

Western Caribbean Music Cultural Context Guide

Andre R. Clark

University of Florida

MUH 6935

Dr. Amber Peterson

Author Note

Direct correspondence directly to Andre Clark, via andre.clark@ufl.edu.

Information about the Hispanic Caribbean

Music in the Hispanic Caribbean is a book written by Robin Moore, professor at the University of Texas in Austin, for the Global Music Series. This textbook serves as the primary basis of information used to development of instruction material for this five-unit study of Hispanic Caribbean music, including its cultural and musical development over time. In order to support student learning, this guide should provide a baseline of information that will be pertinent to support student learning in this unit. Learning outcomes for students have been developed using three themes that Moore identifies on page xiii of the Preface, which encapsulates a majority of the musical development through cultural influence.

1. “the legacy of colonization and slavery”
2. “hybridity or creolization”
3. “diaspora, movement, and musical exchange”

While the ultimate goal would be a study of the Hispanic Caribbean style over a longer period of time, this unit plan will focus on the development of rhythms and styles discussed in “the legacy of colonization and slavery,” to facilitate discussion about how outside cultural influences can shape a musical culture.

The Hispanic Caribbean is a set of islands situated south and southeast of the peninsula of Florida. While there are several island chains, including the Bahamas. Moore indicates, “This book focuses on several islands of the Greater Antilles, the larger Islands lying to the northwest, beginning with Cuba and ending with Puerto Rico – as opposed to the smaller islands of the Lesser Antilles.” (Moore, 5) Spanish rule was dominant during the Colonial period, prior to colonization activities during the Seventeenth Century by the British, French, and Dutch. These activities have an effect on the primary spoken languages on the islands. Moore states, “Relative

to other parts of Latin America it is less homogenous, with a half a dozen colonial languages (English, French, Dutch, Spanish, various forms of Patois) spoken by inhabitants. (Moore, 4)

Other than locale and language, Moore notes, “Several factors do tie Caribbean islands together, however, related to their common experience of domination by foreign powers and the gradual emergence of new cultural forms in the context of forced slave labor.” (Moore, 5) He states that Cuba and Puerto Rico have been “described famously as ‘wings of the same bird’; they remained Spanish colonies well after most gained their independence, eventually plotting together to fight against Spain in the 1860s.” (Moore, xi) He also notes that (Dominicans) “... took up arms at roughly the same time in order to maintain their independence in the face of the Spanish interest in assuming control of their country once again.” (Moore, xi)

It is generally accepted that Christopher Columbus “discovered” the New World in 1492, when he sailed into Hispaniola, the island now separated into the Dominican Republic and Haiti. This discovery, of course, was a quest popular in this time period to essentially expand land ownership in order to plunder resources with little regard for the inhabitants. As Moore notes, “Within a period of 150 years they managed to kill off all but a handful of the original inhabitants of the region, who by some accounts numbered in the millions.” (Moore, 31)

The Role and Meaning of Music Within the Hispanic Caribbean

In his remarks about cultural and music that survived the Colonization period, he discusses the concept of the areito, or “large communal music-and-dance events involving as many as a thousand participants who move in circles around a group of musicians. Since the colonization by Spain lasted for nearly 150 years prior to additional efforts, it is not surprising that Moore states, “Spanish-derived music has had a strong influence on music throughout the Americas.” (Moore, 32) One particular way he describes the influence is, “Catholic priests

performed religious music on expeditions and incorporated music into their efforts to “civilize and convert both indigenous groups and later Africans.” (Moore, 32) The European influence is not limited to sacred music, as there is considerable discussion about the influence of dance styles and instrumentation that is most notably from the European traditions.

From an instrument perspective, few instruments of the original indigenous cultures are discussed, save percussion instruments such as “a slit drum known as the *mayohuacan*, maraca-like shakers, conch shell trumpets, and notched gourds similar to the *guiro*.” (Moore, 31) Moore notes the majority of common instruments are of European influence, which would include, “the guitar, accordion, the violin, and the piano. Virtually all string and keyboard instruments in the Caribbean come from Europe or were based on European models.”

Puerto Rico is noted in the text as having the strongest correlation to the Spanish influence. Moore uses the term “*música jíbara*” to describe a style referred to as “Puerto Rican country music.” (Moore, 34) He describes the ensemble as a vocalist being supported by a number of string instruments, including the *cuatro*. The *cuatro* (four) is a lute or guitar-like instrument that has five sets of strings, which are doubled, such as on a twelve-string guitar. Other instruments he describes that add to the Spanish-derived folk style are “the *bandurria*, a mandolin-like instrument with six pairs of doubled strings, the *laúd*, also with six doubled strings, and the guitar.” (Moore, 34) These instruments are used to perform the most common style of *música jíbara*, the Puerto Rican *seis*, string-based music incorporating sung poetry, played either for listening or dancing. (Moore, 36) Moore details several types of *seis*, including detailed directions about the dancing vocabulary.

When discussing music of the rural farmer in Cuba, the term “*música guajira*” would be the equivalent to the Puerto Rican *música jíbara*. (Moore, 41) Moore details differences in the

ensembles, "...the tres (a folk guitar with three double courses of strings), and other local instruments. These days, some Afro-Cuban percussion (maracas, clave, even conga drums) may be used by *música guajira* groups as well." (Moore, 41) He also notes that the most famous piece is "La guajira guantanamera," which was made famous in the 1940s in the US. (link to video - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CiJhDO8Tb_Y) This work is the subject for Lesson 3 this week, focusing on chord progression similarity across cultural lines. I found an interesting comparison being made in Moore's discussion, as he compares, "Singers of Spanish-derived folk music often improvise the words they sing on the spot, similar to what freestyle rappers in the United States might do." (Moore, 41) His assertion lends another world music connection to the East Coast derivative of rap and hip-hop.

Another example of Spanish-influenced musical style comes from the Dominican Republic. Moore discusses how Catholicism and its development in the Caribbean is affected by "less orthodox local practices such as 'folk Catholicism'." (Moore, 46) He explains further, "One common manifestation of folk Catholicism on all three islands are *fiestas patronales*, or patron saint festivals." Moore discusses further, "These are annual festivals held in honor of Catholic saints who hold a special place in the history of a particular town or city or are of importance to an individual patron who sponsors them." (Moore, 46) It is during what Dominicans call the "velacion," or vigil, that *salves*, derived from the words "Salve Regina," are performed. Moore says, "The *salve* may well be the genre of Dominican religious music most widely performed by the population at large." (Moore, 47)

"The Atlantic slave trade is arguably the historical event that has had the greatest influence on modern Caribbean history and culture." (Moore, 52) While Moore quantifies the number of people who were directly trafficked, the cultural and human rights effects on those

directly and indirectly involved due to this form of trade is unmistakable. Despite the barbaric act, the human spirit cannot be deterred, which leads us to Moore's statement, "large segments of the population – a sizeable majority on most islands – are of African or mixed African descent, so a focus on this repertoire becomes central..." (Moore, 9) As he later states, "The scope and diversity of Afro-Caribbean musical traditions are nearly overwhelming..." (Moore, 56), and as such, here is a brief selection of styles for discussion during this unit.

Moore describes the Afro-Caribbean "*Toques de guiros*" as "literally 'the playing of the gourds,..." He documents the ensemble as "one or two conga drums, a metal bell or hoe blade, and three roundish dried gourds of different sizes surrounded by a net of beads. The latter are known as *guiros* or *chéqueres*..." Moore notes that "drumming in the Hispanic Caribbean is generally performed by men; women participate in worship as dancers and singers..." (Moore, 58)

Moore takes a portion of Chapter 3 to discuss the Afro-Dominican *salve*, and the cultural development of the Dominican Republic solidified a more diverse musical beginning. He notes, "Because the African slave trade ended in the early rather than the late nineteenth century, African-derived elements have fused to a significant extent with European forms in many cases." (Moore, 67) Earlier in the book, Moore calls this concept, "creolized music – that is, music that fuses distinct cultural elements from Europe, Africa, or elsewhere – has been accepted by the entire populations of most countries over time and has come to symbolized their national spirit or character in everyday discourse." (Moore, 9) He describes the playback, noting, "Musicians play Afro-Dominican *salves* at a brisk tempo with a strongly marked beat. Call-response singing predominates between a lead singer and chorus, often alternating between them after every phrase." (Moore, 69) Moore also lists differing instrumentation for the creolized *salve*, noting

use of *panderetas* or *panderos* similar to a tambourine, along with a small drum held between the knees known as a *mongó* or *tamborita*, little drum.” (Moore, 69) He also describes palo drums, *tambora* (double-headed drum) played with a stick, and the *güira* scraper. (Moore, 69) Moore also provides context for the playing of Afro-Caribbean *salves*, “...essentially the same as those described for *salves de la Virgen* in Chapter 2: *velaciones* in small churches or private homes, brief street processions, pilgrimages to sacred locations, and so on.” (Moore, 69)

The final musical style with distinct Colonial/Spanish influence we will focus on during this weeklong unit is the Puerto Rican *Bomba*. According to Moore, “Bomba is a secular dance form, intended for recreation rather than Devotion.” (Moore, 76) Moore states, “The most common Afro-Puerto Rican genre featuring percussion and voice that continues to be played today is *bomba*.” (Moore, 76) Moore further states, “... *bomba* music is often confined to stage performances by folklore troupes or community centers.” (Moore, 76) He does note that in a town outside of San Juan, *bomba* is performed as part of community festivals. As for the instrumentation of the ensemble, Moore states, “Bomba incorporates at least two drums, wider and shorter than conga drums and more resonant. The lower drum, called the *buleador* (plural *buleadors*), plays a relatively static pattern... However, only one player improvises on the more prominent lead drum known as the *bomba* or *primo*, at a time.” (Moore, 77) This will be the first lesson completed, and uses audio material from the included CD. Links to the audio are in the online lesson plan, located at [<http://andreclark.com/eportfolio/muh6935>].

The Puerto Rican protest song “begins with reflections on factors that led to the rise of leftist politics throughout Latin America in the Post-World War II period and to a pan-regional musical form known as *nueva canción*, or “new song.” (Moore, 147) Like the protest songs of the late 1960s in the United States as a response to unpopular political decisions by leadership,

musicians in the Hispanic Caribbean were also using their musical voice to call their peers to arms. Multiple geo-political issues were at work in the region, including calls for independence by Puerto Rico from the United States. Moore describes the artists in this counter-culture as, “teenagers and young adults, primarily middle-class and college educated. They sought an alternative to music dominating the media that they perceived as overly commercial.” (Moore, 148) In Puerto Rico, the strains, “had to do with the desire of U.S. authorities to “Anglicize” Puerto Rico, essentially to strip it of its Hispanic heritage. The lesson using “Libertad y Sobernia,” is emblematic of this style, written for Andrés Jimenéz’ album, “In the Final Trench.” The album is discussed at length in Moore’s text, but can be paraphrased as a reaction to the continued uncertainty stemming from the Puerto Rican people and their sovereignty from the United States.

How Music is Taught and Learned Within the Hispanic Caribbean

During the Introduction chapter, Moore describes a way of communicating the rhythmic patterns of the region by using the “TUBS” or “time unit box system,” which he describes in an activity on page 7. On pages 6 and 7 of the book, he uses this TUBS system to indicate simply if the beat is active or silent. During the activities this week, we will be using this system, which Moore states is commonly used by musicologists, to chart out rhythms we here, and also to help program our drum machines during the playback and creativity exercises. While not described by Moore as the transmission method used in the Caribbean, figures below show two different rhythmic examples for use during instruction.

Example 1: Simple 4/4 Rhythm

Eastman method

1 te 2 () 3 te 4 ()

[\[http://andreclark.com/eportfolio/muh6935\]](http://andreclark.com/eportfolio/muh6935)

Time Unit Box System

x	x	x		x	x	x	
---	---	---	--	---	---	---	--

Example 2: 4/4 Pattern called “tresillo”

Eastman method

1 () (2) te (3) () 4 ()

1 () 2 () 3 () 4 ()

Time Unit Box System

x			x			x	
x		x		x		x	

Pattern on top, Pulse on Bottom

Throughout Moore’s book, considerable time is given to the nomenclature of style, instrument, and how each unique style is derived, but it is hard to discern from his work how the musical vocabulary is transmitted from generation to generation. I can only surmise that the call and response nature and distinctly religious music is passed on aurally. It would follow that a young musician taking up an instrument would receive direct instruction on the playing of the instrument using appropriate technique by a master teacher, learning enough material that would enable the young musician the opportunity to play in the larger ensemble with doubled instruments. A majority of the examples and activities are using traditional staff notation, so my inclination is that students in the region may have some musical training, at least in their grade school classes. For purposes of this unit plan, I will use traditional notation and the TUBS system. (Clark, 2014)

References

Moore, Robin. (2010). *Music in the Hispanic Caribbean*. New York: Oxford University Press.