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### *Espirito: An Extraordinary World Music Journey with Lawson Rollins*

by Dr. Jessie Voigts 02/22/2010

I love **music** - was raised on jazz and classical, and musicals, and world music. I learned early on the joy of listening and learning with different ears - musical odysseys that teach so much about a culture, whether it is Khaled, Youssou N'Dour, Habib Koite, Buena Vista Social Club, Cathie Ryan, Watanabe Sadao, or my new favorite, **Lawson Rollins**. Lawson is a world-renowned guitarist - and an extraordinary musician. We recently were sent a copy of his new cd, *Espirito* - and it's been on constant play in our house.

Lawson's **TECHNIQUE** - WOW! I can't imagine being able to play like that, but we sure enjoy listening to his virtuosity. Joined on *Espirito* by a plethora of incredible musicians from around the world (Spain, Brazil, Cuba, Persia, Afghanistan, India and the U.S), Lawson brings us a cd that is pure pleasure to listen to. The #1 radio debut, *Moonlight Samba*, is a Latin masterpiece. Some songs (*Espirito*, *Rumba del Sol*) are pure joy to listen - and dance - to. My favorites, though, are *Cape Town Sky* (a nod to my love of African music) and the “*The Caravan Trilogy*” – *Migration*, *Shadowland*, and *Into the Light* - a **musical journey from east to west**, from India to the New World.

I'll be honest - this cd haunts me. When we are doing something else, snatches of songs float through my head. Lawson has done an incredible feat, joining cultures, musicians, and the world into one joyful cd. His jazz and classical guitar influences, along with his supreme technical proficiency, combine to make one of the best cds I've ever heard. I highly recommend it!

We were lucky enough to sit down and talk with **Lawson** about *Espirito*, musical background, and more. Here's what he had to say.

**WE:** *Please tell us about your new cd, Espirito...*

**LR:** On *Espirito* I offer 13 original compositions that meld an eclectic mix of Latin and Middle Eastern musical influences with my Spanish-tinged guitar style. The album features an ensemble of internationally recognized musicians. I co-produced the album with Persian-American musician and producer **Shahin Shahida** (of the group *Shahin & Sepehr*) and multi-platinum producer **Dominic Camardella** (*Flora Purim*, *3rd Force*, *Ottmar Liebert*). The cast of performers includes the iconic Brazilian singer **Flora Purim**, percussionist **Airto Moreira**,

Iranian kamancheh master **Kayhan Kalhor**, and Grammy winners **Charlie Bisharat** on violin and Cuban drummer **Horacio “El Negro” Hernandez**.

*WE: Where did you get the inspiration for this cd? How did you choose these particular songs?*

**LR:** *Espirito*'s wide-ranging musical palette spans continents and cultures. I love the hybrid quality of World Music and how it allows for cross-cultural communication and exchange. Centuries ago, travel, trade, and migration created new forms of musical expression. The Spanish guitar is a true manifestation of the commingling of cultures with its ties to the Arabic oud, the Persian tar, even the Indian sitar, so drawing on those connections seems natural to me. The players on *Espirito* are connected to traditions from India, Persia, Afghanistan, Spain, Brazil, Cuba and the United States. Together we took a far-ranging musical journey of our own in the recording of the album.

*WE: Please tell us about your musical education/background...*

**LR:** I was born and raised in North Carolina and developed a love for the Spanish guitar in my mid-teens when I discovered the recordings of classical guitar maestro, **Andres Segovia**. I put aside what had been my primary instrument since the age of 8 - the drums - and dedicated myself to learning the music of the great Spanish composers that Segovia popularized. By my late teens I migrated towards more improvisational music and began composing my own songs that drew from Brazilian and Latin rhythms. In 1998 I partnered with fellow guitarist **Dan Young** to found the Latin fusion guitar duo *Young & Rollins*. We recorded four albums together and toured widely in the U.S. and abroad. Our sound was defined by two Spanish guitars and a small Latin percussion section. My desire to work with a wider range of musicians and singers led me to pursue a solo recording career several years later. In 2008 I released my first solo cd, "*Infinita*", which reached a wide audience through jazz radio play. I partnered with the same producers I have on *Espirito* and we assembled a cast of 18 musicians from around the globe on the album, many of whom have rejoined us on *Espirito*, along with several new faces.

*WE: What's up next for you?*

**LR:** I am already about half way through composing my next solo cd and have started the recording process. The hope is to have it ready for a release sometime in 2011.

*WE: Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?*

**LR:** Please visit my website [www.LawsonRollins.com](http://www.LawsonRollins.com) to keep up with all the news about *Espirito*. So far, the first single "*Moonlight Samba*" is on an exciting run up the jazz radio charts. Also on the website you can view a couple of short performance videos from me on that feature a different, more aggressive side of my playing style. These videos have so far reached several million viewers through postings on the various video sites like Youtube.

**WE:** Thanks so much, Lawson! I love your new cd - we can't stop listening to it! You've brought much joy to our lives.