



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 8, 2019

Chan Centre Presents Sensational New 13-Piece Cuban-American Big Band Featuring Instrumentalists of Irakere, Cubanismo, and Los Van Van Fame

Driving rhythms, punchy horns, and the soaring vocals of José “Pepito” Gómez are front and centre in this straight-from-the-heart project reminiscent of the golden era of Cuban music.

Vancouver, BC — The Chan Centre for the Performing Arts at the University of British Columbia presents a talented group of musicians bursting with energy and named for the Yoruba word that means “from the heart”, **Orquesta Akokán**, on Saturday November 16, 2019 at 8pm in the Chan Shun Concert Hall. Born of a visionary collaboration between producer **Jacob Plasse** and pianist **Michael Eckroth**, both New Yorkers, together with Cuban-born, New York City-based **José “Pepito Gómez”**, the trio recruited a group of Cuba’s top talents and recorded a stunning debut album at Havana’s famed Areito Studios. They have been wowing audiences with their tight-knit performances and classic yet contemporary mix of mambo and son ever since.

Their debut eponymous release, on Daptone Records, shines with fine-tuned attention to sonic detail and timeless and immaculate songcraft. It features the dazzling lead vocals of Gómez, the incendiary arrangements of music director Eckroth, also on piano, and seamless production by Plasse, also on tres. The 13-piece band is rounded out by **César Lopez** (Irakere, Los Van Van) on alto saxophone and flute; **Evaristo Denis** (Habana Sax) on baritone saxophone; **Jamil Schery** on tenor saxophone; **Heikel Fabián** (Cubanismo) and **Yoandy Argudin** on trombone; **Harold Madrigal** and **Reinaldo “Molote” Melian** (Maraca y Otra Visión) on trumpet; **Alex “Apolo” Ayala** on bass; **Reinier Mendoza** on timbales; and **Roberto Junior Vizcaino Torre** on the conga and bongos.

“The music that spilled from Havana bars and nightclubs in the 1940s and 50s was and still is incredibly infectious—you can’t help but get up and dance to it,” says Joyce Hinton, Co-Managing Director of the Chan Centre. “Being at one of Orquesta Akokán’s concerts is like taking a journey back in time to the heyday of the Tropicana cabaret. They have found a way to perfectly replicate that feeling, that vibe, while infusing the music with fresh arrangements and renewed energy. I can’t wait for Vancouver to experience this special project, featuring the skill of Cuba’s top players, for the very first time.”

Vocalist José “Pepito” Gómez moved from his native Cuba to New York City in 2008, where he met Jacob Plasse and Michael Eckroth, both mainstays of the city’s Latin music scene. Gómez began regularly subbing in on vocals for Los Hacheros, Plasse’s salsa band, and the two bonded over a shared passion for Cuban music. Eckroth, a talented jazz pianist, composer, and arranger, completed his PhD in Cuban piano solos of the 1940s and later met Plasse during a project they both worked on about the life of Celia Cruz. After discovering their shared musical affinity they began recording together, and Plasse subsequently founded Chulo Records, a label that would be focused on producing vintage Latin music. In the beginning, Plasse and Eckroth knew only that they wanted to find a way to work more with Gómez, but initial sessions with the three musicians in New York City fell flat. A somewhat impromptu trip to Havana in 2016, however, took their partnership to new heights.

The trio landed at Havana’s legendary Areito Studios, and the wood-paneled room where Buena Vista Social Club’s famed 1997 album was recorded, along with virtually every other notable Cuban recording of the last 75 years. Gómez and Plasse had invited some of the island’s most ferocious and pedigreed players, both old and young, to the studio to explore some of Eckroth’s arrangements. The enthusiasm and combined talent of these collected instrumentalists, the passion and knowledge of the Americans in their midst, and the inspirational

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setting of Areito led to a hugely successful recording session and the formation of the backbone for Orquesta Akokán. Says Plasse of that initial time spent as a group in the studio, “It’s a cliché, but these [Cuban] musicians have this tradition so deeply ingrained and understand the phrasing and rhythm on a cellular-like level. And they were so into it! The magic came from the players, and the room. I have never heard anything like those saxes playing in that room—there is a power and fullness that can’t really be described, but luckily it’s right there on the recording.”

That recording of all original songs was sent to Daptone Records, the generous tastemakers responsible for the likes of Charles Bradley, Antibalas, and Sharon Jones, who knew immediately that it was significant and signed on for its release in 2018. The acclaimed collection of songs features robust, time-tested musical architectures of Cuban son and mambo with hints of salsa dura, and are modernized through a synthesis of the rich compositional styles of Havana, New York, and beyond. Says Plasse, “We’re not trying to recreate a moment in history, but we’re trying to draw inspiration from an era that was really rich, especially harmonically, melodically, and rhythmically, and use those ideas now to create new music.”

Orquesta Akokán made their US debut in July 2018, have played Lincoln Center, and were nominated for a 2018 Grammy Award in the Best Tropical Album category.

Chan Centre Connects Events (chancentre.com/connects)

Programmed in conjunction with Chan Centre performances, exploring the role of arts and artists in society.

- **Pre-show Talk with Ramón (Arturo) Antonio Victoriano-Martinez – Saturday November 16, 7:15pm in the Royal Bank Cinema at the Chan Centre.** Dr. Arturo Victoriano, UBC Associate Professor in the Department of French, Hispanic & Italian Studies, discusses the ways in which Cuban music has influenced a variety of genres including jazz, flamenco, salsa, and soul.

About the Chan Centre for Performing Arts at UBC (chancentre.com)

Since 1997, the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts has earned an international reputation for its striking design, stellar acoustics, and exceptional programming. Artists, critics, and patrons alike are unanimous in their praise of the facility, winning it a place among North America's top-rated performing arts spaces. Featuring three unique venues—the Chan Shun Concert Hall, the Telus Studio Theatre, and the Royal Bank Cinema—the Chan Centre is a vital part of UBC campus and community life where artistic and academic disciplines merge to inspire new perspectives on the world around us. Past performers and speakers include Wynton Marsalis, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Renée Fleming, Dan Savage, Yo-Yo Ma, Jane Goodall, Herbie Hancock, Lila Downs, and Anoushka Shankar.

LISTING INFORMATION

Date:	Chan Centre Presents Orquesta Akokán Saturday November 16, 2019 at 8pm
Ticket Prices:	From \$46
Address:	Chan Centre for the Performing Arts University of British Columbia 6265 Crescent Road Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1
Box Office:	604-822-2697 / chancentre.com Open Tue–Sat, 12pm–5pm
Website:	chancentre.com
Link to Artist Photos:	chancentre.com/press-downloads/

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