(LAS 7351)

LYRICHORD ARCHIVE SERIES - MERENGUES FROM THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC Recorded by Verna Gillis

On the surface, a style far more rustically simple than its Cuban and Puerto Rican equivalents, the rural merengue is a music of rather offhand paradox. Aparty music, equally at home beneath the stars or under the thatch or concrete of rural bars and dancehalls, it yet carries lyrics covering almost every facet of its audience's life: political as well as amorous, tragic as well as-with such a debonair idiom how could it be otherwise? - humorous. Unlike many Latin American dance forms, the merengue's origins are lost in history and myth. Though theories abound, all that is known is that it developed in the Dominican Republic during the 1840's, and in Haiti about the same time. The modern merengue is a fine example of New World syncretism. Clearly African and as clearly Spanish in many of its elements, any attempt to identify specific Africanisms or Hispanicisms is pointless. Like the people who play it, the merengue's sources are far less significant than its abounding Dominican-ness.

Wherever it came from, the Dominican merengue has a very strong personality of its own, almost more South American sounding than Latin-Caribbean with its crisp and jaunty 2/4 swing. Originally it was a gui-tar-based style. But during the late 19th century the accordion swept the

country, and the classic instru- mentation was established. This consists of a German button accordion (or, increasingly common, pianoaccordion), a metal scraper called a guayo that has a much more biting sound than the gourd scrapers of other Latin styles, and a drum called the tambora.
The tambora is a double-ended instrument played with one stick on the front head (it hangs from the musi- cian's shoulder) while its other head is hand-muted to provide highly varied effects. Its triple-throb is as essential to the merengue as the basic 2/4 pulse.

Other instruments do occur in the country merengue-a large version of the African fingerpiano called a marimbula is still sometimes used as a bass instrument, a sax may join the accordion, and bass guitars are heard these days. But the accordion, scraper and tambora are fundamental to the folk or "tipico" style. As the examples in this album show, the country merengue is a heartening example of a living, and extremely lively, tradition. It may be under threat from mass music, but if it is, nobody told the musicians!

Track 1- Grupo Isaiah Henriquez. "Si Una Mujer Llora" Recorded in Santiago.
A good example of how new elements can be brought in to country merengue without disturbing the classic balance of accordion, tambora and guayo. The high, sharp, declamatory vocal style, the adventurous guayo playing, the marvellously lilting accordion, are typical. The bass guitar, playing Cuban style rhythmic patters (montuno) in new.

Track 2- El Ciegito do Nagua. "una Mujer Me Dejo"
Recorded in Santiago.
More evidence of the living merengue tradition's flexibility. 'The tumbling accordion cound only be merengue, yet in detail it is very different from the previous track. The classic instrumentation is augmented by an electric guitar chording in a way reminiscent of the vamps of Cuban band piano. The vocals move between choral, call-and-response and also passages in typical Dominican vein. The two-instrument percussion moves the relatively foursquare 2/4 beat in a hundred jaunty directions.

Track 3- "Dolorita" by Tono Abreu - Recorded in Santiago.
Like most of the remaining tracks, this group maintains the standard accordion-tambora-guayo instrumen-tation. In other, less obvious, respects, it is typical of the genre. The accordion is played in a jaunty, plain-man style very different from the previous track, though by no means

simple, with its bold bass notes under the melodic improvisations, and the vocal in the second section is call-and-response.

Track 4- "Noche Me La Llevo" - Recorded in "Santiago. Country style with city influences - the chord patterns here contain modulations that are far from traditional. The harmonic basis of its first section, in fact, is more U.S. than Latin, with the same inherent structure as "When the Saints Go Marching In," and a thousand other jazz and folk examples. The second section, by contrast, shows the classic merengue format of a solo opening moving directly into call-and-response.

Track 5- "La Cruz de Palo" - Recorded in Santiago. Another merengue traditional in instrumentation and style, with another solo-into-call-and-response second vocal. But this one follows the pattern only in its melody line: It is sung as a solo. Notice also the way in which the guayo player picks up a double shuffle rhythm from the accordion during the solo passages.

Track 6- Sung by La Macan, a popular musician in Santiago. "Alla en la Sabana" South American influences seem to shade the vocal in this merengue, despite its traditionally harsh and slightly rough tone.

Track 7- Nicolas Guitierres y su Grupo "Yo Soy El Negrito Aquel"
Recorded in Santo Domingo
Typically enough these days, the opening section here is skipped in favor of moving directly into call-and-response. By moments, the accordion work still seems to contain vestigial traces of the 17th century English country dance which led into the Spanish contradanze, and indirectly became part of the basis of early 19th century Latin American dance music.

Track 8- Los Hermanos Martinez - Recorded in San Jose de la Matas
Though call-and-response is an extremely common form in merengue vocals, it is not the only one. Especially in rural districts, the shouting style tradad back and forth between two leads (and often backed by the chorus) is also traditional - and interesting compromise between the European and African formal elements in the style.

Track 9- El Ciegito do Nagua "Hatillo Palma" Recorded in Santiago
Athrowback to the 19th century? The paseo here retains the slightly military sound and different rhythm that was typical of the Cuban danzon,

the Puerto Rican danza and other 19th century bourgeois dances, a reminder of the days when peacetime Latin armies provided a good deal of "civilian" music.

Track10 - Group de Bachata.* "Desiderio Arias", written by Julio Alberto Hernandez. Recorded in Santiago
The original guitar-based sound of the merengue has almost died out - but not entirely so. This example shows the strong influence of 1930's Cuban and 1940's "international" boleros. The origin of the merengue's tumbling, slightly manic, accordion and sax patterns is made instantly clear by hearing guitar based merengues. What is highly idiosyncratic played on accordion and sax comes from a natural type of guitar strum!

Track11- Grupo de Bachata. "La Cotorrita de Rosa" Another track with - inevitably, given the weakness of contemporary Dominican guitar traditions - a strong bolero influence in its opening. But, equally characteristically the merengue reasserts itself.

Track12-Grupo Isaiah Henriquez "Tu a Mi No Me Quieres Na (da)" Recorded in Santiago.
To close, a last typical example of the contemporary Cibao style, its rhythm secion padded out with the bassd guitar thatr is taking the place of the gradually vanishing marimbula.

*Desiderio Arias was a noteworthy politicain who was in a top position from the turn of the century until 1932 when he was assassinated by Trujillo who was to become dictator for the next thirty years. He was a guerilla leader, and every time that a govt. that he didn't agree with came to power he would take arms. This is where his fame as a "montonero" comes from. He was Deputy Minister, a Senator and always had a large following because he was considered concerned for the people.

Tracks

1.	Si Una Mujer Llora	5:12
2.	Una Mujer Me Dejo	3:55
3.	Dolorita	3:22
4.	Noche Me La Llevo	3:20

5.	La Cruz de Palo	2:51
6.	Alla en la Sabana	3:37
7.	Yo Soy el Negrito Aquel	5:20
8.	Untitled	4:06
9.	Hatillo Palma	3:48
10.	Desiderio Arias	3:42
11.	La Cotorrita de Rosa	3:36
12.	Tu a Mi No Me Quieres Nada	4:37

Credits
Recorded in 1977 by Verna Gillis, assisted by Ramon D. Perez Martinez.
Notes by John Storm Roberts
Edited by Verna Gillis

The Lyrichord Early Music Series
PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station
New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291
email: nick@lyrichord. com Web: www.lyrichord.com