

William Cepeda

BIO (Long)



WILLIAM CEPEDA is a cultural icon of Puerto Rico. The four-time Grammys-nominated artist and composer is a member of the world-renowned Cepeda Family, one of Puerto Rico's most distinguished Afro-Puerto Rican folkloric Ensembles.

Cepeda's music career began at the age of ten playing percussion in his hometown, Loiza, the heart of "little Africa" in Puerto Rico. As a teenager, he picked up the trombone, which became his instrument of choice. Also, it was then that he began playing professionally.

A protégé of Dizzy Gillespie, William Cepeda was a member of the United Nation Orchestra, Cepeda and has traveled the world and performed with many jazz and Latin artists, which include: Lester Bowie and his Brass Fantasy, David Murray, James Moody, Steve Turre, Bobby Watson, Miriam Makeba, and Slide Hampton & The Jazz Masters. Also, he is equally well-known in the Latin music scene and has performed with such legendary figures such as Tito Puente, Paquito D'Rivera, Arturo Sandoval, Eddie Palmieri, Celia Cruz, Marc Anthony, Ruben Blades, Oscar De Leon, and Chucho Valdez.

From 1980 to 1990 he studied jazz composition and arranging at the Berklee College of Music (Boston). Also, he started composing and experimenting with Puerto Rican traditional music and mixing it with jazz, blues and, funk. At the time, recordings that combined traditional Puerto Rican music with jazz were nonexistent, so Cepeda was not aware that he created a new style of Afro-Puerto Rican jazz. In 1991, he formed a group to interpret the music. Also, he spent one year rehearsing and sharing his concept with the group.

Cepeda's musical influences include artists such as Dizzy Gillespie, Miriam Makeba, Miles Davis, Fela Kuti, Charles Mingus, and Lester Bowie among others. For over three decades his ensemble has toured the world, performing in prestigious jazz and world music festivals such as Montreux, NorthSea and Tabarka, as well as performing arts venues and clubs.

In addition to jazz and world music, Cepeda's oeuvre includes contemporary classical music such as Bomba Sinfonica, a full-length orchestral work that mixes contemporary classical music with traditional folkloric Afro-Puerto Rican rhythms and sounds for a symphony, opera, choir, and soloists.



JAZZ ARTIST INNOVATOR TROMBONIST CONCH SHELLS PRODUCER COMPOSER EDUCATOR

Cepeda has been composing music for many different kinds of groupings, including chamber ensembles, big bands, and symphonic orchestras. Also, he has developed artistic collaborations with dance companies, theater and film scoring.

His publications include the four-volume encyclopedia titled, The Music of Puerto Rico: Roots and Beyond. The project consists of performance, and educational components, workshops, and master classes) and introduces Puerto Rico's musical heritage to a wide audience and documents four genres (Bomba, Plena, Danza, and Musica Jibara) through concerts and other activities such as DVDs, CDs, and curricula for educational and commercial release. These recordings are being used across a wide variety of primary, post-secondary and university level educational institutions across Puerto Rico and Latin America.

William Cepeda created Casabe Records (www.casaberecords.com) in 1997 to celebrate and document Puerto Rican music and professionally record and produce legendary Puerto Rican folk artists and ensembles such as Los Hermanos Ayala, Don Felix Alduen, Angel Luis Torruella, and Grupo Esencia. Also, his productions have been released on the Blue Jackel label – Grupo Afro-Boricua (“Bombazo”) and William Cepeda Afro-Rican Jazz (“My Roots & Beyond” and “Branching Out”). William Cepeda Afro-Jazz, produce with Casabe records Live at Montreux Jazz Festival, Bomba Jazz, Plena Jazz, Jibaro Jazz, Danza jazz and William Cepeda International Quintet, Únete – Casabe Records.

Cepeda's formal musical education includes two Bachelor of Art degrees; one in jazz composition and arranging from Berklee College of Music and another in Music education from the Conservatory of Music in Puerto Rico. He was awarded a full scholarship to the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College in New York, where he received a Masters degree in Jazz performance, and studied composition and improvisation with Donald Byrd, Jimmy Heath, and Slide Hampton. Cepeda has taught at the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music, and the Conservatory of Music of Puerto Rico. He also conducts seminars and workshops as well as private lessons.

He was bestowed an Honorary Doctorate from the Berklee College of Music in 2013 as well as having had the 2013 Puerto Rico Heineken Jazz Festival dedicated in his honor. He has been widely credited as having innovated a unique sub-genre of Jazz known as Afro-Rican Jazz. For the last six years, Cepeda has been a Professor and Artistic Composer at the University of Puerto Rico. Also, he has been invited to serve as a composer and artist-in-residence at many distinguished institutions.

Cepeda continues to compose, develop new projects and seek new opportunities.