Afro-Cuba Transnational: Recordings and the Mediation of Afro-Cuban Traditional Music

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AFRO-CUBA TRANSNATIONAL: RECORDINGS AND THE MEDIATION OF AFRO-CUBAN TRADITIONAL MUSIC

by

Johnny Frías

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Music in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Johnny Frías

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Music in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

Afro-Cuba Transnational: Recordings and the Mediation of Afro-Cuban Traditional Music

by

Johnny Frías

Advisor: Peter Manuel

This dissertation analyzes the way audio and video recordings and the internet have impacted, shaped, and helped create a transnational Afro-Cuban music scene. My focus will be on the most popular and widely-recorded genres of Afro-Cuban music—rumba and the religious repertoire of Santería, particularly batá drumming—both of which I also perform regularly with other Cuban musicians in Miami. Incorporating interviews, online ethnographic research, and participant-observation as a musician, my research has three main arguments.

First, recordings of Afro-Cuban music helped create a transnational Afro-Cuban music scene by increasing the popularity of these traditions outside of Cuba, including their amateur performance among non-Cubans. The earliest widely-disseminated audio recordings of rumba from the 1950s and 1960s helped introduce rumba to non-Cuban audiences and were critical in the creation of the first local performance scenes outside the island in New York and Puerto Rico. They assisted in bridging the geographical and political gap that separated Cuba from the outside world for much of the latter 20th century. With the waning of analog (pre-digital) media in the 2000s, YouTube and other social media sites like Facebook have become the primary media for the dissemination of Afro-Cuban music recordings and related information, and have brought Cuban and non-Cuban performers, students, and fans ever closer together in space and time.
My second argument hinges on what Mark Katz (2010) terms “phonograph effects”—the specific effects recordings have on performance, listening, and composition practices within a given music community. Indeed, audio recordings of Afro-Cuban groups in Cuba have often served as primary sources of song and drum repertoires for amateur musicians outside Cuba and have heavily influenced the dominant drumming and singing styles performed by those outside the island. More recently, the popularity of social media and YouTube has resulted in democratizing effects including easier, quicker, and largely free access to a wide variety audio and visual recordings, including those taken within the more intimate spaces of non-public casual performances or religious events.

My third and final argument examines the socioeconomic effects of Afro-Cuban music-related materials on the internet for Cuba-based performers. The foreign students that have flocked to study Afro-Cuban traditional music in Cuba have served as important mediators of audio and video recordings and promotional information by posting and sharing such materials online. Since most Cuba-based culture bearers have limited or no access to the internet, these materials serve to promote these teachers and musicians, who are able to gain more students, travel abroad for workshops or performances, and perhaps eventually emigrate. Foreign students and opportunities to travel abroad also represent access to much-needed hard currency. In the past few years, younger Cuban performers on the island have begun to enjoy greater direct access to the internet and social media, which has led to less reliance on foreign intermediaries.
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ensemble, which I directed during my time as a master’s student at UF. My studies at the CUNY Graduate Center, as well as some of the time writing my dissertation, were also supported by a Presidential Magnet Fellowship and a Dean K. Harrison Fellowship from the Office of Educational Opportunity and Diversity, for which I am extremely grateful.

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INTRODUCTION

The first time I heard rumba was on a cassette copy of the LP Guaguancó, featuring the group Guaguancó Matancero on one side and Papín y sus Rumberos on the other. I was about 18 years old and was living in Gainesville, in north central Florida. Despite my mother being Cuban and me having spent much of my childhood in southern California alongside my Cuban great-grandmother, I had not grown up hearing this music, which I soon learned was part of a larger set of traditions grouped collectively by Cuban musicologists under the labels música afrocubana, música folklórica afrocubana (“Afro-Cuban folkloric music”). Part of the reason for my lack of exposure was that my Cuban family, like most that left shortly following the Cuban Revolution, was from a middle-class, (mostly) white background, socially removed from much of what Cuban whites often look down upon as cosas de negros (literally “things of blacks”). And yet perhaps the main reason I had never heard this music was geographical in nature: I was not born in Cuba nor had I been raised in cities where these traditions were widely cultivated (e.g. Miami, New York).

Luckily, in Gainesville, where I lived as a teenager, there were a few drummers—Billy Bowker and Robert Glaser (both white Americans)—who had previously lived in New York and Miami and had some experience with rumba. I crossed paths with them when I was a drum set student trying to learn more about Latin popular music rhythms. Bowker and Glaser provided me with my first recordings of rumba and introduced me to basic technique and rhythms for the tumbadoras (congas) and shekere¹. I began buying recordings of other Afro-Cuban folkloric groups and in 2000, when I was 19, I made my first trip to Cuba, where I studied and learned

¹ A gourd with a net of beads hung around the outside which can be shaken or struck on the bottom with the heel of the hand to produce a tone.
more about rumba and a few other Afro-Cuban traditional genres. During that trip and in several subsequent trips, I came to realize that the depth and complexity of Afro-Cuban traditional music was far greater than what was represented on recordings. And yet those recordings were a life-line for learning these traditions for those of us that did not grow up in the midst of these traditions. The recordings had helped me circumvent, in an important way, the geographical and political barriers between my US home and Cuba, allowing me to access music and musical knowledge that might otherwise be inaccessible to me. I noticed that there were many others like me—fans and aspiring rumberos residing abroad—that had learned a great deal of what they knew by studying and imitating what they heard on recordings.

Upon returning from my first trip to Cuba, I headed a small amateur rumba group in Gainesville and performed in the local community. A few years later, several of us in the group moved to San Juan, Puerto Rico, where there was—and still is—a lively local rumba scene. After living in Puerto Rico, and later, New York and Miami, I continued to notice the pervading influence of recordings, particularly in terms of the song repertoires and playing style of local rumberos (most of whom were not Cuban). More recently, in 2014, I was sworn in as an omó Añá⁵ in Miami and began learning and performing the complex batá repertoire in weekly tambores³. In addition to performing regularly with culture bearers, recordings of the tambor repertoire greatly aided my ability to grasp and memorize the rhythms, and to expose myself to the styles of various drummers. Together, these experiences illustrated the importance and

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² Literally “child of Añá,” the orisha that resides within the consecrated batá drums (tambor de fundamento). An omó Añá is a batá drummer who has been sworn (jurado) to a tambor de fundamento. They hold a special role within la religión (i.e. “the religion,” referring to Santería, or Regla de Ocha), as they facilitate communication with orishas through drumming and, along with the lead singer or akpwón, help “bring down” the orishas (i.e. provoke possession among the participating santeros).
³ In the context of Afro-Cuban traditional music, a tambor refers to an event featuring batá drumming and songs for the orishas. The repertoire thus encompasses all the batá rhythms and songs used in this context.
widespread influence of recordings, particularly in the case of music traditions—like the Afro-Cuban examples—in which musical knowledge is transmitted orally. Further, the fact that there is a clear geographical center (Cuba: where the music is performed regularly and in its original contexts) quite far-removed—geographically, politically, and economically—from its numerous transnational nodes spurred my realization that recordings have not only influenced performance practices, they have been integral to the development of the transnational scene itself.

Transnationalism and phonograph effects

These two realizations form my central arguments in this dissertation. The first is that the transnational character of the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene has been made possible and facilitated in large part by the production, circulation, and use of recordings of the music. While there are many musics—especially commercial popular musics—that are spread by recordings, what is striking here is that Afro-Cuban traditional music is neither commercially popular nor inherently media-based. Rather, it is primarily transmitted orally and live-performance-based, so given the circumstances, recordings have played an unusually important role. My second argument is that the use of these recordings by those in the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene, which includes everyone involved in the production or consumption of the music, has resulted in various phonograph effects.

In his book Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music, Mark Katz describes a phonograph effect as “any observable manifestation of recording’s influence,” which may be observed in—but is not limited to—performance, listening, or composition practices (2010, 2). As he explains, recordings do not always provide a “mirror of sonic reality;” rather, they represent a technology (or technologies) that has fundamentally transformed the way humans
produce, consume, and otherwise interact with music (Katz 2010, 1). The idea is related to Marshall McLuhan’s (1964) description of media as “extensions of man” and his argument that “the medium is the message” because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action” (1964, 9). And yet, as Katz reminds us, as scholars, we must be wary of falling into technological determinism. Therefore, the description of phonograph effects must consider the relationship between technology, users, and society (2010, 6).

While Katz provides a few case studies in his book (e.g. phonograph effects in the jazz scene and phonograph effects on violin performance), this dissertation represents the first large-scale case study which focuses on the phonograph effects observed within an entire transnational scene of traditional—as opposed to commercial—music scene, spanning its earliest recordings in the 1930s until the present, when Web 2.0 and its related technologies have greatly expanded the possibilities for the production, consumption, and dissemination of recordings. This study thus contributes to the literature on the intersection of music, media, and technology, as well as to the scholarly study of Afro-Cuban traditional music. It was Fernando Ortiz (1937; 1950; 1952-55) who first demarcated and named an “Afro-Cuban” culture (highlighting music and religion) in the early 20th century, creating and positioning it as an ethnographic object and as one worthy of scholarly study.

**Designating “Afro-Cuban traditional music” and its culture bearers**

The term “Afro-Cuban” and its creator (Ortiz), as well as the ongoing scholarly examination of “Afro-Cuban religion” have been critiqued by scholars more recently, due in part to the environment of scientific racism in which this term first developed (see Moore 1994 and Palmié 2013). It is also important to note that among culture bearers and scholars in Cuba, as well as in
the Cuban mass media, recordings, and most other references, the music in this scene is referred to as “Afro-Cuban folkloric music,” or sometimes just “Afro-Cuban folklore,” terms that Ortiz and his scholarly successors used to denote the music traditions practiced by black Cubans that displayed a high degree of what they analyzed African musical “retentions.” In his book *Listening for Africa*, David García (2017) describes how, beginning in the early 20th century, Western researchers of black musical manifestations in the Americas—including Melville Herskovits, Richard Waterman, and Fernando Ortiz, among others—tended to actively search for components of these musical expressions that linked them directly to African antecedents. Although many of these scholars intended to document and validate these musical expressions, their work in some ways also served to portray black music as being tied to a distant “savage” past in an essentialized Africa, spatially and temporally separated from modernity (located in the West) (García 2017).

Therefore, despite the ongoing popular use of the word “folkloric” in Cuba to designate the traditional music of black Cubans and the interesting processes of folklorization and folkloricization that transformed these traditions since the mid-20th century—described and critiqued by scholars such as Moore (1964; 1988), Matibag (1996), and Hagedorn (1995; 2001)—I have chosen to use the label “Afro-Cuban traditional music.” The word “traditional” makes sense, given that these Afro-Cuban genres (and religions) are often described by culture bearers as “traditions” that are handed down orally. Indeed, in her definition of folklore, María Teresa Linares (1979, 1) describes how folkloric customs and practices are those of the people (el pueblo—in this case used in the Marxist sense, referring to the masses rather than elites) are

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4 In Cuba, these designations include “la música folklórica afrocubana,” “el folklor afrocubano,” or even simply “el folklor.” Similar views of black music as “folklore” tied to notions of “the past” or nostalgia are common in other areas of Latin America. See Godreau (2002) for a discussion of recent examples of such issues in Puerto Rico.
passed down orally, through imitation and continuity, constituting tradition. Although the term “traditional” may in some ways be broad and even ambiguous, it serves to separate these from Cuban popular\(^5\) music genres by highlighting their general non-commercial character and their place as oral traditions that have been handed down since the 19\(^{th}\) century and earlier. Afro-Cuban traditional music thus encompasses the same genres that are generally referred as Afro-Cuban folkloric music in Cuba.

While these genres were indeed grouped together as “Afro” by white Cuban scholars who observed them from an outsider’s perspective, I believe that it is important to continue to recognize their origins and ongoing cultivation by a primarily—although not always exclusively—black and mulatto population in Cuba. While some popular music genres such as *son* also originated among blacks and mulattos in Cuba, the genre was subsequently adopted by white Cubans as well and became an internationally popular commercial music. Afro-Cuban traditional music and dance, however, continues to be heavily dominated by black Cubans, who comprise the majority of its culture bearers.

By “culture bearer,” I am referring to people who form a core part of these music traditions and have made them (often initially as children or teenagers) an integral part of their lifestyle. In addition, these people have extensive experience and thorough knowledge of the traditions, to the degree that they are capable of carrying and passing on these traditions comprehensively to others within their oral, traditional (often religious) contexts. Cuban

\(^5\) The category “popular music” (*la música popular cubana*) is used by Cuban scholars to denote genres such as *son*, *timba*, *danzón*, and *reggaetón* to highlight their wide acceptance, visibility, and commercial popularity at the national or transnational level, and whose style has evolved in close connection with their dissemination on the mass media and sale as commodities (Ortiz 1950: 8; Linares 1979, 10). Of course, there is a clear racial delineation as well: these genres tend to display a greater degree of European influence in their inclusion and use of instruments which have made them more acceptable to white Cubans, who have always dominated Cuban society and have consistently marginalized that which is seen as black or African, such as the percussion-centric rumba or Afro-Cuban religious music practices.
musicologists (e.g. Orozco González 1983) and organizers of state-sponsored folkloric groups have sometimes referred to such persons as *portadores de la tradición*: “carriers” or “bearers” of the tradition. María Teresa Vélez (2000, 77-78), citing Guerra (1989, 30-37) and Vinueza (1988, 56-57), discusses how researchers and musicologists would, in the process of producing the staged performances of professional and amateur folkloric groups, seek out the “real” tradition bearers and use their input to guide the production, whilst leaving out any religious functions attached to the traditions. In the case of Afro-Cuban traditional music, the various kinds of traditions may be distinguished or named based on the Afro-Cuban or African ethnic group designation (e.g. *arará*, *congo* [Bantu], etc.) or by the name of the particular music style (e.g. *tambor*, *rumba*, etc.), or both. Hence, culture bearers may be carriers of only one or some of these traditions. Indeed, because of many of these traditions’ social and geographical proximity, many culture bearers are carriers of multiple traditions, a phenomenon illustrated in the title of María Teresa Vélez’s (2000) book, which presents Felipe García Villamil as a *santero*, *palero*, and *abakuá*.

I choose to use the term “culture bearer” as opposed to more general terms like “musician,” “performer,” “*rumbero*,” or “*tambolero*” because there are important distinctions between them. There are many different levels and varieties of involvement one may have with these traditions; this has been particularly true given the gradual eroding of social, religious, and even geographical barriers between culture bearers and outsiders since the 1930s and 1940s, when researchers’ investigations, recordings, and public performances began to reveal more of

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6 A practitioner of the Regla de Ocha who has undergone initiation and ritually received orishas. In Spanish, the process of initiation is referred to as *haciéndose santo*, literally “making [your patron] saint.” In English, I have sometimes heard it described as “getting crowned,” with one’s orisha (i.e. patron saint).

7 Initiate in the Bantu-derived religious practices of Palo Monte.

8 Initiate in the all-male Abakuá religious society.
these traditions to cultural outsiders (i.e. those with limited knowledge of the traditions). Of course, there is a certain degree of subjectivity here, as well as various degrees of “insiderness.” For example, while I am an insider in several ways in some of these traditions, I would not consider myself a culture bearer. On the one hand, I am a tambolero, as I’m an omó Añá who works regularly in the Miami Afro-Cuban religious community playing tambores. That does not make me a bearer of the tambor tradition, and there are a number of reasons why: I was not born into this tradition nor was I raised in the context of its natural contexts or social environment, nor have I the experience and depth of knowledge required to purport to “know” the tradition thoroughly.

In fact, I have often heard Cuban tamboleros often use the expression “he knows the tambor” (“se sabe el tambor”) to describe a musician who has a thorough understanding of the tambor repertoire, in its entirety. Interestingly, however, “knowing” the tambor is not necessarily equated with being a great or virtuosic musician; it merely refers to the fact that the musician is familiar with and capable of performing the (perceived) entirety of the tambor repertoire. In turn, in order to have this depth of understanding and accumulated knowledge, and since transmission of knowledge occurs primarily orally, it is necessary to have a high degree of experience with the tradition(s), preferably from an early age. The knowledge and practices that comprise these traditions are both immense and heterogenous; they are learned in various contexts and in bits and pieces from listening to and observing family members or others in the scene. The process is similar to—and in ways linked to—the memorization of long (sometimes unwritten) proverbs by West African griots or initiates into the Cuban or Nigerian variants of Ifá (a system of religious practices and divination originating in Ife, in modern-day Nigeria).
Culture bearers in the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene are generally highly experienced professional musicians, in the sense that they perform as part of their income, and have lived much of their life either as *rumberos*9, *tamboleros*10, *abakuás* (initiates in the Abakuá religious society), or whatever other type of tradition they are a carrier of. Since these traditions originate in and are primarily practiced in Cuba, most culture bearers are black (or mulatto) Cubans, yet there are also some white Cubans in the scene on the island. Due to the expanding interest of non-Cubans abroad in these traditions and their involvement from the 1950s and especially since the 1990s, it is important to recognize that there are many students and amateur performers in the transnational scene who also practice these music traditions. For example, Afro-Cuban student ensembles and other amateur performance groups have appeared in recent decades in many countries, including the US, Canada, Australia, Japan, and across Europe. Further, cities such as New York and San Francisco have been centers for Afro-Cuban workshops and dance or drumming classes for many decades, and have well-developed amateur performance scenes, such as the weekly casual rumbas in New York’s Central Park during the summer months.

There are some non-Cubans abroad who could be considered culture bearers, such as some *tamboleros* in New York, like Kenneth “Skip” Burney or Abidoaye Holliday, who have adopted the traditions as their own and have performed in the scene consistently for decades alongside other (Cuban) culture bearers to the point that they “know” the *tambor* repertoire

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9 In the most general sense, the word *rumbero* refers to someone who is a dancer, singer, or drummer in the rumba tradition, or someone who is a fan and frequent attendee of rumbas. In my experience in the realm of rumba, and as described by Jottar (2011b), there is a general aesthetic among *rumberos* that a well-rounded, experienced *rumbero* should be able to dance, sing, and play rumba competently.

10 An initiated *batá* drummer, or *omó Añá*. Based on my experience, the term *tamblero* is often used among *tamboleros* themselves to designate an initiated *batá* drummer who is or was active in playing (working) in *tambores* and has accumulated the knowledge to do so competently. This distinguishes what they may see as “real” (working, competent) *tamboleros* from, say, musicians who have learned some *batá* rhythms but are not initiated, or from those who underwent initiation but do not actual perform (Schweitzer 2003, 38).
thoroughly and know how to navigate the ritual maintenance of the consecrated drums. For most non-Cubans who do not reside in areas like New York or Miami where they can achieve that degree of involvement in the scene, it would be difficult for them to become culture bearers due to their lack of immersion.

There have long been racial, linguistic, geographic and ethnic barriers to entry to learning the Afro-Cuban traditions that whites and non-Cubans have faced, although these barriers have become much less pronounced in recent decades for a number of reasons. Prior to the 1930s and 1940s, when some of these traditions became more accessible to a wider public in Cuba and elsewhere (via recordings, public presentations, classes, workshops, and scholarly literature), there were very few non-black musicians in Cuba participating in these traditions. One of the earliest documented instances of the inclusion of whites in Afro-Cuban religious practices was the admitting of white men to some potencias (chapters of the Abakuá society, also called juegos) beginning in the late 19th century (Vélez 2000, 17). As far as the tambor repertoire, whites were not taught to play batá—not to mention getting initiated as an omó Añá—prior to the 1960s, until Jesús Pérez (who had been at the forefront of bringing batá into the public arena for the first time in preceding decades) began teaching some white Cuban students (Miller 2003, 72). According to several drummers who lived in New York, including Kenneth “Skip” Burney and Jesse Feldman, when Afro-Cuban traditional drumming styles began to gain a presence in New York in the 1950s-1970s, the few Cuban drummers there—namely, Julito Collazo—were very reluctant to teach the Puerto Ricans (including Nuyoricans), white Americans (including Jewish Americans), and black Americans who were interested in learning (Burney 2015, interview; Moreno Vega 2008; Vélez 2000, 154). In addition, those who were not native Spanish speakers had to work to achieve at least some competency in that language if they were to
communicate effectively with the Cubans from whom they wanted to learn and with whom they collaborated.

These barriers continue to exist today—for example, white Cuban musicians of these traditions (especially drummers) are still a small minority on the island, although many white foreigners do go to Cuba to take classes and workshops. Outside of Cuba, non-black/mulatto drummers (including white Latinos and non-Latinos, as well as Latin American mestizos from Mexico and Venezuela, among others) are much more common, just because—aside from the handful of black American drummers—they have comprised the majority of the foreign population interested in learning Afro-Cuban traditional music. For example, despite having a Cuban family background and being an active tambolero in the Miami scene, since I am was born in the US (rather than Cuba) and am viewed as white (i.e. white Latino), I am ultimately viewed by most other Cubans as a yuma, or foreigner. Among Cubans, the word yuma is used in several ways, but it primarily serves to separate out those who have not been raised in Cuba: those who have not taken part in that experience. The word thus denotes outsidersness, and also has a general racial connotation, as foreigners in Cuba (e.g. foreign tourists or students) tend to be white and are viewed as much more privileged than Cubans, due to the economic, political, and other hardships endured by the latter. In recent decades, the “reterritorialization” of batá drumming (Villepastour 2015a, 26-27), the flourishing of rumba practices outside of Cuba, the increase in number of and access to recordings (especially since the 1990s, including the plethora now available on the internet), and the spike in the number of foreigners studying Afro-Cuban traditional music in Cuba, there are doubtless hundreds (or more) of non-Cubans now practicing and learning these musical traditions around the world. Nonetheless, there remain comparatively few true non-Cuban culture bearers simply because the traditions still maintain their strongest
and most pervasive presence on the island. Therefore, many foreign students and researchers prefer to go to Cuba—often viewed as the “source” or cradle of these traditions—in order to study and research them in places like Havana or Matanzas, where there exists the highest concentration of culture bearers of many of the most internationally well-known and sought-after traditions (e.g. rumba and *batá* drumming).

**Characterizing Afro-Cuban traditional music**

Afro-Cuban traditional music is an umbrella term that serves to designate a group of music traditions which, though containing many elements derived from Africa, took their current form in Cuba\(^1\) and are primarily practiced and maintained in Cuba’s black-dominant communities. Most of them also share several musical characteristics which reflect black Atlantic musical aesthetics: repeating ostinatos such as the *clave* or stick patterns (which lend the musics their rhythmic structure), syncopation, the use of call-and-response singing, the key role of improvisation, nasal or raspy vocal timbres, and the heavy use of percussion instruments, often modeled on West African antecedents.

The traditions are also frequently practiced in close geographical and social proximity to one another. For example, many of the traditions I focus on here—rumba and several Afro-Cuban religious genres (including the *tambor* repertoire, *abakuá*\(^2\), *güiro*, *bembé*, *palo*, and *makuta*)—have their primary performance arenas in Havana and Matanzas’s *barrios*, which is where much of the urban black population resides. Culture bearers are often involved in several

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\(^1\) Although some traditions, such as *batá* drumming, are seen as continuing from an African lineage, they were nonetheless re-created in the Cuban context; often substantially altered and influenced by other African ethnic groups in Cuba, other Afro-Cuban musical practices, and popular culture. In addition, they then underwent a natural course of evolution as oral traditions handed down through many generations. We can thus say that as Afro-Cuban traditions, their “origins” are in Cuba.

\(^2\) The word *abakuá*, aside from denoting an initiate of the Abakuá society, is also used to refer to their music.
of the Afro-Cuban music and religious traditions simultaneously—that is, the traditions overlap in terms of their membership. This phenomenon is nothing new; there were exchanges between various African ethnic groups’ representative cabildos\textsuperscript{13} in Cuba during the colonial and republican eras (Delgado 2001). In addition, the beliefs and values in Afro-Cuban religious traditions are not mutually-exclusive of one another—as in the way traditional Christianity or Islam doctrines forbid worshiping any other deities or participating simultaneously in another faith. Rather, Afro-Cuban religious beliefs like Regla de Ocha, Palo, and Espiritismo are often embraced as complementary to one another, and I have often heard practitioners of Regla de Ocha and Palo often speak of their religious objects (i.e. material objects imbued with religious meanings or representations) as poderes (literally “powers”) that are received and can be accumulated for personal gain. The various Afro-Cuban religious traditions also represent a wealth of esoteric knowledge that can in many cases can only be accessed through formal initiation and study (González-Wippler 1989).

It is therefore not uncommon for someone to be both a rumbero and a tambolero or to be a santero and a member of the Abakuá religious brotherhood. Because of this social and spatial proximity, these Afro-Cuban traditions have long co-existed and co-influenced one another. In many contexts, such as rumbas or the shows of Afro-Cuban folkloric groups in Cuba, genres from multiple traditions are more than likely to be found in the same performance. To be sure, there are other Afro-Cuban traditional genres in other regions of the island, including eastern Cuba’s tumba francesa and changüí, and Trinidad’s tonadas trinitarias, yet I will focus here primarily on the aforementioned traditions most prominent in Havana and Matanzas, especially on the rumba and tambor performance scenes. Another reason I focus on these traditions—with

\textsuperscript{13} Societies associated with specific African ethnic groups in Cuba founded during the island’s colonial era which served as centers of culture, religion, and mutual aid.
emphasis on rumba and *tambor*—is that they that are the genres that have been recorded the most and are often featured prominently in classes, performances, and workshops on Afro-Cuban music and dance abroad, making them the central Afro-Cuban music traditions in the transnational scene.

Following Ortiz’s creation of Afro-Cuban (traditional) music as an object of scholarly investigation, there have been many Cuban and non-Cuban (mostly Western) scholars who have researched and written about the various genres. Cuban musicologists have provided some of the most insightful research\(^\text{14}\), although despite incorporating information from interviews with culture bearers, most of the scholars have—like Ortiz—necessarily viewed the traditions from the outside, that is, they are neither performers of the music nor followers of Afro-Cuban religious beliefs (i.e. beliefs related to Regla de Ocha, Palo, Abakuá, Espiritismo).

Most non-Cuban researchers have also approached these music traditions as non-performers, with the exception of authors of the literature on *batá* drumming, which has often been written about by musicians who have studied and learned the traditions from culture bearers in Cuba, New York, Washington D.C., or San Francisco (Altmann 2007; Amira 2015; Cornelius 1991; Akiwowo and Font-Navarrete 2015; Leobons 2015; Marcuzzi 2005; Mason 1992; Schweitzer 2003, 2013, 2015; Quintero and Marcuzzi 2015). Other scholars who research *batá* drumming, including several women (who are generally prohibited from being fully initiated as ritual drummers), have focused on the histories of *batá* drumming in Cuba or Nigeria, the links between these two traditions, and gender issues related to *batá* (Klein 2007, 2015; Hagedorn 2015; Miller 2003; Vaughan and Aldama 2012; Vélez 2000; Villepastour 2010, 2015a, 2015b,\(^\text{14}\))

\(^{14}\text{Acosta (1983; 1991); Alén Rodríguez (1986); Esquenazi Pérez (2007); Lachatañeré (1961a; 1961b); León (1964; 1974); Linares (1974; 2006); Martínez Rodríguez (1977; 1984); Martínez Furé (1979a; 1979b; 1991); Neira Betancourt (1991); Pérez (1986); Suero Reguera (1972); Vinueza (1988); Zayas Bringas (1997; 1999).}
2017; Vincent [Villepastour] 2006). Non-Cuban scholars have also focused more on political, racial, economic, social, and otherwise theoretical aspects of Afro-Cuban traditional music and its musicians than have scholars on the island, due in part to political taboos on the island (Berry 2015; Bodenheimer 2013, 2015; García 2017; Hagedorn 2001; Jottar 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Knauer 2005, 2009; Moore 1994, 1997, 2006; Windress 2015). Rumba has been another favorite topic among both Cuban and non-Cuban scholars (including several of the aforementioned), due in part to its greater accessibility and public presence, its largely secular character, and its greater popularity outside the island (Acosta 1991; Bodenheimer 2013, 2015; Crook 1982; Daniel 1995; Frías 2015b; Jottar 2009, 2011a, 2001b; Knauer 2000; León and Urfé 1967; Martínez Rodríguez 1977, 1984; Moore 1995; Pasmanick 1997; Sublette 2004). Finally, there are several Afro-Cuban traditional music forms that have not been written about very often by scholars outside Cuba, and the scholarship often tends to focus on general histories of the traditions, many of which are less visible in the public arena or confined to very specific geographic areas. Such traditions include iyesá drumming\(^{15}\) (Delgado 2001, 2008, 2015), violines\(^{16}\) (Frías 2015a), cajones espirituales\(^{17}\)

\(^{15}\) Musical practices of the Iyesá cabildos of Matanzas.

\(^{16}\) In the context of Afro-Cuban traditional music, a violín (or “violín para Ochún”) is a religious musical celebration featuring a small group of musicians (violin[s] accompanied by percussion and usually at least one other melodic instrument for harmonic accompaniment, such as acoustic guitar, although there is wide variation in accompanying instruments). These are performed specifically for Ochún and are a creole invento (“invention”), meaning that they as religious musical events, they are not always viewed as serious or traditional as other more common and established events such as tambore and güiros. The first violines took place in the early 20th century in Matanzas (Rivero n.d.). The musical repertoire features mostly religious themes as far as lyrics, but the genres used reflect a heavy influence from popular music (including son, chachachá, danzón, and even reggaetón). See Frías (2015a) for further information.

\(^{17}\) A musical ceremony used in Espiritismo practices in Havana and Matanzas that mixes the (originally a capella) Espiritismo song repertoire from eastern Cuba with rumba rhythms played on cajones (wooden box drums). This event is often referred to simply as a cajón (or sometimes cajón de muerto) and is performed to honor a person’s deceased relatives or accompanying spirits and often also features songs and rhythms from the Bantu-descended palo and makuta.
(Warden 2006), *abakuá* (Miller 2000, 2010), and the *tonadas trinitarias*\(^{18}\) (Frías 2015c), among others.

**Musical scholarship on recordings, media, and technology**

There has been some focus by scholars of Cuban music on recordings, media, and technology, and yet there has been little analysis of how the use of these has impacted the scene, particularly in terms of performance, listening, and composition practices. Knauer (2009) highlights the importance of audiovisual remittances (in the form of video messages or recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music) between Cubans in New York and those on the island and how these flows reinforce identity and create a “transnational structure of feeling.” Pacini-Hernández (1998) and Hernández Reguant (2012) examine the resurgence of Cuban music recordings in the West via the world music industry, focusing on Cuban dance music and, in the case of Pacini-Hernández, issues of race and authenticity. In their studies on the New York rumba and street drumming scenes, López (1976), Knauer (2000), and Jottar (2011) briefly mention the importance of Cuban recordings in the development of the local performance scene since the 1950s. Moore (2006, 190, 193) describes the general lack of Afro-Cuban traditional music and dance in Revolutionary Cuba’s radio or television and the scarcity of opportunities to record for Afro-Cuban folkloric ensembles\(^{19}\) prior to the 1990s, when there was a resurgence of performances, workshops, books, and video and audio recordings. Finally, Cristóbal Díaz

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\(^{18}\) An Afro-Cuban musical tradition originating in Trinidad de Cuba in the 19\(^{th}\) century and currently maintained only in the form of staged performances by the Conjunto Folklórico de Trinidad (Frías 2015c).

\(^{19}\) While I have chosen not to use the word “folkloric” to describe Afro-Cuban traditional music as a whole, I will use “Afro-Cuban folkloric groups” (or ensembles) to describe the performance groups specializing in these traditions. I do this primarily for reasons of clarity, seeing as this is how these specific groups are referred to in Cuba and abroad by musicians and scholars. Perhaps more importantly, these groups—including the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional—embody the processes of folklorization (and folkloricization) of these Afro-Cuban traditions and do not represent the traditions as performed in their original contexts.
Ayala’s (1994; 2002) discographies present an impressive goldmine of information on Cuban music recordings, and while many of the entries contain meticulous notes on specific recordings, these do not contain analyses of the influence or impact of these recordings, and the discography only covers recordings made through 1960. Of the aforementioned scholars, only Knauer (2009) takes recordings (including non-musical video messages) as a central element of analysis, and yet she focuses here on identity and transnational ties rather than the music scene. My research thus helps address this lacuna in the scholarship on Afro-Cuban traditional music by presenting an extensive analysis of the impact and influence of Afro-Cuban traditional music recordings throughout their history and how these have played a critical role in shaping a transnational scene.

On the other hand, there is plenty of literature situated at the intersection of media studies and sound recording. Yet many scholars, including Kittler (1999), Sterne (2003; 2012a; 2012b), Jones (2002a, 2002b), Mjos (2012), Jung (2014), and Waldron (2011) have focused on the type of mediation, the technology (i.e. sound recording, the internet and virtual spaces, social media, digital music), or on the creation of virtual or online communities rather than on the perceivable effects of these things on music practices. Conversely, Manuel (1993), Nowak (2014), and of course Katz (2010), have all examined phonograph effects (although only Katz uses this term) more directly by focusing on specific music scenes. Waldron (2009, 2011, 2012) and Kruse and Veblen (2012) have concentrated specifically on the dynamics of music instruction and learning with YouTube videos. Windress’s (2015) chapter is related to my own study, as he examines the use of YouTube among some bata drummers as a way of marketing their services and
establishing authenticity.\textsuperscript{\ref{note1}} Finally, some of the most recent studies on media and music, including Arditi (2014), Burkart (2014), Marshall (2015), Nordgård (2016), and Johansson et. al. (2017), have focused on streaming services and the music industry. Despite the challenges faced by the industry in terms of illegal file-sharing in the early 2000s, these scholars demonstrate that streaming services such as iTunes and Spotify continue to favor major record labels and their artists, which helps to maintain their dominance.

In my experience, however, the most significant impact of YouTube, the internet, and recordings in general within the scene has been their ability to help expand the reach, popularity, learning, and practice of these music traditions, bridging geographical, political, and social barriers between Cuban culture bearers on the island and those abroad, thus facilitating the creation of a transnational scene. The bridging of geographical and political barriers has been of central importance in this case, as Cuba is geographically separated from all other countries (as an island) and communication between the island and the outside world has been greatly limited due to the political constraints imposed by the Revolutionary government since 1959. In addition to migration, media—in this case in the form of recordings, whether in the form of LPs, cassettes, CDs, DVDs, or digital audio or video—have thus occupied a highly important place in the history of Afro-Cuban traditional music since the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century due to the way they helped the scene flourish in spite of these barriers. In addition, since these are oral traditions, recordings have played a direct role in the transmission of the music and in the spread of specific performance practices. Finally, as traditional music produced (in its Cuban contexts) by a racially and economically marginalized segment of the population (i.e. working-class black

\textsuperscript{\ref{note1}} Windress uses the examples of some batá drummers in Mexico that have used YouTube for such marketing purposes, although in my experience, this particular phenomenon is less common or very rarely seen in the US, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and especially in Cuba.
recordings have served to facilitate economic opportunities for its musicians in several ways.

**Background and methodology: Combining performance and research**

As touched upon in the opening paragraphs to this dissertation, my research interest in Afro-Cuban traditional music stems from my background as a performer. Like most students studying and performing music in the US, my middle, high school, and college music education focused primarily on Euro-American traditions and instruments. Yet, as a 17-year-old drummer in jazz band, I was exposed to Latin jazz for the first time, for which I had to learn some “Latin” rhythms to fit the style. Upon taking an interest in these rhythms—an interest that also tied in with my identity as Latino and a person of Cuban heritage—I began studying what in the US is commonly referred to as “Latin” percussion (i.e. *timbal, tumbadoras* [congas], *bongó*) in the context of Latin popular music. As I immediately learned, many of these instruments and rhythms were Cuban in origin. By this time, I had started college at the University of Florida, which happened to have the largest Latin American library collection in the nation. Of greatest interest to me was their extensive collection of literature on Cuba and its music. The collection had what seemed to be almost every book ever written about Cuban music, including shelves and shelves of books by Cuban authors, which—although I had grown up speaking Spanish fluently—helped expand my Spanish vocabulary as well as my understanding of the island’s history and culture.

Throughout the seven years I spent at UF (I returned later for a Master’s), I spent countless hours reading and studying those books, becoming well-acquainted with the works of Fernando Ortiz, María Teresa Linares, and other Cuban researchers, and finding articles in
obscure, sometimes very old, Cuban journals. At the same time I was reading about these things during my undergrad years, I was practicing, learning, and performing rumba with Rumbakuá, the amateur performance group I belonged to. After my initial two-week trip to Cuba in 2002 when I was 19, I made several trips in the following years during which I stayed for a month at a time. During each trip, I stayed with family in Fontanar (a neighborhood just outside the city of Havana) and studied Afro-Cuban traditional music (including rumba percussion, singing, and dance, with marginal musical incursions into other non-secular traditions like abakuá and batá drumming). After returning from each trip, I would teach what I had learned to my fellow group members in Gainesville and tell them about my experiences going to Afro-Cuban religious musical events like güiros\(^\text{21}\), violines, and cajones espirituales, for the first time. During this time, I was doing an ethnomusicology concentration as part of the Music and Literature undergraduate program at UF, with ethnomusicologist Larry Crook as my advisor. For my senior project, I decided to write about the history of rumba, for which I went to Cuba to conduct research and interviews in Havana. After graduating, I and the other members of the rumba group (Rumbakuá) moved to San Juan, Puerto Rico, where we had recently been introduced into the local rumba scene. As a group, we practiced and rehearsed every day and performed shows in bars, festivals, and live music venues with our amateur rumba group. As individual musicians, we sometimes performed with other rumba groups as well, or participated in informal street rumbas.

After residing in Puerto Rico for two years, I returned to UF to do a Master’s in ethnomusicology, during which time I founded and directed the university’s first Afro-Cuban

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\(^{21}\) A musical ceremony in Regla de Ocha in which the singing is accompanied by shekeres (usually two or three), a bell (often a hoe blade, or guataca), and a drum (a tumbadora [conga drum], often referred to generically as jicamo).
Ensemble (Fundamento Rumbero) and completed a Master’s thesis on the *tonadas trinitarias*, an almost-extinct Afro-Cuban musical tradition from Trinidad de Cuba. A few years later, I moved to New York to begin my doctorate at the CUNY Graduate Center. In New York, I was thrilled to be able to take part in the local rumba scene, including as a performer of La Nueva Timba de Cajón, led by ex-Muñequitos de Matanzas singer Andro Mella. Through this group I met well-respected local tambolero Abi Holliday, with whom I began performing in güiros and cajones espirituales. Thanks to Abi, who encouraged me to pursue batá drumming, I decided to get jurado (sworn in) as an omó Añá, which I did upon finishing my coursework in New York and relocating to Miami in 2014. One of my best friends and former member of Rumbakuá, Charley Rivas, had recently been jurado to the tambor (set of drums) of Alain Fernández, a well-known akpwón. Charley introduced me to Alain, who started calling me to work (perform) on weekends in güiros and cajones espirituales with his piquete (i.e. among tamboleros, this refers to a group of musicians that perform regularly together).

I also started attending tambores where they were playing, at first just to watch and learn. Seeing that I had some experience and potential as a drummer, Alain soon mentioned that he would be willing to jurarme (swear me in) as a tambolero. It should be noted that getting sworn in as an omó Añá is different from getting one’s “hand’s washed.” The latter denotes a quicker, less serious ceremony that is often used as a quick (or temporary) solution to being able to play

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22 See Frías (2015c) for further description and a history of the *tonadas trinitarias*.

23 *Akpwón*, or *akpón*, refers to a singer well-versed in performing the Yoruba-derived song repertoire featured in the music of Regla de Ocha, particularly the tambor repertoire. The akpwón act as the “lead” singer inasmuch as they alternate with a chorus (call-and-response-style) and are in charge of introducing songs, which in tambores are performed in groupings of associated, successive songs called tratados. Nowadays, in common parlance, tamboleros usually use the word cantante (singer) to designate someone who is a specialized “lead” singer.

24 In the Afro-Cuban religious music scene, there is usually one person that gets called for gigs by clients (other religious practitioners that need the service of musicians for a tambor, güiro, etc.). This lead person, or organizer, then calls other musicians (often calling the same people he usually works with) and arranges for the proper instruments to be taken. Oftentimes, this organizer is someone who owns a tambor de fundamento (set of consecrated batá drums) or is a lead singer, although this is not always the case.
the consecrated batá drums before the drummer is later sworn in fully as an omó Añá. There are those, however, who choose not to get fully sworn in because of the religious commitment or the fact that they do not intend to perform in tambores regularly or over the long-term (this seems to be more common among non-Cubans outside the island).

In order to undergo the full juramento (initiation) to become an omó Añá, many tamboleros expect that the new initiate either have santo made (i.e. they are a santero, which entails receiving and getting crowned with an orisha) or at least have received their guerreros and mano de Orula. Therefore, prior to undergoing the juramento, I underwent the three-day ceremony to receive my mano de Orula along with the guerreros. Shortly after, in November of 2014, I was jurado to Alain’s tambor de fundamento, (named Añá Obá Gba) and thereafter dedicated myself to studying and learning the tambor repertoire as a drummer. In order to accelerate my learning, I also took private lessons with Kenneth “Skip” Burney, a well-respected and highly experienced tambolero who had played many years alongside Orlando “Puntilla” Ríos and others in New York. The norm for beginning tamboleros—called aprendices (apprentices)—is to start out on the smallest drum, the okónkolo, learning all the different rhythms and variants of each toque (rhythm or set of rhythms played together for an orisha). A central part of the learning process, apart from one’s private practice, is attending and playing in

25 The guerreros are comprised of Eleguá, Ogún, and Ochosi. They can be received by themselves or can be received along with the mano de Orula, also called owofakán (for males) or ikafafún (for females). The mano de Orula is symbolized by a bracelet (iddé) with the colors of Orula: yellow and green (in the Cuban, or criollo, variant of the religion) or purple and green (in the Nigerian variant). In the ceremony, the person receives Orula, the orisha associated with divination.

26 Each tambor de fundamento (i.e. set of fundamento drums) has its own designated ritual name and lineage. The lineage refers to the set from which the tambor was “born” from—like a “parent” set—as well as the sets from which the “parent” set and “grandparent” set were born from, and so on. Keeping track of a set’s lineage is important, as it serves to prove its religious authenticity, or in other words, to show that it comes from a legit or respectable line of tambores de fundamento. For example, Alain Fernández’s tambor, Añá Obá Gba, was born from Pedro López’s (one of the Chinitos brothers) set, Añá Fumí Ará, which in turn was born from Lázaro Cuesta’s set, Obá Ilú.
tambores. At first, an aprendiz (apprentice) might only take a turn on the drum once or a few times during a tambor; the rest of the time they watch, sing chorus, and clap clave with the songs, which helps them learn the songs and accompanying rhythms through repetition. Once I demonstrated enough competency, I began playing entire tambores as an okonkolero (okónkolo player), and began branching out, sometimes playing with other local tambor crews other than that of Alain.

After about a year, when I had a good grasp on the okónkolo parts for the entire repertoire, I began studying the segundo (middle drum, also called itótele). Since then, I have been playing segundo and am starting to learn the caja (largest drum, also called iya). Altogether, I have been working in the local scene in Miami (with some excursions to Texas and California) with Alain and other drummers since 2014. This has entailed playing tambores, güíros, cajones espirituales or malongos (toques de palo) almost every single weekend. Most weekends, there are two events, and sometimes we play on weekdays. From 2014 through 2017, our piquete also had a monthly rumba gig in Little Havana every Viernes Cultural de la Calle Ocho (8th Street Cultural Fridays). The gig was eventually cancelled, but I have nevertheless continued performing rumba regularly in casual gatherings and recently recorded on a rumba album collaboration with rumba singer Totin Agosto in Puerto Rico.

Taken together, my years of experience participating in several aspects of Afro-Cuban traditional music performance, and in several different cities with so many different musicians

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27 In my experience, most contemporary tamboleros in Cuba and abroad use the Spanish words segundo and caja to refer to the middle and large drum rather than their Lucumí designations (itótele and iyá). On the other hand, many scholars, perhaps due to the precedent set by earlier Afro-Cuban ethnographers like Fernando Ortiz (and his informants), continue to use the Lucumí designations for these drums. The small drum, however, is still commonly referred to by tamboleros by its Lucumí name: okónkolo or kónkolo.

28 A malongo or toque de palo refers to a musical ceremony used in the system of religious beliefs known as Palo, derived from slaves of Bantu descent brought to Cuba from central west Africa. The music features call-and-response singing, a bell, and two or three drums (tumbadoras) or cajones (or a combination of these).
have allowed me to develop insightful perspectives on the ideas, material culture, repertoires, and activities associated with the scene. Since I have passed through—and am continually involved in—the process of learning these traditions, I am able to draw on many of my personal experiences as examples of the importance and influence of recordings in the process of learning, particularly for those of us who do not live in Cuba. My most recent experiences as a working musician in the Afro-Cuban religious community in Miami have been particularly rewarding, as I have been able to form friendships and bonds with singers and drummers of various backgrounds and generations, including non-Cubans and Cubans who arrived in the 1980s, 1990s and later. Indeed, over the past decade, Miami has become perhaps the most active center of Afro-Cuban religious music performance outside of Cuba, due to the large Cuban religious community here and the arrival of many musicians of various generations in recent decades.

While much of the scholarship on Afro-Cuban traditional music outside the US focuses on New York, I am happy to be able to provide some new insights into the Miami scene, which has exploded in recent years.²⁹

²⁹ While Afro-Cuban traditional music in Miami does not enjoy widespread exposure in terms of public performances—there are very few performances compared with the high number of musicians here and there is still little public support for Afro-Cuban traditional music in the white-dominant Cuban community in Miami—there is a thriving religious music scene. The scene has an “underground” quality to it, as most performances take place in private homes all over Miami (with occasional gigs by Miami-based musicians in Broward or West Palm Beach County, Naples, Lehigh, Tampa, and Orlando). There are a plethora of Cuban culture bearers (musicians) in Miami, as well as a few Cuban American (including myself), Venezuelans, as well as transplants from the New York scene (including Kenneth “Skip” Burney, Felix Sanabria, Ramín Khorassani, and Abraham Rodríguez). Afro-Cuban traditional dance classes are also taught regularly by Cuban dancer Marisol Blanco. In terms of musical events (tambores, güiros, etc.), there is constant activity. For example, I play with my piquete on average two times a week, but there are many, many other such piquetes (including some who special mainly in güiros, malongos, and cajones espirituales) who play just as often, or more. Altogether, this level of activity far surpasses that in New York City or other traditional centers of Afro-Cuban religious practice. It is noteworthy to mention that there are other cities that have become hotbeds of activity as far as Afro-Cuban religion and religious music. Mexico City, with its large and growing population of santeros has been another popular destination, especially in the past five years, for Cuban tamboleros choosing to leave Cuba and yet still wanting to work as tamboleros. According to tambolero Manley “Piri” López, who relocated there after living in Miami for a few years upon leaving Cuba, the tamboleros there (most of whom are Cuban, but now include Mexicans who have learned from the Cubans) are working almost daily. Caracas has also developed a thriving Afro-Cuban religious music scene, thanks again to a large and growing local population of santeros. Based on my conversations with Venezuelan tamboleros, of which I have met
Most of the musicians I work regularly with are ex-members of professional folkloric groups in Cuba, including Alain Fernández (Conjunto Folklórico Nacional, or CFN), Michel Aldama (CFN), and Caridad Paisán and Daniel González Gil (both in Clave y Guaguancó). Most of them also were highly experienced and well-respected musicians in the tambor scene in Cuba, primarily in Havana. Among the Cuban culture bearers I have interacted with, most have also arrived rather recently (from the late 1990s), and many of the younger players arrived from Cuba less than five years ago, with new drummers still arriving. Since most gigs include plenty of waiting (to begin playing) and breaks between sets of playing, musicians often spend plenty of time having conversations. Thanks to growing up around Cuban family and speaking a lot of Spanish growing up, I can easily participate in these conversations, although I have had to decipher what many of the Lucumí references mean, as they often get sprinkled in during these interactions.30

Being around culture bearers regularly (including the non-musician santeros, espiritistas, and paleros in whose homes we are hired to perform) has proved an invaluable experience to say the least. Through listening and participating regularly in conversations at gigs, ceremonies for Añá (including juramentos), and in casual gatherings, I have been able to absorb a large amount of information, including how and what culture bearers talk to each other about. This process includes grasping vocabulary specific to the musicians or religious practitioners, including words from the ritual language of Regla de Ocha, lucumí. Conversations among culture bearers go four or five working in Miami (fleeing the harsh current political and economic climate of their country), they played gigs almost every day in Caracas and were able to make a living from it. The tambor scene is rather recent there, having exploded since the 1990s following visits by Cuban tamboleros, who laid the foundation for the first generation of Venezuelan tamboleros. According to Venezuelan tambolero Javier Peña, the Venezuelans then continued learning from their Cuban teachers, each other, and from recordings, and many made trips to Cuba to study and go to tambores in Havana.

30 Use of Lucumí words in otherwise conversational Spanish is common among Cuban tamboleros and other Cubans involved in Regla de Ocha. For example, men may refer to a woman as an obini, or refer to a situation as good or bad (oddara or osogbo, respectively).
beyond musical or religious knowledge as well and may involve discussions of aesthetics, values, history, and personal experiences. For example, being around older Cuban *tamboleros* who are recounting and comparing the sacrifices they had to endure in Cuba as *aprendices* with what they see as an easier process of apprenticeship among the youth now (or outside Cuba) has helped me better understand their values (such as the value placed on the personal sacrifice), as well as the differences between generations and between how things are done in Cuba and abroad. Recurring conversational topics such as this one (apprenticeship) also reflects the importance of the topic for those musicians. Other popular conversation topics center around one’s experience in folkloric groups in Cuba (such as the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional), discussing the unique talents or accumulated knowledge of an esteemed musician (especially regarding elder musicians in Cuba), or less commonly, disqualifying or criticizing a musician based on something they did that violated certain values, morals, or musical rules adopted by culture bearers in the scene.

As my dissertation focuses on recordings and media, my ethnographic research has also extended into the area of media, particularly in the online arena. As with my experience as a performer, my personal involvement in these areas came first as a performer and participant. I have been buying, copying, and obtaining recordings of this music both online and offline since the late 1990s. Since that time, I have also been a frequent visitor to Afro-Cuban music-related internet sites (including sites like Descarga.com, from whom I used to order much of my recordings) and, with the introduction of social media sites in the early 2000s, I have been involved as a musician and fan in circles and groups related to Afro-Cuban traditional music. Following the advent of YouTube in 2005, I have been a frequent visitor to the site, contributed content, and witnessed the variety and amount of content grow over the years. Of course, I
adopted a more critical gaze after making this part of my dissertation research, taking note of specific sites, users (including producers of content), and patterns in order to discuss and cite these in my work.

Finally, in addition to participant-observation (as a performer and as a consumer and producer of related media content), I conducted several formal interviews with musicians and scholars in Miami, New York, San Juan, and Havana. Among these were several of the Cuban culture bearers with whom I perform, members of the Chinitos (López) family in Cuba, other Cuban musicians and musicologists, performers and fans of rumba in Puerto Rico, and New York musicians who witnessed first-hand the growth of the local Afro-Cuban traditional music scene there. These accounts provided me with a chance to ask in-depth questions and to allow the interviewees to express themselves at length and in detail. Taken together with my participant-observation as a performer and in the social media arena of the scene, they have helped provide me with a multi-faceted view of the transnational scene, bringing together the perspectives of Cubans, non-Cubans, rumberos, tamboleros, scholars, non-performers, and people of various racial backgrounds and generations.

A note on language and translation

In line with the idea of shifting roles (insider, outsider) discussed by David Font-Navarrete (2018) my involvement with these traditions involves navigating between these roles, on the one hand, as an insider (performer, Cuban-American, experienced musician) and on the other, as an outsider (scholar, Cuban-American, apprenticing on batá as an adult in my 30s) (Font-Navarrete 2018). In my translations and use of Spanish or Afro-Cuban (e.g. Lucumí) vocabulary, I have striven to remain true to the tone and character in which words and expressions are used by
Cuban culture bearers. My ability to do this stems in some ways from my immersion in the environments in which these traditions are performed and carried out as social, religious, and economic (work) events. In addition, my years of experience navigating the in-betweenness of insider-outsider and constantly having to translate things for myself—for example, between English/Spanish/Lucumí in speech or literature, or between oral/written or Western/Afro-Cuban conceptions of rhythm and music—and for others outside or inside-outside the tradition (e.g. North American or Puerto Rican students or performers), have shaped the way I express my own and others’ ideas. As Font-Navarrete (2018) explains, having this sort of experience and preparation is important in order to write about these traditions in a responsible manner.

Accordingly, since I am talking about traditions dominated by Cuban musicians and first documented in literature by Cuban researchers like Fernando Ortiz, I try to respect the Spanish orthography in much of the vocabulary I use. And yet, in some cases, since this text is being written in English—and will therefore be read primarily by researchers, musicians, and fans who can read English— I have chosen to follow some conventions from the English language. For example, in much of the literature written about Afro-Cuban traditional music—especially batá drumming—the names of the various Afro-Cuban belief systems and languages are capitalized, and I have chosen to follow this convention (e.g. Santería or Regla de Ocha, Lucumí, Abakuá, Espiritismo, Palo, Yoruba). However, when using some of these words to designate their music

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31 In contrast to most other scholars of Afro-Cuban traditional music—I employ some elasticity in my use of terms like Santería, Regla de Ocha, and la religión (“the religion,” referring to Santería), which designate the same broad set of Lucumí-derived religious beliefs. In the most general sense, I use these terms interchangeably, because they reflect my own and others’ use of both terms. For example, musicologists and other scholars in Cuba and abroad choose to use “Regla de Ocha” as opposed to “Santería,” as the latter term can be seen to reflect a focus on (Catholic) saints rather than orishas. And yet in my experiences, many Cuban culture bearers tend to use “Santería,” la religión, or sometimes even la Ocha rather than “Regla de Ocha.” Therefore, in my aim to organically reflect the multiplicity of terms used to describe this system of religious beliefs, I employ both terms in the way I feel best suits the description or discussion at hand.
(e.g. *abakuá, congo, arará, palo, yoruba*) or when describing a person who is linked to one of these traditions as an initiate, practitioner, or descendant (e.g. *santero, abakuá, lucumí, arará, palero*), I use them as Spanish descriptors and thus follow the convention of making them lower-case (and italicized as non-English words).

**Outline of chapters**

The chapters follow a chronological order, as they deal with the creation and evolution of the transnational Afro-Cuban traditional music scene and the role of recordings therein. In chapter one, I address the circumstances surrounding the beginnings of the transnational performance scene. I focus primarily on the New York scene (the first local performance scene outside Cuba) and recordings of rumba, although I also include some discussion on recordings of Afro-Cuban religious musics such as *batá* drumming. I also provide a history of early recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music, spanning the first recordings in the late 1930s through 1980, which marked a turning point in the New York scene due to the arrival of several influential Cuban culture bearers after the Mariel boatlift. I argue that rumba recordings during this time spurred three primary phonograph effects, the first two of which underline the role of recordings in the beginnings of the transnational scene: 1) recordings served to disseminate and popularize (i.e. expose new audiences to) rumba outside Cuba; 2) due to the first effect, there was a sharp rise in the participation of non-Cubans; and 3) effects on performance (primarily outside Cuba).

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32 Many Cuban performers of the Lucumi-derived music and dance traditions in Cuba use the descriptor *yoruba* to describe these repertoires. While some older culture bearers are documented as describing these same traditions as having pertained to the Lucumi religious beliefs in Cuba (as opposed to using “Yoruba”) (e.g. Felipe García Villamil in Vélez [2000]), the tendency to use *yoruba* as a descriptor likely stems from its use in state-sponsored folkloric groups like the Conjunto Folklorico Nacional and the discourse of Cuban musicologists.

33 While the earliest phonograph effects on local music in Cuba occurred following the first recordings in the 1890s, those early recordings did not include Afro-Cuban traditional music. The earliest recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music were not made until the 1930s.
included standardization of certain musical features; the crystallization of core song repertoires
drawn from recordings; the spread of stylistic elements drawn from recorded groups, individuals,
and regions; a drum-centric approach to performing rumba; and the emulation (in live contexts)
of the compact canto-montuno song format used in rumba recordings. Drawing on literary
sources and interviews with New Yorkers and Cubans, I also address the difference between
learning Afro-Cuban traditional music in Cuba and outside Cuba, and the important role of
recordings as learning materials for those in the latter category.

Chapter two deals with the 1980s and 1990s and analyzes the role recordings played in
the evolution of playing styles during this time, particularly in New York. I show how the arrival
of several Cuban culture bearers after the Mariel boatlift helped transform the way New Yorkers
performed rumba (which had been shaped in part by recordings from previous decades) and
established a legitimate tambor scene. In the following decade, performers in New York and
elsewhere, including Puerto Rico, were heavily influenced by the release of albums from
contemporary Cuban rumberos playing the guarapachangueo style of rumba. Upon discussing
some characteristics of this style, I argue that the guarapachangueo recordings had specific
phonograph effects, including popularizing the guarapachangueo style in performance outside
Cuba, updating and diversifying rumba performance practices in New York, expanding the
rumba song repertoire, and promoting new standards for rumba group instrumentation. Similarly,
I examine the influence of the Abbilona series of recordings on batá drumming practices since
the 1990s and discuss how these recordings served as important learning materials for aspiring
tamboleros. Finally, I provide a brief history of rumba in Puerto Rico and discuss the importance
of Cuban recordings in the development of the local performance scene. As with the previous
chapter, I supplement my literary sources with interviews with musicians. In some cases, I also
draw on some of my own experiences as an aspiring performer in the 2000s, including my involvement in the rumba scene in San Juan.

In chapter three, I continue focusing on the 1990s, this time examining several interrelated trends in the Afro-Cuban music scene, including the surge in international (especially Western) exposure to and interest in the music, the re-insertion of Cuban music recordings into the global market via the world music industry, Cuba’s opening up to foreign tourism, the state support of Afro-Cuban folkloric groups as part of cultural tourism, a rise in the public performance of Afro-Cuban traditional music in Cuba, the “blackening” of Cuban popular culture, and the increased commodification of Afro-Cuban traditional music in the form of recordings and taught knowledge (i.e. instructional media products, classes, lessons). Upon providing a short history of foreign (especially Western) interest in Cuban music, I draw on Pacini Hernández (1998) in discussing the dissemination of Afro-Cuban traditional music recordings via world music circuits, including views of the music as “authentic” or embodying a racialized Other. These views, coupled with Cuba’s embrace of foreign tourism and the state’s support of cultural tourism encouraged foreign interest in (and exposure to) Afro-Cuban traditional music. During this time, a slew of instructional books and audiovisual materials appeared on the market featuring Afro-Cuban percussion and rhythms, and many foreigners began taking music and dance classes in Cuba and abroad. Together, these trends formed a mutually-reinforcing cycle in which foreign interest provided an economic impetus encouraging the commodification of Afro-Cuban traditional music in the form of live performances, study-in-Cuba trips, classes, lessons, recordings, and instructional media. Finally, I discuss the effects of these trends on Cuban culture bearers, which included increases in social and cultural capital, increased economic opportunities, and possibilities to travel or migrate abroad. In addition to
scholarly sources, I incorporate information from interviews with the Chinitos family as well as some of my personal experiences studying percussion in Cuba.

Emerging in the 1990s and developing a more democratic character in the 2000s, the internet has now become the primary form of dissemination for many music scenes around the world. Chapter four examines the rise and evolution of the internet and the effects of its use within the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene. Drawing on Manuel (1993), Norris (2004), and Howard (2004), I argue that the use of the internet as a form of new media has contributed to the democratization of consumption and production patterns, expanded and coalesced the transnational character of the scene by facilitating the bridging and bonding of people, and helped increase the social and cultural capital of many Cuban culture bearers, as well as provide them with new economic opportunities. I discuss the various sorts of content found on the internet pertaining to Afro-Cuban traditional music and analyze the racial, socioeconomic, political, and geographical nature of the digital divide. I argue that at first, since foreigners, and Westerners in particular, had privileged access to the internet, they served as mediators of online content and were the primary producers and consumers of that content. Later in the 2000s and 2010s, following the advent of Web 2.0 with its social media and DIY features, and with growing numbers of Cuban culture bearers emigrating to teach and perform abroad, Cubans were able to participate more directly as participants in the online dimension of the scene. In addition to my experiences as a participant in the online dimension of the scene since the early 2000s, I draw on interviews with Cuban culture bearers and foreign promoters and bloggers to provide examples of these dynamics.

In the final chapter, I focus on what has become one of the most popular forms of media for listening to music in the 2010s: YouTube. Like many forms of participatory web culture,
YouTube has contributed to the democratization of music production and consumption patterns, blurring the lines between the latter two. I argue that the use of YouTube has led to four primary phonograph effects in the transnational Afro-Cuban traditional music scene. First, like other kinds of social media, it has increased economic opportunities for culture bearers based in Cuba and abroad by providing publicity and promotion, a process which at first relied heavily upon foreigners serving as mediators content. Second, it has led to wider and faster dissemination of musical content and related knowledge due to the availability of a huge, ever-growing, free digital archive of audio and audiovisual recordings. Third, since this wide variety of recordings serves as listening and study materials for performers and students of the music (particularly those abroad who enjoy internet access), it has led to the spread of musical practices contained in those recordings. These elements include performance practices and styles of individuals and groups not often featured in commercial albums or recordings. Fourth, due to the embeddedness of YouTube and other social media, as well as the widespread use of portable digital recording, there has been an increase in the practice of video recording in Afro-Cuban religious musical events and a transformation of the views of many culture bearers towards recording, which used to be strictly prohibited.

As a final note in chapter five, I show how YouTube has facilitated access to what I call intimate musical spaces: performance spaces previously outside the realm of recordings. In other words, these are spaces that are otherwise private and therefore outside the purview of those who were not direct participants; recording was very rare, or even prohibited in these spaces, which include religious musical spaces and rumba celebrations in homes and solares. The availability and dissemination of recordings taken in these intimate musical spaces—which usually coincide with the traditions’ original contexts—has helped to recontextualize these traditions in the face
of folkloricization and commodification. I support my arguments with interviews with culture bearers and users as well as my personal experience as a YouTube user and participant in the online realm since the early 2000s. As a final note in the chapter, I address the seemingly positive and negative aspects of YouTube and participatory web culture, incorporating Keen’s (2007) and Anderson’s (2008) discussion of the topic.
CHAPTER ONE

DISSEMINATING AFRO-CUBAN MUSIC: EARLY RECORDINGS, PHONOGRAM EFFECTS, AND THE BEGINNINGS OF A TRANSNATIONAL SCENE

In this chapter, I provide a historical account of audio and video recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music prior to 1980 and discuss the phonographic effects of these recordings. As previously discussed, Katz (2010) defines a phonographic effect as any change to musical behaviors brought on by recordings, which may include musical, social, or economic effects. For example, one of the most general phonograph effects in the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene since the early-mid 20th century has been that recordings have extended and prolonged the music’s reach as a result of the portability of recordings. Indeed, portability is discussed at length by Katz (2010, 17-21) as a key trait of recordings, one that enables musicians, listeners, and scholars to listen to music from other places and other groups. Concerning Afro-Cuban traditional music in the pre-digital age, I will focus primarily on rumba, which is perhaps the most-recorded Afro-Cuban genre, although I will also comment on other traditions, such as batá drumming. The most important phonographic effects brought on by rumba recordings in the pre-digital age included the dissemination and popularization of the music abroad, primarily among non-Cubans; the rise in non-Cubans learning and performing abroad, often in the context of local performance scenes, such as those in New York and Puerto Rico; and finally, musical effects (which especially affected the new local scenes outside Cuba) including standardization; crystallization of core song repertoires; the spread of stylistic elements connected to specific recorded groups, individuals, and regions; a drum-centric approach to playing rumba in local scenes outside Cuba; and a switch to compact canto-montuno song formats. While some of these changes occurred more directly than others as a result of recording Afro-Cuban music, other
elements such as migration, folklorization, and the resurgence of tourism in Cuba in the 1990s were also contributing factors.

Taken together, these effects signaled the rise of a transnational Afro-Cuban music scene, as recordings helped both nourish local amateur performance scenes abroad and facilitated the creation of an interconnected web of people, music practices, and ideas no longer limited to culture bearers on the island. Although not recorded as often as (the largely secular) rumba during this pre-digital age, recordings of Afro-Cuban religious music were also a part of the transnational scene. However, the more serious boundary of religious performance was not as easily crossed by non-Cubans prior to the 1980s. During and after this decade, however, thanks to Cuban culture bearers who emigrated during the Mariel boatlift (1980), the popularization of cultural tourism in Cuba the 1990s and increased availability of recordings of Afro-Cuban religious musics, more and more non-Cubans were introduced to the music of Santería, Palo, and other Afro-Cuban religious practices. For example, there were a few non-Cuban percussionists in New York playing batá in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, learning from a few low-quality recordings, Fernando Ortiz’s (1950) transcriptions, and from the handful of Cuban drummers in the city that knew some of the repertoire (Cornelius 1991). But it was not until Orlando “Puntilla” Ríos and other knowledgeable tamboleros arrived in 1980 that the legit, full repertoire of batá drumming really took hold in New York.

**Prelude: Encountering rumba**

Originating in the late 19th century, rumba was originally performed on household items such as spoons, doors, and tables, but the first instruments used specifically for rumba were cajones—a small box for a quinto sometimes made from boxes used to ship candles, and a larger box which
was often made from crates used to ship bacalao (salted codfish)—sticks or spoons for the catá, and perhaps claves (claves were first constructed from pegs used in ship building\(^1\)) (León and Urfé 196?). Early rumbas had a simple song structure. The columbia, which likely originated sometime around the mid-19\(^{th}\) century in rural areas of Matanzas province, featured call-and-response singing between an improvising lead singer (called a gallo) and a chorus and was reminiscent of the Bantu-inspired yuka traditions practiced by slaves and in cabildos (Martínez Rodríguez and de la Hoz González 1977; Moliner Castañeda and Gutiérrez Rodríguez 1987). Some of the oldest rumbas in Havana, called rumbas de tiempo España (“from the time of Spain”) were either comprised solely of a chorus, as in the case of “¿Cómo se empina el papalote?” or they had a short verse preceding the chorus, as in the rumbas “Mama abuela” and “El gavilán.” The early 20\(^{th}\) century saw the popularization of guaguancó, with its bipartite song format: canto (verse sung by a lead singer or chorus, sometimes including a cuarteta or décima sung by a lead singer) and montuno (call-and-response section with a repeating chorus (Frías 2014).

Some of my first recordings of rumba were also some of the earliest and most popular recordings among Afro-Cuban music enthusiasts outside of Cuba. My first rumba albums were given to me as cassette copies by one of my drum teachers, Billy Bowker, around the time I was finishing high school, in 2000 or 2001. Billy worked as a jazz drummer in Gainesville, Florida, but had long been an avid fan and performer of Cuban and other Latin popular music styles. An Anglo-American in his sixties at the time, Billy had been heavily involved in the world of Latin popular music during the 1970s and 1980s, performing salsa, merengue, cumbia, and other Latin dance genres as a drummer or timbalero (timbal-player) in south Florida, and still occasionally

\(^1\) Many early rumberos were dock workers in the ports of Havana and Matanzas.
performed with local Puerto Rican musicians in Gainesville. I had approached Billy on
recommendation from my drumset teacher after expressing the desire to learn more about Latin
popular music rhythms. Billy laid out all the basic rhythms for me on *timbal* and gave me a
whole box of cassettes in which he included important albums and compilations to serve as
musical examples. These recordings became my primary study materials as I mastered the
rhythms and learned to differentiate the various genres. What I did not know was that one of
those cassettes would ultimately change my life by introducing me to a genre of music that
would become my passion. That cassette was a copy of the album *Guaguancó* by Conjunto
Guaguancó Matancero and Papín y sus Rumberos (now these groups are known by their later
names: Los Muñequitos de Matanzas and Los Papines, respectively). The album, originally
released in 1954 and available outside Cuba by the late 1960s and 1970s, was popular and
influential among rumba enthusiasts in New York and Puerto Rico, where rumba had become
increasingly popular in the form of a percussion-centric, amateur street drumming movement
(Kenneth Burney 2015, interview; Gene Golden 2015, interview; Luís Fernando “Totin” Agosto
Báez 2016, interview).

**Beginnings of the New York scene**

According to Gene Golden (2015, interview), there were people playing rumba in New
York’s parks as early as the mid-1950s. He added that now, most people do not know that there
was drumming in Central Park, Brooklyn, and Riverside Drive:

> . . . no one was into filming like they do now. [Now] they pull out a smartphone and it’s on YouTube! So, back to ’67, ’65, me and this guy Richie, we used to mess around with stereos and buy these kits and make them ourselves. So we finally got enough buy our little hi-fi stuff and little tape recorders . . . and we said, “you know we can take this around and places and record the groups and stuff.” So I started recording and never stopped! You know a lot of times I was recording, where I didn’t
realize how valuable that would be later years down the line. I got a lot of recordings of people who are not here [i.e. no longer alive].

In lamenting the fact that there are no musical archives of the earliest rumbas in New York’s parks, Gene was implicitly pointing out the importance of recordings in influencing collective memory and history. The lack of audio or visual recordings (along with scant written or scholarly documentation) of those times and places has resulted in it being largely forgotten, at least in the collective memory of those in the Afro-Cuban music scene who might care about such history. Such recordings would have served as documentation of these activities, and likely would be coveted now as archival footage or musical content. Of course, during the 1950s portable video cameras were not invented yet and portable audio recording devices were not widely available to the general population. Indeed, audio or visual recording during this time was not the democratic activity it evolved into in later decades. Very few people had the capability and necessary equipment to record portably prior to the 1960s, which is when the cassette tape was invented.²

The advent of rumba drumming in the parks in New York was a result of the heavy presence of Cuban music and musicians in the city, whose recording industry was a mecca to which Cuban musicians had been flocking since the 1920s, when Cuban son groups would come to record (Moore 1997). This created a musical circuit between Havana and New York where Cuban musicians were coming to record, perform—and inevitably—connect and interact with musicians in New York. On the flip side, with North American tourism booming in Cuba during the time—particularly from the 1920s through 1950s—US jazz groups and other artists were performing in Havana to both North American and Cuban audiences (Schwartz 1997). The

² See Manuel (1993) for further explanation of the democratic effects of cassette tapes on musicians and music communities.
Havana-New York connection was not the only major transnational musical connection (Cuban artists were also quite active in Mexico City and Paris, for example), but it was perhaps the most intense and influential, musically.

Many Cuban musicians, including Mario Bauzá, Chano Pozo, Mongo Santamaría, Julito Collazo, and Francisco Aguabella emigrated to New York, which encouraged the spread and flourishing of Afro-Cuban drumming locally. As culture bearers, they were highly influential not only as live performers, but as general purveyors of knowledge in New York. Chano Pozo, who collaborated and performed with Dizzy Gillespie, moved to New York in 1947 and was among the first drummers with a background in Afro-Cuban sacred music to play in a North American jazz group. Unfortunately, he was murdered the following year, and thus was not a New York resident very long. Pozo did, however, leave his mark by way of his musical creations (including the style cubop), recordings, and in the knowledge he passed to his musician colleagues. Musician and bandleader Mario Bauzá, although not a drummer, was also influential in introducing Afro-Cuban rhythms into New York’s jazz scene after emigrating to the city in 1930. Indeed, he was the one who turned Dizzy Gillespie on to Afro-Cuban music in 1938, which in turn later guided Gillespie to hire Pozo as a drummer for his band in 1947. Bauzá also helped create Afro-Cuban jazz in the early 1940s with the founding of his orchestra Machito and the Afro-Cubans (Morena Vega 2008).

The early 1950s saw the arrival of several other drummers who would help further the presence and popularity of Afro-Cuban drumming in New York City. Mongo Santamaría moved to the city in 1950 and thereafter performed with artists such as Tito Puente and Cal Tjader. While he was most active in jazz orchestras, he incorporated his knowledge of Afro-Cuban

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3 Aguabella would later make Los Angeles his permanent home.
music into his performances. His first albums, recorded in the early 1950s, constitute some of the earliest recorded examples of Afro-Cuban traditional music. While the music on his recordings in the following decades leans more in the direction of Afro-Cuban jazz, his earliest recordings include several rumbas, congas, and songs and rhythms from the Abakuá and Santería repertoires. Julito Collazo and Francisco Aguabella arrived in New York in 1954 to participate with Katherine Dunham’s dance company. Dunham, an anthropologist studying Afro-Cuban and other Afro-Caribbean religious dances, had met the two drummers in Cuba through Fernando Ortiz. As tamboleros, both had collaborated with Fernando Ortiz in his early studies and expositions on Afro-Cuban music and culture. Dunham invited Collazo and Aguabella to join her dance company in New York, and they accepted (Morena Vega 2008).

Soon after their arrival in 1954, the drummers began attending religious events held by local santeros, many of whom were Puerto Rican. They also began performing with local popular music orchestras, strengthening Afro-Cuban musical influence among New York musicians. Furthermore, they and other Cuban musicians like Mongo Santamaría, would jam with the musicians of the Dunham dance company during the group’s rehearsals. Indeed, Collazo and Aguabella’s presence in Dunham’s group and their performances in the local religious community were important influences on the development of the local performance scene. Many working class New York Puerto Ricans, African-Americans, and Jewish-Americans showed early interest in Afro-Cuban traditional music, particularly in the drumming. While Pozo, Bauzá, and Santamaría furthered the influence of Afro-Cuban music in jazz, Dunham and her company were key in bringing traditional Afro-Cuban drumming and dancing to New York, and more

These early albums include *Afro-Cuban drums* (1952), *Drums and chants: Authentic Afro-Cuban rhythms* (1957), *Yambu* (1958), and *Mongo* (1959). The first three of these albums feature almost entirely Afro-Cuban drumming, whether in the form of drum jam sessions or accompanied by singing.
generally, to international audiences. While still not widely known in the West, the scholarly work and collaboration between Herskovits, Ortiz, and Dunham, along with the presence of Cuban culture bearers in New York brought greater acceptance and awareness of Regla de Ocha at the national and international level (Morena Vega 2008).

Learning Afro-Cuban traditional music in New York: The importance of recordings

During the 1950s in New York, learning about Cuban percussion was a personal and informal process learning directly from culture bearers, of whom there were still relatively few in the city. In his interview, Gene Golden provided an excellent example of this sort of informal learning. He recounted how, in the 1950s when he was about 16, he began going to the Club Cubano on 125th Street in Harlem to see Arsenio Rodríguez’s band, which played Cuban dance music. There, he met Arsenio’s brother Israel “Kike” Rodriguez, who played the *tumbadora* (conga drum). Gene expressed his interest in learning, and Kike showed him the basic *tumbadora* parts—called *tumbao* or *masacote*—for *son* and *guaracha*. The teaching and learning thus took place informally, on the spot, likely over the course of several performances at the Club Cubano, where the group performed every Saturday evening.

In the realm of Afro-Cuban traditional drumming, Collazo and Aguabella were teaching and performing with Dunham’s school, but they, as was the case with several other Cuban culture bearers, did not always give away their knowledge freely, especially to non-Cuban locals. For example, according to Kenneth “Skip” Burney (2015, interview), the Cuban drummers in Dunham’s dance company were hesitant to teach Puerto Ricans at first, perhaps due to ethnic rivalry or the religious nature of the drumming tradition. They would either refuse to show them the rhythms or they would teach them an incomplete version. This is one reason that *batá*
drumming was not really established locally—that is, played correctly and consistently in its ceremonial context by local performers—until after Orlando “Puntilla” Ríos arrived in 1980 and began swearing in drummers and teaching the tradition in greater depth. Prior to 1980, however, most local drummers had to rely heavily on alternative sources—and on each other—for learning what they could about batá drumming (Amira 2015; Cornelius 1991). For instance, copies of Ortiz’s (1950) transcriptions of batá rhythms were prized as learning resources and circulated amongst local drummers during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, although these have since been criticized for being inaccurate or for being notated all in 4/4 (Schweitzer 2003, 47). Rumba, as a secular genre, was more widely practiced and taught during this time (late 1950s-1970s), particularly in New York and in Puerto Rico, although this was primarily in the form of street drumming which often lacked—or only minimally incorporated—singing. However, due to the relatively small number of Cuban culture bearers from which to learn rumba, as well as to the often-unspoken rivalry between Cubans and Puerto Ricans, there was a heavy reliance on recordings as sources for listening and learning (Amira 2015; López 1976; Moreno Vega 2008).

Thus, from the early years of the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene in New York, recordings were prized by locals as listening and learning materials. I will discuss this issue in further depth later. The other important part of learning here was based on watching, listening, and mimicking what performers did in live contexts, whether in the form of a one-on-one lesson as in Gene’s example, or in a larger group performance in which younger or less-experienced drummers could watch and learn from more experienced musicians. Indeed, this continues to be the primary way for culture bearers to learn in Cuba. As with many other oral musical traditions, they are handed down through repeated exposure to live performance contexts. This is complemented by individualized explanations here and there, for example, an elder or more
experienced performer answering a question or correcting a technique of someone with less experience. As attested to by New York drummers like Gene Golden (2015, interview), Kenneth “Skip” Burney (2015, interview), Steven Cornelius (1991), René López (1976), and John Amira (2015), and based on my own experiences learning and performing in Florida, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and New York, the learning for these drumming traditions involves the interchange of knowledge between individual drummers, their peers, and elders.

This process is often a lifelong, ongoing one, as these traditions are in a constant state of evolution, with each successive generation adding, subtracting, altering, and losing certain musical or stylistic aspects. Both Gene and Skip, for example, learned much of what they know about *batá* drumming from Orlando “Puntilla” Ríos, who arrived in New York in 1980 following the Mariel boatlift. And yet even before this, they learned bits and pieces of knowledge, including techniques, rhythms, songs, or history, from their peers (friends and acquaintances who were also musicians) and from other more experienced performers. Indeed, my own process of learning involved one-on-one explanations and demonstrations from more experienced local drummers (like Billy Bowker), traveling to Cuba to study with drummers there, and then coming back to Florida to show my peers what I had learned. As my network in the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene expanded, so did my exposure to new knowledge. When I lived in Puerto Rico, New York, and now in Miami, my exposure to musicians in these places impacted my performance style and knowledge of rhythms, techniques, songs, and histories. But for those of us residing outside Cuba, like myself and other drummers in New York and Puerto Rico, there is another, highly important piece to the puzzle of learning Afro-Cuban drumming: recordings.

As previously stated, recordings—both audio and visual—have been highly prized by aficionados of Afro-Cuban music residing outside of Cuba. Most recordings of Afro-Cuban
music prior to the 1980s were audio recordings contained on records and cassettes. While a few visual recordings did exist, including those in Cuban documentaries such as Nosotros la música (1964) or in clips of Afro-Cuban drumming and dancing in old Cuban movies, these were not widely available outside of Cuba at the time (Kenneth “Skip” Burney 2015, interview). These audio recordings came to form a sort of collective musical reference, like a set of encyclopedias, for those outside Cuba interested in learning Afro-Cuban music. For example, speaking about batá, Skip remarked, “as far as batá, the encyclopedia was Giraldo Rodríguez y sus tambores batá with Raúl Díaz and those guys, and another album called Santero, and they had a series of them, and then there was a lady named Carmen Batista that had an album . . .” (2015, interview).

**Learning at the source: La mata**

While those in Cuba often had frequent, often unlimited access to live performances of Afro-Cuban drumming, singing, and dancing in their original contexts—informal rumbas, Afro-Cuban drumming ceremonies—and perhaps staged contexts, those learning these traditions in a place like New York or Puerto Rico had to depend on recordings to make up for the lack of such contexts locally. In the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, Afro-Cuban musical ceremonies like tambores, güiros, and cajones espirituales were not nearly as common in New York, Miami, and Puerto Rico as they are today, in the 2010s. Even now, the number of such events in Miami and New York (where there are several events every weekend) or Puerto Rico (where there are perhaps a few each month) pale in comparison to Cuba.

In Havana and Matanzas, there are several Afro-Cuban religious musical ceremonies on any given day, and several rumba performances every week, although the latter are primarily in clubs or other staged contexts. To use a term borrowed from Caridad Paisán in her interview
(2015a), this—the environment in Cuba in which these traditions are rooted and thrive—is *la mata*: literally, “the plant” or “the tree.” The idea is that this is the primary source and living center of Afro-Cuban culture. Thus, the Cuban *aprendiz* (learner or apprentice) of drumming, singing, or even dancing, has at his or her disposal a constant direct exposure to more experienced performers. Among these, elders are often regarded with a high level of respect as keepers of advanced knowledge and techniques, and respected culture bearers possess an often-indescribable feeling in their playing style—referred to alternately as *manana, ibiono, deje,* or *bomba*—that is inherent to the genres they specialize in. To illustrate, I will draw on the example of my *padrino* in Añá (i.e. he who swore me in as an *omó* Añá and owner of the set of drums I am sworn to) Alain Fernández, as recounted in our 2015 interview.

Alain was born and grew up in La Corea, a marginalized neighborhood on the outskirts of Havana in San Miguel del Padrón. The musical family known as Los Chinitos, who are now rightly recognized as the originators of the modern rumba style of *guarapachanguero*, lived a few doors down. Every Mother’s Day and New Year’s Day, the Chinitos threw a huge rumba at their house and all the top *rumberos* from Havana would show up. Alain started attending these rumbas as a kid, *tirando sus pasillos* (throwing down dance steps) when the opportunity allowed. He has told me about these experiences repeatedly, each time straining to impress upon me the richness of those rumbas, in which the best—including several respected elder—singers and drummers were gathered in one place. By the time Alain was 10, he was already quite an accomplished dancer of rumba, and he would later go on to be a dancer with the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional.
In addition, by the time Alain was a teenager, he had become highly interested in singing the song repertoire performed in *tambores* and *güiros*, often referred to collectively in Cuba as *el canto yoruba* due to its Yoruba descent and language (referred to as Yoruba or Lucumí):

With these same people that lived next door to my house—the Chinitos family—I started singing my first songs in *güiros*, in *aberikulá*6, until I had the opportunity to start singing in *tambores de fundamento*. . . . My process of learning was that I had to make the sacrifice constantly to go to *tambores*. I’d get out of the ENA7 and go to *tambores* to learn. I’d stand next to the singers and one day I’d get one song, tomorrow another, I’d write it down. . . . And, not that I’m anti-youth, but I always liked the singers from—as we say in Cuba—the “old guard” [vieja guardia] because they always maintained a sequence, a *tratado*. They maintained everything that made a good Yoruba singer. My guides, for example, included Lázaro Pedroso (Ogún Tolá), Lázaro Galarraga, Rolando “El Gordo,” Pedro Savedra, and many more. They had knowledge, they knew proper song repertoires, and they knew how to call the santo (Alain Fernández 2015, interview).8

His method of memorizing the songs was primarily based on repeated listening, as many of the same songs are performed as a standard part of *tambores* and *güiros*. Yet apart from the standard, core repertoire, there are many other songs that are less well-known or less commonly performed, including rare songs sung by certain elders or even *cantos trillados* (i.e. songs sung in mixed Spanish and Lucumí dialect) sung in rural regions and used in *bembé*. When Alain heard such songs that might have been new to him, he would memorize the lyrics and write these down in a small notebook upon returning home. Eventually, he built up his repertoire and began to master the order and function of songs enough to begin performing. Mario Aspirina, a respected

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5 The language in which the *cantos yorubas* are sung is sometimes referred to by culture bearers in Cuba simply as Yoruba, although many Cuban and North American scholars have referred to the language (and its associated ethnic group) as Lucumí. The latter was an ethnic designation given to slaves arriving in Cuba from what is now Nigeria and what was previously the kingdom of Óyó (López Valdés 2002, 177-79). The name “Yoruba,” which is a sort of umbrella term encompassing what were previously many subgroups with separate dialects, did not come about until the late 19th century, when it was used as a part of a nationalist project for a Christian “Yoruba” nation by Reverend Samuel Johnson in what is now Nigeria (Palmié 2013, 35-37).

6 A *tambor where aberikulá* (unconsecrated) *batá* drums are played, which are considered less serious and less spiritually potent than a *tambor de fundamento* due to the lack of the presence of Añá.

7 National School of the Arts, where Alain was enrolled as a dance student.

8 All translations by author.
elder drummer and owner of a *tambor* (set of consecrated *batá* drums), took on Alain as his singer, and Alain began performing frequently with him.

By the time Alain was 18 and 19 years old, he was singing *tambores* almost every day of the week (often more than one a day) with Mario Aspirina and others all around Havana. All the while, Alain continued to pay attention and learn from other more experienced, elder singers of both *tambores* and *güiros*, expanding his repertoire and absorbing their stylistic tendencies. For example, Alain has often explained to me the difference in the way a singer must approach a *tambor* as opposed to a *güiro*. In a *tambor*, the singer uses a fairly straight-forward approach to enunciating successive notes and a nasal timbre. While many singers might use this same approach to sing *güiro* and not be “wrong,” Alain has emphasized that the *correct* way to sing, according to what he observed among elder *güireros* (*güiro* specialists), *güiro* has a unique *deje* (swing) that is different from the *tambor*. Stylistically, it involves the use of heavy inflections on the approach to musical notes at the beginning (and other areas) of song phrases by the *akpwón*. Alain learned the style from specific singers that specialized in *güiro*. The style is associated with the countryside and is heard in Afro-Cuban traditional genres from rural areas, particularly *bembé*. The *columbia* variant of rumba also incorporates a similar style of singing, as *columbia* has roots in the rural areas of Matanzas. In practice it sounds like a sort of heavy, strenuous, lamenting slide up to (or down to) notes in the beginning and endings of the lead singer’s phrases. In this way it is comparable to the style of singing the blues by early African American singers. The *deje* of *güiro* also draws upon the style of pronunciation associated with *bozales* (Cuban-born black slaves), a sound which is used heavily in Bantu musical styles like *yuka* and *palo*, where a mix of Bantu words and grammatically-incorrect Spanish words form the lyrics. To sum up, Alain’s education as a singer of Afro-Cuban religious music began as he was
exposed to the live contexts as a child and continued through his teenage years as he attended events frequently, absorbing the repertoire and stylistic components through repeated exposure to elders and other experienced performers.

Alain’s experience represents a common example of the learning process for those growing up in Cuba. There is a high level of direct exposure to the live contexts and highly experienced performers over a long period of time, often from childhood. The exposure is even more intense if one considers children whose parents are musicians in the scene, which is often the case. Many accomplished drummers, singers, or dancers in the scene in Cuba come from musical families (e.g. Los Chinitos of La Corea and Los Aspirinas from Guanabacoa), or had a parent or family member who was a musician or dancer of Afro-Cuban music (examples include Jesús Díaz and Barbarito Ramos of Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, whose fathers were members of the group). Further, a major part of being in the environment of la mata is the fact that here, one is exposed to simultaneously to several genres of Afro-Cuban traditional music. In other words, there is a collective exposure to the various facets of these traditions.

As testified to by musicians such as Caridad Paisán (2015a, interview) and Alain Fernández (2015a, interview), musicians and dancers of Afro-Cuban music are enriched in la mata due in large part by being able to access and learn from its various genres. This means that they can attend rumbas, güiros, tambores, cajones espirituales, malongos (musical ceremonies featuring palo, in Cuban Bantu-derived religious practices), and possibly even bembés (usually performed in more rural areas, including Matanzas) or Abakuá ceremonies. In addition, the influence of Cuban popular music is ever-present, as it is heard in concerts, public areas, homes, and in the national media. Since these Afro-Cuban genres originate in the same black-dominant, (mostly) urban environments, they have necessarily evolved together and influenced each other.
over several generations. Nowadays, with the prominence of professional folkloric groups like the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional, an ideal musician of these traditions can perform many or all of them on demand. Indeed, many groups of drummers and singers that work together regularly (such groups are often called *piquetes*) are usually tied to a certain *tambor* (set of Añá drums). Although they play *tambores*, they often offer other standard, common religious musical services as well: *cajones espirituales*, *güiro* and *palo*. On the other hand, some groups or individuals may specialize in what they like and do best. For example, during a recent *tambor* in Miami, Cuban *tambolero* Osiris Kpuataki explained to me how in Cuba that when he was growing up (1980s and 1990s), the *tamboleros* were often perceived as being of higher status (they were better-dressed and better-paid) than *güíreros* or *cajoneros* (the latter being specialists in *cajones espirituales*), insinuating that they were all seen as belonging to different categories as performers. Therefore, many accomplished Afro-Cuban musicians might be considered a master or specialist in one area, say, playing the *caja* in *batá*, but they may not be quite as competent in playing *quinto* in rumba. For example, Lázaro Ros is regarded by some as having been a highly knowledgeable *akpwón* (ritual singer) of the *tambor* repertoire. Yet, despite the similarity of the song repertoire, his style of singing did not lend itself as well to *güiro* or *bembé*, where there is a characteristic *deje* in the singing which is not necessary in a *tambor* (Alain Fernández, pers. comm.).

In professional folkloric ensembles like the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional or Clave y Guaguancó, musicians are expected to be as “complete” as possible. That means being able to demonstrate competency in the various genres of Afro-Cuban music (Daniel González Gil, pers. comm.). A drummer in such groups should know how to play the different *catá* parts for

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9 Despite being one of the most recorded singers of this repertoire, Ros performed primarily with the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional in staged contexts rather than in actual *tambores* (Alain Fernández, pers. comm.).
guaguancó and columbia, know the stylistic approach to the bonkó enchemiyá (improvisational drum in the Abakuá ensemble), and know the shekere parts for güiro. Of course, the fact that professional folkloric groups require this reflects the process of folkloricization, in terms of its staging and grouping together of Afro-Cuban traditional music. Nonetheless, the Afro-Cuban traditional music genres in and around Havana and Matanzas have long inhabited a shared black cultural space. To grow up in this space—la mata—and learn the music is to be enriched by exposure to the idiosyncrasies of each genre. So, for example, learning batá and becoming proficient tambolero enhances one’s ability as a rumbero, and vice-versa. Unfortunately, those who learn outside Cuba have much less access to such varied, direct exposure.

Beyond la mata: Learning Afro-Cuban traditional music abroad

Those who are learning these traditions outside la mata can usually only access these performance traditions partially, in bits and pieces via culture bearers who have migrated (or whom they visit in Cuba), visiting performers, peer groups of performers, and recordings. The difference between learning can be compared to the difference between learning one’s native language (learned from the time of childhood) and learning a foreign language as an adult. The first is acquired over years of direct immersion, while the latter is often learned via teachers and through studying texts and recordings. The result of learning of foreign language is often only partial dominance and an accent that is different than that of a native speaker. Of course, exceptions do exist, but the parallels with studying a foreign music culture are many: the student learning to perform Afro-Cuban music outside Cuba often approaches it as an object of study. Each genre, for example rumba or batá drumming, has its stylistic elements, rules, structures, and social protocols, which can be mastered by the student outside Cuba, although it is my
opinion that few have truly achieved mastery. For the vast majority, and even—those who reach a high level of competence—they still have a foreign “accent,” which is to say that their particular style of performing—their swing—is still distinguishable as coming from outside la mata. It is not the same deje. The foreign “accent” is more readily evident in singing that in drumming, and in rumba more than Afro-Cuban religious music. For example, rumba singers in Puerto Rico often employ a timbre more commonly heard in New York or Puerto Rican salsa and have a different fundamental swing to their style. Based on my observations, this seems to be the natural result of the musical environment in which they were raised. For many working-class Puerto Ricans (or Nuyoricans) growing up sometime during the second half of the 20th century, this would have commonly consisted of salsa, boleros, merengue, plena, and perhaps jíbaro music, among other possible genres. Having absorbed the stylistic flavors of those genres, it is natural that would be some carry-over to the performance of non-native music, like Afro-Cuban music. For example, I have heard several Puerto Rican rumba singers employ a little vibrato in their singing, a trait which is common in salsa (particularly in New York and Puerto Rico) and other Puerto Rican and Latin popular musics. On the other hand, Cuban rumberos usually employ a natural voice, often with a slight or marked nasal timbre, when they sing.

The other factor in causing the foreign “accent” in the swing of a vocal or drumming of non-culture bearers outside Cuba is precisely the lack of long term, repeated, direct access to live performances in la mata, which I have already discussed. I would like to point out that there are exceptions to this, especially in terms of batá drumming. For example, there are certain areas outside Cuba where batá has really taken root over a fairly long period of time. Such places, New York, where it gained momentum after 1980, have become new centers outside Cuba where, due to the heavy presence of batá drumming and the Santería religion, as well as the
presence of older, experienced drummers serving as mentors, drummers of recent generations (since the 1980s) have had opportunities to begin their apprenticeship (aprendizaje) at an earlier age and have lots of direct access to live performances. For example, New York-born tamboleros such as Abi Holliday and Ramín Khorassani (pers. comm.) have been performing since they were teenagers. Mexico City is rapidly becoming a center for batá drumming as well. Due to the growing popularity of Santería, many Cuban tamboleros (batá drummers), including the highly-esteemed drummers Manley “Piri” López and Lekiám Aguilar Guerrero of Los Chinitos, as well as Bárbaro Yordany Crespo Richard (ex-member of Osain del Monte), have relocated there in recent years to take advantage of the demand for their services as tamboleros. In Mexico City and in Caracas, Venezuela—another place where Santería and batá drumming have taken root in recent decades—there are tambores (religious celebrations with batá drumming) almost every day, so drummers can work full time as musicians (Javier Peña, Venezuelan tambolero, pers. comm.). In Mexico City, many Mexican drummers are now learning and performing batá with Cuban drummers, making the most of their access to live performances and knowledgeable teachers, a pattern that is evident in the many videos of tambores posted on Facebook by Mexico City-based drummers like Piri and Lekiám.

Yet in the realm of rumba—which is popular among non-Cuban students partly because of its more accessible secular nature and its association with fun and dancing (i.e. la gozadera) in much the same way as other Latin popular musics like timba, salsa, and merengue—there are far fewer opportunities to see live rumbas with seasoned performers outside Cuba. In San Juan, Puerto Rico, one can see a rumba maybe once or twice a week, but these are primarily staged performances and feature a fairly small number of the same performers and groups. Yet, despite some of the performers’ high level of musical talent, their style of playing and singing rumba
does not have the core, characteristic *deje* (swing) as that of accomplished *rumberos* in Cuba. The same can be said of some of the rumba in New York as far as the *deje* of some non-Cuban performers being a little bit different. While New York has had quite a vibrant rumba scene over the course of the 1980s and into the 2000s, the frequency of rumbas there pales in comparison to Cuba, where a plethora of professional and amateur folkloric groups thrive and informal rumbas happen regularly.

**Transcriptions and instructional books: Transforming traditional concepts among audiences outside Cuba**

Regardless of whether one is studying rumba, *batá* drumming, or other aspects of Afro-Cuban genres, recordings help to lessen the gap between the source—*la mata*—and students abroad by providing representative examples of performances from those in—or from—*la mata*. The less access a student or amateur performer outside Cuba has to culture bearers and the live performance contexts of these genres, the more they will have to rely on recordings as examples and learning materials. Of course, students can take lessons or attend workshops where available, but even these do not replicate the environment of *la mata*.

Recordings are great learning supplements because they are the closest that exist to being the texts of Afro-Cuban traditional music. While several examples of printed transcriptions exist, it can be problematic to rely heavily on these for learning the rhythms or the song repertoires, as they do not always accurately reflect the traditions. While plenty of rhythmic transcriptions exist of, say, *batá* drum parts and the basic rhythms of *guaguancó*, they should be regarded as optional supplements to learning for those outside *la mata*. One reason these are problematic is because a large percentage, particularly in Cuba, of those who become performers of Afro-Cuban traditional music, including apprentice *tamboleros*, do not read music. As these are orally-
transmitted traditions, there has been no need to know how to read music; however, having a good ear is a must.

These transcriptions thus do not serve developing culture bearers as much as they serve those who read music, who tend to come from a more formal educational background in music and are often performers of popular music. A common example I come across in the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene in the US and Puerto Rico is conga players or trap drummers who also perform jazz or Latin popular music. In my experience with many such musicians in the US and Puerto Rico, it seems as though they often approach Afro-Cuban rhythms as rhythmic supplements to be learned for the sake of their own personal musical knowledge, or to be incorporated as rhythmic ideas in a jazz, salsa, or other popular music arrangement. I myself initially approached this music as a new kind of music and drumming style that I could add to my repertoire as a percussionist; something that seemed perfectly natural and in tune with the idea of the “well-rounded percussionist” that my drumset, drumline, and concert percussion teachers emphasized to myself and other students during high school and college. The idea was that it was best for a percussionist to be able to have working knowledge and skills on a wide variety of percussion instruments rather than just what one enjoyed the most. In my case in high school and college, for example, I was initially drawn to the snare drum (in drumline) and the drumset, but I did not enjoy playing the marimba or timpani which I was nonetheless required to study. In the end, the fact is that, particularly since the 1990s, there has been a market for such transcribed learning materials for genres such as batá drumming, rumba, and bembé.

Perhaps the best examples of printed materials are the compendiums of Afro-Cuban percussion rhythms and songs, such as John Amira and Stephen Cornelius’s *The music of santería* (1990) (*batá* scores) or Adrian Coburg’s encyclopedic *Percusión afro-cubana* (2004...
volumes and *batá* scores, which are basically transcriptions of different styles and variants of Afro-Cuban percussion rhythms, all notated in Western musical notation. In addition, there are many drumset and conga lesson books—often with video or audio supplements—put out by professional percussionists, that use music notation or (less often) custom diagrams to lay out standard rhythms like *guaguancó*, or, in the case of drumset, how to adapt Afro-Cuban rhythms to the kit. The conga lesson books, although helpful for learning basics, cannot teach students to replicate the real sounds, including the subtle aesthetics such as the particular swing of rumba, *batá* rhythms, or other Afro-Cuban genres. Further, the integral relationship between the singing, dancing, and percussion is usually left out, as this would be almost impossible to illustrate and teach through written means. This is why many of these books contain an audio or audiovisual supplement, such as a CD or DVD, that contains musical examples.

Unfortunately, however, conga and drumset instructional books have at times contributed to the spread of misinformation, such as when the books contain incorrect names for genres or concepts invented by the authors. Two examples of this come to mind, the first of which is calling Cuban carnival music “*comparsa*” rather than the correct term, which is “*conga*”. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when this misnaming began, but I remember studying out of drumset instructional books in the 1990s in which they taught you how to play the *comparsa* rhythm (or at least an adaptation of this) on the drum kit. The name *comparsa* has since become widespread among percussionists outside of Cuba in describing the rhythm of Cuban carnival music; I have encountered the incorrect use of this word several times among players and in instructional books. The term *comparsa* in fact refers not to a rhythm or music genre, but to a carnival

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10 For example, see *The art of Latin drumming: A new approach to learn traditional Afro-Cuban and Latin American rhythms on drums* (2011) by Jose Rosa and Hector “Pocho” Neciosup.
group. The latter are made up of percussionists, horn players, and dancers who together represent a certain neighborhood or institution. While not all books make this mistake, the two terms—conga and comparsa—were unfortunately convoluted by some authors at some point, and the term “comparsa” was spread and misused among many percussionists outside Cuba to reference what is actually the conga rhythm. Of course, since the word “conga” outside Cuba usually refers to the tumbadora, it may have seemed confusing to non-Cuban musicians that “conga” also referred to a rhythm and type of music.

Another example of a newly-created concept outside of Cuba is the phenomenon of “3-2” and “2-3” clave. Knowing the difference between these, as well as between “rumba clave” and “son clave,” is standard knowledge for drummers who play Latin popular music outside of Cuba, as I and many of my ethnomusicology and drummer friends can attest to. However, the distinction between 3-2 and 2-3 clave is nowhere to be found among musicians of the Afro-Cuban traditions in Cuba from whence the clave comes, particularly rumba. For rumberos, tamboleros, and other culture bearers there is only “la clave,” conceived as a whole. Therefore, whether a particular rhythmic or melodic phrase begins on the front side (i.e. what many might call the “3” side), back side (i.e. the “2” side), or middle of the clave, this does not mean that the clave is altered or changes direction.

Figure 1. The clave: front and back side. The bar line serves to divide the so-called “3” side—or front side (first bar)—from the “2” side, or back side (second bar).
Of course, in the realm of Latin and Cuban popular music, particularly Latin jazz or *timba*\(^{11}\), a composer or arranger can choose to disrupt the steadiness of the clave by ending a phrase in a way that essentially cuts the clave rhythm in half and then starting another phrase on the same side of the clave (i.e. putting two “back” or “front” sides of the clave back-to-back), but such changes to the clave do not occur within Afro-Cuban traditional music. Of course, this is not to say the distinction between 3-2 and 2-3 clave is not helpful for new students seeking to understand the clave, as it aids in learning the proper placement of rhythms with the musical phrases. The 3-2 versus 2-3 explanation also provides a visual and conceptual tool for those learning from the pages of a book, as it can be notated and literally seen. Nevertheless, such labels are primarily a non-Cuban phenomenon, as culture bearers do not learn these traditions from notated music. In my experience among culture bearers, the clave is simply seen as naturally underlying a given musical phrase in these traditions; if a person is familiar enough with the traditions, it should be apparent how it fits with the clave (i.e. how it lines up rhythmically with the clave\(^{12}\)). For example, I have often encountered situations where a song phrase or chorus is sung to a *rumbero*, and, even if they are not familiar with it, they can usually figure out where the clave is based on the feel of the phrase. Indeed, in Afro-Cuban traditional music, rhythmic and melodic phrases, including the clave itself, rely heavily upon patterns of (rhythmic) tension and release (Frías 2015b).

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\(^{11}\) A genre of Cuban dance music that dominated the popular music scene in Cuba in the 1990s and 2000s. The genre is exemplified by groups such as NG la Banda, the Charanga Habanera, and more recently, Habana d’Primera.

\(^{12}\) The clave rhythm serves as a matrix—a rhythmic framework into which all the rhythms of the percussion and any melodies (such as singing) need to line up in a way in which they rhythmically complement each other. The clave rhythm is often conceptualized by musicians and musicologists as being comprised of two halves: a grouping of two and a grouping of three notes, or vice-versa, depending on whether one groups the notes according to Western notation [meter] or according to their proximity to one another. Each half of the clave either starts with or ends on a strong beat (i.e. a downbeat as emphasized in the corresponding dance steps), but also contains other syncopated notes. Therefore, rhythms that “fit” correctly with the clave are those whose arrangement of syncopated notes and downbeats correspond to the syncopations and downbeats of the clave.
As far as the distinction between “rumba clave” and “son clave,” this is another ingrained idea that is common among both Cuban and non-Cuban musicians. However, the use of these labels is somewhat misleading, as both clave variations were used in rumba before being incorporated into the son in Havana by musicians (many of whom were also rumberos) in the early 20th century. In addition, the instrument was also featured in the large choral groups in Havana and Matanzas (called coros de clave in Havana and bandos in Matanzas) in the late 19th and early 20th century. The clave variation known as the “son clave” was predominantly used in Havana’s rumba scene in the early 20th century, which is when and where son became popular in Cuba and then abroad. During this time, son musicians in Havana revamped the rural son montuno from Oriente, adding in urban influences from rumba (including the use of the clave) and other Afro-Cuban genres. As is evident in recordings of the 1940s through 1960s, by the mid-20th century, rumberos in Havana were turning increasingly towards the use of the other clave (the so-called “rumba clave” or “clave de guaguancó,” used more commonly in Matanzas at first), where the third note is pushed back an eighth-note (as commonly written in cut-time) (Sublette 2004, 342-43).

13 These clave rhythms are also related to several other rhythms in Cuba, central west Africa, and other areas in the sphere of the black Atlantic that serve as short rhythmic cells or timelines. Perhaps the closest-related in Cuba is the clave rhythm used in Abakuá music, which is the same as the clave used in guaguancó, although with more of a 6/8 feel. The cinquillo rhythm is also closely related to the clave, perhaps even serving as a rhythmic predecessor to the later. The cinquillo was a defining rhythm in 19th century Cuban popular musics like the contradanza and danzón, not to mention the Haitian meringue and the Dominican merengue. Indeed, the cinquillo came into the contradanza due to the Haitian cabildos in eastern Cuba and the musical influence of tumba francesa, in which the cinquillo figured as a defining ostinato (Sublette 2004, 134).

14 During the late 19th and early 20th century, these choral groups also performed a lyrical genre called “clave,” which featured a defining triple-based rhythm played by the clave in 6/8. The clave genre was also performed by singer-guitarists (trovadores) and was sometimes featured in Cuban theater music during the time, such as that of the teatro vernáculo (Esquenazi Pérez 2007; Linares 1974; Ortiz 1984).

15 While some rumba recordings during this time from Havana rumberos—including the musicians from Alberto Zayas’s Grupo Afro-Cubano—incorporated the “son clave” in some yambú and guaguancó, early and later recordings from Matanzas rumberos like Guaguancó Matancero (Los Muñequitos de Matanzas) and Grupo AfroCuba contain no use of the “son clave.”
In son and later, in salsa (a descendant of son), however, musicians continued using the same clave used by the early soneros of Havana. Even today, the so-called “son clave” is still used in much Havana-style yambú, a style of rumba that likely pre-dates the guaguancó. Nevertheless, it is understandable that musicians in Cuba and abroad learned to distinguish between two different claves: the one used in son and the one predominantly used in rumba. Today, however, these labels are becoming increasingly irrelevant (except for musically distinguishing between the two rhythms), as Latin and especially Cuban popular musicians since the 1990s, including performers and arrangers of salsa, timba, and Cuban reggaetón increasingly make use of the “rumba clave.” This means that the “rumba clave” no longer needs to be associated primarily with rumba; indeed, it is particularly dominant in timba, the grandchild of son. Yet I digress. Now that we have a better understanding of transcriptions, instructional books, and the conceptual issues that surround them, let us return to the topic of recordings as texts.

**Recordings as texts and learning supplements**

Indeed, the accumulated wealth of all audio and video recordings of Afro-Cuban music can be seen as a musical encyclopedia of the traditions, and—in the case of new recordings on current social media platforms—as sometimes even serve a newspaper-like function, showcasing the latest groups and performances. In other words, taken together, the recordings make up an archive. This archive is in a state of constant expansion as albums are released or re-released and people upload new performances, documentaries, and archival footage onto YouTube or Facebook.
Recordings can be viewed as texts because they are an external representation of an idea, as is written language. And yet, unlike written language, audio and visual recordings are not merely symbolic external representations of an idea. With written language, or even musical notation, the text is made of symbols which must be interpreted by a person in the form of reading, often coupled with the physical enunciation of words (reading out loud), singing, or playing the notes on a musical instrument. On the other hand, audio and visual recordings are experienced differently, as audible and visual material produced by someone or something else. The content itself is not merely symbolic; there is less room for personal (mis)interpretation, other than aesthetic judgment, of course.

This brings us to the importance of recordings for the purpose of study, particularly for those outside la mata. As previously stated, recordings are great supplements for studying; they are superior to learning from printed musical materials in many ways. First, many students and performers of Afro-Cuban traditional music do not read music. Second, transcriptions do not communicate the necessary feeling or swing (in the singing or the percussion), which is an integral part of Afro-Cuban traditional music, and indeed, of most oral music traditions. While a beginner could learn how to play the clave or the standard tumbador (low drum) pattern for guaguancó from a book in notated form, it would most likely sound “square” or robotic in comparison to the way a rumbero actually plays the pattern. Of course, acquiring the proper feel for a music genre is a natural part of learning. Yet the point remains that printed music notation does little to communicate the important intricacies of Afro-Cuban music. Since Western musical notation has been developed primarily to suit the needs of Western art music, and to some extent, Western popular music, it is difficult to employ it to reflect the nuances of Afro-Cuban music (Cornelius 1991; Schweitzer 2003). This is not solely because the latter is an oral tradition; it
also contains aesthetic and stylistic aspects which differ drastically from those of Western art and popular music. Rhythmic nuances are particularly salient. One important example of this in Afro-Cuban traditional music is the “bending” or “rounding out” of rhythms so that (to Western ears) it would seem as though they fall in between a duple and triple feel. The difficulty of accurately depicting this in batá transcriptions has also been commented upon by Cornelius (1991) and Schweitzer (2003). At times, this flexibility in feel between duple and triple may go virtually unnoticed, as in the way many rumberos play the clave in guaguancó (see below), and at other times it is more obvious, for example in the characteristic improvisations of the bonkó enchemiyá (the improvisatory drum in Abakuá music). Thus, if we were to examine the clave in guaguancó, the rhythm is usually notated as followed:

![Figure 2. The clave.](image)

However, as can be noticed on recordings or performances of professional rumba groups in Cuba, the clave player does not always execute the pattern so rigidly. Rather, there is a tendency—to varying degrees depending on the performer—to slightly round out the last three notes, so that they become more equidistant. In other words, as performed, the clave rhythm often leans towards a 6/8 feel, which happens to be the clave used in Abakuá music.

![Figure 3. The Abakuá clave.](image)

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16 Schweitzer (2003, 48) provides a great example of this, illustrating the different ways a segundero (i.e. player of the segundo or itótele [middle-pitched batá drum]) can interpret the feel of chachálokañún, which may lean more towards a duple or triple feel.

17 The clave rhythm in Abakuá music is usually played on a bell called the ekón.
To say that it “leans” in that direction does not mean it is played in a fully 6/8 or triple feel, but rather that it falls somewhere in between a strictly duple and triple feel. Further, the link to the Abakuá clave is not gratuitous, as the Abakuá exerted a major influence on the development of rumba. Over the course of rumba’s history, many rumberos have been Abakuá members, and members of this organization can still be found among many rumba groups in Cuba.

Another example of the characteristic rhythmic bending in Afro-Cuban traditional music is prevalent in the performance of the bonkó enchemiyá. One of the characteristic rhythmic ideas employed by players of this drum is the playing of a hemiola comprised of successive groupings of three eighth note muff tones (Figure 4).

![Figure 4. Typical bonkó enchemiyá phrase.](image)

In this example, however, the notation actually falls quite short of replicating the sound as performed, as such rhythmic bending is uncommon in Western art or popular music. When performed properly, the bending of the eighth note triplet groupings rounds them out rhythmically. The rhythm could be described as “staggered” or “stretched” eighth notes (Figure 5).

![Figure 5. Typical bonkó enchemiyá phrase, notated with “staggered” eighth notes.](image)
And yet, depending on the player, the bend in time between duple and triple feel can be either subtle or more pronounced. This might even be to the point that all the muff tones become almost equidistant to each other, eliminating the sound of eighth note triplets altogether, something which would be challenging to accurately notate. This is an example is pertinent not because all students of Afro-Cuban music learn to play the *bonkó enchemiyá*, but because the way of playing the *bonkó enchemiyá* has heavily influenced how other drums are performed in other Afro-Cuban music traditions. For example, this same rhythmic pattern—used in its entirety or in pieces, say of two, four, or more “staggered” eighth notes—is employed in rumba in *quinto* phrases, in the lead drum parts of *güiro* and *bembé*, and in *batá* drumming, particularly in the *caja* (low drum or *iyá*).

The use of such rhythmic phrasing—that is, phrases that fall between duple and triple feels—is also common in singing in rumba and other Afro-Cuban repertoires. For example, Caridad Paisán, an ex-member (singer) of the rumba group Clave y Guaguancó in Havana, has often described to me the importance of using *rubateo* (rubato) when singing rumba. This involves stretching or extending melodic phrases and “rounding them out” so that they do not necessarily line up perfectly with downbeats. Further, in both rumba and other Afro-Cuban singing styles, sung phrases are often started or ended right before or after a downbeat (downbeats being 1, 2, 3, or 4 if in 4/4), as opposed to on it. Indeed, such characteristics are common in many types of Cuban genres, such as *trova* and *son*. One of the common marks of rumba singing performed by non-Cubans is that it lacks the fluidity (rubato, rhythmic bending) exhibited by culture bearers. In other words, to culture bearers, it may sound somewhat square. In fact, my *padrino*, Daniel González Gil (*tambolero* and ex-member of Clave y Guaguancó), made this observation to me when I was playing a recording from Puerto Rican rumba group
Yubá Iré for him. He remarked that while the percussion sounded fine, he could tell that the members were “not Cuban” (i.e. culture bearers) based on the singing style, which lacked the aforementioned rhythmic characteristics of rumba. In my experience, a common practice among non-Cubans who sing rumba is singing “squarely,” for example starting or finishing chorus phrases (in the montuno) on downbeats. Such squareness or lack of rubato is perhaps most pronounced in rumba performed by non-Cuban amateur ensembles of students or aficionados in North America and Europe. For example, I have often noticed this among rumba singers in Puerto Rico, which may be due to the influence of singing styles used in local genres like bomba and plena, which are also performed by many Puerto Rican rumberos. This is not to say that all Puerto Rican or other non-Cuban singers lack the proper swing of singing rumba as defined by culture bearers. Indeed, I have encountered many, such as the New York Puerto Rican rumba singer Abi Rodriguez, who sing very well and have internalized the stylistic attributes of singing rumba. Nevertheless, singing rumba “square” is a common occurrence outside Cuba and is something that is quickly discernible to the trained ear of a rumbero. 18

In sum, the frequent rhythmic incursion into this gray area between duple and triple feels is another reason Afro-Cuban music is difficult to notate accurately. While seeing written notation is undoubtedly helpful for some, recordings are a much better supplement for studying, granted that they are recordings of professional-level groups or the equivalent (i.e. culture bearers). So, just as a student of jazz is often encouraged to listen to “the greats” of that genre, so should students and performers of Afro-Cuban music be familiar with the masters of these

18 As a singer of rumba myself, having been involved the in performance communities of Puerto Rico, New York, Cuba, and Miami, for years I pondered what made rumba performed by some non-Cuban singers, however good they were, sound so different. More recently, I have heard many Cuban rumberos comment on such squareness or lack of swing in the singing, which often is in the form of them saying that one can tell that the singers are not Cuban (i.e. that they are not experienced culture bearers).
traditions. For example, if one is an aspiring *rumbero*, as I was when I was in my early 20s, there are many groups that could be considered required listening: Los Muñequisitos de Matanzas, Yoruba Andabo, and Clave y Guaguancó, to name a few. Of course, as discussed previously, the need to supplement one’s study of the music with recordings also depends if one is living and learning in Cuba in *la mata*, where there is a high degree of exposure to live contexts and thus less reliance on (or access to) recordings, or if one if residing outside of Cuba in an area where there are less live performance contexts.

There are many reasons that audio or visual recordings are helpful as learning supplements. First and foremost is how they allow for repeated listening. Katz (2010) discusses repetition as a key aspect of recording technology. The fact that the listener can stop, rewind, and re-listen as many times as they want, or go to a particular section of a song and study a lick or lyric, makes recordings ideal for study. This seems basic enough, but the reason this is particularly important in the arena of Afro-Cuban music is that memorization is a big part of learning and mastering these traditions, and in this case, memorization is accomplished through repetition. This repetition may take the form of frequent, repeated exposure to live contexts—as those in *la mata* have access to—or of repeated listening to various recordings. In the case of Afro-Cuban traditional music, it is ideal to have access to both, as frequenting the live contexts is the best and most accepted way to learn and advance musically, while repeated listening to recordings allows the listener to study unchanging performances. With recordings, they can listen to a certain lick, break, or effect until they understand it and memorize it. Repeated listening is how rumba singers memorize a song, and it helps *batá* players memorize the hundreds of rhythms they must learn, so recordings can be a big help. Indeed, as I will argue,
they have been an important learning supplement, particularly for those outside Cuba, and have thus been a key factor in the transnational spread of Afro-Cuban music performance practices. Because of their portability, recordings have extended and prolonged the musical reach of Afro-Cuban traditional music. They do not require the presence of immigrant or visiting culture bearers; they can be bought in stores, borrowed from friends, sent through the mail, or, in our digital age, shared or viewed instantly online. They are an indirect, alternative way of connecting with these traditions for those who do not reside within Cuba in la mata. And unlike printed, notated music, recordings allow aspiring performers to hear and absorb important intangible elements such as the timbre used by singers, the swing or feeling of various styles and rhythms, and the characteristic improvisations used by singers in rumba or religious music. In rumba, such characteristic improvisations include recurring, traditional inspiraciones\(^\text{19}\) such as “el yambú no se vacuna” (used in yambú), “guaguanco co’ los millares” (used in guaguancó), or generic inspiraciones referring to the act of rumbeando: “la timba me está llamando,” “la timba me llama,” or “con sentimiento manana.” On the other hand, some rumbas (i.e. rumba songs) have more specific inspiraciones that go with a certain coro, or chorus phrase. For example, in the coro “amarrar tu perro guajiro,” used in colombia, the singer often uses the inspiración “si no lo amarras te lo mato.” Similarly, there are characteristic inspiraciones used in palo, such as “congo me llama” and “sala malekum, malekum sala.” Recordings expose aspiring performers to these important, characteristic inspiraciones, which is particularly helpful if the performers are not frequently exposed to live contexts.

Learning the song repertoires used in tambores and güiros is much more complicated than learning rumba. The improvisations used by the lead singer in these repertoires are song-

\(^{19}\) Improvisations sung by the lead singer during the montuno (call-and-response section).
specific and practical; the improvisatory nature here has to do more with choosing from and alternating between a few accepted lyrical variations available to a singer within a specific song (all of which are in the form of call-and-response chorus phrases). To master the lead singing in these repertoires it is necessary not only to know the proper lyrics to each song, but also why, when, and how to employ these lyrics, as well as which variations are available for the singer to choose from. The fact that the lyrics are in Lucumí and are used to praise and “bring down” the orichas makes it all the more important for aspiring lead singers to study and master the songs. Therefore, in this case, recordings are helpful for learning and memorizing the songs and variations, the aspiring lead singer still needs to learn the meaning and proper use of the songs from experienced lead singers. This is illustrated in the case of akpwón Alain Fernández discussed earlier in this chapter, who learned the song repertoire primarily through attending tambores regularly and listening closely to the elder akpwones he observed there. He would then supplement this by studying the few recordings that he had at home of some of his favorite akpwones, including Lázaro Galarraga and Felipe Alfonso (Fernández 2015, interview). These few recordings he had, however, only represented a small fraction of the enormous song repertoire used in tambores and güiros, which comprises hundreds of songs; this is another reason they can be seen as helpful supplements rather than primary sources of learning. In general in Afro-Cuban traditional music, however, recordings have played an important role in reinforcing—and in some instances, particularly in the realm of rumba creating—characteristic (standardized) inspiraciones or other lyrics. Yet before delving into this specific phonograph effect, I would like to address the role recordings have played in the formation of the transnational Afro-Cuban music scene.
Preparing the way for the popularization of the first Afro-Cuban traditional music recordings

Afrocubanismo

In this section I will discuss some of the prehistory of what could be termed the first golden age (1950s-60s) of recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music. The latter, which features solely percussion and voice, was not widely recorded before the 1950s. Why was this the case? What were the conditions that led to the making of the popular recordings of the 1950s and 1960s, including those of Mongo Santamaría in New York and Alberto Zayas, Guaguancó Matancero and Los Papines in Cuba? Why did these recordings gain popularity and among which audiences? In answering these questions, I propose that several factors were involved, namely the greater acceptance of and support for Afro-Cuban culture and music by certain white artists and intellectuals in Cuba, beginning with the period of afrocubanismo; the presence of many Cuban musicians in New York; the mass migration of Puerto Ricans to New York beginning in the 1940s; the folkloricization of Afro-Cuban traditional music in Cuba, which itself produced professional ensembles and a drive to recreate and preserve traditional music; and finally, improvements in recording technology allowing for drums and percussion to be heard better and thus better appreciated.

Cuban music and dance forms, almost all of which of draw on Afro-Cuban influences, were exported from the island even before the advent of recording technology. Located in a prime geographic position in the Caribbean, Cuban ports—particularly Havana—were important stopping points for ships during colonial times. Sailors, soldiers, pirates, merchants, travelers, slaves, indentured servants, elites, workers, and free blacks, among others, came into contact with one another—to varying degrees—in Havana. Here, and to a lesser extent, in other Cuban port cities like Matanzas and Santiago de Cuba, cultural elements were exchanged, and many
elements of Cuban popular music and dances made their way to other port cities in the Americas and Europe, especially from the mid-19th century on. For example, during the middle part of the century, the contradanza habanera became popular in Puerto Rico after being introduced by visiting Cuban youth (Díaz Díaz and Manuel 2009). The influence of Cuban music and musicians was also felt in New Orleans—another major port city linked to Havana and the Caribbean—where it fed the musical currents that would produce jazz in the early 20th century (Sublette 2004).

On the other hand, in Cuba, Afro-Cuban traditional music was still largely confined to poor, urban, mostly-black communities prior to the second quarter of the 20th century due to institutionalized racism during colonial and republican Cuba. The latter targeted blacks and African-derived practices, which were seen by whites as uncivilized and inferior to European-derived cultural practices and values. This was manifested, among other ways, in the form of government prohibitions on drums and drumming during certain periods in the late 19th and early 20th century. Lacking acceptance among the dominant white middle and upper classes, traditional Afro-Cuban drumming was not performed publicly during this time and was instead practiced and maintained primarily in black-dominant communities, with the exception of music performed by comparsas during street carnival celebrations (which were also banned at times) (Moore 2006; Sublette 2004).

Due to such hostile circumstances during colonial and early republican times, these traditions were not as likely as others to be exported via professional musicians or theater groups touring at the time. During this time, Afro-Cuban musical influences that were adopted by such touring groups were often highly stylized, such as the so-called “rumbas” (sometimes referred to as “rumba de salón”) performed beginning in the late 19th century in Cuban teatro bufo, a
vernacular form of theater featuring political satire and local musical forms (Thomas 2009). In the 1930s, Fernando Ortiz organized the first public performances of Afro-Cuban traditional drumming, yet it would not be until the 1950s and 1960s that public performances—in this case by folkloric ensembles—would become more common in Cuba. Indeed, as Harold Courlander described the situation around 1940, Cuba’s wide variety of “folk” music and instruments were little known outside the island, where Cuban music was represented by the popular symbols of the conga drum, maracas, and the genres son (often known as, and confusingly termed, “rhumba”) and the stylized, carnival-derived conga (Courlander 1942, 227).

In the end, Afro-Cuban traditional music would only begin the path to greater national acceptance (i.e. among Cuban whites) in the late 1920s and 1930s, when the trend of afrocubanismo appeared and gained popularity among certain white Cuban intellectuals, musicians, and artists. However, these afrocubanistas, as they are called, represented only a small, ultra-liberal group. They believed that Afro-Cuban traditional music could only be made accessible (to whites) and serve as a national symbol if it was “elevated” or “refined.” The resulting stylized versions of Afro-Cuban music entailed a process of whitening, although this is not to say that the afrocubanistas were actively plotting against these traditions, intent on “whitening” per se.\(^\text{20}\) An afrocubanista composer, for example, might create a Europeanized version of an Afro-Cuban melody (or a new piece otherwise inspired by Afro-Cuban rhythms) which was then meant to be performed by an orchestra of primarily European-derived instruments. Far from a being widely-accepted point of view among the general white Cuban

\(^{20}\) Rather, as is pointed out by scholars of whiteness such as Tim Wise (2012), whites (in this case Cubans who were socially white) tend to take whiteness for granted, or as the norm; much of its power lies in its invisibility, including its invisibility to white persons themselves. In this case, for example, the “Afro” elements of Cuban culture and music were singled out as objects of study that were different and unique from the societal (white-dominant) norm, in this case the mainstream (unnamed, “white”) Cuban culture (i.e. Cuban culture as practiced and accepted by socially white Cubans).
population, many of the *afrocubanista* composers were snubbed at the time for even considering the idea of adding Afro-Cuban rhythms or instruments to an symphonic or concert band. Such purportedly “African” rhythms and instruments had, since colonial times, been looked down upon by most whites as savage and uncivilized, in keeping with general views towards black culture (Moore 1997).

It would not be until the following decades that non-stylized Afro-Cuban traditional music in Cuba would start to come into the purview of the dominant white society in the form of public performances\(^{21}\) and recordings. As Moore (1995) observes, a large part of this greater acceptance on the part of white Cubans was also due to the growing popularity of Afro-Cuban influenced genres abroad, such as the (stylized) rhumba\(^{22}\), *son*, and *guaracha* in the US and Europe by the 1930s. The fact that the white middle classes of the US and Europe took interest in Afro-Cuban influenced music lent greater legitimacy to these cultural forms in the eyes of some white Cubans, namely the *afrocubanistas*. Thus, while it certainly did not apply to the general white Cuban population at first, the greater acceptance of African-derived cultural forms among artists and intellectuals over the following decades would foster an environment for the local growth and transnational spread of Afro-Cuban traditional music. Ironically, part of this growing tendency to recognize Afro-Cuban music and culture as part of national Cuban culture was due to nationalism in the face of perceived US cultural imperialism. Afro-Cuban—as opposed to

\(^{21}\) Fernando Ortiz organized the first public performance of *batá* drumming with drummers Pablo Roche, Aguedo Morales, and Jesús Pérez in 1936 for an ethnographic conference (Hagedorn 2001, 141). The agency of the drummers was at work here as it was during their entire cooperation with Ortiz. For example, they used aberikulá (unconsecrated) drums which were commissioned by Ortiz, setting a precedent for the exclusive use of aberikulá drums for almost all future public performances involving *batá* drumming, and in general only providing Ortiz and the public with the information, music, and knowledge that they deemed acceptable for them to know or hear. In other words, they did not just give these white intellectuals and general public all the long-guarded secrets of tamboleros and their religion.

\(^{22}\) “Rhumba” or “rumba” as performed by Cuban or North American jazz bands was often in fact the genre of *son*, although Moore (1995) also points to the elasticity of the term, which, particularly in the US, referred to almost any Cuban- Latin American-, or Middle Eastern-derived, or otherwise “exotic” sounding piece of music.
European-derived—cultural elements were seen as distinct and unique to Cuba. New York City would be the first major node of a transnational scene.

**The development of the Cuban music scene in New York**

Because it was a center of jazz performance and the recording industry, many Cuban musicians migrated to New York beginning in the early decades of the 20th century. By the 1930s, these musicians were introducing elements of Cuban popular music into North American jazz bands and dance music orchestras. Xavier Cugat, who had moved from Cuba to New York in 1915, was influential in starting the “rhumba” craze of the 1930s among North American audiences in New York following his appointment as bandleader at the Waldorf Astoria in 1932 (Sublette 2004, 400). Don Azpiazu was also hugely successful in Paris and New York during the 1930s as a bandleader, and was particularly well-known for his recording of “El manícer” (“The peanut vendor”) (Díaz Ayala 1988). Chano Pozo, along with Mario Bauzá and Dizzie Gillespie, created the “cubop” style of jazz in the late 1940s, which combined traditional Afro-Cuban musical elements with bebop (Sublette 2004, 572). Traditional Afro-Cuban music itself would still not be performed in New York consistently until the 1950s, with the arrival of Aguabella, Collazo, and Santamaría. Nevertheless, the presence and popularity of Cuban (and Cuban-influenced) popular music in New York in the 1930s and 40s significantly expanded the audience for these styles; after the 1930s, the audience for Cuban popular music became increasingly transnational.

Outside Cuba, the earliest consumers and fans of Afro-Cuban traditional music, in both its live and recorded contexts, were primarily Nuyorican youth and fans and musicians of Cuban popular music (including Cuban dance music and Afro-Cuban jazz). Based on my observations
and interactions with musicians and fans in the scene, there has been a long-recurring pattern—still seen today—of many non-Cuban fans and performers of Afro-Cuban traditional music being introduced to the latter via Latin jazz and salsa. In fact, Manuel (1994) has noted that it was common for salsa songs—many performed Puerto Ricans or Nuyoricans—to be cover versions of Cuban rumbas (like Eddie Palmieri’s performance of “Consuélate”), to incorporate song quotes from Santería, or to simply praise the rumba (e.g. guaguancó). Many Puerto Rican and African American New York rumberos I have spoken to who were around in the early New York scene, including Gene Golden and Kenneth “Skip” Burney, were fans of genres such as Afro-Cuban jazz, son, mambo, and (in the 1960s) salsa, before they first heard and learned about Afro-Cuban traditional music. Due to their participation in the related sphere of what became “Latin” jazz and “Latin” dance music, they were eventually introduced to what they viewed as the “roots” of these popular genres.

Skip’s path was typical: in the early 1970s in Los Angeles, he was a trap drummer, playing mostly jazz at first. Then he started performing Latin jazz, and learned some basic techniques and rhythms on tumbadoras. According to Skip, radio stations that played jazz and Afro-Cuban jazz also sometimes played recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music, for example, recordings of Mongo Santamaría. Upon becoming involved with the Afro-Cuban jazz scene, Skip was exposed to rumba, which he started learning as well. Finally, he began learning about batá with Francisco Aguabella, who was also in Los Angeles. Then, in the early 1980s, he returned to his native New York, which he felt was the best environment for studying and

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23 The branding of popular music as “Latin” occurred in the US from the beginning of Cuban music’s popularity there (1930s), where “Latin” was commonly used as a descriptor in place of “Cuban” (Waxer 1994). During the 1930s and in the ensuing decades, more and more Puerto Rican and other non-Cuban Spanish-speaking musicians were incorporated into the bands performing these styles. These musicians contributed musical influences from their respective countries as well. By the 1960s with the rise of a “Latino” consciousness in places like New York, “Latin” came to be a more fitting label for the popular music produced by such bands (Manuel 2006).
performing Afro-Cuban traditional music. Here he began his long apprenticeship and performance career as a *tambolero* with Orlando “Puntilla” Ríos, who had recently arrived from Cuba (Kenneth “Skip” Burney 2015, interview).

The early audience for Afro-Cuban traditional music outside Cuba was centered in New York and was comprised primarily of Puerto Ricans, along with some African-Americans, Jewish-Americans, and others (Kenneth “Skip” Burney 2015, interview). They also tended to come from uptown areas (e.g. Harlem, the Bronx) as opposed to downtown areas (i.e. associated with white and upper/middle class audiences) (Glasser 1990). As the Cuban musical influence in New York grew in the 1930s, New York City already had a Puerto Rican community. However, the peak wave of Puerto Rican immigration to New York City occurred in the 1940s and 50s. In terms of the Spanish-speaking population in New York, Puerto Ricans came to dominate in numbers and were thus well-represented among local musicians, particularly in the growing jazz and Latin popular music scene (Glasser 1995).

Puerto Rican musicians in New York played alongside Cuban musicians and were highly influenced by the Cuban rhythms and other Cuban musical elements circulating in the city. Puerto Rican youth in New York were also among the first in line to show interest in learning to play Afro-Cuban traditional music in the 1950s and 1960s (working-class African Americans, Jewish Americans, and other Latinos also figured as fans). For these youth, who were marginalized economically and racially from mainstream white America, they used “street drumming” on roofs, sidewalks, and parks (drawing primarily on rumba and other Afro-Cuban traditional forms) as a vehicle for the expression of their ethnic identities (Puerto Rican, pan-Latin, Afro-Latin) and rebelliousness against mainstream culture. Drumming on congas (and sometimes bongos) offered an alternative “Latin” expression from their parents’ *jíbaro* and *trío*
music and connected them with an Afro-Latin musical form which they could access, since there was very little knowledge available about Afro-Puerto Rican forms like bomba and plena in New York at the time (López 1976; Manuel 1994).

The Puerto Rican affinity for Cuban music (and Afro-Cuban traditional music) stemmed not only from the shared the language and the similar social and musical histories of Cuba and Puerto Rico, but from the long presence and influence of Cuban music and Cuban musicians in Puerto Rico (Díaz Ayala 2009). By the 1940s and 50s, many Puerto Ricans would have been familiar with Cuban popular music, which was mediated throughout Latin American and the Caribbean via radio and films (including the presence of Cuban bands and dancers in the large Mexican film industry) (Blanco 1992; Sublette 2004). Even Puerto Rican musicians in Puerto Rico had long been incorporating Cuban popular music into their performance style. For example, the guaracha had already been widely cultivated on the island (and New York) for decades prior to 1960 (Manuel 1994, 268).

As previously discussed, Puerto Ricans and African Americans formed an important part of the new and growing local community of Santería adherents whom Collazo and Aguabella performed for after arriving from Cuba in the 1950s. Puerto Ricans were also exposed to Afro-Cuban traditional drumming through Collazo and Aguabella in Katherine Dunham’s dance company, in practice sessions, performances, and casual jam sessions, although they did not always teach liberally (Moreno Vega 2008). For example, according to Kenneth “Skip” Burney (2015, interview) and Moreno Vega (2008), the Cubans did not always want to teach the Puerto Ricans due to rivalries between the two groups (or rather, between some Cubans and some Puerto Ricans) in New York. On the broader level, this may also have had to do with a general reluctance on the part of the Cuban drummers to divulge their full musical and or religious
knowledge when it came to Afro-Cuban religious music, including batá drumming, santo songs, and Abakuá drumming and songs. Afro-Cuban religious practices and its associated music had long been guarded by culture bearers due to their historical persecution by the dominant (white) mainstream in Cuba. Further, African-inspired religious traditions have also been—and, to varying extents, continue to be—marginalized and stigmatized in the US, Cuba, and Puerto Rico.

Due to such barriers to learning from Cuban culture bearers, recordings and any texts became valuable study materials, although recordings or texts concerning the Yoruba or batá repertoires were not widely available until the 1960s and 70s. Indeed, Skip, who learned to play some batá in the 1970s in New York and Los Angeles, often told me how much they relied on the few audio recordings that were available to them: “That was our encyclopedia!” He repeatedly explained to me just how hard it was for them to learn due to the fact that there were no drummers in New York that really knew batá, that could show them “real Añá.” By this he meant that there were few if any truly qualified Cuban tamboleros in New York prior to the arrival of Orlando “Puntilla” Ríos in the city in 1980. For example, Julito Collazo, who had been in New York since the 1950s when he arrived to perform with Katherine Dunham, knew the batá repertoire, but was neither a master drummer nor very willing to teach what he knew to others (Kenneth “Skip” Burney 2015, interview). On the other hand, Francisco Aguabella, who did gain a reputation as a highly qualified drummer, did not stay in New York very long before relocating to Los Angeles. 24 Referring to the early rumba street drumming scene in New York in the late 1950s and 1960s, López (1976) adds that, since most drummers could not read music (i.e. the Ortiz batá transcriptions), they relied heavily on recordings, especially those of Mongo

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24 In Los Angeles, Aguabella eventually began teaching at UCLA and helped popularize the Matanzas-style approach to batá drumming on the west coast of the US, although there has never been a vibrant religious music scene (i.e. original contexts for the music) there that compares to that in New York. On the east coast of the US, the Havana style of batá is dominant and it is rare to encounter Matanzas-style batá drumming.
Santamaría and Patato Valdés. Local enthusiasts—mostly Nuyorican youth—would also watch Patato, Julito Collazo, and other Cuban drummers jam on Sundays in Central Park (López 1976, 108).

Returning to the recordings of batá and the Santería song repertoire that Skip collectively called “their encyclopedia,” these were few in number and quite limited in the repertoire they covered. They included the popular *Afro: ritmos afrocubanos con los auténticos tambores batá* (1970) by Giraldo Rodríguez y sus Tambores Batá, which featured master drummer Jesús Pérez. According to Skip, this recording was particularly important as a reference for learning batá rhythms for himself and others in New York during the 1970s. Other important references included *Ritmos santo* by Candita Batista y sus Tambores Batá (year unknown, most likely late 1950s or 1960s) and the *Santero* series: *Santero* (1957), the first volume, with various featured singers, such as Celia Cruz, Merceditas Valdés, Caridad Suárez, and Mercedes Romay, and *Santero Vol. II* (year unknown, possibly early 1960s). While the first volume of the *Santero* series featured mostly batá and some güiro or bembé, the second volume featured no batá, instead being a sort of a stylized approach to güiro. To be sure, a few other Santería-themed recordings exist from the 1960s and 1970s, but seem to have been less popular, less widely-circulated, and thus less influential. These include *Fiesta santera: Toques y cantos santeros lucumí*, by Conjunto Santero Batá de Onelio Scull, which seems to have been recorded in the 1960s but not released until 1983, and *Despojo-santero: Tambores africanos* by Conjunto Santero y Tambores Batá de Catanga (year unknown; likely 1960s or 1970s). Other santero-themed albums also appeared in the 1980s and 90s, but were also not widely-popular. By then,

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25 Unfortunately, many of these old albums from the 1950s through the 1980s are rare and information concerning dates of release or re-release is hard to find. For some of these albums, there is little else available in terms of information online other than pictures of the old album covers or descriptions scattered across Pinterest, eBay, and other internet sites.
however, new Cuban drummers and singers of Afro-Cuban traditional music had arrived in New York, like Puntilla, who is credited in part with bringing what drummers like Skip would call “real Añá” or “real batá” to New York. This was because Puntilla was responsible for teaching—for the first time—the complete, proper batá repertoire to many local drummers, including Skip and Gene Golden.

Another Cuban tambolero, Alfredo Coyudde, also arrived, like Puntilla, with the Mariel boatlift. He also established himself as a tambolero and teacher in New York. Before Puntilla and Coyudde, local drummers trying to learn batá learned only a limited part of the repertoire; they learned this in bits and pieces, with the prime sources being the Ortiz texts (for those that could read music) and recordings (Cornelius 1991). For example, according to Skip, the local drummers performing in New York prior to Puntilla were not performing the full oru seco, which is the primary set of rhythms (no singing) performed for the orishas on the batá drums in front of the altar at the beginning of a tambor (ceremony and musical celebration featuring the batá drums, singing and dancing). Héctor “Flaco” Hernández, who Skip learned from prior to Puntilla’s arrival, was a Cuban batá drummer who did know the oru, but did not really have other (qualified) drummers to play with. Other Cuban drummers, like Pedro Morejón and Carlos Sánchez, played some batá, but they were in the process of learning as well, and only knew bits and pieces. In addition, all these drummers, including Collazo and Hernández, did not own and play full consecrated Añá drums—they played aberikulá (unconsecrated drums) (Kenneth “Skip” Burney 2015, interview).

It was thus difficult in New York to fully learn or understand the tambor (the full batá repertoire of rhythms and the songs that go with it) as a whole, which is recognized by many musicians of Afro-Cuban traditional music as representing the most complicated and advanced
of Cuba’s drumming traditions, the rhythms and rules of which must be absorbed through many years of experience (Cornelius 1991). It would have been quite difficult to try to decipher the proper rhythms played by each individual drum in the available recordings.26 The batá ensemble comprises six total drumheads—two for each drum. While it is not always difficult to pick out the parts played by each drum’s enú, or boca (the larger head, or “mouth,” of the drum, played with an open tone or muff) as these are heard as a high, middle and low tones, the three chachás (the smaller head of each drum, played as an open slap) can be difficult to distinguish, as they sound similar to each other. Further, the recording quality for the drums in these recordings, spanning 1950s-1970s, did not allow for as clear a sound as recordings made since the 1990s.

While Puntilla in Cuba had been known more as a quinto-player than a tambolero, in New York he attained a legendary status as the most highly esteemed tambolero (Cornelius 1991). He ritually “swore in” (i.e. juró) many local drummers, among whom were African Americans, New York Puerto Ricans, Jewish Americans, and even a man born and raised in Japan. Puntilla and Coyudde thus helped raise the standards of batá performance and knowledge in New York, and his ahijados (godchildren) in the tambor—that is, the drummers that he swore in as tamboleros—in turn propagated and passed on his knowledge and his strict approach to the religious and musical protocol. They did this by teaching other local drummers, and some eventually even established their own tambor (set of consecrated batá drums) and swearing in new drummers, which became their ahijados. Puntilla and Coyudde thus became two dominant “schools” of batá, not only because batá are considered a religious lineage—in terms of new sets of consecrated drums, which must be “born” from an existing, preferably prestigious, set—but

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26 Cornelius (1991) points out that the Ortiz transcriptions, or in other words, the example they provided as far as a schematic for the way many of the drums’ parts fit in with each other (i.e. the enú and the chachá parts for each drum), helped some New York drummers in deciphering some of the rhythms on recordings.
because each lineage of batá is associated with certain approaches to performing, especially in terms of musical style (Kenneth “Skip” Burney 2015, interview).

Because the standards of batá performance in New York were raised and more drummers could attain the knowledge from each other, there was no longer a sole reliance on recordings, although these would still serve as helpful learning supplements. Particularly helpful for batá drummers since then have been the long series of recordings of the tambor repertoire put out by artists such as Grupo Abbilona and akpwón Lázaro Ros since the 1990s. These series comprise a list of over a dozen albums each, with each album corresponding to a certain theme, usually a certain orisha. These are the only recordings, which taken together as a series, come close to presenting the full spectrum of songs and rhythms that are played in tambores, particularly the numerous songs and rhythms of the oru cantado (part of a tambor featuring drumming, singing, and dancing). Even so, there are several lesser-known songs or tratados (specific song sequences) that have yet to be recorded, and the Abbilona series continues to produce new material. Batá recordings by other groups, such as the Conjunto Nacional, Yoruba Andabo, or Ilú Añá tend to be more introductory, that is, they usually are a single album containing an oru seco and a short selection of songs for some of the more popular orishas.

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27 This can refer to small rhythmic differences in basic rhythms or conversations between the drums; general tendencies in tempos, like playing alante (fast) or atrás (slow); the order of the oru seco; as well as other subtle differences. In addition to the musical differences between specific drum lineages, there are also regional (and micro-regional) differences. For example, the differences between batá in Havana and Matanzas are fairly pronounced, as both areas encompass a large number of drummers. Yet within Havana, there are also stylistic differences between certain areas of the city such as Pogolotti, Centro Habana, and San Miguel del Padrón. As batá has gained a fuller presence outside Cuba, drummers can also be heard discussing how tambor (i.e. “batá”) is played in Venezuela, New York, or Puerto Rico.
Creating the conditions for a New York rumba scene

The story of the evolution of rumba performance in New York is similar to that of batá, although rumba has had a larger fan base and performance community than the former. This is due to several factors, the first and foremost being that rumba is secular and requires no religious initiation or long period of strict apprenticeship as does batá; rather, it can have somewhat of a “jam session” quality that allows several performers of various skill levels to participate, depending on the context. Informal contexts, in particular—as opposed to the professional stage—allow for greater opportunities for those who are in the process of learning or those who are not highly proficient to participate and practice their skills in a live group performance. New York has a long history of rumbas being performed in such informal contexts, particularly in its parks. As mentioned previously, Afro-Cuban drumming, including rumba, has been performed in New York City parks since the 1950s.

The amateur drummers participating in such rumbas included mostly Puerto Ricans, African Americans, a few Cubans, and some Jewish and Anglo Americans. In later decades, other Latinos, such as Dominicans and Cubans (in greater numbers after Mariel), joined the ranks. Part of the appeal of such informal rumbas in the streets or parks was that they were a way in which these musicians and fans (some of whom enjoy simply watching or singing along with the choruses) could connect with an Afro- or Latin-identity, in this case through Afro-Cuban drumming as a cultural expression (López 1976). Further, they could connect with others who enjoyed the same music and participate in the creative process of music-making, which may not have been available to them otherwise. For example, the many Puerto Ricans that immigrated to New York during the middle of the 20th century came from a culture in which black cultural elements were not only looked down upon by the dominant white society, but they had also not
garnered the comparatively higher amount of international attention and popularity afforded to rumba and other kinds of Afro-Cuban traditional music. For instance, *bomba*, an Afro-Puerto Rican genre that is in some ways a Puerto Rican counterpart to rumba, was not widely known and appreciated by most (white) Puerto Ricans until quite recently, following a grass-roots renaissance of *bomba* groups and the surge in popularity of *bomba* dance classes in the 1990s and especially 2000s (Rafael Maya [*bomba* musician and educator], personal communication). For Puerto Ricans in New York prior to the 1990s however, Afro-Cuban music was a much more viable and accessible avenue through which to explore Afro-Latin music culture.

Another factor which made rumba more popular than *batá* in New York was its greater accessibility. In addition to the Cuban *rumberos* in the city such as Patato Valdés, Virgilio Martí, Eugenio “Totico” Arango, and Mongo Santamaría, there were a few key audio recordings of the music which circulated widely among local enthusiasts. As recounted to me by several New York musicians who were in the scene at the time, including Skip, Abraham Rodríguez, and Félix Sanabria, these few recordings were highly prized precisely because they were limited; enthusiasts shared them, borrowed them, and made cassette copies for each other. Another major advantage of having the recordings was repetition: they could be listened to over and over again at the whim of the listener. Yet before getting into the earliest recordings and their phonograph effects on the New York scene, it is important to understand under what conditions these recordings were first produced and popularized, particularly in terms of audience.

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28 As in Puerto Rico, Afro-Puerto Rican (and Afro-Dominican) traditional music in New York came to be practiced and performed more frequently in the 1990s and 2000s among young local musicians of Puerto Rican and Dominican backgrounds. This is evident in the creation of local groups in the early 2000s such as Ilú Ayé, which performs Afro-Cuban, Afro-Puerto Rican and Afro-Dominican traditional music, and Alma Moyó, which specializes in *bomba*. 
“Afro” influences in music and the beginnings of a New York audience for Afro-Cuban traditional music

I have already described the audiences that consumed—that is, bought, listened to, or studied—early recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music in New York. In describing these early recordings, I am referring to what could be called the first “golden age” of recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music—the 1950s and 1960s—which is when many of the recordings now thought of as “classics” were recorded. While some recordings of rumba dating back to the 1940s have now surfaced, thanks to the investigative efforts of bloggers and enthusiasts of Cuban music history such as Barry Cox, the first widely disseminated albums featuring rumba did not appear until the 1950s.

In understanding the contexts in which these recordings appeared, it is important to situate these within the musical environment of Cuba and New York of the 1950s. By this decade, the presence of Afro-Cuban and other “Afro” elements in popular music performed by jazz bands, big bands, and conjuntos (another ensemble that performed Cuban dance music featuring piano, tumbadora, bongó, tres²⁹, bass, and trumpets) was quite common, and fans of such groups would have been familiar with some of the instruments and rhythmic elements drawn from Afro-Cuban traditional music. The vogue of “Afro”-influenced music, which had been around since the 1930s in the United States and Europe, continued to grow and was portrayed and viewed there as “exotic.” This is evident in the album covers of those jazz bands and big bands who ventured into “Afro,” or “Latin” genres, as with the vogue of commercial rumba (or “rhumba”). Such covers often featured a dancer (often a white female) in a frilly

²⁹ A Cuban guitar-like instrument characterized by having three double courses of steel strings. The tres is traditionally used in performing son and changüí.
guarachero shirt (based on stereotypical black rumbero characters in Cuban teatro vernáculo) along with maracas or drums (Moore 1995). A great example of such an image is the cover of *Mambo, mucho mambo* (1955), which features Xavier Cugat, Machito and his Orchestra, and Belmonte and his Afro-American Orchestra. The visual representation of Cuban drums and percussion and their increasingly marked presence in recordings of Afro-Cuban jazz and Cuban (and Cuban-derived) dance music in New York and Cuba helped make these elements more familiar to fans.

While in Cuba there was still public segregation and plenty of racist attitudes towards black culture by the dominant white society in the 1950s, in New York, particularly among the largely working-class Puerto Rican audience for Afro-Cuban music, there was a greater acceptance of Afro-Cuban musical elements in popular music. Many New York Puerto Ricans themselves came from quite mixed backgrounds in terms of their families’ racial affiliations. Most were not white in the way that middle- and upper-class Puerto Ricans and Cubans were; rather, they came from humble rural or working-class family backgrounds and many had blacks, whites, and mulattoes in their families. Further, the young generation of New York Puerto Ricans—those born there or who arrived at a young age—in the 1950s and 1960s were subjected to and had to adjust to the racial hierarchies of the United States, which meant that they often had to deal with racism and the stigma of being brown or black. Further, they grew up in racially-mixed neighborhoods in New York such as Harlem, the Lower East Side, and the south Bronx alongside African Americans and others. This generation of New York Puerto Ricans would be at the forefront of developing a new “Latin” or “brown” identity (along with Chicanos) during the Civil Rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s (Flores 2000; Glasser 1995).
In the 1950s, the popularity of “Afro” sonic influences in popular music in New York gave way to a new niche of recordings. There was a growing interest in the “roots” (i.e. Afro-influences) among many fans of jazz and Cuban dance music in New York as new recordings appeared which featured Afro-Cuban drumming. This is exemplified in Mongo Santamaría’s recordings of the early 1950s. Mongo was a Cuban drummer who moved to New York in 1950 and became a highly successful jazz musician with a career spanning the next several decades (Yanow 2000, 126). Although in later decades he would record more in the vein of Afro-Cuban jazz, Mongo recorded several albums in the 1950s which together represent some of the earliest widely-disseminated recordings of rumba and other Afro-Cuban traditional music. These were quite unique at the time, because unlike Afro-Cuban jazz and Cuban dance music, they featured only percussion and voices. While not all the arrangements were traditional in the sense that they were performed as they would be in a live rumba or bembé—indeed, many tracks were original compositions or were approached in the style of a percussion-centric jam session based on Afro-Cuban traditional rhythms—the recordings were revolutionary at the time. They were the first widely-circulated recordings of Afro-Cuban drumming in New York and were among the first widely-circulated recordings\(^{30}\) of Afro-Cuban traditional music (others were being recorded in Cuba around the same time).

While these recordings may not have attracted the entire audience of jazz or Cuban dance music, but they caught the attention and were prized by those who were interested in drumming and the Afro-roots of these genres. The formation of this niche of listeners, fans, and students, likely including those who were learning about Afro-Cuban drumming from guys like Collazo in Dunham’s company, represented the beginning of a new local (New York) Afro-Cuban

\(^{30}\) Rumba had been recorded in Cuba in the 1940s by Harold Courlander, but these recordings were never widely-circulated or well-known to audiences or musicians (see Cox 2011).
traditional music scene in the 1950s. The scene was basically a network of people interested in the music, many of whom come to know each other personally and become friends. They would meet up at performance events like rumbas at the park, or get together to practice or listen to recordings. Indeed, this continues to be the case today, although new types of networking, like the use of social media, now exist. New York thus became the first node outside of Cuba, marking the creation of a transnational performance scene.

Cuban rumba groups recording in the 1950s

In 1950s Cuba the situation was quite different, but nonetheless, newly-formed professional-level Afro-Cuban folkloric ensembles began recording rumba albums that are still regarded in high esteem among *rumberos* as classics. In addition, the groups of this decade, including their instrumentation, membership structure, and the standard formats of their recordings provided a template for similar groups in following decades and for those learning the genres abroad. There were three primary groups recording in this decade in Cuba, all specializing in and featuring rumba on their albums: Guaguancó Matancero, Los Papines, and Alberto Zayas’s Grupo Folklórico. Los Papines were unique as a recording group because they were cabaret performers; they performed shows on the cabaret stage designed to entertain both visually and musically. The group was comprised of only four musicians—all brothers— who all sang and played simultaneously, while performing coordinated visual effects, such as waving arms, twirling and spinning drums, sometimes taking turns dancing. While their recordings were highly influential, as they were among the first to record, they were in some ways an exception as far as being a standard rumba (or folkloric) group composition—most rumba or otherwise

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31 Luís, Alfredo, Jesús, and Ricardo Abreu.
folkloric groups performing Afro-Cuban traditional music on stage have a separate lead singer and chorus in addition to the drums and minor percussion. Los Papines had three drummers—*quinto, tres dos, tumbador*[^32]—and a fourth percussionist who played the *catá* part on a small box (*cajita china*) complete with bells and wood blocks, the latter used for adorning the basic *catá* rhythm. Papín, the group’s leader, sang the lead parts and played quinto while the other brothers sang the chorus parts.^[33]

In retrospect, Guaguancó Matancero and Alberto Zayas’s group can be seen as more traditional or standard in terms of the composition of its members and the instrumentation used. Both groups featured a lead singer, clave, *catá*, three drummers, and a chorus. This group composition and instrumentation is now considered the standard for Afro-Cuban folkloric ensembles, yet this was not always the case. In the decades prior—indeed since the turn of the century—organized, rehearsed rumba groups were more often in the form of *coros de rumba*, also known as *coros de guaguancó*. These groups were comprised of a large chorus, lead singers who specialized in improvisation and *décimas*, two or three drummers, *catá*, and *clave*. They were based on the membership organization of the even larger and older *coros de clave*. Like the *coros de rumba*, the *coros de clave* were large choral groups drawing their membership from various working-class black-dominated *barrios* of Havana and Matanzas[^34] (at least one existed in Santa Clara). They represented a certain *barrio* and performed publicly in the *barrios* on certain occasions. Sometimes they engaged in friendly (or not-so-friendly) musical battles in which groups from different *barrios* traded songs, sometimes in the form of *puyas*, or songs that

[^32]: *Quinto, tres dos, tumbador* refer to the three drums (high to low) most commonly used to perform rumba, at least since they became more commonplace in the 1930s-1950s. The three drum names are also used to denote the parts each one plays, as well as the player who is performing on that drum.  
[^33]: For examples of video recordings of Los Papines on YouTube, see the following: [https://youtu.be/2AMd01nv5Sg](https://youtu.be/2AMd01nv5Sg) and [https://youtu.be/yyGF4rOoKW0](https://youtu.be/yyGF4rOoKW0).  
[^34]: In Matanzas the *coros de clave* were referred to as *bandos de clave*.
attempt to insult the opposing group (Esquenazi Pérez 2007; Linares 1979). As their name suggested, they specialized in the genre called clave, which was a slow, lyrical song in triple meter borrowed from trova, which the coros de clave performed with a simple clave rhythm and a viola (a small, single-headed drum resembling the shape of a West African kora or North American banjo, but without strings, held in one hand and played with the other). While the coros de clave did perform rumba in addition to claves, rumba was the genre of choice for the coros de rumba.

By the 1940s and 50s the coros de clave and coros de rumba were disappearing, perhaps, as was the case with their Afro-Cuban choral counterparts in Trinidad de Cuba performing the tonadas trinitarias— influenced by the change of technologies and changes in the consumption of music (Frías 2015c). By these decades, the radio, and to a lesser extent, recorded music and television, had begun to compete with previous forms of consuming music (listening to or seeing it live). Of course, small-scale, informal rumbas were still performed in solares and homes in the largely black barrios of Havana and Matanzas, as well as among some migrant sugar cane workers throughout the island. Yet the public face of organized, rehearsed rumba groups changed in the 1940s and 50s.

The new standard for group formats—visible in groups like Guaguancó Matancero—would in essence be a streamlined version of the coros de rumba. This meant that the size of the chorus was reduced, often to two, three, or four singers. The standard number of percussionists was the same—usually four—three drummers and a catá player. The lead singer often played the clave. These smaller groups may have been a response to several factors, including the demise of the larger coros de rumba and coros de clave and greater opportunities for public performances of rumba and Afro-Cuban traditional music in Cuba. The smaller groups were better suited for
stage performances and for recording as well. It would have been difficult for a *coro de clave* or *coro de rumba* to perform on smaller stages due to the size of their chorus, which could number into the dozens. The streamlined groups could fit more easily on stage and could even be more efficient in terms of rehearsing and performing more complex arrangements. Their smaller size and high quality of musicianship was also well-suited for the recording studio, likely allowing them to complete recordings more efficiently than a large *coro de clave* or *coro de rumba* would be able to.

**Making folklore in Cuba: Folklorization and folkloricization**

These groups also grew out of the currents of folklorization arising in Cuba, evident in the advent of public performances of Afro-Cuban traditional music. By “public” performances I mean that these were performed in public spaces and meant for audiences that included whites and were often mixed in terms of their racial, economic, and religious backgrounds. In other words, the new standard “Afro-Cuban folkloric” group of the 1950s and later was meant for the public eye, which included the eyes of the dominant white middle class society. Indeed, it was primarily middle class intellectuals like Fernando Ortiz who spurred the folklorization, and then the folkloricization, of Afro-Cuban traditional music performance, a process that would continue under the Revolutionary government’s Ministry of Culture in the 1960s.

Katherine Hagedorn defines folkloricization as “the process of making a folkloric tradition folkloric” (2001, 12). According to her, this is different from folklorization, as folkloricized performances are twice removed from their original context: as Afro-Cuban traditional music was already considered to be folklore by the 1950s thanks to Ortiz and his intellectual counterparts, its folkloricization entailed rehearsing and dressing it up for formal
stage performances. To better understand this, it is helpful to reference Ramiro Guerra (1989), who, as a choreographer for Grupo de Danza Nacional and the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional was well-acquainted with the processes of transforming Cuban folkloric traditions from around the island into staged performances.

Guerra describes the process in four stages. In stage one, the tradition is performed in its original context, for example a tambor held at a santero’s home in honor of the orisha Obatalá. Here, the batá drums are used and the appropriate songs are sung in their original context, for their religious purpose. In stage two, the tradition is performed by those who have learned it thoroughly on its own terms, yet it is performed outside of the original context and purpose. An example of this would be a public presentation of batá drumming for a class or conference where drummers present the rhythms unaltered. Here, the drumming no longer has its original religious purpose, which is to “bring down” the orishas (bajar el santo) by way of inspiring the possession of participating santeros by an orisha. Hagedorn would see this stage as “folklorized,” as the tradition is once-removed from its original context. This is how batá drumming was first presented in public in Ortiz’s lectures in the 1930s. In stage three, the tradition is formally rehearsed, arranged, and dressed-up for a stage performance. The “dressing-up” of the tradition refers to how dancers perform in costumes—for example, the colorful suits representing a specific orisha, featuring certain colors and attributes, or the use of long skirts and headscarves from slave times when depicting Bantu dances. Dressing-up in this case can also refer to the use of uniforms for musicians and to choreographed group dances. Guerra’s third stage is what Hagedorn would see as “folkloricized,” as the tradition is now twice-removed from its original context. In the fourth stage, the tradition is transformed into something entirely different; the tradition as it was in stage one now becomes merely a starting point in the production of a newly-
created artistic piece. An example of this would be the production of a dance choreography piece that incorporates elements of the dances of certain orishas, and yet does not adhere entirely to the rules and conscriptions of the traditional orisha dances.

The process of folklorization (stage two) in Cuba began in some ways with Fernando Ortiz, who in the 1930s began sponsoring public performances of Afro-Cuban religious music. In the 1940s and 1950s, he also sponsored such performances in the seminars he taught (Hagedorn 2001, 11). As previously explained, the 1950s also saw the establishment of new folkloric groups, particularly those specializing in rumba, like Guaguancó Matancero, Los Papines, Alberto Zayas’s Grupo Folklórico, and Clave y Guaguancó (the latter group did not begin recording albums until the 1990s). Although these rumba groups rehearsed and performed their arrangements, the performances were not necessarily “dressed-up” in terms of elaborate costumes, and the musical style remained fairly close to its performance in its original contexts. These groups may not have represented the full folkloricization of the traditions, but they were a stepping stone in that direction.

Indeed, Hagedorn sees the establishment of the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional in 1962 (after the Revolution) as the beginning of folkloricization. Here, intellectuals and the state’s Ministry of Culture saw Afro-Cuban folkloric traditions as being in danger of being lost and thus in need of preservation. They created the state-sponsored Conjunto Folklórico Nacional to accomplish this. The repertoire and arrangements were planned with input from respected culture bearers, but were also dressed-up in a way that was deemed to be more refined and acceptable to the public eye (i.e. an audience that included whites). Scholars such as Carlos Moore (1988) have described this representation of Afro-Cuban folkloric traditions as “whitening,” as part of the
reason for dressing them up was to make them more acceptable and palatable to the white Cuban majority.

Of course, the folklorization (and folkloricization) of Afro-Cuban traditional music was not only a matter of whites giving black culture bearers these opportunities; part of this had to do with the willingness of black culture bearers themselves to talk about and reveal aspects of their music and religion to outsiders, including white Cubans and foreigners. Indeed, as I have discovered in my years working as a tambolero, many facets of Afro-Cuban religious practices, including some of the music, was—and still is to varying degrees—highly guarded and kept secret. This seems to be due in part to the legacy of racism and persecution by whites. Even in Cuba in la mata, many culture bearers (particularly elders) are to this day still reticent to reveal certain less common musical elements, including rhythms or song lyrics to other musicians, including younger musicians learning the repertoire. Part of the reason behind this is the idea that one must demonstrate a certain amount of effort, dedication, and personal sacrifice in order to earn such privileged knowledge (Alain Fernández, personal communication). Of course, some more experienced or elder culture bearers may withhold more information than others, and this depends on the individual’s personality. Yet the willingness of the culture bearers of Afro-Cuban traditional music to share the traditions, especially religious music, was an important factor in the folklorization and folkloricization of the music. Now that I have explained the underlying processes of folklorization and folkloricization in Cuba, let us return to the discussion of the earliest recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music.
The earliest recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music

While the earliest widely-disseminated albums were recorded in the 1950s (those of Mongo Santamaría, Los Papines, and Guaguancó Matancero), they were not the earliest recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music. According to Reyes (2000), lyrical references to “rumba” have been present in recordings of Cuban music since the earliest days of the recording industry (Cox 2011). Yet these references were made in the context of genres of Cuban popular music, like danzón or the stylized rumbas of the teatro vernáculo the first such example having been recorded in in 1899 (see Cox 2011 for a detailed list of early recordings).

The first rumba song was recorded in 1920 by singer-guitarist María Teresa Vera, who was well-known as a singer of trova and son in the early and mid-1900s (Cox 2011; Díaz Ayala 2006). The piece, entitled “El yambú guaguancó,” was sung in the traditional style and form of rumba, with a diana, décima, and montuno, and accompanied with claves. Yet instead of drums, Vera strummed chords on her guitar, following the harmonic structure of the song. On the other hand, Cox (2011) cites the first known recording of traditional rumba as being from 1937 or 1938, consisting of a short segment from a Cuban film called Tam Tam, o el origen de la rumba (directed by Ernesto Caparrós). While the segment35 does feature rumba dancers with a band on a stage at a nightclub, accompanied by the traditional percussion instruments (drums and minor percussion), as well as voices (call and response between a chorus and lead singer), the rumba is presented in a somewhat stylized manner. There is a trumpet playing with the music and the dancing incorporates a staged storyline with an apparently drunk member of the audience taking the center stage as a dancer. Nonetheless, much of the dancing is performed quite well, with characteristic movements now recognized in guaguancó dancing. While the improvising quinto

and trumpet can be heard in the audio at the forefront, it is difficult to clearly distinguish the accompanying percussive rhythm, although the three drummers and a catá player can be seen. The characteristic drum rhythm of guaguancó can be discerned in at least one point in the segment. It is therefore perhaps a matter of subjectivity whether this segment represents the first recording of traditional rumba or whether it is regarded as a stylized presentation. Nevertheless, another, more clearly traditional recorded presentation of rumba was made around the same time, in 1938.

The latter is also an audiovisual recording: a clip from the Cuban film Siboney, directed by Juan Orol. It was uploaded to YouTube as a one-and-a-half minute clip by Mark Sanders, an American fan of Cuban music based in New York. Sanders is an avid uploader of recorded content and other information to Facebook; he also created the blog Fidel’s Eyeglasses (active from 2008-2014), which features rare recordings of Cuban (and some Brazilian) music. The clip portrays a group of musicians and dancers in what seems to be a solar, alluding to the traditional context of a rumba. Rather than the elaborate frilly guarachero shirts and skirts featured in the stylized rumbas of the cabaret and teatro vernáculo, the dancers are presented in simple, plain clothes. The male dancer, however, is dressed in all white and has a handkerchief around his neck, in keeping with the style of dress associated with certain black performers of son or of the coros de clave or coros de rumba during this time. The instrumentation—with the addition of two machetes played together as a scraper in the manner used in some rural Cuban music—as well as the singing, rhythms, and dancing are all clearly in the style of guaguancó. The drummers are using three tumbadoras with the old-style tacked-on heads, and the quinto.

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36 The film is available on YouTube under the title Décadas 1900 a 1039 Películas Cubanas, uploaded by sanamparbat (https://youtu.be/GyAu0cINfwQ).
37 http://fidelseyeglasses.blogspot.com/
38 https://youtu.be/FJcoeh7fl4Q?list=PLzg0qBv9p-KyaO192zbtcMOhcDj-5sohh
player is wearing wrist-rattles (nkembi\textsuperscript{39}) as he plays. The lyrics are unclear, but the singing features a short introduction by the lead singer, leading to a montuno with a typical rumba chorus melody. The dancing is quite impressive and features the typical steps and gestures of guaguancó dancing, including the use of vacunaos by the male followed by the female’s “covering up” of her pelvis with her hands. According to Felito Obakoso, a respected elder singer specializing in güiro who currently resides in Miami, the male dancer is Orlando “El Peki” Pérez, who was known as a rumba dancer and choreographer for theater shows during the time.

The first audio-only recordings of rumba, and the first recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music for that matter, were made in 1941 by Harold Courlander, an anthropologist and folklorist visiting Cuba with the intent of making field recordings (Cox 2011; Courlander 1942). According to Cox (2011), only a small number of these field recordings were released on record, first by Disc New York in 1947, then in 1951 by Folkways Records as \textit{Cult music of Cuba}\textsuperscript{40} (FE 4410). The record includes 11 tracks representing some of the various Afro-Cuban musico-religious practices outlined in Courlander’s 1942 article, including songs and drumming examples from Cuba’s Lucumí- and Bantu-derived traditions, as well as abakuá. There are a couple of tracks with batá (with and without singing), as well as some palo, yuka, and Abakuá singing and drumming, yet some of the tracks are incorrectly labeled. For example, the “Song to Orisha Chango” and the second “Abakwa Song” are actually palo and yuka, respectively. Unfortunately, the rumbas Courlander recorded are not included in the Folkways album. The

\textsuperscript{39} These consist of two small gourd (or metal) rattles, one tied tightly to each wrist. They were adapted to rumba from Bantu-derived drumming practices in Cuba, but their use is now increasing rare now among rumberos. Although the younger generations have for the most part abandoned the use of nkembi, the practice was still used by rumba groups in Matanzas at least until the 1980s and 90s and appears on audio and visual recordings of AfroCuba de Matanzas and Los Muñequitos de Matanzas.

\textsuperscript{40} \url{http://www.folkways.si.edu/cult-music-of-cuba/caribbean-latin-sacred-world/album/smithsonian}
three tracks, titled “Guaguancó,” “Yambú,” and “Rumba,” are, however, available through the Archives of Traditional Music. Like other pre-1950s recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music, these rumbas and the Folkways album were not widely known or circulated amongst fans and musicians. It has only been in the past few years that many of these early, rare recordings were rediscovered by blogger-researchers like Barry Cox and Mark Sanders.

Other lesser-known early recordings of rumba and other Afro-Cuban traditional musics include those of Chano Pozo and Carlos Vidal Bolado, an early Silvestre Mendez record, Richard Waterman’s field recordings, and records by Filiberto Sánchez and Conjunto El Niño. These are described in detail by Cox (2011) in his article on the earliest recordings of rumba. The records of Chano Pozo and Carlos Vidal were the first studio recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music, including mostly rumbas, with some abakuá and bembé. They were recorded in New York and consist of a set of eight total tracks. Pozo recorded the first four in 1947 and Vidal directed the other four around the same time, yet they were not released until 1949 (Cox 2011). The recordings are available on YouTube and exhibit a high level of musicianship. Despite this, these recordings are not generally well-known among performers and fans of Afro-Cuban traditional music, likely due to the fact that they were made so early, prior to the more widespread development of consumers’ interest in Afro-Cuban traditional music in the 1950s. By the time the local New York scene began to develop, the Pozo and Vidal recordings may have not been widely available, or perhaps they never sold many copies during their original release. The same can be said of the first record of Silvestre Mendez and the rumba recordings of Filiberto Sánchez, as well as the the recordings of Conjunto El Niño made by Juan Liscano. According to Silvestre Mendez, he made a recording of rumba in Mexico City with the Musart label in or shortly after 1948 called “El as de la rumba.” However, neither Cox nor myself have
been able to locate a copy of this recording, nor have I ever heard of it being mentioned among those in the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene. Filiberto Sánchez made the first studio recordings of rumba and Abakuá in Cuba for Panart and RCA Victor in 1948 and 1949, and yet again, they never gained much popularity in or outside Cuba. The same goes for the Juan Liscano collection of recordings, which were made in 1949 (Cox 2011).

A larger collection, consisting of field recordings in Cuba made by anthropologists Richard Waterman, Berta Montero (later Berta Bascom), and William Bascom, was inspired by Melville Herskovits’s work on Africanisms and his search for them in the Americas (Bascom 1948; Cox 2011). The anthropologists recorded 14 rumbas, as well as the music of the Santería and Palo religions, yet as field recordings, these never gained much popularity either and are still not widely known among most musicians and fans in the scene. All these rare, early recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music—primarily consisting of rumbas—never gained much popularity among those in the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene in Cuba or abroad. Again, it is thanks to researchers like Cox that many of these recordings have been rediscovered and, in the case of some, made available online.

Cox also helped fans rediscover other rare old recordings by seeking them out and posting them on YouTube, including several tracks by Guaguancó Matancero that were virtually unknown to those of us in the scene until recently, after being uploaded in 2011. The tracks were recorded on two different Cuban record labels: F.M.R. and Rosy. The precise years of their original release are unknown, but the songs and style are quite similar to one another in terms of sound and quality, suggesting that they were recorded around the same time period. What is certain is that they were recorded after 1952, when Guaguancó Matancero was founded and F.M.R. (active 1952-1958) were founded. According to Díaz Ayala (2002), these recordings—at
least the Rosy ones—were from the late 1950s and were never published. Two of the tracks from the Rosy records were released in the 1960s as part of the LP *Guaguancó vol. II*, and several more were not released until the 1999 album *Rumba abierta*, after being found in archives. The Rosy records were also most likely made after the group’s 1956 recordings with the Puchito record label, as Díaz-Ayala (2002) points out that the reason the group no longer recorded with Puchito after their 1956 record was that they switched recording labels, opting for Rosy instead. Cox has also posted a few other old, rare recordings, including two pre-revolutionary (likely late 50s) 45 rpm records that have also been uploaded on Cox’s YouTube channel (guarachon63): one by Guaguancó Habanero and the other by Conjunto Ogundegara. The latter was unique and consisted of two *columbias* performed by a group from Jovellanos, a town in a more rural area of Matanzas province.

The Cuban-made rumba recordings that gained wide popularity in the 1950s and successive decades were those of Alberto Zayas with his Grupo Afrocubano (also known as Grupo Afrocubano Lulu-Yonkori) which were later released on the album *Guaguancó afro-cubano* and the recordings of Guaguancó Matancero that were later released on *Guaguancó vol. I* with Papín y sus Rumberos (the group was later re-named Los Papines). The different record formats used in the 1950s and 1960s in Cuba and the US make this early history slightly confusing. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the 7” 45 rpm disc was one of the most popular formats used for recordings; this is particularly the case for Cuban recordings of rumba during this time. All the early recordings of Alberto Zayas, Guaguancó Matancero, and Papín y sus Rumberos, made in the mid- and late-1950s, were not originally issued as the albums we know today, which were so influential in New York and elsewhere outside Cuba (*Guaguancó afro-cubano* and *Guaguancó vol. I*). Rather, the recordings were originally released in Cuba in the 1950s on 7” 45
rpm discs (i.e. “singles” with one track on each side). Some of the tracks were first popularized on jukeboxes. In fact, the reason behind Guaguancó Matancero changing their name to Los Muñequitos de Matanzas was the popularity of their late 1950s hit “Los muñequitos,” which was commonly found on jukeboxes in Cuba at the time (Díaz Ayala 2002).

Despite the availability of many other record formats at the time, such as 10” 33 ½ LP discs and EP (extended-play) 45 rpm discs, it was not until the mid-1960s that the 12” 33 ½ rpm LP (long-playing) became a standard, and that the concept of an album (i.e. concept album with a unifying theme) became a trend. Thus, the early “albums” now considered classics of Cuban rumba—Guaguancó-afrocubano and Guaguancó vol. 1—were actually re-edited LP records that basically compiled several of the 1950s recordings of these groups. The re-edited version of Guaguancó-afrocubano came out in 1960, and the Guaguancó vol. 1 seems to have come out in the early or mid-1960s (Díaz Ayala 2002). It was these LP albums that would become popular in the US among enthusiasts in New York beginning in the late 1960s. Prior to that, these early recordings would have circulated primarily within Cuba. Despite this, New York-based enthusiasts of Afro-Cuban traditional music did have some options as far as available recordings in the 1950s and early 1960s; these, however, were all recorded in New York.

The first recordings of rumba available in the nascent Afro-Cuban music scene in New York in the 1950s and early 1960s would have been those of Chano Pozo, Mongo Santamaría, and Silvestre Mendez. Mongo, Silvestre, and Justi Barreto—Silvestre’s half brother—were all contemporaries and left Cuba around the same time (Silvestre left in 1945) for Mexico City. Of the three percussionists, Mongo and Justi eventually left to New York and Silvestre stayed in Mexico City to work in the film industry, although he did some recordings in New York. In fact, Silvestre was also a vocalist, composer, and rumbero, and appears on many of Mongo’s early
records as the lead singer. According to Silvestre, one of Mongo’s earliest recordings of Afro-
Cuban traditional music—*Chango* (1954)—was actually produced by Silvestre and was
comprised primarily of his own compositions, despite the record being officially attributed to
Mongo in the end (Díaz Ayala 2002).

A few things set these early New York recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music apart
from those recorded in Cuba during the same time. First, the New York recordings circulated in
the US\(^\text{41}\), while most Cuban recordings did not become available there until the late 1960s
(Kenneth “Skip” Burney 2015, interview). Second, the New York recordings were not released
as singles like in Cuba, but rather were put out on varied kinds of record formats with a greater
number of songs on each record. Finally, the New York recordings were born out of the jazz and
Cuban popular music scene in New York in which the performers were involved. This meant that
the musical context and musical background of the performers was more varied than that of the
Cuban recordings. In Cuba, the 1950s recordings were done by folkloric groups that would have
rehearsed and played together consistently, such as Guaguancó Matancero and Alberto Zayas’s
Grupo Afrocubano (also known as Grupo Afrocubano Lulu-Yonkori).

On the other hand, the performers in the Mongo and Silvestre Mendez records, as well as
the widely popular and influential *Patato y Totico* (1967) by Carlos “Patato” Valdés and Eugenio
“Totico” Arango came from mixed musical backgrounds, as many of them also performed jazz
and popular dance music. For example, Patato was primarily a cabaret performer, while Totico
was a street singer of rumba, as was Virgilio Martí, another vocalist on the album. In addition,
the record featured Arsenio Rodríguez on the *tres* and bassist Israel “Cachao” López as musical

\(^{41}\) Whether they circulated in Cuba or not is less certain, but there likely would have been much more of an
audience and buying public in the US for these records, particularly in New York’s jazz and growing Latin popular
music scene.
guests, whose own popular music groups prominently featured Afro-Cuban traditional musical influences. Mongo and Silvestre both grew up in Havana’s Jesús María barrio, a center for rumba and Afro-Cuban folklore, but the two actually spent most of their performance careers working with and composing music for orchestras that played Cuban popular music and jazz bands (Díaz Ayala 2002). The recordings of Mongo, Silvestre Mendez, Patato, and Totico were thus special projects that brought together a group of performers to record; they did not feature a cohesive, professional-level folkloric group like the Cuban recordings. In addition, while some tracks are approached quite traditionally, many are influenced by jazz and popular music conventions, evident in the addition of non-traditional instruments such as flute, trumpet, tres, or bass guitar in some tracks; the creation of new rhythms (such as Silvestre Mendez’s “oriza” rhythm); the use of generic “afro” rhythms not used in traditional rumba or Afro-Cuban religious music (sometimes dubbed “Afro”); and the increasing prominence of quinto solos.

Mongo’s earliest recordings included Afro-Cuban drums (1952), Changó (1954), Drums and chants: Authentic Afro-Cuban rhythms (1957), Yambú (1958), and Mongo (1959). While most of Mongo’s performance career and his later recordings were in the realm of popular music and jazz, his 1950s recordings featured mostly Afro-Cuban traditional music—mostly rumba and bembé—with drumming and singing (sometimes a flute or horn is added). He also released Up from the roots in 1972, which also includes several tracks of Afro-Cuban traditional music. Silvestre Mendez, who is featured on many of Mongo’s 1950s recordings as a lead singer and composer, also recorded his own record in 1957-58, titled Bembe aragua, in much the same in style as Mongo’s 1950s records. However, Mongo’s recordings were more popular and widely-known than Silvestre’s. In addition, many of Mongo’s recordings were re-released in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.
Taken together, Mongo and Silvestre’s recordings of rumba and other genres of Afro-Cuban traditional music, including *abakuá*, *conga*, and *bembé* (no *batá* recordings) would have comprised the bulk of what was available in New York as far as recordings in the 1950s and early- to mid-1960s. As many of the same players were featured on these recordings, including Mongo, Silvestre, and Carlos “Patato” Valdés, the stylistic approach was fairly similar among them, as far as the singing and percussion. Although it not released until 1967, the *Patato y Totico* album was also highly popular and influential in New York, where it was recorded. It featured the two performers on the title—Patato as a drummer and Totico (Eugenio Arango) as lead singer—and had an overall cleaner recording quality. While the album is considered a classic New York rumba recording among *rumberos* outside Cuba, it is unique in that the tracks also include a Cuban *tres* (guitar with three sets of double strings used to play *son* and other Cuban popular musics) and a bass guitar. These instruments are used in addition to the normal instrumentation for rumba and for the most part play supporting roles. For example, the tracks often start out with the *tres* outlining the melody, which in effect substitutes the lead singer’s *diana* (introductory melody). The *tres* and bass are played sparsely during the *canto* (song) section of the rumbas, then sometimes use simple riffs in the *montuno* similar to how they would be used in *conjuntos*, Cuban ensembles popular at the time.

The idea of incorporating the *tres* and bass likely stemmed from the fact that Patato was primarily a performer of jazz and Cuban popular music, where combining musical elements of rumba and *son* elements was a common practice. For example, Alberto Zayas’s Grupo Afrocubano made some recordings in the late 1950s featuring a style called *guaguansón*, which basically combined a traditional *guaguancó* rhythm with the traditional *son* parts of the guitar and bass. Israel “Cachao” López also recorded several albums during the 1950s and ensuing
decades featuring *descargas* (jam sessions) in which influences from *son*, rumba, jazz, and other Cuban popular rhythms were combined freely. Further, *conjuntos* were a popular ensemble for performing *son* in New York and Cuba from the 1940s through 1960s, including Arsenio Rodriguez’s *conjunto*, which was performing in Harlem and was heavily influential in the development of salsa in New York City (García 2006). Indeed, Arsenio, who had recorded rumba songs adapted to the *son* style and *conjunto* instrumentation, is actually the *tres* player on Patato’s album, and Cachao is the bassist. Of course, the addition of harmonic instruments also made the *Patato y Totico* album more accessible or palatable to listeners who were less familiar with (or less partial to) music featuring only drumming and singing. However, aside from the presence of *tres* and bass guitar, the album is straight-ahead rumba and is stylistically similar to the Mongo and Silvestre rumba recordings due to the fact that the performers were drawn from a small group of Cubans in New York at the time, in which Patato featured prominently.

The *Patato y Totico* LP, along with the Mongo and Silvestre records, were among the few recordings of rumba available in the New York rumba scene prior to the late 1960s and early 1970s, which is when some of the Cuban recordings of rumba and other Afro-Cuban traditional music began to appear on the local scene (Kenneth “Skip” Burney 2015, interview). And yet the *Patato y Totico* was the first New York record dedicated entirely to rumba; the Mongo and Silvestre recordings only had a few tracks of rumba on each record, the rest of the tracks being primarily *bembé*, along with some tracks featuring *abakuá*, *conga*, or variations on *iyesá* or *makuta* rhythms. Justi Barreto, a Cuban singer, composer, and *rumbero* who had arrived in New York via Mexico in 1952, also produced a rumba album in New York in 1969 (*Guagancó ’69*) popular among *rumberos* at the time. While the local scene for rumba in New York was beginning to appear in the 1950s, in the 1960s the scene really came into its own as the number
of amateur performers grew and the Central Park rumba—perhaps the oldest ongoing public
rumba event in New York City—was established as a recurring event (during the non-winter
months).

Learning from rumba recordings in New York

The aficionados in New York that were learning rumba, and in some cases other Afro-
Cuban traditional music, were primarily non-Cubans, with Puerto Ricans and African Americans
figuring prominently. The local scene grew significantly during the 1960s in large part because
this was when many first- and second-generation New York Puerto Ricans were coming of age
as teenagers and young adults. In the midst of the Civil Rights Movement and the rising tide of
salsa music, both of which helped forge Latino identities, many working class New York Puerto
Ricans and African Americans (groups who often lived in close proximity to one another) found
in rumba a cultural symbol that they could identify with, whether as Latino or “Afro” culture
(Manuel 1994; Jottar 2011a). Further, it was fun for them to listen to and perhaps seemed more
accessible to learn, as it was drums and sticks, than other types of music like jazz or popular
music played by orchestras. According to López (1976), street drumming (which included rumba
rhythms) was popular among local youth and young adults, and could be seen on rooftops,
sidewalks, and parks. López (1976, 107-08) himself was introduced to the drumming in 1957
after finding his cousins and childhood friend playing on the roof of an apartment building in the
Bronx.

The comparatively low number of Cuban drummers, and especially singers of rumba and
Afro-Cuban traditional music meant that the growing number of amateur performers often did
not have the opportunity to learn and study directly with knowledgeable, experienced
performers. As mentioned earlier, there were very few Cuban performers of Afro-Cuban music in New York prior to 1980 (the Mariel boatlift). Totico, Justi Barreto, and Virgilio Martí were among the few singers of rumba (Silvestre Mendez lived in Mexico City), while Patato performed primarily with popular music orchestras. Further, Cubans were often reluctant to teach and share their knowledge fully with non-Cubans in New York, who were ironically the main ones that would have liked to learn (Burney 2015, interview; Moreno Vega 2008). Therefore, amateur performers in New York in the 1960s, and even into the 1970s, were generally dependent on learning what they knew from each other and from recordings (Amira 2015; Burney 2015, interview; Jottar 2011a).

As aforementioned, Kenneth “Skip” Burney (2015, interview), who lived in New York and Los Angeles during the 1960s and 70s and was one of the most prominent non-Cuban drummers in the scene at the time, has often referenced the key importance of recordings for New Yorkers who were learning the music. He makes the point that there were no “real players” (i.e. Cuban drummers that were highly qualified and experienced) in New York prior to 1980 (Mariel boatlift) teaching the guys that were interested in learning, who again were mostly Puerto Ricans and African Americans like Skip, Gene Golden, Abraham Rodríguez, and Felix Sanabria. In other words, they had no real mentors; rather they learned bits and pieces from many different people, including their peers. If one of them learned something new, he (most drummers were male) would share it with his friends. In many ways, this is how my own best friends and I got started with rumba: I would learn from a few local teachers in Florida and from my visits to Havana and then pass on the knowledge to my friends. Skip (personal communication) and his peers would often get together to hang out and practice, just like my friends and I, and it was in these practice sessions that new knowledge and ideas were discussed.
In addition to learning bits and pieces from other players, recordings were another primary source of knowledge, in some cases serving as primary references. In fact, in practice sessions with drummers, whether with Skip’s crew in the 1970s or my own friends in the 2000s, recordings often stimulate important discussions on style and aesthetics. Drummers (or singers) might learn a new lick they like and share it with their group of friends, or they might comment on how they disliked the swing or timbre of the singer featured on a track, or how they enjoyed a rhythm used on the introduction to a certain track. In what follows, I will describe the key stylistic elements of rumba found in the earliest recorded references of the genre—Mongo Santamaría and Silvestre Mendez’s recordings and the Patato y Totico album—available to the growing amateur rumba performance scene in New York in the 1960s. The stylistic approach to rumba found on these recordings, which were all recorded and produced in New York—formed the basis for the performance of rumba in New York, which really cohered as a scene in the 1960s, signaled by the popularity of the Central Park rumba. The basic rhythms, songs, structure, use of drums, and overall sound of rumba in New York was heavily influenced by these early rumba recordings precisely because they formed such an important reference for the people learning them in New York and elsewhere. Being the first hub of a new, transnational scene for rumba performance, the New York style of playing in some ways served as a model for the spread of rumba performance to other areas outside of Cuba, most notably Puerto Rico, which I will also discuss further below.

42 While New York was definitely the center of activity as far as people learning about and performing Afro-Cuban traditional music, there were also people in other cities doing this, albeit to a lesser degree. Los Angeles, for example, had a small community of drummers, some of whom were taught by Francisco Aguabella, who had settled there after leaving Katherine Dunham’s dance company in the 1950s.
**Stylistic features of rumba in New York**

The early style of playing rumba in New York was based primarily on two things: the model used by the few Cuban drummers in New York performing rumba, and their recordings of this style, which served as references. Before discussing the specific elements of this model, it is important to understand the musical elements in rumba that comprise a style, especially in relation to the historical period and region in which rumba is performed. Most of the musical and performance elements in rumba have been susceptible to change over the course of the genre’s history, including the song structure, the use of drums or *cajones* (wooden boxes), the number of drums or *cajones* used, the basic rhythms, the *quinto* approach, the incorporation of non-rumba rhythms or breaks in an arrangement, and the use of *floreos* (rhythmic embellishments) on the drums or *cajones*.

Although the earliest instruments used to perform rumba in the 19th century were comprised of household materials (walls, tables, dresser drawers, bottles, spoons, etc.) and *cajones* (wooden box drums), the use of drums (*tumbadoras*) was becoming common in rumba performance by the 1930s (Esquenazi Pérez 2012). And yet only two drums (*quinto* and *tumbador*) or two *cajones* were used at this time. The third, middle-toned drum—the *tres dos*—was added to rumba at some point after this. The precise date is unknown, but this likely happened in the 1930s, as three drums are visible in the clip of rumba seen in the film *Tam tam: O el origen de la rumba* (1937 or 1938). Amado Dedeu García, director of the rumba group Clave y Guaguancó, in an interview on the Cuban television show *En otros tiempos*[^43], cites “Chawolo” (possibly José María de la Merced)—a relative of Ricardo Abreu of Los Papines—as the person who first added the *tres dos* to rumba. In the same interview, Dedeu also cites

[^43]: https://youtu.be/xyMA2N99uaY
Chawolo as the person who first started introduced the clave now used in *guaguancó* (as opposed to the previous clave pattern, still used in Havana-style *yambú* and in *son*), perhaps around the same time period, although this clave did not become standardized in rumba performance until the 1950s and 1960s.

It cannot be said for sure that Chawolo was the one (or only person) who introduced these new elements, as it has not been verified through rigorous investigation, yet it is a possibility. What is certain is that the *tres dos* was a new element around this time, and that the clave rhythm used to accompany *guaguancó*—at least in Havana—changed. Previous to that, the clave used in rumba in Havana was the one that is now widely known (misleadingly) as the *son* clave, and which is still used often in *yambú* (an older, slower variant of rumba than the *guaguancó*) in Havana. What we now call the “rumba clave,” or what Cuban musicians often call the *clave de guaguancó*, is the same rhythm as the former, except for the third beat, which is shifted one eighth-note back (if written in cut-time). The *clave de guaguancó* is very similar to the clave used in Abakuá music, although the latter is in 6/8. Since Abakuá members and their music were a heavy influence on rumba, it is likely that there is a connection between the two genres and their clave rhythms. For instance, it is possible that the clave rhythm in rumba was adopted from the Abakuá⁴⁴ although this assertion would require further investigation. Another possibility is that the *clave de guaguancó* as we know it was used in Matanzas (where Abakuá influence is also high, as many members of several generations of Los Muñequitos de Matanzas have been Abakuá members) prior to being standardized in Havana. On the other hand, the influence of Bantu-derived musical forms and rhythms cannot be forgotten, particularly via the *columbia* (the

⁴⁴ The possible adaptation of the clave used in rumba from the Abakuá, as well as the influence of Abakuá dance in rumba is discussed in an interview with Adonis Panter Calderón, director of the rumba group Osain del Monte (https://youtu.be/3kYxafQH_BQ).
oldest form of rumba and the only rumba variant born in a rural area) (Moliner Castañeda 1988).
On recordings of rumba from the 1940s and 1950s where the clave is audible, Havana *rumberos*
use the old clave (“*son* clave”) frequently, while Guaguancó Matanceró (from Matanzas) uses
what musicians now call the “rumba clave,” or “clave de *guaguancó*.”

**Early phonograph effects on rumba performance**

**Havana-style rumba and the nascent scenes in New York and Puerto Rico**

Since the drummers recording in New York were from Havana and recordings from Cuba
(available in New York by the late 1960s) were primarily from Havana, recordings of Havana-
style rumba were the only ones available to the nascent New York rumba scene in the 1960s.
This overrepresentation meant that the Havana style of rumba from that time period—the 1950s
and 1960s—predominated in New York and formed the point of reference for playing rumba for
decades to come. The trend represents one of the earliest and most important phonograph effects
in the newly-transnational rumba performance scene. In fact, the hegemony of the Havana styles
of playing both rumba and *batá* remain today, not only in New York, but everywhere outside
Cuba. The Matanzas style of *batá*, for example, has not been recorded very often, and
comparatively few drummers from Matanzas have emigrated. The Matanzas style of playing
*batá* differs from the styles in Havana\(^4\) in terms of some basic rhythms, conversations between
the drums, and other stylistic idiosyncrasies. One of the few bastions of Matanzas-style *batá*
outside Cuba is Los Angeles, due to the presence of Francisco Aguabella, who taught the style
there for decades.

\(^4\) According to what I have heard in conversations with *tamboleros*, within Havana there are also some different
approaches to playing *batá* in different sections of the city and surrounding suburbs (i.e. Pogoloti, Centro Habana,
Los Chinitos in San Miguel del Padrón). These are minimal compared to the greater difference between the Havana
and Matanzas styles, as is the case with other genres cultivated in the two cities, like rumba.
The primary difference between Havana and Matanzas styles in rumba is evident in the *tres dos*’s pattern; in Havana it is played with two open tones while in Matanzas only the first of these open tones is played. Further, in the 1950s New York recordings, the *tres dos* pattern is played on what would now be considered the wrong side of the clave (the front side). In effect, this makes the *tres dos*’s open tones coincide with the first two beats of the clave. Whether playing it like this was considered wrong or right in the 1950s is debatable. We must remember that the *tres dos* itself, and thus its pattern, were still fairly new in rumba (in Havana at least) which means that the placement of the pattern with the clave may not have been standardized yet. It is clear that different groups of drummers in Havana were playing the *tres dos* both ways: on the front and the back side of the clave. For example, in Chano Pozo and Carlos Vidal’s recordings of rumba in New York from 1947-49 in his *Ritmos afro-cubanos 1-8* series (SMC-Pro Arte), the *tres dos* is played on the front side of the clave, which again, by today’s standards would be considered *atravesado*, or “crossed” with the clave. However, Filiberto Sánchez’s recordings of rumba in Havana in 1948 and 1949 have the *tres dos* playing on the back side of the clave. Interestingly, Sánchez’s early recordings were not circulating in New York, and indeed I have never heard them mentioned by any *rumberos* anywhere, leading me to believe that they were never widely popular (and thus not highly influential).

![Figure 6. Tres dos pattern (open tones) played on the front side of the clave.](image)
Figure 7. *Tres dos* pattern (open tones) played on the back side of the clave.

On the other hand, in both Mongo Santamaría and Silvestre Mendez’s highly popular rumba recordings from New York in the 1950s, the *tres dos* is played on the front side of the clave. This makes sense, seeing as Mongo had known Chano and admired him and his accomplishments, so he may have been influenced by the style of rumba that Chano played (and recorded). Further, Mongo’s recordings featured percussionists from a fairly small group of Cuban drummers, including Mongo, Patato, and Willie Bobo (Díaz Ayala 2002). Even in the 1967 *Patato y Totico* album the *tres dos* was still played on the front side of the clave, and this is mostly true as well for Justi Barreto’s *Guaguancó ’69* album (1969), where the *tres dos* plays on the front side of the clave in all but one of the nine tracks.

In Cuba, however, the practice of playing the *tres dos* on the front side of the clave seems to have been largely abandoned by the 1960s and 1970s. Interestingly, on Alberto Zayas’s recordings in Cuba in 1955-56, the *tres dos* is played primarily on the front side, and yet in a few of the *yambú* tracks—not all of them—it is played on the back side of the clave. The standardization of placing it on the back side of the clave was likely a result of several factors, including the rumba recordings of professional-level Cuban groups like Guaguancó Matancero (Los Muñequisitos) and Los Papines—both of whom played the *tres dos* on the back side of the clave, even in their 1950s recordings—as well as the growing tendency to standardize Afro-Cuban folkloric music in state-sponsored folkloric troupes like the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional, established in 1962. Standardization was indeed a part of the folkloricization of these traditions, and state-sponsored ensembles like the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional were at the
center of such tendencies, as all the musicians and dancers needed a standardized reference\(^4^6\) (in terms of basic steps, rhythms, and song structures) for the plethora of Afro-Cuban genres they were performing in order that it appear uniform on stage (Hagedorn 2001).

In the formative years of the New York rumba scene however, the primary references for rumba were the recordings of Mongo, Silvestre, and by the late 1960s, Patato y Totico and Justi Barreto’s Guaguancó ‘69, all of which had the tres dos on the front side of the clave, except for a single track on Barreto’s album. This approach to the tres dos pattern thus became ingrained among the early generation of New York rumberos in the 1960s, and carried over into the following decades. In response to my question about this practice, Skip (personal communication), referring to his experience in the New York rumba scene prior to the 1980s, remarked “We didn’t know that it [the tres dos] was wrong; that [way of playing the pattern] was all we had [as a reference].” Of course, in retrospect, we cannot say that playing the tres dos this was considered wrong at the time, but by the time more Cuban rumberos arrived in New York following the 1980 Mariel boatlift, playing the tres dos on the front side of the clave was definitely seen as wrong (“crossed” or cruzado) by the Cubans, some of whom took up the task of correcting the New Yorkers (Jottar 2011b). Unlike the situation in the 1960s and prior, when the tres dos pattern had not yet been standardized, by the 1980s, there was obviously a clear standardization of the right and wrong way to play tres dos among rumberos in Cuba.

The practice of playing the tres dos on the front side of the clave also took root in Puerto Rico due to the influence of the New York rumba recordings and Puerto Rican musicians traveling between New York and the island, although a traditional rumba performance scene did

\(^{4^6}\) The Conjunto’s early (1960s) references for the singing, drumming, and dancing that they used, elements of which would be retained and standardized by the Conjunto Folklórico, were provided by the group’s founding musicians and dancers, who, as experienced culture bearers, served dual roles as performers and informants (Hagedorn 2001).
not really coalesce in the island until the 1980s, when drummers like Angel “Cachete” Maldonado, Anthony Carrillo, and Frankie Rodríguez began organizing rumba and batá practice and jam sessions (Luís Fernando “Totin” Agosto Baez 2015, interview). Puerto Rican rumba singer Luís Fernando Agosto Baez (better known as “Totin”), who frequented Cachete’s rumba practice sessions, professed that the “rumbas” that were played in barrios and street corners in Puerto Rico prior to the 1980s were really more like jam sessions featuring salsa percussion instruments (timbales, bongó, tumbadoras), as salsa was then the primary popular music of the urban working classes.

Puerto Rican drum maker and percussionist Iván Dávila (2015, interview) describes the early scene further, testifying that there were “bembés de timba” in Puerto Rico in some of the capital’s barrios in the 1960s, influenced by the practices of local bands like Cortijo y su Combo, who in the 1950s were already employing Cuban percussion instruments like tumbadoras and local adaptations of Cuban genres, such as guaracha and son. The bembés de timba described by Dávila were likely along the lines of what Totin described as salsa percussion jam sessions, and yet they may have been influenced by the recordings of Mongo from the 1950s, who frequently and freely used the word bembé in track descriptions involving drum rhythms in 6/8. It is also possible that the reference to bembé was simply a popular way of saying a party or jam session featuring (Cuban) percussion, as the word bembé was also commonly referenced by singers of popular music (son, guaracha, salsa) by the 1960s. The word timba, on the other hand, is used in Puerto Rico to refer to the tumbadora, not as an alternative word for rumba (as it is used among Cuban rumberos), and obviously not to the popular Cuban dance genre developed in the 1990s. According to Totín, the New York rumba recordings, like those of Mongo and Patato y Totico, were influential in Puerto Rico by the 1970s, so it is likely that some rumba rhythms were
integrated into such pre-1980s percussion jam sessions. Yet it was not until the 1980s that the practice of playing traditional rumba was more widely disseminated, thanks to the knowledgeable drummers returning from New York. In many ways, the Puerto Rican rumba scene came about as an offshoot of the New York scene, as New York was the major hub for both Puerto Rican immigration and the jazz and Latin popular music industry. I will delve further into the development of rumba in Puerto Rico later in this chapter; for now, let us return to the growing New York rumba scene of the 1960s and 70s.

**Standardizing the canto-montuno song format in rumba**

Other phonograph effects of these early New York recordings of rumba on the New York scene included the use of *quinto* solos, the dominance of a *canto-montuno* song format used by rumba groups in Cuba, and an overall drum-centric approach to playing rumba. First of all, it is important to recognize that neither *quinto* solos nor the modern *canto-montuno* song format\(^47\) are traditional elements of rumba as performed in the original context of the *solar* or house party. Rather, these are elements that have been popularized—and, in the case of the *canto-montuno* song format, standardized—on the one hand by the performances of rumba by organized, rehearsed groups, and on the other, by recordings of these groups. The *canto-montuno* format of a rumba “song,” or stand-alone performance piece, has been employed at least since the early 20\(^{th}\) century by performers of *son*, as can be heard in the 1920s recordings of María Teresa Vera

\(^{47}\) The modern *canto-montuno* song format in rumba refers to the tendency of *rumberos* to perform a “song” or coherent “piece” wherein the “song” comprises one song’s verse (i.e. the *canto* component) immediately followed by a *montuno* (call-and-response section). This is particularly evident in rumba recordings and performances by professional folkloric groups in Cuba, but is also now commonly practiced in some informal contexts in Cuba and especially by *rumberos* and amateur performers outside of the island.
and the Sexteto Habanero. The format could also be found—albeit in instrumental form—in *contradanzas* as far back as the mid-19th century (Manuel 2009a).

In addition, the *coros de clave* and *coros de rumba* of Havana and Matanzas may have also employed the *canto-montuno* format in their presentations of rumba. These *coros* were large, *barrio*-based choral groups that existed roughly from the late 19th to mid-20th centuries (Esquenazi Pérez 2007). As organized, rehearsed groups, in some cases directed by musicians like Ignacio Piñeiro, who was educated in the way of reading and writing music, the use of a standardized format would have been highly useful for group rehearsals and performances. Further, as inheritors of the European notion of a song as a “piece,” presenting a rumba song as a cohesive piece would have made sense to the local audiences that the *coros de rumba* performed for in public. While the use of a *canto* and a *montuno* section is basic to the performance of *guaguancó*—a genre originating in the late 19th century and said to have lent the *canto-montuno* format to the *son* upon its arrival in Havana at the beginning of the following century—in practice, *rumberos* did not usually approach rumba compositions as stand-alone pieces with a “start” and a “stop” at the end (Alain Fernández, personal communication).

The performances of Cuban *rumberos* in the original context of rumba (i.e. in a *solar* or private home) do not usually feature such clear-cut, stand-alone “songs” featuring the *canto-montuno* format. Rather, the development of a rumba in a *solar* tends to comprise a sort of collective improvisation that develops organically. Instead of a rumba “song” being sung as an independent piece with a *canto* that is followed immediately by a corresponding *montuno*, rumbas in a *solar*, for example, develop and evolve with in-the-moment individual contributions of a group of singers and drummers. It may be helpful to think of a rumba *de solar* being broken up into “sets,” each of which is comprised of a period of uninterrupted playing, and between
which musicians may take a break or switch instruments or roles. In fact, it can be compared to a tratado (a “set” of uninterrupted drumming and singing featuring a string of related songs) used tambores, which usually starts slow and then builds up energy. Similar strings of songs are also used in the music in güiro, palo, and other Afro-Cuban religious genres. Just as individual “songs” are not used in these contexts as stand-alone pieces, the same can be said of non-staged, improvised rumbas (i.e. in their original contexts): they tend to feature a string of several different cantos followed by a drawn-out montuno with several different choruses.

I had the opportunity to witness such a rumba at the house of the Chinitos family in the patio of their home in the barrio of La Corea in San Miguel del Padrón, in the outlying sections of Havana. At rumbas like this one, the event may be planned a few days in advance, and local rumberos are invited. In some cases, rumbas were done on certain days; for example, Los Chinitos used to host a big rumba every year on Mother’s Day, and many of the best rumberos from around Havana would show up (Irián López 2015, interview). Alcohol, particularly rum, is another important element. The rumba gains momentum over the course of the event as the musicians imbibe, loosen up, and get inspired to sing and play.

The beginning of a “set,” may start when someone begins to sing (a capella) or the percussion begins to play. The singer then continues with a diana and a canto (song)48. When the singer finishes, another singer comes in with a new song, often thematically or harmonically related to the previous song. For example, if the first singer sings a bolero about unrequited love

48 Songs sung in rumba are not always songs written to be sung as rumbas. While some pieces are indeed composed as a guaguancó, yambú, or columbia, rumba has also had a long history of incorporating songs from other genres, particularly from Cuban popular music. For example, boleros have long been sung by rumberos, often sung over the guaguancó rhythm at rumbas (Alain Fernández 2015b, interview). More recently, song lyrics from Cuban timba and reggaetón have been incorporated, or lyrics may be rapped over the drumming. This reflects the fact that rumba is ever-evolving and has always been influenced by the popular music of the moment, whether boleros and filin in the 1950s or timba and hip hop in the 1990s.
in a minor key, then the second song may serve as a sort of response to the first song’s theme and remain in the same minor key. Often, a pie forzado is inserted between the songs of each singer, which is a short, well-known, generic verse sung in chorus (collectively) that serve as a bridge between songs or song parts. Perhaps the most widely-known, classic pie forzado is, “Y con los brazos abiertos yo te espero; venid porque te quiero igual o más que ayer” (“I wait for you with open arms; come [to me], because I love just as much or more than yesterday”)⁴⁹. Alternatively, singers can trade décimas, with or without a pie forzado in between. This practice was often observed in the past by dueling coros de clave and coros de rumba (Esquenazi Pérez 2007). The trading of songs between singers in a rumba can go on for quite a while. In the Chinitos’ rumba I attended, this trading of songs would go on for a good 10 to 20 minutes, with perhaps four to six songs being traded before one of the singers would “turn” the rumba (i.e. virarlo) to the montuno by introducing the first chorus.

Of course, the trading of songs could go on longer; this depends on how many and which singers are present. What was clear at this rumba was that the singers enjoyed this (canto) section of the rumba, as they could each contribute songs as they were inspired. At least once or twice, one of the singers would start to introduce the montuno only to be immediately cut off by another singer introducing a new song, effectively stopping the turn to the montuno, the idea being that once you “turn it” to the montuno, it is going to stay there for a while. Of course, at some point, other musicians or dancers, especially the drummers, will signal their eagerness for a singer to begin the montuno, as this is where the rumba can reach its height in terms of the drumming, dancing, and collective energy. Once the montuno is introduced, it also usually lasts a

⁴⁹ The melody of this pie forzado is so well-known that it is often sung without the words, using “A la la” instead, and finishing with the words, “Te cantaremos.” It appears this way on many recordings, including “La china linda,” as recorded by Alberto Zayas’s Grupo Afro-Cubano and Los Muñequitos’s “La polémica.”
long time, while singers take turns improvising and introducing new choruses. The *montuno* may last another 10 or 20 minutes, or longer, depending on the momentum of the rumba. Finally, the “set” comes to an end, often when the singer that is improvising gets tired or senses that the energy is dying down and a break is needed. The singer often signals this with the well-known generic choral ending (borrowed from an old clave [lyrical song genre] sung by past *coros de clave*): “Aquí entre las flores.” With the conclusion of the set, the musicians may take a break, have a drink, and perhaps switch instruments or roles. Perhaps after a few minutes, the next set starts similarly, out of the inspiration of the musicians, and the cycle continues, with sets often progressing from short to long throughout the course of the rumba, which may last an entire afternoon and into the night.

Alain Fernández (2015, interview), Amado Dedeu (personal communication), Los Chinitos (Irián López 2015, interview), and other *rumberos* have testified to the fact that rumbas were originally performed like this (as exchanges of songs between singers) in casual gatherings in *solares* or houses. Yet they also noted that this practice is now less common due to the prevalence of staged rumbas performed by folkloric groups. My *padrino* in Añá, Alain Fernández, grew up a few doors down from Los Chinitos and used to show up to dance at the rumbas, beginning at an early age. Several times, he has reminded me about what he sees “real” rumba:

That is the real rumba. That’s how the elders sang: they took turns singing boleros, without turning it to the montuno, and only after a while of this would someone get inspired and would turn it [to the montuno], or sometimes someone would yell out “Turn it!” and then they would turn it to the montuno. And there wasn’t a ton of

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50 While unknown to many *rumberos* (especially younger generations who may be unfamiliar with the now virtually-defunct clave genre and the *coros de clave*), this famous phrase was originally drawn from a clave titled “La moralidad.” A rare video clip of a *coro de clave* performing the song is available on YouTube: https://youtu.be/i8pj4uGb9Q.
choruses in the montuno! With just a single chorus, they would jam out, and sometimes they would extend that single chorus for a half hour or more.)

This approach to playing rumba is rarely found outside of Cuba, and only with the recent rise of YouTube and online video sharing have video recordings of such events circulated widely, and even then, there are few such videos. Rumba performance outside of Cuba has been based on the performance models of professional-level rumba or folkloric groups, not only because they are the dominant public, international face of these genres, but because these are the groups that record. Even in the case of Mongo or Patato and Totico, the fact that these recorded performers were professional musicians likely meant that they naturally approached recordings as cohesive “pieces,” with a set time limit for each track.

Indeed, the restriction on time for each track exerted a powerful influence on music performance practices in the 20th century. Mark Katz (2010) has shown how this impacted jazz recordings, as solos and improvisation had to be cut short to accommodate the short recording times. The duration of the modern pop song itself is a result of the early time limits on tracks. Of course, tracks can now easily be made as long as the musicians like, but the duration also has to do with stylistic features of the particular genre and audience expectations, as many listeners may have a limited attention span after being used to standard three-minute pop songs. Returning to the discussion of the canto-montuno song format for rumba, the standardization of this song format in current performance practices can be seen as a result of the hegemony of the practices of professional-level rumba or folkloric groups in Cuba, the time limits on recording tracks, and the constant, sole use of this format in all commercial recordings of rumba.

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51 Conversation with Alain Fernández, July 20, 2017, Miami, FL.
**Quinto solos**

As previously mentioned, *quinto* solos are not generally common in rumba’s original context, and even in professional-level Afro-Cuban folkloric groups, the practice is not prevalent. Rather, the role of the *quinto* is to embellish—primarily in response to the singer during the *canto*—and then to heighten the energy of the *montuno* by interacting with and responding to the moves of the dancers and the variations of the other drums. It is my belief that the incorporation of *quinto* solos in rumba—commonly practiced by *rumberos* outside Cuba, including in the New York and Puerto Rican rumba scenes—was first popularized outside of Cuba through recordings of rumba, particularly those of artists like Mongo and Patato. Both musicians were heavily involved in jazz, where instrumental solos are a common feature, so it is quite likely they simply carried the practice over to rumba. The practice had also been used in Chano Pozo and Carlos Vidal’s recordings of rumba in the late 1940s, and although these were not widely popular, the practice may have influenced Mongo’s incorporation of *quinto* solos in his 1950s recordings of rumba.

In the New York and Puerto Rico rumba scenes of the 1960s and 1970s, *quinto* solos became ubiquitous in rumba. The practice of placing a *quinto* solo in a *montuno* was modelled on how it was done in recordings, and is still common today in performance, as can be observed in the Central Park rumba or in street rumbas in Ocean Park or Río Piedras in Puerto Rico. For example, a solo can be placed in the middle or end of a *montuno*, often signaled by the lead singer announcing it the same way Silvestre Mendez announced them in Mongo’s recordings: “¡*Quinto!*” Then the *quinto* would solo in a busy, virtuosic style in the manner of Mongo or Patato. Based on my experiences as a *rumbero*, if a singer tried to insert a *quinto* solo in a rumba *de solar* in Cuba or a gathering of experienced culture bearers in Miami, not only would it bring
down the energy of the rumba by creating a break in the montuno (which is ideally supposed to continually gain energy by the successive introduction of “hot” choruses [coros picantes]), it would signal that the improvising singer must have run out of things to say and thus turned over his or her role as improviser to the quinto.

In the New York context, however, it was Chano and then Mongo who elevated the tumbadora (conga) to the level of a virtuosic, soloing instrument in the jazz scene. Indeed, Chano Pozo is largely responsible for bringing this instrument into the international spotlight (Giro 2007). This virtuosic approach was carried into Mongo’s rumba recordings and then the New York and Puerto Rico rumba scenes. Further, the style of quinto playing itself, in terms of licks and themes, was often imitated from what they heard on recordings of Mongo and Patato, a style which by today’s standards would be seen as very “old school.” Someone aspiring to play quinto in New York in the 1960s would have definitely had to use recordings as study materials, not only because of the limited presence of qualified Cuban teachers, but because quinto, having an improvisatory role, must be learned primarily by repeated exposure to the music, hearing how and where to insert the licks. This brings us to the next phonograph effect, namely the drum-centric approach to playing rumba in the early New York and Puerto Rico rumba scenes.

A drum-centric approach to rumba

The drum-centric approach rumba goes hand-in-hand with Chano’s legacy as a virtuoso of the tumbadora, as well as the stylistic approach Mongo and Patato took on their recordings. Just as Chano and Mongo brought the tumbadora into the spotlight as a virtuosic instrument, the primacy of the drumming—as opposed to the singing—was conveyed both sonically and visually on Mongo’s recordings and album covers. At the time in the US, Europe, and among middle-
and upper-class white Cubans, the image of the *tumbadora* went hand-in-hand with associated stereotypical views of black culture as primitive, exotic, and sexual. Mongo’s and Silvestre’s recordings of the 1950s, as well as recordings of *batá* and *bembé*—like Santero and Candita Batista’s *Ritmo de santo*—all feature album covers that include words such as “Afro” or “roots,” along with visual signifiers of blackness, like the conga drum, black bodies dancing, and black hands drumming.

Further, and as previously mentioned, during the 1960s Civil Rights Era when the first generation of New York-born Puerto Ricans were becoming young adults, the *tumbadora* (known to them as a conga drum) understandably came to symbolize an Afro-Latin heritage. For young African Americans in New York at the time, it was an opportunity to connect with a black musical heritage. Since most amateurs learning rumba and taking part in New York street drumming were interested precisely in the drumming, the *tumbadora* became a focal point of the 1960s and 1970s New York rumba scene; there were far fewer people trying to learn the singing or dancing. Drums and other percussion instruments could be easily acquired in local instrument shops, and as salsa became popular in the late 1960s and 1970s, the *tumbadora* continued its rise in popularity, also becoming an important symbol of Latin music and identity. The *tumbadora* as a symbol of Latin or Puerto Rican identity is still relevant today; images of the drum can be found on necklaces worn by Nuyoricans or featured on bumper stickers in Puerto Rico. Several times, I have even seen the *tumbadoras* themselves painted with the colors and patterns of the Puerto Rican or Cuban flag.

Now, why was there less interest in and performance of rumba singing and dancing prior to the 1980s in the scenes outside Cuba? As far as the dance, a large part of the lack of interest or performance practice likely had to do with lack of exposure, including the lack of a visual
component in the recordings of the time. Since the audio recordings, rather than live performances, comprised the primary exposure to rumba as performed by culture bearers, the local performers were not very familiar with rumba dance and did not see it as an important component to performance (Kenneth “Skip” Burney 2015, interview). There also seem to have been comparatively fewer women involved in the local rumba scene in New York and Puerto Rico than there are now. The overall situation and attitude towards dance would change later with the arrival of the marielitos and Cuban dancers after 1980, as well as the proliferation of dance classes in the 1990s and 2000s, including those taught by Pupy Insua and La Mora in New York. In addition, the importance of dance in rumba seems to have been elevated as part of the folklorization (and folkloricization) of the tradition in Cuba beginning in the early 20th century on Cuban stages, first in the stylized rumba de salón of the teatro vernáculo and cabarets, and later by public performances of folkloric groups. In these contexts, dance has been given a more central role as an integral part of rumba. Nonetheless, based on my personal experiences as a rumbero, it seems that in rumba’s original contexts, dance was and continues to be a complement to the music, often occurring organically, but not necessarily integral for the success or enjoyment of the rumba.

As far as the singing goes, however, it definitely is a central component in rumba. Without singing, there is no rumba. Even if a group of drummers are playing rumba rhythms, without the singing it is simply an instrumental jam session. The New York rumba scene of the 1960s and 70s was not devoid of singing, but there was less emphasis on singing, which is evident in how López (1976) describes a “street drumming” scene in New York rather than a “rumba” scene per se, even though rumba was a major part of the scene. The emphasis on the drumming over singing was due to several factors. First, as previously mentioned, there were
few accomplished Cuban singers of rumba in New York (among these were Totico, Virgilio Martí, and Justi Barreto), but aside from this, there simply does not appear to have existed as much interest in the singing compared to the drumming. I believe this tendency is tied to the association of the drum with rumba, and with drumming as the principal activity. Both associations are reflected in the aforementioned representation of the tumbadora with Afro-derived culture and “roots.” Therefore, if the amateur musicians learning the music were interested in the idea of Afro “roots,” it was the drum and the drumming—not the singing in Spanish—that was most important. Finally, the fact that the singing was in Spanish—which, for most of the New York-born Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and others, came second to English as a language of choice (or on the other hand, was foreign to them)—meant that language could have represented an additional challenge to singing. This is particularly notable when one takes into account that the lead singer needs a different set of skills than drummers: they need to know where to place the song phrases with the clave—something that is challenging to learn without culture bearers as guides—and how to guide the rumba so that it gains momentum and energy.

Although percussion-based jam sessions featuring rumba rhythms were common in New York, singing was not absent. Based on the recordings they used as references, it was clear to these amateur musicians that singing comprised an important element in rumba. Some of the locals in the scene had previous musical experience, but many did not. Whether or not they had previous experience as musicians, there were many that started out as drummers but then had to learn to sing out of necessity, due to the lack of singers. We must remember that this New York rumba scene in the 1960s and 1970s was comprised primarily of local amateurs; most were fans of the music that wanted to learn how to play and learned this in bits and pieces over time. Some,
like Skip, already had experience as professional musicians, but most did not (Kenneth “Skip” Burney 2015, interview).

In New York, as in Cuba and elsewhere, the musicians that are learning—that is, at the amateur, non-professional level—for the most part were not playing rumba alongside the knowledgeable drummers and singers in the recordings like Patato, Mongo, and Justi Barreto. Some of the best and most talented—including Skip and Gene Golden—did reach an advanced level eventually, but for the most part, the local amateurs involved in the street drumming scene were on their own. Further, the “pros,” like Mongo and Patato, were not performing lots of live rumba shows; they were professional musicians primarily involved in the world of jazz and Latin popular music, which again is why local amateurs had to rely heavily on recordings in order to learn the repertoire. This is not to say that these “pros” never performed rumba live or interacted with local amateurs (some Cubans, including Patato, did play on occasion in Central Park), but such interactions were limited, and non-Cubans were not always fully accepted as equals or students (López 1976; Moreno Vega 2008). Moreover, it was not like in Cuba, where the environment of being in la mata meant that locals there could have lots of exposure to the live contexts and to a wide variety of experienced culture bearers.

**Mimicking recordings and practicing performance**

In New York, the learning process and the casual performance of rumba were intertwined; drummers who were friends got together in small groups of say, two, three, or four, and practiced in apartments, street corners, rooftops, or parks, aside from the larger gatherings such as the Central Park Sunday rumbas (López 1976). When they practiced, they could of course just play drumming patterns and try out new licks, but if they wanted to play rumba, there
would need to be singing. Someone in the group needed to be able to do some singing.

Concomitantly, the lead singer would need a chorus to respond to him (most drummers and singers in the scene were men), so by default the other drummers would need to at least learn to sing chorus. This sort of process—as far as practicing with a small group of friends and learning to sing while playing—is indeed an integral part of learning Afro-Cuban traditional music in both Cuba and abroad. I have experienced it firsthand and have encountered this dynamic in New York, Puerto Rico, Havana, and Miami. Such practice sessions are particularly common among younger players, like those in their teens and 20s, and is of utmost importance in developing their skills. These contexts provide opportunities to learn from one another and become a part of the social experience of these musicians.

I will provide two examples that exemplify this process. The first is from some of the drummers in the New York rumba scene of the 1970s and 80s, and the second is from my own experience. The New York example involves Skip and his closest group of musician friends, including Abraham “Abi” Rodríguez and Felix Sanabria, both of whom are New York-born Puerto Ricans. Skip (personal communication) told me how they used to get together to play rumba in Union Square. Abi, who had learned to sing rumba, was the designated singer, and Skip and Felix would play and sing chorus. This was likely in the 1980s, as they had already been involved in the rumba scene for some years, and yet this was but one example of many of casual performances and practices they would have, New York being an especially popular site for street performances.

When I was first learning about rumba in Gainesville, Florida (a college town with no local scene for Afro-Cuban traditional music), it was around 2001 and I was 18 years old. The two guys I used to practice with—Rafael Maya and Charley Rivas, both of whom were Puerto
Ricans raised in Florida—became my best friends, and still are. Indeed, this seems to be a common occurrence among groups of drummers in the scene who have learned and practiced together for years—they bond doing one of the things they love the most. Anyways, we would get together and practice at one of our houses several times a week for hours on end. At first, these reunions involved me showing them the basic parts or passing on new things that I had learned during trips I was taking to Havana. However, once we had the basics of the drumming down, we needed singing to accompany the parts. Although I had never sung before, I was perhaps most qualified to sing because of my previous and ongoing musical education in drumline, symphonic bands, jazz bands, and music theory classes I was taking as a music major at the University of Florida. My ability to read music and understand things like ostinatos and time signatures aided me in explaining to them how the rhythmic cycles of rumba worked. My approach to practicing—developed through my experience in drumline and taking drumset lessons—was also imparted to them, as they had had limited experience musical experience thus far.

To return to the necessity for singing in rumba, I started to teach myself how to sing some of the songs on the few recordings of rumba I had (which I had also shared with them by burning them CD copies). I had never really attempted singing before, but the fact that I was taking music theory classes made the process easier, as I knew about scales, major and minor tonalities, and had to be able to sight-sing for exams. Thus, I became the first person in the group to tackle the role of singing lead as we practiced rumba, and Rafael and Charley would sing chorus in the *montunos*. Together, we worked on things such as singing in tune and eventually added in the characteristic parallel third harmonies used in rumba choruses. At this point in our development as amateurs, most of what we did in practice was based on imitating what we heard in the rumba
albums we had. Charley eventually developed a talent for singing the *tercera* (the “third,” referring to the upper voice, sung in parallel thirds above the primary voice, or *voz prima*) in the chorus, while Rafael would sing the *prima* and I would do the *inspiraciones* (lead singer’s improvisations). The art of *inspirando* (performing the *inspiraciones*) is not an easy one, and it is ideally performed by experienced singers who have mastered the swing of rumba. I had only recordings to learn from at this point, so I modeled my *inspiraciones*, both lyrically, melodically, and stylistically, on the recordings I had at the time, including albums by Los Muñequitos, Los Papines, Tata Güines, Alberto Zayas, AfroCuba de Matanzas, Patato and Totico, and Carlos Embale. Eventually, a fourth friend joined us (Grego Palos, also Puerto Rican and raised in Florida) and we formed an amateur performance group. We would go out and play for fun on the UF campus or on weekend nights on sidewalks in the midtown or downtown area.

As we gained confidence singing, Charley and I eventually started attempting to sing rumba songs *a duo*, which is when the *canto* is performed as a duet (in parallel thirds), with one person singing the *voz prima* and the other doing the *tercera*. We frequently used Los Muñequitos’ recordings as our primary references—particularly those tracks featuring Esteban “Saldiguera” Lantrí and Hortensio “Virulilla” Alfonso—as the Muñequitos were leading exponents of singing rumbas *a duo*. One of the first songs we attempted and were able to figure out enough to perform, harmonically and melodically, was “Arturo,” recorded by AfroCuba de Matanzas, another leading Matanzas-based folkloric group. In our case, and in the case of many New Yorkers who have learned rumba, our Latino backgrounds allowed us to be able to connect more easily with, understand, and perform the Spanish lyrics, although at times we were not exactly sure what certain words were or what the song meant in context, particularly if it drew on ritual African-derived dialects. We just loved the music! For non-Spanish speakers, like Skip and
Gene Golden, who are African American, the process was more difficult (Kenneth “Skip” Burney, personal communication). Skip, for example, who has been in the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene for over 40 years, is able to sing several rumbas, although he does so in a sort of broken Spanish that is based more on imitating the sounds of the words rather than knowing what the words are or correctly pronouncing them.

**Shaping rumba song repertoires outside Cuba**

The imitation of rumba song lyrics was a key and common practice, and this brings us to the next major phonograph effects: the shaping of rumba song repertoires outside of Cuba and the approach to singing rumba. One of the main reasons recordings were so important in the development of the New York rumba scene was that they were the primary source of song repertoires. As previously explained, there were relatively few experienced Cuban rumberos prior to the 1980s in New York, and the Cuban drummers who were there had immigrated during the 1950s, primarily cultivating a style of playing rumba from that era. They were also not very active in teaching local drummers. Prior to the 1980s, most of the local street drumming gatherings in which rumba was performed were casual and dominated by non-Cubans who were learning themselves.

Musical knowledge pertaining to rumba was gained in bits and pieces and shared among groups of peers. And yet there was little guidance in New York when it came to singing rumba. To be sure, singing rumba and other Afro-Cuban traditional music involves knowing and understanding the many rules and conventions that should be followed in order to perform the genre properly. For example, a rumba singer must understand the *clave* and know how to rhythmically position song lyrics and phrases, choruses, and *inspiraciones* so that they are in line
with the *clave*. For example, if a singer introduces a chorus in the *montuno* on the wrong side of the *clave*, this may result in confusion and odd glances from experienced *rumberos*, who will often immediately call attention to the situation by making obvious gestures to switch the chorus to the correct side. This publicly acknowledges the singer’s mistake, upon which the singer may feel embarrassment (*i.e.* *pasar pena*) and make a mental note not to make that mistake again with that chorus. Indeed, such processes—the acknowledgement of a musical mistake in front of peers, and possibly elders—is common in Afro-Cuban traditional music and is a central part of the learning process. According to Alain Fernández (personal communication), this is a common experience in *tambores* in Cuba with younger *tamboleros* that are in the process of learning the drumming or singing, and it is one that I have experienced countless times. Yet a beginner that is learning rumba songs from audio recordings is not likely attuned to such subtleties (placing a chorus on a certain side of the *clave*) because they are not aware of the rules and conventions of the *clave*. If one imitates a rumba song without being aware of these rules, the focus will most likely be on the lyrics and melody. My friends and I, as well as many other *rumberos* learning rumba abroad, experienced this firsthand.

When Rafael, Charley, and I started learning the songs as beginners, we would write down or memorize the lyrics and figure out the melody—basically just imitating what the singers did on the recordings. This sort of approach might work just fine for many other genres, as long as you know where the downbeat is. But in rumba, one needs to have knowledge of how the rhythms of the song phrases fit into the *clave* matrix. We knew a few local drummers who had lived in New York during their youth and knew a little about rumba, but they had little experience with the singing. So, in effect, my friends and I were performing many parts of songs *cruzado* (crossed) with the *clave*—a major mistake—both in the *canto* and in *montunos*. The
importance of performing songs correctly with the clave was not brought to my attention until my second trip to Cuba in 2003, when I was learning some rumba songs with my percussion teacher Raúl “Lali” González Brito in Havana. As a past founding member of Clave y Guaguancó, Lali taught me how to approach songs in rumba using a method that the professional folkloric groups in Cuba use. One of the first, most important steps is to learn how the song fits with the clave. In group rehearsals, they first rehearse the song a capella (working out harmonies) and then add the clave, which insures that singers are all on the same page as to the placement of the clave in all song phrases and choruses. This is particularly important in any parts of the song where there are two or more people singing, as they must begin and end phrases together at precise points in the clave.

Upon returning from Cuba, I was able to teach my friends this approach to singing and learning songs, which we incorporated into our group practices. Using Lali’s technique, I would write down the song lyrics and mark with my pencil where each phrase began with the clave, using recordings as references. At the beginning of each phrase, I would indicate what beat of the clave it started with. A “1” indicated the first note of the clave, a “2” indicated the second note, and so on up to “5,” the final note of the clave. So, for example, the first word of the phrase might start squarely on the “5” (5th note), or it might start right after the “2,” and so forth. Over time and with experience accrued over the following years as amateur performers in Florida and Puerto Rico, we were able to understand the way the clave fits with the swing of a song, melody, or percussion rhythm in rumba without recurring to a recorded reference or written notes.

52 Caridad Paisán (personal communication), a past singer with Clave y Guaguancó, once told me that when the group was learning a new song, Amado Dedeu, the director, would have the piano at hand to work out the correct harmonies and melodies with singers, a capella.
Similarly, an experienced rumbero can simply feel where the clave fits in a given song based on its rhythmic swing.

Another phonograph effect is the use of standardized inspiraciones (the lead singer’s phrases that alternate with the chorus in the montuno) particularly in scenes outside Cuba, due to their imitation. Of course, inspiraciones are commonly defined by rumberos and in literature as “improvised” lines. While at times they are indeed improvised (composed spontaneously in the moment), in practice, they are usually comprised of variations on the lyrics of the chorus or of stock (standardized) phrases, such as “El yambú no se vacuna,” or “La rumba me llama.” Following Turino’s (2009) distinction between true improvisation and the use of recurring formulas and variations, this process might be better described as formulaic performance (Frías 2015b). Recordings may have contributed to the standardization of some stock phrases in rumba to some extent in Cuba, but since those abroad rely much more on recordings as source materials, this standardization has occurred more extensively abroad. For example, my friends and I, when we were new to rumba singing, would often use the same inspiraciones as those in recordings for certain songs. This was not to say they were copied exactly in the same order, word for word, but since singers in recordings often use a handful of inspiraciones for a given chorus on a track, which they vary by mixing up their order and by making slight changes in their melodic execution or lyrics when they recur, we would do the same thing.

This process was—and in many ways continues to be—the same in other local rumba scenes outside the island. In New York, Puerto Rico, and elsewhere, I have observed numerous times—in singers of various generations—the use of inspiraciones in a particular chorus that
match the inspiraciones of a recording of the same chorus. In this way, many phrases used as inspiraciones in a recording of a certain song have become standardized to a certain extent. For example, in the recording of “El yambú de los barrios” on Alberto Zayas’s album of the same name, the singer’s first inspiración is “Yambú, yambú que me muero.” This has since become a standard inspiración for the chorus, which is “A é, lindo yambú,” which also became a widely popular chorus in Cuba and abroad.

The popularization of this chorus (and its standard inspiración) are no doubt due in large part to the popularization and wide dissemination enjoyed by the album, especially in terms of its popularity outside Cuba, not to mention the use of this chorus in some recordings of Cuban popular music. The song (attributed alternatively to Mercedes Romay or Ignacio Piñeiro in various recordings) can now be considered a classic yambú and is featured on Rumberos de Cuba’s DVD Rumbón tropical (2003), filmed in Havana. In fact, the lead singer performing the song on the DVD, Ernesto “El Gato” Gatell, uses “Yambú, yambú que me muero” as his first inspiración in the montuno, testifying to its standardization. Of course, many rumba choruses have at least one standardized inspiración, and it may indeed be that the composer wrote or intended that particular inspiración to be paired with the chorus. It may also be that a certain inspiración has been used repeatedly and over a long period of time in local performances. Regardless, recordings—particularly the most popular and widely disseminated ones—have played a hugely influential role in the process of this standardization precisely because they provide stable, unchanging references that singers can recur to repeatedly for reference.

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53 This practice extends to other related music traditions as well, as in salsa or timba singers like Isaac Delgado or Pedro Calvo (former lead singer of Los Van Van) who incorporate certain catchy or signature inspiraciones (i.e. soneos) from recordings into the live performances of the same songs.
In addition to standardized *inspiraciones*, many songs have become rumba “standards” at the transnational level in large part because they have been featured on prominent or influential recordings (such as Alberto Zayas’s *El yambú de los barrios*), or because they have been recorded several times. Of course, this may also be a reflection of the song’s popularity in local performance in, say, Matanzas or Havana, and yet even in Cuba, rumba recordings listened to by *rumberos* there help to popularize and standardize those songs.\(^{54}\) This is the case for many of the old “classic” recordings of Guaguancó Matancero (Los Muñequitos de Matanzas). For example, many of the group’s original songs, a large part of which were written by Florencio Calle, were popularized in the rumba scene in Cuba as a whole due to their dissemination on records. Even in the 2000s some of these same songs were still being sung by respected elder singers of rumba in Havana like Juan de Dios Ramos and Guillermo “El Negro” Triana. There is a YouTube video of them as a singing “Tierra de Hatuey,” a Muñequitos classic written by Florencio Calle, the original director of the group. They perform the song *a duo*, as it was recorded, with slight variations in the voices reflective of their personal style and taste. I have also heard the two perform “La viola de Homero,” another old Muñequitos song also written by Calle.

**The elevated influence of recorded musicians**

For both the musicians and composers of the songs, their artistic efforts are captured and elevated to a transnational plane via recordings, meaning that the elements that make their style

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\(^{54}\) On several occasions, I have heard Daniel Gil González and Caridad Paisán (both ex-members of Clave y Guaguancó) reference their frequent habits of listening to rumba recordings in Cuba and using these to assist in learning songs. Similarly, prior to emigrating from the island, Alain Fernández (2015a, interview) also frequently listened to recordings of singer Lázaro Galarraga to help learn and memorize songs used in the *tambor* repertoire. Although Cubans on the island have generally had less access to the breadth and variety of recordings available to consumers outside Cuba, they prized the recordings that they had and frequently shared and copied these among fellow musicians and fans (Alain Fernández 2015, interview).
unique can be spread more widely and thus exert greater influence on other musicians. For example, the drummer who played *quinto* for Los Muñequisitos de Matanzas for many years—Jesús Alfonso Miró, who also directed the group and composed many of their most popular songs in their 1990s recordings—was featured on their recordings for decades prior to the 2000s, when his son Freddy took his place (Martínez 2009). His approach to playing *quinto*, which included the use of recurring, signature phrases, became a model for many players abroad, as it provided a template which could be used as a starting point. In fact, it is referenced in some transcriptions and educational books\(^5\) for rumba percussion as a model for learning *quinto*.

Alfonso’s approach to *quinto* was particularly useful for those with little knowledge of how to approach *quinto*, as the drum’s role is often described to new students simply as “improvising.” In practice, however, the *quinto* must “improvise” within various strictures, for example knowing how and when to “speak” and when to give space to the singer. In the aforementioned instructional books, the *quinto* “parts” are presented to students in the manner of recurring patterns and formulas that Alfonso used repeatedly in his performance style, something which again reflects the prevalence of formulaic performance in rumba (as opposed to constant, true improvisation). Of course, if Los Muñequisitos had not released so many albums featuring Alfonso, his style would likely have not exerted such an influence, particularly at the transnational level.

Another similar example of a stylistic element of rumba performance encompassed in recordings and that has exerted influence at the transnational level is the practice of singing of rumba songs as a duet (*a duo*), which gained greater popularity due to Esteban “Saldiguera” Lantrí and Hortensio “Virulilla” Alfonso. As is evident on the majority of early rumba

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\(^5\) Examples include Cliff Brooks’s *Rumba: Afro-Cuban conga drum improvisation* (2001) and Robert Fernandez’s *The Afro-Cuban folkloric musical traditions* (2007), among others.
recordings available abroad prior to the 1990s, including those of Mongo, Patato, Totico, Virgilio Martí, Justi Barreto, and Alberto Zayas, all of which featured Havana-style rumba, the songs were recorded by a single lead singer rather than a duo. Alternatively, in the coros de rumba and coros de clave, some of which were still active in the first half of the 20th century, rumba songs were sung by the entire chorus in harmony.

Saldiguera and Virulilla were the first to use the duet format as a standard way to sing rumba on recordings. They drew on their personal backgrounds, which included singing boleros together as a duet for fun and the influence of Saldiguera’s father, who was a Spaniard and would sing around the house when Saldiguera was a child. Their particular style would become associated not only with singing duets, but with the Matanzas style of singing in general, something which I have experienced firsthand as a performer. For example, one time when I was singing in a rumba in Puerto Rico, one of the other rumberos remarked that my singing style (referring to my timbre and legato style of melodic delivery) sounded very matancero (i.e. stylistically from Matanzas). While I had not necessarily labeled or associated my singing style with Matanzas prior to that, the rumbero’s comment made perfect sense: Saldiguera and Virulilla are my two favorite singers, and my friend Charley and I had long admired their style and based our own approach to singing a duo on their recordings with Los Muñequisitos, the most recorded and emblematic rumba group from Matanzas.

In the amateur rumba group my friends and I had—at first called RumbaCaribe and later Rumbakuá—we were also greatly influenced by the arrangements of rumba recordings. At first, when we were starting out, we often imitated the arrangements as they were recorded, including breaks (efectos), introductions, and changes in rhythms during sections of a song. Of course, as

we gained experience, we began inserting our own percussion breaks and learned to craft new, original arrangements to songs we had originally learned from recordings. Even then, certain aspects of arrangements on recordings remained highly influential in our style as a group, and the same can be said for other rumberos abroad.

The dissemination and standardization abroad of aspects relating to arrangements (as found on recordings) is therefore another phonograph effect. Among the tendencies used by Cuban rumba groups in their arrangements for recordings include the propensity to start or end a rumba track with a percussion break (called an efecto, or “effect” in Cuba) or to use a break to mark the transition to the montuno. Although percussion breaks like this became more common during the 1990s as arrangements for performances and recordings by professional folkloric groups in Cuba became more prominent and complex, some of the earliest use of breaks can be found on recordings by Los Papines, including their popular and highly influential 1950s recording Guaguancó (under the name Papín y sus Rumberos). Their incorporation of breaks was perhaps related to their flashy performance style stemming from their experience as cabaret entertainers. By the 1990s, most recordings of Cuban rumba groups featured breaks, perhaps one of the most influential of which was a drum break that Los Muñequisitos used frequently to end their songs. During the 2000s, I frequently encountered this exact break being used by many rumberos in Miami, New York, and San Juan (including by my own group). The fact that so many drummers knew and recognized this break testified to the influence of Los Muñequisitos’ recordings.

Another element used in arrangements of early recordings and imitated abroad has been the use of choral responses, sometimes in the form of breaks or bridges, in which the chorus sings a diana-like melodic phrase to mark the beginning of a song or as a bridge between
sections, often between the end of the *canto* and the beginning of the montuno. An example of such a chorus break that became popular in rumba scenes outside Cuba thanks to recordings is “A naa, a na, a na, a na [and so on] . . . te cantaremos,” heard on the song “La china linda” on Alberto Zayas’s 1950s recording *El yambú de los barrios*. In Cuba, this choral break is often used as a bridge between the songs of different singers (in non-staged rumba contexts), sometimes sung with the lyrics “Y con los brazos abiertos yo te espero, feliz porque te quiero igual o más que ayer.” Alternatively, it can be used as an introduction to a song, which is how it was used in the early Alberto Zayas recording, which is how I have often encountered it being used among *rumberos* in Miami, New York, and San Juan.

Another standard choral response is the one that follows a specific call by the lead singer, as in “E le vi le ve le ve le ve la…” to which the chorus responds “A, a, aa…” In the case of some of these chorus breaks, they may have been frequently used among *rumberos* in Cuba as standard responses to the lead singer, as with the example “Y con los brazos abiertos…” or in *columbia* when the chorus responds with an “Aaa” (on the tonic) following the lead singer’s opening *llorao* (literally “cried,” referring to the *diana*-like vocal introductions used in *columbia*). However, the fact that such vocal responses were recorded—particularly in early, influential recordings like that of Alberto Zayas—allowed for their transmission to those learning rumba abroad in places like New York and Puerto Rico by the 1960s and 1970s. Further, recordings of specific vocal breaks no doubt facilitated their increased use and standardization abroad and in Cuba.
Conclusion

The way my friends and I learned to sing rumba by imitating recordings was by no means an isolated incident. Indeed, in New York, prior to the new arrival of Cuban *rumberos* like Puntilla in the early 1980s, and in Puerto Rico prior to the 90s, the approach to singing rumba was very similar. Those who wanted to learn a song would memorize the lyrics and the melody from a recording, and then perform the song to the accompaniment of rumba percussion in Central Park or other informal rumba gatherings. Like us, they did not know that the songs and choruses needed to be placed properly with the clave rhythm, so they were often *cruzado* (Luis Fernando “Totin” Agoso Báez 2016, interview). Further, as I have observed extensively among *rumberos* abroad, the use of standardized *inspiraciones*, the common use of songs and percussion breaks drawn from recordings, and the incorporation of *quinto* solos and chorus breaks all serve as examples of phonograph effects in the transnational rumba scene.

Looking at many of these phonograph effects together, it is in some ways difficult to draw a line between which musical aspects are truly effects of recordings as opposed to which are simply inherent qualities of rumba that are imitated and thus transmitted abroad. In terms of the birth and growth of rumba scenes outside Cuba, the phonograph effects are clearer, as many effects have manifested as practices that are either seen as incorrect by culture bearers (such as singing or playing on the wrong side of the *clave*) or different from those found in Cuba (such as the greater reliance on drawing song repertoires from recordings). And of course, aside from the presence of immigrant culture bearers, recordings have played a central role in disseminating and popularizing Afro-Cuban traditional music outside of Cuba and its performance, turning the Cuban scene into a transnational one. Even in Cuba, the dissemination of rumba recordings has exerted an impact on song repertoires, stylistic approaches, and the evolution of arrangements,
which have become increasingly complex. Further, the making of rumba albums in Cuba has also been connected in some ways to rumba performance, as both reflect levels of public interest, government support, and economic impetus. For example, there was a general decline in both the production of rumba recordings and the public performance of rumba in Cuba in the 1970s and early 1980s. This was related to low levels of government support and a lack of economic impetus, which in terms of recorded music in Cuba has long been heavily influenced by foreign consumption.

The lack of recordings in the 1970s and 1980s was followed by a sharp spike in recordings and re-releases in the 1990s as Cuba opened to foreign tourism and Cuban recordings became more accessible to the West once more. I will delve into this issue in later chapters, but for now it is relevant to point out the integral role of recordings in the general evolution of rumba since the mid-20th century. The reason it can be difficult to draw the line between true phonograph effects and those practices that are inherent to rumba performance in Cuba is that while recordings have exerted a heavy influence on rumba practices, they also reflect these practices and pass them on through transnational circuits of dissemination. This process creates a sort of a cycle or feedback loop where the music produced by musicians on recordings influences other musicians—locally and abroad—who may in turn influence others and pass along certain practices through live performances and recordings. In addition, recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music act as its texts; they transcend distance and even generations. It is therefore possible for rumberos in Puerto Rico in 2017 to be influenced by the Muñequitos’ recordings of the 1990s, just as New Yorkers in the 1970s were heavily influenced by Los Papines’ and Alberto Zayas’s recordings of the 1950s. Since recordings of rumba have been a prominent part of the transnational scene for over a half century now, we can argue that the presence of these
recordings and the feedback loop they create is itself an integral part of the story of rumba since the mid-20th century. Recordings have, and continue to be, an important aspect of the evolution and circulation of rumba and other Afro-Cuban traditional music, to the extent that the rumba scene would not be the same today had it been recorded less often or had the dissemination of recordings been less extensive.
CHAPTER TWO
THE 1980s AND 90s IN NEW YORK & PUERTO RICO

In New York, when new Cuban rumberos showed up to the scene in the early 1980s following the Mariel boatlift, some took on the task of correcting some tendencies brought on by the reliance on recordings. One of the most important and influential rumberos in this regard was Manuel Olivera Martínez, better known as “El Llanero” (Jottar 2011b). When he and other Cuban rumberos showed up to the Central Park rumba, which was dominated by Puerto Ricans at the time, they found that the New York *rumberos* were playing a sort of jam session style of rumba that had some elements either missing or played incorrectly, namely the song placement with the clave and, in some cases, the *tres dos* being played on the wrong side. El Llanero was a key figure in New York, not only because he was an experienced rumbero direct from *la mata*, but because unlike some of the Cuban drummers that preceded him, like Mongo and Patato, he was directly and consistently involved at the local, “street” level in New York—especially in the Central Park rumba. He was a *rumbero* first and foremost—not a performer of popular music who also happened to play rumba. Further, he was willing and able to share his knowledge and repertoire with the locals, contributing to and enriching the scene. One of his most notable contributions to the local scene was teaching many New York *rumberos* how to sing correctly (i.e. rhythmically in-sync with) the clave and bringing awareness to the importance of this practice.

Now granted, the tendency of singing incorrectly with the *clave* may have lessened slightly in New York by the early 1980s; according to Skip, a few of the most advanced local musicians had corrected this, due to the arrival and influence of the first rumba recordings from Cuba in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Skip, for example, got hold of some of these recordings
in the early 1970s in New York, and they completely changed his conception of rumba. According to him, this was “the real shit,” the authentic sound, and it contrasted sharply with the recorded references they had had up until then, most notably the recordings of Mongo and the *Patato y Totico* album (Kenneth “Skip” Burney 2015, interview).

**Breaking the ‘dry spell’: The marielitos and balseros in New York**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the New York rumba recordings of the 1950s and 1960s often had the *tres dos* on the front side of the *clave* and included influences from popular music and jazz. Yet the Cuban recordings arriving in New York in the late 1960s and early 1970s represented the first recorded references of actual *rumba groups* (usually referred to as *grupos folklóricos* in Cuba) comprised of highly experienced, specialized *rumberos* that rehearsed and performed together. These recordings included *El yambú de los barrios* by Alberto Zayas and his Grupo Folklórico and the double-sided LP *Guaguancó*, which featured Papín y sus Rumberos on one side and Grupo Guaguancó Matancero on the other. Both recordings were originally recorded in the late 1950s but re-released as LPs in the 1960s (Díaz-Ayala 2002). While the Alberto Zayas LP had the *tres dos* played on the front side of the clave in most of the tracks, the Guaguancó Matancero recording did not. The latter thus provided those learning rumba in New York an alternative—indeed, what by the 1980s in New York (and earlier in Cuba) became standardized as the “proper”—way to play the *tres dos*. More importantly, the quality of the singing, the arrangements, and the entire performance were much better than the New York

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1 The New York recordings from the 1960s through 1970s (i.e. Mongo, Silvestre Méndez, *Patato y Totico*, Virgilio Martí, Justi Barreto) featured musicians who collaborated often, yet they did not comprise a rumba group per se, as many of them worked primarily in the realm of popular music, particularly Latin jazz. The idea of a “rumba group” or “Afro-Cuban folkloric group” was still a new concept in 1950s Cuba. For example, Los Muñequitos (Guaguancó Matancero) was among the first of these groups, formed in 1952, during or right after Mongo, Patato, and other Cuban *rumberos* of this early New York wave left to the US (Duran 1990).
rumba recordings, as the Cuban recordings featured rehearsed, experienced groups. The Cuban rumba groups’ recordings were also more traditional, as they did not draw on popular music or jazz influences to the extent that the New York recordings did. Finally, the Cuban rumba recordings were almost all rumba—*yambú, columbia*, and *guaguancó*, with only one (non-rumba) *abakuá* track by Guaguancó Matancero—while a good amount of the tracks on the Mongo LPs featured *afro* and *bembé* rhythms with original lyrics sung over them.

For these reasons, Skip and others in New York saw the Cuban rumba recordings as contrasting greatly with the New York recordings they had previously been limited to. The fact that the recordings came from Cuba also granted them a certain amount of authenticity and exclusivity, as Cuba was by then largely closed off to Americans due to the embargo. In addition, the Cuban recordings were *new* to those in New York, and since there were only a handful of rumba recording available at the time, any new recordings were highly prized. Because of this high appraisal and the hunger to listen and learn more, these Cuban recordings spread quickly among those in the New York rumba scene at the time. When someone acquired a new album, it was shared among friends and often copied onto cassettes (Kenneth “Skip” Burney, personal communication). By the late 1970s, some of the local drummers and singers had even established rumba groups, including the Rumberos All Stars, which rehearsed in Central Park and drew many of the ideas for their arrangements and drum breaks from the recording of Papín y sus Rumberos mentioned earlier. The group included many of the most talented local drummers and singers that would become leading *rumberos* and *tamboleros* in the New York scene over the following decades: Skip, Félix Sanabria, Abraham “Abi” Rodríguez, Eddie Bobé, Alberto Serrano, Morty and Mark Sanders, Paula Ballán, and Jesús “Tito” Sandoval (Jottar 2011b).
These musicians embraced the arrival of the Cuban *rumberos* following Mariel; the former knew that although they had grasped some basics, there was much to be learned from the Cubans. In particular, many of them became disciples of Orlando “Puntilla” Rios and Alfredo Coyudde, who began teaching *batá* and established the *tambor* scene. On the other hand, the New Yorkers also learned a lot from El Llanero, who was a major source of knowledge for rumba, particularly singing. Abraham “Abi” Rodríguez (personal communication), for example, who became an accomplished singer of rumba and now lives in Miami, learned a great deal about singing rumba from El Llanero, as he was one of the few knowledgeable rumba singers in the city (who happened to also be open to instructing the locals).

The arrival of the *marielitos* also enriched the New York scene by injecting it with other closely related Afro-Cuban cultural and musical influences found in Cuba’s environment of *la mata*. Many of the *marielitos*, including prominent musicians like El Llanero and Puntilla, as well as less accomplished amateurs and fans who attended the Central Park rumba, were involved in Afro-Cuban religions and societies. Among them were *santeros*, *abakuás*, and *paleros*. While some of the earlier Cuban drummers in New York—Chano Pozo, Mongo Santamaria, and Patato—were also involved in these aspects of Afro-Cuban culture, they were first and foremost professional performers of jazz and popular music. They were also few in number and not as highly involved at the street level with the locals. Mariel, on the other hand, brought with it a large wave of Afro-Cubans with urban working class backgrounds, including highly experienced performers of Afro-Cuban folkloric traditions that were able and willing to teach these to the locals. They were highly involved at the street level with the Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and Jewish Americans in events like the Central Park rumba. In their ranks were elders—such as El Llanero and Puntilla—that the New Yorkers could look to for guidance,
a sharp contrast with earlier years when recordings were primary learning materials (Jottar 2011b).

The increased presence of the other Afro-Cuban musical and religious elements—from Santería, Abakuá, and Palo—enriched the local rumba practices and expanded the performance practices of the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene in New York over the course of the 80s and 90s. In a way, this brought the New York scene a little closer to the environment of la mata where all these traditions had long co-existed and co-evolved. As I will explain later, such a confluence of Cuban rumberos, tamboleros, and religious practitioners was not seen in other local scenes, like Puerto Rico, which is one reason that rumba sounds quite different there and why the performance of Afro-Cuban religious genres (güiro, tambor, cajón espiritual, Palo) is less common there.

As Jottar (2011b) has pointed out, the marielitos also helped insert the element of dance into rumba, as well as the concept of the “complete,” or well-rounded rumbero (rumbero completo). El Llanero was a proponent of the latter, teaching the New Yorkers the importance of being able to not only to play the drums (which had been the focus prior to Mariel), but also sing and dance. This is a concept that is still upheld in Cuba as the ideal for a rumbero, and in some cases one’s admittance to a professional folkloric ensemble in Cuba depends on their ability to demonstrate competence in several genres of Afro-Cuban traditional music (Daniel González Gil, personal communication). Enrique “Kiki” Chavalonga was another marielito who became active in the Central Park rumba and helped introduce the element of dance into local rumba practices (Jottar 2011b). The lack of a dance component was indeed another side effect of the reliance on audio recordings for so long; of course, there was also a lack of Cuban dancers in New York prior to Mariel, so there were none to watch or learn from.
This intense period of locals learning and re-learning the intricacies of rumba with the marielitos resulted in the formation of three high quality rumba groups in New York in the 1980s. Rumba groups were not common prior to Mariel due to limited access to knowledge and a lack of a connection with the living, evolving rumba traditions in Havana and Matanzas (i.e. in la mata). The marielitos helped bridge this connection by bringing fresh, updated musical and religious elements from la mata to New York, as well as experience, knowledge, and a willingness to engage with and teach the New Yorkers. Further, El Llanero was a highly qualified and experienced lead singer, which is a key element of a successful rumba group.

Two of these rumba groups—Chévere Macun Chévere (1980) and Los Afortunados (1985)—featured El Llanero, Paula Ballán, Félix Sanabria, Abraham “Abi” Rodríguez, Juan “Bamboo” Vega, Roberto Borrel, Juan “Curba” Dreke, and Enrique Dreke (Jottar 2011b). Another group—Nueva Generación—was headed by Puntilla. These groups, particularly Los Afortunados, helped improve the quality of the local rumba scene thanks to their organization and leadership. Apart from high quality musicians, they presented rumba in the manner of professional folkloric groups in Cuba: as a rehearsed, polished presentation for the stage. They had dancers, experienced drummers, qualified singers that could perform songs a duo, and a seasoned lead singer (El Llanero) who was adept at dianas and inspiraciones and knew how to build the energy of the montuno section through the use of appropriately-selected choruses.

Further, Los Afortunados and the other rumba groups performed all around the city and helped increase the presence of Afro-Cuban traditional music and spread knowledge about the traditions. They performed and offered workshops at festivals, museums, clubs, and public schools, primarily in New York City but also in Philadelphia, Long Island, and elsewhere (AfroCubaWeb 1997).
The mid-1990s saw another wave of Cuban immigrants come to New York, beginning with the *balseros* who arrived during the mass exodus of rafters from Cuba in 1994. Among the most notable were David Oquendo, Pedro Martínez, and Román Díaz, who made New York their home after staying in the US while on tour with Cuban music groups. They since been active in New York and New Jersey as professional musicians and teachers (Jottar 2011b). Indeed, the 1990s saw a revival of Afro-Cuban musical activities in Cuba in large part due to Cuba’s opening to foreign tourism. Most of these tourists were Westerners and, as has been the case historically, they showed interest in Afro-Cuban culture.

Exhibiting such economic potential, Afro-Cuban folkloric groups benefitted from increased state support and were allowed to tour in the US thanks to changes to aspects of the embargo under the Clinton administration regarding cultural exchanges. This policy contrasted with the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, when tours by Afro-Cuban folkloric groups were very rare. During this time, especially the 1960s and 1970s, there was very little direct contact with Cuba for New Yorkers other than the trickle of recordings from the island in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This lack of contact was one reason New Yorkers and Puerto Ricans were so reliant on recordings for learning. Mariel broke this dry spell, and the reliance on recordings as primary learning materials lessened in New York, particularly for those talented local musicians who El Llanero and Puntilla took on as disciples and collaborators. This group of musicians, which included Skip, Abi, Gene Golden, Felix Sanabria in its ranks, became seasoned and respected in their own right, due to their experiences performing and learning with the Cuban musicians, particularly Puntilla.
Puntilla, Coyudde, and the evolution of batá performance in New York in the 1980s and 1990s

Puntilla was especially influential in the realm of batá. Batá was not played extensively in New York prior to Mariel because there was a lack of Cuban drummers there that knew the repertoire thoroughly and could teach it (Cornelius 1991). Learning and performing the batá repertoire fully and thoroughly also requires a willingness to make a religious commitment to Añá (i.e. to get sworn in, or jurado, or at the very least to get one’s “hands washed” to be able to play tambores de fundamento), which not all drummers are prepared to do. The religious nature of batá drumming is still an ongoing issue, in large part due to the prevalence of Christianity and the colonial legacy of characterizing African-derived religious beliefs as superstitious and barbaric.

The tambor repertoire (in which batá drumming figures) is much more difficult to learn than rumba, as it comprises hundreds of rhythms (and songs) that must be memorized and performed according to strict rules and conventions. The rhythms are in many cases more complex and polyrhythmic than those in rumba and contain specific conversations and variations. Because of this rhythmic complexity and the fact that they are all played on drumheads, which provide less of a rhythmic contrast to each other than the rumba percussion battery (which also includes the catá [sticks’ part] and clave), it is more difficult to discern what each drum is playing in an audio recording. Discerning each of their rhythms would have been particularly difficult in older recordings where the definition of the drum sounds is of far lesser quality than in more recent recordings. Granted, once one is familiar with the repertoire, rules, and conventions of each drum’s parts, it is easier to comprehend the recorded rhythms. Yet for someone trying to learn the drum rhythms solely from an audio recording, it can be quite difficult to discern what each drum part is, especially the rhythms played on the chachá (smaller
drumhead) of each drum, which is played as a slap (with little tonal difference between the three chachás).

As with rumba, there were a few recordings that figured as primary learning materials for the New York drummers attempting to learn batá prior to Mariel. These included Ritmo de santo (1961) by Carmen Batista y sus Tambores Batá, which was recorded in Cuba. Another important LP was Santero (1957), which was also recorded in Cuba and features multiple singers: Celia Cruz, Merceditas Valdés, Caridad Suárez, and Mercedes Romay. Although they were recorded in Cuba, these LPs were also made available in the US, as the record labels they were recorded with were re-established in the US after the Revolution: Maype and Panart, respectively. The other important reference for batá was the LP Afro: Ritmos afrocubanos con los auténticos tambores batá de Giraldo Rodríguez, recorded with the Mexican label Orfeon and released in 1970. Like the other records, it contained some songs and rhythms from the oru cantado (separated as tracks according to orisha), as well as a (non-religious) afro lament sung over a batá rhythm (Kenneth “Skip” Burney 2015, interview).

Yet even taken together, these songs and rhythms represent only a fraction of the immense tambor repertoire, which has still to have been recorded in its entirety. Some drummers in New York also had access to some transcriptions in the works of Fernando Ortiz, and yet these were few, somewhat hard to decipher, and not very precise in terms of reflecting actual performance practices. Not only is batá quite difficult in many cases to transcribe accurately, but this would have been even more difficult for someone like Ortiz who was a white, middle class non-santero who was not a tambolero, and was thus trying to interpret the rhythms as an—albeit ethnographically involved—outsider. Thus, when Puntilla and Alfredo Coyudde arrived in the early 1980s, they took many local drummers under their wing, teaching them about the music
and religious aspects of Añá, swearing them in as omó Añá, and educating them in the religion as a whole (Kenneth “Skip” Burney, personal communication). Thus, as with rumba, the arrival of the marielitos provided the New Yorkers with direct access to musical knowledge via experienced musicians, and local performance practices were brought into greater alignment with those in la mata. In other words, a legit tambor and rumba scene emerged in New York, meaning that it was performed on a regular, recurring basis by knowledgeable and qualified musicians, respecting the necessary rules and conventions. This brought with it less reliance on recordings as primary learning materials for batá.

And yet recordings still played an important role in New York and elsewhere in the 1980s and later decades; indeed, they became increasingly available in the 1990s due to increased state support and foreign interest in Afro-Cuban traditional music.² By this time in New York, there was already an experienced and knowledgeable generation of local drummers—those that had learned and performed with Cuban culture bearers like El Llanero, Puntilla, and Coyudde. This first generation was made up of drummers like Skip, Gene Golden, Felix Sanabria, and Abraham Rodríguez, and their immersion in the plurality of Afro-Cuban musical traditions—rumba, batá, güiro, palo, abakuá—and religion eventually transformed them into culture bearers themselves. As such, they passed on their knowledge to a younger generation of New Yorkers coming of age in the 1990s.

The ensuing generation, mostly born in the 1980s, was comparatively privileged in many ways. Many of them had access to the music traditions from a young age, especially if they had family members who were musicians or otherwise involved in the religion. For example, Abidoaye Holliday (personal communication), who is currently one of the most active

² This topic will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 3.
tamboleros in New York City, was first exposed to batá through his father and older brother, who were involved as drummers and religious practitioners in the local scene. Holliday and others in his generation had access to Cuban drummers like Puntilla, Román Díaz and Pedrito Martínez (both highly accomplished tamboleros who arrived in the 1990s), as well as the older generation of New York drummers (Skip, Golden, Sanabria, etc.). Most importantly, they had access to the then-thriving local live performance environment of the 1990s and 2000s, which included a well-established tambor scene (including greater opportunities to be sworn in as omó Añá), the more casual Central Park rumbas, other Afro-Cuban religious music events (güiro, cajón espiritual, palo), and opportunities to see and participate in established and new professional-level groups. There were also weekly rumbas in places such as the Esquina Habanera, a Cuban restaurant and bar with a small stage in Union City, New Jersey catering to a Cuban clientele (many of whom had arrived during or after Mariel). Los Afortunados also had a weekly rumba event in the late 1990s in Williamsburg, and Cuban musicians from visiting Cuba-based groups (e.g. Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, Los Papines, Changuito) would sometimes attend (Ben Lapidus, personal communication). Cuban folkloric groups also visited and performed more frequently than in previous decades, and visiting Cuba to study or for religious purposes became easier. Finally, the renaissance in Cuba of Afro-Cuban traditional music was reflected in a wave of new recordings and re-releases by Afro-Cuban folkloric groups on the island and abroad.

**New rumba recordings of the 1990s and the guarapachanguero style**

In terms of rumba recordings in the 1990s, among the most prominent were those of several Cuba-based groups, including Clave y Guaguancó (Havana), Yoruba Andabo (Havana),
Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, and Grupo AfroCuba de Matanzas. Many older albums were also re-released as CDs, including those of Los Papines, Los Muñequitos, Alberto Zayas, and *Patato y Totico*. Other rumba albums were released by Tata Güines, Carlos Embale (including re-releases), Irosso Obba, and groups in the US, including Raíces Habaneras (a group that performed regularly at the Esquina Habanera in Union City) and the John Santos Ensemble (San Francisco). Perhaps one of the most influential albums in New York was *Rapsodía rumbera*, released by a group of Havana-based *rumberos*, many of whom went on to found the group Rumberos de Cuba in the early 2000s.

The musicians performing on the *Rapsodía rumbera* album, along with Yoruba Andabo, Clave y Guaguancó, and Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, were among the first to record the modern style of rumba known as *guarapachangueo*. The style, first created in the 1970s and 1980s by the musician family Los Chinitos in Havana’s San Miguel del Padrón neighborhood, was not widely known or practiced outside Cuba until it was recorded on *Rapsodía rumbera* and by Yoruba Andabo, and Clave y Guaguancó in the 1990s. Although Los Chinitos created the style, which was at first a minimalist approach to playing the drum or *cajón* parts with only two (as opposed to three) drummers, Pancho Quinto is credited with adapting the style for performance with a larger ensemble, which he did with Yoruba Andabo (Bodenheimer 2015).

Through the recordings of Cuban rumba groups, the style gained wider dissemination, particularly in the transnational scene. *Rapsodía rumbera* was especially influential in New York among the younger generation of drummers. While discussing the subject with me a few years back, Abidoaye Holliday—currently one of the top *tamboleros* in New York, who was also active in the local rumba scene—mentioned that this album was crucial in the development of the *guarapachangueo* style in the city. The album was very popular among local *rumberos*,
especially the most accomplished and active players, and was listened to repeatedly. Similar to how earlier generations had experienced with albums like those of Papín y sus Rumberos and Guaguancó Matancero, *Rapsodía rumbera* represented a new, updated glimpse into how rumba was being played in Cuba in the 1990s. It therefore served as an important reference for *guarapachangueo*—a style that was new to most New Yorkers and others outside Cuba—that local drummers like Holliday studied, along with other albums, like Yoruba Andabo’s *El callejón de los rumberos*. The younger generation in New York adopted *guarapachangueo* readily, evident in its prominent use in local Afro-Cuban folkloric groups like Ilú Ayé and Caja Dura by the 2000s. The older New York generation was also influenced by these albums and adopted some features of *guarapachangueo*, although to a lesser extent, in some cases because they preferred what they considered the more “traditional” or classic rumba style that dominated the middle and second half of the 20th century, with its characteristic melody in the *tumbador* and *tres dos*.

*Rapsodía rumbera* and other early *guarapachangueo* albums in the 1990s were thus responsible in large part for disseminating the style and spurring its adoption in New York. An important factor here that set New York apart from other local scenes outside Cuba was that the city had a fairly mature, developed performance scene of its own. Indeed, by this time, many drummers and singers in New York were experienced and knowledgeable enough with performing Afro-Cuban traditional music that they could listen to these recordings from a position of greater understanding. Although not all musicians in the scene were equally advanced, many of the most experienced were familiar enough with rumba’s musical language and conventions and were thus able to engage with these new recordings as *rumberos*, not as
outsiders or amateurs, as was often the case prior to the 1980s. Their experience and knowledge thus facilitated their ability to more readily learn and adopt the elements of the new style.

Aside from disseminating the _guarapachangueo_ style itself, these 1990s rumba albums stimulated other phonograph effects in New York. For one, their influence facilitated a broadening of rumba performance practices in the city in terms of style. In other words, the older style to playing the drum parts remained relevant to many _rumberos_, while _guarapachangueo_ spread rapidly among the more advanced players, particularly those in the younger generation, as evident in the styles of groups like Caja Dura. This stylistic broadening contributed to the evolution of the genre locally, which in turn reflected its evolution on the island. In a way, the recordings helped bring New York _rumberos_ up to speed with how rumba was being performed in the 1990s on the island, just as the _marielitos_ had helped “update” New Yorkers in the 1980s.

A second phonograph effect stemmed from the fact that, taken together, all of the newly-available recordings, including older re-releases that had not been widely disseminated in the US previously, provided a wave of fresh song repertoire that New York _rumberos_ and those elsewhere could draw on. Of course, by now, some _rumberos_ were experienced enough to not need to rely on recordings as much for song repertoire. And yet this is not to deny the continuing influence of recordings as key sources for fresh, new song repertoire. Even the most seasoned _rumberos_—Cubans or New Yorkers—could appreciate listening to and adopting new songs and other elements from rumba albums as they saw fit. A singer, for example, might hear a song they like on a new recording they heard—whether it was a new song for them or a new interpretation of that song—and memorize it, adding it to their personal repertoire, to be sung in a casual rumba with friends or with a performance group. Singers could also adopt more specific song elements, like a _décima_ from a _guaguancó_, which they could then perhaps insert into another
song. Perhaps one of the easiest song elements to adopt are choruses, as they are comprised of short phrases. If a rumbero hears a new chorus that they think is catchy, it is easy to memorize it and re-use it in another performance context. This process is indicative of the way recordings of rumba (and other Afro-Cuban traditional music) are part of the scene: they are “texts” that circulate throughout the scene and influence aspects of performance. In the case of Afro-Cuban traditional music, recordings are particularly important—or prominent—in local scenes outside Cuba, as the island and its performance scene are both geographically and politically distant. Recordings help bridge that gap in communication, which is primarily one-way, as most recordings are disseminated outwards from Cuba rather than going in.³

Other phonograph effects were connected specifically to the guarapachangueo albums like *Rapsodía rumbera*, including new standards for ensemble instrumentation and the incorporation of distinct stylistic musical elements. As opposed to performing rumba with drums only, the guarapachangueo-influenced ensembles like Clave y Guaguancó, Yoruba Andabo, and the musicians of *Rapsodía rumbera* incorporated the *cajón* as a permanent part of the percussion section, a practice that was also adopted by some New York *rumberos* in the 1990s. Ironically, the *cajón* was the first instrument, along with the *clave*, created specifically to play rumba as the latter was developing as a distinct musical practice in the late 19th century. Their provenance in the shipyards and docks of Havana and Matanzas reflected the fact that many early *rumberos* worked in these port areas. Even after the addition of drums to the rumba ensemble by the early 20th century, *cajones* could be used in lieu of drums if the latter were too expensive to obtain or if local prohibitions on drumming were being enforced.

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³ Knauer (2009) also discusses how home video recordings were also made by some Cubans in New York and sent to Cuba (along with travelers) as an additional way to send news and salutations to family members in Cuba.
Drums became more commonplace in the early 20th century and became the primary instruments of rumba for performance groups, as is evident by listening to recordings of rumba from the 1930s through 1980s. These groups used primarily drums, aside from the occasional use of the quinto cajón. Clave y Guaguancó on the other hand, founded in 1960 in Havana, was one of the few performance groups that still used cajones during the time, and yet the fact that they did not record an album until 1990 is related to the fact that the use of cajones in rumba was less common abroad prior to the 1990s. Indeed, most rumberos outside Cuba seemed to still be worshipping the tumbadora as a symbol of Afro-Cuban music due to its iconic and sonic centrality in recordings and performance groups. Clave y Guaguancó can, however, be seen and heard using cajones in clips from Cuban music documentaries filmed in the 1960s, which were not widely available outside of Cuba until the 1990s and 2000s.

Another rumba group that used cajones as their primary instruments was Guaguancó Maritimo Portuario (later Yoruba Andabo), formed in 1961 in Havana. In the 1980s, they had appeared in a Cuban documentary-like series on rumba produced in the 1980s called La rumba sin lentejuelas, but this was on Cuban television and was not widely available to audiences outside Cuba until the 2000s, when Barry Cox uploaded the series to YouTube. In 1985, the group changed its name to Yoruba Andabo and recorded their first album, which featured cajones and the guarapachangeuo style (Moore 2006). Yet the album (Cajones bullangueros) was never commercially-released and only became available in the US in the 1990s and 2000s via collectors and fans who obtained copies from trips to Cuba (like Mark Sanders, who brought a copy back to New York with him in 1991), which could then be copied and shared (Sanders 2008). I obtained this recording in the 2000s, when it and other “rare” recordings from previous decades were made more widely-available to fans outside Cuba via file-sharing programs like
Napster and Limewire, and later via bloggers and YouTube users like Mark Sanders (Fidelseyglasses blog on Cuban music) and Barry Cox (rumba blogs and guarachon63 YouTube channel). According to collector Mark Sanders (2008), Yoruba Andabo’s 1994 album _Del yoruba al son_ was similarly “impossible to find” until the 2000s. It was _El callejón de los rumberos_, recorded in 1995 and commercially available in the US by the late 1990s that was perhaps their most popular and influential album, and it featured their signature approach to _guarapachangueo_: a dense rhythmic matrix played on a large battery of _cajon_ and drums. In effect, as with the case of Clave y Guaguancó, Yoruba Andabo did not have the privilege of disseminating their group’s style (i.e. use of _cajon_) to a vast, transnational audience until _El callejón de los rumberos_ became commercially-available abroad by the late 1990s.

The re-integration of the _cajon_ in rumba groups and its pairing with drums in Cuba (e.g. among the professional recording groups and Cuban _rumberos_, including the musicians of _Rapsodía rumbera_) and abroad (especially New York) in the 1990s thanks to the Cuban recordings featuring this instrumentation at the time. Yoruba Andabo and director Pancho Quinto’s stylistic approach to the _cajon_ was influenced by the original approach to _guarapachangueo_ of Los Chinitos—the creators of the style in the 1970s—in which the _cajon_ figured as a key instrument. The adaptation of _guarapachangueo_ to the larger ensembles like Clave y Guaguancó, Yoruba Andabo, Rumberos de Cuba, and the musicians of _Rapsodía rumbera_, resulted in the practice of combining of drums and _cajones_, rather than just drums or just _cajones_, as had previously been the case in older styles of rumba.

The new standard instrumentation for rumba groups thus expanded the percussion section and its timbric possibilities. Instead of just one drum, the _quinto_ player often played a _quinto cajón_ between his legs in addition, with the drum placed to one side of the player. The same
went for the *tres dos* and (or) the *tumbador* (or “base”): either one or both drummers would play a large *cajón* in addition to the corresponding drum. Other variations existed as well, for example, Pancho Quinto played the *base* with a large *cajón* (of the sit-down variety known as *cajón maleta*, literally “suitcase *cajón*” due to its rectangular shape), a set of *batá* drums strapped together on one side of him (with the large heads *[boca]* facing forward for easy access), a spoon in his left hand (played on the side of the *cajón* and on various bells), and sometimes a low drum (*tumbador*) as well.

The set-up of Rumberos de Cuba was perhaps the most influential in New York. The musicians of Rumberos de Cuba, a great many of whom formed the group featured on *Rapsodía rumba*, used a vertical *cajón* held between the legs, the *cajón* having tapered sides and a thinner wooden “head” on top that was playing (a shape originally developed by Los Chinitos). This *cajón*, paired with a *tumbadora* (or two), was used by the drummer either playing the *base* or the *tres dos*, or by both drummers simultaneously. This same set up could be seen among New York *rumberos*—particularly the younger generation and more advanced drummers—by the late 1990s and early 2000s, evident in the instrumentation of local folkloric groups started during that time, like Ilú Ayé and Caja Dura.

One of the most distinct stylistic differences in *guarapachangueo* is found in the *base* (a modern term used to refer to the low register drum part in *guarapachangueo*, which often comprises a *tumbador* and a *cajón* played together⁴). In full ensemble settings, like that of

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⁴ Based on my encounters with other Cuban *rumberos* and my experience as an active performer of *guarapachangueo* specializing in the *base*, the term *base* is used primarily in *guarapachangueo* contexts to refer to the combination of *cajón* and *tumbador*. The latter combination is often used in *guarapachangueo* contexts featuring only two drummers (*base* and *quinto*), as Los Chinitos often do and as is common in the Miami scene in rumba and *cajones espirituales*. Alternatively, the terms *tumbador* or *salidor*, which both reference the low-pitched drum in rumba, may also be used to describe the *base*. A single drum or *cajón* can also be used in *guarapachangueo* for the low-register drum part, although the term *base* does not seem to be employed as often in the case of a single low drum (i.e. *tumbador*).
Rumberos de Cuba, the *tres dos* often sticks to its traditional rhythm, “marking” the back side of the *clave* with one or two open tones, with variations here and there in response to the other drums. The *base*, on the other hand, does not maintain the older, traditional *tumbador* part, which is comparatively static (marking beat “4” with an open tone on each side of the *clave*). Instead, the drummer playing the *base* tends to approach the rhythm in a more sparse, conversational manner, responding as necessary to the other drums, the singer, and song sections in a way that creates moments of tension and release.

Based on my experience as an active performer of *guarapachangueo* in the Miami scene, and having participated in playing the style in Havana, New York, and San Juan, I have noticed how skillful players uses the positioning of rhythms in the *base* (e.g. playing “on” the beat or emphasizing offbeats, using fills or empty space) to create “tension and release” to build the energy of the rumba, particularly in the *montuno*. The *base* does not provide a steady, recurring basic part, although there are standards for placing emphasis on certain beats within the *clave* matrix. In addition, some players may draw on recurring themes (including ostinatos) of their own, which they may introduce for a certain song or part of a song. For example, it is common for the *base* to mark the “*bombo*” (second note of the clave) on the *cajón* quite often, but to also “say something” (“*decir algo*,” i.e. to use rhythmic variations on the *cajón* and open/muff tones on the drum as “fills” or embellishments) as they see fit, in response to the rest of the music.5

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5 *Rumberos*, *tamboleros*, and other musicians within Afro-Cuban traditional music make frequent comparisons between playing and speaking. For example, in *batá* drumming, the drums and their rhythms are said to “speak” (in the context of the Lucumí ritual language) and communicate with the orishas. In rumba, however, although the drums do not “speak” in terms of “pronouncing” words as they do in *batá* drumming, verbs associated with the act of speaking are often used to describe playing, particularly in the case of embellishments that contribute to the musical “conversation” taking place among the musicians in a rumba (or other Afro-Cuban traditional music context). As in jazz and other Afro-diasporic genres, the music performance can be characterized as a conversation in which instrumentalists can “say something.” For instance, I often hear the other Cuban drummers with whom I perform in Miami say “déjame decir algo” (“let me say something”) when they want to take a turn. Alternatively, in recorded or live rumbas, it is not uncommon to hear someone reacting to a drummer’s embellishments by saying “¡Habla!” or “¡Dilo!” (“Say it!”).
a whole, *guarapachangueo* can be characterized as having a highly conversational interaction between the various drummers in which there is less reliance on the fixed, recurring ostinatos of older rumba, with drummers still adhering to certain established rhythmic conventions. Therefore, despite the greater liberties given to the drummers and their roles, *guarapachangueo* is not a “free for all” in which drummers simply improvise everything. Rather, a drummer is often judged on his ability to show restraint when necessary, to “mark” in appropriate places and to be able to use variations to create and release tension, thus building the overall energy of the rumba (Frías 2015b).

Learning to play *guarapachangueo* is thus not simply about memorizing a new ostinato and some variations. Rather, it is about coming to understand the qualities and conventions which comprise its language. Indeed, Pedro López, one of the Chinitos brothers who were the original creators of the style, characterizes *guarapachangueo* as a “matrix,” which has undergone numerous “evolutions” in the hands of various other rumba groups (i.e. Yoruba Andabo, Clave y Guaguancó, Iroso Obbá, Rumberos de Cuba, etc.) (Miniconi 2007). In my experience, it seems that most drummers would agree that it is necessary to first learn and dominate the older (traditional) style of rumba first, and only then to move on to *guarapachangueo*, which is considered more advanced due to its greater complexity. To make a comparison with the drumset in jazz, it is necessary to grasp the basics of swing and keeping basic time before moving on to more abstract or experimental forms of jazz. The reason I am emphasizing the intricacies of learning *guarapachangueo* is to illustrate two points: the first is that in New York in the 1990s there were already several drummers with sufficient experience in rumba to be able to move on

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6 Standard places to “mark” the beat (i.e. with a strong notes, like a bass tone on the *cajón*) include the *bombo* (second note of the clave) as well as the front and back of the clave. Marking these provides a sort of anchor to the groove, and drummers may deviate from these in order to “say something” or build tension, and then return to marking one of these “anchor beats” in order to release the tension and support the groove.
to comprehending and adopting the aesthetics of *guarapachangueo*, and the second is that the adoption of the style’s aesthetics entails making these part of one’s musical habitus, a process in which recordings have played a central role, particularly in scenes outside of Cuba as substitutes (and supplements) for person-to-person interactions and live performances (Frías 2015b).

At the time the *guarapachangueo* albums began arriving in New York in the mid-1990s, the style was not yet been widely practiced in the city, as many of the established Cuban *rumberos* (i.e. El Llanero, Puntilla) and their groups, consisting of experienced local *rumberos* who had learned rumba in previous decades, still tended to play the older style of rumba, the style that dominated their generation. It was precisely because of this situation that albums like *Rapsodía rumbera* had such an impact. Not only were they new albums, featuring some of Cuba’s top *rumberos*; the sound was completely different! The albums were thus prized as references and studied as sonic texts of current rumba performance practices in Cuba (*la mata*).

Yet, since *guarapachangueo* cannot be learned simply by mimicking a few patterns, New Yorkers (and others abroad) needed to listen to the music repeatedly, thus exposing themselves to the style enough times so as to absorb it into their musical habitus. And listen they did. Of course, for those learning in New York prior to Mariel, they also listened repeatedly to rumba albums with the goal of absorbing them as part of their musical language. Yet, as explained above, learning *guarapachangueo* entails grasping the intricacies of the musical *process* and percussive *language* employed in the style, elements which are far more complex than they are in the older, traditional style of rumba, with its comparatively static drum parts. Therefore, understanding and learning *guarapachangueo* requires a much greater amount of listening and exposure to the style.
In Cuba, in *la mata*, *rumberos* adopting elements of the style did so in an environment where there were plenty of opportunities to see live performances first hand, especially with the growing number of folkloric groups and performances since the late 1980s in Cuba. Although recordings would have certainly helped spread the style within Cuba, there was less need to rely on them as learning materials, especially in Havana and Matanzas, where the style was practiced by local *rumberos* (Caridad Paisán 2015, interview). In New York, however, the few new recordings of the *guarapachangueo* style provided rare glimpses into the modern style which was coming to dominate the island. In addition, since these recordings were issued on CDs, they were more portable than the LPs of previous generations. Drummers could listen at home, in their car, and it was easy to burn copies for friends. Through repeated, active listening to the style, combined with the deciphering and mimicking of specific licks, drummers in New York gradually acclimated to the style and brought it into their musical habitus, meaning that they could then draw naturally on this musical knowledge when they performed.

Another factor contributing to the spread of the style in New York were the touring of Cuban rumba groups to New York and their performances in the Esquina Habanera in Union City, NJ, which provided a space where local drummers could interact directly with top *rumberos* who lived in Cuba. During one of these visits in the mid-1990s, two drummers from the group Yoruba Andabo decided to stay in the US and made New Jersey their home, providing another avenue through which local drummers could access the modern style of rumba. The drummers—Román Díaz and Pedro Martínez—were both highly capable performers and knowledgeable about Afro-Cuban traditional music and contributed to the enrichment of the New York scene through their interaction with local drummers in performances (*rumbas, tambores*, jazz and popular music events) and teaching, whether in the form of individual study
or workshops. Nonetheless, the guarapachangueo albums still provided the most accessible, readily-available references local drummers could turn to. Thus, while a drummer could perhaps learn some specific elements in a live interaction, whether in a live performance, workshop, or personal lesson, repeated listening to an album like Rapsodia rumbera or El callejon de los rumberos offered the opportunity to absorb the style at a deeper level. Of course, other benefits of recordings include being able to stop and replay a certain part until it is grasped, or to play a track for a friend or teacher to elicit their opinion or spur a discussion. The fact that these recordings were commercially-released and widely disseminated also meant that they could be listened to and shared by many musicians, thus becoming common references of the style that would be widely familiar to many. It was thus that guarapachangueo began to take root in the New York scene.

**Abbilona: The evolution of batá drumming**

There was another evolution occurring within the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene in Cuba in the 1990s which was also largely disseminated via recordings, this time in the realm of batá. Recordings of the tambor repertoire from Cuba released in the 1990s and 2000s led to a phonograph effect which encompassed the widespread adoption in the transnational scene of a new stylistic approach to playing batá created by Los Chinitos. This new style was influenced by the guarapachangueo style of rumba, which they had also originally created. The resulting series of recordings known collectively as Abbilona—the name of the project—is now among the most famous and well-known recorded collection among tamboleros in Cuba and abroad. Although the recording project was called Abbilona, the drummers who recorded were drawn from the Chinitos family and the circle of tamboleros that performed regularly with them, who were also
thoroughly inculcated in the Chinitos style of rumba (i.e. guarapachanguero) as well as batá (Manley “Piri” López 2016, interview).

As with guarapachanguero, the Abbilona style of playing batá was not so much a matter of adding new musical material (i.e. new toques or rhythms) for the batá as it was a new stylistic approach, or as described by Manley “Piri” López of Los Chinitos: a new evolución del tambor (evolution of batá drumming). In effect, it represents the sound of a new generation, and indeed it is often referenced by elder tamboleros as being “de los jóvenes” (of the young [drummers]) or representing “la nueva generación” (the new generation). As with guarapachanguero, younger drummers (i.e. under 45) tend to be its primary exponents, although some older drummers sometimes draw on its stylistic elements. These new elements include a general increase in tempos, a more aggressive approach to playing, an increased emphasis on individual and collective virtuosity, greater liberties in the conversations between the drums, and the insertion of new variations in calls and conversations.

To better comprehend where the Abbilona style came from, it is necessary to understand the musical background of the Chinitos. As previously touched upon, Los Chinitos were well-known as a family of rumberos by the 1970s in Havana, which is when they began creating the guarapachanguero style. The representative musicians of the family comprised four brothers: Pedro, Reynaldo, Berto, and Irián López. Unlike most other tamboleros, who begin the process of learning when they are children or teenagers, the brothers did not begin learning and performing batá until they were in their 30s, with Irián, the youngest, becoming the most proficient tambolero (Alain Fernández, personal communication). Furthermore, they were well-known in Havana as accomplished rumberos prior to endeavoring into the world of batá. Therefore, as they—particularly Irián—developed as tamboleros, they brought their background
as *rumberos* to the table, in this case as the creators of the highly conversational *guarapachangueo* style. This is not to say that *tamboleros* are not usually *rumberos* as well, but it is less common for drummers or musicians to become specialists of multiple genres within Afro-Cuban traditional music.  

The move towards musicians being competent in multiple Afro-Cuban genres is underlined in the process by which professional folkloric groups, such as the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional and Clave y Guaguancó, audition musicians (and dancers): they must be able to show competence in both rumba and genres associated with Afro-Cuban religious traditions like *batá* drumming and *palo*. Furthermore, they are expected to be proficient on multiple instrument roles within these genres, such as the *tumbador* and *quinto* in rumba (Daniel González Gil, personal communication). The obvious reason for this is that it is now standard for these groups to be able to do shows that incorporate multiple Afro-Cuban genres, a product of the folklorized presentations established by the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional and seen in the tendencies to do a *ciclo yoruba* (Yoruba “cycle,” or “set,” usually focusing on *batá* and orisha dances), *ciclo congo* (focusing on Bantu-derived genres like *palo*, *yuka*, and *makuta*), and so on (Hagedorn 2001).  

The unique thing in the case of Los Chinitos was not so much that they brought the influence of rumba to *batá*, but that they transferred the *guarapachangueo* concept and aesthetic

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7 Although this dynamic is becoming more common in the younger generation, especially due to the explosion in activity in Cuba surrounding Afro-Cuban traditional music since the 1990s and the model provided by Los Chinitos, most musicians have one genre in which they excel and for which they are known as specialists. For example, Lázaro Ros, one of the best-known recent singers of the Santería (Yoruba), song repertoire, specialized in singing in the tambor repertoire (although mostly in staged contexts), but was less adept at singing güiro, which has a different deje (swing) that draws on the aesthetics of bembé and is associated with the countryside. Similarly, many great tamboleros from older generations, like Jesús Pérez and Angel Bolaños, were better known as specialists of *batá* than say, rumba. Likewise, there are drummers and singers that are güireros (güiro specialists) and may not even play or sing in tambores (religious *batá* performances) (Alain Fernández, personal communication).
to its performance and execution. According to Piri (2015, interview), Irián and his brothers first began performing the new style of tambor in the context of stage performances with the folkloric group Raíces Profundas, in which they were also performing the new guarapachangueo style of rumba. The new style of batá was created for use in this context—the public stage show (espectáculo)—not necessarily for real tambores. This is due to the fact that, similar to the rest of the religion (Regla de Ocha), batá and its rhythms are highly regulated and governed by an adherence to orthodoxy. As opposed to rumba, which usually occurs as a secular phenomenon, there is far less room for drummers to experiment or improvise as they wish in batá, and this was especially true prior to Abbilona. In fact, some drummers—particularly those of elder generations like Skip—dismiss the new style of batá, characterizing it as “guarachando” (having fun) or as “not the real thing.” They can be especially critical of the faster tempos and may differentiate their (more “traditional” or older) style by highlighting the slower tempos used, which is referred to among tamboleros as playing asentado (literally “seated,” better translated here as “laid back”). While it is true that many rhythms are generally played faster now than they were, say 50 years ago, this does not mean that everything was played slow back then, just like it does not mean that all younger drummers play everything fast. Nonetheless, among both younger and older generations of tamboleros it is common to hear faster tempos associated with the newer style—which as a style is still considered less traditional by drummers young and old—while playing asentado is associated with the older, more traditional.

Although Los Chinitos began using the style as a flashier way of playing batá onstage with Raíces Profundas, it eventually was adopted as part of their personal approach to playing tambor in its religious manifestation. After they matured as tamboleros, they got their own

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8 Evident in early recordings of batá like Santero (1957), Ritmo de santo (1961), and Afro: Ritmos afrocubanos con los auténticos tambores batá de Giraldo Rodríguez (1970).
tambor de fundamento, which allowed them greater independence and the ability to take greater liberties as accomplished drummers. Further, the younger generation of the Chinitos family, including Irián’s nephew Piri and other younger drummers in the vicinity who formed part of their regular crew of working musicians, learned from Irián and absorbed his stylistic tendencies. In addition, these drummers grew up attending the rumbas hosted by the Chinitos family, thus absorbing the guarapachangueo style at its source. The Chinitos’ style of batá was thus propagated and passed on to a new generation (Manley “Piri” López 2016, interview).

Yet, as Piri explained to me in an interview (2015), what really helped disseminate the new style and bring recognition to Los Chinitos as tamboleros was the Abbilona project. The project began in the mid-late 1990s and was released on CD in Cuba and abroad. In Cuba, the new CDs were way too expensive for most Cubans to buy, so musicians would copy them on cassettes and share them that way. This not only gave the Chinitos greater recognition and credibility, as the act of recording often does, but it helped popularize their approach to playing among fellow Cuban tamboleros on the island, particularly impacting the younger generation. And yet, as with guarapachangueo, it was not until the style was recorded that it was disseminated at the transnational level. For both Cuba- and New York-based drummers in particular, as well as those elsewhere, like Puerto Rico and Venezuela, the Abbilona recordings exerted a major influence.

As previously touched upon, this Chinitos influence in batá—exemplified in the Abbilona recordings of the 1990s and 2000s—included a more aggressive, virtuosic approach to playing, a tendency to use faster tempos, a more “open,” spacious approach to conversations in some toques (rhythms), as well as new variations in calls and conversations. Based on how tamboleros talk amongst themselves when they comment on these “new generation” changes in
the *tambor*, the increased tempo is usually viewed as tied to virtuosity (which elder tamboleros often speak of as “showing off”), as drummers—typically younger drummers—will show their virtuosity by how fast they can. This is evident in the many videos uploaded to Facebook and YouTube by the younger generations of Cuban *tamboleros* outside Cuba (inside Cuba tamboleros have far more limited access to the internet) in places like Mexico City. In the latter city, for example, Piri and the drummers who perform with him will often perform the *meta de Changó* and *aro de Yemayá*—challenging *toques* which already tend to be fast—at supersonic speeds in order to exhibit their technical abilities and virtuosity as drummers.

The influence of *guarapachangueo* in this new style of *batá* is perhaps most evident in the more “open” approach to conversing in some *toques*, especially in ñongo, one of the most commonly played *toques* in the *oru cantado*. The older approach of previous generations to playing ñongo, which is in 6/8, can be compared to the older style of playing rumba: the variations in the low and middle drums tend to correspond to the front and back side of the *clave*, respectively. As Skip once put it to me: each drummer (*segundo* and *caja* in *batá*, or *tumbador* and *tres dos* in rumba) “stays in his lane.” In the older style of rumba, for example, if the *tumbador* wants to “speak” or play a variation, the drummer does this primarily on the front side of the *clave*, while the *tres dos* does so on the back side of the *clave*. In this way, the two drummers each have a “lane,” limiting overlapping phrases and thus avoiding “stepping on” one another. In the older approach to *batá*, which was cultivated by elder drummers and was more prevalent prior to Abbilona, the same idea of “lanes” was generally used in ñongo: the *caja* (or *iyá*, low drum) placed its calls primarily on the front side of the *clave*, and the *segundo* (or *ítótele*, middle drum) responded to the calls on the back side of the *clave*. The *caja*, being the lead drum, had slightly more liberties in this respect, but the *segundero* (*segundo* player) would
usually stick to responding on the back side of the clave (Kenneth “Skip” Burney, personal communication).

In the new style of ñongo popularized by Los Chinitos and their Abbilona recordings, some standard “conversations” (i.e. when the caja executes a “call” and the segundo responds) are still played with the drummers staying “in their lane,” yet the cajero (caja player) can also choose to “open up” the conversation in order to create tension and build the energy of the tambor. The cajero does this by deviating from his basic part, often signaled with a short, strong accent (open tone or muff) placed shortly after the downbeat of the front side of the clave.\(^9\) Alternatively, he may deviate from the basic pattern by simply leaving out the open or muff tones on the front side of the clave or replace them with a series of slaps on the chachá. Either way, this creates a sort of jolt in the rhythm (if the accented open or muff tone is used) together with a feeling that the bottom, or anchor has dropped out. The latter effect is the result of the suspension of open and muff tones in the caja and segundo which normally recur as an ostinato that gives ñongo its characteristic melody. The effect is similar to when a jazz, timba, or salsa band has the bass and drums drop out of a particular section of a piece, leaving the audience with a feeling of suspension due to the “bottom” dropping out.

Once this basic ostinato of ñongo drops out (signaled by the caja “opening up”), the time continues to be maintained by the okónkolo (high drum), which keeps its regular part, which, together with the chachá of the segundero (which also keeps marking its normal part) forms a cyclical pattern which is known among tamboleros onomatopoeically as the báquini. The báquini is comprised of the recurring triplet (or group of three eighth notes in 6/8: bá-qui-ni) created between the okónkolo and the segundo’s chachá. When the cajero “opens up” the

rhythm, the Báquini remains as a sort of skeletal rhythm that maintains the basic time. Then the Cajero begins to “speak,” using a combination of tones (open, muff, or slap) and space\textsuperscript{10}, to which the Segundero responds as he sees fit with open and muff tones. Together, this creates an irregular, “open” conversation (which is why it is often referred to as “opening up” or abriendo) in which the Caja and Segundo conversate freely, without the necessity to “stay in their lane” on a certain side of the Clave. While the general time is respected (outlined in the Báquini), the musical phrases exchanged between the two drummers do not necessarily begin or end in correspondence with measures or the Clave, and empty space is often used as a way to emphasize the feeling of suspension, which builds energy and tends to inspire those dancing. This sort of “open” conversation is usually used for a short amount of time, perhaps over the course of a few repetitions of the current song (chorus), after which the Cajero signals a return to the basic rhythm, or perhaps changes the rhythm to Chacholokafún, which commonly follows Ñongo in tratados.

\textsuperscript{10} The use of space is an interesting and unique aspect of the Chinitos’ approach to drumming, evident in both their performance of Guarapachangueo, Batá, and Güiro. The use of space—that is, of inserting empty space or playing notes further apart—is one of the ways to create rhythmic tension in the drumming parts that “speak” in these traditions: the Caja and Segundo in Batá, the base and Quinto in Guarapachangueo, and the Jicamo (tumbadora) in Güiro. This strategic use of space—in contrast to the fairly steady use of ostinatos and standard improvisations—is best represented by the Chinitos’ recordings within the Abbilona project, as well as other, non-commercial recordings of Los Chinitos, and has greatly influenced the style of many younger Tamboleros (most under 40-45 years old), including several of the Cajeros I have performed with in Miami, such as Ramin Khorassani, Daniel González Gil, Yanel Oshebile, and Vitikín Suuru (the last two names are these drummers’ religious names). On the other hand, elder Cajeros with whom I have performed in Miami, including Skip, Michel Aldama, and Marcos “Marquito” Calderón, draw on such “new generation” stylistic elements less frequently.
The “open” conversation in ñongo can be compared to the rhythmic aesthetics of 
guarapachangueo; in both cases, the use of (empty) space, along with the increased liberties 
between the drums’ conversations are used to build and manipulate tension and release. The use 
of such “open” conversations, while used most prominently in ñongo, were also applied by Los 
Chinitos to other toques such as chachalokafún and Imbaloke. Taken together, the approach is a 
trademark characteristic of their style, one that has been widely influential and emulated in Cuba 
and abroad thanks to their Abibilona recordings. The influence of Abibilona and Los Chinitos has 
been especially strong since the 2000s, as the Abibilona series continued releasing new albums 
with new material and drummers in Cuba and abroad continued adopting elements of the style. 
This has occurred to the point where the Chinitos (via the Abibilona recordings of the 1990s and 
2000s) approach to batá has in some ways become synonymous with “modern” or “new 
generation” tambor, similar to how guarapachangueo is synonymous with modern rumba.
Abbilona not only pushed the evolution of tambor forward, but it did so at a rapid rate due to its wide dissemination and popularity among drummers in Cuba and abroad. Indeed, it seems that the recordings of guarapachangueo and the Abbilona recordings helped speed up the rate of evolution of rumba and tambor, respectively. The idiosyncrasies of each style of these genres, which both happen to have been created by a small family from a rather marginalized, outlying area of Havana, would not have been so widely known and adopted in such a short time—in Cuba and especially abroad—had it not been for their recordings. Further, as new albums continued to be released as a part of the Abbilona series through the 2000s and into the present, the series (which has featured other young drummers beyond the Chinitos family in recent years) now represents the most thorough and complete set of recordings of the tambor repertoire.

Perhaps the only other series that comes close to the breadth of song and rhythmic repertoire covered by Abbilona is the series of tambor recordings produced by the late akpwón Lázaro Ros from the beginning of the 1990s through the 2000s. Other tamboleros and singers, such as Lázaro Pedroso, Lázaro Galarraga, Francisco Aguabella, and Papo Angarica also produced high quality recordings of the tambor repertoire during this time. Yet another thing that sets Abbilona apart from many of the more traditional recordings of batá (exemplified by earlier recordings from the 1950s through the early 1990s) was the fact that the tracks were not compact three- or four-minute clips of a rhythm or song, as had previously been the norm. Rather, the Abbilona tracks more closely reflected the performance of rhythms and songs in a real tambor, which are usually strung together in sets that can easily last 10 or 20 minutes, or more. For example, a recording of the oru seco on an Abbilona album comprises a single long track, which is how it is performed in live contexts—as a whole. On older recordings of batá, the oru seco
was normally recorded with each orisha’s rhythm as a separate short track: Eleguá, Ogún, Ochosi, and so on. Similarly, older recordings of the songs and rhythms of the oru cantado would be presented as separate, short tracks corresponding to an orisha, with each track having only a few songs dedicated to that orisha. This is far from the norm in live contexts, where the oru cantado in an average tambor is performed as a series of long sets, with each set being comprised of a series of tratados (song sequences) dedicated to one or various orishas and sung in order according to established conventions. Abbilona’s tracks, which feature the longer, complete tratados, better reflects the performance practices of a real tambor. Having such recordings as references in turn thus makes it easier for other drummers and singers to learn from it, as the material is presented in a way that true to its religious context.

Another interesting point brought up by Piri in our interview (2015) was how the availability of all these recordings of the tambor repertoire, including those of Abbilona, Lázaro Ros, Papo Angarica, and others, have helped shorten the average time it takes for a drummer to learn batá:

Before you could spend your whole life learning the tambor. Now, with the recording it shortens the time of apprenticeship and the time it takes to learn the tambor. Why? [Because] now you hear it. Before you had to go to a tambor to hear it, hear it continually. Now you hear an album and you’ve got it [i.e. you learn or comprehend the rhythm]. Before a tambolero was made in 20 years. Now a tambolero is made in 5 years.

What Piri is emphasizing here is the luxury that recordings provide as learning supplements: they represent at once an encyclopedic reference and a substitute for those who cannot attend tambores constantly. This is not to say that attending tambores frequently is any less important, but the ability to listen to and study recordings acts as a helpful supplement, particularly if tambores are not common in the area in which they live.
The fact that attending *tambores* and using recordings as learning supplements (as necessary) is so important for aspiring *tamboleros* testifies to the reality that learning the *tambor* repertoire thoroughly (i.e. mastering the plethora of *batá* rhythms on the three drums, learning the songs, and understanding religious and musical protocol and conventions) comprises a major commitment requiring lots of study, practice, memorization, and repetition. Indeed, I have often heard more experienced *tamboleros* emphasize how being a *tambolero* entails a lifetime of learning; even for the highly experienced, there is always more to learn. The sheer vastness of the hundreds of songs and rhythms, which must be performed following strict protocols and conventions, relies heavily on repeated exposure because as an oral tradition, all these elements must be retained in working memory. *Tamboleros* and singers do not rely on sheet music or lists of songs when they perform. Drummers must have highly attuned ears and split-second reaction times when answering a call or introducing the proper rhythm with a certain song, and they need to learn songs sung in a language—*lucumí*—that is not Spanish. Taken together, these recordings, which can be repeated, stopped, and repeated once again, provide a sort of encyclopedic text and stylistic example that can be referenced as needed.

In conjunction with attending and participating in live contexts, repeated, active listening increases the level of overall exposure to the music, helping listeners to *absorb* the music at a deeper level. The goal here is that it becomes part of their musical habitus, which they can then draw on at will. For example, in my own experience, listening to recordings has been a key in learning the *tambor*, in addition to personal and group practice and performing in *tambores*, which is where one’s skills are put to the test. I usually listen to recordings in my car, on the way to work, practice, or *tambores*. As an *aprendiz* (apprentice) of the *tambor*, listening to recordings helps me learn the pronunciation of lyrics and refresh my memory of *toques* and songs, including
remembering which *toques* accompany which songs. I can play along with the recordings by tapping the parts of one of the drums on my lap and practice responding to the calls of the *caja* (if I am practicing *segundo*). Alternatively, I can figure out an interesting variation that I heard in a certain track so that I can adopt and add to my personal library of licks. One aspect of *batá* recordings that is particularly helpful is the ability to reference songs and rhythms that are not heard as commonly in *tambores* and recordings, such as some of the *toques específicos* (specific *toques*) which correspond to a given orisha.

As opposed to early albums featuring *batá*, which provided only a minute, singular sample of the repertoire, the series of recordings put out by Abbilona and others, taken together, provide a much more complete representation of the *tambor*, although the entire song repertoire has still not been recorded in its entirety. The Abbilona and other recordings since the 1990s include several *toques específicos*, including many that had never before been recorded. I have often heard *tamboleros* and singers say that the reason these *toques* and their accompanying songs are not heard as often (in *tambores*) is because many musicians do not know them. I would also add that the *toques específicos* tend to be used for very specific contexts in the *tambor*, such as when a certain orisha comes down or is being called. In addition, there are also old songs that are only known and sung by one or a few elder singers, which they may even purposely “hold on to,” so as not to give their secrets away completely, particularly to younger singers that they may not see as deserving of the information (Alain Fernández 2015, interview).

I would argue that in both cases—the *toques específicos* and less common songs—recordings of these have helped to counteract their descension into extinction and have encouraged their dissemination and use by *tamboleros* and singers, in Cuba and especially abroad. In *tambores*, I have heard both singers and drummers reference songs or song variations
(some with accompanying *toques específicos*) that they have heard and adopted from particular singers in recordings. For example, at a *tambor* last year in Miami, I heard Radamés Villega (a highly respected and knowledgeable singer now residing in Miami) discuss a certain melodic variation of a less-common song, adding that Lázaro Ros sung it that way (i.e. a way that was melodically unique) in one of his recordings.

At the other end of the spectrum from the less-common songs and *toques específicos*, there are *toques* and songs that are almost always sung in *tambores* which most of the people seem to know (including the people attending the *tambor*, who sing along). Skip has sometimes jokingly dubbed these popular songs and rhythms the *tambor* “top 40.” Much of this standard repertoire is often performed in the general *oru cantado*, during which the musicians perform short salutes to each orisha. Later in the *tambor* (during the more extensive *wemilere*) is when some of the less common *toques* and songs may be heard, depending on the level of skill and knowledge of the *akpwón* (lead singer). In fact, one of the ways an *akpwón* demonstrates his expertise—besides being able to successful call and bring down orisha—is his or her knowledge and use of less common songs. Introducing such songs may indeed be met with signs of approval by some of the drummers, singers, or religious practitioners that recognize it. They might react by saying something like, “Wow! I haven’t heard that song in years! So and so [i.e. a certain elder singer] used to sing that! Nobody sings that anymore!” Concomitantly, if the *akpwón* is introducing one of these less-common songs a capella, the *cajero* needs to know immediately what *toque* it goes with so that he can bring the rhythm in properly. Of course, not *all* such less-common songs have been recorded, due to the vastness of the repertoire, but of them many have, and the number continues to grow as more and more of the repertoire is recorded with the release of new albums. Hanz, one of the *tamboleros* of the young generation that I practice *batá* with in
Miami, who is originally from Chicago, often sings songs from recordings that some of the rest of us (also younger drummers) have never heard. If we ask about the song, he will often say he learned it from a specific album, sometimes even telling us the specific track. In similar manners and with the help of recordings as learning supplements, drummers and singers who practice and perform together pass along not only the knowledge of such songs and rhythms, but where to locate them (i.e. in certain albums or other recordings) for further study and future reference.

As opposed to the vast repertoire of songs, most toques (in the Havana style—the Matanzas style is still not fully documented in recordings), including the toques específicos have found their way onto recordings by now. Recordings of these toques not only serve as references for those learning them, but they have the effect of increasing exposure to them, especially at the transnational level. For those learning, like myself, some of the toques específicos can be hard to retain (memorized) because they are not played as often as the more standard toques in tambores, like ñongo, chachalokafún, and latopa. In my case, recordings of toques específicos are among the ones I reference the most, in order to refresh my memory of the parts and the songs that go with them.

The toques específicos are usually are paired with a particular song and are often known by the name of the song that goes with it. Examples include kowo kowo for Changó, odo aremu for Obatalá, ferekete meyi for Orula, and bamila Osun for Ochún. Elder singers and tamboleros sometimes complain that some drummers in the younger generation rely too heavily on the more generic rhythms like ñongo and chachalokafún, which are often seen as the rhythms for guaracharando (i.e. for jamming and dancing). While such broad statements do not necessarily reflect the reality—reliance on generic toques may rather reflect a lack of experience or maturity, or simply reflect a drummer’s preferences—there is definitely a concern among some musicians
about certain elements and practices being lost, including less-common songs and *toques específicos*. To the contrary, I would argue that while having a larger amount of the *tambor* repertoire recorded does not necessarily mean that all the less common *toques* and songs will be preserved as part of performance practices, the fact that they are widely-disseminated and available for young musicians and others to learn from means that these recordings are helping to keep these *toques* and songs alive in the transnational scene. For example, when a drummer listens regularly to Abbilona or Papo Angarica albums in which *toques específicos* are used, this increases their exposure to these *toques*, helping to cement the *toques* more quickly in the working memory of that *tambolero*. This dynamic creates an environment that helps speed up the process of learning the *tambor* repertoire thoroughly (for *aprendices*) and promotes—through increased familiarity and repetition—the maintenance and usage of the *toques específicos* in the transnational scene and among younger generations, the latter of whom (outside Cuba) are the most avid users of new media technologies and consumers of the recordings that circulate there.

Recordings of songs also help to spread the way those specific songs are pronounced. Since the songs, which are sung in *lucumi*, have been handed down through oral tradition for well over a hundred years, there are often different pronunciations of song lyrics depending on the singer or region. Sometimes even whole words, short phrases, or parts of the melody are different from one singer to the next, depending on who the singer learned from and what they feel is correct. Since recordings serve as references for learning song melodies, lyrics, and pronunciation, the interpretations of singers that record are likely exert a greater influence in comparison with singers who have never recorded. This is particularly true outside of Cuba, where musicians depend more on recordings as learning supplements. Someone like Lázaro Galarraga, for example, who is one of the most respected singers of the *tambor* repertoire,
appears on a few recordings made in California, where he has resided since the 1980s. He is regarded as a highly knowledgeable singer in terms of the meaning and proper pronunciation of lyrics (Alain Fernández, personal communication). Therefore, musicians might regard his recordings as models for the “proper” lyrics and pronunciation, although it is difficult to discern for sure what is “correct,” as singers have different opinions and interpretations. The Abbilona recordings, on the other hand, feature a number of talented singers, many of which are from the younger generation. While they may not have the level of experience of someone like Lázaro Galarraga, they are nevertheless quite knowledgeable, and the fact that the Abbilona series features multiple singers from various generations lends a level of variety which allows musicians to be exposed to a variety of styles and approaches to pronunciation.

The batá recordings of Abbilona and others, like Papo Angarica, have also helped to spread and popularize new inventos (“invented” toques, variations, or drum parts). Usually when a tambolero calls something an invento in the tambor repertoire, it is used in a slightly derogatory way, as if saying that it is not authentic. Nevertheless, there are toques, variations, and specific drum parts within toques that have become increasingly standardized thanks to their dissemination on recordings. For example, Papo Angarica is known for having invented a few toques, like the one featured on his recording of the song “A la piyoyo e” for Changó, which has become a popular (and widely accepted) way to accompany the song. Angarica also used this same rhythm as a new conversation) that can be used as a variation within ñongo, which has also become widely used thanks to the influence of his recordings and its acceptance among tamboleros of various generations (Alain Fernández, personal communication). In fact, it has become more acceptable to insert such “invented” variations in ñongo, which is one of the most played toques in the oru cantado. It is increasingly treated as a generic rhythm into which
tamboleros can insert numerous variations, many of which have been popularized through recordings thanks to the experimentations of Los Chinitos and others.

As with guarapachanguero, it is the younger generation of tamboleros that adopt such new elements the most, as they are a way to exhibit one’s talent and knowledge of the latest style. Such influence can be a double-edged sword however, as elder or more experienced tamboleros\(^\text{11}\) sometimes complain that some younger tamboleros play too many inventos (in this case referring primarily to non-standard licks) and simply try to show off rather than staying true to the established, fundamental rhythms and to the goal of the tambor, which is to communicate with and bring down orisha (via possession). Therefore—according to the oft-repeated reminders of older, experienced tamboleros—a good, well-balanced tambolero should know when to draw on such inventos while also maintaining solid fundamentals (like time) and a clear execution of their parts. Younger drummers, on the other hand, seem to talk less about inventos per se and seem to view the incorporation of new licks as part of a natural musical evolution. For example, in my interview with Piri, he mentioned the “evolution of the tambor” and the “evolution of rumba” several times, linking them to Abbilona and to his family’s (Los Chinitos) guarapachanguero style of rumba, respectively:

\[\ldots\text{my family is rumbera} \text{ [i.e. love and perform rumba], and when they learned the tambor, that was it. When Abbilona came out it [represented] the evolution of the tambor. And that was the beginning; Abbilona opened the doors of the world to us. \ldots\] Everything my family [Los Chinitos] has done has influenced Afro-Cuban music. Rumba: guarapachanguero. They invented guarapachanguero, it exploded, and that was the evolution of rumba.

\(^{11}\) During the past several years working as a tambolero alongside the more experienced and elder drummers in Miami, I have heard many of them discuss and express these views about the young generation. Among the tamboleros I have heard express this view are Alain Fernández, Michel Aldama, and Kenneth “Skip” Burney. In their conclusions on the topic of young drummers’ (over)use of inventos, however, these tamboleros always seem to point to the necessity of accepting it (even while they preach against it) because it is either “already too late” or too widespread of a practice. The practice is therefore usually tolerated—at least to a degree—provided the tambolero who is inventando (i.e. making up non-standard rhythms) is an experienced musician within the scene who has also demonstrated mastery of the established, fundamental rhythms and rules of the tambor.
Other elements popularized via the Abbilona recordings include variations on calls and conversations that are not necessarily inventos, but have rather come to represent what might be called a “new school” (nueva generación) style or approach. For example, in terms of the way the caja can call the segundo in chachalokafún, there are recognizable differences between “old school” (i.e. from past generations) and “new school” calls, the latter of which are often more syncopated. The new school style calls featured in Abbilona, for example, are spread alternatively via the recordings themselves and through live performance practices by the original drummers (from the recordings) or by others who recreate them. Of course, for those outside Cuba, especially for those residing in places without a strong tambor scene, new recordings often provide the first exposure to such new school elements, which may then adopted by some in the scene. These performance practices then continue to spread on a person-to-person basis in live contexts such as tambores or practice sessions and tend to be shared especially among friends and peers. Alternatively, the arrival of new drummers from Cuba, especially younger drummers, encourages the continual spread of new stylistic elements from la mata.

On a more general level, the prominence of recordings of batá from Havana, together with the fact that most of the Cuban tamboleros who leave the island are from Havana, have helped make the Havana style of batá the standard. For those of us outside Cuba, there is generally much less exposure to the Matanzas batá style because it has been recorded so little. The style differs greatly from that of Havana in terms of the feel, toques, calls, and conversations, and is generally only performed by matanceros and mainly in Cuba. One exception is the Los Angeles scene, which although small, was influenced by the presence of drummer Francisco Aguabella, who was from Matanzas and taught an Afro-Cuban music
ensemble at UCLA for many years. The dominance of the Havana style, of course, also has to do with Havana’s status as the capital and cosmopolitan center of the island. The early recordings of batá from the 1950s, along with the presence of Collazo in New York, helped plant the seed of the dominance of the Havana-style in New York and, more generally, abroad. Later, the Havana style became even more thoroughly entrenched in New York following the arrival Puntilla and Coyudde in the early 1980s. Only in the 1990s did some commercial recordings of Matanzas-style batá emerge, as Afro-Cuban music became a popular educational commodity for foreigners and tourists, evident in the large numbers of persons visiting Havana and Matanzas to study Afro-Cuban traditional music since that decade. And yet, the Matanzas recordings have numbered very few and have not been nearly as popular among tamboleros, as the Matanzas style is rarely played outside Matanzas and thus not necessary to learn or study. For example, Grupo Afro-Cuba de Matanzas released a VHS recording of batá rhythms in the 1990s, and Los Muñequitos de Matanzas released an album featuring Matanzas-style tambor in 1996 (Itó ibán Echu). Yet the popularity and influence of these recordings pale in comparison with the recordings of Lázaro Ros, Abilona, and Papo Angarica, all of which feature the Havana style.

Correlating frequency of recordings with levels of influence: Los Muñequitos de Matanzas and Eulogio el Amaliano

The unrivaled dominance of the Havana style of playing tambor contrasts in many ways with the situation in rumba, where the Matanzas style—although not dominant—is widely recognized and performed due in large part to the high output of rumba recordings by Matanzas-based groups, in particular Los Muñequitos de Matanzas. The other prominent group in Matanzas is AfroCuba de Matanzas, which is also well-known among fans and practitioners of rumba outside of Cuba due to some of their popular recordings. However, Los Muñequitos are
far more popular, as they have released more albums than any other rumba group and have done so over the longest period of time—since the 1950s. They have exerted a significant influence on the transnational scene, both in their style of playing and the extensive repertoire of songs they have recorded. By the 1990s in New York and Puerto Rico, most musicians in those local scenes had been exposed to and influenced by the Muñequitos’ recordings, including several of their releases in the 1990s. According to rumberos active at the time, such as Héctor Calderón and Luis Fernando “Totin” Agosto Baez in Puerto Rico, several drummers in New York and Puerto Rico were playing rumba in the Matanzas style in the 1990s. The traditional Matanzas style is distinguished by having only one open tone in the the tres dos\textsuperscript{12} part—as opposed to two open tones in the Havana style—and tends to utilize distinct conversational responses between the tumbador and tres dos on the front and back side of the clave, respectively. The conversational aspect of the Matanzas style was influenced by the guarapachangueo style in the 1990s, detectable in recordings of Los Muñequitos from the mid-1990s on, in which they incorporate several signature aspects of guarapachangueo. These aspects include increased complexity in the “conversations” between the tumbador and tres dos, the use of some rhythms in the drums associated specifically with guarapachangueo (i.e. the tutukutúm leading up to downbeats), the pairing of cajones with drums in many of their renditions of guaguancó and columbia, and an adherence to the aesthetics emphasizing greater rhythmic liberties in general in the tumbador and tres dos parts.

The Muñequitos’ recordings also exerted a major influence on song repertoire among those in local scenes outside Cuba, including New York and Puerto Rico. Due to the popularity and sheer magnitude of their recordings, which span more than half a century, their recorded

\textsuperscript{12} In Matanzas they often call the tres dos the tres golpes or llamador.
songs are well-known among *rumberos* in Cuba and abroad. Many songs of theirs are originals, written by group members such as Florencio Calle, the original director of the group. Aside from their place as the most-recorded rumba group, their high level of influence is also due to them being one of the oldest groups still in existence (founded in 1952). Further, since so many of their songs were written by Florencio Calle—especially in recordings prior to the 2000s—this makes him one of the most influential rumba composers. His songs have been widely known and used in repertoires by *rumberos* for decades in large part due to the group’s recordings.

Both the high influence of the group and Calle as a composer testify to the way recordings bolster the influence of musicians as individuals or groups. Had it not been for their recordings they would not have enjoyed nearly as much popularity, especially outside Cuba, where many groups and artists are first encountered via recordings. Several *rumberos*, including Piri, Daniel González Gil, and Amado Dedeu (director of Clave y Guaguancó) have expressed to me in interviews the importance of recordings as promotion and exposure, particularly at the international level. The groups and artists with the most recordings tend to be the most well-known outside Cuba. Of course, this also helps with recognition in Cuba’s scene as well, for example as recordings can help groups get “heard” and invited to cultural events such as music festivals, particularly if the group is not based in the island’s metropolitan center, Havana (Amado Dedeu 2015, interview).

I will delve more into the socioeconomic effects and benefits of recordings as promotion in later chapters. For now, however, let us consider the musical phonograph effects of having many recordings and having made recordings over long periods of time, as have Los Muñequisitos de Matanzas. More recordings in this case generally equals increased exposure and thus greater potential for exerting musical influence at the transnational level. In addition, the longer the
period over which a group is producing recordings, the greater the potential for exerting influence, granted that the recordings are all generally widely-disseminated and the group remains popular. For example, Los Muñequentos have been producing successful, widely-disseminated recordings since the 1950s, with the spike of recording output occurring in the 1990s. For their part, Los Muñequentos have also maintained a high standard for the singers and drummers that become part of the group, despite the generational turnover that has occurred in membership. Further, their stylistic approach has evolved through the decades, reflecting and contributing to the stylistic currents and evolution of rumba as opposed to remaining fixed in the past. The group’s original director, Florencio Calle, has become one of the most influential rumba composers due to the high amount of his original compositions having been recorded since the 1950s.

The flip side of this, of course, is that many highly talented performers and composers have not either not recorded, have recorded very little, or in some cases have not been recognized as musicians or composers on a recording. For example, Eulogio el Amaliano, despite being a highly capable and experienced rumba singer, is not as well-known abroad or even among younger generations in Cuba due to the fact that he barely recorded. He has only been featured on one track on a commercial rumba album: Gregorio “El Goyo” Hernández’s 2006 album La rumba es cubana. Unfortunately, he passed away soon after this. Eulogio was, however, well-known among some older generations of rumberos, as he was active in the local performance scene in Havana, although not as part of major folkloric groups. He is mentioned in Yoruba Andabo’s song “Chano en Belén” on their 1997 album El callejón de los rumberos alongside other great rumberos from Belén, one of Havana’s barrios known for rumba:

Y los rumberos más nombrados de La Habana, allá en Belén
Rumbeaba Justiniani, Eulogio el Amaliano, Roberto el Carpintero,
Roncona con su flor en la solapa, Embale y Flor de Amor . . .

And the most recognized *rumberos* of Havana, over in Belén
Justiniani, Eulogio el Amaliano, Roberto el Carpintero,
Roncona con su flor en la solapa, Embale y Flor de Amor all performed and enjoyed rumba . . .

Luckily, a few years ago an old home-made recording surfaced in which Eulogio can be heard singing the lead voice in some of the songs. The recording was made in the 1980s at a small informal gathering of *rumberos* by Raúl “Lali” González Brito, an ex-member of Clave y Guaguancó. Lali just happened to turn on the tape recorder that day—not necessarily a common occurrence among *rumberos* in Cuba—and made a short introduction saying he was hoping to capture some of the “things that have been getting lost” (“*estas cosas que se han ido perdiendo*”) (Cox 2011). That Lali even chose to record is quite interesting\(^\text{13}\) because it points to the idea that some *rumberos* in Cuba in the 1980s must have felt that the traditional elements and practices of rumba were being lost. Of course, Afro-Cuban traditional music and related practices would experience a renaissance in the 1990s which perhaps no one could have foreseen in the 1980s. Lali’s comments and choice to record also reveal the importance of recordings as a way to document such musical traditions, especially if they are seen as in danger of fading away. Such documentation provides an audible record, to be sure. Yet aside from this, can such documentation help restore an endangered music tradition? While the act of recording itself does not have the effect of helping to restore a music tradition that is being lost, if the recordings are disseminated, they can certainly have a positive effect. For example, they could serve to pique the interest of listeners and thus increase exposure to the tradition, perhaps spurring new support or an expansion in the number of practitioners.

\(^{13}\) Prior to the recent (2010s) use of social media and dissemination of smart phone technology in Cuba, most recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music have been made in recording studios, by foreigners, or for Cuban television or movies.
Returning to recording of Eulogio, it is unfortunate that this recording is not widely-known among *rumberos* outside of Cuba, and especially not in Cuba. It has not enjoyed wide dissemination because it can only be accessed through Barry Cox’s rumba blog ¡Vamos a guarachar!, where he posted the recording in the form of four downloadable MP3 tracks and recounts the story behind how it was made\(^{14}\). According to Cox (2011), the cassette sat forgotten for many years in Amado Dedeu’s collection, as the recording had been made at Amado’s house. The recording offers one of the only audible accounts of Eulogio’s unique singing style. He was already in his 50s when it was recorded in the 80s, so his style naturally reflects his generation of *rumberos*. His timbre is slightly raspy, and his execution of melodies is not always necessarily in-tune. And yet, while part of his sound on this recording may be due to his age, listening to him sing reveals a very different rumba singing aesthetic than what many of us are used to hearing in the albums of professional rumba groups, which tend to favor voices that are clear and melodically precise. Indeed, some of the most recorded singers on early rumba recordings were also singers of popular music, like *sones* and *boleros*, such as Esteban “Saldiguera” Lantri, Carlos Embale, and Hortensio “Virulilla” Alfonso.

Instead of a suave, legato, melodic execution, with Eulogio one encounters the raw sound of an older generation of street *rumberos* (i.e. *rumberos* that were active in the rumba scene’s original contexts: house parties and other informal, non-staged gatherings). While a few other recorded rumba singers display a similar raspy rawness—like Mario “Chavalonga” Dreke and Miguel Angel Mesa Cruz on the album *Rapsodía rumbera*—Eulogio brings a unique swing to the table with his style. His unique swing is especially notable in his masterful delivery of rumba *décimas* in the recording, which are sung with an interesting rhythmic swing in which the singing

\(^{14}\) [http://esquinarumbera.blogspot.com/2010/02/eulogio-el-amaliano.html](http://esquinarumbera.blogspot.com/2010/02/eulogio-el-amaliano.html)
borders on sounding like quick-paced speaking. His dianas comprise long, slightly strained melodies, which again is also very different from what most recorded rumba singers sound like.

Cox (2011) sums it up nicely:

Eulogio’s distinctive voice reminds me of the singers from Harry Smith’s "Anthology of American Folk Music," collected from performers who developed their art in the relative isolation of the pre-radio era, before mass communication and the demands of the record industry began to influence performers, favoring those with a more homogenous style and broader appeal at the expense of those with regional, or in some cases wholly individual idiosyncratic styles.

Cox (2011) relates how rumbero Gregorio “El Goyo” Hernández, tried to get Eulogio to record for years, but Eulogio for some reason did not like the idea of recording records. The likelihood that many such talented, unique voices go unrecorded—or at least, in this case, are not featured on commercially-recorded albums—means a few things. For instance, their influence and exposure as singers will not be as wide-reaching in the national or transnational scene, their unique style may go undocumented or never be heard by wider audiences, and the legacy of their name will not be preserved in the same way as that of singers featured on commercially-released rumba recordings. The Eulogio recording posted on Cox’s site, for example, will most likely be accessed primarily by non-Cuban aficionados of rumba who live outside of Cuba and take the time to follow Cox’s blog and read his discussion posts, which are written in English. While discussing the Eulogio example reveals how making (or not making) widely-disseminated recordings affects the influence of a particular musician’s style, I would like to turn now to a larger case-study: the history of rumba in Puerto Rico and the role Cuban recordings have played in the propagation of the Puerto Rican rumba scene and its stylistic performative features.
The Puerto Rican rumba scene: Cuban recordings and the local rumba scene

Rumba in some form has been performed in Puerto Rico as early as the 1950s, but the performance of traditional rumba has certainly been present since the early 1980s, following the return to the island of Puerto Rican drummers who had lived in New York. Surprisingly, there have been no scholarly studies of Puerto Rico’s local rumba scene, which now includes several organized performance groups. Recordings made by Cuban *rumberos* were not only integral to the development of Puerto Rico’s rumba scene, but played a key role in the shaping of local performance practices, which have included the imitation of song repertoires from recordings and the shifting dominance of regional drumming styles—Havana, Matanzas, and now *guarapachangueo*—according to the availability of recordings representative of these styles. The Puerto Rican story of rumba in some ways resembles the history of rumba in New York, and yet Cuban culture bearers did not move to Puerto Rico to live there permanently, as they did in New York. Because of the lack of Cuban culture bearers on the island, the rumba scene did not develop as early as the New York scene.

As previously discussed, most of the participants in the early New York scene (1950s-70s) were of Puerto Rican descent, along with some African Americans, Jewish Americans, and other Latinos. Some of these New Yorkers had learned basic techniques and concepts from the few qualified Cuban drummers in the city, which they passed on to their peers. Recordings made by Cuban *rumberos* based in New York and in Cuba served as key learning materials, providing inspiration for song repertoires and drumming practices in the city. Puerto Ricans were particularly prominent in the scene, as they were the most numerous group of Latinos in New York due to the exodus of Puerto Ricans leaving the island to come to the city in the 1950s. It was primarily the children of these migrants—the New York-born “Nuyoricans”—that found in
rumba and other Afro-Cuban traditional music a symbol of Afro-Latino identity. Comparable Afro-Puerto Rican cultural practices, like bomba, had long been heavily marginalized and even suppressed in Puerto Rico due to their association with blackness, a situation which has only changed since the late 1990s and 2000s “renaissance” of bomba in Puerto Rico and abroad. In the context of the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s, some Puerto Ricans and African Americans in New York found in rumba a symbol of their Afro- or Afro-Latino identity (Jottar 2011a).

While some recordings of rumba were available in Puerto Rico by the 1970s, the lack of Cuban culture bearers on the island meant that there were few options to learn about the proper techniques and basic elements of traditional rumba performance. Rumba as a performance practice arrived in Puerto Rico via New York thanks to Puerto Rican drummers who had learned and played alongside Cuban drummers there (Luís Fernando “Totin” Agosto Báez 2016, interview). However, this is not to say that Puerto Rican drummers on the island were completely unfamiliar with the genre. As early as the 1950s, there were percussion-based jam sessions on beaches, street corners, and patios in some of the working-class neighborhoods of the capital and surrounding areas. These were sometimes referred to as rumbas (in the popular, generic sense of the word as it refers to a gathering with music and dance) or bembés de timba—keeping mind that conga drums in Puerto Rico are known as timbas, and bembé was a popular word at the time which was likely used to refer to any percussion-based music relating to or drawing on Afro-Cuban material (Iván Dávila 2016, interview). For example, the albums released by Mongo Santamaría beginning in the 1950s often described as bembé any tracks that featured Afro-Cuban percussion rhythms in 6/8, even though they may have not necessarily had an Afro-Cuban religious connotation. However, according to Puerto Rican rumba singer Luís
Fernando Agosto Báez (2016, interview), better known as “Totin,” such street “rumbas” prior to the 1980s could be better described as percussion-based salsa jam sessions. Rather than the traditional instrumentation of traditional rumba, these jam sessions were played with conga drums, a timbale, bongos, and a cowbell, with people singing salsa over them.

In the end, it is difficult to say for certain how close any of these street jams came to resembling or being influenced by traditional rumba, or if they were performed differently in certain areas. They were, however, inspired by the prominence of Afro-Cuban percussion in New York and Puerto Rican dance bands of the time, like that of Rafael Cortijo in the 1950s and 60s, and those of the Fania musicians of the 1960s and 70s (Iván Dávila 2016, interview). These bands, of course, had themselves already incorporated elements of Afro-Cuban traditional music like rumba, thanks to the influence of Afro-Cuban drummers in the New York bands, like Mongo Santamaría and Carlos “Patato” Valdés. In addition, albums released by these Afro-Cuban drummers featuring Afro-Cuban traditional music strengthened its influence within the New York and Puerto Rican jazz and popular music scenes, at both the professional and amateur performance levels.

The pivotal year for rumba performance in Puerto Rico was 1980, when Angel “Cachete” Maldonado came back from New York and formed the group Batacumbele. Cachete had moved to New York as a teenager and had been able to learn from and perform with Cuban drummers there as a young musician. He became well-versed in Afro-Cuban percussion and its application to jazz and dance music. Batacumbele, like the Cuban group Irakere, drew heavily on Afro-Cuban traditional rhythms, jazz, and contemporary Cuban dance music. Cachete and several other accomplished Puerto Rican drummers started a regular practice and jam session in practice space that Cachete had in Barrio Obrero, one of the working-class neighborhoods of the capital.
What set these sessions apart from others was that many of the other drummers, like Cachete, had also returned from living in New York, and had also worked and performed there alongside Afro-Cuban drummers. To run down the list of those present is to recite the names of many of Puerto Rico’s top percussionists. They included Giovani Hidalgo, Anthony Carrillo, Frankie Rodríguez, Tony Jiménez, and Pablo Rosario (Luís Fernando “Totin” Agosto Báez 2016, interview).

Giovani Hidalgo, who became of the most well-respected conga players in the world, was a percussionist with Batacumbele. His father, Mañengue, had also played congas with salsa bands and would go on to found Puerto Rico’s first rumba group later in the 1980s. Frankie Rodríguez and Tony Jiménez had both played with Larry Harlow’s orchestra in New York, one of the top salsa bands of the time. Finally, Pablo Rosario, who also performed with Batacumbele, had worked alongside Afro-Cuban drummer Mongo Santamaría in New York. Drawing on and uniting their collective experience and abilities, these musicians’ jam sessions represented the beginning of what Puerto Rican rumberos might call la fiebre de rumba: the rumba fever (Luís Fernando “Totin” Agosto Báez 2016, interview). According to Totin Agosto, who began attending the sessions to learn more about traditional rumba, they would get together almost every afternoon to practice batá drumming and rumba.

The presence of Cachete and his crew of rumberos was in some ways a substitute for the lack of Cuban culture bearers in Puerto Rico. Other drummers and singers, among them many younger musicians like Héctor Calderón (2016, interview)—who now directs the rumba group Yubá Iré—started out in rumba by attending these sessions in the 1980s. Through watching, learning, and participating, they were able to grasp the basic techniques and rhythms of rumba, which they could in turn pass on to their peers. A rumba fever took hold of the capital and
surrounding areas, and the amount of *rumberos* grew. *Rumberos* began to get together in homes, bars, and other places in Bayamón, Levittown, Carolina, Loíza, San Juan, Santurce, and Río Piedras.

Later in the 80s, Giovani Hidalgo’s father, Mañengue, formed the first rumba group on the island, called Sepia Bajomundo. They performed in La Perla, a small marginal neighborhood of San Juan, in what seem to have been rather casual—as opposed to staged—performances. Indeed, most rumbas in the 1980s and into much of the 90s seem to have been at the street level, whether in homes, patios, street corners, beaches, or bars. It was not until the late 90s and early 2000s that more professional-level rumba and Afro-Cuban folkloric groups began organizing more formal stage performances. By the 1990s, the Puerto Rican rumba scene had evolved to encompass a diverse group of performers. There were amateur-level performers who still mixed rumba percussion with the influence of salsa, playing for fun on street corners and beaches, a phenomenon which is still visible in places like Puerto Rico and New York. Many of these players were simply salsa and rumba fans who had learned some basics of the music, but were not professional musicians. Then there were the professional musicians, including Cachete and his crew of drummers. It was this group of musicians, as well as the upcoming generation of drummers who learned from them and displayed talent and dedication to the music, that would go on to pioneer the major rumba groups in Puerto Rico (Luís Fernando “Totin” Agosto Báez 2016, interview).

One of the most popular and still ongoing regular rumba events has been at a bar in Río Piedras called El Vidi, which started in the mid- to late 80s as a monthly rumba. Many of the best *rumberos* were attending this rumba in the 1990s, and by the end of the decade, new rumba groups appeared which have remained active until today. Cachete started a group called Los
Majaderos in the late 1990s, which performed both traditional rumba and a style of rumba which drew on the influence of *son* and salsa, incorporating bass guitar and cowbells. Other groups sprang up as well, including Alfredo y sus Rumberos, Rumba Acana, Los Camellos, and Grupo Carabalí (Luís Fernando “Totin” Agosto Báez 2016, interview).

Yubá Iré is perhaps the most professional-level group; they eventually incorporated dancers, recorded albums, and still perform regular shows featuring rumba and other Afro-Cuban music genres. The group was started in 1998 under the direction of Héctor Calderón, one of the drummers of the younger generation who had attended Cachete’s rumba sessions in the 80s. Calderón and the others who started the group were fervent *rumberos* who had met and played together for years in street rumbas like the one at El Vidi. According to Calderón (2016, interview), the idea for the group came when he was hanging out at a rumba with some of the members of Los Muñequis de Matanzas (one of Cuba’s top rumba groups) after a concert they did in Puerto Rico in the late 1990s. Jesús Alfonso, the group’s *quinto* player, after seeing some of them play, encouraged Calderón to form a rumba, which he did. In 1998, around the same time he founded Yubá Iré, Calderón made his first trip to Cuba to study rumba and *batá*. He was able to take some classes with percussionists from Yoruba Andabo and Clave y Guaguancó, both among Havana’s best rumba groups and both well-known among fans outside Cuba due to their recordings. He also met several important *tamboleros* (*batá* drummers) and attended *tambores*. The following year, Calderón returned to Cuba with a few other Puerto Rican *rumberos*, and they were able to take drumming classes and workshops together. Thanks to the connections he made with these Cuban drummers, Calderón was able to return to study in Cuba in later years and participate in Afro-Cuban religious and music events on the island and in Miami.
In addition to contact with Cuban drummers in New York and Cuba, Puerto Rican *rumberos* were also enriched and heavily influenced by recordings of Cuban *rumberos*, whether recorded in New York or in Cuba. These served as references for rumba as performed by Cuban culture bearers themselves, as there were none in Puerto Rico. Recordings represented one of the few ways Puerto Ricans on the island could regularly and repeatedly tap into the vein of rumba as performed by the best Cuban artists and groups (Luís Fernando “Totin” Agosto Báez 2016, interview). The primary phonograph effects in the Puerto Rican rumba scene have been the imitation of song repertoires from recordings and the adoption of predominant regional and generational percussion styles, including Havana, Matanzas, and *guarapachangueo*.

As was the case in New York, the recordings of Cuban *rumberos* comprised important learning materials for aspiring local *rumberos*. The earliest widely circulating recordings of rumba in New York and Puerto Rico were those of Mongo Santamaría, recorded in the 1950s. These were popular over the next several decades, as were the recordings of Alberto Zayas, Guaguancó Matancero (later Los Muñequitos de Matanzas), Los Papines, and Patato y Totico. These recordings became available in Puerto Rico in the mid to late 1970s, where they circulated amongst fans, who made cassette copies for friends and peers from the original LPs. The dissemination of these early recordings coupled the fact that they were among the few rumba albums available at the time—up through the early 1980s—meant that in both the early New York and Puerto Rican rumba scenes, song repertoires were drawn almost exclusively from recordings. Cuban rumba singers were already scarce in New York, but they were completely lacking in Puerto Rico (Luís Fernando “Totin” Agosto Báez 2016, interview).

According to Totin (2016, interview), who was a part of the scene from its inception, the handful of local singers learned to sing rumba primarily from recordings. For example, Totin
explained how he would pick a song that he liked from an album and listen to it over and over again to memorize it, often copying down the lyrics as well. Once he had it memorized and sufficiently rehearsed, he could then start singing the song at rumbas and it would become part of his personal repertoire. By memorizing and adding new songs from recordings, singers would build up their personal repertoire, and since there were few available recordings prior to the 1990s and few singers in general, many of the same songs from those early recordings were performed over and over, creating a sort of canon in Puerto Rico. Unfortunately, many early singers were only imitating the lyrics and melody but lacked an understanding of how to sing in rhythm with the clave. Totin, for example, was not cognizant of the need to sing in time with the clave until Frankie Rodríguez, who had lived in New York and traveled to Cuba, corrected him. The pattern of drawing song repertoire from recordings continues into the present, although the number and variety of songs performed locally has grown considerably. This is due to the sharp increase in the number of rumba albums released by Cuban groups beginning in the 1990s, as well as the sharing of audio and visual recordings via social media sites like YouTube and Facebook. Of course, part of the reliance on recordings for song repertoire is the relative scarcity of original compositions of rumba in Puerto Rico. This means that rumbas could likely have never been sung in Puerto Rico had it not been for recordings, which together acted as a song archive. While Cachete and other drummers who had lived in New York probably knew a few rumbas that they had learned in the city, there was no other source of rumba song lyrics other than recordings (Luis Fernando “Totin” Agosto Báez 2016, interview).

Similarly, recordings represented the primary stylistic references for the percussion rhythms used in rumba in Puerto Rico. The predominant regional style of rumba used in Puerto Rico until the mid-90s was the Havana style, due to the fact that the Cuban *rumberos* in New
York were from Havana and that the majority of rumba recordings featured the Havana style. In the 1990s however, there was an increase in the amount of rumba recordings from Matanzas based groups, who also began touring in the US and Puerto Rico during this time. Thus, in the 90s, many of the rumberos in Puerto Rico began playing in the Matanzas style, as the Matanzas recordings were new and popular at the time (Héctor Calderón 2016, interview). And yet by the end of the 90s, Calderón and others in the younger generation—who were earnest to stay up-to-date on new rumba releases from Cuba—were being influenced by a new style of rumba. The guarapachangueo style of rumba, first created by the Chinitos family on the outskirts of Havana in the 1970s, had come of age in Cuba in the 1990s, by which time it had been adopted by Cuba’s top rumba groups. It was then disseminated outside Cuba via recordings and through foreigners taking lessons and workshops in Cuba. Both the increase in the number of rumba recordings and the ability to study Afro-Cuban music in Cuba were effects of Cuba’s opening up to tourism in the 1990s.

Calderón (2016, interview) and his peers had first been exposed to guarapachangueo in the mid-late 90s through recordings, particularly the albums Rapsodía rumbera and El callejón de los rumberos. Eager to learn guarapachangueo properly and in-depth, a few of them were able to travel to Cuba to study the style with some of the Cuban drummers featured on those recordings. Upon returning, Calderón drew on these experiences and modeled his group on his favorite Cuban rumba groups and their recordings. His group, Yubá Iré, thus draws much of its style and repertoire from Havana-based groups Yoruba Andabo and Iroso Obbá, especially that featured on their recordings. Cachete’s group, Los Majaderos, represents an older New York generation, and draws on the style of the famous Patato y Totico rumba album from the 1960s. For the youngest generation of Puerto Rican rumberos in the 2000s and 2010s, the breadth of
available rumba recordings online is astounding, whether in the form of documentaries, vintage clips, public performances, or videotaped lessons. These form an ever-growing archive of free, instant-access learning materials which are shared among friends and peers through the internet and social media.

Listening to Cuban rumba recordings not only influenced local song repertoires and playing styles; they were integral to the development of Puerto Rico’s rumba scene. Without the recordings, there would have been little development of singers’ repertoires on the island, since there was very little original composition of rumba among locals, especially in the 1980s and 90s. Since there were no Cuban culture bearers on the island as there were in New York, recordings have comprised particularly important supplemental learning materials. As in all rumba scenes outside Cuba, recordings are listened to repeatedly and studied, and many of their musical elements are adopted or absorbed into the personal musical habitus of the rumbero. In the end, recordings have provided an important glimpse into the current trends and dominant styles employed by Cuban rumberos, allowing these performance practices to be disseminated and received abroad.
CHAPTER THREE
SURGING FOREIGN INTEREST: THE COMMODIFICATION OF AFRO-CUBAN TRADITIONAL MUSIC IN THE 1990s

In the previous chapter I touched on the wave of new and re-released audio recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music in the 1990s and the resulting phonograph effects of these recordings in the transnational performance scene. This surge in new recordings in Cuba was one of the manifestations of a renaissance of Afro-Cuban traditional music performance, especially in terms of state-supported professional folkloric groups and public performances in Cuba and abroad. This chapter focuses on the surge in Western interest in Afro-Cuban drumming since the 1990s and how it was spurred in part by the dissemination of new and re-released recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music via the world music market. The surge in interest was also evidenced by the plethora of instructional books on Afro-Cuban rhythms written by US-based musicians in the 1990s and 2000s.

Cuba’s opening up to foreign tourism in the 1990s not only made Afro-Cuban cultural manifestations in Cuba more physically accessible to foreigners; it played an important role in the renaissance of Afro-Cuban music performance in Cuba in the 1990s. The state supported the promotion of Afro-Cuban traditional music as cultural tourism, whether in the form of state-sponsored study-in-Cuba experiences, workshops, or as direct support for state-sponsored performance groups. In addition, there was a rise in Westerners organizing Cuba study trips that focused on Afro-Cuban traditional music and dance. Concomitantly, many Cuba-based performers began offering private and group classes themselves, a pattern which has increased in popularity as more and more foreigners arrive wanting to study with Cuban teachers. Because of this commoditization of Afro-Cuban music traditions, many Cuba-based performers have been
able to gain greater social, economic, and cultural capital in Cuba and abroad. This may take the form of giving lessons to foreigners, marrying a foreigner (and thus being able to leave the country legally), taking part in tours or workshops abroad (earning hard currency), or even leaving Cuba to teach Afro-Cuban music or dance in Europe or North America.

**Early international interest in Cuban music**

International—and particularly Western\(^1\)—interest in Cuban music is nothing new. To the contrary, as Pacini-Hernández (1998) points out, Cuban music has enjoyed some of the most widespread popularity in the world, and its international presence and influence is perhaps only surpassed in the 20\(^{th}\) and 21\(^{st}\) centuries by black American styles like jazz and rock-and-roll. Even prior to the advent of recordings, 19\(^{th}\) century Cuban styles like the *contradanza* and *guaracha* became popular in places like Puerto Rico, spread via performances of traveling Cuban theater groups. If we go back even further, earlier forms of Afro-Caribbean dance were disseminated along shipping routes between the Caribbean, North America, South America, and Europe (Manuel 2009a). Cuban music reached its height of international popularity from the 1930s through the 1950s, as radio and the record industry gained momentum and records became more affordable and popular, particularly among middle class Westerners.

The recording industry in Cuba was at first dominated by US companies like Edison, Zonophone, Victor, and later Columbia. This domination makes sense, seeing as these companies formed the beginning of music’s recording industry, based on the commodification of music recordings. The earliest recordings of Cuban music featured primarily small ensembles,

\(^1\) By “Western,” I am referring primarily to Europeans and North Americans, who form perhaps the largest and most economically powerful consumer base for Cuban music outside the island. Although the majority are of white European or Euro-American descent, the term also includes Latinos and other minorities residing in the United States who are consumers of Cuban music, such as New York Puerto Ricans.
due to the limitations of early recording technology. Some of the earliest music to be recorded in Cuba was that of trovadores (singer-guitarists) or small instrumental groups, with a repertoire that included canciones, claves, danzones, and boleros. Díaz Ayala (2013) cites 1905 as the year the first recording was made in Cuba, although other sources believe this to be as early as the 1890s. Although the danzón did contain Afro-Cuban influence in its rhythms and instrumentation, it was recordings of the Cuban son that would become one of the most popular and internationally influential Cuban genres with notable Afro-Cuban influence (Manuel, Frías, and Garvey forthcoming).

Son developed in Havana in the first decades of the 20th century after arriving from Oriente (eastern Cuba) in the form of the rural son montuno, a style which featured the tres, guitar, and bongó. Once in Havana, local musicians adopted it and mixed in influences from the local musical environment, most notably from rumba and trova. The first recordings of son were made in the 1920s, although at this time, groups such as the Sexteto Habanero were brought to record in the studios in New York (Díaz Ayala 1994). Local recording studios appeared in Havana in the 1930s, and the first Cuban record companies opened in the 1940s. Son began gaining more widespread popularity in Cuba and abroad beginning in the 1920s, but it was the 1930s that really saw Cuban music enter its prime on the international level. By the 1930s, several Cuban musicians were already relocating to New York permanently, as that city was the center of the recording industry as well as a focal point for the performance of jazz and Cuban music. Indeed, jazz and Cuban music were closely intertwined, as they were both coming into international popularity at the time, particularly through New York’s performance and recording scene. In fact, many of the Cuban bands, band leaders, and performers that went to New York played a style of Cuban music that drew heavily on jazz aesthetics. Some, like Chano Pozo, who
developed cubop with Dizzy Gillespie in the 1930s, leaned more toward the jazz side of the spectrum and integrated Afro-Cuban musical influences into their jazz performances (Díaz Ayala 2002). Others, like Machito, performed first and foremost as dance bands, and integrated jazz aesthetics into their performances of Cuban son. This period coincided with the vogue of afrocubanismo in Cuba among elite and middle-class white composers and intellectuals, which linked Afro-Cuban artistic expression—albeit a “whitened” version of this—with nationalism. Notwithstanding, Afro-Cuban traditional music such as rumba or religious singing and drumming was not recorded and disseminated on a wide scale until the 1950s, although a few lesser-known recordings were made in the 1930s and 1940s (see Chapter 1).

The most internationally successful recordings of Cuban music from the 1930s through the 1950s featured styles like son, mambo, and Cuban music mixed with jazz (which would come to be known as Latin jazz). These styles became popular because of their danceability and the large number of performers and performances in New York and Mexico City, the former being the recording capital of the world and the latter being the epicenter of the Latin American film industry at the time. Cuban musicians and dancers were often featured in Mexican-made movies from the 1930s through 1950s. Thus, Cuban musicians and other performers of Cuban music had access to two of the most important media industries of the 20th century—the recording industry and the film industry—at their inception. Cuban music’s access to this new, impressive form of dissemination greatly increased its transnational character and international presence. Cuban music was similarly familiar to other Latinos and Latin Americans because of the shared language, some shared musical traits, and the history of musical exchanges in the Caribbean and Latin America. Yet in the case of Cuban music, I believe a part of what
encouraged its popularity among middle class white North Americans and Europeans was its exotic appeal.

Europe’s interest in the “exotic” sights and sounds of the culture of Others have long existed and are well-documented (Desmond 1991; García 2017; Godreau 2002; Hernández 2002; Mitchell 1991; Said 1996; Sawyer 2006). Indeed, this interest in categorizations of “us” and “Others” are reflected in the hierarchies of races created by Europeans during the 18th and 19th centuries (Smedley 2007). Comparative musicology and ethnomusicology grew out of similar tendencies to analyze and classify the music of “Others.” By the 20th century, advances in technology such as recordings, the radio, the telephone, and later television, linked different world areas—with the West as the economic center—together in ways that made it increasingly easier for Westerners to access the “Other.” Indeed, European entertainment in the early 20th century often featured cultural expressions of a racial or ethnic “Other.” Cuban music was one of the expressions which became popular because of its availability—thanks to recordings and visiting performance groups—as well as its exotic sound and appeal.

Even in the earliest days of the recording industry, executives and agents realized the marketability of recordings of “ethnic” music, although this was originally conceived of in a different way. At first, recordings of “ethnic” musics (i.e. music outside the Anglo-American mainstream) such as Polish or German polkas, were produced in order to be marketed to immigrants from those groups in the United States on the supposition that this was “their” music in their language. They were not marketed to Anglo-American consumers as “exotic,” even though the singing was in a different language (Díaz Ayala 2002). Cuban music on the other hand, could be marketed not only to Latinos and Latin Americans, but to middle class Anglo-Americans and Europeans (at least those in urban centers like New York and Paris).
Yet another aspect of Cuban music’s appeal to North Americans was the association of Havana with music, dancing, gambling, and vice. Beginning in the 1920s and lasting until the 1959 Revolution, Havana was a popular vacation spot for middle and upper class North Americans. It was close to the mainland US and yet offered a tropical cornucopia of sun, vice, and exotic entertainment. US mobsters struck ran major gambling ventures and North American tourists flocked to see live performances of top Cuban and North American performers of the time (Schwartz 1997). North American views of Cuba were thus heavily influenced by the associations of Havana with music and entertainment, presented with a unique combination of familiarity and exoticness. Taken together, it could be said that these views of Havana and Cuban music by North Americans and Europeans also imbued them with a certain amount of cosmopolitanism: they were foreign in origin, centered in urban areas like Havana, New York, and Paris, and in vogue with the middle and upper classes.

While Cuba and its popular music were seen as cosmopolitan and exotic to middle- and upper-class North Americans and Europeans in the 1930s and 1940s, in the 1950s Afro-Cuban traditional music also began to make an international audience for itself. As discussed in the previous chapters, it was not until the 1950s that recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music really came into their own as far as being commercially viable and being disseminated on a wide scale. Some recordings of rumba and other Afro-Cuban forms like *bembé* became extremely popular in the 1950s, especially in Cuba and New York, including some recordings by Alberto Zayas, Guaguancó Matancero, Papín y sus Rumberos, and Mongo Santamaría. Yet the popularity of Afro-Cuban traditional music in the 1950s, as well as in ensuing decades, was less due to interest in the “exotic Other” on the part of North American and European middle- and upper-class audiences. While many of them retained interest in Cuban popular music and its derivative
offspring like Latin jazz—at least through the 1950s—Afro-Cuban traditional music, which was more percussive and often deemed “folkloric,” became popular primarily among working-class audiences.

In New York, recording of Afro-Cuban traditional music were popular among Puerto Ricans and other Latinos, as well as African Americans and some Jewish Americans. For these audiences, Afro-Cuban music was less of an “exotic Other” and more of a representation of African roots or Afro-Caribbean culture with which they wanted to identify (Jottar 2011a). These groups of New Yorkers and the ensuing New York generation maintained their interest in Afro-Cuban traditional music through the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, even as recordings from the island were few and far between due to the US embargo. By the 1960s, New Yorkers had already established a local performance scene due to the presence of some Cuban culture bearers and drummers who had learned from them (and then from each other as well), not to mention the release of New York-made recordings like those of Patato, Totico, Silvestre Mendez, Mongo Santamaría, and Justi Barreto. During these decades, when Cuba was behind the iron curtain that separated East from West during the Cold War, new music recordings from Cuba were few and far between in the US, and thus at the international level—that is to say, among the economically-dominant classes of North America and Europe—the popularity of Cuban popular music declined drastically following the 1959 Revolution. Of course, this decline also had to do with the Cuban government’s policies toward popular music during the 1960s through 1980s, during which less priority was given to what were seen as commercial or capitalistic cultural expressions like dance music, and more support was given to art music and to a lesser extent, certain traditional or other forms seen to represent “el pueblo” or the ideas of socialism, such as nueva trova in the late 1970s and 1980s (Moore 2006).
The reappearance of Cuban music recordings in the 1990s via world music circuits

Yet widespread interest in Cuban music reappeared in the 1990s among Western middle-class audiences, including both Latinos and non-Latinos, thanks to changes to the US embargo which allowed Cuban music recordings to be imported and sold in the US once more. Pacini-Hernández (1998) describes this process in detail: in 1988, changes to the Trading with the Enemy Act relaxed restrictions on cultural materials from Cuba and allowed for music recorded in Cuba to be distributed in the US and for Cuba-based artists to perform there. However, since Cuban music had not enjoyed wide international popularity and dissemination for decades, Cuban music recordings were a sort of new and unique commodity by this time. For political reasons, including the fact that Cuban exiles were involved in the US-based Latin music industry, Cuba-based artists had long been left out of this sphere, and were not welcome. Cuba and Cuban music were also much less familiar to Westerners in the 1980s than they had been prior to the Revolution. It was through the nascent “world music” niche that recordings of Cuban music began to make their way back into international dissemination and the Western imagination.

The “world music” niche in the music industry developed in the 1980s and involved Western producers and promoters marketing traditional or popular music forms drawn primarily from non-Western countries and under the guise of “authenticity.” As Pacini-Hernández (1998) explains, the concept of “authenticity” had to do with roots, especially African roots. Further, in the sub-category of “world beat,” the featured artists tended to be those who explicitly expressed some kind of African or Afro-diasporic identity. They performed music that was deemed “authentic” in the sense of being African-inspired, although it tended to be mixed with popular styles, for example the Haitian group Boukman Eksperyans and their mizik rasin, which mixes
elements from the music of vodou with rock. The world music category used difference and Otherness as a central marketing idea, although veiled under the guise of “authenticity.” Further, this “authenticity” was often synonymous with racial difference, whether in the form of an explicit “Afro” identity, as in the case of world beat, or in the form of the music’s origins and the artists themselves being of non-white-European descent.

The latter was definitely the case for Cuban music, which was not marketed as “Latin” so much as “Cuban” or “Afro-Cuban” in the world music sphere, which worked well for two reasons already mentioned: 1) Cuban artists were not welcome in the US-based Latin music industry and 2) Cuba and Cuban music were no longer familiar to most Westerners (particularly Euro-Americans) in the 1980s and 1990s—to the contrary, Cuba was a mysterious, taboo island, which made it doubly exotic, especially from the point of view of US consumers. Cuba had for decades been mysteriously hidden behind political barriers, scarcely surfacing in popular media such as the news, music, or movies. Further, it was a communist country with what was often described as a dictatorship in the US, which were often the only facets of Cuba that did appear in any kind of media, such as movies. Indeed, US action movies and shows like The A-Team in the 1980s often used communist dictator-controlled countries like Cuba as a setting for action scenes that featured US military-trained men conducting secret missions in which they had to face off against evil and corrupt local police, military, or officials. Thus, for generations growing up in the US born during or after the 1950s, Cuba was often depicted first and foremost as a communist country, and communist states were of course the sworn enemy of the US and the West. To sum up, by the 1980s Cuba was no longer associated in the Western imagination with dance music and vice as it had been prior to the Revolution; and yet, some of the associations
with music would eventually resurface by the 1990s as the West became reacquainted with Cuban music through the aperture of the world music market.

Although the world music market appeared in the 1980s, primarily in the form of small, independent or subsidiary labels, recordings of Cuban music did not begin to circulate widely in this market until the early- and mid-1990s. However, unlike the prominence of recordings of Cuban popular music prior to the Revolution, the Cuban music recordings released (and re-released) in the world music market did not tend to feature contemporary Cuban dance music (timba in the 1990s), with which Westerners were largely unfamiliar, but rather more traditional, nostalgic forms like *son* and Afro-Cuban traditional music, as Tanya Katerí Hernández (2002) points out in her article on the Buena Vista Social Club project. This preference had to do with the ideology of “authenticity” inherent in the market for world music, which gave precedence to rootsy, folkloric forms, especially if these were of notable African-descent, as is the case with much of the percussion-heavy Afro-Cuban traditional music.

On the other hand, this preference also had to do with the fact that contemporary Cuban dance music did not represent such ideas of authenticity. Further, the sound of *timba*, the contemporary Cuban dance music of the 1990s, was jarringly different from similar Latin dance music of the time, such as salsa and merengue, and largely unfamiliar to fans of Latin popular music, who would have perhaps been the most likely consumers of this music. This unfamiliarity was because Latin dance music was often promoted and employed (i.e. in dance clubs) for *dancing*, and primarily consumed by Latinos and Latin Americans. And yet these same consumers were unfamiliar with the unique and complex rhythms, musical layers, and even the form of *timba*, which included the drum set, piano and bass rhythms that sounded completely different from those used in salsa, and new musical sections like the *bomba* or “breakdown”
sections featuring percussive bass slides and a change to a more individual, hip-gyrating dance called *tembleque* (Perna 2005). Even in the early 2000s as I was attending “Latin nights” on a regular basis and taking various salsa dance classes during my college days at the University of Florida, Cuban music was never played by DJs, as it would have been unfamiliar to the majority of the young, primarily Latino and Latin American audiences. It has not been until recently, in the late 2000s and 2010s—at least in places like south Florida and New York—that Cuban popular dance music like *timba* and reggaeton have become more familiar to audiences and fans of Latin popular music thanks to increased presence in local clubs and dance classes.  

In the case of other genres of Cuban popular music of the 1990s, like *nueva trova*, *novísima trova*, or Cuban versions of rock or funk, some artists like Silvio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés were able to become popular on the international stage, yet their popularity seems to have been mostly concentrated in Latin America as part of the larger tradition of singer-songwriters offering social and political commentary, especially singer-guitarists (Moore 2006). These genres were less marketable to non-Spanish speaking Westerners, as the music largely revolved around the ideas expressed through its florid Spanish lyrics, which mostly addressed the specific political and social circumstances of Cuba and Latin America. They did not necessarily fit into the mold of racial or cultural “authenticity” so central to the world music market.  

To be sure, dance musics like *timba* and Cuban reggaetón (i.e. reggaetón as performed by Cuban artists) did eventually experience success and popularity on the international stage, especially in Europe in the 2000s and 2010s, but this came after the initial success of more

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2 Since the late 2000s, I have noticed an increased presence of Cuban *timba* and reggaeton in dance clubs and dance classes in both New York and Miami. Examples include the dance classes hosted by Casino d’Primera in Miami and events by DJ Asho in New York and Miami in which *timba* is featured. Timba and reggaeton have also become increasingly common on Miami radio stations since the late 2000s, as have performances by Cuba-based *timba* bands and reggaetón artists.
traditional Cuban genres in the world music market of the 1990s. The rest of the world was essentially reintroduced to Cuban music via the world music market, with traditional, “authentic” genres used as a starting point. Their positive reception in the international market undoubtedly encouraged other labels to pursue relationships with Cuban artists. Further, and as a result of the popularity of Cuban music recordings, there were some Cuban bands touring in Europe or even based there temporarily (Caridad Paisán, personal communication). By the early 2000s, both Cuban traditional and contemporary dance music recordings were quite easy to come by in the West, and Cuban music was being increasingly incorporated into the market for Latin popular music. This incorporation is perhaps best exemplified in the success of Descarga.com, a large mail-order company specializing in Latin music with a large online catalogue that included a plethora of Cuban artists and genres, both traditional and contemporary. In fact, I remember it being one of the only places where you could find and buy music from many Cuban artists, including old re-releases and new albums from current artists. The site was quite successful and popular among fans of Cuban and Latin music in the early 2000s when I was ordering from there, which was just prior to the rise to dominance of the mp3 and online shopping, replacing the previous dominance of the compact disc format, in-store shopping, and mail order catalogs.

While Descarga.com specialized in Latin music, many of the labels releasing the Cuban recordings either specialized in world music or in Cuban music specifically. One example is Tumbao Cuban Classics, a label founded in Spain in 1989 and specializing in re-releases of pre-Revolutionary Cuban recordings in CD format. Their catalog includes son recordings from artists like María Teresa Vera, Arsenio Rodríguez and Sexteto Habanero; boleros and filin artists; big band groups like Casino de la Playa, and a few recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional material. The latter include *El yambú de los barrios* (a compilation combining two records by Alberto
Zayas and his Grupo Afrocubano), *Guaguancó matancero* by Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, and compilations of Chano Pozo recordings, some of which feature Afro-Cuban traditional drumming. Another label specializing in Cuban music is Qbadisc, based in New York and founded by Ned Sublette, author and former senior co-producer of Afropop Worldwide (AfroCubaWeb 1997). The latter is a radio show originally launched in 1988 and now broadcasts in the US, Europe, and Africa. The show features a wide variety of artists in the world music market niche, focusing especially on musics and artists of African or Afro-diasporic background (Afropop Worldwide n.d.). Qbadisc is thus a great example of how Cuban music is linked to circuits of world music.

Recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music were logical candidates for promotion via the world music market due, as they are non-Western, non-commercial, drumming-based genres with histories that link them to Africa via the slave trade, and therefore also to ideas of “authenticity” so integral to the marketing of world music. Indeed, most of the rumba, *batá*, and other recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music of the 1990s and 2000s were released by world music labels, Cuba-based labels, or labels outside Cuba specializing in Cuban music. Qbadisc, for example, released at least seven recordings of Los Muñequitos de Matanzas (comprising most of their discography), including some re-releases of older material. As the Muñequitos are the rumba group with the most recordings, these were important releases that were highly influential on the transnational rumba scene of the time. For example, these recordings encouraged the greater familiarity with and adoption of Matanzas-style rumba performance in Puerto Rico in the mid-1990s (Héctor Calderón 2016, interview). The rest of Qbadisc’s catalog is mostly Cuban dance music from the 1980s and 1990s. Other labels specializing in Cuban music
include Tumi, based in the UK; Caney, Caribe, and Tumbao in Spain; and Ahí Namá, based in the US.

Bembé is a great example of a US-based label in the world music vein that put out some Afro-Cuban traditional music recordings, including *Sacred rhythms* by Ilú Añá (released in 1995) and *Música yoruba* by the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional (released in 1996). Notably, they also released *Bata ketu* by Michael Spiro and Mark Lamson in 1996, which was widely popular in drumming and world music scenes in the 1990s when I was starting to explore Cuban and Latin popular rhythms as part of my drumset studies (Discogs 2018). In the *Bata ketu* project, Spiro and Lamson drew from and combined rhythms and influences from Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian traditional music. I would venture to argue that this recording helped to further promote interest in Afro-Cuban traditional drumming among Westerners, due to its popular dissemination, the way it linked the Afro-Cuban and Brazilian music, and its connection to the renewed interest in “hand drumming” (particularly African or Afro-diasporic) in the US at the time.³

Another US-based world music label, Green Linnet Records, which specialized in Celtic music, re-released Clave y Guaguancó’s *Songs and dances* in 1994, the rumba group’s first popular album in the West. In 1996, Clave y Guaguancó released *Déjala en la puntica* under the Cuban EGREM label (re-released in 1997 under the German Enja label). In 1999, they released another album under the Spanish Tumi label titled *Noche de la rumba*. AYVA is a Spanish label whose catalog includes Cuban dance music, Latin jazz, Cuban and Latin American singer-

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³ This link to the “hand drumming” culture is due to Michael Spiro’s role as an educator and author of educational books on Afro-Cuban drumming. Further, he served as a cultural mediator between North Americans and Afro-Cuban drumming traditions, as he is of white American background. A more recent example of his role as a cultural mediator is illustrated by the title of a YouTube video of a world-music-oriented clinic he gave at PASIC in 2011: “Michael Spiro: Understanding the triplet-feel in Afro-Centric music.”
songwriters, and a few recordings of Yoruba Andabo, including two CDs and a DVD of a live performance in Havana. Indeed, Yoruba Andabo’s first and most well-known recording among rumberos in the transnational scene—*El callejón de los rumberos*—was released by AYVA after being recorded in 1993. The same album was also re-released in 1997 by Agave Music.

Pancho Quinto, a founding member of Yoruba Andabo and one of the most influential Cuban percussionists of the time (due to his role in adapting *guarapachangueo* into a large ensemble format with Yoruba Andabo), recorded two independent albums as well. The albums, which featured mostly rumba, were both recorded in the US and released under world music labels: *En el solar de la cueva del humo* in 1997 (Round World Music Productions) and *Rumba sin fronteras* in 2003 (Riverboat Records). Interestingly, even before recording their albums, Pancho Quinto and Yoruba Andabo had also gained increased international attention following their collaboration with Jane Bunnett, a Canadian jazz musician and performer of Afro-Cuban jazz, on her album *Spirits of Havana*, released in 1993 (Kenneth “Skip” Burney, personal communication). Another highly influential rumba group who began recording in the 1990s was the group that released *Rapsodía rumbera* in 1995, many of whom later formed the group Rumberos de Cuba in 2000. Unlike many other groups, their recordings have been released on Cuba’s own EGREM label. In addition, Rumberos de Cuba recorded a DVD titled *Rumbón tropical*, which became very popular among fans of rumba and Cuban music in the US. The DVD was released in 2004 by San Francisco-based Boogalu Productions, which specializes in videos of Cuban popular and traditional music and dance and also organizes Cuba travel trips for individuals or groups (Boogalu Productions n.d.).

As for the two most extensive series of recordings of Afro-Cuban religious music—those of Lázaro Ros and Abbilona—these were first released by foreign labels, and later—likely after
observing their success—by Cuban labels. For example, Lázaro Ros’s recordings of Afro-Cuban religious repertoire, which highlighted his knowledge as an *akpwón*, were first released by Xenophile (*Olorun* in 1994) Caribe Productions (*Asoyi: Cantos arará* in 1994) and Ashé (*Songs for Eleguá* in 1996). Xenophile is based in Nashville, Tennessee, and specializes in world music, as does Ashé, based in Miami. Caribe Productions was a label under EMI Production Music in Spain, which itself is a division of Sony/ATV Music Publishing. Unlike the other two labels, Caribe specialized in Cuban dance music, and had signed many of Cuba’s top *timba* bands and artists of the 1990s and 2000s, including Los Van Van, Revé, and Paulito F.G. Caribe Productions also released the Abbilona project, at least in its early, formative years from 1999 through 2006 (Irián López 2016, interview). After 2006, by which time both the Lázaro Ros and the Abbilona series had become popular in the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene in Cuba and abroad, Cuban labels became more involved. For example, Unicornio, a Cuban label under Producciones Abdala, the latter founded by *nueva trova* star Silvio Rodríguez, released most of Lázaro Ros’s albums after 2005, which include at least 13 albums (Allmusic 2018).

Some of the most recent Abbilona recordings, the *Masters of batá* (2015) album and the 2017 video special titled *Abbilona*, were released by two different labels. *Masters of batá* was released by Sunlightsquare, a London-based independent label run by an Italian pianist, producer, and DJ named Claudio Passavanti. He is also an enthusiast of Afro-Cuban music who has been involved in the production of Latin popular music, jazz, and electronic music, among other things (Soundcloud n.d.). The 2017 recording, the first Abbilona project to be presented in video format, was released by the large Cuban Bis Music label directly onto YouTube.

Both Sunlightsquare and Bis, likely well-aware of the fact that their recordings would be available for free on YouTube anyways (as were most of the Abbilona recordings by the early
2010s, uploaded by various fans), made the Abbilona recordings available for free directly on YouTube. Sunlightsquare also has the MP3 album available for purchase on their site, but the songs can be heard for free on YouTube or Soundcloud, and download links are even provided in the YouTube video descriptions. Likewise, Bis Music released the 2017 video special Abbilona for free on YouTube under their official username. Yet unlike the earlier Abbilona recordings, which fell under the musical directorship of Irián López from the Chinitos family and thus drew largely from the drummers and singers associated with Los Chinitos, the 2017 recording was done with a group of musicians drawn largely from the currently popular and highly successful rumba group Osain del Monte, along with a few other akpwones. Nonetheless, the drummers featured on this Abbilona recording continue to represent the same evolutionary forward-push of contemporary batá drumming. These drummers are from the young generation and perform the rhythms in a way that incorporates modern, “new school” approaches to rhythmic and conversational variations while still paying homage to la base, or the traditional core rhythms. The Abbilona project thus continues to represent the merging of the old with the new as performed by some of Havana’s most highly talented young drummers.

The popularity of instructional media for Afro-Cuban traditional percussion in the West in the 1990s

In general, the belated outpouring of recordings of music from Cuba in the 1990s, particularly those featuring Afro-Cuban traditional music, helped cause—and supported—the surge in foreign interest in Afro-Cuban traditional music. As recordings were released and experienced success on the market—which in the economic sense was largely represented by consumers and music labels in North America and Europe—more and more recordings were released, including both new material and older material from the archives. After a decades-long
dry spell in terms of recordings of Cuban music—especially Afro-Cuban traditional music—coming out of the island, it was as if someone finally turned the water back on in the 1990s. And consumers outside Cuba, including fans, musicians, and students of the music, eagerly made use of these recordings for entertainment and study purposes. For fans and students of Cuban music from younger generations, there were also new opportunities to study and learn about Afro-Cuban traditional music in the 1990s, even if they were not located in places where they could learn directly from experienced musicians like they could in New York or Puerto Rico. These new learning opportunities—aside from the availability of many new recordings to study and learn from—were in the form of instructional books on Afro-Cuban traditional rhythms and study trips to Cuba.

The appearance of instructional books on Afro-Cuban traditional rhythms is most definitely tied to the growing popularity of “world music”—much of which featured African or African-influenced hand-drumming styles—as well as the access to and availability of many new and re-released recordings of Cuban music, including Afro-Cuban traditional music. Of course, the more general interest in internationally-popular Latin popular music styles like salsa was at play here, but even then, there was a growing tendency to look for the “roots” of these styles for those that wanted to study and learn about them. Since Afro-Cuban traditional music is seen as one of the “roots” of Latin popular music like salsa, and since it became available all of a sudden in the 1990s, it began to spark a great deal of interest among Western percussionists. Why?

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4 My good friend Charley Rivas, now a tambolero and accomplished rumbero and director of the bomba group Zona de Bomba, is a great example of someone who was first a fan of salsa and merengue before knowing anything about Afro-Cuban or Afro-Puerto Rican traditional drumming. We first met as undergraduates in 2002 at the University of Florida in a Latin American music class after I gave a short presentation on rumba. Afterwards, he approached me and expressed his interest in learning how to play congas (tumbadoras). He was immediately drawn to rumba after I showed him some of the basic rhythms and he became a member of the rumba group RumbaCaribe, later known as Rumbakuá. We also went on to similarly explore traditional Afro-Puerto Rican music—particularly bomba—and we have remained active as performers in the Afro-Cuban and Afro-Puerto Rican traditional music scenes ever since.
Because one of the most notable things about Afro-Cuban traditional music is its focus on percussion and rhythm, to the extent that melodic instruments besides the voice are either absent or not necessary. If the richness of the percussive music was not enough to attract percussionists, there is also the fact that, as the rhythms became more familiar and accessible via instructional books and recordings in the 1990s, Western percussionists—particularly those working in the jazz or popular music scenes—are often expected to have some familiarity with widely-known basic rhythms like guaguancó. Of course, percussionists of Latin popular music outside Cuba would have already had at least some familiarity and exposure to Afro-Cuban rhythms, but even they would have had greater access in the 1990s to learn more about it, should they choose.

In the end, the instructional books helped provide widespread education on the rhythms of Afro-Cuban traditional music (as well as other rhythms from Latin and Cuban popular music) by helping to make up for the lack of access to culture-bearers outside Cuba. I remember studying out of some of these instructional books as part of my drumset lessons when I was in high school, particularly around 1999 through 2001 when I played in the jazz band. It was through these books that I was first exposed to “Latin” rhythms, before I was introduced to Cuban music per se. Like many high school jazz bands, we incorporated “Latin jazz” pieces in our repertoire, which was always approached as something that necessitated specific changes in style, among the most important of which were the rhythms in the rhythm sections. As a drummer, it was necessary to learn at least some basic rhythms of Latin popular music in order to play the style. Since I was taking private drum lessons at the time, my drum instructor, Tom Hurst, would often incorporate instructional books in our lessons that focused on Latin popular music rhythms, which in actuality featured a lot of rhythms from Afro-Cuban traditional music.
Many of the books I first studied out of were geared towards incorporating these rhythms into the drumset for use in jazz or Western popular music, like funk. My instructor would often make copies out of the book’s examples or let me borrow the books so I could practice at home. Some of the books I studied out of at this time were *Conversations in clave* by Cuban drumset player Horacio “El Negro” Hernández and *TimbaFunk*, by David Garibaldi, Jesús Díaz, and Michael Spiro. As complements to the drum studies, the books included discographies of representative musical examples. In addition, most of the books came with an accompanying CD containing examples of the rhythms from the book, or even play-along examples with a rhythm section. As I became familiar with some of the basic rhythms and their use in drumset, I wanted to dig deeper, and so I sought out recordings where these rhythms were played in what I saw at the time as their original contexts: Latin and Cuban popular music.

Shortly thereafter, I also sought out teachers (Billy Bowker and Rob Glaser) to focus more on other instruments like *tumbadoras*, *timbal*, and *bongó*. Those teachers in turn introduced me to more Cuban and Latin popular music rhythms (*danzón*, *chachachá*, merengue, etc.), but, more importantly, to rumba. This was all happening for me in Gainesville, Florida, and apart from my instructors, all of whom were Anglo-American, I had no access to other culture-bearers, particularly as I became interested in rumba and Afro-Cuban traditional music. Thus I sought out other instructional books that delved deeper into the rhythms of Cuban popular and Afro-Cuban traditional music, like *Changuito: A master’s approach to timbales* (1998) by José Luis “Changuito” Quintana and Chuck Silverman, and later, *Bembe conversations* (2000) by Arturo Rodriguez and *The music of santería: Traditional rhythms of the batá drums* (1999) by Steve Cornelius and John Amira.
These books helped start me out in my studies of Afro-Cuban traditional music and were especially helpful as supplements, expanding upon the limits of what my instructors could show me. This supplementation was necessary, as my teachers at the time (Billy Bowker and Rob Glaser) were not performers of Afro-Cuban traditional music at the professional level, but rather played mostly jazz, Latin jazz, and some Latin popular music like salsa and merengue with local groups. Although Bowker and Glaser had some experience with rumba, their experience was primarily from earlier in their life when they had lived in Miami and New York as youths, respectively. They no longer played rumba often, and they were not tamboleros. Glaser, did however, introduce me to the shekere, showing me how to make them and the proper technique for playing them. And yet, I did not have much access to learn other Afro-Cuban drumming styles like bembé and batá, and at that point I didn’t even know about other genres like makuta or palo. The next step for me was traveling to Cuba in 2002 for the first time to take part in an Afro-Cuban drumming study trip with Chuck Silverman. Yet before I get into talking Cuba study trips and their popularity since the 1990s, I would like to provide a more detailed description and analysis of instructional books on Latin popular and Afro-Cuban traditional rhythms.

**Instructional media on Latin and Cuban rhythms for percussionists: A short history**

Perhaps the earliest instructional book written for Latin and Cuban rhythms was *Authentic conga rhythms* by Bob Evans, written in 1960. Evans was a North American drummer who enrolled in Katherine Dunham’s dance school in New York, where he was exposed to and learned about different types of “primitive drumming,” as it is described in the biography section of the book (Evans 1960). Evans learned the styles, including Haitian, Cuban, and other Latin American genres, both popular and traditional while working as a drummer and conga player with many
bands and Latin-themed shows in the Northeast. He was featured as a soloist in Latin American revues in Boston and New York’s Latin Quarters, and was the rehearsal drummer for the Duke Ellington television show, in which he often figured as a soloist on the congas. Evans was not only a pioneer as one of the first North American professional conga players, but his book on congas came to serve as a template in many ways for the structuring of later instructional books.

In his book, he focuses on the rhythms which were most popular in the US and representative of Latin America at that time. It contains notated rhythms of basic patterns and some variations for 24 different Latin American genres, the majority of which are Cuban, including mambo, son, and chachachá. Several are from Afro-Cuban traditional music, including ñáñigo (referring to abakuá rhythms), “Afro-Cuban,” “Afro 6/8,” and rumba. However, the book is short; while Evans provides a short definition or historical note for each genre, there is little other explanation in terms of performance other than the notated rhythm, which is laid out in one or two bars. As reflected in the “comments” section on the Amazon page for the book, it is a little out of date now and provides little guidance in the way of conga technique, so is it not necessarily helpful for showing someone how to play congas. Rather, it provides examples of basic rhythms that conga players should know.

Another early book with a similar purpose was Afro-Latin rhythm dictionary by Thomas A. Brown. I was unable to find information on the precise year of the first edition, but the second edition appeared in 1984. It was published by Alfred Publishing, a company that would became a major producer instructional percussion books in the 1990s and 2000s. Like Evans’ book, Brown’s dictionary is more of a basic guidebook than a “how to” manual on learning to play the music. In it, Brown (1984) explains that his book is meant for arrangers, percussionists, and educators, and provided basic descriptions of instruments and transcriptions of rhythms in Cuban
(including Afro-Cuban) and Brazilian dances, for example the *martillo* rhythm for bongos, and various parts for the claves, cowbell, and maracas.

One of the first, as well as one of the most popular and influential books focusing specifically on Afro-Cuban rhythms was *Afro-Cuban rhythms for drumset* (1990) by Frank Malabe and Bob Weiner. Like many of the percussion instructional books of the 1990s and later, it was accompanied by audio examples. In the 1990s and 2000s these were often CDs, and in the 2010s these often take the form of digital audio files available online. Malabe and Weiner’s book presents the learner with the basic rhythms used in Cuban popular music and Afro-Cuban traditional music, like the *clave*, the widely-used 6/8 bell pattern, *palito* (stick) patterns used in rumba, rhythms for *guaguancó* on congas. Since the book is geared towards the drumset, several rhythms are presented and then applied to drumset, including *conga*, *songo*, *mozambique*, and even merengue. Many of the later books focusing on Cuban popular and Afro-Cuban traditional rhythms also tend to focus on these same rhythms, perhaps due to the influence and popularity of this book, or maybe owing to the fact that up until the 1990s, these rhythms were among the most influential and widely used outside Cuba in jazz and popular music. Ed Uribe also authored a similar book in 1996, *The essence of Afro-Cuban percussion and drumset*, which provided more in-depth coverage of patterns for Cuban popular and Afro-Cuban traditional rhythms, including more patterns for the congas, bongos, and timbales, along with application to drumset. *TimbaFunk* (1997) by David Garibaldi, Michael Spiro, and Jesús Díaz, was another popular book that took a similar focus on combining and adapting Afro-Cuban traditional rhythms to drumset and funk.

By the mid- and late-1990s, more instructional books started appearing for Cuban traditional percussion instruments as well, including congas, bongos, timbales (these last three
Anglicized in books), and batá, and there was an increased in focus on Afro-Cuban traditional drumming. Among the books focusing on basic rhythms for congas and bongos were Conga drumming: A beginners guide to playing with time (1994) by Alan Dworsky, Progressive steps to bongo and conga drum technique (1996) by Ted Reed, Play congas now: The basics and beyond (2000) by Richie Gajate-García, Latin percussion in perspective (2008) by Dom Moio, Poncho Sanchez’s Conga cookbook (2002), and The Tomás Cruz conga method (2004). The latter, in three volumes, is one of the only instructional books that provides rhythms and concepts for approaching Cuban timba as a conga player (in volume three). In a similar vein, but more focused on conga technique and virtuosity, were several instructional VHS and DVD releases, including A private lesson with Giovanni Hidalgo, mano a mano (1996); Giovanni Hidalgo: In the tradition (1996); and Conga virtuoso (2000) featuring Giovanni Hidalgo. Other VHS releases also incorporated the drumset, including Mastering the art of Afro-Cuban drumming (1995) by Ignacio Berroa, Talking drums (1994) by David Garibaldi, Michael Spiro, and Jesús Díaz.

As for the books focusing more specifically on Afro-Cuban traditional music, while most of these appeared in the 2000s, among the earliest was Conversations in bembe (1995) by Arturo Rodriguez. I remember learning out of this book when I was still just starting to explore the world of Afro-Cuban traditional music, around 2001 or 2002. Like some of the other books focused on conga and traditional Cuban percussion, it broke down the rhythms and patterns into a series of symbols placed on a timeline graph to make the rhythms accessible to those who do not read standard Western music notation. The book was published by Mel Bay, a company that specialized in such music instruction books and published other Afro-Cuban-related books by Arturo Rodriguez, including Rumba guaguancó conversations (1999) and Traditional Afro-Cuban concepts (2003).
Another book I studied out of in the early 2000s was *The music of santería* (1999) by John Amira and Steve Cornelius, which presented the *oru seco* for *batá* in standard music notation. I remember that my two friends (Rafael Maya and Charley) and I were attempting to learn how to play the *oru seco* out of this book. At the time I had only taken a few very basic *batá* classes in Havana during my first trip there in 2002. Due to the lack of local *batá* drummers in Gainesville, Florida during our time at the University of Florida, the Amira-Cornelius book was one of the few resources we had to access and learn *batá* rhythms. We ended up having to relearn or correct many of the rhythms years later, after being sworn in as *omó Añá* and working as *tamboleros* in the 2010s. Nonetheless, the book did serve to familiarize us with some of the unique ways that the rhythms of the three *batá* drums fit in with each other. Another book series, which was presented in a similar manner to *Conversations in bembe* and also published by Mel Bay was *Rumba: Afro-Cuban conga drum improvisation*, (2001) by Cliff Brooks, in two volumes. Both volumes focused specifically on how to approach the *quinto* in rumba; it provided sample licks and showed how to position these correctly in the clave.

Most of the instructional books covered so far were released through large publishing companies such as DCI Video (for VHS releases), Alfred Music, or Mel Bay, and followed a standard format. They often provided a short historical context, listed examples of different rhythms, and provided accompanying audio examples for reference. And yet the most in-depth and, in my opinion, most credible books on Afro-Cuban traditional drumming were published independently by authors that studied these rhythms extensively either in Cuba or with Cuban drummers. These include Bill Summers’s *Havana to Matanzas: Studies in batá, sacred drum of the yoruba* (2002) and a plethora of books by Adrian Coburg, a Swiss musician and researcher who learned in Cuba from drummer and *santero* Julio Davalos. His books comprise perhaps the

Coburg also published an impressive, detailed two volume series on other Cuban percussion rhythms titled *Percusión afrocubana. Vol 1: Música folklórica, percusión mayor y menor* (2007, 12th revised edition) focuses on Afro-Cuban traditional drumming, and is not only very thorough in its coverage of rhythms of a plethora of Afro-Cuban traditional genres, but offers variations from different regions or interpretations, and provides extensive examples of parts that can be used by the lead drum (i.e. *quinto*, *caja*, etc.). The second volume is *Vol. 2: Música popular: Percusión mayor y menor* (2012d), which focuses on percussion rhythms for Cuban popular music. Although several of these books—particularly the ones focusing on songs—are not necessarily widely popular among musicians or students of Afro-Cuban traditional music, many of the songs transcribed in them have likely never been transcribed lyrically or musically, so this is important in its own right. Due to the more widespread interest in Afro-Cuban traditional drumming outside Cuba, his batá and percussion books are much more popular and better-known.5

To sum up, these instructional books were not only evidence of increased Western interest in Afro-Cuban drumming (as well as other types of African and Afro-diasporic

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5 In places like Nigeria, on the other hand, due to a lack of state support, economic support (e.g. through tourism), literature, and recordings, there is far less documentation of traditional music like Nigerian batá drumming and far less interest in and recognition of these traditions abroad (Peter Manuel, personal communication).
drumming) in the 1990s, the dissemination of these books also continued to fuel this interest by exposing more Westerners to the rhythms and providing them with new ways to learn the rhythms (i.e. in the form of books, notations, and audio or audiovisual instructional material). Further, these instructional books usually contained a bibliography and discography for learners to explore additional resources, which in turn complimented the rise in availability of recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music. Students studying from such books could therefore draw on the variety of recordings as listening examples. If we examine these patterns, what becomes visible is a sort of cycle whereby the circulation of recordings and instructional books abroad (particular, but not solely, in the West) helped produce the increased exposure to and interest in Afro-Cuban traditional music in the 1990s and 2000s, which in turn reinforced and encouraged the further production and dissemination of recordings and instructional materials. This international interest further stimulated the organization of new amateur and professional folkloric groups in Cuba and new recordings, which is clear in the plethora of groups present on the island by the early 2000s and the high number of recordings being produced by this time.

For example, in the early 2000s, many new recordings—mostly CDs and some DVD specials—of rumba and types of Afro-Cuban traditional music were being released by both new and established groups. Many recordings of new groups--or at least of groups never before recorded—in this decade included *Extrema casualidad* (2003) by Iroso Obbá (who also produced other albums, some of which were not produced commercially but rather sold to tourists during their performances in the famous Callejón de Hamel), Chvalonga’s *En el barrio de Ataré* (2004), the highly popular DVD *Rumbón tropical* (2003) by Rumberos de Cuba, *¿Dónde andabas tú, acerekó?* (2004) also by Rumberos de Cuba, *Fariñas el rumbero* (2005) by Pedro “Fariñas” Celestino, *Aniversario* (2001) by Tata Güines, *En un solar de Pogolotti* (2004) by

Many of the groups that had already established a name for themselves through their recordings in the 1990s (or earlier), among them some of the most esteemed and popular groups, also continued to produce new albums, many of which now featured a new generation of musicians and an updated and constantly-evolving style of *guarapachangueo*. These included Los Muñequitos de Matanzas (new albums featuring a new younger generation of singers and drummers), Clave y Guaguancó (new, more experimental albums, like the 2008 release *La rumba que no termina*, which incorporated unique arrangements and non-traditional instruments like bass guitar), and Yoruba Andabo (highly popular new style of *guarapachangueo* in recordings by late 2000s which drew on popular influences like reggaetón). In the realm of Afro-Cuban religious drumming, the Abbilona series continued to produce new recordings in the 2000s, as did Lázaro Ros. Papo Angarica also released three albums featuring *batá* at this time: *Fundamento Yoruba Vol. 1* (2001), *Fundamento Yoruba Vol. 2* (2002), and *Osun Lozun* (2005).

Never before had so many new recordings—particularly of rumba—been recorded and disseminated in such a short amount of time. The determining factor here was international—and especially Western—interest, which represented a powerful economic impetus, especially during the late 1990s and 2000s when Cubans were still dealing with and recovering from the devastating economic impact of the Periodo Especial of the 1990s. Indeed, in the wake of the collapse of Soviet support after 1989, the Cuban government made some key economic changes, drawing on the Chinese model whereby elements of capitalism are mixed into the socialist economy. One of the most important changes was opening the country to foreign tourism as a way of generating much-needed income. In the 1990s and 2000s, foreigners began pouring into
Cuba as tourists, hailing primarily from Canada and Europe, but also from Latin America and East Asia, even Australia. North Americans also went, although due to the ongoing US embargo, the trip either entailed going through a third country such as the Bahamas or the Dominican Republic or getting permission to travel there for specific cultural or religious (with a US Department of the Treasury Cuba travel license), or going for family visits. Unless the visitors had family in Cuba, the legal way to travel to Cuba was to do so under a Cuba travel license from the Department of the Treasury. Yet, since this license was not easily obtained by individuals, especially non-academics, it was easier to go with some sort of organized group trip.

For those interested in music, Cuba study trips were a great option. For example, I first went to Cuba through one of Chuck Silverman’s study-in-Cuba trips, which Silverman had started shortly before I first went in 2002. The trip accommodated a group of about 12 people and included daily group lessons with various percussion teachers in both Afro-Cuban traditional music and Cuban popular genres. It also included the hotel room, some meals, and transportation. Students could choose to take additional private lessons if they wanted. Silverman and guides took us to concerts as well, and we performed some of the repertoire from our group lessons in the Teatro América. Silverman’s trips often coincided with the Festival del Tambor dedicated to Guillermo Barreto, a yearly event which Silverman also helped to promote through his group trips. In fact, in 2018 the Festival celebrated its 18th year and paid homage to Chuck Silverman (who passed away in 2014) as an important performer, educator, and promoter of Cuban music, as he had continued to offer several trips each year from the beginning of the 2000s until his death.
Travel packages and foreigners studying music in Cuba

To be sure, foreigners studying Cuban music in Cuba was nothing new. As early as the 1980s, state-sponsored organizations like the Escuela Nacional de Arte had offered such opportunities to groups from abroad. FolkCuba is another example. Hosted by the state-sponsored Conjunto Folklórico Nacional since 1985, it offers students—which came from Europe, Asia, and elsewhere—classes in Afro-Cuban dance and drumming, held once or twice a year for two weeks (Arte por excelencias 2016). However, such study-in-Cuba trips were quite limited in number prior to the late 1990s and especially the 2000s, when they reached a peak of popularity. This was due to Cuba’s opening to foreign tourism in the mid-1990s, the growing interest of foreigners in Afro-Cuban music and culture (including engagement with it as cultural tourism), and the creation of study-in-Cuba packages organized by Westerners living outside Cuba, such as those offered by Chuck Silverman. While such study-in-Cuba packages were initially fostered and controlled by Cuban state apparatuses, now Westerners were organizing trips of their own, perhaps offering the trips once or twice a year, and basically making a sort of travel-music-education business venture out of it.

Often, the Westerners heading these trips were based in cosmopolitan areas where there was high interest in Afro-Cuban music specifically, or at least general interest in non-Western or Afro-diasporic music, as in places like San Francisco or New York. For example, Association Yemayá, an organization founded in 1994 and based out of Toulouse, France (a city with a strong presence of Cuban music and culture which hosts Cuban music and dance festivals), began organizing study-in-Havana trips in the late 1990s in the form of the annual Cuba Hoy Festival. The festival and trips are still ongoing, and foreign students that sign up for the course can choose to study popular or Afro-Cuban traditional dance or music during the two-week
course (ARneT n.d.). The Center for Creative Education, based out of Stone Ridge, New York, also organized Afro-Cuban traditional drumming courses in Cuba in the early 2000s, and the organizers of what is now PlazaCuba, based out of San Francisco, have been offering Afro-Cuban drumming and dance trips to the island since the early 1990s (AfroCubaWeb 1997; PlazaCuba 2018).

Christian Weaver’s Manchester, United Kingdom-based group La Timbala also offered such courses in Havana in the early 2000s (AfroCubaWeb 1997). These are just a few examples; a longer list of such study-in-Cuba courses from the early 2000s is available on AfroCubaWeb, as well as lists of Afro-Cuban music and dance courses offered in the US, UK, France, Australia, Germany and Canada. Although organized by foreigners, these courses feature Cuban teachers and folkloric groups and often last for two weeks, although sometimes as long as a month. The trips often take place twice a year and usually take place in Havana, although sometimes Matanzas is included in the trip, as it is an important hub of Afro-Cuban music and home to prominent folkloric groups like Los Muñequitos de Matanzas and AfroCuba de Matanzas. This pattern continues into the 2010s, and includes organizations such as San Francisco-based Cali2Cuba; ThisWorldMusic, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts; and Ned Sublette’s (founder of the Qbadisc record label) company Postmambo Studies.

State-sponsored programs and Westerners were not the only ones capitalizing on the growing foreign interest in Cuban popular music and Afro-Cuban traditional music by organizing groups and offering classes; by the mid- and late 1990s, Cuba-based performers themselves also started dealing with foreign students directly and offering private and group classes. Some of these interactions likely stemmed from state-sponsored classes or workshops or trips organized by foreigners. For example, in my own experience with the Chuck Silverman trip
in 2002, those of us in the group who wanted to take private lessons with one of the Cuban instructors could do so independently. I chose to take some private classes with Raúl “Lali” González, our teacher for the Afro-Cuban traditional music workshops, and simply paid him by the hour. Since we had not covered any batá drumming in our group workshops, I chose to take a class in batá with him in his home, which constituted my first time playing those drums. I also ended up buying a quinto cajón from Lali and saving his information for future trips. When I returned to Cuba to visit family and conduct research in the following years, I would call Lali and meet with him at his home to take classes in batá and rumba singing and dance.

Such networking and interactions leading to private lessons was and continues to be common practice among foreigners visiting Cuba as part of group study trips. The teacher-student relationship may then continue for years, and the student may also meet other performers with whom they may also take classes. Outside of the private lessons themselves, the teacher may also invite and take the student to private or public music events such as a rumba or tambor. Lali, for example, had an independent group he directed with whom he performed at cajones, güiros, and violines. He would invite me to the events, where sometimes I could participate and play some of the parts.

Other times, foreign students found Cuban teachers by networking through fellow foreign students abroad who had studied with a certain performer who they recommended. For example, the Chinitos in San Miguel del Padrón started teaching some Italian students in the mid- or late 1990s and continue to do so (Irián López 2016, interview). By the 2000s, the family had spaces that the students could rent out and live in while they were in Cuba studying, which was

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6 A religious ceremony dedicated to Ochún featuring a small ensemble with guitar, violin, and percussion which performs a mix of popular and folkloric rhythms and songs loosely related to themes associated with Ochún or the Caridad del Cobre (Ochún’s equivalent saint) and other orishas.
convenient as San Miguel del Padrón is on the outskirts of Havana, well outside the tourist zone where hotels are more common. They thus established a sort of school of their own, where foreign students could stay and study for as long as they liked, paying rent by the day—a system which is ongoing. Not only do the students take private and group classes, they also get to attend the religious musical events the Chinitos are hired to perform, including *tambores*, *cajones*, and *güiros*. Most of the students are Italian, which is likely due to the fact that one of their first and most prominent students—Antoine Miniconi, who lived there for several years studying with Piri—also helped publicize and promote the Chinitos on the internet via YouTube videos and blogs in the mid-2000s. In addition, the Chinitos had previously visited Italy while doing tours and workshops in Europe and elsewhere with the folkloric group Raíces Profundas (Raíces Profundas 2011). Indeed, such performances and classes abroad by Cuba-based groups also led to new teacher-student relationships where foreign students could then continue studying with the same teacher when they visited Cuba.

**Teaching foreigners and accessing divisa: Afro-Cuban traditional music lessons as private enterprise**

Teaching foreigners—whether in the form of group workshops or individual classes in drumming, singing, or dancing—came to represent important economic opportunities for Cuba-based performers. Such economic opportunities continue to be prized but were especially attractive to such performers in the late 1990s and early 2000s during and shortly after the extreme economic hardships of the Período Especial. Being mostly black, the performers of Afro-Cuban traditional music were doubly marginalized in the Período Especial in Cuba because of their lack of access to jobs in the growing tourist sector (jobs given primarily to white
Cubans), where they could access the much-prized hard currency (i.e. dollars or *divisa*⁷). On the other hand, there were the foreign visitors to Cuba, largely light-skinned or white (European, North American, Latin American, or Asian) and middle class. Due to their comparatively privileged socioeconomic status and citizenships, these foreigners had the freedom and the money to travel and pay for study trips or classes in Cuba. The high level of racial and socioeconomic inequality between Cubans—especially black Cubans—and foreigners is readily apparent to both foreign visitors and especially Cubans, who often view all foreigners as being much more privileged economically (hence the prevalence of *jineterismo*⁸). It is no wonder then that so many performers of Afro-Cuban traditional music in Cuba are eager and happy to impart classes to foreign students, who pay for workshops and lessons in *divisa*, especially if these are conducted privately with teachers.

Cuban teachers can easily charge $20 or $30 (CUC, or Cuban dollars) for a private lesson, which is about the same as what a student might pay a private teacher in the US. For

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⁷ In Cuba, the word *divisa* is used to denote Cuban dollars. Since the 1990s, Cuba has had a dual-currency system in which there are Cuban pesos (the normal, everyday, national currency used by most Cubans, also referred to as *moneda nacional*, or “national currency”) and Cuban dollars, which are referred to officially as “CUC” or *pesos convertibles* (convertible peso), or less formally as *divisa* or *fula(s)*. While the exchange rates vary, in the 2000s and 2010s, when I’ve visited family in Cuba, one Cuban dollar has usually traded for about 23-25 pesos; currently, in 2019, the exchange rate is just over 25 pesos. Most Cubans are paid in pesos, and yet, since the 1990s Special Period, when many necessary supplies and commodities became scarce and expensive, many types of commodities (including some kinds of food, like meat and milk, as well as consumer goods like electronics and shoes) are only available for purchase in *divisa*. At first, in the 1990s, Cubans started using American dollars brought or sent by relatives abroad for buying necessary commodities. Although it was illegal at first, the US dollar was then legalized and widely used as part of the dual economy until the introduction of the Cuban dollar, which was to take the place of the US dollar. In this dual economy, dollars became synonymous with privilege, foreigners, tourism, and special “dollar stores,” in which only Cubans with access to dollars (e.g. those receiving family remittances or those who earned dollars via tourism jobs or foreigners) could buy the products on sale. Cubans without such access to *divisa* can change their pesos in national currency exchange kiosks (or on the black market). Yet, since earnings in pesos are only worth a small fraction of any earnings or income in *divisa*, and since black Cubans are less likely to have family abroad sending them remittances or to be working in the tourist sector, there have been an increase in economic and racial inequalities between Cubans due (in part) to the dual economy (Blue 2007; Roland 2011).

⁸ The word *jinetero* in Cuba generally describes someone who hustles tourists. The word—particularly in its feminine form (*jinetera*) is also associated with prostitution or those who have a foreigner as a “sugar daddy” (or “sugar mama”).
Cubans, however, $20 or $30 represents a much larger sum, as most Cubans only get paid about $20 (in pesos) a month by the state! It thus became increasingly common in the late 1990s and especially early 2000s for performers to impart classes to foreign students. So, in addition to being approached by Cubans trying to sell them CDs or cigars, foreign tourists and students might also get offered Afro-Cuban music or dance classes by performers or even random Cuban bystanders in Afro-Cuban-themed shows and events such as the Callejón de Hamel or the Palenque of the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional. In short, the teaching of Afro-Cuban traditional music and dance became a cultural commodity that Cuba-based performers now had the chance to really profit from economically. Since learning Afro-Cuban traditional drumming or dance is something that foreigners are often interested in, and since Cuba-based performers are seen as the most authentic culture bearers, a mutually-beneficial relationship emerges in which performers can access hard currency and foreign students can experience and learn about the music or dance from culture bearers. Further, foreign student have the added experience of learning in Cuba, or in other words, in la mata, where they can attend live events and perhaps even take part in them.

The economic benefits of giving classes to foreigners manifest not only in the form of access to hard currency (divisa) but often extends to opportunities to emigrate, after which they may perform or teach abroad. For Cubans on the island, emigration is often equated with greater economic opportunity: the ability to earn more and enjoy greater access to resources. Manley “Piri” López of the Chinitos family in San Miguel del Padrón is a great example of a culture bearer who emigrated in order to have greater access to resources like the internet and the international music industry, among other reasons. Piri is the son of Pedro López, one of the original Chinitos brothers responsible for creating the guarapachanguero style. Piri’s uncle, Irián
López, the youngest of the brothers, became the most active and experienced performer of batá of the four brothers, and it is he whom teaches foreign students. However, as Piri came of age in the late 1990s and early 2000s, some of the students began to study with him as well, as his talent was earning him increased attention in the local scene. Since many of the foreign students were younger and closer to his age, some were likely interested in the unique flavor of his playing and that of his generation.

One of Piri’s primary students was Antoine Miniconi, an Italian who ended up living in Cuba for five years studying with Piri. In the following chapter I will delve more into Miniconi’s—and other foreigners’—roles in bringing increased international attention to Los Chinitos and Piri through the uploading of YouTube videos and the creation of promotional blogs. Yet Miniconi and other foreign students studying with Los Chinitos also helped the family by providing access to hard currency as they paid rent for their rooms and paid to study. Piri, for example, was able to buy an air conditioning unit for his room in La Corea, where he lived with his father Pedro (2016, interview). Keeping in mind that most Cubans are not able to enjoy the comfort of air conditioning in their homes, work places, public buildings, or public transportation, this was a major luxury. This was especially the case in the early 2000s when Cuba was still emerging from the Periodo Especial. Further the Chinitos family lived in a very poor, marginalized barrio—La Corea—on the outskirts of Havana, where the streets are mostly unpaved and some of the houses are more like shacks with bare concrete walls and tin roofs.

**Culture bearers emigrating to teach or perform abroad**

Yet one of the most important things that came out of Piri giving classes to foreign students was that it enabled him to save up money to leave the country. When he had the
opportunity to emigrate legally, he had saved enough hard currency to be able to pay for the proper legal documents (which Cubans must pay for in Cuban dollars, or CUC) and had some money to get him started abroad. Shortly after getting to Mexico, he moved to Miami with the help of his longtime friend and fellow musician Alain Fernández, where he stayed for a few years. In Miami, Piri performed with Alain in the local Afro-Cuban religious music scene and eventually saved up money to move and establish himself permanently in Mexico City. In Mexico City, Piri had connections with some fellow tamboleros there who were working as musicians in the growing local religious community of santeros. Due to the high demand for Afro-Cuban religious music—tambores especially—and the comparatively small number of Cuban tamboleros there (a number which continues to grow), as well as several Mexican tamboleros who have learned with the Cubans, tamboleros can work almost every day and are able to earn enough money from tambores to make a living. Indeed, the growing demand for this music in Mexico City has made it an attractive option for tamboleros in recent years, from the late 2000s and especially in the 2010s. In fact, another one of the highly-talented drummers from Piri’s generation—Lekiám Aguilar—who often played with Los Chinitos and recorded on the Abbilona series, also emigrated to Mexico City in 2017.

Such stories of networking between musicians and the establishment of new local “scenes” represented another result of the economic opportunities created by foreigners studying Afro-Cuban traditional music and dance. Many drummers have also been able to leave Cuba and establish themselves in Caracas or Miami, especially since the 2000s, and work as drummers in the local religious music scene, due to the large religious community in these areas. Most come to Miami, as there are already a fairly large number of Venezuelan drummers working in Caracas. In addition, since Miami is home to the largest Cuban population living outside the
island and continues to receive the largest number of Cuban immigrants, it has a large religious community, with religious music events occurring frequently. Unlike in Mexico or Caracas, few musicians in the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene in Miami are able to make a living solely from performing, due to the high cost of living. Nonetheless, many of the musicians perform once or several times a week (most activities occur on weekends in Miami due to work schedules), which serves to supplement their income and allows them to continue to do what they love.

Another popular destination for performers of Afro-Cuban traditional music to emigrate to is Europe. Not only are a large percentage of tourists visiting Cuba from Europe, but Cuban popular music and Afro-Cuban traditional forms are fairly popular in western European countries, especially Italy, southern France, Spain, Germany, the UK, and Switzerland. Many students from these countries have gone to study music or dance in Cuba, and many Cuban popular and folkloric groups have toured in these countries. Cuban music festivals and related events are also common here, especially since the late 1990s, when tourism to Cuba became more widespread. Due to this demonstrated interest in Cuban music, many performers of Afro-Cuban traditional music have left Cuba to establish themselves in Europe to give classes and perform. To get there, some simply stayed while they were on tour with Cuban groups, and others married a foreigner from one of these countries (often someone who they met through music) and were able to emigrate legally. According to Caridad Paisán (personal communication), these patterns were common in Clave y Guaguancó, whom she toured with in Europe. Further, these same patterns could be observed among Cuban popular music groups touring in Europe in the 1990s and thereafter (Ben Lapidus, personal communication).
Since Cubans working and living abroad earn more than they did in Cuba and have access to greater freedoms like the ability to travel, use the internet, and enjoy a higher standard of living, many performers choose to emigrate given the opportunity (Moore 2006, 239). Such opportunities may take the form of a tour abroad by a professional folkloric group or through marrying a foreigner. For example, musicians or dancers in a group touring abroad may take the opportunity to stay in a certain country by abandoning the group, although this practice is obviously frowned upon by the Cuban government. On the other hand, marriage with a foreigner is a much surer and legal way to secure the possibility to emigrate.

Kaifa Roland (2011) for example, has shown that such marriages are especially common between black Cubans (often young women) and white foreigners and is often an extension of jineterismo (hustling) employed by Cubans, in particular darker-skinned Cubans, who are in many ways shut out of the economically-privileged tourism industry. Upon emigrating, Cubans can send much-needed remittances to family members in Cuba, as well as save money and establish residency requirements so that they can bring some of them as well. For example, among the performers I work with in Miami who arrived from the late 1990s into the early 2010s, almost all of them left close family members in Cuba, some of whom they were then able to bring after securing their visa and entry to the US. Alain Fernández (personal communication), who arrived in the late 1990s, was not able to bring his eldest daughter here until the early 2010s when his salary met the requirements to vouch for her entry to the US. Daniel González Gil (personal communication) arrived in 2012 from Cuba with his wife Caridad Paisán while coming to perform and give classes in Afro-Cuban music. This opportunity had been secured by their friend, a North American enthusiast of Afro-Cuban music living in New Mexico, which is where the two initially settled and administered classes and workshops. Daniel and Caridad later moved
to Miami, and Daniel is still in the process of working to save up money and securing the necessary paperwork to bring his son to Miami. Another drummer we perform with regularly in our crew is Yosvani González. He stayed in Mexico while on tour with a Cuban music group and began giving classes there. He was then able to save money and make his way to Miami. There, he has been able to work, perform, and send remittances to his family in Cuba, as well as visit them once in a while (Yosvani González, personal communication).

Performers of Afro-Cuban traditional music and dance that have emigrated to Europe since the late 1990s and established themselves as teachers include Lilian Matos Torres (Italy), Ismaray Aspirina (Switzerland), Arturo Martínez (Germany), and Yoannis Tamayo Castillo (Italy and elsewhere in Europe)—among many others—all of whom I follow on Instagram, where they post promotions and photos of festivals and classes they participate in. The European scene is especially integrated due to the close proximity of the countries, so artists and teachers often know each other and travel to participate in events, especially in Italy, Germany, Spain, and southern France, as is evident on their Facebook and Instagram accounts.9

Afro-Cuban traditional music and culture in Cuban popular music since the 1990s

It also bears mention that, in the 1990s, Afro-Cuban traditional music was also becoming more visible in Cuban popular music culture. Perna (2005) and Hernández Reguant (2006) for example, both show how *timba* song themes and lyrical content often reflected the urban black Cuban experience of that decade. Musical, lyrical, and visual references to Afro-Cuban religion and traditional music were and continue to be particularly common among *timba* artists. In fact, the trend has continued into the 2010s with reggaeton artists, who can also be seen as connected

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9 The topic of social media and the role it plays in the transnational scene is explored further in the following chapter.
to the black urban local experience, not to mention the larger transnational reggaeton culture, with its urban, Latin (or black Latin) associations. For example, El Chacal, one of the most popular Cuban reguetoneros of recent years in Cuba, released the hit song “Shango”10 in 2016.

In the accompanying music video on YouTube, the song begins with an extensive introduction featuring a traditional song for Changó performed by traditional musicians as a guiro. The video alternates between the traditional percussion instruments, the singer’s mouth as he sings the Lucumí lyrics, and images of El Chacal himself dressed in all white (associated with the Santería religion) with a large collar (beaded necklace) of Changó (i.e. white and red). He is shown bowing before Changó (in the form of the ritual pot or sopera in which santeros “receive” a particular orisha) on a bamboo mat in the proper way a santero would “salute” an orisha. When the introduction ends and the more commercial-sounding music comes in, Chacal begins singing, and the lyrics (primarily in Spanish with some interjections drawn from ritual language in Santería) comprise an expression of thanks and gratefulness to Changó (who is his “guardian” orisha, or the orisha who “owns” his head in the spiritual sense) for what he has in his life.

Expressing Afro-Cuban themes in a positive light as black and Cuban, while not completely absent in popular music, was uncommon prior to the 1990s due to the taboo nature of the subject in Cuba. While the racial taboo associated with blackness and Afro-Cuban culture has by no means subsided in Cuban society, it has become much more visible, and perhaps even more normalized in a way, given its greater presence in Cuban popular music since the 1990s. While many white Cubans continue to hold prejudiced views toward black Cubans and their culture, foreigners often show greater interest in the exotic elements in the music and culture of the black Cuban Other, not to mention the inherent associations of blackness with authenticity, as

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10 [https://youtu.be/5SIG8fkqCRg](https://youtu.be/5SIG8fkqCRg)
discussed previously in the world music market (Roland 2011; Pacini Hernández 1998). Indeed, Roland (2006) refers to a process of “blackening” of the Cuban identity beginning in the 1990s. Here, Roland refers primarily to the racial dynamics between Cubans and foreigners in the Cuban tourist industry, wherein foreigners are usually white but Cubans are often mulatto or black and thus associated with blackness. Nonetheless, the idea of the “blackening” of Cuban popular music culture is echoed by Perna (2005) and Hernández Reguant (2006) in their discussions of *timba*, and—as can be seen through the example of El Chacal and other current popular artists like Havana D’Primera\(^\text{11}\)—continues into the present.

Foreigners—who are less influenced by the stains of the Cuban variety of racial prejudice, in which socially-white Cubans (and others who share their views) look down upon Afro-Cuban culture as vulgar—have demonstrated greater tolerance of and receptivity to Afro-Cuban themes in Cuban popular music. Accordingly, this receptivity and tolerance (and view of Afro-Cuban culture as exotic) facilitated foreigners’ exposure to Afro-Cuban traditional music beginning in the 1990s. For example, a European dancer visiting Cuba and interested in learning casino-style dancing might be exposed to Afro-Cuban traditional music for the first time via musical or textual references in a *timba* song, which could then prompt their interest and encourage them to seek it out and to learn more about it. The same pattern might occur with a foreign drummer interested in learning about Cuban popular music rhythms for *timbal* or the *tumbadoras*. While listening and learning the popular rhythms, they will no doubt also be exposed to and taught some of the Afro-Cuban traditional rhythms, whether through musical or textual references in the music itself, or as part of group or private lessons. The Afro-Cuban

\(^{11}\) For example, Havana D’Primera’s song “Oni oni,” like Chacal’s song “Shango,” is dedicated to director Alexander Abreu’s patron orisha, Yemayá (https://youtu.be/Ue-uriA9j94). Countless examples of references to Afro-Cuban religion exist, as evidenced in songs by Los Van Van, Orishas, El Niño y la Verdad, NG la Banda, and Elito Revé, among many others.
traditional rhythms are also often taught as part of “basics” or “fundamentals” of Cuban music, and are especially informative for percussionists learning Cuban popular music. As with the example of the dancer, this exposure to Afro-Cuban traditional music may then spark a new interest for the drummer, who may then proceed to pursue further studies in Afro-Cuban traditional music. These dynamics are evidenced by the hordes of foreigners interested in learning about Afro-Cuban traditional music and dance in Cuba since the 1990s, many of whom were first exposed to it via Cuban or Latin popular music.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, what we witness in the 1990s and into the 2000s is the increasing commodification of Afro-Cuban traditional music not only as performances and recordings, but as *taught knowledge*, both in the form of instructional books and in classes and workshops in Cuba and abroad. The interest of foreigners, who tend to be white, middle class and come from countries with higher standards of living than Cuba, has represented an important economic and social impetus to the flowering of the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene in Cuba. Due to changes to the US embargo allowing for the entry of Cuban-made recordings into the US once more, and to the increased dissemination of Cuban-made music recordings via the world music market in the 1990s, Cuban music was re-inserted into the transnational circuits of the Western-dominated music industry. Foreign, and especially Western, interest in the “authentic” traditional sounds of African or Afro-diasporic music cultures converged with historical trends of Western interest in—and Cuba’s promotion of—Afro-Cuban culture as exotic and exciting (Pacini-Hernández 1998; Schwartz 1997). The fact that foreigners were consuming Cuban-made recordings—whether new or re-releases of old material—represented a new economic impetus
for Cuban musicians, as well as Cuban and foreign record labels, to make and release more recordings, including recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music. For example, Yoruba Andabo, now easily considered one of the top rumba groups in Cuba, was around for at least 20 years before making their first commercial recording in the 1990s and thus becoming widely recognized at the international level (Moore 2006, 190).

In addition to the re-insertion of Cuban-made music recordings into global networks, Cuba’s opening to tourism played a major role in spurring and supporting—especially in an economic sense—the renaissance of Afro-Cuban traditional music performance on the island. Indeed, Robin Moore (2006, 193) cites tourism and foreign interest as an important element in the stark increase in performances and recordings made beginning in the 1990s, along with the Cuban government’s liberalized policies concerning the economics of music-making and ongoing promotion by the black Cuban community itself. In all, due largely to the historical marginalization of Afro-Cuban culture, including traditional music, in Cuba, it was not until the 1990s with the increased interest of foreigners—who represent economic power—that Afro-Cuban traditional music attained its present status. This status is marked by its greater visibility within Cuban popular music culture, the transnational world music market, the blackening of Cuban identity vis-à-vis foreign whiteness (Pacini-Hernández 1998; Hernández Reguant 2006; Perna 2005; Roland 2006). In the end, this signaled the growing commodification of Afro-Cuban traditional music, an important part of which was represented by recordings, which both helped bring about increased foreign interest initially (via world music circuits in the 1990s) and helped sustain and increase it via dissemination in Cuba and abroad.

Furthermore, Afro-Cuban traditional music and dance was commodified as taught knowledge, taking the form of instructional media—most of which was disseminated abroad—as
well as classes and workshops taught by Cubans in Cuba or abroad. Indeed, classes taught in Cuba for foreign students became increasingly popular in the 1990s in the form of study-in-Cuba group travel packages. The fact that such commodities were meant for foreign consumption and that black Cubans were seen as the most authentic culture-bearers allowed black Cubans to capitalize on these new opportunities and improve their economic lot. These opportunities are important, as black Cubans remain generally less privileged than white Cubans, the latter often enjoying better access to hard currency via jobs in the tourist sector, where lighter-skinned Cubans are preferred, or in the form of family remittances, which white Cubans are more likely to receive than black Cubans. The commodification of Afro-Cuban traditional music-related products such as recordings (perhaps sold at tourist events) and classes has thus opened avenues for black Cubans to access the highly-prized hard currency (divisa) held by foreigners, as opposed to the much less valuable national pesos in which most Cubans are paid in state jobs. This access has allowed Afro-Cuban traditional music performers to improve their economic status in Cuba. Furthermore, increased international tours or networking with foreigners via performances, classes, and workshops in Cuba have afforded Cuba-based performers opportunities to leave the country through marriage with a foreigner or remaining in another country while on tour. Indeed, living abroad represents greater access to economic opportunities, and performers of Afro-Cuban traditional music often capitalize on this by teaching classes or performing, perhaps then being able to send remittances to family on the island or bring close family members in Cuba to join them abroad.

Rogelio Martínez Furé (1994, 32) has criticized aspects of the commodification of Afro-Cuban culture as it has developed in the 1990s as jineterismo cultural, or cultural prostitution for financial gain. His criticisms are true in the sense that some people have used the culture as a
vehicle for financial gain, perhaps becoming teachers or “selling” the religion (sometimes in a watered-down version) to foreigners via initiations, consultations, or other spiritual services (Hagedorn 2001; Argyriadis 2008). Nonetheless, I would argue that for most performers of Afro-Cuban traditional music and dance, they are simply making the most of their art and knowledge by responding to and capitalizing on the foreign interest in their culture. Many of the performers and teachers teaching abroad and in Cuba for example, are black Cubans who would not have been able to enjoy access to hard currency or their status living abroad had it not been for opportunities afforded through their connections to Afro-Cuban traditional music.

These developments have been largely positive for culture bearers and the performance of Afro-Cuban traditional music in Cuba. For one, the fact that the music represents a more economically-viable product—whether in the form of a recording, performance, or knowledge—makes it a little more attractive to become a musician or dancer who knows about or specializes in this music. Prior to the 1990s for example, such knowledge or expertise represented few social or economic opportunities, aside from those culture bearers who could attain posts in state schools, like the ENA or ISA (National School of the Arts and Superior Institute of the Arts, respectively), where some musicians and dancers of Afro-Cuban traditional were employed as instructors (Ben Lapidus, personal communication). Now, however, even musician families from marginalized neighborhoods, like Los Chinitos, have enjoyed the economic fruits of their talent and expertise (albeit to a limited degree in Cuba, and principally from giving classes and renting rooms to foreigners), and have attained international recognition through recordings, social media, much of it stemming from networking with foreigners, including their students. Thanks to the increase in visibility and status of Afro-Cuban traditional music, the 1990s and 2000s has also witnessed the creation of new performance groups in Cuba, including new generations of
performers, as well as new performance groups abroad. The renaissance of Afro-Cuban traditional music performance has thus helped bring wider recognition and appreciation for the music and create much-needed economic opportunities for the performers that make it. Another one of the most interesting and influential developments impacting the scene during the 1990s was the creation of the first websites featuring Afro-Cuban traditional music content, which in turn gave way to the blogs and social media sites of Web 2.0 in the 2000s.
CHAPTER FOUR
PROMOTION, KNOWLEDGE, COMMUNITY: BLOGS AND SOCIAL MEDIA AS PART OF THE TRANSNATIONAL SCENE

This chapter focuses on the role of the internet and social media in the transnational Afro-Cuban traditional music scene and the effects of their use. The growing popularity of and increased access to the internet in the late 1990s in the West coincided with the renaissance of Afro-Cuban traditional music performance in Cuba and the growing interest of foreigners in the music. As discussed in the previous chapter, this renaissance was motivated by various factors, including the re-introduction of Cuban-made recordings into the global market via the world music circuit in the 1990s, Cuba’s opening up to tourism, the appearance of a multitude of instructional books and videos on Afro-Cuban drumming and singing, and the exposition and support of Afro-Cuban music as cultural tourism by the Cuban state and the Afro-Cuban community. These factors in turn helped stimulate and reinforce the growing popularity of study-in-Cuba travel packages for foreigners featuring Afro-Cuban traditional music, more frequent performances by professional and amateur folkloric groups in Cuba (often frequented by foreign tourists or catering to them), the creation of new folkloric groups in Cuba and abroad, and a boom of new recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music. Many of these occurrences were not simply a matter of cause and effect; rather, they formed a mutually-reinforcing cycle whereby things such as the production of new recordings from Cuba served to stimulate the interest of foreigners, whose economic power—which vastly supersedes that of Cuba-based performers—represented the economic impetus to produce the music, in terms of performances, recordings, and even classes. By the late 1990s, Afro-Cuban traditional music had become increasingly commodified in the form of performances, recordings, and taught knowledge (in the form of classes, workshops, and
instructional media), a process which continued to evolve and gather strength in the 2000s and 2010s.

Aside from the person-to-person exchanges and circulation of older forms of media (VHS cassettes, CDs, audiocassettes, DVDs, books), the rise of the internet as a new medium—in the West primarily—signaled a new evolution in the transnational Afro-Cuban traditional music scene. The use of the internet significantly impacted the scene and facilitated what Norris (2004, 31), drawing on Putnam (2000), calls “bridging” and “bonding;” in other words, the use of this medium helped bring new groups of people together and helped reinforce existing groups who already shared similar beliefs. The use of Web 1.0 began facilitating the widespread dissemination of recordings and information related to Afro-Cuban culture and music, including the promotion of events and travel packages. The use of email and online forums allowed people such as fans, musicians, and promoters to communicate almost instantly over large distances. Despite this, it is important to remember that there was a significant digital divide in the late 1990s and early 2000s (which is to some extent ongoing) in which Westerners and others from developed countries or privileged backgrounds had the greatest access to the internet. In countries such as Cuba, economic and political restraints hindered widespread internet access until very recently, when public wi-fi locations became more common in the 2010s. Because of this, most of the content on Web 1.0, and much of the early social media content of Web 2.0, was at first created and controlled primarily by white, non-Latino Westerners1. As more Cuba-based culture bearers improved their economic circumstances, either by leaving Cuba to live abroad or

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1 The socioeconomic and racial dimensions of the digital divide have been well-documented since the late 1990s (NTIA US Commerce Department 1995, 1998, 1999; Spooner 2000; Spooner and Rainie 2001; Servon 2002; Nakamura 2004; Van Dijk 2005), and transnational (global North vs global South) dimensions have been explored more recently (Graham 2011; Graham and Hale 2012).
by gaining access to social media as it became more accessible in Cuba, they have become increasingly active participants in the online scene.

**Content on Web 1.0**

The content relating to or featuring Afro-Cuban traditional music in the 1990s and early 2000s was much less diverse than it is today, in the 2010s. Indeed, Web 1.0, a term referring to the form of the internet prior to the social media boom of the mid-2000s, is often described as being much more static in its presentation of content than Web 2.0, which is characterized by high interactivity and DIY (i.e. do-it-yourself) features exemplified in the use of social media sites and applications like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. The DIY features of Web 2.0 allowed anyone with access to become a producer of content, thus blurring the line between consumers and producers, a factor which, along with growing access to the internet in less developed countries and among previously economically or politically marginalized populations, contributed to making the internet more democratic in terms of access and use (O’Reilly 2005).

Nonetheless, Web 1.0, although less democratic than its successor, served to open new lines of communication between consumers, fans, and musicians of Afro-Cuban traditional music. In terms of its place in the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene, Web 1.0 was used primarily as a platform for selling and buying recordings and for disseminating information, including historical or musical information, related news, and upcoming events such as performances or study-in-Cuba travel packages. The flow of information from producers of the web content to consumers tended to be more one-directional when compared with Web 2.0, as Web 1.0 did not feature the DIY tools of the latter. Further, both producers and consumers tended to be based in the West, primarily in North America and Europe, and producers tended to
be white. This of course mirrored trends in the larger world music industry, to which the growing foreign interest in Afro-Cuban traditional music had ties. It is also comparable to the early online activity related to salsa dancing described by Juliet McMains (2015), in which websites and content were produced primarily by whites (non-Latinos or Latinos) based in the West, especially the US. On the other hand, there were also some ties to the Latin popular music scene, and to places like New York, San Francisco, and San Juan, where local Afro-Cuban music performance scenes had already established themselves by the 1990s. For those in these already-established communities, the internet offered new and more varied opportunities to find and buy new and old recordings and to access new knowledge pertaining to the music and its history.

For those outside communities with established local performance scenes, like where I grew up in Gainesville, FL, the internet was even more important, as it represented a lifeline to Afro-Cuban music-related content. For example, in the late 1990s and early 2000s when I became interested in Afro-Cuban traditional music, there were three primary ways to access recordings. You could sometimes find them in local music stores where they sold CDs, often under “world music” or “Latin music” sections, but these sections usually had a rather limited selection, at least in a small city like Gainesville. Another way to get new recordings was to get a copy from a friend, a method which has long played an important part in the dissemination of recordings in Cuba and abroad since the advent of audiocassettes. However, the way I was able to acquire most of my recordings at the time was by ordering CDs through online vendors such as Descarga.com. In addition, I was able to order VHS cassettes, DVDs, and books, including instructional books, from sites like Descarga and others. Finally, the internet was also where I first became aware of study-in-Cuba travel packages such as that offered by Chuck Silverman, which was how I was able to first go to Cuba in 2002.
Thus, the internet, even in its Web 1.0 form of the 1990s and early 2000s, allowed greater amounts of people—albeit still primarily Westerners—to buy new and old recordings that would previously have been difficult or impossible to acquire, access new sources of musical and historical information on websites, and become aware of and keep up with current news and events such as study-in-Cuba travel packages. From the point of view of the producers of such content, the internet provided a platform for reaching much larger swaths of the global population as potential consumers of things such as recordings, books, instructional media, news, and knowledge. It thus served an important promotional function as well, especially for events like study-in-Cuba packages, which needed to be planned and coordinated in advance. Such trips would have been more difficult to organize prior to the internet unless the people signing up for the trip were local. With the internet as a coordinating platform, anyone with access, whether they were in London or Los Angeles, could potentially find out about and sign up for such trips. The use of email, which allowed for easier and faster communication between users around the globe, made it possible to coordinate such activities more easily and for users to keep in touch afterwards.

Study-in-Cuba travel packages for music or dance were promoted primarily via the internet by the late 1990s and early 2000s, coinciding with a rise in number and popularity. This type of promotion serves as an early example of how the internet—even in its Web 1.0 form—facilitated the bridging and bonding of groups. In terms of bonding—reinforcing groups of people who already share common interests or backgrounds—the trips brought together foreigners (i.e. non-Cubans residing outside Cuba) that shared an interest in Cuban music. On the

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2 Study-in-Cuba packages for music or dance have existed since at least the 1980s (e.g. Caribbean Music and Dance; PlazaCuba) and used to employed direct-mail marketing prior to promoting on the internet (Ben Lapidus, personal communication).
other hand, the trips served a bridging function on various levels: bringing together people from various geographical regions abroad, bringing Cuban teachers and performers together with foreign students, and including students in the group who may have never even shown much of an interest in Cuban music, but wanted to use the opportunity as a way to go to Cuba. For example, the group I went to Cuba with in 2002, which was organized by Los Angeles-based drummer Chuck Silverman, was comprised of North Americans from all over the US (including one man from rural Iowa). Further, I was the only musician in the group, despite the trip being focused on Cuban music and drumming; the other members of the group had primarily gone on the trip in order to visit Cuba legally and experience the culture, since at the time it was quite difficult to travel to Cuba as a North American.

**Descarga, Earth CDs, AfroCubaWeb, and the Santería Music Database**

As previously explained, the web content relating to Afro-Cuban traditional music in the 1990s and early 2000s was presented primarily in the form of web pages, a standard, rather static form of presenting content in Web 1.0 in which the producer of content is a single individual or part of a designated group that uploads and displays the content. Unlike today, where many web pages feature “comments” sections and other features allowing for consumers to add to the content, back then the web pages were primarily geared towards display (i.e. of information or promotions) or for selling products, such as CDs or books. Among the earliest and perhaps most prominent web sites on the internet in the 1990s relating to Cuban music were Descarga.com and AfroCubaWeb.

Descarga.com, based in the US, was perhaps the largest online vendor of Cuban music in the 1990s and into the early 2000s. Founded in 1992, the online store, which specialized in Latin
popular and traditional music recordings and related media, was around for 24 years before the site was closed in 2016, likely a result of the influence of social media and changes in the way music is consumed. In the 2010s, for example, music is now often bought, sold, and transferred digitally, and it is increasingly difficult to control as a commodity, as there is so much music available for free on social media sites like YouTube, including old and new material.

While piracy is perhaps less evident now on sites like YouTube due to security measures against it, piracy (i.e. reproducing and disseminating copyrighted material illegally) was common before social media were widely popular. For example, I remember using Napster in the early 2000s (prior to it and other sites like it coming under government pressure to discourage piracy) to download countless albums of music, including several lesser-known albums of Afro-Cuban traditional music. Napster was a file-sharing site where users could share and swap files from their computer with other users. Founded in 1999, Napster became extremely popular during the few years it existed, which is part of the reason it was shut down in 2002. Another popular site was Limewire, which featured a similar file-sharing focus. Although short-lived, these sites were widely popular among music fans in general, and I remember being surprised that one could find such a wide variety of Cuban music from other users on there: everything from the newest *timba* releases, to *son*, to rare recordings of rumba. Unlike the file-sharing sites, which facilitated what the government and music industry saw as promoting piracy, sites like Descarga.com were legit and beneficial to the music industry. Sites like Descarga served as internet store fronts where anyone with internet access and the ability to receive their products in the mail could peruse the catalog and purchase products.

Descarga.com was also important in that it served a bridging function in terms of its whole-hearted promotion of recordings from Cuba—both old and new, traditional and popular—
alongside music associated with the Latin music industry. This level of promotion was still unusual in the 1990s, as Cuba-based artists and Cuban-made recordings were still largely shunned by the US-based Latin music industry, in part due to the powerful influence of Cuban exiles and their negative views of Cubans who chose to remain on the island and who showed any sympathy for Castro’s Revolution (Pacini Hernández 1998). This reason was why Cuban music recordings tended to be more commonly disseminated in world music circles than in those related to the Latin music industry, which at the time tended to feature non-Cuban artists who performed romantic salsa, Latin pop, bachata, and merengue, among other popular styles.

Descarga brought these two worlds—Cuban music and Latin popular music—together in a progressive way which served to bridge the gap and strengthen the links between the two. The fact that the past owner of Descarga—Bruce Polin—is a white American photographer not only reflects the racial dynamics of the creators of content of Web 1.0; it also means that he was not constrained by the pressures of the US Latin music industry. Further, due to the regular and substantial contribution of articles by collectors and scholars, such as Raúl Fernández, Descarga also served as a source of valuable knowledge and information on Cuban and Latin American music.

I would also argue that Descarga helped introduce many fans of Latin popular music such as “classic” salsa to Cuban music (and vice versa). Further, it provided a way for fans of Afro-Cuban traditional music to access a wide variety of old and new recordings, articles, interviews, and to keep abreast of new releases or re-releases. For example, newly-available items were promoted on the home page, including a list of “editor’s picks” which were updated every week. The editor’s picks could just as easily include a new release by New York-based salsa artists as a new album by a Cuban timba band. Each “pick” was displayed with a picture of the album cover.
and after clicking on it, you were taken to a page where you could read a detailed review—usually a paragraph or two—by the editor. The review often included some information on the artist or group, especially if they were fairly new or not widely-known, then provided the editor’s reaction to the music. The latter often included comments on the overall sound, for example if it was highly danceable, showed influence from other genres, or perhaps was unique in some way. Specific tracks, singers, or instrumentalists that stood out to the editor were also commented on and perhaps compared with similar currents in that genre.

Content on the site was also grouped under various categories, and the “search” function allowed consumers to look for and find specific artists, genres, or recordings. Even recordings that were not editor’s picks often had a description and the list of tracks, so it was easy for consumers to find out a little more about a certain recording on Descarga than if they simply bought it from a traditional music store as a CD. Indeed, one could spend hours perusing the catalog, reading descriptions of different albums and discovering new artists and genres through links to similar artists or related genres. In the early 2000s, as music streaming became more common, Descarga even enabled a feature whereby consumers could listen to clips from the tracks of an album. One of Descarga’s most important features was its enormous catalog, which contained both old and new material: CDs, instructional books, VHS cassettes, and DVDs of documentaries and performances. Further, the catalog was constantly growing, as newly-available materials were featured regularly on the site. The company also included complementary, updated, printed catalogs with the products they shipped in the mail, a strategy shared with more traditional mail-order companies.

Descarga was among the best sites to order recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music, as they kept up with new releases and re-releases from groups in Cuba such as Yoruba Andabo,
Clave y Guaguancó, and Los Muñequitos de Matanzas. The site featured recordings from several different record labels, including major labels like Sony as well as smaller world music labels, such as those specializing in Cuban music. As previously discussed, in the case of Afro-Cuban traditional music (which is obviously not an enormously popular commercial genre) it was often difficult for fans to find a wide variety of representative albums in stores. Descarga thus provided a centralized online location for consumers interested in Afro-Cuban traditional music (as well as Latin traditional and popular music in general) where they could find and buy new recordings to add to their collection, or purchase other media such as instructional books or VHS cassettes or DVDs of performances, documentaries, or instructional material.

To be sure, there were other sites through which recordings and instructional materials relating to Afro-Cuban music could also be purchased. While they often had catalogues that were smaller and more limited than Descarga, many were also more specialized. For example, Earth CDs, a site founded in 2003 that remains active, specializes in world music-related media (CDs, DVDs, instructional books) and dedicates a large part of its catalog to Afro-Cuban traditional music. Specifically, the site serves as a promotional vehicle for albums produced independently by Lawrence Millard, the owner of Earth CDs, which is based in Illinois. In addition to Millard’s productions, which include several recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music, the recordings of other small record labels and independent producers are featured as well. These include DVDs by San Francisco-based Boogalu Productions, which produced several DVDs in the early 2000s featuring rumba and other Afro-Cuban traditional genres as performed by folkloric groups in Cuba such as the highly popular *Rumbón tropical* (2003) with Rumberos de Cuba, Nolan Warden’s independently-produced *Grupo Cuero y Cajón*, and several recordings and
instructional book-CD packages by Luca Brandoli, an Italian musician who has studied and performed Afro-Cuban traditional singing in Cuba for many years.

Another prominent site during this time was AfroCubaWeb, founded in 1997 by Curaçaoan journalist Eugene Godfried as a platform for promoting knowledge and issues related to Afro-Cuban culture (Dwyer 2009). The producers of the site’s content come from all over the world, but especially from Cuba and the US. The site features articles related to Afro-Cuban music, racism, and history; authors must first submit their articles through the site before they are posted. The layout of the site today remains the same as it did in its earlier days, so for example commenting and other interactive features are lacking. Nonetheless, the site serves as a sort of centralized catch-all site for all things Afro-Cuban. There are informative articles by scholars and journalists from both non-Cubans and Cubans in Cuba and abroad on history, music, news, racism, and other issues related to Afro-Cuban culture. There are lists of Cuban popular and traditional musicians and bands with their tour dates and schedules (in Cuba and internationally) as well as promotions and links to related events like study-in-Cuba travel packages. In fact, if I recall correctly, I believe I first came across Chuck Silverman’s travel packages for studying drumming in Cuba on this site back in 2001 or 2002. In addition, AfroCubaWeb sells some media products like CDs and DVDs, including documentaries, and has links to products sold elsewhere, such as on Amazon.com. Nonetheless, the commercial aspect of the site is a small part of the site’s focus, which primarily features articles on news, events, and new books, as well as tour dates for Cuban bands, including Afro-Cuban folkloric groups. The site also has a page dedicated to links to other sites featuring content on Afro-Cuban culture and music. Even though many of the articles are written by Cubans in Cuba and abroad, the site tracker at the bottom of the homepage indicates that the overwhelming majority of visitors to the site are from the US.
This serves to underline the digital divide between the West (especially the US) and places like Cuba, which continues to exist despite the drastic improvement in recent years in making the internet more accessible in Cuba.

Another early website dedicated to Afro-Cuban traditional music—or, in this case, the music of Santería—is the Santería Music Database, created in 2002 by Martin Blais and still currently active. To my knowledge, this site was the first of its kind, serving as an online guide for finding recordings of songs and the batá rhythms that go with them. The site still retains its basic original format, which is comprised of various interconnected pages of different lists. For example, one page is an extensive list of batá rhythms (toques), another features a similarly extensive list of songs (designated by the first few words of the song), and others have lists of the orishas. One of the most impressive lists is that of albums of Santería music, of which there are easily over a hundred; under this list there are other lists of rumba albums and albums that have some Santería-related material, including popular music albums with musical or textual references to the songs or rhythms. However, the list of Santería music albums seems to have not been updated in quite a while, as many albums produced in the later 2000s and 2010s are not included. Another page on the site is comprised of a list of books that contain transcriptions of the songs and rhythms, including those by Adrian Coburg discussed in chapter three. This is because the site itself does not provide any transcriptions of rhythms, song lyrics, or song melodies. The primary purpose of the site, however, is not only to present compilations of lists, but rather to allow users to locate specific songs and rhythms on recordings. To accomplish this, each of the songs, rhythms, and albums in each list have a link that leads the user to a page with details on which albums (and which tracks) contain a particular song or rhythm, or in the case of albums, a full list of the tracks and which songs and rhythms they contain, along with which
orisha it is for. In this way, the information is all linked together, providing users with an efficient database through which they can locate songs and rhythms on recordings. Further, the organization of the rhythms and songs is such that it provides a unique and rare visual chart of which songs go with which rhythms, a matrix which is quite complex and is otherwise normally memorized over many years through repetition by aspiring tamboleros and singers.

Another early website was Citypercussion, created by two Swiss drummers. The site was one of the first and most popular Afro-Cuban-related sites in Europe, according to Afro-Cuban music enthusiast, blogger, and performer Patrice Banchereau. The site was created in the early 2000s by Thiery Hochstatter and jB Meier, both white Swiss drumset players whose aim, according to the homepage, is to bring together the “universe of percussion instruments and new instrument concepts from all over the world.” The two used the page to connect with other drummers and as a platform for promoting themselves as artists and teachers. Aside from pages featuring the two creators’ biographical information and event schedules, the “teaching” page features links to a few different drumming styles, including batá and tumbas (i.e. tumbadoras). While the tumbadora page contains instructions on how to change a conga head (natural skin) and nothing else, the batá page would have likely drawn the attention of students and enthusiasts.

This section contains several links to pages featuring transcriptions of batá rhythms organized according to orisha and downloadable music clips (RAR and MIDI files), song lyrics (with downloadable RAR files as well), and a list of the four Swiss drummers (Stefan Weber, Olivier Gagneux, jB Meier, and Sébastien Gagneux) who transcribed the rhythms, all of whom are white.

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3 Email message to author, July 30, 2015.
According to French blogger and rumba enthusiast Patrice Banchereau (via email correspondence) who used to frequent the site, the transcriptions were of the oru seco as played by Cuban drummers Angel Bolaños and Regino Jiménez, both widely recognized and well-respected past tamboleros. Both creators of the site, Hochstatter and Meier, had studied in music schools in Switzerland, and Meier had studied popular and traditional music in Cuba with well-known drummers there. Since most Cuban tamboleros are not classically-trained musicians who know how to read and write music notation, the task of transcribing batá rhythms has often fallen to scholars or foreign students who know music notation, as has been the case with Fernando Ortiz, John Amira, Steven Cornelius, Thomas Altmann, Bill Summers, and the many books put out by Adrian Coburg. The activity of transcribing rhythms (and songs) thus exemplifies one way in which foreigners—particularly Westerners—have voluntarily acted as mediators of Afro-Cuban traditional musical knowledge. Since foreigners wanting to learn the music have not been able to absorb it the way it is in Cuba (growing up in la mata), musical transcription serves as a cultural and musical translation, particularly for those who were educated in Western musical traditions and can read music, as well as a shortcut for learning the rhythms, which in their original context are normally memorized by Cuban drummers over many years.

These dynamics invite us to ask the question: who are these sites catering to in terms of their content and why? It is obvious that the creators of these sites would have known about the general nature of the digital divide during this time (late 1990s and early 2000s) and that the most likely visitors to the sites would be from the West, as internet connectivity and use in Cuba remained extremely limited compared to North America and western Europe. Further, the creators of the sites were primarily white Westerners, although it is notable that this was not the
case with AfroCubaWeb, which was created and managed by Eugene Godfried, a black journalist originally from Curaçao who at the time worked in the English Department of Radio Havana Cuba on the island (Dwyer 2009). In some ways, Godfried enjoyed a privileged position in Cuba at the time, as he was able to take advantage of the access to the internet and a computer afforded him by his journalism job in a state sponsored radio station and his status as a foreigner. He took full advantage of this access, using it to create one of the most informative early internet sites for the promotion of Afro-Cuban culture and music, as well as writers and scholars on the subject from Cuba and around the world. Yet it is also significant that while many articles on AfroCubaWeb are in Spanish, many of the lists of music-related events, such as tour dates and travel packages, are in English, which likely means they are meant for a Western—perhaps largely North American—audience. In addition, the site tracker attributes by far the most traffic on the site to North Americans. Similarly, the content on Descarga.com, Earth CDs, and the Santería Music Database is in English.

The purpose of the content of these sites is thus largely in line with the interests and economic capacities of Westerners: Descarga and Earth CDs were largely commercial endeavors catering to fans of Latin music and world music, while the Santería Music Database and the batá section of Citypercussion were obviously meant to serve as a helpful guide for those interested in learning about the songs and rhythms of Santería, which we can surmise would be primarily Western students of the drumming, singing, or dancing. Not only were they written in English, but any young Cuban drummers on the island, for example, would have had little to no internet access at the time. Further, Cuban drummers growing up and learning in la mata do not generally have a necessity for such supplemental learning materials, as they are exposed to the live traditions regularly. The stress on such learning supplements like recordings and especially on
transcriptions (which are beyond the scope of the original oral context) thus comes from foreign students and performers and is geared towards their foreign peers. The educational purpose of these educational-oriented sites is thus comparable to instructional media such as book and CD packages, which were also popular at the time these sites were created. Indeed, both the Santería Music Database and Citypercussion could have served as a helpful supplemental tool for those studying the music out of such books, which also tended to be authored by white Westerners.⁴ AfroCubaWeb, with its greater emphasis on journalism and promotion of events such as performances, tours, and conferences, was the only site out of this early group that was meant for a more diverse group, comprised of both Cuban and foreign intellectuals, writers, educators, and music fans, although most visitors still ended up being from the US.

While the internet can be seen as a democratizing form of media in general, as the creation and maintenance of web sites does not lie solely in the hands of large media corporations, the more pronounced digital divide of the 1990s and early 2000s and the mostly one-way (producer to consumer) flow of information on Web 1.0, meant that the democratizing capacity of Web 1.0 was quite limited in comparison with Web 2.0 (Azenha 2006; Cormode and Krishnamurti 2008). As a new media technology from the West which required paid service and accessibility to this service through phone lines or, later, through cable, wifi, and cellular services, it was natural that the use of the internet was at first concentrated among producers and consumers of content in the West. Finally, we can characterize the content on Web 1.0 relating to Afro-Cuban traditional music as being primarily geared towards the selling and buying of media

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⁴ It seems that there was and still is a tendency for white Westerners to compile, organize, (re)interpret, and generally create (and commodify) knowledge at the transnational level (i.e. through the internet or transnational marketplace). This tendency was particularly prevalent during the 1990s and early 2000s, although some Cuban culture bearers, such as Manley “Piri” López, have been getting more directly involved with the representation of their traditions since the late 2000s and 2010s, especially those who now live abroad.
products—especially recordings—and to the dissemination of information. In all, the internet in its Web 1.0 form acted primarily as a mode of dissemination of products and information.

This dissemination was especially important for the success of Cuban music at the time, which on the whole was being transformed by its re-insertion into global capitalism, with consumers and potential consumers largely concentrated in the West. If we can understand media as “extensions of man” (or extensions of humans), as McLuhan (1964) put it, we can describe the internet as an extension through which musical materials and knowledge have been disseminated in the form of audio and visual recordings, books, images, and text. The internet has also acted as an important bridge to the political and geographical distances between the socialist island nation and the rest of the world, especially the West. While the West retains a central role as consumer and mediator of products and information related to Afro-Cuban traditional music on the internet, this virtual monopoly began to transform in the late 2000s as more and more Cuban performers of these traditions were able to leave Cuba to live abroad. Further, many of those remaining in Cuba have become empowered through access to international travel, hard currency provided by foreign students, the internet, and social media.

Web 2.0 and the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene

The internet has played a key role in broadening and intensifying the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene’s transnational character. In other words, as a new media technology, it has served to extend and widen the music’s dissemination, especially in the West, supporting and encouraging the continued increase in Western interest in the late 1990s and 2000s. The role of the internet in extending the transnational scope of this music scene is echoed by Juliet McMains’s (2015) study of salsa dance, in which she demonstrates how the current transnational
salsa dance scene, with its yearly World Salsa Congress, was largely a product of the use of the internet as a medium for communication, promotion, and the dissemination of information and recordings. The internet has also provided a new outlet for commercial activity in the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene (i.e. the buying and selling of related products) and allowed consumers to access to a greater amount and variety of new and old recordings as well as knowledge-related products like instructional books, CDs, and DVDs, and informational websites. And yet, as previously discussed, in the Web 1.0 years of the internet, prior to the rise of social media, the flow of information was primarily one way (from vendor or producer of content to consumer), and the digital divide meant that foreigners—primarily Westerners—were the primary producers and consumers of content. While the use of the internet as a new medium for Afro-Cuban traditional music did begin to benefit some Cuba-based culture bearers during the late 1990s and early 2000s, the effects were largely in line with the general phonograph effects stemming from the high quantity of recordings being released at the time. Thus, by broadening dissemination for these recordings and related instructional media (books, CDs, DVDs), the internet served to amplify and perhaps even speed up the pace of Western interest in the music and dance, leading to more foreigners traveling to Cuba to study the music and dance.

Aside from serving as a platform for the dissemination of recordings and instructional materials, however, the more unique aspect of the internet at the time was its use in creating and disseminating knowledge and promotional materials in a more democratic way. Prior to the internet, most recordings and instructional materials, and written knowledge (i.e. books and articles) were produced and sold by those in the music industry, professional musicians, or by scholars, respectively. The internet allowed for a wider variety of producers of content, including Western students and non-professional researchers. And yet in the internet’s Web 1.0 version,
producers of content were still few in comparison with Web 2.0, in which DIY features allowed anyone with an adequate internet connection to become a content producer. Further, culture bearers in Cuba, although often featured in content in Web 1.0 (i.e. in recordings, promotional materials, descriptive or historical information) remained marginalized in terms of access to and use of the internet.

The empowerment of Cuba-based culture bearers became more pronounced by the mid-2000s. We can attribute this empowerment to at least two major factors. The first is that by the mid-2000s, the large number of available new and old recordings and instructional materials, along with their dissemination on the internet since the late 1990s, had helped ramp up the international visibility of Afro-Cuban traditional music. The large number of foreign tourists pouring into the island since the 1990s, which continued to rise during the 2000s, as well as the positioning of Afro-Cuban traditional music as a key element of cultural tourism and the prominence of references to Afro-Cuban traditional music and culture in Cuban popular music also fueled this increased international visibility. The increased international attention drawn to these traditions encouraged Western interest, which in turn manifested in economic support for Cuba-based culture bearers in the form of increased opportunities for performances, group workshops, lessons, and in some cases, traveling abroad to perform, teach, or to live permanently. By the mid-2000s, after a decade of this increased—and still increasing—presence of foreign tourists and students in Cuba, more and more Cuba-based culture bearers had been able to take advantage of opportunities to profit economically and socially from performing for or teaching foreigners in Cuba or traveling abroad to do so. For example, in Chapter 3 I discussed how Manley “Piri” López of the Chinitos family was able to buy an air conditioning unit and save up some money, despite living in a poor, marginal neighborhood on the outskirts of
Havana. He and his family were able to increase their income by offering classes and accommodations to their foreign students (primarily Italian), who paid them in hard currency (CUC).

The second major factor serving to empower Cuba-based culture bearers by the mid-2000s was the advent and rise in use of social media and blogs. This was largely due to the more democratic character of Web 2.0. Web 2.0 refers to features of the internet—predominant since the early to mid-2000s—which emphasize user-generated content and software that can be used on multiple devices. As opposed to the more static and consumer-oriented Web 1.0, Web 2.0 embraces the power of collective intelligence, thus users are often both consumers and creators of content (Cormode and Krishnamurti 2008; O’Reilly 2005). Exemplifying these characteristics of Web 2.0 are social networking sites such as Facebook, user-created content sites such as YouTube and personal blogs, and applications that can be used on various devices, such as iTunes, which can be used on a PC or iPod.

Bringing together Manuel’s (1993) idea of the democratizing effects of new media (in this case digital media and the medium of Web 2.0) with Howard (2004), who correlates the use of new media technologies with an increase in social and cultural capital, I will show that with the initial help of non-Cuban mediators, the internet (Web 2.0 in particular) has taken the place of commercial recordings in becoming the primary promotional vehicle for Cuban performers and teachers of Afro-Cuban music. It has also furthered bridging and especially bonding within the transnational scene, bringing members throughout the world into quicker and more intimate contact (Norris 2004). As with recordings and Web 1.0, Web 2.0 has also continued to fuel the increasing foreign interest in Afro-Cuban culture, which by the mid-2000s featured an intense study and performance circuit in Cuba and abroad. This circuit consists of a pattern whereby
foreign students travel to Cuba to study with local teachers and then become cultural mediators and promoters in the transnational scene. While some foreigners were already acting as mediators of content prior to the advent of Web 2.0, the DIY features of the latter allowed for a far greater number of foreign students and fans to upload and share information and recordings related to these music traditions. In addition, many Cuba-based performers have been able to emigrate in recent years as a result of their connections with foreign students and opportunities to teach and perform abroad. Emigration in this case usually leads not only to an improvement of their socioeconomic status, but that of their family (via remittances). Further, upon establishing themselves abroad they can enjoy the social and cultural benefits that come with access to new media technologies, such as online social networking, self-promotion, and access to the plethora of information on the internet.

**Democratizing effects, bridging, and bonding**

The democratizing effects, as well as the bridging and bonding capacities of Web 2.0 both have to do with the people participating in and being exposed to the transnational scene. To review briefly, the modern transnational scene as we know it, which is primarily concentrated in flows between Cuba, the West (North America, western Europe), Latin America, the non-Spanish-speaking Caribbean, and to a lesser degree, Africa, Asia, and elsewhere, was primarily shaped by migrations of Cuban culture bearers to places like New York and Mexico City in the early- to mid-20th century and by the dissemination of recordings of the music on various types of media throughout the rest of the 20th century and into the 21st century. By the late 20th century, local performance scenes had also been established in places like New York, San Juan, Caracas, and Miami. The 1990s witnessed a renaissance of the performance of Afro-Cuban traditional music,
spurred by Cuba’s opening to foreign tourism and the renewed, heightened interest of foreigners (especially Westerners), which was itself also tied to the release and circulation of new and old recordings and instructional materials related to the music on the international market. During the same decade and into the early 2000s, the internet served as a new medium through which recordings and instructional materials were disseminated, bought, and sold, and information related to the traditions circulated among those who had access to it.

The Web 1.0 version of the internet used during this time exhibited some democratizing effects as a new medium, in terms of allowing individuals such as musicians and some scholars to create websites and publish information online that would be accessible around the world without the need for a corporate intermediary (as was the case with much content in the pre-internet age). Web 1.0 also allowed for large numbers of people around the world to access and view this information for free. And yet, limitations to this democratic nature included a pronounced digital divide during this time, in which large segments of the world’s population, namely those underprivileged economically or subject to political restrictions on internet access, as was the case in Cuba, were excluded from direct participation in this new medium. Further, content producers were still fairly few in Web 1.0 because in order to put information on the internet, this usually entailed making one’s own website, which required specific knowledge and skills that most people did not have. On the other hand, in the case of websites like AfroCubaWeb, one could submit an article or promotional material to a third party, often the site’s owner, who could then decide whether to upload the material to their site. In other words, there was a clear line between producers and consumers of content, with producers being few in between and both consumers and producers being concentrated in North America and western Europe among economically privileged sectors of the population.
With the popularization of Web 2.0 features by the mid-2000s, the internet’s potential as a democratic medium increased drastically. Two key factors helping to fulfill this potential were and continue to be the expansion of high-speed internet services to larger sections of the global population and the increasingly embedded nature of the internet and Web 2.0 features in daily life, at first in the West, and increasingly so in many other areas of the globe (Howard 2004). The latter factor—embeddedness—is a concept put forth by Howard (2004) which refers to the way that the internet and other manifestations of Web 2.0, like applications that can be used on multiple devices, are deeply integrated into the daily lives of people. Indeed, the embeddedness of the internet and Web 2.0 in daily life can also be viewed as an effect of Web 2.0’s democratic character, in particular its affordability (many of the most popular applications like iTunes, YouTube, and Facebook are available for free or can be used as free websites) and DIY features that allow for easy participation.

The democratizing effect of Web 2.0 is a modern example of what Peter Manuel (1993) described as happening in India in the 1970s with audiocassette tapes. Prior to the advent of audiocassettes in India, the production and selling of music was largely controlled by the music industry. However, when cassettes became popular as a new medium in the 1970s, many individuals, including musicians, were able to take the production, reproduction, and vending of music into their own hands, essentially becoming producers themselves. This new dynamic was due to the fact that audiocassettes, unlike prior media like LP and 45rpm records, could be recorded onto or copied with the use of a cheap, easy-to-acquire tape recorder. The technology was cheap, accessible, and fairly portable, allowing much larger swaths of the population—including those in the working classes—to participate in production, reproduction, and consumption. This widespread participation stimulated new sectors of economic activity in
which amateur production and pirating flourished, opening up opportunities for local musicians and local music genres like thumri.

The use of Web 2.0 and its democratic effects are thus comparable to the effects of the use of audiocassettes, with the exception that Web 2.0 requires users to have internet access and electronic devices with which to use it. As computers and related electronic devices have become more affordable and internet access more widespread around the world in the 2000s and 2010s however, Web 2.0 has allowed almost any user to become a producer of content and active participant in online activity. The presence of higher numbers of producers has resulted in increased quantities of content and greater variety. This increase holds true not only in the realm of music, but in the production of almost any type of content that can be contained in the medium. Again, these trends echo the effects of audiocassettes in India on music production insomuch as stimulating the diversification of content in terms of genres, styles, and musicians. In the case of Afro-Cuban traditional music, for example, the uploading and consumption of content such as music and videos, whether self-produced, copied, or shared, from another source, can be easily accomplished by anyone with high-speed internet access and an appropriate electronic device. Promotional content and historical, biographical, or otherwise related information can similarly be viewed, uploaded, and disseminated through blogs and social media.

Web 2.0 features, and in particular, social media, have also served as online platforms for those in the scene to interact and for new people to be exposed to and perhaps gain interest in the music or become aware of events or activities related to the traditions. The transnational scene includes performers, fans, students, and others interested in and involved in the music traditions in some capacity. Of course, not everyone in the scene enjoys access to its online dimension—
particularly—those in Cuba, and yet even performers without regular access may knowingly or unknowingly be featured in content at some point, perhaps via a mediator who puts the content online. Nonetheless, the thriving online activity that has taken place among members of the transnational scene exemplifies Norris’s (2004) idea that the internet has served as a medium for the bridging and bonding of groups.

In this case, Web 2.0 has served perhaps primarily to bond—that is, to bring the members of the scene into quicker and closer contact. For example, fans and musicians from across the world can easily and quickly communicate with each other on social media via messaging and commenting, view or share each other’s content, and in the case of sites like Facebook or Instagram, add each other as “friends” or opt to “follow” each other. The latter feature is an example of both bridging and bonding in that it serves to link members of the scene together who may have never interacted in-person or online. Social media may also bring newcomers to the scene (i.e. those from outside groups) into contact with people already in the scene, which is why Facebook and similar sites are also referred to as social networking sites. Such sites promote and support the creation of online networks, which of course may well lead to face-to-face interactions.

I first became acquainted with Barry Cox, a North American singer and researcher of rumba, through an exchange of comments between us on his blog Vamos a guarachar, after which we then “friended” each other on Facebook and continued our communication via messaging and email regarding our interest in rumba. Shortly thereafter I visited New York and was able to find out through him about a rumba in East Harlem where he was performing with the local rumba group Caja Dura. There, I met others in the group, including singer Máximo Valdés Izquierdo, with whom I was also able to connect with via Facebook. Through Cox I also
met Patrice Banchereau, a French rumba enthusiast, performer, and blogger. I interviewed both bloggers during my research for my dissertation, during which I found out that they also first met through Cox’s *Vamos a guarchar* blog. Their interactions on the blog and through email led to Cox being able to travel to Cuba to collaborate with highly esteemed *rumberos* there on some video recordings. Later, the two enthusiasts would eventually meet face-to-face in Havana.

According to Cox, Banchereau helped put him in contact with some great *rumberos* in Havana, including Gregorio “El Goyo” Hernández, with whom Cox stayed and collaborated over the course of several trips to Cuba. Later, the two planned a trip where they met in Cuba and worked with *rumberos* there, as they both share a passion for rumba singing and learning from the elder *rumberos*. Their collaboration led to the creation of a joint blog, *La rumba no es como ayer*, an impressive biographical encyclopedia of *rumberos* in Cuba which they put together based on their investigative efforts and interviews on and off the island, including interviews with some of most highly esteemed *rumberos*. Much of their collaboration and research also benefitted culture bearers by bringing them in contact with recordings and information that was new to them:

> Barry had much more information than I had about rumba, and I had more than him about *yoruba* and *abakú*. I always told Barry that the most important thing we had to do was to bring back to Cubans those recordings and films we had, that sometimes they were in, without even having seen them. I visited Amado [Dedeu], Angel Bolaños, Lázaro Pedroso, and I was invited to stay for free at El Goyo’s house and at El Gato’s (Ernesto Gatell) house. I had many USB drives with me, full of information, books, pictures, films, and all of them were astonished with that. So they decided to share with me too, and then with Barry, who came with another large amount of information in his laptop. . . . Barry is a real killer [sic] about forgotten things, especially about rumba history and discographic history. He had been rebuilding a whole Cuban rumba records history⁵ that even the best like Amado or El Goyo didn’t know. He had precise ideas of where he could find forgotten recordings, and he found them, so he changed the history, he changed [widely-accepted] dates!! Things that everyone—even Amado or El Goyo—thought had begun in 1955-56 with Cuban rumba recordings, now everyone knows that it had begun in 1942-43 [or earlier], thanks to Barry—historical.⁶

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⁵ See Cox (2011).
⁶ Email correspondence with Patrice Banchereau, July 30, 2015.
These examples of networking are but a few of the many that demonstrate the capacity for Web 2.0 features like social media and blogs to promote bridging and bonding, often resulting in a chain of networking whereby making the acquaintance of a new user then leads to other new interactions and acquaintances, both online and in-person. In some cases, like that of Cox and Banchereau, these interactions may lead to long-lasting friendships and have tangible results, in this case traveling to Cuba, working with musicians, and creating a joint blog. The fact that Cox and Banchereau resided on two different continents and eventually worked together in Cuba demonstrates the bonding capacity of Web 2.0; the Web 2.0 features of the internet allowed them to “meet” online, communicate quickly and easily, and share information with each other.

Social media sites like Facebook and Instagram also serve as broadcasting platforms for content that is posted or “shared” by individuals or groups. For example, when a user posts a picture, promotional information, link, video, or other type of content, it is then broadcasted to a large audience often consisting of friends, especially those individuals with whom the user interacts the most, perhaps via “likes” or commenting. The user may even choose to make some or all their content available to a public audience, which means that any user could potentially view and access the content, perhaps resulting in new connections between users. Social media also often “suggest” new friends or accounts for users to add or follow based on shared friends or common interests, with Facebook serving as a prime example. In a similar manner, YouTube features a whole column of suggested videos based on the videos the user is viewing or the types of content they have viewed in the past.
The internet in Cuba

So far, I have discussed the way Web 2.0 features have facilitated bridging, bonding, and greater access to a variety of recordings, general information, and instructional content on the internet, and how these features blurred the boundaries between consumers and producers, proving Web 2.0’s democratizing capacity as a new form of media. And yet participating in such online activity still requires the user have internet access, know how to navigate the features, and have access to appropriate devices such as a personal computer or smartphone. In effect, one still needs to meet these requirements in order to enjoy the democratic features of Web 2.0, such as the DIY quality of social media and blogs. Although the digital divide was becoming less prevalent in the 2000s as internet access in North America, Europe, and the rest of the world grew, Cubans on the island were still comparatively underprivileged.

Indeed, Cubans have long had difficulty accessing the internet due to limitations caused by the US embargo, government restrictions, an outdated telecommunications infrastructure, and the restrictive high cost of computers and internet services. Despite being introduced in 1996, the internet was slow to develop in Cuba due to a lack of funding in Cuba and to the US embargo, particularly the Toricelli Act, also known as the Cuban Democracy Act. The act, passed in 1992, prohibited family remittances, travel to Cuba by US citizens, and also stopped overseas subsidiaries of US companies from trading with Cuba (Press 2011). Through much of the 2000s, most Cubans did not have regular access to the internet; only certain people were allowed this privilege, such as university educators and college students. Further, since internet connections in private homes were rare, most of the people that did have access could only use it in their places of work or study (Juventud Rebelde 2009). Even then, such “access” was often limited to the use of email and a government-censored national “intranet,” which effectively served to
control the content available to most Cubans and featured sites that were aligned with the Cuban government. Such government restrictions, which have yet to be done away with, are comparable with North Korea and Myanmar, who also use a closed national intranet and block much of the content on the wider internet that might conflict with the regimes’ ideological views. Tourists and certain government officials are, however, able to access the global internet (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency 2011, Rhoades and Fassihi 2011).

Until 2008, ownership of a computer or mobile phone required government approval, which was difficult to obtain. However, most Cubans could not afford such devices, and it has only been in the 2010s that cell phones became more common in Cuba, especially in urban areas, among youth, and among those who have family members abroad who can send phones and help with the associated expenses. State-run internet cafés appeared in the 2000s in urban areas, but the high cost of using the services ($0.50-$1.00 [US]) kept most Cubans from being able to use them, as the average salary is only about $20 a month (Wylie 2010, 114). Press (2011) shows a steady rise in internet—or in most cases, intranet—users from 2004 to 2009, from about 900,000 to 1,600,000, with Cuba’s population being about 11 million people. Yet access was overwhelmingly concentrated in the city of Havana (Ciudad Habana) and most users were sharing computers. To compare Cuba’s numbers with two other world areas, in 2009 in North America, 73% of the population had internet access, while the number is only 5.3% in Africa (Juventud Rebelde 2009). By 2011 however, 23 % of Cuba’s population had internet access, rising to 40% in 2018 (Statista 2018). In 2009, the US administration under Obama relaxed restrictions on US companies working with Cuba, yet Cuba chose to begin collaborating with Venezuela on improving internet speeds by installing a fiber-optic cable between the two countries. Increased connection speeds were not available to the Cuban public until 2013.
In 2015, the Cuban government opened the first public wi-fi spots, and as of 2017, there were about 500, concentrated in urban areas (Xinhua 2017). In order to use the public wi-fi hotspots (mobile internet connections are still not available), Cubans can purchase time on a “Nauta” card purchased from the national telecommunications company ETECSA, which works like a phone card that can be replenished. When I visited Cuba in 2016, the public wi-fi spots were already very popular; hordes of young Cubans could be found hanging out in the wi-fi spots in small plazas and parks, with most using smartphones as devices, often accessing social media applications such as Facebook.

Observations on the global digital divide and Cuba’s place in it

Scholarly attention to the issue of a digital divide in the 1990s at first focused only on raw access to the internet (via a computer and an internet connection), and was primarily discussed at the national level by scholars and organizations in the US, using factors such as race, age, socioeconomic status, location (rural vs. urban), and gender (e.g. NTIA US Commerce Department 1995, 1998, 1999; Spooner 2000; Spooner and Rainie 2001; Nakamura 2004). More recently, studies of the digital divide have taken a transnational scope, and the issue of “access” has deepened in scope to include various types and qualities of access. For example, Graham (2011, 219) has argued that rather than a single digital divide, there are in fact many divides which exist and should be taken into account:

There is no singular floating cyberspace, in the sense that a person is either inside or outside, separated by a ‘digital divide.’ There are rather countless small (although often insurmountable) “digital divides” preventing movement through the topologies of the Internet and limiting access to cyberspaces.

Graham (2011, 218) describes the two main types of divides as material divides and virtual divides. Material divides concern resources, specifically, the inability to access the “entry
points of cyberspace”: the appropriate hardware (e.g. computer, smartphone), software (e.g. web browser, social media apps), and a connection (Graham 2011, 218). The second type of divide is virtual in nature, which points to inequalities among internet users in cyberspace(s); in other words, not all users have access to the various areas/uses of the web (cyberplaces). Among the most obvious examples is when the governments of some countries (e.g. China, North Korea) censor content and restrict access to certain websites or features of the internet. Another example is schools’ or businesses’ efforts to only allow students or employees access to approved websites (Hamade 2008). Both of these divides have affected Cubans since the inception of the internet in Cuba: lack of access to resources (entry points) and restrictions on access imposed by the Cuban government.

Cuba’s widespread lack of access to the internet is not exceptional; most countries of the Global South are similarly underprivileged in terms of access to the internet and its associated technologies: Indeed, Graham (2011, 216) and numerous scholars have pointed out the unequal geographic distribution of communications technologies around the world and the opportunities for production and consumption that they afford (Castells 2002; Dodge and Kitchin 2001; Gorman and Malecki 2002; Townsend 2001). According to Graham and Hale (2012), only a minority of the global population has internet access; in their article, they provide a global map that illustrates the geography of internet access. Rather than a regular global map, the countries on the map in the article are not drawn according to their specific contours and actual size. Rather, each country is represented by a square in its relative location on the globe, and the size (how big or small the square is) and shade (dark or light) of a country reflects the overall number and percentage of users. The resulting visualization shows the stark differences in the numbers and percentages of users between the Global North and Global South. The US is by far the
largest and darkest area on the map, followed by China (high overall numbers but low percentage of overall population), Japan, Germany, France, the UK, South Korea, Canada, and other countries in Europe. Meanwhile, the entire continent of South America appears smaller than the US, and Africa and the Caribbean are almost non-existent on the map. Countries like Cuba and those of Central America do not even show up on the map, which highlights their extremely low levels of access.

Despite the fact that most Cubans on the island did not enjoy internet (or even intranet) access in the late 1990s and 2000s, there was a plethora of content circulating online related to Afro-Cuban traditional music: audio and audiovisual recordings, historical and biographical information, websites, blogs, images, event promotions, and instructional media. And yet, for the most part, it was not Cubans putting this material online and disseminating it, or even consuming it. Rather, these activities were dominated by white, middle class Westerners, a group that had enjoyed privileged access to the internet as a medium and as a technology in comparison with much of the world since the internet’s inception.

To illustrate some of the global inequalities in internet access during the time, in 2005, only about 16% of the world population were internet users, but only 8% of those users were in developing countries, while 51% were based in developed countries. In the same year, 46% of Europe’s population were internet users, with a 36% rate in the Americas, while in Africa only 2% of the population were connected, and 8% in Arab states. The numbers had gone up drastically by 2012, but the percentage of internet users remained highest in Europe (including Russia), North America, and Australia. Even in 2016, the countries with the highest percentages of internet users are concentrated in Europe and North America (in the 80 and 90 percentiles),
with countries in Asia falling closely behind and many African nations having among the lowest percentages (often less than 20%) (International Telecommunications Union 2018).

On the other hand, in Cuba, only 0.5% of the population had internet (intranet) access in 2000, rising to 9.7% in 2005. The figures had grown to 15.9% by 2010, and in 2016 the number was up to 32.4%, with the majority of growth occurring between 2011 and 2013 (Internet Live Stats n.d.). Further, we can surmise that black or dark-skinned Cubans, which have been historically marginalized economically and socially, have been even less likely to enjoy internet access. This lack of access would have been particularly pronounced in the 1990s and 2000s, during and after the economic devastation of the Período Especial, and prior to the implementation of public wi-fi services beginning in 2015.

Even in the US, the racial digital divide was heavily pronounced in 2001, with African Americans and Latinos in all income groups being far less likely to own a home computer or access the internet from home. Further, as income grew, so did the likelihood of having internet access, with white adults in the middle- to high-income areas ($20,000 and higher) having the highest percentages of internet access (Fairlie 2003). In 2013, a study conducted by the Princeton Survey Research Associated International concluded that whites in the US were still more likely to use the internet at home and to have high-speed broadband service, although on mobile platforms such as smartphones, access was more equal (Smith 2014). The latter observation points to the democratizing potential of mobile devices such as smartphones, as they are cheaper alternatives to internet access than personal computers.

The growing access to and use of smartphones in Cuba, coupled with the growing numbers of public wi-fi hotspots on the island in recent years is testament to this trend. This expanded access has allowed more and more Cubans—especially young people—to tap into the
global connectivity of the internet through social media. I will discuss this issue further later, but it is important to remember that in the 1990s and 2000s, online flows of content related to the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene were still controlled primarily by non-Cubans. Since most Cubans did not have access to the internet, they were not able to mediate its content. What is more, culture bearers in Cuba—including *rumberos, tamboleros*, and other performers of Afro-Cuban traditions—were often further marginalized socially and racially (being black or mulatto), as well as economically (often based in poor urban areas), which means they would have been even less likely to have the means to pay for internet access (i.e. in internet cafés or post offices) or even enjoy access in their place of employment or study, as many are full-time professional performers in the religious community or in folkloric groups. Even for those that did have access during this time, this access may have been limited to email and use of the national intranet. For example, in our interview in 2015, Barry Cox revealed to me that he communicated via email (beginning around 2007) with renowned *rumbero* Gregorio “El Goyo” Hernández, who lived in Havana, as El Goyo also worked in higher education. And yet, despite being described by Cox as someone with a wealth of knowledge about rumba, *rumberos*, and other Afro-Cuban traditions, as well as an inclination towards researching and discussing these traditions, it was Cox and Banchereau who channeled much of his (and many others’) knowledge into online platforms, effectively acting as mediators of content, be it musical, historical, or biographical in nature.

The example with Cox and El Goyo is but one of many that illustrate the way that foreigners came to act as mediators of content related to Afro-Cuban traditional music on the internet. I have already discussed some of the Web 1.0 websites of the 1990s and early 2000s and how these were often geared more towards selling commodities such as audio or audiovisual recordings, instructional media, and books, and for promoting study-in-Cuba packaged geared
towards Afro-Cuban traditional music. Examples of these sites included Descarga and EarthMusicCDs. There were also a few sites that were more informational, such as AfroCubaWeb, which featured articles on topics related to Afro-Cuban culture and issues and provided information on Cuban music (including Afro-Cuban traditional music as well as popular music) groups, events, tours, and travel packages. Perhaps the site that came the closest to mediating information channeled from culture bearers in Cuba was Citypercussion, as it contained sections with transcriptions of batá drum parts from recordings by Cuban *tamboleros* (Hochstatter and Meier n.d.). As previously discussed, these early examples of online content were created in the days of Web 1.0, during which the online medium was less democratic than the later Web 2.0, with its DIY format which allowed far greater amounts of users to become creators of content.

However, since most Cubans were still comparatively marginalized in their ability to participate in the growing online flows of content in the 2000s, even as Web 2.0 features eclipsed Web 1.0, the online medium was dominated by foreigners connected in some way to the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene. In effect, Cuban culture bearers were largely excluded as participants in the online part of the scene, not because they were unwelcome, but because of their comparatively underprivileged status living in Cuba as Cubans. And yet, what initially started as mediation by foreigners in the online realm would eventually serve to create some opportunities for advancing the economic, social, and cultural capital of culture bearers in Cuba, although many of these would not come into fruition until the latter 2000s and 2010s. Before exploring those effects, let us first examine some examples of how foreigners acted as mediators of content in the online realm, indeed expanding the initial online presence of Afro-Cuban traditional music and transforming this presence into an integral part of the transnational scene.
Further, the new online part of the scene served as a catalyst inasmuch as it sped up the integration of the transnational scene through increased bridging and bonding thanks to social media.

**Barry Cox’s blogs: The Cancionero rumbero and ¡Vamos a guarachar!**

Sometime in the mid-2000s, I came across the blog Cancionero rumbero, created and run by Barry Cox, a North American aficionado and performer of rumba. Cox’s introduction to the rumba scene and his participation in the online scene serves as a great example not only of non-Cubans acting as mediators of online content, but also illustrates how the democratic DIY features of Web 2.0 allowed an aficionado and non-professional performer—as opposed to a professional musician or business owner that creates a full website—to create such a wealth of content online, widely disseminated and available for free to all with internet access.

Prior to being exposed to rumba, Cox (2015, interview) traveled to Cuba for the first time in 1994 and 1996 to learn more about son, as he was a student and performer of the tres at that time, performing with a septeto (septet performing traditional son) at the time. Cox was first exposed to live rumba in the late 1990s while on a trip with a friend to Humboldt State University in California, where a series of summer Afro-Cuban drum and dance workshops have been held annually since 1996. Upon being bitten by the “rumba bug,” as he put it in our interview, Cox returned home to Chicago and went on a shopping spree at Rose Records, a huge record store where he found CDs of groups like Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, AfroCuba de Matanzas, and Los Papines. As he listened and learned more about rumba, he became particularly interested in the songs and the singing and decided to compile a rumba songbook in the spirit of the Rumba-Orisha song anthology. The latter was a self-published collection of
songs produced by Jerry Shilgi and Philip Pasmanick in San Francisco in the 1980s which, according to North American drummer Jesse Feldman (active in the New York and California scenes during that time) had circulated informally among North American *rumberos* and aficionados in the 1980s and 1990s, often shared and photocopied among friends. The result for Cox was the *Cancionero rumbero*, an extensive collection of rumba songs he compiled that was first shared and circulated as a hard copy after its release in 2002; shortly thereafter it was made available for free download as a PDF file online. In fact, I remember first downloading it from the (now-defunct) website batadrums.com.

Cox later started a blog version of the *Cancionero rumbero*—which meant that its content could be continually updated and expanded. Further, the interactive features of the blog, which include commenting and a few playable or downloadable files, allows visitors to the site to comment or provide suggested corrections or amendments on specific songs. I first “met” and interacted with Cox via the comments section on this blog; as a rumba aficionado and amateur performer at the time, this blog was a goldmine for me. I would consult the blog regularly to figure out correct lyrics for songs I had heard on recordings and wanted to learn, as sometimes the lyrics on those recordings were not always clear or audible, or they contained Bantu- or Yoruba-derived words or phrases I was unfamiliar with at the time. Indeed, reasons such as these were why Cox created the blog, and it seems to be what most visitors to the site use it for: looking up and learning song lyrics. Of course, the blog also serves as a centralized online database of rumba songs, the only one of its kind.

As an archive of song lyrics, the blog is searchable, so it is easy to look up a song by its title or lyrics. On the other hand, Cox also organized the site so that visitors could click on a certain group, album, song author, or even the style of rumba (i.e. *columbia*, *yambú*, or
guaguancó) and be taken to a list of songs having to do with that group, album, style, etc. Then visitors can click on the specific song and be taken to a page containing the full song lyrics, complete with indications for repetition of certain lines and the chorus(es) for the montuno. Cox also includes a set of information under the song title, including the composer, the album(s) it is featured on, and whether it is a yambú, columbia, or guaguancó. At the bottom of each song is a comments section. I first interacted with Cox when I started suggesting some corrections or amendments to certain song lyrics. In the case of at least one song I commented on (I cannot recall which one), that there was already a running commentary between Cox and Banchereau debating and suggesting what they felt were the correct lyrics in a specific section of this song. As a Spanish speaker from a Cuban family background, I provided my opinion of what the lyrics were, which Cox then responded to (via the comment section) appreciatively. We continued to interact through similar commenting and eventually—upon realizing we both shared an interest in rumba and its song repertoire—began emailing each other, and later finally met in person in New York at a rumba.

Cox also created another blog around the same time (early-mid 2000s) called ¡Vamos a guarachar!7 The blog features downloadable files of hard-to-find or otherwise rare rumbas, some of which can also be played on the site itself. Some of the song files are individual MP3s and others are zip files containing multiple songs or an album. Each blog post (all in English) includes a short description of the recordings, sometimes including the history behind them, the musicians featured, or a story about how he came upon them or why he feels they are important. In addition, some blog posts are more focused on news or historical or biographical information,

7 http://esquinarumbera.blogspot.com/
such as a post from 2012 announcing the death of El Goyo, which includes pictures, biographical information of this famous *rumbero*, and his discography.\(^8\)

The downloadable recordings of “rarities” on the blog include many songs that were not released on commercial rumba albums, including some *in situ* recordings and songs that were otherwise not widely circulated. According to Cox, the idea of sharing files like this was inspired by his experience with Soulseek, a free file-sharing software in the tradition of Napster and Limewire that was popular in the early-mid 2000s. Also a fan of Brazilian music, Cox had been an avid fan of Soulseek because he had been able to find and download a plethora of old, rare recordings of samba from Brazilian fans on there who had digitized old albums. Cox wanted to do the same for fans of rumba: provide an online platform where rare recordings of rumba could be found and downloaded for free.\(^9\) Indeed, the subtitle to the blog reads (first in Spanish, then in English): “sharing rarities from the world of rumba.”

Cox’s first post on the blog illustrated his inspiration from Soulseek; it featured downloadable recordings of *Cajones bullangueros*, a collection of rumbas recorded by Yoruba Andabo as the soundtrack for the Cuban television miniseries *La rumba sin lentejuelas* (1990, directed by Elio Ruíz). Essentially, Cox turned these recordings—never before released on their own—into an “album” which could be downloaded for free by visitors to the blog. In the following chapter on YouTube, I will discuss how Cox also uploaded the videos of this whole mini-series with the permission and encouragement of the director, Elio Ruíz, who now lives in New York. Cox was thus cognizant of ownership issues, obtaining permission when necessary, as in the case of Elio Ruíz’s *La rumba sin lentejuelas*. Another example of rumba “rarities”

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\(^8\) [http://esquinarumbera.blogspot.com/2012/01/el-goyo-ibae.html](http://esquinarumbera.blogspot.com/2012/01/el-goyo-ibae.html)

\(^9\) Another North American rumba aficionado and collector of recordings, Mark Sanders, created a somewhat similar blog called *Fidel’s eyeglasses* which features images and information on old albums of Afro-Cuban traditional music, Cuban popular music, and Brazilian music and provides many downloadable files as well.
offered as downloadable files include a set of 12 songs recorded by AfroCuba de Matanzas. The following is the description provided by Cox:

Here is a set of tunes by ACdM [AfroCuba de Matanzas] you may have missed, as they were only released on various compilations here and there. I think some of their finest work is here though: Many feature the legendary Virulilla and Saldiguera on vocals, and [Dolores Pérez's](http://esquinarumbera.blogspot.com/2006/11/afrocuba-de-matanzas-12-rarities.html) [link to information on Pérez featured on the AfroCubaWeb site] singing on "Palo Yaya" is not to be missed. I especially like "La viola de Homero," "Las Leyendas de Grecia" and "Tristes Lamentos." I also believe this yambú to be the slowest ever recorded. 10

Under this description, there is a list of song tracks, followed by link to download.

Finally, Cox encourages visitors to the blog to comment by reminding them that comments are appreciated. In the comments section, several people expressed their delight and appreciation of these recordings and the blog. All comments, which date from about 2006-2009, are written in English, and while one was from a Cuban (a self-described *rumbero*) living abroad, others were from non-Cuban fans. One of these fans, with the username “vanessa,” commented about how much she loved the site and that she visited Cuba often and even sent the 12 AfroCuba recordings from the post to Dolores Pérez (one of the singers on the recordings whom “vanessa” knew) and her husband in Matanzas. Cox then responded that he was glad to hear this, and asked if they could continue corresponding via email, as he had questions about the recordings that he wanted to ask Pérez. A final and separate comment in 2009 was from “Christian” (Christian Liebich) a Swiss enthusiast and promoter11 of rumba who has been active in producing video

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10 [http://esquinarumbera.blogspot.com/2006/11/afrocuba-de-matanzas-12-rarities.html](http://esquinarumbera.blogspot.com/2006/11/afrocuba-de-matanzas-12-rarities.html)

11 According to his site ([https://atticindependent.ch/](https://atticindependent.ch/)), Liebich is CEO of a production company called Attic Production with the help of Havana-based musician, producer, and *rumbero* Adonis Panter Calderón, who is also the director of the rumba group Osain del Monte. The company focuses exclusively on Afro-Cuban traditional music—mostly rumba—and works with Cuban artists on the island and in Europe in management, promotion and production of musical events, and documentaries. Liebich has also been involved in organizing study-in-Cuba cultural trips.
promotions of *rumberos* in Cuba on YouTube (including “El Trio Peligroso,” the members of which were active in Yoruba Andabo and later Osain del Monte and the Aspirina family):

I am in regular contact with Minini and the representative for Afrocuba, Maria Valladares, by telephone and email every other week or so. I have set up a group on Facebook, Afrocuba de Matanzas, to try to help get current information from the group to anyone interested and vice versa. If you have any questions you would like to get to the group I can relay them for you, just post anything to the Facebook group. By the way I love what you are doing with this site! Well done. If you have not seen the two DVDs I made in celebration of their 50th anniversary I could send you copies if you mail me an address.  

The correspondence between “vanessa,” Liebich, and Cox themselves serve as very specific examples of how the three foreigners are acting voluntarily as mediators of content—including the relaying of messages—between Cuban culture bearers and the outside world. In the case cited above, the “outside world” refers to that which is beyond the reach of the culture bearers residing in Cuba, including the internet and the ability to connect and communicate easily with others outside Cuba via social media. It is evident that all three foreigners, given their experience visiting Cuba, are familiar with the limitations on the culture bearers there in terms of their access to the internet, social media, and email. Under these circumstances, they volunteer to help each other, understanding that networking with each other is beneficial not only to their own interests, but is beneficial for the culture bearers, as it can mean providing them with access to “new”—or in this case, rare—recordings in the example of “vanessa” sending the AfroCuba rarities recordings to Pérez in Cuba, or in the case of Liebich, opening up possible performance or other opportunities for AfroCuba de Matanzas as a group via Cox or Facebook. The three foreigners are thus serving as mediators of content, which in turn serves to promote the culture bearers as individual artists or groups, whether intentionally, as in the case of Liebich creating a

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12 [http://esquinarumbera.blogspot.com/2006/11/afrocuba-de-matanzas-12-rarities.html](http://esquinarumbera.blogspot.com/2006/11/afrocuba-de-matanzas-12-rarities.html)
13 These dynamics are similar to the ways anthropologists and ethnomusicologists have sometimes served as mediators or advocates for the people whose culture they study.
Facebook page for AfroCuba de Matanzas, or indirectly, as when Cox uploads and disseminates musical and historical information on the group.

The latter example is perhaps the most common form of mediation and promotion by foreigners on the internet in the time of Web 2.0, entailing the uploading and dissemination of music-related content on blogs or social media, which serves as publicity. As the content gets viewed and shared, the group or artist is getting more exposure, ideally leading to greater popularity, which can in turn manifest in an increase in social and cultural capital for those artists (culture bearers) in Cuba. This type of exposure is comparable with the idea that recordings in the pre-internet age served as important modes of publicity for the recording artists or groups, and that the more recordings they had and the more widely-disseminated those recordings were, the more likelihood there was for their music to exert influence (phonograph effects) at the national or (especially) the transnational level. In the case of the internet and especially with Web 2.0, the content disseminated at the transnational level has become much more varied. As opposed to LPs, cassettes, and CDs containing primarily recorded music, now it is also easy to find historical or biographical information; educational resources, including books and instructional media; albums; individual songs; song lyrics; documentaries; and videos of all kinds of performances and classes.

**Non-Cubans as mediators of online content**

Foreigners, in this case non-Cubans who visit Cuba, have become the necessary mediators of content to the online realm because of their privileged position vis-à-vis the culture bearers residing in Cuba. Foreigners acting as mediators, such as Cox, Liebich, and Banchereau, tend to be white and middle class and live in comparatively “free” countries with high standards
of living and high levels of access to the internet. Meanwhile, culture bearers in Cuba tend to be black and reside in marginal neighborhoods with high levels of poverty. In addition, they live in a country where access to the internet continues to be greatly limited, and was minimal prior to the 2010s.

In my 2015 interview with Alain Fernández, who was in the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional in the 1990s as a dancer (apart from being an aspiring akpón), he explains some of the ways Cuban musicians and dancers met and collaborated with foreign students interested in learning the Afro-Cuban music and dance traditions in the 1990s, when the presence of foreigners on the island became more common:

In the 90s, when you’d go out, you’d make friends with foreigners that went to the theater. They liked to learn about our songs and our culture, and then [they would say], “Well, next month I’m going to come back to Cuba to learn, and I’d like you to be the one to give me classes.” . . . And you would create a relationship and give them classes, and if they liked you they would recommend you to other foreigners, and before you know, you have ten foreigners or Europeans taking classes from you. Europeans and Asians would go often to Cuba to take classes, just as much as for dancing as for singing [or drumming]. Then through those encounters, there was the possibility that a foreigner would take a video and take it back to their country and promote it, perhaps through a friend of theirs who owned a company. That was one of the ways through which many of those videos [from that time] were recorded and [eventually] put on YouTube, but that was in ’91, ’92. . . . That was the way that many of those recordings were made. Then many of those students would invite their teachers to go to their country and promote the dancing, singing, [and drumming].

Based on my experiences and what I have heard from people like Cox, Banchereau, and Manley “Piri” López and his family (Los Chinitos), the dynamic between foreigners and culture bearers is, for the most part, one of mutual cooperation. Despite foreigners occupying privileged positions, most seem to genuinely want to use their resources (such as access to recording technology or the internet) to help culture bearers in Cuba via promotion or other means, who in turn are often active and enthusiastic participants in the process. For example, culture bearers may encourage their foreign connections (students, friends, etc.) to record videos of
performances, classes, or interviews, and then post these on the internet as way of publicizing their name, group, or opinions (via an interview, for example).14

Antoine Miniconi, an Italian student of Manley “Piri” López of Los Chinitos, helped to publicize and promote Piri and his family as artists and teachers by creating a blog and uploading several videos of batá and other percussion lessons and demonstrations by Piri on YouTube. The blog, available in English and French and created with the help of Patrice Banchereau, serves as a biographical and promotional platform for Piri and his family. Indeed, the blog’s address reflects its intent as an online curriculum vitae: manleycvenglish.blogspot.com. It includes photos of Piri and his family members, background on his professional and teaching experience, his experience with various kinds of Afro-Cuban traditional instruments and genres (cajones, batá drums, rumba, etc.), and interviews with Piri’s father on the Chinitos’ creation of the guarapachanguero style of rumba. There is also a short section featuring Miniconi’s curriculum vitae which outlines his experience in Afro-Cuban music, complete with photos of him studying with Piri and his family.

The creation of such a promotional blog would have not been possible without the assistance of a foreigner as a mediator between the Chinitos and the internet medium, to which they did not have access to in La Corea, a poor, marginal neighborhood riddled with poorly constructed homes and unpaved streets. Indeed, as discussed in previous chapters, Los Chinitos would likely have never been recognized as the true creators of the guarapachanguero style in the transnational scene had it not been for foreign mediators like Miniconi and Marco Fadda. According to Irián López, one of the Chinitos brothers, Fadda was an Italian student of his who

14 Such dynamics have also been common among anthropologists and ethnomusicologists and the people whose culture they study, particularly if the former are—or are perceived to be—of more privileged socioeconomic and racial backgrounds.
filmed a short documentary on the Chinitos and their role in the creation of the *guarapachangueo* style. The video, titled “Rumba Guarapachangueo, Concept and History, Los Chinitos,” uploaded and disseminated via YouTube, was the first to explain the history of *guarapachangueo* and features the Chinitos brothers—the original creators—recounting their stories on how it was created and demonstrating the style in performance.

The practice of encouraging foreigners to mediate content also extends in some cases to Cubans living abroad. For example, in Miami, I was encouraged by several of the musicians with whom I perform regularly, including Caridad Paisán (a past member of Clave y Guaguancó), to record and post a collective discussion we had on the marginalized state of Afro-Cuban traditional music in Miami. In another example, *akpwón* Alain Fernández had the idea (following our interview) to do a video in which I interviewed him concerning specific topics having to do with the Lucumí song repertoire (or, as he put it, “el canto yoruba”) so that he could discuss specific things he felt the younger generation needed to know in order for traditional practices to be maintained properly. He believed it was important to disseminate this information and that I had the means and the knowledge to help him mediate this content online, as he had little experience creating and posting videos online. I posted the video on YouTube and shared it on Facebook, including in some Facebook group pages dedicated to Santería and Afro-Cuban religion. There, the video received several comments from Cuban musicians and *santeros* who agreed with Alain’s arguments (that certain practices were being lost with current generations),

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15 [https://youtu.be/K8n3GR81Ks0](https://youtu.be/K8n3GR81Ks0)
16 [https://youtu.be/NwDTZSSEJDk](https://youtu.be/NwDTZSSEJDk)
17 “El canto yoruba en el ámbito afrocubano” [https://youtu.be/xWYVeNZRQho](https://youtu.be/xWYVeNZRQho)
as well as one person who criticized it based on Fernández’s use of the term “Yoruba” to describe the language used in singing in the music of Santería.18

As the previous examples (Miniconi’s blog featuring Piri and the videos I uploaded featuring Fernández and Paisán) illustrate, much of the content uploaded on behalf of—or in conjunction with—culture bearers is promotional or informational in nature; and yet there is other content that is purely musical. Indeed, as is the case with many popular and traditional music cultures from around the world, Web 2.0 has become the primary medium for promoting Afro-Cuban traditional music, artists, and events at the transnational—and in some cases, the local—level; for disseminating knowledge (i.e. biographical or historical information in blogs, articles, or documentaries); news, such as the passing of an elder musician; and for disseminating music recordings, which now includes the live streaming of performances on applications like Facebook.

Social media as vehicles for promotion of events

Facebook and Instagram are commonly used by musicians and promoters in the scene to post, distribute, and organize events. Users may post images of flyers to advertise events or promote a performance or class by creating a Facebook “event” that users can RSVP to or share and invite others. For example, Cuban dance festivals and Afro-Cuban dance classes in Italy and France are often advertised on Facebook and Instagram by dance teachers, event organizers,

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18 At least one commenter on YouTube and Facebook called attention to Fernández’s use of the term “Yoruba” to describe the language of the singing in these traditions, arguing that this was inaccurate as it was not actually the Yoruba spoken in Nigeria. I would contend however, that Alain’s use of the term “Yoruba” reflects its common usage in Cuba (particularly in state-sponsored folkloric groups and among Cuban musicologists) to reference to the dialect used in singing (and praying) in the context of Cuban Santería and the ethnic group from which it was derived. Cuban culture bearers who use the term nonetheless generally understand that it is not equivalent to the Yoruba language spoken in modern-day Nigeria.
musicians, dancers, and fans. Such events are often “created” (i.e. as Facebook events) by key organizers and then shared on individuals’ home pages on Facebook and in Facebook groups centered on Afro-Cuban traditional music, like the popular NYC Rumba News group (over 1,300 members) or the event page for the yearly Cubanyando festival that takes place in Toulouse, France (liked and followed by over 2,500 users). On Instagram, Switzerland-based Cuban dancer Ismaray Aspirina, among others, regularly posts flyers advertising dance classes and study-in-Cuba trips, as does the Cali2Cuba company, the latter run by a Mexican-American drummer based in San Francisco.

Other users, including many fans, use Facebook as a platform to share music, especially videos of music performances. For example, Jesús Guerra, a New York-based Cuban rumba aficionado who frequents the Central Park rumbas, regularly posts videos of rumba and other Afro-Cuban traditional music performances on his Facebook page, whether these are shared from YouTube, copied as clips from a movie or documentary he owns, or videos he recorded himself, the latter often taken while visiting Cuba. His videos are watched and liked by many followers of the NYC Rumba News page, as many of these are New York-based rumberos or rumba fans whom he knows personally. Others also follow, view, and like his shared videos, not only because he posts often but because they may be recordings that viewers have never seen before, such as videos he recorded while visiting Cuba. For example, during the first week of July 2018, he posted a new video almost every day, all of which feature Afro-Cuban traditional music. The videos received between 14 and 39 “likes” during the first few days and they were “shared” by other users between 2 and 9 times. Guerra is thus serving as a mediator of content as well, able to do so because he resides in New York rather than Cuba and is familiar with using social media, as he has resided in the US for many years.
Guerra’s use of social media, along with other Cubans and non-Cubans in the scene who reside outside—and to a lesser extent, in—Cuba, is an example of what Howard (2004) calls the embedded media perspective. This refers to the embeddedness of new media, like Web 2.0 and social media, in our daily lives. Of course, we cannot take for granted that “our” refers to everyone on the planet, but rather those of us living in politically privileged parts of the world and economically privileged sectors of our societies. As previously discussed, in terms of access to and use of internet and social media technologies, Howard is thus most likely referring to Westerners and others residing in the West, in places like North America and Europe. To this idea of embeddedness, we can add McLuhan’s (1964) perspective of media as extensions of man, thus being able to see Web 2.0 and social media technologies as extensions of our lives. Again, this applies perhaps most to those of us in the West, and yet many other areas of the world and sectors of society, including places like Cuba, are increasingly becoming a part of this trend. And yet since Cubans on the island have and continue to be underprivileged in terms of regular access to the internet, foreigners have often been a necessary link between Cubans and the internet.

**Correlating culture bearers’ use of social media with increases in economic opportunities and social and cultural capital**

The trend of foreigners acting as mediators of content related to Afro-Cuban traditional music has become normalized over the past two decades as foreigners have become a regular part of the scene in Cuba, interacting with culture bearers in public performances, group classes and workshops, private lessons, the production of recordings, and in the more private sphere of secular and religious performances in homes. The trend has had largely positive effects for culture bearers on the island whose content and roles as artists or teachers are promoted by
foreigners on social media or blogs. As with promotion on Web 1.0, this increased publicity has led to many culture bearers getting new students and opportunities to perform abroad. In turn, such economic advantages (e.g. increased income due to more students) or opportunities to travel abroad can result in greater direct access to the internet and social media, or even to emigration from Cuba. In the latter case, if the culture bearers relocate to a country where access to the internet and technologies like smart phones are common, such as countries in Europe or North America, then they will be able to take full advantage of these technologies directly, without the need for a foreign mediator (so long as they learn the technology and choose to use it).

This brings us to the idea, put forth by Howard (2004) that the use of new media technologies—in this case Web 2.0 and social media—leads to an increase in social and cultural capital. In other words, use of new media technologies expands our social circles and worth in those circles (who we know) as well as our cultural knowledge and worth (what we know). This is obvious in the case of social media, in which the very social nature of the media is described in its name; social media both reinforce and extend users’ social networks. In the case of other Web 2.0 and general internet features, like search engines and folksonomies (archive sites where users contribute content, such as YouTube), the ability to search, read, watch, and listen to online content or stumble upon new content or information by chance, leads to an expansion of users’ cultural capital as well.

To this, we can add that direct or even mediated use (i.e. via a foreigner) of Web 2.0 and social media often leads to an increase in economic opportunities for culture bearers in Cuba or abroad. A prime example can be seen in the case of Piri and his family, Los Chinitos, who gained increasing international recognition after their Italian students promoted his talent and the role of Los Chinitos as the creators of guarapachangueo via blogs and YouTube videos in the
2000s. The income generated from Piri’s student, Miniconi, for example, led to Piri being able to make improvements to his home in Cuba, like installing an air conditioning unit in his room (a luxury in Cuba). Piri and his family continued (and still continue) to get more students as their names became better-known abroad in the larger transnational scene, just as they had become more widely recognized in Cuba and abroad as the musicians featured in the Abbilona series of batá recordings. Eventually, Piri was able to take advantage of an opportunity to travel abroad and relocate to Miami and later Mexico City. Due to social media and especially YouTube, the names “Los Chinitos” and “El Piri” are now very widely popular and well-respected in the transnational scene, everywhere from New York to Caracas to San Juan.

A similar example is José del Pilar Suárez Entenza, a Havana-based dancer and musician in the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene. Despite being well-known in the Cuban scene due to his participation in several professional folkloric groups, such as the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional, Clave y Guaguancó, and Yoruba Andabo, he was not necessarily well-known in the larger transnational scene outside Cuba until recent years, during which he has been featured as the primary teacher for the study-in-Cuba project Cali2Cuba (based in San Francisco). Because of his role as teacher, he is now a prominent feature in Cali2Cuba’s social media presence, including Facebook and Instagram pages. The company frequently posts pictures of him, along with his qualifications and descriptions such as “internationally known” as part of their advertising for recruiting students abroad for their trips. Such advertising, featuring a highly experienced culture-bearer, is appealing to international students looking for an “authentic” experience with Afro-Cuban traditional music. On the other hand, the opportunity for culture bearers to work with foreigners, including Cali2Cuba’s director and their students from abroad, provides Suárez with extra income in the form of hard currency (divisa). This income has
undoubtedly helped his economic situation in Cuba, as trips occur several times a year and last for about 7-10 days. Further, the publicity he has received through social media (mediated in this case primarily through a foreigner—Cali2Cuba’s director—has helped extend his social network through exposure; it is likely that more people in the transnational scene will know who he is (seeing his name and face more often in social media circles related to Afro-Cuban traditional music) and social media can make it easier for past students to keep in contact with him for future trips or travel opportunities.

Another example is Osain del Monte, currently one of the most popular rumba groups in Cuba and abroad. The group is based in Havana but has traveled abroad frequently for performances and workshops in the past several years to Europe and North America. The group is directed by Adonis Panter Calderón and consists of a large group of highly talented musicians who represent the style of the current (young) generation of rumberos. Many of the core members of the group, including Panter and Barbarito Crespo Richa, first became well-known outside Cuba due to their featuring on a series of YouTube videos under the names “La timba encendida” or “El duo [or trio] peligroso de La Habana,” produced by Christian Liebich for Attic Independent Productions. Based on my personal experiences and interactions in the transnational scene, I have observed that these videos became widely popular among young rumberos and percussionists in the transnational scene (e.g. in New York, Miami, and San Juan) during and after 2009 when they were uploaded, with some of the most popular videos having over 12,000 views (“No me copias a mi – Conjunto Timba Encendida – 2nd Take”

19 https://youtu.be/dMfPYzqQy20
20 https://youtu.be/Sqkg7FsvQg

as of 2018.
Their videos encouraged international attention and recognition of these young artists, as fans and performers abroad viewed, shared, and discussed the videos and their “new school” approach to rumba, which reflects their generation and regional affiliation (i.e. the San Miguel del Padrón neighborhood). These videos were mediated by way of Liebich, the Swiss producer and owner of Attic Independent Productions. Over the next few years, Liebich continued to collaborate with these musicians, and Panter formed the group Osain del Monte. The group has since continued to enjoy Liebich’s support, and Panter is listed as a co-founder and producer of Attic Independent Productions on the company’s site. Most of Osain del Monte’s recordings, which, as of 2019 include singles, a full album, and several music videos, have been produced and disseminated by Attic Independent Productions and their social media networks (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr). Piggybacking on the initial popularity of the Timba Encendida and Duo Peligroso YouTube videos through Attic Independent Productions, the Osain del Monte videos of the following years (continuing into the present) helped the group achieve popularity and success in the transnational scene. The group currently performs regularly in Havana and tours abroad, giving performances and workshops. The ability to travel abroad is highly prized by Cubans, as it represents opportunities to access hard currency and to buy things abroad that might be difficult to find or too expensive to get in Cuba. The success story of Panter and the musicians of El Duo [or Trío] Peligroso and Osain del Monte again underline the power of social media and access to the internet. In their case, this access has led not only to an increase in cultural and social capital, it has also opened the doors to economic opportunities in the form of being able to have frequent, regular shows with their group in Havana (for the past several years they have performed at El Diablo Tuntún), and the ability to travel and perform abroad.

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While artists like Piri and Panter initially relied heavily (or exclusively) on foreigners as mediators of content, as the economic and social situation of these and other culture bearers improved, many have eventually been able to bypass foreign mediators and access the internet and social media directly to make use of it for themselves. For example, since emigrating from Cuba to Miami and then Mexico City, Piri has set up his own social media profiles on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, and has been quite active in the scene. He frequently posts photos and videos of himself on Facebook playing at tambores with the group of tamboleros he plays with regularly, which includes both Cubans and Mexicans. Sometimes, the videos are uploaded directly by him; other videos might be recorded and posted by another of the tamboleros, in which case they might “tag” Piri. These photos and videos serve as publicity and are viewed frequently by tamboleros and musicians in other cities around the world. As of 2019, his profile is followed by over 500 people and his videos often get several thousand views. For example, one video from October of 2015 that he reposted in July 2018 has over 20,000 views. His page and the videos circulated on it are particularly popular among tamboleros because he is viewed as a prodigy of the current generation due to his talent and the fact that he has been at the forefront of the evolution of the tambor playing style since his and his family’s (i.e. Los Chinitos) participation in the Abbilona project. For example, among the many rumberos and tamboleros I perform with in Miami and San Juan, it is not uncommon for one of them to mention and discuss a recent video they saw of Piri on Facebook or YouTube.

Like other “star” percussionists, such as Giovani Hidalgo, Piri has come to be idolized by many in the transnational scene of Afro-Cuban traditional music, especially among the younger generation (i.e. mostly those under 45 years old—Piri is currently in his late 30s). His success was made possible not only because of his talent, but because of the publicity and popularity
gained through the videos and other online content in which he is featured. The earliest YouTube videos were mediated through foreign students while he was in Cuba, and now he has been able to better his economic situation in Mexico City (where he is able to work full-time as a tambolero due to the large santero community and high local demand for tambores) and take full advantage of social media on his own. These factors have aided his rise as a successful professional musician, and in the past year he has also created a Facebook musician page for himself (titled “Manley López (Piri) de ‘los Chinitos’”) which he regularly updates with new photos and videos of his current and past work, including his video lessons on batá taken in Cuba in the 2000s (originally posted on YouTube by Antoine Miniconi), videos of tambores where he is performing, and photos of himself with his family or at music events.

In the past year he has also started posting videos on YouTube and Facebook featuring original pieces in which he approaches traditional Afro-Cuban music such as rumba or batá rhythms from a new experimental angle (featuring, for example what he calls the batá batería: three batá strapped together with a cajón on the side and a few cymbals on top, which he plays as a full set). The pieces, which at the present include “Oyá bembé”21 and “Guara-Guarapachanguero”22 are professionally videotaped in a studio and feature him as a percussionist, and he is accompanied by a singer and instrumentalist. According to Piri, his goal is to be able to move to New York and work professionally as a musician there, so videos such as these, as well as the other content he posts, serves as continual publicity for his career as a musician, and he is obviously well-aware of the power of social media in achieving popularity as a musician in the West, where social media is embedded in our daily lives.

21 https://youtu.be/Yx-RPpFEggk
22 https://youtu.be/L8YVkikli2fE
Similarly, Adonis Panter Calderón, director of the group Osain del Monte and co-founder of Attic Independent Productions, has also been able to become much more independent in handling social media publicity for himself and his group in recent years. As previously discussed, the “Timba Encendida” and “Duo Peligroso” videos from 2009 were uploaded to YouTube by Christian Liebich, and while Liebich still collaborates with Panter—whether from his base in Switzerland or during trips to Cuba—Panter also has his own Instagram and Facebook accounts for himself and Osain del Monte where he regularly posts announcements for upcoming events in Cuba or abroad, as well as photos and video clips from performances. Of course, since Panter still resides in Cuba, he still has to deal with some of the difficulties of accessing the internet there and thus still benefits from collaborating with a foreigner like Liebich. Piri, on the other hand, living abroad, has direct access to and independent control of his online and social media presence. Both musicians, however, have greatly benefitted from Web 2.0 and social media in their rise to popularity in the transnational scene.

Conclusion

To sum up, the online realm of Web 2.0, particularly social media sites like Facebook, has become a space where knowledge, promotions, news, and recordings are circulated. Here, scholars mix with fans, students, and performers in what has become the media par excellence that connects those in the transnational scene, especially those outside Cuba who enjoy regular internet access. Further, non-professional journalist-researchers such as Cox and Banchereau play an important role in setting up blogs and contributing information. At first dominated by white, middle-class non-Cubans as a result of racial and economic inequalities, more and more
Cuban culture bearers, especially those based abroad, are gaining access to and partaking in social media in particular, circulating their own videos and promotional information.

By participating in the online realm of Web 2.0 and its social media networks, culture bearers generally experience a boost in social and cultural capital and greater economic opportunities, sometimes including opportunities to travel abroad or emigrate. Emigration embodies perhaps the greatest economic opportunity for culture bearers, as it opens the way for them to be able to directly access and engage with the internet and social media, which, due to the fact that music in the West and much of the world is now circulated primarily through social media and sites like YouTube, is highly important for musicians to participate in if they are looking to achieve success and popularity at a national or international level. In the following chapter, I will take a closer look at the specific dynamics and phonograph effects of YouTube in the transnational scene of Afro-Cuban traditional music.
CHAPTER FIVE
AFRO-CUBAN TRADITIONAL MUSIC ON YOUTUBE

In this final chapter, I delve into the characteristics of YouTube as an example of global social media and participatory web culture. In the previous chapter, I discussed the effects of the use of the internet and Web 2.0 features on the transnational Afro-Cuban traditional music scene. As part of Web 2.0, the effects of the use of YouTube as a medium include many of the same effects analyzed in the previous chapter. Due to its widespread popularity and its features as a DIY, online, archival platform for uploading, viewing, and sharing video and audio recordings, the use of YouTube has also resulted in unique phonograph effects. In what follows, I will discuss and analyze these phonographic effects, using the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene as an example.

Like Web 2.0 in general, the use of YouTube has helped increase the democratic nature of participation in terms of consumption and production of content, blurred the line between consumers and producers, and resulted in greater exposure and publicity for culture-bearers, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, tends to lead to new economic opportunities for them. In addition, some of the unique phonograph effects resulting from the use of YouTube stem from how easy it is to use and the way it encourages exposure to a huge variety of recordings (audio, audiovisual, commercial, non-commercial, instructional videos,

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1 By “democratic,” I am referring to general qualities of Web 2.0 in which participation—in terms of content consumption and production—is available to a far greater number of users than in Web 1.0, when content production was limited to specialists. However, there are some ways in which YouTube and Web 2.0 are not democratic, including for example, the monetized and privileged status afforded to content and ads owned or created by large corporations (e.g. media industry) and those of highly popular YouTubers (i.e. those with over 100,000 followers). Such privileged statuses may translate into the increased likelihood that their content shows up in searches, possibly resulting in greater numbers of views, likes, and subscribers, which can translate into revenue (Postigo 2016). Indeed, YouTube has slowly become more profitable (through advertising revenue) for both its parent company Google, and for highly popular YouTubers, for which revenue is largely represented through the number of views, likes, and subscribers (Miller 2010).
documentaries, rare recordings, etc.) due to its archival quality and its “suggested videos” feature.

The wide variety of content available, largely for free viewing, not only serves a bridging and bonding function for the globally-dispersed members of the transnational scene but can encourage simultaneous dynamics of musical standardization and diversification in the scene, an extension of the phonograph effects of recordings in general in the scene. The visual component allows users to engage more directly with what musicians are doing, which is very helpful for studying the music or learning new styles, licks, or techniques. The visual component may also lead to a greater connection with the artists in the videos, whose face and body can be seen by viewers and connected to the music. Further, access to old and new documentaries and interviews uploaded by professional or amateur researchers, fans, and students also help those in the scene become more informed on the social, cultural, political, and historical dimensions of this music scene. Among the unique changes brought about by YouTube is the new access to intimate musical spaces (performances in private homes, parties, ceremonies) via audio and video recordings. Performances of this nature normally take place outside the public eye but are now increasingly available to a global audience thanks to mobile recording technologies and the ease of uploading and disseminating such recordings on YouTube. All this content can be used as listening, viewing, or learning material by users in the scene, and as with the larger Web 2.0, it can serve to promote culture bearers as performers and teachers and to disseminate particular performance styles and practices.

Upon analyzing the characteristics and phonograph effects of YouTube in the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene, I will discuss some of the benefits and disadvantages of YouTube as an example of participatory web culture, drawing on the ideas of Keen (2007), who has
criticized participatory web culture on the basis that it favors rule of the “mob” or non-experts over those with legitimate expertise. While agreeing in some ways with Keen, based on the presence of some YouTube videos containing incorrect information or low-quality performances by non-experts, I argue that overall, the more democratic, participatory nature of YouTube has resulted in largely positive effects such as serving as an archive and platform for the dissemination of a large quantity and variety of musical and non-musical content for free, which benefits performers and students. Further, it has led to greater exposure for many highly talented culture bearers who may otherwise have not been widely known and appreciated.

**Characterizing YouTube**

YouTube has been described in various ways by several scholars, all of whom recognize its unique characteristics and important role in the Web 2.0 environment. Founded in 2005 and bought by Google in 2006, by the late 2000s it was one of the 10 most-visited sites on the internet globally (Burgess and Green 2009, 1-2). Beer and Burrows for example, categorize YouTube as a type of participatory application called a folksonomy, which are “archive sites where users contribute data to the archive and metadata to organize the archived content” (2010, 5). Burgess and Green, who also characterize YouTube as an example of participatory culture, describe it as having multiple roles: as a high-volume website, a platform for broadcasting, a media archive, and a social network (2009, 5). Further, as they explain, YouTube is a platform that is both top-down and bottom-up in terms of production and consumption of content; in other words, there is production of content from the top—including from YouTube, Inc. and major media corporations such as Sony—that is disseminated to global audiences, and yet most of the content is produced by individual users around the world, such as videos, profiles, and
comments. This dynamic represents YouTube’s democratic qualities, which are themselves examples of some of the democratic qualities of Web 2.0, in which there is a blurring between consumption and production. On the other hand, in older forms of media like cable television or radio, there was a clear boundary between consumers and producers, carried out in top-down fashion. According to Jawed Karim, one of the co-founders of YouTube, the site’s success and popularity is due to four attributes: video recommendations (“related videos”), a link that allows users to share videos, comments and other social networking features, and an embeddable video player, which allows users to stream videos (Gannes 2006).

The site was first created with the idea that it would serve primarily as a digital video archive for its users, a function which is still central to the platform. However, YouTube later embraced “broadcast yourself” as its slogan, which emphasized the site’s function as a social medium in which individuals could express themselves through the production of video content. According to Burgess and Green, the site is dominated both demographically and culturally by the United States and “is a potential site of cosmopolitan cultural citizenship—a space in which individuals can represent their identities and perspectives, engage with the self-representation of others, and encounter cultural difference” (2009, 81-82). And yet, as with the internet and Web 2.0 in general, there is a participation gap in which those without the access to the technology, or those without the skills or knowledge needed to use it, are left out. Despite this, in places where use of Web 2.0 is widespread, particularly in the West, YouTube has become embedded in our daily lives and has become an especially popular medium for disseminating and consuming music.
Music on YouTube

YouTube was originally created as an archive for digital videos, a function that made it a great medium for uploading and disseminating recordings of music, whether audio or audiovisual. And yet, in its early years in the mid-2000s, there were restrictions such as a time limit for recordings and a need for high-speed internet connections in order to stream videos. The latter limitation was a problem for many consumers, since high-speed connections were more expensive and less widely accessible than in the 2010s, when they became the standard in much of the West and in some parts of Asia. From 2005 to 2010, there was a 10-minute limit on video uploads; this was increased to 15 minutes in early 2010, and then the limit was removed in late 2010 for approved users who had demonstrated good behavior (i.e. not getting into trouble uploading copyrighted material). Indeed, part of the idea behind the time limits in the first place was to discourage users from uploading copyrighted video material such as television shows or movies (although users would often get around this by uploading the content in various parts). By 2010 however, YouTube was using Content ID technology which tested uploaded content against YouTube’s archive of copyrighted videos submitted by media companies to catch copyrighted content before it was made available to the public (Kincaid 2010).

While time limit restrictions would not have prevented users from uploading individual song recordings, which are often only a few minutes in length, this would have kept users from uploading entire albums in a single video (as is now popular) or from uploading longer videos of entire live performances or music documentaries. Further, the fact that high-speed internet connections such as broadband cable were not as widely available in the mid-2000s meant that listening to music on YouTube—which requires a high-speed connection in order to stream smoothly—was not necessarily efficient. For example, prior to having access to high-speed
internet, I remember having to let YouTube videos fully “load” before watching them so that they would not constantly pause in order to “load” the new few seconds of content. Now, with high-speed connections much more accessible, it is now common for users to look up a song or play a playlist directly from YouTube—in other words, it has become more common to use it as a go-to media for listening to music. Users can easily search for a song, artist, or genre and find a plethora of recordings, as well as other content related to what the user searched for. Users can rate the videos, comment on them (i.e. participate in dialogue on a global platform), save them in personalized playlists, and share them via other media like Facebook or even as text messages (on smart phones).

Its popularity, integration with other social media apps like Facebook, and embeddedness in our daily lives in the West and much of the world—evident by its widespread use and its standard inclusion as an app in many smartphones in the 2010s—coupled with the greater ease of access to the high-speed connections needed to stream video content, has made YouTube one of the most popular forms of media for disseminating and listening to music in the 2010s. According to the International Federation for Phonographic Recording, YouTube accounted for 46% of all on-demand streaming for music, while other music-streaming services like Apple Music and Spotify accounted for a much smaller fraction. Further, during the month that the report was conducted, 85% of YouTube visitors (about 1.3 billion people) used the site to listen to music. While most users (76%) search specifically for a song they were already familiar with, the other quarter of users are listening to songs or artists they are not familiar with, which means that YouTube encourages—to a degree—users’ exposure to new songs, likely through the “related videos” feature on the site (McIntyre 2017).
While not a central focus of this study, there are issues that arise related to ownership and copyright concerning music on YouTube. While many artists and record labels do release their own music recordings on YouTube for free (albeit often while gaining revenue each time the video is played), some songs, including entire albums, are uploaded by individual users without the permission of the artists or record labels, although this is less common in recent years due to Content ID technology implemented in 2010. Currently, in the case of most commercially-recorded songs and albums of Afro-Cuban traditional music, the record labels or distributors have either uploaded the recordings themselves or licensed them when users upload them. Such licensing was not the case in the 2000s, when it was more common to see songs and albums that were uploaded without being licensed by a record label or distribution company. Since the uploading of songs and albums has become so pervasive by the 2010s, it seems as though record labels and distribution companies might as well license and make available their recordings (and generate revenue through each playback on YouTube) since they would probably be uploaded anyway by individual users. In other words, this illustrates the centrality of YouTube as a medium for listening to and disseminating music; record labels and others in the music industry must know by now that it is wiser to embrace this embedded technology and popular medium rather than try to fight against it.

Let us use Los Muñequitos de Matanzas—one of Cuba’s most popular Afro-Cuban folkloric ensembles, specializing in rumba—as an example. First of all, it is easy to find almost any song from Los Muñequitos de Matanzas’s entire discography on YouTube, which spans from the 1950s until the present. Many of the songs have been uploaded by individual users and licensed by distribution companies on behalf of music labels, and in the case of popular songs like “Congo yambumba,” there are several videos of the original version available. In addition to
songs uploaded by individual users, many of the songs, such as “Vale todo” from their 1998 album *Vacunao*, have been made available directly by the music distribution company itself, in this case Alfafonte Music Distribution\(^2\). In recent years, the Cuban record label Bis Music, under which much of the Muñequis’ albums have been produced, has begun making its artists’ recordings available for free directly on YouTube.\(^3\) Again, this is likely because they have little other choice than to embrace YouTube as a medium; if they did not upload their content, there would likely be pirated copies uploaded anyway. So, for example, Bis Music has its own channel on YouTube where it releases music videos of the songs of its artists, like Adalberto Alvarez and Elito Revé, as well as clips containing interviews with artists from the music program *Que la música no falte: 25 aniversario de Bis Music*\(^4\).

In addition to commercially-recorded songs, albums, and music videos on YouTube uploaded by those in the music industry or individual users (with or without licensing from a record label), there are several other manifestations of music recordings on YouTube. These can be grouped into those that are professionally-recorded—often involving professional videographers and professional recording studios—and those that are produced non-professionally, often both recorded and uploaded by an individual user to their personal YouTube channel. Professionally-produced recordings may take the form of a song, album, interview, or music video recorded for commercial purposes and released under a record label, such as the previously discussed examples of Los Muñequis’ “Congo yambumba” and the

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\(^2\) [https://youtu.be/EnLPP6Jzp64](https://youtu.be/EnLPP6Jzp64) Interestingly, several recordings such as this one have been “auto-generated” by YouTube, as is also the case with the Los Muñequis de Matanzas YouTube artist page.

\(^3\) For example, Los Muñequis’ most recent album, *Maferefun la rumba* (2018, Bis Music), is available in its entirety on YouTube for free: [https://youtu.be/w89G8Bd7aY](https://youtu.be/w89G8Bd7aY). Another 2018 rumba album release, *5 raíces* (EGREM), which features several Cuban rumba groups, is also available for free in its entirety on YouTube: [https://youtu.be/bZsm1_cn_wg](https://youtu.be/bZsm1_cn_wg).

\(^4\) [https://www.youtube.com/user/BisMusicOfficial/featured](https://www.youtube.com/user/BisMusicOfficial/featured)
content of Bis Music’s YouTube page. Other professionally-produced music content includes documentaries and commercial recordings of live performances, the latter comprised either of live concerts or videotaped music productions. Such videotaped music productions are common in the context of Cuban music, and there are several examples of such recordings featuring Afro-Cuban traditional music. A good example is the most recent release\(^5\) in the Abbilona series, which, rather than featuring audio only as with its earlier albums, took the form of a videotaped musical production. Released directly on YouTube by Bis Music in 2017, the recording is an hour long and features drummers, singers, and dancers in full costume performing live on a closed set. The set is comprised of a large stage decorated with several replicas of altars dedicated to the various orishas.

AfroCuba de Matanzas has been featured in several such videotaped productions as well, which are different than normal music videos primarily due to their length: while music videos usually feature a single song and are thus only a few minutes in length, these productions contain the equivalent or more of an entire album, and may even contain non-musical sections such as an interview with one of the artists. AfroCuba de Matanzas has figured in several such productions since the 1990s, at first released in VHS or DVD format for purchase. Sometimes, YouTube may be used to promote such videotaped productions, which may only be available for purchase, in which case a promoter may post a trailer or clip from the production on YouTube and then provide a link for purchasing the full production. Some YouTube channels such as Cubasoyyo, run by an Italian fan and promoter of Cuban music, Giuseppe Lago, are used primarily as promotional platforms for Cuban artists (Lago 2012). The channel contains full songs and music videos of Cuban artists (mostly popular music) as well as promotional clips such as the trailers

\(^5\) [https://youtu.be/MrJQhgJyMS8](https://youtu.be/MrJQhgJyMS8)
for AfroCuba de Matanzas’s *Mokequeré okagua: Atención cubanos* (a 2 CD plus DVD set released in 2013)⁶ and Clave y Guaguancó’s DVD production *Carraguan vs. Pueblo Nuevo* (released in 2014)⁷. Sometimes, clips from such productions are uploaded without the permission of the label or company that produced it, as is the case with clips from Boogalu Productions’s classic *Rumbón tropical* (released in 2003) featuring Rumberos de Cuba, which can be found on YouTube in addition to the company’s own promotional clip for the production.

Another interesting variant of commercially-produced recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music on YouTube are old, rare recordings that are difficult or almost impossible to find elsewhere. These kinds of recordings are often uploaded by collectors and are an extension of the ways bloggers and others used websites, blogs, or file-sharing services in the past to share hard-to-find recordings. A prime example is Barry Cox, whose YouTube channel guarachon63 features twelve old, rare recordings of Guaguancó Matancero from the 45rpm records produced by Rosy and FMR in the 1950s. Likewise, some of the earliest commercial recordings of rumba and other Afro-Cuban traditional music—Chano Pozo’s *Ritmo afro cubano* (recorded in New York in the 1940s)—are available on YouTube, uploaded by user Reid Whatley⁸ and also through the Arhoolie Foundation’s Frontera Collection page⁹. Early recordings of *batá* drumming such as the album *Ritmos afrocubanos con los auténtico tambores batá de Giraldo Rodríguez* (from the 1970s) and Celia Cruz’s 1950s recordings of the religious repertoire of Santería are also available on Youtube. The availability of such old or rare recordings—some of which are not available anywhere else—is an interesting topic I will return to when discussing

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⁶ [https://youtu.be/DRK69t3zH30](https://youtu.be/DRK69t3zH30)
⁷ [https://youtu.be/4dLKoll_16c](https://youtu.be/4dLKoll_16c)
⁸ [https://youtu.be/Z4BxKHq5U6c](https://youtu.be/Z4BxKHq5U6c)
⁹ [https://youtu.be/age6w1jXuaig](https://youtu.be/age6w1jXuaig)
the specific phonograph effects of the use of YouTube in the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene.

Various types of non-professionally-produced videos of Afro-Cuban traditional music exist on YouTube as well, including music lessons or demonstrations, self-produced (non-commercial) documentaries or interviews with musicians or experts, recordings of live public performances, and recordings of non-public performances, including those that are planned as well as videos of private musical events, or what I refer to as intimate musical spaces. Videos of music lessons or demonstrations\textsuperscript{10} are usually audiovisual recordings and may be recorded by the student (i.e. a student recording the lesson a teacher is giving them) or filmed by the teacher for an internet audience. For example, there are several videos of members of Los Chinitos in their home or neighborhood in Cuba giving a demonstration or lesson to a foreign student. In fact, the only existing YouTube videos containing drum-by-drum demonstrations of the rhythms of the entire \textit{oru seco} feature Manley “Piri” López of Los Chinitos, first uploaded by their Italian student Antoine Miniconi. The videos were then transferred (and are currently located on) Piri’s own YouTube page: Manley López.

This delayed transfer was due to the fact that Miniconi first uploaded those videos when Piri, his teacher, still lived in Cuba, during which he was unable to upload videos due to lack of internet access. After Piri left Cuba and established himself in Mexico City, he was able to have regular access to the internet and to take advantage of that access and of social media for self-promotion as a musician. This example illustrates a common dynamic in terms of who is uploading videos of who. In the case of Afro-Cuban traditional music, video lessons or

\textsuperscript{10} For clarity, I classify music lessons as videos in which a teacher is instructing a student in a specific musical task, incorporating explanations and demonstrations on an instrument (or through singing). By contrast, video demonstrations feature primarily a person or group playing a certain musical piece, rhythm, song, or the like, with little or no explanations.
demonstrations of Cuban musicians in Cuba are usually both recorded and uploaded by foreigners. As discussed in previous chapters, this mediation is due to the marginalized economic and political circumstances of most Cubans in Cuba and their comparative lack of regular access to the internet. Foreign students or tourists, on the other hand, tend to come from comparatively privileged backgrounds and reside in countries where internet access is more widespread, and indeed embedded. As with other content on the web mediated by foreigners, the videos often serve a purpose of publicity and promotion for the musicians. The videos may help popularize their name and talent and to encourage students or other foreigners to seek them out, which may lead to economic opportunities in the form of lessons or performances. And yet when Cuba-based musicians are able to leave the island and reside abroad, they are much more likely to be able to have regular internet access and enjoy the social, cultural, and economic benefits that come with it, such as being able to self-promote for free on social media. Other videos lessons and demonstrations are recordings in which the teacher has filmed themselves and then uploaded the video to their channel. These usually feature a white, Western, non-Cuban teacher explaining the rhythms of percussion parts of a certain genre. Several such videos also contain substandard, incorrect, or stylistically transformed musical material or explanations, a point to which I will return in discussing phonograph effects.

Another category of recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music on YouTube includes self-produced, non-commercial documentaries or clips of interviews with musicians or experts. Like with the videos of lessons and demonstrations, these are often recorded in Cuba and feature Cuba-based culture bearers. They are also almost always recorded and uploaded by foreigners who are enthusiasts or students of Afro-Cuban traditional music. Examples include “El Sabor del Solar,” and “La Familia Aspirina” by Jane Thorburn, which include clips of rumba performances
in *solares* in Havana. Another is the YouTube video that first helped establish the Chinitos as the true creators of *guarapachangueo* in the transnational scene ("Rumba Guarapachangueo, Concept and History, Los Chinitos" ) was created and uploaded by a British musician visiting the family in Cuba, according to Irián López (2016, interview), a member of the Chinitos family. Now—as with his *batá* demonstration videos originally recorded and uploaded by one of his Italian students—the video can be found on Piri’s page: Manley Lopez. There are also a few videos of interviews of Irián López talking about *guarapachangueo* and *batá*, which were also planned, recorded, and uploaded by foreign students of his.

YouTube also contains several more recent, professionally-produced videos and documentaries, most of which are made possible thanks to financial backing from foreigners. For example, some Cuban folkloric groups have put out a few music-video-style recordings (known in Spanish as *videoclips* in Cuba). For example Osain del Monte, in conjunction with Attic Independent Productions (under Swiss CEO Christian Liebich), has several videoclips on YouTube, including “Cachita” (2013), “La negra” (2017), and “Popurrí” (2019), all of which feature tracks from their 2017 album *Pa’l monte*. Yoruba Andabo’s catchy song “La cafetera” (2018) also became extremely popular among Cubans in Havana and Miami, in part due to the videoclip on YouTube, which was produced by Fiebre Latina Music Productions (Italy-based) and has received over a million views as of 2019. This contrasts with Osain del Monte’s videoclips, the most popular of which have received over 90,000 views as of 2019.

Havana Club’s project Havana Cultura, whose mission it is to promote contemporary Cuban

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12 https://youtu.be/K8n3GRB1Ks0
13 https://youtu.be/5wsmX_g9ME8
14 https://youtu.be/6n1Kw5VaHqo
15 https://youtu.be/76bWSSWpL4Y
16 https://youtu.be/1yypFVnSHhc
music and culture, has, in conjunction with British DJ and radio broadcaster Gilles Peterson, produced a film documentary series called *La Clave*, which is available on their website and on YouTube. The film is split into six episodes and features performances and interviews with various Cuban rumba groups. With the rise in Cuban videoclips featuring rumba, it is possible that they may someday be included more prominently in Cuba’s Premios Lucas, the national music videoclip awards, which currently only features categories for popular music (e.g. *timba*, *trova*, *reggaetón*, pop, etc.). Nonetheless, at least one rumba group—Los Muñequitos de Matanzas—has appeared prominently in one of the nominated videos from 2018: “Sobre mi pecho Matanzas”\(^{17}\) by Orquesta Fafíde (CiberCuba 2018).

Videos of live public performances abound on YouTube as well. In this case, the majority are recorded and uploaded by non-Cubans who visited the island, whether as tourists or as students of Afro-Cuban music or dance. They often feature a performance by a Cuban folkloric group such as Yoruba Andabo or the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional along with dancers and other aspects of such public performances. These shows often represent a folkloricized interpretation of the Afro-Cuban religious traditions in terms of choreographed, pre-rehearsed sets and fully costumed dancers. There are also plenty of videos of public performances of groups outside Cuba, ranging from amateur ensembles made up of non-Cuban students of the music to videos of public rumba events in New Jersey and New York, like the Esquina Habanera or Central Park. Examples of these types of videos include Cox’s (i.e. username guarachon63) uploads of Yoruba Andabo performing in the 1990s\(^{18}\) (in public spaces and on television), Gene Golden’s uploads of some of his personal (now digitized) video recordings, including one of Pancho Quinto’s

\(^{17}\) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtbMW5-IeBY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtbMW5-IeBY)

\(^{18}\) [https://youtu.be/mOEAwOQlJ0](https://youtu.be/mOEAwOQlJ0)
rumba group performing at the Esquina Habanera in Union City, New Jersey in the 1990s\(^9\), and user quintomayor1’s videos of the New York rumba group Los Afortunados\(^{20}\). Older videos like these have the added benefit of allowing viewers to see highly respected musicians from past generations who are now deceased, such as (in the previous examples) Calixto Callava and Pancho Quinto. The videos of Los Afortunados offer a rare glimpse in the form of video of one of the early (1980s/1990s) professional-level rumba groups in New York and its musicians, among whom were several of the earliest and best non-Cuban performers in New York, including Kenneth “Skip” Burney, Gene Golden, Felix Sanabria, and Manuel Olivera Martínez “El Llanero.”

On the other hand, there are also recordings on YouTube of non-public performances. These recordings may take the form of a planned, self-produced performance of a soloist or group or they may be a recording taken by someone at a private musical event. The former are similar to demonstration videos, yet rather than presenting a basic rhythm or concept, these are usually presented as a performance in which the musical skills of the musicians are expressed. Examples of such performances are the videos of the Duo Peligroso or La Timba Encendida discussed in the previous chapter. They feature a group of two to four musicians performing a short song or percussion-themed piece that, while not necessarily fully pre-composed, is planned in terms of it being recorded. In this case the musicians are set up with a few chairs and drums on a balcony or patio and are being recorded by Christian Liebich of Attic Independent Productions. Liebich also uploaded the videos and thus helped promote the talented musicians featured in the videos, several of whom (including Adonis Panter Calderón) went on to found the now-popular rumba group Osain del Monte. While the performances are not carried out in public spaces or for

\(^9\) https://youtu.be/GeDqBrt4B_Q
\(^{20}\) https://youtu.be/1xkjc6eufwY
public audiences in the moment they are recorded, they can be considered public in the sense that they are planned recordings meant for an international audience via the internet. Barry Cox also filmed a number of semi-casual, unstructured performances of rumba meant to recreate the informal, unplanned quality of spontaneous rumbas in a solar. The resulting videos\textsuperscript{21}, recorded in the 2000s, capture some beautiful singing by some of the best and eldest rumberos in Havana, some of whom are now deceased.

The other type of recording of non-public performances is that of a private musical event, such as a casual rumba or a religious musical event such as a tambor, güiro, or cajón (i.e. cajón espiritual), all of which also commonly take place in private homes. As opposed to recordings of performances that are planned and meant for an internet audience, recordings of private events capture what goes on outside the public eye, beyond the stages of folkloric ensembles that often feature the most polished or folkloricized versions of these traditions meant for the eyes of foreign tourists, the Cuban state, or a larger international audience. In other words, these recordings represent the live performances of these traditions in their original contexts. Because of the (normally) intimate nature of these events, I refer to them as intimate musical spaces.

In Cuba, Afro-Cuban traditional musical and religious practices have always been marginalized from Cuba’s white-dominant society and were actively oppressed at several points in history. In more recent history, this includes the prohibitions on drumming and the confiscation of instruments by police during the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries (during which rumba first crystallized as a genre) and the prejudices toward Afro-Cuban religious expression on the part of the Revolutionary government in the 1960s and 70s (Vélez 2000). Indeed, Afro-Cuban traditional music and religion have a long history of being practiced outside the public

\textsuperscript{21} These recordings comprise a series of videos on Cox’s page (guarachon63) under the names “Rumba en Casa de Amado” and “Rumba en Atarés.”
eye, a history that goes back to the time of when African slaves and members of *cabildos* had to transform or camouflage their belief in their deities and their traditional religious practices. In Cuba, the intimate nature of these musical spaces is thus a product of both racial and—in the case of music associated with Afro-Cuban religion—religious prejudice and segregation; not only do they take place primarily in private spaces such as homes, but those homes tend to be located in the urban working-class neighborhoods in Cuba in which most culture bearers reside.

Further, under the Revolution, most Cubans on the island have long been politically marginalized and economically underprivileged, particularly during the Periodo Especial and its aftermath. These circumstances have resulted in a certain isolation, which in many ways is tied to the difficulties of accessing the internet on the island. In addition, black Cubans were especially marginalized economically during and since the Periodo Especial in the 1990s and with the creation of a dual economy (i.e. *pesos* and dollars, or CUC) on the island during this time. Of course, there are also examples of recordings of intimate musical spaces outside Cuba, such as a rumba at a private house party in San Francisco or a *tambor* in Miami or Caracas. These recordings also represent the traditions in their original contexts, albeit in another country, and may feature various combinations of culture bearers, Cubans, and non-Cubans.

Perhaps the most intimate musical spaces of Afro-Cuban traditional music would be those of religious musical events in private homes in Cuba; not only do they occur in a segregated religious and geographic space (i.e. in black working-class neighborhoods amongst religious practitioners), they *are* religious. In the context of Afro-Cuban religion, sacred manifestations are also often equated with privacy and even secrecy. Of course, much of this is tied to these religious traditions’ historical persecution by the dominant white society. Yet even within the communities of practitioners, there is often a lot of gatekeeping in terms of religious—
and sometimes related musical—knowledge. General examples include the secrecy surrounding the initiation of *tamboleros*, *santeros*, and initiation in *Ifá*, all of which occur, for the most part, in private spaces where only a few key practitioners have access (all of whom have already undergone the the initiation ceremonies themselves). Other examples include the long-held taboo against filming or photographing persons who have been *montado* (mounted) by a deity or *muerto* (spirit of a dead person).

This belief is based on the idea that such a deity (like an orisha) or *muerto*—or the physical incarnation of these in the form of someone who has been mounted—should not be filmed or photographed, and the idea extends to other representations of deities such as the contents of the *soperas* (large containers usually made of glass or porcelain) containing the icons of the orishas. Similarly, since the *batá* drums (those that are *tambores de fundamento*, i.e. consecrated drums) contain the deity Añá inside them, there are also many religious practitioners that have maintained that they not be filmed or photographed. Despite this belief, the practices of filming and photographing have become common since the 2000s due to ease of access to digital video recording technology (especially in terms of video cameras in smartphones) and online platforms such as YouTube and other social media that enable the uploading and dissemination of such recordings. This topic brings us to the discussion of the phonograph effects from the use of YouTube as a medium for Afro-Cuban traditional music.

**Phonograph effects of YouTube on Afro-Cuban traditional music**

Indeed, the use of YouTube, as well as the associated technology that is used to facilitate its use (smartphones, digital video cameras, etc.), has resulted in phonograph effects in the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene. These phonograph effects include 1) increased economic opportunities
for musicians and dancers in Cuba and abroad due to publicity and promotion on YouTube; 2) the wider, faster dissemination of musical content and related knowledge due to the availability of an enormous, ever-growing, free, easily accessible digital archive of both audio and audiovisual recordings; 3) the spread of musical practices contained in recordings on YouTube; and 4) an increase in the practice of video recording in religious musical events, as well as a transformation of the views of many practitioners towards recording. As with some of the phonograph effects of the internet and Web 2.0 technology, these—save the one concerning opportunities for musicians in Cuba—are felt to a lesser degree in Cuba due to local limitations on internet access and the ability to use YouTube. On the other hand, many of these phonograph effects are felt to a much greater degree abroad, as these are areas that have only developed a local Afro-Cuban traditional music scene in recent years or decades, for the most part. They are thus newer additions to the scene and have much lower concentrations of culture bearers than in Havana or Matanzas. Further, the people in these areas, including for example, North America, Europe, and Latin America, enjoy easier and more widespread access to the internet and associated technology than those living in Cuba.

The first phonograph effect—increased economic opportunities for Cuba-based culture bearers—does not need much elaboration, as this was discussed in the previous chapter concerning phonograph effects of the use of the internet and Web 2.0. YouTube, in this case, simply represents a specific and prominent part of Web 2.0. As with blogs and social media, YouTube has become a popular medium through which content related to Afro-Cuban traditional music is disseminated and accessed. This should come as no surprise, seeing as it is one of the top sites accessed to listen to music online and that it is easily integrated with other social media such as Facebook. A YouTube video featuring a specific artist, artists, or musical group can
serve as publicity and thus promotion, particularly if the content and artist are seen as “authentic,” authenticity in this case often depending on if the musician or dancer is Cuban (especially if they live in Cuba and the video is recorded on the island), black, and perceived as being a culture bearer.

Video content on YouTube (or other streaming digital video content from other sites like Facebook or Instagram) can reinforce and represent such authenticity in a different way than an audio recording because there is a visual element; the viewers of the content—most of whom reside outside of Cuba in countries where high speed internet is easily accessible—can see who the people are that are making the music. If the musicians are black and the video was recorded in Cuba (often indicated in the video’s title or information), the video will be seen as more “authentic,” as such markers are associated with culture bearers and the original context of the music. On the other hand, Windress (2015) has discussed how some batá drummers, for example in Mexico and Venezuela, have made YouTube videos of themselves drumming in ceremonies to promote themselves as “authentic” tamboleros available for hire. In other words, they use the videos to represent themselves as musical and religious specialists who are both masters of their craft and have legitimate credentials (documented video evidence of their musical skills and consecrated drums).

The visual element also personalizes the musical experience in that it links the musical sound to a specific person that can be seen. For a YouTube viewer who lives abroad and is not Cuban culture bearer, it is thus easier to recognize specific musicians and their talents, as opposed to listening to an audio recording of a group and then trying to find who it was that played a specific drum or part in a track, especially if that information is not readily available with the recording (i.e. in the digital audio information or the CD tracks). For example, as I have
discussed previously, Piri and his family (Los Chinitos) became famous at the transnational level of the scene through YouTube in a way that could not have likely occurred through audio recordings only. Indeed, the Chinitos family were at the center of the Abbilona project (an ongoing multi-volume project featuring Afro-Cuban religious music, especially the tambor repertoire), which became extremely popular at the transnational level from the late 1990s when the first volumes were released.

Yet outside of Cuba, for example, among tamboleros and musicians who were only hearing them and not seeing them, the name “Los Chinitos” and their individual names (and what drums they were playing on a specific track) were much less widely-known prior to the release of a series of YouTube videos in the mid-late 2000s featuring them as a family, or in the case of Piri, as a drumming prodigy. These videos, including a short documentary on the family which illustrated their place as the originators of guarapachanguero and others which featured Piri demonstrating batá and guarapachanguero rhythms, among others, gave them a more clearly-defined “name” at the transnational level of the scene. It gave them international visibility in a very literal sense: those in the scene that did not live in Cuba and form a part of the Havana scene and thus did not know them from personal experience could now see them and thus better know who they are. In addition, since they are black Cubans and the videos were recorded in the marginal barrio where they live, the videos were complete with markers of authenticity, not to mention musical demonstrations in which their unique style and skills were featured.

As a musician active in local scenes and the online scene in the 2000s, I remember when the Chinitos’ videos first became popular and drummers and musicians abroad (in places like Miami, New York, and San Juan) began talking about “Los Chinitos” and “Piri” and their
seemingly original and yet unique approach to playing rumba and other Afro-Cuban drumming. Today their names are ubiquitous throughout the scene, as they are still frequently featured in online videos on YouTube and Facebook. Aside from this rising popularity in the transnational scene outside Cuba, the family has benefited from getting more foreign students coming to study with them, which equals greater access to divisa (Cuban dollars) and thus economic gain. The family continues to receive many students and has a sort of “school” for these foreign students, who can rent a room and live right there in their neighborhood for extended periods of time, including several years. Piri was later able to leave Cuba and now resides in Mexico City, where he continues to produce video content (which no longer requires mediation through a foreigner) on YouTube and Facebook for promotional purposes as a professional musician. Other culture bearers have similarly benefitted from the circulation of their YouTube videos, such as Adonis Panter Calderón and other members of Osain del Monte and Yoruba Andabo, who have become more well-known as individual talents in the transnational scene.

Of course, videos of musical content are nothing new—after all, there were VHS and DVD recordings (even a few “home videos”) circulating in the scene abroad from the 1980s and 1990s, and yet these kinds of recordings were rare compared to audio recordings, in terms of the quantity of content produced, as albums were the norm in the music industry for mass circulation. Further, apart from a few privately recorded events in homes, such videos tended to feature a planned show, event, lesson, or demonstration by a group or perhaps a single teacher (the latter becoming more common among non-Cuban teachers residing abroad in the 1990s as hand drumming gained popularity in the West). While such planned video recordings can also be found on YouTube, the DIY features of the site, along with its role as an archive easily accessible for all (provided they have the necessary access to the internet) allow for a much
greater variety of content, not to mention a large, ever growing number of recordings that can be individually located through searches or suggested videos.

Such a large, heterogeneous archive accessible by so many people in the scene around the world, and particularly outside of Cuba (where it is in higher demand) serves as a medium through which recordings of all kinds—particularly audiovisual recordings—are circulated quicker and to far greater numbers of people than ever before. The musical knowledge and practices, as well as other information, including history, anecdotes, and explanations of concepts or practices, are also circulated more widely and faster than ever. As opposed to individual albums or video recordings prior to YouTube—which usually circulated either through person-to-person interactions, the market (i.e. purchasing the content), and (in the 2000s) computer-to-computer file-sharing—recordings related to Afro-Cuban music are accessible to a far larger international audience. This audience includes people who are new to Afro-Cuban traditional music and have, for instance, encountered the content through YouTube’s “suggested” or “related” videos.

Further, the availability of such a wide variety of recordings—audio or audiovisual recordings, recordings from albums, rare recordings, old and new documentaries, lessons or demonstrations by Cuban culture bearers or non-Cubans, interviews, movie clips, music videos, recordings of live public shows or private events—allow for viewers and listeners to connect with, experience, and perhaps learn from the content. The content is also diverse in representing

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22 As explained in chapter one, those in the scene in Cuba—in la mata (especially Havana, Matanzas, etc.)—are less likely to need recordings as supplemental listening or study materials if they are immersed in the scene on a regularly basis, such as playing or attending multiple tambores every week, or practicing and performing regularly with a professional folkloric group. On the other hand, recordings in general tend to be much more prized and relevant sources of musical material (for listening, studying, learning) for people that reside outside Cuba, where such musical events are less ubiquitous, particularly if they did not grow up and develop as musicians in the context of la mata in Cuba. This is also reflected in the fact that recordings (albums, videos, and other recordings, online and offline) are shared and discussed among musicians in the scene outside of Cuba to a far greater degree than in Cuba, where one has easy and frequent access to the live contexts.
various eras and generations of musicians in the recordings, spanning the early-mid 20th century until the present. This broad access allows users to experience and better comprehend the history of these traditions through recordings, including the various evolutions and styles they represent, should they choose to explore this wide variety of content. For example, old—and sometimes hard-to-find—Cuban documentaries from the 1970s and 1960s on Afro-Cuban music represent some of the only pre-1990s video recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music and its culture bearers and thus provide valuable insight into earlier musicians and their styles. For instance, a clip from the 1970 documentary *Cuba: L’art et la Révolution* uploaded by Barry Cox (username guarachon63) contains one of the only video recordings of a *coro de clave* performing a *clave*. Cox also uploaded a 1974 Cuban documentary on the *tonadas trinitarias*, an almost-extinct Afro-Cuban drum-and-singing based genre from Trinidad de Cuba on which I conducted my master’s research. The documentary represents perhaps the only video recording of (the last generation of) culture bearers performing the genre. These phonograph effects of YouTube can again be compared to similar effects spurred by recordings on analog media and their dissemination on Web 1.0 and other areas of Web 2.0, yet with YouTube the effects have strengthened and become more variegated due to the medium’s embeddedness in much of the world and its more prominent inclusion of visual content.

The next phonograph effect has to do with the influence on actual musical practices and is again observable for the most part in the transnational scene outside of Cuba, where access and use of Web 2.0 features such as YouTube are embedded and where there is greater recurrence to recordings for listening and learning purposes than in *la mata* in Cuba. This phonograph effect is connected to the previous one, as it is a product of the fact that YouTube contains such a vast and

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23 [https://youtu.be/i8pq4uGb9Q](https://youtu.be/i8pq4uGb9Q)
24 [https://youtu.be/Os--Qom3Cfl](https://youtu.be/Os--Qom3Cfl)
heterogeneous archive of audio and audiovisual recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music, which are disseminated quicker and more widely than they were with previous media. The primary effects on musical practices stem from the increased access to a wide variety of styles, which can be studied, learned, and adopted by viewers in the scene. This access means that these styles—including individual drumming or singing styles, group styles, generational styles—and even specific “licks” or songs can be spread, assessed, discussed, and adopted (or even criticized and avoided) throughout the transnational scene. This effect can also be seen in audio recordings and analog media to a lesser degree, but in the case of YouTube video recordings, the fact that viewers can see what the musicians are doing with their hands, their bodies, as well as see the context (in some videos), such as interactions with dancers, makes it much clearer for viewers to connect with and understand the collective or individual musical practices being performed.

Most recordings featuring lessons or demonstrations have usually been produced in audiovisual format (VHS, DVD, digital videos) precisely because it is easier for students to learn when they can see what their teacher is doing. Since YouTube was designed primarily for audiovisual content and serves as the largest archive of videos of Afro-Cuban traditional music, viewers can access a plethora of videos containing demonstrations and lessons by various Cuban and non-Cuban teachers and musicians based in Cuba and abroad. Since students can access this for free on YouTube, it is no longer as necessary to purchase books or DVDs to learn basic concepts or rhythms. Indeed, the availability of content for study purposes on YouTube means that beginning students can learn many basic concepts on YouTube for free, hence the common reference in the West to a “YouTube University.” This is not to say that students of the music should rely on YouTube in learning this music, which is best learned in person and as close to
the original contexts as possible, but it does provide a very helpful supplement which can significantly speed up the process of learning.

Piri’s style, for example, has become one of the most commonly cited stylistic references among young tamboleros in the transnational scene outside Cuba. Not only is he featured on many YouTube videos, he and the drummers he performs with currently in Mexico City are constantly posting new videos on Facebook from events they perform. Yet perhaps some of his most influential videos are his series of batá drumming video demonstrations on YouTube. In these videos, each drum part for every rhythm of the oru seco is played individually, then with added variations and embellishments on the caja, and finally the entire rhythm is played with all three drums. Piri’s videos are the first in which all this information has been laid out clearly and made available to mass audiences for free.25

This series of videos has had a few specific effects on musical practices in the transnational scene: they have opened up access to information (all the basic parts to the rhythms) that was previously guarded by many tamboleros and closed to the general public, thus making it easier for any interested student or drummer to learn the rhythms; they have spread Piri’s individual style and the general style of Los Chinitos, a process which had started in the late 1990s through the Abbilona recordings, but in this case focused more on Piri’s individual style on the caja; and, as attested to by Piri in our interview, they have helped speed up the process of learning the tambor rhythms for aspiring tamboleros abroad, who can easily access these well-known recordings as part of their studying. For example, in my experience among tamboleros in Miami, San Juan, and New York, it is common for me to hear other young (i.e.

25 It may seem that Piri is making a gamble here, giving away this information for free. Rather than be concerned with this issue, Piri seemed to have (proper) documentation of the traditions as his goal. Regardless, and because of, the information on the videos (which only provide short demonstrations of basic parts and some variations), students have sought him out to study the drumming because of his unique skills and abilities as a culture bearer.
below age 50 and especially below age 40) tamboleros cite Piri as a reference when discussing a
certain rhythm or lick that they or someone else played. Then it may be contrasted with how
other drummers play it or “how it is normally played” (i.e. by the vast majority of tamboleros).
The conversation may take the form of one drummer saying something like, “Piri plays such-
and-such rhythm like this [sings the rhythm], but most people just do this [sings the rhythm].”

Of course, it serves to mention that Piri and Los Chinitos, as well as a few other

tamboleros such as Papo Angarica, have been particularly adept at creating and incorporating
new stylistic approaches and licks, some of which have become adopted by many other crews of

tamboleros in Cuba and abroad and thus legitimized to the degree to which they become an
accepted part of the tambor repertoire. Such dynamics have occurred precisely due to the wide-
reaching effects of popular recordings of the tambor repertoire such as the Abbilona project, the
recordings of Lázaro Ros and Papo Angarica, and other recordings on YouTube. Indeed, all the
aforementioned artists’ recordings are available on YouTube, including the most recent Abbilona
release (2017), which is in the form of an extended video production. I myself have frequently
referenced Piri’s batá video demonstrations to learn some of the caja parts in the oru seco on my
own, which have helped me get the parts much faster than if I was to try to learn these little by
little from watching others play. In other words, in its original context in la mata in Cuba, batá is
usually learned through a process of absorption from repeated exposure, rather than through, say,
private lessons, as many non-Cubans learn. Using video lessons from a respected expert in which
all the parts are demonstrated individually, the learning process, which also requires
memorization, can be sped up significantly. To sum up what Piri told me, before, it took years
and years for someone new to learn the tambor; now, thanks to recordings, people can learn it
much quicker.
The visual component also helps greatly with respect to learning or studying batá. On audio recordings, it is often difficult to distinguish what each drum is playing individually unless one is already quite familiar with the tambor repertoire. Specifically, the chachá heads (the smaller of the two drumheads, found on all three drums and used exclusively for slaps) can sound very similar in a recording, making it difficult to pick out, for example, what exactly the cajero (i.e. caja player) is doing as a variation in a specific section. A video thus allows viewers to see more clearly what each individual drummer is doing and thus grasp the particular lick or rhythm more quickly. They can then learn the rhythm or lick that particular way (i.e. how Piri plays it or how Lekiam Aguilar plays it, etc.) and choose to incorporate it into their playing, which may in turn spur another drummer to adopt it, or even spur a discussion or criticism regarding it among the musicians.

There are several other examples of demonstration videos on YouTube that have facilitated access to musical information that is not otherwise easily come by. Among these are other videos by Piri, including one in which he demonstrates the basic guarapachangueo rhythm for the base (i.e. cajón and or tumbadora part played by a drummer in conjunction with a quinto player) and others where he demonstrates the basic caja (low/lead drum) parts for palo and güiro. All three of these demonstrations are especially significant references for drummers in the scene outside Cuba because they are not rhythms that are commonly demonstrated or even taught to most people that are beginning to study the music. In a way, these parts (i.e. the caja parts for palo and güiro and the base parts for guarapachangueo) are more advanced concepts that require a certain level of experience with other basic concepts. For example, a drummer learning to play the guarapachangueo style of rumba needs to first have a certain basic understanding of rumba
first: how the clave works and how the more basic, old-school, or what some might call the “traditional” rumba (i.e. the common parts for guaguancó, for example) is structured.

This knowledge allows the drummer to better contextualize and digest the style. Such views are often expressed in the scene by experienced culture bearers: musicians should first learn the basics and then proceed to the more advanced or modern concepts, as the former are a foundation for the latter. These views are related to the hierarchy of drummers wherein a common trope or evolution of learning includes a tambolero first learning the (more fundamental) okónkolo and segundo parts before proceeding to try to play the caja, which requires the most experience and advanced knowledge to execute well. In the same way, drummers should ideally learn the more basic parts for palo or güiro (i.e. the cachimbo, bell parts, shekeres, etc.) before proceeding to play the lead drum for those rhythms. In my own experience, I remember learning the basic concepts for executing the Chinitos’ guarapachangueo style by watching and studying Piri’s video in which he demonstrates the basic rhythms. At the time (mid-late 2000s), others among my rumba acquaintances in San Juan, Puerto Rico—where I lived at the time—did the same, and this practice allowed us to form a performance group in which we used the Chinitos’ brand of guarapachangueo, the first group of its kind in Puerto Rico. As some local Puerto Rican rumberos, including some of the members of the group Yubá Iré came to see us play, they noted our unique approach and recognized it as the Chinitos’ style. Although we did not continue performing as that group (called Los Tocororos) for very long, as I left Puerto Rico shortly after, in this instance it gave the Chinitos’ style a

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26 I have heard several culture bearers, including Alain Fernández, Daniel González Gil, Michel Aldama, and Kenneth “Skip” Burney emphasize this concept in reference to rumba and other Afro-Cuban drumming styles: it is important to first master the traditional (i.e. older, more established) approaches to these traditions before attempting to play the newer styles or new “inventions.”

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certain, if brief, presence in Puerto Rico, and it continued to shape and influence several of our
group members’ approaches to rumba into the present day.

Years later, in 2018, my close friend Charley Rivas (who had also been a member of Los
Tocororos and Rumbakuá) and I, both of us having adopted and leaned heavily on the Chinitos’
style of rumba for many years due to the influence of their videos on YouTube, were brought to
San Juan from Miami to record on a rumba album for singer Totin Agosto. In the album, we
were featured as the primary drummers (quinto and base) on several of the tracks, in which we
performed in what many of the local rumberos there instantly recognized as the Chinitos’ style.
Indeed, we were the first to record that style of rumba in Puerto Rico, meaning that the style is
more likely to be heard, spread, and practiced within the local rumba scene there, especially since
Agosto and several other of the percussionists featured represent some of the most prominent
performers of rumba on the island. In addition, with the release of the album in 2019, Charley
and I (based in Miami) and the other performers (based in Puerto Rico) have been traveling and
performing live shows and release events for the album in several cities in the US and Puerto
Rico. For example, in March 2019, we performed in Chicago at a cultural center for a largely
Puerto Rican audience, including several young members of the local Puerto Rican bomba
community who were also in the process of learning rumba. For most of them, the approach
embodied by Charley and I in our playing styles on base and quinto were new and inspiring for
them; one audience member even told me that after seeing us perform in person, he was much
better able to understand what we were doing in the album recording (which, being a newer style
to him, sounded very interesting and yet abstract). In all, this heightened exposure to Puerto
Rican and US audiences to the Chinitos’ brand of the guarapachangueo style illustrates a very
specific trajectory of a phonograph effect of the use of YouTube.
Compared with rumba or batá drumming, palo and especially güiro are not as popular abroad as rhythms to be studied and learned, particularly outside of the religious context and by non-Cubans. To some extent, this lower level of popularity is a result of a lack of available commercial recordings of these genres\footnote{Compared to rumba and batá, there are relatively few commercial recorded examples of palo and especially güiro. Some rumba albums, including some by Los Muñequitos or El Goyo, feature a single palo song, but there are few recordings that really focus on these genres. The Antología de la música afrocubana albums include several in-situ recordings of palo and güiro, yet these have poor audio quality and are very old (recorded in the early 1980s), featuring a style of playing that would now be considered outdated. There are, however, a few great, high-quality, recent recordings of güiro (about four tracks) released as part of the Abbilona recordings in the 2000s; these can be found on YouTube.} and the religious nature of the music. Palo has a specific dance that accompanies the music, and for this reason it is sometimes included in the shows of Cuban folkloric groups. Güiro, on the other hand, is not as frequently featured in the standard line up of shows performed by Afro-Cuban folkloric ensembles on or off the island, which means it is perhaps less “visible” to non-culture bearers and less popular as a subject of study among those learning Afro-Cuban traditional music. For example, on YouTube, there are far fewer recordings and demonstration videos for güiro or palo compared to batá drumming or rumba; bembé and makuta are similarly less commonly recorded and less popular in practice than batá drumming and rumba outside of Cuba.

Learning to execute the lead drum parts properly in palo and güiro is much more difficult if one is not immersed in their original contexts, in which repeated exposure to knowledgeable lead drummers allows an upcoming percussionist in the scene to learn the “rules” and absorb the particular “flavor” of these genres. In addition, there are many different approaches to playing the lead drum parts among individual players and across generations, so it is more difficult to access and understand these lead drum parts, as they are highly variable, especially in the case of güiro. Piri’s YouTube videos demonstrating the basic parts for the lead drum parts for these
genres thus provides a somewhat rare peek into the way culture bearers in la mata approach and conceptualize these parts. As among the few references in the form of demonstrations, it is likely that they will contribute to the spread of Piri’s and Los Chinitos’ style and approach, although perhaps not to the extent of their influence on current batá drumming practices. Yet while demonstration videos are great for learning the basic concept, they still do not represent the tradition in its proper context. There are however, several videos on YouTube of these genres—particularly güiro—in their original context, which allow viewers to hear and see how they (and many others) are performed in la mata. This brings us to a discussion of intimate musical spaces.

**Intimate musical spaces**

In music scenes around the world, and particularly in the case of Afro-Cuban traditional music, one of the most interesting effects stemming from the use of YouTube and digital mobile recording technology (i.e. digital cameras or smart phones with a video camera) has been the internet public’s increased access to intimate musical spaces. By intimate musical space, I am referring to a musical space that is private and not open to the general public; from the point of view of those in attendance, these are intimate spaces into which they have access due to their shared membership in a specific scene or social group, such as a religious or music scene. The nature of these events is not always religious, and simply calling them “private” musical spaces would be inaccurate, as they are not always purposely exclusive of the general public. In other words, they are not always private in the sense that only invited guests can show up, although such may be the case in many instances. For example, some tambores or rumbas are treated as parties by guests or musicians, and sometimes people show up when they hear about them on the street, even if they were not invited individually. Of course, there are intimate musical spaces
that are indeed private, such as a small family event at a home with live music. And yet we cannot describe all private musical events as intimate; rather, “intimate” implies a sense of closeness which may not be present in all private events. Therefore, I would characterize intimate musical spaces as having audiences in which there is a general shared sense of participation or investment in the music. I would not consider a business networking event in a warehouse with some musicians playing music in the background to be an intimate musical space. There is no sense of a collective investment in the musical experience here; rather the musicians are performing for whoever passes by or happens to pay attention to them, and the event does not feature the music as a priority but rather as background music. On the other hand, a group of four friends jamming together in an apartment conveys a greater sense of intimacy inasmuch as the four friends are all participating in and invested in their musical experience. Further, they are all musicians and perhaps even a part of the same music scene.

Intimate musical spaces are particularly important in the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene, as these tend to be correlated with the original contexts of the various traditions, particularly the religious genres. Despite the ongoing influence of folklorization from folkloric ensembles, the music in these original contexts—particularly that of the religious traditions—is performed quite different from what is performed on stage for tourists and the general public. As a largely secular genre associated with entertainment, rumba is perhaps the genre that is most visible to the public, as it is often performed in public areas by rumba groups and Afro-Cuban folkloric ensembles. Further, there are far more recordings of rumba available than there are of other genres of Afro-Cuban traditional music. On the other hand, most folkloric shows only contain a sampling of various religious genres (i.e. a Yoruba “cycle” with music for the orishas and a congo “cycle” featuring Bantu-derived genres) in which only a small percentage of the vast
repertoires are represented and often include several frequently performed “standards” for the stage (i.e. *ilubanché* for Eleguá).

To comprehend and access the repertoire in its fuller extent, one needs to access the intimate musical spaces of these genres’ original contexts, such as a *tambor* or a *cajón espiritual*. There is also a far greater number of performances that take place in these original contexts than on the public stage. In this case, these events are religious and occur in private homes; they are not open to the general public and are primarily meant for those within the Afro-Cuban religious scene. Until recently, the music and related activities in these intimate musical spaces were not widely accessible to the general public. Practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions conduct most events and rituals in private spaces, beyond the view of the public, which in this case refers to the gaze of a white-dominant Cuban society and foreigners, most of whom are also white. Afro-Cuban religious culture has been historically stigmatized, marginalized, exoticized, and racialized by whites as Other. In this case, the culture of the black Other stands in contrast to the (unspoken, tacitly agreed upon) standard of whiteness. Added to this situation is the related fact that there are no centralized, official buildings serving as meeting areas, such as churches, in these religions. Rather, private homes are the norm for most religious events, including most musical events. Thus, the vast repertoire of *tambores*, *güiros*, *cajones espirituales* (also called *cajones* or *cajones de muerto*), and *toques de palo* (also called *malongos*), the most common kinds of Afro-Cuban religious musical events in Havana and Matanzas, are performed primarily in private homes in the *barrios* of these cities. They are carried out by hired professional musicians who are the culture bearers of these traditions; this is the heart of *la mata*.

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28 Many cabildos served this function to varying extents in the past, yet most cabildos either disappeared in the 20th century or they no longer serve this function.
The ability to look “behind the curtain” of folkloricized public performances and more directly access this heart, these intimate musical spaces, is now achievable thanks to YouTube, as well as to the widespread use of portable digital recording technology. Digital cameras and smart phones with video cameras provide the means with which to record and YouTube provides the medium for mass dissemination to a potentially global audience. The latter characteristic is perhaps most important here, as even old “home videos” recorded prior to the advent of portable digital recorders, can (once digitized) be made available to a global audience on YouTube. Examples of such videos include Gene Golden’s “Los Popines [Papines] at party 1978” and “Grupo Yorobo Andabo,” uploaded by user Chango Prieto, both of which feature the performers at private gatherings in homes. Other, more recently recorded videos however, are often carried out with small portable digital video cameras or smartphones. Examples include “Rumba en el Cayo,” uploaded by Marcelo Fioramonti and “Rumba con Los Chinitos y El Piri,” uploaded by Jouhara Ismaili.

Indeed, the growing embeddedness of YouTube and portable digital recording technology in the West and many other places around the globe since the 2000s has led to the growing DIY practice of recording and uploading videos. Of course, in the case of such intimate musical spaces in Cuba, it is often foreigners who have access to such privileges, so it is they who often act as mediators of such content. These foreigners are often students or fans of Afro-Cuban traditional music and have been invited to the event by the hosts or brought as guests by the hired musicians. Some Cuban religious practitioners have also recorded and uploaded some

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29 https://youtu.be/o-19qqjge5w
30 https://youtu.be/nRPVdpy848
31 https://youtu.be/LtITQn05bik
32 Examples of such videos include the following: https://youtu.be/Z57L8ji8hEo, https://youtu.be/lJo7g4MNk_k, https://youtu.be/b0rx1UPc07M.
videos of intimate musical spaces in Cuba, although this is less common and is often indicative of a Cuban who lives abroad and thus enjoys greater access to the necessary technology.

In events outside Cuba, especially in places where there is a thriving community of Afro-Cuban religion like Mexico City, Miami, New York, and Caracas, recordings can be taken by almost anyone in attendance, and the musicians themselves, many of whom are Cuban culture bearers, are more likely to record such events. The latter is most common among the younger generation of musicians, as they usually are more frequent users of social media, YouTube, and smart phones. For them, videos in which they are featured serve as markers of authenticity (especially for non-Cubans) and identity, as well as to share their skills as musicians and to a lesser extent, marketing (Windress 2015). Such videos are usually circulated via sharing on Facebook (and less commonly on Instagram), and many are recorded directly onto Facebook. In recent years, Facebook “Live” videos have become common. As a working drummer in the scene in Miami, I commonly see a host, other practitioners, or other young musicians recording a Facebook “Live” video (or sometimes simply holding an online video chat with a person from another city or country) using their smart phone to record as we play. Such “live” videos are the most direct connection to intimate musical spaces, as they allow others—and in the case of Facebook “Live” videos, this number can reach into the hundreds or higher—not in the vicinity to view the events as they are happening, and to participate in the form of writing comments, which are often in the form of salutations and positive affirmations of the religion in general, the orisha being honored, or the performing musicians. The Facebook “live” videos are then saved—along with the commenting activity—and are viewable and sharable after the live stream is concluded. As “live” videos require access to a reliable, wireless internet connection, they are most common outside Cuba in places like Miami, Mexico City, and New York.
Most Cuba-based culture bearers do not record such religious events themselves, not only because of a lack of access to the internet and digital recording technology, but also because of traditional views that prohibit or look disdainfully upon taking photos or recording in such religious contexts. For example, according to practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions, anyone who is mounted or being mounted by an orisha, other deity, or dead person (muerto) should not be photographed or video recorded, just as other direct representations of the deities, like the contents of the soperas (pots which contain an orisha), should likewise not be photographed or video recorded. Despite this prohibition, there are several instances of YouTube users (practitioners and non-practitioners) uploading videos of various rituals and elements which most practitioners would regard as blasphemous. This view stems from the fact that many rituals and elements are seen as secrets that should be guarded and respected by practitioners, and not revealed to non-practitioners or persons who have not undergone initiation within one of these religions. These observations of mine are based on several years of working actively as a musician in Miami’s Afro-Cuban religious scene, during which I have heard many conversations in which tamboleros and santeros condemn such video recordings or photos, which they see as inappropriate and wrong. Further, they may condemn the spreading of what they interpret as false or incorrect knowledge or ideas on the internet by people who they may see as either unqualified, ignorant, or trying to profit economically in an unjust (e.g. a santero or babalawo who exploits his or her clients economically). Such conversations are also commonly found on Facebook in the form of comments, as this is where a great deal of videos, photos, and

33 For example, when tamboleros are sworn in (jurado), the initiates are told very clearly that they must not reveal what happens during the initiation; this is kept a secret, an act which helps to solidify bonding within the group of participants and with all other tamboleros, all of whom have undergone the initiation.
recordings of content related to Afro-Cuban religious culture is circulated at the transnational level.

Photographing or taking videos of the drums in a tambor de fundamento has become more common over the past decade or so as YouTube and portable digital video recording technology have gained popularity and become embedded in many parts of the world. Kenneth “Skip” Burney (personal communication), a tambolero of over 40 years who played with Orlando “Puntilla” Ríos in New York, often repeats the story of how Puntilla was very adamant about not allowing photographry or filming during a tambor. Contrasting that strict stance with what he sees in tambores today, Skip laments the fact that it is increasingly common among santeros and even tamboleros to make video recordings in which the drums (tambor de fundamento) are shown, which he sees as disrespectful. Indeed, many tamboleros still see this practice as wrong or disrespectful. For example, I myself learned about this restriction in one of the first tambores I attended in Miami when I pulled out my phone to record the drummers during a tambor de fundamento and was immediately stopped by one of the musicians.

I have often seen musicians (especially those over 40) stop other, often less-experienced, santeros from recording video of the drums and drummers on their phones during a tambor. And yet it seems that the deepening embeddedness of smart phone technology, used in conjunction with social media (usually Facebook or YouTube) for sharing is advancing like an unstoppable tide against the taboo against recording. In the past four years during which I have been working as a tambolero in the Miami scene, I have witnessed the practice of video recording the drumming in a tambor become very commonplace. The many tamboleros I work or have worked with in Miami, many of whom are over 40 and would agree that the tambor should not be video recorded, have come to accept the fact that recording is so commonplace that it is not worth
stopping everyone who pulls out their phone to record. There are so many recordings of tambores on Facebook and YouTube now that it may seem useless to resist the practice. Further, musicians are hired to work for their clients, so there is sometimes an element of keeping the client satisfied and not asking them to adhere to a “rule” that no one else in the transnational communities of social media seems to be following. Another argument may be that while the drums should ideally not be filmed, the actual elements of Añá are inside the drum—hence not visible to observers or cameras—and that this is the real secret which should not be seen by non-tamboleros. Overall, there seems to be a growing consensus among tamboleros that filming is perhaps not ideal, but it is not that bad. On the other hand, other more stringent rules against recording are still strictly enforced by musicians and practitioners, such as the rule against video recording the presentation of an iyawó (new initiate in Santería) or anyone who is mounted or being mounted by an orisha or muerto (dead person’s spirit). Anyone caught filming an iyawó or someone who is mounted is immediately stopped by experienced santeros or the musicians and reminded that the practice is prohibited.

The practice of video recording in tambores has even become more common among musicians themselves. This applies to both Cuban and non-Cuban musicians but is most common among those in younger generations (under 40) who reside outside Cuba and thus have access to the internet and the necessary technology. For example, YouTube user adeeguns is a Venezuelan drummer whose channel is dedicated primarily to videos of Añá Obá Nikosó Ayé (name of the set of consecrated batá drums) filmed in Havana, which he has been uploading from 2008 until the present (2018). Another YouTube user (username David Chico), a young tambolero of Puerto Rican descent residing in Orlando, uploaded videos in 2009 and 2010 of tamboleros performing in Orlando and Tampa, as well as a few videos of rumbas at peoples’ homes in Cuba.
YouTube user, ERMELO ILIZASTEGUIS, a young Cuban singer I have performed with and who resides in Miami, has videos of himself singing at tambores. However, he and other Cuban musicians in the Afro-Cuban religious music scene residing abroad tend to post most of their performance videos on Facebook rather than on YouTube, as posting on Facebook is more conducive to the content being viewed by one’s online connections (especially Facebook friends) in the scene. For example, Piri and several of the Cuban and Mexican drummers with whom he performs in Mexico City (most of whom are under 45) regularly post and share each other’s videos of tambores in which they are performing.

Indeed, in the case of tambores, it seems that videos of these—as opposed to, say, videos of more secular traditions like rumba—are found more commonly or posted more frequently on Facebook than on YouTube. For example, I am friends on Facebook with many different tamboleros (Cuban and non-Cuban) residing in Miami, New York, Mexico City, and San Juan, among other places, and new videos are posted and shared every week, if not every few days. Even if I do not see the videos, I often will hear about them in conversation (e.g. “Did you see Piri’s latest video? He did this crazy thing in the meta for Changó!”) with local tamboleros, most of whom are also friends on Facebook with many of the same musicians in the scene, such as Piri and the group of tamboleros he performs with in Mexico City. Indeed, this group of drummers seem to be among those who post videos (and pictures) the most frequently and regularly, tagging their posts with the name of the tambor (set of drums) they use: Añá Sayeró Ayan Asha Ilú (they have a Facebook “user” page for the tambor under this name). Not only do these videos serve to promote the musicians’ individual talents and authenticity, they can also serve as promotion for religious musical services (Windress 2015).
In all, while there are still many musicians that discourage video recording in tambores, the practice is nonetheless becoming more widely practiced and accepted than ever before. Even Caridad Paisán, my padrino’s wife, who is also a singer of the Afro-Cuban religious repertoire, sometimes records videos on her phone of us playing at a tambor (usually she will record a clip of a few minutes when the musical energy of the tambor has reached a peak) in order to post it on Facebook. The videos usually get dozens of “likes” and several comments (usually in the form of religious salutations or positive reactions) by other santeros and musicians in the scene.

Other kinds of videos of intimate musical spaces on YouTube include video clips of güiros, cajones espirituales, toques de palo, and rumbas played in homes or parties. When I was first learning about Afro-Cuban traditional drumming in the early 2000s in Gainesville, FL, my friends and I had little access to recordings of such events. Rather, we relied on what was commercially available for purchase or what we could obtain by chance through sharing services such as Limewire, most of which was also commercial recordings. Our early learning thus heavily reflected the practices and repertoires these references, which were primarily commercial recordings. In the case of rumba, these commercial recordings only represented the approaches handful of Cuban folkloric groups, themselves the product of a process of standardization and folkloricization since the 1950s and 1960s (see Chapter 2).

Our own approach to rumba was thus patterned on that of large folkloric ensembles like Clave y Guaguancó, Yoruba Andabo, Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, and AfroCuba de Matanzas, as well as a few others. The practices of Cuban rumberos beyond these groups were largely unknown to us, as well as to others not born and raised in la mata in Cuba. Having access to more of these intimate spaces through recordings would have been invaluable to us, as well as to others performing rumba abroad. In fact, later in the 2000s, when we were able to access such
intimate musical spaces through YouTube, it drastically impacted our playing style and approach to rumba as a performance group and as individual *rumberos*. Thanks to YouTube, we were able to hear and *see* the Chinitos’s style of *guarapachangueo* (i.e. the original version of the style, which contrasts greatly with the large ensemble approaches to *guarapachangueo* used by Yoruba Andabo or Clave y Guaguancó) as performed in its original context for the first time.

As previously mentioned, we even started a new rumba group (Los Tocororos) in Puerto Rico based on the Chinitos’ minimalist approach (two drummers instead of three), the first of its kind on the island. Later, I was able to carry this knowledge of *guarapachangueo* with me as I performed with other young *rumberos* in New York, including with the group La Nueva Timba de Cajón, directed by ex-Muñequisitos singer Andro Mella. Knowledge of this style and the ability to play it also benefited my friend and fellow *tambolero/rumbero* Charley Rivas and I when we began performing at *cajones espirituales* and rumbas in Miami, as our ability to perform the modern style well helped us gain acceptance among Cuban culture bearers in Miami and later, during a trip to Havana where we played at a rumba at the Chinitos’ house. More recently, we were chosen by Puerto Rican rumba singer Totin Agosto to be the primary drummers on his first solo rumba album[^1], making it the first album recorded in Puerto Rico featuring the Chinitos’s brand of the *guarapachangueo* style. This example is but one personal, specific instance of a phonograph effect stemming from Charley and I’s access to video recordings of intimate musical spaces (i.e. videos of rumbas at the Chinitos’ house in San Miguel del Padrón).

To be sure, the Chinitos’s style of *guarapachangueo*, as well as their role in the development of *guarapachangueo* itself, is now widely acknowledged among *rumberos* outside of Cuba thanks to YouTube videos in which they are featured. The videos of rumbas in their

[^1]: *Orgánico y medicinal* (2019).
home—which have long been frequented by many of the best rumberos in Havana of various
generations—form an important complement to Piri’s (one of the youngest Chinitos)
demonstration videos and the short documentary in which they are introduced as the creators of
guarapachangueo. In the former, viewers can see and hear the Chinitos performing their style in
its original context. Since some of the basic parts of guarapachangueo are demonstrated in Piri’s
demonstration videos, viewers can then see how these building blocks are applied in the videos
of the Chinitos’ rumba parties and witness the dynamics of the music in its original context. This
knowledge and musical material is invaluable for rumberos and others interested in rumba
abroad, as the practices of music making in rumba in its original context in Cuba is quite
different from most performance practices abroad, which are based primarily on Cuban folkloric
groups featured in commercial recordings. For example, in some of the YouTube videos of
rumbas at the Chinitos’ house on YouTube (most recorded by foreigners), viewers can witness
different singers—some of whom may have never been recorded commercially—taking turns
singing songs (verses) without introducing a montuno, which is a practice that is rarely seen
outside such intimate musical spaces, for example, on stage or in recordings. Further, since the
Chinitos’ style has only been featured on one album, which has only circulated rather informally
among those in the scene rather than as a commercial recording, these videos provide otherwise
rare references of the Chinitos performing their style of guarapachangueo.

In contrast to rumba, there were fairly few recordings of güíros and toques de palo, as
well as cajones espirituales, bembés, and violines for Ochún prior to YouTube and portable
digital video cameras (or smart phones) becoming popular. The latter two facilitated the making
and widespread sharing of these recordings, most of which are recorded by foreigners or Cubans
residing abroad. These videos allow viewers to access these traditions, whose full repertoires or
various styles are not as highly represented in secular settings (or recordings\textsuperscript{35}) as rumba. Further, users can often access the intimate spaces of these traditions in places outside Cuba, often performed by non-Cubans or Cubans residing abroad (or a mix of both. For example, users can view a toque de palo in Mexico City, a güiro in Miami, or a violín for Ochú in Caracas. These provide unique representations of the local musicians, local variants in performance practices, and help bolster the recorded repertoire of these traditions available on YouTube, which serves as a central archive.

Alternatives to folklorized representations: Re-contextualizing Afro-Cuban traditional music

The visual element of video recordings of the intimate musical spaces of Afro-Cuban traditional music is highly important. These recordings allow viewers to see several things: the musicians, the instruments, the audience, the dancing, religious artefacts, the manner of dress, the physical space, the behaviors, and the interactions between the people and the musicians. Such recordings allow viewers to connect all of these elements with the music in a way that is not reproducible outside such spaces and contexts. For instance, the music and dance in live public shows performed by folkloric ensembles are withdrawn from their original contexts, while audio recordings are usually recorded in studios and obviously have no visual element. In short, these videos provide a view of these traditions that is closer to that of an insider. I say “closer” because as recordings these videos are still disembodied from the live context; further, as clips of what are usually very long (i.e. 4-5 hour) musical events, and with some restrictions on recording still upheld by most (e.g. not recording a person who has been mounted), the recordings do not

\textsuperscript{35} YouTube has also served as an important medium of dissemination for existing commercially-recorded albums in the form of audio tracks, which users can search for and access for free.
represent the entirety of the event. Nonetheless, since they are carried out in the original contexts, these videos provide important, well-contextualized representations of performance practices.

The growing online availability of video recordings of the intimate musical spaces of Afro-Cuban religious traditions may indeed help to re-contextualize (i.e. place them in their original contexts) the international representation of these music and dance traditions, which have been increasingly commodified since the 1990s. The videos provide a counterbalance to instructional books, videos, and classes that grant students access to these traditions—in particular the *tambor* repertoire, dances of the orishas, *bembé*, and *palo* music and dance—in many cases as commodified or semi-secularized music or dance practices separated from their original religious context. The popularity of instructional books and videos in the world music and Western drumming scenes by musicians who are for the most part white non-Cubans shows that these traditions have become commodified and whitened. These processes are evident in the necessary “translation” that occurs in these books wherein a black Cuban religious and oral tradition is explained—often via written means (words and Western-derived music notation) and by white non-Cubans—for a largely Western, white audience. On the other hand, most commercially-made audio and video recordings of these traditions are recorded in studios or on stages by folkloric groups. The Abibilona series of audio recordings of the *tambor* repertoire perhaps come closest to presenting the repertoire as it is performed in the original context, yet they lack a visual element and were mostly recorded in studios.

The democratic qualities and DIY nature of YouTube and the increasing access to portable digital video recording technology have facilitated the production and dissemination of these recordings of intimate spaces, which also circumvent the music industry. And while many
practitioners might argue that certain aspects (i.e. a *tambor de fundamento*) of these religious traditions should not be video recorded for the public, videos of these intimate musical spaces in the original contexts provide a more valid representation of these traditions than that found in Afro-Cuban folkloric ensembles. Indeed, the latter present folklorized versions of the music and dance, having undergone what Carlos Moore (1964) describes as cultural whitening: made to be more “presentable” or acceptable to a (dominant white) public and state (Moore 2006, 187). Recordings of these intimate musical spaces may therefore serve as a counterbalance to the dominance of folklorized performance practices in commercial recordings and whitened or Westernized educational resources.

Other kinds of videos, especially those in which culture bearers give demonstrations beyond the context of the folkloric stage, also help to circumvent whitening or Westernization by providing a direct line to culture bearers in *la mata*, giving them a voice and letting them explain or demonstrate the concepts that they deem important. Examples of this kind of video include Piri’s various demonstration videos (*batá, palo, güiro, guarapachanguero*) and Maximino Duquesne Martínez’s video on Vimeo (uploaded by David Font-Navarrete) *Tumbadora de güiro*³⁶. In the latter, Duquesne explains the importance of internalizing the rhythm and swing of *güiro* and how this should be expressed in the drummer’s shoulder movements. Complementing this video explanation are several videos on YouTube of Duquesne drumming in *güiros*, where viewers can observe his style, the silent movements of his shoulders and torso, and the way he “marks” dancers. Taken together, the videos of Duquesne are important and highly valuable for those studying or performing *güiro*, as he is frequently cited among drummers in the scene as being one of the best players of the *caja* (i.e. *jícama* or drum) in the *güiro* style. In all, the videos

³⁶https://vimeo.com/channels/95187/13737622
of intimate musical spaces and of culture bearers’ demonstrations serve to provide a more direct line to what is happening in *la mata* and in the original contexts of these traditions. Such videos offer a serious, culture-bearer-based representation that is more properly contextualized, thus providing an alternative to the ongoing dominance of folklorized performance practices.

**Misrepresentations of Afro-Cuban traditional music on YouTube**

While videos of intimate spaces and culture bearers have a generally positive impact on the transnational scene in terms of contributing valid musical knowledge, there are other videos whose contribution is questionable. For example, it is common for percussion teachers and percussionists on YouTube to upload videos of themselves explaining a certain concept or demonstrating rhythms. In the case of Cuban popular music and Afro-Cuban traditional music, many of these percussionists are Western, white non-Cubans who do not perform these traditions in their original contexts. The de-contextualized rhythms which they offer as knowledge to other drummers are often performed or explained incorrectly, or more generally, in a whitened or Westernized manner that is significantly different from how they are performed by culture bearers.

This phenomenon is exemplified by YouTuber Michael de Miranda, a white Dutch percussionist who has produced over 200 videos in which he explains and demonstrates Cuban, Brazilian, and African rhythms and percussion instruments. After creating his channel (“Michael de Miranda”) in 2008, he began uploading demonstration videos in 2011, all of which are in English and frequently contain images of the rhythms transcribed in Western notation. Miranda now has 31,000 subscribers and several of his popular videos have over 100,000 views. In comments, viewers from all over the world express their gratitude for his demonstration videos
and his simple explanations, so it is evident that many people around the world have watched, studied, and learned from his videos, as well as others like him.

According to his website, Miranda has visited Cuba, Brazil, and Africa, and yet his presentation of these musical traditions is rife with problems. First is the issue of representation; in this case Miranda is almost always the sole demonstrator. Second, as has become widely common in West (particularly since the 1990s), the rhythms are presented solely as “rhythms;” there is no explanation of the contexts from which the music comes. In positioning himself in the role of teacher, Miranda presents himself as someone who is qualified to teach and pass on these traditions. Nonetheless, the manner in which the rhythms are explained, taught, and performed are inconsistent with how culture bearers would explain, teach, or perform the music. Finally, the feeling with which he demonstrates and performs the rhythms produces a sound that many culture bearers would call extranjero (foreign), or—in the jargon of US popular culture—might stereotypically be deemed “white” (i.e. square, lacking the proper swing).

Indeed, these issues of representation are reflect tendencies of whiteness. As scholar of whiteness Robin Diangelo (2018) has argued, a major issue with whiteness lies in the set of tacit, often unconsciously held beliefs shared by whites in the universality of the white Western experience. Another tenet within whiteness studies is the idea that whiteness is invisible; it is the non-raced norm against which everything outside it is contrasted (Dyer 2008; Redding 2010). In Miranda’s videos, for example, white interlocution is taken for granted by Miranda and many of his followers, many of whom are white and non-Latino. Based on the comments of viewers on his video pages, no one seems to question whether Miranda is qualified to teach all of these rhythms, which are drawn from Afro-Cuban, Afro-Brazilian, West African, and many other

37 http://www.michaeldemiranda.nl/
music cultures. Further, there is little to no credit or explanation provided by Miranda as to the sources for these rhythms, despite the fact that many (dare I say most?) of the rhythms are derived from notated examples in books, such as Coburg’s *Drum melodies of AfroCuban music* (2002). For example, Miranda’s video *Guarapachanguero on 3 congas tutorial* reproduces note-for-note a notated example of *guarapachanguero* from Coburg’s book.

Most of Miranda’s explanations contain a note-by-note breakdown of each rhythm in a linear manner, which seems like a logical approach, as it is common in Western contexts. Yet while such an approach simplifies the learning process for students, it also reduces the learning to linear memorization (i.e. learning the first two notes of a rhythm, then adding then next note, and the next, etc.). The problem here is that this kind of learning is not only inconsistent with the way culture bearers learn the rhythms (i.e. via repeated exposure in the original contexts), it is also not the way most culture bearers teach these rhythms to others, whether they are Cuban or foreign students. Even in the folklorized environments of Cuba’s folkloric groups and classes offered by culture bearers, the rhythms are usually taught in a way that not only breaks down the rhythm, but helps students understand the concept, time, and necessary feel of these rhythms. The rhythms are broken down in teaching, but tend to be taught as rhythmic chunks or skeletal parts at first, not in the comparatively rudimental, note-by-note approach used in Miranda’s videos.

For those studying Miranda’s videos, they may indeed learn the rhythm, but due to the learning process and the teacher, the content they learn is significantly whitened. In other words, the rhythms they learn and the process through which they learn them come embedded with aesthetics associated primarily with (white) Western art music and its approach to percussion. In this case, these aesthetics—which contrast with those of Afro-Cuban traditional music—include
elements such as the stress on uniformity of sound and an almost mathematical approach to rhythms in which the notes are played literally as notated, with little or no attention to the swing or to how they fit into other parts in the ensemble. Hence, his demonstrations lack the proper feeling or swing—very important to culture bearers—referred to as timba; rather, his square feeling comes from playing the rhythms metronomically and from improper technique. In his videos, he plays the drum with “light,” tapping strokes on top of the drum head; which possibly reflect the influence of being a Western-art-music-trained percussionist (i.e. where they often teach percussionists to “pull the sound out” of the drumhead). More importantly however, such a technique is never used by culture bearers, thus implying a lack of knowledge and experience as far as technique used in Afro-Cuban drumming.

In addition to the whitened learning process and incorrect technique, the rhythms Miranda demonstrates are completely de-contextualized from their original social and religious functions and contexts, including the singing the rhythms are supposed to accompany. Instead of explaining where the rhythms come from (context) and why they are used (function), Miranda contextualizes here solely as abstract rhythms to be learned as a lesson; a “lesson” being itself in the tradition of Western musical training wherein the student is supposed to learn and digest a specific piece of musical knowledge in a one-on-one teacher-student setting. Let us examine a specific video: in *Percussion Palo tutorial*\(^\text{38}\), Miranda describes the rhythm as a Bantu rhythm from Cuba, but leaves out any description of its religious function, which includes inducing possession. Further, there is no mention of the call-and-response singing that accompanies the rhythms or the way that the lead drum (*caja*) is supposed to mark the movements of the dancer and progressively build energy in the music in order to facilitate possession by the participants.

\(^{38}\) https://youtu.be/8qBeI6BBry
Far from offering a fruitful demonstration and explanation of *palo*, this video serves to contribute to the spread of a *palo* rhythm as something discrete and separate from *palo* practices in Cuba and abroad. Again, the rhythms are performed squarely and are introduced linearly note-by-note rather than as patterns that fit into the *clave* in particular ways.

In the video *Shekeres in the cuban guiro by Michael de Miranda*[^39], he does a similar disservice to *güiro*, which is again presented simply as a set of rhythms that are played together. The only reference to the original context or function of *güiro* comes with a text (presented during the video) that states “At a guiro party in Cuba they sing songs for the Santeria.” Some videos even contain information or rhythms that are nothing less than incorrect. For example, in *Rumba Yambú Havanna style by Michael de Miranda*, the clave pattern he performs is actually used primarily in Matanzas (evident in recordings and performances by Los Muñequitos and AfroCuba de Matanzas)—not Havana. Further, that clave rhythm would not be combined with the drum parts he performs in the video, as the clave and drum parts do not match stylistically.

Miranda is perhaps an extreme example of processes of whiteness, appropriation, commodification, and Westernization at play on YouTube, yet there are many others. Similar channels include Nathan Ouellette, Obatala Music, Arnold Moueza, Ortoaxis Suarez, World Drum Club, PowersPercussion, and TouchTonePercussion, among others. The videos produced by the creators of these channels seem to be aimed at a largely Western audience of hand drumming enthusiasts. In addition, the videos are in line with the values and tenets of the world music industry and Western percussionists since the 1990s, reflecting the increased Western interest in the percussion of West African, Latin jazz, or Latin popular music traditions. For example, among the values of Western-trained percussionists—which I experienced in my own

[^39]: https://youtu.be/Nap4t-LqLfY
training in high school and college as a percussionist—includes the idea that percussionists should be “well-rounded” by being able to show versality on various percussion instruments. Further, they should have—especially in the jazz and Latin popular music realm—a healthy repertoire of rhythms from various music traditions and genres (e.g. Afro-Cuban or Brazilian) which they should be able to draw upon at their discretion and incorporate into their performances.

Other representations of the music can even be characterized as cultural appropriation, as with the case of the Puerto Rico-based musical group Ifé, much of whose music—despite being claimed as original—is based almost entirely on songs from the Santería repertoire. The group’s director, an African American DJ who goes by the name Otura Mun, claims authenticity as a babalawo and tambolero (in online promotional materials) despite having very little experience in the Afro-Cuban religious and musical realms. Nonetheless, the group, whose style of dress (worn by musicians and dancers) imitates and exoticizes Nigerian and Afro-Cuban religious garb, has become quite popular in Puerto Rico, Europe, North America, and Latin America with its blend of Afro-Cuban-derived rhythms with electronic music. The group and its music are salient reminders of how Afro-Cuban religious music can be commodified and drastically removed from its original contexts to be sold as something exotic, spiritual, and “authentic” by those who falsely represent themselves as knowledgeable representatives of these traditions, or even as culture bearers. In the end, such misrepresentative content can serve as a reminder of the importance of responsible mediation, on the one hand, and knowing how to distinguish the

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40 This is evidenced by Otura Mun’s social media posts and confirmed with phone conversations with ex-bandmember and Ifá priest (awo) Rafael Maya, August and September 2018. For example, in an Instagram post on his personal page (otura_roso_mun) from June 14, 2018, Otura Mun gave thanks to the Latin Percussion company for sponsoring him, claiming that years of studying batá paid off, despite the fact that he has never studied batá with an actual tambolero and has never played in a tambor in Puerto Rico or anywhere else.
“good” content from the “bad.” For those interested in the subject, a good rule-of-thumb in this case would be the direct involvement of culture bearers⁴¹. In this way, it is similar to the importance of drawing upon and citing responsible sources in scholarly works and journalism.

On a more positive note, there are also some videos on YouTube featuring culture bearers demonstrating the rhythms in which the latter are taught in manners more stylistically consistent with their performance in their original contexts or in Cuban folkloric groups. Examples include several videos on Manley Lopez’s (Piri from Los Chinitos) channel and the video Cuban Rumba Instruction DVD by Javier Campos Martinez. While these videos are highly valuable and valid for those studying the music outside Cuba, the videos of intimate musical spaces are just as valuable, as they allow viewers to repeatedly access the traditions in their original contexts.

Videos of the intimate musical spaces of Afro-Cuban traditional music would still be scarce were it not for the democratic, DIY quality of Web 2.0 that characterizes YouTube and social media. On the other hand, these qualities also enable less-qualified (and often more economically, socially, or racially-privileged) persons to act as direct mediators of information and knowledge, as the case of Michael de Miranda illustrates.

**Evaluating positive and negative effects of participatory web culture**

The dynamics evaluated thus far in terms of Afro-Cuban traditional music recordings on YouTube represent some of the positive and seemingly negative aspects of participatory web culture. It is thus clear, at least in the case of music, that the increasing democratization brought

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⁴¹ Some examples of responsible online representations of Afro-Cuban traditional music are Barry Cox’s blogs *La rumba no es como ayer* and *Cancionero rumbero* (in which much of the information has been gathered through interviews and other interactions with Cuban culture bearers) and YouTube channels that feature culture bearers as direct participants. Such channels include Manley Lopez, IrianLopez, AFROROOTs, Ismaray Chacón Aspirina, BataHabana, atticindependent, Gene Golden, MANANA CUBA, América Afroindígena, guarachon63, and D Ritmacuba, among others.
on by Web 2.0 and associated technologies like portable digital video recorders and smart phones is not inherently and wholly positive. On the other hand, Andrew Keen’s (2007) critique of participatory web culture, in which he dismisses it as negative and harmful, is a little extreme. According to Keen, participatory web culture has threatened “our” (human? Western?) culture in that it allows amateurs and people with no qualifications to create content of their choosing. He argues that wisdom is not to be found in the crowd, but among experts; therefore, gatekeeping (such as that present in older forms of media) is necessary for quality control. Further, Keen laments what he sees as the downfall of the music industry due to so much content being free, shared, or pirated.

Keen’s critique of participatory web culture is valid in some ways. As is evident with the example of Miranda’s YouTube channel, users lacking qualifications can indeed produce low-quality content that can have negative effects. In this case, such effects include misrepresentation and miseducation, which contribute towards the whitening, de-contextualization, and further commodification of these music traditions. On the other hand, Web 2.0 and YouTube have provided an outlet for many people with talent and valid knowledge who may otherwise not have had the opportunity to reach a large, international audience. For example, the names “Los Chinitos” and “Piri” are now quite well known among tamboleros and rumberos in the transnational scene in large part because of YouTube videos in which their talents and role in the creation of guarapachanguero were highlighted. Participatory web culture and growing access to affordable portable digital video recording technologies has also enabled access, through recordings, to some of the intimate musical spaces of Afro-Cuban traditional music. As discussed previously in this chapter, such recordings are of high value—particularly for those studying these traditions—as they present the traditions in their original contexts. A negative
effect of participatory web culture, however, is that there are some recordings of certain religious aspects that many culture bearers feel should not be recorded, such as the *tambor de fundamento* or, (less commonly) possession, which circulate on YouTube and Facebook.

In the end, I would agree with Chris Anderson (2008) in his counter-argument to Keen (2007), which posits that the characteristic democratization of Web 2.0 and its associated technologies (open systems) is superior to the closed system of older models. Regarding the commercial music industry, Anderson describes how far more new and highly talented musicians have been able to access large audiences and gain popularity than would have been able to previously, when musicians had to be “discovered” or produced by those with the power to do so from within the industry. In what he describes as his “long tail” argument, Anderson contends that, from the point of view of business, the global economy is undergoing a shift from mass markets to a number of smaller niche markets. Therefore, if in the old model, businesses had to stock only the most popular items due to limited shelf space, in the new model there is no need to focus on discriminating between the good (what sells) and the bad because there is infinite “shelf space” when one takes Web 2.0 into account. In his view, businesses can now stock a much larger amount and variety of content, which allows them to better measure what is popular.

While Anderson is talking about business models that might be best applied to the commercial music industry rather than a traditional music scene, it is evident that music content on YouTube and Web 2.0 has indeed greatly increased the quantity and variety of content than that available prior to the advent of participatory web culture. The increased quantity and variety of music content on YouTube is similar to what Anderson describes as happening with business models. The difference with YouTube is that, in terms of videos dealing with Afro-Cuban traditional music, the popularity of videos is not necessarily tied to the quality of its contents. Of course,
judgments of quality may differ among people, yet it is clear in the case of Afro-Cuban traditional music that there are both low-quality examples of content—including that which may contribute to the spread of incorrect information or techniques or the de-contextualization of rhythms from religious contexts—and content produced by or featuring qualified or talented individuals. Therefore, in this case we can recognize Keen’s critiques as valid to an extent, as the democratic-leaning, DIY nature of participatory web culture also leaves opens the door to content that misinforms or misrepresents. And yet such misinformation and misrepresentation is nothing new; it was also present in the 1990s and 2000s in some of the instructional media on Afro-Cuban traditional music produced by white Westerners. The problem now is that this misinformation and misrepresentation can occur more frequently and can reach many more people around the globe quickly. Therefore—and unfortunately—it is up to viewers to distinguish between the content that is valid and that which is invalid or misrepresented in some way. While this distinction may be subjective to a degree, those with a certain level of experience and knowledge stand the most to gain from the content, as they can focus on (and possibly share or pass on) content or information they deem to be valid while bypassing (or critiquing) that which is not.

Despite the presence of many invalid or misrepresented content on YouTube, the democratic qualities of participatory web culture and the concomitant plethora of digital recordings on Web 2.0 have had a largely positive impact for those in the transnational Afro-Cuban traditional music scene, as it has helped previously marginalized culture bearers to gain international recognition and for viewers to connect with and learn from their expertise. It has allowed viewers to access a much wider variety of musicians, styles, and spaces, including the
intimate musical spaces in which most performances and most of the repertoire of Afro-Cuban religious music are carried out.

**Final conclusions: Ongoing trends in media technologies and the implications for musicians**

There is no doubt that we live in an age of information. Major technological achievements like artificial intelligence and self-driving vehicles have become realities over the past several years, technologies that will increasingly affect the everyday lives of people around the world. At the corporate, institutional, and state levels, data on consumers, employees, students, and citizens are constantly being collected and linked together. Expanded (and ever-expanding) access to the internet and global social media webs has made the internet and associated technologies central to the way businesses, states, institutions, and individuals communicate. It is the medium of the 21st century, and within it are found a plethora of more specific media, many of which are linked together in the form of social media. Given the fact that these media have become increasingly embedded in the lives of so many people around the world, particularly among those in developed countries (in which the most economically privileged consumers reside) it is no surprise that music as a commodity is now circulated increasingly in digital—and often streamed—form through the internet and related media (i.e. social media and “apps”) (Johansson et. al. 2017; Jones 2011; Molanphy 2015; McIntyre 2017).

Indeed, for the millions of us that regularly use smart phones, individuals such as Elon Musk (CEO and founder of SpaceX, Tesla, and Neuralink) have likened us to cyborgs, as our phones (and the potential access to an ever-growing web of information) have in a way become extension of ourselves. Of course, this idea is nothing new, falling in line with McLuhan’s (1964) characterization of media as “extensions of man.” In a September 2018 interview with
Joe Rogan on YouTube⁴², Musk, whose endeavors position him at the forefront of AI technology, likened the internet—specifically Google and social media—as being comprised of “giant cybernetic collectives” made up of humans and machines. He goes on to mention that in the near future, it is likely that humans will effectively merge with AI by way of technology (like Neuralink) that will allow direct, immediate access to the web of information and communication that we know as the internet and its associated media. Others, like historian Yuval Noah Harari (2017), have echoed such ideas, and like Musk, have discussed and warned against the implications of these “godlike” technologies (namely AI and genetic engineering), which may represent the next stage in humans’ evolution. While such technological evolutions may sound like science fiction to many, we need only remember that our current technological state and constant connectivity (i.e. via computers, apps, smart phones, etc.) would have sounded like science fiction to many people only thirty or forty years ago.

While these evolutions will require dealing with a host of moral and ethical issues, it is likely that the implications for music will be intertwined with the technologies and media surrounding the internet and participatory web culture. As with Google, which Musk describes as a sort of AI-like technology constantly being fed with humans’ questions, answers, desires, fears, and opinions, our access to and use of the internet embodies an ever-expanding, collective informational core (or cores) that serves simultaneously as an archive for music, a platform for its dissemination (including consumption and production), a social network, and a medium through which to access all kinds of music-related information (history, discussions, opinions, instructional content, etc.). In other words, taken together, it is becoming a grand version of a folksonomy, which is how Beer and Burrows (2010, 5) characterize YouTube: an archive site

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⁴² “Joe Rogan – Elon Musk on Artificial Intelligence.” https://youtu.be/Ra3fv8gl6NE
where users contribute the content as well as the data to organize the content. Of course, as with all new media technologies, it is important to remember that there are privileges and inequalities with regard to access, use, content and representation. In the case of YouTube and other social media, those in the US and the West (particularly whites) tend to enjoy privileges in all these areas (Burgess and Green 2009). On the other hand, countries such as China, India, Russia, and South Korea have become increasingly “connected” and have created features and social media that are in some cases highly popular in their own national contexts. And while these media have contributed to the internet’s democratization as access has expanded and DIY features enable users to become producers of content, it also seems that there is an element of corporate control reasserting itself in areas such as the music business, despite forecasts by many in the 2000s of the downfall of the music industry.

However, as music dissemination and consumption in many parts of the world—most notably the West—became increasingly centered upon mobile digital formats (like MP3s) and online media, and particularly as the illegal sharing of music files soared in the early 2000s, the major corporations of the music industry certainly needed to adapt in order to maintain their dominance, and they did. As Johansson et. al. (2017) have shown, the music industry has adopted new business models such as legal file downloads (i.e. iTunes), cloud-based streaming services like Spotify, and YouTube’s content ID technology, all of which combat piracy and help keep major record labels on top. Further, both iTunes and Spotify have favored the continued dominance of the majors through licensing deals, gatekeeping tactics, and in the case of Spotify, granting record companies part ownership (Arditi 2014; Burkart 2014; Marshall 2015; Nordgård 2016). In fact, according to Marshall (2015) and Nordgård (2016), the ‘streaming economy’ has
facilitated an increase in revenues for recorded music and continues to premier established mainstream artists.

Johansson and Werner (2017) concur with Steve Jones (2011, 444) in his assessment that the primary impact of the use of the Internet on popular music has to do with the “availability of news, information, and discussion about music facilitated by Internet media.” Indeed, this sums up much of the impact of Internet use on popular media, yet it also looks to the future, to the probability that these high levels of information exchange, happening at increasingly quicker rates and among growing swaths of the global population, will continue to intensify. It is no mistake that these dynamics reflect ongoing processes of globalization; indeed, the internet can be seen as the globalizing medium par excellence. While I agree with Jones’s (2011) assessment, there are many other important effects of new media on music scenes; indeed, the more nuanced effects may only be revealed upon investigating a particular scene, as I have done here with Afro-Cuban traditional music.

Such scholarly endeavors should be encouraged, as music, media, and technology are irreversibly linked in their fates, particularly in the case of transnational scenes. This dissertation, for example, has taken a unique angle by investigating the impact of the use of recordings and new media on what is largely considered a traditional—as opposed to popular—music scene, one that has its historical center in a very small, specific geographical area in an economically disadvantaged and politically marginalized island. So on the one hand, while the continued dominance of the majors in the music industry reflects in many ways the continued dominance—in numbers, content and influence—of Western artists of popular music and Western users of new media, an examination of traditional music scenes tends to reflect the more democratic effects of new media, as I discuss in chapters four and five. For example, due to the DIY quality
of YouTube and other social media, as well as to the growing connectivity and the embeddedness in much of the world of mobile media technologies like smart phones, there has been a drastic increase in the amount, variety, and availability of new and previously produced recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music. This in turn has resulted in greater international visibility for culture bearers, amateur performers, and their music and knowledge. For many—particularly those based in Cuba—this has facilitated an increase in economic opportunities and social and cultural capital, sometimes including the ability to tour internationally or emigrate to teach or perform in places like Europe, Mexico, the US, and Canada. New media, which intensify the effects of the use of earlier recordings, have also facilitated increased bridging and bonding within the scene, contributing to a growing sense of synchrony between various local scenes (i.e. New York, Havana, Miami, Mexico City, Rome, etc.) in terms of time (e.g. daily notifications, videos, photos, “live” videos), space (the online arena of social media), and modern playing styles (e.g. guarapachangueo, Abbilona recordings, groups representing the current generation like Osain del Monte). The widespread dissemination and availability of recordings online provide listening and study materials for students and performers and can act as promotional materials for organizers and performers.

As connectivity continues to increase around the world, especially among underprivileged segments of the global population like that in Cuba, these trends will continue to increase (increased international visibility and promotion, bridging and bonding, economic opportunities for culture bearers, synchrony between and influence between local scenes). In addition, as is happening in many scenes, there is a gradual move away from the production of “albums,” which are increasingly replaced by singles, short music video productions, and video or audio recordings from intimate musical spaces. For example, Sendero Music, Matanzas’s first
independently owned and operated recording studio and artist collective, currently releases video singles—as opposed to albums—of Matanzas-based musicians (including local rumba group Rumba Timba) via their YouTube channel El Almacén.43

In general, recordings of Afro-Cuban traditional music are also increasingly self-produced (i.e. produced unprofessionally by individuals, as is the case with impromptu smartphone recordings) or produced by independent niche production companies, as is the case with one of the current top rumba groups and their promoters: Osain del Monte and Attic Independent Productions. As I have shown in previous chapters, Cuban culture bearers in Cuba and abroad have slowly become more directly involved in mediating their music and promotional materials, which to various degrees still involves foreign mediators, especially for the economically marginalized in Cuba. Overall however, due in large part to DIY promotional practices on YouTube and other social media, there has been a move toward greater independence (from foreign mediators and record labels) on the part of Cuban culture bearers. This dynamic is part of global trends stemming from the democratization of musical production, which in turn is connected to access to new media and its associated technologies (Manuel 1994; Nowak 2014). Examples of Cuban culture bearers that have benefited from DIY promotional practices on YouTube and other social media include Manley “Piri” López (currently based in Mexico City; self-promotes on Facebook and YouTube) and Adonis Panter Calderón, who manages Havana-based Osain del Monte and is a co-founder and producer of Attic Independent Productions, a small Zurich-based production company run by Swiss CEO Christian Liebich. The company works primarily with Osain del Monte and the well-known rumberos of the Aspirina family and

43 https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtYLi6OndWuBQMF1Diz0Bjg/featured
has produced two documentary films—as well as several less formal videos on YouTube—based on rumba, which are marketed on its site as “authentic” and “real-life.”

These trends toward greater independence and direct involvement with mediation and promotion on the part of culture bearers signify a move away from Afro-Cuban traditional music’s tie to the (Western-controlled) world music industry, although it remains laden (for Westerners and others outside these traditions) with notions of exoticism, blackness, cultural authenticity, and spirituality. While ties to the world music industry have weakened, Afro-Cuban traditional music recordings as commodities continue to circulate within global flows associated with other Afro-diasporic traditions, such as Afro-Caribbean traditions that feature drumming at their core. For example, among Puerto Rican performers and fans of such traditions in Puerto Rico and New York, Afro-Cuban traditional genres like rumba and the music of Santería and Palo are often seen as closely related—musically, socially, and even spiritually—to Afro-Puerto Rican traditional genres like bomba and plena.

In addition, Afro-Cuban traditional drumming is still highly popular among non-Cuban drummers and percussionists—especially those based in the West—of jazz and Latin popular music backgrounds, who often prize the former traditions as “roots” (e.g. Afro-, Latin, or Afro-Caribbean roots): rhythms, knowledge, and techniques that they can draw on and incorporate into their individual musical practices as percussionists. And yet, unlike the instructional books, CDs, and videos that burst onto the market in the 1990s and 2000s in conjunction with the spike in the production and availability of Afro-Cuban recordings from Cuba during that time, in recent years there seems to be a move towards online instructional formats based on streaming video, particularly YouTube. YouTube channels such as AFRORoots, Manley Lopez, and

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44 [https://atticindependent.ch/en](https://atticindependent.ch/en)
CongaMasterClass.com, among many others, feature a plethora of instructional videos and performances aimed at drummers who are learning or studying the respective drumming styles. Specialized practices, like single drummer playing *batá* rhythms on the three drums (strapped together) at the same time, at first only practiced by a few relatively advanced or virtuoso drummers, have now become increasingly common among Western-based drummers interested in Latin jazz or hand drumming, as evidenced in the plethora of YouTube video demonstrations produced in the past several years. Indeed, as Afro-Cuban traditional music-related resources continue to accumulate online, it increases the likelihood that more people (internet users) are exposed to these resources and can learn about the music.

Unfortunately, as previously discussed, there are both “good” (i.e. knowledgeable and responsible) and “bad” (i.e. inaccurate or misguided) representations, demonstrations, and explanations of the music found in videos and other content online. Therefore, there is a growing need among those are learning to perform these traditions to be able to distinguish between content of varying quality and musical authority. For scholars, it is also important to maintain awareness of ongoing or new racial and socioeconomic inequalities in music scenes. As I have illustrated here with the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene, an examination of these dynamics reveals power dynamics between groups and can help explain why and how the structures of mediation have developed as they have for a particular scene. In the case of non-Western traditional music scenes, for example, the economic viability or “success” of a particular genre or group of related genres may very well depend on the interest of the economically-privileged. In the Afro-Cuban traditional music scene, the popularity and economic value of the music has been largely shaped by growing Western (i.e. the economically-privileged) interest in the music and dance over the course of the 20th century and particularly since Cuba “opened up” to the
West in the 1990s. As the internet and related new media forms continue to evolve and extend possibilities for human expression and interaction, they will play an increasingly important role in future musical scholarship.
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**Interviews**


