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The Rise and Fall of the Danza as National Music

Present-day Puerto Ricans live in a world throbbing to the beat of reggaetón, salsa, bomba, plena, bachata, rock, Dominican merengue, Afro-Cuban music, and, at times, the romantic and fatalistic bolero that alternates with Latin American baladas. Quite rare today would be anyone who recalls hearing of the contradanza, the variant of the European figure dance that was practiced in the first half of the nineteenth century in Puerto Rico. However, most Puerto Ricans would certainly recognize a close relative and creolized derivative—that is, the local danza—especially in the form of Puerto Rico’s national hymn, “La borinquería,” which is heard in innumerable contexts, including as wake-up music on early-morning radio programs. In fact, whenever the “The Star-Spangled Banner” is heard in this colony of the United States, it is invariably preceded by the official local anthem, “La borinquería,” which, unlike most anthems, is not a porpous march but a suave and romantic danza. Composed in 1868 as a symbol of resistance to Spanish colonial rule, the hymn serves as a unique but representative example of the genre that constituted the most popular dance music expression in Puerto Rico between 1850 and the 1930s.

The beginnings of a distinctly Puerto Rican danza circa 1848 are documented in various newspapers and books published around those years (such as Manuel Alonso’s El gíbaro of 1849) and the later reminiscences of such chroniclers as Alejandro Tapia y Rivera ([1880] 1973 and Salvador Brau ([1885] 1977). While the traditional contradanza was a collective figure dance whose sequential group choreography was either dictated by a caller or fixed by convention, the danza was regarded as revolutionary in that, like the waltz, it liberated the couples to dance on their own, often in scandalously intimate
embrace. The danza emerged musically and choreographically from the ashes of the duplê-metered European contradance through the incorporation of local and regional rhythms that incited dancers to move in ways that eventually subverted whatever aristocratic and stately identity remained in this expression. Such transformations constituted creolization insofar as they represented the growth of new, indigenous forms generated by the mixture of foreign and local elements. Of potential confusion to the student of Caribbean music history is the fact that the Puerto Rican danza, in the 1840s–50s, was most commonly known as "merengue," a term more familiar nowadays as the name of the modern, up-tempo Dominican popular music genre; as discussed in Chapter 4, although the term "merengue" has denoted a variety of genres in the Caribbean Basin, the Dominican form is by no means unrelated to the Puerto Rican one and indeed probably constitutes to some extent an offspring of it.

The family of contradances, as performed in Puerto Rico in the mid-1800s, included quadrilles, rigadons, Lancers, and Spanish contradanzas based on the "longways" style of English country dance, with its initial and recurring format of men and women in two lines facing each other. Most of these formats remained prominent in upper-class dances until the early twentieth century. Of them, only one contradanza type, with its form of two duplê-metered repeated eight-bar sections alternated indefinitely, is seen by most observers as the principal tableau for the emergence of the local merengue, although chroniclers disagree as to the source of the contradanza in Puerto Rico as well as that of the variant that became the merengue.

This chapter draws from original research (including that published earlier in Díaz Díaz 1996, 2006, and 2008) and the work of other prominent Puerto Rican scholars, including Ángel Quintero-Rivera, and earlier chroniclers, such as Tapiay Rivera, Brau, Alonso, and José Balseiro. It seeks to elucidate extensive knowledge of the antecedents and dynamics of Spanish, British, and French contradances in Puerto Rico, their rearticulation as merengue, and the latter's renaming and popularization as the Antillean "danza" that became not merely a dance music genre but arguably the most meaningful artistic expression of Puerto Rican culture in that period of seventy years. It may not be an exaggeration to assert that no other symbol during that period possessed the power—especially at key moments, such as the 1868 anticolonial insurrection in Puerto Rico and Cuba—to unite all social classes and mobilize Antillean social life. From its European antecedents—of which the introductory paseo constitutes the most outstanding residue—a hidden fairy-tale world of monarchic births, weddings, coronations, and funerals also reverberates in this saga.

The Contradanza in Puerto Rico

As discussed in the introduction, the country dance appears to have originated in rural England in the mid-1500s and went on to be adopted in stylized form in the court of Elizabeth I by 1600. Over the next century, it became a favor-
ite recreational dance of the rising middle classes. Introduced to the Netherlands and France around 1685, from 1710 it came to be cultivated by the Bourbon rulers of Spain in Madrid. The bipartite, longways-style contradance variety that much later transformed into merengue was practiced in the Spanish courts alongside the more formal and elegant minuet (Sachs 1937: 421); as such, most nineteenth-century Puerto Rican chroniclers of the contradanza tended to think of it as Spanish in origin, ignoring the dance's English beginnings behind the imperial façade of the Spanish courts. Spanish, French, and British colonists, sailors, and visitors collectively introduced diverse forms of the contradance and its derivative, the quadrille, to the Caribbean Basin from the latter 1700s. From Madrid, the contradanza and quadrille reached the Spanish American colonies through royal festivities as well as interchanges among sailors and other common folk. In Puerto Rico, particularly important were celebrations of births, baptisms, confirmations, weddings, birthdays, or wakes—generally modeled, on a more modest sphere, after activities held at the Spanish courts. On a more official level, social dancing occurred in formal commemorations and festivities held on Catholic holidays and festivities.

In Puerto Rico, although dances were often linked to other events, they also were held for their own sake since the beginning of Spanish colonization. Dances were held variously indoors or outdoors, in public buildings, in private upper-class homes, and in humble shacks at lower-class fiestas. Particularly in San Juan, events directly tied to overseas royal celebrations entailed a higher degree of cosmopolitan influence, especially if they were held by authority officials imbued with up-to-date ideas of modernity or by merchants whose networks effectively transcended the cultural and economic dependency on the Spanish metropole.

By the first quarter of the nineteenth century, any day of royal festivities featured afternoon events, such as parades, horse racing, games, marching band music, and fireworks, that prevailed as contemporary forms of popular entertainment. At the conclusion of the day, the program eventually changed as elegant indoor dance activities replaced the traditional nightly dramatic plays. At the margins of these events was the remaining portion of the population, for whom outdoor dances were sponsored by local authorities in newly illuminated public spaces. Festivities might also include comparsas, or street processions of revelers. Such groups of revelers as well as equestrian routines could be called "quadrilles" (cuadrillas), and some have speculated that these conventions constituted one sort of inspiration or source for the contradanza derivative of the same name. Social stratification and economic development increased in the transitional period that culminated in the 1811 Cédula de Gracia, a provincial bill that offered economic incentives to foreign and local investors to establish their businesses in Puerto Rico. The greatest beneficiaries were planters and merchants engaged in sugar production; as a result, the insular economy came to be gradually integrated into the world market, at the expense of the subsistence economy formerly enforced by imperial prohibitions of free trade.
The immediate effects of these global trends among the island’s urban population included the introduction of cultural artifacts such as pianos, band instruments, musical scores from Italian operas, and teachers of contemporary dance trends, including current European contradanza styles that were seen as more fashionable than rustic local traditions. Even in rural areas, as long as they were closer to sugar plantations, cultural patrons frequently adopted cultural models in vogue from cities like Paris, Vienna, and Hamburg. A favorite context was the soiree or velada, a kind of indoor chamber performance of discourse, poetry, concert pieces, and opera excerpts, which ended with a dance party. Contemporary accounts indicate how a typical event of the 1830s might feature waltzes and contradances in French and Spanish styles, performed to the accompaniment of a twelve-piece ensemble. Smaller villages and towns in the interior held their own festivities, with outdoor dances on a kind of improvised wooden stage known as an esmana, for all people, regardless of class and race.

By these years, the “Spanish” contradanza—generally implying the British-derived longways format—contended with a French cousin, the stately rigodon (rigadoon, rigadoon), along with waltzes for nightly indoor activities (Tapia y Rivera [1880] 1973: 18), most of which still remained affixed to royal celebrations. Even where communities were barely exposed to foreign cultural and economic good, local Catholic priests held the official festivities with dance parties at their homes. Dances were even held at funerals in churches (Brau [1885] 1977: 1).

On August 9, 1820, the San Juan Gaceta reported a festivity in Cumaná, Venezuela, that featured a parade of Spanish cavalry and infantry and a military ensemble, the Granada regimental band, that accompanied twelve couples contradancing, evidently in longways style, on a stage. At first, the report seemed irrelevant to Puerto Rican social life, but the convulsions in South America and their repercussions would have direct impact on the island’s culture. In June 1821, anticolonial leader Simón Bolívar inflicted a major military defeat on the Spanish military forces led by Peruvian-born Spanish Field Marshall Miguel de la Torre in the Battle of Carabobo. The disaster provoked a massive exodus of Venezuelan civilians and Spanish officials, whose main destination was Puerto Rico. De la Torre then became Puerto Rico’s governor until the mid-1830s. With Puerto Rico’s prior population estimated roughly at three hundred thousand people (twelve to fifteen thousand of these residing in the capital), the arrival of several thousand immigrants from Venezuela exerted a significant demographic and cultural impact, especially since so many of the newcomers were highly skilled and educated.

The 1820 Gaceta account of longways-style contradancing, together with other contemporary Puerto Rican accounts (especially Tapia y Rivera [1880] 1973: 120; Alonso 1849: 58), suggests that it was this longways style that would evolve into merengue twenty-eight years later. In San Juan, the ubiquity of this same Granada regimental band—at parties, drama and comedy intermissions,
church and dance activities, and, of course, official celebrations—constituted the kind of "community service" delegated by high Spanish army officials to similar military ensembles through the rest of the century.

The contradanza had probably been introduced to Puerto Rico well before 1820, just as it had been established in Haiti and Cuba several decades earlier by visitors—whether elite or plebian—from Spain, France, and England. However, the arrival of the Venezuelan refugees appears to have provided considerable input to Puerto Rico (perhaps comparable to that of Franco-Haitian refugees in eastern Cuban in 1801). Brau (1842–1912), in his oft-cited 1885 essay on the danza, writes, "Benefiting from a wealth of civilization that we lacked, those immigrants spread throughout the country, thus modifying the rusticity of our old customs while lifting our rudimentary prosperity with the remnants of their fortunes. These immigrants came to be the main introducers of the Spanish contradanza that—along with the minuet, cachucha, waltz, britanica, and rigidon, but dominating these—delighted the generation of youths among our forefathers" ([1885] 1977: 4; emphasis added by Díaz Díaz).

In earlier years, the island's musical environment had consisted primarily of diverse folkloric genres of various Spanish and African origins together with the European religious, military, and art music patronized by the Church and the small elite. Only the San Juan Cathedral was able to sustain an orchestra that would have met Continental standards of size and quality, though a few smaller towns, such as Mayagüez, also boasted presentable orchestras. Residents of other small municipalities could also be exposed to contemporary European styles via events featuring contracted musicians brought from San Juan, mostly for church activities. Such local communities often lacked the personnel to staff ensembles in accordance with European standards—that is, in the format of a "well-balanced" combination of string, percussion, brass, and woodwind sections. Until the 1880s, such gaps were typically filled by hiring members of the existing military bands, whose members also became active as music educators and dance-band performers, especially in San Juan and Ponce (Callejo Ferrer [1915] 1971: 43; Coll y Toste 1921: 162). Thus rural hacendados—sugar plantation owners—would be able to bring professional ensembles from cities for their festivities. The diffusion of contradancing throughout the island was not simply a matter of hiring musicians from the principal cities but also demanded the presence of knowledgeable dancers. For many of these dancers, the contradanza constituted more than mere entertainment; it also served as a marker of social distinction through which dancers could demonstrate their refinement, elegance, and ability to keep up with the latest Continental trends.

Despite a dearth of documentation preceding the 1840s, various sources do offer accounts of the longways-style contradanza. Thus, for example, a letter of 1831 describes how in the western coastal town of Rincón, a comparsa of twenty couples of men and women dressed as gardeners performed in the streets "longways contradanzas" that, without exaggeration, we can say were of
the best taste. After street lamps were lit, the group roamed the streets with music, attended a light comedy and a pantomime performance, and held a night dress dance at the local authorities’ building known as Casa del Rey (or king’s house). 6

During his 1822–35 tenure as governor, de la Torre oversaw cultural changes fostering an environment conducive to public entertainment, including the spread of European contradancing. Allegedly saying, “People that amuse themselves do not conspire,” he presided over the various festivities and the erection of a well-endowed public theater in San Juan in 1832, specifically intended to uplift the cultural level of the island. As the most prestigious indoor venue for the arts in Puerto Rico, this theater markedly distinguished upper-class dance events in the capital from those of the rest of the island.

Church and military interests still permeated the theater’s mission, but the city’s population demanded fresh activities, such as veladas, concerts, and masked balls, as well as drama and opera. Together with the increasing involvement in the world of market commodities came an enhanced interest in European cultural and political trends, including Romanticism and Enlightenment values, that in the colonial context, constituted political radicalism. By directly or indirectly promoting socioeconomic progress and international contacts, de la Torre ironically helped intensify anticolonial sentiment. Meanwhile, the need to raise revenue for the theater’s maintenance necessitated contracting private entrepreneurs sponsoring popular entertainment, which also served to indirectly undermine the principles of the church-state alliance that owned the theater.

In 1838, a rebellion involving officials of the Granada Regiment whose aim was restoration of the Spanish Constitution led to the dissolution of this regiment and the arrival of two others, with their military bands. One, the Iberia regiment organized by Tapia y Rivera’s father, was from Spain; perhaps more significantly in terms of musical interactions, the other, the Catalonia regiment, came from Cuba. A third military group, the Asturias regiment, arrived in San Juan around 1842 (Tapia y Rivera [1880] 1973: 124–125).

The prevailing choreographic form of contradanzas before 1850 was that of a figure dance, in which couples would perform a sequence of moves. As Alonso noted, the figures “symbolize restraints to some (the young men) but safety to others (the young ladies)” (2002: 15). This standard format for the contradanza obliged dancers to follow the elaborate figures set by the first couple, risking embarrassment and ridicule were they to get lost or commit a literal faux pas (false step). Tapia y Rivera described the system of contemporary longways contradancing, which he noted was identical to that danced in Seville, Spain, as related to him by an acquaintance of that city: 7

[The contradanza] consisted of couples following one another in a long series, starting with the gentlemen and ladies facing each other.
The first couple began the dance, with the gentleman and lady... setting the figures of their choice, which the rest were obliged to maintain unchanged. Such figures, with their respective names, were at times so ingenious, given the zeal of those who set them, that the others had to study them closely, and no other couple could dance until arriving at the head of the set. So, when the established figure was executed correctly by every couple down to that in the last position, the "burner" [fogón], as it was called in disdain, the result was charming and picturesque. [(1880) 1973: 126–128]

Brat's description of the figure format is also worth quoting at length:

Every dance, even the most intimate, that was done by our fathers had to have a bastonero (dance caller), the exclusive director of the event, whose commands could not be challenged, and which designated the number of couples that had to enter in the contradanza and the position each occupied. To those selected he provided a dance card or tag, enumerating each dance and specifying which young woman was to be the partner of which gentleman, obliging the latter, as indicated, to initiate their perambulations of the salon in search of the maiden indicated by the inflexible number shown.

Our modern dancers would have little patience for the inconveniences of such a system. And truly, those inconveniences did not fail to annoy people then. It was doubtless for this reason that the designation of the partner by the bastonero was falling into disuse, until it was forgotten altogether by 1839. [(1885) 1977: 5]

Brat went on to describe, in terms similar to Tapia y Rivera, the format in which dancers were obliged to reproduce the intricate figures initially performed by the first couple and how failure to do so might provoke the wrath of the first couple, interruption of the dance, and an infelicitous confrontation "on the field of honor." The pressure and conflicts ensuing from such practices constituted one incentive to discard the complex figures and adopt the independent couple dancing already standard in the waltz and subsequently adopted in the Puerto Rican merengue/danza as well as in the Cuban danza. Tapia y Rivera continued, "Later, the contradanza/danza was simplified, disregarding the positions and figures, for which no one needs any more the previous study that made dance academics indispensable in the past." [(1880) 1973: 126].

The extent to which foreign expressions overwhelmed local styles or vice versa varied in Puerto Rico according to diverse factors, especially socioeconomic ones conditioned by the island's topography. In coastal sugar-plantation areas, slaves perpetuated neo-African bomba in their relative social isolation from European culture. After Emancipation in the 1870s, many settled
near towns and incorporated European elements into their dances and customs. Meanwhile, in the mountains, jíbaros (white peasants) preserved much of the musical, poetic, and choreographic styles introduced by early conquerors. Over the generations, however, both bomba and jíbaro music adopted a creole identity, largely due to centuries of social integration and cross-fertilization. Material conditions were also influential, obliging instrument makers to create native versions of their original models, whether European or African.

Various sources indicate that by the 1840s this local contradanza choreography had already become distinct from that of its Continental counterpart. Alonso wrote in 1849:

The contradanza is the Spanish dance of the same name, preserved much better in Puerto Rico than in Spain itself; its figures display the variety which originally marked the contradanza, while its steps acquire greater charm with the natural grace of the daughters of the tropics. It is impossible to follow with the eye the motion of one of those dark beauties of languid glance, slender waist, and tiny foot without feeling his heart expand to the point of leaping from his breast. The contradanza americana is the most expressive dance imaginable, it is truly a poem of passion and of beguiling visions: in a word, the story of a charmed love. (2002: 14)

As Alonso indicated, the Puerto Rican contradanza had become distinct in musical as well as choreographic terms: “The music which contributes not a little to the enchantment of the contradanza is a mélange of suggestions: now melancholy, mournful and sentimental; now cheerful, witty, and boisterous. This music is a product of the island itself, and composers sometimes use known folk melodies, finding a pretext in some more or less celebrated event to compose a piece which will then bear their name” (2002: 15).

Although only a few printed scores of contradanzas from the 1840s and 1850s survive to this day, the accounts of Alonso and contemporary newspapers clearly indicate a lively music and dance scene in the island based around the contradanza, with local composers and ensembles accompanying dances in diverse settings for different social classes.

Danza scholars in Puerto Rico agree that a two-part piece of eight measures in 2/4 comprised the musical form to which dancers performed the longways contradanza just before its evolution into merengue. Composer Anaury Veray recalls having seen an 1839 score of a contradanza performed that year in Aguadilla and describes its binary shape in the following words: “Each of the parts had a specific character. The first part was less rhythmic than the second, as it was also less accentuated. The second one, on the contrary, was more lively and lifting. Both parts consisted of four eights, frequently having repeated chord figures with a solid and equidistant rhythmic unity” ([1956] 1977: 24). This bipartite form corresponded to that current elsewhere in the
region and also, in a more general sense, to that established in the 1600s in the English country dance.

Contemporary accounts also indicate conflicting attitudes toward the proper spirit and tempo of social dancing, where rigodons, mazurkas, gallops, and contradanzas alternated with each other. While one chronicler complained of the slowness of the rigodon (obliging one to move as “if one were a Capuchin priest in a temple”), others protested that the sometimes strenuous figures of the contradanza were unsuited to the sultry local climate, especially in the inadequately ventilated San Juan municipal theater. In 1839, one local poet, “P,” decried the chaos and confusion (“like a sort of ballroom horseplay”) involved in performing the figures (which evidently commenced longways style) of the danza (opting for the term currently gaining favor in Cuba):

How could they call it “danza” when in a hallway are “figuring” a hundred couples face to face, all waiting to be trampled upon, or better put awaiting some clumsy oaf who doesn’t look where he’s going?

“P” goes on to lampoon the clumsiness with which locals dance the rigodon and gallop and concludes by asserting that the vigorous danza is unsuitable to the balmy tropical climate:

I do not hate danza at all, on the contrary, yes sir,
I love it with as much fervor as has anyone,
I admire the costliest one with ambitious fondness,
but I also prefer the calm one, for there is heat in this land?

What emerged in such accounts can be seen as a tension between local rhythmic exuberance and the perspiration and fatigue provoked by the heat, especially during dancing’s high season in the summer; this tension was later reinterpreted as the “ambiguous” character of local dances ranging “between lively and melancholic and, above all, cheerful and characteristic of our climate and styles of sentiment” (Tapia y Rivera [1880] 1973: 128). In the decades to come, arguments about danza’s appropriate tempo shifted to encompass a variety of ontological views, sometimes condemning the lively Afro-Caribbean “tango” and asserting that Puerto Ricans, being perpetual colonial subjects, were “indolent and docile,” as reflected in the danza’s lethargic and languorous pace. The overtones of these dialectics can be traced in part to the contradictory aesthetics of European Romanticism. Much of the variety of later Puerto Rican danzas can be seen as embodying this tension between the opposing orientations of the “romantic” as opposed to “festive” danzas. A parallel tension could be said to exist between conceptions of danza as a means of displaying social order and propriety and, by contrast, as an occasion for innocent and unpretentious diversion.
Concerning other specific details of the pre-1850s contradanza, several sources report the activities of military bands, the sale of pianos and piano music, and the performances of operas, such as Donizetti’s Belisario. These operas—some of which contained contradanzas—would have provided melodic material to local composers and would have exposed local musicians to more varied harmonies than were typical of the relatively simple and straightforward local contradanzas.

Nearly all danzas written in Puerto Rico featured a time signature of 2/4, although most of them reflected variants of a metric combination of three against two (or vice versa, for melody and accompaniment, respectively). Puerto Rican danzas, as in other parts of the Caribbean, have traditionally been celebrated for the distinctive rhythmic flair with which they were interpreted, especially in the case of dance-band renditions of the more animated sections following the paso, with their accordingly lively dance styles. Various chroniclers stressed how foreign musicians unfamiliar with the creole aesthetic would be unlikely to interpret it properly. As Alonso wrote, “In order to really understand the contradanza I had to hear one played by someone from the Antilles” (1849: 60). Some chroniclers used the word “jaleo” to describe this rhythmically kinetic aspect of contradanza renditions, which was also an essential trait of danza and merengue performances. In 1836, Cuban chronicler El Lugareño wrote, “A Cuban contradanza arrives in Europe; the European performer plays it, but never reproduces that feeling, that jaleo, that flavor which a creole performer shows’ (in Galán 1983: 128). The term “jaleo” (which might otherwise loosely translate as “hubbub” or “boisterous noise”) went on to denote both the rhythmic dynamism of the second sections as well as those sections themselves (as the term is still used in reference to the modern Dominican merengue’s call-and-response section following the verse passage). Thus, for example, in April 1848, the Gaceta del gobierno de Puerto Rico reported that organizers of a dance gathering had included “one of those magic contradanzas with that Havana-style feeling that involuntarily make even the most serious people move their feet, with its staccato tones, its seductive rhythms, and its vivid and very special jaleo.”

It is not possible for us to ascertain for now the specific nuances that provided the sense of jaleo to nineteenth-century danza renditions. Conceivably, however, they may have had some relation to a rhythmic phenomenon that has been much discussed in literature on the Puerto Rican danza—the “elastic tresillo” (tresillo elástico). The term was coined, albeit with somewhat ambiguous meaning, in a 1915 book byandleader Fernando Callejo Ferrer (1802–1926; see Rivera-Guzmán 1993: 9–15). Subsequently, the elastic tresillo has often been claimed to be a unique feature of the Puerto Rican danza. Eventually the term came to refer to the rhythmic pattern noted as a triplet in either of the two contexts shown in Figure 3.1 (A and B). (Note that the Puerto Rican use of tresillo to mean ‘triplet’ differs from the Cuban use of that term to denote a 3-3-2 pattern, e.g., dotted-eighth–dotted-eighth-eighth.) As Callejo
Ferrer wrote, “The word ‘elastic’ means that the measure of a triplet must not be precise, but involves enlarging one note over another in order to make the accompaniment’s creole rhythm” ([1915] 1971: 54). Most typically, and especially among piano performers, the A pattern shown in Figure 3.1 tends to be played as an amphibrach, while the B pattern tends to be rendered as a cinquillo (see patterns C and D, respectively). These two rhythmic patterns themselves, of course, are scarcely unique to the Puerto Rican danza but rather are basic, typical, and even defining rhythms of creole Caribbean music.

The abundance of triplets in scores like “La mulata” (Figure 3.2), composed during danzas formative period around 1850, reveals the signature of

![Figure 3.1 Elastic tresillo forms](image-url)

![Figure 3.2 “La mulata” danza from circa 1855](image-url)
an old 6/8-metered contradanza from Spain introduced, as Tapia y Rivera and Brau stated, via educated immigrants, aristocrats, and military bands fleeing the Venezuelan revolution since 1817. Fernando Callejo Ferrer, one of the most distinguished composers and band leaders during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, asserted that these triplets appeared in the old "danzón" (danza) imported from Venezuela in 1821 (Callejo Ferrer 1915: 244). But Callejo Ferrer added that these rhythmic cells, unlike the elastic triplet of latter-nineteenth-century danzas, consisted of quarter-note triplets "one measure . . . but not the next" (un compás sí y otro no), thus suggesting the pattern known as sesquialtera—that is, "a 6/8 metrical feel alternating with a 3/4 emphasis" (Sheehy 1999: 41).

Pedro Malave Vega (1992: 158) questions this assertion on the basis of Callejo Ferrer's misleading term "danzón," which he used to refer to this form. But traces of what is known as sesquialtera are seen in "La mulata," on bars 2 and 8 (Figure 3.2), respectively, thus giving credence to Callejo Ferrer's thesis. The score for the right hand shows two syncopated triplets with a 6/8 feel, while the left-hand triplet for the entire 2/4 measure suggests instead a 3/4 one. A rhythmic and metrical feature prominent among mestizo populations (in countries like Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, and Colombia), the inscription of sesquialtera patterns in "La mulata"—along with the 6/8 feel—shows (in the opinion of Díaz Díaz) the degree to which imported South American contradances bridged the evolution from the old Spanish contradanza to the merengue emerging in San Juan twenty-seven years after the first significant Venezuelan migration in 1821.

In addition to the 6/8 feel in the 2/4 structure and the 6/8 and 3/4 metric combinations of the sesquialtera, a third and definite rhythmic factor is the one that helps set the stage for the creation of contradanza in Puerto Rico in those years: the so-called "habanera" rhythm that is prominently inscribed in the second section of local contradanzas like "La mulata." In piano scores, this distinctive pattern was generally assigned to the left hand. Otherwise, composers wrote them for instruments at the lower register. Beyond the musical implications of these habanera rhythms lie contradictions of a rather sociopolitical character observed during the formative period of the late 1840s. The adoption of this pattern into the pre-existing form of the local contradanza imposed a new impetus to the dance in ways that epitomized how creole Puerto Ricans responded musically and choreographically to the prevailing social and political environment.

The Advent of the Merengue

In Puerto Rico, notions of "inner creole" and "outer creole" make sense as subcategories of identity for a process not constrained to the insular sphere. By the mid-1800s, a movement for the independence of Cuba and Puerto Rico was underway in which such intellectuals as Ramón Emeterio Betances, a
French-educated Puerto Rican physician, visualized an integrated region of autonomous islands, regardless of language. With compatriot Eugenio Maria de Hostos, Dominican intellectuals and political leaders like Gregorio Luperón envisioned an Antillean danza as a shared expression of the region. A champion of the tenets of abolitionism and the Paris Revolution of April 1848 (Ojeda 2001: 22), Betances had arrived from Paris just at the time when merengue was documented in Puerto Rico. The abolitionist spirit that Caribbean slaves shared with many mulattoes and poor white laborers constituted a predisposition to the ready-made Afro-Caribbean rhythms that would enliven a new form, known as "merengue," which was about to become Puerto Rico's first "baile del país," or national dance.

The social dances of the mid-1800s were not merely idle recreation but physical embodiments of aesthetic and social sensibilities and ideologies. The courtly and over-refined minuet had increasingly come to be seen as stuffy and archaic, but the still-popular ngodon retained much of that earlier dance's formal solemnity. For its part, the contradanza could be executed in a spirit of fun and relative informality, but, as we have seen, it was often highly structured by the baionero and the obligation to follow the first couple's figure. It also had a thoroughly collective, "family fun" orientation that prevented intimacy of any sort between couples.

By the end of the 1840s, a clearly local Antillean sensibility was spreading in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic in ways that invited dance couples "to merengue" (merenguear) sensually, embracing each other tightly, whispering intimately, and even undulating their hips in a manner suggestive of slave dancing. This new sensibility signaled a fundamental shift from the affective relationships once dominated by conventional conceptions of morality and good taste prevalent in European colonial regimes.

In Europe, in the years around 1800, the revolutionary adoption of independent couple dancing had come in the form of the waltz and, to a lesser extent, the polka. The waltz had enjoyed some subsequent popularity in the Caribbean, including in Puerto Rico, where it had been documented as a stage dance since the 1820s and came to often be paired with the danza in ballrooms. But on the whole, the waltz did not lend itself to the same sort of creolization and the incorporation of a voluptuous character possible among creole Caribbean dances.

The arrival around 1845 of a group of youths said to be from Havana may have inspired what Tapia y Rivera ([1886] 1973: 126–128) called "a horde of undistinguished musicians who devoted themselves to composing danzas by the dozens, among whose ranks were distinguished those of Francisco Santaella."

The names of danzas of this period reflect their unpretentious character, rooted in vernacular culture and colloquial phrases, such as "Ay, yo quiero comer mondongo" ("Oh, I Want to Eat Mondongo") and "Zabaleta, rabo de puerco" ("Zabaleta, Fork Tail"). Tapia y Rivera also noted that in contrast to the evident Cuban style of repeating the short contradanzas indefinitely, Puerto Rican composers like Aurelio Duerto began extending the second part of the dance piece...
in such compositions as “La sapa” of 1844. However, due to the absence of publishers comparable to Juan Federico Edelmann in Cuba, scarcely any surviving examples of Puerto Rican danzas predate the early 1890s. The earliest local danza found so far is the piece examined above, “La mulata,” which Brau cites as enjoying particular popularity in 1855. Both it and “La hortensia” of 1865 (discussed below), although of historical interest, would fall into the category of the unpretentious and ordinary ditties (“obriolas”) described by Tapia y Rivera. “La mulata,” shown as Figure 3.2, resembles a typical Cuban contradanza of the period in several respects. Its formal structure consists of two sixteen-beat parts, with the first, in this case, consisting of a repeated eight-bar prima and the second being undergirded by the standard habanera ostinate. However, its melodic rhythms, at least as notated, are more typical of subsequent Puerto Rican danzas than of Cuban counterparts, as discussed above. The two forms of elastic tresillos (eighth-note triplets followed by two eighth notes) might in other pieces be “rounded off” to conventional duple-metered seisillos and amphibrachs, but their combination in this piece with left-hand triplets suggests more deliberate and rhythmically intricate alternations and superimpositions of duple and ternary patterns with remnants of sesquialtera patterns.12

In 1847, Puerto Rican newspaper clips began reporting the popularity of the “contradanzas habaneras” (Havana-style contradanzas), alternately known locally as “contradanzas del gusto habanero” (Havana-flavored contradanzas). Tapia y Rivera and Brau agree that “merengue” constituted musically a bipartite form. Unlike its Cuban counterpart, this new style of contradanza evolved into a multisectional genre consisting of pasaje and two or three parts. Choreographically, it began to show the features of an independent couple dance under the circumstances described below.

The enthusiastic adoption of the sensual merengue in the 1840s and the fondness with which some contemporary writers praised it signaled a contemptuous rejection of the rigodon, which became associated, explicitly or implicitly, with European hegemony. To Puerto Ricans, their own “seductive” merengue came to be enjoyed precisely for its celebration of values as opposed to colonial ideals of decency and propriety.

One night in 1848, the Philharmonic Society in San Juan hosted a welcome party in honor of the recently installed governor from Spain, Juan de la Pezuela. The cultural get-together was designed to attract ordinary people who did not necessarily have interest in any sort of concert music. In order to assure a good turnout, organizers scheduled social dancing to follow the initial music performances. However, the attendants neither hid their impatience during the poorly rehearsed choral music nor concealed their disapproval in the presence of the sanctimonious governor when his wife, the marchioness of Moncayo, played a piano noticeably out of tune in the high register. The governor must have been further annoyed when the orchestra finally “revolutionized” the evening by providing a lively dance piece for the attendees (as related in an anonymous letter published in the Gaceta de Puerto Rico).
The “revolution” alluded to by the chronicler was not the one that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had incited that year in Paris, but was instead the introduction of a dance genre, the merengue. The anonymous writer to the Gazeta went on to declare with defiant intention that the merengue “will undoubtedly spread in Europe as soon as it is known and, in my judgment, its destiny is to replace the grave and boring rigodon.”

Pezuela had just arrived from a turbulent Spain, where the event known as the Paris Revolt had already left a profound sociopolitical imprint. He regarded Puerto Ricans as lazy and boorish, but rather than seek to improve their education, he rejected a proposal for a secondary school, stating that education was injurious and unnecessary. In his role as captain general of Puerto Rico, he had the responsibility of reading and overseeing the official government newspaper. As if intending to provoke the colonial overlord, the Gazeta writer went on to test the limits of the colonial regime’s patience in more provocative and clearly confrontational lines: “Don’t you believe like I do, my friend, that the rigodon seems to be more like a dance expressly sent by superior authority, instead of being the spontaneous product of happiness and well-being? I can only tell you that, once having seen people dance merengue, I find in the cherished rigodon nothing else than a rehearsal of courteous.”

Quite probably, Pezuela had these statements in mind when he released, several months later, a decree banning merengue, imposing a fine of fifty pesos on party hosts and eight days of jail on any musician that played it.

In Cuba, an isolated account circulating during this period indicates the existence of a type of “merengue” among various ephemeral dance styles that included the ley brava and the sopimpa. The account, found in an 1847 verse from Havana, depicts a mulatto woman dancing:

Porque su cuerpos ceña, se extiñe, encoge y doblaga
Igual que la gomé elástica, lo mismo que la gazela,
Y “noranda el jaleo, el fandango y las boleras
——dice ella—— cuando yo bailo la sopimpa de mi tierra,
El merengue y la ley brava, danzas para mi compuestas.”

Because her body gets pressed and stretched, gets pulled and gives in like a rubber band, just like a gazelle,
And she says, “At bad times the jaleo, the fandango, and the boleras,
When I dance the sopimpa of my land,
The merengue and the ley brava [‘wild law’], dances composed for me.”

As of today, this fictional lyric provides the first documented reference to the merengue as a dance-related expression, although one should hesitate to assume that this Cuban merengue was identical to or even directly related to that reported in Puerto Rico a year later. If this Cuban verse seems to describe the merengue only as a dance, the earliest documents in Puerto Rico clearly
tie the term "merengue" with the contradanza—that is, as both a music genre and a dance—as analyzed above. Moreover, the merengue mentioned in the Cuban poem likely takes place in the realm of the local underworld of sailors and prostitutes, not like the merengue reported in Puerto Rico, which was centered in activities sponsored initially by liberal, educated groups. Furthermore, the Havana poem refers to a style of body movements with no reference, in any way, to any kind of sound or to any place of origin.

In 1885, Brau (b. 1842), a toddler living a hundred miles away during the events in question, wrote that in the early 1840s, a new musical and dance expression called "merengue" was introduced from Havana that revolutionized Puerto Rico's dance culture. With no other source but him and with no firsthand reference at hand to sustain such arguments, subsequent authors like Yeray ([1956], 1977: 24) and Hector Campos Parisi (1976: 83) reproduced similar statements. But in the opinion of Díaz Díaz, the views by these and other writers who trace the origins of the merengue only to Cuba seem, so far, unsubstantiated and unreliable. In fact, none of the contemporary publications at the time indicate that the Cuban contradanza, as a musical form, was introduced from Cuba to remain as the exclusive or prevailing form. Yet, with the inspiration of voluptuous Havana-style rhythms, a stream of dance styles imported from Cuba helped subvert the old stately and solemn protocol in the name of a freer and voluptuous style, adopted by the same young members of the highly educated liberal elite advocating the liberty of Cuba and Puerto Rico.

The three styles referred to in the above-cited poem are also reported by Tapia y Rivera. After residing in Havana between 1858 and 1868, he commented that "merengue" denoted "the exaggerated style of dancing the jaleo, or second part of the danza, giving it some of the impudence of the Havana-style lopinpa [sic; sopinpa] or ley brava" ([1880] 1973: 128). The form of these dance styles, or whatever they seemed to be, is unclear, given the paucity and ambiguity of contemporary descriptions. But Tapia y Rivera, who supervised the 1848 party in honor of Governor Pezuela, refers to the merengue as a stylistic dance gesture (an "exaggeration") customary among dancers, as musicians played the second section of local contradanzas that bore the name "jaleo." The "impudence" referred to by Tapia y Rivera denotes more of an aspect relative to body movements likely imported from Cuba than that of a musical style or form. As for sopinpa, Tapia y Rivera's phrase "lopinpa [sic; sopinpa] or ley brava" may suggest that he was referring to one and the same dance style. John Chasteen reproduces a nineteenth-century description suggesting how Cuban dancers, as in Puerto Rico, conspired in using this style to subvert the pompous European modality of dancing contradanzas:

Cuban musicians gave contradance a gently syncopated rhythm. Cuban dancers made their own variation by moving away from European bounciness, with more lateral movement to their hips. We can
“see” this in the evidence because hip motion implies a lower center of gravity, and lowering one’s center of gravity tends to produce a shuffling sound of the feet—the same we “heard” in Buenos Aires dance halls. Cubans call these sounds escobílco or sopimpa. (Chasteen 2004: 157)

In Puerto Rico, local merengue composers, such as Aurelio Dueño and Francisco Santaella, enthusiastically adopted the habanera rhythms, although they continued to use and develop the old Spanish format. A piece like “La mulata,” a 2/4 contradanza with a feel of 6/8 and traces of sesquialtera, hardly falls into the category of the Cuban contradanzas, even if the voluptuous spirit that came to prevail was that of the Cuban habanera.

The 1849 (Non-)Prohibition of Merengue

As cited above, Brau affirmed categorically that the contradanza was introduced by Venezuelan immigrants, a statement that explains why Brau may have confused “upa” as a dance style, with “merengue,” as a contradance-related musical form. A survey of Cuban scholars by Dominican writers Catana Pérez de Cuello and Rafael Solano reveals that the “upa” was never reported in Cuba before the 1850s (Pérez de Cuello and Solano 2003: 223). Among the scholars interviewed in Cuba for this inquiry are prominent musicologists María Teresa Linares, Ilirana García, and Jesús Gómez Cairo.

In fact, the abundance of references concerning this period indicates no evidence concerning “upa” before the August 1849 merengue prohibition by Governor Pezuela. It was precisely during the period of his incumbency (1848-52) that various references revealed the existence of “upa” for the first time. It is likely that the term “upa” was used strategically as a euphemism after Pezuela issued the ban on merengue in 1849. As Tapia y Rivera noted ([1880] 1973: 127), “The ban generated many epigrams, but failed to achieve its goal, because one cannot cure an established habit with remonstration or advice.” One result of the ban may have been the tendency to disguise the dance by referring to it as “upa” and, more lastingly, as “danza.”

Shortly after Pezuela departed Puerto Rico for Cuba in 1852, the term “merengue” was again cited in Ponce as a new dance, where it went on to provoke a lively debate from the first edition of newspaper El ponceño in July 1852 until its last edition in 1854.

Socorro Girón (1984: 211) has illustrated how ingrained merengue was by then in Ponce among ordinary people, who shouted out songs on its melodies. Due to the lack of an adequate ballroom, the list of places merengue dancers resorted to attending includes a center known as La Sonimbula, a house at Isabel Street, a site known as “Madame Fagot’s house,” and an improvised room in the so-called “Meat-market Street,” as well as other numerous pri-
vate homes, such as those of Catalanian merchants José Vilaret and Joaquín Balaguer.

The scarcity of notations of actual 1830s merengues is partially offset by the abundant accounts of it, which come mostly in the form of polemics against it. Detractors deplored in particular the sensual intimacy with which couples danced and the way that it put an end to the contradanza’s group-oriented, asexual recreation that could unite young and old in the collective execution of the lively figures.

One objectionable feature, denounced in an editorial of El ponceño, was evidently the hip-swaying that the new dance accommodated: “The invention of that dance must be a product jointly combined by a poet, a musician, a crazy man, and the devil. What a contrast! The woman inclines her head on his shoulder, adopts a stance of humiliation, or fixes her eyes on St. Cecilia. Whereas the upper half of their bodies makes them look like saints . . . but then . . . the lower half of their bodies . . . heck, it all seems like the day and the night together, the joint of glory and hell, of truth and lie. Ah, merengue! [You are a] distant cousin of venial sin, and so parents must be blamed for your existence.” 19 Another critic called for the invention of a new rational dance to oust the merengue from that position it already occupied only a few years after its supposed banning: “Ask parents to assist the establishment of a decent society, if they fear the consequences of grave abuses; then, with the creation of a new national dance [emphasis added by the authors], merengue shall be eliminated, not by its roots, as these are many and deep, but gradually and by means of modifications which are not hard to effect in such a dance. . . . Establish a social organization and expel the merengue; but as long as it is barely sustained by a mere handful of youngsters, they will make it triumph.” 20 The merengue’s romantic and potentially erotic rather than family-oriented nature was bewailed by another critic, who in an 1855 letter to El ponceño denounced the events in which well-to-do young men, “forgetting their obligation to us, their mothers, their sisters, and their relatives, attended dances to socialize with other young women. That such women might be of lower social classes added yet another dimension to the merengue’s harmfulness. As the writer elucidated, ‘Society can be compared to the steam engine on Father’s plantation, whose various parts, each functioning separately, are never hindered in their respective motions except for the contact and the friction necessary to attain the general result. [. . . Accordingly,] each rank and class of the society in which we live, each circle of our social sphere, moves within determined limits beyond which the individual should not and indeed cannot venture without risking a clash with unknown bodies’ (in Thompson 2002: 58). To the dismay of this aristocratic stuffed shirt, young men were evidently not only risking but actively seeking “clashes with unknown bodies” by attending merengue dances. Indeed, despite the fire and brimstone spouted by the merengue’s enemies, the dance’s supporters were clearly in the majority, expressing their enthusi-
asm either with their feet and hips or in letters and essays, such as this one from 1858:

The music of these dances, that bears the sweet and revealing name “merengue,” is itself quite unique and delicious, in its distinctive composition, particular harmony, and the melodies and modulations of its sections and phrases. It is certainly true that upon hearing the danza, everyone dances, because even people who, because of their age or other reasons do not wish to enter the dance floor, or even move their bodies gently, sway their heads, or at least tap their canes on the floor to the music—even they not only enjoy the music but find their nervous systems affected and moved by the special character and particular naturalism of its chords, cadences, and consonances. (In Brau [1885] 1977: 9; emphasis in original text)

Merengue in the Military Bands

By the early nineteenth century, advances in design of musical instruments at once facilitated and responded to the proliferation of brass-dominated bands, especially associated with the military. Two of the most outstanding contributors to these trends were the Frenchman Adolph Sax, inventor of the saxophone, and Hector Berlioz, genius of orchestration. These profound transformations were reflected as well among Spanish colonial regiments in the Antilles and in Puerto Rico by 1854.

As mentioned, many aspects of public musical life in the nineteenth-century Spanish Caribbean were tied to centers of colonial rule, in particular the Church and the military. These institutions provided the primary vehicles for many musicians and composers to fulfill their artistic aspirations. A case in point is that of regimental bands.

Regimental bands were an effective means to disseminate contemporary music, whether Continental European, local, or from other Caribbean islands. Informed by such sources, native composers and performers in the Caribbean worked under the continuous influx of incoming musical scores along with newly invented instruments. In most cases, the military administration was willing to pay, however dearly, for these items in its interest to maintain a prominent space within the musical environment of colonial society.

After 1852, to the extent that people no longer feared Pezuela’s anti-merengue decree, the term “merengue” recovered its prominence as connoting dance music with some sort of repetitive rhythmic patterns. However, in their evening retretas, army officials tended to prefer the more elegant and less controversial terms “danza” or “contradanza.”

“Retretas” were evening public concerts generally held twice a week by Spanish regimental bands—usually on Sundays and Wednesdays at eight, in
open spaces, such as town squares. As seen in the following program for a retreta scheduled to take place on Sunday, March 8, 1857, Spanish regimental retretas were occasions where the public became acquainted with the latest musical styles from Europe and other parts of the Spanish and French Caribbean, including Louisiana:

1. The "March of the Coronation," from the opera Il profeta
2. Cavatina for triple, from the opera Lucia
3. "Tambulé," contradanza
4. Obbligato aria for saxophone ("a newly invented instrument")
5. "La bordonua," contradanza
6. "Jota," from Postillon de la Rioja
7. "Cocoyé habanero"
8. "Para usted," contradanza

During the months that followed, the Cádiz Cazadores band followed a format whose beginnings and conclusions consisted of local danza or Spanish paso dobles, thus suggesting a preference among retretas' organizers to feature locally popular pieces along with peninsular Spanish ones.

One influential musician in the military and dance band milieu was a Frenchman named Carlos Allard, a flutist, bandleader, and brother of a distinguished Parisian violinist. Allard was probably a member of the delegation that accompanied Pezuela as the latter disembarked from Madrid. Subsequently, after his arrival in Ponce with the governor in April 1850, he figured prominently in the Peninsular Iberia Infantry Regiment No. 2. In March 1857, he became the band director of the Cádiz Cazadores’s Regiment No. 1. In these and subsequent outdoor concerts, Allard introduced saxophone obbligatos, which—as more typically played on the euphonium, a brass instrument similar to the alto horn, referred to in Spanish as the "bombardino"—went on to become distinctive and important features of the Puerto Rican danza style, as we discuss below.

In 1857 at St. Thomas, Allard met Louisiana-born and European-trained pianist-composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk and singer Adelina Patti, then a fourteen-year-old girl. After all three of them arrived in Ponce, they gave several concerts with the Cádiz regimental band serving as accompaniment. Whenever the military band was not available, Gottschalk, the pianist, resorted to having Allard perform as flutist and Patti as singer (Starr 1995: 262). In 1858, after Patti’s parents demanded her return to New York City, Allard joined Gottschalk in a tour of several Caribbean islands.

In Allard’s absence, the Cádiz Cazadores’s band came to be directed by the Spaniard Joaquín Montón, a danza composer who specialized in bombardino. In retretas, Montón maintained the tradition of saxophone obbligatos introduced by Allard and also applied this style to the bombardino.
Manuel Tavárez and the Efflorescence of the Danza

Puerto Rican musicologists have typically divided the history of the danza into three periods: (1) an early stage, comprising roughly 1840–80 and culminating in the figure of Manuel Gregorio Tavárez, (2) a zenith of vitality and popularity, encompassing the 1880s–90s, represented especially by Juan Morel Campos, and (3) an autumnal period stretching to the 1930s, comprising the work of José Ignacio Quintón and his contemporaries.

By the 1840s, as noted above, local composers were avidly penning danzas and imbuing them with local flavor by incorporating elements of contemporary popular song. From 1844, as we have seen, visitors from Cuba sparked the vogue of a dance style of independent couple dancing, most commonly called jalo, which evidently constituted an especially lively and sensual way of dancing the second part of a danza/contradanza. As a musical idiom, this merengue, like the Cuban danza, would have been distinguished by a pronounced use of the habanera syncopation in the latter sections. In evident merry disregard of Governor Pezuela’s ban of 1849, it is clear that by the 1850s the new merengue and independent couple dancing had effectively replaced the older Spanish contradanza, and presumably a more syncopated and creoleized musical style had become standard. After 1852, with Pezuela gone and his ban evidently a dead letter, the term “merengue” and the dance itself could flourish without official censure; however, that term—which may have denoted a specific dance variant—increasingly gave way to the rubric “danza,” which was at once more dignified and less controversial. (The term “merengue” hence came to refer to the individual parts of the danza that succeeded the introductory paseo.)

Strikingly, one of the first self-identified surviving “danzas” composed on Puerto Rican soil is the 1857 piece “Danza” (Opus 33), by Gottschalk (1829–69). As discussed in the previous chapter, Gottschalk spent much of the period between 1853 and 1860 touring the Spanish and French Caribbean, where he befriended, encouraged, and inspired local musicians and thrilled audiences with his colorful performances. Some of these were orchestral extravaganzas, but most were piano recitals in which he performed contemporary European classics alongside his own flamboyant compositions, many of which incorporated elements of local Caribbean vernacular music. In 1857, as previously mentioned, Gottschalk arrived from Cuba to Puerto Rico, where he collaborated with influential brass-band leader Allard. The same year, he presented a few new compositions of his own at packed concerts in Ponce and San Juan; one was “Marcha de los gícharos” (“March of the Gícharos”), which incorporated elements of jíbaro music and the Yuletide song “Si me dan pasteles”; the other was “Danza” (Opus 33), which can be heard on the compact disc accompanying this volume.
As mentioned in Chapter 2, Gottschalk’s “Danza” (Opus 33) may have been inspired to some extent by Cuban music, as reflected in the insistent *cincuillo* typical of popular songs in Oriente, where he had recently resided, and the use of the term “danza,” which was standard in Cuba as well as Puerto Rico. In at least one significant respect, however, the piece was more aligned with Puerto Rican practice than Cuban tradition. Cuban contradanzas and danzas, as discussed earlier, invariably comprised only two sections, which were presumably repeated ad infinitum in the dance context, perhaps with some improvised variations. By contrast, as mentioned, Puerto Rican danzas from the 1860s—and perhaps earlier—generally used a different extension technique, in the form of additional sections, such that they most typically consisted of a short introductory *paseo* followed by two or more sections popularly known as “merengues.” “Danza” (Opus 33) can be seen as an idiosyncratic precursor or variant of this practice, with a C section segueing to a concluding return to the initial A and B sections. As performed to great success in his recitals, Gottschalk’s “Danza” (Opus 33) further helped legitimize the danza as a genre fit for concert events and earned him the appreciation of intellectuals like Brau ([1885] 1977:11-12) for his contribution to island music culture. (Composer Campos Parsi went so far as to call Gottschalk “the father of Puerto Rican national music,” but most scholars would regard this assessment as an exaggeration [see Malave Vega 1992: 246].)

In the 1860s, Puerto Rican musical life blossomed somewhat, aided by the construction of several theaters and social centers in San Juan, Ponce, and Mayagüez. Contemporary accounts attest to the popularity and vigor of the danza in this decade and also to its thorough creolization. The rustic *güiro* scraper, introduced as early as 1853, had become standard in ensembles, and composer Braulio Dueño Colón (1854–1934), in an influential 1913 essay, seemed to be writing of the 1860s in his denunciation of the more Afro-Caribbean, populist style of danzas preceding the genre’s supposed rescue at the hands of Tavárez and others:

> We can’t deny that there was a time during which our danza sadly degenerated due to the poor artistic taste of certain composers and bandleaders who used the African bomba [an Afro–Puerto Rican music and dance genre], imposing on the danza a grotesque and thus anti-aesthetic rhythm.

> Fortunately the exquisite taste of artists like Tavárez, Ramos [Hierbas] and [Morel] Campos imposed itself, and the creole danza recovered the suave and charming rhythm that always characterized it.

> In the epoch to which we refer, which was deadly for the development of our regional music, were written hundreds of danzas of detestable taste, of which only two or three survived the shipwreck, and which were composed by the likes of Santaella, a prolific author of dance music. ([1913] 1977: 13)
As it is, few danzas from this decade survive, although we have record, via Duenio Colon and others, of their colorful colloquial titles and their standard ensemble formats. One of the first documented pieces of the decade is "La hortensia" ("The Hydrangea"), composed by Giné Ramos in 1865 (reproduced in Muñoz 1966: 53–54). "La hortensia" is in many ways typical of subsequent danzas. It opens with an unsyncopated eight-bar paseo in sixteenth notes repeated once, an eight-bar B section (also repeated), and an eight-bar C section (repeated), with a final four-bar coda. The B and C sections could be regarded as comprising the "merengues" or body of the piece. Elastic tresillos permeate the right-hand melody of the B and C sections.

Despite its historical interest, a work like "La hortensia" is trivial compared to the series of sublime danzas that flourished a few years later from the pen of Távarez. Born in San Juan in 1843 to a French Creole father and a local mother, Távarez studied piano as a youth and in 1857 moved to France to further his training at the Paris Conservatory, becoming the first Puerto Rican musician to pursue such Continental grooming. In 1860, he suffered a stroke that impaired his hearing and the use of one of his hands and obliged him to return to San Juan, where he eventually commenced teaching, concertizing, publishing piano reductions of operas, and composing danzas, along with a few waltzes and other works. His first surviving danzas are "La lopita" (ca. 1864) and "Como me mira el viejo" (1863). In 1867, he shifted to Ponce, which enjoyed a livelier and more cosmopolitan ambience especially hospitable to the creole danza. There he became mentor to Morel Campos and others and composed his most famous danzas, including "Margarita," "Ausencia," "La ordinaria," and "La sensitiva," performing them at local theaters and private salons. In 1883, he died at the age of forty, being survived by his four children, including his daughter Elisa (1879–1960), who went on to become a distinguished pianist and pre-eminent interpreter of her father's oeuvre.

Prior to Távarez, Puerto Rican danzas had flourished primarily as danceband items, even if they were originally notated, like contemporary Cuban counterparts, as piano scores. Távarez, however, was well-familiar with Gottschalk's "Danza" (Opus 33) and presumably with some of the more pianistic 1850s and 1860s contradanzas of Cuban composer Manuel Saumell. Moreover, his Parisian training steeped him in the music of Chopin, Schumann, Liszt, and their contemporaries. It was his singular mission and contribution to elevate the danza to the level of a sophisticated light-classical salon and concert piano music while retaining its creole character. Although the danza predated Távarez's input, he is regarded to some extent as the father of the local danza in that, like Saumell, he was the first to transform it from a quaint and provincial dance-music form into a sophisticated art form. Subsequently, of course, his danzas became widely popular and were easily absorbed into the island's vernacular music culture, being performed not only in formal piano recitals but by the most humble accordion-and-guitar ensembles. Most, like "Margarita," were also fitted with sentimental romantic lyrics, such that as
slow, romantic songs, they enjoyed a status akin to that of the popular Cuban bolero from the early 1900s. Like his student and successor Morel Campos, Tavárez gave his danzas elegant, often wistful titles ("Absence," or dedications to society ladies) in contrast to the colloquial, saucy titles in vogue during the 1850s—60s.

"Margarita" can be heard on this volume's accompanying compact disc. The piece's Chopinesque and pianistic rather than dance-band orientation is evident from its first bars. The subsequent body of the piece epitomizes the languid and romantic voluptuousness for which local writers have celebrated the danza. Figure 3.3 shows the melody's first phrase (following the paseo introduction), with its accompaniment alternating cincillo-like patterns and 3-3-2 tresillos. As discussed above, dance bands and even many pianists tend to play the two eighth-note triplets (with their tied inner notes) more or less as cincillos (eighth-sixteenth-eighth-sixteenth-eighth; see Chapters 1 and 2); in her well-known recording of this piece, Tavárez's daughter Elisa retains the cincillo pattern only in the most languorous rubato (as imitated in the compact disc's recording). They can be seen as the most subtled, rarefied distillation of the same cincillo that thunders insistently in vodun and bomba drumming and that, in more moderate tempi and alternating with bars in straight eighths, constituted a hallmark of the Antillean danza and Cuban danzón.

The assessment by Campos París of Tavárez's role in island music culture merits quoting at length:

It is with good reason that Manuel Gregorio Tavárez has been baptized "father of the Puerto Rican danza," as it was in his hands that the crude form of the Cuban habanera [sic; contradanza] was transformed into a personal vehicle of great finery and exquisite construction. The

![Figure 3.3 Opening phrase of the main section of "Margarita," by Manuel Tavárez.](image-url)
danzas, which previously were played by humble ensembles for dance, were adapted to the fluid language of the piano. The composer not only created melodies of romantic breadth, but also explored the distinctive sonorities of the instrument. It was Tavárez who linked the danza to the piano, elevating it to the characteristic form of his century. The danza returned as a messenger of profound and intimate emotions. It became the vehicle of the confession of longing, the disconsolate lament, or the expression of a felicitously requited love. In creole society these short pieces occupied the place which in Romantic-era Europe were held by the "musical moments," "songs without words," or "pages of an album" of Schubert, Mendelssohn, or Schumann.

Tavárez created the prototype of the composer of danzas, the cultured and sensitive man, who while lacking an environment which would enable him to express himself completely, focused his energies on the creation of small, flexible works, which, though written as piano works for listening, easily lent themselves to being used as dance accompaniment.

Nationalism, Ponce, and "La Borinqueña"

By the 1860s, Puerto Rico and Cuba had the unenviable distinction of being the last remaining colonies of Spain in the Americas—in the words of Puerto Rican poet Lola Rodríguez de Tió, the "twin wings of the same bird" that was unable to fly. Spanish rule continued to be supported by various Hispanophile reactionaries, employees of the colonial regime, and others fearful of potentially American domination by subaltern people of color. Yet in both islands, nationalist sentiment was growing, especially as a bourgeois phenomenon fueled by Enlightenment notions of democracy and progress, by imperial Spain's parasitic and backward economic policies, and by the despotic rule of arrogant governors sent from Spain who busied themselves with decrees like the bans on merengue and, for a period, on wearing beards. With governors like Pezuela actively opposing public education, the island's literacy rate was below 12 percent in 1860; colonial rule was also tested by the thousands of day laborers ( jornaleros) required to fulfill quotas of forced labor on plantations under penalty of imprisonment.

Cuba, if for no other reason than its greater size, sustained a vigorous independence movement from the 1830s and armed insurrection in 1868. Such overt rebellion was less feasible in smaller and heavily garrisoned Puerto Rico, but by the 1860s anticolonial sentiment was strong and widespread, including among otherwise conservative hacienda owners frustrated by imperial restrictions on commerce. A popular nationalism increasingly came to manifest itself in the 1860s, whether via open political anticolonialism—however vigorously repressed—or in the more subtle, safe, and oblique form of a pride in creole culture, including the danza.
The capital city of San Juan enjoyed prominence as the hub of various forms of popular celebrations with its carnivals, diverse bands and orchestras, Afro-Caribbean ensembles from nearby sugar plantations, military and church events, and other formal ceremonies and celebrations sponsored by the colonial administration. By the 1860s, however, the southern city of Ponce emerged as a rival economic and cultural center especially hospitable to ideals of European liberalism and local creole arts, such as the danza. With its substantial communities of German, English, French, and Corsican immigrants, Ponce had a more cosmopolitan ambience than San Juan, whose religious life was dominated by reactionaries and bigoted forms of Catholicism. As Quintero-Rivera and others have noted, Ponce’s independent and progressive cultural ambience was linked, whether directly or indirectly, to its socioeconomic milieu. Ponce was the main commercial center for the fertile, plantation-dominated, south-central part of the island, where merchants and landowners felt particularly frustrated by Spanish mercantilist tariffs imposed on imports and exports. Progressive political activism extended to working classes and petty-bourgeois artisans, who published their own newspaper from 1874. Meanwhile, the town administration promoted cultural activities in its own way, as by the 1864 installation of lamps around the town plaza to encourage and enhance public open-air concerts (Quintero-Rivera [1986] 2002).

With the participation of slaves and lower-class mulatto artisans, Ponce’s ambience proved especially hospitable to the creole danza as it flourished from the 1860s. While most composers and bandleaders remained in San Juan, those living in Ponce became the most prominent. As mentioned, Tavárez shifted to Ponce in 1887 to take advantage of its cultural climate, and the city went on to host his student, Morel Campos, the most outstanding composer of the 1880s–90s. Moreover, it was especially in Ponce and its surroundings that the danza became a more properly “rational” genre in that it was celebrated as such by locals and its appeal extended to diverse social classes. Quintero-Rivera insightfully attributes this broad social popularity in particular to the “contradictory” socioeconomic orientation of the hacendados—capitalist slave owners who were at once linked to but frustrated by colonial rule—and their economic and cultural links to local artisans, from whose ranks danza performers came. Even today, Ponce retains some of its attractive colonial flavor, with its elegant balconies, plazas, and gardens. For composer and essayist Veray, Ponce’s cultural charm was quintessentially expressed in the danzas of Tavárez and especially Morel Campos: “The danza of Morel Campos is saturated by the atmosphere of Ponce, and displays the defining qualities of that austere, provincial, sober, and defiant Ponce society of the 1880s” ([1977] 2002: 65).

The closest Puerto Rico came to hosting an open anticolonial revolution occurred in the provincial town of Lares, where in 1868 local conspirators proclaimed independence and seized the town in what was supposed to be
the first spark in a broader insurrection; unfortunately, colonial militias soon snuffed out the uprising. Although abortive, the event—commemorated as the "grito [cry] de Lares"—intensified anticolonial patriotism, precipitated a liberalization of imperial rule, and promoted the popularity of a serenata that soon became the island's unofficial anthem, "La borinqueña." While the origin of this piece is contested, as a musical composition it appears to have been a song of anonymous authorship that surfaced in various parts of Latin America, including Peru. In Puerto Rico, its composition, or alteration, has been generally attributed to guitarist and composer Francisco (Paco) Ramírez Ortiz and his acquaintance, Catalan immigrant Félix Astol; Ramírez at the least may have endowed the tune with the typical creole rhythmic touches that essentially transformed it into a danza. Astol is believed to have composed for Ramírez's melody a romantic text, eulogizing a lovely local mulatto woman. Verses similar to those attributed to Astol have surfaced in Peru and elsewhere. Astol's slightly precious lyrics commence:

Lovely mulata, image of candor of the garden of Borinquen,
pure and fragrant flower—
dumbstruck is every person who beholds your gentle and gracious
countenance
and your dainty foot.18

In 1868, when anticolonial fervor flared into insurrection, nationalist poet Rodríguez de Tió composed a new, explicitly militant set of verses to the already popular song:

Awake, Borinqueño [Puerto Rican], the signal has been given!
Rise from this dream, the hour to fight has come!
Doesn't your heart burn on hearing this patriotic call?
Come, our companion will be the roar of the cannon.
See how the Cuban will soon be free, the machete will give him his liberty.19

"La borinqueña," whether with the lyrics of Astol or Rodríguez, went on to enjoy extraordinary popularity and dissemination on the island that continue to the present. While the official anthem of Puerto Rico must by flat remain "The Star-Spangled Banner," "La borinqueña" retains a special and more immediate patriotic appeal and in 1952 was declared the "National Hymn" of the island, as refitted with lyrics by Manuel Fernández Juncos (which such commentators as Makavey Vega deem rather bland [1992: 515, 265–276]). What is particularly significant for the present study is that the song is not a pompous martial air but a rather typical, if especially melodious, danza, with the characteristic creole syncopations of the 1860s. As such, the song provides another illustration...
of the extent to which the danza constituted a national genre and a quintessential expression of island cultural identity.

Juan Morel Campos and the Danza in Its Prime

It would be a mistake to conceive of the history of the danza as a unidirectional evolution from a rustic dance music into the light-classical, rarefied piano idiom of Tavárez. In some respects, the culminating heyday of the genre involved not such a stylized purification but rather its vigorous flowering as a national dance music enjoyed by rich and poor, embodying a Caribbean creole character in a way that became distinctively Puerto Rican and, as such, a symbol of a truly national music. While Tavárez’s unique achievements constituted a precondition for this efflorescence, ultimately the most important figure in this process was Juan Morel Campos, whose danzas were at once more broadly popular than the salon-oriented works of Tavárez while displaying a variety, tunefulness, and originality that distinguished them from earlier dance pieces and exhibited an ineffably Puerto Rican character.

Born in Ponce in 1857, Morel Campos undertook formal training in most of the standard instruments of contemporary ensembles, including bombardino, cornet, contrabass, and piano. With the French-trained Tavárez and Spanish-trained Antonio Egipcaco, he went on to study composition, harmony, counterpoint, and piano. During his obligatory military service, he served as featured bombardino player in the regimental band of the Madrid Cazadores. His professional career commenced in the latter 1870s, shortly after leaving the military, when he formed his own ensembles and began composing in earnest. Meanwhile, he worked on occasion as an orchestra conductor in South America and the Caribbean and as an arranger for itinerant Cuban theater troupes and Italian opera and Spanish zarzuela companies. His facility at playing several instruments was accompanied by a prodigious gift for producing ad hoc arrangements as were needed for performances of orchestral works in town ensembles lacking proper instrumentation.

Morel Campos was gifted with a Vivaldi-like fecundity and facility enabling him to compose music virtually as fast as he could write it down. Until his death from a heart attack at age thirty-eight in 1896, he composed around 550 pieces, including waltzes, paso dobles, mazurkas, polkas, church music, and zarzuelas; but he is remembered almost exclusively for his 283 danzas, especially such favorites as “Maldito amor,” “Alma sublime,” “Laura y Georgina,” “Felices días,” “Ten piedad,” “No me toques,” and others. Through two decades of regularly performing these pieces in ballrooms and public plazas, Morel Campos succeeded in popularizing them at diverse social levels, such that they entered the repertoire of ballroom ensembles, salon pianists, and humble street musicians. Morel Campos inspired several eloquent encomiums that celebrated his unique status in island culture. Campos Pari noted how Tavárez had refined the unpresumptuous local merengue and danza tradition, elevating
the danza to a sublime light-classical art. Morel Campos pursued a more democratic path:

Morel Campos revitalizes it, inserts in it large doses of the popular, he reworks it, explores and molds it to his whim. He found in the danza the perfect form to express all his artistic, personal, and political needs. Fernando Callejo insightfully comments that in the danza, Morel Campos condensed the state of the popular Puerto Rican conscience agitated by the ongoing struggle for political freedom. Further, he used the danza as a great social leveler bringing to high society the picareseque rhythms of the people and to the people the rich harmonic conception and formal complexity of the salon danza. He was the great synthesizer of all the musical currents of the age in his island. (Campos Parsi 1976: 93–94, in Malaret Vega 1992: 317–318)

Veray also penned an expansive tribute to Morel Campos, similarly eulogizing how his danzas simultaneously symbolized the aristocratic bourgeoisie of the era and depicted "an entire generation, and an entire epoch" (1977) 2002: 68).

As Balseiro observed in his informative discussion of the composer (1900-1977), Morel Campos notated his danzas for a variety of formats. Seventy-five were notated for piano, as was customary for contemporary Puerto Rican contradanzas, danzas, and danzones and enabled them to be sold as sheet music for local pianists. However, it is generally assumed that he intended most to be performed by dance bands in ballrooms. Some were fitted with romantic lyrics and written for voice and piano, while a few notations call for whimsical words or phrases to be shouted out. A few were penned for four-hands piano. From the 1940s, they became staples of the repertoire of renowned piano virtuoso Jesús María Santomé (1902–84), who recorded many of them. In his lifetime, Morel Campos performed most of his danzas primarily as ensemble pieces for dance, in which he might take the role of featured bombardino player. Such ensembles would typically consist of three or four violins, two clarinets, two bombardinos, a cornet, a güiro, and a timbalito or kettle drum. Since then, as mentioned, the danzas have been freely performed as arrangements for various ad hoc combinations of instruments, and such favorites as "Maldito amor" might even be encountered in the repertoire of a humble jibaro guitar-and-cuatro duo. As discussed in the next chapter, the danzas of Morel Campos (more so than Cuban danza danzón composers) also became standards in the salon music of the Dominican Republic and constituted models for local composers there.

Campos Parsi and others have celebrated the prodigious variety of Morel Campos’s danzas, many of which, like other Puerto Rican danzas, tend to fall into either affectivo (lyrical) or festivo categories. In the first set are melancholy works, such as "Ten piedad," "Mis pernas," and "Vano empeño." Lighter and more festive are such pieces as "Anita," "No me toques," and "Sí, te toco."
Most of the danzas might be said to fall into an expressive and formal range that is in some respects homogeneous, finite, and not hostile to generalized description. The typical Morel Campos danza adheres to a form that was standard not only for the Puerto Rican danza but also for its derivative danza forms in the Dominican Republic and Curaçao. The danza traditionally comprises with an eight-bar *pasco*, repeated once, often in straight, unsyncopated eighth or sixteenth notes, with a sort of annunciatory character, half-cadencing on the dominant. Then follows the true body of the piece, in the form of two "merengues," leading to a trio, and then a return to some material of the first merengue, and possibly a brief coda. In some cases, the harmonies are in a conventional early-Romantic, perhaps Rossini-like mode, and the melodies conform to familiar eight-bar patterns, always in 2/4. The merengues are enlivened with the by-then familiar creole rhythms—especially the habanera pattern, and the amphibrach and cinqullo—the latter two alternating, as in Cuba, with unsyncopated measures in even-note values. The cinqullo are typically notated in the form of elastic trezillo, suggesting and perhaps actually occasioning distinctively distended note values. As he expanded the traditional pasco-merengue structure of the danza, Morel Campos endowed the genre with melodic and harmonic sophistication with modulations into remote tonalities, while maintaining the austere, sober, and provincial character of his native city of Ponce. Traces of Italian cantabile are clear in danzas composed in the 1880s, such as "Alma sublime," "Tormento," and "Influencia del arte." Chromaticism is especially marked in danzas like "Noche deliciosa" (date unknown). His danza "Felices días" (1894), a piece that received an award in Florence, is considered a masterpiece of creole Caribbean popular music. Such pianists as Julio Arteaga, Gonzalo Nuñez, Anita Otero, and Elisa Tavárez brought Morel's danzas to international concert halls, alongside works of Chopin, Schumann, and other Europeans. Many were recorded in the 1940s by pianist Sanromán under RCA's Red Seal label devoted to classical music.

The compact disc accompanying this volume contains two renditions of "Laura y Georgina," one of the most popular danzas of Morel Campos. The first is a piano solo modeled on that recorded by Sanromán. The second was recorded in 1909 by the horn-dominated Orquesta de Cocolia (formerly the Juan Morel Campos orchestra). The piece opens with a pasco replete of an Italian operatic introduction; the subsequent merengue nicely illustrates Morel Campos's gift for melody. The bass/left-hand accompaniment does not follow the standard creole forms of elastic trezillo, cinqullo, or amphibrach, but it can be seen as a sort of variant, providing, with passages of the melody, an ongoing and expressive ambiguity as to whether the piece is in 6/8 or 2/4.

Contemporaneous with the Ponce-based Morel Campos and others was a different set of composers and bandleaders who were active in San Juan, whose styles bear enough similarities as to be regarded as constituting a "San Juan school." The leading figures in this category included Julián Andino, regimen-
tal clarinetist Casimiro Duchesne (1850–1906), and versatile instrumentalist, conductor, and essayist Dario Colón. None of their music is easily available today. Venay contrasts the two schools:

The San Juan danza is more rowdy and frivolous . . . . It lacks the sentimental flight and daring of the Ponce danza. It is a danza of academic spirit . . . though at that time it was more tropical and legitimate than the Ponce style, evolving directly from the Spanish contradanza. It didn’t have, like the Ponce style, that spirit of the French salons. It was thus more pure in essence. The Ponce danza of Tavárez was adorned with finery imported from Europe. The San Juan style insists on short, equidistant phrases. The Ponce style is more lyrical, querulous, and passionate. As it is more spontaneous, it enters our inner world more easily. ([1956] 1977: 30)

The Mainstream Danza: Form, Style, and Structure

One distinctive feature of the danza, contrasting in particular with its Cuban danza and danzón counterparts, is its extended formal structure. As discussed in the introduction, Cuban danzas—lasting barely a minute if played through only once—would typically be extended for dance accompaniment by being repeated numerous times or perhaps by reiterating, with some variation, the ostinato-like B section. The Cuban danzón popular from around 1880, by contrast, adopted a rondo format, with a recurring A section, and from the early 1900s could feature a vamp-like, harmonically static coda informed by son rhythms. Puerto Rican danzas as early as “La hoertensia” of 1865 illustrate a different approach, in which the traditional two sections of the contradanza could be supplemented by further sections; as mentioned, the danzas of Morel Campos typically contained two or three such “merengues” after the introductory paso. Further, the individual sections might extend far beyond the customary eight- or sixteen-bar lengths. As Brau notes, “Originally limited to sixteen bars, in 1854 it grew to thirty-four, and in an ever-ascending progression has stretched up to 130 measures” ([1887] 1977: 8). Particularly characteristic was the technique of extending a merengue by means of a passage featuring an obligato on the bombardino or, less often, the saxophone.

An “obligato” is a melody ranking in importance just below the main melody, typically with an independent rather than contrapuntal character. Earlier, obligatos had been added to such frameworks as Bach’s fugues and Baroque operatic duets. (An obligato familiar to North American ears is the flute melody that accompanies the primary theme of “Stars and Stripes Forever.”) Eventually, upon its arrival in America, the obligato was introduced in vernacular
forms by saxophonists and *bombardistas* in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, and by flautists in Cuban *danzón* orchestras. In the *danza*, the *obligato* typically consists of *arpeggios* outlining the through-composed (rather than recurrent *ostinato*) harmonies, while rhythmically adhering to an *ostinato*, most often a *cinquillo*, in the standard creole two-bar form alternating with a bar of even eight notes. In Figure 3.4, the *bombardino* *obligato* would consist of the bass ("left-hand") pattern. The more typical creole *cinquillo* *bombardino*
Figure 3.4 Continued

obbligato can also be heard on the piece “Impromptu,” available on this volume’s compact disc. This piece, a danza by Luis Rodríguez Miranda recorded in 1909 by the Puerto Rico Regimental band, also illustrates the style known as “canto de bombardino,” in which the bombardino plays an extended precomposed solo.

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The Danza and Its Cuban Counterparts

Except for its significant formal expansion and its idiosyncratic treatment of triplets as discussed above, the Puerto Rican danza, in its heyday roughly spanning the years 1850–1930, bears obvious links and evolutionary affinities to its counterparts in Cuba. In the latter nineteenth century, dance-band styles of
both islands’ danzas would have been similar in various respects. Further, in
the salon piano idiom, the danzas of Tavárez and the Cuban Ignacio Cervantes
are not dramatically different in style (and it would be pointless to argue for
the superiority of one over the other). At the same time, after the advent of the
merengue in 1848, the Puerto Rican danza followed what is better viewed as a
parallel rather than derivative trajectory in relation to Cuban music.

As discussed above, most Puerto Rican chroniclers attribute the 1840s–
50s flourishing of the merengue/danza to the “spark” provided by the import-
tation of the habanera rhythms via exposure to the Cuban contradanza/danza
between 1845 and 1848. However, it is clear that even by the 1850s the Puerto
Rican danza was following an independent path. As we have mentioned, even in
the 1840s–50s composers and bandleaders were basing pieces on local popu-
lar songs (as did their Cuban counterparts). Other formal distinctions of the
local danza also arose.

One of these, also described above, pertained to the formal structure of the
danza, in particular the practice of extending the piece not by endless repetition
of the traditional A and B sections but rather by composing additional sections or
extending them with parts featuring obligatos, especially on the bombardino.
The first part was reduced to an eight-bar (repeated) paseo, during which dance-
ners would stroll about the floor arm in arm before embracing ballroom-style in
the subsequent merengues. In contrast, the Cuban danza retained its two-part
form until morphing into the rondo-structured danzón around 1880.

On the other hand, neither the bombardino nor the performance of ex-
extended obligatos and solos on it appear to have been adopted in the Cuban
danza. However, as we recall, the obligato is given the role of a subaltern
melody along the entire Puerto Rican danza. The joint contours of melody
and countermelody led, in Díaz Díaz’s opinion, to a form of counterpoint ver-
nacularly known as contracanto, a vocal style popular among Cuban trova
groups. In Puerto Rico, the first signs of contracanto were registered in the
danza “Alondra en los bosques,” by tobacco worker Carlos Padilla (d. 1902;
Limón de Arce 1925: 131). Much is to be inquired concerning the exchanges
Puerto Rican tobacco workers had with their Cuban counterparts during the
nineteenth century. However, in his memoirs, Sindo Garay, one of the founders
of the trova cubana, attests to his exchanges with danza composer Morel Cam-
pos during the former’s visit in Puerto Rico (De León 1990: 77).

We have also mentioned how several popular danzas of Tavárez, Morel
Campos, and others were fitted, whether by the composer or a poet, with
romantic lyrics, such that they circulated not only as instrumental works but
as sentimental songs, somewhat akin to Cuban habaneras or early-twentieth-
century boleros. Aside from the Cuban habaneras themselves, some Cuban
danzas also acquired such vocal texts, but on the whole it appears that the sung
aspect of Puerto Rican danzas enjoyed a greater prominence and popularity
than did their counterparts in Cuba, where canción and bolero were the preva-
alent romantic vocal idioms.

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applicable copyright law.
By the 1880s in Cuba, the danzón had largely replaced the danza, such that the Puerto Rican danzas of Morel Campos and his contemporaries are better compared not with earlier contradanzas but with danzones, which, indeed, were popular in Puerto Rico and often played and danced alongside local danzas. Both the danzón and the Puerto Rican danza were typically played by similar ensembles, with similar persistence of the *cincuillo* ostinato (in its creole two-bar form, however notated), such that in listening to excerpts of either genre it might be easy to mistake one for the other. However, the different formal structures are again notable: The danzón used a rondo form (e.g., ABACAD)—often, from the early 1900s, with an ostinato-based, vamp-like coda—while the Puerto Rican danza, meanwhile, adhered to its multisectional form. Further, each genre had its own stylistic conventions and clichés, for example, nearly ubiquitous in the A theme of the danzón was the eight-bar rhythmic structure previously outlined in Chapter 2 and the cliché of following a four-bar melody with a four-bar sixteenth-note run. Such conventions were wholly uncharacteristic of the danza. On the whole, one might also generalize that an Afro-Caribbean percussive flavor was also somewhat more pronounced in the danzón than in the danza—perhaps in accordance with Puerto Rico’s whiter racial demography. In extant early-twentieth-century recordings of ensemble danzas, such as those on this book’s compact disc, percussion parts are barely audible, such that the pieces sound generally European except for the pervasive *cincuillos* and *cincuillos*. Finally, the two genres have enjoyed—or suffered—different sorts of fates in the twentieth century. The Cuban contradanza and danza are extinct as dance idioms and survive at all only insofar as the works of Saumell and Cervantes are played and studied by some pianists. The danzón may be a bit more familiar to modern Cuban listeners, but its lasting historical importance may reside in the way that it evolved directly into the 1950s cha-cha-cha and big-band mambo—itsself a precursor of salsa.

The trajectory of the Puerto Rican danza, which is discussed further below, has been in some ways distinct. On the one hand, it cannot really be said to have contributed directly to the evolution of the salsa and reggaetón that dominate modern dance music on the island. Nevertheless, even if the danza’s era as a focus for composition passed in the 1930s, the genre has gone on to retain a certain niche in island music and dance culture that accords it a greater afterlife than the Cuban danza has had.

The Danza in the Twentieth Century

Veray and other music historians generally regard Morel Campos’s death in 1890 as marking the end of the danza’s most dynamic period. As Veray comments, “With Juan Morel Campos closed the grand tradition of our nineteenth century; upon his death, the world of the danza seemed to lose its orbit” ([1956] 1977: 32). However, the danza enjoyed another three decades of prodigious popularity and compositional activity, while the island shifted from Spanish
to North American colonial rule in 1898. Some of the leading composers during this period were of the generation of Morel Campos, although they outlived him and can be said to have perpetuated the fin de siecle idiom in their individual styles. Among Ponce-based followers of Morel Campos were Juan Ríos Ovallé, Jaime Peréz (1870–7), the Spanish-born Arturo Pasarell, and bombardino virtuoso and regimental bandleader Ángel Milián (1862–1914), of the San Juan school were composer and essayist Dueño Colón (1854–1934) and violinist Andino. Most of these musicians composed danzas along with other works, while performing in dance bands and other contexts. 20

Of the next generation, the most distinguished figure was José Quintón (1881–1925), who is generally regarded as closing the cycle of the genre. Quintón was a prodigious and prolific talent, composing Masses, concertos, and other works aside from danzas, few of which have been published. His danzas are themselves diverse in character; some incorporate elements of jíbaro music, while others showcase virtuoso display or impressionistic harmonies redolent of Debussy and contemporary European music (see Veray [1956] 1977: 34; Balseiro [1960] 1977: 57). Certainly Quintón sought greater vistas for the genre, promoting the idiom of the “concert danza” and introducing colorful cadenzas in some of them. In a different vein is his popular “El coqui” of 1901, whose playful arpeggiated octave leaps mimic the sound of the frog once unique to the island (and now annoying Hawaiians with its nocturnal racket); “El coqui” can be heard on the compact disc accompanying this book. Like Tavárez and Morel Campos, Quintón died young, at age forty-four. Also of Quintón’s generation, but longer lived, was Simón Madera (1875–1957), whose best-known danza, “Mis amores” (composed at age eighteen), is also presented on this volume’s compact disc. Since Quintón, production of danzas has not ceased entirely, but the spirit of subsequent compositions in this ultimately archaic genre has inevitably been either neoclassicist and impressionistic (as with Narciso Figuera), self-consciously modernist (William Ortiz), or even postmodernist (Díaz Díaz).

In his oft-cited essay of 1885, Brau presciently foresaw the inevitable decline of the danza, steeped as it was in the sort of Romantic languor that could not survive modernity ([1885] 1977: 13). Indeed, by the 1930s the world of aristocratic hacendados and curteying, fan-wielding señoritas was disappearing under the advent of agribusiness, Cuban rumbas, and Yankee pop culture. For Antonio Pedreita, author of Insularisimo, a widely read 1934 rumination on his island’s culture, such developments were anathema, and he called for a revival of the danza as a quintessentially Puerto Rican product. Like other essayists of preceding generations, in his nostalgia for the era of the hacienda, he hailed the danza as ineffably languid, melancholy, soft, voluptuous, and thus “feminine,” ideally suited to his island’s climate and its people’s endearingly mild and anemic disposition (Pedreita [1934] 1973: 152–165).

Perhaps because of its genteel eloquence, Pedreita’s ode became standard reading in Puerto Rican schools, but its underlying obscurationism, Hispano-
philic racism, and patriarchal essentialism—so glaringly obvious to modern readers—were trenchantly critiqued the very year after its publication by liberal essayist Tomás Blanco in his “Eulogy to the Plena” (1939). Blanco celebrated rather than lamented the black and mulatto presence in his island’s culture and counterposed the earthy, feisty dynamism of the proletarian plena songs to what was by then the quaint prissiness of the danza. While acknowledging the beauty of many danzas, he wrote:

The danza is a greenhouse plant. Transplanted and acclimated, its regional modifications were acquired by being grafted on, the leaves and flowers were nurtured at the expense of the roots. . . . Its gist, its substance, is the product of an epoch more than of a people. For this reason it has been accused of being foreign. . . . Very much of the nineteenth century, it has become disjoined from our present reality. See, if you disagree, how affected and precious appear to us today the lyrics of the most famous of our danzas, which undoubtedly, in their own time seemed charged with grace and emotion. [He quotes the lyrics of “La borinquera, with its eulogy to the ‘genteel countenance’ and ‘pretty and delicate foot’ of the dainty lass on the balcony] Such a woman suits the vulgar sensuality which romps through the measures of the danza. Lachrymose supplication and plump metaphors lent a Romantic prestige to the false ambience which cradled the aristocratic gallantry of the epoch. Today there scarcely exist examples of such women. Abundant, in their place, are sinewy, muscular mulatto women, whether slim or heavy, young or mature, but with calves and armpits instead of feet and countenances. (Blanco 1935: 42)

In his 1960 essay, Balseiro commented similarly on the anachronistic nature of the danza in the age of televisions and airplanes: “When we harness nuclear energy and atom bombs, it is foolish to hope that this dynamic can be kept on a par with the sweet, slow, and harmonious dance music of the last century” ([1960] 1977: 60). Like the mazurka, he noted, the danza lives on as a concert idiom rather than the social dance it once was.

Meanwhile, as for the essentially ‘feminine’ (that is, soft and passive) character of the danza and Puerto Ricans as a people, one might well counterpose the insurrectionary stridency of Rodríguez de Tió’s lyrics to “La borinquera” and the activism of such a woman as proindependence militant Lolita Lebrón, celebrated in Vitín Calderón’s danza “Lolita” (Apancio 1998: 24–25).

Although no longer a focus of compositional interest, the danza has continued to occupy a place in Puerto Rican culture.21 Through the 1960s, various sorts of ensembles and singers continued to record evergreens like “Laura y Georgina,” which acquired the status of bolero-like vernacular popular songs. A period of patriotic revival in the 1970s became the opportunity for compos-
ers like Antonio Cabán Vale ("El Topo"), Eliado Torres, and Raúl Escudero to cultivate short danzas with unrepeated sections and straightforward harmonies. The most emblematic of these danzas is El Topo’s "Verde luz" ("Green Light"), which has become an obligatory standard in family parties and festivities. School bands still perform danzas, and the works of Távarez and Morel Campos remain strong in the repertoire of local pianists in conservatories and concert halls. Lastly, danzas may even be danced on occasion, especially at weddings, when the first song the band plays may be a chestnut of Morel Campos, during which the bride dances with her father.

Notes

1. An exhaustive survey of several hundred historical documents by Díaz Díaz makes it possible to discuss with some accuracy the transformation of the contradanza into a native genre. Research also profited from the valuable annotated bibliography of Donald Thompson and Annie E. Thompson (1941). The present chapter includes revised versions of passages from earlier publications by Díaz Díaz (1990, 1996, 2008).

2. See, e.g., the letter by War Lieutenant Esteban Cambræle to Captain General Miguel de la Torre, Ponce, February 16, 1831, in Colón 1971: 50–53. A useful source is Emilio Colón’s edition of Relación de las Fiestas Públicas de 1831, a compilation of fifty-nine letters by military representatives of the island’s population.

3. An early case of a dance celebration at a Catholic priest’s home is found in the northern coastal plain of Vega Baja, to celebrate the Spanish Constitution of 1811 with an orchestra from San Juan, according to La gaceta del gobierno constitucional de Puerto Rico, August 8, 1821, p. 281.

4. La gaceta del gobierno constitucional de Puerto Rico, August 9, 1820, pp. 109–110

5. La gaceta del gobierno constitucional de Puerto Rico, June 20, 1821, p. 196.


7. However, Tapia y Rivera also relates how members of a recently arrived Spanish garrison, ‘ignorant of these customs’ clashed provocatively with some local youths, occasioning the subsequent intervention of Governor López.

8. The carnets system is further discussed in Díaz Díaz 1990.

9. Buenin Instructivo y Mercantil de Puerto Rico, August 3, 1839, p. 358. “¿Cómo podrían llamar danza / figurando un corredor, / o un pareja frente a frente / todas en expectación / esperando una pisada, / o mejor dicho una cos, / del que viene adol- / dinado / sin mirar alrededor? / No aborreces yo la danza, / al contrario, Señor; / la amo con tanta gana / como otro cualquier amo; / admires la más costosa / con ambiciosa afición, / mas la escoto seseada / que en esta tierra hay calor.”

10. La gaceta del gobierno de Puerto Rico, February 24, 1848, pp. 3–4


12. This transcription was made from the faded and, in parts, barely legible manuscript copy found by Díaz Díaz in the Archivo General de Puerto Rico; among other ambiguities, the treble clef in m. 18 may be flat.
13. ‘Folletín,’ *La gaceta del gobierno de Puerto Rico*, September 19, 1848, pp. 2–3. (The *Gaceta* was Puerto Rico’s leading nineteenth-century newspaper, changed its full name a few times in the course of that century.)

14. Bartolomé José Crespo, *Las aduanas pintadas por sí mismas* (Havana: Imprenta de Oliva, 1847), cited in Linarex 1970: 20 and Quintana-Rivera 2005: 114. See Galán 1983: 245–256 for discussion of ‘in ley bravo.’ The sepimpa is also mentioned in various other chronicles from Santiago, but no certainty exists concerning its specific nature. The *sanchangos* and *bóteros* (boleros) were three Spanish-derived dances. The verse resists translation into fluent English.


18. ‘Belleza rústica, imagen del campesino, del jardín de Borinquén, para y fragante flor / Por ti se queda exaltado, todo el mortal que ve, tu aire gentil, simpático, tu breve y lindo pie.’ According to one version, after the dissemination of Rodríguez de Frías’s lyrycics, llamérez, fearful of persecution by the colonial regime, attributed the melody’s authorship to Astol, who, as a Spaniard, would have been relatively immune to persecution.

19. ‘¡Despierta Borinquén, que han dado la señal! ¡Despierta de ese sueño, que es la hora de luchar! A ese llamar patriótico, ¿no arde el corazón? Ven, no seas simpático el ruído del cañón. Mira, ya el cubano libre será, le dará el machete su libertad.’

20. Andino, concertmaster of opera, theater, and cathedral orchestras, has the distinction of composing a subgenre of *jibaro* music, the *seis arredo*, which became standard in a repertoire otherwise accumulated in oral tradition.

21. Unfortunately, various parties, whether motivated by capitalist greed or bureaucratic obduracy, have done their best to lock up the national patrimony of Morel Campos and Tavárez.

References


