

sammy figueroa

MASTER PERCUSSIONIST

Sammy Figueroa has long been regarded as one of the world's great musicians. As a much-admired percussionist he provided the rhythmical framework for hundreds of hits and countless recordings. Well-known for his versatility and professionalism, he is equally comfortable in a multitude of styles, from R & B to rock to pop to electronic to bebop to Latin to Brazilian to New Age. But Sammy is much more than a mere accompanist: when Sammy plays percussion he tells a story, taking the listener on a journey, and amazing audiences with both his flamboyant technique and his subtle nuance and phrasing. Sammy Figueroa is now considered to be the most likely candidate to inherit the mantles of **Mongo Santamaria** and **Ray Barretto** as one of the world's great *congueros*.

Sammy Figueroa was born in the Bronx, New York, the son of the well-known romantic singer **Charlie Figueroa**. His first professional experience came at the age of 18, while attending the University of Puerto Rico, with the band of bassist **Bobby Valentin**. During this time he co-founded the innovative Brazilian/Latin group **Raices**, which broke ground for many of today's fusion bands. Raices was signed to a contract with Atlantic Records and Sammy returned to New York, where he was discovered by the great flautist **Herbie Mann**. Sammy immediately became one of the music world's hottest players and within a year he had appeared with **John McLaughlin**, the **Brecker Brothers** and many of the world's most famous pop artists.

Since then, in a career spanning over thirty years, Sammy has played with a multitude of distinguished artists including **Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, Chet Baker, Dave Sanborn, Quincy Jones, the Brecker Brothers** (for 12 years!), **Dave Grusin, Michel Camilo** (who wrote the tune 'And Sammy Walked In' in his honor), **George Benson, Stanley Clarke, Grover Washington, Jr., Al Jarreau, Lena Horne, Joe Williams, Mark Murphy, Mike Mainieri, Nestor Torres, Chico O'Farrill, Mike Stern, Dave Valentin, Arturo Sandoval, Paquito D'Rivera, Ruben Blades, Eddie Palmieri, Tania Maria, Jorge Ben Jor, Daniela Mercury, Tom Jones, Mariah Carey** (in her multi-million selling MTV Unplugged) **James Taylor, Dr. John, Mick Jagger, Average White Band, David Bowie, Celine Dion, Natalie Merchant, Luther Vandross, Ashford & Simpson, Anita Baker, Roberta Flack, David Lee Roth, Hall & Oates, Joe Cocker, Rickie Lee Jones, Annie Lennox, Paul Winter, Glen Velez** and many, many more.

As unlikely as it may be for a successful professional musician such as Sammy to make the transition from sideman to leader in what some might term "the middle years", in the new millennium Sammy has firmly established himself as a bandleader and artist in his own right and the role has fit him comfortably, as if that was always his destiny. Both of his first two albums have been honored with **Grammy™ Nominations**, his devoted following is rapidly growing, and Sammy's famed sense of humor, ebullient personality and open-heartedness, long famous within the music industry, have further empowered him in his connection with musicians and audiences alike.

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As leader of The Latin Jazz Explosion, Sammy hosts an ensemble that is astounding in its musical excitement. His first album, *“And Sammy Walked In”* (on Savant Records), co-produced by longtime production partner **Rachel Faro**, included music by **Michel Camilo** (who wrote the title track in Sammy’s honor), **Hermeto Pascual**, **Eugene Uman** and trumpet player **John Lovell**. His second album, *“The Magician”*, (also on Savant Records), again co-produced with Rachel Faro, features spectacular original compositions by Venezuelans **Silvano Monasterios** and **Gabriel Vivas** alongside jazz classics such as Miles Davis’ *‘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 and Iridium Jazz Club, Milwaukee’s Pabst Theatre, Boston’s Sculler’s, Palm Beach’s Sun Fest and the Burghausen Jazz Festival in Germany.

In addition to his work as a musician, Sammy has also produced or co-produced several important jazz and world music albums, including his own two Grammy-nominated releases. In partnership with producer/musician **Rachel Faro** (**Odetta**, **Eddie Palmieri**, **Bobby Sanabria** and others), trips to Cuba and Venezuela have led to historic productions such as *“Una Forma Mas”* and *“De Vacaciones”* by the phenomenal Cuban a cappella group **Vocal Sampling**, authentic Afro-Cuban rhythms set to modern jazz arrangements in *“Cantos: Lazaro Ros con Mezcla”*, spectacular Cuban jazz recorded in Venezuela with *“Cuarto Espacio”*, featuring **Omar Hernandez** and **Ernan Lopez-Nussa**, and the classic *“Celebremos Navidad”* by cuatro legend and Fania Allstar **Yomo Toro**. He also participated as musician and producer on *‘Una Solo Casa’*, an album by **Ruben Blades’** band, **Seis Del Solar**.

Gifted with a warm speaking voice and a fanatic knowledge of jazz, Sammy has also found a natural vocation as a radio host. *“The Sammy Figueroa Show”* every Monday morning at 11 AM EST on 88.9 FM Serious Jazz Radio in Miami, Florida is one of the station’s most popular shows, with fans that stream it on the internet throughout the world. On this highly entertaining show Sammy shares his enthusiasm for all kinds of music, playing everything from Latin Jazz to Afro-Cuban chants to Celtic, Turkish music, African, and Native American music.

Sammy has also been working closely with **Larry Rosen**, the legendary founder of GRP Records, on his highly successful Jazz Roots concert series. In 2008 Sammy appeared as a special guest in a tribute to **Tito Puente** and the **Machito Orchestra**. In December 2009 he was a featured artist with the **Dave Grusin Orchestra**, also featuring **Jon Secada**, **Patti Austin**, **Gary Burton**, **Arturo Sandoval** and the **Henry Mancini Orchestra**. A live recording of this show, produced by **Phil Ramone** is to be released on Concord Records.

In May 2010 Sammy was invited to participate on *“Miles Español”*, a tribute to Miles Davis produced by **Bob Belden**. This recording also features **Chick Corea**, **Jack DeJohnette**, **Eddie Gomez**, **Alex Acuña**, **Jorge Pardo**, **Howard Johnson**, **Paquito D’Rivera**, **Carlos Benavent**, **Cristina Pato** and many other great musicians.

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Sammy has recently had the great honor of being invited to rejoin **Sonny Rollins** and his band, which includes guitarist **Russell Malone**, bassist **Bob Cranshaw** and drummer **Kobie Watkins**. In 2010 Sammy toured Japan and Europe (twice!) with Sonny and also appeared on September 10, 2010 as a featured musician at Sonny's historic **80th Birthday Celebration** at New York's **Beacon Theatre**. Sammy has received many honors in his career: in addition to receiving two **Grammy Nominations** for **Best Latin Jazz Album** with his own albums, he has twice been named **NARAS Percussionist of the Year**, he has received several **Drummie Awards** from *Drummer's Magazine*, and in 2010 was proclaimed **Best Jazz Musician in Miami** by the *Miami New Times*.

Sammy appears 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 abound in **Paquito D'Rivera's** amusing book "**My Sax Life**". Sammy has also been included in *The Grove's Dictionary of Jazz*.

Sammy Figueroa and His Latin Jazz Explosion's third album, "**Urban Nature**" shall be released on February 15, 2011 on K7 Records.

Sammy endorses **Pearl Percussion**, **Sabian 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**.