

High-octane Man

Ten-time Grammy Award-winner Arturo Sandoval is hailed as one of the most dynamic Latin jazz trumpeters of our time. We take a deep dive into the life and accomplishments of the celebrated American-Cuban musician ahead of his first performance in India at the NCPA, Mumbai.

By Beverly Pereira

Arturo Sandoval (left) is one of the world's greatest living trumpeters

Arturo Sandoval's energy seems to know no bounds. It was only last month that he played two concerts in Zagreb, made a dash for his show in Bruges, and then landed on home ground in the United States (U.S.), where a slew of shows demanded his attention. His energy offstage is no different from the powerful, vibrant and vigorous rhythms he delivers onstage. If he is not on a plane to play his next benefit concert or simply in his studio composing, he would still be immersed in music in some manner. Browse through his Instagram account and you would know. The jazz trumpet master, who turns 70 this month, is possibly more active on social media than most of us. In one of his newer posts, Sandoval entertains friends at his Miami home as he playfully performs on his Bosendorfer Imperial grand piano, once owned by the legendary jazz pianist Oscar Peterson.

In addition to playing the trumpet, Sandoval plays the flugelhorn and is a well-known composer, pianist and recording artiste. A protégé of the legendary jazz musician Dizzy Gillespie, Sandoval caught the attention of the jazz world at a young age and continues to do so as he unleashes his robust sound during captivating performances with his band. He has been awarded 10 Grammys and was nominated 19 times, in addition to receiving six Billboard Awards. Unsurprisingly, he was presented with an Emmy Award for his work on the underscore of *For Love or Country: The Arturo Sandoval Story* (2000), an HBO film based on his life. He has since lent his compositions to several other films and was commissioned by the Kennedy Center Ballet to score the ballet *Pepito's Story*.

A tough start

Sandoval was born in the small town of Artemisa on the outskirts of Havana, Cuba, in 1949, barely two years after Gillespie became the first musician to inject Latin strains into American jazz. Growing up in Cuba and surrounded by traditional

Cuban music, Sandoval always knew he wanted to be a musician someday and yet it was practically impossible to get hold of any instrument at the time. He was all of ten when his aunt gifted him a small horn. He found it challenging at first, but soon took to it after hours of practice. "The first trumpet teacher I went to in Cuba told me to play for him and since I had never played before, he immediately told me to throw the horn away and give up.

Sandoval has recorded with artistes ranging from Ariana Grande and Pharrell Williams to Rod Stewart, Stevie Wonder and Al Jarreau

That day, at ten years old, I walked home crying the whole way. That's when I decided I wasn't going to let him discourage me, and I embarked on my journey as a trumpet player," says Sandoval.

Most might know him for the accomplished jazz player that he is and, quite specifically, for the blisteringly high notes he hits with ease on the trumpet. But few really know that he is just as respected in the world of classical music. He was enrolled in the Cuban National School of Arts and was classically trained since the age of 12. He would go on to become one of Cuba's most recognised trumpet players by the age of 20, and would eventually perform with many of the world-renowned symphony orchestras. As a composer, he has written two concertos for the trumpet and orchestra – works that illuminate not only his composition skills on the trumpet, but also every instrument in the orchestra.

A whole new world

So, how did he go on to become an acclaimed guardian of the jazz trumpet? He was only exposed to the new sounds of bebop-tinged jazz when an acquaintance played him a record of jazz masters Charlie Parker and Gillespie in what can be described as a pivotal moment for the young Sandoval. The music was quite unlike anything the teenager had ever heard. He was hooked to this new sound of American jazz, even as Cuba considered it unlawful to even listen to "imperialistic music" such as this. Sandoval was drafted into the military in 1971; serving in the Cuban military was something of an obligation for the youth in Cuba at the time. One can say that jazz stole Sandoval's heart but it was also the very music that eventually landed him in jail for three months after a sergeant discovered him listening to an American jazz radio broadcast.

When Dizzy came to town

Years later, Sandoval met his idol Gillespie on a fateful day in 1977 when the American jazz master arrived on a cruise in Cuba. Sandoval offered to show him around town, not once revealing the musician in him. It was only later that night that Sandoval's vibrant trumpeting was unravelled, and it blew Gillespie away. It was an association that lasted for over a decade and a half until the passing of Gillespie in 1993. Sandoval's album *Dear Diz (Every Day I Think of You)*, which reinterprets ten Gillespie compositions, is nothing short of the heartfelt tribute the Cuban trumpeter intended it to be.

"Meeting Dizzy changed my life, just as music did. It was with his help that I was able to get political asylum and move to the U.S. with my family. He afforded me the greatest freedom as well as more personal and professional opportunities that I could have ever wished for," says the trumpet maestro who defected to the U.S. in 1990, while on tour with Gillespie. "I was very fortunate to meet and then play and tour with Dizzy. It is a truly marvellous thing to meet your

Sandoval, always technically perfect, is known for his supercharged performances



hero, and then form a relationship and a bond with him. He was my mentor, my friend, my teacher and is still an inspiration to me every day." Eventually, Sandoval became a U.S. citizen and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2013 – making him the fourth jazz musician after Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Ella Fitzgerald to have been bestowed with this honour.

The living legend

Sandoval has accomplished a lot more since those years of highs and lows. Every one of his stratospheric recordings and performances are always worth writing home about. Where one can barely imagine the meeting of jazz and pop, Sandoval has achieved this rare amalgamation with aplomb – not once deflecting from the authenticity of jazz. Instead, he gave form to the idea of the commercially successful jazz musician. He has recorded with artistes ranging from Ariana Grande and Pharrell Williams to Rod Stewart, Stevie Wonder

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and Al Jarreau. Sandoval has truly given the world much to relish and he still has the stamina and spirit to go on. But, when he says that his true legacy is what he leaves behind, he is referring to the Arturo Sandoval Institute (ASI), his non-profit organisation that provides instruments, masterclasses and music education to underprivileged students in the U.S. "I want to be a part of making sure that our

children and grandchildren have music in their lives, despite the fact that schools are cutting their music programs."

Performing day after day can get tiring, he says, but no matter how old he gets, it is the audience's energy that he gladly feeds off. When he takes to the stage at the NCPA this month, one can expect to hear the master trumpeter at his fiery best. "I'm looking forward to experiencing the country, its people, music and food and am very interested in the percussion of India," he says. "I look forward to hearing some and maybe playing some while I visit your beautiful country." ■

Arturo Sandoval will perform on 29th November at the Tata Theatre. He will also play with some of India's leading jazz and Indian classical musicians in an exclusive All-Star Jam on 30th November at the Tata Theatre. A masterclass with Sandoval will be held on 1st December at the Godrej Dance Theatre.