



CHUCHO VALDÉS

PROGRAM

There will be an intermission.



Saturday, October 4 at 8 PM

Zellerbach Theatre

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Winner of five Grammy® and three Latin Grammy® Awards, the Cuban pianist, composer and arranger Chucho Valdés is the most influential figure in modern Afro-Cuban jazz. His most recent work, *Border-Free*, features eight pieces (all but one new originals) and is a great example of Valdés' musical pursuit, one in which the conventional limits of style and tradition blur and disappear. On this recording, Valdés is featured with his Afro-Cuban Messengers, and the compositions include nods to flamenco, the Gnawa music of Morocco and the ritual rhythms of the Orishas, the deities of the Afro-Cuban Santería religion. There are mentions of hard-bop and danzón but also echoes of Bach, Rachmaninoff and Miles Davis, and yet the sum total is a deeply personal and open-ended sound.

Dionisio Jesús "Chucho" Valdés Rodríguez was born in a family of musicians in Quivicán, Havana province, Cuba on October 9, 1941. His first teachers were his father, the pianist, composer and bandleader Ramón "Bebo" Valdés, and his mother Pilar Rodríguez, who sang and played the piano. At the age of three, Valdés was already able to play melodies he heard on the radio. At the age of five, Valdés began to take lessons on piano, theory and solfège with maestro Oscar Muñoz Boufartique. He continued his studies at the Conservatorio Municipal de Música de la Habana, from which he graduated at age 14. Valdés also took private lessons from Zenaida Romeu, Rosario Franco, Federico Smith and Leo Brouwer.

In 1958, at the age of 15, Valdés formed his first jazz trio and worked as a pianist at the Deauville and St. John hotels in Havana. In 1959, he debuted with the orchestra Sabor de Cuba, directed by his father. At home he played music by jazz greats and, because his father was the piano player at the Tropicana, he experienced live performances by music legends such as Nat King Cole, Errol Garner, Sarah Vaughan, Rolando Laserie, Fernando Álvarez and Pío Leyva. Valdés learned to perform with and conduct an orchestra directly from work alongside his father.

In the early '60s, Valdés worked as a pianist at the Teatro Martí (1961), the Salón Internacional del Hotel Habana Riviera (1963) and the orchestra of the Teatro Musical de la Habana (1964-67). In 1967, Valdés organized his own combo, and that same year, joined the important Orquesta Cubana de Música Moderna, then directed by maestros Armando Romeu and Rafael Somavilla. While a member of the orchestra, Valdés revisited the idea of a small group and appeared at the Jazz Jamboree in Poland leading his own quintet in 1970.

In 1972, after recording *Jazz Batá*, an album featuring an unusual jazz trio comprising bassist Carlos del Puerto and singer and percussionist Oscar Valdés on batá (the traditional hourglass shaped drums used in the ritual music of the Orishas), Valdés decided to enlarge the group adding brass and trap drums. That was the genesis, of Irakere, a small, Cuban-style big band that played an explosive mix of jazz, rock, classical music and traditional Cuban music.

Irakere made its mark internationally in Finland in 1976 and was discovered by Dizzy Gillespie the following year. In 1978, producer and CBS president Bruce Lundvall signed the band for the label. Irakere debuted as surprise guests at Carnegie Hall as part of the Newport Jazz Festival. As fate would have it, the program that night also featured pianists Bill Evans and McCoy Tyner, two of Valdés's main influences. Selections from Irakere's performances at Carnegie Hall and at the Montreux Jazz Festival comprised the repertoire of *Irakere*, their debut recording in the U.S, which won a Grammy® for Best Latin Recording in 1979.

The group went on to create an extraordinary body of work that includes great dance recordings such as *Homenaje a Beny Moré* (1989) and *Indestructible* (1997); explorations of Afro-Cuban religious music such as *Babalú Ayé* (1999) featuring the great Orisha music

singer Lázaro Ros; and ambitious projects such as *Tierra En Trance* (1983) and *Misa Negra* (1987). Irakere's line-up went through many changes over the years but Valdés remained as the one, great constant.

In 1997, Valdés won his second Grammy® Award for his work on *Habana* as a member of trumpeter Roy Hargrove's Crisol. The following year, while not completely leaving Irakere behind, he started a parallel career as a solo player and quartet leader, looking for greater opportunities to explore and showcase his playing. Valdés stayed with Irakere until 2005. The fruitful period that followed is highlighted by albums such as *Solo Piano* (1991), *Solo: Live in New York* (2001) and *New Conceptions* (2003), as well as quartet recordings such as *Bele Bele en La Habana* (1998), *Briyumba Palo Congo* (1999) and *Live at the Village Vanguard* (2000), capturing a performance that features Valdés' sister, singer Mayra Caridad Valdés. The recording won a Grammy® for Best Latin Jazz Album. He also won Grammy® awards for *Juntos Para Siempre* (2007), the duet recording with his father, and for *Chucho's Steps* (2010), featuring his new group, the Afro-Cuban Messengers.

In total, Valdés has won five Grammy® Awards and three Latin Grammy® Awards. In 2012, Valdés reorganized his Afro-Cuban Messengers to include Yaroldy Abreu on percussion, Dreiser Durruthy Bombalé on batá drums and voice, Reinaldo Melián on trumpet, Gastón Joy on bass and Rodney Barreto on drums. His most recent production, *Border-Free*, is yet another expression of the continuing musical search and evolution of Chucho Valdés as a pianist, composer, arranger and director.