

Freddy Poncin

By Gary France

I recently met powerhouse percussionist Freddy Poncin while in Perth for the 2014 PAS Day of Percussion. Western Australia Born in Amsterdam the Netherlands, Freddy's talent was recognized at a young age and he started learning congas at the age of 12. Freddy was honoured to study with Raoul Burnet who was regarded as the best conga player and teacher in Western Europe. Raoul was a master percussionist (one of the first musicians endorsed by LP - Latin Percussion in the Netherlands) and an expert in Afro Cuban rhythms. Raoul Burnet played with music legends such as Patato Valdez, Tito Puente, Mongo Santamaria, Wilson Pickett, Art Blakey and many more. After Raoul's sudden death, Freddy started to play kit drums as well to reggae music, ska music and funk. In the 80's he joined the band Revelation Time that quickly grew into the best afro reggae band in the Netherlands and one of the finest in Europe. Revelation Time had a top 40 hit in Europe with a song called South Africa. Freddy played drums and percussion with this band for over 12 years and toured Germany, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, France, Sweden, Malta and Italy. Revelation Time backed up Jamaican artists such as Lee Perry and Eek a Mouse, and supported well-known bands such as Ziggy Marley, Steel Pulse, Aswad, Alpha Blondy, UB40, Inner Circle, Ossibisa, Saleif Keita, Toure Kounda, Senemali, Kumbi Saleh and Fela Kuti. During this period throughout the 90's Freddy found a passion for West African rhythms and in particular djembe drumming from Guinea West Africa.

Since being in Australia, Freddy has made an impact on the WA Music Scene. He is currently playing and has played with Latin Jazz group Descarga (featuring Chris Tarr, Tom O'hallaran, Troy Roberts, Dane Anderson, Des White, Jeremy Grieg, Matt Jodrell), LC Salsa, Los Chasquis, Latin Fusion, was the founding member of WAADA (now Akwaaba), Mike Pignegy, Glynn MacDonald, with Russell Borrows in Oday Nmai's group, WAAPA's award winning Defying Gravity, WAAPA Latin Music Ensemble, Lamine Sonko, Brenda Lee, Mohamed Bangoura, Ziggy Bey Diagne, Glenn Shorrock (Little River Band) in the Perth Concert Hall, Percussion Group Wongai, Barney McAll, Paul Tanner, Funkalleros, Lafaya (Mauritian Community band), Jason Heerah (Australia's top drummer from Electric Empire and currently on X Factor 2014), Thieryno Gangou (One of Mauritius most versatile keyboard players), Nuevo Salsa Orchestra with Marty Purvan, Mutima Band with Wajipha Congwe, Shahira Jazz and 5xWAMI winner with Grace Barbe as best World Music Act in Western Australia. With the Grace Barbe Afro Kreol band Freddy has

performed as a drummer and percussionist at SAKIFO Reunion Island 2010, lomma 2011 Reunion Island, Reggae Donsa Mauritius 2011, WOMADELAIDE 2012, Byron Bay Blues and Roots in 2010 and 2011, Blue Mountains Festival 2010, Queenscliff Festival 2009 and Woodford Folk Festival in 2009, 2009 and 2012, Nannup Music Festival 2010, Fairbridge Folk Festival in 2010 and 2011, WOMAD Adelaide 2012, Port Fairy 2013, WOMAD NZ 2013.

Because of his travels to Mauritius and Reunion Island, Freddy has emerged himself into the music styles like the Segga and the Seggae. In 2010 the Mauritian Perth based group Lafaya (with Freddy as drummer) were the backing band for the famous Mauritian vocal duo Nancy Derougere and Mario Justin and in 2011 Freddy was the percussionist for a Mauritian Allstar band called Tamtam Nostalzi with Jason Heerah, Thieryno Gangou, Damien Binzagou and Gerard G backing up Mauritian sega pioneers Serge Lebrasse (81), Jean-Claude Gaspard (65), and Roger Clency (80). Special mention to my friend, the pianist Thieryno Gangou who I regard as my mentor in Mauritian Music.



I have also studied with the famous Mamady Keita.

You have performed with numerous renowned artists both live and on recordings. Can you please tell me about some of your highlights?

Some of my early highlights in Europe would be performing with Raoul Burnet at the famous Jazz Venue the Bim House in Amsterdam (playing clave, cowbell and shakere!) and his memorial concert where I played with Orquestra de Amsterdam at the Milky Way. Other highlights in Europe would be playing as a drummer/percussionist with Reggae outfit Revelation Time for the legendary Lee Perry and an impromptu jam I had with the famous Art Blakey. In Australia it would be performing with Guinean Master Drummers Mamady Keita and Mohamed Bangoura in Sydney, performing and working at WAAPA with Paul Tanner, Chris Tarr and Defying Gravity, playing with Barney McAll and Danny Susjnar at the Perth Jazz Society, performing with Glenn Shorrock at the Perth Concert Hall and winning 5 WAMI's for the best World Music act as a drummer in Grace Barbe's band.

Can you please describe your percussion set up, does it vary for different ensembles you work with?

Luckily in 2005 I got semi endorsed by LP so I own some lovely LP Palladium congas and Giovanni bongos. With Nueva Salsa Orchestra I play with two congas however for the bigger gigs I like to play with all four: quinto, conga, tumba and super tumba. Playing in Mutima Band I play drumkit and have a conga and/or a djembe to the side. With Grace Barbe I played drum kit and my percussion set up was from left to right on stands: Djembe, bongos, 2 congas, timbales and a variety of cow bells, blocks and chimes.

Do you feel different in the recording studio versus live performance?

Not really, however I do keep in mind that a recording will "stick" so it's the "focus" that makes the difference.

What current projects and tours are you working on at the moment?

My last tour was with Grace Barbe playing at WOMAD NZ, Port Fairy Festival (VIC) and Tasmania in 2013. In 2014 I have been performing with Mutima at Nukara Folk Festival, Bathurst Beach Music Festival and Worldly Winter Warmers Concert Series in Perth. Last month I have been recording percussion for Italian singer Alfredo Malabello who is going to release his CD later this year. Another thing in the pipeline is a tutorial DVD I am working on.

How did you become interested in Percussion and can you please tell me about your studies?

My mother noticed I was always tapping and hitting things to music, luckily she always noticed that I was doing it "in time". Since a very young age I had hand drums laying around. From Moroccan Clay drums, Indonesian and Nepalese double sided drums and... the table. At the age of 12 I got my first set of congas and I got introduced to Raoul Burnett, a conguero from the Antilles in the Caribbean. Raoul lived in Puerto Rico and New York before settling in Amsterdam. Raoul was a lecturer at the Conservatorium and an old school teacher that worked me hard. I was studying with Raoul for 3 years non stop till his sudden death. Through Raoul I got to attend workshops with Patato Valdes, Tito Puente and Mongo Santamaria. This is all shaped me in becoming the hand percussionist I am today. My more recent studies I have had in Guinea West Africa, where I studied with Mohamed Bangoura, one of the lead soloists of Les Percussions de Guinea and



Freddy Poncin - 4 years old