Summary of work with the Cristóbal Díaz Ayala Collection,
with recommendations on how the Collection may be improved or enhanced.
By Barry Cox
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During my week (May 9-13) at the Díaz-Ayala Collection, my research was focused on rumba. This research principally involved combing through the recordings in the collection to find early references to rumba and rumba melodies, but also extended to documenting record labels and covers for a rumba discography I am compiling, as well as more generally exploring the collection's holdings of photographs, videos, books and articles related to rumba. In all this I was always ably and cheerfully assisted by Ms. Verónica Gonzalez and her staff.
I was able hear two early recordings of particular interest to me, María Teresa Vera's "El Yambú Guaguancó (Columba C3557) c. 1920, and Orquesta Reverón's "Guaguancó" (Victor 68558) 1918. I was also able to satisfy myself that my efforts to document all vinyl recordings of rumba have been exhaustive and virtually complete.

The improvements I would suggest are mostly of a practical and technological nature. Although the collection is very well-organized, and Ms. Gonzalez is a highly effective navigator, determining what is actually in the collection can still be a rather difficult process. I was informed that an update of the database is in the works, and in my opinion this is vital and needs to be expedited. Where possible, input from Ms. Gonzalez, other music librarians, and researchers should be solicited so that the final result will support their needs as much as possible.

On a practical level, I feel that better space allocations could be made for researchers. For example, an alcove in a secure location with a bookshelf, a lockable compartment for books, laptop and other materials, and a monitor with access to the collection's entire database. (In some instances, such as to search the lists of videos and interviews, I had to view the documents on Ms. Gonzalez's monitor, which kept her from her own work.)

Regarding transcriptions of interviews and other material that is input into the database via student labor and interns, efforts should be made to improve the integrity of this data. For example, I came across a listing for a video called "Fiesta de Changó," which was in fact called "Fiesta de Changüí". I was happy to find this video too, but a person with better knowledge of Cuban music might not have made this error. Of course, this is a specialized form of knowledge in a labor pool that is not readily available for data-entry during the day.

To rectify this, I would propose that the Collection initiate a "crowdsourcing" trial, sort of a "volunteer ombudsman" program, in which certified individuals could have a special limited access to the database via the internet, and could suggest changes or corrections as they are discovered.