

WINTER 2016

# ReVista

HARVARD REVIEW OF LATIN AMERICA



MUSIC

## Soundscapes

When I was nine or ten, I learned to pick out two songs on the piano. One was “Jingle Bells.” The other was “Que Sera Sera.” My mother hummed that song a lot, and I always associated it with the tales of tropical breezes and colonial forts of my parents’ honeymoon in Cuba and Mexico.

Latin music trickled into my early life. “I Love Lucy” with the Cuban orchestra leader Ricky Ricardo as Lucy’s husband brought an incessant infusion of mambo and other lively tunes into the living room. And then there was Ricky Valen’s “La Bamba,” whose rhythms I couldn’t keep out of my head. Harry Belafonte and his Caribbean calypso songs also formed part of my emerging Latin soundscape.

One of my absolutely favorite songs—“Lemon Tree,” sung by Mexican-American crooner Trini Lopez—was based on a Brazilian folk song “Meu limão, meu limoeiro,” arranged by Jose Carlos Burle in 1937 and made popular by Brazilian singer Wilson Simonal.

In time, my own personal soundscape blended many influences, Latin and non-Latin. The first trip I ever took to a Spanish-speaking destination was to the Casals Festival in Puerto Rico in 1967. The sounds of the festival were purely classical, but my memories also hold the street sounds of salsa, *plena* and *bomba*.

Music is integral to my life experiences. Mercedes Sosa’s “Gracias a la Vida” is inextricably entwined with graduate school and protests against the Vietnam and Cambodian wars. I moved to Colombia in 1975, and soon discovered *vallenato* music, country accordion music, long before it became popular in urban circles. My friends in Bogotá thought I was absolutely crazy when I traveled to Valledupar for the annual Vallenato Legend Festival in 1977.

“Nicaragua, Nicaragüita” by Carlos Mejía Godoy provided the sweet backdrop to the hopes of the Sandinista Revolution in 1979, my first experience in covering war and revolution as a young reporter. And on and on I went, creating my own soundscape through the decades.

We all have these soundscapes, a mix of tunes and sounds that provide the musical backdrops to our lives. As I prepared this issue of *ReVista* on music (which doesn’t pretend to cover every country and every genre), I realized just how varied Latin music is—ranging from experimental music on cactuses to *bachata* to *boleros* and *nueva trova* and so much more.

When I started to write this editor’s letter, I decided to google the dates on “Que Sera Sera.” Much to my surprise, I found it wasn’t a Latin song at all. The song was written by Ray Evans and Jay Livingston because Doris Day needed a lullaby for Alfred Hitchcock’s 1956 remake of his 1934 film *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. Hitchcock wanted a foreign title because her screen husband Jimmy Stewart was a doctor who loved to travel.

The phrase “que será, será” came from the movie *The Barefoot Contessa*, in which the protagonist’s family motto was “che sera, sera.” The motto in the film was Italian, but Evans and Livingston switched the “che” to “que” because more people spoke Spanish in the United States.

That was a very tenuous Latin connection, I thought. I’d have to start my editor’s letter from scratch. But the next night I went to Villa Victoria in Boston’s South End to hear the Colombian group Gregorio Uribe Big Band and his Cumbia Universal. The audience was dancing when he started to play the Beatles’ “Come Together” to a distinctly cumbia rhythm. If you can play the Beatles to cumbia, why not fall in love with an imaginary Latin tune? After all, that mixing and matching is what soundscapes are all about.



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### David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies

#### Director

Brian Farrell

#### Executive Director

Ned Strong

#### ReVista

#### Editor-in-Chief

June Carolyn Erlick

#### Copy Editor

Anita Safran

#### Publication Interns

Isabel Espinosa

Gabriela Farrell

#### Design

Jane Simon Design

#### Printer

P+R Publications

#### Contact Us

1730 Cambridge Street

Cambridge, MA 02138

Telephone: 617-495-5428

#### Subscriptions, Back Copies and Comments

jerlick@fas.harvard.edu

#### Website

revista.drclas.harvard.edu

#### Facebook

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## MUSIC

### FIRST TAKE

Music and Nature *by Brian Farrell*

2

### CLASSICAL AND BEYOND

The Cactus Song *by Violeta Nigro Giunta*

Contemporary Cuban Pianists *by Alan West-Durán*

La Habana por su música *by Matthew Leslie Santana*

A Cellist in Exile *by Pedro Reina Pérez*

Conflicted Musical Identities *by Felipe Ledesma Núñez*

6

8

11

14

18

### MUSIC CHANGING LIVES

The Opportunity to Live a Life in Music *by Julia Salvi*

El Camino Project *by Marcela Davison Avilés and Carla Dirlikov*

Playing for Your Life in Venezuela's El Sistema *by Yana Stainova*

Music for Social Change *by Patricia Zarate and Danilo Pérez*

Teatro del Lago *by Uli Bader*

The Youth Symphony Orchestras of Santo Domingo *by Darwin Aquino*

22

24

26

29

30

32

### NUESTRAS VOCES/OUR VOICES

Hips (and Numbers) Don't Lie *by Shakira*

Musical Identity *by Carlos Averhoff Jr.*

A Magical Journey *by Manuel Monestel*

36

38

40

### A MUSICAL SANCOCHO!

El Pututu *by Sadie Weber*

From Carmen Miranda to the Grateful Dead *by Larry Rohter*

Embera Music/Palénque Rhythms: Photoessays *by Steve Cagan*

Notes on Mexican Rock *by Humberto Delgado*

New Life for the Violin in Mexico's Hotlands *by Lindajoy Fenley*

Polkas in Paraíba *by Panayotis (Paddy) League*

Regional Mexican Music: A Photoessay *by Chris Vail*

Dominican Bachata *by Deborah Pacini Hernandez*

Musical Transitions *by Susan Thomas*

Nature's Sonorous Politics *by Joshua Tucker*

Mauricio Kagel and Electroacoustic Music *by Anna White-Nockleby*

44

46

50

54

57

60

64

66

71

73

76

## IN EVERY ISSUE

### BOOK TALK

From Nazis to Supermarkets

*A Review by Manuel Azuaje-Alamo*

77

A Roadmap for Gay Marriage

*A Review by Omar G. Encarnación*

79

A New Framework for Colonial Relations

*A Review by Paula De Vos*

81

A Case of Extremes

*A Review by Tamaryn Nelson*

82

### BUILDING BRIDGES

Bridges to Modern Medicine

*by Laurie Schleimer*

84

## ONLINE

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## Music and Nature

From Humpbacks to Harvard **BY BRIAN FARRELL**

**NATURE AND MUSIC ARE INTIMATELY CONNECTED.** Almost as long as I have been a naturalist, these connections have been woven through my life. I have been playing drums since I was a boy. Though I played in a rock band in high school, I was trained in jazz and Latin music, genres I play to this day. As a teenager I wrestled with the decision to follow music or something else (not yet fully aware how biology could be a profession), and am happy that one can pursue these two interests at the same time and discover eventually how closely they are tied together.

As a scientist, I am now more fully

have such a hold on us, able to change our mood and bring us together? What is music's evolutionary origin, and can we learn about music by considering other species that use sounds in similar ways? These are old questions, but they have received new insights from fields as different as paleontology, neurobiology and evolutionary theory.

Music appeared early in human history, documented by the discovery of 40,000-year-old flutes made of bird bone or mammoth ivory, as well as remnants of ancient drums. Some scientists believe that the large nasal passages of the Neanderthals, who existed in Eur-

the bright colors of a male bird's plumage attract females who select their mating partner(s) based on their attractiveness. Certainly, the field of neurobiology has greatly increased our understanding of the depth and breadth of the "wiring" of our brains for music response and music production. While language abilities may be lost through a blow to the side of the head or a small lesion on the brain itself, musical production and responses are almost impossible to knock out. In fact, individuals who have lost their language abilities sometimes can learn to sing their thoughts.

Music reception and production both employ neurotransmitters that are key in brain function, as well as release hormones, such as serotonin and oxytocin, that are associated with the pleasure centers of the brain. These "feel good" hormones seem to reinforce the feelings of happiness and belonging that music often produces. Music shares features with humor and experiences of nature both by fulfilling expectations and by creating lively elements of surprise. Music, meditation, nature, artistic and religious experiences have similar effects on the brain, engendering the kinds of contemplative changes in brain waves that have concomitant positive effects on stress levels, and perhaps overall health. This is an area of active research.

Humans are remarkably adept at music. We can (famously) recognize a song from hearing very few notes, often two or three, and can pick out a song over the cacophony of a crowd. It is remarkable that, however closely we guard our feelings from strangers, or even from those familiar to us, we nevertheless express strong emotions toward music, especially played live. Recent investiga-

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**Music, meditation, nature, artistic and religious experiences have similar effects on the brain, engendering the kinds of contemplative changes in brain waves that have concomitant positive effects on stress levels, and perhaps overall health.**

aware of the links. I notice the similarities between jazz—a famously improvisational form featuring trades of motifs between players, as if in conversation—and that of birds and other species that trade vocalizations to convey their motivations to each other. Music permeates nature, and nature permeates music.

I believe it is fair to say that for most people on earth, including myself, music is an integral part of everyday life. Our memories are often tied to certain songs or genres associated with the paths of our emotional lives, particularly in the teenage years. A song can carry us back in time and draw forgotten emotions from deep inside ourselves. Why does music

have such a hold on us, able to change our mood and bring us together? What is music's evolutionary origin, and can we learn about music by considering other species that use sounds in similar ways? These are old questions, but they have received new insights from fields as different as paleontology, neurobiology and evolutionary theory. Music appeared early in human history, documented by the discovery of 40,000-year-old flutes made of bird bone or mammoth ivory, as well as remnants of ancient drums. Some scientists believe that the large nasal passages of the Neanderthals, who existed in Eur-

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**Clockwise from left:**  
A young woman  
plays the violin for a  
solidarity delegation of  
visiting North American  
in Cuba, 1993;  
Shakira; three Peruvian  
musicians; bone flutes.

tions of the extensive cave systems in Lascaux, France, have revealed that the most acoustically-resonant chambers are the ones decorated with Paleolithic murals, leading to the conclusion that they were performance halls. I can say that this thought has transformed how I think about my own attendance of musical performances in resonant concert halls—we've been enjoying such experiences together for tens of thousands of years or more!

Humans are not the only acoustical performers on earth, of course. Birdsong has figured in our poetry for as long as there has been a written record, and the group we call songbirds that actually learn their songs from adults have been singing since the beginning of the Cenozoic Era, 65 million years ago. Of course, earlier birds were screeching and calling for 100 million years before, but they were not the first species to use sound to communicate their impassioned pleas

for mates and territory. This would be the insects and frogs, whose rattles, scrapings and trills have resonated through swamp, forest and field for a quarter of a billion years. But, is it music? Some of us certainly love to be enveloped in these wild sounds—I sometimes have rainforest recordings playing in the background as I work—but music is so defined that it excludes many other species and sounds, however beautiful they may sound to us. According to many authorities, music

contains repeated motifs that may be combined in various ways to produce a larger composition, and so includes atonal music such as some percussion, while also excluding pure tones that do not form such patterns, such as train whistles (though one could play a train whistle in a musical fashion!).

Defined this way, the songs of birds, lasting from a few seconds to several minutes in length, are truly songs, and new studies show that certain mice also sing. However, mice and birds are not the only songsters on earth, and they are far from being the largest. These would be the whales. For many centuries, fishermen and other maritime peoples were undoubtedly aware of the amazing vocalizations of whales, especially those of the humpback whales widespread in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. However, it was not until a Harvard graduate named Roger Payne '54 first recorded them from the back of his sailboat that these sounds were understood for what they were. Payne and his

colleague Scott McVay analyzed their recording by marking the various motifs that appeared here and there across the thirty minutes or more of their duration. It became clear that these long vocal utterances were in fact composed songs that were repeated over and over again. Their landmark 1967 paper, followed by the 1970 commercial release of their recordings (*Songs of the Humpback Whale*), occasioned an enormous raising of awareness of these amazing creatures who sing below the waves, and highlighted their plight as whaling countries continued to drive whales towards extinction.

Jazz clarinetist Professor David Rothenberg '84 takes whale music seriously, and has played music with whales (via underwater speakers) and birds, though it is very unclear as to whether they respond. While other animals may sing, no species apart from humans can follow a rhythm (though the dancing of a now defunct cockatoo named Snowball suggests such abilities in parrots).

Drumming, therefore, comes closest to a musical signature that is uniquely human, surprisingly enough.

Today, I teach a Harvard Freshman Seminar entitled "Why we animals sing" that bridges acoustic biology and the evolution of music. I play in a weekly jazz ensemble and occasionally around the university and in my spouse's home country, the Dominican Republic, which I find especially amenable to combining music and nature in one setting. For your Director of DRCLAS, this special issue of *ReVista*, dedicated to music, is therefore a very special pleasure, and I hope you find these authors' contributions with a Latin perspective as rich as I do.

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**Brian Farrell** is the Director of the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies (DRCLAS) and a Professor of Biology who is Curator of Entomology in Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology. He is also a jazz drummer and performs weekly at a Boston-area venue.



Rock musicians play an anniversary concert in Mexico's El Chopo market.



# CLASSICAL AND BEYOND



Violeta Nigro Giunta [The Cactus Song](#) • Alan West-Durán [Contemporary Cuban Pianists](#) • Matthew Leslie Santana [La Habana por su música](#) • Pedro Reina Pérez [A Cellist in Exile](#) • Felipe Ledesma Núñez [Conflicted Musical Identities](#)



Argentine experimental composer Carmen Baliero makes music on a gigantic cactus in the desert.

# The Cactus Song

Beyond Silence in the Argentine Desert **BY VIOLETA NIGRO GIUNTA**

**CAN CACTUSES MAKE MUSIC? THE ANSWER IS definitely yes.**

Argentine experimental composer Carmen Baliero took a look at *cardones*, a species of gigantic cactus (some are over 32 feet) that flourish in the Quebrada de Humahuaca, in Jujuy, Argentina. Seeing these amazing plants, Baliero imagined what they would sound like.

The three basic sounds that come from these cactuses, filled with water, are from plunking the thorns (which have different pitches depending on their sizes); from drawing a bow across these thorns; and from stroking the “body” of the plant with drumsticks. For these

sounds to have a better projection, they have to be amplified with contact microphones (pickups or *piezos*) placed on the cactus. These microphones (as well as the eventual lighting and use of electricity in general) cause minimum disruption to both the cactus and the environment.

The *cardones* are silent and they live in a silent geography, a silent landscape. They grow on hillsides, emerging from biologic residues in the land. This means that under each cactus there is the residue of something that was once alive, bringing to mind the idea that the cactus will not only make sounds but also speak. Baliero voices the possibility of a “hidden

discourse of the *cardón*.”

When talking to people from Jujuy, I often heard them mention an unlikely historical anecdote: that during the Spanish conquest, people used to dress up the cactuses to swell the appearance of their ranks. Observes Baliero, “The *cardones* look like soldiers; they appear to be the guardians of history. They stand like sentinels everywhere, watching. Because if underneath lie biological residues, this means that you can have a Spaniard, a *coplera* [local popular song writer], a guaraní, a llama. Underneath, there is history, and that’s where the cactus comes from. It is like a witness or





Carmen Baliero, Fernando Ariki and author Violeta Nigro Giunta prepare a *cardón* for playing.

buoy that indicates where there was life. I think that for any *jujeño* and especially any *humahuaqueño*, from the region of the Quebrada, a *cardón* is a part of your family.”

Baliero emphasizes the idea that musical discourse should not be exclusive in any way (be it an orchestra of Germans or of *copleras*), and that “any musician with a sensibility can play a cactus rather well.” In a private in-depth interview on April 2014, she observed, “If the *coplera* wants, for example, to do contemporary music, and play Luigi Nono, why shouldn’t she? A poor person must be folkloric, s/he cannot be modern, and that’s how it is. That is why I say we have to mix up, and that is for me a cultural action, to mix different discourses and make a single one.”

In 2003, UNESCO declared that everything in the Quebrada, including the *cardones*, was a World Heritage site.

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As a protected species, *cardones* cannot now be used, for example, for furniture or in house construction. But recently a new plague, a butterfly that migrated to the area, began to lay eggs in the *cardones*, eating them from the inside and threatening them with extinction. Treatments are not giving the desired results. This is the urgency of the project, when rehearsals begin in 2016: for someone to effectively cure the *cardones*. As Baliero says: “I believe one must be with the *cardones* to cure them. They have to become visible. And since they are silent, we must make them talk.”

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**Violeta Nigro Giunta** is a Ph.D. Candidate at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS/CRAL) in Paris. She is also a pianist and performer. She can be reached at <[violetanigrog@hotmail.com](mailto:violetanigrog@hotmail.com)>.

# Contemporary Cuban Pianists

A History in Notes **BY ALAN WEST-DURÁN**



Aruán Ortiz is a restrained pianist.

MUSIC FANS MIGHT THINK OF CUBA IN TERMS of salsa or *nueva trova*, but the country's pianistic tradition has built its world reputation. Few countries have had pianists as gifted as Cuba: from the 19th century, with the likes of Cervantes, Saumell and Espadero, to the 20th and beyond, Cuba has been blessed with figures such as Gonzalo Roig, Antonio María Romeu, Ernesto Lecuona, Lili Martínez and Peruchín (Pedro Justiz), not to mention Bebo Valdés, Rubén González, Frank Emilio Flynn and Emiliano Salvador. They were followed by a host of other pianist-composers like Chucho Valdés, Ernán López-Nussa, Hilario Durán, Omar Sosa, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, and Arturo O'Farrill, the last three born in the 1960s. They have been followed by new waves of pianists, but in what follows the focus will be on three pianists from the 70s and 80s who loosely fall within the tradition of "Latin Jazz" and contemporary music.

**Aruán Ortiz (1973)**, born in Santiago de Cuba of Haitian descent, was trained as both violinist and pianist. While he draws on Afro-Cuban forms, he is at ease with classical and free improvisation as well. Ortiz is hard to pin down, as he can go from hard post-bop idioms (as in his

first two albums, *Volume 1* and *Alameda*; 2005, 2009) to the rigorous exploration of sound textures evident in his album with Bob Gluck (on piano and Moog Synthesizer; Ortiz, piano and computer) to a contemporary re-interpretation of *tumba francesa* and Cuban song with the blues as in his *Santiarican Blues Suite* (2012). A recent album, *23:54 Get Moving* (2014), a trio with saxophonist Biagio Coppia and drummer Rob García, has Ortiz on piano and electronics, going from Monkish riffs to eerie atmospherics to funk.

Overall, Ortiz is a restrained pianist: he does not go in for dramatic changes in dynamics, crashing chords, splashy ornamentation, Lecuona-ish lyricism or *son montuno guajeos*. His approach, while fluid, is slightly jagged and with a keen sense of the overall architecture of the song. He can move up and down the keyboard with considerable velocity but not in a way that calls attention to itself (a la Chucho Valdés or Art Tatum). Both his first albums and the recent live recording *Banned in London* (2013) illustrate this: on tracks like "Jitterbug Waltz" (Fats Waller) and "Orbiting" (Ortiz), he performs extended solos, and despite some Tynerish flourishes, the notes come out soft, deliberate, as if a kitten were walking over the keys.

His *Santiarican Blues Suite* is an ambitious project, originally written as a ballet for the José Mateo Ballet Theater in 2011 (titled "Pagan or Not"). The suite has five movements, beginning with "Diaspora," and opens with percussionist Mauricio Herrera playing a slow beat on timpani, followed by a dark mournful segment on strings which quickly turn spiky, then joined by a dissonant flute. Eventually, the strings are accompanied by the *tahona* rhythm (brought from Haiti by former slaves and considered a precursor of the rumba). The *tahona* also bears some

similarities to the *tumba francesa*, prominently featured in the second movement, "Pa'l Monte" (To the Hills), which has inspired singing against the rhythmic presence of the *catá*. It is followed by "San Pascual Bailón" (part III), a Catholic reference, but musically alludes to the *danzón* tradition, originally influenced by what was called the *tango haitiano*. "Sagrado" (IV), inspired by Sindo Gary's "Perla Marina," begins in a slow and melancholy fashion with string instruments dominating. Slowly it begins to crescendo, with percussion joining in, then slows down with strings accompanied by a gentle flute. The final and longest movement, "Jubilee/Comparsa," opens with violin and percussion, then flute. It continuously quotes and reworks a Cuban classic "Drume Negro," but in bits and phrases. Slowly the rhythm picks up, then accelerates into a flurry of percussion (becoming a *comparsa*) with strings and piano providing a strident counterpoint with jabbing notes and ends with a final beat of the timpani. Ortiz's composition is fresh, highly creative; it takes folk traditions and reinserts them into a contemporary idiom, and is a true tribute to the Haitian legacy of Cuban music, often overlooked.

**Manuel Valera**, born in Havana in 1980, came to the United States in 2000. His first album as leader was *Forma Nueva* (2004) and since then he has recorded ten albums. Valera has a rich expansive sound, one that blends Cuban percussiveness with jazz idioms. From the first note his music has an undeniable appeal, with the notes cascading gracefully in sparkling legato lines. Valera can swing with the best of them, but he is equally adept at standards, ballads and more meditative pieces. Seamus Blake's Getz-like hard bop sound, on Valera's first three albums, works wonderfully with the pianist, adding fire to the Cuban's elegance. "Forma



Nueva,” “Simplicity” and “En cinco” are great up-tempo examples of their complementarity, each propelling the other to stretch out. Valera’s interpretation of a standard “Say it (over and over again)” is soulful, ruefully lingering on the notes. It is an homage to Coltrane’s *Ballads*, which features the Jimmy McHugh composition. In the liner notes Valera says that “Say it...” is the “best ballad of all time.” He may be right and his version states the case eloquently.

The centerpiece of his second album (2004) is Silvio Rodríguez’s “O Melancolía” (the liner notes provide both original Spanish lyrics and a translation to English, but the song is instrumental) and again Valera works with Seamus Blake, this time on soprano, to recreate Silvio’s classic. They capture not only the sadness of the original, but a kind of sensuality as well. In his next album (*Historia*, 2005) he reprises some Cuban classics (Cervantes, Carrillo and Silvio, again). The Cervantes (“Adiós a Cuba”), done in a trio format, follows the original but Valera then adds some thoughtful improvisational riffs that give the piece a bounce without losing the sense of long-ing envisioned by Cervantes.

In *Vientos* (2007), with a core quartet (Joel Frahm on sax, James Genus on bass, Ernesto Simpson, drums), Valera adds a woodwind quintet that includes Anat Cohen on clarinet. The woodwinds are featured on seven of the twelve compositions—all by Valera—and they are not just there as charming accompaniment; they are integral to the piece even if it is the jazz quartet that performs the solos. Especially effective are “A la Interperie” and “Rapsodia,” which blend fierce jazz or blues motifs with the more classical sounds of the woodwinds. Valera was trained classically, as are most Cuban pianists, although originally he was a saxophonist, which might explain his skillful use of the instrument in his different groups.

After recording a trio album (*Currents*, with Genus and Simpson, 2009) Valera formed a group called New Cuban Express (sextet or septet format) and under this configuration released three albums (2012–2014). The sound is bigger, the percussion a bit more complex and the music high octane with an unmistakable Latin groove. He is definitely seeking to take “Latin Jazz” (whatever that is) in a new direction. In his remarks

on the third of the New Cuban Express recordings (*In Motion*, 2014), critic Raul da Gama says “His statements are elaborate as he expands on the geometry of the melody making wondrous structures in a high-wire act that is breathtaking to behold.” This has been Valera’s trademark from the beginning.

These “wondrous structures” are also evident in his most recent work, one a solo album (*Self-Portrait*, 2014). In a more contemplative work, Valera explores his classical side with three impromptus (dedicated to Satie, Gershwin, and Satie), and tackles three jazz giants (Monk, Evans, Bud Powell) and two Latin composers (Agustín Lara, Eliseo Grenet), but most of the compositions are original. The first cut, “Spiral,” is a gleaming, aquatic foray that then builds into a soaring bridge, but always tempered by steady work by the left hand. He returns to the song on his recent live album (*Live at Firehouse 12*, 2015) with a trio (with bassist Hans Grawisch and drummer EJ Strickland) and Valera’s driving arpeggios, with bass thumping almost frenetically and hyper-kinetic drum work, are mesmerizing. The trio deftly manages Wayne Shorter’s “Footprints” and offers an elegant and lilting version of the “Intermezzo Sinfónico” from *Cavalleria Rusticana*, as well as brilliant up-tempo tunes like “Lirico” and “Century.”

At 35, Valera has already recorded eleven albums as a bandleader and mastered different formats (solo, trio, quartet, septets, quartet with woodwind, quintet); his symphonic approach, his impeccable execution, attention to structure and unerring sense of timing are not a question of promise anymore. He is a major presence and will surely continue to be so for a long time to come.

**Harold López-Nussa**, born in Havana in 1983, comes from a musical family; his uncle is pianist Ernán López-Nussa, and his brother, Ruy Adrián, is an accomplished drummer who is part of his trio. His first album (*Sobre el atelier*, 2007) was a solo effort, receiving a contract after winning a prize for a “Montreux Jazz Solo Piano Competition” in 2005. Half the



Manuel Valera blends Cuban percussiveness with jazz.

compositions are originals, and López-Nussa exhibits his trademark skills: a nimble energetic style with fast runs up and down the piano, an ability to change rhythms, a jabbing intensity, sudden stops which gave way to a flurry of notes. Like many Cuban pianists, he cut his teeth on a Chucho Valdés classic, “Mambo influenciado,” handled with aplomb and humor. His second effort, *Herencia* (2010), is a trio album with his brother and a great young bassist Felipe Cabrera (Mayquel González is on trumpet on two tracks). The recording contains a special treat: Omara Portuondo sings a Noel Nicola song, with López-Nussa adding romantic flourishes. Overall, an upbeat album, and the two songs with trumpet are bright, warm, and swing hard.

*Canciones* (2011) is the only album where the great majority of the songs are not his own. He focuses on Cuban composers (except for one by Jobim, another by Fito Páez). Working in a trio format but adding instruments—González plays trumpet on four tracks—López-Nussa plays classics such as “Contigo en la distancia” and “A felicidade.” Perhaps one of the most compelling numbers is his rendition of Carlos Varela’s “Detrás del cristal” which begins with the piano but is joined by soprano sax and strings that are both lush and haunting, and reminds one of Piazzolla’s film music (minus the bandoneón, of course). His version of Pablo Milanés’s “Para vivir” begins with a jagged riff on piano, almost haltingly, and then flies off into a catchy son.

*El país de las maravillas* (2011) is a trio album that features David Sánchez on four tracks. “Guajira,” written by Ruy Adrián, begins with hand-clapping, features nice percussion in a fast-flying melody with a breathless pace that has López-Nussa hammering away at the piano in riffs or ostinato which continues to the end. The songs with Sánchez (except for one) all feature son-inflected idioms with López-Nussa diving into montuno-like riffs and trading off with Sánchez, who plays with a sweet ferocity.

*New Day* (2013) is a truly joyous work from the beginning (“A degüello”) and barrels forward deliciously all the way to the end: there isn’t a clunker in the album. It is followed by a duet with his brother, titled “Cimarrón” (Runaway Slave). López-Nussa begins with a vamp in the upper register and plays the melody with his left hand, while his brother plays the *cajón*—a lively and irresistible tune. “Paseo” rumbles out like a force of nature, even if it does have quiet moments with fine work by bassist Gastón Joya. It is hard to imagine a piano trio getting such a huge sound; one critic has described the piece as “mysterious but impassioned.” Magic maybe, but mystery? The only mystery is why does it end after only seven minutes? The duet “Eso fue hace 20” (That Was Twenty Years Ago) with Mayquel González, is a gorgeous ballad, whose title evokes Vera’s “Veinte años,” but does not actually quote it; instead it captures the longing of the original but with its own charm.

Most recently López-Nussa has recorded an album with Senegalese bassist-vocalist Alune Wade (*Havana Paris Dakar*, 2015), with a mix of Cuban jazz, Afropop, and covers of classics from Africa (Mali, Senegal, Cape Verde, Algeria, and the Congo). The songs have an instant appeal and López-Nussa’s work,

as always, is top-notch and discerning.

It would be unfair to finish without recognizing some other significant piano voices: Roberto Fonseca (1975-), Aldo López Gavilán (1979-), David Virelles (1983-), Alfredo Rodríguez (1985-), Osmany Paredes (1983-) and Fabián Almazán (1984-). Fonseca’s *Akokán* (2009), Almazán’s *Rhizome* (2013), Virelles’s *Continuum* (2012) and *Mbokó* (2014), and Rodríguez’s *Invasion Parade* (2014) are world-class creative projects that are exhilarating, and yes, sometimes demanding music. As they continue to rework their Cuban roots while drawing on jazz, blues, classical, African, contemporary and electronic idioms, these composer-musicians redefine the Cuban pianistic tradition as they bring it fully into the twenty-first century.

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**Alan West-Durán** (*Cuba, 1953*) is a poet, translator, critic, and essayist. He is the author of two books of poems, as well as a book of essays *Tropics of History: Cuba Imagined* (1997). He is currently writing a history of Cuba through its culture. West-Durán is a contributor to the website “Panoramas” and is editor of the webzine “Cuban Counterpoints.”



Harold López-Nussa has a nimble, energetic style.





The Afro-Cuban rock group *Síntesis* blends music from *Santería* with elements of progressive rock and jazz.

# La Habana por su música

## A Popular Havana Nightclub Hosts a Transnational Music Conference

BY MATTHEW LESLIE SANTANA

**MY MOTHER LEFT CUBA JUST BEFORE THE BAY OF Pigs** in 1961. She was six years old then, and she has never been back. When I arrived in Havana in June, I became the first person from my generation in my family to step foot on the island. I was there primarily to do preliminary field-work as an ethnomusicologist but also to visit the country where my mother was born, to see the church where she was baptized, to take pictures of the apartment she lived in for the first six years of her life.

Though my mother didn't raise me on a diet of Cuban music, I absorbed a fair amount growing up in Miami. For an island nation with a population smaller than many major cities of the world,

Cuba's music has received a disproportionate amount of attention. Cubans both on the island and in the diaspora are often portrayed as a relentlessly musical people, always ready to dance. You can take salsa lessons in Cambridge, Ann Arbor, Edinburgh and Tokyo.

Perhaps in reaction to this I found myself avoiding organized music events during my time there. It's not all big bands and dance clubs in Havana. You might notice staggering silence, as I often did in the late evenings on the terrace of my apartment in the Cerro neighborhood of Havana. Or you might stumble upon a *toque*, a *Santería* ceremony featuring *batá* drums, voice and dance. If you spend any time near the Malecón, the

sea wall between Havana and the Florida Straits, you will certainly hear vendors singing out their goods: "Maní, pastel de coco, merenguitos" ("peanuts, coconut pastries, merengue").

My avoidance did not last long, however, as I eventually ran headfirst into the sizeable conference *América por su Música* (AM-PM; America Through Its Music). Sponsored by the *Fábrica de Arte Cubano* (Cuban Art Factory) in collaboration with the *Centro Nacional de Música Popular* (National Center for Popular Music), AM-PM was devoted to the music sector in Latin America and to making musicians and music professionals from the region more visible internationally. The event featured music-related

photography exhibits by U.S. artists Petra Richterova and Joe Conzo, Jr., a documentary series on Latin American and Caribbean music and a workshop on live music production, and music management. But the linchpin of AM-PM was a series of sixteen mini-concerts held over four nights at the Fábrica.

First opened in February 2014, the Fábrica de Arte Cubano is a nightclub and exhibition and performance space run by Cuban fusion musician X Alfonso. Housed in a converted olive oil factory, the space has quickly become a gathering spot for many members of Havana's arts scenes. At any given night at the Fábrica you can hear live music, see a documentary and rotating exhibits of visual art, and perhaps even catch X Alfonso himself enjoying a drink at one of the venue's several bars.

A veritable who's who of Cuban music performed at the Fábrica during AM-PM, ranging from the multi-genre singer-songwriter Yusa to the hip hop group Golpe Seko to Haydeé Milanés, the daughter of the *nueva trova* icon Pablo Milanés. The conference showcased a grab bag of Cuban popular genres: jazz, hip hop, rock, and *trova*, among others.

On the festival's opening night, I arrived at the Fábrica just before 11 p.m. I had intended to get there earlier, but my friend Magdalena and I got held up at another performance. My visit to Cuba coincided with the twelfth Havana Bienale, a month-long celebration of global contemporary art. That night, the Canadian duo 2boys.tv had performed their show "Cuerda Floja" at the Hotel Riviera. The performance artists had already been in Cuba for several weeks collaborating with local drag performers, and they had prepared a dramatic show that began in the forecourt of the hotel as the queens filed in to the hotel led by a clarinetist and saxophonist playing George Gershwin's "Summertime."

Magdalena and I managed to peel ourselves away halfway through the show to make it to the Fábrica. After catching up with a few of our friends in one of the Fábrica's two courtyards, we got word

that the Cuban hip hop artist Telmary was about to start her set, and we followed the crowd back into the building. Telmary was already on stage when we arrived. She was performing in the smaller of two performance spaces, and it was packed impossibly tight with people trying to get a view. Telmary, who has been on the scene for over a decade, is well known for her unapologetically feminist lyrics and the often breakneck speed of her delivery.

Wearing a dress and a bright pink wrap around her hair, Telmary was flanked by a number of musicians. There were two backup singers, a guitarist, a bassist, a drum kit player, and a man playing auxiliary percussion, trumpet and trombone. The audience erupted when she began her well-known song "Que equivoca'o" ("How mistaken").

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## **Telmary, who has been on the scene for over a decade, is well known for her unapologetically feminist lyrics and the often breakneck speed of her delivery.**

"Que equivoca'o tu 'ta de la vida mi amor, que equivoca'o" ("How mistaken you are about life, my love, how mistaken"), goes the hook, accompanied by a salsa groove. It was particularly exciting to see instrumental music performed live in collaboration with a hip hop artist, a not-too-common sight in the United States right now.

The concert felt like it was over before it began, but such was the design of these numerous mini-concerts, each roughly 45 minutes long. So we filed dutifully into the larger performance space where the Afro-Cuban rock band Síntesis was about to go on. Síntesis is known for their blend of music from Santería with elements of progressive rock and jazz.

At this performance there were seven musicians on stage: three singers (one doubling on percussion and another on electric bass), a keyboardist, a guitarist and two percussionists (one on drum kit and the other mostly on congas).

Sound problems plagued the performance—at times the microphone of one of the singers wouldn't work; frequently the keyboard cut out. While this clearly bothered the band, the audience didn't seem to mind. The space was full, but the throngs managed to dance and often sing along.

The Fábrica's size and its popularity mean that it is often so packed that one scarcely has room to shuffle one's feet, much less dance. Even in the largest performance space, I was often pressed up against any number of sweaty bodies while listening to groups perform. Such was the case with Síntesis. As my friends and I were shuffling together, I noticed a few of them leaning in to speak to one another. When David, shuffling nearest to me, came back a bit closer I asked him what they were talking about. "Que los extranjeros ocupan mucho espacio cuando bailen" ("Foreigners take up a lot of space when they dance"), he told me, gesturing toward the group of U.S. students nearest the stage. "Sí!" I agreed, laughing out loud. And he was right. Though we had accepted our limitation to slight shuffling, those in the group closest to the stage were twirling each other around, creating an increasingly large circle for themselves.

Indeed, there were many *extranjeros* at the Fábrica each time I went. The audience there has often been described as "bohemian" in various travel magazines. I would describe the clientele as cosmopolitan, well dressed and young. People visiting from all over Latin America and handfuls of North Americans visit the Fábrica, as do young, educated, artsy Cubans. It is safe to say that the Fábrica attracts a particular crowd, one that led one interlocutor of mine to imply that it was the playground of Havana's burgeoning middle class.

América por su Música successfully



brought together musicians, producers and managers to benefit from a well-curated interarts experience. The Facebook page started for the event is still updated frequently with events all over the hemisphere related to the music sector in Latin America. It appears to have provided measurable resources for people working in the music industry in Havana. And the Fábrica seemed to be an ideal and thought-provoking venue

for the performances, documentary screenings and exhibition.

Though many spend time worrying about how Havana and Cuba might change in the wake of normalizing relations between Cuba and the United States, it is worth remembering that class formations have long been shifting and responding to tourism in Havana. Visitors from the United States have not yet arrived in droves in Cuba, but

at music venues like the Fábrica there is already a fair amount of space being taken up by *extranjeros*.

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**Matthew Leslie Santana** is a Cuban-American violinist from Miami, Florida. He received his Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Michigan in 2015 and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology at Harvard University.

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Telmary is known for her feminist lyrics.



Pablo Casals is filmed at the United Nations.

## A Cellist in Exile

Pablo Casals and the Cold War **BY PEDRO REINA PÉREZ**

**WHEN PABLO CASALS FIRST SET FOOT IN PUERTO Rico** in 1955—his mother's native land—his life took a dramatic turn. At 79 years of age, any other musician of his artistic stature would have quietly retired, but he did quite the opposite. Not that the previous decades of his life had been peaceful or easy. In exile in France since 1939 and pained to see his native Catalonia torn to pieces by the Spanish Civil War, he

watched as Europe was reduced to rubble by Nazi ambition, spreading destruction and tragedy. San Juan offered the possibility of a new beginning, focused on performing and conducting, surrounded by family and friends. But his decision to settle in this unincorporated territory of the United States was also controversial, for he had vowed never to play in a country that offered support to the Spanish dic-

tatorship led by Francisco Franco.

Casals had been an ardent supporter of the Second Spanish Republic at a time of intense political conflict, and had fled Barcelona to avoid execution by the Nationalist Army. He settled in Prades, a small French town only one hour away from the Spanish border and suspended his professional career until 1950. It was then that he received an invitation sent



by Jaime Benítez, Chancellor of the University of Puerto Rico, to join the academic community in San Juan. It afforded him the opportunity to get acquainted with members of his mother's family he had never met, while participating in new developments on the island's cultural scene led by Governor Luis Muñoz Marín. Yet accepting the invitation also implied a change in his long-held stance against totalitarianism, and would invite government scrutiny.

Born in the small Spanish town El Vendrell on December 29, 1876, he learned to play the cello and the violin at an early age. He focused on the cello and developed a unique playing technique that was eventually named in his honor. He began his professional career in Paris in 1899 and quickly became famous for his talent and charisma. Returning to his native Barcelona in 1919, he founded a new professional orchestra at the Palau de la Musica Catalana, named the Orquesta Pau Casals. The Spanish Civil War and World War II interrupted his highly successful career as a musician and director.

Upon his arrival in San Juan, Casals received a hero's welcome as he descended from the ship into a multitude that awaited him. An entire week of activities honoring his visit was planned. Thanks to his mother's heritage, he was treated as a native son. Governor Muñoz Marín invited to him head a new musical festival bearing his name, beginning in 1957. Casals' presence stimulated the establishment of a symphony orchestra (1958) and a conservatory (1959), and gave much needed gravitas to the governor's efforts to develop new cultural endeavors reflecting the island's aspirations. The economy was moving away from agriculture into manufacturing and new factories were opening everyday. Cultural sophistication would mean that not only banks were flourishing in the island but sensibilities and tastes as well. At least that was how Abe Fortas, the renowned Washington D.C. lawyer who was the governor's adviser, saw it. His advice was to turn Casals into a symbol of all the good that was happening in the cultural scene. And he was right: Casals

**When he decided to play at the United Nations headquarters in 1958—his first international appearance after his vow of artistic silence in 1945 to protest tolerance by the Allies of Spain's dictatorial regime—Casals became the focus of an intense international crusade that led to his nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize that same year.**



was the perfect symbol for this—and he enjoyed being close to family and friends. When asked about Puerto Rico's subordination to the United States and his rejection of countries that supported Franco, he drew a comparison between his native Catalonia and Spain. For him Puerto Rico was not the United States, just as being a Catalan was not the same as being Spanish. A different language and culture were the fundamental elements.

In time Fortas became Casals' American mentor and confidant, even when he was appointed justice of the Supreme Court—and Casals' prominence only grew.

When he decided to play at the United Nations headquarters in 1958—his first

international appearance after his vow of artistic silence in 1945 to protest tolerance by the Allies of Spain's dictatorial regime—Casals became the focus of an intense international crusade that led to his nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize that same year. Not only was he revered as the greatest cellist of his generation, but he was also applauded for his courage. Such visibility was unparalleled for an artist at 82 years of age, and many were surprised to witness such energy and determination on his part after decades of living practically in seclusion. He began to travel frequently to conduct his oratorio "El Pessebre," composed with his friend Joan Alavedra as an ode to the highest human values. He was perceived as a cultural diplomat and champion of the arts as a means to prevent violence and war. He still refused to play in any country that recognized Francisco Franco's dictatorship in Spain; yet in 1961 he accepted an invitation to play in private for John F. Kennedy at the White House, even though the United States had repeatedly expressed support for the Spanish government. For many of his Spanish and Catalan friends, such a concession amounted to betrayal, something that could neither be explained nor tolerated if one looked at Casals' history of activism. While he was hailed in the United States, he was shunned and criticized by others, particularly by fellow expatriates.

Casals' overt crusade against totalitarianism was amplified by a new medium: television. Major television networks and the Voice of America, among others, broadcast his speeches and concerts all over the world. Puerto Rico and the network of people that assisted him in that

endeavor had a key role in his success as an international figure. It was with the support of a tight group of benefactors—and Fortas—that he was able to gain access to circles of influence in the United States. His evolving relationship with the United Nations, where he gave three major concerts between 1958 and 1971, and his support of Spanish refugees in France through the Spanish Refugee Aid Committee, based in New York City, also broadened his reach. As a result the FBI took an interest in Casals and his activities, as evidenced in recently declassified FBI documents that reveal how suspicious J. Edgar Hoover became as the cellist's prominence grew.

In a series of memorandums addressed to the FBI Director between 1958 and 1961, the San Juan office took notice of Casals and reported on his pronounce-

ments in favor of world peace published in the local press. He was also cited for signing a petition to the President urging a new trial for Morton Sobell, a U.S. engineer who worked on government contracts and was tried and convicted of spying for the Soviet Union. His nomination as honorary delegate of the Puerto Rican Council of Peace was noted because it had sent a representative to the Congress for Disarmament and International Cooperation, suspected of being sympathetic to the Soviet cause. In another document he is quoted as voicing "approval for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, support for the Cuban Revolution of Fidel Castro and belief in the liberty of all people," a problematic expression given the FBI's suspicion of all things Cuban.

This particular period of Casals' life, from his arrival in 1955 and his passing

in 1973, has received simplistic treatment in the existing literature instead of a more critical reading. Perhaps because he lived to be 97 years old, many conflicts he experienced during the last two decades of his life were downplayed in favor of events that highlight his many virtues. His correspondence with Alexander Schneider, member of the Budapest String Quartet and a very close friend from this period, revealed his initial reluctance to return to the United States, even with generous financial incentives. He also shared his doubts with Joan Alavedra, his Catalan compatriot, with whom he had shared a house in France for ten years. Both collections of letters from 1949 to 1973 offer a new perspective on Casals' decision to move to Puerto Rico and his willingness to return to the United States while he still wished to remain an advocate for democ-





racy for his native Spain. Together with his involvement with the Spanish Refugee Aid Committee reflected in personal letters and photographs, and copies of his FBI files proving that Casals was kept under surveillance even as he grew closer to the White House, this correspondence effectively shows that his activities drew suspicion from certain government elements.

Taken together, these documents present a more complex picture of Casals' life than previously considered. His two published biographies (1974, by H.L. Kirk, and 1992, by Robert Baldock) overlook these important aspects and are very general, mainly for lack of adequate sources. The intersection of the musical with the political at that moment in his life prompted his return to the international stage, increasing his exposure and credibility. Likewise

his values fueled other personal endeavors, such as his yearly pilgrimage to the Marlboro Music Festival in Vermont to teach young musicians, and his participation in the Casals Festival, both in Puerto Rico and France, which offered important platforms for communicating his beliefs. Yet Casals remains a musician better known for his musical than his political achievements.

His advocacy for Catalonia and Spanish democracy while living in Puerto Rico was unparalleled among his peers but remains mostly ignored in Spain, as historians have preferred to emphasize his previous exile in France. Some even claim erroneously that he died there, choosing to ignore a very important period of his life. As for his concert at the Kennedy White House, which irked some of his friends, that calculated political move had allowed

him a private meeting with President Kennedy to lobby for the return of democracy to Spain. It may have been risky but it was bold as well. At his age it would have been unlikely for him to get another such opportunity. In taking it he revealed both his talent for diplomacy and his passion for the pursuit of liberty. Both deserve renewed consideration.

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**Pedro Reina Pérez**, a historian, journalist and blogger, was the 2013-14 DRCLAS Wilbur Marvin Visiting Scholar. He is a professor of Humanities and Cultural Agency and Administration at the University of Puerto Rico. Among his books and edited volumes are *Compañeras la voz levantamos* (2015), *Poeta del Paisaje* (2014) and *La Semilla Que Sembramos* (2003). More of his work can be seen at [www.pedroreinaperez.com](http://www.pedroreinaperez.com)

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Opposite page: Pablo Casals conducts; Above: Pablo Casals talks with Martin Luther King Jr.

# Conflicted Musical Identities

On Being a Classical Music Practitioner in Ecuador **BY FELIPE LEDESMA NÚÑEZ**

## TRAINING AS A CLASSICAL PIANIST IN MY NATIVE

Ecuador was, to say the least, an identity struggle. As I learned the Western classical music canon—Chopin, Beethoven and others—I was confronted with how alien this music was to my upbringing. For my friends and family, such music was a foreign and untranslatable language, deemed important by others—namely music professors and foreign visitors—and thus assumed to be valuable. Nevertheless, they couldn't reconcile this type of music with the passions and anxieties of their musical selves.

Like most practitioners of classical music in Ecuador, I had to move abroad as my performance career advanced. I performed frequently in concerts overseas and obtained advanced degrees. This, I was told, was the path to success—what one must do in order to become a professional musician. But deep inside, this success felt to me like horrendous displacement. To be a professional I had to leave home, I had to ignore the musical passions of the people with whom I grew up, I had, in other words, to become foreign. The collision of my professional aspirations and my Latin American upbringing thus resulted in a conflicted identity, the identity of a man who disseminated a foreign musical language while ignoring the musical sounds of his upbringing.

Torn by this conflicted identity, I turned to others who, in a similar position, had apparently come to terms with this struggle of identity. I studied the works of Luis Humberto Salgado (1903-1977) and his teacher Segundo Luis Moreno (1882-1972). Both were trained in the classical music tradition while living in Ecuador and thus were arguably familiar with the anxieties that affected me. Crucially, both were deeply committed to the development and inclusion of Ecuadoran music into the classical music tradition. Salgado

**Like most practitioners of classical music in Ecuador, I had to move abroad as my performance career advanced.**

composed more than a hundred classical works including nine symphonies, four operas, five ballets and seven concertos, the great majority of which include Ecuadoran musical components. Moreno wrote a multi-volume history of music in Ecuador—the first of its kind—and authored several books and collections of music from Ecuador. For Salgado and Moreno, the incorporation of Ecuadoran music into classical music compositions and musicological studies served as a way to empower Ecuadoran music—to, in Salgado's words, "elevate" it.

Yet as I studied Salgado and Moreno, it became evident that their work was problematic. They used classical music and comparative musicology, both inherently Western disciplines, as vehicles for understanding and empowering Ecuadoran music. And in doing so, they interpreted Ecuadoran music in Western terms, unwittingly constructing them as inferior expressions in need of Western assistance. This is patently clear in their evolutionary understanding of music. Moreno openly argued that Ecuadoran indigenous music was less evolved than Western music, and that music in Ecuador had evolved beyond more "primitive" evolutionary stages thanks only to the Spanish colonization. Salgado, following his teacher, also defended the evolutionary superiority of Western music. He suggested that by combining Ecuadoran music genres with Western modernist techniques his compositions elevated Ecuadoran music to the highly evolved standard of Western modernism.

Decades later, the noxious assumptions encompassed within Moreno's and Salgado's evolutionary worldview are obvi-

ous. Put simply, they denigrate Ecuadoran music, marking it subservient to Western musical values. Still, it is important to note that their intention was not to debase Ecuadoran music. Quite the opposite, they were passionate about Ecuador's musical traditions and devoted their careers to their development. And their efforts proved fruitful. Salgado and Moreno, in a very real way, empowered Ecuadoran musicians by providing them, virtually for the first time, with a substantial and valuable repertoire of classical music and musicological studies dedicated to Ecuadoran music. Salgado in particular developed a truly individual compositional language that challenged the expressive and technical models of his Western musical training, inspiring many later Ecuadoran composers to create music that confront Western totalizing models.

The fact that Salgado and Moreno subscribed to Western musical values and evolutionary theories that undermine Ecuadoran music should not discount their outstanding contributions. Rather, it should shed light on the intellectual and musical environment in which they were operating, one in which Western music and scholarship were widespread and generally admired—an environment created largely by institutions like conservatories, universities, printing presses and recoding labels. Products of their environment, it was only natural that Salgado and Moreno would assume the superiority of Western classical music, and that they would transpose their Western values onto the music of their community—not without resistance, as illustrated by Salgado's nonconformist compositions. Their adoption of music evolutionism thus illustrates how knowl-





Jorge Oviedo conducts *Boletín* on its opening night, October 25, 2007, in Quito's Teatro Sucre.

edge, usually produced in institutions, can serve to painlessly transmit power, enforcing the position of superiority of those who produce it.

Despite their unquestionable value, Moreno's and Salgado's contributions do little to help reconcile my conflicted identity. If anything, they exacerbate it. To adopt their worldview would be to consider the music of my Ecuadoran upbringing as unevolved, subdued and made legible only by the superiority of my Western musical training. In search of a more balanced way to address this identity struggle, I now turn to composer Mesías Maiguashca (1938-). Maiguashca grew up in an indigenous lower-class family and received a Western classical music education—first at the Conservatorio Nacional in Quito, where Salgado and Moreno taught, and later at prestigious institutions in the United States, Argentina and Germany. Given his indigenous heritage, Maiguashca would be likely to feel the clash between the music of his upbringing and his Western music education more strongly than most. Indeed, members of Ecuador's indigenous communities often experience intense pressure to mask their customs, pressure usually exerted through acts of racism and public shame. In Maiguashca's case, this pressure was magnified through his music education, as indigenous styles of music were explicitly forbidden and mocked within the Conservatorio's halls. As a result, Maiguashca's musical identity is particularly conflicted, formed not only by two opposing sonic worlds, but also marked by the intense pressure exerted against his indigenous musical heritage. In his words: "Living in a 'lower-class' social and economic context and attending...elite institutions produced in me instability, an uncertainty about which group I belong to." "Both musics, that of the 'chichería' [bar frequented by indigenous] and the 'classical,' are embedded in me...I have two halves in my musical soul."

Maiguashca musically addresses his divided identity in his scenic cantata *Boletín y Elegía de las Mitas* (partially available at [youtube.com/watch?v=e7DewJpjf\\_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7DewJpjf_I)). In this 90-minute musical setting of César

Dávila Andrade's poem of the same name, Maiguashca juxtaposes the diverse sounds of his disparate musical upbringing. Andean instruments collide with European flutes and clarinets; recordings of Ecuadoran songs, voices and soundscapes are electronically melded with *avant-garde* noises; choirs speak, sing and scream in both Spanish and Quichua; and novel instruments are used throughout. In addition, this work includes on-stage projections of portraits of indigenous faces.

The result of this juxtaposition of disparate musical elements is not an agreeable fusion as Salgado and Moreno would have liked, but rather a cacophonous musical world, a world of broken melodies, distorted voices and defamiliarized musical memories. All the sounds that form Maiguashca's musical identity are brought together in their fullest, unadjusted, colliding nature. This is not a composition that attempts to create beauty by homogenizing disparity—rather, it is a celebration of disparity. It negates the supremacy of any single sonority, instead treating all sounds in their own terms, displaying their sheer difference. Yet in the end all sounds are consumed by an increasingly thundering recording of the Ecuadoran song "Cuchara de Palo." This ending is undoubtedly a musical triumph, a liberation. Perhaps this is the resolution of Maiguashca's conflicted identity, a musical embrace of his divided self in its fullest, plural existence. Or perhaps the celebratory ending indicates, as Maiguashca says, a musical enactment of the indigenous liberation from the colonial yoke. I believe that it is both. I believe that in acknowledging the multiplicity of his divided self, Maiguashca musically resolves the troubled identity that his post-colonial upbringing caused.

*Boletín* calms the anxieties of my conflicted musical identity. It gives me reason to believe that my disparate musical upbringings—like Maiguashca's—can coexist despite their differences. But when I think of what Maiguashca had to do in order to compose *Boletín*, my anxieties return. To articulate the voice of his divided self in music, Maiguashca needed to master cutting-edge sound technologies and

avant-garde compositional languages, skills that he only acquired thanks to his education abroad. Moreover, the performance of a work as ambitious as *Boletín* required substantial financial and organizational support from numerous institutions that was likely available to Maiguashca given his credentials as a respected professor in Germany. Maiguashca's case suggests that, in order to address similar identity issues, one has to migrate and affiliate with foreign and powerful institutions, which—as Salgado's and Moreno's cases illustrate—largely precipitate these identity issues in the first place. Had Maiguashca remained in Ecuador, his musical voice would be silent. But in leaving, Maiguashca may have exacerbated the material causes of his conflicted identity.

Trying to understand my conflicted identity through these case studies has now led me to reflect on the problematic status of Ecuadoran practitioners of classical music. Ours is a choice between making audible our personal voices while empowering foreign institutions, or having silenced voices subdued by the Western-centric knowledge and power that emanates from these same institutions. But perhaps in this dilemma there is opportunity for our empowerment. Perhaps by choosing to make use of the tools and resources of foreign institutions, we can build a meaningful understanding of our musical selves, one that would provide us, at the very least, with audible voices, and which could even give us the means to critically challenge the totalizing foreign models that constitute our identities and subdue us. As I embark on my doctoral studies in musicology at Harvard University, I truly hope that this is not mere wishful thinking.

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**Felipe Ledesma Núñez** is a first-year graduate student in historical musicology at Harvard University. Felipe holds degrees in music history, theory and performance from Northwestern State University and Stony Brook University. He can be reached at [ledesmanunez@g.harvard.edu](mailto:ledesmanunez@g.harvard.edu).



# MUSIC CHANGING LIVES



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# The Opportunity to Live a Life in Music

The Cartagena International Music Festival **BY JULIA SALVI**

**IN THE COBBLED STREETS OF CARTAGENA,** where the sea meets with a land vibrant in history and beauty, music—in particular classical music—has become a protagonist during nine days of January since 2007. Musicians of all ages and backgrounds stroll around the city day and night, reminding visitors and locals that something magical is taking place. The Cartagena International Music Festival combines artistic excellence and education in benefit of a social cause: promoting the arts as a channel for social integration.

The Festival supports the development of local musicians, increasing the openings for a life in the arts. It also mobilizes communities from within and outside Colombia around the festival. Thus, we generate an ideal space for human interaction with the aid of a universal language: music. The event promotes social integration along with fundamental values for civic coexistence such as solidarity and respect, assisted by the arts that open up our minds and help us become better human beings.

The existence of a festival or the mere access to music does not guarantee that the conditions for a better society will emerge and solidify. However, fostering this form of expression in people's lives does increase the possibilities for this to happen. Through the Cartagena International Music Festival and related programs, Fundación Salvi (Colombia) focuses on mobilizing resources, organizations and people to create the opportunities for the expansion of music, seeking ways for society to find common grounds to coexist in peace.

Young adults from 18 to 25, as well as adolescents from age 12 up, have been the focus of our didactic work. Fundación Salvi's leading educational program is its Master Classes, designed to bring inter-

national artists of excellent artistic and human qualities together with talented local musicians and professors who seek more opportunities to progress. Each Master Class is characterized by its academic rigor combined with friendly dia-

of whom have received Fundación Salvi grants. Beyond the classrooms, young adults experience other educational settings such as concerts, conferences and exhibitions. The exposure to live performances, for instance, teaches them much



**Above:** Children learn to make instruments; **Page 23,** a detail of instrument making (top); **a girl checks her progress in learning to make wind instruments (bottom).**

logue between professors and students. As a previous participant put it:

"I take with me [the good fortune of] having had the opportunity to be in contact with great interpreters of universal music and of meeting colleagues from other universities with whom we have identified ways of improving the quality of academic music in our institutions"—Robinson Giraldo Villegas, trombone teacher and beneficiary of a 2015 Salvi grant.

Robinson's experience as a student, despite being himself a teacher, reflects feelings that other participants have shared with us about their academic and professional experiences. In its ten years of existence, more than 3,500 students have benefited from this program, many

about the connection between a performer and his audience and the joy that a spirited musical interpretation can bring to the people that gather to listen.

On the technical front, students improve their musical ear, posture and personal presentation, among other abilities, while on the personal side they engage with peers, colleagues and people from different walks of life. This gives them insight into various social contexts, helping to dispel stereotypes and to find more common ground than differences—all essential to reinforcing civic values. As Fundación Salvi's academic program director Javier Duque points out, "The Festival complements the regular cycle of formation offered by our teaching institutions, in an environment that is ideal

for stimulating learning.”

In this context, social integration and even valuable friendships result from the encounter between national and foreign musicians. Leading international artists who have participated in our program include the violinist and conductor Scott Yoo, Italian baritone Roberto De Candia, and, in 2016, the great Russian violinist, Maxim Vengerov. For the professors too it is an opportunity to teach young musicians, with different backgrounds than theirs, who bring their own visions of the world into the way they interpret music.

### THE INSTRUMENT HEALERS

This artistic and educational experience is complemented by the silent activity of instrument building and repairing known as *lutería*, a historical craft that is essential to music and its evolution. All year long, separate from the festival but also in preparation for it, Fundación Salvi, in alliance with the Colombian Ministry of Culture and with the support of private benefactors, carries out a *lutería* program which, in addition to building and repairing services, provides training and education with a focus on young musicians and artisans.

In its six years of existence, this program has reached four of the country's major cities and their surrounding suburbs; it has provided 38 courses of formation to Colombian artisans, served 45 municipal bands and repaired 900 instruments. During the festival itself, a total of 136 workshops have been held, benefiting 2,200 participants. Beyond the numbers themselves, what is most important is the overall socio-cultural impact.

Over the past two decades numerous musical programs have sprung up in different regions of the country, not only to expand the opportunities for the young to live a life in the arts, but also to give young people some tools to face the various threats present in society. Examples of such programs are the Network of Music Schools of Medellín, the youth groups of the Bogotá Philharmonic Orchestra, the Cartagena Symphony Youth Orchestra,

and the various suburban bands that have risen with the support of non-profit organizations such as Fundación Batuta, nationwide, and Fundación Música por Colombia, in the Caribbean region.

In this context, the work of *lutiers*, that is, instrument makers and repairers, is vital for existing bands and orchestras. Thus, the Lutería and Wind Instrument Centers in Colombia, which began as an initiative of the Ministry of Culture, play a fundamental part in strengthening this craft and its impact on musical development. The centers have grown and expanded their reach thanks to the



initial financial and philanthropic support of Fanny and Luis Carlos Sarmiento. In 2015, another local non-profit, Fundación Mario Santo Domingo, took up the flag and became the Centers' new benefactor, helping us initiate a new entry-level training program, under the guidance of two Italian and one Colombian luter.

### MAKING AN IMPACT

The work of Fundación Salvi is an example of the impact of non-profits on society in various fields, in this case, the arts. By bringing the public and private sectors together, non-profits help consol-

idate projects that in time become mature programs with a long-lasting impact. To be more effective, such impact must be pursued as well through unity among cultural leaders and agents. This is why, in addition to its musical focus, Fundación Salvi has made Colombian plastic artists a key part of the festival, by inviting fine artists to help create the images that will reflect the spirit and identity behind each year's program. With their participation, the festival exalts the connection between the arts and their contribution to society.

As we continue to follow the wise reflections of the thinkers, activists and leaders who have upheld the importance of the arts in promoting progress and well-being, it is insightful to refer to the words of Italian novelist Umberto Eco. In a 2015 column written for Italian newspaper *L'Espresso* and published in one of Colombia's leading newspapers, *El Espectador*, he said: "in a world made up of so many diverse cultures living in constant interaction, our cultural resources are essential to our mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence." This global idea is a guiding principle in the work of Fundación Salvi and its focus on youth and education. Thus, the best way to honor ten years of artistic and educational work in Colombia is to roll up our sleeves and continue with more whole-hearted, hands-on work, taking first the opportunity that these pages give us to thank all of those who have been a part of this journey.

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*Julia Salvi has dedicated her life to bringing music and the arts to new audiences throughout the world. As president of the Victor Salvi Foundation, Salvi promotes music education and philanthropic activities in connection to the harp. In Colombia, the Foundation's most ambitious project is the Cartagena International Music Festival, now in its 10th season. To learn more about Fundación Salvi's artistic, educational and social programs, visit [www.fundacionsalvi.com](http://www.fundacionsalvi.com) and [www.cartagenamusicfestival.com](http://www.cartagenamusicfestival.com).*



# El Camino Project

Forging Classical Links on an Ancient Road **BY MARCELA DAVISON AVILÉS AND CARLA DIRLIKOV**

**WITH THE LATEST ELECTION CAMPAIGN UPROAR** about Mexican immigrants, the U.S. mainstream media may be paying attention to their political clout, but generally not to the contributions of Latinos to the civic culture of the Americas.

When the U.S. media does pay attention to Latin American or Latino cultural life, they most often overlook the genre of classical music. Indeed, in the United States, audience attendance at classical music concerts is at an all-time low. Yet the opposite is true in Asia, Europe and Latin America.

Which makes what happens when Americans hear—really hear—classical music, especially that of Latin America, all the more miraculous. We believe, in fact, we *know* that the traditional and classical music of Latin America can help American communities avoid the pernicious impact of negative stereotypes. And we have launched a new initiative this year at Harvard and in California with a mission to prove exactly that.

El Camino Project merges our experience as performers, educators, producers, and advocates with our combined experience of what it means to be Mexicans, Latinos and Americans. We are taking that combination on the road—literally and figuratively—to rebuild a new awareness of Latino culture for a broad audience. The road of our choosing is El Camino Real—the ancient highway linking two continents and hundreds of cultures. It will serve as the central artery of our efforts, providing history, ideas and music—the lifeblood of culture—to map and guide our efforts.

The path of our collaboration disregards current notions of presenting traditional music in the usual way (in a large hall, with a large orchestra, on a large stage, in front of a tiny audience) in favor of the troubador's approach—tak-



## The road of our choosing is El Camino Real.

ing the stories and music of our heritage on the road with intimate salons or community gatherings. Our “*artesanía de acción*” combines elements of surprise, production and entertainment value with thoughtful curation of the Latin American classical and heritage genres and a soupçon of wit and old-fashioned parlor gossip. This paradigm is closer to forum theatre than to traditional concert presentation. The result?

The result is what we call the “I Had No Idea” effect upon an audience and community. “I see people’s faces change during performances,” says Dirlikov. “First one, then a couple more, then it’s like the whole room suddenly lights up.”

“They’re all thinking, ‘I had no idea,’” Davison Avilés adds. “I had no idea that Latin America had composers of classical music. Or, I had no idea Latinos performed classical music. Or, I had no idea the music is so beautiful, ethereal, transformative—all adjectives we have heard after one of our salons.”

“Actually in the United States there was one person who had an idea,” says another of our collaborators, Marisa Canales, founder and principal of Urtext, Mexico’s leading classical music label. “Leonard Bernstein.”

In his time, Bernstein innovated the popularization of classical music with lively presentations for young people, and filmed lectures that were equally entertaining and educational. He also knew and loved the music and people of Latin America—his wife, Felicia Montealegre, was born in Costa Rica and grew up in Chile. Through her, and his travels in Mexico and South America, he achieved a deep understanding of the power of its culture.

The idea for El Camino Project arose not with Leonard Bernstein—although it might very well have done—but with a policy conference a little more than a year ago. The White House Initiative on Education Excellence for Hispanics joined forces with the Mexican Heritage Corporation, Pixar Animation Studios, arts educators, curators and acclaimed international performing artists to discuss creating access to music education for Latino youth.

The two of us met at this conference (Dirlikov is an opera singer and Davison Avilés is a San Francisco-based impresario and arts advocate). Of Bulgarian and Mexican heritage, Dirlikov became an agent for change, forging an international brand through constant re-invention of her own trajectory as a professional singer. In the process, she has given new meaning to the term “emerging artist,” performing gigs in China, South America, Mexico, and Europe to make up for the fact that in America a career in opera is, in her words, “a challenge.”

“But really, there has never been such a thing as a traditional path to become



Cathedral at Puebla, Mexico.

ing an artist. And, what's more, I have always believed that artists can be more than just interpreters—we can be educators and advocates, and researchers. I was especially interested in researching culture as I believe that art is born out of culture. I felt that being an artist allowed me a unique perspective to research culture, particularly while singing abroad,” notes Dirlikov.

If Dirlikov is the artistic change agent within El Camino, Davison Avilés is its finance and strategy guru. A Harvard College alumna '80 with a degree in Fine Arts and a law degree from Stanford, she has combined her knowledge of the law, business and the arts to forge a career in which the tag might be, “production meets advocacy.” “I’m a producer—my job is to raise funds, build capacity, get the show up and do it in a way that creates and amplifies relevance and meaning for an international audience.”

Energized by the conference and policy discussions and by the urgent need to strengthen the financial, artistic and community development capacity for Latino classical and heritage music, we decided to join forces with colleagues Marisa Canales and Benjamin Juárez Echenique on a new strategy to change attitudes in the U.S. performing arts

community, which neither understands nor appreciates the true impact of Latino classical and heritage music.

Canales and her husband, Juárez Echenique, have built an international reputation in the world of classical music. Together their footprint spans the worlds of recording, performance, research and academia. Canales is the founder and principal of Urtext Digital Classics, a producer of digital content in the classical music genre and an international concert flutist. Juárez Echenique, the group's strategic adviser, is a conductor and currently a member of the music faculty at Boston University; he was formerly head of the Music Department at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, and Musical Director of Mexico City's Grand Festival.

El Camino Project is not only following ancient roads; it's carving out innovative paths. Canales will be developing new digital content for El Camino Project. A good example is the new software application Canales developed through her record label. This app, called *En Concierto*, brings the audience directly into the heart of an orchestra by creating an experience in which the user can choose to hear the music as the proverbial “fly on the wall” or actually immerse

herself in the work of the conductor, soloists or members of the orchestra. This is accomplished through a scrolling score which is synchronized with the audio of the piece and four video screens showing each one of the players, as well as the conductor.

The first version of *En Concierto*, which presents the music of Mexican composer Samuel Zyman, performed by the Orquesta de Las Américas, is available for android devices through the Google store and was scheduled to be available for Apple devices by mid-October. El Camino Project amplifies the outreach and promotion of this digital content to build audience for the music and composer, and encourage investment in its distribution and development of new versions.

At Harvard, El Camino Project has also partnered with the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Foundation at Adams House, the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies and the Cultural Agents Initiative at the Latin American Studies Department to voice the impact of Latino culture at a three-day international conference “Beyond Tomorrow: Safeguarding Civilization Through Turbulent Times” in October 2015.

Whether along an ancient road, in the halls of Harvard or through digital media, classical music is a way of empowering Latino voices. Music is perhaps the preeminent human practice for preserving past cultures. Through music we keep the past vividly alive and experience as closely as possible the feelings of our ancestors. By delving into the creative process, our project provides the community with a deep engagement with heritage art forms in danger of destruction, financial collapse or worse—of being forgotten amidst the noise and clamor of contemporary society.

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**Marcela Davison Avilés**, Harvard College '80, is Managing Director and Executive Producer of *El Camino Project*.

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**Carla Dirlikov** is an opera singer and founder of *El Camino Project*.

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# Musical Slums

Playing for Your Life in Venezuela's El Sistema **BY YANA STAINOVA**

THE SMALL BUS WAS TRUDGING UP THE ALMOST vertical hill, swerving sharply to the left to let off the passengers. The street where I got off was littered with electric cords and big piles of uncollected trash emitting an unbearable stench and inviting ominous vultures. I went up an alley of stairs that wound its way between the bare-bricked houses, where some curious elderly women peeped out of the windows. After a couple of hundred steps, feeling the sweat, dust, and strong sun on my arms, I reached the top of the staircase. Below me stretched a vast expanse of houses densely scattered on hills and in the distance, hidden by the afternoon fog, the center of Caracas. But in the background, I heard children's laughter, the sound of running feet, and the disorderly tuning of a symphonic orchestra. Drawn out of my reverie, I walked into the music school where for a year I taught flute to children living in a Venezuelan slum.

There are 423 such music schools all over Venezuela. They are part of *El Sistema*, a state-funded classical music program that provides cost-free music education and instruments to half a million young people between the ages of 2 and 18 across the country. Founded in 1975 by economist and musician José Antonio Abreu, *El Sistema* has weathered the volatile political climate of seven changes in government and has been adopted in 35 countries around the world. What started out as a dozen musicians playing together in a garage is today a nationwide after-school program comprising more than a thousand children's and youth orchestras and dozens of professional orchestras and ensembles that tour the world. *El Sistema* aims to lessen socioeconomic exclusion and everyday violence through music, and 81 percent of the program's participants are from



the poorest and medium-low social strata (Inter-American Development Bank).

*El Sistema's* activities take place daily between 2 and 6 p.m., the first two hours dedicated to instrumental classes and the last two to orchestra rehearsals. Children, some as young as two, begin by singing in choirs, playing the recorder or cardboard instruments in the so-called "paper orchestras." After a couple of years, they are encouraged to listen to, touch, feel, and play with the real instruments, choosing the one they like best and having the freedom to switch instruments later on. As soon as a child is able to play an instrument, he or she is expected to teach younger children. As a result, *El Sistema's* pedagogy is spontaneous and playful, not wedded to centuries of top-down and formal European traditions in learning. As the weather is warm all year round, classes often take place in improvised spaces: in an open patio, under an awning, in the town plaza or under a tree.

When I first found out about *El Sistema*, I was a Ph.D. student in anthropology at Brown University. The idea that music was practiced on such a wide scale in Venezuela captured my imagination. Born in Bulgaria, on the eve of the revolutions that brought down the Berlin Wall and changed a continent, and having just written an undergraduate honors thesis on the place of poetry in the Chilean transition to democracy, I was committed to the idea that artists could be agents of political and social change. I was a life-long pianist and flutist, and the daily practice of music had shaped my own life. My fascination with *El Sistema* sharpened my resolve to go to a country which has some of the highest homicide rates in the world and was then on the brink of political and economic turmoil. *El Sistema* eventually became the subject of sixteen months of ethnographic research and my dissertation.

I arrived in Venezuela without knowing anybody in 2011. The first thing I did was to visit the headquarters of *El Sistema*, a seven-story building in the center of Caracas where the professional orchestras are housed. It was teeming with activity all day long; individual and orchestra rehearsals, music classes, and in the evenings, invariably, at least one concert. Children of all ages energetically played Mahler, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and Stravinsky, and identified with the personal histories of the composers. Their passion for classical music was fueled by the words, visits and inspiration of their own Gustavo Dudamel, a program graduate who is now the conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Famed foreign conductors, such as Claudio Abbado and Sir Simon Rattle, as well as professors, were other common visitors in *El Sistema*.

Eager to find out where many of the





musicians hailed from, during my next two summer research trips to Venezuela I set out to visit schools outside of Caracas. My travels took me to the Lara region famous for its Venezuelan popular music, where popular ensembles coexisted with the Western classical music conservatories. There, I asked Lucia, a little girl who was a violinist in the local children's orchestra, what she liked about music.

**Photographer Meredith Kohut paints a portrait of children of all ages who learn how to play music through Venezuela's El Sistema.**

She hugged herself tightly and rocked back and forth, her eyes shyly looking down, a cunning smile on her face. "With music I create my own stories," she said, telling me of a beautiful princess forced to marry a man she did not love. She told me that her instrument helped her communicate with others: "I am usually shy but when I am holding my violin I feel brave enough to talk to people." From there, I traveled to the mountainous region of Mérida and visited a school perched at 5000 feet, where the wind instrument players felt dizzy as they drew a breath in the rarefied air. There, Alicia would walk out of the music school with her cello on her back, and sing all the way home. From Mérida, I went to the deserts of Coro, where the wood of the violins cracked in the heat. I met Carlos, a youth who worked over the weekends in his uncle's liquor store to save up enough money to buy his own trumpet, which he caringly polished and lovingly played. And then I went to Canaima, near the highest waterfall in the world, where indigenous children took music classes under palm trees and later swam in the nearby lake. And where, in the evenings, a mother played the viola in the local orchestra, while her baby daughter played at her feet.

For my year of fieldwork, I was, however, based in Caracas. I taught flute in the largest slum in Venezuela, which has the highest homicide rate in the country. In between gang crossfire, the *El Sistema* bus came to pick up children and take them up the steep streets to "la orquesta" (the orchestra), as the musical activities were popularly called. As my Ivy League students had been replaced by seven-year-old pranksters, I struggled to make them concentrate on the music class and gain their respect. "You do it then," Juan, one of my flute students, challenged me on my first class after I corrected his technique. I found teaching to be enormously rewarding because it enabled me to engage with people in an activity that could not be expressed in words. "Let's just play and you'll see for yourself," was

what Laura, a bassoon player, replied to my question what music meant to her. Teaching also made me a valued member of the community, and I met my students' mothers and took part in their everyday lives. They were faithfully dedicated to their children's everyday practice of music because it kept children away from the violent gangs that permeated the slum. Furthermore, the mothers believed that participation in *El Sistema* gave their children opportunities they themselves had never had.

I experienced the thrill of these opportunities when I was invited to join one of the professional orchestras on a tour to Japan and South Korea. Many musicians were leaving the country for the first time, replacing their beds in the slums with rooms in five-star hotels. They experienced the excitement and intimidation of getting to know new countries. Performing for enthusiastic audiences in Hiroshima, Tokyo and Seoul, they cried with emotion or worried over concert mishaps. Some took part in the activities for the children orphaned in the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, where a school inspired by *El Sistema* was created. They played in binational orchestras, where a Venezuelan and a Korean musician shared a stand and a score but not a common language.

Today, as Venezuela faces fast-growing inflation, political instability and scarcity of basic goods, *El Sistema's* thousands of musicians continue their daily musical activities.

***Yana Stainova, a pianist and flutist, is a Ph.D. Candidate in Sociocultural Anthropology at Brown University. She earned her B.A. in International Relations and Spanish from Mount Holyoke College.***

**Above: El Sistema's most famous graduate Gustavo Dudamel is director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Orquesta Sinfónica Simón Bolívar. Below: El Sistema students with drums and cello.**





# Music for Social Change

## The Origins of the Danilo Pérez Foundation BY PATRICIA ZARATE AND DANILO PÉREZ

**WHEN DANILO PÉREZ URRIOLA, A SALSA SINGER** in Panama, decided to study pedagogy in the 1960s, he faced a difficult challenge: a teaching internship in Colón, one of the poorest cities of the Republic of Panama. As a young and enthusiastic teacher, he accepted troubled teenagers into his classroom, but soon found they had difficulty learning even the simplest subjects because they couldn't relate to the material.

It was after everyone in the class failed a poetry exam that Pérez (the father of one of the co-authors of this article) began to think that maybe the students were not the problem. He decided to change his teaching methods and started to bring music into the poetry class. Once the poetry was set to music, everyone passed the test, so Pérez started applying music to all the subjects taught in the school system. Within a couple of months, every middle-school class started with a song, and the material content of the class was taught through improvisation or by rearranging traditional songs. Math formulas were taught in the form of repetitive songs, geography lists were simple melodies, and history was a complete improvisation in the key of G. Composition, call and response, melodic development, improvisation and singing a cappella while clapping a repeated clave pattern allowed the students to remember their subject matter. Sometimes, Pérez had to tell them to sing softer during test times and some students began asking if it were okay to simply sing through their tests instead of writing them. Students began to learn and successfully graduate.

This experience—more than fifty years ago—embodies the work and spirit of the Danilo Pérez Foundation, established in 2005, and now run by his son, president of the Foundation in Panama and Cultural Ambassador of the Republic of Panama, as well as Artistic Director of the Berklee

Global Jazz Institute in Boston, Massachusetts, and a Unesco Artist for Peace. Projecting his father's ideas onto the world stage, Pérez Jr. has expanded the concept of music as an instrument of social change.

The Foundation teaches hundreds of children ages 8 to 14, including many from very poor and crime-ridden areas of Panama City. Like his father, Pérez insists that they receive an education in much more than just music. The nonprofit, housed in a former conservatory building, provides a safe place that the *Boston Globe* once described as “full of instruments, books, and role models who teach principles like respect and honesty alongside rhythm and music theory.”

Despite his father's efforts in Colón, Pérez finds that over the past 20 years, the overall situation of poverty has only gotten worse in this small corner of Panama, an hour away from Panama City. Disaffected youth who can't finish school are most likely to be in jail or dead by the age of 20. His father's students faced much better odds, and today many of them say they still remember many of their teacher's songs, which led them into more productive lives.

His father's unpublished 1967 thesis, “Influence of Music on Primary Education,” forms a cornerstone of the Foundation's philosophy today. The thesis asserts, “Music could serve the education of a child, or education could serve the child to learn music.” Each serves a purpose. For example, a music teacher's goal is to make the child good at the art and craft of music. In this process, Pérez argues, the purpose may not necessarily be for the child to become a professional musician, but simply for her or him to be able to play, compose or better appreciate the musical arts. Conversely, the use of music to “serve the education of a child” sees music as a universal means by which teachers, parents, community leaders and others can

transmit all types of information to the younger generation. In this respect, Pérez recommends that every single teacher in the Republic of Panama should be trained in the study of music sufficiently to use it to teach any subject in the school curriculum. This proposition contends that music holds a pre-eminent place among all academic subjects as the method by which every subject should be taught to make it meaningful for students.

Used in this way, music can bring a sense of coherence to an otherwise disjointed education system. When students are trying to understand why they have to study mathematical subjects they may never use in daily life, they can instantly recognize the essential role of math in music. For example, instead of studying addition, multiplication or division by adding, multiplying or dividing abstract numbers, students can study all this with musical notation, and then can sing or play the math exercise in the form of memorable tunes. Algebraic fractions are physically audible in the form of a whole note that is musically divisible into halves, quarters and sixteenths. A fractional relationship is therefore directly explained and understood as a component of rhythm, and an elementary example can get as sophisticated as one likes. Thus when a whole note is musically divided into halves, quarters and sixteenths, it can change pitch and form melodic intervals, creating a tune. The same melodic shape can then be enriched with harmony, lyrics and different emotional interpretations, and suddenly a dry mathematical exercise has acquired an abundance of meanings that the student can hear, play and emotionally perceive.

Pérez's thesis goes on to describe the problems ingrained in Panamanian public education and suggests that the inclusion of music—both as a subject in itself, and as a general method of teaching—can





Danilo Pérez with his father and mother, taken in 2013 with some of the foundation children.

help in these specific ways: it can develop a sense of national identity, encourage school attendance, help with memorizing subject matter and provide vivid experiences for each academic subject. Music education in a national curriculum, his thesis asserts, develops students in six ways: Music helps construct an integral personality and enriches the lives of young people by helping them function in collectives based on emotional intelligence and self-expression. It provides the healthy experience of unifying mind and body and creates aesthetic awareness while also building intellectual skills and the attitude of scholarship. On a larger scale, music develops a national folklore and historical identity.

Danilo Pérez Urriola graduated from the University of Panama with a degree in pedagogy (or “education” as it is known in other countries). His thesis was never published and remains in storage on the shelf of the university library, but his teachings live on in the Danilo Pérez Foundation. It teaches music to paying and scholarship students, but it also builds social responsibility and foment Panamanian culture, transforming its students into respected citizens and constructive members of society.

We can see the concrete results of the philosophy of Danilo Pérez Sr. in the fruits of Danilo Pérez Jr.: the Danilo Pérez Foundation and the Panama Jazz Festival, which have funded scholarships for

countless students, many of them living in extreme poverty. The Festival has brought more than 250,000 people to Panama, creating both cultural and educational tourism.

These large endeavors bear witness to the legacy of Danilo Pérez Sr. But this inheritance is also present in the small, concrete examples of individual success, of a young man named Joshue, virtually the only youth in his rough neighborhood in Colón who has managed to stay out of jail. It was music that saved him. Or perhaps one should say music as a powerful instrument for social change.

*Patricia Zarate, a Chilean-born saxophonist, is the Executive Director of the Panama Jazz Festival and Outreach Coordinator for the Berklee Global Jazz Institute in Boston, Massachusetts. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Music Therapy from Berklee College of Music and a Master Degree in Jazz Studies from New York University.*  
[www.patriciazarate.net](http://www.patriciazarate.net)

*Danilo Pérez, a Panamanian pianist, has received Grammy awards for his musical projects, as well as awards for his philanthropic work. He performs and leads educational and performance projects with students and professionals all over the world experiencing the power of music for the restoration of humanity.*  
[www.daniloPerez.com](http://www.daniloPerez.com)

# Teatro del Lago

## Education Through Music BY ULI BADER

TEATRO DEL LAGO IN FRUTILLAR IN THE SOUTH of Chile offers spectacular views of lakes and volcanoes. This natural setting has attracted international and Chilean artists, ranging from Yo Yo Ma to Gil Shaham to the Bamberg Symphony, and the Youth Orchestra of the Americas.

When my team and I inaugurated the theatre in November 2010, we saw it only as a performance space, one that would be able to nurture an entire region with creativity and a new quality of life.

In the original concept, education did not play a large role. However, quite early on, we discovered the importance of educating through music. Teatro del Lago now manages an arts school with musical instrument classes and an extensive ballet program (connected to the Royal Academy of Dance in London). Five years after its inauguration, Teatro del Lago has become an education and arts center receiving 20,000 students per year through its several innovative and integrative education activities.

Teatro del Lago has also created an International Orchestra and Choir Academy to bring together students and young professionals from all over Latin America and the world to jointly create sophisticated musical programs. In addition to these formal international programs, Teatro del Lago recently created two community programs “Puedes Bailar” (You Can Dance!) and “Puedes Cantar” (You Can Sing!).

These programs were inspired by the realization that not every child and every family can easily afford to buy or rent a violin, a piano or any other instrument to bring music into their children's lives. Inspired by several talks and readings of Sir Ken Robinson, an English author and

adviser to arts-in-education programs, as well as by other creative leaders, we focused on the fact that most of us have a working body and most of us have a voice. With that body and with that voice we can dance and we can sing without the need for any other instrument.

“Puedes Cantar,” like its sister program “Puedes Bailar,” recruits youth of varied social economic backgrounds from many of the region’s schools—one of the essential cornerstones of this program. Real integration does not happen in programs that “only” help vulnerable students. Connecting children from different social backgrounds is what matters, especially at an age in which social background is not yet important.

Teatro del Lago’s Choir Movement, which began six years ago, now has 120 participants and incorporates a children’s choir, a youth choir and a choir for young and older adults. The choir performs traditional music, as well as more contemporary forms.

The benefits of a choir in education reflect the values of our society in general: listening while singing requires multitasking, coordination, discipline, teamwork, expression and learning how to read music as an additional creative world-language. The incorporation of one’s own voice into the sound of a choir is a sensitive multitasking act; the tuning of the voice is a corporal feeling, steering the voice in a controlled and coordinated way. We work in teams, thus fostering the sensibility that enhances community and social understanding. Combining those techniques with the emotional activity of music, like singing or dancing is proved to be more effective than learning without emotion.

Neuroscience tells us that all emotional activities are stored and remembered in the amygdala, the oldest part of the evolution within our brain. That means learning certain procedures or skills in combination with an emotional experience will make them firm and last forever. Tests with people afflicted with Alzheimer’s disease have proved that though the patients forget the lyrics of

songs early on, when the melody is played the memory of the text returns.

All these scientific discoveries should be applied in simple ways at an early age: in education.

In addition to the “Puedes Cantar” program, “Puedes Bailar” brings together about seventy teenagers from twenty schools in seven communities each year. These youngsters, between 14–18 years of age, would normally never meet, and the reality is that they would probably never dance. Teenagers in Chile move within their one-and-only social group, that of the school. Creating an additional social horizon by making new friends from different social backgrounds and communities enhances social ability, connectivity and communications skills.

In addition, learning modern dance teaches these students discipline, stamina, artistic creativity, presence in front of others and presence on a big professional theatre stage, as well as communication (also corporal silent communication!) and coordination, teamwork and friendship through the arts. Shy children or those with low self-esteem transform their personalities and acquire leadership skills.

In November 2014, the group performed in the Annual Gala’s special program with choreography by New York-based Christopher Huggins. The Chilean youth shared the stage with dancer-“colleagues” from Philadanco/Philadelphia. I created “Puedes Bai-

(see also:

<https://vimeo.com/channels/772575/121638839>

<https://vimeo.com/channels/772575/121485554>,

<https://vimeo.com/channels/772575/121482073>)

lar” and “Puedes Cantar” after reading extensively in the field of neuroscience. I tried to apply this knowledge in the arts. Today, Teatro del Lago trains a young generation during after-school activities. This is the generation we want to foster and nurture. This is the power of quality arts education programs, and it should be the goal of all education to re-focus on the essence of human value before sophistication of technical skills.

Dancing and singing are small steps in every life but are huge steps for society’s future.

*Uli Bader is the creative director, co-founder and member of the Board of Directors of Teatro del Lago, Frutillar, Chile. Born in Germany, he studied music and arts administration and worked in several positions in the arts field in the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie, Philharmonie Koeln, National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC and Teatro del Lago in Chile.*



“Puedes Bailar” performers dance with exuberance.



# When Music Changes Lives

## The Youth Symphony Orchestras of Santo Domingo

BY DARWIN AQUINO

IN 2004, I GOT A SURPRISING PHONE CALL FROM Santo Domingo on one cold winter night. I was then studying musical composition in Strasbourg, France, a great opportunity for a young Dominican musician. The officials of the recently elected government of my country were offering me a job to lead and reactivate the *Sistema* of youth orchestras in my homeland.

Most of you readers will know about *El Sistema*, the influential social movement created by Maestro José Antonio Abreu in the early 1970s in Venezuela. Without a doubt, the program is a model of altruism, vision and commitment, which brought to all of us the most transcendental change in musical education of the past decades—not only in Latin America, but in the entire world.

That movement gave rise to countless musicians playing a variety of instruments, as well as to the formation of children, youth and professional orchestras. Perhaps the most emblematic fruit of this movement is one of the stars of classical music, the youthful Venezuelan conductor Gustavo Dudamel, who currently leads both the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra in Venezuela.

At 23 years of age, I had directed some concerts with a small youth orchestra. And I was already a composer and a professional violinist, but I had little experience in managing programs. I wasn't sure why I had been chosen for the job, but I decided to take it after much deliberation. I packed my bags and said goodbye to France to return to Santo Domingo. I had what was needed to take on the task: youthful energy and a great desire to accomplish a lot.

Our *Sistema* had been founded by presidential decree in 1999. It was the result of visits by several Venezuelan

musicians in the early 1990s. At that time, we witnessed the creation of the Juan Pablo Duarte Symphony Orchestra of the National Music Conservatory and later the National Youth Symphony Orchestra, the main musical group that gave rise to the beginnings of the *Sistema*.

The lives of many people changed through the *Sistema*. There are debates about whether this is the appropriate method for teaching music. I believe that the human aspect of this program takes precedence over any technical aspect, whether the method is effective or not. Ten years have gone by and we are now beginning to see the emotional impact that the *Sistema* has put into motion. Instead of theorizing, I will only say what I have experienced—together with thousands of children and youth and their relatives—throughout the Dominican Republic.

In early 2005, I traveled to Venezuela, where I met with Maestro Abreu, the founder of the *Sistema*. In his humble and simple manner, he asked me directly, "What do you need?" I told him that we need to start up the program, the most difficult task, and he talked about our mission as young Latin American musicians to multiply these teaching methods throughout our nations, "because everyone knows the reality of his or her country." It was the first time I heard the word "multiply" outside of the context of arithmetic.

On my return home, I took up the challenge. The previous Youth Symphony Orchestra had disintegrated because of political instability. The first step was to recruit the most talented young musicians by seeking them throughout the country. I did not know many of the country's provinces and often felt like a foreigner traveling in my own country. I



PHOTO COURTESY OF DARWIN AQUINO





knew the works of Pierre Boulez, Edgard Varese and Olivier Messiaen, but I didn't have a clue about the mountainous province of Santiago Rodríguez in the north-east of the country.

Wherever I went, I found talent. I will never forget the small boy from the poor southwestern province of Hato Mayor, who arrived with a trumpet in his mouth. He only came up to my waist and the trumpet was almost bigger than he was. But he could really play, and we found examples of exceptional talent like his throughout our travels. My own life changed because these experiences taught me to value both my identity and my nation.

We didn't have enough resources to absorb all these talented youth in our program, so we started small with the idea of reaching out to them in the future. The forty new members of the orchestra came from the provinces closest to Santo Domingo, the capital. We didn't even have chairs or music stands yet, but the young musicians were motivated to travel four hours by bus to get to rehearsals. Many of them got up at dawn and arrived without having eaten a decent breakfast. Nevertheless, some of them blew their wind instruments forcefully, a metaphor perhaps for the enormous sacrifice they were making to be part of the new *Sistema*.

So I was learning how to direct the orchestra and they were learning at the same time to play instruments—a process of exchange in which distance disappeared between the conductor and his musicians and among the individual musicians.

The results of this new form of making music surpassed all expectations. In the summer of 2005, we offered a summer camp for the youth in which they performed Dvorak's "New World Symphony" in its original version. Previously, the youth groups had performed simplified arrangements. I will never forget the look of satisfaction on the faces of the youth the night of the concert, nor will I forget the pride of their families watching them perform.

Most of the families had come from



Youth musicians practice with Aquino.

the provinces to see and hear their children play. One could see the importance of the support of each family, something the *Sistema* promotes.

After a year, with the help of the government, we organized more presentations (including an exchange program with a German youth orchestra), workshops, classes, and the establishment of some orchestral "nuclei," small groups that operated in each locality (province, town or city) throughout the country.

Gradually, the older and more advanced youth took charge of these groups on their own initiative. The multiplying effect had begun. It was, for me, the unstoppable force of gratitude as a motivating energy.

In 2007, the orchestra that we had received in the exchange program invited us to Germany to perform on a concert tour. Our government paid for the high costs of the trip, a miracle of official largesse in our countries. More than half of the orchestra, which now boasted eighty members, needed to apply for passports since they had never before left the Dominican Republic.

The emotion was intense and the tour was a success by any standard. Perhaps this was the climax of our ten years of work: the first time these young people got on a plane, experienced another country, language, culture, went to theatres, museums, toured cities and got to perform in foreign venues. After Germany came New York—a further validation for our program.

Inspired once more by the Venezuelan model, we created the Youth Symphony Orchestra Foundation to continue with our expansion. We obtained financing for the orchestra and for others at the provincial level. We bought new instruments, increased the number of orchestra nuclei and held internationally oriented events with the visits of acclaimed *maestros*.

To my surprise, many of these programs run by themselves. This, I believe, demonstrates the power of inclusion, whether it is social, cultural, economic or educational.

We always want to grow more, of course. Former orchestra members are now conductors and teachers with the orchestral nuclei, and their parents are an essential part of our board of directors. We could say that we are one family spiritually united through music.

Recently, I decided to pursue a Master's in orchestra conducting in the United States. The project keeps growing, even though I am not in Santo Domingo to represent the commitment of a new generation. I never expected that. Success is the fruit of the teaching and love that the true *Sistema* gives our youth.

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*Darwin Aquino is a conductor, composer and violinist. He is the Dominican representative to the Jeunesses Musicales International, the Central American Youth Orchestra and the Youth Orchestra of the Americas (YOA). The youngest member of the Latin American Composers Union, he has received three Dominican music prizes, as well as the Young Artist Humanitarian Award from the Hildegard Behrens Foundation in the United States.*

[www.darwinaquino.com](http://www.darwinaquino.com)



# NUESTRAS VOCES/ OUR VOICES



Shakira [Hips \(and Numbers\) Don't Lie](#) • Carlos Averhoff Jr. [Musical Identity](#) • Manuel Monestel [A Magical Journey](#)



# Hips (and Numbers) Don't Lie

The Truth of Early Childhood Development **BY SHAKIRA**

**THE FIRST TIME I REMEMBER SINGING WAS AS** a five-year-old on the way to the beach. Going to the beach is almost sacred—you have to go to the beach every Sunday when you live in a coastal town in Colombia. My parents commented on my very special voice. That's when I became aware of it.

Looking back, I'm proud that I've been able to make a difference so that the smallest voices—the voices of our children—have a chance to be heard. Artists can reach, inspire, and motivate young people and leaders in a powerful way.

Music has given a voice to many. We, as artists, can be a part of creating a better world. But I am also very concerned with the creation of partnerships with grass-roots groups, the private sector and government leaders. It doesn't matter if you are a musician, a business leader, a president or a student. We all have a responsibility to give back. That's why I believe so strongly in early childhood development.

The first years of life are crucial in the development of a human brain. Advances in neuroscience are revealing striking discoveries about how early experiences in the first five years can have a huge impact on the developing brain of a child and repercussions that can span a lifetime. For example, in the early years, 700 to 1,000 new neural connections form every second.

I just gave birth seven months ago, so to me this information is astonishing. This is the moment when we want to be doing things right for a baby, because as we get older, the brain loses plasticity and it becomes more difficult to change its architecture.

Thus, we have a very, very small window to affect a child's life and his future.

We need to provide children with the proper care, nutrition and stimulation in

the first five years, because it's proven that children who benefit from Early Childhood Development programs do better in school and later in life, as opposed to kids who don't have that advantage and are then more likely to have severe learning difficulties, lack attentiveness, and have less ability to interact well with others.

And unfortunately, the disadvantage can be especially drastic when a child is exposed to violence, because it affects the development of the brain and can cause aggressive behavior later in the adult.

As a person who comes from a country marked by violence, and civil and social strife, I've seen this firsthand. Sadly in Colombia, like in many other developing countries, if one is born poor, one is destined to die poor.

This lack of social mobility is due in part to education being perceived as a luxury instead of a right; people don't have access to equal opportunities and this perpetuates the cycle of poverty and unrest.

In the schools my Barefoot Foundation has set up in Colombia, the role of early childhood development is seen as vital for the kids to complete their education successfully. Many of our students had been victims of violence or have lost family members, so you can imagine the obstacles we encountered that ranged from behavior issues to problems of basic infrastructure to malnourishment.

In order to overcome many of these difficulties, we had to find creative solutions such as school feeding programs, parent and teacher training, and psychosocial support for the children and community at large.

We now have six schools in Colombia; in Barranquilla, we have 2,000 students and in Cartagena, 1,800.

We've been able to have an impact on more than 60,000 people, virtually elimi-

nated malnutrition and child labor, local gangs have disbanded, and we were able to commit the government to do its part by bringing electricity and potable water to the area, as well as paving roads.

However, it has been a process of trial and error, and we had a hard time, a really hard time keeping kids in school, because they had never received adequate care and nutrition, so that's when we realized that we were getting to these children too late. That's when I became aware that we needed to make Early Childhood Development (ECD) a priority.

Children who had access to ECD programs were more school-ready, could learn better, and today we have virtually no school dropouts.

We started forging public-private alliances and expanded throughout Latin America, building four ECD centers in Mexico, 13 in Argentina and 19 in Colombia. The success stories paint the picture better than I can. Take Tania, for example, who entered one of our schools in Soacha, Colombia, at the age of nine having been expelled from her previous school for serious behavior issues.

She was eventually able to rise above her situation and even become an example to other students, helping to form an after-school program to keep children out of trouble. Now a 19-year-old university student, she is studying to become a child psychologist herself. And this is just one of many, many examples that I could give you of kids who have turned their lives around in our schools.

And that is the beauty of investing in education and that is what keeps me so passionate! The change is real, and it's immediate.

Apart from my musical career, working on early childhood development is one of the most exciting things I've done. It's incredibly encouraging knowing I

haven't wasted my time or my money, because nobody likes that; here every dollar invested has produced results. The plan is to continue developing models for comprehensive ECD centers and programs in Latin America and the United States.

Economic studies demonstrate that for every dollar invested in a child's early education, the same child returns \$17 to the state in his or her adult life.

Just like my hips, numbers don't lie.

Among those who have done the math is Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman, who says that ECD interventions lower the risk of disease, increase the wages of children in their adult lives and also produce benefits for the rest of society, up to 10 percent a year either in savings or in revenue.

The simple truth is that ECD programs boost economic growth and are one of the most effective ways to guaran-

tee global stability and security. I recently read a study by the Brookings Institution that caught my attention. It states that a national ECD program would add \$2 trillion to America's annual GDP within a generation.

I'm no economist, but imagine what we'd be looking at if we multiply that number several times with ECD programs in the rest of the world.

We need a new generation of philanthropists and entrepreneurs to make this issue their own. We can be the first society that eradicates poverty and figures out an intelligent way to bring education to the most disenfranchised people on earth.

I often wonder why there isn't a global fund dedicated exclusively to ECD strategies around the world. Much like the Global Fund for Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria, money in this fund could be used to encourage countries to agree on initiatives for ECD.

Every year that passes without us making significant investments in ECD, millions of kids will be born into the same cycle of poverty and lack of opportunity—today there are still 59 million kids out of school.

We cannot afford this.

From an economic perspective it is important, sure! But now take that to a human level, and the case becomes so much stronger.

Because money isn't everything in the end.

But investing in humans and the future of our society is.

I strongly believe that the best is yet to come, but we need to move faster. Our children and our collective future depend on it.

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**Shakira Isabel Mebarak Ripoli** is a Colombian singer, composer and philanthropist.



Shakira (second from right) poses with (from left) Harvard Professor Jack Shonkoff; UNICEF Director Anthony Lake; Madam Yoo Soon-taek; UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and Matthew Bishop of *The Economist* at the "Meeting of the Minds," an event she co-hosted with UNICEF at the United Nations.



A portrait of Carlos Averhoff Jr. Opposite: Scullers flyers, CD front cover, Dave Liebman flyer and Global Jazz flyer.

# Musical Identity

Looking for a Sound Between Two Oceans **BY CARLOS AVERHOFF JR.**

**FRANKLY, I'M NOT USED TO TALKING ABOUT** myself, and even less writing about myself. My way of expressing myself has been through musical notes, whether the buoyant Cuban clave rhythms or the equally ebullient American swing.

I'm a Cuban saxophone player, composer and teacher. Ever since I was a kid, music has been my reason for living. Maybe even before. If it's true that babies hear things from inside the womb and absorb those sounds, my dad's saxophone playing formed an integral part of that gestation. Carlos Averhoff Sr. is a Cuban saxophone player who played

with *Irakere*, the prestigious jazz band of Cuban pianist Chucho Valdés. From early on, my dad ingrained in me the tenacity, discipline, unflagging rigor and the conviction that only long and tireless hours of study could help me achieve musical excellence.

But as life and Cuban reality would have it, my father left the island when I was barely a teenager. In his absence, I became a man. I became a musician while he was in a faraway place—in a world unconnected by Skype and Internet. But even so with his help I discovered the American jazz greats through the cassette

tapes he sent me from Miami with people traveling to the island. I analyzed them in an almost scientific manner in great detail, dissecting each note, every arpeggio and every phrase. Like me, many Cuban musicians educated themselves in the language of jazz *a fuerza de guataca*—by the sheer effort of listening.

My pedigree, if you could call it that, was involuntary. At home, I grew up imbued with music, for reasons beyond my control. One could almost call it inertia. The country of my birth also shaped me, since Cubans can hardly escape from the all-encompassing music of the island.



Music forms us, shapes us, gives us our identity. My musical training, academically speaking, took place in Cuban state-run schools: the Manuel Saumell Music Conservatory, the Amadeo Roldán school and for a short time, the Higher Institute for the Arts. My initial training focused on the classical genre and I began playing the alto saxophone.

I remember that period fondly. It's well known that artistic training in Cuba is outstanding. But perhaps it's not as well known that the dynamics between teacher and student is one of respect and rigor—at least within the arts. The student is a faithful devotee of the words and instruction of his or her teacher, and the effort made in and beyond the classroom is unquestioned. Cuban teachers of this period—Juan Felipe Tartabul, Francisco Javier Lara, Javier Salva and Jorge Luis Almeida—made me shed a lot of tears, but evoked just as many smiles.

Through another stroke of luck, at the age of 19, I held in my hands a tenor saxophone. My school had been invited to Canada on a cultural exchange and they needed a tenor saxophone player. And although I play other types of saxophones, this was the moment of truth for me. I found myself, my voice, in the tenor saxophone. It brought together everything about who I am, my temperament, my voice, my personality, my identity. And precisely in search of that identity and voice, I left the island a little more than a decade ago. The desire to study the language of American jazz in its purest and strictest essence brought me to Boston, where I received a scholarship from Berklee College of Music. I finished up my studies there with honors and contin-

ued the following year to study for a Master's degree at the New England Conservatory of Music (NEC). These were years of sacrifice and challenges, but above all, years of constant discovery.

During my classes with renowned teachers in these institutions, I began to understand that without doing the homework of studying the underpinnings and the fundamental keys of the language of American jazz, one could not even begin to create fusion. Without understanding history, one could not generate new sounds. It would be like constructing a building without cement. At Berklee, great teachers and friends like Ed Tomassi, George Garzone, Frank Tiberi, Bill Pierce and one of my greatest influences, Greg Osby, led me to explore the genre from the essence of swing to improvised jazz or so-called Free Jazz. Later, Jerry Bergonzi, whom I had admired from a distance in Cuba, was one of those teachers who, while I studied for my Master's degree at NEC, consolidated my inspiration and knowledge, enabling me to search and develop my own sound.

Undoubtedly, we're all products of our early years—the experiences of childhood and adolescence shape our routes. But what defines us? At home, there was always the hunger to study pure jazz that led me to explore beyond Cuban music and to look, across other waters, how to create my own musical language.

My music emerges from my lived experiences as a Cuban, as an immigrant, as a student of American jazz and as an admirer of Afro-Cuban traditions. With my ensemble *iRESI*—named after a Yoruba word that means the spirit of

each human being—I try through musical notes to develop a sound, a focus and a distinctive identity. The compositions in my first album—also entitled *iRESI*—have been nourished by an amalgam of influences: contemporary and vanguard jazz, classical music and Afro-Cuban rhythms, as well as the *timba*, a dance genre that emerged in the 1990s. Together, they make up a musical knowledge that reflects the very essence of my creation and artistic expression.

Asking myself how to fuse elements of the two cultures—the Cuban and the American—I've developed a new musical technique, Melodic and Rhythmic Independence (M.A.R.I.), bringing together an interactive and percussion technique to my composition and performance. To execute it, I play a percussion instrument with my left foot, while at the same time I interpret melodic phrases on the saxophone. Through M.A.R.I. I attempt to blend the colors and traditional sound of the Cuban clave and other African rhythms into my music without distorting the typical sound of a jazz quartet.

How does a musician create when his own identity has undergone the process of emigration? How did I find my musical identity? I believe that discovering one's own identity is a matter of perseverance and patience. Jazz critics say that my music navigates between two waters—that it fuses traditional Cuban music with contemporary jazz. They describe my music as ingenious, passionate, mystical, daring, visionary, visceral, expressive and majestic. Those are their words. I play what I feel, and what I have created as a result of this long process of blended identities. When you hear my music, you can form your own opinions. I invite you to listen.

*Carlos Averhoff Jr. is a Cuban saxophone player, composer and teacher. He graduated with honors from the Berklee College of Music and the New England Conservatory of Music. His first album as leader of the musical group iRESI received critical acclaim.*  
[www.carlosaverhoffjr.com](http://www.carlosaverhoffjr.com)



# A Magical Journey

Making Music in My Narrow Piece of Land **BY MANUEL MONESTEL**

## I GOT MY FIRST GUITAR FROM A CLASSMATE IN

1967 at age 17 in my last high school year at Liceo Vargas Calvo high school in San José, Costa Rica. I paid thirty colones (around five or six dollars) and gave him fourteen 45 RPM records in exchange for the middle-size guitar, which came with three rusted strings, two missing tuning pegs and was broken at the neck joint. I received my sweet guitar with great affection, polished it, bought new tuning pegs and strings that I installed myself, but not before enlisting the help of a cabinetmaker in my neighborhood to fix the broken part. Then, came the pleasure of embellishing it. I varnished and painted it with flowers that looked like colorful daisies and peace symbols of the hippie generation and started the task of learning chords.

I learned my first chords by peeking through the keyhole of my younger brother's room, because Alvaro locked himself away while practicing so I would not steal his knowledge. A schoolmate of his was already a good guitarist and had taught him many things. One day my brother found out I was spying on him and since then decided to practice with his back to the door. I had to find other ways to move forward in my musical "career."

Playing around with my humble guitar was the start of a musical life I did not imagine then, which has given me lots of satisfaction and made me become a professional musician and something of an expert on Costa Rica's Afro-Caribbean music.

At the age of 19, already hooked on music, I used to visit the workshop of Reca Mora, a Costa Rican bolero writer. I loved watching him make guitars, around the corner from La Dolorosa Church in downtown San José. He would cut the pieces, sand and varnish the wood and tune the strings. From time to time that magician

**As a university student I heard records of wonderful singer-songwriters from Latin America like Violeta Parra, Atahualpa Yupanqui, Daniel Viglietti and Victor Jara. From their lyrical, musical and political examples I learned to sing about social and political issues from the perspective of love and peace.**

of wood and sound stopped his work and began to sing songs composed by him that I thought no one would remember; they were cute boleros appreciated by a 19-year-old even though at the time I only listened to rock and roll. Reca was the author of "Noche Inolvidable" and icon of the Costa Rica repertoire recorded by several international artists. The sound of bolero was familiar to me since I grew up listening to my dad singing it. The workshop was dark and dingy, full of sawdust, wood, tools, nylon strings, vinyl records and some pictures on the wall, including a photo of Paraguayan classical artist and composer Agustín Barrios Mangoré with Reca's father. I later learned that Mangoré while living in Costa Rica had the Mora luthiers make him a guitar.

It was now 1969 and the American astronauts had landed on the moon while I had to work to finance my studies, selling appliances in a small shop that belonged to my brother-in-law, just around the corner from that historic guitar workshop. Business was slow, and the most frequent customers were prostitutes from the street corner who offered me sexual favors in exchange for letting them take a TV set or a record player without making the first payment or going through the legal commercial process. Being a shy boy from a Catholic home I did not fall into such temptations and ended up getting insults and obscene gestures from those

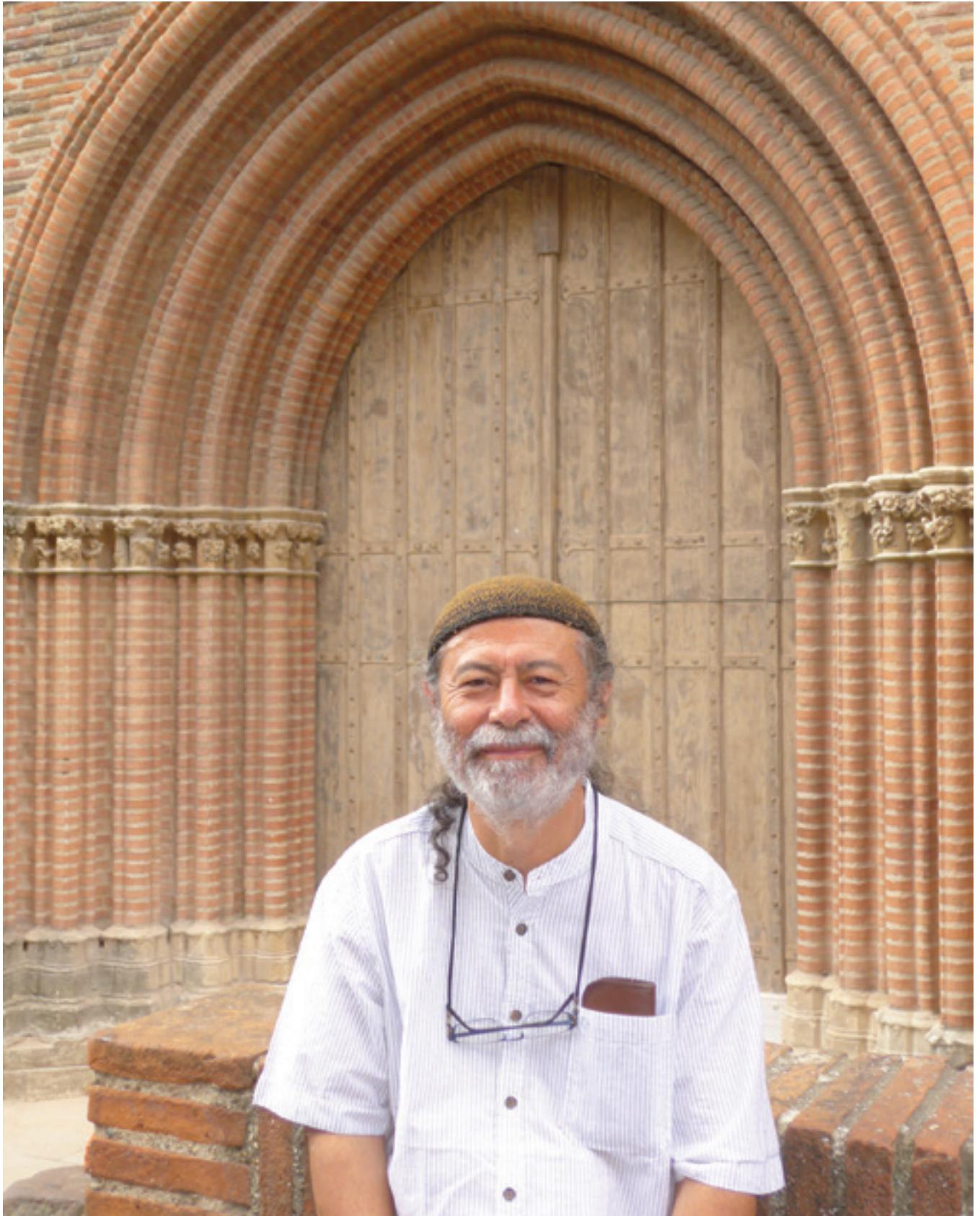
women.

In my neighborhood, my friends Ronald, Enrique and Julio and I learned the songs of the Beatles, Dylan, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young and many other rock and pop groups of the northern hemisphere as well as Joan Manuel Serrat from Spain. We also learned Latin American boleros, nice love songs that made our adolescent hearts vibrate. We used to serenade girls in a strange mixture of Spanish boleros and ballads in English hoping the girls at the other side of the window would choose one of us, troubadours who shivered in the middle of the night to offer them love by means of those bilingual romantic songs.

I came from a musical family: my father was a non-professional singer, my grandpa, a folk guitarist, and his cousin Alejandro Monestel, a well-respected Costa Rican formal classical composer and organist who made his career in New York in the early 1900s. I soon discovered I wanted to be a musician for the rest of my life.

As a university student I heard records of wonderful singer-songwriters from Latin America like Violeta Parra, Atahualpa Yupanqui, Daniel Viglietti and Victor Jara. From their lyrical, musical and political examples I learned to sing about social and political issues from the perspective of love and peace. At about the same time, I discovered Woody Guth-







rie and Pete Seeger with the help of my American friends. Later I learned about Silvio Rodríguez, Pablo Milanés, Chico Buarque and Caetano Veloso.

By mid-1970s I founded my first group of Latin American music called Erome, with my younger brother Bernal and two friends from Venezuela. By the end of that same decade I joined Tayacán, a band with a repertoire of political folk songs led by Luis Enrique Mejía Godoy. We sang at a thousand concerts to support the liberation struggles in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala.

In 1980 I founded Cantoamérica, my current music band along with Rodrigo Salas, Roberto Huertas, Carlos Saavedra and my brother Bernal Monestel. This new group started to move towards the roots of Afro Costa Rican sounds.

As a sociologist, I had begun to discover another part of Costa Rica, far from my roots in San José. By now I had experienced the music of many places, from rock and roll to *haynos*, *cuecas* and *joropos*, but at the same time I ask myself: what is to be discovered and developed as a local musical expression?

In the late 1800s black West Indians came to build a railroad from San José to Port Limón, so the new coffee industry could compete in the coffee world market. The Costa Rican ruling class had invented a white, Catholic and Spanish-speaking country when they founded the new republic after independence from Spain. Ironically, the country was, and still is, a mixture of indigenous, European, African and Asian population.

The railway company decided to hire labor hands from the Antilles and that became a threat to that artificial whiteness the coffee oligarchy wanted to keep.

The racist attitude from the so-called “white society” remained, so in the 1980s there was no information about the music in Limón, and most of the population of the country did not know about it and did not want to know.

In that context I started to do some basic research about the music in Limón, based on my background as a sociologist.

After reading Paula Palmer’s *What*

**The racist attitude from the so-called “white society” remained, so in the 1980s there was no information about the music in Limón, and most of the population of the country did not know about it and did not want to know.**



**Above: The Calipsonians**

**Below: Gavitt and Manuel**

*Happen: A Folk History of Costa Rica's Talamanca Coast* (University of Texas Press, 1977), I foresaw a new cultural strand of music. Then I met Walter Ferguson, the greatest Costa Rican calypsonian and later some other great calypso songwriters. From then on, I have been learning, recording, producing, researching and promoting calypso limonense around Costa Rica and the world.

With this band and as soloist singer I have had a marvelous musical journey along the Costa Rican Caribbean. Since the late 1970s until today I have studied the sounds of the province of Limón in the Caribbean Coast of Costa Rica.

Recording many albums has been the only way to move forward in a country where the radio stations are bound to promote foreign music, normally pro-

duced by the big entertainment corporations, while the national production is ignored. Music albums are good means of promotion: they are like free birds that fly to different places and pose themselves on many branches, which means that you never know who will end up listening to your material and what doors can be eventually opened by means of the recording. So far, I have 14 albums of Cantoamérica and as a soloist, and three more produced for such artists like Calypso Legends, Kawe Calypso or Lenky.

Keeping away from the mainstream and the massive musical industry I feel, at 64 years of age, very happy and satisfied with what I have done. I have travelled the world singing my songs; I have met and shared stages with wonderful artists from different parts of the world. Singing in either an old arsenal in Holland, at the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall in Taiwan, at the Alliance Française in Benin, West Africa, Teatro Verano in Montevideo Uruguay, Los Baños in Port Limón, in Cahuita, in the San José National Theater, Casa America in Madrid, the Paul Masson Summer Series in California or wherever, I feel proud and grateful of having this magical job that fills me with happiness and gives me the opportunity of sharing good messages and good energies with the audiences everywhere.

**Manuel Monestel** is a Costa Rican musician, sociologist and ethnomusicologist. The founder and lead singer of Cantoamérica, he is the author of *Ritmo, Canción e Identidad: El Calypso Limonense* (Editorial de la Universidad Estatal a Distancia, 2005) and *Enclave Afro Caribe* (Centro Cultural de España, 2010). He was a 2008-09 Society for the Humanities Visiting Fellow at Cornell University.

# A MUSICAL SANCOCHO!



Sadie Weber [El Pututu](#) • Larry Rohter [From Carmen Miranda to the Grateful Dead](#) • Steve Cagan [Embera Music and Palenque Rhythms](#) • Humberto Delgado [Notes on Mexican Rock](#) • Lindajoy Fenley [New Life for the Violin in Mexico's Hotlands](#) • Panayotis League [Polkas in Paraíba](#) • Chris Vail [Regional Mexican Music](#) • Deborah Pacini Hernandez [Dominican Bachata](#) • Susan Thomas [Musical Transitions](#) • Joshua Tucker [Nature's Sonorous Politics](#) • Anna White-Nockleby [Mauricio Kagel and Electroacoustic Music](#)



# El Pututu

The Sound of the Andes **BY SADIE WEBER**

I FIRST TRAVELED TO PERU IN THE SUMMER OF 2009 as an overly enthusiastic freshman on her first archaeological field school. My destination was Chavín de Huántar—a 3,000-year-old temple complex in the Sierra de Ancash. I learned about the site when my professor—John Rick of Stanford University—lectured about it during my introductory archaeology course. One day he brought out the *pututu*.

*Pututu* is a Quechua word meaning snail, but it has been coopted to refer to various trumpet-like instruments including those made of cow horns that appeared after the arrival of the Spanish. This particular *pututu* was a classically Andean conch trumpet made of the adult *Strombus galeatus* shell. I looked at it with relative indifference.

Then my professor played it. The mel-

ancholy drone filled the lecture hall and reverberated off the walls. We were all astonished to say the least; the sound had stunned all of us, and that was exactly Rick's goal. Combining archaeology with sound was completely foreign to us, but an entirely appropriate lesson in the context of Chavín de Huántar.

The archaeological site comprises a monumental temple complex with a surrounding settlement that was occupied contemporaneously. The temple's cut-and-selected-stone architecture is honeycombed with a network of internal spaces known as galleries. These galleries—as well as the various plazas and platforms across the site—are thought to be the stage for the many rituals that occurred during the temple's use.

In July 2001, a team of archaeologists,

students and workers of the Proyecto Arqueológico Chavín de Huántar discovered a cache of *pututus* in a space that would become known as Galería de las Caracolas. Given the contents of other galleries, Rick conjectured that this space was used exclusively for the storage of these sacred objects. Marks of long-decayed textiles indicate that the *pututus* had been wrapped and stored with care. These instruments were prominent in Chavín iconography particularly in stone art, but this quantity of instruments had never been seen before; previous investigators had only encountered a few *pututus* or pieces of the shells themselves.

The embellishment of each instrument is highly varied. Some are elaborately incised with the complex, twisting iconography for which Chavín Period art is known, while others are comparatively plain. Each one is different—visually and acoustically. They are all still playable—we are able to produce the same sound a musician played 3,000 years ago. Each of the conch trumpets demonstrates its degree of use; these instruments were apparently used and valued for generations.

While we haven't found another cache of this magnitude at Chavín de Huántar, we are understanding more and more the role these instruments played within the Chavín "cult." The leaders of the cult



Dressed in their official Proyecto Arqueológico Chavín de Huántar vests and holding their *pututus*, Rieman (left) and Aldo wait to begin their performance during the 28 de Julio parade.





convinced potential followers that their power and authority were real by bringing followers to the galleries and inducing hallucinations through the use of psychotropic plants and sensory deprivation or overstimulation. The drone of multiple instruments played simultaneously is thought to have amplified or focused the mental states of the Chavín cult initiates.

Miriam Kolar, a postdoctoral fellow at Amherst College who was a graduate student in Stanford University's Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics (CCRMA), studies the acoustic properties of these instruments in relation to the built space of the Chavín de Huántar temple. Studying the perception of sound in cultural contexts, Kolar has proved that the architecture of Chavín de Huántar was designed with the acoustic properties of the space and sound-making implements in mind.

### FROM SNAIL TO SOUND

What becomes an instrument for us was once a live snail—the Eastern Pacific Giant Conch (*Strombus* or *Lobatus galeatus*). It is a large, herbivorous marine snail native, as their name suggests, to the warm tropical waters of the eastern Pacific Ocean and found as far north as Mexico and as far south as Ecuador. When Chavín de Huántar was growing as a monumental center, the 930-mile walk from Ecuador's south coast to Chavín de Huántar would have taken at least twelve days to complete. This distance and effort involved augmented the status of *pututus* as a conspicuous prestige good.

Making a *pututu* is relatively simple. The end spine is cut off and the subsequent surface is polished to create a useable mouthpiece. The *pututus* from the cache are further modified with a v-shaped cut taken out of the apical lip. This cut is thought to have improved the musician's ability to manipulate the tone of the instrument and improve visibility when playing the instrument during processions.

Producing a sound on a *pututu*, however, is not simple. While the mouthpiece appears similar to that of any brass

## The drone of multiple instruments played simultaneously is thought to have amplified or focused the mental states of the Chavín cult initiates.

instrument, the embouchure is distinct and challenging to master successfully. I have played various wind and brass instruments for most of my life, but my first attempt at *pututu* was a blow to my ego. My pitiful deflating balloon tone was nothing compared to the rich sound a musician can make. Since then I have improved, but I'm a novice when compared to the pros.

### THE PUTUTU TODAY

My dissertation research is centered on Chavín de Huántar, where I have worked there since my first year of college. Since the gallery and cache discovery, the *pututu* has returned to the archaeological monument and town of Chavín de Huántar.

To mark the beginning of the excavations at Chavín de Huántar, we open each season with a *pagapu* or offering to the *apus* (mountain spirits) to ensure a safe excavation season. Eliseo—a lifetime resident of the town of Chavín de Huántar and a two-decade worker at the archaeological monument—begins the *pagapu*. He speaks of how honored he is to work in this sacred place and how fortunate we are to be afforded the opportunity to learn from those who came before us. The ceremony is trilingual, including speeches in Quechua, Spanish and English. Anyone who wants to speak is welcome. Following the speeches, coca, candy, rum and cigarettes are offered in the directions of the *apus*. The *pagapu* concludes with Eliseo's son Reiman playing *pututu* to the *apus* and the earth. The sound the instrument produces is a haunting, deep noise that resonates through the valley and echoes off the Chavín de Huántar temple. And when the last note is played, the work begins again.

Archaeological project members also play the conch trumpets during the 28 de

Julio (Independence Day) parade in the town of Chavín de Huántar. Rick and several site workers and technicians showcase their skills to the town and thousands of tourists that flock to the area to visit the monument. Each player produces a different tone on his *pututu*. The long drone is punctuated by another sound—a rasping, high pitched noise meant to mimic the voice of a jaguar—a powerful animal in the Andean religious pantheon.

The discovery of the gallery and cache afforded the residents of Chavín de Huántar a rare opportunity—the chance to revitalize the use and production of *pututus* in the Peruvian highlands as a specialized craft. Though undecorated instruments are common in the tourist craft markets of Lima and Cusco, the *pututus* produced in Chavín de Huántar are decorated using what are believed to be traditional production techniques.

*Pututus* are not limited to Chavín de Huántar, nor are they a lost instrument. While they did not entirely go out of use in the Andean region after the arrival of the Spanish, they have seen an increase in use in recent years. *Pututus* are consistently included at political events such as protests or inaugurations—most notably during the inauguration of Alejandro Toledo, the first indigenous president of Peru, and the third inauguration of Evo Morales, the first indigenous president of Bolivia.

I see the *pututu* as a symbol of the resilience and vigor of the Andes. Its persistent use in the political sphere is a testament to the influence of the past on the Andean present.

**Sadie Weber** is a fourth year Ph.D. candidate in anthropology at Harvard University. She is currently investigating the development and role of intensive llama and alpaca pastoralism in 1,200 BC Peru.

# From Carmen Miranda to the Grateful Dead

Brazil and the United States' Musical Dialogue **BY LARRY ROHTER**



Pixinguinha playing live in his 60s, long after switching from flute to saxophone.

IN THE 21ST CENTURY, FANS OF POPULAR MUSIC expect, or even demand, that all styles of music be in communication with each other. Sound scavengers like the American DJ Diplo have made their reputations by going into the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and coming back home with beats and riffs that can be recycled into hit songs by Madonna, Shakira, Beyoncé, Justin Bieber, Usher, M.I.A. and the like. But at the same time, the favela funk style that powers dance parties in Rio is itself

a mash-up of influences that include the Miami bass sound, New York Latin free-style, rap and Kraftwerk electronica.

It is tempting to think of this as a purely modern phenomenon, an aspect of the process of globalization that we see around us daily. But it is not. The reality is that U.S. and Brazilian popular music have been engaged in an ongoing dialogue dating back to at least the mid-19th century, and that such exchanges, both visible and subterranean, have only

intensified with the passage of time.

Acknowledging this is crucial to any appreciation of popular music, for the United States and Brazil are the world's two most influential sources of contemporary pop music. Or as the Brazilian composer and pianist Antônio Carlos Jobim, one of the founders of the bossa nova, was fond of saying, "the only music that really swings is that of the United States, Brazil and Cuba, all places where the black thing and the white thing mixed. The rest, with due respect to the Austrians, is all waltzes."

The theory of a mutually reinforcing musical conversation between Brazil and the United States is one that has appealed to me since the 1970s, when I first heard the music of the 19th century American classical composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk, a Louisiana native. I was living in Rio at the time, and in a piece like Gottschalk's "Bamboula," a fantasy for piano, I thought I detected affinities with *chorinho*, a Brazilian popular music style that originated in Rio in the second half of that century and remains popular there.

A little bit of research yielded these suggestive clues: because of a scandal—he appears to have behaved "inappropriately" with one of his underage female piano students—Gottschalk had to leave the United States. He chose to settle in Rio de Janeiro, where he died at the age of 40 in 1869. In Rio, he took on additional students, two of whom went on to teach Ernesto Nazareth, the father of the *chorinho*, and Heitor Villa-Lobos, the celebrated Brazilian classical music composer who began his career playing *chorinho* in clubs and theaters showing silent movies.

This Gottschalk-*chorinho* connection



The Tropicalistas, and some of their friends, in 1968, including Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, standing second and third from left.

Vianna was only 19 at the time, but, under the stage name Pixinguinha, he would go on to become a central figure in the emergence of Brazilian popular music in the 20th century—as revered and important in Brazil as Louis Armstrong is in the United States.

dovetails nicely with a cultural theory that has predominated in Brazil since it was first enunciated in the late 1920s, that of “cultural cannibalism.” As Brazilians see it, theirs is a culture that swallows foreign influences whole, digests them, and then spits them out as some-

thing new and quintessentially Brazilian. No matter whether the culture so consumed is Gottschalk’s “Creole Eyes” or Afrika Bambaata’s “Planet Rock”—what matters is the transformed, cannibalized product, which can range from *chorinho* to favela funk.

This early example of Brazilian absorption of a cultural artifact from the United States, indirect though it may be, seems almost a miracle, coming as it did in an era in which music could be transmitted only by live performance or sheet music. But with Edison’s invention of the phonograph in the late 19th century, followed by the popularization of shellac discs early in the 20th century, the dialogue between Brazil and the United States quickened. For the first time, it was possible for a listener a continent away to actually hear a performance, with all of its melodic nuances and rhythmic variations from a written score, instead of having to deduce from sheet music what a song was supposed to sound like.

Late in 1916, an ensemble that includ-

ed the flute player and arranger Alfredo da Rocha Vianna went into a studio in Rio de Janeiro to record “Pelo Telefone,” which, although permeated with a *chorinho* feel, is now regarded as the first samba ever to be recorded. Vianna was only 19 at the time, but, under the stage name Pixinguinha, he would go on to become a central figure in the emergence of Brazilian popular music in the 20th century—as revered and important in Brazil as Louis Armstrong is in the United States.

Pixinguinha and his group Os Oito Batutas would record “Sofres Porque Queres” and a number of other songs for the Odeon label, predecessor to today’s EMI conglomerate. These caused a commotion in Europe, and in 1922, the group embarked for Paris, where it held a six-month residency at a club on a street where other nightspots featured American ensembles playing the latest sensation from the United States—jazz. Musicians being musicians, the Brazilians and Americans played together in afterhours



jam sessions and sat in on each other's shows, swapping licks and learning each other's styles.

On his return to Brazil, Pixinguinha shifted to the saxophone, even then an instrument much favored by jazz musicians, as his main instrument, and changed the make-up of his groups so that they more closely resembled a jazz band. That led to complaints in the Brazilian press that he had "come back Americanized"—an accusation that, up through our own times, has dogged every Brazilian musician who is open to, or experiments in, any foreign style.

Until the 1920s, U.S. music was more influential in Brazil than vice versa. But that would change in the 1930s and into the 1940s with the emergence of Carmen Miranda. Not only was Miranda a huge movie star—she was the top actress at the Hollywood box office for several years in the 40s—but the songs she sang, first on Broadway, then in her nightclub act and finally in movies, ignited a samba craze in the United States. Even today, songs like "South American Way" and "Tico Tico" remain in the repertoire of dance bands, not to mention that of most every drag queen and female impersonator ever to take the stage.

In a 1940 song called "They Say I Came Back Americanized," Miranda satirized the usual complaints about changes in her evolving style. But the accusation stung, and she and her band moved permanently to the United States, where she remained until her death in August 1955. Members of her band found their way into American jazz ensembles, bringing a Brazilian flavor.

Yet even as Miranda was being laid to rest in Rio, a new musical movement was germinating in the bars and cabarets of Copacabana and Ipanema. From 60 years' distance, bossa nova seems like a thoroughly Brazilian style, a quieter and more harmonically sophisticated refinement of samba. But from the beginning, Antônio Carlos Jobim and the other musicians who forged the bossa nova sound—João Gilberto, Johnny Alf and João Donato among them—



Pixinguinha, father of modern Brazilian music, with bossa nova lyricist Vinicius de Moraes.

**On his return to Brazil, Pixinguinha shifted to the saxophone, even then an instrument much favored by jazz musicians, as his main instrument, and changed the make-up of his groups so that they more closely resembled a jazz band.**

always acknowledged that they had also absorbed foreign influences, from Chopin's "Nocturnes" to U.S. jazz icons like Nat King Cole, Miles Davis's "Birth of the Cool" album, Frank Sinatra and Stan Kenton.

The impact of Kenton, a pianist who led a big band, was especially powerful. His orchestra included Laurindo Almeida, a Brazilian guitar virtuoso who had written hit songs for the Andrews Sisters and others, and the Kenton group had also recorded Brazilian songs like "Delicado" and "Tico Tico" thereby pointing a way to transform Brazilian popular

music.

By 1961, of course, bossa nova was being exported all over the world. "The Girl from Ipanema," which Jobim had written with Vinicius de Moraes, was everywhere: Stan Getz had the hit single in a version he recorded with João Gilberto and Gilberto's then-wife Astrud, but Frank Sinatra also did a version, which led to him collaborating with Jobim on two albums of Brazilian music. Other jazz musicians, from Cannonball Adderley to Charlie Byrd, also experimented with the style, and even those who didn't often incorporate bossa

nova's understated drumming style and subtle rhythms into their arsenals.

By the 1970s, most leading-edge jazz groups had a Brazilian drummer or percussionist, starting with Weather Report and Return to Forever, as did the jazz-rock band Chicago. In his most experimental phase, Miles Davis had two Brazilians in his band, the saxophonist and pianist Hermeto Pascoal and the percussionist Aírto Moreira, who would later also play with Santana and The Grateful Dead. Brazilian rhythms, as well as cover versions of Brazilian songs by instrumentalists like Wayne Shorter and George Duke, were everywhere in jazz, a situation that continues to this day.

At the same time, though, Brazil was beginning to hear rock 'n' roll and incorporate that sound into the mix. Roberto Carlos, best known today as a singer of romantic ballads, began as an Elvis Presley and Little Richard acolyte, and had early hits with cover versions of songs like "Splish Splash" and "Unchain My Heart." And as the 1960s progressed, the emergence of acts like The Beatles, The Jimi Hendrix Experience and the musicians of the San Francisco underground scene only deepened Brazil's fascination.

The Brazilian response was Tropicalismo, which ingested Anglo-American rock 'n' roll and created a revolutionary new style. Artists like Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso, Tom Zé and the band Os Mutantes shocked Brazilian traditionalists, including the military government then in power, with everything they did: they played electric instruments, a no-no at the time, and wrote songs with unusual time signatures and veered stylistically from one measure to the next, often mixing American, Brazilian, African and even French chanson influences into one heady stew. Their album "Tropicália: Ou Panis et Circenses" came out in 1968, and was as much a bombshell to Brazilians as "Sgt. Pepper's" was to Americans.

But during a political crackdown late in 1968, Gil and Veloso were among those jailed. When they were released early the next year, they quickly went into exile—not elsewhere in Latin America, as

so many Brazilian political activists were doing—but to London, where they could be exposed to the latest trends in pop music, including music drifting across the ocean from the United States. Married to sisters at that time, they settled into an apartment in Earl's Court together, and started going to shows: Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, the Isle of Wight Festival, the burgeoning reggae scene.

"England is where I learned to be a showman," Gil once said to me, explaining that before going into exile he had been more of a static performer, often content to sit as he sang and played his guitar. For his part, Veloso recorded an album known as "London, London," with most songs in English and splashes of West Indian melodies and rhythms in the music—cultural cannibalism based on whatever material was at hand.

Artists remaining in Brazil such as guitarist and singer Raul Seixas (with the future novelist Paulo Coelho writing his lyrics) followed the same approach: Gilberto Gil once wrote a song called "Chuckberry Fields Forever" but it was Seixas who adhered most closely to a classic rock style. Milton Nascimento, with a voice so sweet that it would lead to collaborations with Wayne Shorter and Pat Metheny, wrote a song called "For Lennon and McCartney," recorded an idiosyncratic version of "Norwegian Wood," and in return had some of his songs recorded by Earth, Wind & Fire. Meanwhile, Tim Maia, who had spent part of the 1960s in the United States in rhythm and blues bands, was mining American soul and helping create the "Black Rio" movement that would eventually morph into today's favela funk scene.

And as the catchall genre known as "world music" began to grow in popularity in the United States during the 1980s, Brazilian music became, along with that of South Africa, one of its principal references. It became chic for rock and pop stars to go to Brazil in search of new rhythms and melodies: Paul Simon, David Byrne, Peter Dinklage, Sting, Michael Jackson and Rod Stewart were among those who made the trek,

and Brazilian influences can be heard on songs ranging from "The Obvious Child" to "Do Ya Think I'm Sexy?"

By the 1990s, crate-digging pop musicians and DJs in the United States and United Kingdom had belatedly discovered Tropicália, finding its cut-and-paste aesthetic to be very congenial to their own inclinations. The indie musician Beck was especially enamored: he made liberal use of the Tropicalistas' collage technique, and even recorded a CD called "Mutations," meant as a tribute to Os Mutantes.

"Hearing Os Mutantes for the first time was one of those revelatory moments you live for as a musician, when you find something that you have been wanting to hear for years but never thought existed," he told me in 2001. "I made records like 'Odelay' because there was a certain sound and sensibility that I wanted to achieve, and it was eerie to find that they had already done it 30 years ago, in a totally shocking but beautiful and satisfying way."

With the emergence of the Internet two decades ago, combined with a 20-year spurt of economic growth in Brazil that now seems to have hit a wall, yet another stage has been reached. Bands like U2 and Metallica play regularly in Brazil, the singer/songwriter Seu Jorge can record a CD of David Bowie covers in Portuguese and have a worldwide hit, and a Brazilian like Mario Caldato can produce albums by the Beastie Boys or Jack Johnson, and nobody blinks. In the words of Gilberto Gil—who served as Brazil's Minister of Culture from 2003 to 2008, a sign of yet another profound change—today we live in "uma geleia geral," an age of "generalized jelly" in which everything is mixed and anything goes.

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**Larry Rohter** spent 14 years in Brazil as a correspondent for The New York Times and Newsweek and is the author of *Brazil on the Rise*. He is now a fellow at the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, where he is writing a biography of the Brazilian explorer and statesman Candido Mariano da Silva Rondon.





EMBERA MUSIC/PALENQUE RHYTHMS



# Embera Music

A PHOTOESSAY BY STEVE CAGAN

**THE EMBERA OF WESTERN COLOMBIA, ONE OF THE LARGEST INDIGENOUS** groups in the country, have been victims of violence and displacement by the Spanish conquistadors, abandonment or outright hostility by modern national governments, destruction and displacement by the armed groups in Colombia's civil conflicts, and attempts to suppress their culture by Catholic missionaries up to the late 20th century. In recent years, community leaders have been concerned about the way young people have been torn between maintaining their traditional cultural identity and adopting elements of western society—both the attractive elements of medicine, education and communication tools, and the destructive allure of consumer culture—a conflict that has produced tragic outcomes within the communities.

Some have responded by developing a unified movement to reclaim cultural activities—music, song, dance, storytelling, community festivities and rituals—that can serve as a foundation to maintain and strengthen an identity that can allow younger people to navigate these treacherous social waters. The Embera are divided into three ethnic groups who speak distinct dialects of their language, Embera-padea, and these cultural activities also help connect the groups.

Supported by the efforts of people from within and outside the community, young people—especially, but not exclusively, men—are taking up traditional musical instruments and forms, as well as adapting western instruments and technology to those forms. The revival of dance and song primarily engages girls and women. This movement has included reviving techniques for making traditional wind and percussion instruments.

The Catholic Diocese of Quibdó and cultural entities of the Department of Antioquia have helped support this work by releasing CDs—although with quite small runs and now very difficult to find.

Young people are also learning to play western instruments, which allows them to play some of the popular music genres attractive to people in the communities. Much of this teaching is being done by an Embera musician respected for his ability to instruct the young people in several instruments and to help them learn to play in bands.

In this photo essay, I have concentrated on performances and other manifestations of the revival of traditional music that I have had the privilege of witnessing at cultural events and community meetings and workshops—though I must admit it's impossible to avoid guitars, especially when played by one of the few girls in the workshops.

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*Steve Cagan is an independent documentary photographer who has lately focused on environmental issues and grassroots daily life on the Pacific Coast of Colombia.*

*He can be reached at [stevecagan.com](mailto:stevecagan.com)*



Opposite page: The Embera—especially, but not exclusively, men and boys—are taking up traditional wind and percussion instruments. These photos illustrate how the younger generation is becoming involved in these cultural and musical activities.



EMBERA MUSIC/PALENQUE RHYTHMS



# Palenque Rhythms

A PHOTOESSAY BY STEVE CAGAN

**SAN BASILIO PALENQUE, NOT FAR FROM COLOMBIA'S PRIME TOURIST destination of Cartagena, is the only surviving example of places that once existed throughout the country—communities founded by escaped slaves. It is also the home of what has been described as the only surviving Spanish-based creole language, which had declined in use but seems to be becoming strong again.**

In a country rich in traditional, folk and popular music forms and genres, Palenque is well known for the band music called *champeta* and for drumming, showcased in the annual Festival de Tambores. A few years back, I was happy to be invited to spend that period with a *palenquero* family, a particularly welcome invitation because of the community's reputation for reticence with outsiders.

The Colombian Ministry of Culture decided to support the festival. UNESCO had already included the culture of Palenque in the non-material heritage of humanity. Unfortunately, the hand of the ministry often produces a homogenization of cultural expression, and what had been essentially a family-based and artisanal expression of an indigenous local culture now had a sadly different character—performances on a huge stage in the town square by groups that all shared the quality of being Afro-Colombian, but not necessarily from Palenque or even from the Caribbean coast. It had become, in good Colombian Spanish, “*la misma vaina de siempre*.” Some leading local groups actually left town during the festivals.

Still, music sounded from some houses and the porches of small stores, where the commitment to participating in music-making can be seen in the use of non-formal instruments—beer bottles and stools. And there was irrepressible dancing in front of the stage as well as in the streets and alleys. The joy was contagious, reaching virtually ecstatic levels in the dance. I hope I was able to capture some of the joy and the commitment to the traditions in these images....

*Steve Cagan is an independent documentary photographer who has lately focused on environmental issues and grassroots daily life on the Pacific Coast of Colombia. He can be reached at [steve@stevecagan.com](mailto:steve@stevecagan.com)*

**In a country rich in traditional, folk and popular music, Palenque is well known for its band music and for drumming showcased in an annual festival. Palenque music is not just for listening; as these photos amply illustrate, it inspires dancing!**









# Notes on Mexican Rock

Through the Lens of El Chopo **BY HUMBERTO DELGADO**

SINCE THE 1960S, THERE'S BEEN A BOOMING underground rock scene in Mexico. It defines itself as countercultural, but not in absolute opposition to the mainstream—although sometimes it indeed is. Rather, the underground rock scene developed to seek inclusion in the midst of political and economic backwardness. It was and still is also a way of resisting the strict yet worn imposition of official values carried out by the state since the Mexican Revolution.

Rock, like other social phenomena, includes “simulations of social interactions,” as Laura Martínez Hernández, following Néstor García Canclini, points out in *Music and Alternative Culture* (p. 29). In this way, the Mexican underground rock scene—beyond its musical quality which is much criticized by specialists like Hugo García Michel—needs to be looked at as a parallel construction of the Mexican identity, this time, however, one that is elaborated from the periphery. The stories told by *rockeros* make them visible, and in the process manage to show what the status quo promotes and what it renders invisible and even causes to disappear. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), a hegemonic party that has controlled Mexico's political system for many decades, produces and successfully imposes an unambiguous construction of a national identity of a country that has left behind the era of social injustice for a new age of development. The still current triumphalist discourse generated by those in power suffered its first great rupture in the 1960s, when the first economic crises began to affect large sectors of the population. People began to react to the political erosion and the consequent and increasingly authoritarian and censorial attitudes of a party that could no longer sustain the illusion of being an agent for democracy and social equity.



The first years of rock in Mexico demonstrated the capacity of the power structures of the authoritarian state and media to control and manage culture. Facing the inevitable advent of rock and roll, the system responded not so much by rejecting but by absorbing it and taking away any dissident undertones. Among other strategies for exerting cultural—and with it, political—control, the PRI systematically created a media strategy in which

**The audience listening to this rock concert in El Chopo are fans who often carry backpacks with used CDs they sell or trade for other CDs and concert admission.**



the decision was not to nationalize the media, but to give it over to entrepreneurs who had ties to the government. In this way, in 1955, precisely during the birth of rock and roll, the first—and for many years, the only—private television company, Telesistema Mexicano (which would later be called Televisa, and whose owner named himself a soldier of the PRI in a polemical interview), was established. The television station, whose scope gradually extended to all sorts of musical shows, radio stations and movie productions, acted during the first years of the rock phenomenon as a filter that let in those aspects of the new musical movement that aligned with the official interests of the time, in this way getting rock to lose its subversive capacity and become a model of the modernity it was entering. Including this musical novelty was even considered a gesture of democratic acceptance of the new phenomenon that some conservatives accused of being a foreign threat to the national identity. The system, however, was prepared to neutralize these and other attacks. The Mexican media managed to control the phenomenon during its first years, making space for politically correct musical groups and singers, who then turned into soap opera and sitcom stars. Covers and bands that were noticeably copied from bands in the United States—even in their skin tones—dominated in this initial period. The Teen Tops, the Locos del Ritmo or the Rebeldes del Rock allowed Mexican youth at the end of the 50s and beginnings of the 60s to get the eternal adolescent sensation of the modern and the different with a light touch of rebellion. The initial mainstream strategy continued during the following decades. It was only well into the 80s, when the underground movement was unstoppable, that transnational record companies first attempted to promote artists under the slogan “Rock in your language,” selecting groups that were more or less independent yet still followed the same old initial model: white artists who catered to the apolitical middle class, with fundamentally romantic songs and

rhythms that were more sophisticated yet still very close to pop.

Nevertheless, this type of commercial rather than musical policy never satisfied a generation of youth who began to understand that rock was a transversal phenomenon that went beyond what the national media allowed. Thus a musical scene emerged, mainly in the outlying neighborhoods of large urban areas like Guadalajara, Monterrey, Tijuana or Mexico City, which was subsequently attacked for decades by classist and nationalist critics who disqualified it and shut all doors to this sort of music. This second reworking of rock in the 60s left behind the covers sung in Spanish and proposed new lyrics that were often sung in English as a way of returning to the origins and separating itself from the rock that dominated radio and television stations. A vast number of groups emerged; some of them did not hide their political militancy while they adapted and Mexicanized rock. Their names said it all—as direct allusions to the Mexican Revolution—showing that the appropriation of the national promoted the revolutionary myth along with the PRI: La Decena Trágica (The Tragic Ten Days), División del Norte (Division of the North), and especially, La Revolución de Emiliano Zapata (The Revolution of Emiliano Zapata). This last group’s story is as sad as it is symptomatic of what happens in Mexico. Their song, “Nasty Sex” (1970), had reached beyond Mexican borders and acquired a certain prestige, but in the end the system asphyxiated their impetus and impeded their economic survival, for which they sold their rock soul for the romantic ballad.

These and other underground Mexican groups, plus the global and local contexts of the turbulent 60s, created the surge of a youthful social phenomenon known as the Onda, which went beyond rock but cannot be understood without it. Those involved in the Onda, called *jipitecas* (a mix of hippie and Aztec) became one of the first youth-centered urban and suburban configurations that, beginning in the 80s, formed part of the Mexican

scene. In a book essential for the understanding of Mexican culture in the 20th century, *Lost Love*, Carlos Monsiváis cannot resist dedicating a large chapter to the subject where he writes: “The Onda is the first movement of contemporary Mexico that refuses institutional conceptions from non-political positions and, with eloquence, reveals to us the extinction of a cultural hegemony. The *jipitecas* anticipate and sum up a process: in rejecting nationalism, they resolve, without major theoretical effort, the construction of options. The first aim is the mocking of Unappealable Social Goals, the objectives for which their fathers have lived. The monopoly on the perception of reality is mocked” (p. 235, emphasis his). Monsiváis here points out what is perhaps the principal contribution of the Mexican underground rock movement extending beyond the Onda: its capacity to create a sort of mirror that reflects a distinct and disillusioned image of the country, one that contradicts the political and media discourse, not by directly denouncing it as protest music, cinema or militant literature does, but by creating a meta-narrative in which previously hidden social entities become the protagonists, including the creative subjects themselves who promote themselves as the model for the downfall of the system. The figure of the Gramscian subordinate emerges once more, just as other local archetypes had in the past, like the low-class boor (or churl) featured in Roger Bartra’s classic text, *The Cage of Melancholy*. The rocker takes various elements from the figure of the churl, among them a new sense of popular and local language: “Ya chole, chango, chilango.” (“Hey dude, stop it!”). Mexican rock also constructs a Mexico City not represented by other artists: a city of rats, housing projects, bank robberies and stray dogs mowed down recklessly by cars, but also a city with neighborhood beauty queens, student cantinas and subway stations where urban life takes place.

Perhaps the only organized rock movement in the country emerged in Mexico City beginning in the 80s. The



Photographer Carin Zissis captures the style and flair of rock concert fans who go to El Chopo to listen to music and to buy CDs, albums, musical instruments and other merchandise.

Rupestre Movement started not only as a counter-offensive against mainstream music, but also in contrast to Cuban *nueva trova* and Andean music that was dominant primarily among the middle class youth in universities, who found a new continental form of resistance in the Hispanic American identity of the 70s. A great many young people did not feel represented in this expression and called for a more direct and more local music that diverged from the melodic sweetness of Cuba's Silvio, or the national folklore of Mexicans such as Óscar Chávez or The Folkloristas, or the radical militancy of León Chávez Teixero. The Rupestres created their own spaces, organized concerts and promoted artists. They even wrote a manifesto that showcased the subordinate figure, now adapted to Mexico City's urban culture: "It isn't that the rupestres have escaped from the old Museum of Natural Sciences, nor from the Museum of Anthropology; neither have they come from the hidden hills in a truck full of chickens and beans. This is simply about everyone who isn't very handsome, doesn't have a tenor voice,

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**Like Rockdrigo, the Mexican underground rock movement has been able to organize and manage its own marketing and distribution during times when globalization and the free market were absent.**

doesn't compose like the heights of aesthetic knowledge, or (even worse) doesn't have the sophisticated electronic equipment and crazy effects that impress the first scatterbrain who hears it" (excerpt from the *Rupestre Manifesto*). The Rupestres don't appeal to either political or social labels, it's enough for them to show the disillusionment of a generation that has left behind the rural world of the mid-20th century, entering into a Mexican modernity that has no hope of social ascent, but is willing to fight the creative

fight to occupy a space in it.

After more than three decades of emerging, and despite being lauded by homages and documentaries about them (one has just come out on YouTube: *Rupestre, the Documentary*), the members of this movement are practically unknown by the majority of the Mexican population, which implies that their marginal condition still prevails. Among them, one iconic figure stands out—perhaps the only one in the history of Mexican rock. This is Rodrigo González, also known as Rockdrigo or the Prophet of the Cactus, both nicknames he invented. September 2015 marked the 30th anniversary of his death in the 1985 earthquake, which ended the Rupestre movement. However, with a first album that he himself produced and sold (*Hurbanistorias*, 1985), and others posthumously created from loose recordings, Rodrigo is still being heard and valued by a sector of the population beyond Mexico City, as seen in the 2013 documentary, *Who Is Dayani Cristal?* in which Central American immigrants aboard the train known as The Beast sing one of his songs from memory even better than Gael García Bernal did.

Like Rockdrigo, the Mexican underground rock movement has been able to organize and manage its own marketing and distribution during times when globalization and the free market were absent. The Rupestre movement rests on the support of the National Autonomous University (UNAM) and other spaces funded by, yet independent from, the state, like Education Radio. At UNAM, the Rupestres find modest support from the Chopo Museum, which organizes concerts and disseminates their music. In 1980, the Chopo Museum began to allow a music street market by the same name to flourish in front of its premises, but when the market began to become highly popular and expand, it moved to a street close to the enormous PRI headquarters, a surreal vision of the official and the countercultural convening in one point in Mexico City. The Chopo street market did not get started thanks to the democratic opening of the party in power, but



rather in spite of its opposition. The vendors who sell here, today *rockero* grandfathers in T-shirts and white beards, began to offer music that was impossible to obtain elsewhere in the 80s. Their success has been such that the street market has become a space of tolerance where the police cannot intervene, under the condition that the vendors will be responsible for security, a responsibility carried out with even greater success than the authorities have had, resulting in a safe space that is entirely devoted to the sale of music (yes, much of it pirated, but how else would one acquire a German heavy metal album in Mexico in the 80s?). There, one can also find booksellers, movie stands, tattoo artists, musical instruments and other paraphernalia related to rock. Its fame has brought artists and intellectuals who give concerts or participate in a variety of activities to support and promote the market.

As the reader may deduce from these notes, Mexican rock is a political endeavor without directly trying to be one. Its simple discourse based on binary opposites has allowed for the idea of an alternative country, not for the purpose of following the sometimes naïve rock utopias, but to refuse the idea of a single path for the construction of national identity during a time when no one shouted as loud as they did, even though few listened. Its musicians' initiatives used creativity to break the country's media and marketing monopoly bubbles, which was no small feat during the years in which social repression and censorship reigned with no social networks to denounce them. Today, with a new authoritarian temptation in Mexico, a return to these Ruprestes is advisable.

**Humberto Delgado**, a Mexico City native, studied Latin American literature at UAEM and film studies at CUEC/UNAM, where he also taught film editing. He is currently finishing his doctorate in the Harvard Department of Romance Languages and Literatures with a thesis on the artistic representations of the *Zócalo*.

# New Life for the Violin in Mexico's Hotlands

The Legacy of Juan Reynoso **BY LINDAJOY FENLEY**



Juan Reynoso plays his violin while Lindajoy Fenley listens in background.

ONCE UPON A TIME, THE MUSIC OF TIERRA Caliente was hidden treasure—wild and charismatic violin melodies lifted up by guitar chords, rooted in driving bass runs, and punctuated by varied sounds of a little drum called *tamborita*. The few who knew about Tierra Caliente's *sones* and *gustos*—people living in other parts of Mexico—coveted recordings of a remarkably talented violinist, Juan Reynoso. They shared these rare possessions with awe-struck friends and then lamented, “You’ll never hear him live; he’s no longer with us.”

Fortunately, I never heard those rumors before I decided to track down the musician I had discovered on a cassette in a Mexico City music store in 1993. After listening repeatedly to “El gusto federal,” “La malagueña de Guerrero” and “La tortolita,” I invited a friend to go to Ciudad Altamirano, Guerrero, to see if we could find the magnificent musician

who played those Tierra Caliente classics. To our delight, we spent an entire day with don Juan. He was very much alive.

We found his little blue house in the nearby dusty village of Riva Palacio, Michoacán, seven hours southwest of Mexico City, though the drive had taken us much longer than that. Although we left Mexico City about midday, we had to stop once it got dark, and we didn’t pull in to Altamirano until the next morning. Esperanza, his wife and the mother of ten, told us about her husband’s three marriages and his numerous children—more than two dozen if you count those out of wedlock—while we waited for him to finish his morning shower.

“I play yesterday’s music,” he told us, when he emerged. He didn’t know he had fans far away who thought he had passed away, or that within a couple of years he’d have many more admirers in the United States as well as Mexico, or that in 1997,



Juan Reynoso relaxes as he plays his violin in a red hammock.

the President of Mexico would hand him the country's highest award for an artist, the *Premio Nacional de Ciencias y Artes*.

But before he could become well known again in Mexico, he became recognized internationally. Through my musical contacts, I arranged for Don Juan to perform at the 20th Annual Festival of American Fiddle Tunes in Port Townsend, Washington, in 1996. The standing ovation he received from U.S. musicians led to a standing invitation to the Port Townsend week-long workshop featuring many traditional fiddle styles.

I had only planned to travel with him that once in 1996. However, I soon fell into being his festival escort-translator-assistant year after year, slowly leaving behind my career as a business journalist.

Don Juan returned to the festival as long as he was able, finally canceling his tenth appearance just before what would

have been a difficult journey in 2005. For the Reynosos, going to the festival meant a seven-hour bus ride, an overnight in Mexico City, two flights which together took seven or eight hours not counting the layover, and finally a two-hour car ride.

Accompanying him each time he taught and performed in Port Townsend, I was inspired to launch an annual festival in Mexico that featured don Juan and other traditional musicians from Mexico, the United States and Canada. That festival, the *Encuentro de Dos Tradiciones*, lasted eight years, from 1997 to 2004.

I also began booking Juan Reynoso's performances elsewhere and serving as his media contact. The BBC as well as Mexico City papers contacted me. In addition, filmmakers Pacho Lane and Marcia Perskie produced hour-long documentaries titled, respectively, *Viva mi Tierra Caliente* and *Looking for Don Juan*.

I had never imagined that a casual

encounter with a cassette would make such a profound change in both my life and don Juan's. I still remember so well that first day with him. Even at 80 years old, he didn't seem to tire, playing music and telling stories about his life throughout the entire day. Occasionally he'd pick up a red bandana and wipe beads of sweat from his brow. Otherwise, the heat didn't seem to bother him. Nothing was more important than the music. He played fast, he played slow—depending on the melody—but always with precision. Thick fingers, large hands; double stops; always in tune.

I learned that he was born in Ancón de Santo Domingo, a dusty village above Coyuca de Catalán, on a hot summer day in 1912. Juan's birthplace was in Michoacán at the time, but a shift in state lines later made it part of Guerrero state. The largest nearby "city" would have been Pungarabato, a unpaved town that



eventually changed its Tarascan name to Ciudad Altamirano to honor a 19th-century Supreme Court president and writer born near Guerrero's state capital. It was two years into the Mexican Revolution when Juan entered the world, while his parents Felipe Reynoso and Luisa Portillo were struggling to survive in a remote area during that tumultuous era.

In the midst of the decade-long Revolution, the elder Reynoso worked hard to scratch out a living. Juan remembers begging his dad for a violin and hearing him reply, "whatever for?"

"Even a little guitar would do," Juan countered.

Over the years, Juan repeated an anecdote about getting his first violin thanks to an orphan boy staying with his family. The boy stole a little instrument from the market but didn't play it much. Juan toyed around, exploring the sounds a plastic bow made on four strings until he could scratch out familiar melodies. Later, he said the story wasn't true. It doesn't really matter how he got that first violin, or any of the subsequent ones. It doesn't even matter that he thought the ordinary fiddle he played when I met him was a Stradivarius. What matters is that in his hands, any instrument made powerful, beautiful music. The great composer Bardomiano Flores, much older than Juan, once gave him an instrument. According to Juan, there had been some rivalry, but the gift put that to rest. Tierra Caliente musicians are fiercely competitive and jealous. But the struggle to be king of the mountain is also fertile ground for lifelong friendships.

During the 1940s, Juan lived in Mexico City, performing regularly on the radio. In the 1970s, he was among the musicians immortalized when three young men traveled throughout Mexico to make field recordings of regional music. One later created a record company, Discos Corason, which eventually released their *Antología del Son Mexicano* as phonograph records, then cassettes, and finally CDs. That collection, as well as an LP record issued by the University of Guerrero, and homemade

tapes made by one of Juan's *compadres*, introduced the "Paganini de Tierra Caliente" to many of his future fans.

His coke-bottle glasses might have given a different impression, but even as an octogenarian don Juan was alert to the world around him. He noticed when a guitar string was barely out of tune from across the room. He recognized people from across a busy street. And his memory for melodies he hadn't played or heard in half a century was precise even though he was unable to read written music.

After I left Mexico, Andrés Jaimes from the town of Tlapehuala wrote a song—"Linda Paloma"—about how I had come to Tierra Caliente and become involved with the music. By then, the festivals were over and the premature rumors of the great violinist's death became real in January 2007, when he passed away. Jaimes' song had a melancholic line: *Oye Lindajoy, ya no está Juanito, solo sus notas, sonando bonito*. (Listen, Lindajoy, Juanito is no longer here, just his notes, sounding beautiful.) But the song is joyful because it explains that the music of Tierra Caliente is alive and well.

Llegaste un día removiendo de retardo  
la inspiración ancestral de mi pueblo.  
Uniste eslabones para que cada mañana  
se despertara con violines y guitarras

You arrived one day, belatedly stirring up  
the ancestral inspiration of my people.  
You connected the links so that every day  
we would wake with violins and guitars

Indeed. Tierra Caliente does wake up to the sounds of violins and acoustic guitars more frequently. Tierra Caliente sounds are in far better health than when I first happened across them and found that the only people playing traditional violin music were in their 70s, 80s and 90s. Even though some people there still prefer more modern styles with electronic instruments, in other circles the traditional music don Juan thought had

faded into obscurity is coming back into its own.

A group of young people in their teens and twenties—who call themselves *Los Nietos de don Juan* though not related to him—play his music in the town of Arcelia. Little music schools have sprung up in Zirandaro, Tlapehuala, Altamirano and other Tierra Caliente towns. And an annual summer camp for children in the region brings the music alive with instrument and dance lessons. *Los Jilgueros del Huerto*—perhaps the best representatives of promising, young *calentana* talent, and key participants in the summer workshops—followed in Reynoso's footsteps when they performed at the Festival of American Fiddle Tunes in 2013. When I organized my last event in Mexico, these young musicians had performed on the same stage in Morelia, Michoacán, with the master when they weren't yet teenagers. Another top *calentano* fiddler, Serafín Ibarra, a lifelong fan of Juan Reynoso who learned the musical style from his own great-uncles, continues to perform and teach Tierra Caliente music. He is one of the very few who can play the difficult *jarabes* in this style as well as *sones*, *gustos*, *pasodobles* and waltzes. Ibarra has released over a dozen recordings with his group, *Los Carácuaros*, and is soon to release one with Jesús Peredo reproducing the violin and guitar work of Juan Reynoso and Salomón Trujillo. The blind Trujillo was perhaps Juan's favorite guitarist. Another favorite was his son Máximo. Unfortunately, both had died long before I went to Tierra Caliente.

When I first met don Juan and the other older fiddlers, I rarely saw people dance to the music they played. Ironically, now that most of the old men are gone, the music they feared might die with them has revived amongst the young people who dance as well as play *sones* and *gustos calentanos*.

Juan remembered the strong steps of the *zapateado* that allow the dancers to become a percussive part of the music. But in the last years of his life he played in cantinas or at concerts where his audiences were sitting down. Although the

environment might have been more festive in his earlier years, quiet audiences suited don Juan just fine. He told Raquel Paraiso, a Spanish academic at the University of Wisconsin who focused her post-graduate ethnomusicology research on don Juan, that he didn't want people to dance because it took attention away from the music. "He wanted people to listen," she said. "Incredible, such a strong character he had."

Paul Anastasio, one of the many American fiddlers captivated by Reynoso at the Festival of American Fiddle Tunes, also attended every Encuentro de Dos Tradiciones festival except the first. He studied under don Juan for the rest of the master's life, earning his approval as a musician, transcriber and arranger. He now writes in the style of his teacher and uploads videos of Juan Reynoso to a YouTube channel.

Today, Tierra Caliente is hot. Not just because of its blazing sun. Not just because of its driving music. Violence and illegal drug activity have created an environment where it is highly unlikely that a foreigner like me would hang out with local musicians and organize festivals.

The music of Tierra Caliente, however, is now safe in the hands of local youth whose love for it exceeds any interest in money or drugs. With the music schools popping up in small towns, more people breathe life into the tradition by singing, playing, and partying. And, as my friend Zarina Palafox, who became part of the Dos Tradiciones festival as well as the Mexican government's now dormant Tierra Caliente program, likes to say, "When a young person has a violin in one hand and a bow in the other, there's no place for a gun."

*Lindajoy Fenley went to Mexico in 1988 as a journalist. After meeting Juan Reynoso, she began promoting music and culture, organizing festivals in Tierra Caliente. She returned to the United States in 2006 and continues to work with musicians from many countries in Arts Midwest programs.*

# Polkas in Paraíba

## The Many Lives of the Brazilian Button Accordion

BY PANAYOTIS (PADDY) LEAGUE

WE PULL UP TO THE SMALL PINK HOUSE PERCHED at the top of a steep, cobblestoned incline. It seems to float above the verdant Pernambuco hills, a jagged melody wafting from the wrought-iron bars of the exterior door. I peer out the window of the car and see an elderly man seated in a chair on the porch, wearing a crooked pair of glasses, grease-stained shorts, and an old button accordion strapped to his chest. "That's João," says Luizinho. The musician is playing a twisty, virtuosic phrase that sounds to me like an old choro, one of the polkas popular in Rio de Janeiro a century ago. As we walk through the door, he stands up and somehow manages an enthusiastic greeting without interrupting his practice session. He nods for us to sit—his grandson, watching silently with chin in hand, gets up to make room—and plays for another minute or two. Luizinho tells him he's playing it wrong: "No, it goes like this." João wags his finger of his left hand, the one pumping the bellows. "No, no, it goes up here, doesn't it?" Luizinho grabs the instrument from him and plays the phrase in slow motion. João's face lights up, and he snags the box back, tries again. "Ah, this one is sticking!" he exclaims, fiddling with the lowest of the inner row of buttons on the instrument's face. He grabs a screwdriver, removes the front panel, and lays the accordion on his workbench: a few slabs of plywood, some clamps, an empty margarine tub full of files and pliers, and an electric guitar tuner.

From his workshop in the small town of Moreno west of Recife, João Leite practices a dying profession that in its own way encapsulates much of the cultural, political, and economic history not only of his corner of Brazil but of its trans-Atlantic relationship with the European continent. He tunes and repairs accordions, particularly the diatonic button accordion known

by a host of colorful names in Northeastern Brazil: *sanfona de oito baixos* ("eight-bass accordion"), *pé-de-bode* ("goat foot"), or simply *fole* ("bellows"). His guest of honor today, and my guide, is Luizinho Calixto, a talented performer on the *sanfona de oito baixos* from the neighboring state of Paraíba. Luizinho has brought me to visit João so that I can round out my current research trip by documenting the work of this rare artisan and getting a literal glimpse into the inner workings of the Brazilian button box.

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**There is ample evidence to support this belief in the connection between the musical traditions of Northeastern Brazil and the western edge of Europe.**

Anyone who has visited Northeastern Brazil—or the huge Northeastern migrant communities in Rio or São Paulo—has heard and probably danced to the bouncy swing of *forró* music, with its cheeky melodies, booming *zabumba* bass drum, and strident triangle marking the time. But *forró's* reach extends far beyond the borders of Brazil; bands made up of ex-patriot Brazilians and gringos alike pack nightclubs and underground dance parties in New York, Boston, Paris, London and beyond. Regardless of when and where, at the center of this music is the accordion, a shape-shifting character that has trotted the globe since its origin.

In 1828, a Viennese organ builder named Cyril Demian patented a novel





**Zé Calixto plays an old button accordion with a great deal of concentration. Below: a closeup of an accordion or Brazilian button box—an essential key to *forró* music.**

invention: a small hand-held reed organ with five keys that he named the *akkordeon*. True to its name—from the Italian *accordare*, “to sound together”—Demian’s portable device enabled musicians to play not just melodies but full chords and rhythmic accompaniment for dancing, igniting a revolution in European popular music. Suddenly, a single skilled player could imitate a whole dance band. With the subsequent Industrial Revolution, the mass-produced machine took on myriad forms. Most of these instruments were diatonic single-action accordions: instead of the piano keyboard that became the international standard by the mid-20th century, the right-hand or melody side of the button accordion features one to three rows of round typewriter-style keys, each of which produces a different pitch when the player opens or closes the bellows. The same logic applies to the bass and chord buttons on the left-hand side, used to provide simultaneous accompaniment in lieu of a guitar or piano. This design gives the performer an extremely wide array of notes—twice as many as there are buttons—on a lightweight, portable



instrument. By the end of the 19th century, merchants, soldiers and sailors had taken various types of accordion not only to every corner of the European continent but to its current and former colonies.

Brazil was no exception. German and Italian firms imported and even manufactured accordions in the country’s rapidly urbanizing south, where immigrants from these and other non-Iberian nations shaped the soundscape of the border between Brazil and Argentina. How the diatonic button accordion made its way to Northeastern states such as Pernambuco and Paraíba, where it took on an entirely different tuning and playing style, is less clear. However, local folklore attributes

the instrument’s presence to the large numbers of English and Irish workers employed by the British companies that built the Northeast’s railway infrastructure in the late 19th and early 20th century. There is even a persistent myth claiming that the word *forró* is a corruption of the English phrase “for all,” which these railroad workers supposedly wrote on signs advertising public dances that they held for the residents of the towns where they were stationed.

These stories are so prevalent in Northeast Brazil that accordion players assume an almost biological relationship between their music and that of the British Isles. When I first met my teacher Luizinho Calixto in his hometown of Campina Grande, Paraíba, he was perplexed. How in the world had I, an American musician and researcher, had become so interested in the *sanfona de oito baixos*? When I mentioned that I had grown up around Irish traditional music, he and the other musicians who were listening to our conversation all threw up their arms and let out a satisfied “Aaaaaaaa!”—as if to say, *Well, of course! That makes sense.*

There is ample evidence to support this belief in the connection between the musical traditions of Northeastern Brazil and the western edge of Europe. For one, *forró*, the dominant genre of dance music in the states of Paraíba, Pernambuco, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, and Alagoas, clearly owes much of its melodic and rhythmic structure to the social dance music of 19th-century Britain and France. Some of the most popular *forró* dances are directly linked to their immediate ancestors even in name, such as the square dance-like *quadrilha* (from the French *quadrille*, the same source as the Irish “reel”) and the *xôte* or *xôtis*, descendant of the *schottische* (or “Scottish-style” couple dance). And the local version of the accordion itself provides another clue: most Northeastern musicians re-tune their instrument to what they call *afinação transportada* or “transposed tuning,” a fully chromatic set-up that facilitates playing difficult instrumental music in a variety of keys. This transposed tuning is almost identical to





Above: João Calixto and his son play music; bottom left: Luizinho Calixto performs at the Parque de Povo; bottom right: João Leite plays his accordion in his workshop.



the keyboard layout that has been popular among Irish accordionists for most of the last century.

Whatever its provenance, the *sanfona de oito baixos* occupies a central, if at times hidden, position in both the history and the current state of popular music in Northeastern Brazil. The modern style and repertoire of *forró* were developed by button accordionists who mixed the latest Western European fashions with the modal music of Iberian origin that had been performed for generations on the guitar-like *viola* and *rabeca* (rustic fiddle). Though today the more versatile piano accordion has almost completely obscured the *oito baixos* in the public imagination, most of the accordionists who popularized *forró* and other Northeastern genres outside the region and throughout the world were the sons of button accordionists and began their careers playing the instrument. These include not only Luiz Gonzaga, *O Rei do Baião* (“The King of the Baião”)—who sparked an international dance craze in the 1950s and whose music has inspired such artists as David Byrne of the Talking Heads—but such seminal figures as influential producer Sivuca (who worked with Harry Belafonte and South African singer Miriam Makeba) and modern jazz icon Hermeto Pascoal (who composed three pieces for Miles Davis’ 1971 record *Live-Evil*).

Despite the *sanfona de oito baixos*’ decreased popularity, several talented musicians have dedicated themselves to not only preserving the instrument’s style and repertoire but pushing it in surprising new directions. None is more impressive than 60-year-old Luizinho Calixto. Northeastern musicians often call the diatonic button accordion *este instrumento ingrato*—“that ungrateful instrument”—because of the inherent difficulty in coordinating the movement of the bellows with the desired notes, a playing technique that makes even the simplest melodies challenging to play. Yet in Luizinho’s hands, seemingly impossible feats of musical expression seem natural. Earlier on the same day that Luizinho took me to visit João Leite at his workshop, I

saw him perform a concert in Recife at which he played a program exclusively comprised of virtuosic *frevos*—march-like pieces traditionally executed at breakneck speed by mobile horn and percussion ensembles during Recife’s carnival. No Northeastern genre could be farther from the *oito baixos*’ traditional territory, but Luizinho’s performance was so flawless that the highly critical audience at Recife’s Paço do Frevo (“Frevo Palace”) gave him an extended standing ovation. Luizinho is also rare among current *sanfona de oito baixos* players in that he easily navigates other styles of Brazilian popular music, such as samba, bossa nova, and *choro*, and is a talented improviser.

But to Luizinho, nothing could be more natural for a *sanfoneiro* (or *tocador de fole*, “bellows player,” as Northeastern button accordionists call themselves). “Nowadays, people think that the *sanfona de oito baixos* can only play *forró*,” he tells me over a carafe of strong coffee. “But my father, Seu Didéus, played everything. Polkas, marches, mazurkas, *sambas*, *choros*, waltzes, you name it.” Luizinho’s eldest brother, octogenarian *sanfoneiro* Zé Calixto, confirms this. “You see, in those days, musicians were few and far between in the countryside, and before everyone had electricity, radios were rare,” he explains. “*Sanfoneiros* had to play everything that people asked for at a dance, and audiences were very demanding.” This training as a musical omnivore served Zé well when he moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1959, searching for work as a professional artist: when he auditioned for the Philips recording company, he impressed the artistic director by performing *choro* and samba, genres popular among urban audiences, and was hired on the spot—launching a recording career that has now spanned five decades.

For his part, Luizinho manages to survive as a full-time *sanfoneiro*, performing at festivals and concert series throughout the Northeast, but the going is rough. “In general, instrumental music isn’t valued in Brazil,” he tells me, “and it’s harder for Northeasterners because of the prejudice we face. Promoters aren’t willing to pay

us what we deserve, and audiences lose patience if you don’t play exactly what they expect.” Despite these challenges, he’s hopeful for the future. For the last few years, he has been giving *sanfona de oito baixos* classes through the University of the State of Paraíba in Campina Grande, his hometown, and has a dedicated core of students. His brother Zé, who lives in Rio, has also taught *oito baixos* to a few young carioca musicians. And, perhaps most promising, several young members of the Calixto family, including Luizinho’s son and a few of his nephews, have taken up the instrument.

Near the end of my most recent trip to Paraíba, Luizinho invited me to a gathering of *sanfoneiros* at the Luiz Gonzaga Museum in Campina Grande. In the courtyard, next to a statue of the King of the Baião, Luizinho, Zé, and their brother João played *forrós*, *xôtes*, marches, and *choros* with members of the younger generation, taking occasional breaks to drink coffee, eat steaming hot corn, and tell stories about the instrument and its old masters. During one of these lulls in the activity, as someone fiddled with a sticky button, I thought again of João Leite at the top of that narrow street in Moreno, and about his twelve-year-old grandson, who sat silently, watching and listening, during my visit. I imagined him stealing into João’s workshop late at night and trying his hand at tuning the steel reeds of an old *sanfona*, scraping at them with a file, matching them to get just the right slightly out-on-tune buzz. Perhaps one of these Paraiban *sanfoneiros*-in-training, now learning to navigate the ins and outs of the bellows and buttons, will take an instrument to him someday for an adjustment, and they’ll sit on that porch in a friendly argument over a phrase from an old *choro*.

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*Panayotis (Paddy) League is a Ph.D. candidate in Ethnomusicology at Harvard University, where he researches traditional music, oral poetry, and dance in Northeast Brazil and the Greek diaspora. He frequently performs on the fole de oito baixos with Forró Zabumbeca (www.zabumbeca.com).*

# Regional Mexican Music

COMMUNAL VIBRANCY | A PHOTOESSAY BY CHRIS VAIL

**MEXICO'S PORT CITY OF VERACRUZ WAS ALIVE** with music the week before Carnival. Musicians, dancers, and audiences popped up on street corners, parks, and in driveways. Maybe it was the final stage of rehearsals. Or maybe the performers could not contain their pent-up excitement. The scheduled parades and ensuing revelry were still a week away, but the flurry of activity already felt like one big delightful street party.

Having escaped a New York City winter and landed in the middle of this creative melange, I was surprised to see how often the audiences joined in the singing and dancing. That certainly didn't happen with musicians on New York subway platforms. But in Veracruz, performance quickly morphed into a communal gathering. I wondered if all these people actually knew one another or if there was something else at work. As I wandered around, I asked people that question. Often the scene seemed to suggest that everyone was someone's cousin but people also told me "this is our culture and this is how we share it."

A few years later I returned to Mexico to live and work as a photojournalist. An early assignment took me back to southern Veracruz, this time into the rich world of traditional Mexican music where I witnessed a similar communal vibrancy. With Veracruz as a starting point, I began visiting musicians in different parts of Mexico. I was curious to see if the communal magic in the music existed elsewhere in the country.

The results were mixed. In some places the traditional music was a lively multi-generational cultural experience. In others it was barely hanging on, with performers in their 80's and 90's. It felt more like a vestige of a fading past.

Depending on whom I spoke with, explanations for this discrepancy ranged from the degree of musical complexity

to volume (louder is better) to the 1940s bracero program sending workers to the United States, where Mexicans from different regions mingled for the first time. Modern improvements such as paved roads and electricity changed daily life and tastes. Some suggested that state control of radio stations influenced playlists, reflecting the favored regional music of each president. Obviously there were no simple answers to my question. But in this country where past, present and future are often so inextricably intertwined, the fortunes of any regional form seemed more like cultural ebb and flow than a final verdict, especially given the common roots of the music.

The majority of musicians I encountered played some form of traditional Mexican *son*, which developed from a blend of Spanish and indigenous music and in some cases African rhythms. Regional styles of *son* vary but the themes remain fairly constant. The music blends bacchanalian pursuits and affairs of the heart with ritual, religion, patriotism and history. Memories are resurrected, wounds salved, hearts broken—and sometimes people just get up and dance.

Traditional Mexican music expresses pride, joy, longing and pain. And in every region I found people devoted to the music and committed to maintaining its role in their culture. For them now, as it has been for generations, the music is the soundtrack for a way of life.

*Chris Vail is a documentary and news photographer. He covered Latin America, the Caribbean and Spain as a news photographer throughout the 1980s and early 90's. He returned to Latin America from 2002 – 2005. He also works as an editor, producer, and strategist on a wide variety of digital projects.*







Top: Musicians and costumed dancers celebrate Carnaval in northern Veracruz. Bottom from left to right: Weekly Saturday morning dance takes place in the Plaza Ciudadela in Mexico City; Otomi brass band, Banda Estrellita de Oro, practices; A man blows his instrument during an Otomi brass band practice. Photojournalist Chris Vail notes that regional music shares a blending of bacchanalian pursuits and affairs of the heart with ritual, religion, patriotism and history.

# Dominican Bachata

Moving from el Campo to the Garden **BY DEBORAH PACINI HERNANDEZ**

ASK KIDS IN ANY U.S. URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL if they know who Romeo is. They'll likely respond with an enthusiastic yes, but their answer will not refer to the Romeo in Shakespeare's classic play about star-crossed lovers, but rather, to the Dominican/Puerto Rican *bachata* singer Romeo Santos. Like his Shakespearean namesake, Romeo is known for his romantic passion, but not in the context of an ill-fated love affair. This contemporary Romeo's silky and seductive voice has made him a heartthrob to Latino kids (especially girls) since the early 2000s, when he was lead singer of the *bachata* group Aventura. In 2010 he began attracting attention from the mainstream media when Aventura sold out four shows in Madison Square Garden—triple the number of tickets sold for a Lady Gaga concert opening at the same time. In 2014, by then a solo act, Romeo made the national news again when he sold out two shows in Yankee Stadium within hours, a feat achieved only by superstars such as Madonna and Paul McCartney. Today Romeo's popularity has spread to encompass Latino youth beyond his original Dominican-American fan base. Through his savvy practice of recording duets with hip hop and R&B stars such as Usher, Lil Wayne, Pitbull and Drake, his fans now include African Americans, other ethnic minorities and Anglo-Americans. By now, Romeo and other New York-based groups who have followed in his and Aventura's footsteps have introduced *bachata* to audiences around the globe.

So who is this wildly popular singer most non-Latino adults have never heard about? And where did his signature musical genre, the romantic *bachata*, come from? The explanations take us back to the musical genres circulating in Dominican countryside in the era of the dicta-



Romeo performs *bachata* with a silky and seductive voice.

**In 2010 he began attracting attention from the mainstream media when Aventura sold out four shows in Madison Square Garden—triple the number of tickets sold for a Lady Gaga concert opening at the same time.**

tor Rafael Trujillo, who controlled every aspect of Dominican society for more than thirty years until he was assassinated in 1961. Under Trujillo's iron grip, the Dominican Republic was largely closed off to direct musical exchanges with the

outside world, although recordings of then-popular music—Cuban boleros and guarachas, Mexican rancheras, Puerto Rican jíbaro music—could be heard on the radio and jukeboxes throughout the country. Rural Dominican musicians



could perform these guitar-based genres, so over time, they became core features of rural musicians' repertoires, alongside local styles such as merengue and *música criolla*.

After Trujillo's death, thousands of rural folk migrated to Santo Domingo in search of work, settling in the shantytowns springing up around the margins of the city. Among them were musicians who aspired to record in the country's fledgling music industry, which had only recently been liberated from the suffocating fear of meddling by the Trujillo family. The guitar-based romantic music they played was known generically as *música popular*. Singers such as Bernardo Ortiz, Rafael Encarnación and Mélida Rodríguez—are today recognized as the forefathers of the genre later to be known as *bachata*.

The term *bachata* originally referred to an informal gathering in a backyard or patio, enlivened by food, drink, music and dance. Eventually, the sounds of humble rural musicians playing guitar-based music began to filter into Santo Domingo's working class neighborhoods, urbanites aspiring to a more cosmopolitan identity perceived the music as worthless and its practitioners as country bumpkins. They began referring to the music as *bachata*—a coded way of calling the music vulgar and uncouth. Initially the musicians resisted the term, which they knew was intended to be disparaging, but by the 1980s *bachata* had become the common way of referring to what was audibly coalescing as a distinct style of Dominican music. The influence of its guitar-based antecedent genres from Cuba, Mexico and Puerto Rico could still be heard, but the new sound, unambiguously Dominican, was marked by prominent lead guitar arpeggios, rhythms provided by bongos and maracas, and highly melodramatic singing about romantic and sexual relationships. The countryside continued to produce musicians versatile in the emerging style, but music industry recording took place in the capital Santo Domingo, so musicians seeking a recording career necessarily migrated

there.

Over time, the music, originally characterized (indeed, stigmatized) by its rural aesthetics, was urbanized, expressing the sounds and sensibilities of shantytown life, especially the social and emotional disruptions experienced by underemployed men. Some musicians, such as Luis Segura (recognized as one of the fathers of *bachata*), maintained the tradition of romantic lyrics, but others began composing songs with bawdy lyrics reflecting the erotic preoccupations of men whose social worlds were centered in neighborhood bars and brothels. Women were treated harshly in these *bachata* lyrics, appearing as treacherous and untrustworthy beings whose uncontrolled sexual appetites threatened men's well-being.

While poor Dominicans embraced the emerging style, the upper layers of Dominican society were scandalized by the crudeness of the music and its ribald lyrics, as well as the lack of sophistication of the barely literate musicians themselves. Scorned by mainstream society, *bachata* was effectively boycotted by the mainstream media: only one Santo Domingo radio station, Radio Guarachita, would play it, and in rural areas it could be heard only on programs airing in the pre-dawn hours, when *campesinos* were getting ready to go to work. Live performances took place only in neighborhood bars that "respectable" folk would consider disreputable.

Despite these obstacles, *bachata* continued to grow in popularity as it developed stylistically: electric guitars and bass drum were added to the original lineup of two acoustic guitars, bongo, and maracas, and the Dominican *guira* scraper substituted for the traditional maracas. Groups also began incorporating more songs in merengue rhythm, long the country's most popular dance. Dozens of *bachata* musicians became locally successful among consumers who, like the performers themselves, were at the bottom of the Dominican Republic's social hierarchy, although their economic success was limited by their exclusion

from the mainstream music industry.

At the turn of the millennium, *bachata*'s low social status began to improve. In 1990, sensing a cultural phenomenon at a grass roots level, Juan Luis Guerra, a Berklee College of Music-trained jazz and merengue musician of middle-class origins, released a recording entitled *Bachata Rosa*, which won a Latin Grammy and brought the Dominican genre to the attention of international audiences. Despite its title, the recording contained only three highly stylized, elegant *bachatas*, but the stamp of approval given to *bachata* by one of the country's most well-respected musicians began opening doors to the mainstream media. Through these doors stepped a younger generation of *bachata* singers such as Luis Vargas and Raulín Rodríguez, whose careers, now supported by the resources of the country's mainstream entertainment industries, began taking off. Many Dominicans, especially those who had always associated *bachata* with vulgarity and poverty, continued to avoid the style, but it had moved out of its former confines.

As *bachata* evolved in Santo Domingo, thousands of working-class Dominicans were migrating to New York and other northeastern cities: numbering only 11,883 in 1960, people of Dominican descent in the U.S. increased to over 537,000 by 1993, and by 2006 the numbers had risen to over 1,217,000. If the first generation of Dominican migrants preferred the familiar sounds of merengue and *bachata* to connect them to home, their U.S.-born or raised children were eagerly absorbing the hip hop and R&B permeating New York's soundscape. Inevitably, these urban African-American sounds made their way into the musical preferences and practices of young "Dominican Yorks" and other Dominican-Americans.

Aventura, the first U.S.-based *bachata* group to achieve success, retained the traditional guitar and bongo-based sounds of Dominican *bachata*, but in their 2000 debut recording *Generation Next*, they constructed a New York

rather than an island-based identity in their cover art, in which the group posed in front of an unmistakably New York apartment building. They also included a song, “Cuando Volverás,” whose lyrics switched seamlessly between Spanish and English—the first time English had been heard in *bachata*. In subsequent recordings, Aventura continued to weave hip hop and R&B aesthetics into *bachata*, articulating the bicultural experiences of their Dominican-American peers and other similarly bilingual and bicultural Latino youth.

In the wake of the successes of Aventura and Romeo—after he went on to become a soloist—interest in *bachata* spread throughout Latin America and then to Europe and Asia, encouraged by the emergence of other New York-based bilingual and bicultural *bachata* groups such as Bachata Heightz, Xtreme and Prince Royce. Increasing its reach even further, *bachata* dancing has also gone global. As an Internet search will quickly reveal, *bachata* dance congresses and festivals are take place worldwide, with the preferred dance music recorded by young U.S.-based *bachateros*, who are considered more cosmopolitan than their more traditional Dominican counterparts.

Today, *bachata*, once considered an artless music created by poor *campesinos* who didn’t know any better, has travelled and triumphed beyond anyone’s expectations. Its trajectory, however, is much more than a simple story of stylistic evolution leading to economic success. The globally interconnected social contexts in which *bachata* is being performed and consumed reflect the transnational and circular flows of people, media and ideas between home and host countries.

One example is how Dominican racial identity is being negotiated in contemporary *bachata*. In the Dominican Republic (as elsewhere in the Americas) poverty correlates strongly with race, but early *bachata* was perceived simply as poor people’s music, never as a black or diasporic music in the same way that, say, reggae or salsa’s African influences were acknowledged when they emerged

within similarly impoverished and dark-skinned communities. This deflection of race is the product of Dominicans’ longstanding ways of understanding race and their nation’s racial identity: dark skinned Dominicans have historically been referred to as *indios* rather than black; only Haitians are considered *negros*. In the United States, however, with its “one-drop” rule, dark-skinned immigrants would fall into the black category, but Dominican immigrants have generally refused to accept this racial construct, insisting on identifying themselves nationally—as Dominicans.

By imbuing their music with hip hop and R&B aesthetics, and recording highly visible music and video duets with leading African-American stars, however, U.S.-based *bachateros* have visually and audibly located their music in close proximity to the African-American end of the U.S. popular music spectrum. It is not surprising, then, that their New York style music is being referred to as *bachata urbana*, which distinguishes it from the island style. In the United States, the term urban has long indexed African-American styles, from soul and funk to hip hop and R&B, so this linguistic designation might suggest a shift in the racial identities of young Dominican-American musicians and their fans. Yet, if dark-skinned Dominicans in the United States have understood that whether they like it or not, their skin color places them within the U.S.’s black category, they distinguish themselves from their African-Americans peers through their use of Spanish. Fully bilingual, these young musicians could seek to increase their audience base by singing more in English, but Romeo and his peers continue to prioritize Spanish, or Spanglish, in order to underscore their *Latinidad*, and to maintain themselves within the racial ambiguity of these categories. Prince Royce, for example, had a 2010 hit with his bilingual *bachata* version of Ben E. King’s 1961 hit “Stand By Me,” but when New York Times’ Jon Caramanica asked him for his thoughts about performing it in English, Royce responded: “It’s not as easy as it sounds.



Plus it’s a very sensitive situation right now,” making it clear that his core fans, while appreciating the hip hop and R&B influences, continue to insist that *bachata* be sung primarily in Spanish. In short, *bachata*’s signature musical aesthetics—the acoustic guitar arpeggios and bongo drum rhythms—may be essential ways of displaying Dominican-ness, but even when the musical style is heavily indebted to African American aesthetics, language serves as a powerful way of constructing distinctions between Dominican and African-American racial identities.

Changing Dominican understandings of gender roles can also be perceived in the music’s recent trajectory. Only a handful of female *bachata* singers have established a name for themselves since *bachata* coalesced into a genre: *bachata* performance has always been, and continues to be, a primarily male-dominated genre. The audiences, however, have changed dramatically as the new generation of *bachata* musicians eschewed the raunchier and misogynistic lyrics characteristic of their predecessors, relying instead more on romantic songs of love and loss—sentiments likely to appeal to immigrants longing for loved ones at home, and more specifically, to women. The newer generation of singers, whose soft and pleading voices expressed their emotional vulnerabilities, attracted women who formerly might have reluc-



tant to associate with the disreputable genre, and who appreciated an alternative to more masculine genres such as hip hop and reggaeton. Thousands of men were in the audience at Romeo's Madison Square Garden concerts, but it was widely understood that these men were likely there to please their girlfriends.

In the early 2000s, a number of successful male-female *bachata* duets appeared, such as Monchy y Alexandra, but no female soloist has been able to approximate the success of male singers such as Romeo and Prince Royce. Urban *bachatera* Leslie Grace had a hit in 2012 with "Will U Love Me Tomorrow," a bilingual *bachata* version of the Shirelles' 1960 song, and André Veloz is seeking to build her career on the original rootsy sound of traditional *bachata* but with feminist lyrics. It is noteworthy, then, that within such a highly masculine domain, which reflects the Dominican Republic's traditionally patriarchal society, the issue of homophobia is being addressed in this music. In 2007, Andy Peña, a not widely known merengue musician, released a *bachata* entitled "Quiero Volar," which can be technically translated as "I want to fly," although the verb *volar* is popularly used as a code word for "flighty" homosexual behavior. Peña's video for this song features a somewhat heavy-set man in yellow, green and white tights and a bright pink top and cap, walking through the streets of Santo Domingo with mincing and exaggerated steps and gestures, and singing, in *bachata*'s classically melodramatic style, that he wants to "fly" but is restrained from expressing his true self by society, including his father. Not surprisingly, Peña began to be nicknamed *el bachatero volador*, or *el bachatero gay*.

The novelty of a *bachatero gay* led to television appearances in which Peña presented himself wearing make up, a pink head band, and singing with an exaggeratedly feminine voice and mannerisms. In interviews, however, he refused to explicitly identify as gay—or to deny that he was—insisting that it shouldn't matter. This ambiguity increased the public's fascination with Peña, especially



Opposite page: A poster in Barcelona; above: André Veloz is a popular female *bachatera*.

since he admitted that he had a wife and three children—which led many to speculate that he was performing his gayness in order to attract attention and advance his career, or perhaps even as a piece of performance art. In 2014 Peña released a *bachata* entitled “Solo le pido a Dios,” presenting himself in the video as emotionally vulnerable but not conspicuously gay. So perhaps “Quiero Volar” was an act, but regardless, Peña stimulated a much-needed public dialogue about gender roles and homophobia. In 2014 Romeo continued the discussion with a song and video entitled “No tiene la culpa” (“It’s not his fault”), whose lyrics, urging tolerance for homosexuality, narrate the story of a gay teen harassed by his peers and rejected by his father. Romeo, correctly anticipating rumors that he wrote the song because he, too, is gay, sends a strong message affirming his own heterosexuality midway through the narrative with these lines, which he speaks rather than sings for greater emphasis: “100% heterosexual. I was born like this. And you?”

Other Latin America and Caribbean popular musical genres—son, salsa, merengue, reggae, reggaeton and cumbia—have similarly been born within the most dispossessed sectors of society, and gone on to achieve national and international popularity, and they have also been vehicles for lyrics addressing important social issues. But *bachata*’s ongoing trajectory from humble origins in the Dominican campo to the stage lights of Madison Square Garden and beyond, and its increasingly audible role as both reflection and agent of social change, make it a music well worth listening to.

**Deborah Pacini Hernandez**, *Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, Tufts University*, is author of *Oye Como Va!: Hybridity and Identity in Latin/o Popular Music*; *Bachata: A Social History of a Dominican Popular Music*; and co-editor of *Reggaeton and Rockin’ Las Americas: The Global Politics of Rock in Latin/o America*.



PHOTO BY JORGE VILLA. PHOTO COURTESY OF LUIS BARBERÍA.





Luis Barbería sings and plays guitar.

# Musical Transitions:

## Transnational Singer-Songwriters Give Voice to a Changing Cuba

BY SUSAN THOMAS

CUBAN SINGER-SONGWRITER LUIS BARBERÍA'S album, *A Full*, was awarded the prize for best album in Cuba's annual music awards, Cubadisco in May 2015. Vocal group Sexto Sentido, the jazz piano of Harold López Nussa, and guitarist Nam Sam Fong accompanied him in the album, providing the glue that bound together the sound of four Habana Abierta albums from 1996 to 2011. *A Full's* blend of funk, R & B, *guaguanco*, and close harmonies is as much a commentary on the musical influences that shaped Barbería's musical experience over the previous two decades as it is a mature and confident statement of his artistic present.

A member of the collective Habana Abierta, Barbería left Cuba in 1996 for Spain, where he lived for nearly two decades. In 2014 he returned to live in Cuba, joining a growing number of former émigré musicians who have returned—as musical professionals—to Cuba. Barbería's win was an unprecedented embrace of a prodigal son, but it comes after a gradual engagement with diasporic artists by the Cuban musical establishment.

Musicians have been audible representatives of the diaspora that scattered a generation of Cubans in the 1990s and early 2000s. In many ways they can be seen as the “canaries in the coal mine” of a slow-moving Cuban transition. Maintaining artistic and personal ties to the island, their music voiced a claim for Cuban citizenship that transcended territory boundaries and pushed back against previous binaries of patriotic belonging or exile.

### THE BEGINNINGS

The singer-songwriters who emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s came of age at a time of transition and economic and political unrest. While still revolu-

tionary in their thinking, they responded by turning their songs inward, critiquing contemporary social issues, generational concerns and frustration with political stasis. The 1990s economic crisis in Cuba brought fiscal and material shortages as well as a tightening of restrictions on expression following the fall of the Berlin Wall. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the state had neither the mind nor the means to contain and foster counter-cultural creative effervescence. Instead, officials worked to suppress artistic activities, using musicians' amateur status to marginalize them from institutions, keeping them out of state media and barring their access to performance venues.

Musicians responded by organizing themselves, playing with and for each other in a variety of *peñas*, or jam sessions, around Havana. For the musicians, most of whom were self-taught, the *peña* gatherings were “our school,” as Luis Barbería later told me, their collective pedagogy shaping the sound of a generation. At *peñas*, musicians not only enjoyed, critiqued and collaborated with each other's songs; they shared the space with poets, humorists, artists and actors, creating a scene that Vanito Cabellero described to me as “una gran bohemia artística” and that Kelvis Ochoa later commemorated in his song, “Cuando salí de La Habana.”

Tensions grew between the musicians, who wanted to advance professionally, and institutional functionaries, who denied them access. It is impossible to know what would have transpired had musician Pavel Urkiza not returned to Cuba from Spain in 1995 with a contract to record a collaborative album for the Spanish record label, Nube Negra, titled *Habana Oculta*. The musicians were invited to travel to Spain to launch the album, but this posed

a problem; they needed exit visas and as professionally unaffiliated musicians, they had no institution to sponsor them. The youth cultural organization, the Asociación de Hermanos Saíz, sponsored the unaffiliated musicians, signing off on their exit visas, a move that, at the time, was assumed to be “definitivo.” Joaquín Borges-Triana described the actions of the AHS as both a “rescue mission” for the artists and a “releasing of pressure” for the state.

In Spain, members of the Habana Oculta project, along with other members of their cohort who were not in Havana at the time of the first recording, recorded two more albums with the BMG Ariola label under the name that would come to define them, Habana Abierta. Musically hybrid, danceable, with direct lyrics that spoke to contemporary social concerns, the music of Habana Abierta spread back to the island through cassettes and burned CDs. Here were musicians who had left, but who were not exiles, making music that was aesthetically and rhetorically directed at a home audience. Their collective protagonism and distant location enacted a kind of transnational solidarity that reimagined Cuban citizenship for a generation that had been literally torn apart by the diasporic reality of the 1990s and early 2000s. That the counter-cultural possibility represented by Habana Abierta was understood by fans back on the island is illustrated by the catharsis that greeted their triumphant return in 2003, when they performed in Havana at the Tropical amphitheater for a crowd estimated to number between 8,000 and 10,000.

## MUSIC AND TRANSNATIONAL CUBAN CITIZENSHIP

If Habana Abierta represented a call for a wider definition of Cuban citizenship, this claim was made more explicit by the Interactivo collective. Led by pianist Robertico Carcassés, Interactivo was founded in 2001 and is based on the island. Like Habana Abierta, the group practices a collective protagonism, with songwriters and instrumentalists representing a wide variety of musical styles

cycling through the ensemble. If Habana Abierta represented the voice of Cubans demanding to be heard from outside its territorial boundaries, Interactivo has simply refused to recognize such boundaries, collaborating with artists resident on and off the island in an undeniably political performance practice. The most striking example of this occurred in a 2002 concert in Havana’s Teatro Nacional that was later broadcast on Cuban television. The concert was a *tour de force* of Cuba’s most virtuosic musical talent, bringing together singer-songwriters and rappers with Havana’s most select jazz musicians, multiple percussionists, a brass section to rival the “horns of terror” of NG la Banda, and a string orchestra. Joining them onstage were Cuban musicians living abroad: Gema Corredera, Pavel Urkiza, and Kelvis Ochoa, then resident in Spain, and Descemer Bueno, then resident in the United States. The inclusion of émigré artists in official media was unprecedented and their audible and visible presence enacted a radical politics of citizenship and belonging that no pamphlet or forum on “repatriation” could achieve.

Since then, a wave of former émigré musicians has returned to Cuba’s shores, including David Torrens (from Mexico) and Raúl Paz (from France). Descemer Bueno, who penned the 2014 hit song, “Bailando,” traveled freely between Cuba and the United States. Transnational artists living abroad as well as returnees strained a state policy used to writing off those who had left, and they can be seen as public and audible test cases for policy reform. Transnational musicians—both those who remain abroad and those who have returned—can be seen as public and audible instigators of policy change. The first evidence of change occurred in the early 2000s when two prominent groups living abroad, Orishas (in France) and Habana Abierta (in Spain), were brought to Cuba to perform with an official invitation from the Ministry of Culture. The Ministry later continued a slow politics of opening by seeking to “repatriate” artists who had lost the right to return by overstaying their exit visas. All of these chang-

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## Transnational artists living abroad as well as returnees strained a state policy used to writing off those who had left, and they can be seen as public and audible test cases for policy reform.

es—the return of Ochoa and Torrens, the peregrinations of Bueno, and the “repatriation” of artists by the Ministry—occurred before 2013 emigration reforms officially allowed Cubans to retain their citizenship even if residing abroad.

While the voices of musicians in Havana, Miami or Madrid have tested state tolerance of its diasporic citizenry, they are voices that could easily be silenced. Such silencing could be overt, as Interactivo learned in 2013 when its overly loud call for greater opening resulted in an immediate professional blacklisting by the Instituto Cubano de la Música, or as subtle as a “malfunctioning” audio system or a visa that arrives too late.

Sound carries, and musicians’ voices often reach opposite shores well ahead of diplomats and politicians. The careers and collaborations of Cuban musicians over the last twenty years have been remarkably prophetic of changes in Cuba’s economic, cultural, and immigration policies. We should all listen to what they sing of next.

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**Susan Thomas** is Associate Professor of Musicology and Women’s Studies at the University of Georgia. Her book, *Cuban Zarzuela: Performing Race and Gender on Havana’s Lyric Stage*, is the recipient of the Robert M. Stevenson Prize (American Musicological Society) and the Pauline Alderman Award (International Association of Women in Music) and she is currently completing a book on the transnationalization of Cuban popular music. She was a 2011-12 DRCLAS Santander Visiting Scholar.



# Nature's Sonorous Politics:

Music, Ecology, and Indigenous Activism in Andean Peru **BY JOSHUA TUCKER**

**THERE'S NO INDIGENOUS POLITICAL MOVEMENT** in Andean Peru. This, at least, has been the consensus view of scholars since the 1990s, when protests organized by indigenous parties shook the foundations of nearby Bolivia and Ecuador. Peru has been a neighborhood outlier ever since, a central Andean country where most people have indigenous ancestors, but few claim an indigenous identity.

A visit to Radio Quispillaccta, a community AM station located in the south highland city of Ayacucho, belies this conclusion. It shows that we need to consider carefully what we mean by politics, and where we look for how it operates. Amid posters advertising indigenous

activist meetings and festivals in rural Quechua-speaking communities, Radio Quispillaccta's staff is sparking a profound change in local attitudes. Furthermore, they are doing it through broadcasts that center on the *chimaycha* music of their hometown, presenting it as part of a distinctive land ethic. Once inaudible within Ayacucho's urban soundscape, *chimaycha* has become a favored genre and a symbol of Quechua cultural affirmation for the city's youthful, indigenous migrant majority. It's helping to shape a newly invigorated debate over indigenous self-determination. As such, it holds keys to the ways that local leaders will organize their struggles in years

to come.

My current research project traces the people, ideas, and technologies through which the *chimaycha* scene is organized. I didn't mean to get caught up in this: when I returned to Ayacucho in 2011, after several years of absence, I meant only to follow up on a thread I had dropped during dissertation research in the early 2000s. At that time I had become friends with Marco Tucno Rocha, a *chimaycha* performer and the foremost maker of the small *chintlili* guitars that accompany it. Few city residents could have identified this esoteric, aesthetically challenging style, and fewer still would have called themselves fans. The music



Author Joshua Tucker helps out by sanding a musical instrument.







circulated mainly among migrants from the small rural indigenous communities in the nearby Pampas River Valley.

However, I was enchanted by the contrast between its high, strident vocals and the music-box brilliance of its *chintlili* accompaniment and by the metaphoric intensity of its lyrics, which figured tales of romantic deception and abandonment. When I returned to ask what had happen to this rural music in a rapidly modernizing city, I found the improbable: not only had *chimaycha* become a stalwart feature of Ayacucho's rural hinterland, it had become part of an indigenous politics absent from the region a scant decade before—and its ecological resonance played no small part in this dynamic.

*Chimaycha* has always been an eco-centric idiom. In its original form it was part of a web that bundled human animal, and environmental cycles together into the kind of system that anthropologist Steven Feld calls an acoustemology—a sonorous way of experiencing ecological knowledge. Performed largely for amorous purposes by unmarried adolescents, it was associated with the annual pastoral cycle when animals are driven seasonally between high, frigid plains and tropical river bottoms. Herding was a young person's job, and long days away from parental oversight gave plenty of opportunities to meet, flirt and arrange nocturnal musical parties. *Chimaycha* became associated with a series of named places scattered around the mountain landscape, each a center of pastoral activity in a distinct season. Andean song is everywhere framed in terms of natural metaphors, and it was inevitable that *chimaycha* would come to revolve around the birds, mammals, landforms, and rivers that populated the very spaces in which the songs were sung. In this way, *chimaycha* made seasonal change, pastoral subsistence, community geography, and the human life cycle—particularly the securing of a life partner—into distinct facets of one indissoluble ecosystem.

Nevertheless, *chimaycha* wouldn't have developed in the way that it has



Opposite page, workshop for making instruments; Above: Various sized *chintlilis* (top); Author with renowned *chintlili* player José Tomayllain in Chuschi plaza in Ayacucho, Peru (below).

without the mediation of aid workers and local intellectuals. Shortly after the 1959 reopening of Ayacucho's Universidad Nacional San Cristóbal de Huamanga (UNSH), foreign non-governmental agencies (NGOs), working in partnership with the university's Centro de Capacitación Campesina (CCC), came into poor rural communities like Quispillaccta. They mainly promoted crop improvement, irrigation and other such development projects. However, the CCC also established a Quechua-language radio

program, featuring field recordings made by and for rural musicians with borrowed cassette recorders. This radio program drove the creation of a *chimaycha* performing scene, made up of young musicians eager to hear themselves on the radio. More importantly, it established a cassette archive of traditional music.

This bore fruit of a different kind in the 1990s, after the CCC's program went defunct. Development projects had improved Quispillaccta's economy, providing new opportunities to its children,

and by 1992 the community housed an unusual sort of NGO. Founded by *quispillacquina* sisters Magdalena and Marcela Machaca, agronomist graduates of the UNSCH, the Asociación Bartolomé Aripaylla was staffed entirely by fellow *quispillacquinas*. It promoted indigenous agricultural knowledge to counter the assumptions of academic agronomy, and provided resources for mitigating the local effects of climate change. It also supported cultural traditions like *chimaycha*, through which such knowledge was learned and transmitted. By the time they organized Radio Quispillaccta, at the turn of the millennium, ABA was in dialogue with actors tied to the global indigenous movement, and members of the association became convinced of the need to make environmental stewardship and indigenous distinctiveness into twin pillars of a regional movement for self-determination.

Listen to Radio Quispillaccta, then, and this is what you will hear: community news, programs about human rights and agricultural technique, exhortations about the value of indigenous tradition, and a lot of *chimaycha*. It's not all traditional: the older style competes with an urban version that borrows heavily from mainstream pop, and has little to do with community life. However, Radio Quispillaccta's staff accepts this as a part of a process through which young Quechua speakers are finding their voice and defining their values as indigenous people, tacking between the poles of community-centered ecocentrism and the dynamic changes of urban indigenous life.

There's no indigenous movement in Andean Peru? Maybe not in the nation's halls of politics. But perhaps that's not the right place to look.

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**Joshua Tucker** is Dean's Assistant Professor of Music at Brown University. He is currently completing a book about the relationship between music, ecology, and indigenous social politics in the Peruvian Andes. He was a 2009-10 DRCLAS Santo Domingo Visiting Scholar.

# Mauricio Kagel and Electroacoustic Music

Tango Alemán BY ANNA WHITE -NOCKLEBY

WHEN MAURICIO KAGEL RETURNED TO HIS native Buenos Aires in 2006, 111 cyclists greeted the avant-garde composer by performing his theatrical composition, "Eine Brise." The festival in his honor, organized by the historic Teatro Colón, celebrated his decades as a pioneer in experimental music that often borrows from theatre, cinema and site-specific art. It had been years since Kagel—a longtime resident of Germany—had visited Argentina, and the festival was thus an opportunity to reclaim the composer for Argentina's legacy and for a younger generation of musicians.

Kagel's biography mirrors the multilingual and cosmopolitan nature of his compositions, shaped early on by his studies with another Argentine who understood the vexed nature of tradition: Jorge Luis Borges. Born to Jewish immigrants who fled anti-Semitism in Russia in the 1920s, Kagel developed as a composer in the experimental music circles of Buenos Aires, staging his first compositions, such as a multimedia installation called "Música para la torre," in the 1950s. Shortly afterward, he moved to Germany where he resided until his death in 2008.

Particularly striking is the theatricality of many of his compositions, such as "Sur Scene" (1959-60). The work begins as a lecture on the crisis of modern music and progressively devolves into nonsense and ellipses as its words turn to rhythm and are taken over by the accompaniment of musicians and a mime, parodying not only the intellectual establishment but also the inadequacy of language itself. Despite his exile, South America comes up in both his investigations of language and his focus on the influence of musical tradition, in such works as "Tango Alemán" (1978). He would later explain it in an interview with Anthony Coleman, "I was born in Argentina, and tangos and vernacular music are

for me what American music, jazz, is for you. In America you can never forget that jazz exists."

And yet in much of his work, national identity seems to take a back seat to the Cage-influenced explorations of the outer limits of musical performance. His national origins seem perhaps most in line with his interest in the aesthetics of chance, as when he tells Max Nyffeler, "I was born in Buenos Aires, but it could just as well have been Chicago, Shanghai or Milan. Emigrants often travel, not to where they want to go, but where they can get a visa to go. The geography of chance is tolerable but unfathomable. I am Argentinian by birth, but in no way a typical citizen of that country. Or perhaps I am?"

An investigation into Kagel's trajectory also helps to explore the limits of the national when it comes to contemporary music. What does it mean to look for the new, to cast off or parody tradition, to examine the limits between sound, language and sense? Does electroacoustic music have a nationality, or is there a rejection of the national that comes with these sonic explorations? Is Kagel's move to Germany an example of "brain drain" (or rather, "creative drain"), influenced by his early inability to develop an electroacoustic music studio in Peronist-controlled Buenos Aires? Or are Kagel's contributions to contemporary music a product of his formative years at the intersection of economic, linguistic and musical traditions unique to the reality of urban, post-war Latin America?

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**Anna White-Nockleby** is a Harvard Ph.D. student in the Romance Languages and Literatures Department and a Teaching Fellow in Spanish. A longer version of this article can be found online <[revista.drclas.harvard.edu](http://revista.drclas.harvard.edu)>.



# From Nazis to Supermarkets

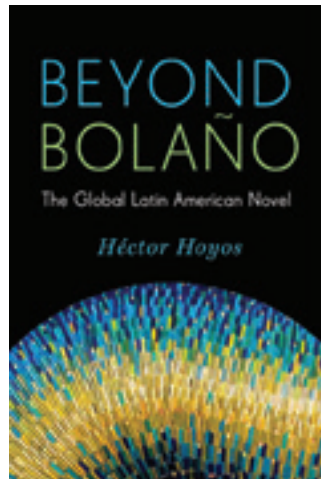
A REVIEW BY MANUEL AZUAJE-ALAMO

**Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel**, by Héctor Hoyos. (Columbia University Press, 2015.)

I often wonder what life would have held for the late Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño if he had not passed away due to liver complications more than a decade ago. This year he would have turned 62 years old and very likely could have become the foremost literary heavyweight of contemporary Latin American letters. He might have won the Nobel Prize for literature—or at the very least he could have been a perennial runner-up for the prize, much like the Japanese author Haruki Murakami.

The comparison above with Murakami is not whimsical. I am writing this review in Beijing, China, where in the foreign books section of local bookstores the English translations of the works of the Chilean writer stand next to those of the Japanese, as do Mexican and Turkish novels. Chinese writers are not far away—all these global writers' book appear side by side, playing, at least in principle, in the same literary league. The question then becomes: how does the Latin American novel play—or is expected to play—in this global league?

*Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel* by Héctor Hoyos, assistant professor of Latin American literature at Stanford Univer-



sity, joins a growing number of books from the field of Latin American literature aiming to answer this question and its usual counterpart: if the world reacts to novels from Latin America, how do Latin American novels react to, and portray, this new globalized world?

Hoyos' book looks at this question from several approaches, focusing on contemporary Latin American writers working in Spanish and Portuguese. The book is a call to readers to consider contemporary Latin American literature "beyond Bolaño," and the dimensions of its analyses are not only aesthetic and academic, but also political.

In the book's introduction, Hoyos seeks to explain the blend of two academic traditions that his monograph embodies. The first tradition is that of world literature studies, a burgeoning field of academic research that originated from an ongoing

conversation within the discipline of Comparative Literature since the turn of the 21st century. It seeks to define the current cultural concept of "the world" and to clarify the role that the process of reading literature from all over the world plays in the mind of the local (and at times global) individual. The second tradition is Hoyos' own, that of Latin American literature research as conducted in the U.S. university, a site of discourse about Latin American culture in which exile, translation and transculturation are common. The position from which Hoyos writes the book is problematic but not insurmountable; as Hoyos comments, it is an "unstable site of enunciation, but it is also one I [Hoyos] embrace" (9). The book immensely benefits from this recognition of its own instability. Fortunately, Hoyos—a Colombian who holds degrees from the Universidad de los Andes and from Cornell University—is up to the task.

The first chapter fittingly deals with a novel by the writer whose name is on the cover, namely Roberto Bolaño's breakthrough novel *Nazi Literature in the Americas*, which presents itself as an encyclopedia of an underground tradition in Latin American letters: that of Nazi fiction and poetry. Scholars tend to study the novel in two ways. One involves its relationship to the stories by the Argentinian Jorge Luis Borg-

es, whose narratives took the form of encyclopedia articles. The other approach views Bolaño's novel as a critique-through-parody of the Latin American ideological missteps that led to the spread of military dictatorships during the 20th century. Hoyos brings to the discussion an interesting, if perhaps underdeveloped, concept from, of all things, the realm of American pop culture: the concept of the "bizarro world" of the Superman comics. The ideological differences and the inversion of values in the bizarre world of Superman provides Hoyos with a framework within which to describe the operation of this novel whose "characters think in reverse" (40).

The second chapter deals with a novel by a Brazilian superstar: Chico Buarque's border-crossing novel *Budapest* (2003). In terms of the text and the context of the work, this might be the most important chapter for readers who want to find out what issues are in play when we talk about the global Latin American novel. This is because the context surrounding the actual novel is so interesting: Chico Buarque, the Brazilian legendary *bossa nova* singer and songwriter, wrote this novel, set in an exotic peripheral city of Eastern Europe, at the turn of the century, and some years later a movie version, jointly made with Brazilian and Hungarian capital, was

produced, featuring stunning shots of Rio de Janeiro and Budapest, as well as a cameo by Chico Buarque himself.

In this way, just the creation and circulation process of this novel illustrates many of the processes and issues of the contemporary Latin American novel: the importance—and at the same time the ironical invisibility—of the process of translation in today's so-called global world, the emergence of travel and tourism between peripheries in a capitalist world, the emergence of Brazil as a member of a global power. All of these themes already would have made for a great reading, yet Hoyos also provides a formidable close reading of the text to illustrate how it links language to sex, capital and dominance, and hence represents a continuation of the conservative male-centered discourse of Latin America, in a novel which putatively wants to be read as a progressive narrative.

The book's third chapter opens with a re-consideration of the supermarket as a kind of modern day universal space that is at the same time, embedded in a specific place and staffed by local people. In Hoyos' reading, global capital makes it possible to have chains of supermarkets displaying and offering similar goods all over the world, and yet their staff provide a local point of view from which narratives can develop. He opens up new creative research possibilities by arguing that scholars might consider supermarket narratives as a valid fictional genre deserving of academic study.

In the fourth chapter, Hoyos deals with a key issue in today's study of Latin American literature: crime narratives of the drug trade. Is this a case of the global predetermining what becomes known of what is written by the local? Or, is it in fact the opposite, a Latin American critique of the economic and legal system by which global demand—ever willing to consume the same drugs that they criminalize—wreaks havoc in the Latin American continent? The genre of *narconovelas*—novels dealing with the various facets of the underground of organized drug crime in Latin America—has at least a three-decades long history, but especially in this century it has taken a central position in the literary canon of Latin American literature. Whereas in the past magical realism was the main literary export of Latin America, nowadays works that touch on the violence, or the aftermath, of the drug trade prevail. Hoyos centers his analysis on the 1994 Colombian modern classic *Our Lady of the Assassins*, by Colombian writer Fernando Vallejo, exiled in Mexico. Hoyos provides the reader with a poignant reading of the *narconovela* genre in relation to its use of religious imagery. The legendary pantheon of the kingpins of the drug trade—the late Colombian capo Pablo Escobar taking pride of place among them—combines with local popular and religious belief to give the genre its allure, as Hoyos astutely quips rephrasing Marx's famous dictum: in

this genre, "it appears that opium—or cocaine, rather—is the people's new religion" (127).

The fifth and last chapter is a look back at the French avant-garde artist Marcel

readership becomes instead a kind of litmus test for the validity of Latin American as an equal player in the sourcing of world literature.

Hoyos' book is an excellent guide for casual readers

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## Whereas in the past magical realism was the main literary export of Latin America, nowadays works that touch on the violence, or the aftermath, of the drug trade prevail.

Duchamp and his artistic practice of repurposing everyday objects, and its distant cousins (or, more correctly, descendants) in Latin America. The focus is on the Mexican writer Mario Bellatin and the Argentinian César Aira, two of the most famous contemporary writers in Latin American writing in what one could call a post-modern mode. Their novels very frequently play less with the plot and character development than with the medium itself. They are, Hoyos argues, novels as ready-mades, written with the understanding that it is their dislocation in regards to their genre's usual rules and expectations that make them interesting. This kind of experimental avant-gardism can be difficult, "if it [Latin American literature] does not enjoy a standing in world literature as a source of theoretical reflection" (187). Thus, if the work of these experimental authors transcends the purely national, their success or failure as authors of experimental fiction in the eyes of the global

of Latin American literature wondering what lies beyond the traditional canon of Borges, García Márquez, Vargas Llosa and even of the more recent Bolaño. By tying the narrative of the continent to its history, it will also interest readers curious about trends in contemporary Latin American culture. Finally, to specialists it will be of special interest as it develops new angles from which to think of the local and the global as it pertains to Latin American literature. These are some interesting points that perhaps could have benefited from a lengthier development, but the fact that I was left yearning for more length is a testament to the power and creativity of Hoyos' arguments.

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*Manuel Azuaje-Alamo holds an M.A. from the University of Tokyo and from Harvard University. He is currently a Ph.D. Candidate at the Department of Comparative Literature of Harvard University, and is writing his dissertation in Beijing.*



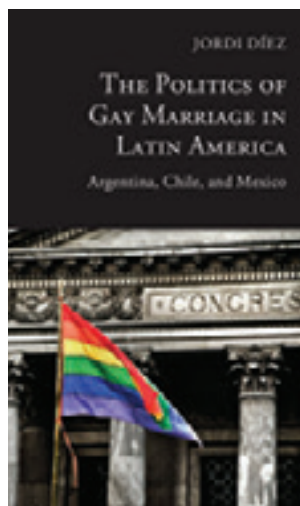
# A Roadmap for Gay Marriage

A REVIEW BY OMAR G. ENCARNACIÓN

**The Politics of Gay Marriage in Latin America: Argentina, Chile, and Mexico** by Jordi Díez (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 302 pages).

Despite its recent successes, the gay rights movement in Latin America is generally ignored in discussions of contemporary Latin American politics. Even students of Latin American social movements have traditionally shunned the activism by gay rights organizations. Consequently, it is not easy for scholars, and much less for the casual observer, to make sense of the patchwork of gay marriage laws emerging from Latin America in recent years. In this first book by a single author on the politics of gay marriage in Latin America, Jordi Díez, a 2014 DRCLAS Peggy Rockefeller Visiting Scholar, offers his take on why gay marriage has met divergent receptions across the region. As such, the book is both pathbreaking and a welcome addition to the growing scholarship on Latin American gay rights politics.

Argentina, Mexico and Chile, are at center of the analysis. Collectively, these countries encapsulate Latin America's varied experience with legislating gay marriage. Argentina legalized gay marriage in 2010, by action from the national legislature, the first for a Latin American nation. In Mexico, some states and the Federal District of Mexico City have moved



forward with gay marriage laws, with the blessings from the courts, while other states have moved in the opposite direction by banning gay marriage. Chile, at the time when Díez was finishing his book, managed to enact a same-sex civil unions law; but for years the country lagged behind other Latin American countries in legislating any kind of state recognition of same-sex relationships.

Díez's theoretical approach for explaining the divergence of gay marriage laws in Latin America draws heavily on two seminal schools of thought from the social movement literature. First and foremost is "resource mobilization," which emphasizes the organizational assets and capacities that social movements bring to their struggles. The second is "framing," which stresses the arguments that social movements make to justify their demands, and the extent to which these arguments res-

onate with the public and the culture at large. In keeping with these theoretical anchoring points, Díez argues that the key factors accounting for gay marriage divergence in Latin America are: (1) the strength of the network of ties linking activists to other groups society; (2) the access to the policy-making arena afforded by particular national political institutions; and (3) the resonance of the claims used by gay activists to demand the expansion of marriage rights to same-sex couples. This theoretical framework is consistently and successfully applied to all three case studies.

The analysis of Argentina compellingly shows how the contacts that gay activists made with members of the political class, the bureaucracy, the media and the human rights community were pivotal to the success of the struggle for gay marriage in Argentina in 2010. Argentine gay activists were also very skilled in framing their demands for marriage less as a right for a particular minority than as a benefit for advancing citizenship and democracy in Argentina. In addition, gay activists in Argentina benefited from several key features of Argentine politics, such as a discredited Catholic Church and the absence of "confessional" parties.

In contrast, gay activists in Mexico and Chile were less socially and politically con-

nected than their Argentine counterparts. They also had the misfortune of having to face "veto" players such as a powerful Catholic hierarchy and Catholic-influenced political parties, and their messaging lacked the cultural and political resonance of Argentine activists. For one thing, the claim that "gay rights are human rights" had less emotional pull in Mexico and Chile than in Argentina, because of the latter's uniquely traumatic experience with human rights abuses under military rule.

Despite offering an excellent roadmap of the emergence of gay marriage laws in Latin America, a great deal remains hidden in Díez's analysis, and mainly because the analysis hews so close to the social movement literature. By and large, Díez neglects to consider the underlying social and political foundations that have anchored the rise of gay rights in Latin America—not just gay marriage, but also laws intended to eradicate anti-gay discrimination and to advance transgender equality. Alongside the rise of a surprisingly effective gay rights movement, these foundations include social and economic modernization, the growing secularization of the public, the reformation of the Latin American constitutions and the judiciary, and the embrace of social liberalism by the Latin American Left. These happenings do

make an appearance in the book, especially early in the analysis, but they are not engaged in a manner that allows the reader to gain a deeper understanding of why some countries have been more successful than others in legislating gay marriage.

Another criticism of the book is the light treatment of the issue of external influence, especially the diffusion of homosexual identities and politics flowing from the developed West to the developing South. Yet this influence is essential for understanding not only why gay rights have erupted across

Manuel Puig and Néstor Perlongher) who endeavored to bring to Argentina the energy and intellectual content of the riots, as embodied in New York's Gay Liberation Front. Indeed, Argentina's Frente Homosexual de Liberación was the only truly viable gay liberation movement formed outside of the developed West. The importance of this development is that Argentina, unlike the rest of Latin America, developed an early consciousness about gay rights activism. Indeed, this consciousness allowed gay activists a historical rooting that has no peers in

tual trends that foreshadowed the advent of the marriage equality movement in Western Europe and the United States, such as the legitimizing of gay rights as human rights and the need to incorporate homosexuality into the mainstream of society.

Finally, it is almost impossible to understand the success of the Argentine gay marriage campaign without accounting for the direct influence of Spain, the first overwhelmingly Catholic nation to legalize gay marriage, in 2005. This influence went well beyond serving as inspiration for the Argentines. At the request of local activists, Spanish gay activists traveled to Buenos Aires to train gay activists on how to craft their campaign for marriage equality and to testify to the Argentine Congress on the need to legislate gay marriage. Spanish NGOs financed media campaigns in favor of gay marriage in Argentina modeled after those implemented in Spain. Not surprisingly, the campaign for marriage equality in Spain and Argentina shared the same slogan: "The same rights with the same name."

All of this said, the most disappointing thing about the book is how the overarching emphasis on political networking as a means for attaining gay civil rights, especially marriage, unintentionally strips gay rights politics in Latin America of much its liveliness, and, frankly, its grittiness. Overlooked by the analysis of the Argentine case are some of the most confrontational aspects of the gay rights campaign,

such as the shaming to which President Carlos Menem was subjected in 1991-92 for his refusal to legalize gay rights organizations (he eventually relented); the storming of the Buenos City Hall by activists in 1996 as city councilors were debating adding an anti-gay discrimination clause to the city's constitution; and the liberal use of *escraches* (screaming), a pressure strategy borrowed from the human rights movement, to force approval of Buenos Aires' same-sex civil unions ordinance (that 2002 ordinance foreshadowed the coming of same-sex marriage in 2010). This in-your-face activism is noteworthy if only because it disrupts the mostly polite story that Díez tells in his book.

None of these critiques detract from the overall coherence and utility of Díez's work. The book is a major contribution to the study of a very important and timely story in Latin American politics. Rather, my critique reveals how big the story of the advent of gay marriage in Latin America actually is, as well as the need to bring a richer set of analytical lenses and perspectives than those provided by the social movement literature to tease out the complexity of the Latin American gay rights experience.

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**Omar G. Encarnación** is Professor and Chair of Political Studies at Bard College. He is the author of *Out in the Periphery: Latin America's Gay Rights Revolution*, forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

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## Argentina was the Latin America country most directly influenced by the 1969 Stonewall Riots.

Latin America in the first place, but also why a country like Argentina would leap over all others in emerging as the region's gay rights leader. While the book rightly recognizes the Argentine gay rights movement as the oldest in Latin America, not much is said about it being the most externally oriented in the region. Even less is said about how Argentine activists have consistently tapped on international gay rights trends to fashion their own activism.

Argentina was the Latin America country most directly influenced by the 1969 Stonewall Riots. This was not happenstance, but rather the deliberate outcome of the actions of a small cluster of activists (led by the writers

Latin America and probably nowhere else in the developing world.

Another important external development of importance to the rise of gay marriage in Argentina was the return of a large number of gay exiles from Europe (France and Spain in particular) after the democratic transition in 1983. They were pivotal in transporting from Europe to Argentina many of the strategies and tactics that guided the activism of the Comunidad Homosexual Argentina (CHA), the most important gay rights group in the country since the democratic transition. While in Europe, Argentine gay activists such as Carlos Jáuregui (the CHA's first president) were exposed to the intellec-

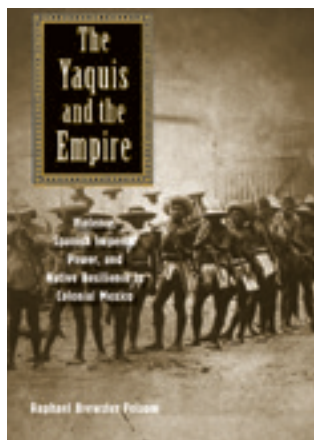


# A New Framework for Colonial Relationships

A REVIEW BY PAULA DE VOS

**The Yaquis and the Empire: Violence, Spanish Imperial Power, and Native Resilience in Colonial Mexico** by Raphael Brewster Folsom (Yale University Press, 2014, 312 pages.).

Winner of the 2015 Latin American Studies Association Social Science Book Award and runner-up for the 2015 David J. Weber-Clements Prize of the Western History Association, *The Yaquis and the Empire* presents a very readable revisionist account of Yaqui history and identity. Rafael Folsom writes with an enviable fluidity and brings alive historical personalities. He paints a vivid and memorable picture of the dramatic scenes he describes. Reading and interpreting documents with care, he is attuned to subtleties that other historians have missed. Thus, he is able to explore the motivations and worldviews of Yaquis, Jesuits and Spanish officials in a way that is reminiscent of the masterful work of Inga Clendinnen (especially *Ambivalent Conquests*, Cambridge 1989, 2nd ed. 2003) and Camilla Townsend (*Malintzin's Choices*, U. of New Mexico 2006). At the same time, like these authors, Folsom weaves detailed accounts of battles and personalities into a larger narrative with a complex and important argument: that the relationship between Yaqui peoples and the various Spanish



actors in the colonial system cannot be understood in terms of domination and resistance, but rather as one of constant negotiation and hard-won alliances that were at all times precarious.

Folsom begins his book with a brilliant depiction of the traditionally accepted view of the Yaqui as the archetypal resisters of Spanish encroachment but finds, through careful and detailed reading of abundant but underutilized archival sources from Mexico, Spain, Italy and the United States, that the opposite was actually true: the Yaqui were in fact some of the empire's most important allies in "fringe" areas of north-western New Spain. As well-known scholars Evelyn Hu-DeHart and Edward Spicer have argued, this does not, however, represent the triumph of Jesuit efforts at assimilation or "reduction" in the missions. Rather, the tenuous alliances forged between Yaquis, Jesuits

and colonial administrators were based upon a policy of appeasement and exchange, where Yaquis offered their children and their cooperation to the Spanish in return for aid, gifts, and material assistance. In this way, Folsom argues that the Yaquis "reduced" the Spaniards as much as, if not more than, they themselves were bound to the colonial system. This attention to ethnographic evidence of the exchanges that took place, exchanges that historians and anthropologists have largely overlooked, makes Folsom's argument particularly original and innovative. He is able to give agency to all actors without falling into simplistic notions of heroes, villains or victims. Rather, his account shows the complexity of the negotiations and illustrates that there were no easy "sides" to identify. Different factions within indigenous and European communities had different and often conflicting goals that kept their relationships in a constant state of tension and flux, all of which serves to give a much more satisfying explanation for what took place than can be provided when understood in binary terms of conquest and defeat or assimilation and resistance.

Folsom's work in fact provides a new framework for understanding colonial relationships not only in the Spanish borderlands of

northern New Spain, but throughout other "fringe" areas in the Viceroyalties and within the imperial core as well. In this way it stands out among much of the borderlands scholarship produced in the last two decades. Although the so-called borderlands regions remained squarely within the claimed jurisdiction of the Viceroyalty of New Spain for the entire colonial period, scholarship on the region has remained largely separate from that of the colonial "core" of central Mexico. Raphael Folsom's monograph, however, like Cynthia Radding's *Wandering Peoples* (Duke, 1997) and Ida Altman's *War for Mexico's West* (U. of New Mexico, 2010), has the potential to bridge the subdivisions within the field and be of interest to and significance for colonial historians generally. In particular, it engages with several emerging historiographical themes in the history of colonial Mexico. Folsom's careful attention to the role of intermediaries, negotiation, and exchange in the colonization process joins a chorus of outstanding work by recent scholars, including Yannakakis, *The Art of Being In-Between* (Duke 2008), Restall, *The Black Middle* (Stanford 2009), and O'Hara and Fisher, *Imperial Subjects* (Duke 2009).

His work also contributes greater understanding of the role of native allies, or

“Indian conquistadors,” in a relatively new area of scholarship that radically alters traditional understanding of Spanish conquest by highlighting, as Folsom does, the dependence of Spaniards on indigenous support. Works in this field (including Matthew and Oudijk, *Indian Conquistadors*, U. of Oklahoma 2007) serve as a basis for understanding conquest as facilitated by indigenous-Spanish alliances that go beyond the well-known collaboration with the Tlaxcalans.

*The Yaquis and the Empire* delves deeply into the processes of state formation that took place in Mexico’s Sonora and Sinaloa during the seventeenth century, a period that until recently has remained largely overlooked in the literature but was a crucial time in the maturation of a highly complex colonial society. In this way, Folsom’s work engages with some of the most important emerging historiographical trends in the field and is especially useful in that it ties borderlands studies together with those of the core Mexican regions.

**Paula De Vos** is associate professor of Latin American history at San Diego State University. Her current book project, which has received fellowship support from the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Institutes of Health, and San Diego State University, concerns the history of pharmacy, chemistry, natural history, and medicine in colonial Mexico.

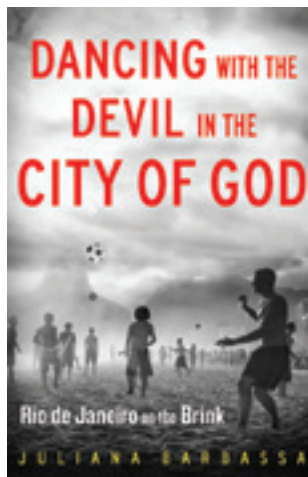
## A Case of Extremes

A REVIEW BY TAMARYN NELSON

**Dancing with the Devil in the City of God: Rio de Janeiro on the Brink** by Juliana Barbassa (Simon and Schuster, 2015, 336 pages.).

Juliana Barbassa and I have similar stories. We are both Brazilian with a chronic case of wanderlust, but in some ways on opposite tracks: Barbassa is from Rio and I am from São Paulo, two cities known for their differences much like Los Angeles and New York. I grew up in Brazil, speaking English at home. Barbassa grew up abroad, speaking Portuguese with family. Yet after being away for almost a couple of decades, we both wanted to go home.

Five years ago, Brazil was booming and hopes were high. Economic growth was at an annual 7.5%, five times the growth of the United States, and millions left the ranks of poverty to join the middle class. Brazil had elected its first woman president and enhanced its international reputation by becoming the next host of the World Cup and the next Olympics. Overall, the country seemed to have turned the expression “Brazil is the country of the future, and always will be” on its head. This was it – the future had arrived. Thousands of Brazilians living abroad returned to Brazil, including Barbassa. Back in November 2010, she returned to Rio as the Associated Press correspondent and



began rediscovering her own country while documenting the changes Rio underwent in preparation for the World Cup and the Olympics, weaving these two narratives together into *Dancing with the Devil in the City of God*.

Any book on Rio during the preparation of two international events could easily fall into the trap of painting an oversimplified romantic or gruesome picture of the city, known for iconic images of fun-loving football, beaches and carnival, as well as alarming violence, organized crime and pollution. Barbassa covers it all. She documents the crack-down on Rio’s sex industry and attempts to reconcile the city’s gay-friendly image with its long-standing machismo. She then goes crocodile viewing with a biologist to learn how animals native to the swamps of Barra are affected by construction on this growing high-end real estate,

and visits a 60-million-ton capacity landfill that is slated to disappear for the international sports events. Through these narratives, Barbassa offers a nuanced glimpse into how Brazil was coping with being the poster-child of rapid growth and inclusivity, while still facing deep-rooted socio-economic problems. Rio served as a case study: it is a city of extremes where all facets of Brazil seem to be magnified, while the World Cup and the upcoming Olympics renewed hope that a firm external deadline and solid investment would catalyze change.

As soon as Barbassa settled in Rio, she witnessed a wave of violent hit-and-run attacks by criminal organizations that have a stronghold over much of the city and were pushing back on police efforts to reassert their presence in these areas. This led her to research the historical roots of the Red Command (*Comando Vermelho*), one of the most infamous criminal networks of Rio involved in arms and drug trafficking. As Barbassa finds out, during the military dictatorship in the 1970s, some of its early founders crossed paths with political prisoners. Barbassa interviews one of these inmates who tells her how they and the political prisoners shared books and food, held study groups, and collectively worked to improve prison conditions. Some of the Red



Command's earliest documents were even signed with the motto "Peace, Justice, and Liberty," but when the political prisoners were released in August 1979 the ideals that had once fueled collective work gave way to a bloody clash in which the incipient Red Command began rul-

plan to urbanize these communities did not get off the ground. Instead, authorities opted to prioritize forced evictions and the "pacification" of these favelas.

Barbassa narrates her experience of witnessing the "pacification" of Vila Cruzeiro, which involved at least

could fix some of Rio's deepest problems. Yet while covering some of these missed opportunities, Barbassa manages to unearth special gems about the city. For example, even though Brazil boomed in the last decade and 70% of Brazilians today have cell phones, only 54% are hooked up to

arrived in Rio, many would argue that the city—much like the rest of Brazil—has gone from boom to bust. The words inflation, unemployment and impeachment have come back into our lexicon. Brazil's economy is expected to contract by 1% in 2015 and the President's approval ratings are at an all-time low. As for the promise of cleaning up the Guanabara Bay, Rio's mayor announced that in August 2015 that staff would be present throughout the Olympic sailing to remove trash and waste to avoid disrupting the competition. While this may serve the purposes of the month-long Olympic games, Cariocas still will be left with 480 Olympic size swimming pools of sewage pumped into the bay every day.

Despite these challenges, changes over the last decade have made a positive imprint on deep-rooted problems that often seem intractable. If I were to critique anything missing from *Dancing with the Devil in the City of God*, it would be that I hoped to learn more about Barbassa's impression of race identity in Brazil. I wish I could meet up with her to discuss this, but she just left Rio and I just landed in São Paulo, ready to begin my own journey back into Brazil.

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*Tamaryn Nelson is a graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School and a Jorge Paulo Lemann Fellow awarded to Brazilians working to transform the country. For the past 15 years she has led innovative research, advocacy and capacity-building on human rights across Latin America.*

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## A common saying in Brazil is that "the more it changes, the more it stays the same" and as Barbassa's writing progresses the reader senses a dwindling hope that Brazil's upswing could uproot some of Rio's deepest problems.

ing organized crime in Rio's prisons. Two years later, an 11-hour standoff between a Red Command bank robber and the police made it evident that the faction was better armed than law enforcement. The Red Command then grew largely unchecked, leaving the letters "CV" spray-painted in red in different areas as a reminder of its increasing stronghold in the city.

Since then little has improved for Rio's underprivileged communities that are either often overlooked or besieged. Killings of young black males are all too common while basic infrastructure and public services are too scarce. The Olympics and the World Cup brought some hope that Rio could become a more inclusive and livable city and numerous proposals were made to improve infrastructure and address the stark inequality between favelas in the hills and the wealthy coastal neighborhoods below. However, even the government's own *Morar Carioca*

600 police and armed forces storming the favela. Once the area was occupied, a Pacification Police Unit (Unidade de Policia Pacificadora, UPP) was set up as a permanent police presence in the favela. The other common tactic, forced evictions, has long existed in Rio but gained force and political backing with the approach of the World Cup and Olympics. Barbassa illustrates this trend through the story of Altair Guimarães, who has faced losing his home three times: in 1967 to expensive apartment complexes, in 1988 to a highway, and in 2011 to the Olympics. This time Altair learned he was about to be evicted from his home by casually watching the news, just like the rest of the city heard about the "removal."

A common saying in Brazil is that "the more something changes, the more it stays the same" and as Barbassa's writing progresses the reader senses a dwindling hope that Brazil's upswing

pipes that channel waste. Rio's Guanabara Bay would be an idyllic setting for Olympic sailing if it were not full of trash and sewage, another problem promised to be resolved for the games. Boggled by how Rio's water got to this point, Barbassa explores the Carioca River, which once fed the city fresh water and played an instrumental role in the establishment of Rio. Ironically, though the natives of Rio were named after it, few people today think of it at a river or even know its name—it is mostly cemented underground, and on one end it bubbles sewage into the ocean like other canals in the city. Barbassa runs by this trickle every day and decides to go upstream to trace the source in the mountains, like Darwin once did. She does this trek with Phellipe, a 28-year old man who grew up in a nearby favela and spearheaded the river's only public clean-up effort Barbassa came across.

Five years since Barbassa

# BUILDING BRIDGES

## Bridges to Modern Medicine

Bringing Cancer Treatment and Education to the Central Plateau **BY LAURIE SCHLEIMER**

**WHEN YOU ASK PATIENTS ON** the oncology ward at the University Hospital in Mirebalais, Haiti, to answer the question “What is cancer?” this is what they say: “*Vreman, mwen pa konnen.*” Honestly, I don’t know.

Patients will say it’s a disease that kills you. A disease that can’t be cured. They tell you, the only thing they’ve heard about cancer is that it’s serious and it’s deadly.

Scientific breakthroughs in recent decades have dramatically reduced cancer mortality in countries where treatment is readily available. But these advances haven’t made it to the world’s poor. Developing countries suffer 70% of global cancer deaths, but receive only 5% of the world’s resources dedicated to fighting cancer, according to the *World Cancer Report 2014* compiled by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. [J:to avoid the awkward Cancer’s]. In Haiti, only a handful of oncologists serve

the population of 10.2 million, most of whom practice in the capital Port-au-Prince and charge prices few patients can afford. As a result, for many patients, cancer is tantamount to a death sentence.

In 2011, the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and the Harvard-affiliated Partners in Health joined forces to establish the first cancer program in Haiti’s Central plateau, seeking to bring the benefits of modern medicine to those who need it most. Hundreds of patients have since made their way to the University Hospital in Mirebalais for treatment, many traveling long distances at great personal expense.

I was first introduced to the PIH/Dana-Farber global cancer team via a 9 a.m. conference call during my first month of medical school. An email was circulated to the team with consult sheets, pathology reports and pictures of breast cancer so advanced it made me shud-

der. Then, over a crackling long-distance connection, Dr. Ruth Damuse began presenting her patients in Haiti to oncologists from the best hospitals in Boston who are helping to supervise their care.

In June, I traveled to Haiti in order to carry out a project developing educational materials for these patients. I joined an ongoing collaboration between the non-profit Global Oncology (GO) and design firm The Meme that aims to produce and disseminate low-literacy educational materials to cancer patients in low-resource settings worldwide.

GO had worked with providers in Rwanda and Malawi to develop a booklet called *Cancer and You* with information about cancer and chemotherapy. My role was to bring Cancer and You to Haiti, conduct the first formal evaluation of its effectiveness as an educational tool, and help the providers at Mireb-

alais implement it as part of routine patient counseling.

I partnered with the oncology social worker, Peter-Gens Desameau, to conduct interviews and focus groups with more than thirty patients. We listened to their stories; we showed them the booklet and asked what they thought. We sought input from the providers themselves and used the results to make recommendations on how to make *Cancer and You* even better.

Most patients at Mirebalais have never known another cancer patient, much less a cancer survivor, when they receive their diagnosis. When you ask patients what they’ve learned since they’ve come to Mirebalais, many will say that they learned that cancer has treatment.

“For a long time I thought that when a person gets cancer, they’d die regardless,” said one patient. “At Mirebalais I learned that I have a chance to be cured. There’s a treatment they give called chemotherapy. If I take this treatment, and I don’t miss any appointments, I have a chance to be cured.”

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**Laurie Schleimer** is a graduate of Brown University and member of the Harvard Medical School Class of 2018. She received a grant from the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies to support her work with cancer patients in Haiti during the summer of 2015.



**Left:** A view of the neighborhood; **Right:** Peter-Gens Desameau, the Zanmi Lasante social worker, goes over cancer information with a patient.





Top: Two men play their music on Havana's Malecón; Bottom: musicians play in the the Plaza de Yauyos in Jauja, Peru.







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## CONTRIBUTORS

**32 Darwin Aquino** is a Dominican conductor, compositor and violinist. **38 Carlos Averhoff Jr.** is a Cuban saxophone player, composer and teacher. **77 Manuel Azuaje-Alamo** is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Comparative Literature of Harvard University. **30 Uli Bader** is the creative director, co-founder and member of the Board of Directors of Teatro del Lago, Frutillar-Chile. **50 Steve Cagan** is an independent documentary photographer. **24 Marcela Davison Avilés** is Managing Director and Executive Producer of El Camino Project. **81 Paula De Vos** is associate professor of Latin American history at San Diego State University. **24 Carla Dirlikov** is an opera singer and founder of El Camino Project. **54 Humberto Delgado** is a Ph.D. candidate in the Harvard Department of Romance Languages. **79 Omar G. Encarnación** is Professor and Chair of Political Studies at Bard College. **2 Brian Farrell** is the Director of the David Rockefeller Center of Latin American Studies. **57 Lindajoy Fenley** is a journalist who organized music festivals in Tierra Caliente, Mexico. **60 Panayotis (Paddy) League** is a Ph.D. candidate in Ethnomusicology at Harvard University. **18 Felipe Ledesma Núñez** is a first year graduate student in historical musicology at Harvard University. **36 Shakira Isabel Mebarak Ripoli** is a Colombian singer, composer and philanthropist. **40 Manuel Monestel** is a Costa Rican musician, sociologist and ethnomusicologist. **82 Tamaryn Nelson** is a graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School. **6 Violeta Nigro Giunta** is a Ph.D. Candidate at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS/CRAL) in Paris. **66 Deborah Pacini**

**Hernandez** is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, Tufts University. **14 Pedro Reina Pérez**, a historian, journalist and blogger, was the 2013-14 DRCLAS Wilbur Marvin Visiting Scholar. **29 Danilo Pérez**, a Panamanian pianist, has received Grammy awards for his musical projects. **46 Larry Rohter** spent 14 years in Brazil as a correspondent for The New York Times and Newsweek. **22 Julia Salvi** is the president of the Victor Salvi Foundation. **11 Matthew Leslie Santana** is a Ph.D. candidate in ethnomusicology at Harvard University. **84 Laurie Schleimer** is a member of the Harvard Medical School Class of 2018. **26 Yana Stainova** is a Ph.D. Candidate in Sociocultural Anthropology at Brown University. **71 Susan Thomas**, a 2011-12 DRCLAS Santander Visiting Scholar, is Associate Professor of Musicology and Women's Studies at the University of Georgia. **73 Joshua Tucker**, a 2009-10 DRCLAS Santo Domingo Visiting Scholar, is Dean's Assistant Professor of Music at Brown University. **64 Chris Vail** is a documentary and news photographer. **44 Sadie Weber** is a Ph.D. candidate in anthropology at Harvard University. **8 Alan West-Durán** is a poet, translator, critic, and essayist. **76 Anna White-Nockleby** is a Harvard Ph.D. student in the Romance Languages and Literatures Department. **29 Patricia Zarate** is the Executive Director of the Panama Jazz Festival and Outreach Coordinator for the Berklee Global Jazz Institute.

FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHERS: **Steve Cagan, Meredith Kohut, Jonathan Moeller, Chris Vail, Carin Zissis** and from Ojos Propios in Peru: **Jorge Jaime Huancayo, Carlos Rojas Villa** and **Nilton Vela**.