



La Mixta Criolla

¡De Puerto Rico a la Bahía!



STUDY GUIDE



RHYTHMIX CULTURAL WORKS



Dear Teachers and Educators,

Rhythmix is excited to have you and your students join us for the 2022-23 season of **PAL - Performance, Art & Learning**. PAL assemblies are designed to foster awareness of world cultures, stimulate a sense of pride in students' cultural heritage and deepen connections to their communities.

PAL assemblies also serve as a catalyst for arts learning and a springboard for integrating arts education into your classroom.

To help your students gain the most out of each PAL assembly, we suggest that the learning begin before, and continue after, every performance. Utilizing the resources provided, your students can engage more fully with the performance experience, connecting what they see and hear to their personal lives, culture, community and any school subjects you choose.

Aligning with the **California Arts Standards**, the accompanying study guides and slide sets help foster students' artistic competencies, cultivate their appreciation and understanding of the arts, and support them to fully engage in lifelong arts learning.

At Rhythmix, we believe exposure to the arts can be a transformative experience, helping us to learn about ourselves, each other, and the world.

Thank you for joining us on this journey,

Your PALs at Rhythmix



¡De Puerto Rico a la Bahía!

An educational performance by Héctor Lugo y La Mixta Criolla

In this exciting performance, La Mixta Criolla introduces students to the music of Puerto Rico. Through song, dance, and storytelling, we will trace the Island's musical journey all the way back from its Taíno, African, and Spanish-Mediterranean roots to its expressions today.



During this concert students and teachers will:

- * Learn about some of the instruments used in Puerto Rican music such as the *cuatro* guitar, the *barriles*, *panderos* and the *maracas*.
- * Interact with artists through call-and-response songs and rhythmic clapping.
- * Learn how a *güícharo* is made and how it is scraped to produce rhythms and *floreos*, or adornments.
- * Listen to a *plena* song and learn how the three *pandero* drums connect with the *güícharo* scraper to create the *plena* rhythm.
- * Listen to a *seis con décima* song and learn to identify the ten lines of the poem.

- * Watch a *bomba* dance performance and learn about the way *bomba* is used to express a wide range of feelings.
- * Learn the basic dance steps of the *sicá* style of *bomba* and learn how you start a musical conversation with the lead drummer by doing *piquetes* (dance moves) which are marked by the drummer with *golpes* (hits) on the drum.
- * Learn interesting facts about the music, culture and history of Puerto Rico.

About Héctor Lugo and La Mixta Criolla:

La Mixta Criolla is a music and dance ensemble founded by percussionist, singer, songwriter and educator Héctor Lugo. Rooted in the *música criolla*, the creole music, of Puerto Rico and inspired by the soulfulness of Caribbean music, La Mixta Criolla cooks up its unique *mezcla caribeña* with a dose of Bay Area grit. The band's repertoire of originals and funky renditions of standards features a wide range of Afro-Caribbean grooves from *plena*, *bomba*, *guaracha*, *jíbara*, *seis*, and *aguinaldo*, to *merengue*, *cumbia*, *rumba* and *son*. The band's sound is based on the mix of *cueros*, *cuerdas y voces*—skins, strings, and voices—with the *panderos*, *barriles* and *güícharo* providing the rhythmic drive, the *cuatro* guitar and voices delivering the melodies, and the bass anchoring the ensemble.



Héctor Lugo is a percussionist, singer, song-writer, and educator. Born and raised in Puerto Rico, he moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1989 to pursue graduate studies in sociology and Latin American history at UC Berkeley. Shortly thereafter, he began to work with some of the top artists in the Bay Area's Latin, Jazz, and Afro-Caribbean music scenes, dedicating himself to what has become a lifelong study of the performance and teaching of Latin-Caribbean music, history, and culture.

Héctor is the founder and director of *La Mixta Criolla* and of the Bay Area Bomba y Plena Workshop (2000), and a founding member of the Afro-Puerto Rican *bomba* group *Aguacero*. His compositions and arrangements have been featured in the documentary film “Dolores” (PBS, 2017) about the life and work of the great labor organizer and feminist leader Dolores Huertas, in the acclaimed compilation “Salsa de la Bahía,” vol. 2 (Patois Records, 2015), and in *La Mixta Criolla’s AfroTaino* (Round Whirled Records, 2011).



Héctor has been a teaching-artist with SFJAZZ Education since 2012, developing and implementing curricula that explores the connections between music, social studies and language arts. He is also a member of the faculty of the San Francisco Community Music Center, and an artist in residence at La Peña Cultural Center and at the Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts.

THE MUSIC OF PUERTO RICO

Music is a big part of the culture and life of Puerto Ricans. In Puerto Rico, almost every occasion - birth, baptism, birthday, holiday, wedding, wake, march and protest - is celebrated with music. Today many people know of the great Puerto Rican *salsa* and *reggaetón* artists but few know of the roots of the Puerto Rican musical tree.

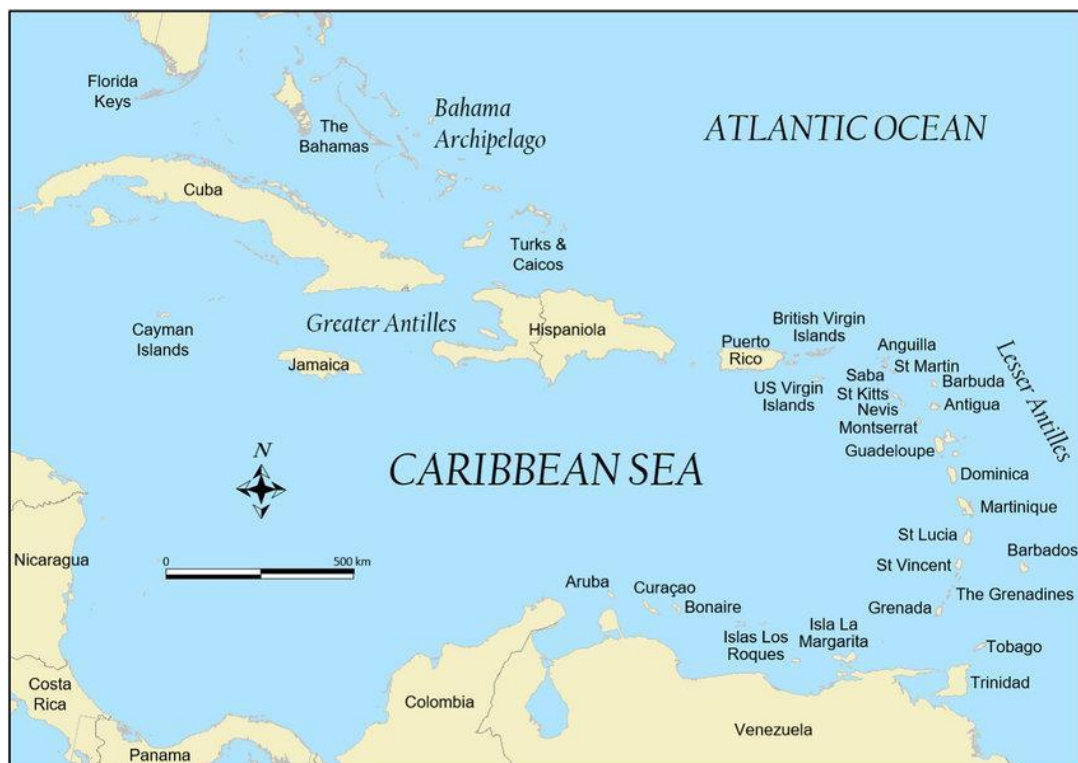


Before there was *salsa* or *reggaetón* there was *bomba*, *música jíbara* and *plena*. The sound of *barriles*, *panderos*, *güícharos* and *cuatros*, the wisdom and wit of the *coros* and *décimas* of *plena* and *jíbaro* songs, the elegance and strength of the *piquetes de bomba* have accompanied Puerto Ricans for hundreds of years. They are a reminder of our

history and our determination to be, and have inspired countless artists in Puerto Rico and beyond.

In this presentation we will listen to examples of *bomba*, *música jíbara* and *plena* music, identify the main instruments and rhythms played in each one of these styles of songs, learn how the instruments are made, and also hear a few stories about the people that created these beautiful styles of music. But first, let's learn a few facts about Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico is the smaller of the *Antillas Mayores*, an archipelago in the Caribbean Sea that also includes Cuba, Jamaica and the island of Hispaniola, divided between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The main island of Puerto Rico is small, about 100 miles long and 35 miles. To the east of Puerto Rico extend the *Antillas Menores*, an archipelago that goes all the way from the Virgin Islands in the north to Trinidad and Tobago off the coast of Venezuela in South America. The music and culture of Puerto Rico reflect over 500 hundred years of encounters, conflict, and collaboration among many different peoples: the Taíno native inhabitants of Borikén, Spanish and European settlers, enslaved Africans and their descendants, immigrants from the Caribbean, South America, and other parts of the world. Puerto Rican music also has been influenced by the culture and music of the United States which have ruled the Island since 1898. Today the people of Puerto Rico are American citizens but cannot vote for President or have representatives in the U.S. Congress.



Bomba Music and Dance



Bomba is the oldest form of Puerto Rican music and dance. It is a living tradition that keeps evolving, changing as it adapts to new challenges. At its heart, *bomba* is a conversation between the singer, the dancer and the lead drummer.

The bomba musical ensemble is made up of two *barriles*, barrel drums made out of wood with a goat skin head, *cuás* (two sticks played on the side of the drum or on a small barrel or bamboo log) and one *maraca*, a shaker made out of the dried fruit of the *higüera* tree.

The *cantaor* or *cantaora*, the lead singer, introduces the song. The *coro* (chorus) responds in call-and-response style as the singer delivers all the verses of the song.



The basic *bomba* rhythms are played by one or more drums known as *buleador* along with the *cuás* and the *maraca*. The *subidor* or *primo* lead drummer then enters into a dialogue with the *bailador* or *bailadora*, the dancer, and marks their steps and movements with specific hits on the drum. There are many different bomba rhythms. Each rhythm is used to express different types of feelings.

The Story of Bomba

The history of *bomba* is rich and inspiring. Bomba is rooted in the experiences and culture of African peoples and their descendants in Puerto Rico. From the early 1500s to the middle of the 1800s thousands of enslaved Africans arrived in Puerto Rico to work in large farms called *haciendas* or plantations. They were separated from their homeland, families and culture, and forced to work alongside other captives that often spoke different languages.

Bomba music was a way to fight back against the injustice of slavery. Through the execution of ancestral drum rhythms, the strength and elegance of the dancing, and the coded messages of *bomba* songs, *bomba* participants could express their humanity with pride and dignity and communicate their feelings, stories, and knowledge without the interference of masters. They could also organize rebellions and attempts to escape from the plantations in search of freedom. That is why *bomba* was banned by the government and plantation owners at various times in history. Today *bomba* has become a truly national music practiced by Puerto Ricans of all racial and economic backgrounds and appreciated by people all over the world. Yet, it remains true to its spirit of resistance, liberation and respect that our ancestors defended.

How to Make a Maraca

In Puerto Rico maracas are made out of the fruit of the *higüera* tree. The most perfectly round fruits are picked for making maracas. The fruits are let to dry out in the sun, which can take up to a month, the pulp and seeds are taken out through two little holes at the top and bottom of it, and then the hollow and dried fruit is filled with small pebbles or dried beans. The last step is attaching a handle to it so that it can be shaken to produce a sound.

You can make maracas by putting seeds, small pebbles or dried beans inside an empty container, a plastic bottle or can.



Plena: el periódico cantado (the sung newspaper)

Plena is one of the most popular genres of Puerto Rican music. It was born in the *barrios*, the working class neighborhoods of the Island's main cities over a hundred years ago. *Plena* songs tell the stories of national and international events and of important events in the daily lives of the people. For this reason *plena* is called the *periódico cantado*, the sung newspaper.



Plena songs are also created to protest injustice and demand a better life for the common folk. However, no matter what the theme of the song is, a good *plena* song must always be witty and uplifting.

The main instruments of the *plena* ensemble are the *panderos* or *panderetas*, hand held frame drums made out of wood or metal capped with a goat skin. Another important instrument in *plena* music is the *güícharo* or *güiro* scraper, a long gourd that is dried, carved with fine parallel grooves, and scraped with a *raspa* made out of metal strings attached to a handle. *Plena* songs, are like *bomba* songs sang in a call and response pattern. Sometimes *plena* groups add other melodic instruments to the ensemble such as the *cuatro*, the acoustic guitar, the accordion, the harmonica, horns, bass and piano.



Música Jíbara



Música jíbara originated in the more remote areas of the Puerto Rican countryside, up in the central mountain ranges, among small farmers and agricultural workers. *Música jíbara* is the result of the encounter among peoples of different cultures and races—the Taíno natives of Puerto Rico, Spanish, Moorish, Arab, African and European immigrants—that blended together over the centuries. As time passed *música jíbara* spread from small villages in the mountains to the large cities of the Island and beyond to Puerto Rican communities in the United States. Nowadays, it is performed in a many different settings, from family gatherings and parties to music festivals and concert halls.

The main instrument in *música jíbara* is the *cuatro*, a ten-string guitar created in Puerto inspired by the string instruments that the Spanish settlers brought to the Island. Other instruments used in *música jíbara* are the acoustic guitar, and the *güícharo* or *güiro* also used in *plena* music. Sometimes, *bongó* and/or other drums are added to the ensemble. Most *música jíbara* is sang in *décimas*, poems of ten lines with a set rhyme and meter. The lead singer, called the *trovador* or *trovadora*, often improvise their *décimas* to express many different feelings and ideas in a musical form.



GLOSSARY AND NOTES FOR EDUCATORS

Archipelago - A group or chain of islands.

Barriles or **bombas** are the names given to the traditional bomba drum. Enslaved Africans in Puerto Rico could not move freely to search for an adequate tree trunk to make a drum. Therefore, they would take the discarded barrels used to transport foodstuffs in and out of the plantations to make drums. Barriles use a goat skin and are tuned with wooden pegs, cunyas, rope tension, known as torniquete, or metal screws. The typical bomba ensemble has three barriles: two *buleadores* that keep the basic rhythms, and one *subidor* or *primo* drum that improvises around the basic rhythms and marks the steps and movements of the dancers.

Batey was the central plaza in Taíno villages or *yucayeques*. There, the community gathered for the *areytos* and other important ceremonies. Today the space where the community gathers to play and dance *bomba* music is referred to as “el batey.”

Bomba is a centuries old Puerto Rican tradition of music and dance rooted in the culture and experiences of Africans and their descendants. Bomba involves singing, drumming and dancing in community. From its very origins *bomba* has been a music of resistance and rebellion, a form of cultural and spiritual survival in the face of oppression and discrimination.

Bombazo is the modern word for the coming together to play and dance bomba in community. Nowadays, there are regular *bombazos* all over Puerto Rico and throughout Puerto Rican communities in the diaspora.

Borikén is the Taíno name for the island of Puerto Rico. Based on this name, Puerto Ricans call themselves “Boricuas.”

Call-and-response is an African-derived musical form and practice consisting of a lead singer alternating with a repeated chorus. It is found in many cultures in the world and is very prominent in the music of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Cimarrones was the name given to slaves who escaped the plantations in search of freedom. Often they would settle in the hinterlands of the islands of the Caribbean creating small villages or blending with other groups that lived beyond the areas of government control. In the English Caribbean they were known as maroons. In Puerto Rico and throughout the Caribbean *cimarrones* influenced the development of an autochthonous Afro-Caribbean culture and often played important social and political roles.

Coded messages - a way of communicating by using words or symbols which represent other words, so that the message is secret unless you know the system behind the code.

Coro (chorus) - This is the main refrain of the song which is repeated by the chorus after each of the lead singer's verses.

Criolla(o) - this is the word we use to describe the blend of Taíno, African and Spanish-Mediterranean cultures that create Puerto Rican music and culture. The meaning of this word is very similar to that of the English word *creole*. There are many creole peoples and cultures throughout the Caribbean region. In the United States the city of New Orleans is also known for its creole culture.

Cuás are two wooden sticks played against the side of the bomba drum, or on a small barrel or piece of bamboo to keep the basic rhythmic pattern of the beat being performed.

Cuatro is a ten string guitar which evolved in Puerto Rico out of the stringed instruments that arrived from Spain and North Africa since the early 16th century. The *cuatro* originally had four strings, thus its name, but since the late 1800s has been made with five sets of double strings tuned in fourths. It is the national instrument of Puerto Rico and used extensively in *música jíbara* and *plena*, but also in other genres such as salsa, jazz, classical, and pop.

Décima - The *décima* is the main lyrical form in *jíbaro* music. It originated in Spain in the 16th century, and became a popular poetic form throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. A *décima* consists of ten verses, of octosyllabic meter, that rhyme in the following manner: ABBAACDDC. The *décima* is also very popular in Cuban *son* and *punto guajiro*, Venezuelan *joropo*, Mexican *son jarocho* and other genres of Latin American music.

Genre of music or music genre - a kind of music. Music of the same genre share common instruments, ways of playing them, rhythms and styles of song and singing that distinguishes it from other genres of music.

Güícharo or güiro is an instrument made out of the dried and hollowed fruit of the *calabazo*, a type of gourd that grows on a vine. The fruit is dried, seeded and then carved with fine parallel grooves and scrapped with a metal *raspa* or *puyero* to produce rhythmic sounds. It is one of the most important instruments of Puerto Rico and different versions of it are used all over Latin America and the Caribbean.

Higüera - A tree is found throughout tropical America. *Maracas de bomba* are made from the fruit of this tree. The gourd-like fruit was used by the Taíno people and later by Puerto Rican country folk to make bowls, containers, ladles, and drinking cups.

Maraca is a shaker made out of the dried fruit of the *higüera* tree which is hollowed and then filled with seeds, pebbles, beans or beads to produce a sound. It was one of the main instruments of the Taíno musical ensemble and remains a central component of the Puerto Rican *bomba* ensemble and widely used in Caribbean and Latin music.

Música jíbara is the name given in Puerto Rico to a variety of musical genres that originated in the Island's countryside, particularly in the villages of central mountain ranges, among small farmers and agricultural workers of mixed race. It has evolved out of the interaction of diverse cultural influences that have been combining for over 500 years.

Musical tradition - a set of songs, rhythms and ways of playing music that has been passed down orally from generation to generation for a long time.

Pandero or **pandereta** is the typical drum used in *plena* music. It is a cylindrical frame drum with a goat skin. *Panderos* come in different sizes, from about 8 to 16 inches in diameter and two to three inches in depth. The typical plena ensemble has three panderos: the *seguidor* bass drum and the *punteador* middle drum keep the basic rhythm, while the higher pitched *requinto* drum elaborates intricate improvised patterns that respond to the melody of the lead singer and chorus.

Plenazos - This is the modern name given to large community gatherings to sing and play plena music. These occur frequently throughout Puerto Rico and in Puerto Rican communities in the U.S. and are open to all who play or enjoy listening and dancing plena.

Seis con décima - one of the principal styles of música jíbara, Puerto Rican country music. The lyrics to the song are written in the form of décima poems and sung by a *trovador* or *trovadora* accompanied by *cuatro*, acoustic guitar and *güícharo*.

Taíno - The Taíno people were one of the largest groups of the indigenous Arawak peoples of the Caribbean. At the time of European contact in the late 15th century, they were the principal inhabitants of most of Cuba, Trinidad, Jamaica, Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic) and Puerto Rico. Despite being decimated by war, disease and forced labor during the European colonization of the Caribbean, the Taínos survived and often mixed with Spaniards and Africans. Their food,

language, beliefs and spirituality, have been of great importance in the development of Puerto Rican culture and way of life.

Tradition - the passing down of information, beliefs, customs and ways of doing things by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction.

Trovador(a) - The trovador or trovadora is the lead singer of the jíbaro musical ensemble. They must possess a melodic voice, understand the form and rhythmic characteristic of a variety of styles of music, and, in order to be considered a master, must be able to improvise lyrics in décimas, the main poetic form used in jíbaro music. A good trovador must be able to express his or her ideas about a range of topics with elegance and eloquence, from the most mundane to topics of great intellectual and emotional importance.

CLASS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you know about your family's roots? Do you come from a multicultural background?
2. How many languages are spoken in your family and your community?
3. Is music part of your family's or your community's life and traditions? In which ways?
4. Have you ever heard Puerto Rican or other types of Latin music? What do these musics bring to mind? How do they resemble and differ from the music that you listen to?
5. Did you know about the African roots of Puerto Rican and Latin music?
6. What aspects, besides music, are important expressions of culture and identity?

VIDEO AND AUDIO SAMPLES

- 1) Listen to La Mixta Criolla's album [AfroTaíno](#). Listen to more [here!](#)
- 2) PBS Video: "[Why Puerto Rican Bomba Music is Resistance](#)"
- 3) Video: [Plenazo Callejero](#) (street plena jam in San Juan, Puerto Rico)
- 4) Video: [Bombazo in NYC](#) (Bomba Jam in a yard in the Bronx, NYC)
- 5) Video: [Bay Area Bomba y Plena Workshop](#) (La Mixta Criolla's and Aguaceros' community teaching project in the East Bay)
- 6) Video: A *música jíbara* song, [Grupo Mapeyé](#)
- 7) Listen to a *música jíbara* song, [Ramito y La Calandria](#)





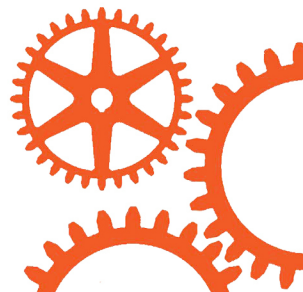
Thank You!

Thank you for joining Rhythmix Cultural Works and La Mixta Criolla.
We look forward to seeing you next time!



La Mixta Criolla performing at Rhythmix Art Walk in Alameda. Photo by JZ Lim Photography.

For more info about Rhythmix, please visit: www.rhythmix.org



About Rhythmix Cultural Works

Rhythmix Cultural Works brings people of all ages together to experience and explore music, dance, visual art and educational opportunities. The organization seeks to build community by inspiring engagement in the arts as a way to learn about each other and the world. With a strong commitment to provide programming relevant to the local population, Rhythmix strives to promote cultural awareness, encourage participation in the arts, and support local artists in the presentation of their work.

Since Rhythmix opened its doors in 2007, the community-based arts facility has built its reputation through the artistic excellence and cultural depth of its programming. To date, more than 150,000 people have engaged in arts experiences, attending high-quality performances of world music, dance, theater, exhibits and community events, as well as enrolling in classes for youth and adults in the arts, crafts, and movement-based practices from other cultures.

About PAL - Performance, Art & Learning

Rhythmix Cultural Works believes that exposure to the arts can be a transformative experience and a catalyst for cultural celebration. In support of this vision, Rhythmix developed PAL as an assembly-based youth arts education program in collaboration with the Alameda Unified School District. PAL fosters awareness of world cultures and empowers underserved youth through exposure to educational music and dance performances.

After two years of presenting PAL virtually in response to the pandemic, Rhythmix is excited to host PAL live again in its theater for the 2022-23 school year, with virtual in Alameda County. Thanks to the belief in the power of arts education and generous support from our funders and sponsors, PAL has served over 50,000 students since it launched in 2012.



Thanks to our PAL Funders and Partners

RADIUM



Robert L. Lippert
Foundation



Laurel
Scheinman

Lauren & Joshua
Cook

Shuler-Heimbürger
Family Fund

and supporters like YOU!

This study guide was written and developed by La Mixta Criolla with additional design modifications by Rhythmix Cultural Works.

©Héctor Lugo, La Mixta Criolla and Rhythmix Cultural Works, 2022.

