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***"Papo VA!zquez is coming back to Philly with his Mighty Pirates Troubadours"***

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Papo VA!zquez is coming back to Philly with his Mighty Pirates Troubadours

Latin jazz trombonist and Philly native Papo VA!zquez talked to AL DIA News in anticipation of his performance with his Mighty Pirates Troubadours and Argentinian-born folk jazz vocalist Sofia Rei, this Friday, Dec. 5, at the **Annenberg Center** in West Philly.A

The musician, composer and arranger is celebrating his 40-year anniversary of a career that spans jazz, Latin, Afro-Caribbean and classical music and recordings.

His passion for jazz began when he was a teenager and he received two records as a gift, one by J.J. Johnson and the other by John Coltrane. Soon after, he began playing and recording with top artists in the salsa scene like The Fania All-Stars, Celia Cruz, Willie Colon, Eddie Palmieri, Hector Lavoe and Tito Puente.

During the 1980s, he began to experiment with a mixture of jazz and traditional Puerto Rican bomba, and he started his first band, "Bomba Jazz," with the purpose of creating a new variation of contemporary Puerto Rican music.

"My goal ever since has been mostly to record and play original compositions around Puerto Rican culture," VA!zquez said.

In 1993 he recorded his first album as a leader: "Pirates & Troubadours - At the Point, Vol. 1," followed by "At The Point, Vol. 2." This project evolved into the Mighty Pirates Troubadours, an Afro-Puerto Rican jazz band.

VA!zquez's music is typically categorized as Latin jazz, but he prefers to say its Afro-Caribbean and takes pride in drawing inspiration from Puerto Rican folklore.

"It's very different from what the majority of people consider Latin jazz," he said.

In 2007, VA!zquez was commissioned to compose new music for the orchestra. The following year, the resulting live record titled "Marooned/Aislado" received a Grammy nomination for Best Latin Jazz Album.

"As a musician, I feel very blessed that I've been able to lead my band for the last 20 years," VA!zquez said. He also takes pride in performing in the main jazz festivals around the world, being nominated for the Grammy, and being one of the go-to musicians for the Jazz Lincoln Center when they need an arrangement for the orchestra.

During his presentation in Philadelphia, the Grammy award nominee will play songs from his latest album "Spirit Warrior", released back in February, as well as other numbers from throughout his career.

"People who know me and my music know that when they go to one of my concerts they are going to hear original compositions on the cutting edge," VA!zquez said. "It's about pushing the envelope without losing the audience. I like to take them to the edge and then stop."

When asked about the title of the album, he said it was inspired in the "spiritual struggle" he faces

as a composer when writing music and "deciding what to put on paper and what is going to come out on the other side."A

"Being a musician is a struggle. Life is a struggle. We are all spirit warriors," VA!zquez said.A

The album features the Mighty Pirates Troubadours and guest musicians Orlando Maraca Valle on flute and Roberto Quintero on percussions, playing a Venezuelan drum, with a Kongo lineage, and a very peculiar name: "culo e puya."A A

For now, VA!zquez has some pretty interesting things in the works, which may be present in his next album. Earlier this year, he was commissioned by Pregones Theatre in the Bronx to take on Johann Sebastian Bach's Goldberg Variations and to create his own variations for a jazz quartet.

Tickets for VA!zquez's presentation Dec. 5, at the **Annenberg Center** in Philadelphia are \$20, \$35 and \$50. For more information, visit **Annenberg Center**.

Audience provided by Nielsen/NetRatings

***Highlights: Annenberg Center***