



40 years of *Modern Clics*, the New York album by Charly García that marked a before and after rock

Behind the scenes, new testimonies and revelations celebrate a definitive work of Argentine popular music

By Oscar Jalil

Photography by: Uberto Sagramoso

Nov. 2, 2023

"My name is **Charly García** and I live in New York. It's three in the afternoon and the heat is infernal. The New York summer is very dense. I suppose you want me to talk about something else and not the weather. But this is my monologue. So I'm going to do it however I want," says Charly in a long soliloquy published by *La Semana* magazine on **August 8, 1983**.

"I'm in a huge loft. This is what they call here the apartments built in buildings that were previously warehouses, factories or workshops. Obviously, I'm in **Greenwich Village**. I can't imagine living in **New York** any other way. The place is gloomy on the outside and very warm on the inside. It has been painted, from the ceiling to the floors, in a pure white. In front of the three windows that face Weverly Street, the two new synthesizers that

I bought are installed. Towards the back – let's say, behind where I am sitting now, dictating this kind of open letter to the recorder and from a distance – is the kitchen. Very spacious and with copper pots hanging from the ceiling. At the other end of the living room – almost as big as a tennis court – are the internal windows, and in a corner, lots of plants. There is a sign with recommendations in English on plant care. It was left by the dance teacher who rented me the apartment. It still looks fresh. "It's just that I moved two days ago."



Rolling Stone's digital cover to celebrate 40 years of *Modern Clicks* . (Photo: Uberto Sagramoso)

In mid-1983, **Charly García** was the most important figure in Argentine rock. Each movement of the musician had a correlation in the specialized media and also in current magazines such as *Gente*, *Siete Días* or *La Semana*. He had said goodbye to the turbulent 1982 with a massive concert at the Ferro Carril Oeste stadium and was now preparing to work on the songs for his second solo album. The soundtrack of ***Pubis angelical*** together with the album of songs from ***Yendo de la cama al living*** marked the launch of a solo career after more than ten years as part of different group formations. Just when **the Malvinas War** began, Charly recovered some songs composed for **Serú Girán** and they all ended up as banners for a healing album: *Yendo de la cama* narrowed the distances between his recent past and the times to come.



Charly García: “Me moviliza el afán de participar, de integrarme a los movimientos artísticos de Nueva York”. (Foto: Uberto Sagramoso)

"I arrived in New York two months ago. I came to buy new instruments. I stayed for ten days and went to Los Angeles, where **Pino Marrone** , **Pedro Aznar** , **Gustavo Santaolalla** and other Argentine musicians have been working for some time. That's when the bug bit me to stay and live in the United States for a while. And here I am. I am motivated by the desire to participate, to integrate into the artistic movements of New York. Not through recorders, but playing in pubs, with small groups and things like that. In short, I came to start over. Furthermore, I wanted to isolate myself from what was suffocating me in Buenos Aires. Because musicians who have a success, as happened to me, have two options: either continue at full speed, or cut it off and try to change. I decided to change, to be in a place where no one knows me, where I can play for free in a square if someone sings to me. I have an immense stage at my entire disposal, and all hours of the day and night. The setting is called New York."

Before traveling to New York, Charly learned of the death of his father, **Carlos Jaime García Lange** . The news surprised him in San Pablo, in the middle of recording "**Inconsciente collective**" , a version performed as a duet by **Mercedes Sosa** and **Milton Nascimento** for the album *Mercedes Sosa 83* . García served as producer, arranger and also played the piano. The recording was suspended, Charly returned to Buenos Aires and once again had the company of Mercedes; The Sosa-García alliance functioned as a shield of mutual protection.

"I want to make music that comes from my heart. And in Buenos Aires they wanted me to become a public man, to make political statements all the time, to play games and say things that would be salable for a newspaper or a magazine," says Charly in the long monologue published in the aforementioned Buenos Aires weekly. . "Really, that's why I'm here. I want to make music of pure inspiration again. There they sucked more energy from me than I received. And that has nothing to do with my audience. Those who follow me know that I am going to come back with something really good. "It is those who listen to my music who know that what I provide is an act of love and communication."

Charly's open letter expressed a moderate enthusiasm for the state of the country's situation. A few months earlier, in April 1983, the last de facto president, Reynaldo Bignone, issued the decree setting the election date for October 30 of that year. At the same time, he ordered the destruction of existing documentation on the detention, torture and murder of the disappeared. He did not achieve his goal. From that moment on, the country began to move to the rhythm of a new political campaign.

The change of scenery that **Charly García** was looking for had the support of **Daniel Grinbank** , his manager since the time when **Serú Girán** released *La grease de las capitales* (1979). The producer's plan began to come together when he crossed paths with **Carlos Narea** , manager in Spain of **Miguel Ríos** , and **Mariscal Romero** , popular radio host and factotum of the Madrid label Chapa (Barón Rojo, Obus, Leño). "They both saw the local talent we had, but at the same time they stressed to me that the production levels in the studio were below the standards of Spain, which at that time was already exporting music to the rest of Latin America. So to enter the Spanish market properly, the sound had to be improved," says Grinbank. "And, obviously, Charly was the one to start this stage," says **Daniel Grinbank** in his biography *About him I love you, I hate you, give me more*.

“I didn't erase myself. I am aware that everyone, from the shoemaker to the musician, has the obligation to do something to enlighten others, so that everything turns out better. But that doesn't mean giving definitions or giving labels. That's why I think the progressive thing, cool, is to continue 'developing', as they say here in Spanish. That is, developing... In Buenos Aires I was suffering. Not because of material things, but because of the lack of communication with people. Because the people there are very down. There is an incredible lack of faith. Nobody believes in anyone. That is making us a little more stupid every day. In short, I'm here to see if I can... take a little more twist. I need to feed on new ideas. I have a song called 'The Dinosaurs' and it says: 'when the world is going down, it is better not to be tied to anything.' And that is my philosophy. I'm a guy who feels quite alone, and when I feel like a lot of things are taking hold of me, I feel bad. “I prefer to be a small mobile unit that moves around.”

In June 1983, Charly traveled to New York for the first time. In his suitcases he carries the tapes of a possible album, it is an eight-song demo recorded at Estudios del Jardín, together with **Willy Iturri** . “I had already been working since *Going from the bed to the living room* , he handled all the harmonic part and, of course, I handled the rhythmic part. We always get along very well and the results were excellent. In the case of *Modern Clicks* , we made some songs, not all, we had started using rhythm machines. The Roland TR-808 wasn't there yet, I had been working with the TR-707, which is the one we used for 'Collective Unconscious',” says the drummer currently based in Chile. “I took care of the assembly between the Roland and the drums, I worked everything in the form of a loop.”



Charly García and Joe Blaney (producer of The Clash, among many others), during the recording of *Modern Clicks* . (Photo: Uberto Sagramoso)

Ada Moreno arrived in New York in January 1977 escaping the jaws of the civil-military dictatorship. As a photographer she had been a privileged witness of several historical moments of Argentine rock. **Billy Bond** 's partner in the early 70s and a close friend of **Jorge Álvarez** , she attended the first meeting of the Sui Generis with their future producers. She was there when the duo played their folk songs in front of Bond and Álvarez, and from that moment she had an active participation in key records such as the promotional photo of the *Adiós Sui Generis* concerts at Luna Park, in September 1975. When she landed At the JFK airport, **Gustavo Montesano** was waiting for her , the former **Crucis** bassist and Ada's boyfriend was about to start his solo career with the album *Homenaje* , which in those days was touching the rock sky by mixing his new songs in Electric Lady, the legendary studios founded by **Jimi Hendrix** , in 1970. By 1983, Ada was already a stable resident of the Big Apple willing to help friends and acquaintances who had recently arrived in the new Babylon.

“He called me from a pay phone on the corner. 'Come!' I open the door and Charly was there with some cans of ribbons, he came from Los Angeles. I told him 'stay home,'" says Ada Moreno from a cafe table in San Telmo. “Charly stayed for a relatively short time, he began to get paranoid that they would break in and take the tapes. I recommended a hotel, the Gramercy Park, where the Clash were, everyone who came to New York wanted to stop at that bohemian place," says Ada and admits to Charly's several moves: "He moved to the Washington Square Hotel and finally rented the loft in front of Washington Square Park.” All movements within a radius of action located in the heart of Greenwich Village, which also included Electric Lady, the place chosen to record a good part of *Modern Clicks*. During her stay, Ada became her *baby sitter*; many stories from that stage appear in her memoir *De ella No soy unastrana* . “He came and was with me [*laughs*] because he can't be alone. I had an American husband, but he still gave me permission to put up with Charly. Then his girlfriend Zoca came and we immediately became friends.”

Between Buenos Aires, Los Angeles and New York, García projected the roadmap for the album that changed the history of Argentine rock after the Malvinas war. **Daniel Grinbank** had the help of a friend, **Carlos Pirín Geniso** , who has lived in NYC since 1974. “He was in charge of the coordination and logistics, and was the manager for renting an apartment in the Village, an ideal area for Charly was installed, very close to the studio we wanted to record, the famous Electric Lady. The studio was the top one in New York, it cost \$250 an hour. Pirín negotiated directly with the owners, the Selby family and his son Alan, who managed it, and who had bought it from the successors of Jimi Hendrix, its original owner. He got us to reduce the hour to 75, paying in cash and using room C. As if that were not enough, he also negotiated with **Joe Blaney** ,” Grinbank says in his memoirs.

“Today, in 2007, I wouldn't change anything about *Clics* . It's a self-produced album, even financially, made in New York, where I met Joe Blaney. I bought the instruments, I set up a sixteen-channel studio in the Village and Pedro Aznar showed up with his girlfriend and we did the first rehearsal. We were with Zoca, the four of us, in the loft and... being so hysterical, I don't know how we managed to live together. I do remember that we crossed Washington with a supermarket cart full of emulators and equipment... I had already recorded an album in Los Angeles—the first by Serú Girán—and it had helped me with experience, but I used to have a lot of problems capturing the sounds. what did he want. The start of the album was like this: I go to the Electric Lady studios and I tell them: 'I want to rent the best, rent it.' The owner tells me: 'Is your father rich or what?' I show him

the money and he asks me: 'Coffee?', in addition to giving me a list of engineers, the last of which was Blaney. I called him and he showed up the next day: tall, cool, leopard shoes... He saw the loft, the sixteen-channel Tascam table; I showed him my records and we agreed to start. I needed a drummer and I loved Jan Hammer's; I tried it and it didn't work for me, nothing was happening, we even went to record and I asked Blaney what drum sound he could get out of it. And it didn't work: we knew that he played phenomenon, but it didn't work with us. And the next day I had no choice but to put in a TR-808 electronic drum kit and we recorded 'Nos Continue Hitting Down', and he got it together. Blaney realized it, we all realized it, and we continued with machines. It is the first album that has a James Brown sample," **Charly García** told **Rolling Stone** in 2007 for the special *The Best 100 National Rock Albums*.



An iconic postcard: the cover of *Modern Clicks* . (Photo: Uberto Sagramoso)

Uberto Sagramoso is the author of the cover photo of *Modern Clix*. He has known **Charly García** since the days when he worked at the magazine *Expreso Imaginario*. The photographer arrived in New York in 1980 almost by chance. "I was living in Mexico, starting to work and publish my work, when a friend and I decided to set up a photography studio in Mexico City. I sold all my cameras and equipment and left for New York for 15 days to buy new devices, studio flashes, etc.," says Sagramoso from his house in a southern town near El Bolsón. "From the first moment I stepped foot in New York I felt at home, a place with people from other parts of the country and the planet, arriving with the irrepressible desire to survive and the secret dream of succeeding. But, above all, determined to live in freedom, even at the cost of transgressing some of the rules established in the strict North American system of coexistence."

Sagramoso first landed at a friend's house in the West Village. Shortly after arriving in the city he found himself in the middle of a party that his friend had organized for the weekend. "At the meeting I talked for a long time with someone I met there, we talked about music and culture, politics and religions. In the end, upon finding out what I did, he told me almost in passing that he worked in a publishing house and that they were just looking for a photographer. According to him it was a 'small' job, with a first part of about 15,000 dollars. "For me, 43 years ago, that was a small fortune." In the end he never set up the photography studio in Mexico, his years in New York ended up being almost 24.

For some years now, Sagramoso had walked every day through some alleys near his house and his studio located in Chinatown. He "He thought they were a perfect set for the shots of some punk group, with their post-industrial air, full of dirt, graffiti and abandonment. I felt that those streets reflected the contrasts of the time in which we live, framed between the opulence of the capital of the world and the remains of its marginalized people," says the photographer who, without knowing it, had already chosen the place when Charly came with his idea. to make the cover of the new album "by spray painting a wall."

For Sagramoso, the title *Nuevos Trapos* announced the arrival of a new era with a leap to a postmodern world. "An idea that was in vogue in New York at the time."

Once the photo was taken, and ready to return to the studio, the musician and the photographer discovered the "Shadowman" by artist **Richard Hambleton** on the next corner. "The image sucked us in like a magnet. Charly naturally sat at his feet and we took several more photos. At night we got together in the studio to see the developed and enlarged shots, and we immediately felt that there was a photo that represented exactly what we were looking for." In the end, the name would come from the Modern Clix graffiti which, after brief consideration, was translated into Spanish. "It was a drawing of Fran Powers, the leader of the band of the same name. Later we discovered that the signature of Zephyr, a veteran train graffiti artist, also appeared," says the photographer. Charly has said on several occasions that this human form "looked very similar to the figures they painted in Argentina to represent the disappeared."



Charly poses with two of the models and actresses from the group of artists he linked up with in New York. (Photo: Uberto Sagramoso)

Forty years later, **Uberto Sagramoso** recognizes that the definitive title is still perfect. “It added to the renewing energy that accompanied new wave music and its revisionist attitude, recycling some postulates of rock in a contemporary version,” says the author of *It was only rock and roll*, a beautiful book of photographs and first-person stories of artists such as **Claudio Gabis, Pappo, Rodolfo Mederos, Charly García, Horacio Fontova, Oscar Moro, Jorge Pistocchi, Astor Piazzolla, Charles Mingus, Gilberto Gil, Hermeto Pascoal, Miguel Cantilo, Alex Zucker, Pipo Lernoud, Rocambole, Alfredo Rosso, Gabriela, Donvi Vitale and Skay Beilinson**, among others.

The name of **Pino Marrone**, a fundamental ally of the Los Angeles stage, appears in the list of thanks for *Modern Clics*. The former **Crucis** guitarist was part of a delegation of Argentine musicians residing on the West Coast of the United States. "When Charly came to Los Angeles with the intention of recording, the first thing I did was recommend Casey Scheuerell, he liked him and hired him, so much so that years later he called him again, this time for a tour of Argentina with Pedro Aznar" says the guitarist. Casey worked wonders sitting on the drums and turned the failed session with Greg Carter into an anecdote. "Casey is one of the first friends I made when I arrived in LA in early '78. Until then he had toured and recorded for a few years with Gino Vanelli and another with the great violinist Jean-Luc Ponty, and with the singer Chaka Khan, among many others."

Among the guest sessions, in addition to **Casey Scheuerell** and **Doug Norwine**, the figure of **Larry Carlton** stands out, a true guitar legend known in our country thanks to countless recordings, where his collaborations with **Steely Dan** and **Joni Mitchell** stand out. "Larry is unique and lives in a world and a category and style that he invented. Many of us discovered his extraordinary ability as an improviser in the songs 'Kid Charlemagne' and 'Don't Take Me Alive', by Steely Dan, on the album *The Royal Scam*, an album that both I and thousands of rock *musicians* here and elsewhere of the world we listened to every day when it came out, fascinated but without the slightest idea of what it was doing in musical terms. A guitarist with a blues and rock sound had never been heard playing that unusual group of notes and making them sing, it was a great inspiration," says Pino and confirms that the sessions to record the guitar parts were recorded in the Carlton studios, Room 335. Unfortunately, when the North American guitarist visited Argentina for the first time, he did not remember his participation in *Clics modernos*. In an interview published in No. 274 of *Pelo* magazine (September 1986), and when asked by Lucía Idiart about the sessions with the Argentine musician, Carlton asks "with whom?", after the journalist's clarification he answers with a laconic "no, I don't remember."

Willy Iturri provides another vision on the subject of machines and batteries that occupied a prominent place in the pulse of *modern Clics*. "I was going to travel to NY, but we didn't agree. I don't know... with the matter of the ticket. On the other hand, they called me every day: 'I need you here!', Charly told me. He tried several drummers and they didn't suit him much, until Casey Scheuerell arrived, who finally recorded and then came to Argentina to present *Tango* with Pedro Aznar. He even came home because he wanted to meet the person who had made the arrangements. The truth is, I would have liked to have gone to Electric Lady but well... Scheuerell copied exactly what I had done."

On October 30, 1983, the candidate of the Radical Civic Union won the presidential elections. **Raúl Alfonsín** obtained just over 51 percent of the votes, followed by the Justicialist Party candidate Ítalo Luder, with 40 percent. Charly did not vote, he arrived a few days later, on that date he was still in New York although from a distance he publicly supported Alfonsín's candidacy. *Modern Clicks* appears in the first days of November and the launch includes a national tour with a stopover in Buenos Aires for four nights at the Luna Park stadium. **Willy Iturri**, **Pablo Guyot**, **Alfredo Toth**, **Daniel Melingo**, **Gonzo Palacios**, **Fabiana Cantilo** and **Fito Páez** are chosen to accompany García.

"Everything in my life is a before and after that moment. Listening to the album was a religious experience. A revelation. *Modern Clix* is one of the musical summits of the twentieth century. And I was there, in the front row. The privileges that luck gives you. A

very elegant mix of polyrhythms, state-of-the-art keyboards, Pedro Aznar, Rickenbacker, Larry Carlton, drum machines, James Brown samples fresh from a cave in Greenwich Village, a young Joe Blaney, the pain caused by the missing Argentines under the State terrorism, the desire to stop hiding. NYC, fractured Argentina and the sacred talent of Charly García asking questions: 'Why do we have to go so far to be here?' Wanting to make a country dance that was still asking him for explanations, that was already tired of thinking. "He, who was only interested in skeletons in motion," says Fito Páez in his book *Of Him Childhood and Youth Of Him*.



The poster for the four nights of official presentation of *Modern Clics* at Luna Park, December 1983. (Photo: Uberto Sagramoso)

In the search for members for García's band, names appeared such as **Leo Sujatovich**, former keyboardist for **Spinetta Jade**, and **Pino Marrone** was also close to joining the group. "Charly loved Skay (Beilinson). We went to see him and he told us that he was very comfortable playing and composing in his group, he thanked us and said no," says Iturri and reveals a little-known fact about the Redondos guitarist, who still had to wait two years until the release of their debut album. "I suggested Toth and Guyot, they thought it was good. Daniel (Grinbank) brought a musician from Rosario to try out: he was Fito. The first day he already knew the topics. We had a lot of fun. We rehearsed at Fonalex, a very comfortable place. We had an easy month there."

Beyond the use of machines so typical of the early 80s, *Modern Clicks* is not a work tied to a specific time. It is true that it is associated with the memory of the return of democracy, although it can be used for other moments that have passed in the last 40 years. “ **Modern Clicks is likely to be that unique moment in the career of every great artist in which one of his works can concentrate all of his past, but also all of his future.** However, something similar could also be said about *Going from the bed to the living room* or *Piano bar* . It happens that in those eighties, Charly García was floating in such a state of grace that he delivered these three longplays in just 24 months; It is difficult to find something similar in contemporary history anywhere in the world. On the other hand, with this trilogy, but especially with *Modern Clicks* and the break that he represented with 'Charly of the seventies', García pulverized his brilliant and recent past. 'He outdid himself,' the rock critic might say. That is to say: his first albums as a soloist ate Sui Generis, La Maquina de Hacer Pájaros and Serú Girán like a PacMan and Charly became an artist of the 80s as if he had been born artistically in that decade," says Roque Di **Pietro** , author of the monumental two-volume saga of *Charly Tonight* .

In the exhaustive survey that Di Pietro proposes after Charly's recitals from 1956 to 2008, the author reconstructs a live life marked by somewhat lukewarm first impressions from the press towards transcendent moments in García's work. “I didn't read any adverse reviews of the album in the 'rock press'. Yes, on the other hand, I found very negative reviews about *Clicks...* 's live performances at Luna Park. The most notable were those of *Tiempo Argentino* (the critic **Guillermo Pintos**) and *Humor* (**Gloria Guerrero** in Las Páginas de Gloria). To summarize, Pintos suggested that García was already trapped in the clutches of commercial music; He even complained that in one song (probably 'Transas') Charly only appeared accompanied by a drum machine. Gloria, meanwhile, pointed out that she got bored, plain and simple. However, the review published in *Clarín* by **Roque de Pedro** (at that time a 40-year-old 'veteran' dedicated to rock in its *Rockerías* section , but with experience in contemporary academic music) seemed to fully understand the concept of García's album: 'sophisticated and simple at the same time', he wrote to describe his new music,” says Di Pietro and now looks towards the audience. “It is a classic of rock folklore to hear the stories of old García fans disappointed by the new *modern Clicks* proposal (just as it is a classic to hear stories about how those *Clicks* fans felt betrayed at some point in the *Say No More* era).). However, for a long time *Modern Clicks* was the best-selling album of García's entire solo discography and we must not forget that to present it live he occupied the Luna Park stage for four nights. That is to say: if his old fans didn't like the album at first, they turned out en masse to watch his staging. Probably his new look (short hair, much more mannered than in the first months of 1982) clashed with the expectations of a public (in Buenos Aires, but especially in the interior) still established with the aesthetics (and the still militarized customs) of the 70s.”

One day after the commemoration of 40 years of *Modern Clicks* , the corner of Walker St. & Cortlandt Alley, in the heart of New York's Soho, will be renamed **Charly García Corner** . The ceremony will take place on the 6th of this month, at 11 in the morning (United States time), with the presence of local authorities and officials from the Argentine Consulate. The initiative belongs to **Mariano Cabrera** , an Argentine actor who has lived in Manhattan since 2015. Thanks to a friend, Cabrera learned of the exact location where Uberto Sagramoso photographed **Charly García** . “I was surprised to see that the corner is preserved exactly the same as it was 40 years ago, except for the absence of the street

art that Charly chose to be portrayed in,” says Cabrera, who teaches acting classes in Buenos Aires and New York. “I put together a project to present at the Argentine Consulate and together we could get to work on the issue, they with the administrative part of the city and I with the permits of the hotel where said wall is located.”

For **Uberto Sagramoso**, it was a little frustrating that the cover printing was quite poor. “Some turned out well, others more or less, and the rest were forgotten,” says the photographer. “It was also frustrating that my original idea of the photo being in black and white with the sole exception of the Shadowman's heart, which would be in red, could not be realized in Argentina at the time. Despite my insistence on this detail, Charly could only get the cover to be accompanied by a sticker of a small red heart so that people could cut it out and paste it on the white heart of the Shadowman, but that was an idea that was never understood.” .

“But neither fame nor noise nor money attract me too much. My trip is to reach the age of 60 and continue playing the piano, to be able to educate my son, to help him seek his happiness. I say in one of my songs: 'I don't want to tie myself to anything.' And I live it like this: one cannot tie oneself to the military, to the office or to drugs. Because it is a one-way trip with no return. Bye, kids: I thank *La Semana* for allowing me to speak with you, directly and without subterfuge. I cut it here because the tape is ending. I would like to make you listen to a song that I have in mind but... Ugh!... The tape is over.”