



12/10/10

Roland Vazquez Band The Visitor

By [Michael J. West](#)

With *The Visitor*, drummer Roland Vazquez joins the ranks of Maria Schneider and Darcy James Argue as a visionary composer of contemporary big-band jazz. This, it's no surprise, is the Latin version. It's that flavoring that is Vazquez's greatest advantage on the disc; the hand percussion and salsa-fied piano licks guarantee its sumptuous beauty.

Though kinetic and danceable, the band's going concern is sweetness. They never overwhelm the proceedings with heat; the rock backbeat of "Whirlpool" and Afro-Cuban flair on Clare Fischer's "Guarabe" come close, but in each case the woodwinds play flowing legato backgrounds, keeping the tunes in check. Meanwhile pieces like "Urantia" and "The Path of Change" unfurl with ease; the former is a quick, light salsa whose demeanor is a luxurious ballad, the latter a gently rolling groove with hope tinting every phrase.

Hope, in fact, is the album's preeminent mood, and the musicians articulate it well—via restraint from both ensemble and soloists. With 22 musicians (not including Vazquez, who only conducts here), there's a lot of detail to listen to, but certain players do dominate. Alto saxophonist Aaron Heick might be called the star of the show: He takes magnificent solos on four of the album's seven tracks, but is equally important as a structural component for "Thru A Window" and "Sevilla." Likewise, enough can't be said of pianist Luis Perdomo and his determinedly smiling chords, or of the omnipresent soft lilt from percussionist Samuel Torres. Yet *The Visitor* is ultimately Vazquez's music...and his triumph.