

# Nairobi meets Mad Professor

Buenos Aires-based dub band presents debut album tonight

BY ANA LAURA CARUSO  
 Herald staff

While the dub scene is positively exploding all over the world, all that's left for Buenos Aires city to become a buffet of music is to have its own dub band. That's when Nairobi comes into the picture. The band started two years ago and is currently presenting their debut album *Wu Wei: Nairobi meets Mad Professor*, released by Estamos Felices record label. The CD was mixed at Ariwa Studios (London) by Mad Professor and features collaborations by Lee Perry and Sly & Robbie. The quintet comprises Argentine musicians Ivi Lee (vocals and synthesizers), George Washington (guitars), Bastard (drums), Chile's DJ Baladi (scratch and sampling) and Mexico's Chivi (bass). Nairobi played at Glastonbury Festival (UK) in June — the largest outdoor music and performing arts festival in the world — and then started touring around Europe. Now, they are playing in Buenos Aires to promote their debut album.

For those who are not familiar with the term, "dub" is a music genre that actually evolved from reggae and involves revisions of songs already recorded by others. The dub sound consists of instrumental remixes of existing recordings. This is generally achieved by removing the vocals from an existing music piece, emphasizing the drums or adding extensive echo effects. Lee "Scratch" Perry pioneered the style in the 1960s and early 1970s.

The Herald met Nairobi at a pizza parlour in San Telmo to talk about their debut album. "Eating pizza after playing is paramount for us," George says as soon as we all sit down.

## How did you meet?

**Bastard:** I met Ivi Lee about six years ago. He was playing with George Washington in a band called Martín & the Deerhunters. I went to see their last show at La Cigale and started talking to Ivi. We soon learnt that we both liked dub music and became close friends. One day, we got together to jam and later decided to start a band with the former members of Martín & the Deerhunters. Yet, Iván and I later took another road. We met Chivi (bass) through some Chilean friends. Chivi told me that he had composed a dub song. I listened to it and I liked it. So we started a dub trio and began playing. We later met DJ Baladi and George. We started playing in 2007.

## What does *Wu Wei* mean?

**Bastard:** It is an important concept in Taoism that involves knowing when to act and when not to act. We chose it as a title because that's how Nairobi started, it was only natural. Besides, we feel that we belong to something bigger than Nairobi — something universal.

## Are there any dub bands in Argentina?

**George:** There is a band called



From left to right, the five members of Nairobi: Chivi, George, Ivi Lee, Bastard and DJ Baladi.

Humanidab which plays a root dub style (with drums) and also a band called Alimentosonorro from Zárate who play a sort of punk dub, which is very good. But there's not much more than that.

## Which bands do you usually play with?

**George:** We play with many different bands — it doesn't matter what they do. We played with rock bands Los Álamos and Los Peyotes two weeks ago. It is great, actually, because many people go to see these bands and end up listening to us.

**Ivi Lee:** A lot of the people who listen to dub music do not belong to the "reggae scene." We like to mix all music styles. There's a bad thing about Buenos Aires — there are many musical sub-cultures and they can't stand listening to other styles. But when two or three different bands are scheduled to play on the same day it's like going to a party on a ship — either you have fun or you fall asleep, because you can't jump off.

## Are there any local bands you enjoy listening to?

**George:** We love Uruguayan music above all — Hablan por la espalda, Fiesta Animal, Pharaon, Santa Cruz. People in Uruguay love to dance at concerts and they are less prejudiced.

## Did you get good reviews from the CD?

**Ivi Lee:** We don't know many people's opinion yet. The press published positive reviews. We are sure of ourselves but we don't know if listeners will like the music or not. There are only very few people who are familiar with Nairobi. It's difficult to increase your audience, even if you get good reviews.

## What was it like touring around Europe?

**Ivi Lee:** Playing Glastonbury festival was fantastic. It was perfectly organized and you could feel good vibes everywhere. It was the best way of beginning the tour.

farian, a Communist.... everything is fine with us.

**Ivi Lee:** We enjoy watching shows. It's such a good sensation when you go to a concert and it takes you back.

## What concerts made you feel that way?

**Ivi Lee:** Seun Kuti, Mad Professor and Lee Perry, James Brown... They give their very best on stage. We like to create a certain mood in our shows. We want people to smile, relax and enjoy.

**George:** There are times when the artist is the lead figure in a show and other times when the audience is the main character. At times, also, the artist and audience are on the same level, like at Woodstock. We don't care if we're playing in Padua or in Glastonbury, it all depends on how we and the audience feel.

## Who did you share the stage with at Glastonbury?

**Ivi Lee:** There were a lot of great bands — Blur, Bruce Springsteen, Seun Kuti, Dub Pistols...

## What were the places you played in Europe like?

**Ivi Lee:** They were pubs or clubs mostly. We also played at a five-floor-squat in Berlin. Thing is, we love to play. I remember reading that actors don't know what to do with their lives when they are not shooting a movie. The same goes for us!

**George:** It's like Hendrix record *Band of Gypsies*, which owes its title to the sensation of not knowing where your home is.

**Ivi Lee:** We think of ourselves as professional musicians, we want to make a living out of this and play a lot. That's why we invested in touring abroad, and we recorded the album with international figures.

## How did you get in contact with Mad Professor?

**Bastard:** We tried to get in contact with him since the moment we knew that he was coming to Buenos Aires. We wanted him to listen to our songs. He did and said he was willing to take part in the album. He suggested that we mixed the album at Ariwa Studios. We later learned that Lee Perry had also accepted our offer to collaborate in the album, so Ivi Lee went to Lee Perry's house in Switzerland.

**Ivi Lee:** It was magical. I arrived in town and it was all covered in snow. Lee Perry is a very professional and hard-working person — he is also a deep and mystical human being.

## WHERE & WHEN

Tonight: Macumba y exorcismo at Ultra Bar, San Martín 678. At 9pm. Free admission. With help and support from the Opción Música programme of the Buenos Aires City Government.

THE HERALD PHOTO BY MARIANO FUCHILLA