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Marcela Pinilla, 2013

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*Molly Whitehorn:* So, this is an interview for Echoes of Memphis, with Marcela Pinilla, and the interviewers are Dr. Charles Hughes and Molly Whitehorn. The date is February 6th, 2013.

Okay, so for the record, can you please state your name.

*Marcela Pinilla:* Marcela Pinilla.

*Molly Whitehorn:* If you don't mind telling us, can you tell us what year you're born?

*Marcela Pinilla:* I was born in 1989.

*Molly Whitehorn:* OK, can you tell me a little bit about your childhood in Columbia?

*Marcela Pinilla:* When I think about my childhood, it was filled with music. Most of my family there are musicians. My dad is a singer and a guitarist, and my mom is a dancer. She used to dance ballet. So, I grew up surrounded by that. Grew up there. I lived there until I was 16, and yeah, my life was just surrounded by music.

*Molly Whitehorn:* When did you first start performing?

*Marcela Pinilla:* When I was four, it was my first performance, like for the family, for like the extended family,

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but when I was five, it was when I joined the band. When I was five, it was a traditional Spanish music band. I don't know. It's called "Tuna" in Spanish and is the one that has like big capes and they play the tambourine and the guitars, and all that Spanish music.

*Molly Whitehorn:* Okay, cool. So, in 1998 is when you first went on an eight-month tour of Southeast Asia, with Tropicaribe

*Marcela Pinilla:* Yeah, '97, '98.

*Molly Whitehorn:* '97?

*Marcela Pinilla:* I think it was in '97. The end of my discovery.

*Molly Whitehorn:* Okay, so how was your style influenced there?

*Marcela Pinilla:* I was – like where I get influences?

*Molly Whitehorn:* Yeah, from Asia. Where did get \_\_\_\_\_.

*Marcela Pinilla:* Oh, let's see. Well, in Asia, I discovered jazz. Like, that was a big – that kind of divided my career to before and after, when I fall in love with jazz. I like that over there in Malaysia.

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So there was no very influence by the traditional regions, from Malaysia, but as much as it was by jazz and by this other movement that was forming there – this world music movement.

*Molly Whitehorn:* Okay, so, in 2007 is when you moved to Singapore, right?

*Marcela Pinilla:* Yes.

*Molly Whitehorn:* How did your –

*Marcela Pinilla:* Very badly \_\_\_\_\_.

[Crosstalk]

– but yeah, I think so. It was – yeah. There's also \_\_\_\_\_.

*Molly Whitehorn:* How did your style of music evolve there?

*Marcela Pinilla:* There, I became more of like a solo artist, because I've always been a singer, but I was always part of the band, or doing background vocals for an artist. So there, I became a solo artist, because where my career started, and I started writing more songs. I used to write when I was very young.

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Since nobody was – I mean, we weren't doing anything with the music. I stopped writing. So in Singapore, I started writing again and I started doing my own music, my own band.

*Molly Whitehorn:* Okay, cool.

*Dr. Charles Hughes:* The musicians that you met in Asia who were playing jazz, were they Asian musicians? Or were they from elsewhere in the world?

*Marcela Pinilla:* They were from different places. I met Steve Orton there, who used to play with Miles Davis. He's percussionist. He's from New York. I met a lot of Columbian percussionists there. Also, Asian musicians. There was a pianist from Shanghai, very good \_\_\_\_\_. A lot of Europeans from the Philippines. I think it was eclectic. Singapore is very – it's a multicultural pot. So, from different places.

*Dr. Charles Hughes:* Yeah, and was there a specific kind of jazz that they were playing? Was it a certain era or a certain style,

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or was it just where –

*Marcela Pinilla:* They were doing different standards, like everybody you know, or I don't know. Whatever they were playing standards. Whatever. I was singing like \_\_\_\_\_ and from the Americana songbook. They were also having their own project. Like there was this interesting project with some musicians from India. They were like incorporating **Kabbalah** and Indian instruments and singing to jazz, and that was interesting. That was \_\_\_\_\_. So, it's different. I think it varies. I think it was a mixture of both, yeah. the new projects that everybody had and then we all played standards, not \_\_\_\_\_.

*Dr. Charles Hughes:* Yeah, but I would assume jazz was sort of this popular – was it like –

[Crosstalk]

*Marcela Pinilla:* It is more popular than here, I guess. It's more popular, and it's more – people appreciate it more. Like, they appreciate the form of arm, that expression. So there are a lot of places that have

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jazz place. I used to sing there almost every day. There was something to do, just happy hours of singing jazz \_\_\_\_\_, and now I work here with a guitarist, or – there was a \_\_\_\_\_.

*Molly Whitehorn:* Okay, cool, so how did you decide to come to Memphis, like of all places?

*Marcela Pinilla:* Of all places. My husband is from here. We met in China and then we moved to Singapore. We got married there in Singapore,

and when I decided to do my music, I wanted to do more of my regional music. So we decided that the States was a better place to do that. So, we also wanted to be close with two family. My family is in Columbia, and Singapore is great, but it's so far away. It's really – like when you get those phone calls, "You need to come here now," there's no way, because of that. So, we decided to come to Memphis for a few months to

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be with his family for a while, and decided to where we wanted to go, to what city, and we just fell in love with Memphis. Well, he's from here, but I fell in love. Like I started to miss so many things. It was really fast, the way I kind of connected \_\_\_\_\_ into the music community here. Memphis has been really nice to me. It **doesn't** embrace me, so here I am. It's been almost four years.

*Molly Whitehorn:* What were ideas about Memphis before you came? What did you know about the city?

*Marcela Pinilla:* I really didn't know much. I mean, just what my husband told me, like about his friends, but I didn't really know much about history. I didn't really read about it. I didn't know much. I didn't want to like my own idea of the city, like those preconceptions. It sometimes gonna be mistaken, so I wanted to come and live it and be here, and just go by what I was feeling. So, yeah, I didn't know much.

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*Molly Whitehorn:* Okay, cool. So, when you first got here, what was the music that was inspiring you?

*Marcela Pinilla:* That I saw here?

*Molly Whitehorn:* Mm-hmm.

*Marcela Pinilla:* The blues. Like I saw musicians on Blue Street, but to me, were just unbelievable. Like, the \_\_\_\_ musicians, and they play \_\_\_\_\_. Sometimes like I wonder if people in Memphis know the type of musicians you guys have here. Like it's just very really talented, very, very soulful. So it was amazing, being able to go to different places and listen to great music. I was sad though, because I felt that Memphis was missing more venues, and I still think that more venues for lack of performances, having so much talent.

Molly Whitehorn: So, I know that you've collaborated with Debar Case before –

[Crosstalk]

Marcela Pinilla: A little something. It was for Haiti. It was called – a song called *A Message from Memphis*. It was just giving hope

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to people in Haiti, and they were really, "It's gonna be okay," and "You're not alone."

Molly Whitehorn: It's okay. Cool. So how do you see your style of music kind of fitting into the \_\_\_\_\_, like that whole soul sound.

Marcela Pinilla: Yeah, the way I see my music. Well, I do world music, and it has influences from different genres. Like, in this record that we're releasing in April, it will have a little something, a little Memphis soul in there, so – and we saw that we recorded. I mean, it was only \_\_\_\_\_. So, I also believe that when you're doing music, like from your soul – I mean, that's what music's about, from your soul, but that there is just that music language, like I think that they're very \_\_\_\_\_ about \_\_\_\_\_ I think.

Molly Whitehorn: Okay, cool.

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Did you make your first solo EP in Memphis?

Marcela Pinilla: In Memphis, yes.

Molly Whitehorn: Okay, so how did that happen? Like, how did you go about doing that?

Marcela Pinilla: How did it happen? Well, when I moved here – when I left there, when I left \_\_\_\_\_ came here determined to do songs. Like I wanted to say something. I actually wanted to do songs that were positive to people, that brought a message, and I wanted to bring people together that normally don't get together. Like it was of the type of music that I do. I started noticing that the people that came to my concerts were different backgrounds, from different ethnicities, so I wanted to do that with my music, my original music.

So when I came to Memphis, I was determined to do it and to record something, like said at least something. It doesn't have to be a whole album. So, I had some songs, and I met musicians through other musicians here and there, singing – I started singing when I came here with a band

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Called \_\_\_\_\_, which is a salsa band, and through them, I met other musicians. I mean, the rhythm section from the band. We became friends and they became my band, the four \_\_\_\_\_ drums, piano, and bass, and my \_\_\_\_\_. He was \_\_\_\_\_ and I just asked him, and I started putting together the money and met a very nice guy, a producer. His name is Isaac Daniel and he helped me a lot to do it \_\_\_\_\_ 2010.

*Molly Whitehorn:* Okay, so how did you start working with the \_\_\_\_\_ music foundation. I know you mentioned Isaac. Was it through him?

*Marcela Pinilla:* Yes, I – no. Actually, I met him when I was already working there. I started going to the music foundation – it was actually \_\_\_\_\_, the guitarist. One day – I mean, I met him when I came here, I think.

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It was probably a week after I came here. He was one of the first musicians I met, and he told me – I was like all confused, because I had sung my whole life, but I didn't have to do this work. Like, I was \_\_\_\_\_ soloist, like I said, so it was never my responsibility to take care of all that. So I was kind of lost, like very lost. Like I didn't know where to start and he said, "You should go to the music foundation. Maybe they can guide you to all this business side," because the industry has changed so much. It's just totally different ballgame now, so you kind of need it. Like a compass to navigate. So, I went there. They were very helpful, very good.

*Molly Whitehorn:* Okay, so did you start working there

*Marcela Pinilla:* That was your question.

*Molly Whitehorn:* Yeah, \_\_\_\_\_.

*Marcela Pinilla:* I always – I do that. How I started working there? After that, they started helping me, they started noticing that they didn't have anybody that's spoke Spanish, and they wanted to

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do outreach, to target also, to a Latin community. They saw a need, and I was there, so they asked me if I wanted to be a consultant and help out random projects, so I said yes and that was three years ago, and I worked there till last month. Actually, last month was my last month.

*Dr. Charles Hughes:* Memphis is certain music history. It's known for a lot of different things, but it's certainly – I would say probably not thought of historically as being a place where Spanish language music happens. Have you found it difficult to kind of bridge that gap and sort of the Spanish language music in Memphis? Do you think there's a difficulty there? Or do you think the community's really ready for it?

*Marcela Pinilla:* Yes and no. I think that the community's ready for it. I think that people are open

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to new things. They want to learn about new things. It's good for me, because there is not many people who mean it, so I get to do a lot, 'cause it's nobody else. I'm like there's nobody, 'cause I'm like the best one, but it's 'cause there's nobody else. So, that's good for me, personally. Selfish. Oh, sorry.

And, now, it's hard, because there are not many venues to perform. There's actually one, the Rumba Room, and that's where \_\_\_\_\_ for dancing. It's not really for like concerts. \_\_\_\_\_ symphony orchestra there, and it was hard, because the room is not build for live music, even though it's a great room. It's just build for that. So, that makes it hard, and maybe like the media. There's no many ways to like sometimes promote things in Spanish, or things like that, but at the same time, I think it's exciting, because it's funny.

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When I was telling you before, I came here, I thought I want to do salsa, bring people together, because of what I was noticing there in Asia. I was \_\_\_\_\_, and then, when I came here, it was like for the perfect place to do that. Like I didn't know Memphis was going to be like that, and I thought Memphis is like meant to be. So, it's challenging, but it's exciting, I think.

*Dr. Charles Hughes:* Just sort of a more kind of boring aspect of that question, just sort of so we can kind of think about, what does it mean to sort of do outreach among Spanish speaking musicians? Like what have you sort of done among – and I know it's kind of a boring question, but I think it's really interesting to think about kind of blazing this trail of doing that. So what does that involve you doing in the community?

*Marcela Pinilla:* As with the Memphis music foundation or in general?

*Dr. Charles Hughes:* Well, either one. Yeah, just doing outreach.

*Marcela Pinilla:* Okay, well, but I – what I've noticed, that has changed. Like a lot of people have come out

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out of the closet. There were some artist here that really never do anything because they thought that Memphis is about blues and rock and roll, and we have no opportunity here. After that, I came and I started performing. They started coming out and it was great, just seeing – receiving those phone calls at the music foundation, saying, "Oh, I want to do it too. Can we put a show together? Just having – we have the Latin festival at the Latin show." We've been having it like every year in the fall, that happen, that we did that. Just building that presence, that Latin presence, every time is more – like more Latino come out. They were like really scared, really – and so I think it's being create more events, helping out with \_\_\_\_\_ that was outreach that we did the music foundation. We rented program that was sponsored by the First Tennessee Bank. It was called *Campo Lexito*, helping three bands to get to the next step.

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We did that, and yeah, I think that basically, it's like building that Latin presence, knowing that we're here, sharing a little bit of our culture. I think that's pretty much like tangible, whatever [inaudible due to background noise]. But yeah, pretty much – does that answer your question?

*Dr. Charles Hughes:* Oh, absolutely, yeah, and I mean, it seems like you think it's working. You think it's happening.

*Marcela Pinilla:* I think so, yeah, absolutely. I see there are things. I see when they call me. I see them performing in places. So at least, just not just

me. It's like this person is doing something, and they all get excited. I also organized a songwriter's – the Hispanic songwriter's group, and people have been very receptive to that, for them to create new material. Yeah, I've seen big change, really, since I came, and I don't want to say that it was because of me. I mean, it could have been another person that came, that come to town to do what I did.

I think that the fact that I do jazz and that I sing in English too

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help to bridge that gap. I think it would have been hard if I just came straight – Latin music, straight Spanish. That would have been hard, but to get a little Memphis is hard, because *[inaudible due to background noise]* for me here. I just kind of started bringing it slowly.

*Molly Whitehorn:* And it's kind of a final question, where do you hope to see, with this music, going in the future? Maybe talk about all the progress and stuff, but like, if you could envision that perfect Memphis in 20 years, what would it sound like musically?

*Marcela Pinilla:* Glorified Memphis. I love Memphis. I really believe in this genuine energy that Memphis has. It's just like very artistic to me. I find it very – I don't know how to say Bohemian, but just very artistic. Just like real, and so I want the world to see that, because I've been there. If we wanna

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keep renewing this world, we have to move to that, towards that; to be more real, to express ourselves. Like here, I see people doing their music. They don't care if you're gonna buy the records. They just want to express themselves. So I wish that the Memphis music keeps growing, so the world can see that. I hope the musicians get more support here, since they're so talented. Like more venues to perform. Also, we were talking with my husband. He has APL, doing more, like house concerts. People that have a lot of money, it's Memphis \_\_\_\_\_ just hiring a little band, a little three-piece or something, just to keep their money going for the musicians, right, because we have to eat. Sometimes we \_\_\_\_\_ and we pay bill. It would be great if we gave the energy that we're bill and we can sing a song to pay for it. Oh, that would be good. So, I hope that we can really have more venues, that we

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just own our city, just bring it together and start. I think that we need more English \_\_\_\_\_ too. I think that we're missing that part here also, and I understand that there is a lot of history here – stocks and sound studio. Many things happen here, but many things are happening as we speak, and sometimes people just are so busy building monuments they'll forget about the musicians that are here and creating – I mean, it's a Memphis sound \_\_\_\_\_ yes. It's a Memphis sound \_\_\_\_\_.

*Molly Whitehorn:* Okay, cool.

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