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New Rican Voices

Un Muestrario/A Sampler at the Millenium

The word went out, and Rican words came streaming in. About a year ago, with the millenium fast approaching, an informal call went out that we were compiling a selection of recent writings by Puerto Ricans in the diaspora for publication in the Centro Journal. Far beyond expectations, we received submissions from nearly fifty writers. Most of them are young and unpublished, and many of them were unknown to us. Works poured in from many places, not just the Bronx, El Barrio and Loisaida in New York but also Springfield (Massachusetts), Philadelphia, Chicago, San Francisco, Minneapolis and Madison (Wisconsin), among many other sites, including New Jersey and Connecticut. We were, of course, thrilled at the abundance and rich creativity of the present-day generation of Boricua writers, but at the same time overwhelmed at the prospect of trying to arrive at a selection that would fit in the allotted pages. It would not be possible to include all of the writers, nor all of the work they submitted.

Our review process resulted in the following sampler. Though we were forced to omit nearly half of the contributors, we feel the selection is representative of the many themes and styles now evident among the present generation in widely different settings. We noted the resonance with the well-known Nuyorican writers of previous years, such as Pedro Pietri, Víctor Hernández Cruz, Sandra María Esteves, Tato Laviera, and others, and the continuities in the diaspora experience and expression are evident. But there are also new concerns and voices, perspectives and languages that are more typical of recent years. It is clear, first of all, that many of the texts were intended for oral presentation and performance, as spoken word and rap rhymes have become so prevalent among creative Latino youth in our generation. More than half of the submissions, and the inclusions, are by women, and women's struggles and sensibilities are very striking in many of the works.

Issues of "race" and sexuality are also prominent, as is the abiding reality of ongoing colonialism in Puerto Rican life. Many of the writings are concerned with the personal and political importance of Puerto Rico, and with the relation to African Americans and to other Latinos. Puerto Rican identity today is indeed complex, and we have tried to be inclusive of the multiple backgrounds and diversity of experience given voice in the submitted writings. And throughout, whether explicitly or implicitly, the question of language—English, Spanish, Spanglish—is of paramount interest and importance.

We hope that you enjoy this sampler as much as we have enjoyed compiling it and maintaining contact with the writers. We thank all of them for their collaboration with us, and voice once again our regrets to those not included in the present project. The dynamic response encourages us to begin thinking of a follow-up publication, where we hope to include a much wider representation of the many fine young Puerto Rican writers entering the scene in the new millenium.

The word is still out, and more showcases of New Rican creativity are on their way. ¡Pa'lante!

Jorge Matos Valldejuli and Juan Flores
Editors

Photographs by: Fernando Reals
Mural in Losaida (Lower East Side), N.Y.C., n.d.

lo que nunca te diré

tres closets son tres machetes
uno para cada década que tú me has quitado
las ganas de aprender inglés guiar un carro
de cortarme este pelo que me estrangula cuando duermo
de cargar el dinero que gano en la factoría

tres closets son tres machetes
uno para cada hijo quien se mete entre yo y
la hoja afilada con que cortas el aire
detrás de tu espalda te llaman mujeriego, borrachón
y me tienen mucha pena, a mí, tu tercera mujer

tres closets son tres machetes
pero hasta ahora he tenido solo un deseo
que susurro cada vez que prendo la vela en mi altar
que me dejes vivir en paz
negro, dejame vivir.

**María
Luisa
Arroyo**

Born in Manatí,

Puerto Rico, and raised in

Springfield, Massachusetts,

María Luisa Arroyo is currently

a Ph.D. candidate in German at

Harvard University. Her poems

appear in journals such as

CALYX, *The Americas Review*,

and the *Bilingual Review*.

el crucifijo de oro

I

Chubby legs dangle from a hammock.
A screen door away, I sit and laugh
like a seal, sip café con mi comai.
The breeze rocks too easily between
the only trees. I drop the cup,
ignore the ink that scalds my legs
and wail in slow motion toward emptiness.
Comai slaps me to breathe, to think
like you, now three, who hears
campanitas—silver bells in summer.
I cannot remember what you are wearing
except for the wafer-thin crucifijo
no bigger than your pinkie nail.

II

Blurs of color and tires swoosh by
and knock you down in the breakdown lane.
A van pulls over, door slides sideways,
and so many women pop out like clowns
as you clap. A wrinkled man,
father of these thirteen daughters,
scoops you up with bleeding knees.
Chubby legs dangle from police desk.
I cry like a wounded seal, steal
your breath with hugs that hurt.
I finger el crucifijo blessed in Puerto Rico.
Gracias a Dios for giving your papi
one less reason to beat me.

sundays, los domingos

bebemos, cantamos, comemos, celebramos
after church, men in guayaberas
migrate to my papi's backyard
where cans of beer bob in open coolers
and bottles of ron y caña
circle the pole of the Coors umbrella
Salud! men cry, throw back
fiery shots and chase them with gulps
of beer, unaware of children
mimicking their grimaces, as they sit
on the fence, feet dangling
the umbrella shades papi's bearded face
as he picks the strings of his cuatro
that rests against his round belly
the cuatro whines until it finds the right note
compai Beno strums a guitar
while compai Adrián scrapes el güiro
with a nod, compai Colón clears his throat:
"Solo rogando por el mundo . . ."
bebemos, cantamos, comemos, celebramos
las canciones tremble with love
as Colón's voice throbs, words weave
through musical chords like fingers
the women huddle and press their noses
against the screen door, sighing

the boleros fade and mami slips
back into hot kitchen and drops
chopped and salted pork pieces
into a pot of oil two burners wide
that sizzles and pops over blue flame
as one of the many comais serves
arroz con gandules on paper plates,
mami yells out the door:

JoséMaríaLuisMaritza—ven acá

JoséMaríaLuisMaritza appear
at doorway, hands outstretched
to cradle steaming plates
and race back to their papis
before the darkening heat hits their palms
bebemos, cantamos, comemos, celebramos
once the last piece of pork is eaten,
the men wipe their hands, lean back
and nurse rum and cokes as musicians
strum and stroke their instruments
the women gossip over fulana de tal
bebemos, cantamos, comemos, celebramos
until the streetlamps flicker on
until the last drop of liquor is swallowed
until the last song is sung

What I Will Never Tell You

three closets mean three machetes
one for each decade you have squelched
my dreams to learn English the right way . . . to drive
to cut this hair that strangles me in sleep
to carry the money I earn in factories
three closets mean three machetes
one for each son who risks its broad blade
as you slice the air between us
behind your back, they call you borrachón,
and pity me, your third and last wife
three closets mean three machetes
all these years, I have shared only one wish
with the candle that flickers in my secret altar:
that you let me live in peace
papi, let me live

Janis Astor del Valle

Bronx-born, Puerto Rican, lesbian, Janis Astor del Valle is a member of the Primary Stages New American Writers Group and co-founder of Sisters On Stage (S.O.S.) A graduate student at Columbia University, she was recently awarded scholarships from the National Hispanic Foundation from the Arts/Hispanic Scholarship Fund, New York Women in Film and Television, and a grant from Aaron Davis Hall, The Fund For New Work. Her poetry and plays appear in five anthologies, including *Puro Teatro* (University of Arizona Press), and *Action: The Nuyorican Poets Cafe Theater Festival* (Simon & Schuster).

Trans Plantations: Straight and Other Jackets Para MI

Excerpt 1:

Stage is dark. MI stands, wearing a straitjacket, with her back to the audience. Lights fade up slowly on her. Music cue: Kabuki. Strobe light on. MI eventually faces the audience by the end of the following.

MI

I am so tired . . . I am so tired . . . I am so tired. I don't remember the exact moment I got IN—it's all a blur . . . one moment I was chopping sofrito for my girlfriend's omelette—one moment I was loving her, one moment I was loving my Self, and the next, I was OUT . . . I was OUT, but not really OUT . . . I mean I was OUT, like a light . . . OUT like a light on the deconstructed Bruckner Expressway . . .

Fade out Kabuki music. Strobe light off. Music cue: "Son Con Son" by Millie Puente. Lights up full. Music fades out as MI starts to speak.

MI

(turning to audience) I thrived the first seven years of my life, in the Bronx. And though I spent the next 15 transplanting my little Puerto Rican self into rural Connecticut, I've always considered myself to be a city kid at heart. Those early days, mami and me buying platanos and ajo at Hunts Point (it used to smell so good then, as pure and gentle and strong as mami's kitchen), Christmas shopping at Alexander's or Macy's in Parkchester or Korvette's on White Plains Road, meeting Papi for real pizza on Westchester Square, bein' babysat by my big brother Linky who got me hooked on the 4:30 movie and Frank Sinatra and Humphrey Bogart and Edward G. Robinson and James Cagney . . . those early days, vibrant colors and thunderous rhythms, keep my heart beating and my head reeling . . . I don't remember the exact moment I got IN—it's all a blur . . . one moment I was chopping sofrito for my girlfriend's omelette and the next, I was OUT . . . I was OUT, but not really OUT . . . I mean, I was OUT, like a light . . . OUT like a light on the deconstructed Bruckner Expressway. . .and then I woke up, and found myself strapped IN . . . but, you see, it wasn't sudden at all . . . no, no—this was thirty years in the making . . .

Excerpt 2:

Lights fade up slowly. The straitjacket is on the floor. MI addresses the audience from a bar stool, then eventually rises during the following.

MI

I was wearin' men's boxer shorts way before they became fashionable and Hanes started makin' 'em for women! Flannel pajamas, too. I wore my Dad's hand me downs. Nah, I wasn't into cross-dressing. I just thought his clothes felt more comfortable, so soft and natural; they were made better and lasted longer, too. Papi didn't seem to mind until I came out . . . I didn't even come out to him—I came out to my mother. She told him I was a lesbian and she told me that he cried. It was right about then that he stopped wearin' boxers . . . and givin' me his hand me downs. He never really said anything, but, he didn't have to. I knew. And its funny, tu sabes, about a year ago, I was writing a play and all of a sudden I got writer's block—just at the point where the Latina lesbian daughter is confronting the homophobic father. And I haven't been able to write another word since. And that's weird, cause I've been writing plays since I was nine, and I never had writer's block before. Only I didn't know they were plays then. I called them "stories". Me and my cousins would perform them at our Tita's house in the Bronx. She lived in Castle Hill, between the projects and the river, with a great view of the Whitestone Bridge. Her neighborhood became the backdrop for many of my stories. I always cast my cousin Val and myself as the dope addicts; the rest of the cousins played neighborhood bigshots—cops, parents, principals and fellow drug dealers. Oh, and sometimes we'd let Val's little sister be our 7-year old alcoholic sidekick, Chicky. I don't know why I was writing about characters like that. Maybe I had some sick fascination with their desperation. Or maybe I was just so used to being fed those images . . . Anyway, I'm happy to say that through the years my writing has evolved. Now I'm writing about much more realistic people—like me and my friends: Latina lesbian love stories with happy endings. And I've done pretty well for myself . . . Although, sometimes, I look at Rosie Perez and I think, maybe I haven't done that well . . . Maybe I haven't suffered enough . . . if only I had bad hair, if only I had been a shade darker . . . if only I had stayed in the Bronx, and kept my accent, permed my hair, joined a gang—I could've passed for a light-skinned Puerto Rican and been a star! I'm sure I would've had a feature film or two under my belt by now—probably co-starring Jessica Lange as the adoptive mother of my illegitimate child or Michelle Pfeiffer as my sympathetic but tough-as-nails high school teacher . . . or, Al Pacino as my drug-dealing big brother . . . or, Miriam Colon as my mother, the maid! I guess Im just not marketable enough . . . but "I coulda been a contenda"!

Born Equal

I am Black,
with
broad-flat nose, thick lips
labios carnosos.

My skin becomes a
deceptive mirror
to deflect
signification.

My
tightly coiled hair,
spreads into a field of vision
of Venus made out of whitest wonderbread.

My sensuous torso with
pendulous breasts
stand like Tuartget lances.

In the home of the brave,
my blackness flies
into territories,
into landscape,
into landlords . . .

My equality reduced,
distorted, contaminated
eliminated, eaten
by words, gazes, gestures
credit history . . .

I am marked by words, by my epidermis . . .
My skin imprinted with a
flaming carimbo.

My physiognomy contaminates
the field of vision
with delusions
of drug dealer,
dealer of dirt,
dealer of credit,
dealer of destruction,
dealer of crime . . .

My equality
devoured
within the phenotype
of racism.

**Sonia
Báez
Hernández**

Untitled: Sonia Báez Hernández



I am black
segregated
by words, skin color, records, features . . .

Warriors saturated
with dirt, clay, color, and sudor
expanding into
territories.

Papá Ogún
God of war
standing against the landscape
with
omnipotent
armor.

Warriors formed with shields of
relámpagos
embroiled with
millions and millions of
broad-flat noses, thick lips.
Azotando like tropical cyclones.

The numerous shields
embellished
with tightly coiled hair.
They are impregnated with
blood, dust, and sudor.

In the center of their shields
encrusted with numerous mouths
crying
in accord
igualdad.

Sonia Báez Hernández was born in the Dominican Republic and immigrated to Puerto Rico in 1965. She has been writing since the 1970s and painting since the 1980s. She obtained an MFA from the Art Institute of Chicago, and has completed her course work toward a Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles.

En la gallera de mi papá

I was ten on ah Sunday afternoon
en la Bermudez “Gallera”
Helping my dad feed los gallos de pelea.

Grabbing ah handful of special type of corn,
He inhaled, getting his words lined up for de sunday speech,
on life, dat days topic: Cruzan Rican Blackness.

“En dis life deres only two type of people:
de Black and de white”,
he placed de grains of corn en de Canaway’s red
mantecilla cup
As I poured wata in de blue . . .
“wha you mean, de Black o de white, no in between?”

My fada:
A first generation Cruzan Rican.

His moda:
Ah Afro-Puerto Rican arrived in St. Croix at the age of three

Her Fada:
Ah negrito, from Luquillo
Married a Spanish mid-wife from Vieques.
and together dey went to work de sugar cane fields of St. Croix

As we moved in de same routine,
him placing corn and i pouring wata
en de mantequilla cup:

I was vecks and hot like a jack-spaña
In opposition to sting at what I thought was a racist remark.
Coz all I knew about black and white
Wa A Different World and The Jeffersons.
I believed in de American history books
We were the black and latina girls walking hand en hand with little
white
girls.
Even though I never saw a white girl
en de whole entier public school system.

On my father’s grey and black coil chest hairs,
I would fantasize about
Moving to California
to become a movie star.
There were no fantasies for mi Isla del Encanto.
Where my mother born and raised jibara with taino blood de Arcibo
Had left at age of 16 to be her sister’s daughter’s nanny
en Chicago,
Meet my father at 21
married
and together dey moved to St. Croix.

My mother Taina
hair deep black and still
with Spanish creamy skin
And Puerto Rican Tongue
in the midst of Cruzan blackness and dreadlocks
would say
“Aqui yo no voy a criar ningunos ingleses”

My mother took a political stand
refusing to speak to us three sisters en
English.

Took me ah few times to la Isla of forever highways and never ending
pineapple fields,
Compared to our one little pot-hole highway
named after the ex-slave freedom
“Queen Mary”
dat took us from one end of de island to de next
en less than 30 minutes,
if u drove 45 miles per hour,
and next to our imported pineapples
Puerto Rico was massive.

My mother took me to her blond hair blues
whose Taino heritage could not be
spoken about or at least dats what I thought at de time.
Had me standing out with my black curls
what dey saw as grifas.
Me who said chinas for naranjas
Spoke Cruzan Rican Spanish
not Proper Puerto Rican . . .
hated my Enchanted Island
for hating my negra Rican heritage.

As I am holding de red cock
de oppenonent
my dad putting de spare boots
on de Canaway’s legs
en preparation for dem to fight says:
“when someone asks you wha you be?
you tell dem u are black!”
Cruzan Rican Black
Taina, Española, Negra
Reggae y Salsa
Merengue y Calypso
Bomba y Plena

Cruzan Rican Blackness

Fungi y Pescao Frito
Kallaloo y Alcapurria
Saltfish and Dumplin con Vianda

Cruzan stuffing y Arroz con Gandules y Pernil.
“Cruzan Rican Black!”

Johanna Bermudez Ruiz is a
third generation Cruzan Rican. Her father’s
family was expropriated during the late 1940s
from Vieques and relocated to St. Croix, a
colony of the United States. She is a poet and
award-winning documentary filmmaker. She is
currently working on her second documentary,
Vieques: An Island Forging Futures.



Photographer: Manuel Sileva

Bonafide

The Creed of the Graffiti Writer

we strike at night
the streets of new york is our canvas
we hide in the shadows
when the pig patrol strolled by
the moon gave us our only light
we are the
addicts of aerosol
the krylon can clan
the rusto patrol
we are the german tip spraying
backpack wearing
magnum pilot tagging
the wack toy buffers
we are the brigade of bombers
mounting on our
midnight mission of colorized madness
the color blending, spray paint
and mind melding maniacs
we are the ghetto picassos
the modern day matisses
the artistic shakespeares
that tear white walls in half
we are the street canvas killers
with one quick splat
of an ultra flat black
with silver outlines
and yellow highlights
perfected
during 3:AM night skylines
we are the crews that redecorate
building walls with wildstyles
burning people's imagination
with motions of the can
the walls wailed words of life through
sight of krylon colors
on the streets of new york
we bomb city blocks
rocking throw ups on top
of window sills while standing
on top of garbage cans
we are the underground turnstile
hoppers that bomb subway posters
with one light being our guide
our names are found
highways and high rises
bridges and building roofs
our plans are waterproof
shockproof and foolproof
we are the tye, dye, tone, tint
marauders that wrote
graffiti manifestos on
black walls with
silver uni's, SG-7s
and white pentel markers
we marked the many lands
and train stations
our tags ragged blackbook and cardboard
scratched on windows and train doors
stickers slapped over any
motherfucker you had beef with
only in self defense
we are the graffiti gurus
that spray silver spots on blackness
that becomes stars in the walls of galaxies
we are the 12oz prophets that wrote
prophecies with our hieroglyphics that
help humans understand us



Photograph by Fernando Reals

it was simply the love of seeing
our name on the wall
it was the symbolic value of feeling
important in a world we were lost in
it was the outlet that introduced art
into our way of thinking
we wore baggy jeans
hats to the back
and army fatigues
when we ventured on our trip of
blending bombing wonderland
the street is our canvas
when art brushes and stencils didn't matter
only liqui-techs and spray paint
the toxic aroma that entered our
bloodstream on nights

Steven
"Bonafide" Rojas.
The Graffiti poem
(what people call it)
was the first piece
that i really caressed
hip hop as a issue to
write about i'm very
honored to write this
piece for the fact that
i participated in
almost every action
mentioned. Bonafide
born in 1977 lives in
the Bronx and is a
huge poetry fanatic
as well as of life and
rock and roll.

when we froze our fingertips
writing upside down with the can
trying to get all the paint out
feel the wrath of graff
when society calls us
vandals and delinquents
that's why your child wants
to be just like us
we bomb your door to tell you
our name it's a shame you erased
our high rise artistic motion trains
The Far Rockaway/Lefferts A
The outside D,B,and Q in Brooklyn
The Coney Island F
The Canarsie L
The J,M,Z over the Williamsburg Bridge
The N and The R in Astoria,Queens
The 1 and The 9 in Washington Heights
The 2 and The 5 in the Bronx
The New Lots 3
The Jerome 4
The Westchester 6
and The Flushing purple 7 trains
now we reign on your law
the ink scribes scribbles on
your forehead then
pronounce you hip hoply dead
the 4th son of hip hop
overshadowed by technic table
microphones and puma grey suede
complexion tone
there's no hip hop without graffiti
only rap so we wrap our hands
around cans becoming one
our motions were studied
by plagiarist anthropologist
making money off our art
the spritz on clean canvas
can be hazardous to minds
who can't understand
the buck wildstyle alphabet
sunrises call for travels
homeward bound
we are the ones who make that
klikclakklikclakklikclakklikclak
sounds with the can on new land
when a tag could get our asses shot
we are the artistic poets
who perform magic with spray paint
and just called ourselves writers
Graffiti writers.

Caridad De La Luz (La Bruja)



José

From *Boogie Rican*

Okay, Papo, yu reddy? I want you to concentrate. I want you to tsink HomeRon. Bend yu knees, bend yu knees. Keep your hands together. Okay. (Throws the ball). Pero Papo, if yu don't bend yu knees, you no gonna hit the ball. Now go gettit.

Dejame ver si los Jankees estan ganando. (Puts on radio headset). Okay, dame la bola. (Catches ball). Que what? What did Abuelo tell yu? Primero practice and then I take you to MacDonalls. Wheng I say concentrate, no en happy meals, es en el Basebol. Mira, pay attention. Ven Aca. Here.

When I say concentrate, yu think about cheezberrgers. Thats no good. Yu pay attention like in eschool, porque si no, Abuelo's no gonna buy yu thee nice clothes like Abuelo wears. What yu mean? Que yo no soy yiggy, I'm yiggy. A que te meto en el yiggy.

mira y tambien, no more coming home, right away MTV, MTV, MTV. Yu show rrespect and say "Bendicion Abuelo, Bendicion Abuela" And what I say to yu? "Que Dios te bendiga y que La Virgen te favoresque y que te acompana." What yu mean why. Because so God will bless yu.

Yu know Abuela love yu verry much, she cook all day, everything perfect, and what yu always do? Ketchup, Ketchup, Ketchup. All over. That's no good. Yu do like me, taste my food, I eatit. Yu no looking at me. Ey, Listen.

Basebol brought me here to New York City. Wheng I was your age, yu could not estop me from playing Basebol. I could hit a ball over thee mountain. I played for my hometown of Yabucoa Puerto Rico. We was called los Azucareros, the Sugar Papis. We were so good they sent us here to play.

First thing I went to esee Los New York Jankees, right then and there I knew I was going to be a Jankee. I signed my hat "Sugar Papi Number One," I send it to me Mami and I estayed. And luckily my friends fathers cousins uncles brother owned a bodega rright next to Jankee Estadium. He let me live there and work there.

I spent most of my life in that bodega. That's rriight, I own that bodega now.

I met your Abuela in that bodega. When I met Abuela, I wanted to use my bat and balls for other things. And I wasn't wearing a helmet either, that's why I have six children, and sixty grandchildren. Pero I love all of my children. Yu listening?

Yu have to be sstrong, and be good at somesing. Yu could be el next Duque or Sammy Sosa. Okay.

Now vete pa ya. Okay Papo, get rreddy. (Throws the ball). Wow, that was good. That's somesing like a Homerom. I told yu, yu could do it. Beautiful! I love yu so much . . . Now go gettit.

Paco

Mira Paco
Half-Mex, some call him Taco
Pobre Fulano
Chico that none of ya know
But I do, he's mad cool...and quiet
Suffers from the internal riot

Mad if he ain't high yet
But he tries to keep it in
Plays a game that he can't win
So smart but so oppressed
Not a time when he ain't stressed
From the society that binds him
With tears that cut and blind him

He longed to be a superstar
With dreams that reached to Mars
But scars for stars
Windows with bars
All these fancy cars
But he ain't got none
Not one
Just tons of dreams
And constant schemes

Busting big deals
Sporting Polo that he steals
From that mine with sixteen wheels
That parks right off Hunts Point
To pay for puss and puff a joint
Between the month and on a Friday
Rocks get knocked – back on the highway
All in between
Paco and team
Take the shit they got the fly way

I can't blame him
Can you?
Poverty means no more school
For troubled bros that can't keep cool
Eyes on backs for fools with tools
City life if hungry – cruel

Constant fight
Day and night
Pass the time by playing pool
Sniffing caine to numb the pain
The sensational insane
Stopped the riot in his brain
Long enough to say sweet stuff
As he kissed and called my name...

Pssst. Mira mami

What do you want?

A lot

Papi, all that I ain't got

*I like the way you shine
A kiss from me and you'll be mine*

Hot rosy cheeks that filled with wine

You say that all the time

*Oh, but I mean it
I am Mars and you are Venus
Not even Earth could come between us
Shine by me and well go far
cause Mami, you're beside a Superstar!*

In that moment, a star he was
I forgot the illegal shit he does
As his dreams in time
Glistened in his eyes
I loved him for his quiet cries

We closed our eyes and said goodbyes
With weighted hearts of ghetto size

Happiness some stars do bring...
Paco, keep safe man, do your thing.

Caridad De La Luz, a.k.a. La Bruja, is a Puerto Rican poet/multitalent born and raised in The Boogie Down Bronx. She has been heard from Switzerland to San Francisco, from Poland to Puerto Rico . . . check her website www.LABRUJANYC.com. She continues to bless mics, stages, radio stations, music videos, and, most recently, the silver screen . . . Watch out!!!

When Tito Plays

For Jenny, Rudolfo, La'Keisha and the Puente Family

Sabor Latino
Nuyorican Caribbean Ritmo
Sound of the Ages
Modern Day Holy Song
AWAKENING THE GODS,
AWAKENING THE GODS . . .

WHEN TITO PLAYS!

GooseBumps
Run UP
and DOWN my spine
Feet Move
Fingers Snap
Head Jerks
Body Quakes
and my Brown SOUL
comes to Life.

WHEN TITO PLAYS!

African ORISHAS
become bleached skin saints
living in URBAN ghettos
bestowing their powers
as,
Lucumis children
LAY
their HANDS on Animal SKINS.
CONGAS/BONGOS/TIMBALES
emanate
vast powers.
CROWDS turn into
an orgy of History, Culture,
and Latin Love.
SHANGO/YEMAYA/OCHUN/ELEG-
GUA/OBATALA
se "MONTAN", on
Musicians who keep moving
regardless of the Cosmic Forces

transforming their Poor surroundings.
The Moving-Grooving
Body of people
DANCING before their FEET
Become
the Moving-Grooving Destiny
of a people
called

BORICUA/LATINO/AFRICANO
YORUBA/TAINO!

WHEN TITO PLAYS!

Our struggles are seen
in the wrinkles of his face
the gray of his hair
the shape of his musical head
and from his CALLOUSED HANDS.
THE HANDS

working so-so HARD
to please US,
Brothers and Sisters
Gathered Here,
to listen to Poets/Griots/Musicians
Do their Thing!
Bring us Back! Bring us Back,
to the Motherland
where Children of Color Play.

PLAY
"las Canciones de nuestra Comunidad."

PLAY the SUFFERING, la REALI-
DAD!

WHEN TITO PLAYS!

Racist Gringos Yell:
"Dig!Dig!Dig!
that Latin Jazz!"

**Jaime
"Shaggy"
Flores**

But . . .
I Say
NO! NO Yanqui!
Not Latin Jazz, But
SALSA/MAMBO/CHA CHA CHA/GUAGUANCO
or "BATA."
This Product
of the Immigrant People.
GENTE
regulated to SPICKS and NIGGERS.
Spears become Guns
Modern Day Africans
Killing each other, pulling genocidal
TRIGGERS!

WHEN TITO PLAYS!
Stars and Stripes
can be Enemy or Friend.
"QUE BONITA BANDERA" vs.
IMPERIALISM,
COLONIALISM,
AND CAPITALISM.

Revolutionary People
we Don't need a precious HOUSE or STATUE
which Stands for WHITE LIBERTY
in the land of the not so FREE
the home of the imprisoned SLAVE?
Play Tito, Play!
Take me Away
from the Slums and Degradation
No more Chains, No more
PLANTATIONS.
Play
"la Esperanza"
so the WE
may WAKE UP
Before
It's TOO LATE!

The Future
moves rapidly.
TIME
is not endless.
Subliminal messages
by the great band leader
who whispers in the Wind:

PALANTE . . .

"PALANTE MI GENTE!

DESPIERTA."

Jaime Flores is

better known as "Shaggy."

A new generation Nuyorican
poet, he follows in the tradi-
tion of Louis Reyes Rivera
and Arturo Schomburg,
believing the poet should also
serve as cultural worker.

A member of the 2000
Hartford Slam team, his book,
Sancocho, is released
through his own **Dark Souls**
publishing company.

Response to a Disillusioned Chicana

Chicana, I am not Chicana.
Is this flavor reminiscent of *mariachis* or *enchiladas*?
Do you see the *Virgen of Guadalupe* tattooed on my breasts?
Assumptions you make about me as if my pride were a jest;
just another disgraceful attempt to label my experience in the U.S.
You impose your *placa* without due respect
and I return with a fight.
Can you stand the test?

Label:
A fortified construction created just to Be.
Shouldn't you know better Chicana?
Havent you fought to be free?
Ain't you been dis-placed, dis-graced in your own land,
living on the border between sea and sand?
You are "Other" everywhere you go.
Shouldn't you know better?
I guess the answer is "No."

"Who are you?" "What may I call you?"
I never got those requests,
just shrouded with your umbrella
to claim my people are like your rest.
Let's talk about shelter from the cold, cruel, world;
don't stick me in your box
making me livid enough to hurl
angry words and resistance in the face of an ally.
Our union must be consistent
cause we ain't ready to die.

Rain in my face and my clothes drenched,
bone wet fighting for freedom in warfare of the trench.
Freedom to experience life without a label,
love without a limit, identity stable.
Just when I was ready for life without borders,
here comes a Chicana claiming a new world order:
"We are all Chicano."
Yeah right, says you,
ask a Dominican or Colombian and they'll tell you who's who.
Don't minimize our struggle with your single-minded vision,
only at the risk of trapping your brain in prison.
A mind is a terrible thing to waste,
so please Chicana, listen up and make haste.

I got a name *Chica*,
I wear it like skin.
It protects me from vultures
and makes sure my next of kin
got a future, a culture, that they can call their own,
so that they know where their Mama used to call her home.
It took years to cultivate,
this identity,
this skin that protects me from posers and wannabes.
I'm ready to peel it,
slip out, bare my ware,
without any borders, free to breathe fresh air;
but as soon as I let go
I get mistaken for dead
by a Chicana who's claiming me by sticking her label on my head.
This is who I am damn it! Don't mess with me.
Stop trying to make me yours,
stop trying to claim me.

These verses are dedicated, with love, to the inspirational Chicanas who've educated and shaped the consciousness of this proud Boricua. The poem is a response to one woman's belief that the label "Chicano" can be used as a political identity to define ALL bi-cultural Latinos in the U.S. I disagree.

**Sandra
García
Rivera**

I got a name,
the name my family claims
from my ancestors and grandparents whose lives tragically became
sacrificed for mine in the land of sugar cane;
whose blood and sweat was shed for our common cause
so we could sit and write poetry and browse in shopping malls.
I know who I am but I won't tolerate
another fool putting a label on me,
oh no, this makes me irate.

Why do Puerto Ricans think they all that?
I'll tell you why,
cause our culture is phat!
Our passion, our heart and our families
are all we got left in this land of make believe.
They give us welfare and then tell us that we are free?!
We've lost our island, our homes and our solidarity,
in the name of politics that isolate and delete
our histories from our books,
the beauty from our looks;
I can't stay silent while eating from the hands of crooks.
Ill raise my banner even higher
and start a funeral pyre for the one who disclaims
my struggle or my name.

A tool of the oppressor,
these labels that divide us,
keeping warriors from uniting and confiding and reciting,
to fight against injustice
in a system that just don't trust us,
to stand together *sin fronteras*.
You know it's true, de veras.

Choose to let go of borders,
Comadre, lend a hand.
Let's become one *Raza*,
But be conscious, understand.
To be sisters in struggle on common ground
you can't put yourself up while keeping me down.
Its a mutual endeavor, living parallel lives,
conscious of our roots,
on this journey we strive
to embrace all scents, colors, and flavors
that God has created without prejudice or favor.
Compassion, love and a willingness to learn
are the tools we hold my sister,
to meet on equal terms.

Against this system I will fight,
but against my *Comadre*?
No, that's not right.
So check yourself *Chica*,
I come as a friend,
but along my identity, I will not bend.
As long as you offend and don't claim your error,
were just wasting time cause it's our children who will never
know a *Raza* without hypocrisy,
Latinos in a real democracy,
holding their heads high,
denied unity as allies.
Look in the mirror, don't hide behind pride,
you better step back, take a look,
recognize,
that I ain't stuck, *para adelante voy*,
but don't dis me again *porque pendeja no soy*.

Sandra García Rivera is a New York City-based writer and performer. She writes to heal, heals to change, changes to cultivate peace and justice in her world. Sandra's writing is influenced by life experiences and knowledge attained from the urban playgrounds of Puerto Rico, New York and San Francisco; includes a splash of international travel; and is lightly shaken, (not stirred) with a twist from university mentors from across the U.S.

Mariposa

Ode to the DiaspoRican (pa mi gente)

Mira a mi cara Puertorriqueña
Mi pelo vivo
Mis manos morenas
Mira mi corazón que se llena de orgullo
Y di me que no soy Boricua

Some people say that I'm not the real thing
Boricua, that is
cause I wasn't born on the enchanted island
cause I was born on the mainland
north of Spanish Harlem
cause I was born in the Bronx...
some people think that I'm not bonafide
cause my playground was a concrete jungle
cause my Río Grande de Loiza was the Bronx River
cause my Fajardo was City Island
my Luquillo, Orchard Beach
and summer nights were filled with city noises
instead of coquis
and Puerto Rico
was just some paradise
that we only saw in pictures.

What does it mean to live in between
What does it take to realize
that being Boricua
is a state of mind
a state of heart
a state of soul...

¡Mira, No nací en Puerto Rico
Puerto Rico nació en mi!

Mira a mi cara Puertorriqueña
Mi pelo vivo
Mis manos morenas
Mira mi corazón que se llena de orgullo
Y di me que no soy Boricua.



Photographer: Fernando Reals

Poem for My Grifa-Rican Sistah or Broken Ends Broken Promises

(para mi melliza, Melissa, who endured it with me)

Braids twist and tie
constrain baby naps never to be free
braids twist and tie
constrain / hold in the shame
of not havin' long black silky strands
to run my fingers through.

Moños y bobby pins
twist and wrap
Please forgive me for the sin
of not inheriting Papi's "good hair"
moños y bobby pins
twist and wrap
restrain kinky naps
dying to be free
but not the pain
of not having a long black silky mane
to run my fingers through.

Clips and ribbons
to hold back and tie
oppressing baby naps
never to be free.
Clips and ribbons
to hold back and tie
imprisoning baby naps
never to have the dignity to be.

Chemical Relaxers
broken ends / broken promises
activator and cream
mixed in with bitterness
mix well...
the ritual of combing / parting / sectioning
the greasing of the scalp / the neck / the forehead / the ears
the process / and then the burning / the burning
"It hurts to be beautiful"
my mother tells me
"Pero Mami me PICA!"
and then the running / the running to water / to salvation
to neutralizer / to broken ends and broken promises...

Graduating from Carefree Curl
to Kitty curl / to Revlon / to super duper Fabulaxer
different boxes offering us broken ends and broken promises
"We've come a long way since Dixie Peach."
My mother tells me as I sit at the kitchen table.

Chemical relaxers to melt away the shame
until new growth reminds us
that it is time once again
for the ritual and the fear of
scalp burns and hair loss
and the welcoming
of broken ends
and broken
promises.

Mariposa (born
María Teresa Fernández) is a
proud Boricua poet, activist and
painter from the Bronx.
Mariposa, who has recited
poetry throughout NYC, the
northeast of the U.S. and the
island of Puerto Rico, was
recently featured in the HBO
documentary "Americanos:
Latino Life in the U.S."

Her work has been published
in **Drum Voices, Gathering
of the Tribes** Magazine,
**LongShot, Vol.23, Whats
Up** Magazine, **Urban Latino**
Magazine and **Resistance
in Paradise.**

Jueguitos

(For Ana, Dolores and Alicia)

Alicia knows every monument museum and “historically” significant site
She says that figure skaters in mid-air are suspended on threads of silk
and I wonder what other treasures lie buried beneath the surface of her being.
struggling with the darkness that envelopes the glow of a tortured mind

Ana creates beautiful spinning sparkling comforting objects from scraps
I am shocked at the similarity to her life

Dolores refuses to use the sewing machine
her once nimble fingers continue to stumble over hand threaded needles
sewing only during the day.
She gave me a quilt top
one day I will attach a middle and a bottom

there poetry simmers
beneath the surface and
I play “if only” with their lives

If only Dolores had not left her house when she was twenty-two to clean other homes
she wouldn't have met abuelo
he met her legs one day while they were hanging out the wash.

if only mami's titi Belén hadn't married papi's tío Luis
mama wouldn't have met papa. . .

if only the world had defended Alicia's intelligence

perhaps they would have traveled
perhaps they would have studied
perhaps they would have created themselves
perhaps they would have lived
ceasing only to survive.

perhaps they would never have been near one another
perhaps I would never have been born
never have met them.
never have seen
the poetry simmering

that is a frightening thought
this game isn't fun anymore.



**Magda
Martínez**

Tribu

one false move
lead to the path of the sonámbulos

Sonám
Sonám
Sonám
Sonám
BULOS

Traveling the world
in a long unending
waking dream

Listen
Listen
incessant scratches

on tar

asphalt

against flesh
flesh which can no longer identify itself
among these strange uninviting substances

how did i lose the tribe

the world of browns reds yellows
deep unending turquoise blues.
Soft whispers of oh nenene
haunting
holding the tattered map that leads back
back

answer
Don't stop singing
the notes lead home
the song recounts the journey
and you will return
drenched in the life you have lived

the tribe is patient it always has been
it waits for you
defend the tribe
defend the tribe
listen to the soft whispers that stir your heart
that remind you to smile
that protect you from the Arctic winds

Magda Martínez
is a Philadelphia-based
writer. Born to Puerto Rican
and Ecuadorian parents, she
is a native of New York
City's Loisaida. She writes
because she simply
loves it.

**Tony
Medina**

The Taking Of Harlem 1, 2, 3

east harlem
where my peeps
be at
where creeps
be at
fuckin wid
my peeps
in east harlem
they nicknamed
harm them
where boyz iz
boyz
& bloodz iz
spilt
by boyz
ackin likes
mens
they peeped
on drive by
tee veez
how they
squeeze
the reel gunz
they carry
not toyz
dese boyz
my peeps
touched by
drive by
creeps
lowerin dum
down
in da groun
uptown
in east harlem
where my peeps
be at
peepin out
the window
or up off
the curb
eese hollum
where my peeps
be squeakin
baneef
a elephant's
nuts

English Only or Bust

We have been banned
from speaking
Spanish
Now when
immigration officials
kick
 our teeth
in
we must
respond
 with
 an
 ouch
or an OW!
and not
our usual
Ay!
Ay!
Ay!
 or risk
being deported
or have our
heads turned
into flower pots
 sprouted
with a brilliant
 bouquet
of night sticks
& 45s.

A Burnt Offering at the Babalao
a tale of two phillie blunts

He committed suicide
because he thought
he was alegba
or shango
but was told
that he was just
a janitor.

rice & bean aesthetics

we want a deeper blues
a harder bop
a saucy salsa serenade
painting sound pictures
in the heart
bring me into the world
i am in the world
though they paint me
into corners of invisibility
where i have no voice
but find sound
& rhythm & music
& tone
in the world
a tone
clear and straight
like the stares &
arrows aimed at me
from the forces of hate
trying to keep me
away from my
humanity
which is true
& real,
a funky hard bop
mestizo salsa serenade
with laughter & madness
in the wicked
trembling belly
of truth
& reason

Tony Medina is the
author of ***Emerge & See,***
No Noose Is Good Noose,
In Defense of Mumia,
Sermons from the Smell of
a Carcass Condemned to
Begging, Memories of
Eating, DeShawn Days,
and ***Christmas Makes***
Me Think.

In Honor Of A Puerto Rican–American
War Hero Dead In Somalia

I guess it's important to honor our dead
Even if they died for no true cause at all
I guess it's important to remember
One less young man on this earth
Even though he wasn't missed alive
I guess plaques and flowers
and scholarships are important
Even though it takes the snuffing out of a life
To recognize a life
I guess it's safe to cry after the fact
To pat our hero on his back
For a job well done while he lies in his coffin.

*Memories are not a dangerous thing,
Memories can be replayed over & over
At no corporate expense,
Memories can be easily forgotten as such.*

I guess the mayor done the right thing
Dedicating a community room
In the projects as an honor
A room that feels more like a concrete tomb
A room already erased from everyone's mind
A room, frigid, poor lit
Dark with broken down furniture.
We shouldn't complain
His mother received letters
From everyone and their mother
Expressing condolences
We shouldn't complain,
She became a television star
On the local cable station
Receiving all those plaques and proclamations
We shouldn't complain,
Even though the President couldn't attend
He sent his representative
Even though the Senator couldn't attend
He sent his representative
Even though the Governor of Puerto Rico could not attend
He sent his representative
We shouldn't complain,
His mother was given a chance
To come up to the podium
To say a few things in Spanish
That were never translated,
She gets to keep all her photo albums
And all of those plaques and letters
Even though they'll fade
In time—



Photograph by: Ismael Fernández/El Nuevo Día

Respite From What Hurts

In the eye of the storm
Calmness comes to soothe the heart
A song to ignite passions of palm trees surging in the wind
A song to give hope to the earth
The rebirth of a kiss—

In the eye of the storm
Arrives a respite from what hurts
From age persisting ahead
A song to give time a chance
To grow and blossom
To come and go renewing crystal sands—

In your song, exist the wisdom of Ceibas
With roots that anchor the earth
To extract secrets for its children
To sing of yesterdays past
Of visits to rivers
Of idle hours in the sun
Hours of beauty noticed within the palm
Of a friend's hand—

In the mist of this storm
Comes a song to lift the soul
A praise almost forgotten
A promise to the sky
A moment created for joy to envelop all
In one motion of an embrace
In a prolonged memory of delight—

In your eyes are found the gleam of stars
That comes with the night
That holds onto stories
That tells of lazy afternoons high up on mountains
That fills the mind—

In your sound are heard legends
Of women and men working the fields
The cutting of cane
The gathering of grain
The home cooked meal at the risen sun—

In your soul linger my great grandfathers
Who filled the soil to nourish the soul
With miracles that grow into history
Miracles to give us immortality
Miracles to give us ourselves—

Nancy Mercado is the author

of ***It Concerns The***

Madness (Long Shot

Productions, 2000).

Her work also appears in

Identity Lessons, Changer

L'Amérique: Anthologie de

la Poésie Protestataire des

USA (Maison De La Poésie,

France), ***Aloud: Voices From***

The Nuyorican Poets Café,

and ***In Defense Of Mumia,***

among others. She is currently a

Professor at Boricua College,

New York City.

**Josie V.
Miranda**

climax II

a solitary
palm—

wild
and
remote—

shadows
desire

across
blue white
sand

until gradually pressed
celibate again

by a
jealous
tropical
sunrise.

longing

the sweetness
of
guanabana

lingers
implicit

in the
migratory
arrangement of

footprints at a
bus stop.

lilt and cadence

do you hear my accent,

piquant flavor
of the
mother tongue
to which i
emigrated
as a womanchild?

listen carefully to my speech,
inflected
with the particular
lilt and cadence
that transform my life's dreams
into powerful, living
songs of survival;

my accent—
however imperceptible
or pronounced—
testifies to my uniqueness
como boricua,
and bears witness to the
essential truths
of my life

while reminding me
to lovingly celebrate
the desire
to speak out

and the necessity
to be heard.

Josie V. Miranda Cartagena is a California-born Boricua living in Sacramento with her partner, April, and their six cats. She is a graduate of the University of California, Davis, and works as a program coordinator at the UC Davis Women's Center.

Sheltered

Arturo lived near Graham Avenue where mom shopped for cheap clothes on Sunday
On his roof was a makeshift stage and tanning salon
I turned brown as he read me his lyrics about all that was wrong
And asked me when they would hear his song

I lived on Olive Street where the waves crashed on rocks
Where grass was cut and the garbage men came on time
There was little crime
In the Emerald city of Suburbia

I wanted to be Brooklynese
Whatever Brooklyn was
I was on that Coney Island cyclone ride in my mind
Rickety and loud over tranquility.
Wanted concrete not fake grass

I tried to be black, white, latina
No way out, no way in.

Arturo sold candy to my Latino panas in the suburbs and my panas sold it to the white kids trippin on the beach.
White kids kept their dreams alive cause Pops was the firechief, mom was the doctor and uncle was the lawyer.

Pink Floyd and boleros played in my sky
As I watched the white boys getting love off acid
We read Emerson and Thoreau telling us "build your castles in the air"
No boundaries
Dream of free love and open spaces, community and real integration
Whatever that means.

Meanwhile, the fists around those jail cell bars were ebony
Arturo got caught American style,
No band aids for the bruises, no trial.

White kids talked about wanting to be free to date any race
Benetton and MTV style
They never remembered my face
And meanwhile,

My titi, Arturo's mom died of cancer weighing 90 pounds
As she like a raisin shrunk
I saw my hands and my books age

I cried in the rain, no wipers for my glasses.

We wuz kids once you know
When we were young, Arturo came to where I lived on the beach
Staring at the sand and the water repeating,
"You are so lucky to live here, to have a beach with real sand and ocean waves,"
He said.

I said, "What! But no one here even knows I exist. I loved those hydrant street waves where kids would really laugh."

I read him my Suburican, Boricua poems,
He read me lyrics he wrote in jail.
I told him, I am a pure old school salsa.
He told me he liked Pink Floyd.

We found each other inside each other
Hiding so long we were afraid to come out.

His lyrics foam in my mind
Thrashing ferociously to paper
He never knows that half his soul is in my verse
But he knows that half his lyrics come from his view of the ocean near my house,
Where he saw hope
And I saw hell.

To her Spirit

HIJO DE LA GRAN . . .

Moist was the grass where you were born Abuelo
Soft, brown was your mother's womb

HIJO DE LA GRAN . . .

With friends who urged her on
Your mother slept under sheets
Folded and washed by her hands in the sun

Mira mija, mi amor
They told her whispering
Close your eyes
Let him touch you
Maybe he will marry you
Sleep next to your body, and no one else's

HIJO DE LA GRAN . . .

Who knew what your mother had
Mixing courage y verguenza
She told you to call him father
But named you after herself, a woman
Morales was her name

Morales,
Every day your father cries
Drinking Puerto Rican rum to calm the nightmares of your face
His only brown son
He lets you keep your mother's name

Abuelo Morales
We dance around you
As you smile and look in our eyes
Eyes, yours are cautious like a woman
For fear of being fucked

Tired man,
You laugh at me who talks to myself in the rain
Who tells my father to bring his own plate to the kitchen

My eyes are not cautious
And I am a woman,
Whole, sweet, steep, hard to climb.

You are woman grandfather
You are woman grandfather
Raised by and carrying a woman's name
Angry, tired woman that you are

Hombre, abuelito
If you are a man
I ask you to fight like a woman, man
Against the men that die before they die
And kill their women first

Rise man, like a woman rises
From that 2:30am beating to make that 9:30am breakfast

Rise
And fight with the silence, love and laughter
that knives macho souls at their core
You are a woman's man abuelo
Morales is the mane of your goddess's brown blood.



Lenina Nadal is an aspiring poet and filmmaker. She works at Hunter College as Program Director for the Student Resource Center. She has been published in *In Defense of Mumia*, the *Olive Tree Review*, and the *Hunter Spheric*.

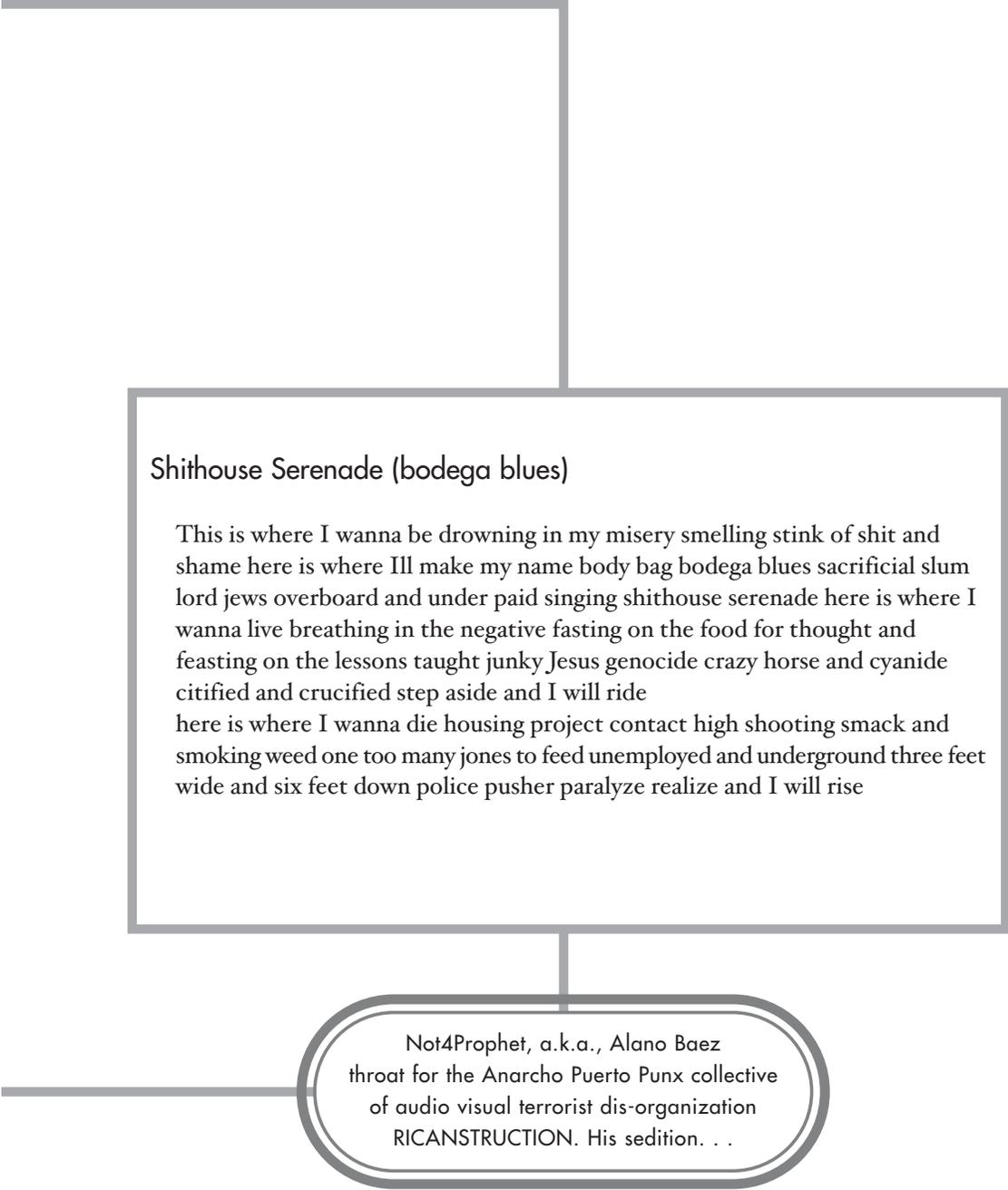
Not4Prophet

Dream in Porto Rican

Dream in Porto Rican freakin dreamin a nightmare of evil institutions
wielding weapons as welfare of sacred soldier cemetery slaves to the shitstem
of sabotage survivors never knowin what hit em the scribbled bible drivell of
a barrio breakdown the SIDA sucker swivel of societal shakedown like lucky
loteria losers liven a last chance well dance and romance and pretend that
its only a dream in Porto Rican freakin dreamin of death camps of suicidal
supermarket saviors and foodstamps of project pimps and pushers peddling pain
in the playground of poverty perico and last round
of medicine manteca and the mercy of markdowns of prison politicians police
pumping the gasps sounds of pentacostal preachers teaching coffins and Cristo
estoy listo ya

Photographer: Fernando Reals





Shithouse Serenade (bodega blues)

This is where I wanna be drowning in my misery smelling stink of shit and shame here is where Ill make my name body bag bodega blues sacrificial slum lord jews overboard and under paid singing shithouse serenade here is where I wanna live breathing in the negative fasting on the food for thought and feasting on the lessons taught junky Jesus genocide crazy horse and cyanide citified and crucified step aside and I will ride
here is where I wanna die housing project contact high shooting smack and smoking weed one too many jones to feed unemployed and underground three feet wide and six feet down police pusher paralyze realize and I will rise

Not4Prophet, a.k.a., Alano Baez
throat for the Anarcho Puerto Punx collective
of audio visual terrorist dis-organization
RICANSTRUCTION. His sedition. . .

Willie Perdomo

The Day Hector Lavoe Died

The baritone Univision broadcast came from the living-room t.v.
“En la noticia hoy, El Cantante de Los Cantantes, Hector Lavoe, se murió en—”

Mami yelled from her dent in the sofa, where the world is a novela, and where she can book flights to Miami and Mexico and get lost in other people’s drama, sure that there will be a happy ending.

“Papo! Mira! Hector Lavoe!”

She knows that I will stop to see the voice that helped me when I was trying to sing my own song about *mi gente en el barrio, y la vida de las putas, los tecatos, y las brujas, los dichosos, los tiburones, los cantantes y los soneros, los bodegueros, los perros y las gatas, las matas en las ventanas de los proyectos* and dare you to call it ugly.

I rubbed the funk out of my eyes and hocked back all the dope between the top of my nose and bottom of my throat. I walked out to the living room. Mami points to the color t.v. “Miralo, mijo. Se murió. He died. He was the best of the best, and look how he wasted away.”

She starts her story about how Hector use to come to her house in the morning to pick up my uncle Lole, who was a bad boogaloo *congero*. They use to start the day off with a bang-bang, and then go looking for jam sessions, letting their blood lead them to the right beat.

I sink into the love seat and sing with Hector thru technicolor footage of a young Fania All-Star, looking at his *gente* through hazel-tinted glasses, a canary-yellow suit, giant brown bow tie, and we all stand in a garden, singing and clapping along to his *comedia* tragic. The broadcast cuts to a hospitalized *salsero*, body twisted under sterile white bed sheets, glasses too big for his face, waving to his fans with the strength he had left.

“Coño, que flaco.” I say. “Look how skinny he is.”

“Como tu, mantecoso” Mami says. “Just like you. You know why hes like that, right? You know, right?”

She gives me the answer by miming an injection into the crook of her elbow. But what she means to say is *all that talent and if you keep messing around with that shit, the same thing is gonna happen to you because even though you not putting a needle in your veins, you still lock yourself up in your room and die a little bit more every day.*



Photograph by Fernando Reals

After the retrospective I went back to my room and snorted my last bag. It was suppose to be my wake-up in the morning; the bag that was gonna get me off empty and help me start another day. I turned off the lights, sat in my fold-up chair and Hector sings to me in a closing tribute. “*Que problema caballero/en que me encuentro yo.*” I thought about my uncle’s fight with his monkey. Mami continues her commentary on the breaking news.

“Just like you. He didn’t have a monkey on his back. He had King Kong, baby.”

The nod comes to take me to a parade. I hear a blast of trumpets, a wave of trombones, and I change my direction. I follow the sun as it funnels its way through a cool black sky. *Viejos* stop slapping their *capicú* dominos, radios are turned off, *bochinche* stops flowing, bodega gates come slamming down and I finally get to see my uncle play. He is sitting on a park bench with a conga between his legs. A woman next to me does not realize her hips are moving until she lets out a loud moan, asking for more. My uncle tells me that this is where he’s been spending the rest of his life. I ask him if we can collaborate. I am lost in the drip coming down my throat. I can hear a long cigarette ash fall and tap the linoleum.

Mami starts talking about salsa and love. Her slippers drag to the bathroom. The water pills are working extra hard today. She is saying that my uncle coulda been one of the best like my father coulda been one of the best/like my father coulda been one of the best/ *papis* in the world but once he got his rum on the night became ninety-proof and if he thought that mami was being too friendly with one of his baseball buddies, he would go kapow! And that’s where some of us learn to find the beat. She knocks on my door without calling for me. She doesn’t answer when I reply. It’s a wake-up knock. A making sure I ain’t dead in my vomit kind of knock. I clear my throat, take a deep breath and sigh cuz she fucked up my high with that same old story about a small fortune wasted and all that coulda been in a world where the only thing left is a woman, putting on her nightgown, talking about the night she saw Hector Lavoe sing at the annual St. Paul’s Mother’s Day Dance and how he made her feel like she would never grow old.

Willie Perdomo is the author of ***Where a Nickel Costs a Dime***. He has been featured on PBS in the programs, “Words in Your face” and “The United States of Poetry”. His work has appeared in several anthologies, including ***Aloud!: Voices from the Nuyorican Poets Café***, ***Boricuas***, ***Listen Up!***, and ***Step into a World***.

**Irene
Pérez**

Las ilusiones de la vida

are they las desiluciones you heard your mother, in the kitchen, utter when she needed to sum up life for herself, not knowing you were listening?

Our mothers thought that because we were not growing up with sea waves awakening us, the sun darkening our skin,

nor with the good fairies who could cure us while the evil one could make us ill, that we were protected from their words, we the unprotected ones.

Unshielded from the lamenting lilt of Spanish, we were aware of its story imprinting lines in our palms, foretelling our next steps, turning us

into the mothers they once were.

A Doorstep

A hand sneaks in to
Flick a delicate glass
I have placed by the sill
Of a window I keep unopened
In my bedroom.
The shattered pieces bring in
Blinding glints of a broken moon.
It, also, keeps unlocking
The front door when I'm in bed.
The deep click of the bolt
Like a cluster of feldspar
Hurled out
Left a spread of blue pebbles
By the gate.
Still, I cannot wake to the
Revelations.
There is no track
Here, in this in-between,
In this point of exiting and

Irene Pérez obtained a Master's degree in Spanish at Hunter College. Her work has appeared in *The Bilingual Review*, *The Americas Review*, *Logshot* and *Latingirl* Magazine. She lives in Jersey City.

Entering.

Pájaro Transeúnte

My insular confusion
feeds off the polluted veins of consciousness
born in the Bronx, El Barrio, Guayama, Corozal, Ponce,
y dondequiera que se conozca la voz
del pájaro transeúnte

The bird travels many miles
but is not tired.

In the Bronx,
in titi Dolca's house,
where people count ambulances to fall asleep,
the picture of mi bisabuela,
is the same picture of my father's arms,
bronze from his run at the pista,
by Yankee Stadium,
or down Webster Avenue,
left on Tremont,
left on Park,
down Fordham Road,
back on Webster,
past the corner store,
up the pissed stairwell,
down the graffitied hallway,
into cell 4AE,
where I might be
staring at the sun,
with eyes closed,
feeling mis manchas de plátano
grow

**Hector
Luis
Rivera**

The Band

everyone
has a part
to play

Idealism

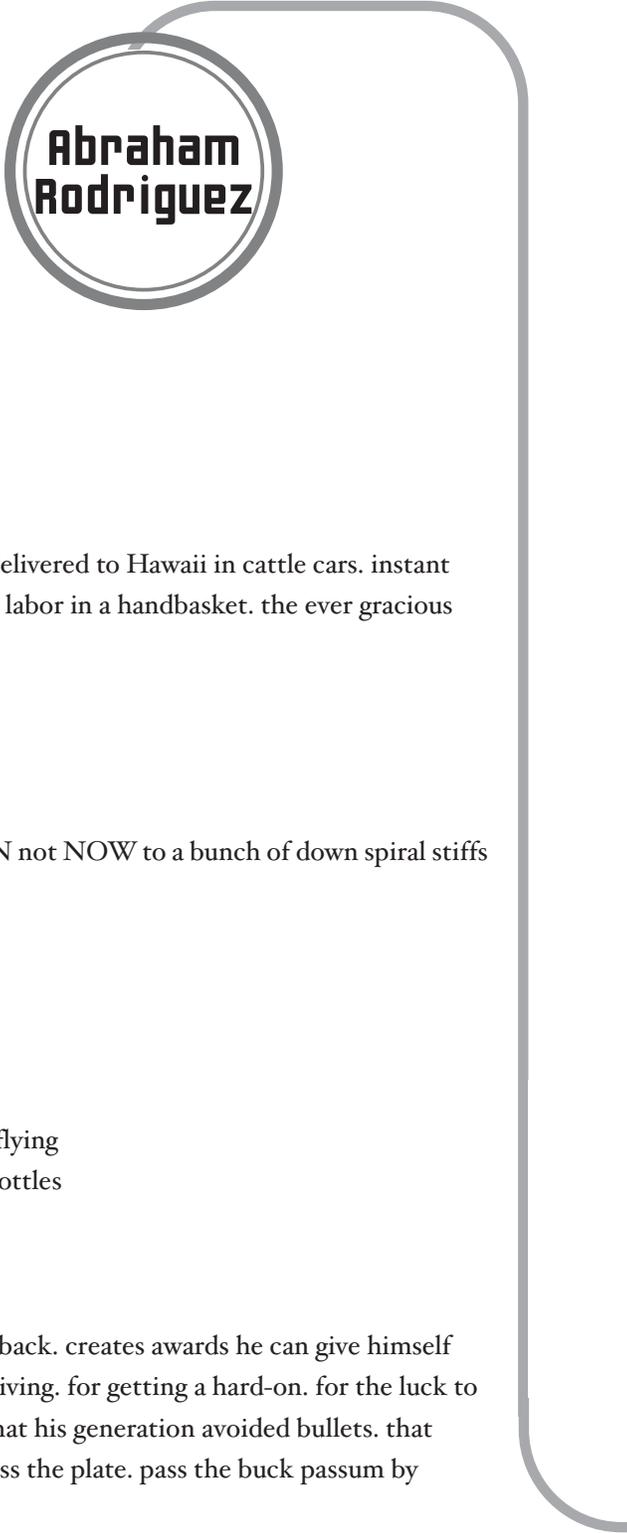
Idealism
I
deal
with
ideas
dear
to
I
Idealism



Photo by Fernando Reads

Hector Luis Rivera, is co-founder and member of the Welfare Poets. In the past ten years they have performed throughout the Northeast and, increasingly, throughout the country. His poetry was recently commissioned and performed in Nancy Nevarez's play, "Blind Alley," a Puerto Rican Travelling Theatre Production. He is also

a teacher, facilitating poetry workshops in New York City.



**Abraham
Rodriguez**

Same Old

I.

I see Puerto Rico as two nations
divisible
under Gard

cut apart sold stapled carted stamped. delivered to Hawaii in cattle cars. instant gratification for major industries. cheap labor in a handbasket. the ever gracious

war booty

and a hundred years later

the same old bastard writing about THEN not NOW to a bunch of down spiral stiff
who laud the treason of their fathers

who play dominoes while weeds grow
and choke the flowers

another tall grass empty lot
with a tin shack and a puerto rican flag flying
a walkway made out of brick and beer bottles
the dead pig on a spit
the need to party away our misfortune

the same old bastard pats himself on the back. creates awards he can give himself
and his friends. congratulations for surviving. for getting a hard-on. for the luck to
have an umbrella on the day it rained. that his generation avoided bullets. that
the move he learned best was how to pass the plate. pass the buck passum by
while they die.

(he can avoid action, and that is his gift.)

that the young people won't listen
so he can blame them too

and wring his hands and say,
“this generation. what can you do?”



II.

4 Puerto Ricans in a room.

guayaberas and coffee stink. clackety of bone-white dominoes. they see fire engines out the window. they see cop cars ambulances bulldozers. tenements around them go up blazing like roman candles. sometimes screams sometimes gun shots sometimes. they sit and slap down that double six that five-oh that *ficha blanca*

and they blare the salsa chug the beer and say how proud they are to speak
SPANISH

(though this is NOT what Spaniards would call what they speech)

and culture is *guiro*, *lechón*, and their days at Fort Dix
a remembrance of things last and lasting forever
the same mantra the same song the same painting on the same wall

(the insane were locked up for wanting OUT)

a gun battle, but it's about crack
so relieved they sit, knowing full well

Abraham Rodriguez lives in the Bronx. His first book, ***The Boy Without A Flag***, was a 1993 New York Times Notable Book Of The Year. *Spidertown* won a 1995 American Book Award. It has appeared in British, Dutch, German, and Spanish editions, and was optioned by Columbia Pictures. His work appears in a dozen anthologies and literary magazines. His newest novel, ***The Buddha Book***, will be published by St. Martin's Press this year.

Taking It Back

they spared their kids a revolution
and left them an undeclared war.

Back to the cradle of Hip-Hop
Since they distorted its true purpose
I had to resurface
It was becoming a circus

It's like if the A & R s used
Some sort of post-hypnotic suggestion
To cause the epidemic
Mainstream infection

The sugar pop M.C.
Is the worst thing to happen since H.I.V.

The music industry's infested
Contaminated with guinea pigs
Willing to be tested

You would be surprised
At what some people would do
To become a star
Selling out is like getting branded
And that's a permanent scar

You know who you are
As a matter of fact
It's about that time
This PortoRock
A Latin brother like me
Retaliates with lyrical contact

So notify a relative
Because your demo tested
H.I.T. popsitive

And I developed
A fatal lyrical vaccine
To keep sellouts in quarantine
its either that
or get decapitated by a guillotine

[Chorus:]

What we're gonna do right here is go back. "Yeab!"

What we're gonna do right here is go back. "Yeab!"

What we're gonna do right here is go back

We're taking it back

We're taking it back

We're taking it back to the cradle of hip-hop

Back into the Gang Era
A time of terror
Over the neighborhood territory
Unlike the Hollywood version
Of the West shattered
Bodies are left scattered
There's no satisfaction
Until a couple of brains get splattered

All over the area
The more the merrier
Causing mass hysteria
Just like a savage pit-bull terrier

You got to do, what you got to do
An outlaw's mentality
Has always been F.T.W.

God forgives, outlaws don't
F. around, lay around
Six feet underground
Vaya con Dios
Think you won't

Brother please
You'll get stomped with M.C.s
Big shout out goes out
To all the real O.G. s

Coast to coast
State to state
City to city

(What we're gonna do right here is)

Form a committee

From the Boogie Down
To L.A.'s South Central part of town
Take a look around
Everything is cool
As long as you don't step out of bounds

[Chorus:]

Back to the time

When I was just a little bitty boy
In 77 rolling with a convoy

Of juveniles
Straight out of the Boogie Down
A graduate from the School Of Hard Knox
Keeping it underground

One of the many PortoRocks
Putting hip-hop on the map
With my clean-cut Caesar
And my baseball cap

Or Kangol tilted to the side
In a B-Boy stand
Representin for my people
at every jam

Sporting British walkers
All flava B.V.D.s
The denim Lee jacket
And classic bell bottom Onyx Lee's

With the buckets coming to the knees
If not the piece coming down the side
Of the dungarees

PortoRocking mock necks
Name buckles
Crazy fat laces
Personally I had sneakers by the cases

From 69ers to suede Pumas
To Adidas Shells
As a matter of fact
'Til This Day
Try not to step on my kicks

Cause all hell's going to break loose

(I swear to God)

We're taking it back,
We're taking it to the school yard

Where D.J.s were cutting up records for M.C. s

B-Boyz constantly
Going down into a freeze

Graffiti writers
out to bomb trains
Come to think of it
Here's a couple of Old School names

LEE

Let me see there was
SCENE, TAKE-2, P.BODY, and DONDI,
MITCH77, CEASAR, BLIND, & my man

That's just some of the few
who had it going on
And on the wheels of steel
D.J. MIKE MIKE and JOHNNY JOHN

Big ups to Zulu
The 12 O'Clock crew
and of course the Rock Steady Crew
with the legendary B-Boyz
JIMMY LEE
RUBBER BAND, JO JO, C.N.
and JIMMY DEE

I can't forget my man BATCH
Word Up T.B.B.
THE BRONX BOYZ
A part of the Hip-Hop
Family Tree

[Chorus:].



Rick Rodriguez (aka "Puerto Rock") was born in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico, and raised in the Bronx, New York. With his cousin Tony Boston ("Krazy Taino"), he is a member of Latin Empire, the rap group they founded in 1988. Since their popular early rhymes like "Así Es la Vida" and "Puerto Rican and Proud", Rick and Tony have kept on rhymin and representin. They're still in the hip-hop game.

Between Language and Me

“Regresa,” I command my old speech.
It doesn’t matter that my tongue now
flirts with a new sound system.

It doesn’t matter that my head
swells at the attempt to understand
new grammar rules.

I let my voice grow as if riding waves
or taming cascades.

I acquiesce. Whatever hope is there
to find the path—the one that will
only mold to my footprints—

the only passage capable of echoing
my voice—depends in reaching the center
of this silence—

The responses are the riddles I must
answer to recover the luminosity of my shadow.

I had hoped the confusion would dissipate
like spring fog exposed to mid day heat.

This ambivalence perching inside my chest
like a torrent threatening to overflow.

I stretch my vocal cords—when necessary
scream—make sound travel over water
and mountains, over pinos y palmas.

A foreign echo surfaces as the only safeguard.

I brace for the fall—
New words glisten under the sun.

balancing act of two new human beings
suddenly striving to meet half way and
still emerge as a whole being from the
quagmire of definitions.

**Nydia
Rojas**

I was born in Morovis, Puerto Rico, but have been living in the States for 22 years. My poetry and short stories have appeared in several magazines, among them: ***Calyx, U.S. Latino Review, Poetry International & Wisconsin Academy Review.***

Molding My Definitions

The solid ground of the first language
removed from underneath my feet—

a ladder tumbling down the chasm
suddenly opening up and swallowing.

Coldness embraces my body.

Not even the memory of the summer sun
of my childhood can warm my skin.

I learn the language of survival—

silence—

but—

wake up in the middle of the night
drown in words demanding to be born.

The tingling of the tongue wanting
to raise like whip to shape
the truth won't cease
until I manage to emerge like phoenix
from old ashes.

I take in my own hands the task
of redefining myself—

word by word—
adjective by adjective—
definition by definition—

silence crumbles like dust I can easily
mold

particle by particle—

This time my hands rush to the dust
before it touches the ground
and becomes
permanent.

Terms of Exile

I

You offered us, as if you were a belated king—

mira, incienso, oro
in exchange for our ports,
in exchange for our names.

In this new version we were the ones
following the brightest star

but twentieth-century technology had
rendered it a hollow, shining shape
incapable of guiding the dreams
we so carefully had nurtured—

II

You expected us to write a coherent
story without allowing us access
to the necessary words.

When we refused, you invented categories
to contain us. You made it clear that,
whichever the terms, the land remained yours.

You invented maps detailing the route
to which we were restricted—it led
to fringe places.

III

How long do we have to wait
until you see us?

IV

We cultivated our fragile voices, tended them
as the uprooted beings they had become.

“You are on your own,” this was the tale’s
end you didn’t clarify before we began the journey.

We knew about challenges.
This was only one more obstacle
to overcome.

We are on our own, we told ourselves,
while our eyes surveyed this foreign soil
molding our skin.

**Johanny
Vázquez
Paz**

African Yearning

Mamá,
why did you make me so white
when so much African Blood
hammers the whips of my veins?

Mamá I want wide hips to move them
to the rhythm of the tambora,
at the beach the blacks are playing bomba
and the music calls me, Mamá, it pulls me...

Listen to the *pru cu tá*,
feel the *pan pan pá*.
Ay! I can't stop moving.
Ay! I wonder why.

Mamá, please understand,
that this whiteness blinds me
and my straight hair bothers me.
I want the wind to whirl my hair around
and leave me looking wild and beautiful
like an African queen.

Windows vibrate with the *tum tum tá*.
Lets go to the beach so we can dance!

Mamá, explain to me,
why I was born so white
when I feel my African soul inside?

Johanny Vázquez Paz was born in San Juan, but currently resides in Chicago, where she earned an M.A. in Hispanic Studies from the University of Illinois. She has been included in four anthologies published by Calíope Press in Spain and many magazines. She is currently editing an anthology of Latina poets for MARCH/Abrazo Press and teaches Spanish at Olive Harvey College.

Carta a mi madre

No te preocupes por mí, madrecita,
todo pretende estar bien al norte del mundo
y yo me hago perfecta antes tus ojos.

No hay problema que me aturda
más de diez horas cada día.

Mi salud está excelente
sin doctores y sin dietas,
y no hay nadie que interrumpa
mi soledad perpetua.

Pero, no te preocupes, mami
no es tan malo como tu piensas.

Aquí hay millones de trabajos
mal pagados.

Hay muchísimo dinero
en otras cuentas.

Hay edificios nuevos cada semana
que atrapan a la gente detrás de cada puerta.

Si sueño triste es tal vez por la nostalgia
del que extraña la patria, la familia y el todo,
por el frío que entumece más el cuerpo cada año,
por la lista de las cosas por comprar
que crece como niño bien alimentado,
por los problemas que cada día me visitan
sin invitarlos.

Estoy bien,
sobrevivo día a día
arregládomelas sola.
No sientas pena, viejita,
aquí la vida es perfecta.



**Emanuel
Xavier**

Papi Chulo

When I look into your papi chulo eyes
I see happiness and joy
the Christ-child con los tres reyes magos
& bags full of toys
for the first time noticing
the beauty of brightly lit bodegas
against cobalt skies
the subway smiles of homeless mothers
watching two men kiss quick secret goodbyes
walking away from each other
banjee boys on their way home
forbidden love glistening in their souls
like the melted candles and whispered prayers
from altars glowing late at night
in the barrios of a sleepless city
–still prejudiced and cold

When I touch your papi chulo skin
I abandon myself to ecstasy and hope
childhood scars lost somewhere in your embrace
abrasando tus sueños wrapped inside my coat
your breath acariciandome like the soft island breezes of Oyá
soothing the jagged edges of my ghetto face
while gently rocking under the moonlight back and forth
back and forth
back and forth
to the rhythms of salsa and Spanish lullabies
engraved in memory like graffitied names on a hostel wall

When I kiss your papi chulo lips
I close my eyes to taste your tropics
my inhibitions drowning in the sweet river of your saliva
struggling to survive somewhere deep within
while tongues dance to the beat of our hearts
deseando que estos momentos would last forever
in a world without boundaries
in love without limits
en la isla de Nueva York
papito lindo
tu amor
es mi bendición

Jibaro Dreams

En la isla de Nueva York
I search for secret gardens
Spiritual sanctuaries
a child lost in a forest of Jibaro dreams
where santos sail through the salsa of my soul
& only fruits fallen from the tree
violently smashing against once rat-infested grounds
remind me of the outside world
sweet juices spilling
feeding the soil
with abuelas lagrimas
fathering life to our culture
nature to our concrete jungle
Earth bathing in virgin nectars
lodging seeds in uncemented wombs
struggling for growth somewhere beneath
the choking tight clothes of buildings and overpopulation
outside verandah fortresses
Spanish lullabies and guaguanco healing her birth
amongst the casitas de nuestra gente
still standing
defiantly
freedom from oppression
paradise
amidst metal and decay

Emanuel Xavier is author of the poetry collection, *Pier Queen*, and the debut novel, *ChristLike*, which was nominated for a Lambda Literary Award. He is recipient of a Marsha A. Gómez Cultural Heritage Award for his contributions to gay and Latino culture and a Nuyorican Poets Café Grand Slam winner.

