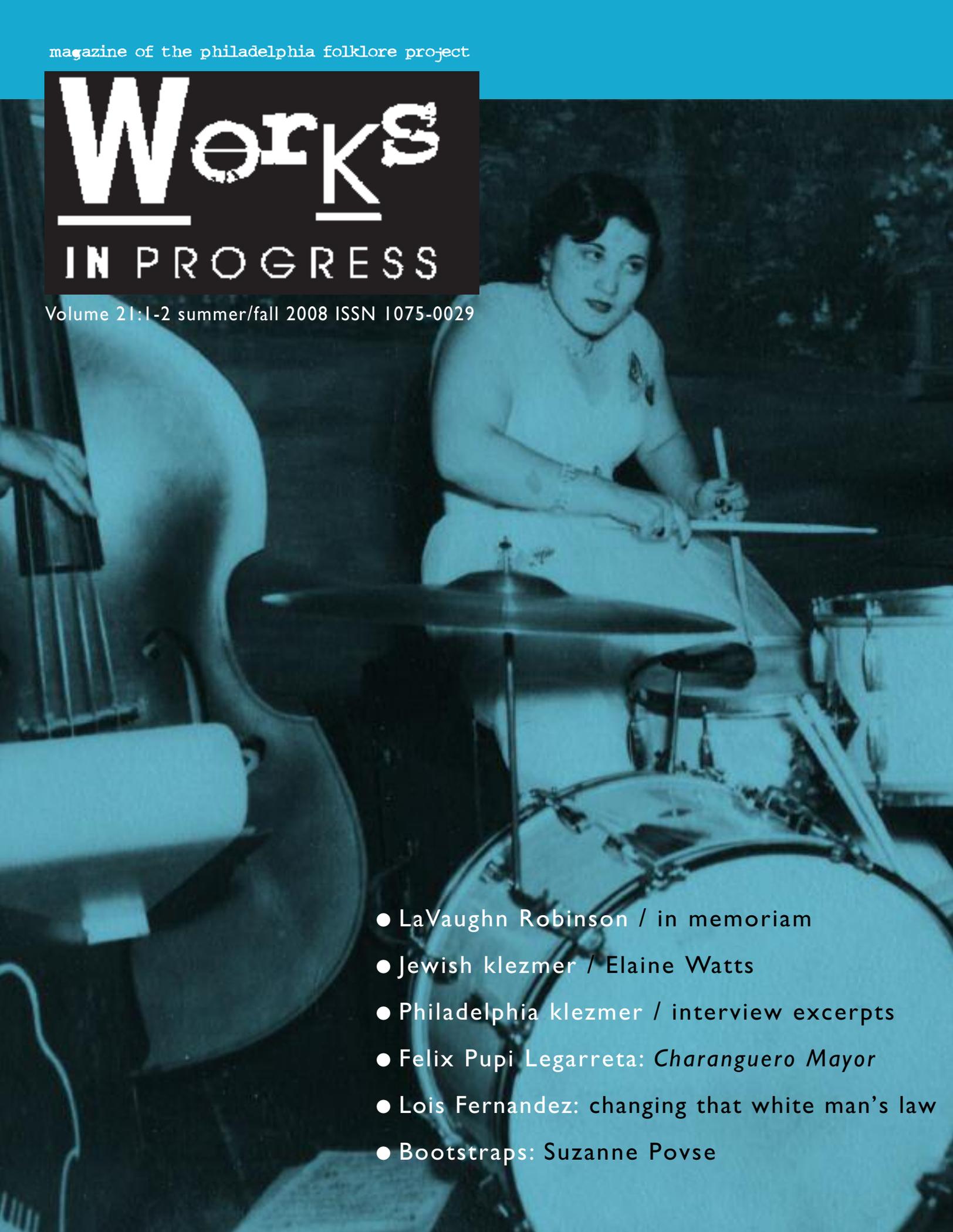


magazine of the philadelphia folklore project

# Works

## IN PROGRESS

Volume 21:1-2 summer/fall 2008 ISSN 1075-0029

- 
- LaVaughn Robinson / in memoriam
  - Jewish klezmer / Elaine Watts
  - Philadelphia klezmer / interview excerpts
  - Felix Pupi Legarreta: *Charanguero Mayor*
  - Lois Fernandez: changing that white man's law
  - Bootstraps: Suzanne Povse

# Works IN PROGRESS

**Works in progress** is the magazine of the Philadelphia Folklore Project, a 21-year-old public interest folklife agency. We work with people and communities in the Philadelphia area to build critical folk cultural knowledge, sustain the complex folk and traditional arts of our region, and challenge practices that diminish these local grassroots arts and humanities. To learn more, please visit us: [www.folkloreproject.org](http://www.folkloreproject.org) or call **215.726.1106**.

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*Front cover:  
Elaine Hoffman  
performing at the Curtis  
Institute Christmas Party,  
1951.  
Photo courtesy Elaine  
Hoffman Watts*



Strength of character, nerve, sheer persistence, creativity, real mother wit: a catalog of sterling virtues fills these pages of stories about local people. A community activist and single mother forced the state to change policy on birth certificates for children: this is the proudest achievement of Lois Fernandez, better known as founder of the long-lived ODUNDE festival. The first woman percussionist to graduate from Curtis Institute and a working mom long before it was common, Elaine Watts kept playing her family's klezmer tunes, even when no Jewish bands would hire her. One of the first women to work locally as a transmission mechanic, Suzanne Povse figured out how to advance in her trade, one hard-won step after another. Playing Cuban charanga music for more than sixty years and well-known as one of the Fania All-Stars, Pupi Legarreta became an electrician when music wouldn't pay the bills. And in these pages, the late great Philadelphia hooper LaVaughn Robinson keeps dancing, his sound and Philly-bred style remembered by his protégé and dance partner, Germaine Ingram. Each of the remarkable people in these pages broke new ground. None had an easy road. All of them persisted and endured—and we are so grateful!

For 21 years, we have been using this magazine to offer

small but penetrating glimpses of inspiring neighbors—people who sustain some of our city's greatest artistic traditions or who have been part of grassroots efforts for equity and justice. From our perspective, the practice of significant cultural expression and grassroots social activism are similar in their positive effect on the social fabric of our city and its neighborhoods. The parallels and similarities are reflected in the stories contained in this volume. Each story is about an "everyday" Philadelphian—someone who could be our next-door neighbor—whose passion and vision led each to defy the conventions of the day. For Fernandez, it was a passion for the worth and blessedness of each child, regardless of the marital status of his or her parents. Povse was motivated by a vision of respect and fairness in the workplace, regardless of gender or race. Watts rejected limiting assumptions about the value and place of women musicians and ethnic music. Robinson and Legarreta proved that excellence and artistry can be achieved in cultural expressions that were disregarded, devalued, or even denigrated. These people have fed sustenance to a vision of our city as a place where each person receives equal respect for his or her humanity and potential, where the power of significant cultural practice to build and sustain communi-

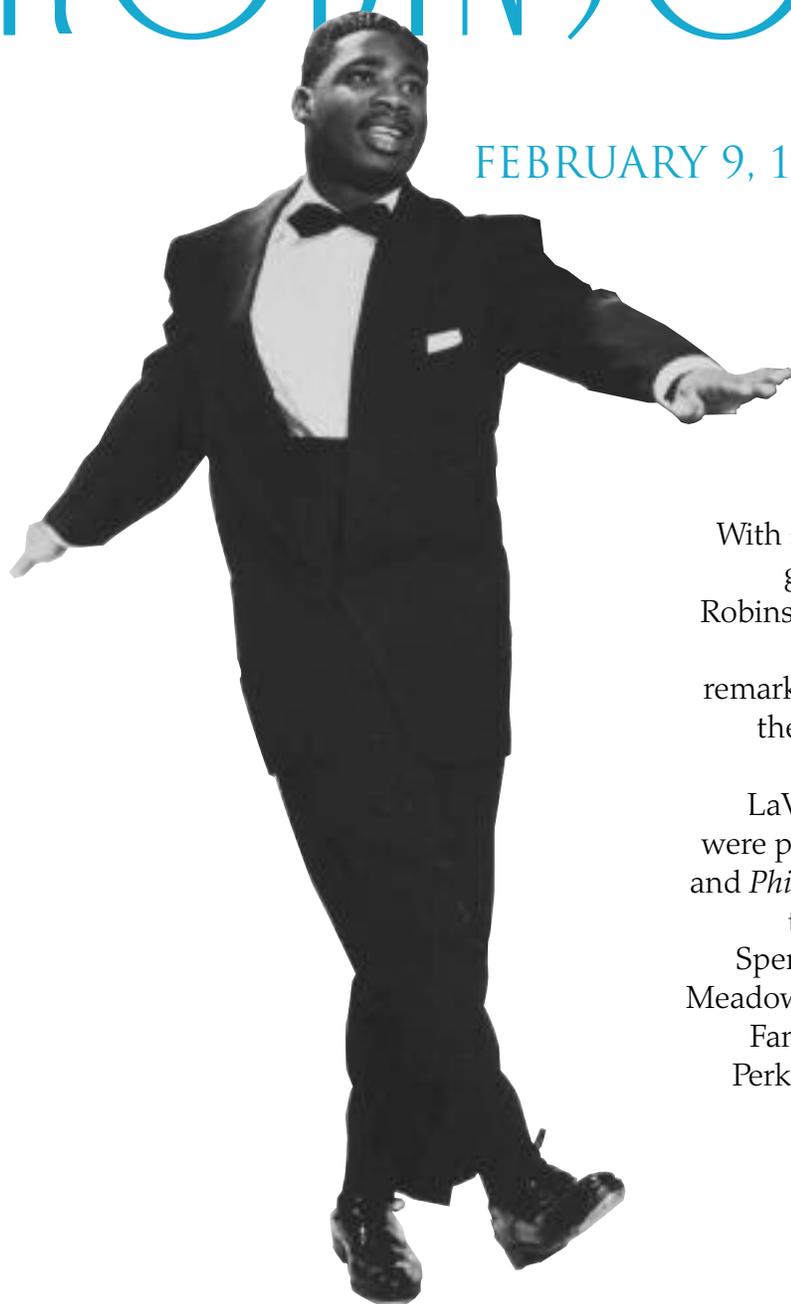
ties is understood and nurtured, and where talent and accomplishment are recognized in a multitude of diverse forms and faces.

We tell these stories to honor inspiring individuals, but also to remind ourselves and our readers that paying attention to the cultural treasures among us is something we each can do—individually and together, in large and small ways—to build a sense of shared promise and an avenue for collective investment in social progress in our city and region. The work of building never stops. Rarely does a week pass without a headline announcing an incident of disregard, neglect or abuse of this city's children. The fact that a man of color, born of an African national and raised in Indonesia could become our country's next president should not obscure the continued existence of unfair barriers to opportunity based on gender, disability, religion, language, race, sexual orientation and other invidious distinctions. Commercialization and homogenization of culture threatens our ability to know who we are and teach our children who they are. Telling these stories is our modest contribution to showing and building a way forward. We invite you to read on.

— Debora Kodish and Germaine Ingram

I N M E M O R Y O F  
L A V A U G H N  
R O B I N S O N

FEBRUARY 9, 1927 - JANUARY 22, 2008



With sorrow, we announce the passing of the great Philadelphia tap dancer LaVaughn Robinson this past January. In many ways, this feels like the end of a defining era of remarkable tap veterans and entertainers. Join the Folklore Project in the coming year for programs recalling the contributions of LaVaughn and others, all now passed, who were part of our *Plenty of Good Women Dancers* and *Philadelphia Tap Initiative* projects dating to the 1990s: Hortense Allen Jordan, Libby Spencer, Edith "Baby Edwards" Hunt, Henry Meadows, Delores and Dave McHarris, Isabelle Fambro, Michelle Webster Roberts, Patricia Perkins. We are privileged by their presence.

*Above: LaVaughn Robinson  
Photo courtesy of the artist*

*Right: Master tap dancers and elders Henry Meadows, Edith "Baby Edwards" Hunt and LaVaughn Robinson, with their students and dancer partners Pete Briglia and Germaine Ingram. Photo: Jane Levine*

*LaVaughn Robinson and Henry Meadow at a PFP "Stepping in Time" rehearsal. Photo: Thomas B. Morton, 1994*



## FOR LAVAUGHN

Philly street dancer romancing the floorboards like Cyrano diggin' Roxanne;  
Tapping beguines that breathe the urgent purr of felines drunk on catnip.  
Swingin' like a Hampton jump—like Lunceford layin' down "For Dancers Only"—  
like Frankie Manning stompin' at the Savoy...  
like Ella chasin' her yellow basket...  
Skippy ain't seen no smooth like his soft shoe, and the moon ain't been so high  
as me, watching from the wings, him putting an exclamation point on "Artistry."  
Fernando jumped out the Hideaway just long enough for him to run an armada's worth of paddles;  
And "Lover" drew near to hear the rapture of staccato heels tradin' with stop-time tune.  
Papa Smurf catchin' his wind while tellin' jokes older than New Years Day.  
"Sound tap dancing," that's what he'd say, 'fore pouring fire on the stage.

"Peace be still" you say? Death can't hush his satin roar.  
Sod and stone can't quell his story. Sunset can't out his flame.  
I stood on the banks of Jordan to see his ship go by...  
While his song lingers, lingers, lingers, in the air.

*Germaine Ingram, January 27, 2008*

Susan Watts  
and Elaine  
Hoffman  
Watts. Photo:  
Julie Brown,  
2005



In May 2008, PFP presented a major concert with Elaine and Susan Watts and a band of klezmer greats, premiering new arrangements of the music that these exceptional women have learned from two older generations of musicians in their family. The following conversation was recorded on March 4, 2008, at the Havertown home of Elaine Hoffman Watts by PFP staffer Elizabeth Sayre. Three other women were present, representing two generations of the Hoffman family: Elaine's sister, Leanore Nathans, and two of Elaine's daughters, trumpeter Susan Watts and Lorrie Keammerer.

# "from then on, i never dropped the sticks"

**Elizabeth:** Tell me about the musical life of your family.

**Leanore:** When Elaine was a toddler, Daddy [Jacob "Jake" Hoffman] was always at that piano. Elaine took Daddy's drumsticks in her hands, and the practice pad, and she started to play in time with him. Daddy said, "Give me the sticks, I'll show you how to hold them." From then on...

**Elaine:** I never dropped the sticks.

**Leanore:** ... to perfection. My father always took interest that she be properly educated in music, percussion. She had the finest teachers, like Benjamin Podemski and David Grupp.<sup>1</sup> I have nothing of music. My ability is in handwork.

**Susan:** And dancing. She has a fantastic sense of rhythm.

**Lorrie:** She does have musical ability. They just did never find the right thing for her.

**Elaine:** No, no, my father made her stop when she was sixteen, because, you know, to become a chorus girl—was terrible.

**Elizabeth:** Where was the house that you grew up?

**Elaine:** 6205 Ludlow Street.

**Elizabeth:** What was the neighborhood like at that time?

**Elaine:** Mixed. It wasn't a Jewish neighborhood. It wasn't Gentile.

**Lorrie:** But then they moved. Susan doesn't even remember. My grandparents moved from that house to Wynnefield. We used to lay and nap under this piano, and Pop-Pop played and played and played. You know, your concept of what is normal is relative. When there were parties, or even just dinners, there was always live music after. It didn't even have to be a party. You always came into the house, and Pop-Pop was playing a freilach<sup>2</sup> on the piano. Whether it was a big holiday or we were just there being babysat, you always had music. In the basement, we used to put on puppet shows, and Pop-Pop used to play the xylophone with our puppet shows. So, Eileen, my older sister, and I were constantly exposed to anybody playing anything at any time.

**Leanore:** You would come home from school, Daddy was either teaching or playing. It was always happy. Every holiday, every dinner, every Friday night dinner, family dinner, it was beautiful.

**Elizabeth:** So, where was Jake Hoffman born?

**Elaine:** Krivoe Ozero in Russia.

**Elizabeth:** How old was he when he came over?

**Elaine:** Seven.

**Elizabeth:** How did he meet your mom?

**Elaine:** He played her brother's bar mitzvah.

**Leanore:** And he put a telephone in their home in Strawberry Mansion, so that he could call her and talk to her on the phone.

**Elizabeth:** Tell me about your mom's family a little bit. Was she born here?

**Elaine:** No, she came here when she was three, from Kiev, Russia [Ukraine]. She didn't find this out till we were all grown—there were two children, Aunt Margaret and my mother. My mother was three or four, they were like eighteen months apart, and they wanted to get out, from the pogroms. They gave the little girls wine, put them to sleep, and they were in the hay wagon, with horses, and they covered them in the hay. And they drove them out of Russia into Poland. A cousin told my mother the story.

**Leanore:** When they were in Russia, and the Cossacks — my mother told me this — would trample into their house with the horses. The floors

[Continued on next page >]



*Uncle Johnny Hoffman playing drums. Philadelphia, c. 1920s. Photo courtesy Elaine Hoffman Watts*

were dirt, mud. My grandfather dug a tunnel. When they would come in, the Cossacks, and raid, he would put the two girls in this tunnel. And he put the mud back on them, and the rug.

**Elizabeth:** Did your parents speak Russian or Yiddish?

**Elaine:** My mother did say they had an old grandmother that lived with them, she did speak Russian. But when the grandmom died ...

**Lorrie:** They spoke Yiddish.

**Elizabeth:** Tell me how your father learned music.

**Elaine:** They were shamed into it. He graduated high school, which nobody did then. He was going to Brown's, one of those pharmaceutical prep things. And Grandpop said, "What, do you want

to make sodas at a fountain? Be a musician!"

**Lorrie:** But the whole family played. The grandfather wrote music, and they all played. He had lessons at Settlement Music School ...

**Leanore:** Seven lessons, he always told me, seven. Then he would come home at night, a little boy, playing weddings. ...

**Elaine:** Polish weddings ...

**Leanore:** or affairs that went on and on and on. His hands were frozen from carrying the drums, and he would kick with his foot on the door and call his mother in Yiddish, "Please open the door, my hands are frozen."

**Elaine:** But I'll tell you another one. He always worked, he made money. They lived in this little hole of a

house in South Philly. He put in indoor plumbing, a toilet. He made money!

**Elizabeth:** This was before you were born.

**Elaine:** Oh, he was a young man!

**Lorrie:** You're talking 1910, '12, '14, before even the First World War. He was born in 1898.

**Elaine:** The Second World War wouldn't take him because he was too short. He wanted to go in the Navy Band. It would have changed his whole life.

**Leanore:** Uncle Morris was taller. He was drafted in the band.

**Lorrie:** All the brothers played. He had how many brothers? There were four boys ...

**Elaine:** Uncle Johnny, Uncle Harry, Uncle Morris, and Daddy.



*Jake Hoffman, Elaine's father, and the "ersbte Eynikl," first grandchild, 1945.*

*Jake Hoffman at a family Passover seder, with grandchildren Eileen, Robert, Joanie and Lorrie. Photos courtesy Elaine Hoffman Watts*

**Lorrie:** There were four boys and a girl.

**Elaine:** Two girls, Ida and Esther.

**Lorrie:** Oh, I didn't know Aunt Ida. But, anyway, they all played. All the boys played.

**Elaine:** They all went to Settlement. Aunt Ida went to Settlement, she would perform ...

**Lorrie:** She never played professionally, concerts.

**Leanore:** She played concerts for organizations.

**Susan:** How about Esther?

**Leanore:** Violin and piano.

**Elaine:** Esther, she could play, but she was crazy.

**Elaine:** Uncle Morris told me that Aunt Ida at one time taught piano at Settlement.

**Lorrie:** Uncle Johnny played the drums...

**Elaine:** ... Good jazz!

**Leanore:** With Paul Whiteman.

**Lorrie:** And then Uncle Morris Hoffman, he's still alive, he's 95, he played at the — what was the name of that place?

**Leanore:** The Latin Casino.<sup>3</sup>

**Elaine:** From the day it opened till the day it closed, at shows and theaters. He was a doubler; he played all the reeds. He played sax, clarinet, flute, bassoon.

**Lorrie:** He taught me how to play clarinet.

**Leanore:** Daddy got to hate music!

**Elizabeth:** What did he hate about it, the business?

**Susan:** I think it just eats you up. It's very difficult.

**Elizabeth:** Was it different then than

it is now?

**Susan:** It was different then because there was more work and you could make a good living. But it was still very difficult.

**Elizabeth:** You mean, like, competitive, and people not treating you well?

**Elaine:** Right, right, right, right!

**Leanore:** You were not looked up to. You were a klezmer.

**Elaine:** No, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the shows, the theaters. Daddy didn't depend on the klezmer work. This man was a musician for anybody! Before the sound came in movies, every theater had a symphony orchestra as good as the Philadelphia Orchestra. Daddy used to play in those 60-piece orchestras. Podemski — this is when Leanore was born, in 1923 — he said, "Why don't you come in the Philadelphia Orchestra?" Daddy said, "I'm making \$60 a week playing at the theater, and you're only making \$40 a week at the Academy." Daddy did not depend on klezmer.

**Susan:** Nobody depended on klezmer!

**Elizabeth:** What was klezmer for in those times?

**Elaine & Leanore:** Weddings.

**Elizabeth:** Just weddings, or were there other events?

**Lorrie:** No, like at our house ...

**Leanore:** Organizations. The Krivozer [Krivoe Ozero]...

**Elaine:** The landsmanschaft organization — these people that came over from

the same town in Russia, they were called landsmanschaft organizations.

They would have parties and banquets, and Daddy would play them. The Krivoe Ozero was the town that Daddy came from, and that's the musicians they used. The German Jews used Abe Neff, this one used this one, and it's a whole mish-mosh, I found out. Daddy was not a businessman! Daddy was a virtuoso musician. He couldn't care less about the business!

**Leanore:** He used to play an act, "Sing along with Jake."

**Elizabeth:** What was that like? A solo act?

**Leanore:** He'd play the xylophones, starting out with "My Baby," and those songs, all Fred Astaire type of numbers. He used to write to Lawrence Welk constantly, "Please, let me audition for you."

**Elizabeth:** He was a composer, too, right? Tell me about his compositions.

**Lorrie:** We always heard them. He played them all the time. He played "Eteleh"; he played "Lakeleh"...

**Leanore:** And another one, "First Grandchild"...

**Elizabeth:** Were there charts?

**Elaine:** Yeah, two, for "Lakeleh" and "Eteleh." And one was lost. I have a little cassette that he made in the living room on Braddock Lane — you [Susan] were not born. I'm playing drums and Daddy is playing piano. I have it, and he played those three freilachs. And off of those, we had the music for "Eteleh"

[Continued on p. 20 >]



# "50 YEARS AGO, I PLAYED THE SAME WAY": EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEW

For the documentary video on Elaine Watts that we are making, we've had the pleasure of recording dozens of people: members of Elaine's family, fellow musicians, long-time friends, her students, and klezmer scholars. We thought we'd share some of this pleasure with you! Interviewing, transcribing, and pouring over careful transcriptions can change how you hear: time slows down and you savor the nuances, rhythms and feeling in peoples' voices. Eventually we'll use nuggets of these interviews to fill out a picture of who Elaine Watts is and why this family legacy of klezmer is so precious. For now, we offer a small sampling of the rich reflections people have shared in interviews. Interviews were transcribed by Thomas Owens, and edited by Debora Kodish.

**Hankus Netsky:** There's already these families in Jewish music [in Philadelphia]. There's a scene already for Joseph Hoffman to come into when he shows up in 1905; it's already here. And what happens is they add on to it— it becomes a cumulative thing. It becomes this in-gathering of the exiles. Because somebody comes from Krivoie Ozero— and he comes with his book [of music]. Harry Kandel's already here and he's from Krakow, you know, and he's from Galicia and he brings his book. Then you've got these guys from around Kiev who come also. And then you've got Morris Fried from Belarus, and he brings his book. And the Alexander family, also from Belarus. It's one community, and the musicians are basically putting together a repertoire that becomes the Philadelphia repertoire. And then it's a scene with families that continue

throughout the generations. So you have generations of Lemisches. Or you've got the Hoffmans, with Joseph Hoffman, Jakey Hoffman, Elaine Hoffman, Susan, you know. These families stay. They just stay here for generation to generation. So, it just continues. It's a place that has its own feeling and its own kind of atmosphere. It's not like these people played klezmer music every day— they didn't do that. They'd play it at weddings. But at a wedding you were back in the old country.

**Morris Hoffman:** Oh yeah! Pesach was the day. After the Seder, my father would say, "Get the clarinet!" He gave just one order, and that was it! So I would play the clarinet. My brother Jake, he played piano, and my brother John played the drum. And the family had a good time. In fact, we lived in South Philadelphia, where we had a porch. All the neighbors



# THE WATTS

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A page from Joseph Hoffman's books. Jake Hoffman on xylophone, in an Italian band in Philadelphia. Photos courtesy Elaine Hoffman Watts

would be on the porch, would watch us. We had fun! My father loved to dance. He was very ostentatious. He had to be the boss. And we had a good time. The whole family was together. And then, we were enjoying ourselves. But my father was the boss! He had my whole life planned. And I didn't dare disobey him. If he said this was green, this was green. The older generation, whatever they said, went. That's how it was.

**Elaine Hoffman Watts:** My cousin Buddy studied drums with my father, Jake. And he said, "Your father was eccentric," he said. "But what a musician." I said, "Nah, you're telling me he was eccentric?" He was a brilliant musician. Very troubled guy, you know. He worked hard to make a living. And he was just great. And

he didn't go to Curtis or Julliard. He took a half-a-dozen lessons at the Settlement Music School when they were, you know, "Got these immigrants, teach 'em something," you know. That's what that school was for. And he started out as a piano player, and he did play for silent movies. He had a sister, Aunt Esther, she's only died in the last five years or so. She played violin and piano, and would never play for anybody—one of those. And Uncle Morris, great saxophone and clarinet. And there was another uncle, Johnny, handsome guy, who was a jazz drummer: he worked for Paul Whiteman orchestras. I'm going back! And, uh, there was another uncle, Uncle Harry, screwball, great violinist who ran away from Peabody. And then there was

another sister, Aunt Ida, who was a great pianist.  
**Henry Sapoznik:** This is what's so tragic and poignant about this. If you wanna play Irish music or Bulgarian music or old-time music, you just get in a plane and you fly to those countries, and you just roam around. You'll find some old guy on a porch and he's playing, and you're off to the races. We [Jews] don't have that. We need our elders. We need the carriers of the tradition. Drummers were in reasonably short supply. But to find an old-time drummer who was still actively working, and a woman! I mean, c'mon—break all the molds right here in this one person. She forces us to re-examine the received wisdom.

**Elaine Hoffman Watts:** When I started already to play, Daddy didn't

[Continued on p. 26 >]



by Elizabeth Sayre

# Felix "Pupi" Legarreta, *Charanguero Mayor*

**A personal note:** For me, writing about the life and work of musicians is the next best thing to playing music, but it can also be daunting. Basing my writing on interviews and research into the histories of sounds and places, I strive for two goals: accurate, nuanced representation and increased visibility and understanding of the artist's work and life in cultural and historical context. I used to find this task most challenging when I was faced with an unfamiliar musical style or art form and had to learn enough about it, quickly, to represent it well. It turns out that describing something better known can be equally challenging. How do I capture what I, and others, have heard and felt over years, or even decades? How do I express the visceral feelings and understandings that certain sounds give me? How do I relate those personal thoughts to a bigger picture? How do I connect an individual's story to a complicated cultural history in just a few pages? How do I inspire in the reader the same respect that I have for a musician, based not only on his or her reputation, but also on my own accumulated musical experiences?

Writing about Pupi represents exactly that kind of challenge. I first saw him

playing with the outstanding Puerto Rican Latin jazz drummer/percussionist Steve Berrios at International House in the 1990s. I met Pupi several years ago through AMLA, a North Philadelphia-based non-profit arts organization that has worked on behalf of Latin music and musicians for more than 25 years.\* In 2003 I had the unforgettable opportunity to rehearse and perform as a percussionist with Pupi and 22 other musicians as part of a two-year project that brought new arrangements of "classic" Latin tunes (mostly Cuban) to audiences in Allentown and Philadelphia. Under the direction of Johnny Pacheco (a Dominican star of salsa music from the sixties and seventies) and Elio Villafranca (Cuban, a former resident of Philadelphia, and a Latin jazz pianist from a younger generation), the orchestra was made up of people from the Philadelphia area. Many were experienced Latin musicians; others came from different genres, such as classical music or jazz. (The concerts were titled "A Night of Latin Classics;" major funding was provided by the Philadelphia Music Project.)

Sitting across the stage from Pupi was a remarkable experience. I had played in Latin rhythm sections (which usually

consist of *congas*, *bongó*, *timbales*, bass, piano, and *percusión menor*), but I had never been part of a *charanga*. I had never experienced first-hand the unique sound of violins in Latin dance music. In that context, the violin is an important rhythm instrument, as well as a melody and harmony instrument. A skilled *charanguero* must have the instrumental technique of a classical player, the ready-to-invent ear of a jazz musician, and the rhythmic sense of a Latin percussionist. The violins in *charanga* play legato melodic lines, but they also cook! They add to the collective rhythmic energy of the music by playing repetitive, syncopated patterns (called *montunos*), just as all the instruments do at certain times. The *montunos* of the melodic instruments along with the *tumbaos* of bass and percussion create a rhythmically dense engine to propel dancers, and a thick platform of sound to support melodic soloists and singers. The confidence, attitude, knowledge, and heart that Pupi put into his playing — both *montunos* and solos — during those rehearsals and shows made the whole experience inspiring, energizing, and fun. Pupi plays the simplest line with feeling that makes clearly audible his more than 50 years' worth of experience. — ES

Pupi Legarreta.  
Photos:  
Elizabeth Sayre



**M**aster musician Felix “Pupi” Legarreta has performed and recorded with the best of the best in Latin dance music since the 1950s. By turns a violinist, flutist, singer, arranger, composer, and bandleader, Pupi has personally witnessed and participated in the birth of several important musical genres: *charanga*, *cha-cha-chá*, *pachanga*, *salsa*, boogaloo. Yet he is humble, accessible ... and, unfortunately, not so well known by people outside his community or generation.

Pupi was born in 1940 in the city of Cienfuegos, also known as *La Perla del Sur*, the “Pearl of the South,” for its French-influenced colonial flavor. Cienfuegos is on the southern coast of Cuba, the heart of the sugar-growing lands. It was the original home of Orquesta Aragón, founded in the late 1930s and one of Cuba’s most important *charangas* (a type of Cuban dance orchestra that uses violins, cello, and flute instead of horns). This was the music that Pupi grew up hearing. By the age of seven he was studying violin—and more:

Our fathers, they are very strict. We’re poor, so our fathers have to be sure that we get some profession because they cannot support us for too long. It’s not like here. All the music courses in Cuba are the long way. Studying reading four or five years, with *la teoría, el instrumento, la forma de la música*, harmony, counterpoint, orchestration, conducting. Oh, please. Ear training.... [When you begin] music in Cuba, the teacher will be sincere with you. If the teacher puts you to do, let’s say, the scale — [sings] “*do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si, do*” — and he sings that to you. And he says, “I want you to catch the same note. I’m giving you this scale by ear.” And you don’t do that? He’s going to tell you that you cannot do [music]. Teachers in Cuba used to say to some of us, “Hey, you don’t have the ear for music. Try to be a barber, or a tailor, or something. But quit music, ‘cause you got problems.”

By the age of fifteen, Pupi had moved to Havana with his uncle, who would escort him to gigs. He soon joined another of Cuba’s best-known *charangas*, Orquesta Sensación:

When I was around twelve, I was

playing with a band by the name of Orquesta Sorpresa over there in Cienfuegos. And I played with that band maybe two years, and then I went to Havana. [Orquesta Sensación] used to go to Cienfuegos sometimes to play. The guy who played the drums, he used to be my friend, Chuchú [Jesús Esquizarrosa]. He saw me in Havana. I went to see San Lázaro around December 17,<sup>2</sup> and [Chuchú] saw me down in Rincón, Santiago de las Vegas. He saw me there, and he said, “Hey, Cienfueguero, you’re here?” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “What are you doing?” I say, “Nothing, I don’t even have a violin.” He said, “Don’t worry about it. Go tomorrow to the radio station, and we’re going to get you a violin, and you’ll play with me. You’re working with me. That’s it.” And that’s the way I started playing with Sensación. We used to do Radio Mambí, a radio program. We used to do Radio Cadena Habana. We’d do three radio stations, live, a day.

Pupi began his professional life at a time when Latin dance music of the Spanish/Afro-Caribbean variety was internationally popular; and well-

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Lois Fernandez at  
ODUNDE, c. 1991.  
Photo:  
Thomas B. Morton

“Mother wins fight to end stigma of illegitimacy” was the headline in the *Philadelphia Bulletin* on December 10, 1978, announcing that all children in Pennsylvania would have the right to receive a birth certificate, regardless of the marital status of their parents. Lois Fernandez, best known as a founder of ODUNDE, was the major force behind the effort to change Pennsylvania policy. She says, “This is the big one for me, This was my biggest victory. ODUNDE definitely would take second place. This is my greatest achievement.” Thirty years later, we offer Fernandez’s story about this struggle, transcribed from an interview in the PFP Archive, and inaugurating our new series of stories offering first person perspectives on local history and cultural heritage. Like her work at ODUNDE, this struggle reflects Fernandez’ commitment to self-determination, equity and respect—and her courage.

It started in 1971. I started talking with my mother about the rights of children born out of wedlock, because I hadn’t gotten a birth certificate for my son.

And I said to her I hadn’t received anything. And she was working for the Bureau of Vital Statistics at the time. And she said in her own way, “You won’t ‘cause he’s a bastard. Il-legit.”

And she looks at me and she said, “I don’t believe what I see in your eyes! You think you’re gonna change that white man’s law that’s over two hundred years old?”

So, I was at Community College at the time. I think I was part time, working for the Department of Welfare as a gang worker and majoring in Library Tech, so they taught me how to do research. So I started looking and seeing some things about children born out of wedlock. A friend of mine was

working at Blue Cross told me I could use their law library at lunch time. So I started going over there to Blue Cross, right across the street from City Hall. And I became obsessed one night. I remember calling my girlfriend and saying, “I’ve written this letter to State Representative Hardy Williams for the rights for children born out of wedlock.”

And in that one big paragraph that I wrote to him I said that I’d given birth to a prince, but according to law I didn’t have a birth certificate for him because the law says that, you know, he was a bastard or il-legit born out of wedlock, and you don’t get a birth certificate. You can get a notification. And the notification only had the child’s name on there, no mother or father. And I considered that like it was nobody’s child. And when my child was born, I gave all that information—his father’s name and everything, you know—to the

hospital. But that was the law and my mother had told me. And I couldn't accept the fact that because I wasn't married, that my son would not have a birth certificate. And how key, in my view, a birth certificate was: a passport to life. You couldn't go to school without it. You couldn't go in the army without it. You couldn't get married without it. You needed a birth certificate. And so I asked Hardy Williams could he help change the law, so children born out of wedlock could have their birth certificate. And so I sent that letter to Hardy.

I didn't hear from him. It was a week or two, and I ran into him one day in town. And I was crazy, so I asked him

And so folks saw that, and a classmate of mine from Community College, she said to me that she had a good friend who was heading the Urban League here, and she felt they needed an issue. And so she said, "Lois, I'm gonna have them contact you, and get in contact with you." And she did. And so I met with them, and he decided that he would let me go make a presentation to their board. And I did, and they were very receptive, and several of them said that they too were born out of wedlock, and that they knew about the birth certificate issue. Other people were amazed. Other people didn't believe that they had separate

whether he was married or not." And we got that.

And then I went on to talk to the Public Interest Law Center, Ned Wolf. Because I think the Urban League didn't have but so much money to put into that legal part of it. And I heard about the Public Interest Law Center, and went to do a presentation for them. And when their lawyer finished talking about it, I said, "You ready to listen to me?" And finally they let me have my say, and when I finished Ned Wolf said, "All right, I'll write the brief." 'Cause I took the position after doing all my research that it was unequal protection under the law, 'cause here were two separate birth

# "You think you're gonna change that white man's law?"

by Lois Fernandez

why he hadn't responded to my letter. And he said, "What letter?" So I pulled the copy out of my bag, said, "There it is." And he said to me, "Well I'll check up on this, and you will hear from me." And I did in a couple of weeks, and he said he was going to introduce a law that he thought would be the forerunner for what he called the "most wanted human rights legislation that should be in the state." I still have the original letter he sent me. And that was how that got started. And I was so happy when he wrote that back to me.

And then after that, I decided we need some publicity on this thing, in order to get it out there. I don't know— I'd go on my gut. I just felt it was time. But I needed to get some public interest stirred up about it. And so I knew this woman from the newspaper, Sarah Casey. She was working for the Inquirer. I called Sarah, and I think that she wrote the first article about children.

birth certificates. So they were gonna finance the legal part of it.

And we went to court, but it got thrown out, if I remember, the first time, because they said we didn't have a father who said that children could inherit from him. Because the way the law had it, inheritance was a different issue. If you were able to get inheritance, you had to pay a higher rate of inheritance tax. So the whole thing was out of whack for children if they allowed you to inherit from your father. But if you inherited from your mother, you still had to pay a higher rate of tax because you're born out of wedlock.

And so finally we got a father. The man who came—his uncle heard me on radio, and told his nephew. The nephew, after he'd got in contact with me, and he said, "I'll be your father for that part of the case. I heard that you all got thrown out of court because you had no man who wanted his child to have the right to inherit,

certificates. Children born in wedlock had a certificate with their mother's maiden name and their father's name. Children born out of wedlock, just had a notification with the name of the child.

But obviously there had been a thing where, you know, it was an embarrassment for many women. And women— as my research has shown—women had to take a whole lot of heat for having children out of wedlock. You were a spoiled woman. I mean you had been tainted. If you got married, you were supposed to be so honored that this man gave you his name. You were now married; you were legit yourself, and it made you honorable. And I just didn't feel dishonorable. I always felt like, "I'm a human being as anybody. Had my child, and I'm just ready to go to wherever I have to go to deal with anybody. I'm as honorable as anybody, and I ain't taking nothing from nobody. And I will kick ass and take names for

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# BOOTSTRAPS

by Suzanne Povse





*Suzanne Pouse and the RCA building in Camden where she once worked. Now they are upscale lofts. Photos: Eva Himmelein, 2008*

**M**y first co-workers were 1977 vintage RCA employees: all men. The older men were WWII and Korean War vets, and many of the younger ones were less than ten years removed from their Viet Nam experiences. I spent my first day on the job in a section of the machine shop that did assembly of sheet metal parts. It was a back shop behind the main machine shop.

The six-story brick building covered a whole city block along the Delaware River. It had floor-to-ceiling windows: they were selling points when the building was converted into upscale loft apartments. Its loading dock is now a bar/restaurant carrying the name of a company that at one point employed thousands of people in the region. My shop was on the top floor of the building. In the winter the wind blew through the wall of windows facing the river. I was hired at the end of October. The temperature became unkind in November along the river. Standing on cement floors in steel-toed work boots made a machinist's feet particularly cold. On these cold and windy winter days my friend — a welder who was responsible for my getting the interview that landed me my job — would wheel in a hand truck carrying a large hunk of aluminum that he had heated up with a welding torch. He would drop it on the cement floor and shove it under my bench. My feet would stay warm for a good hour.

Handling steel and aluminum for eight hours a day in bitter cold weather was not kind to the fingers either. On days like this, the senior men in the back shop would take apart a pallet and fill a steel drum with the wood and some of the brown wrapping paper we used for shipping our parts. Then they would douse the contents of the steel drum with isopropyl alcohol, which we used for cleaning and as a lubricant for drilling aluminum. They would create a blaze, and we new hires would stand around the drum laughing at their ingenuity and bravado while we warmed our bodies and thawed out our fingers. This behavior was more a statement to the bosses about the horrible conditions we had to work under than a real solution to our discomfort, but it was good for our morale.

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# behind the scenes at pfp



**How do people come to be featured in Works in Progress?** Certainly, they are in these pages because we think they have something to say— but also, their presence usually means that they are involved with one of PFP's programs. **Elaine Hoffman Watts** was featured in a major PFP concert last spring and is the subject of a documentary in progress. The

late **LaVaughn Robinson** was involved in Folklore Project efforts over decades, including both the major production *Stepping in Time* and the documentary *Plenty of Good Women Dancers*. **Pupi Legarreta** and **Suzanne Povse** have participated in PFP's technical assistance program. **Lois Fernandez** first came to a PFP technical assistance workshop more

than 15 years ago, and ODUNDE and PFP have been friends and allies ever since. We've worked together in many ways, including collaborative efforts from a landmark project on social dance (*From Huckleback to Hip Hop*), to the multi-year *Philly Dance Africa* programs, and a 2007 documentary photo exhibition in honor of ODUNDE's 30th birthday. On that occasion, we showed a



selection of **Tom Morton's** beautiful photos of this important community event, offering copies of the images in exchange for peoples' stories about them. This was a chance for us to hear about (and to document) some of what ODUNDE means to people, and a way to make the exhibition live on in homes around the city, where the photographs are deeply known and treasured—and where they surely continue to stimulate important storytelling. As part of this process, Nia Bey Al-Rasul shared a story about Lois Fernandez— saying that she was beloved in the community for her fight around birth certificates. That prompted us to get the story down on tape. It is now preserved in both our Archive and at ODUNDE. What appears in these pages tends to be part of such larger and ongoing efforts (and part of how we learn what we need to be doing). We are initiating this new "Afterword" column to share some of these behind-the-scenes matters. But all that said: we are happy to entertain your ideas about what might be in these pages. We focus exclusively on community-based cultural heritage in this region, paying close attention to local folk and traditional arts and artists, and to

documenting significant community experiences, especially regarding social change. We prefer work in which people speak for themselves, in their own words. If you have an idea, we would be happy to hear from you.

This summer the wonderful folks at Mill Creek Design built a new back shed at PFP and made some other needed repairs to our building. Thanks to them (and a grant from the City's Capital Fund), we'll be opening a new folk arts resource room for public use this fall—a home within our home for our long-running technical assistance program offering services to people working in folk and traditional arts and cultural heritage. We are proud that over the last 21 years, we have helped local traditional artists and grassroots groups to raise more than \$2.876 million dollars in outside funds to support community-based folk arts activity here, but that is just one mark of impact. The learning and conversation among workshop attendees has always been rich: now we have a permanent space to support this activity. Look for expanded "office hours" in addition to our second Saturday workshops, beginning this fall.

These services are always free.

Our 21st year was filled with activity: two major concerts (sold out, artistic successes), a busy year of technical assistance (resulting in major awards to many local traditional artists— see our website [www.folkloreproject.org](http://www.folkloreproject.org) for details), a full complement of folk arts education programs reaching more than 400 students at the Folk Arts – Cultural Treasures Charter School (FACTS), founded by Asian Americans United and PFP, and more. The photos give some glimpses of activities at our building.

If you are reading this within easy distance from PFP, we hope that we'll see you this fall. Visit our website for current programs, See [www.folkloreproject.org](http://www.folkloreproject.org) for virtual exhibitions, glimpses of our archive, and of course, to purchase our books and documentaries and back issues of our long-running magazine. Or call or email and we'll add you to our mailing list: 215.726.1106 or [pfp@folkloreproject.org](mailto:pfp@folkloreproject.org)

—Debora Kodish

*Photos: Liberian performers Blamoh Doe, Gbaltuo Comgbaye, Kormassa Bobo and Fatu Gayflor at PFP's farewell party for long-time staffer Toni Shapiro-Pbim. Tai Joselyn and Dr. Joamie May Cordova making birthday bats at PFP's 20th birthday celebration. Board member Mawusi Simmons with PFP materials and glimpses of our Hmong exhibition. PFP board and staff: Germaine Ingram, Ellen Somekawa, Ife Nii-Owoo, Debora Kodish, Mary Yee, Toni Shapiro-Pbim and Dorothy Wilkie. Photos: Ife Nii-Owoo. Above: Linford Martin and Andy Peifer, from Mill Creek Design, hard at work at the new PFP resource room, summer 2008. Photo: Thomas Owens*

and “Lakeleh,” and Susan’s friend, we sent him the tape, and he transcribed “The Ershte Eynikl.”

**Elizabeth:** That’s “The First Grandchild”? And you’re going to play those three tunes in the show?

**Elaine:** Yeah.

**Elizabeth:** Tell me about what else you’re playing.

**Susan:** Well, we’re playing all the music that my great-grandfather wrote. I never met him. He seems like the most interesting, nutty. My mother’s father’s father.

**Elizabeth:** What was his name?

**All:** Joseph Hoffman.

**Susan:** He wrote these books. I don’t know whether he did it from memory. Nobody knows about these books.

**Elizabeth:** So these books of his that you have are dated 1927?

**Susan:** Yeah. I don’t know whether he had sheet music and copied it. He did it in three different keys: B-flat, C, and E-flat.

**Elizabeth:** It’s for the different instruments, in other words.

**Leanore:** He also wrote poetry, beautiful poetry...

**Susan:** He learned Yiddish, he learned how to play cornet in the Russian Army. So in this book there’s all these really nice Russian marches. And there’s concert pieces. There’s things he wrote — there’s Naftuli Brandwein doinas.<sup>4</sup> Naftuli Brandwein is a klezmer clarinetist. Dave Tarras, who was a big klezmer clarinetist at the time, that wrote popular stuff ...

**Elizabeth:** You mean, these compositions from other people are in the books?

**Susan:** Yes, yes!

**Elizabeth:** Did he transcribe them?

**Susan:** I don’t know, that’s what I’m saying. I don’t know whether he did it from his memory, or if he did it from other sheets of music ...

**Elaine:** Or old phonographs, the 78s.

**Elizabeth:** So, these books are a mix of his compositions and other people’s stuff?

**Susan:** And “Trad” pieces, traditional klezmer tunes, traditional

eastern European tunes...

**Elaine:** That they’re still playing today.

**Elizabeth:** Well, Elaine, your father saw your talent, and he really supported you. Tell me what else happened to you, and how did you become a musician?

**Elaine:** Actually, I can’t do anything else. My family will tell you that.

**Susan:** She certainly can’t nurse.

**Lorrie:** She can’t cook, she can’t ...

**Elaine:** I can cook, I don’t want to cook!

**Lorrie:** She can’t sew, she can’t type.

**Elaine:** I can’t sew and I can’t knit. So it was default — play the drums! But I can make kasha. No, I always wanted to be a drummer.

**Leanore:** She went to junior high, Holmes Junior High at 55th & Chestnut.

**Elaine:** It’s an African American old age home now.

**Leanore:** When Elaine went to junior high, I said, “Go down and apply to play in the band.” She came home and she said, “They gave me the triangle.” I said, “You hit the triangle. Someday something will happen and they’ll need you.” And she became the drummer.

**Elaine:** No, want to hear a story? I had become a famous drummer by then, in junior high. The teacher wrote a musical. I was the only one that could read music, sit down and play the set. I had the chicken pox. The principal of the school came to the house, and they covered me up with calamine lotion—the rash was already all out already—and I went and played the show and came home!

**Leanore:** And did you not perform — Paul Whiteman had a program...

**Elaine:** An amateur hour. Yes. I did that.

**Elizabeth:** When was that?

**Elaine:** I was eighteen years old. I was at Curtis. I was on television. He had an amateur hour.

**Elizabeth:** What did you play, drum set?

**Elaine:** The drums, and I soloed, whatever.

**Elizabeth:** So, tell me a little bit

about Curtis and what it was like being there.

**Elaine:** Oh, it was nice! When I first got in there, a couple of guys came and said to me, “Are you the girl that plays the drums?” Because I didn’t realize, not till many years later, that I was the first female that was ever accepted there to play percussion.

**Susan:** And graduated.

**Elaine:** Yeah, that graduated.

**Elizabeth:** Did the other students and the teachers accept you?

**Elaine:** Oh, yeah! These students that I went with, they all became famous symphony musicians.

**Elizabeth:** So, how long were you there? You went straight from high school to Curtis?

**Elaine:** Yeah, I went two years there, then I went a year to the New Orleans Symphony, which I did not like. It was boring.

**Susan:** You sit there and count ...

**Elaine:** And then you come in wrong. Then I came back to Curtis, and I was really devastated because my teacher left.

**Elizabeth:** So it was two years, and then the New Orleans Symphony, and then another year, and then you got your diploma.

**Elaine:** Right. In 1952 I was in the New Orleans Symphony. Of course my mother came with me. You couldn’t let a nineteen-year-old Jewish girl go by herself. Anyway, it was still segregation there. On the buses, they had signs: “Colored.” They had pegs in the signs, and the seats had holes in them, and then you moved them. So, my mother and I got on the bus, and there’s nobody on the bus but us, so we took the sign and hid it. All the people, white or black, didn’t know where to sit. It was hysterical, they’re looking for the sign — “Where’s the sign?” Somebody said to me, many years later — Susan and I were together, they said, “Why didn’t you steal the sign?” I said, “I didn’t have anything, I just stuck it in the bottom.” But it was a hysterical story.

**Elizabeth:** And then what happened?

**Elaine:** I jobbed around, played, taught ...

**Susan:** Had children, got married ...

**Elaine:** No, no! Got married first, then had children! Anyway, but — I played and then I got married.

**Elizabeth:** What year did you get married?

**Elaine:** 1955.

**Elizabeth:** And you played ... there's that picture of you playing drums at your own wedding, right?

**Elaine:** Yeah! Daddy was playing a solo, and I played along.

**Susan:** You had to play at family things whether you wanted to or not. She played at my wedding. We had a jazz quartet, or something like that, and she played the drums. She said, "Get out of there, get up, I'm going to play!"

**Lorrie:** We just went to a wedding in April, in Brooklyn, our cousin's wedding. The band was terrible. Susan and my mother, and then Buddy's kids, who really play good, Jordan and Larry plays saxophone, they took over the band, because this band was horrible. Susan knew the guitar player, and she goes up, and she goes, "What's up with this band?"

**Elaine:** Susan played, we all played.

**Elizabeth:** Elaine, how was Susan as far as music when she was little?

**Elaine:** Genius! From the get-go. First she went to Suzuki piano. She was really good.

**Elizabeth:** How old was she?

**Elaine:** How old, Susan? Three or four?

**Susan:** I don't know. I just remember loving it. And Lorrie was a fabulous clarinet player! She played so good, and I remember her clarinet teacher coming over to the house, teaching her, and giving her lessons — Joe Smith — and she had such a beautiful sound. She thinks she wasn't any good. I don't know why she thinks that.

**Lorrie:** 'Cause I never could count, and Mommy used to say, "You can't count, you can't count!" I could play really good, but you have to do that

counting thing when you play. So I never felt that I was as good as everybody else.

**Elizabeth:** Susan, when did you start playing trumpet?

**Susan:** When I was eight; she said I was seven. I didn't like my piano teachers, and what wound up happening was I quit the piano, but I never stopped playing. I still, to this day, love playing the piano. Lorrie played the clarinet, Eileen played the accordion and the bassoon, Pop-Pop was always there playing the piano, we had a vibraphone set up. Mommy's vibraphone was set up in the living room. I would come home from school, and she [Elaine] was teaching, and I'd sit on her lap while she gave lessons, you know? So we had this closet, and it was A, B, C, D. It was a sliding closet, the panels on the closet. A was coats, B was another sliding [door], then C....

There were four doors, and in the fourth door on the bottom, ooh, it was always a mess. On the bottom were all kinds of instruments. There was the accordion, there was a violin, there were all sorts of percussion instruments, and my dad's trumpet from high school was there. I remember one day, just picking it up and playing it, and I loved it. I just could do it right away, naturally; it just came out. I remember saying, "I want to take trumpet lessons." That's how I started to play. I couldn't count either. I didn't learn how to count until I started teaching.

**Elizabeth:** Did you play in groups in middle school and high school? What kind of groups?

**Susan:** Everything.

**Lorrie:** You didn't have your own bands and stuff, no, no. She played in school orchestra and district orchestra.

**Susan:** But I was in Philadelphia Youth Orchestra. I was the youngest person they ever accepted for brass. That's how I got the travel bug. 'Cause I went to Australia. I was fifteen. I was like, "Oh, my God! I love this!" Then we went to ...

**Elaine:** Scotland! England, Scotland, and Wales. We were in Dover ...

**Susan:** I got sick as a dog. Do you remember?

**Elaine:** They wanted to take her tonsils out in England.

**Susan:** Yeah. And I missed a concert in Bath. Then I went away to St. Louis Conservatory of Music. It was like Curtis, you had to live on your own. It was too much, it was too far away, I was too young. It didn't work out. But I came back home, and that's when I started playing more. I went back to Temple, and I started playing in Haitian bands, and I started working in radio, and I worked at WRTI, and I got into jazz more. I was in the scholarship brass quintet at Temple. To make a long story short, I never graduated with a music degree. Then I went and got married, and I went back to school and got a bachelor's degree in English literature from Rosemont, and quit playing the trumpet. Then, eleven years ago, I left my husband, and I came home to this wonderful world of klezmer!

**Elaine:** That's true, that's it! That's how she found klezmer.

**Elizabeth:** How did klezmer go from being something that was bad to being what it is now?

**Elaine:** If you were a musician, you wouldn't want to be called a klezmer. It meant you were a bum in the park. It died out. Dead! Gone! For 20 some years. I would say from the Second World War on. These musicians in New York, Frank London, Henry Sapoznik, and Hankus Netsky here in Philadelphia, and several other people. They went and they said, "This music is too good to die, to leave it like that." In 1976 Hankus Netsky called me and said, "I'm looking for Jake Hoffman." I said, "You're two years too late, he died!" Then Hankus came here and I showed him Grandpop's books, and he [Hankus] had that Klezmer Conservatory Band. Which is a joke because klezmer was not a

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known bands toured frequently between Cuba and the United States. Mexico City was also a desirable working environment for Cuban musicians; Pupi headed there after a few years with Sensación to work with a group led by Ninón Mondéjar (1914–2006):

With Sensación, I played a few years. From around 1956, I was playing with Sensación. And then, Ninón Mondéjar from Orquesta América, he had problems with [his] musicians in Mexico, so then I quit Sensación to go to Mexico with América. 'Cause that's the people that did the cha-cha-chá, so I said, "Let me go with Ninón Mondéjar." And besides that, I was going to Mexico. Anybody, to really be a musician [at that time], you had to be in Mexico and live two or three years. Music and art in Mexico, it [was] like in Cuba. If you were a musician in Mexico, you were a professional.

I used to be very good friends with Enrique Jorrín [1926–1987].<sup>3</sup> I was in Mexico, I was with him almost every day, seeing the music that he got on top of the table, writing music. He played the piano — that's how he wrote his music. And he was incredible, an incredible musician, Enrique Jorrín. Violin player, piano player, good composer. He did incredible music. Top of the line. The time of the cha-cha-chá, the tunes that he did, I'm not going to see a Cuban person do that again. He was very intellectual, his words about the music, incredible. The melodies, type of connections in music, you know that he studied music. You know, the system we use in Cuba is very long, but in the long run, we are musicians.

When he returned to Cuba in the late 1950s, Pupi realized that daily life there was changing because of political developments. He decided to leave and soon found a way to do so:

I stayed in Mexico from, I would say, '57, '58, beginning of '59. I went back to Cuba. I saw Cuba real

depressed, you know what I mean? No dancing, nothing — everybody was scared to go outside. So, I went back with Sensación. When I came back from [Orquesta] América, from Mexico, right away Rolando [Valdes] said, "Pupi, all right?" That's the way I went back to Sensación. At that time, América dissolved over there [in Mexico]. The contract finished, and some musicians stayed, and others went back to Cuba.

When Fidel Castro came in, I was in Cuba. A little before that, I meet Rudy Calzado [1929–2002], the singer. I understood there were some Cuban people — they used to have Orquesta Nuevo Ritmo de Cuba in Chicago, with Rolando Lozano on the flute, René Hernandez on the piano ... a bunch of those Cuban musicians. So I said, "Rudy, can you get me out, and talk to Cuco, the drummer, and Armando Sanchez [1920–1997]?" To see if they can bring me there to Chicago with that band. "I want to get out of here." Rudy used to sing with Enrique Jorrín in Mexico, so he knew what the problem was in Cuba. He was living in this country already. So Rudy said, "Pupi, let me talk to Armando and Cuco, because we need a violin player there. Let's see, maybe they'll help you out." It was like that. One day, Rudy said, "Pupi, those people, they're interested in bringing you to go over there." He gave me the papers the Palladium in New York gave me a contract.<sup>4</sup> Yeah! To make them believe that I'm going to play with [José] Fajardo [1919–2001] at the Palladium in New York and to come back to Cuba. But it was not true, I was not going back to Cuba. 1959. November 18, 1959. It was very cold, Chicago! Whew!!

After coming to Chicago in 1959, Pupi stayed with Nuevo Ritmo till the early 1960s, when the band dissolved at the end of a tour that wound up in Los Angeles. He and some of the other musicians in the group were picked up immediately

by Mongo Santamaría [1922–2003]. Pupi recorded four albums on the Fantasy label with Mongo's group<sup>5</sup> and eventually moved to the Bronx, where he lived till the 1980s except when he was gigging and recording in Colombia or Venezuela or some other place. In the early 1960s, Mongo's group was the most successful among several competitors in New York, playing at the Palladium, the Village Gate, Birdland, clubs in the Bronx around Hunt's Point, and other venues. In 1962, Pupi ventured to put together a band and eventually made a dozen records of his own on the Remo Records label. In 1962 he became the first person to use the term "salsa" in a record title — *Salsa Nova with Pupi Legarreta* — on the Tico label, anticipating the rise of this new term for Latin dance music in the late sixties. In the mid-1960s Pupi decided that he needed to learn the flute. He practiced for a year or so and came out playing the five-key wooden "charanga flute," which is preferred by some musicians for its full-sounding high notes. The flutes he prefers were manufactured by Martin Frères in Paris in the 19th century.

On a lot of my records, I play the flute, not the violin. Because [the five-key] is the flute we use in Cuba. And that's the one we need really to make the sound of this thing that we play.

The late 1960s saw the rise of Fania Records, and the 1970s, the creation of the Fania All Stars. Arguably the best-known salsa group in history, the All Stars were essentially a collection of superstar performers who had all had their own groups at different times. Pupi performed with Fania through the mid-1980s, touring the U.S., Puerto Rico, Europe, Japan, and Africa.

We used to travel there like crazy. One time we went in one week to these countries: we went to Madrid, Madrid to Barcelona,

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Barcelona to the French Riviera, Nice or Cannes. [Then] to Paris. From Paris to Amsterdam. In one week. In 1980 we did it, those five cities like that, in one week.

Because when I came back, that's when those people were leaving Cuba. I cannot forget about that trip. When I came back they say, "Oh, people leaving from Cuba!"<sup>6</sup>

[In 1974] we traveled from here to Spain to change planes. We went to Congo, Zaire, Kinshasa. We went there, we waited there about three or four days with that weather. And then the day of the concert, we start playing, on the stage, and we were playing [sings] "*Que baile mi gente*." I was playing the flute. I grab the flute from [Johnny] Pacheco, and put the violin on the [ground] ... I was standing right there by the drum, so I put the violin on the floor, and I grab the flute [laughs]. It starts raining, and you know what the guy with the camera says? "That's it, fellas!!" We start playing the tune. They canceled the [Ali-Foreman] fight,<sup>7</sup> and we start playing the concert at the baseball stadium... and the guy, the camera technician, he said, "That's it!" They didn't want to get those cameras wet. Just like that. We started the concert, and finished!

After the mid-1980s, live music scenes declined as disc jockeys became more prevalent; work for dance bands—in all styles of music—became scarce. Salsa bands, usually large ensembles with rhythm section, horns, and singers, were affected too. Pupi found himself obliged to seek other work.

I'm going to tell you the real truth. After Fania and the salsa went down or whatever, I had to look for a job. Music—people really cannot make a living with music, sometimes. So, I liked electrical [work]. I found a job with this person, that's where I learned, and he helped me 100 percent. After that, I went to school, I got my license. I went to take the test with the City [of Philadelphia]. I went

there three times; I failed. And the fourth, I took the test. When I came back to the job, the lady at the office said, "Pupi, go back, you passed the test." I say, "What?! What you say?" "Go back. The lady from the city called that you passed the test. You have to go over there to fill out all the papers." "Ah, OK!" You know how many times people fail this? Twenty-seven, 30 times! It's serious!

I've been having more bad moments than good moments. In music ... this is a dangerous job here ... the economic situation. To be a good musician, most of the best musicians, they've been suffering in life a lot. No, I haven't stopped playing! I'm still playing, but I cannot count on ... covering the expenses of this house with music. So, I got a living. Thank God I got that. Some other people, they don't even have that.

Pupi settled in Philadelphia in the mid-1980s, although his connections with musicians here date back to the early 1970s. He continues to play with local musicians. Most recently he played on a 2006 CD by local band *Foto Rodríguez y Charanga la Única*. That CD was dedicated to him and his work with Philadelphia Latin musicians. He is still regularly called to New York and Puerto Rico to bring his expertise to other musicians' projects, particularly in the realm of *charanga*.

To close, I would like to share the words of my friend and teacher Orlando Fiol, himself a young master of Latin dance music and a newer addition to Latin music scenes in Philadelphia.<sup>8</sup> He offers an expert bandmate's perspective on Pupi's musicianship:

By the time Pupi left Cuba in 1959, he'd already played with all the great *charangas*. If he didn't play with a group, he knew everyone in it. Like most *charanga* violinists of his day, Pupi received classical training. That classical background is probably responsible for Pupi's mastery of not only the violin, but

also the Cuban five-key flute and the piano. Upon arriving in the States, he quickly got incorporated into New York's burgeoning salsa scene. He helped Arsenio Rodríguez realize many of his latter-day arrangements and arranged for [Johnny] Pacheco, [Ray] Barreto, Orquesta Broadway, and other *charangas*. As we all know, he became a Fania All Star during the 1970s and has remained closely associated with that enterprise, for good or ill. But there is so much more to Pupi than biographical details. Pupi is one of the most deeply knowledgeable and continuously probing musicians I know. His solos are simultaneously soulful, jazzy, dotted with Cuban folklore, tuneful, and emotionally gratifying. His intimate knowledge of the *charanga*, *bolero*, *son montuno* and jazz standards repertoires is truly breathtaking. I fondly recall my first gigs with him, where he'd tell me the key of a song, very briefly familiarize me with its chords, and school me on how to play it, all live in front of an unsuspecting audience. Pupi seems very interested in modern Cuban music and frequently cites Paulito FG as one of the best of Cuba's current crop. His harmonic grasp is truly unparalleled, at least in Philadelphia's Latin scene. Pupi has schooled us all. I've seen him teach tumbaos to bass players, breaks to percussionists, and coros to vocalists. We've spent many moments critiquing arrangements or live performances, always sticking to the music itself and evaluating harmony, beauty in melody, and tightly structured presentation. In today's Latin music world, careers are often meteorically launched and quickly discarded before musicians get a chance to apprentice in truly great ensembles and familiarize themselves with the vastness of the many repertoire strands that

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My first couple of months working at this company were divided between this back shop and the paint shop, where my job was putting masking-tape circles over holes in machined parts that were to be painted in the spray booth. My trainers in the back shop were Joe, a big Serb who was a widower, and Felix. Most of the time the room was noisy with the stamp of the rivet machines attaching sheet metal parts to other sheet metal parts, the sound of hand drills making holes in parts, and the tap of ball peen hammers against metal. I noticed too that when it was noisy, communication between the men consisted of whistling across the shop at one another. Someone would whistle a few notes, and someone else would whistle a few notes back. This was generally the practice of the older men.

Now, 30 years later, I work in a large shop as a transmission mechanic, and I've noticed that this way of communicating through whistling is something that happens between some of the younger mechanics. Someone will start with a few funny and unique notes, and across the shop someone else will pick it up. I laugh to myself because they're actually having fun with this back and forth response. Sometimes three or four people will pick up on this from different sections of the shop. Perhaps when you're working on a job, you have to have some fun, and the closest person may be at a distance. And sometimes the call and response is just a way of taunting a coworker. If the noisy shop were full of women mechanics, I wonder what our attempts at communicating would be like.

In the back shop, we were working on sheet metal cabinets that housed the electronic components for the Aegis defense system. I worked at a bench assembling parts with simple hand tools: ball peen hammers,

screwdrivers, pliers, socket wrenches, and hand-held rivet guns. The object was to build a finished assembly from many individual parts. My first job in this section was placing individual aluminum sheet metal louvers into 8 x 10 metal spot-welded frames. The finished products were air vents for the large cabinets that contained the electronics.

My lead man was Felix. A lead man is a worker with a lot of experience on the job who has been appointed by the boss to oversee others in the same occupation. In a union shop, he is usually top on the seniority list. He can train, assign jobs, and make sure that the jobs are done. I liked Felix. We got along well. But all of my jobs were assigned to me by Joe, the second senior man in this shop. He oversaw my work and also enjoyed cooking lunch in his makeshift kitchen behind a rack of shelves. A half hour before lunch, you could hear the refrigerator door open, followed by the rattle and scrape of pans over the two hotplates. Joe would signal that lunchtime had begun by placing a plate of wonderfully tasty pierogis or blintzes in front of me as I worked at my bench. I had no idea what lunch was like in other parts of the machine shop because I had decided that I would not venture out to the main floor unless absolutely necessary. As the first and only woman in the shop, I was uncomfortable with the attention I received. The less interruption I caused to the work process, I thought, the more obvious it would be to the bosses that I could fit into that environment. At least one of the older men must have understood my situation. It was Herb who took me aside my second day and showed me the back way to the break room and the back way to the ramp to the fifth floor, where the ladies' room was. There was only a men's room

on our floor.

I was one of four newly hired machine operators. We had all been placed in the assembly shop to begin our training. After two weeks of placing small 8 x 3/4-inch louvers into the tacked frame and peening over the tabs to hold the louvers in place there, I noticed that the three other new people, who were men, were being trained to use different air-driven hand tools, drills, and hand rivet guns. They were being shown how to set up and run the single spindle drill press and the freestanding rivet machine — learning the skills on simple machines that were the next step on the way to becoming a first-class machinist. It occurred to me that perhaps few people — in this case, few of the men — had a positive assessment of my ability to become a first-class machinist. When I applied for the entry-level machine operator job, I had every intention of working my way to first-class machinist status. It didn't occur to me that I might be incapable of that. I expected to get that job and the money and other benefits that went with it, such as good health insurance and a retirement plan.

Soon after I noticed the disparity between my training and that of the men who were hired with me, Felix called me to his work area. In his hands was a thick roll of paper that I assumed was a blueprint for a job we were going to do. But when he spread it out on the work table, I saw that it was a schematic drawing showing the locations for small electronic terminals pressed into fiberglass boards. These boards were the forerunners of computer chips. "This is what you should be learning," he said. He explained that one floor below us was an assembly shop where women sat at benches all day and pressed small electronic terminals of various diameters and lengths into fiberglass boards. He, of course, was implying that by

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learning to read the schematic drawings, I could get a more suitable job. I was appalled by the discrepancy between what I was expecting of myself and what he was expecting of me. After the shock wore off, all I wanted to do was strangle him. A machinist's labor grade and pay were much higher than a board assembler's. I'm sure that Felix did not intend to insult me, but his words clearly exposed his opinion.

I never knew if he thought I was incapable of being a machinist or if he just thought that this was an unsuitable environment for a woman — dirty, hard, and sometimes heavy work with men who spent their lunch hour in the locker room watching 16mm films. (I might add that when there were finally three women working in the shop, the lunchtime films were discontinued. The reason, I was told, was that they no longer seemed appropriate.) I never asked Felix why he thought I should be working a floor below because I had no intention of following his advice.

That day I learned that there was at least one man who thought I was capable of becoming a first-class machinist. After Felix spoke to me, I thanked him for the information and went back to my bench. Joe came up to me. "What did Felix want?" When I told him, all he did was shake his head. That was all I needed to see. He might not have been able to do anything about it, but it meant the world to me that he disapproved of what was going on.

That first year in the back shop with Joe and Felix, when it became evident that I was not going away, the general manager who had hired me said, "Well, if you're going to work in this shop you might as well learn something." I had been in the shop about three months at that point, and two other women had been hired after me. They had been masking parts in the paint shop.

Now we were all placed in the drill press section under the supervision of a new lead man, George. George liked us and enjoyed setting up our jobs and overseeing our work. Our job was to load milled parts of various sizes into drill fixtures and spot-drill, drill, and tap holes. At times there were four to six different procedures to execute on one loaded part. This would require using six spindles. After loading a part into a fixture, I would spot-drill; scoot down to the next spindle on the multiple spindle table, and drill either a blind hole or a through hole; then move down to a third spindle and put threads in the hole at the tap-spindle. And sometimes there were hundreds of the same part to be loaded, drilled, unloaded, etc. The difficult part of the job was staying awake.

One day, soon after I started feeling confident about my new skill as drill press operator, I asked George if I could see the blueprint and set the hole depth myself. He had seen that we were competent on the drill press and seemed to be tickled that he might have a crew of women who actually could set up jobs. All that setting up the job required was knowing how to read a simple print, how to measure the depth of a hole, and how to use pin gages to see if the hole I was drilling was within the allowed tolerance. My small toolbox now held a set of 0–1 inch micrometers, 1–2 inch micrometers, a set of verniers, a small selection of slot and phillips screwdrivers, an adjustable wrench, pliers (needle nose and blunt nose), and a set of hex wrenches. After finding the information I was looking for on the blueprint, I proceeded to set up my row of spindles by simply adjusting the setscrew on each spindle to the required depth. I would then check the size and depth with a pin gage and my set of verniers. It turned out that setting my own stops caused a stir. The men were

astounded by my mechanical skills. I accepted their compliments graciously and reserved for a later time my outrage at their low expectations of me. The men who had been hired with me were already operating horizontal and vertical milling machines. Needless to say, my determination to be an A mechanic was strong. But it was at this time that I realized that people's low expectations were deadly and that their well-meant protection was undermining my confidence.

Over the 30 plus years I've worked in machine shops and model shops, tool and die shops, and transmissions shops, there have always been special men who have understood my position or recognized my ability or just liked me, who have both taken the time to teach me new skills and taken the generally unpopular role of being my advocate and ally. There was only one time when a woman was in a position to help my career. When I started working for RCA, the company had an apprenticeship program for tool and die and model making. Once a year applications were taken and interviews were set up for four or five positions. The third year that I submitted an application, I was not feeling good about going into the interview, but when I walked into the room I was surprised to see a friendly face among the ten interviewers. That year the company had decided that it might be wise to include the head of Employee Relations, and the head of that department was an African American woman. I was at ease; the interview went well. I was accepted as an apprentice tool and die and model maker. The next time this woman was walking through the shop, she took me aside and congratulated me. She said that I had done well on the interview. With a slight smile as she was walking away, she said, "I gave you a one hundred."

want to play the klezmer business because it had a terrible connotation. "What are you, a klezmer musician?!" And this man, he played for years with Leopold Stokowski in the Philadelphia Orchestra. And, 40's, 50s, after the war, he traveled with Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops. The Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo came here, and he traveled with them. I mean, this was a musician, and so this klezmer stuff— he would laugh at the whole thing. He would. He would say, "What do you mean? What a joke," he would say. But he knew songs. And he played for the Jewish Theater, when it was on Arch Street, and he knew all the stars— Molly Picon, Paul Muni. All the composers, conductors—they all knew Jake Hoffman. And, later years, at the Locust Street Theater, I played. It was a Jewish performance. And one of the men—I can't remember his name—they wanted to know who the drummer was, whatever, and they said "It's Jake Hoffman's daughter. Jake Hoffman." **Morris Hoffman:** Elaine, she was a nice little girl, and when she was growing up, my brother [Jake] taught her the drums. And then she went to Curtis, and her schooling was superb. And she was a fine, fine drummer. She could play the symphony orchestra, that's how good she was. Very talented musician. The klezmer stuff— no, she didn't play much of that. She was an excellent Jewish drummer. She knew all the tricks of the trade. [But] in those days, the men wouldn't hire a girl! And she resented it terribly. And, uh, it's different [now], but the men resented the ladies.

**Elaine Hoffman Watts:** The Jewish Society bands, they wouldn't use me. "She's a girl." My own cousin: "Elaine, you're great but you're—" I was a married woman. My children heard him say it! "But you're a woman," what's that got to do with how I play? They didn't

wanna use me. I did play Sunday mornings— Town Hall. Remember Town Hall? Broad and Race. Was this great theatre. And the B'nai Chaim used to bring in these very poor productions from New York City. Remember? And, they had a small orchestra. They hired me only because of Daddy, because I knew the music. Ernie used to come with me. And I had to bring drums. The Town Hall had acoustics: unbelievable. The Philadelphia Orchestra used to record there on the whatever. And these programs were for nothing that the B'nai Chaim used to give. And do you remember the people used to hit each other over the head to get in? It was hysterical. And the productions were—they were poor. But they used me 'cause I knew the music. That was it. They weren't thrilled about it, but they had to have a drummer. And all the actors knew I was Jake's daughter, so I had to be all right.

**Elaine Hoffman Watts:** I played— fifty years ago I played the same way: where were you? It isn't that overnight I became this marvelous drummer. I remembered that the boys in high school used to make fun of me, and I played rings around them, honest to God I did. And then, then I went to Curtis. Go know I was the first. It didn't even dawn on me. I just went on my merry way, dumb way.

**Hankus Netsky:** I mean, Elaine, you know, I had no idea that her father had taught her the traditional drumming exactly as he played it, and that they'd made recordings together with him playing xylophone and her playing drums. He would show her everything to do, just like she's doing for her grandson now, you know.

**Susan Watts:** The fact that this is a family thing—it means something. It means something to me. I think that's one of the reasons it feels comfortable. Most most people that I talk to— my friends that are

musicians—their families very reticent to support them being a musician. My family was reticent to support me NOT being a musician. So it's a totally different paradigm— totally, totally, totally different. And because [Elaine] made a living at it, and all her uncles made a living at it, and her father made a living at it, and his father made a living at it, it was okay for me to make a living at it, you know. But here's, again, her three children, each one in their own right, like, a full—like, really good, fine musicians and artists. And, I just think that that's kind of amazing, to be honest with you. **Elaine Hoffman Watts:** That's where I learned to play the drums. [Daddy] would take me down to the cellar, in West Philly, on Ludlow Street and he had a drum set, 'cause he taught there, and a xylophone, and that's how he taught me. I sat down at the drums, and he would say, "Do this, and I'll play that." And that's how I learned to play. And I remember him saying to me—he would show me something and I didn't get it, and he would say, "I'm showing you, dummy! Dummy, dummy!" But I didn't learn to read music, or the rudiments and all that stuff, until I was twelve years old.

**Hankus Netsky:** Elaine starts playing, and I'd never heard anybody play like that. Everything in the music—first of all, she knew everything. She knew exactly how the songs went. But she wasn't playing a beat on the drums; she was playing the tunes on the drums. It was different for every tune he played. Elaine played a style that was an older style. It really was a style that was like a tone painting with the drums. It was not like this Russian military kind of beat. She really was playing the music on the drums. Then I listened back to how Jakey Hoffman played on those recordings, and that was how Elaine was playing exactly. And it was amazing; it was like a time machine.

It's like, here was this person in 1995 playing a style that I don't know if anybody had played since the 20s. And it turned out that the reason that she had stayed with that style was basically that because she was a woman, she couldn't get on the scene. The Jewish klezmer scene was really a male thing in Philadelphia. And it was kind of a both blessing and a curse in a way because, you know, because she never modernized, and never did what the guys did—you know, in terms of playing, really kind of transforming the klezmer into just kind of general club date rhythm. She still played this incredible music on the drums, and it was like meeting someone who was a hundred years old.

**Henry Sapoznik:** Those of us who have had the chance to work with these representatives of another era, like Elaine, are fortunate. Anyone who doesn't take advantage of playing with the old musicians has missed a glorious opportunity. For example, last night when we were setting up the bandstand, I was one musician separated from Elaine. I said, "No, I wanna be next to the drums." And I'm sitting there listening to Elaine, and I'm saying, "I'm stealing that. I'm stealing that. I'm stealing that. I'm gonna play this back for her on the next repeat." And then I'm hearing Elaine hearing me, and I'm saying, "I don't care about anyone else, we've got our own concert going on back here. I'm her audience and she's my audience." The thing I always found most interesting was listening to the drummers to understand the press rolls and those tight patterns, and that became the goal for playing banjo. So, when working with someone like Elaine, whose musicality is so immense that she can coax out a variety of tonal ideas in the playing—not just easy stuff like volume or stream of consciousness playing—it's really about, "How can I support and

enhance what's going on in the frontline?" So that's why I always like sitting next to her; it's like I'm still learning.

**Elaine Hoffman Watts:** But when I started out, you know, my father was just worried I wouldn't get married. I did play in the New Orleans Symphony. I didn't like that kind of work. I liked playing the shows, and different stuff. In the Symphony, you sit there for three movements, and come in with a triangle, or whatever. It wasn't my cup of tea. But I was a very, very good tympanist, and I could've made it as a tympanist in a symphony. But I, you know, I was married. I had Eileen. I would have to take my family to North Dakota or some place, you know.

**Hankus Netsky:** I think of Elaine as someone who really plays the old style. It's like putting something in a time capsule in about 1920, and we still have it because of her father teaching her, "This is the way it's done." Whereas Jakey Hoffman was not a very modern drummer, [his brother] Johnny Hoffman was. Johnny Hoffman played with swing bands. I mean, Johnny Hoffman did make that transition more. Jakey was more of an orchestral drummer. When swing music came along for that generation, they had a choice to either go with it and modernize or not. And I don't think Jakey was a guy who modernized. He stayed with that orchestral approach, and he learned, you know—the right way. I mean he learned, he was a trained drummer, and he could play with the orchestras. And the Jewish music for him—and this is the key with Elaine—the Jewish music was an outgrowth of the orchestral music. It was not a subset of swing, but in New York it became one.

**Susan Watts:** The live music in the house was Jewish; there really wasn't anything else. The only other thing was that when I was a kid, you know, she taught every day after

school, and I would sit on her lap after school while she taught her students, 'cause otherwise I never got to see her. And she played the xylophone with the kids too, so I got to learn all these other songs that she played on the xylophone. Then, starting at a very early age, she schlepped me to her jobs.

**Elaine Hoffman Watts:** And the first date we had, Ernie came with me on the job to carry the tympani, and he's been carrying the drums ever since. But I always worked! Oh, from the day I got married. Listen, I went out with boys who said, "Oh, you can't play the drums." I said, "Yes. Goodbye." A couple of them. What are you, crazy?

**Elaine Hoffman Watts:** This is a little story about Jacob Neupauer. We used to rehearse every Sunday morning Saturday—whatever—Richmond and Allegheny on top of a taproom. And my oldest daughter had just been born. And I used to bring her. We all used to go to the rehearsals! My mother, Ernie—and I used to bring her in a wicker clothes basket! I was the tympanist. And he made this unbelievable arrangement! They were all great. They all went on to become great musicians. And I became a klezmer drummer. And then Marco Farnese, we did these great operas. And I used to take my mother. And we used to play in South Philly on all the playgrounds. And he was just a wonderful man to me. Also, you didn't make a lot of money. But I was the only drummer, and I had to do everything. And he used very, very good musicians. I mean, these were all good jobbers: a lot of retired orchestra violinists. And it was a pleasure, and it was good. Then I used to do some jobs around Columbus Day for Italian bands. Ernest'll tell you about it. And I used to take the kids. We had fun there. Not a lot of money. You'll notice this strain runs through it.

**Marco Farnese:** I had a small opera

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company here in the city, and the man who was getting me musicians for the performances, the contractor, said, "I have a little lady for you that you might be able to use. And, so that's how I met Elaine. So, of course, she did ask me would we have anyone else. I said, "No, you're it." And, to make a long story short, she'd just go through that music, and she would select every crucial section of whatever section had to play, and she just would make up, you know, either in her mind or a separate sheet or something, and cover everything that had to be done, which was incredible. And fortunately she also had all her own instruments. She carried those back and forth. And she just was incredible. Incredible, for all the years that she did this for me. I would have certain people that I knew I could depend on. And, of course, Elaine was right at the top of the list. Once I got to know her, then I wouldn't hire anybody else. She was just great, you know. To me it never meant anything that she was a woman playing, you know, percussion. She was a percussionist, and period. And top flight.

**Susan Watts:** She really taught me to listen to singers—'cause she always used to play for operas. And she would sit over there when we lived here, and when we lived on Braddock Lane she would sit in this big, fuzzy brown chair that was right next to the stereo. And she would put the opera on, and she would have the score in front of her, and she would read the score as the opera was playing, where she would—and when her tympany came in, she would practice. You know what I'm sayin'? She learned her part in a way that—she listened! Do you know what I'm saying? This is big, huge and important. This was a big, huge lesson for me that carried me throughout my whole, entire musical life, to this day. You have to listen. You have to listen to music. Music is an aural click thing, you know. And it's all about your ears. And you can only get out what's in. And what's—you can only get what's in by putting in, you know. And so I listened,

and I listened, and I listened, and I listened, and I listened, and I listened, and I continued to listen, daily, to singers, to everything I can— anything I could get my hands on. I'd buy just any old Jewish record for a quarter at yard sales. Whether it's good, whether it's bad, it doesn't matter. It's all good; it's got somethin' on it that I need to listen to, you know.

**Gwen Foster:** We couldn't do Handel's Messiah without her unless she was just unusually busy and couldn't come. After that first performance, we just fell in love with her—this little Jewish lady. And that was controversial enough, but when Elaine—you know how she is full of passion; we just fell in love with her. But wherever she was, she just fit in and just electrified the performance, brought not only class, but excitement, to every performance and still does. Nothing bothered her. I mean, we would just do something she'd never heard of before, she said, "Just bring it on me." Whatever you wanted, she could make it happen.

**Elaine Hoffman Watts:** How did I do this? I don't know how I did this. And I carpooled Hebrew school too. When I started working the theaters and things like that, my husband got disgusted washing dishes, and he bought a portable dishwasher. That's how I got my portable dishwasher!

I taught for the Philadelphia public schools music. They had— this was in the 50s, the 60s— such a music program like you wouldn't believe, and the man's name was Dr. Lewis Worsen. He was a marvelous, marvelous man. When he died, forget it, and now it's nothing. And I taught on Saturday mornings for them; they had satellite things. And I was making three-something an hour. I was making ten dollars for the whole morning. And they had all good musicians coming there and teaching. I started teaching Gerry Brown when I was about eighteen or nineteen. Daddy started him, and he said, "No, Elaine, you teach him. He's better off with you." He used to come in a little sailor's suit. And Eileen used to sit on my lap when I

taught him. Eileen was in her Dr. Dentons. And he was just good. He was good!

**Gerry Brown:** So they took me to this place—the West Philadelphia Music Center. Well, they brought me there, and the teacher that was there was this gentleman by the name of Jake Hoffman. However, as it turned out, he was busy with touring and things like that so I studied with [his daughter] Elaine for, I guess, about nine years. That was the foundation of my career. People can come up and say, "Oh, yeah, yeah, you know, you're a world-class drummer." You know. And, "How did you get started?" Well, I actually got it started with a woman. I'm very proud to acknowledge that and to give Elaine the accolades that [she] deserves. You know, she was dropping little seeds, and of course it was up to me to, you know, "Okay, I need to check this out." I didn't know where it was leading, but there was this trust. The desire was there, but I [also] trusted her and that's priceless.

**Susan Watts:** When she had students in the basement, which she still does, but when I lived there, I would go down and play the xylophone with her students. I would play the xylophone, she would play the drums some times. Like, I've been playing with her forever. From the get-go. When she schlepped me to jobs, she schlepped me 'cause she was playing the drums. I was playing with her. So, I [have] played with her forever.

**Theresa O'Brien:** She would never pull any punches with you. She'd say, "Come on, get it right! What are you doing? Did you practice?" She would get on you. We'd trudge down to her basement, where she had a drum set of pads, and that's where I started taking lessons and learning how to play more classical music. And she opened my eyes gently. She was harsh on me in a nice way, you know. But she always pushed me to try to do better, just because she wouldn't take less than what I could do. You know, it's all about confidence, and I think that's what Elaine gave to me, which I'm trying to

give to my students, is you can't lose if you don't try. She always wanted me to do better.

**Elaine Hoffman Watts:** In 1959, I was teaching I think it was the Logan Elementary. They had Saturday morning music classes, and wonderful, wonderful teachers. Those kids—it was great. I was pregnant with Lorrie, my middle daughter. And the supervisor came in. I was sitting at the desk and I got up. And he said, "Hup! You can't teach when you're pregnant. Go home, and when you have the baby, you can come back next year." That's the way it was. It isn't that they fired me. They said, "You can't teach when you're pregnant. You'll come back in the fall."

**Susan Watts:** People are starting to give her attention, and I think that what initially came out is important but it's not the whole story. What initially came out was, you know, "Huh! You men, you had the monopoly, but here I am!" And

that's true and right and feh! to all you men who had the monopoly, but that's not what makes her so fascinating. And that's not what makes me lucky, you know. And it's not what makes her an amazing musician. And it's not what makes her a great teacher. And it's not what makes Marco Farnese hire her. I mean, it's this one thing that happened to her. And, because she is the kind of woman that she is — very strong— people saying things to her goes in one ear and out the other, you know. I mean, anger motivates her. And that's what she's done from the beginning. So she's getting all this attention because she's this woman musician, and woman drummer, which is rare. And she's still playing. She's never stopped. She's full-time. All these wonderful things about her. And, you know, she doesn't see that what she's done has made a difference. And, fine. But it has. Do you know what I'm saying? I mean, it has made a huge

difference. You throw a pebble in the water, and the ripples and the ripples and the ripples. Well, she has sixty years of ripples! Do you know what I'm saying? She's still rippling! So it's still happening. . .

my child," you know. "Cause he's the same as anyone else. His momma just wasn't married, that's all," you know. I said, "But that is not their fault, and the sins of the parent I would never allow, in my view, to fall on the children —if there was a sin." And so that was my position.

I know folks even said I was arrogant, or whatever. But I just was adamant about it, you know. That these children had no right to be stigmatized, or no right to be discriminated against. And above all, not even have their parent's name on their birth certificate? Nobody's child? And that's what I wrote to Hardy Williams. I just couldn't accept it. And Hardy introduced the law. And then we needed some more legal help. So then we went to Community Legal Services. It was Jonathan Stein. And we end up getting the Women's Law Project involved with it. There was Jonathan Stein, who was a beautiful legal mind, and another woman— Ann Freedman.

And with that, the long legal battle began, you know, with things back and

forth. And Ann Freedman from the Women's Law Project, she came to me one day and said, "Lois, they're saying that the woman gonna have to prove that the fathers are the fathers." And I said, "Why?" You know, "Are they calling us a bunch of whores, like we don't know who we laid down with?" I said, "Now I don't like that." I said, "So let the fathers disprove that they're not the father. Why not put that on them? Everything's on the woman. She got to prove this. The men don't get stigmatized; they're still Mister so-and-so. I don't accept that either. They're Mister. I'm Miss. Therefore, they don't get no stigmas, and I ain't takin' none," you know. "And I ain't gonna let nobody think that I'm just choosing some guy to father my baby. No, I laid down with him," I said. "I wasn't raped. It was conception by consent, and I know who fathered my children. And that's it. That's definitive. I ain't got to qualify nothing; let him prove that he ain't. That's what I'm saying. I'm tired of the women carrying this weight." Too long; women had to sack their babies, killing

babies 'cause they didn't want to be stigmatized if people knew. Women had to go through hell. She went with that strategy, she did.

It took seven years. We started in '71; we won in '78. The Attorney General of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania wrote a legal opinion, I think it was, based on laws and precedents that had been set in other states, and then they filled in all the other gaps. But we won; that was a big one.

That's the one with the picture where you see Ade and Bumi. Bumi is four years old and Ade is eleven. And we won. And I was just — I mean, it brought tears to my eyes to see it in my lifetime, for my children being able to benefit and the millions of other children that it had affected, you know. I said, "Oh my God, this is just a gift. This is just a wonderful gift," you know.

*Interviewed and edited by Debora Kodish  
Transcribed by Thomas Owens*

contribute to our great traditions, including folkloric music, commercial popular dance music, American jazz, and Western classical music. There is an indescribable charm to encyclopedic knowledge, and Pupi definitely possesses it. He sees patterns between songs, distinguishes between similar chord progressions, and always reserves his most prized mental faculties for the veneration of beautiful melody.

We look forward to more contributions from Pupi soon; he plans an album with a few of his own compositions alongside classic but forgotten Cuban tunes, as well as songs written by some of his Fania compatriots. He was recently honored with a prestigious Pew Fellowship in the Arts — well-deserved recognition. I can only encourage you to take any opportunity you to hear the history of Cuban music in Pupi's sound.

—Elizabeth Sayre

### Notes

\* “Latin music and dance” can refer to any music and dance from Latin America, from any social register — classical to pop to folk. A more specific term is “Spanish Caribbean popular dance music,” describing the music developed in Cuba, Puerto Rico, New York City, and other locations over the 20th century. Son montunos, guarachas, cha-cha-chás, salsas, boleros, danzones, and other forms may be heard in an evening of “Latin dance music.” Another common umbrella term, “salsa,” refers specifically to a certain type of instrumentation (the inclusion of trumpets and trombones) and tempo (medium fast). Musicians and others have challenged the use of this word, which some view as a marketing handle pushed by Fania Records

and other labels in the 1970s, and others see as a valid rallying point for Puerto Rican cultural pride.

<sup>1</sup> Cuban-influenced rhythm sections have evolved from lighter sounds of bongó, güiro, and maracas (son) to the louder and fuller rhythm sections of today; in Cuban timba (the island's contemporary dance music, distinct from salsa in instrumentation and feeling), the rhythm section also has a drum set. “Charanga” refers to both a musical ensemble and a musical style, first heard in the early 20th century, that grew out of the elegant dance orchestras, *charangas francesas*, of 19th-century Cuba; instrumentation usually consists of flute, violins and cello, piano, percussion, and male voices in unison. Orchestras typically play *danzón*, *cha-cha-chá*, and *pachanga*. *Pachanga* is an up-tempo variation on Cuban dance music from the early 1960s. Boogaloo, from the 1960s, is a New York City blending of Cuban and Puerto Rican dance music with rock, R&B, and soul music.

<sup>2</sup> San Lázaro is the saint ruling illness and healing in Cuba. On December 17 there is a major procession of devotees, some crawling on hands and knees, to his shrine in Rincón, Santiago de las Vegas, near Havana.

<sup>3</sup> Enrique Jorrín created the cha-cha-chá in 1951, a rhythm designed to have universal and easy appeal for dancers. Jorrín played with Mondéjar's Orquesta América, the band that popularized the cha-cha-chá, but after a dispute over credit for this invention he left for Mexico City, where he formed his own orchestra. Mondéjar eventually followed him there and re-created Orquesta América with new personnel.

<sup>4</sup> From 1948 to 1966, the Palladium Ballroom, a second-floor hall at 53rd and Broadway in New

York, programmed Latin bands; it was a famous destination for dancers and musicians.

<sup>5</sup> One source, <http://www.donaldclarkmusicbox.com/encyclopedia/detail.php?s=2184>, says he appears on six of Mongo's albums.

<sup>6</sup> This was the “Mariel boatlift” exodus from Cuba in the spring and summer of 1980.

<sup>7</sup> This concert coincided with the 1974 “Rumble in the Jungle” fight between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman.

<sup>8</sup> Orlando is a pianist, percussionist (both popular and Afro-Cuban folkloric music), singer, arranger, and composer. He was raised New York playing from childhood in his father Henry Fiol's salsa band. Orlando is also an outstanding student of North Indian classical music. He has lived in Philadelphia since 2001.

### Resources for further exploration

#### Books:

Bardfeld, Sam. 2002. *Latin Violin: How to Play Salsa, Charanga, and Latin Jazz Violin*. New York: Gerard/Sarzin (book and CD).

Gerard, Charley. 2001. *Music from Cuba: Mongo Santamaria, Chocolate Armenteros and Cuban Musicians in the United States*. Westport, CT: Praeger (includes a chapter on Pupi Legarreta).

Moore, Robin. 2006. *Music & Revolution: Cultural Change in Socialist Cuba*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1997. *Nationalizing Blackness: Afro-Cubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920–1940*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Sublette, Ned. 2004. *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press.

Waxer, Lise (ed.). 2002. *Situating Salsa: Global Markets and Local Meaning in Latin Popular Music*. New York: Routledge.

[Continued on next page >]

Online:

Legarreta biography/discography:  
<http://www.donaldclarkmusicbox.com/encyclopedia/detail.php?s=2184>

Orquesta Sensación, past and present:  
[http://www.cubamusic.com/pg018\\_oplookup\\_t-FIGURES\\_s-BIOGRAPHY\\_v-133.shtml](http://www.cubamusic.com/pg018_oplookup_t-FIGURES_s-BIOGRAPHY_v-133.shtml)

University of Texas online resource on Latin American music:

<http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/region/music/>  
Archived articles from

<http://www.descarga.com>, an excellent commercial Latin music

resource: <http://www.descarga.com/cgi-bin/db/archives/index?Rj4ZvDhQ;;453>

(articles on *charanga*, *charanga* 5-key flute, various musical groups, and much more)

Fania Records: [www.faniarecords.com](http://www.faniarecords.com)

Selected Recordings:

*Fania All Stars*. 1980, reissued 2006.  
Commitment. Fania/Emusica remastered edition 130 184.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1976, reissued 2007.  
*Fania All Stars Live in Japan 1976*.  
Fania/Emusica remastered edition 130 278.

Larry Harlow. 1975, reissued 2006. *El Judío Maravilloso*. Fania/Emusica remastered edition 130 115.

Pupi Legaretta. Reissued 1993. *Pupy y Su Charanga*. Tumi 33.

Israel “Cachao” Lopez. 1977, reissued 2005. *Cachao y Su Descarga*. Salsoul 7015.

Orquesta Nuevo Ritmo. 1960, reissued 1999. *The Heart of Cuba*. GNP 2264 (reissue with Peruchín recording).

Foto Rodríguez y Su Orquesta La Única. 2006. *En Honor a Pupi Legarreta — el 27 Aniversario*. CM/Corre Music 52.

Mongo Santamaría. Reissued 1996. *¡Arriba!* Fantasy 24738.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1963, reissued 1998. *Watermelon Man*. Milestone 47075.

Various Artists. 2007. *Charanga at the Palladium, Vol. 1*. Universal/Protel 160

conservatory kind of music! It was folk music. So that’s how it started. What we found out is that every city has its own kind of klezmer tunes, because the people that settled in New York came from some wherever, and they brought their music with them. Boston has its own. Philly is known for its particular kind of klezmer, and a lot of it is in Grandpop’s book. Everybody has their own shtick, their own genre, and we don’t do that. We do Philadelphia klezmer. That’s what we’re known for.

**Elizabeth:** Can you tell me any ways that it’s different from the other styles?

**Elaine:** It’s just different melodies, that’s all. It’s still klezmer. It’s still a freilach, it’s still a bulgar,<sup>5</sup> it’s just different tunings. Some tunes are exactly alike, but they start in different places in different cities.

**Elizabeth:** Since klezmer has come back, or been revived, by these younger guys, how has that affected you? You’ve been able to do some traveling, and you go teach at workshops?

**Elaine:** We didn’t know about these klezmer things. This KlezKamp in New York, Henry Sapoznik — it’s been there! I said, “Susan, you and I

are going to go.” It was at this broken-down hotel in the Catskills. We go up there, and we start to play. They had no idea who we were. They went, “Oh, my God, who are they?” And that was it. In 1996. And then, Alicia Svigals — I played on her record, *Fidl*. I always say she discovered me. She played for me in Washington at the concert we did for the NEA.<sup>6</sup> So, [now at] KlezKamp, I have a class. Year after year after year. And then Hankus got me into KlezCanada.

**Elizabeth:** Do you see a lot of young people who are interested?

**Elaine:** Oh, it’s marvelous! It is really great to see all these kids, and my grandchildren, of course.

**Elizabeth:** So you think it’s going to continue to live?

**Elaine:** Oh, I hope so, yeah. They travel — some of these ethnomusicologists travel to Europe, to these little towns, to dig up things.

**Leaonore:** Elaine is a genius musician. She was properly educated to bring it out of her, the finishing touches.

Now through change of environment and situations, the horah, the Jewish dances, it’s all being recognized and properly brought forward. Before, a klezmer played on a corner in a street, with my father’s time, before

the War, before the Depression. Times change, that’s all it is. Of course, you get disappointments and frustrations, and fortunately, now, at this age, Elaine is being recognized for what she worked for and really deserves. Really, it’s a wonderful feeling.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Podemski was a percussionist in the Philadelphia Orchestra and author of the now-classic *Standard Snare Drum Method*. Grupp was timpanist in the Philadelphia Orchestra in the 1950s.

<sup>2</sup> A type of lively Yiddish dance and tune.s

<sup>3</sup> Originally located in Center City Philadelphia, this well-known area nightclub relocated to Cherry Hill, NJ, in 1960, and finally closed its doors in 1978.

<sup>4</sup> Another common klezmer tune type: improvised, said to derive from the music of Romanian shepherds.

<sup>5</sup> Popular klezmer dance tune.

<sup>6</sup> In Summer 2007, Elaine and other winners of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) National Heritage Fellowship were honored in Washington, D.C.



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