

# *William Anthony Colón Román*

*Salsa has many roots: the Son of Cuba, the Mambo of the Palladium, 1950s Cha Cha Chá, Puerto Rican Bomba and Plena and so much more from the Afro-Spanish-Caribbean diaspora. But the root buried the deepest tells the tale of a generation of young Latinos, the children and grandchildren of immigrants, raised in El Barrio, in New York, in 1960s America.*

*William Anthony Colón Román was born in the South Bronx in 1950 to US-born parents of Puerto Rican descent. Though his roots were refreshed by frequent stays at the family farm back on the island, Willie was and is unequivocally, much like Salsa, quintessentially Newyoricán. Colón makes the relation between diaspora and Caribbean homeland the central theme of his work, particularly in his 1971 Christmas album, Asalto Navideño.*

*He began playing the trumpet at age fourteen, clad in second-hand “old man” suits, complete with a painted mustache and a cigar. He played trumpet and then trombone at seedy local clubs, part of a ragtag movement known as Latin Boogaloo. Much like his friends, he’d grown up with the sounds of Cuban and Puerto Rican classics, the Mambo and the Cha Cha Chá, and like them was also deeply steeped in Rock and Roll: Smokey and the Miracles, the Temptations, Elvis Presley. They brought these sounds together in Boogaloo.*

*Their innovation was met with skepticism by the established musicians of the 40s and the 50s. “Tito Puente, and others used to make fun of the young groups,” said Colón. “They said... we knew nothing. That we shouldn’t bring different styles together... But for those of us who had grown up in the Barrio listening to all these influences, there was no contradiction.”*

*In 1967, Colón, then only 16 years old, was signed by a new label, Fania Records, created by Dominican bandleader Johnny Pacheco and an Italian entrepreneur, Jerry Masucci. His band featured a raw aggressive sound that appealed to young, urban Salsa fans.*

*Colón was soon put to work with a newly arrived Puerto Rican, Héctor Lavoe. From their first album El Malo, a surprising success promoted with a gangster’s edge, Colón and Lavoe went on to create some of the most memorable music of Salsa. “I had the Bronx street stuff going and he had that country Puerto Rican folkloric thing, you know, and it was a great combination,” says Colón.*

*Colón stopped touring in 1973 to dedicate himself to producing records, but his collaborations continued to deepen the popularity and reach of Salsa. In 1978, he joined with Panamanian singer-songwriter Rubén Blades in a seminal album, Siembra, which for two decades remained the number-one selling album in the history of Salsa. With its rousing social commentary and unconventional sound, Siembra set the Salsa world on fire.*

*In September 2004, Colón received the Lifetime Achievement Grammy Award from the Latin Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. He has served as the chair of the Association of Hispanic Arts, in addition to serving as a visiting professor and receiving honorary degrees for music and humane letters at various universities. He remains active, filling stadiums and concerts halls throughout Latin America.*