

**CULTURAL COUNTERPOINTS:
Examining the Musical Interactions between the U.S. and Latin America**



**Thomas, Susan (University of Georgia):
“Radio Dialogues: U.S. Musical Influences on Cuban Alternative Music”**

Abstract:

U.S. accounts of post-revolutionary Cuban music history tend to focus on the island’s isolation, constructing a narrative that explains more about our own isolation from Cuba than Cuba’s isolation from the rest of the world. This paper works against such narratives by examining contemporary Cuban musicians’ pervasive and tactical engagement with U.S. music in the 1980s and 1990s.

The generation that created the eclectic and experimental genre now known as Cuban Alternative Music (Borges-Triana, 2010) was born roughly two decades into Cuba’s socialist experiment. Coming of age during the revolution’s greatest prosperity and optimism, they experienced the economic crisis that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. There may not been an open market for “imperialist” culture in Cuba, but young people actively sought out U.S. and British popular music by listening to Miami radio broadcasts and acquiring recordings via relatives who worked as merchant marines or diplomats, or who traveled abroad for educational or military purposes. Michael Jackson; the Jackson Five; Earth, Wind, & Fire; and Cool and the Gang are routinely cited as major influences along with Argentine rock and Brazilian jazz and *bossa nova*. This paper examines the role of recordings as well as direct Cuban-U.S. collaborations in shaping contemporary Cuban music. Such musical engagement should not be viewed as another example of U.S. hegemony. Rather, it was willful and selective; Cuban musicians sought out artists and genres that fulfilled certain aesthetic criteria or that offered innovative solutions to issues of rhythm, harmony, arrangement, or production.

How to Cite this Paper:

Thomas, Susan. “Radio Dialogues: U.S. Musical Influences on Cuban Alternative Music.” Paper presented at the Latin American Music Center’s Fiftieth Anniversary Conference “Cultural Counterpoints: Examining the Musical Interactions between the U.S. and Latin America,” Indiana University, Bloomington, 2011. Available from *IUScholarWorks* (<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/handle/2022/15551>); accessed [Date Accessed].

Editorial Disclaimer:

This paper/abstract was presented at the Latin American Music Center’s Fiftieth-Anniversary Conference titled “Cultural Counterpoints: Examining the Musical Interactions between the U.S. and Latin America,” Indiana University, Bloomington, October 19-23, 2011, and was accepted on the basis of its abstract, which was peer-reviewed. This paper is presented as submitted by the author, who has authorized its dissemination through *IUScholarWorks*.