

PÉREZ, GRACIELA (1915–)

Afro-Cuban vocalist Graciela Pérez, the younger half sister of Francisco (Machito) Grillo, made her professional debut in 1933 when she joined the Cuban all-female Septet (later Orchestra) Anaconda. She was the group's lead singer for ten years. Known for their recordings and successful international tours, Pérez eventually left the group as new opportunities beckoned. She joined the Afro-Cubans in 1944, a band that transformed the Latin sound with their Jazz and authentic Afro-Cuban fusion. They played in New York City's Town Hall to critical acclaim. The band and Pérez, career skyrocketed. For three decades she was an integral part of the group that was key in the formation of the city's Latin music scene. She toured throughout the United States, Europe and Latin America and was considered by jazz critics the Latina equivalent of Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald. Her success and contributions to Latin music continued after she left the Afro-Cubans to work with Mario Bauzá as principal vocalist in his orchestra. A series of historical recordings in the 2000s presented the musicians to a whole new generation. Pérez remains a revered and legendary icon in the Latin music scene today.