



## NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

### **Narrative Section of a Successful Application**

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs Notice of Funding Opportunity at the appropriate resource page ([Awards for Faculty at Hispanic-Serving Institutions](#), [Awards for Faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities](#), [Awards for Faculty at Tribal Colleges and Universities](#)) for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

**The application format has been changed since this application was submitted.** You must follow the guidelines in the currently posted Notice of Funding Opportunity (see above links).

Project Title: The History of Spanish Caribbean Music in New York City and the Shaping of an International Sound, 1940-1990

Institution: John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY

Project Director: Benjamin Lapidus

Grant Program: Awards for Faculty at Hispanic Serving Institutions

## **The Sound of Nueva York: How an American City and its Residents Shaped an International Sound from 1940-1990**

I am requesting funding from the NEH to complete a book on the unwritten history of Spanish Caribbean music in New York City from 1940-1990 that will detail how musicians, educators, composers, arrangers, folklorists, and instrument builders collaborated to shape the course of both popular and folkloric genres in profound ways. I have conducted numerous interviews, acquired scores, and done archival research. Funding for one year starting in Fall 2013 will allow me to organize this research and write the manuscript.

New York City is an important site in the history of the transnational Latin music scene because it was the place where musicians came from abroad to educate themselves and one another in the latest musical trends and techniques for performance, production, and arranging that would eventually be accepted in their home countries. Many musicians studied Latin music in formal settings such as the East Harlem Music School and in the homes of private teachers like Alberto Socarrás and Nicolás Rodríguez. Informal education took place at *rumbas* and during *jíbaro* music, *bomba y plena* gatherings throughout the city, religious rituals, and in reading/rehearsal big bands for professional musicians. Past scholarship has acknowledged interethnic collaboration, but has not used the musicological rigor of transcription analysis informed by social, archival, cultural and oral history to qualify it. The majority of the musicians in the Latin music scene were formally trained and the study of musical scores illustrates the important musical choices and stylistic innovations they put into practice and will enable readers to identify significant structural details of an arrangement and its recorded performance while also providing insight into otherwise undetected musical sophistication and complexity. Since the late nineteenth century, New York was the focal point of the Latin music recording industry and musicians assumed numerous national identities both on stage and in the recording studio as necessitated by their employment. Musical negotiation required musicians to maintain a particular idealized New York Latin sound during the period of this study that embodied a mix of various sources while still being commercially and culturally appropriate. Playing contexts determined the sound of the music and demanded particular performance techniques so both musical and cultural identity among musicians remained fluid. Thus, Cuban musicians who arrived in New York during the 1980 Mariel boatlift would learn to adjust their performances to fit the highly codified performance expectations for Latin dance music in New York, while simultaneously they were expected to perform Cuban religious and folkloric music as traditionally as possible alongside earlier Cuban arrivals and non-Cubans. Panamanian, Puerto Rican, Dominican, African-American and Jewish musicians shared this nuanced experience. This project is intellectually significant to the humanities, because it revises and corrects the dominant historical narrative of Latin music in New York that simplifies and conflates Puerto Rican immigration and political consciousness with the deterioration of U.S.-Cuban relations and its effects on music. This narrative does not include the dynamic contributions of many ethnic groups to the development of Latin music, continued musical contact with Cuba post-1959, nor the variety of musical genres besides salsa that were impacted through ongoing inter-cultural exchanges that began in the late 19th century.

The study is organized into eight chapters. **Chapter 1** covers the overlooked legacy of the Panamanian musical community of Brooklyn and explores how Panamanian musicians positioned themselves and were positioned both musically and socially by their Latino and non-Latino colleagues. Numerous Panamanian musicians such as Nicolás Rodríguez, Walter Gene Jefferson, and Frank Anderson successfully negotiated Classical, Jazz, Broadway, Caribbean, and Latin music scenes and left a considerable body of work that has never been previously analyzed or contextualized. **Chapter 2** examines the rise and fall of Típica 73, a pan-ethnic salsa group representative of the period 1973-1980. The band featured musicians from Panama, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and New Yorkers of Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Mexican descent. Key band members such as Sonny Bravo and Johnny Rodríguez represented important NY-based familial and musical lineages but the group covered

contemporary Cuban songs and pushed the boundaries of tradition through their instrumentation as heard in performances of *El jamaíquino* and *Chachagüere*. Their success was a direct result of musical innovation and negotiation but the band came to an abrupt end after a career-defining trip to Cuba during which they recorded with Cuban counterparts only to return to the United States and be branded as communist sympathizers. **Chapter 3** examines New York-based Puerto Rican musicians from the 1940s through the 1990s and how the specific performance locales, performance techniques, and recordings made by Yomo Toro, Angel Luis Torruellas, Ismael Santiago, and others shaped the cosmopolitan sound of Latin music in 1950s and 1960s New York, while forging the national sound of Puerto Rican music through their performance and recordings of bomba, plena, and jíbaro music. **Chapter 4** details the formal and informal Latin music education settings and networks in New York City as well as the ways in which musicians discussed, in previous chapters, benefitted from them. Some of the institutions explored include the East Harlem Music School, The Harbor Conservatory, as well as private instructors who taught theory, solfège, and instrumental technique to the most prominent musicians in Latin dance music. **Chapter 5** explores the interconnected nature of the Afro-Latin folkloric music scene that was an incubator for musical innovation and preservation. Throughout the twentieth century musicians from across ethnic groups have studied, performed, and recorded folkloric genres that created a preponderance of folkloric groups dedicated to nationally associated genres but made up of non-nationals. Batá drumming, rumba, bomba, and plena are but a few genres where inter-ethnic collaboration was actively encouraged. **Chapter 6** discusses the immediate musical impact of the dancers and musicians who arrived in New York City during the 1980 Mariel Boatlift. The activities of Orlando Ríos, Manuel Olivares, Roberto Borrell, Daniel Ponce, and others had long-term effects on the folkloric and Latin popular dance music scene in New York, the greater United States and generations of non-Cuban musicians. **Chapter 7** explores the multi-dimensional relationship of New York Jews with Latin music and the ways in which New York Jews contributed to the development of the New York Sound as musicians, arrangers, sound engineers, producers, disc jockeys, and booking agents. **Chapter 8** details the important history and role of craftsmen based in New York City who produced and repaired traditional instruments used in the performance of Latin music. These individuals came from Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Jewish communities, but their instruments represented the actual sound of Latin Music to New York and the world.

### **Research and Contribution**

This study is based on musicological analysis focused on musical transcriptions, archival research, and oral history collected in interviews. To date, studies of Latin music in New York have not examined how inter-ethnic music making was achieved in musically tangible and identifiable ways. Similarly, no study of New York's Latin music scene has ever examined exactly how music education, folklore, or instrument making were connected to the evolution of an identifiable sound. Washburne 2008 focused strictly on late 1990s salsa. García 2005 examined the Afrocuban identity central to Arsenio Rodríguez's music, and its transmission to subsequent generations of non-Cuban musicians, but did not explore the possibilities of other Afro-Latin identities or roles as represented by the Brooklyn-based Panamanians and similar communities in this study who were active in Arsenio's ensembles, and those of Tito Rodríguez, Tito Puente, Machito, Louis Armstrong, and others. Waxer 2002 was also limited to salsa and did not explore how Afro-Latin folklore, musical instrument craftsmen, musical education and migration impacted the music. Glasser 1998 focuses on some of these themes surrounding New York-based Puerto Rican musicians, but is limited to the time period of 1917-1940. Unlike previous scholarship, this study illustrates how the seemingly disparate worlds of music education, performance, instrument making, composition and arrangement were in fact intimately connected, and therefore must be viewed as a whole when considering the history of Latin music in New York. Furthermore, this study is unique in that it provides specific, concrete musical examples that illustrate the ways in which New York-based musicians, educators, folklorists, and craftsmen worked together to codify the tradition and create new innovations in Latin music that would have a far-reaching impact. Thus, this work will represent the first view of the development and formation of Latin music in New York City, which incorporates all of the

major elements that have never before been seen as a whole. The resulting book will be the fundamental work which will set the standard for future discourse and scholarship on this topic. It will fill a major gap in current scholarship, and can be used as a primary resource for undergraduate and graduate education. The study will, for the first time, present a unified and accessible view of this popular musical culture, and the unique circumstances which created it.

### **Methods and Work Plan**

The request herein is for the time needed to organize and analyze previously collected data, and write the book outlined above. All of the major fieldwork will have been completed by the tenure of the award. This included fieldwork and research in Puerto Rico during 2007, where I interviewed Angel Luis Torruellas, Mario Hernández, and others about specific musical techniques in Puerto Rican music that were employed in New York from the 1950s-1990s. I collected recordings and conducted extensive interviews with Sonny Bravo, the de-facto leader of *Típica 73*, and his band mates, to obtain their views on how musical negotiation in the band's performances was conceptualized. I copied and analyzed numerous scores from the time period of this study in Mr. Bravo's personal archive of over 300 arrangements as they reveal the use of non-traditional harmony and other innovations. Nicolás Rodríguez and Alberto Socarrás were two important educators who taught numerous contemporary masters. I have interviewed their students, Oscar Hernández and Benjamin Bierman, as well as Gilberto Colón, Mike LeDonne, and Ronnie Baró. I have interviewed Gene Jefferson, Frank Anderson, and Enid Lowe regarding Panamanian musicians in Brooklyn. Additional interviews of other Panamanian musicians such as Terry Pierce, Donald Nicks, and Alex Blake were also conducted. During the first part of this award, from January 2013 through March 2013, I will transcribe all of these interviews along with any remaining musical arrangements and performances by key musicians for which scores do not exist. I will also conduct archival research at the Schomburg Center (for photos and other documents of early pan-Latin New York-based groups), the Raíces collection (for scores, photos, and ephemera) and the Cristóbal Díaz Ayala Collection (for recordings), as well as scores in the private collections of numerous bandleaders and arrangers for the time period of this study such as Ray Santos and Israel Morales during April and May 2013. The remaining tenure of this award will be used to complete the writing of the eight chapters from Spring 2013 through Summer 2014 and submit the manuscript for publication to Temple University Press, which has already indicated its intent to publish.

### **Competencies**

This project is the culmination of 25 years as a professional musician and New York City resident along with 15 years as a scholar. I have performed and recorded with many of the musicians in this study and our conversations have provided the initiative to document their history and the unwritten history of Latin music. I am fluent in Spanish and have published chapters in peer-reviewed scholarly books. This has helped the interview process and in the collection of ephemera, recordings and transcribing musical performances for this project. My previous book was dedicated to *changüí*, a regional genre of Cuban music particular to Guantánamo, its protagonists and their connections to the greater Caribbean. It was the first book on the topic within or beyond Cuba and was well received by scholars and fans of Cuban music. I am applying many of the same research techniques in completing this project.

### **Final Product**

The goal of this project is provide a historical record for future generations. A monograph published by a university press will allow for scholarly dissemination ensuring availability to researchers and educators. However, this topic is of great interest to the general public since it provides history from a popular perspective. I will present the information from my research at conferences in the U.S., Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe. Another important audience for this work is fans of Latin music and students in my classes on Popular Music of the Caribbean and at other institutions at the secondary and university level. John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY is a U.S. Department of Education Title V Grantee and officially recognized as an Hispanic Serving Institution.

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