

## THE CURRENT

### MUSIC

# FREEDOM JAZZ: ARTURO SANDOVAL BRINGS HIS LEGENDARY TRUMPET SKILLS TO SA



COURTESY PHOTO

By **Matt Stieb**

PUBLISHED: MARCH 19, 2014

In the fall of 2013, Cuban-born trumpeter Arturo Sandoval won the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest award granted to civilians. “It’s a huge honor, I’ll be grateful forever,” Arturo tells the Current over the phone in a luxuriant Cuban accent. “For me, it’s the most important word in the dictionary.

No freedom, no life. I never get tired of repeating that.”

For a jazz musician, it’s a perfectly titled honor. Freedom defines jazz, an art form fixated on expressing emotion through improvisation. And Sandoval defines what it means to be a jazz musician, carving out a signature, playful tone in the pursuit of artistic freedom. As Sandoval says, “Jazz and freedom, they are brothers.”

Born in Artemisia, Cuba, in 1949, Sandoval began playing trumpet at the age of 13, quickly becoming a talent of national caliber. Though skilled on a variety of instruments, the trumpet immediately hooked the young Sandoval. “I love the sound, the personality of the instrument. When the trumpet

speaks, everybody has to listen. You can express your feelings all the way without any kind of limitation.”

When Sandoval plays his horn, there’s no choice but to tune in at full attention. His high register attack is simultaneously joyous and violent, ripping through bursts of energetic and proficient runs. First brought to the international stage with the dream team Cuban big band Irakere, Sandoval has since claimed nine Grammys, a testament to his extraordinary talent.

From day one, Sandoval has found a role model in a similar-sounding trumpeter, the great bop and Latin jazz innovator John Birks “Dizzy” Gillespie. “I strongly believe that Dizzy was the most musical trumpet player that ever lived,” says Sandoval. “One of my missions is to keep the music he invented, bebop, alive.”

Bop, invented by Gillespie and saxophonist Charlie Parker in the early 1940s, transformed jazz from popular music to pure art form, turning up tempos, fragmenting melody and focusing on improvisation. In contemporary jazz, though fads come and go, bop still reigns supreme. “In jazz, you better get familiar with bop, otherwise you’ll have a big hole in your information,” says Sandoval.

In 2012, Sandoval released *Dear Diz (Every Day I Think of You)*. Far from just another rehash of Gillespiana, the Grammy-winning record celebrates the compositions of Gillespie and his cohorts, giving his works new arrangements in big band form. “I love bebop and I’m going to try my best to keep that style of music alive,” says Sandoval. “Sometimes it’s difficult because you’re swimming against the current of the water, but I’m going to keep swimming as hard as I can to keep that tradition alive, the legacy of his invention.”

Sandoval became a naturalized American citizen in 1999 and currently lives outside of Los Angeles, scoring movies “11-12 hours a day. And I don’t even feel it.” At 64, the idea of retirement is a joke. In addition to his movie work, touring with his sextet and running his own institute of musical education, Sandoval just finished an album dedicated to Mexican bolero composer Armando Manzanero. When asked why he returns so often to the tribute album, he laughs. “We owe those people a lot. It makes you feel good when you pay respect to the people to whom you owe so much.”

### **Arturo Sandoval**

\$36-\$120

7:30pm Thurs,

March 20

Lila Cockrell Theatre

200 E Market

(210) 207-8500

[ticketmaster.com](https://www.ticketmaster.com)