

Puerto Rico. The 51st State?

The United States took possession of Puerto Rico after its war of Independence from Spain in 1898. Despite U.S. continuous presence in Puerto Rico, the island has maintained its cultural uniqueness. After 1898 big companies from the United States moved into Puerto Rico for the sugar industry. Since then, Puerto Rico has moved from an agricultural to an industrial economy, producing mainly textiles, pharmaceuticals, petrochemicals and electronics.

In 1917 U.S. congress passed the Jones Law whereby all residents in the island were granted U.S. citizenship, and in 1952 a Puerto Rican majority approved a new constitution that recognized an autonomous government in the island. Puerto Rico was defined as a Free Autonomous State (Estado Libre Asociado). Puerto Ricans do not need a visa or a passport to enter the U.S. and can be recruited in the U.S. military. The residents of Puerto Rico vote for their government and state legislature, and also create a commission that represents them in Washington D.C. However, Puerto Ricans cannot be members of Congress and they cannot vote in U.S. Presidential elections. Puerto Ricans do not pay U.S. government taxes, but have their own tax system instead.

There is an ongoing debate in Puerto Rico on the preferred future for the island: to continue as a Free Autonomous State, to obtain full statehood, or to appeal for complete independence from the United States.

Source: Notes from Talk by Dr. Laura Briggs
3rd November, 2004

□□ **La música Puertorriqueña** □□

Puerto Rico is famous for its music, probably the most heard Caribbean music in the United States. The music of Puerto Rico is a mix of the Spanish, the African and the Indigenous traditions. Some of the instruments used in Puerto Rican music, the güiro for example, originated from Puerto Rico's indigenous population, the Taínos. The Spanish guitar suffered various adaptations into instruments for Puerto Rican music. The *requinto*, the *bordonua*, the *cuatro* and the *triple* are all descendents of the guitar.

Puerto Rican music also includes a wide variety of percussion instruments such as tambours (hollowed tree trunks covered with stretched-out animal skin), maracas, and a variety of drums, most from Africa by the slaves. Spanish, African and Taíno traditions all feed into Puerto Rican music.

Classical Music

There are some Puerto Rican important figures in classical music, such as composers Manuel Tavares and Juan Morel Campos, opera tenor Antonio Paoli, the pianist Jesús María Sanroma and the famous cellist Pablo Casals.

- *La danza*, a musical form that developed from the minuet was the most popular dance in the 19th century.

Folk Music

Puerto Rican Folk music has a large following. The most widely applauded of the island's folk music are the music of the *jíbaros*, the country folk from Puerto Rico. This music is the one that most expresses the longing that Puerto Ricans in the United States feel for the island.

Bomba y Plena

They are two different things although often grouped together. *Bomba* is a musical form from Africa, brought by the slaves who came to work on Puerto Rican sugar plantations in the 17th century. This type of music is described as a dialogue between dancer and drummer. It is as if one was challenging the other to a rhythmic duel.

Whereas *bomba* is strictly of African origin, *Plena* blends the African with the Spanish and Taíno traditions. It might have been a type of music that the Taíno tribes used during ceremonies. About one hundred years ago, this type of music became a hallmark of the Spanish tradition and coquetry. Dancing *plena* became a kind of living newspaper. Singers recited the events of the day, for example political news or the threat of a hurricane.

Salsa

It is the type of music that Puerto Rico is most known for in the United States. Originally developed within the Puerto Rican community of New York, it draws heavily from the musical roots of the Cuban and the African-Caribbean traditions. The first great salsa musician was Tito Puente. Other famous salsa musicians include the deceased Hector Lavoe and Willie Colón. Source:

<http://www.welcome.topuertorico.org/culture/music.html>

MAP OF PUERTO RICO



Nuyorican Lament by Gloria Vando

San Juan you're not for me
My cadence quails and stumbles
on your ancient stones:

there is an inner beat here
to be reckoned with-
a *seis chorraeo*, a *plena*,¹
an imbred !! Oyeeee! ²
and ! *mira tú!*³ Against which
my Manhattan (sorry,
wrong island) responses fall flat.

!Vaya!⁴ how can I deal with that?

And yet...once, long ago,
your beach was mine; Luquillo
was my bridle path to ride-
back then, before the turning of the tide
when Teddy's blue-eyed shills
secured the hill
and tried in vain to blot
the language out. But patria⁵

is a sneaky word – it lies,
seeming to turn its back
upon itself- it lies,
through paling generations –lies
and lies in wait:
the sleeping dog of nations
no translation can obliterate

(And when it's roused-
beware the bully
beware the apple pie).

I rode with purpose then,
back then, when
you were mine, harnessing
the strength of iron
in my thighs-
my eyes blazing with self, my self

¹ A Puerto Rican folkdance and its music; a type of song

² Listen!

³ Hey, look here!

⁴ Well!

⁵ Fatherland

with pride-

and once, at La Parguera,
I was baptized
on a moonless night in spring
emerging purged and
reinvented, the phosphorescent
spangles clinging
to my skin, signaling
the night to bless my innocence-

then, only yesterday –or so it seems-
I spent my youth
in La Princesa’s dungeon
for unproved crimes
against an unloved nation –yes

only yesterday, I knew where I belonged,
I knew my part.

and now, you see me here,
a trespasser in my own past,
tracing a faint ancestral theme
far back, beyond the hard rock
rhythm of the strand.
I wald down El Condado, past
Pizza Huts, Big Macs and
Coca-Cola stands
listening for a song-

A wisp of song-

That belongs in my heart.

**Source: Cortina, Rodolfo (Ed.). Hispanic American Literature. An Anthology.
Houston: NTC Publishing group. Pp.277-280**

List of Recommended Websites

Music:

http://www.antillania.com/Arte_antillano.htm – Website dedicated to
Caribbean art

<http://antojitos.com/> - Internet Puerto Rican related products

<http://www.dubina.com/>

<http://www.dubina.com/Arte/cultura.asp> - Provides an extensive list of links to Puerto Rican culture, art, music, literature, and press

<http://www.prpop.org/> - Popular Cultural Association of Puerto Rico

<http://www.icp.gobierno.pr/> - Cultural Institute of the Government of Puerto Rico

<http://www.radiouniversidad.org/index.php> - Radio of the University of Puerto Rico

Press:

Diálogo: **<http://www.dialogodigital.com/portada.php?id=6E1>**

Nuevo Día: **<http://endi.com/>**Por Dentro:

<http://www.moralespr.tripod.com/>

List of other publications:

<http://conuco.upr.edu/revistas.html>

<http://www.dubina.com/Arte/cultura.asp>

Other Sources

Documentary: *Newyorican Dream* (Independent Film about a Puerto Rican family in N.Y

complete Excellent source for high school students. Contains a brief but

Review of Puerto Rican history.

Children's books:

Pitre Felix & Christy Hale. *Juan Bobo and the Pig: A Puerto Rican Folktale*

Some Puerto Rican music we recommend for the classroom:

Grupo Afro Boricua – *Bombazo*

Los Alegres de Borinquen – *Para todo el mundo*

Hermanos Ayala – *Bomba de Loíza*

Roy Brown – *Aires Bucaneros/Casi Alba*

Willie Colón & Héctor Lavoe – *Lo Mato*

Edwin Colón Zayas – *Taller Campesino*

Rafael Hernández – *Su música, Interpreta Gilberto Monroig*

Andrés Jiménez “El Jíbaro” – *Cien años con Albizu*