

Santana tribute success just the start for GaloFusion

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What happens when a tribute band starts to stand on its own musical legs?

That's the question that Galo Rivera, a Delray Beach-based guitarist and leader of the popular Santana Tribute Band, has been asking himself for the past couple of years.

Rivera's six-piece South Florida group, featuring musicians from the Miami area to West Palm Beach, became so skilled at fusing Latin styles with rock, pop and R&B — a la Santana — that it wasn't long before Rivera decided to take it to the next level.

"It opened avenues for me to do my own music," says Rivera, who has rechristened the group GaloFusion. The band will be one of the featured ensembles at LatinFest.

A native of Puerto Rico who moved to New Jersey when he was a teenager, Rivera says he particularly likes to incorporate the native rhythmic style known as *plena* into his original compositions.

At the same time, Santana remains a strong influence.

"It's not necessarily a Santana thing, but it has that feel," Rivera explains of his music.

Rivera's group plays more than two dozen shows a year, including several South Florida festivals.

They've also started to travel beyond the area, including a recent date in Texas.

Later this month, Rivera will travel to Cuba on a combined humanitarian and musical mission with a local ministry; he plans on playing eight concerts, partnering with Cuban musicians along the way.

"We're going to be working with the best over there," he says.