

# LATUNES

## An Introduction

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*Abstract: Beginning in the 1930s, a new type of song entered American popular music—the so-called “latune,” that is, a tune with a Latin beat and an English-language lyric. Although latunes drew on a variety of genres, what prevailed were Cuban rhythms, and particularly the “rhumba,” an elastic term (unrelated to the Afro-Cuban rumba) that included up-tempo sones as well as languid boleros. At one time or another, many of the best-known American composers—Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Cole Porter, Hoagy Carmichael, Johnny Mercer—contributed to the latune songbook. In spite of their popularity, however, latunes have elicited little attention, for they have been regarded as vapid, watered-down versions of authentic Latin American music. Arguing that these songs furnish important clues about the United States’ absorption of Latin American culture, this essay undertakes a study of the history, features, and principal categories of latunes.*

It seems as though there is always bad news coming from Cuba. This year it was the revolution, and last year it was Cuban music.

*Life Magazine (1933)*

In *You’ll Never Get Rich* (1941), the first of two musicals starring Fred Astaire and Rita Hayworth, Fred (in the unlikely role of a GI) agrees to put on a show at the base where he is stationed. During the rehearsal, he gives instructions to the stagehands: “I want a tree right here”—and a fake palm tree appears; “Bring me a house”—and a Spanish-style cardboard facade slides onto the stage; “Boys, now I want an ocean”—and the boys bring in the backdrop, a large image of the entrance to the Havana harbor as seen from the seaside avenue called El Malecón. Once the scenery is in place, Rita Hayworth appears, looking señorita-lovely in a sheer black dress with a ruffled skirt. Leaning against the palm tree, Fred launches into Cole Porter’s “So Near and Yet So Far,” whose lyric alludes both to Rita and to Cuba. After he finishes singing, he and Rita dance the most elegant rhumba ever captured on film.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the song that Fred and Rita perform was sometimes called a “latune,” that is, a tune with a Latin beat and an English-

language lyric.<sup>1</sup> Although latunes drew on a variety of genres, what prevailed were Cuban rhythms, and particularly the “rhumba” (or “rumba”), an elastic term (unrelated to the Afro-Cuban rumba) that included up-tempo *sones* and *guarachas* as well as languid *boleros*.<sup>2</sup> Cole Porter, who regarded himself as a “self-adopted Latin” (Hubler 1965, 52), wrote many rhumbas, among them some that have become standards: “In the Still of the Night,” “Night and Day,” “I’ve Got You under My Skin,” and “Begin the Beguine” (which, as Roberts remarks, should have been called “Begin the Bolero” [1999b, 83]). Porter was not alone. For more than thirty years, latunes figured prominently in the American songbook. In the 1930s, Anglophone versions of tunes like “Canto Siboney” (“Siboney”), “El mani-ero” (“The Peanut Vendor”), and “Mamá Inés” (“Mama Inez”) were played often over the radio or on band outings. Recordings of Ernesto Lecuona’s “Say Sí Sí” (“Para Vigo me voy”) sold more than a million copies (Sargeant 1994, 154). In 1940, Lecuona’s “The Breeze and I” (“Andalucía”) reached the top spot on *Your Hit Parade*, as did Artie Shaw’s interpretation of “Frenesi.” The following year, five different recordings of “Perfidia” were top-fifteen hits, and during the 1940s, a war-weary nation found solace in sentimental songs like “Amapola,” “Bésame mucho,” “María Elena,” “You Belong to My Heart” (“Solamente una vez”), and “Always in My Heart” (“Estás en mi corazón”), which not only earned a nomination for an Academy Award but also was featured in the Bugs Bunny cartoon “Swooner Crooner.”

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, latunes continued to flourish. In 1954 alone, Perry Como had a million-seller with “Papa Loves Mambo,” while Rosemary Clooney scored with “Mambo Italiano,” the Ames Brothers with “The Naughty Lady of Shady Lane” (a rhumba about a nine-day-old “lady”), and Dean Martin with “Sway” (the original was Pablo Beltrán Ruiz’s “Quién será la que me quiere a mí”). On Broadway, the musical *Pajama Game* (1954) included the tango-tinged “Hernando’s Hideaway.” *Damn Yankees*, which premiered the following year, showcased the rhumba “Whatever Lola Wants, Lola Gets,” as well as a send-up of the mambo “Who’s Got the Pain (When They Do the Mambo)?” A couple of years

1. For the term “latune,” see *Variety* 1991a and 1991b.

2. According to John Storm Roberts, “Virtually all of the pieces known to the U.S. as rumbas were in fact something else. Mama Inez was a tango conga, and Siboney began life as a *danzón*, but the majority were *sones*” (1999b, 77). Writing in 1948, dance mavens Josephine and Albert Butler report that Ernesto Lecuona, whom they asked for a definition of the rhumba, was “more than faintly grieved because Americans endowed all the subtle, fascinating Cuban rhythms with the term *Rumba*—a term which has a tinge of odium to the native” (Butler and Butler 1948, 34). For a detailed discussion of the terminological history of *rumba*, see Beardsley, “Rumba-Rhumba . . .” A handy guide to the multiple genres of Cuban popular music is Helio Orovio’s 2004 *Cuban Music from A to Z*.

later, mambo mania safely past, rock-and-roller Sam Cooke observed in a song, “Everybody loves to Cha Cha Cha”—a title become reality in doo-wop hits like “Stay” and “Little Darlin’” and pop ballads like “Diana” and “Johnny Angel.” When the bossa nova became all the rage, Elvis Presley had a million-seller with “Bossa Nova Baby” and Astrud Gilberto did likewise with “The Girl from Ipanema.”<sup>3</sup>

Another staple of these years was the Latin-themed LP. Many major stars (and some lesser lights) recorded LPs filled with latunes, including Tony Martin’s *Go South Young Man* (1958), Mel Tormé’s *Olé Tormé* (1959), Irving Fields’s *Bagels and Bongos* (1959), Peggy Lee’s *Latin ala Lee!* (1960), Victor Feldman’s *Latinsville!* (1960), Dean Martin’s *Cha Cha de Amor* (1961) and *Dino Latino* (1962), and the soundtrack to Elvis Presley’s *Fun in Acapulco* (1963). Even Tito Puente got into the act with *My Fair Lady Goes Latin* (1964), which contained such gems as a mambo version of “Get Me to the Church on Time” and “The Rain in Spain” played as a bolero. One of the last entries into this latune fest is Doris Day’s *Latin for Lovers* (1965), with a title swiped from one of Xavier Cugat’s old albums, which covered several songs by Antonio Carlos Jobim as well as “Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps” (“Quizás, quizás, quizás”), “Be Mine Tonight” (“Noche de ronda”), and “Be True to Me” (“Sabor a mí”). In addition, it offered Latinized versions of American standards like “Fly Me to the Moon” and “Our Day Will Come” (pun on *Day* probably intended). By the mid-1960s, Cuban rhythms had become so pervasive that their contribution to many hit songs—from the Beatles’ “And I Love Her” to Frank Sinatra’s “Strangers in the Night”—went unnoticed.

3. I should also mention the “baby-cha” quintuplets: “There Goes My Baby” (The Drifters), “Take Good Care of My Baby” (Bobby Vee), “Be My Baby” (The Ronettes), “Don’t Worry Baby” (The Beach Boys), and “Baby I’m Yours” (Barbara Lewis). One of the people responsible for the presence of Latin rhythms in rock and roll was Bert Berns (1929–1967), a Brooklyn-born songwriter and record producer who acquired a taste for Cuban music while working in Havana nightclubs during the 1950s. Berns composed or produced such Latin-inflected hits as “Twist and Shout,” “A Little Bit of Soap,” “Under the Boardwalk,” and “Brown-Eyed Girl.” On the relation of rock and roll to Latin music, see Torres (2002, 167) and Emerson (2005, 121–140). Emerson sums up late 1950s Brill Building music as follows: “white writers producing black performers with a Latin beat” (2005, 124). (Many of these white writers had grown up in New York in the 1940s and 1950s listening to Latin bands.) But the story of the Latin influence on 1950s and early 1960s pop music remains to be told in full. “It’s Mashed Potato Time,” Dee Dee Sharp’s 1962 hit, discloses that “the Mashed Potato started a long time ago / with a guy named Sloppy Joe.” The reference to the famous bar in Havana (and later Key West) is a veiled acknowledgment that musically “mashed potato time” has its origins in cha-cha-chá time—as does “The Loco-Motion,” another popular record from 1962 whose punning title winks at the song’s origins. That same year Bobby Rydell had a top-ten hit whose rhythmic heritage was not veiled at all: “The Cha-Cha-Cha.” It begins: “Baby, baby, / come on sway me, / drive me crazy, / do the cha-cha-cha. / Something’s missing / when we’re twisting. / Let’s start kissing / to the cha-cha-cha.”

In spite of their popularity, however, latunes have elicited little attention. When they are noticed at all, they are criticized as vapid, watered-down versions of authentic Latin American music. John Storm Roberts, who has written authoritatively about the “Latin tinge” in American music, calls them “Latinoid” compositions (1999a, 64). Others are more blunt. Robert Louis labeled them “watered-down, emasculated versions of rumba, written or played by musicians who were not brought up with Caribbean rhythms” (Luis 1958, 64). The gendered putdown recurs in Ed Morales’s recent survey of Latin music in the United States, in which latunes are dismissed as “flaccid Afro-Cuban music, rearranged to accommodate show-tune lyrics and with little room for improvisation” (2003, 20). As far back as the early 1940s, the Latin tinge had two distinct hues: the darker one was visible in the music of Machito’s Afro-Cubans and similar groups, a “high-octane rumba style” that, as *Time* remarked, could “rattle the fenders off a jeep” (1943, 40); the lighter hue was on display in society bands like Xavier Cugat’s (whose last name was said to rhyme with *glue pot*). Whereas Machito catered to a Latino or black clientele, Cugat became rich and famous by satisfying white America’s craving for Latinate exotica. As he once put it, “I’d rather play ‘Chiquita Banana’ and have my swimming pool than play Bach and starve” (Cugat 1948, 207).<sup>4</sup>

Although it is undeniable that latunes lack the energy of high-octane music, they are not without charm and interest. Latunes are often silly, but they can also be ingenious and, on occasion, surprisingly artful. At its best, the fusion of Latin beats and English syllables engenders songs gracefully poised on the cultural border of Anglo and Latin America, somewhere between Tin Pan Alley and El Malecón. Like Fred and Rita’s rumba in *You’ll Never Get Rich*, this type of song is “so near” to and yet “so far” from indigenous Cuban music, for while the rhythm may transport us to Havana, the lyric strands us in the United States. However watery and flaccid, these songs constitute a significant but little-studied chapter in the history of the United States’ consumption (and construction) of Latin American culture.<sup>5</sup>

4. Cugat explained his popularity as follows: “the basis of my success is that no other Latin-American orchestra has perfected the American touch in presenting Latin-American tunes. Other bands stress the native side. I do not. Yet I do not emphasize the American side either. I give a distinctive and colorful blending, a formula no other leader has yet had the good fortune to discover” (Cugat 1948, 171). On the two styles of U.S. Latin music during the 1940s, see Díaz Ayala (1981, 326–335) and Roberts’s *The Latin Tinge* (1999b, 86–91).

5. Until Roberts’s *The Latin Tinge* (1979), the influence of Latin rhythms in American music went largely unacknowledged. Even after Roberts’s pioneering book, that influence is sometimes not given its due. Charles Hamm’s *Music in the New World* (1983), which would have been more accurately titled “Music in the United States” (as other parts of the New World are not discussed), says nothing about the Latin influence on U.S. music. Neither do William and Nancy Young in their recent survey *Music of the Great Depression* (2005). If some regard latunes as insufficiently Latin, for others they are not American enough. According

Not every American song with a Latin subject is a *latune*. At least as far back as the middle of the nineteenth century, American songwriters began to find inspiration below the border, often as a result of political or military events, but only rarely did their compositions reflect Latin American musical idioms. In 1897, Victor Herbert penned “Cuban Song,” whose lyric already included the fateful rhyme between *Havana* and *banana* but whose melody or beat had nothing specifically Cuban about it. A few years later, the completion of the Panama Canal inspired “Via Panama,” another tune whose subject matter does not enter into the musical setting. Missing in these songs, as in many others, is the characteristic combination of Latin rhythms and English words.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, *latunes* do not require overt references to Latin America in their lyrics. One of the most recorded, “What a Difference a Day Made” (from María Grever’s “Cuando vuelva a tu lado”), has no Latin content other than the rhythm, but this is enough to give the song its Latin feel. Like most *latunes* from the 1960s, The Drifters’ “Under the Boardwalk” and The Marvelettes’ “Please Mr. Postman” also do without Latin references, even though they are *cha-cha-chás*. The same applies to most of Neil Sedaka’s early hits, beginning with “Oh, Carol” and “Stairway to Heaven.” By setting the sounds of American English to Afro-Cuban rhythmic patterns, *latunes* speak two languages, one cognitive and the other kinetic. As we will see, English’s role as the cognitive language, the one that controls the song’s intellectual content, allows *latunes* to domesticate—that is, to mute and explain—the foreignness of Latin American rhythms.

For practical purposes, one can date the origins of *latunes* from 1931, the year of *The Cuban Love Song*, the first of the so-called maraca musicals that gave Latin-curious Americans the opportunity to sightsee and tune in without ever leaving their theater seats. Capitalizing on the tremendous success of “The Peanut Vendor,” which had been introduced into the United States only a few months earlier, the movie also offered what may have been the first Anglophone bolero, “Cuban Love Song,” popular enough to be included by *Variety* in its “Fifty Year Hit Parade” (Shaw 1998, 94). Also in 1931, other Anglophone versions of Cuban songs were

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to Alec Wilder, a composer and musicologist who authored one of the standard guides to American popular song, the tunes in *Flying Down to Rio* (1933) “show a marked Latin influence” and “don’t truly add to the body of American song writing.” Therefore: “there is no point in going into detail about [Vincent Youmans’s score], simply because of its un-American-ness” (310). For Wilder, the Latin tinge becomes the Latin taint.

6. On nineteenth- and early twentieth-century antecedents of the Latin tinge, see Koegel (2006) and Stevenson (1980). Although beyond the scope of this essay, notice should also be taken of the (Iberian) Spanish presence in American music, for which see Stein (2002), and of the Mexican origin of such traditional songs as “Allá en el Rancho Grande,” improbably recorded in English by Bing Crosby. I would like to thank John Koegel for bringing these references to my attention.

published or recorded: “Adios,” “African Lament” (“Lamento africano”), “Green Eyes” (“Aquellos ojos verdes”), “Mama Inez” (“Mama Inés”), “Maria My Own” (“María la O”), “Marta (Rambling Rose of the Wildwood)” (“Marta”), and “Yours” (“Quiéreme mucho”)—as was “When Yuba Plays the Rumba on His Tuba,” which exemplified the tendency to accompany latunes with novelty lyrics.<sup>7</sup> These songs and others like them made possible the vogue of Cuban music during the Depression years. Already in August 1931, the American Society of Teachers of Dancing, lobbying for “a renaissance of grace,” lambasted “the short steps and stomping of the Cuban rhumba” (Beardsley 1994). A few years later, in 1934, an anonymous wag lamented in *Life Magazine*: “Radio bands can kill a tune in six weeks but they don’t seem to be able to do anything about that Cuban music.” By 1936, the American Society of Teachers of Dancing had been forced to change its tune, if not its tone: Philip Nut, its president, complained in the *New York Times* that the continuing popularity of the rhumba had caused “the doom of ‘Swing.’”

Two lyricists who played a major part in the early history of latunes were Marion Sunshine (1894–1963) and L. Wolfe Gilbert (1886–1970). The versatile Sunshine, who started her career in vaudeville as part of the sister act Tempest and Sunshine, married the Cuban bandleader Mario Antobal (brother to the better-known Don Azpiazu) and wrote many of the songs performed by his orchestra, Antobal’s Cubans. During her long career, she wrote lyrics (and sometimes music) to many Latin rhythms: danzón (“My Margarita”), conga (“Here Comes the Conga”), samba (“Playtime in Brazil”), mambo (“Mama, I Wanna Mambo”), and bossa nova (“Bossa Nova Stomp”). She also authored or coauthored novelty latunes: “The Moon over Cuba Was High and So Was I,” “They All Look Alike to Pancho,” “The Cuban in Me,” and “El Presidente,” a curious war conga published in 1942 that sings the praises of FDR.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to collaborating with Sunshine on the lyric of “The Peanut Vendor,” L. Wolfe Gilbert penned the words to “Marta,” “Mama Inez,” “Green Eyes,” “African Lament,” and “Maria My Own.” Not known for his modesty, Gilbert took credit for “starting the Latin rhumba craze in America”: “The tunes were brought into the country; I saw their potential, wrote American lyrics, and they had their vogue” (Gilbert 1956, 166).<sup>9</sup>

7. It is hard to believe that Herman Hupfeld, who thought up the silly song about Yuba down in Cuba with his tuba, also composed “As Time Goes By”—and in the same year. For more on Hupfeld, whose only hits were two such different songs, see Friedwald (2002, 213–241).

8. I am indebted to John Koegel for the sheet music to Sunshine’s war conga. Sunshine was not alone in giving the conga a military turn during this period, as is shown by “I Came, I Saw, I Conga’d” (1941), recorded by the England-based bandleader Edmundo Ros.

9. Composer Burton Lane made an analogous claim: “One of my earliest songs was ‘Tony’s Wife.’ I wrote it with Harold Adamson. It was a rhumba, probably the first American-written

Even if Wolfe started the craze—a dubious claim—credit for its longevity also belongs, at least in part, to such figures as Bob Russell (1914–1970), who penned the English lyrics to such latune standards as “Babalú,” “Brazil,” “Frenesí,” “María Elena,” and “At the Crossroads” (“Malagueña”), and to the team of composer Harry Warren and lyricists Mack Gordon and Leo Robin, which provided the songs for Twentieth Century-Fox’s cycle of maraca musicals: *Down Argentine Way* (1940), *Weekend in Havana* (1941), *That Night in Rio* (1941), and *The Gang’s All Here* (1943). Asked about his qualifications to write Latin tunes, Mack Gordon replied: “I feel confident of turning out a good job—I’ve been smoking Havanas for fifteen years!” (Woll 1980, 69).

Latunes number into the hundreds, if not thousands. In the early 1930s, music publisher E. B. Marks listed almost six hundred Latin songs in his catalog (Díaz Ayala 1981, 328). Fifteen years later, the author of an essay on Cuba’s Tin Pan Alley calculated that 20 percent of all the music played over the radio, in jukeboxes, or in Hollywood movies was Cuban (Sargeant 1947, 145). During the heyday of the Hollywood musical, most musicals included a Latin number, whether or not the plot called for it, as did many other movies with songs. Although some latunes derived from Latin American compositions, many others were written originally with an English lyric, as happened during the 1950s with the plethora of mambo-inspired songs: “Mambo Baby,” “Mambo Man,” “Middle Aged Mambo,” “Mambo in the Moonlight,” “Early Dawn Mambo,” “Loop-de-Loop Mambo,” “Mambo Rock,” “My Yiddishe Mambo,” “Mambo Shevitz,” “We Wanna See Santa Do the Mambo,” “I Saw Mommy Doing the Mambo (with You Know Who),” and “They Were Doing the Mambo (and I Just Sat Around).” A columnist for *Melody Maker* dismissed these hybrids in no uncertain terms: “So much for the dubious attempt of popularizing the mambo by simplifying its beat, adding lyrics or building it around a novelty. For those who love and respect Cuban music, it was a wretched lot—poorly invented, poorly played, and in poor taste” (Borneman 1955, 5). Nonetheless, mamboids did very well; during a single month in 1954, American record companies released no fewer than ten “mambo-styled platters” (*Variety* 1954).<sup>10</sup>

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rhumba. . . . The song never became a big hit, but it became a much-played song for that period. I think there was a singer by the name of Ramona [Estrild Raymona Myers] with Paul Whiteman’s band who recorded it, and the song made a lot of noise” (qtd. in Shaw 1998, 33). Lane’s lyricist, Harold Adamson, wrote the words to the *I Love Lucy* theme. Hoagy Carmichael also claimed that his “One Night in Havana,” written after a visit to Cuba in the late 1920s, was “the first American attempt at a rumba with gourds and sticks” (1946, 140). A decade later, fitted with a new lyric, “One Night in Havana” turned into “Chimes of Indiana” and was eventually adopted as one of the two alma maters of Indiana University, which Carmichael had attended.

10. On the mambo craze of the 1950s, see “A Brief History of Mambo Time,” in Pérez Firmat 1994 (79–102).

Latunes can be grouped into three classes according to their subject matter. The first group includes the ubiquitous geographical latunes, songs that purport to describe a Latin American locale: "Ah-bah-nah, Coo-bah," "Managua, Nicaragua," "It Happened in Monterrey," "It Began in Yucatan," "In Santiago, Chile ('Taint Chilly at All)," "I'll Si-Si Ya in Bahia," "You Can't Say No in Acapulco," "You Can in Yucatan," and many others. Little in the lyric of these songs addresses the distinctive features of the cities or regions named in the titles. In 1930, a plug in the *Washington Post* for the radio program *The Lucky Strike Hour* included the following: "Those who have visited Cuba, Mexico or other Latin American countries, will find this atmosphere faithfully portrayed in a novelty, 'The Peanut Vendor,' to be performed by Lew White, organist, tonight" (Heinl 1930, 10). Other than the curious choice of instrument, what is striking is the use of the word *atmosphere*. Instead of a continent with two languages and two dozen countries, Latin America is a singular atmosphere into which national differences evaporate. Irving Berlin's "I'll See You in C-U-B-A," composed in 1920 in response to the Volstead Act and revived for the musical *Blue Skies* (1946), also begins by invoking an atmosphere: "Not so far from here / There's a very lively atmosphere / Everybody's going there this year."

This atmospheric view of Latin America underlies the paradoxical "so near, yet so far" stance that typifies American approximations to Latin American culture. Lacking solidity and concreteness, atmospheric Latin Americanism makes possible acquaintance without contact. It turns distance into a psychological category and divorces proximity from location. Whether applied only to Cuba or to Latin America as a whole, atmospheric Latin Americanism is a mode of intimacy, a mechanism for cultural appropriation that, paradoxically, has the effect of keeping the appropriated object at a distance. "Miami Beach Rhumba," recorded by Xavier Cugat in the 1940s, tells the story of a young woman who, on her way to Cuba to learn how to rhumba, found what she was looking for in Miami Beach—the Cuban atmosphere:

I started out to go to Cuba, soon I was at Miami Beach.  
 There, not so very far from Cuba, oh what a rhumba they teach.  
 Palm trees are whispering "yo te quiero," what could I do but stay a while?  
 I met a Cuban caballero, we danced in true Latin style.  
 So I never got to Cuba, but I got all its atmosphere.  
 Why even Yuba and his tuba, they played a night right here.

As this lyric suggests, atmosphere contains both musical and cultural elements. Musically, atmosphere arises primarily from the beat of Latin or Latinoid tune; thus, according to the music historian Sigmund Spaeth, "the Latin atmosphere" of many of Cole Porter's songs comes from the underlying rhumba rhythm that was one of the trademarks of his style (1948,



505). But musical atmosphere also conjures up cultural stereotypes like the amorous palm trees and the Cuban caballero of Berlin's tune. Praising Porter's "Begin the Beguine," Spaeth adds that "the dramatic and highly emotional text" effectively maintains "the Latin atmosphere" of the song, an observation that plays on the cliché that Latin Americans are excitable (1948, 505).

As do other Latinoid songs, geographical latunes generate an enveloping haze, kinetic as well as cognitive, that turns Latin America into a continent of interchangeable parts. The original title of *Down Argentine Way* (1941), the first musical inspired by Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy, was "Down in Rio." When the country was changed, Carmen Miranda remained, singing in Portuguese. Because an atmosphere has no history, no borders, no flag, atmospheric Latin Americanism breeds denationalization, the single most important feature in American culture's perception of Latin America. Applied to latunes, denationalization produces incongruities that, depending on one's mood and mind-set, are either comical or insulting. In October 1932, for the Bolero Ball held at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City, the hotel was decorated "in Argentine fashion" and the show featured "Argentine dancers" and "Gaucho guitarists" (*New York Times* 1932). A couple of years later, when bandleader Luis del Campo was headlining at a midtown nightclub, the *New York Times* (1934) remarked: "He is, they say, Chilean, and thereby qualified to conduct a show which leans toward rhumba rhythms." Campo, incidentally, was Cuban.

Perhaps more than any other country in Latin America, Brazil was denatured by atmospherics. In *Flying Down to Rio* (1933), the big ballad is a tango and the dance extravaganza, "Carioca," is a rhumba. *Blondie Goes Latin* (1941), based on the popular comic strip, culminates in a "Brazilian Cotillion" that begins as a rumba and ends with a conga (to which Blondie tap-dances). Some years later, in "A Rainy Night in Rio," written for *The Time, the Place, and the Girl* (1946), señoritas have nowhere to "say sí sí"—a reference to the English title of Lecuona's conga, "Para Vigo me voy." In *Copacabana* (1947), Andy Russell sings: "My heart was doing the bolero / under the stars in Rio de Janeiro." Not to be outdone, a few scenes later Carmen Miranda jiggles to a samba that evokes the "pampas from Brazil." And in the 1960s, Paul Anka warbled macaronic Spanish in "Eso Beso," another samba knockoff: "Eso besa, ooh that kiss. / Kiss me mucho, and we'll soar, / And we'll dance the dance of love forever more."

Like Fred Astaire's stage directions, geographical latunes put in place a virtual geography that renders invisible a country's or a region's distinctiveness. That is why it isn't chilly in Chile: because of the atmosphere that envelops it. In "Cuban Pete," the title tune from one of his mostly forgettable movies, Desi Arnaz sings: "You're now in Havana, / where it's always mañana." When he utters these words in the movie, he is in New York; but

the song, like all geographical latunes, transports its listeners—if not by magic, by music—to a place defined primarily by atmosphere. Thus the formula that recurs in titles and texts: “Down Argentine Way,” “Down Havana Way,” “Down Mexico Way”: the directional impetus of *down*, attenuated by *way*, points to a place with contours rather than coordinates. Because “Down Argentine Way” means somewhere in the direction of Argentina, the phrase designates a locale without a location, a fuzzy, generically Latin no-place.

The imaginary habitat that is latune land does have some recurring features. It is usually a tropical island (or, for ease of rhyme, a tropic isle) where palm trees sway in the breeze and waves lap against the shore in *clave*. When you bask in the sun of this beguiling isle, instead of a tan you develop a Latin glow; when you walk in the moonlight, you are bathed in perfume and sighs. Although vegetation abounds, a few species thrive: peanuts, bananas, and coconuts. The female inhabitants of latune land are all señoritas, and the males all caballeros—often gay but never unmanly. (Although there are also people of color on the island, they are usually heard rather than seen.) Some of the local lovelies include Chiquita Banana (also known as the First Lady of Fruit), the improbably named Tangerine (unlike Chiquita, not a fruit but a girl), and Conchita Marquita Lolita Pepita Rosita Juanita Lopez, or the Rose of Juarez for short. Where is this place? According to Cole Porter, it’s in Panama, which he rhymes with Shangri-la (“Visit Panama”). According to Mack Gordon, it’s in Acapulco, though the name doesn’t really matter: “If you can’t say Acapulco, you can call it Paradise” (“In Acapulco”). Perhaps most accurate would be to say that this place, like the hometown of Latin bombshell Lola in *Damn Yankees*, is “somewhere generally in South America” (which does not exclude areas north of South America but south of the Rio Grande).

A second category comprises latunes whose lyrics comment on the music. These self-referential latunes function on several levels. At their most superficial, they are novelties that make fun of the dance steps that go along with the music. On another level, they serve a pedagogical function, as they explain how to accomplish those steps. Most important, the lyrics of these songs exert a normalizing function, minimizing the foreignness of the song with a gloss in a language intelligible to the listener. An early example is the English version of Lecuona’s “Canto Siboney,” which in Spanish is a profession of love for the noble *siboneyes* (Cuba’s indigenous inhabitants who, needless to say, had been extinct for several centuries when Lecuona composed his song). Translated into English, the disappearance of the *siboneyes* is even more absolute, because *Siboney* now refers only to the song, described in colloquial terms in the lyric as “the tune that they croon down Havana way.” Although Lecuona’s “Canto Siboney,” which is best suited to an operatic voice, was not meant to be crooned, the

use of familiar vocabulary says to the American listener, "Even if this song has been imported from Havana, it is no different from other tunes." Significantly, the most popular English-language recording of this song was by Bing Crosby, the quintessential American crooner. Something similar happened to "Mama Inez," which in English becomes a song about the "brand new fandango," the rumba.

Every genre of Latin music, genuine or faux, inspired such songs. In *Swing High, Swing Low* (1937), Dorothy Lamour sings the "Panamania," a dance that "came from the Canal Zone, / that fiery gal zone." In *Argentine Nights* (1940), the Andrews Sisters explain how to do the "Rhumboogie," which combines the steps of rumba and boogie. In *Panama Hattie* (1942), Lena Horne sings "The Sping," "a Cubaninic, Harleminic, Caribbinic, Castilinic thing" (the name of the dance seems to be a blend of *Spanish* and *swing*, or perhaps of *spic* and *swing*). "Six Lessons from Madam La Zonga," from the movie of the same name (1941), consists of a crash course on "the rumba and the new La Conga." Because of the simple moves, the conga inspired more musical lessons than any other dance, among them "Doing the Conga" from *Down Argentine Way* (1940); "Do the La Conga" from *Strike Up the Band* (1940); "Kindergarten Conga" from *Moon over Miami* (1941); and "One, Two, Three, Kick," a Cugat composition. A late-twentieth-century addition to the pedagogical conga line was Gloria Estefan's 1980s hit "Conga," which explained: "It's the music of the islands / with its sugarcane so sweet. / If you wanna do the conga, / come and listen to the beat." Once again in Estefan's lyric, cultural, and musical elements combine to create the Latin atmosphere.

Sometimes the lyrics of these songs center on the effects, deleterious or delightful, of the music. In George and Ira Gershwin's "Just Another Rhumba," the speaker complains that because of the rumba, he can't eat or "slum-bah." In "Caramba, It's the Samba," recorded by Peggy Lee, she laments that, because the samba is the one dance that she cannot do, she will lose her chance at romance. An analogous terpsichorean handicap afflicts Arthur Prysock in "Show Me How to Mambo," and in "Blame It on the Bossa Nova," Eydie Gormé faults the Brazilian rhythm for making her fall in love (earlier incarnations of the same idea: "Blame It on the Rhumba," from the musical *Top of the Town* [1937], and "Blame It on the Samba," from the Disney cartoon film *Melody Time* [1948]). But the definitive anti-Latin-music hymn of all time is surely "South America, Take It Away." Composed for the musical revue *Call Me Mister* (1946) and turned into a hit by Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters, the song voices good-humored irritation at the fad of Latin music and musicals:

Take back your Samba, ay! Your Rumba, ay! Your Conga, ay-ay-ay!  
I can't keep movin', ay! My chassis, ay! Any longer, ay-ay-ay!

Now maybe Latins, ay! In their middles, ay! Are built stronger, ay-ay-ay!  
But all this takin' to the quakin' and this makin' with the shakin' leaves me  
achin',

[olé!]<sup>11</sup>

The third category of latunes includes songs that exploit Latin America's reputation as a sensual, romantic locale, a fiesta for the heart and the senses. Many of these—"South American Joe," "Old Don Juan," "Rita the Rumba Queen," "Cleo from Rio"—play off the stereotype of the Latin lover or the Latin bombshell. Although in some cases cultural references figure prominently in the lyric, at times the words allude obliquely, if at all, to Latin America. Johnny Mercer's "Tangerine" tells the story of a glamour girl from Argentina, "the beauty of her race," who turns out to be an empty bombshell, for her dark eyes and red lips result from artful makeup (a similar situation obtained in "She's a Latin from Manhattan").<sup>12</sup> In contrast, "The Lady in Red," an up-tempo rumba from *In Caliente* (1935), describes a sexy young woman (by implication the film's star, Dolores de Río) but without identifying her as Latin American. Likewise, in "Hernando's Hideaway," Latinness is all in the air: the tango rhythm and the clicking of castanets (the hideaway itself is somewhere generally in middle America).

More interesting are the ballads that translate Latin American boleros, for in these instances the Spanish lyrics supply a precedent for the English words. Although sometimes the English follows the original closely (two examples: "Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps" and "Quizás, quizás, quizás," and "Come Closer to Me" and "Acércate más"), for the most part the connection between Spanish and English words is tenuous. In English, "Adiós Muchachos," a tango whose speaker intones a deathbed good-bye to his friends, becomes a song about a man who "gets ideas" while dancing with a woman ("I Get Ideas").<sup>13</sup> Just as unexpected is the transformation under-

11. The reply to Bing was not long in coming. The following year Desi Arnaz wrote and recorded "I'll Take the Rhumba," in which an exasperated Desi worries that the "conspiracy" against Latin music will put him out of business: "We gave the rhumba to North America / and now they want us to take it back. / Folks are saying when they do the rhumba, / they crack—boing!—their sacroiliac."

12. Mercer explained that he called the girl Tangerine because of the "Latin flavor" of Victor Schertzinger's melody (Furia 2003, 145), but he does not say why the word *tangerine* should connote Latinness, unless it is because of the spectral resemblance to *tango* underscored by the rhyme with *Argentine*. In addition to the negligible "Conga from Honga" (from the movie *The Fleet's In* [1942]), Mercer also wrote latently Latin lyrics to Harold Arlen's "That Old Black Magic," whose rumba rhythm perhaps suggested black magic, and to Duke Ellington's "Satin Doll," who "speaks Latin" and does her rhumbas "with uno."

13. Like other Latin American standards, "Adiós muchachos" inspired more than one English lyric. Carol Raven's version, "Farewell Boys," which follows the Spanish words closely, was performed in the 1930s by the Italian tenor Nino Martini but, to my knowledge,

gone by three Lecuona classics: "Andalucía" turns into a thoroughly un-Spanish "The Breeze and I," a number-one song on *Your Hit Parade* in 1940; "La comparsa," which evokes the sound of a Cuban carnival celebration, becomes "For Want of a Star," a sentimental fox-trot; and "Danza lucumi" is reborn as "From One Love to Another," another ballad. Mitchell Parish, who wrote the lyrics to both "Star Dust" and "Sidewalks of Cuba," remarks that when putting words to Latin songs he did not let himself be governed by the "foreign idea" (Shaw 1998, 188). "Let Me Love You Tonight," his version of René Touzet's "No te importe saber," a bolero whose brooding text addresses unresolved tensions between two lovers, turns into a straightforward plea for a night of bliss.

Unlike the translator of nonmusical verse, who can choose whether to reproduce the meter of the original, the lyricist-translator is music dependent, bound by the accentual pattern and syllabic count of the melody. When meter and meaning clash, it is meaning that gives way. Nothing in the lyric of María Grever's "Muñequita linda" explains its translation as "Magic Is the Moonlight," except that both phrases have six syllables in duple meter. Were it not for atmospherics—the bolero rhythm—one would not suspect that "Magic Is the Moonlight" is an import. The stimulus for refashioning "Muñequita linda" as "Magic Is the Moonlight" may have been nothing other than the initial alliteration, which the American lyricist Charles Pasquale exploited to good effect.<sup>14</sup>

No matter how closely or distantly the originals are followed, translations of Spanish lyrics have two features in common. One is the elimination of the racial references that abound in Cuban music. Margarita Lecuona is best known for two compositions with an Afro-Cuban theme: "Babalú," popularized in the United States by Miguelito Valdés and Desi

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was never recorded. Another version faithful to the original, "So Long, Good Fellows" (1940), apparently also went unrecorded (Shapiro and Pollock 1985, 2: 86). Still another English version from the 1940s, "Pablo, the Dreamer," with words unrelated to the original, was recorded by the popular British vocalist, Anne Shelton. "I Get Ideas" was a hit for Tony Martin in 1951.

14. In some instances, the English words to Latin American songs are almost dummy lyrics, that is, provisional words that a lyricist uses to get a feel for the meter and that often are little more than gibberish (though in one famous instance, "Tea for Two," the dummy lyric ended up as the definitive one). When Al Stillman renders "Me gustas tú y tú / y nadie más que tú y tú y tú" (from Bobby Capo's "Piel Canela") as "A new-born rose, a-ding, a-dong. / How beautiful it grows, a-ding, a-dong" ("A-Ding, A-Dong"), the prosodic requirements produce something like a nursery rhyme or a dadaist poem. Perhaps not satisfied with this effort, Stillman wrote another set of lyrics to the song, "Until Tonight," which does without *dings* and *dongs*. Betty Reilly also tried her hand at translating into English, turning "Piel canela" into "I Think of You." Although I have not been able to find recordings with Stillman's or Reilly's lyrics, Capo's popular bolero-mambo also yielded "You Too, You Too," recorded by the Andrews Sisters, whose lyric accomplishes the feat of rhyming *piel canela* with *beach umbrella* and *sarsaparilla*.

Arnaz, both of whom claimed the title of Mr. Babalú, and “Tabú,” which was recorded by many Latin orchestras. In “Tabú,” which begins with an invocation to several African deities, a black man, “the son of slaves,” gives voice to his desire for an *hembra blanca*, something that, of course, is taboo. Written by Bob Russell and recorded by Tony Martin, the English version centers on a man in love with a woman who is taboo, because *he* is promised to someone else. But if falling in love with another woman were really taboo, songwriters would be out of business. What is truly taboo in the English version of Margarita Lecuona’s composition is the motif of interracial romance. As if to reinforce the racial cleansing, Dinah Shore answered Tony Martin with a rumba on the same topic, “Is It Taboo (to Fall in Love with You)?”

This whitening-out occurs throughout latune land. “Mama Inez,” popularized in the United States by Maurice Chevalier, eliminates the black speaker of the original; in Chevalier’s French-accented interpretation, “Ay Mamá Inés, / todos los negros / tomamos café,” morphs into “Oh mon Inez, / No Cuban rum’s / Like la rhum-ba for me.” Just as Marion Sunshine turns “La negra Quirina” into “The Cuban Belle,” Marjorie Harper renders “Negra consentida” as “My Pet Brunette”—a translation that retains the idea of the dotted-on beloved but changes skin color to hair color. In the spectacular musical finale of *Weekend in Havana* (1941), Carmen Miranda performs another of those faux-Latin dances, “The Nango,” a new craze that has gone over with a “bango from New York to Pango Pango.” According to John Storm Roberts, *Nango* (which Miranda pronounces “Ñango”) derives from *Ñánigo*, the name of the Afro-Cuban sect (1999a, 65), although it may be more likely that the term goes back to *ñanguear*, which means “to twist” or “to bend.” Either way, the lyrics make no reference to the word’s (and presumably, the dance’s) African origins.

The irony, of course, is that this erasure of race is undone by the irrepressible Afro-Cuban atmosphere of many of these songs. Even when Tony Martin sings “Taboo,” the arrangement incorporates a flute line and muted drums that imitate the jungle sounds, though there is nothing in the speaker’s banal predicament to motivate them. Although the Afro-Cuban beat is key to the allure of these songs, black men and women seldom speak (or are spoken about) in the lyrics. Only in the instruments can their voices be heard. This dissonance is even more pronounced in those recordings that incorporate both Spanish and English words, for then the whitening-out in the English lyric clashes with the race-based Spanish lyric, though nobody seems to notice. Because English remains the only cognitive language, Spanish words are reduced to ambient sounds.

The other common feature of translated latunes also involves a pattern of deletions; however, its source is no longer anxieties about race but conventions curbing the expression of sentiment. One of the darkest, most despairing songs in the bolero canon (though originally a waltz), Agustín

Lara's "Noche de ronda," recounts the misery of a man whose beloved has arranged a rendezvous with someone else. At the root of the speaker's predicament is helplessness: he doesn't know where she is, or with whom, or even with how many. Implicit in the lyric is the figure of the fallen woman, the *aventurera*, which recurs in many of Lara's songs. Although the moon is no less fickle than the woman—it too is making the rounds—the speaker begs it to tell his beloved that *rondas* lead only to heartbreak and tears. Of course, the only tears in the song are shed by the speaker, who secretly wishes for himself what he counsels against: a rendezvous with his beloved. And even as he rails against *rondas*, he stages a rendezvous with the moon that, like a streetwalker perhaps, cruises by his balcony.

When Lara went to Hollywood in 1937, he brought "Noche de ronda" with him. Adapted by Sonny Burke (who a few years later would kick-start the mambo fad by covering Dámaso Pérez Prado's "Qué rico mambo"), an English version was filmed for the B-musical *Lost in a Harem* (1944) but cut at the last minute. Retitled "Forever Mine," it made it into another negligible musical, *Masquerade in Mexico* (1945), with a new lyric by Bob Musel and Eddie Lisbona (who also cowrote English lyrics to Lara's "Granada"). But it was not until another prolific latune smith, Sunny Skylar, turned "Noche de ronda" into "Be Mine Tonight" (1951) that the song enjoyed moderate success.<sup>15</sup> After Skylar's version was featured in *Havana Rose* (1951), starring Estelita Rodríguez, the "Cuban Fireball," several well-known singers recorded it: Dinah Shore, Tony Martin, The Ames Brothers, Andy Williams, Doris Day, and Abbe Lane (backed by Tito Puente's band).

Comparing Lara's and Skylar's lyrics, the first thing one notices is the different settings. The pathos of "Noche de ronda" emerges in large part from the scene sketched in the lyric: alone, unable to sleep, the speaker stands on his balcony and looks up at the moon that peeks from behind the clouds.

Luna que se quiebra  
sobre la tiniebla  
de mi soledad,  
¿a dónde vas?  
Dime si esta noche  
tú te vas de ronda  
como ella se fue.  
¿Con quién está? (Márquez 1992, 91)

15. Skylar also wrote the English lyrics to Consuelo Velázquez's "Bésame mucho," Gabriel Ruiz's "Amor," and the Rigual Brothers' "Cuando calienta el sol." In most English-language sources, the composer of "Noche de ronda" is mistakenly given as María Teresa Lara, who was Agustín's sister. To dodge contractual obligations with music publishers, Lara copyrighted some of his songs, including "Noche de ronda," under his sister's name.

Changing the time of day, the place, and the circumstances, Skylar portrays a romantic rendezvous, almost as if the lyric were now spoken by the unknown rival of Lara's protagonist. Rather than interrogate the distant moon, Skylar's speaker addresses his beloved directly:

See the setting sun,  
the evening's just begun  
and love is in the air.  
Be mine tonight.  
At a time like this  
would you refuse the kiss  
I'm begging you to share.  
Be mine tonight.

In the same slot in the lyric where Lara puts the questions that summarize the speaker's predicament—"¿A dónde vas?" "¿Con quién está?"—Skylar inserts not a question but a command: "Be mine tonight." Instead of falling on the key interrogatives—*dónde* and *quién*—the principal stress in the line falls on the possessive *mine*. And rather than ending the phrase with an open vowel that underscores the speaker's uncertainty, Skylar gives the plea an air of finality by the sense and sound of *tonight*.

Although Lara's lyric is far more artful than Skylar's, what interests me is not the relative merits of the two sets of words but the differences in affect. In Mayra Montero's *La última noche que pasé contigo* (1991), a fictional homage to late-flowering lust, one of the protagonists sums up the philosophy of bolero as "sufrir con elegancia [y] perder con dignidad" (1991, 103). Sorrow and loss—these are the twin coordinates in bolero's emotional compass. Converting passion into pain, the bolero subject is a *vir doloris*, "amigo viejo del dolor" ("Tu condena"), and the course of the love affair a via crucis (Castillo Zapata 1990, 7). Not so with the protagonist of "Be Mine Tonight." The agony in "Noche de ronda," whose waltz tempo cruelly underscores the wanderings of the speaker's beloved, finds no echo in the English version, a song of conquest rather than loss. Lara insists on his protagonist as affective subject: the adjective *triste* projected onto the night, is repeated at the beginning of the verse: "Noche de ronda, / qué triste pasas, / qué triste cruzas, / por mi balcón." Verbs of affect recur in the rest of the lyric—*herir*, *lastimar*, *morir*, *esperar*, *hacer daño*, *dar pena*—a sequence that culminates in *llorar*, the paradigmatic verb of sentimental poetry (McGann 1996, 7). Little of this flood of feeling carries over into Skylar's lyric, whose speaker is focused on thoughts of possession. For him, the via crucis is a garden path.

"Be True to Me," the latune version of another classic bolero, "Sabor a mí," corroborates the varying erotic temperament of boleros and their Anglophone clones. Composed by Álvaro Carrillo in 1959, "Sabor a mí" is not only one of the last great boleros but also one of the most daring. Like Tin Pan Alley ballads, boleros typically employ a euphemistic vocabulary



that spiritualizes physical desire. Alternating between the discourse of the soul and that of the body, “Sabor a mí” undermines the poetry of euphemism even as it pays tribute to it:

Tanto tiempo disfrutamos de este amor,  
nuestras almas se acercaron tanto así,  
que yo guardo tu sabor  
pero tú llevas también  
sabor a mí. (Márquez 1992, 120)

Starting from the Neoplatonic conceit of two souls merging, the third line suddenly brings us down to earth: *amor* rhymes with *sabor*, which suggests that *disfrutar*, mentioned in the first line, involved more than the couple’s souls. To be sure, this is not the first instance of gustatory language in a bolero—“Sabor de engaño” by Mario Álvarez and “Sabor de besos” by Gonzalo Curiel are antecedents—but Carrillo’s image has a directness absent from earlier uses. “Sabor de engaño” is a metaphor; “sabor de besos” shouldn’t be, except that it is the tropical night that kisses. Unlike its predecessors, “Sabor a mí” calls attention to the materiality of *the sabor* by blurring the line between the literal and the metaphorical.

What is the indelible taste that the speaker has left on his beloved? The implication is that she is full of his sabor because he deflowered her, a motif that appears frequently in boleros. Even though he cannot aspire to be her *dueño* because he is poor (insinuating that she is another *aventurera*), she is his because he has possessed her. This claim culminates in a stanza that has become proverbial:

Pasarán más de mil años, muchos más.  
Yo no sé si tenga amor la eternidad.  
Pero allá tal como aquí,  
en la boca llevarás,  
sabor a mí.

Having wavered all along between the literal and the figurative, in closing the speaker plants himself firmly on the side of the literal. His sabor is no diaphanous trace, but the physical taste of his mouth on hers (like the ubiquitous *alma* and *corazón* of bolero lyrics, *boca* is also often euphemistic). Although he doesn’t know whether love is eternal, he has no doubt that she will carry his taste beyond the grave: *Sabor vincit omnia*.

Consider now what happens to “Sabor a mí” in the voice of Doris Day, Hollywood’s eternal virgin. With lyrics by Mel Mitchell, “Be True to Me” is no less periphrastic than its model, but it addresses a different moment in the relationship. Like other boleros, “Sabor a mí” is retrospective—indeed, postcoital: the “tanto tiempo” of the consummated love affair weighs on the present and the future. What Rafael Castillo Zapata has labeled bolero’s “monstrous mnemonics” is very much in evidence in this song (1990, 71). In “Be True to Me,” however, there is no past to recall or overcome,

for the lyric is not only prospective but, more accurately, preemptive. Day seeks assurance that if she proves her love with a kiss (euphemisms, still), her beloved will reciprocate with unswerving loyalty.

If I prove how much I love you with each kiss,  
will you cross your heart and promise this:  
that it's more than just a thrill,  
that you love me and you will  
be true to me?

Essentially a retread of one of Day's biggest hits from the 1950s, "If I Give My Heart to You," these words seek to extract a promise of marriage—what the speaker calls a "solemn vow"—in exchange for sex. As in "Sabor a mí," the underlying issue is the woman's virginity. If the male subject of "Sabor a mí" staked his claim of possession on having deflowered her, the female subject of "Be True to Me" tries to make sure, sweetly but insistently, that she does not prove her love without getting something in return. What is unsavory bitterness in the former is cautious expectation in the latter. In spite of the tender melody, "Sabor a mí" is vindictive, quietly fierce; the taste it leaves in the listener's mouth is that of sour grapes. In contrast, the speaker in "Be True to Me" is reserved but eager, "feeling feelings that I've never felt before." If "Sabor a mí" is a song of experience, "Be True to Me" is a song of innocence. Both dramatize subjects at risk, but whereas the male bolero subject seeks revenge for the damage supposedly done to him, the female speaker of the latune tries to protect herself from potential harm.

An examination of other paired songs—"Solamente una vez" and "You Belong to My Heart"; "Cuando se quiere de veras" and "Yours"; "Tu felicidad" and "Made for Each Other"; "Frenesí" and its English homonym—would confirm this pattern of changes and deletions. In every case, the English version is less dark, more hopeful. A couple of explanations suggest themselves for this. The first is that, by convention, American ballads tap into different registers of feeling than do boleros. It is not coincidental that the first bolero, composed by Pepe Sánchez around 1883, was titled "Tristezas." Disinclined by tradition to accentuate the positive, boleros do not claim that falling in love is wonderful or predict that love is here to stay. If a bolero asks, "How long has this been going on?" chances are that the occasion is not a first kiss but jealousy over a rival. As Castillo Zapata and others have pointed out, the genre reflects what Lawrence Osborne has termed "sexual pessimism," an insistence on the destructive consequences of romantic love (ix). Ballads like "Be True to Me" and "Be Mine Tonight," however, call attention to the affirmative, life-enhancing aspects of romance. The "love with a laugh" philosophy that Cole Porter predicated of sentimental songs (McBrien 1988, 191) is foreign to the dour spirit of bolero, in which the humor is always ill.

Yet American popular music does have a genre analogous to bolero: the torch song, whose overriding concern is also unhappiness in love.<sup>16</sup> But unlike boleros, whose speakers are predominantly male, torch songs were usually interpreted by women. Especially in the 1930s and 1940s, the outpouring of feeling characteristic of these songs was the province of (sometimes black) female singers, sultry and expressive, who were not held to the same stoic code as the (usually white) male crooner, who was cool and urbane.<sup>17</sup> For this reason, it is difficult to imagine a crooner pointing self-pityingly to his wounds or breaking into tears in the manner of the speaker of "Noche de ronda." In this respect, a bolero is a torch song with the genders reversed: instead of a woman lamenting the indifference of a man, a man laments the fickleness of a woman. To make boleros suitable for American ears, the excess of feeling had to be skimmed and, if necessary, the sex of the singer had to be changed. In this way the Latin atmosphere is retained but emptied of its unseemly emotional charge.

A different kind of explanation for what is lost in the translation from bolero to ballad takes us back to North American cultural transactions with Latin America, and more pertinently, with Latin American music. As John Storm Roberts mentions, in the United States, Latin music has always been perceived as "fun, light-weight and essentially trivial" (1999b, 84), a stereotype that cannot accommodate the complicated tensions and somber lessons of bolero. Like many latunes, the Latin America portrayed in these songs is itself a novelty. The make-believe island that is both cradle and referent of latunes is not a tragic venue; one goes there to forget one's woes and to find romance (not coincidentally, latunes thrived during the Great Depression and World War II). A faithful translation of lyrics such as those of "Noche de ronda" or "Sabor a mí" would be inconsistent with the lighthearted atmosphere of latunes. To make the song palatable, the lyric had to be sweetened, even if that sweetening entailed trivialization.

In the preceding pages, I have only sketched the lineaments of latunes. A great deal remains to be done. Although the lyrical content of latunes did not substantially change for decades, the music did. Not only did the underlying Latin genres vary (from *son* to conga to samba to mambo to chacha-chá to bossa nova), but also the gradual acculturation of Latin rhythms produced modulations in the music. The recordings from the early 1930s of Enric Madriguera or Mario Antobal have a raw, unvarnished sound that sets them apart from their later café-society avatars. And the more "genuine" the sound, the more incongruent the English words. Whereas Antobal's Cubans play "Cachita," a self-described "rumba caliente," Al

16. For an analysis of the torch song, see Moore 2000.

17. It was not until the 1950s that an American male singer, Frank Sinatra, recorded several albums of what he called "suicide songs."

Stillman's feckless lyric describes a young man who is trying to convince a girl to "stop being [her] mother's pet." In another song recorded by Antobal's Cubans, Marion Sunshine comments—in rhumba rhythm—on the stock market crash ("The Night the Lady Said No"). Further study of the accord (or dissonance) between lyric and music would allow for a more complete understanding of how latunes evolved.

A related question concerns deviations from the latune formula. Composed and performed with a specific audience in mind, American Latin music, as Tito Puente once remarked derisively about Cugat, is "commercial" (*Time* 1943, 40). But in this, latunes are no different from other types of popular music, and their apparent uniformity may be misleading. Are the lyrics of Marion Sunshine indistinguishable from those of Sunny Skylar or Mack Gordon? What to make of the fact that even though Tin Pan Alley was an almost exclusively male domain, three of the most prolific latune smiths—Marion Sunshine, Marjorie Harper, and Carol Raven—were women? And what of the staying power of latunes? In spite of oft-repeated predictions that the Latin-music fad would run its course, as the years went by Latin rhythms became increasingly integrated into the mainstream of American pop music. When Don Azpiazu began performing "El manisero" and "Siboney" in New York in the early 1930s, he was playing unheard melodies; by the end of World War II, these songs and many others had become items of Americana, and even unadventurous orchestras like Lawrence Welk's or Guy Lombardo's included Latin numbers in their shows and recordings. Simultaneously familiar and foreign, so near and yet so far, latunes provide insight into how U.S. culture negotiates Latinness, a process that involves creation of an atmosphere impermeable to anything in the foreign culture that does not melt into air.

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