

## CMA's City Stages to present CimaFunk

by Noah Auby



In the last few years of touring his brand of Afro-Cuban funk fusion, CimaFunk has been all over the world and yet, he looks forward to visiting Cleveland for the first time this month. While he's on his visit, CimaFunk and his live band will perform at the Cleveland Museum of Art's upcoming City Stages event.

CimaFunk's performance for the series will take place on Wednesday, August 10th around 7:30 pm at Transformer

Station — located at the corner of Church Avenue (1460 W. 29th St. Cleveland, 44113). Seating will be limited, so bringing your own might not be the worst idea. The event is free and open to the public.

While he was visiting Germany, I had the chance to have a chat over Zoom with CimaFunk about the anticipated performance as well as the relationships he's been fortunate to form by virtue of doing music professionally.

*Noah Auby: How long have you been performing?*

CimaFunk: Longer non-professionally than professionally. Before CimaFunk, my unofficial music nickname was Eric Funk because I've always been devoted to funk as more than just a genre. As CimaFunk, I've been at it professionally since late 2017, early 2018. I put the whole crew together, made the album, and there it was.

*NA: That's awesome. Do you come from a musical family?*

CF: Nobody made music professionally, but everybody sang, everybody danced, everybody had music inside; etc. I was just the first to take that step into the professional realm.

*NA: Has there been a defining moment in your career?*

CF: It was a show in Havana, which is a legendary place where you mostly see bands doing popular dance music like salsa music and other really danceable types of music. At that time, the people of Havana were liable to call my music “alternative.” I never saw my music like that, but they were calling it that.

*NA: They couldn't categorize it so they just slapped that label on it?*

CF: Yeah, but it's just Afro-Cuban music. Fortunately, that didn't matter. The show was packed and sold out. We orchestrated a crazy show because I was working with my actual designer as well as a custom designer. There were costume and set changes happening left and right. I put a crew of young people together, and we made it work. After that first big show, there was an explosion of interest in CimaFunk.

*NA: How did you get involved in the City Stages project in Cleveland?*

CF: Booking agents always help to figure out and find the right places with the right people and the right energy. It's actually going to be my first time in the city. Since I started touring in the US back in 2019, I've always wanted to visit and pass through. The booking agency was super involved in trying to put me there with the right crowd at the right moment.

*NA: You're in Germany right now. Is this your first time there?*

CF: No, sir. I came to Berlin in 2018 and then to Halle in '21. Both times here were amazing. The people are kind, and everyone's into the groove.

*NA: Have you had a favorite city to perform in?*

CF: Until now, Berlin has been my favorite because it has a lot of community. There weren't so many Latino people, but there were some Latinos that I knew from my generation that had studied with me. It was fun and nice to see them in Berlin, and the night life was pretty crazy.

*NA: I'm with a Cleveland publication. I presume the nightlife here might pale in comparison.*

CF: You never know. Normally in the places we don't expect, we found the craziest stories. That's the funny thing. Typically, near the capital is not the best place for a fun time. It's actually in the small villages and towns where you'll find the vibes are on point.

*NA: Like the underground in a way?*

CF: Yes.

*NA: Do you know which songs you'll be performing for City Stages?*

CF: Yeah, it's gonna be the entirety of the new album (*El Alimento*), some improvised stuff, and material from the first album (*Terapia*). We're gonna be jamming and have an interactive show with the crowd. People are gonna have fun.

*NA: Speaking of El Alimento, I noticed there's a collaboration with Lupe Fiasco on Rómpelo. How did that come about?*

CF: It was amazing. I'm a big fan of his. He's a legendary rapper. At the time, we were able to reach out to him for a feature. He said yes, and I was like, woah, I didn't expect that to happen. And the guy just dropped magic there. His verse is fire. All of the knowledge he drops is fire. You can see it, you can feel it, and yeah, it's amazing.

*NA: Assuming Lupe's not one of them, what have been your favorite collaborations so far?*

CF: I would have to say "Funk Aspirin" with George Clinton and "Salvaje" with Chucho Valdés. Both are on *El Alimento*. Chucho's a big inspiration for me because he was making funk in Cuba a long time ago. Mixing the Afro with the Cuban, he developed a new style called Timba. He is really a godfather for all Cuban musicians. I admire him a lot, and his music has had a lot of influence on me.

And George is a genius. I was blessed enough to be with him for a whole day in the studio recording together. We talked about some of the history of music — Africano music, funk; etc. I'm a big fan of the Funkadelic movement. The clothes. The custom. Everything. He was talking to me about the new movement in music and that he'd been producing for it. I was thinking that he'd been taking a break from music, but I learned that he was helping to produce a bunch of albums for new, up-and-coming artists while also occasionally going on tour. The guy is magic, and he has so much knowledge of

music and art in general. Spending that time with him was a really big experience for me. We keep in touch to ensure the friendship remains a funky brotherhood.

*NA: I can imagine that would be a really humbling experience as well, but then as you get to know each other, you realize everyone's human at the end of the day, right?*

CF: George is for real. All that you hear in his songs is a deep message of human behavior as it relates to achieving real, long-term happiness. The whole crew is for real. They live that energy. And it's amazing because you can have an artist talking about spirituality, but then when you come into their life, you see they're not really on the level that their music implies it would be. George's level, on the other hand, is even higher than what his music is speaking to. It's for a whole 'nother world. Since the first time I listened to him and the way he sang with this unique voice and style, I was intrigued. It's a brand and an influential one at that.

*NA: I also saw that you guys did a live EP with Nu Deco Ensemble. What did you learn from that, and will there be another live release in the future?*

CF: Actually, we just made one more a couple months back with a big crowd on a Miami beach, so look forward to that. The first one was amazing because I only really knew one thing about Nu Deco beforehand — that they were trying out a new mix of preexisting genres with other artists. That was really interesting to me at the time, but I didn't imagine we'd be able to connect. Luckily, they connected with us. They just called and said, "yeah, let's do it."

I didn't have any idea of what was gonna happen that day but fortunately, I trusted my intuition. They were really good musicians. They built a full orchestra around these five songs. When I arrived at the sound check, that was the first time I got to hear the arrangement that we brought to life on the stage. There was an even bigger band behind me, and everyone started dropping a groove with all the violins and all this crazy stuff. It was amazing, and it was really a big deal. The show that night was crazy. The people there were really feeling it, and so we decided to drop it as a live album.

*NA: Is there anything that you've learned from crafting the first two EPs and LPs that you anticipate you'll carry over to your next work?*

CF: The realest lesson that I've been learning all this time is to chill with the music. Let the music tell you what it wants. With the first album that I made in-house (*Terapia*), I didn't know anything about production. I was just playing with and relying on autotune, machines, and special effects. *El Alimento* was made during the pandemic, and it was almost the same style, but this time, it was with a producer — Jack Splash. At the end of

the creation process, I noticed the album was a lot more plain and analog in comparison to *Terapia*. It was chill. It was simply for having fun, and I'd like to have more and more fun making music in the future.

*NA: Sounds like a plan to me. Before we wrap things up, is there anything you'd like to add?*

CF: I'm excited. Nowadays, I go out to the street just to look around and move about since it feels like the first time since the start of this COVID pandemic where we have that freedom. I'm looking forward to seeing the people freely jamming and grooving with us during the show.

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