

Folk instruments of puerto rico: their origins, roots and influence in puerto ric...

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INSTRUMENTS OF PUERTO RICO: THEIR ORIGINS, ROOTS AND INFLUENCE IN

PUERTO RICAN CULTURE Luis F. Rodriguez MH 631 – Introduction to

Musicology Prof. Mirchandani 12/19/2001 CONTENTS: Introduction³ Historical

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Heritage⁸ Plucked String Instruments (“ Spanish Heritage”)⁹ Their

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Puerto Rican Culture¹³ Conclusions¹⁵ Bibliography¹⁶ INTRODUCTION The

history of Puerto Rican music in general is incomplete and inaccurate.

There is little documentation available from the 16th through the 18th-

century, due to the lack of attention that the Spanish authorities paid

towards Puerto Rico. During this gestation time, educated people considered

it not interesting to write about culture and music –especially jibaro music– in

Puerto Rico during the first centuries of the colonization time; it was more

interesting to be a philosopher, for example. It is possible the exposure of

other European cultures (and thus their music and instruments) brought to

Puerto Rico by contraband during this time, but there is no concrete

evidence[1].

The only true fact is that the music of the jibaros is the basis of the Puerto

Rican’s shaping; to say jibaro is the same as to say Puerto Rican. Thus, it was

the jibaro that first began to give shape to Puerto Rican culture, and with it

the music and musical instruments. This paper will explore the Puerto Rican

instruments and how are they related to the history and culture of Puerto

Rico. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND Puerto Rican culture is part of a Hispanic

civilization. It is the result of the Spaniard's encounter with the Taino Indian and the African—with the Hispanic element remaining decisive and dominant.

This creates an autonomous culture and music with national characteristics of its own and a variety of forms. Various foods and many names of towns are of Taino (Indian) origin in Puerto Rico. And so are some musical instruments, like the maracas and the guiros. Drums from hollow tree trunks with a thin skin are Indian, too. The rhythms themselves are Spanish or African. During colonization times in Puerto Rico (around 1508) began the Golden Age of the vihuela de mano in the courts of Spain; it had 6 courses. There was also the vihuela del pueblo with four courses, the vihuela de plectro and the vihuela de arco.

The documents of the Real Hacienda in Puerto Rico tell us that the first vihuela entered Puerto Rico in 1512, and in 1516 entered the first Spanish guitar. [2] The Spanish tradition makes itself strongly felt in the melodies of Puerto Rican folk music. The melodies are carried usually by the Spanish guitar or by the Puerto Rican's own string instruments: the cuatro, tiple, tres and bordonua[3]. During the 19th century, Puerto Rican musical tradition had been developing, as the Spanish heritage was slowly assimilated into Afro-Caribbean folk music.

In 1898, during the Spanish American War, American troops invaded Puerto Rico and raised the American flag. To many Puerto Ricans, it was apparent that the almost 400 years of cultural exchange with Spain had come to an end. According to some musicians and writers, the arrival of Americans announced the beginning of a period of decline. Curiously, after Spain ceded

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sovereignty over Puerto Rico to the United States, Puerto Rico retained its Hispanic character and culture. Evidence shows that the musical culture did not decline. Musical activities continued on the island throughout the first decade of the era. MUSICAL GENRES

There is no doubt of the importance and transcendence of the orquesta jibara (folk ensemble), which began to take its shape in the 16th-century among all social classes. The jibaro music was used before for almost every occasion, including festivities, funerals, religious occasions, and especially in Christmas season. Its topics involve in one way or another national affirmation, patriotism. Some examples of jibaro genres are the seis, which is the dorsal spine of the music in Puerto Rico; the Spanish villancico and the aguinaldo are other forms used for Puerto Rican Christmas songs. These are sung by trovadores.

The trovadores make use of the improvisation. This difficult art is one of the remarkable features of Puerto Rican folk music, used in the decima. The decima, a song of ten-line verses in rhymed octosyllabics descending from medieval Spanish ballads, and the aguinaldo are often extemporized. The trovador sings of love, of man's conditions and experiences, of his people, his country, of persons he wants to honor and of events that impress him. The direct African influence on the folk music of Puerto Rico and on Puerto Rican folklore in general has been the consequence of the importation of African slaves by the Spaniards.

Traditionally the African influence in Puerto Rican music has been strongest near the coasts where the percentage of people of African descent is much

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higher. The Afro-Puerto Rican people brought the joyfulness of the dance even into events of religious solemnity, like the baquine (a funeral dance for a black boy who died), the chanted rosaries and the fiestas de Cruz (celebration of the Holy Cross). The bomba is an Afro-Puerto Rican dance (and song). People used it to express themselves. The bomba dance of the Black sugar-cane cutters and other plantation workers was named after a wooden drum covered with goatskin, the bomba or bombo.

It was a monotonous and sensuous dance for festivities at the end of the harvest. The accompaniment was provided by percussion instruments: the bomba drum (different sizes), palillos (wooden sticks), and maracas[4]. There are two types of bomba drums: one is the buleador, which makes the basic rhythm; the other, the primo, makes the improvisation. The primo has a unique responsibility: to do exactly what the dancer does with his/her dancing, at the same time he/she is doing it; it is a kind of challenge, a communication between the dancer and the drum player.

There is no limit on the number of buleadores to be playing, but there can be only one primo. The plena is the most famous Afro-Puerto Rican musical form. It has Taino antecedents and is proletarian. The instruments originally used in the plena dance are usually panderos (kind of hand-drums), guiro and maracas. There are three kinds of pandero used in the plena dance, depending on their size, sound and function in the music. The first is the seguidor, which makes the principal basic rhythm. The second, the punteador, makes a counter-rhythm to the seguidor.

And the last one, the requinto, improvises, with syncopated rhythm, as an answer or complement to the seguidor rhythm. There should not be confusion between the plena name for the musical genre and the panderos; the panderos are not plenas. In addition to these instruments, as the plena evolves they have added the Spanish guitar, the Puerto Rican cuatro, and even the clarinet and the accordion; this last one brought by foreign sailors when they stopped at the port and join the musicians in Puerto Rico.

The Puerto Rican danza was officially the first national musical genre, because it is shared by all social sectors. The danza has a European character and originated with the 19th-century upper class. It was a society dance; and it became music for bands, for the piano and for singing. It has become very much a part of Puerto Rico's musical folklore; but it also was to develop into concert music. Into it were incorporated the cuatro and the guiro by one of the best exponent of the danza, Juan Morel Campos. The danza can have different rhythms and moods.

Romantic or affective danzas usually have soft rhythm and cadences. Festive danzas (often referred as danzas de carnaval) have more syncopated and accelerated rhythms; There are also the danzas which use the bombardino as a soloist instrument, like Sara (Angel Mislan), La Coquetona (Jose E. Quinton) and Impromptu (Luis R. Miranda). MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS “ The musical instruments are not the only neutral roots, but solid deposits of the historical continuity; and, similarly to tools and buildings, they have memories and history. They carry inside bites of social and conceptual hanges through which they were developed and transformed. ” (Luciano

Berio) Puerto Rican traditional musical instruments include basically the plucked string and percussion families. One interesting datum in the mention among Puerto Rican instruments of the marimbula, an Antillean modification of the African lamellophone[5], that serves as a basis instrument during many popular festivities involving music. There is no evidence of this instrument being used currently, but it deserves to be mentioned since it is registered in history.

As in the culture itself, the Puerto Rican musical instruments share the heritage from all their three roots: Taino, African and Spanish. TAINO HERITAGE The Taino Indians sang with their dances a monotonous chant (monody), the areyto, accompanied by a maguey, by the maracas and the guiro (which in the country is also called carracho). The voice range was short and monotonous, and their chants were nasal. They had a constantly repeated rhythmic figure. It is presumed that their modes were similar to the old ecclesiastic modes of the European church in the Middle Ages.

They had the response characteristic of a leader (or small group) singing something and then the other remaining people repeat the same or answer to it, doing the chorus function. Their instruments belong to the woodwind and percussion family: Woodwinds: Guamos or trompas de caracol (fotuto) Flautines de junco o hueso (silbato) and ocarinas de barro Pitos, chirimias and reed flutes Percussion: Maguey or mayohuacan drums (made of wood) Amaraca (known today as maraca) Guajeyes (the guiro belongs to this family); scraped with a pua (metal piece)

Sonajeros pequenos (caracoles), attached to their wrists and feet to shake them while they were dancing The Taino instruments were used for dances, magic enchantments, battles, and for weather, parties and victory announcements. From all of these, the maraca and the guiro are the only ones which still survives in Puerto Rican culture today. The AMARACA is originally made of dried round gourds from the fruit of the higuera tree, with pebbles or dried seeds inside. Its deaf sound served to mark the beats in music. They used only one amaraca. The costume today is to use two; this is probably an influence of the African culture.

They used two kinds of amaracas, one for religious rituals and the other for other kinds of activities; though they did not have any social activities, but all rituals. Today the amaraca is known as maraca. The name maraca is thought to be Pre-Columbian Araucanian origin. They form an integral part of the rhythm section of Latin American orchestras and are widespread particularly in Colombia, Venezuela and Brazil. They have been adopted by Western rhythm bands and percussion ensembles and are also important instruments in primary school education.

Modern composers to score for maracas include Varese (Ionisation, 1934), Prokofiev (Romeo and Juliet, 1935) and Malcolm Arnold (Fourth Symphony, 1960) Occasionally maracas are used as ' drumsticks'. Bernstein's Jeremiah Symphony (1942), Harold Farbermann's Concerto for Timpani and Orchestra (1962) and Marius Constant's ballet Paradis perdu (1967) request this effect. The GUIRO is an elongated gourd made from the fruit of the guajey tree, with a notched surface to be scraped with a piece of metal. It is used in the

Caribbean, Panama and South America. It gives rhythmic emphasis to the music.

In Puerto Rico, the guiro is used in most types of folk and popular music, and in certain religious festivals. The modern guiro has been used in orchestral scores, including Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges*; in this last one may be in place of the specified scraped cheese-grater. The maguey, their wooden drum, differently to the African drums, did not use goatskin. The Taino made it by cutting a tree of the same thickness as him, and shortening it with axe and stone. By hitting its surface with a 12 inches stick produced its deaf sound.

AFRICAN HERITAGE To talk about African music means to talk about drums or instruments made of goatskin, which is the biggest African heritage to Puerto Rican culture, along with rhythm. There are different drums sizes: the tamborcillos, the gran timba or conga, the bongo, the sonajeros made of coconut nuts (similar to the Taino's ones) and the tambourine. The clave, as well as the cencerro, comes from the bantu culture. The Negro tradition survives in the bomba dances that came mainly from the Ghana coasts, and originated in Puerto Rico in the sugar cane central.

The instrumental ensemble is made by two or more drums (called bombas), two palillos (wooden sticks) and one maraca. The **BOMBA DRUM** is an Afro-Ecuadorian double-headed drum, found in Chota and Intag, Imbabura Province, and in Rio Limones, Esmeraldas Province. The drum has barrel shape and the goatskin is heated to create tension and change the pitch. The biggest of the drums has the deepest sound and is called burlador or

buleador, and has the basic rhythm. The smallest of the drums is the requinto, subidor or primo, which has a high timbre and supplement the rhythm of the buleador.

It is also the one who “ dialogues” and makes a challenge with the dancer. Another musician hits the sides of the barrel drum with sticks called cua or pua, to keep the exact measure of the beat in the music. The maraca is played by one of the singers in the choir, usually a woman. A unison choir, directed by a leading voice (usually a woman), sings the main melody. The musical elements present in the bomba dance are the rhythm (the most important one) and the melody (chant) between the leading voice and the unison choir. The main instruments in the plena dance were the PANDEROS and the guiro.

Little by little another instruments were added, like the accordion, the Spanish guitar, the cuatro and the cencerro. The CONGA is an Afro-Cuban drum. It has a long, tapered or barrel-shaped shell up to about 90 cm deep and a single head about 25 to 30 cm in diameter. Congas are usually played with fingers and hollow palm of the hand. They have become integral to Latin American dance orchestras, where they are used in pairs or singly, having a screw-tensioned heads; in such cases the hoop is well below the rim of the shell (as with the bongos) to allow free action of the fingers, etc.

Applying pressure to the head (from edge to center) can raise the pitch with the hand, wrist or elbow. The PALILLOS (other names include palitos or claves) are simple wooden sticks used to mark the certain rhythms in the music. The Bombardino The alternatively name for the bombardino is

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flicorno baritono. It is a valve bugle horn of widely conical profile; the Italian equivalent to the Austrian flugelhorn, the Spanish fiscorn and the French saxhorn. The bombardino is the equivalent of the euphonium with three or four valves, with configuration in C or Bb, compass E-d'.

This instrument, though not a Puerto Rican folk instrument, played an important part during the 20th-century virtuoso solos in many Puerto Rican danzas. PLUCKED STRING INSTRUMENTS ("SPANISH HERITAGE") The tiple, the cuatro and the bordonua, all together with the guitar and other percussion instruments (like the guiro and the maraca) make the main spine of the musical culture of Puerto Rico[6]. From these, the cuatro is the most important and re-known of all (it will be discussed more in detail later in this section). The BORDONUA is a plucked string instrument derived from the guitar, with five courses of strings tuned A-d-f#-b-e'.

It took its name from the bordon (thick string). Due to the absence of information makes it impossible to trace the origin and development of this instrument. Probably its model was the guitarron or giant lute, used in the 18th-century string ensembles and having the same role as the bordonua. The Puerto Rican costumbrista literature of the 19th century makes a lot of references to the bordonua, mentioned together with other native plucked string instruments[7]. The bordonua is the less known instrument in Puerto Rico, though it is not the less important one.

The bordonua is the low voice in the orquesta jibara. A peculiar characteristic of it is a tremolo/vibrato the player does to the string, which gives the feeling that the string "is crying". It was replaced in the beginning of the 20th-

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century by the Spanish guitar; since that, it began to disappear. Thank to the effort of some people in the second half of the century, especially Francisco Lopez Cruz, it was rescued. He created an orchestra of bordonuas, and its sound began to be heard again. The TIPLE is told to be a descendant from the guitarillo of the Canario Islands of the 17th-century.

The word tiple itself came from the Spanish language, which means, “treble” or “soprano”, often applied to specific instruments. This instrument also exists in Spain, Colombia, Guatemala and Venezuela. In Puerto Rico there are three kinds of tiple: the tiple doliente, the tiple requinto, and the tiplon or tiple con macho. The tiple doliente has 16 frets, 5 strings and is tuned in C. It is the most common in the mountains. In the coast area the most common are the requinto, with 10 frets and 3 strings, tuned in B; and the tiple con macho or tiplon, with 18 frets and 5 strings, tuned in E.

Its fifth string is attached to a peg on the neck, similarly to the North-American banjo. Since the banjo has African origins, is it thought that this kind of tiple does too, especially because the wood used to make both instruments is the same African people use. The TRES is a type of small guitar with three singles or double courses of strings. They are more common in Cuba. In Puerto Rico it has three singles strings, tuned b-g'-d". It is primarily a melodic instrument, and not as common as the tiple. The CUATRO is the main instrument of Puerto Rico.

Its sounds represent today the national identity of Puerto Rico; it is the voice of the jibaro in the mountain and in the coast. Besides Puerto Rico, it is also found in South America and the West Indies, specifically Colombia, Jamaica,

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Mexico, Sundam and Trinidad. In Puerto Rico and Venezuela the cuatro is used as an ensemble instrument for both secular and religious music. It is made of native woods and exists in a wide variety of shapes, retaining plectrum technique of the Spanish vihuela de penola. The cuatro is associated with the Puerto Rican jibaro; his music has the same meaning than memories and history.

There are several theories of the origin of the cuatro, but none of them have complete documentation. Those are: 1. The vihuela. It was the first instrument to enter Puerto Rico, but there is no prove for it to be a predecessor of the instrument as well. The biguela is mentioned twice in Alonso and Atilas writings, but there are not even tuning descriptions to compare with. It is the most convincing of all the theories by now. It is curious that the word vihuela remains in the jibaro's vocabulary when they refer to the string instruments (including the cuatro). . The bandurria is a possibility stated by the Cuatro Project in New York, due to the Spanish closeness of the rondallas and fourths tuning, like the cuatro. 3. The tiple (doliente or requinto) is thought to be already present before the cuatro. The cuatro could be a modification of this instrument that continued growing up since then (this can be possible, based on the writings of Juan M. Delgado) [8]. It is also mentioned the Portuguese cavaquihno as its 15th-century predecessor which, like the cuatro, had four strings.

But again, there is no documentation to support it. Originally, as the name itself, the cuatro had four single strings, tuned in 4ths. Between 1849 and 1887 the strings were doubled and it was added an additional double

string[9]. By the beginning of the 20th-century the cuatro had already five double courses of strings. One of the reasons for these changes was the looking for a greater volume of sound. The first five double-course cuatro registered in history can be seen in a picture of Joaquin Rivera “ El Surdo”, a great left-handed Puerto Rican cuatro player.

Between the 16th-century and the end of 18th-century the Puerto Rican people had no direct contact with European luthiers. The jibaros did not have good-quality materials available to make the instruments; so they made them with whatever they had available at that time. Usually the closest people to these skills were cabinetmakers, carpenters and handwork makers, so the technique of doubling the wood was not known at that time[10]. In the 19th-century, however, there is a generation of good-quality, four double-course cuatros made by good artisans, which were played by great cuatro players from that time.

By 1910, the cuatro had officially its new or modern shape, as a result of better artisans and more accessible materials to work with. In the 1970's, the artisan Cristobal Santiago continued the project that Antonio Rodriguez Navarro began before: to create a whole family of cuatros of different ranges. The cuatro soprano substitutes the tiple; the cuatro tenor is the most-known one; the cuatro alto is a new invention; and the cuatro bajo substitutes the bordonua. The cuatro becomes officially a Puerto Rican national instrument in the middle of 19th-century. Example A: Tuning of the old cuatro (four double courses) [pic] Example B: Tuning of the new cuatro (five double courses) [pic] THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH FOLK/POPULAR MUSIC

AND ART MUSIC AND THEIR INFLUENCE IN PUERTO RICAN CULTURE Around 1850 there were theater, opera and zarzuela companies, military bands and orchestras in Puerto Rico traveling around the cities and enriching the Puerto Rican. The jibaros that traveled from town to town were the only ones to listen to this, because it never got into the rural area.

Thus, they began to imitate and perform rhythms and pieces in their cuatros like the waltz, the mazurka, the polka and the paso doble, among others. The cuatro made his official entrance to the world of popular music in 1915 with the Borinquen Quintet in New York, and in Puerto Rico itself in 1924 with the ensemble Bohemios Puertorriquenos. After that it was used in the trios music in the 1950s, highly influenced by Los Panchos trio. The arriving of the radio broadcasting to Puerto Rico in the beginning of the 20th-century affects the entire island.

After established, around 1930-40, the cuatro was popularized through a radio broadcasting program called Industrias Nativas, in which played one of the most famous and greatest cuatro player, Ladislao Martinez (better known as maestro Ladi). He was the one responsible for the creation of a wide repertoire for the cuatro with his ensemble Aurora, where the music is perform with two cuatros, Spanish guitar and guiro. His repertoire included mazurkas, polkas, waltzes, paso dobles, fox-trot, guarachas and boleros, among others.

He is the first one to perform the cuatro when the radio broadcasting station WKAQ AM began in the old San Juan in the 1920 decade. This way he reached to all the people from the mountains without having to go there and

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providing a performable repertoire, in comparison to the orchestral repertoire that was not easy to learn for the cuatro players that listened to the radio. These cuatro players then listened to him by the radio and imitated him. Maestro Ladi worked on the project of Industrias Nativas together with the composer Felipe R.

Goyco (Don Felo) and the guiro player Patricio Rijos (better known as Toribio). They marked an unforgettable time for all the Puerto Ricans. The 1970's are characterized by the creation of the Nueva Cancion (New Song), where youth people are seen using the cuatro. In the 1980's the cuatro made its entrance to the art music. Each day there are more and more transcriptions of works by Bach and other composers for the cuatro. Ernesto Cordero, a prominent 20th-century Puerto Rican composer, wrote a Concerto for Puerto Rican Cuatro and String Orchestra (1988).

The Rondalla of Humacao (a folk ensemble) applied the techniques of the Suzuki method to the cuatro teaching. The first method to learn how to play the cuatro (La antorcha) was created and published by Efraim Ronda between 1933 and 1934. In the late 1950's the Dr. Ricardo Alegria, director of the Institute of Culture of Puerto Rico (created in 1955), supported the creation of a cuatro hand-making course. Then in the 1960's he contacted Francisco Lopez Cruz, who was in Spain, and asked him to work with the creation of a cuatro method targeting the teaching in mass, due to the danger of its virtual disappearance.

This was the boost that gave again life to the Puerto Rican cuatro and brought it to the place it has today among Puerto Rican people as a

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representative of the national identity in the string category. Rafael “ Pilo” Suarez also published a cuatro learning method after 1970. In the 1990’s the University of Puerto Rico (Rio Piedras campus) created an institutional ensemble called Conjunto Criollo, dedicated to folk music (using folk instruments), as a suggestion of Dr. Luis Manuel Alvarez. In 1997 the Conservatory of Music of Puerto Rico began to offer a Puerto Rican cuatro course, limited to two years but aiming to create a whole degree in he instrument and its actual repertoire. Also, the Inter American University of Puerto Rico (metro campus) has included the Puerto Rican cuatro in its popular music program. Similarly to the Institute of Culture of Puerto Rico, the Ateneo Puertorriqueno was founded in 1876, and it promoted the arts by encouraging the development of literary forms, musical compositions, musical performance, and the other fine arts. They together make efforts today to keep alive the musical genres and musical instruments in Puerto Rico. CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing what we have exploring through this paper, we have the fact that Puerto Rican culture is a very rich culture with a very complex history, that I have to confess not every Puerto Rican knows. These musical instruments, as well as the musical genres are the ones who determine the identity of the Puerto Rican. As long as each Puerto Rican (and this applies also to every person of every nation) knows his/her roots, then he/she can grow as a person, as a human, and blossom like a tree, like a flower, because he/she has strong fundamentals.

Based on this information given here, we can conclude that there is plenty of work remaining to do in the Puerto Rican culture, more specifically in music. As a Puerto Rican –and a musician– I feel responsibility and commitment with my country to be part of the team that helps to investigate, collect information, and put together all so other people from other countries can know more about Puerto Rican instruments and music in general. I think even when researchers have done pretty good job there is still a long way to work on. I just hope every Puerto Rican musician feels the same way as me...

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Volumen I: desde 1493 al 1959. Produced, written and directed by Juan Sotomayor, William Cumpiano and Wil Echevarria. 85 min. Puerto Rican Cuatro Project, 1999. Videocassette. Popular Bank of Puerto Rico. Raices. Produced by Popular Bank of Puerto Rico. 90 min. Popular Bank of Puerto Rico <https://assignbuster.com/folk-instruments-of-puerto-rico-their-origins-roots-and-influence-in-puerto-rican-culture/>

Rico, 2001. Videocassette. ————— [1] Orlando Laureano mentions the existence of people from Ireland settled in Puerto Rico before 1812 in his article *El Cuatro Puertorriqueno*, *Breve Historia*, available from <http://www.teoria.com/articles/laureano/index.htm> (Internet; accessed 15 November 2001). [2] See the Musical Instruments section later in this paper for more information about the vihuela and the Spanish guitar. [3] See the Musical Instruments section later in this paper for more information about the cuatro, tiple, tres and bordonua. [4] See the Musical Instruments section later in this paper for more information about the bomba drum, palillos and maracas. [5] A musical instrument whose sound is generated essentially by the vibration of thin lamellae (thin plate or layer) or tongues of metal, wood or other material. It is found throughout many regions of sub-Saharan Africa and in Latin America. [6] Mentioned for the first time (except the guitar) as the components of the *orquestra jibara* (folk ensemble) in 1849 by Manuel A. Alonso in his book *El Gibaro* (Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico: Editorial Cultural, 1974), 39. [7] Manuel A. Alonso (1849-82), in his book *El Gibaro*, describes the bordonua as “ a guitar of big dimensions, made most of the times with the only-available-to-the-moment tools, like a knife or a dagger”. [8] In a writing by the Puerto Rican artisan from the Cabo Rojo town, Efrain Perez, he presents the cuatro made in his town in the beginning of 20th-century as the *cuatro doliente*.

Still is needed to see the transition in shapes of the old cuatros and its variations. [9] The theories about which string was added (either the highest or the lowest one) are different. However, valuable evidence is found in the *cuatro* method by Efrain Ronda (*La Antorcha*, 1933-34), where there is a hint <https://assignbuster.com/folk-instruments-of-puerto-rico-their-origins-roots-and-influence-in-puerto-rican-culture/>

about the tuning for the old cuatro. As shown in the following examples A and B, the string added during the transition of the courses was the highest one, that is, the G string, while the B string was originally tuned in A. 10] The Puerto Rican historian and luthier, Prof. Rafael Aviles Vazquez, tells us in one of his writings about the first cuatros: “ These cuatros, which we called archaic, were forgotten because the materials used to build them were of weak resistance to the time action. The old cuatro was very rustic, and its acoustic box was more similar to the African lute-harp rather than the European instruments. Its tuning was inaccurate, just like the African lute-harp. Its rough ending shows the poor skills of the tools used in the handwork”.