

## **'Barroco hispano-guaraní' Music: Decolonizing Paraguayan Early Modern Repertories**

I was brought up to believe that the 'conquest' of South America was, overall, a great multicultural opportunity that boosted the region's culture. But was it? My name is Camila Corvalán Ocampos, I'm from Paraguay, and in this paper, I describe the issues that constitute the construction of Paraguay's music history. My central topic is the creation and recovery of the musical genre dubbed *barroco hispano guaraní*, *barroco misional*, or *barroco Suramericano*, which is presented in five sections. In the first one, I deal with the colonial period and the settlement of the European conquistadors in South America, the establishment of the Catholic missions, and the use of music as a colonizing tool within them. Then in the second section, I consider the origin of the Creole Guaraní language and its relation to music, explaining how music and language merged in musical life. In the third and fourth sections, I look at the 20th-century recovery of cultural practices from the colonial period, and how the idea of *barroco misional* was adopted by the Paraguayan scholars who constructed Paraguay's music history. Colonial music outside of the Catholic missions is also touched upon. In the final section, I examine *barroco Suramericano* in the context of the current Paraguayan Historically Informed Practice (HIP) movement, in an attempt to explain how musicians from the early modern music movement might, indirectly, reinforce colonialism through their practice.

The imposition of European arts in Paraguay contributed to the displacement of the Guaraní world, devaluing local culture and reinforcing the positioning of Europe as 'universal', correct and superior. Let me explain how this happened.

Before the Europeans arrived in South America at the end of the 16th century, its original inhabitants, the Guaraníes, were distributed in fourteen complex socio-political structures of geographic settlements or provinces named the *guarás*. In 1537, the Spaniard Juan de Salazar de Espinoza founded the fort Nuestra Señora del Asunción in Paraguay's current capital, Asunción. This was the *guará* of the Guaraníes Cariós who, at the beginning of the 16th century, were spread over a wide region extending from the Mato Grosso to the River Paraguay and from the Uruguay and

Parana Rivers to the mouth of the Delta Island. <sup>1</sup> In 1537, the Franciscan missionaries also arrived in the region, followed later by the Jesuit order. What is currently the territory of Argentina, Uruguay, southern Brazil, Paraguay, and eastern Bolivia, was referred to by the Jesuit Order as the Paraquaria Province, the Jesuit Province of Paraguay. Here, in 1610, the Jesuit Order founded the first of their missions, known as *reducciones*. These settlements created a town-based nuclei of Indigenous people, formerly itinerant, whom the Jesuits organized into sedentary communities so that the Indigenous could learn Catholic Christian doctrine alongside European crafts. Between 1610 and 1767 these Jesuit towns, once established, institutionalized a system of Western European instruction in schools where the Indigenous learned the catechism, dance, music, handcrafts, reading, and writing in Spanish, Latin, and Guaraní.

The missionaries realised that a very efficient colonizing strategy was European artistic production. The Jesuits priests swiftly recognized the Guaraníes' ability for music; so, formal musical training was emphasised in order to effectively evangelize the Indigenous (with their supposed consent). Music schools were part of the *reducciones*: each town had its own system of Indigenous teachers and students who remained under the supervision of a Jesuit Priest. The daily flow of life inside the Jesuit towns was accompanied by music. Masses, psalms, dances, motets, hymns, carols, and instrumental pieces were regular parts of the routine, and daily activities were guided by the sound of bells and drums.

Although the conquistadors' domination of the Province of Paraguay was similar to that of other South American regions, there was an important difference: the creation of a local creole language, Guaraní. Guaraní was a fusion of Indigenous, autochthonous, and oral languages into one common written lingua-franca. First the Franciscans and then, building on their model, the Jesuits made Guaraní the 'official' language of the *reducciones*, generating a linguistic, orthographic, and textual practice that resulted in a written language: creole Guaraní. Through forging dialects into one language, the Jesuits could evangelise and dominate culturally 'by consent', a process

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<sup>1</sup> Laura Fahrenkrog Cianelli, *Los 'Indios cantores' del Paraguay - Prácticas musicales y dinámicas de movilidad en Asunción colonial (siglos XVI-XVIII)*, 1st ed., vol. I, Historia Americana (Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: SB Editorial, 2020), 45.

that, although gradual, was drastic. Today, Paraguay is the only South American country in which an Indigenous and a European language enjoy equal status: in 1992 both were made the country's official languages.<sup>2</sup>

While music helped advance the imposition of European culture, it also contributed to the entrenchment of creole Guaraní. Western European art music was composed and adapted by modifying the Indo-European and European devotional texts into Guaraní, with composers also writing musical theatres, operas, and masses in the local language. In combination with this lingua-franca, music's multiple functions boosted the imposition of European education and, at the same time, imbued the Guaraníes with Catholic beliefs, organizing their social and personal habits as well as their strict schedule during their labours for the missions.

The Jesuits were finally expelled from this region in 1767, yet their legacy has accrued authority and power through scholars' creation of a historic 'style' dubbed *barroco Suramericano*, *barroco misional*, or *barroco hispano guaraní*. The idea of *barroco Suramericano* was adopted by Paraguayan scholars, who firstly used it in relation to fine arts and music. Since Josefina Plá (1903-1999) coined the term in 1964<sup>3</sup>, *barroco hispano guaraní* has been linked to the *mestizaje* (creolization) of arts that was said to have 'evolved' during the 17th century, as Europe took over the Paraquaria province. Plá scrutinised architecture, embroidery, goldsmithing, gilding, painting, sculpture, engraving, and printing, dedicating just a few passages to discussing music and dance, treating them as tools for converting the Guaraníes. Elsewhere, the term *barroco mestizo* was used to refer to architecture and fine arts. In the 1960s, Teresa Gisbert and José de Mesa started researching Indigenous art from colonial Bolivia. In 1985 they wrote about what had become known as *mestizo* architecture<sup>4</sup>. Later, scholars likewise conceptualised the *barroco* style in South America as an inclusive, multicultural artistic movement that drew together 'races' that had coexisted during the colonial period. According to this framework, the European Baroque, having brought cultural elements together, worked as an

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<sup>2</sup> Constitución Nacional del Paraguay Honorable Cámara de Senadores, 'Ley Nº 4251 / DE LENGUAS', 2010, <https://www.bacn.gov.py/leyes-paraguayas/2895/ley-n-4251-de-lenguas>.

<sup>3</sup> Josefina Plá, 'El barroco hispano guaraní', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos* No. 173 (May 1964).

<sup>4</sup> Teresa Gisbert and José de Mesa, *Arquitectura andina, 1530-1830: historia y análisis*, 1st ed., Colección Arzans y Vela (La Paz: Embajada de España en Bolivia, 1985).

‘emancipatory force’.<sup>5</sup> As such, the majority of South American scholars justify the teaching of European art during the colonial period as overwhelmingly positive for the Indigenous communities in South America.<sup>6</sup>

However, I ask myself, does the *barroco Suramericano* represent what is known as ‘colonial music’? Did music-making spread only from the Jesuit towns? What about the Spanish settlements or the Franciscan missions? Only a few scholars<sup>7</sup> recognised and described the ways in which music was fostered disseminated throughout the region, taking into account Asunción, the Jesuit province of Paraquaria, the Franciscan missions, other Indigenous’ territories, and further cities and South American provinces. There is still so much to be researched into the understanding of so-called colonial music, the genre *barroco Suramericano* with its different variants, and the European influence on Indigenous practices. In particular, there is an absence of information regarding Indigenous practices and the consequences for their practices in relation to ‘Paraguayan’ music. What is for sure is that music was part of everyday activities, either in a more formal configuration, like greeting political or ecclesiastical visitors, for religious rituals, or civic ceremonies, or more informally, like accompanying the work in the fields, and that, for the most part, this was done by the Guaraníes.

Regardless of its geographic, political, or social source, music was central to colonial life and was indeed led by Indigenous musicians. Yet nearly all the musicians native to the Paraguayan province remain unnamed in the annals. Instead, the names of Jesuit music teachers are passed down. Most of the ideas that are being taught in Paraguay are the product of colonialist assumptions found in letters, official documents, and inventories written by the European conquistadors or missionaries themselves. As has been critiqued by decolonizing scholars, this recording of history was collected, classified, and taken ‘back to the West, and through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized’.<sup>8</sup> A profound shift in the analysis of

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<sup>5</sup> Alfonso Hug and Francisco Brugnoli, *Alegoría Barroca En El Arte Contemporáneo* (Chile: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (MAC), 2006), <https://www.gettextbooks.com/isbn/9789561905474/>.

<sup>6</sup> *Barroco - Capítulo 3*, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q\\_jnYxLNEeA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_jnYxLNEeA).

<sup>7</sup> Laura Fahrenkrog, ‘Los Indígenas Músicos En El Paraguay Colonial: Consideraciones Desde La Movilidad Espacial’, *Resonancias* 20, no. 39 (July 2016): 43–62, <https://doi.org/10.7764/res.2016.39.3>.

<sup>8</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Zed Books, 2021), 1, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350225282>.

the 'rationales' for Paraguayan histories – their epistemologies – is needed in order to acknowledge the Eurocentric legacy endemic to South American studies.

A critical analysis of the ways in which European music was received and adopted by the Indigenous, how their practices were dealt with, or the possibility of acknowledging the Indigenous contributions to a *barroco mestizo*: such decolonial perspectives are passed over or missing from Paraguayan music histories. Instead, music scholars typically praise the Jesuits, crediting them with inducing the *barroco misional*. The justification for this perspective lies in Paraguayan scholars' unexamined belief in a 'universal music' that the Jesuits 'illuminated' for the Indigenous. In other words, 20th-century music scholars perpetuated Baroque Eurocentrism, parroting eighteenth-century writers who argued for Western European art music being 'universal' – that is, a cultural product whose power, appeal, and sophistication allow it to transcend its territorial location. According to most Paraguayan scholars, the spread of European Baroque taste in the arts– its drama, rhetoric, and profusion of details was a foregone conclusion. In fact, social actors and educational institutions combined to project Western European art music as beyond any specific set of values or practices. Music worthy of study became, as in Europe, a serious and complex science regulated by institutions, rules, treatises, and techniques; authority and success depended on the fulfilment of the expectations of audiences and professionals. There is a big gap between how Early Modern music sources from Europeans in Paraguay are treated, and sources for Indigenous music practices, with the spotlight having been thrown on the Jesuits and their legacy – why?

In 1957, Plácido Molina was the first to present evidence regarding the existence of music from the colonial period; his contributions were nevertheless neglected until 1972. In May of the same year, whilst working on the restoration of San Rafael's temple in Bolivia, the architect Hans Roth found a box containing four thousand pages of musical scores and written documents full of valuable information regarding musical practices from the colonial period. According to South American scholars, the discovery of the San Rafael and Santa Ana de Velasco Jesuit archival materials is one of the most important events in South American historical musicology.

<sup>9</sup> In 1986 Paraguayan musician Luis Szarán visited the Chiquitos' archive. After this, and due partly to his findings, Early Modern music in Paraguay has been held almost exclusively to evidence the *barroco misional*. To convert the regions' Indigenous, Jesuit composers incorporated local music practices into their compositions. These adaptations typify scholars' belief that composers' *amalgama hispano guaraní* would 'advance' Paraguayan music-making, turning the act of tracing the 'South American Baroque' into a means of epistemic colonization.

From Szarán's work, art music has, in Paraguay, taken an unexpected turn: Historically Informed Practice (HIP) has helped establish an alternative 'Latin American' historical authenticity. The Paraguayan musicians who perform in these ensembles are dedicated to learning, performing, and teaching Western European Baroque music according to historically informed frameworks. They seek simultaneously to champion *barroco hispano guaraní* or *barroco misional*, cultivating through study-practice and music-making not just Western European art music, but its 'South American version', claiming to create a 'Latin American sound'. <sup>10</sup> Specialists on the subject aim 'to revive a sonorous memory by searching for the best way of reproducing the sounds of those times and from that environment' – which, to their minds, stand for the most splendid musical moment in Paraguayan music history, <sup>11</sup> a conclusion which seems uncritical, to say the least. HIP 'Latin American' Baroque devotees cherry-pick colonial narratives (without scholarly justification), adding Indigenous elements to exoticize the Early Music 'South American' style. If *barroco hispano guaraní* is merely viewed as 'splendid' and not critically analysed, Eurocentric practices will continue to carry excessive weight and authority.

Considering musical 'style' from a colonial perspective, the categorization *barroco Suramericano* or *barroco hispano guaraní* is a term created by modern

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<sup>9</sup> Bernardo Illari, 'El patrimonio musical de Chiquitos, o una verdadera Joya en la selva Boliviana', 1988; *Expresso* - Luis Szarán, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjMdTk4C9-A>; *Barroco - Capítulo 4*, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bwm13\\_H34W4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bwm13_H34W4).

<sup>10</sup> Deutsche Stella Volk, Gaby Reucher, 'Das Bachfest Leipzig lädt Chöre der Welt ein | DW | 03.06.2022', <https://www.dw.com/de/das-bachfest-leipzig-l%C3%A4dt-ch%C3%B6re-der-welt-ein/a-61980165?fbclid=IwAR04Z26qRfLkXckdfEaL3yrl-u9AoeahljG271HWUNly2xH9CKyvNrUAj0>, 6 March 2022, <https://www.dw.com/de/das-bachfest-leipzig-l%C3%A4dt-ch%C3%B6re-der-welt-ein/a-61980165>.

<sup>11</sup> Hugo Ruiz Olazar, 'Szarán busca revivir el esplendor del pasado jesuita', *Diario ABC Color*, 3 March 2019, sec. Política, <https://www.abc.com.py/edicion-impresa/politica/szaran-busca-revivir-el-esplendor-del-pasado-jesuita-1791858.html>.

scholars from incomplete Eurocentric evidence. For these writers, a Jesuit-transmitted repertory is the receptacle for musical characteristics that 'developed' during the 17th and 18th centuries. If questions regarding music from the colonial period are not addressed from a complete, exhaustive research perspective, then critical analysis of this complex cultural phenomenon will remain very limited. Although there are no straightforward answers to queries on Indigenous practices before the Jesuit missions, what is certain is that the voice of the Guaraníes was left aside and unheard. The available historical documents represent a European perspective and we have been left with no option but to infer and interpret from the conquistadors' accounts. The *barroco Suramericano* represents views that merely reinforce European authoritarianism and colonial epistemologies, and concurrent music outside Jesuit transmission remains unaccounted for. The Eurocentric mindset in which the *barroco Suramericano* was born continues to grow within historical and musicological publications in Paraguay with practically no critical analysis of the term's history or consequences. Music scholars and performers in Paraguay often seem to repeat the colonialist aims of the Jesuits: rather than using art to gain insight into the past, they seek to reproduce it.

The name *barroco Suramericano* exemplifies a critically unreflective, Eurocentric discourse in which the authority of the 'Old World' over the 'New' is assumed. Historians refer to a process according to which *mestizaje* (creolization of arts) is said to have advanced cultural production. Although the Indigenous led and contributed to Early Modern art production in the region, Paraguayan scholars have yet to adequately acknowledge their agency, authorship, and how their practices were dealt with. By considering how *barroco hispano guaraní* repertory and compositional procedures helped to extend European power in the region, new perspectives emerge, ones which have led me to posit my research within a decolonizing framework with the aim of constructing fairer and more accurate ways of re-writing the history of the region where I was born.

The colonial period signifies enslavement, genocide, and the destruction of a large part of the cultural and social legacy of the Indigenous of South America, with consequences that clearly exist to this day. Post-colonial literature demands a radical shift, beginning with a critical analysis of the primary sources and a re-construction of the narratives circulating during the past two centuries. An alternative approach could be one whose diverse intercultural elements are given their due place in Paraguayan music history. Scrutinizing how the Jesuits practiced colonization through education allows us to re-think what 'colonial music' is, and what 'Paraguayan' music has been and could be: a *barroco Suramericano* created, in part by the Indigenous, that does not represent colonial music as a whole.