Christina D. Abreu

Rhythms of Race: Cuban Musicians and the Making of Latino New York City and Miami, 1940-1960. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. xi + 303 pp. (Paper US\$29.95)

Most Cuban Americans tend to view the making of Latino culture in New York City and Miami as a product of the Cuban Revolution. Although an influx of Cuban immigrants did arrive to these two cities following 1959, prior historical events were equally fundamental in shaping their musical culture. Christina Abreu does a wonderful job of shedding light on the musical scenes there in the 1940s and 1950s among Cuban musicians and entertainers, showing how social clubs, music festivals, Spanish-language newspapers, the New York Palladium, and films and television broadcasts with Cuban entertainers served as important platforms for fostering the image of Cuban culture (and by extension Latin culture) in the United States. More specifically she discusses the influence of race on the musical atmospheres of both New York and Miami. By narrating the careers of musician immigrants, she draws interesting parallels between black and white race discourses in Cuba and the United States and explains how these different identities merged. The book would be ideal for any graduate student, professor, or researcher focusing on race discourses among Cuban musicians in the United States.

Most scholarship of this period focuses on particular genres and styles—see, for example, *Latin Jazz: The Perfect Combination* (2002) by Raúl A. Fernández and *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York* (2001), edited by Agustín Laó Montes and Arlene Dávila. Abreu instead examines Cuban musicians who influenced Latin American music making. Through their stories, she evaluates how race played an important role in the way that white, mainstream America accepted popular Cuban culture in the United States. Her research framework revolves around the construction of Cubanidad, Hispanidad, and Latinidad through Cuban and Afro-Cuban performances. She argues, for instance, that charismatic light-skinned musicians such as Desi Arnaz, Xavier Cugat, Marco Rizo, and José Curbelo portrayed Cubanness as “nonblackness, tropical escape, and sanitized exoticism” (p. 1). She also analyzes the construction of black Cuban identities as performed by Celia Cruz, Mario Bauzá, Machito, and Arsenio Rodríguez and shows how performances of Cubanness became defined as “Latin” when performed by white Cubans, but “Afro-Cuban” when performed by Afro-Cubans. These negotiations of race and identity were important in defining “Cuban ethnic and broader Hispano/a and Latino/a identity in the United States” (p. 3).

In her conclusion, Abreu argues that the period after the Revolution overshadowed many of the former musical dialogues and experiences of 1940–60 that had come to form what would eventually become recognized as Cuban musical styles. For example, genres such as *son*, cha-cha-chá, rumba, and mambo all rose to prominence during this time. Abreu notes that popular culture began to change after the 1960s, as immigrant Latin American audiences began to listen to North American popular music such as rock and roll. Many of the social clubs and venues that hosted Cuban music in New York City and Miami closed after the 1960s. For example, the Tropicana and the Palladium closed in the mid-1960s while others in Miami became eclipsed by post-Revolution organizations such as Cuban exile radio stations and Hispanophone newspapers.

After 1959, Cubans became largely associated in the U.S. imaginary with white elite culture, due to the mass immigration of Cuban middle and upper classes fleeing Castro's political system. Abreu's narrative, however, points to the presence of Afro-Cuban performers in the Latin jazz scene of New York City. Before the Revolution, Afro-Cubans such as Mario Bauzá immigrated because they felt more accepted in the black neighborhoods of New York City than in Cuba. Although many Cubans consider their country free of racism—as constructed by Martí's racial ideology—discrimination against Blacks was (and is) widespread.

The different narratives concerning relationships between Cuban, Puerto Rican, and other Latin American countries was another interesting analysis of this study. The book discusses the role pan-Americanism plays in cultural identity within the United States. Before the Cuban Revolution, the immigration of Cubans to the United States was viewed similarly to that of Puerto Rican and Mexican immigration. By looking at the interactions between Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and African Americans in New York City, Abreu suggests that racial dynamics between these groups came to define the Cuban American identity. She considers those who came before the 1959 Revolution as immigrants rather than exiles, with immigrants usually coming by choice while exiles arrived out of necessity. The fact that most Cubans before the Revolution were considered “immigrants” instead of “exiles” may in part help explain the rich musical innovations that took place during these two decades and its effect on the construction of Cuban American identity.

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