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Haila María Mompíe has become an example for the new generation of Cuban soneros.

Haila and her orchestra are a reference point in contemporary Cuban music.

Mireya Castañeda

• HAILA María Mompíe, one of the best contemporary Cuban performers, is celebrating her 25-year strong career with the release of her seventh album: **Haila, Mujer de Acero** (Haila: Woman of Steel).

With a clear sense of the market, the *sonera* (Cuban son singer) par excellence began the year with a tour of Cuba, during which she sang the new songs included on the album, recently presented during a press conference held at the Iberostar Parque Central hotel, in Havana.

Ready with the CD physically in hand, the charismatic Haila offered dancers a great show in Havana's Salón Rosado de la Tropical, alongside some of the well-known singers who featured as guests on the album.

To reach such a high professional level, with widespread popularity among Cuban audiences, the singer assured, has been a long road full, of course, with sacrifices.

A brief history for our readers: in 1991 Haila was invited to become a member of the Septeto Tradición; in 1994, she joined the Bamboleo band; in 1998, founded Azúcar Negra; and in 2001 she decided to launch a solo career.

Since then, she has released seven albums. Among them are the first, **Haila**, followed by **Haila live**, **Haila Diferente**, (in which she began singing ballads, bachata, merengue, salsa, and offered something new by singing in a middle range), and **Haila Mala** (awarded the Cubadisco Prize in the dance music category).

In this intense period, she featured in 2001 on the album **La rumba soy yo**, winner of a Latin Grammy Award; shared the stage with figures such as Cheo Feliciano, Oscar de León, Olga Tañón, Rey Ruiz, José Alberto El Canario, Gilberto Santa Rosa, Chucho Valdés, Muñequitos de Matanzas, Mario Rivera, Adalberto Álvarez, David Calzado, Issac Delgado, and Lázaro Valdés; and joined the Cuban Grammys project, along with Eliades Ochoa, Juan Formell, Sampling, Chucho Valdés, Los Papines and Ernán López-Nussa.

GOING BACK TO HER ROOTS

During the press conference to launch **Haila, Mujer de Acero**, the versatile singer was confident in her latest production. "I have always considered myself a rather daring human being. They say that she who doesn't take risks doesn't make it across the river."

Haila was accompanied by Mario

Haila: Woman of Steel

The renowned singer's seventh album offers
spectacular sounds



The cover of the new album was well thought out and carefully designed, including Haila's costume.

Escalona, general manager of the Musical Recording and Editing Enterprise (EGREM), the label under which the album has been released; Lester Hamlet, film and video director, who provided the album notes; and the album's arranger, Carlos Cartaya; who each referred to various aspects of the conception of the recording.

Lester Hamlet (filmmaker and director of **Ya no es antes**, the soundtrack to which features a track from the album), noted that Haila has stood out for the past 25 years for her excellent vocal qualities and high level of improvisation, stating, "She has become a myth, a label, she is authentic, she is Cuba." Meanwhile, Escalona emphasized that the new star of EGREM "is an artist with her own image, a symbol of professional credibility."

The comments of Cartaya, who, alongside Aned Mota, arranged the 11 tracks featured

on **Haila, Mujer de Acero**, were very revealing of Haila's professionalism. He noted that the album is well thought out, with tracks selected from among her wide repertoire. "She is very strict and does not stop until everything is to her liking. I create my melodies, Haila offers her own, and I think the result is satisfactory. We have produced a CD with a spectacular sound, it sounds Cuban and international."

In response to a question regarding how the idea for this album came about, Haila noted: "The title almost always comes out of a song. It should attract attention. In my seven productions it has always been 'Haila...' and something else. And when Issac (Delgado) gave me the song, I said this is it: Woman of Steel."

"The song was written by my brother Issac and Misael Bosaa, and metaphorically, with this production, as always, I defend women

who take advantage to sing what they can not always say with words.

"I sing songs of all kinds, but also for women to defend themselves. This CD is for the brave, the fighters, women who are strong, faced with any situation in life, like me."

Her seventh album to be released was produced by Aned Mota, the author of six of the 11 tracks. Other featured composers were Carlos Cartaya, Randy Malcom, Issac Delgado, and Taimy Estrada.

Haila stressed that the guests featuring on the album were "friends and great, fervent lovers of Cuban music: Descemer Bueno, Leoni Torres, Issac Delgado, Paulo FG, Alain Pérez."

Regarding the tracks, the singer stated, "I am always careful with the texts, to make sure they have common meaning for the public to identify with them." In this regard, she highlighted: "Te traigo flores," "Amor a primera vista," "La lluvia se llevó tu amor," "Lo que tengo es mío," "Santiago, mi Santiago," "Para que llorar" (a conga selected to identify Havana's Carnival this summer), "De donde vengo," and "El susto."

Questioned as to the place this latest album holds within her discography, Haila explained: "One of my first records was masterfully arranged and produced by Juan Manuel Ceruto. I think it will go down in history and musical history, but for me they are all wonderful. With **Mujer de Acero**, I feel more mature when it comes to performing, to making Cuban music, and offer dancers a variety of musical genres and styles, guarachas, rumbas, sones, timba."

Haila always surprises us with excellent music both on her albums and on stage, and with her command of different genres, especially son. She is a woman with a great stage presence, and when she raises her voice, dancers are charmed and listeners impressed.

This true star of Cuban dance music was categorical in her encounter with the press with regard to her passion for son, a genre she includes in all her productions: "It's my life, my devotion, I experience it to the fullest."

With **Haila, Mujer de Acero**, the singer seeks something more: "Cuba is the island of music, and in many genres. I work to reach out to the young, to encourage them toward Cuban music, our rich art, so that their ears are turned away from so much toxicity."

A contemporary icon, Haila owes it all to her audiences, who sing her songs and dance to her music. She is well aware of this, and does not disappoint. •