

# Johnny Polanco

## *Pa'I Bailador*

*In his function as the fearless leader of the ultimate West Coast party band of Latin kind, the New York-born with Dominican and Puerto Rican roots, multi-instrumentalist, composer, arranger Johnny Polanco has earned over the years a reputation for creating what the local music writer Lina Lecaro categorized once as "the kind of infectious, rhythmic, multilayered Latin music that makes even the most timid wallflower abandon all restraint and give it a whirl on the dance floor."*



**Johnny Polanco** was born in the South Bronx, New York, to Dominican and Puerto Rican parents who loved the music of the Caribbean, especially Puerto Rican, Cuban and Dominican rhythms. He grew up listening to Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez, Machito, Cortijo y su Combo and traditional trio music from Los Panchos and Johnny Albino.

**Johnny Polanco** got his first real guitar at age 5, but it was not until about the age of 10 that he really started to get interested in playing Latin music. He self taught himself how to play guitar, as well as the tres guitar, violin, percussion instruments, electric bass, trombone and vibraphone. As a young teenager he started playing alongside his uncles **Julio and Arturo Urrutia** in a trio format, performing in all family gatherings and some local social club events. By the age 14 he was a member of the **Steve Colón Band** in the Bronx and then moved on to a group called **Charanga Sensual**. He started to get more interested in the tres guitar and began to absorb with greater intuitiveness this unique string instrument, within a couple of years the tres guitar would become his instrument of choice.

The Latin music scene was growing and taking on a new form, finally evolving into what came to be known as "salsa music". Artistically, it was an amazing and exciting period to experience, but socially and economically times were hard and ugly in the city. Due to these conditions, he decided to join the military (the Marines) to get away from it all. After been stationed in North Carolina, Okinawa (Japan), he finally arrived in Southern California until he was honorably discharged in 1988. From the time he arrived in California, Latin Music came back into his life, initially thanks to the work of Orange County radio **DJ Rae Arroyo** and her weekly salsa show on **KXBR FM**. Before long, he was working with percussionist **Bobby Matos** and shortly after that with **Freddy Crespo** and his group **Costazul**. As time went on **Johnny** eventually worked with just about every group in town that was playing Latin music.

**Conjunto Amistad** was formed in 1993 at the request of **Armando Castro Sr.** owner of **El Floridita Restaurant** in **Hollywood**. **Castro** a connoisseur of Latin Music liked **Polanco's** tres guitar playing and asked him to head a Cuban jam session in his restaurant on Monday nights, after several months **Johnny** assembled his own band and played also weekend nights. **Conjunto Amistad** soon became one of the hottest and most in-demand tropical dance ensembles in the city.

With all of the talent of this band the obvious progression was recording, their first was in 1997 during the band's fourth anniversary. The CD entitled **L.A. Amistad** features **Angelo Pagán** and **George Balmaseda** on vocals, with New York-based singer **Ray Ramos** as guest vocalist. The production was well received throughout the west coasts, as well as abroad.

His second release is **Pa'I Bilador** (For The Dancer) on **Morrowland Records** label from Los Angeles. In this record **Johnny Polanco** varied the band's format from conjunto on some tracks, to a big band on others, accomplishing a variety of different sounds and styles from basically the same core of musicians. Like the title implies the repertoire is tailor-made for dancers, but thanks to some great arrangements, the selections are excellent listening songs as well. Featured throughout the CD are the guest vocal talents of veteran salsa singers **Ray De La Paz**, **Hermán Olivera**, **Freddie Crespo**, along with band members **Fabio Miranda** and **Daniel Castillo**.

The production is a true gathering of old and new friends getting together to have a good time while making some great dance music, old-school style.