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## REVIEW: Marco Lo Russo Performance at Teatro Vallarta

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Last night's performance by Italian accordionist and composer Marco Lo Russo at Teatro Vallarta, local group La Boquita, and special guests, was, by far, one of the most important performances that have taken place to date at Teatro Vallarta, since it opened in 2010.

With amazing credentials, Lo Russo opened the evening by himself for a concert that began only 20 minutes after the advertised time—we're getting better at this, aren't we? Having obtained a copy of his latest CD a few days prior, I wasn't quite sure whether his program would feature lighter classical fare, or some of his more vanguardist jazz improvisational extrapolations. To my delight, he focused on the latter at first, performing, for example, an extended version of Astor Piazzola's seminal *Adios Nonino*. Never missing a beat, Lo Russo explored and developed the tune's harmonic structure in such a way that it would have taken a truly experienced ear to keep up with his pace as he improvised on it. His performance was bewilderingly sophisticated and complex!

The audience stayed with him through its entirety, however. And while he could have relied on his virtuosic technique to do so, he didn't have to. Instead, the artist won the public with his charm as most truly seasoned musicians do. Lo Russo then continued his set with more user-friendly material, including his own transcription of Rossini's *Overture to The Barber of Seville*, for which he received a standing ovation. A surprise contribution by local dancer/choreographer Adriana Quinto, who improvised onstage to one of his more commercial arrangements helped showcase the artist's wide interpretative range.



The second half of the evening brought Silvia Basurto and Paolo Uccelli—known as La Boquita—to the stage. Interestingly enough, mainstream Puerto Vallarta has yet to discover this duet's ability to seduce and capture your soul as they perform, Basurto on voice and a variety of percussion instruments and Uccelli on guitar and bouzouki—a Greek guitar-like instrument.

La Boquita had but a few days to put together a set in which they could support their guest artist friend, and, at the same time, create an opportunity for themselves in such a large space as Teatro Vallarta. They did so, admirably, also receiving standing standing ovations after their intimate version of *Cucurrucucú Paloma*, the popular Mexican huapango introduced

by Lola Beltrán in the 1965 eponymous film. Not unlike [Marta Gomez's take on \*Cielito Lindo\*](#)—performed lullaby style, instead of the usual belted approach—Basurto's take on *Cucurrucucú Paloma* became a pain-stricken lament, made even more poignant by Adriana Quinto's tortured dance improvisations.

The evening ended with a surprise piano intervention by Sergio Zepeda, director of Municipal Culture, and mastermind behind the city's decision to sponsor the free concert in the first place. For those of us aware of the ongoing budgetary challenges that presently constrain local government to transform our city into what it should be, Zepeda's performance confirms his place among local artists—first and foremost—and not as another bureaucrat standing in the way of artistic development. Unfortunately one cannot say the same about Teatro Vallarta's owner, Manuel Díaz Preciado, who as a businessman, is seldom present at the theater during performances—he would have liked this one. And to make matters worse, he has failed to find the ideal combination of business and artistic sensibility to run his operation locally.

## Wrapping it Up

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What made the evening so special? In no particular order:

1. Sophisticated, complex music, performed by a spectacular guest artist, and an audience that was more than happy to keep up the pace. And more accessible music, but very soulful nonetheless, to make the entire evening memorable.
2. Local talent. Extraordinary local talent, for that matter, that successfully masterminded a memorable concert and, in a way, their own debut for local audiences.
3. A full house, made possible thanks to the Department of Culture underwriting of the entire evening as a free concert. (That said, this may not always be possible, so they—along with other concert promoters—that underwriting a concert is one of two ways to go about it. The other one is, to charge for the performance, but truly promote it well in advance to guarantee its success—this one was not promoted, and it would have more than likely been a flop had they charged for the privilege.)
4. Sergio Zepeda's timely piano intervention, confirming his artistic sensibility, and the fact that, given a bit of resources, he could actually facilitate even more cultural offerings representing the City of Puerto Vallarta.

Was there something not to like? Keep reading!

## Photography Disclaimer

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The attached images were photographed by yours truly with a three year-old camera, using only a monopod, and no flash. The photos are not ultra sharp, or truly spectacular images. But they are good enough for blogging, and for most print publications. A newer camera should be able to yield even better results. That said, the number of ~~official~~ photographers people with cameras interrupting local performances with flash photography is simply abhorrent. The worst offender last night set up a tripod, pointed it at the audience, and repeatedly fired his camera—flash and all—becoming a true nuisance. I got close enough to him at the end to confirm that his SLR camera was clearly much better at capturing a performance without the use of flash than his brain's ability to grasp the concept. It turns out, he was hired by the Department of Culture—the same people that produced the event—to photograph the evening! I made sure to hold on to his business card, as I know exactly where to file it.