

Cruzando el charco: Plena crossing the pond

[coquí]

[Puerto Rican cuatro and other guitar sounds of plena]

[*chorus*: “Puerto Rico, my dear little island of my love. Your songs can make me revive. It’s your sons’ singing your history to your beat, and you’re so far but you still can hear. It’s your sons’ singing your history to your beat, and you’re so far but you still can hear.”]

[*plenero*: “Ay sing, sing and support your little island with furor. Sing, sing to revive. It’s the memories of a people who fight with furor, even though it is tired from suffering. It’s the memories of a people who fight with furor, because it is tired from suffering.”]

Sammy Tanco: Well, Los Instantáneos of la plena are a thing over there in Chema’s house. First, so-and-so came in with his pandero, and then the other, and then they’re the instantaneos. All of a sudden group formed and they’re the Instantáneos de la Plena.

narrator: Well, here we are in the corner (rincón), Rincón Criollo. It’s been twenty-five years since it’s been here. It was founded by Mr. José Soto, known as Chema.

Chema: I was born in a little house, like this, which was my grandma’s. And this here was an empty hole. A hole of like fifteen feet that way.

Juan Flores: Little by little they realized that in this little plot, they could use it to plant, to like occupy themselves. You can look around, there are many symbols of the island, but you also see evidence that we’re in New York.

narrator: they themselves constructed little houses. Then, the dynamic was something like, look, let’s celebrate what we are, and let’s play plena here. A plot rescued by community members.

Flores: A geographic nostalgia for the island. And a historical nostalgia too.

Chema: So close where you’re so far.

[*plenero*: “I’m a jibarito. I’m a jibarito. Yeah, you knew. I’m like the coqui, of my land, who sings at night and sleeps all day.”]

[*chorus*: “I’m like the coqui, I’m like the coqui, of my land, who sings at night and sleeps all day.”]

[cuatro solo]

[coqui whistle sounds, with güiro in the background]

Miguel “Mickey” Sierra: This is the link, between Puerto Rico and New York.

And now plena sounds all over the US.

[*plena ensemble*: “You live like I live, I live having fun. You live like I live, I live having fun!”]

[*plenero*: I sing to you Puerto Rico, to the beat of bomba and plena. I’m going to Puerto Rico, to the beat of bomba y plena. Come and dance young woman, it’s so delightful the bomba y plena. Dance away young woman, so delightful the bomba y plena.”]

[*plena ensemble*: “Going up, going down. Going up, going down. If you live the way I live, I live having fun. If you live the way I live, I live having fun!”]

[*plenero*: We will sing from over here. We will sing it anywhere We will sing from over here. We will sing it anywhere. I represent Puerto Rico, and I bring with me my flag. I represent Puerto Rico, and I bring with me my flag. Puerto Rico!]

[brass section]

[*plenero*: ¡Echale Boricua! That’s it! Live it up!]

[*Hijas de Boriken*: ¡Eso! Woo!]

Besides its role in cultural nationalism, plena sounds in advocacy, especially after hurricane Maria.

[*plenero*: When the Boricua unites, nobody can stop him. Let’s go everyone to the land we want to help.]

[*chorus*: You will all see, you will all see. Puerto Rico raises up and that is pure truth.]

[*plenero*: Puerto Rico raises up, and you’re going to advocate, because the land that I love, that’s what I came here to help.}]

[*chorus*: You will all see, you will all see. Puerto Rico raises up and that is pure truth.]

[*plenero*: Puerto Rico raises up, let’s all sing it out, this plena, I’m telling you, we will not stop!]

[*chorus*: You will all see, you will all see. Puerto Rico raises up and that is pure truth.]

[*plenero*: That is a pure truth.]