

—Slug:.....COMM-0855.arts.VJC_Zenon
—Contributor..... Eugene Uman
—Contributor email..... vtjazz@gmail.com
—For section..... The Arts
—Format..... Column
—Dateline..... Brattleboro
—Article Number:..... 43138



Notes from editor (not for publication):

Thanks, Eugene! I didn't go nuts with checking the podcast quotes. —J



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 'Stay hungry, stay focused, stay passionate, and be ready'

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 Combining virtuosity with heart, Grammy Award-
3 winning Miguel Zenón brings his quartet to Brattleboro

####END SUBHED####

4 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

5 THE VERMONT JAZZ CENTER is honored to present Miguel
6 Zenón in concert with his long-standing quartet on Saturday,
7 March 7, at 7:30 p.m.

8 The Grammy Award-winning saxophonist will appear
9 with Luís Perdomo on piano, Matt Penman on bass, and Henry
10 Cole on drums. With the exception of Penman, this group has
11 been together for more than 25 years.

12 In an advertising profile for music instrument
13 manufacturer and supplier D’Addario, Zenón has [discussed](#) the
14 positive attributes of working with the same people for so many
15 years, saying this quartet is “always there, always game.”

16 “It doesn’t matter what I’m working on, the level of
17 difficulty, the level of commitment — they’re always there. It’s not
18 necessarily the norm these days, because the industry pushes us
19 to present ‘all-star’ bands. It’s good to have a vehicle you can
20 trust and conceptualize for — it’s been a blessing.”

21 The music played by this band is consequential, heady,
22 and heartfelt. Zenón is known for creating projects that reflect his
23 love for the music, culture, and people of his native Puerto Rico.

24 In an [interview](#) with the *CODA* podcast (which explores
25 the arts of Puerto Rico), he stated: “I have a close relationship
26 with Puerto Rico — it is my principal inspiration and serves as a
27 bridge to understanding and portraying my true self.”

28 Nonetheless, Zenón is quick to point out that his varied
29 discography, although greatly informed by his knowledge of Latin
30 music, is broad.

31 In a profile of jazz artists profiled on the Grammy
32 Awards’ [website](#), he said: “I consider myself a jazz musician who
33 happens to be from Latin America.” His influences stem from the
34 language invented by Charlie Parker (bebop) and the post-bebop
35 stylings of John Coltrane (especially the albums *Crescent* and *A
36 Love Supreme*). They are also strongly affected by his fascination
37 with complex rhythms.

38 Before his ascension as a leader, Zenón was mentored by
39 the legendary Panamanian pianist and composer Danilo Pérez.
40 He then went on to record and study with another of his mentors,
41 David Sánchez.

42 From 2004 to 2019, Zenón was a founding member of
43 the eight-piece SFJAZZ Collective, with whom he recorded the
44 music of Chick Corea, Stevie Wonder, and Thelonious Monk and
45 others, arranging a healthy selection of their epic charts.

46 In the early 2000s he performed and recorded with
47 percussionist Ray Barretto, bassist Charlie Haden, the Mingus Big
48 Band, and many others, demonstrating the extreme breadth of his
49 abilities and interests.

50 Zenón's discography as a leader began in 2002 with the
51 prescient recording *Looking Forward*, and then he embraced
52 deep dives into such topics as *Law Years: The Music of Ornette*
53 *Coleman*, *Alma Adentro: The Puerto Rican Songbook*, and two
54 volumes of *El Arte del Bolero*. (Volume 2 won him and pianist
55 Luís Perdomo a Best Latin Jazz Grammy in 2024.)

56 To date, Zenón has recorded 18 commercially available
57 recordings as a leader. He has established himself as an artist
58 who cuts his own path and, in doing so, has earned great critical
59 acclaim.

60 * * *

61 AFTER GRADUATING high school, Zenón had to choose
62 between a scholarship to Recinto Universitario de Mayagüez (in
63 Puerto Rico) to study engineering or the Berklee College of Music
64 in Boston to study music.

65 Music won out, but his love for math, engineering, and
66 disciplined study have served him well, and these focuses
67 continue to inform the way he embarks on new creative
68 endeavors.

69 In the interview with D'Addario ,Zenón discussed his
70 methodology: "Through all the different projects that I've made,
71 what I really enjoyed is this idea of focusing on one project or
72 one source of information, be it something that has to do with
73 Puerto Rico, or something else that interests me[...]. That research
74 part, for me, is as important as writing the music."

75 Zenón's curiosity, discipline, and passion have led to an
76 associate professorship at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
77 He is also affiliated with Columbia University, where he is
78 involved with the Zuckerman Mind Brain Behavior Institute. In
79 2008, Zenón received the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship,
80 commonly known as the "genius grant."

81 The MacArthur website states that Zenón was granted the
82 Award “for expanding the boundaries of Latin and jazz music
83 through his elegant and innovative musical collages. As both a
84 saxophonist and a composer, Zenón demonstrates an astonishing
85 mastery of old and new jazz idioms, from Afro-Caribbean and
86 Latin American rhythmical concepts to free and avant-garde
87 jazz.”

88 In 2022, he received an honorary doctorate from La
89 Universidad del Sagrado Corazón in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

90 * * *

91 WHAT MAKES Zenón’s music so important, so interesting,
92 and so listenable?

93 Three attributes are consistent throughout his body of
94 work: the intentional quality of his sound, his unfathomable
95 attention to rhythmic detail, and his heart connection to the
96 music and to the community.

97 Zenón is a person who “pays it forward,” using his
98 involvement with music as a direct way to benefit his chosen
99 communities and his audience.

100 Eunice Mabel Santana, host of the *CODA* podcast,
101 described Zenón’s visit to her village in Puerto Rico several years
102 earlier as a life-changing experience. She is not alone. In 2011
103 Zenón used the money he received from the MacArthur
104 fellowship to launch Caravana Cultural, a jazz awareness
105 program he designed to eventually visit all 78 municipalities of
106 Puerto Rico.

107 In a conversation with Melissa Aldana, a saxophonist
108 from Chile, Zenón stated, “I wanted to go to places where people
109 wouldn’t normally have access to this kind of music... to
110 eliminate the ‘taboos’ around who should listen to jazz.”

111 Thus, Caravana’s programming pays tribute to major
112 figures from the jazz canon like Miles Davis, Duke Ellington, and
113 Keith Jarrett. The free day-long events include pre-concert
114 educational sessions, a performance with Zenón’s quartet, and
115 the on-stage inclusion of area youth musicians.

116 Other indications of his community involvement include
117 Zenón’s participation in a U.S. State Department Jazz
118 Ambassadors tour to West Africa, his continued work with the
119 music school of his youth, and a recent commission by SFJAZZ.

120 For that program, he conducted more than 50 in-depth
121 interviews with immigrants from the San Francisco area, research
122 that served to inspire the compositions he created for his
123 recording the *Golden City* suite.

124 His achieved his goal of bringing awareness to the
125 tremendous impact that the immigrant communities have added
126 to the rich culture of the Bay Area. The resultant recording was
127 nominated for a 2025 Grammy award for Best Large Jazz
128 Ensemble.

129 * * *

130 COME LISTEN to the Miguel Zenón Quartet and find out
131 why Zenón told Dr. Jazz that “the one piece of advice that I tell
132 myself every day is to stay hungry, stay focused, stay passionate,
133 and be ready. Because when that door opens, you want to be at
134 your best.”

135 Zenón will fulfill this musical promise at the Vermont
136 Jazz Center.

137 For those unable to attend in person, check out the VJC’s
138 livestream at vtjazz.org. Thanks to sponsorship engagement, VJC
139 operates using a subsidized ticket system, which lowers the cost
140 per ticket to \$25 even though the value per seat is more than
141 double that amount. Admission is \$25 general admission (sliding
142 scale).

143 Tickets can be reserved online at vtjazz.org, or by phone
144 at 802-254-9088, ext. 1. For those needing mobility access, make
145 arrangements by emailing or calling to schedule a time for one of
146 our staff to meet your party.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

147 **EUGENE UMAN** is director of the Vermont Jazz Center.
148 *The Commons'* Deeper Dive column gives artists, arts
149 organizations, and other nonprofits elbow room to write in first
150 person and be unabashedly opinionated, passionate, and
151 analytical about their own creative work and events.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

####BEGIN MAXISSUE####

152 0

####END MAXISSUE####

LINKS:

####BEGIN LINKS####

153

####END LINKS####

VIDEO:

####BEGIN VIDEO####

154

####END VIDEO####

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

####BEGIN LOGLINE####

155

####END LOGLINE####