

ROBERTO FONSECA

Akokan (Justin Time)



Cuban pianist, composer, arranger and bandleader Roberto Fonseca, a former member of the Buena Vista Social Club and Ibrahim Ferrer's Orquesta who has worked with Rubén González, Cacháito López and Omara Portuondo, arrived on the international scene with the release of *Zamazú* in 2007. Recorded at the legendary Egrem Studios in Havana, *Akokan* (Yoruba for "heart") traverses Cuba, Latin America, Europe and Africa, reflecting the wide range of musical and cultural influences informing Fonseca's creative sensibility, from traditional Afro-Cuban flavors to the Balkan-tinged "Bulgarian" to the world of French film permeating "Como en las Películas."

Opening with the traditional "Fragmento de Misa," softly sung a cappella by his mother, Fonseca establishes both skill and eloquence on the emphatic "Lo Que Me Hace Vivir," offering a glimpse of the intensity of his live performances. Lyricism and driving energy often inhabit the same tune, as Fonseca explores different timbres and moods. Joining the fine musicians who have been accompanying him for the past 12 years—Javier Zalba (reeds, flute), Omar González (bass), Ramsés Rodríguez (drums) and Joel Hierrezuelo (percussion)—are Cape Verdean singer Mayra Andrade on the sweet "Siete Potencias" and American guitarist-vocalist Raúl Midon, who penned the incongruous, Sting-esque "Everyone Deserves a Second Chance." *Akokan* showcases Fonseca's virtuosity, soulfulness and strong sense of melody as he pays homage to his ancestry, the earth and the sacred spirit world that serve as his inspiration.

SHARONNE COHEN