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Ismael Rivera
Maelo: A Man & His Music
Fania Records

The Fania music anthology of Ismael “Maelo” Rivera (October 5, 1932 – May 13, 1987) digs deep into the lesser-known catalog of dance tracks that spanned his three decade career. His music was crucial in the development of the salsa sound that emerged in New York City during the 1970s. The collection takes listeners through early recordings such as Lo Deje Llorando (1958), Cortijo y Su Combo and a true gem of the double-disc collection, the original recording of the international hit Volare (1957). There is also more obscure material from the mid-to-late 1960s during which Rivera was released from prison for drug-related charges. Rivera sought a new beginning in New York City because the city presented larger opportunities and an entirely fresh music scene to conquer. The impact of Rivera’s time in the city on the happenings of the international salsa scene cannot be underestimated. Many of the younger salsa of the time,

whether from the Bronx, Colombia or Venezuela, readily admitted to owing a debt to Rivera for the influence his sonero rhythmic style of delivery had on their career. Maelo's animated stage presence, which included bouts of dancing and other acrobatics also thrilled many aspiring artists. During the 1970s Latinos wanted music to provide a soundtrack to their festivities and speak to their cultural values. Rivera's brand of music was joyful and buoyant, yet was full of the blues. Songs such as Quiero A Mi Pueblo and Borinqueneando incorporated a message of pain and suffering, yet denoted Rivera's profound love and nostalgia for his island and its peoples. In one of his last interviews Rivera retrospectively confessed, "I blew a lot of money but I had plenty to share with my loved ones. I lived intensely, and I don't regret it. The life you live, it's your life…you have to be loyal to yourself and feel good about yourself as a man, a son, a father."

Words by JCM