Tuesday & Wednesday, October, 21-22, 2014
8:00, p.m. (one admission for the full night)
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