

Oscar Perez studied classical piano with teachers at NYU and Juilliard. Later on, his jazz teachers included Danilo Pérez (no relation) and [Sir] Roland Hanna. In his early days as a sideman, he played with jazz masters like Bunky Green and George Russell.

That rich musical schooling now serves Perez in his role as an effective and passionate teacher. He is a teaching artist with Jazz at Lincoln Center, a clinician for youth programs run by Carnegie Hall and the New York Pops, and a faculty member at Jazz House Kids in Montclair, NJ. In all of these assignments, he seeks to instill in young musicians a sense of joining a great tradition. "I always try to say where I got things from," Perez says. "I'll mention Danilo Pérez or Charlie Caranicas and say, 'This is the person who gave this to me; I'm just passing it along to you.' It has a lot more foundation for them

that way: they'll think 'He got this from someone really great.'"

Perez also makes a point of exposing his jazz piano students to the classical masters who informed so much of his own music-making. "To play the instrument correctly, it's just part of your training," he says. "I give them Bach inventions, because if you're going to be a jazz musician, it doesn't give you an excuse for bad technique. No matter how complex you think Coltrane or Gil Evans is, if you listen to Brahms, it's got so many textures, so many chords—he did it 150 years ago. At first you think playing about playing jazz as an alternative to playing classical. Then you realize it's all part of the same tree."

At 39, Perez notes that he is no longer a young lion. "In the jazzing scene, if you're under 25, you're very marketable, then you

aren't marketable again until you're 60," he observes. "Everything in between prodigy and living legend—you're just working." These protestations aside, he sustains an active performance career, working as a sideman for vocalists Charenee Wade and Vivian Sessoms and leading his own ensembles, including Oscar Perez Nuevo

School Master

Comienzo, a sextet devoted to his own compositions and a recent recipient of a CMA *New Jazz Works* grant.

Perez finds teaching every bit as rewarding as performing. "When my students progress, it shows *me* what's effective," Perez says. "I always say to them, 'You guys teach me as much as I teach you.'" ■

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