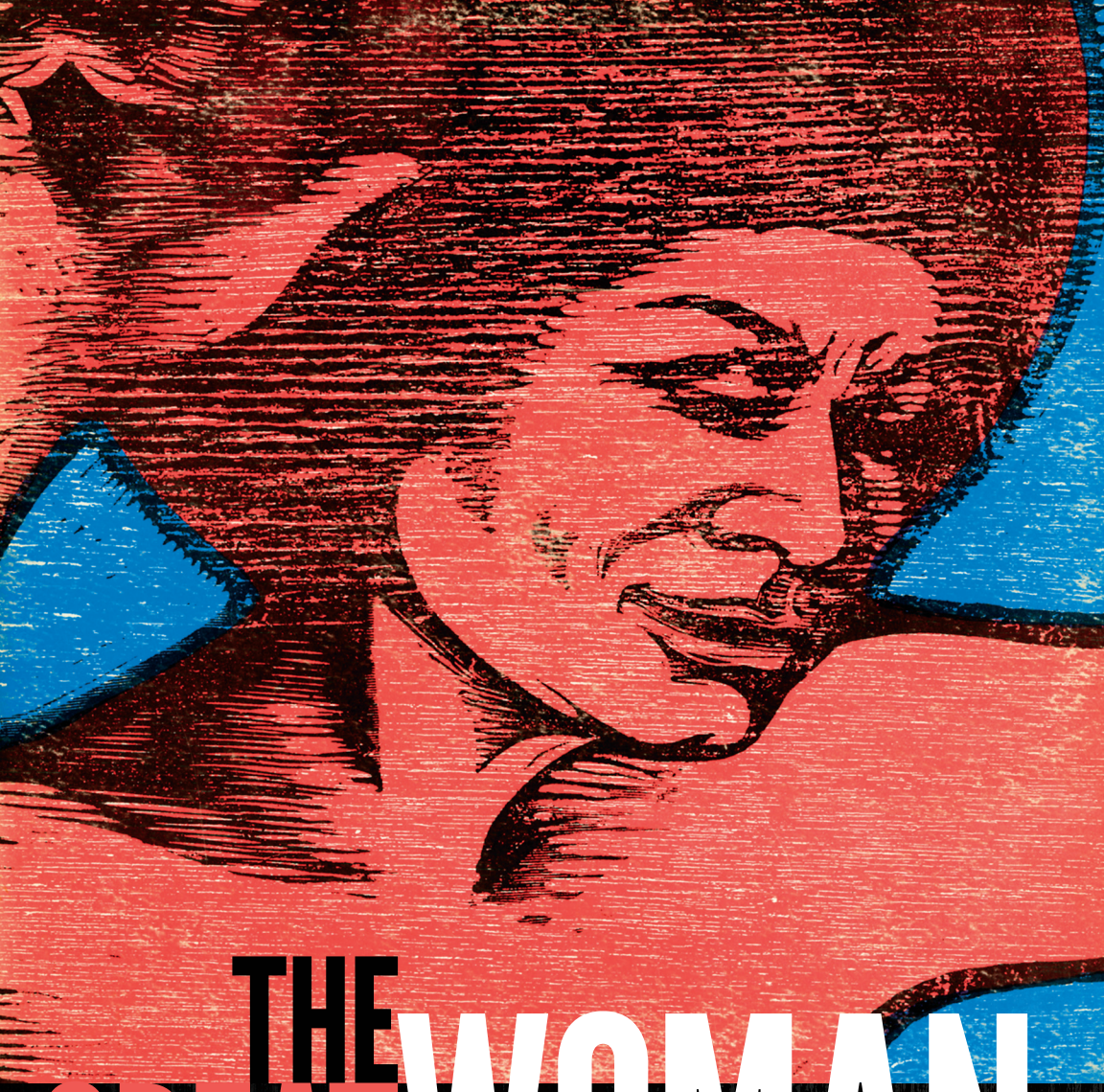

THE GREAT WOMAN SINGER

GENDER AND VOICE IN PUERTO RICAN MUSIC

LICIA FIOL-MATTA

Refiguring American Music

A series edited by
Ronald Radano
and Josh Kun

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contributing editor

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Gender and Voice in Puerto Rican Music

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Cover art: Portrait of Lucecita Benítez for the LP *Soy de una raza pura*, original in woodcut by Antonio Martorell, 1973.

A Lena Burgos-Lafuente

La música (lo supe entre una y otra tienda)
era el perfume de un país, el recurso que quedaba
a ese cuerpo emputrecido para hacerse presente
de algún modo. Podía convertirse en anodina.
Adelgazar hasta no ser notada. Coquetearía con
su desgastamiento y, en determinado momento,
se alzaría prístina, metería el punzonazo.

ANTONIO JOSÉ PONTE

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Quiñones is my first mentor, all the way back to my undergraduate years. He taught me how to look at creative works historically, without sacrificing their aesthetic heart or enlisting any artist in the service of dogma. I have purposefully tried to emulate Sylvia Molloy's limpid-yet-hip scholarly style and her centering of the reader. Since her decisive engagement with gender studies in the 1980s, Sylvia has been the touchstone of an entire critical generation, to which I belong.

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My music education began in my childhood home. My father, Juan Fiol Bigas, had a large record collection; he loved Caruso, Belafonte, marching band music, and opera. My mother, Emma Matta Méndez, loved all music, from classical to popular. She took me to the Festival Casals, my first live operas (*Aida* and *Carmen*, when I was about six years old), and numerous

concerts and open-air events, including the unforgettable open-air, free concert Lucecita Benítez gave in La Puntilla in 1975. My sister Liana played the accordion; from her twenties on, she sang with the choir (her passion to this day). As a little kid I received letters from my sister Liza recounting her college visits to the opera in Washington, DC. Later I could not wait for Saturday to arrive, so I could spend the afternoon in her apartment in Hato Rey, where I would listen, wide-eyed, to her myriad tales about music and musicians. A gifted guitarist and singer, a wondrous musical storehouse and erudite, Liza is without a doubt the single most important influence on my experience of, and thinking about, music. My brother Juan played the trombone and brought late-1960s and early-1970s rock to my ears, including some of my perennial favorites (like the Moody Blues, *A Question of Balance*), played in his snazzy hi-fi stereo that he carted with him from college a few precious summer months a year. My sister Lynn never left the house without her guitar. I heard her sing with her guitar every single day of my childhood. She played her favorite records like any true fan, over and over. Thanks to her I listened to La Calandria and learned to respect jíbaro music. My brother Antonio played the trumpet and was a huge fan of Chicago; I know "Only the Beginning," "25 or 6 to 4," and "Does Anyone Really Know What Time It Is?" by heart. My sister Lía phoned Radio Uno every day to vote for her favorite artists and ask the DJ to play her favorite songs. Our family owned a record player that we children had to share among so many budding audiophiles, and I remember how Lía and I discussed which songs we were going to play in "our" turn. Since I idolized her, I always agreed with her selection. I still idolize her. My brother Carlos and I shared all our childhood years and music was a common language. We were religious in our weekly listening to the American Top 40 with Casey Kasem. Carlos bought progressive and punk records for his collection, although I had no idea as a kid that that's what the bands were called. He also gave me my first vinyls (I didn't own many more, being an '80s-cassette fiend): Donna Summer's *Bad Girls* and *Live and More*. *A la familia Fiol-Matta, gracias por el regalo de toda la música.*

As I began to write this book, I met Lena Burgos-Lafuente, whose musical knowledge is astonishingly capacious and who also comes from a music-loving family. She captivated me from the moment I heard her voice. She exponentially increased my listening with her loving playlists and huge MP3 collection. Thanks to her, I became more conversant about bolero, salsa, flamenco, décima, jazz, post-punk . . . She is the most perceptive and original thinker I know. I'm hooked. This book is for her.

INTRODUCTION
I AM NOTHING

In 1969, at the height of the Cold War, the Puerto Rican singer Lucecita Benítez won the First Festival of Latin Song in the World with her performance of "Génesis":

Cuando nada en la tierra quede que tibie el sol
Cuando nadie en la tierra quede que evoque a Dios
Cuando sobre la tierra no haya ya ni dolor
Solo habrá una lumbre y esa será el amor
¡El amor, el amor! ¡Para empezar!

When nothing is left on Earth to feel the warmth of the sun
When no one is left on Earth to invoke God
When not even pain will be felt on Earth
There will only be a flame and that flame will be love
Love, Love! To begin again!

Considering its lugubrious content, it seems odd, more than forty years later, that the music industry and listening public frantically celebrated "nothingness" in this very melodramatic way. The muscular symphonic orchestra rushed to keep pace with the singer who had appeared, seemingly, out of nowhere and literally came out of the nowhere that was Puerto Rico to Latin America, the United States, and the world.

Ironically, the singer's name means little light, akin to the flame of love that rises after the apocalypse's destruction in the last, triumphant bars of the song. It is not the name her friends and family use to address her: She is Luz, Luz Esther, or Lucy. Lucecita is a stage name, a diminutive that always has seemed not quite right for this mercurial singer, and yet also on the mark in Latin American Spanish as a signifier for the enormous affection she has evoked in generations of Puerto Ricans. "Lucecita" incorporates the love that the song

names as the world's salvation — resonating with the adoration the singer easily provoked — but it also contains a kernel of societal diminution, mockery, and domestication: women as marginal, minor, and suspect.

The song attempted to re-create beginning and end, alpha and omega, genesis and dissolution. It was a response to both the terrifying prospect of global, nuclear annihilation, and the colonial condition of Puerto Rico that diminished social life. It stands as a testament to the increasing paranoia of the small colony, its anguish expressed as an anxiety over its smallness and presumptive incapacity to affect its destiny or the world's. "Génesis" also entailed a subliminal protest of the topsy-turvy gender and sexual world which the star, paradoxically enough, embodied in her dashing tuxedo and grippingly loud vocal volume. Its author, fellow Puerto Rican Guillermo Venegas Lloveras, found himself suddenly owing his major triumph to a masculine woman, one the public did not know how to read. At the dawn of her career, she was often described as "boyish" or "androgynous." In 1969, she disconcerted all of Latin America by presenting as mannish.

Venegas Lloveras could not have foreseen the artist's eruption onto the world stage with his song, since she had been a wondrous but inoffensive and "feminine" youth star up until that moment. He probably never imagined that his status as the songwriter of "Génesis" would become subordinate to the performer's. In a music industry practice that is not yet quite extinct, singers functioned as the placeholders for someone else's genius. Furthermore, that genius was invariably male, whether the songwriter's, musician's, or bandleader's.

Lucecita had transformed Venegas Lloveras's predictable song into a watershed sonic and visual event. She had single-handedly put Puerto Rico on the map. She was the one the adoring public rushed to see when the winning cohort returned to Puerto Rico. She was the figure that admiring singers and musicians came to respect. It is telling that in his 1992 memoir, Venegas Lloveras wrote, "Total genius is men's priority. A true man is he who can penetrate everything. Women were born for flirting, not for knowledge; to be dominated, not to dominate; to give children, not ideas. Do you know of a single woman who has attained the status of Thinker? A single woman who has shaken or altered the intellectual conscience of the world? Do you know of a single woman possessing an unparalleled probing capacity [*inigualable penetración*]?"[1] "Génesis" expressed extreme male melancholy, yet a masculine woman unexpectedly delivered this affect home. The songwriter's lament for women and men who did not conform to the expected roles of a misogynistic

and homophobic society, who dared usurp the masculine domains — music among them — throws into the sharpest of relief just how vexed women's incursion into pop music can be.

In Lucecita's case, no scripts were available to subordinate and tame her eruption. She was not feminine. She did not sing softly or croon about heterosexual love. She claimed the masculine prerogatives of expressing social and political ideas outside of marriage and motherhood, eschewing the roles that her managers sought to implant in her earliest persona. When it came to representing difference, decked in her stage costume that night in Mexico and armed with her mind-blowing delivery, she proved she had no intention of merely supplying a commercial hook to sell songs.

Lucecita Benítez would become an international icon in only a couple of years; would survive attempts to erase her career and silence her magnificent voice; would claim her right to speak and not merely to sing; and would refuse all imperatives to civility, moralism, and even proper nationalist performance. In her later career, all the way forward to the 1990s, she would be baptized the National Voice of Puerto Rico in the simulacrum of late colonial society, when difference did become a commodity and nationalism coexisted with — indeed fueled — Banco Popular television specials honoring the people, selling brands and financial products more than songs and music.

Lucecita's career arc is like a crash course in history combined with an embodiment of the crucible voice can throw us into. The absolute nothing of dissolution, of ceasing to be, which "Génesis" evoked, gave way to the relative nothing that the singer claimed for herself, when she informed the public that it could not dictate what she was. "I am nothing," she said in 1974, furiously and presciently. She was not legibility, but potentiality. She could not be generalized: She was singular. That's what she meant when she said, "I am nothing."

Lucecita troubled several paradigms that have dictated matters when it comes to women's careers as pop singers, in Puerto Rico and elsewhere in Latin America. Almost all women who entered pop when the pop music business began did so under some kind of pressure to perform values — whether of the moral kind, nationalism, the home and reproduction, or liberationist politics. Lucecita was not the only singer in Puerto Rico who had troubled morality, class-defined participation in music, or politics. In this book, I discuss three other women who, each in their own way, did so too. And there are others. However, Lucecita was, decidedly, one of the first women singers who broke

out of any possibility of being described as a "great woman singer." The qualifier did not make any sense after her triumph with "Génesis"; she became a great singer, period.

This meteoric rise did not solve problems for the artist so much as it created an excruciating existence where she found herself increasingly dissatisfied with the content of her repertoire, to the point of asking herself, "Why am I singing this nonsense?"[2] The answer is more complex than resorting to a straightforward repressive paradigm, to recall Foucault's critique of how power operates.[3] The "great woman singer" reveals the procedures of the pop music singing career established as an arc, a feat of determination and stamina, a fight to the death with oversignification, a zealous, successful stewardship of persona, and the ultimately successful defense of the voice. It also reveals the toils of the biopolitical uses of voice within a collectivity, and the "distribution of the sensible" that makes plain an inside/outside partition.[4] The book aims squarely at a critique of the logic of the exceptional — still the critical rule in dominant accounts, despite commonsense knowledge about marquee artists who were women since the nascent days of the pop music industry in the region, back in the 1930s or so.

The Great Woman Singer refuses to espouse a predetermined idea of what is feminist in music, nor does it seek to theorize what this standard of feminism in music might be. It is not a survey of women in music or a tracing of resistance by women to the strictures of dominant music making. My interest in the female pop music star is about querying instances where singularity erupts despite heterosexism and misogyny, through the vehicle of voice. My goal is to disrupt the normative business of scholarly studies on women artists. Overall, I aim to really listen to women's voices, in the sense of paying attention to their conceptual dimension, away from notions of natural or intuitive performance.

I detail how four paradigmatically iconic artists elaborated their concept, troubling the gaze on their figures as simple manifestations of artistic serendipity or, alternatively, as creations made possible by male insufflations of spirit. The book narrates their histories and analyzes their work outside the poverty of critical tools and the near-universal gesture of dismissing women artists as merely women singers.[5] Yet, it's not as easy as merely rejecting or ironizing the epithet, however much we may wish it gone from our consciousness. The ideology we seek to disrupt influences our apprehension of these voices, inescapably. If we do not critically isolate this problem of the collectivity — this imposition of acritical listening — we won't be able to dispel it.[6] The grouping,

then, of these four artists qua women is a function of the hermeneutic: a move to unsettle matters, not to reaffirm them. Speaking of the voice as if it were not in actuality covered by gender (riffing on Hortense Spillers, who spoke of a subject "covered by race")[7] is simply to contribute to the further buttressing of the status quo we see verified in books on Latin popular music, which to this day only name Celia Cruz and La Lupe, usually in passing, in their surveys; or in university courses on Latin American popular music that can run for years without studying any women artists; or in the record store, however vanishing, that includes a section on women, which women are expected to browse and men should not approach lest they be taken for members of "the gender vanquished for all time, women."[8]

Politically speaking, the Cold War had crossed Lucecita's performance of "Génesis" in a chilling way. The prospect of nuclear war lent a hair-raising quality to the last verse of the song, "Sólo habrá una lumbre" (there will only be a flame). Regardless of whether the flame represented love, listeners were clearly preoccupied with extinction, with war. Several great women singers had labored within the protocols of the Good Neighbor policy and the Cold War, becoming either goodwill ambassadors performing the folklore of Latin America, like Libertad Lamarque; steamy sex symbols, like Carmen Miranda; or maternal stalwarts in Mexican movies, like Rita Montaner (although this great star was burdened with problematic "black" roles, such as the "mammy" figure of the 1948 *Angelitos negros* [Little black angels]). In this book, I refrain from making value judgments on any decisions to represent, preferring to investigate matters in terms of their historicity: what was allowed or possible, individual temperaments, and voice operating in the realm of the future perfect. The future perfect is the time of the *arkhé*, according to Giorgio Agamben:

> The *arkhé* towards which archaeology regresses must not be understood in any way as an element that can be situated in chronology (not even one with a large grid, of the sort used in pre-history); it is, rather, a force that operates in history — much in the same way in which Indoeuropean words express a system of connections among historically accessible languages; in which the child in psychoanalysis expresses an active force in the psychic life of the adult; in which the big bang, which is supposed to have originated the universe, continues to send towards us its fossil radiation. But the *arkhé* is not a datum or a substance — different from the big bang, to which the astrophysicists

> try to assign a date, even if it is in terms of millions of years. It is much rather a field of bipolar historical currents within the tension of anthropogenesis and history, between the point of emergence and becoming, between arch-past and present. And as such — that is to say, to the extent to which it is, as anthropogenesis itself, something that is necessarily supposed to have factually happened, and which yet cannot be hypostatized in any chronologically identifiable event — it is solely capable of guaranteeing the intelligibility of historical phenomena, of "saving" them archeologically within a future perfect, yet not grasping its (in any case unverifiable) origin, but rather its history, at once finite and untotalizable.[9]

When it came to war and pop music, Lucecita troubled paradigms too. In early interviews, when she was a youth star, she had spoken out against the Vietnam War: "What's happening in Puerto Rican music is happening all over the world. We love independence and have a rebellious spirit. For instance, we are against the draft and we can make that part of our music. Why should we fight for something that does not concern us? Some people are looking for adventure but, there are so many dead Puerto Ricans and for what? For nothing, it is not our quarrel. I for one am against all these impositions."[10] Here we have an example of a disquieting, societal "nothingness" that is not the same artistic and political "nothing" she later claimed.

In "Génesis," Lucecita eschewed the edifice of goodwill. She presented as anything but folkloric in sartorial terms. Musically, she unleashed a powerful *balada* that departed from the esteemed Pan-Americanist *bolero*. Lucecita's performance of "Génesis" did not offer the "Latin American" sound, or the "American" sound of her youthful LPs. Even the theme of the song — planetary trauma — hardly corresponded to the usual fare women sang all over the hemisphere. Most women's pop hits were about failed heterosexual romances; hardly any were about the state of the world. That discourse was reserved for political song, which knew one "great woman singer" of its own by 1969, the Chilean Violeta Parra. Yet Parra became encased in the well-worn, gendered narratives of doomed love affairs and an unspecified depressive personality.

I am resolutely not interested in indicting any singer's political stances, or in interpreting any career as a reflection of personal woes. Critical biography is a mode of analysis in this book because, from a Benjaminian perspective, the "biographical historicity of an individual" contains what is allegorical in their life and therefore is an avenue to grasping the arkhé, what in history

is "untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful . . . expressed in a face, or rather in a skull."[11] Keying into the career of women singers must entail this approach to history for three reasons: Their histories have not been written, nor a general history of a collective subject; it is hard to piece together the actual sources of these histories, necessitating a method that will privilege the question over the answer; although associated with freedom and play, music careers in given contexts are very tough and often unsuccessful, notwithstanding the existence of talent. If we add to this women's dominant treatment as all nature, as body, animal, and so forth, the Benjaminian allegory emerges as not only suitable but also urgent.

In reconstructing an archive of voice, I do address and in certain cases redress the problems of omission, politics of memory, and, last but not least, plainly sexist approaches to popular music that still hold sway in popular culture. Yet my purpose is to examine embodied existences within the very dense grid of significations in which multiple subjectivities circulate, which includes music producers, arrangers, entrepreneurs, politicians, fans, and citizens who are not especially attracted to music. Women singers labor along the twin poles of adoration and derision. With the complexity of such affects in mind, I cite singers from Puerto Rico as paradigmatic for Latin American and American Studies. Adoration is presumptively benign, but the widely regarded positive aspects of music performance require critical attention, in order to detect their "patterning" effects.[12] We associate derision with disciplinary power. Examining contempt, aside from charting its obvious negative impact on careers, also affords insights into collective fantasy, which pop women singers symbolize in an easily consumable and shareable way. In this book, I examine the reining in, ordering, correcting, or training of women's vocal performances, but also the lines of flight opened up in these performances, their *écarts* and silences.

All the women I named in the preceding section, from the more straightforwardly political to the more conservative, were "great women singers" because a thinking voice took up residence in their careers, unleashing questions and providing answers — consciously or not — in response to the cultural moment of their times. In this book, a narrative toward elucidating how voice calls to thought unfolds, until the thinking voice appears fully formed in chapter 4. I mimic the qualities of "future perfect" that the voice in music performance must have, presenting the reader with a problem that takes its time in becoming graspable or knowable. Sidestepping dominant notions of

voice, particularly notation (as in the highbrow musical pedagogy that recognizes voice solely as a musical instrument) and intuition (the widespread notion that a singer trades not in conceptual thinking, but only in spontaneous execution), I come to isolate the performing voice as an object (thinking voice in performance), while advancing the study of voice as thought producer (presenting the voice as it thinks, riffing on Martin Heidegger's treatise *What Is Called Thinking?*).

Chapter 1 details Jacques Lacan's treatment of the voice as part object or *objet a*. In a nutshell, the part object exists as both an illusion and its foil. I employ the part object to indicate the breach between associations of voice with plenitude and the reality that voice, in the last instance, represents lack or, to put it more colloquially, a puzzling absence that must be reckoned with and is not pacified by enjoyment (which musical voice represents for most listeners). Applied to the voice, the part object entails separating from accounts of the voice as always already knowable, as certain, and focusing on its status as having "no specular image, no alterity."[13]

The rest of the book follows this template, establishing a relationship to the archive but not allowing it to dictate interpretation. I have had in mind, among others, Sylvia Molloy, who pithily stated,

> It is true that archival work is absolutely necessary as a starting point for any reflection on gender. But I would like to think that those of us who work on this unstable category of gender do it *from* gender more than *in* gender; that we are attempting to articulate, not just a reflection on gender, but a *re-flexion* (if I can be allowed the word game here), that is to say, a new *flexion* in the Latin American cultural text (in that text's totality, not in select parts) that will allow us to read otherwise, in many different "otherwises."[14]

While the book is, in a certain sense, an archive, bringing into painstaking play both sonorous and nonsonorous items from the past (and as such thinks from an archive), it is, above all, a critical theorization of voice and gender, with an anchor in psychoanalytic thought without being exclusively psychoanalytic. In "Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psychoanalysis" (1912), Sigmund Freud explained the nature of psychoanalytic listening, which specialists often refer to as "distracted" or "wavering" listening: "[It] consists simply in not directing one's notice to anything in particular and in maintaining the same 'evenly suspended attention' . . . in the face of all that one hears. . . . To put it in a formula: [The analyst] must turn his own uncon-

scious like a receptive organ toward the transmitting unconscious of the patient. He must adjust himself to the patient as a telephone receiver is adjusted to the transmitting microphone."[15] Peter Szendy usefully paraphrases Freud, closer to our purposes: "If I summon here the expression 'wavering listening,' it is of course because I am thinking of Freud's famous phrase, a phrase that might basically be saying this: the sense of a discourse is not a *given* to be deciphered, but must be *constructed conjointly* by the one who utters it and by the one who listens to it. It obviously does not go without saying that this *psychoanalytic* listening can be translated into the vocabulary and practice of *musical* listening."[16]

As in Freud's technological metaphors, this book's method imitates "the telephone adjusted to the microphone" and listens distractedly to all available objects in the sound archive. Needless to say, some sounds are distorted or missing. Others are too loud. Singers don't always speak into the microphone. And so it goes. An archive might give a sense of plenitude and illusion of mastery, but I have worked with its incompleteness and contingency in mind. I could also not include everything I encountered: A process of selection and indeed forgetting had to take place. Without the latter, I would have encountered a disquieting "nothing to say."

Relatively ignored, local music had been of passing interest to the Spanish imperial state. At the dawn of Puerto Rico's second colonial period, in the early twentieth century, professional ethnologists bolstered their credentials in managing imperial subjects through ethnographic recordings. Photojournalists trained in the American Works Progress Administration (WPA) presented the occasional portrait of the native musician. Columbia and RCA Victor pressed 78s according to the racist conception of ethnic music that Ruth Glasser encapsulates in her classic, *My Music Is My Flag*: "The record companies persisted through the years in treating Puerto Ricans and other ethnic audiences as dumb animals with an unreasonable instinct for music, or at best as mere sale ciphers."[17]

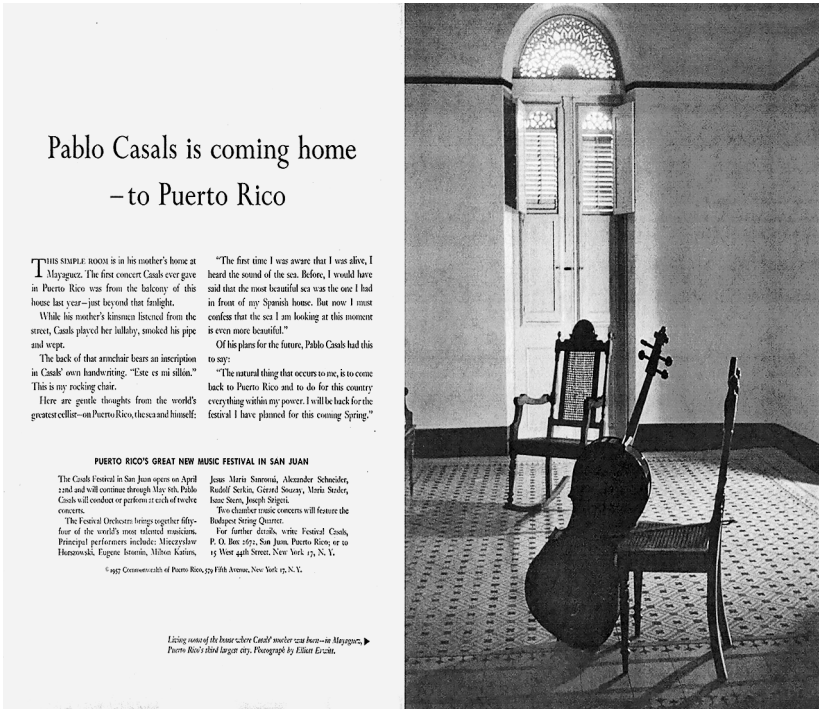
The *prócer* (founding father), the Spanish-born Manuel Fernández Juncos, cleaned up the lyrics of the revolutionary anthem into the official version of "La Borinqueña" in 1903. He simultaneously churned out wholesome children's ditties to be sung by rote by schoolchildren suffering from Spanish being intermittently, yet consistently, banned in instruction. The peasant figure, the *jíbaro*, was characterized as having only one talent — music — while Afro–Puerto Ricans were tasked with the entertainment of elites. Both were

folklorized. Musical pedagogy evolved around European classical music and for decades was taught as the only music worth studying in a formal setting. Women in Puerto Rican music occupied a decidedly minoritarian place in the sounded world, being, in discourse and in the aggregate, representative of the qualities that made up the presumed secondariness of pop — capable, at best, of incidental music in the classical vein.

The state invested popular music with a degree of power and prestige upon the establishment of the Estado Libre Asociado (ELA, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico) in 1952. Controlling pedagogical channels from primary school to higher education, shaping markets after the ELA, creating the country's Institute for Puerto Rican Culture and other cultural institutions to advance its agenda, the state largely succeeded in its quest to employ music as palliative; revenue-generating arm of tourism to provide the needed "local color"; and card to assure investors that Puerto Rico was "peaceful" and, as such, represented a safe haven for investors. The climax of the state's success in controlling the musical happened in the 1950s and 1960s, captured in the 1957 David Ogilvy advertising campaign for the Festival Casals de Puerto Rico, "Pablo Casals is coming home — to Puerto Rico," paid for by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (figure I.1).

Naturally, the state could never control all of the arenas that affect touches, even if that is its sustaining fiction. The performance space is one arena where the designs of mandated enjoyment might falter. In this book, I trace both mandated enjoyment and when its designs fail. I unpack enjoyment's dependency on the performing, female body and detail when, how, and why various forms of control short-circuit, despite their certainty of managing women. I examine, in equal measure, the advantages of music as a profession where some women could craft a space of artistic expression, and the limitations of their careers in music.

With the ELA, song opened up to female stars, who were still regarded as exceptions. What was thought of as feminine subjectivity was barely considered a locus for creativity. As to women singers specifically, they entertained. They did not think. The lives and works I have selected came to exceed power's advantages as well as the limits power imposes. Hence their singularity. They also became uncannily aligned with standardized music genres, immediately putting them in touch with larger cultural scripts. As women who persevered in the face of a world that denied them the hallowed space of the artist, women who succeeded as professionals but also became icons, the four artists studied in this book give the lie to normative functions of music, showing the



Pablo Casals is coming home
– to Puerto Rico

THIS SIMPLE ROOM is in his mother's home at Mayaguez. The first concert Casals ever gave in Puerto Rico was from the balcony of this house last year – just beyond that fanlight.

While his mother's kinsmen listened from the street, Casals played her lullaby, smoked his pipe and wept.

The back of that armchair bears an inscription in Casals' own handwriting. "Este es mi sillón." This is my rocking chair.

Here are gentle thoughts from the world's greatest cellist – on Puerto Rico, the sea and himself:

"The first time I was aware that I was alive, I heard the sound of the sea. Before, I would have said that the most beautiful sea was the one I had in front of my Spanish home. But now I must confess that the sea I am looking at this moment is even more beautiful."

Of his plans for the future, Pablo Casals had this to say:

"The natural thing that occurs to me, is to come back to Puerto Rico and to do for this country everything within my power. I will be back for the festival I have planned for this coming Spring."

PUERTO RICO'S GREAT NEW MUSIC FESTIVAL IN SAN JUAN

The Casals Festival in San Juan opens on April 22nd and will continue through May 5th. Pablo Casals will conduct or perform in each of twelve concerts.

The Festival Orchestra brings together fifty-four of the world's most talented musicians. Principal performers include: Mieczyslaw Horszowski, Eugene Istomin, Milton Katims, Jesus Maria Sanromá, Alexander Schneider, Rudolf Serkin, Gerard Souzay, Mitia Stoler, Isaac Stern, Joseph Szigeti.

Two chamber music concerts will feature the Budapest String Quartet.

For further details, write Festival Casals, P. O. Box 2672, San Juan, Puerto Rico; or to 15 West 44th Street, New York 17, N. Y.

©1957 Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, 579 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.

Living room of the house where Casals' mother was born – in Mayaguez, ▶ Puerto Rico's third largest city. Photograph by Elliott Erwitt.

FIGURE I.1 Ad, "Pablo Casals is coming home — to Puerto Rico," *New Yorker*, February 2, 1957. The government of Puerto Rico sought to advertise the island to foreign investors and tourists by promoting a festival of classical music, signifying refinement and civilization. Reputedly this single ad helped to boost tourist expenditures by the millions. Removing the cellist from the picture avoided the risk of "visual bromide."

parallel ability of music to disrupt and reorder a variety of injunctions, among them how enjoyment should proceed and where, how patriotic allegiances should be expressed, how obscenity should appear in the repertoire, how politics should enter music lyrics, and how consumption should become the main activity of subjects in capitalism.

As elsewhere, the Puerto Rican musical constellation has many more women singers than I can study here, many excellent in their own right, many beginning full-fledged careers around the founding of the ELA in 1952. They have loyal fans and successful records, despite the industry's prejudiced practice of limiting the number of women recording artists because they felt that women did not sell records since women did not buy records. However, the

four chapters present four careers that are singular within this context, which merit a distinct grouping to consider voice, gender, power, and thought.

Chapter 1, "Getting Off . . . the Nation," reviews Myrta Silva's (1927–1987) stellar music career. I detail how the artist was able to wrest the dominant perception of a problematic female performing body and create a highly autonomous and conceptual intervention, which I theorize as a cynical ethics. This meeting ground of Jacques Lacan's ethics and Michel Foucault's parrhesia focuses on the relationship between speech and song. Contra Jacques Derrida's famous critique of the autoaffectivity of voice in *Voice and Phenomenon*, which assigned voice a metaphysical burden that it simply could not shake off, Myrta Silva as figure and her simultaneous practices of *parlando* and self-reference mock the very idea of autoaffectivity and provide a template from which to examine similar uses of speech-song and self-referential lyrics. This chapter sets up an extended meditation on the obscene as the obverse of a cleaned-up repertoire, as the stage from which to construct an approach to the symbolic capacities of voice. The star female body veers from being apprehended as a beautiful object visually to becoming a visual disturbance in multiple ways, while her vocal capacity to enthrall through play with voice's role in the symbolic order dispenses with notions of the beautiful as the needed identity of presumptively female pop music. Voice is installed in thought instead. Silva proved that an exceptional pop voice is one that knows how to foreground listening. I examine Silva's voice also as a television producer, host, gossip columnist, and social chronicler, which together comprise the totality of her figure and represent the multifaceted aspects of voice. The chapter rescues her musicality from accounts that have buried it, examining her repertoire of self-referential songs, many obscene, and articulated almost completely around word play. Concomitant with a psychoanalytic understanding of voice as part object, the treatment of words is not just semantic but sounded. Of all the singers studied in this book, Silva comes closest to having carefully thought her singing.

Chapter 2, "So What If She's Black?," discusses Ruth Fernández (1919–2012), a black contralto working in pop genres whose nostalgic self-narrative of star inception would point us to a linear account of progress from early U.S. empire to the modern Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. An unusual call, "So what if I'm black?," is the center of a preoccupation over being, the classic analytic quandary. This call is not a statement as much as a demand, for recognition as much as reparation. It is difficult to decipher. The protestation indicates a

permanent suspension in which metaphysical and ontological questions are never settled. While race is an important analytic in chapter 1, it takes center stage in chapter 2, not primarily because the singer was black (although this is no small detail in a racist society) but because the singer's entire career is threaded around this cry and its attendant societal questions: What are you, and why are you? Are you a woman? Should you exist as a singer? Dialogical models are put to the test in a radically unequal structure of interlocution. I isolate intra- and intergroup interpellations figured in songs, together fissuring the oneness of the polity that "nationalist sonorousness" attempted to manufacture in the early days of developmentalism in Puerto Rico and through its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s (as elsewhere in Latin America).[18] Here the star female body is routinely derided as unsuitable visually and attractive sonically. The chapter's twist is this subject's entry into the certifiably political sphere, where she helped install a conservative mode of thinking via pop music, manipulating the listener as shrewdly as chapter 1's exemplar even if, ultimately, her decisions might have restricted the freedom of her music.

Chapter 3, "Techne and the Lady," pivots to migration and music. It seeks to prove the solidity and importance of more modest forms of the star female body, and their crucial role in the larger structure of which they are a part, refuting the general notion that huge sales numbers and big markets alone determine fame. Each Latin American nation has its own set of local stars, like Ernestina Reyes, La Calandria (1925–1994), who perhaps did not reach hemispheric fame but were critical to localized musical politics. These stars often found their reception in circuits excluded from today's archive of music, which mostly records middle-class practices of middlebrow culture and middlebrow attempts to enter musical culture considered high in the pedagogical imagination of music (classical music). In this scheme, country music mattered only as occasional spice or entertainment, or as values vessel. Country musicians often were forced to create personas that were buffoons or dimwitted. Some knowledge of their practices is available in manuals of folkloric music, anthropological investigations into instruments, preserved ditties, and folk songs, all studied within the matrix of the national popular. Focusing on local circuits of exchange that underwrite the star female body in Latin American country musics dislodges the primacy of lettered interpretations, and their moralizing injunction toward collective representation, in favor of an aesthetics of the moment favoring bricolage and invention. La Calandria mobilized a prototypical women's folk voice, similar in color and texture to those found in flamenco, *perico ripiao* merengue, or Mexican *rancheras* (the latter was a

favorite genre of the singer's and her working-class audience). Calandria was fun loving and unconventional, embodying country music's class-defined aesthetics, which seemed garish and uncouth to elite listeners but were delightful to the working-class audiences of Puerto Rico and New York. She pursued her free-wheeling, party-going ethics in the jíbaro milieu, which was more permissive and elastic than middle-class, highly capitalized entertainment, thus putting an accent on the present and undercutting the state's tight conceptualization of temporality and women's role in its reproduction.

Chapter 4, "The Thinking Voice," grows out of the three preceding chapters, which lay out an argument for understanding the propitious moment when this voice emerges, showing how — along with the exhilaration it provokes — the voice carries with it the history of struggles, the reality of duress, and the relative triumph of endurance. Pure pop is not readily associated with thought, although female stars often evoke feelings precisely because they only come to being as creatures of thought. Usually propped up on spurious grounds that have little to do with their own conception of self (sometimes when they are too young to have one to begin with), they have to truly fight to the death in order to arrive at independence of concept — to formulate an alternative to heteropatriarchal ideas of what their art should be about and the form it should take. Otherwise they are simply mowed down, spit out by the machine when capital is done with them. If, on top of that, a singer becomes aligned with the arkhé, the expression of thought in voice reaches beyond the recording, concert hall, or TV screen into the very psychic structure of a collective. This I demonstrate by taking Lucecita Benítez (b. 1942) seriously as a musician. Identified with left-leaning politics, the artist's residence there and elsewhere was never entirely comfortable. Lucecita traversed successive stages when she changed personas very swiftly, going from being a youth star in the 1960s to her three iconic incarnations: the auteur of the late 1960s, the artiste of the early 1970s, and the diva of the 1980s. I examine these in turn.

In music, you have to play the cards you're dealt. Women artists know this from the get-go. Their lives as working musicians are complicated. Aside from all the labor that most musicians face, the years of debt if not poverty, the long hours playing and recording (often for a pittance), women singers must confront their intense symbolization, one whose decisive elements they have a tiny or no hand in shaping. The women portrayed here are remarkable for their intellect, iconic significance, and influence. All expressed ambivalence about the pedagogical imperative to represent what national music

should: respectability, accomplishment, values, and triumph. In one way or another, all expressed, directly or subliminally, the philosophical protestation, "I am nothing." All have been subjected to an oblivion that, up to this day, remains as profoundly puzzling as it is disturbing, rendering them as the "nothing" in pop.

As in the Festival Casals ad, where the machinery of advertising evacuated the body of the world-famous cellist, absented any hint of the act of performance or any visual trace of listening to performance, and stated that the inclusion of Casals playing the instrument would be equivalent to a "visual bromide," the nothing is the center of this book, its key.[19] My approach to the nothing, though, proceeds to different ends from that of the ad, resolutely away from Latin America as paradise and Latin Americans as natural-born performers for someone else's pleasure and profit. I do not expel the visual from my archive. I do not make claims for the sonorous over the visual. I place them side by side as part objects, elements of a sensorium, while centering the sounded voice. I listen "distractedly." Not confined to the nation-state, or any regional understanding of the musical phenomenon, the inquiry that follows hopes to approximate what Lauren Berlant wrote of the "case": "When it doesn't work to change the conditions of exemplarity or explanation, something is deemed merely a case study, remanded to banal particularity. When it does, a personal or collective sensorium shifts."[20]

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

All translations from Spanish are my own.

1. Venegas Lloveras, *Marzo dos*, 215.

2. Diego Manso, "Lucecita Benítez: 'Yo no canto tonterías.'" *Revista Ñ*, June 14, 2013.

3. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1.

4. *Le partage du sensible*, the distribution of the sensible, is Jacques Rancière's well-known concept. See Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

5. Feminist scholars have considerably complicated this narrative. Farah Jasmine Griffin (*If You Can't Be Free*) on Billie Holiday, Judith Halberstam (*Gaga Feminism*) on Lady Gaga, Gayle Wald (*Shout, Sister, Shout!*) on Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Laura Gutiérrez (*Performing* Mexicanidad) on Mexican cabaret stars, Deborah R. Vargas (*Dissonant Divas in Chicana Music*) on the "dissonant divas" of the Texas border, Alexandra T. Vazquez (*Listening in Detail*) on Cuban music, and Shane Vogel (*The Scene of Harlem Cabaret*) on Harlem cabaret come to mind as examples of how the study of female stars is at a much different place than when I began this book a decade ago. These scholars debunk dominant narratives, in which female stars don't have complex histories or put a great deal of intelligence into their performances.

6. Many works have discussed this problem of listening critically. See, for example, Kun, *Audiotopia*, who takes his cue from his objects of study, in a move that is similar to mine in this book: "Kafka's dog performs the same kind of critical listening that Los Tigres [del Norte] do, the same kind of listening that all of the subjects in this book do — a critical listening that does not necessarily reject consensus or harmony, but questions its default functionality as an apparatus of obligatory group belonging and nationalist solidarity" (16). In this book, I privilege dissonance over harmony, following Vargas, *Dissonant Divas*, but do not discourage and, when called for, document the positive affects that may be created by liberating "spaces of music" (Kun, *Audiotopia*, 22). I do, however, query any "sanctioned citizenship as women members" within nationalist formations (Vargas, *Dissonant Divas*, ix).

7. "The individual in the collective traversed by 'race' — and there are no known exceptions, as far as I can tell — is covered by it before language and its differential laws take hold." Spillers, "'All the Things You Could Be by Now,'" 378.

8. Monsiváis, " 'Los que tenemos unas manos que no nos pertenecen,' " 50.

9. Agamben, "Philosophical Archaeology," 230.

10. Rubén Torres, "En PR al igual que en todo el mundo, la música busca la libertad" [In Puerto Rico and elsewhere, music searches for freedom], clipping found in the Oscar Hernández Scrapbook, Fundación Nacional para la Cultura Popular, San Juan, Puerto Rico; source and exact date not available, circa 1968 or 1969.

11. Benjamin, "Allegory and *Trauerspiel*," 166, translation modified.

12. "My method is to read patterns of adjustment in specific aesthetic and social contexts to derive what's collective about specific modes of sensual activity toward and beyond survival. Each chapter focuses on dynamic relations of hypervigilance, unreliable agency, and dissipated subjectivity under contemporary capitalism; but what 'capitalism' means varies a lot, as each case makes its own singular claim for staging the general forces that dominate the production of the historical sensorium that's busy making sense of and staying attached to whatever there is to work with, for life. . . . [Affect's] activity saturates the corporeal, intimate, and political performances of adjustment that make a shared atmosphere something palpable and, in its patterning, releases to view a poetics, a theory-in-practice of how a world works." Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 9, 16.

13. Lacan, "Subversion of the Subject," 693. Lacan discussed the voice as a part-object in *Anxiety*. Mladen Dolar has brilliantly glossed Lacan's contributions to the study of the voice (extending their application in multiple manifestations as objet a) in *A Voice and Nothing More*.

14. Molloy, "La flexión del género en el texto cultural latinoamericano," 54.

15. Freud, "Recommendations to Physicians," 357, 360.

16. Szendy, *Listen*, 122.

17. Glasser, *My Music Is My Flag*, 168.

18. Carpentier, "Del folklorismo musical," 44.

19. "One day Ogilvy observed that the program for industrial development was going well, with hundreds of new factories, but if they were not careful, they would turn that lovely island into an industrial park. What do you suggest? asked [Teodoro] Moscoso. 'Well, my native island Scotland was always regarded as a barbarous place until Rudolph Bing went to Edinburgh and started the Edinburgh Festival. Why don't you start a festival?' Moscoso made a note in his little diary. Three months later, he persuaded the cellist Pablo Casals to come to live in Puerto Rico and start the Casals Festival of Music. In one ad, instead of showing Pablo Casals just sitting there, playing the cello, which Ogilvy said would have been a 'visual bromide,' the photograph showed an empty room, with a cello leaning against a chair. The evocative scene, described by a creative man as 'lit by Vermeer,' became a classic." Roman, *The King of Madison Avenue*, 94–95. Although Moscoso was put in charge of the Festival, as head of the Compañía de Fomento Industrial, the official invitation came directly from the governor, Luis Muñoz Marín, acting on the advice of Abe Fortas, in 1955.

20. Berlant, "On the Case," 665.