

Majino from Perico, and *Arará Savalú* from the city of Matanzas itself. Over the course of approximately two hundred years, each of these *Arará cabildos*, or religious houses, developed their own songs and rhythms to venerate the Foduces.

Arará songs and rhythms also exist outside of the Matanzas province, primarily in the capital city of La Habana. But this form of Arará is a further amalgamation of the three Matancero forms, borrowing and blending rhythms and songs from each *cabildo*. La Habana forms of Arará are an interesting cultural phenomenon in their own right, but in our opinion the heart of Dahomean culture in Cuba exists in the province of Matanzas.

During the latter third of the 20th century, as the country began to relax its views of religious practices in general and, specifically, African-derived religions, practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions began to emerge from secrecy. Music from the Lukumí faith, *Bantú* faith, and *Abakúa* faith slowly started to make their way into popular culture. The advent of government-funded folkloric ensembles with mission statements aimed toward demonstrating the breadth of traditions on the island certainly aided this public exposure. These groups performed Afro-diasporic music throughout the island, including a few selections from the Arará tradition. However, beyond these few pieces deemed acceptable for public stage performance, Arará maintained its secrecy far longer than the other religions, not emerging to the public until the last ten to fifteen years.⁷

Today, the Arará community is going through a full revitalization in Cuba, in part due to the more public nature of Arará's customs. A new generation is getting initiated through the sacred consecrations in Arará as opposed to Lukumí, creating new growth in Arará's numbers and a new interest in learning the songs and drums. With an upswing in younger practitioners comes the resulting adaptation of rituals for a new generation. Arará is still a living tradition, so as new members join the community, they bring their modern sensibilities with them. Over the course of our studies with Arará masters from both old and new generations, we have witnessed rhythms and songs adapt with the times. For that reason, among others explained at the end of this chapter, the contents of this book may not precisely resemble the music heard in an Arará Savalú *cabildo* depending on day and place. However, this text resembles the amalgamation of our studies as best as we can demonstrate up to this point.

Overview of book materials

The Savalú ceremonial structure

We have divided this book into several sections based on the typical needs of a Savalú musician participating in a traditional *tambor* (music ceremony). Therefore, as this introduction explains the overall structure of an Arará Savalú *tambor*, it also explains this book's format and vice versa. The remainder of this text conforms to this overarching structure, with explanations of these elements at the beginning of each respective section.

An Arará Savalú *tambor* contains three primary sections. It opens with an *Oru Seco*, meaning the drums play alone without singing. The *Oru Cantado* follows the *Oru Seco*, where drumming and singing combine to praise all the Fodu. Just as the ceremony ritualistically opens, it must also close, therefore a *tambor* has a specific cycle of songs and rhythms to complete a *tambor*.

The instruments and drumming techniques of an Arará Savalú battery

Arará Savalú drums

The Arará Savalú percussion battery consists of a large bell and five drums played in different combinations depending on the specific needs of each *toque*. However, no *toque* requires all five drums simultaneously. Therefore, a total of five musicians can play the battery and cover all the interlocking parts, switching drums periodically when necessary. Typically, it is the lead player who moves between drums, while the supporting players stay with their own drum.

⁷ As Michael Spiro explains in the forward, with his own exposure and experiences studying Arará.