

## Miguel Zenón Biography

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### Miguel Zenón

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*"This young musician and composer is at once reestablishing the artistic, cultural, and social tradition of jazz while creating an entirely new jazz language for the 21st century."*  
--MacArthur Foundation, 2008.

**Grammy Nominee and Guggenheim and MacArthur Fellow** Miguel Zenón was born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico. There, he studied classical saxophone at the famed *Escuela Libre de Musica*. Although Zenón was exposed to jazz while in high school, it wasn't until he began his studies at the Berklee School of Music that his formal jazz training began. After graduating from Berklee, Zenón received a scholarship to attend Manhattan School of Music and in 2001, he received a Masters in Saxophone Performance. The distinguished list of educators he has studied with include: **Angel Marrero, Leslie Lopez, Rafael Martinez, Danilo Perez, Dick Oatts, Dave Liebman, George Garzone** and **Bill Pierce**.

In his relatively short, but rather illustrious career, Zenón has performed and/or recorded with a quite a diverse array of artists including: **Charlie Haden, David Sanchez, The Village Vanguard Orchestra, Bobby Hutcherson, Bob Moses and Mozamba, The Either Orchestra, Guillermo Klein y Los Guachos, The Mingus Big Band, Jerry Gonzalez & The Fort Apache Band, Ray Barretto, and Steve Coleman**, among others.

In 2004 Zenón was asked to become one of the founding members of the **SFJAZZ Collective**; an octet whose past and present members include Joshua Redman, Bobby Hutcherson, Nicholas Payton, Joe Lovano, Dave Douglas and Brian Blade. The members, who participate in a residency period where they workshop and rehearse new music, divide their time (roughly two months) between composing, performing and teaching. The SFJAZZ Collective has toured in the US, Canada, Asia, and Europe and to date, have released six critically acclaimed live recordings, garnering them a spot in the Downbeat Critic's Poll Rising Star Small



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Group category in both 2006 and 2007 – an honor which, coincidentally, they shared with Zenón's own quartet.

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The Saxophonist and Composer has released five recordings as a Leader. His debut CD **Looking Forward** was selected by the *New York Times* as the number one independent jazz record of 2002. In 2004, after being one of the first artists signed to Marsalis Music, he released the critically acclaimed **Ceremonial**. This same year also marked the beginning of three consecutive years on the top of the Downbeat Critic's Poll in the Rising Star Alto Sax category. Zenón topped that category as well in 2008, making that the fourth time in the last five years. In 2005 Zenón was honored by Billboard magazine as one of the "Faces to Watch-- 30 Under 30: Top Young Acts and Executives." That year Zenón also released **Jibaro**, a tribute to the "Musica Jibara" of Puerto Rico and commissioned by a grant from the New York State Council of the Arts. Like his previous recordings, **Jibaro** was uniformly well received and appeared on many top ten lists including *The New York Times*, *Latin Beat*, *El Nueva Dia*, and the *Chicago Tribune*. In 2006, the readers of Jazz Times Magazine voted him the Best New Artist of the Year. **Awake**, his fourth recording as a leader was released in April 2008. It was chosen as one of the Best Jazz Cd's of 2008 by Jazz.com, Jazz Improv Magazine, Cuadernos de Jazz, JazzTimes and El Nuevo Dia, among others.

**Esta Plena**, his latest release as a leader, creates a bridge between elements of "Jazz Music" and "Plena Music" from Puerto Rico. It was unanimously heralded as one of the best Jazz releases of 2009 by publications such as The Village Voice, The Chicago Tribune, The Philadelphia Enquire and Jazz Times, as well receiving a **5 Stars** review on the heralded Downbeat Magazine. It also received two **Grammy Nominations**, for "Best Latin Jazz Album" and "Best Improvised Jazz Solo", and a **Latin Grammy Nomination** for "Best Latin Jazz Album".

In addition to touring extensively throughout the US and Europe and Latin America with his quartet, Zenón has made teaching a priority in his professional career. In 2003, as part of the Kennedy Center's Jazz Ambassador's Program, Zenón's quartet was selected to teach and perform throughout West Africa.

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Since then he has done master classes, clinics and/or residencies in such diverse institutions as the Banff Centre, University of Manitoba, LeMoyne College, UMASS-Amherst, the Brubeck Institute, Berklee College of Music, Conservatoire de Paris, Rotterdam Conservatory, Manhattan School of Music and the Diaz Institute. Zenón also serves as a private saxophone instructor at The New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music in New York. Starting in the Fall of 2009, Zenón will be joining the Jazz Faculty at the New England Conservatory in Boston, MA.

In April 2008 Zenón received a fellowship from the prestigious **John Simon Guggenheim Foundation** to work on the project that would later become Esta Plena. Later that year he was one of 25 distinguished individuals chosen to receive the coveted **MacArthur Fellowship**, also known as the "Genius Grant".