

[00:00:00.0]

Angelo Esquina: From birth, I have grown up here and I live here as well.

[00:00:05.8]

Jeronimo Chiari: When were you born?

[00:00:07.2]

AE: I was born the 20th, the 20th of January 1992.

[00:00:12.6]

JC: What is your relationship to Portobelo?

[00:00:15.4]

AE: Well my relationship is that I am, I am a son of Portobelo. I have grown up, lived, I have had the best moments of my life here and I hope to be here always.

[00:00:33.2]

JC: Comparsa Barrio Fino is unique to Portobelo or are there others in other areas?

[00:00:39.4]

Gustavo Esquina de la Espada: Well Comparsa Barrio Fino is unique to Portobelo. In Panama City and in Colon there are comparsas but Barrio Fino is unique to Portobelo.

[00:00:49.2]

JC: What is it that motivates you to participate in or help the group?

[00:00:55.0]

GE: Well I have always loved music. I like to sing and well, literally I live by the love of art. Everything that has to do with art interests me. Thus, when they put the idea to me of joining Barrio Fino, that is, I had no reservations in doing it, no? Because when I am making art, I enjoy myself.

[00:01:21.5]

AE: Well Barrio Fino is a group that began, and well, it is something that I really liked. We started, we directed ourselves, we began to create songs, music, rhythms and it is something that started from small to big and up to now is something wonderful that is happening in Portobelo.

[00:01:46.4]

JC: I see that a lot of the members of Barrio Fino also play Congo. What is the relationship between Barrio Fino and the Congo tradition?

[00:01:54.8]

GE: Well in Panama as in the rest of the world, that is, when one hears the sound of the drum there is a direct relationship with Africa. And therefore we people from Portobelo are African descendants, no? Therefore there is a tradition that remained, no, of that African past that was

here and are the Congo. So, there it is that the relationship between Barrio Fino and the Congos is directly tied.

[00:02:30.0]

JC: When there are Barrio Fino performances during carnival season, including Tuesday and Wednesday of Carnival, how do the artist negotiate their obligations to the band with their Congo obligations?

[00:02:43.3]

GE: Well normally in Panama during carnival one does not work or do anything. So that what we are saying, what we are talking about is the Sunday of Carnival. One does not work or do anything. So there remains time to enjoy and, well, participate in Carnival and enjoy it to the max, no? Those that play Congo have their time to play Congo and return to Barrio Fino. Those that play devil and vice versa, no? And as it is, as the guys said earlier, Barrio Fino belongs to everyone. So, Congos and Devils and everyone no? We get together, we conjugate there, we work, we come together in that space called Barrio Fino and so there is no kind of problem with that.

[00:03:23.5]

JC: That is to say that the obligation is open. It is not something methodical or obligatory?

[00:03:27.0]

GE: No. It is not methodical because in music the only things that are methodical are the scores. The expression is spontaneous.

[00:03:37.0]

Renee Alexander Craft: And I have another question about that also? Then during carnival season they play with their Congo outfits, some of the people, or they change their clothes?

[00:03:53.4]

GE: No. And if at least Barrio Fino as to go out (to play) Saturday of Carnival and there are people playing Devil, the Comparsa passes and those that are dressed as devils join the Comparsa and those that are dressed as Congos also and vice versa. That does not, that does not matter.

[00:04:10.3]

JC: Tell us something about your favorite activity as a group or with the group. What is it that pushes or motivates, something special for you all?

[00:04:25.9]

GE: Well what was I going to ... for me I have always loved music and my idea for the music is to someday be able to win a Grammy. I do not know how I am going to do it or in what way. In Barrio Fino I have that possibility. Therefore for that, for that reason, I love it.

[00:04:44.2]

JC: Is there an activity that you remember that you loved?

[00:04:49.6]

GE: Well all of the activities that we have done are special. They all have, all have their magic. They all have their splendor. But If I have to recover one special one it would be the party that Barrio Fino had in the plaza in front of the Customs Building that was something that not even I myself hoped would turn out like it did. It was something that we did like “Oh well. Carnival is over. We do not have anything. We have not done anything important. Let’s do something to relax and release some stress.” But after we added a little methodology and we started to include more artistic expressions, then it was practically not a party any more but a show of diverse cultural expressions here in the village. It was a super cool thing for me.

[00:05:39.9]

AE: For me it was special; it was marvelous, the first year that the Festival de la Pollera was celebrated. It was the first time that we did in public, live, in front of a lot of people, we started our first act as a comparsa, as friends, as the group that we are and we presented to the people what it is that Portobelo has, what there is in Portobelo – the music, the rhythm, all that there can be in a small village in Panama.

[00:06:17.0]

GE: Yes, adding a little to what my friend says, that spectacle was, we had to follow the marine parade of the Festival de los Diablos. We were the ones at the head of the parade so that was something spectacular because we were able to get outside the context of Panama as there was international press, there were some of everything. That was also one of the most important that we could place in our showcase as memorable.

[00:06:45.1]

JC: What are the final objectives or the mission of the group?

[00:06:52.4]

GE: Well, I will repeat again what I said earlier, my final objective is, that is, to make our music known on a national and international level. To get it out there, and if God wants, to win a Grammy.

[00:07:11.0]

AE: As my friend has communicated also we want to express our rhythm, our music, our flavor of comparsa to the world and have them get to know us hearing it. That from this small town something marvelous has risen up, something as really special as Barrio Fino is.

[00:07:33.6]

GE: And also as Oronike and RC (Alexander Craft) know, having been coming to Portobelo for more than ten years. They came here as Taller Portobelo, now they come and they find a group that has amplified what was Taller Portobelo three and four times over – that is so much more than what Taller Portobelo was. That’s important because that allows people to see that Barrio Fino is a seedbed. A seedbed, that apart from everything it is done to win a Grammy, what we most want is for this to continue for generations and generations, no? That time brings about the

legend of Barrio Fino and that the whole world is excited and well, that everyone who can participate in it, participates.

[00:08:20.3]

(interview concluded; cheers and applause)

[00:08:29.3]