

**Guest: Hugo Cruz, leader Hugo Cruz and Caminos**

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**Maria M.**

*Thank you all for being here with us. We are in the first Pittsburgh Latino Magazine Podcast and today I am happy to spend time with you. Here I have Hugo Cruz from the group Hugo Cruz and Caminos. He is going to talk to us today about well, about everything he has done, he has done a lot, and about his projects that he currently has and in the future, so Hugo - welcome!*

**Hugo Cruz**

*Thank you very much, Maria, thank you very much for having me here in your beautiful place and a project that I think is very beautiful, that you are starting now and that I hope that at some point you will have many, many more successes for you.*

**Maria M.**

*Thank you very much.*

**Hugo Cruz**

*Surely it is. So yes, I've been in Pittsburgh, I moved in 2019 and it's been like a great journey to this day. But hey, let's talk a little about that. In 2019 I arrived and tried to connect with many people, many musicians here in Pittsburgh. It was a very new world for me because of the language. I am from Cuba.*

*And so, but it was a very nice thing because I was able to connect with a lot of people who are influential here in the cultural scene of Pittsburgh, and I was always lucky, trying to work and do things as well as possible to be able to connect with the audience here. You know what I mean? And, it has really been nice to really work here.*

**Maria M.**

*That's great and tell us a little bit about your childhood, that is, when you started to enter the world of music?*

**Hugo Cruz**

*Yes, yes, I started when I was 15 years old.*

**Maria M.**

*Oh, wow, I mean, you were already a young man.*

**Hugo Cruz**

*Yes, I was a young man and in Cuba it is a little late to start at that age. Growing up I didn't want anything to do with music and my dad, my dad is a violinist. I come from a family of musicians, my father and my two uncles. My two uncles are trumpet players. My father is a violinist and my uncle, my mother's brother, was a very famous singer in Cuba named Pepe Olmos.*

**Maria M.**

*A singer?*

**Hugo Cruz**

*He was a singer from Aragon, the Aragón Orchestra which is a charanga band. And then that is when music came to me. I think that music comes from that part of my family, although my mother is very musical and likes music a lot and dances very well to Cuban popular music.*

*But she doesn't play any specific instrument like that. So that's how, that's where musical influences come from, I think. And how did I get started, how did I choose percussion? It was a bit comical, because my brother was dabbling in percussion. Then one day I copied him. I liked his drum set. And when he would leave the house and leave the drumsticks there with me, I immediately picked them up and, to this day, I haven't let go of them.*

**Maria M.**

*And he continued playing the drums?*

**Hugo Cruz**

*Or not him, he didn't continue, he plays violin now, I'm the only percussionist in the family. I have two brothers who play violin, and my sister sings. And I play percussion and I'm a composer. So I was lucky, I am from Santa Clara, which is a very small city in the middle of the island of Cuba, very cultural, a lot of music, theater, dance, very strong in Cuban culture. But there I was at the elementary level of music. And then I had the opportunity to move to Havana because I started working with a well-known group in Cuba called Síntesis. And there I was lucky enough to start meeting other musicians, to start getting to know another type of cultural movement in Havana. So my dad always pushed me hard and told me, if you are there, you should go to university, you should go because the music university in Cuba is in Havana and there is a headquarters in Santiago or Camagüey.*

*But if you want to go to university for music in Cuba you have to move to Havana. Then I was able to do the admissions tests. My dad helped me find teachers, and I prepared, one year of preparation and thank God I was able to enter the university in the*

*percussion modality. And then in Cuba, when you get percussion lessons you get piano lessons, harmony lessons and then that's why, that's why I can write my own music today, That's why I'm a composer, because it's sometimes a little complicated to write music coming from percussion. You know what I mean? A bit tricky because sometimes you can play a melody, you can do harmonic things and everything, but the piano and the guitar, and maybe even the violin, are instruments that give you more ease when it comes to composing than percussion, than many of the instruments that I play like the conga drums, the drums, the cajón.*

**Maria M.**

*What you're saying is that thanks to that you can then combine, right? All those different skills and then make something new...*

**Hugo Cruz**

*To do other things, yes, from that point of view and from the ease that the school gave me to understand what melodies are, chords from the piano. Hence, the ease of being able to understand the piano, and then being able to bring the things that I can do on the piano, and an idea that I have, and then it becomes a composition.*

**Maria M.**

*Of course. So, since you told us a little bit about how you got here, then tell us now about your group here, Hugo Cruz and Caminos.*

**Hugo Cruz**

*Exactly "And Caminos" is always important for me to explain why not "y caminos" because I, under the same name, have two projects. With one project I make Cuban dance music, that is, it is very different from the other project I do, fusion music, but mostly jazz, funk, R&B music. So that's why I call it "And", because it has the influence of the music of the United States, of the music that was born here, which is the R&B, jazz.*

*Rock, blues. So that's why I try to bring my name with one word in English and one word in Spanish, Caminos. So many people want to say "Hugo Cruz y Caminos" and I say "AND" Caminos, but the reality is and I love it, that you said it that way because it's very beautiful, it's the real name. So, with the group I do those two types of work, that is, I can do a dance concert as well as a jazz concert, but always with original music, both things, with original music. I write dance music and I write jazz music, that is, for people who like to go to a place and sit down to listen to music. I do that, but also for the person who likes to go to a place and dance.*

**Maria M.**

*So, for example, the other day I saw you at this Alpfa Pittsburgh event, the one where you were playing. So, when you go to those kinds of activities here in Pittsburgh, which type of music are you playing?*

**Hugo Cruz**

*Yes, I mostly play danceable music because Alpfa is an organization, which my great friend Albert leads, and he works a lot to help the Latino community and Latino professionals. And so he always likes to include dance at these kinds of events. I make dance music so that people have a moment of satisfaction, a moment of having a good time, a moment of joy, because mostly with the other music you there is a difference in feeling. You can play a song that's very happy, but you can play a song that's a little sadder, or a song that's a little harder to understand because it's jazz, it's an expression.*

**Maria M.**

*Well, look, something I want to comment on is that two years ago, maybe 2 or 3 years ago, an event was held in honor of Puerto Rico. I think funds were being collected to send to Puerto Rico - I'm Puerto Rican for those who don't know. I've been in Pittsburgh for a long time, but I'm from Puerto Rico – Well, I went to that event. Hugo was playing and I remember that everyone was dancing, but there came a time when he was doing a solo. It seemed to me like a jazz type, something like that, and what he was playing was so impressive that everyone stopped dancing, and everyone focused on him. And that was like 5 or 10 minutes that I still remember and it was, you know, incredible, very beautiful.*

**Hugo Cruz**

*Thank you, I remember that moment. That concert was really beautiful. We wanted to raise funds to help Puerto Rico, our sister island, and that was the part you talk about. It's an introduction that I do in one of my songs called El Cimarrón. So in Cuba, we call cimarrón a person who is a slave and decided not to be one anymore, of his own choice. Then this person goes wherever they want, making their own decisions. So at the beginning of this song I sing Afro-Cuban music and then do the solos and things like that on the timbales. But it is very nice to know about this anecdote of yours. Thanks a lot. Thank you.*

**Maria M.**

*Yes, and I'm going to look for short videos and what you have to share with our audience. So, now I want us to talk a little bit about what's coming next for you with Kelly Strayhorn Theater, which is a theater in the East Liberty area, right?*

**Hugo Cruz**

*Yes, yes, a beautiful theater. The team working there has been able to maintain the theater for many years and will continue to do so. And I feel ... I'm really proud, and honored that they've chosen me this year to be the primary musician who's going to lead the performance.*

**Maria M.**

*A truly special event, what is it called?*

**Hugo Cruz**

*The event is called Sweet LIFE, yes, it's called Sweet LIFE. Great for people who live in Pittsburgh, to know a little more about the music of Billy Strayhorn, and the music that Gene Kelly performed in his movies. He made everything, in the things he sang. And so it's, it's very interesting to me not being from Pittsburgh, being a Cuban musician.*

**Hugo Cruz**

*And so I was talking to them not long ago, and I asked if someone other than local people from Pittsburgh had taken this main role before me and they said no. And they have been doing this show for 16 years now, which is something very notorious. It's something respectable because that is a long time. They do other shows too, it's very beautiful. So, I'm really looking forward to this day, to this concert. I made arrangements for 8 songs by Billy Strayhorn and songs that Gene Kelly sang at the time. And there are some pieces where I brought in a little bit of Cuban music into Billy Strayhorn and Gene Kelly's music. So it's something very special, really.*

**Maria M.**

*That sounds like it's going to be great. So, tell us what day the event is going to be? Or if there are several dates? How can people get tickets?*

**Hugo Cruz**

*Yes, the date is going to be November 30, that is, we are almost two weeks away from that and then you will have the possibility to buy VIP and regular tickets. What's going to happen with the VIP is that people will have the opportunity to listen to a rehearsal before the concert and to share with all the musicians who will be playing, talk to them and more. For the regular tickets you will be able to see the complete concert from, as we say in Cuba, from top to bottom.*

*And it will be on the 30th. Tickets can be found on the [Kelly Strayhorn Theater website](#) and on my [Hugo Cruz and Caminos website](#). And when this interview comes out, here we will also put the link to the tickets and I hope, I really hope to be able to see many Latin brothers at this concert because this interview is for you.*

**Maria M.**

*Thank you very much, Hugo. And then we're going to talk a little bit about what else is coming around. I mean, what are your plans now for this holiday season ... November, December, and next year.*

**Hugo Cruz**

*Sure, I'm doing a very nice concert on November 23rd. Which is called Light up Night in Downtown.*

**Maria M.**

*Really, where?*

**Hugo Cruz**

*The information, it's on [my website](#), but it looks like Stanwix Street.*

**Maria M.**

*There we will find it and include it in the episode links.*

**Hugo Cruz**

*Yes, we will put it with the details.*

*So also a project that I have been doing for almost two years is called the Cuban night, which I do in a very beautiful place called King Fly. I play my own Cuban music and almost always many Latinos come, many brothers also come from here and it has been great. I'm doing that and the other thing I'm doing is a concert every month at Con Alma. It's the best jazz club out here in Pittsburgh, very, very renowned. And so, I am there every second Saturday of every month.*

*We play from 9 to 12. So I try to make a mix between my jazz group and the Cuban music group, which both have the same name. It's just different music. So one month I do Cuban music and the other month I do jazz music, which is a little different.*

**Maria M.**

*Sure, to keep it interesting.*

**Hugo Cruz**

*Of course, so as not to bore you, because that's important. So the other project I have, which is significant, is that I'm recording my second album and I have many people from Pittsburgh and from Cuba taking part in it as well. And then it's a really beautiful thing. In a few weeks I'm going to be recording one of my songs with the Pittsburgh big band*

*orchestra and it's really something very nice. Just like being here today chatting with you, Maria, thank you very much indeed.*

**Maria M.**

*Thank you, and well it's time to say goodbye. I thank Hugo for daring to be our first guest. I hope you enjoyed this. We are going to leave all the information with this post. And well, once again Hugo, thank you very much for being here.*

**Hugo Cruz**

*Thank you so much.*

**Maria M.**

*Well, take care of yourself!*