

The Butterfly Dance

Category: Legends and traditions

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Written by redpinar

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By Gerardo Ortega.

The dance called "Las Mariposas" was known in Cortés and La Grifa and extended to Las Martinas between 1794 and 1850. This manifestation, mimicking the French rondo or ballroom dance, musically transferred a syncretism of Walá-walá, Haitian song, and the dance, with a mixture of contradanza in zapateo and some movements of Afro influence, when the women opened their multicolored skirts, which justified the name of Las Mariposas Dance".

In fact, the synthesis that was taken to the Historical Monograph that I delivered completed in 1993 is being quoted. In the text itself, some unpublished research from the Center for Cuban Music Research, which claims to have been written in 1985, is cited earlier. In it, I recognize textual words used by me (and surely these researchers will recognize it in such a way, since they point out that they are based on "results of local research carried out in Pinar del Río province".

My initial work, in addition to accompanying the researchers who in 1980 worked on the Cultural Atlas, in the interviews with various informants of the territory, was written three pages, of which I still keep the original, includes the paragraph that now precedes the quotation that is made from my information and that I transfer here:

"The Butterfly was a dance of pictures, of linked walls, in which the women wore wide skirts adorned with ribbons, laces and entredós, when turning the women held the tips of the skirts with the fingers of both hands, simulating the open wings of a butterfly and for that reason the name of the dance is supposed to be given".and I remember that it was my main informant "Joseíto Lugo".

However, Felix Caceres, who occupied the position related to the Atlas in Sandino, was in charge of delivering to the provincial level the text that I allude to and deepen in it about the dance; explaining that its initial version arrived in that territory along with the French who, fleeing from the Haitian Revolution in 1892, arrived in Cortés and settled in that town and in Rancho de La Grifa, but that their black servitude (at the request of the local pontevedres and other settlers) had to populate an area on the "outskirts" of both localities; and for this they settled in Llopi.

He also explained that it was the black Haitians who began to popularize the Walá-walá there and later the French families and the others, Spanish and Creole; they were incorporating in their costume parties in La Grifa - already known since 1834 - some elements that

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~~Creole were mixing, of the hilarious dance that sometimes in cross and~~
other simple "bars" of four or more couples was danced.... for example, the four men in front of the four women move away and approach each other without intertwining in a contradanza, in zapateo. And throughout this initial part, sometimes, as in the Walá-walá, they come close "too much for public taste and decency" (the black slaves clashed their hips on one side and the other before separating); and then intertwined, each with his partner, they arrived until the final moment when they separated again without turning their backs; and in each of these steps the women beat their skirts, like butterflies that flutter.

In reality, this dance only remained in the memory of some octogenarians when we began the researches, but, it is significant the existence of other manifestations of this consubstantiation: as the fact of not finding a single black living in La Grifa in 1976 and no white in Llopi in that date; and the fact that the frangollo derived in the most exquisite cashew nougat of the Island and was produced in Llopi. They are indubitable samples of that mixture of races and cultures that in the zone took place for more than two hundred years... of that historical background arose the Dance of The Butterflies.