



All Around This World Latin America Song-by-Song Overview

African, European and Native American history may be present in every stroke of Latin music (and, even farther back, in the North African, Romani, Sephardic Jewish and other genres that influenced the music of Spain), but when the rhythms of sub-Saharan Africa fused with the Spanish melodies in “the New World,” an entirely new and distinct set of “Afro-Latin” music formed. Today’s Latin music thrives on its own, inventing and reinventing itself. In Latin music, history may be everything, but the past is only a hint of great music to come...

1. WE ARE HAPPY

Country: Uganda (original)/ On CD: [Dominican Republic](#)

Language: originally English, Luganda and Hebrew

Genre on CD: [Merengue](#)

Instruments on CD: Piano, Trombone, Trumpet

["We Are Happy" on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#) |

[More "We Are Happy" information and links to classroom materials](#)

We sing “We Are Happy” at the beginning of every All Around This World class, changing the hello to match the featured country of the week. All Around This World’s version is actually a mashup of two songs the Abayudaya of Uganda sing to greet important visitors to Nabugoye Hill, which is a small area a few miles outside of the Eastern Ugandan city of Mbale. The Abayudya of Uganda are a small community of about 500 Luganda-speaking Bagandans who have been practicing Judaism for almost 100 years. Abayudaya community leaders Rabbi Gershom Sizomu and his brother JJ Keki wrote the two greeting songs and the community sings them when important visitors arrive.

2. LA GUACAMAYA

Country: [Mexico](#)

Language: Spanish

Genre on CD: [Son jarocho](#)

Instruments on CD: [Jarana](#), [Marimbula](#), [Quijada](#), [Requinto](#), [Tarima](#)

["La Guacamaya" on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “La Guacamaya” information and links to classroom materials](#)

“La Guacamaya” is a son jarocho song from Veracruz in Mexico. (A guacamaya is a parrot.)

Instruments particular to son jarocho include a jarana, a quijada (a donkey jawbone used for percussion), a requinto, a mariumbula, a harp and a wooden dancing platform known as a tarima that the musicians actually consider a percussion instrument and factor into the arrangement of son jarocho songs.

3. BAMBO DE BAMBU

Country: [Brazil](#)

Language: Portuguese

Genre on CD: [Samba](#)

Instruments on CD: [Agogo](#), [Caixa](#), [Cavaquinho](#), [Cuica](#), [Ganza](#), [Pandeiro](#), [Surdo](#), [Tamborim](#)

["Bambo de Bambu" on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More "Bambo de Bambu" information and links to classroom materials](#)

A samba from Brazil, initially recorded in 1939 by Carmen Miranda, then again in 1940 as part of a legendary yet, for decades, unreleased joint U.S./Brazilian goodwill endeavor coordinated on the Brazilian end by iconic composer Heitor Villa-Lobos. The original is an *embolada*, a fast-paced, often-improvised song style popular in northeastern Brazil in which vocalists challenge each other, competing lightly based on verbal and vocal ability. The song is sometimes titled "Bombo du Bambu," though we more often go with "Banbo de Bambu," which seems more grammatically correct in Brazilian Portuguese.

4. LA COLORÁ

Country: [Cuba](#)/[Puerto Rico](#)

Language: Spanish

Genre on CD: [Changui](#)

Instruments on CD: Bass, [Bongó](#), [Tres](#)

["La Colorá" on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More "La Colorá" information and links to classroom materials](#)

"La Colorá" is a nickname for someone with red hair, though the term could also imply a light complexion and fiery personality. In the original, Madam Maria has a grinder and must hurry to get it and grind some yuca/cassava, which is an edible starchy plant that mainly grows in tropical and subtropical areas, to use it for flour or else the yuca will go bad.

Juan Morel Campos, Puerto Rico's most famous composer, is said to have written this song. The liner notes of the album "Bomba: Monitor Presents Music of the Caribbean" say Campos "[occupies] a place in the island's legend comparable to Stephen Foster in the U.S.A."

The song originated as a "guaracha," a form of music with bawdy lyrics meant to accompany dances that blended Spanish and African moves. The guaracha originated in Spain and became a staple of Cuban theater groups that toured Puerto Rico in the 1800s, which would play clever guaracha songs between acts of their performances to keep the audience entertained.

The guitar-like instrument you hear in our arrangement is a three-stringed Cuban guitar known as a tres, and the genre, changui, is a distinct form found mainly in Eastern Cuba.

5. WANG BOTO

Country: [Suriname](#)

Language: Sranan Tongo

Genre on CD: [Soca](#) (original genre: [Kaseko](#))

Instruments on CD: Bass, Drum kit, Guitar, Trombone, Trumpet

[“Wang Boto” on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “Wang Boto” information and links to classroom materials](#)

A song from Suriname, which is a small country on the northeast coast of South America. Unlike any other country in South America Suriname was primarily a colony of the Netherlands, so the culture and colonial language are not Spanish or Portuguese, but Dutch. Suriname has a very diverse population composed of substantial percentages of East Indians (primarily Hindu descendants of Northern Indian laborers who replaced Africans after the abolition of slavery), “Creoles” (people of European descent born in Suriname), Indonesians and “Maroons” (descendants of escaped slaves). There is also an active minority of indigenous people such as Carib, Arawak and Amerindians who retain their original languages and religions. The official language of Suriname is still Dutch, but many in the country speak Sranan Tongo (sometimes called Sranan Tongo, or “Taki Taki,”) which is a creole language that draws upon Dutch, English, Portuguese and a few African languages.

“Wang Boto” appears to be a song about and by coastal fishermen. The lyrics translate roughly to, “One boat is coming with just one flag! Why only one flag...?”

6. CACHUMBAMBÈ

Country: [Cuba](#)

Language: Spanish

Genre on CD: [Merengue](#)

Instruments on CD Bass, [Congas](#), Drum kit, Piano, Trombone, Trumpet

[“Cachumbambe” on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “Cachumbambe” information and links to classroom materials](#)

This is a Cuban kids’ song All Around This World jazzed up with a merengue arrangement. A cachumbambè is a seesaw. The original version has Old Lady Ines, a beloved archetype of the super-strong Cuban “little old lady,” smoking tobacco but refusing to drink coffee. After much deliberation, All Around This World chose to bring Ines to the U.S. and put her on a health kick, keeping the reference to Cuban coffee but changing the lyrics to suggest she’ll drink guarapo, which is a drink of raw sugar cane juice. How dare we do such a thing? Not as a slight to the tradition of the hardy Cuban woman! We decided to bring Ines to the U.S. in song in a way that American kids may be more inclined to relate to her, and nowadays cigar-smoking grannies in the U.S. are few an far between. Though, in retrospect, we certainly could have kept a little kick in her and had her eschew the guarapo in favor of a thick cup of coffee. In class we may right this wrong by letting the kids know that Ines may occasionally choose a mild sugary beverage, but she didn’t live long enough to earn the right to be called “Old Lady Ines” by playing it safe.

7. OUR STORY MAY BE SAD

Country: [Honduras](#)/Belize

Language: Garifuna

Genre on CD: [Punta](#)

Instruments on CD: [Garifuna drums](#) (primero and segunda)

[“Our Story May Be Sad” on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “Our Story May Be Sad” information and links to classroom materials](#)

This song comes is from the Garifuna of Honduras, derived from the opening lines of an epic story performed as a dance by a couple. The liner notes of the Smithsonian Folkways recording which first introduced AllAround This World to this song, say “The words of this particular song refer to a man who thinks himself better than anyone. The woman laughs at him and tells him it doesn’t matter how high the floors are from the ground. One day they’ll fall and the crows will take care of everything.” (The song is listed there as “Punta.”) Our version takes just the first couple lines of the introduction, originally translated as, “Sit down see the enjoyment, Won’t kill me misery.” We take that to imply that the tale in the story may be a sad one, but that we can enjoy the telling of it anyway. A further implication is that though there may be many struggles in the world, we may find a way to survive them with our ability to enjoy life intact, a sentiment that is common throughout the Caribbean.

8. ESTE TORITO

Country: [Mexico](#)

Language: Spanish

Genre on CD: [Son jarocho](#) (original genre: [Mariachi](#))

Instrument on CD [Jarana](#)

[“Este Torito” on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “Este Torito” information and links to classroom materials](#)

Este torito is a well-known Mexican song about a bull who comes from the central Mexican town of Tepango who will only obey his owner if bribed by an offer of yummy mango.

9. A CANOA

Country: [Brazil](#)

Language: Portuguese

Genre on CD: [Samba pagode](#)

Instruments on CD: [Cavaquinho](#), [Pandeiro](#), [Rebolo](#)

["A Canoa" on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “A Canoa” information and links to classroom materials](#)

A Brazilian kids' song that All Around This World recorded in the samba style known as pagode. The song is about a canoe that flips over because a child in it didn't know how to paddle.

10. UN BARCO CHIQUITITO

Country: (many)

Language: Spanish

Genre on CD: [Cuban salsa](#)

Instruments on CD: Bass, [Congas](#), Drum kit, Piano, [Timbales](#), Trombone, Trumpet

["Un Barco Chiquitito" on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More "Un Barco Chiquitito" information and classroom materials](#)

A "barco chiquitito" means little boat. There are several versions of this song, but in the most widely sung, there is a little boat that can't set sail for seven weeks, during which time provisions start to run out. In one translation, crew members get so hungry they eat their boots "with red sauce and a walnut," get very sick and have to turn back. In our version we not only let the ship sail, but say that it's unable to stop sailing, then we also sing about an airplane that can't stop flying, and, in class, we go through other modes of transport and say they can't stop going either (a car, a bicycle, a pogo stick....).

11. NIÑO COLLA

Country: [Argentina](#)

Language: Spanish

Genre on CD: [Andean Cumbia](#)

Instruments on CD: Bass, [Charango](#), [Quena](#)

["Niño Colla" on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More "Niño Colla" information and links to classroom materials](#)

This song is a story about a boy from the Coya (Kolla) community of Northern Argentina who, living alone on his little ranch, sets off on a walk up into the hills. In the original he is wearing a "poncho," a sombrero and one leather sandal, known as an "ojota." He is also accompanied by his donkey and dog and plays his quena flute on the way.

Most Kolla live in "yungas," which are "misty forests" found high in the Andes mountains. When the Kolla people have made the international news over the last couple decades the story usually has to do with their protesting agribusiness and mining interests encroaching on the yungas and other native lands.

12. CITRON

Country: [Mexico](#) (original)/Peru (on CD)

Language: Spanish

Genre on CD: [Afro-Peruvian](#), [Festejo](#)

[“Citron” on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “Citron” information and links to classroom materials](#)

“Citron” is a Mexican children’s game. Kids sit in a circle and pass stones around clockwise, trying not to mess up the pattern as the tempo gets faster. As with many kids songs, the lyrics make no sense, but no one seems to care.

13. LA LLAVE

Country: (many)

Language: Spanish

Genre on CD: [Corrido](#) (jarocho style)

Instrument on CD: [Jarana](#)

[“La Llave” on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “La Llave” information and links to classroom materials](#)

“La llave” means “the key.” All Around This World derived this from a traditional song called “Estrellita” which is about a girl finding the best occupation for herself, disliking all of them except the job of teacher. (“Estrellita is looking for a job, Ma-tey-ree-lay-ree-lay-ree-lay... What kind of job will we give her...? We’ll let her work as a cook...She doesn’t like that job... We’ll let her work as a teacher...That job she likes!”) Another commonly sung version is the story of a castle and a key to the castle, which the singer has unfortunately lost at the bottom of the sea. Fortunately, a little girl, perhaps “Estrellita,” is enlisted to look for it.

14. O PIÃO

Country: [Brazil](#)

Language: Portuguese

Genre on CD: fusion

[“O Pião” on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “O Pião” information and links to classroom materials](#)

A pião is a top that spins “en la roda,” in a round space. On the All Around This World CD the song appears in an eclectic fusion of Latin styles.

15. LAS MAÑANITAS

Country: [Mexico](#)

Language: Spanish

Genre on CD: [Huapango \(Mariachi\)](#)

Instruments on CD Bass, Guitar, Violin

[“Las Mañanitas” on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “Las Mañanitas” information and links to classroom materials](#)

A well-known Mexican birthday song, usually sung to honor the birthday boy or girl before eating the cake (though it’s also sung on Christmas as well, presumably as a birthday song for Jesus). When sung at a birthday party, the “mi bien” in the original Spanish lyrics gives way to the name of the object of the song– “Despierta Maria, despierta, mira que ya amaneció.”

16. MAYAN PEACE SONG

Country: [Mexico](#)

Language: (vocables)

Genre on CD: [Aztec](#), [Mayan](#)

Instruments on CD: [Huehuetl](#), [Rain stick](#), [Teponaztli](#)

[“Mayan Peace Song” on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “Mayan Peace Song” information and links to classroom materials](#)

Mayan culture is so ancient that most Mayan music has been lost, but contemporary interpretations of potentially ancient melodies still exist. Researchers believe that music was very important in Mayan culture, especially in funeral ceremonies, during which it is believed that drummers and flute players would follow the casket of well-respected women, sealing their instruments into the burial tomb at the end of the march. Music also apparently was part of ceremonies and celebrations involving war. Archaeologists have found drums and whistles in the houses of many “lower class” Mayans, suggesting that in Mayan culture music was not just reserved for the elite.

A scratchy version of this tune, listed as “Song of Peace, Chalchuitan,” appears on the Smithsonian Folkways release, “Modern Mayan: The Indian Music of Chiapas, Mexico – Vol. 1 .

17. LA LUNA

Country: (many)

Language: Spanish

Genre on CD: [Plena](#)

Instruments on CD: Bass, Drum kit, Hand percussion, Trombone, Trumpet

[“La Luna” on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “La Luna” information and links to classroom materials](#)

This is a children’s song found in several parts of Latin America that accompanies a game during which all the kids dance in a circle around one child who stands in the middle. When the lyrics of the song reach, “Ay ay ay!” the circling children scream “Ay ay ay!” into the ear of the child in the middle. The original lyrics of this song include references to the Spanish region of Catalonia, Catalanian soldiers and the Spanish king, all of which may possibly be a reference to the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714). The words in the All Around This

World version are more poetic: “I’d like to be the moon way up high high high.... I’d like to be a dove so I could fly fly fly....”

18. TAMBOBAMBINO

Country: Peru

Language: Spanish

Genre on CD: [Andean Cumbia](#)

Instruments on CD: [Charango](#), [Quena](#)

["Tambobambino" on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “Tambobambino” information and links to classroom materials](#)

This is a story of a little boy from the small town of Tambobamba in Southern Peru who foolishly walks outside in the rain carrying his charango (a little guitar-like instrument). There are many versions of this song found in Peru, and most are much darker in theme than this one. An example of the song’s alternate lyrics, when used as a funeral song: “The river of blood has brought a lover from Tambobambo. Only his tinya is floating, only his charango is floating, only his quena is floating.” Wisely, All Around This World decided to not use the alternate lyrics in class. The song was originally in Quecheua, which is a language with many variants spoken throughout in the Andes.

19. AHORA ES CUANDO ES

Country: Cuba

Language: Spanish

Genre on CD: [Conga](#)

Instruments on CD: much hand percussion, Bottles, [Campanas](#)

[“Ahora es Cuando es” on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “Ahora es Cuando es” information and links to classroom materials](#)

A conga arranged in the style of Santiago de Cuba. In Havana, Cuba’s capital, musical performances during “carnaval” are most often presented to the community as a formal performance, while in Santiago de Cuba the whole community more often participates in the music-making.

20. ARRORO MI NIÑO

Country: [Argentina](#)

Language: Spanish
Genre on CD: Lullaby

[“Arroro Mi Niño” on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “Arroro Mi Niño” information and links to classroom materials](#)

A variation on a lullaby that is common throughout Latin America.

21. LOS POLLITOS

Country: (many)

Language: Spanish

Genre on CD: [Son](#)

Instruments on CD Bass, [Congas](#), Piano, Trombone, Trumpet

[“Los Pollitos” on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “Los Pollitos” information and links to classroom materials](#)

Chickens! This song is about little chicks pecking (pio! pio!) and about the mother hen who protects them. “Los Pollitos” is one of the most widely sung Latin American songs in schools in English-speaking countries, used mainly as a way to introduce young children to Spanish. All Around This World’s version adds a bit of kick with an arrangement as a Cuban son.

22. AZULÃO

Country: [Brazil](#)

Language: Portuguese

Genre on CD: [Cuban bolero](#)

["Azulão" on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “Azulão” information and links to classroom materials](#)

This is a love song in Portuguese sung by boy who lives on the sertão, which is a rather barren-looking, semi-arid plain in Brazil’s interior highlands. The girl in the song has moved away, and the boy, lamenting the fact that the girl is gone, dispatches a sertão bluebird to fly to her and tell her how much he misses her.

Noted Brazilian 20th century poet Manuel Bandeira wrote the lyrics for this song, which is a “modhina,” a Brazilian romantic art song that became popular in the 18th and 19th centuries.

23. GOODBYE

Country: Uganda (original)/[Dominican Republic](#)

Language: originally Luganda

Genre on CD: <http://www.allaroundthisworld.com/merengue>

Instruments on CD: Piano, Trombone, Trumpet

[“Goodbye” on AllAroundThisWorld.com](#)

[More “Goodbye” information and links to classroom materials](#)

We sing this goodbye song at the end of each class.