



Mark D'Antonio

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Mark D'Antonio is a professional Conga player currently residing on the island of Maui, Hawaii. He has been a 'student of the drum' since age 9, studying drum kit with a host of talented instructors and mentors. A musical epiphany at age 15 (*mesmerized by Armando Peraza's brilliant conga playing*) ignited the proverbial "light bulb" over his head and he switched from studying drum kit to Conga drums (tumbadoras) and all things Afro-Caribbean, with a focus on Cuba.

The rich abundance of West African drumming and dance (brought by slaves to the Caribbean), fused with the instrumentation, song forms and melodic richness of the Spanish colonists resulted in a cultural phenomenon that has yielded more musical wealth than most countries ten times Cuba's size. The mixing of an established African polyrhythmic, call-and-response musical foundation introduced musical concepts that we take for granted in popular music these days, but were vastly different than the classical linear musical structures found throughout Europe.

Personally, these complex Afro-Cuban fusions made perfect sense at a very rudimentary level. There was no doubt where his hunger for more musical knowledge and expression would lead.

It was not easy however, to find the tools and the teachers. Seeking out Afro-Cuban instructors and "keepers of the flame" at a time when there were practically no instructional books, videos, DVDs, or workshops to gather the knowledge from was a unique challenge. The music, and especially the drumming, was an oral tradition, and one that you had to prove your sincerity to learn and to humble yourself before the drum and your drum teachers.

He can remember the joy of locating a difficult or obscure drum pattern, painstakingly transcribed by hand, or locating a recording of one of the greats like Mongo Santamaria playing "Afro Blue" clear enough to pick out all the subtle parts or best yet, seeing a Santana concert with the percussion team of Orestes Vilato, Raul Rekow and Armando Peraza having a "percussion discussion" that sent chills down your spine. Most rewarding was that feeling when a difficult pattern would "stick" and be committed to muscle memory; when the patterns of notes evolved from mechanical repetition to musical expression.

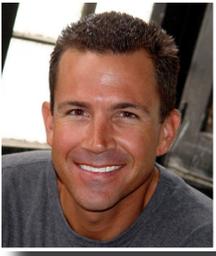
The tools are far easier to come by these days, but Mark stresses that it is only possible because of the greats who have come before, pioneers who have elevated the music, the instruments and the role of conguero in a musical setting. The connection we have with these greats keeps us rooted in tradition while exploring and expanding into brilliant directions.

Fortunate to have studied with some of the today's most talented hand drummers, Mark is still in love with the Conga drums and is honored to have a deep connection with traditional Cuban, Puerto Rican and West African music and the rhythmic foundations they are built upon. These rich musical foundations create a base in which to fuse and assimilate the diverse modern music that he surrounds himself with.

As with any artist, the inextinguishable thirst for rewarding creative endeavors drives him to create something new while firmly rooted in the rich rhythmic traditions he has studied.



Its a great time to play.



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Excerpt from **LATIN PERCUSSION, INC.**

Instead of pursuing a career in his native San Francisco, Mark D'Antonio took off across the waters to Maui, Hawaii and an idyllic existence. One of the first things he did when he got there was to establish an entertainment magazine. Five years spent as publisher and editor kept the gigging schedule tight, but after successfully selling the publication he is able to resume a full-time career as a percussionist. He's played with a number of name artists who live, work, or visit Maui, including **George Benson, Willie Nelson, Pat Simmons (Doobie Brothers), Rob Wasserman, Emil Richards, Ras Michael, and Joe Cano**. He has opened for such as acts as the **Foo Fighters, LL Cool J, Gov't Mule, Train, Sheila E, Paul Oakenfold, Rickie Lee Jones, Bonnie Raitt, Dishwalla, 38 Special, Bedouin Soundclash, Fishbone, Pato Banton, Nestor Torres**, and many others.

His current musical evolution is a balance of salsa/son/timba bands and electronic House music. "It's important to stay rooted in the music that I love and the rich tradition and proper technique yet stay creative with new forms of music and the possibilities they bring." "You're living on an island of 120,000 people," Mark says. "There aren't as many house gigs and touring players, but we're all 'gunslingers'. That is, there isn't the opportunity for a tight knit group to tour, lock in steady house gigs, and do a circuit." Every other month, on average, to recharge, as he puts it, Mark does the big commute to San Francisco, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Seattle or Miami and NYC for gigs and recording sessions with a variety of artists, including a large contingency of House DJs and electronic music producers. Sharing the stage with DJs such as **Dave Ralph, Mark Grant, John Howard, Marques Wyatt, Miguel "Migs", M3, Jay-J, Isaiah Martin, Brent Lawrence, Corey Baker, Rick Preston**, and others. His latest projects include the Hawaiian Hoku Award-winning debut release from the **Barefoot Natives**, and Billboard-charting single (featuring Grammy-nominated **Willie K**), and **Latrice Barnett's** album, *Illuminate*. His conga playing can also be heard on a number of House music tracks put out by Grammy-nominated producer, **Jay-J**. From "Summertime", to "October Moods", "With Him" to "Higher".

Over twenty nine years ago, Mark got his start "on rubber practice pads - for the neighbor's sake. It was rudiments on rubber for over a year, until my parents realized that the drums were more than a passing phase." Intent on becoming a drumset player he studied with great drummers and great teachers, and began gigging in his pre-teens. Then he heard legendary LP artist **Armando Peraza**. "His influence was sudden and direct," recalls Mark, "sort of like getting hit on the head with a surfboard. Armando 'bent' time in a way that connected the jazz I heard growing up, to the funk and rock I was listening to. His sound was the benchmark - a slap like breaking glass and tones so warm they melt. It was an epiphany as clear as a bell, and it became obvious that I needed to seek out those who could pass on the valuable knowledge; there might have been one instructional conga video out at the time; you had to get it firsthand from one of these keepers of the flame".

Bongos were D'Antonio's first LP instrument at age 14 - "an old weather-beaten pair that probably washed in with the tide...", and expanded as he sought out teachers and players who could pass on the oral tradition of Cuban music and percussion. Mark naturally gravitated to conga drums, and currently his set-up centers on three LP Patato Congas. Says Mark, "Their warmth and character inspire performance and offer a rich sonic palette that facilitates the kind of musical communication that makes it all worthwhile." Synthetic heads are a boon in Maui. Explains Mark, "You have an island where it is not uncommon to play an Oceanside gig in the tropical sun, do a recording session in the damp north shore rainforest, then head up Haleakala (10,000 foot volcano) to a freezing cold elevation - all within the span of a day!"

To showcase his work as a sideman, Mark has released a limited edition CD, Mark D'Antonio "For Example". When he rubs shoulders with the greats, he gets to pick up a few pointers. "I was rehearsing with **George Benson** for an upcoming Maui gig," he recalls. "After a song with a long conga solo, George smiles at me and says, 'Man, you gotta make more faces! You're a great player but people need to be shown how good your are.' You can bet that my face was twisting and contorting at that next gig."

LP Gear: LP Patato Congas, LP Tito Puente Timbales, various LP instruments.