

## **San Antonio Express-News**

### **Review: Arturo Sandoval breaks it down brilliantly**

By Hector Saldana: March 21, 2014

SAN ANTONIO – Grammy-winning jazz trumpeter Arturo Sandoval – he’s won 10 and been nominated 19 times – showed why he is an absolute monster of jazz and Latin jazz music on Thursday. Not that anyone had any doubts about the Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient.

With his virtuosic sextet, the Cuban-born Sandoval delivered an awe-inspiring concert at Lila Cockrell Theatre, part of the excellent ARTS San Antonio music series. Often, he was stationed behind the timbales or an electronic keyboard (producing wild Carlos Santana guitar-like solos).

Time and again, monotonous -- afro-Cuban breakdowns where the music strips to its essential elements or riff -- were awesome displays of musicianship.

“We’re so happy to be here San Antonio,” said Sandoval, the modern equivalent of B-bop great Dizzy Gillespie. Their mysterious, enduring musical relationship is the subject of the book “The Man Who Changed My Life.”

Sandoval’s epic life was the inspiration of the HBO feature film, “For Love or Country,” starring Andy Garcia.

By his side at the Lila Cockrell was the saxophone monster Ed Calle, a legend in the jazz world. The instrumentation included grand piano, electric piano, electric standup bass, drums and percussion.

Sandoval’s tone on his brass instrument is velvety, almost indescribable. The notes, whether trilled sharply or slurred a la the blues, are simply marvelous. Never are they outside the gravitational pull of melodic gravity.

The groove is likewise never heavy-handed. Yet it swings so hard. For example, a touching ballad he wrote for Gillespie (they met in 1977) – “Dear Diz (Every Day I Think of You”).

“Every day of my life I think of you,” he sang. “Your music plays inside my head.”

The lyrics go on with Sandoval, heartbreakingly, wishing they could play one more time together and professing that his mentor Gillespie “saved my life; you set me free.”

Gillespie died in Jan. 1993.

Sandoval related to this attentive audience (the venue was about half filled) with an easygoing manner.

“My first instrument wasn’t the trumpet,” he said. “It’s a hate-love relationship. It’s a lot more hate. There’s no room for nothing but pain.”

Mostly the trumpet wins “and then you die,” joked Sandoval, whose first instrument was actually the piano.

He proved to be a down-to-earth star and shared stories before he sat at the grand piano and commanded the entire keyboard. “This (expletive) is badass,” said Grammy-winning record producer Joe Treviño, sitting in the balcony.

Also at the concert was legendary musician Luis Gasca. “He’s one of the best,” said Gasca.

But that was before Sandoval delivered a beat box vocal display of Gillespie B-bop music which was nothing short of amazing and spit out so fast (and probably unplayable on conventional instruments) that it was impossible not to smile.

Will we still love him when he’s 64? Absolutely. He opened his encore singing Charlie Chaplin’s “Smile.”

For those that didn’t make it to Thursday’s concert, check out trumpeter Al Gomez and saxophonist Louie Bustos next time they play in town. They’ll take you there.

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