



MALECÓN BUENA VISTA

MARIO MC BY WOLFGANG WICK

reggaetón
and
hip-hop
in
HAVANA

RAPPER DO NOT LAUGH!

Mario Delgado Sotomayor, known as Mario MC, was born in Havana in June 1976. Birgit Bienhaus and Wolfgang Wick asked Mario MC, co-initiator of the project *Muraleando* in Havana and “idea provider” of the CD *Malecón Buena Vista*, how he managed to become a rap musician in October 2011.

BIRGIT BIENHAUS AND WOLFGANG WICK:
Mario, what does rap music mean to you and what is so special about it?

MARIO MC: First of all, I must say that I love rap music. It is the ideal way for me to express what is in my heart, what moves me. I want to pass that on. Rap plays a great part in my life; I make music to give advice to young people. I want to achieve a radical change in people's mind that have negative thoughts. The special thing about my music are its positive messages, good lyrics and endless rhymes. The most important thing is: I write the lyrics first and then I make the music. The lyrics convey the content; the music brings it to the mind of the audience. Rap is a complicated and complex style of music.

How did you get into rap music?

When I was 15 years old, my mother died. My father already left me when I was six. Suddenly I was alone and completely left on my own. There was no more perspective for me and suddenly everything seemed hopeless. I got together with people, who eventually weren't good for me and caused me problems. At that time I didn't realize this yet, that came only later. Finally I ended up in prison for minor offenses, where I had much time to think. I saw it as a real punishment for a wrong chosen life. I had to change my life. Moreover, I became conscious that there are many young people like me. Therefore, I took the decision to look for possibilities to give other people who had similar problems like me to give them a new purpose in life and to break fresh ground. I learned English, because I knew that I had more opportunities with the language. After my release I sat down together with Manuel Díaz Baldrich, a painter and designer from my hometown Lawton. Lawton is a district of Havana. There were many children and teenagers who were bored after school on the street. We wanted to give them meaning and support in their lives. They shouldn't have to experience and go through similar things like me. Moreover, on every street corner waste was piled high and was getting bigger, in general

the district didn't seem appealing. We thought about how we could on the one hand give the teenagers a meaningful organization of their leisure time and on the other hand beautify our neighborhood. So we founded in 2002 *Muraleando* which means as much as painting walls. We had to round up the next generation. Our idea was received enthusiastically and enjoyed wide approval. Gradually, colorful paintings adorned the streets of Lawton. The waste piles disappeared and in its place beautiful places arose to relax or just to look at. From old typewriters or disused car rims grew sculptures, real works of art, which were colorfully painted, finally brought color to the formerly drab streets. Eventually we came up with the idea to offer the children also music workshops. This was then my remit. I showed them how to feel music and how to express one's feelings in music. Rap and reggaetón seemed therefore ideal to me. After four years of music lessons I started recording the reggaetón songs of the children. So I came up with the idea also to produce my own songs. For me, I rather prefer rap/hip-hop, which is the same in Cuba. Unfortunately I had to cease the music recordings due to the lack of funds.

Do you get any money for *Muraleando*? How is it that you have produced CDs anyway?

No, *Muraleando* is completely volunteer work. Primarily, it is important for us to increase the quality of life in our neighborhood and we succeeded. That dream has come true. Since my music has never let me go I've teamed up with other rappers and reggaetóneros which are all very dedicated. They help and support each other. That's how I've met Rosa and Ashlie from Company Yoruba, who set up a small recording studio. Everyone has their own style. This is a real asset to me. I bring also the youth of *Muraleando* with other musicians together to give them new ideas and new experiences.

Mario, a question at the end: What do you wish for the future?

I would like to travel the world and give concerts where I want.

Wolfgang Wick is the initiator of the music project *Malecón Buena Vista* which promotes the artist initiative *Muraleando* in Havana. Read about the project, read about rap, reggaetón and hip-hop in Havana.

Cuba is revamping – gradually reforms are changing the socialist island. This is also reflected in the music. Rap, reggaetón and hip-hop represent the lifestyle of the young generation. The CD *Malecón Buena Vista* is a current sampler, on which young musicians from Havana present themselves. They love their country and all of them dream of performing once at the Madison Square Garden.

QUÉ TU DICES*

The Madison Square Garden in New York is called simply "The Garden" by insiders and is by self-declaration "the most famous arena of the world." Many legendary boxing matches have taken place here, but also concerts that have written music history. George Harrison gave his concert for Bangladesh here. John Lennon, ... Elton John, The Police or Billy Joel adorned their tour plans with gigs at "The Garden." Michael Jackson celebrated his 30th anniversary on stage in the rotunda in Manhattan. So it is no wonder, that even Cuban rappers, hip-hoppers or *reggaetóneros* and *reggaetóneras* dream of performing at the Madison Square Garden once in their life.

NO BABAS TÚ TRIUNFO, NO BEBAS TU VIDA*

The path to get there is becoming shorter, at least from the government side. The country is opening up. As of 2013 everyone can leave the country, who possesses a passport and visa – one of many reforms that are changing the socialist country step-by-step. The young Cuban music opposes the ubiquitous salsa and son tunes with a new sense of life. A crossover of traditional instrumentation and imported rhythms named after their Latin American and US-American role models of rap, reggaetón and hip-hop. "I make music to give advice to the young people. I wanted to effect a change in their head." says Mario Delgado Sotomayor, a rapper and hip-hopper from Havana named Mario MC. "I want to make the people think ... The unique thing about my music is the positive messages, good texts and an infinite amount of rimes." Like many of his colleagues he wants to convey messages, but is yet far off from the radical statements of his US-American paragons. Cuban rap, reggaetón and hip-hop songs seldom take a stance against the socialist government or their authority. The musicians often describe things cryptically which young people in Cuba miss or encourage improvements. The lyrics follow the high art of placing their criticism between the lines.

UNA ADIVINA CREADA CON TODOS ELEMENTOS*

None other than Harry Belafonte allegedly was the one who introduced Fidel Castro to the hip-hop culture. The Maximo Lider was impressed and extolled the music style to the "Avantgarde of the Revolution." Hip-hop and rap are part of the state culture in Cuba: since 1995 there is an annually hip-hop festival in Havana that attracts international artists, a state-owned record label, radio and television shows. Around 500 bands supposedly play music on the island, some of them, like the Orishas are internationally successful. Criticism is allowed as long as it is not regarded as counter-revolutionary.

Reggaetón music is seen as too commercial: too consum-oriented, passion for parties, provocative eroticism, too much escape from everyday life. In contrast to many rappers, who possess a musical education from a public musical school, the *reggaetóneros* and *reggaetóneras*, which is how the singers call themselves, are often autodidacts.

"I started offering music workshops to children as part of the district project named *Muraleando*. This then became sphere of activity," recounts Mario MC to the question of how he started with music. "I showed them how one can feel music and how one can express their feelings through music. Rap and reggaetón seemed to be ideal to me. After four years of music lessons I started to record the reggaetón songs of the children. That is how I had the idea to produce my own songs."

AAAAYYYY VE LUCHA POR TUS SUENOS*

The mixture of reggae, salsa, merengue and hip-hop was imbued in the 2000s with elements of the nationally typical timba, which arises from the Cuban son, known to us through the *Buena Vista Social Club*. This combination constitutes the typical Cuban reggaetón, also known as *cubaton*.

The transition from rap, reggaetón and hip-hop is often blurred in Cuba. Many musicians consider themselves as representatives of different music genres. "I'm a rapper and a reggaetón musician" explains José Alberto Jabiqué Vinet, another colleague of Mario MC.

* LINES FROM THE SONG "QUÉ TU DICES",
ROSITI-K AND EL MÁS KOMPLETO, COMPANY YORUBA, HAVANA

INSIDE COMPANY YORUBA, ZACOF574,
AFITO 19, LA HABANA, VIBORA / CUBA,
BT WOLFGANG WICK



Their music originates in provisional backyard house studios, lined with egg cartons and thick rugs; here they record their songs, burn them on CD's and do their own marketing. Only a few have access to the Internet. In the course of a trip to Cuba the idea was born to introduce this new young Cuban music to Germany. The tour organizer aventOURa supported this undertaking with the production of the CD Malecón Buena Vista. The mood of the musicians involved was enthusiastic. The project provides them with an opportunity which they have to a limited extent in Cuba: to make their music known outside of the borders of the country.

MURALEANDO PRESENTS RAP AND BREAKDANCE IN LAWTON / HAWANA



Reggaetón: The Cuban government considers the reggaetón music as too commercial. When the reggaetón fans can have their say, they wish for the independence from politics and long for freedom and a positive atmosphere. On the reggaetón dance floor it is often improvised. Although there are dance steps, which are similar to salsa, the man doesn't necessarily take over the lead. Each and everyone dances as they please: alone, in pairs or as a threesome. The most important rule is that there are no rules. Women and men have equal rights. The musicologist Geoffrey Baker calls this dance style "Politics of the Body."