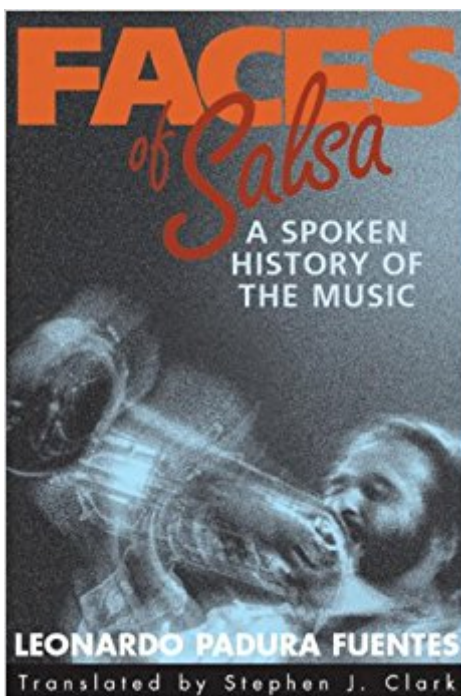


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Faces Of Salsa: A Spoken History Of The Music



Synopsis

In this collection of masterfully crafted interviews with some of the most famous creators of the music we call Salsa, prizewinning Cuban novelist Leonardo Padura Fuentes explores the genesis of the music, its rise in popularity, its social context, and its artistic legacy. Filled with personal revelations by the musicians, historical detail about their lives and times, and colorful anecdotes about their identities, friendships, and working relationships, the book is a tribute to the artistry and social commitment of some of the most inventive artists of our time. In his brilliant introduction about the idols of Latin music since the 1920s, and throughout the book, Padura takes up the old dispute about the relationship of salsa to the Cuban music known as son, but the book is not a search for origins. Rather, through his conversations with a group of extraordinarily articulate musicians, he reveals how the aesthetics of salsa filled a cultural void, transforming popular Latin and Caribbean dance music and creating a new generation of musicians who would establish a new model: the salsero, an artist who had embarked upon something his forbearers never did—a conscious project.

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Customer Reviews

Leonardo Padura Fuentes is a Cuban writer whose works include *Máscaras*, *La Puerta de Alcalá* y *Otras Cacerías*, *Vientos de Cuaresma*, and *Pasada Perfecto*.

For many, the word salsa connotes rhythm and excitement. For Leonardo Padura Fuentes, it

represents the struggle of a people to create music with meaning. In this book, the Cuban writer interviews thirteen men who figured prominently in the Latin music scene during salsa's early development. Their various journeys explore music as a form of expression, protest, and inspiration. And they all point to a genre that has sought to reconcile flash with substance, popularity with meaning. They point, writes Fuentes, to a "salsa with a conscience". No discussion of salsa history is complete without the unsolvable debate over the very word "salsa". How did the term come about, what music does it encompass, is it even a valid categorization of the music it connotes? Some of the very musicians responsible for making salsa what it is today give their take on the term and whether it should be used at all. Most interesting is Fania founder Johnny Pacheco's take on the term that he is said to have created to market the music, as well as Cuban musicologist Radamés Giro's more detached view on the label. The interviewees also discuss the roots of salsa, from its evolution from the Cuban son to the great variety of Caribbean influences to the development of its urban identity in the Latino barrios of New York. The exploration of salsa's roots and the labels that define it are not only a matter of history. Fuentes' interviews reveal the conscious struggle of Latin musicians to maintain a balance between salsa as music and salsa as commodity. Music can inspire, enlighten, reveal, and criticize. It can speak to people's conditions and point out injustices. It can also, on a purely musical level, push the limits of rhythm, instrumentation, and improvisation. But in spite of music's role as an art and a craft, it is also a commercial product and requires an audience that is willing to pay. These interviews express the tension between evolving as an artist and evolving to fit the popular taste of consumers in the context of salsa's unique story. They also explore the decline of the genre in the 1980s with erotic salsa and reveal the lessons that this decline has for salsa musicians in the future. The ability of Fuentes' book to touch on universal themes in salsa music extends also to the figures he interviews. Though the title emphasizes salsa - and all the complicated baggage that the term entails - Fuentes includes interviews from three merengeros who should never be left out of any serious discussion on Latin music over the past half century: Johnny Ventura, Wilfrido Vargas, and Juan Luis Guerra. And, though Fuentes is a Cuban writer and emphasizes the Cuban connection in salsa, he interviews Dominican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban musicians. The interviews also make constant reference to Latin jazz (which is basically inseparable from salsa) as well as to the variety of influences across the Caribbean that have made salsa such a unique blend of musical elements. What I enjoy most about this book is that Fuentes provides an excellent introduction to the central themes the interviews address and blends his own commentary throughout the book, keeping his voice and creating unity even with the variety of perspectives that he offers. His interviews manage to give insight into the history and culture of

salsa while touching on universal themes that influence the development of every musical and creative genre. The only drawback for those who are not very familiar with salsa history and music is that the interviews are not preceded by short biographies or historical background on the references that his interviewees make. Those readers will get more from the book by doing a little historical research first to better inform their reading. However, Fuentes' collection of interviews provides an enjoyable and stimulating variety of perspectives on the creation and continuous re-creation of salsa.

Very good book, interesting and made reminisce about the old days growing listening to this music.

En que otro libro puedes leer de tan diversos personajes de la musica latina como Juan Formell, Juan Luis Guerra, y Willie Colon?El libro esta lleno de entrevistas muy interesantes, y se nota el amor del autor a la musica. Lo mas importante que saque de este libro es esto:1. Casi todos los musicos salseros de Puerto Rico escuchan Timba Cubana2. Casi todos los Timberos Cubanos escuchan Salsa de Puerto RicoHay un tema de union latina que es muy positivo. Si van a conseguir un libro, y solo un libro, sobre la musica salsera este es una muy buena seleccion.

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