Project Kalinda Funded by MacArthur Grant

THE CENTER for Black Music Research has received a grant in the amount of $112,460 from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The funds, to be provided over two years, will support Project Kalinda, including lecture-demonstrations and performances of Ensemble Kalinda Chicago, Afro-Latin and Afro-Caribbean acquisitions for the CBMR Library and Archives, public exhibition of project-related materials, production and distribution of Kalinda! newsletter, and augmentation of the Center’s program staff.

Ensemble Kalinda True to Spirit of Latin American Beat

BY HOWARD REICH

[JANUARY 27, 1995] The debut of a serious and scholarly musical ensemble does not typically inspire cheering, shouting and whistling from the audience.

But Ensemble Kalinda Chicago, which made its bow Thursday night in the Getz Theater, on East 11th Street, is anything but typical. Its eight players specialize in neglected works of the Caribbean and Latin America, from Cuban dances to traditional Brazilian song-forms to Puerto Rican ceremonial pieces.

The great appeal of this ensemble, however, lies not so much in the novelty of its repertory as in the authenticity of its performances. Consistently, Ensemble Kalinda honors the stylistic requirements and historical demands of the music while dispatching it with a freshness and a spirit that one might sooner expect to hear from an indigenous street band.

Little wonder, then, that Ensemble Kalinda Chicago seduced general listeners and connoisseurs alike during Thursday night’s show. The feat seemed all the more impressive considering the band has been in existence less than half a year and has given only a couple of preliminary performances leading up to Thursday’s official debut.

Like the Black Music Repertory Ensemble, Ensemble Kalinda is a venture of the Center for Black Music Research, a nationally noted institution based at Columbia College, Chicago. But while the Black (continued on 3)
Toward Community: 
Project Kalinda, Its Purpose and Goals

BY SAMUEL A. FLOYD JR.
DIRECTOR, CBMR

THIS SECOND ISSUE of Kalinda! follows two very successful programs designed to foster intimate musical and intellectual ties among Latino, West Indian, and African-American communities in Chicago. The first, entitled “From the Mandinga to the Mambo: African Rhythms in Latin Music,” was held on September 24 at the Columbia College Dance Center. The second was a January concert in which our Ensemble Kalinda Chicago appeared jointly with Sones de México Ensemble and Son del Barrio. Recognizing that the pursuit of our goal requires musical, cultural, and intellectual interactions that build mutual respect, effective communication, and lasting relationships, we think the September and January events were a significant step in the right direction.

Building an audience
Another goal of Project Kalinda is to build an audience for its cultural activities—a diverse audience with a working knowledge of Latin-American, Caribbean, and African-American musics and their connections. It is the assumption of the project that the programs created and sponsored by Project Kalinda will build such an audience, which will be well prepared for future and larger events of Project Kalinda.

This publication, Kalinda!, serves as another means of fostering the goals of the project, containing as it does articles that provide information about the African roots of present-day Latino and West Indian musics. The CBMR hopes thereby to facilitate the understanding of contemporary manifestations of African-based musics through knowledge and familiarity with the historical manifestations of the common and distinctive elements of varieties of musics of the Americas.

We take this opportunity to thank all who have attended and participated in our events. And we ask that you continue to support our effort by spreading the news about the activities of Project Kalinda.

Voices

MERVIN MÉNDEZ
Assistant Director, Center for Latino Research
DePaul University

PROJECT KALINDA’s efforts to develop scholarship pertinent to the African music of the Americas will serve to illustrate how African peoples and their cultures have persevered in the face of physical and cultural genocide over the past five hundred years. While racial repression throughout most of the Americas has prevented the recognition of African cultural influences, this project will represent one more effort toward celebrating this rich and valuable heritage.

Music is the most universal of all languages. Through it we can experience how much we really have in common. Project Kalinda is a window of opportunity for both Latin Americans and African Americans to appreciate their common heritage through music.

EVARISTO RODRIGUEZ
Segundo Ruiz Belvis Cultural Center

PROJECT KALINDA opens the discussion on the issue of black music, which is badly needed in our community. The project will create unity and, in a sense, a common identity in the Americas and the rest of the world. (continued on 3)
Music Repertory Ensemble specializes in music by black composers, Ensemble Kalinda explores specifically Latin contributions to the black musical canon.

In other words, because African slaves were taken not only to North America but to sites throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, unique Afro-Latin and Afro-Cuban music sprang up in these regions. Ensemble Kalinda's mission is to revive these musical traditions and to show their links to such Afro-American idioms as jazz, blues, gospel and so forth.

The links were apparent even in this premier performance, whether in the gently swinging backbeats that drove most of the evening's works or in the specific rhythmic motifs and riffs that defined particular works.

Sure the four-square, pre-swing meter of "Las alturas de Simpson," a turn-of-the-century Cuban dance piece, bore obvious similarities to the pre-swing march forms of turn-of-the-century New Orleans. And the five-note rhythmic motif that defined "Loreta," a merengue from the Dominican Republic, suggested a close relationship to the ostinatos of music from African antiquity.

The evening also included strong performances by Sones de Mexico Ensemble and Son del Barrio.

**Ensemble Kalinda (continued from 1)**

**Voices (continued from 2)**

TSEHAYE HEBERT
*President of the Board*
*African American Arts Alliance*

**THANK YOU** for thinking of us as you progress with Project Kalinda. The work of the Advisory Committee and the Center for Black Music Research is vastly important to the ongoing scholarship in black music. We wish you much continued success!

TIFFANI FRAZIER
*Chicago, Illinois*

**I JUST GOT** the *Kalinda!* newsletter and it's really great and extremely important. As an African American, I used to think (when I was a kid) that although Latin Americans, African Americans, and Caribbean blacks might share some commonalities, we were extremely distinct populations that really didn't mix in any significant way. I now know much better—from school and working politically with people of these communities.

ROBERTO A. NODAL
*Shorewood, Wisconsin*

**I HAVE JUST** received my copy of the *Kalinda!* newsletter. I find it excellently produced, containing absolutely wonderful and fascinating material. *Excellent job!!*
The African influence upon the music of most of what is now called Latin America is demonstrated in the negrito, a type of villancico. Its text and music speaks to us in a living language about the confrontation and assimilation of diverse cultures during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The Villancico

The term “villancico” is derived from the Spanish word for “rustic” and was first applied to poetry of the mid-fifteenth century. During the sixteenth century, the villancico became a favorite song for many voices. Its texts were joyful and frequently referred to Christmas. The villancicos of this period are usually popular in style and rhythmically energetic; their musical form often reflects the poetic structure of their text. Their middle sections, called coplas, feature contrasts between solo and ensemble passages and thinner textures. One of the best-known villancicos of this type is “Riu, riu, chiu,” which comes from the Cancionero de Upsala, a collection of songs published in Venice in 1556.

As in the case of many Spanish cultural forms, the villancico quickly became popular in Latin America. Like the villancicos of the mother country, those of Latin America were intended for the feasts of Christmas and Corpus Christi. Parades, pageants, or even dances conferred color and drama on these celebrations. Increasingly, villancicos were composed for the feast of Christmas and were entitled “Villancicos de Navidad.” By the eighteenth century the term villancico almost always implied a Christmas composition.

The Negrito

During the seventeenth century a particular type of villancico—variously called negro, negrito, guineo, or negrilla—appeared in large numbers in Latin America. As these names imply, this type of villancico is special because the texts mix Spanish and dialect, with frequent references to Africa. Many of these villancicos were composed for Christmas, and most feature such African-derived elements as call-response patterns and intricate oscillations between duple and triple rhythmic groupings.

The negrito grows out of the tradition of cofradía, or a brotherhood formed to fulfill particular religious and benevolent purposes. Many of these brotherhoods had exclusively black membership and provided the participants an opportunity to socialize and do good works. These brotherhoods often put on colorful pageants for the Christmas and Corpus Christi events that the villancicos marked. Music played a central role in these religious events by highlighting the meaning of the particular occasion as well as by giving the members a chance to perform. Because of the nature of such confraternities, lively villancicos rather than complex liturgical polyphony were apropos.

The negrito provides background on the membership of these cofradías because of the specific references to persons of African descent. Some negritos tell of a young black man giving a gift to Christ, which leads to a charming account of the gift’s origins or the reason for its presentation. Occasionally, texts are nostalgic, implying that the speaker, although apparently content with his new surroundings, has not forgotten the place from which he came. Many songs make specific references to African dances and the use of percussion, thus providing invaluable information about African music and dance as they came to Latin America.

The large number of negritos found in Latin American sources implies that Africans quickly became an important part of Latin American society, a society characterized by racial diversity. Because of the high mortality
rate of the Indians, Africans took their places on estates, in mines, and in other work places. Thus, large concentrations of blacks were found as early as the sixteenth century not only in the Caribbean region but also in Mexico, Peru, and Brazil.

Readers who may be interested in hearing examples of the *negrito* will find two charming examples on a recent recording by the Boston Camerata entitled *Nueva España: Close Encounters in the New World, 1590–1690*. “Dame albrícia” by Gaspar Fernandes (c. 1570–1629) begins with the following text:

*Dame albrícia mano Anto que Jisu naçe en Guinea.*
*Una lunguya y viejo su pagre son yebarnos le culagion.*

*(Hear the good news, brother Anthony, that Jesus was born in Guinea of a virgin and old man. Let us bring him something to eat.)*

This *negrito* alternates solo, duet, and full ensemble in rapid fashion. Slower rhythmic values underline the narrative, which is followed by a rhythmically more active duet for the upper parts.

The second *negrito* on this recording, “Tarará tarará” by Antonio de Salazar (c. 1650–1715), features short phrases for the two upper voices which move to repeated cadences supported by a bass line. The infectious rhythmic pattern of the opening dominates the piece and highlights the refrain. The text refers to dancing in Puerto Rico and Cameroon, implying that specific African dances were common in Latin America by the end of the seventeenth century. The style of this example suggests that the genre is rich in individuality and that composers looked at each *negrito* as intimately related to its text and the challenges it offered.

These two examples show the power of the African influence on the music of colonial Latin America. Above all else, *negritos* are musically interesting and challenging and deserve to be better known.

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**Latin and Caribbean Recordings Held at the CBMR Library**

*By Marcos Sueiro*

**General**


(continued on 6)

Marcos Sueiro, a musician and graduate of Columbia College, is the assistant librarian of the CBMR Library.
Recordings (continued from 5)

Salsa Session. WHMCWH 29999 RM. Cassette.
Singers of the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica. Traditional Songs of the Caribbean. Inter-American OAS-005.
Wagner, Roger. Latin American Musical Treasures from the 16th, 17th, and 18th Centuries. Eldorado 2.
West Indian Spirituals and Folk Songs. Musical Heritage Society MHS 1515.

Belize

Mr. Peters Boom and Chime. Haul up Your Foot, You Fool. Fire Ant FACD 1006.
The Spirit Cries: Music from the Rainforests of South America and the Caribbean. Rykodisc RCD 10250.
Traditional Music of the Garifuna (Black Carib) of Belize. Folkways FE 4031.

Brazil

Amazônia: Festival and Cult Music of Northern Brazil. Lyrichord LYRCD 7300.
The Best of the Bossa by Brazil's Best. Monument SLP18074.
Brazil-Roots-Samba. Rounder CD 5045.
Brazil: Forró. Rounder CD 5044.
Brésil en fête: Batucadas et musique du nordeste/Brazilian Folk Festivities: Batucadas and Music of the North-East. Playasound PS 65098.
Carnival in Rio. Olympic 6144.
Gomes da Rocha, Francisco. Novena de nossa
Carriacou.
See Grenada

Cayman Islands
Under the Coconut Tree. Original Music
OMCD025.

Colombia
Afro-Hispanic Music from Western Colombia
and Ecuador. Folkways FE 4376.
Cumbia cumbia 2: La época dorada de
cumbias colombianas. World Circuit
WCD 033.
Durán, Alejandro. Alejandro Durán interpreta
a Escalona: Cantos vallenatos. Fuentes
D16097.
In Praise of Oxalá and Other Gods: Black
Music of South America. Nonesuch
H-72036.
Meza, Lisandro. 'Lisandro's Cumbia':
Sabanero King of Colombia. World
Circuit WCD 026.
55509.

Costa Rica
Lyrichord LYRCD 7412.

Cuba
Azpiazu, Don. Don Azpiazu. Harlequin HQ
CD 10.
Brouwer, Leo. The Classics of Cuba. Musical
Heritage Society MHS 3839.
Cachao y su Orquesta. Descargas cubanas.
Maype CD-122.
Caliente=Hot: Puerto Rican and Cuban
Musical Expression in New York. New
World NW 244.
Candido. Candido. ABC-Paramount ABC-
125.
___: Drum Fever. Polydor PD 5063.
___: Latin Fire. ABC-Paramount ABC 286.
Celina y Reutilio. Rezos y cantos guajiro.
Ansonia HGC 1392.
Chappotin. Chappotin y sus estrellas. Antilla
CD-594.

(continued on 8)
Recordings (continued from 7)

Cuervo, Caridad. Hoy canto a Cuba. Orfe ARS 17025.
Les danses des dieux. Ocora C 559051.
Irakere. The Best of Irakere. Columbia CK 57719.
El jazz cubano. World Pacific CDP 0777 7 80599 2 9.
Jungle Rhythms. Olympic 6150.
Muñequitos de Matanzas. Rumba caliente 88/77. Qbadisc QB-9005.
Roldán, Amadeo. Rítmica No. 1, for Wind Instruments and Piano. Angel 35105.
_____., Two Rítmicas. Concert Percussion for Orchestra. Mainstream MS/5011.
Sandoval, Arturo. Danzín (Dance on). GRP GRD-9761.
_____., Up from the Roots. Atlantic SD 1621.
Sulzbirck, Birger. Latin American Percussion 1: Cuban Rhythm Instruments. WH Rytmisk Bibliotek KWH 29822/1 RM. Cassette.

Dominican Republic

Afro-Dominican Music from San Cristóbal, Dominican Republic. Folkways FE 4285.
Caribbean Revels: Haitian Rara and Dominican Gaga. Folkways CD SF 40402.
Cradle of the New World: Music from the Dominican Republic. Folkways FE 4283.
Expresión Joven. ¡La hora está llegando! / The Time Is Coming! Paredon P-1025.
Guandúlitó y su Conjunto Típico Cibaeño. Merengues. Ansonia SALP 1517.
Henríquez, Tatico. 20 éxitos. Bachata B-6007.
The Island of the Española: Music from the Dominican Republic. Folkways FE 4282.
The Island of Quisqueya: Music from the Dominican Republic. Folkways FE 4281.
Merengues from the Dominican Republic. Lyrichord LLCT 7351. Cassette.
Songs from the North: Music from the Dominican Republic. Folkways FE 4284.

Dutch Antilles.

See Netherlands Antilles.

Ecuador

Afro-Hispanic Music from Western Colombia and Ecuador. Folkways FE 4376.
French Guiana
The Spirit Cries: Music from the Rainforests of South America and the Caribbean. Rykodisc RCD 10250.

French West Indies

Grenada
The Big Drum Dance of Carriacou. Folkways FE 4011.

Guatemala
Music Of Guatemala, WL 2. Folkways FE4213.

Grenada
The Big Drum Dance of Carriacou. Folkways FE 4011.

Haiti
Calypso-Meringues. Folkways FW 6808.
Caribbean Revels: Haitian Rara and Dominican Ga,ga. Folkways CD SF 40402.
Drums of Haiti. Folkways FE 4403.
Folk Music of Haiti. Folkways FE 4407.

Jamaica
Abyssinians, The. Satta Massagana. Heartbeat CD HB 120.
Bennett, Louise. Jamaican Folk Songs Sung by Louise Bennett. Folkways FP 6846.
Bongo, Backra and Coolie: Jamaican Roots, Volume 1. Folkways FE 4231.
Bongo, Backra and Coolie: Jamaican Roots, Volume 2. Folkways FE 4232.
Burning Spear. Live. Island ILPS 9513.
Cliff, Jimmy. Give the People What They Want. MCA-5217.
———. The Harder They Come. Mango SMAS-7400.
**Recordings** (continued from 9)

- **Unlimited**, Reprise/Warner Bros. MS 2147.
- **Drums of Defiance: Jamaican Maroon Music**, Folkways SF CD 40412.
- **My Turn to Love you**, Epic JE 36522.
- **Irma Circle. Everything is Great**, Island ILPS 9558.
- **KING KONG COMPIL. MANGO MLPS-9671**.
- **The Kmg Kong Compil. Mango MLPS %32**.
- **Kingston Town: 18 Reggae Hits**, Heartbeat CD HB 82.
- **Marley, Bob. Chances Are**, Cotillion SD 5228.
- **Legend: The Best of Bob Marley and The Wailers. Island 90169-1**.
- **Live. Island ILPS-9376**.
- **Natty Dread. Island ILPS 9284**.
- **Survival. Island ILPS 9542**.
- **Uprising. Island ILPS 9596**.
- **Mighty Diamonds, The. Right Time**, Virgin PZ 34235.
- **Mowatt, Judy. Look at Love**, Shanachie 43087.
- **Paragons, The. The Paragons. Mango MLPS 9631**.
- **Riley, Jimmy. Rydim Driven. Mango MLPS 9671**.
- **Roots of Reggae. Lyrichord LLCT 7314**.
- **Shabba Ranks. Rough and Ready, Vol. 1. Epic EK 52443**.
- **Skatalites, The. Scattered Lights. Top-Deck CDB 1000**.
- **The Spirit Cries: Music from the Rainforests of South America and the Caribbean. Rykodisc RCD 10250**.
- **Third World. You’ve Got the Power. Columbia FC 37744**.
- **Toots and The Maytals. Funky Kingston. Island ILPS 9330**.
- **Tosh, Peter. Bush Doctor. Rolling Stones COC 39109**.
- **Equal Rights. Columbia 34670**.
- **Mama Africa. EMI SO-17095**.
- **Mystic Man. Rolling Stones COC 39111**.
- **Wailers, The. Catch a Fire. Island SW-9329**.
- **Wailing Souls. Wild Suspense. Mango MLPS 9523**.
- **Watch How You Flex!: More Reggae Dance Hall Killers. Shanachie 45002**.

**Lesser Antilles**


**Martinique.**

**See French West Indies.**

**Mexico**

- **Santana, Carlos. Lotus. CBS 66 325**.
- **Greatest Hits. Columbia JC 33050**.

**Netherlands Antilles**

- **Tumba, Cuarta and Ka’i. Original Music OMC 202C, Cassette.**

**Panama**

- **[Duo Sonata?]. Delphin and Romain at Fisk University Chapel. Cassette.**
- **Quintet for Flute, B-flat Clarinet, Violin, Cello and Piano. Turnabout TV-S 34505**.
- **Perez, Danilo. The Journey. Novus 63166-2.**
- **Street Music of Panama. Original Music OMCD 008.**

**Peru**

- **Chocolate. Peru’s Master Percussionist. Lyrichord LYRCD 7417.**

**Puerto Rico**

- **Barreto, Ray. Taboo. Concord Picante CCD-4601.**
- **Caliente=Hot: Puerto Rican and Cuban Musical Expression in New York. New World NW 244.**
- **Canario y su grupo. Plenas. Ansonia HGCD-1232.**
- **Fefita La Grande. Todos los hombres son
buenos. José Luis CDJLR-160.
*Puerto Rican Music in Hawai‘i*. Folkways CD SF 40014.
Rodríguez, Pete. *I Like it Like That (A mí me gusta así)*. Alegre SLPA 8550.
Son del Barrio. *Son del Barrio*. AVL94156CD.

**St. Lucia**

*Musical Traditions of St. Lucia, West Indies*. Folkways CD SF 40416.

**St. Thomas. See Virgin Islands of the United States**

**Surinam**

*The Creole Music of Surinam (Dutch Guiana)*. Folkways FE 4233.

**Trinidad and Tobago**

*Calypso Calaloo*. Rounder CD 1105.
*Cult Music of Trinidad*. Folkways FE 4478.
Lord Invader. *Calypso with the Lord Invader*. Folkways FW 6914.
*The Music of Trinidad*. National Geographic 3297.
*Soca Session*. WH GR 30136K. Cassette.
*Spiritual Baptist Music of Trinidad*. Folkways FE 4234.
Trinidad Panharmonic Orchestra. *Steel Band*. Folkways FW 6865.
*West Indian Folksongs for Children*. Scholastic SC 7744.

**Venezuela**


**Virgin Islands of the United States**

—. The Governor’s Own. *The Pride of America: The Golden Age of the American March*. New World NW 266.
*94 Calypso and Brass: Collage*. Brown Sugar Productions BSPCD-6444.
Regenerated Singers. *Let’s Go Forward*. R.S.-0013/4629 92.2CD.
Rising Stars Youth Steel Orchestra. *On Tour with the Rising Stars Youth Orchestra*. Territorial Court CAS0004. Cassette.
*Under the Coconut Tree*. Original Music OMCD025.
Muñequitos (continued from 14)

Ministry of Culture.

During the July 1994 visit of the Muñequitos de Matanzas to Chicago, I had an opportunity to interview Mr. Villadares-Pombo. The excerpts that follow are taken from our interview.

CARLOS FLORES: How and when did the Muñequitos begin to incorporate certain aspects of Yoruba religion into their show?

ARMANDO VILLADAZ-POMBO: The religious phase of the Muñequitos' show began when I became involved with the group in 1989. I indicated to the group that the rumba had become very sophisticated around the world and that in order for the group to go out of Cuba we had to develop a spectacular show that would include the various forms of the original rumba as well as a program that demonstrated the Yoruba religion. We wrote a program called "Patakín," which translates to the legends and history of the African ancestors. In 1989 the group incorporated the bata and abakuá drums. Abakuá societies were exclusively male fraternal organizations brought to Cuba by the Carabali slaves from Nigeria. (Bata drums come directly from the Nigerian Yoruba people who were brought to Cuba during the slave trade. The bata are double-headed drums used primarily for religious purposes. They are similar in shape to an hourglass, with each head being a different size and pitch.)

CF: To what do you attribute the preservation of the African religion, music, and culture in Cuba, that is, Yoruba religion, Abakua societies, and so on?

AVP: There is at least one secret as to why the Cubans have maintained and preserve their African traditions for over four hundred years, and even today the music is being played in the same manner it was brought by African slaves several centuries ago. The secret is that it has been passed down from fathers to sons, generation after generation. For example, the province of Matanzas has two neighborhoods that have maintained these African musical traditions; one is called Simpson, and the other is called La Marina. Havana has Belen; Santiago has Barrio Losollo. If you were to walk in these neighborhoods, you would think you were in Africa.

The Muñequitos were visited by the Ambassador of Nigeria at the Provisional Museum in Matanzas, Cuba, and the Muñequitos performed the Yoruba program of their show. The Ambassador was delighted with the performance and commented that the Muñequitos had transplanted him back to Nigeria and that the Yoruba demonstration was identical to what the African ancestors brought from Africa. The Ambassador also commented that this music is no longer being played in the same manner in Nigeria.

CF: Since its inception, has there ever been any hostile or discriminatory action by the majority of the society against the rumba?

AVP: The rumba originated in Matanzas in the earlier part of this century. In some respects, the rumba was considered a taboo, especially when it was associated with the African religion. Cuba was predominantly Catholic, and the Church prohibited the practice of other African religions. There were laws passed in the 1930s and 1940s prohibiting rumba playing. These laws were strictly enforced by the police to repress any conga-drumming associated with the rumba. In the 1950s rumba playing was permitted in various neighborhood outdoor parks, but never in theaters or at high society functions. Since 1959, the rumba is allowed to be played throughout Cuba. Today, the music of the Muñequitos is heard in all of Cuba's best concert halls.

CF: Why has the role of women been limited or nonexistent in rumba playing? Why have the Muñequitos incorporated some women to participate in their performance?

AVP: When the Muñequitos began, there were eight men and no women. Women began to be incorporated in the group when the need arose to actually dance the rumba. One of the characteristics of the rumba are its dances, especially the guaguanco, where the male
to maintain many of the rich cultural traditions handed down by their African ancestors. The Muñequisitos de Matanzas is one of the many artistic groups in the Americas that have preserved the language, religion, music, and dance of our African ancestors.

**Discography**
The following is a partial listing of the recordings made by the Muñequisitos de Matanzas.

**Cantar Maravilloso: The Rumba Originals.**

**Guaguancó: Con Papin y Sus Rumberos.**


**Congo Yambumba.** Qbadisc Records QB-9014, 1994.

pursues the female and tries to possess her. In the yambu, the fundamental of the dance is that the female is showcased more than the male. Twenty-seven years ago, Diosvaldo Ramos became the first dancer of the Muñequisitos, but there was a need to have a female dancer to accompany him in the dances. That is how Ana and Vivian were incorporated in the group. In rumba groups or groups that practice Yoruba religion, there are no women percussionists. In the Yoruba religion women are not allowed to play the bata drum; the impediment of not allowing women to participate in the drumming rituals came from the mandates of the religion.

Over four hundred years ago, Africans were introduced to the Americas through the cruel institution of slavery. Today, many descendants of African slaves have managed
province of Matanzas, the members would gather in “El Gallo Bar,” located in a neighborhood called Marina. One day as they were drinking in the bar, the jukebox was playing a son (one of the oldest Afro-Cuban musical forms) by Arsenio Rodriguez, and they began to follow the music by beating on tables, glasses, and bottles. Villadares-Pombo states that “people were so astounded with the rhythms being created by their playing that someone suggested starting a group, and the rest is history.”

Initially, the group was called Guguanco Matancero. Their first album, recorded in 1953, included a song about a character in the newspaper funnies. The album became such a hit that people began calling them the Muñequisitos de Matanzas (funny figures from Matanzas). The group has recorded at least twelve albums. Since the 1950s, several of the original members have been replaced; the majority of the new members are related to their predecessors. Today, the group continues to perform the classic rumbas: yambu, columbia, and guguanco (three dominant styles of rumba music). The group also presents “Patakin,” a performance that preserves the religious music and dance of the Yoruba, one of the primary groups from West and Central Africa imported to Cuba.

Armando Villadares-Pombo was responsible for researching and writing the first “Patakin” for the group, which resulted in performances in England, their first trip outside Cuba. Before joining the Muñequisitos de Matanzas, Mr. Villadares-Pombo worked as an actor, radio personality, and writer. For the last twenty-three years he has spent most of his time working for Cuba’s...