Soundbites
by Gene Armstrong

LATIN MUSIC OF CUBAN AND JEWISH ORIGINS

The details of the early history of Orquesta Cubana often are debated. You know: who came first, who added which instrument, who first brought it to the United States, etc.

It’s certain, however, that the historic group Orquesta Nacional de Arsenio Pérez was there when at least some of that work down. The orchestra was formed in 1927 by bassist-singer Pérez (1888-1990), who is credited as the first bandleader to add trumpet to the traditional sextet son sound, introducing the element of swing. He’s also credited as the originator of the musical term “salsa,” thanks to his song “El Chico Salsa,” which roughly means “put some salsa on it.”

Separada Nacional has released many albums in the United States over the decades, my personal favorite being the archival release The Music of Cuba/The Cuban Sax/Alexandria 1936. The group’s latest is Sir Arsenio We Hop-San, a wonderful travelogue through the ever-evolving world of Cuban music, including styles such as rumba, son, bolero, canciones and conga-san.

Cuba’s Separada Nacional will play at 7:30 p.m., Wednesday, March 30, at UA Centennial Hall, 1020 E. University Blvd. Tickets range from $22 to $34, with a variety of discounts available. Call 621-3344 for more information.

Speaking of variations on Latin music, the Florida-based Klezmer Company Orchestra will visit Tucson for a special concert on Tuesday night. This group’s wonderfully eclectic style combines sounds of the Jewish diaspora with jazz, Afro-Cuban, chamber music and even the New Orleans second-line tradition.

Led by music director and accordionist Panoe Kalu, the KCO is headquartered at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton.

The event is a benefit for the Tucson Jewish-Latino Teen Coalition and has been named its name—“Beyond the Tribes: A Latin Jazz and Klezmer Extravaganza”—from the title of the KCO’s excellent new album, Beyond the Tribes.

The Klezmer Company Orchestra shows off various musicianship, a wavy range of idioms and a discerning sense of humor. Cheeky titles such as “Jew-Orleans March,” “2nd Avenue Hoedown” and “Mardi Beach Rumba” are exactly as described.

The Klezmer Company Orchestra will play at 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 29, in the auditorium at the Tucson Jewish Community Center, 2500 E. River Road. A free Latin-dance class will precede the concert at 6:45 p.m. Tickets cost $15, or $10 for seniors, students and the military. There’s also a special “Patron” package with two tickets and a CD for $50. Call 299-3000 for tickets or information.