

**Ottmar Liebert + Luna Negra**  
**LA SEMANA**

Although *La Semana* is the first Ottmar Liebert + Luna Negra album with all-new songs in five years, the multi-faceted, Grammy-nominated, platinum-selling guitarist has been his usual prolific self, writing, drawing, touring and exploring, his myriad experiences informing the 13 evocative instrumental compositions on *La Semana*.

Like his music, Liebert is respectful, creative and open-minded; a thoughtful artist who likes to begin albums with a concept and structure, even if it's an untraditional one. But he's also intuitive and open enough to let the music decide what it wants to become. Thus, the more than an hours worth of songs on *La Semana* began with a firm direction, though ultimately the record found a different path to completion. "I usually start with a title before I start an album," Liebert explains. "The title decides what the palette will be; what sounds I'm going to use. It's very important for me to set certain limits. Will it be a color album or black and white? To me, *La Semana* is a drawing. As such, musically the record is back to basics with the wooden box drum used in flamenco, the clapping, and the palmas. It's all one acoustic guitar, no electric, no lutes, no steel string guitars."

Conceptually, he says, "*La Semana* began with the idea of a diary, perhaps in a leather-bound package, and each song would be titled after a different day of the week. I was going to write a diary entry for each day/song." However, as a renowned instrumentalist, Liebert decided he didn't want too many words to potentially interfere with *La Semana*'s pure musicality. So a few months before completion, the concept of *La Semana* shifted. "For me, the beautiful thing about instrumental music is it allows each person to have their own interpretation of what the music is about. The eyes rule over the ears; that's the way the human body works," he observes. "And if you're being told something, the music takes a second seat. In the end this idea seemed too confining; I want music to be free of that specific a context." So the diary concept segued into one of discovering a box of photos in your grandparents' attic, *La Semana*'s songs invoking mental pictures and aural-inspired mental memories. Furthering that idea, *La Semana*, on Liebert's own SSRI label, is released in two formats. The first is a less-expensive, simple CD package, letting the music do the talking. For the collector who wants, as Liebert laughs, "the whole enchilada," a collectible CD box is designed to look well loved and worn, and includes 27 pages of photos plus drawings and notes on each song, in a limited edition of 2,000 copies. The Santa Fe resident has also created a font from his handwriting to further personalize the elaborate but organic package. The drawings will be his own, a "loose collection" of his art. "I had guitar lessons since I was 12, but then I went to an art school, so for a long time I knew more about paintings, drawings and art history than I did about music," explains Liebert. "A few years ago I started seriously drawing again."

One of *La Semana*'s most alluring songs is inspired by one of Liebert's favorite artists, painter/filmmaker Jean Cocteau. (Pablo Picasso is another beloved influence.) Like Cocteau himself, the song is somewhat mysterious and idiosyncratic. (Liebert's song even inspired author Lawrence Russell to pen a story, "OboCocteau" <http://www.culturecourt.com/Cocteau/Obo.htm>). "On 'Cocteau,' on the guitar in the background, the arpeggio is in 3/4 and the rhythm over it is in 4/4, so there's an interesting tension, a tug

there," Liebert explains. "I've written songs in 12/8 and 5/4 in the past," he furthers. "In 'Longing,' the whole verse, the guitar and bass are in 3/4 and the drums are in 4/4, but the chorus, everything is in 4/4. When some musicians do odd time signatures, it's too obvious. To me, it only works if you like it, not because it's an odd time signature just to be intentionally clever or different."

What *is* different about *La Semana* was Liebert's recording process. In keeping with the innovative, flamenco-based world music that has marked his career, the multi-talented artist recorded the songs for *La Semana* in his home studio, Sprial Subwave, by himself, sans an engineer, for the first time ever. Liebert found the process freeing and delightful, as he explains: "I can't be in two rooms at once, so I'd set the microphone and computer up to record. I'd use a delay function that goes back 16 bars, which was enough time for me to go into the other room and get my headphones on." Liebert played to his heart's content, no time constraints and no outside judgments. "It's a great moment and it's more personal because of it." Besides bass and percussion, all of the sounds were made on the flamenco guitar, and Liebert's longtime partner in Luna Negra, Jon Gagan, came in when it was time to lay down bass. Gagan will also be on the 2004 tour in support of *La Semana*, together with Ron Wagner on tablas, dumbek and percussion and Robbie Rothchild on Cajon, Congas and Djembe.

Each of the 13 compositions on *La Semana* has a fascinating back-story to match the beautiful musicality, although the songs are easily enjoyed in and of themselves. "AlhambraJackson" has old roots, back to 1987, when Liebert, a funk virtuoso, got more seriously into flamenco. "Someone suggested I incorporate some funk elements into my flamenco playing, and this song is a delayed reaction to that suggestion!" he laughs. "The Alhambra is the palace of the Moorish king in Granada, Spain, and Paul Jackson Jr., the number one R&B session guitarist, has been a hero of mine for many years." Hence a song that combines both: "AlhambraJackson." Other songs have a more recent genesis. Of "La Luna (Lunatic Love Letter)," Liebert recalls, "This melody just flowed out of my guitar one afternoon--all at once and in one take. It's one of my favorite tracks on this album. I imagine this song is a love letter...there is a hesitation in the first note of the melody and then the ink flows freely...seldom have musical notes seemed more like words to me, full of meaning." On the evocative "Cave In My Heart," recollections are buried beneath the surface, yet, Liebert says, "you can hear memories bubble up to the surface like lava in the middle of the song." The end of the song features Gagan's slithering fretless bass work through a virtual amp, which is set to overdrive and distort to create a gorgeous sound.

Although in the years since Liebert began his career, much has changed with the music business, the guitarist has changed with it—and perhaps even ahead of it, *La Semana* being the first-internet only release via the guitarist's own Sprial Subwave Records International label. With SSRI, formed in 2001, Liebert is in control of all aspects of his art and career: "We'll be touring, reaching out to people; I'll be doing TV appearances and staying in touch with my fans via my online diary, and other internet postings." He's also musing on the idea of Internet subscriptions, allowing his fans unprecedented access and immediacy to his new music and art. In 2004 alone, Liebert will have three releases. *Transit* came out in March, *La Semana* in June, and a Christmas record, with a special festive packaging of colored CDs, will hit in time for the holidays.

Since 1990, Liebert has released a total of 22 albums, including live releases, Christmas CDs, 10

CDs of original music, a DVD and remixes. His debut album, 1990's *Nouveau Flamenco*, featuring the stunning "Barcelona Nights," sold double-platinum and has become the biggest-selling guitar album of all time, redefining Flamenco music and marking Liebert as one of the most talented, influential and creative guitarists and performers to surface in years. His fans--hardcore guitarists and guitar fans, instrumental music aficionados and numerous lovers of his often poignant, always inspired sound--are ardent in their appreciation of Liebert. Critical acclaim has been equally fervent, *Billboard* magazine honoring him twice New Age Artist of the Year. From rumba to Bossa Nova to classical to Christmas tunes to lullabies, Liebert has explored and expanded them all, putting his unique stamp and intellectual yet visceral spin to music.

As with everything Liebert does, there are many facets to be explored and angles to traverse. Prior to *La Semana*'s release, 2003's *Nouveaumatic* record marked the completion of a trilogy that began with 2002's *In The Arms of Love: Lullabies 4 Children + Adults* (which was followed by number two in the trilogy, February 2003's *The Santa Fe Sessions*). This concept was first explained on the 2001 CD *Little Wing*, his album of stellar covers. Going forward, Liebert decided, his CDs would be color-coded in conjunction with the musical formation contained within. Blue would be solo material along the lines of *In The Arms of Love*. Red would be Luna Negra music, such as the acclaimed *Nouveau Flamenco*, and would be mostly acoustic; and gray would be remixes of earlier albums, as 2002's *Euphoria* was a remix of 1993's Grammy-nominated *Hours Between Night and Day*. "This way there are three distinct directions. I need to split myself into parts because I think I've taken some of the mixing as far as I can take it," explains Liebert. "I like these three different elements of my music too much to not take them each into a separate direction and let them grow. I think by splitting into three entities, the people who like all of my music will have more music from me, and those who like one style more than the other will be able to pick just that." Thus, *La Semana* is a "red" album, and will likely be followed by blue and gray releases.

Liebert has always been a creative thinker and doer. Born in Cologne, Germany to a Chinese-German father and Hungarian mother, he traveled extensively through Europe and Asia intent on fully absorbing each musical tradition he encountered. Liebert was, and remains, influenced by everything around him, from museums to nature to books. "I read very early on," he reveals. "We didn't have a TV. We didn't get one until my grandparents moved up to a color one, and I was 12 years old. And we didn't have a phone until then either!"

*La Semana* is a stellar release from a singular artist, a Renaissance man who nurtures his songwriting, guitar playing and albums like the children they are. And he invites everyone along for the journey through life. "Music is about seducing someone to what you're feeling, your vision. As a guitarist, I'm enjoying discovering, how, really, a melody is an associative process. It's a Rorschach test. You have a bunch of chords and what do you associate with that?" he muses of the myriad emotional avenues. "As you get older, more possibilities emerge, as you have more experience." Liebert is also interested in collaborations, leaving the door wide open. "I enjoy it the more twisted it is. I'd love to do something with a really hard rock band, because you think, 'how the hell is this going to work?' It leaves room for finding something new," says the guitarist. And with the universe as his palette, Liebert has indeed created something new with

*La Semana*, as he concludes; “Music is a discovery for myself first, and second for my listeners. My soul is my antenna, I am the instrument + the guitar is my amplifier.”

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