Matanzas, Cuba, ca. 1957: Afro-Cuban Sacred Music from the Countryside

From the historic recordings of Lydia Cabrera and Josefina Tarafa
Recorded in Matanzas in 1957, these ritual rhythms provide a direct link to the music of 19th-century colonial Cuba, and provide a window into the religious life of the first generations of Africans who worked the sugar mills. Collected by Lydia Cabrera and Josefina Tarafa, these recordings preserve extremely rare bembé lukumi ritual drumming used by practitioners of Santería to summon the gods or salute Cuba’s African nations. It is remarkably different from the urban style heard today in Havana, although some of the same songs were sung in both city and countryside. With origins in Yoruba religion in West Africa, this music reveals the roots of today’s Afro-Cuban ceremonial practices. 32-page booklet, extensive notes, photos, 69 minutes.
MATANZAS, CUBA, ca. 1957:
AFRO-CUBAN SACRED MUSIC FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE

from the historic recordings of LYDIA CABRERA and JOSEFINA TARABA

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Lydia Cabrera once said that she had discovered Cuba on the banks of the Seine. She was born in 1900 into a prominent Havana family, her father a writer and publisher who had been active in the Cuban independence movement. She went to Paris in 1927 to study painting. Taking up residence in Montmartre, near the painter Utrillo’s studio, she enrolled at the École des Beaux Arts. Besides her painting, Cabrera began to study the art and religions of India and Japan, whose myths she later said reawakened her interest in Afro-Cuban subjects. They reminded her of the stories she had heard from Black servants in her childhood.

Cabrera lived in Europe until 1938, and during those eleven years she traveled extensively on the continent and made several trips back to Cuba. On a visit to Havana in 1928, Cabrera felt a strong need to establish contact with the Afro-Cuban community. It was during this visit that she befriended Omi-Tomi and other elders who would figure prominently in the pages of El monte, her masterwork of Afro-Cuban ethnography, first published in 1954 (Cabrera 1983).

Cabrera’s interest in Afro-Cuban subjects was probably also stimulated by the cultural currents of Paris in the 1920s. Interest in negritude was very strong, and African art had been in vogue since the days of the Cubists during the previous decade. In 1927, the year that Cabrera arrived in France, Josephine Baker was the highest-paid entertainer in Europe. This heady period incubated Cabrera’s first published work, Cuencos Negros de Cuba (Black Tales of Cuba). Cabrera had originally written these stories for Teresa de la Parra, a Venezuelan novelist, while de la Parra was convalescing in a Swiss sanitarium, where the two lived from 1932 to 1934 (shades of Thomas Mann and The Magic Mountain). The stories were first published in 1936 by Gallimard in a French translation.

In 1938, with warehouse gatherings in Europe, Cabrera returned to Havana. In 1940, she and María Teresa de Rojas began to restore an abandoned 18th-century mansion, La Quinta San José, owned by Rojas. They hoped to turn it into a museum that would document the evolution of the Cuban colonial house, and they filled it with antique furniture and art. It was in Marianoao, on the edge of the mostly Black Pogolotti district, which Cabrera had often visited on previous trips to Havana, and which she continued to frequent. In 1943, she traveled to other parts of Cuba, continuing her studies of Afro-Cuban religions and folklore, which ultimately focused on the Havana area and Matanzas. This was the beginning of the years of research that culminated in her masterwork, El monte.

Cabrera and Rojas were still living at the Quinta San José when these recordings were made in the late 1950s. With Josefina Tarafa, a photographer who often accompanied Cabrera in her research and who took many of the photos that appear in El monte, she set out to record Afro-Cuban ritual music. In her prodigious investigations of Afro-Cuban traditions, Lydia Cabrera never used a tape recorder. She relied instead on her phenomenal memory and on index cards. Her contributions as a musicologist are perhaps the least known part of her output, and the recordings she and Tarafa made are often not cited in her bibliographies. It may have been her friend’s fascination with technology that persuaded Cabrera to venture into this kind of research. With Tarafa’s portable Ampex tape recorder and the help of two sound engineers who later transferred the tapes to discs, the team managed to record a set of fourteen LPs, Música de los cultos africanos en Cuba (Music of the African Cults in Cuba). Some of the music was recorded in Havana, but most of it was collected in rural and semirural areas of Matanzas, where Tarafa’s family owned a sugar mill (central) which became the base of operations for the team’s research. In a book first published in Spain, Cabrera’s text and Tarafa’s photographs document their fieldwork in Matanzas in the 1950s (Cabrera 1975).

In Matanzas, Cabrera and Tarafa focused on rural Lukumi music as performed by priests (iolosíbas) in farmland (ari oho), many of whom were descendants of the Yoruba slaves who had worked at the local sugar mills, but they also collected Arará (Dahomean) and Kongo material. Their recordings open new horizons in the study of rural Afro-Cuban culture, and give glimpses of late 19th-century life in the slave quarters (barracones). Much of this music is in an old bome
proceed, a person called the orixá begins the songs that accompany this rite, and the san- 
teras answer in chorus. There are sixteen, sev- 
enteen, or twenty-one prayers for Osain; that 
is, with these songs and prayers, the santeras 
make orí or summon the orishas" (Cabrera 

The fourth song in the Osain series ("Osain guerre givien 
to ble") also connects Cabrera to the work of two 
important researchers in her generation: Harold 
Courlander and Melville Herskovits. Calling it a 
"Lukumi song," Courlander had collected the same 
melody near Havana in 1945, and it appears on his 
folkways record Cult Music of Cuba (F-440, track 2). 
In Courlander's notes to his recordings (1951), he 
recognized its similarity to a Brazilian song. One can sense 
his excitement here, as field recordings began to reveal 
the outlines of the interconnectedness and transna- 
tional nature of Yoruba diasporic music. "Probably one of 
the most interesting points in connection with this 
[\"Lukumi song\"] is that almost the identical melody 
was recorded by Dr. Melville J. and Frances Herskovits 
in [Bahia], Brazil [in the early 1940s]. The Brazilian 
variant, from the repertoire of one of the Yoruba cults, 
is somewhat richer in its form and presentation, but the 
identity of the two songs is immediately apparent" 
(Courlander 1951).

Besides echoing Courlander's research in Havana and 
Herskovits's in Brazil, a song recorded by Cabrera and 
Tarafa in Matanzas suggests another link in the Yoruba 
diaspora, this time between Cuba and Trinidad. In the 
late 1930s and at the opposite end of the Caribbean,

Herkovits had found in the Trinidadadian village of Toco a 
"Yariba" song, Oshun Talade ("Oshun is worthy of 
queenliness"), that was being sung simultaneously in 
Matanzas, Cuba. The song may have come with the 
Yoruba who were arriving on both islands at around 
the same time, in the mid 1800s. They had come while slavery 
was still in force, but in 


In 1970, Cabrera started a new writing career, and pub- 
lished extensively well into her 80s. Lydia Cabrera died 
in Miami in 1991.
A paradox of Yoruba-based nature religions in the Americas is that, from the city of Porto Alegre in southern Brazil to the Bronx, they are typically practiced in urban settings. Exceptions are the Shango religion of Grenada, which has remained connected to the agricultural cycle of the island, and the Lukumi religion of rural and semirural Matanzas. In the heart of a sugarcane-growing area about sixty-five miles east of Havana, the Yoruba-dominated areas of Matanzas form a second nucleus of orisha worship in western Cuba. Lydia Cabrera and Josefa Tarafa had been conducting research in Matanzas before 1954, the year El Monte was first published. The book contains numerous references to the province, and some photos that Tarafa had taken there. While El Monte and other Cabrera publications are focused on the religious culture of Havana and its environs, with some reference to Matanzas, the recordings are just the opposite, the great bulk of them devoted to rural styles.

West African history was still very much in evidence in the Matanzas of the late 1950s, in the memories of old people who remembered stories of the wars with the king of Dahomey that had brought their ancestors to Cuba. In Cárdenas and other towns, Cabrera and Tarafa found an "Africa in miniature." In the countryside, they discovered an Africanized landscape: lakes, rivers, streams, woods, and savannas transformed into sanctuaries sacred to Yoruba orishas and Dahomean vodun. Many older people still spoke beezal, an Afro-Cuban creole full of African words (Castellanos 1988: 220–25). Bombé drums were still playing rhythmic salutes to some of the different African "nations" present at the sugar mills.

Cabrera wrote that going from Havana to Matanzas was like passing back to the 19th century. This was the peak of the sugar boom, when Cuba and Brazil were the major centers of sugar production in the Americas (Mintz 1985). The expansion of the Cuban sugar industry drew hundreds of thousands of Africans into the slave trade. It is estimated that between the years 1835 and 1864, almost 400,000 were brought to Cuba. The largest numbers by far during these years came from the Bight of Benin, and included Yoruba, Fon, Popó, and Nupe peoples. Other "nations" drawn into the slave trade to Cuba during this period were the Ibo, the Efik, and the Ibibio from the Gulf of Biafra; many Kongo-Angola groups; and the Macúa from Mozambique (Castellanos and Castellanos 1988: 19–59). In the cities, African identities coalesced in church-sponsored associations known as cabildos, which allowed members of the same African "nation" to preserve their culture and language. But about 80 percent
of newly arrived Africans, known as bozales, were sent to the sugar mills, and in Matanzas, rural slaves far outnumbered those in urban centers (Knight 1974). No mention of cabildos at the mills survives, but it is clear that African ethnicity was recognized there, even without the formal organization of cabildos. At the sugar estates in Matanzas, judging from the names found on these recordings and from eyewitness accounts, a broad distinction was drawn among Yoruba, Dahomean, and Kongo peoples, and finer distinctions were made among several of these. At least three Yoruba-speaking groups, the Oyo, the Ejíbá, and the Yéa (Íjesha), are described in the descriptive names of drum pieces in this collection, as are the Araarí, the Mina, and the Gángá–Nongobá, a Bantu-speaking people.

SAINTS OF THE BARRACOES

The music in this collection is a window into life at the sugar mills during tiempo España, the colonial period. The sugar estates were more like small, self-contained industrial townships than "plantations" in the North American sense (Knight 1974). Before 1830, rural slaves had been quartered in hokías, cabins or huts like those found in the Cuban countryside. But with the great tide of arriving Africans, sugar growers had to devise new ways to house the workforce. They invented the barracón, which in some ways resembled a prison, or even a 20th-century concentration camp. The barracones de nave built during the 1830s were rectangular in shape, of rubblework walls and a tiled roof. Inside, pinewood walls divided the space into rooms. The floor was of beaten earth, with posts driven in to support the slaves' sleeping platforms. In the 1840s and 1850s, the barracón de patio was created: a square, walled-in, prison-like structure with a single heavily barred door to the outside and often with no exterior windows. The interior patio, often very large, was enclosed by an overhanging roof, which gave access to rooms where the slaves were crowded together, sometimes separated by age, sex, and marital status. As many as four hundred slaves might have occupied a single barracón de patio (Castellanos and Castellanos 1968).

From contemporary descriptions of the filthy, airless, and overcrowded barracones, patrolled by guards and attack dogs, and in view of the hellish daily work required by the cutting and the industrialized processing of sugar cane, it is amazing that anyone could have survived long, let alone lead a life dedicated to spiritual concerns. Nevertheless, there is evidence that African religious practices flourished, maintained at the individual level and on a day-to-day basis. Someone who had witnessed life in the barracón firsthand gave this account:

"The Congolese were more involved with witchcraft than the Lukumis, who had more to do with the saints (the oríshas) and with God. The Lukumis liked rising early with the strength of the morning and looking up into the sky and saying prayers and sprinkling water on the ground. The Lukumis were at it when you least expected it. I have seen old Negroes kneel on the ground for more than three hours at a time, speaking in their own tongue and prophesying. . . . The old Lukumis liked to have their wooden figures of the gods with them in the barracoon. All these figures had big heads and were called oche" (Montejo 1968:34–36). These are the Yoruba thunder axes (oše Shango), used as dance wands in ceremonies in Nigeria, where every Shango initiate is given one for his personal shrine (Rascom 1969:84).

In the late 1950s, festivals were still being organized by descendants of 19th-century sugar mill workers, in honor of their ancestors and what Lydia Cabrera calls the "resident oríshas" of the sugar mill (Cabrera and Tarafa 1958). With this phrase, Cabrera provided a clue as to how another feature of Yoruba religion and social organization was adapted to the exigencies of life in the slave quarters. Slaves maintained ritual continuity between West Africa and Cuba by treating the barracón de patio like the compound of a Yoruba village: "In the Cuban countryside, and especially in the plantations and sugar mills, the Lukumi religion was carried on in a manner similar to the more personal, family-oriented worship practiced commonly in Yoruba compounds [in West Africa]. In this system, the orísha was consecrated for the entire compound or household. The oríshas indicated a representative from the family to attend the deity's worship, and certain ceremonies were performed to grant the individual the right to do so. . . . This person, although considered an Oloruba [priest], because he or she attended the deity, was not duly ordained into the priestlyhood, that is, he or she was not crowned [ordained—see notes to SPW CD 404.89]. This type of worship in Cuba was called santo pandro (standing saint), or santo de dotación (work gang's saint)" (Ramos 2000:99). It was these "resident oríshas," the collective "saints" of the barracoon and the sugar mill, that were still being honored in the Matanzas countryside when these recordings were made.

In the cities and towns of Matanzas, slaves transported, stored, and packed sugar and other agricultural products, rendered domestic service, and did other kinds of work. During the colonial period, Yoruba and Dahomean cabildos had been established in Ciudad Matanzas, Jovellanos, and other places. With the end of slavery, in the 1880s, migration from the sugar mills
swelled the ranks of the Lakumi and Arará already in the towns. For example, Dahomeans from the sugar mill called España went to the town of Perico, and those from the União and Santa Rita mills went to Agronomo and Jovellanos, respectively. Some founded cabildos in these places, including the one called San Manuel y Sus Descendientes, founded around 1900 in Jovellanos by Esteban Baró, an important source of information concerning Arará music for Fernando Ortiz (Vinueza 1981). Baró bore the name of the owners of the Santa Rita mill (Vinueza 1988:a,b), today called the Central René Fraga. The contemporary Arará folklore group Ojún Degara is made up almost entirely of members of the Baró family.

In the Matanzas cabildos, Yoruba and Dahomean drum styles still survive. In the Lukumi cabildo of San Juan Bautista in Ciudad Matanzas, Yéyá drums can still be heard (see note to tracks 18 and 22). Dahomean drums thunder in the Arará temples. Bata drums are played in the urban cozas de ocha, and their construction and playing styles are somewhat different from the Havana bata heard on the companion volume to this collection (Marks 1994). But the most common drum type in rural Matanzas remains the bembé drum, which Cabrera called the typical style of ori okó, the countryside.

BEMBÉ LUKUMÍ

The Yoruba term bembé refers to a single-headed drum, played with a curved stick to accompany dancing. But in Cuba, the construction and nomenclature of bembé drums reflect influences from non-Yoruba Afro-Cubans, and differ from region to region. In Matanzas, the most common types of bembé drums are cylindrical, conical, or barrel shaped, with a single head of mule-skin, oxhide, or some other type of animal skin, nailed to the body of the drum. The nailed head is typical of certain kinds of Kongo-influenced drums. Another type of bembé drum is double headed and played horizontally, with the skins nailed to the body of the drum or laced in a zigzag, as in the double-headed Yéyá drums, from which they may be derived. Other kinds of bembé drums in Matanzas include pegged varieties, which resemble Arará models (Sáenz 1997).

The terminology of bembé drums reflects similar intra-African contacts. In some parts of Matanzas, the drums have the same names as a set of yuka drums, of Kongo derivation: caja, mula, and cachambú for the master, middle, and smallest drum, respectively. However, though bembé drums are found all over the island, only in parts of Matanzas does an entire set of them have Yoruba names: ífù for the master drum, as in the batá ensemble, òbábatá for the middle drum, and ẹrún for the smallest support drum (Sáenz 1997:302). This last term may be related to the rum, the master drum of Brazilian Candomblé, and the jun of the Arará cabildos in Matanzas. (The words rum and jun would be pronounced almost the same way.)

From a musicological perspective, the greatest value of this collection is in its preservation of numerous ritual bembé-drumming styles, which may lead to a reassessment of the way musicologists have viewed these drums. From the Havana-centric point of view and because of their association with las quimbambas (remote areas, “the sticks”), bembé drums have always been seen, at best, as secondary to bata. While it is true that bembé drums do not contain Añá, the indwelling spirit found in the consecrated batá trio, one of the most misleading statements about bembé drums is that they are not ceremonial. This attitude is apparent in an entry in a respected dictionary of Cuban music: “Bembé. A festival held for the amusement of the gods and orishás, with the playing of drums. Of a profane nature” (Orocovis 1992:52). Fernando Ortiz, in his massive study of Afro-Cuban percussion (1996), devotes little space to bembé drums, but supplies relevant information that not only describes the music heard in this collection, but also hints at why bembé drums are viewed as nonritual. Writing not long before these recordings were made, he noted that in Matanzas there were three types of bembé drumming: bembé lukumi, bembé lukumi eriló, and suncha. It is the first “African” style, sung in Cuban Yoruba

and in a non-Europenized scale, that is heard on these recordings, and that is found in precisely the places where Cabrera and Tarafa recorded, near the towns of Jovellanos, Pedro Betancourt, and Agronomo, in the center of the province. In comparison, bembé eriló is characterized by “corruptions” and sometimes unintelligible texts and simplified drumming, and suncha is played as a recreational dance with little religious content (Ortiz 1996, vol. 2). The suncha style may have given writers the idea that all bembé drumming is “profane.”

In parts of Cuba, bembé drumming has been ritualized, but in the bembé lukumi style of Matanzas, bembé drums functioned in much the same way as the consecrated batá, and can even be seen as substituting for the batá. A trio of bembé drums could perform

an ori de ighódá, a cycle of rhythms for the individual orisha (see SFW CD 404 for the batá ori de ighódá). Ortiz also says that bembé drums bring the orishas, or induce trance, like the batá drums in the ceremonies called semisieré. Bembé drums are not surrounded by the kind of elaborate ritual with which the batá are treated, but in their “African” mode they are nonetheless accompanied by ritual procedures. In the most important religious “houses” in Matanzas, drummers are

Esther Pedro, Yéyá elder, with banner of cabildo Yéyá Modún, Samped, Matanzas, in the 1970s. Photographer unknown.
supposed to have las manos lavadas (their hands washed), which means they have gone through special ceremonies before learning the sacred rhythms and playing for bembés (Saenz 1997:309). Ortiz also notes that before a bembé ceremony began, someone would "throw the coconuts" (perform divination), and "feed" Elegá so he might protect the dance as its "guardian" (Ortiz 1996).

In notes to the original recordings, Cabrera doesn’t describe the bembé drums heard in this collection, but there is a Tarafa photograph (facing page) of two cylindrical drums with nailed heads. In a performance that included a full set of three bembé drums, the master drum (yùn) would have been in the center, the ebbatì or middle drum to the left, and the small drum (erum) to the right. The master drum is played with a stick (boguetà or palito) and a hand, with the drummer sometimes hitting the stick against the body of the drum or against the rim and striking the center of the drumhead with his fist. The support drums are played with sticks. The function of the master drum (yùn) is similar to that of the master drum in Brazilian Gandomble and Haitian Vodou: its patterns are closely related to the dancing, and the intention of the drummer’s variations is to bring on possession. As can be heard in these recordings (tracks 4 and 8), the master drummer plays off-accents under the singing, in much the same way as in Gandombé. He also plays against the hoe blade (guataca), which another performer strikes with a piece of iron or wood to keep the basic timeline.

The hoe blade is a possible Arará influence in bembé lukumi. In Dahomey, it has or had a ritual significance beyond its use as a musical instrument: as a tool, the hoe digs graves and opens the road to death and the beyond, and its agricultural use suggests fertility and abundance (Ortiz 1996). In construction, the Cuban hoe blade looks very much like the ogún, the timekeeper used in Arará music in Cuba, and in Rada and other kinds of music in Haiti. It also recalls the old hoe (olóke), "the bell-gong that signals spiritual forces and sounds the essential nation code of the Cremantti rhythm" in the Nation dance of Caracou, an island in the southeastern Caribbean (McDaniel and Hill 2001: see note to track 1 below).

The bembé drums are also accompanied by a single beaded-gourd rattle (ógbé, shekeré). An ensemble of three such rattles, a hoe blade, and a single drum plays a Lukumi musical substyle called guiro (songs for Ogún, Babalawo, Shango, and Yemayá, tracks 7, 10, 11, 13).

Other homemade percussion instruments, including a spoon on a bottle, are sometimes heard in this collection.

Next pages: Country lukumi procession, with guiro player and young goats in ritual jacket (2a), to be offered to the orishas.
The drums here play in a dense ensemble texture, which may be related historically to Oyo regional rhythms, which could have been played on a different style of drum. This track points up the bembe drums' ability to play in different styles, perhaps even imitating other drum families, as will be seen below.

2. Toque Arará
Performed by Domingo Hernandez, Marcelo Carreras, Angel Rolando, drums, Domingo Hernandez, Jr., hoe blade

Although overshadowed by the Yoruba, a considerable Dahomean presence existed in the part of Matanzas where these recordings were made. The name Arará, derived from the Dahomean city of Allada, is related to the term Bada in Haiti and Arrada on Carriacou. Arará cabildo had been founded in Cuba as far back as the 17th century, and the names that qualify the general Arará designation—Dajomé, Sabalu, Magino, Agción, and others—reflect regional and ethnic differences (Sogbossi 1998). The name Sabalu refers to Savalu, a northern Dahomean town conquered by the Fon and recalled in the cabildo title Arará Sabalou. It was inhabited by the Mahi people, remembered in the cabildo called Arará Magino. In Matanzas, migrations from the countryside to the towns added to the existing urban Arará presence, which survives in Jovellanos, Perico, and Agramonte. As recently as the 1990s, an elderly resident of the town of Perico, a descendant of Dahomeans at the España sugar mill, remembered a song in the Fon language, by which his ancestors had recalled their departure from the port of Ouidah in Dahomey (Sogbossi 1998).

While the previous track is in more of an ensemble style, this salute is an example of West African master drumming. At times, the lead drum lands on the strong or weak beats of the timeline (played on the hoe blade), and at other times he plays against it. When the master drummer’s figures are in the strongest contrast to the hoe blade’s timekeeping, they recall the easter, rhythmic disruptions of the master drum (masanm) of Haitian Rada, the Dahomean component of Vodun.

3. Toque Mina—Yona (Obatalá)
Performed by Domingo Hernandez, Marcelo Carreras, Angel Rolando, drums, Domingo Hernandez, Jr., hoe blade

Another African people in Cuba were the Mina-Popó, from the border area of what is now the Benin Republic and Togo (Castellanos and Castellanos 1986). Oni-Tomi, an old friend and respondent of Cabrera’s from Havana, was the daughter of a Mina-Popó. She had explained to her the Dahomean-Yoruba connection in Cuba: “Lucumi, Arará, Dahomey, and Mina, they’re all related. They understood one another, even though their languages were different. But their saints were similar—they traveled back and forth between their lands” (Cabrera 1983:26).

This passage helps explain the similarity between this Mina rhythm for Obatalá and the Haitian drum salute nago, played for Ogún, who, as Papa Ogou, heads up the family of the lou nago, the Yoruba orishas of Yodan. One of his roads or avatars in Haiti is Ogou Oluwa, or Obatalá. The close resemblance between the Cuban and Haitian rhythms leads back to Dahomey, where Gun (Ogún) is considered a child of Lisa and Mawu, male and female counterparts of the Yoruba orishas Obatalá. These details are found in a book by Pierre Verger (1981), which treats the Nigerien and Dahomean sources of Candomblé. Verger had visited Matanzas with Cabrera in 1957. It is unlikely that he suspected that something he would write years later about Dahomey would illustrate the field recordings his friend was making in Cuba around the time of his visit there.

4. Mo jubá ocha (I pay homage to the orisha)
Performed by Inés Sotomayor and group

Inés Sotomayor, an elderly song leader (akpoun), was a well known and respected priestess (iyaboeha) in Jovellanos and the surrounding area. A surviving member of the work gang (dotación) of the defunct Arratí sugar mill, she was a “child” of Agróniga (Babalahayiye), one of the most venerated orishas at that mill. She organized and led the annual festival that drew crowds of descendants of the Yoruba slaves of Arratí, a festival that honored their ancestors and the saints of the barracoons.

Here, she offers prayers to her orishas, her ancestors, and her natural parents and godparents, whose names must be mentioned in every ceremony and whose permission must be sought to carry out any rite.
5. Ogún Onile
Performed by Inés Sotomayor and group

If Shango reigned in Havana, Ogún was the major orisha of the Matanzas countryside, the other Yoruba nucleus in western Cuba (Montejo 1968). Ogún Onile is the road of this orisha who left his throne to take up a hunter’s life, which relates him to el monte, in the sense of the forest or the bush. Like Alberto Jenkins (heard below on tracks 19–21) Inés Sotomayor’s songs and singing style have an archaic quality, which probably dates back to the 19th century and tiempo España.

6. Ibarabo ago mo juba
(Song for Eleguá)
Marcos Portillo Domínguez and group

This song is from the beginning of a complete orí cantado in bembé lukumi style. It is the same melody and substantially the same text as in the Havana versions, found on SFV CD 40.489 (tracks 1 and 6). Thus it is easy to compare the percussion orchestras that accompany the different versions, the city báti and the country bembé drums. Though lacking the internal “conversation” found in the báti trio, this song has a good deal of rhythmic complexity: the báki, the gúiro and support drums play interlocking patterns, and the master drummer plays off-accents on the side, rim, and head of his drum. This version is especially notable for its swelling chorus in the second section.

7. Song for Ogún
Performed by Marcos Portillo Domínguez, with gúiro trio, báki and bembé drum

The gúiro, also called chokeré and guió, is a large, hollow, dried gourd, covered with a network of beads, seeds, or cowries. The gourds can be shaken or struck to produce different effects. The master gourd can be thrown in the air and caught on the beat—a feature also observed in West Africa. Ortiz gives names for the three güiros: the largest is called the caja (box), like the master drum in bembé lukumi; the middle size is the dos golpes (two beats), and the smallest is the salidor (“one who goes out”) perhaps so named because it is shaken outside the main rhythm to produce a tremolo effect, said to attract the saints. Ortiz observed that güiro trios are found more in the countryside, where they substituted for drums, than in Havana. Cabrera also noted that in Havana, these trios would substitute for báti drums. For Matanzas, Cabrera gives the names for the trio as follows, from the largest down: caja or mayor (major), segundo (second) or golpeador (beater), and salidor.

8. Oshosi Ayiólódá Mala Malá De
(Song for Oshosi)

This is taken from the same orí cantado as the Eleguá song, heard on track six. Like that song, this song is in bembé lukumi style, a country version of the same melody heard on SFV CD 40.489 (track 8), where it is accompanied by báti drums.

9. Omordara Dei (Song for Orishaako)

Sung by Emiliano de Armas and group

Omordara dei. / Omordara Orishaako. (2x) Olodumare de. / Omordara Orishaako. The good son arrives. / The good son is Orishaako. (2x) Olodumare arrives. The good son is Orishaako.

Migrations took place between the Yoruba nuclei of Havana and Matanzas, and an exchange of rituals occurred. Orishaako’s worship was brought to Matanzas from Nigeria in the 19th century by the priestess María Luisa (known as Má guia), and from Matanzas it was taken to Havana in the 20th century by Octavio Samá, known as Ohadimeji (Miguel Ramos, personal communication). Cabrera noted that Orishaako, an earth deity and orisha of crops and fertility, was more venerated in Matanzas than in Havana. One might wonder why his worship survived in a system where the harvest did not belong to the cultivators, but it is not surprising that he was important in Matanzas, where the spectre of death hovered over the canefields, and the bodies of slaves were “feeding” this orisha, one of the senior owners of the earth.

10. Babaluyé
Performed by Marcos Portillo Domínguez and group

Babaluyé, another earth deity, was one of the important barrocão saints. Of Dahomean origin, his Ayara and Lukumi roads converged in rural Matanzas, as they did in Havana, where he has both Dahomean and Yoruba songs and rhythms. Cabrera notes that the gúiro trio was sometimes played for him in Havana, probably because the báti could not play after 6 p.m., when rites for him would be held. In free rhythm, this gúiro song emphasizes the tremolo, instead of the percussive, side of the gúiro orchestra.

11. Shangó
Performed by Marcos Portillo Domínguez and group

The song leader was a member of the work gang at the Mariategui sugar mill, in Corral Falso (Pedro Betancourt) and his African name was Ateboka, given to Shangó by his mother. According to Cabrera’s notes, he had learned these songs from the old Yoruba at this sugar mill, people including Tá Bruno, Tá Cecilio, and the priestesses Adúa (a name given to daughters of Shangó), Fatumá, Akhibila, and Mahe Alagúy, whose names were still remembered in that district (Cabrera 1938).
12. Óya
Performed by Marcos Portillo Domínguez and group

If the Havana songs for Óya on the companion volume to this CD are about her "wind" aspect, then this song addresses her fiery side. According to Yoruba myth, Shàngò once sent Óya to the kingdom of Bariba to find a magical preparation that, placed under his tongue, would allow him to spit thunderstones. She kept a bit of lightning for herself, hidden under her tongue (Cleason 1992).

The text of this song pans on the Lakumi word akani, and on the masculine and feminine powers implicit in the two meanings of the word. In Lakumi, akani can denote either a kind of spicy fried beanake (one of Óya's favorite foods), or a lit candlewick, made of cotton. The pun is based on the fact that akani, the beanake, belongs to Óya, and is not a suitably masculine offering to give to Shàngò. What she is bringing him is lit wicks, so that he can eat fire, a part of his masculine powers. So this song can be seen as Óya's empowering of her husband, Shàngò.

A similar pun is also possible in Nagó, the Yoruba of Brazil, where akani can likewise mean a beanake or fire in edible form. This refers to the flaming cotton wads consumed by Óya priestesses at midwinter festivals for Shàngò, as they reenact Óya's mission to Bariba and her theft of lightning. Again, it commemorates Óya's empowering of Shàngò.

This song is a good example of a rhythmically "hot" òmọ̀bẹ̀ style, generated through the shifting relationship among the song leader, the chorus, and the rhythm section. The main accents of the melody line maintain a general independence from the percussion, but in the first section of the song, the words kara kara touch down on the main underlying rhythmic pulse. This kind of interplay between the melody and the percussion throughout the song demolishes another cliché, that òmọ̀bẹ̀ is rhythmically "cool" and "simple."

13. Yemayá
Performed by Marcos Portillo Domínguez and group

This song, called Aró, is found in more versions in this collection than any other. On the Havana CD (SFW CD 4249(b)), it is heard unaccompanied, with batá drums, and as a solo batá rhythm. Aró denotes blue indigo dye, and is a reference to Yemayá as dye (one of her roads is Ibi Aró, deep place of indigo dye)—and owner of the sea. A pot of blue dye is kept on Ibi Aró’s shrine. Just as the batá rhythm called Aró is meant to represent in sound the transition from a calm to a turbulent sea, so the tremolos of this guito trio, played in free rhythm, convey another kind of oceanic feeling, the vast expanse of Yemayá's domain.

14. Osain Songs
Recorded outdoors, like several other tracks in this collection, these songs are performed by Domingo Hernández, a noted herbalist (óludún) from the town of Jovellanos. He was considered knowledgeable in the magical and medicinal properties of the plants found in el monte, the bush. He would gather them for use in important ceremonies, including ordinations (asientos).

PALO SONGS—GANGÁ-ÑONOBÁ
Performed by Florida Pastor, Agustín Diago, and group

15. Guirigui tongo un mene mene ó
16. Magó kueki baya arere
17. Okun leoo, vamo' pa' la loma

Kongo-Angola peoples were one of the largest groups in rural Matanzas, after the Lukumi and the Carabali. Gangá-Ñonobá is the Cuban name for a Bantu-speaking people identified as the Nyong, a subgroup of the Puku, from the Nigerien plateau north of the Bight of Biafra (Castellanos and Castellanos 1980). Their Kongo affinities are especially notable in the first song (track 15), whose yodellike melody has clear connections to Central African music. The second song (track 16) sounds like an invocation from Palo Monte or Mayombe, two of Cuba’s Kongo-based religions. The third song (track 17) is a good example of domestic music making, with hands and feet adding to the drum accompaniment.

All these songs, called by the Kongo name of mambú, are performed by members of the Pastor family, whose hundred members kept up Gangá funerary rites, holding wakes where they would circle the corpse, singing, clapping, and dancing to the sound of a drum, and sending off the spirit before dawn.

18. Toque Yesá for Ínlé
Performed by Domingo Hernández, Marcelo Carrera, Angel Rolando, drums; Domingo Hernández, Jr., hoe blade

Ínlé (Erinlé), whose name in Yoruba means "elephant-in-the-earth" or "land-elephant," is the patron deity of Ifọba, a southwestern Nigerian trading town, which lies along the Erinlé River, a tributary of the Oshun River. Ínlé is a complex orisha on both sides of the Atlantic, inhabiting both earth and water. In Nigeria, his roads are known as ibi (pools, or deep parts of the river). His worship is carried out on a riverbank (Martin Tsang, personal communication, Verger 1981). Many of these roads are particular to his hunter aspect or his aquatic aspect.

In Cuba, Ínlé combines several elements: with Òpín and Òshóhó, he belongs to the triumvirate of hunters in the Lukumí pantheon. Ínlé is considered the physician Òshóhó, a healer with a knowledge of herbalism. He is also aquatic, a fisherman who hunts in the water.

One of the most fascinating aspects of òmọ̀bẹ̀ drums is that they can play in the style of, or even imitate, other drum families. In this òmọ̀bẹ̀ lukumi salute, the drums are playing in the style of the Òsẹ́ ensemble, whose characteristically short phrases they reproduce. The Òsẹ́ drums are cylindrical and double-headed, and are played in groups of three or four, with only one head played with sticks. The double-headed òmọ̀bẹ̀ drums may be derived from Òsẹ́ drums.

19. Órú Ódáá
Performed by Alberto Yenkins and group

Alberto Yenkins, known as Yín, was one of the most traditional singers (òitàà) in Matanzas. Elderly Lukumí worshippers (òbààsààs) from Jovellanos and other towns in the province said he sang "old style," the way
they sang in slavery times. Dáda is not a well known orisha in Cuba, and there are few rituals and songs for him, so this old track from Matanzas is rare indeed.

20. Shangó moritoriale
Performed by Alberto Yenkins and group

Moforiblele fu Shangó Oba [r]ere Oba koso eloja. / E aírá 6. I place my head on the ground for Shangó. / The king is [a] good thing. / He who did not hang is watching. / Aírá is a praise name for Shangó.

"According to a [Nigerian] myth, it was a defeat in a magical contest that led Shango to leave Oyo and hang himself, although when lightning flashes, his worshippers shout 'The king did not hang himself' ("Olà ko so") (Bascom 1969).

And when thunder rolls, they say, as does Yin on this track, "Kauo, kahiye sile. "Welcome, we prostrate ourselves before you" (Bascom 1972). To do so is to pay homage.

21. Yeye/Songs for Iroko
Performed by Alberto Yenkins and group

In Nigeria and Dahomey, the iroko/loko is a kind of African teak (Colonophora excelso), but in Cuba, the Yoruba gave this name to the ceiba tree (Gaba penrun-dà), known in English as the kapok or silk-cotton tree. Lydya Cabrera devotes an entire chapter in El monte to iroko, sacred to Lukumi, Arará, and Kongo peoples alike. There were several famous ceibas in Matanzas, and it was said that if a woman asked one of them for a child, it would grant her wish. The first song relates the story of a woman who makes promises to the iroko in exchange for a child, and when she doesn't fulfill them, the tree takes the child back. This song is now associated with Oshún, the Yéyé (Mother) of the title. It is usually sung to Oshún to instigate possession; the sequence then moves into songs for iroko. As recorded by Cabrera and Tarafa, the first song accompanied a sacrifice for Oshún at the foot of the tree. The master-drumer pattern under Yin's vocal is especially powerful, and offers yet another facet of bembé lukumí.

22. Toque Yesá for Oshún
Performed by Domingo Hernández, Marcelo Carreras, Angel Bolando, drums, Domingo Hernández, Jr., hoe blade

In the Igboja region of southwestern Nigeria, the river that bears Oshún's name flows past Oshogbo, where her principal shrine is located. As in the salute for Inlé (track 18), the bembé ensemble here is imitating the short phrases typical of the yesi (igbesa) drums.

23. Moritoriale Ogún (I pay homage to Ogún)
Unknown solist with Inés Sotomayor and group

As noted earlier, Ogún rules in Matanzas. If Shangó is king (ogún), in Havana, then Ogún, always toiling at his anvil and forge, represents slavery in el campo, the rural areas. Other symbols of Ogún, including the macete and the mayordomo's whip, reinforced the connection between this orisha and rural slavery (Ramos 2003:106-7).

24. Olokon
Sung by Fernando Hernández with Inés Sotomayor's group

Olokon, sometimes considered a road of Yemaya, is owner of the mysterious and impenetrable depths of the sea. Olokon's main center of worship in West Africa is now in Benin City, Nigeria. This orisha was brought to Cuba in the mid 19th century, and his worship became centered in two places, both of them port towns: Regla, across the bay from Havana, and Ciudad Matanzas. The priestess Monserrate González, known as Obatero, brought Olokon directly to Matanzas from the Egbo region of Nigeria, northwest of Lagos. A waterpot filled with several kinds of coral, shells, and other ingredients represented the Olokon she brought from Africa. This pot was passed on to Ferminita Gómez, a priestess of Yemaya, who also became the custodian of the only existing set of drums in Cuba dedicated to Olokon (Mason 1996: 26, 27, 29). These four goblet-shapedpegged drums, now about 140 years old, remain in her house in Ciudad Matanzas. The songs and dances these drums accompanied were considered to be of Egbo origin (Vinuesa 1997:251).

While this compilation was being researched, some of the musicians consulted by the producer thought that the drums heard on this track may in fact have been this set of Olokon drums. If this were the case, then Cabrera and Tarafa must have recorded in Ferminita's house, which the Olokon drums never leave. But since the ogun is a male, this possibility was ruled out, since only women would have sung for Olokon there.

25. Toque egbado
Performed by Domingo Hernández, Marcelo Carreras, Angel Bolando, drums, Domingo Hernández, Jr., hoe blade

This nation salute has also been identified as being in the style of the egbado (Olokon) drums, described above. Olokon is obviously an orisha of coastal peoples, and in Cuba, egbado, besides being a "nation" designation, has connotations of "coastal" (Cabrera 1970).

26. Toque de bembé
Performed by Domingo Hernández, Marcelo Carreras, Angel Bolando, drums, Domingo Hernández, Jr., hoe blade

The rhythm shifts within this intricate bembe lukumí ensemble contribute to its evocative and dramatic professional quality, which makes it well suited to end this collection.


**DISCOGRAPHY**


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**MORTON MARKS** is an ethnomusicologist, folklorist, and producer, specializing in the music of the Caribbean, Brazil, and Lusophone Africa. He has been a coeditor of the *Endangered Music Project* on Bykodisc, and of the *Alan Lomax Caribbean Voyage Series* on Rounder Records. Two of his field recordings have appeared on Smithsonian Folkways: *Music of Pará, Brazil: Garimbó, Pajélança, Batuque and Umbanda* (F-4285), and *Afro-Dominican Music from San Cristóbal, Dominican Republic* (F-3426).

**CREDITS**

Produced, compiled, and annotated by Morton Marks

Collected by Lydia Cabrera and Josefina Tarafa with Oduardo Zapillo and Benito Bolle, sound engineers

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Lukumi transcriptions and translations by Miguel "Willie" Ramos

Mastered by Pete Reinger

Production supervised by Daniel Shechy and D. A. Sonneborn

Production coordinated by Mary Monsieur

Editorial assistance by Jacob Love

Design and layout by Sonya Cohen Cramer, Takoma Park, MD

**ADDITIONAL SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS STAFF:** Judy Barlas, manufacturing coordinator; Carla Borden, editing; Lee Michael Demsey, fulfillment; Betty Derbyshire, financial operations manager; Katina Epps, fulfillment; Sharleen Kavetski, mail order manager; Helen Lindsay, customer service; Kevin Miller, fulfillment; Margot Nussan, licensing and royalties; Edmé Pernia, program assistant; Jeff Place, archivist; Ronnie Simpkins, audio specialist; John Smith, marketing and radio promotions; Stephanie Smith, archivist. Special thanks to Edmé Pernia, Kelly Boyer, Elisa Wagman, and Stephanie Cronenberg.

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