

MUSICAL CULTURE

Rhythm, harmony and musical sounds have an important role in the making of Dominican Republic's characteristics and history. The country offers a great diversity in its musical culture, influenced by traditions of West Africa and Europe (especially Spain), with touches of native Tainos. The most representative and revered genres are merengue, bachata, son and atabales or palos (sticks).

MERENGUE

Merengue is the national dance and music of Dominican Republic, with such recognition worldwide that in 2016 UNESCO declared it an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The basic musical training is made up of four instruments – four-stringed guitar, güira, percussion and tambourine, influenced by the Spanish, African and Indigenous cultures, while its lyrics are the stories of everyday life in the country.

In 1870, the four-stringed guitar was replaced by the accordion to give birth to a new style. In the late 19th century the "*Perico Ripiao*", which originated in Santiago, continued to give rhythm to the day to day experiences of the Dominican people. It is said that "*Perico Ripiao*" is the name of a brothel, where it all started.

Despite the popularity of the merengue and its variations among the masses, the upper classes refused to accept it because their words lacked lyrical elegance. But the essence of its rhythm reached popular festivals, and the efforts of the intellectual musicians ensured their subsequent introduction to high society.

Wider acceptance started in 1930 with the arrival of the dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, who used merengue for his electoral campaign. Thus, the merengue reached social areas where it was not previously known; at a party for the elite in the city of Santiago, this musical genre managed to enter and impress the attendees. For what became a historical occasion, renowned musician Luis Alberti was asked to compose a merengue for the occasion. He agreed to write and perform the famed song "*Compadre Pedro Juan*," which caused a commotion and became the anthem of the merengue.

It then began to spread throughout the country and turned into the launching point for the popularization this Dominican rhythm around the world. Today, it has a host of exponents that have led the merengue to be heard and danced worldwide, such as Joseíto Mateo, Juan Luis Guerra, Johnny Ventura, Milly Quezada, Wilfrido Vargas, Fernando Villalona, Los Hermanos Rosario, Eddy Herrera, among others.

A new generation of musician is taking merengue to a new and more experimental level, introducing synthetic sounds and merging this rhythm to other genres like rock & roll and cumbia.

BACHATA

Bachata originated as a string bolero and emerged from popular spontaneity. Among its creators is the musician José Manuel Calderón from the 1960s. Later, the singers Rafael Encarnación and Luis Segura popularized bachata among the masses, followed by Luis Vargas and Anthony Santos. Finally, the musical group Aventura, led by Romeo Santos, created a very particular bachata for its fusion with other musical styles which led to a very young and modern genre.

The names of Juan Luis Guerra and Víctor also should be mentioned by the great richness of letters and musical compositions they created for bachata.

SON

Between 1870 and 1890 this genre appeared around the cities of Montecristi and Puerto Plata. There is a theory that Son is a hybrid between Hispanic and African elements that seems to come from bolero. Its creation is attributed to the Cuban musician and composer Miguel Matamoros. It is unquestionable that the influence of Matamoros crossed the border and took over the Dominican geography between 1930 and 1950. The Cibao region stands out for its musical scene with several outstanding groups of son.

ATABALES

Also known as *palos* (sticks), this music genre is associated with the Afro-Dominican confraternities with its main instruments being three drums of different dimensions, that sometimes are accompanied by the tambourine, güira – a cylindrical shape wind instrument made of metal, with its surface punched with little holes – and in some cases, voice.

The *atabales* can be divided into: magic – religious, those which render cults to saints; ceremonial, rituals made to remember the deceased; and festive, danced and sung in many gatherings.

With more than fifty modalities of this rhythm found throughout the Dominican territory, its principal characteristic is associated with the celebrations of almost all the great Dominican saints.

POPULAR MUSIC

Today, the traditional merengue, bachata, son and *atabales* are still extremely popular, but other genres are as important in the Dominican music scene, like rock, hip-hop and Dominican reggaeton, also known as *dem-bow*.

FUSION

Several Dominican artists have made fusion a distinctive art, resulting in an undeniable attraction when it comes to playing their musical pieces. These mergers have a peculiar brand of mixing folklore and Antillean rhythms with other genres such as jazz, rock, folk, among others.

Artists such as the late Luis Terror Díaz took costume lyrics to another level when merging them with the forceful beat of rock. Highlight songs like "*Ay Ombe*", "*Liborio*" and "*La Basura*" are all time favorites.

José Duluc, folklorist and composer, has made his creations an ode to alternative popular music, playing with the sounds of *sarandunga*, *pripri*, *congos*, *bamboulá*, son, urban bachata and much more.

Among the most recent generation, groups like Rita Indiana, Vicente García, El Gran Poder de Dios, and Riccie Oriach and La Alucinante Banda stand out for their fresh mix. In a daring and adventurous way, they have fused Afro-Antillean rhythms, lyrics of Dominican daily life and sounds of genres around the world.