

CTRONIC VOTING MACHINES CAN'T BE TRUSTED
SPECIAL REPORT BY ROBERT F. KENNEDY JR.

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The Salsa Kings

Fania Records, the greatest Latin-music label of all, opens the vaults. By Peter Relic

Various Artists Fania

In 1964, Dominican bandleader Johnny Pacheco and Italian-American lawyer Jerry Masucci founded Fania Records, the label that captured the sound of Latino music in New York at a crucial moment: the period when it added a funky backbeat to traditional mambo. Thus the mighty (and mighty popular) modern salsa sound was born, with Fania becoming one of the biggest Latin labels of its time. Now, the Fania floodgates are being reopened with a deluge of remastered releases from the label's deep catalog. The first batch of reissues is fantastic, offering a thrill equal to being exposed to the Stax catalog for the first time. Louie Ramirez's *Ali Baba* (1968) is bright and easy to dance to, spiced up with the timbales-playing leader's double-entendre exhortation to buy the album: "I need the bread to buy a couple of camels/See, I haven't had a hump in a month!" The trombone gets pushed to its brash, exuberant outer reaches on Willie Colón's *El Malo* (1968), a masterpiece blending shing-a-ling sounds with traditional Cuban styles, made when Colón was merely seventeen. The Lebron Brothers' 1970 album *Salsa y Control*

slows down tempos to explore the funky R&B spaces inside their rhythms and includes "Regresa a Mi," their adaptation of Glen Campbell's Jimmy Webb-penned hit "Honey Come Back." *Bohemio y Poeta* (1979) is a collection of mid-Seventies work from Panamanian statesman Rubén Blades; string-swept and brooding, Blades' tunes are more complex than standard Fania fare, but less immediately appealing. Celia Cruz and Johnny Pacheco's album *Celia & Johnny* (1974) is a matchup made in twist-and-shout heaven, and utterly essential. And finally, the term "supergroup" is barely adequate to describe the might of the Fania All-Stars, who counted among their ranks heavyweights including conga maestro Ray Barretto, bassist Bobby Valentín and singer Cheo Feliciano. *Live at the Cheetah* (1971) is bombastic proof of why the Fania sound came to rule all corners of Latino New York after dark. Come 1976, the All-Stars were playing Yankee Stadium. These albums show why and how Fania's artists were worthy of such mass adoration.



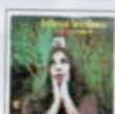
The mighty modern salsa sound is born. From top: Fania All-Stars; Rubén Blades; Celia Cruz and Johnny Pacheco.



Willie Colón,
El Malo
★★★★



Louie Ramirez,
Ali Baba
★★★



Lebron Brothers,
Salsa y Control
★★★★½



Fania All-Stars,
Live at the Cheetah, Vol. 1
★★★★★



Celia Cruz and Johnny Pacheco,
Celia & Johnny
★★★★★



Rubén Blades,
Bohemio y Poeta
★★★