



# Preciosa: The People, History, and Music of Puerto Rico

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## Introduction

Puerto Rico is a land rich in culture, natural beauty, tradition, and, diversity. From music indigenous to the island's original habitants to rapper Daddy Yankee, Puerto Rican artists have been influenced by Europe, Africa, Cuba, the United States, and more.

Puerto Rico is one of 7,000 tropical islands, the largest of which is Cuba, that form the West Indies and belongs to the group of islands called the Greater Antilles. Three quarters of the island is hilly or mountainous, and the trade winds from the northeast keep it an average of 82 degrees in the summer and in the mid-70s in the winter. The island experiences rain throughout the year, with the heaviest rains occurring between May and December, and only one third of Puerto Rico has soil considered to be of good quality. There are over 200 species of birds, the water is bright blue, and the marine life includes colorful tropical fish.<sup>1</sup>

With a population of nearly four million, Puerto Ricans are predominantly Roman Catholics, and God is worshipped in large public demonstrations, such as fiestas, processions, and celebrations of saints' days. There is a close relationship with the Virgin Mary, and saints are regarded as friends. Children usually get their Christmas toys on Epiphany, January 6<sup>th</sup>, celebrating the visitation of the Three Wise Men.<sup>2</sup> Spiritualism and folk religions also remain an important part of Puerto Rican spiritual life.<sup>3</sup>

In their daily diet, Puerto Ricans consume shellfish and other kinds of seafood, rice, red beans, tostones or mofongo made from plantain, and bread. Pork is the meat of choice for special celebrations. Made from sugarcane, rum is the national alcoholic

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<sup>1</sup> Jerome J. Allotta, *The Puerto Ricans*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., in *The Immigrant Experience*, ed. Sandra Stotsky, New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1996, 19-21.

<sup>2</sup> Pedro A. Malavet, *America's Colony: The Political and Cultural Conflict Between the United States and Puerto Rico*, in *Critical America*, edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, New York: New York University Press, 2004, 108.

<sup>3</sup> Allotta, 77.



drink, and piraguas, shaved ice covered in syrup, and ice cream made with local fruits are very popular in the tropical heat.<sup>4</sup>

Famous Puerto Ricans include singers Ricky Martin and Tony Orlando, journalist Geraldo Rivera, actor Freddie Prinze, game show hostess Vanna White, Pittsburgh Pirates batter Roberto Clemente, actor José Ferrer, actresses Chita Rivera and Rita Moreno, actor Raul Julia, Metropolitan Opera bass Justino Díaz, boyband Menudo, singer and guitarist José Feliciano, and legendary drummer and bandleader Tito Puente, born of Puerto Rican parents. Annual festivals and concerts include Puerto Rican Danza Week, the Puerto Rican Heineken Jazz Fest, and Le Lo Lai Festival that takes place year around, featuring weekly concerts of popular and folk music.<sup>5</sup> Pablo Casals, of partial Puerto Rican descent, moved to Puerto Rico at age 81 and brought international fame to San Juan by bringing to it the internationally acclaimed Casals Music Festival of orchestral and chamber music.<sup>6</sup>

The United States is the primary deliverer of goods and services to Puerto Rico. 9 out of 10 pharmaceuticals consumed in the United States were produced on the island,<sup>7</sup> and U.S. companies enjoy tax exemptions on profits and on interest earned from deposits made in local banks. Tourism is also important, and Puerto Rico has the highest per capita income of Latin America. But despite these successes, Puerto Rico ranks below the per capita income of Mississippi, and its unemployment rate is three times greater than that of any state in the United States.<sup>8</sup> As described by Pedro Malavet, Professor of Law at the University of Florida, contemporary Puerto Rican culture is heteropatriarchal, sexist, racist, homophobic, and elitist, and homosexuals are the most likely to suffer discrimination, with the second group being ex-convicts.<sup>9</sup>

## Discovery to Exploitation

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<sup>4</sup> Malavet, 108.

<sup>5</sup> *Puerto Rico—Music and Performing Arts*,

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/destination-hunter/north-america/caribbean-atlanti> . . . Accessed September 10, 2010, 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Music*, on website *Welcome to Puerto Rico!* <http://www.topuertorico.org/culture/music.shtml>. Accessed September 10, 2010, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Malavet, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Allotta, 20-21.

<sup>9</sup> Malavet, 107.



On Nov. 19th, 1493, while sailing through the Caribbean Sea, Christopher Columbus came upon a large tropical island, called Borinquén (Island of the Brave World) by its 30,000 Taino Indian inhabitants. The Taino, peaceful fishermen with primitive weapons, had reddish tan skin, straight, long black hair, and high cheekbones. Columbus renamed the island San Juan Bautista in honor of Don Juan, the son of his Spanish patrons King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. He was sent back to the island to establish another Spanish colony and brought with him Ponce de León, a soldier who had distinguished himself in Spain's war against the Moors of Granada. King Ferdinand appointed León the first governor of the island of San Juan. León built a house in Caparra, the first Spanish settlement, and, in 1511, the settlement was renamed Puerto Rico. By 1521, Puerto Rico had been moved across the bay and its name changed to San Juan. San Juan became the capital, and the entire island took on the name Puerto Rico.<sup>10</sup>

With both Cuba and the Dominican Republic also under their rule, the Spanish began their full-scale colonization of Puerto Rico in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This included the destruction of the natives, the introduction of slavery, and careful attempts by the Spanish government to maintain white Spanish domination over the island. The native-born Puerto Ricans were known as a "criollos," later as "puertorriqueños." The island natives were the first slaves, but the largest group of slaves were from Africa, imported beginning in 1510.<sup>11</sup> Puerto Rico's agriculture was based primarily on sugarcane, but by the mid 1600s, the sugar industry had declined. Landowners began raising cattle and growing ginger and tobacco. Spain wanted people to settle in and develop Puerto Rico, but there were few Spanish women. Spanish men, therefore, bred with and married Taino and African women. The island also attracted Dominicans, Haitians, Venezuelans, Canary Islanders, and French inhabitants of Louisiana who fled their homes when the United States bought the territory in 1803. The result was a racial and ethnic mix, and slavery was finally abolished in 1873 by King Amadeo of Spain.<sup>12</sup>

The 1800s saw a rise of national consciousness and cultural distinctiveness. The jíbaros were the working farmers or rural wageworkers and were thought of as

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<sup>10</sup> Allotta, 22-23.

<sup>11</sup> Malavet, 29-31.

<sup>12</sup> Allotta, 24-26.



“philosophers of nature,” exemplifying the national character. The criollos were seen as those other than Spaniards or Spaniards of a different kind, akin to the pre-Columbian inhabitants, the Tainos. The blacks were considered to be those belonging in the future to the subordinate laboring classes.<sup>13</sup>

In April of 1898, the Spanish-American War broke out, beginning in Cuba and the Philippines. The United States found little resistance in overpowering the Spanish troops, evidenced by the fact that only 5 U. S. and 17 Spanish soldiers died in the conflict that lasted only 19 days. The islanders saw this as a positive break with the past, and breaking from Spanish rule led to a clearer separation from the Catholic Church.<sup>14</sup>

On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson signed the Jones Act, granting U. S. citizenship to the Puerto Ricans.<sup>15</sup> Not all governors appointed by the United States were particularly supportive of Puerto Rico. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., for example, had disdain for the islanders, referring to them as, “shameless by birth,” and saying that he did not, “know anything more comic and irritating than Puerto Rico.” Moreover, in 1932, in a letter written by Rockefeller Institute cancer researcher Dr. Cornelius P. Rhoads, Rhoads wrote, “Working in Puerto Rico would be ideal, except for the Porto Ricans. They are beyond doubt the dirtiest, laziest, most degenerate and thievish race of men ever inhabiting this sphere. It makes you sick to inhabit the same island with them. They are even lower than Italians. What the island needs is not public health work but a tidal wave or something to totally exterminate the population.”<sup>16</sup>

It wasn't until Puerto Ricans were granted U. S. citizenship in 1917 that they began migrating to America. Most Puerto Rican immigrants settled in urban, not rural, areas, and the most popular destination for Puerto Rican immigrants during pre-World War II was New York City.<sup>17</sup> Puerto Rican musicians came to New York City in the 1920s owing to the disastrous economic situation in Puerto Rico while others came because they heard that it was a hotbed of Latin music for North American audiences

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<sup>13</sup> César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898*, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007, 74-77.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-19.

<sup>15</sup> Allotta, 29-37.

<sup>16</sup> Malevet, 151.

<sup>17</sup> Ruth Glasser, *My Music is My Flag: Puerto Rican Musicians and Their New York Communities, 1917-1940*, Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1995, 17.



and for displaced Latinos from other countries. What they found, however, were low wages, poor working conditions, employer and union discrimination, unstable employment, and jobs in which the skills they brought with him were useless or outmoded.<sup>18</sup> By 1930, New York's East Harlem became known as El Barrio (the neighborhood), also known as Spanish Harlem, owing to the large number of Puerto Ricans living there. Puerto Rican musicians who performed in African-American bands faced the same struggles of discrimination as Blacks and were in competition with them for jobs and housing available to non-Whites.<sup>19</sup>

"The Great Migration" occurred at the close of World War II up through the mid-1960s owing to the many jobs in America and to the unemployment and underpaid workers in Puerto Rico.<sup>20</sup> The 1960s were known around the world as a time of social movements, cultural shifts, and political unrest. Mass primary education became a reality, and an expanding university produced a growing number of professionals and skilled workers, including women. The 60s saw also the emergence of a new political activism.<sup>21</sup> The early 1970s gave way to a new wave of feminist activism, led by university students and young professionals who had become frustrated with the lack of interest in women's issues exhibited by traditional parties unions and the new left. In 1973, abortion became legal in Puerto Rico, and gay and lesbian activists formed Puerto Rico's first gay organization.<sup>22</sup>

Since 1970, there has been a rise in street and domestic violence, and unemployment and prohibitionist policies have led to the expansion of the illegal drug trade. Although lower than that of the U. S., Puerto Rico has the 12<sup>th</sup>-highest rate of imprisonment in the world. From 1980 to 2000 was what some called the rise of neo-nationalism. By the 1990s, Puerto Rico was seeing a large influx of people from the Dominican Republic, immigrants who have been accused by Puerto Ricans of taking jobs away and being responsible for the deterioration of services and a higher crime rate, much the same for which the Puerto Ricans were blamed in the United States. Racism also plays a part, with the darker skins of the Dominicans seen as inferior to the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 84-94.

<sup>19</sup> Glasser, 41-94.

<sup>20</sup> Allotta, 47-48.

<sup>21</sup> Ayala and Bernabe, 223.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 235-36.



whiter Puerto Ricans. The 1990s saw newfound pride in being Puerto Rican to an anti-statehood emphasis on identity to national motifs in commercials and pop music lyrics.<sup>23</sup>

## **Puerto Rico's Musical History and Legacy**

Music in Puerto Rico reflects centuries of political, social, and cultural change on the island. During the island's conversion to Christianity after its colonization by Spain, the only formal music imported from Spain was chants and religious music. As the fortunes of the Puerto Rican planters increased in the 1800s, so did their social aspirations. Those who showed musical promise were sent abroad, mostly to Spain, for their further development.<sup>24</sup> By the 1830s, the port cities and coffee, sugar, and tobacco processing centers had founded their own theaters, artistic circles, and private musical academies.

There were large annual fairs in the heavier populated cities, featuring band and orchestra concerts, contests, and dances. Small towns and cities had municipal bands that played eclectic, semi-classical music programs before diverse audiences. Each town or city also had a central church that usually sponsored organists, musical ensembles, and compositional activity. Church and state were intertwined; so, royal marriages and births, patron saint days, and Catholic holidays were occasions for concerts and dances as well as for religious processions and masses. Small ensembles sometimes played religious music for church ceremonies and then assembled outside to play operatic overtures and classical symphonies for secular entertainment.<sup>25</sup>

Spanish and Italian opera companies were also present, and the lyric and comic theatre companies from Spain, Italy, and Cuba provided jobs for local orchestral musicians. European opera companies and instrumentalists appeared in theatres, and these musicians sometimes remained to teach. Touring circus and theatrical companies acquainted Puerto Rican audiences with the latest Cuban, Spanish, and Italian music.<sup>26</sup> The Caribbean music melded with the early music of Black America and with the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 235-326.

<sup>24</sup> *Music*, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Glasser, 22.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 23.



European music of the dominant culture. New Orleans musicians, such as W.C. Handy and Jelly Roll Morton, flavored their own blues and ragtime compositions with Caribbean musical references. Louis Moreau Gottschalk traveled through Cuba, Puerto Rico, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, cross-fertilizing this music with his own in New Orleans.<sup>27</sup>

The dance halls were separated by class in the latter half of the 1800s—those of Spanish birth danced in casinos espanoles. Second-class casinos were developed for mulato artisans and common laborers, and the very dark-skinned might have a third-class club. On the island, blacks and whites, upper and lower classes, danced to the same mixes of Spanish, Cuban, Puerto Rican, European, and North American ballroom music—in separate clubs.<sup>28</sup>

At least four different instruments were adapted from the six-string Spanish classical guitar: the requinto, the bordonua, the cuatro, and the triple. The most popular is the cuatro, a guitar carved from solid blocks of laurel wood, creating resonances and pitches different than its Spanish counterpart. The cuatro, the name meaning “the fourth,” refers to the instrument’s four pairs of strings--the fifth pair was added around 1875. Percussion instruments of Puerto Rico include the tambours, drums made from hollowed tree trunks covered with stretched animal skin, the guiro, whose sound is produced by scraping a beater over notched sections of a hollowed out gourd, and a variety of drums whose designs were brought from Africa by the island’s slaves. Maracas, gourds filled with pebbles or dried beans and mounted on handles, were also popular.<sup>29</sup>

### *Jíbaro Music--Seis and Aguinaldo*

Jíbaros were creoles living on small farms and in small towns along the mountainous spine of the island, known as “Boriquén” to its original Taíno Indian

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<sup>27</sup>René López, and Pia López, collected by Carmen S. Nieves, CD Eddie Palmieri: Listen Here! Beverly Hills, CA: Concord Records: 2005, 2.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>29</sup>*Music*, 1.





population.<sup>30</sup> They included Spanish settlers fleeing plantation work, escaped slaves, and those escaping the occupation of the Spanish colonial government. The instruments of the jíbaro culture included maracas (gourd rattles) and the guiro (a gourd scraper) of African and local indigenous cultures. Also featured in jíbaro music was the Spanish guitar and the cuatro.

The most popular song of the jíbaro culture was the seis, of which there are around 100 types, each marked by a recognizable melody and name. With the seis, Puerto Rican peasants, many of whom could not read, preserved their history, transmitted the contents of the Bible to the next generation, and commented on life around them.<sup>31</sup> A seis is named after the town in which it originated, the person who composed or popularized it, or the kind of music after which it was modeled. The fast-paced seis are for dancing, and the slow ones are for singing.<sup>32</sup> The aguinaldo is a song form that is sung around Christmas by singers going from house to house for food and drink, who we would refer to as carolers.

### *Bomba*

Until the abolition of slavery in 1873, African slaves ground the sugar cane in the coastal areas; thus, these areas produced music with distinctive African components. The musical form, “bomba,” was a product of this slave practice and of the various instruments that they reinvented from their African traditions. The Spaniards were afraid that the slaves were communicating secrets to each other through the drums; so, the bomba was outlawed in the 1700s and 1800s.<sup>33</sup>

The bomba is characterized by its namesake, a drum that varied in size and construction according to available materials, including empty rum, nail, or lard barrels with a goatskin head and a system of ropes or screws for tuning the head. The bomba was played during the festival of St. James, for slaves were not allowed to worship their

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<sup>30</sup> Daniel Sheehy, *Jibaro Hasta el Hueso: Mountain Music of Puerto Rico by Ecos de Borinquen*, in CD *Jibaro Hasta el Hueso: Mountain Music of Puerto Rico by Ecos de Borinquen*, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, SFW CD 40506, 2003, 3-4.

<sup>31</sup> Glasser, 20.

<sup>32</sup> *Music of Puerto Rico*, 3-4.

<sup>33</sup> Glasser, 18-19.





own gods. Harmony is not used, and dancers interact with the drummer, who is usually solo, and dance in pairs without touching each other.<sup>34</sup> The bomba has more bravado and percussion than the plena but says less.<sup>35</sup>

Ismael Rivera (1931-87), known as Maelo by his fans, was born in Santurce. He found a job singing in La Orquesta Panamericana by his boyhood friend, Rafael Cortijo. Cortijo y su Combo was the first Puerto Rican band to succeed on the island and was the first black group to perform at the prestigious Hotel Condado in San Juan. Cortijo and Rivera were able to take the bomba and plena from the neighborhoods into major venues around the world. Rivera sang about social issues and his Afro-Puerto Rican heritage, such as slavery, race, and imprisonment.<sup>36</sup>

### *Plena*

The plena originated around 1900 in the Afro-Puerto Rican music of lower-class neighborhoods in the Ponce area, influenced by Africans and the migration of slaves from the English-speaking Caribbean. The plena is a danceable musical form in which panderos, tambourine-like drums, and sometimes other instruments accompany the interaction between a singer and chorus (constituted by the drummers and other instrumentalists).<sup>37</sup> Plenas were musical newspapers featuring editorials and gossip columns, texts that changed with the topics of the day. Their repertoire included attitudes and sentiments such as pleading, animosity, advice, and warnings from the lowerclass. Workers would improvise plenas to reflect their lives and their interpretation of the world around them. A plena would usually focus on a major event or lampoon the Catholic Church or powerful people, and Black workers on rural farming or construction projects were the primary audience. By the 1930s, the plena had lost favor to the

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<sup>34</sup> *Music of Puerto Rico*, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Augustine Vélez Jiménez, *La Bomba y Plena* (September 2001). Notes from CD, *Bombas y Plenas: Bombas y Plenas Bailables de Puerto Rico*. Santurce, PR: Disco Hit Productions, DHCD 8201, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Carlos Flores, *In Memory of Ismael Rivera: El Sonero Mayor (1931-1987)*.

[http://www.puertoricanchicago.com/essays.memory-ismael-rivera%3A-el-sonero-mayor-\(...\)](http://www.puertoricanchicago.com/essays.memory-ismael-rivera%3A-el-sonero-mayor-(...)). Accessed September 10, 2010, 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> Ayala and Bernabe, 86.



bolero, son, guaracha, and rumba.<sup>38</sup> Upper-class Puerto Ricans wished to think of their background as that of Spain, and the ties to Africans could have been seen as detrimental by Puerto Ricans working in New York City who did not want to be seen as Blacks.<sup>39</sup>

### *Danza*

The danza is Puerto Rico's national music, although it was popular mostly among the white population. The slave owners came from Spain, Italy, Germany, France, and Ireland, and the black musicians, mulatos, would perform songs and dances of their masters on European instruments.<sup>40</sup>

The minuet was a popular dance by 1850 and was adapted to become the danza in Puerto Rico. It has an underlying lilt that makes it Caribbean<sup>41</sup> and can be heard in the Puerto Rican national anthem, *La Borinqueña*. The danza originated around 1840, probably as a reaction against the highly codified contradanza, and was highly influenced by Cuban immigrants and their habanera music. There are two types of danzas: lyrical/romantic (an intense, romantic character with long phrases) and playful/festive dances.

Manuel G. Tavares and his student, Juan Morel Campos, composed over 300 danzas, mostly on the topics of romance and women.<sup>42</sup> Tavares was born in 1843 in San Juan and began music studies there before moving to Paris to study at the Conservatory under Auber and D'Albert. He suffered a brain arrest that left his left hand partially paralyzed and a hearing impairment. He taught in Ponce, and among his students was Campos. Campos (1857-1896), considered to be the father of the Puerto Rican danza, began studying piano at age 8 and later became a student of Tavares. He wrote many works for piano, half of which were danzas.

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<sup>38</sup> Glasser, 171-187.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>41</sup> Music, 2.

<sup>42</sup> Gold, 1.



## *Latin Bands*

The 1930s was the first combination of the American big band model with Latin music. Puerto Rican musicians, such as Juan Tizol, explored jazz first hand while playing or arranging music for Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson, and other ensembles. *Caravan* and *Perdido*, standards of Ellington, were composed by Tizol. This was also the golden age of trios and quartets, including Trío Borinquen in 1926 and Cuarteto Victoria in 1932, each organized by Rafael Hernández.<sup>43</sup>

Rafael Hernández (1891-1965) became Puerto Rico's best known and most prolific popular composer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was the son of poor Afro-Puerto Rican tobacco workers and one of many talented artists who grew up in Aguadilla. For blacks and mulatos, music could be a means toward upward mobility. Hernández was 36 when he formed the Trío Borinquen with Salvador Ithier and Manuel "Canario" Jiménez. With this group, he composed *Lamento Borincano*. This plena is about a poor farmer, a jíbaro, who comes down from the mountainous interior to sell his "bag or two of tubers" that "his scrappy patch of land has thrown up." He discovers that the town has closed up owing to the Depression and that his dreams of a better life have been shattered. Such lyrics certainly reflected the angst of the small farmers who suffered economic hardship after the American invasion in 1898. The work depicted also the reception by Puerto Ricans who came to New York City seeking a better life. The instrumentation was simple: guitar, maracas, and claves.<sup>44</sup> After the ensemble dissolved, Hernandez formed Cuarteto Victoria with Pedro Ortiz Dávila, Rafael Rodríguez, and Franciso López Cruz with whom he recorded *Preciosa*. On July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1930, a Puerto Rican group led by Manuel A. Jiménez ("Canario") recorded Hernández's 1929 work, *Lamento Borincano*, and *Preciosa*, both which became unofficial national anthems.<sup>45</sup> *Preciosa* expressed feelings of love and nostalgia for Puerto Rico but also the discontent regarding poor conditions.<sup>46</sup> The work was a loving and idealistic view of its people being a combination of traits of Hispanic and Indian traditions, with the African dimension going

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<sup>43</sup> Ayala and Bernabe, 132.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 163-67.

<sup>45</sup> Glasser, 2.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 2-8.



unmentioned. *Preciosa* made reference to the tyrant who ruled Puerto Rico and became a favorite of autonomist patriotism.<sup>47</sup>

### *Boogaloo*

Puerto Rican musicians during the boogaloo period were formed during the mambo period of the 1950s. The three major orchestras included Machito, Tito Rodriguez, and Tito Puente, whose most popular song was *Oye Como Va*. These bands reflected Latin traditions in the direction of African-American R&B soul sounds. Latin boogaloo thrived in the 1960s, the days of flower power, hippies, psychedelic drugs, and sexual liberation.

### *Salsa*

Salsa began in the 1970s with Cubans and Puerto Ricans combining rock music with the Puerto Rican plena and the Cuban son montuno with chachacha, mambo, rumba, and Latin jazz.<sup>48</sup> One critic said that salsa is big band jazz meeting African-Caribbean rhythms.<sup>49</sup> Salsa is highly danceable, rhythmically sophisticated, and compelling music. Salsa bands require a huge array of percussion, including guiros, maracas, bongos, timbales, congas, claves, and cowbell in addition to a bass, horns, chorus, and a lead vocalist.

The first great salsa musician was Tito Puente, the mambo king who, in the 1950s, brought Caribbean sounds to mainstream America. Puente moved the timbales to the front of the band and introduced the vibraphone as a featured instrument in Latin music.<sup>50</sup> From Puente's band came pianist and composer Eddie Palmieri who played not only with Puente but with Dizzy Gillespie and others, as well.<sup>51</sup> The 1980s saw the rise of salsa romantica stars like Frankie Ruiz and Eddie Santiago, softening the beat to

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<sup>47</sup> Ayala and Bernabe, 132.

<sup>48</sup> *Music of Puerto Rico*, 5.

<sup>49</sup> *Music*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Jesse Varela, CD *Tito Puente and His Orchestra: Live at the 1977 Monterey Jazz Festival*. Monterey Jazz Festival Records, MJFR 30700, 2008, 4-9.

<sup>51</sup> Lopez, 3.



make it smooth and romantic. The salsa kings included Willie Colón, El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico, and Hector Lavoe.<sup>52</sup> Gilberto Santa Rosa is a bandleader and singer of salsa and bolero. He developed a style of “soneo,” improvisation in salsa music.

### *Rap, Hip-Hop, and Reggaetón*

Like other rap artists, Puerto Ricans use rap as a vehicle for affirming their history, language, and culture under conditions of rampant discrimination and exclusion. Rap among Puerto Ricans came from strong traditions of street drumming, doo-wop, boogaloo, and Latin jazz.<sup>53</sup> By the mid 90s, Tomás Robles (TNT), born in Puerto Rico and who later moved to New York City, had become a Spanish rap artist.<sup>54</sup> Tego Calderon is a Puerto Rican rapper who delves into mambo, salsa, blues, and reggaetón. Reggaetón borrows from rap and reggae and rose from underground movements in Panama and Puerto Rico. The lyrics have strong nationalist undertones, speaking of racism, inequality, and the ghettos.<sup>55</sup> The most popular reggaetón artist at present is Daddy Yankee. Born in 1977 near the capital city of San Juan, Daddy Yankee (Raymond Ayala) performs to large rap audiences around the world, and his recordings are heard on CDs, television, and in the clubs.

Hip-hop emerged in the late 1970s in New York City by African-American and Puerto Rican youth who were familiar with shrinking employment, low-paying part-time jobs, gang life, police brutality, eroding housing and public services, and long-standing forms of discrimination.<sup>56</sup>

Puerto Rican pop stars included J. Lo, Chayanne, and Ricky Martin and boy bands Menudo and Los Chicos. Latin salsa star Marc Anthony recently recorded Rafael Hernández’s patriotic song, *Preciosa*.

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<sup>52</sup> *Music*, 3-4.

<sup>53</sup> J. Flores, 134-38.

<sup>54</sup> J. Flores, 134.

<sup>55</sup> Jake Gold, *Afropop Vignettes: Puerto Rico*.

<http://www.afropop.org/multi/feature/ID/729/Afropop+Vignettes%3A+Puerto+Rico>. Accessed September 10, 2010, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Ayala and Bernabe, 323.



## Conclusion

With its humble origins of gentle fisherman, the island of Puerto Rico has survived the brutalization of Spanish and American colonization, industrialization, slavery, discrimination, and economic hardship. The influence of European dance on the danza, the influence of Africa on the bomba and the plena, the island's own mountain heritage of the seis and the aguinaldo, America's influence of the big band on salsa, and the current generation's version of rap through reggaetón are a testament to the island's resilience and assimilation of cultures and societies. As Beethoven, Brahms, and Wagner eagerly linked their national heritage to the brilliance of German composer Johann Sebastian Bach, so followed Hernández, Jiménez, Puente, and Marc Anthony in keeping alive the music, people, and struggles of their Puerto Rican homeland. There remains a yearning by Puerto Ricans for their own national identity, free of American, European, and African influences. From the discovery of Puerto Rico by Columbus in 1493 to the present day, it is clear that music has been the sole portal through which Puerto Ricans could communicate with one another, reflect on their past, and embrace global culture while, at the same time, creating their own national identity--*puertorriqueño*.

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