Alejandro Madrid, a recognized researcher on Mexican music history, and Robin Moore, with excellent previous books on Cuban music, have joined forces to produce a book on a musical genre that originated in Cuba but that is danced more in Mexico than anywhere else. The book is arguably the most comprehensive study of danzón and will surely be of great help to future studies of Afro-Latin American music for many decades to come.

It is also an excellent example of a combination of methods and analytical approaches in music studies, moving from historical sources to personal interviews, from printed books and articles to archives, from social phenomena to individual life histories, from ethnographic observations to discourse analysis, from musical sonorous experiences to choreographic analysis, from records to scores.

The first two chapters are directed toward a characterization and general historical outline of the musical genre through the concept of “performance complex,” which includes not only music but also dance and the basic instrumental conjunto or ensemble. Chapter 3 focuses on an important aspect of danzón’s history up to 1940: the discussions and implications of its dance and music on “race” and morality. Chapter 4 examines early dialogues between danzón and jazz—the “Latin tinge” in the history of jazz that other authors have carefully analyzed (e.g., Acosta 2000), but still not usually recognized by some jazz historians and the general public. Chapters 5 and 6 stress the importance of the performativity concept for the contemporary “danzón scenes” and styles. Finally, Chapter 7 explores the influence of danzón on other music beyond the dancehall: such as Nueva Trova, concert music and Latin Jazz.

As for shortcomings, the authors examine all known previous writings on danzón, but do not fully consider the porosity between musical genre histories, especially in Afro-Latin American popular sonorities and dance. They therefore miss some important previous analysis of related genres. If, for example, they had examined sources on bolero (an important musical form in both Cuba and Mexico), they would have realized that many processes that they analyze for danzón are similar to those experienced by the bolero, thus allowing a better understanding of the processes themselves.

This is particularly important regarding danza and merengue. Madrid and Moore recognize that danzón emerged from contradanza and that originally the word was more an adjective than a noun—that is, a way to describe “a much bigger danza.” Contradanza is not then (metaphorically) the “mother,”
but the “grandmother”; and *danza* should have been studied more carefully. This applies also to *merengue* (a word that was originally used indiscriminately for the same genre), which later became the danceable part of *danza*. (*Danza* is divided into a short nondanceable *paseo* and the long danceable *merengue*.) They do refer to an important book edited by Peter Manuel (2009), but unfortunately another excellent one (López Sobá 2013) was not yet published. Other very relevant sources on *danza* and *merengue* that could have been of even more help for their analysis (e.g., Tejeda & Yunén 2006) are also missing. And I would love to have seen this excellent book enter into dialogue with my own previous writings on *danza* (e.g., Quintero 1998, 2009, 2013), which have been published by well-known editorial companies in Mexico and Madrid-Frankfurt and are, thus, very easily accessible. My 2009 piece is, in fact, not strictly on *danza*, but a very detailed historical examination on the origins of dancehall couple dancing in the Hispanic Caribbean—Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico.

Finally, the subtitle, *Circum-Caribbean Dialogues in Music and Dance*, is somewhat misleading because the dialogues examined are almost exclusively between Cuba and México. Those dialogues, which may be the most important for *danzón* in the narrow conception of musical genre, are excellently examined and analyzed, but the remaining Caribbean is almost totally absent. There are some mentions of Haiti, New Orleans, and Puerto Rico, but not really dialogues; and other important regions for related music performance complexes are absent: the Dominican Republic, Caribbean Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, Curacão, and New York. *Danzón* does go beyond the tradition of examining musical genres only in their national expressions, and the dialogues between Cuba and Mexico that are examined clearly show the impossibility of understanding *danzón* as a music performance complex through a nationalist point of view. But an even wider scope would be most welcome in future research and analysis.

*A.G. Quintero-Rivera*

Social Science Research Center, University of Puerto Rico,
San Juan, Puerto Rico 00931
*agquinterorivera@yahoo.com*

**References**