

Cellblocks To Mountaintops
Video 8B: Antonio Sánchez performs “The Bucket”
Transcript

TEXT CARD:

JACK LONDON REVUE JAZZ CLUB
Portland, Oregon
One Year After Release

Sterling Cunio: It's a Blessing man. Thank you.

Antonio Sánchez:
So glad we could do this.

Sterling Cunio: You? This is...

Antonio Sánchez:
Jazz Drummer
Four-Time Grammy Winner

Every every time we play that song is very deep for us, you know, and every time I tell the story and every time people hear the story, you know, because it's kind of the most poignant thing in the whole record. Yeah. Just so fortuitous. And and just it was meant to be, you know...

Sterling Cunio: I believe that man...

Antonio Sánchez: The one thing that is important to me is social justice and human rights. When I was doing this record, I was asking different artists for material. And Becca Stevens, a great friend of mine, she found a text that Sterling wrote from “*The Bucket*,” and she sent me the text and I was floored by the words. And then she put the beautiful, haunting melody to it. Then I worked on it, for I was always listening to it constantly while I was working on it.

Antonio Sánchez: And then when she's (Thana Alexa) done singing...

Antonio Sánchez: Tonight, to have Sterling come, to meet him and then to have him recite the whole thing as we're playing, this is just very powerful, you know, very poignant.

Antonio Sánchez: Never talked to anybody that had been in that situation before. So everything he's saying is, is mind-boggling to me. It was just brand new.

Sterling Cunio: The play is about the experience of eight different men in long-term solitary confinement.

Antonio Sánchez: You spent nine years...?

Sterling Cunio: In a collective total of nine and a half years

Antonio Sánchez: Intermittently...

Sterling Cunio The longest uninterrupted stretch was 36 months.

Antonio Sánchez: Oh my God.

Sterling Cunio: Like, we had all these little methods for dealing with that. Like bring it on, I can deal with this. But I couldn't deal with my own guilt. So I started writing to save my sanity, and I was in an environment to where you couldn't share your feelings anywhere else. So the only place I could put them was on the page.

Antonio Sánchez: What was the worst part about it for you? The whole...

Sterling Cunio: For me, the worst part about my incarceration was genuinely coming to understand it was the harm that I did, because then it was no longer about my location. Now it was about my soul.

Antonio Sánchez: I just love his sincerity and his openness. You know, he's not trying to hide from what happened or... the opposite, you know. I think he's, he has become what he has become because he has accepted what he did, and he just has made a decision to become a better man.

Antonio Sánchez: So I think it's just an incredible redemption story. And and I'm just so proud that that is in the record for posterity.

Thana Alexa: (singing melody)

Sterling Cunio: In these concrete tombs that most call cells, resistance is survival. Art and creativity enable some to transcend negativity. Sleepless nights. The perfect time to write. Cold, hungry, and alone, I draw pictures of warm places with abundant food for many companions. Barren environment void of stimuli, I make a garden of my mind, planting seeds and fertilizing self-actualization. We sing songs of resistance heard by none because we are the voiceless that transform the struggle into the substance of stanza.

Cellblock scholar, handcuffed residency, master degrees of captivity. Unaccredited doctorates of deprivation who, with toothbrushes and ink from Sunday comics paint bright murals inside of dark tombs where monk-like meditation reveals the inner alchemy necessary to transform tombs to monasteries.

Paranormal paradox instead of being spiritually crushed, I evolved in a box thrown in a hole and told I never see the sun again. I am him that blow kisses at the moon, because indomitable wills create artistry out of sufferance. And thus, even with handcuffs on wrist, I can build peace from inside the prison industrial complex where resistance is survival and love our salvation, where resistance is survival, and love our salvation.

Antonio Sánchez and Thana Alexa: [Applause} Sterling Cunio...

Antonio Sánchez: Sterling Cunio everybody.