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Rafael Hernández and the Puerto Rican Legacy of the 369th Regiment's Harlem Hellfighters

BY ELENA MARTÍNEZ

Over a decade ago, I became interested in the story of the Puerto Rican musicians and the World War I Harlem Hellfighters Regimental Band and their influence on jazz music, after finding scholar Ruth Glasser's extraordinary book, *My Music is My Flag*, in a Smithsonian Museum bookshop and then viewing the exhibit, *RAICES: The Roots of Latin Music*, curated by Louis Bauzó and Roberta Singer at the Museum of the City of New York. It was such an incredible story that I was surprised I hadn't heard about it elsewhere. I found that in some circles the African American component of this history was well known, but the Puerto Rican history was either ignored or disregarded, which is a shame because it adds another layer to an already fascinating tale. For instance, in Ken Burns' serial documentary, *Jazz*, during the episode recounting the story of the Harlem Hellfighters, never once were the roles played by the 18 Puerto Ricans mentioned. It is especially disturbing, because one of the Puerto Rican musicians was a young Rafael Hernández, who would become Puerto Rico's—and Latin America's—greatest composer. I think this exclusion reflects a tendency to look at different issues, cultural or social, in terms of either *Black* or *White*, and musically speaking, this leaves out Latinos or relegates them to ethnic genres such as salsa and *nortño*. Ethnomusicologist Deborah Pacini Hernández has commented how numerous scholars "...have begun breaking down such essentialist notions

by providing more complex and nuanced views of the musical practices of Latinos, demonstrating that for decades they have engaged extensively with US mainstream popular musical styles" (Pacini Hernández 2000, 71). So, in search of this history and to pay homage to those rarely mentioned musicians, I have delved, along with musician Bobby Sanabria, into the Hellfighter's Latino past to find ways to bring this story to light.

Rafael Hernández— Beginnings

Rafael Hernández was born October 24, 1891, in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, to Afro-Puerto Rican tobacco workers. His grandmother inspired him and his three siblings, Victoria, Rosa Elvira, and Jesús (Pocholo), to take an interest in music. Rafael learned the cornet, trombone, *bombardino* (small concert tuba known as a euphonium), guitar, violin, and piano. Jesús played clarinet, and Victoria was an accomplished violinist, cellist, and pianist. Not surprisingly, the siblings came from the town that has been called "*El pueblo donde hasta las piedras cantan*" ("The town where even the rocks sing").

Rafael's professional musical career started in 1914, when a Japanese circus, El Circo Kawamura, passed through his hometown on a tour of Latin America. The Kawamura Brothers had heard of Hernández's musical abilities and hired him to tour the island with them. Upon arriving in San Juan, Rafael made connections and began playing in various bands including *la*

banda municipal (the municipal band), which was directed by Manuel Tizol (the uncle of valve trombonist Juan Tizol, who would later play in Duke Ellington's band and compose jazz standards such as *Caravan*), as well as playing violin in the Orquesta Sinfónica. It was at this time that Rafael began writing and composing songs in earnest.

James Reese Europe

In 1917, 26-year-old Rafael met the renowned African American bandleader James Reese Europe. This meeting drastically

Filmmaker Ken Burns has had a less than stellar history documenting Latinos. His 18-hour documentary, *Baseball* (1994), featured six minutes on Latinos, at a time when, although with less representation than today, Latinos still made up 20 percent of the players (Castro 2013). Latinos have been a part of jazz's history since its beginnings in New Orleans, but the 2001 *Jazz* serial was 19 hours and had less than four minutes devoted to Latin jazz (Alvear 2007; Gonzalez 2007); and his *The War* (2007), about World War II, didn't feature any Latinos, although a half million served in that war, and 13 were awarded Medals of Honor. This prompted the group Defend the Honor to protest, and Burns eventually tacked on some segments about Latino and Native American service in that war.

changed Rafael's life and brought him into contact with people and events that would make musical history. James Reese Europe was a highly regarded bandleader in New York City. In 1910, he had founded the Clef Club in Harlem, which functioned as a union and booking agency for African American musicians who were ignored by the American Federation of Musicians. In 1912, Europe started an orchestra of over 100 musicians, and the following year the orchestra was the first Black group to play Carnegie Hall. Europe's prowess as a bandleader and conductor was later established with mainstream audiences, when he became the musical director for Irene and Vernon Castle, the dance partners who were responsible for igniting the tango craze in the United States prior to World War I, in what was North America's first love affair with Latin music and dance.

As the US was about to enter World War I, Europe signed up for service and became part of the 15th Infantry Regiment of the New York National Guard (on June 2, 1913, the governor of New York signed a bill that authorized the creation of the regiment, which was New York's first Black National Guardsman troop, and on June 16, 1916, the regiment was formed). Though it was a Black regiment, it had a white commander, Colonel William Hayward, who was a military music enthusiast. Hayward's dream was to have a regimental band that would bring prestige to the regiment, as "the best damn brass band in the United States Army." Europe, now a lieutenant, was assigned to assemble and direct this band. It included Harlem dancer Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, who together with Noble Sissle (he would later gain fame as a jazz composer) were assigned as drum majors; Charles "Lucky" Roberts, the stride piano player who had occasionally played in Europe's Clef Club Orchestra for the Castles; and Buddy Gilmore, who was recognized as one of the first jazz drummers in the modern sense. Other notables in the regiment included the baseball player Spottswood Poles of the New York Lincoln Giants and the popular vaudeville star

Bert Williams. Williams served as captain and inspector of small arms with the 15th Regiment during their recruitment period in New York before they left for active duty, but according to his biography, "Not yet an American citizen—he would be naturalized in 1918—he would remain in the States" (his family had immigrated from the Bahamas) (Forbes 2008, 271). This shouldn't have made a difference, because during WWI 18 percent—almost 1 in 5—soldiers were immigrants. The US Army was not prepared to enter a major war (at the time, its armed forces were ranked 17th in the world), and everyone was needed. On May 9, 1918, Congress passed an amendment to the naturalization laws so that non-citizen soldiers who served in the war would become citizens without the five-year residency previously required (Laskin 2010, 167). There were so many immigrant soldiers that the Military Intelligence Section established the Foreign-speaking Soldier Section (Ford 2001, 13). After the war, 280,000 immigrant soldiers became US citizens, because they had served in the armed forces.

An infantry band normally consisted of 28 individuals, but for the music that he wanted to play, Europe felt that the minimum wouldn't work, and due to his standing in the musical community, he was permitted to recruit 40 musicians. At one point, the regimental band reached 65 musicians, but most were not actual soldiers, and many were unwilling to enlist. In addition, Europe had recruited Black musicians from around the United States, but after some rehearsals, Europe realized the clarinet section was weak. He needed these players on short notice, and they had to meet three requirements: they had to read music well, be disciplined, and most importantly, had to be Black.

Puerto Rico

Europe traveled to Puerto Rico where he recruited 18 Afro-Puerto Ricans from the island's municipal bands. How did Europe know he could find well-trained musicians on the tiny island of Puerto Rico? There

are a few possible reasons. The respected Puerto Rican bass and tuba player, Rafael Escudero had played in Europe's Clef Club Orchestra, and there were also Puerto Rican musicians in Europe's Syncopated Society Orchestra, which played for the Castles, so Europe would have been familiar with the quality of musicians from Puerto Rico (Thompson and Moreno de Schwartz 2008, 3). The Victor Talking Machine Company had been in San Juan in early 1917 on a recording tour through Latin America, and Manuel Tizol's band (whom Rafael Hernández had played for in San Juan) had recorded for them. Europe also recorded with Victor, so through the record label, he would have been aware of Tizol and the musicians who performed with him (Glasser 1995, 55). Tizol was known on the music scene in New York, because he regularly contracted orchestras from New York to play in San Juan. In fact, he likely had preselected some potential musicians for Europe prior to Europe's visit to the island; therefore, Rafael would certainly have been on the list of candidates (Thompson and Moreno de Schwartz 2008, 4).

The multitalented Rafael Hernández played trombone for the regimental band, an important instrument in military and early jazz bands. His musical talent was noticed, as the regiment's trombone section "was the outstanding feature of the band" (Gracyk 1996, 26). Other musicians who were recruited from Puerto Rico included clarinetists Jesús Hernández, Rafael's brother; Rafael Duchesne Mondríguez, who also played with Manuel Tizol's municipal band in San Juan and came from a leading musical family on the island; and Gregorio Felix, who would play with Fess Williams and his Royal Flush Orchestra for the grand opening of the Savoy Ballroom in 1926 (Serrano 2012, 260–262).

The reason there were many well-trained musicians of African ancestry on the island, in large part, comes from the tradition of the *bandas municipales* common throughout Latin America. These bands were modeled after military bands and would play in the main square or plaza of a

Puerto Rican Harlem Hellfighters

Every source lists a different number of recruits from Puerto Rico. Noble Sissle's memoir states Europe "enlisted fifteen of the best Porto Rican musicians" (Sissle 1942, 51); a document from the James Reese Europe Collection at the Schomburg Manuscript Collection lists 18 musicians; and the ship manifests on the Ellis Island Passenger Search, www.ellisland.org, also lists 18 musicians arriving on at least three different ships, but a couple of names are different from the document in the Schomburg collection. According to the Ellis Island passenger manifests, they came in three groups to New York. The first group came onboard the *SS Caracas*, along with Europe, on May 5, 1917, and were enlisted the same day they arrived in New York City on May 11. The second group included Rafael Hernández and his brother, along with Eligio Rijos, and they arrived July 23. The last group had Duchesne (the nephew), Cruz, and Sánchez and arrived on August 6 aboard the *SS Brazos*. In this last group, not all the names coincide with the list below, and one from the list, Ramón Hernández, has an enlistment date when the regiment would have already been en route to Europe.

The 18 Puerto Rican Harlem Hellfighters are listed here (James Reese Europe Collection, 1847–1996, Box 1, Folder 1):

Name	Service No.	Enlistment Date	Rank
Rafael Hernández	102827	May 11, 1917	Band SGT
Rafael Duchesne	102824	May 11, 1917	Musc 1st CL
Antonio Gonzales	102825	May 11, 1917	Musc 1st CL
Severino Hernández	102828	May 11, 1917	Musc 2nd CL
Eligio Rijos	102829	July 24, 1917	Musc 2nd CL
Gregorio Feliz	102835	May 11, 1917	Musc 1st CL
Jesús Hernández	102837	July 25, 1917	Musc 1st CL
Jiminez Froylan	102838	May 1, 1917	Musc 3rd CL
Elenterio Melendez	102839	May 11, 1917	Musc 2nd CL
Nicholas Vasquez	102841	May 11, 1917	Musc 2nd CL
(He is listed a second time as Nicholas Vasquese, but has same Service Number)			
José Rosa	102840	May 11, 1917	Musc 2nd CL
Janero Torres	102846	May 11, 1917	Musc 2nd CL
Leonardo Cruz	102834	August 12, 1917	Band SGT
Pablo Fuentes	102817	May 11, 1917	Band Corporal
Arturo B. Ayala	104496	May 11, 1917	Musc 3rd CL
Sixto Benites	DOB Oct. 1898	May 11, 1917	Musc 3rd CL
Ramón M. Hernández	1768060	February 13, 1918	Musc 2nd CL
Angel Carrión	n/a	June 5, 1917	Pvt.

Tim Gracyk (1996), in his liner notes, has tried to reconstruct the band and has come up with the following:

Trombone	Rafael Hernández
Clarinet	Rafael Duchesne, Antonio Gonzales, Gregorio Felix Delgado, Genaro Torres, Elige Rijos, Jesús Hernández, Arturo B. Ayala
Saxophone	Ceferino Hernández
Bassoon	Pablo Fuentes
Mellophone	Francisco Meléndez, Eleuterio Meléndez
Baritone Horns	Nicolas Vazquez, Froilan Jiménez
Tuba	José Rivera Rosas, Sixto Benitez

town (the Church and the military provided most aspects of public music in the 19th-century Spanish Caribbean). In this way the regimental bands helped to disseminate popular, contemporary styles of music to the public. Most local communities didn't have all the necessary personnel to form a complete band, so until the 1880s gaps in the personnel were filled by military band members, especially in the bigger municipalities of San Juan and Ponce, where these musicians would later become active as local educators as well. These changes would consolidate the disciplined European military aesthetic with the local sound (Díaz Díaz 2008, 235). Many of the Puerto Rican musicians who were part of James Reese Europe's regimental band started their careers in municipal bands on the island. Due to this training, they brought with them important skills, which made them invaluable to Europe.

Their training was rigorous, and they spent many years learning music theory and *solfeo*—the ability to sight sing written music. They could read music on an extremely high level and play several instruments (Glasser 1995, 35). This gave them a step up over many African American musicians who, due to Jim Crow segregation laws in the United States, did not have access to music education and the instruments, specifically the expensive ones like brass instruments. In the US, they also had to work within segregated circuits: “With the lines between classical and popular music more strictly drawn in the United States than in Puerto Rico even the most qualified African-American musician would more likely be found in a minstrel show than in a symphony orchestra” (Glasser 1995, 59). An additional factor making it more difficult to recruit musicians in the US may have been the fact that established African American musicians who worked in the nightclub scene probably figured that the regimental band offered less substantial pay with more risk involved (Díaz Ayala 2009, 43–44; Shack 2001, 14; Harris 2003, 72). It is likely that when the Puerto Rican musicians accepted Europe's offer to take part in his

band, they weren't aware they were soon going to be shipped off to play at the front.

Puerto Ricans have had a unique relationship with the United States since 1898, with the ending of the Spanish-Cuban-American War, which also made the island a natural place to turn to for more musicians. In 1899, the US Congress authorized the establishment of a Puerto Rican military unit, and the following year the Porto Rico Battalion was established, and this eventually became the Porto Rico Regiment, US Infantry, and eventually the 65th Regiment, US Infantry (the Anglicized name for the island was used until 1932, when it was changed back to the Spanish spelling through U.S. Code, Title 48, Sec. 731a). In World War I, 236,000 registered for the draft on the island; however, a total of 17,855 actually served in the war (Cabán 1999, 202). Many Puerto Ricans were sent to Panama for the strategic defense purposes thought necessary by many in Congress. The passing of the Jones-Shafroth Act in Congress on March 2, 1917, imposed US citizenship on Puerto Ricans, which just facilitated the process of recruitment of Puerto Ricans into the military; since they would have been available for recruitment anyway, along with other immigrants, as citizens now, they would be migrants to the mainland.

World War I

So 18 musicians from Puerto Rico sailed to New York and were enlisted in the 15th Infantry Regiment. In his memoirs, Noble Sissle recounts the obstacles encountered by them, such as a radically different climate and a language barrier, but musically, they continued to shine. During its training period, the regimental band played a concert at the Manhattan Casino, and a review in *The New York Age* by critic Lester Walton stated, the “dozen or more Porto Ricans who made up the reed section they cannot be excelled” (Sissle 1942, 6); and Charles Welton, in a 1919 article in *The World Magazine*, pointed out some of the outstanding musicians, mentioning by name Elige [*sic*] Rijos, on clarinet and the versatile

Raphael [*sic*] Hernández on baritone sax.

In the summer of 1917, National Guard troops were mustered into federal service, and in early 1918, the regiment sailed for France and became the first African American military unit to ever land in Europe (Harris 2003, 152). Yet in all their experiences that led to their going to fight on the European front, the men of the regiment experienced racism. One such incident occurred when Colonel Hayward asked to have the 15th included in the Rainbow Division (Guard units from 27 states) for the farewell parade down Fifth Avenue in New York City. He was told the Regiment could not join the parade because, “Black is not a color of the rainbow” (Nelson 2009, 31). Jim Crow followed them to France. Under orders from General John Pershing, the commander of the US forces, and following the War Department's segregation policy, Blacks were not allowed to fight with the white US Army. In fact, many African Americans worked in the Services of Supply when they arrived in France and were harassed by officers, fellow soldiers, and military police (Sammons and Morrow 2014, 214). Pershing, however, had heard of Europe's musical reputation, and as soon as they landed, he had them transferred to his headquarters to entertain the officers (Shack 2001, 18). As there were not enough Black regiments to form their own division, the 15th Infantry was “temporarily detached” from the US Army and put under the command of the French army as part of its 16th Division (Pershing had “lent” the 27th and 30th Divisions to the British, but they retained their identity as part of the fighting forces of the US Army) (Laskin 2010, 228). They were now called the 369th US Infantry Regiment (369^{ème} Régiment d'Infanterie US) and were the only American regiment with the French army. In March 1918, they had started training with the French army, and they now wore some of the accoutrements of the French army—blue helmets of the French Infantry (which were later replaced with American helmets), leather belts and pouches, and French Lebel rifles with bayonets. Colonel Hayward

was not happy with this decision, but he described the unit under his command in a letter at this juncture:

Brother Boche [the German army] doesn't know who we are yet, as none of my men have been captured so far, and the boys wear a French blue uniform when they go on raids. I've been thinking that if they capture one of my Porto Ricans (of whom I have a few) in the uniform of a Normandy French regiment and this black man tells them in Spanish that he is an American soldier in a New York National Guard regiment, it's going to give the German intelligence department a headache trying to figure it out (Scott 1919, 206–207).

Ironically, the first Black US soldiers to engage in combat did so while serving in the French army (Sammons and Morrow 2014, 76). The regiment soon gained the name “Hellfighters” for their prowess in battle and became one of the most decorated on the European Front, even earning the French *Croix de Guerre*.

Before the regiment was sent to the front, Noble Sissle recounts the band's duties once in France:

At daybreak every morning the entire regiment would be awakened by the martial strains of our band as the members stumbled along the street in semi-daylight, playing a good ragtime tune to try to cheer the boys up before they departed for their day's drudgery. In the evening, if weather conditions permitted, the band would meet the returning boys from the road and march them back to camp. After supper they would play a concert on the drill field. In this way, they played a very important part in getting the spirits up ... (Sissle 1942, 113).

The musicians in the regimental band did not actually fight because, customarily, band members act as stretcher-bearers in the Ambulance Corps (though this did not lessen their danger, as it often put them on the front lines). Rafael (who had become a sergeant in the band) remembered

“running from trench to trench offering help to the wounded more than playing music” (Javariz, quoted in Glasser 1995, 63). But the band (by this time in France, it was comprised of 44 members) gained its own recognition, credited with introducing proto-jazz and ragtime to the European continent. The music that heralded jazz had probably been played in Paris before, but the 369th Regiment band introduced this music to the French working class (Harris 2003, 155). In 1917, the band played in 25 French cities, performing for both French civilians and Allied soldiers who were at first astonished and then entranced by the music they heard. It was basically ragtime music adapted and performed for a marching band and not what came to be known as “jazz.” They didn't improvise, which is a major

feature of jazz, but the music contained many jazz-like elements such as “breaks, riffs, and trombone smears” (Ward and Burns 2000, 68). How were the musicians received in France? Noble Sissle is quoted in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* on June 10, 1918, as describing what happened when the audiences heard the music:

[They] could stand it no longer; the “Jazz germ” hit them. . . . “There now,” I said to myself. “Colonel Hayward has brought his band over here and started ragtimitis in France; ain't this an awful thing to visit upon a nation with so many burdens?” But when the band finished and the people were roaring with laughter, their faces wreathed in smiles, I was forced to say that this is just what France needed at this critical

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Ad for the James Reese Europe touring band in 1919. Courtesy of the Richie Blondet Collection.

moment. . . . All through France the same thing happened. Troop trains carrying Allied soldiers from everywhere passed us en route, and every head came out of the window when we struck up a good old Dixie tune. Even German prisoners forgot they were prisoners, dropped their work to listen and pat their feet to the stirring American tunes. . . . Who would think that little U.S.A. would ever give to the world a rhythm and melodies that, in the midst of universal sorrow, would cause all students of music to yearn to learn how to play it? Such is the case, because every musician we meet—and they all seem to be masters of their instruments—are always asking the boys to teach them how to play ragtime. I sometimes think if the Kaiser ever heard a good syncopated melody he would not take himself so seriously (Gracyk 1996).

After serving 10 months in France and 191 days under fire—the longest time spent by any US regiment during the war (Badger 1986, 36; Harris 2003, 185), the 369th US Infantry Regiment triumphantly returned to the United States as the most decorated US combat unit in WWI. On February 17, 1919, they were the first African Americans ever to lead the parade down Fifth Avenue, led by Drum Major “Bojangles” Robinson (Shack 2001, 20). Many of the musicians quit the army right away, so they could perform as a smaller version of the 369th US Infantry band. They recorded for the Pathé label in May 1919, and toured briefly until James Reese Europe was fatally stabbed by one of his drummers, following a concert in Boston. After this unfortunate tragedy, the group disbanded, and the musicians struck out on their own. Although the register for the recordings has been lost, historian Reid Badger writes that some of the Puerto Rican musicians were involved, including Rafael, his brother, Jesús, Eligio Rijos, Antonio Gonzalez, and Arturo Ayala (Badger 1986, 237). Of the four trombonists on the recording sessions, one was likely Rafael. Tim Gracyk, writing about the recordings, comments, “One solo moment deserves our special attention. It is the trombone



Rafael and Victoria Hernández. Courtesy of Miguel Angel Amadeo.

break at the end of ‘Memphis Blues.’ These two swift bars reveal a melodic swinging improviser who is fully in command of his horn” (Gracyk 1996, 28). Could this have been Rafael?

James Reese Europe’s decision to bring musicians back from Puerto Rico, many of whom would settle in New York City after the war, would change the face of New York’s and Latin America’s music scene forever (and Paris, too, as French audiences

in the Montmartre quarter were soon eager to hear and see Black performers, such as Josephine Baker, Sidney Bechet, and Paul Robeson). Europe’s cultural importance cannot be overstated, as many credit him as one of the initiators of the subsequent Harlem Renaissance. Due to the regimental band’s success, bands with Black musicians became a regular feature on Broadway, and this opened doors for many other Puerto Rican musicians such as Moncho Usera and

Augusto Coen; and it led to Rafael settling in New York City for a short time.

Rafael's Musical Career in New York, Cuba, and Mexico

I will briefly outline Rafael's musical trajectory, because it is incredible that for one whose music remains so influential throughout the entire Western Hemisphere, many times he doesn't even garner a footnote in the regimental band's story. Between the two World Wars, as New York's Puerto Rican community was rapidly growing, New York was becoming the world's capital for all things related to the music industry: recording, sheet music, piano rolls, and radio. The late 1920s and early 1930s also saw the rise of theater shows, movies, and variety shows organized by professional promoters. Puerto Rican musicians found a welcoming environment in which to make their own music—*plena*, *danza*, *seis*, *aguinaldo*—as well as work in the many Cuban ensembles gaining popularity. Glasser states, "New York City gave birth to the golden age of Puerto Rican small-ensemble music" (1995, 130).

Into this milieu in February 1919, Rafael settled in New York City. He soon found work with the Harlem stride pianist Lucky Roberts (a fellow comrade in the 369th). In 1921, he was offered the job to direct the orchestra of the Teatro Fausto in Havana and went to Cuba. There, he composed songs that would become part of his celebrated repertoire, such as "*Capullito de alelí*" and the *guaracha* entitled "*Cachita*." The latter is an example of the universality of his music, as Rafael didn't limit his songs to Puerto Rican themes only: "*Cachita*" has many associations with Cuba (the title is the nickname for the Virgin of Charity (*La Caridad del Cobre*), the patron saint of Cuba, who is also associated with the West African deity Ochún in the Yoruba religion known as Santería from Cuba).

By 1925, Rafael was back in New York City and soon organized his own trio—which included the legendary Manuel "Canario" Jiménez (the famed *plena* singer).

He called it Trio Borinquen, after the indigenous name for the island of Puerto Rico. In 1927, Rafael started a music store with his sister Victoria. According to Victoria, it was the first Puerto Rican-owned music store in New York City, "*Yo fui la primera puertorriqueña que puse un negocio de discos de música... la única tienda de música puertorriqueña*" / I was the first Puerto Rican woman that owned a music business... the only store of Puerto Rican music (Interview with Glasser, March 21, 1989). To accommodate her growing business, Bartolo Alvarez, musician and founder of the Casa Latina music store, remembers: "Victoria moved the store from there because she had a very small store, and she had a piano in the back because she was a music teacher. She moved to a bigger store at 1724 Madison Avenue" (Interview with Martínez 2001). Legend has it that the song "*Lamento borincano*," considered to be Rafael's most famous work, was created there. Composed during the Great Depression, "*Lamento borincano*" related the tribulations of a poor *jibaro* (peasant farmer in Puerto Rico). People here in the US, in Puerto Rico, and throughout Latin America related to the economic hardship described in its verses.

Rafael started a band called Cuarteto Victoria, named in honor of his sister. During this time Puerto Rican musicians, based in New York City, composed some of the songs that are now considered standards in the repertoire of Latin American popular music and have become unofficial anthems among the Puerto Rican community, such as "*Lamento borincano*" by Hernández and "*Sin bandera*" by Pedro Flores. Music historian Jorge Javaríz comments upon their music:

The bulk of what we call popular Puerto Rican music was written and recorded in New York. Puerto Rico is the only Latin American country whose popular music was mainly created on foreign soil. The curious thing about this phenomenon is that it was precisely in those years that the popular Puerto Rican song became more Puerto Rican than it has ever been before or since (Glasser 1995, 90).

At this time, Rafael was traveling back and forth between New York City and Mexico City. In 1935, Rafael was in Mexico, and during this time he composed many more of his most famous songs, such as "*El cumbanchero*," "*Amor ciego*," and "*Noche y día*." He also worked in Mexican cinema during its "Golden Age," providing music for many films and appearing in some alongside Mexican comedian, Cantinflas. Going back to New York City, he hired new vocalists who would later become major stars in Latin music: Bobby Capó to replace Davilita, and Myrta Silva (who would later sing for Sonora Matancera in Cuba, enjoying such great popularity there that when she left, many were skeptical of the singer who replaced her, a young unknown named Celia Cruz).

Meanwhile in 1939, Rafael and Victoria sold the store to Julio Cuevas, and the siblings moved to Mexico. After a failed business venture, Victoria moved back to New York alone and settled in the Bronx in 1940; the following year, she opened Casa Hernández at 786 Prospect Avenue on the first floor of the Manhasset Building, where she continued to sell music and clothes (her early work in New York had been as a seamstress) and to give piano lessons. She lived on the third floor of this apartment building, and when Rafael visited New York, he would stay there.

In 1947, he settled in Puerto Rico where he lived the remainder of his life. He passed away on December 11, 1965, in the Puerto Nuevo Hospital de Veteranos de San Patricio. Of the many renowned composers in Latin America, he is among the top three, with Agustín Lara (Mexico) and Ernesto Lecuona (Cuba). Of the three, Rafael was the most prolific with more than 2,000 songs, as well as the most versatile, composing songs in the Puerto Rican styles of the *plena* and *danza*, Spanish *zarzuelas*, as well as the Cuban genres of *bolero*, *guarachas*, *son*, and *rumba* (Díaz Ayala 2000, 244).

In 1969, Victoria's store in the Bronx was bought by the composer/musician Mike Amadeo who still owns it today. Today the store's awning reads "Casa Amadeo, *antigua*

369th Regimental March (The Old 15th)

Euphonium
(Baritone)

Composed by
1st Lt. F. Eugene Mikell, Bandmaster

Marcia

Music score for the “369th Regimental March (the Old 15th).” This march was copyrighted in 1924 and was “dedicated to our old French comrades in the World War.” From the 369th Regiment Historical Society Collection, courtesy of Ret. Major General Nathaniel James.

[formerly] Casa Hernández,” in honor of its former owner and Rafael. In March 2001, Casa Amadeo was added (from an application submitted by City Lore) to the National Register of Historic Places—the first time a Puerto Rican site from the mainland was added to the National Register. Casa Amadeo and its history mirror the Puerto Rican experience in New York City, and especially in the Bronx, from the store’s opening in the 1940s just prior to the great postwar Puerto Rican migration to the mainland. While the media called the Bronx a symbol of urban decay, Casa Amadeo continued to provide a context of musical and cultural creativity. It stands as a symbol of New York’s legacy to Latin

music, a cultural expression that developed here, yet has eclipsed its New York City origins to become one of this century’s most influential popular genres of music. And, the store’s historical trajectory began when a young musician, Rafael Hernández, musically trained in the island’s tradition of *bandas municipales*, decided to enlist in an extraordinary regimental band.

The 369th and Rafael’s Legacy Today

One of the first steps that Bobby Sanabria and I took to learn about the history of the regimental band was to visit the 369th Historical Society located at the regiment’s landmarked armory at 142nd Street and

Fifth Avenue along the Harlem River Drive. We viewed their historical displays of the regiment and noticed there was no mention of the Puerto Rican involvement in WWI. We began to look for funding to create various projects, such as an exhibit or a concert. This research has led us in other directions as well. Last year, City Lore began digitizing the remaining sheet music from the regiment, which dates from the first half of the 20th century; and in November 2013, on the first day of Puerto Rican Heritage Month, at Hostos Community College (right across the 145th Street Bridge from the armory), Bobby Sanabria’s Multiverse Big Band played a concert in honor of Rafael Hernández and his legacy in the 369th

Regiment. Thanks to a friend in the Army Reserves who put me in touch with the Army's office for military bands, we were able to get the 319th Army Band, based in Fort Totten, Queens, to open the concert. And incredibly, the new director of the band, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Luis Santiago Sierra had just arrived from Puerto Rico and was excited to take part in a concert honoring Hernández (the 319th were given a couple of the scores for the concert from the digitized historical materials but, unfortunately, were unable to rehearse any new material due to the government shutdown that occurred a month before the concert).

The history of the regiment is in the hands of the 369th Historical Society. However, that history, manifested in 500 artifacts, is in danger of being forgotten. The founder and president of historical society, Retired Maj. General Nathaniel James, has been reaching out to other institutions and

individuals since the State of New York Division of Military and Naval Affairs (DMNA) began renovating the armory, and James was told at the beginning of 2013 that he would need to find proper storage for all the material (Mays 2013). In a letter sent out to supporters of the 369th Historical Society, Maj. Gen. James related how they were packing up and looking for a new home, while the renovation continues (and could take up to three years). The DMNA inventoried their collection and has stored some objects and plans "to install a 'museum grade' exhibition" in the armory when work has been completed (Garcia 2014). There are still many other objects, however, that Maj. General James has collected over the decades. As of October 1, 2014, the historical society had relocated to Taino Towers at 240 E. 123rd Street. Although this move is not meant to be permanent, closings and moves weaken the support organizations located at the armory,

such as the Veteran's Association, the 369th Sergeant's Association, and the Harlem Youth Marines, as well as the historical society, by separating them from the location which anchors their identity. [For more information about the historical society, visit their website, www.369historicalsociety.org.] In 2016, the Harlem Hellfighters will celebrate their 100th anniversary. We hope to see them last another century!

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Photo from the concert in honor of Rafael Hernández, *El Jibarito Bohemio*, which took place at Hostos Center for the Arts & Culture at Hostos Community College in the Bronx on November 1, 2013. The title came from Rafael's nickname, *El Jibaro*, the term for a farmer from the countryside of Puerto Rico; Rafael was also known as a bohemian, as were many jazz musicians. Rafael was part of jazz's early history, and the concert's music was arranged for a jazz band, hence the name. Pictured are the Bobby Sanabria Multiverse Big Band, the 319th US Army Band, the string section for the Bronx Arts Ensemble, soprano Brenda Feliciano, *soñero* Jorge Maldonado, and *bomba* dancer Cristal Reyes. Photo by Dan Z. Johnson.

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