



LEEDS
BECKETT
UNIVERSITY

Citation:

Miller, SM (2022) "'Latin' Gainsbourg and the Parisian Nightclub Scene." In: Julien, O and Bourderionnet, O, (eds.) An International Perspective on Serge Gainsbourg. Bloomsbury. ISBN UNSPECIFIED (In Press)

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:

<https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/7992/>

Document Version:

Book Section (Accepted Version)

The aim of the Leeds Beckett Repository is to provide open access to our research, as required by funder policies and permitted by publishers and copyright law.

The Leeds Beckett repository holds a wide range of publications, each of which has been checked for copyright and the relevant embargo period has been applied by the Research Services team.

We operate on a standard take-down policy. If you are the author or publisher of an output and you would like it removed from the repository, please [contact us](#) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Each thesis in the repository has been cleared where necessary by the author for third party copyright. If you would like a thesis to be removed from the repository or believe there is an issue with copyright, please contact us on openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Serge G. An International Perspective on Serge Gainsbourg eds. Olivier Julien (Sorbonne University) and Olivier Bourderionnet (University of New Orleans)

Chapter Title: 'Latin' Gainsbourg and the Parisian Nightclub Scene

Author: Dr Sue Miller

That Serge Gainsbourg made use of Cuban music on recordings such as 'Mambo Miam Miam' (*mambo/chachachá*), in his film soundtracks 'L'Eau á la Bouche' and 'Cha Cha Cha du Loup' (*chachachá*), and 'Couleur Café' (Cuban *son*) on the *Gainsbourg Percussions* album, is well known. Perhaps less explored, at least in terms of musical influence, is Gainsbourg's background as a performer and musical director within the Paris nightclub scene as a whole¹ and the important role his father Joseph Ginsburg had on his musical development. Both Joseph Ginsburg and Serge Gainsbourg worked in Paris cabarets and the history of live music in Paris therefore holds the key to understanding Gainsbourg's eclectic artistic output. This chapter, specifically, is a musical investigation into the influence of both transnational Cuban music and the pan-Caribbean popular music-making context of Paris on Gainsbourg's Latin-influenced music. Musical analysis of Gainsbourg's Cuban-influenced recordings reveal not only his overt use of Afro-Cuban elements but also uncovers subtle lines of influence that are rooted in the more *típico* legacy of the grassroots culture of Cuban music performance in Paris.²

Cuban music in Paris was well established by the 1930s and was a feature in many clubs. La Cabane Cubaine, at 42 Rue Fontaine, for example, featured a house band, Orchestre Typique Castellanos, which lasted up until the early years of the second world war; in 1941-42 Joseph Ginsburg was the regular pianist there before the dangers of occupation forced him and then the whole Ginsburg family to move to the free/southern zone to avoid deportation to the Nazi concentration camps (Verlant, 1992, 25-26). Before and after the war, Melody's Bar³ housed another influential Caribbean band led by Cuban guitarist Don Emilio Barreto which included a Jewish pianist, Raymond Gottlieb (Dalmace, 2017, 14). Gottlieb also went into exile during the war, returning to the band in 1946.⁴ Cuban flautist and saxophonist Hériberto or

¹ Gainsbourg, while performing at less prestigious right bank venues did also perform at left bank cabarets; at Les Trois Baudets, the club owner and artistic director for Philips, Jacques Canetti, later signed Gainsbourg and his career at Philips as a recording artist started here. (Rudent, 2018, 140).

² Many of the Paris-based Cuban musicians were from the orquesta *típica* and charanga traditions and also classically trained. See Miller 2014, 1-7 and 184-5.

³ The Barreto brothers (Emilio, Sergio and Marino) performed at Melody's Bar at 26 Rue Fontaine from 1932, led by Cuban guitarist Emilio Barreto.

⁴ French Jew Raymond Gottlieb was the main pianist in Barreto's band. See Boulanger, 2018, 43-71.

'Filiberto' Rico was also in the Barreto band himself before creating his own group, Rico's Creole Band, which performed an eclectic mix of Cuban and French Caribbean styles at La Coupole in Montparnasse for over thirty years and was a firm fixture of Parisian musical life.⁵

<insert Figure 1>



Figure 1 La Coupole, home to Rico's Creole band for over thirty years.

Photograph by the author April 2018.

John Cowley, a discographer of French Caribbean recordings, mentions that Rico's Creole Band managed to record French HMV sessions in January 1940 and another in February-March 1941, held after the German occupation of Paris.⁶ Emilio Barretto's band also managed to perform and tour up until 1941 but then he and most of his musicians were interned at the German concentration camp at Compiègne. According to Boulanger, Emilio Barretto remained interned for the duration of the war before returning to the capital in 1946 to recommence his performance career (Boulanger, 2018, 59). Jewish musicians

⁵ Filiberto Rico, also known as 'Hériberto' performed at La Coupole for thirty years, broken up by exile in Spain and Cuba during the occupation. His last pre-war recordings were made in 1941. He then returned at the end of 1946. For further details see the sleeve notes by Alain Boulanger on the Frémeaux & Associés CD *Cuba in Paris: Rico's Creole Band 1947-1951*, 2003.

⁶ John Cowley in personal email correspondence with the author in 2008. For more information on French Caribbean early recordings see Cowley, 2014, 202-333.

such as Ginsburg and Gottlieb, were perhaps more integral to the Cuban and Caribbean music-making scene than is perhaps revealed through the band publicity of the time and there remains more research to be done on this area of hidden history.

The Parisian Nightclub Cultures of Joseph and Serge Ginsburg

Joseph Ginsburg was a pianist and bandleader with the Tortorella's Jazz Band and Les Blue Star Boys, and performed regularly at Chez Maxim's, Aux Enfants de la Chance and at La Cabane Cubaine (1940-41). He also directed the house band at the Madame Arthur cabaret at 75 Rue des Martyrs before Serge Gainsbourg took over in 1954 to 56, composing or adapting repertoire to fit the acts there using a variety of musical styles.

<insert Figure 2>



Figure 2. The Madam Arthur cabaret in 2018. Photograph by the author, April 2018.

<insert Figure 3>



Figure 3. Poster advertising an event on 8 March 2018 celebrating Gainsbourg's association with the cabaret Madame Arthur. Photograph by the author, April 2018.

Both Joseph and Serge Gainsbourg were musical directors for these transvestite/transgender acts at the Madame Arthur cabaret for many years where the Cuban *chachachá* style was undoubtedly used for the striptease acts, as exemplified by Serge Gainsbourg's tongue in cheek composition 'Chachachá Intellectuel.' (Bouvier and Vincendet, 2009, 66).⁷ In fact what was considered exotic and tropical in 1950s France is illustrated well in the CD collection *Chansons Exotiques Pour Cabarets et Music-Halls, Rhymes Orientaux et Tropicaux - Paris-Juan-Les-Pins-St. Tropez-Naples-Oran 1954-1962*. Here music from Cuba, the Mediterranean, Italy, Spain and Turkey played out with an emphasis on the right-bank Paris nightclub

⁷ 'Le Cha-cha-cha Intellectuel' [1957] was not recorded but performed for a striptease number [possibly acted?] by Laura Lor (Bouvir and Vincendet, 2009, 66).

scene. Featured on the CD alongside *mambo* big bands led by Jean Constantin, Dario Moreno, Bob Azzam, Don Barretto y su Cuban Boys and Marino Marini were Sophia Loren, Harold Nicholas (singing in Italian!) and Parisian transgender singer Coccinelle. Born Jacques Dufresnoy in Paris in 1931, Coccinelle started her career at Madam Arthur in 1952 accompanied on piano by Joseph Ginsberg (Comoy, 2017, 16). Serge Gainsbourg, in addition to directing the band at Madame Arthur, performed at the Milord l'Arsouille cabaret at 5 Rue de Beaujolais and was resident pianist for the summer seasons for many years at the Club de la Forêt at Le Touquet (Verlant, 1992, 42). Serge Gainsbourg has always claimed that he owed his musicianship to his father – not just for playing and teaching him the piano at home, but for introducing him into the world of musical entertainment. He says in Verlant (1992, 14-15) that his father would play Latin American songs on the piano when he was growing up; his penchant for 'world' music and mixing styles undoubtedly grew from his father's piano playing and his cabaret work in Paris and on the summer season circuit.

Serge Gainsbourg's Latin influences can be traced, via musical analysis, to these grassroots connections, related as they are to the transnational influence of Cuban music from the 1920s and '30s through to the mid 1960s. Gainsbourg's Cuban-influenced recordings are examined briefly here in order to demonstrate Gainsbourg's understanding of *clave*-based 'Latin' music.

Gainsbourg's Cuban styled repertoire

Gainsbourg drew upon the Cuban styles of *bolero* ('Les Amours Perdues'), *mambo* (Mambo Miam Miam), *chachachá* ('Chachacha du Loup'), Cuban *son* ('Couleur Café') and, more subtly *danzón/habanera* ('La Chanson de Prévert') often combining them with other stylistic elements—'Laissez-Moi Tranquille,' for example, is a *chachachá*-rock hybrid. Gainsbourg's album *Gainsbourg Percussions* has the most overt use of Cuban rhythmic elements and the uncredited percussionists on this recording were probably the French studio percussionists Diego Masson, Michel Delaporte and Jean-Pierre Drouet who worked regularly with one of Gainsbourg's long-term producers and arrangers, Alain Goraguer.⁸ The assumption that these were Cuban players attests to the well-executed rhythm section playing; accusations of racism and appropriation regarding the omission of credits for the percussionists may therefore be slightly misplaced. One could, however, ask why eminent Cuban musicians in the Barreto, Castellanos and Rico bands were not engaged for Gainsbourg's Cuban-styled studio recordings. These session players may have learnt the

⁸ This information was given to the author by two of the delegates at the *SergeG* conference held at the University Paris La Sorbonne 9-11 April 2018. To date no other evidence has been found regarding the percussion personnel on this recording.

styles directly from these Cuban musicians or perhaps via Goraguer himself who may have studied or listened to these Cuban players in the clubs of Rue Fontaine or 'Calle Cubana' (Boulanger, 2018, 22). Certainly many musicians from Guadeloupe and Martinique assimilated Cuban styles (for example saxophonist and bandleader Félix Valvert from Guadeloupe) and a few French musicians may also have done so. French Jewish musicians, Raymond Gottlieb and Joseph Ginsburg, performed in Cuban bands in the city but were perhaps not promoted much in the publicity posters of the day as promoters wanted to engage authentic (and exotic) Caribbean performers. As with New York there appears to have been a mix of Cuban, French Antillais, and Jewish musicians in these Cuban bands and Raymond Gottlieb was certainly an integral part of this Latin Paris scene.⁹

Whether or not Serge Gainsbourg went to hear these Cuban bands in Paris is not clear and his experiences may have been through his father's piano playing at home and through his use of the styles in the cabaret bars. Serge Gainsbourg's Cuban-styled works mostly belong to his 1950s and early 1960s repertoire when Cuban big band *mambo* and *chachachá* styles were popular internationally. In 'Mambo Miam Miam' (recorded in 1959), the Cuban dance styles of *chachachá* and *mambo* are less stylistic in that the *timbales cha* bell pattern is played on the triangle (and possibly with a lightly played high cymbal) with variations against the one bar *clave* neutral conga *tumbao* pattern. Christian Garros is credited as playing drum kit on the recording so he may well have adapted the drum set to play some of these rhythmic textures. Less frantic than the big band *mambos* of Pérez Prado or Tito Puente, the *mambo* elements reside in the swing band orchestration, the call and response between the vocals and the horn section lines and the foregrounding of the bongo *martillo* pattern and fills. The flute enters at 1'27 behind the vocal line with a typical violin *guajeo*-styled short solo in 2-3 *clave* referencing the *charanga típica* tradition and thus the origins of the *chachachá*. Use of the jawbone instead of the *güiro* on beat 1 is less common in *chachachá* but not unheard of, particularly in Cuban *son*. Alain Goraguer arranged this piece around Gainsbourg's melody and the vocal line is phrased in 2-3 *clave* with the arrangement also following 2-3 *clave* direction. The piano adds some high register *chachachá* short breaks for comedic effect (for example at 1'25) and there is an underlying humor in these piano and guitar additions to the arrangement. Even without these percussive elements, Gainsbourg's melodies and his vocal phrasing demonstrate some understanding of Cuban music as the next example demonstrates further.

⁹ See Miller *Improvising Sabor: Afro-Cuban Dance Music in New York*, University Press of Mississippi (forthcoming) for more on the Jewish contribution to Cuban music performance in the city.

Créativité ‘Parfumé de Rumba’

The ‘rumba seasoning,’ in Alain Goraguer’s words (Verlant, 1992, 77), was more than a flavoring in Gainsbourg’s songs and a Cuban feel runs through a large segment of his earlier work. Alain Goraguer worked on the orchestrational aspects for the film tracks ‘L’Eau á La Bouche’ and ‘Cha-cha-cha du Loup’ and contributed to the Cuban and jazz elements on these recordings in the main as Gainsbourg wrote the melody and lyrics only (Verlant, 1992, 76). However Gainsbourg’s melodic lines and vocal delivery together with his stylistic rhythmic inflections demonstrate his affinity with jazz and Latin phrasing as producer Claude Dejaques intimates, “His swing was better than everyone else. I think his Slavic origins have something to do with this: via jazz and his pianist father he inherited a sense of phrasing and a distinctive sense of rhythm.”(Verlant, 1992, 75)¹⁰ In ‘Chanson de Prévert’ Gainsbourg’s vocal phrasing follows a Cuban *clave* and *baqueteo* two bar rhythmic organization to some extent as demonstrated in the following analysis.

‘La Chanson de Prévert’ and ‘La Canción de Prévert’

Luca Cerchiari traces the history of ‘Les Feuilles Mortes’ as a jazz standard with French origins, analysing the original song to reveal its dance origins (an instrumental piece by Joseph Kosma for a ballet *Le Rendez-Vous* by Roland Petit in 1945) and the popularisation of it in France through Juliette Greco’s recording with words by Jacques Prévert in 1949, followed by the film version sung by Yves Montand in *Les Portes de La Nuit*. Further recordings of the song in English translation by Johnny Mercer resulted in subsequent interpretations as a jazz standard (Cerchiari, 2012, 110-17). Gainsbourg’s reinterpretation of the song adds further layers to the song’s history, and beyond these literary references lie musical ones which link to the history of transnational popular music making in Paris. Listening to the song there is a sense of Cuban *clave* with touches of the *cinquillo* rhythm, emblematic of the Parisian Cuban scene, underlying the rhythmic movement. The emphasis on beat 4 in the bass line and the guitar accompaniment (missing beat 1 by entering on beat 2 or 1+) provide a backdrop that suggests Cuban *son* and earlier *típico* styles. As shown in Example 1, Gainsbourg uses touches of rubato, anacrusis and an emphasis on the 3-side of the *clave* (linked to the *cinquillo* pattern) on ‘do-nne,’ ‘to-ne,’ and ‘mor-tes,’ all hooks in the piece, and has a

¹⁰ “son swing était supérieur á tout ce qui se faisait. Je pense que ses origines slaves y sont pour quelque chose: á travers le jazz, á travers son père pianiste, il a hérité d’un sens de la cadence, d’une installation du tempo tout á fait personnels.”

tendency to start phrases on beat 4 or 4+ coinciding with the bass. While not written deliberately in a Cuban popular style the phrasing draws on *clave* feel from Cuban dance styles that were played in Paris for over thirty years before this recording was made. The *cinquillo* pattern with the *danzón* two-bar pattern alongside the *son clave* two-bar timeline under verse 2 in example 2 demonstrates these correlations with Gainsbourg's vocal phrasing.

<insert musical example 1>

La Chanson de Prévert Gainsbourg's 'Latin' Phrasing

c. Serge Gainsbourg, 1961. *L'Étonnant Serge Gainsbourg*, Philips France B76-516-R

verse 2

3-side of the clave
and cinquillo part of the baqueteo

8 A - vec d'aut-res bien sûr je m'a-ban - don - ne _____

6 3-side of the clave
and cinquillo part of the baqueteo

8 mais leur chan - son est mo - no - to - ne _____

10

8 et peu á peu je m'in - dif - fe _____ re anacrusis

14

8 Á ce - la il n'est rien á faire _____ car_ cha-que

18 chorus

8 fois _____ Les_ Feui-lles Mor - tes _____

22

8 te rap - pelle á mon sou - ve - nir Jour_ a-près

26

8 jour _____ les_ a-mours mor - tes _____

30

8 N'en fin - iss - ent pas de _____ mou - rir

This annotated transcription (c) Sue Miller, Leeds, 28 March 2019.

Example 1 Gainsbourg's Cuban phrasing

<insert musical example 2>

verse 2

Vocal

8

A -vec d'aut - res bien sûr je m'a-ban - don - ne

3-side of the clave and cinquillo part of the baqueteo

3-2 danzón baqueteo pattern

cinquillo (5 note)

3-2 son clave

tresillo (3 note)

pizz. Gm Gm Bb

Bass

5

Vocal

8

mais leur chan-son est mo-no - to - ne

3-side of the clave and cinquillo part of the baqueteo

Timb.

Clv.

Bb Eb Eb Bb Bb

Bs.

Example 2: Cuban flavors in 'La Chanson de Prévert' (Cuban rhythms on *timbales* and *claves* superimposed).

In example 2, the vocal line has echoes of the *contradanza* (*danzón baqueteo* and *son tresillo*) reflecting Filiberto Rico's Orquesta *Típica Cubana* influence, the *danzón* background of Les Frères Castellanos and Emilio Barreto's roots in the charanga of Tata Pereira (Boulanger, 2018, 43 and 73).

Gainsbourg's place within the French Chanson Tradition

As the son of Russian Jewish immigrants, Gainsbourg was part of an entertainment industry that tapped not only into record industry demands but into more grassroots scenes many of which diverged from those experienced by left bank chanson artists such as Brel and Brassens. For all the talk of cultural appropriation surrounding Gainsbourg's use of Cuban, Brazilian and African sources, Gainsbourg was nevertheless drawing on the musical world he grew up in. As Louis Laibe, the artistic director at Madame Arthur, asserts "We wrote songs in all styles: blues, waltzes, javas, African mood pieces, South American *mambos* and pure music hall."¹¹ (cited in Verlant, 1992, 41-2) Serge Gainsbourg is different to the ACI trinity (auteur-compositeur-interprète) of Brel, Brassens and Ferré (Lebrun, 2014 and Looseley, 2003) as he performed in more multicultural and subcultural environments. Reflecting on the reception and perception of French-Maghrebi music, Barbara Lebrun concludes "there is no doubt that the important concepts of race, identity and ethnicity, and the important artists who work with them, will continue to be apprehended with the sophistication and complexity that they imply, and which they deserve" (2018: 113). Serge Gainsbourg was never a part of 'La Douce France' or 'La France Profonde' and his French Russian Jewish identity has meant that his participation in the French music industry is more multi-layered and ambivalent – and French popular music is the richer for it.

<insert Figure 4>

¹¹ "Nous avons écrit des chansons dans tous les styles: des blues, des valse, des javas, des ambiances africaines, des mambos sud-américains et du pur musichall." Louis Laibe in Verlant, 1992, 41-2.



Figure 4. 'Une Ame Slave' - Serge Gainsbourg's grave in Montparnasse Cemetery, 2001. Photograph by the author.

References

- Anderson, Darran. 2013. *Histoire du Melody Nelson – Serge Gainsbourg*. New York and London: Bloomsbury.
- Boulanger, Alain. 2018. *La Havane á Paris – Musiciens Cubains á Paris (1925-1955)*. Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray: Jazzedit.
- Boulanger, Alain. 2003. Sleeve notes on the Frémeaux & Associés reissue CD *Cuba in Paris: Rico's Creole Band 1947-1951*, FA 5055, 2003.
- Bouvier, Yves-Ferdinand and Serge Vincendet (eds.). 2009. *Serge Gainsbourg. L'Intégrale Et Caetera Les Paroles 1950-1991*. Paris: Bartillat.

- Cerchiari, Luca. 2012. "The European Songbook: 'Greensleeves' to 'Les Feuilles Mortes' ('Autumn Leaves'), 'Gigolo' to 'O Sole Mio.'" In Cerchiari, Luca, Laurent Cugny and Frantz Kerschbaumer (eds.). 2012. *Eurojazzland – Jazz and European sources, Dynamics and Contexts*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Comoy, Philippe. 2017. Sleeve notes to *Chansons Exotiques Pour Cabarets et Music-Halls, Rhymes Orientaux et Tropicaux. Tropical and Exotic Music from Cabarets and Casinos. Paris-Juan-Les-Pins-St. Tropez-Naples-Oran 1954-1962*. Frémeaux et Associés FA 5658.
- Cowley, John. 2014. "La Mascarade, La Biguine et le Bal Nègre [Mascarade, Biguine and the Bal Nègre]." In Boulanger, Alain, Marc Monneraye and John Cowley. 2014. *Creole Music of the West Indies – a Discography, 1900-1959/ La Musique Créole des Antilles Françaises – discographie, 1900-1959*. Bear Family Publications.
- Dalmace, Patrick. *La Musique Cubaine à Paris entre 1930 et la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*. Paris: Edilivre, 2017.
- Gainsbourg, Serge. 1959. 'Mambo Miam Miam,' *Serge Gainsbourg avec Alain Goraguer et son Orchestre – L'Anthracite*. Mercury /Universal Music France 532 347-9. Original Recording EP Philips 432 398 4e Série.
- Gainsbourg, Serge. 1960. *L'Eau à la Bouche*. Philips, France. Original Film Track, 432.492BE.
- Gainsbourg, Serge. 1960. *Les Loups Dans La Bergerie*. Original Film Track, Philips France, 432.447 BE.
- Gainsbourg, Serge. 1961. 'La Chanson de Prévert,' *L'Étonnant Serge Gainsbourg* Philips France B76-516-R
- Gainsbourg, Serge. 1964. 'Couleur Café,' *Gainsbourg Percussions*, Philips France B 77.842 L.
- Gainsbourg, Serge. 1996. *Serge Gainsbourg Couleur Café*. CD Compilation Mercury/Universal France. Philips 528949-2.
- Gainsbourg, Serge. 2001. 'L'Eau à la Bouche,' 'La Chanson de Prévert,' and 'Couleur Café,' *Gainsbourg Forever – Les Meilleurs Enregistrements*. Mercury /Universal Music France 548563-2.
- Gainsbourg, Serge. 2014. 'Cha Cha Cha Du Loup,' 'Les Amours Perdues,' 'Laissez Moi Tranquille,' 'La Chanson de Prévert,' 'Cha Cha Cha Du Loup Instrumental,' 'Mambo Miam Miam,' 'L'Eau à la Bouche,' and 'Les Loups dans la Bergerie,' *Simply Gainsbourg 3CDS from the Genius of Chanson*. Union Square Records London SIMPTNCD001.
- Julien, Olivier. 2015. "Lost Song - Serge Gainsbourg and the Transformation of French Popular Music." In Guibert, Gerome and Catherine Rudent (eds.), *Made in France : Studies in Popular Music*, pp. 47-56. London: Routledge.
- Lebrun, Barbara. 2014. "Beyond Brassens: Twenty-First Century Chanson and the New Generation of Singer-Songwriters." *Modern & Contemporary France* 22 (2), 159-175.
- Lebrun, Barbara. 2018. "Rock, Race and the Republic – musical Identities in Post-Colonial France." In Guibert, Gerome and Catherine Rudent (eds.), *Made in France : Studies in Popular Music*, pp.105-115. London: Routledge.

Looseley, David L. 2003. *Popular Music in Contemporary France*. Oxford and New York: Berg.

Mambo á Paris 1949-1953. 2CD Compilation. Frémeaux et Associés France FA5132.

Miller, Sue. 2014. *Cuban Flute Style: Interpretation and Improvisation*. Lanham: MD, Scarecrow Press.

Miller, Sue. Forthcoming. *Improvising Sabor: Afro-Cuban Dance Music in New York*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Rudent, Catherine. 2018. "A Genre Without Musical Identity." In Guibert, Gerome and Catherine Rudent (eds.), *Made in France : Studies in Popular Music*, pp. 137-49. London: Routledge.

Rico's Creole Band 1947-1951. *Cuba in Paris*. 2CD Compilation. Frémeaux et Associés France FA5055.

Valvert, Félix. 2000. Félix Valvert 1944-1948. Frémeaux et Associés France FA188.

Verlant, Gilles. *Gainsbourg*. Paris: Livre de Poche: Editions Albin Michel, 1985 and 1992.