

# DAVE SAMUELS / CARIBBEAN JAZZ PROJECT

## Profile

Dave Samuels has established himself as the top mallet player of his generation. He is recognized for his fresh new sound and creative approach to both the vibraphone and marimba. Founder of the Caribbean Jazz Project and front man of this Latin jazz collective in its various configurations for the past 15 years, Samuels has demonstrated his versatility and gained worldwide recognition since the early years of his career by performing and recording with a broad scope of artists ranging from Gerry Mulligan, Oscar Peterson, Chet Baker, Stan Getz, the Yellowjackets, Pat Metheny, Bruce Hornsby, Frank Zappa, Spyro Gyra and many others.

Born in Waukegan, Illinois, in 1948, Samuels started playing drums at age six. He first discovered the sound of jazz vibes via the recordings of The MJQ with Milt Jackson.

“The guy for me who really defined vibraphone with a big band was Terry Gibbs,” Samuels recalls. “When I was a kid, I remember hearing these two records he made – *The Exciting Terry Gibbs Band* and *Explosion*. He had these great arrangements by Bill Holman, a great band of all the top L.A. musicians, and himself, right in the middle.

In the early 1970’s, Samuels moved to Boston to finish his studies at Boston University where he graduated with a degree in psychology. While in Boston, he played with Pat Metheny, John Scofield and Bill Frisell. He landed a touring gig with Gerry Mulligan in 1974 and moved to New York City where he started the ground breaking vibe/marimba duo Double Image with David Friedman.

Samuels began a lengthy association with Spyro Gyra in 1979 by appearing as a guest on some of their recordings. In 1982, he became a regular member of the band, where his sound became a pivotal trademark of the group. During his 15-year tenure with Spyro Gyra, the five-time GRAMMY® nominated group was named the Number One Contemporary Jazz Artist and Contemporary Jazz Group of the ‘80s by *Billboard* magazine.

In 1993, Samuels formed the Caribbean Jazz Project, the progressive Latin jazz combo whose original core of players included Samuels on vibes and marimba, Paquito D’Rivera on alto sax and clarinet, and Andy Narell on steel pan. CJP released their initial two albums, *Caribbean Jazz Project* and *Island Stories*, on Heads Up International in 1995 and 1997, respectively. Other players on these first two outings included pianist Dario Eskenazi, bassist Oscar Stagnaro and drummer Mark Walker.

Samuels moved the CJP to the Concord label with the 2000 release of *New Horizons*. The album marked a new direction that included flutist Dave Valentin, guitarist Steve Kahn, bassist Ruben Rodriguez, and percussionists Roberto Quintero, Richie Flores and Dafnis Prieto. For the next five albums on Concord, Samuels continued to explore the mixture of Afro-Cuban, Caribbean, and European musical traditions.

CJP's *The Gathering* scored a GRAMMY® Award in 2003 for Best Latin Jazz Recording. In 2004, *Birds of a Feather* received a second GRAMMY® nomination in the same category, and *Here and Now: Live in Concert* received a third consecutive nomination in the same category in 2005.

*Mosaic*, released in 2006, featured for the first time the sounds of organ and violin, which made for an entirely new texture to the group's overall sound. Samuels also reunited with charter CJP members Paquito D'Rivera and Andy Narell playing on three new original tracks.

The Caribbean Jazz project unites with the Maryland-based Afro-Bop Alliance for the release of the aptly titled *Caribbean Jazz Project – Afro Bop Alliance*, set for release on Heads Up in March 2008. The album recasts nine CJP signature pieces – by Samuels, Coltrane, Monk and Oliver Nelson – in a fresh new light via full-bodied arrangements as played by the Afro Bop Alliance big band. This collaboration is one of the most exciting new sounds on the Latin jazz scene today.

“Repackaging something that had been played a lot in a smaller group made me hear the music in a new light,” says Samuels. “You react differently to it. It’s a different ball game. It’s the difference between playing on a five-man team and a fifteen-man team. And if you’re the listener, you may have heard these tunes with the small group, but it’s a completely different experience hearing it with this big band.”

Over the course of eight acclaimed recordings, a GRAMMY® Award and two GRAMMY® nominations, the inventive Caribbean Jazz Project has blended scintillating rumbas, sambas, boleros and cha-chas with the uncut spirit of jazz improvisation. As the leader of this continually evolving entity, Samuels explains: “Caribbean defines part of what we do, and jazz defines the other part.”