

A festival to leave you Dizzy

Arturo Sandoval will salute his mentor, Dizzy Gillespie, at the music-packed Festival of the Arts Boca.

By Phillip Valys
STAFF WRITER

In his new memoir, "The Man Who Changed My Life," jazz trumpeter Arturo Sandoval shares recollections of his bebop idol, Dizzy Gillespie, the American jazz giant and father figure who helped him defect from Cuba to the United States 24 years ago. An undated photo from the time depicts a smiling Sandoval and Gillespie, arms over each other's broad shoulders. A dedication in blue marker is scrawled over the picture: "To Number 1 Son Arturo — Love Forever, 'Papa' Dizzy."

"That is my favorite photo of all," Sandoval recalls, speaking by phone from his home in Los Angeles. "He was my hero, and when you have an opportunity to be a good friend with your hero, it's like a gift from God. A lot of things happened over the years, but that relationship I always treasured in my heart, you know."

Gillespie's influence on Sandoval will be on display Saturday night at the Mizner Park Amphitheater, site of the eighth annual Festival of the Arts Boca. A marquee act of the nine-day festival, which began Thursday night and will wrap March 15, Sandoval will draw material from his 2012 release of Gillespie covers, "Dear Diz (Every Day I Think of You)," which contains slick, Latin-spiced arrangements of "A Night in Tunisia," "Salt Peanuts," "Con Alma" and other classics. Backing him at the concert will be the Henry Mancini Institute Orchestra, from the University of Miami's Frost School of Music, along with Grammy-nominated singer Monica Mancini, daughter of Henry.

Sandoval, a former Miami resident, still cherishes his bond with



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From left, Josh Page, Sean Panikkar and Fernando Varela of opera tenor trio Forte will perform March 15 at the eighth annual Festival of the Arts Boca, running through March 15 at Mizner Park Amphitheater.

the free-spirited joker who died in 1993, but says such "tributes" — albums or books — can hardly repay Gillespie for the years he spent nurturing his trumpeting career in the 1970s.

"He came to Havana from a jazz cruise, and I met him at the dock and did not speak a lick of English," the nine-time Grammy winner recalls of their initial meeting in 1977. "For him, I was just a driver. I drove him all over the city in my '51 Plymouth and to a jam session that night with Stan Getz. One year later, he invited us [Sandoval's Afro-Cuban band Irakere] to come play New York at Carnegie Hall. Carnegie Hall!"

Nearly four decades on, Sandoval has built a blistering, prolific career that includes 49 albums spanning straight-ahead jazz to Latin-infused numbers. In October, President Obama handed him a Presidential Medal of Freedom,

and at the ceremony he rubbed elbows with former president Bill Clinton, Oprah Winfrey and other honored humanitarians. But the memoir, out April 1, is his current obsession, a project assembled from an idea by his wife, Marianela.

"She's more intelligent than me," Sandoval says with a chuckle. "That's why I didn't think to do it first. I wanted to share all these photos [I] never published. I don't want to keep it for me. My life is an open book. There are no secrets. I don't like to hide anything."

Sandoval's appearance at Festival of the Arts Boca — his third — is part of a vibrant bill of world-class musicians. Also performing is virtuoso violinist Itzhak Perlman, who played Thursday but will return Sunday for a night of klezmer music alongside Jewish cantor Yitzchak Meir Helfgot. Swinging into town next week

will be the high-flying aerialists of Cirque de la Symphonie (March 14) and tenor opera trio Forte, finalists on NBC's "America's Got Talent."

Festival co-founder Charlie Siemon counts Sandoval among the festival's most-generous musicians, recalling how he loaned his brassy talents to the inaugural edition and played with the Boca Raton Symphonica the following year. "He added early local prestige and an infectious personality, and deservedly so," Siemon says. "He's a great guy. The president didn't give him the Freedom Medal for no reason at all, and I believe he cares deeply about music and connecting young people with the long tradition of classical music."

Siemon, long a proponent of courting the younger set to the festival, thinks the tenors who compose Forte should deliver a fusion of pop and opera standards

Festival of the Arts Boca

When: 7:30 p.m. Saturday (Arturo Sandoval); 7 p.m. Sunday (Itzhak Perlman and Yitzchak Meir Helfgot); 7:30 p.m. March 14 (Cirque de la Symphonie); 7:30 p.m. March 15 (Forte)

Where: Mizner Park Amphitheater, 590 Plaza Real, Boca Raton

Cost: \$25-\$125 for concerts

Contact: 866-571-2787 or FestivalOfTheArtsBoca.org

capable of converting even casual listeners. When they perform March 15 as the festival's closing act, the trio of Josh Page, Sean Panikkar and Fernando Varela will perform Celine Dion's "My Heart Will Go On," the Righteous Brothers' "Unchained Melody" and Puccini's "Nessun Dorma," accompanied by the Henry Mancini ensemble under the baton of conductor Constantine Kitsopoulos.

The 33-year-old Varela, a church music director in Belleview, a city 66 miles northwest of Orlando, says Page assembled the band weeks before the auditions for "America's Got Talent." They communicated through Skype and email, and met for the first time in person hours before their New York audition. Their pop-infused act carried the trio to a fourth-place finish on the reality show in September and an immediate recording contract with Columbia Records. Their debut album, "AutoRip," was released in November.

"Literally minutes after we walk offstage, the president of Sony North America said, 'We're signing you to a record deal. Can you go into the studio tomorrow?'" Varela says. "I think people really connect with the identity of our group. Sean sings classical opera, and I sing crossover, and Josh is the third, youthful singer, very much in touch with this younger generation. It's three different colors, and when we sing together, it's a beautiful blend."

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