

**Juan Garcia-Herrerros aka SNOW OWL Melds Chops  
and Compositions on Auspicious Stateside Debut  
*Art of Contrabass Guitar* on Inner Circle Music**

Native born Colombian bassist-composer Juan Garcia-Herrerros is a virtuoso of the highest order who has made the electric contrabass guitar his instrument of choice. On his auspicious Stateside debut, ***Art of Contrabass Guitar***, the gifted young musician also known as Snow Owl unveils his remarkable facility, heartfelt lyricism and compositional prowess in the company of some heavyweight players, including drummer Antonio Sanchez, pianist Hector Martignon, reedman Klaus Dickbauer, trumpeter Pete Nater, percussionist Roberto Quintero, bassist Harvie S and guitarist Luis Leite. (His first CD, 2006's *Snow Owl*, was recorded with alto saxophonist Greg Osby, drummer Teri Lynne Carrington and pianist Edward Simon for the Austrian label Quinton).

An eclectic outing that ranges from affecting melodies like "Pequeña Samba," "Good-night Resurrection" and the lush "Balada Para Mis Hijas" to the epic "Miss Jones Drove Me to School," the second line fueled "Bulket," funky "Blues for Krampus" and the atmospheric "Song from St. Kathrein," *Art of Contrabass Guitar* is bookended by two extraordinarily expressive unaccompanied improvisations – "A Step Towards Vision" and "Seis Rosas" -- that showcase his staggering facility and should instantly elevate Snow Owl to heroic status in the bass world.

Born in Bogota, Colombia on July 1, 1977, Garcia-Herrerros moved with his family to New York City in 1985. He began studying flute at age nine. After completing middle school in 1991, his family relocated once again to Dunedin, Florida, where he discovered the electric bass. Juan's high school band teacher recognized his talent and encouraged him to also study acoustic bass so that he could be a part of the symphonic band in school. After woodshedding for countless hours on the upright bass, he became proficient enough to perform with the Tampa Bay Symphony at age 17. Around that same time, Juan competed in New Orleans for a slot in Berklee College of Music's Scholarship program, earning an invitation to attend the prestigious school in Boston. At Berklee he studied with bass instructors Bruce Gertz, Joe Santerre, Rich Appleman and Oscar Stagnaro.

It was during his tenure at Berklee that Snow Owl switched from conventional four-string bass to the custom-made six-string contrabass guitar. "I was a big fan of Anthony Jackson," he recalls. "I really loved his whole concept with the contrabass guitar. There's such a command in his way of playing, such a clear approach. I just loved his patience and control of the instrument, whether he was soloing or accompanying. And one day I walked into this guitar shop right down the street from Berklee and they had a six-string Hohner bass there. I said to myself at the time, 'That's it! I'm absolutely going to get that.' And I worked my ass off to pull the bread together for that instrument. Between classes I was working at a bookstore, and I finally earned enough money to buy it."

His first contrabass guitar, purchased in 1995, was a Hohner. After moving to Vienna in 2004, Juan got together with Viennese luthier Andreas Neubauer to create a custom six-string contrabass guitar. "This instrument is semi-acoustic with a lot of open chambers on the wings. So we have the actual resonance coming from the wood, and I don't use any active electronics at all, which gives it a very natural sound."

In retrospect, Garcia-Herreros says that when he first enrolled at Berklee, "I was absolutely not playing anything like I am today. When I got there at age 17, I didn't even know what the Real Book was. I was just coming more from loving Led Zeppelin and Latin music...just a completely different direction. And I didn't have any technique to speak of." But through intensive woodshedding, Juan was able to completely reinvent himself as a formidable instrumentalist. "It was a combination of persistence and discipline....not only with the instrument but with myself, mentally and spiritually," he says. "I think a lot of it involves conquering your fears. If you're going to walk out on a stage and improvise in front of people, it takes a lot of guts to do that every night. So it's not just a question of mastering your instrument. I think deep within yourself you have to work on that as well. And that is where persistence, discipline and sheer love for the music pays off."

In 1998, at age 21, Garcia-Herreros returned to New York City to pursue a professional music career. At age 26, he moved to Vienna, Austria, where he currently resides and teaches at the Jazz Institute in Graz. His nickname, which he also sometimes uses as a stage name, is rooted in Native American tradition. As he explains, "The day I was born there was an Indian chief in the hospital and he told my father that a snow owl had brought me here from the spirit world. And as long as I can remember, no matter where I'm at there's always been owls around me. It might be a real owl, a stuffed owl, an owl painted on the wall...that image always seems to follow me, everywhere. Later on, before I went to Berklee, I had an encounter with a shaman at an Indian reservation. And he said to me, 'You know, you should not deny your feathers. You're a snow owl.' And he didn't even know anything about that, when I was born. But he could see that energy. And when he said, 'Don't deny your feathers,' that was very beautiful. So I said, for an artistic name, why not welcome the entity."

Garcia-Herreros commented on the tracks from *Art of Contrabass Guitar*:

"A Step Towards Vision" – "That's an improvisation that highlights the beautiful tone and harmonic possibilities of the contrabass guitar. You can hear a distinct Anthony Jackson influence here.

"Pequeña Samba" – About four years ago the guitarist Alegre Corrêa, who was a member of the Joe Zawinul Syndicate, asked me to join his band. He's an amazing Brazilian guitarist and composer and I was just really inspired when I was in his band. His wife was pregnant at that time and one day I put my hand on her belly and could feel it kicking back and forth and said to her, "Hey, you've got a little samba in there."

So I decided to write a song for that little samba, which was my way of saying thank you for the wonderful music that I was able to share with them.

“Miss Jones Drove Me To School” – In high school I remember listening on the school bus to jazz standards, and there was one that I loved so much, which was “Have You Met Miss Jones?” And by pure coincidence, my bus driver’s name was Mrs. Jones. She was always dressed elegant, always wearing a hat with a feather. And man, she could drive that bus! So this piece is a whole mix that was inside of me emotionally on that bus ride to school everyday. In this track there are elements of swing, there’s a quote even from a Ravel melody and then there’s a rhythm from Colombia called bambuco. Also, the distortion solo – which a lot of people think is a guitarist but it’s actually me playing the contrabass guitar with a little fuzz on it – represents my youthful memories of Led Zeppelin.

“Balada Para Mis Hijas (Ballad for my Daughters)” – I have a very wonderful friend here in Vienna named Hans Baumgartner, who has always been a big supporter and has been sort of like my bass tech. Unfortunately, his wife passed away from cancer and when I asked him if there was anything I could do for him, he said, “Could you write a ballad for my daughters?” So I wrote this for him and his two daughters Bettina and Romana. They’re very lovely people. I’m very close to them.

“Bulket” – Many years ago when I was in New York, there was a time when (bassist) Harvie S and I would sort of learn from each other. He really taught me a lot about walking bass and soloing on jazz standards. At the same time he wanted to learn about Latin music and the tumbao. So I would go up to his house and we would just play together and exchange ideas. Ever since then it was a big dream of mine to one day get a duo together with Harvie. On this tune, Harvie holds down the groove while I play the melody and also play unisons with the piano and sax. The title was inspired by a concert promoter in Moscow who kept contacting me about a show that I had coming up there. And she would say, “We have to make bulket.” I didn’t know what she was talking about at first but then we finally figured out that she was trying to say ‘booklet.’ She meant we needed to put together a program for the concert. So on this tune I married some of that New Orleans second line feel with unique pulse that exists in Moscow.

“Goodnight Resurrection” – Its intention is to be as much as possible a lullaby. It’s a bedtime lullaby in the beginning and then it evolves into a dream. So it’s a process of going to sleep, dreaming and waking up blissfully.

“Blues for Krampus” – You can hear a little bit of Jaco Pastorius’ influence on this funky tune. I think Jaco was an influence on every bass player in the world, and rightfully so. I remember the first time I heard his solo record. Another bass player gave it to me and of course I fell in love with his playing and immediately began shedding on that album. Over the next year or so learned everything that he played. I think that’s even how I got a scholarship to Berklee...I sent a cassette of me playing Jaco’s “Havona.” Then of course, I spent a lot of time forgetting everything

I learned about Jaco. Because at some point your own voice has to come out. You should learn a lot and take everything in that you can, but there comes a point where I think you have to question everything. So for that reason alone, I took away four string bass and fretless bass and just concentrated on contrabass guitar.

"Song for St. Kathrein" – This is a very old melody from the Austrian Alps. And it's actually in a very tonal harmony. I made an arrangement for it, reharmonized it, gave an instrumentation for it the way I would interpret it. It's basically my way of documenting how Austrian life and the mountains have influenced my music. It's like how Zawinul was influenced by that same setting in writing "In a Silent Way." I personally would say that I did not completely understand that composition of Joe's until I stood here in Vienna looking up at the Alps. It's the same thing as Monk's "52<sup>nd</sup> Street Theme." I didn't fully understand that until I stood there on 52<sup>nd</sup> & Broadway and felt the unique energy of that place.

"Amsterdam" – That's a piece written by Luis Leite, who's an amazing guitarist from Brazil. We have a great relationship, a real nice chemistry together. Luis is a big fan of Hamilton de Holanda, the mandolinist. He wanted to make a little tribute to him so he wrote this song for him.

"Seis Rosas" – That's an improvisation dedicated to Mr. Peter Infeld, the founder of Thomastik-Infeld Strings, who recently passed away. I worked closely with him in designing my bass strings. He was a wonderful human being and one of my biggest supporters. At his funeral I brought him six roses and put them on his resting place. So that was a very emotional improvisation for me. As a tribute to Mr. Infeld, I wanted to make a kind of statement of rebellion because the way that he looked at life was kind of like a rebel. A lot of bass players think that the only slappable bass is a four-string bass because it's also very hard to do it on six-string bass since you have to mute all the other strings. So it's not the easiest thing to. But I wanted to prove that it could be done on the six-string as well. So musically, it was more of a challenge and a rebellious thing for me.

**SNOW OWL – ART OF CONTRABASS GUITAR**  
**Inner Circle Music CD 010**

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