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## MIGUEL ZENÓN'S ALMA ADENTRO: MEET THE COMPOSERS

### BOBBY CAPÓ

Bobby Capó, born Félix Manuel Rodríguez Capó, (January 1, 1922–December 18, 1989) wrote his first song at age 13. He began his international career touring and recording as a member of Rafael Hernández's Cuarteto Victoria. He migrated to New York City in the early 1940s, joining the orchestra of popular Catalan bandleader Xavier Cugat. He made his name not only for his recordings but also for his work on film and television.

Capó wrote an estimated 2,000 songs, including titles such as "Juguete," (a vehicle for singers as disparate as Cheo Feliciano and Ednita Nazario), "Incomprendido" (a theme song of sorts for Ismael Rivera), "Llorando me Dormí" (I Went to Sleep Crying), "Piel Canela" (Cinnamon Skin), "El Bardo" (The Bard), "Sin Fe" (Without Faith, a hit for José Feliciano in the 1960s), "Triángulo," as well as songs about the homeland such as "Soñando con Puerto Rico" (Dreaming of Puerto Rico), "De Las Montañas Venimos" (We Come from the Mountains, a Christmas standard in Puerto Rico), and "Despierta Borincano" (Wake Up Puerto Rican). Capó lived in Mexico City in the 1960s before returning for good to New York City in the 1970s.

### PEDRO FLORES

Pedro Flores ( March 9, 1894 – July 14, 1979) was born Pedro Juan Flores Córdova in a large, very poor family, lost his father at age nine, and had to work from an early age. At 16, he received a teacher certificate from the University of Puerto Rico and taught for the next five years. He later worked at a sugar mill, served in the U.S. Army (1918-24), and worked a series of odd jobs including train inspector and tax collector.

He moved to New York in 1926 and worked at the Post Office, and later as a construction worker, working on the tunnel for the 8th Avenue subway. While in New York, he met and befriended fellow Puerto Rican Rafael Hernández. Flores had no formal musical education, but wrote his first songs and collaborated with Hernández's Trío Borinquen. In 1930, Flores formed his own group. Theirs became a friendship informed by a strong competition as composers. Some of Flores's best known songs include "Perdón" (I'm Sorry, made famous by, among others, Daniel Santos, and Trio Los Panchos), "Amor" (Love), "Sin Banderas" (Without a Flag), "Amor Perdido" (Lost Love), "Quejas del Alma" (Cries from the Soul), "Bajo un Palmar" (Under the Palm Tree), "Linda," "Despedida" (Farewell), and the classic "Obsesión" (Obsession). Flores lived in Mexico, Cuba and New York before settling back in Puerto Rico in 1967.

### RAPHAEL HERNÁNDEZ MARÍN

Raphael Hernández Marín (October 24, 1892 – December 11, 1965), is a key figure in Puerto Rican popular music. Born in a poor family, he learned cigar-making as a child. His parents supported his love of music and at 12 he began to study, learning to read and write music and also play several musical instruments, including the clarinet, tuba, violin, piano and guitar. He was working as a musician in North Carolina when the United States entered WWI. In 1917, Puerto Ricans were given American citizenship and Hernández was recruited, with other 17 Puerto Rican musicians, by bandleader James Reese Europe, to become a member of the military band of the 369th Infantry Regiment. Nicknamed the Harlem Hell Fighters, the remarkable 369th was celebrated for its bravery in the battlefield and for bringing jazz to continental Europe.

After the war, Hernández settled in New York and organized the Trío Borinquen, and later, the Cuarteto Victoria. He moved to Mexico in 1932 (writing, among other songs, "Qué Chula

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es Puebla" How Beautiful is Puebla, the unofficial anthem of the Puebla state). Then again, many people in the Dominican Republic consider Hernández's "Linda Quisqueya," another national anthem.

Hernández wrote an estimated 3,000 songs including classics such as "Perfume de Gardenias," (most recently heard by the late Cuban singer Ibrahim Ferrer, but also by idiosyncratic Ranchera and jazz Mexican singer Lila Downs), "Silencio" (Silence), "Lamento Borincano" (Puerto Rican Lament), "Preciosa" (Precious, a love song to his homeland), "Ahora seremos felices" (Now We Will Be Happy), "Campanitas de Cristal" (Crystal Bells), "Capullito de Alhelí," "Culpable" (Guilty), "El Cumbanchero" (The Fun Guy), "Ese soy yo" (That's Me), and "Tú no comprendes" (You Don't Understand).

#### SYLVIA REXACH

Sylvia Rexach (January 22, 1922 – October 20, 1961) was not only a one-of-a-kind songwriter but, at different times throughout her life, she was also a comedy scriptwriter, a poet, a music critic, and a singer.

Rexach began writing poetry in high school (some of her poems later became lyrics for her songs) and also learned how to play several musical instruments, including the piano and the guitar. In 1942, after the United States entered World War II, Rexach, then a university student, dropped her studies to join the United States Army as a member of the WACS (Women Army Corps Service). In 1945, after her honorable discharge, she moved to New York City, where she married. After her divorce, Rexach returned to Puerto Rico where she worked at a radio station as a scriptwriter and performer. She also founded Las Damiselas, an all-women ensemble, was a columnist, and co-founded The Puerto Rican Society of Women Authors, Composers and Music Editors.

Some of Rexach's best known songs include "Alma Adentro" (Deep in the Soul, not a standard love song but actually a tribute to a brother who died in an accident), "Idilio" (Idyll), "Olas y Arenas" (Waves and Sands), "Mi Versión" (My Version), "Nave sin Rumbo" (Wandering Ship), and two songs written in high school: "Di, Corazón" (Tell Me, My Heart) and "Matiz de Amor" (Shades of Love).

#### CATALINO "TITE" CURET ALONSO

Catalino "Tite" Curet Alonso (February 12, 1926 – August 5, 2003) was not only a songwriter but became an internationally respected musicologist and journalist.

The son of a teacher and musician, and a seamstress who divorced when he was just two years old, Curet studied music theory and wrote his first song in 1941. After high school he studied journalism and sociology at the University of Puerto Rico. In 1960, he moved to New York City and found work as a sportswriter. In 1965, he broke through as a songwriter when bandleader Joe Quijano had a hit with Curet's "Efectivamente" (Actually). He also found success with "La Tirana," (The Tyrant) interpreted by Cuban singer La Lupe, who also sang Curet's now-classics "Carcajada Final" (Final Laughter) and "Puro Teatro" (Pure Theater). Curet worked for the United States Postal Service for more than three decades, all the while writing journalism and composing many songs now considered standards. He wrote many ballads, and boleros, but made a distinctive contribution with his lyrics addressing social and political issues, what came to be known as "salsa con conciencia" (salsa with a conscience).

Some of his titles include "Tiemblas" (You Tremble, sung by, among others, the great Tito Rodríguez and Gilberto Santa Rosa), "Temes" (You Fear, made popular by Vitín Avilés), "Plantación Adentro" (Deep in the Plantation, made famous by Rubén Blades and Willie Colón), "La Tirana," "Las Caras Lindas" (The Beautiful Faces, sung by Ismael

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Rivera), "Periódico de ayer" (Yesterday's Newspaper, a classic by Héctor Lavoe and, later, Cheo Feliciano), "De Todas Maneras Rosas" (Ismael Rivera), "Piraña" (Willie Colón), and "Anacaona" (sung by Cheo Feliciano).