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Poems: "Ode to Celia", "Puerto Rican Discovery #II Samba Rumba Cha-Cha Be-Bop Hip Hop",
"Dance with Me"
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Ode to Celia

Puerto Rican Discovery #11

Samba Rumba Cha-Cha Be-Bop Hip-Hop

Dance with Me

Artesanía Puertorriqueña (1982), by Sandra María Esteves.

Poetry by Sandra María Esteves
I may have been an only child from the Bronx but Celia always takes me back lifetimes before I mastered English in New York City schools, or Spanish in tobacco fields even before that middle passage where so many cousins, uncles, and aunts perished all the way back to Motherland Africa's family shores with Spanish gypsy guitars empowered by Arabic love songs.

"Mi Mamá fue una negra
Que nacío entre la selva
Mi Mamá fue una negra
Que nacío entre la selva"

In Celia's voice I hear the night full of stars and smell the rich dark soil of coqui symphonies and dream of a time when we belonged to the Sun. Everytime I press play, Celia takes me out of this chicken box and my jumping feet lead the way back home with every flex, twirl, and skip, chacha two-step, shake and twist hands flying up, feeling the light, pulling down aché from heaven into me. So much healing happens when Celia sings in the history of my body's remembering in the music of my spirit's awakening.

"Quimbala Quimbamba Cumba Quimbamba"

Yeah, Mamá!
Take me all the way back home.
Celia sings and I become a Black woman's montuno in dark Latin swing. So much history hidden in her love from when the earth was my tribal mother teaching lessons in tune to seasons, the moon, the river, and the rain.

"Eh Mamá, eh eh, Eh Mamá"

Celia becomes the rain of my missing rain forest and I am deluged in this healing from a time when Tainos fled, or were forced into slavery so many spirits rise up to dance with me and Celia's love songs are a war cry back to life her boleros lead my feet to joy and my body knows, better than these words can tell you So much happens in these songs.

"Mi Mamá fue una negra..."

Celia sings and I remember ballrooms and getting drunk the first time listening to the Congo Spanish of my ancestors' African dialect mixed with Lucumi saints. The black language I never learned The one we've all forgotten Except for my feet, which seem to remember all too well the downbeat of heavy Bomba I mean, my body records its own history, and I don't know when or how But it knows what to do when the drum calls Like when a woman goes into labor and never took a class on how to breathe and didn't meet Lamaze or read the book. The muscles take over. They pull and stretch that cervix open wide enough to push a baby thru Just like that, my body slides into a guaguancó ritmo wading in the water of a chekere current with Baba Chief Bey like it's been doing it forever "Quimbala Quimbamba Cumba Quimbamba"

Celia sings and I return to 1965 dancing sweaty mambos at the Tropicoro on Longwood Avenue or the Bronx Casino on Prospect or the Colgate Gardens where La Lupe exposed her soul to the hustle, ah-peep-peep and boogaloo pachanga of Johnny Pacheco Celia reminds me where I came from in ways I don't want to forget.

"Eh Mamá, eh eh, Eh Mamá"
Puerto Rican Discovery #11
Samba Rumba Cha-Cha Be-Bop Hip-Hop

for Merian Soto and Pepetian

Feet jumping. Hips swaying
Arms swinging wide
She dances
Heating her body
Awakening her spirit
Drinking from the waters of her soul
Finding herself
Cancelling tears
Muddy and pain-filled
She dances
Mimicking birds
Whose flight is envied
Praying for rain
Blessing the harvest
Transforming herself to run free
She dances
Lifting her sorrow
Separating bondage
Breaking loose from a cluttered world
Healing wounds
Massaging scars
Absorbing light flowing into her
She dances
Feet on fire
Lighter than air
Swirling in the whirlpool wind within
Giving thanks to the moon
In homage to the stars
Flowers adorning her hair
She dances
Teaching her children
Sharing energy on her path
Empowered by the ancestors.