

## **Queer Bolero: Bolero Music as an Emotional Space Among gay men in Special-period Cuba**

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My research and book deal with the role of music as space for identity, interaction and escapism, among gay men in Cuba during the era of financial crisis known as “the Special Period”. One of the “musical spaces” I discovered was emotional, rather than physical, provided by bolero music, constructed by queer appropriation of the lyrics and through identifying with the over-sentimental character of its music, poetry and performance.

This paper identifies particular characteristics of bolero that gays identify with: the melancholic musical character, the ambiguous discourse allowing queer interpretations, the tragic and “deviant” heroes, and the melodramatic and “camp” performance style.

Popular themes in bolero lyrics, such as danger, suffering, betrayal, illusion and disillusion, and being “prohibited”; and its characteristic ambiguity, melancholia, nostalgia, hysteria, and liminality, resonate with the emotional and psychological (and sometimes even physical) world of many gay Cubans during the Special Period. In the needy, oppressive, and restrictive environment, and the lack of physical spaces for gay socializing and self-expression, bolero became an important outlet for self-affirmation and consolation, mostly experienced in private, listened to and mimed, at kitchens or private fiestas, where the music triggers a state of emotional transformation I describe as “Bolero mode”.