

EDWARD SIMON | ENSEMBLE VENEZUELA

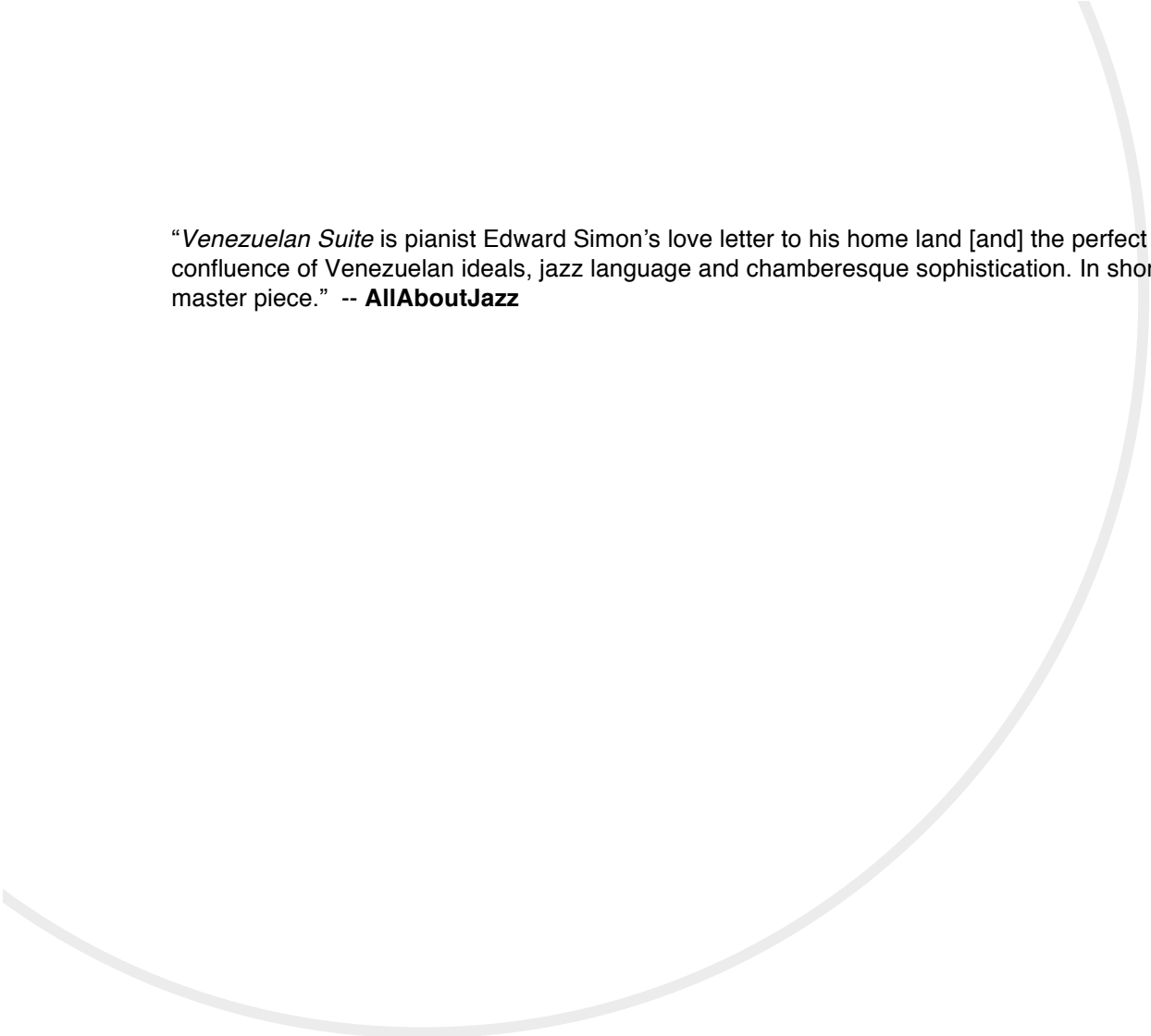


The music of Venezuela has yet to gain the wider recognition of many other beloved musical traditions in Latin America, but renowned jazz pianist and composer **Edward Simon** aims to change that. Simon - a Guggenheim Fellow and member of the SFJAZZ Collective, as well as leader of his own fine bands - has blended the color-rich lyricism and rhythmically buoyant sounds of his native Venezuela with the harmonically sophisticated, forward-looking manner of jazz. The resulting 2014 album release - **Venezuelan Suite**, his 13th as a leader (Sunnyside Records) - sees Simon leading **Ensemble Venezuela**, which features some of the best jazz improvisers alongside virtuosos of the Venezuelan folk tradition. Drummer **Adam Cruz** is one of Simon's longstanding associates, and he joins bassist **Roberto Koch**, flutist **Marco Granados**, **Jackeline Rago** on cuatro and maracas, and **John Ellis** on bass clarinet.

During roughly the last 15 year, the oil-rich country of Venezuela underwent tremendous social, political and economic changes, culminating in its present crisis and causing a great number of Venezuelans to migrate.

"The motivation behind composing my Venezuelan Suite was in large part to provide a glimpse of the richness and diversity of Venezuelan folk music, a music that for reasons unbeknownst to me, lies mostly undiscovered by audiences around the world. Perhaps there is no better way to learn about a culturally vibrant nation such as Venezuela than through its music. I am saddened by the current events and conditions in my country. Today, more than ever before, the world needs to know what is happening in Venezuela. I hope this project can serve as a calling for the international community to become more aware and involved."

The sound of Ensemble Venezuela is distinctive, with the bright timbre of traditional Venezuelan instruments including flute and cuatro - a traditional guitar-like instrument with four nylon strings - mixed with the darker sounds of jazz saxophone, piano bass and trap drums. Simon's Venezuelan Suite - composed on commission from Chamber Music America - takes the listener through four of the principal genres of the country's folk music. "the group shifts from sounding like a jazz band to sounding more folkloric then back again and everything in between," Simon explains. "But the goal is always to form and integrated sound. Latin American music has such rhythmic vitality, and when you combine that with the harmonic richness and real-time invention of jazz, it yields a profoundly beautiful mix -a beast of both worlds."



“*Venezuelan Suite* is pianist Edward Simon’s love letter to his home land [and] the perfect confluence of Venezuelan ideals, jazz language and chamberesque sophistication. In short, its a master piece.” -- **AllAboutJazz**