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### ***Música: Spanish Caribbean Music in New York City***

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***Música. Produced by Gustavo A. Paredes, Jr. Directed by John D. Wise. NEP Productions, 1984. 59 minutes.***

Despite its vague title, the orientation of Gustavo Paredes' film is fairly specific: it focuses on the history and development of Latin jazz in New York City, and on the social meanings of Latin dance music to the Spanish-speaking immigrant community there through various decades. Intended for a general audience, the documentary considers the lives and artistic contributions of key individuals involved with music making in New York since the 1930s, a number of whom are interviewed directly by the filmmakers. The documentary includes an effective mix of performance footage, voice-over commentary, interviews with performers, with musicologists and sociologists, and period images from past decades that bring to life the context in which Latin jazz and salsa dance music developed.

Most of the issues raised by *Música* surface through a focus on particular performers and their life histories. The documentary begins by discussing Mario Bauzá, for instance, describing his move from Havana to New York, his collaborations with well known jazz bands of the 1930s, the difficulties he encountered as a Spanish-speaking immigrant in New York of that period and as performer of color, the ties he gradually established with the diverse Latino community consisting of Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Colombians, and others, and so on. The documentary continues in roughly chronological fashion, considering many other artists (Desi Arnaz, Noro Morales, Miguelito Valdés, Tito Puente, Arsenio Rodríguez, etc.) whose contributions to Latin jazz and dance music in New York have been significant. Later sections of the hour-long film describe collaborations between African-American and Afro-Latin artists in New York in the 1960s, issues of crossover and the mainstreaming of Latin music among English-speaking audiences, and emphasize the importance of preserving Latino heritage into the future.

One of the most impressive aspects of this documentary is the number of interviews it contains with key figures in Latin jazz and New York's Latin music industry. I know of no other film that includes direct

commentary by flutist Alberto Socarras, for instance, or with individuals from the music industry including Enrique Fernández and (especially) Ralph Mercado. This in addition to valuable firsthand commentary by performers Mario Bauzá, Joe Cuba, Dizzie Gillespie, and Paquito D'Rivera, and others, interspersed with that of academics and authorities (Isabelle Leymarie and Max Salazar), as well as others involved in Latin music education (Johnny Colón) proves quite valuable. The film includes a surprising number of vintage performance clips by likes of Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Machito and his Afro-Cubans, Carmen Miranda, etc. For students unfamiliar with these individuals or how they presented themselves on stage, the film has the potential to bring historical material and artists to life in meaningful ways. The fact that Paredes' documentary dates from the 1980s works to his advantage in the sense that many mid-century performers he discusses were still alive and contributed directly to the film's content. A similar attempt by film makers today would be much more limited in terms of performers who would be available for consultation or interviews.

I can imagine that *Música* would be useful in various ways as a classroom aid. For instance, it could facilitate discussion about racism in the mid-century music industry; sexism and the marginalization of female performers in the world of Latin music; generational shifts in the tastes of Latino audiences, especially since the 1960s; inter-influences between North American jazz musicians and others from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and elsewhere in Latin America; and the common roots of both black North American and Afro-Caribbean music.

The film does an especially good job of elucidating the relationships between political issues facing Latino immigrants at particular moments in U.S. history and the ways they have impacted music making. Paredes takes pains to music as part of a broader socio-cultural whole that includes demographic trends, changing racial attitudes, the impact of military engagements such as World War II on culture, the mediating effects of the music industry and its demands on individual performers, and so forth. Given the focus on the potential mainstreaming of Latin music in later sections, Paredes' film might also facilitate interesting discussion about what has happened in this respect since the early 1980s. Some of the experts he questions, for instance, feel that Spanish-language music has little chance of ever being accepted by English-speaking audiences, an assertion at least partially refuted by recent phenomena such as the impressive sales of Buena Vista Social Club recordings.

One minor issue I took with the documentary is that it doesn't define its focus well; Paredes covers a great deal of ground and touches on many interesting issues, but never states his intentions or orientation as a chronicler of cultural history. The broad title "*Música*" seems a bit pre-

tentious, given that the documentary makes no attempt to discuss Spanish-language music broadly, even in the context of the United States. Beyond this, the varied sequences of the film move from individual biographic details about particular persons to the development of Latin jazz and of hybridized dance music, to discussion of Latino immigration, to U.S. foreign policy, to the commercial realities of music making, to Latin music education in East Harlem, etc., somewhat abruptly. For the most part the concern of the author seems to be Latin jazz and its exponents, but enough of the film changes orientation later on so as to put this in question.

The temporal framing of the film is also a bit difficult to understand. Approximately two-thirds of Paredes' documentary centers around music making in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. This was a crucial moment for Latin music in various senses, clearly, and merits attention. But attention shifts later to the 1980s and pressing concerns facing Latin musicians at the very moment the documentary was filmed. The later discussion has little or nothing to do with the history of Latin jazz or with its early star figures, leaving one to wonder what exactly the connections between the initial and final segments of the film are meant to be.

The 1980s represents an important period of early crossover in terms of Anglo-American interest in Latino music, as *Música* clearly notes. But in most histories of Latin music it is characterized to an even greater extent by trends such as a declining interest in the "*salsa dura*" sound of the late 1960s and 1970s and its replacement with so-called "*salsa romántica*," as well as with the increasing popularity of Dominican merengue, Latin rock, and English-language music among U.S. Latinos over any kind of salsa music. Neither of these latter issues are evident in the documentary at all, which seems surprising. Perhaps it was filmed too early in the decade for such trends to be apparent, or perhaps the desire to concentrate heavily on the mid-twentieth century precluded a more extended consideration of issues facing Latino musicians in later decades. It is also possible that the authors consciously chose not to confront issues pertaining to the potential "dissolution" of Spanish Caribbean culture in New York given their overriding concern in preserving and further valorizing such heritage.

One final concern with the documentary relates to its spatial framing; this is in fact the most troubling issue to me. Despite admirable commentary by Isabelle Leymarie on at least one occasion in the film about early Latin influences on the development of jazz in New Orleans, *Música* strikes this reviewer as heavily and unnecessarily New York-centric. No definition of Latin jazz is ever provided, which is problematic in itself, but beyond this the vast majority of individuals discussed had careers based largely or solely in New York. Of course, New York

is an extremely important site in Latin jazz history. But experiments with Latin-jazz fusions also took place beginning in the 1920s in Latin America itself, for instance in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Mexico, and elsewhere. None of the work of individuals such as Bebo Valdés, Mariano Mercerón, Dámaso Pérez Prado, and Astor Piazzola that took place outside of New York are recognized at all, either by interviewees or in the narration. This is a significant omission. On a related note, more emphasis could have been placed on the roots of jazz in the Caribbean and on the history and influences it shares with Cuban music of the nineteenth century such as the *danzón* and *habanera*. Rather than describing jazz and Latin music as fundamentally distinct, as this film does for the most part, it is important to consider their points of intersection and their *common* pasts.

Despite these limitations, I consider *Música* to be a documentary of significant merit, one with a great deal to offer students and educators. The producer and director touch upon many issues that continue to be of great relevance today. I would recommend its use in classroom settings as a supplement to readings on Latino music history, immigration, jazz, and related subjects.

### Movimiento: La cubanización del Hip Hop

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*Short Radiography of Hip Hop in Cuba. Dirigido y producido por Ricardo Bacallao. Bacallao en Puerto Film, 2004. Aprox. 21 min.*

Uno de los fenómenos más interesantes dentro del rap del mundo de habla hispana es la escena de hip hop subterráneo en Cuba. Quizás por el aura de lo desconocido y lo prohibido, el rap cubano se ha convertido en el blanco de un sinnúmero de documentales, ensayos y estudios sociológicos, tanto de propios cubanos como de extranjeros. Aún no he conocido escena de hip hop nacional (de habla hispana) con tantos documentales como lo es la de Cuba, como por ejemplo *Inventos* (2005) y *Calle Real 70* (2008). Uno de ellos es la modesta producción