

## EMERGENCE AND THE INSULA IMPROVISA:

St. Brendan's Island and Afro/Canarian (Jazz) Fusion Music

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### Abstract

This article addresses the historical creation of the Canary Islands as spaces of isolation and spaces that isolate, and suggests how these spaces are re-appropriated and re/worked as critiques of that isolation. Beginning with the mythical St. Brendan's Island, I will outline some episodes through which we can critique the actively produced elisions that confine the Canary Islands and their inhabitants to the periphery, perhaps glimpsing opportunities for emergence from within these boundaries. By outlining some historical gaps in Afro/Canarian historiography and geographic gaps in Afro/Canarian cartography, I will demonstrate how the politics of the *cite* can gloss over the actualities of the *site*. Amid these gaps and fissures lie spaces in which inhabitants of the Canary Islands can re/form local and global ideas about the Islands and local cultures. Based on ongoing ethnographic research begun in 2009, this article explores how Afro/Canarian jazz musicians draw on local histories and historiographies of fusion to resist and rewrite their peripheral status, reasserting and re/placing themselves on the map through critical re-appropriation of cartographic, historiographical, and sonic technologies.

### Key Words

Canary Islands, improvisation, cartography, jazz music, fusion, St. Brendan's Island

### I. Rupture, Translation and the Map

Bassist Luismo Valladares — one of the first musicians I met after arriving in La Laguna, Tenerife, in Autumn 2010 — lives with his girlfriend Nuhr, a performance artist and dancer, a few blocks away from the apartment where I stayed. I first met them at a festival of media, visual and fine arts, and improvisation outside of Santa Cruz de Tenerife, where their performance featured Nuhr dancing interpretatively to a short film, accompanied by Luismo on the electric bass. In subsequent conversations with Luismo, I learned more about him and Nuhr, their collaborative, multimedia work, and their lives together — including a recent vacation to La Graciosa, one of the Canary Islands of which I had never heard. After years of background preparation and research in the United States and after having spent several months on the Islands, I could not imagine making such a basic error as not knowing the number and names of the islands of the archipelago. Soon after I consulted a map and, looking more closely, discovered that, along with Isla de Alegranza, Isla de Montaña Clara, Roque del Este, Roque del Oeste, and Isla de los Lobos, La Graciosa is not one of the *main* Canary Islands. Not all of

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these Canary Islands are inhabited; this fact and the islands' small sizes are presumably reasons for their exclusion from popular and institutional discourses (weather forecasts, maps, trade books, transportation routes, and my study up to that point). They are unique in their peripheral status – among the already peripheralised Canary Islands – as spaces that are often exnominally displaced in linguistic and cartographic formations of 'The Canary Islands', both locally and globally. Mentioning them requires additional qualifiers, exceptions that allow them into conversation, but simultaneously situate them outside normative discourses on the Islands.



Figure 1 – Location of the Canary Islands (source: [www.justonewine.com](http://www.justonewine.com))

This article addresses the historical creation of the Canary Islands as spaces of isolation and spaces that isolate, and the ways in which these spaces are re-appropriated and re/worked as critiques of that isolation. I will outline here some episodes through which we can critique the actively produced elisions that confine the Canary Islands and their inhabitants to the periphery and, perhaps, glimpse opportunities for their emergence from within these boundaries. That is, I will outline some historical gaps in Afro/Canarian

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historiography and geographic gaps in Afro/Canarian cartography, unfolding how the politics of the *cite* can gloss over the actualities of the *site*. Amid these gaps and fissures lie spaces in which inhabitants of the Canary Islands can form and reform local and global ideas about the Islands and local cultures. Based on ongoing ethnographic research begun in 2009, this article explores how Afro/Canarian jazz musicians draw on local histories and historiographies of fusion to resist and rewrite their peripheral status, reasserting and re/placing themselves on the map through critical re-appropriation of cartographic, historiographical and sonic technologies. However, rather than moving forward with the actual Canary Islands that have been constantly excised from maps of the Eastern Atlantic, Africa and Spain, I would like to continue first with an always unidentifiable Island that was included on maps of the area for centuries — St. Brendan's Island.

As recorded in many sources, St. Brendan's Island is the mythical arrival point of a journey undertaken in the 6th Century CE by Brendan of Clonfert, an abbot who set out from Ireland to find an island of blessed saints. The legendary tale chronicles the travails of his journey, including combating sea monsters, performing a Catholic Mass on the back of a whale (see Figure 2 below) and arriving at these Blessed Islands at the edge of the world.<sup>1</sup> The story of religious pilgrimage was widely dispersed and celebrated, in part because of its correlation with ancient texts that situate several mythological paradises in the vicinity of the Canary Islands. St. Brendan's journey was so well catalogued that it inspired subsequent journeys toward the Island, which was speculatively drawn on maps into the Modern Era.<sup>2</sup>

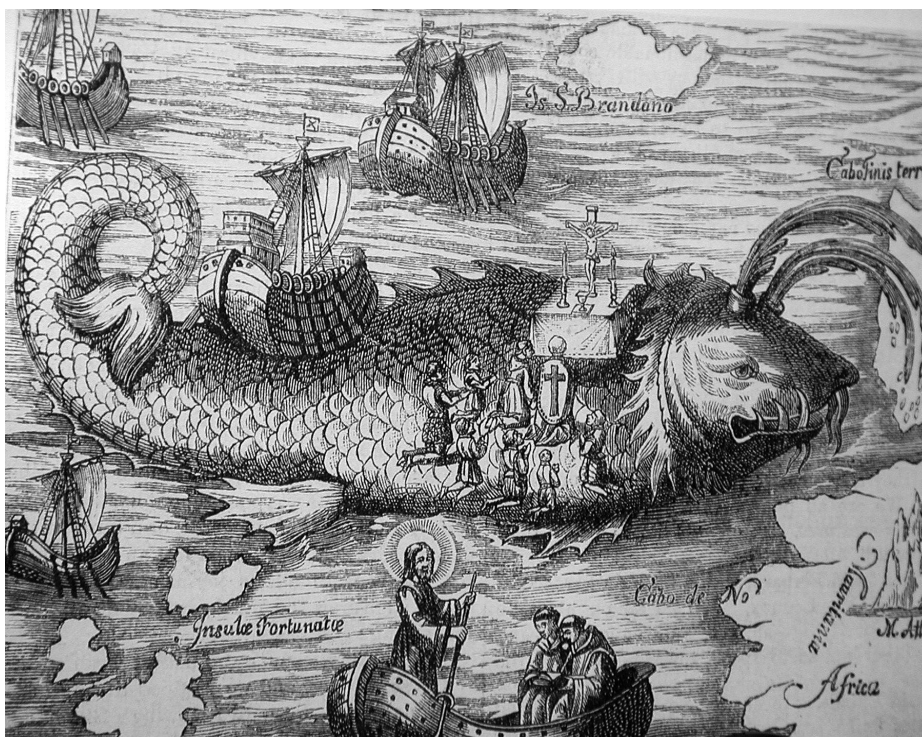


Figure 2 – Illustration from Plautius (1621: 13<sup>3</sup>)

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Before the advent of trans-Atlantic navigation, Ireland and the Canary Islands represented the farthest western lands of the Western world. Discourses mapped onto these islands - the threshold of the known world - were steeped in mythology, wonder and anxiety about the unknown. The journey of St. Brendan is now often seen as part of the Irish literary genre of *immrama*, an epic narrative form of Christian pilgrimage that maintains tropes of Irish mythology.<sup>4</sup> However, because of the translational slippage among cultures and texts, the magical rhetoric and discursive performances on St. Brendan's Island, known in the Canary Islands as San Borondón, endure and continue to play a constitutive role in Canarian cultural geography and discursive imagination.

Speculation surrounding the Canary Islands has always mitigated but never impeded inscription on the Islands, which have been recorded in mis/mapped, mis/placed and mis/characterised forms since the epochs of Ancient Greece and Rome. The area around the Islands and the Islands themselves was considered the gateway to the Elysian Fields and the Hesperides.<sup>5</sup> Renowned for their abundant flora nurtured by an eternal Spring, the Islands became known as the *Insulae Fortunatae* (Latin, 'the Fortunate [or Blessed] Islands'), however reported sightings of feral dogs earned the Islands their current name. While it has been suggested that the dogs were more likely Mediterranean Monk Seals, the Latin adjective *canariae* mis/labeled the Islands as 'full of dogs'<sup>6</sup>. This is but one example of the many records of the Islands that have been informed by actual encounters but significantly altered by mythologies (Christian, Irish, Greek, Roman, etc), mis/interpretation of information and the failings of technological mediation; such that it is impossible to construct an 'actual' history for the Canary Islands. The boundaries among history, myth, mythology, and historiography are blurred beyond recognition, and heavily influenced by interpretative authorial biases on religion, intercultural communication, and economic power. Brief trade encounters (to which archaeological research attests<sup>7</sup>) become only part of the basis for Western understandings of the Canary Islands, the gaps and slippage filled in by supposition, stereotype, and pseudo-science.

The storied existence of St. Brendan's Island thrived in this environment of proliferating, generative mis/information to such an extent that, in addition to its well-documented inclusion in cartographic representations of the Islands, San Borondón has been adopted as local mythology and a constitutive element of Canarian identity (*canariedad*). St. Brendan's Island/San Borondón — the historiographically mis/identified eighth island of the (seven, not thirteen) Canaries — signifies a fluid discursive realm onto which Canarians are continually re/mapping autochthonous conceptions of identity.<sup>8</sup> The gaps and errors in cartographic and historiographical accounts present potential spaces in which inhabitants of the Islands can write back their identity and history against the millennia of mis/information and mis/recordings propagated through Western scholarly thought.

Each recording of St. Brendan's has played out variations on the exact location and characteristics of the island, embellished with tropes of hard-fought nautical adventures threatened by sea monsters but promising idyllic repose and vast riches to those who reached it.<sup>9</sup> These variations truly made St. Brendan's Island/San Borondón an *insula improvisa* (Latin, 'unforeseen island') to those who wrote or traveled in search of it. The historiography of the island demonstrates the power of mythology in the Western imagination about the Canary Islands. In tracing the translating shifts and slippage between *insula improvisa* and *isla improvisada* (Spanish, 'improvised island'), this article outlines a critical, cultural history of the Canary Islands as a process in which colonial

mythologies, histories and mythico-historiographies converge to create a conceptual space of continual and repetitious erasure and lack to which the Islands and their inhabitants have been relegated.

This storied liminality survives in contemporary Canarian discourse as the concept of *aislamiento* (Spanish, 'isolation', from the verb *aislar*, 'to separate or isolate').<sup>10</sup> The suffix *-miento* is derived from the Latin *-mentum*, meaning 'the instrument, result, or product of action'. And so *aislamiento* literally means 'the instrument, result, or product of isolating', or 'of placing on an island' (in Latin, *ad + insula + -mentum*). Just as written accounts of St. Brendan's Island/San Borondón have created a mythology around this imagined island, historical events and their recordings have shaped contemporary *canariedad*, perpetuated this sense of *aislamiento* and impacted Canarian individuals who are forced to work with and against these phenomena in their everyday experiences. I would suggest that the movements of St. Brendan's Island through cartographic and historical space mimic the unfolding discourses about the Canary Islands as island/isolating/isolated space. Just as the cartographic reaches for the unforeseen island of St. Brendan's Island/San Borondón float amid the Atlantic without firm grounding in actual geography, so too have the historiographical and scholarly reaches for the *afro/canario* continually fluctuated — floating qualifiers without clear antecedents — as discourses open to mis/interpretation, the proponents of which reveal more about themselves and the politics of their cites/sites than of any fixed, unified culture or history. Lost in millennia of near approximations, cursory glossings-over, and glaring elisions, *aislamiento* encodes Canarian identity through an actively produced lack that continually reifies the boundaries within which the Islands, their history and inhabitants are circumscribed. Through the act of inscription, the speculation of the cartographer — historian, scientist, ethnographer, et al — is concretised and canonised as an intentional act, the inked lines of which, now buttressed with the edifying mirage of authorial intention, can represent embodied actions of political and epistemological conquest. In the same way that nautical reachings for the unforeseen St. Brendan's Islands entailed improvisatory manoeuvres toward an unforeseen destination, so too do the critical reachings of Afro/Canarians who seek to write back against these journeys and their recorded histories so that they might inhabit the spaces left by these isolating elisions. Applying this history to some case studies of this ongoing project, this article describes how some Afro/Canarian jazz musicians are resisting these acts of conquest by critically arranging and manipulating the plurality of meanings and associations mis/mapped onto St. Brendan's Island — and Canarian culture in general — through localised traditions of global jazz fusion.

## II. Fusion and Re/appropriating Afro/Canarian Identity

*Wanderer, traveler, I am following your reflection without arriving.  
Disguised in the tide, a hallmark that the tribal reveals.  
Hidden among the mists, emerge from the abysmal depths  
Lush island, be reborn like a phoenix from the sea.  
Travelers who were accidentally stranded on your beaches  
In return, [became] a legacy of kings, who lost their future and liberty.  
San Borondón, be reborn from the sea ...  
Oh, guest, we share your pain. Your mother is dead  
And we are defeated.*

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*We should make a marriage covenant.* (Gonzalez, 2010 – author's translation<sup>11</sup>)

San Borondón — the mythic island constantly reached for, but never reached— represents one of the strongest discursive tropes in Canary culture. Its persistence and survival, as a foremost testament to colonial failures of circumscribing the Islands, are perpetuated now in large part because Afro/Canarians are re-inscribing it with tropes of local authenticity — expressed but unable to be articulated, improvised but unable to be codified. The Centro de la Cultura Popular Canaria runs a digital magazine and radio station named 'San Borondón', which are appositively named *voz del pueblo*, the voice of the people. Invoking San Borondón (that un/locateable, un/acted place of the improvising cartographic imagination) grounds Afro/Canarian performance among the gaps of historical time-space into which the Canary Islands have been located — in a break in which rupture can become potentially generative. When I asked guitarist and composer Miguel Jaubert about San Borondón, he referred to it as *la isla adentro* ('the island inside'), perhaps a universalist understanding of the limits and promises of isolation. The concept(ual space) of San Borondón as improvised through music is a perfect exemplar of this idea: in the constant re/workings and reconfigurations of San Borondón — all of which fail to bring about its (re-)emergence — we can glimpse the Afro/Canarian subject in the representationality of the performance.

Jaubert collaborated with poet Francisco Bontempi and percussionist Jose Pedro Pérez on a publication titled *Cantos de San Borondón* ('Songs of San Borondón'), a multimedia (prose, poetry, and music) reflection on the Island. In the prosaic introduction, the poet Bontempi confronts the evidence-festishising audience member living in *el tiempo concreto y asfáltico* ('the concrete and asphaltic moment') by circling around the un/circumscribable:

*If someone were to ask me, 'And what is San Borondón? I would tell them: 'San Borondón is a place somewhere and nowhere. At the same time, it's a time, a good time. San Borondón is the space-time where love becomes conscience of being, where love joins one's matter from shore to shore. [...] San Borondón is the Paradise, a certain state of the Reality. San Borondón is an illusion for ordinary perception, for the conditioned thought: a break in the spirit's mirror, but a useful break: through that crack peers out, [that] most vast wave, the wave without time or place that washes over all existences.... San Borondón is San Borondón. San Borondón is a story. San Borondón is music. San Borondón is the adventure of the magma converted into a searcher for itself. (2004: 11)<sup>12</sup>*

Bontempi's evocative preamble unfolds so many aforementioned themes discussed in this article, and serves as a useful catalyst — grounding past theories and experiences among the musicians with whom I have been working — for our discussion. Bontempi's cracked mirror suggests a surfacing structure that encapsulates and frames, the visible scratches in which compel re/viewing and re/listening. At the same time, the surplus of meanings and associations Bontempi graphs onto San Borondón resonates with the many cartographic reaches for San Borondón. Confronted with these co-existing surpluses that have continually failed in re/presenting the Island, we must re/consider the conditions of failure, allow these differences to play deconstructively with and among each other, and wait for emerging identities to peer out.

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In the same way that varied and dissimilar mappings of St. Brendan's Island/San Borondón create a surplus of disparate views of the Island, so too does Afro/Canarian identity, in its lack of fixity, remain open to interpretative slips and re/forms. In bringing together the local Canarian jazz traditions of fusion and improvisation with those of Canarian traditional music, many musicians have realised the potential of self-expression and mobility around imposed structures. These improvising re/soundings of the Afro/Canarian often lie in the interstices among codified genre boundaries — in which musical characteristics, as well as personnel, move quite freely among performances and projects. This continual accruing of surplus mappings characterises the Afro/Canarian and the Canary Islands as uncircumscribable wholes — a host of attendant, disparate meanings not necessarily bound to a coherent and fixed centre but rather a range of free associations to be redrawn and improvised continually. In contrast, the collective, discursive cohesion (as wide a range of interpretations as could describe such a condition as 'cohesion') that forms around Canarian jazz usually begins with the group Jazz Borondón.<sup>13</sup> When I first arrived in Tenerife and told people of my project about *jazz canario, y jazz hecho en Canarias* (Canarian jazz, and jazz made in the Canaries), people spoke to me of this group in near-mythic terms of local authenticity — as in, *el primero verdadero, el principio, and la canariedad auténtica* ('the first true, the beginning, authentic canarian-ness').

The group's two records — *Borondón* (1990) and *Botaraste* (1992) — mark what are widely regarded as the first attempts of fusing jazz with traditional and folkloric Afro/Canarian music. Compositions invoke certain local musical forms through names (*Arrorró, Berlina*<sup>14</sup> and *Tango*<sup>15</sup>), compositional elements and performance techniques culled from Afro/Canarian music. Yet the latter are very much aesthetically contemporary with the US and British jazz-rock fusion bands that formed the foundation of the emergent Canarian jazz music scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>16</sup> Jazz Borondón's fusion aesthetic and its use of samples and quotations translate and improvise the history of mapping(-)surplus associated with San Borondón and the Canary Islands into a musical mode. Jazz Borondón's arrangement of the *tango* (from their album *Botaraste*) features a binary form that oscillates between a vamp in which the bass and drums perform a traditional Canarian (not Argentinian) *tango* rhythmic figure and a jazz rock setting of a traditional tango melody, performed by guitarist Ruskin Herman. The ensemble cycles through this structure several times, elaborating each time: the first establishes the foundation, synthesising elements of Afro/Canarian musical history; the second re/views this foundation, adding a keyboard improvisation onto this foundation; the third and final iteration re/states the first iteration, but augments it with a choir singing along with Herman's melody. As the melody and track fades (back) into silence, Herman further elaborates, superimposes and improvises soloistic embellishments above the choir whose sung melody lacks lyrics, performed as composed, scatted non-linguistic phonemes. The Afro/Canarian sounds *outside, around, and in spite of* its linguistic isolation.

On his recording *Ropa Vieja* (2000), bassist Jose Carlos Machado explores fusion of cuisine and traditional Afro/Canarian culture through improvised jazz music. Machado's work, like many of these creative re-framings, can be considered programmatic to the degree that liner notes, or at least song titles, suggest certain extra-musical phenomena intended to resonate with local audiences. While performing and recording widely with groups on the Islands over the last four decades, Machado—a member of Jazz Borondón — only recorded his first album as leader, *Azul Marina*, in 1996. Most tracks on Machado's album — *Ropa Vieja* (Old Clothes), a popular Canarian beef dish — are

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entitled after elements of Canarian cuisine, the few exceptions being named after personal acquaintances. Moreover, each track is labeled as a particular music form on which the composition and improvisations are based. The first is *Borondongo*, ("dedicated to the incredible musicians who have participated on this disc and to the group 'Jazz Borondón,' without a doubt one of my favorite musical experiences") is a play on word fusion: *Borondón* and *sorondongo* are joined in a song whose form Machado describes as "*coplas* of the most pure Lanzarote."<sup>17</sup> Regarding his own reaches for fusion, Machado is quite articulate with his thoughts on the project in the sleevenotes:

*With these tracks I have tried to give form to one of my greatest obsessions as a musician: to find a link between Canarian folklore and the 'fusion' of jazz and rock. I have selected certain things that caught my attention to try to create 'something' that had the essence of the 'ancient' and combine it with the current trends (of popular music) that attract me the most. In all the tracks (except 'Ropa Vieja' and 'Sopa de Ajos') there are elements extracted from some Canarian 'rhythm' or dance (rhythmic claves, melodic resources, etc.) and they move with a 'groove' or bass and drum accompaniment constructed on the basis of the original piece. In that my objective is extremely ambitious, I hope to be on a suitable path and to continue perfecting it in the future. (2000, author's translation)*

For this particular album, the path Machado travels brings the Canarian traditions of musical and cultural fusion into critical engagement with the Afro/Canarian table where Machado makes citationally-informed reaches and elaborations on this base/base of Afro/Canarian culture in order to continue re/working it (*perfeccionándolo*) into the future.

A recent release, entitled *Latitud* (2012), by the group Junonia Mayor from the island of La Palma. continues this work and resonates with many of themes I have discussed, including the use of local geography and mythology, jazz fusion aesthetics and improvisation as critical engagements with *aislamiento* ('isolation'). Drawing on various histories of Canarian culture, geography, and music, Junonia Mayor orchestrates a pastiche of perspectives constantly spinning back on and re/sounding themes of Afro/Canarian identity. Like the maps and histories of the Islands, the group's original compositions remain open to interpretation and re/working through the musicians' improvisations that constantly re/frame each composition as a space of continual emergence.

The album's liner notes refer to the project's two principle musicians, guitarist Alexander Sputh and bassist Mike Fernández — residents of the island of La Palma — as avid hikers who drew inspiration from the Island's landscapes.<sup>18</sup> The musical cartographies of the Island that they recorded on *Latitud* shift in focus and reach: the project title, 'Junonia Mayor', is the Spanish translation of the name given to La Palma by Ancient Roman cartographer Pliny the Elder, whose writings were the basis of many myths and histories of the Islands. In navigating among these cartographies, the musicians-as-hikers suggest the formation of emergent, improvising and subjective cartographies, reminiscent of Michel de Certeau's walker whose circuitous routes critique and resist the totalising work of the cartographer (and/or cultural theorist) who imposes deceptively definitive systems of order and organisation over unmappable and constantly shifting landscapes.<sup>19</sup> As the improvisations by Pérez and Sputh on the track



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*The Correct Path* would suggest, the appearance of a single, unified phenomenon — whether an island's location, hiking path, or musical composition — surely masks a complex arrangement of (actual and potential) individual interpretations and singularities.

In addition to the project name, Junonia Mayor carves out new sonic pathways over Canarian musical culture and geography throughout the album, but most overtly on the track titled *28 degrees, 40 minutes north parallel* — the exact location of La Palma in the geography coordinate system — and the track *St. Brendan (a la leyenda de San Borondón)* ('dedicated to the legend of San Borondón') which concludes the album. Both tracks were composed by Fernández but feature the collaboration and improvisation present in all of the tracks. *St. Brendan* — with its emphasis on keyboard synthesisers and electric guitar — features one of the album's most overt stylistic references to the jazz fusion aesthetics so influential to Afro/Canarian jazz. The tracks also feature pianist Polo Ortí, one of the most important and most widely acclaimed jazz musicians in the Islands whose early performances in the 1980s were foundational moments for Afro/Canarian jazz. Ortí's presence on the album performs a legitimising role for Junonia Mayor and these Palmeran musicians, who are isolated from the more active jazz performance centers of Tenerife (where Ortí lives) and Gran Canaria.

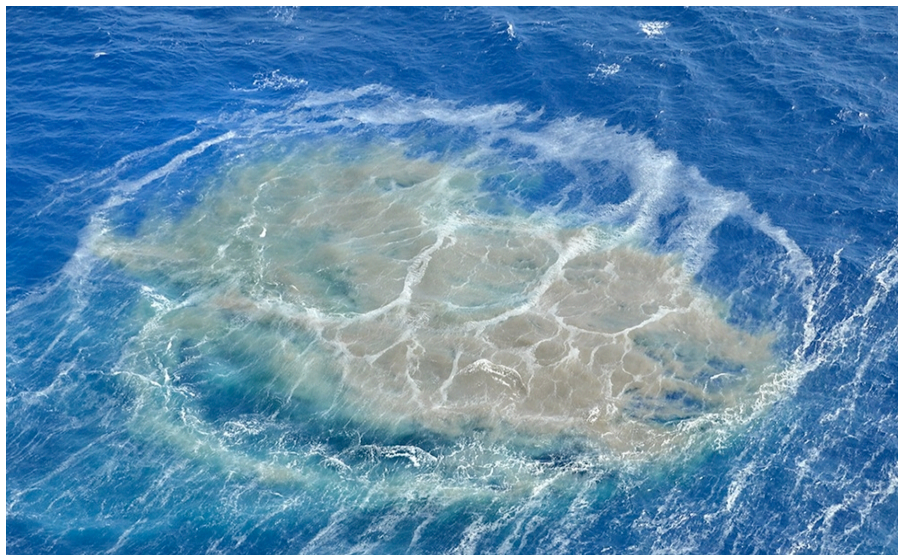
Following *The Correct Path*, the track *Even More Things* continues the re/mapping work of the album. This track is a musical contrefact, a composition using the same chord structure of an earlier piece over which a newly written melody is employed. The title alludes to the composition on which *Even More Things* is based: Jerome Kern's song 'All the Things You Are', first published in 1939, considered a jazz standard due to its frequent performance by jazz artists around the world, and has served as the basis for other contrefacts written by iconic US jazz musicians such as saxophonists Charlie Parker and Dexter Gordon and trumpeter Kenny Dorham. Here the musicians of Junonia Mayor elaborate on the harmonic progression of 'All The Things You Are' in much the same way that they used the mythological imaginings of St. Brendan's Island and Pliny's speculative geographies of the Canaries — as yet another map on which to overwrite a new path informed by their subjective and individualistic interpretations of sonic and cultural histories — while simultaneously placing themselves on the global map of jazz music by aligning themselves with revered musicians and established traditions in more well-known locales.

The album's plurality of maps echoes the multilingualism of the disc, which includes liner notes and album titles in English, German and Spanish, and the stylistic diversity of compositions which invoke jazz fusion, neo- and post-bebop, Latin jazz, modal jazz, bossa nova, and samba. The diverse associations of the album — coupled with the wide range of other projects in which each musician of Junonia Mayor has been involved — alludes to the impossibility of circumscribing or transcribing Afro/Canarian jazz with any sense of comprehensive fixity. Rather, by improvising an interweaving and complex pastiche of linguistic, musical, and cartographic representations of Afro/Canarian place and culture, these musicians have shown how the gaps and fissures mapped onto the Canary Islands that have isolated them for centuries are actually spaces imbued with potential for emergent identity and critical revision of that isolation and the systems that perpetuate it.

Conclusion — *Como un fénix*: the emergent Afro/Canarian

*Our soul resounds when it hears a malagueña, a folía, an isa... this envelops us musically, offering us an identity as a people. This issue makes us reflect still that we are in continuous movement. We cannot forget that folklore as we know it today is the unmistakable result of the passage of other cultures through our islands. Montaña Blanca emerges from this equation, and forms a part of the ancestry of Canarian tradition. Fusing our more traditional instruments with other more avant-garde ones, offering a completely different level of expression, opening a new path for other young musicians who want to experiment with concepts. (González 2010, author's translation<sup>20</sup>)*

Recently, an update to the Google Earth website corrected earlier glitches that incorrectly mapped many areas of the world. Among the un/written mappings was an area of the Atlantic Ocean near the Canary Islands and Madeira that eager, imaginative cartographers had been speculating was perhaps the lost city of Atlantis — yet another origin myth for the Canary Islands.<sup>21</sup> Evidently, there are still those who would map these unforeseen islands like St. Brendan's, as there have been those who sought to recreate his journeys inscribed in the Irish *immrama*.<sup>22</sup> While this upgrade to Google Earth re/erases Atlantis/*San Borondón* from the global map, it still falls short of its efforts to represent accurately: the Roque Islands — part of the *Chinijo* archipelago of which La Graciosa is one island — are glossed over completely. In Google's 'Earth', the seven-island archipelago of the Canaries is there, but the thirteen-island archipelago is not. Meanwhile, an underwater volcano located off the coast of La Restinga, El Hierro, erupted between July 2011 and March 2012 and talk of an eighth (twelfth? fourteenth?) Canary Island has surfaced.<sup>23</sup> Emergent geography ruptures and evades the surveying cartographic imagination that generates continuous failure in its attempts to represent *las Islas Canarias*.



El Hierro underwater volcano, 2011 (source: <http://msnbcmedia.msn.com>)

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In the liner notes to his album *Montaña Blanca – Folkcomunicacion*, Julio González discusses how musical fusion reflects and re/frames cultural processes of continual emergence and change. The nostalgic familiarity of an imagined past is renewed through individual interpretation, innovation, and rearrangement. In the track *San Borondón*, González enacts this philosophy in several ways. The sonic elements of the track bring together natural sounds of birds and oceans, with orchestral instruments (woodwinds and strings), and finally Afro/Latin percussion (several conga and clave). The voices include two soloists, one speaking and singing in Spanish and the other in Tamazight, the language of the Amazigh to whom indigenous Afro/Canarians and the enslaved populations of the Canaries are genetically and historically related and also with whom current Afro/Canarians maintain a strong cultural affiliation. These soloists are counterbalanced by a chorus singing interspersed, repeated lines such as *San Borondón, renace desde el mar* ('San Borondón, be born again from the sea'). The cumulative effect of the musical track is a calling-forth of San Borondón not as a return to the past or a revisiting of fixed and discreet history, but rather as a new beginning – a rebirth – of place, culture, and people, celebrating the cohesive diversities and critical possibilities of unforeseen, improvised, and emergent Afro/Canarian identity.

As with the myth of San Borondón, ideas about Canarian identity and *aislamiento* are constantly being re-appropriated for their generative potential to critique prior mappings and representations that glossed over some or all of the cultural and geographic particularity of the Canary Islands. By focusing on the diverse characteristics and interpretations of local culture, Afro/Canarians build communal belonging that reframes lack and absence as particularity and potentiality. Jazz Borondón, Miguel Jaubert, Julio González, José Carlos Machado and Junonia Mayor are all fusing elements of Canarian identity and *aislamiento* with individual and collective musical aesthetics to re/view and augment *canariedad* as an uncircumscribable whole inherently resistant to the cartographic gaze and critical of the structures of power that have and continue to marginalise and isolate them. By elaborating on the critical potentiality of improvised, embodied action, these musicians re/write the everyday phenomena that comprise *canariedad* as fusion, surplus, and open to revision.

The musicians discussed here have not been on the map; they have been historically written out of cartographic conventions within the Canary Islands, across the Atlantic Ocean, and among the representations of the Atlantic world, the African continent and Diaspora, and the global jazz milieu. In the search for space for expressing their realities, they have to re/write against the gaps and fissures of these representations. They have compiled and arranged a surplus of words and sounds to be repeated with difference in the hopes of overcoming any number of actively silencing lacks. As Julio González wrote and sounded, fusion – of maps, histories, cultures, and musics – opens a new path (*un nuevo camino*) of improvising, emergent singularity... on which to walk... to re/map, re/write and re/sound... and to continue re/working (*perfeccionándolo*) into the future.

## Endnotes

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1 See Benito Ruano (1978) and Babcock (1919).

2 See Bruquetas de Castro and Toledo Bravo de Laguna (1995-1996); Reguiera Benítez and Poggio Capote (2007); and Bonnet y Reverón (1927, 1929a, 1929b, 1929c, and 1929d).

<sup>3</sup> Online at: [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St.\\_Brendan\\_celebrating\\_a\\_mass.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St._Brendan_celebrating_a_mass.jpg) – accessed July 2013.

4 Benito Ruano (1978: 19). For more on the relationship between the mythology of St. Brendan and Irish *imrama*, see Mackley (2008) and Sobceki (2003).

5 See Pinto de la Rosa (1954: 38-60).

<sup>6</sup> A passage from 14th Century Florentine humanist Domenico Silvestri describes the etymology of the islands: "Canaria insula a canibus quibus abundat sic dicta in oceanō orientālī sita una ex Fortunatīs Īnsulīs dē quibus infrā. In hāc canēs māximē fortitūdinis admirandēque magnitūdinis oriuntur quōrum duō, ut Solinus prōdit, Iūba rēx habuit." I translate this passage as: "The Canarian Island, named for the dogs with which it abounds, situated in the Western Ocean, [is] one of the Fortunate Islands about which [I will write] below. On this island dogs of the greatest strength and of astonishing size are born, two of which, as Solinus records, King Juba had."

Marcos Martínez's 1994 article cites the Silvestri and translates it in Spanish as: "La isla Canaria se denomina así por los perros que tiene en abundancia, situada en el Océano oriental. Es una de las Islas Afortunadas, de las que hablaremos más adelante. En esta isla nacen unos perros de muchísima bravura y de un tamaño digno de admiración, de los que el rey Juba llegó a tener dos, como refiere Solino." The literal translation of this passage—in comparison to my translation of Silvestri's Latin—clearly demonstrates how history and historiography of the Canary Islands is open to creative interpretation, authorial license, and translational slippage: "The Canarian Island is named this way for the dogs that it has in abundance, situated in the Western Ocean. It is one of the Fortunate Islands, the ones about which we will discuss later. On this island are born dogs of much fierceness and of a size worthy of admiration, those of which King Juba came to have two, as Solinus told."

7 See Rodríguez Rodríguez and González Marrero (2006).

8 The subtitle of Benito Ruano's book on San Borondón is "octava isla de Canarias," the eighth — not thirteenth — island of the Canaries.

9 See Daly (1904).

10 I learned this word only through the context of conversation, the frequent recurrence of which compelled me to consider not only its denotative meaning but its possible connotative meanings contextualised as they were among my consultants and friends on the Islands.

11 This is my translation of the lyrics to Julio González's composition *San Borondón*, from his recording *Montaña Blanca—Folkcommunication*. In deference to the formatting conventions of this journal, all non-English quotations are placed in the endnotes, with my translation included in the main text. I would highly encourage the reader to consider the thoughts of the cited individuals in their original words and treat my translations critically, as just one possible interpretation. The original text of González's

lyrics are: "Errante, viajera, voy siguiendo su reflejo sin llegar / disfraz en la marea, contraste que revela lo tribal, / oculta entre las brumas, resurge desde un fondo abisal, / exuberante isla, renace como un fénix desde el mar. / viajeros que vararon en sus playas sin pensar, en regresar, / legado de reyes, que perdieron su futuro y libertad. / San, San, San Borondón, renace desde el mar...Aicá maragá, aitutü aguahae / maicá guere, demacihanineigá haruuti alemakai." The section after the ellipsis is from an Afro/Canarian inscription referring to emergent inter-island Afro/Canarian alliances born out of the mutual suffering of colonial violence, as recorded by Leonardo Torriani in 1590. My translation of this passage is based on Professor Ignacio Reyes's Spanish translation and analysis of the text. See Reyes (2007); Álvarez Delgado (1944: 113-21); and Cabrera (2010: 56-7).

12 Bontempi and Jauber (2004: 11). The original text: "*Si alguien me preguntara ¿Y qué es San Borondón? Yo le diría: "San Borondón es un lugar en alguna parte y en ninguna. Al mismo tiempo es un tiempo, un tiempo bueno. San Borondón es el espacio-tiempo donde el amor se hace consciencia de ser, donde el amor unifica su materia de orilla a orilla. [...] San Borondón es el Paraíso, un cierto estado de la Realidad. San Borondón es un espejismo para la percepción ordinaria, para el pensamiento condicionado: un quiebre en el espejo del espíritu, pero un quiebre útil: a través de esa grieta se asoma, vastísima, la ola sin tiempo ni lugar que abarca todas las existencias. [...] San Borondón es San Borondón. San Borondón es un cuento. San Borondón es música. San Borondón es la aventura del magma convertido en buscador de sí mismo.*"

13 Jazz Borondón included Luis Fernández (keyboards), Ruskin Herman (guitar), Alfredo Llanos (drums), Jose Carlos Machado (bass), Jose Pedro Pérez (percussion) and Kike Perdomo (saxophones).

14 See Díaz Reyes and Pérez (2004).

15 See Jordán Hernández and Machín Jiménez (2006).

16 Jazz Fusion—a genre of music characterised stylistically by influences of rock, jazz, and funk and instrumentally by the use of electronic keyboards, guitars, and bass, as well as acoustic ones such as saxophone, trumpet, and drumkit common in other genres of jazz—played a foundational role in the cohesion of a jazz community in the Canary Islands in the late 1970s and 1980s. Groups such as Weather Report, Return to Forever, the Mahavishnu Orchestra, Spyro Gyra and the Rippingtons were highly influential in the Islands, where musicians gravitated to jazz fusion via English rock music, which continues to enjoy singular influence among Canarian popular music consumption and production, as a result of a long standing economic relationship between Great Britain and the Canary Islands. For more on jazz fusion, see Fellezs (2011); for more on the relationship between Great Britain and the Canary Islands, see Morales Lezcano (1992).

17 Machado, liner notes to *Ropa Vieja*. The original texts: the track, "*dedicado a los increíbles músicos que han participado en este disco y al grupo 'Jazz Borondón,' sin duda una de mis mejores experiencias musicales,*" is based on "*coplas de la purísima Lanzarote.*" The sorondongo is regarded as one of the pre-colonial survivals of Afro-Canarian culture. See Pérez (2005).

18 The other musicians on the recording are drummer Dimas Machado, trumpeter Idafé Pérez, and guest artists pianist Polo Ortí and percussionist Petetoni Tamarit.

19 See de Certeau (1988: 91-110).

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20 Julio González, liner notes to *Montaña blanca*. The original text: "Nuestra alma retumba cuando suena una malagueña, una folía, una isa... esto nos envuelve musicalmente ofreciéndonos una identidad como pueblo. Esta cuestión nos hace reflexionar ya que estamos en continuo movimiento. No podemos olvidar que el folklore tal como lo conocemos hoy en día es el resultado inequívoco del paso de otras culturas por nuestras islas. Montaña Blanca surge de esta ecuación, que forma parte de los herederos de la tradición canaria. Fusionando nuestros instrumentos más típicos con otros más vanguardistas aportando un nivel de expresión completamente diferente, abriendo un Nuevo camino a otros jóvenes músicos que quieran experimentar conceptos."

<sup>21</sup> See Derbyshire (2009) and Emerson (2012).

<sup>22</sup> See Severin (2000/1978).

<sup>23</sup> See Unattributed (2011: online).

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