

ARTS & BOOKS

THIS ACT IS NO GIMMICK IN ROTATION, E5



TRYING TO GET TO KNOW AN UNCOMMON PLAYWRIGHT BOOK REVIEW, E9



THE PHOTO FILE



Photographs by © 2011 LARRY FINK Schirmer/Mosel

RED CARPET: Larry Fink's Oscar party images for Vanity Fair veer away from the glamorous norm.

An eccentric flash

LIESL BRADNER

As one of Vanity Fair's official Oscar party photographers, it's hard to believe Larry Fink is not familiar with most of the celebrities he is shooting.

"It's absolutely true," said Fink by phone on his drive home from Bard College in upstate New York, where he has been a professor of photography for 19 years. "I don't watch TV or go to movies," he confessed, which may help him go undetected as he meanders along in the back rooms away from the red carpet paparazzi.

More than 90 of his candid photographs have been published in a coffee table-size collection, "The Vanities: Hollywood Parties, 2000-2009" (Schirmer/Mosel, \$68).

The black-and-white documentary-style photos catch celebrities mingling at leisure with their guard down, acting rather, well, human. His pictures are the antithesis of the glamorous, artificial images the public is accustomed to seeing.

"In the early days it became apparent that whatever I did was OK. What they [Vanity Fair] were used to seeing was not what they were seeing in my work, so I was given carte blanche with my interpretation," Fink said. "I was their official eccentric photographer."

A shadow across the face, animated in midconversation without pretense, his images are often unintentionally unbecoming. "I have no vendetta, no rage, no reason to make a picture that is unflattering," Fink noted.

"He makes himself invisible in plain sight, he's a fly on the wall," said Luc Sante, photography critic and contributor to the New York Review of Books, who wrote the text along with Ash Carter, son of Vanity Fair editor Graydon Carter, who is seen in several shots.

"Many of his pictures remind me of 19th century painters who seem to be giving you a news report with different events happening all at once," Sante said. He cites Gustave Courbet's painting of a funeral, "A Burial at Ornans": "This scene never happened at the same time. Different events were montaged into one panoramic painting."

One example, a photo of Warren Beatty looking grunted while a woman in the background seems to be having a good time watching another man spouting off. "There are so many details, whole layers of society. They are like miniature novels," said Sante, who met Fink at Bard, where he also teaches photography classes.

Fink has had one-man shows at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum and the Musée de



LAYERS: Warren Beatty is caught in the spotlight. "They are like miniature novels," says Luc Sante of Fink's documentary style.



"SO HUMAN": The photographer captures Meryl Streep whispering to Natalie Portman in an unguarded moment.

l'Élysée in Switzerland. In 2008 he was commissioned by Vanity Fair to cover Barack Obama, Hillary Rodham Clinton and John McCain during the presidential campaign.

Referring to his 2009 photograph of Meryl Streep whispering to Natalie Portman, who has her

eyes closed: "There was something so human in the way they were speaking and being secretive, the physicality of their faces. There was nothing manufactured for beauty in the way that was photographed."

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CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Lure of marimba's hypnotic sound

CHRIS KRAUL
REPORTING FROM
CALI, COLOMBIA

Woodstock, it's not. And therein lies much of the appeal of a once-obscure Afro-Colombian music festival that, despite being held in this out-of-the-way corner of the Andes, attracts increasing numbers of international visitors, in addition to die-hard locals.

The common thread that ran through most of the Petronio Álvarez Music of the Pacific festival, which ended last weekend, was acoustic marimba music from the Pacific coast. There, inhabitants of poor, isolated Afro-Colombian communities located amid mangroves and estuaries have clung to music styles their forefathers brought with them as slaves two or three centuries ago.

Among the 18,000 cramming Cali's Pascual Guerrero soccer stadium for five days running were foreign documentary filmmakers, DJs, tour packagers and talent scouts. Many said they'd been seduced by the music's hypnotic quality and the frenzied audiences.

"It's very different, very mystical," said Pablo Ramirez, an organizer of the annual Viña del Mar music festival in Chile, who was here to scout talent for his February event. "Maybe it's the fact that everyone in the stadium is dancing along with it, but the music is very penetrating. You can't help but move."

The festival's namesake, Petronio Álvarez, was a musician and composer from the port city of Buenaventura who died in 1966 after writing dozens of songs and poems about the everyday lives of poor Afro-Colombians. The inaugural festival was held in 1996 in an open-air theater in Cali that seated a few hundred.

The success of the 15th-annual festival — it was moved this year to a giant soccer stadium from its former venue, a 2,000-seat bullring — speaks to a long-ignored musical genre getting its due. But the event's popularity also testified to the fact that African descendants — who make up 15% to 20% of Colombia's population — are claiming an increasing stake in a society that has long excluded them.

"Afro-Colombian culture is more visible, not least because the people are more visible," said professor Juan Camilo Cardenas of the University of the Andes in Bogotá. "Displacement caused by decades of conflict has forced many more Colombian blacks from rural areas to the cities. And there is a push on for their equal rights with projects financed by U.S. aid."

The festival is also a competition, with bands vying for cash prizes and recognition that can lead to regional, U.S. or European tours.

Most of the 70 bands included one or more marimbas, those 30-key xylophone-like percussion instruments. Others played *guasas*, a hollow tree branch with seeds inside that produce a rasping sound when shaken. Percussionists beat time on *cununos*, drums made with leather from the hides of tiny mangrove deer.



SINGER: Enith Cristina Mosquera at the festival.

While Colombian *cumbia* and *vallenato* have worked their way into the world music mainstream, thanks partly to the popularity of pop singers Shakira and Carlos Vives, marimba is just now making inroads, said Will Sabatini, an L.A.-based DJ known as DJ Sabo. He attended the festival last year by happenstance, after being hired to work a show at a Cali nightclub.

He described the festival as a "life-changing event" and persuaded several colleagues to attend this year.

"Marimba has a rootsy feel to it, a side of the African influence I had never heard before," Sabatini said. "With thousands of people in the stadium dancing along, it's a feeling you can't get anywhere else in the world. Among DJs who look to Latin music, it's really getting known."

But the Petronio Álvarez festival celebrates more than just music.

One end of the stadium was given over to a food court where dozens of Afro-Colombian communities sold hand-crafted and offered up local dishes including *pianguas* (clams), *cocadas* (coconut and pineapple candies) and *arrechón* (a home-brewed aphrodisiac liquor).

The many facets of Afro-Colombian culture are what attracted Stephanie Schneiderman, owner of the Ann Arbor, Mich.-based tour packager Tia Stephanie Tours. A marketer of roots cultural tours to Mexican American and Afro American travelers, Schneiderman said Colombia had only recently registered on the tourism industry's radar screen.

"African Americans want to learn about the diaspora of former slaves in other countries as well," Schneiderman said.

On the festival's final day, Aug. 28, there were at least as many people outside the stadium watching the festivities on giant video screens as there were inside it.

Angel Beltran, the lead marimba player with the group Socavón, and winner of the festival's top soloist prize, said the event was helping poor Afro-Colombian musicians seek better lives. The Colombian government recognizes the economic potential and is financing a marimba school that Beltran runs in his coastal town of Iscuande.

"The school is giving a skill to kids who otherwise would be on the streets, and it exists because Petronio Álvarez gives value to what we do," Beltran said. "Every year, more people come to the festival, and soon marimba will be as popular as *cumbia*, even more."

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Photographs by FRANCISCO PARRA

AFRO-COLOMBIAN: The marimba played a key role at the recent Petronio Álvarez Music of the Pacific festival.