



Self-Representation  
and Community  
Building: Latino  
Artistic Expression  
in Cambridge, MA

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Professor Pacini-Hernandez  
By: Chinar Mahadkar

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## **Introduction**

### ***Urban Borderlands Project:***

The Urban Borderlands Project is an endeavor in which Tufts University undergraduates document the oral history of Latinos in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Through personal interviews and field research, the undergraduates hope to record the history of Latinos in Cambridge as well as the contributions they have made to the city through the voices of the Latino people themselves. The project enables these important voices to be heard and documented in order to increase the awareness and appreciation of Latino influence in Cambridge. Each participant in the project embarked on their own topic regarding the Latino population of Cambridge. In particular, I focused on the artistic expression of the Latino community.

### ***Artistic Expression:***

*From all that I have seen I am more than ever convinced that art must communicate, it must represent, it must describe and express people, their lives and times.* - Raphael Soyer.

Artistic expression is an important component of a community's sense of identity. The art of a particular community can reflect similarities in experience and thought; however, it can also conversely reflect the difference, individuality and breadth of experience imbedded within a specific community as well. This juxtaposition between similarity and difference, between the Latino community at large and the individual

ethnicities and classes that compose it, is precisely what I found while exploring the artistic expression of the Latino community in Cambridge.

Although art definitely does “represent, describe, and express people, their lives and times,” people and as it pertains to this paper, Latino people, are not a homogenous entity. Latinos in Cambridge vary according to age, gender, city or region of origin, country of origin, religion, race, class, occupation, and extracurricular activities. In short, no individual can be accurately represented by an ambiguous umbrella term like Latino; there is no clear-cut Latino culture. My exploration into Latino artistic expression via the variety in music, cultural festivals, food and film highlights the diversity within the Latino community.

At the same time however, there are commonalities among all these diverse groups of Latinos that do in fact unite them as a larger Latino community in Cambridge. These commonalities are the Spanish language (although there are various dialects depending on the country of origin), the sharing of common space and living areas in Cambridge and the differential treatment of Latinos in American society. These commonalities too, are reflected in the artistic expression of Latinos in Cambridge. In Cambridge, these similarities are highlighted through the hybridity and fusion of culturally diverse musics and food as well as through the proliferation of festivals in general that bring various communities together and film festivals, in particular, that attempt to break stereotypes regarding the Latino community.

By exploring music, cultural festivals, food, muralism, film, and youth art programs, I found that Cambridge Latinos are a dynamic and innovative community alive with both commonalities and diversity. The importance of artistic expression cannot be

overlooked. It is an important medium through which Latinos, both individually and collectively, express their culture, their opinions, and their ideas, and in doing so simultaneously enrich and effect the larger Cambridge community in general. In turn, the Cambridge Latinos are influenced by the larger Cambridge community and the diverse ethnicities outside the Latin Diaspora that it entails. Through these types of exchange, artistic expression is able to bridge gaps and bring diverse communities both within the Latin Diaspora and outside it, together.

### ***Methodology:***

In my research, I focused on six forms of artistic expression in Cambridge: music, cultural festivals, food, muralism, film and youth art programs. I focused on these topics in particular because each of them reflects the diversity within the Latino community in Cambridge, the coming together of these diverse Latino communities into one large Cambridge Latino community and finally the interaction between Cambridge Latinos and the larger Cambridge and/or American community. I have organized these topics precisely as stated above, the only exception being that I combined the two topics on music and cultural festivals together. This is because they both profoundly impact the evolution of one another.

My search for information on Latino artistic expression was plagued with difficulty. The Cambridge community is not a stagnant homogenous unit and so naturally, its composition according to nationality, ethnicity, race and class varies with time. As the community's make-up changed through time, so did the community's artistic expression. This makes sense given that art is a reflection of its people. Due to

the constraints of time and resources, my research is limited to the history of Cambridge Latinos during the post eighties and beyond. Furthermore, it focuses more on the opinions of individuals who are considered artists, bohemians and intellectuals rather than on the individuals who make up the working class. Although I try to be as thorough, complete and accurate as possible, it is important to consider and expound upon the limitations of and gaps in my information as well.

In addition, many of my narrators were opinionated individuals who often times disagreed with one another on varying topics. This inconsistency again serves to highlight the diversity of the Cambridge Latino community. Through out my report, I have made every effort to present all differing views and opinions in order to provide the reader with a comprehensive view on Latino artistic expression in Cambridge. In doing so, I hope to highlight the rich diversity of opinions among the Latino community while avoiding stereotypes and pigeonholing.

All seven of my narrators were informative and engaging. Each interview, filled with a variety of opinions, insights, and personal accounts captured my attention and taught me an immense amount. I can only hope that their words will do the same for the reader.

## **Music and Festivals: Let's Celebrate!**

*I think music in itself is healing. It's an explosive expression of humanity. It's something we are all touched by. No matter what culture we're from, everyone loves music.* -Billy Joel.

Music is the art form of the masses. Simple gestures like singing, whistling, snapping fingers, and creating instruments, can produce beautiful harmonies that can be heard by any receptive ears. This is why Rafael Periera, a cooking teacher at the Cambridge Center for Adult Education and the Cambridge Culinary Arts Institute, as well as a long time resident of Cambridge says, "Music is the most accessible of all the arts," (Rafael Periera Transcription, 3/2/03). It is because of this accessibility that music has played a major role in the artistic expression of the Cambridge Latino community from its beginnings in the 1960s till today.

Because music is especially the art form of the masses, music, more so than any other art, truly reflects the community that fosters its growth. Because communities change through time, so do trends in music. This association between community and music and their variance through time is very much reflected in the musical expression of Latinos in Cambridge.

Unfortunately, my research is centered toward Latino musical trends during the post-eighties. Time constraints and lack of resources did not allow me to delve deeply into the origins of the Latino music scene in Cambridge. However, it is important to acknowledge that there was in fact a vibrant Latino music scene prior to the eighties started by early immigrants, the majority of whom were from Puerto Rican decent. These musical pioneers expressed their culture and found entertainment through traditional

musical styles associated with their countries of origin, mainly Puerto Rico.

Furthermore, these mainly Puerto Rican pioneers had a large impact on the Cambridge Latino musical scene for years to come and they continue to have a strong influence today.

In addition, my research is further limited in that it mainly reflects the opinions of artists, bohemians and intellectuals rather than those of the working classes. Again, it is important to note that the opinions reflected in my paper are not necessarily indicative of the entire Latino community. The Latino community is not only ethnically diverse but socio-economically diverse as well. Grassroots, working-class initiatives like the Puerto Rican Festival were and continue to be important scenes in which working class people are able to come together, celebrate their culture and just have fun.

In this section I document how the changing composition of the Latino community in Cambridge is reflected in the variation in musical trends through time. From the early dominance of Puerto Rican musical styles to the more recent preponderance of hybrid musical styles, this art form has always reflected the evolution of the Latino community in Cambridge. Furthermore, I will also discuss cultural festivals and how they operate as important venues that showcase local musical acts. It is through this exposure that various musicians are able to come together, listen to one another and impact each other musically. Not only are festivals prime venues for musical expression, but they are also common gathering spaces for diverse people within the Latino community and outside of it, who are normally segregated by ethnic and/or socioeconomic and/or geographic difference as well as job competition. The Cambridge cultural festivals are important celebrations that allow various communities to unite,



appreciate each other's culture and identity, and enjoy each other's company, if only for a short period of time.

### ***The Early Years: Musical Pioneers:***

Music has been an indelible part of the Latino community in Cambridge since its inception. The Puerto Ricans were undeniably one of the first people of Latin American descent to settle in Cambridge, MA. Their numbers and influence clearly affected the musical trends of Cambridge in the 1960s and throughout the 1970s.

The Pagan family is noted as one of the earliest Puerto Rican families to settle in Cambridge, supposedly residing in the Windsor Street area. Mr. Pagan has been heralded as the one of the first Latinos to form social gatherings for other Latinos during the 1960s. These social gatherings consisted of local dances as well Latino film screenings on a theatre in Tremont Street in Boston (Brannigan, Kennedy & Miranda 80).

Rafael Benzan, an early Dominican resident of Cambridge, also organized musical events during the 1960s, the most noteworthy being the establishment of the "Hispanic Club", a venue where Latinos could gather and enjoy themselves (Brannigan, Kennedy & Miranda 81). It is apparent that when Latinos immigrated, they did not leave their culture and music behind. Moreover, recreating it in Cambridge was in fact a priority among the community.

The 1970s were marked by more Puerto Rican immigration. These years also allowed the aforementioned pioneering, mainly Puerto Rican, Latino community to solidify. This solidification and camaraderie, again, was reflected in the fact that Puerto Rican musical styles were the forefront of the Cambridge Latino music scene. Maria

Bermudez, a Cambridge resident during the 1970s, reflected that during her time, the Boston area music scene was greatly impacted by the musical culture of Puerto Rico. She went on to state that many bands from Puerto Rico would in fact tour the greater Boston area, performing in venues such as the Wonderland Ballroom and other rented halls (Brannigan, Kennedy & Miranda 81).

The influence of the growing Puerto Rican community was further reflected in the composition of the Latino student population enrolled in Cambridge area colleges during the 1970s. During this time, many of these Latino students assisted the fragile Latino community in their efforts to improve working conditions and secure Latino rights in general. In return for their help, the Latino community sponsored cultural activities for these students that emphasized Puerto Rican food, music and dance (Brannigan, Kennedy & Miranda 81). The fact that Puerto Rican food, music and dance were emphasized at these functions indicates the predominantly Puerto Rican composition of the Latino community and the Latino student population at that time

Furthermore, the impact of Puerto Ricans on the early Cambridge Latino music scene is also reflected in the establishment of a weekly Con Salsa program on WBUR in Boston. This radio show, started by Jose Masso in 1975, initially had a strong Puerto Rican audience both in Boston and its surrounding areas. Today however, the show is popular among a diverse range of people from various geographical backgrounds (Brannigan, Kennedy & Miranda 82). Again, it is apparent that Puerto Ricans were the musical pioneers in Cambridge and their influence greatly affected the types of Latino music played in Cambridge at the time.

The influence of Puerto Ricans on the Cambridge Latino music scene has been so strong that even today, when the Cambridge Latino community is increasingly diverse and when its musical styles span the globe and fuse together, the most popular Latino music form is still the Puerto Rican derived salsa. Pereira says, “Yes, yes all these people have a different kind of music. But you have predominant music. If you take the Latinos as a whole they gonna go for salsa, because number one, it’s very popular in their countries and maybe ‘cause the first group that came were the Puerto Rican,” (Rafael Pereira, Transcription, 4/2/03). Pereira states that salsa is the dominant form of Latino musical expression in Cambridge and this can be attributed to the fact that the Puerto Ricans were one of the first Latino groups in Cambridge. Although the origins of salsa are hotly disputed, it is predominantly seen as a Puerto Rican and moreover a Newyorican music. This being said, it makes sense that the pioneering Latino group in Cambridge, the Puerto Ricans, would influence the predominant Latino music in Cambridge, salsa.

### ***The 1980s: Diversity and Adversity:***

#### **A Changing Scene:**

Throughout the 1980s, there was a new wave of Latino immigration from the Dominican Republic and via the advent of the Sanctuary Movement, from El Salvador as well. Pereira states, “Until ten years ago it was predominantly Puerto Rican, very small group of Dominicans, and a significant group of Salvadorian people,” (Rafael Pereira, Transcription, 4/2/03). The presence of these new groups, each with their unique traditions and culture, had an affect on the established local music scene. A thirteen

piece Salvadoran ensemble called *Orquesta Salvadorena* began performing in the Cambridge area in the mid to late 1980s (Brannigan, Kennedy & Miranda 83).

Furthermore, a local Cambridge band called *Flor de Cana*, which recorded its Central, South American and Caribbean based music on the nationally distributed Flying Fish Label, began playing venues such as the Modern Times Café in Inman Square in 1986 (Brannigan, Kennedy & Miranda 83).

Not only was the Cambridge Latino community becoming increasingly ethnically diverse, but it was also becoming socio-economically diverse. Pereira left Puerto Rico and arrived in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1985 when the Latino community was young, small and fragile. He notes that it was also a time when there was a lot of hostility toward the Latino community in general. He remarks that in these early years there were three main Latino groups, the working class, the artists and bohemians, and the middle class who were either intellectuals or professionals. This differentiation still exists today.

The most working class Latino expression of musical and cultural solidarity during this time was formed by the community that had been in Cambridge the longest, the Puerto Ricans.

### The Cambridge Puerto Rican Festival

The Cambridge Puerto Rican festival began in the early 1980s in Central Square and more specifically on Columbia Street. It was truly a grassroots initiative founded by the working class Puerto Rican community living in the area at that time. This festival created a gathering space for mainly working class Puerto Ricans, but also other Latinos

and Caribbeans, who could not ordinarily afford the prices of club and restaurant style Latin music venues. This festival allowed working class people to come together and have an outlet for entertainment and cultural expression of their own.

Pereira states, “Those Puerto Rican Festivals are a lot of food, one kiosk after another of food. A carnival kind of atmosphere where everybody, especially the working class people, was very nicely dressed, a lot of perfume, that kind of stuff. And music. And salsa, music, salsa music,” (Rafael Pereira, Transcription, 4/2/03). Pereira highlights the fact that these festivals were predominantly a working class affair. The festival had a party atmosphere and was an occasion for cultural celebration in which people got dressed up and decked out. Salsa was of course a staple at these Puerto Rican festivals, accurately reflecting the composition of the majority of the attendees.

Furthermore, besides having a working class contingent and salsa bands, the festival also had an abundant amount of Puerto Rican food that was sold in various kiosks. Pereira elaborates:

It was all homemade food... Puerto Rican predominantly, but you can say Hispanic-Caribbean because its very similar. It's not identical to the food of Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, it's pretty similar and also this is tropical America. So you have running all the way to Venezuela, not identical, but I can tell you a number of dishes that you have from those countries that you always have if you go to a Hispanic activity. Empanadas you have from Cuba to Argentina. What's gonna change is the meat. So in the Caribbean there's a lot of empanadas with seafood and in Colombia, in Argentina its beef. They eat less spicy than we do but you have a continuum of the food. But it's predominantly Puerto-Rican... *Acapurria*, is my personal favorite, is done with yucca, which is again a tropical-American root crop. It's tender, it grows in the ground; it's like a potato. It originated in Brazil, yucca, and in Brazil still it unities Caribbean people with Brazilians in terms of food... We mash the yucca and combine with it something that is called *achiote*, another tropical American product that is called in English *anato*, in fact

its all over the place, this provides a color, an orange color, and it provides a piquant paprika flavor. You flavor the yucca with that and make a dough out of that and then you have a filling and then you make a fritter. Actually when you fry yucca like that it, it tastes a lot like falafel. Similar to falafel. So I love falafel so I love this one. That's one of the most typical Puerto Rican snacks that was there. And that was only one. Empanadas again, or patties. There were patties of salted cod, a very Caribbean staple, actually a very Mediterranean staple also.... So that was also... it's called *bacalaitos*, because in Spanish salt cod is called *bacalao* (Rafael Pereira, Transcription, 4/2/03).

Not only did the Puerto Ricans retain their culinary and musical traditions but they also maintained their competitive traditions as well. David Fichter, a prominent Cambridge muralist, depicted a scene from this festival on his Area IV Potluck Mural. Fichter says:

On the right side [of the mural], there's an image of these guys climbing this greased pole, which was an event that happened in the summer in Columbia Park, which was part of a Puerto Rican Festival... But there's this very dramatic moment, well they were all usually guys, I don't think there were any women. They dress in these old clothes and they grease this giant flagpole and put money up at the top. And these teams of guys, they climb, and we're talking thirty, forty guys. They climb on each other's shoulders and try and climb up the pole to get to the top. You know, they fall, they literally slide down. So that's what that is. It's a traditional festival in Puerto Rico (David Fichter, Transcription, 3/2/03).

The greased pole is indeed a popular tradition in Puerto Rico as Pereira elaborates:

Yeah, yeah. I never saw it personally. But this is a tradition in Puerto Rico... I assume that this was part of the activities because again this was a television show. It was called "*Sube, bebe, sube!*" which is "Go, baby, go!" Which is, you have these poles and you have something sticky going up. You're supposed to get to the top to get the money. The man generally does it and his wife or his girlfriend will be telling him "Go baby, go baby!" People are cheering on the side (Rafael Pereira, Transcription, 4/2/03).

The greased pole is an excellent example of a popular Puerto Rican tradition that is still cherished and that was practiced in Cambridge for many years before the festival shut down.

Although the Festival was a celebration of Puerto Rican culture and tradition, it was never exclusive. The festival actually attracted people from other ethnicities, including those outside of the Latin Diaspora. Pereira says, “What it was, it was always Caribbean people. There were more Caribbean people than Latino people because we [Puerto Ricans] are Latin and Caribbean... But there was a small group of Dominicans and Salvadorian people. It was mostly Puerto Rican, I’ll tell you ninety percent, but there were always Afro-Americans and Jamaicans and Haitians, more than Latins actually,” (Rafael Pereira, Transcription, 4/2/03). Pereira makes an interesting point here. He states that Puerto Ricans are both Latin and Caribbean and so share many commonalities with other immigrants from the Caribbean islands. In many instances, Puerto Ricans may feel a greater bond and camaraderie with their Jamaican and Haitians neighbors than with the South American and Central American immigrants with whom they only share a common language. This statement highlights the remarkable diversity within the Latino community. It also shows that open-air cultural festivals like the Puerto Rican Festival foster a broad community camaraderie that is by no means exclusive.

The Puerto Rican Festival was an important grassroots event that allowed Puerto Ricans to express their culture while bringing diverse communities together. Unfortunately, however, the Cambridge Puerto Rican festival does not run today. It ran for about ten years and then mysteriously shut down in the early nineties. Many attribute it to violence while others attribute its collapse to the fragility of the Puerto Rican

community at the time. Fichter says, “They no longer do it now. And it’s not because there are not a lot of Puerto Ricans but that I think there was some break-in or something like that where somebody got hurt... My memory, and I wouldn’t, you can maybe look it up, was that there was something, and somebody got hurt. There was probably a lot of drinking or something,” (David Fichter, Transcription, 3/2/03). Pereira says, “The one time I went, there was a conflict though. A fight and so on. It was pretty nasty... It was not an ethnic conflict with other groups. It was from within even though there was a lot of police there and you can see that a lot of the Puerto Ricans felt there was too much police for kind of activity that was going on. There was also that tension, that tension has been going on for awhile, conflicts with the police, yes,” (Rafael Pereira, Transcription, 4/2/03). Although aware of the violence and tension involved with the festival, Pereira blames the festival’s failure to the fragility of the Puerto Rican community at the time.

He says:

It was a fragile position in terms of money and in terms of interests of the city and so on. And all those people who were involved in organizing those festivals, to my knowledge, went to organize the Puerto Rican Festival in Boston, which has become a big process. They realize I think that the community was small here. In a way, many of the things you can see when you are a fragile group is failures, in the sense, not that that is not important for several reasons, later, but you see a lot of debris, you see a lot of things that were not able to take place. I know attempts of having a Latin festival here before, and it just couldn’t happen (Rafael Pereira, Transcription, 4/2/03).

Whether it was due to violence or community instability, the Cambridge Puerto Rican Festival is no longer celebrated on Colombia Street. Pereira alludes to the Puerto Rican Festival in Boston and how that might have in fact grown out of the one in Cambridge. In any case, the importance of the festival cannot be underestimated. Not only was it a space where working class Puerto Ricans could gather, celebrate their culture, relax and



have fun but it also bridged cultures and brought diverse people together as a larger Cambridge community. People of different ethnicities were able to interact; this is evidenced in the fact that many Caribbean people of non-Latin descent partook in the festivities. In addition, even people from different socioeconomic backgrounds stopped by; this is evidenced in the fact that both Pereira and Fichter attended the festival in its prime.

### Rough Times for Artists and Bohemians:

The fragility of the Latino community as well as the hostility toward the community during this time period caused many artists and bohemians to resort to “street work” and a lifestyle that adversely affected their well-being. Pereira says:

At that moment [the 80s] there was no audience. You had asked me about the changes, now all the nightclubs in Boston and in Cambridge, in particular, have Latin music. The hot days, Friday and Saturday, and Sunday - Johnny D's and Ryle's and the Green Street Grill right behind us, I can tell you one after another. At that moment it was not the case at all. At that moment most of the Latino musicians and artists in general operated in the streets of Central Square or Harvard Square. Few of them were homeless and they were really struggling to survive even in the streets. There was not a big audience at that moment for Latin music at all. Which is the opposite again [today]. Now, what you have in that process given that that takes a lot of time, [is that] many of those early artists were burnouts. They either left or they were destituted because it was such a struggle. Some of them used drugs and died actually. A few friends of mine died. Kiké was the best timbales player in Massachusetts, who I have seen even playing with Tito Puente who's a great Latin performer, who just recently died. He [Kiké] died on an overdose of drugs. You have the problems that happen to many artists in the periphery of that culture. And even if they survive, they burnout. For instance now most of the Latin performers who are in this area don't know that those people were here before and underestimate their contributions, which was to open up the

space for them to be there actually. So there's a huge communication gap (Rafael Pereira, Transcription, 4/2/03).

Periera states that a lot has changed in the past thirteen years. Whereas fear and prejudice had previously had detrimental effects on the careers and lives of pioneering Latino musicians, today's aspiring Latino musicians are embraced by Americans who appreciate and enjoy Latino music. It is important to note, as Perira does, that there was in fact a vibrant Latino music scene in Cambridge that precedes the more popular Latino music scene found on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays in venues such as Ryles and the Green Street Grill. Musicians like Kike and the hardships they endured paved the way for many successful Latino musicians in Cambridge today. It is important to acknowledge and celebrate these musical pioneers, their dedication to their craft and culture, and their impact on the Latino music scene today.

### ***The 1990s: An American Audience***

Prior to the 1990s, the Latino Community in Cambridge had faced hostility and discrimination due to fear, prejudice and stereotypes. Alberto Aponte, an employee at the Green Street Grill, and of Puerto Rican decent, recollected the time that he was chased down the street in Central Square by a group of white men who were harassing him because he was a Latino (Personal communication with Alberto Aponte, Chinar Mahadkar, 2003). In addition, Pereira recounts how many aspiring Latino musicians had to resort to "street work" because there were limited venues that were open to Latino music and musicians at the time. This trend began to change in the 1990s. Although discrimination was not and is still in no way eliminated, the 1990s ushered in an era in

which Americans became more accepting and appreciative of the Latino culture and music scene. John Clifford and his Green Street Grill is one such example.

It is important to note however, that at the same time, many venues that ordinarily played Latin music and catered to a Latino audience like the Latin Quarters club and the restaurant, Latin-O, shut down. In addition, in 1994, the elimination of rent control greatly changed the Cambridge Latino population demographics as many Latinos were forced out of Cambridge due to the fact that they could no longer afford to live there (Brannigan, Kennedy & Miranda 84).

Nevertheless, although the 1990s had its share of hardships on Latinos, an increased American appreciation of Latino music and culture opened up many opportunities for Latino musicians. In addition, this heightened appreciation reflected the undeniable presence of Latinos in Cambridge. This cultural celebratory enthusiasm also promoted the formation of festivals that in turn encouraged community pride among Latinos and among Cambridge residents in general.

### The Green Street Grill

The Green Street Grill, located at 280 Green Street in Central Square, began promoting Latin music and hiring Latin bands in the 1990s. The owner, John Clifford, an Irish American, credits both the Latin music initiative and the Caribbean influenced cuisine for his business' success (Brannigan, Kennedy & Miranda 86-87). In the beginning, there was only one Latin music night, Thursday night. However, the popularity of the music prompted Clifford to have live Latin bands perform nightly, Friday through Sunday. Today, the Green Street Grill has a fairly eclectic crowd,

catering to Latinos and non-Latinos alike. However, there is a definite discrepancy as to who exactly places like the Green Street Grill, Ryle's and any other non-Latino owned establishment that plays Latin music caters to. This issue will be addressed later in the section entitled "2000 and Beyond: Opinions and Trends".

### The Central Square World's Fair

The Central Square World's Fair, founded by Clifford in 1994, was a massive daylong festival on Massachusetts Avenue that celebrated the culture, music and food of many countries around the world. It also had an entire street dedicated to Latin America. This street, filled with kiosks that sold Latino food, had a Latin stage that showcased a wide variety of local Latino bands, and prompted a lot of dancing. These bands included everything from *Timba Loca*, a Venezuelan band that plays afro-Hispanic music, to *Inca Son*, a Peruvian band that plays indo-American music, to *Kilombo Mambo*, a multi-ethnic band that plays afro-Cuban salsa and jazz.

Marcello Ozain, an Argentinean resident of Cambridge, is the founder of *Kilombo Mambo*, which performs weekly at the Green Street Grill. He was an organizer of the World's Fair as well. Ozain emphasizes that it was a huge festival that brought together thousands of people of all ethnicities and cultures from all over the northeast. In particular, he states, that the Latin stage always attracted a diverse audience due to the popularity of Latin music because "it is loved by all." Again, it is apparent how widely accepted and celebrated Latin music has become. Furthermore, it is precisely this ability that the World's Fair had in bringing many different cultures together, that made it essential to the community. Not only did the festival promote interaction between the

diverse Latino community and among the multi-ethnic Cambridge community in general, but it also exposed second-generation Latino children/teenagers, otherwise immersed in American pop and hip-hop, to Latin music. Instead of feeling different or ashamed of their cultural heritage, these children started to see their music and their culture as cool by partaking in these festivals. When they see people of other cultures enjoying and appreciating their culture, they begin to appreciate it as well, (Marcello Ozain, interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar, 4/12/03). In this way the World's Fair and in particular, the Latin Stage, played a strong role in exposing Latino culture to a larger audience and instilling Latinos, especially second generation youth, with a sense of cultural pride.

Unfortunately, the World's Fair too has shut down. It shut down after 2001 due to a lack of funding. This is unfortunate considering the obvious interest in the festival and the countless benefits it provides for the Latino community and Cambridge community at large.

#### The Cambridge Caribbean American Festival

Unlike the Puerto Rican Festival and the World's Fair, the Cambridge Caribbean American Festival still goes on today. The festival takes place on Massachusetts Avenue, in the late summer and runs for one full day. In the festival, countries like Jamaica, Trinidad, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Cuba are represented. Ozain states that the festival is like a huge carnival, with parades, music, sensual dancing, and a lot of skin. He states that Puerto Rican and Dominican bands play, but many steel drum and calypso bands as well, (Marcello Ozain, interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar, 4/12/03).

Pereira too elaborates upon the festival:

Yes, you have the parade and you have a kind of representative of all the groups. Trinidad, Jamaica, have always been big groups. And then you have a parade, it starts here, right here, in front of the post office all the way almost to MIT. And then you have stages, like five, every few blocks or so. Going not only on Mass Avenue, but going down that way. And you have, ya know, all kinds of groups going on. Merengue and Haitian music and then you also have fusion. Many groups are doing fusion. So for instance the Brazilians, they are not necessarily Caribbean but they participate also in the Caribbean festival, but they actually play with a lot of other people (Rafael Pereira, Transcription, 4/2/03).

Again, in much the same ways that the Puerto Rican Festival and World's Fair brought people together, so does the Cambridge Caribbean American Festival. This festival both brings together various Latino communities, mainly Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, and unities these communities with a larger Caribbean population. As Pereira stated earlier, Puerto Ricans are Latin and Caribbean, so are Dominicans, and this festival allows them to embrace and appreciate their Caribbean side and interact with their Caribbean neighbors. Furthermore, Pereira notes that Brazilians actively take part in this festival as well. This is probably due to the strong emphasis on Carnival in Brazil, as well as the country's strong Afro-Brazilian roots that enable many Brazilians to relate to Caribbean Americans and their carnival traditions. Again, it is apparent that Latinos are not a homogenous group, but are in fact multi-faceted individuals. Furthermore, public festivals are more than just a day to dance, eat, and have fun; they foster community interaction and solidarity within the Latin Diaspora and outside it, an important aspect of empowerment for marginalized communities.

## Importance of Festivals

When asked why cultural festivals like the Puerto Rican festival, the Central Square World's Fair and the Cambridge Caribbean American Festival are important to the Cambridge Latino community in particular, Pereira answers:

For entertainment, for popular contact. And for acknowledging each other. Many of these people are separated; they don't even know each other, [or] what they have in common and what they don't have in common. Many times they actually face each other as enemies. For the simple reason, that if you're talking about the working class people, which are the minorities, it's the majority of Latin and Caribbean people here. They go to the labor market... and they face each other in competition. So this is very good for them. I think also it's very good for the overall population, to know first and foremost that we are here and we're gonna stay here and that we want to be acknowledged, we want to be acknowledged as musicians. I don't think you can separate the links between the groups in the Caribbean or Latin and also the links with the overall population. It [the links] happened with tension but I think there's more opening everyday to be accepted. So I think it's a positive. First and most I think it's a positive because working class people don't have money to go to the fancy restaurants in Cambridge and so on and they need an outlet to go and have fun and have good food and so on. Generally, this festivals, the food prices are very reasonable and the music is free, it's very good, in my opinion (Rafael Pereira, Transcription, 4/2/03).

Pereira argues that the majority of working class people are minorities and in Cambridge they tend to be the majority of Latin and Caribbean people. This being said, many of these people cannot afford to go to restaurants like Ryle's, the Green Street Grill and the Western Front every Friday and Saturday night. However they still need an outlet to have fun, enjoy good food and listen to Latin music. Festivals provide this space and more. They not only give an opportunity for the Latino community to express and enjoy their music, their food and their culture but they also bring the otherwise diverse Latino

community, often times separated by employment competition, space and ethnic difference, together.

Although Pereira makes a valid point, it is important to acknowledge socio-economic diversity when discussing topic. Ozain states that the festivals are important to have because they bring diverse Cambridge residents together, in general. However, he states that the festivals are not necessary for Latinos to come together. Latinos are not dependent on festivals as sources of entertainment. In other words, Latinos do not need festivals to come together because they have their own venues to gather and have fun. Ozain believes that the Green Street Grill is one such place (Marcello Ozain, interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar, 4/12/03). However, in the next section, there is again a discrepancy as to whether this really is the case. It may be that many well-to-do Latinos do in fact frequent restaurants like Ryle's and the Green Street Grill and thoroughly enjoy themselves. Conversely, these spots may not be feasible possibilities for working class Latinos to find entertainment due to cost and comfort level.

### ***2000 and Beyond: Opinions and Trends***

Today, Cambridge has an even more diverse Latino community than ever.

Pereira states:

Until five years ago it was almost 100% Puerto Rican and Salvadorian and Dominican. Now the Mexican population has increased immensely. And the Mexican population has increased immensely here; it's a working class population. They are the people who are washing the dishes in the restaurants and cooking the food and cleaning the subway. That was practically nonexistent until ... if I was gonna start with the first one, I would tell you ten years ago but if I gonna start at the moment that you can watch or notice then until five years [ago] they were invisible. Not to speak of the Brazilian population, which is also Latin American group, which have increased



immensely. That is a more complex population. So I think from that population then you have all social groups, including bourgeoisie people, very rich, but also people who are very working class and a big middle class group. That is also very recent. First time I realized how many Brazilians were in Boston, not in Cambridge which were a very tiny group, was in the World Cup of Soccer in the United States many years ago. But I went to a restaurant in Mass Avenue, so I said, “wow, check out all these Brazilians”. Now it’s impossible not to take them into account. So again, the Mexican and the Brazilian have been by far the most significant group in the last five years in terms of numbers and their presence. .

The discussion on music and festivals thus far has shown that both the Latino community and the over-all Cambridge community are highly ethnically diverse. However, it is important to keep in mind that both these communities are equally socio-economically diverse as well. The above quotation reflects these two realities. Today the Latino community consists not only of Puerto Ricans, Dominicans and Salvadorians, but also a significant amount of Mexicans and Brazilians. Furthermore within these ethnic differences are also class differences. This can be correlated to the larger Cambridge community as well. These factors make Cambridge a very socially complex city. Interestingly enough, this social complexity has yielded two opposing reactions: one of criticism and tension among diverse groups and one of fusion and camaraderie among diverse groups. These two juxtaposing outgrowths are reflected in the current Cambridge Latino music scene.

#### Mixed Emotions:

The popularity of salsa, rumba and other afro-Caribbean and afro-Hispanic music among the general public in Cambridge has caused mixed emotions within the Latino community. Periera says:

They, the Americans, also absorb that music. So this tango and salsa are promiscuous musics. These are working class musics in the borderline... like blues, you always have hookers or prostitutes, a lot of cigarettes and there was always the element of danger. These people have sterilized this music. You go to Ryle's, it's mostly white people dancing to salsa, no smoking, no drinking, and also very little flirting. Well the main purpose for dancing is also to flirt. A lot of the men can't dance. You go to this area and... so for me it's conflictual. Ultimately I applaud it, I clap to it, but that is a matter of tension (Rafael Pereira, Transcription, 4/2/03).

This quotation exemplifies the fact that although many Latinos appreciate the fame and recognition that Latino music like salsa and rumba has obtained, they at the same time feel that their music has been reappropriated by a predominately white audience who cannot fully relate and connect with the roots, tradition, and significance of the music. Pereira states that the music has been "sterilized" and has lost its "element of danger". The type of music ordinarily associated with sex, flirting, dancing and loss of inhibition has now been made more rigid and commercial. In addition Pereira says, "I don't go to Rhyle's in particular, I hate to go to Ryle's. How artificial the crowd there is. So I will tell you that split is already happening. Where the Latinos go to dance Latin music and where the Americans go to dance Latin music," (Rafael Pereira, Transcription, 4/2/03). Again, Pereira notes that the sterilization and reappropriation of afro-inspired Latino music by mainstream America has in fact created a rift between Latinos and Americans living in Cambridge. While many Americans enjoy spending their Friday, Saturday and even Sunday nights at places like the Green Street Grill, Ryle's and the Western Front listening to salsa and Latin jazz, many Latinos shy away from these venues. Pereira mentions that the crowd at these places is artificial. Latinos may not frequent these venues because they attract predominately white middle-class audiences that do not accurately reflect the origin, significance and tradition associated with primarily working-

class Latino music like salsa. Although this tension exists, Pereira does “ultimately applaud” the recognition and appreciation that Latino music, in particular afro-inspired Latino music, has gained in Cambridge. He states that it is recognition of numbers and of influence and truly shows that Latinos are a significant part of the Cambridge community and have been for many years.

Furthermore, Pereira argues that rather than having an American audience, or predominately white audience reappropriate afro-Latino music, he would much rather see a greater appreciation for the fusion music scene that has been taking shape in Cambridge since 1985 and probably even earlier.

#### Fusion, Cultural Growth:

Not only does the diversity within the Latino community influence the variety of Latino music in Cambridge, but the diversity within the Cambridge community at large also influences and affects the Latino music scene in Cambridge. These fusion musics are then a reflection of the American experience on the Latino community. Many people from various Latin American countries immigrated to Cambridge, shared common space and neighborhoods and so necessarily influenced one another. In addition, they, themselves, were influenced by American pop culture, as well as the ethnically diverse community around them. This is reflected in the music. Pereira says:

There’s a few people of the younger generation that are doing fusion music and combining rock and roll with hip-hop with all kinds of styles, Latin music, predominantly Hispanic-Caribbean music, rumba and salsa and so on. Abe, which is a friend of ours, is from Puerto Rican and Peruvian descent. He’s ... I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of a group called *Jayuya*, it was like seven years ago. But they already did a fusion of rock and roll and Latin and he’s still doing. He

just made a presentation at Johnny D's about two weeks ago which was very original of hip-hop, rock and roll, and a ... little merengue, a little plena, a little bit of the traditional afro-Hispanic style. So there's a few people working in that area also, not enough in my opinion, because I think that's the way to go (Rafael Pereira, Transcription, 4/2/03).

The music of Jayuya, (which is also the name of a town in Puerto Rico where many of the first Puerto Ricans immigrated from to Cambridge), embodies the fusion of various cultures and the influence of different communities upon one another in Cambridge. This band has brought together hip-hop, an African-American music form, with rock and roll, an all-American music form, with merengue, plena, and other afro-Hispanic styles, which all originated from various Latin American countries. The Cambridge Latino community is both diverse, reflected in the breadth of Latin styles of music and yet united, reflected in the fusion of many different Latin American musics into a uniquely Latino-American sound. Furthermore, these Latino musicians do not exclusively borrow from only Latin music forms. They are also influenced by everything from African-American hip-hop, to American rock and roll, to Latin American rock and roll and finally even by Arabian music. Pereira states:

But I think its quite possible now because you know Arab music is very popular now also, and the Hispanics are mingling with a lot of the Arabic musicians and stuff, I'm sure something's going to come out of that...In the Middle East if you go Wednesday nights they have Middle Eastern music. And if you check out the audience, the audience is largely Latin American and Turkish and most of the people who play in the Middle East are actually Armenian-Americans (Raphael Pereira, 4/2/03).

Again, common space and entertainment venues provide an atmosphere where people from different backgrounds and countries can mingle and befriend each other. The Middle East in Central Square is one such venue. Here Turkish-Americans, Armenian-

Americans and Latin Americans are befriending one another and impacting each other's lives through music. Again, music is a very influential medium that reflects individuality and community, both innovative trends and long-standing tradition.

Although Pereira refers to this type of musical camaraderie as fusion, Ozain refers to it as cultural growth. He does not believe this phenomenon is really fusion; it's too forceful a word, but really just cultural development as people become more accepting, tolerant and embrace difference. He states that it is bound to happen and he sees it in himself. He, himself, is bicultural and this aspect of him is reflected in his music and in *Kilombo Mambo*. Although he respects tradition and so plays Cuban salsa, he incorporates elements of hip-hop into his music as well because it is an extension of himself. He also states that hip-hop shares a lot of commonalities with Afro-Cuban music because they all have their roots in Africa so it's natural to combine the two, (Marcello Ozain, interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar, 4/12/03).

It is apparent that the Cambridge community and the Cambridge Latino community in particular, is vastly ethnically and socio-economically diverse and these issues are actively played out in regards to music and festivals in Cambridge. This social complexity leads to complex reactions in which Latinos feel both elation and apprehension for the growing appreciation of their culture and music. Further more, Cambridge's social complexities also provide fertile ground for innovative and unique multi-cultural creations to take shape. In these ways, diverse Latinos retain their individuality but also unite as a larger Latino community as well as a larger Cambridge community.

## **Food: Reappropriation, mmm mmm good?**

*If you want to know something about people, eat their food.* –Elizabeth Ahsawullah

Food is a vital part of a people's identity and culture. For Latino people, this is especially true. The sheer diversity within the Latino community yields cuisines that are distinct and delicious. The American community has realized how truly delectable Latino cuisine is and for this reason there has been a surge in the number of Latin American Restaurants, Latin American fast food chains and Latin American dishes in restaurants in general in and around Cambridge. However, much like the case with salsa, rumba and other afro-Hispanic music that has gained popularity among mainstream America, Latin American food too is being reappropriated by a community not its own. Pereira elaborates:

You go to all the restaurants here, the main chef is... The main chef is white! But all the people who are actually doing the cooking, all of them are Haitians and Salvadorians and Colombians. They are not getting credit. The Boston Globe just put an article about six months ago that said that in Cambridge in particular, 90% are white. So you have the contradiction that food is very popular today and this is something that Americans are gonna acknowledge, they don't have food to contribute. They are an exception in world history to the extent that every time a country had had the highest civilization, they have the best food. From China to India to the Roman Empire to Greeks, they and the British are the exception. So now they are embracing but at the same time there's a little piracy there. They embrace the food, but not the people... I came to the food business because I couldn't finish my PhD and I always love food but I'm furious, again, Americans have the copy down. It's a tragic problem. Both because its popular and its supposed to bring people together. So if you go to a sophisticated restaurant I assure you they will have a Latin dish or a Spanish dish. But they don't have any recognition. Very few people of that background have that money to actually go there and participate and so again you have

segregation but indirectly by appropriation of the food and of the music and the culture of the people (Rafael Pereira, Transcription, 4/2/03).

“They embrace the food, but not the people” is a resounding statement in the above quotation. It is a definite problem and concern that needs to be researched further. There is no reason why the culture of a people should be revered more than the people that compose that culture and give it the very life and vitality that many other people have come to appreciate. Again, food and music are two staples that are supposed to bring people together, however, in both cases there is this tension among the Latino community between gratitude for exposure and animosity for reappropriation.

## **Murals: Public Art on Display**

*And murals can play a great role in trying to humanize those spaces, I think, where there are these wounds.* – David Fichter

Take a walk around Central Square and you will see many colorful and stunning murals; truly beautiful works of art plastered on the sides of buildings, walls and other edifices. When I initially approached this topic, I assumed there would be some Latino artists responsible for these works of art, given the impact of the Mexican Muralist Movement. However, this is Cambridge, Massachusetts, situated in the northeastern United States and in this territory, Latino influence is predominately of the Caribbean nature rather than the Mexican. Consequently, although there might be an immense amount of murals in the California area, created by Latino muralists concerning Latino issues, this is not necessarily the case in Cambridge. Nevertheless, in my research I spoke to two prominent and talented muralists in Cambridge, David Fichter and Joshua Winer, regarding their work and artistic vision. In this paper, I will only elaborate upon Fichter, who was strongly impacted by Latin American art, has a unique vision on the purpose of murals and works interactively with the community in order to produce art for the community.

After Fichter earned his undergraduate degree in Fine Arts from Harvard, he made two trips to Latin America. Soon after he became interested in not only murals but also the whole visual culture of the Latin countries with an emphasis on Central America and countries in the Andes like Bolivia and Peru and Ecuador. He also spent a lot of time in Nicaragua, right after the Nicaraguan revolution in '79, where there was a large number of murals being done by both Nicaraguan artists but also artists from all over the



world, who were doing it as partly out of solidarity with the people there. Through this experience, Fichter was both inspired to think about how he could be helpful to what people were trying to do there but also inspired about the idea of making murals as public art. He then returned to Cambridge in the 1980s and helped organize a group who took artists to Nicaragua to paint murals and who brought Nicaraguan artists here to paint murals in the Boston area, (David Fichter, Transcription, 3/2/03). In this manner, Fichter used art and muralism in particular to bridge communities together. In this case, through mural art, Fichter formed a linkage between Cambridge and Nicaragua and was instrumental in helping Nicaraguans immigrate to and work in Cambridge.

Although murals can be political, like with regards to the Nicaraguan Revolution, Fichter views them more as “tattoos over scars.” He states that they transform space and buildings that are often failures as architecture or as urban spaces. Murals can play a great role in trying to humanize spaces, walls and the like that are decrepit, worn down or “wounded”. Murals heal urban scars and this is a great metaphor for their healing capacities. In addition, Fichter elaborates that murals are universal as well. They speak to a lot of different kinds of people and they become part of their lives both in an overt way because they are there, everyday, in local neighborhoods and also in an almost unconscious way too because they become part of people’s daily life, routine and architecture, (David Fichter, Transcription, 3/2/03).

One of Fichter’s most notable murals is the Area IV Potluck Mural. Fichter wanted to do a mural in Area IV because he had lived in that neighborhood. He applied to a group called the Area 4 Neighborhood coalition that was sponsoring projects, and got a grant to create a mural. His wall of choice was on the Harvest Co-op. He settled on

food as the theme because of the fact that the mural would be painted on a co-op, and because Central Square, in general, has various cuisines, due to the different cultures that impact the identity of this area. He then chose the idea for a potluck because he has always loved potlucks and how they bring people together while reflecting individual identity and difference as well as connection, (David Fichter, Transcription, 3/2/03).

Not only did Fichter's theme for the mural promote the importance of both community diversity and unity, but his whole art process promoted community camaraderie as well. When local people came by, they would ask to be in Fichter's mural and he would put their portrait in there, no questions asked. The whole mural is filled with portraits of local people and Fichter believes that these portraits give the mural a sense of power. People really relate to depictions of themselves by an artist and that gives the people themselves power. It gives them a sense of worth, importance and even immortality. Fichter says, "I hadn't really realized how important that was for people. But still today, I see, I run into people who are on there, whose lives have totally changed. There was this one guy who was a construction worker and he's now homeless who I see all the time. I remember when he just came up to me and asked me if you could be in the mural so I put him,"(David Fichter, Transcription, 3/2/02). Again Fichter uses art to bridge communities within the mural by depicting various people feasting at a communal potluck. By doing so, this form of community art bridges real-life diverse communities who are exposed to this mural in their everyday routines. Furthermore, including portraits of locals into the mural further enhances their attachment to their neighborhood and community because they are now physically part of it.

Besides just painting local community members into the murals, Fichter also worked with local kids after-school in Area IV, drawing sketches about food in their own family, in their own culture and their lives. He incorporated their designs into the mural as well. In fact he even hired some middle school students to work on the mural for the summer, one of whom was Juanita Morales, a girl of Puerto Rican descent, who lived in the neighborhood, (David Fichter, Transcription, 3/2/03).

It is apparent that all aspects of Muralism that Fichter engages in, has community and collaboration at its forefront. Fichter believe this is the most effective means to produce a public mural because it brings people together and gives them a sense of pride in their neighborhood, their community and themselves. He states:

Just one of the ways that I prove this is effective is that if you look at the mural; it's been up there about ten years. It doesn't have a single mark on it or graffiti or any sort of defacement. And if you look at all the other walls around it, they're covered with it. So I mean I think that is sort of part of the fact that people don't want to destroy it or avoid trashing it because they seem some ownership in it or they feel a representation of themselves in it, whether its themselves, their actual identity or you know people that they know around there (David Fichter, Transcription, 3/2/03).

Muralism, and Fichter's approach in particular, is a vital asset to the Cambridge community at larger. Through public art and community collaboration, Fichter simultaneously beautifies and socially strengthens Cambridge neighborhoods.

## **Film and Youth: Hand in Hand**

*Film is the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and now we're in the 21<sup>st</sup>. So maybe we develop a new one but all the other forms of art we carry from the past. -Raphael Pereira.*

In my research I came across three important and beneficial community programs that all centered around film. Film is not like any other art form in that it is fairly modern, innovative and new. Furthermore, it is an expensive art form that is generally considered elitist. For these reasons, film is only now making an impact on the Cambridge arts scene. This is due in part to the recent large influx of Latino professionals and intellectuals immigrating to Cambridge, mainly of South American descent. This “film revolution” probably could not have taken place in 1960s. Jose Barriga, the founder of the Cambridge Latino Film Festival and Roberto Arevalo, the founder of the Mirror Project are two examples of this immigration wave.

The Cambridge Latino Film Festival is an event that reaches out to the greater Cambridge and Boston area in an effort to break stereotypes and bridge communities. It does not necessarily reach out to working class Latinos residing in Cambridge. However, the festival is only now in its second year, and Pereira says that a grassroots approach is an eventual aim. The Mirror Project on the other hand is a grassroots program that empowers underprivileged youth by allowing them the technology and freedom to create their own movies about their own experiences. Furthermore, Paulina Mauras’ Teen Media Arts Program (TMAP) is a grassroots program as well, in which she herself, was once enrolled. This program provides an artistic outlet for at-risk youth, like she was once herself, and youth in general to have after school. Similar to the Mirror Project, the

TMAP allows youth to showcase their original film creations at the Kendall Square Movie Theatre.

All three programs are beneficial to the Latino community of Cambridge because they allow the community to represent themselves in order to accurately reflect the diversity and breadth of experience and thought that is imbedded within the Latino community of Cambridge, while simultaneously combating stereotypes. Furthermore, the Mirror Project and the Do It Your Damn Self Festival, although not specifically targeted at Latino youth, are nonetheless an invaluable assets to Latino youth today. Film is a powerful medium that gets points across quickly in a visually stunning manner and in doing so captures the attention of youth in particular, who often times have short attention spans. They give youth an artistic outlet, an after-school activity, or a career goal. The benefits are boundless.

### ***Cambridge Latino Film Festival***

The first annual Cambridge Latino film festival took place June 14-22 2002 and was an incredible success thanks to the efforts of its founder, Jose Barriga. Barriga is originally from Lima, Peru and then immigrated to Los Angeles, where he lived for ten years. In Los Angeles, he was a writer/producer for Telemundo and Fox Latin America. Barriga then decided to change careers and become a community organizer, accepting a job as a bilingual community organizer in Boston and moved to Cambridge, MA in 1992. He then left his job due to ethical reasons and realized that there were not many opportunities for a Latino producer in Cambridge/Boston. This realization led him to create the Cambridge Latino Film festival in order to “break barriers” and “bridge communities through movies,” (Jose Barriga, interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar, 3/28/03).

Barriga states that in Cambridge/Boston and in the U.S. in general, Latinos tend to reside in particular areas where they only associate with each other and do not mix with other communities. The media then forms stereotypes based on their isolation. Barriga states that he formed the festival to fight these media stereotypes with more media/film that is more accurately representative of Latinos. In addition Pereira, an organizer of the festival, adds that in addition to breaking stereotypes and bridging communities the festival is also on a mission to prove that Latinos are a part and have always been a part and will always be a part of American history. They are not foreign, or an “other”. Pereira says, “In other words what I’m trying to present to you is that we are part of the United States from the beginning. We, many of the oldest public buildings in the United States are in Spanish names. Because before you had the Mayflower you already had people in the south of the United States. So I think this film festivals can portray that history. The fact that we have been part of the history of this country for a long time,” (Rafael Pereira, Transcription, 4/2/03).

The festival accepts films from Latino filmmakers from all over the U.S. as well as from abroad. The festival also accepts work from local Latino youth associated with The Mirror Project (to be explained in the following section). Furthermore, the festival accepts films from non-Latino filmmakers that address Latinos or Latin America. Barriga points out that the festival selection committee consists of both socio-economically and ethnically diverse community members, not industry professionals. He also points out the festival is for the Boston and the greater Boston area, not only Cambridge. However, the festival itself does take place in Cambridge (Jose Barriga, interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar, 3/28/03).

When asked about the audience at the festival, Barriga states that he focuses marketing on non-Latinos because that is the target population needed to break stereotypes. The audience was 60% non-Latino and 40% Latino, however, the majority of the Latinos that attended were affiliated with the universities (Jose Barriga, interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar, 3/28/03).

The festival ended up attracting 2600 viewers and was a greater attendance than Barriga ever dreamed of. Barriga pointed out that all attendees were granted free admission with keeping of his goals as “not for profit-oriented organization, but knowledge-orientated organization.” Because the festival was such a success, the Harvard film and video archives, one of the most highly reputed venues in New England offered its use for the festival screenings to come (Jose Barriga, interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar, 3/28/03).

Barriga remains enthusiastic about the festival, despite lack of funding, and believes that the 2003 festival will draw an even larger crowd, believing that “people are not only receptive to different cultures, they want to experience culture, and a wonderful way for them to do so is through film,” (Jose Barriga, interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar, 3/28/03).

### ***The Mirror Project***

Roberto Arevalo, the founder of the Mirror Project, is originally from Colombia and has been in the U.S. for twenty-one years now. Because of media portrayals of U.S. prosperity and democracy in Columbia, Arevalo wanted to come to America. Once in America however, Arevalo realized how the media portrayals and stories he had heard

about America were not 100% accurate and that he had to struggle in New York to make a living when he first arrived in the states. He then decided to go to school at Hunter College in NYC in order to fight marginalization and oppression intelligently. It was at college that he picked up a video camera and began taping everything around him in an effort to more closely examine people and the world around him (Roberto Arevalo, interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar, 4/2/03).

The Mirror Project, a project that gives underprivileged youth video cameras and the opportunity to make their own films based on their daily lives in areas like Somerville and Cambridge, was an outgrowth of his experiences in New York. He states that the mission of the Mirror Project is to get people (adults, but mostly youth) to look at themselves by focusing on their everyday experiences. He believes that everyone's idiosyncrasies and mannerisms help them to understand themselves better intellectually and emotionally. It is a source of empowerment. Arevalo also states that by focusing social documentary on underprivileged youth and allowing them to produce their own films, the program is contributing a new variety of experiences to social documentary, a field that previously concerned and produced by elites (Roberto Arevalo, interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar, 4/2/03).

Arevalo took part in the Summer Media Arts Institute that took place in the summer of 1999 and involved exclusively Cambridge youth. At this institute these children were given cameras and were given free artistic reign. However, Arevalo points out that The Mirror Project is not only about Latino youth, although the topic is close to his heart, but about all underprivileged youth in the Somerville/Cambridge area at large (Roberto Arevalo, interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar, 4/2/03).



## ***The Teen Media Arts Program & The Do It Your Damn Self Festival***

Whereas Barriga and Arevalo were relative newcomers to Cambridge, Paulina Mauras was born and raised in Cambridge and continues to live in Cambridge today. A second-generation Puerto Rican-American living with two Puerto Rican parents, Mauras grew up in New Town Court, a housing development located around Windsor Street. She attended Cambridge Rindge and Latin and was an honor student. However, Mauras' life was far from perfect. She had an unstable family life that eventually led to her rebellious behavior. During this time, Mauras would run away from home for long periods of time and at the age of seventeen, she became the mother of a baby girl. Today, Mauras is a college graduate with a B.A. in Psychology from Suffolk University, an independent self-sufficient mother, and the director of the Teen Media Arts Program at the Cambridge Arts Center. Mauras credits all her success to the Cambridge Arts Center, candidly stating, "If it wasn't for the Cambridge Arts Center I can tell you, I honestly don't know where I'd be today. I would have fallen completely off track a long time ago," (Paulina Mauras, interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar, 4/24/03).

The Cambridge Arts Center used to be located in the basement of New Town Court and so was Mauras' convenient safe haven when times got rough. Today it has greatly expanded and is part of a larger complex that houses the Windsor Street Health Clinic as well. The center has a Teen Media Arts Program that much like the Mirror Project gives youth a video camera and allows them to document anything they desire. Mauras says that in the past many youth have produced a variety of work ranging from documentaries on discrimination to hip-hop music videos (Paulina Mauras, interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar, 4/24/03).

In addition to directing the Teen Media Arts Program, that she herself was enrolled in as a teen, Mauras recently started the Do It Your Damn Self Festival that allows local youth to judge video and film entries created by youth from across the United States and then screen their favorites at the Kendall Square Movie Theatre. Mauras says that the youth get really excited about this event and during this time, after school, the room gets packed to capacity with kids screening and grading the films with total enthusiasm (Paulina Mauras, interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar, 4/24/03).

Mauras also states that at the given moment there are not many Latino youth in the TMAP or the Do It Your Damn Self Festival. However, she plans to make a more concerted effort to attract Latino youth because of how influential the program was for her, her siblings and her daughter today. She says that the program is predominantly African American. When asked why the Cambridge Arts Center does not draw a larger Latino contingent Mauras replied that many Latino youth that are recent immigrants or that only like to hang out with other Latino kids often times choose the AHORA program and Concilio Hispano. However, Mauras says that those programs were never the right fit for her. She states that she is a second-generation Puerto Rican girl, who although very proud of her Puerto Rican heritage, has always had a greater affinity for hip-hop and urban culture than salsa and the Latin culture. All her friends are predominately African-American and places like Concilio Hispano actually make her feel like an outsider (Paulina Mauras, interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar, 4/24/03). Again, the breadth of experience and thought and the differing concepts of identity among Latinos are astoundingly diverse. Programs like the Teen Media Arts Programs, The Mirror Project and Festivals like the Latino Film Festival are desperately needed in order to visually

reflect this diversity and self-expression as well as the sense of cultural pride and community.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Latino community of Cambridge is definitely not a homogenous entity. The individuals that compose the community differ by age, gender, sex, region or country of origin, ethnicity, race, socio-economic status, extracurricular activity and self-identification. In addition, the entire community changes through time. All this diversity and change through time is clearly reflected in the various artistic expressions of this rich community. Various musical and culinary traditions directly reflect variation in general and variation through time within the Cambridge Latino Community.

However, this is not to say that the Latino community as a whole is fragile, weak or fragmented. Quite the contrary, actually, and this strong sense of community is reflected through artistic expression as well. Through innovative multi-ethnic musical creations and or musical fusion and/or growth, this art form reflects the fact that shared space and shared tradition definitely forges interaction and multicultural expression. Furthermore, unique multi-ethnic musical creations not only reflect multi-ethnic interaction within the Latino community, but they also reflect multi-ethnic relationships within the diverse Cambridge community at large. From Latin inspired hip-hop to Arabian-inspired salsa, the Cambridge community is generally a warm and accepting one, open to new trends and modes of cultural expression.

In addition cultural festivals like the Cambridge Puerto Rican Festival, the Central Square World's Fair and the Cambridge Caribbean American Festival are other venues that bring the varying communities within the Latin Diaspora and outside it together in

order to celebrate a common Cambridge community that everyone is equally a part of. Muralism is yet another inspiring example of community camaraderie.

There is no denying that Cambridge is an extremely complex society plagued with extreme inequalities in education and wealth as well racial and ethnic divisions. There is bound to be tension, animosity and uneasiness among people. Some of this tension was noted in the reappropriation of Latino food and music and also in terms of police relations.

It is because of these tensions and issues that community based organizations like the Cambridge Latino Film Festival, the Mirror Project and the Teen Media Arts Program are so necessary. These film programs provide an outlet through which these voices and issues can be raised in a socially constructive manner. Through the powerful medium of film that rightly targets Latino youth, the future leaders of this dynamic community, changes can be made, communication and repertoire with diverse communities can be forged, and community can keep being built with the realization that variation and diversity exist but that does not mean that community cannot.

## **Suggestions For Further Research**

Further research should be conducted into specific bands and performers that have impacted the Cambridge music scene. In addition, further research should also be directed toward the issue of reappropriation of Latino food and music and its effect on the differing sectors of the Latino community. Furthermore, a lot more in depth research could be conducted on each of the festival mentioned briefly in this report: The Cambridge Puerto Rican Festival, The Central Square World's Fair and especially the Cambridge Caribbean American Festival since it is still held annually. I would also suggest more in depth research into various youth art programs. Jam'nastics is yet another youth art program that promotes cultural expression through dance. These programs are important to document because they could be beneficial for many Latino youth in Cambridge are unaware of the possibilities and opportunities out there. Finally I would delve deeper into the interaction, relationship and history between the Latino community and African American community.

## Appendix: Interviews with Community

### Members

Arevalo, Roberto. Originally from Colombia. Founder of The Mirror Project, a project that provides underprivileged youth with video cameras in order to make movies about their own lives, times and concerns. Interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar on 4/2/03.

Barriga, Jose Augusto. Originally from Lima, Peru. Founder of the Cambridge Latino Film Festival. Interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar on 3/28/03.

Fichter, David. Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts from Harvard University and is currently a resident of Cambridge. He has painted numerous murals in the Eastern, Southern and Midwestern United States, as well as in Nicaragua and in the former Soviet countries of Russia, Georgia and Armenia. Many of his art works like "The Potluck" and the "Cambridge Senior Center Mural" can be found in public areas and buildings around Cambridge. David Fichter has been commissioned numerous times by the Cambridge Arts Council and has close ties to the leading local mural artists in Cambridge. Interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar on 3/2/03.

Mauras, Paulina. Second-generation Puerto Rican, lived in Cambridge all her life. Director of the Teen Media Arts Program and the Do It Your Damn Self Festival at the Cambridge Arts Center. Interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar on 4/24/03.

Ozain, Marcello. Born in Argentina but has lived in both the United States and Argentina since childhood. Musician in the band called Kilombo Mambo that plays Cuban salsa at the Green Street Grill. Interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar on 4/12/03.

Pereira, Rafael. Originally from Puerto Rico. Cambridge resident since 1985. Culinary

Teacher at the Cambridge Center for Adult Education and the Cambridge Culinary Arts Institute. Organizer of Cambridge Latino Film Festival. Interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar on 4/2/03.

Winer, Joshua. Joshua Winer is an award-winning artist who creates murals and works of public art on commission through out the United States and abroad. His work is found on interior and exterior walls, in public buildings, stores, restaurants and residences. Joshua Winer is also an experienced educator and creates public art projects with schools and community groups. His background includes a Degree in Fresco Painting from the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (1976), a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts from Yale University (1978) and a Master's Degree in Architecture from Harvard University (1986). He currently resides in Westwood, MA but is in the process of relocating. Interviewed by Chinar Mahadkar on 3/2/03.



## **Bibliography:**

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