



Camila Falquez

# ORQUESTA AKOKÁN

**TRES/PRODUCER** Jacob Plasse  
**PIANO/ARRANGER** Michael Eckroth  
**SINGER** Kiko Ruiz  
**ALTO SAX** Cesar Lopez  
**BARITONE SAX** Evaristo Denis  
**TRUMPET** Reinaldo "Molote" Melian  
**TRUMPET** Reinaldo Melian Zamora  
**TENOR SAX** Jamil Schery  
**BASS** Lino Piquero  
**TROMBONE** Heikel Fabian  
**TIMBALES** Keisel Jimenez  
**CONGA/BONGO** Yuya Rodriguez

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Zellerbach Theatre

Friday, April 12 @ 8 PM

There will be no intermission.

23/24 SEASON

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## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

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When **Orquesta Akokán** burst onto the global music scene in 2018, its no-holds-barred 21st-century take on the venerable Cuban mambo lit up stages around the world with a fierce and unremitting joy. Producer Chulo Records, multi-instrumentalist Jacob Plasse and arranger Michael Eckroth joined forces with a carefully curated selection of Havana's most extraordinary musicians as Orquesta Akokán, polishing Cuban mambo's golden sound to a luminous, contemporary sheen. Along the way, Orquesta Akokán imbued these legendary Cuban grooves with a renewed vitality and powerful sense of *akokán* – the Yoruba word used by Cubans to mean “from the heart” or “soul.”

Following the group's debut recording on Daptone Records – the first ever Spanish-language album released by the renowned label that shared Sharon Jones and Charles Bradley's immortal voices with the world – Orquesta Akokán kicked off its U.S. debut in the summer of 2018, enthraling audiences with a series of performances culminating in a sold-out show at Lincoln Center. This was followed by international touring throughout 2019 and early 2020, nominations for a Grammy®, Billboard Latin Music Award, Telemundo Latin American Music Award and critical acclaim from press and media around the globe.

Fast forward to 2021, and Orquesta Akokán unleashed *16 Rayos* on the world's dance floors, via Daptone Records. The group united in Havana once again to record, but not with the intention of depending on the formulas that heaped laurels and accolades upon Orquesta's first album. Instead, it brought a cohesion forged by an intense performing and touring cycle, and the musical conversation that began in the Areito studios three years earlier blossomed into an easy, intimate dialogue between good friends. Now in Egrem Studios, this allowed full, fearless musical expression and risk-taking outside of the musicians' comfort zones.

Suffused with this sense of possibility, the band continues to explore, develop and expand the island's rich rhythmic palette and repertoire – pushing the conventions of what is considered mambo – and drawing deeply from folkloric and religious traditions seldom heard in popular music. The Cuban musicians' deep spiritual reservoir and knowledge of folklore informs Orquesta's contemporary sensibilities, allowing the album to remain true and faithful to the spirit of the music's origins while pushing the grooves into previously uncharted vistas.

Building upon Perez Prado's dissonant, near avant-garde vision of the mambo, and highlighting the Lucumí subtext of Cuban rhythms and styles, *16 Rayos* exudes a fierce spiritual and secular ecstasy. Like the Yoruba story of the sixteen rays of sun gifted from Olofi (one of the supreme manifestations of Divinity) to Obatalá (Sky Father and creator of human bodies) so that Obatalá could take care of earth's children, *16 Rayos* is here to shine its musical rays on us, warm our hearts and irresistibly move our bodies.

In November 2023, the band was back in the studio working on their most searing album yet. Fresh out of the famed Abdala Studios in Havana and raring to go, Orquesta Akokán has a newfound sense of vibrancy and swing to their blazing mambo style.