



Mi Gente: Fania Records & New York Salsa Music

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What is Fania Records, and how does it reflect the history of Spanish-speaking Caribbean communities in New York City?

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will explore the founding of Fania Records and its pioneering recording artists Johnny Pacheco, Celia Cruz, and Héctor Lavoe. They will compare performances by Lavoe and Cruz from the Fania All-Stars album, Live in Africa and examine the history of Spanish-speaking Caribbean communities in New York City during the 20th century.



Photo: Judy Morales/Fania Records

Fania Records, the record label established in New York City in 1964, helped popularize Salsa music around the world. Composer, bandleader, and flutist Johnny Pacheco founded the label in partnership with his attorney, Jerry Masucci. Fania was the full realization of Pacheco's vision. Pacheco wrote, arranged for, and led the Fania All-Stars, the label's house band, whose members were instrumentalists from the Caribbean, and Central and South America. Fania paired Pacheco with young musicians like him—introducing elements of Jazz, Rhythm and Blues, Funk, and other genres to traditional Afro-Cuban music. This unique musical blend created Salsa—Spanish for “sauce.”

Salsa grew out of the rhythms and dance of three Spanish speaking nations in the Caribbean: Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. These influences all came together in New York City in the early 1960s, where people with roots in all three Caribbean islands, and other Spanish-speaking Caribbean nations, found themselves living in New York in greater numbers. What began as a local style first heard in the streets and clubs of New York would grow to be one of the most beloved and commercially successful music genres in the world. In part, this was due to Salsa being sung in Spanish, the official language of 20 nations and spoken by over 42 million people worldwide.

Two vocalists who recorded for Fania Records would become international stars with legacies extending well beyond their lifetime: Héctor Lavoe and Celia Cruz. Héctor Lavoe was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico in 1946 and migrated to New York City as a teenager. He was a featured vocalist on dozens of recordings for Fania before recording *La Voz*, his debut solo album for the label in 1975. In addition to collaborating on recordings by other Fania Records artists, Lavoe released 10 solo albums on Fania through the 1980s.

Celia Cruz, who is known as the Queen of Salsa, first established herself as a musical force in her home nation of Cuba. There she led La Sonora Matancera, a band with an international fanbase that included listeners in Mexico and the United States. Cruz left Cuba in 1957,

moving first to Mexico and then permanently to the U.S. In 1973, Cruz joined the Fania All-Stars touring ensemble and collaborated with Johnny Pacheco to record her first studio album for Fania, the landmark 1974 release, and one of Cruz's favorites, *Celia & Johnny*. Celia Cruz's career spanned nearly 70 years and during that time she won multiple Grammys. She was posthumously awarded a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2016.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The Fania Records label and its artists Celia Cruz, Héctor Lavoe, and Johnny Pacheco
- The historic presence of Caribbean people in New York City
- The folk music and dance traditions of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico
- Where the Caribbean is on a map and where Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico are on a map

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to identify artistic movements and the formation of new communities as the result of migration patterns, socio-political developments, and cultural expression by analyzing video of performances, studying maps, and investigating documents.

ACTIVITIES

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Write "*Mi Gente*" on the board. Inform students that today's lesson has a theme and it is the Spanish phrase, "*mi gente*" (Pronounced Me HEN-tay). (*If there are students who may speak Spanish, make them welcome to pronounce "mi gente" for the class.*) Ask students:
 - Do you know what "*mi gente*" translates to in English? ("*My people*") (*If there are students who may speak Spanish, make them welcome to translate "mi gente" for the class.*)
 - What do you think of when you hear the phrase, "my people"? (*Guide students to consider that "my people" might include: being from the same geographic area, members of a family, fans of a sports team or a musical artist, or sharing the same culture of language, food, music, and dance.*)

PROCEDURE

1. Play **Clip 1, Fania All Stars Live in Africa**, and remind students to take notes on what they notice while they watch. Then ask students:
 - Did you hear the phrase "*mi gente*" anywhere in the clip? If so, where?
 - What instruments were being played?(*Congas, timbales, bongos/*
 - cowbell, trombone, electric bass, guitar, piano, violin, trumpet, and trombone.*)
 - How would you describe the singing?
 - What language are the lyrics sung in? (*Spanish*)

- What was the audience doing during the concert?
 - How would you describe the demeanor of the musicians? Do they seem serious or more playful?
 - How would you describe the demeanor of the audience?
 - What else did you observe about the video?
2. Explain to students that the music and dance being performed in the clip is called Salsa. In the next video, students will be learning more about Salsa and where it comes from.
3. Play **Clip 2, Fania Records & New York Salsa: Music, Dance & Migration**. Then ask students:
- What musician is featured at the beginning of the the clip? Where is he from? (*Héctor Lavoe a musician from Puerto Rico.*)
 - What is Salsa, and how did it develop? (*A music created in New York that mixes a variety of Caribbean dance musics with Jazz and RnB.*)
 - What is Fania Records? (*A record label that began in New York associated with Salsa music.*)
 - What other musicians were part of Fania records? Where were they from originally? (*Celia Cruz is a musician from Cuba, Johnny Pacheco helped found Fania Records and is from the Dominican Republic.*)
4. Inform students that they will now be discovering how Caribbean music and culture came to New York City. Play **Clip 3, How Caribbean Culture Was Born in New York**. Then ask students:
- What was the major crop in the Caribbean? (*Sugar.*)
 - What is an archipelago? (*A group of islands.*)
 - In the 1970s what city in the United States became home to many people from the Caribbean? (*New York.*)
 - The musicians who created Salsa came from many different places. What did they have in common? (*They lived in New York, they spoke Spanish, they knew traditional music from their respective cultures.*)
 - What is the name of the Cuban singer who we saw in a rehearsal and a performance in this video? (*Celia Cruz.*)
5. Inform students that they will examine a Fania Records artist and share their findings with the class. Organize students into four groups. Assign each group a Fania artist to examine and provide a corresponding handout for the group to complete. Display **Image 1, Questions for Station Activities**.
- Group 1: Johnny Pacheco**
- Handout - Johnny Pacheco
- Group 2: Celia Cruz**
- Handout - Celia Cruz
- Group 3: Johnny Pacheco**
- Handout - Héctor Lavoe
- Group 4: Fania Records**
- Handout - Fania Records
6. Reconvene as a class and have each group share about their Fania Records artist, using the questions in **Image 1, Questions for Station Activities** as a starting point.

SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Explain to students that while English is the official language of the United States, about 23% of the U.S. population (52 million people) speak Spanish.
2. Distribute to students **Handout - On Fania Records And The Music That Made It Matter Listening Guide** (*Teacher's Guide available here*).
3. Play the NPR news story, “On Fania Records And The Music That Made It Matter”. Instruct students to write down the people, places, musical styles, and record labels that are mentioned in the story. (*If necessary, play the news story multiple times for students.*)
4. Discuss what students wrote down on their handout.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Explore one of the following articles or radio documentaries and make a creative response (podcast, oral presentation, slideshow, visual art, or essay) to the paired question to each resource.

Celia Cruz: The Voice of Experience: <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/17/759193674/celia-cruz-the-voice-of-experience>

- Who is La India and how does her story relate to that of the legendary Cuban singer Celia Cruz? How did they collaborate?

Remembering Johnny Pacheco of Fania Records: <https://www.npr.org/2021/02/24/970951550/remembering-johnny-pacheco-of-fania-records>

- Johnny Pacheco was a visionary, record label founder, bandleader, and flutist. How were all of the roles he played critical in the creation of Salsa music?

Before the Rumble in the Jungle, Music Rang Out at Zaire 74: <https://www.npr.org/2017/06/14/532636128/before-the-rumble-in-the-jungle-music-rang-out-at-zaire-74>

- Zaire 74 was a unique cultural event created to parallel a sports spectacle. What was the inspiration for the concert? What connections, musical and otherwise, do you see between Fania All-Stars, James Brown, Miriam Makeba, and Ike and Tina Turner?

STANDARDS

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading (K-12)

Reading 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Reading 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Craft and Structure 4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 10: Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening (K-12)

Comprehension & Collaboration 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Comprehension & Collaboration 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Presentation of Knowledge 4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language (K-12)

Language 1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Language 2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Language 3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 3: People, Place, and Environments

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 7: Production, Distribution, and Consumption

Theme 9 : Global Connections

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION – NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MUSIC EDUCATION (NAFME)

Core Music Standard: Responding

Interpret: Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators' and/or performers' expressive intent.

Core Music Standard: Connecting

Connecting 11: Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

Connecting

Anchor Standards 11: Relate artistic ideas and work with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

RESOURCES

VIDEO RESOURCES

- Fania All Stars Live in Africa
- Fania Records & New York Salsa: Music, Dance & Migration

HANDOUTS

- Handout - Héctor Lavoe
- Handout - Celia Cruz
- Handout Johnny Pacheco
- Handout - Fania Records
- Handout - On Fania Records And The Music That Made It Matter Listening Guide
- Handout - On Fania Records And The Music That Made It Matter Listening Guide (Teacher's Guide)