

# Music of Cuba

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The Caribbean island of Cuba has developed a wide range of creolized musical styles, based on its cultural origins in Europe and Africa. Since the 19th century its music has been hugely popular and influential throughout the world. It has been perhaps the most popular form of world music since the introduction of recording technology.

The **music of Cuba**, including the instruments and the dances, is mostly of European (Spanish) and African origin. Most forms of the present day are creolized fusions and mixtures of these two sources. Almost nothing remains of the original Indian traditions.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Overview

Large numbers of African slaves and European (mostly Spanish) immigrants came to Cuba and brought their own forms of music to the island. European dances and folk musics included zapateo, fandango, paso doble and retambico. Later, northern European forms like minuet, gavotte, mazurka, contradanza, and the waltz appeared among urban whites. There was also an immigration of Chinese indentured laborers later in the 19th century.

Fernando Ortiz, the first great Cuban folklorist, described Cuba's musical innovations as arising from the interplay ('transculturation') between African slaves settled on large sugar plantations and Spaniards or Canary Islanders who grew tobacco on small farms. The African slaves and their descendants made many percussion instruments and preserved rhythms they had known in their homeland.<sup>[2]</sup> The most important instruments were the drums, of which there were originally about fifty different types; today only the bongos, congas and batá drums are regularly seen (the timbales are descended from kettle drums in Spanish military bands). Also important are the claves, two short hardwood batons, and the cajón, a wooden box, originally made from crates. Claves are still used often, and cajons (*cajones*) were used widely during periods when the drum was banned. In addition, there are other percussion instruments in use for African-origin religious ceremonies. Chinese immigrants contributed the *corneta china* (Chinese cornet), a Chinese reed instrument still played in the *comparsas*, or carnival groups, of Santiago de Cuba.

The great instrumental contribution of the Spanish was their guitar, but even more important was the tradition of European musical notation and techniques of musical composition. Hernando de la Parra's archives give some of our earliest available information on Cuban music. He reported instruments including the clarinet, violin and vihuela. There were few professional musicians at the time, and fewer still of their songs survive. One of the earliest is *Ma Teodora*, by a freed slave, Teodora Gines of Santiago de Cuba, who was famous for her compositions. The piece is said to be similar to ecclesiastic European forms and 16th century folk songs.<sup>[3]</sup>

Cuban music has its principal roots in Spain and West Africa, but over time has been influenced by diverse genres from different countries. Important among these are France (and its colonies in the Americas), and the United States.

Cuban music has been immensely influential in other countries. It contributed not only to the development of jazz and salsa, but also to the Argentinian tango, Ghanaian high-life, West African Afrobeat, Dominican Bachata and Merengue, Colombian Cumbia and Spanish Nuevo flamenco.

The African beliefs and practices certainly influenced Cuba's music. Polyrhythmic percussion is an inherent part of African music, as melody is part of European music. Also, in African tradition, percussion is always joined to song and dance, and to a particular social setting.<sup>[4]</sup> The result of the meeting of European and African cultures is that most Cuban popular music is creolized. This creolization of Cuban life has been happening for a long time, and by the 20th century, elements of African belief, music and dance were well integrated into popular and folk forms.

## 18th to 20th century

### 18th/19th centuries

Among internationally heralded composers of the "serious" genre can be counted the Baroque composer Esteban Salas y Castro (1725–1803), who spent much of his life teaching and writing music for the Church.<sup>[5]</sup> He was followed in the Cathedral of Santiago de Cuba by the priest Juan París (1759–1845). París was an exceptionally industrious man, and an important composer. He encouraged continuous and diverse musical events.<sup>[6]</sup> p181 Aside from rural music and Afro-Cuban folk music, the most popular kind of urban creole dance music in the 19th century was the *contradanza*, which commenced as a local form of the English country dance and the derivative French *contredanse* and Spanish *contradanza*. While many *contradanzas* were written for dance, from the mid-century several were written as light-classical parlor pieces for piano. The first distinguished composer in this style was Manuel Saumell (1818–1870), who is sometimes accordingly hailed as the father of Cuban creole musical development. In the hands of his successor, Ignacio Cervantes (1847–1905), the *danza* (as it was more typically called in the latter 1800s), achieved even greater sophistication as a piano idiom.

"After Saumell's visionary work, all that was left to do was to develop his innovations, all of which profoundly influenced the history of Cuban nationalist musical movements." Helio Orovio<sup>[7]</sup> Cervantes was called by Aaron Copland a "Cuban Chopin" because of his Chopinesque piano compositions. Cervantes' reputation today rests almost solely upon his famous forty-one *Danzas Cubanas*, which Carpentier said, "...occupy the place that the *Norwegian Dances* of Grieg or the *Slavic Dances* of Dvořák occupy in the musics of their respective countries". Cervantes' never-finished opera, *Maledetto*, is forgotten.<sup>[6]</sup>

In the 1840s, the *habanera* emerged as a languid vocal song using the *contradanza* rhythm. (Non-Cubans sometimes called Cuban *contradanzas* "habaneras.") The *habanera* went on to become popular in Spain and elsewhere. The Cuban *contradanza/danza* was also an important influence on the Puerto Rican *danza*, which went on to enjoy its own dynamic and distinctive career lasting through the 1930s. In Cuba, in the 1880s the *contradanza/danza* gave birth to the *danzón*, which effectively superseded it in popularity.<sup>[8]</sup>

Laureano Fuentes (1825–1898) came from a family of musicians and wrote the first opera to be composed on the island, *La hija de Jéfe* (the Chief's daughter). This was later lengthened and staged under the title *Seila*. His numerous works spanned all genres. Gaspar Villate (1851–1891) produced abundant and wide-ranging work, all centered on opera.<sup>[6]</sup> p239 José White (1836–1918), a mulatto of a Spanish father and an Afro-Cuban mother, was a composer and a violinist of international merit. He learnt to play sixteen instruments, and lived, variously, in Cuba, Latin America and Paris. His most famous work is *La bella cubana*, a *habanera*.

During the middle years of the 19th century, a young American musician came to Havana: Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829–1869), whose father was a Jewish businessman from London, and his mother a white creole of French Catholic background.<sup>[9]</sup> Gottschalk was brought up mostly by his black grandmother and nurse Sally, both from Dominique. He was a piano prodigy who had listened to the music and seen the dancing in Congo Square, New

Orleans from childhood. His period in Cuba lasted from 1853 to 1862, with visits to Puerto Rico and Martinique squeezed in. He composed many creollized pieces, such as the habanera *Bamboula (Danse de negres)* (1844/5), the title referring to a bass Afro-Caribbean drum; *El cocoye* (1853), a version of a rhythmic melody already present in Cuba; the contradanza *Ojos criollos (Danse cubaine)* (1859) and a version of *María de la O*, which refers to a Cuban mulatto singer. These numbers made use of typical Cuban rhythmic patterns. At one of his farewell concerts he played his *Adiós a Cuba* to huge applause and shouts of "bravo!" Unfortunately his score for the work has not survived.<sup>[10]</sup> In February 1860 Gottschalk produced a huge work *La nuit des tropiques* in Havana. The work used about 250 musicians and a choir of 200 singers plus a tumba francesa group from Santiago de Cuba. He produced another huge concert the following year, with new material. These shows probably dwarfed anything seen in the island before or since, and no doubt were unforgettable for those who attended.<sup>[11] p147</sup>

## 20th century classical and art music

The early 20th century saw the beginning of an independent Cuba (independence from both Spain and the USA: 1902).

"Amadeo Roldán (1900–1939) and Alejandro García Caturla (1906–1940) were Cuba's symphonic revolutionaries [though] their music is rarely played today".<sup>[11] p354</sup> They both played a part in Afrocubanismo: the movement in black-themed Cuban culture with origins in the 1920s, and extensively analysed by Fernando Ortiz. Roldan, born in Paris to a Cuban mulatta and a Spanish father, came to Cuba in 1919 and became the concert-master (first-chair violin) of the new *Orquesta Sinfonica de La Habana* in 1922. There he met Caturla, at sixteen a second violin. Roldan's compositions included *Overture on Cuban themes* (1925), and two ballets: *La Rebambaramba* (1928) and *El milagro de Anaquille* (1929). There followed a series of *Ritmicas* and *Poema negra* (1930) and *Tres toques* (march, rites, dance) (1931). In *Motivos de son* (1934) he wrote eight pieces for voice and instruments based on the poet Nicolás Guillén's set of poems with the same title. His last composition was two *Piezas infantiles* for piano (1937). Roldan died young, at 38, of a disfiguring facial cancer (he had been an inveterate smoker).

After his student days, Caturla lived all his life in the small central town of Remedios, where he became a lawyer to support his growing family. He had relationships with a number of black women and fathered eleven children by them, which he adopted and supported. His *Tres danzas cubanas* for symphony orchestra was first performed in Spain in 1929. *Bembe* was premiered in Havana the same year. His *Obertura cubana* won first prize in a national contest in 1938. Caturla was a fine man, and an example of a universal musician, happily combining classical and folkloric themes with modern musical ideas. He was murdered at 34 by a young gambler who was due to be sentenced only hours later.<sup>[6]</sup>

Gonzalo Roig (1890–1970), was a major force in the first half of the century.<sup>[12]</sup> A composer and orchestral director, he qualified in piano, violin and composition theory. In 1922 he was one of the founders of the National Symphony Orchestra, which he conducted. In 1927 he was appointed Director of the Havana School of Music. As a composer he specialized in the zarzuela, a musical theatre form, very popular up to World War II. In 1931 he co-founded a *Bufo* company (comic theatre) at the Marti Theatre in Havana. He was the composer of the most well-known Cuban zarzuela, *Cecilia Valdés*, based on the famous 19th century novel about a Cuban mulata. It was premiered in 1932. He founded various organizations and wrote frequently on musical topics.<sup>[13]</sup>

One of the greatest Cuban pianist/composers of the 20th century was Ernesto Lecuona (1895–1963).<sup>[14]</sup> Lecuona composed over six hundred pieces, mostly in the Cuban vein, and was a pianist of exceptional quality. He was a prolific composer of songs and music for stage and film. His works consisted of zarzuela, Afro-Cuban and Cuban rhythms, suites and many songs that became latin standards. They include *Siboney*, *Malagueña* and *The Breeze And I (Andalucía)*. In 1942 his great hit *Always in my heart (Siempre en mi Corazon)* was nominated for an Oscar for Best Song; it lost out to *White Christmas*. The Ernesto Lecuona Symphonic Orchestra performed the premiere of Lecuona's *Black Rhapsody* in the Cuban Liberation Day Concert at Carnegie Hall on 10 October 1943.<sup>[15]</sup>

Although, in Cuba, many composers have written both classical and popular creole types of music, the distinction became clearer after 1960, when (at least initially) the regime frowned on popular music and closed most of the night-club venues, whilst providing financial support for classical music rather than creole forms. From then on most musicians have kept their careers on one side of the invisible line or the other. After the Cuban Revolution in 1959, a new crop of classical musicians came onto the scene. The most important of these is guitarist Leo Brouwer, who made significant innovations in classical guitar, and is currently the director of the *Havana Symphonic Orchestra*. His directorship in the early 1970s of the Cuban Institute of Instrumental and Cinematographic Arts (ICAIC) was instrumental in the formation and consolidation of the *nueva trova* movement. Manuel Barrueco is also a classical guitarist of international renown. Ernesto Tamayo, a former student of Leo Brouwer, performs internationally.

Cuban-born classical pianists include many who have recorded with the world's greatest symphonies, including Jorge Bolet (friend of Rachmaninoff and Liszt specialist), Horacio Gutiérrez (former Tchaikovsky Competition silver medalist), and prize-winning pianist and owner of the "Elan" classical CD company, Santiago Rodriguez, a Russian-music specialist. Cuban-born classical pianist Zeyda Ruga Suzuki has been recorded on labels in Japan and Canada.

## Popular music

### Musical theatre

From the 18th century (at least) to modern times, popular theatrical formats used, and gave rise to, music and dance. Many famous composers and musicians had their careers launched in the theatres, and many famous compositions got their first airing on the stage. In addition to staging some European operas and operettas, Cuban composers gradually developed ideas that better suited their audience. Recorded music was to be the conduit for Cuban music to reach the world. The most recorded artist in Cuba up to 1925 was a singer at the *Alhambra*, Adolfo Colombo. Records show he recorded about 350 numbers between 1906 and 1917.<sup>[16]</sup>

The first theatre in Havana opened in 1776. The first Cuban-composed opera appeared in 1807. Theatrical music was hugely important in the 19th century<sup>[17]</sup> and the first half of the 20th century; its significance only began to wane with the change in political and social weather in the second part of the 20th century. Radio, which began in Cuba in 1922, helped the growth of popular music because it provided publicity and a new source of income for the artists.

## Zarzuela

Zarzuela is a small-scale light operetta format. Starting off with imported Spanish content (List of zarzuela composers), it developed into a running commentary on Cuba's social and political events and problems. Zarzuela has the distinction of providing Cuba's first recordings: the soprano Chalía Herrera (1864–1968) made, outside Cuba, the first recordings by a Cuban artist. She recorded numbers from the zarzuela *Cádiz* in 1898 on unnumbered Bettini cylinders.<sup>[18]</sup>

Zarzuela reached its peak in the first half of the 20th century. A string of front-rank composers such as Gonzalo Roig, Eliseo Grenet, Ernesto Lecuona and Rodrigo Prats produced a series of hits for the *Regina* and *Martí* theatres in Havana. Great stars like the *vedette* Rita Montaner, who could sing, play the piano, dance and act, were the Cuban equivalents of Mistinguett and Josephine Baker in Paris. Some of the best known zarzuelas are *La virgen morena* (Grenet), *La Niña Rita* (Grenet and Lecuona), *María la O*, *El batey*, *Rosa la China* (all Lecuona); Gonzalo Roig with *La Habana de noche*; Rodrigo Prats with *Amalia Batista* and *La perla del caribe*; and above all, *Cecilia Valdés* (the musical of the most famous Cuban novel of the 19th century, with music by Roig and script by Prats and Agustín Rodríguez). Artists who were introduced to the public in the lyric theatre include Caridad Suarez, María de los Angeles Santana, Esther Borja and Ignacio Villa, who had such a round, black face that Rita Montaner called him Bola de Nieve ('Snowball').



Rita Montaner in 1938 during shooting of *El romance del palmar*

## Bufo

Cuban *Bufo* theatre is an example: a form of comedy, ribald and satirical, with stock figures imitating types that might be found anywhere in the country. Bufo had its origin around 1800-15 as an older form, *tonadilla*, began to vanish from Havana. **Francisco Covarrubias** the 'caricaturist' (1775–1850) was its creator. Gradually, the comic types threw off their European models and became more and more creolized and Cuban. Alongside, the music followed. Argot from slave barracks and poor barrios found its way into lyrics that are those of the guaracha:

Una mulata me ha muerto!  
 Y no prendan a esa mulata?  
 Como ha de quedar hombre vivo  
 si no prendan a quien matar!  
 La mulata es como el pan;  
 se deber como caliente,  
 que en dejandola enfriar  
 ni el diablo le mete el diente! <sup>[6] p218</sup>

(A mulata's done for me!  
 What's more, they don't arrest her!  
 How can any man live  
 If they don't take this killer?)

A mulatta is like fresh bread  
 You gotta eat it while it's hot  
 If you leave it till it's cool  
 Even the devil can't get a bite!

So the bufo theatre became the birthplace of the typically Cuban musical form, the *guaracha*.<sup>[17]</sup> <sup>[19]</sup>

### Other theatrical forms

Vernacular theatre of various types often includes music. Formats rather like the British Music Hall, or the American Vaudeville, still occur, where an audience is treated to a pot-pourri of singers, comedians, bands, sketches and speciality acts. Even in cinemas during the silent movies, singers and instrumentalists appeared in the interval, and a pianist played during the films. Bola de Nieve and María Teresa Vera played in cinemas in their early days. Burlesque was also common in Havana before 1960.

### Guaracha

The *guaracha* is a genre of rapid tempo and with lyrics.<sup>[20]</sup> It originated in Bufo comic theatre in the mid-19th century,<sup>[21]</sup> and during the early 20th century was often played in the brothels of Havana.<sup>[22]</sup> <sup>[23]</sup> The lyrics were full of slang, and dwelt on events and people in the news. Rhythmically, *guaracha* exhibits a series of rhythm combinations, such as 6/8 with 2/4.<sup>[24]</sup>

Many of the early trovadores, such as Manuel Corona (who worked in a brothel area of Havana), composed and sung *guarachas* as a balance for the slower boleros and canciones. The satirical lyric content also fitted well with the son, and many bands played both genres. In the mid-20th century the style was taken up by the conjuntos and big bands as a type of up-tempo music. Today it seems no longer to exist as a distinct musical form; it has been absorbed into the vast maw of Salsa. Singers who can handle the fast lyrics and are good improvisors are called *guaracheros* or *guaracheras*.

### Trova

In the 19th century here grew up in Santiago de Cuba a group of itinerant musicians, troubadors, who moved around earning their living by singing and playing the guitar.<sup>[25]</sup> They were of great importance as composers, and their songs have been transcribed for all genres of Cuban music

Pepe Sánchez, born José Sánchez (1856–1918), is known as the father of the *trova* style and the creator of the Cuban bolero.<sup>[26]</sup> He had no formal training in music. With remarkable natural talent, he composed numbers in his head and never wrote them down. As a result, most of these numbers are now lost for ever, though some two dozen or so survive because friends and disciples transcribed them. His first bolero, *Tristezas*, is still remembered today. He also created advertisement jingles before radio was born.<sup>[27]</sup> He was the model and teacher for the great trovadores who followed him.<sup>[28]</sup>

The first, and one of the longest-lived, was Sindo Garay (1867–1968). He was an outstanding composer of *trova* songs, and his best have been sung and recorded many times. Garay was also musically illiterate – in fact, he only taught himself the alphabet at 16 – but in his case not only were scores recorded by others, but there are recordings. Garay settled in Havana in 1906, and in 1926 joined Rita Montaner and others to visit Paris, spending three months there. He broadcast on radio, made recordings and survived into modern times. He used to say "Not many men have shaken hands with both José Martí and Fidel Castro!" <sup>[11]</sup> p298 <sup>[29]</sup>

José 'Chicho' Ibáñez (1875–1981)<sup>[30]</sup> was even longer-lived than Garay. Ibáñez was the first trovador to specialize in the son; he also sung *guaguancós* and pieces from the *abakuá*.

The composer Rosendo Ruiz (1885–1983) was another long-lived trovador. He was the author of a well-known guitar manual. Alberto Villalón (1882–1955), and Manuel Corona (1880–1950) were of similar stature. Garay, Ruiz,

Villalón and Corona are known as *the four greats of the trova*, though the following trovadores are also highly regarded.

Patricio Ballagas (1879–1920); María Teresa Vera (1895–1965), Lorenzo Hierrezuelo (1907–1993), Níco Saquito (Antonio Fernandez: 1901–1982), Carlos Puebla (1917–1989) and Compay Segundo (Máximo Francisco Repilado Muñoz: 1907–2003) were all great trova musicians. El Guayabero (Faustino Oramas: 1911–2007) was the last of the old trova.

Trova musicians often worked in pairs and trios, some of them exclusively so (Compay Segundo). As the sexteto/septeto/conjunto genre grew many of them joined in the larger groups. And let's not forget the Trio Matamoros, who worked together for most of their lives. Matamoros was one of the greats.<sup>[31]</sup>

### **Bolero**

This is a song and dance form quite different from its Spanish namesake. It originated in the last quarter of the 19th century with the founder of the traditional trova, Pepe Sánchez. He wrote the first bolero, *Tristezas*, which is still sung today. The bolero has always been a staple part of the trova musician's repertoire.

Originally, there were two sections of 16 bars in 2/4 time separated by an instrumental section on the Spanish guitar called the *pasacalle*. The bolero proved to be exceptionally adaptable, and led to many variants. Typical was the introduction of sychopation leading to the bolero-moruno, bolero-beguine, bolero-mambo, bolero-cha. The bolero-son became for several decades the most popular rhythm for dancing in Cuba, and it was this rhythm that the international dance community picked up and taught as the wrongly-named 'rumba'.

The Cuban bolero was exported all over the world, and is still popular. Leading composers of the bolero were Sindo Garay, Rosendo Ruiz, Carlos Puebla, Rafael Hernández (Puerto Rico) and Agustín Lara (Mexico).<sup>[26] [32] [33] [34] [35]</sup>

### **Canción**

*Canción* means 'song' in Spanish. It is a popular genre of Latin American music, particularly in Cuba, where many of the compositions originate. Its roots lie in Spanish, French and Italian popular song forms. Originally highly stylized, with "intricate melodies and dark, enigmatic and elaborate lyrics"<sup>[36]</sup> The canción was democratized by the trova movement in the latter part of the 19th century, when it became a vehicle for the aspirations and feelings of the population. Canción gradually fused with other forms of Cuban music, such as the bolero.<sup>[37]</sup>

### **Waltz**

The waltz (*El vals*) arrived in Cuba by 1814. It was the first dance in which couples were not linked by a communal sequence pattern. It was, and still is, danced in 3/4 time with the accent on the first beat. It was originally thought scandalous because couples faced each other, held each other in the 'closed' hold, and, so to speak, ignored the surrounding community. The waltz entered all countries in the Americas; its relative popularity in 19th century Cuba is hard to estimate.

Indigenous Cuban dances did not use the closed hold with couples dancing independently until the danzón later in the century, though the guaracha might be an earlier example. The waltz has another characteristic: it is a 'travelling' dance, with couples moving round the arena. In Latin dances, progressive movement of dancers is unusual, but does occur in the conga, the samba and the tango.

### **Música campesina**

The rural music of Cuba as was played and sung by peasants. All forms of música campesina make use of the guitar, and its variations. There is usually some percussion, and on occasion the accordion (*acordeón de botones*). While it remained unchanged in its forms, there was a steady decline in interest among the Cuban youth. Later, some artists tried to renew música campesina with new styles, lyrics, themes and arrangements. The music of Celina González is a successful modern version.

### Zapateo

Typical dance of the Cuban campesino or guajiro, of Spanish origin. A dance of pairs, involving tapping of the feet, mostly by the man. Illustrations exist from previous centuries, but the dance is now defunct. It was accompanied by tiple, guitar and güiro, in combined 6/8 and 3/4 rhythm, accented on the first of every three quavers.

### Punto guajiro

Punto is a rural form of music derived from a local form of *décima* and verso called punto guajiro or *punto cubano*.<sup>[38]</sup> It has been popularized by artists like Celina González, and has become an influence on modern *son*. Albita Rodríguez, now in Miami, began her career as a punto singer.

### Guajira

First, a genre of Cuban song similar to the punto<sup>[38]</sup> and the criolla.<sup>[39]</sup> It contains bucolic countryside lyrics, rhyming, similar to *décima* poetry. Music a mixture of 3/4 and 6/8 rhythms. According to Sánchez de Fuentes,<sup>[40]</sup> its first section is in a minor key, its second section in a major key.

Secondly, it is now used mostly to describe slow dance music in 4/4 time, a fusion of the son and the guajira. Guillermo Portabales was the outstanding singer-guitarist in this genre.

### Criolla

Criolla is a type of Cuban music and song; the term is said to derive from *canción criolla*, or creole song. This genre developed in the late 19th century, and is similar to some other forms of that period, such as the *canción*, the guajira and the bolero. Criollas usually consist of a short introduction, followed by two sections of sixteen bars each. They are written in a slow tempo in 6/8 time. Many criollas were first heard in the bufo theatre.<sup>[39]</sup>

### Contradanza

The contradanza is an important precursor of several later popular dances. It arrived in Cuba in the late 18th century from Europe where it had been developed first as the English country dance, and then as the French contradanse. The origin of the word is a corruption of the English term.<sup>[41]</sup> Manuel Saumell wrote over fifty contradanzas (in 2/4 or 6/8 time), in which his rhythmic and melodic inventiveness was astonishing.

The contradanza is a communal sequence dance, with the dance figures conforming to a set pattern. The selection of figures for a particular dance was usually set by a master of ceremonies or dance leader. There were two parts of 16 bars each, danced in a line or square format. The tempo and style of the music was bright and fairly fast. The earliest Cuban composition of a contradanza is *San Pascual bailon*, published in 1803. The Cubans developed a number of creolized version, such as the paseo, cadena, ostenido and cadazo. This creolization is an early example of the influence of the African traditions in the Caribbean. Most of the musicians were black or mulatto (even early in the 19th century there were many freed slaves and mixed race persons living in Cuban towns).

"The women of Havana have a furious taste for dancing; they spend entire nights elevated, agitated, crazy and pouring sweat until they fall spent."<sup>[42]</sup>

The contradanza supplanted the minuet as the most popular dance until from 1842 on, it gave way to the habanera, a quite different style.<sup>[43]</sup>

### Danza

This, the child of the contradanza, was also danced in lines or squares. It was also a brisk form of music and dance in double or triple time. A repeated 8-bar paseo was followed by two 16-bar sections called the primera and segunda. One famous composer of danzas was Ignacio Cervantes, whose forty-one danzas cubanas were a landmark in musical nationalism. This type of dance was eventually replaced by the danzón, which was, like the habanera, much slower and more sedate.<sup>[44]</sup>

## Habanera

The habanera developed out of the contradanza in the early 19th century. Its great novelty was that it was *sung*, as well as played and danced. Its development was at least partly due to the influence of French-speaking immigrants. The Haitian revolution of 1791 led to many colonial French and their slaves fleeing to Oriente. The *cinquillo*, an important rhythmical pattern, made its first appearance at this time.

The dance style of the habanera is slower and more stately than the *danza*. By the 1840s habaneras were written, sung, and danced in Mexico, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, and Spain.<sup>[45]</sup> Since about 1900 the habanera has been a relic dance; but the music has a period charm, and there are some famous compositions, such as *Tu*, which has been recorded in many versions.

Versions of habanera-type compositions have appeared in the music of Ravel, Bizet, Saint-Saëns, Debussy, Fauré, Albeniz. The rhythm is similar to that of the tango, and some believe the habanera is the musical father of the tango.

## Danzón

The European influence on Cuba's later musical development is represented by *danzón*, an elegant musical form that was once more popular than the *son* in Cuba. It is a descendent of the creollized Cuban *contradanza*. The *danzón* marks the change from the communal sequence dance style of the late 18th century to the couple dances of later times. The stimulus for this was the success of the once-scandalous *walz*, where couples danced facing each other, independently from other couples and not as part of a pre-set structure. The *danzón* was the first Cuban dance to adopt such methods, though there is a difference between the two dances. The *walz* is a progressive ballroom dance where couples move round the floor in an anti-clockwise direction; the *danzón* is a 'pocket-handkerchief' dance where a couple stays within a small area of the floor.<sup>[46]</sup>

The *danzón* was developed, according to one's point of view, either by Manuel Saumell<sup>[6] p191</sup> or by Miguel Faílde in Matanzas, the official date of origin being 1879.<sup>[47]</sup> Faílde's was an *orquesta típica*, a form derived from military bands, using brass, kettle-drums &c. The later development of the *charanga* was more suited to the indoor salon and is an orchestral format still popular today in Cuba and some other countries. The *charanga* uses double bass, cello, violins, flute, piano, *paila criolla* and *güiro*. This change in instrumental set-up is illustrated in Early Cuban bands.

From time to time in its 'career', the *danzón* acquired African influences in its musical structure. It became more syncopated, especially in its third part. The credit for this is given to José Urfé, who worked elements of the *son* into the last part of the *danzón* in his composition *El bombin de Barreto* (1910).<sup>[48]</sup> Both the *danzón* and the *charanga* line-up have been strongly influential in later developments.

The *danzón* was exported to popular acclaim throughout Latin America, especially Mexico. It is now a relic, both in music and in dance, but its highly orchestrated descendents live on in *charangas* that Faílde and Urfé would likely not recognize. Juan Formell has had a huge influence through his reorganization of first *Orquesta Revé*, and later *Los Van Van*.

## Danzonete

Early danzons were purely instrumental. The first to introduce a vocal part was Aniceto Diaz in 1927 in Matanzas: *Rompiendo la rutina*. Later, the black singer Barbarito Diez joined the charanga of Antonio María Romeu in 1935 and, over the years, recorded eleven albums of danzonetes. All later forms have included vocals.

## Son

The son, said Cristóbal Díaz, is the most important genre of Cuban music, and the least studied.<sup>[49]</sup> It can fairly be said that son is to Cuba what the tango is to Argentina, or the samba to Brazil. In addition, it is perhaps the most flexible of all forms of Latin-American music. Its great strength is its fusion between European and African musical traditions. Its most characteristic instruments are the Cuban guitar known as the *tres*, and the well-known double-headed bongó; these are present from the start to the present day. Also typical are the claves, the Spanish guitar, the double bass (replacing the early botija or marímbula), and early on, the cornet or trumpet and finally the piano.



claves

The son arose in Oriente, the eastern part of the island, merging the Spanish guitar and lyrical traditions with African percussion and rhythms. We now know that its history as a distinct form is relatively recent. There is no evidence that it goes back further than the end of the 19th century. It moved from Oriente to Havana in about 1909, carried by members of the *Permanente* (the Army), who were sent out of their areas of origin as a matter of policy. The first recordings were in 1918.<sup>[50]</sup>

There are many types of son. Odilio Urfé recognised these variants:<sup>[51]</sup>

- son montuno
- changuí
- sucu-sucu
- pregón
- bolero-son
- afro-son
- son guaguancó
- mambo

and one can certainly add

- salsa (in large part)
- timba

In addition, the son has again and again changed the older danzón to make it more syncopated and creole in style, starting in 1910, through the danzón-mambo and the cha-cha-cha, to complex modern arrangements that defy categorization.

The son varies widely today, with the defining characteristic a syncopated bass pulse that comes before the downbeat, giving son and its derivatives (including salsa) its distinctive rhythm; this is known as the *anticipated bass*. Son lyrics were originally decima (ten line), octosyllabic verse, and performed in 2/4 time, but diversified hugely from the 1920s. See clave for the son's underpinning structure.



Sexteto Occidente, New York 1926

*back:* María Teresa Vera (guitar), Ignacio Piñeiro (double bass), Julio Torres Biart (tres);  
*front:* Miguelito Garcia (clavé), Manuel Reinoso (bongó) and Francisco Sánchez (maracas)

## Changuí

Changuí is a type of son from the eastern provinces (area of Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo), formerly known as Oriente. Because these early groups did not write down and publish their music, it is unclear how the changuí originated, and whether it is a precursor to the mainstream son or not. Changuí has been characterised by its strong emphasis on the downbeat, and is often fast and very percussive.

Changuí exists today in the form of half-a-dozen small groups, mostly from Guantánamo.<sup>[52]</sup> The instrumentation is similar to that of the early son groups who set up in Havana before 1920. These son groups, for example the early Sexteto Boloña and Sexteto Habanero, used either marimbas or botijas as bass instruments before they changed over to the double bass, musically a more flexible instrument.

It is an open question whether the changui represents a genuinely distinctive music, or whether it is simply an archaic form of son artificially preserved by state support. Some modern orchestras, such as Orquesta Revé, have claimed changuí as their main influence. Whether this is accurate, or not, is unclear.

## Jazz

The history of jazz in Cuba was obscured for many years; however it has become clear that its history in Cuba is virtually as long as its history in the USA.<sup>[53] [54] [55] [56] [57] [58]</sup>

Much more is now known about early Cuban jazz bands, though a full assessment is plagued by the lack of recordings. Migrations and visits to and from the USA and the mutual exchange of recordings and sheet music kept musicians in the two countries in touch. In the first part of the 20th century there were close relations between musicians in Cuba and those in New Orleans. The orchestra leader in the famous Tropicana Club, Armando Romeu Jr, was a leading figure in the post-World War II development of Cuban jazz. The phenomenon of cubop and the jam sessions in Havana and New York organized by Cachao created genuine fusions that influence musicians today.

A key historian of early Cuban jazz is Leonardo Acosta.<sup>[53] [54]</sup> Others have explored the history of jazz and latin jazz more from the U.S. perspective.<sup>[55] [56] [57] [58]</sup>

### Early Cuban jazz bands

The Jazz Band Sagua was founded in Sagua la Grande in 1914 by Pedro Stacholy (director & piano). Members: Hipólito Herrera (trumpet); Norberto Fabelo (cornet); Ernesto Ribalta (flute & sax); Humberto Domínguez (violin); Luciano Galindo (trombone); Antonio Temprano (tuba); Tomás Medina (drum kit); Marino Rojo (güiro). For fourteen years they played at the *Teatro Principal de Sagua*. Stacholy studied under Antonio Fabrè in Sagua, and completed his studies in New York, where he stayed for three years.<sup>[59]</sup>

The Cuban Jazz Band was founded in 1922 by Jaime Prats in Havana. The personnel included his son Rodrigo Prats on violin, the great flautist Alberto Socarrás on flute and saxophone and Pucho Jiménez on slide trombone. The line-up would probably have included double bass, kit drum, banjo, cornet at least. Earlier works cited this as the first jazz band in Cuba,<sup>[60]</sup> but evidently there were earlier groups.

In 1924 Moisés Simons (piano) founded a group which played on the roof garden of the Plaza Hotel in Havana, and consisted of piano, violin, two saxes, banjo, double bass, drums and timbales. Its members included Virgilio Diego (violin); Alberto Socarrás (alto sax, flute); José Ramón Betancourt (tenor sax); Pablo O'Farrill (d. bass). In 1928, still at the same venue, Simons hired Julio Cueva, a famous trumpeter, and Enrique Santiesteban, a future media star, as vocalist and drummer. These were top instrumentalists, attracted by top fees of \$8 a day.<sup>[53] p28</sup>



Jazz Band Sagua, 1920s

## African heritage

This section discusses music of African heritage in Cuba.

### Origins of Cuba's African groups

Clearly, the origin of African groups in Cuba is due to the island's long history of slavery. Compared to the USA, slavery started in Cuba much earlier and continued for decades afterwards. Cuba was the last country in the Americas to abolish the importation of slaves, and the second last to free the slaves. In 1807 the British Parliament outlawed slavery, and from then on the British Navy acted to intercept Portuguese and Spanish slave ships. By 1860 the trade with Cuba was almost extinguished; the last slave ship to Cuba was in 1873. The abolition of slavery was announced by the Spanish Crown in 1880, and put into effect in 1886. Two years later, Brazil abolished slavery.<sup>[61]</sup>

Although the exact number of slaves from each African culture will never be known, most came from one of these groups, which are listed in rough order of their cultural impact in Cuba:

1. The Congolese from the Congo basin and SW Africa. Many tribes were involved, all called *Congos* in Cuba. Their religion is called *Palo*. Probably the most numerous group, with a huge influence on Cuban music.
2. The Oyó or Yoruba from modern Nigeria, known in Cuba as *Lucumí*. Their religion is known as *Regla de Ocha* (roughly, 'the way of the spirits') and its syncretic version known as *Santería*. Culturally of great significance.
3. The Kalabars from part of Nigeria and Cameroon. These semi-Bantú groups are known in Cuba as *Carabali*,<sup>[62]</sup> and their religious organization as *Abakuá*. The street name for them in Cuba was *Ñáñigos*.
4. The Dahomey, from Benin. They were the Fon, known as *arará* in Cuba. The Dahomeys were a powerful and terrible people who practised human sacrifice and slavery long before Europeans got involved, and even more so during the Atlantic slave trade.<sup>[11] p100 [63] [64]</sup>
5. Haitian immigrants to Cuba arrived at various times up to the present day. Leaving aside the French, who also came, the Africans from Haiti were a mixture of groups who usually spoke creolized French: and religion was known as *vodú*.
6. From part of modern Liberia and the Ivory Coast came the *Gangá*.
7. Senegambian people (Senegal, Gambia), but including many brought from Sudan by the Arab slavers, were known by a catch-all word: Mandinga. The famous musical phrase *Kikiribu Mandinga!* refers to them.

### Subsequent organization

The roots of most Afro-Cuban musical forms lie in the *cabildos*, self-organized social clubs for the African slaves, separate *cabildos* for separate cultures. The *cabildos* were formed mainly from four groups: the Yoruba (the *Lucumi* in Cuba); the Congolese (*Palo* in Cuba); Dahomey (the Fon or *Arará*). Other cultures were undoubtedly present, more even than listed above, but in smaller numbers, and they did not leave such a distinctive presence.

*Cabildos* preserved African cultural traditions, even after the abolition of slavery in 1886. At the same time, African religions were transmitted from generation to generation throughout Cuba, Haiti, other islands and Brazil. These religions, which had a similar but not identical structure, were known as *Lucumi* or *Regla de Ocha* if they derived from the Yoruba, *Palo* from Central Africa, *Vodú* from Haiti, and so on. The term *Santería* was first introduced to account for the way African spirits were joined to Catholic saints, especially by people who were both baptized and initiated, and so were genuinely members of both groups. Outsiders picked up the word and have tended to use it somewhat indiscriminately. It has become a kind of catch-all word, rather like salsa in music.<sup>[11] p171; p258</sup>

The *ñáñigos* in Cuba or *Carabali*<sup>[62]</sup> in their secret *Abakuá* societies, were one of the most terrifying groups; even other blacks were afraid of them:

"Girl, don't tell me about the *ñáñigos*! They were bad. The *carabali* was evil down to his guts. And the *ñáñigos* from back in the day when I was a chick, weren't like the ones today... they kept their secret, like in Africa."

[65] [66]

### **African sacred music in Cuba**

All these African cultures had musical traditions, which survive erratically to the present day, not always in detail, but in general style. The best preserved are the African polytheistic religions, where, in Cuba at least, the instruments, the language, the chants, the dances and their interpretations are quite well preserved. In what other American countries are the religious ceremonies conducted in the old language(s) of Africa? They certainly are in Lucumí ceremonies, though of course, back in Africa the language has moved on. What unifies all genuine forms of African music is the unity of polyrhythmic percussion, voice (call-and-response) and dance in well-defined social settings, and the absence of melodic instruments of an Arabic or European kind.

Not until after the Second World War do we find detailed printed descriptions or recordings of African sacred music in Cuba. Inside the cults, music, song, dance and ceremony were (and still are) learnt by heart by means of demonstration, including such ceremonial procedures conducted in an African language. The experiences were private to the initiated, until the work of the ethnologist Fernando Ortíz, who devoted a large part of his life to investigating the influence of African culture in Cuba. The first detailed transcription of percussion, song and chants are to be found in his great works.<sup>[4]</sup> [67]

There are now many recordings offering a selection of pieces in praise of, or prayers to, the orishas. Much of the ceremonial procedures are still hidden from the eyes of outsiders, though some descriptions in words exist.

### **Yoruban and Congolese rituals**

Religious traditions of African origin have survived in Cuba, and are the basis of ritual music, song and dance quite distinct from the secular music and dance. The religion of Yoruban origin is known as *Lucumí* or *Regla de Ocha*; the religion of Congolese origin is known as *Palo*, as in *palos del monte*.<sup>[68]</sup> There are also, in the Oriente region, forms of Haitian ritual together with its own instruments, music &c.

In Lucumi ceremonies, consecrated batá drums are played at ceremonies, and gourd ensembles called abwe. In the 1950s, a collection of Havana-area batá drummers called Santero helped bring Lucumí styles into mainstream Cuban music, while artists like Mezcla, with the lucumí singer Lázaro Ros, melded the style with other forms, including zouk.

The Congo cabildo uses yuka drums, as well as gallos (a form of song contest), makuta and mani dances. The latter is related to the Brazilian martial dance capoeira.

### **Clave**

The **clave** rhythmic pattern is used as a tool for temporal organization in Afro-Cuban music, such as rumba, conga de comparsa, son, mambo (music), salsa, Latin jazz, songo and timba. The five-stroke clave pattern represents the structural core of many Afro-Cuban rhythms.<sup>[69]</sup> Just as a keystone holds an arch in place, the clave pattern holds the rhythm together in Afro-Cuban music.<sup>[70]</sup> The clave pattern originated in sub-Saharan African music traditions, where it serves essentially the same function as it does in Cuba. The pattern is also found in the African diaspora musics of Haitian vodou drumming and Afro-Brazilian music. The clave pattern is used in North American popular music as a rhythmic motif or ostinato, or simply a form of rhythmic decoration.

## Rumba

Rumba is a music of Cuban origin, but entirely African in style, using only voice, percussion and dance.<sup>[71]</sup> It is a secular musical style from the docks and the less prosperous areas of Havana and Matanzas. Rumba musicians use a trio of drums, similar in appearance to conga drums (they are called *tumba*, *llamador* and *quinto*) or, alternatively, wooden boxes (*cajones*) may be used. Also used are claves and, sometimes, spoons. There is always a vocal element, African in style, but sung in Spanish: call and response vocals. There were three basic rumba forms in the last century: columbia, guaguancó and yambú. The Columbia, played in 6/8 time, was danced only by men, often as a solo dance, and was swift, with aggressive and acrobatic moves. The guaguancó was danced with one man and one woman. The dance simulates the man's pursuit of the woman. The yambú, now a relic, featured a burlesque of an old man walking with a stick. All forms of rumba are accompanied by song or chants.<sup>[72] [73]</sup>

Note also two other uses of the word, both technically incorrect:

- Rumba as a cover-all term for faster Cuban music. This usage started in the early 1930s with *The Peanut Vendor*. In this sense it has been replaced by salsa, which is also a cover-all term for marketing the music to non-Cubans.
- Rumba in the international Latin-American dance syllabus is a misnomer for the slow Cuban rhythm more accurately called the bolero-son.

Rumba is usually seen in Cuba in the performances of professional groups on set occasions. There are also amateur groups based on *casas de cultura*, and on work groups. Like all aspects of life in Cuba, dance and music are organised by the state through Ministries and their various committees.<sup>[74]</sup>

## Comparsa

In Cuba, the word *comparsa* refers to the neighbourhood groups that take part in carnival. Conga is of African origin, and derives from street celebrations of the African spirits. The distinction is blurred today, but in the past the congas have been prohibited from time to time. Carnival as a whole was banned by the revolutionary government for many years, and still does not take place with the regularity of old. Conga drums are played (along with other typical instruments) in comparsas of all kinds. Santiago de Cuba and Havana were the two main centers for street carnivals. Two types of dance music (at least) owe their origin to comparsa music:

Conga: an adaptation of comparsa music and dance for social dances. Eliseo Grenet may be the person who first created this music,<sup>[11] p408</sup> but it was the Lecuona Cuban Boys who took it round the world. The conga became, and perhaps still is, the best-known Cuban music and dance style for non-latins.

Mozambique: a comparsa-type dance music developed by *Pello el Afrokan* (Pedro Izquierdo) in 1963. It had a brief period of high popularity, peaked in 1965, and was soon forgotten. Apparently, to make it work properly, it needed 16 drums plus other percussion, dancers...<sup>[75]</sup>

## Other forms

Black immigrants from Haiti have settled in Oriente and established their own style of music, called the *tumba francesa*, which uses its own type of drum, dance and song. This survives to the present day in Santiago de Cuba.

## Diversification and Popularization

### 1920s and '30s

Son music came to Havana, probably early in the century. By the 1920s it was one of the most popular forms in Cuba: recordings of the Sexteto Boloña exist from 1918. In the 1930s recordings by famous groups like the Septeto Nacional and the Trio Matamoros went round the world. Son was urbanized, with trumpets and other new instruments, leading to its tremendous influence on most later forms of Cuban music. In Havana, influences such as American popular music and jazz via the radio were also popular.

The son sextetos gave way to the septetos, including guitar or tres, marímbulas or double bass, bongos, claves and maracas. The trumpet was introduced in the latter part of the 1920s to improve the sonority, that is, mainly to increase the sound. Lead singers improvised lyrics and embellished melody lines while the claves laid down the basic clave rhythm.

The son has always had a wide range of interpretations, from the Oriente style, where even the lyrics could be Afrocuban, with reference to various santos and rituals, to the silky salon style of groups like Conjunto Palmas y Canas. It was, and still is, played by individual trovadores, conjuntos and big bands.

### Cuban music enters the United States

In the 1930 Don Azpiazzú had the first million-selling record of Cuban music: *The Peanut Vendor* (El Manisero), with Antonio Machín as the singer. This number had been orchestrated and included in N.Y. theatre by Azpiazzú before recording, which no doubt helped with the publicity. The Lecuona Cuban Boys became the best-known Cuban touring ensemble: they were the ones who first used the conga drum in their conjunto, and popularized the conga as a dance. Xavier Cugat at the Waldorf Astoria was highly influential. In 1941 Desi Arnaz popularized the comparsa drum (similar to the conga) in the U.S with his performances of Babalú. There was a real 'rumba craze' at the time.

Later, Mario Bauza and Machito set up in New York and Miguelito Valdés also arrived there.



Musicians at the Hotel Nacional, Havana. October 2002

## 1940s and '50s

In the 1940s, Chano Pozo formed part of the bebop revolution in jazz, playing conga with Dizzy Gillespie and Machito in New York City. Cuban jazz had started much earlier, in Havana, in the period 1910–1930.

Arsenio Rodríguez, one of Cuba's most famous tres players and conjunto leaders, emphasised the *son's* African roots by adapting the *guaguancó* style, and by adding a cowbell and conga to the rhythm section. He also expanded the role of the tres as a solo instrument.

In the late 1930s and 40s, the danzonera Arcaño y sus Maravillas incorporated more syncopation and added a montuno (as in son), transforming the music played by charanga orchestras.

## The big band era

The big band era arrived in Cuba in the 1940s, and became a dominant format that survives. Two great arranger-bandleaders deserve special credit for this, Armando Romeu Jr. and Damaso Perez Prado. Armando Romeu Jr. led the *Tropicana Cabaret* orchestra for 25 years, starting in 1941. He had experience playing with visiting American jazz groups as well as a complete mastery of Cuban forms of music. In his hands the Tropicana presented not only Afro-Cuban and other popular Cuban music, but also Cuban jazz and American big band compositions. Later he conducted the *Orquesta Cubana de Musica Moderna*.<sup>[53] [76] [77]</sup>

Damaso Perez Prado had a number of hits, and sold more 78s than any other Latin music of the day. He took over the role of pianist/arranger for the *Orquesta Casino de la Playa* in 1944, and immediately began introducing new elements into its sound. The orchestra began to sound more Afro-Cuban, and at the same time Prado took influences from Stravinsky, Stan Kenton and elsewhere. By the time he left the orchestra in 1946 he had put together the elements of his big band mambo.<sup>[78]</sup>

"Above all, we must point out the work of Perez Prado as an arranger, or better yet, composer and arranger, and his clear influence on most other Cuban arrangers from then on."<sup>[53] p86</sup>

Benny Moré, considered by many as the greatest Cuban singer of all time, was in his heyday in the 1950s. He had an innate musicality and fluid tenor voice, which he colored and phrased with great expressivity. Although he could not read music, Moré was a master of all the genres, including son montuno, mambo, guaracha, guajira, cha cha cha, afro, canción, guaguancó, and bolero. His orchestra, the Banda Giganta, and his music, was a development – more flexible and fluid in style – of the Perez Prado orchestra, which he sung with in 1949–1950.

## Cuban music in the US

Three great innovations based on Cuban music hit the USA after World War II: the first was Cubop, the latest Latin jazz fusion. In this, Mario Bauza and the Machito orchestra on the Cuban side and Dizzy Gillespie on the American side were prime movers. The rumbustious conguero Chano Pozo was also important, for he introduced jazz musicians to basic Cuban rhythms. Cuban jazz has continued to be a significant influence.

The mambo first entered the United States around 1950, though ideas had been developing in Cuba and Mexico City for some time. The mambo as understood in the United States and Europe was considerably different from the danzón-mambo of Orestes "Cachao" Lopez, which was a danzón with extra syncopation in its final part. The mambo—which became internationally famous—was a big band product, the work of Perez Prado, who made some sensational recordings for RCA in their new recording studios in Mexico City in the late 1940s. About 27 of those recordings had Benny Moré as the singer, though the best sellers were mainly instrumentals. The big hits included *Que rico el mambo* (Mambo Jambo); *Mambo No. 5*; *Mambo #8*; *Cherry Pink (and Apple Blossom White)*. The later (1955) hit *Patricia* was a mambo/rock fusion.<sup>[79]</sup> Mambo of the Prado kind was more a descendent of the son and the guaracha than the danzón. In the U.S. the mambo craze lasted from about 1950 to 1956, but its influence on the bugaloo and salsa that followed it was considerable.

Violinist Enrique Jorrín invented the chachachá in the early 1950s. This was developed from the danzón by increased syncopation. The chachachá became more popular outside Cuba when the big bands of Perez Prado and

Tito Puente produced arrangements that attracted American and European audiences.<sup>[80]</sup>

Along with "Nuyoricans" Ray Barretto and Tito Puente and others, several waves of Cuban immigrants introduced their ideas into US music. Among these was Celia Cruz, a guaracha singer. Others were active in Latin jazz, such as percussionist Patato Valdés of the Cuban-oriented "Tipíca '73", linked to the Fania All-Stars. Several former members of Irakere have also become highly successful in the USA, among them Paquito D'Rivera and Arturo Sandoval. Tata Güines, a famous conguero, moved to New York City in 1957, playing with jazz players such as Dizzy Gillespie, Maynard Ferguson, and Miles Davis at Birdland. As a percussionist, he performed with Josephine Baker and Frank Sinatra. He returned to Cuba in 1959 after Fidel Castro came to power in the Cuban Revolution, which he helped fund with contributions from his earnings as a musician.<sup>[81]</sup>

### **Filín**

Filín was a Cuban fashion of the 1940s and 1950s, influenced by popular music in the USA. The word is derived from *feeling*. It describes a style of post-microphone jazz-influenced romantic song (crooning).<sup>[82]</sup> Its Cuban roots were in the bolero and the canción. Some Cuban quartets, such as Cuarteto d'Aida and Los Zafiros, modelled themselves on U.S. close-harmony groups. Others were singers who had heard Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan and Nat King Cole. Filín singers included César Portillo de la Luz, José Antonio Méndez, who spent a decade in Mexico from 1949 to 1959, Frank Domínguez, the blind pianist Frank Emilio Flynn, and the great singers of boleros Elena Burke and the still-performing Omara Portuondo, who both came from the Cuarteto d'Aida. The filín movement originally had a place every afternoon on *Radio Mil Diez*. Some of its most prominent singers, such as Pablo Milanés, took up the banner of the nueva trova.

### **1960s and '70s**

Modern Cuban music is known for its relentless mixing of genres. For example, the 1970s saw Los Irakere use batá in a big band setting; this became known as son-batá or batá-rock. Later artists created the mozambique, which mixed conga and mambo, and batá-rumba, which mixed rumba and batá drum music. Mixtures including elements of hip hop, jazz and rock and roll are also common, like in Habana Abierta's rockoson.

### **Revolutionary Cuba and Cuban exiles**

The triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 signalled the emigration of many musicians to Puerto Rico, Florida and New York, and in Cuba artists and their work came under the protection (and control) of the Socialist state, and the monopoly state-owned recording company EGREM. The Castro government abolished copyright laws in Cuba, closed many of the venues where popular music used to be played (e.g. night clubs), and so indirectly threw many musicians out of work.<sup>[53] p202</sup> This undoubtedly had deleterious effects on the evolution of popular music and dance.<sup>[83]</sup>

Many young musicians now studied classical music and not popular music. All musicians employed by the state were given college courses in music. In Cuba, the Nueva Trova movement (including Pablo Milanés) reflected the new leftist ideals. The state took over the lucrative Tropicana Club, which continued as a popular attraction for foreign tourists until 1968, when it was closed along with many other music venues (and later reopened with the rebirth of tourism).<sup>[53] p202</sup> Tourism was almost non-existent for three decades. Traditional Cuban music could be found in local Casas de la Trova. Musicians, if in work, were full-time and paid by the state after graduating from a conservatory. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the loss of its support for Cuba changed the situation quite a bit. Tourism became respectable again, and so did popular music for their entertainment. Musicians were even allowed to tour abroad and earn a living outside the state-run system.

Famous artists from the Cuban exile include Celia Cruz and the whole conjunto she sang with, the Sonora Matancera. 'Patato' (Carlos Valdés), Cachao, La Lupe, Arturo Sandoval, Willy Chirino, La Palabra, Paquito D'Rivera and Gloria Estefan are some others. Many of these musicians, especially Cruz, became closely associated with the

anti-revolutionary movement, and as 'unpersons'<sup>[84]</sup> have been omitted from the standard Cuban reference books, and their subsequent musical recordings are never on sale in Cuba.<sup>[85]</sup>

### Salsa

Salsa was the fourth innovation based on Cuban music to hit the USA, and differed in that it was initially developed in the USA, not in Cuba. Because Cuba has so many indigenous types of music there has always been a problem in marketing the 'product' abroad to people who did not understand the differences between rhythms that, to a Cuban, are quite distinct. So, twice in the 20th century, a kind of product label was developed to solve this problem. The first occasion was in the 1930s after *The Peanut Vendor* became an international success. It was called a 'rumba' even though it really had nothing to do with genuine rumba: the number was obviously a son pregon. The label 'rumba' was used outside Cuba for years as a catch-all for Cuban popular music.<sup>[86]</sup>

The second occasion happened during the period 1965–1975 in New York, as musicians of Cuban and Puerto-Rican origin combined to produce the great music of the post Cha-cha-cha period. This music acquired the label of 'salsa'. No-one really knows how this happened, but everyone recognised what a benefit it was to have a common label for son, mambo, guaracha, guijira, guaguanco &c. Cubans and non Cubans, such as Tito Puentes, Ruben Blades and many experts of the Cuban music and salsa have always said "Salsa is just a another name for Cuban, music. Tito Puentes once said, now they call it Salsa, later they may call it Stir Fry, but to me it will alway be Cuban Music"; but over time salsa bands worked in other influences. For example, in the late 1960s Willie Colón developed numbers that made use of Brazilian rhythms. N.Y. radio programmes offered 'salsarengue' as a further combination, like a good cook Willie Colon You look at a band of the 1940s playing Cuban music and you will see the same exact instruments in Salsa Music. Later still 'Salsa romantica' was the label for an especially sugary type of bolero. Even when, Benny Moré, Perez Prado the greatest Sonero that ever existed, was singing Boleros with a salsa cadence in the 1940s. It was not until 1950s that Cuban music became popular for Puerto Rican bands. Plena, Bomba an other styles or music were popular at the time in Puerto Rico. Many famous famous Puerto Rican musicians went to learn the music styles of Cubans in the 1930s and 1940s, and it was not until the arrival of Castro in 1959 and the Cuban music stopped its exportation to the world, that Puerto Ricans in New York were able to be greatly noticed, but what is known as Salsa today, was brought to New York in the 1920s and 1930s by Dizzy and Chano Pozo,<sup>[87]</sup> <sup>[88]</sup> this last one was discovered by Dizzy as he was one of the greatest percussionist that ever lived.<sup>[89]</sup> <sup>[90]</sup> <sup>[91]</sup>

The question of whether or not salsa is anything more than Cuban music has been argued over for more than thirty years. Initially, not much difference could be seen. Later it became clear that not only was New York salsa different from popular music in Cuba, but salsa in Venezuela, Colombia and other countries could also be distinguished. It also seems clear that salsa has receded from the great position it achieved in the late 1970s. The reasons for this are also much disputed.<sup>[92]</sup>

### Nueva trova

Paralleling nueva canción in Latin America is the Cuban Nueva trova, which dates from about 1967/68, after the Cuban Revolution. It differed from the traditional trova, not because the musicians were younger, but because the content was, in the widest sense, political. Nueva trova is defined by its connection with Castro's revolution, and by its lyrics, which attempt to escape the banalities of life by concentrating on socialism, injustice, sexism, colonialism, racism and similar issues.<sup>[93]</sup> Silvio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés became the most important exponents of this style. Carlos Puebla and



A local musical house Casa de la Trova at Santiago de Cuba.

Joseíto Fernández were long-time old trova singers who added their weight to the new regime, but of the two only Puebla wrote special pro-revolution songs.

Nueva Trova had its heyday in the 1970s, but was already declining before the fall of the Soviet Union. Examples of non-political styles in the Nueva Trova movement can be found, for example, Liuba María Hevia<sup>[94]</sup> whose lyrics are focused on more traditional subjects such as love and solitude, sharing with the rest a highly poetical style. On the other side of the spectrum, Carlos Varela<sup>[95]</sup> is famous in Cuba for his open criticism of some aspects of Castro's revolution.

The Nueva Trova, initially so popular, suffered both inside Cuba, perhaps from a growing disenchantment with one-party rule, and externally, from the vivid contrast with the Buena Vista Social Club film and recordings. Audiences round the world have had their eyes opened to the extraordinary charm and musical quality of the older forms of Cuban music. By contrast, topical themes that seemed so relevant in the 1960s and 70s now seem dry and passé. Even *Guantanamera* has been damaged by over-repetition in less skilled hands. All the same, those pieces of high musical and lyrical quality, among which Puebla's *Hasta siempre Comandante* stands out, will probably last as long as Cuba lasts.<sup>[96]</sup>

## 1980s to the present

Son remains the basis of most popular forms of modern Cuban music. Son is represented by long-standing groups like Septeto Nacional, which was re-established in 1985, Orquesta Aragón, Orquesta Ritmo Oriental and Orquesta Original de Manzanillo. Sierra Maestra, is famous for having sparked a revival in traditional son in the 1980s. Nueva trova still has influence, but the overtly political themes of the 1960s are well out of fashion. Meanwhile, Irakere fused traditional Cuban music with jazz, and groups like NG La Banda, Orishas and Son 14 continued to add new elements to son, especially hip hop and funk, to form timba music; this process was aided by the acquisition of imported electronic equipment. There are still many practitioners of traditional *son montuno*, such as Eliades Ochoa, who have recorded and toured widely as a result of interest in the *son montuno* after the Buena Vista Social Club success.

In the 1990s, increased interest in world music coincided with the post-Soviet Union *periodo especial* in Cuba, during which the economy began opening up to tourism. Orquesta Aragón, Charanga Habanera and Cándido Fabré y su Banda have been long-time players in the charanga scene, and helped form the popular timba scene of the late 1990s. The biggest award in modern Cuban music is the Beny Moré Award.

## Timba

Cubans have never been content to hear their music described as *salsa*, even though it is crystal clear that this was a label for their music. For the most part, *timba* equals *salsa cubana*, though there are claims that it is something more. Since the early 1990s timba has been used to describe popular dance music in Cuba, rivalled only lately by Reggaetón. Though derived from the same roots as salsa, timba has its own characteristics, and is intimately tied to the life and culture of Cuba, and especially Havana.

## Buena Vista Social Club

A true watershed event was the release of *Buena Vista Social Club* (1997), a recording of veteran Cuban musicians organized by the American musician and producer, Ry Cooder. *Buena Vista Social Club* became an immense worldwide hit, selling millions of copies, and made stars of octogenarian Cuban musicians such Ibrahim Ferrer, Rubén González, and Compay Segundo, whose careers had been damaged by the consequences of the revolution of 1959.

*Buena Vista* resulted in several followup recordings and spawned a film of the same name, as well as tremendous interest in other Cuban groups. In subsequent years, dozens of singers and *conjuntos* made recordings for foreign labels and toured internationally.

The huge international response stirred some resentment amongst younger musicians who felt that their work, and the evolution of forty years, was being ignored. The conclusion some have drawn is that the wholesale closure of popular music venues (after the revolution), which threw many musicians out of work, and subsequent control by state committees, damaged the development of Cuban popular music.<sup>[53] [83]</sup>

## Rap/Hip-Hop/Reggaeton

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Cuban economy went into decline. Poverty became more widespread and visible in Cuba. In the 1990s, some Cubans start to protest this situation by means of rap and hip-hop. The rappers become a 'revolution within a revolution'. [97]. In Cuba, hip hop is used to describe life and aspirations.<sup>[98]</sup>

During the Special Period, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Cuban government then took steps to improve the economy. Tourism was mildly encouraged, and Havana's music venues started to cater for visitors as well as locals. Before then, tourists were quite a rarity.<sup>[99]</sup> When hip-hop emerged, the Cuban government opposed the vulgar image that rappers portrayed, but later accepted (1999) that it might be better to have hip-hop under the influence of the Ministry of Culture as an "authentic expression of Cuban Culture".<sup>[100]</sup>

Unlike salsa, which is an indigenous dance music, rap music in Cuba is culturally of foreign origin. Although some rap groups have prided themselves in remaining loyal to true hip hop essence, others (like the Orishas, the only Cuban rap group to succeed in Latin America), have been criticized for using salsa rhythms to generate commercial appeal.

Like hip hop, Reggaeton from Puerto Rico is a new genre for the Cubans. The advent of web software helped to distribute music unofficially. Both lyrics and dance movements have been criticised. Reggaeton musicians responded by making songs that defended their music. Despite their efforts, the Ministry of Culture has ruled that reggaeton is not to be used in teaching intuitions, parties and at discos.<sup>[101]</sup>

## Government and Hip-Hop

Hip-hop being tolerated by the government of Cuba is something out of the ordinary, because performers are provided with venues and equipment by the government.<sup>[102]</sup> The Cuban rap and hip-hop scene sought out the involvement of the Ministry of Culture in the production and promotion of their music, which would otherwise have been impossible to accomplish. After the Cuban government provided luke-warm endorsement, the Cuban Rap Agency provided the Cuban rap scene, in 2002, with a state-sponsored record label, magazine, and Cuba's own hip-hop festival.<sup>[100]</sup>

Under this scheme, the government gives rap and hip-hop groups time on mass media outlets in return for hip-hop artists limiting self expression and presenting the government in a positive way.<sup>[103]</sup> The hip-hop artists talk about everyday life in Cuba. However, most critics believe that the Cuban Rap Agency will hide rappers' opinions of the Cuban government.<sup>[104]</sup> The government evidently recognises that rap and hip-hop is growing in Cuba, and would be difficult or impossible to eliminate.

## Rockoson

**Rockoson** is a form made with elements of timba, nueva trova and rock and roll made since the late 1980s by groups like "Vanito y La Lucha Almada" and "Habana Abierta".

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