

advertisement | your ad here



tickets available online now!
waltdisney.org

The Walt Disney Family Museum is not affiliated with The Walt Disney Company. Photograph © Disney. The Walt Disney Family Museum is a trademark of Disney Enterprises, Inc.

THE WALT
DISNEY
FAMILY
MUSEUM

home of the

Home Delivery | Subscriber Services

SEARCH

SFGate

Web Search by YAHOO!

Advanced Search

Sign In | Register

Movies Music & Nightlife Performance Art Events Books TV & Radio Horoscope Comics Things To Do Seensters

AP Associated Press

advertisement | your ad here

Caribbean beat becomes global dance craze

By MADELEINE BAIR, Associated Press Writer
Thursday, October 15, 2009

PRINT E-MAIL SHARE COMMENTS

FONT SIZE: - +

(10-15) 16:11 PDT CARTAGENA, Colombia (AP) --

On a brick plaza in this walled colonial port where slave ships once dumped human cargo, a young black man cries out a Spanish verse over the beating of his tambor drum.

With two whacks on the stretched animal skin, the musicians flanking him let loose a percussive hailstorm that settles into a cumbia, a dance reverently performed by young Afro-Colombians. A musical mating ritual that came about in Colombia's colonial era, it begins with a line of barefoot women in period dress, baskets balancing on their heads, sashaying toward male partners.

Now the folk rhythm has fused with such postmodern styles as electronica and hip-hop into a musical sensation in dance clubs from San Francisco to New York to Buenos Aires to Paris. African drums, native wind instruments and maracas are often replaced by guitar, bass and deejays, whose audiences favor Day-Glo sneakers and strobe lights to the more colonial attire.

Until just a few years ago, "cumbia digital" or "nu-cumbia" was only mentioned on obscure music blogs. In July, it was a hit at the Latin American Music Conference in New York, where it was declared the latest global dance craze.

At the annual showcase for alternative Latin artists, among groups creating a major buzz around the new cumbia, was Bomba Estereo, a Bogota-based band that creates electronic dance music. Another was ZZK, a collective of Argentine deejays whose soundscapes replace traditional instruments such as cane flutes and tambors with electronics, while retaining the music's identifying 4-4 rhythm.

Mexico and Argentina were the first countries to adopt cumbia decades ago. Today, a new generation in those countries is taking what was considered a backwater style and giving it a cosmopolitan spin. This summer, Bersa Discos released an EP by Mexican deejay Toy Selectah, which fuses cumbia with electronica in such a frantic way that it almost sounds like a Mario Bros. video game set in Tijuana.

An hour by bus from Cartagena, at the mouth of the Magdalena River, is Barranquilla. The cargo ships that have long called at its harbor enriched the city with immigrants: its Italian, Chinese, and Lebanese restaurants are rarely matched elsewhere in Colombia.

The region's diversity dates back centuries, when African slaves brought to Colombia to cut sugar cane and harvest bananas and tobacco shared their imported beats with local Creoles.

The story of cumbia's origin is imbued with legends and debates. It is said, for example,

MOST COMMENTED MOST READ MOST E-MAILED

1. Judge refuses to toss suit challenging Prop. 8
2. Morning after: Balloon boy gets sick twice on TV
3. Limbaugh blasts critics after losing bid for Rams
4. S.F. a dangerous city for careless pedestrians
5. Crescent City man accused of threatening Obama
6. Interracial couple denied marriage license in La.
7. Ready to eat your face and scream Zombies and vampires and evil viruses...

that the dance steps are short paces back and forth because that was as long as shackles would allow enslaved dancers to go.

But one thing is for sure.

"Cumbia is the folkloric representation of the Caribbean region," explains Pedro Beltran, the 79-year-old frontman of La Cumbia Moderna de Soledad, a half-century-old Colombian musical institution.

"The percussion part we inherited from the slaves, or from Africa," he says. "But the flute, or the gaita, is pure Colombian, from this region," he adds, referring to the cane-made wind instrument that projects a powerful clarinetlike sound.

What defines the cumbia — and makes it so easily malleable — is its beat, a loping call and response between the drums. That beat is readily blended, as Beltran's work shows, with whatever else might come along, be it the accordion-driven vallenato, or the merecumbé, a fusion of the merengue and cumbia.

Forty years ago, Beltran was among the first to add a horn section and electric bass to a cumbia ensemble, hence the moderna in his orchestra's name. He enriched his repertoire with foreign sounds that seduced him — the disco of Rod Stewart or the Afro-beat of the Nigerian-born Fela Kuti.

In his time, nu-cumbia meant Stewart's "Do Ya Think I'm Sexy" reinterpreted on gaitas and tambores.

The cover became one of Beltran's biggest hits, a song you can hear all along Colombia's Caribbean coast, where speakers piled outside cinderblock homes on Saturday afternoons blast salsa, dance hall, vallenato and champeta, the local dance music fusion.

"You can dialogue with any type of music and maintain the local swing," says Walter Hernandez, better known as DJ Indigo, as he fingers through floor-to-ceiling cases of vinyl at Discolombia, a record shop and veritable music library in Barranquilla, headphones sneaking out of his shirt collar.

Indigo, 34, whiles his hours among its dusty stacks when he's not spinning at Barranquilla nightclubs or performing in his electro-Caribbean band, Systema Solar. Using samples from Indigo's vast vinyl collection of musicians such as Beltran and Toto la Momposina, Systema Solar adds contemporary elements: electronics, scratching and rapping.

In Discolombia's back room, he points to a corner pile of records topped by a sleeve depicting a group of men in polo shirts posing on a soccer field. It's Abelardo Carbone's group, which put a cumbia spin on American disco and funk to make uniquely Colombian covers of songs like Donna Summer's "I Feel Love" and the Bee Gees' "Staying Alive."

A more contemporary spin on the core Caribbean beat comes from Bomba Estereo, the Bogota psychedelic cumbia combo that just wound up a 12-date U.S. tour. Its bassist-producer, Simon Mejia, was astounded at how quickly U.S. audiences took to the band's music. At a Brooklyn, N.Y., gig, he said, fans already knew the lyrics to some songs.

"The crowd went crazy," he said. Which doesn't mean hipster audiences in Europe and the United States know how to dance the cumbia, a partnered shuffle to the beat.

"It was very funny for us," said Mejia. "They bounce around and jump up and down like it's a rock concert."

PRINT E-MAIL SHARE

TopJobs

ADVERTISING

Responsible for achieving sales
[SeattlePI.com](#)

GOVERNMENT

Campaign Jobs to protect
Grass Roots Campaigns, Inc.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Seeking two experienced,
San Francisco Housing Authority

[About Top Jobs](#)
[View All Top Jobs](#)
[Search more Jobs](#)

PROVIDED BY —
YAHOO! HOTJOBS

REAL ESTATE



Pacific Heights beauty

This four-level Pacific Heights Victorian has been renovated to be luxurious and functional. The first level has large formal living...

[Contemporary Craftsman?](#)
[Real estate loans biggest concern](#)
[How to negotiate, or renegotiate, your lease](#)

[Search Real Estate »](#)

CARS



S.F. considers extending parking meter hours

Drivers who park at metered spaces in San Francisco would have to pay on Sundays and up until midnight...

[Ford color data reveals quirks](#)
['65 Shelby roadster fetches \\$440K at auction](#)
[Ford adds 4.5M cars to defective switch recall](#)

[Search Cars »](#)

JOB

Obama says he's looking at any way to create jobs

Standing at the site of a highway project funded by his economic stimulus plan, President Barack...

[Jobless rate rises to 10.1 percent in S.F.](#)
[A look at the Bay Area jobs future](#)
[Outplacement firm sees improvement](#)

[Search Jobs »](#)

ADVERTISERS

Equifax can help you monitor your credit score

Add Your Comment

You must be signed in to add a comment. [Sign In](#) | [Register](#)

Submit



Nellie: \$9M/yr and Jack's unhappy?



'Wild Things' hard to love, or dismiss



The gang rape and the Republicans



Berkeley Rep a Broadway star



Winners of 'Pets with Personality'

Ads by Yahoo!

Royal Caribbean Cruises

Guaranteed lowest prices! All cruise destinations, excursions & more.
(www.cruise.com)

75% Off Caribbean Cruises

See America's lowest Caribbean cruise prices on our 90-Day Ticker.
(www.VacationsToGo.com)

Caribbean Travel

One stop Caribbean travel Web site - hotel specials, package deals, forums, hotel reviews, exclusive maps and more.
(www.caribbean-on-line.com)



[Subscribe to The Chronicle](#)

[Home](#) [News](#) [Sports](#) [Business](#) [Entertainment](#) [Food](#) [Living](#) [Travel](#) [Columns](#) [Buy & Sell](#) [Jobs](#) [Real Estate](#) [Cars](#) [Site Index](#) [\[return to top\]](#)

Advertising Services: [Place a Classified](#) [Advertise in Print](#) [Advertise Online](#) [About Our Ads](#) [Public Notices](#)

Reader Services: [Home Delivery](#) [Subscribers](#) [E-Edition](#) [Mobile](#) [RSS Feeds](#) [Newsletters](#) [Feedback](#) [Buy Photos](#) [FAQ](#) [Corrections](#) [Get Us](#)

Company Info: [Contact Us](#) [Hearst Corp.](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Terms and Conditions](#) [Work for Us](#) [Chronicle in Education](#) [Events & Promotions](#) [Submissions](#)

© 2009 Hearst Communications Inc.

