

Ray Vega

A native of the South Bronx, Ray Vega is a veteran of salsa and Latin jazz bands of Tito Puente, Ray Barretto, Mongo Santamaria, Tito Nieves, and Celia Cruz to name a few. Ray has now established himself as one of the innovators of the new generation of Latin jazz players with his own fiery brand of real New York Latin Jazz - a true fusion of jazz repertoire and Latin rhythms. A multi-talented trumpeter, percussionist, composer, and arranger, he presents Latin jazz from a refreshingly original and contemporary perspective. His two recordings on the Concord Picante label, his self-titled debut Ray Vega, and Boperation, have been well received by critics, audiences and musicians alike.

Vega grew up immersed in the heart of two vibrant New York City music scenes: salsa and jazz. In addition to learning about these two musical styles with some of the great legends, he received his formal training, studying trumpet with Michael Lawrence, Stan Shafran, Laurie Frank, Richard Brezowski and Jerry Gonzales. He studied jazz harmony and improvisation with Susan Winder, Bobby Rogovin and Lonnie Hillyer and Afro-Caribbean percussionist Luis Bauzo.

A much in-demand musician, he has performed with Mongo Santamaria with whom he recorded three CD's, Mario Bauza's Afro Cuban Jazz Orchestra, including their first-ever European tour, and Ray Barretto and the New World Spirit. Vega was privileged to record two projects with this landmark group including the Grammy nominated Taboo. It was during his time with Barretto that Vega was called upon to join the Tito Puente Latin Jazz Orchestra, of which he is still lead trumpeter. Vega recorded with Puente's Orchestra many times over including the Grammy winning Mambo Birdland (RMM Records). He can also be heard on Conrad Herwig's Grammy nominated The Latin Side of Coltrane and Grammy winning Joe Henderson's The Joe Henderson Big Band. Vega has recently performed and recorded with Pete Escovedo; has been recently featured on Mr. Escovedo's recording E Music (Concord Records), and Nicholas Payton's Armstrong Centennial Celebration (Verve).

In addition to his busy sideman schedule, Vega has also been developing his own band with a weekly appearance at Kavehaz in NYC. The Ray Vega Latin Jazz Sextet has also performed at the American Museum of Natural History, the Museum of Modern Art (both in NYC), the Indianapolis Museum of Art (two years in a row), the San Jose Jazz Festival, The Blue Note and The Jazz Standard, Artsposure in Raleigh, NC, the Battery Park Salsa Series and the South Street Seaport/Heineken Latin Jazz Series. He performed at two benefits: a Benefit For Friends of Music and the Arts in Bedford, NY and The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families (his nine piece band will feature Dave Samuels and Steve Wilson). In December of 2000, Ray's Latin Jazz Quintet traveled to Tortola in the British Virgin Island for a concert and clinics, performed at the WBGO Members party and The Blue Note's Anniversary Party (NYC). Future performances include the Internationales JazzFestival Bern in Switzerland, the Puerto Rico Heineken Jazz Festival, and Latin Jazz Stravaganza in Hartford, CT. He continues his weekly series (over a year now) at Kavehaz in NYC on Wednesday nights.