Alexandra T. Vazquez

Listening in Detail: Performances of Cuban Music. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2013. xviii + 333 pp. (US\$ 24.95)

Alexandra Vazquez takes us through the sound paths of musicians in both Cuba and Greater Cuba (mainly the United States but also Europe) in a beautifully written book that goes beyond an in-depth account of musicians' life. Her observations spread like droplets of watercolor on a porous sheet of paper, allowing for the exploration of unanticipated detours and contours. She provides exquisite descriptions of the textures, characters, and colors of the music, "listening in detail" in both the literal and metaphorical senses. Listening to the sounds—including noises—unveils the colonial, racial, and geographical past and present of Cuba, but also shows attention to theoretical passages, felt impressions, and musicians' accounts, not to recreate the past but to reassemble what is inherited from them in the present. Rather than a comprehensive reading of Cuban music, Vazquez proposes an interpretation of it, raising Cuban music to an aesthetic level. She *experiences with* Cuban music rather than providing a detached ethnographic *account of* it. In using music as a gateway, she addresses the question of what Cuba and the United States have in common, navigating through sensitive borders and politics to address the way musicians and their music have created numerous crossings and overlaps.

Five chapters dedicated to specific musicians provide key elements to an alternative experiencing of Cuban music and its relationship with borders, aesthetics, politics, and history. In the first, Vazquez listens, in detail, to the album *Cuba Linda* by Alfredo Rodríguez, a powerful arrangement of Cuban sound, to provide an alternative acoustic cartography of Cuba. She pushes the island's boundaries to relate *Cuba Linda*, a "creative laboratory," and the people associated with it, connecting New Orleans to Paris. She further deconstructs a rigid interpretation of musical genre in highlighting the various musical influences on the work.

The second chapter deals with the music of Graciela Pérez, who was a member of the famous all-female Orquesta Anacaona, and later a vocalist for the New York-based band Machito and His Afro-Cubans. Vazquez listens to interviews to reconsider the relationship between gender, pedagogy, and music. Reflection on Pérez's contribution, based on interviews as well as ephemera and songs, allows her to address master narratives of sound, providing a refreshing feminist perspective of the emergence of Salsa music.

The grunt made by the "King of Mambo" Dámaso Pérez Prado during his performances is the focus of the third chapter. Vazquez provides a fascinating interpretation of this vocal signature by connecting with issues of improvisa-

tion, dance, and even literature. This strange vocal intonation corresponds to a “musical eruption” that leads to reflections on “the details of violence, history, and creative collaboration” (p. 134). In addition to being part of the mambo experience, including its improvisational nature, Pérez Prado’s grunt echoes the noises of the New World—a sonic accent that connects the African diasporas.

The fourth chapter considers two documentaries about Cuban music produced after the beginning of the Revolution: *Nosotros, la música* (1963) by Rogelio París and *Y... tenemos sabor* (1967) by Sara Gómez (the first black woman film director in Cuba). Vazquez treats the filmmaking as a form of musicking and depicts how the musical is transposed to the visual in a post-Cold War climate and how the Cuban “we” took shape through ruptures and raptures. She compares Sara Gómez’s handiwork to an arranger, beautifully connecting the worlds of filmmaking and music.

The fifth chapter is somewhat more eclectic and personal as Vazquez examines the Cold War kids through song lyrics, a personal letter written by her father, and recordings by Alex Ruiz, Los Van Van, and X Alfonso, among others. The broken people (Cold War kids born outside Cuba after 1960) with whom she identifies, the broken city (Miami) and the pain of broken ties (between Cuba and the United States) create noises that Vazquez deconstructs in detail, showing, for example, how the different generations of Cuban migrants relate to the blockade, and more specifically to music (using the controversial Los Van Van concert event in Miami in 1999 as an example). She also reveals the shared preoccupations and common experiences of Cubans in the United States to other Cold War children from Viet Nam and Korea, highlighting an interesting continuity of refugee experiences among these groups.

For Vazquez, listening in detail is a transformative experience, enabling an interweaving of writing and music. She wrote the book while listening to music, and reading her work in detail is unquestionably a sonic experience as well; her colorful writing encourages the reader to listen not only to the poetic style of her prose, but to the music that accompanies it. That said, there is one voice that could have been amplified—Vazquez’s own background as a Cold War child comes rather late in the book. I felt the desire to know more about her from the beginning as a way to fully immerse myself into her sonic score, which is so rich in details and contours.

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