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The Routes of Rumba (review)

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positions. Her discussion of early folkloric musicians, Pancho Gómez Negrón and Julio Benavente Díaz, is especially valuable here, given their centrality to later folkloric efforts, and though their playing style has been discussed elsewhere (Turino 1983), the biographical information now provided is new and stimulating.

Creating Our Own adds a great deal of nuance to the stark picture of dominance and exclusion painted by de la Cadena and other scholars of folkloric performance. Mendoza shows that indigenous people participated avidly in folkloric work, that their contributions were central to the emergent representation of cuzqueñismo, that the folkloric imaginings of the age were often adopted by less privileged cuzqueños as eagerly as they were by the intellectual elites, and that an important effect of all these activities was work for performers of all kinds. This account of fluidity, with various actors using the folkloric frame at various times to achieve their own ends, recalls some of the best recent work in this area, including Heidi Feldman's *Black Rhythms of Peru*. Furthermore, like that book, *Creating Our Own* raises, without fully settling, questions about the ownership of cultural practices. Often missing from other works, such ambiguity should provide grist for further fruitful discussion. Having said this, however, the book's argument is best considered in tandem with de la Cadena's opposed account. While *Creating Our Own* documents subaltern contributions to folkloric performance, underlining the agency of indigenous peoples and other non-intellectuals in their creation, Mendoza declines to reprise the questions that de la Cadena has grappled with, about the negative representational effects that the images under discussion may have in the later course of interethnic relations. These two poles of interpretation are equally provocative, and surely they must be balanced in any future consideration, not only of folkloric performance in Cuzco, but rather of the parallel modes of performance that that resonated throughout Latin America, over the course of the entire 20th century.

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MARTÍNEZ, PEDRO, AND ROMÁN DÍAZ. 2008. *The Routes of Rumba*.
Round World Productions/Round Whirled Records 844185096942.
Compact disc.

Contrary to presenting a nostalgic collection of folklore, this recording focuses on the contemporary sound of Cuban rumba, particularly the guarapachanguero style. A freelance producer and assistant professor of performance studies and Latino/a studies at Williams College, Berta Jottar has brought together two of the top Cuban musicians in the United States in

the production of *The Routes of Rumba*. Jottar conceptualized the album as a representation of culture of rumba, a Cuban musical genre associated with its African roots. This recording succeeds in bringing together experimentation, tradition, experience, and innovation, providing a refreshing look at contemporary Cuban rumba. Jottar also provides an interactive component and a video, which are included on the disc, and even dedicates a website to the album.

Pedro Martínez and Román Díaz both performed with highly esteemed folkloric groups in Cuba, such as Yoruba Andabo, which attests to their training and experience. Arriving in the United States in the late 1990s, they have already collaborated with the likes of Giovanni Hidalgo and Paquito d'Rivera, establishing themselves as heavyweights in the Latin musical scene. Jottar, a rumba enthusiast, first saw the two performing at La Esquina Habanera, an established rumba space in Union City, New Jersey (Jottar, 2008). With her help, they have produced their first recording as a duo, focusing almost entirely on the guarapachangueo style of rumba.

Guarapachangueo, invented by the group Los Chinitos in Havana in the 1970s, is based on "the interplay of beats and rests," and is highly conversational (Jottar, 2008). Far from the standardized regularity of the drum rhythms of recordings such as Alberto Zayas's *El vive bien* or *Patato y Totico*, guarapachangueo often sounds slightly random or unorganized to the untrained ear, yet presents a plethora of percussive synchronicities for those who understand the clave. Using both cajones (wooden boxes) and tumbadoras (congas), Martínez and Díaz reflect the tendencies of their generation of rumberos in combining these instruments, which widens the sonic plane to include more bass and treble sounds.

Jottar chose to base the album on six concepts representing rumba's culture, including prohibition, dialogue, conflict, abakuá, seduction, exodus, and fragmentation. These concepts were presented to the musicians, who in turn came up with the songs and percussive works. While interesting, they are difficult to grasp without a working knowledge of rumba and its history, and even then, they seem out of place—well-intended, but a theoretical distraction from the music itself. These socio-historical concepts are better intended for scholars trying to understand rumba rather than musicians or fans, and are subjective, falling short of representing the genre effectively. In the end, rumba is best represented not by abstract concepts, but through its own lyrics and sounds, which is still well accomplished by the masterful rumberos.

The album begins with a salute to three orishas: Eleguá, Ogún, and Ochosi, played on the batá. In religious ceremonies, these orishas are usually the first three greeted by the batá, hence the symbolism for the opening of this album. Here, the recording quality allows for a clear sound of all six

drum heads. Most instruments on the album were recorded separately, allowing for a sound mix which details the different drum sounds. The drawback to recording rumba this way is the loss of the full sound and chemistry of the group “in the moment.” Vocals were also recorded this way, which adds to a sense of artificiality, resulting in choruses which are often *too* perfect or clean, resembling the chorus sound of *Raíces Habaneras*, an album on which Martínez and Díaz also appear. Yet some of this was done out of necessity, as Martínez is recorded in multiple roles: as a percussionist, a lead vocalist, and a chorus singer. Few musicians were used for this recording, which showcases the talents of the duo. A wider selection of musicians and less tampering with the sound mix (especially certain choruses) would have yielded a more natural sound. Despite these drawbacks, the overall sound quality is great, and allows for a clear understanding of both the lyrics and the percussive vocabulary.

Track two is entitled “Prohibition,” and actually contains the songs “Protesta carabali” and “Cajones bullangueros” previously recorded by Yoruba Andabo. An innovative montuno (call-and-response chorus section) yields three contrapuntal choruses in addition to Martínez’s improvisations. The piece represents prohibition itself, which was imposed upon many traditions of African heritage in Cuban history.

“Stomach Health,” the fourth track, sounds odd with its English title. In fact most track titles on the album are translated into English. This does not make sense, as they are all sung in Spanish, and are not really necessary for the audience. This track begins with a simple cajón-and-spoon (box-and-spoon) rhythm, which makes for a great contrast to the usual clave-only introductions in rumba, creating funky cross rhythms when the clave comes in. The technique was used often by the percussion master Pancho Quinto, exemplified on his album *En el solar de La Cueva del Humo*. Lead vocals on this track are performed by Alfredo Díaz “Pescao,” who is also featured on three other tracks. The eldest rumbero of the group, he contributes original compositions that comment humorously on health matters (“Stomach Health”) and neighborhood gossip (“El brete”).

“Abakuá: Greetings to the Powers” represents the all-male abakuá brotherhood, of which many rumberos are themselves a part. The large collection of abakuá songs presented here far bypasses the normal amount. Sung a cappella, except for some clave accompaniment, allows for clear listening and focuses attention on the songs.

“The Monument” is performed as a tribute to its author, Manuel Martínez Olivera “El Llanero,” who gave guarapachangueo its name in Havana before coming to the United States, where he taught many New York rumberos to sing rumba properly, in relation to the clave. In this version, the entire verse isolates the conversation between the lead vocalist and the quinto,

leaving out the other two drums and the cajón until the montuno. This is a nice contrast to the normal guaguancó accompaniment, and makes for a great study piece of the relationship between singer and quinto.

"El brete" begins with another funky cajón-and-spoon introduction a la Pancho Quinto, and proceeds to comment on the chismosa (woman known for gossiping) of the neighborhood, a classic character of the Cuban barrio scene, who is often satirized in Cuban popular culture. The final track, "Fragmentation," is arranged by Román Díaz, and offers a percussive feast of Cuban popular-folkloric rhythms. It is similar to the "Diálogo de percusión" performed by Yoruba Andabo and Clave y Guaguancó on the album *La rumba del siglo*, in which guaguancó rhythms respond to and are answered by batá rhythms. Here, Díaz brings together rumba, Congo traditions, abakuá, Yoruba (batá), and carnival rhythms, which do not answer each other, but flow into one another, sharing each other's elements. This highlights their similarity, a result of the endless influences they have imparted on each other.

An interactive flash player is included, which allows for subtracting or adding individual instrumental parts, as well as lead vocals and chorus. The player is based on the track "Exodus" and permits the user to isolate certain instruments or focus on certain combinations. There is also a video included, which shows Martínez and Díaz performing "Dialogue," an a cappella piece in which the two imitate the sounds of rumba instruments, exchanging ideas and conversations. To the listener, the sounds of the full rumba battery here appear at times to involve many more than two voices.

The Routes of Rumba has succeeded in bringing together elements of rumba's history and culture. Combining experimentation with tradition, modernity and a high caliber of musicianship, Jottar's collaboration with these rumberos has produced an exemplary musical production of the Cuban diaspora. I lament the lack of a yambú, but this reflects the general limited attention given to this type of rumba in modern commercial recordings. The same phenomenon applies to columbia; there is only one, yet this brings focus here to the guaguancó, which is testament to its centrality within rumba. For those who wish to learn more, Jottar established a website dedicated to the album which explains her motivations behind the project and provides links to the musicians' websites. By emphasizing the guarapachanguero style, this album is a great example of what is happening now, and is a refreshing addition to the collection of recorded rumba and Cuban music in general.

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