

# SOUND CHECK

## Jon Secada: Miami's New Sound Machine

By Julia Ann Charpentier

Though Jon Secada has called himself a confessionalist, his impact has been one of inspirationalist

*Jon Secada* sold more than 7 million copies worldwide and produced four Top Ten hits, including "I'm Free" and "Just Another Day." He won a Grammy, Best Latin Pop album, for the Spanish version *Olro Dia Mas Sin Verte*, the longest-running album on *Billboard's* Latin charts.

Out since May, Secada's second release, *Heart, Soul & a Voice* (SBK/ERG), has reached multi-platinum, international status and turned out two high-energy singles so far, "If You Go," another Top Ten hit, and his latest "Mental Picture." The Spanish version, *Si Te Vas*, was released in July.

Secada's new music is an exploration of his R&B roots, as well as his Latin ones.

"That aspect to my musical and spiritual heritage may have been overlooked and this album is my opportunity to reclaim it," Secada said.

Co-produced with Grammy award-winner Emilio Estafan, Jr., *Heart, Soul & a Voice* was recorded at Crescent Moon Studios in Miami. Secada says the album symbolizes who he is right now.

"My life has changed dramatically since my first album and my songs are bound to reflect that," he said. "It's a bit more aggressive, more pronounced both lyrically and musically. I think people will be surprised at

my boldness and directness."

The singer's delivery of "If You Go" is a passionate roller-coast ride that takes the listener on the downfall of a relationship. The promotional video was directed by Matthew Rolston, acclaimed for his expertise in photography.

"The song was written from a rawer, moodier side of my persona, but it's as much a part of my emotional makeup as a straight forward love song," said Secada.

As an only child, the 33-year-old Afro-Cuban American emigrated from Havana with his parents in 1971 at the age of 9 after several years of struggling to leave the country. They settled in Hialeah, FL,

where his parents, Jose and Victoria, opened a coffee shop.

Secada, who changed his name from Juan to Jon in 1990, spoke Spanish as a child but learned English rapidly. He was studious and

his talent for music was evident when he was a junior in high school.

The singer holds a bachelor's degree in music and a master's degree in jazz vocal performance from the University of Miami, and taught voice at the Miami-Dade Community College for six years.



Jon Secada

Emilio Estafan, Jr. listened to a demo of the singer's intimate, palpable music, became his manager and subsequently launched a recording career.

Secada worked for Don Johnson and Pia Zadora, then as a songwriter and back-up vocalist for Gloria Estafan and the Miami Sound Machine for three years. While on Estafan's *Into the Light* world tour, Secada gave a four-minute solo performance that captured international attention.

Divorced since 1993 after a five-year marriage to Jo Pat Cafaro, Secada, a former student and makeup artist, remains based in Miami, having recently purchased and reno-

vated a new home on Biscayne Bay.

Onstage and off, he has a reputation for being easygoing and natural. Older Miamians remember his aunt, Moraima Secada, a bolero singer from Cuba.

Some fans see him as a Latino folk hero with a strong following throughout the Americas and Asia. Secada's image has transcended that niche, making him a leading mainstream vocal performer and songwriter. He listened to pop music in his younger years, while other Cubans tuned in disco and salsa. Many friends were Anglo-Americans.

After playing to Latin and South America audiences, his first solo tour of North America, sponsored by AT&T, began on February 17 at the Los Angeles Universal Amphitheater and will end in Miami Beach on April 17, with concerts in 42 cities throughout the U.S. and Canada. It's his most ambitious stage production to date. He will perform his hits in English and Spanish.

Though his second album has the black R&B influences of Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, and Earth, Wind & Fire, his romantic Latin-American heritage is still alive.

"I won't deny or downplay my Cuban heritage," he said. "It's very gratifying to have the support of the Spanish-speaking audiences."

*Secada will perform at Milwaukee's Riverside Theatre at 8 p.m. on March 4.*