

Long Island Traditions

NEWSLETTER

www.longislandtraditions.org

Vol. 10 No. 2 Spring 2003

Bay House Tours

On May 3rd & 18th and on September 13th Long Island Traditions will sponsor its annual Bay House Tour in the Town of Hempstead. Due to popular demand we have scheduled two additional days to these unique historic sites. Don't miss these opportunities to visit these reminders of Long Island's nautical past that are still used today by the area's baymen. A comfortable passenger boat will leave from Freeport for the 1½ hour trips to the houses. Tours will depart at 10:30am and 12:30 pm. The tour will be led by LI Traditions director Nancy Solomon. Those on board will be treated to a brief history of the bay houses, the first of which were built in the 1700s. Bay houses were traditionally used by fishermen who harvested clams, oysters, crabs and other species from local waters. The surviving houses date from the period between 1870 and 1950. Each tour will visit two bay houses including the Magnus-Milek house. Their owners are renowned duck boat builders and decoy carvers. The boat will then proceed to other nearby bay houses.

For an excellent preview of the bay houses and their environs, visit the Long Island Marine Education Center, 202 Woodcleft Avenue (Nautical Mile) in Freeport, where a diorama by Jeff Blossom is on permanent exhibit. The center's number is



Photo by Nancy Solomon, 1989

The Milek-Magnus bay house will be among those featured on the tour.

516-771-0399. You can also buy or read at your local library On The Bay written by Nancy Solomon which document the history of the bay houses in the Town of Hempstead. Copies can be purchased at the Sea Horse Gift Shop on Woodcleft Avenue in Freeport or by calling the Old Bethpage Gift Shop at 516-572-8415. **Reservations are required** (sorry, but this trip cannot accommodate children under the age of 10.) Tickets cost \$25 per person and \$40 per couple. Members of Long Island Traditions will receive a \$5 discount. For more information call Long Island Traditions at 516-767-8803. ■

Perico Ripiao Comes to Long Island

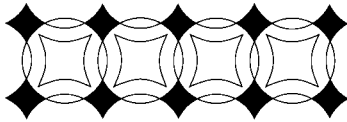
By Sydney Hutchinson

Anyone who has ever listened to a Latino radio station has probably heard merengue, a fast two-step dance music from the Dominican Republic that now rivals salsa in popularity. But many Americans are not aware that this music has a 200 year history. This spring and summer Long Island Traditions will host a series of workshops and concerts about *perico ripiao* or *merengue típico*, creating an opportunity for people to learn about this exciting but little-known art form.

Merengue típico or traditional merengue was born in the early 19th century in the *Cibao* region around the city of Santiago. The original group consisted of stringed instruments such as guitar, *tres*, or *cuatro*, but when Germans brought the accordion to the island in the 1870s, it quickly replaced those earlier instruments as leader of the ensemble. *Güira* scraper, *tambora* drum, and a bass instrument called *marimba*, descended from the African *mbira* or "thumb piano," filled out the group. The instrumentation is said to represent the three cultures of the Dominican Republic: European guitar or accordion; African marimba and tambora; and *güira*, believed to be of native Taíno origin.

Like other kinds of rural folk music, merengue típico was originally considered disreputable. Its more colorful name, *perico ripiao* (literally 'ripped parrot'), is said to have been the

See *Perico Ripiao* on page 3



Long Island Traditions Inc.

Dedicated to the documentation and preservation of Long Island's living cultural heritage.

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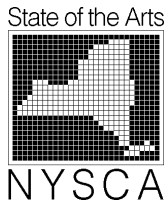
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Decoy Heritage Festival at Stony Brook

The First Annual Decoy Heritage Festival will be held at the Long Island Museum in Stony Brook on Saturday, June 21st from 11:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. The event will be a day of fun for the entire family, with traditional decoy carving demonstrations, games and activities, music, food and vendors selling contemporary and antique decoys, wildfowl art and other related items. Highlights of the day include demonstrations from four award-winning traditional Long Island decoy carvers: Jack Combs, Tom Stewart, Pete Palumbo and Joe Begy. In addition, there will be many activities for children and families. A special puppet show about Long Island waterfowl is being planned and live animal displays will be on view. Admission is \$7 for adults; \$5 for Museum members, seniors and students; children under 6 are FREE. Festival goers will have the opportunity to learn about Long Island's duck hunting heritage and its role in preserving this maritime tradition. Admission includes access to the museum's galleries including its exhibition: *The Bayman's Art: Wildfowl Decoys of Long Island*. For more information, please call Laurel Garbarini at (631) 751-0066, ext. 214 or Joshua Ruff at ext. 224. ■

Architecture in the Schools

During these past several months LI Traditions has been working with the Finley Middle School's social studies teachers on a project that examines the vernacular and traditional architecture of Long Island. This project is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Gilder Foundation. Working with preservation educator Kathleen Kane, formerly of SPLIA, director Nancy Solomon and Kane have developed program materials and identified primary documents on Native American, African American, English and Dutch houses during the 17th - early 19th century. Using the Joseph Lloyd Manor house as its base, the team, including teachers Rick Eriksen, Brad Reminick, Denise DeChiaro, Christine Garger and social studies chairperson Debra Haskins have explored the history of settlements and the built environment in Huntington and neighboring towns, in order to understand the conditions of ordinary people. Lessons are being developed for classroom use that include census records, historic maps and photographs, wills and deeds, slave contracts and emancipation papers and architectural drawings from the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). Among the workshop's guest presenters have been archaeologist Lori Blair and Underground Railroad researcher Katy Velsor. ■

Great Neck Plaza Walking Tour

In early June the Village and Great Neck Plaza and Long Island Traditions will have completed its published 20-page guide to Great Neck Plaza's historic architecture. This free publication includes profiles of 22 sites and structures that reflect the village's extraordinary history and social changes from its beginnings in the 1500s. Included in the guide are worker's homes, luxurious apartment buildings, commercial banks and storefronts, theaters and garden apartments. The guide was written by Nancy Solomon and includes historic and contemporary photographs by Martha Cooper. Funding was made possible by the NYS Council on the Arts, the Empire State Development Corporation and the Village of Great Neck Plaza. To receive a copy call the Village of Great Neck Plaza (516-482-4500) or Long Island Traditions at (516-767-8803). ■

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name of a house of ill repute where the music was played. The lyrics were often suggestive and sometimes political. Activists tried to ban the music and its provocative dance with little success. It continued to be played into the 20th century, along with other dances like *mangulina*, *carabiné*, polka, *guarapo*, and *zarambo*.

Dictator Rafael Trujillo (r. 1930-1961) recognized the symbolic power of this music that appealed to poor, rural voters. In the 1930s he elevated the merengue above other dances, turned it into a nationalist symbol, and expanded its audience across class lines. Trujillo took accordionists Níco Lora and Toño Abreu with him on campaign tours across the nation, popularizing the formerly regional style all over the country. Following his election he commissioned numerous merengue compositions in his honor and brought the music to the middle class through the new medium of radio. He encouraged bandleaders like Luis Alberti to adapt the merengue to the big band format then popular in the US, replacing the accordion with a large brass section and bringing the music to the capital's classy ballrooms. There began the split between mostly urban *merengue de orquesta* and mostly rural perico ripiao that has continued to this day.

Since then the two styles have developed along separate but parallel trajectories. Típico musicians like Tatico Henríquez updated their sound during the 1960s by replacing the marimba with electric bass and adding a saxophone to harmonize with the accordion. In the 1990s, the now "standard" lineup was completed by the addition of a bass drum played with a foot pedal by the güirero. Meanwhile orquesta musicians of the 1960s and 70s like Johnny Ventura and Wilfrido Vargas incorporated rock and disco influences, creating flashy, choreographed stage shows. In the 1980s and 90s Juan Luis Guerra, a university-educated composer, took orquesta merengue to a new level through his inventive arrangements and collaborations with international musicians.

Though perico ripiao seldom gets airplay in the States, both because of its perception as unsophisticated and countrified and because of the payola system governing Latino radio, the music continues to thrive in live performances. In the wake of massive emigration by rural Dominicans, a number of típico musicians followed their compatriots to New York City in the early to mid 1990s. Today many well-known artists live in the metropolitan area, performing regularly in local clubs and restaurants.



Photo by Martha Cooper, 2003

Well-known accordionist Rafaelito Polanco will be joined by Haydee on güira and Pablo on bass in a Freeport concert.

Though Dominican musicians in Long Island tend to play more guitar than accordion, Freeport's Luis Cordero has added some típico songs to his repertoire to satisfy his audience's diverse tastes. Cordero's Los Amigos del Amargue will join Rafaelito Polanco, a virtuoso accordionist and Brooklyn resident, at the June 8 Freeport concert. During the Brooklyn concert on July 12 Brooklynites Lidia de la Rosa and Franklyn, Alejandro y La Sorpresa Típica will play. Corona resident Berto Reyes will join Lidia in Queens on May 31.

Workshops will allow interaction with individual artists and close-up viewing of instruments, while the concerts will give audiences an opportunity to listen and dance to merengue groups in a relaxed atmosphere. All events are free and are suitable for the whole family. These events are made possible by a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts. Please check the LI Traditions web site (www.longislandtraditions.org) or call 516-767-8803 for further information.

- May 30 Perico Ripiao workshop with Berto Reyes, Pinto Güira, and Domingo "Flaco" Peña; Queens Central Library, 5:00 PM; 144 89-11 Merrick Boulevard, Jamaica, Queens
- May 31 Perico Ripiao concert with Berto Reyes and Lidia de la Rosa; Langston Hughes Center, 7:00 PM; 100-01 Northern Boulevard, Corona, Queens
- June 4 Perico Ripiao workshop with Luis Cordero and Rafaelito Polanco; Freeport Memorial Library, 7:00 PM; 144 W. Merrick Road, Freeport
- June 8 Perico Ripiao concert with Luis Cordero and Rafaelito Polanco; Freeport Recreation Center, 2:00 PM; 130 E. Merrick Road, Freeport
- July 10 Perico Ripiao workshop with Lidia de la Rosa, Alejandro Guzmán and Javier Román; Brooklyn Public Library, 4:00 PM; Grand Army Plaza
- July 12 Perico Ripiao concert with Lidia de la Rosa and La Sorpresa Típica; Brooklyn Public Library, 12:00 noon; Grand Army Plaza ■

Farming Documentary

Documentary filmmakers Glenn Gebhard of Loyola Marymount University and Mario Cosgrove, along with Professor Frank Turano of SUNY @ Stony Brook have completed "Long Island Farming," a documentary that examines the history and current status of the region's family and commercial farms, beginning in the pre-settlement periods of 1640 up to the present day, as farms vanish from the Long Island landscape. This 1-hour portrait examines the history and current efforts to preserving this traditional occupation and the families that continue to work the land of Long Island. Using historical footage, paintings by William Sydney Mount, photographs from the Hal Fullerton collection contemporary and interviews, Gebhard asks us to consider the future of Long Island's farmers and how we can preserve this occupation. You can order this video from Long Island Traditions by calling (516) 767-8803. Gebhard also produced "Baymen" which is also available from LI Traditions. ■

EVENTS OF INTEREST

PLEASE NOTE: If you have a Long Island concert or program that focuses on some aspect of traditional culture, drop us a line and we'll put it in our "Events of Interest" column. The deadline is the 1st of October, January and April.

- May 3 & 18** Bay House tours. See inside article. Tickets are \$25/person, \$40 couple. Reservations required. Call (516) 767-8803.
- May 30** Perico Ripiao workshop with Berto Reyes, Pinto Güira, and Domingo "Flaco" Peña, Queens Central Library, 144 89-11 Merrick Boulevard, Jamaica, Queens. 5:00 PM. (718) 990-0778.
- May 31** Perico Ripiao concert with Berto Reyes and Lidia de la Rosa, Langston Hughes Center, 100-01 Northern Boulevard, Corona, Queens. 7:00 PM. (718) 651-1100.
- June 4** Perico Ripiao workshop with Luis Cordero and Rafaelito Polanco, Freeport Memorial Library, 144 W. Merrick Road, Freeport. 7:00 PM. (516) 379-3274
- June 8** Perico Ripiao concert with Luis Cordero and Rafaelito Polanco, Freeport Recreation Center, 130 E. Merrick Road, Freeport. 2:00 PM. (516) 377-2310.
- June 21** LI Museum decoy heritage festival. 11am - 5pm. 1200 Route 25A. Stony Brook. Admission \$7/\$5 museum members and seniors. (631) 751-0066.
- July 10** Perico Ripiao workshop with Lidia de la Rosa, Alejandro Guzmán and Javier Román. Brooklyn Public Library, Grand Army Plaza. 4:00 PM. (718) 230-2100
- July 12** Perico Ripiao concert with Lidia de la Rosa and La Sorpresa Típica Brooklyn Public Library, Grand Army Plaza. 12:00 noon. (718) 230-2100

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