

## A note from author Dean Robbins



In 1940, Francisco Raúl Gutiérrez Grillo, known as Machito, formed Machito and His Afro-Cubans and helped invent Latin jazz. The band played their songs in the sophisticated jazz style that was popular in the United States, improvising on traditional jazz instruments such as trumpets and saxophones. But they also added strong dancing rhythms from African and Latin American countries, like Machito's native Cuba, along with Latin American instruments such as maracas and congas.

Mario Bauzá, who composed classic songs for Machito and His Afro-Cubans, compared the music to the layers of a lemon meringue pie: jazz on top and Afro-Cuban rhythms on the bottom. It blended influences from many cultures.

Machito, Tito Puente, Tito Rodríguez, and other great Latin jazz bandleaders started in a part of New York City called Spanish Harlem, becoming popular with the neighborhood's many Latino residents. They soon took their music three miles south to the Palladium Ballroom, which welcomed fans from all neighborhoods. The diverse audience at the Palladium marveled over the wide range of expression in Latin jazz, from elegance to ecstasy. I saw Puente's band late in his career and swooned over the joyous music, just like the people who first heard it in the 1940s.

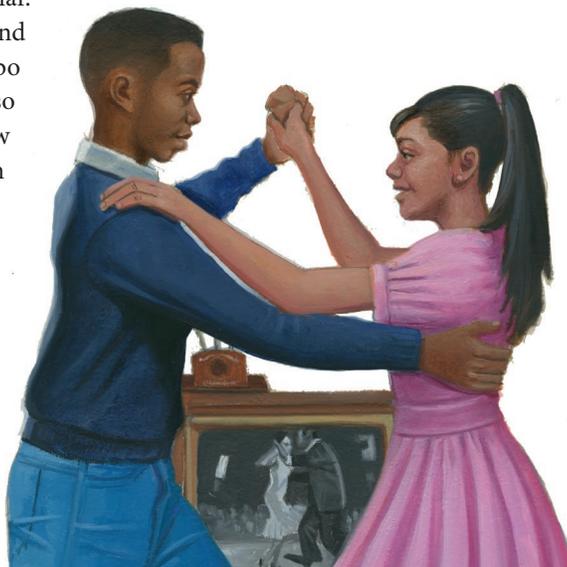
Latin jazz was thought-provoking for those who paid close attention to the creative compositions and solos. It was deeply emotional for those who responded to the passionate performances. And it was fun to dance to for those who just wanted to cut loose.

The new Latin jazz style paired perfectly with a new dance, the mambo, which came from Cuba. During songs like "Mambo Mucho Mambo," dancers moved to the powerful beat, stepping quickly while swinging their hips in a smooth motion. Each couple added their own ideas, from leaps to backbends to splits.

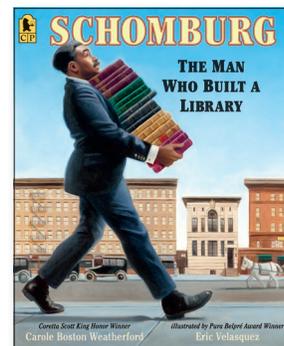
Some of the Palladium dancers became well known for their special talents. Ernie Ensley and Dotty Adams did wild jumps and spins that many others tried to imitate. Harry and Rose Fine danced while Harry worked as the ballroom's photographer. Harry sometimes took pictures as he did the mambo, sliding across the floor on his knees!

Millie Donay won a dance contest at the Palladium in 1950, and so did Pedro Aguilar. They met at the ballroom, married, and became one of the country's best mambo teams. As a mixed-race couple, they also challenged the prejudice of the times. Few people had seen a white woman and a man of color proudly dancing together in public.

By challenging segregation, the Palladium Ballroom set the stage for the 1950s civil rights movement. In the 1960s, the movement succeeded in changing the laws of the United States so that people of all backgrounds could mix on the dance floor and everywhere else.



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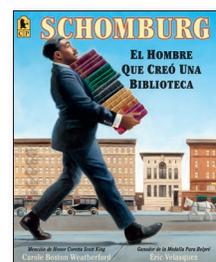
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