

# Sammy Figueroa



It is rare for a successful, professional musician to make the transition from sideman to leader of his own band in what some might term "the middle years". Even more unlikely is that both of this leader's first two albums are each honored with Grammy Nominations. But since Sammy Figueroa became a leader in his own right the role has fit him comfortably, as if that was always his destiny. Sammy Figueroa is currently considered to be the most likely candidate to inherit the mantles of Mongo Santamaria and Ray Barretto as one of the world's greatest congueros. When Sammy plays percussion he tells a story, taking the listener on a journey. As leader of The Latin Jazz Explosion, he empowers his players and has created an ensemble that is astounding in its musical excitement. Sammy's famed sense of humor, ebullient personality, and open-heartedness are famous within the music industry and have further empowered him in his connection with musicians and audiences alike.

Sammy Figueroa was born in the Bronx, New York, the son of the well-known ballad singer Charlie Figueroa. His first professional experience came at the age of 18 with the band of bassist Bobby Valentin. During this time he cofounded the innovative fusion Brazilian/Latin group Raices, which broke ground for many of today's bands.

After releasing a classic album on Atlantic Records, the band moved to New York where Sammy was soon discovered by jazz flautist Herbie Mann. Tours and albums with the Brecker Brothers, Average White Band and John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra followed, culminating in recordings and tours with the legendary Miles Davis.

Since then Sammy has played with a multitude of distinguished jazz and Latin jazz artists including Sonny Rollins, Dave Sanborn, Quincy Jones, Dave Grusin, George Benson, Chet Baker, Stanley Clarke, Grover Washington, Jr.,

**2007 Grammy Nomination  
for Best Latin Jazz Album  
"The Magician"**

**2006 Grammy Nomination  
for Best Latin Jazz Album  
"....and Sammy Walked In"**

**Best Jazz/Fusion  
Percussionist  
Drum! Magazine**

"Hopefully Sammy Figueroa will be able to keep this accessible and swinging group together for many years, keeping alive the traditions of both Art Blakey and Tito Puente."

**Scott Yanow  
All Music**

"An immensely enjoyable CD... All in all, "And Sammy Walked In" is a wonderful addition to Figueroa's long resume"

**John Anderson  
Miami New Times**

"Figueroa and his Latin Jazz Explosion burst out of the gate with energy and verve, bristling with chops-busting unison lines and fiery solo exchanges. Figueroa adds fire to the proceedings with his precise, rapid-fire conga playing"

**Bill Milkowski  
JazzTimes**

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Al Jarreau, Lena Horne, Joe Williams, Mark Murphy, Mike Mainieri, Nestor Torres, Chico O'Farrill, Mike Stern, Dave Grusin, Chuck Loeb, Bobby Watson, Dave Valentin, Arturo Sandoval, Paquito D'Rivera, Luis Salinas, Ruben Blades, Eddie Palmieri, Bobby Valentin, Nestor Torres, Tania Maria and Michel Camillo, (who wrote the song "And Sammy Walked In" in his honor, which Sammy took and made the title track on his first album) Sammy also played with most of the world's major pop stars. He appeared on Mariah Carey's MTV Unplugged album and video and has recorded or performed with James Taylor, Dr. John, Mick Jagger, David Bowie, Celine Dion, Blues Traveler, Natalie Merchant, David Lee Roth, Hall & Oates, Joe Cocker, Rickie Lee Jones, Annie Lennox and many, many more.

Sammy has also played on many classic r & b hits such as Chic's "We Are Family", "Luther Vandross' "The Night I Fell In Love" and Ashford and Simpson's "Solid Like A Rock". He also recorded with Whitney Houston, Anita Baker, Grace Jones, James Ingram, Diana Ross, Roberta Flack, Aretha Franklin and can be heard on most of the Nile Roger and Bernard Edwards disco hits such as Chic and Sister Sledge.

In the spirit of experimentation he has recorded and appeared with "New Age" artists such as Paul Winter, Glen Velez and Michael Schrieve and some of Europe's greatest electronica artists, including Vienna's dZihan & Kamien and the UK's Mark De Clive-Lowe. He has also worked with Wynton Marsalis on an educational program for children, taught a shaman/percussion workshop called Thunder Drums and taught numerous clinics and master classes in connection with his endorsement of Pearl Percussion.

Sammy's sounds and rhythms are also featured on "Percussionworks" (Big Fish Audio), a highly popular sampling and "beats" collection used by producers and recording engineers throughout the world. He also recorded his own "Sammyworks" a sampling album of loops and breaks for the use of d.j.s and producers, using his extensive knowledge of rhythms and vast collection of percussion instruments.



In 1993 Sammy was invited to play at the Havana Plaza Jazz Festival where he played with Cuban bands such as Irakere and Grupo Afro-Cuba. This trip had a profound effect on his life and music, leading to a number of research trips to Cuba, teaching at Percuba, Cuba's distinguished festival of percussion. Soon after he formed a production company, Faro Figueroa Productions, with producer/musician Rachel Faro, later to become the co-producer of his own Grammy-nominated albums. Faro Figueroa soon became one of recording industry's most promising progressive Latin record producers, with releases out on major and

independent labels, including the historic albums "Una Forma Mas" and "De Vacaciones" by the phenomenal Cuban a cappella group Vocal Sampling (Sire/Elektra), "Cantos: Lazaro Ros con Mezcla" (Intuition), "Cuarto Espacio", featuring Omar Hernandez and Ernan Lopez-Nussa (Ashé), and the INDI award-winning "Celebremos Navidad" (Universal/Ashé) by cuatro legend Yomo Toro. As both musician and producer he appeared on "Una Sola Casa", an album by Ruben Blades' band, Seis Del Solar.

In 2001 Sammy relocated to Miami and joined the band of Raul Midon, a remarkable singer/songwriter who has since signed with Manhattan/EMI and become a worldwide phenomena. In South Florida Sammy discovered that he could tap into a rich treasure trove of Latin jazz virtuosos from Cuba, Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia and Argentina who were developing an alternative to New York's Latin jazz scene. In September 2002 Sammy debuted his own Latin jazz band, Sammy Figueroa and his Latin Jazz Explosion, at the Hollywood Jazz Festival, with special guests Dave Valentin and Ray Vega.

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Since that time Sammy and his band have become the most exciting group in Latin jazz today. His first album, "And Sammy Walked In" (on Savant Records), included music by Michel Camillo, Hermeto Pascual, Eugene Uman and trumpetplayer John Lovell. His second album, "The Magician", (also on Savant Records), features spectacular original compositions by Venezuelans Silvano Monasterios and Gabriel Vivas alongside jazz classics such as Seven Steps and Cedar Walton's Firm Roots. Both albums received Grammy Nominations for Best Latin Jazz Album. The group has appeared at countless festivals and clubs, including the San Juan Heineken Jazz Festival, the JVC Jazz Festival Miami, New York's Jazz Standard, Cleveland's Nighttown, Sammy is also a radio personality. His show "Latin Jazz Quarter", every Friday afternoon on 88.9 FM Serious Jazz Radio in Miami, Florida is one of the station's most popular. On this popular show Sammy has taken the definition of "Latin Jazz" to a new level, playing music from Turkey to Africa to Native American. Sammy has also been written about in several important books on music and its legends. His relationship with Miles Davis is described at length both in Miles' own words in his autobiography entitled "Miles" and in "The Last Miles: The Music of Miles Davis From 1980 - 1991" by George Cole. Anecdotes about Sammy are also included in Paquito D'Rivera's amusing book "My Sax Life" and Sammy has also been included in The Grove's Dictionary of Jazz.

Sammy endorses Pearl Percussion, Zildjian Cymbals, and Vic Firth Sticks. In addition, he also plays the ZenDrum, which mids the sampled sounds of Sammy's percussion, and a set of unusual steel pans called Panart HandPans.

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