Daymé Arocena

Daymé Arocena, vocals
Jorge Luis Lagarza, piano
Rafael Aldama, bass
Ruly Herrera, drums

Post-performance discussion with the artists

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Spaulding Auditorium’s Hamburg Steinway concert grand piano was purchased with generous gifts from Members of the Hopkins Center and Members of the Hood Museum of Art; the class of 1942, in memory of Allan Dingwall ’42; and anonymous donors. Spaulding Auditorium’s New York Steinway concert grand piano was restored with a generous gift by Huntley Allison ’42 P’74.

Thu • April 12, 2018 • 7 pm
Spaulding Auditorium • Dartmouth College
Daymé Arocena (singer, composer, arranger, choir director, band leader) is a skillful, charismatic presence in Cuban music. Dressed always in white, her apparel is a visible reminder of her induction into the Afro-Cuban religion of Santeria: its chants and songs are just as important to her as jazz and Cuban neo-soul. In her mid-twenties, she comes from a family steeped in music. Her grandmother, she says, “sings better than she does” and her father has stacks of CDs that include the likes of George Benson’s smooth jazz classic “Breezin',” which have trickled into his daughter’s tastes over the years.

Arocena often imbeds fragments of rumba rhythms and outbursts of scatting into her songs and performances. “Even though I’m a classical musician,” she explains, “at school I also sang Santeria songs, which is the official Cuban religion for me. I studied its beautiful energy and all the elements from the sea to the wind and the earth. My saint is Yemaya, saint of the sea.”

Arocena experimented with a series of instruments—violin, trumpet, piano and guitar—before she found her niche in choir directing, a route popular with Cuban music students. Her talent was spotted at a young age, winning her the prestigious Marti y el Arte award in 2007 and making her principal singer for big band Los Primos at age 14. With marks of approval soon to follow from the likes of trumpet player and jazz impresario Wynton Marsalis and much-lauded saxophonist Jane Bunnett, it wasn’t long before Arocena came to the attention of François Renié, Communications Director at Cuban rum maker Havana Club and founder of the Havana Cultura platform, which co-produced the Havana Cultura album series with Brownswood Recordings.

Renié took an immediate shine to the singer. “Gilles (Peterson, Brownswood’s founder) and I met Daymé for the first time on Gilles’s first trip to Cuba,” he recalls, “with Edrey (from the Grammy-nominated Cuban band Ogguere), improvising at a rumba session at a friend’s place. She started to sing and we were amazed. She was just a teenager.” Arocena already knew and listened to the singers, rappers and musicians involved in the Havana Cultura project but was considered too young to join in.

Her time came a few years later, however, with the Havana Cultura Mix project, for which Peterson mentored selected producers from around the world to make a record in Cuba involving local musicians. Following her audition, all of the producers opted to work with her. She sang on three tracks on the album, including the major work “U Knew Before.” Seeing huge potential in her, Peterson invited her to London to perform at the album launch event, where she enchanted a packed audience and sealed plans for a solo record with Brownswood and Havana Cultura.
About the Artist continued

Her debut album, *Nueva Era*, was released to critical acclaim in 2015. With *The Guardian* declaring her “a rich and powerful new voice from Cuba” and *Songlines* recognizing her as “one of the most exciting new artists to come along in years,” her album was an important first statement for an artist who has plenty more to say. In May 2016, she released the album *One Takes* (Brownswood Recordings) featuring Horace Silver’s powerful “The Gods of Yoruba” among a collection of masterfully reimagined rare covers that further bridge her musical worlds. Her newest album, *Cubafonia*, is a soulful mix of Latin, jazz and R&B influences, a perfect blend for her powerful vocals. NPR’s First Listen featured the 2017 album, saying: “There is not a dull moment on Cubafonia. It is a major statement on the progress of Daymé Arocena as an artist for the ages. And it reminds us that the best music moves the body and the spirit.” This is Daymé Arocena’s first Hopkins Center engagement.

Connecting Artists to the Community

While at Dartmouth, Daymé Arocena visited a class in the Department of Religion: shared dinner and a mini-concert with a House community; presented a public talk titled “Using Your Voice” with Barbary Coast Jazz Ensemble Director Taylor Ho Bynum; and will participate in a post-performance discussion. For more information on Hop Outreach & Arts Education, call 603.646.2010 or visit hop.dartmouth.edu/online/outreach.

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