

Entertainment & Life

Listen Up: Carlos Odria Trio offers gorgeous ‘El Rio’

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It’s difficult to say more about the Carlos Odria Trio’s new album, “El Rio,” other than that it’s gorgeous: Stunningly, jaw-droppingly, trying-not-to-weep-at-work beautiful. Guitarist Odria and his cohorts — drummer Thomas Spears and bassist Geoffrey Oehling — serve up a tapestry of Spanish music inflected with jazz that’s captivating from beginning to end, even on the 12-minute-long opener, “Morning of Carnival,” a composition by Luiz Bonfá.

The trio — which will perform July 27 at Nick’s Bar and Restaurant in Worcester — uses the opening number to demonstrate its collective musical versatility. The arrangement begins with Odria digging deep into classical Spanish guitar, each note precise and startlingly lovely, their cascade a light rain. Then, it changes, taking on a sultry, jazzy quality, starting slow, and then building in gradual steps. After a moment, Spears’ percussion comes into sharp contrast to Odria’s guitar. Soon after, the guitar escalates, then slides into the riptide of Oehling’s bass. That the piece is beautiful is one thing, certainly, but it’s even more impressive that the trio manages to take the listener on a complete emotional journey, all without a single lyric. The drums take on a heavier character as the song recedes, at the end the only prominent sound. It’s a bracing experience.

The second song is an original composition by Odria, “Orange Dreams,” and it begins with Oehling playing his bass as a cello, creating a sort of wistful moment of repose before the guitar takes over, leading the listener to a more joyful place. That celebratory feeling carries over to “Niu Festejo,” a vibrant and cheerful Odria composition. Odria’s Latin guitar stylings shine here, especially when they’re married late into the song by deeper bass notes. The sense of texture the

trio manages to create and maintain from beginning to end is astounding. Each piece of music has depths for the listener to explore, making re-listens extremely rewarding.

Odria's "Sour Grapes" begins with a heavy feel, which is almost jarring, coming as it does on the heels of the cheerful "Niu Festejo." The bass seems to drive this particular passage of the album, with the percussion lending a sense of weight to even the lightness of the guitar. The bass and percussion create a sense of gravity, which the guitar seems to almost imperceptibly escape by the end of the song. There's a moment of flight, before it all fades into the spare beginnings of Antonio Carlos Jobim's composition, "Corcovado."

For most of the album, the three have worked more in concert than in solo, save perhaps for instances where Odria takes the lead. "Corcovado" gives the bass and guitar plenty of room to demonstrate what they're capable of achieving, and from Oehling's cello-like moments to an exhilarating drum solo, the pair makes each note count.

When we return to Odria's compositions with the album's title track, the earlier sense of joy has returned, but even here there are shadows. A tempo change at a bridge seems to cast that ineffable joy in jeopardy, before it's rescued by another change. The trio takes a swinging turn at John Coltrane's "Mr. P.C.," before moving into the album's penultimate track, Odria's "Curruquito," a soulful and bracing song that burns with a great deal of emotional content. Each passage of the song seems to take the trio deeper into an internal emotional landscape, until partway through, it hits a mournful, caesura, courtesy of Oehling's bass. There's a complete pause, and the music escalates again, finding that place of joy. The album ends with Roberto Menescal's "Little Boat," which almost feels like an epilogue, a short stretch of pure, well-earned musical bliss at the end of a staggering musical journey.