



Guide to the Tato Laviera Papers



**Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora
Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños
Hunter College, CUNY
2180 Third Avenue @ 119th St., Rm. 120
New York, New York 10035
(212) 396-7877
www.centropr.hunter.cuny.edu**

Cover Photograph: Tato Laviera by Marlis Momber, ca. 1992

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Tato Laviera, 1950-2013

Title: The Tato Laviera Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1964-2013

Bulk Dates: 1992-2012

Volume: 5 cubic feet

Repository: Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños

Abstract: Acclaimed Puerto Rican poet, playwright, performer, educator, and community leader. Collection provides insight into Laviera's life and career, as well as into the Nuyorican poetry movement, of which he was an early member. Consists of correspondence, manuscripts, typescripts, notebooks, press clippings, articles, flyers, event programs, posters, photographs, and audio and video recordings.

Administrative Information

Collection Number: 2013-006

Provenance: Gift of Ruth Ella Laviera and Ruth Sanchez

Copyright: Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY. Original works owned by the Laviera Estate.

Other Finding Aids: Index and Chronology

Restrictions: Open to researchers without restriction.

Preferred Citation: The Tato Laviera Papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.

Technical Access: Diskettes and microcassette are currently inaccessible.

Processing Archivists: Alberto Hernández-Banuchi with assistance from Rebecca Machado.

Date: October 2015

TATO LAVIERA (1950-2013)

Biographical Note:

Tato Laviera was born Jesús Abraham Laviera Sánchez on May 9, 1950 in the Santurce district of San Juan, Puerto Rico. His father was a philosopher and his mother a writer. Laviera was a gifted student and served as an altar boy for the bishop of San Juan from the time he was six. In 1960 his family moved to New York City, settling in the Lower East Side. Laviera graduated from Seward Park High School with honors in 1968 and attended Cornell University and Brooklyn College. He never completed his undergraduate studies, instead devoting himself to aiding youth in his community. Some of Laviera's early community work included teaching for the New Beginnings Program (1967), serving as youth organizer for Little Star of Broome (1968), and directing the University of the Streets (1969-1972), an educational project to help young adults obtain a high school diploma and attend college. He also became a Lower East Side political leader, serving as chairman and president of the New Jibaro Democratic Club from 1974-1981.

Laviera's strong leadership skills and community activism attracted many social agencies, granting him a seat on various boards. He served as assistant director and director of the Association of Community Services (1970-1980), Manhattan coordinator of United Bronx Parents' summer feeding program (1971-1973), Associate Producer of Fiestas de Loiza on NBC-TV (1977), and was a writer/consultant for many organizations, including PRACA, Inc., the Puerto Rican Family Institute, Harriet Pitt Public Relations, Bronx Council for the Arts, Dammah Productions Speaker's Bureau, the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, and Alianza Dominicana. Laviera was also an educator, teaching basic writing skills at Rutgers University (1971-1973) and lecturing at Livingston College's Department of Puerto Rican Studies (1979-1980).

When Laviera was nine years old, his uncle took him to a literary event in Santurce, where he heard Luis Palés Matos recite poetry. He later credited the occasion as his inspiration for becoming a poet. Jorge Brandon, fellow resident of the Lower East Side, was also an early influence, along with Juan Boria. Laviera became involved with the Nuyorican Poets' Café in New York City, a venue and movement featuring the work of Puerto Rican poets. In 1979, Arte Público Press of Houston published Laviera's first anthology of poetry, *La Carreta Made a U-Turn*. The anthology garnered widespread praise and honors, as well as an invitation to the White House by President Jimmy Carter for a gathering of American poets in 1980. After publication of his first book, Laviera gave up administrative work to dedicate himself to writing.

His second book, *Enclave* (1981), made him the first Latino author to win the prestigious American Book Award of the Before Columbus Foundation. Poems from his third publication, *AmeRícan* (1986), have been included in more than thirty anthologies, with *AmeRícan* being the most anthologized Puerto Rican poem in the history of American literature. Other published collections include: *Mainstream Ethics* (1988), *Continental* (2003), and *Mixturao and Other Poems* (2008).

Laviera was also a prolific playwright. *Olú Clemente* (1978), based on the life of Puerto Rican baseball legend Roberto Clemente, was published in *Nuevos Pasos: Chicano and Puerto Rican Drama* and was one of his most successful plays with around forty performances in New York City. *Piñones* (1979), *Can Pickers* (1995), *Mixturao Revue* (2004) and *King of Cans*, a musical based on Celia Cruz, are also among his best known plays, with *The Spark* (2006) and *77 P.R. Chicago Riot* (2007) appearing in *The Afro-Hispanic Review*. His plays have been produced in Chicago and New York City, including the Lower East Side's Henry Street Settlement New Federal Theater, Circle in the Square, and Teatro Cuatro at El Museo del Barrio. Several of his plays were produced by theatre impresario Joseph Papp at The Public Theater, Central Park's Delcourt Theatre, and the New York Shakespeare Festival. Laviera had been working on a children's story *Mayanito* and a novel entitled *El Barrio: Spanish Harlem* when he became ill.

In 2004, Laviera became legally blind as a result of a diabetic condition. He became a spokesperson for Latinos suffering from the illness, and developed the "Jesús A. Laviera One-Day with Diabetes Project," which promoted "sugar slams," events in which poets talked about the devastating effects of diabetes in minority communities. The American Diabetes Association awarded him their Trailblazer Award, in recognition of his efforts to promote diabetes awareness amongst Latino communities in New York.

Laviera led numerous creative writing workshops throughout his career, including the Hispanic Drama Workshop at the New Federal Theatre (1980-1986) and cofounding "Cosecha Voices" (2007-2009) for first year migrant students at the University of Texas – Pan American. He was also an artist-in-residence at many organizations, including Teatro Cuatro at Museo del Barrio (1981-1987), Talent Unlimited (1999-2005), the Center for Puerto Rican Studies (1997), and El Regreso Foundation in Brooklyn. He toured widely as a performer of his poetry, directing plays and producing cultural events at more than 100 universities, institutions and community centers in the United States, the Caribbean, Mexico, Europe and Africa.

In 2009, a medical emergency left Laviera homeless and nearly destitute. Aided by Lorraine Montenegro of United Bronx Parents, he found temporary shelter at Casita Esperanza in the Bronx. Despite his privations, Laviera cited this period as creatively liberating, and he held poetry readings with residents of the shelter. A May 2010 *New York Times* article by David Gonzalez about Laviera's circumstances ignited a national campaign to raise funds to establish the Tato Laviera Foundation, to help the poet and other artists in need. Several months later he moved into a studio apartment at the Taíno Towers in East Harlem.

Generally recognized to be the best-selling Latino poet in the United States, Laviera's prolific career spans four decades, with his poems appearing in virtually every anthology of Latino poetry. His innovative works have been noted for their bilingualism, biculturalism and the melding of the orality and musicality of Afro-Caribbean poetic traditions with the distinct sounds and voices of El Barrio. Some of his recent awards include the Long Island State University Lifetime Achievement Award, the 2008 Comité Noviembre Puerto Rican Heritage Award (2008), and the Pedro Pietri Hand Award (2009) presented by the Puerto Rican Embassy.

On November 1, 2013, Tato Laviera passed away from complications of diabetes at age 63 at Manhattan's Mount Sinai Hospital. He had two children, Ruth Ella and Abraham Malik.

Sources:

Center for Puerto Rican Studies. "Tato Laviera." <http://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/tato-laviera-bio>.

Gonzalez, David. "Poet Spans Two Worlds, but Has a Home in Neither." *New York Times*, February 12, 2010.

Gonzalez, David. "Tato Laviera, 63, Poet of Nuyorican School." *New York Times*, November 5, 2013.

Latino Rebels. "An Interview with Tato Laviera, the King of Nuyorican Poetical Migrations." Posted on July 11, 2012. <http://www.latinorebels.com/2012/07/11/an-interview-with-tato-laviera-the-king-of-nuyorican-poetical-migrations/>.

Note: Biographical information also derived from the collection.

Scope and Content:

The Tato Laviera Papers span the years 1964-2013, with the majority concentrated between 1992 and 2012. The collection chronicles the career of one of the Puerto Rican community's most popular published writers, and one of the early members of the Nuyorican poetry movement. The papers include biographical and personal information, correspondence, manuscripts and typescripts of Laviera's works, handwritten notes and notebooks, flyers and programs from various events, photographs, and audio and video recordings.

The collection is divided into the following series:

- I. Biographical and Personal Information**
- II. Correspondence**
- III. Writings**
- IV. Events, Projects and Workshops**
- V. Audiovisual Materials**

Access Points:

Names

Algarín, Miguel
Brandon, Jorge
Kanellos, Nicolás
Meléndez, Jesús Papoleto
Papp, Joseph

Subject Organizations

American Diabetes Association
Arte Público Press
Association of Community Services
El Regreso, Inc.
Hunter College
Hunter College. Center for Puerto Rican Studies
International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Local 237 (New York, N.Y.)
Juan Antonio Corretjer Puerto Rican Cultural Center
Loisaida Festival, Inc.
Museo del Barrio (New York, N.Y.)
New Jibaro Democratic Club
Nuyorican Poets Cafe
Saint John's School (San Juan, Puerto Rico)
Taíno Towers Management
Talent Unlimited, Inc.
University of Texas -- Pan American. Department of Modern Languages
United Bronx Parents, Inc.
University of Texas, Pan-American

Subject Topics

American drama -- Puerto Rican authors
American poetry -- Hispanic American authors
American poetry -- New York (State)--New York
American poetry -- Puerto Rican authors
Performance poetry
Poetry and the arts -- New York (State)--New York
Poetry slams -- New York (State) -- New York -- 21st century
Puerto Rican drama -- 20th century
Puerto Rican poetry -- 20th century
Puerto Rican poetry -- New York (State)--New York
Puerto Ricans -- New York (State) -- New York -- Poetry

Subject Places

East Harlem (New York, N.Y.)
Lower East Side (New York, N.Y.)
New York (State)--New York--Poetry.
Santurce (San Juan, P.R.)
South Bronx (New York, N.Y.)

Document Types

Audiovisual materials

Clippings

Correspondence

Diskettes

Ephemera

Event programs

Flyers

Manuscripts

Notebooks

Photographs

Sheet music

Typescripts

Series I: Biographical and Personal Information (1981-2013)

This series contains biographical sketches, resumes, awards, press clippings, interviews, medical, financial and legal documents, schedules, notes, and a few items about his son, Abraham Malik, and sister, Ruth Sanchez. Also included are materials related to Laviera's touring and travel, such as itineraries, airline tickets, and honorariums.

Box	Folder	
1	1	Awards, 2006-2007, 2009-2010
	2	Biographical Sketches and Resumes, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2006-2009, 2011, ca. 1990s-2000s
	3	Clippings, 1981, 2005, 2007-2010, 1983-2010, ca. 1990s-2000s
	4	Contact Lists and Business Cards, ca. 1990s-2000s
	5	Financial and Legal Documents, 2005-2010, ca. 2000s
	6	Interviews, 1992, 2009
	7	Laviera, Abraham Malik, 2005, ca. 2005
	8	Medical Documents, 2004-2006, 2008-2009
	9	Memorial Service, 2013 November
	10	Sanchez, Ruth, 2010, ca. 2000s
	11	Schedules, To Do Lists and Notes, 2007-2009, ca. 1990s-2000s
	Travel	
	12	Airline Tickets, 2006-2009
	13	Itineraries and Receipts, 2006-2011, ca. 2000s
	Oversized Documents	
11		Clipping [laminated], "Poet Spans Two Worlds, but Has a Home in Neither," <i>New York Times</i> , 2010 February 13

Series II: Correspondence (1991-2012)

This series contains both incoming and outgoing correspondence, including personal and business letters, printed emails, and cards. Also found is correspondence with his publisher at Arte Público Press, Nicolás Kanellos, and letters from a group of students at St. John's School in Puerto Rico.

Box	Folder	
2	1-2	Arte Público Press, University of Houston, 1993-2010
	3	Cards, 1991, 2006-2007, 2010, ca. 1990s-2000s
	4-5	General, Incoming, 1992, 1996-1997, 2000-2001, 2003-2011, ca. 2000s
	6	General, Outgoing, 2005-2007, 2010-2012, ca. 2000s
	7	St. John's School (San Juan, PR), 2007 February 9

Series III: Writings (1979-2011)

This series contains the prose and verse writings of Laviera, including numerous drafts, sketches, fragments, and notes. The writings have been arranged into four subgroups: Plays and Performance Works, Poetry, Prose, and Notebooks. There is also a small group of prose and verse writings by others, such as Jesús Papoleto Meléndez, as well as literary criticism about Laviera's work. Also found are several musical scores with lyrics written by Laviera.

Box	Folder	
		Plays and Performance Works
2	8	<i>Bandera a Bandera</i> 3 typescripts (printouts): pp. 3-65, 2007 December; pp. 1-55, 2007 December; pp. 2-55, undated
	9	<i>Bandera a Bandera</i> excerpts, production notes, and correspondence, 2007-2008
3	1	<i>The Base of Soul in Heaven's Café</i> typescript (photocopy), 46 pp., 1985 February
	2	<i>Can Pickers</i> 2 typescripts (printouts): pp. 1-30, 33-46, undated; 32 pp., undated
	3	<i>Celia and Ruthie</i> 3 typescripts (printouts): pp. 1-33, 2003 August; pp. 1-32, 2003 August; pp. 26-34, ca. 2003
	4	<i>Celia and Ruthie</i> handwritten notes, loose sheets and 2 notepads, undated
	5	<i>El Gran Show de Puerto Rico</i> manuscript, undated
	6	<i>Chupacabra</i> production notes and typescript (printout), pp. 1-20, 2007 February 7
	7	<i>Integration</i> 2 typescripts (printouts): pp. 1-8, undated; pp.1-3, undated
	8	<i>King of Cans</i> typescript (printout), pp. 1-97, undated
	9	<i>King of Cans</i> 2 typescripts (photocopies): draft, pp. 1-79, 2008 summer; fragments, pp. 2-27, 39, ca. 2008
	10	<i>King of Cans</i> , song lyrics typescript (printout), 24 pp., 1999
	11	<i>La Media</i> 2 typescripts (printouts): pp. 1-15, 2008 March; pp. 1-15, undated
	12	<i>Mixturao Revue</i> 5 typescripts (printouts): pp. 1-13, 2005 November 9; pp. 1-15, 2005 November 9; pp. 1-10, 2005 December; 58 pp., 2005 December; pp. 1-33, 2006 March 16
4	1	<i>Mixturao Revue</i> drafts, notes and fragments, handwritten notes and notepad, 2005-2006, undated
	2	<i>Olú Clemente</i> photocopy, 11 pp., from <i>Nuevos Pasos</i> , Arte Público Press, 1979
	3	<i>Que Navidad, or Luz de Navidad</i> typescript (printout), pp. 1-46, 2006 December 6
	4	<i>Qué Navidad! What a Christmas!</i> correspondence, notes, and typescript (printout), pp. 1-16, 2006
	5	Drafts and Notes, 2005, 2011, undated
	6	Lyrics and Musical Scores, 4 transcripts (1 printout, 3 photocopies), undated
	7	Untitled typescript (printout), pp. 8-16, 19-28, undated
		Poetry
	8	<i>Continental</i> typescript (printout), 76 pp., 2002
	9	<i>Enclave</i> bound (missing covers), published by Arte Público Press, 71 pp, 1981
	10	<i>Rabbi A[h]vrahm</i> correspondence, notes, and drafts, 2001, undated

- 11 *Raising the Roof: South Bronx Anthology*
introduction by Laviera, published by College Now - Hostos Community College, 2003
- 12 Drafts and Notes, 2005, undated
- 13-14 Poems by Title (A-O), typescripts (printouts), undated
- 5 1 Poems by Title (P-Y), typescripts (printouts), undated
- Prose**
- 2 *coroLenguas [palabras migrantes]*
2 typescripts (printouts), 1997 March 12
- 3 *Don Viejo de la Guardia*
drafts and fragments, typescripts (printouts), undated
- 4 *Jorge Brandon, el coco que habla*
typescript (printout), 20 pp., 1992 October
- 5 *María Cruz, "Executive/Matriarch," or María Cruz, "Guapa Sexagenarian"*
3 typescripts (printouts): 11 pp., 2010 August 1; 16 pp., 2010 August 1; 15 pp., 2010 September
- 6 *Mayanito*
typescript (printout), pp. 1-38, 2005 June
- 7 *Mayanito*
2 notepads, undated
- 8 *Pantoja*
"veneers" for documentary by Lillian Jiménez, draft and typescript (printout), undated
- 9 *Portable Bloomberg / Bloomberg Portátil*
correspondence and 5 typescripts (printouts), 2007-2008
- 10 Miscellaneous, manuscripts and typescripts, 2003, 2007, undated
- 11 News Columns, 2002-2003
- Notebooks**
- 6 1-4 Notebooks, 2006-2007
5-6 Notepads, undated
7-12 Notepads, 1997-1998, 2003, 2005
- 7 1-3 Notepads, 2008-2009
4 Notes, loose sheets, 2009, undated
- Writings by Others**
- 5 Literary Criticism, 1979, 1983, 1985, 2002, 2008, ca. 1990s
- 6 Poetry and Prose, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2005, 2008, 2010, undated

Series IV: Events, Projects and Workshops (1983-2011)

This series includes materials relating to Laviera's poetry workshops, artist residencies, consultancies, and performances. Materials from his workshops at the University of Houston (Cosecha Voices and Hemispheric Group) include calendars, notes, itineraries, and written works by students. Also found are various flyers and programs related to events featuring Laviera as director, producer and/or performer. Some of the organizations Laviera collaborated with include El Regreso, Talent Unlimited, United Bronx Parents, and VIP Community Services. Laviera established the "One Day with Diabetes Project," an event designed to address the diabetes epidemic through "sugar slams," where participants express their experiences with diabetes through music, poetry, and open verse. Laviera also participated in "Hoops for Haiti," a joint effort between the Teamsters Local 237 NYC, the residents of Taino Towers in El Barrio, and the nonprofit Registered Nurses Response Network. The event aided the victims of the 2010 hurricane disaster, and included basketball clinics for kids, concerts, and special guest presentations.

Box	Folder	
		Flyers and Event Programs
7	7-9	Laviera, Tato, 1983, 1996, 1999-2000, 2002-2011
	10	Others, 2003, 2005, 2007-2011, undated
8	1	Hoops for Haiti, 2011, undated
	2	Hunter College, "Español Para Maestros Bilingües," Workshop Synopsis and Poetry Collection, 1997 spring
	3	Miscellaneous Projects, 2003, ca. 1990s-2000s
		One Day with Diabetes Project, "Sugar Slam"
	4	General, 2005-2006, ca. 2005-2006
	5-6	Proposals, 2005-2006
	7-8	El Regreso, Inc., 2008
	9	St. Mark's Church in the Bowery, "Mixtura Revue," 2005
	10	Talent Unlimited, Inc., District 4/TUC Community Marching Band Proposal, 2000 July
	11	United Bronx Parents, Inc., 2002-2003
9	1	University of Georgia, 2006 February 14
		University of Texas – Pan American
	2	Cosecha Voices, 2007-2009, ca. 2007-2009
	3-4	Hemispheric Group, Student Projects, 2009
	5	VIP Community Services, Inc., <i>Horizons</i> , undated
		Oversized Documents
11		Flyers, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2011, ca. 2000s

Series V: Audiovisual Materials (1964-2013)

This series consists of photographs, CDs, DVDs, diskettes, and a mini cassette. Photographs include more personal images, including family and friends, as well as those related to events and performances, such as "Hoops for Haiti" and "One Day with Diabetes Project."

Box	Folder	Item
		CDs
10	1	1 Bronx Music Heritage Center, Declamadores: Sery Colón, Prisionera, Tato Laviera, 2012 December 1 [15 audio tracks]
		2 <i>King of Cans</i> , Red Carpet Theatre Rehearsals © George Malave, 2012 [51 photographs]
		DVDs
	2	1-2 <i>Eye of the Storm</i> , National Nurses United RN Response Network, 2011 [12 min.]
		3 <i>From Zero to 60 at Warped Speed: A Newyorican Dream</i> , Ray Serrano, 2010 June [100 min.]
		4-5 <i>The King of Cans</i> , Roberto Cricket Productions, 2012 July 29 [94 min.]
		6-7 Local 237 Hispanic Heritage Celebration: Tato Laviera, Anderson Productions, 2008 September 25
		8-10 Tato Laviera: Celebration del Poeta, Funeral at St. Peter's Church © George Malave, 2013 November 8 [slideshow, 96 photographs]
		11 University of Texas – Pan American, "Writing for Performance," Tato Laviera and Emmy Pérez, 2009 spring
		12 <i>Visiones #14</i> , "Poetry in Motion: Tato Laviera" 1981 June 20
	3	1-5 Diskettes (4) and Microcassette, undated

Photographs

- 4-7 Assorted (chronological), 1964, 2001-2002, 2006, 2008, ca. 1950s-2000s
- 8 Hoops for Haiti, 2011
- 9 One Day with Diabetes Project, "Sugar Slam," printouts, 2006
- 10 Printouts, 2009-2013, ca. 2000s