

[00:00:00.0]

Jeronimo Chiari: What's your name?

[00:00:09.1]

Heraldo de Hoyos: Comparsa Barrio Fino. It's the name we have and use. Comparsa Barrio Fino. BF.

[00:00:19.7]

Oronike Odeleye: And what's your name?

[00:00:21.6]

HDH: My name is Heraldo Eucebio De Hoyos.

[00:00:24.6]

OO: And how old are you?

[00:00:27.4]

HDH: The group?

[00:00:28.5]

Abdiel Valdez: You.

[00:00:29.8]

OO: You.

[00:00:30.3]

HDH: I'm 35 years old.

[00:00:36.8]

OO: And where are you from?

[00:00:38.1]

HDH: I'm from the city of Colon. Panama. From here in Panama. The Atlantic coast of Colon representing.

[00:00:46.9]

OO: And where do you live now?

[00:00:48.8]

HDH: Well, now I'm here in Portobelo as you can see. Now, I'm almost from Portobelo, here.

[00:00:59.7]

OO: And what's your relationship with Portobelo?

[00:01:02.7]

HDH: Well aside from me, the other two professors who are here at my side, we came here to provide music classes and well, some other things have happened outside of my hands, and I have a relationship here. But we're here because of music, doing something positive for the town.

[00:01:25.6]

OO: And what's your name?

[00:01:27.9]

AV: My name is Abdiel Valdez.

[00:01:29.9]

OO: And how old are you?

[00:01:31.6]

AV: 34 years old.

[00:01:33.3]

OO: And where are you from?

[00:01:34.5]

AV: I'm from Colon here in the Colon Province. C3. But indigenous descent from Kuna Yala.

[00:01:41.7]

OO: Ok. And where do you live now?

[00:01:44.5]

AV: Currently, I live in Cativa in Colon.

[00:01:48.3]

OO: And what's your relationship with Portobelo?

[00:01:51.0]

AV: Well as my colleague said, we came here to work as music teachers, to provide music classes to the youth, and well the relationship that we have here is very close. We're working closely in the community so it keeps elevating itself culturally.

[00:02:12.5]

OO: And what's your name?

[00:02:14.9]

Eric Blanquicet: My name is Eric Blanquicet.

[00:02:17.1]

OO: And how old are you?

[00:02:19.0]

EB: 25 years old.

[00:02:20.4]

OO: And where are you from?

[00:02:22.4]

EB: From the city of Colon.

[00:02:23.3]

OO: You too? And where do you live now?

[00:02:25.8]

Currently, I live in the city of Colon on 8th and Melendez. The Vatican.

[00:02:30.1]

OO: And what's your relationship with Portobelo.

[00:02:33.0]

EB: Well the relationship with Portobelo is really tight because more than even coming here to teach music classes, it's been like making a new family. The kids seeing us it's like they see us as part of their family. It's a really close relationship that we have here in Portobelo.

[00:03:04.03]

OO: Ok and a question for the group. What does the name Barrio Fino mean? What does that word Comparsa mean?

[00:03:17.05]

HDH: Ok. Comparsa means "a lot", or rather, "group" or "quantity."

[00:03:28.1]

AV: Happiness.

[00:03:28.6]

HDH: Happiness.

[00:03:30.6]

AV: Enjoyment.

[00:03:31.4]

HDH: Enjoyment. The word Barrio Fino, well, it was . . . Barrio Fino didn't just come up all at once because we had to debate between if we name it that, there's a neighborhood over here called La Campana, a neighborhood over there called El Relleno, another one called La Estacada. So, what we didn't want was there to be any kind of suspicion with the name if we use La Campana or whatever. That's where the suggestion came from, Barrio Fino, Fine Neighborhood. We're going to be Barrio Fino. That's where the name Barrio Fino came from.

[00:04:12.9]

OO: And how and when did the group start?

[00:04:17.7]

HDH: Well, the group started here -- back here in the alley. It was all the guys here. There was a need for it, as the carnival festivities were getting close. So we said, why is it in Portobelo, a place that dominates in all that is culture, Congo drums, Congo dance, why isn't there a comparsa. If in Colon the comparsa is about the culture, then it belongs to us to as the Colonenses that we are. So the need arose to form the group we wanted. And the most important part of all of this is that it was a group of guys who really had the inclination, the motivation, to do something. So that's how we formed the team, with just the congas and the timbales. That's how we formed the group Barrio Fino.

[00:05:40.0]

OO: And when did it start?

[00:05:42.0]

HDH: Well it was exactly on the 15th of January. January 15th, 2011. Talking about it. That was the first talk about it. Because before anything it was a conversation-are we going to do it or not? Later after a short time we said, yes we're going to do it. And with the motivation that we had we went out looking for resources and everything and that's how it started. That was the exact date.

[00:06:21.5]

OO: And what's the relationship between Barrio Fino and the Music School? Being that you all are teachers at the Music School but Barrio Fino is something separate?

[00:06:33.7]

HDH: Ok. Barrio Fino as I was explaining earlier didn't have instruments, didn't have a place to practice. We were just the neighborhood. I mean, we weren't anything. Me, being part of an institution that teaches music here in Portobelo, I took that motivation that we had to the administrators of the music school and I asked if they could help facilitate a few things for us like instruments, etc. And as it's something positive in the community they said yes. So as we didn't have any instruments to start the comparsa, that's where the relationship between Barrio Fino and the Music School came from. That's where it came from.

[00:07:40.1]

OO: And how many members participate in the group.

[00:07:45.1]

HDH: When Barrio Fino started up we began with 35 musicians. Between percussionist, singers, lower percussion, we started up with more than 35 musicians.

[00:08:09.8]

OO: And now how many are there?

[00:08:11.1]

HDH: Well, Barrio Fino, once carnival had passed, suffered a transformation because the same guys who started it felt the concern that since carnival was over we lost some members so they felt a need to evolve Barrio Fino; to transform it; to toss it into the area of (more traditional) music mixed with the rhythm of the comparsa (style).

[00:08:58.5]

OO: And what instruments does the comparsa have now?

[00:09:02.0]

AV: Well, what I wanted to add is that Herlado invited us to join Barrio Fino with the goal of changing the old format. Comparsas, in general, don't include musical instruments, I mean, wind or string instruments or piano. The comparsas are percussion and voices, voices without intonation. So what we wanted to do was change and amplify the functions of the musicians. So that's why Barrio Fino evolved. So what we've done is incorporated wind instruments like the saxophone, the trombone and the trumpet, and also the piano, guitar and bass. Basically like a Latin orchestra to put it in a genre. The genres that we're playing, however, are diverse. We don't just base ourselves in one genre. We try to do the most popular Latin genres that mix well with the comparsa rhythm. So more or less what we're trying to do is trying to market this musical fusion that is happening in the world.

[00:10:26.2]

OO: And Comparsa Barrio Fino is the only one in Portobelo or there are others in different areas?

[00:10:32.8]

AV: It's the only one.

[00:10:34.4]

EB: In Colon, more than anything, I mean, the term comparsa comes from Cuba. Santiago de Cuba. There they have a rhythm called Mozambique and Congo. It's from there that they rhythm was extracted and brought to Panama. So, in Panama City they have one comparsa rhythm and in Colon there's another. The Panama City rhythm is a little faster than the one in Colon. And the rhythm here in Colon -- the same people from Panama City hear it and say goodness -- it's more flavorful because we bring to it that flow, that energy that we put in it, and that style that we have in Colon. In Colon there are a few comparsas. So basing ourselves in that format, we took that motivation that we had to create a comparsa here in Portobelo based on the comparsa format in Colon. But here we've modified it because people have come that belong to comparsas in Colon, from the city of Colon, and they've noticed that we're doing something different.

[00:12:02.1]

OO: And what is it that motivates you to participate and help the group.

[00:12:12.8]

HDH: Well more than anything the motivation is the desire, because there are those moments when we're there and the guys say-hey are we gonna play? Yeah, let's play. What are we gonna

play? Come on let's play something. So they come and we get it started. That's where the desire comes in. And, seeing as it's something positive. It's something that contributes. It contributes to what is music. It contributes to what is culture. It contributes to the desire to do something positive, which is the most important thing -- to do something positive. So that's the desire that we have. Barrio Fino performs with that energy and those that see Barrio Fino performing in the street say goodness, those guys have a lot of passion and strength and it sounds hard. La Comparsa Barrio Fino is hard. So the desire that we have forces us more than anything to play with them and guide them in what is Comparsa Barrio Fino.

[00:13:32.3]

EB: Speaking of that, I want to contribute something also. Adding on to what he said, a lot of people, when they get off work they don't have anything to do. You understand me? I would say that that's one of the fundamental reasons that they group has remained active outside of carnival season. Because as my colleagues said, after carnival season is over, what do you do? Everything is done. There's no more Congo, there's nothing because everything ends on Ash Wednesday. You understand me? So a key point is this. When they get off work, a lot of them are coming back from Colon, from the city, from work and they don't have anything to do. And if you've noticed over the years that you all have been coming here, little by little you've seen a different town than before. I mean in terms of music. There is a musical environment growing here. Something really good is happening in Portobelo.

[00:14:42.1]

OO: Returning to the subject of the Music School, when did it open? The music school?

[00:14:52.1]

AV: The Music School opened its doors on the 12th, I mean 13th of January 2008. I believe it was 2008. But it was only supposed to be for three months. It was a test. So what happens? This test turned out better than we could've imagined. So the music school formally opened its doors on March 9th of the same year. After we formed the music group, we formed the music school. And it's basically supported by The Portobelo Bay Foundation which is the identity that currently governs it.

[00:15:33.8]

OO: And how did it happy that you all came to work with the school? Was it that Aurora talked with you all about her wanting you to come teach classes or how did it happen?

[00:15:50.0]

AV: Well we need to make a special mention here. Because as the adage says, you have to give honor to whom honor is due. The person that brought us here was Nemesio de Hoyo, Herald's father. He was the bridge to all of this. He was the one speaking with Aurora and he's the one who brought us here to work.

[00:16:16.5]

OO: Ok. And you all already knew each other in Colon right?

[00:16:20.0]

AV: Yes we knew each other. We were already friends in Colon because we're all local musicians. All the musicians in Colon know each other.

[00:16:27.0]

OO: Ok. And we see that a lot of the musicians in Barrio Fino also participate in the Congo tradition. What's the relationship between Barrio Fino and the Congo tradition.

[00:16:39.5]

HDH: Well the relationship has to do with the word Barrio Fino. Barrio means all there is around Portobelo. Neighborhood. In the neighborhood, one will find Congos. One will find tricksters. One will find devils. One finds a multitude of different kinds of people. But when they come to Barrio Fino we're all on the same road, following the same route. That's what's different about Barrio Fino. Barrio Fino has painters. Barrio Fino has poets. Barrio Fino has artists. Barrio Fino even has a lawyer. Barrio Fino has electricians. Barrio Fino has folks that don't work. Barrio Fino has people with degrees. Barrio Fino has drunks. Barrio Fino has it all.

[00:17:42.2]

AV: It's a spectrum.

[00:17:42.3]

HDH: It's a spectrum that doesn't exclude religion, race, sport or anything.

[00:17:50.5]

OO: And when there are Barrio Fino performances during Carnival season, including Fat Tuesday and Ash Wednesday, how do the musicians manage their obligations to the band with their Congo participation?

[00:18:05.2]

HDH: The Barrio Fino part comes mostly on Fat Tuesday and Ash Wednesday. Some of the group participates in Congo carnival as always, then Barrio Fino performs after or before. The majority of times Barrio Fino is the end part of the event. We always try to be the end part. I mean, the time changes, they go off and do their thing. They dress Congo, they take that off, later they come back to Barrio Fino because when Barrio Fino takes to the streets we bring the heat. From there, it doesn't have to do with if their dressed Congo or no. They come as they are and we go to it.

[00:19:04.1]

EB: The main course in carnival here in Portobelo is Barrio Fino. In Portobelo, Barrio Fino is the strongest part.

[00:19:11.5]

AV: It's what the people are waiting for.

[00:19:13.4]

EB: It's what the people wait for.

[00:19:16.9]

OO: And what are some of the long-term goals of Barrio Fino?

[00:19:25.0]

AV: Well for me, as I've discussed with Professor Aldo, it was that Barrio Fino has taken a different turn than the normal comparsa, like Eric explained, than the different comparsas of Colon and Panama City. In Portobelo, it's the only one. But it's not only the only one, it's unique, I believe if I'm not mistaken, that uses professional sheet music written on the computer, as if we were, well we are, professionals. From there, Barrio Fino has changed the game. Now it's not just singing to sing. There are singing classes. There are music classes. And one of the objectives that we share as teachers, amongst us was to give Barrio Fino a musical identity that teaches music to adults. To people that want to learn music on a larger scale like in the case of Gustavo that likes to sing; in the case of some guy that likes to play the congas; in the case of some student that likes to play the saxophone, or whatever; we want it to be a window through which they can learn. Do I explain myself? That's one of the long-term goals because truthfully it's something that one achieves little by little.

[00:20:48.4]

JC: Tell me about one of your favorite Barrio Fino activities. It could be a show, a practice or anything that has really stood out for you.

[00:21:59.7]

HDH: Well, that first show that we did, that Barrio Fino had here in Portobelo. For us, because I have to include all of us, for all of Barrio Fino it was so special because we really didn't have the view of what effect Barrio Fino had in Portobelo. How powerful, how strong or how impactful Barrio Fino is here in Portobelo. The first show we had, goodness, it was out of this world. People were there wanting to know what was going on. People came from the other side and more. As Portobelo is a tourist town, so the people, the energy, the whole world. And when Barrio Fino went out (into the streets) goodness, that was something that left even me surprised.

[00:22:02.5]

JC: Do you remember when that show was?

[00:22:05.8]

HDH: Of course. It was Fat Tuesday of Carnival.

RINGING PHONE & NOISE & CHATTER

[00:22:09.1]

JC: Tell us about one of your favorite activities that you all have done as a group.

[00:22:18.4]

HDH: Well, it was something unforgettable because there was the impression that almost none of the guys, none of my colleagues in Barrio Fino imagined the impact that Barrio Fino would cause here in Portobelo. It was like when Barrio Fino went out (into the streets) people from all

over (were shouting) Barrio Fino! Barrio Fino! Barrio Fino! And that's why, for us, that was something new. That was the first show that we had done as a group for the community.

[00:22:59.1]

EB: Adding on to that, for that show I remember when we went out, it was just those of us that play instruments. And when we were in the middle of the park I said to Aldo, "Hey. Check out what's happening." There was a huge amount of people. Because as Aldo mentioned here it's the tradition that people who have family here come back during Carnival and Holy Week. All the times of year when there are parties, people migrate to the coast, to the villages of, it can be their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, relatives. Because in these villages, if you've noticed, the majority of the people are related. So those people, that avalanche of people that came from various places from all over the nation -- as people from here have emigrated to all over. And those people, when they came and they saw the flavor, that flavor that Barrio Fino has, there's nothing left to do but get in there and jump and shout! And that was super cool and I would say it's one of the strongest presentations that Barrio Fino has done. Yes.

[00:24:22.9]

AV: That coupled with another experience that we had, and I don't know if my colleagues would share that with me, was the day that we did the feast of Barrio Fino in the plaza. Because it was the first time Barrio Fino performed with musical instruments -- with the saxophone and everything, as if it were an orchestra. And that also was impressive for the village because that was not a show that we had been invited to. No. It was something that came from us and we organized. In fact we gave out soup to the people who were there. And it was something. A very nice experience. People danced. They enjoyed coming. Because they came and thought, wow, this is different. Very different.

CELL PHONE, NOISE & CHATTER

[00:25:03.1]

AV: Another experience that we had that was good, that I personally liked, was the day we had the Barrio Fino party which was in the plaza of Portobelo. Then, it wasn't something that anyone invited, or that someone invited us to. It was organized by the same group, by the same people from here. We gave out soup. We gave out food. By chance, we had a cultural group from Panama here. Because in that same time it was doing the Festival of the Pollera. But they got the date wrong and arrived the Saturday after. They're asking, "When is the festival?" "It passed already." "Oh! Already." They were sad. As they saw the group there organized we were like, well come on with us. Join with us. And they participated and that was the way, as if it was something planned but it was not. It was improvised but it was nice. People danced. The people enjoyed themselves. And it was the first time that Barrio Fino had presented itself as if it were an orchestra or had functioned as a comparsa.

CHATTER & APPLAUSE

[00:26:21.5]