

Educational Video Script

The Story of Rey Mambo

TITLE: The Story of Rey Mambo

AUDIO: Bongos

Perez Prado Band Playing

NARRATION: This is a story of Miami Beach, Latin music and "Rey Mambo."

PULL OUT to reveal '50s TV and Rey talking

REY: I first came to Miami Beach in 1938, two months after I was 13 years old. I guess it was love at first sight. That's what turned me to everything Latin. My desire then, at that early age, was not to learn about Latin stuff -- to be Cuban.

Rey ON CAMERA Slide to reveal band

We would listen to the radio from Cuba and on a good day it came in as clear as if it were a radio station in Miami. So we heard the best bands in Cuba in the '30s and '40s.

Painting: "La Rumba" by Antonio Sanchez Araujo (1937). Museum of Arts and Sciences, Daytona Beach, FL

NARRATION: The music, already gaining popularity with tourists to Cuba, was a fusion of West African rhythms and European dance music.

Drums were the driving force.

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That beat was just fascinating to me and I got so wrapped up in it. I remember not being able to afford bongos. So I got two Quaker Oats, tied it with a string, and those were my bongos.

My dad who was in a retail store on Miami Beach on Washington Avenue. And one day he comes in and he hands me a pair of bongos -- a present to me. I went absolutely bonkers. My nickname was bongo. Kids in school, "hey, bongo."

NARRATION: In 1940 Miami Beach was bustling with tourists. Latin music bands played in all the night clubs and hotels.

When the U.S. entered World War Two in 1941, Miami Beach became a military training base. The hotels were filled with soldiers. Troops marched to training classes and did exercises on the Beach. Marvin finished high school in 1942. As soon as he turned 18 he was drafted into the Army.

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REY: I got in the Army in '44 and ended up in the War Department show playing bongos. "What did you do in the war, daddy? I played bongos with a Puerto Rican orchestra."

NARRATION: As part of the "Khaki Caballeros" Marvin performed across the country on army bases and in hospitals for wounded soldiers,. After the war he came back to Miami Beach.

I was just playing with three other guys, just for kicks, and I saw an ad in the Miami Herald and it said "strings wanted, Latin room, Pan American Hotel." And I said "let's go. We'll audition." We went and auditioned and the guy liked it. He said "we'll hire you for the weekend. What's your name?" I said, "Marvin Baumel." He said "we can't do that, you're a Latin band.

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You know, you gotta have a Latin name.” So, I said, “let me think. No you can’t think. I have to call the Herald in, the deadline is now.” So, I had a recording that was “El Rey del Mambo,” by Machito. Nobody knew what the mambo was, hardly, in this country. So I said “Rey, Rey Mambo.” And I figured for a weekend, what the hell.

15 years I had the name, Rey Mambo, and what was even worse my wife was Mrs. Mambo, for 15 years.

I said to her, “you know this is ridiculous I've got a band you're a singer why aren't you singing with the band?” She says, “you know why. I don't sing in Spanish. I said... I'll teach you to sing in Spanish.” And she said, “you're nuts.” And I said, “no I'm not.” And she learned to sing phonetically in Spanish, perfectly...

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Translation: "Excuse me, I have a request -- a song.

One moment."

She played maracas and sang, but she couldn't speak Spanish.

Someone would come up after we did a number and say, "perdóname, yo tengo una petición -- una canción." She would say, "un momento." And she'd pointed to me.

Narrator: Rey was riding high on a new wave of Latin music, which was an exciting interplay of Afro- Caribbean percussion, brass horns, and vocals.

People didn't just listen, they danced. Recordings poured out of studios in New York and Mexico. When tourists came to Miami Beach on vacation, they loved the beach but at night they wanted to go to the clubs and dance the Rumba, the Mambo, and the Cha-Cha.

Every hotel had a Latin band. In the 50s at that time... these people who circled the Palladium on Wednesday nights in New York came down here and they had to have their their Latin music.

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In every hotel, the major band was a Latin band. If you heard an American band in a hotel it was usually what they called the “relief band” that filled in after the Latin band.

Narrator: In the 1950's, rock and roll became the new sensation and Latin music faded to the background. But in Miami, especially, Latin music was revived with the arrival of tens of thousands of Cubans who left Cuba after the Cuban revolution and brought their music with them.

Young musicians who are growing up in culturally rich south Florida are part of the mixture of new and old. The Latin beat will continue to resonate on Miami Beach the place where Marvin Baumel became Rey Mambo.

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