

Chapter 1: Cuban Son and Cultural Tourism

Tourism in Cuba Since the 1980s

Rosalie Schwartz points to 1982 as the year in which Cuba entered its third phase as a tourist destination.¹ During the first two decades of the Cuban revolution, Castro's government had little reason to actively pursue tourism as a source of revenue. While inflated sugar exports to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe alleviated the immediate need for other sources of income, tourism was also associated with the corrupt capitalism of Batista and the imperialistic presence of the United States. Thus, tourism was left out of Castro's plan for a new Cuban society (Schwartz 1997: 205-06). Although some sources indicate that the government had shown interest in tourism as early as the mid-1970s, it was not until 1982, and the passing of the Cuban Joint Venture Law (also known as Decree #50), that the government began to pursue tourism in earnest.

¹ Cuba first became a tourist hotspot in the 1920s, when it was visited primarily by the American jet-set. Prohibition, combined with the relative inaccessibility of Europe during World War I, turned the attention of rich American vacationers to Havana and Varadero beach (Moore 1997: 183). Schwartz (1991: 251) holds that tourism stopped abruptly after the revolution of 1933 and the end of prohibition, but Moore (1997: 82-83) provides evidence of tourism continuing into the late 1930s. The 1950s represent a second boom and a change in character of Cuban tourism, as Havana became a favorite destination for the U.S. middleclass (Schwartz 1991: 521-52).

Decree #50 allowed up to 50% ownership by foreign companies, something unheard of until that time. However, Cold War politics prevailed, and Cuba's continued trade and political involvement with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, combined with pressures to enforce the U.S. embargo, intimidated investors in Europe and the Americas (Jenkins 1992: 141-42).

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 and the onset of the *Período Especial en Tiempo de Paz* (Special Period in Peacetime) in 1990 forced the Cuban government to make tourism a major source of national revenue (Schwartz 1997: 206). Castro scrambled to make up for debilitating losses in foreign trade; in 1988, 85% of imports and exports had been carried out with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (Jenkins 1992: 142; Pozo Fernández 1993: 5). The GNP dropped by over 40 % in 1990, and lack of energy supplies and manufactured goods made water rationing, widespread power outages, transportation crises, and shortages of food common occurrences by the early months of 1992. Up until 1989, Cuba had been one of Latin America's most affluent countries; in a matter of a few years, it became one of its poorest (Moore 2005: 343).

Despite the new allowances for foreign investment passed in the 1980s, tourism progressed slowly until 1993, when, in the face of continually declining sugar harvests, large-scale blackouts, and food shortages, the government passed another string of special measures, including price freezes, rationing, and, most importantly for the tourist industry, the

legalization of the U.S. dollar (ibid.). 1993 was also the year in which some forms of self-employment were made legal, such as home-based food production, and taxi service (Travel & Tourism Intelligence 1996: 16).

In 1994, tourism surpassed sugar as the main source of revenue, earning \$850 million, above sugar's \$720 million. Unfortunately, the exodus of Cubans in the summer of 1995 cost millions in bad publicity: "As in the past, resort tourism's fortunes depend on positive images and expectations of relaxation and good times" (Schwartz 1997: 206).

However, many are quick to point out that the real source of revenue for the Cuban government comes in the form of remittances from Cubans living abroad. Money sent to individuals from friends and relatives is in turn spent in new government dollar stores, all in all contributing well over \$800 million each year to the GNP. Much of this money comes from the members of the Miami exile community, who would, hypocritically, deny Cuba any and all political and economic aid but pay the welfare of their relatives out of their own pockets (Moore 2005: 344).

According to some studies in the late 1990s, the tourist industry in Cuba is expanding at a rate of 15% per year (de Holán 1997: 783; Aoki 2002: 44). Although statistics on the number of tourists vary, most studies indicate that by the year 2000 the number of visitors per year had increased by more than 500% since 1985, with gross earnings in the neighborhood of 1.7 million

dollars. Italians are the most common tourists, followed by Canadians, Mexicans, Spaniards, and other Europeans (Moore 2005: 348).²

Music plays a prominent role in Cuba's promotional plan to attract tourists. At major hotels, every night features a performance of a salsa band, folkloric troupe, or even a big-name *timba* group. When I visited Havana in 2003, Issac Delgado's group, one of the most popular on the island at that time, performed weekly at the Spanish-owned Meliá Cohiba, the newest hotel on Havana's waterfront.

The effort to attract tourists has changed the content of Hotel cabaret shows. As Rosalie Schwartz notes:

After two decades in which the government downplayed ethnic distinctions for ideological reasons, it once again emphasizes Cuba's African and [Native American] heritage and, like other tourist destinations, capitalizes on folklore (Schwartz 1997: 208).

² This growth has not continued as expected into the 21st century. Statistics provided by the World Tourism Organization show a drop in net tourist earnings from \$1.737 million in 2000 to \$1.639 million in 2002 (WTO 2005). Moore (p.c. 2005) suggests that this might have to do with Cuba's tendency to copy other models of tourism in the Caribbean without taking into account unique aspects of Cuba that might attract different types of visitors, such as those interested in learning about Cuba's successful socialist programs in education and medicine. My own experience confirms Moore's observation (see below).

Katherine Hagedorn (2001: 12) notes the impact of tourism on the “folkloricization” of Santería rituals:

Afro-Cuban religions such as Santería have been catapulted from the target of both persecution and prosecution to the destination of foreign tourism (ibid.: 10).

As Pacini Hernández (1998: 114) notes, it is through a clearer affirmation of African roots that Cuban music has been successfully marketed as “world music” to international audiences, including not just percussion-based groups like Conjunto Folklórico, but also those performing son, like the *Buena Vista Social Club* (BVSC) and the Afro-Cuban All-Stars.³

While the tourist boom has created more performance opportunities for musicians, it has had negative consequences for the population as a whole. The legalization of the dollar, along with the opening of dollar stores which sell a wide range of manufactured goods, has created a dual economy in which those with access to even small sums in dollars can afford to live much more comfortably than the best paid government employees. Highly trained professionals leave careers as doctors or lawyers to work in the tourist sector, finding better pay in restaurants or driving *bicitaxis* (bicycle taxis).

Music is increasingly seen as a way of accessing the tourist dollar economy that is open to almost anyone. This is especially true of son, since it

³ See Chapter 2 for further discussion of the marketing behind the Buena Vista Social Club.

requires little initial investment (although even finding a guitar and guitar strings can be difficult) and has had overwhelming success with foreigners.⁴ Thousands of amateur musicians have flocked to the cities and major tourist destinations in the hopes of making dollars in tips, music or dance lessons, or even catching the eye of foreign entrepreneurs (Moore 2005: 345). Meanwhile, the best music venues and nightclubs charge admission in dollars, effectively creating a “musical apartheid” (ibid.: 348); Cuban citizens cannot see live performances of the most popular bands simply because they cannot pay the cover charge.

For performers on the island, performing for tourists is a new experience, with potential for notable musical and social consequences. The study of music in tourism is not a new field, however. The following section provides a summary of its history in ethnomusicology and then addresses issues relative to Cuban musicians in more detail.

Tourism Studies in Ethnomusicology: A brief summary

Although anthropologists had addressed issues relating to tourism peripherally as early as the 1960s, the first works published with a specific

⁴ Chapter 2 discusses some factors contributing to son’s rise in popularity. Among Cubans, son and dance music in general have been on the rise since the 1980s, but most tourists are probably exposed to Cuban music through World Music marketing networks, which most often feature “traditional” Cuban music (e.g. the *Buena Vista Social Club*).

focus on tourist phenomena saw light in the mid-1970s.⁵ MacCannell (1976) and Smith (1977) are the two most important works on the subject.⁶

Ethnomusicologists were slow to follow suit in the active study of tourism. It was not until 1986, more than ten years after the Anthropological Society's national symposium on tourism, that the International Council for Traditional Music held its first colloquium on the impact of tourism on traditional music. The papers presented at this colloquium, held in Kingston, Jamaica, were published in the volume *Come Mek Me Hol' Yu Han'* (Kaeppeler 1988), which represents the first major ethnomusicological study of tourism.

As Frederick Lau (1998: 117) points out, up until the early 1990s "most discussions of tourism [could] be charted along a continuum between the two extremes of condemning or celebrating its consequences."

⁵ In her introduction to *Hosts and Guests*, Valene Smith (1977: 2) cites Theron Nuñez's (1963) article on tourism, as well as the Central States Anthropological Society session on tourism in 1964, as the earliest tourism studies in American anthropology.

⁶ Emanuel de Kadt (1979) is also widely cited. Although de Kadt's contributions to the subject are significant, the two books mentioned here are recognized as the pioneering works in tourism theory. The journal *Annals of Tourism Research*, established at around the same time, is widely cited as well, especially in its early volumes. I will not include a detailed discussion of *Annals* here, as I have not seen it cited significantly in ethnomusicological work, with the exception of some key articles (e.g. Cohen 1988).

In recent years, however, this evaluative approach has been largely replaced by an emphasis on meaning and “sub-text” in tourist performance (Lau 1998:114). The works of Benedict Anderson (1983) and Eric Hobsbawm (1983) greatly influenced tourism scholarship across disciplines in the 1990s. Lau (1998), Sarkissian (1998), and Rees (1998), whose papers on tourism in Southeast Asia were published in a special issue of *Journal of Musicological Research*, all deal with tourism in terms of Anderson’s definition of nationalism, identifying ways in which tourist performance can oppose or affirm national and local identities.

All three authors use Hobsbawm’s theory of tradition as well, problematizing the rhetoric of “tradition” and “authenticity” as strategically employed by both musicians and audience members (ibid.)⁷ Frederick Lau elucidates these concepts most clearly, saying:

What is considered “authentic,” “historic,” and “traditional” in the context of these cultural performances can only be views rooted in the imagination of either the foreign audience or a segment of modern Chinese society (Lau 1998:118).

Lau (1998: 117-18) is among the first to include the theory of folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in his work (Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

⁷ Here Erik Cohen (1988) and Edward Bruner (1994) are important as well for their theories of “authenticity.”

1994). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995, 1998) has proven to be immensely important for ethnomusicologists in the late 1990s and early 21st century.

Herself heavily influenced by Hobsbawm, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett presents a theory of “heritage” as a socially constructed, “‘value-added’ industry” (1995: 369). In other words, outmoded cultural products are given renewed value in the present as display objects. Rather than a preserved or rediscovered cultural continuity, “heritage” is a “transvaluation” of outdated practices (ibid.).⁸

Sarkissian (2000) presents one of the best in recent models for understanding tourist performance through the eyes of performers. Her ethnography of musicians in Malaysia’s Portuguese settlement combines Bruner’s (1994) theory of authenticity and Hobsbawm’s (1983) theory of invented tradition with Clifford’s (1997: 12) “experiments in travel writing and poetic collage.” She explores the way local and national identities are constructed and negotiated in the interaction of music, tradition, and tourism.

Cultural Tourism and Commoditization in Cuban Son

The notion of commoditization, as it is used by tourism scholars such as Eric Cohen (1988 : 380), or commodification, as the term has emerged in

⁸ Transvaluation, here, is another articulation of “value-added,” i.e.: Cultural products are given new value vis-à-vis their new status as display objects rather than as practical components of everyday life.

other disciplines, is often of central importance in contemporary scholarship on tourism. However, in the case of son, a popular dance music that has become “traditional,” commoditization is not a new factor in the sense that one can say that it applies to sacred music, for example. In the case of the Conjunto Folklórico, sacred performances once reserved for local private participation become “folkloricized” (Hagedorn 2002: 12) and, in effect, commoditized for the benefit of tourist audiences. Son, on the other hand, has always existed in a context of commerciality.⁹

Nonetheless, contemporary musicians in Cuba approach the growing re-commercialization of son differently than their predecessors might have. After more than forty years of the U.S. embargo and the resulting limits on international trade, as well as ideological opposition to capitalism, an entire generation of musicians has grown up in Cuba without having to deal with market pressures the way musicians know them in other parts of the world. Cuban pianist Elio Villafranca cites this as being one of his biggest obstacles to a career in music in the United States:

In this country [the U.S.], business issues such as market penetration and selling product are difficult for me...It is much more difficult to

⁹ See Moore (1997) for an excellent account of the rise of son in the context of early radio, changing political climates, and changing notions of “blackness” during the early part of the 20th century.

have a commercial sense or direction over there [in Cuba]...As an artist in Cuba...you have to depend on [your own] musical talent whereas in this country it's more important to know how to navigate the musical industry than having talent (Quiñones 2003).

This fact has the romantic allure of purity and exoticism that attracted artists like Ry Cooder, who thought of his musical collaborators on the island as "not yet touched by commercialism" (Cooder in Mariner 1999). But of course, the reality is much more complex. It is not as though lack of commercial engagement in the world recording industry has had any preservational or "time-capsule" effects. Quite the opposite: Cuban musicians have had to succeed or fail based on their local and national popularity.

This is still the case, to some extent, especially for bands that perform for local concerts in city amphitheatres, playing salsa, *timba*, and *reguetón*.¹⁰ For son groups it is also important, as they often perform concerts for locals as well as for tourists, and for an amateur to group to gain recognition by an *empresa*, it helps to have local support.

For the younger generation of musicians, European and American tourists, whose presence may have shaped the history of son since its origins,

¹⁰ Reguetón is essentially a blend of Jamaican dance hall styles, hip hop, and Puerto Rican bomba and salsa popularized in the 1990s. It is primarily associated with Puerto Rican and "Nu-yorican" culture, but has become popular throughout much of Latin America. The name, (also spelled "reggaetón"), literally means "big reggae."

once again provide an “external public” (Cohen 1988: 382). This new “external public” can provide some space for renewed meaning: thanks to the commercial success of son in international markets, many musicians who self-identify themselves as soneros have found a respect among their musical peers not enjoyed in earlier periods.

This effect has been noted before by tourism scholars. Cohen writes:

Folk musicians...may be excited by the opportunity to present their art and proud to display their competence...It would be absurd to think that all popular music is meaningless for the artists simply because it is commercialized (ibid.: 381-82).

Many musicians remain ambivalent about the extent to which this increased value placed on son represents a real “revival” among musicians and a renewed interest in son within Cuba. They view it simply as an attractive way to make a living. But even to non-musicians whom I spoke to, son seems to have gained renewed significance in light of its new-found currency (literal and figurative).

Tourism is not a simple one- or two-way exchange between foreigners and locals. The average tourist audience member represents only part of the new external public. Other foreigners, such as entrepreneurs and record company scouts, form another audience with different criteria. The internal public is multifaceted as well, consisting of different local players with

varying levels of interest in and control over musical performances, including empresa representatives, hotel and nightclub managers, and local music fans.

For each internal and external public, musicians must present some acceptably “authentic” product. According to Bruner (1994: 399-401), authenticity can have four different meanings: verisimilitude, genuineness, originality, and authority. The first two meanings describe reproductions of an original; the first being a reasonable facsimile that is acceptable according to the public’s expectations, and the second a more detailed replica incorporating historical data. The third meaning refers to “original” as opposed to “replica,” and does not allow for any reproduction whatsoever. Finally, the fourth meaning refers to an endorsement or certification by some authority.

The application of these meanings to musical performance could be illustrated by, for example, a Led Zeppelin cover band. According to the first meaning, a band could be considered to perform authentic Led Zeppelin covers as long as they played Led Zeppelin’s songs in a style more or less similar to that heard on the band’s most well-known recordings, including all of the well-known guitar riffs and drum solos. The players might still improvise note choices or rhythms in the accompaniment parts, or the guitar player might play his own Jimmy Page-inspired guitar solo.

According to the second meaning, the band would only be acceptably authentic if they cut their hair like the original band members, wore similar

clothes, and mimicked the original recordings as specifically as possible, performing all guitar solos and vocal lines note for note. To be authentic according to the third meaning, the band could not be considered authentic at all, since they are not, in fact, members of the original group. If the band members had all attended the official Page and Plant University of Rock, they might be considered authentic according to the fourth meaning.

The next section examines the “publics” or audiences that gauge a given group’s authenticity in Cuba, including interview data from musicians and other participants. In all cases, I stress the agency of both the musicians and the public; the public actively assesses musicians according to predetermined criteria, while the musicians actively present performances according to what they think will be acceptable.

The Empresa System

Since around 1978, two years after the official formation of the Ministry of Culture, nationally centralized hiring centers for musicians were restructured into empresarial systems, following a general trend of decentralization in Cuban government during the 1970s.¹¹ These systems,

¹¹ It is widely agreed that the earlier central hiring system had catastrophic consequences for musicians, causing innumerable bureaucratic delays and “destroy[ing] the customary mechanisms of contact between the public and popular musicians” (Acosta in Robbins 1990a: 84; see also Moore 2005: 144; Fernet et al. 2001: 175).

although slightly revamped in 1984, remain in place today. In common parlance, “*empresa*” refers to any of the various agencies whose main function is the employment of musicians (Robbins 1990a: 59, 76-87).¹²

Each province and municipality has at least two *empresas*, which function simultaneously as both talent agencies and musicians’ unions. Their official responsibilities are to organize the hiring, contracting, and payment of professional and semi-professional musicians (ibid.: 78).

Musicians are given a rating of “A” through “F” (“A” being the highest) based on their performance at an audition, and this rating is the principle factor determining the musicians’ pay scales and performance opportunities. Musicians who rate a “C” or higher are eligible for a *plantilla* (staff, or salaried) position; all others fall into the second category, *por contrato* (“by contract”) (ibid.: 96-97).

Since 1968, professional musicians have been required to hold a degree from a national conservatory such as ENA (*Escuela Nacional de Arte*). Conservatories are free, but entrance is fiercely competitive, as there are many more applicants than slots. For those who are unable to attend a conservatory, or unable to graduate, the prospect of becoming a professional

¹² Technically, only “auto-financed” agencies are called *Empresas Artísticas*, while the ones that receive an annual budget have other names. Robbins (1990a: 77, 88-91) points out that the organization of musical genres into budgeted or auto-financed *empresas* can be indicative of values assigned to one genre over another at the level of local and national government.

musician is considerably more difficult. Amateur musicians must work on an act in their spare time, and make arrangements to play for free at local venues. Once they have a steady monthly rate of “amateur” performances, something like twenty per month, they are eligible to audition for an empresa (Moore 2005: 143).

The only way in which empresas differ from talent agencies is that they do not seek out contracts for musicians. Musicians must approach nightclub owners, hotel managers, and others, to find performance opportunities for their bands. Occasionally, non-music agencies will contact empresas to hire musicians for an event. In either case, the rules of payment are standardized and set by the empresa, so musicians do not typically discuss payment with the venue (Robbins 1990a: 110).

Up until the Special Period, the empresa was the sole means of employment for musicians. Although there were problems with the system, for the most part, musicians’ salaries only varied slightly (ranging from 128 to 450 pesos per month), and work was easy to come by.¹³ Robbins (1990a: 110-111) notes that in the late eighties, he never heard a single complaint about musicians having difficulties filling their monthly quotas of performances. At most, musicians complained about competition to get into a good band or having to play an instrument that they did not like.

¹³ In 2004, the official exchange rate for one dollar was 26 pesos.

Since then, the dual economy of pesos and dollars has divided musicians and drastically altered their relationships with *empresas*. Recent changes in laws regarding compensation for performances abroad has allowed musicians to keep most of the money earned on tour in Europe or Latin America, but musicians who perform on the island, even at high-priced tourist venues, are still paid in virtually worthless pesos. While Robbins' (1990a: 111) experience indicated that musicians generally regarded *empresas* as fair and sometimes helpful to musicians, many today have come to regard the *empresas* as nothing more than corrupt tax collecting agencies.

Ángel Luís "Sinsonte" Balmaseda, the lead singer of a Havana-based septeto, is one of many who feel that the *empresas* are run unfairly:

Look, to win an audition, you have to know the brother of the [artist representative]. You have to already have money, before you make any, because you have to take him out for drinks, introduce him to your sister, and I can't do that! (Balmaseda, interview).¹⁴

Balmaseda pointed out that the process of getting gigs for the band, which is still left up to the musicians, is just as corrupt as passing the audition, and in the end, he claims, there is no incentive to bring people to see

¹⁴ "Mira, para ganar una audición, tienes que conocer el hermano del representante. Tienes que tener dinero ya, antes de ganarlo, porque tienes que invitarle a tomar una copa, presentarle a tu hermana, ¡y yo no puedo hacer eso!"

your show, since all of the money you make will be split up by all the other acts that the empresa represents.

Other musicians have expressed similar concerns, saying that empresas now often deduct taxes of up to 65% of earnings. One bandleader called his empresa “a vampire that sucks your blood and won’t let you live” (Aponte in Moore 2005: 155).

It may be that one reason for this recent negative reaction on the part of musicians is that monetary transactions, especially entrance fees, which were once exclusively handled by the empresa, are now out in the open and often negotiated by musicians themselves. Robbins (1990a: 111) notes that in the 1980s, musicians were largely unaware that empresas took money off the top of performances fees, since musicians were paid according to set pay scales. Also, entrance fees for public performances were most often free or at extremely low prices; performances were typically funded out of specifically allocated budgets. Today, any musician can read the sign advertising a cover of “10.00 USD,” take one look at the crowd, and immediately realize that their performance is generating well beyond the measly 300 pesos paid to the band.

Joaquín Leyva, who works for Empresa Santiago de Cuba, contradicted some of the things that musicians told me about the empresa’s goals and responsibilities. According to Leyva, the only criterion for acceptance of a group into an empresa is the quality of the music – no

practical matters, such as whether or not the group will be able to work in local establishments, are taken into consideration. Leyva stressed that many of the members of the audition evaluators were musicians themselves, which helped to rate prospective performers fairly.

It doesn't matter what genre, it doesn't matter whether they play a son, a changüí, a ... if it's a *good* changüí, well there you go, if it's a *good* guaracha, we accept them (Leyva, interview).¹⁵

Clearly, the audition and rating process of a band could be quite subjective, regardless of whatever strict criteria might be in place beforehand. In this case, *empresas* appear to adhere to the first meaning of authenticity; they are concerned with whether or not a performance is “credible and convincing” (Bruner 1994: 399) according to their previous expectations.

Leyva went on to say that in many cases, the *empresa* does in fact promote its groups to the extent of finding gigs for them, sometimes even working with other towns outside of Santiago. But most of the time, the work that is available is dictated by the requirements of the venues. For the Hotel Casa Granda, for example, bringing a big band, or a band that uses amplifiers, would be too loud for the space.

¹⁵ “No importa el género, no importa si tocan un son, un changüí, un...si es un *buen* changüí, pues ya, si es un *buen* guaracha, nosotros les aceptamos.”

In most cases, according to Leyva, these kinds of practical concerns are what make son groups more favorable. They are a great combination, from the point of view of the venue: they are small, they play acoustically, and they are popular with tourists. Leyva agreed with other musicians I spoke with in saying that it was easiest to book son than any other type of music.

Leyva assured me, however, me that son bands were not the only groups that found work in Santiago. The groups that played salsa and timba got lots of gigs as well, but they needed much bigger venues. Unfortunately these venues are on the outskirts of town, outside of the tourist center. Leyva seemed to think that this was ok, since tourists generally preferred son bands anyway.

This last statement shows how empresas reinforce the kind of “musical apartheid” mentioned earlier, where musical events are divided into “tourist” and “local” categories, in this case by geographic location. Compared to Havana, Santiago’s tourist music venues are relatively accessible to locals as well; a number of the most well known ones, like Casa de La Trova, are free during the day and charge a split admission (two dollars for tourists, 10 pesos for Cubans) at night.¹⁶ However, for the practical reasons Leyva describes, most shows that would appeal to young Cuban fans are performed near the

¹⁶ Havana does have some venues that offer similar discounts for Cubans, such as the Hurón Azúl Club at UNEAC (National Union of Cuban Artists and Writers), but these represent only a small portion of the city’s commercial music venues.

outskirts of the city, in marginalized neighborhoods. This leaves the center of town, with its attractive colonial architecture (much of which has been recently renovated thanks to UNESCO funds [UNESCO 2005]) for tourists.

Hotel and club managers

EGREM, the Empresa de Grabaciones y Ediciones Musicales (Company for Musical Recordings and Publication), was founded in 1962 and charged with the “historic mission of preserving all the values of Cuban music which are not yet totally recorded” (Gómez García in Robbins 1990a: 179). The majority of recordings produced through the 1980s were made without any regard for popular interest or market pressures. Audience polls and radio “top ten lists” were rejected on the basis of their inherent connections to capitalism. Instead, recording projects were approved by a panel of thirty music experts, including ethnomusicologists such as María Teresa Linares (who was president of the panel during the 1980s) (ibid.: 180-85).

Robbins (ibid.) outlines the many problematic aspects of record production governed by scholarly consensus rather than market demand, including uneven sales of records produced, seemingly arbitrary decisions about which popular band to record, and a tendency toward musical conservatism. Although these problems have begun to be addressed in recent years, my experience suggests that the problematic lack of feedback

mechanisms from local and national audiences persists, both in recording and in the newly established Casas de la Música (Houses of Music).

The Casas de La Música were established in 1996, and are a completely auto-financed, semi-autonomous enterprise (Martínez Galán, interview). The first Casa de la Música was opened in Miramar, followed by another in downtown Havana. Since then Casas de la Música have opened in Trinidad and Santiago, and EGREM has also been charged with the management of two other venues in Santiago, the Patio de Los Abuelos and the Casa de la Trova.

Yurina Martínez Galán, who acts as the “Principal Commercial Specialist” for EGREM in Santiago, described the music booking process for the Casas de la Música as identical to that of clubs like Nell’s in New York.¹⁷ Essentially, bands are booked on a trial basis, and the bands that bring in the most revenue are asked to return. Martínez Galán contradicted Leyva’s assumption about tourist audiences’ preference for son, saying that the best groups were always the more “modern” ones (i.e. salsa or timba).

Just across Plaza Céspedes, at Hotel Casa Granda, musicians perform on the terrace overlooking the plaza. This is an important regular gig shared

¹⁷ Nell’s has since closed its doors, but through the summer of 2004 it was one of the best-known venues for Cuban son in New York City. Martínez Galán was contacted by the owner to discuss the possibility of bringing some Santiago musicians to perform there (which accounts for her knowledge of this specific club and its procedures).

by three local bands, Son Diamante, Septeto Naborí, and Moneda Nacional. Other groups are occasionally hired when these three are out of town (which happens fairly often). I spoke with hotel manager Andrés Santor, who told me that the hotel qualifies for a budget from local and national cultural agencies including the Centro Provincial de la Música (Provincial Center for Music) and the Agencia Cubana de Música Tradicional (Cuban Agency for Traditional Music). Bands are selected from the roster of Empresa Santiago de Cuba, and Santor stressed that their criteria are mostly practical: the limited space and live acoustics of the terrace cannot accommodate bands much bigger than septetos.

Hotel and restaurant managers prefer acoustic ensembles as they perform at a much more manageable volume level, and can play in a patio or other open-air space that may not have access to electrical outlets (Santor, interview). Also, although in recent years power outages have become much less common, electricity is still not something that can be relied on with any confidence, so an entirely acoustic ensemble is preferable to one that relies on amplification (Brito, interview).

I asked Santor if he had ever booked bands that performed acoustic music that was not son, such as jazz combos or acoustic rock bands, and he laughed at the idea. "Tourists aren't interested in that sort of thing. You

know, why would you come to Cuba to hear music from another country?" (Santor, interview).¹⁸

However, neither EGREM nor Casa Granda has any set mechanism for gauging audience response or interest. EGREM does well with the bands that have an established reputation, but cannot effectively plan ahead and pick out up-and-coming acts. Casa Granda's groups are booked based on anecdotal experience of tourist tastes: "We know this to be the case thanks to lots of experience – lots of experience with tourists, working in the world of tourism for a long time" (ibid.).¹⁹ There are no mechanisms in place for evaluating tourists' opinions of the music they hear or would like to hear.

For Casa Granda, authenticity is an important factor, since tourists presumably want to hear "real" Cuban music; Santor's comment above indicates that he considers son and other "traditional" music to be more Cuban than jazz or rock, even if performed by Cubans. But Santor does not select the musicians himself, or even pay much attention to them. Instead he follows the fourth meaning of authenticity, relying on the empresa's endorsement of a certain group as a guarantee that they are "certified" septetos.

¹⁸"A los turistas no le interesa esa serie de cosas. Usted sabe, ¿cómo va a venir usted a Cuba para escuchar música de otro país?"

¹⁹ "Nosotros sabemos eso gracias a mucha experiencia- mucha experiencia con los turistas, trabajando en el mundo del turismo desde hace mucho tiempo."

EGREM, on the other hand, is not so concerned with finding “real” Cuban music. Martínez Galán enthusiastically touts the eclecticism of the Casa de la Música programming, which even includes local rap groups from time to time. Martínez Galán does not waste time evaluating groups before they perform. Instead, the sole criterion is their success at drawing a crowd.

Tourists

Although Cuba’s tourist sector continues to grow, this growth has fallen somewhat short of expectations in the last two to three years. As noted above, some studies in the late 1990s estimated annual growth at 15%, but a recent presentation by Cuban Tourism Deputy Minister Oscar González at the International Tourism Fair of Berlin in March of 2005 showed that tourist arrivals had only increased in 2004 by about half that, around seven percent (Cuba XP 2005).²⁰

One reason for this may be that Cuban marketing has targeted the wrong type of tourist. Tourism projects initially hoped to pick up where 1950s tourism had left off, capitalizing on the reputations of Havana and Varadero beach as fantastic Caribbean getaways with vast beaches and exciting nightlife. The main obstacle to tourism was seen as the limited hotel capacity, since five-star hotels like the Habana Libre (the old Hilton) and the Hotel Nacional were in serious need of renovation (Pozo Fernández 1993: 12).

²⁰ Also see figures from the World Tourism Organization, above (in footnotes).

However, tourists who can afford to pay five-star prices are more likely to vacation in established Caribbean destinations, like the Bahamas, Cancún, or Jamaica, since these offer comprehensive luxury packages complete with golf courses, sunset cruises, jungle tours, etc., all in complete comfort. Although old hotels have been beautifully renovated and new hotels are of equal or better quality, Cuban tourism agencies cannot offer these kinds of all-inclusive vacations.

In fact, many tourists come to Cuba for reasons other than to relax poolside in a five-star hotel. Gislène and Caroline, two schoolteachers from Paris, came to take an informal tour of Cuban primary schools as part of their vacation. Their interest in Cuba came partially from its reputation for sun and good music, but also from the success of its educational system. They were much more interested in learning something about the way Cubans lived than in glitzy hotel cabaret shows. Like me, they avoided the most expensive venues for music, hunted for local restaurants that charged in pesos rather than dollars, and stayed at *casas particulares* (privately owned houses)²¹ rather than hotels (Caroline, interview).

²¹ Tourists are legally allowed to stay in rooms rented by locals who hold official licenses to do so, as part of a general trend toward allowing more self-financed enterprise. However, these sources of income are heavily regulated and taxed, making it difficult to turn a profit except in the busiest tourist areas. Many Cubans rent rooms to foreigners illegally for lower

Michel, also a teacher, came to hear music and get away from the hustle and bustle of Paris. Although his interest in Cuba was much more stereotypical (hot sun, pretty women, great music), he also traveled on a budget, and stayed at the house of a friend's distant cousin in Santiago. Michel pointed out to me that in many cases there were no intermediate options between activities promoted to tourists at high prices and activities open, and sometimes restricted to, local participation (Michel, interview).

Moore (p.c. 2005) agrees that there has been little effort to promote anything other than first-class tourism, and that plans for the future (including cruise ship docks and golf courses) continue in the same direction.

Thus the tendency of Santor and Leyva to generalize about tourist taste can be viewed as part of a larger trend throughout Cuba's tourist industry. In terms of music, all three of the tourists mentioned above expressed an interest in a wide variety of Cuban music, and complained of hearing the same songs over and over again from septetos. They fall into the category of what Cohen (1988: 378) would call "experiential" tourists, those who are concerned with the appearance of authenticity (as opposed to "existential" tourists, who demand "the real thing" in every last detail). They were most entertained by performances that did not openly reveal themselves to be "just for tourists." Hearing the same songs from different bands made them realize that the

than average prices, but are subject to heavy fines and even confiscation of property if discovered.

songs evidently formed some kind of tourist repertoire and were not just the songs that the musicians themselves liked to play.

For tourists like Gislène, Caroline, and Michel, who are interested in music but have no musical training, repertoire is one easily quantifiable aspect of musical performance.²² Rees (2000: 155) suggests that age is often an important factor in suggesting authenticity, and this can be true for repertoire performed by Cuban septetos as well. Some of the most frequently requested songs, according to musicians, are compositions from the 1920s by Miguel Matamoros, such as “Son de La Loma” or “Lágrimas Negras.” However, the extent to which the age of a given piece can certify its authenticity has its limits. Specifically, recognition of the piece is crucial; if a band performs a song that is not recognized by the audience, they may have little ability to recognize it as older or newer than other pieces.

What seems to be most important in establishing authenticity in repertoire is covered by the fourth definition. When a given piece is duly authorized (by important performers or recordings, for example) it becomes authentic, regardless of age. An excellent example is the song by Francisco Repilado (a.k.a. Compay Segundo) called “Chan Chan,” which I heard performed by nearly every band I saw in 2004. Although the song’s composer was the oldest musician on the *Buena Vista Social Club* (BVSC) recordings, the

²² This is not a representative sample of tourists’ musical tastes. The attitudes of these three tourists constitute one of many possible perspectives.

song itself was written in the 1980s. Its presence on the recording, which has itself been given the stamp of authenticity, deserving or not, in World Music networks, ensures its place in what tourists perceive as authentic repertoire.²³

Thus, tourists' perceptions of authenticity in Cuban septeto performance have direct links to international music markets, even if many groups performing in Cuba do not have access to these markets. The more familiar a tourist is with a certain set of recordings, the more rigorous (and perhaps idiosyncratic) their criteria for an authentic sound.

Although a growing interest in Cuban dance music has seen the re-release of many out-of-print recordings, distribution problems make all but the most well known groups difficult to obtain. The ease of internet shopping offsets this to some degree, but it is still true that only the most well-publicized artists are sold in large quantities.²⁴

Even eight years after the initial release of the BVSC, the most well-known artists remain those associated with this project in some way. Thus,

²³ As Pacini Hernández (1998: 114) points out, Cuban music has, since the early 1980s, been marketed as a World Music commodity, avoiding the more insular Latin category in the U.S. See Chapter 2.

²⁴ For example, Nonesuch records (the U.S. subsidiary of World Circuit, producers of the BVSC) has garnered 6 gold and 3 platinum record awards since 1994. Re-releases of Septeto Habanero, Septeto Nacional, and other well-known groups from the 1920s and '30s, produced by Arhoolie Folkways, Tumbao Cuban Classics, and other small labels, have sold only in the tens of thousands (RIAA 2003).

the expectations of foreign audiences in Cuba are shaped by the repertoire, stylistic elements, and instrumentation heard on BVSC and its affiliated recordings (Ibrahim Ferrer, Afro-Cuban All-Stars, etc.). These recordings provide audiences with an idealized version of what authentic Cuban music should sound like.

However, as Hernández-Reguant (2000: 1) points out, BVSC may not have had a significant impact on local music scenes in Cuba. In fact, the recording itself remains unavailable on the island, even in tourist shops (ibid.). Thus, tourists are often asking for music that they define as “son” (according to the liner notes of BVSC), with very specific expectations and different criteria than those of performers.

This might explain the communication gap between musicians and tourists implicit in Gislène and Caroline’s complaints; musicians continue to play the same songs, thinking that they are catering to tourists’ desires, while tourists are actually tiring of the same old repertoire and searching for more authentic performers. It could be that tourists, who use repertoire as the easiest way to communicate style, might request something from BVSC or other World Music compilations that local performers have never heard. For musicians familiar with the song in other contexts, it might have other stylistic connotations or be associated with another performer.

The members of Cañambú, a band that until recently was still directed by one of its founding members, Arístides Ruíz Boza (see Chapter 4), attribute the lack of variety in repertoire to regional differences.

Let me tell you: we play mostly in hotels, and tourists will come up and say [in a high-pitched voice] ‘What about “Son de La Loma”? What about Chan Chan?’ because they always come from Havana first, toward Oriente, all along hearing all the groups play all the same things! (Ramón Suarez in Cañambú, interview).²⁵

The group suggested that musicians in Havana, where son has not been as popular in recent years as in Santiago, simply do not know as much repertoire. They therefore only learn songs that are specifically requested, while Santiagueros have a wealth of local knowledge to draw from.

This assertion is in itself a bid for authenticity, as Cañambú’s members seek to define themselves as “the real thing” as opposed to imitators in Havana. Judging from this remark it is clear that musicians themselves have other criteria for authenticity that may not be significant to tourists.

²⁵ “Déjame decirte que, nosotros tocamos en hoteles, y viene el turista y dice ‘Y el “Son de la Loma”? Y el “Chan Chan”?’ Porque siempre vienen desde la Habana, hacía Oriente, ¡oyendo los mismos y todos grupos con la misma cosa! Cuando nosotros tocamos, la gente aplauda y baila, ¡y gozan bien!”

Musicians' Perspectives: Regional Identity and Competition

As the comment above suggests, regional identity can often serve as an authenticator. In general, across the country the musicians I spoke with conceded that Oriente was still the region with the strongest tradition of son. Many pointed out that the star players in many groups, both septetos and bigger bands, like Adalberto Álvarez y Su Son, were from Oriente. The winning group of this year's septeto competition was Moneda Nacional, from Santiago.

A finer distinction is often made by noting that a player is *de monte* (of the hills). Musicians who come from eastern mountainous regions near the Sierra Maestra, and especially close to Guantánamo, are considered to be "hard-wired" for son. The perceived authenticity of certain musicians by their band members was often articulated to me in this way.

For performers in Santiago, Havana musicians are perceived as lacking in both musical talent and respect for tradition. Their eclectic tastes and efforts at musical fusion are regarded with disdain and sometimes ridiculed. As Manuel "Bigote" Palacios, of Sonora La Calle, told me "Yeah, they try to stick everything in there, cha-cha, jazz, reggae, but you can't do that! It's not son!" (Palacios, interview).²⁶

²⁶ "Si, ellos quieren meterlo todo – cha-cha, jazz, régue, ¡pero no se puede hacer eso! ¡Eso ya no es son!"

Meanwhile, Habaneros often consider bands that perform too closely within established regional styles as not inventive enough. When I mentioned to Julia, the lead singer for Son Soneros, how strikingly different I found the vocal harmonies of Pinar del Río group Compás de Espera, she was not impressed. “Well, that group is from Pinar del Río. They play in the style from over there, I mean, like Polo Montañez, who is from there too” (Julia, interview).²⁷

I spoke with Joaquín Leyva about the feeling of rivalry with Havana that I felt from other musicians in Santiago. He explained that, yes, there is a tradition of regional antagonism, but that these days, the economic situation for musicians brings this much closer to the surface.

The thing is that Havana is a much bigger tourist center than Santiago. Because of that, they have more resources for the employment of musicians. They have more theatres, more bars, the Casa de la Música is much bigger. And lots of tourists never go outside of Havana, so they think they’ve seen everything. That’s why a lot [of musicians] moved there [to Havana], like Adalberto Álvarez (Leyva, interview).²⁸

²⁷ “Bueno, ese grupo es de Pinar del Río. Tienen el estilo de allá, o sea, como Polo Montañez, que es de ahí también.”

²⁸ “Lo que sucede es que La Habana es un centro turístico mucho más grande que Santiago. Por eso, tienen mas recursos para el empleo de los músicos. Tienen más teatros, más bares, la Casa de la Música es mucho más grande. Y muchos turistas nunca salen de La Habana, así

It is true that Cuba's tourist industry is largely centered around Havana. As a brief example, www.cubatravel.cu, a tourism website run by the Cuban tourist agency Publicitur, shows that Havana alone has 68 hotels (not including another 45 located along Varadero beach, a two-hour drive to the east), while other tourist centers around the island rarely have more than ten. Santiago, Cuba's second largest city, as well as the "birthplace of son" and the city with the highest Afro-Cuban population, only has 15 hotels (*Cubatravel* 2005).

Many in Oriente, near Santiago and the rural province of Guantánamo feel left out of the Ministry of Tourism's plan for the future. Ben Lapidus (2002: 3) notes that Guantánamo, where most performers of *changüí* reside, is absent from official lists of developing tourist attractions.

Dolores, an older trova singer in Santiago, figures that the influx of tourists has done good things for music in Santiago, except, she feels, for the musicians who are doing music "automatically," or just for the extra cash, and not because they love music. She notes that when tourists started to arrive, the number of son bands playing in Santiago multiplied exponentially. "It used to be just the old guys...young people go [to Casa de la Trova] now,

que creen que han visto todo. Por eso muchos [músicos] se fueron de aquí para allá, como Adalberto Álvarez."

but not because they like son. No! It's to find a *yuma*, you see!" (Dolores, interview).²⁹

Dolores' comment underlines the ubiquitous nature of *jineterismo*³⁰ in tourist areas. Hustlers hoping to sell bootleg CDs or cigars, others hoping to make a new friend that can afford to buy them some drinks or a meal, and women hoping to exchange sexual favors for gifts or money often frequent music venues, especially those that offer lower entrance fees for Cubans (Moore 2005: 348). Some musicians feel that playing for dollar tips and catering to tourists' tastes constitutes another form of *jineterismo*. Ángel Luís Balmaseda, describing musicians who play in bars around Old Havana, said:

A lot of people hustle, down in Old Havana, and you know why? To make money, yeah, but [the biggest thing] is to have more contact with the Yuma [the tourist/foreigner]. Because they want to do their thing, but that's being a prostitute, and I can't do that (Balmaseda, interview).

²⁹ "Si, los jóvenes entran ahora, pero no porque les gusta el son. No! Es para buscar un yuma, fíjese!" Yuma is a slang term for "foreigner," "tourist," or, specifically "American." Its use is generally somewhat negative, implying someone who has money and can be easily hustled.

³⁰ Roughly "hustling." While *jinetera* (lit. "jockey") in the feminine form means a prostitute, the masculine form refers to small-time scam artists or hustlers who make money off of tourists. Both hustling and prostitution are worthy of study, and have some relevance here since they often occur in musical contexts, but these are outside the scope of this work. See, for example, Hodge (2001).

Rather than trying to get by on tourist handouts, Balmaseda is determined that his group will stand out from the competition enough to catch the eye of another type of foreigner, the foreign entrepreneur. This is the end goal of many aspiring groups, especially since the success of the BVSC. In some musicians' eyes, Ry Cooder could have made a star out of anybody, and, as Cantor (1998) and Katerí Hernández (2002: 65) point out, Cooder is not the only fish in the sea. Many recording executives from the U.S. and Europe regularly send representatives to Cuba in search of new talent, and musicians on the island are ready, willing, and able.³¹

Amateur Musicians: Estrellas de Son and Innova

The final section of this chapter is an ethnographic account of two bands that hope to achieve success as international touring acts. Chapter 4 returns to some of the same issues raised by musicians in this section, showing ways in which the newly competitive climate of the tourist industry affects performance styles.

Due to the difficulty of acquiring professional status without a degree from a conservatory (as noted above), many amateur musicians choose to

³¹ While the opportunity to travel and perform abroad is generally a positive experience, Cuban musicians are easy targets for exploitative foreign companies. See Moore (2005), Perna (2001), and Katerí Hernández (2002) for more details.

focus on trying to attract attention from foreigners in hopes of economic salvation and opportunities to travel outside of Cuba.

On my first day in Havana, I met Armando Hernández, director of a most unusual band called Innova (short for *innovación* or “innovation”). He is in his late sixties and a retired music teacher. The rest of the band, also retired, rehearse at the Casa de Cultura de Playa, in Vedado.

The band was founded ten years ago, at the start of the Special Period. María Elena, who is the director of the Casa de Cultura and also plays guitar in the band, told me that the band was initially formed “just for laughs” (Innova, interview),³² but that the band members quickly realized that they might have a chance to make money or travel if they played their cards right.

Musically, Innova is far from innovative. They are basically a conjunto, playing simple tunes in the style of Arsenio Rodríguez or Chappotín y sus Estrellas. However, the band is clearly designed to catch the eye (rather than the ear) of foreigners.

One look at the band gives a sense of Hernández’ quirkiness: he has spent the past ten years building homemade instruments for the band members to play, including percussion instruments in the shape of umbrellas or giant scissors, an electric bass that can be worn as a necktie, and a number

³² “solo para reírse”

of guitars and percussion instruments specially modified to be played with piano keys!³³

I wondered if this apparent obsession with piano keys (*teclas*) could be some sort of commentary on contemporary bands' excessive use of synthesizers, but Hernández offered few words of explanation about his inventions. Clearly, he is not the "people-person" of the band.

María Elena is responsible for promotions, and more than makes up for Hernández' shyness. According to her, Innova represents the foremost development in Cuban music of this century!

At first I was skeptical that this rag-tag bunch of retirees could really attract the attention of foreign concert promoters, but sure enough, Innova has been on two international tours. In 2002 they traveled to perform in France, and in 2003, they toured Canada. Mateca Productions, who organized their Canadian tour, describes them as "traditional, original, funky and fun" (*Mateca Productions* 2003).

For ten years of rehearsal, two tours does not seem like a very big payoff, especially since Innova have not really benefited from their success at home in Havana. They occasionally perform at Casa de Cultura events, but never receive payment for performances. Still, they count themselves as lucky and eagerly prepare for their next trip, whenever it might be.

³³ See photos 1-4, in appendix B.

In Santiago, I met a group of young amateur musicians who still have a long way to go to reach the success of groups like Innova. Estrellas del Son is an amateur septeto, formed two years ago at a CDR party.³⁴ Initially, the group was just for fun, but the group leaders, David and Nargis, thought that maybe the group had a shot at getting some work. Now the group rehearses five days a week, performing whenever they have the chance at local functions.

Carnival is an opportunity for many new groups to cut their teeth, and to try and get noticed by tourists, representatives from Empresa Santiago, and local fans. During the week of Carnival, the city offers performance opportunities to amateur groups; each group is given permission to play at a certain location for a certain period of time. The members of Estrellas were excited to have gotten a good gig: 10am-2pm and 3pm-6pm at Plaza Céspedes.

³⁴ The *Comite Defensa de la Revolución* (Committee for the Defense of the Revolution) is the civilian branch of the communist party, consisting of a national network of neighborhood organizations committed to maintaining the moral integrity of Cuban society. In my experience, attitudes toward the CDR were ambivalent at best; although the CDR does sponsor a number of cultural events, such as the one in which the founding members of Estrellas del Son played, many see the CDR as nothing more than neighbors spying on neighbors. Cubans rarely explicitly criticize the CDR, but there are many jokes about the ubiquity of *elefantes* (“elephants,” i.e. people with big ears and very long memories).

I accompanied the group one afternoon on their lunch break, to the outskirts of Santiago, Reparto Altamira. A far cry from the newly renovated colonial homes of the tourist center, Reparto Altamira reveals the hidden class system in this so-called classless society. While across town, groups like Son Diamante, with access to dollars and contacts in foreign countries, record their albums in snazzy home studios, Estrellas del Son rehearse in the basement of Nargis' two room, cinder-block home.

David hopes that someday, when the group has a really solid sound together, they will get a contract to travel to the U.S. or Europe, and be able to save money. Nargis has plans to build a third room on the house, which he would do himself, but his salary does not provide any extra money for cinderblocks or cement. The others have similar plans. But more than saving money, they told me, the main attraction of playing in a band is the possibility of travel. Being in a band is as good a chance of seeing Europe as there is.

Unfortunately, the end of Carnival probably means the end of regular performance opportunities for Estrellas del Son. Santiago's normal performance venues are limited, and most gigs are tied up by empresa bands. It seems that success for Estrellas is still quite far off.

Conclusion

Identifying the criteria by which different audiences judge musical performance highlights the complex nature of musical interaction in tourist

settings. For performers of son, the importance of creating a unique sonic identity, or *sello* (lit.: stamp), while remaining true to tradition in the eyes of both tourists and employers, heightens the importance of stylistic choices. Performers who stick too closely to traditional styles might not stand out enough from the competition, while those who sound too “modern” might be rejected by the local *empresita* and not even get a chance to perform.

First, it is necessary to closely examine factors that might shape the formation of the aforementioned criteria. In the next chapter, I examine the *Buena Vista Social Club* (BVSC) project and the controversy surrounding its portrayal of Cuba and its musicians. Chapter 3 discusses scholarly definitions of son and related genres, which have more than theoretical significance given the importance of genre classification in Cuban *empresas*. Through these discussions, I suggest some possible factors affecting the multiple publics of tourist contexts, providing a basis for examining the ways in which musicians make stylistic choices that reinforce or oppose notions of tradition and local identity.