

**LA PARRANDA PUERTORRIQUEÑA:  
THE MUSIC, SYMBOLISM, AND CULTURAL NATIONALISM  
OF PUERTO RICO'S CHRISTMAS SERENADING TRADITION**

A thesis

submitted by

David G. Gleason

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Advisor: David Locke

## ABSTRACT

The *parranda* is a Christmas serenading tradition of Puerto Rico. During the Christmas season *parranda* musicians surprise their friends and relatives with festive music during the night. This thesis is an ethnomusicological study of the *parranda* tradition of Puerto Rico. It examines how the *parranda*, on the island and the mainland, has been affected by cultural change. It considers how the *parranda* has become an icon of Puerto Rican national pride and discusses how this tradition, its music, and its lyrics reflect ideals of cultural nationalism.

I assert that the *parranda* has become a symbol of Puerto Rican national pride because of its association with the iconic *jíbaro*, or peasant farmer. Folk music and traditions associated with the *jíbaro* have become central to the idea of Puerto Rican national culture. The *parranda's* music and lyrics reflect cultural nationalism by referencing the *jíbaro* poetically and musically. Although the *parranda* has become a symbol of Puerto Rican folk tradition, it continues to be shaped by modernization, urbanization, commercialization, and North American cultural influence. Paradoxically, Puerto Ricans consider these forces to be oppositional to their cultural heritage.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
Methodology .....	2
Related Theory and Research .....	3
CHAPTER ONE	
CHRISTMAS AND CHRISTMAS MUSIC IN PUERTO RICO .....	9
Christmas in Puerto Rico .....	9
The Parranda .....	14
The Christmas Music of Puerto Rico .....	16
Summary .....	21
CHAPTER TWO	
THE PARRANDA AND MODERNITY .....	22
Description of the Modern Parranda .....	24
Decline, Change and Modernity .....	30
Preservation .....	36
The Parranda on the Mainland .....	38
Summary .....	39
CHAPTER THREE	
THE PARRANDA, SYMBOLISM AND CULTURAL NATIONALISM .....	40
Icons of Religion and Patriotism .....	40
The Ideas of Pierce and Turino .....	43
The Process of Shifting Symbolic Associations .....	47
Capitalizing and Politicizing the Parranda .....	52
The Parranda's Changing Meaning Among Nyoricans .....	54
Summary .....	56
CHAPTER FOUR	
EVOKING CULTURAL NATIONALISM THROUGH MUSIC .....	58
Música Jíbara .....	58
Recomposition: Evoking the Jíbaro through Music .....	68
The Lyrics of the Parranda Songs .....	73
Summary .....	80
CONCLUSION .....	82
Implications for Future Research .....	83
The Future of the Parranda .....	84
LIST OF INFORMANTS .....	86
PHOTOGRAPHS .....	87
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	90
Collections of Sheet Music and Lyrics .....	94
SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY .....	95

## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1 Alegre Cantar.....	25
Fig. 2 No Me Da la Gana.....	27
Fig. 3 Traigo esta Trulla.....	28
Fig. 4 The Rhythmic Matrix of Música Jíbara.....	62
Fig. 5 The Caballo Pattern .....	62
Fig. 6 “El Jíbaro que Canta:” Décima Rhyme and Syllable Scheme.....	63
Fig. 7 “Nacimiento de Cristo:” Aguinaldo Rhyme and Syllable Scheme.....	64
Fig. 8 Seis Mapayé.....	65
Fig. 9 Seis Fajardeño.....	65
Fig. 10 Seis con Décima .....	66
Fig. 11 Aguinaldo Orocoveño.....	66
Fig. 12 Aguinaldo Jíbaro.....	67
Fig. 13 Aguinaldo Cayagueño .....	67
Fig. 14 Aguinaldo Jíbaro Recomposed as “Si Me Dan Pasteles” .....	71
Fig. 15 Seis Enramada Recomposed as “Si No Me Das de Beber” .....	72
Fig. 16 Parranda de Sopón .....	76
Fig. 17 Pobre Lechon .....	77
Fig. 18 Si Me Dan Pasteles .....	78
Fig. 19 Si Me Dan de Beber.....	78
Fig. 20 Traigo esta Trulla.....	79
Fig. 21 Asómate al Balcón.....	79
Fig. 22 Alegre Vengo.....	80

## INTRODUCTION

The *parranda* is a Christmas serenading tradition of Puerto Rico. During the Christmas season *parranda* musicians surprise their friends and relatives with festive music during the night. This thesis is an ethnomusicological study of the *parranda* tradition of Puerto Rico. It examines how the *parranda*, both on the island and the mainland, has been affected by cultural change. It considers how the *parranda* has become an icon of Puerto Rican national pride and discusses how the tradition, its music, and its lyrics reflect ideals of cultural nationalism. The research presented here is based on fieldwork conducted in Boston, Massachusetts; Albany, New York; and Amsterdam, New York from December 2001-December 2002, and in Puerto Rico from December 2002-January 2003.

Chapter One provides essential background information. It describes Christmas in Puerto Rico, examines the historical development of Christmas music on the island, and discusses the role of the *parranda* in the larger celebration. Chapter Two explores the *parranda* in a modern context, examining how urbanization, commercialization, and cultural influence from the United States have caused this tradition to decline and change in Puerto Rico and among Puerto Ricans living on the mainland. Chapter Three examines how the *parranda* has become symbol of the Puerto Rican nation through its connection with idea of the *jíbaro*, a figure central to the island's campaign for cultural nationalism. It traces the shifting symbolic meaning of the *parranda* tradition in Puerto Rico and among Nyoricans. Chapter Four explains how the instrumental music, melodies, and lyrics of *parranda* songs resonate symbolically with broader notions of Puerto Rican identity.

I assert that the *parranda* has become a symbol of Puerto Rican national pride because of its association with the iconic *jíbaro*, or peasant farmer. Folk music and traditions associated with the *jíbaro* have become central to the idea of Puerto Rican national culture. The *parranda*'s music and lyrics reflect cultural nationalism by referencing the *jíbaro* poetically and musically. Although the *parranda* has become a symbol of Puerto Rican folk tradition, it continues to be shaped by modernization, urbanization, commercialization, and North American cultural influence. Paradoxically, Puerto Ricans consider these forces to be oppositional to their cultural heritage.

## **Methodology**

The ethnographic fieldwork conducted for this thesis was based on participant observation and interviews. I attended *parrandas*, and other Christmas activities in Boston, Massachusetts during the 2001-2002 Christmas season. In Puerto Rico, from December 2002-January 2003, I attended multiple Christmas activities including *parrandas*, masses, concerts, and other festivities. During these events I took extensive fieldnotes, and conducted casual interviews.

I also had the opportunity to conduct interviews with ten informants ranging from student participants to master musicians. These interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Although I conducted the interviews with specific questions in mind, I allowed the informants to guide the interview process. In this way I was able to understand the aspects of this tradition that the informants considered important. In addition to participant observation and interviews, I conducted a survey of Puerto Rican Christmas music recordings. I transcribed much of this music and learned how to perform it with the assistance of my informants. Once all of the ethnographic data had

been compiled, I analyzed it allowing themes to develop organically from the research process.

### **Related Theory and Research**

Although no ethnographic writings on the *parranda* exist, there are varied writings on the Christmas music and traditions of Puerto Rico. Manuel Alfonso's *El Gíbaro: cuadro de costumbres de la isla de Puerto Rico* includes the oldest account of the *parranda* tradition. First published in 1849, it provides the first account of rural Puerto Rican folk customs. In a chapter devoted to the *aguinaldo*, a style of Christmas folk song, Alfonso describes the *parranda* tradition as it occurred in the nineteenth century. The image he puts forth of *jíbaro* musicians, in *jíbaro* costume, performing traditional *aguinaldos* has become central to the idea of the *parranda* as a folk tradition. This imagery offers a point of departure from which we can understand the tradition, its symbolism, and the ways it has changed during the twentieth century.

A number of studies address Puerto Rican folk music from musicological and ethnomusicological perspectives. Some authors focus on the poetics of the music's lyrics, especially on the poetic form of the *décima*, which underlies the construction of many folk songs, including *aguinaldos*. In his article from 1918, "Porto-Rican Folk-lore: Décimas, Christmas Carols, Nursery Rhymes, and Other Songs," John Alden Mason investigates the poetic structure of the *décima* tradition including transcriptions of *décima* lyrics. Pedro and Elsa Escabí's *La décima: estudio etnográfica de la cultura popular de Puerto Rico* is a comprehensive explanation of the *décima*. The authors address the history and practice of the *décima* tradition as well as analyze its form and poetics. They

include lyrical transcriptions as well as detailed tables and charts comparing poetic forms and devices.

For a musicological perspective, the writings of Francisco López Cruz are perhaps the most comprehensive. Francisco López Cruz's *La música folklórica de Puerto Rico* is of primary importance to any study of Puerto Rican folk music. Through history, cultural practice, musical transcription, and analysis, he addresses the *bomba*, *plena*, *guaracha*, religious music, the *aguinaldo*, and 28 styles of the *seis*. In *El aguinaldo en Puerto Rico (su evolución)*, López Cruz's directly addresses the Christmas music of Puerto Rico. He examines the evolution of the *aguinaldo* and considers the lyrics, rhythm, harmony, and melody as discrete topics.

Some musicological and ethnomusicological writings address the concept of syncretism as it applies to Puerto Rican Christmas music. In his Ph.D. dissertation, *The Bomba and Aguinaldo of Puerto Rico as They Have Evolved from Indigenous, African and European Cultures*, James McCoy asserts, based on musical and historical analysis, that Puerto Rican folk music developed from a syncretic mix of African, Indigenous and European musics. In this thesis I will take exception to his theory, noting that the syncretism he espouses reflects a cultural mythology put forth by the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña.

In the article "The Camouflaged Drum: Melodization of Rhythms and Maroonage Ethnicity in Caribbean Peasant Music," Angel G Quintero-Rivera asserts that the African rhythms of the *bomba* exist as rhythmic cells in the *aguinaldo* and *seis*, forms have been traditionally perceived as Spanish derived. Quintero-Rivera claims that a change in orchestration from percussion to chordal camouflages the rhythmic identity of *jíbaro*

music. Rivera's work helps us to understand how African elements are often ignored in popular beliefs about Puerto Rican folk music. In this thesis I will explain how, as a Spanish-derived genre, *música jíbara* has become a national icon at the expense of more African-derived idioms.

Also addressing Puerto Rican folk music from an ethnomusicological perspective, in the article, "Décima, Seis and the Art of the Puertorican Trovador Within the Modern Social Context," Prisco Hernández explores the music of Puerto Rican folk musicians including the *décima*, *seis* and *aguinaldo*. His analysis demonstrates that these forms have fully developed musical and poetic structures and aesthetics. He compares historical *trovador* performances with modern performances to illustrate the changing cultural meanings of *jíbaro* music. In "El trovador, el aguinaldo y el seis puertorriqueño," Alberto Medina Martínez explains the music of the Puerto Rican *trovador* with brief transcriptions of music and lyrics. In the article "The Social Organization of a Musical Event: The Fiesta de Cruz in San Juan, Puerto Rico," Martha Ellen Davis explores the resurgence of the Fiesta de Cruz, its social organization, and shifting meanings. She ironically asserts that since the festival's resurgence modern corporations have assumed a philanthropic role in supporting tradition. This article along with the work of Arlene Davila helps us to understand how culture is commercialized in Puerto Rico. Based on these theories, I will argue that the *parranda* tradition has been similarly commercialized.

There also exists writing that directly addresses the musical Christmas traditions of Puerto Rico. In the article, "La música navideña: testimonio de nuestro presente y pasado histórico," Luis Manuel Alvarez examines the history of Christmas music in

Puerto Rico. He discusses how poetic structure of the *villancico* and *aguinaldo* developed from Moorish *zéjel* and describes the tradition of the *promesa* and *parranda* as they developed during the Spanish colonial period. In the book, *Navidad que vuelve, la tradición y el cantar navideño en Puerto Rico*, Pedro Malavet Vega explores the development of the traditional Puerto Rican Christmas song repertoire from its colonial origins to the present. He offers a study of the Christmas traditions, cultural meaning, and lyrical analysis. He includes interviews with major composers and performers of Puerto Rican Christmas music. The history of Puerto Rican Christmas music presented in this thesis is based on Malavet Vegas history. In addition, his study of the lyrical content of Christmas songs offers a point of departure for understanding the secularization of Christmas music in Puerto Rico. In this thesis I take exception to Malavet's notion that this secularization is corrupt and vulgar. Instead I assert that it is related to ideals of cultural nationalism.

Scholarship on Puerto Rico outside of the realm of music studies provides theory relevant to this thesis. In her book *Sponsored Identities*, Arlene M. Davila discusses the dynamics of cultural politics in Puerto Rican society. She examines how culture and cultural nationalism have been used to promote consumer goods and political viewpoints. In *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move, Identities on the Island and in the United States*, Jorge Duany examines how Puerto Ricans imagine themselves as a nation. Relevant to this thesis, he makes a distinction between cultural and political nationalism. He also examines the cultural impact of the massive migration of Puerto Ricans to the mainland since the 1950's. Also relevant to this research, he asserts that the diasporic communities are an integral part of the Puerto Rican nation because they "continue to be

linked to the island by an intense circular movement of people, identities, and practices, as well as capital, technology and commodities” (Duany 2002:5). Duany refers to this concept by using the Spanish folk term “*en vaivén*” meaning “on the move.” Although this thesis focuses on *parranda* tradition as it is practiced in Puerto Rico, I have, based on the idea of a Puerto Rican nation “on the move,” allowed it to address topics relevant to its practice among Puerto Ricans living on the mainland.

In *Nacion y ritmo: “descargas” desde el Caribe*, Juan Otero Garabis examines the construction of national imaginaries in the literature and popular music of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. In his chapter on the Puerto Rican community of New York City, he examines how the salsa music of trombonist Willie Colon incorporates multiple cultural products and musical styles in order to resist cultural assimilation. Included in this chapter and relevant to this thesis is Otero Garabis’s examination of Colon’s renowned Christmas album, “Asalto Navideño.” Garabis’s research not only contributes to the understanding of the relationship between music and the nation as perceived by Nyoricans, it also offers a valuable paradigm for the analysis of symbolic meaning in Puerto Rican Christmas music.

Finally, my approach to the symbolic communication of the *parranda* has benefited from Thomas Turino’s book, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*. Turino utilizes the semiotic ideas of Charles Sanders Peirce to analyze the nature of and relationships among musical symbols in Zimbabwean cultural nationalism. Turino provides a clear definition of cultural nationalism as “the use of art or other cultural practices to develop or maintain national sentiment for political purposes” (Turino 2000:14). Turino’s definition of cultural nationalism as well as his application of

C.S. Pierce's semiotic philosophies provides the necessary theoretical tools for understanding how Puerto Rican folk music has come to represent the Puerto Rican nation.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CHRISTMAS AND CHRISTMAS MUSIC IN PUERTO RICO

#### Christmas in Puerto Rico

Christmas in Puerto Rico is a time of great festivity and celebration. The air is warm, the colors are bright, and the festive music is ever-present. It is a time to celebrate family; people return home from around the island and the world, especially from the United States. It is a time to celebrate religion; religious services and holidays offer the possibility for spiritual reflection. It is a time to celebrate Puerto Rican cultural heritage; traditional festivals, food, and music provide an opportunity to consider what it means to be Puerto Rican. Perhaps the tourist advertisements are correct when they proclaim, “*Navidad* is the best of Puerto Rican culture.”

Puerto Ricans celebrate Christmas not as a single holiday, but as a season. *Las Navidades*, that is, the Christmas season begins in late November and ends in the middle of January.<sup>1</sup> During the Spanish colonial period (1493-1898), when Puerto Rican life was centered on agriculture, *Las Navidades* occupied the time between the coffee harvest and the planting of sugar cane (Malavet Vega 1987:40). In the twentieth century, after years of North American cultural influence, the Friday after Thanksgiving marks the beginning of the season.

During this season, Puerto Ricans celebrate the birth of Christ and a number of associated biblical stories through several holidays and festive events. These stories include the visitation of the magi, the annunciation of Mary, the doubt of Joseph, the

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<sup>1</sup> The information in this section is compiled from a number of sources including; Malavet Vega, Pedro. *Navidad que vuelve, la tradición y el cantar navideño en Puerto Rico* (Santo Domingo, Republica Dominicana: Editorial Corripio, 1987); various interviews; and my own fieldwork experiences in Puerto Rico during the 2002-2003 Christmas season.

announcement to the shepherds, the flight into Egypt, and the massacre of the innocents by Herod. The visitation and adoration of the magi, in particular, forms the basis of much of the celebration. Central to the idea of Christmas in Puerto Rico, any customary gift exchange can be symbolically linked to the presentation of the gifts to the Christ child by the magi.

During Spanish colonial times, almost all Puerto Ricans were practicing Roman Catholics. Since American occupation, a small but growing percentage of Puerto Ricans have converted to Protestantism or Evangelical Christianity. This trend is particularly apparent when one walks along the streets of Old San Juan. Even in this center for colonial Spanish architecture one can find Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and other congregations. Although there may be a variety of ways Christmas is celebrated in Puerto Rican churches, almost all Puerto Ricans take part in the many public festivities. Christmas is an unofficial national holiday in Puerto Rico. Colleges, libraries and some government offices are often closed during the season. For all Puerto Ricans, regardless of religion or degree of religiosity, Christmas is a time for friends and family to gather and celebrate with food and song.

Since Puerto Ricans are traditionally Catholic, church services have been an important part of the Christmas tradition. Unique religious services begin nine days prior to Christmas Eve. The *misas de aguinaldo*, that is, *aguinaldo* masses are celebrated at 5:30 in the morning on each of the nine days that precede Christmas Eve. Although the word *aguinaldo* in Puerto Rican Spanish, means “gift,” it can also refer to a Christmas song, especially if performed in a lively folk style. This use of the word equates the playing of Christmas songs with the giving of gifts. During *aguinaldo* masses Puerto

Rican folk music is substituted for the usual worship music. This particular folk music, known as *música jíbara*, provides a festive and rural quality that connects the modern urban Christmas celebration to the rural and traditional *jíbaro*, or idyllic peasant farmer (the significance of this connection will be explored in Chapter Three). What is known as the folk or *jíbaro* ensemble includes the guitar, the *cuatro* (a small guitar-like instrument with five courses), and the *güiro* (a hollowed-out gourd scrapper). Parishioners bring their own instruments such as *maracas* (shakers), *palitos* (wooden sticks similar to the Cuban *claves*), and *panderetas* (single-frame hand-drums) to the mass. During the performance of the *aguinaldos*, they play and sing along to familiar Christmas melodies.

Seated on the altar during *aguinaldo* masses and other services during the Christmas season is what I would call a “living nativity.” Like the traditional wood-carved nativity depicting the birth of Christ or the adoration of the magi, which can be found in each Puerto Rican home and town plaza, the “living nativity” includes parishioners dressed in costumes that evoke the same imagery. Dressed as the holy family, they sit on the altar during the service. Although Mary and Joseph are usually adults, children are often dressed as shepherds, angels, or in nineteenth century *jíbaro* costumes. To begin the mass, the nativity group processes in like a Christmas pageant. The mass ends each morning as the sun rises, symbolizing the rising of Christ from the dead. At the conclusion of the service the parishioners, lead by the “living nativity” and the children, parade through the streets continuing to sing and play *aguinaldos*.

On Christmas Eve, called *Nochebuena*, family and friends gather in celebration. The evening concludes with a candlelit midnight mass known as *la Misa de Gallo*. On

*Navidad* (Christmas Day), families gather again to celebrate. Although Christmas day is not the traditional day for Puerto Rican children to receive gifts, Santa Claus now visits many children on that day. Santa Claus, Christmas trees, and Christmas lights constitute a trio of North American influences. Although some Puerto Ricans resent their inclusion, these icons have nonetheless become part of the Christmas traditions of Puerto Rico. Images of Santa Claus and Christmas trees adorn storefronts and homes throughout the island. Christmas lights decorate homes and public spaces too. Town governments aggressively adorn town plazas with lights and decorations

December 28<sup>th</sup> marks *Día de los Santos Inocentes*. On this day Puerto Ricans celebrate a biblical story that tells of the slaughter of the innocents. After the birth of Christ, Herod, then king of Judea, ordered his soldiers to kill many Hebrew children in an attempt to prevent Jesus from fulfilling prophesy and becoming “king of the Jews.” This holiday is celebrated most prominently as the *Día de las Máscaras* (Day of the Masks) in the town of Hatillo. At one time the men of the town used to dress as Herod’s soldiers and process from house to house, “kidnapping” the first born boy from the homes of families and friends. To recover the children the families would offer the “soldiers” gifts. Today, the fiesta is celebrated like a carnival parade. Participants dressed in exotic and colorful costumes, parade through the town and party in the town’s plaza.

Puerto Ricans celebrate New Year’s Eve by gathering for parties, setting off firecrackers, watching yearly musical extravaganzas on television, and performing a traditional New Year’s toast called *El Brindis del Bohemio*. The celebration continues on New Year’s Day. January 6<sup>th</sup> marks the Epiphany or the *Día de los Reyes*. Since it signifies the adoration of the magi, it is on that day that Puerto Rican children receive

gifts brought to them by the three kings during the night. On the eve of this holiday the children prepare for the magi's visit by placing grass in shoeboxes for the camels to feed on. In the morning they receive mysterious gifts left by the kings. This holiday is the apex of the Christmas season. Towns hold festivals with outdoor celebrations of the Catholic mass, food, music and vendors. The *Fortaleza*, or Governor's mansion in Old San Juan is inundated with families. They wait in a line that stretches for miles, obstructing traffic throughout San Juan so that the children can receive small gifts from the Governor.

Three Kings Day, in many respects, marks the end of the season. Most people return to school and work on January 7<sup>th</sup>. Traditionally, however, the season continues with a feast day for each of the three kings. These days begin on the 6<sup>th</sup> and end on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January. Starting on January 9<sup>th</sup>, some Puerto Ricans celebrate the *Octavas*, a liturgical festival commemorating the Virgin Mother. These eight days of mild celebration close the Christmas season. In addition to the *Octavas*, Puerto Ricans once celebrated the *Octavitas*, eight additional days that served as both the termination of the Christmas season and a prelude to Lent.

Puerto Ricans associate several traditional foods with the Christmas season. The *lechón asado* is a piglet roasted on a spit over an open flame. The roasting of this piglet serves as the focus for a gathering of friends and family that can occur at any time during the season. Often families will roast a *lechón* on one of the major holidays such as *Nochebuena*, *Navidad*, or *el Día de los Reyes*. Other foods that are eaten at family gatherings include *arroz con gandules* (rice with pigeon peas), *arroz con dulce* (a kind of rice pudding), and *pasteles* (mashed *platinos* filled with meat and wrapped in boiled

banana tree leaves). Common beverages include, rum, *pitorro* (a homemade and very potent liquor made from sugar cane), and *coquito* (a kind of eggnog made from coconut milk, rum, milk, egg and cinnamon).

### **The Parranda**

Pedro Malavet Vega author of *Navidad que vuelve, la tradición y el cantar navideño en Puerto Rico* writes, “perhaps there is no institution more firm and venerable in our Christmas traditions than the *parranda*” (Malavet Vega 1987:40). According to Gilberto Rivera, a Boston-area salsa bandleader, “The *parranda* is the essence of Christmas in Puerto Rico.”<sup>2</sup> A *parranda*, also known as a *trulla*, is a group of friends and family who go from one house to another, singing and playing Christmas music during the night. These *parrandas* occur unexpectedly throughout the entire Christmas season. I have witnessed *parrandas* that have included fewer than twenty participants, as well as *parrandas* that have included nearly one hundred people. Often the *parranda* begins after ten o’clock at night. When it arrives, unsuspecting friends or relatives are surprised by the music.

Once the musicians have congregated on someone’s porch, they begin an *asalto navideno*, or a Christmas assault. This song awakens and greets the homeowner who must come to the door and let the musicians in. The musicians squeeze into the house and continue to perform *aguinaldos*. The host will then offer the guests traditional refreshment, so that a party can ensue for some time. Subsequently, the entire group, including the host, ventures to another house where the process repeats. This ritual

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<sup>2</sup> Gilberto Rivera, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. Boston, Massachusetts, 19 May 2002

occurs several times throughout the night, surprising and accumulating persons until dawn.

*Parrandas* are linked to the celebration of Christmas by their symbolic character. In my view, they are a performative representation of the essence of Christmas. Symbolically they represent the exchange of gifts that lies at the heart of Christmas celebration; the musicians offer music and the surprised recipients provide food and drink in return. *Parrandas* also symbolize specific religious events. It seems to me that this tradition can be linked to two biblical stories. A *parranda* can represent Mary and Joseph searching for a place to stay the night, and birth the Christ child. In this biblical story the holy family goes from one Bethlehem inn to another inn until one innkeeper allows them to reside in the manger. In this way the *parranda* exhibits a link to the *posada* tradition of Mexico, which includes a pageant-like reenactment and parade of the holy family. Like the *parranda*, the *posada* group visits homes and sings specific Christmas songs. *Parrandas* can also represent the journey of the magi and the presentation of their gifts to the baby Jesus. As mentioned above, this story is central to the Puerto Rican celebration of Christmas.

The tradition of the *parranda* is not completely unique to Puerto Rico, similar traditions exist in Venezuela, and elsewhere in Latin America. Puerto Ricans, however, have developed unique ways of doing *parrandas* as well as an exciting music to accompany them. Historically, the *parranda* is rooted in the religious traditions of the Puerto Rican countryside. It is associated with the traditional singing of the rosaries and a tradition known as the *promesa*. The *promesa* is a musical covenant that a family makes with God. Through the singing of the rosary and Christmas songs a family offers

a musical promise to the baby Jesus, the three wise men, or a patron saint. In exchange, the family is granted protection for up to thirty-three years, symbolic of the lifetime of Christ. As part of this agreement, the family brings a *parranda* to its extended family and friends.

According to Malavet Vega, nineteenth century authors describe varied ways of carrying out a *parranda*. In the nineteenth century there were distinctions between *parrandas* carried out on foot and those that were accomplished on horseback (Malvet Vega 1987:40-41). Francisco Vasallo considers the *parrandas* on horseback to be those of the gentry while the *parranda* by foot was that of the poorest Puerto Ricans. These *parrandas* are said to have traveled great distances from their homes, playing and singing the entire day and night of the *Día de los Reyes*. In his book *El Gíbaro*, Manuel Alfonso describes the peasant lifestyle of Puerto Rico during the middle of the nineteenth century. He identifies a difference between the *parrandas* of the country, that is, the mountainous interior of Puerto Rico, and the coastal cities. Alfonso asserts that the *parrandas* of the city are not as legitimate as those of the country because they do not retain a rural folk character. This belief persists today. Urban *parrandas*, which reflect modern, commercial, and North American influences, are perceived as being less traditional than those of interior. Puerto Ricans believe that the *parrandas* of the mountains maintain a nineteenth century character.

### **The Christmas Music of Puerto Rico**

Music is a particularly important aspect of Christmas in Puerto Rico. Christmas music is ever-present during the celebrations and rituals described above. Music is inseparable from the traditions of the *aguinaldo* mass, *promesa*, and *parranda*. This

rhythmic music is performed with an excitement and verve that generates an atmosphere of intense celebration and festivity. Since it shares common themes, origin, and styles, we can consider Christmas music in Puerto Rico to be its own genre.

Malavet Vega identifies five discrete eras during the historical evolution of Christmas music in Puerto Rico. He begins with the Spanish colonial period. Columbus first arrived in Puerto Rico in 1493; from 1510 until 1898 Spain administered Puerto Rico. During this period the cultural traditions from Spain were brought to Puerto Rico forming the basis of Puerto Rican cultural heritage. When Columbus arrived there were tens of thousands of Tainos living on the island, but by the end of the sixteenth century the indigenous population was decimated. Slaves brought from West Africa during this period added to the island's cultural diversity. Today, Puerto Ricans consider their culture to be a blend of these three roots.

Musically this period was dominated by the Spanish *villancico*. The *villancico* developed in fifteenth century Spain from the lyric structure of medieval dances such as the *virelai* and the *ballade* as well as from the poetic conventions Moorish *jézel* (Manuel Alvarez 1988: Part 1). During the fifteenth and first half of the sixteenth century the *villancico* became secular polyphonic style. In the second half of the sixteenth century it was used in sacred worship and acquired sacred themes while continuing to be sung in the vernacular (Pope and Laird 2002). Eventually it came to be associated specifically with Christmas themes.

The *villancico* evolved differently throughout Latin America. In Puerto Rico it developed a homophonic and pastoral character. It is most often in three-four meter and has considerable compositional flexibility. According to Francisco Lopez Cruz, the

eminent Puerto Rican musicologist, modern *villancicos* have no specific rhythm, no harmonic limitations and can utilize any instrumentation. They can use any poetic formula to set their religious themes (Lopez Cruz 1967:185). The term *aguinaldo* refers to Christmas carols thought to have developed from the *villancico* in the New World. In Puerto Rico they must utilize the rhythms, harmonic progressions, poetic conventions, and instrumentation of *música jíbara*. This is a style of rural folk music that is generally faster, and more syncopated than the *villancico* (Lopez Cruz 1967:185). The *aguinaldo* provides the basis for much of the music that accompanies the *parranda*.

In 1898 as a result of the Spanish-American War, Puerto Rico became a colony of the United States. With the addition of some degree of self-rule, this political configuration persists to the present day. During this era, Malavet Vega asserts that the Christmas music of Puerto Rico also came under the cultural influence of the United States. As the economy of Puerto Rico modernized, the island experienced the growth of mass media in the form of phonographs and radio. The control of this mass media, however, was in the hands of U.S. companies. At first this media promoted mostly American Christmas music, but later it came to play Puerto Rican Christmas music recorded by Puerto Rican immigrants to New York City. These recordings included performances by groups such as Rafael Hernández's Trío Borinquen, Grupo Victoria, and Canario y su Grupo. According to Ruth Glasser, the manner in which the North American phonograph and record industry functioned paralleled other neocolonial capitalist business arrangements. This arrangement consisted of the extraction of natural resources, which were refined and processed abroad, and then resold to the people of their country of origin. In this way the music industry recorded Puerto Rican musicians,

sometimes in Puerto Rico, but mostly in New York City. Subsequently companies pressed the records in the United States and then marketed them to the population of the island. The acquisition of radio and record players, also made in the United States, allowed U.S. record companies to virtually ignore Puerto Rico as a recording site while simultaneously flooding the island with recordings of Puerto Rican music recorded or pressed in New York (Glasser 1995:40, 50, 131-132). As a result of the growing commercial influence of the United States, Malavet Vega asserts that the popularity of traditional *aguinaldos* diminished in the cities while it persisted in the countryside, where life experiences less North American commercial influence.

Malavet Vega describes the period from 1945-1960 as a time when the Christmas music of Puerto Rico became increasingly urban. Christmas music came to be written and performed in popular styles such as the *guaracha* and *bolero*. With economic progress came an expansion of the Puerto Rican middle class and the production of affordable radios and record players. Media, for the first time, became widely accessible. During this period two developments had a profound impact on the genre of Christmas music, (1) the development of nationalist policies by the newly formed commonwealth government, and (2) the foundation of the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña that encouraged the preservation of traditional genres and cultural practices.

Malavet Vega labels the era from 1960-1980 the “Invasion of the *Tunas*” (Malavet Vega 1987:67).<sup>3</sup> During this period, Spanish-style student choruses called *tunas* were immensely popular. These groups were modeled after the Tuna de la

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<sup>3</sup> Malavet Vega uses the term “Irrupten las Tunas,” meaning irruption or invasion of the *tunas*. I believe he uses this term not as an indicator of cultural invasion but in the same way one might refer to the musical “British Invasion” of the United States led by the Beatles and other groups during the 1960’s. This term does not imply an “invasion” that threatens the cultural balance of the society. Instead it refers to the excitement and interest that surrounds the reception of the music in a new market.

Universidad Central de Madrid that had visited Puerto Rico several times. In Spain, the *tuna* tradition stems from the sixteenth century. Since that time, *tunas* or large student *trovador* groups have sung and played various instruments for the community. In the twentieth century Spanish *tunas* continued to utilize the traditional guitars and mandolins and perform in sixteenth century costumes.

The *tunas* that developed in Puerto Rico during the 1960's were modeled directly after those from Spain. They also utilized Spanish instruments such and wore the renaissance costumes. The most famous of the Puerto Rican *tunas* is the Tuna de Cayey. Gigi Maldonado, president of the Tuna de Cayey, explains the popularity of the *tuna*, "The *tuna* became popular in Puerto Rico because, as a serenading tradition, it resembled the *parranda*."<sup>4</sup> She also told me that while the Spanish *tunas* had included only men, the Puerto Rican *tunas* have always included both men and women. More recently they have become a way of preserving the *parranda* tradition, and providing positive musical activities for high school and college students. I believe that interest in the *tunas*, like the interest in *musica jíbara* reflects an Iberocentrism that is part of Puerto Rico's official nationalism. The development of a Puerto Rican national identity that gives preference to its Spanish roots, while giving less recognition to other influences, will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Malavet Vega describes the period from 1980 to the present as a "commercial explosion." Today there are many musicians and groups that focus their careers on the production of Christmas music. Most groups release one Christmas album per year. Commercial Christmas music ranges from traditional *aguinaldos* and *villancicos* to salsa,

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<sup>4</sup> Gigi Maldonado, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 30 December 2002.

*merengue* and *rock en español*. During the Christmas season both commercial and traditional Christmas music can be experienced constantly on the radio, television, festivals, and shopping malls.

## **Summary**

Christmas in Puerto Rico is a time of great festivity and celebration. Puerto Ricans celebrate Christmas as a season that begins in November and ends in January. During this season they celebrate several holidays and festivals. Catholic religious traditions, folk traditions, music, food, and some North American cultural influence characterizes these celebrations. The *parranda* tradition is central to the celebration of Christmas in Puerto Rico. *Parrandas* are surprise Christmas serenades that can occur unexpectedly throughout the season. Music is a particularly important aspect of Christmas in Puerto Rico. The historical development of Puerto Rican Christmas music can be divided into five eras, the Spanish colonial period (1510-1898), the development of mass media and Americanization (1898-1945), The period of urbanization (1945-1960), The “Invasion of the *Tunas*” (1960-1980), and the current period of commercial explosion (1980-present). Throughout this history, Puerto Rican Christmas music has experienced a stylistic diversification from the *villancico* to *boleros*, *tunas*, and salsa. Throughout this diversification the genre has remained focused on the musical conventions of *aguinaldo*.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PARRANDA AND MODERNITY

This chapter explores the nature of the *parranda* in its modern context, particularly the ways the *parranda* has changed during the twentieth century. In his book, *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World*, Philip V. Bohlman writes, “folk music in the modern world undergoes many processes of change, but two large processes—modernization and urbanization—dominate and influence many of these other processes” (Bohlman 1988:124). This chapter discusses how modernization and urbanization have affected the *parranda* tradition. In addition, it considers how resultant processes such as commercialization, and North American cultural influence have altered this tradition. Paradoxically, modernity has caused a decline in the actual practice of *parrandas*, while simultaneously generating greater accessibility to its music and a greater interest in its traditions. In addition, as the *parranda* changes to address the obstacles presented by modern life, its practice has become displaced from its rural origins.

In *El Gíbaro: cuadro de costumbres de la isla de Puerto Rico* Manuel Alfonso provides the oldest account of the *parranda* tradition. First published in 1849, his description of the *parranda* and other *jíbaro* traditions captivated generations of Puerto Ricans. He sets forth the image of the *jíbaro* as a romantic country farmer living a simple life in the mountainous interior of the island. This imagery extends to the *jíbaro*'s traditions including the *parranda*. Describing a *parranda* he experienced, he writes,

It was eight o'clock at night, the moon was very clear and the clouds seemed as far away as the great sheet of linen that covered slope of the mountains...We were late in arriving at the first house; traversing the

ground by foot, and placing ourselves at the foot of the stairs: one country musician accompanied us playing a new *aguinaldo*. The verses came from one of the singers and he changed it into a customary greeting to the inhabitants of the house and desired for them all kinds of prosperities, if they would give us candies, sweet breads and a million other things. Concluding the song, the family appeared at the top of the stairway with the head of the household and invited us to go up and to have some refreshments, the very best that they had (Alfonso 1849:130, 132).<sup>5</sup>

Alfonso sets forth the idea of the *parranda* as a *jíbaro* tradition. This concept has subsequently become central to the celebration of Christmas. The imagery associated with the *parranda* includes *jíbaro* musicians wearing traditional clothing and playing folk instruments. The *parranda* is imagined to move from one small country house to another while the *jíbaro* musicians happily sing *aguinaldos*. Today, although Christmas in Puerto Rico celebrates the *jíbaro* and traditional culture, the kind of celebrations one finds throughout Puerto Rico are quite unlike this romantic image. The *parrandas* in Puerto Rican cities, especially the San Juan metropolitan area, are profoundly different from the Alfonso's description of the *parranda*.

Urban Puerto Ricans imagine that *parrandas* of the countryside still maintain a nineteenth century character. In some respects these rural *parrandas* do preserve tradition; they are perhaps more spontaneous, they are often on foot, and include more of the traditional *seises* and *aguinaldos* than the urban *parrandas* do. However, even the *parrandas* of the countryside have experienced some of the same changes that have greatly altered the practice of the *parrandas* in the cities.

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<sup>5</sup> This translation is my own.

## Description of the Modern Parranda

In order to contextualize my discussion of the *parranda* in modern Puerto Rico, I offer below descriptions of two *parrandas* I attended. These accounts, expanded from my fieldnotes, are intended to help the reader understand the experience of the *parranda* in modern Puerto Rico. In addition, I have provided transcriptions of some of the music that was played at these events. These transcriptions include the selection's melody, lyrics and harmonic progression. For a discussion of the rhythms and instrumentation that accompanies these examples see Chapter Four.

On December 23, 2002 I attended a *parranda* in Old San Juan. Many *parrandas* begin with the musicians gathering at someone's home to start the progression to other houses. Instead of beginning the *parranda* with this core group of musicians, I was instead invited to receive the *parranda* at one of the houses that was to be visited. Since *parrandas* are becoming rarer, and because people's lives are increasingly busy, the families that this *parranda* would visit were notified in advance.

I arrived at the house around ten o'clock at night. The family was preparing for the guests by laying out food and drink. They had put out meats, cheese and crackers, had placed beers in a cooler, and set up a bar with soda, rum and other beverages. In addition, they had put out bottles of homemade *coquito* and *pitorro*. As we waited for the *parranda* to arrive, we made conversation and watched television. Shortly after midnight we heard the *parranda* approaching. From some distance, we heard people singing and playing. As the group approached the house, the sounds became louder. Soon the music was quite loud, and the group was standing directly in front of the house.

The family and I went downstairs to greet them. There were more than fifty people singing and playing in front of their home. According to the participants, this

group was larger than usual. Apparently, they had started much earlier in the evening and had accumulated many persons along the way. They played and sang with tremendous enthusiasm. They performed a song entitled, “Alegre Cantar” meaning “Happy to Sing.” Its lyrics include the greeting, “saludos, saludos, vengo a saludar,” that is, “greetings, greetings, I come to greet you” (see fig. 1).

**Fig. 1 Alegre Cantar<sup>6</sup>**

The musical score for "Alegre Cantar" is presented in four staves. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 120. The key signature has one flat (Bb), and the time signature is 2/4. The lyrics are written below the notes, and guitar chords (Dm and A7) are indicated above the staff. The lyrics are: "Sa - lu - do, sa - lu - do, ven - go a sa - lu - dar. Sa - lu - do, sa - lu - do, ven - go a sa - lu - dar. A lo I - sa - be - li - no bo - ni - to can - tar. A lo I - sa - be - li - no bo - ni - to can - tar." The score includes measure numbers 6, 10, and 14.

The ensemble was a diverse group. Although most of the participants were adults, some families brought their children too, including a few infants. The participants also represented the ethnic diversity of Puerto Rico ranging from Afro-Puerto Rican to Caucasian with many gradations of bi-raciality in between. Located at the front of the large group was a cluster of musicians. At the heart of this cluster was a trio of middle-aged men. One played the *cuatro*, another played the guitar, and a third played the *güiro*.

<sup>6</sup> The transcriptions in this chapter are compiled from a variety of sources including field recordings.

This trio led the entire group. They chose what houses to go to and when to leave one house for the next. The *cuatro* player chose the songs and sang their verses. Although these men are considered professional musicians when they perform in other settings, at this *parranda* they volunteered their talents and provided musical leadership for their peers. Surrounding this trio was a group of musicians playing non-traditional *parranda* instruments including, saxophone, trombone, clarinet, *bongos*, and upright bass. In addition to these musicians, the rest of the group sang the choruses, clapped their hands, and played additional percussion instruments like *maracas*, *güiros*, *claves* and tambourines.

After the completion of the *asalto*, or greeting song, the group entered the home. As the large group proceeded into the house, the family was not sure that everyone would fit. They told me that they did not mind letting the entire group in because they knew almost everyone. They were confident that the few people they did not know personally, were friends of their friends. Upstairs the entire group squeezed into the living room and enjoyed the food and drink that had been set out for them. They sang and played more songs.

The group stayed there for about a half an hour eating, drinking, singing, playing, talking, and dancing. Then the musicians, deciding it was time to move on to the next house began playing a song that signals for the group to exit. This song, “No Me Da la Gana,” was written by Ramon Andino (see fig. 2). Its lyrics describe how, although no one wants to leave such a good party, the *parranda* is ending, and everyone is leaving. After this song, the family went downstairs and joined the group as it moved along to the next house for a repeat of the same activities.



**Fig. 3 Traigo esta Trulla**

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 110. The melody is on a single treble clef staff. The lyrics are written below the notes. Chord markings (A, B7, E) are placed above the staff at the beginning of each measure. The score consists of three lines of music, with measure numbers 1, 5, and 9 indicated at the start of each line. The lyrics are: Trai-go és - ta tru - lla pa - ra que te le - van - tes; trai-go és - ta tru - lla pa - ra que te le - van - tes Es - ta; tru - lla es - tá ca - lien - te és ta tru lla es - tá que ar - de.

After we played our greeting, the group enjoyed some food and drinks. Then we began to sing other *parranda* songs. Once again, one of our hosts went inside and brought back instruments for everyone to play along. A neighbor arrived with his *conga* drum and joined in. The men, who had been enjoying rum and beer for most of the evening, were especially festive. After the group had played a few of the common *parranda* songs, one of the men began singing “The Bomba Song,” which functions more like a poetry game. Although the chorus of the song sings about the song-game itself, using the word “bomba,” this song should not be confused with the Afro-Puerto Rican drumming tradition. Notwithstanding the name, the two are not related.<sup>7</sup> This song has the same rhythmic structure as other *parranda* songs. After the chorus is sung a break occurs, the musicians stop and any member of the *parranda* can fill the break with spoken poetry. Whether impromptu or memorized this poetry must confine to a specific rhythmic and poetic structure. It must be four lines, each containing eight syllables. The

<sup>7</sup> Bomba drumming scholar Sal Ferreras believes there is no musical connection between these two styles, personal communication.

second and fourth lines must rhyme. The poetry can refer to anything related to Christmas, the *parranda*, or the friends and family present.

Traditionally men may have used the *bomba* poetry to court women, poetically professing their love. Today, participants tend to use these poems to make comic remarks about each other. If the poetry satisfies the metric and rhyme qualifications the song returns to the chorus and breaks again for another poem. If the poetry fails to meet the specifications, an extra chorus is inserted. This chorus sings, “Tu sabes na” slang for “you know nothing,” therefore, mocking the improviser. On that evening their poems aggressively mocked each other. In particular they teased one man for consuming too much alcohol. When he tried to retort with a poem, he failed to rhyme it correctly and the group mocked him again. I also became the object of some substantial mocking, mostly for not being Puerto Rican or for having trouble speaking Spanish.

After “The Bomba Song” the music began to shift away from *parranda* songs. Rivera led the group in some romantic *boleros*. Later an interesting thing happened; the group began to sing rock songs from the seventies. I was impressed with how many Rivera knew how to play, including “Hotel California” by the Eagles, and “Dust in the Wind” by Kansas. According to Rivera, rock music was very important to him and his cousins during their childhood. One of Rivera’s cousins remarked on how ironic it was that I came to Puerto Rico to study their traditions, yet instead of singing *parranda* songs, they were playing “Dust in the Wind.” To me, the *parranda* tradition seemed flexible enough to embrace other kinds of music. It seemed that as long as the ensemble played the greetings, ending songs, and a few of the other *parranda* songs, they could add additional music without breaching tradition.

## Decline, Change and Modernity

According to one Puerto Rican disc jockey, “there is no Christmas without *parranda*.” Yet there are fewer *parrandas* than ever in Puerto Rico. There is a general opinion among Puerto Ricans that the *parranda* tradition is in decline. Ramon Andino leads Los Andinos, a family musical group dedicated to performing Puerto Rican Christmas music. He has been an active performer and composer of Puerto Rican Christmas music since 1955. Since Ramon Andino directs a professional ensemble, each year his peers look to him to provide music for their *parrandas*.<sup>8</sup> Andino asserts that over the last twenty-five years the amount of *parrandas* his family gives has been profoundly reduced. They used to do two or three *parrandas* each week during the Christmas season. Now they do one each week or as few as four each year.

It seems to me that the decline of this tradition can be directly attributed to the modernization and urbanization of Puerto Rico. Accompanying these changes, commercialization, and North American cultural hegemony have also contributed to this decline. When the *parranda* tradition continues, its practice has to be altered to adjust to the obstacles that modernity presents. *Parranda* musicians and participants have developed interesting ways of altering their traditions in order to continue practicing this ritual in the modern world.

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<sup>8</sup> It is customary for amateur musicians to provide music for *parrandas* voluntarily. For providing music they receive refreshment and hospitality. Today, many folk musicians like Ramon Andino work professionally by giving concerts, and recording. Their communities look to them to provide the *parranda* music. Professional folk musicians continue to provide music for their friends and family’s *parrandas* voluntarily and without financial compensation. Perhaps as a result of the commercialization and capitalization of Puerto Rican society, some musicians are now offering their services as “*parrandas* for hire.” This arrangement allows people who know no musicians to hire a stranger to lead their festivities. I suspect that this is a rather rare occurrence; none of my informants, including the musicians, mentioned it. I observed this phenomenon’s existence in an internet advertisement. I believe that if they do occur, “*parrandas* for hire” simultaneously reflect the decline in available musicians, commercialization of the tradition, and continued interest and demand for *parranda* performances.

Puerto Rico has experienced a tremendous urbanization in the last fifty years. The migration from the country side to the cities and from the cities to the suburbs has diminished family-centered living patterns. In small rural towns families and acquaintances may live within walking distance of one and other. This facilitates the gathering of the community for events like the *parranda*. In urban Puerto Rico, where families and friends may not be living on the same street or even the same town, it becomes difficult to spontaneously gather for events such as the *parranda*. As Walter Ramos told me,

In Puerto Rico you have the break up of the community. As people become more affluent they move out into the suburbs. As the economy becomes more centered on industry, farms close. When the farms close you have all that land left unused. What do you do with all of that unused land? You develop it because it is not economically feasible to have it sitting there. So you sell the farm, they make a development; people migrate to those nice concrete developments with nice tile floors. But it breaks up the community that provides the crucible for the development of musical styles or for organizing *parrandas*. It is a lot easier to organize a *parranda* where people know each other, where everyone hangs-out, and where they have common experiences. In the developments everyone is a nomad, and it becomes much more work to organize a *parranda*.<sup>9</sup>

One way the *parranda* tradition has adjusted to the decentralization of communities throughout the urban sprawl of modern Puerto Rico is by using cars to progress from one house to another. Although it alters the tradition slightly, motorized vehicles provide a comfortable way to reach one's family especially if they are living in the many suburbs of metropolitan San Juan. When many cars travel in a group they use their flasher lights to indicate that they are on a *parranda* and should not be separated.

Further complicating *parrandas*, gated communities have become the preferred way for the middle class to live. According to Yara Ordóñez, a Puerto Rican musician

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<sup>9</sup> Walter Ramos, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. Albany, New York, 9 November, 2002.

and *parranda* participant, sometimes these developments do not allow *parrandas* at all.<sup>10</sup> Some boards of directors claim that the *parrandas* are disturbing to the neighbors. When these developments or *urbanizaciones* do allow *parrandas*, the tradition has to be altered. The *parranda* can not surprise the inhabitants. Instead, the *parranda* must stop at the security gate and the inhabitants must be informed of their presence and allow them to enter. Sometimes those who are visited are informed about the *parranda* before hand. This way they can make the guards aware that they will receive a *parranda*. If this is done they can still be partially surprised when the *parranda* arrives. Even in non-gated communities the *parranda* has become less spontaneous. The pace of urban life requires that *parrandas* be planned at least a few days in advance so that they can ensure many participants.

Crime, a major concern in Puerto Rico, has also greatly affected the *parranda* tradition. Some musicians are afraid to be out on the streets at night. Other people are afraid to open their door to any surprise. Ramon Andino told me a story he had heard about robbers that dressed up like musicians, performed *parrandas* and mugged people when they came to the door. Whether this story is true or not, it certainly makes people think twice before opening their door to a surprise *parranda*. Alfonso Orona, a Puerto Rican student, described an event that explains how people have become fearful of any unwarned activity. He told me that, during the 90's when the crime in San Juan was particularly bad, a *parranda* group came to a friend's door and yelled "*asalto*," which is a common way to surprise ones friends or family before beginning a greeting song. The neighbors thought the voices were calling help. Subsequently they called the police

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<sup>10</sup> Yara Meléndez Ordóñez, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2 January, 2003.

believing that there was a criminal assault in progress.<sup>11</sup> When I asked Ramon Andino how crime has affected his *parrandas*, he told me that he is sometimes afraid when he is giving them late at night in unfamiliar neighborhoods. He explained that, Tito Rojo, another *parranda* musician, was mugged while returning from a *parranda*.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to urbanization, commercialism has affected the *parranda* in multiple and paradoxical ways. Each year composers and performers release new commercial Christmas albums. One prevalent type of recording includes arrangements of popular *parranda* songs given in a *parranda* style. These recordings feature a large group of performers, ambient party noise, and amateur-sounding singing. They sound like commercial recordings of the *parranda* activity. These recordings have begun to replace both *parranda* musicians and *parrandas*. According to Yara Ordóñez, these recordings have been used on car stereos, for example, to give *parrandas*.<sup>13</sup> They replace the musicians and provide an adequate accompaniment for the singing participants. In addition, it has become popular to use these *parranda*-style recordings at family Christmas festivities. Instead of receiving a *parranda*, a family can play the commercial recordings of the *parranda* music on their stereos.

Each year companies capitalize on the interest in *parranda* music by releasing new versions of old songs. In 2002 Walmart released the “Cuerito Mix,” this included dance and hip-hop versions of the *parranda* songs. Although some Puerto Ricans believe that commercial influence has had a negative impact on the tradition, Alex Torres, a salsa bandleader living in Amsterdam, New York, conversely asserts that the commercial

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<sup>11</sup> Alfonso Orona, interview by the author. Boston, Massachusetts, 24 May, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Ramon Andino, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. Levittown, Puerto Rico, 4 January, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Yara Meléndez Ordóñez, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2 January, 2003.

versions of *parranda* songs encourage the preservation of the tradition. According to Torres, commercial recordings of *parranda* songs played in contemporary styles provide an accessible way for the younger generation to learn the traditional melodies and lyrics. Torres also cites computers and the internet to be important to the preservation and continuation of the tradition.<sup>14</sup> The ability to download *parranda* songs provides greater accessibility. I see this as paradoxical; although the music reaches a greater audience it is also profoundly altered.

Similar to the way mass media has allowed greater accessibility, modern telecommunications extend the ability of the *parranda* to reach people. Cell phones are sometimes used to see if people are home before they are surprised, or to invite friends to join a *parranda*. During a *parranda* participants often call friends or relatives on their cell phones. They point the phones out towards the group so that the person on the receiving end can hear the *parranda* music. This extends the *parranda* to a peripheral group of people. In a way this is like a mini *asalto*, as it often surprises the person on the receiving end with festive music.

Given the declining number of *parrandas* each year, other events have come to replace them during the schedule of the Christmas season. Public concerts have come to provide a gathering place and an occasion to celebrate Christmas and *parranda* music. Some Christmas concert events, such as those sponsored by the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, tend to be focused on music that is considered traditional. These events often promote the preservation of cultural heritage. Concerts by more commercial groups tend to be less focused on tradition and more widely attended. Christmas concerts at venues like San Juan's Roberto Clemente Stadium are particularly popular. These

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<sup>14</sup> Alex Torres, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. Amsterdam, New York, 15 November 2002.

resemble rock or salsa concerts, and are often sponsored by national or multinational corporations.

Since Puerto Rico became a colony of the United States in 1898, it has experienced tremendous North American cultural influence. Some aspects of cultural influence from the United States have contributed to the decline and change of the *parranda* tradition. Many Puerto Ricans have converted to Protestant Christianity, including Pentecostal denominations. According to José Masanet, a member of the Tuna de Cayey, Pentecostals and other groups do not allow *parrandas* because they are seen as including too much drinking and not enough celebration of Christ. According to Masanet, these religious groups have replaced the *parrandas* with celebrations called *matutinos*.<sup>15</sup> These Christmas parties are held at the church and include no alcohol consumption. At *matutinos* the music, whether live or recorded, pertains directly to Christ and Christianity.

Perhaps as result of Americanization and other cultural changes, there is lack of interest in the *parranda* and its music among the younger generations. This has caused a breakdown in the oral tradition. As the current musicians age, few younger musicians have the sufficient musical knowledge to replace them. According to Alex Torres, these young musicians are more interested in hip-hop, Jamaican-style dance hall music, or *rock en español*, than the folk music of Puerto Rico.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps because of their colonial status, and the prevalence of North American culture as well Puerto Rican national pride, there is, paradoxically, great concern and awareness in Puerto Rico regarding the decline of traditions. When I asked an elderly

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<sup>15</sup> José Masanet, interview by the author. Caguas, Puerto Rico, 27 December, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Alex Torres, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. Amsterdam, New York, 15, November 2002.

man at a corner store in the town of Aguada about the decline of *parrandas* he poignantly provided a metaphoric story. He told me that, the children of the town go to the store and buy soft drinks while the fruit, good for making juice, lies beneath the trees rotting. I took this to mean that the *parranda*, like the fruit is something indigenous to Puerto Rico that can be satisfying. The youth however, is more interested in commercial music, processed in other places.

The interest in other popular musics at the expense of folk music is not unique to the youngest generation. Gilberto Rivera once commented that it was his generation's fault that the *parranda* music has experienced such decline. Instead of focusing on folk music they were more interested in rock and salsa. Engaged in the same conversation, a woman of an older generation said it was also her generation's fault since they were more interested in *mambo* and *boleros*. I am not as critical about the interest in other musics. The *parranda* tradition has always embraced songs from other genres. After the greeting songs and Christmas music, the festivities have always included the possibility for the performance of popular music. A century ago this may have included waltzes and mazurkas, fifty years ago it may have been *gurachas* and *boleros*, perhaps now it is salsa, rock and other songs.

### **Preservation**

While the *parranda* tradition continues to decline and change, its preservation has become the goal of certain musical families and performance organizations. These ensembles preserve musical traditions by aggressively practicing them. According to Gigi Maldonado, Puerto Rico has a tradition of musical families that are dedicated to the continuation and preservation of certain types of music. Maldonado points out that the

Figueroa family has, for many generations, been regarded as Puerto Rico's classical music family. She asserts that there are other families that preserve the *bomba* and *plena* traditions.<sup>17</sup> The musical families that are dedicated to the preservation of the *parranda* tradition include the Familia Sanabria, which releases a Christmas album almost every year, the C3lon Zayas family, which includes the virtuoso *cuatro* player Edwin Col3n Zayas, and the Andino Family, whose ensemble is known as Los Andinos.

I had the privilege to interview members of the Andino family, including its leader Ramon Andino. He has been playing guitar, and singing on *parrandas* since the 1950's. For many years now he has been joined by his sons who also sing and play Puerto Rican folk music. In addition to recording six albums of Christmas music, Ramon Andino has written some of the most popular songs including the customary farewell song, "No Me Da la Gana." They continually practice and prepare for *parrandas* and recording sessions. In their community, they can be depended on to provide *parrandas* every year.<sup>18</sup>

Other performing groups like the Tuna de Cayey also preserve and continue the *parranda* tradition. As mentioned in Chapter One, a *tuna* is a student group that performs Christmas music. According to Gigi Maldonado, the president of the Tuna de Cayey, they perform *parrandas* several nights a week during the Christmas season.<sup>19</sup> Since the group is a non-profit organization, the proceeds from any concert they perform are used to supply the group with costumes, instruments, travel expenses and other needs. Each of the *tuna*'s more than twenty members is entitled to have the ensemble bring a

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<sup>17</sup> Gigi Maldonado, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 30 December 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Ramon Andino, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. Levittown, Puerto Rico, 4 January, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Gigi Maldonado, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 30 December 2002.

*parranda* to their family. Like Los Andinos, the *tuna* practices throughout the year in preparation for Christmas performances. As a professional ensemble, the *parrandas* that the *tuna* presents are more polished and organized than others.<sup>20</sup> They perform routines that combine their arrangements of *parranda* songs, and choreography.

### **The Parranda on the Mainland**

According to 2000 census, 3.4 million persons of Puerto Rican origin reside on the mainland United States. This compares with 3.8 million persons on living the island (Duany 2002:13). In his book, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move, Identities on the Island and in the United States*, Jorge Duany asserts that “Puerto Ricans—on and off the island—imagine themselves as part of a broader community that meets all the standard criteria of nationality, such as territory, language, and culture, except sovereignty” (Duany 2002:4). As one might expect, the *parranda* has experienced similar decline and change in the United States as it has on the island. In the United States however, the decentralization of families and the disinterest in folk music has been more profound. In addition, Gilberto Rivera cites the cold winter climate as an additional factor contributing to the decline of *parrandas* among Puerto Ricans living in the northeastern United States. According to Rivera, “most December nights are simply too cold to play music on your neighbor’s porch.”<sup>21</sup> Given the fluency of travel between Puerto Rico and the United States, many Puerto Ricans return to the island for Christmas. They never have a need to perform *parrandas* in the States. Also, the desire among immigrants to become more “American” negatively impacted the *parranda* tradition. This assimilation involves

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<sup>20</sup> Although the Tuna de Cayey is a professional ensemble, they perform *parrandas* voluntarily for their friends, families and communities. Like other musicians their reward is refreshment and hospitality.

<sup>21</sup> Gilberto Rivera, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. Boston, Massachusetts, 19, May 2002.

rejecting cultural practices such as the *parrandas* for more North American ways of celebrating Christmas. This topic will be discussed with regard to symbolism and cultural identity in Chapter Three.

The *parranda* tradition persists in the United States in the same way it does in Puerto Rico. Specific musicians and musical families provide *parrandas* to their respective Puerto Rican communities. I suspect that this occurs anywhere there is a substantial Puerto Rican population. I know that Rivera gives *parrandas* in Boston, Massachusetts, and Alex Torres gives them in Amsterdam, New York. From conversations with various musicians I have heard of *parrandas* being given Western Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York City as well.

### **Summary**

Manual Alfonso's *El Gíbaro* set forth the idea of the *parranda* that is central to Christmas in Puerto Rico. This idea is based on nineteenth century imagery, and the icon of the *jíbaro*. The *parrandas* given today bear little resemblance to these romanticized events. They have been greatly affected by urbanization, commercialization, and cultural influence from the United States. These cultural changes have not only caused a decline in the tradition, but have also profoundly changed it. Opposing this decline and change specific musical families and ensembles have become committed to the preservation of this tradition. The *parranda* has experienced similar decline and change among Puerto Ricans living on the mainland United States. As on the island, specific musicians have become dedicated to the continuation of this tradition.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE PARRANDA, SYMBOLISM AND CULTURAL NATIONALISM

#### Icons of Religion and Patriotism

On January 6, 2003, I attended the Three Kings Day festival in the small town of Juana Diaz, north of Ponce. Along with the pageant of the three kings, and the mass in the town's plaza, there were numerous kiosks and vendors selling various foods and crafts. Among the crafts, which ranged from homemade soaps to religious icons, I noticed some items that greatly altered my perception of Christmas in Puerto Rico.

Amid the baskets of *güiros* and jewelry, there were a number of arts and crafts that presented a strange juxtaposition of symbols. Initially, I noticed a particular set of wood carvings. Wood carvings of religious icons are considered a traditional folk art of Puerto Rico. Similar country wood carvings could be found at every tourist shop in Old San Juan. These, however, were the first ones I observed containing this particular symbolic juxtaposition. They were carvings of the magi, clothed in robes and crowns. Instead of presenting the Christ child with gold, frankincense, and myrrh, they instead presented him with the Puerto Rican flag. The wise man in the center held it outstretched in front of him. Its bright red, white, and blue contrasted with the magis' muted colors.

Located directly across from that display table were paintings that echoed the same intermingling of patriotic and religious symbols. These prints depicted a nativity scene in which the virgin mother swaddled the Christ child in the Puerto Rican flag. Around the corner, this symbolic conversation reverberated once again. This time, a third symbol was involved. Displayed on the center of a T-shirt were the three kings standing adjacent to a Puerto Rican flag, surrounded by a border. On the robes of the kings were

Taino-style glyphs. Written outside the black border was the name and date of the festival.

I should note that it is not unusual, but rather common to find patriotic arts and crafts being sold or displayed at festivals during the Christmas season. Nor is the integration of these particular symbolic domains an abnormal occurrence. I have also noted this relationship among visual images in newspapers and magazines. Common are visual depictions that encourage the viewer to associate Christmas with folk traditions, especially that of the *parranda*. These depictions often allude to the tradition of the *parranda* by the simple representation of the folk instruments that have come to be associated with folk music in Puerto Rico, the guitar, *cuatro*, *maracas*, *güiro*, and *pandereta*.

An advertisement from one of San Juan's daily newspapers, *El Nuevo Dia*, provides an example of the visual depiction of folk instruments alone representing the idea of Christmas. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, 2002 *El Nuevo Dia* ran an advertisement for the Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria also known as the BBVA bank of Puerto Rico. It depicts the *cuatro*, *maracas*, and *güiro*, without any other visual allusion to religious or cultural aspects of Christmas. Along the lower perimeter of the *cuatro* is written, "animate your Christmas, give yourself to the next year to begin paying," referring to a loan agreement. Perhaps it is suggesting that one should animate their Christmas in the same way that a *parranda* celebration would. It is clear that the folk instruments, which remind us of the *parranda*, in turn represent Christmas itself.

A second advertisement, found in the December issue of the *telenovela* digest *Vea*, contains only a gigantic Ritz cracker with jingles attached to it. This imagery hints

at the tambourine style of *pandereta* which is popular in modern *parrandas*. In the lower right hand corner of the ad, there is a box of Ritz crackers above which is written, “It is enough to have Ritz.” This advertisement references the *parranda*, and by extension Christmas, through the simple juxtaposition of two of its essential elements, musical instruments and snack food. It entails suggestion; one ought to stock Ritz crackers in their home, in case they receive a *parranda* unexpectedly

A third item, which I viewed on display at the Casa Aboy art gallery in Miramar, San Juan, was a painting depicting the three kings. The painting was designed to resemble the stained glass depictions one might find in a Catholic church. Although the magi were dressed in their traditional clothing, they were also engaging in a *parranda*, with the Puerto Rican country side behind them. Each of the magi carried a traditional folk instrument. One played a *güiro*, another had a guitar, and the third held the *maracas*. At the base of the painting, as if part of the stained glass window, was written in gothic script, “I saw the kings that happily came singing *aguinaldos*, to my nation.” The manner in which religious and national iconography are integrated in this painting suggests that an overt and complicated relationship exists among religion, folk music, tradition, and nationalism. This relationship must be explored in order to understand the *parranda*, its music, and Christmas in Puerto Rico.

Based on the images described above, as well as interviews and other fieldwork, I believe that Christmas in Puerto Rico is not only a time to celebrate religious belief; it is also very much about patriotism and cultural heritage. This chapter illustrates how Christmas in Puerto Rico became associated with cultural traditions and national sentiment. I assert that these relationships developed as a result of the shifting meanings

and associations of particular symbols. This change, which occurred during the twentieth century, has distanced Christmas from its religious connotations and realigned it with cultural and national symbols. The *parranda* tradition occupied a central role in this process. It has both facilitated and reflected the shifting of symbolic associations.

This chapter examines the events which have shaped the symbolic associations of Christmas music and the *parranda* in Puerto Rico. It chronologically traces the development of these associations among Puerto Ricans on the island and the mainland. In order to understand the complex nature of, and relationships among, symbols I have employed Thomas Turino's adaptation of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic philosophies (Turino 2000). Before the nature of symbolism in Puerto Rican Christmas celebration can be discussed in full, I must first outline the philosophies of C. S. Peirce as they are applied to music and cultural nationalism by Thomas Turino.

### **The Ideas of Peirce and Turino**

In his 2000 monograph, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*, Thomas Turino utilizes the semiotic ideas of C. S. Peirce to analyze the nature of, and relationships among, musical symbols in Zimbabwean cultural nationalism. He outlines Peirce's ideas as follows. According to Peirce, an index is a sign or a symbol that is related to its object, or what it signifies. An index is able to signify an object because of a co-occurrence between the two items in the experience of those who perceive them (Turino 2000:174). Puerto Rican Christmas music provides a clear example of this. The *décima*-based folk music style known as the *seis* is sung all-year round with a variety of themes forming the basis of its lyrics. To most Puerto Ricans, the *seis* is heard most prominently at Christmas time along with other *décima*-

based folk idioms. Christmas and the *seis* have become associated because of many years of co-occurrence. In this way, the *seis* functions as an index for Christmas in Puerto Rico. It could also be an index for folk music, the idea of the *jíbaro*, and by extension, for the Puerto Rican nation.

Since indices are associational and context-dependent, they lack the generality of linguistic signs. For this reason, there are no dictionaries for indices. Indices are dependent on personal and shared experience over time. They are, therefore, more affective and personal than linguistic signs. The affective potential of a given index is dependent on one's own life experiences (Turino 2000:175). Puerto Rican folk music would most likely affect a Puerto Rican differently than it might affect someone from Eastern Europe, for example. Upon hearing a *seis*, a Puerto Rican may register ideas such as nationalism, country life, or Christmas celebration. A non-Puerto Rican, lacking the same life-long associations, might perceive different ideas and identify the music with warm weather, palm trees, and tropical drinks.

Interestingly, indices may come to signify multiple ideas simultaneously. Often the repeated use of a preexisting index in a new context causes a sign to take on additional layers of meaning. The collection of varied associations over time creates what Turino refers to as the "semantic snowballing effect." This adds to the semantic ambiguity of any particular index since signs can call forth densely layered meanings (Turino 2000:175). This is the manner in which Christmas and its celebrations have come to index multiple and varied associations such as national pride, traditional music, cultural heritage, and religion.

The “semantic snowball effect” also increases an index’s affective potential since its semiotic synergies can create the complex effects we experience as “feelings.” In some cases multiple semantic references can produce effects in the perceiver that are too complex to be initially processed through linguistic-based thought. Often an index calls forth clear foreground associations, as well as many other vague sensations (Turino 2000:175).

Unlike linguistic-based symbols, indices are sometimes experienced as signs *of* an object instead of signs *for* that object. That is to say, they are experienced as part of the reality they signify. This yields a different response than its linguistic-based counterpart. Turino provides the example of a tree, explaining that perceivers do not mistake the word “tree” for an actual tree. However, a performance by a Puerto Rican *trovador* seems to index Puerto Rican cultural heritage, without being prepositional to it. It seems as if the music *is* the cultural heritage. This is what Pierce refers to as an index’s “reality potential,” its ability to seem as if the index *is* the object it signifies rather than symbol for that object (Turino 2000:175-176).

The manner in which Turino applies Pierce’s ideas to the concept of cultural nationalism facilitates the understanding of symbolic meaning in Puerto Rican cultural nationalism. Turino asserts that the concept of a nation is a vague idea that requires concrete indexical emblems to bring emotional reality to the idea. A nation’s flag or national anthem provides this type of index. Turino points out that one does not pledge allegiance directly to a nation because the concept of the nation is too vague. What exactly is implied by “the nation?” Rather, one pledges their allegiance to the more concrete index that represents the nation, the flag, and subsequently to that for which it

stands (Turino 2000:175). The need for such common concrete indices propels campaigns of cultural nationalism. Turino defines cultural nationalism as “the use of art or other cultural practices to develop or maintain national sentiment for political purposes (Turino 2000:14).” The idea of cultural nationalism as it applies to Puerto Rico will be discussed later.

Here a word on the concept of the nation is deserved. In his seminal work, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson examines the idea of the nation from multiple viewpoints. He defines a nation as “an imagined political community – imagined as both limited and sovereign” (Anderson 1983:6). He clarifies this definition by explaining that it is *imagined* because its members could never know all of their fellow-members. Yet, in their minds each lives the image of their communion. It is *limited*, because even the largest nation has finite borders, and no nation encompasses the entire planet. It is *sovereign* because the concept of the nation was born during the Enlightenment, when the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained was being challenged. Sovereignty became an emblem of freedom from the religious beliefs and political goals of others. Finally, it is imagined as a *community* because comradeship and fraternity makes it possible to achieve both civil and military goals (Anderson 1983:6-7). Jorge Duany notes that the Puerto Rican community meets all of the standard criteria of a nation, except sovereignty (Duany 2003:4). This is why cultural nationalism has become so important to Puerto Ricans. Since their political nationalism is stalled in a political configuration that Juan Flores calls “the postcolonial colony” (Flores 1993), they have turned to cultural nationalism in the hope that it will define them as a nation.

## **The Process of Shifting Symbolic Associations**

During the Spanish colonial period and the years of American occupation that preceded Operation Bootstrap, Christmas in Puerto Rico was associated with religion and celebration. The Christmas season occupied the time between the coffee harvest that ended in November and the sugar cane planting that began in January (Malavet Vega 1987:40). This hiatus in farming left a mainly agricultural society with ample time for celebration. Although celebratory activities such as folk music, dance, feasting and serenading were present all year round, they may have been practiced more frequently during this season of general festivity and relaxation. Musical activities, common to Puerto Rican country life, were enhanced with religious symbolism. Important religious themes included the birth of Jesus, the annunciation of Mary, the doubt of Joseph, the announcement to the shepherds, the adoration of the magi, the flight into Egypt, and the massacre of the innocents by Herod (Malavet Vega 1987:8-9). These themes would have been represented in the *villancicos* and *aguinaldos* of that period.

The *promesa* and *parranda* would have also been unified in practice with religious symbolism. The *promesa* represented, through song, the making of a covenant with god. Through the singing of the rosary and *aguinaldos* a family would offer a musical promise to the baby Jesus, the three wise men, or a patron saint. In exchange, the family would be granted protection for up to 33 years, the lifetime of Christ. As part of this agreement, the family would bring a *parranda* to its extended family and friends. This *parranda* represented a symbolic exchange of gifts. The musicians brought the *aguinaldos* as a musical gift and exchanged them for food and drink. This act symbolized the visitation of the magi. The travel from house-to-house may have also represented the search of the holy family for a place to birth the Christ child, similar to

the *posada* tradition of Mexico. At first, the *aguinaldos* and *villancicos* would have been composed mainly of religious references. Later, they would come to reference the activities and traditions of the Christmas season. These themes included the *parranda* tradition, foods, and stories of events that had occurred during previous Christmases.<sup>22</sup>

After World War Two, the United States asserted its colonial power over Puerto Rico through a campaign to modernize the island's economy. This project, known as Operation Bootstrap, had a profound effect on Puerto Rican society. It caused the dismantling of small agricultural operations in favor of large-scale industry. It led to a mass migration from the interior countryside to the coastal cities, and ultimately, for millions, to the United States. These migrations led to a breakdown of the traditional agrarian society. As a result of the operation, a great cultural change occurred. As the leisure time of workers decreased, activities such as serenading and folk music performance also decreased. In addition, many urban Puerto Ricans traded the traditional music and celebrations of the mountains for their more urban and American counterparts.<sup>23</sup>

The symbolic relationships of Christmas in Puerto Rico changed irrevocably during this time. The peasant farmer's traditional music and traditions declined in the face of growing American commercial, industrial, and cultural influence. Only at the most festive time of year, Christmas, did these traditions persist along side their religious and celebratory variations.<sup>24</sup> Through the continual co-occurrence of pre-Bootstrap folk

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<sup>22</sup> Gigi Maldonado, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 30 December 2002.

<sup>23</sup> The historical information for this section is compiled from a variety of sources including, Davila 1997, Duany 2003, Steward 1956, and Maldonado-Denis 1972.

<sup>24</sup> Gilberto Rivera, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. Boston, Massachusetts, 2 November 2002. Arlene Davila also asserts that folk music has become mainly associated with Christmas when she writes,

traditions and the Christmas season, Christmas became an index for folk music and traditions. In addition, as Puerto Rican society became more secular and Americanized, the *parranda's* religious symbolism became less important than its social potential. Its music also shifted from religious themes to descriptions of Christmas celebrations.<sup>25</sup> These transitions were facilitated by Puerto Rican folk music's inherent flexibility. Since the music of the *trovador* is intended to be malleable enough to encompass new themes and stories, it came to reflect the social rather than the religious aspects of Christmas celebration.

In 1952, with Operation Bootstrap underway, Puerto Rico's political status was altered. Amid debate over the political future of Puerto Rico, with independence on one side and statehood its alternative; commonwealth status was enacted as a compromise. This turned Puerto Rico into a "free associated state" of the United States. This act provided local political autonomy while maintaining the island's colonial relationship with the United States. Luis Muñoz Marín, the champion of the commonwealth idea, became the commonwealth's first Governor.

Turning away from the struggle for political nationalism, Muñoz enacted a policy of cultural nationalism. He promoted the nation as a cultural unit defined by a common cultural identity. These views were facilitated through policy known as Operation Serenity. This policy was designed as the social counterpart to Operation Bootstrap. As part of Operation Serenity, the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, commonly known as

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"[The ICP focused on] the continued relegation of folk music to the Christmas season, giving it the popular reputation as 'Christmas music' (Davila 1997:66).

<sup>25</sup> Gigi Maldonado, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 30 December 2002.

the ICP was founded. This organization was designed to define Puerto Rican culture and defend it against foreign influence.

The Institute developed an official ideology that emphasized the island's cultural distinctiveness. In order to accomplish this, it objectified a set of concrete symbols that could index the idea of the nation. These indices were chosen for their connotations of folklore and an idyllic agrarian past, or indications of Hispanic society that could easily be used to define Puerto Rican culture against North American cultural influence.

The centerpiece of the ICP campaign is what has been referred to as the "blending myth" of Puerto Rican identity (Davila 1997:69-73). This myth espouses a harmonious integration of the Taino, African and Spanish cultures, giving rise to the highly romanticized *jíbaro*. According to this narrative Spanish culture provided Puerto Rico with its religion and language along with wood carvings of the saints, Spanish lace, and an architectural legacy. When the three roots are visually depicted the Spanish conquistador is positioned at the center of the triad. The Taino "adds temporal depth to the national myth by representing the nation's roots in the past while supplying continuity to the present which is essential for establishing the legitimacy of a nationalist ideology" (Davila 1997:70). Although the Taino were considered extinct by the middle of the eighteenth century, they provide an important link to the territory upon which the nation is founded. The African component has often been referred to as the "third root" because it was the last to arrive. African contributions to Puerto Rican culture are downplayed and often attributed to the Taino. Food, music, and racial make-up that ought to be attributed to the African component are often claimed to be Taino instead (Duany 2003:279-280). As a result of this hierarchy, Afro-Puerto Rican musical genres, such as

the *bomba* and the *plena*, have experienced less nationalistic appeal. While more Iberocentric genres became symbolic of the Puerto Rican nation, Afro-Puerto Rican genres, through their exclusion, have come to represent a discrete African component of Puerto Rican culture rather than their integration and interaction within the whole of Puerto Rican society.

The idyllic *jíbaro* represents the culmination of the three roots, and the essence of “Puertoricaness.” Aspects of culture associated with the *jíbaro*, such as clothing and music, have also become national symbols. It is in this way that the music of the Puerto Rican *trovador* has become a national icon, and the *seis* and *aguinaldo* have also become symbols of the Puerto Rican nation. It has also been asserted that the *aguinaldo*, like the *jíbaro* has developed from the three ancestral roots (McCoy 1967). The instrumentation associated with the *trovador* has also been explained through the blending myth. The *güiro* and *maracas* are the indigenous elements, the guitar is the Spanish contribution, and the bongos are the African component. In this scenario, the *cuatro* is perceived as the ideal *jíbaro* instrument because it is *criollo*, that is, born of the new world. It too has become a strong symbol of cultural nationalism. Its presence in any musical performance indexes national sentiment.

The meanings and associations of the *parranda* have also been altered by the process of cultural nationalism. Although it continues to represent religious stories and a Christmas gift exchange, it has acquired a new layer of meaning through its association with the *jíbaro*. It is in some ways the ideal symbol of national pride, the continuation of a musical tradition directly associated with the *jíbaro*. The *parranda*, like folk instruments, folk music, and the Puerto Rican mountainside, evokes the *jíbaro* which has

come to stand so overtly for patriotism. Patriotism is sometimes expressed during a *parranda* by wearing *pava* hats reminiscent of the *jíbaro*, or by yelling, “¡Boricua!” or “¡Viva Puerto Rico libre!” between songs.

When I inquired about the relationship between patriotism and Christmas in Puerto Rico, multiple informants explained that patriotism and politics are important parts of Puerto Rican life all-year round. Nationalism is not only expressed at during the Christmas season. Since Puerto Ricans, as Yara Ordóñez told me,

...have been a colony for 500 years, they have lacked identity. They have been told that they are not good enough. Whenever you can do anything to say “yes, you are good enough,” you seize the opportunity.<sup>26</sup>

Christmas, therefore, provides an opportunity to express patriotism in the face of colonialism. Paradoxically, although the *parranda* and its music express nationalism through their association with patriotic icons, they continue to be shaped by the colonial forces that they express sentiment against. As described in the previous chapter, Americanization, commercialization, and urbanization have altered the nature and practice of the *parranda*. A decline in practice and purity of the tradition are opposed by an increase in symbolic and romantic potential.

### **Capitalizing and Politicizing the Parranda**

The symbolic connections of the *parranda* tradition have been utilized for political and commercial gain. During the Christmas season, mayors in towns such as Aguada on the west coast, and Levittown outside of San Juan, use the *parranda* as a public relations event. The mayor advertises an open invitation to all members of the community to join him for a *parranda*. These events may occur several times during the

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<sup>26</sup> Yara Meléndez Ordóñez, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2 January, 2003.

season until all of the constituents' houses have been visited. In some towns, such as Levittown, when the mayor visits a house, the family is presented with a small gift. In this manner, the mayor uses the *parranda* as a pretext for political campaigning.

In her 1997 book, *Sponsored Identities, Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico*, Arlene Davila asserts that cultural nationalism has been used by corporate advertisers to promote consumer goods (Davila 1997:7). Similarly, the *parranda* has been used as an advertising tool. Images related to the *parranda* are being used to sell compact discs, hamburgers and snack foods. Images of the *jíbaro* engaged in musical activity saturate television, festivals, and concerts during the Christmas season. Instruments associated with the *parranda*, in particular, are capitalized upon. Local drugstores and large American chains like Walmart, sell pre-packaged *parranda* kits containing traditional instruments of poor quality. Often they contain a *güiro*, *puya* (scraper), *maraca*, *palitos* (literally small sticks, similar to the *claves*), and miniature *panderetas* with tambourine-like jingles. In Walmart, the set is packaged in a transparent plastic backpack so that it can be placed on one's back while participating in a *parranda*. At Wendy's one can purchase "maracas parranderas," literally *maracas* for a *parranda*, for only \$1.99 with the purchase of a combo meal.

An advertisement from the Banco Popular de Puerto Rico, found in the newspaper *Vocero*, illustrates one manner in which the *parranda* is used in advertising campaigns. This advertisement for a personal loan ran on December 23, 2002. It features a drawing of a guitar, *cuatro*, *maracas*, and poinsettia flower. Across these drawing is written "Parranda and Win." This is the name of a contest sponsored by the bank. The

advertisement encourages readers to join the contest by applying for a loan. Among the first prize winnings is a “tremendous *parranda*” provided by the bank.

### **The Parranda’s Changing Meaning Among Nyoricans**

The symbolic meaning and associations of the *parranda* have also changed for Puerto Ricans living in the United States. Walter Ramos recalls that during the 1960’s in New York City the word “*jíbaro*” was considered pejorative.<sup>27</sup> It was used by Puerto Ricans born in the United States to describe Puerto Ricans who had recently immigrated to the mainland. To Puerto Ricans who were attempting to assimilate into American culture, the *jíbaro* represented rural poverty, lack of education, and cultural backwardness. Ramos told me that his exposure to Puerto Rican folk music was minimal during his childhood in Brooklyn, New York. Only at Christmas was it sparsely heard. He and his peers rejected Puerto Rican folk music in the same way they rejected anything associated with the *jíbaro* in favor of more American music and cultural icons.

It was not until Ramos was eighteen years old that he knew of anyone who went on *parrandas*. Ramos’s peers began doing *parrandas* in the projects of New York as a political statement. “That was at about the time we started developing a political consciousness,” he told me. “We started learning who we were during the height of the civil rights movement and the Young Lords,” a Puerto Rican political organization similar to the Black Panthers. “We were becoming aware of our identity as Puerto Ricans and the struggle to make Puerto Rico an independent country.” Ramos explains that in order to reclaim their cultural traditions, his peers began to “force feed”

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<sup>27</sup> Walter Ramos, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. Albany, New York, 9 November, 2002.

themselves customs like the *parranda*. He explains his peer's interest in folk traditions as follows.

It wasn't because it arose naturally from their experience, but because they came to appreciate their roots. They wanted to bring back those traditions. They made a concerted effort to relive those moments that were left behind and that was more of a political statement than anything else.

In New York City, therefore, the *parranda* experienced a symbolic reversal. It went from being considered an aspect of a rejected culture to being regarded as a political assertion of pride in that once rejected culture. Other folk traditions and the idea of the *jíbaro* itself were reclaimed by Nuyoricans as symbols of pride.

The reclamation of cultural icons such as the *jíbaro* was accomplished through the efforts of a number of political organizations in the late 1960's and the 1970's. In addition to the Young Lords, Ramos attributes this reclamation to the Last Poets, a coalition of civil rights-minded Black and Puerto Rican spoken word poets. In particular Ramos attributes Felipe Luciano's poem, "Jíbaro, My Pretty Nigger" with reclaiming the *jíbaro* as a cultural icon for Nuyoricans. This poem reached a wide audience through its performance as a prelude to Eddie Palmieri's 1972 album entitled "Live at Sing Sing." Luciano's poem reclaims the word *jíbaro* by reversing its symbolic associations and embracing it.

Through a subtle and musical juxtaposition Willie Colon and Hector Lavoe's album "Asalto Navideño" echoes the political sentiments discussed above. The title itself suggests interest in the *parranda* tradition at a time when it was lacking on the mainland. The idea of a Christmas assault or surprise *parranda* represents a renewed interest in folk traditions. In his book *Nación y ritmo "descargas" desde el Caribe*, Juan Otero Garabis points out that in 1971, "Asalto Navideño," was the first New York salsa

album to incorporate Puerto Rican folk music. The inclusion of the *cuatro* into the salsa band, according to Garabís, symbolically unites the mountain and the *barrio* (Garabís 2000 147). Of particular interest to Garabís is the first track, “Canto a Borinquen,” or “Song to Puerto Rico.” This song utilizes the harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic style of the *Seis Mapayé* to support a *décima* that sings of patriotism. The performance style, however, is characteristic of New York salsa. Garabís asserts that this juxtaposition represents the nostalgia of Puerto Rican emigrants and demonstrates the metaphoric connection between the *jíbaro* and the Nuyorican (Garabís 2000 147-148). In addition, I believe that evoking the *jíbaro* in a salsa Christmas album represents a conscious reclaiming of identity, much like the reclaiming of the *parranda* by Ramos’s peers. Through musically evoking the *jíbaro*, Colón illustrates his desire to be associated with the folk music and patriotic symbols that characterize Christmas music on the island. Therefore, he demonstrates that as a Nuyorican, he remains connected to the cultural heritage of Puerto Rico.

## **Summary**

Christmas in Puerto Rico is not only a time to celebrate religious belief but also patriotism and cultural heritage. In Puerto Rico, Christmas has become associated with cultural traditions and national sentiment. These relationships developed as a result of a twentieth century shift in the symbolic meanings and associations of folk traditions like the *parranda*. This shift in symbolic associations occurred in two steps. (1) A decline in folk traditions during Operation Bootstrap led to folk traditions and music becoming associated with the Christmas season. (2) As a direct result of the campaign for cultural nationalism, folk traditions and music acquired nationalistic and patriotic associations.

The *parranda* and its music have therefore become a symbol of the Puerto Rican nation. These associations have been utilized for political and commercial gains. Puerto Rican migrants to New York City have also resignified the *parranda*. During the early 1960's folk traditions were perceived as symbols of a culture they rejected. During the civil rights movement they became icons of cultural pride. This reversal was evident in poetry, music and by the renewed practice of giving *parrandas* as a political statement.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EVOKING CULTURAL NATIONALISM THROUGH MUSIC

The music and lyrics of *parranda* songs strongly correlate with Puerto Rican national sentiment. Through a series of sonic symbols, the music of the *parranda* evokes the idea of the *jíbaro*, and by extension the Puerto Rican nation. Through an analysis of the music and lyrics of *parranda* songs, this chapter demonstrates the symbolic connections between the *parranda*, the *jíbaro*, and cultural nationalism. I believed that the *parranda* music evokes the *jíbaro* by utilizing specific sonic symbols borrowed from music associated directly with this iconic figure. In addition to referencing instrumentation, rhythms, harmonies and melodies associated with the *jíbaro*, I assert that many modern *parranda* songs are recomposed based on traditional Puerto Rican song forms, indexing national pride and cultural heritage. Since the lyrics of *parranda* songs describe the traditions of the *parranda* rather than religious themes, they echo the symbolism embedded in the music, calling forth the idea of Puerto Rican cultural heritage. Puerto Rican authors and journalists such as Pedro Malavet Vega, Jorge Javariz, and Juan Cepero, have characterized the progression away from religious themes as a corrupt and vulgar result of commercialization and materialism. Unlike these authors, I assert that the *parranda*'s self-referential lyrics demonstrate a poetic manifestation of cultural nationalism.

#### **Música Jíbara**

The music associated with the *jíbaro*, known as *música jíbara*, forms the basis of the modern *parranda* music. During the Spanish colonial era, this was the music that

primarily accompanied the *parranda* tradition. Today, although some *parrandas* continue to use *música jíbara*, much of the current *parranda* music draws upon a repertory of commercial music. As described below, this music symbolically evokes the *jíbaro* by utilizing the harmonies, rhythms, melodies, and forms of *música jíbara*. In my opinion, the modern *parranda* repertory is a symbolic extension of this music. This relationship metaphorically connects *parranda* participants to the *jíbaro*, and encourages feelings of pride in musical traditions and national heritage.

Puerto Ricans have developed mythology to explain the history of *música jíbara*. According to this mythology, *música jíbara* evolved from the *trovador* music of southern Spain. This music was brought to the island in the late sixteenth century by soldiers, farmers, and artisans who had migrated from the provinces of Estremadura and Andalusia. Along with the guitar, they imported musical styles such as the *romanza*, *seguidilla*, and *copla* (Hernández 1993:20). Centuries of relative isolation from Spain and contact with African and indigenous musics yielded a distinctly Puerto Rican style of *trovador* music. This style became a mode of expression for the Puerto Rican *jíbaro*. It provided entertainment at social gatherings such as weddings, baptisms, festivals and dances, as well as ritual music for rosaries, and *promesas*, and *parrandas*.<sup>28</sup>

As *música jíbara* developed, new instruments such as the *cuatro*, were created (Hernández 1993:20). The *cuatro* descends from the miniature Spanish guitar known as the *guitarrillo* or *requinto*. Originally, as the name indicates, it had four strings. During the early twentieth century it acquired five courses of doubled strings (Hernández, 1993:20). The *cuatro* has become a powerful visual and aural symbol of the *jíbaro*.

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<sup>28</sup> This information is taken from an exhibit entitled “Acangaña! 100 Años de Música Puertorriqueña,” Banco Popular, San Juan, Puerto Rico: December, 2002.

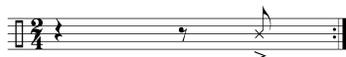
Additional string instruments similar to the *cuatro* were developed by the folk musicians in Puerto Rico. These instruments include the *tiple*, which is a miniature soprano version of the *cuatro*, and the *bordonúa*, which is a type of bass guitar similar to the Mexican *guitarrón*. The *tiple* and *bordonúa* declined in popularity during the twentieth century, leaving the *cuatro* to remain as the instrument most often associated with the *jíbaro*.

Puerto Ricans consider the *cuatro*, guitar, and *güiro* to constitute the traditional *jíbaro* ensemble, also called the *conjunto típico*. The origin of the *güiro*, a hollowed-out gourd scraper, is enigmatic. The popular myth is that it was borrowed from the indigenous inhabitants of the island (McCoy 1967). This myth is, as of yet, unproven. It is also possible that the *güiro* is of African origin. During the twentieth century a number of other instruments have been added to the *conjunto típico* on occasion. These instruments include the *bongos*, *congas*, *maracas*, and *campana* bell.

Underlying any performance of *música jíbaro* is a specific rhythmic matrix that serves to support and accompany the improvised singing of the *trovador* (see fig. 4). The rhythms of each instrumental part interlock in a manner that propels the music. At the foundation of the rhythmic structure is a configuration known as the *caballo* pattern (see fig. 5). This pattern, whose name refers to the galloping of a horse, is a commonly-learned pattern among all Puerto Ricans. Often during a *parranda* you will see participants, or listeners playing this pattern with their hands on their legs or on a table. If we consider the music to be in two-four, the *caballo* pattern occupies one measure and contains an accent on the and-of-two.<sup>29</sup> The music feels as if it is being propelled

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<sup>29</sup> For those not familiar with this jargon the and-of-two refers to the second eighth note division of beat two, i.e.,



forward because of the rhythmic discrepancy between those parts that outline the *caballo* pattern, and those that play in opposition to it, accenting other beats within the measure.

Within the *conjunto típico* (*cuatro*, guitar, and *güiro*), the guitar part outlines the *caballo* pattern. It accomplishes this by articulating a strumming pattern that contains the *caballo* pattern. The two patterns would be identical, except the guitar does not rest on the second and third sixteenth-note divisions of beat one. Instead, it connects the *caballo*'s beat one, and the final sixteenth-note division of beat one, by playing all four of the sixteenth-notes of the first beat. In addition it contains an accent on the and-of-two further correlating with the *caballo* pattern. The guitar can also play a bass-like pattern that also contains an accent on the and-of-two as well as the fourth sixteenth-note division of the first beat. This configuration also outlines the *caballo* pattern.

The *cuatro* plays independently of the *caballo* pattern. It leads the ensemble by performing melodic introductions, endings, and by filling in the rests between each the singer's phrases. Underneath the singer, the *cuatro* plays a variety of chordal arpeggiated patterns. Each pattern is specific to particular variations of *música jíbara*. The *güiro* can play a variety scraping patterns that provide a sixteenth-note pulse. If the *bongos* are added to the ensemble, they play the *caballo* pattern. If a *conga* is used, it performs two bar variation on this pattern. Its open tones correlate with the guitar, and *bongos*. If *maracas* are added to the ensemble they play a sixteenth-note pulse, like that of the *güiro*. If a cow-bell, known as the *campana* is utilized, it articulates the quarter-note pulse.

**Fig. 4 The Rhythmic Matrix of Música Jíbara**<sup>30</sup>

**Fig. 5 The Caballo Pattern**

The rhythmic foundations of *música jíbara* provide accompaniment to four distinct styles of *música jíbara*. Musicians in Vega Alta refer to the *cadena*, *caballo*,

<sup>30</sup> Compiled from a variety of sources including; various recordings; Gilberto Rivera, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. Boston, Massachusetts, 2 November, 2002; López Cruz, Francisco. *La música folklórica de Puerto Rico* (Sharon, CT: Troutman Press, 1967).

*seis*, and *aguinaldo* together as “música completa” or “complete music.”<sup>31</sup> Complete music can be divided into two groups according to the poetic form of their lyrics. The *cadena* and the *caballo* are based on the *copla*. The *copla* is a four-line poetic format that rhymes ABAB or ABCB. The *cadena* contains alternating phrases of 5 and 7 syllables while the *caballo* is octosyllabic. The two remaining styles, the *seis* and *aguinaldo* are based on the *décima*. The *décima* is a ten line poetic structure that developed in medieval Spain from the poetic conventions of the Moorish *jézel* (Luis Manuel 1988: Part 1). The rhyme-scheme of the *décima* can be either ABBAACCBBC or ABBAACDDC. In the *seis*, each line of the *décima* contains eight syllables while in the *aguinaldo*, also known as the *decimilla*, each line is hexasyllabic. While the *seis* can sing of many topics, the *aguinaldo* is reserved for Christmas themes. In order to clarify the rhyme structure and syllable scheme of the *décima* and *aguinaldo*, I have included two poems by Francisco Arnau, a Puerto Rican folk poet who utilizes these poetic genres (figs. 6 and 7).

**Fig. 6 “El Jíbaro que Canta:” Décima Rhyme and Syllable Scheme<sup>32</sup>**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1	A	Soy el jíbaro que canta;							I am the <i>jíbaro</i> that sings;
2	B	coplero de la altura							<i>copla</i> singer of the highlands
3	B	que llevo en mi alma pura							that brings in my pure soul
4	A	un orgullo a mi garganta,							a pride to my throat,
5	A	trovador que no se espanta							<i>trovador</i> that is not afraid
6	C	en ver otros valoríos,							to see the worth of others,
7	C	que no acepta el desafío							that do not accept the challenge
8	D	que me brinda el camrada							that salute me as a comrade
9	D	porque formé de la nada							because I formed from nothing
10	C	la llave del verso mío.							the key to my verse.

<sup>31</sup> “Acangaña! 100 Años de Música Puertorriqueña,” Banco Popular, San Juan, Puerto Rico: December, 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Spanish language poetry is take from; Aranau, Francisco. *El Gallo Que Canta* (Mayagüez, Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1972), 9. The English translation and analysis is my own.

**Fig. 7 “Nacimiento de Cristo:” Aguinaldo Rhyme and Syllable Scheme<sup>33</sup>**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
1	A	Desde	Galilea				From Galilee
2	B	cuidad	de Nazaret,				city of Nazareth,
3	B	caminó	José				walked Joseph
4	A	a Belén	de Judea,				from Bethlehem to Judea,
5	A	la verdad	no idea				with no idea of the truth
6	C	según	está escrito,				according to what is written,
7	C	para	echar los ritos				in order to etch the rites
8	D	de las	religions				of religions
9	D	que con	tradiciones				that with traditions
10	C	han	negado Cristo.				have denied Christ.

Specific musical styles accompany each of the poetic forms. Although each style contains the rhythmic matrix mentioned above, it also has specific melodic and harmonic material that compliments the poetic form. The music that accompanies the octosyllabic *décima* is known as the *seis*. According to Prisco Hernández, there are over eighty styles of *seis*, many of which are named for their town of origin (Hernández 1993:22). Each style is a harmonic, melodic and tempo complex that supports a vocal improvisation. In other words, each *seis* has a specific melody, chord progression, and tempo but is not considered a song in and of itself. It is only a particular accompaniment to which the *décima* can be improvised. Although it may be altered slightly, it must retain the same melodic contour and basic progression. Prevalent styles of *seis* include *Seis Mapayé* (see fig. 8), *Seis Fajardoño* meaning the *seis* from Fajardo (see fig. 9), *Seis con Décima* (see fig. 10), *Seis Milonguero*, *Seis Sainés*, *Seis Andino*, and the *Seis Chorreao* which does not accompany the *décima*, but is an instrumental dance piece.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 69.



**Fig. 10 Seis con Décima**

The musical score for 'Seis con Décima' is presented in three staves, all in 2/4 time. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 82. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/A minor).

- Staff 1 (Introduction):** Labeled 'introduction', it begins with a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. Chords above the staff are Am, Dm7, E7, (Am), and E7.
- Staff 2 (Accompaniment pattern):** Labeled '5 accompaniment pattern', it starts with a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature. The melody features a repeating eighth-note pattern. Chords above the staff are Am, G, F, E7, (Am), and E7.
- Staff 3 (Possible variation):** Labeled '9 possible variation', it starts with a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature. The melody is a variation of the accompaniment pattern. Chords above the staff are Am, G, F, E7, (Am), and E7.

The music that accompanies the hexasyllabic *décima*, and sings of religion or Christmas is known as the *aguinaldo*. Like the *seis*, each *aguinaldo* has a specific melody, chord progression, and tempo but is not considered a song in itself. Also like the *seis*, there are many distinct styles of *aguinaldos* named for the different towns of Puerto Rico. Popular *aguinaldos* include the *Aguinaldo Orocoveño* meaning from *Orocovis* (see fig. 11), *Aguinaldo Jíbaro* (see fig. 12), *Aguinaldo Manola*, and the *Aguinaldo Cayagueño* meaning from *Cayaguas* (see fig. 13).

**Fig. 11 Aguinaldo Orocoveño**

The musical score for 'Aguinaldo Orocoveño' is in 2/4 time with a tempo of quarter note = 96. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/A minor).

- The melody is written on a single staff with a treble clef. It consists of eighth and quarter notes.
- Chords above the staff are B<sup>°</sup>/D, Am/C, B<sup>°</sup>, and Am.

**Fig. 12 Aguinaldo Jíbaro**

♩ = 100 introduction, interlude, ending

Dm C/E F

Gm E°/B♭ A7 A7

Dm C/E F Gm E°/B♭ A7

accompaniment pattern, strummed chords

Detailed description: This musical score is for 'Aguinaldo Jíbaro' in 2/4 time with a tempo of 100. It consists of three systems of music. The first system (measures 1-3) features a melody with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. The second system (measures 4-6) continues the melody with a repeat sign and a second ending. The third system (measures 7-9) shows an accompaniment pattern of strummed chords. Chord symbols are placed above the notes.

**Fig. 13 Aguinaldo Cayagueño**

♩ = 96 introduction

G C G C

G C G C

F C G C

F C G C

accompaniment

F C G C

Detailed description: This musical score is for 'Aguinaldo Cayagueño' in 2/4 time with a tempo of 96. It consists of five systems of music. The first system (measures 1-4) includes an introduction and the first four measures of the melody. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the melody. The third system (measures 9-12) continues the melody. The fourth system (measures 13-16) continues the melody. The fifth system (measures 17-20) shows an accompaniment pattern of strummed chords. Chord symbols are placed above the notes.

*Aguinaldos* and *seises* display similar musical characteristics. They begin with a melodic introduction, which can also serve as an interlude or ending. This melody is composed over a four or eight-measure harmonic progression. After the introduction the same harmonic progression is repeated as an accompaniment to the singer. Between each *décima* the melody is performed as an interlude. After the final *décima* the melody is performed as an ending. The harmonic progressions are simple yet specific, based on traditional Spanish minor and major harmony. *Aguinaldos* are generally faster and more festive than the *seis*, which has a more stately character.

In performance, singers may call for a specific *seis* or *aguinaldo* and a particular key that suits their voice. Once the introduction is played, the *trovador* improvises melody and lyrics that conform to the poetic limitations of the *décima*. These *décimas* are sung on what Prisco Hernández calls “reciting tones” or “specific tonal cells within the basic harmony” (Hernández 1993:28). Often *trovadores* engage in *pie forzado* meaning “forced foot.” In this situation, they are provided with the last line of the *décima* and have to improvise the poetry that precedes it. Two singers may also sing *controversias*, that is, *décimas* in alternation that comment on each other or discuss a particular theme.

### **Recomposition: Evoking the Jíbaro through Music**

Although the original repertory of the *parranda* consisted only of *aguinaldos* and *seises*, today it is more common to hear a varied repertory of *parranda* songs that cannot be strictly defined as *seises* and *aguinaldos*. These songs evoke the *jíbaro* by utilizing aspects of *música jíbara*. Some of these modern *parranda* songs, loosely referred to as

*aguinaldos*, are based directly on particular *aguinaldos* and *seises*. Others reference the *jíbaro* in disparate musical ways.

Much of the current *parranda* repertory is borrowed from the commercial Christmas music of Puerto Rico, made popular through radio and record sales. Puerto Ricans have been buying commercial Christmas music for nearly one hundred years. The careers of musicians and ensembles such as, Danny Rivera, José Noguerras, and the Tuna de Cayey are based solely on the production of Christmas music. I believe that, although the commercial music is stylistically diverse, ranging from *música jíbara* to salsa, it can be considered a unified genre because all of the songs thematically focus on Christmas celebration. This thematic focus is accomplished by evoking the symbols that Puerto Ricans associate with Christmas. These ideas, as discussed in Chapter Three, are folk traditions, patriotism, cultural heritage, and most importantly the image of the *jíbaro*.

*Jíbaro* symbolism in the modern *parranda* music is accomplished in a variety of ways. The primary way of evoking the *jíbaro* is through recomposition: new songs are based directly on the melodies and chord progressions of specific *seises* and *aguinaldos*. An *aguinaldo*'s *décima* improvisation is replaced with choruses and verses that are easily sung and remembered. This process, which may date back to the Spanish colonial period, produces easily remembered and performed songs.<sup>35</sup> According to Alex Torres, the process of substituting and developing new choruses to traditional *seises* and *aguinaldos* is fueled by personal creativity and facilitated by a flexibility inherent within

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<sup>35</sup> Gigi Maldonado, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 30 December, 2002. Maldonado points out that some of the current *parranda* recompositions predate commercial music recordings and have anonymous authors.

Puerto Rican folk music.<sup>36</sup> Each year musicians develop new and unique songs based on familiar patterns that are hundreds of years old.

Through the use of these traditional melodies and chord progressions, modern *parranda* participants connect themselves with the idyllic *jíbaro*, and their cultural heritage. In this way the music reflects the associations between the *parranda* and cultural nationalism that were discussed in chapter three. Since the *jíbaro* is associated with cultural heritage and national pride, the *parranda*, which was once a religious ritual, acquires a patriotic character.

Perhaps the most widely recomposed *aguinaldo* is the *Aguinaldo Jíbaro*. Among the large number of songs based on this *aguinaldo*, the most commonly performed adaptation is called “Si Me Dan Pasteles.” This song, which may have originated in the nineteenth century, is considered traditional and has no known composer. Many recomposed songs begin with the *Aguinaldo Jíbaro*’s instrumental melody. The *aguinaldo*’s *décima*, however, is replaced with a less elaborate chorus based on the harmony and rhythm of the accompaniment figure (see fig. 14).

The song “Si No Me Das de Beber” by Vicente Carattini provides a second example of the recomposition process. This selection is based on the *Seis Enramada*. In this example, the *seis*’s melodic introduction serves as the melody for the song’s new chorus. The chord progression that once supported the *décima*, now accompanies the song’s verse (see fig. 15).

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<sup>36</sup> Alex Torres, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. Amsterdam, New York, 15, November 2002.

**Fig. 14** Aguinaldo Jíbaro Recomposed as “Si Me Dan Pasteles”,<sup>37</sup>

♩ = 96

introduction

Dm C/E F

Gm E°/B♭ A7 A7

7 Dm C/E F Gm E°/B♭ A7

Si me dan pas - te - les den - me - los ca - lien - tes,

11 Dm C/E F Gm E°/B♭ A7

que pas - te - les fri - os em - pa - chan la gen - te.

In addition to those songs that evoke the *jíbaro* by utilizing the melodies or chord progressions of *seises* and *aguinaldos*, there are many Christmas compositions that call forth the idea of the *jíbaro* more loosely by including a variety of specific musical symbols and devices associated with *música jíbara*. One way this is accomplished is through using the rhythmic matrix of *música jíbara* even if a song does not contain chord progressions remotely based on a *seis* or *aguinaldo*. Conversely, the rhythm may change while melodic, and harmonic components are retained. For example, commercial Christmas songs in styles such as *salsa*, *plena*, *bomba*, *bolero* and *merengue* continue to evoke the *jíbaro* through the use of familiar *jíbaro* melodies, harmonic progressions, or

<sup>37</sup> The lyrics and melody taken from; Transue, Miriam L. *Aguinaldos de Puerto Rico* (New York: Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Migration Division, Department of Labor, 1957), 3.

the addition of the highly symbolic *cuatro*. In this context the *cuatro* often plays the same series of fills between melodic phrases as it does in *música jíbara*.

**Fig. 15 Seis Enramada Recomposed as “Si No Me Das de Beber”<sup>38</sup>**

♩=110 E7 Seis Enramada, Introduction E7 Am

E7 E7 Am

E7 Si No Me Dan De Beber, Chorus E7 Am

Si no me dan de be - ber, llo - ro, si no me dan de be - ber, llo - ro,

E7 E7 Am

si no me dan - de be - ber llo - ro, si no me dan de be - ber.

Regardless of rhythmic style, songs that use parts of specific *aguinalos*, *seises*, or other phrases common to *música jíbara* call forth the idea of the *jíbaro*. The melody of a *seis* or *aguinaldo* can be played as an introduction, interlude, or ending to a piece even if the rest of the piece bears no relationship to that *seis* or *aguinaldo*. In another type of recomposition songs are composed as stylistic variations on a specific *seis* or *aguinaldo*. These variations include altering the piece’s melody or harmonic progression, adding jazz or popular harmony, or by simply changing the piece’s mode, i.e., from major to minor.

<sup>38</sup> *Seis Enramada* is taken from; López Cruz, Francisco. *Método para la enseñanza del Cuatro Puertorriqueño* (San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1967), 168. The melody and lyrics to “Si No Me Das de Beber.” taken from; Ríos, Harry. *El manual de parrandas puertorriqueñas* (New Orleans: Sunset Productions, 1994), 31.

Finally, specific musical and extra-musical symbols are used to connote the *jíbaro*. Singing the syllables “lei lo lai,” which are considered to be common to *trovador* performances, is one such symbol. The sound of Puerto Rico’s unofficial national animal, the *coqui*, is another (this unique tree frog, indigenous only to Puerto Rico, sings a perfect octave). In addition to being a symbol of national pride, it is associated with the mountainous countryside and the *parranda*. Since its call is heard at night, it provides a natural backdrop for *parranda* performances. In commercial songs, the *coqui*’s call can occupy silences during introductions, interludes, and endings.

Interestingly, national symbols, such as flags and anthems, are usually fixed. *Parranda* music, however, is malleable and changing. Its symbolic elements are continuously recomposed and restructured. Perhaps this fluidity is appropriate because the music represents the Puerto Rican nation by referencing its culture, a concept that is also in flux. Unlike unwavering national icons, these songs come from the community not the state. As such they escape fixed ideology and represent many disparate conceptions of Puerto Rican life.

### **The Lyrics of the Parranda Songs**

In his book, *Navidad que vuelve, la tradición y el cantar navideño en Puerto Rico* Pedro Malavet Vega examines the lyrics of the Puerto Rican Christmas song repertory. He subjects 152 songs to a quantitative analysis in order to understand what themes they contain. Of the 152 songs, 65% describe the Christmas traditions of Puerto Rico, while only 17% are based on religious themes. In addition, 35% specifically describe the tradition of the *parranda* (Malavet Vega 1987:80). Since the repertory was once entirely religious, Malavet Vega asserts that the Christmas song tradition of Puerto Rico has

experienced a “vulgarization” and “corruption” during the twentieth century. Malavet Vega contextualizes his findings by presenting the writings of Puerto Rican journalists and music critics. One such critic, Juan Cepero asks, “What’s up with our [Puerto Rican] composers? Are they not inspired by the birth of Jesus?” (Malavet Vega 1987:75). Jorge Javariz, another Puerto Rican writer, asserts that “commercialization” and “materialism” have caused composers to write about the festivities of Christmas rather than its religious themes (Malavet Vega 1987:75).

Gigi Maldonado, president of the *Tuna de Cayey*, offers an alternate explanation. She believes that as new songs and lyrics were devised based on *seises* and *aguinaldos*, new choruses were composed about the Christmas traditions themselves rather than religious themes. Maldonado believes that as the *parranda* and its music developed the entire tradition of Christmas music moved away from religious themes and towards festive themes.<sup>39</sup> Alex Torres echoes this sentiment when he asserts, “The songs are not about the religious aspects of Christmas, they are about the traditions of the *parranda* itself.”<sup>40</sup> The musicians I interviewed are proud that their tradition focuses on festivity and celebration. Unlike the authors described above, they do not condemn the music for singing of cultural traditions and not sacred themes.<sup>41</sup>

Maldonado also believes that many Christmas songs were written in commemoration of specific events that occurred during the *parrandas* of previous

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<sup>39</sup> Gigi Maldonado, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 30 December 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Alex Torres, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. Amsterdam, New York, 15, November 2002.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, as well as Gigi Maldonado, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 30 December 2002. Ramon Andino, interview by author. Minidisc recording. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 4 January, 2003, and others.

years.<sup>42</sup> She compared the lyrics of the *parranda* to a “sung newspaper,” that recounts specific events from years passed. This style is congruent with the Puerto Rican *plena*, which sings of social and political occurrences. Maldonado explains that many of the songs that the Tuna de Cayey performs were written about events that occurred on their *parrandas*. She also describes a song by José Noguerras entitled “Parranda de Sopón,” which means *parranda* of the soup (see fig. 16). This song describes a *parranda* at which the musicians were given a traditional Christmas soup that made them sick. She believes that this event actually occurred and was commemorated by the song. The lyrics tell us that when the hen was taken to make the soup the rooster became angry, and put a spell on the soup causing the musicians to become sick. This is an example of what Maldonado calls, “picardia,” that is, lyrics containing comic or fantastic commentary on real life situations. She believes that many of the *parranda* songs utilize this technique. Often it involves the personification of animals, especially those who become food.

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<sup>42</sup> Gigi Maldonado, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 30 December 2002.

**Fig. 16 Parranda de Sopón**<sup>43</sup>

A las dos de la mañana  
Nos comimos un sopón  
Y se nos pegó un dolor  
Allá por la madrugada.

Cogieron una gallina  
le torceiron el pescuezo  
la partieron to los huesos  
le cortaron la pollina.  
Todo el mundo en la cocina  
comentaba el gran suceso.  
No quedaría ningún hueso  
De aquella pobre gallina.

Con aquella alagrabía  
que en la fiesta se formó  
el gallo se despertó  
No creyó lo que veía  
brincoteó hizo lo que pudo  
se le encrespó toa la cresta  
pero al terminar la fiesta  
el gallo era gallo viudo.

Se comieron el sopón  
Con gusto y mucha alegría  
Y al rato se retorcián  
al sentir un gran dolor  
la gente de aquel sopón  
comentaban y decían  
eso fue una maldicion  
que el gallo nos echaría.

A las dos de la mañana  
Nos comimos un sopón  
Y se nos pegó un dolor  
Allá por la madrugada.  
Y allá por la madrugada.  
aquel gallo se reía  
Y allá por la madrugada.  
aquel gallo se río.

At two o'clock in the morning  
We ate soup  
And it gave us a stomach ache  
There in the middle of the night.

They took the little hen.  
they twisted its neck  
they separated the meat and bones  
they cut up the little chicken  
Everyone in the kitchen  
said it was a great success  
They didn't leave a single bone  
Of that poor chicken

With all of the hubbub  
that the party made  
the rooster awoke  
Not believing what he saw  
he jumped and made a fuss  
he totally twisted his crest  
but by the time the party finished  
He was a widowed rooster

They ate the soup  
With pleasure and happiness  
And after a while the cramped up  
and felt a great pain  
those who made the soup  
commented and said  
it was a curse  
that the rooster put on them.

At two o'clock in the morning  
We ate soup  
And it gave us a stomach ache  
There in the middle of the night.  
And there in the middle of the night.  
that roosted was laughing  
And there in the middle of the night.  
that rooster laughed

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<sup>43</sup> The Spanish lyrics are taken from; López, Benjamín. *Cantares de navidad* (Puerto Rico: Sociedad de Arte y Literatura, 1997), 26. The English translation is my own.

A second example of comic personification is the song “Pobre Lechón,” meaning “poor roasted piglet” (see fig. 17). This selection is a sung cookbook retelling the way traditional roast piglet is prepared and eaten. Although the piglet does not engage in any humanoid behavior, we are encouraged to feel empathy for its situation.

**Fig. 17 Pobre Lechon**<sup>44</sup>

Ese pobre lechón  
se murió de repente  
con un tajo en la frente  
y otro en el corazón  
lo metieron al horno  
lo sacaron caliente  
le metieron diente  
a ese pobre lechón.

That poor piglet  
it died quickly  
with a spit in its front  
and another through its heart  
they put him in the stove  
they took him out hot  
they put him to their teeth  
that poor piglet.

Even when animals are not personified, traditional foods are a major theme of *parranda* songs. Malavet Vega concludes that there are songs that pertain to the *lechón* (roast pork), *pasteles* (pork and mashed *platinos* boiled in banana leaves), *arroz con dulce* (rice pudding), *sopón* (chicken soup), *turrón* (nuget candy), *rum*, and *pitorro*, a potent homemade liquor (Malavet Vega 1987:86). Many of these songs focus on the customary exchange of food or drink for music during a *parranda*. The song, “Si Me Dan Pasteles,” states, “If you are going to give me *pasteles*, give them to me hot (see fig. 18).” In the song, “Si No Me Dan de Beber,” the *parranda* group has brought the gift of music to a family without receiving anything to drink in return (see fig. 19). They request to have some rum, and sing, “if you don’t give me something to drink, I’ll cry.”

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<sup>44</sup> The Spanish lyrics are taken from: Ríos, Harry. *El manual de parrandas puertorriqueñas* (New Orleans: Sunset Productions, 1994), 13. The English translation is my own.

**Fig. 18 Si Me Dan Pasteles**<sup>45</sup>

Si me dan pasteles,  
Dénmelos calientes.  
Que pasteles fríos,  
Empachan la gente.  
Si me dan pasteles,  
No me den cuchara.  
Que mama me dijo  
Que se los llevara.

If you give me *pasteles*,  
give them to me hot.  
Because cold *pasteles*,  
give people indigestion.  
If you give me *pasteles*,  
don't give me a spoon.  
Because my mother told me,  
to bring my own.

**Fig. 19 Si Me Dan de Beber**<sup>46</sup>

Si no me dan de beber, lloro,  
si no me dan de beber, lloro,  
si no me dan de beber, lloro,  
si no me dan de beber.

If you don't give me a drink, I'll cry,  
if you don't give me a drink, I'll cry,  
if you don't give me a drink, I'll cry,  
if you don't give me a drink.

Aquí está la trulla, aquí hemos venido,  
aquí está la trulla, aquí hemos venido,  
a beber el ron que tienes escondido.  
a beber el ron que tienes escondido.

Here is the *trulla* we have brought,  
Here is the *trulla* we have brought,  
to drink any rum that you can find,  
to drink any rum that you can find.

Other songs sing of the *parranda* itself, especially of waking up those who are visited and greeting them with song. These songs commemorate the *asalto* (assault) aspect of the *parranda* tradition. In “Traigo esta Trulla,” which means “I bring this *trulla* (or *parranda*),” the singer explains how they bring a very large and good *parranda* to wake someone up (see fig. 20). The verses describe the action of the *parranda*, such as dancing and drinking. “Asómate al Balcón,” requests that the listener wake up and come to their balcony to see the *parranda* that has been brought to them (see fig. 21). Songs

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<sup>45</sup> Spanish lyrics taken from; Transue, Miriam L., *Aguinaldos de Puerto Rico* (New York: Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Migration Division, Department of Labor, 1957), 3. The English translation is my own.

<sup>46</sup> Spanish lyrics taken from; Ríos, Harry. *El manual de parrandas puertorriqueñas* (New Orleans: Sunset Productions, 1994), 31. The English translation is my own.

that sing of an *asalto* or contain greetings are often used as *asaltos* and greetings during actual *parrandas*.

**Fig. 20 Traigo esta Trulla**<sup>47</sup>

Traigo esta trulla para que te levantes,  
traigo esta trulla para que te levantes.  
Esta trulla está caliente,  
esta trulla está que arde.

I bring this *trulla* to wake you up,  
I bring this *trulla* to wake you up.  
This *trulla* is hot,  
this *trulla* is burning.

La hija de Eustevio conmigo bailó,  
la hija de Eustevio conmigo bailó.  
Ella dice que no bebe,  
yo creo que se lo dió  
Uno, dos, tres,  
¡Cuando abre la puerta ña!

*Eustevio's* daughter danced with me,  
*Eustevio's* daughter danced with me.  
She says she doesn't drink,  
I think she had one.  
One, two, three,  
When you open the door, bam!

**Fig. 21 Asómate al Balcón**<sup>48</sup>

Asómate al balcón  
para que veas mi parranda,  
Asómate al balcón  
para que veas quien te canta,  
Asómate al balcón  
que aquí estamos tus amigos,  
Asómate al balcón  
formemos un vacilón.

Appear on the balcony  
so that you might see my *parranda*,  
Appear on the balcony  
to see who sings to you,  
Appear on the balcony  
here are your friends,  
Appear on the balcony  
so we can form a party.

Some songs directly evoke romantic imagery of the *jíbaro*. The song, “Alegre Vengo” or, “Happily I Come” recounts the story of a *jíbaro* who comes from the mountains bringing a gift of the best flowers from his rose bush (see fig. 22). This is a quintessential example of the *jíbaro* image: a simple happy way of life, and a simple happy way of celebrating Christmas.

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<sup>47</sup> Transcribed from a performance by Gilberto Rivera, interview by the author. Minidisc recording. Boston, Massachusetts, 19 May 2002. The English translation is my own.

<sup>48</sup> The Spanish lyrics are taken from; *El gran cancionero Navideño de todos los tiempo* (Puerto Rico: n.p., c1990), 23. The English translation is my own.

**Fig. 22 Alegre Vengo**<sup>49</sup>

Alegre vengo de la montaña  
De mi cabaña que alegre está  
A mis amigos les traigo flores  
De las mejores de mi rosál  
A mis amigos les traigo flores  
De las mejores de mi rosál.

Happily, I come from the mountains  
From my hut, that is happily there  
I bring flowers to my friends  
From the best of my rose bush  
I bring flowers to my friends  
From the best of my rose bush.

Clearly, Malavet Vega is correct when he asserts that the Christmas song repertory has become less religious and more focused on festive and social themes. I believe that this occurred during the recomposition of *seises* and *aguinaldos*. These changes correlate with a greater sociological progression towards secularization. Unlike other authors who believe that the focus on festivity and tradition results from only the influence of commercialism and materialism, I believe that the trend away from religious themes and towards themes that reflect the Christmas celebrations of Puerto Rico also represents a manifestation of cultural nationalism. Commemorating Puerto Rican Christmas traditions through song defends and preserves cultural traditions against the North American influence. The creation of a self-referential tradition ensures that the tenets of that tradition will be preserved for future generations. It echoes the greater progression of Puerto Rican Christmas celebration away from a focus on religious themes and towards a focus on Puerto Rican cultural heritage.

**Summary**

The music and lyrics of the *parranda*, like the tradition itself, indexes Puerto Rican cultural heritage, and national pride. It accomplishes this in a variety of ways. Much of the current *parranda* repertory is recomposed based on *música jíbara*. This

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 16.

process develops new songs based on specific *seises* and *aguinaldos*. These recompositions, and other *parranda* songs evoke the idea *jíbaro* by using a variety of sonic symbols such as melody, harmony, rhythm, and form that are directly associated with this iconic figure. By containing fewer religious themes, and instead singing about the *parranda* and its traditions, the lyrics of *parranda* songs call forth notions of cultural heritage. These self-referential lyrics demonstrate a poetic manifestation of cultural nationalism. In this way, I assert that the music and lyrics of the *parranda* are congruent with the symbolic association between Christmas and nationalism that was described in Chapter Three.

## CONCLUSION

Christmas in Puerto Rico is not only a time to celebrate religious belief but also patriotism and cultural heritage. In Puerto Rico, Christmas has become associated with cultural traditions and national sentiment. These relationships developed as a result of a twentieth century shift in the symbolic meanings and associations of folk traditions like the *parranda*. The *parranda* and its music, through their association with the iconic figure of the *jíbaro*, have become a symbol of the Puerto Rican nation.

The music and lyrics of the *parranda* reflect this symbolism in two ways. (1) Through recomposition, much of the current *parranda* repertory is based on the on specific *seises* and *aguinaldos*. These recompositions evoke the *jíbaro* by using a variety of sonic symbols such as melody, harmony, rhythm, and form that are directly associated with this figure. (2) By singing about the *parranda* and its traditions rather than religious themes, the lyrics of *parranda* songs call forth notions of cultural heritage. These self-referential lyrics demonstrate a poetic manifestation of cultural nationalism.

The idea of the *parranda* called forth by its music and lyrics is based on nineteenth century imagery of the *jíbaro*. The *parrandas* given today bear little resemblance to these romanticized events. They have been greatly affected by urbanization, commercialization, and cultural influence from the United States. These cultural changes have not only caused a decline in the tradition, but have also profoundly changed it. Opposing this decline, specific musical families and ensembles have become committed to the preservation of this tradition.

## Implications for Future Research

One aspect of the *parranda* tradition that deserves additional study is its practice among Puerto Ricans living on the mainland United States. In this thesis I established that the *parranda* has experienced a similar decline and change among both Puerto Ricans living on the island and the mainland. In addition, specific musicians have become dedicated to the continuation of this tradition in the United States. Also, I observed how Puerto Rican migrants to New York City have resignified the *parranda*. During the early 1960's the tradition was perceived as a symbol of the island culture they rejected. During the civil rights movement the *parranda* became an icon of cultural pride. Inspired by poetry and music some Nyoricans began giving *parrandas* as a political statement. Investigating how migration and immigrant life affected this tradition could provide a paradigm for understanding of the Puerto Rican experience in the United States.

A second area that deserves exploration is the relationship among race, class and the *parranda* tradition in Puerto Rico. Since the *parranda* is associated with the *jíbaro*, the following questions come to mind. When did the *parranda* begin to be practiced in Afro-Puerto Rican communities? To what extent do wealthy Puerto Ricans engage in this tradition? Is the *parranda's* music altered among these diverse communities? Although I cannot conclusively answer these queries, I can offer a harbinger of what this research might include. During my first week of fieldwork in San Juan, I attended several concerts of Christmas music. One night I attended a *promesa* sponsored by the ICP. The traditional songs, however, were not performed in the *música jíbara* style. Instead common Christmas songs were performed in the Afro-Puerto Rican styles of *bomba* and *plena*. Since the performers were all Black Puerto Ricans, I wondered if this

was the way Afro-Puerto Rican communities had adapted the *parranda* music for their own use. A night later, I attended a string quartet performance at an art gallery in the more exclusive neighborhood of Miramar. After the performance of a Beethoven quartet, they too played the same *aguinaldos* I had heard the previous night. The style, however, was markedly different. I wondered to what extent all Puerto Ricans celebrated the same songs in styles appropriate to their mutually exclusive communities.

### **The Future of the Parranda**

What does the future hold for this unique tradition? I can only speculate. In many ways it is contingent on the future of Puerto Rico. If the current political situation persists, I foresee continued assertion of national and cultural pride through the performance of the *parranda* and its music. As modernization and urbanization continue to effect Puerto Rican society the *parranda* and its music will likely continue to demonstrate commercialization and North American influence. I do not believe the tradition will decline into obscurity; Puerto Ricans are too enthusiastic about their music and cultural traditions to allow this. The preservation of the tradition appears promising as long as groups like the Tuna de Cayey and families like Los Andinos continue to provide *parrandas* and pass the tradition on to the next generation. The flexible nature of the tradition is perhaps its greatest tool for survival. It is remarkable how musical material, which is hundreds of years old, is reinvented and recomposed each year to yield fresh and new music. Often this new music becomes standard to the tradition.

I will close with one new tradition. Since it provides effective farewell, Ramon Andino's song "No Me Da la Gana," has been utilized as the conclusion to many *parrandas*. Thus its lyrics will also serve to close this thesis, "vamos, vamos,

vamos porque la parranda se acabó,” meaning, “let’s go, let’s go, let’s go, the *parranda* is finished.”

## LIST OF INFORMANTS

Ramon Andino	Leader of Los Andinos	1/4/03	Levittown, PR
Gigi Maldonado	President, Tuna de Cayey	12/30/02	San Juan, PR
Jamie Maldonado	<i>Parranda</i> Participant	4/15/02	Boston, MA
José Masanet	Musician, Tuna de Cayey	12/27/02	Caguas, PR
Yara Ordóñez	Musician	1/2/03	San Juan, PR
Alfonso Orona	<i>Parranda</i> Participant	5/24/02	Boston, MA
Walter Ramos	Musician	11/9/02	Albany, NY
Gilberto Rivera	Musician	5/19/02 10/28/02 11/2/02	Boston, MA Boston, MA Boston, MA
Cristina Rueda	<i>Parranda</i> Participant	1/6/02	Ponce, PR
Alex Torres	Musician	11/15/02	Amsterdam, NY
Rosaura Vega	<i>Parranda</i> Participant	4/16/02	Boston, MA

## PHOTOGRAPHS



Gilberto Rivera (Guitar) and Güiro player performing aguinaldos.  
*By David Gleason*



Asalto in Old San Juan.  
*By David Gleason*



The same parranda inside a home in Old San Juan.  
*By David Gleason*



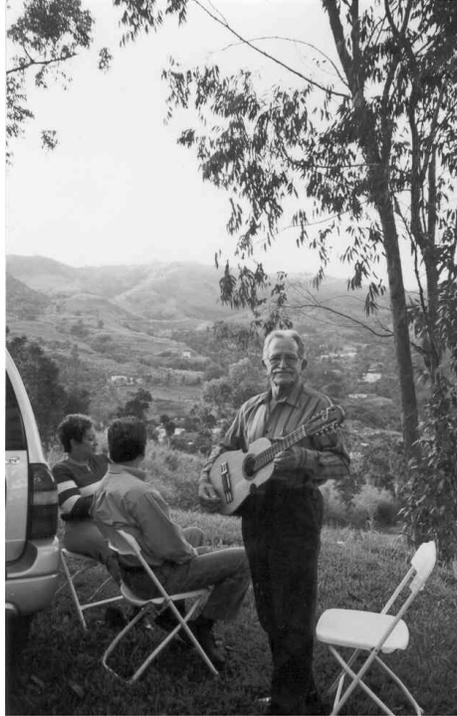
The Tuna de Cayey gives a parranda in Caguas.  
*By David Gleason*



Advertisement for maracas at Wendy's in Old San Jaun.  
*By David Gleason*



Wood carvings of the Magi presenting the Christ child with a Puerto Rican flag.  
*By David Gleason*



A folk musician holding his cuatro.  
*By David Gleason*



Gilberto Rivera playing aguinaldos.  
*By Limari B. Rivera*

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