

2013 GRAMMY NOMINATED ARTIST  
**MANUEL VALERA**  
SELF PORTRAIT  
SOLO PIANO



**“He leaves no doubt that he is destined to play a role in the future of jazz.”**  
—Philip Van Vleck, *Billboard*

## the press release

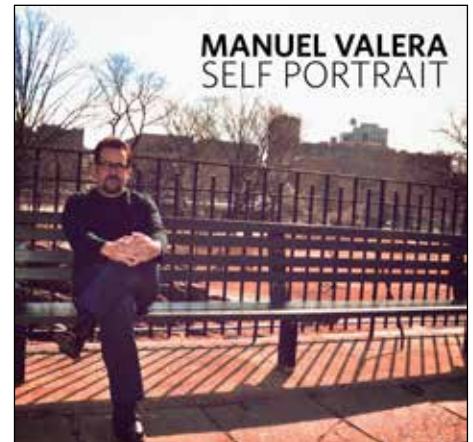
### ACCLAIMED CUBAN PIANIST-COMPOSER MANUEL VALERA RELEASES *SELF-PORTRAIT*

## FIRST SOLO PIANO OUTING REFLECTS HIS LOVE OF CLASSICAL, JAZZ AND BOLEROS

After a string of seven exhilarating, clave-fueled recordings with various ensembles, including his dynamic, Grammy-nominated New Cuban Express from 2012 and its 2013 followup album, *Expectativas*, acclaimed pianist-composer Manuel Valera decided to take a more introspective route on his eighth album as a leader. His first-ever solo outing, the aptly-titled *Self-Portrait* reflects the Havana-born musician's classical background along with his love of jazz and the Cuban boleros that he grew up with. And while he readily admits that the prospect of recording without the support of a burning rhythm section and killer soloists was somewhat daunting, the results are sublime and enchanting.

“I’ve always liked solo piano recordings and have listened to a lot of them,” said the 33-year-old talent deserving of wider recognition. “Bill Evans had some amazing solo recordings and Keith Jarrett, of course, had some really incredible solo recordings. But I always felt that the solo piano thing is something that you really have to feel ready to do it. I never felt that I was really, really ready to do it. Because it’s so completely revealing. There is no camouflage, no cover, it’s just you. It’s like being naked on tape. And for the longest time I was really intimidated about the prospect of doing it.”

A few situations emerged to help Valera eventually begin embracing the idea of solo piano. “First, when I was playing with (Cuban trumpet great) Arturo Sandoval, he would sometimes just leave me alone on stage and let me play solo. That’s when I first realized that this could possibly be done. Then a couple of years ago, Jim Luce, a promoter who works with Fazioli, got me involved with his piano series. I did a couple solo concerts and it felt good, and I began to think, ‘Hmm, I can probably do this.’ So I booked some solo concerts in Baltimore and other places around the Northeast and I realized that I really enjoyed doing it. I always had like a natural facility for the instrument, which I find a blessing, and I realized that I could do a lot of things and take a lot of liberties just playing solo. And I really like that.”



- 1 **SPIRAL** (Manuel Valera) 5:58
- 2 **VERY EARLY** (Bill Evans) 5:39
- 3 **SOLAMENTE UNA VEZ** (Agustín Lara) 5:30
- 4 **IMPROMPTU NO. 1 for George Gershwin** (Valera) 4:43
- 5 **HALLUCINATIONS** (Bud Powell) 3:42
- 6 **WATER** (Manuel Valera) 6:45
- 7 **IMPROMPTU NO. 2 for Erik Satie** (Manuel Valera) 2:32
- 8 **ASK ME NOW** (Thelonious Monk) 6:33
- 9 **LAS PERLAS DE TU BOCA** (Eliseo Grenet) 5:15
- 10 **IMPROVISATION** (Manuel Valera) 2:27
- 11 **HOPE** (Manuel Valera) 6:00
- 12 **IMPROMPTU NO. 3 for Nicolas Slonimsky** (Manuel Valera) 1:57
- 13 **BLUES** (Manuel Valera) 3:41

Total Time: 60:43

**STREET DATE** JUNE 10, 2014  
**ARTIST** MANUEL VALERA  
**TITLE** SELF PORTRAIT  
**CATALOG #** MAVO 1106  
**FILE UNDER** JAZZ, LATIN JAZZ, WORLD  
**UPC** UPC 888295074421

**SUGGESTED  
RADIO TRACKS** 1, 2, 3, 6, 8

MANUEL **VALERA** | Solo Piano

Recorded on November 13 and 19, 2013 at  
Arlan Harris Piano Salon

more >>>

## ACCLAIMED CUBAN PIANIST-COMPOSER MANUEL VALERA RELEASES *SELF-PORTRAIT*

For his first solo piano recording, Valera was very mindful of representing four different aspects of his musical makeup. As he explained, “I knew I wanted to represent some of my jazz piano influences, so I play ‘Very Early’ by Bill Evans, ‘Hallucinations’ by Bud Powell and ‘Ask Me Now’ by Thelonious Monk. Those are three of my all-time favorite pianists. I really like Monk’s rhythm and I like Bill’s harmonic thing and I really like Bud Powell’s lines.”

Valera’s Cuban roots are represented by two beautiful boleros, “Solamente Una Vez” and “Las Perlas De Tu Boca,” while his classical side is covered by three newly-composed “Impromptus” (for Erik Satie, George Gershwin and Nicolas Slonimsky of the “Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns” fame). A fourth element here is Valera’s own compositions, represented by his hypnotic opener “Spiral,” his gently cascading “Water,” his moving “Hope” and his remarkably soulful closer, “Blues,” which has him testifying in inspired fashion. “That blues is not really a blues form, it’s more like a blues essence,” said the pianist-composer. “I was thinking more like how Robert Johnson played the blues, what he really conveyed when he played something. Mentally, it’s really hard to do.”

Valera calls in a number of spirits on this outstanding solo debut. And his restored 1918 Steinway D piano sings majestically from start to finish on these 13 tracks. The most stirring release in his catalog to date, *Self-Portrait* is both a milestone and a captivating tour-de-force in the gifted Cuban pianist-composer’s burgeoning career.

**For More Information, Bio and Tour Dates on Manuel Valera go to:**  
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**the artist** Based in New York City, Grammy nominated pianist and composer Manuel Valera was born and raised in Havana, Cuba. Since arriving in NYC, he has become well known in the NYC modern jazz scene, garnering national reviews and lending his talents as a pianist and composer to such notable artist as Arturo Sandoval, Paquito D’Rivera, Brian Lynch, Dafnis Prieto, Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, Jeff “Tain” Watts, Chris Potter, Dave Binney, Adam Rogers, Mark Turner, John Benitez, Samuel Torres, Joel Frahm, Yosvany Terry and Pedro Martinez among many others.

This dynamic and prolific artist has recorded eight cds as a bandleader. His critically acclaimed debut cd in 2004 *Forma Nueva* (MAVO) features John Patitucci, Horacio “El Negro” Hernandez Bill Stewart and Seamus Blake. *Historia* (Fresh Sounds New Talent 2005), a jazz quartet with Antonio Sanchez, Seamus Blake and Ben Street. His third release *Melancolia* (MAVO 2006)—employs a string quartet incorporating world rhythms and classical concepts in the jazz idiom. *Vientos* (Anzic 2007), representing a new working quartet, features bassist James Genus, drummer Ernesto Simpson, saxophonist Joel Frahm and a woodwind quartet. His fifth and trio recording *Currents* (MaxJazz 2009) features Ernesto Simpson and James Genus. His sixth and Grammy nominated *New Cuban Express* was released in 2012 followed by his seventh *Expectativas* in 2013 both on MAVO.

In addition, he has been awarded several grants for composition most notably Chamber Music America’s New Jazz Works and the ASCAP Young Jazz Composer Award. Manuel has travelled the world performing in over 30 countries at some of the biggest international venues and festivals.

### publicity

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### links

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