

Changó, Lord of Fire and Lightning



Changó is a mighty warrior.

Changó (Shangó) is the owner of fire, lightning, thunder, and war, but he is also the patron of music, drumming, and dancing. He represents male beauty and virility, passion and power. His colors are red and white, and his eleke (sacred necklace) is made of alternating red and white beads. His number is 6, and his day of the week is Friday and the 4th day of every month. He's [syncretized](#) with Santa Barbara because she's portrayed in Catholic lore as a fiercely independent and brave young woman, dressed usually in a red and white costume, holding a sword and wearing a crown like Changó. The feast day for Changó/ Santa Bárbara is December 4, one of the most important festival days in Cuba. In a way, it's surprising that such a powerful masculine Orichá is syncretized with a female saint, but there are underlying similarities between their stories. For example, Santa Barbara's torturer was struck down by a lightning bolt, which is Changó's favorite weapon. And according to a patakí (sacred story) about Changó, one time he had to dress in women's clothes (lent to him by Oyá) in order to escape undetected from his enemies. Santa Bárbara's association with Changó shows that females and males alike can wield Changó's power. Both male and female initiates can be crowned with Changó, making him their father in the religion.

Changó likes bananas, okra, red palm oil, and *amalá* (corn meal dumplings). He usually wears red satin pants and a red shirt with white trim; on his head he wears a crown. He lives in a wooden *batea* (shallow bowl with lid), sometimes placed on a wooden *pilón* (pedestal). He protects against burns and death by fire. Changó's symbol is the double headed ax, which represents swift justice. His followers call him by shaking a maraca as they pray to him at his altar. Those who have Changó on their head salute him by lying face down on the floor with arms extended to their sides.

Changó's Characteristics

In human form, Changó was a king in Oyo, the Yoruba ancestral homeland. As an Oricha, he shows many of the qualities we associate with human kings: he's proud, fierce, brave, a magnificent warrior, intelligent, hardworking and, above all, he likes to be acknowledged as the leader so he doesn't have to take orders from anyone. He knows how to be a good friend, he's a master at divination, and he's a great healer. But, he also shows imperfections that remind us of his time on earth. For example, he's a great womanizer, and a bit of a libertine. He seduces with his charm and his lies. He's a fast talker, and can be manipulative. He can also be a compulsive gambler and wasteful with money. When his ego gets out of control, he's arrogant and domineering. As long as his children are obedient, he's a good father, but he's very critical and quick to punish them if they don't live up to his standards. Changó's children are like their father, strong willed, energetic, full of fire, extraordinarily intelligent, sometimes arrogant and self-absorbed. They often have stormy tempers, although they like to have a good time, go to parties, flirt, dance. They're very charismatic and like to be the center of attention.



Changó is power

Changó's Relationships with Other Orichás



Saluting Changó at his altar

The lovers of Changó are too numerous to mention, but he was married at different times to Oyá, Obá, and Ochún. He stole Oyá away from Ogún, who is usually considered his brother or half-brother; this

explains why some patakís talk about rivalry between Changó and Ogún. When Changó goes to war, he prefers Oyá's company because she's just as fierce as he is. The sound of thunder followed by lightening means that Changó and Oyá are riding together into battle in the heavens above us. Ochún is Changó's favorite lover because of her sensual and seductive ways. Obá cut off her own ear in a misguided attempt to please her husband, but he rejected her and she, broken-hearted, retired to live in the cemetery. Some patakís say that Changó was the son of Agayú and Yemayá, but she gave him away to Obatalá, who raised him and made him king on earth. A variation on this story says that Yemayá was the foster mother of Changó, and Obatalá (in a female avatar) was his birth mother. Changó is the owner of the sacred batá drums and he's the greatest dancer among the Orichás. This wasn't always the case, according to a patakí that says that Changó was originally the best diviner and Orúnmila (Orula) was the best dancer. But, Changó and Orúnmila agreed to exchange talents, because Changó cared more about dancing. Changó is still a skilled diviner, but now he does divination using the dilogún (cowrie shells), not the opuele (divination chain) and tablero (wooden divining board), which belong solely to Orúnmila and his priests, the Babalawos.