
Samuel Formell and his Family Legacy about the Van Van Band

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“Samuel Formell is one of those persons who open the door of his house and invites him to enter. He offers you a coffee and you even feel his dog as a lifetime’s friend in his house's living room .”

“Even when he was a child, Sami or Samuelito, as he was known by his friends and relatives, had the passion for really different careers. However, it was almost impossible to escape from a musical house.”

“That is the reason; as a director of the main musical and popular dancing band of Cuba, he promotes the musical legacy of his father, along with his mother’s influences he always defends. Let us know much more about this musician and man.”

Samuel. How did music get to you?

“My father did not want to start it, and even before having decided for studying it, the naval engineering was the first career that I always liked. It was something really incredible and after that, I approached”

“The architecture much more and psychology, but I had many music-related

concerns and the drums, specifically.” “My brother talked to my father and said to him: “

“I tested Samuel and I think he has a good hearing for music and his answer was that there was already another musician in the band and I already had my plans.”



“From that moment on, I left all, taking into account the fact that once you study music by becoming it into your career; you have certainly to dedicate yourself to it since you were a child and stop playing many children’s games due to that theme.”

“To be a good musician, it is necessary to study for many years as I think that study never ends.”

Which would be the musical rhythms if you had to talk to us about them?

“I was always marked by too many musical rhythms. My mother was the best tap dancer of Cuba and jazz, rock and music from the 70s and 90s were always listened at my home.”

“When my father knew her, he used to play the double bass for El Barbarán band and she was a professional dancer who used to travel, made shows and performed at Tropicana, Las Vegas and El Parísien centers and my father liked the way she danced tap and told us when we were children that he was behind that mixed-race woman until he achieved it.”

“My mother had a much better economic position at that time and they became a couple in the end. He father began living at her house and my older brother was born later. However, they could not send another child to her and my father asked my mother to stop working and that happened when Juan Formell was at the Revé musical band.”



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Moraima Secada vivía en la esquina, Elena Burke iba mucho a visitarnos, Ángel Díaz también, entonces tuve mucha influencia de ellos, junto con el jazz que siempre estaba presente

Samuel Formell



“Why do I tell this history? Why he was at the helm of the feeling movement and my mother was at home with me? Moraima Secada lived in the corner. Elena Burke used to visit us a lot and Ángel Díaz too. There was then too much influence from them, along with the always present jazz.”

“Those were my great influences not only to me but also for my father to create the Charanga format with the drums that is the first in Cuba which appears a dancing band with that musical instrument, electric bass and so on.”

Which music did you use to listen to and like, specifically?

“At that time, I used to listen to my mother showed to me like Ballads in English. She used to sing very well by using the Blue style and that influenced me a lot when I started the Arts school.”

“The musician almost always tends to become attached to the good harmonies as you train your ear. I study classic music and I think it is from there where the proper technique comes. The power about knowing how to listen to the sounds and making orchestral arrangements train you completely. It is compulsory to study piano even though you wanted to play trumpet, bass or whatever and that took me to the contemporary Jazz music and that is what I have always liked listening to, even at present.”

We have talked about art and its influences thus far, but it is time to tell us the way Samuel is at home.

“I have almost always had each month, a day where I wake up something that occurs at home. That is what I could not have studied from architecture. I have made many transformations and I built them from zero. I made myself the designs.”

“I like cooking everything, sea food, a paste which is the knowledge learnt from my father that passed me on the cook’s legacy.”

“I am also very fond of movie, photography. I respect the sound bands a lot and I do think that no one could match the process of creating music for a film as that increased your level. You have to study the script and it is really difficult when you have a scene that lasts a minute and a hundredth. It is certainly difficult to compose a melody without happening it, taking into account that could give the related continuity or the opposed effect, as well.”

“It is a hard work because that is the way the feelings are expressed, but it is a very rewarding outcome in the end.”



Now that we are talking about the film world, what is your relation with the audiovisual world?

"I do like the Cuban movie, the Latin American movie as it is the most complete art due to its many platforms. I believe that music keeps that path through video clips due to there is a screen and being there. The audience watches constantly and the tendency about listening to music has been lost, especially in the public places and that is why to be allied to the cameras, videos through 4K and HD formats and they should really have certain quality to be able to show them worldwide."

At this point, I imagine that you have many things to be fulfilled. Which are them?

"I have many illusions and of them is about the Van Van band never to disappear. That is all a dream and a demand because we are not going to be alive forever. Moreover, my own son could join us or even not, however, all it is certainly a dream due to the band is already an additional emblem for the Cuban."

"Nevertheless, if you asked about a dream of mine, it would be playing at a symphony orchestra of London as I would really like it."

What else would you like to do as a musician, apart the Van Van band?

“To be honest, I have right now some projects which have anything to do with the Van Van orchestra that takes lots of my time, but I think Samuel Formell sharing with friends, musicians playing Jazz, funk and songs in English, lots of improvisation with cords and local bands and doing much more and feel attached to the music that made me grow, is certainly my debt.”



Time becomes an enemy sometimes. How do you use it to do many things?

“It is difficult, the musical instrument that I play the people often do not know how it is really is. My work is like the one carried out by three musicians at the same time and not only from the musical point of view but also physically one, the I have had to deal with it, I almost undergo a surgery due to my two elbows were affected, so if I had a surgery, the Van Van band would not be performing for four months and there was not any certainty about them being properly recovered after the physical therapy treatment. It was then decided to add mother cells into them with a related treatment for almost a month and I ended up really well. “

“I start here because in my personal life, apart from the band I have always to have a space for physical exercises and trying to be fit which is a habit I had not before.”

“In addition, I have to deal with all the family, I am the father of my nephew, who is the little brother who left my father and other relatives like my sister Elisa, my sister Paloma, taking into account that Juan Formell was the one who protected the family, even economically, so I have to keep doing the same so that they are all ok.”

“There is a moment when I read, do Yoga and I always find time to be focused, adapt myself to the music, interviews of television, and the videos of the rehearsals. The tours are really intense for us. We go and we waste sometime some time in cities where we do not know absolutely anyone, so I take advantage of any period of time to be with the family.”

“We wanted to know how was Juan Formell's Jazz. We insinuated first, we asked for it later and he sat down and began playing later and we had not another option other than sitting down and enjoying from that show and drinking coffee.”