

The Musical Landscape of the South Bronx

A South Bronx Latin Music Tale

ROBERTA L. SINGER AND ELENA MARTÍNEZ

AND THE EARLY YEARS IN EAST HARLEM

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ABSTRACT

When the story of Latin popular music (salsa) is told in popular and scholarly writings, the South Bronx is consistently overlooked despite the critical role it played in the development of that music. From the late 1940s through the early 1970s Hunts Point, Longwood, and Mott Haven were thriving Puerto Rican communities where an explosion of musical activity and creativity was taking place. This article examines the confluence of people and places that created an environment for the growth of Latin music in the South Bronx. While highlighting the sites that provided a locus for performers to adapt and reinterpret predominantly Afro-Cuban music forms and styles to express their urban South Bronx reality, the work reveals the symbiotic relationship between music, place and community; issues of identity are an underlying theme but are not the central focus of the work. [Key words: Salsa, Bronx, palce, Latin Music, mambo, New York City]

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Latin Music & Hip Hop Trail in Harlem & the Bronx.
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from Roberta Singer and Elena Martínez.

People from the Bronx would go downtown to the **Palladium**.
That was the apex, the mecca, the place. But what was good
about the Bronx is that it...developed its own clubs,
so everybody wanted to go there! **The Bronx was HIP**,
the Bronx was where you went to **DANCE**. The Bronx always
had its own style; it's always had its own vibrancy.

Percussionist Jim Centeno
(Martínez 1999b)



I refer to it as...maybe... I could say... **mushrooms....**
It's like a growth of something that **comes out of**
the Earth and it's there. Well, out of the Bronx sprung
forth so many **Latin musicians**.

Timbalero Joe Rodríguez
(Martínez 2000e)

Introduction¹

Popular and scholarly writings about the development of what came to be called “salsa” in the late 1960s overlook the importance of the South Bronx. Starting in the post-WW II era and continuing through the early 1970s, the Hunts Point, Longwood, and Mott Haven neighborhoods were thriving Puerto Rican communities where an explosion of musical activity and creativity was taking place. This article examines the confluence of people and places that created an environment for the growth of Latin music in the South Bronx, highlighting the venues that provided a locus for performers to adopt, adapt, and reinterpret predominantly Afro-Cuban music forms and styles to express their urban South Bronx reality. The work reveals the symbiotic relationship between music, place, and community and, while issues of identity are an important factor and underlying theme in the creation of a New York Latin music sound, they are not the central focus of and will not be specifically addressed in the work.²

Puerto Rican Settlement in the Bronx

The history of Puerto Rican migration to New York can be found in numerous sources and need not be repeated here (Dietz 1994; Fitzpatrick 1971; History Task Force 1979; Sánchez Korrol 1983). Most histories tend to focus on the early pioneer settlements in Brooklyn and later in El Barrio, even overlooking the continuing growth of Puerto Rican communities in Brooklyn in the post-WW II period. In large part historical narratives about Puerto Ricans in the Bronx, most especially but not solely those told by outsiders to the area and the culture, take a temporal leap into the fires of the Bronx in the 1970s, overlooking three decades of vital, thriving, rich community life with an infrastructure to support a stable community. One notable exception is Clara Rodríguez (1991), whose excellent work on the Bronx is an invaluable resource. Rodríguez succinctly observed that its Puerto Rican “communities were poor, but they were intact” (1991: 107).

In the 1940s Puerto Ricans began settling in southern areas of the Bronx following a pattern of groups before them, like the Italians and Jews, who left the Lower East Side and East Harlem to go north. A *New York Times* article from 1955, speaking of the arrival of 20,000 Blacks and Puerto Ricans to the Bronx, pointed out that “for most people, it is a way stop on the social and economic ladder; the lower Bronx has always been a low-income area, whether its people were white or non-white, native-born or immigrants. It has been a surprisingly faithful mirror of the immigration patterns for the entire Middle Atlantic Seaboard” (Gruson 1955).

They settled in southern areas of the Bronx just across the river and a few train stops away from El Barrio, where more than half the city's Puerto Rican population lived, and where, in the 1920s and '30s, at places like the Park Palace, the city's first Latin popular music scene was created. Most of the music was Cuban, but the Puerto Rican *plena* and *música jíbara* were also part of the mix. Following World War II, there was a wave of new housing construction in the Bronx, especially in the South Bronx. At the same time large numbers of Bronx residents moved north to private housing, making room for some of the nearly 170,000 people displaced by “slum clearance” in Manhattan. The new Bronxites, primarily Black and Puerto Rican, settled in neighborhoods such as Hunts Point and Morrisania (Hermalyn and Ultan 1995: 145). In the decade and a half after World War II, more than half a million Puerto Ricans moved to the States—most to New York, the majority to the Bronx. By 1960 at least 20 percent of the island's population had migrated to the States (Santiago 1994: 171). In 1953, the peak year of migration, 52,000 people left the island for New York and, by the early 1960s, New York City had a larger Puerto Rican population than the San Juan metro area (Jonnes 2002: 165). Cubans also came to the Bronx during this time and, in the early years, the new Latino arrivals shared the area with other, mainly European, groups.

A fair amount has been written about the economic and political environment in Puerto Rico which led to outward migration, but what were some of the factors that led migrants to the Bronx in such great numbers? While El Barrio continued to thrive, thousands of families were displaced through the city's “slum clearance” of housing stock that was deteriorating because the city or landlords made little effort to maintain the buildings in livable condition, and because of the planned construction of low income housing in the area. In the Bronx there was a mix of old and relatively new sturdy apartment buildings, which European-Americans were leaving in favor of better housing in northern areas of the Bronx and the suburbs, aided in their movement up the economic ladder by the benefits of the GI Bill. At least some of this

outward/upward movement can be understood in the historical context of “white flight” as Puerto Rican communities expanded. Additionally, tenements and single-family homes throughout the East and South Bronx were razed and then replaced with public housing projects. In the South Bronx the New York City Housing Authority built the “largest concentration of public housing” in the United States; the area ended up with 96 public housing buildings (Jonnes 2002: 118–9).

For Puerto Ricans from the Island and other parts of the city, the South Bronx represented upward mobility. Its attractions included wide avenues and streets and affordable housing; moreover, it was close to El Barrio; three subway lines and a host of bus routes converged in the area; there were stores where one could find all one’s needs for daily life; there were movie houses, theaters, and clubs for entertainment; and light manufacturing provided some employment. The physical infrastructure for the growth of an economically sound, socially lively, and culturally rich community was already in place.

Place Matters

People invest a broad range of values in places and localities. Belonging, identity, and meaning are aspects of the human experience that depend in large measure on place. Places are the physical dimension of our lives; home for our traditions and memories. Places provide us with the ability to store history and anchor cultural traditions; they bring economic, social, and cultural vitality to neighborhoods. Yet despite the critical importance of place, few among us are consciously aware that we have—and are grounded by—a sense of place. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan notes that a “sense of place is made up of experiences, mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day and over and over the span of years. It is a unique blend of sights, sounds, and smells, a unique harmony of natural and artificial rhythms such as the sunrise and sunset, of work and play” (in Ryden 1993: 38).

Within the past decade, the relationship between place and expressive culture has been explored by scholars in ethnomusicology and folklore (Ryden 1993; Stokes 1994a). “Place” can be a specific venue, a neighborhood, or a city, state, or nation. Whatever the unit of measurement, as students of culture we are better able to understand music as social experience and grasp its meaning for the practitioners and their communities when we give locality and place equal status; when we recognize that musical events evoke and organize “collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity” (Stokes 1994a: 3). Stokes even goes so far as to assert that “social experience which is not tied to locality becomes difficult to grasp with the techniques...and analysis at our disposal” (Stokes 1994b: 98).

In investigating the “Liverpool Sound” Cohen finds that merely speaking a name is sufficient to conjure up a complex of musical styles, approaches, sights, and sounds among rock enthusiasts and practitioners. Moreover, the name “implies a certain relationship between the city and its music” (1994: 117) and the “music exercises territorialising power” (1994: 133). Similarly, Singer’s work (1982) explores the interplay of identity, locality, and a New York Latin music sound. Among practitioners, she finds nearly universal agreement that the music they are making, while deeply rooted in Afro-Cuban traditions, is a decidedly New York expression of their ethnic, social, political, and New Yorker identities. The music, they contend, could *only* have been made in New York City.

Glasser’s (1995) superb work on Puerto Rican musicians in New York City from 1917–1940 situates the musicians and their music firmly in their (predominantly)

East Harlem neighborhood and the venues they performed in, as well as the manner in which the venues helped shape community and music style. This work stands in sharp contrast to the myriad histories of any number of music styles, where we rarely find analysis—or indeed, even mention—of the places so important to the development of the music. Photographic documentation of music performance, all taken in some *place*, infrequently identify the setting. For practitioners of the music, however, experience and memory are grounded in place. For the musicians of the South Bronx who were part of the Latin music scene, part of making history, those places in which they learned, grew, and created a style of music meaningful to their experiences are deeply valued for their role in the culture, community life, and development of their music and life experiences.

Music and Place in the South Bronx

Previous groups of Bronxites had brought their love of and appreciation for music, theater, and dance across the ocean with them. By creating places and spaces where they could come together to share the cultural expressions of their homelands, they were able to ground themselves in this strange new world. They built the huge dance halls, theaters, and clubs that hosted local cultural, social, and political life. The Bronx was filled with theaters built early in the century to help promote the borough. An article in the *Edison Monthly* in February, 1911 observed:

Four new theatres have been constructed in the Bronx within the last two years, and at the present time a fifth is nearly completed. This is one of the evidences that the Bronx is developing into a community by itself, with its own amusements, for without its own amusements a locality never becomes anything more than a suburb.

By the latter part of the 1800s the Irish had established themselves in the Bronx, and by 1890 there were Irish parishes in Mott Haven and Melrose, as well as other neighborhoods to the north. Throughout the city the Irish created new and adapted existing dance halls. Ultimately, there were halls representing almost every county of Ireland, such as the Star o’ Munster in the Bronx (Casey 1995: 601). Though not as widely established in the Bronx as in Manhattan, Yiddish theater nonetheless left an infrastructural legacy such as the Bronx Art Theatre (1014 E. 180th Street) and McKinley Square Theater (1319 Boston Road).

In the 1920s a few dinner and music restaurants and clubs catered to the small number of Puerto Ricans and Cubans who had moved into the area. By the 1940s that number had grown considerably and, using the old Yiddish, Irish and Italian theaters, halls, and clubs in Hunts Point, Mott Haven, and surrounding neighborhoods, the now sizeable Latino community had what it needed to meet their cultural and social needs. The same process took place in other areas as well—for example in East Harlem the Mack Morris Theater at 116th Street and 5th Avenue reopened as the Hispano and, later, Teatro Campoamor and the Photoplay Theatre on 5th Avenue and 110th Street became Teatro San José.

The Caravana at 442 E. 149th Street was originally the Tara Ballroom, an Irish venue; Casino Puerto Rico/Teatro Casino at 250 Willis Avenue was originally the Casino Theater, which offered movies and Irish-oriented vaudeville in the late 1930s and early ‘40s; Colgate Gardens, formerly the Imperial Gardens at 1209 Colgate

Avenue, was a Jewish catering hall; Teatro Puerto Rico, 490 E. 138th Street, was a boxing arena for the local Irish and Italian communities; the Tritons Club at 961 Southern Boulevard was built on the second floor of the former Spooner Theatre, named after actress Cecil Spooner, whose company was considered “the toast of the Bronx”; the Tropicana at 915 Westchester Avenue was originally Prospect Pool, which also housed a traditional Russian/Turkish *shvitzbud* (bath); and the Hunts Point Palace at 963 Southern Boulevard was popular among the Jewish, Irish, and Italian communities that lived in the area. There was even a Swiss settlement in the Bronx, whose prominent cultural society, Schweizwe Maennerchor Winkelreid, used the immense dance hall to hold the largest, most popular masquerade ball in the Bronx.

Other ballrooms, clubs, dance halls, after-hours spots and theaters recycled from earlier times were included as the glamorous Tropicana Club; the elegant Hunts Point Palace; Club Tropicoro, which was owned by boxer Carlos Ortiz; Longwood Casino, a former social club; Public School 52, which nurtured musicians and held weekly dances; and the venues created for and by the community such as the small but jumping Tritons and Alhambra clubs and the Casalegre and Casa Amadeo record stores.

As the Puerto Rican communities in the South Bronx were cohering in the late 1940s, mambo burst onto the New York cultural scene with a force that lasted on and off for more than 20 years, transitioning from mambo to *cha-cha-chá*, *pachanga*, Latin *bugalú*, and salsa. By the early 1950s “mambo mania” had struck the Americas and much of Europe. Everyone was dancing to the mambo beat. In the U.S., especially in New York’s Italian, Irish, and Jewish communities, wedding and *bar mitzvah* bands *had* to be able to play at least one mambo. By 1954 mainstream music icons such as Rosemary Clooney and Perry Como were cutting pop versions of mambo, and one could buy mambo kits, which included a record, maracas, and a plastic sheet with foot prints that was to be placed on the floor to learn the mambo steps. This mambo phenomenon would be just the beginning of the role the Longwood-Hunts Point-Mott Haven communities would play in the creation, innovation, and dissemination of a New York Latin music sound.

A special music scene was unfolding there, different even from that continuing to take place in El Barrio, which by the 1920s had become the largest, most thriving Puerto Rican neighborhood in New York.³ Hundreds of Latino musicians lived in the Bronx. Most were Puerto Ricans who had either moved there from El Barrio or directly from Puerto Rico, or were born and/or raised there; a good many were or would become internationally known. Many were affected by the creative bridge through which Afro-Cuban rhythms and styles such as *son*, mambo, and cha-cha were transformed into the distinct New York Latin sound that was labeled salsa in the late 1960s.

Latin music legends who called the area home at one time or another included the three “Mambo Kings”—Tito Puente, Machito, and Tito Rodríguez—as well as Vicentico Valdés, Marcelino Guerra, Arsenio Rodríguez, Charlie and Eddie Palmieri, Orlando Marín, Manny Oquendo, Ray Barretto, Barry Rogers, Johnny Pacheco, Joe Loco, Joe Quijano, Willie Colón, Héctor Lavoe, and many others who starred in or backed-up performances and recordings from the 1930s onward. They rehearsed and jammed in informal places such as apartments and courtyards, on rooftops, parks, and street corners. Conguero Adolfo “Lefty” Maldonado remembers that “in the South Bronx...you could walk every block and hear this *tun-tun-tun-tun* from the roof, everywhere. And it was so beautiful” (Martínez 2000b). They also played in more formal spaces such as social clubs, dance halls, after-hours joints, movie theaters, and schools.

Percussionist Benny Bonilla recalls how “on weekends I would convince my mother to let me go out, and I would sling my *conga* over my shoulder and try to sit in with musicians in the seven or eight bars that were only a few blocks from my house on Kelly Street—the Alhambra, La Campana, and many others. It was like going to school for me” (Martínez 1999a).

People came from all over the City to dance to the greatest names in Latin music, most of whom lived in the area at one time or another. A few of the great venues still exist, most as something other than what they were—some rebuilt into offices, converted to supermarkets or *iglesias* (churches), some in shambles with no hint of their former glory, and others vanished under the wrecking ball. Only Casa Amadeo remains intact, and musicians from out of town still drop in to visit with proprietor Mike Amadeo and catch up on news of old friends.

The history of this neighborhood, its music, and venues during this period may have been overlooked by most scholars and journalists telling the history of salsa, but Latin musicians and their audiences agree: this area was one of the great crucibles for the development of a New York Latin music sound from the 1940s onward.

Some students of culture hypothesize that the physical nature of a location can impact cultural expression in tangible ways. In examining why the popular music of different English cities differs, Sara Cohen quotes a Manchester musician:

Manchester is more spacious than London, where you can’t see more than 200 yards in front of you. . . . This freedom of movement is all important to the Manchester groups: You can hear it in the slowed down James Brown backbeat which . . . has become the year’s dominant rhythm

(from *Observer Magazine*, July 7th 1990, in Cohen 1994: 121).

Many New York musicians claim that the New York mambo sound and its later manifestations, such as cha-cha and *danzón* (*charanga*), were faster, busier, and denser than their Cuban counterparts, attributing this phenomenon to New York’s faster pace, noisier ambience, and denser tenements. Indeed, numerous descriptions of Latino neighborhoods note that “Spanish Harlem was bursting its borders” (Jonnes 2002: 100), and a *New York Times* article in 1950 notes that “every window was crowded with men, women and children and the sidewalks were thronged” on Brook Avenue in Mott Haven (Jonnes 2002: 100).

Oftentimes, memorable, even historic, turning points and the memories of them are linked to a specific site. “Our sense of place. . . is rooted in narration. A person is at home in a place when the place evokes stories and conversely, stories can serve to create places” (Johnstone 1990: 5). Such was the case with the Alhambra club for bandleader and *timbalero*, Orlando Marín, who recorded one of the earliest *pachanga* hits, “Se te quemó la casa.” He remembers how he knew the song would be a hit:

It starts with a thought and a feeling and then you see a reaction. You know that song which was very famous, “Se te quemó la casa?” Before I recorded it, I was at the Alhambra playing this song. There were a lot of good dancers in the audience. They loved it and they really got into it,

and we had not even finalized an arrangement or anything. And we knew it was going to be a hit because you see the sentiment of the people (Martínez 2000c).

Another venue inextricably linked to the development and popularity of the *pachanga* is the Triton after-hours club where Johnny Pacheco improvised the “Bronx hop” a step that became part of the dance fad. And, just as the Palladium in mid-town Manhattan was known as the home of mambo, the Bronx’s Caravana Club became known as the home of *pachanga*.

Bronx venues, especially the Hunts Point Palace, are often compared with venues in Manhattan, especially the Palladium. One aspect of the Palladium that is consistently raised is that it was the one of the few places where people of all colors, nationalities, and classes came together and were accepted—as long as they could dance. Other downtown venues—clubs, hotel lounges—were not as welcoming of people of color, whether performer or audience. But all our interviewees agree that the Bronx clubs, dance halls, theaters and after-hours places were at least as egalitarian as the Palladium, and certainly more tolerant of less experienced dancers.

Bronx Venue Case Studies

THEATERS

Theaters, either for dramatic works or vaudeville-style shows, held great importance to the emerging Hispanic and Latino communities in New York City. Like other newcomers before them, the Bronx’s newly arrived Latinos both converted existing theaters for their own use and used other venues for their own affairs. In large measure the theaters helped ground the community in dealing with the unfamiliar present by presenting its familiar island past. Moreover, the shows served as an awakening for many of the Bronx’s burgeoning musicians even if they didn’t understand or appreciate it at the time. They considered many of the *espectáculos*, which featured Puerto Rico’s *jíbaro* music, as “hick,”—that is, corny and not relevant to their urban Bronx experience. Even so, going to these shows was a family and community tradition; being with one’s parents and grandparents offered an historical and cultural link to island heritage and integrated the community. Given the community’s complex and multidimensional relationship with the theaters, it is no surprise that performers and audience alike express a deep nostalgia for the theaters and their shows.

Teatro Puerto Rico

“El Puerto Rico fué un teatro que en esa época, representaba un pedazo del alma borícuca y como era también el máximo centro artístico.” [Teatro Puerto Rico, in that era, represented a piece of the Puerto Rican soul and was also the greatest artistic center.]

(John Castro, poet, writer, and actor, who worked as an emcee at Teatro Puerto Rico in the late 1940s and early ‘50s, speaking of *la farándula* at the theater.)



Teatro Puerto Rico, ca. 1950s. The Justo A. Martí Collection, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.

John Castro is referring to one of the most important venues for the Puerto Rican community. This theater on 138th Street in the Bronx was home to some of the most popular shows of *teatro de variedades* as well as musical performances. On any weekend at Teatro Puerto Rico, lines of three generations of families snaked around the corner to catch Spanish-language variety shows. It was “*la familia* away from *la isla*. This was *el otro lado del charco*” remembers community activist George Rodríguez (Martínez 1999c). Originally the Forum Theater, the name was changed in 1948 to Teatro Puerto Rico, reflecting the growing Puerto Rican presence in the area. The theater’s “golden era” lasted from 1947–1956, although shows were presented through the 1960s and after. Teatro Puerto Rico, seating over 2,200 people, became the center of *la farándula* in New York City. Mexican entertainers and cinema celebrities were major attractions. In 1949 Argentinian singer and actress Libertad LaMarque headlined at the theater, which took in more than \$40,000 in one week. *Cue* magazine reported that in New York City that week only the Broadway shows *Kiss Me Kate* and *As the Girls Go* grossed more.

A typical night at Teatro Puerto Rico featured one or two Spanish-language films (primarily Mexican) and a star attraction; occasionally stars featured in the film shown that day, such as Cesar Romero, Cantinflas, or Jorge Negrete, took part in some of the comedy skits or talked about their life and career. The managing director of the theater was Carlos Montalban, older brother of actor Ricardo Montalban, whose connections

in Hollywood helped attract big stars to the theater. Other performers included Juan Boria, a *declamador* of Puerto Rico's *poesía negroide*, tango singers, flamenco dancers, and musicians such as Bobby Capó, Ruth Fernández, Beny Moré, and Trío Los Panchos. Shows featuring *la música jíbara* were offered during the Christmas season. They were massive extravaganzas featuring Puerto Rico's greatest *trovadores*, including Ramito and Chuito de Bayamón. Even a burro was rented for the performances, heightening the nostalgic connection to home. Novelty acts included a bullwhip performance, Mr. Tiny—a mambo-dancing Chihuahua—and child prodigy performers. José Feliciano, whose family moved from Lares, Puerto Rico, to El Barrio in 1950, got his start when he debuted at the Teatro Puerto Rico in 1954 at the age of nine. A popular feature of the shows was the theater's chorus line consisting of 12 women (one of whom, according to John Castro, was a former Moulin Rouge dancer) who performed between acts. And a weekly feature was *La Familia Cómica*, performing skits modeled on American burlesque.

Numerous theaters hosted Latin music events either as part of the variety show or as performances during intermission between two movies. These included Teatro Borinquen (754 Westchester Avenue), Teatro Isla (Westchester and Tiffany Street), Teatro Art (1077 Southern Boulevard), Teatro President (827 Westchester Avenue), and Teatro Prospect (671 Prospect Avenue), to name just a few. Pianist Ken Rosa remembers seeing one of his first performances at a theater:

One day as a child I went to the movies at the RKO Franklin. The first of two main features finished and the curtains closed. I didn't know what was going on, but in front of me these teenagers start to applaud. The curtains open again and there's a band on stage. At first I'm angry because I wanted the other movie. But here comes this fella dancing out on stage from the wings and he's playing maracas, and everybody's well dressed, particularly the person coming to the microphone and his piano player. And he starts to sing and I was totally speechless. Wide-eyed, enchanted, totally captivated. What a voice! And later I found out that it was Marcelino Guerra and his pianist Gilberto Ayala. They became my favorite band (Martínez 2000f).

Benny Bonilla also remembers being inspired by a theater show:

Boulevard Theater, yeah, they used to have amateur night every Wednesday, and this particular day this rhumba band was there—not even mambo, a rhumba band was there. I saw it. I was fascinated, I'm watching the *congas* and the bongos and...I said, 'This is what I want!' So I'm talking to my mother about a musical instrument and she says, 'I don't have any money, I can't give you lessons.' So I decided on my own I'm going to learn the one that you learn by yourself, that was the *conga* (Martínez 1999a).

BALLROOMS

Hunts Point Palace

According to current owner, Mel Stier (who also owned the Audubon Ballroom and Palm Gardens in Manhattan), who bought the building in 1950, the Hunts Point Palace was built by the Morgenthau family around 1911 (exact building records are missing). It had a small ballroom on the first floor and a larger one on the second floor, with a balcony that stretched all around the interior. The fourth floor had seven smaller rooms for weddings and other functions.

There was also a roof garden, where bands occasionally performed. The Hunts Point Palace hosted functions for the area's changing ethnic communities for six decades. Early clientele included the Jewish, Italian, and Irish communities; by the 1950s, the neighborhood was home to a large Puerto Rican population and the venue had begun presenting Latino music. Dancer Emma Rodríguez remembers her grandfather taking her to *bailes jíbaros* as a child in the 1940s for events such as Three King's Day. Dancers would dress in *jibaro* outfits—white clothing, red scarf, *pava* (straw hat), and wooden machete—and dance to the traditional Puerto Rican mountain music. As a teenager Rodríguez later went there to dance to the mambo bands. "That was the Latinos' dance hall, the Hunts Point Palace. Definitely" (Martínez 2000d).



Flyer for Hunts Point Palace with Bronx natives Orlando Marin, Eddie Palmieri, and someone who lived in the Bronx later in his life, Tito Puente. Courtesy of Orlando Marin.



Former Hunts Point Palace and Spooner Theatre (Duane Reade) on Southern Boulevard. Photo by Martha Cooper. Reprinted, by permission, from Roberta Singer and Elena Martínez.

During the mambo era the Hunts Point Palace became a key performance spot for some of the biggest bands, primarily because it was one of the largest venues in the Bronx, holding 2,500 people and boasting a big bandstand. Musician Ray Santos claims: “They were doing a Palladium Bronx, that was the idea” (Carp 1995). This “Palladium of the Bronx” was a popular place. “The Hunts Point Palace was my favorite place because it was where they had the biggest affairs. People dressed sharp as a tack. Beautiful women. Everybody looked great and they all came to dance. And the music was being created as you breathed” (Orlando Marín interview, Martínez 2000c). Architecturally, the Hunts Point Palace was far more beautiful than the Palladium. People remember it as a very elegant ballroom with a beautiful façade, large and polished dance floor, balconies, and elaborate ornamentation. It was at the big dance venues such as the Hunts Point Palace that promoters such as Federico Pagani began producing dances featuring as many as six bands in one night, playing one set after the other.

Caravana Club

The Caravana Club, located next door to the celebrated Bronx Opera House near the Hub at 149th Street, was opened in the summer of 1959 by Gil and Sonny Merced along with Federico Pagani (who produced events at the Palladium, Hunts Point Palace, and elsewhere). Almost immediately the Caravana became one of the most important dance venues in the Latin music scene, presenting major bands every week. Recorded live, Charlie Palmieri’s *Pachanga at the Caravana* (1961) increased the club’s popularity and established its reputation as “home of the *pachanga*.” A group of Caravana club patrons even formed a dance team—Los Pachangueros—which went on to perform at other venues in the city and Long Island. Joe Rodríguez, *timbalero* with Charlie Palmieri y La Duboney, remembers how the album came to be recorded at the Caravana: “Charlie made a new *charanga* [band] which wound up...being the house band there for awhile. At the time the new so-called rhythm, *pachanga*, came out. And since he was the band at the Caravana, Alberto Santiago [of Alegre Records] wanted to make an album featuring Charlie” (Martínez 2000e). In writing about the Caravana and the “new rhythm” *Ballroom Dance Magazine* stated that “As early as



Charlie Palmieri and his band La Duboney rehearsing at the Caravana Club. (Joe Rodríguez is playing timbales). Photo by John Crespo, courtesy of Joe Rodríguez. Reprinted, by permission, from Roberta Singer and Elena Martínez.

October 1960, Johnny Pacheco and Charley [sic] Palmieri and others were making the new music and the club’s patrons were doing the new dance” (B.W. 1961: 11). The Caravana closed in 1962 for a short period, then reopened in 1963 as the Bronx Casino, remaining in business until 1973. In 1975 it re-opened as El Cerromar, continuing to present live music events even as the area around it succumbed to the devastation known as the “burning of the Bronx.”⁵ In the early 1980s the theater became a Pentecostal church, Templo de Renovación Espiritual.

CLUBS

Tritons

Few clubs have the distinction of being so humble, unassuming, small, and undistinguished, yet so important in the creation and development of a music that became as internationally popular as the Tritons. On the second floor of the former Spooner Theater, next to the Hunts Point Palace on Southern Boulevard, a small after-hours club gained rapid celebrity. It opened around 1960, built by a group of friends who played on a stickball team together. According to Orlando Marín, “There was a team called the Sparks, which was a social club basically, but they had a stickball team. The Sparks got together and started the Tritons Club” (Martínez 2000c). It remains memorable to the musicians, dancers, and patrons who created, performed in, and frequented it. “I think it was the hottest after-hours club that I knew of in the Bronx at that time. And the greatest played there, from Patato to Mangual, to Pacheco to Barry Rogers to Eddie Palmieri, Charlie Palmieri. Everyone played in the Tritons after-hours” (Adolfo “Lefty” Maldonado interview, Martínez 2000b).

The Tritons Club was the site of that historic moment in Latin dance when Johnny Pacheco, jamming on a *pachanga* rhythm at the club, improvised what came to be known as the “Bronx hop.” The step was a main feature of the dance as it quickly became a widespread (although short-lived) craze.

The *pachanga* rhythm itself was not a Bronx, or even New York, invention, but it was at the Tritons Club that the dance craze began. In 1959 Cuban composer Eduardo Davison had written a song called “La Pachanga” (after the slang term meaning “party”);



The Pete Rodriguez Orchestra at Teatro Puerto Rico in the late 1960s. Among the band members are Pete Rodriguez (center), Benny Bonilla (top right corner), Tony Pabón and Pete’s brothers, Manny and Richie. Photo by Hiram Mercado, courtesy of Benny Bonilla. Reprinted, by permission, from Roberta Singer and Elena Martínez.

it met with success in 1960, when José Fajardo recorded it and then, along with his band and dancers, played at the New York Palladium. During this time Charlie Palmieri's La Duboney orchestra and, later, Johnny Pacheco's *charanga*, were having great success at clubs such as the Caravana in the Bronx. When the *pachanga* dance craze hit in 1961 it was so popular that numerous articles appeared in publications such as the *New York Times*, *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, and *El Diario*. Though the mainstream press situated the start of the *pachanga* craze at the Palladium, others correctly point out the critical role of the Bronx and the Tritons and Caravana clubs in maintaining the popularity of this dance. Johnny Pacheco may not have originated the dance, but he was so closely associated with it that he was named El Rey de la Pachanga (King of the Pachanga). In an interview in *El Diario*, April 3, 1961, Charlie Palmieri commented that the choreography associated with the dance started at the Tritons Club, passed on to the Caravana Club, and then was brought to the Palladium. Johnny Pacheco and other musicians such as Orlando Marín maintain that it was at the Tritons that Pacheco who, while waving his handkerchief (this act later became a common feature of *pachanga* when danced at the Palladium), started doing fast, jumping steps that were copied by the audience. *El Diario* confirms this in an article, "¿Así nació La Pachanga?" (Camacho 1961: 4):

De una cosa están todos seguros, que el estilo en que hoy los jóvenes neoyorquinos bailan la pachanga es genuino del Bronx. El "brinquito" que caracteriza a la pachanga no se exportó de ningún país. Se originó aquí. [Of one thing everyone is sure, that the style of pachanga that is danced today by the young Nuyoricans is from the Bronx. The little jump that characterizes the pachanga is not from another country. It originated here.]

This Bronx-born style soon became popular with dancers and venues throughout the city. There are stories of passers-by walking past the car showroom below the Palladium, which was located on the second floor, and seeing the glass in the storefront window flex in and out to the stomping and jumping of the dancers upstairs; or of persons watching the ceiling pulsate in Gray's Drugstore, also located downstairs from the Palladium (Lucchese 1961: 7). "I remember in the Palladium they would dance the *pachanga* there and that place would shake. That chandelier, I would say, holy cow, this floor is going to give.... I remember... that chandelier had a better beat than the band" (Adolfo Maldonado interview, Martínez 2000b).

The Tritons also had the distinction of being the birthplace of the Alegre All-Stars, a truly distinguished aggregation of mostly Bronx-based musicians who were tremendously influential—individually and as a group—in the development of a New York Latin music sound. Johnny Pacheco remembers that his band and those of Charlie Palmieri and Eddie Palmieri played the Tritons on different nights. The manager wanted to add another night of performance, and Johnny suggested getting a "little group together. We got Barry Rogers, Chombo Silva, and myself on horns and then Charlie [Palmieri], Kako [Francisco Bastar], and Bobby Rodríguez, and they said, 'Let's just jam.' We went upstairs and we were improvising all the time and that's how it started" (Carp 1997: 8).

This group, all of whom had recorded on the Alegre label, jammed together at the Tritons on Tuesday nights starting in 1961.

Al Santiago, who founded Alegre Records in 1956, one year after he opened the Casalegre music store, remembers the formation of the Alegre All-Stars slightly differently. He had already put out nine recordings on his Alegre label but was so impressed and moved by the sound and feel of the Cachao *descarga* recordings, with their informality and party-time ambience, that he decided to make a record of similar music and pulled together the leaders and top musicians from the bands he had under contract (Carp 1996a). Santiago's

musical consciousness was formed in the South Bronx of the 1940s as part of a heavily Puerto Rican community incredibly rich in cultural and family values. The majority of his most celebrated [musicians] were also New Yorkers born in the 1930s. (Exceptions such as Johnny Pacheco came here at a relatively early age and are New Yorkers, culturally speaking.) (Carp 1996b)

For the innovative Alegre All-Stars Santiago wanted to produce recordings that combined the Cachao *descarga* and Machito big band feeling with what the young musicians were creating at the Tritons:

the freewheeling improvisational and re-creative talents of Chombo Silva, Barry Rogers, Charlie Palmieri, Eddie Palmieri, Johnny Pacheco and others...creating a sound for hip New Yorkers of the 1960s.... He [Al Santiago] knew how to produce and promote this sound. Al brought new standards of studio technique, post production, graphic design, and use of media to the Latin record business.... It's not unfair to say that without the Alegre label the industry would have been very different. It's hard to imagine aggregations such as the Fania All Stars without the Alegre All Stars.... Al Santiago was a great enabler of talent, and not just performing talent. Izzy Sanabria never looked back after designing his trendsetting Alegre covers (Carp 1996b).

Financial difficulties beset Alegre Records and Santiago sold the label in 1966 (Casalegre remained open through the mid-1970s), but the Alegre All-Stars continued to record, albeit under different names so as to avoid contractual problems. In his notes to the 1996 re-issue of the All Stars 1974 recording, Santiago boasts: "The cynics prognosticated that the Alegre All-Stars would not last because we were too hip, too jazzy and too above the heads of the average Latin-music lover. Boy were they wrong! 1996 is our 35th Anniversary." A 1996 version of the All-Stars performed at S.O.B.'s in New York City.

Tropicana Club

Prior to opening as a Latin music nightclub, the Tropicana (known as the Tropical Paradise in the Bronx), was the Prospect Pool and traditional Russian/Turkish *shvitzbud* (bath). Later, in response to the change in the neighborhood's ethnic make-up, it was converted to a Latin music nightclub. In 1945, under the ownership of Cuban restaurateurs, the brothers Manolo and Tony Alfaro, the Tropicana became the most glamorous nightclub in the Bronx. Inspired by the glitzy Tropicana Cabaret in Havana, it was the mecca for Latinos seeking floor shows with a chorus line, first-rate dance bands, and first-class Cuban cuisine. Two memorable and influential bookings were Gilberto Valdés' *charanga*, which played as early as 1951 and is the first known stateside *charanga* band, and Conjunto Casino, from Cuba, which played in 1953. Johnny Pacheco, who lived in Mott Haven, later played with Valdés a few blocks from his home at Puerto Rico Casino. However, he was inspired seeing Valdés perform at the Tropicana: "And it turned out that being I loved the *charanga*, I started playing with him in the club. At one point he was the house band at the Tropicana Club. I used to go there when I was very young to listen to the group. It was the only *charanga* in New York" (Carp 1997: 5). These engagements foreshadowed the *cha-cha-chá* craze of the mid-1950s and the success of Charlie Palmieri's own *charanga* in the late 1950s.

NEIGHBORHOOD HANGOUTS

The commercial success and international popularity of what came to be called salsa seem to have overshadowed its community-based, grassroots beginnings. The streets, record stores, living rooms, apartment house stoops, rooftops, and candy stores were places where aspiring musicians learned from each other and from local musicians who lived in the area. Young musicians organized their own bands and performed wherever they could find a place to play. Orlando Marín describes trying to get a band together as a teenager:

So I was asking people, 'Gee, I need somebody to play piano.' And I said to a kid who lived on Kelly Street, which was a block from Dawson where I lived. And the kid says to me, 'Oh there's a young kid over there that lives down the block and his name is Eddie. He's the brother of Charlie Palmieri. He plays piano. . . . Oh yeah and we were joined by a young singer that Eddie found who lived near him, Joe Quijano....Now one thing that's important in my career was that I grew up in a neighborhood where one block (I lived on Dawson and Longwood Avenue)... to the left was a great piano player by the name of Joe Loco. Then one block to my right you had...the Palmieri family. Two blocks up from there you had Manny Oquendo living. A little further you had Rogers Place and Tito Rodríguez lived there. Who else was around? I mean all these local guys, Ray Barretto, Johnny Pacheco, Hector Rivera, lived on Jackson Avenue. Then you had Joe Rodríguez who lived on, I think it was Beck St. . . . It was like a phenomenon, you couldn't plan a thing like this. It was like the cream of the crop from the future (Martínez 2000c).

"The Mambo" Candy Store

Candy stores have always been gathering places for kids and teens. Most blocks had a candy store where local kids would hang out. Charlie and Eddie Palmieri's father owned a candy store and ice cream parlor in the mid- to late 1940s, on the corner of Longwood Avenue and Kelly Street. Dancer Louie Mercado remembers its name as The Mambo or El Mambo, no doubt due to the music that was played there on the juke box and to which the teens danced. Mercado also remembers that Eddie Palmieri worked behind the counter when he was about 12 or 13 years old and that he made a pretty good egg cream. There was always music playing and the jukebox carried the latest music with Marcelino Guerra, Machito, José Curbelo, Vitín Aviles, and Noro Morales.

I used to hang around mostly on Kelly and Longwood and that's where I met all these guys that 90% of them became musicians at the time—Louie Goigochea, Eddie Palmieri, Benny Bonilla, Mikey Collazo, Mike Rodríguez—all these guys played ball with us and we hung out in a candy store called the Mambo Candy Store. It was run by Eddie Palmieri's father, and we used to hang out there because they always had the best records. We used to dance in that little candy store. We hung in that candy store. And that's what we'd do. We would play stickball on Kelly, and every night we danced (Louie Mercado interview with Carp et al. 2000).

Percussionist Lefty Maldonado remembers the candy store on Union Avenue and 156th Street where everyone in his neighborhood hung out:

There was one on Union Avenue where we had a whole bunch of stickball games. We had a nickel and we'd play the jukebox and the guys would hang out there.... We all lived in apartments. It wasn't like we had houses that we could go in the backyard. So where was it? It was the street, the stoop, and the candy store and that was our meeting place.... Definitely. The candy store was a pivotal place for us to congregate, to meet, and to talk—girl and boy stuff. (Martínez 2000b).

Melrose House

Melrose House at 786 E. 156th Street was not only a place for local teenagers to attend dances, it was where many of the young musicians met to rehearse with their bands. Al Santiago started the Chack-A-Ñu-Ñu Boys there and, in return for letting him use the space for rehearsals, he held dances there.



Young musicians Benny Bonilla and Orlando Marín, ca. 1950. Courtesy of Benny Bonilla. Reprinted, by permission, from Roberta Singer and Elena Martínez.

The Melrose House was really a community center and they used to let people hang out during the day. Then once a week they used to let this band rehearse there. It was Al Santiago's. And that was another place where Eddie Palmieri would go. All the musicians, they would go there. That was the incubator....What I'm saying is the Melrose House was another melting pot where all the musicians would go and hang out and talk or meet. If one guy needed a guy on *conga* or a *bongocero*, you could recommend someone or you could ask for the job yourself. (Benny Bonilla interview, Martínez 1999a).

Louis Mercado adds that “the dances started with Melrose House and Al Santiago and the Chack-a-Ñu-Ñu Boys—that’s where everyone went on Wednesdays.... It looked like a shack, or a storefront. It was like a type of YMCA for that area, like a youth house” (Carp et al. 2000). An apartment complex now exists on this site.

P.S. 52

P.S. 52 (now M.S. 52) on Kelly Street is perhaps best known as the school Secretary of State Colin Powell attended. But among Bronx Latino musicians the school holds a deep-rooted special meaning having nothing to do with political figures. P.S. 52 stands as a symbol of the musical creativity and talent nurtured in this neighborhood. During the 1950s a group of local teenagers, who were alumni of the school and played stickball in front of the building, formed a band. This band included some musicians who would later become notable figures in Latin music, including Eddie Palmieri, Orlando Marín, and Joe Quijano. They started rehearsing at P.S. 52 because it had a piano and the space to accommodate the sound of the band's trumpets. In exchange for rehearsal space, the band played Friday night dances there. Orlando Marín says, “While I was organizing this group and we were rehearsing in P.S. 52 in the auditorium, we would pay them back by playing every Friday a dance for free” (Martínez 2000c). This band had a friendly rivalry with the band of Gilbert Maldonado, which he formed at the Bronx Vocational High School (Johnny Pacheco and Barry Rogers were featured musicians). They alternated Fridays with Orlando and Eddie's band. After playing dances at P.S. 52 and the nearby Police Athletic League for about six months, they built up quite a following and started to play gigs at places such as the Hunts Point Palace. Other important P.S. 52 alumni in Latin music include Charlie Palmieri, Hector Rivera, Ray Barretto, and Manny Oquendo.

Lefty Maldonado explains why the school was significant in the development of musicians who weren't even part of the school band:

The key to it was all the brass players came from a school band. So without that even if we are doing the street stuff and the piano players are taking their private lessons, see it all clicked. It's a magical thing. We were doing it from the records, because the percussionists were doing it from the records. And the piano players were doing a private thing because their mothers wouldn't let them go out and play stickball. And the trumpets and the brass guys were doing it in schools. And this phenomenon, this incredible combination got together. But one without the other wouldn't make it. So the school had a lot to do with it (Martínez 2000b).

And so the school became a breeding ground for talent. Benny Bonilla tells us that “they had school dances, they cost 50 cents to get in or something. Then all the other local guys like myself who were learning, we would go and we would end up sitting in with them. So we would end up with a nine piece band” (Martínez 1999a).

RECORD STORES

Casa Amadeo

Other important, but often overlooked sites that influenced the development of Latin music were the numerous music stores located in Latino neighborhoods. New migrants from Puerto Rico could walk past stores and hear the sounds of their island streaming from the speakers; musicians gathered at the stores looking for gigs; and record companies looking for new artists and groups to record sought advice from store proprietors. Historian Virginia Sánchez Korrol notes:

As a business venture the small music store spread quickly throughout the *colonia hispana* and came to symbolize the Latin settlements as the candy store had characterized other ethnic immigrant neighborhoods. Emanating from these establishments were the rhythms of *el Son*, *la Guaracha*, Puerto Rican *plenas* and *aguinaldos*, combined with the romantic *boleros* and *danzas* (1983: 80–1).

The Bronx had its share of record stores—Casa Hernández, Casalegre, La Cigueña—even Tito Puente’s uncle Santos owned a store on Longwood Avenue, which sold, among other things, sheet music and records. Music stores were integral elements of the burgeoning Latin music scene in the 1920s and ‘30s, continuing throughout the 1950s mambo era and the salsa era of the 1960s and ‘70s. Historian Ruth Glasser (1995) describes the importance of the record store for musicians who went there looking for gigs; additionally, major record companies such as Victor and Columbia depended on the store’s owners to act as “middlemen” in obtaining musicians for recordings and to gauge the community’s musical tastes.



Mike Amadeo in front of Casa Amadeo. Photo by Martha Cooper. Reprinted, by permission from Roberta Singer and Elena Martínez.



The enduring cultural significance of Casa Amadeo was acknowledged in 2001 when the Manbasset building in which it is located was added to the National Register of Historic Places. Victoria Hernández lived on the third floor. Photo by Martha Cooper. Reprinted, by permission, from Roberta Singer and Elena Martínez.

Victoria Hernández and her brother, composer Rafael Hernández, opened a music store, Almacenes Hernández, in El Barrio in 1927. While Rafael made music Victoria took care of the store (although she was an accomplished musician herself). In November 1939 Victoria and Rafael sold the store to Luis Cuevas. After a brief stint in Mexico, Victoria opened Casa Hernández in the Bronx, which sold music on one side and dresses on the other. She owned the store until 1969, when she sold it to composer and musician Mike Amadeo (who had previously worked for Al Santiago at Casalegre). The store is now Casa Amadeo antigua Casa Hernández, and musicians coming to the city still drop in catch up on news of friends.

Bronx musicians remember buying their first records there. Mike Amadeo himself says he and his cousin listened to “Siete besos” by Felipe Rodríguez y su Trío in one of the store’s listening booths and bought the record for 75 cents (Martínez 2000a). The venue, located at 786 Prospect Avenue, is the oldest extant Latin music store in New York City.

Casalegre

Casalegre at 852 Westchester Avenue was opened in 1955 by musician, arranger, record producer, and bandleader Al Santiago. He had worked for his uncle, musician Bartolo Alvarez, who owned the famous Casa Latina Record Shop in East Harlem. Santiago originally wanted to open a “Casa Latina of the Bronx” near 138th Street, but ended up on Westchester Avenue, near another hub—the intersection of Prospect, Longwood, and Westchester Avenues, where other stores, theaters, and clubs were located. In 1956 he founded the Alegre record label, which became synonymous with the New York Latin music sound. It was unrivaled until Fania was established in 1964. Some of its recordings include *Pacheco y su Charanga*, *Charanga at the Caravana* (Charlie Palmieri), *Se Te Quemó La Casa* (Orlando Marín), and the first three recordings of Eddie Palmieri’s *La Perfecta*. Unlike the mega-music stores of today, this and other neighborhood music stores were gathering places for local and visiting musicians.

SOCIAL CLUBS

Social organizations have historically served a variety of important functions for immigrant groups arriving in New York City. Within the Puerto Rican community the earliest organizations were mutual aid societies formed by tobacco workers (Sánchez Korrol 1983:136). Other organizations were geared toward particular activities or social services. Overall, the social clubs provided a wide range of service and support for incoming migrants.

The neighborhood clubs or hometown groups of the 1920s and '30s evolved at a time when the survival of the individual and the community was at its most tenuous. The hometown club provided migrants with an oasis in an otherwise hostile territory, served to link the New York environment with the village or island towns they had left behind, and in general cushioned the inevitable cultural adjustment made by new immigrants (Sánchez Korrol 1983: 158).

Club Cubano Interamericano

Club Cubano Interamericano was originally situated at a small site at 914 Prospect Avenue at 162nd Street. Since there was not much room for a bandstand that could fit a *charanga* or *conjunto*, the club moved to 671–681 Prospect Avenue, the site of the former Chalet D'Or. Although it was primarily a Cuban social club, the “Interamericano” in the name was a conscious statement of the inclusion of Puerto Ricans in the club. Much of the impetus for founding this club came from a migration of Cubans from Tampa, Florida (most of whom were of Afro-Cuban descent and worked in the cigar industry there) during the 1930s and continuing through the early 1940s. By late 1945 there was a substantial enough *Tampeño* community in the Bronx to form Club Cubano. It was a continuation of the Tampa Afro-Cuban concept of worker's mutual self-help organizations. The club evolved out of a 1945 fund-raising campaign to celebrate Antonio Maceo, a national hero in the Cuban war for independence. The money was used to hire a hall and host a banquet, but the event was so successful it led to the formation of the social club.

The second site of the club had a large dance floor and regularly booked Latin music bands, including Arsenio Rodríguez and Orquesta Broadway, and Ray Barretto. Members of the club organized public dances on a regular basis. Attendees, both Cuban and Puerto Rican, formed a close-knit community, which has continued to come together annually for 30 years at a reunion dance called Baile de Mamoncillo (named after a Caribbean fruit). Since Club Cubano closed about 10 years ago, the gathering has been meeting annually at Bohemian Hall in Queens.

Conclusion

The process of systematically documenting the story of Latin music in the South Bronx reveals an untold story. For the people who lived the story, documenting the story reaffirms their experience.

With the exception of Casa Amadeo, the theaters, clubs, dance halls, and hangouts have vanished under the wrecking ball, having burned to the ground or been converted to some other use. In his exploration of place, identity, and culture Ryden notes that “place enfolds relationships; relationships shape memory; memory sparks stories.” This is very clearly so with the musicians who participated in our work. But Ryden also notes that “stories cling to place with such tenacity that the destruction of place threatens the entire structure—the fear is that stories will fly away unanchored, memory will dim, emotion will fade, identity will become tenuous

if the geographical root is cut” (Ryden 1993: 94). Despite the passage of time and the destruction of entire neighborhoods the memories are sharp, the stories compelling, the emotion deep, and the identity strong.

For the generation that was the creative bridge between Latin music's past and future, music was a primary vehicle for finding their own voice, rooted in the traditions of their forbears but carrying the distinct mark of their current reality. The processes of exploring and expressing identity are enacted in *places* that ground experience and memory, enabling us to store history and to anchor cultural traditions. Whether longing for a perceived simpler time gone by or forging ahead with self-determination into the future, Puerto Rican musicians in the South Bronx don't speak in abstract terms of the place of music in their lives or the trajectory of its development; instead, they speak concretely of the places in which they and the music became one.



NOTES

- 1 This essay derives from on-going research of the “Place Matters” initiative of City Lore and the Municipal Art Society. For information visit placematters@citylore.org. The authors wish to express our deep appreciation to David Carp for bringing to our attention the need for systematic investigation of the Latin music scene in the South Bronx, for working with us on the initial stages of the project, and for generously sharing his information and insights with us.
- 2 For an in-depth study of these issues see Singer (1982).
- 3 The authors are aware of the importance of El Barrio in the development of Latin music in New York and recognize that much work remains toward the systematic documentation of places of importance to Latin music there. The present work, however, concentrates on the almost completely overlooked South Bronx.
- 4 *La farándula* originally meant a theater company or “strolling” comedy troupe during the *siglo de oro* (18th century) of Spanish theater in Spain. Nowadays it is not exclusively identified with comedians, but it includes all those who are part of the artistic endeavor. While some use it to refer to vaudeville-type theater, a better term for the Spanish-language equivalent is *teatro de variedades* or *espectáculo*.
- 5 For a look at this period and the emergence of another expressive cultural complex in this same area of the Bronx, see Hager (1984).

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- _____. 11/11/2000e. Joe Rodríguez.
- _____. 1/7/2000f. Dr. Ken "Leo" Rosa.

SELECT RELATED DISCOGRAPHY*

THE EARLY YEARS, 1910S–1940S

Lamento Borincano—Early Puerto Rican Music: 1916–1939 (compilation CD, Arhoolie 7037–38), extensive liner notes

Pedro Flores 1938–1942 (Harlequin HQ CD 49)

Noro Morales: Rumba Rhapsody (Tumbao 36)

Davilita 1932–1939 (Harlequin HQ CD 102)

CLASSIC MAMBO, CHA-CHA-CHÁ, 1950S

Machito: Mucho Macho (Pablo 2625712)

Machito's Tremendo Cumbán (Tico 1094)

Tito Puente: Dancemania, Vol. 1 (BMG Tropical Series 2467)

Tito Puente: Mambo Macoco (Tumbao 18)

Tito Rodríguez: Mambo Mona (Tumbao 14)

Tito Rodríguez: Boleros with Love (Palladium PCD 5161)

CHARANGA, PACHANGA, 1960S

Johny Pacheco: Pacheco y su Charanga (Alegre 8010)

Charlie Palmieri: Live at the Caravana Club (Alegre 8040)

Orlando Marín: Se Te Quemó la Casa (Alegre 6015)

LATIN BUGALÚ

Pete Rodriguez: I like it Like That (Alegre 8550)

CLASSIC SALSA, 1960S–'70S

Eddie Palmieri: Echando Pa'lante (Tico 1113)

Eddie Palmieri: Azucar Pa' Ti (Tico 1122)

Ray Barretto: Que Viva la Música (Fania 427)

Ray Barretto: Indestructible (Fania 456)

Orquesta Harlow: Tribute to Arsenio Rodríguez (Fania 404)

Willie Colón and Hector Lavoe: Cosa Nuestra (Fania 384)

COMPILATION

Caliente=Hot: Cuban and Puerto Rican Musical Expression in New York (NW244), extensive liner notes

* Compiled with the aid of David Carp and Mike Amadeo