

Paraguay: Modern and Contemporary Performance Practice

Contemporary performance practice in Paraguay is inextricably linked to the guitar and diatonic harp, which are used widely in performances of folkloric music traditions, pop and commercial, classical, rock and jazz music. Much folkloric music is based on the *polca paraguaya* and *guarânia* performed by traditional *conjuntos* during festivals and touristic events, but there is a trend among young urban Paraguayans to prefer pop and commercial music. Classical music performance is dominated by the classical guitar repertoire of Agustín Barrios Mangoré (1885-1944) beside performances of symphonic orchestral music, chamber music, and opera. Rock music is widely enjoyed in urban centres with a growing number of festivals and live performances by international artists alongside a thriving local *rock paraguayo* scene that also includes experimental and fusion music. There also exists a small vibrant jazz community in Paraguay.

Folkloric Music Traditions (música popular)

Paraguayan folkloric music traditions, which are closely linked to the Paraguayan nation, are based on various music styles. Most Paraguayans regard the *polca paraguaya* and *guarânia* as the core folkloric repertoire. The *polca paraguaya* is a rhythmically lively song and dance style in 6/8 meter based on diatonic harmony and short melodic phrases, featuring *hemíola* rhythmic patterns and syncopation (*sincopado paraguayo*). There are many variants of the Paraguayan polka, including the *galopa*, thus the term is often used to refer to Paraguayan music in general. The *guarânia* shares similar melodic and harmonic features with the *polca paraguaya*. It was invented as an urban vocal and instrumental musical style in 1925 by Paraguayan composer José Asunción Flores (1904-72). Today, *guaránias* are usually performed on the guitar and diatonic harp, although the latter is often regarded as the instrument *par excellence* for the performance of *guaránias*. Other folkloric music styles include the *vals*, *rasguido doble*, *compuesto*, *marcha*, *balada* and *avanzada*.

Folkloric music is performed by ensembles called *conjuntos*, which consist of one or more singers accompanied by guitars and harp, and accordion or *bandoneón*. The most successful *conjunto* was Los Paraguayos under the leadership of guitarist and singer Luís Alberto del Paraná, which travelled extensively in Europe and South America and achieved international success during the 1960s. There exist numerous *conjuntos* today that perform during feasts of local patron saints and paraliturgical festivities combining dance, fair, food, games, and music like the festivities of San Blás (patron saint of the nation) on 3 February; Kuruzú Ara on 6 May; San Juan (Saint John the Baptist) on 24 June; and the Virgen de Caacupé on 8 December. In the capital, the state-sponsored *Conjunto Folklórico de Municipal Asunción*, which features the *requinto* guitar, also performs Paraguayan folklore for touristic events and activities.

Juan Cancio Barreto is one of the most well-known *requinto* performers today, whose early musical performance style was influenced by folk guitarist Efrén Echeverría (Camba'i). The latter also influenced classical guitarist Tania Ramos, who is widely known for performing her own arrangements of Camba'i's oral folk music repertoire on a custom-made classical guitar. Folkloric music is also performed by large harp ensembles that have become extremely popular in recent years, notably the three hundred-member *Conjunto de Arpas de Sonidos de la Tierra*, alongside festivals dedicated to the Paraguayan harp like the *Festival Mundial del Arpa en el Paraguay* (World Harp Festival in Paraguay). While the guitar is perhaps the most ubiquitous musical instrument in Paraguay, the diatonic harp is regarded widely as a symbol of Paraguayan national pride and social identity, also referred to as *paraguayidad* (Paraguayan-ness) (Colman 2012).

In recent years, folkloric traditions have become displaced by pop and commercial musical styles amongst younger-generation urban Paraguayans, who enjoy music styles like *bachata*, *cumbia* (including *cumbia pop*, *cumbia nacional*, *cumbia internacional*, *tecno cumbia*), *electro house*, *reggaeton*, *big room*, *electrónica*, *electro house*, *moombahton*, and other Latin music styles (Paraguay Hits 2014). A current example of *reggaeton* is the soundtrack album *Talento De Barrio* written by Daddy Yankee for the film of the same title. Some pop styles like *bachata* are accompanied by an innocent boy band imagery, while other styles use displays of sexist and, at times, misogynistic nature with depictions of highly sexualised female performers and hyper-masculine poses by male artists that is typical in some hip hop styles. Pop and commercial music is often performed live through DJ remixes in night clubs like Asunción’s Mouse Cantina or Coyote and in outdoor dance venues during all-night dance parties, and sold “officially” in music shops or via pirate copies on local markets.

Classical Music

Paraguay is inextricably linked to the classical guitar, and many Paraguayans take great pride in the world fame of the classical guitarist and composer Agustín Pío Barrios Mangoré (1885 – 1944). Barrios’ compositions, music recordings, and celebrated status as “greatest guitarist-composer of all time” (John Williams, in Stover 2012:238) are currently undergoing a massive revival in Paraguay that began with Cayo Sila Godoy’s commissioned collections of Barrios’ works since the 1950s and continued with John Williams’ recording of the LP *John Williams Plays the Music of Barrios* (1977). The Barrios revival currently proliferates through the performance practices of *La Escuela de Mangoré* (School of Mangoré), which started with international concert guitarist Cayo Sila Godoy (1919–2014) who is credited with the preservation of Barrios’ legacy, and continues with contemporaries Felipe Sosa (1945-) who, of his generation, has had the greatest success as an international concert guitarist and guitar professor in Paraguay; Luz María Bobadilla (1963-), who studied with Felipe Sosa and Cayo Sila Godoy and is Professor of Guitar at the National University in Asunción and Head of Guitar Programme at the Agustín Barrios Conservatory, Municipal School of Music in Asunción (*Conservatorio Municipal de Asunción*); and Berta Rojas (1966-) who is undergoing a successful career as an international concert guitarist and ambassador of Paraguayan music (Stover 2012:354-57). There is also a growing younger generation of contemporary classical guitarists, notably Rodrigo Benítez and Diego Guzmán, who specialise in the performance of Barrios’ guitar repertoire. There is also an exciting proliferation of mediated performances via recordings based on Barrios’ compositions and arranged in eclectic music styles (Figure 1; Example 1).

<INSERT FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE>

Figure 1: Album *Barrios Hoy Guitarra: Luz María Bobadilla* (2011) under the musical direction of Carlos Schvartzman (pianist/guitarist/bassist, composer, arranger and educator), featuring jazz arrangements of selected Barrios’ compositions. The album was premiered as part of the official Bicentennial celebrations on 9 May 2011 during a televised performance in the Teatro Municipal Ignacio A. Pane, Asunción. Provided to author by Luz María Bobadilla and reproduced with permission.

The *Orquesta Sinfónica de la Ciudad de Asunción* (OSCA; Asunción Symphony Orchestra), established in 1957 by Remberto Giménez, regularly presents performances of classical orchestral music, while promoting symphonic orchestral music by Paraguayan composers (*música nacional*) alongside works from the western European symphonic tradition. Conductors and composers Remberto Giménez (1957-76), Florentín Giménez (1976-90), and current director Luis Szarán (1990-present) have devoted their entire musical careers to the promotion of Paraguayan orchestral music, including arrangements of folkloric traditions like *polcas* and *guaránias*. Meanwhile, the *Orquesta del Congreso Nacional* under director and composer Diego Sánchez Haase is affiliated to the Centro Cultural de la Republica Cabildo, which also houses exhibitions of historical and cultural heritage, including a major exhibition of Agustín Barrios' original manuscripts, recordings, guitars, and photographs within its larger exhibition on Paraguayan culture. Other ensembles performing classical music include the *Orquesta de la Universidad del Norte*, *Orquesta de Cámara Municipal* (Municipal Chamber Orchestra), and others.

Opera was first introduced to Asunción in 1887 by Italian opera company *Compañía Italiana de Opera Bufo*. During the twentieth century, several attempts were made at establishing Paraguayan opera troupes, notably with the establishment of a truly national opera company in 1974 via the creation of the *Centro Lírico del Paraguay*. In 1987, Florentín Giménez composed *Juana de Lara* with texts by Milcíades Jiménez and Velázquez, which is regarded as the first national opera. The opera was launched at the Teatro Municipal on the 450th anniversary of the founding of Asunción and performed on twelve occasions under the musical direction of Florentín Giménez and Luis Szarán. During the 1990s, operatic activity declined significantly, but witnessed a recent resurgence with the 2011 performance of *Norma* under the musical direction of Diego Sánchez Haase at the Teatro Municipal de Asunción by the recently established national opera company *La Ópera de la Universidad del Norte*.

Main venues for the performance of classical music, including classical guitar concerts and opera, include the Teatro Municipal de Asunción, Centro de Convenciones del Banco Central del Paraguay, Club Centenario, Centro Cultural de España Juan de Salazar, as well as smaller venues in the capital. A number of outdoor theatres have been opened outside of Asunción in order to accommodate audiences of several thousands, including the Teatro Ovando, Teatro al Aire Libre José Asunción Flores, and the Anfiteatro Herminio Giménez.

Rock and Jazz Music

Rock music became popular in Paraguay during the 1960s under the influence of American rock music culture and the introduction of electronic instruments, and gave rise to rock music festivals and rock bands in Asunción. Initially an underground rock movement targeted by the state, Paraguayan rock music became “officially” established in 1980 with the emergence of the band Pro Rock Ensemble. During the 1990s, *rock paraguayo* enjoyed new opportunities with the overthrow of the dictatorial rule of Alfredo Stroessner in 1989. Consequently, the rock music scene has enjoyed greater freedom to perform concerts and festivals, mostly in urban centres and the suburbs of Asunción. With the transition to democracy in Paraguay, rock music began to adopt less a tone of protest and to bear little resemblance to earlier forms of Paraguayan rock. New sub-genres began to emerge in the 1990s like power metal, death metal, black metal, and punk, followed in the twenty-first century by new heavy metal sub-styles like black thrash metal, grindgore and death metal, as well as punk rock, ska reggae, and punk ska.

Since the 1990s, there is also a noticeable trend towards staged live performances of *rock internacional*, including John Bon Jovi (1993), Animal (1996), Sodom or Napalm Death (1997). Large corporate rock music festivals (e.g. Pilsen Rock Festival; Quilmes Rock

Festival) sponsored by the companies producing Pilsen and Quilmes beer have attracted record-breaking audience numbers. These festivals are dominated by international rock bands alongside Paraguayan bands like Revolber. The past years have further witnessed large corporate-sponsored rock music festivals, notably the Personal Rock Festival (2011), featuring international bands like Guns N' Roses and Aerosmith alongside Paraguayan rock bands. Another recent festival, Vulcan Rock, was organised by Live Ace Entertainment, with appearances of Rata Blanca and Megadeth alongside Paraguayan exponents of heavy metal. In 2012, Paul McCartney performed a concert to thirty thousand people in the Defensores del Chaco Stadium, followed in 2013 by Ringo Starr, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Iron Maiden, Slayer, and in 2014 by Metallica, Guns N' Roses, and pop/rock act One Direction.

In the 1990s, a distinct trend emerged among some rock bands to explore the roots of Paraguayan folk and traditional music, notably the *polca paraguaya*, *guaranía* and songs in the Guaraní language. Of great impact was the rock version of the popular *guaranía*, “Curuzú Vera” by the rock band Paiko on their album *Al Natural* (2000), which brought rock music into the mainstream media. The album is regarded as an “epic album” that changed the music scene of Paraguay, as for the first time Paraguayan rock music made the top charts of dozens of radio stations and won numerous awards. This style of rock music continued to evolve into, what is known today as, experimental and fusion music, composed and performed by artists and bands like Rolando Chaparro, Dosis, La Secreta, Fauna Urbana, and Made In Paraguay, who merge the 6/8 (compound triple) meter of Paraguayan folklore, elements of jazz, and other world music ingredients in their fusion rock repertoires.

Rolando Chaparro is regarded as one of the most versatile instrumentalists among the new generation of Paraguayan musicians and as a lead figure in the second generation *Nuevo Cancionero* movement. He has written songs and composed music in diverse musical styles, notably rock, jazz fusion, folk fusion, music for theatre, commercial jingles, music for TV series, and entertainment music; developed acclaimed collaborations with well-known folk artists like Efrén Echeverría (Camba'i), Juan Cancio Barreto, Barni Chaparro, and César Cataldo; and performed with the Asunción Symphony Orchestra on numerous occasions. Examples of Rolando's eclectic performance style can be seen in his album *Afro Polka* (2005), a fusion album that grew out of collaboration with the Tamborileros del Cambacúa, drummer musicians of Afro-Paraguayan descent (see Durán 2013), blending African rhythms with Paraguayan folklore, jazz, blues, and rock; and *Bohemio* (2011), a tribute to Paraguayan composer and guitarist Agustín Barrios Mangoré in the style of rock fusion. Chaparro's interpretation of the original compositions is characterised by melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic alteration with jazz-induced influences, alongside improvisation typical for “classical” rock of the 1980s (example 1).

<INSERT MUSICAL EXAMPLE AROUND HERE>

Example 1: Arrangement in the style of *rock fusión* of “Una Limosnita por el amor de Dios” by Agustín Barrios Mangoré from the album *Bohemio* (2011) by Rolando Chaparro, which is framed by a field recording of children singing in Guaraní faded in prior to and after the piece proper.

Beside fusion music, there also exists a small vibrant jazz community in Paraguay, and jazz is performed regularly in smaller pubs in urban centres like Asunción where it first emerged during the 1960s, notably with the opening of the Jazz Club Paraguayo under Elias B. Hernández who formed a jazz orchestra and organized musical activities, presentations, and festivals in the CCPA (Centro Cultural Paraguayo-Americano). Since the 1960s, numerous international jazz musicians have performed in Paraguay, and today a small number of international jazz musicians reside in Paraguay (e.g. Gustavo Viera, Tato Zilly,

Toti Morel, Ronnie Knoller, Rodrigo Quintás, German Lema). Since 2003, the CCPA has held an annual International Asunción Jazz Festival with support from the Municipal and US Embassy. 2014 saw the first jazz festival in Ciudad del Este. From 2000-2005, Carlos Schwartzman was the leader, arranger, and conductor of an influential jazz big band. Since March 2014, the first undergraduate program in Popular and Jazz music has been offered at the Universidad Nacional de Asunción where teachers and students perform regular jazz concerts. The Police Jazz Big Band, consisting of 21 members performing international and Paraguayan-influenced jazz and conducted by Oscar Barreto, has witnessed recent success and launched their first CD in 2014. Prominent Paraguayan musicians today include Giovanni Primerano, Victor Morel, Bruno Muñoz, Rudy Elías, Carlos Centurión, Remigio Pereira, Carlos Schwartzman, Ariel Burgos, Nico Cañete, Paula Rodriguez, Pacita Díez Pérez, David "Pepino" Rodríguez, Sebastian Ramírez, Luis "Riolo" Alvarenga, and José Villamayor.

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See also: Paraguay: History, Culture, and Geography of Music

Further Readings

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