A Light from Above
Trumpet legend Arturo Sandoval has led a blessed life
By Hilary Giorgi

Considered one of the most vivacious live performers around, Arturo Sandoval has come a long way from the small town where he grew up on the outskirts of Havana, Cuba.

With his trumpet, Sandoval mixes his classical training with jazz influences to create fierce music that crosses genre lines. His award-winning talents have made him a sought-after composer for television and film, and his extensive discography dates back to the mid-1970s.

On Sept. 11, 2014, as part of the Yankees’ celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month, Sandoval performed “God Bless America” at Yankee Stadium — but not before speaking with Yankees Magazine editorial associate Hilary Giorgi about music and the meaning of success.

Yankees Magazine: What does it mean to you to be performing “God Bless America” in New York during Hispanic Heritage Month?

Arturo Sandoval: It means a lot. When I play or when I say, “God Bless America,” I really mean that. It’s not just an expression because I love the U.S., and I’m so grateful to live in this country with my family. We pray to God every day, and we thank God because we live in this country.

YM: Did growing up in Cuba influence your music?

AS: Well, yes, but to tell you the truth, I consider myself a music lover. I love all kinds of music, but I consider myself a jazz musician mainly.

YM: What led you to jazz?

AS: That’s a good question because I grew up on a countryside in a little village and nobody there was at all related to art in general. Nobody. So I really don’t know why I said, “I want to be a musician.” Everybody in my family, everybody in my village, said, “What are you talking about? Are you nuts?” Even though I knew it was going to be against everything, I really became a musician because this is what I have been doing since I was 10 years old. And I’m 65 now so that means I’ve been doing this for 55 years.

YM: Why the trumpet, of all instruments?

AS: Because of the sound and the personality of the instrument. The personality of the instrument is such that it doesn’t put any limitation on your expression. You can express yourself 100 percent in any kind of environment with any kind of feeling. You can whisper so soft with the trumpet, and then, with the same instrument, you can make a note that is the loudest of all the instruments in the whole orchestra, and then you can whisper in your ear very softly again. That means you’re able to express your feelings 100 percent.

YM: So, you’ve won 10 Grammys.

AS: And an Emmy, and I’ve had 19 nominations and, most important, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

YM: So what does all that success mean to you?