

GATO BARBIERI

"I try to play something beautiful," explains Gato Barbieri of his approach to music. "The more people like it, the more I like it . . . I think I can be open without losing my soul." Since his landmark soundtrack album, *Last Tango in Paris*, Barbieri's unique and fiery amalgam of Latin, jazz, and funk has crossed over again and again from jazz to pop audiences. His A&M albums, *Caliente*, *Ruby, Ruby*, and *Tropico*, are definitive examples of an artist so sure of his own powers, so sure of his musical center, that he willingly embraces the sounds of streets, the pop signatures of his times, and sails them into the clouds. *Euphoria*, Gato's new album, follows in this tradition. It offers a blazingly contemporary reworking of Kurt Weill's "Speak Low", a spacey, exploratory version Jorge Ben's "Gods and Astronauts," and a host of new Gato original compositions, including the flashy "Theme from *Firepower*" and the haunting "Sophia," both from the soundtrack of the James Coburn/Sophia Loren film, *Firepower*.

Celebrated jazz critic Nat Hentoff has called Gato's style "explosively and specifically alive." The energy that so passionately animates Gato flows from the interface of this acutely emotional and intensely gifted man with three continents and over a decade of musical experience. In Gato's early years, when jazz was going through a period of exciting anarchy, his music became as avant garde as it could without completely eschewing structure. He and his wife (and now associate producer, Michelle) were living in Argentina then. "A lot of people would listen to my music," he remembers, "and say 'straange.' But it wasn't strange. It was what I was feeling." From his point of view, his music is simply more "connected" now than it was in that period.

Gato and Michelle left Argentina in 1965 and moved to Rome and soon after to New York. The ensuing years were spent recording for ESP, Flying Dutchman and ABC Records and touring extensively in Europe, America, and South America. After *Last Tango* and his signing to A&M he began attracting a wider audience but it was the people recognizing and coming to him rather than Gato going after the masses. The staccato tenor saxophone blowing whirlwinds around each note remained, always, unassailably pure.

Produced by Jay Chattaway, who has arranged the last three Barbieri albums, *Euphoria* boasts a group of supporting musicians that reads like a hall of fame list. Eric Gale and A&M artist David Spinozza play guitar; Eddie Martinez, Richard Tee, and Pat Rebillot add keyboards; Bill Cobham, Idris Muhammed and Alan Schwartzberg play drums with the basses of Anthony Jackson and Ron Carter.

On June 24, 1979, Gato headlined the Newport Jazz Festival in New York's Carnegie Hall. His triumphant performance left no doubt of his stature in the world of music, not just a particular field of music but rather among all musicians. Gato Barbieri is one of those rare artistic entities whose art and passion are seamlessly welded into a single, living organism. He is a giant whose greatness is available for the whole world to enjoy. Don't pass up the opportunity.

