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From Mambo to Hip Hop: A Bronx Tale. Directed by Henry Chalfant; produced by Elena Martínez and Steven Zeitlin; written by Henry Chalfant, Steven Zeitlin, Elena Martínez, Roberta Singer, and Bobby Sanabria; DVD, 56 minutes, 2008. Distributed by MVD Entertainment Group, PO Box 280, Oaks, PA 19456; (800) 888-0486; <http://www.mvdb2b.com>

It might seem like the unlikeliest of locations, but the birthplace and home of New York's cultural pride and joy, its tradition of Latin music, is none other than the South Bronx, the very symbol of urban blight. Mambo,

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salsa, hip hop—for over three generations that supposedly sinister cultural wasteland of burned-out buildings and criminal violence has spawned an endless array of successful and renowned Cuban, Puerto Rican and African American musicians and been home to countless venues of lively creativity in the world of popular music and dance.

While that surprising reality has been history for many years, it is only in recent times that the Boogie Down has been getting its due props. Perhaps because of the undeniable origins of hip hop the South Bronx and its momentous popularity worldwide, attention is finally turning to the mean streets as a key source of artistic innovation. Thanks to New York's urban folklore organizations, City Lore and Place Matters, and the prophetic ingenuity of long-term hip hop guru Henry Chalfant, we now have an exciting and engaging documentary film account of that musical location over the decades, and the South Bronx finds its well-earned place on the map of modern popular music. "From Mambo to Hip Hop: A Bronx Tale" brings us right to that incredible scene, and lets the homegrown artists and audiences themselves tell the story of that humble neighborhood, that infamous site of social abandonment, and its seemingly boundless cultural energy. And all to an irresistible soundtrack of Afro-Caribbean Latin sounds in its ongoing mix with the pulsating African American styles of the times.

We hear from seasoned veterans like Tito Puente, Orlando Marín, and Benny Bonilla from back in the 1950s when mambo was king, and when many of the musicians cut their social teeth playing stickball in the city streets. We hear from salsa greats Willie Colón, Eddie Palmieri, and Ray Barretto telling the story of what came to be called salsa breathing still new rhythmic life into the New York Latin sound during the 1960s and early 1970s. And we meet the gang leaders turned masters of the beats, mics, and turntables describing the emergence of hip hop from that same South Bronx 'hood, rising like a phoenix out of the ashes of tenement buildings set aflame. What a story that "Bronx tale," a story of human resilience that goes to defy all assumptions about where art and culture come from in our society.

With all of these engaging personalities telling it like it was, bringing us to the inside of that remarkable locus of creativity and contagious enjoyment in the midst of social deprivation and suffering, it is perhaps the historical footage that leaves the most indelible impression on today's viewers. The lively neighborhood scenes from the 1950s and 1960s, the old-style cars and get-ups, the vibrant dance halls and house parties, the bodegas and schoolyards, and of course the bustling people everywhere bring back memories among the old-timers and awaken historical curiosity among the new generation of Nuyoricans and inner city African Americans still living side-by-side, and still creating the latest musical and artistic styles of our times.

While there are other film versions of the mambo era and of the hey-

day of salsa and Fania Records, and a deluge of hip hop movies, some even claiming a modicum of authenticity, "From Mambo to Hip Hop" is the first documentary to establish the historical continuity of New York Latin music, and to point to the South Bronx Puerto Rican community as the place where so much of that happened. This film demonstrates cogently and definitively the immense value of cross-generational social awareness to our understanding of music and dance styles and their practitioners. Check out for example the thumbnail history of Latin dance from mambo and cha cha through disco, the Latin hustle and salsa through up-rocking, free style and windmills, as narrated by the knowing and articulate innovator Popmaster Fabel, and it becomes clear that b-boying and breakdancing, rather than springing intact from some daring teenager's brain, has its integral place in a long lineage of energetic, gymnastic, martial-arts-derived bodily movement in sync with complex percussive textures and patterns. And witness the indissoluble links between New York Puerto Ricans and their African American neighbors and running buddies over the course of several generations to dispel once and for all the notion that forms of cultural expression voice the social experiences of any single ethnic or national group in isolation from others. All of these successive styles—mambo, salsa, hip hop, and others—are joint or multiple creations, extending on and transforming Puerto Rican, Cuban, African American and a range of other inherited expressive traditions. Without fusions and crossovers, there would be no creative invention, and it is not the music industry but the communities themselves who impel and catalyze those irreversible breakthroughs and interchanges.

While the movie captures and holds our interest and attention throughout, it is no doubt the latter part, the 20-or-so minutes on street gangs as the seedbed of early hip hop, that carries the greatest fascination, and where filmmaker Henry Chalfant draws on his unique treasure trove of performance footage and engaging interviews with the protagonists and pioneers of the culture. Chalfant, who has already brought us memorable films and books on the history of New York City street gangs and on the beginnings of hip hop (*Style Wars* and *Subway Art*), carries his documentary achievement a step further by drawing the connections between the otherwise disconnected worlds of Mario Bauzá, Tito Puente, Celia Cruz, and Willie Colón, and those of hip hop pioneers like Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmaster Cas, and Charlie Chase. Hearing them all talk, on their common home turf, within the space of an hour, we come to realize that their varied stories are really part of one story, and that out of all that devastating social experience it is understandable that artistic creativity is one of the few outlets of human expression left. A key missing link in this social and musical history is perhaps the presence of the Young Lords Party and the Black Panthers, whose revolutionary energy inhabited the same world as salsa and the origins of hip hop, the political

correlative of those stylistic rebellions. The failure to even mention those political movements is a glaring omission in this otherwise impeccable and long overdue account of New York City's Black and Puerto Rican culture, past and present. Including that key dimension would have also helped lend even greater cogency to a startling statement by Grandmaster Cas of the legendary Cold Crush Brothers (and, also unmentioned here, the composer of the first rap superhit, "Rapper's Delight"); toward the end of this wonderful, not-to-miss film, Cas goes a long way to making sense of the seeming anomaly of the South Bronx as the cradle of art and culture when he states that, for him, and in his time and place, "it was either creating hip hop or starting a revolution."

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