

## Now this is exciting music

### SPANISH ROCK!

Santa Lucia adds Latin rhythms to funk and rock

#### CD Release

#### Santa Lucia

Where: Ginger 62, 1219 Granville St.

When: Thursday, 10 p.m.

Tickets: \$10 advance at Highlife and Zulu



Stuart Derdeyn

ON MUSIC



Guitarist-singer German Castillo, left, and saxophonist Byron Russell are part of the hot and happening nine-piece band, Santa Lucia.

Arterciopelos, Cafe Tacuba, Fabulosos Cadillacs, Maná and Manu Chao.

None are household names here. Drive a few hours south to Seattle and these acts sell out stadiums. In the enormous *rock en Español* (Rock in Spanish), they are multi-platinum chart-toppers.

Curiously, this worldwide music phenomenon mostly passed us by in terms of both tours and influencing local combos.

This week's release of Santa Lucia LFR's *The Streets/Las Calles* (Grade: A-) changes that. Arguably the first local *rock en Español* CD, the nine-piece crew's debut marks six years of serious effort for founder/leader German Castillo.

"The LFR signifies Latin-Funk-Rock, which is what we play," says Castillo. "The biggest part of what makes it different from average North American rock is all the

Latin-style percussion."

"The timbales, congas, bongos and cowbells bring a whole new dimension to the funk, especially when you add on the horns," says Byron Russell, the Kyokushin karate expert who enforces the saxophone chops in the group.

Born in Nicaragua, Castillo left his homeland with his father in '83. They lived in Mexico, San Francisco, Winnipeg and moved to Vancouver in '91. Along the way, he soaked up a wide variety of sounds and styles. At one point, he began criss-crossing Canada with the cumbia band Sanzibar before hitting VanCity in Vallarta.

There was always a pull to play something that mixed it up more.

"I bet if I'd grown up in a Latin-American country, my music would have been a much deeper traditional style. But I wanted rock, funk and the same thing that I grew up with," says Castillo. "Latin

rock was exploding in the United States and I thought, 'why not?'"

And so, Santa Lucia was born. When Russell — always ready to do something new and exciting — came onboard, things really got rolling. A five-song EP recorded with Darryl Neudorf (Sarah McLachlan, Neko Case) came out in '01. *The Streets/Las Calles* was recorded at White Rock's Turtle Studios with Larry Anshell (Nickelback, Pearl Jam). It sounds ace.

"It has this Latin sound but I find it's very easy to get into and to naturally get people excited about," says Russell.

No doubt. With its big brass section blaring and a salsa-funk rhythm that brings early Santana to mind, songs such as "Lupita" could make a wallflower start bustin' moves. For this album, Santa Lucia left the syrup at home and only brought the hot sauce.

"Locally, there isn't too much

going on like this," says Russell. "That can work for and against you. How do you market yourself?"

"Everything that comes from the States that seems similar — Ozomatli, Yerba Buena, etc. — we go after the opening spot aggressively," says Castillo. "When things work, it doesn't take long for us to get people up and going."

Taking what's open for now, the group performs its release this week but has become something of a regular show at the increasingly cool Malone's at 608 W. Pender. The band played the venue on New Year's Eve and is skedded to return shortly. It records a CBC studio session on Feb. 26.

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