PUERTO RICO in WASHINGTON

Marcial Reyes y sus Pleneros and Cuerdas De Borínquen

Smithsonian Folkways
Produced by René Lopez. Recorded live at the 1989 Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D.C. Notes by Jorge Pérez-Rolón and Juan Flores.

Marcial Reyes y sus Pleneros de Bayamón

Plenas:
1. Olguina, la del Bronx 3:16
2. No Tengo Amigos 3:30
3. Como Suena Mi Conjunto 3:20
4. Báilala Hasta Las Dos 2:55
5. El León 3:25

Bombas:
6. Se Oye Una Voz 3:30
7. Aclotile 5:40

Cuerdas de Borínquen

Jíbaro Music:
8. Seis Mapeyé 6:10
9. Seis Milonga 5:45
10. Seis Salinés 5:30
11. Seis Fajardeño 7:50
12. Seis Chorrreo 2:45

Puerto Rico in Washington presents the musical traditions of bomba, plena, and jíbaro recorded at the 1989 Festival of American Folklife. Spontaneous, powerful, and resonant, this live recording of Marcial Reyes y sus Pleneros and Cuerdas de Borínquen is the first to capture the energy and creative genius of these masters as they draw the audience into their performances. Extensive notes with photos and lyrics in Spanish. (Total time: 54 minutes)
Puerto Rico in Washington
Puerto Rico en Washington
Recorded live at the 1989 Festival of American Folklife

Marcial Reyes y sus Pleneros de Bayamón
Marcial Reyes, leader, percussion, vocals
Antonio Juan Bones, percussion, vocals
Eva Hernández, vocals
Enrique Martínez, percussion
José Ramírez Rivera, percussion
José "Frankie" Sepúlveda Hernández, percussion
Eduardo Walker, percussion, vocals
Ricardo Sepúlveda Hernández, percussionist
José Calderón, dancer
Milagros Mojita, dancer

1. Olguita, la del Bronx 3:16 plena
2. No Tengo Amigos 3:30 plena
3. Como Suena Mi Conjunto 3:20 plena
4. Bálala Hasta Las Dos 2:55 plena
5. El León 3:25 plena
6. Se Oye Una Voz 3:30 bomba
7. Acotílie 5:40 bomba

Cuerdas de Borinquen
Aníbal Alvarado Negron, güiro
Edicelio Caraballo, vocals
Edwin Hernández Rodríguez, bass
Víctor Rafael Hernández Figueroa, vocals
Juan Montalvo Cruz, cuatro
Elvín Pérez Matos, cuatro
Martín de Jesús Rodríguez, vocals, güiro, and bongó
Conrado Albino Torres, guitar

8. Seis Mapeyé 6:10 jibaro
9. Seis Milonga 5:45 jibaro
10. Seis Salinés 5:30 jibaro
11. Seis Fajardeño 7:50 jibaro
12. Seis Chorreado 2:45 jibaro

Caribbean Culture at the 1989 Festival of American Folklife

Puerto Rican Encounter in Washington, D.C.
23rd Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife
Notes by Jorge Pérez-Rolón
Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico

Everyone was euphoric. The Festival organizers were busy with last-minute arrangements, and the various participating music groups were in their final rehearsals. More than a million North Americans and thousands of tourists from around the world would gather in Washington, D.C., to participate in the Festival of American Folklife during the week of the Fourth of July celebration in 1989. The performance of traditional music from Haiti, Jamaica, Cuba, and Puerto Rico was about to begin.

A full week of sounds and dance of Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico! By the end of the Festival it was clear that, with all

Cover photos: Marcial Reyes y sus Pleneros de Bayamón (front cover) and Cuerdas de Borinquen (back cover) performing at the 1989 Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D.C.
its regional and historical variations, Caribbean music shares many common features, as well as an underlying expressive aesthetic.

The Puerto Rican contingent consisted of two groups: Marcial Reyes y sus Pleneros de Bayamón, led by Marcial Reyes, a 70-year-old exponent of plena music from the city of Bayamón, and Cuertas de Borinquen, a jíbaro (peasant) music group from the town of Peñuelas in the southwest region of Puerto Rico. During the week-long Festival each group would give two daily concerts, and would show the world that traditional Puerto Rican music, whether from the mountains, the coastal areas, or the cities, is still very much alive, and continues to develop.

**Bomba and Plena**

Marcial Reyes y sus Pleneros de Bayamón

Puerto Ricans usually link *bomba* and *plena* together, sometimes even as one word: *"bombyplena."* And even though they are different in many respects, Puerto Rican *bomba* and *plena* do indeed share common historical roots that can be traced to the west coast of Africa and the slave trade, and the transformations of African music in the Caribbean setting. *Bomba*, which emerged in the context of plantation life at the end of the 17th century, remains Puerto Rico’s closest expression of this West African heritage, although other influences — indigenous Taíno, European, and intra-Caribbean — also played a major role in its development.

Plena, while rooted in *bomba* traditions, is a product of the past 100 years. Its origins correspond to the change from Spanish to North American colonial rule, and to the economic upheaval following the abolition of slavery and the movement of displaced workers throughout Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. Most of these workers sought economic opportunity in the growing urban centers of the
region, such as Ponce, on Puerto Rico’s southern coast. It is Ponce that is considered to be the birthplace of the plena. Although plena has its musical and social roots in bomba — many of the early pleneros were also bomberos — plena also owes much to jibaro music, with its own Spanish-Arabic influences, and to European-style salon music such as the Puerto Rican danza. In its early years, the plena was also strongly influenced by styles from the English-speaking Caribbean islands, such as Nevis, St. Kitts, St. Thomas, and Barbados, whose displaced freed slaves also traveled throughout the Caribbean, including Puerto Rico, in search of work. Plena, the music that resulted from this contact, represented the sound of an emerging Puerto Rican working class.

Plena instrumentation traditionally consists of three or more panderetas (hand-held frame drums of different sizes and pitches that resemble tambourines without the cymbals), and sometimes accordion or harmonica, and guitar. Marcial Reyes’ group maintains this traditional instrumentation used at the beginning of the century: rhythmically interacting panderetas accompanying the solo and choral voices, to which he has added a conga drum.

Plena is known as “el periódico cantado” (the sung newspaper) because it reports and comments upon the history and everyday life of the Puerto Rican people. Some of the best-known plenas, like “Tintorera del Mar” (“The Shark”), “Cortaron a Elena” (“They Cut Up Elena”), “Mamita, Llegó el Obispo” (“Look, Sweetie, the Bishop’s Arrived,”) and “¿Aló? ¿Quién llama?” (“Hello? Who’s Calling?”), all make reference to topical events of the day.

As Marcial Reyes puts it, “Whatever is going on, gets into plena.” He should know — he has written hundreds of plenas drawn from the pages of newspapers, the gossip of the community, and his own life experiences. Marcial is a plenero in the full sense of the word: he composes, sings, and is an all-time master at playing the pandereta. He even makes panderetas, the traditional and most distinctive instrument of plena music. For the thirty years that he lived in New York City, Marcial was constantly teaching, spreading the tradition, and of course playing plena wherever he went. He was a plenero at work, in the streets and as a founding member of the two main plena groups in New York over the past decades: Victor Montañez y sus Pleneros de la 110 and Los Pleneros de la 21.

1. Olguita, la del Bronx (“Olga from the Bronx”) Since the beginning of this century millions of Puerto Ricans have been forced to abandon their homeland in search of jobs. Marcial Reyes himself was one of them, and in this song he tells one of the many anecdotes of the violence he witnessed while living in New York City.

Ayl Olguita
From the Bronx
A thug on Third Avenue
Held her up.
2. No Tengo Amigos
(“I Have No Friends”)
For most of his life Marcial has
dedicated himself to writing,
playing, studying, and developing
the *plena* — sometimes to the
exclusion of everything else. In
this song he tells us that he can
live without any-thing in his life,
but not without *plena*!

I have no friends
I don’t have anyone
But this *plena*, sweetheart,
Is a mother.

3. Como Suena Mi Conjunto
(“How My Group Sounds”)
Every group of *pleneros* has a
theme song. For Marcial Reyes y
sus Pleneros de Bayamón, it’s
“Como Suena Mi Conjunto” (“How
My Group Sounds”):

How my group sounds
Hear how it sounds
Marcial Reyes and his *pleneros*
Playing *plena*.

After the soloist sings this first
verse, the chorus responds with the
same lines. Then they exchange
verses with the soloist. With each
new verse the soloist improvises
until the song reaches the main
section. Then the *requinto
pandereta* (highest - pitched solo
drum) improvises, and it is here
that the true value of a good
*plenero* is demonstrated. He must
develop syncopated rhythmic units
and take the song to its climax and
conclusion.

4. Báilala Hasta Las Dos
(“Dance with Her Till 2”)
This song captures a bit of what life
is like in the poor urban quarters of
Puerto Rico and New York, where
*plena* was born and developed.

Dance with her until two
Dance with her till it’s two
Dance with her until two
‘Cause at two I take her with me.

5. El León
(“El León” (“The Lion”)) is one of
those newspaper stories,
recounting in playful, ironic tones
what happened when a lion
escaped from the zoo.

A lion escaped
And it’s just logical
That the people run for it
Out of the zoo.

Bomba Roots
Long before the emergence of
*plena*, as the voice of the Puerto
Rican working class, *bomba* had
been an established tradition on
the island. It is generally believed
that *bomba* was developed earliest
and most strongly in the area of
Loiza, a town with a strong African
presence on the island’s north
coast. But *bomba* flourished
throughout the island, wherever
Africans and their descendants
lived and worked the colonial
plantations. The term “*bomba*”
refers to a variety of forms of
*bomba* music and dance, and to
the community event in which it is
performed (*baile de bomba —
bomba* dance).

Originally, *bailes de bomba*
provided an important social,
spiritual, and political outlet for
enslaved Africans and their
descendants. During *bailes de
bomba*, baptisms and marriages
were celebrated, and rebellions
Bomba music and dance are characterized by two types of call-and-response: between the solo singer and coro (chorus), or as a call-and-response "dialogue" between the dancer and the solo drum (called requinto). The solo drummer must never take his eyes off the dancer; he must be prepared to "answer," in the language of his drum, the improvised steps and arm and body movements of the dancer. In a community baile de bomba, the first sound of the singer and the drums draws the crowd into a circle around them. The audience becomes the coro, repeating the lead singer's refrain. The solo singer improvises the verse. Dancers take turns, either one at a time or in couples dancing to and challenging the drums.

The musical instruments in the bomba ensemble are called bomba drums (or bariles—barrels—because they are made from dried codfish or rum barrels, with a goatskin head). As in plena instrumentation, two or three drums of different sizes and pitches make up the foundation of the ensemble, which is rounded out by the cuá (wooden sticks that are struck on the side of the drum by another player) and maracas (gourd rattles).

6. Se Oye Una Voz ("A Voice Is Heard")
In this bomba the singer Marcial hears the "divine" voice of his dead sister calling to him from above:

Could it be my sister
The one that passed away?
A divine voice is heard
That called me from heaven.
7. Acotile
The bomba's combination of music and dance is evident in the bomba titled "Acotile." According to Marcial, the song is intended to evoke the spirit of bomba music, or a dedicated master of bomba. The soloist begins by calling out to "Acotile," and singing verses in recognition of the importance of this African tradition in Puerto Rico.

Acotile, Acotile, Acotile, I want to play to the bomba rhythm
Acotile, Acotile, Acotile, I want to dance to the bomba rhythm
Acotile, Acotile, Acotile, I want to have fun with the bomba rhythm.

As soon as the chorus repeats the lines, the soloist begins to improvise, calling on people to dance and enjoy the bomba. This is followed by a dialogue between the dancer and solo drum. It ends the same way it begins, with the soloist improvising and the chorus responding with the principal refrain.

Jibaro Music
(Country Music)
Cuerdas de Borinquen

According to the noted Puerto Rican musicologist, the late Francisco López Cruz, of all the country music genres in Puerto Rico, the seis is "the backbone of jibaro music." This is evident in the selections included in this recording, all of which are seis. In addition to the seis, the repertoire of jibaro music also includes forms such as the aguinaldo, the baquíné, and the mapeyé.

Seis takes its name from a six-couple dance and refers to a variety of music and dance forms. Although historians have not yet agreed on the specific Old World origins of the seis, there is agreement that this musical form came to Puerto Rico from Spain during the time of colonization and settlement in the late 17th century. Spanish music also bears the mark of eight centuries of Moorish domination, and the influences of Arabic culture on Spanish expressive culture can be heard in Puerto Rico's musical expressions. Spanish settlers adapted a rich variety of Spanish/Arabic music styles to their new environment, with the seis becoming the most important genre of the Puerto Rican jibaro.

A similar process of adaptation occurred with traditional Spanish stringed instruments, which served as the basis for the development of the bordonúa (bass), tiple, and requinto. The cuatro, a variant of these string instruments, remains unique to Puerto Rico, and is most integrally associated with jibaro music. It stands as a symbol of the Puerto Rican people and their music. The cuatro, together with the guitar and the güiro (scraped gourd of indigenous origin), came to form the typical jibaro ensemble. Modern groups, like Cuerdas de Borinquen, have replaced the bordonúa with an electric bass, added bongo drums, and often feature two or even three cuatros.

With the exception of the Seis Chorreao, which is instrumental, and the improvised cuatro interludes, the jibaro ensemble is
used to accompany the **trovador** — the improvisatory singer/poet. The melodies are characterized by short, two- to four- bar phrases. They have their harmonic basis in the tonic, dominant, and subdominant chords (I, V, IV), or what is known as a typical Andalusian harmonic progression. This progression is used to develop melodies that often reveal the Arabic presence in this music, reminding us of the Andalusian *canto jondo*. The use of the vocalizations “le lei le lei lo lai,” also Arabic in origin, gives the *trovador* the opportunity to organize in his mind the verses he is about to improvise.

Most *seis* verses use the **décima** poetic structure: ten lines of eight syllables each. There is a strict rhyming formula: the first line rhymes with the fourth, fifth, eighth, and ninth; the second line rhymes with the third, sixth, seventh, and tenth. Not all *seises* in the **décima** structure are improvised; some are part of a *jibaro* poetic repertoire, while others are "stock" phrases that may be brought into many different songs.

The **trovadores** in *Cuerdas de Borinquen*, Víctor Rafael Hernández and Edicelio Caraballo, are among the finest improvisers in Puerto Rico. Everyone at the Festival thrilled at their ability to make up these complex verses on the spot. But the forte of *Cuerdas de Borinquen* (Puerto Rican strings) as their name implies, is their masterful performance of the **cuatro**. *Cuerdas de Borinquen* is comprised of nine brothers and cousins all from the town of Peñuelas. The group, organized and led by Aníbal Alvarado, is well known throughout Puerto Rico from its frequent performances at festivals, parties, and in concert settings, as well as on television and recordings. It is recognized and loved for its confident mastery of traditional styles, stunning virtuosity, and innovativeness in both vocal and instrumental technique.

The titles of *seises* and other *jibaro* forms generally refer to the type of dance involved (such as *seis chorrerano*), the town of origin (*seis salinités*), or the harmonic structure (*seis mapeyé*) rather than to their theme or subject matter. But each song does address a specific topic, often of a philosophical kind, such as love, patriotism, freedom, and human dignity.

8. **Seis Mapeyé**

*Seis Mapeyé*, the first selection on the recording, is named for the musician who popularized it, brother Peyé (or Mapeyé). Following the instrumental introduction characteristic of this *seis*, the *trovador* borrows verses from Ramito, the most famous *jibaro* singer of them all, to denounce the problem of racism in our society.

Today I address a subject of great concern to me. These are verses based On the racial problem.

9. **Seis Milonga**

Some *seises* take their music from the melodies of other countries, as is the case of *Seis Milonga*. Using an Argentine melody, the singer philosophizes in five **décima**
verses on the subject of life's dialectic — the battle between good and evil.

We see how evil directs at us
His merciless attack
While on the other hand
Good gives us hope
Thus forming a balance.
We see how evil breathes
Hate against innocence
Thus paying the consequences
Of good people and evil people.

10. Seis Salinés
Seises may also take their name from the town where a particular style first became known. This is true of Seis Salinés, from the coastal town of Salinas on the southern coast of the island. Here the theme is the trovador's own imagined death, and the role of the jibaro singer himself. The poet tells us that on the day of his burial he wants a jibaro ensemble with a trovador to improvise. He pleads with his countryside not to abandon this vital musical art.

My people, I advise you
Once I have left you
Do not abandon this art-form
That I leave in your trust
That gave joy to the young and old
And all those that heard me.
But you must go on encouraging
And not lose the essence
And what conveys the meaning
Of a peasant improvising a song.

11. Seis Fajardeño
The following seis takes its name from Fajardo, a town on the east coast of Puerto Rico. In this selection Victor Rafael and Edicelio show us another way of performing seis in a controversia (controversy), two trovadores debate an issue by trading verses and trying to outdo one another. Freedom, the theme of this seis, was suggested by an audience member. The final stanza says,

Oh, I adore this my land
That is my beautiful Borinquen
In Manati we find an Eden
Full of love and happiness.
I carry its brave blood
Within me, this is the truth
And honoring its dignity
Abandon that position
Abandon colonialism
And follow the path to liberty.

12. Seis Chorreo
Jibaro dances may go on from early afternoon long into the night, and whatever music went before, they all end with the instrumental Seis Chorreo. Of all the seis it is the fastest, allowing couples to slide on the dance floor in fast swirls and turns. In this seis, the musicians of Cuerdas de Borinquen demonstrate their musical versatility, blending traditional harmonies and melodies with contemporary virtuosity.

Even the dazzling solos on the cuatro, güiro, and bongos, of course, are fully in keeping with a tradition that relies for its life on the art and joy of improvisation.

Plena Song Texts

1. “Olguita, la del Bronx”
Chorus: ¡Ay! Olguita/la del Bronx/un bandido allá en la Tercera/la canoneó
Con la pistola en la mano/la cartera le quitó/un bandido allá en Tercera/la asaltó
Todo el mundo discutía/vida mía, que pasó/que un bandido en la Tercera/que la asaltó
Llegó la policía/y el bandido se escapó/yo un bandido en la Tercera/se la llevó
¡Ay! Olgota de mi vida/cuántame que pasó/que un bandido me ha robado/reño pesos y un reloj
El domingo allá en la plena/todo el mundo comentó/Belén, belén, belén/La asaltó
No asuste, cosa buena/eso te lo digo yo/que un bandido allá en Tercera/me la llevó.

2. “No Tengo Amigos”
No tengo amigos/no tengo a nadie/pero canto esta plena,
corazón/que manda madre. (6x)
Soy huérfano/de padre y madre/pero mira, mira, mira,
corazón/no engaño a nadie. (2x)

Le canto a la vida/por alegrarme/pero mira, mira, mira,
corazón/yo tengo la llave. (2x)
¡Ay! el domingo en la plena/quería cantarle/pero mira, mira, mira,
corazón/te invito al baile. (2x)
Le canto a la vida/por alegrarme/pero mira, mira,
corazón/no engaño a nadie. (5x)
Grita la negra/tú bien lo sabes/pero mira, mira, mira,
corazón/yo tengo la llave.

3. “Como Suena Mi Conjointo”
Como suena mi conjunto/como suena/Marcial Reyes y su conjunto/tocando plena. (5x)

4. “Báilala Hasta Las Dos”
Báilala hasta las dos/báilala hasta las dos/báilala hasta las dos/que a las dos me la llevo yo.
No te asustes, negra linda/esta lo conozco yo/pero báilala hasta las dos/que a las dos me la voy a llevar.

5. “El León”
Se escapó un león/y es lógico/que la gente salga corriendo/del zoológico. (4x)
Oye, dicen que vino sacando sangre/sin compasión/que tiene colmillos bien grandes/porque es un león, Juan Ramón. (2x)
Oye pero Pancho el cojo, señores, ese no corrió/se trepó/en el cuello de la girafa/y se quedó hasta mañana.
Y toito el mundo corrió/como en un maratón/porque del zoológico,
mira/se escapó un león, Juan Ramón.
¡Huyel que viene el león/huye, que viene el león. (3x)

Bombas Song Texts

6. “Se Oye Una Voz”
Se oye una voz/se oye una voz/se oye una voz divina/que del cielo me llamó.
Será mi hermana/digo, que se murió/se oye una voz divina/que
del cielo me llamó.
Que me cieren la ventana/que canto yo/que te dice, hijo
mío/vestida de compasión.
Habla dulce, caballero/ésta te
canto yo/está cantando Marcial
Reyes/es el bravo lo digo yo.
¡Ay! será mi hermana/dice la que
se murió/se oye una voz
divina/que del cielo me llamó.

7. “Aclotile”
Aclotile, Aclotile, Aclotile, que con
la bomba quiero tocar
Aclotile, Aclotile, Aclotile, que con
la bomba quiero bailar
Aclotile, Aclotile, Aclotile, que con
la bomba quiero gozar
El domingo por la tarde se fué
para San Juan, Aclotile con la
bomba quiero tocar
Ya tu ves cosa buena, lo que es
saber repicar, Aclotile, Aclotile con
la bomba quiero tocar

El domingo allá en la bomba se
puso allá a repicar, Aclotile, Aclotile
con la bomba quiero tocar
No diga vida mía, bendita pena me
da, Aclotile con la bomba quiero
gozar.
[drum solo]
Aclotile, Aclotile, Aclotile, que con
la bomba quiero gozar.

Jibaro Song Texts
8. Seis Mapeyé
O le le le le la/le le lei le le
la/Hoy tengo cien estados/hoy
tiene cien estados
Escuelas muy importantes/y no
admiten estudiantes/Si son de color
quemado/Pero en conflictos
armados/Pero en conflictos
armados/demostrando su
valor/Pelean en nuestro honor/en
busca del comunismo/Entonces vale
lo mismo/entonces vale lo mismo/El
blanco y el de color.

O le le le le la/le le le le le
la/Hace poco que un galeno/hace
poco que un galeno
Un hombre blanco operó/y en el
pecho el injertó/El corazón de un
moreno/ese corazón ajeno
Ese corazón ajeno/que trasplantó
ese doctor/Quién sabe si a lo
mejor/continúen sus latidos/
Manteniendo más unidos/el blanco
y el de color/Manteniendo más
unidos/manteniendo más unidos/El
blanco y el de color.

9. Seis Milonga
¡Ay! Yo me puse a meditar/en las
cosas de la vida/Yo me puse a
termine todo/que quede en el cementerio/ya no existirá el criterio/que me sirvío de acomodo/ya como no habrá ningún modo/de seguirme presentando/este verso estoy grabando/para dejar con mí rima/el recuerdo en la tarima/de un jibaro improvisando/el recuerdo en la tarima/de un jibaro improvisando.

Y yo sé que mis familiares/sufrirán porque me quieren/cuando escuchen que me hieren/criticando mis cantares/y cuando en fiestas populares/escuchen a otro cantando/llorarán pensando/en dónde estará el cantor/que simbolizó el valor/de un jibaro improvisando.

Pueblo mío, yo te aconsejo/que al marchar para dejarte/no abandones este arte/que a tu cuidado yo dejo/que alegre al chico, al viejo/ya al que me estuvo escuchando/más debo de ir fomentando/ya no dejar sucumbir/lo que recoge el sentir/de un jibaro improvisando/lo que recoge el sentir/de un jibaro improvisando.

11. Seis Fajardeño — Controversia
(Víctor) ¡Ay! siempre he soñado ser libre/siempre he soñado ser libre/allá en mi pequeño lar/veo de vez a cantar/de muchísimo calibre/y dejando que mi voz vibre/con respeto y seriedad/por todo su dignidad/su prestigio y gallardía/redámi/la patria mía/en pos de su libertad/redámi/la patria mía/en pos de su libertad.

(Edicelio) Con amor y frenesi/con amor y frenesi/te brindo un verso,

mi hermano/y de ser un borincano/estoy orgulloso si/si mi patria para mi/me brinda sinceridad/ella brinda su amistad/para los otros países/si miran sus matizes/en pos de la libertad/siempre llevan sus matizes/en pos de la libertad.

(Víctor) ¡Ay! no aplaudo la esclavitud/¡Ay! no aplaudo la esclavitud/más la condeno, señor/porque soy un trovador/que Dios se lo diga por virtud/predicar en su inquietud/en toda una eternidad/a toda capacidad/le pido que no se asombre/si ven cómo lucha un hombre/en pos de su libertad/si ven cómo lucha un hombre/en pos de su libertad.

(Edicelio) Abandona ese paraje.
(Víctor) Abandona el coloniaje.
(Edicelio) En pos de la libertad.
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ABOUT SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS

Folkways Records was founded by Moses Asch and Marian Distler in 1948 to document music, spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. In the ensuing decades, New York City-based Folkways became one of the largest independent record labels in the world, reaching a total of nearly 2,200 albums that were always kept in print.

The Smithsonian Institution acquired Folkways from the Moses Asch estate in 1987 to ensure that the sounds and genius of the artists would be preserved for future generations. All Folkways recordings are available on high-quality audio cassettes, each packed in a special box along with the original LP liner notes.

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings was formed to continue the Folkways tradition of releasing significant recordings with high-quality documentation. It produces new titles, reissues of historic recordings from Folkways and other record labels, and in collaboration with other companies also produces instructional videotapes and recordings to accompany published books, and a variety of other educational projects.

The Smithsonian Folkways, Folkways, Cook, and Paredon record labels are administered by the Smithsonian Institution’s Center for Folklore Programs & Cultural Studies. They are one of the means through which the Center supports the work of traditional artists and expresses its commitment to cultural diversity, education, and increased understanding.

You can find Smithsonian Folkways Recordings at your local record store. Smithsonian Folkways, Folkways, Cook, and Paredon recordings are all available through:

Smithsonian/Folkways Mail Order
414 Hungerford Drive, Suite 444
Rockville, MD 20850
phone (301) 443-2314
daytime orders only 1 (800) 410-9815
(Discover, MasterCard, and Visa accepted)

For further information about all the labels distributed through the Center, please consult our internet site (http://www.si.edu/fofolkways), which includes information about recent releases and a database of the approximately 35,000 tracks from the more than 2,300 available recordings (click on Data Base Search).

Or request a printed catalogue by writing to: Catalogue, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 955 L'Enfant Plaza, SW, Suite 2600, Smithsonian Institution MRC 914, Washington, DC 20560, USA. Or use our catalogue request phone: (202) 287-3262, or e-mail folkways@aol.com