Salsa Essay, Research Paper

Salsa Music

Since Columbus ?discovered? America and the slave trade began, music has always been a very important part of the Cuban culture. Cuba?s strategic position in the Caribbean, made it a real crossroad for all the trades between Central and North America and for most of the incoming slave ships from Africa. Cuba became a ?sponge? that absorbed and processed all the surrounding music influences and all the incoming African rhythms and melodies. Since those days the music has mutated many times and through out the years one genres of music gave birth to new ones one of the most resent of those mutations has been called Salsa. The history of salsa is no only limited to Cuba but it extends to Puerto Rico and New York. In the last few years salsa has reached even the most unthinkable places of the world.

Since Columbus came to America and brought with him the colonization of Las Americas, music has been a rich part of Cuban culture. When Spanish colonists started the trade of African slaves, the history of salsa music began. Given to Cuba?s crossroad position between North America, South America, the Old World and the New World most of the slave trading that occurred in the New World was done in Cuba. As consequence of this Cuba basically absorbed the cultures and religions from surrounding islands in the Caribbean and all the traditions and music that came from Africa.

The real development of salsa music genre came from a series of music mutations when in the late 1800 the guaguanco or Santeria music started to make its way out from the sugar plantations to rural peoples life?s and then to the cities. The first music style that had its roots in guaguanco or Afro melody was a music genre named danzon but as all genres it slowly mutated. In the 1920s, the son, a faster, more danceable version of the older danzon was making it self to the top, but the classic ballrooms rejected it. However, Cuban youth refused to be dictated to an adopted son. This new mutation went to form the base for what is today called salsa.

On October 21, 1921;Celia Cruz, who is called the mother of salsa, was born in Havana. She grew up in huge family of fourteen children. While she was growing up she always wanted to pursue a career in singing but her father urge her to pursue a career as literature teacher. After singing in a talent show, which she won interpreting a tango piece ?Nostalgia in a bolero tempo feeling she had a future in the music business Cruz, abandoned her studies. Her career launched was when she joined the ensemble named ?La Sonora Matanzera? replacing the lead singer of the assemble, Myrta, Silva and then staring in five films produced in Mexico. She also headlined in one of the most important nightclubs of the time named Tropicana.

In 1959 Dictator Fidel Castro came to power and Cruz had to immigrate to Mexico and then to the United States where she did not find the success she had in Cuba. In the late 1960s became familiarized with a new music genre that was the result of various Hispanic musicians experimenting with different sounds of the Caribbean to modify the son genre. As a result of these experiments was created the new genre of salsa.

Why she is considered the mother of salsa? Celia Cruz or also known as ?La guarachera? or ?La guarachera de Cuba? was the singer that introduced salsa to the world and made it what it is today. She has performed in the farthest and most unthinkable places in the world as China, Japan and Australia. She has been honored with a doctorate of music from Yale University, a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and a 1990 Grammy award.

Since the1970s she has had many artists followers as Willie Colon, Tito Puente, Johny Pacheco who have taken on ?La guarachera? mission to deliver this beautiful and history full music style to the rest of the world. Although this music style was originated from Cuban music genres and created mostly by Cuban musicians, New York has been nominated as the new center of Cuban music, due to the isolation of Cuba from the Western hemisphere and salsa has been overtaken in the United States by Puerto Ricans and New Yorkers or so called Newyoricans. Nevertheless, as it has happened in the past this type of music has changed and new trends and styles where developed in Cuba after the Cuban Revolution and these new mutations have been quickly adopted by the new Newyorican salseros (salsa singers).

The division and isolation of Puerto Rican salseros and Cuban salseros has come to generate a new rhythm which Cubans and some critics call casino, which is the Puerto Rican salsa and the original salsa they call it Cuban. The Cuban salsa has also changed. In the past traditional salsa ensembles, took up issues as the original theme of boy meets girl; because if they where to take another theme they would have been incarcerated or banned from air. Now the lyrics take on such issues as AIDS, the country?s economic hardship, and the desire to know the world outside Cuba. This shows the power of music and its ability to affect people?s minds.

Salsa has had a big influence on Cuban people?s minds but not enough for the people to see how the government manipulates the media. The aperture in the freedom of speech does not mean that the government is going to tolerate the revolutionary lyrics of some songs. The Cuban government demonstrated this when in July of 1998 it banned a popular group named La Charanga Habanera from public appearances for six month since the government is the group?s manager and employer it can do that. The reason for the banning is not known. Some say that it was because the group sang about unprotected sex and drugs use at an international youth fair. Other say because they started undressing on stage, others say that it was because the following words were sang ?Hey green mango, now that you?re ripe, why have you still not fallen?? People say that the green mango was interpreted to be the communist dictator Fidel Castro that always dresses in green army fatigues. What is the reason for the banning? Could have been the undressing on stage, or the taken on issues as AIDS and unsafe sex or the revolutionary words.

Cuban musicians are worried that when there will be an aperture in the system will erode Cuban music. Yet Giraldo Piloto, composer and percussionist for the Klimax salsa band says he?s not worried about any foreign influences. ?I find my self bringing more and different elements into the music I?m composing, some rap and some new African rhythms, but at its heart it remains Cuban.? he says.

If you ask a Cuban ?How can you survive the poverty and humiliations?? he will tell you ?Cubans live on music the way others live on bread and water. That?s enough right there to keep us producing something unique.?