

AfroPanamanian Newsletter



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Delia Maria Elcock de Brown

Devoted Teacher

Controversy

Poetry

Anecdotes

LOS AMIGOS :

**Por la superación de la Etnia Negra
(Incorporated to SEAPAT EVENTOS, S.A.)**

A group of friends, in Panama, decided to join forces to work on the rescue of values, customs and cultural traditions bequeathed to us through our ancestors. These have been displaced by others, thus losing a large part of our Black Heritage. We are evaluating all these forgotten traditions and values and highlighting figures as examples for future generations.

“For Black history to be done right, we must do it ourselves.” Edward Gaskin

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The editor is not responsible for the opinions expressed by our collaborators

Cover Page: The stamp which appears on the cover was proposed to the Canal Zone Government by Mr. George W. Westerman (r.i.p.) accepted and issued in 1951 as a 10 cent postage stamp, used for years. Permission for its continuous use was given by his grandnephew, Cecil Reynolds.

Editorial

ADVICE FOR LIFE

"Courage
is what it takes
to stand up and speak;

Courage
is also what it takes
to sit down and listen."

~Anonymous

Kindness is the language the blind can see and the deaf can hear.

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The Untold Story Cynthia Elaine Brown Franklin

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/du1zbxvaxjoc8lr1/ClarkMom.mov?oref=e&n=38127212>

Cynthia's voice in the background.

Downloading provides the best show. It's clean. We prepared it.

Feel free to share.

First daughter of Mildred Ometa Callender Brown and Eric Augustus Brown, was born on April 8, 1944, in Panama, Rep of Panama.

Cynthia began school at the age of 5 at Escuela Privada Suzana de Lindo, and at the appropriate age, was transferred to Escuela Rep. de Haiti during her elementary years. He went on to high school at Instituto Panamericano (IPA).



She began studying the piano in Panama City at a very young age with Mme. Olga King, a singer of renown, who always encouraged Cynthia to sing. While a student at IPA, Cynthia sang and played during student activities.

Cynthia migrated with her family to the United States in 1958 where she attended Prospect Heights High School and was encouraged by her music teachers to audition for Marion Anderson and Mme. Marion Szkely-Freschl, who immediately recommended her for scholarship and study at the Julliard School of Music – Extension Division. After graduation from Prospect Heights, she was awarded a full scholarship to continue study in voice at Julliard. She studied under Mmes. Florence Berggren and Marion Szkely-Freschl, continuing her advanced studies of voice at the Cleveland Institute of Music under Prof Burton Garlinghouse...

Cynthia made her New York City debut in 1975 at Cami Hall to great acclaim by the press. As a member of the Julliard Opera Theater, she performed the role of the Countess in Mozart's "Le Nozze di Figaro" and Leonora in Beethoven's "Fidelio". She understudied the role of Serena in Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess" and performed numerous concert versions of these operas. Her greatest accolades were for her solo recitals and oratorio for almost 42 years as Soloist at Janes United Methodist Church in Brooklyn, New York.

COMMUNITY WORK

In addition to her work as a singer, Cynthia was active politically in Panama and the United States. She was a civic leader who was very much involved with the seminal National Conference of Panamanians (NCOP) held in the Poconos and most recently served on the Colon Disaster Relief Committee.

September 1994, she was called into service by the President of Panama (at the time) Ernesto Perez-Balladares, who appointed her Vice Consul General of Panama, in New York. She served as community relations liaison to the Government of Panama and as its representative to the business community. On November 1, 2004, she again took the oath of office as Vice Consul General of Panama to New York in the Government of President Martin Torrijos Espino. In her role as Vice Consul General, she represented Panama in the Black and Hispanic Caucuses of the Congress of the United States; the Congressional delegations for the State of New York, the Office of the Mayor of the City of New York, the City Council of New York, The Offices of the Borough Presidents of Brooklyn, Queens and Manhattan. She participated in all activities on behalf of the Government and served as liaison for the community in governmental offices in Panama.

Cynthia was the recipient of numerous awards and recognitions for being a credible spokesperson and advocate in the promotion of Panama: Interaction with the Caribbean and American communities encouraging and arranging visits, investments and retirement in the Republic of Panama. Some of those visits included Carib News, The Urban League of New York, where she arranged meetings with local NGOs, the Ministry of Foreign Relations, The Supreme Court and the Office of the Mayor of the City of Panama .

She was the catalyst in the formation of an Alliance of Panamanian Organizations (more than 44 entities) in the tri-state area and worked toward making the Alliance a national model, encompassing all Panamanian Organizations in the United States. She served as President of the Day of Independence Committee of Panamanians in New York, host of the nation's largest annual parade commemorating Panama's 1903 separation from Colombia. The Panamanian community galvanized under her leadership as she threw open doors of the Consulate . The community received needed services, the marching bands grew exponentially and the presence of the dance troops became “de riguer” at events.

Cynthia's life and legacy will forever be celebrated by her children. Rodolfo Antonio Franklin, Jr. (AKA Tony/ DJ CLARK KENT), Eric Martin Franklin and Kathryn Eneida Franklin, daughters-in-law and grandchildren even after she left us on August 31, 2015.

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Delia Maria Elcock de Brown *(based on biography prepared for the SAMAAP commemoration of the 101 anniversary of the Panama Canal)*

Born the fourth daughter to Barbadian parents, Clyde and Edith Elcock on February 24, 1929 in the City of Panama. Delia Maria completed her elementary studies at the Manuel Amador Guerrero Center in the Sta. Ana area, High School at the Professional School and Graduated from the University of Panama with a title in?

A dedicated teacher, Delia devoted 17 years as an English teacher at the Manuel Jose Hurtado elementary school, went on to teach English and Spanish shorthand, and, Office Practice at the High School level at Instituto Comercial Panama from which she retired in 1977. At the College level she taught English and Spanish shorthand, and, Office Practice at the Faculty of Public Administration of the University of Panama.



On the private scene, Delia Maria taught Elective Courses at the Justo Arosemena High School for 30 years and did 14 years as Principal of the Saint George International High School; its first.

Delia, who was married to the late Vincent Brown for 52 years, continues to be a faithful member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, where she has taught Sunday School and served in many other capacities.

Delia Maria Elcock de Brown has been honored several times: In 2009, during Black Heritage month she was handed the “Key to the City”, in 2013, the Diploma of Directors, 2015, saw her being honored by the Society of Friends of the West Indian Museum during the celebration of the anniversary of the Panama Canal.

OUR MUSIC

Danilo Perez rejuvenates Panamanian jazz

(with excerpts from an article by Howard Reich in the Chicago Tribune)

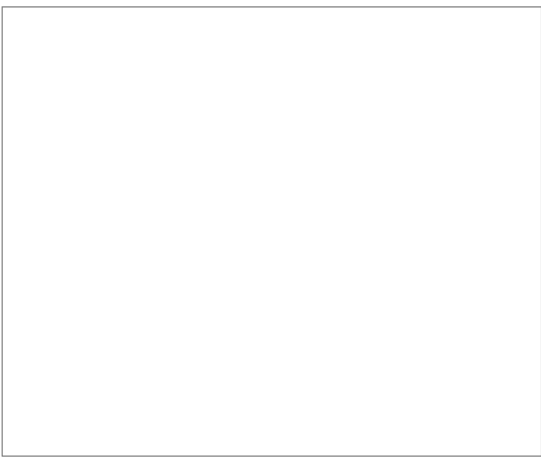
Trying to retrieve their musical heritage, through performance ensembles such as the Bannaba Project and through the fledgling Panama Jazz Festival itself, Panamanians are not only attempting to reconstruct their cultural legacy, but also their spiritual.

Their quest carries implications for the rest of the musical world, for it speaks to the origins of jazz and its precursors. That's because Panama -- like Havana and New Orleans -- once stood at the crossroads of the slave trade, the Africans who forcibly were brought here, and elsewhere across the Americas, carried with them the rhythms and techniques that eventually blossomed into jazz and its many offshoots.

From the ancient chants and ritualized dances of the indigenous Kuna people to the American-made recordings of Panama's first bona fide jazz star, **pianist Luis Russell**, (who powered Louis Armstrong's great bands of the 1930s), Panama's musical roots run deep in a jazz scene that thrived in the Panamanian provinces of Colon and Bocas del Toro.

Just as the cultures of Spain, France, Africa and North America shaped the music of Louisiana, so too did these same influence: the mystical, ancient sounds of Africa, borne by men and women in chains converge in Panama. Like Louisiana, Panama, at the dawn of the 20th Century, was poised to create a nascent jazz.

Bocas del Toro <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ixp2tCwUNs>

	<p>If we are to judge by the accomplishments of Russell -- who famously collaborated with such first-generation New Orleans jazzmen as clarinetist Albert Nicholas, drummer Paul Barbarin and the great Satchmo himself -- the initial wave of Panamanian jazz artists was formidable.</p> <p>That a Panama-trained musician such as Russell, one of many Panamanian jazz pioneers, could hold his own alongside the first great jazzmen of New Orleans suggests that the Central American country may have been at the forefront of said music. Unfortunately, Panamanians of Russell's vintage "had a chance to listen to the jazz but never the technology to record jazz groups here in Panama," says Ernesto Crouch, a Panamanian music historian and drummer who has been researching the subject for decades.</p>
<p>If it weren't for Luis Russell, a Panamanian jazz genius, born in Bocas del Toro, who moved to New Orleans in 1919, at age 17, the first chapter of Panama's jazz may totally have escaped documentation.</p>	

Colon

The influx of American servicemen and civilians, as well as workers from across the Western Hemisphere, practically ignited Colon with the sound of jazz, the city of Colon emerged as the capital of a recognizably Central American brand of jazz.

The city became a kind of New Orleans of the Caribbean, its all-night bars, rowdy dance bands and 24-hour carnival atmosphere provided an ambience parallel to the Crescent City to the north. Nearly forgotten musicians such as Samuel "Sam" Gooding, who led an eponymous band, and Professor Reginald Prescott, who fronted The Ambassadors of Jazz, thrived in Panama throughout the Roaring '20s. They played rooms such as the Blue Moon and the Cotton Club, creating a music designed to entertain the American visitors, and others.

June 2015

"Colon was a crazy place, because that was where most of the ships came in," says Francisco Buckley, who enthusiastically discusses the history of Panamanian music. "The sailors would go around the clubs, and they brought music. They sometimes brought their instruments to play. "If 1904 was the beginning of the American influence, by 1914, when the canal was completed, American servicemen were all over Colon. "If the Panamanian musicians wanted to make money, they had to play what the Americans wanted to hear." Moreover, only American armed services radio, broadcast in Panama until 1937, when the country's first independent station went on the air, which meant that American big-band and small-ensemble music held sway throughout Panama during nearly the first four decades of the 20th Century.

Panama

"It was a fascinating time to be in Panama when I was growing up, in the '40s and '50s," remembers **Victor "Vitin" Paz**, a legendary Panamanian trumpeter who eventually moved to New York before retiring and returning to live in Panama City.

"We listened to the Armed Forces radio, where we heard the American music -- Harry James, Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Dizzy Gillespie, Cab Calloway. I could hear the music coming out of the bars -- Spanish music, Cuban music, Panamanian jazz. It was thrilling, like the whole world was coming together in Panama." Inside the clubs, the Panamanian players were combining the fire and fury of American jazz with the smoldering melodicism and unhurried rhythms of the Caribbean.

"You could hear **Bat Gordon** (*bio in Nov. 2011*) on alto saxophone, who could blow like crazy in those days," recalls **Carlos Garnett** (*bio in Nov. 2011*), who was born in the U.S.-controlled Canal Zone in 1938, moved to the States in 1962, where he earned a sterling reputation, before returning to home a few years ago. At the Panama Jazz Festival, he galvanizes the crowd with the sheer sonic heft and musical complexity of his solos. "And on trumpet there was Gene White, and on piano Victor Boa," adds Garnett, the latter having championed Panama's "tambo jazz," which embraces uniquely Panamanian rhythms.

Indeed, Gordon and White often were referred to as the Parker and Gillespie of Panama, while Boa's all-over-the-keyboard virtuosity evoked comparisons to no less than Art Tatum. Singer **Barbara Wilson** (*bio in Aug. 2013*), meanwhile, was dubbed Panama's Ella Fitzgerald.

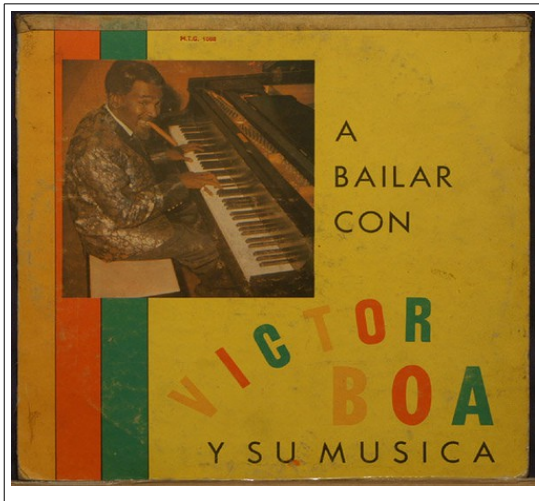
Though there's no mistaking the sway of Cuba in this music -- its dance rhythms and song forms, to this day, influence music across the Americas -- the Panamanians in some ways even withstood the impact of Havana.

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Victor Boa

An Interview by Roberto Ernesto Gyemant (expanded)

Afro-Panamanian jazz pianist and composer Victor Everton McRae (**Victor Boa**) was known as the "High Priest of Jazz" and "Master of the Keyboard". Victor was a key part of the vibrant Panamanian jazz scene beginning in the late forties and played alongside jazz greats such as Clarence Martin Sr., Gladstone "Bat" Gordon, Barbara Wilson, Harold "Zaggy" Berry, Ricardo Staples, Danny Clovis, John "Rubberlegs" McKindo, Reginald Johnson and Carlos Garnett. He was a well-loved fixture in the hotels and jazz clubs of Colon and Panama city for many years, playing everywhere from the humblest of venues to the Balboa Theatre and the National Theatre, always with his trademark cigar or pipe in his mouth.



Victor lived in Juan Diaz, Panama City, where I had the luck and pleasure of interviewing him in June of 2004 in the company of Panamanian salsa great Francisco “Bush” Buckley and photographer Marcela Tason. **On Monday, December 6, 2004 El Maestro passed away from a heart attack at age 80.** He left behind an enormous group of admirers and friends, among them Panamanian jazz piano virtuoso **Danilo “El Cholo” Pérez**, who counts Victor, whom he compares to Art Tatum, as one of his influences. He also left behind over 300 original compositions and a place as one of the great composers in Panamanian music history. His particular flavor of jazz was called “**Tambo Jazz**,” and was the subject of a 1992 documentary of the same name by University of Panama sociologist Gerardo Maloney.

But jazz was only one of the musical idioms with which he was proficient — he also composed and recorded *guarachas*, *guajiras* and *mambos*, *boleros* and waltzes, soul and blues pieces as well as calypsos with artists such as Lord Panama, Sir Jablonsky and Two Gun Smokey.

According to Licenciado Noel Foster Steward’s excellent resource “*Las Expresiones Musicales en Panama: Una Aproximacion*” (Editorial Universitaria, Panama, 1997) Victor was born in the “El Vaticano,” building in Chorillo, Panama City. Victor grew up in the Baptist Church: his mother Louise McCray played piano and sang, his father John played organ. Victor performed with the early jazz quintet “Downbeat Five” in 1946 along with trumpet player Luis “Draper” Gregory, drummer Richard “Dicky” Griffith, bassist Lensworth “Sombra” Reece and Sax player Mitch Kelly. Widely regarded as a musical genius himself, Clarence Martin Sr. joined the group soon after.

Victor played piano professionally with Armando Boza’s famed “La Perfecta” in 1947, leaving to start his own orchestra, “*La Sonora de Victor Boa*,” in 1950. Victor performed all over Panama, at the Snake’s Pit and Kelvin’s in Rio Abajo, Club Windsor and Club Camelot, the Continental, Marriott, Hotel El Panama and *Panama Señorial*. He also played with visiting jazz stars such as Avelino Muñoz, Woody Herman, Gerry Mulligan and Charlie Parker. Anel Sanders, who was the first to play the stand-up timbales in Panama, played with Victor in what later became Maximo Rodriguez’s *Estrellas Panameñas* in the 1950s; the group included famed singer Camilo Rodriguez, presenter Cab Calloway Jr. and Fermin Francisco Castañeda on bongos. Castañeda later became head of the Panamanian Symphony, and a professor at the Conservatory of Music

Victor recorded various 45 rpm records under the labels Musa, Grecha and Tropolco, and in 1970 released a full length LP “*A Bailar con Victor Boa y Su Musica*” by *Victor Boa y Sus Estrellas* on the Taboga / Discos Istmeños label. The instrumental LP, which is at once modern, funky and rooted in classic jazz forms, was produced by Leroy Gittens, another Panamanian music great and original singer of the international hit “My Commanding Wife.” The album is a brilliant mix of Victor’s innovative compositions, including guarachas, bossa novas, modern waltzes, boleros and soul boogaloes on which Victor’s feathery flourishes can be heard as his agile fingers roam over the piano keys.

Victor’s *Estrellas* were an excellent group of musicians: Victor directing on piano, Reginald Johnson on tenor sax, José “Tata” Pinto on alto sax, Jimmy Maxwell on bass, Danny Clovis on drums, and Francisco “Chino” Cho on congas.

Victor continued to play through the 70s and 80s, forming a number of trios and groups such as 1989’s “Los Ejemplos.” He recorded a CD called “*Leyendas del Tambo Jazz*” in time for 2003’s centennial celebration; the excellent album features sax player Carlos Garnett and drummer Ricardo Staples.

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After suffering a massive stroke which doctors predicted he would never play again, he showed a dogged determination to overcome this setback, emerging just as dextrose as he was before that catastrophic illness.

Professor Maloney's documentary "Tambo Jazz", which screened in New York City in 1992, was a first step in the process of shedding light on the rich history of jazz music in Panama. In recognition of his many achievements, Victor was the subject of a number of awards and nights of recognition, including from the Union of Music Workers, from the Arts Magnifique Foundation, from the Society of Friends of the Afro-Antillean Museum of Panama and the Black Panamanian Congress.

Danilo Pérez also performed a concert in homage to Victor at the Teatro La Huaca , ATLAPA Convention Center.

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Contributions from our readers:

There is something wonderful about time spent with friends and family we love that can't be matched by our time alone. Hug a loved one today, and think how lucky you are that this person is a part of your life.

---Ellis Peters

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PANAMA'S 13th Annual Jazz Festival will be held January 11 – 16, featuring the great piano maestro, **Randy Weston**. He will be honored for the many milestones reached during his spectacular 70 year career. ([Explosion of talent at 13th Panama Jazz Festival ...](#))

**"THE CUT"
(A survivor's saga)**

A declining job market, employment very slow
Droughts, a parched land, sugar cane at a low
Foreign contractors hiring, as many men to go
As laborers to a canal, being built not long ago.

Unemployment rampant, on many islands at large
To Barbados men flocked, for a worthy cause
Boarding steamships, uninformed of the risks
For a heroic adventure, a eager quest to enlist.

Arrived to the isthmus, ship docked in Colon
Contracted laborers, to Panama they did come
Anticipations high, their saga has just begun
Avid to get started, for there is work to be done.

Processing completed, each group to their hut
Many of the arrivals are assigned to "The Cut"
The quaint living quarters, of which they were told
Unfit dilapidated shacks, reality began to unfold.

On a train to "The Cut", apprehension and dismay
Devastated landscapes, an eerie unsightly affair
Steam shovels, locomotives, quagmires a foul air
Deafening noises, explosions, men everywhere.

In the belly of "The Cut" wagons loading with dirt
An explosion afar, which shook the unstable earth
Crest of an hill swayed, broke loose with a growl
Tons of rocks, mud, in a rush to the depths below.

Men, equipment as one, in a nature's instant tomb
Devoured buried inside, such fatal landslide womb
A frantic woeful digging, for survivors and the dead
Scores are extricated, many, body parts are, instead.

Remains of the dead, await the funerary trains
A Monkey Hill internment, devoid simply of tears
Laboring in "The Cut" surviving those many years
Give glory to my Lord, whom forever I must praise.

L. Emanuel

Official pictures of President Obama's visit to Jamaica and Panama for the Summit of the Americas

<https://medium.com/@WhiteHouse/in-photos-the-president-s-trip-to-jamaica-and-panama-857d694df758>

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