



La Cumbiamba eNeYé´

History

The powerfully rhythmic Afro-Colombian music of *La Cumbiamba eNeYé´* is the heart of the traditional open-air gatherings known as *cumbiambas*, from which this ensemble takes its name. Performing the music of both the Pacific and Caribbean coasts of Colombia, the group has been establishing itself as one of the finest ensembles of its kind in the United States. *La Cumbiamba* explores the Colombian musical styles of *cumbia*, *puya*, *mapale´* and *currulao* with the use of the traditional instruments from the African Diaspora, as well as those of the native Indians of Colombia and the European settlers.

La Cumbiamba ´eNeYé´ was created in the summer of 2000 with a group of musicians of caliber who share an enthusiasm for investigating, performing and advancing musical expressions emanating from the mix of African, Native Indian, and European cultural contributions in the Americas. Initially, *La Cumbiamba eNeYé* began performing a repertoire of cumbia related rhythms outdoors in public spaces of New York City. Given this circumstance, ´eNeYé´ adopted its denomination of ´cumbiamba´ from the cultural vocabulary of the north western Caribbean coast in South America. In Colombia, ´cumbiamba´ is a familiar word which carries the meaning of an outdoors celebration with live cumbia music, or the bands that perform in such events. *La Cumbiamba ´eNeYé´* evokes this lively atmosphere with every performance.

La Cumbiamba eNeYé´'s musical work and development is shaped by traditional styles that emanate from the popular coastal traditions in which music is just one of the various artistic manifestations. The group takes coastal music as a departing point and source of material not only because of the musical background of some of the members, but because coastal traditions in Colombia, as in other regions of the Caribbean are inexhaustible fountains of artistic creation. In addition, having two separate coastal regions in Colombia, the Atlantic and Pacific, has led to distinct cultural traditions stemming from both coasts.

La Cumbiamba eNeYé´'s approach to music is investigative. However, from the styles, genres, rhythms, and melodies explored, the group is inspired to create new arrangements and even entirely new compositions, which although traditional influenced, may have eclectic characteristics in texture, harmony or rhythm. This aspect of *La Cumbiamba eNeYé´* can be seen as the result of being a New York born and based group, where interactions and continuous contact with musicians from different places around the world generates new possibilities.

Musical Styles

Since its beginnings, *La Cumbiamba eNeYé* has been working from a handful of traditional kinds styles present in Colombia. Some of these musical styles include:

From the Atlantic Coast

Gaitas y Tambores

From the Atlantic coast, this style is performed with pre-Columbian woodwind native indigenous instruments along with the maraca. In this powerful musical style developed and cultivated throughout the colonial and post-colonial eras until present, drums from the African Diaspora blend as two peas in a pot with the gaitas and their unique contour of melodies. A given piece can be instrumental or sung in Spanish. When it is sung, it is said that this style constitutes a perfect artistic expression of the tri-ethnicity that characterizes general population in the region.

Banda 'Pelayera'

Also from the Colombian Caribbean region, this style is performed with the same instruments present in any traditional marching band except that the percussion section contains only one of each. However, this style has plenty of freedom in terms of the brass or woodwind instruments that can be used for a given performance. The term "pelayera" alludes to San Pelayo, a small town in the Atlantic coast region home of a famous and popular annual band festival. 'Música Pelayera' denotes the above-mentioned instrumentation along with the body of repertoire, which a band from the region usually plays, or its musical characteristics and nuances.

Terapia or Champeta

From the Caribbean coast, 'la musica champeta' refers to the most recent wave of popular influence to be embraced by the common folk in the Colombian Caribbean. Even though present in the Caribbean throughout the century, this musical style was propelled to unprecedented heights by popular music movements emanating from Africa in the immediate post revolution/independence years in the 1960's, particularly from the Congo area. As a result, 'champeta' is more easily compared and associated with Congolese 'zoukous'. However, the term champeta as it is used in Colombia may include or take various characteristics of similar styles such as calypso, socca, samba, bomba, or zoukus from other regions of the Caribbean or even Brazil which share Congo elements.

From the Pacific Coast

Conjunto de marimba

This musical tradition takes its name from one of the rhythms played by this type of traditional ensembles found in numerous small villages and towns along Colombia's Pacific coast and in Ecuador.

This ensembles feature the marimba as the main melodic and harmonic foundation, singing, and drums called *bombos* and *cununos*. Other genres within the traditions of these types of ensembles are *currulao*, *bunde*, *arrullo*, *aguabajo*, and *juga*.

Chirimía

This musical style is from the Pacific coast, and its instrumentation is the same as in the 'banda Payera'. There are however, great differences between these styles, but those are entirely and strictly musical. The differences are present in nuances, rhythms, melodic contour, and phrasing.

Dance Styles

Traditional Cumbia (gaita & porro)

Cumbia is perhaps the most famous style of music in Colombia. Its dance and music are rich in history. Its rhythms and melodies, as well as the costumes, are the perfect mixture of Indian, Spanish and African cultures that developed in the Atlantic coastal region of Colombia. The *cumbia* is a mid-tempo rhythm. The dance is one of courtship. Typically, the male African slave dances around the female Indian slave trying to woo her.

Puya

Puya is played with the same instruments as *cumbia*. Its rhythm is quite similar, but differs in that it is slightly faster than the *cumbia*, and the drum patterns are different. The dance movements are also similar to the *cumbia*.

Mapalé

Mapalé is perhaps one of the purest African rhythms that exist in the region. The *Mapalé* is an up tempo rhythm, it is played and danced at an incredibly fast speed for long periods of time.

Folkloric Instruments

GAITAS (flutes)

The body of the *gaita* is made of cardón, a type of cactus from the Atlantic coast of Colombia. The head of the instrument is made of a mixture of beeswax and vegetable coal, with a duck quill inserted at the top of the head. Through this quill the musician blows to play the *gaita*.

There are two primary types of *gaitas*: *el macho* and *la hembra*, or the male and the female. Both of the *gaitas* are about 70 to 90 centimeters long. The number of holes in each flute distinguishes them. The female *gaita* has five holes and it plays the melody, while the male *gaita* has two holes and plays the base accompaniment. The musician who plays the *gaita macho* also simultaneously plays a *maraca*.

DRUMS

Colombian drums are descendants of African drums, and have evolved and developed in different shapes and sounds over the years. The drums are made of wood and tuned with *cuñas*. *Cuñas* are pieces of wood slipped underneath the straps of the drums stretching the skins. The sound of each drum depends on its length, height and the diameter of the shell.

The **Alegre** drum is the lead hand-drum.

The **llamador** drum is a smaller hand-drum.

The **Tambora** is a bass drum, double skinned and played with drumsticks.

MARACAS

The *maraca* is an instrument made of a dry gourd with a wooden handle and seeds inside. The *maraca* can be considered the key instrument in the Afro-Colombian music ensemble.

It ties the other instruments together

by keeping time, as well as adding adornments at certain moments.

GUACHE

The *guache* is made of a metal cylinder filled with seeds. It accompanies the drums and helps to keep the rhythm.