

LOS ARCHIVOS DEL TALLER

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Imagen Latina : “The Manifesto of Salsa Brava”



ET: Bernardo, what made you, a folk musician and a poet known for protest songs, create a *Salsa*?

BP: César Rondón, *The Book of Salsa*, called all these Caribbean rhythms, trademarked as *Salsa*, “Urban-Caribbean” and I think of them as Urban-Caribbean Folklore: the music of Africa via the Islands and recreated with the sounds of New York. The folk music of a group of people is formed by their collective stories and *Salsa* reflected the stories of the Latino immigrants in New York the same way that *Tango*, in Argentina (using a Yoruba name) portrays the immigrant experience of the Europeans coming to the Americas.

I am a Latino immigrant living in New York. When I lived in Mendoza, Argentina my experiences were expressed in *tonadas* (the rhythm of my hometown) in New York, I was exposed to *Salsa* and it became a part of my “folk”.

In the early 70s, Luis Alonso, a Puerto Rican film and video producer asked me to create lyrics for the theme song of the first television show in Spanish called *Imágenes Latinas*, that was to be transmitted from New Jersey (USA). When I finished writing it, Luis passed it on to Andy Gonzalez to add music to the lyrics. Although his group, “*Conjunto Libre*”, did not record the whole song that time, they recorded enough to make it the theme song for the television show.



Eventually, “Conjunto Libre” recorded a version on their second album that lasted almost 12 minutes. The dancers, the *Salseros*, following Manny Oquendo and Libre knew that version of the song. It includes a solo by trombone player Barry Rogers, who many consider anthological in the history of *Salsa*. However, 12 minutes made it too long for typical radio play in the US. Probably Joe Caire, the Salsoul Producer, was resigned that this version would never be featured as a radio “hit”, but he dared keep that length: it is a jewel.



Imagen Latina (Palombo/Gonzalez) performed by Conjunto Libre:

Audio clip: Adobe Flash Player (version 9 or above) is required to play this audio clip. Download the latest version [here](#). You also need to have JavaScript enabled in your browser.

ET: How, then, did El Trabuco end up recording **Imagen Latina** and performing it with Irakere? ([wikipedia, 1981](#))

BP: I am not sure. I don't know that part of the history. I hope to be able to ask Rene Lopez about this. He knows.

ET: When did you hear the Trabuco version for the first time?

BP: Many, many years after it was recorded in NY, my brother-in-law, Momón Terrero, told me about a version that was different from Libre's ***Imagen***, but at that time, before internet (and Youtube.com), I couldn't find it. Seven or eight years ago, a group from Venezuela came to El Taller and gave me a CD called "Homenaje a Los Rumberos", a tribute CD of the "hits" by the 80's masters recorded by the "new" Venezuelan *Salsa* bands. ***Imagen Latina*** was one of them.

They told me about Trabuco's version then and did not believe my surprise: the fact that I did not know about it and that I had never heard it. When they returned to Venezuela, they sent it to me.



Imagen Latina (Palombo/Gonzalez) performed by Trabuco Venezolano:

Audio clip: Adobe Flash Player (version 9 or above) is required to play this audio clip. Download the latest version [here](#). You also need to have JavaScript enabled in your browser.



ET: Why do you think that the song was, and continues to be popular in Venezuela and virtually unknown in the US?

BP: The Trabuco, in Venezuela, was and still is a national institution of music. In the US, Libre was almost never heard on the radio because, Fania, the record label that trademarked “Urban-Carribean Folk” as *Salsa*, and therefore had a monopoly on that word excluded, Libre who were recorded under the SalSoul label.



IMAGINE

LATINA AS PERFORMED BY SON MADERA SON: MARCH, 2012 DIEGO IBARRA PLAZA, CARACAS

ET: Tell us about César Rondón and the comment he made in his book “El Libro de la Salsa : Crónicas del Caribe Urbano”, that ***Imagen Latina*** is a “manifesto of salsa brava”.

BP: I think César Rondon’s comment in History of Salsa is because ***Imagen Latina*** is one of the first, and few, *Salsa* songs written from the US, for the Latinos in the US: as an affirmation that we came here to stay and to live and without the longing of what was left behind. *Salsa* is one of the common grounds, a unifying ground, of our diverse “Latin image”, especially here, the “melting pot”, that is New York. In this respect, it is a song written “locally”. Do you remember that James Bond movie from “Russia with Love”? ***Imagen Latina*** is a song “from the Bronx with Love”. The combination of my lyrics with Andy’s music and the interpretation of a group like Trabuco Venezolano has taken it to a global level.

ET: Why does Rondón say that the lyrics for ***Imagen Latina*** are from the Colombian poet Bernardo Palomo?

BP: ...to confuse the enemy!...a joke; I don’t really know. In New York, Latin refers to many possibilities: Colombian, Puertorican, Paraguayan, e.t.c. I met Rondón at an event at the New Rican Village (he talks about that night in El Libro de la Salsa).

I remember the first time I saw the Conjunto Libre perform. It was in July 1977 when they played at a modest venue known as Nuyorican Village, a sort of refuge for Puerto Rican poets, musicians, and actors, obviously intent on reaffirming a cultural identity that they felt was threatened. That evening I witnessed an extraordinary musical manifesto. On the margins of the commercialized "salsa," already as clearly packaged and nondescript as ketchup, these musicians showed what was possible. Despite their modest resources, they performed, with pride, the enduring and daring salsa that remains an authentic musical testament to the contemporary barrio. I remember how pleasantly surprised I was with the guaguancó, "Imágenes latinas," later recorded with one of salsa's best trombone solos ever, performed by Barry Rogers. The lyrics were adapted by Andy González from a poem by Colombian Bernardo Palomo. They show the unifying character of salsa, a musical expression that, though primarily born in the New York barrio, brought together all urban Caribbean communities:

Indians, Hispanics, Blacks,
Let's all come together
With our roots and our blood,
To form one successful future.

FROM CESÁR RONDÓN'S THE BOOK OF SALSA

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