

Mambo – college essay



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The madness of the human passions permeates temperamental and sensual mambo. Cuba can be proud of its melodies and rhythms. Rumba and cha-cha-cha as well as salsa and mambo chant this charming, sunny island.

The sound of mambo is one of the most genius inventions in a world of music. This rhythm originally was created in Cuba and was responsible for shaping the spellbinding sounds of salsa music. Mambo may be referred to as the result of a long cross-cultural journey. It is necessary to learn all the peculiarities of the development of this style in order to understand why it is so popular all over the globe till nowadays. The central question this paper seeks to answer is how mambo became worldwide spread music and dancing style.

The etymology of the word "Mambo" may be interpreted in different ways. Some researchers prove that it means "shake it" while others prove that this word means "conversation with the gods". There exist evidences that voodoo priestesses were usually called "Mambos" and this name was connected with the drums that were irreplaceable musical instruments during sacred rituals. The word "Mambo" were imported into Caribbean by American slaves. Afterwards, a new dance created in order to fit with a new music style developed. The Danzon music style which, was exceedingly popular back in 1930, influenced all Cuban music. Miguel Failde Perez created the original form of Danzon in 1879. He began with the introduction (four bars) and paseo (four bars). They were repeated and followed by a 16-bar melody.

Duane Shinn suggests “ despite its African resonance, the mambo can be traced back to an unexpected source, English country dance, which in the seventeenth century became the contredanse at the French court and later the contradanza in Spain.” (The Mambo: The Cuban Rhythm That Makes Feet Dance, 2008)

The very first mambo rhythms were rarely intended for dancing and were based on French and English ballroom dancing music. Its distinctive sound the rhythm of mambo received after the mixture of instruments that were used in the big bang jazz and Cuban rhythmic instruments.

Originally, mambo was created only for the sake of music and any dance had not been assigned to it.

Rumba and cha-cha-cha are very close to the Mambo music in its structure, but Mambo is faster and more luxurious one. A lot of famous musicians have made an outstanding contribution into a history of mambo. Israel “ Cachao” Lopez, Perez Prado, Tito Puente, Pupi Campo, Orestes Lopez, Enrique Jorrin, Xavier Cugat, Arsenio Rodriguez, Benny More and many others artists may be called Kings of Mambo.

One of the most popular groups of those days was the orchestra Arcano y sus Maravillas. They played usual motifs of Danzon as well as created totally new variations of the classic Danzon beats. In 1938, two brothers Israel “ Cachao” Lopez and Orestes Lopez created a new single entitled Mambo. Danzon de Nuevo Ritmo, the so-called Danzon Mambo, was immensely popular among people because of incorporation of heavier African beat into a new music style.

Ernest Barteldes stated the following:

Mambo came to the existence in the late 1930s, when Cachao and his brother were searching for new ideas after having written and recorded several string-and-flute charangas. Modernizing French parlor music called the Danzon they came up with a new beat, which they recorded in 1938 with the title " Mambo". (Cachao: Mambo Man, 2007)

Cachao remembered that time:

My brother and I were trying to add something new to our music and came up with a section that we called Danzon mambo. It made an impact and stirred up people. At that time, our music needed that type of enrichment. (Cachao: Mambo Man, 2007)

Cachao was a remarkably pleasant person as well as a musician. Andy Garcia admired him " With Cachao, his humbleness and complete devotion to his art are great examples to me as an artist. He is loose and easygoing, but very serious about his work. There are certainly a lot of people who know Cachao's music, but very few that are as obsessed and devoted as I am. I know what he is stylistically capable of, so that is why I'm a good producer for him." (Cachao: Mambo Man, 2007)

Obviously, Lopez brothers have made an immense contribution into music history, but, unfortunately, they did not make any steps to advance their innovation. The new style was able to transform itself into Mambo only after a couple of decades. It was Damaso Perez Prado who contributed to this process. Damaso Perez Prado was a brilliant Cuban pianist who was able to

consolidate the definite arrangements. He has made Mambo music a global phenomenon.

Israel "Cachao" Lopes joked:

"Mambo was something I created with my brother. Later, Perez Prado began calling himself the king of mambo, but I never had any hard feelings about this, because if it weren't for him the mambo would not have been internationally recognized." (Cachao: Mambo Man, 2007) Cachao explained they were never rivals nor enemies, but particularly close friends.

Mambo's roots are far more European than Latin despite the fact that mambo is a decidedly Cuban style. Typical instruments that mambo music often used were the bongo, claves, conga drum, timbales as well as a mixture of band instruments including the saxophone, trombone, bass (upright or electric bass), trumpet, and piano.

This style still remains tremendously popular among musicians and dancers. The most famous pieces created by Perez Prado were called "Mambo No. 5" and "Que Rico Mambo". These singles were like splashes of energy. The Mambo rhythms Prado developed originally in Havana, then in Mexico and afterwards in New York City.

Perez Prado is always credited with bringing mambo music and dance to the United States that caused as a result, the cultural change.

Prado was already a huge point of reference for Latin music all over the world by the mid 1950s. It should be said that in order to appeal to mainstream American listeners this original style became homogenized.

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Prado deserved his title “ Mambo King” for creating and popularizing the new form. The most popular mambo songs are “ They Were Doin’ The Mambo”, “ I Saw Mommy Do The Mambo”, “ Papa Loves Mambo” “ Mambo Italiano”, “ Mambo No 5” and many others brilliant examples.

Mambo mania had reached its fever pitch by the mid 1950’s. The mambo was played in New York City Palladium Ballroom, in a high-strung, sophisticated way. Very soon this famous Broadway dance-hall proclaimed itself the “ temple of mambo” for the most talented mambo dancers. Paulito, Louie Maquina, the Mambo Aces, Lilon, “ Killer Joe” Piro and Cuban Pete made a reputation for their expressive use of hands, arms, legs, and head. They gave mambo demonstrations in the Palladium Ballroom, but everyone desired to be the most popular dancer that is why fierce rivalry between bands existed. There was a real dance fever.

Duane Shinn stated “ the bands of Machito, Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez and Jose Curbelo delighted habitues such as Duke Ellington, Bob Hope, Marlon Brando, Lena Horne and Dizzy Gillespie, not to mention Afro-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Upper East-Side WASPs and Jews and Italians from Brooklyn.” (The Mambo: The Cuban Rhythm That Makes Feet Dance, 2008)

Dancing mambo in the post-war years was a voluptuous and euphoric celebration of long-awaited freedom. That was a dance of happiness.

The articles with the headings “ Mambo mania” and “ Mambo Revolution” began to appear in New York in the 1950s the Golden Age of Mambo.

The orchestras Tito Rodriguez and Tito Puente also made a name for themselves as Kings of Mambo at the height of the Mambo's success.

Tito Puente with other Latin musicians, such as Tito Rodriguez, helped give rise in the 1950s to the golden age of mambo. ("Tito Puente". Encyclopædia Britannica, 2012)

Shinn Duane gave such a definition of Mambo phenomenon. "Mambo is a Cuban genre of music and dance that combines traditional Cuban music with the highly Americanized forms of swing and big band. It is a very syncopated type of music, a style that finds its footing in rhythm as opposed to melody (though a melody, of course, plays its role). Mambo is always played in 4/4 time and uses an amalgamation of American big band instruments and those found in traditional Latin styles; mambo bands will typically have a horn section in addition to the very percussive bongos, timbales and congas." (The Mambo: The Cuban Rhythm That Makes Feet Dance, 2008)

In conclusion, it should be said that this rhythm lost its rabid popularity as quickly as it arrived. Nowadays it is morphed into many different styles. However, many dance studios in Mexico City teach the authentic Mambo music and dance. The original style of the mambo is still alive in Cuba.

Despite the fact that rhythmically, sound of mambo is similar to tango, samba, beguine and bossa nova it is quite original to be identifiable as a distinctive rhythm of mambo.

During the age of its popularity, mambo blurs the boundaries between whole nations. Color and class melted away in the incandescent rhythm of this

fantastic music. Even talented jazz musicians such as Sonny Rollins Erroll Garner, Sonny Stitt, and Charlie Parker fell under the mambo's charm as people listen on the many Latin recordings that were made in the 1950's.

One can not disagree that mambo dance and music is sensual and flirtatious, as well as can get terribly gross at times, even raunchy. Mambo dancers are truly passionate and express their passion with the help of their hips. Sharp, quick steps in connection with flowing movements contribute to the sensuous feel of the mambo rhythm.