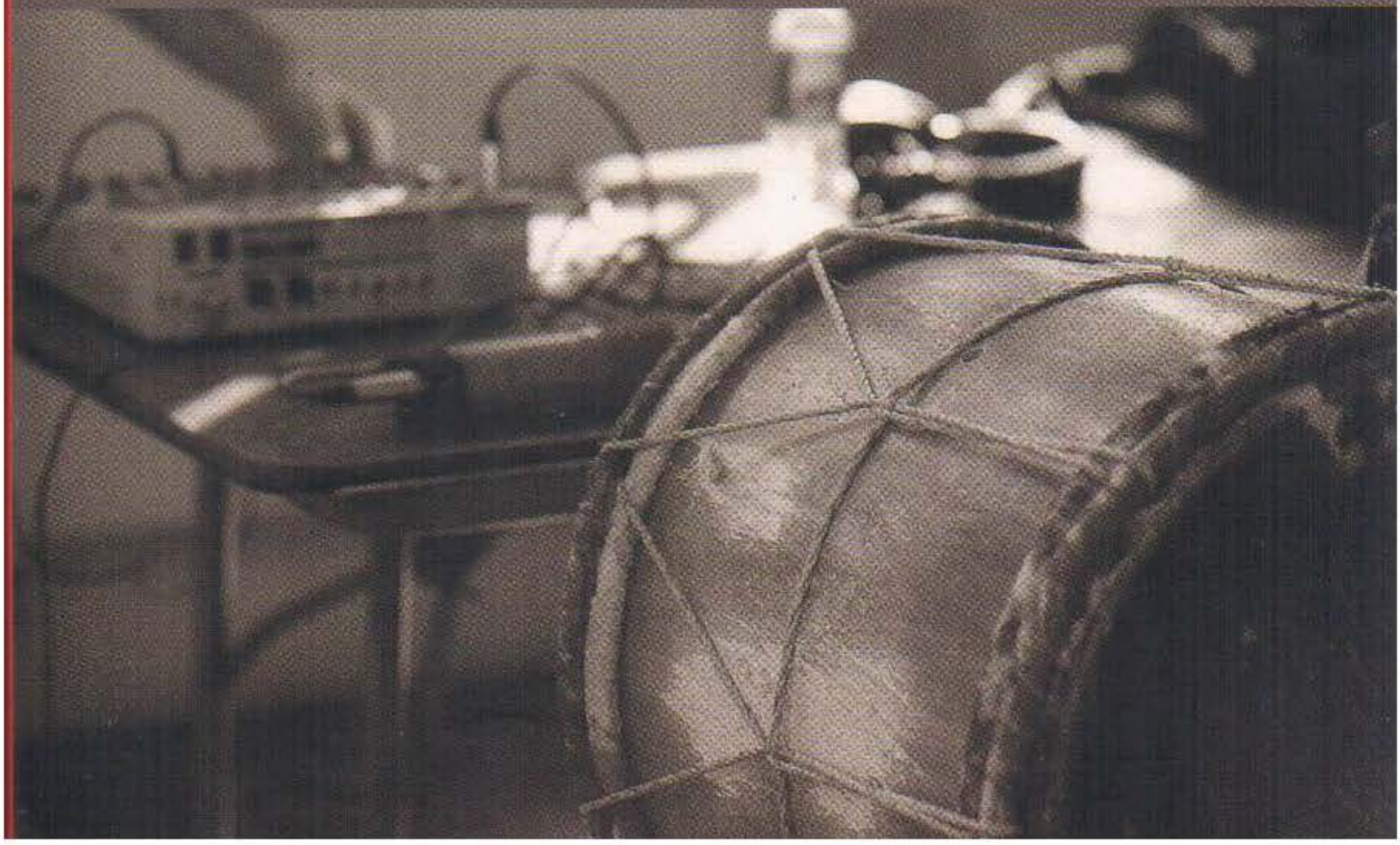
CUMBIA!

Scenes of a Migrant Latin American Music Genre

Edited by **HÉCTOR FERNÁNDEZ L'HOESTE** and **PABLO VILA**



I.

Cumbia Music in Colombia

Origins, Transformations, and Evolution of a Coastal Music Genre

Costeño Music and Its Sociocultural Context

The Caribbean coastal region of Colombia is called the *Costa*, and its inhabitants are referred to as *costeños*.[1] The *música costeña* (coastal music) is a product of tri-ethnic syncretic cultural traditions including Amerindian, Spanish, and African elements (List 1980b, 1983), a merging that begins with the colonial period and continues into the republican period on the Caribbean Coast.[2] Traditional music from the Colombian Caribbean coast expresses its tri-ethnic costeño identity in various vocal styles and musical forms and through its type of instruments and the way they are played.[3] In this chapter I describe the aspects and circumstances under which *cumbia*, a coastal musical genre and dance form of peasant origins characterized by an African-derived style, has spread from its local origins in the valley of the Magdalena River to acquire a Colombian national identity, becoming in a few years a transnational musical phenomenon.

Through its heterogeneity, coastal ethno-organology reflects the different ethnic and cultural contributions that shape costeño culture. Instrumental ensembles are the product of this process of hybridization. They usually combine instruments of indigenous origin, such as the *gaita* (vertical duct flute) and the *maraca* (rattle); African origin, such as the *tambor alegre* and the *llamador*, single-headed drums of different sizes, the *tambora* (double-headed drum), the *caña de millo* (a millet-cane transverse clarinet), the *marímbula* (a large wooden-box lamellaphone), and the *marimba de napa* (musical bow); and European origin, such as the accordion and the wind instruments of the brass bands.

Most of the *ritmos* (as the musical genres for dancing are called) of Colom-

bia's Atlantic coastal region—such as *tambora, bullerengue, chandé, mapalé, cumbia, porro, puya, fandango*—show some "Africanisms" present in their musical structure:

> The basic concept operative in most cases is the underlying reiterated cycle of pulses or time-span. . . . African influence is therefore to be found in the complex framework built above this foundation, involving pervasive off-beat phrasing, overlapping of call and response patterns, specific uses of the hemiola, and the employment of both disjunct and irregular cycles in the realization of the underlying time-span. These traits plus the density of rhythmic structure displayed in the performances of percussion ensembles relate costeño music to that of sub-Saharan Africa. (List 1980a: 16–17)

There are various occasions during the year when music is traditionally performed: during Catholic festivities,[4] such as Christmas and Easter, on patron saints days, and at carnivals and folk festivals (e.g., Festival Nacional de la Cumbia at El Banco, Festival de Gaita in San Jacinto, Festival de la Tambora in Tamalameque, Festival del Porro in San Pelayo, and Festival de la Leyenda Vallenata in Valledupar).

On the Caribbean coast, musical groups, or *conjuntos* (small instrumental sets with four to five elements), represent a further metamorphosis or evolution of the earlier tambora,[5] which, spread among the black communities along the Magdalena River, stands as an archetype. The tambora ensemble consists of percussion and vocals only, including a conical drum with a single head (*currulao*),[6] a cylindrical drum with a double head (*tambora*), and chant in the form of a call-and-response pattern performed by a male or female solo singer alternating with a chorus of women (*cantadoras*) and accompanied by the *palmoteo* (hand-clapping) or beating of the *tablitas* or *palmetas* (wooden paddles) of a chorus of women singing the refrain (Carbó Ronderos 2003). Its repertoire includes the *bailes cantados* (sung dances)—such as bullerengue, tambora, chandé, *berroche, guacherna*—and songs in call-and-response form (with a solo singer and chorus), accompanied by drums and handclap.[7]

As an expression of Afro-Colombian music culture, tamboras are quite common in the region considered the birthplace of cumbia, the Mompox area. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, many *palenques*, villages formed by fugitive slaves (*cimarrones*) during the colonial period, sprang up in this area.[8] In fact, from the organological point of view, the line-up of coastal conjuntos consists of drums that make up the tambora, to which the transverse clarinet, the caña de millo (cane of millet), or two vertical flutes

(gaitas) were added, giving birth, respectively, to the conjuntos of *cañamilleros* and *gaiteros*. Throughout this instrumental development, there was a loss of the chorus of female singers (cantadoras) and, obviously, of the refrain sung by them (in some cases, sung by the same musicians). When the tune is sung, the vocal element appears in a call-and-response form and, consequently, the musicians in the group carry out the choral answer.

Origins, Dissemination, Instruments, and Forms of Cumbia

As a music and dance genre, cumbia is most representative of coastal oral traditional culture. It is the artistic and cultural product of the rural and artisan classes, who reveal a tricultural Afro-Indo-Hispanic heritage, although the African component is dominant. In traditional costeño music culture, the term *cumbia* has a variety of connotations: it refers at the same time to a rhythm, a musical genre, and a dance.

As music and dance, cumbia originates in the upper part of the Magdalena River, in the zone called the Mompox Depression, which is located at the confluence of the Magdalena and Cauca Rivers, between the cities of Mompox and Plato (Fals Borda 1986b: 132), and its epicenter is located at the nearby city of El Banco, where the Festival de la Cumbia has taken place since 1970. Later, the port city of Barranquilla, located at the mouth of the Magdalena River, became the center of dissemination of cumbia. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Barranquilla has hosted the yearly Carnaval, to which traditional music and dance ensembles come from all over the Caribbean coast and the valley of the Magdalena River to perform at the *desfile* (parade) called Batalla de Flores (Battle of Flowers), along with *comparsas* (dance ensembles) (Friedemann 1985).

The etymology of the term *cumbia* is controversial. According to the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, "*kumba* is a very popular toponymic and tribal denomination in Africa, from the north of Guinea to the Congo." He adds, "The same root is evident among the Kalabari, who use the term *ekombi* for 'a certain dance of women,' also called *tukhube*" (1985: 183). The historian Carlos Esteban Deive (1974: 19) contends that the term *cumbancha* comes from *nkumba*, the word for navel. Nicolás Del Castillo Mathieu (1982: 221) suggests instead that the terms *cumbia* and *cumbiamba* probably derive from Kikongo *ngoma*, *nkumbi*, which signifies "drum." T. K. Biaya (1993: 204)

claims that the name *cyombela*, which refers to the percussionist Luba-Kasai from the Congo, comes from *komba (ngoma)*, meaning "beat on the drum." On the island of Annobón (Equatorial Guinea), the term *cumbé* indicates a square drum with legs, used to complement a dance with the same name. The drum is proper of Jamaica, where maroons called it *gombay* or *goombah* (Roberts 1926), and it arrived in Annobón during the nineteenth century through Freetown immigrants in Sierra Leone, which is where Jamaican maroons were taken, forming the Krio group (Creole in Sierra Leone; Horton 1999; De Aranzadi 2009).

Cumbé was also the name given to the towns founded by fugitive slaves in Venezuela (called *palenques* in Colombia and *quilombos* in Brazil) during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (De Granda 1970: 452; Bermúdez 1992: 61–62). The same name also turns up in the catalogue for Mexican string instruments, the *tablatura de vihuela* from 1740, where, among many dances listed from the colonial period, there is an entry for *cumbees o cantos negros* with the subtitle *cantos en idioma guinea* (Stevenson 1971: 162).[9]

The hypothesis on the origin of cumbia as a ritual initiation dance from Central Africa, based on etymological similarities, is also quite appealing: (a) In the upper region of Zaire, an initiation ceremony called *kikumbi* takes place, which includes dances comparable to the Brazilian *batuque* of *Kongo* origin (Mukuna 1979);[10] (b) *Likumbi* is the name of the shelter that houses a male initiation rite (*jando*) of the Makonde of northeastern Mozambique (Ndege 2007); (c) *Nkumbi* is the initiation ritual of the Mbo of the Ituri Forest in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Towles 1993); (d) In the female initiation rites of the Tsonga, fertility songs are sung and the *khomba* dance is performed with the purpose of encouraging women's fertility (Johnston 1974).

Nevertheless Colombian cumbia bears no ritual connotation at all and, according to existing written and oral sources, does not appear to have had any in the past either. At present, just as in the past, the traditional occasions when cumbia surfaces are mainly folk festivals, carnivals (the Carnaval de Barranquilla, for example), and holidays of the Catholic liturgical calendar (e.g., the celebration of the Virgin of Candelaria by the hill of La Popa in Cartagena de Indias during November).

According to historical sources, cumbia does not seem very old; its origin does not appear to go back to the colonial era, but rather to the republican period. The first documented written comments on cumbia date back to the end of the nineteenth century, in the newspaper *El Porvenir* from Cartagena

de Indias. On March 2, 1879, there is reference to the *cumbiamba* performed during the festival for the Virgin of Candelaria:

> At night you hear the *cumbiamba*, a popular dance whose music consists of a *flauta de millo* and a drum that produced a monotonous, but rhythmic sound. It is danced in a circle, and the man makes bizarre and graceful movements to the sound of the drum, while the woman holds a bundle of burning candles on her head, covered by a pretty handkerchief, which catches fire at the end, when the candles go out; that is the splendor of the dance.[11]

From the choreographic perspective, cumbia is a Spanish-like court dance that is characterized by a lover's duel, in which movements simulate a game of repulsion and attraction between two dancers (the *cumbiamberos*). A couple dancing in a counterclockwise circle around a group of musicians performs it. As it is usually performed at night, the woman carries a bundle of lit candles that she uses to push away the man, who pursues her by circling her with open arms. With the other hand, the woman holds the tip of her long skirt (*pollera*), and in a standing position, swings her hips and takes small steps, all while trying to remain untouched by her partner. The man dances around the woman with a hat (the traditional *sombrero vueltiao*, a staple of the Colombian Caribbean) in his hand, which he tries to place on her head as a symbol of amorous conquest.

In terms of musical performance, in its most conventional variety, Colombian cumbia is exclusively instrumental (Escalante 1964; D. Zapata 1967; List 1980b). The traditional caña de millo ensemble (or cumbiamba) is made up of the caña de millo (the transverse idioglottic clarinet), the *tambor alegre* (a conical drum with only one drumhead), the *tambor llamador* (a conical drum with one drumhead), the tambora (a cylindrical drum with two drumheads) and the *guache* (tubular rattle).

The caña de millo (also known as *millo*, *pito*, or *pito atravesao*) is not really a flute (Abadía 1983, 1991) but a transverse idioglottic clarinet, originally made of millet, nowadays often made from a palm called *lata* (*Bactris guineensis*). It consists of a short cane with four finger holes and a tongue cut in one end to act as a reed, which is fitted with a small thread that catches between the teeth in order to adjust the sound and produce the vibrato. The technique involves the inhalation and exhalation of air through the reed. The resulting sound is sharp and nasal-like.

The origin of this instrument is contentious. According to the Africanist perspective of the foremost ethnomusicologist George List,

> There is no evidence that the clarinet existed in South America in the pre-Colombian period. There are no archaeological findings of clarinets, no reproductions of clarinets on artifacts, and no references to such an instrument in early historical literature. . . . To my knowledge, a transverse idioglottic clarinet, that is, a clarinet held horizontally with the reed cut from the same body, and remaining attached to the tube of cane, is found in the Western Hemisphere only in the Atlantic coastal region of Colombia. Apparently, not the Indians, but the Spanish-speaking people from the plains are the only ones who play it. (1983: 61)

In Africa, the transverse idioglottic clarinet with a simple reed is found in the Sahel belt area, where pastoral nomadic populations use it (since it is the same area where millet is grown). According to List (1983), the caña de millo is a modified version of the *bobiyel* played by the Fulbe (Fulani) of Burkina Faso, of the *bounkam* of the Bissa of Burkina Faso, and also of the *kamko* of the Kasera-Nakari in the north of Ghana. Thus "the source of the caña de millo is Africa and the clarinets like the *bobiyel*, the *bounkam*, and the *kamko* are its progenitors" (65). These African examples are transverse clarinets made from a stalk of millet cane, with the reed cut from the side of the cane. The performance is based on the emission of sound while inhaling and exhaling without interruption. It should be noted that there are also surprising similarities with the transverse *libo* clarinet of the Hausa of Chad. This latter instrument also comes from the same type of millet cane and is also equipped with a small string that, when played, adjusts the sounds that are produced.[12] According to the hypothesis regarding the indigenous origin of the caña de millo (Abadía 1973, 1983, 1991; Bermúdez 1985), the Wayúu Indians from the Guajira Peninsula in northernmost Colombia use a very similar instrument, the transverse idioglottic clarinet called *massi* and *wotorroyoi*. However, it is possible that the Wayúu (also known as Guajiros) adopted these instruments recently from Afro-Colombian musical culture.

The *tambor alegre* (or *tambor hembra*, "female drum") is a conical drum,[13] with a drumhead made of goat skin, and is made of the wood of the *banco blanco* (*Gyrocarpus americana*). Its tension system in the shape of a V is made of wooden wedges and pieces of string from the *fique* plant (*Furcraea andina*). The *llamador* (or *tambor macho*, "male drum") is the same as the tambor alegre in form, material, and system of tension, but its dimensions are smaller.[14] The tambor alegre has the role of "cheering up," "improvising," or varying

around a predefined rhythmic base, while the llamador performs a constant, unvaried isochronous pulsation on the offbeat.

The tambor alegre and the tambor llamador are single-headed drums with a "wedge-hoop" tension system that displays notable structural similarities with some African drums, such as the *sangbei* from the Susu and Mende peoples in Sierra Leone (List 1983), and with certain Afro-Venezuelan drums (*chimbangueles*), Afro-Panamanian drums (*pujador, llamador,* and *repicador*), and Afro-Brazilian drums (*atabaques*). All of these types of drums are very similar to the sacred *enkomo* drums of the secret society of Abakuá or Ñáñigos (Cuba), which makes up part of the Carabalí.[15]

The tambora is a cylindrical bass drum with two heads joined together with a "zigzag" tension system.[16] It is placed horizontally on a wooden rack and played with two drumsticks that alternate between the drumhead and the shell of the drum. Drums with double heads of this type are found in the Gulf of Guinea, such as the *tempe* drum of Temne in Sierra Leone and the *gbùn gbùn* drum of Kpelle in Liberia (List 1983; Stone 1982).

Finally, the *guache* is a tubular rattle, originally made from *guadua* bamboo (*Bambusa americana*). Today it is generally made of metal and filled with seeds.

Another group related to the playing of cumbia is the *conjunto de gaitas*, quite common in the coastal savannah region, which, roughly speaking, includes the departments of Córdoba, Sucre, and Bolívar.[17] Two gaitas flutes (*macho*, "male," and *hembra*, "female") with the maraca, the tambor alegre, and the tambor llamador traditionally form this ensemble (List 1973, 1983, 1987). The function of the *gaita hembra* is to play the melody, while the role of the *gaita macho* is to emphasize just a few notes of the melodic line. The best known example of this kind of band is the group Gaiteros de San Jacinto.

The gaita is a flute of indigenous origin.[18] Coastal gaitas are identical to the *kuizi* (*kùisi sigì* and *kùisi bunzi*) flutes of the Kogi Indians from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (Izikowitz 1935; Abadía 1983, 1991) and are similar to the flutes called *tolo, suarra*, or *supé*, used in pairs (male and female) by the Kuna Indians of the Darién region near the Colombia-Panama border and the San Blas Islands (Garay 1930; Taylor 1968; List 1973; Marulanda 1984; Abadía 1973, 1983, 1991).[19] The maraca (*tani* in the Kogi language, *na* or *nasi* in Kuna) is a rattle of the Arawak Indians (Tro Pérez 1978), made from a dry fruit filled with seeds, called *totumo* (*Crescentia cujete*). Among the *indios*, the maraca has a dual function: it's the musical instrument for parties and the

ritual instrument for the healing rites of the shaman. *Gaita* is also the name given by gaiteros to the musical genre corresponding to cumbia when it is played with gaita flutes.

As mentioned, traditional cumbia is an exclusively instrumental music genre (List 1980b). Later, singing was added to cumbia in the form of *cuartetos* (stanzas of four octosyllabic lines) sung by one of the musicians of the group, which alternates with the refrain of the chorus through a responsorial song (with soloist and chorus).

Cumbia is in double simple tempo (2/2 or 2/4). The *millo* (clarinet) begins and then the tambora follows, which alternates with the *paloteo*, the beating on the wooden shell of the drum using two sticks. Afterward the llamador comes in, giving a regular pulse offbeat, and the guacho is shaken upward and downward, emphasizing the binary scansion and accentuating the offbeat. The bullerengue (a *baile cantado*) could be considered a precursor of cumbia because its rhythm is also characterized by the offbeat played by the llamador. The tambor alegre plays a rhythmic ostinato with short variations at the end of each phrase. The song is fragmented by *revuelos*, rhythmic variations or improvisations. Improvisation is allowed to all instruments, with the exception of the llamador (whose role is to maintain a regular, repeated pulse), and its function is to carry the song to a climax, thus developing the same provocative function as the *gritos* (cries).

Media Distribution and Circulation

Since the 1930s, radio broadcasting has played a significant role in the diffusion of Caribbean and Latin American music (above all, the Cuban *son*, the Mexican *ranchera*, the Argentine *tango*, and the Brazilian *maxixe*), as well as the North American fox-trot. The first radio station in Colombia, La Voz de Barranquilla, took place in Barranquilla in 1929. Just a few years later, in 1934, a new radio station from Barranquilla, called the Emisora Atlántico, followed up. Around the same time, another radio station emerged in Cartagena, called La Voz de Laboratorios Fuentes (later simply called Emisora Fuentes). Cuban music (*bolero, son, rumba, guaracha, danzón*) had an immense impact on the Colombian audience; its success favored the process of "Cubanization" as a stylistic transformation of Colombian music.[20] In brief, radio stations of Barranquilla (La Voz de Barranquilla), Bogotá (La Voz de la Víctor), and Cartagena (Emisora Fuentes) all broadcast the recordings of Trío

Matamoros, Sonora Matancera, Sexteto Habanero,[21] Septeto Nacional, and the great Cuban orchestras (Benny Moré, Machito, Xavier Cugat, and Pérez Prado). Cuban bands such as Trío Matamoros and the Casino de La Playa orchestra toured Colombia in the 1930s, the latter performing on La Voz de la Víctor, La Voz de Barranquilla, and Emisora Fuentes (Betancur Álvarez 1993).

During this period, broadcast music was partly recorded and performed live at the radio station's studio. Each station had a stable orchestra that accompanied the guest soloists (as in the case of the Emisora Atlántico Jazz Band, the Orquesta Emisora Fuentes, and the Orquesta La Voz de Barranquilla). Programming could not sustain itself solely on recordings, because almost all were imported and, as a result, were quite expensive. Consequently this process led to the orchestration of folk music tunes, which had significant implications for contemporary Colombian popular music. The Cubanization of the arrangements was used to incorporate Afro-Cuban musical instruments: congas, bongos, maracas, claves, güiro, and trumpets.

Thanks to orchestral arrangements of many radio station bands, the cultivated "urban" interpretation of traditional "rural" melodies (originally performed by conjuntos and brass bands) led to a transformation of the folk repertoires into new urban musical forms: "Radio, then, not only provided a workplace for musicians and a point of circulation for their efforts, but also collaborated in the development of an urban musical culture for the Atlantic Coast" (González 1989: 27).

In the 1940s and 1950s the process of adapting traditional rhythms and melodies to cosmopolitan dance orchestras brought about a transformation from *música costeña* to *música tropical*. The rhythmic and melodic structures of costeño musical genres (cumbia, gaita, porro, fandango) traditionally interpreted by groups of gaiteros and *milleros* were stylized and orchestrated by composers and conductors such as "Lucho" Bermúdez (Luis Eduardo Bermúdez, 1912–94) and "Pacho" Galán (Francisco Galán, 1904–88).[22] Both had come to the regional music tradition of the coast to give stylized orchestral arrangements and big band sound to the music. Their music was halfway between the big band jazz style of Benny Goodman and the mambo of the Pérez Prado, Xavier Cugat, and Benny Moré orchestras. (Xavier Cugat toured Colombia in 1951, Benny Moré in 1955, and Pérez Prado in 1966; Betancur Álvarez 1993). At the same time, they were inspired by the *bandas de viento* (brass bands) from the towns in the Sinú River Valley, above all in San Pelayo (Córdoba), which was considered the "cradle of porro," and where the brass band style was strong and rooted in local tradition. Peter Wade clarifies:

> People such as Bermúdez and Galán came from backgrounds that had strong elements of the provincial middle class but had some links with rural lower-class experience as well; they had formal musical training, not always in a conservatory, but they were also familiar with Costeño instruments and styles from traditional peasant repertoire and from the *bandas de viento*. They knew, played, and often composed a wide range of styles, including *bambucos* and *pasillos*, but they wanted to bring Costeño music, albeit in highly adapted form, into the same arena—this was their way of making a mark. (2000: 87)

Since they conveyed supplementary meaning and rendered melodies recognizable to wide audiences, orchestral arrangements habitually respected the rhythmic structure of traditional genres. It is also imperative to consider the significance of the musical training of these musicians and conductors: "Lucho" Bermúdez, "Pacho" Galán, and Antonio María Peñalosa were all conductors who, during their youth, had participated in folk bandas de viento.

In the nineteenth century, bandas de viento emerged next to traditional groups in some towns in the department of Córdoba (San Pelayo, in particular; Fals Borda 1986a; Fortich Díaz 1994). Since then, folk music of the Sinú River Valley (porro and fandango) has been performed by traditional conjuntos (gaiteros and cañamilleros), or by a banda de viento, better known as *papayera*, made up of clarinets, trumpets, sax, bass drum, snare drum, and cymbals (Lotero Botero 1989).[23] Usually, *banda* musicians do not know how to read written music but rather play by ear. In other words, their training is still mostly through oral tradition. Young apprentices of wind instruments practice by making small lemon leaves vibrate between their lips, to imitate the trumpets and clarinets, making true brass bands called *bandas de hojita* (little leaves ensembles).

One of the most popular bandas de viento from the 1950s and 1960s, Pedro Laza y sus Pelayeros, is a quintessential example of this kind of cultural practice. Founded by Laza (1904–80) in 1952, its collection of works was made up mostly of porros and fandangos, in accordance with local banda tradition, and some cumbias as well. Its interpretation of coastal music was a unique combination of orchestral style and the typical sounds of village banda flavor, called *sabanera* (from the savannah).

Costeño music, particularly cumbia and porro, has strong African elements. Thus, to make it more accessible (aesthetically) and acceptable (socially) among the middle classes of the interior of the country and to contribute to its international diffusion, great ballroom dance orchestras re-

interpreted it in a stylized and orchestrated form, eliminating all the African-derived musical instruments:

> *Cumbia* and other styles that belong to coastal music are a classic instantiation of a black inspirational tradition that, with time, has been turning "white." Previously, it was attacked, when in the past it was practiced independently by blacks. Nevertheless, it converts into a form that is more and more acceptable to the extent that it extends through the non-black world, losing its "Africanism" and its principal association with black people, although it retains its attractive quality of "hot." It is not a coincidence then that tropical music is also known as "hot, sexy" music. (Wade 1997a: 334–35)

The white and mestizo population of the Andean interior, who listened mostly to Andean music (*bambuco* and *pasillo*), began to listen and dance to coastal music (cumbia and porro), as well as Cuban genres (bolero, guaracha, son, and rumba).

National and international diffusion of orchestrated cumbia acquired a primary role in the relationship between music and national identity and the process of homogenizing tendencies of nationalism. Urban orchestrated cumbia begins to replace the bambuco, an Andean music genre till then considered the most representative form of traditional music in Colombia, as the flag of national identity:

> Colombia was no longer represented either at home or abroad by a style associated with the Andean interior, center of power, wealth and "civilization"; it was now represented by tropical music from the Caribbean coastal region, seen as poor, backward, "hot" (climatically, sexually, and musically) and "black" (at least by association, even if many of the musicians in the dance bands, even the Costeño ones, were whites or light-coloured mestizos). (Wade 1997a: 9)

Orchestras played in the social clubs for the elite in the large Andean cities, such as Bogotá and Medellín, or broadcast live on radio stations. Stylized and orchestrated cumbia by the great ballroom dance orchestras was popularized as *música tropical* (tropical music) in other Latin American countries: "Lucho" Bermúdez played with his orchestra in Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, and the United States; "Pacho" Galán played in Central America and Venezuela (Wade 2000: 173).

National record production was also fundamental to the process of diffusion of música tropical, especially the role played by the first Colom-

bian record label, Discos Fuentes, founded by Antonio Fuentes (1907–85) in Cartagena (later transferred to Medellín) in 1934. Fuentes was the same person who had been so important as a promoter of the first radio station in Cartagena, Emisora Fuentes, and, who had also, in the 1940s, regularly transmitted the music produced by the Orquesta Emisora Fuentes. In the following years, other record labels that made history with Colombian popular music eventually popped up: Discos Tropical, founded by Emilio Fortou in Barranquilla in 1945, and Discos Sonolux, founded in Medellín in 1949.[24]

Currently, for the older generations living in the interior of the country, the term *cumbia* still refers to the stylized cumbia from the great orchestra shows of the 1940s and 1950s. Such a process of identification began when a young clarinet player, "Lucho" Bermúdez, recorded the track "Danza negra" (Black Dance),[25] a cumbia sung by Matilde Díaz; the song was so successful that people began to identify it as *the* Colombian cumbia (as the text of the song suggests). Nowadays, some hits from the 1940s and 1950s, such as the cumbias "Danza negra" and "Colombia, tierra querida" (Colombia, Beloved Country), or the mapalé "Prende la vela" (Light the Candle) by "Lucho" Bermúdez, are considered classics and known throughout the country, even today, half a century after their inception. Indeed these songs have become musical icons of Colombian national identity.

On one hand, the commercialization of cumbia has assisted its national and international dissemination through the production of recordings and increased radio playtime; on the other, it has also generated significant stylistic changes that have brought into question issues of authenticity and the alleged degeneration of cumbia. The musician Luis Antonio Escobar points out that the passage of cumbia from the "folk" to the "popular" domain caused a loss of authenticity:

> In this sense we have to consider another transition from folk to popular domain. Such is the case of famous musicians who adopted some native rhythms such as *cumbia* and *porro*, making arrangements and changing their character.
>
> I refer particularly to Lucho Bermúdez, a musician of immense musical talent and the author of numerous *porros*, *cumbias* and other forms, trying to represent a new kind of mixture between Indian, black, and white components. This new musical trend, synthesis of a new people of Cartagena, is another important expression, but it belongs to the Colombian popular music in some cases covered with international orchestration, which needs a certain number

> of harmonies, rhythms, and instruments that are going to represent another musical level, perhaps more striking but less authentic. (1985: 84)

The folklorist José Portaccio writes, "One cannot deny that cumbias that have had national and international impact are the ones that are sung and orchestrated, contrary to the true and authentic performance, which corresponds to *milleros* and drum ensembles. The taped recordings of these groups hardly enjoy regional distribution and are very scarce through the entire country" (1995: 69). In fact it is surprising to note the enormous stylistic differences separating the two musical phenomena under the same name of *cumbia*. It's simply a matter of comparing, for instance, the "rural, traditional" cumbia played with autochthonic instruments by the cañamilleros of river towns like Mahates, Botón de Leyva, and El Banco, with a "popular, urban" cumbia, stylized, and with vocals, like "La pollera colorá" (The Red Skirt) by Wilson Choperena, sang by its composer and performed by Pedro Salcedo's orchestra (and successfully released by Discos Tropical), which eventually became a sort of popular national anthem.

The 1960s mark the progressive decline of ballroom dance orchestras and the rise of the smaller combos. With an instrumental structure made up basically of a brass band and two accordions (including the virtuoso *acordeonero* Alfredo Gutiérrez), Los Corraleros de Majagual contributed to the circulation and popularization of cumbia and *vallenato* in the entire country and in other nations where they played, such as Mexico, Ecuador, and Peru. Another band with a brief national popularity but a strong impact outside the country was Sonora Dinamita (inspired by Cuba's Sonora Matancera), renowned for its adoption of an electric bass and the accordion. The Sonora Dinamita, started in Cartagena in 1960 by Lucho Argaín (Lucho Pérez Cedrón), played a crucial role in spreading a simplified form of cumbia. This kind of *cumbia de exportación* (export cumbia; Escobar 1985; Pacini Hernandez 1992) began to circulate all over Latin America, enjoying particular acceptance in Mexico, Peru, Argentina, and Chile. As Deborah Pacini Hernandez writes:

> Other Colombian musicians and bands—recognizing cumbia's economic potential outside the country, also have continued to record cumbia produced exclusively for export to Central America and the Andean nations. Nevertheless, these cumbias have increasingly been transformed to adapt to the tastes of populations with very different aesthetic traditions than those from the strongly African-derived coastal culture from which cumbia origi-

> nally emerged. Most noticeably, these made-for-export cumbias have lost the rhythmic complexity of their predecessor, the cumbia *costeña*. . . . As a result, these cumbias are uncategorically rejected by *costeños*, who refer to them politely as *cumbias del interior* (cumbias from the highland interior), or more scornfully as *cumbias gallegas*, the closest (figurative) translation of which I can think of is "honky cumbias." (1992: 292)

The commercial and standardized variant of cumbia spreading in all Latin American countries was so successful that it went through a process of appropriation and transformation according to the local taste. In the 1980s Peruvian cumbia, or *chicha*, for example, adopted the pentatonic melodies from the Andean *huayno*, adding the rhythmic structure from Caribbean cumbia. (Such is the case of the hit "El Aguajal" by Los Shapis, a chicha version of the huayno "El Alisal.") Then, in the 1990s, the Peruvian *tecno-cumbia* left the folk huayno component and mixed Colombian cumbia with Tex-Mex sounds. (Such is the case of the singer Rossy War.)

Cumbia and Other Genres

In the 1970s and 1980s, cumbia had to confront, at the national level, the emergence and growing admiration for another music genre, the *vallenato*. Named after its main center of dissemination, the city of Valledupar, vallenato is a musical genre played in its traditional form by an accordion ensemble, formed by the *acordeón* (diatonic accordion), the *caja* (drum), and the *guacharaca* (scraper), whose repertoire consists of four basic music forms: son, *paseo*, merengue, and puya.

With the encouragement of the first governor of Cesar and former president of Colombia, Alfonso López Michelsen (1913–2007), vallenato changed from a regional folk expression of La Provincia (the department of Cesar) into a national popular music for the masses. López Michelsen was a steadfast supporter of vallenato and the principal promoter of the now renowned Festival de la Leyenda Vallenata (established in 1967), together with a local politician, Consuelo Araújo, and the composer Rafael Escalona. Having garnered official validation thanks to a process of increased acceptance by the Andean middle classes and enjoying steady support by selected members of Bogotá's ruling classes, vallenato was losing its plebeian connotations (being an expression of the lower social strata of northeastern coastal populations)

and an image closely associated with drug trafficking and smuggling during the late 1970s, to become a type of music disseminated and appreciated by the entire country and all social classes.

Vallenato's most recent revival as a widespread middle-class phenomenon took place in the early 1990s with the singer and actor Carlos Vives, who, after playing the role of Rafael Escalona on a hit soap opera produced by Caracol TV in 1991, asserted himself as a *rock-vallenato* star.[26] Vives's music found inspiration in the classics of the vallenato repertoire composed by Rafael Escalona and accordionists like Francisco "Pacho" Rada, Alejandro "Alejo" Durán, and Emiliano Zuleta, among many others. In this way, through the novel arrangement of instruments (integrating the gaitas, drums, and accordion to the electric bass and drums) and musical styles (blending traditional Caribbean ritmos, including cumbia, with contemporary urban rock), the singer from Santa Marta managed to bestow a modern and innovative air to vallenato, creating a new tendency that connects to the tastes of a large portion of Colombia's audiences, comprising both old and new generations, as well as different social classes: "By the early 1990s, *vallenato* had come to replace *música tropical* as the new popular Colombian sound" (Waxer 2001: 148).

In the 1980s the panorama of Colombian music began to change due to the influence of *salsa*, a Cuban-based popular dance music developed by Latinos in New York during the 1960s and 1970s. The music became apparent in the city of Cali, the principal urban center near the Colombian Pacific Coast, with a large Afro-descendant population. It is precisely in Cali and the nearby port of Buenaventura that the first groups of Colombian salsa emerged: Guayacán and Grupo Niche. But the first successful Colombian group was Fruko y sus Tesos, founded by Ernesto "Fruko" Estrada (formerly of Los Corraleros) in 1971, whose singer, the late Joe Arroyo, would eventually have an extremely successful solo career. The song "El preso" (The Prisoner), composed by Alvaro Velásquez and performed by Fruko y sus Tesos, was a hit for a long time in Colombia, becoming a classic of Colombian salsa. Colombian salsa takes the form of a variety of "sauces" with many local "flavors," inspired by rhythms of the Pacific Coast (*currulao*) and the Atlantic Coast (cumbia). For quite some time, Colombian salsa remained a decidedly regional and marginal phenomenon, with little national resonance and distribution, thus distinguishing itself significantly, in both style and form, from *música costeña* and *música del interior*.

Despite salsa's growing popularity and the advent of new, imported genres like Dominican merengue, commercial cumbia enjoyed substantial accep-

tance abroad throughout the 1980s, thanks to the success of songs like "La colegiala" (The Schoolgirl) by Rodolfo y su Típica.[27] The song became a hit in Europe when it was used as jingle for a coffee commercial. Actually, this song is not even considered a cumbia by most coastal musicians, but rather is considered contemptuously as *chucu-chucu*,[28] the derogatory, onomatopoeic term describing the kind of simplified and repetitive version of cumbia embraced by Colombia's recording industry studios after the 1970s.

In the 1990s cumbia was summarily included in the marketing of world music, awakening interest from British recording labels of world music such as World Circuit, Mango Records (a division of Island Records), World Music Network, and Globe Style, which released compilations of "old-fashioned" cumbias from the Colombian labels Sonolux and Discos Fuentes. In 1982, in Stockholm, during the ceremony for the Nobel Prize for literature, the Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez introduced to a worldwide audience the Colombian singer Sonia Bazanta, otherwise known as Totó La Momposina, from a family of singers and musicians from the village of Talaigua, a small riverside town in Magdalena (an old palenque of fugitive slaves). Since then, Totó La Momposina has become a staple of the global circuit of world music, participating in WOMAD (World of Music, Arts, and Dance), the traveling festival of ethnic music from all over the world. Peter Gabriel started the festival in 1991, after successfully recording albums like *La candela viva* (The Burning Fire), by Totó La Momposina, for the Real World label in 1992. As the new emblem of traditional cumbia, Totó La Momposina has never altered her style or her traditional costeño repertoire to please the global market. Additionally, she has seldom strayed far from her roots (with the exception of some phases in her artistic career when she composed and interpreted some pieces inspired by the Cuban son), replicating coastal and river musical traditions in the finest way available.

In 2007 an unexpected and surprising event took place. The Gaiteros of San Jacinto, one of the most representative groups of traditional cumbia, won a Latin Grammy. Their album *Un fuego de sangre pura* (A Pure-Blooded Fire), coproduced by the Colombian recording artist Iván Benavides for the Smithsonian Folkways label, was awarded the prize for best folklore recording, celebrating the spirit of more conventional, unadulterated costeño music, the potential of a return to grassroots or, as many Costeños would claim, "to our very tradition."

Conclusion

Cumbia is the most representative musical form of costeño traditional culture of the Colombian Atlantic Coast as the cultural product of the Afro-Indo-Hispanic *mestizaje*, although the African component is its most relevant. Cumbia has its origin in the rural villages in the Magdalena River Valley, within the zone called the Mompox Depression, originally as an instrumental form only, played by the conjunto de cañamilleros. From the postwar period on, cumbia was popular in its stylized and orchestrated form in conformity with cosmopolitan taste, through national and transnational channels of diffusion (e.g., radio and records).

Big band adaptations of orchestrated cumbias in the 1940s and 1950s contributed to the processes of popularizing the sound, which became familiar as the new national music of Colombia, but at the same time redefined its social and cultural connotations with the erasure of blackness or Africanness. The process of "modernization" and commercialization induced by the national record market brought about its diffusion at the national level as música tropical, an urban orchestrated form, with the elimination of Afro-Colombian traditional musical instruments. To gain the acceptance of the Andean white and *mestizo* middle class, cumbia left behind its own regional connotations and acquired unofficially the status of Colombian national music.[29]

Fundamental to this process of commercialization or "modernization" and affirmation in the national and transnational market is the role of Colombian record companies (Discos Fuentes, Discos Tropical, Sonolux). In the 1960s cumbia was disseminated as música tropical in other Latin American countries (Mexico, Peru, Argentina, and Chile) through small groups made up of a wind section, a rhythm section, and an accordion set. In the 1970s and 1980s cumbia had to confront the arrival of other music genres, vallenato and salsa, mixing with them in some cases. In the 1990s cumbia, in its different forms, experienced a revival thanks to the boom of world music spreading throughout the global musical market.

From being a regional music genre with strong ethnic-social connotations and a musical expression of a local costeño identity, cumbia acquired the status of national music, transcending local culture and becoming the marker of Colombian national identity. A few years later, through a process of appropriation, reinterpretation, and commercialization, cumbia became a Latin American transnational style.

Filmography

Triana, Gloria. Cumbria sobre el río; series: Yurupari, 16mm, audiovisuales, Focine, 25 min., 1984.

Notes

1. The Atlantic Coast of Colombia extends from the Guajira Peninsula in the northeastern portion of the country to the Gulf of Urabá in the northwest, near the Panama border, and is made up of the departments of Guajira, Magdalena, Cesar, Atlántico, Bolívar, Córdoba, and Sucre, as well as portions of northern Antioquia (Urabá) and the northern arm of Chocó. The lower coastal and river plains are inhabited by Afro-Hispanic (*mulatos*), Indo-Hispanic (*mestizos*), and Indo-African (*zambos*) populations. The indigenous Kogi and Ika are located in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, in the department of Magdalena, and the Wayúu are settled in the Guajira Peninsula.

2. In the past decades, the process of cultural mixing in the Colombian Caribbean coast and islands has been enriched by contributions from Middle Eastern immigrants (Syrian and Lebanese), called *turcos*, or the Turkish.

3. Manuel and Delia Zapata Olivella carried out the first notable recordings and investigations of ethnofolkloric interest regarding Caribbean coastal music in the 1960s (M. Zapata 1967; D. Zapata 1962, 1967). Before that, in 1959, the ethnomusicologist Isabel Artez, together with the folklorist Delia Zapata, started a campaign of fieldwork in coastal towns such as Palenque de San Basilio, Soplaviento, María La Baja, and San Jacinto (Aretz 1991). They were followed in 1964 by the investigations of the American ethnomusicologist George List, who did fieldwork in the town of Evitar (Bolívar) with the collaboration of Delia Zapata. This work brought about the publication of *Music and Poetry in a Colombian Village: A Tricultural Heritage* (1983). The ethnographical studies of Aquiles Escalantes (1954, 1964) about Palenque de San Basilio mark the beginning of interest in Afro-descendants culture in Colombia. One of the most interesting audiovisual source materials for the anthropological research has been the series of documentaries *Yuruparí*,—including "Cumbia sobre el río" (1986)—produced by COLCULTURA (Colombian Institute of Culture) in the 1980s and directed by the anthropologist Gloria Triana. Even though there is still a demological character that remains in the study of ethnic music (Abadía 1973; Marulanda 1984; Ocampo López 1976), an anthropological and sociological approach is now emerging (Bermúdez 1992, 1994; Wade 1997, 1998, 2000).

4. In Palenque de San Basilio the *lumbalú* is still performed; it is a funeral ritual of the descendants of the *cimarrones* (fugitive slaves) that make up ancient *palenques* (Escalante 1964, [1954] 1979, 1989).

5. The term *tambora* has different meanings, but they all relate to one another: (a) a low cylindrical drum with two heads; (b) the rhythm (*golpe*) played on this drum (characterized by a ternary rhythm on a double meter); (c) the ensemble of voices and per-

cussion (including the tambora); (d) the dance associated with this music; and (e) the festive occasion with dances and songs performed by the tambora (Carbó 2003: 63).

6. The term *currulao* also indicates a genre of music and dance from the Afro-Colombian people from Colombia's South Pacific Coast, performed by a *marimba* ensemble.

7. Colombian *bailes cantados* present some similarities at the formal and stylistic level (above all, in the type of call-and-response songs that are accompanied by the drums) with other dance-music expressions broadcast in Caribbean Afro-Hispanic areas, like the *rumba* in Cuba, the *baile de bomba* in Puerto Rico, and the *baile de los palos* in the Dominican Republic. Petrona Martínez, belonging to a family of cantadoras, is the most representative singer of bullerengue (and in general of the bailes cantados repertoire) and has performed in many festivals in Europe, Asia, and North Africa.

8. In Colombia the *palenques* were numerous and very spread out, above all in the outskirts of Cartagena and Mompox, on the banks of the Cauca and San Jorge Rivers, in the Cauca Valley, in the mountainous region of Antioquia and in the Chocó, on the Pacific Coast, in the middle Magdalena up to the east in the Llanos (grasslands). The most famous palenque, which for the longest time was able to fight off the Spaniards, was Palenque de San Basilio.

9. Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, in the book *La población negra de México* ([1946] 1989), attributes the name Cumbás to the ethnic group Cumba-manez from the former Mali Empire: "In the second half of the 16th century black tribes such as the *Cumbás* and the *Zapés* were brought to Nueva España, and in general to America. These groups never appear again in the slave lists in the centuries to come" (119).

10. In Brazil the *cucumbis*, singled out during the nineteenth century in Bahia and Rio, were dramatic dances performed at the Christmas festivals and Carnival, which represent the clash between the black and Indian cultures; according to Oneyda Alvarenga (1947), *cucumbi* was also the regional Brazilian name for the black populations from the Congo.

11. See Enrique Luis Muñoz Vélez's (2006) "La cumbia: Trazos y signos de una historia cultural," www.musicalafrolatino.com/pagina_nueva_22j.htm.

12. This confirms the thesis regarding the African origin of the instrument, the fact that millet is originally from an Asian graminaceous plant that spread out to Africa, Europe, and successively to America, with the arrival of Europeans, which excludes the use of *millo* in the pre-Columbian era.

13. The term *tambor alegre* refers to its function: "to make happy" or "to improvise," "to vary."

14. The term *llamador* means "caller." The function of a "call" by the drums is also recurrent in other Afro-American music traditions, such as Afro-Uruguayan *candombe*, Honduran *punta*, and Cuban rumba.

15. The Carabalí are Afro-Cubans of Efik/Ibibio origin, an ethnic group that inhabits the Calabar region in the southeastern part of Nigeria and uses the same drums called *ekomo* (Akpabot 1975).

16. In his monograph *Music and Poetry in a Colombian Village* (1983), List calls the tambora *bombo*, a generic Spanish term that identifies the bass drum with two drumheads and is used today on the Pacific Coast to refer to drums of this type.

17. The traditional genre performed by this group is the *gaita*, but in groups of *gaiteros*, the cumbia, the *porro*, and the puya also appear in their repertoire.

18. The Colombian gaita has no relationship to the Iberian *gaita*, a term that in Spanish and Portuguese means "bagpipe."

19. In the town of San Pelayo (Córdoba), one finds the *gaita corta* (called *pito cabeza de cera* in slang) that is distinguished by its dimensions from the *gaitas largas*. In addition, the gaita corta is played alone, not in pairs, as are the gaitas largas (Cantero and Fortich 1991: 120).

20. There is also a process of "Cubanization" of the Colombian repertoire on behalf of Cuban orchestras, as is the case with the porro "La múcura" (The Vase) by Crescencio Salcedo and reinterpreted by Pérez Prado, and the bambuco "Bésame morenita" (Kiss Me, Little Dark One) by Pedro Fernández and popularized by the group Sonora Matancera (Betancur 1993).

21. In some coastal cities during the 1940s, some sextet groups appeared that were imitations of Cuban groups, in particular the Sexteto Habanero, which formed in Cuba during the 1920s with the repertoire of son. The typical formation of the Cuban *sexteto* was guitar, *tres*, *bongo*, *maracas*, *claves*, and *marímbula* (later replaced by the double bass), while the Colombian *sexteto*—the Sexteto Tabalá of Palenque de San Basilio, the only one remaining in Colombia—includes *tambor alegre*, *timbal* (the same bongo), *maracas*, *claves*, and *marímbula*, with a repertoire of *son palenqueros*.

22. Some landmark songs include Bermudez's "Carmen de Bolívar," "Salsipuedes," "Tolú," "San Fernando," and "Colombia, tierra querida" and Galán's "Ay cosita linda" and "El merecumbé."

23. The *porro* is the slow version of the cumbia, with the same rhythm of the backbeat of the cymbal—the stress of the simple 2/4—that will be taken up by orchestras, played on a cymbal with a drumstick, and muffled with a hand. The term *papayera* has its origin in the typical musical apprenticeship of a *banda de hojitas*, accomplished by players who use papaya leaves vibrating between the lips, and for this reason it gets the name *papayera* (Fals Borda 1986b: 127).

24. The most acclaimed composers and interpreters of coastal music, such as Lucho Bermúdez, Pacho Galán, and Escalona, have recorded for Sonolux. Today this Medellín label continues promoting new Colombian talents.

25. See the LP *San Fernando y otros éxitos inolvidables de Lucho Bermúdez y Matilde Díaz* (Sonolux LP 12-267).

26. Rafael Escalona (1907–2009) was the most celebrated composer of classic vallenatos of the 1940s and 1950s.

27. This group was established in the 1970s by the coastal singer Rodolfo Aicardi (1946–2007).

28. This is an onomatopoeic term referring to the simple and commercial imitation of coastal music, very common in the 1970s. Another slang term with the same meaning is *música gallega* (lit. "music from Galicia").

29. Even though officially bambuco, a musical expression from Andean mestizo culture, represented the musical emblem of Colombian national identity at that particular point in time (Wade 1998, 2000).