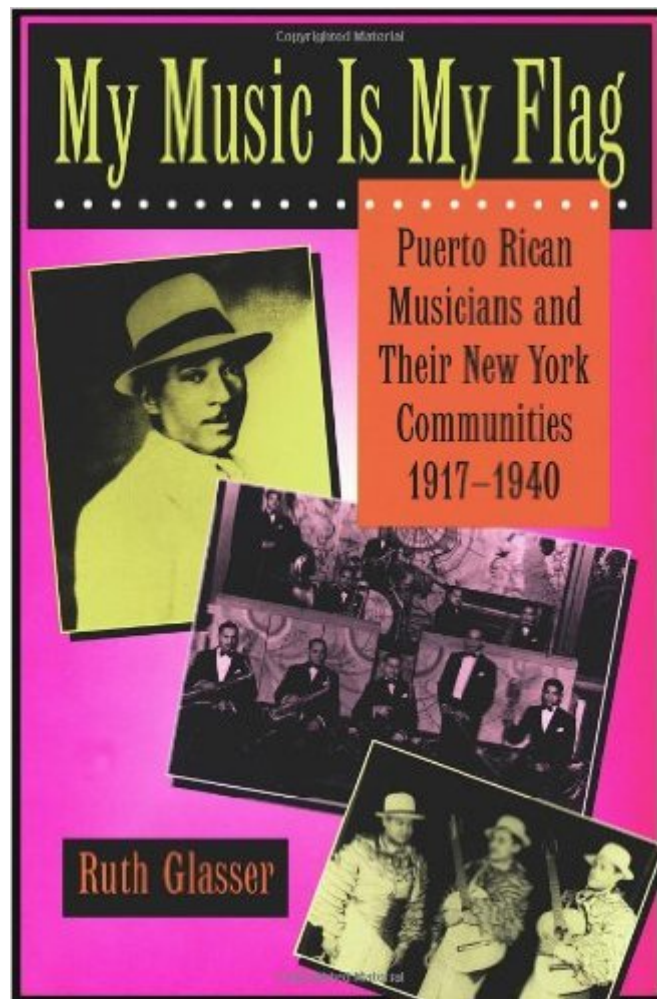


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My Music Is My Flag: Puerto Rican Musicians And Their New York Communities, 1917-1940 (Latinos In American Society And Culture)



Synopsis

Puerto Rican music in New York is given center stage in Ruth Glasser's original and lucid study. Exploring the relationship between the social history and forms of cultural expression of Puerto Ricans, she focuses on the years between the two world wars. Her material integrates the experiences of the mostly working-class Puerto Rican musicians who struggled to make a living during this period with those of their compatriots and the other ethnic groups with whom they shared the cultural landscape. Through recorded songs and live performances, Puerto Rican musicians were important representatives for the national consciousness of their compatriots on both sides of the ocean. Yet they also played with African-American and white jazz bands, Filipino or Italian-American orchestras, and with other Latinos. Glasser provides an understanding of the way musical subcultures could exist side by side or even as a part of the mainstream, and she demonstrates the complexities of cultural nationalism and cultural authenticity within the very practical realm of commercial music. Illuminating a neglected epoch of Puerto Rican life in America, Glasser shows how ethnic groups settling in the United States had choices that extended beyond either maintenance of their homeland traditions or assimilation into the dominant culture. Her knowledge of musical styles and performance enriches her analysis, and a discography offers a helpful addition to the text.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"My Music Is My Flag" is a rare and genuine contribution, as well as a very provocative and insightful analysis, of the history of Puerto Ricans and their music in New York City during the period of 1917 through 1940. However, this book "failed" to mention the enormous contributions and the importance of "Pregones" (Musical cries of street vendors used to attract customers...in many cases they were bawdy, double entendre compositions. Lyrics patterned after the "pregon" also appeared in many compositions by Puerto Ricans). Many of these "pregones" were recorded in New York. A perfect example was "El Botanico", done on a 78, inspired by Manuel Jimenez "Canario". He recorded it with his band on June 8, 1929. Pedro Flores, Rafael Hernandez, Mirta Silva, Johnny Rodriguez and many others also recorded "pregones". Johnny Rodriguez did them all from New York. These "pregones" were very important, as they reflected much about the economic and social conditions of the Puerto Ricans. Nevertheless, Ruth Glasser has made an important contribution to our understanding of the role Puerto Rican musicians have played in the development, growth and evolution of Latin music today. Highly recommended!

This book is everything other reviewers have said, and more. For it doesn't cover some encapsulated mono-ethnic phenomenon. Long before Diz, Puerto Ricans were a permanent part of mainstream jazz. They made up almost half JR Europe's WWI Hellfighters band, and were present in some of the most famous black swing bands (and you thought it was just Juan Tizol!) Moreover it was largely PR music and musicians who added to Cuban roots what turned them into US salsa. As anybody who has read my LATIN JAZZ knows, I couldn't have written parts of it without Glasser and I'm glad to acknowledge the fact publicly. JOHN STORM ROBERTS

I wrote a paper in Graduate School on "The Impact of American Colonialism on Puerto Rican Music." Ms. Glasser's book served as a principal resource. I was totally unaware of the existence of such notables as Rafael Hernandez and Pedro Flores. The story behind the origins of the song, Preciosa, was fascinating. It has become my personal anthem. Today, there is a new version of the song being played on the radio by Marc Anthony. It always brings a tear to my eye. In Ms. Glasser's book I have found a part of my heritage that I didn't know existed. I was born and raised in New York City. My parents came to this country from Puerto Rico in 1948. They, like many of the self exiled musicians in the book, came to New York from Puerto Rico seeking a better life and economic prosperity. This is a wonderful book, with plenty of anecdotes and heart warming narratives. I intend to buy a copy for my parents and my brother. It is a part of our history that must be told. Bravo, Ms. Glasser.

Ruth Glasser hace un recorrido sobre la música latina y sus interpretes en la ciudad de Nueva York, dando un conocimiento mucho mayor al lector sobre cómo, a lo largo del tiempo, la música hispana fue porta-estandarte de países latinoamericanos en esta ciudad a comienzos del siglo 20.

Ruth Glasser illustrates how the political circumstances, the particular situations of some of the social sectors, and the geographical settings of the Puerto Rican population produced the musicians that created a musical corpus which in turn identified Puerto Ricans as a people in the first half of the 20th century. The text gives an account of how those musicians forged the template of popular Puerto Rican music for the century, while contributing to the popular music of other Latin American cultures. It helps us comprehend, from a music perspective, how the interaction of innumerable conditions and situations and their consequences sculptured the elements of a national culture.

The reason I say that is that many of the race and segregation issues which Latinos had to deal with, and how they dealt with those issues is largely unknown by the public at large. These include the proliferation of "white" and "colored" latino bands, the role Puerto Ricans had in mainstream US bands based on their high chart reading skill, and of particular interest to Puerto Ricans is the section on the history of the Plena. The writing style is a little bit too academic. Even though it was written as an academic study, I still think the author sometimes used more ink than needed to make philosophical logical arguments to academia.

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