

A conversation with Dafnis Prieto

By Colleen Clark

Dafnis Prieto, winner of a MacArthur “Genius” Fellowship, multiple Grammy and Latin Grammy nominations and one Grammy win, will not only perform at PASIC50 with his Sí o Sí Quartet but also present a clinic.

Since his arrival from Cuba to New York City in 1999, Prieto has shared the stage with jazz and Latin jazz luminaries including Michel Camilo, Eddie Palmieri, Steve Coleman, Roy Hargrove, and Henry Threadgill, among many others. Prieto’s sound is distinct and truly one of a kind. Leading multiple groups, from big band to duos, he has enjoyed a long tenure as a bandleader, drummer, and composer.

2025 is a celebratory year for Prieto. He released his tenth studio album, *3 Sides of the Coin*, featuring his Sí o Sí Quartet. He

also published his third book, *What are the Odds? A Journey on Latin Rhythms and Meters*, which will be the basis of his PASIC clinic. Aligning with his vision as a teacher, Prieto uses the organizational opportunities of book writing to supplement his artistry in the classroom. In 2015, Prieto joined the faculty at the University of Miami, where he leads the highly regarded Frost Latin Jazz Orchestra.

I had the distinct pleasure of speaking with Prieto ahead of his return to PASIC. We spoke about *3 Sides of the Coin*, the Sí o Sí Quartet, and what he’d like for audiences to take away from his performance and clinic at PASIC50. Don’t miss the opportunity to be in the rooms with this legend at either his clinic or his Thursday evening concert.

Colleen Clark: What would you like for audiences to take away from your clinic and performance at PASIC?

Dafnis Prieto: Well, I’m doing two performances. One is going to be a workshop, at which I will focus on my latest book, *What are the Odds?* It’s a book on my own interpretation of traditional rhythms, taking them through a journey of different meters. That’s one of the subjects I teach to my students at Frost School of Music. I believe that’s happening at noon.

Then in the evening I’m doing a performance with my Sí o Sí Quartet. We are going to concentrate on the music of the latest album, *3 Sides of the Coin*. This is the second album of this band; the first album was *Live at Jazz Standard*. The new one is differ-



Dafnis Prieto Sí o Sí Quartet

ent because it was done in the studio. It has a different sound and personnel, except the saxophonist and me stayed the same from the first incarnation of the *Sí o Sí* Quartet. So, it has a different personality and different music. The sound is also different because the sound really depends on many factors, especially on who is playing and the interpretations that those specific musicians add to the music. The difference also has to do with us playing different music. The musicians are Peter Apfelbaum, sax; Martin Bejerano, piano; Raul Reyes, bass; and myself on drums.

CC: You're experiencing so many milestones this year: 50 years on the planet, 25 years in the U.S., 10th studio album. Do you feel your writing has reflected that or do you feel the same in your writing and playing?

DP: I hope my writing has evolved [laughs]. I would like to believe so. It has evolved not because it's better or worse, but because it moves on. It's going in different directions. It doesn't have to be a better direction or a worse direction, or whatever direction it is; to me, music is storytelling. There are going to be different stories, different things in that time difference from one album to another, especially because the first one was done in 2009. So yes, it's different and it has evolved. I'm al-

ways writing music not only for this ensemble, but for many other ensembles of mine. I also write music for commissions and things like that. Composition is a big thing in my life.

CC: Did you have a great experience with NYO (National Youth Orchestra)? I saw they had premiered one of your pieces.

DP: Yes. They commissioned me to write a new piece for big band. I actually ended up playing. I went there [Carnegie Hall], and I just wanted to do that. It was very meaningful to me to share my point of view. I did a masterclass with them. They are all great kids, very talented. They do an amazing job with the direction of Sean Jones. He's doing a beautiful job with them.

CC: Do you feel that your level of artistry has influenced your teaching and vice versa? Have you felt the effect from both sides of the coin?

DP: I think it's all combined. It's very intrinsic. One thing goes with the other. Obviously, the education helps me organize ideas in order to deliver and present them to the students in different ways so they can take advantage of that information. As an artist, I don't think about those things. Those things might happen as a consequence of it. The artistry thing in terms of music is not only what you learn but also how you're able to process that and how you're able to reimagine and make it your own so that it becomes an artistic statement and not just a copy of a formula. In a nutshell, there are differences and similarities between one and the other because it's inside oneself. It's very difficult to compartmentalize that. I learned how to love education and teaching, but I think more as an artist than as an academic.

CC: Would you like to send a special message to *Percussive Notes* readers about your PASIC appearances?

DP: I am really looking forward to shar-

ing my music, knowledge, and information through this third book as well as music from *3 Sides of the Coin*. It's very exciting to share it to a big community of percussionists and drummers who I know are very interested in all of this information to help them organize music or make music. **PN**

INTERACTIVE DRUMMING

Arlene de Silva

Drumming Up Health with HealthRHYTHMS

HealthRHYTHMS group empowerment drumming is a well-established evidence-based creative music expression protocol supported by several peer-reviewed scientific publications focusing on biological and psychosocial outcomes in a host of subjects. The program is a cost-effective strategy for fostering group-based nurturing, support, camaraderie, and self-expression. The program is well-suited as a stress-reduction strategy that reduces depression, anger, and anxiety, and builds self-esteem, respect, and empathy. Research has documented statistically significant improvements in quality of life, including physical, emotional, and social benefits. HealthRHYTHMS is effective for individuals facing numerous health and psychosocial challenges. The one-hour program creates a non-threatening environment and is offered by a trained facilitator who guides individuals of all ages to take an active and meaningful role in their health and wellbeing. No prior musical knowledge is required to participate.

Lucho Pellegrini

IDC Washboard Session

This masterclass will first dive into the history of the washboard as an instrument, and then will cover patterns and rhythms that the washboard is well known for, as well as exploring the possibilities of adapting it to other music styles. This workshop is for EVERYONE. You'll learn how to keep a washboard rhythm, and we'll also work on improvisation.



Dafnis Prieto