

**This interview with
GLORIA ESTEFAN
was conducted by the Library of Congress
on May 13, 2019**



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS: I'm always interested in the sort of basic background of a song. That is: How did it come to be written? Where was it written?

GLORIA ESTEFAN: You'd have to ask [my co-writer] Kiki Garcia where he originally got the idea for [it] and wrote "Boogie Man's Gonna Get You," which was the first incarnation of the song. But I remember telling him that there was no way I was going to scare little children with that lyric and that I'd like to rewrite some of [the lyrics]. I had an inspiration for the hook while on tour in Charleston, South Carolina, at The French Quarter Inn and I still have the original lyrics that I wrote down on the hotel notepad.

LOC: How long did it take to compose?

GE: Once I came up with the idea of changing the "Boogie Man" to "the Rhythm," the lyrics came quickly to me as is made clear on the notepad where there are very few changes. I remember feeling very excited about the song.

LOC: What was the dynamic like between you and Kiki Garcia—did you sit together in a room, did you each have an assigned "task" in the songwriting process?

GE: As I mentioned, Kiki had already started the process and I wrote the rest alone. When I write it's usually an interior process with a lot of changes happening at breakneck speed in my head so I have rarely written in the same room with anyone. As a matter of fact, I've written most of my songs between midnight and 6 a.m. because I feel like I'm not taking time away from my responsibilities and the inspiration channels are more open. I like to write my ideas in

longhand and prefer a big space on the page to write word ideas or alternate line choices until I make final decisions. Some songs use more “craft” after the original inspiration; other songs feel like they come “through” me. With “Rhythm,” I was very inspired and excited so it came quickly.

LOC: Why do you think this song was a hit and why do you think it has proven to be so enduring?

GE: Like the song says, the rhythm is gonna get you! The original long-distance communication of human beings involved drums because the sound carried. And in most cultures, drums, however they may be designed, play a part in religious celebrations or celebrations in general and move people to dance. I believe since this song focuses on exactly that, it translated readily throughout the world to different cultures and the language was not of particular importance. The actual rhythms we employed are used in the Afro-Cuban religion of Santeria and has its roots in the music brought to Cuba by the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria. We fused those with funk bass lines and a 2/4 dance beat on kit drums to create the percussion bed of the song. I think it has stood the test of time because the tongue-in-cheek humor of the hook has been quoted repeatedly in popular television shows for the last three decades and it continues to move people on the dance floor.

LOC: Do you recall the first time you performed “Rhythm” live? Where was it? How did the audience react to it?

GE: I have been so fortunate to have performed many concerts in my career so it’s hard to remember the exact time or place where we first performed it live. But to this day I remember the excitement of singing the song to my husband, Emilio, in the wee hours of the morning in that hotel room in South Carolina right when I finished it.

LOC: When you perform the song now, do you sing it or approach it any differently than you might have earlier in your career?

GE: Through the years we’ve done fresh things with the song when performing live because we always want to continue to grow and evolve musically. But I’m also careful to keep its integrity for the fans because they like to hear the songs they love in the way they’re used to hearing them. But I’ve just completed an album where we reimagine some of our greatest hits in the rhythms of Brazil, one of them being “Rhythm Is Gonna Get You” which was recorded as a samba and works amazingly well. The album was recorded in Rio, Sao Paulo and Bahia with some of their top musicians. We filmed a documentary highlighting the roots of Samba and how the African rhythms of the Yoruba tribe had an impact and changed the music of Cuba and Brazil.

LOC: Do you think that this song is representative of you as a songwriter—why or why not?

GE: Although “Rhythm” may not be completely representative of me as a songwriter, because its first incarnation was not born from my own inspiration, it is a very good example of how I have

collaborated with fellow songwriters in the band and how my writing grew from simply having joined The Miami Latin Boys which then became Miami Sound Machine.