

ANTONIO SANCHEZ

STICKING WITH PAT METHENY

JAZZ DRUMMER ANTONIO SANCHEZ WAS ONLY FIVE WHEN HE DISCOVERED HIS destiny. "My uncle took me to a friend's house," he recalls. "The first thing I saw when they opened the door was a big drum kit with a bunch of cymbals. It was love at first sight! I started taking lessons and never looked back."

Sanchez has played with many great bandleaders—Michael Brecker, John Patitucci, Paquito D'Rivera, Marcus Roberts, Avishai Cohen, Dee Dee Bridgewater and Dave Samuels, to name a few. But he says his current gig with Pat Metheny is especially rewarding. "I get to play great music in front of thousands of people every night! It's a privilege being able to play creative and challenging music in front of such a wide audience. Pat gives me a lot of space to solo as well, so it's great for me."

Sanchez grew up in an artistic family in Mexico City—his grandfather, uncle and mother were involved in the film industry. Initially inspired by bands like the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Cream, the Who, Rush and the Police, he discovered traditional jazz after a fusion interlude. "Fusion sounded more 'rocky' to me than straight-ahead jazz," he says, "so it was an easier transition."

Latin music was another big influence. "In Mexico there's always some salsa, cumbia or danzón playing somewhere," he says. "Growing up with all these different kinds of music gave me a global grasp of musical styles. It's fun to let all these different influences come out in my jazz playing. Some of the strongest ones come from rock and Latin-oriented feels."

Sanchez also studied piano, a discipline that further enhanced his drumming skills. "Playing piano made me think in a more melodic way," he notes. "It made me pay more attention to harmony and form, which is extremely important when you're playing jazz. It also made me feel the actual volume of the piano, so I could blend better with piano players."

After being accepted at Berklee School of Music, Sanchez relocated to Boston. "Going to Berklee made me realize how important formal education is," he reflects. "It made me appreciate the tradition of the

music I was trying to play. At the same time, I was getting a great street education. Every night, I had gigs that required me to play in many different styles. I mean, a lot of styles: calypso, Afro-Cuban, funk, rock, Brazilian, straight-ahead jazz, weddings—you name it."

Playing with Pat Metheny's two groups—the acoustic Pat Metheny Trio and the larger Pat Metheny Group—presents many artistic challenges. "With the Group, one of the biggest challenges is consistency," says Antonio. "I can't say, 'I'm tired today, so I'll play really different.' I have to move this huge truck with a bunch of people on it, so I need to drive it in a very consistent way. Dynamics are a key part of this. I play to a click 90 percent of the time, so it's a challenge to keep it sounding loose, but precise. On the other hand, playing with the Trio is like driving an all-terrain sports car. You can take it in all sorts of directions and know it's not going to flip over! With the Trio, the challenge is coming up with different ideas every night to keep the music fresh and interesting."

Sanchez plays a Yamaha Maple Absolute Nouveau kit. "I've always loved Yamahas," he says. "These drums are incredibly consistent in every way. I love the warmth of the maple, and the hardware is so easy to set up. We play a different city every night, so the drums are set up, torn down and hauled around every day. The pace is brutal, but the drums hold up amazingly well. It's crucial to trust your instrument to perform every night. You don't want to be worrying about something happening to the drums while you're playing. You want an instrument that helps you concentrate just on the music, and these drums do exactly that."

For Sanchez, it's been a clear path from that first childhood glimpse of a shiny new kit to his current career heights. He has one bit of advice for drummers with similar aspirations: "Be clear on what you want out of music. If you're serious about it, go for it—but if you're not sure you want to make it your livelihood, then maybe you should view it as a hobby, because it takes all of your passion and time to make it happen. If you feel like there's nothing else in the world you'd rather do, then give it all your heart, your soul and your mind. And start practicing your butt off now!"

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