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**CANDIDO CAMERO**  
**NEA Jazz Master (2008)**

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**Hector Corporan:** Today is Friday, March the 12<sup>th</sup>, the 1999. My name is Hector Corporán and as part of the Jazz Oral History Program of the Smithsonian Institution, I am interviewing Mr. Candido Camero at his apartment in New York City. Candido, very good afternoon and on behalf of my colleagues at the Smithsonian, many thanks for granting us this interview.

Well Candido, let's talk a little about everything. To begin with, tell us your full name, and place and date of birth.

**Candido Camero:** Well, from my birth - I was born on Friday, April 22, 1921 at six thirty in the afternoon in El Cerro, one of the neighborhoods in the city of Havana, Cuba. My dad's name is Candido Camero. My mom's name is Caridad Guerra.

**Corporan:** And do you have brothers and sisters, and what are their respective names?

**Candido:** Well, my sister who follows me in age, her name is Elena Camero - Elena Camero Guerra. My brother who follows my sister in age is Virgilio Camero Guerra. And the youngest of all my brothers is Faustino Camero Guerra. Only my sister and I are still living. My mom died, my dad died, my two brothers passed and only my sister and I are left.

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**Corporan:** *Tell me maestro, what did your father do to make a living?*

**Camero:** My dad worked in a factory making bottles for soft drinks in Cuba. He worked at the factory. My mother worked only at home. She attended to us, raised us, but never worked - only my dad.

**Corporan:** *Tell us some of your fond memories of your parents and your childhood.*

**Camero:** Well when I was four, my uncle - his name is Andres Guerra Cardenas - was the one who taught me to play the bongos. The way I learned to play the bongos - I was four years old - was with two empty cans of milk. My uncle made me repeat what he played on the bongos. He'd make me repeat what I heard him play and I'd repeat it on the empty condensed milk cans and that was my first inspiration. That gave me inspiration to continue learning aside from the fact that I was in school, too. I was still in Kindergarten. But whenever I came home, I asked my uncle to teach me to play the bongos.

**Corporan:** *Was your uncle a professional musician?*

**Camero:** Yes, professional.

**Corporan:** *Tell us more about him.*

**Camero:** My mother's brother, he was a professional. And he made a living playing music with a septet called Segundo Nacional. He'd take me to the radio broadcasts and to parties so I could hear how he played. Then I went to school and when I came back from school, I'd repeat what I heard him play at the parties, at the broadcasts, what he taught me at home and so on.

**Corporan:** *Do you have any memory of the specific groups that you saw play, or you saw at that early age playing with your uncle?*

**Camero:** Well yes - Septeto Habanero, Septeto Nacional, Septeto Bologna, Septeto Cauto - were many - the Sonora Matancera - there were many septets. They were all good in that era, very good - different styles.

**Corporan:** *And so he as a musician, was known to all of the members of these groups, so from a very young age, you were around professional musicians, right?*

**Camero:** Yes, from my mom's side and from my dad's side. On my mom's side, my uncles were all musicians. And on my dad's side, he taught me to play the tres. My uncle taught me to play the bongos and my mom sang. So I imitated all of them. I wanted to be the one-man-band. (Laughs).

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**Corporan:** *Apparently you had a gift and your parents and uncle recognized that talent in you.*

**Camero:** Indeed, because when I came home from school - I was still in kindergarten - so, I returned from school at lunch or mealtime. I'd pretend to play bongos on the table. And my mom told me, "It's time to eat, not music time. What are you going to do, eat or play?" And I'd say, "A little of both. I will eat and then I'll play a little." And that's how I began. So my grandfather told my mother, "Let him be because I know he will be famous someday." And indeed, I wish he lived long enough for me to have been able to say to him, "Grandfather, you were right."

**Corporan:** *I get the impression that your childhood was very different from the other kids, right? Because, or rather, let me ask you, did you also have time to share with kids your age and the mischief that is very normal?*

**Camero:** About my childhood, indeed. For example, when I came home from school, my dad would say, "I need you to go to the store," and I'd say, "Okay, tell me what you need." Then he would give me the list and then he'd tell me, "This is not play time for you, so I'm giving you a limited time to return so you can't be playing with the boys because this is no time to play, this is time to go to the store." Then I went to the store and my dad would say, "I'm going to spit on the floor. You have to get back before it dries because if not, you know what awaits you." Then I'd go to the store and see my friends and we'd be talking and what not and I'd think of what my dad told me and I'd say "Hey, see you tomorrow because I have to return to my house before my dad's saliva dries, like he told me." (Laughs) Because I had to return before it dried. Then I told the boys my age, "Let's get together tomorrow to play ball, go to the movies, or tell stories, or go sit in the park - it was like that. And when I started as a professional at fourteen, he told the director of the orchestra, "Okay, I'll let you take him, but you bring him back. You take him and bring him back." I was only fourteen. But as soon as I came home, my dad would say, "Say *ha*." And I said, "*Ha ha*." And then he'd say, "Only one *ha* is needed. One is enough." He wanted to smell my breath to see if I had been drinking. So he'd say, "Say *ha*." Then he'd smell my hands also, to see if I had smoked.

**Camero:** Of course I was so afraid of what he always told me, "If you don't do what I say, you will not like what will happen later." So of course to please him while not really knowing what would happen, I said, "I'd better do as he says." So I never drank to this day and, thank God, I'll be 78 years old. I never smoked. I never used false inspirations as I call it. (Laughs) In other words, I said, "Well, if it's not necessary, I don't have to bother with it." And that was when I was fourteen. Then later he told me "Okay, now you can go play, go play with your friends, but at nine o'clock at night, you've got to come home. No matter where you are, when the nine o'clock blast goes off . . ." Everyone was guided by the cannon at nine as the official time to set the clocks and stuff. He told me "After you hear the shot at nine, I'll give you ten minutes to get home." So I was playing with the boys in the street and all, playing ball and telling stories, and when I'd hear the cannon at nine I'd tell the guys, "Hey, I'll see you tomorrow," and I'd take off

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running home, (Laughs) before the ten minutes that my dad had given me were up. (Laughs) There was a belt hanging on the wall. He'd say, "You see that belt there? Well, that's your teacher too." So I've been following all my dad's rules up until now, and have not regretted it. And I thank him, too.

**Corporan:** *Maestro to some extent you had a very productive childhood in a musical sense. Now, you told me that you began playing professionally at fourteen. But before we get to that point, tell us about that stage of practice, rehearsal, and daily discipline that eventually prepared you to play professionally. Tell me more stories about the influence of your father as a musician, of your uncle who was also as a musician. Tell me about that musical training. Your mother as a singer and because - we started to go there.*

**Camero:** Well, as I said earlier, my uncle taught me to play the bongos starting when I was four, but as an amateur. My dad taught me to play the tres. My mother played in the community and at home and I would sing the chorus for her and stuff. Now the other uncles from my mom's side, they were all musicians. One taught me to play the bass as a hobby.

**Corporan:** *What is his name?*

**Camero:** His name was Jacinto Guerra, the brother of my mother. Another uncle taught me to play the flute as a hobby. His name was Victor Guerra. Regarding the flute, a curious thing, my uncle had one as he was a professional musician, so he had a professional flute and played with an orchestra - a charanga, what was called a charanga. Then . . .

**Corporan:** *Do you remember exactly which one?*

**Camero:** The charanga?

**Corporan:** *Yes.*

**Camero:** It's called Campo Marquetti. That was the name of the charanga. Charanga Campo Marquetti. Then my uncle made me a flute, but made it from a piece of pipe of...

**Corporan:** *Bamboo?*

**Camero:** No, water - a tube from the water pipe system. He made me one - the flute, for example, has the mouthpiece and has the keys to make the different sounds. So he made me a piece with the same length of a regular flute. He made me a flute with a piece of pipe, a water pipe, and he opened the hole for the mouthpiece and then made eight more little holes each covering four fingers of each hand and that was my flute. Then, what my uncle played on the professional flute, I had to imitate what he did on that flute that he made me from plumbing pipes. That was my uncle.

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**Corporan:** *And how long did this stage last?*

**Camero:** Oh, for how long?

**Corporan:** *Yes.*

**Camero:** For a long time, long time. . .

**Corporan:** *And there came a point where you then learned enough to play the flute professionally?*

**Camero:** Exactly.

**Corporan:** *Tell me about it,*

**Camero:** It was like that. Well, then he bought me a professional one. But not new, he did not buy it new. He bought one used as we say, in what they call, a pawn shop.

**Corporan:** *A purchase and sale shop?*

**Camero:** Aha. It was inexpensive. Then he taught me how to manipulate the keys with your fingers the same as . . . of course it was a professional flute. The only thing is that it was not completely new. Then he taught me to manipulate the fingers with the keys and the mouth piece. And there I started, playing danzones and all those things he played, but also as an amateur. On the tres, we had a septet, we later had a septet called the Septeto Gloria Habanera. That was the first septet in which I played. But there I played the bongos in that septet. Later, I played in another septet named . . . Jovenes del Cerro. I played the bass in that septet. Then we formed another septet named Apolo. It was then that I played tres and the bongo player who is also famous today, was Mongo Santamaria.

Then we had a radio broadcast every day to announce the weekend dances for people to know where we were going to play. We were payed ten cents for the radio broadcast every day which was enough to only pay for our travel. But we played with the idea of announcing the dances where we were going to play so that people would come out. At that time, Mongo Santamaria worked for the post office. And I helped him to deliver the mail and complete the job faster so that we could start the rehearsals earlier. And soon after, we toured the entire republic. Afterwards I played in another septet named Nacional Juvenil that was a derivative of – or a subsidiary of the Septeto Nacional. The person that sang in that septet is someone who was also famous here in the United States, Vicentico Valdés, and I was the tres player.

After that I went to the first nightclub I worked at in Cuba. It was the Cabaret Kursaal in 1942.

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1943 I went to Cabaret Tropicana and doubled on CMQ radio, also at the Tropicana with the orchestra of Armandito Romeu. Also at CMQ I played with the Orchestra of Gonzalo Roig. After that we went to Sans Souci. In this show we were four conga drummers - Trinidad Torregrosa, Antolín, Jesus and me. We were the pioneer players of the rhythm batanga that was created by Bebo Valdés with the orchestra of the Tropicana.

**Corporan:** *But let's go back with your permission. Your uncle Jacinto Guerra taught you the tres.*

**Camero:** No, my dad.

**Corporan:** *And your uncle Jacinto taught you?*

**Camero:** He taught me to play bass.

**Corporan:** *The bass.*

**Camero:** Aha, as a hobby. And my uncle Victor, the flute.

**Corporan:** *The flute.*

**Camero:** Exactly.

**Corporan:** *Tell us about that experience of learning the bass.*

**Camero:** Well, the bass I learned because my uncle liked to sing tango. And he liked me to accompany him on the tangos with the bass because I could not play the accordion.

**Corporan:** *Who could play the accordion?*

**Camero:** I could *not* play accordion.

**Corporan:** *Oh, I see.*

**Camero:** So, my uncle liked that I accompany him on bass when he was singing tangos. It was he who taught me. I forgot to say also that at fourteen my dad only let me wear long pants. When I went to work playing music, it was the opposite, only shorts pants, bombache, as they we called them - which were used by all the schools, khaki pants in bombache style which had a fold down here on the knee which is why we called them bombache pants - because he did not want me to believe that I was ready for everything. He said, "With time. All in due time, all in due time." And it was like that, all in due time. I say, even to be born one must wait nine months. so in other words, all in due time. (Laughs). I never forget that.

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**Corporan:** *You say that your uncle was fond of tango?*

**Camero:** Yes, yes, yes.

**Corporan:** *Was much tango listened to in Cuba at that time?*

**Camero:** Yes, yes, yes. Carlos Gardel was very famous then, very famous, very famous. I still have several records of his. He was number one, the number one tango singer.

**Corporan:** *Because there was the impression that at that time that Cuban music was heard mostly or exclusively . . . I'm not sure if that was the situation in Cuba, that to some extent countries protected their national music ...*

**Camero:** Yes, naturally.

**Corporan:** *. . . and not much outside influence was allowed.*

**Camero:** Well, what always predominated of course was Cuban music all over the radio, always. There was still no TV and this and that, but the radio, definitely. And all the orchestras and all septets were of Cuban music - son, danzon, guajira, guaracha, mambo, danza, contradanza, guaguancó, all this is Cuban music.

**Corporan:** *Other than the tango, what other foreign music was listened to at that time in Cuba?*

**Camero:** A lot of American bands were heard. The musicians who liked jazz listened a lot. And there was always a station that was half Cuban music and half jazz and that was very popular among the musicians who liked jazz. So everyone was pleased with Cuban music and jazz.

**Corporan:** *Okay maestro, let's talk about your professional career. Let us return again to your first experience as a professional musician. You played with, tell me again which group?*

**Camero:** The first group as a professional?

**Corporan:** *Yes.*

**Camero:** Gloria Habanera.

**Corporan:** *And who were the members?*

**Camero:** The director was Floro Costa. He played claves and sang. Floro Costa. That's Floro Costa, director and singer. Raul Diaz, maracas and second voice. Raul Sequeira, trumpeter.

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Enrique Leiva, played guitar. Carlos, I don't remember right now, Barbón, Carlos Barbón played bass, no, I think bongos. And Lorenzo, I forget the last name now, played the tres. Those were the members of the Gloria Habanera. That was in 1935. My first professional group - and I say as a professional because it was when I first earned money for playing music. Because before that, I was still in school. So what I did was go to all the amateur competitions and we'd agree that the kids in my classroom would go to cheer me on and I almost always won first prize. That was part of my inspiration in music – to meet up with the kids from school and we'd go to the amateur contests and I almost always won first prize.

**Corporan:** *Maestro you never . . . it seems by then had you learned to read music?*

**Camero:** No, I do not know a single note of music.

**Corporan:** *Even now?*

**Camero:** Not even now.

**Corporan:** *So this was all by ear?*

**Camero:** All this by ear.

**Corporan:** *Thanks to the teaching of your uncle and father.*

**Camero:** Exactly – partly from my uncle, my mother, my father. . . Yes.

**Corporan:** *How long were you with the group Gloria Habanera?*

**Camero:** Oh, many years, many years. I would say . . . from '35 to 1942. Yes.

**Corporan:** *Did they record?*

**Camero:** No, never. Never. But we worked every weekend. Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

**Corporan:** *What did you earn per person?*

**Camero:** Per person?

**Corporan:** *Yes, weekly?*

**Camero:** Oh weekly. Well, for three days. Six pesos per person.

**Corporan:** *I guess that was a whole lot of money.*

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**Camero:** Well, back then it was more than a whole lot of money. (Laughs) More than a whole lot of money (Laughs). Yes, yes, two dollars per dance. Two dollars per dance. And the radio broadcast, 10 cents for the bus, so we wouldn't have to walk that far.

**Corporan:** *Maestro I imagine also that being as young as you were, you all were the great attraction of the girls.*

**Camero:** Oh yes, yes. Across the republic, in all the republic. Every weekend traveling to different places in the republic always. Two dollars for each dance.

**Corporan:** *Name the other contemporary groups of that time.*

**Camero:** From that time?

**Corporan:** *Youth groups of that age.*

**Camero:** From that time, there was Gloria Habanera. Then there was, the group, the Septeto Montparnasse. I don't remember the musicians well, the names, because well you know so many years, but I remember the Montparnasse as it was called. After the Gloria Habanera I worked with the Montparnasse.

**Corporan:** *How long were you with them?*

**Camero:** In Montparnasse, about . . . about five years.

**Corporan:** *And what instrument did you play?*

**Camero:** There I played the bass. Later there was another conjunto, septet from, the town of Regla - a septet called Jovenes Sociales. They were from Regla. The director's name was Jose Salinas. We called him Cheo. There I played guitar.

**Corporan:** *The tres.*

**Camero:** No, the guitar.

**Corporan:** *Ah, the guitar.*

**Camero:** Yes, the guitar. After Los Jovenes Sociales, El Apolo.

**Corporan:** *How long were you with the Apolo?*

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**Camero:** With Apolo, I was there about five years.

**Corporan:** *And what instrument did you play?*

**Camero:** I played the tres there. After the Apolo, I was with the Bolero del '35 de Tata Gutierrez, where I also played tres. The bongo player in that group was Mongo Santamaria. And then the orchestra . . .

**Corporan:** *Let's return to the Apolo Septet. Apart from Mongo, who else was part of the group?*

**Camero:** Well, starting with Mongo on bongos, Bebo Alan on bass, Miguel Luis, no Jose Luis on claves - sorry, Modesto Perez on claves, later he was the singer in the Hermanos Contreras Orchestra. Let's put them in order again. Mongo Santamaria on bongos, Bebo Alan on bass, Modesto Perez on the claves, Miguel Luís on maracas, and Raul Diaz who was the director on the guitar. And the other, the other trumpet was, Miguelito, Miguelito, Miguelito, I am trying to remember the name now, Miguelito, well now I do not remember the last name of the trumpeter. Miguelito . . . Moliné – Miguelito Moliné was the trumpeter.

**Corporan:** *Now maestro, what year are we talking about more or less?*

**Camero:** Excuse me?

**Corporan:** *What year are we talking about?*

**Camero:** Well, I was twenty two years old at that time. Yes I was twenty two years old. That was long before my first child was born and now he is an adult. He has a wife, has grandchildren, great grandchildren, and I have also grandchildren and great grandchildren. Yes, I was about twenty two years old when I was in that group. I do not remember the year exactly. I think it was like in '40, not '40, '40 something, '40. A very good conjunto. A very good septet.

**Corporan:** *Maestro tell me the difference between the sextet and conjunto.*

**Camero:** Well, the septet consists of seven, which are the tres, the guitar, the bass, bongos, trumpet, maracas, and clave - that's the septet. Apart from those instruments I just mentioned, the conjunto has an additional trumpet, piano, and conga. That's the difference.

**Corporan:** *Precisely. When was it that the conjunto was created? In what era did the conjunto become popular? And to some extent I guess, replaced the septet.*

**Camero:** Exactly. Well, to my understanding it was around the year 1934 and it was the conjunto of Arsenio Rodriguez, that was when he added a trumpet which means then that he had two trumpets, conga and piano. So this means that instead of seven they were ten. So he

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changed the name to *conjunto* because they were ten.

**Corporan:** *I estimate that this revolutionized Cuban music.*

**Camero:** In the world.

**Corporan:** *In the world.*

**Camero:** Yes.

**Corporan:** *You lived this.*

**Camero:** Yes.

**Corporan:** *Tell me about that please.*

**Camero:** Well, without bragging, I have traveled almost half the world and wherever I have been in the most remote corner of the world always, there is always an interest in playing this kind of music, Cuban music whether that be son (Phone rings) . . . whether it be the son, danzon, guaracha, guajira, mambo, son montuno, guaguancó, all that kind of music, for example every music has its . . . the one who initiated the genre for example, in the guaguancó and the son montuno, Arsenio Rodriguez, can be mentioned as one of the founders. Then there was the son that came from Santiago de Cuba to Havana by Miguel Matamoros, with the song, *Son de la Loma*, exactly, it is called *The Son de la Loma* de Miguel Matamoros. There is for example, by Arsenio Rodriguez, *La Yuca de Catalina*. Then there is Marcelino Guerra's *Pare Cochero*. Then there is for example, Marcelino Guerra, Arsenio Rodriguez, Miguel Matamoros, you have *El Manicero* by Moises Simmons and *Siboney*, a world-famous song by Ernesto Lecuona. This means that each composer was made popular by a song and by the type of music, the music genre, in what time, in which genre as it is called, how you can refer to this kind of genre, son, son montuno, guajira, guaguancó, guaracha, danzon. There is Aniceto Diaz from Matanzas, who was the creator of the danzonete sung by Paulina Alvarez. There are many, many composers and each created a genre that was... and that is where the difference is between genres, among the composers. (Door bell rings) . . .

**Corporan:** *Well, let us go back to the group Septeto El Apolo. You made mention several times of Mongo Santamaria, who of course was a percussionist of your era very well known here in the United States with a very long history. How did you and Mongo meet? Did you grow up in the same neighborhood?*

**Camero:** No, no, no, no. Mongo is from the neighborhood of Jesus Maria and I'm from the neighborhood of El Cerro. Because Havana has forty-three neighborhoods. So, Mongo belongs to the Jesus Maria neighborhood and I belong to the neighborhood of El Cerro. But we met

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because someone was looking for a tres player and Mongo was with the Boloña Septet. So they were looking for a tres player and a friend of Mongo said he knew a very good tres player in El Cerro. Then my friend took me to meet Mongo and there began the friendship between us. At that time, Mongo was working for the postal service as I said before and I helped him to deliver the mail so he would finish his work early so that we could start rehearsing really early. That was how our friendship was and is until now, until now. Right now I think they are going to do a tribute to him soon and I was the first to say, "I'll be the first to be there," because his health isn't too good now.

**Corporan:** *That is what I understand.*

**Camero:** Then so long as it deals with Mongo of course - we are friends from childhood. A very good, very good companion, very good companion.

**Corporan:** *You tell me that in Cuba there are forty-three neighborhoods. That reminds me of the carnivals.*

**Camero:** (Laughs) In fact I was going to tell you about that. Each neighborhood has its comparsa. But not because I'm from El Cerro but in the Traditional category, my neighborhood's comparsa, Los Alacranes (The Scorpions), always took the first prize in the Traditional category. Now the comparsa in the neighborhood of Belén, whose director was Chano Pozo, they always took first prize in Elegance. Los Dandys de Belén always took the first prize. The director was Chano Pozo. They always took the first prize in Elegance. El Alacran always took first prize in the Traditional category and the other comparsas of course took first, second, third, fourth, and so on, differently. Each neighborhood had its comparsa, but those that always came in first in the Traditional category were Los Alacranes, my neighborhood. In first place in Elegance came Chano Pozo's Los Dandys de Belen. And the rest of the groups thus depended on the jury there in the Paseo del Prado.

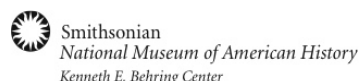
**Corporan:** *For a person who is not Cuban who has not lived that time, describe the celebration, the parade, those carnivals. Each neighborhood came marching with its troupe towards one meeting place?*

**Camero:** Where the jury was. They gave out the awards.

**Corporan:** *But how did they get there? They came dressed dancing in the streets? They came by bus?*

**Camero:** No, no, no, nothing like that. From their respective neighborhood, no matter where they were, wherever it was, they came dancing and singing until they arrived in front of the jury. And the jury was on the Prado which is one of the longest thoroughfares in Havana. In the Prado, that is where the jury was. Each troupe came from its neighborhood. I would come with the

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comparsa El Alacran from the neighborhood of El Cerro. But I played the snare drum, what is known in English as the snare drum. I played the snare drum in the comparsa El Alacran.

**Corporan:** *I guess it was a little difficult for neighborhoods that were a bit far?*

**Camero:** Yeah, very difficult. But they set out with enough time to get before the jury at the indicated time.

**Corporan:** *But can you imagine that person who came playing that percussion - those drums on their shoulder.*

**Camero:** Well, I had a towel on the shoulder here and played and I'd sweat and me with the towel and playing like that from the neighborhood of El Cerro to the Prado and that took almost two hours - there dancing and singing with the lanterns, which were heavy. And the drums hanging here. . . all that. But that was a fantastic thing that each neighborhood with different costumes, with different songs, different rhythms, some softer, some a bit lighter. That was once a year, as the carnivals of New Orleans, or carnivals in Brazil and carnivals here in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, and the carnivals in Cuba, yes that was very good...

**Corporan:** *I imagine that there was an intense rivalry between neighborhoods.*

**Camero:** No - not to the point of hatred, but instead to compete amicably, just looking for the top prize, that was the thing.

**Corporan:** *Maestro you told me of Chano Pozo, you told me about Mongo, you told me about you. What other drummers of that era were involved, that today are recognized on that level that you remember?*

**Camero:** For example let's see, Tata Guines and now among those that are new, Los Papines, Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, there are many.

**Corporan:** *And you eventually played with each of them?*

**Camero:** Well, musically no. Personally, yes. Like friends, "Oh how are you?" and this and that but musically no. I know them from the time period. And they also know me, but we never shared musically, only personally as friends, talking about music and the neighborhood and stuff. Quite interesting.

**Corporan:** *You never competed with them professionally?*

**Camero:** Compete?

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**Corporan:** *Yes.*

**Camero:** Well ...

**Corporan:** *Musically, say to get a gig with an orchestra.*

**Camero:** No no no on the contrary, it was quite the opposite.

**Corporan:** *You recommended each other?*

**Camero:** Exactly, exactly and when you could not do a job, you recommended your friend and the friend went. No matter how good he was, even if he was inferior or whatever but the friend was recommended. There was none of that. There was competition to excel, but not hatred and that is very important. Yes.

**Corporan:** *The last group with which you had participated you tell us was the Septeto Apolo.*

**Camero:** The Apolo.

**Corporan:** *Then after that, to which group did you go?*

**Camero:** To the Conjunto del Bolero of 1935.

**Corporan:** *Conjunto de Bolero?*

**Camero:** Conjunto Bolero.

**Corporan:** *Ah, Conjunto Bolero.*

**Camero:** 1935 of Tata Gutierrez.

**Corporan:** *How long were you with them? Tell us, where did they play?*

**Camero:** Well, I was with them until the year '46.

**Corporan:** *And then from there?*

**Camero:** From there I came to the United States in 1946 with a pair of dancers, Carmen and Rolando. They were the ones that brought me.

**Corporan:** *But I understand that before you traveled to the United States with them, you were traveling throughout Cuba with them, right?*

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**Camero:** Ah yes, in Cuba yes. With Cascarita - vocalist Orlando Guerra. He was known by his nickname Cascarita because he was short and thin. We called him Cascarita, but he was very good, very good. After that, Beny Moré then climbed in prominence. After Cascarita.

**Corporan:** *I have understand that both their styles were a little similar.*

**Camero:** No, completely different.

**Corporan:** *Different?*

**Camero:** Yes, both were complete. With equal ease, they could sing a bolero, a guajira, a guaracha, a son montuno - complete, both of them were complete. Another who was also complete, excuse me, Miguelito Valdés.

**Corporan:** *Miguelito Valdés.*

**Camero:** Also very complete.

**Corporan:** *So you were with Carmen and Rolando . . .*

**Camero:** They were the ones who brought me to the U.S.

**Corporan:**... *the dancing couple. But before coming to the United States you had a little time together over there.*

**Camero:** Over there, yes.

**Corporan:** *In Cuba.*

**Camero:** Yes, yes.

**Corporan:** *Tell us where did you perform and. . .*

**Camero:** With that couple for the first time, in the Cabaret Kursaal. Because I played the bass in the group of the Cabaret Kursaal. But during showtime, we had to play rumba, and they needed a conga player and a bongo player. I played the conga in the show then. But when they were given the contract to come to the United States, there was no budget to bring the conga and bongo player. So they decided to bring me. Because I had to do two jobs as if it were, for example, a bongo and conga player. But I would do that myself. I was the bongo player and the conga player, myself. That was why they brought me because they said, "He can do the job and there is no budget for the conga and bongo. So let's take him since he can do that." So they

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brought me and we debuted here at the Cabaret Havana Madrid.

**Corporan:** *In what year?*

**Camero:** 1946. The stars of this show were Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. They were the stars of this show. Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis.

**Corporan:** *In Havana Madrid?*

**Camero:** In Havana Madrid in 1946.

**Corporan:** *Dean Martin performed?*

**Camero:** They were the stars of the show.

**Corporan:** *And Jerry Lewis?*

**Camero:** Exactly.

**Corporan:** *And you went as what?*

**Camero:** Yes, as part of the show.

**Corporan:** *Part of the show.*

**Camero:** Yes, but they were the stars of the show. So they closed the show. After their contract ended at the Havana Madrid, they crossed the street to the Capital Theater. From the Capital Theater they went to Hollywood. And from there, onward and upward.

**Corporan:** *The rest is history.*

**Camero:** When we ended the contract in the Havana Madrid, we went to Chicago. The pair of dancers and I, to the Latin Quarter of Chicago. By the way I had never seen snow until we got to Chicago. And when we got to Chicago there was a snowstorm and I said to the pair of dancers, "Look sperm is falling from the sky." (Laughs.) After we finished up there in the Latin Quarter of Chicago, we came to the Cabaret La Conga in New York. The orchestras of Machito and Pupi Campo were there. And the star of the show was Miguelito Valdés.

**Corporan:** *Now what was the dance repertoire of Carmen and Rolando composed of?*

**Camero:** Well, in three parts: first a bolero, then a rumba, and then . . . yes those two. First, a very slow bolero and then the rumba. That was their repertoire. Well I say three because then

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came my solo – me alone with the conga and the quinto.

**Corporan:** *And more or less how much time?*

**Camero:** Did the entire show last, or our part?

**Corporan:** *Your part.*

**Camero:** Oh my part? It lasted like, I would say about fifteen minutes.

**Corporan:** *So you went at it there alone. . .*

**Camero:** Alone.

**Corporan:** *. . . on drums for fifteen minutes alternating between bongo and?*

**Camero:** And the quinto.

**Corporan:** *And the quinto.*

**Camero:** Conga and quinto.

**Corporan:** *And there you played rumba ...*

**Camero:** Everything . . . it was something to see . . . (Laughs) All of the Afro-Cuban rhythms.

**Corporan:** *Exactly.*

**Camero:** So then I accompanied them. But I opened the show and I would stay on to accompany them. When they finished, Miguelito Valdés then closed the show. That was at the Cabaret La Conga in 1946. After there we went to Puerto Rico. From Puerto Rico, we went to . .

**Corporan:** *Let's stop in Puerto Rico.*

**Camero:** Aha.

**Corporan:** *Tell me where did you perform in Puerto Rico? How long were you there? How were you received? Let's stop in Puerto Rico briefly.*

**Camero:** Okay. We arrived in Puerto Rico. We worked, debuted at the Hotel Escambrón. It was a tremendous success. After the Escambrón we went to the Cabaret Mocambo, which was also a big success. After the Cabaret Mocambo we went to the Cabaret Copacabana, also a great

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success. After the Copacabana we went to Santo Domingo.

**Corporan:** *And how much time in total were you all in Puerto Rico?*

**Camero:** Six months.

**Corporan:** *Ah six months.*

**Camero:** Six months in total. Then we went to Santo Domingo . . . and we toured all over the country.

**Corporan:** *Which towns did you visit?*

**Camero:** Well, the towns that I remember right now are naturally the capital, at the Hotel Jaragua. Then we went to Santiago de los Caballeros, Puerto Plata, La Romana, San Pedro Macorí, San Francisco Marcorí, Monte Christi, Moca, Bonao, those are the ones I remember (Laughs).

**Corporan:** *How much time in total were you in Santo Domingo?*

**Camero:** Another six months.

**Corporan:** *Another six months.*

**Camero:** Aha.

**Corporan:** *Tell us, you were there at the time of Trujillo, Trujillo's dictatorship. Tell us what impressions did you have and how were you received by the Dominican people.*

**Camero:** Very warm. Always looking back over my life in music, as always, that's what I've always tried to be - about the music, nothing more than the music. But they are a very warm people, they admired and respected me a lot. And everywhere they yelled, "Candido, Candido, Candido, Candido."

**Corporan:** *With whom else did you perform there in Santo Domingo?*

**Camero:** Well, the singer Lopez Balaguer took us. And in that same show was Angel Viloría's Conjunto. There was a singer named Canelina who did Afro-Cuban singing and the dancing couple and me. That was the show. We toured the entire republic with that show.

**Corporan:** *So then there was Balaguer who was a bolero singer, Angel Viloría . . .*

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**Camero:** With his group . . .

**Corporan:** *With his group, Conjunto Tipico Cibaeno.*

**Camero:** Exactly.

**Corporan:** *Was Dioris Valladares the singer at that time?*

**Camero:** Yes Yes Yes Yes.

**Corporan:** *And your show?*

**Camero:** Aha.

**Corporan:** *That was mostly Cuban music.*

**Camero:** Exactly.

**Corporan:** *That is, a bit of everything.*

**Camero:** A bit of everything. So everybody was pleased. We did all the theaters - only theaters throughout the republic.

**Corporan:** *Exactly. Tell me about some of these places - the theaters, radio, television, where you performed.*

**Camero:** Well, the first was at the Hotel Jaragua and then the theaters in those towns that I mentioned earlier. There in the main theaters of these towns.

**Corporan:** *And on the radio?*

**Camero:** No, we did not do radio, but we would go often to hear the orchestras . . . in Bonao . . . a radio station . . . I think it was called at that time La Voz del Yuna (The Voice of Yuna). And that was in Bonao. We went there because I believe the drummer of one of the orchestras was Cuban and he would always tell me, "Come to hear the orchestra." And they invited me there for lunch or dinner and stuff. I had a really good time there.

**Corporan:** *What memory do you have of the great merengue orchestras of the time? Do you remember some of them.*

**Camero:** Well, as I remember . . .

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**Corporan:** *Were there great merengue orchestras back then.*

**Camero:** O yes, very good indeed. Very good. There was ...

**Corporan:** *The Orquesta San Jose?*

**Camero:** The San Jose. Another very famous - two more - two more that were famous. The San Jose . . .

**Corporan:** *Orquesta Angelita?*

**Camero:** Aha, the director was Papa Molina I believe. And well, the small conjuntos, yes, Angel Viloría.

**Corporan:** *Joseito Mateo?*

**Camero:** Mateo Joseito too. Then came, well that was much later, Alberto Beltrán . . .

**Corporan:** *All those people.*

**Camero:** . . . who recorded with La Sonora Matancera, *El Negrito del Batey*. Very good, very good. Yes.

**Corporan:** *Then, from Santo Domingo, where do we go?*

**Camero:** We went to Puerto Rico.

**Corporan:** *And in what year?*

**Camero:** In the same year.

**Corporan:** *In the same year.*

**Camero:** After there then . . .

**Corporan:** *What did you do in Puerto Rico, when you got back?*

**Camero:** We worked in several . . . for example we worked in the *Hipódromo Las Monjas* it was called back then, and various cabarets. After there we left and returned to Cuba. I then returned to the Cabaret Tropicana.

**Corporan:** *And still with the same dance couple or?*

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**Camero:** Yes, with the same couple. In the Cabaret Tropicana, after the Tropicana I was moonlighting with the radio station CMQ. Doubling up at the radio station CMQ. Later I returned again to the United States.

**Corporan:** *Stop a bit on the CMQ. CMQ is a recognized institution.*

**Camero:** Yes.

**Corporan:** *In Cuba. So almost everyone performed there.*

**Camero:** Yes, yes.

**Corporan:** *And to perform there you had to be . . .*

**Camero:** Yes, because they presented artists from around the world. So the musicians had to be complete to accompany all those artists from all over the world. The musicians had to be complete. They could not be limited. They brought in artists from all over Latin America.

**Corporan:** *What musicians can you identify as associated with CMQ or belonging to the band of the CMQ. Because CMQ had his own band right?*

**Camero:** Yes, yes.

**Corporan:** *You accompanied ll these guest artists?*

**Camero:** Aha. Well, the Orquesta de Carlitos Anza, Carlos Anza. Gonzalez Roig as well. Those are the ones I remember right now. Because that was the set orchestra to accompany all the artists who came to the radio programs. And then in the Tropicana with the Orquesta de Armandito Romeu. Bebo Vadés was the pianist.

**Corporan:** *And what instrument did you play there?*

**Camero:** In Tropicana, the bongos. And Rolando Alfonso the conga, Bebo the piano, Guillermo Barreto the drums, the saxophones were Pedro Chao, El Cabito, Roberto, Virgilio, and also the brother of Armandito Romeu, Ruben Romeu. The bass was Fernando Vivar. On trumpet was, we nicknamed him Platanito, his brother Rabanito, El Guajiro and El Chino. Those were the trumpets. (Laughs).

**Corporan:** *We are already talking about the first stage of the fifties, right?*

**Camero:** Aha.

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**Corporan:** *At that time is when I understand that Bebo Valdés came out with a new rhythm called...*

**Camero:** The rhythm Batanga.

**Corporan:** *The rhythm Batanga.*

**Camero:** Yes, it was the combination of the conga and bata drums and very good arrangements. It began in 1952 on radio Cadena Azul. The rhythm Batanga. And Bebo was the composer and creator and the contributors were Trinidad Torregrosa who played the Iyá batá drum, Rolando Alfonso, Jesus and me. We were the . . . the rhythm section of Bebo Valdés' Orquesta Ritmo de Batanga.

**Corporan:** *And what kind of popularity did the Batanga have?*

**Camero:** Musically yes, but it was hard to put a dance to it. That was why . . .

**Corporan:** *Why so? I don't get it . . .*

**Camero:** Because the steps, if I can say bluntly, the steps were difficult for some people so then it continued only as music. The music continued with great success. Fellove was the one who tried to give it dance steps. Because when we did the broadcasts every Sunday, while the orchestra played Fellove began to teach the audience the steps and stuff, but dancing alone is different than dancing with a partner. Because alone you can do anything you want, but with a partner it's different and it was not easy for the partner to follow the steps of the lead dancer. That's why the dance was not very successful. But the music itself, yes. Several orchestras recorded his music here with the rhythm of Batanga with bata drums - African drums.

**Corporan:** *Today is Saturday, March the 13<sup>th</sup> 1999. My name is Hector Corporán and as part of the Jazz Oral History Program of the Smithsonian Institution we continue with the second part of the interview with Mr. Candido Camero at his apartment in New York City.*

*Maestro, I understand that you want to add something to the interview from yesterday.*

**Camero** Indeed. I want to clarify that the first nightclub I worked at in Cuba was the Cabaret Kursaal. After the Cabaret Kursaal, I went to the Cabaret Chaflán. After Cabaret Chaflán,

**Corporan:** *What year more or less?*

**Camero** That was in about 1940. After Cabaret Chaflán, I went to the Cabaret Eden Concert. After Eden Concert, I went to the Cabaret Faraón. That was where I met my great friend, pianist

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Bebo Valdés, and also the dancing couple, Carmen and Rolando who were the ones who brought me to the United States.

**Corporan:** *Maestro, tell me about Bebo Valdés as a personality or character.*

**Camero** Well, as a musician, he was a great musician. As a person, a great person. The best I've met in the music scene.

**Corporan:** *And you met . . . ?*

**Camero** So well that he treats me . . . he calls me, "My brother, my brother Candido, Candido my brother," for everything, "My brother, my brother." He even dedicated a photo, "For my brother Candido." When he sends me a Christmas card every year, "For my brother Candido." When he sends me a card for my birthday every year, "For my brother Candido." A great friendship exists between us.

**Corporan:** *Tell me how you met, under what circumstances?*

**Camero** Well, when I went to work at Cabaret Faraón, he was there as a pianist with the orchestra of Wilfredo Curbelo.

**Corporan:** *Wilfredo Curbelo is related to Jose Curbelo?*

**Camero** They are cousins, yes . . . of Jose Curbelo. All the Curbelos, most are all musicians, in fact, good musicians also. That was where I met Bebo at the Cabaret Faraón. So . . .

**Corporan:** *And how long did you work together there? How many months?*

**Camero** Well, about a couple of years. Because I came to the United States that same year . . . no in 1946 and he stayed there. But when I went back to Cuba in 1948, Bebo was already at the Cabaret Tropicana. I was hired then to work for the Cabaret Tropicana with the Orchestra of Armandito Romeu and Bebo was already there playing piano. And that was how we met. Since well, 1940 I would say until now. Every time he comes here to the United States, the first thing he does is call me, "My brother I am here, let's get together to eat and talk and remember the days of the cabarets and of the batanga." And it is always like that, always. He has not changed.

**Corporan:** *The name Bebo Valdés is also associated with the development of mambo. I understand that Bebo Valdés also had much to do with the development of mambo or . . . ?*

**Camero** Well, he has many compositions that . . . *Cinematicop* for example, he has another *Rapsodia del Cuero* (*Rhapsody of the Skin*), all of those have the mambo influence, yes. I use *Rapsodia del Cuero* as part of my act. It is a very good arrangement . . . a large arrangement for

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seventeen musicians. I also use the other one, called *Cinemacop* – it is a large arrangement too. In *Cinemecop* I use bongos for my act and in *Rapsodia del Cuero* I use three congas to do my act. And aside from that, the batanga rhythm was successful, musically it was successful. Because here in the U.S., many orchestras recorded music with the batanga rhythm. I still have the sheet music for the entire arrangement. I have it here with me.

**Corporan:** *Talk to me about the Curbelo family. You say that most of them are musicians. How many are there and . . .?*

**Camero** Well, to my knowledge . . . of the Curbelos, the first I met was Wilfredo, in the Cabaret Faraón there in Cuba. Then when I came here to the United States, I met Jose Curbelo, pianist and conductor of the orchestra that bears his name and was working at the Cabaret China Doll. He was in that cabaret - China Doll. Jose Curbelo and Noro Morales were in Cabaret China Doll – those were the orchestras. In the Cabaret La Conga, where I returned to . . . after the Chatteu Madrid, I went to the Cabaret La Conga. The Machito Orchestra and Pupi Campo were there. And then also at the Martinica was the Marcelino Guerra Orchestra, the composer of *Pare Cochero* and many other compositions that are known and have had success.

**Corporan:** *Then you came to United States for the first time with the dance couple Carmen and Rolando in 1946 to perform at the Havana Madrid.*

**Camero** In the Havana Madrid.

**Corporan:** *Then you all went to the Conga Club.*

**Camero** No. Before the Conga we went to Chicago - to the Latin Quarter of Chicago.

**Corporan:** *Ya.*

**Camero** After the Habana Madrid, we went to Chicago. Then we returned from Chicago to La Conga.

**Corporan:** *And there you replaced another dancing couple made up of Cacha and Chano Pozo.*

**Camero** Well, they came later. We were . . . the show was made up of . . . Miguelito Valdés, he was the star of the show. So in that show we were Carmen and Rolando, I was the bongo player for them, then came Chano with Pepe and Cacha. Cacha was Chano's wife and Pepe was Cacha's dance partner. After there well, then we left when the contract was up. Chano went to work alone. The couple went one way and Chano another. He joined Katherine Dunham's Afro-Cuban company.

**Corporan:** *Oh, Katherine Dunham.*

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**Camero:** At the Roxie hotel here in New York. And we went to Puerto Rico to the Escambrón Beach Club. After Puerto Rico, well we were there six months. Then we went to Santo Domingo. We were there touring the entire republic. A very good show, very good.

**Corporan:** *Speaking of the show, tell me your impressions of Chano Pozo and Cacha's show? That is, what distinguished that couple's show from the show of Carmen and Rolando of which you were a part.*

**Camero:** Well, even though they were dancers, the trio of Carmen and Rolando and I, after the trio Chano with Cacha and Pepe were two different styles.

**Corporan:** *In what sense?*

**Camero:** In the dance moves. Different - completely different. For there to be two couples in the same show, you normally do not see stuff like that. Because for example, people will say, "Well, two couples of dancers in the same show, what will be the difference? But there was indeed a difference because each one, each couple had their style, movement and music. And that was what made the success of the two couples was that they did not imitate each other.

**Corporan:** *The music for their show was mostly what kind?*

**Camero:** Well, composed by Chano Pozo. And the music of Carmen and Rolando was another musical arranger, so even the music was different. Because Chano Pozo was a very good composer, a very good conga player, a very good composer and was a showman, he was a showman.

**Corporan:** *You told me in the first part of this interview yesterday that one of the foreign musics that was heard most during your childhood in Cuba, besides the tango, was jazz music.*

**Camero:** Yes indeed.

**Corporan:** *Who were the artists that were heard at that time?*

**Camero:** Well, the jazz orchestras - large orchestras such as Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, Woody Herman, Tommy Dorsey, Glen Miller . . . the orchestra of, let me see, Cab Calloway, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Glen Miller, Tommy Dorsey, Harry James . . . All those big orchestras at that time were heard a lot on the radio there in Cuba.

**Corporan:** *Of those that you just named which influenced you the most?*

**Camero:** All of them. They all had their different style and arrangements, and musicians. I was

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fortunate enough to work and also recorded with Count Basie when I came here to the United States, with Count Basie, with Stan Kenton, Duke Ellington with Tommy Dorsey, with Woody Herman, with Buddy Rich - those were the bands that were heard there in Cuba.

**Corporan:** *During that same period of which we are speaking, which Cuban musicians played jazz in Cuba?*

**Camero:** Well, the musicians in Cuba were complete because those that dedicated themselves to accompany shows had to be a complete musician. They could not be limited because they had to play all kinds of music. So there were – they brought artists who had something to do with jazz music. So there were many good musicians, on any instrument needed. If they had to play jazz, the musician had to be good. So they always would work on excelling because they knew they had to play all kinds of music. They did not know what would happen, nor were they told what would happen (musically), no - it was a surprise, so they had to be ready for that surprise. So then the musicians . . . for example like the same Bebo Valdés on piano, was complete in all genres, the trumpeters were for example Chico O'Farrill, saxophonists Gustavo Mas, Pedro Chao . . . there were many - guitarists, there was Isito – the bassists, the brothers Felo y Papito. On drums was Daniel Perez, Guillermo Barreto - in short, everyone was ready for any kind of music and when it came to playing jazz, well they were there - present.

**Corporan:** *This means that in Cuba there was a jazz movement too?*

**Camero:** Yes, oh yes, yes yes always, always, always, always.

**Corporan:** *In which all of those that you just mentioned were involved. Another name came to mind as you mentioned those characters - Chombo Silva came to mind.*

**Camero:** Oh yeah, oh yeah, very good, very good Chombo Silva, yes - saxophonist.

**Corporan:** *E Negro Vivar?*

**Camero:** El Negro Vivar, trumpeter. Right, I mentioned the brother of El Negro, Fernando. Well, of the basists Papito, Felo and Fernando Vivar were all brothers of Negro Vivar. El Negro was a very good trumpet player. And the Barretos were also very good. I mentioned one of them, Guillermo Barreto the drum set player, but also there was the saxophonist and then there was the other eldest brother who they called Coco. The other brother was a good saxophonist - and there was even a famous danzon called *El Bombin de Barreto*. They lived . . . he is the famous, the first, the eldest of all, lived in Europe. It was to him that the danzon *El Bombin de Barreto* was dedicated. And so the rest of the brothers and cousins . . . but it was a family entirely involved in the music and all of them were good, all were good.

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**Corporan:** *A recording that is also representative of that time was the descarga made by Cachao there.*

**Camero:** Oh yeah Cachao. Cachao - one of the first gigs he did here in the United States was with me when I had an orchestra at the Cabaret Liborio. Cachao worked with me for ten years there. Later, he worked with me at the Chateau Madrid. I was at the Chateau Madrid fifteen years. Cachao worked with me. Then from there he went to Las Vegas with Pupi Campo. And from Las Vegas, he is now living in Miami. And he is on one of my recordings as well. He played a solo, a bass solo with the bow that no one had ever heard - on one of the American numbers entitled *The Shadow of Your Smile*. So Cachao played a bass solo there with the bow and the commentary he received about that performance was very good.

**Corporan:** *Maestro, there is no doubt that the marriage of Cuban music and jazz that Dizzy and Chano Pozo made opened many doors.*

**Camero:** Oh yeah, oh yeah. Primarily for conga players.

**Corporan:** *Exactly!*

**Camero:** Primarily for conga players. In the whole world (Laughs), I laugh because, well, that's an instrument originally from Africa, the conga. Indeed, the construction is different and the look is different, but the original - that's an African instrument. So then the conga has now become popular in the world, the conga is used in all kinds of music, in all genres of music. And Chano had much to do with that too. After that . . . of course his fatality - which was a shame because he was already well known worldwide mainly because of his compositions in collaboration with Dizzy Gillespie - *Manteca*, that has been recorded I don't know how many times. And so, he was one of those who made this possible, that the conga is used worldwide in all types of music, in all orchestras. Then I arrived, then came Mongo, then came Peraza, Patato came after, then came Francisco Aguabella and we have all worked well in the Latin scene as well as the American scene with name singers and musicians who are world-renowned. We have established that - of the conga players I mentioned - we have worked to reach a point that is a basis for . . . how to make a home - you have to do the groundwork first. They have given value to the conga. For the rhythm, the rhythm and the flavor that it gives the music.

**Corporan:** *You developed a close relationship with Dizzy. Tell me how did you become such good friends?*

**Camero:** Well when Chano Pozo . . . after Chano Pozo died, Dizzy was looking for a conga player.

**Corporan:** *What year?*

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**Camero:** That was in 19 . . . well I met Dizzy in 1952, but Chano died in 1948. I met Dizzy in 1952 in one of the trips where I went and came in '52. There in . . . I was working in a Broadway show called *Noche en la Habana, A Night in Havana*. When I finished the show I went to the Palladium. The orchestras of Tito Puente and Machito were playing. Then someone introduced me to Dizzy. He said, "Look, Dizzy is looking for a conga player. Are you working?" And I said, "Look, just today I finished the contract on Broadway with the show that was six weeks." Then my friend took me and introduced me to Dizzy.

**Corporan:** *What was your friend's name?*

**Camero:** His name is Catalino Rolon. So then, he was my interpreter because I could not speak a word (of English) with Dizzy. I did not know any English and he could not speak much Spanish. So Catalino served as interpreter because Dizzy wanted me to audition. He wanted to hear me because he was looking for a conga player and I said I am willing and they asked me if I had ever played jazz and I said, "Well I've heard a lot of jazz and I like jazz but I have not played jazz." He says, "Well what do you think?" I said, "Well, I can try." After I played a set with Machito and a set with Tito Puente . . .

**Corporan:** *In the Paladium.*

**Camero:** In the Paladium. Catalino then talked to Dizzy who says, "Wow, I like his playing, ask him if he can audition in the genre of jazz, and I said, "I can audition. I can't guarantee anything, but I can audition." Well, they took me to the Downbeat Club. Dr. Billy Taylor's trio was working there. Dizzy spoke with Catalino. Catalino spoke with Billy Taylor. Dizzy wanted to hear me play the congas and if I was okay with him. And then Billy Taylor said to Dizzy, "Sure, its fine with me if he plays our next set." I played and Dizzy liked it too. He said, "He feels jazz - it's fine. I like the way he plays, the Latin and American jazz." So then Catalino told me "Well . . . it seems that he is pleased." So then I said to Catalino, "Well, thanks for everything, for serving as interpreter." Catalino left, but now comes the good part. Dizzy did not know a word in Spanish and I did not know a word of English. Just that Dizzy told me something in English, but the last word he said was "tomorrow" and I said, "Well that means I should come back tomorrow and work at the Downbeat here with Billy Taylor."

OK, Dizzy went home and I went home. The next day I return to the Downbeat and the owner of the Downbeat asked me, "You want to work here?" And I said, "Yes, it depends on if Dr. Billy Taylor agrees with that because yesterday was the audition but now it depends if he wants to give me steady work." He asked Billy Taylor and Billy Taylor said, "Yes, yes, hire him right now, I want him here with my trio. Hire him now." I was hired for one year. But (Laughs) the problem was that Dizzy had told me, "tomorrow. . ." that I would travel with him the next day - is what he wanted to say. And I didn't understand, so then I return to Downbeat and was there a year. Dizzy said to me, "What happened?" I said, "Tomorrow, tomorrow me here, me here tomorrow." Then he told me "Well, it's okay, it's okay." Dizzy Gillespie's pianist, Wynton

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Kelly, spoke Spanish because he was a descendant of Panamanians. He spoke Spanish - then Wynton Kelly said, "Dizzy wanted you to start with him the next day after the audition. And then he sent me here now to see if you are in agreement." He went to my house, Wynton Kelly came to my house where I lived in the hotel. And I said, "Well, the only thing I understood was 'tomorrow.' I believed that he wanted me to return the next day and they hired me for a year." So Wynton Kelly talked to Dizzy and explained everything and Dizzy said, "Well, it's okay, it's okay. Tell him to stay there and when the contract is over then he's coming with me." And so that is the way it happened. When I finished the contract at the Downbeat with the Dr. Billy Taylor Trio, I went touring with Dizzy Gillespie all across the United States and throughout Europe. And so that was the relationship . . . and I recorded with him many times too and that's how the relationship began between him and me. The "tomorrow" was the thing. (Laughs)

**Corporan:** *And a year waiting.*

**Camero:** One year waiting. But no, he understood well, then. . . . he was good people, good people, good people. A genius, a genius. Very humble, very humble as they say in English. But I had to wait a year. That was the relationship between Dizzy and me. I'll never forget "tomorrow."

**Corporan:** *How many recordings did you do?*

**Camero:** With him?

**Corporan:** *Yes.*

**Camero:** Several, several. Several recordings.

**Corporan:** *Remember any of them?*

**Camero:** Well, there was a suite called . . . well, the suite of *Manteca* arranged by Chico O'Farrill. That is the one I always have in mind because it was the same composition but with a different style and each style had its different arrangement. The same composition of *Manteca* which was a composition of Chano in collaboration with Dizzy. That was recorded with several different rhythms and with each style there was a different musical arrangement.

**Corporan:** *Oh there is an LP called "Afro" also.*

**Camero:** *Afro* yes.

**Corporan:** *That was a recording between you two, right?*

**Camero:** Yes, that one too. There were several, there were several.

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**Corporan:** *I remember having read a comment that you made that when Chano Pozo played jazz with Dizzy Gillespie, you say that the music was not in clave. Is this true?*

**Camero:** Well, not exactly not in clave. What was true was that for Chano the arrangement was a bit difficult. So Dizzy told me that once he sang the melody to Chano, Chano already knew what he had to do. Because obviously the custom of Latinos, mainly the rhythm with clave, are guided by the clave because the clave to the rhythm is like a metronome. But then that was where Dizzy told me, "No - after I sang the melody to him, he knew what he had to do." So then, Chano Pozo already was familiar with everything that was happening there and so he knew where the clave was.

**Corporan:** *To accompany jazz music, requires a certain technique from the Cuban percussionist. Can you explain that style of playing?*

**Camero:** Well yes, it depends on the rhythm - 2/2 or 4/4, or 2/4. or 6/8. You have to hear the arrangement then adapt to the arrangement because there are two, how can I explain, two different feelings when playing Latin music, especially Cuban music or when playing jazz. They are two different styles so you have to be careful to know how to play. Because you can not play as if you were playing Latin as you can . . . if you play Latin you can not play as though you were playing jazz. And if you play jazz you can't play as if you were playing Latin. They are two different styles with two different ways of feeling and expressing it. That is the importance in that.

**Corporan:** *Maestro, your first recording here in the U.S. or maybe your first professional job was with Machito here in the United States. I understand, or better yet, tell me about that event in as much detail as possible. Who directed the recording musically? Details like that.*

**Camero:** Well, the musical director of Machito's orchestra was his brother in law, Mario Bauza, who was married to Machito's sister, the singer Graciela. So then the recording was made possible because just when I was working at the Cabaret La Conga with the dancing couple I mentioned before, Carmen and Rolando, there was a weekly radio transmission to all the United States from La Conga. (Clears throat) Excuse me. So, the theme of the beginning and the end of the program was a composition of Mario Bauza's called *Tanga*. When we would end the show, the radio broadcast from La Conga went out to the entire United States.

**Corporan:** *More or less at what time?*

**Camero:** At twelve o'clock at night.

**Corporan:** *And how long did it last?*

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**Camero:** One hour. Then they . . . I said to them, "I would like to accompany the orchestra during that radio hour." They said, "Yes of course, you can, with pleasure." They had their rhythm (section). The conga player was Carlos Vidal and the bongo player was Mangual. Jose Mangual. The timbale player was Ubaldo Nieto. That was the rhythm. Rene Hernandez on piano, the bass was Julio Andino. That was the rhythm section. Then I asked them, "I would like to accompany the radio broadcast and play *Tanga*, and they said, "Yes, it would be a pleasure for us." Then I accompanied the rhythm section. I also accompanied them on the recording, but only at the beginning and end of the recording . . . of the broadcast - at the beginning and end of the broadcast on the theme song that was played, *Tanga*. After they heard me, they said, "Would you like to record with us?" And I said, "Today." And that's how it was. In this recording I remember the number . . . one of the numbers they recorded is called *El Rey Del Mambo*, a musical composition of Madera, the last name (Jose Madera). And that's how it was during my first recording here in the U.S. with the orchestra of Machito and his Afro-Cubans. Since I would sit in with the orchestra to play the theme, they asked me if I wanted to record and I said, "Yes, of course" and we recorded. That was in 1946. *The King of Mambo* was one of the numbers on this recording.

**Corporan:** *Who decided whether to re-record certain numbers because they did not meet the requirements of good sound recording? Whose whims were followed?*

**Camero:** Well, that was an agreement between the director, the singers, and the producer of the record company. That was an agreement between them. They were the ones who would agree and decide what is right and what needs to be fixed or what would be better this way or would be better otherwise, and this and that - but an agreement between the singers, the arranger, the orchestra director and producer of the record company.

**Corporan:** *And this recording was made in how much time?*

**Camero:** Well, very little time. Naturally, only a rehearsal was necessary. And then when we got to the studio, the sound, a sound check and we recorded. Sometimes you'd have to repeat for certain things but almost always the first time everything goes well.

**Corporan:** *The mambo had not yet achieved its maximum popularity, right? I wonder.*

**Camero:** Well, the mambo was being played already. The mambo always existed. But we can say that it became popular for example because of Perez Prado. He recorded, *Mambo Number 5*, he recorded *Patricia*, he recorded *Cherry Pink*. All these things were known as the mambo. He made that popular with those recordings and the rhythm and the good musicians he had too. But it had been some time that the mambo was played.

**Corporan:** *Maestro I have read that the era of mambo in the Paladium was an incredible experience that has no comparison. Can you recap those nights of dancing at the Palladium with*

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*the orchestras of Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez and Machito playing full steam ahead.*

**Camero:** Si. Si. Well there were four, no several orchestras, several major orchestras, several orchestras. Because there was the orchestra of Miguelito Valdés, he had his orchestra, Marcelino Guerra had his orchestra, Machito naturally had his orchestra, Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez. Those were the bands that played at the Palladium at that time. So that's why they called it *The Palladium - Home of the Mambo*. Because at that time, the mambo was in its heyday in the world. I heard a recording by Los Hermanos Lopez, Cachao's brother. I heard a recording that was recorded in 1938 and the montuno or what they called montuno of the danzon, the chorus, the only thing it said was "Mambo." That was in 1938, the only thing it said was "Mambo, mambo, mambo."

Later, in Arsenio Rodriguez's Conjunto, when they reached the trumpet part we call the guajeo, Arsenio said, "Mambo" to give the signal to the trumpets that what came now was the guajeo, to lift the rhythm of music and the vibe (environment). Arsenio said, "Mambo." Then later, at the Palladium, there was a couple, no a trio, a trio of very good dancers – Anibal, now I cannot remember the names of the other two boys, but Anibal, had the trio named Los Mambo Aces. So as you can see the word mambo was always in the foreground. Los Mambo Aces. Machito recorded a number called *Mambo Inn*, and so the word mambo went on . . . and then when Perez Prado got to Mexico, he started with "Mambo, mambo, mambo, mambo here, there and everywhere." So the mambo was always poised to go to first place. And it came and stayed in first place. Because the mambo is still something that no one can stop hearing or stop playing. So then. . .

**Corporan:** *The style of mambo of Perez Prado is different from the style of mambo by the orchestras in New York.*

**Camero:** Well, it depends on the arrangement. It depends on the arrangement, yes. A different style exactly, but depends on the arrangement. But always stemming from the root of mambo. The base of the mambo. It is like saying you can record a number with different rhythms and different arrangements but it is always the same number - that happens with the mambo, that is what happened and what is happening. It depends on the arrangement, but always based on what is the mambo.

**Corporan:** *Maestro let's go back to review in detail your collaborations, recordings with renowned jazz artists. Let's start with Billy Taylor.*

**Camero:** It was my first recording in the jazz scene. It was my first recording with Billy Taylor.

**Corporan:** *How many years were you with him?*

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**Camero:** One year.

**Corporan:** *One year. And you recorded?*

**Camero:** About five times. Yes, about five times. Most of them have come out on CD now - of those recordings from 1952, most have come out now on CD.

**Corporan:** *To some extent you defined a style of playing Cuban percussion to accompany jazz that was really liked.*

**Camero:** Yes.

**Corporan:** *And that style was solicited - your services, as a consequence of that? . . . Your services were requested by many great jazz musicians.*

**Camero:** Yes.

**Corporan:** *Tell me about your collaboration with Duke Ellington.*

**Camero:** Well, with Duke Ellington it was this way. I was recording in a studio named Nola's Studio on Broadway and 52nd – the corner of 52nd. The girl, the receptionist who was very fond of percussion said, “I want you to hear something that I recorded to see if you like it for the conga, the instrument.” Then she gave me a demo and in that demo was Duke Ellington, Duke Ellington’s bassist and drummer, the drummer of Duke Ellington. The song, the number is called Kinda Dukish. I brought the demo home. I heard and liked it. Only three musicians, Duke Ellington, bass and drummer. Kinda Dukish. I like it. When I returned to the studio the next day I told the girl receptionist, “This is beautiful. You *can* add the conga.” Because that was what she wanted, that if I could put conga on it like that or record it on one of my recordings. And I said, “Yes, I like it,” and she said, “You want to put the conga on it now?” and I said, “Yes, I’ll put on the conga.” And then we went to the studio. She put on the demo and I added the conga to the demo. And she was shocked and said, “But how can you do that without the rest of the musicians here?” and I said, “Well, by ear, a good ear is sufficient. What you need is to feel it rhythmically and an ear to know what to do.” The next day I went to the office that Duke Ellington had . . . the office was in partnership with Cab Calloway. When I arrived at the office, I told the receptionist girl that I would like to make an appointment with Mr. Duke Ellington if possible. She went inside and told Duke Ellington. When she returned she said, “Can you come tomorrow at two o’clock?” and I said, “Yeah, okay.”

I went the next day at two in the afternoon with the original demo with Duke Ellington which was only Duke Ellington on piano, the bassist and the drummer. Then Duke Ellington, when he heard that, he asked me, “You like that song?” and I said, “Yeah, I like it so much that now when you play the next part, you will know if I liked it or not.” When he played the other part of the

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demo and heard the conga, he looked at me as if to say, "But can that be possible?" Then he told me, "I have a TV show from coast to coast of the United States next week. Then I have a recording after the TV show. Would you like to do it?" I said, "It is an honor for me." He said, "Ok." Then he gave me all the information and I complied and followed everything that was there on paper. So, I went the following week, we did a TV show called *A Drum is a Woman* (The Drum is a Woman). We did the TV show. After that, we did the recording, too. In this recording was that song *A Drum is a Woman*. The point was that I . . . when he heard the original demo, his part of it, he asked me, "You like it?" I said, "Yeah, I liked it so much that you need to listen to the other part of the demo so that . . . you can believe it." When he heard the conga then he told me about the recording and the TV show. And then in one of my recordings I also recorded *Kinda Dukish*. That was the point of contact between Duke Ellington and I through the girl receptionist who gave me the demo and I liked it so much that I put on the conga (Laughs). And I took it to him, when he heard it, he liked it so much he said to me, "You want to record and make a TV show?" and I, "Yes." And after that, I also worked with his son, Mercer Ellington. I worked with his son also after Duke Ellington. That was the . . . how the relationship between Duke Ellington and me began.

**Corporan:** *Tell me about your relationship with Count Basie.*

**Camero:** Well, with Count Basie - when I was working with Tony Bennett, it was in 1958 in Philadelphia at the Latin Casino in Philadelphia. Count Basie was the orchestra that accompanied Tony Bennett on that show. In that year I was working with Tony Bennett. This was how I met Count Basie personally but I had heard his records back in Cuba on the radio. I had heard him but I said, "I would love it if one day I have the luck to reach the United States, to meet all these great musicians there in person and hear them, know them and hear them." And I was so lucky that not only did I meet them and hear them but I worked and recorded with them. So I said, "Well, what else can I ask?" So was the relationship between Count Basie and me.

**Corporan:** *And with Lionel Hampton?*

**Camero:** Well, with Lionel Hampton. With Lionel Hampton, he did hear me play at Birdland when I was working with Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker. At Birdland. When he heard me, about a week later he called me. He asked me if I would like to record with him and if I would like to travel with him on a tour of the entire United States. I said yes because at that time I could do it and I said yes. And I worked and traveled with him throughout the entire United States. And then we went to Europe as well. And that's how the relationship started with Lionel and I because he heard me at Birdland when I was working with Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker.

**Corporan:** *What year was that maestro? How much time were you together?*

**Camero:** With Lionel Hampton?

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**Corporan:** *Yes.*

**Camero:** About a year.

**Corporan:** *What year?*

**Camero:** In '69. In 1969. We were over there in . . . my first job with him was over there in New Hamsher.

**Corporan:** *New Hampshire?*

**Camero:** New Hampshire. That was my first job with Lionel Hampton. Yes. That was my first job. Yes.

**Corporan:** *Tell me about Erroll Garner?*

**Camero:** Well, Erroll Garner. I was working in Chicago this time. I was working on my own in Chicago then I received a telegram at the cabaret from the manager of Erroll Garner, Martha Glacier. She asked me if I wanted to do a recording with Erroll Garner. Then I called her and I told her that when I finished my contract in Chicago I could do the recording. When I finished my contract, I called because she told me to call when I finished my contract in Chicago so that she could set a date for the recording. The day I finished my contract, I called and she said, "Can you do such and such a day, and such and such an hour?" I checked and I said, "Yes I could do it," and then I worked with him a long time. After Erroll Garner, I went to work with George Shearing. Jose Mangual then occupied my post with Erroll Garner.

**Corporan:** *And spent many years.*

**Camero:** Many, many years. When I finished with George Shearing, I went with Stan Kenton. Then Armando Peraza took my post with George Shearing.

**Corporan:** *And spent many years.*

**Camero:** And spent many years. Eighteen years.

**Corporan:** *Yes.*

**Camero:** And so between us, we have that bond.

**Corporan:** *Yes.*

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**Camero:** That was with Erroll Garner. Speaking of the mambo, the LP that I recorded with him is called *Mambo Moves Garner*. So, the word mambo was raining down on those who were wet for many years. (Laughs) *Mambo Moves Garner* that is the title of the LP, *Mambo Moves Garner*. Yes, yes, yes, yes. Very good, very good. He did not know a single note of music but he was good, good, good, good, good, oh! He was good people, such good people.

**Corporan:** *What, he did not know how to read a single note of music? How was that?*

**Camero:** Erroll Garner did not read music.

**Corporan:** *How is that?*

**Camero:** Not a single note.

**Corporan:** *Erroll Garner no . . . ?*

**Camero:** No, his thing was entirely feeling and heart and his hand, his hand, a left hand that was something serious imitating the sound of the guitar and his right hand doing its thing. Listen, fantastic, fantastic. Erroll Garner.

**Corporan:** *Maestro I'm looking here at a historical photo - 1950, Candido, Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker.*

**Camero:** Ah, that was at Birdland, that was at Birdland.

**Corporan:** *Tell me.*

**Camero:** Yes.

**Corporan:** *That, tell me about that event.*

**Camero:** Well, I was called for the job there by the manager, no the brother, the brother of the manager of Birdland. The brother . . . no excuse me. The brother of the owner of Birdland ran the Downbeat, which was where I worked with Billie Taylor for a year. So it was he who called me to do that job with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie at Birdland that belonged to the brother, the owner was the brother. Then I did several concerts with Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker at Carnegie Hall and traveled with them to Europe, we toured all over Europe and the entire United States. With the two of them. He always, Charlie Parker always called me "Dido, Dido." "Dido. How are you Dido? Dido." Like that. He did not speak much Spanish but he'd tell me, "Dido how are you?"

**Corporan:** *How was Charlie Parker as a person?*

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**Camero:** Oh, humble very humble, very humble. Too bad he died young at only 35 years. Very young. And Dizzy Gillespie what can I tell you, another genius, another genius, and boy did he like the Afro-Cuban rhythms. And the times he went to Cuba also, well since he was working with Chano Pozo, well he went to Cuba several times. He always liked it, using congas after Chano, he always liked having a conga player after Chano.

**Corporan:** *Let's talk about George Shearing. He was British, is British.*

**Camero:** He is British yes. And because of a twist of fate he is . . . he doesn't have his sight. As fate would have it, he's missing it. But when he sits at the piano no one knows the things of fate but only what you hear. Phenomenal, phenomenal, phenomenal, phenomenal. I recorded with him too. The first job I did with him was in Boston. The cabaret was called *Storyville*.

**Corporan:** *What year?*

**Camero:** That was more than thirty years ago. More than thirty years. The owner of Storyville is, was, or is because he is still alive, George Wein, who organized festivals in the summer here in New York and outside New York as well - the Cool Jazz Festivals as they are called.

**Corporan:** *Yes.*

**Camero:** I did several of those concerts. That was my first job with George Shearing in Boston. The first. After that it was several times and I also record with him a number of times.

**Corporan:** *I am saving Stan Kenton's name for the end.*

**Camero:** Stan Kenton, ah.

**Corporan:** *Tell me about that relationship with him and that famous tour of '50 something.*

**Camero:** Well, that time it was a connection through the office that represented me in that era, in '53. The office of Show Artists, Show Artists Corporation. They were representing me that year and they were the ones that connected me to do the tour across the United States with Stan Kenton and the recordings I made with him. '53 and '54 - a tour of the entire United States. From head to tail, from coast to coast. Also a phenomenon. Genius.

**Corporan:** *I understand that the tour was a bit demanding - in what sense?*

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**Camero:** Well, because it was a different city every night. Every night in a different city and then it was all bus trips.

**Corporan:** *How many members were there more or less?*

**Camero:** The orchestra? Seventeen. But there were two buses. One for the instruments and luggage and one for the staff and musicians. Two buses. That tour lasted through '53 and '54. Every night in a different city. I have on a list, the hours that it took to go from one city to another on the bus. A list that I have. I was always sleeping on the bus because there was not much time for anything. We arrived in a city and went directly to the hotel and from the hotel to the concert and in the evenings and later that same night . . . we'd leave for the next city. The the tour was like that.

**Corporan:** *I understand that back then, the racism in this country . . .*

**Camero:** Was strong.

**Corporan:** *That it was strong, exactly, and that Stan Kenton, well, stood up for you . . .*

**Camero:** Yes.

**Corporan:** . . . *because in certain places they did not . . . tell me about that.*

**Camero:** Well that was mostly over there in the south mostly, yes. But then, as I had at that time, I had a passport. I still had a Cuban passport at that time so then things were made smoother.

**Corporan:** *In what sense? Tell me one of those incidents?*

**Camero:** Well, for example, we arrived at a hotel and it was like there was a certain something not so, not very acceptable, then he said, "No, it's fine because he has his passport, he is a foreigner." Well that never bothered me to tell the truth, it never bothered me because I'd say, Well I don't have . . . I am not a delinquent, nor am I a fugitive, only a musician to entertain the world. That was what I had in mind always and still always have in mind so far. I have not had anything to do with that and so I've never spoken nor will speak about it because that is what has worked. I have traveled halfway around the world without any problem. If I don't have . . . my thing is the music and the conga. Nothing of politics or race or nationality or religion, none of that - that is not

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included in the music. So my thing is music only. So for that part yes, yes always it was . . . at first it had its thing and that, but everything worked out. Yes, it all worked out.

**Corporan:** *And were you the only (black) member in the group?*

**Camero:** Yes. Yes. The only, the only one.

**Corporan:** *Maestro I also understand that you did not get to complete the tour of 52 cities with Stan Kenton. That in the course of a few months you . . .*

**Camero:** Well, I went to work with Tony Bennett at the time. I went to work with Tony Bennett and also we toured the entire United States. Then we went to South America, Canada and Venezuela and I recorded with him a number of times too - a huge concert at Carnegie Hall that was recorded. And now in the book on his life which is entitled, *Better Life*, he mentions my name several times and speaks highly of me and aside from that, he has also included some pictures of me in the book where I appear working with him. That was the first recording I did with him that is called *The Beat of My Heart* by Tony Bennett.

**Corporan:** *How long were you with Tony?*

**Camero:** Well, on several occasions from '58 to '94.

**Corporan:** *No kidding.*

**Camero:** Because in '94 was the last occasion with him, in Las Vegas at the Desert Inn. But my first job was at the Copacabana in New York here in 1958. From then until '94 which was the last gig I did, and now when there is an opportunity, he calls me and I go right away. The office with whom I now work since 1981 to the present is the office of Steven Scott Productions, which is connected with the office of Scott Universal Services. So whenever the opportunity presents itself, Tony Bennett calls me and I consult with the office to see if I will be free at that time and the office tells me, "Even if you're not free, we'll give you the time for you to go with Tony Bennett." Its been like that since 1981 to the present. Also, I have been given the honor of having my picture in the *World Book Encyclopedia* to represent the different percussion instruments, since 1962. In the photo, I am sitting behind . . . playing the conga to represent different percussive instruments. They have the snare drum, the bass drum, timpani, bongos and the conga. Those are the instruments that are represented in the *World Book Encyclopedia*. And there I am in the photo with the conga in 1962.

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**Corporan:** *Maestro, to what do you attribute the fact that your artistic career has enabled you to accompany so many great figures, not only from the jazz world but also from the pop world and as you just mentioned you have been included in the World Book Encyclopedia for so long - to what do you attribute this recognition?*

**Camero:** Well I would say my consistency. . . firstly, as I say, if I respect myself, I am respected. My seriousness, my being able to fulfill my work and my devotion to the work. Not dismissing it. I think that's what I've done so far and thank God I've had that luck. And I'm always happy and proud to say so.

**Corporan:** *Maestro, other figures from the world of pop music here in the U.S. with whom you also collaborated include the unequalled Eartha Kitt. What can you comment about Eartha Kitt?*

**Camero:** Well, I have worked with her several times. And she has always liked to have a conga player in her rhythm section. First there was Modesto Duran, then there was Francisco Aguabella, and then me. For me it was a great satisfaction to work with her. It was a great experience because she was talented, very talented. And she knows how to appreciate and respect someone who is dedicated to their work, and is not playing around or anything like that, but instead, "This is how it is, and it has to be this way." That's what I like about her as a person and as a singer, as a great artist.

**Corporan:** *Where and when have you collaborated with her?*

**Camero:** Well, my first job with her was here in New York in the hotel Pierre. That was my first job. Then I went to the Plaza Hotel, and thereafter, several concerts. The only thing is that I have not recorded with her but I have worked with her quite a bit.

**Corporan:** *Tell me about Billie Holiday.*

**Camero:** Oh Billie Holiday, I did several radio programs accompanying her and at the Apollo Theater I also accompanied her.

**Corporan:** *What era?*

**Camero:** That was 1952. In Atlantic City and I also accompanied her in the club . . . Club Harlem in Atlantic City. I accompanied her here at the Apollo theater and then in Newark at a radio station.

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**Corporan:** *Tell me about that experience.*

**Camero:** Very quiet but also with a great deal of experience and a sense of what art is. A phenomenon.

**Corporan:** *She sang with much feeling.*

**Camero:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. When she was working, she would give all of her soul, her whole being.

**Corporan:** *And Lena Horne?*

**Camero:** Well, Lena Horne too. I accompanied her on the Ed Sullivan show and then on another program, I think it was, Steve Allen. Because she lives not far from here, where I live. Two blocks away. In the penthouse that was where I first went to rehearse with her before the TV programs. Her husband still lived then who was also her musical director, conductor and manager.

**Corporan:** *What year?*

**Camero:** That was like, I would say it was 30-odd years ago.

**Corporan:** '64 . . .

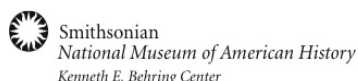
**Camero:** Right about there. Yes, yes.

**Corporan:** *And you'd rehearse in her house?*

**Camero:** In her house. When you'd take the elevator, when the elevator door would open, that was her apartment in the penthouse here on Western Avenue. I think, though I'm not sure if he still does, but Harry Belafonte lives in the same building. Lived, if not lives, lived in the same building as Lena Horne on this street, Western Avenue. Tremendous person as well.

**Corporan:** *Maestro let us turn to the Latin world that judging by this list that you have here is quite extensive. You've worked with countless renowned Latin American artists. Let's start with Celia Cruz. Tell me on what occasions, on what recordings did you work with Celia Cruz and I understand that you are very good friends.*

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**Camero:** I met her in person for the first time in 1957 in the carnivals of Caracas, Venezuela. As fate would have it, she was singing during that time with the Sonora Matancera and the group was staying at the same hotel. That was the first time. Later, the second time was when I accompanied her for the first time in the Liborio in 1963. Since then every year up until this year that just passed, she always remembers me, she and her husband Pedro. Pedro and I are good friends because when he came from Matanzas to Havana and I saw him play for the first time, I said, "Why don't you move over here to Havana because the way you play, it would be a good idea to stay because you could get a lot of work." And he said, "Well, I'll think about it." And indeed after that he returned to Havana and remained in Havana until well, until they started to travel and he went to Mexico and has traveled the world as musical director of Celia Cruz but now he is not only leading and accompanying her wherever she goes.

So then, I accompanied her for the first time in the Liborio as I said earlier, in 1963. After that, after I accompanied her in the Chateau Madrid twice, in 1970 and 1971. Always, every year without fail, every year since 1963 until last year in 1998, they always send me a Christmas card and a birthday card. Since then and you see that they have traveled the world and how many thousands of people who they have known and who have celebrated them? But they never forget, and now they have added the name of my grandson to the Christmas card. Always, always, always, every year. It says, "To Julian and Cándido, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year." That is now, every year for four years now they have sent it here that way because my grandson is here in the U.S. now. But the two, oh, and they sign, "Your family, Celia and Pedro." When I show people the Christmas or birthday cards they say, "Are they family?" And yes, in sentiment, they are. They are incredible, incredible, incredible.

**Corporan:** *Another legend of Cuban music, Olga Guillot.*

**Camero:** As well, as well.

**Corporan:** *When did you two collaborate?*

**Camero:** I also accompanied her for the first time there in the Liborio because I was at the Liborio for ten years. Many big name artists of much renown came through. And she was there at that time and I also accompanied Olga Guillot. First in the Liborio twice and then at the Chateau Madrid four times because I was at the Chateau Madrid for fifteen years. In the Liborio ten and at the Chateau Madrid fifteen, coming and going, coming and going, coming and going but always accompanying these big name artists like Celia

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Cruz and Olga Guillot, Miguelito Valdés. All these big name artists.

**Corporan:** *What opinion can you give me of Olga Guillot.*

**Camero:** Very good, very good, very good. Her style is unique . . . unique.

**Corporan:** *Bolero singer.*

**Camero:** Bolero singer, and then the expression of the hands, body, voice - no, no - it is an incredible thing. You have to see it to believe it.

**Corporan:** *Maestro speaking of voice, that of Xiomara Alfaro . . .*

**Camero:** Oh, I call her the linnet because . . . I've heard a song that she has interprets done by many singers but for me I believe until now, it could be that someone else does it better, but so far the song *Angelitos Negros*, I believe that Xiomara Alfaro, for me, she is number one on that song.

**Corporan:** *You know I knew you would make mention of that song. I too have have felt touched by that song.*

**Camero:** Yes, yes, yes, *Angelitos Negros*. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. This and many more but this is one of them. *Angelitos Negros*.

**Corporan:** *She stayed in Mexico, right?*

**Camero:** No, no - now she lives in Tampa.

**Corporan:** *Ok.*

**Camero:** She lives in Tampa. I received the Christmas card last year. They live in Tampa now. They are always traveling. Always, always. I think they are trying to bring me to Tampa, because I was asked to do them the favor of sending pictures, biography, and if I have a video where I'm performing or something, I think with the idea to take me to perform a concert in Tampa.

**Corporan:** *She is still active then?*

**Camero:** Oh yes, yes. Her husband is the Panamanian musical director and arranger

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Rafael Benitez. Good musician too. Good musician. Xiomara Alfaro, yes. She lived here in this same building.

**Corporan:** *Don't tell me.*

**Camero:** Yes. She lived here in this same building. And I think, well, a few floors above. I can not remember exactly now but a few floors above. I'm on the seventh floor and they were a little above.

**Corporan:** *More or less what year?*

**Camero:** Excuse me?

**Corporan:** *What year did she live here?*

**Camero:** Well, I've lived here thirty years, so I would say they were here at least five years. So it would be, it would be how many? Twenty-five years since they moved. Because I've lived here thirty years in this building.

**Corporan:** *Libertad Lamarque.*

**Camero:** Also. Also. I accompanied her in Cuba for the first time with the Tropicana Orchestra of Armandito Romeu in the movie entitled, *Te Sigo Esperando . . .* that is the title of the movie. I accompanied her there in Cuba for the first time. Then I accompanied her as I said earlier in the Liborio too. Since I was there ten years all of those artists came through. I was fixed at the Liborio for ten years. And did the movie *Te Sigo Esperando* with her with the orchestra of Armandito Romeu Jr. at the Tropicana.

**Corporan:** *Rolando Laserie.*

**Camero:** Rolando Laserie.

**Corporan:** *The Barbaro*

**Camero:** Yes, de película!

**Corporan:** *Yes.*

**Camero:** That was his popular saying, “De película!” (From the movies!) I also

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accompanied him for the first time there in the Liborio. Well for first time, but several times, I say for the first time in the Liborio and then at the Chateau Madrid, too. Yes.

**Corporan:** *Let's see who else appears here on this list . . . Armando Manzanero . . .*

**Camero:** Also in the Liborio and the Chateau Madrid.

**Corporan:** *Roberto Ledezma,*

**Camero:** And exactly in the Liborio and the Chateau Madrid.

**Corporan:** *Marco Antonio Muñíz,*

**Camero:** The Liborio and the Chateau Madrid.

**Corporan:** *Lucho Gática,*

**Camero:** Liborio and the Chateau Madrid. (Laughs)

**Corporan:** *Bobby Capó . . .*

**Camero:** Yes, yes. (Laughs) ah no, Bobby Capó in Cuba for the first time. In Cuba, in the radio program on CMQ. The program was . . . that which announced Ron Bacardi. So there I accompanied . . . yes, many people of the great artists. In radio and cabaret.

**Corporan:** *Here I see, Pedro Vargas,*

**Camero:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Corporan:** *Myrta Silva,*

**Camero:** Aha, aha.

**Corporan:** *So let's talk about the Liborio. In short you tell me which years you were there, and who was the owner of this place? Apparently it was the place one had to go through.*

**Camero:** There were only two, only two first-class cabarets, the Liborio and the Chateau Madrid. Those were the two. And so then they made . . . one would do a season, one year

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at the Liborio and the following year at the Chateau Madrid.

**Corporan:** *Who was the owner of the Liborio?*

**Camero:** Of the Liborio? Perez Blanco.

**Corporan:** *From where?*

**Camero:** Cuban, from Pinar del Rio. The province of Pinar del Rio. Perez Blanco.

**Corporan:** *And how many years, what year was this place open?*

**Camero:** Well I was there ten years.

**Corporan:** *What years?*

**Camero:** When I entered there it was in '63. I was accompanying that year . . . my first show there was with Miguelito Valdés. He was who recommended me. It was he who asked that I be brought in to accompany him. That was in 1963. So I was there ten years.

**Corporan:** *And the group that accompanied those great artists who passed through here, through New York via the Liborio consisted of whom?*

**Camero:** Of the orchestra?

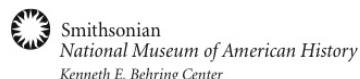
**Corporan:** *Yes.*

**Camero:** Well that depended, depended.

**Corporan:** *On the era.*

**Camero:** No, not exactly . . . well, also of the era but I mean, for example, the instrumentation brought by the artists. How many musicians were required by this instrumentation - the orchestra was built according to that, so that the arrangement would sound good. So then, the one who, the director, of the Liborio was German Lebatard who was one of the brothers of one of the famous orchestras in Cuba, The brothers Lebatard. He was the director of . . .

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**Corporan:** *Musical director.*

**Camero:** . . . of the Liborio. And the musical director of Chateau Madrid was Emilio de los Reyes, who is part of several brothers who are also all very good musicians because Emilio Reyes was the director of Chateau Madrid and who played the trumpet. His brother, Walfredo de los Reyes who played with the Orchestra Casino de la Playa in Cuba, too, was also a trumpeter. And another brother who played the trombone, Emilio de los Reyes, trumpeter. So those were the brothers whose last names were Reyes, De los Reyes, trumpeter.

I wanted to make a clarification if possible on the De Los Reyes brothers. Emilio de los Reyes was a trumpeter and music director of the orchestra of Chateau Madrid. Walfredo de los Reyes was the trumpeter of the orchestra Casino de la Playa, and Rafael de los Reyes was the trombonist in the orchestra of the radio CMQ in Cuba. That was what I wanted to clarify, thanks.

**Corporan:** *Maestro, let's talk about your career as a leader of your own group and your own recordings. You have on several occasions had your own group here, no?*

**Camero:** Yes, on several occasions.

**Corporan:** *What was your first band?*

**Camero:** My first group was precisely in the Liborio. I had on the piano, Rafael Benitez, Xiomara Alfaro's husband. On the bass at first was the Panameño, Alfonso Joseph. Then came Cachao on bass.

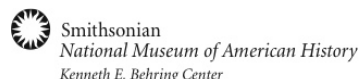
**Corporan:** *How long was Cachao on bass?*

**Camero:** Ten years, he was with me ten years. And on the trumpet was Johnny Malcom, also Panamanian, a very good trumpeter, very good – Johnny Malcom. So then I would play for . . . for example, for the music that required Latin rhythm, I played all three congas, guiro, bell and sang. The four, those four things at once, myself.

**Corporan:** *How was that possible maestro?*

**Camero:** Well, I don't know myself. (Laughs) Because I was always inventing and my inventions gave me results, so I followed them. They would call me the one-man band. The three congas with one hand. With the right hand I held the rhythm with the guiro

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and if it was something other than a cha cha chá, or mambo or merengue . . . if it was a bolero, then I'd do it with the maraca instead of the guiro, but always with the three congas and the cowbell.

**Corporan:** *With your feet.*

**Camero:** With my feet, with a pedal that is used by regular drummers for the bass drum, that is what I used for the cowbell. Then when I had to play American music or a tango or something Brazilian, things like that where the style required the drum set, then I played the drum set . . . in the group.

**Corporan:** *Oh you play drums too?*

**Camero:** Yes.

**Corporan:** *Where did you learn to play drums?*

**Camero:** Right there in the Liborio.

**Corporan:** *In the Liborio.*

**Camero:** Out of necessity.

**Corporan:** *Yes.*

**Camero:** Because there was no budget for one more musician. So then I said, "Well let me try," and it worked. And what I did was buy a drum set. The necessary instruments for the drum set, not the entire set. The necessary parts of the drum set to accompany a tango, or a paso doble, a little bit of samba, things like that where the music requires a drum set. The rest was with the three congas, guiro, bell and maraca. I would use the maraca for the boleros. And the rest, well the guiro, bell, the three congas and singing. That was at the Liborio. This same group I took to the mountains where there are those summer hotels . . . The hotel was called Laurels Country Club. And I worked there every year. I would go from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

**Corporan:** *During what years?*

**Camero:** From '57 until '64, every year during that period. Because in the other cabarets I always came and went, came and went, came and went, but I was always there all that

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time, all those years but I always came and went. And after that . . . so the first group was in The Liborio.

**Corporan:** *Now, back to The Liborio. You mentioned a piano, bass, trumpet, you on percussion. It was a quartet?*

**Camero:** A quartet.

**Corporan:** *Okay.*

**Camero:** A quartet, yes.

**Corporan:** *Okay. So, during what years did you have that quartet?*

**Camero:** In The Liborio?

**Corporan:** *In The Liborio.*

**Camero:** When I was there . . . for ten years until '64 when I went to Japan.

**Corporan:** *And it was with your own group?*

**Camero:** With my own group.

**Corporan:** *Okay.*

**Camero:** Later, I also worked with that same group in Puerto Rico in the San Juan Hotel. With that same group I worked in the mountains as I said earlier in Laurels Country Club Hotel in Monticello, New York.

**Corporan:** *And Cachao was still with you?*

**Camero:** Not, he only did The Liborio and The Chateau Madrid. Because he then went to Las Vegas with Pupi Campo to Cesars Palace Hotel.

**Corporan:** *So then where did you continue with this group?*

**Camero:** Well, later, a few times to record . . . all my recordings . . . well, the recordings were not my own group. It was a selection because to record, one always has to try to get

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studio musicians to save time and money.

**Corporan:** *Yes.*

**Camero:** So those were selected musicians on all my recordings. So the one who took care of that was the producer together with the arranger. They agreed on who we could bring - this guy, that guy, or the other one. And that's how the recordings were made, but never with the group that I used at The Liborio, or the group that I used at the Chateau Madrid, or the group I used in the mountains. From that group, Cachao is the only one I used. Only Cachao. Oh, and also . . . no - only Cachao. It was a very good group - we played everything, everything, everything. Well, like I said, I was hired for two weeks and was there for ten years.

**Corporan:** *At The Liborio?*

**Camero:** At The Liborio. Same thing at The Chateau, two weeks and I was there fifteen years with the group.

**Corporan:** *No way!*

**Camero:** And after traveling, because they'd always tell me, "If you have something you think you can do, I'll let you go and when you finish, just return," and like that . . . That's why I spent so much time in those places because I came and went, came and went. I always had the steady work when I returned, I always had the job there waiting for me.

**Corporan:** *Let's talk about your trip to Japan. What year did you go to Japan and for how long?*

**Camero:** It was in 1964 for six months. It was when the Olympics of '64 were in Japan - a tour all over Japan with a Japanese orchestra of seventeen musicians accompanying me. It was called Tokyo Cuban Boys. That was the name of the orchestra, (laughs) Tokyo Cuban Boys. (Laughs) I said, "Well, which ones are the Cubans? (laughs) They said, "No, it's just that we like the Lecuona Cuban Boys orchestra.

**Corporan:** *Ah, yes.*

**Camero:** So they named it Tokyo Cuban Boys. They accompanied me throughout the tour of Japan during the Olympics of '64.

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**Corporan:** *And tell me a little more about that experience. What was the caliber of the Japanese musicians?*

**Camero:** Very good, very good. Yes, yes, yes. They really prepare themselves well and study to qualify for the job. And they treated me like a king, providing me with three men to always assist me. Well, first a driver who took me to work and everywhere I needed to go apart from the tour. The driver . . . an interpreter who spoke Spanish like you and me aside from their own language, Japanese. And a boy, a valet who took care of the instruments and things so that I didn't have to touch anything off the stage. The other was with me, well, every time I had to work outside of the tour, they provided the driver, the interpreter, and the valet to deal with the instruments, the three congas, the music and things.

**Corporan:** *And you say that you traveled all over Japan.*

**Camero:** All of Japan, all of Japan, all the large cities in the concert halls comparable here in New York, to Carnegie Hall. In those . . . in those types of halls, only.

**Corporan:** *Were they filled?*

**Camero:** Filled, filled, packed, packed, packed. They wanted me to stay six months longer after I finished my contract. But at that time I had to return to the United States because I already had commitments.

**Corporan:** *Maestro, and the repertoire?*

**Camero:** Well, I brought my music. For my act, I brought my music and so the orchestra played that music.

**Corporan:** *Like what numbers?*

**Camero:** Pardon me?

**Corporan:** *Like what musical numbers?*

**Camero:** I was doing two numbers in the show. I performed a merengue. In that number I played only the Dominican *tambora* and danced and sang and stuff. And the second number was a mambo - a type of mambo titled, *The Conga Drums That Sing*, that was the title . . . That was an arrangement of Rafael Benitez, the husband of Xiomara Alfaro. But

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I did the merengue with the Dominican tambora - only the tambora. Then the second number was with the three congas. That was my act. Overall I played about half an hour in total between the merengue and the mambo. But they liked it a lot, they liked it a lot. And the newspapers . . . they made me a book of the publicity and photos and the like. They made me a book all in, well naturally, in Japanese - very interesting, very interesting. Of the whole book, the only thing I understood there was, "Cándido." (Laughs) Where I see "Cándido," I'd say, "Ah, they're talking about me." (Laughs) Now, I don't know if is good or bad, but they are talking about me. (Laughs) No, no, I was treated like a king, like a king. It is true, I have no complaints. I have no complaints.

Wherever I have gone . . . in Santo Domingo they also treated me like a king, like a king. We did a tour of the entire republic there. When I finished my work I would go to the other cabarets to hear music and dance and the like. Well, I was young. I did more turns than a top. "Hey, Cándido's here. You know the merengue he likes? Play him a merengue - *La Maricutana*." Same with the food. "Cándido, what do you like?" "Well, you know what I like. Ma'am, you know what I like. " "Oh, let's make *mangúo* for Cándido." (laughs)

**Corporan:** *You didn't get to record in Japan.*

**Camero:** In Japan?

**Corporan:** *Yes.*

**Camero:** No, no, no, no. But I did many television programs. Indeed in some of the television programs I was in the - what's it called? - a *panel*, right?

**Corporan:** *Yes.*

**Camero:** Then they had to guess who I was. They thought I was an athlete because it was the time of the Olympics. An athlete! And no, I was no athlete, I was a conga player. (Laughs). I really liked this program a lot and it interested me, too. I have pictures of that program where I'm sitting with a . . . what do they call it? . . . a kimono! And of course at that time, I worked with just a medal here and some bracelets, and a big gold belt. So they mistook me for an athlete and believed that I was part of the Olympics.

**Corporan:** *With your gold medal.*

**Camero:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I was a conga player. Oh! In the end, he says, "You

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did not guess - he is a musician - the famous musician, Cándido - not an athlete.

**Corporan:** *I get the impression that was a great experience.*

**Camero:** Yes, yes, yes. (Laughs) And they took me everywhere to experience everything - to where that statue of Buddha is.

**Corporan:** *Yes.*

**Camero:** They took me there. They took me to that mountain, Fujijama, Fuji, Fuji.

**Corporan:** *Mt Fuji.*

**Camero:** Mt Fuji, Mt Fuji. They took me there. So, we did the whole tour by train - the one they call *The Bullet*. Back then it was called Sokairo, Sokairo, Sokairo train. Then they changed the name to *The Bullet*, which quite fast, ah! No - I always - about that, I feel extremely fortunate, extremely fortunate. I call it . . . as we say, "A blessing from God." To have that opportunity to wish for something and have it after all.

**Corporan:** *Maestro, let's talk about your recordings as a leader. What was your first recording as a leader of the group?*

**Camero:** It is called only *Candido*.

**Corporan:** *And who participated in this recording? Where was it?*

**Camero:** That was here in New York and they were jazz musicians. The pianist was . . . Dick Katz on piano. The bassist was Whitey Mitchell, on drums, Ted Sommer and Al Cohn on saxophone (also Joe Puma on guitar). That was my first recording. And after that, several recordings.

**Corporan:** *Was . . .*

**Camero:** Pardon me?

**Corporan:** *Speaking of that, Cándido? Was it mostly jazz material you recorded?*

**Camero:** Yes, yes, on that one, yes. That recording, yes.

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**Corporan:** *What type of success did it have, and . . . ?*

**Camero:** Very good. They are still using it at the University. They use that disc to explain about jazz and Afro-Cuban rhythm.

**Corporan:** *What year was this, maestro?*

**Camero:** That was . . . well, I'd estimate it was about thirty years ago - about thirty years. It was my first recording. The very first one! About thirty years ago. (Actually recorded and released in 1956)

**Corporan:** *And your second LP?*

**Camero:** Well, that was with a big orchestra, huge, huge. It even had french horns, tuba . . . well, big, big, big, big. On this record I recorded one of the compositions of Duke Ellington - *Kinda Dukish*.

**Corporan:** *Was that the one Chico O'Farrill directed?*

**Camero:** No. The one with Chico was . . . it was called *Drum Fever*.

**Corporan:** *Drum Fever.*

**Camero:** Drum Fever. He was the arranger and conductor. And in this recording there are several compositions which were collaborations between him and me. This, this recording belongs to me. That recording is called *Drum Fever*. Very good indeed, very good indeed. There are several different arrangers and musicians also, according to the type of music to be recorded. That was how they chose the musicians - according to the type of music - someone who had experience in that particular music.

**Corporan:** *Tell me about other recordings.*

**Camero:** Well, there are so many, so many. Also another called *Beautiful*. The arranger was Joe Cain. There is another called *Cándido The Volcanic*. The arranger was Ernie Wilkinson (actually, Ernie Wilkins).

**Corporan:** *And that was mostly what kind of music?*

**Camero:** The Volcano? Jazz. Then there is another called *Brujerías de Candido*.

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**Corporan:** *That one.*

**Camero:** Which most certainly has no witchcraft. (Laughs) But that was the title that the producer, Pancho Cristal, gave it.

**Corporan:** *Oh, Pancho Cristal.*

**Camero:** Yes it was.

**Corporan:** *What kind of music was that?*

**Camero:** That, Latino, all Latino. The arranger was Tito Puente and is he playing the timbales and vibes on that recording. So he was the arranger, timbales player, vibraphonist and conductor. It's called *Brujerías de Candido*. What was the other? There is another called *Indigo*, but the arranger was Dick Hyman. There is another one called . . . I don't know . . . I have to think because there are so many, because I want to be accurate about the names of the arrangers.

**Corporan:** *One was called "Candi's Funk."*

**Camero:** Ahá, exactly - *Candi's Funk*. The arranger was the Argentine, Carlos Franzetti. And there is another called *Conga Soul* where the arranger was Lalo Schifrin.

**Corporan:** *Lalo Schifrin.*

**Camero:** Lalo Schifrin was the arranger for the famous television series, *Mission Impossible*. Lalo Schifrin was the musical arranger of that program and the arranger of my recording called *Conga Soul*. There are several numbers there composed by him and me. Many, many but yes . . . *Conga Soul*.

**Corporan:** *Maestro, some of your many accomplishments, because there have been so many throughout your career . . . you pioneered the use of multiple congas.*

**Camero:** Exactly.

**Corporan:** *Tell me how it occurred to you and why and when you decided to use more than one conga?*

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**Camero:** Well, the first time was in 1946 when I came to the United States. That time I was playing the conga and the quinto because the pair of dancers that brought me were supposed to bring a conga player, and a bongo player to accompany their show. But as the budget was weak, they were like, "Well, the one who is playing the rumba in the show is the one we have to take because he is doing the daily work," and that was me. And being that there was no budget, I said, "Okay, I'm going to try something to see if you like it and if it works." And they said, "What is it?" I say, "Well, I'm going to surprise you." Then I brought the conga and a quinto. At showtime . . . I began to play the rhythm with my left hand on the conga and to do what the bongo player was supposed to do with my right hand on the quinto to mark the steps when they were dancing. That was the first idea, the low drum and the quinto at the same time, in 1946.

Then in 1952, it occurred to me to play three congas in order to play melodies like the timpani's. That idea occurred to me and since 1952; I've been using three congas. Certainly there was one of the compositions called *Las Congas Que Cantan (The Congas That Sing)* that was arranged, as I said earlier, by Rafael Benitez, the husband of Xiomara Alfaro. After that, 1954, another idea occurred to me while I was working with Stan Kenton's orchestra touring in the United States. The idea occurred to me that after the orchestra accompanied me, I would keep playing by myself. When it was time for my conga solo, I was by myself and then I used the conga, bass drum and hi-hat to carry the rhythm by myself instead of the drum set - accompanying myself rhythmically at the same time that I took my conga solo. When I gave the cue to the orchestra at the end of my solo, they would return to accompany me until the end. That was 1956. So that means that in 1946 it was the conga and the quinto. In 1954, no, pardon me, '52, the three congas. 1954, the conga, bass drum and hi-hat. 1956, and that was the last invention (laughs) - the latest invention in 1956 (laughs) which was the three congas, the guiro, bell and singing at the same time. That was the last invention.

**Corporan:** *At The Liborio?*

**Camero:** Yes, in '56. So, I was always inventing different something different for . . . well, something to do . . . something different, that was all. To do something different.

**Corporan:** *No doubt you were one of the pioneers incorporating the congas, no?*

**Camero:** Yes, the congas.

**Corporan:** *In orchestras, and notably the North American ones.*

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**Camero:** Aha.

**Corporan:** *And thanks to that contribution to North American music, the company LP . . .*

**Camero:** Exactly.

**Corporan:** *They identify strongly with you.*

**Camero:** Exactly.

**Corporan:** *And you have a very special relationship with them.*

**Camero:** Very, very, very special, very special.

**Corporan:** *Explain to us the relationship that you have with them.*

**Camero:** I was working in the San Juan Hotel in Puerto Rico.

**Corporan:** *What year?*

**Camero:** In '64. When I returned from Japan, I went straight to St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, then to Puerto Rico. Then one night while I was working there, arrived the owner Martin Cohen, who now is, well yes, the owner ever since. But at that time he had come to the hotel with what is called a *cabasa* - that is an instrument used in Brazilian music, the cabasa. So we were talking about who I was, where I came from, and how many years I've been here. Then he told me who he was and what he did, and how he was beginning a business of all the percussion instruments. After that, I began (with LP). When he saw me . . . he saw the work I was doing here in New York at Birdland. He saw that I played the congas and he asked me if I would like to use the congas that he was beginning to make. The ones I had were made of wood. The ones he was beginning to make were fiberglass. And he asked me if I'd like to use one of the congas he was beginning to make at the time. And I said yes, I would like to try one out. After a time, I received a telegram that told me to pass by and pick up the congas that were now ready for me.

**Corporan:** *So that you would use them in . . .*

**Camero:** So that I would use them. Since then, I've been using the LP congas and all percussion instruments that are LP. And that has been for over twenty years.

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**Corporan:** *And now you are giving them some publicity and certain benefits in using their congas.*

**Camero:** Well yes, that works, that . . . I would say is true for both sides also because everything I need at any time, at any hour, I have it.

**Corporan:** *These are the exact details I wanted to know. In what way, without getting too personal, in what way do they benefit you? Do they provide the instruments?*

**Camero:** Yes, yes. All that I need.

**Corporan:** *Wherever you are going to perform?*

**Camero:** All that I need. No matter where it is. So long as it is an LP product, I will have it without any problem. If I call them, then the next day, I have it at home. And then advertising in magazines and everything. And now they have put up a picture of me and part of my biography on the internet. So it's something where one thing compliments the other.

**Corporan:** *What is the big difference in the sound of congas made of wood and these fiberglass congas?*

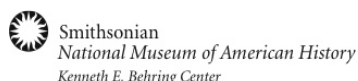
**Camero:** Well, the wood congas sound more solid. The fiberglass sound is good because it is a clean, clear sound and then they are flashier, visually since they are fiberglass, so . . . and then the wood ones are good. The fiberglass ones are good. Different, the sound is different. And the brilliance is different too. But the two give the same . . . how can I put it . . . ? You can use either of the two.

**Corporan:** *They offer the same result.*

**Camero:** The same result, same result. But I'm now using, for over twenty years, I've been using LP.

**Corporan:** *Well maestro, we've reached the end of this interview. On behalf of my colleagues at the Smithsonian Museum, my most sincere thanks to you for your hospitality and for taking the time. I know you are a busy person and you have no idea how much I have personally learned. I learned a lot in these last two days talking with you. Thank you very much.*

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**Camero:** Thank you. Thank you. Well, I also want to thank you and as you said, to your colleagues as well for giving me this honor. And I am proud and pleased that this opportunity was given to me to be interviewed by you, Mr. Hector Corporán. Once again, thank you very much and as always, may it not be the first or the last time. Thank you very much for everything (Laughs).

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