



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK & TRADITIONAL ARTS PROGRAM

AUDIO TAPE LOG

Accession No.: KK-05-05-C Date(s): 10/18/05

Fieldworker(s): Kate Kruckemeyer

Interviewee(s): Angel Sanchez "Junoir" Ortiz; translation by his wife Zulma Cabral

Event: _____

Place of Recording: their apartment in Holyoke: [REDACTED]

Recording Equipment: Marantz PMD Microphone(s): Beyer M58

Recorded in: mono Tape Brand and Format: Cassette, 60 minutes

Amount Tape Used: Cassette: 50 min. DAT: ABS time:

Related Accession Numbers: _____

Brief summary of tape contents: Vejigante mascararas (masks); how Junior learned this craft in Ponce; his experiences here, particularly the difficulty to get support for the work; his experiences teaching children and his desire to help them connect with Puerto Rican culture through art [most descriptions of the process are in the fieldnotes for this accession]

NOTE: The tape includes Junior's comments in Spanish, with Zulma's translations in English; the transcript below includes only the portion of the tape that is in English as the fieldworker's Spanish is weak; readers wanting a full account of Junior's words are advised to listen to the Spanish themselves

Counter/ABS	Contents
001	tape intro
006	how did he learn to do this; what was his inspiration?
009	Zulma Cabral translates: "He would see his cousins doing masks in the backyard. He says 'So one day I went to the backyard and I started playing around, and I started doing one.' He says 'I started playing around with it, I put horns, crazy ideas, like I could.' He says 'So I started using the left-over paint. They told me I was talented—I don't remember who, someone who did the costumes. Since then, I do them, have fun, with the masks and the costumes.' He says that 'At the age of nine, it interested me so much, that I overheard there was a school for it, so I went to school for it. And at that time I did my first professional mask with the teachers.' He said 'I showed them and everybody that I knew how to do it, and then I stopped going to school.' And he says, 'Traditionally, the experience that I have, since then, then I would participate in the Carnival in Puerto Rico. I would get dressed with the little [some discussion of what "the negrito" is—character in blackface] hunchback.' He says he would paint his face black, white [indicates lips], he would wear a hat, a costume, and with a cane, and that's the way he used to play. And would watch the parade, and everybody would be there. 'And at that time, you know, friends would dress like women, and we would all have fun at

the Carnival. And at that time, you would dress up so that nobody could know who you are, they would have to guess who you are. And every year would be a different idea.' Then he would have to work, travel, and... he says he came to the United States at the age of 15, he was here until he was 19, he went to New York at the age of 19. Then he worked a little bit and then he went back to Puerto Rico. Then at the age of 20 married, but then at the age of 35 came back to the United States."

051 where in PR

053 "Ponce. Street Number 4. Near the beach."

055 questions about Carnival

056 Once a year "In Ponce, it's February the 2nd until the 29th." Then in other cities after that "Loiza's in the summer, and Hatillo is in December." Did you go to the others? "He says 'The most important is Ponce.'"

070 The meaning? "Day by day it's different. On the last day is the burial [of Rey Momo], the bonfire, stuff like that. Everybody gathers. He says, 'Everyday from that month of February is a different activity.'" Like what? "He says it's difficult, you would have to have a list. One day bomba & plena, dancing, there's a lot." Significance of the masks? "For me, my way of thinking, my opinion, is how to identify the vejigante, how to irk him, so the vejigante could chase other people around. Tease him, sing to him, "Mask, mask, I know you from the back." Then you would have to sing something about the vejigante, sing the songs. "Sing, sing, vejigante ate mangos." There's a lot of history.' He says you are putting him through—to remember old times. He says 'I wait until all of the kids get dressed, and they go all over the little towns that they call barrios.' He says 'Almost all the time, the ones from Ponce, by the ocean, are the ones that come out first, visiting every little town dressed as a vejigante. Every day. Until the last day of the Carnival.' He says 'And the group appears at every little town, and it gets excited because they're visiting, in groups, dressed as a vejigante. Then everybody starts, buying the masks, or sitting on the porch and doing the masks, so they can get also dressed and play around."

124 "He says it's very exciting when this happens because you have kids, children, doing the mask, competing—who does the bigger one, who does the scarier one. And they win prizes. He says "well in Puerto Rico, the artists, old ones, usually win the prize, because they do it and take more time, and they have more experience. And they usually are the ones that win the prize." They ran the school? "He says 'Usually not really, you learn it in the streets.' He says 'Not really, not in school—in the streets. The reason why they go to school is because when it's time for it, the kids want to learn, so there's a teacher that teaches it. And then the masks come from the idea of the artist. In school you don't learn that kind, it just comes out from the head and you just do it.'" Inspirations besides the cousins? "He says when he was younger 'Yes, I liked to carve. I like to paint. And I would always be interested in the arts, it would always keep me busy.' He says and when Columbus Day would come, he would be excited and he would do a boat. The three boats—he has them downstairs, actually. Every time happens different, during the year. He says 'You know, if a person is really interested in the arts, it motivates himself to do the art.' He says 'There was a group of us, me from Ponce, another person from [Cuatrocaye? Town name], another person from another little town, another person from the beach, and we would all get together.' He says he participated in City Hall doing a big piñata, everybody was participating in a huge one. They would paint it, clip it, and fill it with candy, and it would go up, be really up, for the Carnival. There was always something to do."

[when he was young] “He says ‘I really don’t know if they keep on doing it the same way as when I was growing up.’”

193 “He says when I came here when I was young there was a lot of gangs. And then that’s when I showed, it was interesting for me to show [my masks]. Then from there it interested me even more, because my dreams is to take the kids off the street.’ You know, he wants to take the culture and take the kids of the street, give them ideas, the ideas from Puerto Rico, like the Three Kings. ‘And then there I dedicated even more, to doing my art.’” You came back around ’95? “In Springfield, Holyoke, New Haven—no close to New Haven, Connecticut, [in] New Britain. ‘My goal is to go to New York.’ He says it started in 1994, then they started bringing artists from Puerto Rico over to the United States. And you find newspapers in Puerto Rico at almost the same time, and New York [talking about the vejigante]. He says ‘Here, I’m starting here, and some of them don’t find me. Some of the people don’t find me.’”

228 so, renewed interest in masks in the last 10 years? “He says it went all over after this, it was like all over.” Did he stop for a while? “He says ‘I stopped 1998.’ But people would come to me like dancers’ and they would ask him. And he would do the mask and give it to them, but he would see that nobody was interested. What they’re interested in—they want to learn how to do it, so they can take advantage and win money.’ [leafing through his scrapbook] “They would find Junior and they would say [to Junior] ‘This guy [who is pretending to know masks] doesn’t know anything about the masks,’ and he [Junior] would have to jump in and finish. That was the last, 1997, costume parade [pointing to an article].” Started again? “Two years [ago]. ‘I prepared myself for the University of Amherst.’ For the Gallery there.”

265 more interest in last two years, teaching? Zulma responds: “Right now he’s not teaching anywhere, but he was. We went to Holyoke Community College for the summer and we taught a group of kids, they did their own masks. And we went to” [talking about the exhibit this past spring at Augusta Savage Gallery] “‘Last year I had to prepare myself for this. I would need like a year to prepare all my stuff the way I wanted to to participate.’” [reference to the Santos carver, they have his number]

286 would he like to do more if the opportunity came? “‘Yes,’ he says, ‘I love my art. And I’m going to continue with this. It’s a hobby, but yes, I’m going to continue with it.’ And he would love to do it. He says ‘It needs to have a purpose, not for them to use me and leave me on the side.’ He says, ‘It’s good, I want to teach the children in the schools, but I want them to participate, like in the Puerto Rican parade, the children, so they can show what they did.’ He says, ‘Kids, in school, so they can get together in the summer for the parade—this all has to do with children, kids.’ He says when Halloween comes, they can use it for Halloween. If there’s, again—you know, vejigantes are celebrated in Puerto Rico in the Carnival. He says and to succeed, kids, even older people can participate, but they focus on the kids. He says, so the last day they can close with all this excitement.

327 anything here that is like Carnival? What could be similar? “He says, ‘Well, the kids need to learn how to do their masks, they’ll learn the culture, so they can maintain it wherever they go. How to use paper, so they can learn to use paper, so they can do masks, so they can do the big heads. They can do something with the paper animals, or the costumes. He says when they go to see a costume, of a personal person, they can do it themselves, they can do it with the paper. Paper is very important. He says right now, you want to go to a Puerto Rican parade, and all you see is cars. There’s nothing with flowers, or nothing that would trigger the

excitement of the Puerto Rican parade. Just cars and motor cycles, no dolls [muñeca] that move their hands or anything. Stuff like that, you do it with paper.”

363 what is particularly Puerto Rican about the masks? “He says ‘For me, my personal opinions, is the month of February. And it comes, and excites everybody, and we just dress as vejigantes, and it’s exciting.’ The cultural tradition “He says, the whole year, you don’t see anybody up until that certain month. It’s a part of the little towns. He says it’s not like you’re employed and you’re obligated to do something, you just do it because you want to do it not because you’re obligated to do it.” Many people in this area of Massachusetts are from Ponce, right? “He says, ‘Yes, and they know a lot about the culture.’” So this would draw people together? “‘Well, yes.’ He says ‘Well, when I participated with this company [photo of kids and adults in mascararas from 1997], it felt like Puerto Rico. It was happiness, it was enjoyable, exciting. It was all from seeing the masks, the costumes. When he did the Chupacabras, everybody was there, from the beginning to the end [or the parade], yelling “Chupacabras!”” a special character? Zulma’s words: “That was a very special character. That character was found in Puerto Rico, and supposedly this character would suck the blood of a cow. Remember that? He did that, that costume.” “‘In ’97 I did that, right here. And it attracted a lot of attention.’” [END OF SIDE ONE]

[SIDE TWO]

000 talking about the kids that were in the troupe “They have got to be big, they have got to be like teenagers, they’ve got to be big. He says ‘A couple recognize me. There’s a couple that are at their homes. Maybe if I show them the picture they would remember me,’ he says. He says, ‘Again, I left it behind. And the people that wanted to learn it, they couldn’t, because I left it behind.’” Because of the difficulty? Zulma responds: “Because of the difficulty and the problems that occurred.” Zulma translates: “You need to grow with it, he says, and to be a successful person with this, you need to grow with it. The culture, so they continue every year with it. If there’s not a group, or an older person to do it, the kids, they’re not going to be—they’re going to forget about it. They’re not going to have the courage to do it. Then, he says, again, I left it alone, and the children that wanted to do it, they don’t want to do it by themselves, so they forgot about it. They’ve tried, but he hasn’t seen anything.”

018 what supports would this art need? “He says, ‘Right now I’m very happy because I started and now people are noticing me again, and I’m bringing back the excitement that I had brought at that time.’ He says, ‘And I’m seeing that the doors are opening again for me.’ He says ‘I see it as now they know me, and I now I could be there. At the beginning it was very hard,’ and he says ‘Now I see more of the fruits. It’s better, it’s easier.’ Because it was very hard. He says, ‘Now the schools have my back, they are supporting what I do. And I would just love it for the culture to keep on going. The only thing I ask for, you know, when I do an event, is proof that I have do the event, that I have it here. [his notebook]

042 “He says in Puerto Rico, the artist is always jealous of the art, protects the art. He says there was a person in Puerto Rico, saying ‘I am the teacher, I’m the teacher,’ and he [Junior] gave information back, a message back, and said ‘Don’t say that, because you’re not the teacher.’ That he [Junior] brought it here to the United States, and [the other man] has been a beneficiary, him in Puerto Rico, because he [Junior] brought it to the United States. He says ‘Now everybody wants to know the culture in Puerto Rico, the old artists and art in Puerto Rico, everybody goes to Puerto Rico, everybody travels to Puerto Rico, and gets information about the

artists and the culture and—he says, ‘and they ask about the person, and, yet again they don’t remember me.’ He says ‘I visited schools where they have the masks, but they are from Puerto Rico. It’s from so-and-so [in Puerto Rico], but I am here and I’m doing my art _here_. They don’t use my art, they go to Puerto Rico and buy the masks. And then the ones that have the beneficiary are the ones from Puerto Rico.’ He says ‘They should support me because I am here in the United States and not in Puerto Rico.’

067KK: artist in the schools program looking for PR artists, probably lots of interest in his work

077 “He says ‘The culture in Puerto Rico is always going to be there. What I want is to bring the culture here, to the United States. That the kids can do something, do something here, to continue here.’ He says, ‘So they could talk about it and say here, too, in the United States, it’s the same as Puerto Rico, the culture.’ He goes, ‘Realistically, the vejigante was born in Ponce, but in different little towns they keep on celebrating, on different dates. Here in the United States a lot of children don’t know the culture, and that’s one of my goals, so they can learn the culture. He says ‘So they could participate here. In the summer they could get together, in the parade they could see the vejigantes. And other ideas that as well they can use with paper.’ He says it doesn’t have to be vejigantes either, it could be something else. He goes ‘It could be anything. If they want to do it with the balloon, they could do it with the balloon. They can do the big heads.’ He says, ‘Themselves, they can do it themselves, their own ideas. And school is where it can all start.’ He says ‘They should support a lot the art, not only mine, but every art. And that’s my idea. He doesn’t look for a lot,’ he says, ‘I’m already old.’ He says ‘See, I see it as, when I stopped, they forgot about it. Now that I brought it back, now everybody is interested in it again.’ He says, ‘When I started, I started opening it with a person named Angel, Angel Nieto.’ He says, ‘And then I went to school, a school in Holyoke, and I found myself with a paper stating that they’re looking for a person that does masks. I tried to go in, I spoke to him, he had found somebody else.’ He says ‘Eduardo Melendez doesn’t know—he’s using my masks.’ He says, ‘I don’t think he knows how to do masks, and if he did, he would have to use his own [not Junior’s].’ He says, ‘And I came here to see if they could help me get a job as an artist, and they denied me, but yet they are using my art, my masks.’ He says that Angel Nieto didn’t know that they were his masks, he thought it was Eduardo Melendez’s masks.’ He says then Angel Nieto asked him ‘What do you want?’ And Junior said ‘I need your help, for you to help me [instead of Melendez].’ He says, ‘I was the one that put the seed here in the United States with these masks.’ He says ‘Nobody knows me, the masks are here, and somebody else is getting paid for it, somebody else using my masks, and my name doesn’t even appear in the paper. I just want for people to back me up.’ He says, ‘And through him [Nieto], he said make thirty masks, and you’re going to go to U. Mass., to go to U. Mass., that’s how it started here, again.’”

Clarification—Angel Nieto got him connected to U.Mass. “And then from there, all doors started opening up for me.” Clarification—Angel Nieto is current or perhaps most recent past director of Holyoke Creative Arts Center

155 “He says ‘There are a lot of programs out there, and he even goes to schools, and nobody backs him up. He has to usually bring his proofs that he is the artist.’”

Can something help ease the conflicts within the community? “He says, he doesn’t know either, but they use the art to take the Governor’s money. He said, ‘That’s what, my opinion. Because I don’t know English, I’ve never studied, and I’m not the only one. Learning stuff from the other artists, and so they can learn

and ask around. And then, they have titles, diplomas, and they can get support.’ He says, ‘See, I can’t teach the children my art because I don’t know English. But then yet, I can show somebody else, so somebody else can teach the children because the other person knows English. That’s a problem.’” Zulma: “He’s going to school now.” “He says, “I have the pictures. Here’s one of my pictures.” [looking through notebook] “He says, ‘this person used one of my pictures. He asked for ideas, how do you do the masks. And because of my pictures, he told everybody it was his, you know?’” [talking about some of the pictures; first came in 1995] “He was giving classes to the children [in this picture].” We decide to stop to take down some names, etc. END OF TAPE, SIDE TWO AT COUNTER
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