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Global Cuba Fest Bounces Back to Celebrate All Aspects of Cuban Music

DAVID ROLLAND | FEBRUARY 26, 2021 | 8:00AM



Dafnis Prieto / Photo by Osmani Tellez

Last year, Global Cuba Fest's 13th edition **certainly proved to be unlucky.**

"We were on top of the Citadel dancing our butts off to Sol and the Tribu. It was March 11," remembers Beth Boone, the artistic and executive director of Miami Light Project, the organizers of the event. The very next day the world ended and we were forced to cancel the rest of our concerts."

Now, in its 14th year, the festival that strives to demonstrate Cuban music encompasses a whole lot more than salsa is back. This is welcome news to live music lovers, but the preparations that have to be made to safely host a concert would have been unimaginable last year.

"It's open-air at the North Beach Bandshell and they've done an extraordinary job of making sure all safety protocols are passed," Boone says. "The bandshell has a capacity of 1,000 people. For this event, seating is limited to 200. You must sit in pods of two, four, or six people that will be no closer than ten feet from anyone else. We'll have rapid testing at the venue and a paperless form you can fill out if we need to do contact tracing. We'll also have rigorous testing of the artists and staff."

Global Music Fest wanted to make certain they had a lineup that lived up to all these safety precautions. This year features a double bill. The first half of the evening will feature trombonist, percussionist, and singer Julio Montalvo, who joins forces with bassist and singer Alain Pérez for what they describe as a mix of "jazz, Latin, fusion, and a musical journey seasoned with Cuban flavor." The act was scheduled to appear last year but canceled.

Afterward, drummer and Global Cuba Fest veteran Dafnis Prieto and his jazz sextet take over to perform selections from their new album, *Transparency*.



"It's Latin jazz but not what you expect from Latin jazz," Prieto tells *New Times*. "You hear the influence of my Cuban culture and influences from my jazz and classical music training. I try to make the music as personal as possible."

Prieto immigrated to the U.S. from Cuba in 1999 when he was already in his 20s. While he sees differences between performing for different nationalities, he doesn't exactly feel the need to tailor his style to fit a particular crowd.

"In Cuba, you're surrounded only by Cuban music," he says. "Here you're surrounded by lots of different music, so audiences in the U.S. have a completely different perspective. But I play the same way for everyone whether I'm in Cuba, the U.S., or Italy."

Transparency, Prieto's eighth record as a bandleader, is an attempt to express both sincerity and, of course, transparency – two traits that Prieto says are hard to come by. So how does he manage to express that in an all-instrumental album without the benefit of lyrics?

"For 500 years since the Renaissance, people have been expressing ideas through music," he explains. "I translate my emotions into something very focused. Through melody, rhythm, and harmonics you can convey emotions and ideas. Music should get the same feedback with or without words."

During the past year, Prieto has been able to perform on the University of Miami campus where he teaches, but Global Cuba Fest will bring his first large audience in over a year.

"I'm so glad to have this experience. I do music every day 24/7," he says. "The stage is an extension of my everyday life, so I'm not nervous, but I am very excited."

Global Cuba Fest. *With Alain Pérez and Julio Montalvo & the Cuban Collective and Dafnis Prieto Sextet. 7 p.m. Saturday, March 6, at the North Beach Bandshell, 7275 Collins Ave., Miami Beach; 305-672-5202; northbeachbandshell.com. Tickets cost \$40 via venuepilot.co.*