



### Susie Hansen cooks with 'salsa jazz' [B-1]

Susie Hansen and her band at Mr. E's. Philip Elwood reviews. [B-1]

# Hot salsa with cool swing

Jazz violinist Hansen brings her unique Latin sound to East Bay club

By Philip Elwood  
EXAMINER MUSIC CRITIC

I'VE HEARD MY share of sizzling salsa bands over the years but I don't recall, until Friday night, ever listening to a sizzling, *swinging* salsa band. Certainly not one to match the eight-piece Latin jazz ensemble that the ebullient blonde violinist Susie Hansen brought up from L.A. to Mr. E's for the weekend.

Besides Hansen's hard-body electric violin, her group includes a vocalist, trombone, sax/flute, piano, bass, drums, bongos and congas; for this gig, she has included Bay Area percussionists Eric Rangel (bongos) and Michael Spiro (congas).

Swinging the strong straight-ahead beat of a Latin rhythm section, whether to the mambo, charanga, salsa, rumba and Brazilian carioca (as in "Back Talk," written and arranged by trombonist David Stout) — can be tough sledding, but Hansen does it, and well.

From Chicago, the daughter of a symphonic violinist, bobbed-blond Hansen matriculated into the Los Angeles Latin music scene a number of years ago; she has played with Orquesta Los Van Van both in L.A. and Cuba, and soloed with a number of L.A.-based groups. Like the late French fiddler, Stephane Grappelli, Hansen can both lead the ensemble (working beautifully with Stout and sax/flutist Steve Marsh) and solo as if her bow was afire.

The combination of fiddle,



Susie Hansen and her Latin swing ensemble had Mr. E's jumping Friday night.

flute and trombone is a magical one.

This band's arrangements and its *esprit de corps* blend into an astonishingly hot ensemble sound. Only a couple of people were dancing at the first set's start; eight tunes later there were 20 couples on Mr. E's elegant dance floor.

Hansen's fiddle was wailing over the surging sax and trombone undercurrent, pianist Joe Rotondi — playing in the best Cuban style — was going wild, Spiro was having a great time on the congas and the whole room was jumpin' for joy.

"When they're dancing out there, we play better," said Hansen, "they're joining us — it be-

comes a wonderful experience.

Singer Ruben Esteve — I should say *lead* singer, since it seems the whole band sings — is an ingratiating co-host with Hansen, and on the ballads, particularly, he's in the finest Latin tenor tradition.

On "Quedate Mas," the small horn-fiddle lead instruments are beautifully orchestrated, and on "Cuban Pete" (a hit for Desi Arnaz) the band plays a cartoon-style arrangement to go along with the ensemble's vocal — seven of the band's complement can sing while playing.

The swing of the band is largely the result of scoring most selections so that the syncopations of Rene Camacho's bass line work

against the 4/4 meter of the percussion instruments, creating the side-to-side rhythms we call swing.

The Hansen band plays again Saturday and Sunday at Mr. E's, 2284 Shattuck at Bancroft, Berkeley. (510) 848-2009.