

# Henry Brun gets Latin Playerz back to their roots on new album

By [Hector Saldana](#), *San Antonio Express-News*

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Henry Brun and his wife, singer Judi DeLeon

It's a groove thing.

That's not exactly a shocker when it comes to a new album from Henry Brun & the Latin Playerz. After all, it's salsa and Latin jazz.

But Brun was going for something more with "In Ritmo We Trust."

"I wanted to go back to the basics, back to our roots," said Brun for the group's 25th anniversary effort.

Such a quest brought Brun to record producer Joe Treviño's Blue Cat Studio in Southtown, a place known as a Tex-Mex rock 'n' roll, conjunto and Tejano music crossroads, where the percussionist had done session work but never an entire project.

The recording sessions began in earnest in July.

"I really wanted to go in there and for the band to get to show off its maturity and finesse," Brun explained.

The result is some silky Latin big-band horn sounds, mysterious intros, gentler grooves (as well as Fania All Stars fire) and jazzier moments, too. Not to mention that legendary “Little Joe” Hernandez makes a guest appearance, singing lead on the romantic ballad “Y.”

Henry Brun & the Latin Playerz celebrate Sunday with a CD release party at the beer garden at Alamo Beer Co., 202 Lamar St.

“It’s a monster horn section,” said Treviño, who engineered and mixed the record, about the 14-man group. Of course, Treviño is all about recording live “on the wood.” He felt that had been missing from Brun’s previous efforts.

“We went for some live grooves,” said Treviño, who has worked with Flaco Jimenez, Augie Meyers, Raul Malo, Max Baca & Los TexManiacs, Rita Vidaurri, the West Side Horns, Michael Martin and Juan Tejeda.

But there’s an elegance to the song selection and performances. Brun avoided the hyper, in-your-face cliché approach to salsa.

Brun’s wife, Judi Deleon, sings lead on “Summertime.” Pete Rodriguez sings lead on “Con Mi Ritmo” and “La Pelota.”

“We turned the project around in about five weeks,” Brun said. “I’ve always had a thematic approach but with one I just wanted to present the band where it is today, its sound, its identity. It’s come full circle.”

The record begins with “Amanecer,” a track written by José Gallardo for Ramón Mongo Santamaría, the Cuban-born composer, rumba musician and Afro-Cuban percussionist who wrote the late ’50s standard “Afro Blue.”

Santamaría’s 1963 hit version of Herbie Hancock’s “Watermelon Man” is essential listening. Gallardo, a member of Santamaría’s band (and before that, the Latinaires with Little Joe) explores the gentler side of the groove on “Amanecer.”

Jazz trumpeter and educator Adrian Ruiz, a former musical director for the Latin Playerz, says Bronx-born Brun’s passion and influences is the unifying thread.

“I branched out into salsa and Latin jazz through Henry,” said Ruiz, who teaches at St. Mary’s University and the University of Texas at San Antonio and leads the Adrian Ruiz Quintet.

KRTU-FM program director JJ Lopez praised the Playerz’s longevity, musical dynamics and Brun’s flair.

“Henry’s a Bronx transplant and brought that kind of (New York) Latin jazz sound,” Lopez said. “He’s a great bandleader, a great entertainer and good businessman.”

Sunday's ARTS San Antonio outdoor event is purposely down-home. The rustic setting is a far cry from the Latin Playerz's past gigs at the Empire Theatre.

"Not every fan likes to dress up in a coat and tie and go to the theater," Brun said. "I wanted to make sure that this one here, celebrating the milestone, was done in the same fashion as in the beginning, just relaxed. People can bring their kids and let 'em run around and have a great time."

## **More Information**

### **In concert**

**Who:** Henry Brun & the Latin Playerz

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Sunday

**Where:** Alamo Beer Co., 202 Lamar St.

**Admission:** \$20-\$50 at [artssa.org](http://artssa.org)

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