# CULT MUSIC OF CUBA

INTRODUCTION AND NOTES ON THE RECORDINGS
BY HAROLD COURLANDER

THE FOLK MUSIC OF CUBA IS GENERALLY UNKNOWN OUTSIDE OF THAT COUNTRY. FOR MOST
OF US THE TERM "AFRO-CUBAN" STIRS UP
THOUGHTS OF LA CONGA, THE RHUMBA, AND THE
SON. FOLK MUSIC THEY MAY BE, BUT WITH A
THICK OVERLAY OF SOPHISTICATION AND INVENTION; YET IN THE MAIN THEY ARE NOT
"AFRO-CUBAN", ANY MORE THAN BOOGIE-WOOGIE
IS "AFRO-AMERICAN". SUCH FORMS REPRESENT
A CONSIDERABLE HYBRIDIZATION, AND IN PARTICULAR INSTANCES IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY
DIFFICULT TO FIND SUBSTANTIAL AFRICAN ELEMENTS.

AMONG THE GUAHIROS, OR WHITE PEASANT FARMERS OF THE "INTERIOR", ONE MAY STILL HEAR FRAGMENTS OF VERY OLD IBERIAN MUSIC THAT HAS LITTLE IN COMMON WITH THE POPULAR CITY MUSIC. LIKEWISE, AMONG THEIR NEGRO NEIGHBORS ONE MAY HEAR TRUE AFRO-CUBAN, EVEN PURE AFRICAN, MUSIC.

FOR YEARS THERE HAS BEEN A RAGING CONTRO-VERSY IN CUBAN MUSICAL CIRCLES AS TO THE ORIGINS OF THE NATIONAL MUSICAL IDIOM. FROM A SOCIAL POINT OF VIEW THE FINAL IS-SUE OF THAT CONTROVERSY IS NOT IMPORTANT. BUT IT IS A MATTER OF GREAT INTEREST THAT THERE REALLY IS SUCH A THING AS AFRO-CUBAN MUSIC, AND THIS ALBUM PRESENTS SOME OF THE EVIDENCE.

THESE RECORDINGS WERE MADE IN HAVANA, GUANABACOA, AND MATANZAS PROVINCE IN 1940, DURING A FIELD TRIP SPONSORED BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL OF LEARNED SOCIETIES, IN COOPERATION WITH COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY S ARCHIVE OF PRIMITIVE MUSIC. THE ORIGINAL CUTTINGS ARE AT PRESENT IN THE CUSTODY OF INDIANA UNIVERSITY.

THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE CONTINUED IN CUBA WELL INTO THE 19TH CENTURY. THERE ARE MANY AMONG THE OLDER GENERATION WHOSE PARENTS ACTUALLY WERE BORN IN AFRICA, AND A FEW

AGED PEOPLE IN THE COUNTRY WHO CLAIM TO HAVE BEEN BORN IN AFRICA. AFRICAN TRADITIONS HAVE SURVIVED STRONGLY, IN SOME RESPECTS, TO THIS DAY. MUSIC AND DANCING OF THE AFRICAN VARIETY HAVE PERSISTED IN THE CABILDOS, OR SOCIETIES, ORGANIZED BY THE AFRO-CUBANS. A GREAT MANY OF THESE SOCIETIES HAVE A RELIGIOUS BASIS, WHILE OTHERS ARE SURVIVALS OF SECRET ORGANIZATIONS WHICH EXISTED PREVIOUSLY ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT.

AMONG THE MORE IMPORTANT CULTS EXISTING IN CUBA TODAY ARE THE LUCUMÍ, THE ARARÁ, THE ABAKWÁ AND THE KIMBÍSA.

IN THE LUCUMI GROUP SURVIVE RELIGIOUS BE-LIEFS OF THE YORUBA PEOPLE WHO CAME FROM THE REGION OF WEST AFRICA THAT LIES BETWEEN THE NIGER RIVER AND THE NIGERIA-TOGOLAND BORDER. AS WITH THE AFRICAN YORUBA, THE LUCUMÍ HAVE A PANTHEON OF SPIRIT-GODS OR ORISHA, MOST OF WHOM ARE COMMON TO BOTH AREAS. THEY INCLUDE LEGUA (OR ETCHO). GUARDIAN OF THE CROSSROADS; OGUN, GOD OF THE MOUNTAINS; OTCHOSI, THE HUNTER GOD; OBATALA, GOD OF IRON AND WAR; CHANGO, DEITY OF THE STORM AND LIGHTNING; ORULA, THE CURER; OTCHUN (OR PANCHÁGARA), THE RIVER DEITY; YEMAYÁ (OR YALODE), GOD OF THE SEA; AND MANY OTHERS. LUCUMI MUSIC IS MAINLY DEVOTED TO SUPPLICA-TION AND PRAISE OF THESE SUPERNATURAL BEINGS. THE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS USED BY THE LUCUMI ARE DRUMS, LARGE CALABASH RATTLES WITH EX-TERNAL BEAD STRIKERS, AND VARIOUS KINDS OF BELLS.



Cumparsa scene snowing double bell -- all photos by Harold Courlander

THE ABAKWA, OR CARABALÍ, GROUP APPEARS TO BE A SECRET SOCIETY THAT CUTS THROUGH OTHER CULTS, PERMITTING A MEMBER TO BELONG TO, SAY, THE LUCUMÍ SOCIETY AS WELL. THE TERM CARA-BALÍ MAY REFER TO THE CALABAR REGION OF WEST AFRICA, AND ABAKWÁ SEEMS TO BE DERIVED FROM ABAKPA, THE NAME OF A TRIBE FROM THE NIGER REGION. IN CUBA MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY ARE REFERRED TO BY OUTSIDERS AS NANIGOS, A TERM THAT IS NOT RESPECTFUL AND IS MUCH RESENTED. THE CULT IS COMPOSED ENTIRELY OF MEN, ITS SECRETS ARE CAREFULLY GUARDED, AND IT RETAINS SOME OF THE DRAMATIC ELEMENTS OF AFRICAN MAGICO-RELIGIOUS LIFE WHICH ARE ABSENT AMONG THE OTHER CUBAN CULT GROUPS. SPIRIT-DANCERS APPEAR AT CULT FUNCTIONS TO PERFORM FOR THE MEMBERS. WHILE LUCUMÍ DANCING STRESSES GROUP PARTICIPATION AND INVOCATION, CARABALI DANC-ING IS MAINLY PANTOMIMIC OF ANIMALS, AND PERFORMED BY SPECIALISTS. PROBABLY ONE OF THE SOCIALLY-SIGNIFICANT FACTS IN CONNECTION WITH THE ABAKWA CULT IS THAT WHILE IT IS UN-QUESTIONABLY AN AFRICAN CULT ITS MEMBERSHIP IS PARTIALLY COMPOSED OF WHITES. AT A MEET-ING I WITNESSED IN GUANABACOA, ABOUT ONE MAN OUT OF EVERY THREE PARTICIPATING IN THE RIT-UAL AND SINGING WAS WHITE, AND OF SIX NEW MEMBERS INITIATED THAT NIGHT, ONLY TWO WERE NEGROES. DRUMS, BELLS, VARIOUS AFRICAN-STYLE RATTLES, AND FRICTION DRUMS ARE AMONG THE ABAKWA MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS.

ONE OF THE MAIN CULTS OR CUBA IS THE ARARÁ, WHICH IS KNOWN IN HAITI AS ARADA. IT IS STRONGEST IN EASTERN CUBA, PROBABLY BECAUSE OF THE PRESENCE OF A LARGE NUMBER OF HAITIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THAT SECTION. THE ARARA CULT IS A SURVIVAL OF THE DAHOMEAN RELIGIOUS



the Lucumi cult. used by



Cuba, inherited from Africa.

PRACTICES AND TRADITIONS. LIKE THE LUCUMI,
THE ARARA CULT HAS ITS PANTHEON OF SPIRITBEINGS, INCLUDING MANY THAT ARE FAMILIAR
NAMES IN DAHOMEY AND HAITI. DRUMS, AFRICANSTYLE BELLS AND SMALL HAND RATTLES ARE USED
IN MAKING ARARA MUSIC, ALTHOUGH SOMETIMES
A BATTERY OF LARGE CALABASH OR TIN RATTLES
WITH EXTERNAL STRIKERS IS EMPLOYED.

THE KIMBISA OR MAYOMBE CULT IS ONLY ONE OF THE MANY CONGO GROUPS KNOWN TO HAVE EXIST-ED IN CUBA. NUMEROUS CONGO "TRIBES" ARE SPOKEN OF BY PRESENT-DAY CUBANS, INCLUDING THE PALOMONTE, BIYUMBA, MOSUNDÍ, CONGO REÁL, MUNDÉLI, LOÁNGO, MONDÓNGO, AND BAFIOTE, BUT IT IS NOT CERTAIN THAT THEY ALL EXIST TODAY AS CLEARLY DEFINED CULTS. THE KIMBISA DEIT-IES ARE ANSÁSI, GOD OF THE STORM; SARAVÁNDA. DEITY OF THE MOUNTAIN; PANSUA, THE CURER; MARELANGO, GOD OF THE OCEAN; TCHORLA, A RIVER DEITY; TIEMBLAENTOTO, CHIEF OF THE CEMETERY; ENSAMBIA, CROSSROAD GUARDIAN; AND KENGE, GOD OF WAR. DRUMS ARE THE MAIN INSTRUMENTS FOR CONGO MUSIC, WITH HAND RATTLES AND WRIST RATTLES SOMETIMES SUPPLEMENTING.

EACH OF THE CULTS RETAINS, AS PART OF ITS TRADITIONS, A RITUAL LANGUAGE WHICH IS BASICALLY AFRICAN. THE LUCUMI VOCABULARY IS YORUBA, THE ARARÁ IS DAHOMEAN, AND THE KIMBÍSA IS, SEEMINGLY, FROM ONE OF THE CONGO DIALECTS. SONGS ARE SUNG EITHER IN THE AFRICAN LANGUAGES, IN SPANISH, OR IN A HYBRID LINGUISTIC COMBINATION.

FOR MANY YEARS THE AFRO-CUBAN CULTS HAVE SUFFERED AT THE HANDS OF LOCAL OFFICIALDOM.





Old Arara drums; some of these may have been carved by firstgeneration Africans in Cuba.

Guayo, a gourd scraper.

YORUBA CULTS, IS SOMEWHAT RICHER IN ITS FORM AND PRESENTATION, BUT THE IDENTITY OF THE TWO SONGS IS IMMEDIATELY APPARENT. THE COMPARISON MAKES THE POINT THAT NOT ONLY THE AFRICAN STYLE IS PRESERVED THROUGH MANY GENERATIONS, BUT ACTUAL MELODIES. IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE PIECE WAS CARRIED IN-TO BOTH BRAZIL AND CUBA BY YORUBA SLAVES, AND PRESERVED IN EACH COUNTRY BY THEIR RE-SPECTIVE YORUBA CULTS. (SEE RECORD NUMBER 1402 OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS ALBUM, MUSIC OF BRAZIL.")

SONG TO ORISHA OKO -AGRICULTURE. THE SINGER ALSO CALLS UPON OTHER ORISHA, SUCH AS LEGBA, CHANGO, AND

ABAKWA SONG -- MALE CHORUS, DRUMS. RECORDED AT GUANABACOA.

5 SONG TO ORISHA CHANGO --MALE CHORUS, DRUMS. THIS SONG, SUNG PARTLY IN SPANISH, IS TO THE ORISHA CHANGO, DEITY OF LIGHTNING AND THUNDER. THE CHORAL PART CONSISTS MAINLY OF THE WORDS BUENA NOCHE chenchene comay -Ver BUENA NOCHE.

ABAKWA SONG -- MALE CHORUS, DRUMS. RECORDED AT GUANABACOA.

DJUKA DRUMS -- THREE DRUMS. THIS DRUMMING WAS SAID BY THE PERFORMERS TO BE A DJUKA WAR DANCE.

FEMALE VOICE. THIS SONG IS AN INVOCATION TO THE ORISHA, OR SPIRIT, OKO, PATRON OF YEMAYÁ.

TWO MALE VOICES, WITH IYA DRUM, ATCHERE (CALABASH RATTLE WITH EXTERNAL STRIKERS). AMONG THE ORISHA, OR DEITIES, INVOKED ARE LEGBA (OR ÉTCHO), GUARDIAN OF THE GATEWAY, THE CROSSROADS, AND OF HUMAN FERTILITY; YEMAYA (OR YALODE), THE SEA DEITY; AND OKO, DEITY OF AGRICULTURE. LUCUMI SONG -- TWO MALE

CULT ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN OUTLAWED BY STAT-

NOT INTERFERED WITH EXCEPT AT THE WHIM AND

CONVENIENCE OF LOCAL OFFICIALS. CULT MEM-

BERS COMPLAIN THAT LOCAL POLICE HAVE FRE-

QUENTLY RAIDED THE CULT TEMPLES, CONFISCA-

TED DRUMS AND OTHER PARAPHERNALIA, AND IM-

DISTURBANCE OR CRIME IN THE REGION. IN AD-

DITION TO SOMETIMES SUFFERING AS SCAPEGOATS

FOR SOCIAL ILLS ARISING OUT OF ACUTE POVER-TY, THE CULTS ARE RIDICULED BY THE "CASTIL-IAN" WHITES, WHO BOTH DISAPPROVE AND FEAR

/= SONG TO LEGBA AND YEMAYA --

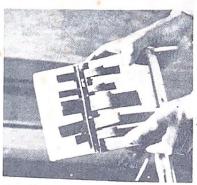
PRISONED CULT PRIESTS AS A LAW AND ORDER

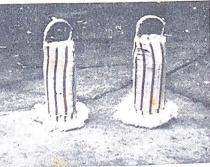
DEMONSTRATION FOLLOWING THE REPORT OF A

CULT ACTIVITIES.

UTE FOR MANY YEARS, BUT USUALLY THEY ARE

VOICES, WITH IYA DRUM, ATCHERÉ (CALABASH RATTLE WITH EXTERNAL STRIKERS). THIS SONG, WHICH COMES FROM THE LUCUMÍ REPERTOIRE, WAS RECORDED NOT FAR FROM HAVANA. THE SINGERS BELONGED BOTH TO THE LUCUMI CULT AND THE ABAKWÁ SOCIETY. PROBABLY ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING POINTS IN CONNECTION WITH IT IS THAT ALMOST THE IDENTICAL MELODY WAS RECORDED BY DR. MELVILLE J. AND FRANCES HERSKOVITS IN BRAZIL. THE BRAZILIAN VARI-ANT, FROM THE REPERTOIRE OF ONE OF THE

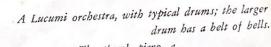












-The thumb piano, a musical instrument developed in Africa;

Basket-type rattles used by the Carabali in Cuba; these are clearly African in origin.

Quinto, a modern Cuban version of the African signal drum. The double bell or ogan, another African contribution to Cuban music.





2708 LUCUMI-DRUMS -- PLAYED ON THE THREE LUCUMÍ HOUR-GLASS SHAPED DRUMS. THIS PIECE IS A KIND OF SALUTE TO ALL THE ORISHA OF THE LUCUMI CULT, AND IS THE FIRST PIECE IN A CYCLE OF INVOCATIONS TO THE VARIOUS INDIVIDUAL ORISHA. THE THREE LUCUMI DRUMS (CALLED BATA COLLECTIVE-LY) ARE THE IYA (LARGEST), ITOTELE (MIDDLE SIZE), AND THE TKONKOLO OR AMELE (SMALLEST). THEY ARE DOUBLE-HEADED DRUMS, WITH ONE LARGE HEAD AND ONE SMALL ONE. THEY ARE HELD IN THE LAPS OF THE DRUMMERS, WHO PLAY THE INSTRUMENTS AT BOTH ENDS. (SEE ILLUSTRATION.) SOMETIMES THESE SACRED DRUMS CONTAIN AN AFRICAN COCOA BEAN IN-SIDE, WHICH IS BELIEVED TO TIE THE RITES TO THOSE IN AFRICA. THE IYA IS DECORATED WITH A GIRDLE OF HARNESS-TYPE BELLS CALL-ED TCHAWORO, WHICH CAN BE HEARD TINKLING FAINTLY IN THE BACKBROUND.

no chango 2729 DJUKA SONG -- DRUMS AND CHORUS.

Elube change

10 song to changó - chorus, DRUMS. THIS PIECE BELONGS TO THE CYCLE OF INVOCATIONS WHICH CONSTITUTE A SERVICE, AND APPEARS TO BE SUNG TO CHANGO, THE ORISHA OF LIGHTNING AND THUNDER.

SONG TO OBATALA -- CHORUS, DRUMS. THIS IS A LUCUMÍ PIECE, A SONG TO OBATALA, DEITY OF IRON AND WAR.

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