Abstract

Drawing on oral histories, musical examples, newspapers accounts, and scholarship, this article draws connections between El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico's transnational audiences, and the transnational history of Cangrejos, which is known today as Santurce. El Gran Combo's parent band, Cortijo y su Combo (which drew most of its members from the Santurce neighborhood of la Parada 21) helped forge diasporic connections between diverse black communities in the Caribbean and Latin America in the 1950s. El Gran Combo has continued and expanded that legacy over almost five decades, through a strong community ethic. We argue that the transnational reach of these musicians is due in part to: 1) centuries of immigration from other islands that created a hybrid and inclusive musical culture in Cangrejos; and 2) 20th century economic developments that positioned Santurce at the crossroads of international entertainment, media, and labor migration. These flows of people and music constitute a "musical geography" that connects local neighborhoods and musicians in Santurce to transnational networks, and that locates Puerto Rico in Latin America as much as in the United States. In the last section we analyze how Santurce's transnational culture contributed to the international reach of salsa music in the 1960s and 70s, and make some concluding observations about music's role in building community across national boundaries.

Keywords

Gran Combo, Cortijo, Puerto Rico, Santurce, salsa, transnationalism.