Listening for Africa

Garcia, David F.

Published by Duke University Press

Garcia, David F.

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These experiments also indicate descriptively the existence of an auditory space-level; for when the noise of a metronome stroke occurs, it enters into a thus far empty, yet phenomenally existing, auditory space. [...] The conclusion is that normally we possess a general spatial level within which we are anchored. When we lose this anchorage, we are practically lost. —KURT KOFFKA, “Perception: An Introduction to the *Gestalt-Theorie*,” 1922

Kurt Koffka was one of three German experimental psychologists—the other two were Max Wertheimer and Wolfgang Köhler—whose innovative work on Gestalt theory revolutionized psychology and greatly influenced other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, including comparative musicology.¹ This chapter’s epigraph is from Koffka’s first publication in English (“Perception: An Introduction to the *Gestalt-Theorie*”), dating from 1922, in which he gave American readers a detailed introduction to the Gestalt movement in psychological thought that had been developing in Germany during the previous ten years.² Koffka, along with his colleagues Wertheimer and Köhler, focused on developing a theory of perception that took into account the phenomenological whole of an auditory or visual experience. In “Perception,” for instance, he proposed that the apprehension of “stillness,” as in the silence in between beats, or “white spaces,” as in the space between shapes, are integral to the entirety of an experience. No pattern of sounds (or figure) could thus occur without its contingent silences or background noises (or ground).³ Moreover, as the
spatial conditions surrounding the perception of a figure become unstable (as in seeing a flashing light in total darkness) or manipulated (as in effecting the direction in which a sound reaches the ear) the more unstable that figure and the perceiver’s orientation become in that space.\(^4\)

Koffka’s observations concerning the perception of sound in particular serve as a productive introduction to this chapter for several reasons. First, German and American comparative musicologists drew from the work of Gestalt psychologists not only for their hypotheses concerning perception of sound but also because Gestalt psychologists set forth to establish Gestalt psychology as a rigorously empirical science on a par with the natural sciences.\(^5\) As Melville Herskovits’s correspondence and work with Erich von Hornbostel and Mieczyslaw Kolinski demonstrate, measurement was the methodological activity by which Gestalt psychologists as well as comparative musicologists and anthropologists working on black music’s and dance’s African origins could claim scientific reliability. Second, Koffka’s invocation of the notion of Gestalt qualities in the analysis of sound perception resonates with the notions of habitus of listening and affect, both of which enable a nuanced critical analysis of those phenomenological principles of listening to music as black and of African origins that were specific to this historical moment. Third, and most importantly, he asserts what was at stake if a perceiver of sound were to lose any relationship with a fixed level of coordinates (physical or ideational) within an auditory space. Citing Hornbostel and Wertheimer’s experiments in directional listening, Koffka relates that the “left-right localization of sound depends upon the time difference with which the sound wave strikes the two ears, localization occurring towards the side whose ear is struck first.”\(^6\) He goes on to explain how locating a sound to fixed coordinates in front or “straight ahead” of the listener (or observer) depends on her or his orientation within a physical space, such as within the four walls of a room.\(^7\) When not squarely facing one of the walls, a listener, according to Koffka, is unable to successfully determine the sound’s location of origination and, as a result, she or he loses “subjective assurance.”\(^8\)

This final observation is significant for analyzing the phenomenological, not to mention historical, factors that conditioned how, where, and why listeners observed music and dance as black and of African origins. For, as this chapter’s case studies will show, listeners of music as performed by bodies racialized as black, whether on the streets or on stage in Havana, as recorded in the anthropological field in Trinidad, Brazil, and Cuba or in studios in New York City and Havana, and listened to in the laboratory or domestic spaces, were disposed to localizing that music in temporally and spatially distant locations, the effect of which was that the listener remained anchored in, or at
least aware of, their physical modern present. Sometimes listeners, particularly comparative musicologists, used headsets to get closer to the music (produced as field recordings) in order to better determine the distance that it had traveled in time and space by virtue of measuring the intervals separating its scalar, rhythmic, and harmonic elements. In other contexts, listeners such as concert goers, music critics, and record reviewers were momentarily transported in time and space by the music to primitive or savage Africa, or they heard the threat of disorder of a bygone stage of humanity’s or the nation’s social evolution, the experiences of which signaled varying possibilities of the listener’s subjective assurance within the modern present. Regardless of the physical locale in which the listening took place, most listeners perceived musical sound of certain qualities and especially as produced by black bodies, in accordance with modernity’s striating temporal and spatial horizons, orientations, and distances. Because without being anchored in the present or modern metropolis with a clear perception of temporal and spatial coordinates, one’s subjectivity as a modern white or black citizen was indeed threatened or altogether lost. For other listeners, however, their dislodgment from modernity into an antimodern or “smooth” space, no matter how momentary, was in fact desirable (see chapter 5).

In further exploring the contours of this historical moment’s logic of black music’s and dance’s African origins, the listening practices of modern aurality emerge as crucial activities of analytical and theoretical inquiry. Who was listening? What was being listened to? How and where was the listening taking place? With whom was the listener listening? When was it occurring? And why were listeners listening in these ways in the first place? Because access to this insight for the purposes of historical studies in particular is primarily obtained from text-based materials, such sources as articles, correspondence, and field notes require that we account for the listener’s translation of sound, hearing, and listening into written texts via the dominant discourses in circulation at that time, the process of which nevertheless resulted in the listener imbuing sound and the act of listening with profound meaning. In addition to text-based sources, the materiality of sound, too, helped determine this historical moment’s listening practices, sensory experiences, and reliance on certain discourses. Indeed, the 1930s and 1940s was a time when the pace of the materiality of sound increased exponentially such that new formats, including ten-inch and twelve-inch 78-RPM disc albums and 33 1/3 long-play records (LPs) necessitated sound’s mediation by the auditory together with the visual and tactile senses, lending therefore increased haptic depth to a listener’s listening experience.
As Veit Erlmann has recently noted, “The modern era without question witnessed the massive dissemination of new patterns of sensory consumption marked by distraction and the atrophy of concentrated listening, but this new way of hearing was also the result of efforts to sharpen the ears of modern subjects and to turn them into more finely calibrated and ever-ready receivers of signals and codes.”

This crisis of twentieth-century listening that Erlmann analyzes was in fact central to how and why modern listeners listened to or for Africa in the ways they did. It helps contextualize not only the importance Koffka places on the subjective assurance of the listener—given the anxiety-producing distractions from the mass dissemination of radio, films, and record players, not to mention the inhumane sounds of World War I and the rise of fascist governments—but also the growing emphasis of listening scientifically in comparative musicology, as we have already seen with Kolinski’s synthetic and analytical methodology of listening to field recordings. Chapter 1 analyzed the temporal and spatial significance of traveling to the bush to locate and document African music and dance of the past as hearkening to Auguste Comte’s positivist philosophy and sociology, wherein, Comte argued, human and social development passes through three stages, the third of which—the Positivist stage—enables the scientist “to take a comprehensive and simultaneous view of the past, present, and future of Humanity.”

This chapter will explore how this “view” of the past in particular also enabled listeners, whether scientists or otherwise, to hear the past in not only the recorded products of such research trips in the laboratory but also music as performed by black Cubans and other black Others in the streets, on stage, and on records produced in the studio or field, played on the radio, and listened to in domestic spaces. Such listening practices undergirded a habitus of listening to music as black and of African origins regardless of who the listener was or where and how the listening took place. The notion of habitus, as proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, is crucial here because it asserts that individuals internalize practices (thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions) as a result of historically, socially, and politically conditioned principles, the process and results of which, accumulating over time, appear as reasonable, commonsensical, or natural. In methodological terms Bourdieu advises that to explain such practices, one must relate the “social conditions in which the habitus that generated them was constituted, to the social conditions in which it is implemented.”

For the purposes of this chapter we can readily point to Johannes Fabian’s discussion of the naturalization of Judeo-Christian and Western time in his historiographical critique of anthropology’s emergence in the nineteenth century.
in order to historically situate listening to music as black and of the distant African past in the mid-twentieth century, especially as practiced by comparative musicologists. As Fabian explains, the modern Western notion of time developed as a system of temporal and spatial coordinates, with the Western metropolis operating as the spatial center and temporal present, onto which “given societies of all times and places [have been] plotted in terms of relative distance from the present.” The disposition to locating one’s subjectivity within modernity’s geographic center and temporal present—as is indicative of the scientist in Comte’s theory of human and social development—was fundamentally operational when listening to music during this historical moment.

Whereas the habitus of listening in general terms, as Judith Becker has proposed, is quite “tacit, unexamined, seemingly completely ‘natural,”’ the habitus of listening to music as black and of African origins often involved a disposition to listen for particular sonic characteristics—for example, hand drums, syncopation, offbeat phrasing, and nonharmonic singing—and interpret the meanings of these sounds and one’s affective responses to the musical event itself in varying yet rather predictable ways. Underlying this disposition were the metropolis and the bush, operating as one set of opposing coordinates in time and space, as the previous chapter demonstrated. It is thus not a coincidence that Gestalt psychologists, anthropologists, comparative musicologists, and historians tended to articulate sound to coordinates of time and space, for in doing so they perpetuated the practice of reifying their presence as listeners in modernity. Insofar as listening to music as black and of African origins anchored the nationalist listener in the modern present, it involved a rendering of African music as having contributed to the formation of what Hegel called the “Spirit of a people.” Indeed, listening to music as black and of African origins was for listeners a powerful way to appropriate to themselves the ideals of science, modernity, and the nation, making modern life, with all its technologically induced sonic distractions, navigable and livable and thus “enabling [modern listeners] to have a definite place in the world.”

So, what was it about music’s soundings that engendered these dispositions of listening? And how did the materiality of the music in performance and on recorded formats contribute to and expand the viability of these dispositions? An analysis of the public debate in Havana surrounding the question of African influence in Cuban music will begin to address these questions. This analysis will focus on the organization, content, and reception of three lecture-concerts, two featuring the music of Gilberto Valdés and the third the drumming, singing, and dancing of Santería, which took place in the months leading up to and following the celebration of carnival in Havana in February 1937.
During this time a contentious public debate emerged surrounding the city government’s reauthorization of *comparsas*, the celebratory music, dance, and parading of which for many, including some black intellectuals, embodied the worst ramifications—chaos, violence, and immorality—of Africa’s presence in an earlier stage of Cuban society’s development. The lecturers, Salvador García Agüero and Fernando Ortiz, aimed to lend the audience’s listening experience a sense of rationalism based on Hegelian, Comtean, and anthropological notions of the spirit, art, history, and cultural survivals of African civilization. García Agüero also accused those who denied Africa’s presence in Cuban music as, on the one hand, harboring repressed anxieties toward modern society’s black presence and, on the other, symptomatic of Cuban society’s classism, whereas for Alberto Arredondo the lingering African presence in Cuban music was a sonic marker of the nation’s ongoing colonial status under American imperialism. In either case, articulations of the sounds and movements of contemporaries to Cuba’s racial pasts, whether African or European, Congo or Spanish, Masinga or Gallego, were bounded by modernity’s political, economic, and cultural imperatives brewing in Cuba, the United States, and especially Europe in the late 1930s.

Rationalized listening to music as black and of African origins, as put on display at these lecture-concerts, was at its most scientifically compelling among comparative musicologists in the laboratory, where music originally recorded in the field was made, in Jonathan Sterne’s words, “cellular, cut into little pieces, and reassembled” for intense listening. When transcribed and analyzed in the laboratory, this kind of listening made the recording a crucial gauge in determining its content’s sonic historical and spatial coordinates. Herskovits set up the Laboratory of Comparative Musicology at Northwestern for his student Richard Waterman so that his work on the acculturation of African music in the New World could continue in Kolinski’s absence. Waterman listened to transcribe and analyze Herskovits’s field recordings from Trinidad and Brazil, doing so at times with Nigerian university students who were working as research assistants at Northwestern. He also drew from Gestalt, behavioral, and psychoanalytical psychology, from which he would develop his theories of “hot” rhythm and metronome sense, thus contributing significantly to the ongoing debate among American academics regarding the African presence in American Negro music. Waterman, like Kolinski before him, certainly fit the profile of the modern audile wherein listening was the privileged sense for knowing or experiencing. Only, for Waterman, his notions of “hot” rhythm and metronome sense reveal an eclectic application of psychological theories marked particularly by Sigmund Freud’s topography of the mind, wherein
his interlocution with Nigerian students, as they listened to field recordings together, opened to Waterman access to the African musician’s unconscious. Thus the unconscious region of the musician’s mind served for Waterman as that which the bush served for Herskovits, that is, a topographically determined spatial level, previously unexplored scientifically, in which Waterman oriented his listening in the past as stored in the black mind.22

In analyzing black music and its African origins as the product of certain listening dispositions, instead of as materializations of African musical retentions, the distinctions made between, on the one hand, modern and superficial black music and, on the other, orthodox and authoritative black music erode altogether. Thus, by deconstructing these otherwise historically and ideologically formative dichotomies, we are able to further study the habitus of listening to music as black and of African origins in other contexts. Whether purchasing from Decca, Victor, disc, or Ethnic Folkways Library, a record buyer was already disposed to listening to the recorded music of Cuba or the Caribbean as emanating from a distant and often dangerous past, in large part as a result of the disc’s promotion and packaging, not to mention record reviews published in widely read American magazines and newspapers. Even before placing the disc on the record player and hearing the music’s sonic characteristics, the listener was preparing to go, as one reviewer put it, on an adventure. This, along with the music’s effect, tended to evoke in the listener predictable kinds of emotions, meanings, and discourses, oftentimes regardless of the musician—folk, traditional, cult, jazz, white, or black—who happened to be captured playing music on disc. What was certain was the listener’s desire to remain in, or momentarily escape from but always return to, her or his subjective assurance in the modern present.

Locating Africa’s Presence

Havana’s carnival season of 1937 was a unique moment in twentieth-century Cuban social history during which the city’s residents partook in a celebration that provoked an impassioned debate over the nation’s musical identity and, in particular, black music’s effects on the public’s well-being. The editors of Adelante, a black social club’s periodical, described it as the “most notorious [event] . . . since the matter has provoked a troubling and animated debate.”23 This debate centered on the decision by Havana’s mayor, Antonio Beruff Mendieta, and the Advisory Committee on Municipal Tourism to reauthorize the participation of comparsas, or performance groups, that its supporters considered beautiful and respectable examples of folkloric culture to parade as
Robin Moore explains that municipal authorities lifted the twenty-five-year-old ban of these groups for at least three reasons: to bolster tourism during carnival in February; to feature it in response to the international vogue of black primitivist music and dance; and to recover the collective past during a heightened degree of Cuban nationalist sentiment following the overthrow of the Gerardo Machado dictatorship in 1933. Because comparsas, along with rival neighborhood performance groups known as congas, were originally banned in 1912 for the occurrence of violence, particularly among the latter groups, the fear among those who objected to the comparsa’s reinstatement, as well as those who supported it, was that congas, with their “vulgar music, devoid of any beauty in their dancing and singing,” would spontaneously form and mix with the comparsas, thus inciting violence once again.

The mayor’s detractors articulated the specter of the “repulsive” conga’s re-emergence among the orderly comparsas to its origins among African slaves in the colonial period, and thus reason enough not to lift the ban, while his supporters proposed to revive the comparsas, “elevating them to the category of folkloric art representative and evocative of customs and popular traditions of the past born from our nation’s core . . . [that is] from the mixture and fusion of the diverse races integrating this core.” Moore has considered this debate’s racial implications in regard to the ideological underpinnings of the formation of Cuban cultural nationalism. Historians of Cuban labor in the early twentieth century similarly point to business practices, state immigration policy, and labor organizing to explain the contradictory definitions of racial difference at this time, all the while noting the dominant ideology equating whiteness with progress and modernity and denigrating blackness as inferior, atavistic, and savage.

For the purposes of this chapter, Cuban race history, along with the debate surrounding the inclusion of comparsas and the threat of the conga’s unsanctioned reemergence in the city’s carnival celebration, provide the discursive and spatial backdrops for the analysis of a set of lecture-concerts programmed in 1936 and 1937 to address the question of Africa’s presence in the nation’s music and in the character of the Cuban people. These lecture-concerts provide invaluable openings into understanding the reasons why listening to music as black, of African origins, degrading, or respectable empowered social, cultural, and municipal organizations to form alliances, and these lecturers, musicians, and critics to act, discursively or otherwise. Whether the comparsa’s and conga’s sonic and performed characteristics were African retentions biologically or culturally determined was beside the point. What mattered more was
the reconciliation of the African primitive past with, or its condemnation as a
detriment to, Cuban society’s modernizing present, which for either perspec-
tive hinged on the desire for a culturally assimilated or racially homogeneous
nation.

Havana’s preparations for the 1937 carnival season began almost a year be-
fore its official start when the city’s Department of Tourism approved the for-
formation of the Advisory Committee on Municipal Tourism in March 1936.30
This committee was charged with the responsibility of approving the expenditure
of forty thousand dollars of municipal funds by the department and mayor to
support the organization and promotion of carnival events. The promotion of
the events took place via newspapers, cinemas, radio, and posters. The com-
mittee also approved expenditures for the construction of public stages and
dance floors, musical groups, prizes, concerts, costumes, and the formation of
two comparsas, Los Guajiros (Country Folk) and El Barracón (The Hut), to
participate with other comparsas in the carnival parade. Three of the concerts,
featuring the music of thirty-two-year-old Cuban composer Gilberto Valdés,
took place in the Anfiteatro Nacional (National Amphitheater); the first two,
on February 18 and 25, occurred at the height of carnival celebrations, and the
third followed on March 11.31

Before scheduling Valdés’s concerts, the advisory committee had attended a
lecture-concert featuring his music in November 1936 at the Institución His-
pano Cubana de Cultura (Hispanic Cuban Institute of Culture), an association
that the Department of Tourism recognized as “highly prestigious” and having
“authority” in matters concerning the nation’s Hispanic folkloric roots.32 Club
Atenas (Club Athens), a black middle-class social club also regarded by the
department as being of “well-known prestige,” had invited the committee to
attend this event with the hope that its members would invite Valdés to partici-
pate in programs scheduled for the upcoming carnival season. Preceding the
performance was a lecture delivered by Salvador García Agüero, an educator,
member of the Cuban Popular Socialist Party, and treasurer of the Sociedad de
Estudios Afro-Cubanos (Society of Afro-Cuban Studies), an association con-
cerned with the African folkloric roots of Cuban culture. In his lecture, titled
“Presencia africana en la música nacional” (The African presence in the nation’s
music), García Agüero stressed Valdés’s “veracious ability” to give voice to the
“black emotion” in Cuban music for all Cubans to appreciate, thereby consti-
tuting in his music the promise of a racially unified Cuban society:

White criollo, Gilberto S. Valdés has, in addition to his musical genius
and vigorous sincerity, a singular sensibility to receive, understand, and
interpret the black emotion in rhythm and harmony. And, in doing so, he remains faithful to the spontaneity of the themes that he pulls out from the very life of the black man: pain, jubilation, rebellion, faith. . . . It is not by stabbing the drum and strangling the black song that he elevates the height of art and Cuban society, but by lifting the yoke of hostilities and reserved worries that attempt to keep the black man in the shadows of an unjust omission. 33

Throughout his lecture García Agüero referred to the “emotional tone of the Negro,” which represented, he argued, the essence of the soul of the black composer and musician dating to the colonial period and thus serves as the undeniable evidence, no matter how “latent” in modern Cuban music, of Africa’s presence in contemporary Cuban music and society. 34 He pointed to the historical record to assert that music making throughout colonial society was “in the hands of the black man” or “in the hands of the descendants of Africa.” Now, with Cuban society having progressed from slavery and colonialism to freedom and a republic, García Agüero believed that “music is, certainly, the collective manifestation in which we can best observe the mental evolution of a human group (and even much of its material transformation) from the shadows of its primitive stage to the supreme stage of its civilization.” 35 Thus García Agüero, like so many other Latin American intellectuals before him, took the positivist view that music, as the most social, resonant, and reasoned of the arts, rendered in the most vivid way the consolidation of the nation’s consciousness. 36 But the realization of Cuban society’s evolution, he believed, was being hampered by the persistence of racism and classism, as was evidenced by some critics who “denied the African influence in our nation’s traditional music.” 37

This alliance between these diverse public entities to install Valdés and his music in the city’s sanctioned carnival events (where not only Havana’s residents but also the nation’s rural visitors, or guajiros, as well as foreign tourists would watch and hear the sounds of modern Cuba) formed in large part from his music’s resonance with their own conviction in seeing the completion of the nation’s progress toward modernity without, however, denying the presence of its African past in its musical and cultural soul. Identified as white, Valdés was born in Jovellanos, a rural town in the province of Matanzas that Cuban folklorist Herminio Portell Vilá characterized as “one of the strongest nuclei of Cuba’s African populations.” 38 By 1924, Valdés had moved to Havana, where he eventually studied composition with Spanish-born composer Pedro Sanjuán. 39 Indeed, Valdés’s advocates, both black and white, mapped the evolution of Cuba’s progress from its colonial origins to its modernized status onto
the composer’s biographical trajectory from rural Jovellanos to modern Havana, as well as onto the sonic resonances of his music. As the discourse surrounding his concerts and music demonstrates, they also pointed out, or else alluded to, his whiteness as material evidence of the nation’s synthesis of the primitive African’s spirit into the modern Cuban’s emotion.

In a statement dedicated at Valdés’s concerts at the National Amphitheater in February 1937, the Department of Tourism declared, “Because Gilberto Valdés’s orchestra, who will tonight offer the performance of the director’s original black poems, is, certainly, the admirable vehicle that brings to us all that which for some time now was due to foreigners, that is, the profound vibration of that spiritual chord that can give them with maximum veracity the intimate sentiment of the Cuban emotion; and to us [Cubans] . . . he hands over in the rhythm inherited from Africa the deepest impulse of our ardent and sensual exaltation.” The rhetoric of this introduction certainly drives home the municipal government’s goal to present the city as racially inclusive and modern. But it also prepares the audience, both Cuban and foreign tourist alike, to locate the presence of Cuba’s African past as sounded in Valdés’s “black poems” in the spirit, sentiment, emotion, exaltation, and soul of the modern Cuban citizen. In addition, mayor Beruff Mendieta, in a report to the advisory committee, plainly stated that “one [of Valdés’s three concerts at the National Amphitheater] will be offered free to the people, in accordance with our plan of cultural dissemination and to put the masses in contact with correct interpretations of their very own music.” The mayor was explicit in identifying the altruistic nature of the city’s plans and those whom they targeted as the recipients of the aesthetic veracity in Valdés’s music, but he was less explicit in critiquing the deniers of African influence in Cuban culture and music, for it was they presumably who were to be the recipients, he and the advisory committee hoped, of its goal to disseminate the music of the masses as interpreted “correctly” by Valdés and his orchestra.

It is not known to what extent the masses populated Valdés’s audience at the amphitheater. We do know, however, that among the audience’s tourists were Beatrice Wilson from New York and Helen Cooper of Washington, DC, two black American women who were visiting Havana and were in attendance at the concert accompanied by Zoila Gálvez, Cuba’s most popular soprano at the time. According to Gálvez, Wilson and Cooper were “surprised that the musical spectacle, which [they] had described as something traditional of ours, was for them familiar from the melodic and rhythmic point of view.” Gálvez’s recollection of Wilson’s and Cooper’s hearing Valdés’s music as melodically and rhythmically familiar must be interpreted in the context of the formation of
her own identifications with African and American Negro music based on her performance career in Europe and the United States (see chapter 3). What is important here is the Department of Tourism’s intention in contracting Valdés to prepare a series of concerts exhibiting the nation’s modern status in music. The advisory committee, following Valdés’s concert in November 1936, approved an advance for the composer to “organize an orchestra with all of the elements necessary for the exact interpretation of his creations.”43 With this advance he orchestrated his music for a symphonic orchestra with the addition of, according to the Department of Tourism, “a chorus of twenty vocalists and a battery of [batá] drums, both authentically black, recruited from genuine cultivators of this musical modality,” that is, musicians of the Santería religion. The batá drummers were Jesús Pérez (okónkolo), Aguedo Morales (itótele), and the leader Pablo Roche (iyá).44 In addition, the performance featured two Cuban vocal soloists, Rita Montaner (soprano) and Alfredo Valdés (tenor).45 Montaner had by 1937 attained national and international popularity as a vocalist and actress of the theater and film, having appeared on stage in the United States with Al Jolson and in Paris with Josephine Baker.46 While not as well known internationally as Montaner, Alfredo Valdés had gained national popularity in his own right performing with Cuban popular dance bands, including the Septeto Nacional.47

Thus, with the participation of “authentically black” and “genuine” batá drummers and singers of Lucumí, the Yoruba-based language of Santería, along with popular singers of the stage and film, Valdés’s music better enabled his audience the vantage point of listening to Cuba’s African past without having to leave the city’s aesthetically or geographically modern present. Indeed, in choosing the recently constructed national amphitheater, located adjacent to the waterway entrance to the Port of Havana, through which the tourist members of the audience probably arrived and left the city, the Department of Tourism further prepared the audience to listen to a “fusion of what some might call ‘cultured music’ and ‘savage music,’” reassuring them, however, that they would try to explain the “exact technical criteria” of Valdés’s music.48 The program notes follow with a somewhat detailed explanation, most likely prepared by Valdés himself, of the tuning system of each of the three double-headed batá drums (okónkolo, itótele, and iyá), identifying their pitch placements on the musical staff.49 The purpose of this musically technical explanation was twofold: first, to show that the rhythms of these African drums, as heard in the introduction to Valdés’s “Tambó” (Drum), the opening piece of the program, were “at once, melodic and harmonic”; and, second, to show that the orchestra “executes variations without changing the notes inside the same rhythmic
and harmonic complex” set by the batá. This presentation of African rhythm’s commensurability with Western music notation, harmony, and melody seemed appropriate, since Valdés’s music satisfied the concert organizers’ desires to harness Cuban music’s African origins within a modern musical and social setting. What is more, the first section of “Tambó,” following the introduction, is set in a 6/8 meter wherein the batá, piano, bass clarinet, and double bass alternate ostinato phrases in duple and triple, thus creating a hemiola, which the program notes are careful to explain lacks syncopation: “The batá, in reality, do not execute syncopation. The listener thinks he is hearing syncopations as a consequence of the rhythmic combination of the drums that proceed, one in triple time and the other in duple.”

Of all the qualities of rhythm, syncopation had carried in it an overwhelming power to affect the perception of it as quintessentially black, African, or savage and threatening to the body politic, psychologically and biologically. As Ronaldo Radano points out in regard to the emergence of ragtime in the United States, its xenophobic detractors equated its syncopated rhythms with other epidemics or contagions endangering the health of whites and thus threatening the integrity of the (white) modern social order. This discourse of black rhythm as pathological to the morality of whites and blacks and the civilized status of American society continued through the Jazz Age in the 1920s but it was certainly not unique to the United States. For, in addition to some of the American tourists in the audience, Cuban listeners might have also harbored qualms about listening to black syncopated music. In fact, García Agüero made sure to stress to the advisory committee, which attended Valdés’s concert in November, that the composer “evades syncopation. What fundamentally preoccupies him [instead] is the development of the rhythmic phrase.” With this, the department in its program notes was able to reassure their audiences that what they might hear as syncopation was in fact not that at all. As was the case with nineteenth-century spirituals and musical notation in the United States, the discourse of notation in the department’s program notes became “a way of encouraging a particular way of hearing,” in this case, hearing Valdés’s music as simultaneously modern and of African pedigree. However, since notation was perceived as unable to fully harness African rhythm, as Kolinski complained in transcribing Herskovits’s field recordings, so were municipal officials, Valdés’s music, and its advocates unable to convince all listeners of the African presence in, or its value to, modern Cuban music and society.

One of the most vocal critics of the reinstatement of comparsas, Valdés’s music, and its advocates was journalist and economist Alberto Arredondo,
who identified himself as an anti-imperialist. Drawing rather poignantly from Hegel, Marx, and Comte, Arredondo asserted the following:

In terms of “afrocubanismo” we repeat that it is as absurd as “hispanocubanismo.” The Cuban nation cannot afford the likes of Fernando Ortiz who, on the one hand, flatters Hispanicists with the distinguished “Hispana Cubana de Cultura,” and, on the other, flatters blacks and mestizos with the “Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos.” [ . . . ] Our nation is such because it has stopped being the nation of Africans or the nation of Spanish. Both, Africans and Spanish, brought to a geographic zone (space) and evolving into a distinct society (time) dialectically shaped a distinct nationality.

Modernity’s spatial and temporal coordinates, in this instance, functioned in plain sight and sound, for, as Arredondo states, they measure how and when the modern Cuban materialized. It is important to clarify that García Agüero and Arredondo, both of whom were black Cuban intellectuals, theorized Cuban society based on the “internal laws of history” or Comtean positivism and Marxian material dialecticism in economic as well as historical terms. In his Marxist-inspired characterization of the comparsa as a “drug” of the “lumpen-proletariat,” however, Arredondo relates what he claims to have overheard spectators—“not only politicians, journalists, and capitalists but also those of the working classes”—say of the comparsa participants from various vantage points along the parade route: “And then they say that the black man has evolved! . . . They are degenerates! They’re in the jungle! In plain barbarity, the blacks need to be civilized!” Where Arredondo and Valdés’s advocates parted ways was thus in regard to the viability of the nation’s African past in modern Cuban society and culture. For Arredondo, the nation’s African past was dead and, at best, Valdés’s music could be considered African but not Cuban or, worse, Afro-Cuban: “Those rhythms that Valdés resuscitates constituted a stage of our musical development. [ . . . ] One may maintain that Gilberto S. Valdés’s artistic dedication should be known as ‘African’ since its rhythms are refined of all other influences.”

In his book El negro en Cuba (The black man in Cuba), published in 1939, Arredondo reiterated his condemnation of afrocubanismo, whose racist imperatives, he proclaimed, “seek to divide the black man from the Cuban.” In terms of music, could he have really meant unhinging the black man from modernity?

Following his concerts at the National Amphitheater, which the Havana weekly magazine Carteles proclaimed were “triumphant,” Valdés’s orchestra
performed again on March 24, a concert organized by the Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos and hosted by Club Atenas in honor of a visiting cohort of French dignitaries, among whom was the author André Demaison. De- maison’s descriptions of the effect that listening to Valdés’s music had on him provides yet another occurrence of modernity’s habitus of listening to music as black and of African origins, in this instance from the perspective of a French author who, according to Carteles, had “written and published six very important books about African life and dramas and novels about African themes.” Demaison published his impressions of Valdés’s music in the edition of the French periodical Les Nouvelles littéraires, artistiques et scientifiques (Literary, artistic, and scientific news) that appeared on January 29, 1938. Titling his article “Musique Afro-Cubaine: Souvenirs de La Havane” (Afro-Cuban music: Souvenirs from Havana), the author reveals that after listening to “Tambó” and “Sangre africana” (African blood), he felt

once again, a shake, the one that invades me when I listen to the great ancient and modern works. . . . As the chorus, orchestral themes, and solos develop, they launch, they mutually penetrate, I do not know in which continent I find myself, at this hour. And as to intensify my strange disturbance, the faces of those women who balance themselves singing leitmotifs, evoke the diversity of the African populations. . . . One comes from Egypt; that other one is a Somalian, that one, a little stocky, a Makua; this one is from Dahomey, without a doubt; a Yoruba is together with a Mandinga; and not even their suits of diverse colors . . . managed to separate those distant presences that have materialized before my eyes.

Demaison’s rhetoric seems reminiscent of accounts of travel to Africa written by European explorers, dating back to as early as the seventeenth century. But there is much more to analyze in his rhetoric’s temporal and spatial implications, such as in the becomings before his eyes of “those distant presences” or African ethnicities embodied by the singers. Not only the music’s sound but also the singers’ faces and bodily comportment contributed to this performance’s affect, producing in Demaison, among other physical sensations (e.g., “shakes”), a “strange disturbance,” only to result in his seemingly ecstatic relocation to Africa and, simultaneously, the “materialization” of Africa and its populations in Havana. In an interview published in Carteles Demaison explained, “We feel the nostalgic and sensual tropic in the broken yell of Jorgelina singing ‘Sangre africana,’ or in the melancholic drum of Pablo [Roche] when his artistic hands play ‘Tambó.’” In describing his listening to “Ilé-nko Ilé-nbe,” Demaison asserts, “In a hurry, Africa reveals itself. [. . .] These three drummers [Pérez, Morales, and Roche] are
terribly curious! I observed them, before they started to play, indifferent, similar to all of the other Negroes in Havana.” Such musical performances listened to and observed by Demaison and those spectators whom Arredondo reportedly overheard commenting on the comparsas exemplify the kinds of temporalizing that were undertaken by individuals in general on a moment-to-moment, everyday basis. In other words, at the micropolitical level, the temporalizing in these spectators’ utterances reveals the functionality they sought from particular conceptual equipment (i.e., black man, evolve, degenerate, barbarity, the jungle, Africa, Egypt, Yoruba, and so on) that they deemed singularly handy at that moment in order to best allow what they were seeing and hearing to be given to them and others (in Demaison’s case, his readers) in homogeneous, appropriate, and familiar ways.

Moreover, what seems to escape commentary by Demaison—that is, Valdés’s use of modernist compositional techniques to include inflections of the whole-tone scale, modal harmonic patterns, and the “mystic chord” heard at the beginning and at the end of “Sangre africana”—might in fact have been functioning, in Gestalt terms, as the sonic ground from which the perception of its temporalizing features (“nostalgic and sensual tropic in the broken yell”) took maximum effect.

Although this conceptual equipment as projected in these instances suggests that these performers share a common distance and pastness (i.e., one Africa accessible along the same evolutionary trajectory), we must take into account those subjective assurances from which the temporalizing is occurring in the first place. For Demaison’s colonialist perception of the African presence in Cuba as that derived from his experiences traveling in Africa beforehand differed from García Agüero’s Hegelian perception of another Africa’s metaphysical presence in the constitution of the modern Cuban’s spirit, which equally differed from Arredondo’s Comtean perception of yet another Africa relegated to an earlier stage of the modern Cuban’s evolution but whose reappearances are the results of racially divisive and politically exploitive imperatives.

In still another temporalized Africa, Fernando Ortiz projects Africa’s presence in Cuba based on the current anthropological notions of retention and survival, undergirded nonetheless by his own positivist perspective on Cuban history. As a founding and active member of both the Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos and the Institución Hispano Cubana de Cultura, Ortiz had assisted in organizing Valdés’s concerts in November and March. Following these concerts, Ortiz organized his own lecture-concert program, which took place on May 30, 1937, at the Institución Hispano Cubana de Cultura. Titling the program “La música sagrada de los negros yorubá en Cuba” (The sacred music...
of the Yoruba Negroes in Cuba), Ortiz aimed for his lecture presentation to be a “simple exhibit of the instruments, rhythms, songs and dances constituting one of the most primitive religious liturgies of the black Yoruba and of their Cuban descendants, as is conserved here in its ancestral purity, without contamination of European music, nor with vernacular decorations that would corrupt its sacred feeling.”

There was no being transported to Africa here. Rather, the cultural practices of Africa’s Yoruba, Bantu, Calabari, Ganga, and Dahomey had remained fixed, unchanged, and isolated from modern Cuba since slavery—proof positive scientifically of Africa’s presence in Cuba. Indeed, Ortiz promised his audience that “they would hear and see” Yoruba religious music and dance, which is “conserved pure and orthodox in Cuba. [. . . ] Until today they have not left the temples of the Negroes.”

In his introduction Ortiz declared that his lecture-presentation on the musical and ethnographic qualities of Cuba’s Yoruba was to be “the extreme opposite” of Valdés’s November program, which presented the “extreme advancement of modernity” by featuring his compositions “of the modern musical technique.” But to demonstrate Africa’s presence in the music featured in both presentations (modernist and sacred orthodox), Ortiz invited Pablo Roche’s batá ensemble, the same one that had performed with Valdés’s orchestra in the National Amphitheater, to participate in his program (figure 2.1). The lecture itself, as published in the Estudios Afrocubanos volume of 1938, is quite remarkable for Ortiz’s emic descriptions of the music and dance of Santería. For instance, he discussed the añá, or sacred force, residing in consecrated batá drums; he gave careful attention to the Yoruba terms for the drums, players, Orishas (gods), and other aspects associated with the music; and he described in fluid detail aspects of playing the drums, including methods of producing the tones necessary to make the batá speak “in the Lucumí language,” as well as tuning the drums; the mimetic aspects of the dances dedicated to the Orishas Babalú Ayé, Ochosi, Changó, and Yemayá; and the Orisha’s characteristics. In regard to explaining the music itself, however, he confessed that he was insufficiently prepared to do so; instead he cited Gilberto Valdés’s conclusions about the music, one of which concerned the lack of syncopation in batá drumming that had already appeared in the Department of Tourism’s program notes prepared for Valdés’s concerts at the National Amphitheater. Ortiz, however, gave a more thorough and accurate explanation of Valdés’s conclusion, which is equally remarkable since it anticipates Richard Waterman’s theory of metronome sense by at least six years.

According to Valdés, songs and rhythms in the music of “black Africans” do not accent strong beats; particularly in rhythms, strong beats are “represented
as silences.” These silences, Valdés continued, are “registered mentally by the instrumentalist for the complete integration of the rhythm,” and “reflected by the musician, we might say instinctively or unconsciously, in the movements of their body, their gestures and postures, or by certain soundless contacts of their hands with the drum.” As we will see, Waterman’s theory of metronome sense was based on similar musical and psychological explanations, with the addition of his suggestion that dancers, too, accented strong beats with their steps. For his part, Ortiz also anticipated Waterman’s work in discussing the percussiveness, antiphony, and timbral density of Santería music.

Following the lecture, an ankoori (choir) of sixteen women and men, including soloists Benito “Roncona” González and Alberto Angarica, sung chants of the Santería liturgy. Other members of the choir included Alberto Zayas, who would appear on field recordings made by Harold Courlander in 1941 and on the booklet cover of the album Music of the Cults of Cuba produced in 1947.
The final part of the presentation, a *luluyonkori*, involved a complete performance of drumming, song, and dance, featuring four dancers who demonstrated the sacred mimetic significances dedicated to the Orishas (figure 2.2). But Ortiz made sure to clarify for the audience that the batá were not consecrated, which, he noted, is required for actual ceremonies. In addition, the dancing was “without abandoning itself to the emotional frenzy that provokes the experience of possession, which is beyond the purpose of this lecture.” For our purposes, this is a crucial moment in the lecture because, in spite of his earlier claim of the “orthodoxy” and “purity” of the African music and dance the audience members were about to hear and see, he confesses to its necessarily artificial nature in recognition of the secular or modern space of the lecture-concert hall. But he also refers to Cuban society’s anxieties about Santería by virtue of his attributing its process of possession to the “emotional frenzy” of the dancers rather than to the presence of the Orishas invoked in the drumming, singing, and dancing in their entirety. In other words, Africa’s presence in such emotional frenzy was decidedly unmodern, as opposed to its presence in the emotion of the modern Cuban citizen. We can further pry loose this contradictory moment in Ortiz’s text by examining other texts (both recorded and written) pertaining to this event’s intended orthodoxy and purity in contrast with Valdés’s concerts.

For example, among the *toques* (rhythms) performed for Ortiz’s audience were “Ilé” and “Yemayá,” which Valdés used in “Sangre africana” and “Tambó,” respectively. Set in the colonial period, according to the Department of Tourism’s program notes, “Sangre africana” is a dramatic rendition of slaves at work who throw down their tools at the sound of distant singing and drumming. At specific moments of the performance, the program notes continue, the batá and tympani initiate the “rhythmic phrase” (i.e., toque for “Ilé”) along with the cellos and bassoons. Later, “in the middle of a cadence of the violins, a violent percussion and a silence denote the rebellion of those who have hurled their irons to the ground.” In the recorded version of “Tambó,” the toque for “Yemayá” is played at a fast tempo, as it is in the sacred context, according to Ortiz, who describes it as a “singularly vigorous rhythm.” It is unknown how many of the audience members, if any, might have recalled Valdés’s “Sangre africana” and “Tambó” upon listening to the toques for “Ilé” and “Yemayá,” but for Ángel Lázaro, whose review of Ortiz’s lecture-concert, titled “The Academy and the Drums,” appeared in *Carteles*, the performance portion transformed the stage of the Institución Hispano Cubana de Cultura into a “jungle”: “the jungle suddenly arose imaginatively under the spell of the ancestral voices. And the noble audience . . . felt that unknown gods had entered the temple of the
As the noble audience sat in their seats located in the academic world, squarely facing the stage, the jungle materialized once again from the distant sounds and frenzied movements of the black bodies on stage. Indeed, such materializations of Africa and the jungle on stage or in the streets of Havana reveal modern aurality’s practices, which together with modernity’s conceptual equipment for dealing with dance music’s affects, racialized as they were in the black body, made these practices tacit, unexamined, and completely natural to Cubans and foreigners alike. The fact that modernity’s power brokers (such as municipal officials, intellectuals, and musicians) enacted what Jacques Attali said about music’s power of “making people believe by shaping what they hear” is beside the point of modern aurality’s privileging of the ear as a form of embodied knowledge. But the significance of listeners’ subjective assurances
in the act of projecting such listening practices onto others is, in the end, what matters most if we are going to take seriously Martin Heidegger’s claim that time is “intrinsically self-projection pure and simple.”

The debate among Cubans over Africa’s presence in the spirit, culture, and music of the nation continued into the 1940s, as did the debate about Africa’s presence in American Negro music and culture in the United States. Although distinct in regard to each nation’s history with colonialism, slavery, and race relations, these debates were undergirded fundamentally by the same dispositions of listening to music as black and of African origins, wherein Freudian psychology provided a particularly apt, if new, set of conceptual equipment to map the topography of anxiety toward and repression of black music’s and dance’s African origins.

Habitus of Listening Scientifically

At the American Folklore Society annual meeting in 1960, Richard Waterman presented a paper titled “On Flogging a Dead Horse: Lessons Learned from the Africanisms Controversy” in which he presented five factors that he argued contributed to the resolution of what he called the Africanisms controversy as it pertained to black American music in particular. As he makes clear in the title, Waterman considered the controversy a settled issue and thus felt a “dis-吨ue” when he was asked, once again, to broach the “importance of the African cultural background for certain present-day characteristics of the music and the folklore of the American Negro.” Indeed, as we have seen in this chapter thus far and in the previous chapter, this debate had raged among Waterman’s colleagues in comparative musicology since at least the 1920s. Among the five factors of the acculturation method that he credited with contributing to the resolution of this controversy, the second—knowledge of the characteristics of West African music, namely via phonograph record and magnetic tape—is especially relevant not merely to the historiographical study of comparative musicology of New World Negro music but more importantly to this chapter’s analysis of the practices of listening to music as black and of African origins. Whereas the analysis of the debate in Havana focused on explaining the spatially and temporally demarcating principles of listening to Africa’s sonically embodied presence in music as performed in Havana in 1936 and 1937, this section takes into account these demarcating principles as evoked primarily by sound recording technology as utilized by Richard Waterman in the 1940s, the comparative musicological work of which, as he argued, definitively settled the question of the African origins of black music.
By the time Waterman began his graduate studies in anthropology at Northwestern University in 1941, researchers in the fields of anthropology, folklore, and comparative musicology had used sound recordings for the scientific study of primitive music for about fifty years. During this time, sound recording technology changed, but the scientific motivation in using this technology to study primitive music changed little from its study in the prephonographic era. Writing in 1903, for example, Otto Abraham and Erich von Hornbostel reiterated the Comtean notion that the music of primitive peoples can “provide us with criteria for a way of looking at the music practice of [European music] antiquity” so long as comparative musicologists can “securely establish” their common factors and analogous contexts of musical development. The fact, according to Abraham and Hornbostel, that music transcription and phonographic recording are the two best methods available to comparative musicologists to establish these criteria not only bolsters the comparative musicologist’s viewpoint of music’s past and present but in the case of the phonograph makes her or his scientific task easier to accomplish: “With the phonograph one can record a piece of music and study it at leisure in the studio, where attention is not so much distracted visually as it is at performances by exotic peoples. Moreover, the phonograph has special advantages.”

These special advantages afforded by the phonograph, realizable only in the studio or laboratory, included adjusting the speed of the playback to “bring within the ear’s comprehension” music that is too quick; splitting the music into fragments for better measurement in terms of pitch distribution and tuning; and securing a lasting document for repeatable and comparative listenings. The sound recording for Abraham, Hornbostel, and the next generation of comparative musicologists carried in it, as Jonathan Sterne points out, a triple temporality of linear-historical time, geological time, and fragmented time. That is, in belonging to the equipmental contexture of measuring time and space (along with the conceptual equipment discussed above), recording technology enabled the anthropologist and comparative musicologist to not merely record the voices of dying cultures, archive the sound recording, and listen to it repeatedly in the laboratory in temporal fragments for analysis; it also allowed for the preservation, and thus control, of time writ large. It was these dispositions toward the field recording that compelled Herskovits to not only go to the bush to preserve the origins of American Negro music but also to establish the Laboratory of Comparative Musicology at Northwestern and eagerly recruit Richard Waterman to matriculate in the graduate program in anthropology so that his entire collection of field recordings could be analyzed.
In his attempts to recruit Waterman (who had also been accepted to Yale University), Herskovits wrote to him in June 1941 expressing his support of Waterman’s dual interests in anthropological theory and musicology by suggesting he could work on his discs from Trinidad, which Herskovits had recorded during the summer of 1939. Herskovits even hoped that Kolinski would be at Northwestern that academic year, and he suggested to Waterman that Kolinski could help train him in the methods of comparative musicology. At the time, Herskovits was still writing letters to raise financial support to help save Kolinski from Nazi-occupied Belgium. The most recent letter Herskovits had received from Kolinski was written on March 24, 1941, in Brussels, informing Herskovits of the possibility of receiving a regular visa from the US consulate in Antwerp. That summer Herskovits worked persistently to secure another lecturer appointment for Kolinski at Northwestern, which was granted, and to raise money to pay for his transportation and salary, but to no avail. By June all US consulates and embassies had closed in Germany and in all German-occupied territories, thus closing off the official channels to secure Kolinski’s transport out of Europe and to the United States. In addition, Herskovits had received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to conduct research in Brazil for twelve months, starting in September 1941, and with the United States’ entrance in the war that December, Kolinski’s only chance for survival was to hide, which is what he did, in Ghent, Belgium. Unbeknownst to Herskovits, his letter of March 24 was the last he would receive from Kolinski until Ghent’s liberation in 1944.

As for Waterman, Herskovits informed him that in his absence during the academic year of 1941–1942, William R. Bascom and Herbert Passin were “going to be in charge” in the Department of Anthropology and “will be able to give you stimulating work.” Waterman completed his master’s in anthropology with Morris E. Opler at Claremont College in June 1941. With Opler’s input, Herskovits designed Waterman’s program for his first year at Northwestern. He advised Waterman to take Social Organization, Folklore, and Political Institutions with Bascom, and Primitive Economics with Passin. He also encouraged him to take courses in the Department of Psychology, specifically Social Motivation and Conflict and Psychological Foundations of Social Sciences with Donald T. Campbell, and to pursue independent study with Robert H. Seashore, who was “carrying further,” Herskovits noted, “his father’s [Carl E. Seashore’s] studies of the psychology of music.” Based on Waterman’s use of concepts such as “subliminal perception,” “subconscious,” “unconscious,” and “Gestalt,” beginning in his dissertation, in addition to Seashore’s publications dating from this time, Waterman clearly and eagerly drew from Seashore’s
instruction in various fields of psychology, which included psychoanalysis, Gestalt psychology, and behaviorism. Herskovits, as well, had applied the Freudian concepts of repression, compensation, and the unconscious in his attempt to put forth an analysis of “primitive psychology” among the Dahomey and the Bush Negro of Suriname. Thus, Freudian, Gestalt, and behavioral psychology played a formative role in Waterman’s training as a graduate student.

Waterman began to inquire about a dissertation topic by the end of his first year of study. With Herskovits still in Brazil conducting fieldwork, Waterman asked Bascom for advice on possible topics; he expressed interest in studying the Negro in Mexico, of which Bascom disapproved for the lack of existing scholarship on, and thus the low probability of receiving research support for, this topic. Bascom suggested that Waterman wait until Herskovits returned, and in the meanwhile encouraged him to contact historian Fernando Romero of Peru to inquire about the possibilities of doing research on black populations of Colombia, Peru, Argentina, Uruguay, or Chile. He also discouraged Waterman from considering Cuba since he himself was planning to conduct research on the “Yoruba influence” there, adding, “I think I could do better work there than someone who hasn’t been with the Yoruba.” In the end, Waterman completed his dissertation, “African Patterns in Trinidad Negro Music,” working with Herskovits’s Trinidadian field recordings and notes, and defended it in February 1943, less than a year after initially consulting with Bascom. His dissertation committee included Robert H. Seashore and John Eberhart from the Department of Psychology, linguist Werner F. Leopold, and sociologist Ernest R. Mowrer, in addition to Herskovits. After Waterman successfully defended his dissertation, Herskovits secured a position for him as interim instructor and, starting in the fall of 1944, as regular instructor in the Department of Anthropology. Herskovits also established the Laboratory of Comparative Musicology in January 1944, of which Waterman served as director until 1956.

Thus Waterman’s program of comparative musicological research and teaching at Northwestern was established by January 1944. With the war ongoing, no word from Kolinski had reached Herskovits until November, when he received a letter from a British lieutenant, N. T. Rider, informing him that Kolinski was “in very good health and that he was married a few weeks ago.” Kolinski had been in hiding in Ghent at the home of painter Fritz van den Berghe. While in hiding, he continued to work on “new and detailed methods to analyze the structure of primitive music.” The British Army had liberated Ghent in September, and now Kolinski was very eager to immigrate with his wife, Edith van den Berghe, to Evanston and proposed to start an Institute of
Comparative Musicology with a record and film archive, a staff to complete transcriptions and analysis, a journal, and sponsored research trips, all based on the work and activities done at the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv before 1933. Herskovits expressed to Kolinski his elation about and congratulations on his safety and marriage, but he also quelled his proposal by updating him on the comparative musicological work Waterman had already started and planned to continue at Northwestern. It would be another seven years before Kolinski would arrive in the United States. In the interim, he remained in Belgium, where he continued his scholarship, including publishing articles, and his career as a composer and pianist.

As for Waterman, it is important to note that his first experience of fieldwork did not occur until 1946, despite his having expressed an interest in doing fieldwork as a graduate student. There is no indication, however, that he complained about the lack of opportunities to do fieldwork. On the contrary, his comparative musicological work in the laboratory not only led to conference presentations and published articles but also facilitated a wartime research opportunity for the State Department. In planning his research activities for the summer of 1944, Waterman received a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLs) to compile a bibliography of archival collections in the United States containing records of non-European music. This project was originally conceived by the Advisory Committee on Music of the State Department’s Division of Cultural Relations, the members of which included Herskovits, Gilbert Chase, Charles Seeger, and committee chair Harold Spivack, who was also serving as chief of the Music Division of the Library of Congress. With Herskovits’s encouragement, both Spivack and Seeger read Waterman’s dissertation and based on its merits decided to assign Waterman to complete this bibliography of records for the purposes of their possible “use in propaganda programs” in addition to providing documentary information on extant recordings of non-European music for researchers in the country. As part of his research, Waterman was charged with submitting a report indicating “the reception of native music and its meaning to the inhabitants” as well as “their response to occidental music.” After completing this project, he returned to Northwestern for the fall semester to continue his teaching and research at the laboratory.

Among the classes he taught was Primitive Music, which in the course description was described as a “survey of the musical styles of native peoples of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the New World, and analysis of foreign musical idioms, based on records in the departmental collection.” In addition to covering musical instruments, their uses, and the role of music in “primitive societies,”
Waterman taught “techniques in the recording and study of non-European music.” Thus his work in the Laboratory of Comparative Musicology informed his teaching as well as his research, which in large part followed the conventional techniques of transcribing and analyzing recorded music as established by Hornbostel and further developed by Kolinski. One of the clearest examples of this is a worksheet that Waterman presumably designed for his use in the laboratory (figure 2.3). Like his predecessors, Waterman believed that “modern techniques of musical analysis [had] reached the point in development where they can be used to characterize musical styles in strictly objective fashion.”

He distinguished the musicologist, who among other subjects studies music in its cultural context, from the comparative musicologist, whose work “calls for such a high degree of technical specialization that the [comparative] musicologist cannot always be expected to be an ethnologist as well.” What Waterman said distinguished his approach from his German colleagues’ approach, however, was his belief that music’s patterns were culturally rather than biologically or psycho-physically determined. In fact, his approach was very much shaped by Freudian psychology as well, but his use of Freud’s topographical system of the mind to locate the retention of African rhythm in the unconscious went far beyond what Herskovits had attempted with Freudian theory. Regardless, they all rendered recordings and transcription as the best equipment to subject music, a cultural “intangible,” according to Waterman, to “objective analysis,” even as the music resided in the African musician’s unconscious mind.

The worksheet demonstrates how recorded music enabled the manipulation of time on multiple levels. The recorded “song,” as identified by its number, informant, song name, collector, location, and date of recording, guaranteed the preservation of the music as it existed at that particular date and place, which for Herskovits, however, meant not so much the present as it did his informant’s “present,” that is, the African past shared among Negroes living in the bush throughout the New World. For example, while making his field recordings in the rural village of Toco, Trinidad, in 1939, Herskovits complained to Harold Courlander that the “much touted calypsos are learned from the phonograph records that the commercial bands make! There are plenty other kinds [of music], however, that are well worth while [sic].” To George Herzog, he wrote, “The Calypsos are pretty synthetic; I have quite a number of the commercial ones, but they are not as good as some of the older ones in Creole. The whole Calypso tradition is a carry-over of the African custom of improvising songs for purposes of social comment, usually adverse.” Of course, the desire for authentic songs was not unique to Herskovits. But his selection of Toco as a research site because of its predominantly Negro population, “far
### Laboratory of Comparative Musicology

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**Northwestern University**

**Department of Anthropology**

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**Song No.**

**Record No.**

**Informant:**

**Name of Song:**

**Collector:**

**Location:**

**Transcriber:**

**Date of Recording:**

**Date of Transcription:**

---

**Instrumentation:**

**Time Signature:**

**Original Key:**

**Tempo:**

**Phrase-length:**

**Pattern of Phrases:**

**Scale:**

**Mode:**

**Tonal Range:**

---

**Melodic Direction (Differences in semitones):**

**Intervals:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ascending (semitones)</th>
<th>Descending (semitones)</th>
<th>Repetitive Monotone (4 or more notes)</th>
<th>Dim. r.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Attack r:**

**Release r:**

**Release f:**

**Dumbell r:**

**Dumbell f:**

---

**Full Harmony:**

**Spontaneous Harmony:**

**Overlapping:**

**Ldr.-Chor:**

**Unison:**

---

**Melodic Rhythm:**

**Percussion Rhythm:**

**Dotted Notes:**

**Syncopation:**

**Triplets:**

**Percussion Pitch:**

**Add. Characteristics and Remarks:**

---

**Function of Song:**

**Prescribed Time, Place, Personnel:**

---

**Context of Song:**

---

**Specific Use of Song:**

- Note: B—beginning tone, E—ending tone, H—highest tone, L—lowest tone, M-major, m—minor, r—rising, f—falling.

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**FIG. 2.3** Laboratory of Comparative Musicology worksheet (verso). From Afrobafrican Cult Music, Folder 12, Box 138, Series 35/6, Melville J. Herskovits Papers.
removed . . . from the capital in the northwest” and untouched by industrial-
ization, pointed to, according to Herskovits, historical and economic factors
that bound “the life of the Toco Negroes” with “Negroes in many other West
Indian islands, and in the rural sections of [the] southern United States.”
He wrote Courlander again with the following update: “The only ones I recorded
were the pre-phonograph ones in Creole French. Many of them are interesting
from a musical point of view and I hope eventually they will be worked up and
analyzed.”

The worksheet also indicates how the recording rendered the music of the
informant’s distant past repeatable such that the music’s traits (semitones, in-
tervals, rhythm, syncopation, etc.) could be accurately represented in musical
notation and objectively analyzed in the modern laboratory’s perpetual pres-
ent. Finally, the recording enabled the measurement of the spatial and tem-
poral distance separating, in Waterman’s terms, European from non-European
or primitive music, as inflected by the sheet’s categories of distantiating, such
as phrase length; tonal range; scale; mode; repetitive monotone; triadic split
fifths; linear, interlocked, and pendular thirds; and full and sporadic harmony.
In other words, the comparative musicologist’s auditory detection of sporadic
harmony, pendular thirds, or repetitive monotones, for example, was a good
indication of not only the song’s ethnic affiliation but also its distance from
European music’s modern status. In short, this worksheet graphically represents
that which the comparative musicologist’s technical specialization as a scientific
listener was equipped to translate from recorded sound to text.

In his pursuit of determining the African background of Negro music, Water-
man consistently stated the importance of not only the comparative musicolo-
gist’s adequate application of this technical specialization but also the use of
modern recording equipment. Writing in 1949, he discussed how early re-
searchers of African music might have mistaken recordings of individual sing-
ers for the absence of harmony in that music, explaining the limitations of early
acoustic recording technology, which required that the musician be “carefully
placed in front of the horn.” He added, “Since the usual field musicological
task is looked upon simply as the collection of melodies, it is not difficult to
comprehend how choral backgrounds, possibly harmonized, could elude the
ear of the laboratory musicologist who heard only the recorded result, although
he might be making use of the best equipment available at the time.” In his
dissertation, Waterman stressed the significance of Herskovits’s use of an elec-
tric recording machine in Trinidad as assuring “material having the highest pos-
sible degree of fidelity.” Of the collection of 325 field recordings, Waterman
transcribed a random selection of forty-five, encompassing styles identified by
Herskovits’s informants as Baptist, bele, bongo, calenda, calypso, quadrilles, Shango, and Yariba. Expectedly, his presentation of his analysis is organized according to the categories listed on the worksheet, and, with the exception of his discussion of “percussion polyrhythms,” his findings deal with these items in strictly technical musical terms.

Waterman’s section titled “Percussion Polyrhythms” in chapter five stands out for several reasons. It is the first section in which he declared, “The music of Trinidad is strongly African,” in particular the music of the Shango cult, which he identifies as Trinidadian culture’s “most African” manifestation. He also credits the electric phonograph recorder for its unique contributions to his analysis, namely, those recordings that Herskovits made of drummers alone, the discs of which Waterman characterized as invaluable “aids to the understanding of these rhythm patterns, since it was possible to separate individual drum-parts from the total rhythmic configuration.” Finally, it is here that he enacts the kind of psychological theoretical eclecticism that Robert H. Seashore embraced to produce his most lasting, yet controversial, contributions to the study of black music’s African origins. In drawing from Gestalt psychology, behaviorism, and psychoanalysis, and from acculturation theory and his experience playing jazz, Waterman put forward a theory of African rhythm that necessitated a different kind of auditory space-level in which the analyst anchors his listening within that which “the African” holds “below the level of consciousness,” the implications of which, nevertheless, perpetuated the temporal and spatial principles demarcating the modern auditor and laboratory from the primitive musician and the bush.

Waterman’s orientation of the analyst’s auditory space-level within the mind of the African musician began with his attempt to explain what he termed the “off-beat phrasing” of melodies, which he detected in the majority of the forty-five Trinidadian field recordings that he transcribed. These were melodies lasting one or more measures whose beats were rendered syncopated given their displacement usually by an eighth note in relationship to the accompanying “steady and dependable” beat patterns of the three drum parts. In recordings in which a solo vocalist accompanies himself with hand clapping, Waterman asserts that such melodies “could hardly have been performed without a 16/8 ostinato in mind, accented triply for the first twelve beats and duply for the remaining four.” What is significant here is his articulation of these field recordings’ musical contents to Gestalt theory, specifically in terms of the dynamics between figure and ground. For example, in describing each drum part’s relationship with the other two as well as with the sung melody, he identifies either its amplitude or its metric relationship with the other parts to explain
why a part “fades in and out with regularity, psychologically if not acoustically.” A part “fades in,” or takes on the solid and coherent character of a figure, when it is set against the other parts.\textsuperscript{121} It “fades out” when it takes on the loose and empty character of the acoustical space or ground, remaining, in Waterman’s words, “in the background of the rhythmic gestalt.” For Waterman, the ground of the music’s rhythmic gestalt typically consisted of the highest two drum parts set in a 4/4 and 6/8 meter, respectively. It was the function of the third or lowest-tuned drum, “upon entering [this] rhythmic gestalt,” to momentarily effect a “radical dislocation” in the listener without his mistaking this dislocation for a change in meter.\textsuperscript{122}

Waterman presented his findings from his dissertation in a paper titled “‘Hot’ Rhythm in Negro Music,” which he delivered on December 28, 1943, at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society held at Schirmer Hall in New York City.\textsuperscript{123} Among the musicologists whom Waterman consulted about his research at the conference was George Herzog, who apparently questioned his formulation of black music as constituting rhythmic Gestalts, proposing instead the existence of varying degrees of independence among the percussion and sung parts.\textsuperscript{124} In a letter written after the conference, Waterman admitted to having pondered over Herzog’s objection, but after listening again to field recordings in the laboratory with this in mind, he found himself “as firmly convinced as ever that, at least in the African music . . . there is a definite integration of melodic and percussion rhythms.” Most convincing for Waterman were those “instances in which a singer himself plays [sic] the percussion rhythms, either on a drum or by clapping his hands,” which indicate that the “rhythmic complex is perceived as a gestalt.”\textsuperscript{125} As mentioned above, six years earlier Gilberto Valdés had given a similar explanation of the psychological and physical processes involved in a musician mentally registering, and not actually accenting, strong beats for, in Valdés’s words, “the complete integration of the rhythm.” But Waterman did not stop with Gestalt theory in his analysis of these field recordings, for in his attempt to fulfill Herskovits’s New World Negro acculturation program he drew from behaviorism as well as acculturation theory in order to define what he agreed to be the “essential homogeneity” of black music of Africa and the New World, offbeat phrasing being one of its defining characteristics.\textsuperscript{126}

In the opening paragraphs of his “‘Hot’ Rhythm in Negro Music” paper, Waterman outlines his eclectically conceived theoretical framework for explaining this homogeneous rhythmic style heard by “those who have had opportunity to listen to Negro music in Africa or the New World.” He labels this rhythmic style “hot,” identifying its provenance as a “linguistic concept of West African
“tribesmen” used to describe a compelling or exciting rhythm. Because, as he notes, “hot” has “come to our own slang” to describe this rhythmic style’s “overt manifestations” in Negro music everywhere, including jazz, Waterman argued that “hot” rhythm was an Africanism, or “one of those subliminal constellations of feelings, values, attitudes, and motor behavior patterns” that is not racially inherited but rather has survived as a “culture-pattern carried below the level of consciousness, often unrecognized by those who adhere to it.” This, in essence, is the eclectic framework that he had begun to construct as a student and attempted to collect more evidence for after completing his dissertation. But the sources for his use of the term “hot” rhythm were anyone but “tribesmen” from West Africa.

In addition to Herskovits’s Trinidadian field recordings, Waterman in all likelihood had access to his field notes as well. It is in Herskovits’s entry for August 20, 1939, that we read of his making reference to the “‘jazzing’ of a Sankey hymn” that he observed while attending a Shouters service in Toco. Herskovits writes of “the hymn . . . being sung over and over until it gradually went into a jazz rhythm which brought about the second possession of the evening”; he adds, “The song leader shook a bit and did a kind of foot-patting dance that gave a further basic rhythm to the massed song.” Finally, he uses the term “hot”: “The singing became hotter and hotter, the lad who had been dancing starting again. This time they went into full cry, and gave as ‘hot’ a performance as I have ever seen.” Then, in October 1944, Waterman wrote his colleague William Bascom, who had been drafted by the US Army and was currently working for the Foreign Economic Administration in West Africa, asking him to “collect five or six words, from different [West African] languages” that mean “‘hot’ as in ‘hot music.’” He continued, “The idea, of course, is to suggest that the concept of ‘hot music’ in this country is sort of an Africanism. If there aren’t any African words with this meaning, my heart will be broken.” He indicated to Bascom that he had received confirmation of this term’s provenance as an African linguistic concept from Abdul Disu, a student of Yoruba background from Lagos, Nigeria, who had studied journalism at Lincoln University and the University of Wisconsin at Madison. But, as Waterman stated, “like a dope I didn’t ask him for the words.”

Disu took up residence in Evanston in the spring of 1943 to work as a research assistant for Herskovits, Bascom, and Waterman at Northwestern. His work included demonstrating Yoruba dances, which Waterman would later recall while observing Cuban dancers (presumably at a Santería ceremony) while making field recordings in Havana in 1946. Disu returned to Evanston for two weeks in June 1943 to help Herskovits translate the Yoruba-based songs
he had recorded in Bahia, Brazil, and to review his field notes for comparisons with similar customs among the Yoruba in Nigeria; Disu accepted this work to help pay for his matriculation at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University that fall semester. In addition to Disu, Waterman also credited Julius Okala for his work as an informant in the preparation of his dissertation and “‘Hot’ Rhythm in Negro Music” paper. Born in Onitsha, Nigeria, of Igbo background, Okala applied to Northwestern also to work as a research assistant in the anthropology department. Like Disu, Okala studied at Lincoln, majoring in linguistics, but he arrived at Northwestern before Disu and worked during the fall semester of 1941, the same year Waterman started the graduate program. Okala’s work with Waterman included addressing the “problem of oblique expression or indirection in West Africa [i.e., Igbo derivative songs]” in addition to translating the Yariba songs in Herskovits’s Trinidad field recordings, confirming their Yoruba texts for Waterman’s dissertation. Disu and Okala were two of a relatively small group of students from Nigeria and the Gold Coast studying in the United States who were also active in promoting African decolonization, activities that Herskovits and Waterman never acknowledged in their published work. In any event, Bascom, Disu, and Okala did not provide Waterman with specific West African words equivalent to “hot” rhythm. Without such evidence, he could not definitively establish this Africanism’s linguistic origins, though he never completely abandoned the notion of “hot” rhythm, especially when discussing its significance in jazz performance and terminology. In reality, the notion of “hot” rhythm in jazz as delineating that which was believed to be authentically black and of African origins had continued to be disseminated widely via concert programs organized by John Hammond, Jr., in the 1930s and in published books and articles by Rudi Blesh in the 1940s (see chapter 4). Instead, Waterman further pursued “hot” rhythm’s psychological and behavioral qualities (and not its African origins per se), and by 1949, in a paper titled “African Influence on the Music of the Americas,” which he delivered at the International Congress of Americanists, he substituted “hot” rhythm with “metronome sense” to hone in on the psychological and behavioral processes that he continued to argue constituted not only the musical foundation of African music’s difference from European music but also that which any listener, even “the most careful investigator,” must develop in order to comprehend those aspects of African music that are “most important to the African.” Central to his behaviorist argument of metronome sense was the importance of rhythm in many contexts of “native life,” including the economic and religious as well as musical: the playing of percussion instruments, in particular, was formative in
establishing the pace of work and affecting spirit possession, for example. Metronome sense was not limited to the drummer in musical contexts, however. As Waterman argued, “Signs . . . of the African feeling for music are to be read . . . likewise . . . in the motor behavior of participants in African dance.” The fact is he had asserted the importance of dance to his theory of “hot” rhythm as early as 1943, inspired no doubt by Herskovits’s field notes from Toco: “The thread of each rhythmic element contributing to the thunderous whole of the percussion gestalt is followed in [the dancer’s] movement without separation from its polyrhythmic context.”

Waterman’s Gestalt-based explanations of the auditor’s “subjective meter” in listening to African music when it is affected by an “objective stimulus” is strikingly reminiscent of Kurt Koffka’s work on auditory space-level, as is the case in this statement: “The off-beat phrasing of accents [i.e., objective stimuli], then, must threaten, but never quite destroy, the orientation of the listener’s subjective metronome.” But Waterman also stressed the conscious, subconscious, and unconscious in explaining African rhythm’s diffusion and retention among black populations of the New World. In one instance, he declared that musical patterns “are formed, and are carried to a large degree, below the level of consciousness” (to wit, “the musical patterns stemming from Africa, and passed down through several generations of Negroes to the present time”), thus making the description of such “‘unconscious’ patterns in objective terms” a “major problem in studies of cultural dynamics.” This statement, too, is reminiscent of Freud’s declaration of the importance of the person analyzed in order to make conscious that which is unconscious.

In another instance, Waterman declared that whereas “conscious and unconscious aspects of the Negro rhythmic style are fully integrated” in Africa and, “for the most part,” in Latin America, North American “slaves were forced to relinquish many of these conscious and material aspects [i.e., African drums] of their rhythmic tradition.” Thus the “concept of ‘hot’ went underground . . . until it reappeared in jazz music.” In the interim, the “process of inducing the Negroes to adopt behavior patterns befitting an inferior caste in white society was looked upon as a humanizing process, and the North American Negroes soon learned to be ashamed of their African heritage.” Waterman’s equating of African musical patterns with repression in the unconscious (or “below the level of consciousness”) of American Negroes is, in part, patterned after Herskovits’s analysis of socially “sanctioned release[s] of inhibited feelings” such as “suppressed emotions” and “repressed grievances” among singers in Dahomey and Suriname. His applications of the unconscious thus evoke its
uses in Freudian and behavioral psychology, for he reads the contents, both admissible and inadmissible (or repressed), of the unconscious in social and historical terms, as had also García Agüero in reference to Cuban composers and music historians who denied Africa’s presence in Cuban music. Ultimately, however, these archaeologies of the mind in their racializing and temporalizing capacities were continuations of the work of Henry Edward Krebsiel and his generation of musicologists, who helped carry forward from the nineteenth century into the twentieth the mining of the subconscious memory of the Negro’s savage past. In fact, these aurally induced excavations of the mind and soul belong to a much longer history of modern aurality that include the work of René Descartes.

The debate over the African presence in black music of the New World persisted among intellectuals, economists, politicians, folklorists, anthropologists, comparative musicologists, and others in Cuba, Germany, Martinique, the United States, and elsewhere. For Waterman, his analysis of field recordings and field notes, as well as his consultations with Disu and Okala, in the Laboratory of Comparative Musicology at Northwestern University produced the musical and psychological evidence locating African music’s retention in the mind of the African and his descendants, that is, regions that he seemed to believe could now be accessed through scientific listening given the methodological gains achieved in psychology and comparative musicology. The dynamics of the mind, he claimed, psychologically, socially, and historically explain how the retention and reinterpretation of “African musical formulae” occurred in varying acculturative contexts, a commonplace of culture contact that he felt by the late 1940s (and certainly by the 1960s) needed no explanation if “not for the fact that a sort of academic tradition has been in force which . . . has systematically denied both the fact and the possibility of such persistence of African tradition.” It bears pointing out that Katherine Dunham, Salvador García Agüero, and Richard Waterman all evoked psychoanalytical discourse (at varying levels of theoretical rigor) to address such denials as emanating from repressed anxieties harbored by black Martinicans; as symptomatic of a “black phobia in music” harbored by certain Cuban music historians and composers; and as either conscious feelings of inferiority or an unconscious inferiority complex as harbored by past generations of American Negro musicians, respectively. Attention to such turns to psychoanalytical discourse as a mode of black musical and cultural listening, analysis, and commentary allows for an even fuller grasp of the temporal and spatial discrepancies between black music and its African origins rendered by other epistemologies, such as comparative musicology and acculturation theory.
As these interlocutors’ chosen methodologies varied—whether Hegelian phenomenology, Comtean positivism, Marxist historical and material dialecticism, acculturation theory, or Gestalt, behavioral, and psychoanalytical psychology—their practices of listening to music as performed and recorded by black bodies, whether in the streets, the amphitheater, the lecture hall, the bush, or the university laboratory, proved that much more decisive. Apart from their motivations, including those who denied Africa’s influence in Cuban and American Negro music, what seemed always at stake was their urgency in not merely listening to music in racial terms but also in delineating its racial materializations and valuations for listeners. Thus, when García Agüero and other public speakers addressed music that sounded (or not) Africa’s racial and historical presence in the Cuban nation’s body politic, their articulations and textualizations of what they wanted their audience to hear operated so as to privilege their own presence in modernity’s spatial and temporal center. Whereas for Waterman, his work in the modern laboratory—removed from the distractions of the bush or of bringing African “tribesmen” out of the bush and into the laboratory—was intended to enable listeners to access the unconscious mind of African musicians now temporalized in order to hear how their descendants, including jazz and boogie-woogie musicians, have perceived music for generations, all the while remaining physically in their own present.\textsuperscript{151} The market for records, both field- and studio-produced, in the 1940s further enabled and perpetuated modernity’s modes of listening among domestic record buyers.

\textit{Topographical Listening for the Home and Study}

“Fighting a losing battle against time, and using the same weapon as the phonograph salesmen, anthropologists and folklorists the world over are doing what they can to salvage the remnants of primitive music.”\textsuperscript{152} This statement is taken from a \textit{Time} article titled “Melody Hunters” published in 1937. Although the article’s author is unnamed, in all likelihood it was written by \textit{Time}’s music critic, Winthrop Sargeant, who conveyed to his readers the urgency felt by folklorists and anthropologists in making and preserving recordings of “fast disappearing” “native music” of “out-of-the-way parts of the world.” This music, played by “woolly-headed blacks,” “aging tribesmen,” and “long headed Congo Negroes,” is fast going “extinct,” Sargeant warned, due in part to the phonograph, the very modern device that was at once helping to preserve “primitive music” and disseminate commercial phonograph records to record buyers in, for example, Toco, Trinidad to Herskovits’s vexation. Sargeant mentions that the music on some of these records from Africa “shows rhythmic resemblances
to jazz,” noting also that the records, besides being collected by anthropologists for museums and universities including Northwestern and Columbia, are “now & then” put on sale. Ten years later, in 1947, the Washington Afro-American published a record review of two albums that Decca released that year, Katherine Dunham’s Afro-Caribbean Songs and Rhythms and Miguelito Valdés’s Bim Bam Boom: An Album of Cuban Rhythms (figures 2.5 and 2.6).153 Both sets of records, according to the reviewer, “show examples” of the music “created in the Caribbean [sic] when Africans and Europeans came in direct contact” by virtue of the musicians’ uses of “authentic rhythm accompaniment” “stemming directly from Africa.” Like the Time magazine article, this one too suggests that these records give some indication of the “kinship” between jazz, African music, and the music of the Caribbean, but both reviewers agreed that the rhythms on these records are “more complicated than Gene Krupa’s randiest rataplan” and “far more complicated and animated than those of jazz,” in general.

Decca producers recorded and designed the Dunham and Valdés albums in New York City. But readers of the Washington Afro-American’s review and Decca’s record buyers may not have assumed so if we take into account the reviewer’s impressions of the music contained on the albums and her or his prediction for the prospective record buyer: “Some of the Dunham numbers are chillingly weird, while Valdés is at times positively savage. If you haven’t heard this music, you’re due for an amazing experience.” As this and the Time commentary demonstrate, the discourse of evolutionary time, as used by writers to convey their listening impressions and experiences to prospective record buyers, blurred the boundary between records made in the field, such as Harold Courlander’s DISC album Music of the Cults of Cuba (figure 2.4), and those made in the studio by reinforcing the distance separating the record buyer and listener from the recorded music’s place and time of origin. Also blurred, or altogether overlooked, were the performance contexts in which the music of these two albums originated: Dunham’s album consisted of the songs included in Tropical Revue, which she and her troupe performed throughout the country between 1943 and 1945 (see chapter 4); and Valdés’s album consisted of the music he performed at the time in nightclubs, mostly in New York City. Modernity’s listening practices did indeed transcend such differences, including even album cover designs. The cover of the DISC album’s booklet conveys a documentary aesthetic highlighted by the greyish tone and the image of an anonymous musician (cropped above the torso) playing a marímbula. In contrast, the Decca covers gesture toward entertainment and spectacle by featuring Dunham in an exotic headdress and neck covering, and Valdés, engulfed in a hellish fire, playing the savage conga drum.
**FIG. 2.4** Alberto Zayas playing marimba on the cover of *Music of the Cults of Cuba, Disc Ethnic Album 131 (1947)*, booklet. From the Moses and Frances Asch Collection.

**FIG. 2.5** Katherine Dunham, *Afro-Caribbean Songs and Rhythms*, album cover, 1947, Decca A-511.
Other reviews of Dunham’s album, in addition to the music and production itself, are particularly insightful in indicating that listeners considered it a product of the scientific enterprise, if not to save primitive music from extinction, then to confirm jazz’s origins. Will Davidson of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* credited Dunham’s authority as an artist to her earlier “explorations of native Caribbean dance and musical forms, begun as part of her work for a degree at the University of Chicago.” Writing for the jazz monthly the *Record Changer*, John Lucas characterized Dunham’s album as a “documentary and highly interesting set” of records whose “relation to jazz, though indirect and at times indistinct, is obvious enough.” The back cover of the LP version of the album released in 1950 summarized Dunham’s activities as a student in Chicago and researcher in the Caribbean, including her initiation into “a Haitian voudun cult.” It also gives detailed information about the various percussion instruments heard on the recordings, all of which shaped the listener’s expectations and experience in ways and for reasons not unlike those pursued via the Cuban concert lectures and program notes discussed earlier.

Comparative musicologists and ethnomusicologists have acknowledged the interrelated histories, especially from the 1880s to the 1930s, of the commercial record industry and folklore, anthropology, and comparative musicology.
The American Society for Comparative Musicology’s stated objectives, for instance, stressed not only the collection but also the issuing of phonograph records. Kay Kaufman Shelemay, however, suggests that by the end of the 1930s an “irreversible divide separated the record industry from the world of ethnomusicological field recording” due in part to the industry’s marketing of the playback-only gramophone, which she argues “necessitated more sophisticated recording facilities to achieve ‘professional’ sound recordings” on the part of record companies.56 In fact, this divide, in addition to differences in album design, seemed to have little bearing on listeners when listening to recorded music as black and of African origins—regardless of whether the record was produced in the field or in the studio—even though the temporal and spatial gulf separating the out-of-the-way field and the modern city, as Shelemay notes, continued through the 1940s to weigh heavily on ethnomusicologists wishing to preserve the former’s dying music traditions. Indeed, certain performances as captured on discs made by Harold Courlander and Richard Waterman in Cuba document modernity’s encroachment on Havana’s outlying and rural towns, but for the critical listener they function to further destabilize the distinction between field and studio recordings and, in turn, the temporalizing and spatializing logic of Cuba’s musical topography.

Funded by a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies, Harold Courlander traveled to Havana in April 1941 to make field recordings on behalf of Columbia University’s Archive of Primitive Music using a windup recording machine loaned to him by George Herzog. Courlander, who had always considered himself primarily a novelist, had also pursued his research interests in American Negro culture.57 Encouraged by Herskovits and Herzog, he set out to study African survivals by conducting fieldwork and, eventually, making field recordings in Haiti in 1939.58 Courlander applied to the ACLS in January 1941, proposing to gather the folksongs of Afro-Cubans, “paying particular attention to the various cults,” the recordings of which, he believed, “should prove of value to students of exotic music, particularly those studying the survival of Africanisms in America.” After identifying Fernando Ortiz as his sponsor in Havana, he concluded his application by stating that the “bulk of the recording will be done in remote and out of the way places where the old cults are strong.”59 Once in Havana, Courlander met with Ortiz, who put him in contact with Alberto Zayas, who had participated as a singer in Ortiz’s lecture-concert “The Sacred Music of the Yoruba Negroes in Cuba” four years earlier.60 In addition to singing songs and playing marímbula for Courlander’s recorder, Zayas assisted him in getting musicians in Guanabacoa to perform Abakuá and Santería music as well. Ortiz also encouraged Courlander to travel to Jovellanos to record
musicians there as well. Since he had proposed to record the music of cults in “out of the way places,” it is not surprising that Zayas and Ortiz recommended he go to Guanabacoa and Jovellanos, since both locations and their inhabitants lay beyond the modern city of Havana.

In total, Courlander collected about two hundred discs, most of which contained music of the Abakuá, Arará, Congo, Guajiro, and Lucumí repertories recorded in Havana, Guanabacoa, and Jovellanos. Several, however, cannot be contained within these categories, representing instead recorded performances in excess of comparative musicology’s field recording enterprise. While in Jovellanos, for instance, Courlander made copies of 78-rpm discs of commercially produced Cuban music using his recording machine, presumably in his hotel room. One of these field recordings consists of a one-minute excerpt of Orquesta Casino de la Playa’s disc “Los venecianos” (The Venetians), which was recorded for the Victor record company in Havana in September 1938. Courlander started the recorder about one minute and seven seconds into the disc, when the lead singer and future Decca recording artist Miguelito Valdés sings the final line of the first verse: “Ya a llegar a Caraguao, el mundo ahí se acabo porque gritaron así” (And in arriving in Caraguao, the world came to an end because they yelled out). The style of the music is a conga, and the song describes a nostalgic remembrance of the comparsas of the past as invoked in the protagonist upon hearing Los venecianos perform at carnival, parading through various neighborhoods of Havana, including Caraguao. Victor in fact recorded dozens of such congas as performed by Cuban-style big bands like Casino de la Playa following the reauthorization of comparsas in Havana in 1937.

Casino de la Playa and lead vocalist Valdés recorded many types of Cuban music, including songs from the Santería repertory. One of these is “Elube Changó,” which the band recorded in June 1939. The sung melody and antiphonal responses heard on this record match with two performances of this song that Courlander recorded in Havana and Jovellanos, but apart from the phrase “elube Changó” the text of Valdés’s performance does not match with those sung in Courlander’s recordings. The instrumentation, of course, is distinct as well. The performance in Havana was given by a group of singers and batá drummers, while the one in Jovellanos was given by two singers accompanying themselves on achere (small rattle) and bembé drum. Casino de la Playa consisted of a big band format (trumpets, trombone, saxophones, piano, and double bass) with the addition of a bongo player. Another 78-rpm disc that Courlander copied was Chano Pozo’s “Blen, blen, blen,” which was recorded by Casino de la Playa and Orquesta Hotel Nacional in Havana and Xavier Cugat’s Waldorf Astoria Orchestra in New York City, all in 1940. Eight years later,
while conducting his own field recordings in Jovellanos, Richard Waterman recorded Alberto Brito singing “Blen, blen, blen” as a *columbia* (from the rumba repertory) accompanied by two drummers and two other percussionists playing claves and *palitos* (sticks).

This particular session recorded by Waterman generated twenty-six recordings of songs from the rumba (including the *columbia* and the *guaguancó*), conga, Congo, Santería, and Abakuá repertories. He collected a total of 118 performances on twelve-inch acetate discs from June through August 1948. Initially, Waterman settled in Manantiales Villiers, located on the border between Regla and Guanabacoa (just east of the Port of Havana), where he planned to make recordings of music from the Abakuá and Santería repertories. By mid-July, however, he had made less than ten discs, none of which was of music from these repertories. Instead, two were of a male speaker reciting words in Abakuá with their Spanish translations; another of children singing children’s songs; one of a woman named Hilda Miguel singing “La barca de oro” (*The boat of gold*) from the 1947 Mexican film *La barca de oro* starring Mexican singer and actor Pedro Infante; and one of a woman named Gume Sastre singing “Angelitos Negros” (*Little black angels*) from the 1948 Mexican film of the same title. Eventually, Waterman decided to relocate to Cárdenas, Matanzas, on the recommendation of William Bascom, who was also conducting fieldwork with Berta Montero-Sánchez, a Cuban graduate student in the anthropology program at Northwestern University, in nearby Jovellanos. Once he was settled in Cárdenas, Waterman recorded dozens of discs there, in addition to those made in Jovellanos.

As these recordings of “Blen, blen, blen,” “Elube Changó,” and “Angelitos Negros” suggest, such categories as “popular” and “Santería” music, as well as “field,” “studio” or “film” recordings, are unable to fully capture what was clearly a free-flow circulation of music whose radius not only undermined the notion of “remote and out-of-the-way places” but also stretched far beyond Cuba itself. It is important to stress that this circulation of music was induced not only by the market for 78-RPM discs or the Mexican film industry and radio broadcasts, but also by the everyday practices of individuals who made music, whether among friends in their home, for folklorists and comparative musicologists, or for American record companies. Just as “folk” or “cult” music from the field formed a significant part of music recorded in studios, such as with Casino de la Playa’s “Elube Changó,” records from the commercial music and film industries formed an equally important part of music making and listening in Guanabacoa, Jovellanos, and Cárdenas. In short, Cubans in remote and out-of-the-way places watched Mexican films, listened to the latest popular 78-RPM
discs, and even incorporated some of these tunes into their performances for anthropologists, folklorists, and comparative musicologists. Still, such musical utterances, once captured on disc as a studio or field recording, were destined to be listened to in any number of modern spaces beyond Cuba itself, the effects of which involved familiar dispositions in listening to music as black and of African origins.

We have already read that one reviewer of Katherine Dunham's and Miguelito Valdés's Decca albums felt that some songs “at times” were “chillingly weird” and “positively savage.” Although the reviewer does not specify in which songs these moments occur, utterances that had excited other listeners to similar effects also occur in some of these recordings. For example, Dunham’s “Toitica la Negra” (Toitica the black woman) and Valdés’s “Enlloro” exhibit sonic utterances that signaled for many American and Cuban listeners the “underworld” of “voodoo,” brujería, and ñañiguismo, the latter two of which were stereotypical terms that Cubans used to criminalize the religious practices of Santería and Abakuá. Labeled a “ritmo santo-Cubano” (rhythm for a Cuban saint) on the disc’s seal, “Toitica la Negra” begins with the beating of a low-pitched hand drum, followed by a male baritone voice (La Rosa Estrada) reciting a prayer in Lucumí for Changó. Then the vocalist sings a salutation for Changó over a drum roll as other male vocalists add mocking laughter, woops, and other assorted vocables. Dunham begins singing halfway through the record, now over a steady beat on the hand drum, while the vocalized noises continue. Valdés’s “Enlloro,” similarly, begins with male voices singing a short, dirge-like chant punctuated by short and loud attacks—or sonic stabbings, as Salvador García Agüero would have it—by the big band. Soon after, the band settles into a throbbing ostinato as Valdés sings the verse. For non-Spanish-speaking listeners, the verse’s text would have been rather meaningless if not for Valdés’s use of eerie laughter in addition to the dirge-like chorus sung in the lowest part of the bass range. For Spanish speakers, words such as selva (jungle), sacrificio (sacrifice), and África emerge from Valdés’s exaggerated “black Spanish” speak. Listeners of jazz, regardless of language, might have instantly recognized the trumpet wah-wah growl at the end of the second verse as belonging to Duke Ellington’s jungle music style.

For Cuban listeners, the song’s title, “Enlloro,” might not have been significant unless the listener was aware of the enlloro funeral ceremony of the Abakuá, to which the song makes vague reference. Regardless, its sonic signifiers in all probability invoked the notions of brujo (witch) and ñáñigo (member of an Abakuá lodge), terms that, according to Cuban folklorist Lydia Cabrera, Cubans commonly and interchangeably used to refer to “all the religious
practices or beliefs of African origin.” Men suspected of being ñáñigos or brujos were considered to be murderers, criminals, devil worshippers, and kidnappers. Cabrera herself admitted to having once imagined in deathly fear that “a black hand . . . was taking out my heart” upon hearing references to past (fabricated) murders committed by ñáñigos. In fact, these terms were commonly used to refer to many activities, including musicking and dancing, that were deemed by some to be socially useless, backward, dangerous, or simply African. For instance, in the year after the reauthorization of comparsas the editors of Adelante warned again of the dangers in allowing the “lumpen-proletariat” from the surrounding barrios of the city (such as Caraguao) to arrollar (parade) behind the city’s sanctioned comparsas during carnival, even going so far as to draw equivalences between arrollando, morphine addiction, brujería, and ñañiguismo.

In spite of attempted interventions by the Department of Tourism, Salvador García Agüero, and Fernando Ortiz, the Cuban listener’s musical topography of brujería and ñañiguismo continued undeterred into the 1940s and was even presented in the United States, namely through reports in the newsprint media. Winthrop Sargeant, who became Life magazine’s senior music writer in 1945, published an exposé-style article on the Cuban popular music industry. Titled the article “Cuba’s Tin Pan Alley,” Sargeant uncovered for his readers Havana’s violent, seedy, and seething “underworld of African Cuba” from which Cuban music’s most internationally popular styles—such as the rhumba, son, and conga—originated. Cuban music’s melodies, Sargeant clarifies, “echo the sultry songs that were brought to Cuba from Latin and Moorish Spain,” while “its rhythms are descended from the tom-tom beats of the African jungle.” This, and Sargeant’s survey of Havana’s Tin Pan Alley, consisting of “brothels, taxi-dance halls, and clandestine voodoo lodges” and populated by “bullet-scarred, marijuana-smoking characters,” could be passed off as journalistic sensationalism if it were not for its consistency with the Cuban nation’s evolution toward progress and modernity and its persistent threats from brujos and ñañiguismo. “Seventy percent of the Cuban population,” Sargeant states, “is African, and much of the male portion of that percentage is affiliated with a secret organization known to Cubans as Los Nañigos.” During carnival celebrations, he continues, “the streets of Havana stream with joyous throngs of fantastically costumed Negroes, prancing and dancing to drumming and chanting that sounds as though it comes straight from the heart of Africa.”

In stressing that Cuban music rivals the nation’s main exports of sugar, tobacco, and rum, Sargeant is careful to put his American readers and potential record buyers at ease by claiming that in the course of preparing (or depatholo-
The record for export, the music is “toned down for the tourist trade.” It is significant that Sargeant mentions Chano Pozo, a “big, well dressed Cuban Negro,” as an example of a Cuban musician who achieved fame as a dancer and “player of the big African conga drum,” and as someone who escaped certain death on at least two occasions as a result of the industry’s materialistic and violent ethos. At the time of this article’s publication in *Life* magazine on October 6, 1947, Pozo had already traveled to New York City to continue his career as a composer, musician, and dancer (see chapter 4). Moreover, by 1947 American buyers of Cuban music records had doubtless already listened to his songs, some of which in fact contained prayers, melodies, and rhythms from the Congo, Santería, and Abakuá repertories. These include Orquesta Casino de la Playa’s “Muna sangafimba,” recorded in 1940. Pozo himself was an initiate of the Abakuá order Muñanga Efó located in Pueblo Nuevo, one of Havana’s outlying barrios. The reality is that many of these prayers, regardless of the supposed “toning down” of the associated music, resounded in the homes of Cuban music record buyers throughout the United States and beyond.

But these and other prayers and rhythms of Cuba’s “African population” resounded in homes from records produced, marketed, and distributed not only by Victor and Decca but also by DISC and Ethnic Folkways Library. In 1947, six years after collecting his field recordings in Cuba, Harold Courlander, in collaboration with Moe Asch, the owner and founder of DISC Records, released *Music of the Cults of Cuba*. The album consisted of three ten-inch records, containing twelve of Courlander’s field recordings, along with a booklet that provided the listener with information on the music’s background, including names, descriptions, and images of instruments. As an independently owned company, DISC Records attempted to produce records for an impressive variety of markets, such as traditional and contemporary jazz, folk, spoken word, blues, calypso, and classical (including contemporary and opera), doing so by releasing records in diverse formats, including live jazz performances, which was an innovative format at the time. Another album format was the field recording, which DISC Records began to produce for the “ethnic” music market. Courlander agreed to license a select number of his field recordings from Cuba, Haiti, and Ethiopia to Asch, who began to promote the company’s new Ethnic Series in March 1947: “New York—Disc records has inaugurated a new Ethnic Series, which will feature albums of authentic folk music from Haiti, Cuba, Russia, Ethiopia and other musically ‘neglected’ points. All recording will be done ‘on location.’ ”

Although this advertisement, and the DISC Ethnic Series itself, grouped these records under the category of “ethnic” music, Courlander’s use of the
term “cult” in the title of the Cuban music album signaled that he heard and
intended audiences to listen to the music on these records as more than sim-
ply authentic Cuban folk from neglected places. In fact, his use of the term
was informed by the Cuban notions of ñañiguismo and brujo, and traces back
to his correspondence with Fernando Ortiz in 1940, when Courlander was
preparing his applications for funding to travel to Cuba. In a letter to Her-
skovits Courlander mentions that he had “spoken to Fernando Ortiz about the
Cuban nanigo and brujo stuff, and he’s madly in love with the idea of recording
some of it.” In his application to the ACLS, Courlander stated that he
would be “paying particular attention to the various cults. Nanigo and brujo
music will be an outstanding objective, though songs and rhythms of the popu-
lar social dances, worksongs, etc., will be included.” In publishing excerpts
from his diary written while in Cuba, we see that Courlander used the term
“cult” extensively to refer to the Lucumí, Abakuá, Arará, and Congo, and to
qualify their activities as such (e.g., “cult activities,” “cult life,” “cult feasts,” and
“cult business”). He even includes an explanation of the meaning of the term
to “most white Cubans”: “The word ‘cult’ is synonymous with ‘savagery’ and
‘crime.’ Their knowledge of cults comes entirely from news and columns and
gossip. Journalistic reports tell of ritual murders by the Kimbisa people [of the
Congo] in various parts of the island, of all the horrible remnants of cult feasts
found by the police, and of the disappearance of children (‘obviously’ stolen for
cult use), usually white. The chief delight seems to be recounting the objects
seized by police raids, as though each one of them were prima facie evidence of
debauchery and degeneration.”

Unlike Sargeant, Courlander recognized the sensationalism and racism under-
pinning the uses of “ñañigo” and “brujo” in Cuban society and in fact addressed
this in the album’s booklet. “Ñañigo,” he explained, is a “term that is not re-
spectful and is much resented” by members of the Abakuá “secret society.” He
continued, “In addition to suffering as scapegoats for social ills arising out of
acute poverty, the cults are ridiculed by the ‘Castilians,’ who both loathe and,
I think, fear, cult activities. Add to these factors the secret character of many
of the rituals and you have a not too receptive ear to the idea of recording cult
music.” Thus, in addressing the social deviancy articulated to the Lucumí,
Abakuá, Arará, and Congo, Courlander reveals his motivation in denoting
these groups as “cults,” for in addition to their secrecy and social marginaliza-
tion, their music as well existed within “neglected points” of Cuba’s social and
historical topography. This cult music was not, according to Courlander, folk
music, since the latter could consist of “considerable hybridization,” such as in
conga, rhumba, son, or the music of guahiro (or white peasants); rather, cult
music of the Lucumí, Abakuá, Arará, and Congo was “true Afro-Cuban, even African, music.”

The titles of the sides, as they appear in the booklet, all include the term “cult” preceded by its ethnic affiliation, but not all of these are labeled correctly, beginning with the first side (1512-A), which is a song from the Congo, not the Carabali (or Abakuá) repertory. The second cut on the flip side of this record (1512-B) is mislabeled a Kimbisa cult song; it is the canto (song) “Adádará mádá 6” for the Orisha Osain accompanied by the toque kurukuru bede of the Santería or Lucumí repertory. Nor are the sides ordered chronologically according to when and where Courlander made the recordings. For instance, Courlander made the two Carabali sides 1513-A (b) and 1514-A (c) on records two and three, respectively, at the same session in Guanabacoa. The original unedited recordings of these sides (251.8 and 251.6, respectively) were 4:36 and 5:11 in length; they were shortened to one minute each for the album. This was Courlander’s second recording session of the trip, but unfortunately he did not document it in his diary.

Of course, such factual data had no real or immediate bearing on how audiences listened to the recorded music on this album. But we do know what Courlander heard, for example, in the Abakuá music as it was performed at an initiation ceremony that he attended in Guanabacoa and detailed in his diary.182 To Courlander, the drumming was “simple but African,” while the melodies “sounded hybrid.”183 In actuality, the antiphonal responses are sung in two- and three-part harmony, as heard on the album’s Abakuá sides. But he also heard these “hybrid”-sounding melodies as “Carabali” and “African” as well, even after realizing that the singing at the ceremony was being done by white as well as black members of the lodge: “Something bothered me a little, and I sensed it only vaguely. It later came to me with a shock that many of the spectators and ocobíos [ritual brothers] were white. White men singing Carabali songs. When I closed my eyes there was no way of distinguishing who was white and who black. The white ocobíos were as completely ‘African’ as the Negroes. Their singing gestures and postures, too, were African. I have a great admiration and respect for those white ‘brothers’ who have somehow leaped the great gap between the guahiro or Castilian attitude of mind and that of the direct and legitimate heirs of Africa.”184

Ivor Miller has documented the fundamental role that admission of non-Africans into Abakuá society, beginning with Spanish creoles in the 1860s, played in strengthening and helping defend the brotherhood from Spanish colonial authorities.185 Miller even quotes Courlander’s passage above, arguing that his shock in encountering white ocobíos was a result of his North American
understanding of race as a primary marker of identity, whereas Abakuá identity since the nineteenth century had been based, Miller argues, on practices of ritual kinship with West Africa, regardless of the racial makeup of members.

Courlander’s shock was a symptom, however, of much more than a North American racial logic, pertaining particularly to dispositions of listening to music that transcended national boundaries. First, his understanding of the Abakuá as a cult (and not merely a racial category prescribed by North American attitudes) was directly shaped by Cuban society’s notions of ñañiguismo and brujo, notions that were circulated in the United States not only with the release of *Music of the Cults of Cuba* but also with Winthrop Sargeant’s *Life* magazine article, both of which were published in 1947. Second, his shock signaled his momentarily lost anchorage subjectively in the general and audio spatial level of modernity. In addition to being shocked, his lost orientation is also revealed in the unresolvable contradiction in his hearing Abakuá melodies as, on the one hand, “hybrid sounding,” a characteristic of folk music (according to Courlander’s booklet), and, on the other, “cult,” “Carabli,” and “African.” They (white bodies) who were “straight ahead” of Courlander’s attention did not accord with that (African music) to which he was disposed to hearing. Even when he closed his eyes, he could not help but try to listen for “who was white and who black.” Finally, he regained his orientation in modernity by reasoning that the white ocobíos had “somehow leaped the great gap” separating their modern selves from ñañiguismo and African exclusivity. How they did it, or why black ocobíos allowed it, apparently remained a mystery to Courlander. What is clear is that his reaction speaks to the question of whiteness, which was as much the unraced default of modern Cuban identity as it was for modern American identity. With this in mind, Courlander’s affective reaction to this instance of bodies sounding and moving exemplifies precisely what German philosopher Günther Stern Anders theorized about the truth of listening to music, wherein musical situations put a stop to worldly time and space (i.e., the subject’s anchorage in identity). In other words, the white ocobíos leaped no such gap; it was Courlander who, in failing as a listener in “smooth space” to be “in the music” and thus free from the subject/object divide, instead leaped “the great gap” from this musical situation’s absence of racialized subjectivities back to his self-defined whiteness and anchorage in modernity.

Howard Taubman, music critic for the *New York Times*, reviewed two albums from DISC’s Ethnic Series, *Folk Music of Haiti* and *Music of the Cults of Cuba*, in November 1947. Readers were told that the recordings on both albums were made “on the spot” with “non-professional performers.”
the distance from Havana of both Guanabacoa and Matanzas Province: Guanabacoa is “a half hour from Havana’s Prado,” the central avenue down which the publicly sanctioned comparsas parade during carnival; and Matanzas is “several hours east of Havana.” Taubman ended his review by telling his readers and potential record buyers, “If you went traveling in search of just such music, the chances are that you would have great difficulty in getting to hear an honest version of it. Disc has made it available for home and study.” Taubman’s emphasis on demarcating distance, along with the quality of the music and the recorded music’s distinction from Cuban popular music (produced in the modern studio), compels the listener to listen to the music on the album in a temporally and spatially defined framework. Moreover, such indexical cues enabled the listener to handle the album itself as having been transported from that distant past and place to the listener’s modern present (or home).

Soon after Moe Asch’s Disc Record Company fell into bankruptcy in the spring of 1948, Folkways Records and Service was established, as was the 33-1/3 long-playing (LP) record format. By December 1949, Courlander and Asch came to an agreement to rerelease the Music of the Cults of Cuba album as a twelve-inch LP on the new corporation’s record label, Ethnic Folkways Library. With the new LP format, the rereleased album, retitled Cult Music of Cuba, contained twenty-two minutes and thirty-three seconds of recorded music, about ten minutes more than the disc album of three ten-inch 78-rpm discs. Courlander replaced four tracks on the original album with six new and longer tracks, including “Elube Chango” (labeled “Song to Chango”) and toque Ilé (labeled “Lucumi Drums”). The new booklet contained much of the same information found in the disc booklet, including Courlander’s explanation of the difference between folk music, popular music, and “pure African music,” and his retelling of his observation of white members participating in the Abakuá initiation ceremony. He does not, however, mention his “shock” at seeing white ocobios singing, dancing, and becoming African.

Folkways Records sold anywhere between four and forty-six copies of Cult Music of Cuba every six months through the 1950s, according to its business statements. In addition to record sales, Courlander’s recordings and his narrative explaining their significance reached the homes of radio listeners as well. For instance, Courlander served as the featured commentator for one episode of the Adventures in Music radio program, which aired on WNYC in New York City through the 1950s. His script includes the main themes found on the album and LP booklets, such as Cuban recordings a little off the beaten path, city music, highly urbanized styles, highly developed West African musical traditions remaining strong in the interior of the island, and the idea that where
cult activity goes on you may hear true Afro-Cuban music or even pure African music. The term “cult” remained a consistent theme as Courlander played excerpts of, for example, drumming of the “Lucumi cult” (toque Ilé). He also played two recorded versions of a canto (song) for the Orisha Osain, one from both the album (1512-B [b]) and LP (side A, track 2) (i.e., “Osain adádará mádá o”) and another recorded by Herskovits in Bahia and released on Afro-Bahian Religious Songs from Brazil by the Library of Congress’s Music Division in 1947. He played Herskovits’s field recording as evidence of the “antiquity of this type of music.” Then, in concluding the program, he stated, “I am going to play you another recordings [sic]… This one is also a Lucumi piece, but musically it is a hybrid. You will notice that other influences have entered. And I think you will notice also that it is a good bit closer to what we call modern Cuban music than anything else I have played for you.”

The script’s playlist indicates that Courlander in fact played a “Carabali Cult Song,” not a “Lucumi piece,” a Freudian slip, as it were. Or was it? Courlander’s experience at the Abakuá initiation ceremony was indeed disorienting. His “shock” in observing and listening to white ocobíos becoming African was not unlike the “shake” experienced by Demaison upon observing and listening to Gilberto Valdés’s musicians similarly becoming Egyptian, Somalian, Makua, Dahomey, Yoruba, and Mandinga in Havana, while he was simultaneously being transported to Africa. Nor were these effects different from the Washington Afro-American’s description of Dunham’s recordings as “chillingly weird.” They are not different in that all of these suggest a momentary state of subjective dislocation induced by listening to music. This application of Koffka’s theory of directional listening and subjective localization might seem metaphorical if it was not a contemporaneous discourse of listening, albeit a specialized one, or directly implicated in Waterman’s theory of metronome sense, which similarly theorizes those musical events in which a listener’s orientation is momentarily dislocated without being completely destroyed.

All of these examples, including statements by Herskovits from the previous chapter, thus give way to an expanded conception of listening disposed to articulating subjectivity to distance through sound:

It is, of course, interesting to hear them [i.e., Herskovits’s field recordings] once more and at this distance from the music the correspondence between these [African] songs and the Suriname music of the bush comes out very strikingly.—Herskovits to Hornbostel, March 6, 1932

It is a good bit closer to what we call modern Cuban music than anything else I have played for you.—Courlander, “Adventures in Music,” no date
Both, Africans and Spanish, brought to a geographic zone (space) and evolving into a distinct society (time) dialectically shaped a different nationality.—Arredondo, “El arte negro a contrapelo,” 1937

The left-right localization of sound depends upon the time-difference with which the sound wave strikes the two ears, localization occurring towards the side whose ear is struck first.—Koffka, “Perception,” 1922

Again, putting these observations (regarding subjectivity in observing and listening to sound and movement) into proximity is intended to gesture beyond the metaphorical. We might also add to this list Waterman’s laboratory worksheet. We should be reminded, however, of the unresolvable contradictions that occasionally emerged resulting from these same acts of locating and naming music. For Courlander, the harmonic singing of the “Abakuá cult” was an example of hybridity, a characteristic of Cuban folk and popular music, or “modern Cuban music,” but not cult music. When sung by white ocobíos, however, it transformed them into Africans. For Salvador García Agüero, Fernando Ortiz, and Gilberto Valdés, the batá sounded the essences of the modern Cuban, both black and white, Western music’s melodic and harmonic language, the Lucumí language, and Cuba’s African ancestral purity, all in one.

These are anything but trivial or nonsensical errors; nor can they be reduced to what Freud called parapraxis, since, in all of their not-accidental inexactness, they in fact exhibit what always occurred in listening to music and observing dance as black and of African origins in modernity. Whenever an observer and listener phenomenally puts themselves into proximity of bodies racialized as black musicking and dancing, not only does that music and dance become black and African, the bodies of those musicking and dancing become distanced temporally and spatially from the observer and listener. Without distancing the racialized musician and dancer, the arbitrary essence of the listener’s and observer’s subjectivity reveals itself and thus threatens his or her contingent anchorage in the world. But what of the racialized musicians and dancers themselves? Did they, in turn, desire the freedom from such anxieties surrounding one’s subjective contingency in the world? We turn to the next chapter for insight.