

James Sanders' Conjúnto: Latin Inferno

Pritzker Pavilion, Millennium Park, August 26, 2010

James Sanders, violin; Steve Eisen, reeds; Leandro Lopez-Varady, piano; José Porcayo, bass; Brett Bentler, bass; Roel Trevino, congas and percussion; Joe Rendon, bongos and percussion; Jean-Christophe Leroy, drums and timbales; plus Tomeka Reid, cello.

Special guests: Pharez Whitted, trumpet; Papo Santiago, vocals; Cerqua Rivera Dance Theatre.

Latin Inferno represents the next evolutionary step for James Sanders' Conjúnto. In Latin Inferno, Sanders brings together many of Chicago's disparate musical strains (avant-garde, mainstream, Latin, classical) in a framework rooted in Afro-Latin traditions, yet pointed somewhere new and unexplored.

Violinist James Sanders brings a lifetime of experiences to his music. The son of a Dominican mother and U.S. born father, Sanders grew up in an ethnically mixed Chicago neighborhood where Latin rhythms filled the nighttime air. Encouraged by his mother, he began violin studies at the age of six, continuing through high school at Lane Tech and culminating in a performance degree for Yale University. He quickly landed a seat in the Chicago Sinfonietta, an orchestra known for championing new works by young composers with a global perspective, as well as guest spots with several other orchestras. He began improvising on the violin shortly after completing his degree, at first sitting in with various ensembles around Chicago, and then forming the James Sanders Trio in 1990. Developing his jazz chops through constant work, he joined Alfonso Ponticelli's Gypsy Jazz ensemble Swing Gitan in 1995. He regularly plays with several members of Chicago's AACM collective and is a member of several classical and jazz groups, including Dee Alexander's Evolution Ensemble. Recalling the music of his youth, he formed Conjúnto in 2001.

In Latin Inferno, Sanders' lifetime of experiences find their logical next step.

The inspiration for Latin Inferno grew out of several conversations that James has had with the late Fred Anderson during the many nights James has performed in one ensemble or another at the legendary Velvet Lounge. Sanders relates it this way: "I observed that what he has created with his sound and approach to playing is a unique singular language, an approach that is personal and yet ultimately very understandable and based on a strong logic and reason. What he explained to me was that it takes time and much experimentation to develop a language but it is possible if you

stay the course and find points of communications and continue to build on them.”

Latin Inferno, then, is James Sanders staying the course on his musical journey.

The members of Conjúnto as well as tonight's special guests all represent signposts on the journey. Between them, the group members are in dozens of notable bands. For example, Tomeka Reid shares stages with James in several classical and jazz ensembles. Steve Eisen and Papo Santiago are both members of the Chicago Afro Latin Jazz Ensemble, and played with James in a band put together by Fania salsa legend Larry Harlow for a *Fiesta Puertorriquena* concert in Humboldt Park. Eisen also plays with Joe Rendon in Chevere. Leandro Lopez-Varady plays with James in Doug Lofstrom's New Quartet, a contemporary chamber music ensemble. James first met Pharez Whitted two decades ago when they were both undergraduates at DePauw University in Indiana. The connections go on and on.

Among Sanders' many engagements is a member with Cerqua Rivera Dance Theatre, a unique company that combines dance with visuals and a live jazz ensemble for all of its performances. Past Cerqua Rivera performances have been inspired by musicians, painters, and social issues. James called on CRDT's Artistic Director Wilfredo Rivera to choreograph a brand new set of pieces especially for this concert. More connections: Papo Santiago and Tomeka Reid also perform in the Cerqua Rivera ensemble.

“Ever since childhood, I've lived in several worlds” says Sanders. “I'm Latino, I'm Black, I'm white – I'm all of these things, and all of this goes into my music. I love straight up salsa, but I also need the freedom of improvisation as well as the formalism of classical and dance to grow as an artist. All of that comes to bear in Latin Inferno. Despite the stylistic differences, I'm looking for common elements that will allow everyone to speak in their natural voice they use the most often and still fit with one another. As a result, many of the compositions have a great deal of space and are simple elegant forms that will create a framework for the musicians and dancers to come together.”