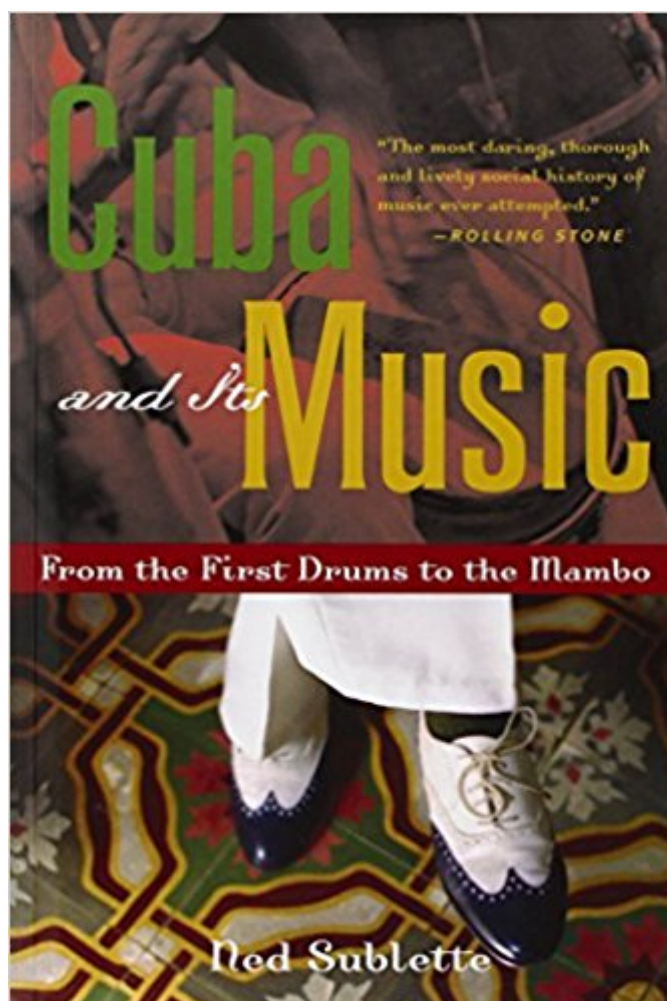


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# Cuba And Its Music: From The First Drums To The Mambo



## Synopsis

This entertaining history of Cuba and its music begins with the collision of Spain and Africa and continues through the era of Miguelito Valdés, Arsenio Rodríguez, Benny Moré, and Pérez Prado. It offers a behind-the-scenes examination of music from a Cuban point of view, unearthing surprising, provocative connections and making the case that Cuba was fundamental to the evolution of music in the New World. The ways in which the music of black slaves transformed 16th-century Europe, how the claves appeared, and how Cuban music influenced ragtime, jazz, and rhythm and blues are revealed. Music lovers will follow this journey from Andalusia, the Congo, the Calabar, Dahomey, and Yorubaland via Cuba to Mexico, Puerto Rico, Saint-Domingue, New Orleans, New York, and Miami. The music is placed in a historical context that considers the complexities of the slave trade; Cuba's relationship to the United States; its revolutionary political traditions; the music of Santería, Palo, Abakuá, and Vodún; and much more.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As the cofounder of the important Cuban music label Qbadisc and coproducer of public radio's Afropop Worldwide, Sublette is a well-known figure among elite mambo aficionados. Still, the sheer size and historical precision that makes this volume essential is a bit surprising coming from this proud nonacademic. The first two chapters, for instance, offer a fascinating narrative that explains the complex formulation of Iberian culture, beginning with the appearance of Phoenician traders in what is now the southern Spanish city of Cádiz in 1104 B.C. When the Cuban story finally kicks

in with chapter five, Sublette makes the most of his prehistory to create a visceral and astute vision of the island as incubator of musical revolution. Most of the story has been told before, but rarely in such painstaking detail, and Sublette's easygoing and engaging writing style makes the reading almost painless, although sometimes his analysis is overly determined by politics. His most important accomplishment is combining information from rarely translated musicological works from Cuba with data from his active involvement with surviving giants of the music to produce one sustained, living history. Given all this, it is odd that he ends the book so abruptly, in 1952, especially since he has participated so much in the music's recent permutations. While not exactly for beginners, this book is a solid, supremely lush effort. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Sublette, cofounder of the QbaDisc record label and an expert on Cuban music, argues in this exhaustive history that the influence of the "fundamental music of the New World" can be heard in almost every genre of modern music from classical to hip-hop ("Louie Louie" is basically a cha-cha-cha). Equal parts world history and music history, Sublette's tome examines the music from a "Cuban's point of view." The story begins with Spain's earliest encounters with Africa and continues through Perez Prado and the mambo explosion of the 1950s. Sublette places the music in a historical context by offering thorough accounts of its journey across the Atlantic--the slave trade, Afro-Cuban religions such as Santeria, and Cuba's revolutionary history all have important roles in shaping the music's sound. Most music-history books tend to rely on extended laundry lists of styles and influences, but Sublette takes an informal narrative approach instead, making his work far more approachable both for readers new to the country's rich musical history and for devotees who have already succumbed to its rhythms. Carlos Orellana Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Sublette's book is a thorough and meticulously researched history of Cuban music covering the period from colonization to the mid 20th century. I found this book by researching syllabi for university-level courses in Cuban music, and it came up frequently. Sublette is not an academic, which is both good and bad. The good part is that the book is refreshingly free of academic jargon, and should be quite accessible to any interested reader. (I did my bachelor's in ethnomusicology and I can't tell you the tremendous volume of BS you have to slog through most of the time.) What's more, the author is free to present the material in a candid and quite engaging way, without the burden of trying to impress other academics or research funders. The downside is that the book is

somewhat lacking in academic rigor and at times frustratingly devoid of narrative cohesion.

However, you can't say that Sublette is not knowledgeable about the subject and the level of detail may be a bit much for some readers. Overall I have to say that this book will give anyone interested in the subject far more information than they could ever want. I suggest skipping around to get to the parts that are of particular interest (the chapters on the early history and post Spanish-American war are particularly useful).

This is a fabulous book from start to finish. It's well written, well organized, fascinating and comprehensive. The author ties together a rich and detailed history of instrumental and vocal music from Africa and the Arab world then funnels that well-elaborated context onto the island of Cuba as if it were a rich and savory stew being poured into a large kettle. His knowledge of African regions and spiritual practices informs the later parts about Cuban music. His vast knowledge of and unbounded enthusiasm for 20th century Cuban music pioneers like Benny More make the book's last chapters a delight. His understanding of what can and cannot be laid at the doorstep of US military interventions and organized criminal enterprise gives an unsparing yet balanced picture of how post-Prohibition mobsters virtually exclaimed "carpe diem"! when they realized the profit potential in Cuban gambling and other night life, and how structural weaknesses in Cuban political and economic institutions, often traceable to US-caused distortions, shaped the setting in which the music of the 1940s and 50s flourished when US labor unions limited many Cuban musicians' ability to perform much less record in the US.

This book is a miracle of ethnomusicology, history, humor, common sense, and just plain good writing. I was fortunate to bump into it via ; I'd never heard of it before. I was shocked when it came in the mail- over 500 pages! I feared I'd never get through it; would be inundated with somewhat useless material. Boy, was I surprised! The history sections alone are worth the price of admission. The great streams of African slaves brought to Spain, to Cuba, to the U.S. are the foundations of the contemporary music as we know it. The book allows to see this as well as the differences between Afro-Cuban music and Afro-American Blues and Jazz. The religions of Africa/Cuba are displayed and integrated into the narrative. Cuban history presented is entirely connected to U.S. history in ways that are at best unseemly. The variations of Cuban music from the earliest to the 1940's is shown with thought and love. Recommended for folks interested in Cuba, Latin music, blues, jazz, the African diaspora, and those who like a good read. Brilliant!

I've read this book probably 10 times; now it may be time to do some personal first hand investigation? It covers everything up to the Castro Era, from 1500's until the part I loved best, reading about Cuba of the 1920-50s--- it's heyday. Cool jazz cats mixing with the Santeria and African elements of Cuba provided the basis for AfroCuban Jazz. Wondering though if it might be like the same as someone coming today to USA and looking for John Coltrane--- Does anybody really jitterbug nowadays let alone know how to dance it? I play some cuban music using conga and piano. I found that the historic explanation along with his comments give the music a clear perspective. Again, with things the way they are now, this may finally lead me to go there.

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