

(H.B. 1392)

(No. 91-2010)

(Approved July 26, 2010)

AN ACT

To recognize San Antón Ward of the Municipality of Ponce as a place of historic and cultural interest, and designate it as the “Cradle of Plena,” and to provide for coordination between the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture and the Municipality of Ponce to implement the provisions of this Act, and to promote the historic and cultural values of this community.

STATEMENT OF MOTIVES

Ponce is Ponce for its folklore, traditions, and legends, which have earned Ponce the name of *Ciudad Señorial* [lit.: Stately City].

Plena is originally from Ponce, and its name is derived from a misinterpretation of the expression “Play Anne” that a black Tortola native used to say to his wife, so that she would beat the conga drum louder.

The most prolific Plena author in Ponce was Bum-bum, who found inspiration in everyday life events, such as: when Elena was cut, the San Felipe hurricane, and the arrival to Ponce of its first Bishop, Monsignor Byrnes.

Both Bomba and Plena peaked in popularity in San Antón, a typical Ponce ward that was home to a large number of families of freed slaves.

In the past century, San Antón was the home and the place of business of the notorious *Doña* Isabel Luberza, known throughout Puerto Rico as “Isabel La Negra.”

In 1980, a group of residents of San Antón, a ward that refuses to disappear and be absorbed into any of various housing developments—created the Bomba and Plena Festival. (General data, *Ponce: Notas para su historia* by Mariano Vidal-Armstrong, Ponce 1984).

According to an article written in the *El Mundo* newspaper on Tuesday, November 23, 1971, “La Plena nació en el barrio San Antón” [lit: Plena was born in *Barrio San Antón*].

San Antón is a picturesque Ponce ward which could very well mirror what Loíza is to Santurce; or rather, so as not to cross the People of Ponce, we could say that what Loíza is to Santurce mirrors what San Antón is to Ponce.

La Música Folklórica Puertorriqueña [lit.: Puerto Rican Folk Music], by F. López-Cruz, states about Plena, born in this typical Ponce ward: “that its essential characteristics are simplicity and repetition. As with every other kind of folk music, it is not polished or stylized. It is rudimentary and intimate, real-life and raw.” [Translation supplied]. He adds that the subjects of interest in Plena range from incidents in the slums (*Cortaron a Elena* [lit.: Elena was Cut]) to world events (*Le Cortaron la Melena al León* [lit.: The Lion’s Mane Was Cut Off]), referring to the Dempsey-Tunney fight.

On the origins of Plena, Professor López-Cruz notes: “The origin of this local musical genre has been the object of controversy. The first version on the origins of Plena emerged some thirty (30) years ago and claims that, in the beginning, Plena was sung and danced outdoors, and on moonlit nights the splendor of this traditional activity could be better appreciated. Under an exquisite full moon or complete moon [*luna plena*, in Spanish]. With time, the [Spanish] adjective became the name of the musical genre and dance: *la luna plena, plena*.” [Translation supplied]

Composer Augusto Cohen also quotes, in discussing the origins of the word Plena: “On the origins of the word ‘Plena,’ I have been told by Mr. Barnes, attorney Fornariz, and some other older people who lived in that time—it dates back to the beginning of the century in Ponce; one night, while a group surrendered with abandon to the new dance, the excitement progressively intensified until someone possessed by such a strange frenzy exclaimed from the depths of his subconscious: ‘Plena.’ Since then, everybody continued to call the new dance ‘Plena.’” [Translation supplied]

Plena is a local musical expression you can dance to. It dates back to World War I and is seemingly from Ponce, although it spread rapidly throughout the entire Island, thus becoming so native, something that sounds so vintage and refined, as if it had been lying dormant before it burst out into song (María Teresa Babín, *La Cultura de Puerto Rico*, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña 1970, p. 100). [Translation supplied]

In her already quoted essay, *Doña* María Cadilla de Martínez describes Plena as living, meant to be sung in a chorus, with diversified nuances. “In its acute melodies, rhythms accelerate capriciously and beats are repeated quite frequently, giving preference to those which are most rambunctious. Percussion instruments are used to play Plena and the lyrics almost always narrate a current event, as evident in the titles of the most popular songs: *El Submarino Alemán* (one of the first to appear), *Moratoria*, *El Temporal*, *Cortaron a Elena*, *El Obispo de Ponce*, and *Mataron al Chivo* (which criticizes prohibition in the Island).” [Translation supplied]

Likewise, in his work, López-Cruz quotes Dr. María Cadilla de Martínez, who also agrees that Plena originated in Ponce.

Plena has been memorialized by Nobel Literature Prize recipient, Gabriel García-Márquez: “... because never in the rest of the very long years of his power

would he find the Manuela Sánchez of my perdition again in the labyrinth of her house, she had disappeared in the night of the eclipse general sir, they told him that she'd been seen dancing the Plena in Puerto Rico, there where they cut Elena general sir..."¹

Plena does not overlook any subject whatsoever; but rather it ranges from religious, to philosophical, to medicinal, to superstitious, to popular advice—in brief, everything that makes up daily life is gathered in the diverse subjects discussed in Plena.

The picturesque San Antón ward, where people still play dominoes under the branches of a Ceiba or Genip tree, is very proud to be the cradle of Plena.

It has been close to a century since Plena was created, and in recognition of its place of origin, we hereby pass this measure so that Ponce's San Antón ward is recognized as a place of historic and cultural interest, for it is the "Cradle of Plena." We thus recognize, through this Act, that "Plena comes from Ponce and was born in San Antón ward."

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF PUERTO RICO:

Section 1.—The San Antón ward of the Municipality of Ponce is hereby recognized as a place of historic and cultural interest and designated as the "Cradle of Plena."

Section 2.—The Institute of Puerto Rican Culture and the Municipality of Ponce shall coordinate efforts and resources for the adequate identification of San Antón ward as the "Cradle of Plena," and the promotion of its historic and cultural values.

Section 3.—The Municipality of Ponce is hereby authorized to create the Fund for the Historical Development of San Antón Ward and to receive donations

¹ (*El Otoño del Patriarca*, Editorial Bruguera (1980), p. 111). Translation from *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, Penguin Books: 1976.

from private businesses or any person who meets the standards and limitations established in the body of laws of Puerto Rico and the United States of America.

Section 4.—This Act shall take effect immediately after its approval.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify to the Secretary of State that the following **Act No. 91-2010 (H. B. 1392)** of the **3rd Session of the 16th Legislature** of Puerto Rico:

AN ACT to recognize San Antón Ward of the Municipality of Ponce as a place of historic and cultural interest, and designate it as the “Cradle of Plena,” and to provide for coordination between the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture and the Municipality of Ponce to implement the provisions of this Act, and to promote the historic and cultural values of this community.

has been translated from Spanish to English and that the English version is correct.

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, on the 14th day of November, 2012.

María del Mar Ortiz Rivera