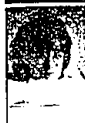


## STREET SCENE

# Nil Lara slides across cultures mixing pop with folk



CHRISTINA FUOCO

Music is a reflection of the artist who produces it and that's never been so evident than with cross-cultural singer-songwriter Nil Lara.

A simple 30-second voice mail message sums up the Miami-based Lara. He rolls his R's, slides between American and Spanish accents, and although he has every reason to be pretentious, Lara ends the message sweetly with "I'll be waiting for your phone call."

In case you haven't figured it out, Lara's music is an unpretentious mix of American pop, Cuban rhythms and Venezuelan folkloric traditions. His effortlessly interchanges the Cuban three-toned "tres" guitar, the "cuatro," a Venezuelan four-stringed instrument, the electric guitar and indigenous percussion instruments.

And that voice: at one minute it's richly melodic, the next a primal wail.

Lara is a master at his craft. Standing outside a phone booth in the cold of Vermont, Lara isn't quite sure what to say about his music.

"I'm at your service," he says. First a little background. Lara was born in Newark, N.J., to Cuban parents but lived in Venezuela until moving to Miami while he was in junior high. Music lessons in Venezuela exposed him to that country's folkloric traditions.

At age 8, he learned how to play the cuatro and eventually graduated to guitar. While studying microwave analysis at the University of Miami, Lara spent his spare time fine tuning his

songwriting craft and eventually stumbled on to the "tres."

"As a child I used to watch live performances by 'mujeres' (Cuban country) artists and noticed a peculiar tonality which was present all the time. I later discovered that to be the 'tres.' It wasn't until I saw it and heard it in person that I fell for it and started to really appreciate the root of the 'son,' which is basically the blues of Cuban music."

Previous to his self-titled debut album released in March, Lara put out two albums on his own label, Beluga Blue Records. It was after a feature in Billboard magazine's Continental Divide column that label reps from Metro Blue, a subsidiary of Capitol Records, came knocking.

Lara's self-titled debut album was well received in Miami to critical acclaim. Lara's songs are portraits of broken-hearted lovers, feelings of longing and loss, and nostalgia. "Bleeding," a muscular pop song that serves as the centerpiece of the album, showcases Lara's knack for writing soul-searing lyrics. "I feel you've got me near the end/You have me bleeding/And so you've got me where you want/I feel you've got me on my knees/You have me bleeding/Try to believe I am drained/I don't want to bleed no more."

The first single, "Baby" is a painful plea to a lover complimented with a Dominican tambora and a Bahamian junkanoo drum. "Baby doesn't know what she wants any more/Baby doesn't know how to love anyone/Baby doesn't know how to love/Baby doesn't know what she wants to believe." Lara follows that up with "Be my savior/Won't you bring me home tonight?"

As a further paean to his heritage, three of the 11 songs on

"Nil Lara" are sung in Spanish.

Through relentless touring of the U.S., Lara gained a grassroots following, having played a variety of small venues Alvin's to the 7th House locally.

Success hasn't spoiled Lara.

"I'm humbled by it. I did my work. I had a good time in the studio. My music and my culture come first. We just did a European thing. That was beautiful. I brought home an oriental instrument that has three strings. It's like a banjo for them but it doesn't sound so banjo-y. The skin is made out of dog," Lara said squeamishly.

Lara said that although he has a few songs written, he's going to take his time for the next album.

"We're livin' the experience, you know. We have songs that I would put on a record already but I'm going to try to live a little bit and experience everything that's going on."

Nil Lara makes two area appearances next week. He headlines a show at 8 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 15, at the 7th House, 7 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. Tickets are \$6 in advance for the 18 and older show. For more information, call (810) 335-8100.

Two days later, Thursday, Oct. 17, Lara will open for Los Lobos at the Michigan Theatre, 609 Liberty, Ann Arbor, at 8 p.m. Ticket prices range from \$20-\$30 for the all-ages show. For more information about that show, call (313) 99-MUSIC or (313) 668-8397.

If you have a question or comment for Christina Fuoco, you can write to her c/o The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia, or via e-mail at cfuoco@aol.com. You can also leave a message for her by calling (313) 953-2647, mailbox 2130 on a Touch-Tone phone.



Cross-cultural rhythms: Nil Lara takes his Cuban and Venezuelan heritage and blends it into relentlessly hook-laden pop songs. He will make two area appearances Tuesday, Oct. 15, at the 7th House in Pontiac, and Thursday, Oct. 17, opening for Los Lobos at the Michigan Theatre in Ann Arbor.

## SCREEN SCENE

A sampling of what's playing at alternative movie theaters across metro Detroit as reviewed by John Monaghan.

**Birmingham Theatre** 211 S. Woodward, Birmingham. Call (810) 644-FILM for information. (\$6.50; \$4.25 matinees and seniors)

**"Basquiat"** (USA - 1996). Artist-turned-director Julian Schnabel's account of the life of contemporary Jean-Michel Basquiat, a New York graffiti artist who rose to fame in the 1980s. Co-starring Gary Oldman, Dennis Hopper, and David Bowie as an appropriately spacedy Andy Warhol.

**"Stonewall"** (USA - 1996). A fictionalized account of the real Greenwich Village uprising in 1969 that launched the modern gay rights movement.

**Baldwin Theatre**, 415 S. Lafayette, Royal Oak (810) 541-6430. Tickets \$10.

**"The Hunchback of Notre Dame,"** (USA - 1923) 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Oct. 11-12. Generations before the Disney version, Lon Chaney played Victor Hugo's tragic hero a bell

ringer in the famed Paris cathedral. A silent classic with live organ accompaniment by John Lauter.

**Detroit Film Theatre** 6200 Woodward, Detroit. Call (313) 832-2730 for information. (\$5.00; \$4.50 students/seniors)

**"Secrets and Lies"** (Britain - 1996). Oct. 11-13 (call for showtimes). In this worthy winner of last year's Palme d'Or, a troubled and world-weary woman is unexpectedly visited by the 27-year-old daughter that she gave up at birth. Another incredibly insightful glimpse of real life from Mike Leigh ("Life is Sweet," "Naked").

**"Paris Was a Woman"** (Britain - 1995). 7 p.m. Oct. 14. A documentary look at the women writers, artists, photographers and editors who flourished in Paris around the turn of the century. Colette, Gertrude Stein, and Alice B. Toklas are some of the more familiar names celebrated.

**Magic Bag Theatre** 22920 Woodward, Ferndale. Call (810) 644-3030 for information. (\$2)

**"Willy Wonka & The**

**Chocolate Factory"** (USA - 1971). 9:30 p.m. Oct. 16. Gene Wilder plays the title character in this bizarre children's fantasy about a group of lucky kids who win the chance to tour a magical candy factory.

**Main Art Theatre** 118 N. Main Street at 11 Mile, Royal Oak. Films play through at least Thursday, unless noted otherwise. Call (810) 642-0180 for information and showtimes. (\$6.50; \$4 students, seniors and matinees \$3 twilight)

**"Big Night"** (USA - 1996). A pair of brothers try to run an authentic Italian restaurant in the 1950s but discover that most people want simple spaghetti

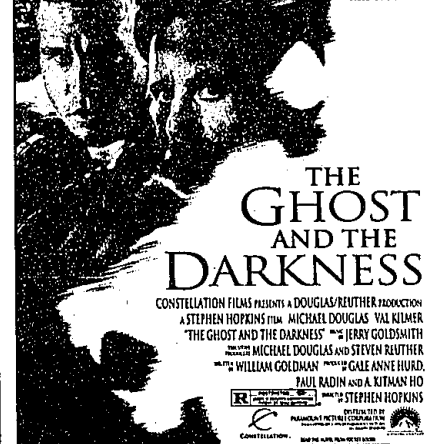
and meatballs.

**"Wallace and Gromit: The Best of Aardman Animation."** The work of British animator Nick Park is highlighted in this entertaining compilation. **Redford Theatre** 13671 Lahser (at Grand River), Detroit. Call (313) 537-2560 for information. (\$3.50)

**"The Phantom of the Opera"** (USA - 1926). 8 p.m. Oct. 11; 2, 8 p.m. Oct. 12 (organ overture begins a half hour before showtime). Lon Chaney's greatest performance, as the vengeful composer who kidnaps a young singer and locks her in the catacombs beneath the old opera house.

**MICHAEL DOUGLAS VAL KILMER**  
"EDGE OF YOUR SEAT THRILLER!"  
A remarkable piece of filmmaking. Sensational!  
Jim Ferguson, PREVUE CHANNEL

"The 'JAWS' of the jungle."  
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**STARTS FRIDAY, OCT. 11**  
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QUO VADIS  
SHOWCASE WESTLIFE  
STAR ROCHSTER HILLS  
UNITED ARTISTS LAKESIDE  
UNITED WEST RIVER  
AMC SOUTHFIELD CITY  
SHOWCASE WILBUR  
STAR ORAHO AT 15 MILE  
UNITED ARTISTS OAKLAND  
FORD WYOMING  
AMC BEL AIR 10  
GENERAL CINEMAS CANTON  
SHOWCASE PONTIAC  
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Eight years ago she lost her memory. Now, a detective must help her remember the past before it buries them both.

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RENAISSANCE 4  
SHOWCASE PONTIAC  
STAR LINCOLN PARK 8  
STAR ROCHSTER HILLS  
UNITED ARTISTS LAKESIDE  
UNITED WEST RIVER  
AMC SOUTHFIELD CITY  
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