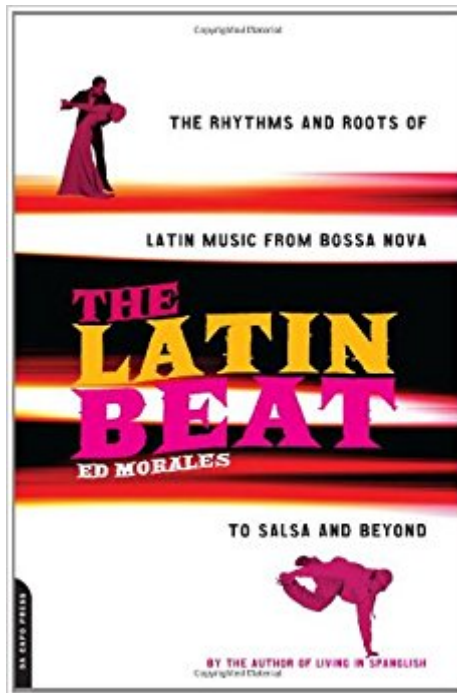


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The Latin Beat: The Rhythms And Roots Of Latin Music, From Bossa Nova To Salsa And Beyond



Synopsis

The Latin explosion of Marc Anthony, Ricky Martin, and the Buena Vista Social Club may look like it came out of nowhere, but the incredible variety of Latin music has been transforming the United States since the turn of the century, when Caribbean beats turned New Orleans music into jazz. In fact, we wouldn't have any of our popular music without it: Imagine pop sans the mambos of Perez Prado and Tito Puente, the garage rock of Richie Valens, or even the glitzy croon of Julio Iglesias, not to mention the psychedelia of Santana and Los Lobos and the underground cult grooves of newcomers like Bebel Gilberto. The Latin Beat outlines the musical styles of each country, then traces each form as it migrates north. Morales travels from the Latin ballad to bossa nova to Latin jazz, chronicles the development of the samba in Brazil and salsa in New York, explores the connection between the mambo craze of the 1950's with the Cuban craze of today, and uncovers the hidden history of Latinos in rock and hip hop. The Latin Beat is the only book that explores where the music has come from and celebrates all of the directions it is going.

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Customer Reviews

First, I am basing my poor review mainly on the sections on Brazilian music, which are a significant part of this book. Contrary to the Editorial review stating Mr. Morales' "incredible depth of historical and musical knowledge" I found the author's lack of knowledge of some of the more basic elements of Brazilian history and music culture downright ignorant. As an example of some of the minute details that may seem insignificant, the famous pre-lenten Carnaval celebrations are not "winter"

celebrations since the entire southern hemisphere has opposite seasons from North America. In other more significant areas, the migration of laborers from the north was not due to the "failure of northern coffee plantations" as the coffee regions were all part of southern Brazil. A basic reading of any decent history of Brazil, such as Skidmore's "Five Centuries of Change" would have taken care of such inaccuracies. Erroneous uses of traditional instrument names and the reference of samba as "a call to wild, mass movement, an (...) of percussion, not the structured rhythmic base for improvisation that came from the fusions of African rhythms and courtly European dances in Cuba...samba is more like 'chaos in tempo'" reek of the typical non-Latin view from insensitive writers who knew little about Latin American culture. It is surprising that a latino, especially in 2003, would be subscribing to the exoticism that permeated the work of scholars (and non-scholars) from the early 20th century. The author uses no citations, although he does include a rather short bibliography of sources. Perhaps the author should have focused on the music and history of the parts of Latin America that he is more familiar with, rather than attempt to be all-encompassing at the risk of demonstrating such utter lack of basic historical and musical knowledge of Brazil.

This book attempts to summarize the music of an entire hemisphere over 400 years in less than 400 pages. Naturally, a lot gets brushed over or even not mentioned. The structure is also a bit odd, with some of the more modern artists covered in the middle chapters, before their precursors and influences have been discussed. The book also leans heavily on its coverage of Afro-Cuban music, which deserves to be covered at length, since it is at the root of most Latin music, but comes off as a bit biased considering how other countries get little to no mention. Also strange is the coverage of Latin Jazz which only focuses on Latin musicians that made jazz and ignores non-Latin artists like Kenny Dorham and Charles Mingus that made great contributions to, and helped gain crossover appeal for Latin Jazz. Dizzy Gillespie gets a little more love, but not enough considering everything he did for the genre. But all that aside, if you want a general survey of Latin music, this is a good place to start. It has enough information to whet the palate and provide a launch pad into deeper research. Experts will hate it. Newcomers will find plenty to learn.

This is a good, basic overview of Latin music, heavy on the Cuban/Puerto Rican scenes past and present. It is unfortunately marred by naive, right-wing political comments that fit pretty well into the George Bush I and II's view of Latino realities. But for those 'cumbancheros' who look beyond the politics there is lots of info here. For Cuban music, however, one might be better served by the bargain 'Cuban Music' by Phil Sweeney or by the erudite works by Fernando Ortiz.

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