



Queens of Havana: The Amazing Adventures of Anacaona, Cuba's Legendary All-Girl Dance Band

Alicia Castro

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The 1930s saw Havana undergoing a seismic cultural renaissance. At night in the *aires libres* (open air cafes), tourists and foreign investors rubbed shoulders with the likes of Ernest Hemingway as they sipped cocktails, cavorted with Cuban beauties, and listened to suggestive melodies from Havana's unmatched musical community. It was rare for women to attend, and unheard of for them to perform. But when greengrocer Matias Castro, father of thirteen, goes bankrupt, his eldest daughter has the idea of starting an all-girl band with her sisters—an outrageous idea in macho Cuba, but a surefire money maker. Every evening, as the rum began to flow, Anacaona took to the stage to let rip—jazz, mambo, rumba, and cha-cha—their infectious rhythms, cheeky lyrics, and sheer sex appeal conquer their audiences' hearts. In this evocative memoir, saxophonist Alicia Castro, now in her eighties, looks back on the Havana of yesterday and the dazzling career of the dance band, from concerts in Paris and New York, to appearances with Dizzy Gillespie, Celia Cruz, Duke Ellington, and Cab Calloway. Spirited and conversational, *Queens of Havana* is a touching piece of hidden history guaranteed to set your heart racing and get your toes tapping!



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