

Friday, November 5, 2010, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Buika



CAMI

Buika *vocals*
Ivan “Melón” Lewis *piano*
Dany Noel *bass*
Fernando Favier *drums*

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BUIKA IS ONE of the most distinctive Spanish artists performing today. Born on the island of Majorca to African immigrant parents from Equatorial Guinea, Buika has become a true revelation to those who thought flamenco had little left to contribute to Spanish music or to jazz. Her evident African roots and her cosmopolitanism, developed in clubs in Spain and Americanized during a strange detour to Las Vegas as a Tina Turner impersonator, explain Buika's rare self-possession. But nothing can quite explain her ability to connect: She is one of those rare and wonderful "one listen" artists.

The singer's latest CD, *El Último Trago* ("The Last Drink"), an homage to the Mexican singing legend Chavela Vargas, was recently nominated for two Latin Grammy Awards, for Recording of the Year (for the song "Se Me Hizo Fácil") and for Best Traditional Tropical Album. She recorded a duet with Seal, entitled "You Get Me," for his new CD, *Seal 6: Commitment*; and she has also finished taping her screen debut for Pedro Almodóvar's upcoming film, *La Piel Que Habito* ("The Skin I'm In"). She closes 2010 with her first American tour, a 21-city swing that began in Chicago on October 15 and ends in Miami on November 20.

Buika ("bwee-kah") was born María Concepción Balboa Buika to parents who came to Spain as political exiles. Her family were the only black residents in one of Palma de Mallorca's poor neighborhoods, and Buika remembers how neighbors used to reach out to touch her hair—an Afro styled from pictures of her early musical idols, Whitney Houston and Michael Jackson. She found a second home among the community of Gypsy families, finding in flamenco's individualistic spirit a path to self-acceptance. Flamenco was an open door, remembers Buika: "It's not just about music, it's a way of life. It's about not running away from yourself. Some people sing about what they would like to happen or would like to be, but in the *copla* and *el cante*, we confront who we are, with all our fears and all our defects. In the United States there's also a great tradition like this: It's called the blues."

Buika released her U.S. debut, *Mi Niña Lola* ("My Little Girl Lola"), in 2007, an album

that had already won "Best Album" and "Best Production" honors at the Spanish Music Awards. Her next recording project, *Niña de Fuego* ("Child of Fire"), produced and arranged by Javier Limón (Bebo y Cigala, Paco de Lucía) and released in 2008, helped to catapult her internationally into the ranks of the most exciting voices in modern Latin music. Supported by just a handful of concerts in Miami, Los Angeles and New York, the CD scored two Latin Grammy nominations in 2008—for Album of the Year and for Best Production—and the singer was soon invited to appear on the televised awards, performing her searing rendition of the Mexican classic, "Volver, Volver."

Buika's fans soon included Alejandro Sanz and Gloria Estefan, along with Nelly Furtado and Portuguese *fado* star Mariza (both of whom she recorded duets with), Pedro Almodóvar, fashion photographer Bruce Weber and the iconic Mexican singer Chavela Vargas. Ms. Vargas in particular was crucial in opening doors for the young Spanish singer in Latin America.

Yet the story of Buika's relationship with Chavela Vargas began with artistic disappointment. It happened in Madrid four years ago, when Ms. Vargas refused to allow Buika on stage to sing with her. After that bitter beginning, the singers became friends, and Ms. Vargas was soon declaring that in Buika she had discovered "my black daughter" and "the most amazing and personal voice I have heard in many years."

El Último Trago, released in October 2009, is first and foremost a tribute to Chavela Vargas, as the hard-living, hard-loving Mexican singer celebrated her 90th birthday. Buika reinvents the repertoire that Ms. Vargas has built over her entire career. "Las Ciudades" ("The Cities"), "Las Simples Cosas" ("The Simple Things"), "Sombras" ("Shadows") and "Luz de Luna" ("Moonlight") are some of the songs that Chavela has performed at New York's Carnegie Hall, Buenos Aires' Luna Park, the Olympia Theatre in Paris, and in Pedro Almodóvar's and Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu's films. On *El Último Trago*, Buika re-imagines these Mexican standards, creating a kind of "tequila *tablao*"—as Iberian as it is Mexican, and as old as it is new.

Supporting the singer on the CD is Cuban piano star Chucho Valdés, who met Buika in 2008 at Spain's Vitoria Jazz Festival, where he was debuting a duet CD with his father, Bebo Valdés. For the recording of *El Último Trago*, the musicians only needed two days at Abdala Studios in Havana, Cuba, in April 2009. Producer Javier Limón recorded all the vocals live, with no overdubs. "El Andariego," Alejandro Fernández's famous song, became a *rumba*; "Somos" ("We Are") was transformed into a *bolero/cha-cha*; and "Sombras" started as a *bolero* but ended in the blues.

Buika performs *El Último Trago*—and celebrates the remarkable life of Chavela Vargas—across North America on this, her first major tour.

Fernando Favier (*drums*) is originally from Guantánamo, Cuba. He became interested in music at age nine, inspired by the musical environment in his home. He studied at the Regino Boti School of Music in Guantánamo (1979–1983) and at the National School of Arts (1983–1989) and the Instituto Superior de Arte (1989–1995) in Havana, where he earned a Bachelor of Music in percussion education and performance. He studied drums with Enrique Pla, Afro-Cuban percussion with Justo Pelladito, classical percussion with Marcos Varcacel and the history of percussion with Dr. Lino Neira.

In 1998, he moved to Madrid, where he currently resides, and has been active on its music scene. For more than ten years, Mr. Favier has been considered among the masters of percussion in flamenco music, and he collaborates regularly with such artists as Joaquín Cortés, Alejandro Sanz, Angélique Kidjo, Antonio Carmona, Buika,

Lolita Flores, Antonio Canales, Niña Pastori, Luis Enrique, Pedro Ojesto, Gema & Pavel and Carlos Varela. On his resume are numerous jobs as a session musician for recordings, video, film and television, both in Cuba and in Spain.

Born in Cuba, **Ivan "Melón" Lewis** (*piano*) received his classical music training and graduated from the prestigious National School of Art. He had toured throughout Latin America, Europe, the United States and Canada, performing with well-known Cuban salsa singer Isaac Delgado.

Based in Madrid since 1998, Mr. Lewis has participated in several of the world's most prominent jazz festivals, including Jazz in Tête, Jazz in Marciac, Festival de Jazz de Montreux and Spain's Vitoria Jazz Festival, sharing the stage with such important artists as Mulgrew Miller, John Hicks, Gonzalo Rubalcaba and Wynton Marsalis.

In 2003, Mr. Lewis formed his own quintet and took it to several of the most important festivals in Spain and Europe. He also actively collaborates with many important singers on the Spanish musical scene, such as Ana Belen and Lolita.

Dany Noel (*bass*), a Cuban musician based in Torino for eight years, played side by side with Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez in the Latin jazz band Italuba and toured around the world. He now lives in Madrid. He collaborates regularly with many important musicians on the Spanish musical scene, such as Buika, Javier Limón, Lolita and Luz Casal.

Mr. Noel also works as a music producer. He is currently working with singer Boris Larramendi, a member of the group Habana Abierta. In addition, Mr. Noel is preparing his own debut album, which mixes *copla* with Cuban styles.