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HOME: DECEMBER 9, 2005: ARTS

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## 'Puerto Rico Mi Patria' Saving the Island for Themselves

BY [BARRY PINEO](#)

"I grew up in the Bronx, New York, in a Puerto Rican neighborhood," says Dr. Ana Maria Maynard. "I was surrounded by Puerto Ricans who spent a lot of time celebrating our culture and longing to return home one day, and it gave me an incredible love for my culture. I moved to Austin after finishing my degree in computer engineering, and when I had my first baby, I thought about my childhood and how much I enjoyed living inside Puerto Rican culture, and I realized that I had no way to show that to my son. He was the initial inspiration for Puerto Rican Folkloric Dance."

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What began as a wish for a child has become in just eight years an organization that recently was named the fifth Affiliated Puerto Rican Cultural Center in the United States, offering classes in dance and music and workshops on poetry, art, and food, as well as regular performances of traditional dance and music from Puerto Rico. On Dec. 11, you can experience the wealth that this culture has to offer through PRFD's original *obra*, *Puerto Rico Mi Patria*. "I wanted an exciting point in history that we could use to create a musical," says Maynard, "so I chose the British invasion of the island in 1797. Seven thousand British soldiers against 200 Spaniards – it's probably one of the most exciting moments in Puerto Rican history. By this time Puerto Ricans were a new, unique race of people, a mixture of the Spanish, the native Taino, and the African, and when they were called upon, 20,000 of them came from the mountains, coastlines, cities, towns, with their machetes and hoes and lances, and saved the island. They definitely didn't want to be British! This was the first time in Puerto Rican history that the people really acknowledged the island as their own. They weren't saving the island for Spain. They were saving the island for themselves. This was the point where the conscious collective was created.

"The first half of the show is traditional Puerto Rican folkloric music and dance: *bomba*, *plena*, *seis*, and *danza*. Some of the pieces will be performances by our professional company and some will be pieces by our students, and that's one of the great things about this show: It's a chance for our students to share the stage with us and get to perform the things we've been teaching them all year. We'll also have some salsa and some cha-cha. The second half of the show is the story of the invasion, which begins on a sugar plantation, where we see the hardships that slaves encountered. Eventually they run away to the town of Piñones, which was founded by runaway slaves. The British initially landed at Piñones, and there were no Spanish soldiers in sight, so the people of Piñones were the first to try and repel them. There's also a love triangle between a brigadier, a beautiful Spanish lady, and the brigadier's girlfriend, so a lot of fiery dances go on, including some flamenco performed by Jaleo Flamenco and the students from the Texas Empowerment Academy. Hardship, redemption, battles, a love story, and lots of tradition – a little something for everyone!"

Puerto Rico Mi Patria will be performed Sunday, Dec. 11, 3pm, at Journey Theatre, in the Fine Arts Center at W. Charles Akins High, 10701 S. First. For more information, call 474-TIXS or visit [www.prfdance.org](http://www.prfdance.org).

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