

Hi, my name is María.

I'm Mar.

We are here in San Juan, Puerto Rico
with If Cities Could Dance.

And this is bomba.

♪ bomba drumming and singing ♪

[Mar] In bomba, you make the rhythm
and then everything else follows you.

♪ bomba drumming and singing ♪

[Mar] We're dancing in three areas
at the heart of bomba in the North:
San Juan, Santurce, and Loíza.

[Mar] It's a liberating way to dance.

It's a dance where you are free to do what you feel in the
moment,

whatever feels natural.

♪ bomba drumming and singing ♪

[Bomba] helped me love myself,
respect and value myself.

♪ bomba drumming and singing ♪

Bomba comes from Africa,
from our African ancestors.

[María] I feel honored and happy because

I am representing my ancestors.

That was their only way to express themselves.

♪ drumming ♪

[Maricruz] It was an instrument, a space for rebellion.

It was anti-systemic, anti-racist,

anti-all that oppression

that the slave system created and perpetuated.

Today, music remains a space

for freedom

and political transformation.

Let's dance!

♪ bomba drumming and singing ♪

[Mar] I remember when my mom

dressed me in [bomba] attire, I felt like myself.

Oh my God!

I felt so beautiful,

I felt like "wow!" This is something with which I can identify.

This is me, this is part of me.

♪ bomba drumming and singing ♪

[Mar] Santurce became the first place

where free slaves came to.

Loíza becomes the town

with the largest concentration of black people.

[Mar] This cave is an ancient place,

but is also known as a shelter for people

escaping slavery.

[María] I dance by myself too,

but it's so much more fun

when I am with my sister.

What joy it is

for both of us to dance together.

[Mar] The Taíno influence is heard in instruments

like the maraca, the cuá.

The cuá and the drums keep a constant rhythm.

The high pitch drum or primo improvises.

It's a conversation between the drummer and the dancer.

♪ bomba drumming and singing ♪

[Mar] The Cepeda family is one of many families

who made sure to keep bomba and its legacy alive.

[Jesús] The first teachers we had

were Don Rafael and Doña Caridad.

They were the first teachers that we had,

they showed us how it all worked.

♪ bomba drumming and singing ♪

Papi always said that when

Puerto Rico finally reaches a point where it recognizes the value
of its folklore,

it will fight to defend its honor.

He fought to give recognition to this music.

It had been marginalized and forgotten

simply because it was black music.

Black music, you know,

comes from the people.

♪ drumming ♪

[Mar] Bomba used to only be played and danced to
while with the family.

♪ bomba drumming and singing ♪

[María] Now, it has made a huge comeback.

People dance to it on the beach,

on stage,

at someone's home, anywhere.

♪ bomba drumming and singing ♪

[María] I feel as if the drums

are beckoning me, asking me to get on the dance floor.

That's the ancestors nearby,

they send us that vibe.

♪ bomba drumming and singing ♪

[Mar] If a little girl watches me dancing,

I can only hope to inspire her

to search for her roots.

♪ bomba drumming and singing ♪