

The Puerto Rican Diaspora of the 20th Century and Her People's Response in Song

By Eunice Noguerras



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Program

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| El Lamento Borincano | Rafael Henández Marín (1892-1865) |
| En Mi Viejo San Juan | Noel Estrada (1918-1979) |
| Verde Luz | Antonio Caban Vale (b. 1942) |
| Preciosa | Rafael Henández Marín (1892-1865) |

-Program Notes-

Lamento Borincano

This song is entitled "Lamento Borincano," which translates to "Lament of the Puerto Rican." Borinquen is the native Taíno name for Puerto Rico, which is still often used by Puerto Ricans when referring to the Island or themselves. Rafael Hernandez Marín, also known as "El Jibarito," was a Puerto Rican songwriter. After studying music in Puerto Rico, he was one of the few Puerto Ricans chosen to play for the United States Army Band in New York as part of the Harlem Hellfighters. After WWI, Hernandez returned to reside in New York, where he wrote this song while reflecting on his childhood. While Hernandez was not himself a "jibaro" (which is the term referring to the peasant people or hillbillies of Puerto Rico), he would often interact with them when they arrived at the town market. This song refers to the time in which Jibaros would come down the mountain with their harvest hauled by their horse, ready to sell them in the town market. As the jibaro walks to the market, he is filled with joy and hope of selling his load, so he sings happily. Even his mare notices his delight. He dreams of buying his wife a dress with the money he makes from what he sells. Yet, when he gets to the market, the morning passes, and no one is interested in buying his produce. Upon surveying the town, he notices that it is deserted and everyone is in need. He can hear the sorrow of his beloved Borinquen and her people throughout the land. Saddened, the Jibarito must now carry his heavy load up the mountain. He cries to himself now, beckoning to the Lord what will happen to his beloved Island, his family, and his home. Reflecting, he reminisces and declares that Borinquen is the land of Eden, which the great writer Gautir called the "pearl of the ocean." Now that this precious Island is dying, the Jibarito sings over her that she is indeed the pearl of the ocean. This song encapsulated the deferred hope of the Jibarito, the sadness of seeing his home and family suffer, yet still knowing fully how amazing, and beloved Puerto Rico truly is.

Hernández Marín, Rafael. Lamento Borincano. Peer International: New York, NY. 1932.

O'Neill, Ramón. "Rafael Hernández Marín (El Jibarito)." Archipiélago.Revista Cultural De Nuestra América 25, no. 99 (Jan, 2018): 43,45,66-67.

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Sale, loco de contento con su cargamento para la ciudad. ¡Ay! Para la ciudad.

He leaves deliriously excited with his load for the city. Oh! For the city.

Lleva en su pensamiento todo un mundo lleno de felicidad ¡Ay! De felicidad.

He carries in his thoughts the entire world filled with happiness. Oh! With happiness.

Piensa remediar la situación del hogar que es toda su ilusión, ¡Si!

He thinks of remedying the situation in his home, which is his entire dream, yes!

Y alegre el jibarito va, pensando así, diciendo así cantando así por el camino;

And joyous the jibarito goes thinking this, saying this, singing this along the path;

Si yo vendo la carga mi Dios querido, un traje a mi viejita voy a comprar.

If I sell my produce, my dear God, I will buy my old lady a dress

Y alegre también, su yegüa va, al presentir que su cantar es todo un himno de alegría;

And his mare is also joyous at hearing that his song is a hymn of happiness

En eso lo sorprende la luz del día, Y llegan al mercado de la ciudad.

He is then surprised by the daybreak, and they arrive at the market of the city

Pasa la mañana entera sin que nadie quiera su carga comprar, ¡Ay! Su carga comprar.

The entire morning passes, and no one is interested in buying his produce, Oh! His produce.

Todo, todo está desierto y el pueblo está lleno de necesidad, ¡Ay! De necesidad.

Everything, everything is deserted, and the town is filled with need, Oh! With need.

Se oye este lamento por doquier, en mi desdichada Borinquen, ¡Si!

You can hear the lament everywhere of my poor Borinquen, yes!

Y triste el jibarito va, pensando así, diciendo así, llorando así por el camino;

And saddened, the jibarito goes, thinking this, saying this, crying this along the path

que será de Borinquen mi Dios querido, que será de mis hijos y de mi hogar.

What will happen to my Borinquen, Dear God, what will happen to my children and my home

Borinquen, la tierra del edén, la que al cantar el gran gautier llamo la perla de los mares

Borinquen, the land of Eden, was called in song the pearl of the ocean by the great Gautier

Ahora que tu te mueres con tus pesares déjame que te cante yo también, yo también.

Now that you are dying let me sing to you as well, me as well.

En Mi Viejo San Juan

This song, En Mi Viejo San Juan, is a national icon that Noel Estrada wrote. Noel Estrada states that he wrote the song at the request of his brother. At the time, his brother was fighting on the front lines of WWII and beckoned him to write a song for the Puerto Rican soldiers so that they could remember their homeland. His brother stated that the Puerto Rican soldiers were saddened and longed to return home. The soldiers longed for families, their parents, their wives, their children, and their home. Upon receiving the letter, Estrada put himself in the shoes of a Puerto Rican soldier. As he admired the historical beauty of San Juan, the words for En Mi Viejo San Juan appeared in his mind. This song is about a person forced to leave Puerto Rico, as fate would have it, and desires to return. It begins by reminiscing about Old San Juan and how he became who he is in that place. His soul is filled with memories of his first dreams and loves while at that place. An afternoon, then, he had to depart to a strange nation, but his heart stayed on the ocean shore of San Juan. He then sings goodbye to his beloved Borinquen: the land of his love, his goddess of the sea, his queen of the palms. He then vows to her that while he is leaving one day, he will return so that he can find his love and dream again in his Old San Juan. The song continues, with him stating that time has passed and destiny mocked his miserable nostalgia for he could not return to his love, San Juan, his homeland. Now his hair is whitened, his life is fleeing, and death beckons him, and he does not want to die departed from his Puerto Rico. So then he cries goodbye, beloved Borinquen. Goodbye, my goddess of the sea, my queen of the palms. I am leaving, but one day I will return to find my love and dreams again in my Old San Juan. When this song was written, Estrada never imagined it would become such an impactful song for Puerto Ricans.

Estrada, Noel. *En Mi Viejo San Juan*. San Juan, PR. 1943.

Estrada, Noel. "En Mi Viejo San Juan." (CD audio). 2014 Vintage Music. July 16, 2014.

<https://youtu.be/kKbedROUmPA>.

-Program Notes-

En mi viejo San Juan cuántos años forjé en mis noches de infancia
In my old San Juan how many years I forged during the nights of my childhood
Mi primera ilusión y mis cuitas de amor son recuerdos del alma
My first dreams and my loves woes are memories of my soul
Una tarde partí hacia extraña nación pues lo quiso el destino
One afternoon I left to a foreign nation for fate destined it
pero mi corazón, se quedó frente al mar en mi viejo San Juan
By my heart stayed in the ocean shore of my old San Juan
Adiós, adiós, adiós Borinquen querida, tierra de mi amor
Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, my beloved Borinquen, land of my love
Adiós, adiós, adiós mi diosa del mar mi reina del palmar
Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, my Goddess of the ocean, my queen of the palms
Me voy pero un día volveré a buscar mi querer, a soñar otra vez, en mi viejo San Juan
I am leaving, but one day I'll return to find my love, to dream again, in my old San Juan
Pero el tiempo paso y el destino burló mi terrible nostalgia
But the time passes and destined mocked my terrible nostalgia
Y no pude volver al San Juan que yo amé, pedacito de patria
And I could not return to San Juan that I loved, my little homeland
mi cabello blanqueo y mi vida se va ya la muerte me llama
My hair whitened and my life is fleeing already death calls me
y no quiero morir alejado de ti Puerto Rico del Alma
And I do not want to day away from you, Puerto Rico of my soul
Adiós, adiós, adiós Borinquen querida tierra de mi amor
Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, my beloved Borinquen, land of my love
Adiós, adiós, adiós mi diosa del mar mi reina del palmar
Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, my Goddess of the ocean, my queen of the palms
Me voy pero un día volveré a buscar mi querer a soñar otra vez en mi viejo San Juan
I am leaving, but one day I'll return to find my love, to dream again, in my old San Juan

Verde Luz

This song was written in the later part of the 20th century when the emigration and diaspora of Puerto Ricans were still prevalent. Yet, nationalism was being promoted by many musicians, songwriters, and key figures. This song was written by Antonio "El Topo" Cabán Vale. Cabán studied music at the University of Puerto Rico and wrote many songs. Among his most popular songs is Verde Luz. He dedicated much of his efforts to renewing and promoting Puerto Rican traditional and folk music. Verde Luz was written during a more revolutionary time in Puerto Rico. The song means green light. It begins by stating the green light of mountains and seas. Virgin island of the coral. The singer then declares that if I am away from your murmuring beaches or far from your silent palms, I want to return to feel the warm sand and sleep on your river. The song then becomes a declaration where the singer states, my island, a captive flower, I desire for you to have free skies, only your single star waving on a flag. I want the green lights of mountains and seas for you, my maiden island. This song has a different tone than the previous, as rather than being filled with lament or sorrow, it is more declarative of what is desired for Puerto Rico.

Cabán Vale, Antonio. Verde Luz. San Juan, PR. circa 1970s.

Fundación Nacional Para La Cultura Popular. "Antonio Cabán Vale ("El Topo")." Fundación Nacional Para La Cultura Popular. 2020. <https://prpop.org/biografias/antonio-caban-vale-el-topo/>

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Verde luz de monte y mar, isla virgen de coral,
Green light of mountain and ocean. Virgen Island of the coral
Si me ausento de tus playas rumorosas, Si me alejo de tus palmas silenciosas
If I leave your murmuring beaches, if I am far of your silent palm trees
Quiero volver quiero volver
I want to return, I want to return
A sentir la tibia arena, a dormir en tus riberas, Isla mía, flor cautiva, para ti quiero tener
To feel the warm sand, to sleep in your rivers, my island, captive flower, for you, I want:
Libre tu cielo, sola tu estrella, Isla doncella quiero tener
Free skies, only your star, maiden island I desire
Verde luz de monte y mar
Green light of mountain and ocean

Preciosa

Rafael Hernández Marín also wrote this song while he was working in Mexico during a later part of his life. The song is "Preciosa," meaning "Beautiful." This song serves as a mosaic of Puerto Rico's beauty and her people's heritage. Puerto Rico is referred to as "La Isla del Encanto," which means "The Island of Enchantment." This song begins with the singer declaring that she knows the enchantments of her beautiful Borinquen, which is why she loves her and will always call her beautiful. The singer then outlines the enchantments of Puerto Rico and why she is beautiful. The singer states that the ocean's waves call Borinquen beautiful as it bathes her. She is beautiful because she is an enchantment and an Eden. And Puerto Rico has the nobility and chivalry of Spain, which is accompanied by the daring pride of the Taíno Indians. Puerto Rico has been called beautiful by all those who have sung about her and her history. And her beauty is unwavering no matter how tyrants treat her with black wickedness. And even without a flag, riches, or glory, Puerto Rico will remain beautiful. She is called beautiful, beautiful, by the sons of liberty, her people.

Hernández Marín, Rafael. Lamento Borincano. Peer International: New York, NY. 1932.

O'Neill, Ramón. "Rafael Hernández Marín (El Jibarito)." Archipiélago. Revista Cultural De Nuestra América 25, no. 99 (Jan, 2018): 43,45,66-67.

Yo sé lo que son los encantos de mi Borinquen Hermosa
I know what are the enchantments of my beautiful Borinquen
Por eso la quiero yo tanto por siempre la llamaré preciosa
That is why I love her so much, forever I will call her beautiful
Isla del Caribe... Isla del Caribe... Borinquen
Island of the Caribbean... Island of the Caribbean... Borinquen
Preciosa te llaman las olas del mar que te bañan
Beautiful you are called by the waves of the ocean that bathe you
Preciosa por ser un encanto por ser un edén
Beautiful for being an enchantment for being an Eden
Y tienes la noble hidalguía de la madre España
And you have the noble chivalry of mother Spain
Y el fiero cantío del indio bravío lo tienes también
And the proud song of the daring Indian you have as well
Preciosa te llaman los bardos que cantan tu historia
Beautiful, call you the bards that sing your history
No importa el tirano te trate con negra maldad
It does not matter how the tyrant treats you with black wickedness
Preciosa seras sin bandera sin lauros, ni Gloria
Beautiful you will be without flag, without lauds, without Glory
Preciosa, preciosa te llaman los hijos de la libertad
Beautiful, Beautiful they call you the sons of liberty

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