

## Somewhere in Havana - 2017



# The Cuban Pachanga

Story by Jim Thomas

## 2017 - The State of FM Radio in Cuba

*Pachanga, f fam ~ a rowdy celebration.*

A person would be hard-pressed to say that most people don't like a party. And such is the way it is in Cuba.

Cuban residents have come to rely on tourism dollars to make a living. And they have also come to expect something from the tourist that they wish could go away. *The Pachanga*. The celebration that tourists expect when visiting Cuba. The Cuban party atmosphere - the sun, the art-deco, the classic cars filling the streets, friendly and funny locals, and the sound of the pulsating merengue music spilling out of doors and windows. *The Pachanga!* The tourists want it, however, the local Cuban resident wants change. In the words of one local Havana business marketer, "We don't like it. We need to make the modern style for Cubans. Sober colors. Clean minimalism. White spaces."

But for a country that averages only 687 pesos per month in wages, they must cater to the tourist. The phrase on the streets in Havana and other Cuban cities these days is "¡Resolver!" and that is quickly followed by, "¡Asi Es La Vida!"

"¡Resolver!" is a genuine Cuban Spanish term that literally means "to get by" - do whatever it takes to make a peso. "¡Asi Es La Vida!" is the equivalent to "That's life!"

The current exchange rate has a Cuban trading 26.5 pesos for every American dollar. One American dollar will make a days wages for the average Cuban employee. If you can, imagine making 11 cents per hour. The picture becomes clear why the *Pachanga* continues to exist in Cuba. And so Cuba appears to be locked in a 1959 time capsule. And yet evidence of capitalism in Cuba is slowly, if at a snails pace, making in-roads into the Cuban infrastructure. This is in a country where any type of advertising is illegal.



Evidence of this "Capitalism in disguise" is found in none other than one of the State's properties - Radio Taíno, which is found at 93.3

MHz in Havana, and on numerous other frequencies throughout the country. Radio Taíno is the tourism radio station for Cuba. The goal is to promote everything about Cuba to the tourist, for one goal of the state - make money. Locally, it's called "capitalismo de incógnito". No other radio station in Cuba is authorized to operate like this.

# The Cuban Pachanga

“According to the constitution, the media cannot be used against the system, and advertising is capitalism, which goes against the system,” explains Yoan Karell Acosta Gonzalez, a professor at the University of Havana.

Gonzalez, then clarifies, “The constitution doesn’t say you cannot promote products exactly. It says you cannot use the media to promote capitalism.”

If this isn’t quite clear, then consider this: Those that choose to operate a bed-and-breakfast, a restaurant, a radio station, or other type of service oriented operation by converting extra rooms inside their homes are not technically considered entrepreneurs, but rather “self-employed,” or *cuentapropismo*, in the preferred nomenclature of the state. Such a categorization apparently accommodates personal initiative while limiting the acquisition of private property used for purely profit-oriented ends, as well as any potential inequality derived from that.

Raúl Castro, Cuba’s current president since 2008, has been lessening the restrictive rules for the self-employed in Cuba. While advertising is still not allowed, very subtle signage can be installed on the exterior of a home for identifying the business location. Anything more and they will draw attention. Just as there are an increasing number of private food business and personal services, Cuba is also seeing a growing number of licensed radio stations being operated out of homes and located in residential neighborhoods. Privately held media in Cuba is still prohibited, and the

## CMIB 96.9 MHz - Radio Amanecer Primero de Enero, Ciego de Ávila



Radio Amanecer, with its studios in a home in a residential district on the outskirts of Primero de Enero, in the province of Ciego de Ávila. The entrance to the studios faces toward a courtyard, which is away from the main road. The signage seen here would not be acceptable if it was facing the street.

Radio Amanecer is one of many privately operated radio stations that have pursued Radiocuba to issue them a broadcast license. Owners of such radio stations have to prove to Radiocuba they have direct affiliation with their community. Radio Amanecer was issued a license for AM radio in 2001. They were awarded their FM license in 2003, with a repeater license for 94.1 in 2005.



Price Tours of Key West Florida published this postcard and used it in marketing campaigns during the mid-1950s.

government owns all mainstream media outlets. Smaller FM radio stations are required to have some type of community or provincial government connection. Funding for such radio operations must come from the government agency.

## A new party in 1959

Since the Cuban Revolution in 1959, Fidel Castro's government applied a series of measures that transformed all national media. Radio Rebelde, the first radio station developed under the revolution, started broadcasting on February 24th.

During the early years of the revolution there was a division between the mainstream media in Cuba, created with private capital that opposed the new political situation. A series of small radio stations in favor of the new government, organized an "Independent Front of Free Broadcasters" (*Spanish: Frente Independiente de Emisoras Libres*). These radio stations were recognized as official by the new government. The government would develop a Bureau of Broadcasting under the political leadership of the PCC. Radio stations in the country were completely put under state control on May 24, 1962 under the management of the newly established Cuban Broadcasting Institute. Under the new broadcasting system, all media were to meet a set of values established by the government to strengthen the political process in the country, some names of radio stations were changed, and the coverage of radio services were extended to reach the whole country. In 1975, the agency changed its name to the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television (ICRT).



# The Cuban Pachanga

## The Cuban radio tempo in modern times

In 2005 Cubans had at least 3.9 million radio receivers, and the country had 169 AM, with 55 main FM stations. The ICRT served as the government's administrative outlet for broadcasting. In 2014, the ICRT relinquished control of licensing procedures when the newly formed division for broadcasting management was introduced. Radiocuba, the new division, is under the direct supervision of the ICRT. Radiocuba manages all activities involving licensing and broadcast regulations.



In early 2016, Radiocuba surprised certain circles in the broadcast industry and radio hobbyists alike, when they introduced Radio and Television maps on their website. The maps show the location for all licensed broadcast facilities for AM, FM, and TV stations and where they are located, by province.

**DIVISIÓN TERRITORIAL LA HABANA**  
Centros Transmisores de Frecuencia Modulada (FM)  
Cantidad de transmisores: 14



The La Habana map, as pictured above. To identify the stations operating at each transmitter location, you would move your cursor on your internet program over the dot and press and hold the left button. This will bring up a box that shows the station names and frequency on the radio dial. To access these maps, follow this URL:

<http://www.radiocuba.cu/Sitioweb/index.php/servicios/transmission-radio/frecuencia-modulada-fm>

A recent count of all FM stations in the Worldwide TV-FM Dx Association's online FM database shows 328 licensed facilities in operation within Cuba's borders. This number includes all forms of broadcast coverage which Radiocuba categorizes as: National, Regional, Provincial, and Community.



CMB 91.7



CMBN 102.5



CMBB 104.7



CMBL 98.3

There are six National AM/FM radio networks, which are all based in Havana. Of those six networks, the top three Cuban major radio outlets are:

1. Radio Progreso, 90.3 with 23 repeaters - entertainment;
2. Radio Reloj, 101.5 with 14 repeaters - news;
3. Radio Rebelde, 96.7 with 32 repeaters - news, music, sports.

## RADIO EQUIPMENT IN CUBA



Radio transmitters and equipment for various Cuban broadcasters at an unidentified location. Radio Progreso and Radio Taíno equipment is seen in the foreground.



Broadcast towers located in Ciudad Habana. The tower on the left has been identified as primarily a TV broadcast tower, while the tower on the right has a variety of radio equipment.



One of Radiocuba's engineering service trailers at the San Isidro Ilegó antenna park south of the city of Sancti Spiritus.



## Cuba's radio future

While Cuba's future of radio broadcasting over the airwaves is still largely in question, one thing is for certain - ¡Llegó Internet a Cuba!

The internet has arrived in Cuba. Cubans are one of the most highly educated people in the western hemisphere and they can't get enough of the internet. And its evident that radio broadcasters in Cuba are following the money trail, even though the Cuban government is against capitalism.

# The Cuban Pachanga

The first connection to the internet in Cuba was in 1996. After that, it stalled, then stagnated. No one really knows why. The Cuban government blames the US and the trade embargo. Whatever the reason or reasons, the Cuban populace is demanding access to the internet, despite the fact users of the internet there are scrutinized more than any other country on the planet.

Availability and use of the Internet in Cuba is slowly changing. There is a good deal of pent up demand among the well-educated Cuban population. On June 4, 2013, Cubans were able to sign up with ETEC S.A., the state telecom company, for public Internet access under the brand "Nauta" at 118 centers across the country. As of March 2017 the cost of Internet access was \$1.50 per hour for domestic intranet access, which is still high in a country where salaries average \$20 a month.

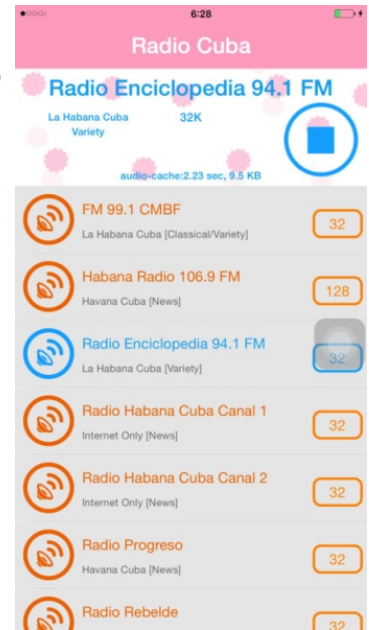
In early 2016, ETEC S.A. began a pilot program for broadband Internet service in Cuban homes, with a view to rolling out broadband Internet services in private residences.

Where the future of radio and the internet lies in Cuba, no one knows. But one thing visitors are quick to discover - Cubans don't like rain. When it rains, people stay home. Shops close early. Schools let out early. Radio stations go off the air because people want to go home. On a rainy day, there is no *Pachanga*. In a country that gets tropical rain, the day the rains come its a lost cause. Umbrellas cost a half month's wages. No one knows where to buy an umbrella, because socialism blocks advertising. No one can advertise they have umbrellas! No umbrella, no *Pachanga*. If you plan to be a tourist in Cuba, hope for a sunny day.

Then you can enjoy your Cuban Pachanga!

### Radio Cuba app

This radio app was developed specifically for the Cuban smartphone market by Apple and third party developers. The Radio Cuba app is available for both iPhone and Android.



Llegó Internet a Cuba - The Internet has arrived in Cuba