

He Got The Funk

By Roberto "Rob" Camacho

For the past twenty-five years Karlos 'Solrak' Paez has served as the vocalist and leader of The B-Side Players, one of the most unique, versatile and enduring bands to come out of San Diego. Having toured with bands and musicians such as WAR, Ben Harper, The Wailers, Toots & the Maytals, and even the late Godfather of Soul James Brown, intermingling and crossing dozens of different genres and styles, The B-Side Players are perhaps one of the funkier collectives of musicians ever to assemble in San Diego.

When not performing or working on new music it's not unusual to see the front man hanging out in front of his business, the San Diego Vintage Co. located on Logan Avenue, chatting with friends and customers. However, this month Paez and The B-Side Players are preparing to celebrate one of the band's most momentous occasions, their own twenty-fifth anniversary of the band's founding.

The forty-six-year-old musician grew up across the border in Colonia Libertad, a suburb of Tijuana, Mexico. His father, Ezequiel Paez, a world-renowned trombone player himself and musical arranger spent seventeen years in the band Los Moonlights in Tijuana and ten years in La Banda Del Recodo.

Having spent his entire life surrounded by music and growing up in a musical household naturally had a found influence on Paez growing up, "I would go watch my dad play when I was little and that was huge for me because I got to be backstage, see the band and study the musicians. That was very fascinating and intriguing to me," Karlos recalled.

"I first started playing music when I was about eleven, and I really started getting serious when I was thirteen or fourteen," Paez said. "My Dad always had instruments around the house when he was gone on long tours. I always had access to guitars, horns, trumpets, trombones; so, curi-



Karlos "Solrak" Paez and The B-Side Players celebrate 25 years of making music. Photo by Sean Horton.

osity being young and being bored you get into music naturally when those instruments are available."

By the early 90's Solrak was heavily involved in the Chula Vista punk scene, "we were coming out of the 'Straight Edge' scene which is like a Punk Rock anti-drug movement that was really big there in Chula Vista," Paez recalled.

However, by 1994 he had begun branching into different genres; particularly the acid-jazz and funk-soul movements taking off in the early 90's. "We wanted to do something that was on that jazz tip but definitely with the Latin flavor," Paez said. "It was really like a loose collective of the community, musicians that were already in other bands coming together to form The B-Side Players. All of these cats from different bands were all on the same tip creating a new Latin fusion of young musicians."

Karlos Paez Celebrates Twenty-Five Years of Making Music With The B-Side Players

In the group's early days, The B-Side Players shared studio space with San Diego band P.O.D. in National City; splitting the rent and rehearsal hours between the two bands. The band began performing in small dive bars like the Casbah, playing covers of popular songs from groups such as Tierra, Malo, Santana, and a variety of other Chicano bands. It wasn't long after Paez began writing and performing original music for the band; and before The B-Side Players were exclusively on original content.

The band also began incorporating reggae influences into their music very early on as well. "We started mixing the reggae fusion into the Latin sound, blending Afro-Cubans rhythms with reggae rhythms," Karlos said. "Every record we'd have three reggae songs on it, three funk songs, three Latin-fusion songs; it's just always been a melting pot of music."

The B-Side Players were also one of the first bilingual bands to play in genre, "We were really one of the first bands to sing reggae in español in the early 90's," the frontman recounted on the band's initial foray into the reggae scene.

While their diverse and eclectic sound earned themselves an equally eclectic following, the band initially had difficulty marketing themselves and their music to promoters. "It was hard for us to do reggae tours because we just don't play reggae, we definitely have reggae style but we also mixed cumbia, salsa, cha-cha, and so many rhythms and the reggae thing kind of put us in a pigeonhole that wasn't comfortable for us."

Taking influence from reggae artists Bob Marley, Steel Pulse, and spoken word poets such as Gill Scott Herron; a strong message of social commentary can be consistently heard in the groups music. Regularly touching on topics such as immigration, racism and the struggles of undocumented immigrants.

"It's emblematic of how we grew up in San Diego

and Tijuana," Paez said. "I grew up crossing the border three times a week so just being a border kid and seeing this had its effect on the content of the music." However, above all The B-Side Players are known for being a dance band, incorporating the best of both worlds with a message. "That's the beauty of our music, there's always a message behind the music and if you want to get deep then you can get deep and if you want to have a fun time you do that."

To commemorate the band's twenty-fifth anniversary The B-Side Players have plans for a huge one-night celebration. Guitarist Raúl Pacheco of the band Ozomatli will sit-in with them for their entire set. Likewise, performances by Tijuana band La Diabla, and Cumbia Machin; a special project by original B-Side Players drummer Joaquin Hernandez will both open up for the band.

"It's kind of like a family thing but it's also a celebration, we're going to be mixing old songs with new songs just having a good time." Karlos said he's tentatively looking forward to the upcoming show. "So much heart and soul has gone into The B-Side Players throughout the years. There's not that many bands, companies or families that reach that milestone; that's why it's such a great thing to celebrate twenty-five years."

During the group's run Paez estimates over seventy musicians have been in and out of the band throughout the years, and Paez says they have no plans of stopping anytime soon.

"I want to play until the wheels fall off, my dad still plays music to this day and I think I'll be the same. For me it doesn't matter if I'm just playing guitar in a room or if I'm playing to thousands of people, for it's like breathing or walking, I'm going to do it until I can't."

You can catch The B-Side Players at their twenty-fifth anniversary show at Belly Up Tavern in Solana Beach on Saturday, July 13th.