



[Header image: The Mexican Band in New Orleans on December 1884. Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection.]

Title: *The Mexican Tinge: The Influence of Mexican Musicians and the Mexican Band in the Development of Early Jazz and Ragtime.*

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The African and Afro-Cuban rhythmic influences upon the development of jazz at the end of the nineteenth century have been [well documented](#). However, little attention has been paid to the contributions of Mexican and Afromexican musicians to this musical practice prior to what is celebrated in popular culture as the Jazz Age—the 1920s and 1930s. In this essay I explore some of the

musical contributions to the development of early jazz of Mexican musicians and the Mexican Band directed by Encarnación Payén during the turn of the century. The Mexican Band performed in various occasions at the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans (December 1884–June 1885), which commemorated the centenary of the first shipment of cotton from the United States to England. Despite the investment of the Mexican government in the design of the pavilion displayed at the Cotton Expo, which included José Ramón Ibarrola's [Octagonal Palace](#) for which Mexican dictator [Porfirio Díaz](#) himself provided design input, the performance of the Mexican Army's 8th Cavalry Military Band became the real "Mexican" success of the event. While the Mexican Band played in Mexico military tunes during official national celebrations, their repertoire also included habanera and waltz-style pieces, and the band also incorporated instruments like saxophones, oboes, among other wind instruments, that were not common at the time among orchestras neither in Mexico nor the United States.

Porfirio Díaz's regime (1876–1911, with a brief interregnum between 1880–1884) was characterized by the repression of peasant working classes in favor of estate owners, while also [setting the underpinnings of the early industrialization and modernization of the Mexican economy](#). Díaz's goal for the Cotton Expo was to enhance the commercial ties between Mexico and the United States, and the fact that the Mexican Band traveled to New Orleans was seen by Díaz only as a secondary element of the Mexican pavilion. However, when the Cotton Expo ended and director Encarnación Payén went back to Mexico, due to the success of the Mexican Band in New Orleans, as jazz historian Jack Stewart has shown in his series of articles about the band published in *The Jazz Archivist*, [Porfirio Díaz himself greeted Payén upon his return to Mexico and named him Minister of the National Conservatory](#).

The acceptance and successful performance of the Mexican Band was reflected by the fact that the band—according to historian [Janice Lee Jayes](#)—was invited to greet the arrival of the Liberty Bell at the New Orleans train station, where the band performed Dixie tunes. Thus “The Mexican Band,” as it became popularly known during the Cotton Expo, played an important musical role in New Orleans, where not only imperialistic and pre-industrial economies and cultural expressions collided, but also musicians from different ethnic backgrounds exchanged their musical expertise and ideas about musical performance. [John Storm Roberts](#), in his 1979 *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States*, shares an anecdote about Mexican saxophonist Leonardo Vizcarra (Mexico, 1860–New Orleans, 1923) who arrived with Payén’s band, stayed in New Orleans after the Expo and never went back to Mexico. Quoting Jack “Papa” Laine, leader of one of the earliest white jazz groups in New Orleans, Roberts says that, “Joe Viscara could hardly speak American, but that son of a bitch could handle a horn!” In his series of articles for *The Jazz Archivist*, Jack Stewart mentions that Vizcarra was probably the earliest New Orleans’ soprano saxophonist, and that Vizcarra played for Laine’s band for about twenty years, besides residing in various addresses in New Orleans that [“were good locations for a musician and music teacher, especially if he was playing at the theaters.”](#) This information about Vizcarra is only one aspect of the many ways in which Mexican musicians were active participants in the musical creation of the genres that during those years became jazz and ragtime.

Regarding the Mexican musical contributions to the development of ragtime, Stewart mentions in the same article that [“three-over-four” syncopation](#) (sometimes called “secondary rag”), which was extremely common in Mexican music of the late nineteenth

century—as in the piece “Aires Nacionales Mexicanos” which was played by the Mexican Band in New Orleans—is included in the performance of Paul Sarebresole’s “Rastabout Rag,” published in 1897, which was the first year of published ragtime. The “secondary rag” is a form of syncopation in which three notes are repeated several times over a four-beat underlying rhythm. As the notes are repeated, they change from upbeats to downbeats, thus the attack and the duration given to the notes tend to change, creating a syncopated effect.

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RASTABOUT RAG.

TWO STEP.

Composed by PAUL SAREBRESOLE.
Arr. by LAWRENCE DUHCLET.

Allegro.

The image shows a musical score for "Rastabout Rag" in 2/4 time. It features two systems of piano and bass staves. The first system includes dynamics like *ff* and *mf*. The second system includes *p*, *marcato*, and *ff*. The score is enclosed in a black border.

[“[Rastabout Rag](#),” composed by Paul Sarebresole (1897). Courtesy of the Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.]

The fact that jazz and ragtime historians accepted Jelly Roll Morton’s concept of “Spanish/Latin tinge,” without naming “Mexican” as a key element of this “tinge” can be explained due to the fact that at the time Mexican music, among other Latin American musical traditions, was understood simply as the music of the Spanish nations. It was until the second half of the twentieth century that jazz historians began to disentangle some of the subtle differences implied in the broad concept of Spanish music, which in fact simply points towards Spain and obliquely to the

Spanish/Latin American nations. While Afro and Afro-Cuban musical influences have been separated from the Spanish nations' musical traditions, little historical and theoretical work has been published to articulate the specificities of what I understand as the "Mexican tinge" in what we have come to understand as early jazz and ragtime. It was thanks to the specificities of this "Mexican tinge" that the Mexican Band and the idea of "Mexican music" became popular in New Orleans, to the extent that it was common to find music shows and local publishers selling sheet music advertised as "played at the World's Exposition at New Orleans by the Celebrated Mexican Military Band."



[Photo: Cover of the program of the Mexican Band performing at the Cotton Expo on December 9th, 1884. Courtesy of the New Orleans Public Library.]

After the Cotton Expo many of the members of the Mexican Band, like Vizcarra, stayed in New Orleans to join the first generation of jazz preceptors and musicians. Mestizo saxophonist Florencio

Ramos, like Leonardo Vizcarra, also arrived with the Mexican Band and never went back to Mexico. [In *Latin Jazz: the Other* \(2020\), Christopher Washburne](#) credits Mexican saxophonists Ramos and Vizcarra with introducing the saxophone to jazz, thus giving credit to Mexican musicians to the introduction of the instrument in the instrumental repertoire of early jazz bands.



[Photo: Florencio Ramos (saxophone, to the right) with the Fischbein-Williams Syncopators at the LaVida Dance Hall in 1923. Courtesy of the Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.]

The case of the Afromexican clarinet master brothers Louis “Papa” Tío (1862–1922) and Lorenzo Tío (1867–1908)—of creole-of-color background but born in the [Eureka Colony](#) near Tampico, Mexico—is of particular interest. The presence of Black people in Mexico has been underacknowledged since the colonial period as the [racial ideology of mestizaje](#) has dominated the ethnic/phenotypical paradigms not only in Mexico, but also across Latin America. In 2015 the Mexican National Institute of Statistics and Geography

(INEGI) included the ethnic identifier "Afromexican/Afrodescendent" for the first time in its history, reporting that at least 1.2 million people identified as "Afromexican." In American music historiography, the presence of Afromexicans has also been ignored, obscuring the historical contribution of Black Mexicans to making music both sides of the border.

Even though the Tíos didn't have any relationship with the Mexican Band and previous Tío family members had been musicians present in New Orleans, according to music historian and applied saxophone professor Charles E. Kinzer, "[the Tíos are perhaps the first significant pedagogues in the history of jazz in and beyond New Orleans.](#)" Lorenzo Tío's method of playing the clarinet, which involved the [Albert system](#), soft reeds, and a double-lip embouchure, was key in the development of [the jazz solo](#). His method allowed performers to follow more loosely the theme's original metrical harmony, allowing the performer to ignore some fragments of the melody to pursue an individual interpretation of it. Even though the Albert system has been widely replaced by the Boehm system, it is still used by clarinetists that perform Dixieland styles, such as hot jazz or traditional jazz.

The most advanced disciple of the Tíos was the son of Lorenzo: Lorenzo Tío Jr., born in New Orleans in 1893. He played the clarinet for the popular jazz band [Piron's New Orleans Orchestra](#). Due to its syncopated cadence the beginning of the 1923 hit record of Piron's Orchestra, "Bouncing Around," resembles the tunes of Mexican military music, thus suggesting the influence of both the idea of "Mexican music" and Mexican musicians in early jazz compositions. Moreover, [the three Tíos deserve credit for the introduction of solfeggio and classical music theory—among other musical skills—to ragtime, blues, and jazz in New Orleans.](#)



[Photo: Lorenzo Tío Jr. with the Piron's Orchestra, circa 1923. Courtesy of Red Hot Jazz Archive.]

Ragtime and jazz pioneer [W.T. Francis](#) (1867–1912), who became a known [Broadway composer and director](#), composed in 1885 a popular waltz-style dance with ragtime treble: "[El Nopal \(The Cactus\) Danza Mexicana](#)," part of broader interest in the idea of "Mexican music" and due to the popularity of the Mexican Band in New Orleans. Francis knew the ensemble well. In *Danzón* Alejandro L. Madrid and Robin D. Moore mention that Francis dedicated some pieces to Encarnación Payén's daughter. The New Orleans-based Anglo American music entrepreneur Junius Hart published "The Cactus" [along with other pieces by Francis that had Mexican titles or made specific reference to the Mexican Band](#). Hart also published a series of piano transcriptions of the repertoire of the band. He advertised this series, and his "Mexican music" in general, as "[all of that weird, sweet nature which characterizes the music of Mexico and \[has\] become justly popular](#)." Hart even advertised himself as "The First and Largest Publisher of Mexican Music in the United States," evidently taking advantage of the lucrative possibilities that the popularity of music with a "Mexican tinge" offered within the music industry of New Orleans.

The First and Largest Publisher of
MEXICAN MUSIC IN THE UNITED STATES,
JUNIUS HART,
 191 Canal and 7 and 9 Burgundy Sts., New Orleans, La.

"CELLO."
 A spirited composition of the Mexican style, very pleasing, and selling rapidly.
 ARRANGED BY W. T. FRANCIS PRICE 50 CENTS

"A MEDIA NOCHE."
 One of those soft and sweet melodies, which in some implies, "the middle of the night."
 ARRANGED BY W. T. FRANCIS PRICE 50 CENTS

"MEXICO GRAND WALTZ,"
 A beautiful composition, suitable for either parlor or concert.
 W. MARTINEZ PRICE 70 CENTS

"ROSES AND THORNS,"
 A purely Mexican Schottische which has captivated thousands.
 ARRANGED BY W. T. FRANCIS PRICE 50 CENTS

"MARIA MAZURKA,"
 Among the numerous Mazurkas now published this will take a conspicuous place.
 FRANCISCO J. NAVARRO PRICE 25 CENTS

"CASTANERA,"
 One of the greatest of Mexican Dances. The music is pretty, taking and remarkably effective.
 ARRANGED BY W. T. FRANCIS PRICE 15 CENTS

"EL NOPAL," (The Cactus.)
 This composition is very lively and brilliant and a magnificent concert piece.
 W. T. FRANCIS PRICE 50 CENTS

"CACTUS ('EL NOPAL') MAZURKA,"
 To our mind this is one of the best of the well-known authors works.
 W. MARTINEZ PRICE 50 CENTS

"CACTUS ('El Nopal') WALTZ,"
 A waltz of especial merit; sure to please students of good taste and appreciation.
 ARRANGED BY W. T. FRANCIS PRICE 50 CENTS

"MELANCHOLY HOURS,"
 This composition is plaintive and almost sad in its tone, but beautiful even in its sadness. Just out.
 ARRANGED BY W. T. FRANCIS PRICE 50 CENTS

"DANCE OF THE ANKLE,"
 A gem whose melodies are judiciously selected and suggestive of the name.
 W. T. FRANCIS PRICE 50 CENTS

These arrangements are all of that vivid, event nature which characterizes the music of Mexico and
 have become justly popular.
OVER 100,000 COPIES ALREADY SOLD.
 Most of them were a part of the Repertoire of the Great
MEXICAN NATIONAL BAND,
 Sent postpaid on receipt of price.

[Hart's advertisement of popular "Mexican Band" titles. Courtesy of the Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.]

Even though many of the score sheets published in New Orleans by Junius Hart have been digitized by the [Hogan Jazz Archive](#) of Tulane University, none have been recorded as of this writing. In 2018 [WWNO 89.9/New Orleans Public Radio](#) released an article on "The Mexican Band." Byron Asher, a local jazz musician, is reported saying that he'd heard about the legend of the Mexican Band, "but because there are no recordings of that band, had never heard them play." I felt a similar musical curiosity and anxiety when I first came across the music sheets at the Hogan Archive in 2012, but I couldn't find any recorded traces of those music sheets. Recording the "Mexican music" published by Hart would be both a form of tribute to the influence of Mexican musicians to early jazz and ragtime, besides a musical curatorial endeavor that

would make finally audible to contemporary jazz lovers what I imagine as the "Mexican tinge."



[Embedded video: "[Over the Waves](#)" performed by the Preservation Hall Jazz Band in 1971. "[Over the Waves](#)" is a waltz composed, and widely applauded in New Orleans during the Cotton Expo, by the nineteenth-century Indigenous Mexican composer [Juventino Rosas](#). The waltz became a must play for early jazz bands.]

REFERENCES

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Author Bio

Franco Laguna Correa has performed singing a cappella with street musicians, particularly of African descent, in Denver, Barcelona, Mexico City, and Sicily. He is an Interdisciplinary Research Associate at the University of Pittsburgh. Previously he was an Assistant Professor of Latinx Cultural Studies at the University of Denver. His personal site can be found [here](#), and he can be followed on Twitter at [@FrancoMilitia](#).