

Escuela de Bomba y Plena Tata Cepeda

Bomba is a music and dance tradition born from the lived experience of the Africans brought against their will in bondage to work the sugar cane plantations of Puerto Rico (and similarly across the Americas and the Caribbean). Puerto Rico's **Bomba** tradition dates back to the early European colonial period in Puerto Rico. It comes out of the musical traditions brought by these enslaved Africans as early as the 1500's. To them **Bomba** was a source of communal and spiritual expression as well as a form of resistance to the harsh realities of living in bondage. The lyrics conveyed a sense of anger and sadness due to their harsh realities on sugar cane plantations, and these gatherings (**Bomba**) sometimes served as a catalyst for rebellions and uprisings. **Bomba** also moved them to sing, dance to remember, to be able to survive, and connect to their home, helping them create community and identity.



Bomba is the oldest living cultural tradition of the Caribbean, and possibly the oldest African cultural practice to exist in the Americas. Of Bantu-Kongo origin, the word **Bomba** means to cool off spiritually by heating up physically. The word "**Bomba**" comes from the name given to the drum (a barrel drum made out of wood historically used for rum or to transport other goods, topped with a goat skin), **Bomba** has now become the name that describes this genre/tradition.

Bomba is a drum and dance tradition where community gathers to sing, invoke ancestors, purify the spirit and fortify the soul. The practice of **Bomba** has close connections and shares many characteristics of other music and dance traditions from the Afro Latino diaspora which share a similar historic experience like the musical traditions found in Guadeloupe, Martinique, Haiti, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and other Caribbean nations. Those characteristics and influences include, improvisation, call and response, and a form of spiritual remembrance and honoring of the ancestors, **Bomba** however, is uniquely Puerto Rican. Songs are sang in Spanish, Kreyol, and Ki-Kongo languages. **Bomba** has been linked to having Taino/Indigenous, Spanish, and African influences (of the African influences notable origins are of Ashanti, Bantu and Kongo traditions). There are slight variations in rhythm and some aspects of the dancing through out the different regions of Puerto Rico, however, **Bomba** is **Bomba** no matter what region or the slight variations found by region and it is the oldest drum and dance tradition of Puerto Rico.

Some **Bomba** rhythms/seises have names that reflect their African origin, names such as belén, cunyá, yubá, calinda, and others. Other **Bomba** styles are named for the type of dance it is associated with, such as balancé, paulé, or leró, which is a French derivative meaning "rose", in reference to the formation of the dancers that symbolized a rose.

The Familia Cepeda have been practicing this tradition in the style of Cangrejos (San Mateo de Cangrejos, now known as Santurce), La **Bomba** Cangrejera for 7 generations (and counting), uninterrupted. Most notable of the Cepedas was the Patriarch of **Bomba** (El Patriarca de la **Bomba**), Don Rafael Cepeda Atilas, whose great grandfather, grandfather and parents were also Bomber@s and whose children, grandchildren and great grand children are today still practicing and teaching this tradition which for them is a way of life.

"Mientras exista la Familia Cepeda, habrá Bomba y Plena para buen rato"
"While the Cepeda Family exists, there will be Bomba and Plena for a good while"

Don Rafael Cepeda Atilas (1910-1996) QEPD (RIP)

Escuela de Bomba y Plena Tata Cepeda
edbyptc@gmail.com

Escuela de Bomba y Plena Tata Cepeda

Instruments used in Bomba:

- **Drums /Barriles** (Made traditionally out of rum or fish barrels with goatskin head), the lead drum is called the **Subidor** or **Primo** and the accompanying drums are called **Buleadores**. In a **Bomba** Ensemble you can only have one **Subidor** and at least one (or as many) **buleadores** setting the rhythm while the lead drum improvises and follows the dancer. The tradition of **Bomba** gets its name from the name of the drum which was originally referred to as a **Bomba**.
- **Cuas** – Two sticks used on a side of a buleador or on a smaller barrel of wood. The Cuas keep the tempo with a pattern specific to each **Bomba** rhythm or seis, they hold the Clave (rhythmical key) for the **Bomba**.
- **Maraca** – Used to keep the tempo. Should be played by the lead singer or Cantadora(or).
- **Cantador(a)** – The lead singer. This person will call out a song which will set both the rhythm and the tempo of the **Bomba** song and inspire the dancer to dance. The songs tell a story and also invite the singer to improvise lyrics around that story.
- **Coro**- Like many Afro influenced musical traditions, **Bomba** follows a call and response pattern, the lead singer improvises and the Coro responds with a set chorus (there is a coro for every **Bomba** song).
- **Bailador(a)** – Unique to **Bomba** the dancer makes the music that the lead drummer must interpret. The **golpes** (or sounds) the dancer requests with his or her movement are called **Piquetes**. This is a friendly challenge interaction but the lead drummer must be well versed in the **Bomba** musical language to properly interpret (the dance is improvised simultaneously) the **piquetes** the dancer requesting. The dancer is inspired by the song or rhythm (or both) being sang and comes into the dance space to have this improvised conversation with the drummer.

Seises or Rhythms:

There are differences of opinion as to how many different rhythms of **Bomba** exist, since this is a tradition that was mainly passed down orally and few, if any, early recordings have survived there is no definite answer but some have suggested as many as 26 or more different rhythms or **Seises** de **Bomba** existed and there are many regional differences or variations in how the different rhythms or Seises are interpreted. The seises belong to either 4/4 Sica family or 6/8 Yuba family.

The most common played today include: **Sicá** and variations or Sica (the 4/4 family or rhythms) which include **Gracimá, Balancé, Cuembé or Guembe, Cuembé Catano, Calindá and Oyo Mula**, the Loiza Rhythms specific to that Region of **Seis Corrido, Ruele and Corve**, Mayaguez is known for the rhythm of **Holande** and then there is the **Yubá** and variations of yuba (the 6/8 family of rhythms) which include **Corve, Yubá Cuarteado, Yubá Mason, and Leró**. In addition to others played in other areas of the Island.

Coros/Music Choruses:

Rhythm: Sica **Song:** “Viento” (By Rafael Cepeda Atilés)

Chorus: VIENTO

Rhythm: Sica **Song:** “Aguatile” (By Rafael Cepeda Atilés)

Chorus: Aguatile, Aguatilé

Rhythm: Cuembe **Song:** “Cuembe Na’Ma”(By Rafael Cepeda Atilés)

Chorus: CUEMBE, CUEMBE NA’ MA

Rhythm: Yuba **Song:** “Yuba la Marile” (By Rafael Cepeda Atilés)

Chorus: YUBA LA MARILE