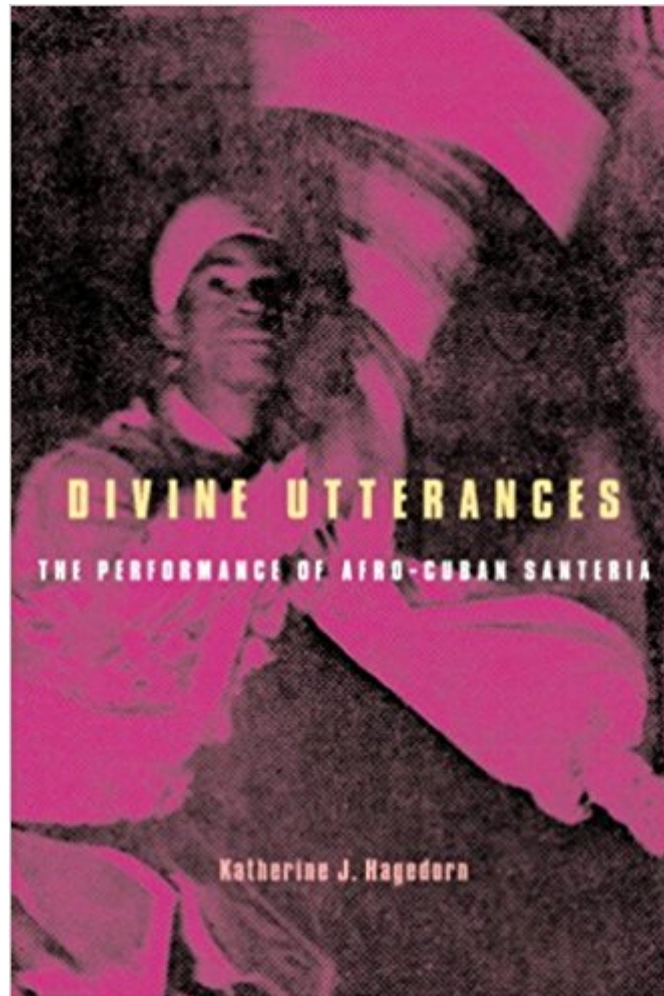




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# Divine Utterances: The Performance Of Afro-Cuban Santeria



## Synopsis

In *Divine Utterances*, Katherine J. Hagedorn explores the enduring cultural and spiritual power of the music of Afro-Cuban Santería—a and the process by which it has been transformed for a secular audience. She focuses on the integral connections between sacred music performances and the dramatizations of theatrical troupes, especially the state-sponsored Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba, and examines the complex relationships involving race, politics, and religion in Cuba. The music that Hagedorn describes is rooted in Afro-Cuban religious tradition and today pervades a secular performances that can produce a trance in audience members in the same way as a traditional religious ceremony. Hagedorn's analysis is deeply informed by her experiences in Cuba as a woman, scholar, and apprentice batá drummer. She argues that constructions of race and gender, the politics of pre- and post-Revolutionary Cuba, the economics of tourism, and contemporary practices within Santería have contributed to a blurring of boundaries between the sacred and the folkloric. As both modes now vie for primacy in Cuba's burgeoning tourist trade, what had once been the music of a marginalized group is now a cultural expression of national pride. The compact disc that accompanies the book includes examples of twenty songs to the orichas, or Afro-Cuban deities, performed by prominent musicians, including Lázaro Ros, Francisco Aguabella, Alberto Villarreal, and Zenaida Armenteros.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“A highly original work . . . that will stand out as the most thorough exploration of

Santería - a music performance, both religious and theatrical. - Raul Fernandez, University of California, Irvine

Katherine J. Hagedorn is associate professor of music at Pomona College.

I'm sorry to say that I bought this book after reading that it was supposed to be "superb." Instead, I was disappointed in the lack of depth in discussing the political situation between the religious contexts and their staged touristic performances. The issue of race is very gently treated--as if blackness, authentic Afro-Cuban practice and performance is not a serious issue in religious presentations. I felt that there was a mediocre discussion of the all-important US dollar as a motivating source for the often incomplete and inaccurate renditions of Afro-Cuban religious ceremonies to which tourists have access. Tourism is a widely studied topic right now, for example, Kirschenblatt-Gimblett has done amazing work on the topic of museums and tourism, and this book doesn't convince me that the author has read or understands the deeply intersecting areas of economy/tourism/voyeurism/performance studies/cultural theory and race. Instead, I can recommend Robin Moore's book on the history of blackness and the political struggles involved in race relations and feel that Moore's book, although it sidesteps religion and the production of religion in Cuba, also gives a badly-needed history of the racism and production of black culture in Cuba from the US occupation until the present day embargo. This book by Hagedorn, while being personally reflective, doesn't problematize race or the economics of these musicians in a way that highlights the history of race relations/blackness or the present political situation. The book *Afro-Cuban Voices* also I would recommend as "superb," as it is a compilation of actual interviews with Cubans who struggle to define their race inside the present socialist society and in light of the revolution and US cultural imperialism. I'm sorry to see that the scholarship of music in Cuba is so superficially related to the actual everyday struggles of the people. There is so much good work now being done on tourism (especially in South Asian contexts) that to disregard these authors and their contributions is a disservice to the study of Caribbean contexts and tourism.

Review of "Divine Utterances: The Transformation of Memory in Afro-Cuban Performance" This is an exceptionally well-researched and well-argued monograph. The author examines the complex relationship between the ritual ceremonies, rhythms, and possession performances of the Afro-Cuban Santería - a religion and the theatrical performance of Santería - a ceremonies, music, and possession by way of the state sponsored Conjunto Folklórico Nacional and other

theatrical troupes..The book is a highly original work in which the authors visit a "busy intersection" where the webs that both unite and separate "authentic" sacred performance and theatrical representations of Santería are dissected against the background of two other dualities: the centuries long dialectic between race relations and Afro-Cuban religious practice in the island, and the seemingly antithetical policy of an officially religion-unfriendly socialist government that relies on the Santería religion as a means to attract capitalist tourist dollars to the island. Hagedorn's book constitutes an in-depth study of the Santería religion. At the same time it presents an analysis of how two types of performances, one grounded on everyday religious practice, the other a theatrical representation of those religious practices, are connected, disconnected, and mutually inform each other. As the author describes, this situation gives rise to a wide variety of paradoxical occurrences. For example, while one would assume the theatrical, non-sacred, representations of Santería themes would be the locus and focus of tourist interest, it turns out that tourists appear to be just, or even more interested, in watching and participating in genuine, non-theatrical, Santería rituals. On the other hand, while the theatrical representations are not supposed to be "real," sometimes local Santería believers in attendance at stylized performances geared to tourists become possessed by the deities of Santería, much as they might have in a genuine ritual. Distinguishing everyday popular Santería drumming and dancing from stylized theatrical presentations of it, is not a simple matter. More often than not the musicians, dancers and other participants in the Folklorico shows are themselves leading active believers and musicians of the Santería religion. Religious practitioners take an active role in the construction of the theatrical presentations which are supposed to be as "real" as possible. In this sense the Cuban Folklorico differs from other similar ensembles (e.g. Mexico's famed Conjunto Folklorico) in which there is little, if any connection between troupe members and traditional practitioners of various cultures represented dances and rituals. One of the most impressive aspects of this book is the way in which the author presents her findings. The manuscript is written in a way that allows the reader to accompany the author in the voyage of discovery. Rather than presenting us with the "data" obtained in painstaking field work, we follow her as the data is obtained, observe her initial situation as an outsider looking in, and are witnesses to her slow becoming of an insider. The book is accompanied by a CD which is very much part of the story. The music in the accompanying CD is compelling and carefully selected to illustrate points made in the text. There are also numerous photographs that cover the main themes, persons, venues and instruments discussed in the manuscript. Each chapter is framed by short personal narratives which the author uses to communicate relevant information about Santería religious practices and the author's own relation to

them. On the whole the manuscript is an impressive production of the highest research as well as literary value, with excellent aural and visual aids. I believe this work will stand out as the most thorough exploration of Santería music performance, both religious and theatrical, in academic literature. Studies in English do not have either the scope, i.e. brief essays by Duany, Mason and a few others; or the depth, e.g. the otherwise excellent work by Cornelius, of Hagedorn's book. Her work essentially continues in terms of scope, detail and analytical value the foundational work done in Cuba before 1950 by Fernando Ortiz and Raúl Mulo Lachatañer.

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