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Music from Cuba: Mongo Santamaria, Chocolate Armenteros, and  
Cuban Musicians in the United States (review)

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**Charley Gerard. *Music from Cuba: Mongo Santamaría, Chocolate Armenteros, and Cuban Musicians in the United States*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001. 155 pp.**

This book is a detailed descriptive account of the musical lives of a number of Cuban musicians — Mongo Santamaría, Jesús Caunedo, Pupi Legarreta, Juan Pablo Torres, Juan Carlos Formell, and Chocolate Armenteros — who migrated and spent a good portion of their lives in the United States. The author utilizes mini biographies of these musicians to support his case for the existence of what he calls “stateside Cuban music.”

The more detailed portions of the book are dedicated to the percussionist Mongo Santamaría (whose story takes up three of the eleven chapters) and to the trumpet player Alfredo “Chocolate” Armenteros. The author’s narrative style is varied; while some chapters, (e.g., those on Mongo and Chocolate) are more analytical, one chapter (on Caunedo) contains paraphrases of oral interviews, while another (the chapter on Pupi Legarreta) simply presents a transcription of interviews. This variation makes the reading easier, and the direct transcriptions allow the reader a glimpse into the musician’s own view of events.

At times the author appears to simplify the early history of the migration of Cuban musicians to the United States by reducing it to a question of racism. While racism may indeed have played a part in the migration of black-skinned musicians to the United States in the 1930s and 1940s, it is not the complete story. Economic factors also played a role. In any event, racism against black musicians cannot explain the migration of numerous white-skinned Cuban musicians to the United States during the same period.

At other times, the author, inexplicably, does not credit the musicians’ own accounts of their actions, as, for example, when he expresses his disbelief that the politics of the Cuban revolution had little to do with Chocolate Armenteros’s decision to migrate. Since Armenteros left Cuba for New York in 1957, two years before the Revolution succeeded, his statement does not appear so hard to accept.

The author is to be congratulated for his use of a wide variety of sources, including some interviews with Cuban musicians from the Smithsonian Institution’s Oral History Program. Yet some statements suggest that further research on Cuban history might have improved the quality of the book. For example, the reader familiar with Cuban history may regard as unnecessarily tentative the author’s statement that General Batista “was apparently a mulatto” (14), since Batista’s racially mixed background is fairly common knowledge.

One cannot fault the author for his repetition of the statement that “the son was a music of the demimonde, associated with criminals and prostitution” (66), which he carefully attributes to another source. Yet this notion, which of late has crept into scholarly writings in the United States, is one based not on

historical facts but on fallacious interpretations that too easily equate the everyday lives of working-class men with crime and those of working-class women with prostitution.

While in this reviewer's view the author may not have completely succeeded in demonstrating the existence of a "stateside Cuban music," he certainly has laid much of the groundwork for that argument. Gerard has written a very useful book that begins to fill a large gap in our knowledge about the lives of Cuban popular musicians in the United States.

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**Alberto F. Álvarez García and Gerardo González Núñez.** *¿Intelectuales vs revolución?: El caso del Centro de Estudios sobre América, CEA.* Montreal: Ediciones Arte D.T., 2001. 212 pp.

Revolutionary Cuba abounds with enigmas, especially in the realm of the State's relation with those intellectuals committed to constructive criticism of the regime. Such criticism occurs and serves to reveal aspects of the inner workings of state policies, but only rarely does evidence emerge about these debates from areas other than those within the principal governing bodies. Since its founding in 1977, the Centro de Estudios sobre América (CEA) has directed its social scientist staff to research and publish on public policy topics pertaining to the Americas. After 1989, the Center turned as well to Cuban topics because of the urgency to right the economy and rethink socialism. As nationalists concerned with the survival of the country's independence amid brutal economic changes, these intellectuals sought to advance ideas and strategies Cuba could embrace to ensure equity to all parts of society during the transition. CEA researchers Alberto F. Álvarez García and Gerardo González Núñez discuss and critique the events of the last decade that led to the State's intervention and subsequent silencing through reorganization and exile of CEA's intellectuals. This account offers insights likely to clarify speculation while also providing valuable knowledge of the State's penetrating role in all aspects of intellectual life. As such, it builds upon the compilation of Maurizio Giuliano, *El caso CEA: Intelectuales e inquisidores en Cuba. ¿Perestroika en la isla?* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1998).

Could Cuba meet international expectations for the autonomy of academic institutions? Substantial evidence exists that it could not because of the interconnectedness among the State, the Communist Party of Cuba, and its Central Committee. Pluralism of ideas expressed privately was individualism, but when the State-sponsored research network embraced this pluralism, only dis-