

MARIO BAUZÁ: SWING ERA NOVELTY AND AFRO-CUBAN AUTHENTICITY

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Introduced to jazz in his native Cuba, Mario Bauzá (1911-1993) immigrated to New York City in 1930 to take part in its active scene as an instrumentalist, and, by enhancing pre-existing musical practices with his arranging prowess, played an important role in the formulation of Afro-Cuban jazz. The Havana native earned impressive credentials as a member of Chick Webb's and Cab Calloway's ensembles in the 1930s and 1940s. With these groups he completed on-the-job performance training, held his first position as a musical director in the United States, and composed Swing Era big band charts. His prominence as a jazz arranger, however, is the result of works he later designed for Machito and His Afro-Cubans, which capitalize on Cuban instruments and rhythms.

Many authors make reference to Bauzá's participation in both big band and Afro-Cuban jazz ensembles during the Swing Era, but in their limited prose they fail to detail accurately or quantify his contributions. I address this gap by illuminating differences between music from the Swing Era that utilizes Latin elements as a novelty and the arrangements of Bauzá that employ Afro-Cuban materials authentically. An accurate assessment of Bauzá's contributions to the creation of Afro-Cuban jazz will result from quantifying and qualifying the approach to Latin traditions in these two bodies of work and then realizing the similarities and differences between the two.