

# The cultural impact of puerto rican plena on puerto rican society

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## **Puerto Rican Plena**

About 100 years ago, plena, also known as “ el periódico cantado”, or the talking newspaper, was introduced to Puerto Rico for the first time.

Throughout those 100 years, plena has made an immense impact on the Puerto Rican culture and has more recently become its folklore.

Plena was created in Ponce, Puerto Rico by the working class barrios, though it truly originated in Africa and gained much influence from Europe, and many parts of the Caribbean along the way. Plena can be about everything from the abolishing of slavery to the everyday life of those who sing it. It focused on the struggles and daily lives of the working class people in Puerto Rico. Plena became primarily folklore in the 20th century but was modernized by Puerto Rico, giving it a fresh start with the future generations in hopes it would continue to remain a major part of the culture (Puerto Rican Folkloric).

There are many instruments played in plena music including guitars, bongos, maracas, guiros, congos, panderetas, and a few others (Lee, Donna 2006). Panderetas, also known as planderos, are the main instruments of the plena. Similar to a tambourine lacking cymbals, a plandero is a drum that is held when played. In order to complete a plena ensemble, three different sizes of these panderetas drums are needed (Music Genre: Plena). All of the instruments, including the vocalist, give the music an upbeat feel that is festive. Plena is also fast paced and couples often dance along face to face, also known as the social position. The audience or community usually enjoys singing and dancing along with the main performers (Lee, Donna 2006).

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Plena is usually performed at informal gatherings as a form of entertainment (Music Genre: Plena).

Ismael Rivera is a very well known plena performer who lived from 1931-1987. Ismael was often known as “ El Sonero Mayor” or the premier improviser. Born in Santurce, Puerto Rico, Ismael always had a love for singing but usually spent his days working as a carpenter with his father. He attempted to join the army but was discharged since he did not speak much english. Upon returning home, Ismael began working with the Panamerican Orchestra, recording his first hit “ El Charlatan”. After that, he continued to grow as a successful artist through his rhythmic, upbeat songs and strong defying voice that set him aside from all other artists during his time (ISMAEL RIVERA).

### **Recordings**

- Siempre Alegre by Manuel Jimenez performed around 1950
- El Incomprendido by Ismael Rivera performed in 1971
- El Nazareno by Ismael Rivera
- Amor Salvaje by Ismael Rivera and Rafael Cortijo performed around 1955
- Agua que va a Caer by Rafael Cortijo performed in 1969

I enjoy the upbeat feel of the music and the lyrics. It talks about the everyday struggles of middle and working class people which I can relate to at times. It reminds me a lot of salsa music and I like that plena music is used as entertainment at informal gatherings where everyone is free to join in and dance or sing along.

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Throughout recent history in Puerto Rico, plena has made an immense impact on its culture and has more recently become its folklore. There are many well known artists that have performed plena through the years and still continue to be celebrated. Plena is upbeat and festive music that continues to thrive in Puerto Rico.