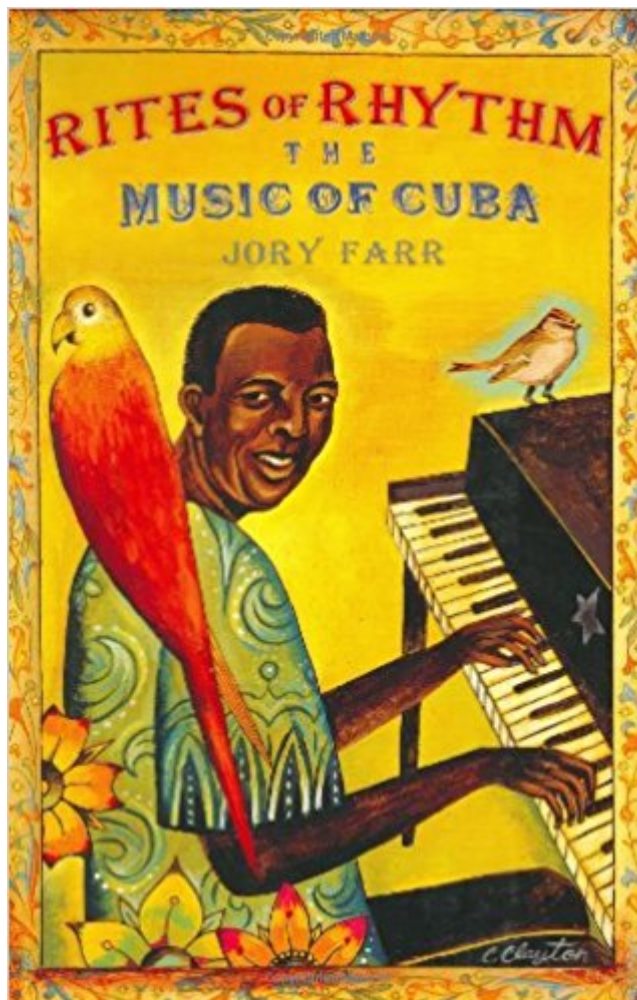


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Rites Of Rhythm: The Music Of Cuba



Synopsis

In the weeks just before carnival, a kind of fevered delirium seizes Santiago. Massive papier-mâché figures known as muñecos must be readied, masks made, costumes and capes created with feathers, rabbit skins, beads, and glass. Songs have to be rehearsed, dances perfected, complex choreography synchronized, for carnival, an explosion of rhythm, song, and spirit meant to lure every sentient being into its swirling vortex, is a fierce competition as well as an unfolding of sensual dementia. -- from *Rites of Rhythm*

The music of Cuba is primordial and poetic: steeped in sex, drenched in mysticism, and at once exotic and familiar. Jory Farr, whose articles about Cuban music earned him a Pulitzer Prize nomination in 1990, has carried on a love affair with the culture and the country for over a decade, returning again and again to research and experience firsthand Cuba's musical heritage as both a journalist and a musician in his own right. Part listener's guide, part memoir, *Rites of Rhythm* is a musical journey through Cuba and its cultural outposts in the United States. The Buena Vista Social Club phenomenon gave many listeners their first taste of Cuban music, but Farr takes us further, initiating the reader in the deeper mysteries of the music by interviewing the masters of Cuban music, from Chucho Valdés and Eliades Ochoa to Los Muñecos de Matanzas and Papi Oviedo. Along the way, he profiles such legends as Benny Moré and Arsenio Rodríguez. Farr also takes us on a historical journey through Cuba, locating the roots of the music in the country's extraordinary confluence of religions, ethnicities, and cultures. Cuban music's influences include African drums and chants, gypsy melodies, Afro-Haitian rhythms, Andalusian folk songs, and the spiraling melodies from Moorish regions. Yet contemporary Cuban music often sounds familiar to American ears because it also contains the jazz and blues licks that we have grown up with. This is the first comprehensive exploration of Cuba's rich musical and mythological heritage and the extraordinary impact it has had on American popular culture. Jory Farr's travels to Cuba's Old Havana, Santiago, the Sierra Maestra mountains, and the Cuban music scenes in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles will give music aficionados everywhere the key to understanding the music they love.

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Customer Reviews

Farr's second book is a useful tool in demystifying the way music is and has been made in Cuba. He dives headlong into the purity of Cuban rhythm, as if to rid himself of the sleaze he uncovered in his previous book, *Moguls and Madmen: The Pursuit of Power in Popular Music*. Invoking Graham Greene at the outset, Farr thrusts the reader into the fabled wild streets of Havana and a series of encounters with legendary musicians such as Benny Moré and Arsenio Rodríguez. But although his prose is comfortably clear, much of the terminology and many of the references will escape those who are not seriously into Cuban music—a glossary provided at the end offers only partial guidance. A satisfying underlying tension pulls between the first part, in which the island is made to seem like a paradise of authenticity, and the second, in which Cuban exiles pile on disparaging epithets about the cruelties of the Castro revolution. The unexplained contradictions between some of the accounts and the political context underline that the study of Cuban music can never be an exact science. A mainstream audience could probably use a little more handholding through Cuba's esoterica, but Farr's voice is reader-friendly and he's gained impressive access to many untold stories. Aficionados will find the book an insightful must-have. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Jory Farr is a journalist, author, and musician whose writings earned him a Pulitzer Prize nomination in Criticism in 1990. His work has appeared in the *New York Times* and other national publications. He lives in Pasadena, California.

This is a personal memoir and does not come close to being the "comprehensive exploration of Cuba's rich musical and mythological heritage," as claimed on the inside sleeve of the book's cover. If you like travel journals and interviews with selected artists, this has some value, but Farr's reluctance or disinterest in fully contextualizing the artists being interviewed is puzzling. (Or downright sloppy as with the Valera Miranda family of Santiago, whose name is repeatedly

misspelled) If you are truly looking for a "comprehensive" text , I would suggest Ned Sublette's master work, Cuban Music: From the First Drums to Mambo.

In Rites of Rhythm, Jory Farr captures the relationship between Cuba's music and its reality--from the spiritual to the socio-economic and the political. His book is highly readable and informative. He openly shares his journey through the Cuban music world (both inside Cuba and beyond its borders), interviewing Cuban musicians about their art, their lives and their spiritual roots in Afro-Cuban music. He expresses the ecstatic side of the music in print, the suffering of the Cuban people, and the psychological effects of living in Cuba since the revolution. For anyone planning to travel to Cuba or wanting to understand its music, I highly recommend this book.

A quick and easy read, but a little flip and trying to be too hip. This book will ring hollow to most who have visited the island. I was pretty disappointed at encounters that pumped up to be more meaningful than they seem on paper. Comes off as journalistic tourism.

Jorry Farr writes with panache and shares his deep knowledge about Cuban culture and music in this entertaining book. Anyone interested in understanding the evolution and synthesis of the various Cuban musical genres will find this to be a valuable addition to their library. The appendix also contains a comprehensive discography, including some rare works.

Beautifully written and superbly insightful. A must read for anyone interested in Cuban music or culture.

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