

PONCHO SANCHEZ

GRAMMY-winning bandleader, conguero, and percussionist Poncho Sanchez is among the most influential percussionists in jazz. For more than four decades, he's stirred up a fiery stew of straightahead jazz, gritty soul music, and infectious melodies and rhythms from a variety of Latin American and South American sources. Throughout his career, Sanchez has held aloft the torch lit by such innovators as Mongo Santamaria, Tito Puente and Cal Tjader, embraced by each of those icons and entrusted to carry forward the traditions of Latin Jazz.

Sanchez was born in Laredo, Texas, in 1951 to a large Mexican-American family, but grew up in a suburb of Los Angeles, where he was raised on an unusual cross section of sounds that included straightahead jazz, Latin jazz and American soul. By his teen years, his musical consciousness had been solidified by the likes of John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Cal Tjader, Mongo Santamaria, Wilson Pickett, and James Brown. Along the way, he taught himself to play guitar, flute, drums and timbales, but eventually settled on the congas. Sanchez landed a permanent spot in Cal Tjader's band in 1975, and remained with him until the bandleader's death in 1982. Sanchez then shifted his focus to his own group, which he had formed in 1980, and signed with powerhouse label Concord for the release of 'Sonando', beginning a musical partnership that has spanned nearly four decades and yielded more than two dozen recordings.

After more than two decades in music, Sanchez's efforts paid off when his album 'Latin Soul' received a GRAMMY award as Best Latin Album of 1999. Throughout the next decade, Sanchez continued to record, releasing such albums as 2000's 'Soul of the Conga', 2001's 'Latin Spirits', 2003's 'Out of Sight!', 2005's 'Do It!', 2007's 'Raise Your Hand', and 2009's hard bop-influenced 'Psychedelic Blues'. In 2011, he paid tribute to the innovative Afro-Cuban recordings of Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pozo by teaming up with trumpeter Terence Blanchard for 'Chano y Dizzy!' Sanchez followed that up with a vibrant concert set with his Latin Jazz Band entitled 'Live in Hollywood'. With his most recent album 'Trane's Delight', Poncho Sanchez continues to honor the giants whose music has helped shape his own, while building upon the rich legacy they've left behind. As this celebratory and heartfelt album exemplifies, he's long since joined the ranks of the luminaries to whom he pays such profound tribute. Sanchez's deeply personal reimagining of the jazz canon, as well as his own spirited original compositions, affirm his place at the forefront of Latin Jazz's trailblazers.

Poncho has recently completed his 31st recording, "Live at The Belly Up Tavern" in Solana Beach, California out March 28, 2025.