



Vol. 5, No. 3, Spring 2008, 95-121

[www.ncsu.edu/project/acontracorriente](http://www.ncsu.edu/project/acontracorriente)

## **Introducing Leonardo Acosta, Music and Literary Critic**

**Raúl A. Fernández**

University of California—Irvine

**Daniel Whitesell**

Irvine Valley College

The recent awards bestowed on Leonardo Acosta, in particular Cuba's Premio Nacional de Literatura (2006), come as no surprise to the authors of this article who have long been aware of the breadth and depth of Acosta's essays on music and literature. To many, however, Acosta's writing career has remained largely invisible. In part this is because Acosta's major essays began to appear in the early 1980s when he was nearly fifty years old, a time by which most professional writers have established their careers; in part, because he had labored rather independently of any official Cuban institutions. As Acosta noted in his acceptance speech for the Premio Nacional de Literatura he had not been identified as "associated with any literary 'group,' or 'revista,' or 'generation,' or 'cohort'. Neither had [he] participated in any aesthetic or ideological polemic affecting arts and letters..." His "invisibility" may also be in part because his writing has consisted primarily of *ensayos*, a genre

that attracts less attention from literary critics than poetry or prose narrative. Another contributing factor has been the diversity of the intellectual field Acosta defined for himself—he began as a professional musician, became a journalist, poet and short story writer for a decade, and then became a writer on music and literature. This career trajectory makes it difficult for any other single author to evaluate Acosta’s work as a whole. So in order to present this introduction to his work, we joined forces to bring our respective expertise in musicology and literature to the analysis of his wide range of critical production.<sup>1</sup>

Despite its diversity, the corpus of writing produced by Leonardo Acosta—from his work on Cuban jazz and Cuban popular music and musicians to his essays on Carpentier and the Latin American baroque—exhibits solid unifying elements. In his writings Acosta has sought to identify, recognize and honor the distinctiveness of Cuban, Caribbean and Latin American culture, and its underlying unity, the latter exemplified by his essays on the pan-Latin American *bolero* genre and the connections he uncovers between José Martí’s “Cuban” poetry and Aztec and Meso-American religions and myths. He has also endeavored to highlight the creativity and impact of the music of African and pre-Columbian ancestry in the Americas, be it jazz, Afro-Cuban popular music, or indigenous music of all of the Americas. One of Acosta’s greatest contributions in this sense has been his superb history of jazz in Cuba—*Cubano Be, Cubano Bop*—and his steady and detailed documentation of the life and work of Cuban popular music practitioners. In terms of form, Acosta’s style is characterized by a persuasive and, at times, highly humorous iconoclasm, an irreverent irony made possible perhaps by his distance and independence from the academic establishment.

---

<sup>1</sup> Much of the biographical and empirical information used in this article, unless otherwise noted is based on numerous meetings and conversations held by the authors with Leonardo Acosta since 1999. Daniel Whitesell met extensively with Acosta in the process of translating Acosta’s book *Cubano Be, Cubano Bop: One hundred years of Jazz in Cuba* into English. Both authors worked closely with Acosta while translating his article “On Generic Complexes and Other Topics in Cuban Popular Music”, for the *Journal of Popular Music Studies*.

**The musician**

Leonardo Acosta was born on August 25, 1933, in the El Cerro district of Havana, into a family with a strong artistic background. His father José Manuel Acosta was a painter, illustrator, photographer and amateur musician who became a member of the Grupo Minorista along with his close friend Alejo Carpentier (and Rubén Martínez Villena, José Z. Tallet, Juan Marinello, and Alejandro García Caturla.) José Manuel lived in New York in the early 1930s working as a graphic artist for *Dance* magazine and *Vanity Fair*. In New York he spent time with other Latin American artists including Mexican painters Orozco and Covarrubias and Cuban painter Carlos Enríquez. Leonardo's uncle, Agustín Acosta, well-known for his socially conscious, nationalist poem "La Zafra", and for the lyrics to the popular bolero "La Cleptómana", officially became Cuba's National Poet in 1955.

Early in his childhood Leonardo was exposed to rich aural stimuli. The carnival *comparsa* "El Alacrán", led by legendary rumbero Santos Ramírez, rehearsed regularly in the evenings a few blocks from his house. At home his mother Esperanza Sánchez listened attentively to Mexican tenor Pedro Vargas' popular repertoire on the radio. Leonardo himself learned to use the hand-cranked record player to listen to *sones* by the Trio Matamoros and Piñero's Septeto Nacional, vocals by Rita Montaner and Enrico Caruso, and later to the Hermanos Palau and Julio Cueva orchestras, the latter featuring the singer "Cascarita." His father entertained the family playing the piano by ear, and singing melodies from the Southern United States accompanying himself with a banjo.

Leonardo began to study music as a child. He started playing with a trumpet purchased by his father and studied solfege, music theory and music appreciation from his aunt Sara Rodríguez-Bas. The young Leonardo attended primary school at Colegio Añorga in the Vedado district of Havana, and began secondary education (or what was then sixth grade, "preparatoria", and first year of "bachillerato") at Colegio Ariel. At Ariel he studied history with Eloísa Lezama (José Lezama Lima's sister), and continued his music studies with Gisela Hernández, a distinguished composer and choral conductor. Under Gisela, Leonardo studied music

history and became familiar with the work of Bach, Mozart and Handel. He attended the Ruston Academy for his second and third years of secondary school and completed the last two years at Colegio Trelles. By this time Leonardo had switched definitively to saxophone as his preferred instrument, something he decided to do after listening to a recording by Charlie Parker, and studied saxophone with Swiss musician José Raphel, trombonist of the Havana Philharmonic Orchestra. Leonardo became enamored of jazz and listened assiduously to the music of Benny Goodman and Duke Ellington.

In 1950 Leonardo Acosta enrolled at the University of Havana. Around this time he played at a New Year's Eve party with the jazz group Loquibambia Swing made up of José Antonio Méndez (electric guitar and leader), Rosendo Ruiz Jr. (second guitar), Isauro Hernández (bass), Frank Emilio Flynn (piano), Niño Rivera (tres), Francisco Fellove, Luis Yáñez (vocals and percussion), and Dandy Crawford (vocals). This was the beginning of a friendship with these musicians that would last decades. At the University Leonardo finished almost three years as an Architecture major. During these early college years he played sax with groups which made jazz an important part of their repertoire, and probed deeply into jazz harmonics with the help of Frank Emilio Flynn.

Acosta "paid his dues" playing with orchestras like Havana Melody and Cubamar; later with the Cheo Valladares Orchestra at the Cabaret Bambú which featured Cheo as vocalist and *marquero* and Rafael Somavilla as musical director.<sup>2</sup> In 1951, Alejo Carpentier introduced him to composer Julián Orbón who became his informal tutor in symphonic music, and through whom he established a relationship with the literary group *Orígenes* (Lezama Lima, Cintio Vitier, Eliseo Diego, etc) and with the world of Cuban arts and letters in general.

At the University he established a friendship with the renowned student leader José Antonio Hechavarría who was actively involved in revolutionary political work against the dictator Fulgencio Batista. At the University Leonardo also joined a band, led by José Ramón Betancourt,

---

<sup>2</sup> See "Leonardo Acosta, el músico," in Mayra Martínez, *Cubanos en la música* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1993), 338-351.

organized to provide entertainment at sports events and patriotic celebrations. Around this time, he switched from alto sax to tenor sax, which was in great demand by local jazz bands. Says Acosta: “Cuban bands left all improvised jazz solos to the tenor sax, plus: alto saxists had to double on clarinet, which I only learned (self-taught) in 1957, to play lead alto in the Rey Díaz Calvet dance band at the Hotel Capri.” To improve his ability to sight read and counseled by drummer Walfredo de los Reyes, Jr., he began to take classes and study tenor saxophone with Bebo Pilón (José Pérez Cedeño), saxophone soloist with the Adolfo Guzmán Orchestra. The combination of his political activities and his increasing involvement in the music scene led Leonardo to abandon the architecture career and dedicate himself full time to music, especially after the Batista regime closed the University in 1954. At informal jam sessions he had already played with musicians of the caliber of Bebo Valdés and Guillermo Barreto.

In 1955 he realized a youth’s dream, traveling to New York City for several months. There he was able to listen live and directly to some of his favorite jazz musicians: Coleman Hawkins, Dizzy Gillespie, Sonny Rollins, Dinah Washington, Dave Brubeck, Allan Eager Stan Getz, Philly Jo Jones, Miles Davis, Zoot Sims, Chet Baker, Count Basie, Woody Herman, and George Shearing “whose musicians—particularly Toots Thielmans and Al McKibbon—I met through Armando Peraz at the Embers in uptown New York City. I also met Paul Desmond between Brubeck’s quartet sets at Birdland.” Particularly important was his meeting pianist Dr. Billy Taylor with whom he chatted at length about jazz on several occasions. He also met composer Edgar Varese who was very knowledgeable about Cuban music and spoke with the highest praise to Leonardo about Amadeo Roldán.

Upon his return to Havana, Leonardo continued to play jazz and the popular dance music of the moment. He worked as a substitute for the Julio Gutiérrez Orchestra, which accompanied leading singers like Celia Cruz, Alfredo Sadel and Lucho Gatica on TV Channel 4; and subbed also for the Tropicana orchestra of Armando Romeu. For a few months in 1956, he joined the immensely popular *Banda Gigante* of Benny Moré’s in which Leonardo and Baracoa native José “Chombo” Silva, who later gained a

great reputation as a Latin jazz soloist in the United States, were the two tenor saxophonists. Later Leonardo traveled to Maracaibo with the Aldemaro Romero Orchestra, which played dance music with arrangements by Arturo “Chico” O’Farrill and which engaged in friendly *mano-a-mano* contests with the big band of Mexican bandleader Luis Arcaraz. Some time later he returned to Venezuela with a very different ensemble. Due in large measure to the dire economic straits that affected many musicians, Leonardo formed, along with Luis Cano and Raúl Ondina, and other musicians, an R&B group—the Hot Rockers—which they transformed into a rock-and-roll group with the addition of singer Tony Escarpenter. After some initial success, the group disbanded in Venezuela, but during the trip Leonardo visited with Alejo Carpentier who was living in Caracas at the time and, at the Festival of Latin American Music met Heitor Villalobos and Carlos Chávez, and spent time with Julián Orbón and Wilfredo Lam.

For personal reasons, including his passion for jazz, Leonardo traveled to New York again in June, 1958, after having obtained a UNESCO-sponsored certificate in Library Science from the Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País which he hoped would allow him to survive and perhaps register (he dreamed) at the Juilliard School of Music. However Leonardo returned shortly to Havana where, with a few associates, among them Frank Emilio Flynn, Cachaito López, Gustavo Mas, and Walfredo de los Reyes, Jr., he founded the Club Cubano de Jazz. The CCJ invited to Havana, in a regular and systematic manner, outstanding jazz artists from the United States. Over the next three years the CCJ brought to Cuba Zoot Sims, Stan Getz, Teddy Corabi, Philly Jo Jones and Kenny Drew. Eddie Shu came a few times as did trumpeter Vinnie Tanno. The CCJ organized jazz jam sessions with singer Sarah Vaughan and her trio, and with the musicians that accompanied Nat King Cole and Dorothy Dandridge (Marty Paich on piano and Frankie Capp on drums) during their respective visits to Cuba. The CCJ became a most important stimulus to the development of jazz and Afro-Cuban jazz in Cuba.

Nearing the end of the 1950s a whole set of new hotels opened up in Havana: the Capri, the Riviera, the Hilton, etc. Leonardo was part of the Rey Díaz Calvet orchestra, which provided entertainment for the official

opening of the Capri. The Díaz Calvert Orchestra alternated at the Capri with Rafael Somavilla's Orchestra, which featured drummer Guillermo Barreto and bassist Papito Hernández. Oftentimes Leonardo, Barreto and Papito joined forces to jam in jazz sessions with musicians visiting from the United States.

In the 1950s he played with visiting jazz reed and trumpet player Eddie Shu; with the members of the Sara Vaughan trio: piano player Jimmy Jones, bassist Richard Davis, and drummer Roy Haynes; he joined the Teddy Corabi quintet, playing alto saxophone at the St. John's Hotel (along with with Alejandro Vivar on trumpet, Luis "Pellejo" Rodríguez on bass and Walfredo de los Reyes on drums) where they alternated with singer Elena Burke who was usually accompanied by Frank Domínguez on piano.

Towards the end of the decade Leonardo, encouraged by Argentine journalist Jorge Ricardo Masetti (first director of *Prensa Latina*), became interested in journalism. In fact, in 1959, and in response to the sectarian, anti-jazz attitude of certain elements in the new government, he wrote a series of newspaper articles to set the record straight about the African-American origins and the popular and oppositional character of jazz music. In 1959 Leonardo's career as a journalist took off when he became one of the founders of *Prensa Latina*, for which he worked as a correspondent in México, Prague and Berlin, and provided coverage of other countries. He did not abandon his passion for jazz and played it whenever and wherever he could. In Mexico he joined the local jazz scene playing with Mexican jazz trumpet players Chilo Morán and José Solís; piano player Mario Patrón, drummer Richard Lemus and saxophone players Héctor Hallal, Cuco Valtierra and Tommy Rodríguez. His stint with *Prensa Latina* lasted until 1968. In 1969 he was one of the founders, together with Sergio Vitier, Pablo Milanés, Silvio Rodríguez, Eduardo Ramos, Noel Nicola, Emiliano Salvador y Leoginaldo Pimentel, of the Grupo de Experimentación Sonora (GES) del ICAIC, directed by Leo Brouwer. With the GES Leonardo composed and recorded music soundtracks for films writing the score for the ICAIC film *Prisioneros Desaparecidos*, a Cuban-Chilean co-production, and for documentaries by Sergio Giral and Sara Gómez. He remained with the GES

until 1972. Acosta continued his musical development studying orchestration and composition with Federico Smith and Leo Brouwer. In the late 60s and 70s he would put together various jazz ensembles in his role as leader of several jazz “veterans” who nourished new generations of musicians like Chucho Valdés and Paquito D’Rivera. With musicians like Papito Hernández, Carlos Emilio Morales, Chucho Valdés, Emilio del Monte, Raúl Ondina, Frank Emilio Flynn, Armandito Romeu, Rembert Egües, Cachaíto López, Paquito D’Rivera, Enrique Pla, Emiliano Salvador and others he organized concerts at various venues, e.g the Amadeo Roldán theater, the Bellas Artes and Hubert de Blanck auditoriums, etc. Acosta also appeared as a soloist for the National Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Manuel Duchesne Durán, on alto saxophone for Juan Blanco’s *Erotofonías* (the other soloist, on guitar, was Leo Brouwer); and on flute recorder for Leo Brouwer’s *Exaedros*, with Hans Werner Henze conducting.

After the GES Leonardo worked as a consultant on music for Cuban television, and as an editor for *Revolución y Cultura*. From the mid-seventies on, Acosta dedicated most of his time to the writing of essays and books on music and literature. His articles appeared over the next thirty some years in periodicals such as *Revolución y Cultura*, *Casa de las Américas*, *La Gaceta de Cuba*, *El Caimán Barbudo*, *Bohemia*, *Unión*, *Cuba Internacional*, *Salsa Cubana*, *Clave*, as well as other journals in Venezuela, Colombia, México, Perú, Argentina, the United States, Puerto Rico, Great Britain, France and other countries.

In 1998 Leonardo Acosta became a member of the Board of Advisors organized by the Smithsonian Institution which supported a tripartite project: the development of the exhibit *Latin Jazz: The Perfect Combination*, which opened in Washington, D.C. in 2002 and traveled to twelve US cities through 2006; a book by the same title to which Acosta contributed several important sidebars; and a CD, also of the same title, about which we say more below.

### **The writer**

Utilizing some of the articles previously published in periodical journals as a point of departure, Leonardo began to develop more complex essays and collections of essays. The result has been more than a dozen books of music and literary criticism, as well as his own narrative and poetry. Five texts stand out from his numerous essays on music and literature.

*Música y Descolonización* (La Habana, 1982), Acosta's first book-length essay about music, analyzes the mechanisms utilized historically in metropolitan centers for the commodification and mass commercialization of musical expressions from the so-called Third World. Acosta examines in a comprehensive manner the utilization of "exotic" music by elite European composers as well as the marketing of popular music of Latin America in the United States, especially those of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Brazil and Mexico. Besides a critique of music colonization, the book provides detailed presentations and analysis of African, Asian and pre-Columbian indigenous music of the Americas and, in particular, African-influenced musical expression in the Americas including blues, jazz, rumba, son, samba and other manifestations. The germ of the book was a short essay on Afro-American music published in the Cuban youth journal *El Caimán Barbudo*. Even though he had not intended to write a book, Acosta proceeded to develop some of the themes from that first essay to produce what would become the first chapter of the book, "Occidente y los inicios del colonialismo musical." This essay in turn led to further writings on popular music and mass culture. Other themes he developed in essays that would become chapters 7, 8, and 9, all dealing with African and African American music. The essays were originally published in *El Caimán Barbudo* and *Revolución y Cultura*.

It would be wrong to assume that the book is a compilation of essays. Rather it is the methodical development of ideas contained in a couple of initial essays and published over a period of five years in various periodicals. Before the book was finished a perceptive editor, the late Cuban musicologist Zoila Gómez, suggested that Acosta include a chapter on rock-and-roll, certainly one of the prime examples of mass musical culture. He was in a unique position to prepare this part of the text because

of his earlier background as a rock-and-roll musician and his access, thanks to American author Margaret Randall who was residing in Cuba, to a vast collection of popular rock-and-roll magazines. Adding this chapter was a way, in an epoch of intense and misguided censorship, to inform the reading public in Cuba about what was going on in the rock world on the outside, even if done under the guise of critiquing some recent rock-and-roll trends.

*Música y Descolonización* has been translated into Portuguese and also had a Mexican edition. Even though the book stayed generally below U.S. academic radar screens, it received a generally positive review in the *Latin American Music Review* Vol. 9, Number 2, Fall/Winter 1988. The work has met the test of time, although there are many things that Acosta would change, or would address in a new introduction, if given the chance. Through no fault of his own, the book was already a bit dated when it came out in 1982, especially in terms of the bibliography referenced. After working on its various component essays for five long years he had turned it in to the publishers in 1978, but it was not released until four years later, for reasons that have afflicted Cuban publishing for decades, i.e. lack of paper, lack of ink, bureaucratic mismanagement and incompetence, and so forth. Thus, some of the references were already dated by the time of the book's release. Empirically, in terms of rock-and-roll, much has happened since 1978. At a more conceptual level, Acosta has dissociated himself since then with the usage of terms like "son complex," "rumba complex," etc., which he criticized in an article written more than twenty years later. In a similar vein, his approach to popular culture and popular music, influenced by the writings of Theodor Adorno and the Frankfurt School, as well as Ariel Dorfman and Armand and Michelle Mattelart, treated the consumer as a passive recipient of mass media production. Acosta has since adopted the views proposed by Stuart Hall, Fiske, Lipsitz and others that treat the music listener as an active agent capable of choosing, accepting, rejecting, and in general having a pro-active role as a consumer.

*Del Tambor al Sintetizador* (La Habana, 1982), a critical analysis of the evolution of Cuban music, has also appeared in French, English, and Italian. This book is for the most part a series of essays pulled together as a

collection. Of the seven articles five had appeared before. Thus the article on the origins of the mambo first appeared in *Revolución y Cultura* and the article on the instrumental formats in Cuban music was a paper presented at a UNEAC event in 1978. Acosta revised the materials before publication, transforming what was originally an interview with Orestes López into the essay on the mambo, and updating the chapters on *nueva trova* and instrumental formats in Cuban music. Two chapters were completely new. The lead essay, which gives title to the book, presents an over-all view of the historical development of Cuban music. It was included in an effort to give coherence and unity to the collection. The other unpublished material is a unique article on the musical history of famed rumbero Tío Tom (of “Consuélate como yo” fame). For the Italian translation (1999) Acosta prepared an additional chapter which explored the ways in which musical diffusion in Cuba changed drastically in the 1990s with the appearance of new recording labels, foreign investment in Cuban music production, and extensive travel abroad by Cuban musicians.

Some of the essays maintain current relevance. The lead article was published in English by *Latin American Perspectives*; the chapter on Tío Tom was included in the anthology *Essays on Cuban music*, edited by Peter Manuel. The article on instrumental formats in Cuban music was reprinted by Radamés Giro in his *Panorama de la música cubana*. The essay on the origins of the mambo has become part of the standard literature on that topic. It was also reprinted by Radamés Giro in *Mambo*. The passage of time has made the significance of other pieces, e.g. the essays on *nueva trova* and musical diffusion, more limited to the specific historical period during which they were written.

*Elige tú, que canto yo* (La Habana, 1993), a third volume by Acosta, focused on specific musicians—leading figures of Cuban popular music and Latin Jazz. It includes a long essay on Benny Moré, perhaps the best available memory of the fabled Cuban singer written by a person who knew him personally and professionally. A second important essay is devoted to Dámaso Pérez Prado in which Acosta goes beyond the discussion of the mambo he initiated in the previous book. This is a fairly definitive discussion of the contributions of several musicians to the development of

the mambo genre, and the singularly prominent role played by Mambo King Pérez Prado. By now Acosta was fairly well advanced on his planned major work on the development of jazz in Cuba and Latin jazz and this is reflected in his essays on Machito, Frank Emilio Flynn, the three “Peruchines”, José María Vitier and Níco Rojas. Two other chapters introduced the reader to the work of José Antonio Méndez, and Pablo Milanés.

Based on unprecedented research in Cuba, the direct testimonial of scores of Cuban musicians, and the author’s unique experience as a prominent jazz musician, Acosta’s *Cubano Be, Cubano Bop* (Smithsonian Books, 2003) is a path-breaking classic of jazz history. The work pays tribute not only to a distinguished lineage of Cuban musicians and composers, but also to the rich musical exchanges between Cuban and American jazz throughout the twentieth century. Cab Calloway, Nat King Cole, Sara Vaughan, and Dizzy Gillespie are just a few of the great North American musicians who figured prominently in Leonardo Acosta’s account of the influence of Cuban music on jazz.

Beginning with the first encounters between Cuban music and jazz around the turn of the last century, and concluding with a chapter on the latest currents in the jazz scene in Cuba today, this book fills a huge gap in the history of one of the most popular musical forms of our time. Acosta writes about the presence of Cuban musicians in New Orleans and the “Spanish tinge” in early jazz from the city, the formation and spread of the first jazz ensembles in Cuba, the great jazz big bands of the thirties, and the inception of “Latin jazz.” He explores the evolution of bebop, the feeling song movement, and mambo in the forties, leading to the explosion of Cubop or Afro-Cuban jazz and the musical innovations of the legendary musicians and composers Machito, Mario Bauzá, Dizzy Gillespie, and Chano Pozo. Acosta takes the reader inside the cultural life of Havana in the fifties and shares with them the spectacular performances and jam sessions at the Tropicana and other nightclubs. He writes with firsthand knowledge of the period of musical transition after the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the new atmosphere of the sixties, and the beginning of soundtrack experimentation in Cuban cinema. The work concludes with a portrait of a

new generation of internationally known Cuban jazz musicians, among them the Grammy Award-winners Chucho Valdés, Paquito D’Rivera, and Arturo Sandoval.

The text of *Cubano Be, Cubano Bop* appeared in various stages. The first half was published in Cuba in 2000, the second half appeared in 2002. The complete work was published in Barranquilla, Colombia in 2001, a version that was poorly edited and contained many errata. The Smithsonian Books English edition is the most polished and complete, an indispensable and significant contribution to the history of jazz, and has received positive reviews by U.S. music scholars.

*Otra visión de la música popular cubana* (La Habana, 2004), brings together sixteen essays about various aspects of Cuban music. Some of the essays address specific issues such as the rise of the timba dance phenomenon in Cuba and the Buena Vista Social Club boom outside of Cuba, the inter-relationships between Cuban and US music, a discussion of the bolero genre, and the figure of Ernesto Lecuona. One article in particular deserves attention, “On Generic Complexes and Other Topics in Cuban Popular Music”. In this essay Acosta critiques contemporary Cuban musicologists for their uncritical adherence to pronouncements of earlier generations. In particular he calls into question the usefulness of the concept of “generic complexes” in Cuban popular music, a concept that first surfaced in Cuban academic discourse in the early 1970s. He also questions the emphasis that musicologists place on the clave rhythm and problematizes the concept of clave itself. For Acosta, the compartmentalization of Cuban popular music by means of constructs such as “generic” complexes and even “genre” tends to obscure the close affinities between all types of Cuban dance music as well as the pan-Caribbeanist and Afro-religious roots of many Cuban musical forms. The essay is of great significance not only because it critiques earlier approaches and calls for fresh thinking, but also because it offers the broad outlines of a new model for the evolution of Cuban popular music. In this “archeology” of music proposed by Acosta, the relationships between the Afro-Cuban polyrhythmic “arsenal”, Afro-Cuban religious and ritual manifestations, and Afro-Caribbean rhythmic traditions are no longer obscured.

Several of Acosta's shorter essays on specific genres (a term he's not fond of) and/or artists have appeared at different times and places. If they were put together they would represent further significant contributions to the study of Latin American and Cuban popular music. We are thinking, for example, of three texts he wrote on aspects on the bolero, the only genre widely shared by Latin American countries from Mexico to Chile: "El bolero y el kitsch", first published in *Letras Cubanas* in 1988 and later reprinted in Radamés Giro's *Panorama de la música popular cubana* (1996); "Sabor a Bolero: algunas interrogantes en torno al bolero latinoamericano", one of the essays in *Otra visión*; and the liner notes to Charlie Haden bolero-focused CD *Nocturne* (see below). The same goes for his essay on the origins of the mambo, one of the chapters in *Del Tambor al Sintetizador*, and his chapter on Pérez Prado in *Elige Tú Que Canto Yo*, which together represent an excellent discussion of the mambo style. Finally two pieces on Benny Moré, one already mentioned, the lead essay in *Elige Tú*, is nicely complemented by his text "Benny Moré, El músico", which appeared as part of the liner notes to the CD Book *Perlas del Caribe*.

Acosta has also written a few other important essays on Cuban musicians dedicated to Niño Rivera, Chano Pozo, Julián Orbón, Emiliano Salvador and Hilario González that have not appeared in anthologies. He wrote the Prologue and assisted in the selection of tunes for the book *Canciones de la Nueva Trova* (La Habana, 1981). Leonardo also authored prologues to Cuban editions of books by Adolfo Salazar, René Leibowitz, Hanns Eisler and Fernand Ovellette. In a demonstration of his wide musical range and interest he also wrote the text and musical analysis for *Móviles*, the book edition of 5 pieces by noted Cuban classical composer Harold Gramatges.

As a music critic Leonardo is perhaps better known, at least in the United States, on account of his commentaries on Latin jazz and Cuban music that have been published as the liner notes accompanying numerous LPs and CDs in the last thirty years. These are detailed and carefully written texts in which Acosta demonstrates his mastery of musical and historical analysis as well as his capacity to explain to a broad public the intricate compositions of jazz-Cuban music fusion in an accessible manner.

The first example of these liner notes was the text that accompanied the release of the Columbia Records LP *Irakere*, which introduced the famed Cuban fusion group to American audiences and obtained the Grammy Award in Latin music in 1979. After a prolonged pause and with the momentary relaxation of U.S.-Cuba relations in the mid-nineties and the simultaneous appearance of Chucho Valdés and other Cuban jazz musicians in American venues, Leonardo Acosta became a veritable interpreter of the sound of Latin jazz, or as he prefers to call it, the Afro-Latin jazz produced in Cuba.

The liner notes that accompany the following six CDs exemplify this particular role of Acosta as a cultural and musical translator. *Bele Bele en La Habana* (1998), in which Acosta presents a summary of the musical education of Chucho Valdes, a synthesis of Irakere's musical trajectory, and a brief analysis of this Grammy-winning recording considered by many to be Chucho's finest production in a quartet format. *Yemayá*, (1998) where Acosta offers up a detailed musical analysis of the contents and explains the way in which, with Chucho's work, something new begins to take root in Cuban jazz: religious and ritual elements of Afro-Cuban music are now making serious inroads into Latin jazz which up to now relied largely on popular dance themes of Afro-Cuban ancestry. In this sense Latin Jazz, Acosta tells us, follows in the steps of modern American jazz, which had earlier afforded expression to Afro-based religious spirituality as in the work of Coltrane, Mingus, Sun Ra and others.

In *Briyumba Palo Congo*, (1999), by Chucho Valdés, Acosta helps us analyze the music as we listen. This is what he says, for example, about "Ponle la clave:"

[This] tune....could be considered as a "study on mixing styles," with an exuberant introduction that surprisingly sounds like Ernesto Lecuona playing free jazz, absurd as it may seem, while the theme is a Cuban contradanza, with inflections of Bud Powell. Here we have an almost perfect equation of jazz and Afro-Cuban ingredients, with such a persuasive and swingin' rhythm section that the piano seems to be flying or dashing out of a volcano. The interplay between drums and tumbadoras is superb, and Roberto Vizcaíno plays a masterfully structured solo on the latter. Chucho's piano offers provocative punctuations and accentuations around the rhythmic flow, with a remarkable concept of time.

Frank Emilio Flynn's *Reflejos Ancestrales*, (1999), allows Acosta to present this singular pianist, one of Cuba's modern jazz pioneers. The text provides a summary of the artistic evolution of Frank Emilio, and a succinct study of the music in the CD performed by an "all-star" cast of Cuban musicians including besides Frank Emilio himself: William Rubalcaba, Joaquín Olivero Gavilán, Lázaro Jesús Ordóñez Enríquez, Pablo Mesa Suárez, "Changuito" Quintana, Tata Güines, Enrique Lazaga Varona, Juan Crespo Masa, Enrique Contreras Orama, "Maraca" Valle, y Barbarito Torres.

In *Nocturne* (2001), Charlie Haden's Grammy Award winning recording in the Latin jazz category, Acosta provides a special analysis for those listeners not familiar with the most popular Latin American musical genre, the bolero. Leonardo defines the bolero both historically and analytically, brings to the fore the relationship that this genre has maintained over many decades with US popular music, and then proceeds to a careful study of each tune. This is the way, for example, in which he aids our listening to Charlie Haden's music:

"Tres Palabras" (Osvaldo Farrés) presents this classic bolero theme on the tenor saxophone of David Sánchez, who plays it straight and then moves into an improvisation that has a meditative tone. Both Rubalcaba [Gonzalo] who quotes from "Summertime," and the two soloists at the end, break with this melancholy climate by using blues passages which fit perfectly into the bolero atmosphere, yet give an impish, Brahms-like touch to Osvaldo Farrés' melody (listen to the almost verbatim quote from Brahms between bars 8 and 12 of the theme).

*Latin Jazz: La combinación perfecta* (2002), accompanied the Smithsonian Institution's exhibit and book by the same name. Several authors shared the tasks of preparing the accompanying texts. Leonardo Acosta was assigned the analysis of the fifteen tunes selected as representative of Latin jazz, beginning with Mario Bauzá's Tanga and finishing with Chucho Valdés' piano version of his father Bebo's "Con Poco Coco." This was by far the most difficult task and Leonardo's elegant texts confirmed his status as one of the world's leading writers on jazz and Latin jazz.

### **The literary critic**

Although one often associates the name Leonardo Acosta first and foremost with music and musicology, his contributions in the field of literature are just as impressive.<sup>3</sup> In this area, Leonardo has devoted his energies not only to the analysis of renowned texts of such great writers as Alejo Carpentier but also to the defense and promotion of autochthonous cultures. Thus his staunch defense of the ideals of José Martí and his insistence on a decolonized culture that will nourish and enrich the human spirit in its multiple and diverse artistic manifestations. He makes clear the need to protect and expand cultural spaces that allow us to withstand the constant pressure of an omnipresent—and seemingly—omnipotent market, a market at the service of large concentrated capital and which exerts an enormous pressure on individuals to convert them into unthinking and acritical units of consumption.

Although the literary corpus of Leonardo is diverse, we have chosen to comment primarily on the critical work he has done on Carpentier and Martí. But we also include a brief summary of his thoroughly entertaining analysis of the detective novel and mass media (*Novela policial y medios masivos*) as well as a commentary on his critical insights on imperialism, cultural penetration and mass media. We will also mention a few of his short stories and poems toward the end.

Leonardo begins his book *Alejo en Tierra Firme* (2004)<sup>4</sup> by questioning the excessive use of such concepts as “lo real maravilloso” and “the baroque,” and he calls our attention to the danger of dogmatically overusing such concepts in the study of literature.<sup>5</sup> That is, when these terms become “cultural tags,” instead of clarifying and illuminating the complex works of an Alejo Carpentier, they tend to muddy the water, to mystify and reduce meaning, to render invisible important textual elements. In an attempt to differentiate the original concept of the “real

---

<sup>3</sup> Leonardo has received the Cuban National Prize for Literature 2006; the Cuban Academy of Language's Prize for Best Book of the Year 2005, *Alejo en Tierra Firme*; the Distinction for National Culture; the "Alejo Carpentier" Medal; the "Félix Varela" Order; and he has won the Premio de la Crítica six times.

<sup>4</sup> As previously noted, *Alejo en Tierra Firme* won the Cuban Academy of Language's Prize for Best Book of the Year 2005.

<sup>5</sup> The baroque is a topic that Acosta had dealt with in more depth in his excellent essay "El barroco de Indias y la ideología colonialista" (*The Caribbean Baroque and Colonial Ideology*), 1972.

maravilloso” from the meaning it had come to acquire as a “cultural tag”, Acosta refers back to the overly cited prologue (of *El reino de este mundo*) not to repeat the same obligatory quote but rather to examine precisely what Carpentier had proposed.

Once the path is cleared of these types of obstacles and distractions, Acosta can then turn to the primary task: the elucidation of a complex labyrinth of intertextualities in *Los pasos perdidos*.<sup>6</sup> In this context a complete enumeration of authors would be almost impossible, but we will at least mention Thomas Mann, Malcolm Lowry, Víctor Hugo, Charles Darwin, Alexander von Humboldt, Ramón del Valle Inclán, Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Rómulo Gallegos, Hermann Broch and Jorge Luis Borges. And the analyses range from ideological questions (written as opposed to spoken tradition), to the use of musical and time elements in the structuring of the work, to how Carpentier’s novels are influenced by surrealism, romanticism, the picaresque novel, the crónicas de Indias, his Venezuelan travels,<sup>7</sup> symbol and mythology. As one reads *Alejo en Tierra Firme*, one is impressed by Acosta’s profound knowledge of the Occidental literary canon, which allows him to bring out such a wide range of intertextualities, parallels, sources and influences in the novels of Carpentier.

While the analysis of musical elements represents only one aspect of *Alejo en tierra firme*, it is—along with the study of epic elements—the primary focus of another excellent book of essays published previously: *Música y épica en la novela de Alejo Carpentier* (1981). The main works analyzed in this context are *Los pasos perdidos* (1953), *El siglo de las luces* (1962) and *Concierto barroco* (1974) but there are also references to *iEcue-Yamba-O!* (1933), *El reino de este mundo* (1949), *El acoso* (1956), *Guerra del tiempo* (1958), *La Consagración de la primavera* (1978) and *El arpa y la sombra* (1979).

Before we move on to José Martí and the topic of anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggle, we would like to mention one more exceptional

---

<sup>6</sup> *Los pasos perdidos* is the main but not exclusive focus of Acosta's *Alejo en Tierra Firme*.

<sup>7</sup> The two short translated chapters of *Alejo en tierra firme* published separately in this issue deal in part with this topic: the influence of Alejo's Venezuelan travels in *Los pasos perdidos*.

essay on Carpentier: *El Almirante según don Alejo* (1980).<sup>8</sup> Acosta analyzes *El arpa y la sombra* from two perspectives: the historical and the artistic, and in this way takes part in a historical debate of great significance. One of the central points of the essay has to do with a literary device that Carpentier incorporated in the novel: a fictional voyage. Acosta explains why Carpentier uses this episode in which Columbus travels from England to Iceland, even though research had already established the improbability of such a trip. Why does Carpentier sacrifice historical reality? The answer has to do with the genius of the novelist. As Leonardo explains, Carpentier relies on the Aristotelian concept of “poetic truth” because the incorporation of this episode allows him to create a symbolic identity: Columbus as the successor of the helmsman of the Argonauts. The result is the creation of a mythological parallel in which Columbus ends up like Tiphys, a failure who is forgotten in the “realm of dark shadows.”

Leonardo’s commitment to the struggle against cultural colonialism and imperialism finds its strongest expression in *José Martí, la América precolombina y la conquista española* (1974). Acosta refutes the cultural argument that the conquest was beneficial because it supposedly brought superior culture to indigenous peoples who had relatively little. He confronts this notion with Martí’s historical conception and appreciation for pre-Columbian cultures. Incorporating Martí’s point of view he redefines the historic debate between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda over the ideological justification for the conquest, colonization, treatment of indigenous peoples and the introduction of slavery in the Americas. He also analyzes a third position taken by Vitoria, less reactionary than that of Sepúlveda, but which has been utilized by modern apologists in support of colonialism. Relying on Martí’s work, Acosta deconstructs this line of argumentation and also establishes a clear trajectory and historical context in which the debate has taken place.

In his brilliant study *Martí descolonizador; apuntes sobre el simbolismo náhuatl en la poesía de Martí*,<sup>9</sup> Acosta illuminates the presence

---

<sup>8</sup> This essay also forms part of the book *El barroco de Indias y otros ensayos*, 1984.

<sup>9</sup> Published in the magazine *Casa*, 1972, it also appears as part of the book *El barroco de Indias y otros ensayos*, 1984.

of symbolic Meso-American elements in the poetry of Martí. As he explains, the incorporation of these elements exemplifies the practical implementation of one of Martí's most passionately held beliefs: the need to create an independent American culture that breaks with and distinguishes itself from a dominant Eurocentric culture and its Greco-Latin, Christian symbology. Acosta focuses on *Versos libres* and *Flores del destierro* as primary vehicles of indigenous American symbolism, but also includes verses from *Ismaelillo* and *Versos sencillos* in the study. Among other elements, he analyzes the following: the eagle, the sun, the eye and gold; the association of the bird to the soul; the symbolism of the self sacrifice; the conjugation of opposites; blood as life and fire or as the union of fire and water: symbol of the "*guerra florida*," the Rain of Fire; the Tree of Life (the Cosmic Tree); the association of woman with the earth, with the stars and with the night; Quetzalcóatl as man who becomes star; the tiger, the serpent, the crocodile and the dog as symbols of the earth and matter at the point of transformation; the hand as a symbol of creation; the butterfly as the symbol of life-giving fire and of the human soul; and the unity of man-god. As Acosta so clearly demonstrates, these and other symbols from Meso-American cosmogony are key to a deeper appreciation of the revolutionary spirit expressed in the poetry of José Martí.

Although Leonardo's essays on Carpentier and Martí stand out for their depth and scope of analysis, it would be a mistake to overlook other works of his. With *Novela policial y medios masivos* (1986), for example, Acosta dedicates a rigorous study to a subgenre that some critics might consider an inferior manifestation of literary expression. But the case of this book exemplifies the integrity of an intellectual who doesn't subordinate his judgment to elite prejudices, dogmatic or arbitrary precepts.

Leonardo begins by explaining the subgenre's susceptibility to becoming nothing more than a mass market commodity, a consumer good, a superficial object of facile distraction. But what makes this book a real pleasure to read is the history that Acosta then traces from the origins of the detective novel to the second half of the twentieth century and the lucidity of his observations throughout. He points out precursors, inter-

relations with other genres or subgenres and the formation of hybrids; that the detective novel is indeed related to the Greek tragedy; that Edgar Allen Poe (writer of the first inductive short stories of this kind) and later Wilkie Collins were authentic literary writers who preceded the age of mass production that would begin with Arthur Conan Doyle. He reviews the defining characteristics of the classic detective novel—reduction of the action to a closed space, strict rules of conduct, etc.—and he exemplifies them in the production of Agatha Christie, the leading writer of classic detective novels. He points out the high literary quality of those whose strong criticism of the genre’s classical trend earned them a reputation as the “tough” ones, writers such as Dashiell Hammet and Raymond Chandler, the incorporation of social critique in their novels, and the consolidation of the realist style detective novel. Acosta comments on the role humor has played in the detective novel and on the continuities and divergences in the kind of humor employed by Raymond Chandler and Rex Stout. He refers to the work of James Cain and explains how this author breaks completely from the classic canon to forge a new direction that will call into question the characteristics and classification scheme of the subgenre, pointing out at the same time Cain’s brilliant command of different shades of humor and his exceptional versatility. Acosta then moves on to analyze the factor of economic influence exercised by cinema and television on mass produced literature. He contrasts the bourgeois detective novel with the socialist one and mentions the work of various socialist novelists (such as Yulián Semiónov, Bogomil Rainov y Arkadi Adámov) within the context of new possibilities. Toward the end he offers a brief panorama of the detective novel in Argentina and Cuba.

Leonardo has also written important analyses on mass media. In *Medios masivos e ideología imperialista* (1974)<sup>10</sup> he deals with various topics such as the structure of power, advertising and consumption, images spread by print media, technology as an instrument that hides ideology, and technocratic sub-ideologies. Among the points touched on in *Revolución y rescate de los medios masivos de comunicación* (1976) are

---

<sup>10</sup> A modified version of the same essay can be found in *Penetración cultural del imperialismo en América Latina*.

the following: mass culture, the press, cinema, radio, television, books, records and posters.

Although new technologies have been developed over the past few decades, the concentration of mass media and the control of these media by large private capital continue to be a primary concern among democratic, progressive sectors of society. The current, grass roots global struggle to democratize media has everything to do with the concerns addressed by Leonardo thirty years ago, and although on the one hand the phenomenon of the Internet represents an important technological revolution, on the other hand the ideological roots of the problem as laid out by Leonardo have not changed in their essence.

To round out our presentation of Leonardo Acosta, we should mention a “fifth” dimension. In addition to his extensive literary criticism, he has also written short stories and poems. *Paisajes del hombre* (1967) is a collection of narratives and *El sueño del samurai* (1989) is a book consisting of poetic texts that were written over the course of twenty years. According to Leonardo himself, the narratives as well as the poetic texts reflect experiences he has had, the people he has met and things that happened on the trips he took to Venezuela, Mexico, Czechoslovakia and New York, but they also include some accounts from Cuba.

### **Conclusion**

A prolific, profound and diverse writer, Leonardo Acosta has made highly significant contributions to Cuba’s musical and literary history and criticism over the last thirty five years. The abundant recognition that has finally come his way in recent years is well deserved. In the preceding pages we have endeavored to explain why.

**Leonardo Acosta: A Bibliography****Books**

- Paisajes del hombre* (short stories), La Habana: Ediciones Unión, 1967.
- José Martí, la América precolombina y la conquista española* (essay), La Habana: Fondo Editorial Casa de las Américas, Colección Cuadernos, 1974.
- Imperialismo y medios masivos de comunicación* (essay), Lima: Ed. Causachún, 1976.
- Música y épica en la novela de Alejo Carpentier* (essay), La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1976.
- Música y Descolonización* (essay), La Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1982.
- Del Tambor al Sintetizador* (essays), La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1983.
- Del Barroco de Indias y otros ensayos*, La Habana: Fondo Editorial Casa de las Américas, Colección Cuadernos, 1985. (Premios de la Crítica)
- José Martí: sobre el indio de Nuestra América* (prologue and selections), La Habana: Fondo Editorial Casa de las Américas y Centro de Estudios Martianos, 1985.
- Novela Policial y medios masivos* (essays), La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1986.
- El sueño del samurai* (poesía), La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1988.
- Medio milenio: esclavitud y ecocidio, antropofagia e identidad* (ensayo), La Habana: Ediciones Unión, 1992.
- Elige tú que canto yo* (essays, profiles of Cuban musicians), La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1992.
- Descarga Cubana: el jazz en Cuba 1900-1950* (essay), La Habana: Ediciones Unión, 2000. (Premio de la Crítica)
- Raíces del jazz latino: un siglo de jazz en Cuba* (ensayo), Barranquilla: Editorial Nueva Música, 2001.
- Descarga Número Dos: el jazz en Cuba 1950-2000* (ensayo), La Habana: Ediciones Unión, 2002. (Premio de la Crítica)

*Cubano Be, Cubano Bop: One hundred years of Jazz in Cuba.* Foreword by Paquito D'Rivera, Preface by Raúl Fernández, translated by Daniel S. Whitesell. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2003.

*Otra visión de la música popular cubana* (essay), La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2004. (Premios de la Crítica)

*Alejo en Tierra Firme: intertextualidad y encuentros fortuitos* (essay), La Habana: Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Cultura Cubana Juan Marinello, 2005. (Academia Cubana de la Lengua, Best Book of the Year Award, 2005)

### **Co-authored Books**

*Canciones de la Nueva Trova* (Prologue and Selections), with Jorge Gómez, La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1981.

*Fiesta Havana, 1940-1960: l'age d'or de la musique cubaine*, with Helio Orovio y René Espí, Paris: Ed. Vade Retro, 1999.

*Son de Cuba* (Photographic essay by Tomás Casademunt), texts selected and written jointly by Leonardo Acosta, Helio Orovio, René Espí and Adriana Orejuela, Mexico: Ediciones Trilce, 1999.

*Móviles* (Facsimile edition of 5 pieces by noted Cuban classical composer Harold Gramatges), text and musical analysis by Leonardo Acosta, La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2001.

*Kubamusika: imágenes de la música popular cubana*, texts written jointly with Bladimir Zamora and Sigfredo Ariel, Anglet: Editorial Atlántica, 2003.

### **Journal Articles**

Acosta has published numerous articles, reviews, essays and interviews about various topics and personalities of Cuban culture in many journals and magazines over a 35+ year period, including *Revolución y Cultura*, *Casa de las Américas*, *El Caimán Barbudo*, *Bohemia*, *Verde Olivo*, *Juventud Rebelde*, *Unión*, *La Gaceta de Cuba*, *Cuba Internacional*, *Mar y Pesca*, *Salsa Cubana*, *Clave*, *Cine Cubano*, *Cuba Now* and others in Cuba as well as in Colombia, Venezuela, México, Perú, Argentina, Puerto Rico, Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, etc. making it very difficult to

present a complete and accurate bibliography of the material. Fortunately he has included the most important of these pieces, usually with revisions, as part of the books and essays listed above. A few notable exceptions that have not been integrated into his book-length essays include:

“Recordando al Niño Rivera,” *Revolución y Cultura*, Número 11 (Junio-Julio 1996): 44-46.

“Niño Rivera: el gran olvidado de la música cubana,” *La Gaceta de Cuba*, Número 5 (Sept-Octubre 1996): 43-44.

“Chano: El Tambor de Cuba, Rumbero y Jazzista,” *Revista Salsa*, Año 4, Número 11, 21-24.

“Homenaje a Julián Orbón,” *Revista Clave*, Año 3, Número (2001): 37-42.

“Vigencia de Emiliano Salvador,” *Revista Salsa*, Año 5, No. 15, 8-11.

“Universo de Hilario González,” *Revista Clave*, Año 1 (Julio-Septiembre 1999): 14-17.

#### **Selected writings published in anthologies or as liner notes**

“Interinfluencias y confluencias en la música popular de Cuba y de los Estados Unidos,” in *Culturas Encontradas*, Rafael Hernández and John H. Coatsworth, co-ordinators, La Habana: Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Cultura Cubana and Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos David Rockefeller, Harvard University, 33-52.

“Zwischen Havanna und New York. Wurzeln und Entwicklung des afrokubanischen und afrolateinamerikanischen Jazz,” in *Kubanische Musik von Rumba bis Techno*, Vervuert, Frankfurt/Main: Bibliotheca Ibero-Americana, 2004, 271-286.

“Reajustes, aclaraciones y criterios sobre Dámaso Pérez Prado,” in *El Mambo*, Radamés Giro, ed., La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1993, 61-68. Acosta’s article “Quién inventó el mambo?” which first appeared in *Revolución y Cultura*, number 42, February, 1976, later included in *Del Tambor al Sintetizador* is also included in this anthology.

“El bolero y el kitsch,” in *Panorama de la música popular cubana*, Radamés Giro, ed., La Habana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1996, 269-284. The original article was published in *Letras Cubanas*, Año III, Number 9, julio-septiembre, 1988. Also included in the *Panorama* anthology is Acosta’s essay “Los formatos instrumentales en la música popular cubana,” which is one of the essays in *Del Tambor al Sintetizador*; this essay, based on an oral presentation, had appeared earlier in the Spanish-language Soviet journal *Vida Musical*.

“Benny Moré, el músico,” in the CD Book *Perlas del Caribe*, EGREM, 2000. A limited circulation English version of this CD Book was published with Acosta (who reads, writes and speaks English perfectly) providing his own translation.

Liner notes to *Irakere*, Columbia Records LP, 1978; *Bele Bele en La Habana*, Blue Note Records CD, 1998; *Yemaya*, Blue Note Records CD, 1998; *Briyumba Palo Congo*, Blue Note Records CD, 1999; *Frank Emilio, Ancestral Reflections*. Blue Note Records, 1999; *Charlie Haden: Nocturne*, Verve Records CD, 2001; *Latin Jazz: La Combinación Perfecta*, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2002. Acosta has written liner notes for numerous other CDs including recordings by Sergio Vitier, José María Vitier, Ernán López-Nussa, Bobby Carcassés, Pablo Menéndez, Juan Pablo Torres, Orlando “Puntilla” Ríos, Stephan Kurman, Rogelio Martínez Furé and Oru group, Emiliano Salvador, Javier Zalba, and Amadito Valdés among others.

### **Articles or chapters available in English**

“The Rumba, the Guaguancó, and Tío Tom,” and “The Problem of Music and its Dissemination in Cuba,” appeared in *Essays on Cuban Music: North American and Cuban Perspectives*, Peter Manuel, ed., New York: University Press of America, 1991, 49-74 and 181-214 respectively. These chapters had appeared in Spanish earlier in *Del Tambor al Sintetizador*. The essay on Tío Tom had been written especially for *Del Tambor*; the chapter on the dissemination of music appeared first in fragments in

various issues of *El Caimán Barbudo* in 1981. “From the Drum to the Synthesizer: A study of a process” in *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol 16, No. 2, 1989, 29-46. This was the lead article in *Del Tambor al Sintetizador* written originally for that book. “On Generic Complexes and Other Topics in Cuban Popular Music,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, Vol 17, Number (2005): 227-254. Translated by Raúl Fernández and Daniel S. Whitesell with an introduction by Raúl Fernández. This essay appeared in Spanish originally in *Clave*, Año 4, Number 3/2002, and was included in the Acosta’s *Otra vision de la música popular cubana*.