

Pianist Edward Simon Presents *Latin American Songbook*, an Album Featuring Supple Jazz Trio Arrangements of Classics from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Puerto Rico and Venezuela

Latin American Songbook - to be released August 19th, 2016, via Sunnyside Records - sees Simon leading his kindred-spirit trio with bassist Joe Martin and drummer Adam Cruz

“One of the strongest pianists of his generation, with intuitive empathy and drum-like ingenuity, Simon solos compositionally with passionate elegance.” – DownBeat

The music of Latin America has long been some of the world’s most beloved, whether Brazilian bossa nova, Argentinean tango, Cuban bolero or irresistible songs from Chile, Puerto Rico and Venezuela. Pianist **Edward Simon** – a native of Venezuela who has made a name for himself over decades in America as a jazz pianist, bandleader and composer-arranger, along with being a Guggenheim Fellow and member of the hit SFJAZZ Collective – has created fresh, supple interpretations of melodies from all these countries for *Latin American Songbook*. To be released via Sunnyside Records on **August 19th, 2016**, the album – the San Francisco Bay Area-based pianist’s 14th – sees Simon leading his working trio with bassist **Joe Martin** and drummer **Adam Cruz**. The trio’s subtly virtuosic performances brim with lyricism, color and groove, giving instrumental voice to songs originally made famous by such singers as Caetano Veloso, Mercedes Sosa and Carlos Gardel. *The New York Times* has praised Simon’s “light, warm touch” as a pianist, while the *Jazz Journal International* singled out “his deep emotional statements.” *JazzTimes* said: “Simon is less talked about than many other important jazz pianists from the Caribbean and South America, but he may be **the most complete creative artist** among them.”

Latin American Songbook is the follow-up to Simon’s 2014 Sunnyside release, *Venezuelan Suite*, which saw the pianist blend the tuneful, buoyant sounds of his native country with the harmonically sophisticated, forward-looking manner of jazz. This rich compositions - written on a grant from Chamber Music America - featured star saxophonist Mark Turner alongside virtuosos of the Venezuelan folk tradition. *All About Jazz* marveled over the album: “*Venezuelan Suite* is pianist Edward Simon’s love letter to his homeland, but that’s not all it is; it’s the perfect confluence of Venezuelan ideals, jazz language and chamber-esque sophistication. In short, it’s **a masterpiece.**” *DownBeat* gave *Venezuelan Suite* a four-and-a-half star review, summing up: “Simon doesn’t forcibly create connections – he opens our eyes to **natural connections** that have always been there.”

For the new album, Simon created artful piano-trio settings of such songs as Astor Piazzolla’s famously rhapsodic “**Libertango**” and Antônio Carlos Jobim’s lilting “**Chega de Saudade**,” as well as the gorgeous Cuban ballad “**En La Orilla Del Mundo**” (At the Edge of

the World), a number jazz fans may know from its appearance on the hit Charlie Haden & Gonzalo Rubalcaba album *Nocturne*. About these songs and five others on *Latin American Songbook*, Simon explains: “I grew up listening to and loving this music – it sings and it dances. It’s irresistible. Later, I dealt with this material playing in Paquito d’Rivera’s band in the ’90s, and in my collaborations with Luciana Souza. As a mature jazz artist now, **I wanted to delve into these songs more deeply and make them my own**. I tried to start from the original source. For something as well-known as ‘Libertango,’ I began by transcribing Piazzolla’s first recording. Then I strove to subtly transform the originals, taking Carlos Gardel’s ‘**Volver**’ from a tango to a 5/4 jazz tune, for instance.”

One element of making the album that Simon enjoyed most was “**the pleasure of the interaction** in my trio with Adam and Joe,” the pianist says. “Adam and Joe have such a broad knowledge of music that I can draw at any point on the three key strands of my musical identity – Latin American, jazz, classical music – and they’re right there with me. Adam, who has been one of my most longstanding collaborators over the past decade, is one of the rare drummers who can draw on various Latin ethnic traditions as well as jazz to make something seamless and undeniable of this own. He is such an inventive player, **able to orchestrate a groove and help shape a composition**. As for Joe, he has such a warm sound on his instrument and is such a solid player you can see why great artists like Mark Turner and Chris Potter rely on him. He’s a very **versatile and sensitive** bassist, enabling Adam and I to **take chances with the music**. That’s what makes the music special, personal. I think this album came out wonderfully, and I can’t wait for people to hear how beautiful and expansive these songs can be.”

Edward Simon

Edward Simon – who first came to the U.S. in 1981 at age 12, then settled permanently stateside after attending the Performing Arts School in Philadelphia – grew up in a musical family in the oil-refinery town of Punta Cardón, Venezuela. His father planted a musical seed with young Edward and his siblings, the kids raised on the strains of their dad playing guitar and singing boleros with his drinking buddies. Chucho Valdés was Simon’s first big influence on piano, then he got the jazz bug watching a VHS tape of Dizzy Gillespie and Stan Getz playing at the White House – with “the freedom of jazz” forever instilled in him as an ideal. After graduating from the Performing Arts School at age 15, Simon received a music scholarship from the University of the Arts where he studied classical music. Later he transferred to the Manhattan School of Music where he studied jazz piano. During his stint as a young jazzier in New York City, Simon was inspired by the innovative Nuyorican jazz of Jerry Gonzalez & the Fort Apache Band, eventually playing with the group.

As a young striver, Simon took the piano chair in Bobby Watson’s band Horizon (1989-94), later moving to the Terence Blanchard Group (1994-2002). Simon made his debut album as a leader in 1994 with *Beauty Within* (Audioquest). The same year, he placed third in the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition, with the albums *Edward Simon* (Kokopelli, 1995) and *La Bikina* (Mythology, 1998) to follow. In 2000, the pianist formed the group Afinidad

with saxophonist David Binney, recording the discs *Afinidad* (Red Records, 2001) and *Océanos* (Criss Cross, 2007); the two also released the duo album *Fiestas de Agosto* (Red Records, 2008). Simon composed the extended work *Sorrows and Triumphs* for Afinidad featuring such guest artists as vocalist Gretchen Parlato. In 2010, he was named a Guggenheim Fellow, and he became a member of the SFJAZZ Collective, which comprises what *The New York Times* called “eight of today’s most in-demand” performer-composers.

Following his leader discs *The Process* (Criss Cross, 2003) and *Simplicitas* (Criss Cross, 2005), Simon recorded several albums featuring his All-Star Trio with bassist John Patitucci and drummer Brian Blade; complementing the studio albums *Unicity* (CamJazz, 2006) and *Poesía* (CamJazz, 2009), the group’s most recent release is the 2013 Sunnyside album *Trio Live*, recorded at New York’s Jazz Standard. With the jazz arrangements of folk material on the album *Venezuelan Suite* (Sunnyside, 2014), Simon garnered some of the most glowing reviews of his career, including a rating of four-and-a-half out of five stars from *DownBeat*. Just out is the pianist’s self-released duo album *Agora* with guitarist-vocalist Guillermo Rozenthuler, and the pianist has also recorded an album for upcoming release with Blade and bassist Scott Colley as the cooperative trio Steel House. With his latest commission via Chamber Music America’s *New Jazz Works: Commissioning and Ensemble Development* program, Simon has composed the 40-minute suite *House of Numbers* for Afinidad and the Grammy-nominated Imani Winds for a September 2016 world premiere at the Brubeck Institute in Stockton, California, with performances to follow at Western Michigan University and the Walton Arts Center in Arkansas.

Latin American Songbook

1. “Libertango” (*Piazzolla*)
2. “Alfonsina y El Mar” (*Ramirez/Luna*)
3. “Volver” (*Gardel*)
4. “Capullito de Aleli” (*Hernández*)
5. “Gracias A La Vida” (*Parra*)
6. “Chega de Saudade” (*Jobim*)
7. “En La Orilla Del Mundo” (*Rojas*) “Chega de Saudade” (*Jobim*)

Produced by Edward Simon

Edward Simon, piano; Joe Martin, double-bass; Adam Cruz, drums

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