
Chucho Valdés Interviewed

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When it comes to Cuban jazz — and Cuban music, generally — the name Chucho Valdés looms large, almost regal. The masterful pianist and musical adventurer has helmed multiple hybrid projects over the past 50 years, including his longstanding Cuban/jazz fusion band Irakere, the Afro-Cuban Messengers, and Jazz Batá, who will join him at Campbell Hall on Sunday, October 20.

Valdés has also been a centralizing force in supporting and promulgating Cuban music as director of the Havana Jazz Festival, an educator, and the unofficial cultural ambassador of his musically supercharged country.

Valdés can always be counted on for lively, sophisticated, and exciting music-making, a reputation still in restless motion at age 78. On last year's album *Jazz Batá 2*, a latter-day extension of his groundbreaking 1972 album *Jazz Batá*, Valdés blends his jazz trio sound with the traditional Cuban batá percussionists, a musical language linked to Santería rituals. While the drums anchor and exoticize the whole, Valdés's voice on the piano runs alternately hot, swinging, sweet, and sometimes avant-garde, but always with musicality as his guide. He's a musical treasure whose dynamic live shows belong in the catch-him-while-you-can category.

