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NEWS RELEASE

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Renowned Saxophonist and Composer Miguel Zenón Releases *Música de Las Américas*, Inspired by the History of the American Continent

Out August 26, 2022 on Miel Music, *Música de Las Américas* features all-new music from Zenón for his long-time working quartet plus master percussionists from his native Puerto Rico

Album release celebration **August 23 – 28** at **The Village Vanguard**, NYC

“This music is inspired by the history of the American continent: not only before European colonization, but also by what’s happened since—cause and effect,” says **Miguel Zenón** of his latest album of all original works, *Música de Las Américas*. The music grew out of Zenón’s passion for the history of the American continent, and the resulting album pays tribute to its diverse cultures while also challenging modern assumptions about who and what “America” is.

Featuring his longstanding quartet of pianist **Luis Perdomo**, bassist **Hans Glawischnig**, and drummer **Henry Cole**, *Música de Las Américas* represents a broadening of scope and ambition for Zenón, who is best known for combining cutting-edge modernism with the folkloric and traditional music of Puerto Rico. In realizing such a wide-ranging project, Zenón engaged the illustrious Puerto Rican ensemble **Los Pleneros de La Cresta** to contribute their unmistakable *plena* sound to the album, with additional contributions by master musicians **Paoli Mejías** on percussion, **Daniel Díaz** on congas, and **Victor Emmanuelli** on barril de bomba.

Zenón’s compositions on *Música de Las Américas* reflect the dynamism and complexity of America’s indigenous cultures, their encounters with European colonists, and the resulting historical implications. Zenón immersed himself in these topics during the pandemic, reading classics like Eduardo Galeano’s *Venas Abiertas de América Latina* (*Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*), which details Western exploitation of South America’s resources and became the inspiration for Zenón’s “**Venas Abiertas**.”

Other sources of inspiration include Sebastián Robiou Lamarche’s “**Táinos y Caribes**”, referring to the two major societies who inhabited the Caribbean prior to European colonization and who are the subject of the album’s opener. “They were the two predominant societies but were very different: the Taínos were a more passive agricultural society while the Caribes were warriors who lived for conquest,” says Zenón, who captures the clashing of the societies in the interlocking rhythms of the piece.

Following the thread of indigenous Caribbean societies, “**Navegando (Las Estrellas Nos Guían)**” pays homage to the seafaring culture that existed across the region. “One thing that blew my mind was how they could travel the sea at long distances just using canoes while being guided by the stars,” says Zenón. “That opens conversations about what’s ‘archaic’ versus what’s ‘advanced’ in terms of scientific achievement between the ‘New World’ and ‘Old World.’”

Zenón referred to the star formations used for navigation by those societies as the musical foundation of the song, which prominently features the percussion and vocals of **Los Pleneros de la Cresta**, who sing and accompany the titular chorus: “Navegando vengo, sigo a las estrellas.”

Possibly the most challenging piece on the album in its harmonic dissonance and complexity, **“Opresión y Revolución”** evokes the tension and release of revolutions on the American continent, notably the Haitian Revolution among others. Featuring the percussion of **Paoli Mejías** matched with the percussive piano work of Perdomo, the piece also reflects the influence of Haitian vodou music, which Zenón was heavily exposed to while working with drummer Ches Smith and his ensemble “We All Break.”

Although for many the term “empire” brings to mind the contemporary Western world, Zenón composed **“Imperios”** with the various indigenous empires of America in mind, including the Incas, Mayans, and Aztecs. “They were some of the most advanced societies at their time; as a matter of fact, they were in some ways more advanced than what was happening in Europe in terms of contemporary mathematics and astronomy, society and politics,” says Zenón. “There was something there already that was really advanced, and it makes me think about what could have been: what would have come out of that?” The melody derives from Zenón’s transcription of music from a ceremony of Aztec descendants, which is the counterpart to the rhythmic structure of the song.

“Bambula” features percussion virtuoso **Victor Emmanuelli**, whom Zenón lauds for pushing the musical envelope as a bandleader in his own right. The term “bambula” refers to a dance that was brought over by African slaves to the Americas. Over time, bambula became the rhythm commonly referred to as “habanera,” which is found in much of Latin American music today. Here, Zenón captures the feeling of connection across time and space that is carried by this single rhythmic cell:

“It’s a thread from New Orleans to Brazil to Central America back to Africa, across all these eras from the past to contemporary pop,” says Zenón. “For me, I wanted it to feel like you’re out at the dance, but at the same time hearing this more modern harmony and melody.”

In highlighting these connections across geographical regions, Zenón also returns to a major theme throughout the album: the conception of America not as a country—that is, only referring to the modern United States—but as a continent. **“América, el Continente”** makes that point clear while reminding listeners of the political implications of the United States assuming ownership of the term “America,” with its subtle erasure of the remaining Western hemisphere.

“Antillano,” named for the residents of the Antilles, showcases what Zenón is best known for: bringing together past and present in a forward-thinking, musically satisfying way. Ending the album on an optimistic note, the piece emulates aspects of contemporary dance music while serving as a feature for **Daniel Díaz** on congas. Some odd-meter surprises may fly past the ear of a casual listener, but they do so without any interruption to the musical flow so naturally conveyed by Zenón’s quartet.

In confronting often challenging historical topics on *Música de Las Américas*, Zenón has created a masterwork, whose musical delights will inspire and uplift while spurring a conversation about the problematic power dynamics across the American continent. The premise that modern jazz cannot be both grooving and emotionally resonant to the casual listener while formally and intellectually compelling is patently false, which Zenón proves here as he has time and again throughout his career.

About Miguel Zenón

A multiple Grammy® nominee and Guggenheim and MacArthur Fellow, Zenón is one of a select group of musicians who have masterfully balanced and blended the often-contradictory poles of innovation and tradition. Widely considered one of the most groundbreaking and influential saxophonists of his generation, Zenón has also developed a unique voice as a composer and as a conceptualist, concentrating his efforts on perfecting a fine mix between Jazz and his many influences. Born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Zenón has recorded and toured with a wide variety of musicians including Charlie Haden, Fred Hersch, David Sánchez, Danilo Pérez, Kenny Werner, Bobby Hutcherson and The SFJAZZ Collective.

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