

Featuring images from
The Vicki Gold Levi Collection at The Wolfsonian–FIU

and essays by Rosa Lowinger and Francis Xavier Luca Jon Mogul, editor Marlene Tosca, art director Lynton Gardiner, photographer Kara Pickman, copyeditor

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Cover images

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Photograph, **Dancers outside San Souci**, c. 1952 Gelatin silver print

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.1136

Director's Foreword

Tim Rodgers, Director, The Wolfsonian-FIU

Thanks to our Miami Beach location, we at The Wolfsonian have a close-up view of Cuba's changing relationship with the United States. But we are more than witnesses to unfolding events. We are also, due to the generosity of one collector in particular, stewards of an important part of the legacy of that relationship. Vicki Gold Levi's 2016 promised gift of photographs, tourist materials, memorabilia, and other items offers rich evidence of the economic, social, and cultural entanglement between Cuba and the United States before the 1959 revolution. These materials were the backbone of our 2016 exhibition *Promising Paradise*: Cuban Allure, American Seduction, the first large-scale show at The Wolfsonian that focused specifically on Cuba, and they are the basis of this book as well.

The significance of Vicki's gift extends very far beyond the exhibition and the book. Together with her earlier gifts to our collection, these items form an archive of considerable importance for research on Cuban culture. They are available both in our library and in our digital catalog, and have already proven of great interest both to advanced scholars and to our students at Florida International University (FIU). The gift comes at a particularly opportune moment, in fact, as FIU is making a substantial investment in promoting Cuban studies, as evidenced in the CasaCuba initiative. The Vicki Gold Levi Collection at The Wolfsonian can be one of the key intellectual assets supporting this development.

The book, like the 2016 exhibition, results not only from Vicki's gift, but from collaboration between The Wolfsonian's chief librarian, Frank Luca, and Rosa Lowinger, an art and architectural conservator and expert on Cuban popular culture. I am most grateful to both of them for contributing incisive essays to this book, building on their very productive work as co-curators of the 2016 exhibition. In addition, the project benefited very much from the skill and hard work of a number of Wolfsonian staff members—most of all, Lynton Gardiner's photography, Marlene Tosca's art direction and design, and Jon Mogul's editorial oversight. I would also like to thank Kara Pickman for her work as copyeditor.

Vicki Gold Levi's generosity is not limited to the gift of her collection. She has also provided significant financial support for the *Promising Paradise* exhibition and publication, as well as for our summer 2019 installation about Cuban illustrator Conrado Walter Massaguer. For their support of the 2016 exhibition, I am also grateful to Dr. Alexander Levi; Bacardi USA, Inc.; Arthur Murray International; Terra Group; Trina Turk, Mr Turk; Brickell Bank; Marsh & McClennan; AlG; BankUnited; and the Cuban Research Institute at FIU.



Photograph, Performance at Sans Souci, c. 1955 Monagas, photographer Gelatin silver print

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.1206

Note from the Collector

Vicki Gold Levi

I have been accused of being a hoarder, but I think of myself as a collector. Collecting images and artifacts has always been a passion of mine, a form of cultural anthropology. This passion started in my hometown, Atlantic City, and inspired a book about the city's history. I knew I had been infected by the collecting bug when I saw my plates, postcards, menus, chalk kewpie dolls, and Mr. Peanut relics on display at the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, part of an Atlantic City architecture exhibition. That experience inspired me to co-found the Atlantic City Historical Museum on the Boardwalk to house these treasures.

Strange as it sounds, Atlantic City led me to an exploration of Cuban culture. After buying a letter on eBay from a woman who rode the High Diving Horse, a water circus act in Atlantic City, I learned that she had taken the act to Cuba. Intrigued, I went on to find amazing advertising graphics on Cuba, and the link between these two places—the resort city on the Jersey coast, and the gem of the Caribbean—made Cuba a natural segue for me. I discovered a symbiotic relationship: not only did Americans export movies, architecture, and automobiles to the island, but Cuba sent its culture our way as well. Back in the 1950s, the Palladium Ballroom in New York City was bursting with energy as Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Jewish American "Mamboniks," and others danced the night away to the music of Machito, Tito Puente, and Tito Rodríguez.

The thrill of a new collectible lies in putting together pieces of a puzzle to discover a stimulating narrative. Following clues from letters, websites, books, and other collectors is exhilarating, especially when you unearth something completely unknown. Contributing to a body of knowledge that will inform those who come after you is a gratifying legacy.

I came to know Cuba through photographs of musicians, tobacco plantation workers, dancers, and Carnival performers, through travel brochures and hotel luggage labels, Art Deco magazine covers, and rum recipes. These poignant articles of Cuban life and tourism made the country come alive for me and led to a 2002 book, co-authored with famed art director Steven Heller, called *Cuba Style*. My fascination with Cuba did not end there. Since then I have traveled to Havana several more times and amassed 1,500 objects and photographs from all over the world, which I donated to The Wolfsonian–FIU. This gift resulted in the vibrant 2016 exhibition *Promising Paradise*, co-curated by Frank Luca and Rosa Lowinger and artfully designed by Richard Miltner. It is also the basis for this book.



During the era of Prohibition, lasting until 1933, illegal speakeasies in America infamously began serving cocktails concocted with cheap "bathtub" gin, so bitter that no amount of honey or fruit juice could mask the flavor—making Havana even more attractive for drinkers. As travel writer Basil Woon boasted in the 1920s, there was "no possibility of the liquor stocks in Havana ever running short." Originally consumed by slaves on plantations, sailors, and pirates in the seventeenth century, rum was rebranded as a gentleman's drink by the Bacardí family, whose firm filtered, distilled, and aged it in oak barrels. With a base of rum and cola, the "Cuba libre" was invented in the wake of the Cuban War of Independence and remained popular well into the twentieth century; but the drink that won tourists over was the daiquiri, a lime, sugar, shaved ice, and rum cocktail named for the eastern sugar-mill town where it originated.⁸

The most popular of Havana's watering holes was a no-frills, dimly lit place with a long mahogany bar, located near the city center. Numerous legends purport to explain how the establishment earned its name; according to Woon, the proprietor, José ("Joe") García Rio, quarreled with a local journalist, who retaliated by running an editorial urging the city's sanitation commission to look into "a place on Zulueta Street which should be called 'Sloppy Joe's.'" The name became an ironic marketing success, and advertisements for the bar were placed in every Cuban guidebook to ensure its popularity with American visitors. Another nearby bar and restaurant, El Floridita, was made famous by Ernest Hemingway, who declared its daiquiris the best in the country.

The wave of tourists that came with Prohibition spurred more American investment and Cuban highway and hotel construction. Within months of the law's enactment, the Biltmore hotel chain acquired the Spanish-Moorish Hotel Sevilla (1906), hiring the New York-based architecture firm Schultze and Weaver to expand it. The proprietors promoted the refurbished hotel with a "Winter in Cuba" campaign designed to entice revelers to ring in the New Year with champagne. 10 Another American firm, McKim, Mead and White, designed the grand Hotel Nacional de Cuba, which opened in December 1930 [fig. 3] Affording a commanding view of Havana Harbor, this hotel was operated by the American managers of the Plaza Hotel and eventually catered to so many American tourists and diplomats that locals nicknamed it la embajada americana. 11 Local architects also transformed Havana's skyline. Bacardí—Cuba's largest homegrown industrial enterprise commissioned the firm Fernández, Castell, y Menéndez to design an office tower for their headquarters in Havana. Erected in three hundred days and completed in 1930, this Art Deco masterpiece clad in terracotta tiles stood as the city's tallest structure. Topped by a bronze rooftop ornament that featured the company's logo of a bat with outstretched wings, the building also included a paneled mezzanine bar where visitors could sample the company's brands free of charge. 12

Fig. 3
Photograph, Cabana Sun Club and swimming pool, Hotel
Nacional de Cuba, c. 1950
Henry Wallace, photographer
Gelatin silver print
The Wolfsonian–FlU, The Vicki Gold Levi
Collection, XC2016.01.1.154

Affluent American visitors enjoyed playing golf and tennis, betting on horseraces, and lounging at stylish beach resorts by day, and spent their evenings dancing and sipping daiquiris at the rooftop garden of the Hotel Sevilla-Biltmore. Lent and Easter tended to fall at the height of the winter tourist season; however, by the 1920s the actual dates of the associated Carnival celebrations and parades were occasionally shifted a week or two in order to ensure the street festivals and processions took place during the tourist season's busiest weeks. Havana offered more hedonistic thrill-seekers year-round burlesque and striptease acts, and other more explicit entertainment venues where the "salaciously-inclined may witness startling scenes in the flesh or by means of moving pictures." Habaneros also began encountering more budget-conscious travelers among the six hundred thousand Americans who came between 1928 and 1932.

Cuban artists and graphic designers played an important role in both reflecting and shaping American and Cuban perceptions of each other during these early encounters. As North American visitors poured into Havana, the Cuban Tourist Commission hired local illustrators such as Conrado Walter Massaguer to portray them as debonair in their advertisements; on the covers of popular Spanish-language magazines, however, Massaguer and other artists caricatured the "migratory ducks" as less than handsome



Sheet music cover, Let's Go to Cuba (Before They Drink the Darn Place Dry), 1920 Jack Darrell, lyricist and composer Jack Darrell Publishers, New York, publisher

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.1224

Fig. 2



Fia. 1

Gilbert, lyricists

New York, publisher

Collection, XC2016.01.1.987

Sheet music cover, The Peanut

Marion Sunshine and L. Wolfe

Lawrence Kempton, arranger

Edward B. Marks Music Co.,

The Wolfsonian-FIU. The Vicki Gold Levi

Vendor (El Manisero), 1930

Moisés Simons, composer

Cuba and the United States were both shaped by the close cultural ties they established between 1919 and 1959. As Havana marketed itself as a sophisticated "Monte Carlo of the Western Hemisphere" to attract tourists, Cuban performers were creating rhythms and dances that swept through the United States and Europe and transformed popular music.

By the 1920s Havana resounded with septets, sextets, and smaller conjuntos that played in bars and open-air cafés, many in the vicinity of the Hotel Sevilla-Biltmore, which was frequented by American tourists. Amona those who heard these groups was George Gershwin, who visited Cuba in 1932 and that year included four bars of composer Ignacio Piñeiro's hit sona "Échale salsita" (c. 1930) in his fifth symphonic work, Cuban Overture.1 Havana's orchestras and musical stars were also heard on Cuban radio stations that opened in 1922, only two years after Pittsburgh's KDKA became the first commercial radio station in the United States. As American musical scouts began arriving on the island, many of these artists were regularly playing on Broadway.

The American craze for Cuban music is often linked to the song "El manisero" (The Peanut Vendor), composed by Moisés Simons. [fig. 1] It debuted in the United States on April 26, 1930, when the house orchestra of Havana's Gran Casino Nacional de Marianao, led by Justo ("Don") Azpiazu, presented it at the Palace Theatre on Forty-Seventh Street and Broadway in New York. The song became an overnight hit. Azpiazu staged it again that year before a soldout crowd at New York's RKO Coliseum, with the band in ruffled-sleeved Cuban shirts using cocktail shakers filled with lead shot as maracas and the silky-voiced lead singer Antonio Machin making his entrance pushing a peanut cart. Probably few Americans understood the salacious double entendre of the lyrics, which not-so-subtly urged women to taste the vendor's peanut cone; nonetheless, the first American recording, released by RCA Victor, sold over a million copies. Dozens of American musicians, including Louis Armstrong, Guy Lombardo, Stan Kenton, and Duke Ellington, recorded their own versions.

and response of street vendors' cries), the music and the dance style that went along with it became known as "rhumba." Actual Cuban rumba (in Cuba there is no h in the word) entailed a series of fast Afro-Cuban rhythms danced to percussion. American-style rhumba was essentially a foxtrot set to Latin music.² Its most ardent promoter was Spanish-born Cuban bandleader Xavier Cugat, who in 1931 was hired to lead the house orchestra at New York's Waldorf Astoria. "[Rhumba] made those who usually only listened get up and dance," wrote Cugat in his 1948 autobiography Rumba Is My Life.³ The dance style quickly became an American staple, taught by schools including Arthur Murray. At the 1933 Chicago World's Fair, the Cuban dance pair René and Estela (René Rivero Guillén and Ramona Ajón) helped popularize it with shows that integrated some of traditional Afro-Cuban rumba's more elaborate steps into the American version of the genre.

Though the rhythm of "El manisero" was a son pregón (a type of song based on the call



The rhumba craze soon extended to Hollywood, where dozens of movies set in Havana were produced for American audiences in the 1930s through '50s. Most of these films were light on plot and heavy on music and dance numbers. Many featured Cuban stars like Cugat and two of his discoveries—the vivacious performer Miguelito Valdés, who introduced the conga rhythm to the American stage, and a "young, mild-mannered handsome Cuban vocalist from Santiago [de Cuba] named Desi Arnaz."4

One of the earliest Cuban-themed films was director W. S. Van Dyke's The Cuban Love Song (1931). The story follows an aristocrat serving in the U.S. Marine Corps (Lawrence Tibbett) who falls in love and fathers an illegitimate child with a Cuban street vendor played by Lupe Vélez. In one scene, Vélez provides her paramour—and the American audience with a fictionalized origin of "The Peanut Vendor," telling him it began as a lullaby whose lyrics she adapted to help sell her peanuts; her crooning costar turns the song into a duet.

Marion Gering's Rumba (1935) tells the story of a love affair between a wealthy American tourist (Carole Lombard) and a poor but ambitious dancer, played by George Raft, who aspires to open a nightclub of his own. Snubbed by the socialite, he plans to seduce and abandon her in revenge—that is, until the couple's romantic impulses take over. [fig. 2] In a life-imitating-art moment, Raft would later become the greeter at the Hotel Capri's casino in Havana.

Hollywood, publisher The Wolfsonian-FIU. The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.726

Paramount Productions, Inc.,

Leaflet, Rumba, 1935

Fig. 2



By the early 1950s American dance charts were filled with mambo songs, including Perry Como's "Papa Loves Mambo" and Rosemary Clooney's "Mambo Italiano" (both 1954). [fig. 5] Vaughn Monroe's "They Were Doin' the Mambo" was reported to be RCA Victor's bestselling record in 1954, the same year that Newsweek, Time, and the New York Times Magazine published articles on "mambomania." 6 Novices flocked to dance academies to learn the style, and dozens of books decoded its impossibly complex moves. In 1953 composer Enrique Jorrín and his Orquesta América introduced a simplified rhythm that was more strongly marked and less syncopated. The tune came to be known as cha-cha-cha after the shuffling sound made by the dancers' feet. The popularity of rhumba, Afro-Cuban jazz, mambo, and cha-cha-cha inspired Cuban-themed nightclubs across the United States.

Postwar Hollywood spotlighted these old and new Cuban rhythms in musicals such as Richard Whorf's Luxury Liner (1948), starring the Xavier Cugat Orchestra and American actress Jane Powell, who performed "The Peanut Vendor" with operatic trills. Promoting Franklin D. Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy south of the border, John H. Auer's Pan-Americana (1945) featured Cugat's protégé Miguelito Valdés and popularized the Afro-Cuban homage to the Santeria deity Babalú Ayé through a song written by Margarita Lecuona—"a not-very-close relation" of the famous Cuban composer, Ernesto Lecuona.8 In the 1950s the same tune became the signature of Ricky Ricardo, the fictional bandleader played by Desi Arnaz in the successful American television series I Love Lucy (1951–57). Arnaz's first film appearance was in Holiday in Havana (1949). [fig. 6] Capitalizing on the popularity of the 1950 Broadway musical Guys and Dolls—itself used to promote travel to Cuba—MGM produced and Joseph L. Mankiewicz directed a film version, which was released in 1955 and starred Marlon Brando, Jean Simmons, Frank Sinatra, and Vivian Blain. In it, Brando plays a high-rolling gambler who bets he can convince an uptight missionary to dine with him in Hayana, the "sin capital of the hemisphere." The tropical atmosphere, drinking, and dancing inevitably loosen her inhibitions, transforming the pair into lovers. [figs. 7, 8] The director of Rock Around the Clock, Fred F. Sears, released the film Cha-Cha-Cha Boom! (1956), in which an American talent scout brings Pérez Prado to New York, where he introduces mambo to the dance-club scene. The gritty film noir Affair in Havana (1957), directed by Laslo Benedek, is remembered mostly today for a scene in which young Cuban singer Celia Cruz made her Hollywood debut.

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The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.1230





Fig. 6

Lobby card, *Holiday in Havana*, 1949

Columbia Pictures Corporation, Los Angeles, publisher

The Wolfsonian–FIU, Gift of Francis Xavier Luca and Clara Helena Palacio Luca, XC2016.02.3.2

Fig. 7

Advertisement, Heading for Havana: Fly the DC-6 Star NonStop, from The New Yorker, November 17, 1951 National Airlines, Miami, publisher

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.899

Fig. 8

Film still, *Guys and Dolls*, 1955 Gelatin silver print

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.900







Brochure, *Havana*, 1950 Farr Tours, Miami Beach, publisher

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.1029

Painting, *La rumba* (also known as *Bailando rumba*), 1928 Jaime Valls (Díaz) (Cuban, b. Spain, 1883–1955), artist Oil on canvas

Ransola Ruggiero Collection, Miami Beach, Florida



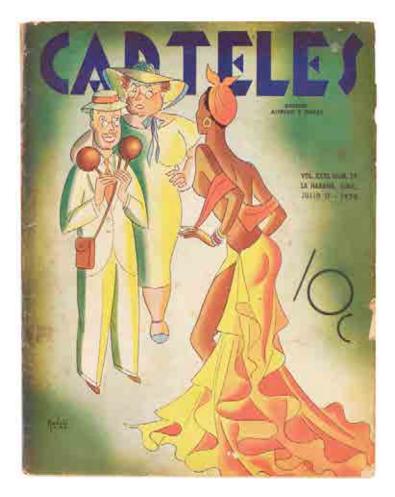


Periodicals, Carteles

February 21, 1932 Jaime Valls (Díaz) (Cuban, b. Spain, 1883–1955), cover illustrator

July 17, 1938 Andrés García Benítez (Cuban, 1916–1981), cover illustrator

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2002.11.4.314.3, XC2016.01.1.929

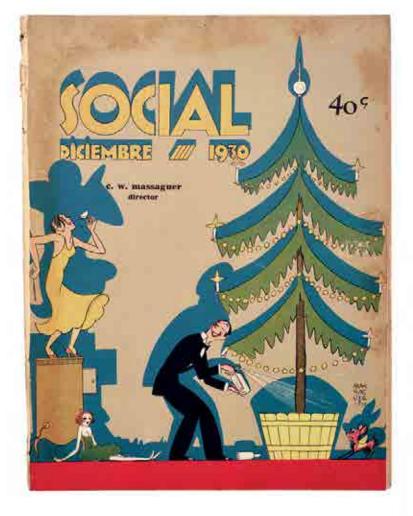




Periodicals, *Social*, October 1924 and May 1927 Conrado Walter Massaguer (Cuban, 1889–1965), cover illustrator

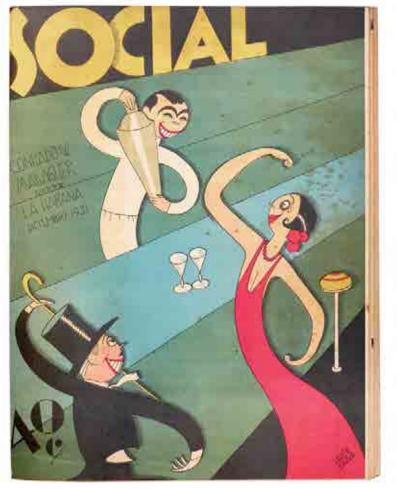
The Wolfsonian–FIU, Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Loan, XM2000.115.22, XM2000.45.3





Periodicals, *Social*, December 1930 and December 1931 Conrado Walter Massaguer (Cuban, 1889–1965), cover illustrator

The Wolfsonian–FIU, Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Loan, XM2000.45.10, XM2000.115.23





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Photograph, Television personality Ed Sullivan at the Gran Casino Nacional, c. 1950 Gelatin silver print

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.51b





Photograph, **Roulette table** at a Havana casino, c. 1957 Gelatin silver print

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, TL2018.13.7

Coaster, George Raft Invites You to the Breathtaking Casino de Capri, c. 1958

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.725

Photograph, Cuban singer Fredesvinda García ("La Freddy"), Casino de Capri entrance, c. 1957 Gelatin silver print

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.844





Photographs Gelatin silver prints

Gloria Normanda ("El Ciclon Dominicano"), pointing to her sign at the Pennsylvania, c. 1957

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.31

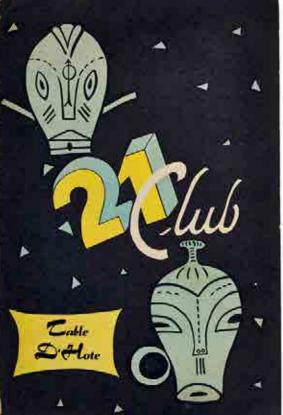
Dancers, c. 1955

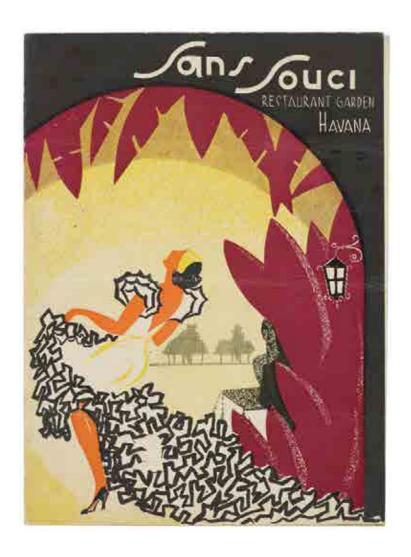
Vicki Gold Levi private collection, TL2018.13.3





The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.732





Menu, **Sans Souci Restaurant Garden, Havana**, c. 1950

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2002.11.4.130

Advertisement, *Montmartre*, c. 1955

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.791.2





Postcard, Eden Concert Night Club, Habana, c. 1935

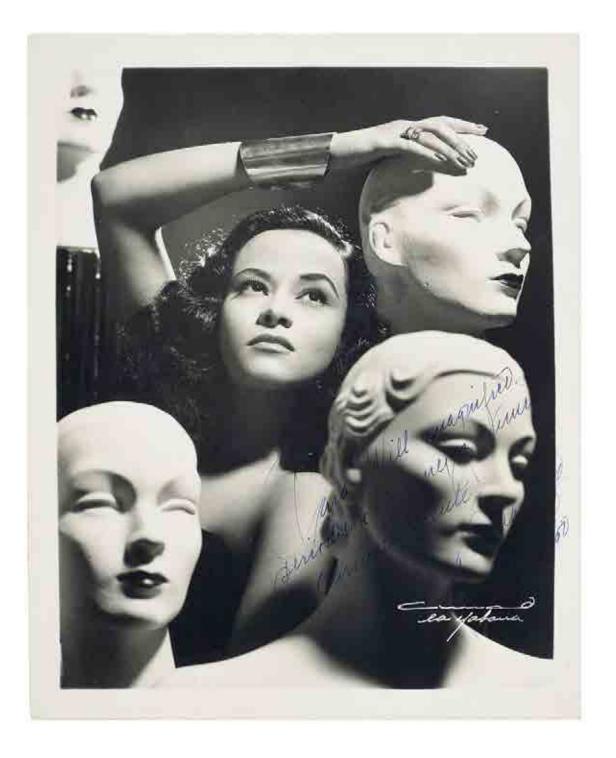
This whimsical souvenir allowed the purchaser to insert a finger in each hole to make the entertainer's "legs" dance.

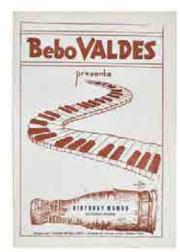
The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.729

Photograph, Dancer Olga Chaviano, c. 1955 Armand (Armenak Arzrouni; b. Ottoman Empire, 1901–1963), photographer Gelatin silver print

A star at Sans Souci, Olga Chaviano was also purported to be the lover of the casino's mob boss, Norman Rothman.

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.87





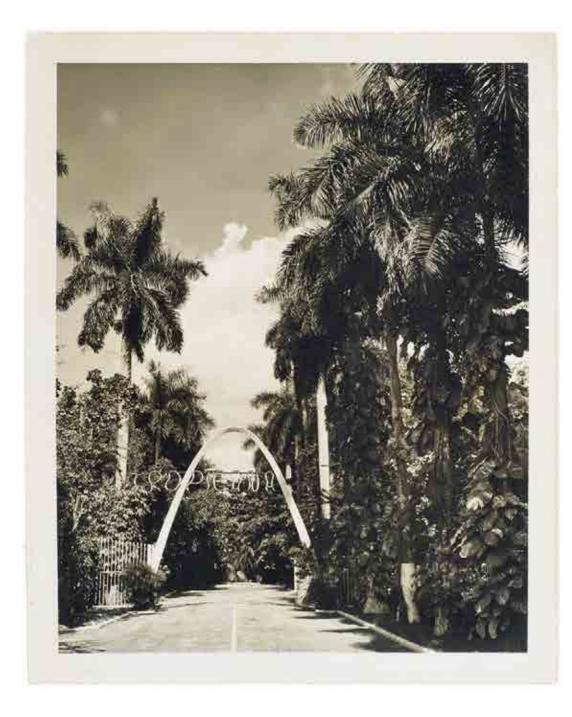


Announcement, Bebo Valdés presenta Birthday Mambo, Batanga Mambo, c. 1955 Valdes Music Corp., Havana, publisher

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.923

Photograph, Tropicana entrance, c. 1958 Vicente Muñiz (Cuban, 1917–2007), photographer Gelatin silver print

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.88

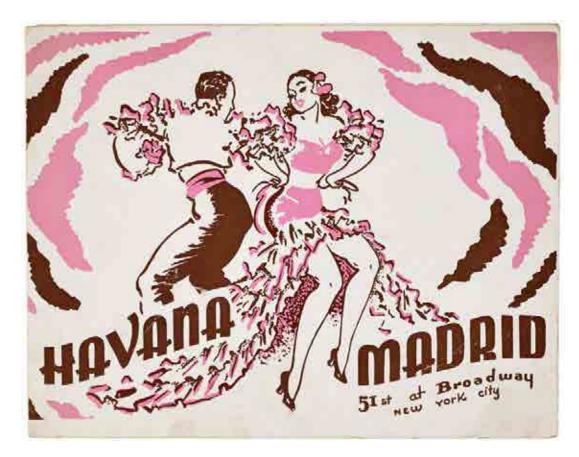




Photograph, Diosas de carne (Goddesses of the Flesh), 1958 Gelatin silver print

This production, choreographed by Rodney and based on the women of Greek literature and mythology, paid tribute to female sexuality.

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.1169



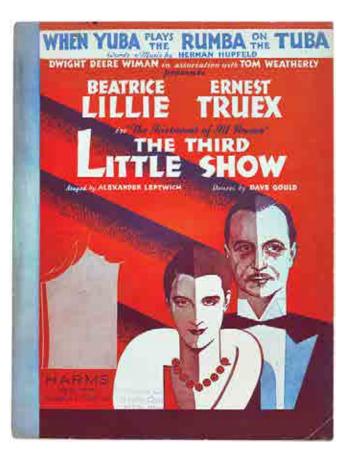


The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.768

Photograph, Elba, Sirelda, Ebano, and Leyte (left to right) of the Cuarteto Facundo performing at the Chateau Madrid, New York, 1953 Osvaldo Salas, photographer Gelatin silver print

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.260





Sheet music cover, When Yuba Plays the Rumba on the **Tuba**, 1931 Herman Hupfeld, composer and lyricist Harms, Inc., New York, by

arrangement with Robbins Music Co., publisher

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.1001

Announcement, Marcel Ventura Presents Ernesto Lecuona, Cuba's Foremost Pianist Composer, 1948

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.1010







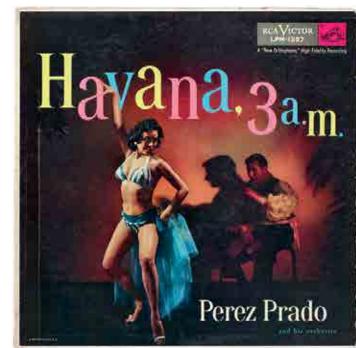


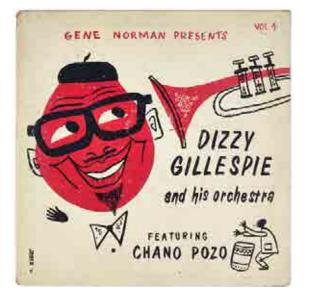
Machito at the Palladium, 1960 United Artists, United Kingdom, producer

Arthur Murray Favorites: Mambos Personally Recommended for Dancing by Arthur Murray, 1951 Capitol Records, Los Angeles, producer

Havana, 3 a.m., Pérez Prado and His Orchestra, 1956 RCA Victor, New York, producer

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.1353, .1306, XC2002.11.4.357.5





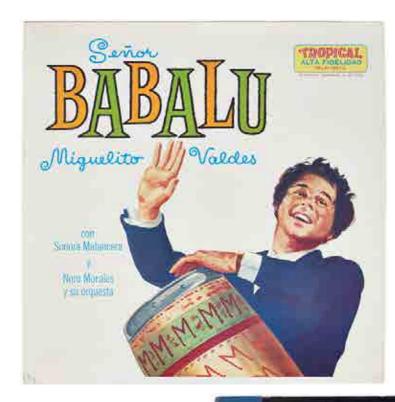
Album covers

Dizzy Gillespie and His Orchestra, Featuring Chano Pozo, 1954 John Brandt, cover designer Gene Norman Presents, producer

2nd Afro Cuban Jazz Suite, Chico O'Farrill, c. 1952 Norgran Records, Los Angeles, producer

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.1332, .1331







Señor Babalu, Miguelito Valdes, c. 1950 Seeco Records, Inc., New York, producer

Babalú and Seven Other Favorites by Desi Arnaz and His Orchestra, 1953 RCA Victor, New York, producer

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.1335, XC2002.11.4.357.1



HOLLYWOOD FILMS & MUSICALS



Advertising card, A la Habana me voy (Weekend in Havana), c. 1941 Lit. Cantin, S.A., Madrid, printer

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2016.01.1.1243

Sheet music cover, Cuban Love Song, 1931 Herbert Stothart, Jimmy McHugh, and Dorothy Fields, lyricists and composers Robbins Music Corporation, New York, publisher

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Vicki Gold Levi Collection, XC2002.11.4.162

