

# DAILY NEWS

Music & Arts

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## Pedrito Martinez finally releases first album with his band after years of live performances

The 'Pedrito Martinez Group' album will be released on Oct. 8 although they've been doing shows at Hell's Kitchen hotspot Guantanamera for a few years.

BY [JOSE MANUEL SIMIAN](#) / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS



Pedrito Martinez and his group have done several live performance at Guantanamera in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of Manhattan. Now they finally will release their first album.

Pedrito Martinez and his group have been building a name for themselves in New York the old-fashioned way: By playing several nights a week at Hell's [Kitchen](#) hotspot Guantanamera.

What they didn't do in a traditional way was to release an album as soon as they could.

They built a buzz around themselves performing night after night, while their eponymous album debut, out on Oct. 8, took a few years to see the light. But the delay was deliberate.

"I like for things to be played over and over again, until they are solid, and then say, 'Okay, let's enter the studio,'" says Martinez, 39, a former member of Yerba Buena and a seasoned session player for musicians such as Paquito D'Rivera, Bebo Valdes and Buika.

"I've taken part in many albums, and things work out well, because we're talking about excellent musicians. But sometimes something is missing: The feeling, that thing that makes the recording sound natural and laid back," adds the Havana-born percussionist and singer.

"And that's what happened with our album: We knew the music by heart. Nobody had to read a piece of paper."

The 11 tracks on "Pedrito Martinez Group" sound exactly like one of the [performances](#) the band — which also consists of keyboard player Ariacne Trujillo, bassist Alvaro Benavides and percussionist Jhair Sala — gives on a typical night at Guantanamera.

From the Cuban rumba of the Martinez-penned "Conciencia" and "Lengua de Obbara" of Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, to their soul-funk cover of Robert Johnson's "Traveling Riverside Blues" and rumba-meets-soul version of the Jackson 5's "I'll Be There," the album showcases the group's versatility and ambition.

But the heart of the album may well be their version of Pachito Alonso's "La Habana," [a love letter](#) to the Cuban capital.

In Martinez's voice, the verses that claim the singer knows every corner of the city so well it's actually too small for him, sound as a metaphor for his personal journey of why he left the island 16 years ago to become a musician on the verge of international stardom.

“I was raised on the street. That’s where I had to go to learn the folklore,” he says.

“But at the same time it started to be too little for me. I had gained all this knowledge, but I couldn’t express it in my country. I had to leave Cuba to express myself, to identify myself as an international musician, not only as a musician who can play Cuban music.”

The album will be officially released with a performance on Oct. 8 at the City Winery, 155 Varick St. in Manhattan, and it could well signify the beginning of a new stage for a band that has become one of the most exciting and talked-about Latin acts to emerge from New York City in years.

“If it wins a Grammy, great — what an honor,” Martinez says. “But I just want to keep doing what we’re doing. Without an album out there, we played the best festivals in Europe. We’ve been doing that for two years, in front of thousands and thousands of people.

“We want to keep Guantanamera as our headquarters, but also to play in the best festivals of the world, being recognized not only as a Cuban group, but as a group that plays international music, a cosmopolitan group,” he adds.

“A group that plays music for the people: Music to dance to, music to go crazy to, music that stays in history.”