

**Negotiating Musical Style in Panama:
Nationalism, Professionalism and
the Invention of *Música Típica Popular***

by

Sean Bellaviti

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
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ABSTRACT

Negotiating Musical Style in Panama: Nationalism, Professionalism and the Invention of *Música Típica Popular*

Sean Bellaviti, Doctor of Philosophy,
Faculty of Music, University of Toronto (2013)

This dissertation provides both an historical outline and contemporary ethnographic account of the Panamanian musical practice called “*música típica popular*,” which is commonly understood in Panama to denote a specific kind of vernacular music that is widely embraced.¹ By examining the social-historical processes, events and discourses that have contributed to the genre’s development, this study seeks to develop greater understanding of what I argue is this music’s particular and pronouncedly *ambiguous* relationship to prominent themes of Panamanian cultural nationalism. Specifically, I endeavour to show that early on in its history *música típica popular* epitomized Panama’s (liberalist-identified) national ethos of progressive modernity and cultural cosmopolitanism while at the same time maintaining alignments to specific territories and musical practices significant to Panamanian vernacular imaginaries.

The historical outline covers *música típica popular*’s development beginning from the late nineteenth century to the present. Its focus is on the genre’s tandem commercialisation and massification, performance and production technologies and associated performance modalities, shared musical/sonic traits, repertoire and approaches to

¹ The literal translation of *música típica popular* is “popular typical music.” The term “popular” in Panama can mean both ‘of the masses’ and having mass popularity/acceptance. During my fieldwork, the latter was the most common interpretation.

innovation through musical mixing or *fusión* (fusion). One of the central goals here is to trace and examine points of alignment between *música típica popular* and dominant paradigms governing isthmian geo-cultural self-identification—particularly the interplay between a rural-identified “vernacular” culture and the perceived urban cosmopolitanism of Panamanian metropolites.

Through ethnographic research this study also aims to examine the various sonic, social and economic factors that contribute to notions of *música típica popular* as a particular socio-musical collectivity actively in dialogue with discourses of Panamanian national and cultural identity. To this end, notions of “genre” and “style” provide an analytical framework particularly for coming to terms with the interplay between sensibilities of convention and common practice, and a need for meaningful differentiation among practitioners. It is my contention that while *música típica popular* practitioners actively cultivate links both to themes of Panamanian music-cultural vernacularism and cosmopolitanism, on the whole the relationship of the genre to nationalist discourse should be more properly understood as one of sustained ambiguity: not wholly aligned to one theme or the other, and in fact doggedly and often productively resistant to such binary categorizations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I chose to make *música típica popular* the subject of my doctoral research in late 2005, I knew I was taking a leap of faith. I had never been to Panama, my aural familiarity with the music was minimal and scholarship on the topic was pretty much nonexistent. For these reasons, writing a research proposal (a condition of my being able to travel to Panama and begin fieldwork in earnest) became an unexpectedly arduous undertaking. It was at this time that I had the overwhelming feeling that I was going at it alone. Fortunately, I couldn't have been more mistaken and in fact, researching for this study became one of my most social experiences to date. The following is but a small token of my gratitude to a great number of people who, in many and varying capacities, have helped me realize this dissertation.

This project simply would have not been possible without the help, support, and guidance of my dissertation advisors and committee members. I would like to thank my supervisor James Kippen for his steadfast support and confidence in my work. Among the many things I learned from him was a respect and consideration for the sound dimension of any musical practice. Throughout the process of researching for and writing this dissertation, I have endeavoured to take this particular advice to heart and I believe my work and (ethno)musical experience has been considerably enriched for it. My co-supervisor Jeff Packman became a presence at U of T approximately halfway into my study. His intellect, prodigious knowledge of Latin American music and related scholarly concerns, and, perhaps most importantly, devotion to his students immediately endeared him to me. As my dissertation drew nearer to completion, Packman assumed an ever greater role in shaping this

project (always for the better, of course) as well as my own thinking as an academic. For that and so many other things too numerous to list here, I owe him a great deal of gratitude.

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My decision to study *música típica popular* can largely be credited to Lucho De Sedas who, along with his wife Leda De Sedas Amaranto and son Juan Diego, not only introduced me to *conjunto* music, but also provided me with my initial contacts in Panama. Throughout the course of my research I benefited immensely from the high regard in which Lucho is held among his *conjunto* peers and Panamanians at large. I feel privileged that I can call *Don Lucho* a personal friend, informant and teacher.

I am grateful to Rodolfo “Fósforo” Jaén and his wife Yadira who provided me with my first ‘home-base’ in Panama and took me to my first *bailes* where I experienced the awesome beauty and power of *música típica popular* for the first time.

Relationships best described as that of a ‘second family’ are often reported among researchers working far from home and I, thankfully, am no exception. Mine are the Jaén Cano family, which include Jorge (Sr.), Maria, Dorissabeth Ariza, Jorge (Jr.) and “Javier” (also Jorge [Jr.]). When I first moved to Las Tablas it was they who took me into their home and eventually (and only on my insistence) set me up with my own house some doors down from theirs. It is with incredible fondness that I remember the many meals we shared together and long conversations we had. The eldest son, Jorge Jaén (cited frequently

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INTRODUCTION

TO THE STUDY

This study examines the Panamanian musical practice called “*música típica popular*,” which is commonly understood in Panama to denote a specific kind of vernacular music that is widely embraced.³ Its aim is to query the relationship between this music and the territory and social construction of the Panamanian nation and Panama as a modern nation-state. It maps a history of musical practices, commercialisation and musical mixing, and suggests that at various points in its history *música típica popular* epitomized the Panamanian national ethos of progressive modernity and cultural cosmopolitanism while underscoring the nation’s want and need of a vernacular⁴ cultural legacy and identity. I argue that through their professional lifestyles and musical practices, genre practitioners actively negotiate (and indeed exploit) the space within and between these dual national allegiances so as to cater to a socially and territorially disparate audience-base. In the process, I argue that musicians take part in shaping Panamanian geo-cultural and musical imaginaries.

As a form of commercial music that has achieved a high degree of mass popularity, *música típica popular* can be understood and identified along a number of trajectories that characterize Panama’s complex social, cultural and ideological landscape. It is generally accepted wisdom that *música típica popular* originated in the rural communities of Panama’s

³ The literal translation of *música típica popular* is “popular typical music.” The term “popular” in Panama can mean both ‘of the masses’ and having mass popularity/acceptance. During my fieldwork, the latter was the most common interpretation.

⁴ Quoted material (be it written text, interviews or song lyrics) appear between double quotations, whereas single quotations are used for my (original) prose.

Azuero peninsula (namely in the provinces of Los Santos and Herrera) sometime around the 1950s. As the idiom developed a greater and more widespread listenership, it gradually became assimilated into the culture and economy of Panama's more affluent urban centres while at the same time maintaining close links with its rural-identified *campesino* (i.e., peasant) constituency. Today, professional *música típica popular* groups maintain busy performance schedules, traveling throughout the country performing for community events and festivals as well as recording an album every year for local airplay and distribution.

In stark contrast to its local popularity, *música típica popular* practitioners have struggled for recognition both within and beyond their national boundaries. Not unlike many aspects of Panama's material and expressive culture, *música típica popular* remains largely unknown or un-exported beyond its own borders. The reasons for the genre's apparent inexportability are often attributed to a range of factors, including highly formalized performance contexts that are resistant to change and not inclusive of other genres; perceived similarities with Colombian *vallenato*,⁵ and the lack of a readily identifiable genre label. Similarly, *música típica popular*'s distinctiveness from accepted forms of folkloric music, use of non-'traditional' instruments and overt commercialism has often led to its exclusion from the vision of Panamanian music promoted by state institutions and the nation's cultural elite.

In considering the genre's relationship to notions of Panamanian national identity, it is useful to point out from the onset that *música típica popular* is not a typical example of musical nationalism in that it has neither been the object of folkloric veneration nor has it

⁵ Panama shares a long and interesting history with Colombia and the similarities between their respective musical forms are tangible. While *música típica popular* musicians often note the similarities between their music and its Colombian counterparts, the degree to which one style has influenced the other remains a part of an ongoing discussion among genre practitioners and aficionados.

been successfully exported as a decidedly national product (as has been the case of commercial Colombian vallenato, for example). On the contrary, *música típica popular* has traditionally been criticized for its lack of ‘authentic’ engagement be it with recognized folkloric idioms or transnational genres. At the same time the scope of the music’s broad appeal (nearly exclusively) among Panamanian audiences has long made it a music-cultural phenomenon that is simply too great to ignore. At various points I argue that it is precisely this anxiety regarding *música típica popular*’s (ostensibly problematic and resultantly ambiguous) relationship to dominant narratives of Panamanian cultural nationalism that has cemented the relationship between the two. Following is a brief outline of some of the key issues germane to this study.

This study takes as a given the social construction of nationalist sentiment as postulated by Benedict R. O’G. Anderson’s notion of “imagined communities” (1991) and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s idea of “invented traditions” (1983). In this sense nationalism is understood as dynamic, responding to the needs of the nation as it negotiates the proverbial “tightening” and “loosening” of the hyphen between nation and state. This study focuses in particular on the process and “style in which [nations] are imagined” (Waterman, 1990:376). It begins with nationalist ideas connected to Panama’s struggle for sovereignty during the late nineteenth century and redefined over the course of the twentieth century as the new Republic strove to consolidate its position within a broader national community. In Panama as in most every modern nation-state, nationalism constitutes a powerful and far reaching ideology that arguably impacts all forms of cultural expression taking place within the nation’s borders. Recognizing, however, the inherent difficulties of extrapolating ideas of nationalism “from the elite to the masses, the literate to the illiterate”

(Hobsbawm, 1992:48) and so forth, this study identifies points of dis/continuity and in/coherence between the *official* discourse of the nation—as outlined in historical documents and musical treatises—and more informal (typically oral) discourses of music as articulated by the practitioners themselves.

My understanding of the relationship between musical practice and ideas of Panamanian national identity is intrinsically linked to the physical and cultural geography of the Panamanian country. Panama is perhaps remarkable among modern nation-states in terms of the degree to which its geography has factored into the construction of nation and national identity—or so most Panamanians would likely argue. To understand Panama therefore is to understand its territory and the natural and manmade boundaries that have appreciably shaped the lives of its inhabitants. This study recognizes that on one hand relationships between territory and social organization are dynamic and linked to factors of economy, political organization (both local/national and international), and cultural practices; on the other hand it acknowledges a sustained and concerted effort on the part of the Panamanian elite and foreign interests to shape the isthmian territory in *specific* ways so as to enable a *specific* national vision, namely the development of the trans-isthmian thoroughfare (culminating with the construction of the Panama Canal) and interoceanic transnationalism, respectively. Throughout this study I endeavour to unpack the relationship of *música típica popular* practitioners to a) a specific region in Panama known as the Azuero peninsula and b) to the broader national territory within which musicians cater to a geographically dispersed and socially diverse audience-base. I argue that together both these alignments form important paradigms that link the music to broader discourses of Panamanian musical nationalism.

For much of its history, official Panamanian nationalism was predicated on the belief that the nation should exploit its geographical situation and enable interoceanic (often couched as global) travel and trade. It is this vision of the role of the isthmus that led to the construction of the interoceanic canal and contributed to an enduring and pronounced cosmopolitan ethos within the national imagination (see Szok, 2001 and 2012, and Castillero Calvo, 2004). My study shows how at various stages of its development, *música típica popular* performance practices became increasingly aligned with this vision of Panamanian transnationalism as shown by sustained links to transnational and urban musical styles and practices (resulting in various forms of musical hybridity), the tandem engagement of musicians with new forms of technology and the increasing commercialisation of the genre, as well as the peripatetic lifestyles of professional musicians themselves.

Following the construction of the canal (and galvanized by ongoing friction with U.S. protectionist policies), official Panamanian nationalism showed signs of increasing conservatism and reactionism—following what historian Peter A. Szok (2001) describes as a progression from “xenomania” to “xenophobia.” This shift found its parallel in projects of cultural ‘revival’ and ‘rescue’ (often imbued with feelings of nostalgia for a distant, colonial past), wherein music from the Azuero peninsula figured prominently. Somewhat paradoxically (albeit quite to the point), *música típica popular* was not only frequently excluded from the rubric of musical genres endorsed and promulgated by projects of cultural revival, but often understood in dialectical opposition to vernacular expressions of *Azeruense*—rebranded as ‘Panamanian’—culture. Many of the reasons for this exclusion are one and the same as those listed above.

I argue that it is within and between the borders of these seemingly competing (albeit historically tenable and enduring) versions of Panamanian nationalism that *música típica popular* practitioners forge a unique musical identity, that is, one that is neither wholly aligned to any particular binary paradigm and remains staunchly and often productively resistant to such facile categorizations. In particular, I highlight the ways in which musicians capitalize on the cultural caché of the Azuero peninsula by alternately cultivating multi-regional, urban-rural performance territories while maintaining tangible links to the Azuero peninsula via nominal homesteads, band naming practices, and performative posturing. Similarly, I show how through practices of (conscious) musical mixing or “*fusion*” (fusion), musicians actively resist facile categorizations of what the music is (stylistically and otherwise) and even what it is called, and by so doing cultivate a broad audience-base divided along rural-urban, regional, and class lines.

In its examination of the role played by ideas of cosmopolitanism and vernacularism (what I will refer to as the “first” and “second” themes of Panamanian nationalism, respectively) in fomenting popular twentieth century musical nationalism, this dissertation is similar to other case studies such as Hellier-Tinoco (2012), Gus (2000), Wade (2000), Vianna (1999), Scruggs (1998a, 1998b, and 1999), Austerlitz (1997), Moore (1997) and Turino (1993). My study, however, endeavours to move beyond this important writing on musical nationalism in Latin America through its focus on relationships between nationalist imaginaries and musical practice that are for the most part implicit and oblique rather than reliant on (characteristically top-down) practices of state support and/or elite appropriation. Further distinguishing this study from the majority of case studies of Latin American musical

nationalism is that I examine a music that despite its remarkable popularity within the nation-state has almost never been exported beyond its borders.⁶

Much of the research for this study resulted from fieldwork I conducted in Panama between June 2006 and May 2008—a total stay of nine months. Whilst in Panama, I maintained a residence in Las Tablas (the provincial capital of Los Santos) and Panama City, and traveled frequently throughout the isthmus often accompanying performing ensembles (*conjuntos*) on their weekly tours (called *giras*). Also I attended, observed, and documented events that featured performances of *música típica popular* or other related musics such as Panamanian “*música folklórica*” (folkloric music) presentations and sung *décimas* (ten-line poems). The commercial “*baile*” or dance is the principal context in which *música típica popular* is performed, and consequently I made it a point to attend as many of these events as possible—see “Appendix G” for a list of *bailes* attended. I also conducted extensive interviews with local musicians and music aficionados. Interviews focused on *música típica popular* performance practice (e.g., instrument roles, characteristic performance techniques, and compositional forms), history, contemporary performance contexts, professional lifestyles and *conjunto* economics.⁷ The goal was to gather information on the criteria, terminology, and modes of discourse that contribute to a locally situated understanding this music. An important part of my research was also somewhat more informal in character and involved “hanging out,” taking accordion lessons, attending house parties and passing many an evening listening to music in local *cantinas* (bars) in and around Las Tablas. These forms

⁶ Scruggs work on Nicaraguan music (1998a, 1998b, and 1999) would be a notable exception.

⁷ I preceded each interview with an explanation of the focus and goals of my research, and explained to informants how they would be represented in my work. All informants cited by name in this dissertation either read and signed a Consent Form (*Planilla de Consentimiento*) or—if they preferred—gave their full verbal consent to be included in this study. In certain cases I exercised caution by omitting names of those whose words I felt might result in social and/or professional disadvantage, however remote the chances. Here, the informant is either listed as anonymous or is given a pseudonym.

of participant/observation often led to insights in how musicians realize their musical goals especially within *música típica popular*'s sometimes competitive and band-oriented scene.

Archival research of various types aided in locating events, practices and discourses within an historical framework, and also frequently lead to new areas of inquiry. During the course of my fieldwork I frequently consulted the fairly substantial collection of Panamanian print media (namely newspapers and periodicals) housed in Panama's *Biblioteca Nacional Ernesto J. Castillero R.* These resources provided valuable descriptive information on *música típica popular*'s development and also revealed the discursive conventions surrounding this practice. On various occasions, the insights provided by this research came to be used as a reflexive tool in the field to elicit further aesthetic and stylistic analysis from my key informants. Finally, commercially available recordings were vital to understanding musical sound both in terms of contemporary conventions and change over time.

This study is organized into three parts each made up of several chapters. A general historical timeline forms the framework for this text, with Parts I and II mapping out a history of Panamanian nationalism and *música típica popular*'s development over the course of the twentieth century, and Part III presenting an ethnography of contemporary *conjunto* practice. The broad historical scope of this study necessarily requires the use of varied forms of source material, analytical methods and theoretical approaches that are often specific to each section of this work and are discussed in their order of appearance.

PART I

PANAMANIAN NATIONALISM AND THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF *MÚSICA TÍPICA POPULAR*

In Part I, I examine the development of Panamanian nationalism followed by an outline of the early history of *música típica popular*. Chapter 1 traces the history and underlying ideologies of Panamanian nationalism from the early colonial period to the first decades of the Republic. Chapter 2 examines the musical practices of an area in Panama known as the Azuero peninsula and focuses on the violin *conjuntos* of the early twentieth century.

CHAPTER 1

ISTHMIAN GEO-CULTURAL FORMATIONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PANAMANIAN NATIONALISM

In this chapter I examine the development of Panamanian nationalist sentiment, identity and ideology beginning with the arrival of Spanish colonists in the early sixteenth century and concluding with the first decades of the twentieth century during which time Panama laboured to establish itself as a sovereign nation-state. A central focus is the creation and consolidation of the trans-isthmian thoroughfare, which, I argue, not only transformed the geo-political orientation and organization of the isthmus, but also formed the basis for Panama's progressively liberalist national identity.⁸ I shall highlight the role that colonization played in establishing the trans-isthmian trade route and the region's geo-political organization. I also outline the development of Panamanian nationalism and the manner in which Panama's ruling classes strove to develop the region's transnational potential under the auspices of Colombia. Finally, I examine the character of Panamanian nationalism following the founding of the Republic of Panama in 1903, during which time Panama pursued its liberal aspirations while at the same time fostering reactionary and perceptibly nostalgic tendencies. My understanding of this point of Panama's history is significantly

⁸ I use the term "liberalist" and "liberal" following Szok (2001) and in reference a specific political and economic thinking that in Panama and elsewhere in Latin America emphasized among other things an opening up to foreign markets.

indebted to the work of historian Peter A. Szok (2001)—who in turn draws on ideas of Panamanian nationalism articulated by Panamanian historian Ricuarte Soler (1977 and 1986).

One of central aims of this chapter is to show how early twentieth century Panamanian nationalism maintained the political goals and ideologies of nineteenth century Panamanian liberalism while at the same time fostering strong feelings of ambivalence and disillusion with the nation's modernization project. Both of these seemingly oppositional albeit historically tenable and at times ideologically coherent positions contributed to what Szok describes as Panama's "divided identity" (2001:62): progressive and liberal on one hand, and reactionary and nostalgic on the other. In later sections of this chapter I will show how these two themes of Panamanian national identity had strong alignments to various forms of cultural expressions (and music in particular) that might be termed cosmopolitan and vernacular, respectively.

An historical overview of Panama's colonial and Republican history, and the rise of nationalist sentiment and twentieth century nationalism

For much of its pre-colonial history the Isthmus of Panama had served as an inter-continental land bridge enabling movement of peoples and goods along a general north-south axis. However, with the arrival of the seafaring Spanish colonialists in the first decade of the sixteenth century, the geopolitical significance of the isthmus changed dramatically. The isthmus offered a much desired land route between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, thus

more effectively connecting Spain with its colonies on the western seaboard. Panamanian historian Alfredo Castillero Calvo notes that this change was swift and drastic, where “[t]he Europeans radically substituted [the isthmus’] pre-existing geographical function for another radically new one” (Vol. 1, Tome 1, 2004:115). This particular function of the isthmian territory is typically expressed using the terms “interoceanic” and “trans-isthmian,” which have come to denote movement along a general east-west axis.⁹

Two important factors that contributed to the transformation of what Castillero Calvo has called the “spatial logic” of the isthmian territory (Vol. 1, Tome 1, 2004:113), and include the first trans-isthmian crossing and the colony’s subsequent colonization strategy during the fourteenth century. In 1513, Spanish *conquistador* Vasco Nuñez de Balboa successfully led an expedition across the isthmus to the Pacific Ocean. The ‘discovery’ of an inter-oceanic land route effectively galvanized efforts of territorial expansion toward the Pacific coast and led to the construction of the first trans-isthmian road/path called the Camino Real or Royal Road.¹⁰ The isthmian route reconnoitred by Balboa came to shape the character of isthmian colonization and in particular the role of urbanization as a means for enabling territorial expansion¹¹ and consolidating the trans-isthmian thoroughfare.

One of the colony’s earliest administrators Pedro Arias de Ávila (also Pedrarias Dávila; 1440-1531) can be credited with establishing the paradigm for Panama’s present

⁹ Although the Isthmus of Panama is shaped like an “S” lying on its side, most discussions of the Panamanian territory describe a thin strip of land oriented along a north-south axis with Atlantic Ocean to its east and Pacific Ocean to its west. This seeming misrepresentation is not surprising considering the significance of the isthmus in connecting these two bodies of water. Given that these relationships are foundational to my understanding of Panamanian nationalism, I too will occasionally refer to the Isthmus in these (very general) terms.

¹⁰ For this and other accomplishments, Balboa is celebrated as a hero among Panamanians today and the state’s official currency presently bears his name.

¹¹ With respect to early Panamanian urbanization strategies, Castillero Calvo writes: “the city was, during the Conquista, the main instrument for the articulation of space/territory, and in the case of the isthmus of Panama, was essential to the definition of its geographical function and for the establishment of its territory as place of passage and transit” (Vol. 1, Tome 1, 2004:103).

geopolitical organization. Moving outward from Nombre de Dios (one of the first successful colonial settlements on the isthmus), Pedrarias founded the coastal city of Panama to the south and the inland cities of Natá and Fonseca to the west. Somewhat symbolically, Castillero Calvo observes that together these four cities took on the shape of “an axial cross formed along a north-south, east-west axis”¹² (see Figure 1.1) and were strategically situated so as to connect the isthmus with a rapidly expanding Spanish empire. Castillero Calvo describes the trans-territorial impetus of Pedrarias’ urbanization strategy as follows:

Panama and Nombre de Dios as port terminals to link with Spain and the world [in the] discovery [of] the Pacific; Natá, as a granary for the first two [cities]; [and] Fonseca [...] to link with the expansive wave that descended from Mexico with [Hernán] Cortés. The character of the interoceanity of the Isthmus remained in this way permanently established; from then on Nombre de Dios and Panama would be the cities of transit, and the Isthmus, the American imperial route *par excellence*. (Vol. 1, Tome 1, 2004:116)

According to Castillero Calvo, Pedrarias’ expansionist strategy demonstrated “an extraordinary vision for the geographical potential of the Isthmus”¹³; simply put, this vision was one that was conspicuously trans-territorial and outwardly oriented.

¹² Vol. 1, Tome 1, 2004:116.

¹³ Vol. 1, Tome 1, 2004:116.

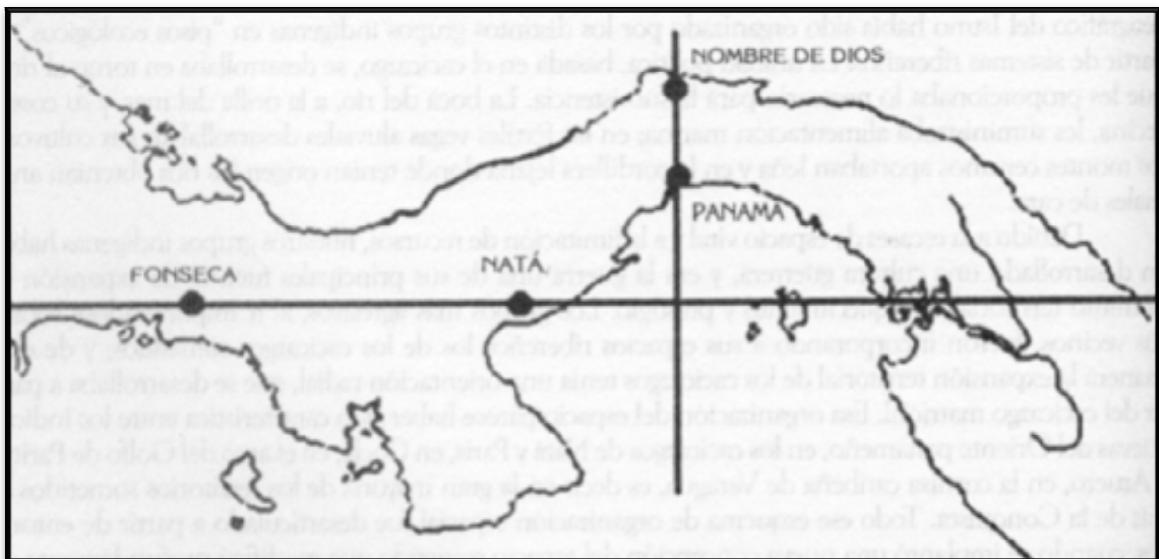


Figure 1.1: Sixteenth century geopolitical organization of the isthmus¹⁴

With the trans-isthmian route established, the Spanish colony endeavoured to exploit its geopolitical advantages with varying degrees of success and largely at the expense of other types of livelihoods. Panama's role as a thoroughfare and entrepôt for the movement of goods and merchandise as well as people made it especially dependent on trans-Atlantic trading networks. As a result, as one text reads, “[t]he greatest events in Panamanian history have usually occurred in some other country” (Biesanz and Biesanz, 1955:24). As a Spanish colony, Panama's economic success or lack thereof was contingent on the welfare of the Spanish Empire. Initial efforts to capitalize on the region's unique geography were largely successful due to Spain's monopoly on trans-Atlantic trade and European mercantile economies. However, as the Spanish Empire began to decline in the mid-seventeenth century so did the fortunes of isthmian traders and the colony's ruling classes—largely made up of Spaniards and their descendants called *criollos*. And by the time Spain's Bourbon kings undertook measures to liberalize trade in the mid-eighteenth century, Panama was

¹⁴ Castillero Calvo, Vol. 1, Tome 1, 2004:116.

irrevocably affected and in the end “Spain’s desperate efforts to maintain its colonial trade monopoly had been self-defeating.”¹⁵ The decline of the Spanish Empire called into question the ability of the local population to “earn its livelihood, whether as the hoteliers and transporters of the traders or as the middlemen of their business” (Szok, 2001:18) and would become a key factor in the development of Panamanian nationalism and independence movement.

It is important to note that despite the seeming ‘natural’ role of the isthmus as a point of intercontinental and interoceanic transit, the region’s potential as an interoceanic land-bridge did not happen by any means naturally but rather was brought about largely through a sustained process of colonization, which in turn reflected specific ideas regarding the role of that territory in relation to broader geopolitical formations. Moreover, these ideas persisted over time and as such formed ideological linkages with the region’s understanding of its own history. Over a short period of time the actual isthmian or intercontinental character of Panamanian territory would be eclipsed by its function as interoceanic crossing point, which would come to permanently define “the spatial logic of the Panamanian territory,”¹⁶ that is, as a land bridge connecting the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

Early expressions of Panamanian nationalism

On November 28, 1821, members Panama’s ruling elite made a formal declaration of independence and shortly thereafter swore allegiance to the union of Nueva Granada

¹⁵ Meditz et al, 1989:13.

¹⁶ Castillero Calvo, Vol. 1, Tome 1, 2004:113.

(subsequently the Republic of Gran Colombia and later Colombia).¹⁷ Despite several independence struggles, Panama would remain a department of Colombia for just over eighty years until the founding of the Republic of Panama in 1903. Tracing this period in Panamanian history in which Isthmians began to imagine themselves as belonging to a nation-state distinct from Spanish colonial and later Colombian state apparatuses has its challenges. Research remains to be done on how and the manner in which nationalist sentiment began to shape not only the world view of the Panamanian elite, but also the individuals living within the bounded territory of the imagined nation. Having said that, Szok highlights both the drafting of the *Acta Hanseatica* (see below) as well as instances of armed conflict tied to Panamanian independence struggles as strong indications of an emerging Isthmian nationalist movement during this period.

The impetus for Panama's independence from Spain can be largely attributed to the steady decline of the Spanish Empire as well as its own economic decline whilst under colonial rule. The decision, however, by Panamanian patriots to annex themselves to the Colombian state and form the Republic of New Grenada¹⁸ rather than seek complete political sovereignty is a somewhat more contentious issue and remains a topic of discussion among scholars of Panamanian nationalism. On one hand, the swift decision to annex the Panamanian territory to the Colombian state calls into question the legitimacy of the very idea of an indigenous isthmian nationalism. In this sense, the actions of Panamanian patriots would suggest that Panamanian nationalism is little more than the product of an opportunistic

¹⁷ On November 10, 1821, the city of Los Santos located in the heart of the Azuero peninsula proclaimed its independence from Spain. This declaration became known as “el grito de independencia” or “the shout of independence,” which to this day remains a source of regional pride for people of the region. The formal declaration followed shortly afterwards.

¹⁸ “In 1985, New Granada became the Grandine Confederation; five years later, it was renamed the United States of Colombia under the Río Negro Constitution” (Szok, 2012:17).

regional elite in collusion with foreign interests—an idea that would seem to be given credence following the actions of the U.S. in securing Panama's twentieth century independence. Szok, on the other hand, argues persuasively that from the point of view of the elite classes, the decision to join Colombia was designed to help the nation realize its ultimate national role, that is, to enable transnational and interoceanic trade and transit. Panama's economic setbacks in the eighteenth century left the country ill-equipped to deal with the challenges that would result from complete independence and consequently, he writes, "patriots were understandably nervous about rebelling against Spain and establishing themselves immediately as an autonomous country" (Szok, 2001:19).

Szok also argues that "the minority status of country's white elite" (2001:19) was also a critical factor in Panama's annexation to Colombia. For much of its colonial history, Panama was "a major distribution point for slaves headed elsewhere on the mainland" (Meditz and Hanratty, 1989:9). As a result, Lancelot S. Lewis points out, "Africans from all nations were brought [...] to Panama since the isthmus served as a major port of labor supply to be distributed to other parts of the Spanish Empire" (Lewis, 1980:2). While most slaves brought to Panama were destined to toil in other colonies, a substantial number of slaves remained on the isthmus and, among other things, were indispensable to the successful movement of people and goods along the trans-isthmian trade route. As would be expected, African and Indian slaves formed the lowest rung of a rigid social hierarchy that saw *peninsulares* (Spanish-born residents) and *criollos* (those of Spanish ancestry born in the colony) in positions of political and social power (Meditz and Hanratty, 1989:14). By the early nineteenth century, these latter elite groups would become a minority group of the

Panamanian population.¹⁹ Keen on maintaining the racial status quo (and likely intent on avoiding a repeat of the Haitian revolution), the white Panamanian oligarchy saw Gran Colombia as a means of preserving its own political hegemony.²⁰

Beginning around the nineteenth century, Panama's transnational economic aspirations found strong alignment with the liberalist ideology, which sought to create links with economically-established foreign powers. The role of liberalism in fomenting nationalist sentiment was far from uncommon in postcolonial Latin America,²¹ however, Szok suggest that in Panama it existed in a more progressive and exaggerated form. Panamanian liberals believed their economic success was *wholly* contingent on their ability to exploit the isthmian territory to its fullest potential. This meant to restore Panama to its former glory as a successful point of trade and “a potentially busy emporium of the North Atlantic economy” (Szok, 2001:15). Similarly, Panamanian liberalism was not guided solely by economic pragmatism, but also tended “to promote Europeanization and to seek out foreign allies who would ‘civilize’ the isthmus” (Szok, 2001:15). As I will illustrate below, this point is significant particularly in terms of understanding how Panamanian nationalism played out on the cultural front.

Arguably the most coherent expression of Panama's liberal nationalism is found in the *Acta Hanseatica*, or Hanseatic Act, wherein Panama declares itself a “Hanseatic State” of Gran Colombia and, as Szok explains, “a place of international transit and a community traditionally dependent on its close interaction with foreigners” (Szok, 2001:21). According to Szok, the Hanseatic Act “outlined the [Panamanian elite's] national aspirations and

¹⁹ Szok writes: “In 1790 just 12% of the capital's inhabitants were white, while another 22% were slaves, and 66% were free people of color” (2001:19).

²⁰ See Szok, 2001:19.

²¹ For a concise outline of other case studies that examine the role of liberalism in nineteenth century Latin America see Szok, 2001:14-15.

feelings of identity” (2001:21) and nation’s role within Gran Colombia. Despite this attempt on the part of Panama’s ruling elite to gain more independence as well as increase their stake of the North Atlantic economy, the national vision as articulated in the Hanseatic Act was generally met with interference from Bogotá.

Notwithstanding the challenges posed by its relationship to Colombia, during the nineteenth century Panama took two concrete steps toward modernizing the trans-isthmian thoroughfare. The first was the construction and completion of the trans-isthmian railroad, which was undertaken between 1850 and 1855 and provided a relatively safe and reliable passageway across the isthmus. The second was the first (and ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to build a canal across the isthmus.²² A significant outcome of both the trans-isthmian railroad and especially the canal undertaking was the influx of foreign labourers, many of whom were of visible African ancestry and hailed from the English-speaking Caribbean.²³ Thus, while both endeavours to modernize the trans-isthmian thoroughfare served to strengthen the nation’s liberalist resolve and Hanseatic vision, they would also come undermine the legitimacy of the territory’s traditional (white and Hispanic) ruling elite.

²² While the idea to build a canal was proposed as early as the sixteenth century (see Meditz et al, 1989:9) and a number of times thereafter, it was not until the proven success of the Suez Canal that the project was undertaken in earnest. The nineteenth century canal project was undertaken by a French company between the years 1883 and 1888. The project was ultimately unsuccessful due to a lack of funding brought about by financial mismanagement, graft, and the crippling effects of yellow fever, among other things (see Lewis, 1980:29).

²³ In addition to labourers from the Barbados, Ireland, India, China, and Colombia, Lewis writes, “the bulk of the major force necessary to build the railroad” came from Jamaica (1980:17). The failed canal project also relied heavily on black migrant labourers and as a result of which, “Approximately 20,000 West Indians were left stranded in Panama because of the French bankruptcy, and faced with no future employment, lacking the necessary funds to return to their homelands, these men asked their governments to assist them in repatriation” (Lewis, 1980:26). Following the cessation of construction activities, many West Indian migrants remained in Panama and established communities in the cities of Colón and Panama City. Lewis states that while these migrants “gave much of their West Indian culture to the Panamanian people in the areas of culinary art and music...at the same time, their very presence [created] a social problem in that many were determined to maintain their British” way of life” (Lewis, 1980:20).

Panama's tenure as a Department of Colombia was fraught with problems and at various points Panamanian nationalists attempted to separate the isthmus from Colombia. A turning point in Panama's independence struggle came in mid-1902 when the U.S. government attempted to negotiate with Bogotá to build a canal on the isthmus. This led to the drafting of the Hay-Herrán Treaty in January 22, 1903, which—pending Colombian approval—provided for “a 100-year lease on an area 10 kilometres wide” (Meditz and Hanratty, 1989:22). The Conservative-led Colombian Congress did not ratify the treaty and consequently provided a strong motivation for the U.S. to support the latest Panamanian uprising. Following a number of abortive attempts to secede from Colombia, with military support from the U.S.²⁴ Panama achieved its independence and became a Republic in November of 1903.

The new Republic and the construction of the Panama Canal

The founding of the Republic ushered in a new era of isthmian political dependence on a foreign power. Seemingly unconcerned with concealing the primary motive for their involvement in Panama's independence struggle, the U.S. government drafted and signed the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty just two weeks after recognizing Panama's independence. Among other things this treaty granted the U.S. the right

“in perpetuity of the use, occupation, and control” of a sixteen-kilometre-wide strip of territory and extensions of three nautical miles into the sea from each terminal “for the construction, maintenance, operation, sanitation, and protection” of an isthmian

²⁴ Notwithstanding the heroic actions of thousands of Panamanian patriots, Panama's eventual independence can be partially (if not principally) attributed to pre-emptive actions taken by the U.S. navy. Realizing the dense jungle of the Darien Gap prevented land travel between Colombia and its northernmost Department, the U.S. navy stationed a ship in each of the port cities of Colón and Panama City. In this way they prevented Colombian troops from quelling the latest Panamanian uprising and thereby further consolidated their canal aspirations.

canal. (Meditz and Hanratty, 1989:22; excerpts of the treaty are enclosed in quotations)

Over a short period of time, the terms of the treaty would become a source of both regret and anger for many Panamanians who came to perceive their economic wellbeing as a contingency of foreign (and especially U.S.) interests.²⁵

In spite of these setbacks, the Panamanian nation did not lose sight of the Hanseatic vision and pursued its twentieth century modernization vigorously. Undoubtedly at the apex of this process was the construction of the Panama Canal: a project of monumental proportions which was realized over the course of ten years (1904-1914) and became “the single most expensive construction project in the United States history to that time.”²⁶ As in the previous canal attempt, the Americans relied on migrant workers to accomplish the majority of the difficult manual labour. Well over 40,000 people migrated to Panama with approximately two thirds being poor blacks from the Antilles islands.²⁷ When the canal was completed in 1914 over 5000 lives had been lost with the vast majority coming from the ranks of migrant labourers.

It is difficult to overstate the profound effect the canal had on Panamanian society as well as the nation’s political and cultural geography. Perhaps most immediately apparent is the fact that the canal effectively bisected the national territory; creating a boundary of water that separated the northern and southern halves of the isthmus. Compounding this physical obstacle to intra-isthmian travel was the artificial, nonetheless very real, obstacle created by the American-controlled Canal Zone, which restricted access to individuals not linked to the

²⁵ Arguably adding insult to injury, Panama’s interests were represented by Philippe Bunau-Varilla, who was both Panama’s official representative and a French national and who expedited the eponymous treaty just days prior to the arrival of a ship-bound Panamanian delegation.

²⁶ <<http://www.pancanal.com/eng/history/history.html>> (accessed June 1, 2010).

²⁷ See Rojas, 2004:101.

operation of the canal. The canal's socioeconomic impact was also similarly transformative. Like the trans-isthmian railroad and the aborted French canal project (albeit at a much larger scale), the canal created a “salaried workforce in a society in which this form of employment was still a novelty” (Castro H., 2004:132-133). As a result, during the first decade of the canal's construction the population of Panama City grew by nearly 200% and Colón by over 600% (Rojas Acosta, 2004:97, 98), further intensifying the nation's economic core along the trans-isthmian corridor and among urban populations.

It is also important to note that the canal's socioeconomic impact not only affected urban populations, but rural populations as well. Of particular relevance to this study was the manner in which it revolutionized traditional forms subsistence agriculture²⁸ and spurred widespread migration of rural populations to Panama City and uninhabited areas of the country—a topic I shall address in some detail in Part II of this study. On the cultural front, the waterway worked to heighten cultural differences between urban and rural populations. The ‘economic belt’ created by the canal and its terminal cities of Panama City and Colón reinforced the distinctions with the so-called Panamanian *interior*: a term used to denote the provinces to the east and west, which were economically underdeveloped and often perceived to be culturally distinct. Such distinctions are reflected in the discursive practices used to describe the ‘typical’ *interiorano* and his/her lifeways and cultural practices. Some references are overtly pejorative, such as the use of the terms “*cholo/a*” (specifically a person of American Indian ancestry, but loosely applied to anyone from the interior²⁹), *pindín* and *curacha* (a rural dance-music setting), while others tended to essentialize and mythologize the mestizo *campesino* or peasant as a nostalgic reminder of the nation's Hispanic history as

²⁸ See Castro H., 2004:144; and Heckadon-Moreno, 2006:69.

²⁹ See Garay, 1999:172 and Club Interamericano De Mujeres, Unidad De Colón, 1949:223.

was the case with the literary movement known as “*ruralismo*” (ruralism) as well as in treatises and studies of Panamanian “folklore” (discussed below).

Reactionary sentiment and the development of Panama’s dual-themed national identity

While the construction of the Panama Canal represented the ultimate culmination of the Hanseatic dream it also posed a number of serious setbacks for the status quo. In his study, Szok identifies a growing sense of delusion among the nation’s ruling class and newly-established intelligentsia with Panama’s overt liberal nationalism, which overtime would manifest in increasingly conservative and reactionary attitudes and tendencies. Despite the seeming paradox, Panamanian liberalism had traditionally included reactionary elements especially as they concerned efforts to “civilize” the isthmus from what was perceived as unwanted “foreign” (i.e., black) influence and intrusion. Szok cites two related factors as principally responsible for this shift in attitude. First was the nature of U.S. presence in Panama and especially its involvement in local political and economic affairs. Second was the presence of a large number of racialized “foreigners” who, following the construction of the canal came, to call Panama their home. Both factors he observes weakened the traditional white oligarchy and led to the rise of a Panamanian middleclass—who ironically also found themselves frustrated by the very conditions that enabled their own upward mobility.³⁰ The ideological position adopted by Panama’s intelligentsia (and by extension, official nationalism) during this time was a pronounced nostalgia for the nation’s Spanish colonial history, which I will outline below.

³⁰ See Szok, 2001:119 and Meditz et al, 1989:26.

Following independence, Panama's depended relationship with the United States had a considerable impact on the development of its nationalist ideology. In principle Panama was a sovereign nation, however, the conditions imposed by the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty of 1903—and later the Kellogg-Alfaro Treaty of 1925—in effect severely compromised the nation's right to political self-determination. George Priestley explains:

From 1903-1906, Panama was a virtual protectorate of the United States. Article III of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty gave the United States rights as if it were the sovereign government. By Article XXIII, the United States could employ force for the Protection and defence of the Panama Railroad and Canal. Article 136 of Panama's 1904 constitution stipulated that the government of the United States guaranteed the independence and sovereignty of Panama, and could intervene anywhere in the country to restore public peace and constitutional order. (Priestley, 1986:11)

In the years following independence the U.S. was not reticent in exercising what it considered to be its right to intervention and by 1920 had intervened in Panamanian civil life a total of four times.³¹ While some interventions involved little to no military conflict, others brought Panamanian nationals into violent confrontation with the U.S. military.

U.S. imperialism real or perceived was not limited to local political infighting, but posed problems for Panama's liberal aspirations. This was largely due to the fact that the conditions of U.S. sovereignty of the Canal Zone resulted in disadvantages for Panamanian business interests, where Panamanian merchants often had to compete with an influx of duty-free American goods, which were destined for the Zone but would inevitably find their way into the general market. Despite a number of concessions on the part of the U.S. government, the problem persisted and contributed to growing sense delusion with the American-run canal project on the whole. Evoking sentiments of the time, one historian writes:

³¹ U.S. intervention was not strictly one-sided. This can be credited to the fact that “[t]he internal dynamics of Panamanian politics encouraged appeals to the United States by any currently disgruntled faction for intervention to secure its allegedly infringed rights” (Meditz et al, 1989:28).

The canal, made out to be the panacea for all things evil, in practice converted the ideals of the nascent republic into a denaturalizing factor. The waterway converted the country into a one-way “thoroughfare”: goods and wealth in transit generated revenues and profits for the de facto owner, the United States, from whom Panama barely fetched crumbs. (Selser, 1989:41)

As a result, anxiety over Panama’s economic future was added to a growing list of grievances regarding the nation’s rapid modernization, requiring, as Szok explains, “the formation of a new identity, beyond the Hanseatic ideals of the nineteenth century” (Szok, 2001:47).

Resentment toward U.S. political and economic imperialism found ideological linkages with rising xenophobia in Panama. Antagonism toward Afro-Panamanians was not new to the isthmus and Panama’s white ruling class had at various times felt threatened by a black majority population. However, with the arrival tens of thousands of West Indian migrants in the first decades of the twentieth century the perceived imbalance had reached a critical mass. Exacerbating the issue were cultural and linguistic differences between the new English-speaking black migrants and Panamanian nationals, which posed a threat to Panama’s Spanish-language hegemony and Hispanic identity. Writing over sixty years after the construction of the canal, ethnomusicologist Ronald Smith observes that black migrants and their descendants are still “looked upon as aliens since they have not wholly adopted the Spanish language and Hispanic customs of their fellow countrymen.”³²

An important feature of early twentieth century attitudes was the ease with which feelings xenophobia and prejudice towards Afro-Panamanians coalesced with a palpable sense of disillusion with the canal project and strong anti-U.S. sentiment. Ethnomusicologist Francesca Rivera observes that reactions to U.S. imperialism during this time was often characterized by a “denial or excision of anything having to do with, or existing in Panama

³² 1976:56; see also Lewis, 1980:69-70.

as a result of foreign, and particularly US, ‘intervention’ ” (2006:6). This stance was directed in particular towards cultural practices that could be linked (either directly or indirectly) to black migrant workers from the West Indies who came to the isthmus as a result of the French and U.S. canal projects. In this context notions of “foreignness” and “blackness,” couched in anti-imperialist sentiment, regularly existed in overlapping discursive and ideological spheres.³³ Perhaps most disheartening to the black labourers who were principally responsible for Panama’s rapid modernization was their relationship to Panama’s growing and predominantly white and mestizo middle class. Observing that West Indians came to Panama as wage earners and have for the most part remained as such, Lewis writes:

By and large, the West Indian communities represented the largest group of consumers within the Canal Zone proper and the Republic of Panama. They supported the food, clothing, and housing industries of the country. On their backs a flourishing Panamanian middle class was built, which ironically, despised him. (Lewis, 1980:74)

Noting the challenges facing the new Republic, Szok argues for the emergence of a dual-themed nationalism that served as an antidote to Panama’s nineteenth and early twentieth century progressively liberal nationalism. “Panamanian intellectuals,” he writes, “would develop a divided identity that retained certain elements of the old Hanseatic project but could not share its naive optimism toward foreigners and their interventions” (Szok, 2001:62). Panamanian elite and middle classes maintained many of the liberal ideals associated with the Hanseatic dream, but at the same time tempered these with a strong ambivalence toward progressively liberal and modernist ideals. Like other Latin American nationalists, Panamanians recognized their need to modernize and as a result “did not

³³ It should be noted that throughout *música típica popular*’s history these ideas have informed a kind of racial thinking that has impacted the acceptance or rejection of particular musical characteristics as either Panamanian or not. While further engagement with the complex politics of race and music in Panama would certainly be a productive endeavour, it remains beyond the scope of this study.

abandon their ties to liberalism. Nevertheless, they needed a second ideology to control its effects” (Szok, 2001:119). This “second ideology” came in the form of a pronounced nostalgia for Panama’s Spanish heritage, which aimed to shake off the notion that Panama was a de facto colony of the United States. “With this end in mind,” Szok writes, intellectuals began to emphasize their Spanish heritage to counter the domestic turbulence and their image as a U.S. colony. Panama was above all, a member of the Spanish-American family, despite the arrival of immigrants who were now transforming the country. (Szok, 2001:119)

Throughout the course of this study I will have reason to refer to Szok’s dual-themed nationalist model, which for ease of reference I will now use the terms “first” and “second” theme nationalism to Panama’s Liberal-identified, progressive nationalism and the nostalgic/reactionary sentiment it engendered, respectively.

Early twentieth century Panamanian cultural nationalism

While the basis for Panamanian nationalism was firmly grounded in longstanding ideas about the nation’s geo-political and economic function, and the consequences of realizing those ideas, it also found expression in various spheres of Isthmian cultural life. To understand the way in which particular forms of cultural expression are capable of evoking nationalist sentiment it is important to consider their particular relation to the pluralism inherent in any “imagined community” (see Anderson, 1983, 1991). For whom does a particular cultural artifact or form of expression evoke feelings of nationalism and if so what manner of nationalism is it?

Most studies of early-twentieth century Panama—including Szok (2001)—have focused principally on the cultural aspirations of the Panamanian elite and intelligentsia, and

as such provide a picture of the particular goals and values of what might be termed ‘official’ nationalism: i.e., the brand of nationalism often promoted by the state. In the majority of cases, the relationship is based on the discursive practices of these privileged groups, as documented in various forms of print media and/or determined by tangible links to the governing apparatus of the state (for example, state sponsored cultural institutions, universities, etc.). On the other hand, comparatively little is known about early twentieth century nationalist sentiment and expression among the urban popular classes and rural peasant classes.

In his study, Szok endeavours to show how the country’s rapid modernization and stronger ties to foreign (metropolitan) societies fostered the conditions for the nation’s divided identity. At the cultural forefront of the nation building process were a growing number of intellectuals, many of whom had received their education abroad or in “foreign-like” institutions within Panama (Szok, 2001:67). In examining the connection between foreign education and Panamanian nationalism, Szok argues that the Panamanian “nationalist” of this time was a “social maverick, a person who traveled widely or had benefited from a foreign education”; he writes,

Quite naturally, these men returned home determined to refashion their country, to make it more reflective of their “progressive” values. They themselves no longer fitted into the older society and would attempt to recast it to allow for their leadership on the isthmus. (Szok, 2001:67)

It is from this group that an emerging Panamanian intelligentsia developed and in time their ideas proved to be very influential not only in furthering the cause of Panama’s liberal agenda, but also in shaping the reactionary attitudes that it inspired.

While certainly problematic, liberalist ideology was foundational to Panama’s “doctrine of independence” and therefore could not be abandoned easily (Szok, 2001:66). As

liberalism manifested itself in various aspects Panamanian cultural life Szok shows that one of its most distinctive characteristics was the way in which it was decidedly “outward-looking and sought to Europeanize the country” (2001:90). “The Panamanians championed ‘civilization,’” he writes, “even as they developed a rival ideology, because to repudiate the doctrine of independence would have discredited their own autonomy” (2001:66). During the first two decades of the Republic,

student enrolment leaped from 4,200 to over 51,000 as the government founded dozens of new schools and cultural organizations, as state press, a national theater, and art and music academies. (Szok, 2001:67)

Among the various examples cited in his study, Szok highlights the role of the country’s new educational institutions in fostering and promoting liberal ideas and values, be it through revisionist historiography—which worked to counter Panama’s image as a foreign creation by providing a historical basis for the notion of an indigenous Isthmian nationalism—and legal treaties that strove to make Isthmian governance “more European” (2001:83). In this and other capacities, “Liberalism infused the republic, manifesting itself in the country’s monuments, heroes, writings, and architecture” (2001:86).³⁴

In terms of its alignment with European-identified art forms, music can also be shown to have played a role in the formation of Panamanian liberal nationalism. Panama City’s Teatro Nacional was inaugurated in 1908—for which occasion the Panamanian government hired an Italian opera company to perform Verdi’s opera Aida. Panama’s first Escuela de Música (Music School) was founded in 1904 and in 1911 was christened the Conservatorio Nacional de Música y Declamación (National Conservatory of Music and Declamation). The idea that these new institutions could play a role in ‘civilizing’ the isthmus is suggested in the

³⁴ See also Ingram Jaén, 2004b:281.

following statement by the conservatory's founding director Narciso Garay, published in 1916:

musical culture did not exist in our capital city and was made possible thanks to the government who undertook to promote it by opening a public conservatory whose mission was to train the public on musical taste and give students the technical skills. (Garay quoted in Ingram Jaén, 2004:300)

As Garay suggests, government-funded musical institutions provided a way for urban concert audiences and musicians to acquire the competencies (be it technical or aesthetic) assumed of their (non-Panamanian) metropolitan contemporaries.

Missing in Szok's study is an examination of popular (or non-elite/Art) musical practices taking place in the nation's capital and elsewhere. This lacuna is not unusual given that Panama's early twentieth century popular/commercial music history remains a grossly understudied topic. Based on my own research, however, there is evidence to suggest that Panama City and indeed the country as a whole became a locus for the performance and promotion of transnational-identified musical practices. Panama appears to have experienced an influx of transnationally popular music and musicians around the late 1920s and 1930s. A number of sources indicate that Panamanian audiences participated in transnational musical trends via performances by visiting musicians, commercial recordings and radio broadcasts. In his book-length survey of the rise of salsa in Panama, the well-known Panamanian musician/bandleader Francisco Buckley "Bush" writes:

In the 1920s began the development of the popular Cuban dance music known today as "salsa." [...] It is then that in Panama began the spread of the "son" rhythm and the romantic boleros of the very famous Trio Matamoros. (Buckley, 2004:34)

Buckley observes that during the 1930s and 1940s, Afro-Cuban musical styles such as *son*, *guaguancó*, *danzón*, *guaracha* and *boleros* reached Panamanian audiences via touring musicians including Armando Orefiche's Lecuana Cuban Boys, Casino de la Playa, José

“Chombo” Silva, Pedro “Peruchín” Jústiz, Dámaso Pérez Prado, Gustavo Más, in addition to many others (Buckley, 2004:34). As I will discuss briefly in Chapter 2 and in more detail in Part II, rural Panamanian musicians from the Azuero region were also impacted by the influx of Afro-Cuban music during this time and as early as the 1930s began to incorporate aspects of its form and instrumentation into their own regional musical practices.

The advent of recording technologies and commercial recordings also served to connect Panamanian audiences and musicians to musical trends taking place elsewhere. Commercial recordings made their way to the isthmus no later than 1929 (and very likely earlier). Records by the Victor Talking Machine Company were available for sale in a store in Panama City called El Postal.³⁵ In a catalogue titled Cancionero Popular Número 3 (Popular Songbook Number 3; see Gervasio, [n.d.]) issued by La Postal sometime between 1928 and 1929³⁶ are listed recordings by musicians from Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico and Spain as well as Panama.³⁷ Among the genres listed are *tangos*, *danzones*, *bambucos*, *boleros*, *fox trots*, and Cuban *sones*.

Commercial radio broadcasting arrived relatively late to the isthmus due to restrictions on radio technology set in place by the treaty of 1903. Citing security concerns, César del Vasto tells us that the treaty implemented measures in which “Panamanian radio frequencies were restricted and permits were only granted to Americans” (2007:26). Beginning in 1904, a number of U.S. radio stations operated on the isthmus presumably at the service of U.S. commercial interests and military operations. “Clandestine” Panamanian

³⁵ Founded in Panama City in 1913 by Spanish national Gervasio García (see Susto, 1947:5).

³⁶ These dates are based on the fact that the catalogue includes the song “La victrola,” which was recorded in 1928, and that Victor Talking Machine Company ceased to exist in 1929.

³⁷ Among the Cuban musicians are listed are Eusebio Delfín, el Selxteto Habanero, Mariano Meléndez, Antonio Utrera; Mexico: Margarita Cueto and Carlos Mejía; Spain: Juan Pulido and José Moriche; Argentina: Rosita Quiroga, Libertad Lamarque, Agustín Magaldi, [Pedro?] Noda, [Adolfo] Carabelli y su Orquesta [Típica], la Orquesta Típica Víctor and Evaristo Barrios; and Colombia: Jorge Añez.

radio stations began broadcasting in 1932, and in late 1934 the Panamanian government issued its first broadcasting licenses (del Vasto, 2007:26, 27).³⁸ In a commemorative publication issued by the La Voz de Panama (The Voice of Panama, the first Panamanian radio station to broadcast legally), director Gilberto J. Cuerrero Viera notes that between 1934 and 1954, the station aired live performances by many Panamanian and visiting musicians, including “Cavali, Papito Bécker, Armando Boza, Los Hermanos Muñoz, Ochoa, Ricardo Fábrega, Luis Séptimo Domínguez, Merel Murt, [Leonidas] Cajar” (1954:34). Buckley also observes that a number of (legal) Panamanian radio stations included Cuban music in their programming (see Buckley, 2007:34). Over a short period of time Panamanian radio stations would also play a significant role in introducing urban audiences to rural musical practices and vice versa, contributing to the formation of hybrid genres such as *tamborera* (a mix of Azuerense *cumbia* and Cuban *danzón*) and *música típica popular*, both of which combined Cuban music with musical genres from the Azuero region.

The degree and manner in which an engagement with transnational musical flows evoked nationalist sentiment is difficult to say without further research. What is clear, however, is that like other forms of government-sanctioned cultural projects, Panama’s commercial music industry reflected an interest in cultural practices that were outward in their orientation and had clear alignments with other nations and metropolitan centres. In effect, the development of Panama’s music industry can readily be understood as a form of musical cosmopolitanism or rather an engagement with the “objects, ideas, and cultural positions that are widely diffused throughout the world and yet are specific only to certain

³⁸ To date I have not found information that would suggest Panamanian listeners had access to foreign radio broadcasts during this time, however, the possibility certainly was not unlikely. Buckley, for example, states “[m]any remember hearing Cuban radio stations on shortwave [radio]” (2004:34). Similarly, a number of informants intimated that people in the Azuero region may have been able to hear radio broadcasts from Colombia, however, no one could say so with any certainty.

portions of the populations within given countries” (Turino, 2000:7). While undoubtedly complex, instances of musical cosmopolitanism appear to have a particularly strong connection to first theme nationalism and, following the work of Panamanian folklorists discussed below, would come to be closely identified urban culture.

As discussed above, resistance to the nation’s nineteenth century Liberal zeal had its basis in rising anti-imperialist sentiment articulated with feelings of xenophobia directed particularly toward black migrants and Afro-Panamanians. The response was one of growing Hispanophilia or *hispanidad*, which sought to valorize the nation’s colonial history and Hispanic roots. *Hispanidad*, Szok argues, “became a second theme of Panamanian nationalism, erected to counterbalance the turmoil then being created by liberalization” (Szok, 2001:94). It was consciously nostalgic and rooted in memory of a distant past; a past which “to the benefit of those groups that led this cultural strategy” aided in the exclusion of relative newcomers to the isthmus (Szok, 2001:95). Reactionary and nostalgic sentiment found expression not only in the literature of the time, but in other forms of cultural expression as well (e.g., public monuments, historiography and architecture).³⁹

An important part of the present study is to understand the relationship between the ideologies that fuelled the second theme nationalism and ideas and discourses of Isthmian vernacular music and cultural imaginaries. In his study, Szok briefly notes that early to mid-twentieth century nationalist fervour sparked an interest in documenting and identifying isthmian musical practices that might constitute a basis for the nation’s vernacular cultural heritage. Much of this pioneering work was carried out by a relatively small group of musical historiographers or folklorists, the most notable among them being Narciso Garay (1876-

³⁹ Szok 2001:86; see also pp. 71-90 and Ingram Jaén, 2004b:281.

1953) whose book “Tradiciones y cantares de Panamá” (first published in 1930⁴⁰) was the first full-length monograph devoted wholly to the topic of Panamanian music and folklore; spouses Manuel Zárate (1899-1968) and Dora Pérez De Zárate (1912-2001), who together and independently authored a number of texts on Panamanian music and initiated a number of programs for cultural “rescue” (oft called “rescate”) and revival (e.g., la Festival de la Mejorana); and Gonzalo Brenes (1907-2003) who wrote on the topic of Panamanian music as well as produced numerous field recordings for the National Archives during the 1950s and 1960s. Significantly, Szok notes that early musical scholarship formed ideological linkages to second theme nationalism by promoting Hispanophile and nativist ideologies that also found expression in other areas of Panamanian cultural life. In particular he posits a connection between musical scholarship and an early twentieth century literary movement known as “ruralismo,” which extolled the virtues of the rural ‘campesino’ or peasant farmer of Panama’s rural ‘interior’ or interior. Proponents of *ruralismo* incorporated this iconic and decidedly *mestizo*—that is of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent (see Szok, 2012:39-40)—figure first into their short stories and novels, and eventually other art forms. In short, what would begin as a fascination with a highly romanticized national imaginary would soon result in a ‘serious’ interest (on the part of self-styled and state sanctioned *folkloristas*) in actual people and music-cultural practices found in specific areas of the national territory (namely Panama’s western provinces). While music only receives cursory mention in his study, Szok’s observation is important as it points to the role of music and musical historiography in the construction of isthmian geo-cultural imaginaries that promoted the goals and ideologies of second theme nationalism.

⁴⁰ All citations are taken from the 1999 reprint.

This topic is examined in greater detail in an unpublished conference presentation by ethnomusicologist Francesca Rivera (2006).⁴¹ In this paper, Rivera engages in a close reading of Garay's "Tradiciones y cantares de Panamá" and shows how a number of key issues concerning Panama's "national question" informed "Garay's analytical frame as he collected, analyzed, and reported on 'Panamanian music'" (Rivera, 2006:6). Particularly relevant here is her argument that ambivalence with the nation's modernization as well as growing anti-U.S. sentiment was critical both to Garay's selection and interpretation of the musical practices included in his study. Moreover, she argues, anti-imperialist sentiment was not only directed toward the US, but, as I have noted already, to Afro-Panamanians as well. "Blackness for Garay," Rivera states, "was not understood as simply being related to African lifeways and culture per se, but linked to foreignness—foreign occupation and immigration." In its broad strokes, Rivera's argument runs parallel to Szok's, however, she takes it a step further when she identifies *specific* analytical and discursive strategies employed by Garay in promotion of a particular Hispanic (non-African) national music-cultural vision. Two are particularly relevant here. One concerned Garay's geo-cultural mapping of the Panamanian territory, which located the nation's Hispanic ethno-cultural and musical heritage among 'rural' populations residing in the central provinces situated west of the Canal—an area collectively referred to as the *interior*—and in particular the Azuero peninsula located at the heart of this general area (see map in Figure 1.2 below). Two concerned his treatment of the cultural expressive traditions found in these provinces, which are analyzed for their European roots with a near total omission of any mention of African cultural retentions. Both of these strategies helped to situate Panamanian (non-Indian) vernacular musical expressions within a

⁴¹ Rivera's presentation is titled "Narciso Garay's 'Creolization' of Panamanian Tamborito" and was presented for the Society for Ethnomusicology's 2006 annual conference in Honolulu. Rivera generously loaned me a transcript of her presentation, from which I cite here.

specific territory and presumably among a rural and Hispanophile demographic of the Isthmus, and in contradiction to a more ethnically and culturally heterogeneous national vision.

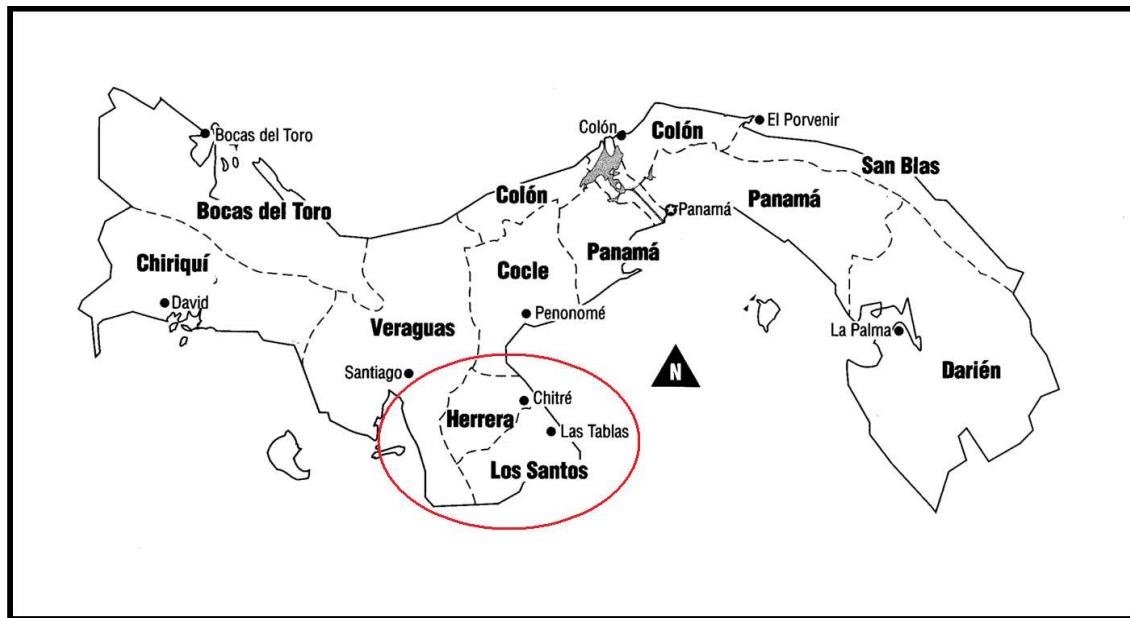


Figure 1.2: Political Map of Panama (circled area indicates the Azuero peninsula)

Both Szok's and especially Rivera's research show how early twentieth century musical scholarship drew on a number of key ideologies related to second theme nationalism—i.e., *hispanidad* and anti-imperialism as expressed by rising xenophobia—that also helped in locating expressions of vernacular/'folk' music within a specific part of the Isthmus and among a rural peasant constituency—that is, the *interior* and *interioranos*, respectively. Theirs form a small body of critical writings on the topic of Panamanian folk music discourse to which this study is also meant to contribute. One area that has not received critical attention is the manner in which this discourse also came to reinforce

longstanding geo-cultural imaginaries that pitted a rapidly modernizing and cosmopolitan urban society against a ‘traditional’/unchanging and ethno-culturally homogeneous rural *interior*. As I have shown already, urbanization on the isthmus was closely linked to the development of the trans-isthmian thoroughfare and the establishment of the terminal cities of Panama City and Colón. Thus, as cosmopolitanism came to be regarded as the normative outcome of the nation’s geo-political role as a global transit point, so notions of cultural vernacularism drew ideological strength (and discursive traction) from the imagined isolation—be it geographically or economically—of *interioranos* from the events affected by the trans-isthmian thoroughfare. Expressions of cosmopolitan or urban-identified musical culture by *interioranos* contradicted this notion and for this reason were regarded as problematic by Panamanian folklorists. A number of musical and dance practices that came to be directly associated with *música típica popular* frequently fell into this category and were either treated with ambivalence, ignored or criticized outright as detrimental to the preservation of the nation’s musical heritage. This process was not sudden and has roots that can be traced further back than Garay’s 1930 monograph.

One of the earliest and most coherent accounts of *interiorano* musical culture is found in an essay by Belisario Porras, which was published in Colombia in 1882⁴² and titled “El Orejano.” The essay’s eponymous subject—a Panamanian neologism roughly equivalent to “peasant” or “*interiorano*”⁴³—is identified as “a notable type of the Isthmus,” which the author claims to describe “with all his rustic splendour, with his knowledge of the countryside, with his beliefs, with his feasts and joyful songs, with his customs” (Porras, 1944:10). In this essay Porras provides an unprecedented (albeit highly romanticized) portrait

⁴² All citations are taken from the 1944 reprint.

⁴³ See also Garay, 1999:169.

of late nineteenth century Isthmian peasant musical culture and lifeways. Later events would show that what is perhaps the most significant aspect of Porras' work is the lack of any specific mention of a geographical area on the isthmus. The closest Porras comes to geographically situating his generic 'subject' is while providing a physical description the "orejano," where he writes: "His skin is white like almost all the inhabitants of the midland interior of the Isthmus" (p.10). In this respect, Porras' essay is not a conventional study of regional folk culture. Its aim, rather, is to describe—for the benefit of his Colombian contemporaries and Isthmian elite—what he regarded as the archetypal Isthmian (and soon-to-be Panamanian) national, which, as he implies above, is a descendant of Spanish *peninsulares* and *criollos*, and is found throughout the central part of the isthmus, possibly west of trans-isthmian thoroughfare.

Porras' exclusion of geographical references, however, does not necessarily preclude the possibility of their existence all the same. In fact, there are reasons to suggest that his is a description of cultural practices found mainly in the Azuero peninsula. One compelling reason is that Porras himself was born and raised in the town of Las Tablas (the provincial capital of Los Santos), and this would have likely been his main—if not only—connection to rural Isthmian culture at the time he wrote "El Orejano." More significantly, however, is the fact that many of the traditions he describes (including the *junta*, *cantadera*, *mejorana* performances, etc.) would come to be regarded by the early to mid-twentieth century (if they were not so already) as more or less the exclusive birthright of Azuerense populations. When understood in these terms, "El Orejano" becomes a pivotal document for a number of reasons. First, it established a precedent by which Azuerense and, more generally, *interiorano* culture came to serve as a synecdoche for national culture. Second, in its capacity

to identify and describe (with some measure of accuracy and detail) specific musical practices taking place within the Azuero peninsula in the late nineteenth century, it provides a valuable historical reference point with which we can trace patterns of change not only in the music, but its historiography as well.

While Porras identifies a variety of musical practices taking place in the Azuero peninsula, it is his description of a form of reciprocal aid called a “*junta*” (literally “meeting” or “assembly”) and the *baile* that accompanied it that is of particular interest here. For various reasons, which I will discuss in greater detail in the following chapter, *junta bailes* were both integral to the development of *música típica popular*—coming to shape many of its most enduring and defining features—and also frequently overlooked and/or criticized by twentieth century folklorists. Briefly, a *junta* was a workforce assembled for the purpose of accomplishing a specific and generally community-oriented project, such as building a house, a school, or a road. A *baile* almost always accompanied a *junta* and provided an additional incentive to participate. Porras describes the motivational purpose of the *baile* in some detail, noting among other things that all of the activity took place in a semi-enclosed, arbour-like structure called an “*enramada*” and attracted people from outlaying communities/homesteads—including men, women and children—all of whom contributed in various capacities to the success of the event. His description of the music and dance that took place is brief, but noteworthy. Porras notes that the music was stylistically varied and included “*danza*,” “*mejorana*,” “waltz” and “*polka*,” each performed in loose succession over a period of 12 hours (from dusk to dawn). He describes the dancing as a “commotion of couples” (1944:14) from which can be deduced that these were a) couples dances that b) took place en masse and c) likely involved a degree of physical intimacy. This is confirmed by his

subsequent description of the dancing that accompanied the “*punto*,”⁴⁴ which he notes took place only at the end of the *baile* and involved a single couple dancing amid circle of “spectators” (*ibid.*). I mention these specific features of rural *bailes* as they would become a matter of concern for Panamanian folklorists keen on ‘protecting’ Azuerense vernacular culture from the ‘destructive’ effects of twentieth century modernization on rural societies.

Although published nearly half a century after “El Orejano” (and nearly three decades after the founding of the Republic), Garay’s landmark study posits a similar vision of Isthmian musical geography as centred around the central provinces and among a rural-identified *campesino* constituency. In the this case, however, the issue is rendered slightly more obtuse due to the intended scope of Garay’s study, which is one of folk-music collection ostensibly at a national scale. In this study, Garay constructs a geo-cultural/musical map the of Panamanian territory by identifying (through transcriptions, pictures, descriptive prose and chapter titles) specific “folk” practices, which are matched to specific ethno-cultural groups resident in particular (geo-political) areas throughout the Isthmus. Despite its nationalist pretences, however, Rivera accurately points out that Garay’s study is selective, devoting a great deal of attention to the cultural traditions of Panamanian indigenous peoples (specifically the Guaymi and Tule-Kuna Indians) and pointedly omitting any mention of musical practices linked to urban demographics and Afro-Panamanians in particular. It is Garay’s discussion, interpretation and geographical positioning of non-indigenous/Indian culture, however, that is of particular interest here.

Garay’s engagement with non-Indian music-cultural traditions is limited to two of the book’s six chapters (i.e., Chapters 4 and 6), both of which read as a travelogue wherein

⁴⁴ Porras regarded the “*punto*” as an Isthmian variant of the (Colombian) “bamboo,” which he writes is “original to that land by which the Panamanian is characterized” (*ibid.*).

Garay reports on his experiences while visiting the “*interior*”: geographically located west of the Canal and coinciding with “the provinces of western Panama, Coclé, Herrera, Los Santos and Veraguas” (Garay, 1999:125). While Garay seems to accord a degree of racial/ethnic heterogeneity to the “Panamanian” subject he claims to study,⁴⁵ his interpretation of the nation’s non-Indian/*interiorano* music-cultural heritage is much more restricted and European-centric. This discussion is largely reserved to the second of the two chapters enigmatically titled “*Lirica Criolla*,” which, as Rivera observes, “roughly translates as ‘Creole Song’” and with few exceptions describes practices found in the eastern half of the Azuero peninsula. Focusing mainly on his treatment of the *tamborito* song-dance genre, Rivera argues persuasively that Garay ideological biases (and political motivations) are evident in his near-complete omission of any mention of African or African-derived cultural retentions, writing: “Garay ignored everything about *tamborito* that might have come from non-European cultures, from the design of the instruments to the compositional organization, to the manner of singing, to the choreography.” Garay’s monograph proved to be immensely influential and is cited frequently in nearly all of the literature on Panamanian music and contributed to the positioning of music-dance practices from Panama’s Azuero peninsula as celebrated forms of Panamanian national culture.

In her assessment of the study’s geo-cultural limitations and omissions, Rivera makes an important point when she notes this strategy enabled Garay “to make two important interpretive moves: he could cast ‘folk music’ in terms of rural [i.e., non-urban], peasant folk

⁴⁵ To this effect, Garay writes: “The enigma of national Panamanian [culture] is something different: it is expressed in the Spanish language by individuals or groups who come from pure race or mixed race, that have since been incorporated into Western civilization and serve as tributaries that come together to form the national soul, protected by the moral fiber of Christianity. From this was born a complex, rich folklore, where elements of Indian, European, and African cultures *combine in various proportions* and act together to form a unique collection of ethnic, linguistic, political, and spiritual elements that respond to today’s definition of Panamanianess” (Garay quoted in Rivera, 2006 [translation and italics are Rivera’s]).

culture, and he could shun the idea of cultural mixing beyond the Colonial-era, pre-Republic transculturation.” For Rivera, this point is significant mainly in terms of its marginalization of Afro-Panamanians—serving to remove “all mention of ‘black music’,” she writes—however, it also can be extended to include Garay’s treatment of perceived continuities between urban/cosmopolitan- and rural/folk-identified (and geographically situated and discrete) musical practices. Porras’ essay provides a useful reference point here. While the *junta* and its accompanying *baile* formed a central part of his description of *orejano* lifeways, the practice is all but ignored in Garay’s study. In fact, the only *juntas* Garay describes or mentions were “theatrical” productions put on by educational institutions and staged for his benefit (1999:59; see also p.139). This lacuna is surprising given Garay’s claim that the *junta* is “a truly Panamanian national institution” (*ibid.*).

There are reasons, however, to suggest that it was the accompanying *baile*—and its attendant music and dance practices—that he found incongruent with his vision of a rural-identified folk culture. In his discussion of *bailes de tambor* (lit. drum dances), for example, Garay briefly describes what he took to be a hybrid ensemble called “*tambor de cuerda*” that combined—“in poor aesthetic taste,” he reminds the reader—the “purely rhythmic instrumentation” of *tambor* ensembles with “parts for violin and contrabass or flute.” Garay regarded the musical effect of the these modifications as “uncharacteristic” and tellingly notes that they had more in common with “the couples dances such as the waltz, *pasillo*, foxtrot and others that the peasants, with reference to the ‘halter’ of a young bull or ox, picturesquely call ‘*bailes apersogados*’ [lit. tethered dances]” (1999:142-143).

In this example, Garay describes features of musical style and dance configuration that would have been common in community *bailes* taking place in the central provinces,

including those accompanying *juntas*. While in this case he hints at the cause for his disdain of these practices, he is more explicit in the book’s closing paragraphs. Here Garay laments the fact that the young symphonic composers at the time tended to ignore what he refers to as “our” (i.e., Panamanian) music in their compositions, choosing instead to focus on “forms of dance music from *other countries*” (my emphasis). Not coincidentally, the offending “dance styles” he singles out are the same as those found in *bailes* taking place in the *interior*, and include the “waltz, *pasillo*, fox-trot and *danza*” (1999:299). When coupled with the foregoing example, this excerpt reveals what I believe to be a critical part of Garay’s understanding of Panama’s cultural geography. If Panama’s symphonic composers—the vast majority of whom studied and worked in Panama City and abroad—were guilty of something it was not that their musical interests were too broad, but rather, and to the contrary, too narrow. Any liberty to mix that might have been enjoyed, for instance, by symphonic composers, however, was not extended to *interioranos*. They instead were expected to *Maintain* Panamanian musical idioms and abstain from the creation of new cosmopolitan musical hybrids. In summary, Garay’s analytical frame not only did not admit expressions of Afro-Panamanian/blackness, but also expressions of cosmopolitanism among rural-identified/non-*capitalino* populations. This idea would become amplified and gain considerable discursive traction in the following decades.

In September of 1949, chemical engineer/folklorist Manuel Zárate organized one of Panama’s first folkloric festivals, which became an annual event that continues unabated to this day. The festival was named the “Festival de la Mejorana” (*Mejorana* Festival)—which referenced both an iconic instrument and performance genre discussed in some detail during Garay’s excursions to the *interior*—and took place in Zárate’s hometown of Guararé

(province of Los Santos). Labelled the following year by one national newspaper as a “great competition of national folklore” (*La Estrella de Panamá*, Sep. 22, 1950:1), the event was important in situating rural- and Azuerense-identified musical practices firmly within the scope of Panamanian musical nationalism. “The program, decor, music and other elements,” the column reads, “will bear the unmistakable mark of that which is rural and traditional, realized, however, under the category of art and in reference to the theme of the *mejorana*” (*ibid.*). Significantly, all of the performances and competitions featured in the festival’s early installments were identifiably *interiorano* and included “*gritaderas*” (competitive “shouts”), “*salomas*” (a form of yodeling) and various drumming and dance traditions such as a “*tambor de orden* and *tuna*” (*ibid.*).⁴⁶ Performances by *baile* ensembles or *conjuntos* were not included in the festival proper, but were featured in the later evening in the form of “popular” entertainment (*ibid.*). “Popular” is a term that appears frequently not only in this text, but in others like it as well (such as Garay [1999] for example), and tends to be used as a local gloss for non-folkloric and very often *conjunto*-based music-dance practice. Thus, while the festival’s programming pointedly excluded “popular” music-dance forms, ironically the festival would also play a role in reinforcing ties between *música típica popular* and Azuerense ‘folk’ practices. This is because many *conjunto* musicians (and especially violinists and later accordionists) also competed in the festival performing ‘traditional’ music, and some also established a reputation as ‘folkloric’ musicians in their own right.

Both Manuel and Dora Pérez de Zárate were tremendously enthusiastic and outspoken advocates for Panamanian vernacular music and wrote extensively on the subject.

⁴⁶ Eventually, the Mejorana Festival would become more inclusive of ‘other’/non-*interiorano* forms of Panamanian ‘folklore’ as represented by visiting *congo* troupes from Colón, Kuna performers from San Blás and so forth.

Much of their efforts were motivated not only by a desire to document important musical practices, but also preserve or ‘rescue’ practices that they felt were in danger of being lost or ‘corrupted’ by Panama’s twentieth century modernization.⁴⁷ The cause for much of their anxiety was with events taking place in the Azuero peninsula and within the context of rural *bailes*. Unlike Garay, these authors had the benefit of hindsight and frequently express their feelings of *música típica popular*, which at that point was quickly becoming a commercial and national phenomenon. As could be expected, their opinion of the music was highly unfavourable and they regarded it as a threat to ‘authentic’ vernacular music. In the introductory chapter to their seminal monograph “Tambor y socavón” (1962), Zárate and Zárate provide some insight into the processes they understood as perilous to ‘traditional’ practices, writing:

We have very intentionally chosen the theme of the *tambor* and *socavón* or *mejorana*, even though they are the most visible [e.g., conspicuous] and well known, because being the most popular, they are therefore more exposed to the insults, the adulterations and exploitation. Everywhere today there are indelicate exhibitions of this music and dance, performed by people who are ignorant of the history, lineage and meanings of this heritage. (1962:15)

Later on in the text, the authors are more specific on what they regard as adulterating and exploitative, highlighting specifically the national popularity of “*bailes agarrado*” (lit. “held” or “embraced dances,” which is another term for “popular”/non-folkloric couples dances) and their accompanying accordion *conjuntos*. “Their orchestras,” they write, use the accordion as the lead instrument, reinforced, in very bad taste, by microphones set to full volume, which can enliven a *baile* for one thousand couples, as is required at the time by the demands of the large masses that [reside] in the urban centres, from the [nation’s] Capital until [its] borders. (1962:150)

⁴⁷ As one newspaper wrote, Manuel and Dora “have dedicated their life to the research and consolidation of our popular culture, *unjustifiably forgotten and even despised for so long*” (La Estrella de Panama, April 17, 1960:2; my italics).

Among their list of grievances is *música típica popular*'s commercialisation (i.e., “he who dances pays”) and the use of “*tumbas*, timbales and cowbells or ‘tin cans’ of Cuban manufacture” (Zárate and Zárate, 1962:150). Zárate and Zárate also hold the accordion *conjuntos* responsible for the disappearance of vernacular drums and drummers, noting “[t]he very same native drums tend to disappear due to the growing number of orchestras that require drummers, and the art of playing [vernacular] drums is a rare gift” (*ibid.*).

By highlighting the *differences* between *música típica popular* and those musical practices they identified as “folkloric,” early musical historiographers were undoubtedly also aware of the *similarities* between these particular categories. And more to the point, it is my contention that *música típica popular* came to be perceived as a threat to the survival of “folkloric” idioms not so much for its differences, but for its shared stylistic, instrumental and historical continuities. Terms such as “adulterated,” “hybrid” and “bastardized” (all of which appear frequently in conjunction with Zárate and Zárate’s discussion of *música típica popular*, for example) point to its perceived liminal status vis-à-vis competing views of Panamanian national identity. Not to be ignored was the threat that the practice posed to the idea of Azuerense cultural and ethnic homogeneity, upon which ideas of Panama’s Hispanic identity were premised. Zárate and Zárate also frequently took issue with the labelling of *conjunto* performance practices, which tended to conflate genres or styles that they preferred remain distinct. In one case, for example, they lament the fact that the term “*cumbia*” (one of their vernacular-identified genres) was commonly used to denote certain repertoire performed by accordion *conjuntos* (i.e., “*cumbia agarrado*”), noting that the latter “only [...] uses the instruments and something of [*cumbia*’s] melody and rhythm” (1960:148). The term

“*música típica*” was also problematic for similar reasons, as is suggested in the following excerpt:

[We] can only wish that *cumbia Santeña* [i.e., a folk genre] was more popular and became the dance of all the *fiestas* of the Panamanian township in the place of these noisy “commercial” *bailes* that we have already noted: Panamanian-Antillean hybrids, which with the false name of “*típicos*” [i.e., traditional or typical] are conquering the country. (1962:158)

Instead of “*música típica*” or “*cumbia agarrado*,” Zárate and Zárate preferred the term “*pindín*,” which had already gained some currency as general descriptor of *conjunto* practice (1960:148). The term, however, also had pejorative connotations conveying a sense of uncouthness and extreme parochialism, and was generally avoided by *conjunto* practitioners. In later chapters I will argue that denotive ambiguities surrounding the name/s used to identify the music played by *conjuntos* has served its practitioners well in maintaining inroads with Panamanian musical vernacularist discourse (as it could not be readily labelled as an ‘other’).⁴⁸

Panamanian vernacular identity is closely linked not only to specific events effecting the Panama’s development as a nation (specifically the tandem promulgation of the nation’s Hispanic identity and nostalgia for the colony), but also to the musical tradition that would come to be known as *música típica popular*. Panamanian musical scholarship in general has not been kind to *música típica popular*, with reactions ranging from disinterest to outright disparagement. By the mid-twentieth century *música típica popular* began to be understood—at least by Panamanian folklorists—in terms of its dichotomic relationship between two (ostensibly) competing visions of Panamanian national cultural identity:

⁴⁸ In her article titled “Naming Country Music” (2001), Carolyn Livingston makes a similar observation when she identifies the potential stakes involved in a music’s labelling, writing: “The names that are given to people, places, events, and phenomena are sometimes predictive of what those entities are to become. A name signifies identity as perceived by self and others. Those who assign names, in many cases, attempt to describe the object being named” (p.20).

progressive, modern and cosmopolitan on one hand, and vernacular and Hispanic on the other. Yet, by keeping *música típica popular* in their crosshairs, Panama's folklorists—presumably unwittingly though no less effectively—strengthened the music's connection to vernacular practices. Much of the music's symbolic vitality in this respect was premised on the heightened role of the Azuerense *campesino/a* archetype, who was quickly becoming a symbol of Panama's Hispanic identity, and with whom *música típica popular* was undeniably linked. As rural Panamanians pursued their musical development in a manner that would seem aligned with the (urban) nation's progressively liberal twentieth century modernization (through the performance of so called foreign music-dance traditions, practices of musical mixing at the level of style and instrumentation construction, and a growing interest in trans-national Cuban popular music), Panamanian folklorists and intelligentsia pursued their nationalism rather differently.

In effect, Panamanian folklorists and musical historiographers established a discursive framework that would effectively position *música típica popular* betwixt and between a medley of dichotomies (e.g., urban/rural, *capitalino/interiorano*, cosmopolitan/vernacular, etc.) that structured twentieth century Panamanian society. By celebrating the cultural practices of Panama's western provinces—a land peopled predominantly by rural *campesinos* imagined as the nation's legitimate title-holders of its Spanish racial and cultural heritage—these authors divided the Isthmus in clear binary terms. The *interior* became the locus for all things vernacular. By the same token, expressions of cultural cosmopolitanism among *interioranos* were often viewed as aberrant and usually ignored or condemned outright. What is particularly important is that while the Panamanian intelligentsia ostensibly championed the cause of rural-identified vernacular culture (which

they often viewed as threatened and in need of *rescate* or rescue), they also promoted ideas of ‘authentic’ expressions of cultural cosmopolitanism as the exclusive birthright of urban populations and *capitalinos* (denizens of the nation’s capital) in particular. Many of these folklorists were themselves educated abroad and some (i.e., Garay and Brenes) were actively involved in Panama City’s concert music scene. Most found nothing amiss with their own engagement in urban-/cosmopolitan-identified cultural practices and yet, as we shall see at various points in this study, were extremely critical of similar activities taking place in the *interior*. Due in part to their efforts, the binary character of Panama’s cultural geography came to be increasingly entrenched in the nation’s own self imagination.

Conclusion

Twentieth century Panamanian nationalism represents both a continuation and departure from the goals and ideologies that led to the establishment of Panama as a modern nation-state. Panamanian interoceanic transnationalism, as its implications for the region’s geopolitical and socioeconomic organization, was on the whole significantly impacted by the colonization process and its attendant strategies of territorial expansion. Similarly Panama’s overtly liberal nationalism has its roots in late eighteenth century and nineteenth century independence movements, in which the promotion of transnational commerce and pronounced (albeit selective) xenophilia became the nation’s *raison d’être*—or as Szok puts it, an “exaggeration” of other forms of Latin American liberal nationalisms (2001:14-15). Parlaying the reactionary tendencies of nineteenth century liberal ideology into the twentieth century, sectors of the Panamanian ruling classes and intelligentsia also fostered and promoted a radically different vision of the nation: one which was reactionary, (selectively)

xenophobic and manifestly nostalgic. While not to ignore their obvious points of coherence and symbiotic relationship, both ideological positions have come characterize Panama's modern nationalism as both progressive/liberal and reactionary/nostalgic.

CHAPTER 2

MÚSICA TÍPICA POPULAR'S ANTECEDENTS

(LATE 1800S TO EARLY 1940S)

In this chapter I examine the early development of *música típica popular*, focusing principally on the instrumentation, repertoires and performance practices of small ensembles or *conjuntos* whose lead instrument was the violin and whose primary performance setting was a community dance or *baile*.⁴⁹ In examining the practices of these ensembles during first decades of the twentieth century, I also aim to highlight points of convergence between the lifestyles and musical practices of musicians from the Azuero peninsula and the nation-building strategies and ideologies outlined in the previous chapters.

One of the challenges of *música típica popular* historiography is establishing a reasonably accurate chronology of events and practices, particularly for the first three decades of the twentieth century. This is due to the fact that much of this early history has variously faded from living memory, occurred in disparate places in the Azuero peninsula, and/or at various times in the nation's history been re-imagined by Panama's cultural architects—i.e., the individuals who were instrumental in providing much of the written information on this period of the music's development. Many of the accounts of early *música típica popular* performance practice that I have encountered—be they from informants or extant written accounts/histories—tend to conflate a number of relevant issues important to

⁴⁹ Additional information on early Azuerense musical practices and taxonomies can also be found in T.M. Scruggs' brief and highly informative contribution to the "Panama" entry for the Grove Music Online (see Gerard Béhague, et al., accessed 2012).

the music's early/pre-1940 history, making it difficult to discern transitional moments, periods, and events as the genre moved from a community-based practice to a commercial musical form. This tendency is not surprising given that many of the hallmarks of contemporary *música típica popular* performance practice appear to be well-established as early as the late 1930s, which is the point in time where standard historical narratives of “*música típica popular*” proper tend to begin. When dealing with the existent literature on this particular period of the music’s history, I endeavour to distinguish possible ‘fact’ from ‘fiction’ (or rather likelihood from unlikelihood) particularly as it manifests itself in the projectionist tendencies of mid-century Panamanian musical historiography. Regardless of the challenges, I believe that an understanding of chronological relationships is indeed important as it provides a measure of insight into the connections between *música típica popular* performance practices and contemporaneous social events.

To understand the relationship of what has become the *música típica popular* genre—that is, the a compendium of shared conventions and relatively consistent performance modalities—to the historical processes that have shaped Panama today, it is crucial to come to terms with the events that led to the genre’s development. Here one encounters the basic ontological challenges of any genesis narrative: origins are often a matter of interpretation and tend to fade and/or evolve over time. These challenges notwithstanding, in this chapter I aim to provide an initial historiography of *música típica popular*, outlining what I believe are the important performance practices—and constitutive social and creative processes—that came to form the basis for later genre sensibilities.

Among the historiographical texts that are most important to this examination of the *música típica popular*’s early history include Porras’ “El Orejano” (1944 [1882]), Narciso

Garay's "Tradiciones y cantares" (1999 [1930]), and Zárate and Zárate's "Tambor y socavón" (1962). Given the timeframe in which these authors were writing and conducting research, Porras and Garay are the most likely to provide a source of firsthand accounts. Briefly, while Porras' work makes no claims to ethnographic methodological rigor, it is likely that the author may have witnessed some or many of the events he describes and as such provides one of the earliest accounts of Azuerense musical practices in general and *junta bailes* in particular.⁵⁰ Garay, on the other hand, makes explicit claims to have personally observed many of the practices he describes in his study, many of which took place in the year of 1920 and possibly thereafter.⁵¹ Zárate and Zárate likely conducted much of their research in 1950s and 1960s and likely did not witness the specific events and musical practices discussed in this chapter. They do claim, however, to have conducted ethnographic interviews with a number of informants who were alive during the first decades of the twentieth century and as such provide secondary source information. An additional study, which I cite mainly in connection with the *conjunto* compositional practices, is Eráclides Amaya's (unpublished) graduate thesis titled "La lírica a través de la obra musical de Francisco "Chico Purio" Ramírez" (Lyrical poetry through the musical work of Francisco "Chico Purio" Ramirez). Somewhat unlike a number of other studies of its kind, Amaya's is unique as it draws on original research (namely ethnographical interviews conducted by the author and reference to extant musical recordings and transcriptions) and offers an insight into the form and attendant compositional processes characteristic of early compositional practice.

⁵⁰ This can be inferred on the basis that Porras had lived the better portion of his life in Las Tablas at the time this text was written in 1882 and that in the text he frequently refers to a number of social (e.g., a celebratory *junta*) and musical instruments and practices that had come to be associated with the Azuero peninsula and its nearby environs.

⁵¹ See Garay, 1999:125, 205.

In general, firsthand ethnographical accounts of early *conjunto* practices tend to begin around the 1940s and only my eldest informants could recall with some degree of certainty events taking place before that time. In order to develop an understanding of the contributions that the foregoing texts can make to our knowledge of the musical practices, performance contexts and social and cultural environments that led to *música típica popular*'s development, I have found it necessary to extrapolate from existing ethnographical data, crosschecking for important consistencies and obvious inconsistencies. This approach at times necessitated that one 'put the cart before the horse' historically speaking and consider the events as we understand them today in reverse. Very briefly, most ethnographical accounts indicate that the antecedents of *música típica popular* are found in the musical practices associated with social (couple) dancing; specifically those performed by small ensembles or "conjuntos" that featured a violin and various accompaniment instruments (e.g., percussive idiophones and membranophones, as well as at times a guitar), which performed a relatively diverse cross-section of music-dance styles/genres—some of which were more or less specific to the Azuero region, and others which were widespread throughout Panama.

Situating the Azuero peninsula

For the various reasons described in the preceding chapter, the Azuero peninsula has been singled out by historiographers as an important site for Panamanian vernacular culture. Not coincidentally, it is within this region that the practices that would become identified as *música típica popular* were developed, and with which the genre is permanently identified. Much of the strength of the music's regional identification has resulted not only from cultural

work by practitioners and historiographers alike (albeit arguably unwittingly in the case of the latter), but also from its various connections to Azuerense society and culture. Given the importance of this region to this study, following is brief outline of its geography, social-economic practices and music with a focus on how these categories have been variously imagined within the larger national context.

Azuerense geo-political organization and rural society

The Azuero peninsula is located along Panama's Pacific coast nestled between the Gulf of Montijo to the west and the Gulf of Panama to the east, and lies at an approximate distance of 300 kilometres from Panama City. Geographically the peninsula is divided by a mountainous region to the west and flatlands to the east. Geopolitically the peninsula intersects with three of Panama's nine provinces: the Province of Los Santos to the southeast, the Province of Herrera to the northeast and the Province of Veraguas to the west. Both the provincial capitals of Los Santos and Herrera are located on the peninsula and include Las Tablas and Chitré, respectively. Together these two towns constituted the main urban centres of the region. The mountainous strip of land on the peninsula's western coast that overlaps with the province of Veraguas remains largely uninhabited to this day. Consequently, the Azuero Peninsula is generally understood to be populated by "Herreranos" and "Santenos" (the names given to people from the provinces of Herrera and Los Santos, respectively) or more broadly "Azuerenses."

The peninsular characteristics of the Azuero region have traditionally worked to separate it from the mainland economy, society and culture.⁵² Much of this isolation was due to the lack of telegraphs, telephones, radio and reliable mail services. Land-based travel between Azuero and the Capital was also hampered by the lack of all-season roads. During the beginning of the twentieth century, most people residing in the Azuero peninsula relied on various forms subsistence agriculture for their livelihood. Living in scattered homesteads and small hamlets of several families, farming took on the form swidden or slash-and-burn agriculture, which was supplemented with small scale animal husbandry and hunting.⁵³ Needless to say, subsistence farming in the tropical climate and mountainous terrain of the Azuero peninsula was a very precarious and labour intensive endeavour. In order to survive and prosper, farmers relied on various forms of reciprocal aid.

One form which would have an impact on the development of *música típica popular* is known as the *junta*, which, as noted above, was a workforce assembled for the purpose of accomplishing a specific and generally community-oriented project. The *junta* differed from other forms of reciprocal aid (such as the *pión dáo* and *peonada*) mainly in terms of its participatory nature. Unlike other forms of labour exchange, the *junta* was open to women and children as well as individuals from outlying communities. Much of the incentive to participating in a *junta* could be credited to its festive character, as Camargo explains: “[during a *junta*,] plenty of food and drink is offered during the intermission and when the work is completed; there are *cantaderas*⁵⁴ and *bailes* are held [as well]” (2004:120). As I

⁵² See Heckadon-Moreno, 2006:62.

⁵³ Leniency on the part of the government in enforcing land title and ownership laws—in addition to a relative abundance of arable land—limited the development of “continuous latifundios” common in other parts of Panama and contributed to the widespread practice of subsistence farming (see Camargo R., 2004:116).

⁵⁴ Settings for the performance of *décimas* (see below).

discuss below, *juntas* often featured a community dance called a *baile* and as such provided a source of periodic employment for local musicians and especially violinists.

Despite a remarkable degree of social and cultural differences between its inhabitants, the relatively bounded territory known as the Azuero peninsula has traditionally been imagined as part of Panama's culturally homogeneous and rural-identified *interior*. Given the country's particular geopolitical development, it is important to consider the relationship of rurality to twentieth century Panamanian modernization and nation building. As is common of national movements in general, the project of nation building affected Panamanians unevenly. For the better part of the nineteenth century, the terminal cities of Panama City and Colón were at the forefront of the nation's modernization effort, which was greatly accelerated with the construction of the canal. Conversely, areas located outside of the economic 'corridor' created by the canal remained largely on the periphery of Panama's modernization efforts. Despite the divisive effects of the nation's modernization, however, rural Panamanians did not constitute a homogeneous group, be it culturally, ethnically and even socially. In her essay on twentieth century rural Panamanian society, Marcela Camargo R. perceptively observes:

there is no single rural world. There are as many as can be formed in accordance with the historical processes that are inherent in its constituent ethnic [groups] and the longevity of their respective culture; the economic and social conditions and links of the group to the land, the type of relation maintained with the owner thereof [as well as] rural society and the country; its geography as well as its degree of interaction with the global capitalist world. (2004:110)

Camargo adds that it is important to consider what is meant by the term and notion of "rural" as it is understood within the Panamanian context. While in Panama (as of 2004) there is no official definition for what it means to be "rural," Camargo makes the following observation:

The studies on rural society made during the large part of the century have focused their study using the traditional concept in which the rural is identified with the countryside [lit. field], in opposition to the urban and is characterized by a population who is dispersed and whose members devote themselves to subsistence farming, for which they rely on forms of familial and cooperative labour such as the *junta* and the *peonada*; that employs very simple technology, that produces little as well as their trade is scarce. (2004:110)

While the foregoing does indeed describe aspects of early twentieth century Azuerense society, it does not take into account the full range of social, cultural and economic differences that structured the lives of people living in that region. And while much of my interest in early twentieth century Auzuero lifeways centres primarily around rural societies such as those just described by Camargo, it is important to recognize that their understanding as such is relative to the social conditions that distinguish them as rural, parochial and pre-modern in the first place. Within Azuero society, music was often a marker of social place and identity, and for this reason ideas of more-or-less urban/rural—with all of their attendant connotations—become a recurring theme throughout this chapter.

Overview of early twentieth century Azuerense musical practices

The Azuero peninsula has a rich and varied musical culture. Given the region's significance to Panamanian national folklore, musical practices from and/or identified with the Azuero peninsula have been the focus of the majority of Panamanian musical historiography. In the following I outline a number of the music-dance practices found in this region, focusing on those that have had the greatest impact on both the development and understanding of *música típica popular*. In this respect I find it useful to reference a basic taxonomical framework created by Zárate and Zárate. In their study, these authors organize Panamanian music-dance

genres mainly according to their instrumentation and arrange them into two general categories, which are labelled 1) “*bailes de tambor*” (drum dances) and 2) “*bailes de cuerda*” (string dances).

Bailes de tambor/drum dances

Zárate and Zárate’s denomination of *bailes de tambor* is an intentionally broad category, covering the whole of the Panamanian territory and meant to include “all the popular dances whose accompaniment includes drums, regardless of whether or not they include other instruments” (1962:20). For the most part, *bailes de tambor* featured both single couples dances (i.e., dances involving only one couple at any given time) and round dances. Two *bailes de tambor* were especially common in the Azuero peninsula and in other parts of Panama as well. These include 1) *tamborito*—sometimes known as *tambor santeño*—and 2) *cumbia*. Both music-dance traditions featured a basic three-drum ensemble common throughout Panama and elsewhere in the circum-Latin American and Caribbean region.

In addition to the three drum formation, the *tamborito* features antiphonal singing by a female lead (called the *cantelante*) and female chorus. Garay pays considerable attention to the *tamborito* and *tambor* (terms he appears to use interchangeably) noting that the musical practice was performed throughout the central provinces as well as in Panama City (see 1999:238-269). In addition to providing accompaniment to social dance, the *tamborito* was also the preferred style of *tunas* and at the time of Garay’s research had even fostered a hit of sorts with the famous *tamborito Tambor de la alegría* (Garay, 1999:240).

Unlike *tamborito*, *cumbia* accompanied a number of round dances wherein the dancers positioned themselves in a circle around the drummers and danced in a counter

clockwise direction. Garay observes that *cumbia* songs featured antiphonal singing between a lead vocalist and chorus, and centred around tonic-dominant chord relationships (see Garay, 1999:294-295). While variants of the *tamborito* and *cumbia* existed outside of the Azuero peninsula (and even Panama) each were marked by their own regional affiliation. In the Azuero peninsula, for example, both genres regularly incorporated the violin or a violin-like instrument known as the *rabel* into their instrumentation. Both the *tamborito* and *cumbia* continue to be performed to this day, however, their characterization as relatively informal and regionally widespread performance practices has diminished considerably as a result of social and economic changes occurring throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

Bailes de cuerda/string dances

In the category of *bailes de cuerda*, Zárate and Zárate include the genres known as *mejorana* (i.e., the music featured during a *cantadera*) and the “popular” (i.e., vernacular/non-folkloric) dance music performed by violin *conjuntos*. The *mejorana* shares its name with a small five-string guitar-like instrument known as either the *mejorana* or *mejoranera*. Garay notes that the genre was widespread in the Azuero peninsula and generally featured as its instrumentation a *mejorana* and on occasion a violin or *rabel* and small percussive idiophones such as *maracas*, *guáchara* and/or *sonajero* (see Garay 1999:287-288), which provided a standard homophonic texture that was also typical of violin *conjunto* practice. Garay notes that the *mejorana* existed in two forms: 1) instrumental *mejorana* and 2) sung *mejorana*. The former typically accompanied a variety of couples dances whereas the latter accompanied the singing of *décimas* or a *cantadera*.

All the authors listed above mention (albeit in minimal detail) the existence of small ensembles that accompanied relatively informal “popular” dances and more formal and elite “ballroom” dances (e.g., *bailes populares* and *bailes de salon*, respectively). The instrumentation, repertoire and performance settings of these ensembles will be the subject of much of the following discussion. Suffice it to say at the moment, however, that violin *conjuntos* were versatile ensembles in the sense that they performed a variety of musical styles which would accompany a specific dance configuration known as *bailes agarrados* (discussed below). Likely due to their “popular” (positioned by these authors as non-traditional) character, these ensembles and their attendant performance practices were routinely overlooked by Garay and Zárate and Zárate, among others.

In Table 2.1, I have adapted a table created by Zárate and Zárate in which they organize a wide variety of dance styles performed by the instrumental categories of *bailes de tambor* and *bailes de cuerda* (see Zárate and Zárate, 1962:293). Given that my study is considerably more focused than that of Zárate and Zárate, I have chosen to limit the genres included in Table 2.1 to those dance practices occurring within the Azuero peninsula during the early part of the twentieth century.⁵⁵ My changes include the omission of a number of dance practices that were/are practiced (only) outside of the Azuero peninsula and the addition of the “fox trot” as part of the “popular or *salon*” dance repertoire. Zárate and Zárate’s classifications (as well as my modifications) organize a limited number of social dances according to a relatively specific ensemble type and an associated performance repertoire. What is immediately evident by looking at Table 2.1 is the sheer stylistic diversity

⁵⁵ The tradition known as *diablico sucios* (lit. dirty devils) is not included in Table 2.1. This is because it is a highly choreographed performance practice that would be best considered a dance/drama rather than a social dance genre.

of dance practices associated with “popular or *salon*” ensembles, which were the domain of violin *conjuntos*.

Music-dance styles linked to specific instrumental/ensemble categories				
Setting:	<i>baile de cuerda</i>		<i>baile de tambor</i>	
Ensemble type:	Popular or <i>salon</i>	Mejorana	Drum only	Mixed instrumentation
Music-dance styles:	<i>danzas</i> <i>cuadrillas</i> <i>lanceros</i> <i>polkas</i> <i>mazurkas</i> <i>waltzes</i> <i>pasillos</i> <i>puntos</i> <i>fox trot*</i>	<i>mejoranas or suestes</i> <i>puntos de mejorana</i> <i>cumbias de mejorana</i>	<i>tamborito</i>	<i>cumbias</i>

Table 2.1: Azuerense music-dance forms categorized according to performance setting⁵⁶ (*not included in Zárate and Zárate’s original classification)

Violin *conjunto* practices

While we know that *bailes* or community dances occurred in and around the Azuero peninsula (and presumably in other parts of the isthmus) significantly prior to the twentieth century, there exists very little information on the character of the ensembles that performed for these events, their instrumentation, and their performance practices. It is only with the publication of Garay’s “Tradiciones y cantares de Panamá” and subsequent research conducted by Panamanian folklorists during the mid-twentieth century (e.g., Zárate and Zárate, 1962) that one begins to get a picture of this particular dance music practice as it existed during the first decades of the twentieth century. Despite the complex and often problematic nature of Garay’s engagement with rural Panamanian music, his text remains an

⁵⁶ Zárate and Zárate, 1962:293.

important document of early twentieth-century Panamanian musical practices and as such features prominently in my examination of early *música típica popular* practice. The following discussion, however, also includes information generously provided by a number of my informants.⁵⁷

Instrumentation

In terms of instrumentation, violin *conjuntos* appear to have been fairly flexible ensembles, likely adapting their instrumentation depending on context, the availability of musicians and in sync with contemporary tastes and trends. When I asked my eldest informants to describe the instrumentation of the earliest violin *conjuntos* their responses were usually given with a certain measure of care and deliberation. Ceferino Nieto believes that prior to the inclusion of the timbales, the violin *conjunto* instrumentation consisted of a violin, *tambor* (a generic term for one of several single headed, conical hand drums found in the Azuero region), maracas and guitar. He noted, however, that the guitar was not used by all violin *conjuntos* and that the maracas could either be replaced or played in tandem with a triangle and/or *güiro*.⁵⁸ Dorindo Cárdenas also described a similar ensemble with the exception of the maracas.⁵⁹

The ensemble that both Nieto and Cárdenas describe is one that is organized around a single lead (violin) and multiple accompaniment (*tambor*, assorted hand percussion and occasionally guitar) ensemble roles. This basic homophonic texture would become a

⁵⁷ My primary informants for this section include Pedro Dominguez (b.1913), Bolivar De Gracia (b.1922), Miguel Jaén Herrera (b.1925, d.2008), Rufino Diaz García (b.1928), Victorino “Nano” Córdoba (b.1933), Dorindo Cárdenas (b.1936), Ceferino Nieto (b.1937), and Boris Duran (1945).

⁵⁸ Personal communication, May 2008.

⁵⁹ Personal communication, November 2007.

mainstay of *música típica popular* sound even after the accordion replaced the violin as the principal lead instrument. Other significant features of this type of ensemble are the general portability and construction of the instruments. All could be carried or otherwise transported with relative ease and, with the exception of the guitar, could be reproduced by local artisans. These features contributed to the general ubiquity of *conjunto* practice among the geographically dispersed and often remote communities within the Azuero peninsula. Following is a brief outline of the (known) history and performance modalities of each of the individual instruments in a *conjunto*.

The violin has long history in Panama. Most texts on Panamanian music credit Spanish colonialists and their descendants with the introduction and eventual proliferation of the violin on the isthmus.⁶⁰ By the early twentieth century, the violin was tremendously popular and, according to Dora Pérez de Zárate, was quickly becoming “the principal and preferred instrument in all of our traditional orchestras used to accompany ballroom dances, both in the interior and in the capital” (1996:56). While the circumstances of the violin’s arrival and eventual proliferation on the isthmus remain largely unknown, we do know that by the time Garay was carrying out his research in 1920, the violin and the *rabel* were popular instruments among rural populations. The *rabel*—also called the “*violín criollo*” (Creole violin) or “*violín rustico*” (rustic violin)⁶¹—was made by artisans living in Panama’s

⁶⁰ See, for example, Brenes, 1999:330 and Smith, 1998:772. Revilla Argüeso is the only author to my knowledge who suggests an alternative explanation, suggesting that the violin may have come to Panama with Italian migrants (see 1987:146). According to Revilla Argüeso, the first recorded account of the instrument on the isthmus was in a newspaper advertisement dating from May 18, 1855, which advertised the sale of violins and violin parts in a store in Panama City (see Revilla Argüeso, 1987:146). Porras also mentions the use of violins as part of a rural ensemble featured during lasso competitions (see Porras, 1944:15).

⁶¹ See Zárate, 1996:60.

central provinces and differed notably from its European counterpart in that it had three strings and three tuning pegs rather than four.⁶²

The case of the *rabel* offers an interesting example of an instrument made by artisans in rural areas of Panama mainly as a *substitute* for what would remain a foreign-made instrument. There is little information to suggest that the *rabel* was regarded as preferable to or used differently from the European violin. In fact quite the opposite seemed to be the case. Most musicians I spoke with tended to regard the violin and the *rabel* as generally interchangeable as far as *conjunto* instrumentation was concerned. By the middle of the century the *rabel* was all but replaced by affordable foreign-made violins to the extent that today one would be hard-pressed to find a functioning *rabel*. The practice of creating (temporary) replicas of foreign-made instruments would recur in the 1930s and 1940s with the construction of locally-made Cuban timbales and congas. In general, this practice is suggestive of a particular kind of engagement with urban and transnational culture: one in which the impetus was less about creative music-technological hybridity, but rather one of authentic recreation and replication, local conditions and resources notwithstanding.

While the triangle is mentioned less frequently in conjunction with violin *conjuntos*, its role within the ensemble could be regarded as significant in terms of the sonic and performance continuities it established with other musical practices. A triangle was typically made by a local blacksmith or sometimes substituted for a horseshoe.⁶³ One informant suggested that the instrument functioned similarly to the maracas and *güiro* in the sense that by moving a beater between two sides of the triangle it played a binary pattern that

⁶² For a description of the *rabel*'s construction see Garay, 1999:287 and Zárate, 1996:59-60.

⁶³ Lioves Gonzalez Frias, personal communication, February 2008. Zárate and Zárate briefly mention the use of the triangle in conjunction with *cumbia* performance in the Province of Los Santos. they write: "Another instrument heard before to accompany *cumbia*[s] in the area of Los Santos was the triangle, a metal instrument of Hispanic heritage" (Zárate and Zárate, 1962:150).

articulated the basic rhythmic pulse of the piece, which is typical of other triangle practices.⁶⁴

On the other hand, Dorindo Cárdenas claims that in violin *conjuntos*

they used the triangle like a *clave* ([sings] *bring, bring, bring, bring*) since they didn't have timbales. The timbales later brought the [cow]bell, however, before the timbales there was the triangle.⁶⁵

The pattern Cárdenas sang was the rhythmically uniform, downbeat rhythm characteristic of the cowbell patterns played by well-known Cuban dance bands (e.g., La Sonora Matancera) and later Panamanian accordion *conjuntos*—which is the timbale/cowbell practice Cárdenas is referring to here. While early *conjunto* timbale/cowbell players did indeed imitate the cowbell patterns played by Cuban bands, Cárdenas' observation provides a measure of insight into the process of musical hybridity involved. The triangle provided a degree of timbral (i.e., iron) and rhythmic/functional (i.e., a “clave”/beat-like pattern) continuity between these two fairly disparate musical practices, which likely inspired and facilitated their mutual integration (this relationship is further examined in Chapter 4).

By the late 1930s, violin *conjuntos*—in tandem with their accordion counterparts—began to institute a number of changes into their ensemble format that reflected an increasing alignment with other urban-identified (and transnational) genres. Changes in instrumentation and instrument performance modalities both added to and modified established practices. Among the most important of these was the inclusion of Afro-Cuban drums, namely a single *tumbadora conga* (referred to simply as “*tumbadora*”) and a pair of (larger and smaller) timbale drums and cowbell (often referred to collectively as “*timbales*” or “*timbal*”). Additionally, *conjuntos* increasingly began to use a female singer whose role it was to sing the melodic lead in compositions that featured lyrics and/or embellish on the violin melody

⁶⁴ Frias, personal communication February 2, 2008; Nieto, personal communication April, 2008.

⁶⁵ Cárdenas, personal communication November 21, 2007.

using a yodeling technique called “*saloma*.” These later additions/modifications will be discussed in conjunction with the mass popularization of the accordion *conjuntos*—which is the subject of Chapter 4.

Repertoire

The earliest description of what (likely) constituted the violin *conjuntos*’ repertoire is found in Porras’s account of the *baile* accompanying a *junta*, wherein he describes a setting in which one dance-type follows another in close sequence; writing: “The *danza* begins followed by the *mejorana* taking place within a tumult of [dancing] couples. From a waltz follows a *polka* and another waltz until the moment arrives to dance the *punto*” (1944:14). The “*punto*,” Porras proceeds to explain, is the final dance of the *baile* in which—and in pointed contrast to the “tumult of couples” dancing preceding it—a single couple dances amid circle of “spectators” (*ibid.*). Although brief, Porras’ account is insightful as it identifies the (*junta*) *baile* as a setting for the performance of various and occasionally transnational music-dance genres. Many of these had strong ties to urban-/cosmopolitan-identified musical and dance practices.⁶⁶ Also important for various reasons discussed below was the relatively independent nature of the dance of many of these genres. Specifically (and in contrast to the *punto* in this case), *junta/conjunto* repertoire featured couple dancing where choreography of each individual couple evolves in a manner that is generally independent of—albeit simultaneous to—other dancing couples and always involves a degree of physical contact

⁶⁶ This was certainly the case of the polka during the turn of the century, which one author notes was not only popular in Panama, but in “the whole of the civilized world” (Revilla Argüeso, 1987:110).

(usually in the form of an embrace). I will refer to this general type of couple dancing as “independent couples dances.”

Clues about the genres performed by early violin *conjuntos* can also be found in Garay’s and Zárate and Zárate’s studies. While these authors reserve much of their discussion of the violin in terms of its role in *mejorana* ensembles, they do occasionally mention its use in a number of performance settings, some of which resemble quite closely ethnographic accounts of early violin *conjuntos*. When visiting the province of Veraguas, for example, Garay notes the existence of (what he regarded as) a hybrid ensemble/practice called “*tambor de cuerda*” that featured the violin in addition to other instruments. Garay notes that this ensemble performed indoors (i.e., “*de orden*”) and accompanied a variety of (independent) “couples dances,”⁶⁷ including “the waltz, *pasillo* [and] foxtrot” (Garay, 1999:142-143). While not a focus of their study, Zárate and Zárate also occasionally mention the existence of community dances (i.e., *bailes de salon/orden* and *bailes populares*) taking place in the Azuero peninsula that sometimes featured small “violin and guitar” ensembles (see, for example, 1962:199).

While extant historiography cannot provide a definitive inventory of violin *conjunto* genre-based performance repertoire, it does provide a picture of the diversity of genres performed by these ensembles that can productively be compared and contrasted with contemporary informant accounts and subsequent performance practices. Having already noted the temporal limitations of information based on living memory, it is possible to infer that the ethnographical data collected in this study roughly coincides with a period dating from the 1930s and afterwards. Polka and *danza* are two genres frequently mentioned in the early historiography that were not cited by my informants. Similarly, only my eldest

⁶⁷ Garay called these dances “*bailes apersogados*” or “tethered dances,” which I discuss below.

informants recalled performing foxtrots,⁶⁸ suggesting that these genres (in line with urban-identified musical trends at the time) may have gone out of fashion and subsequently phased out of *conjunto* practice during the first decades of the twentieth century. While none of my informants cited a “waltz” genre per se, quite nearly all identified the “*pasillo*” as one of the preferred triple/compound duple meter genres of violin *conjuntos*.

A significant disjuncture between established historiography and ethnographic accounts is that quite nearly all of my informants cite “*cumbia*” as the nominal genre for much of the repertoire performed by violin *conjuntos*. According to most of these accounts, *cumbia* (as it was performed by these *conjuntos*) adopted a number of features from other well-known genres (namely Cuban *danzón*) and was a musical accompaniment for independent couples dancing. The fact that this practice is not alluded to in Garay’s study—or Porras’ essay for that matter—may be an indication of a more recent development. Such, however, was not the case for Zárate and Zárate. By the time these authors published their study in 1962, “*cumbia*” from the Azuero peninsula had already become a national and commercial phenomenon, and the term had become nearly synonymous with what would become known (by various names) as *música típica popular*. Zárate and Zárate were painfully aware of this fact and for various reasons often strove to disassociate the earlier practice from its later commercial incarnations.

In order to understand Zárate and Zárate’s ambivalence to this particular aspect of *conjunto* practice it is necessary to examine the way in which *cumbia* was viewed within the context of Panamanian musical historiography. For Garay, *cumbia* ranked fairly low in the “order of folkloric importance” (1999:269) of the musical practices he examined. This was

⁶⁸ Miguel Jaén Herrera, personal communication, May 2008; Lioves Gonzalez Fria, personal communication, February 2008.

likely due to the fact that *cumbia*, as Garay understood it, had undeniable ties to African-derived music-dance practices found not only in Panama, but elsewhere in circum-Caribbean region as well.⁶⁹ This point was not lost on Zárate and Zárate who, citing Garay among others, also acknowledge the practice's African heritage and the fact that the “dance is not exclusively Panamanian.” These factors aside, there were a number of obvious features that recommended *cumbia*'s inclusion in their study and, by extension, the rubric of Panamanian vernacular music. Regional variants notwithstanding, the musical practices classified as “*cumbia*” could be shown to make use of the same basic (Panamanian) drums and drumming techniques, and thus form part of their taxonomy of “*bailes de tambor*” (see 1962:146-149). Furthermore, “*cumbia*,” they point out, “is the *only* popular round dance [found] in Panama” (1962:146; my emphasis).

Less obvious albeit no less a motivating factor for these authors was *cumbia*'s *particular* transformation as a result of the popularity of the accordion *conjuntos*, significant not only for its marked continuities with cosmopolitan-identified musical practices, but, and perhaps more importantly, Azuerense vernacular music as well. While Zárate and Zárate frequently rail against what they perceived to be an “adulteration” of *cumbia*'s “native heritage” brought about by these ensembles—written off as “Panamanian-Antillean hybrids” whose very existence could prove all but “fatal to the art of *cumbia*” (1962:151, 159)—their strong oppositional stance also reveals an underlying anxiety with the commonalities that these ensembles shared with their vernacular-identified Azuerense or “*cumbia santeña*” counterparts. Unlike its variants found in other parts of the Panama, “*cumbia santeña*” had long been performed by ensembles that included a *rabel* or violin and eventually the

⁶⁹ See 1999:294 and in particular Garay's use of the term “*cumbé*,” which would imply connections to a broader African diaspora.

accordion in their instrumentation. The violin was said to have contributed to the *cumbia*'s regional development as an increasingly instrumental practice that led to the introduction of "more elaborate" compositions often at the expense of the more "traditional call-and-response" song form (1962:162). While problematic to their musical taxonomy, Zárate and Zárate nonetheless argued that the instrument's use was an indication of the region's "Hispanic influence" brought about by a so called natural process of cultural "*blanqueo*" (whitening), the effects of which could be measured against the "older" and more 'African'- sounding *cumbia* found elsewhere on the isthmus (i.e., the provinces of Chorrera and Darien).⁷⁰

By 1962, however, it was clear that the compositions and compositional forms of *cumbia santeña* had become a staple of the repertoire performed by professional accordion *conjuntos* in commercial *baile* settings. In an effort to disassociate commercial *cumbia* from its vernacular counterpart, Zárate and Zárate frequently single out its differences—noting in particular the use of non-Panamanian instruments and attendant independent couples dance practices—and in the process frequently attribute these to the advent of the accordion *conjunto*. Commercial *cumbia*, they lament, "[is an] embraced dance that continues calling itself '*cumbia agarrada*' [i.e., held *cumbia*] just because it utilizes the instruments and something of [*cumbia*'s] melody and rhythm" (1962:148). Elsewhere they note that "*cumbia agarrada*" is performed by "orchestras" that featured "the accordion as its melodic instrument" (1962:150). The implication here is that the violin was used to accompany the traditional *cumbia* round dances whereas the accordion "orchestras" accompanied the more modern (read inauthentic) *cumbia "agarrada"* or independent couples dance. By excluding the violin from a key aspect of commercial *cumbia*'s or *música típica popular*'s development

⁷⁰ 1962:147-148, see also the authors' use of the term "natural evolution" on page 151.

these authors effectively limited the degree to which this practice could be imagined as a continuation of “*cumbia santeña*” and a product of a so called normative evolution, vernacular or otherwise. I shall have more to say about the significance of independent couples dances to Azuerense musical historiography, suffice it to say that the genesis narrative Zárate and Zárate promoted would develop ideological and discursive traction easily discernable in the widespread idea that the *música típica popular* genre properly ‘begins’ with the development of the accordion *conjunto*.

Despite Zárate and Zárate claim to the contrary,⁷¹ *cumbia* was played by violin *conjuntos* sometime between the 1930s and 1940s and, like the majority of their repertoire, was danced as an independent couples dance. Based on the foregoing analysis of extant historiography coupled with informant accounts it is possible to compile a provisional list of the genres performed by these ensembles as well as an approximate timeline of when these genres were performed—see Table 2.2. This information suggests that violin *conjuntos* were not only versatile in terms of the genres they performed, but also dynamic in the sense that they adapted their repertoire likely to better cater to the expectations of contemporary audiences/dancers. While research remains to be done on the process in which *cumbia* came to be incorporated in the framework of a *baile*,⁷² it is clear that *cumbia* (as performed by violin *conjuntos*) enabled a degree genre hybridity that was previously unparalleled.

⁷¹ Garay, for example, observes that *cumbia* had gained increasing acceptance in the “salons” of the provincial “high society”—“ceasing to be exclusively a dance of the underworld” as he put it—and that as a round dance its footwork resembled that of “polka” (1999:294).

⁷² A number of my informants, for example, have suggested that *cumbias* did not always accompany community dances, but were also played by accordionists in informal settings such as *cantinas*.

circa 1900s	waltz <i>pasillo</i> <i>punto</i> <i>danza</i> <i>polka</i> <i>foxtrot</i>
circa 1930s	<i>pasillo</i> <i>cumbia atravesado</i> <i>cumbia agarrada</i> (e.g., <i>danzón</i> <i>cumbia</i> , etc.)

Table 2.2: Historical outline of the genres performed by violin *conjuntos*

Compositional form

While violin *conjuntos* traditionally performed a variety of genres, in time *cumbia* would come to constitute the principal genre performed by these ensembles. In this context, *cumbia* was performed differently than in the older round dance setting. One of the practice's more distinctive features was the way *conjunto* practitioners combined the ubiquitous *cumbia* call-and-response song form with sectional forms found in polka, foxtrot and particularly (Cuban) *danzón* compositions. While my understanding of the compositional techniques adopted by early *conjunto* composers is limited to an analysis of a small number of notated transcriptions and recordings of compositions attributed to known *conjunto* practitioners (almost all violinists), there are indications that suggest that these techniques were informed by fairly established genre sensibilities. This is suggested by the multiple labels in existence that are applied (often on an ad hoc basis) to *cumbias* that in various ways combined and integrated aspects of other (often foreign) genres, as might be inferred from names such as “*danzón cumbia*,” “*cumbia zapatea*,” “*porro cumbia*,” “*cumbia lamenta*” and “*son cumbia cubano*” among many others. While not attempting to account for the many variations, in the

following I outline the most common features of *cumbia* compositions as performed by violin (and later accordion) *conjuntos*.

Much of the violin *conjunto* repertoire tends to be organized around series of contrasting melodic sections. Each individual section is generally repeated two or more times with the first section (labelled “A” below) recurring in a later part of the composition as a modified rondo form. In general the vocal/lyric portion of the composition occurs in the middle sections and may involve more repetitions than the previous sections. This is particularly true of the last vocal section, which is usually a short chorus/refrain-type melody that (as in traditional *cumbia* performances) would be repeated indefinitely depending on the requirements of the specific performance context.

Most *cumbia danzón* compositions remain within one or two related keys. Key modulations when they occur typically move between a relative minor and relative major key (e.g., “A” minor and “C” major) and/or a tonic minor and tonic major key (e.g., “A” minor and “A” major). Overall, the harmony is diatonic and centres around tonic-dominant chord relationships. Occasionally secondary dominant chords are used and usually precede movement to subdominant and submediant harmonies—e.g., I7 to IV and III7 to vi, respectively. With the exception of chromatic passing tones and appoggiaturas, the melodies also tend to remain within a given diatonic key.

Violinist Francisco “Chico” Purio Ramírez’s (1902-1988) composition titled *Edicta no me quire* (Edicta doesn’t want/love me) is illustrative of *danzón cumbia* compositional and performance characteristics. A transcription⁷³ is shown in Figure 2.1 and is assembled

⁷³ All musical transcriptions are written in concert pitch unless otherwise indicated. Also, I have notated all the musical examples in ‘cut time’ (i.e., 2/2), indicating what my informants regard as the “*tiempo fuerte*” or “strong time” of the metrical cycle.

from a number of known sources.⁷⁴ In this example, sections are labelled by alphabet letter according to their order of appearance within the composition. Repetition of individual sections is indicated by repetition markers, however, the reader should note that my indications of “first” and “second” endings are only meant to distinguish melodic differences between the *first* and *last* repetition of the given section and are not necessarily meant to suggest a fixed number of repetitions—this is particularly true of vocal section labelled section “E.” The instrumental/violin version of the composition is shown on the top staff and the vocal part is indicated on the bottom staff. Differences between the violin and vocal melody (e.g., bars 43 and 47) are the result of different sources and will remain unaccounted for.

⁷⁴ Sources for the transcription include a score of the composition (author unknown) generously given to me by Roberto Carlos Castillo as well as two recordings: one by a violinist listed only as “Carlos” and another by accordionist Dorindo Cárdenas and his *conjunto*. For the vocal/lyrics examples I reference a transcription of the lyrics cited in Amaya (1996) and the Cárdenas recording. While all four sources present a number of variations, on the whole they are consistent in areas of general form, melody and harmonic structure.

EDICTA NO ME QUIERE

EDICTA NO ME QUIERE

VIOLIN

1 AMI E7 E7 AMI

VLN. 6 AMI A7 DMI E7 1. AMI 2. AMI

VLN. 11 B AMI AMI AMI AMI

VLN. 15 AMI E7 E7 E7

VLN. 19 E7 AMI AMI AMI

VLN. 23 AMI AMI AMI E7

VLN. 27 E7 E7 E7 1. AMI 2. AMI DS AL CODA

VLN. 32 AMI A C D E A D E E E

VOICE YO PÁ PA-RI - TI-LLA YO VOY MA - ÑA-NA. NA-NA.

Figure 2.1: *Edicta no me quiere*

The musical score consists of four staves. The top two staves are for Violin (VLN.) and the bottom two are for Voice. The score is divided into sections by key changes:

- Section A (D major):** Bars 39-43. The vocal line starts with "YO NO SE..... POR QUE'E-DI - CTA NO ME QUIE - RE'A MI. MI." The violin accompaniment features eighth-note patterns.
- Section B (E major):** Bars 44-48. The vocal line continues with "YO MAS NUN-CA VUEL-VO'A PA-RI - TI - LLA POR-QUE'E - DI - CTA NO ME QUIE - RE. QUIE - RE."
- Section C (F major):** Bars 49-53. The vocal line begins with "F E7 AMI". The violin accompaniment includes eighth-note figures.
- Section D (G major):** Bars 54-58. The vocal line begins with "G E7 AMI". The violin accompaniment includes eighth-note figures.

The piece ends with a final section labeled **FINE**.

Figure 2.1 (cont.): *Edicta no me quiere*

Edicta no me quiere is an example of a *danzón cumbia*. The influence of the Cuban *danzón* is particularly noticeable in the composition's sectional form, which would become a permanent feature of *música típica popular* compositions. This example features seven distinct sections as well as a repetition of “Section A” (indicated by the “DS al coda” instruction), which would suggest a modification of the rondo forms used in *danzón* compositions. All the sections employ an even number of bars with the only exception being the break-like figure preceding Section C (i.e., bars 32-33), which adds emphasis to the temporary modulation to the key of tonic major. Other features of *danzón* include the recurring *cinquillo* rhythmic figure (illustrated Figure 2.2 and found in bars 29, 34 and 36) and the cliché two-bar figure that ends the piece.



Figure 2.2: Cinquillo rhythm

Both the harmony and melody of this piece have characteristics that are typical of the repertoire in general that would become features of later compositions as well. The harmony of this piece centres around tonic-dominant chord relationships with occasional excursions to the subdominant chord (e.g., bar 7, 33 and 35). This is a feature which *música típica popular* has in common with a number of other related musical practices, including traditional *cumbia* and many *danzón* compositions. Characteristic of and more particular to *danzón* practice is the modulation to tonic major in section C and return to tonic minor in section D.

A notable feature of the melody is its predominantly disjunct melodic motion. This is true of both the instrumental and vocal sections of the piece, the latter of which are generally devoid of a repetition of discrete melodic pitches (i.e., static melodic motion) that one might expect to find in strophic-type melodies. The melodies of the instrumental sections also display a high degree of rhythmic density or coincidence with the underlying rhythmic pulse—represented as an eighth-note value. This is sometimes recurs in the vocal sections as well, such as in bars 35 and 44.

It is tempting to view both the use of disjunct melodic motion and rhythmic density as a consequence of a predominantly instrumental repertoire—a feature which among other things sets *música típica popular* apart from the older *cumbia* tradition. Amaya, for example, has suggested that the music played by violin *conjuntos* was in fact primarily instrumental

and that lyrics were sometimes added after the fact.⁷⁵ Garay on the other hand provides numerous examples of *tamborito* (vocal) melodies from Los Santos that also feature a predominant use of disjunct melodic motion and in some cases an “enormous tessitura” that spanned two octaves (see 1999:239). Parallels such as this one invite a degree of caution when positing that a causal relationship exists between performance practices and performance intentions. This is particularly true of rural Azuerense musical culture, which has often been romanticized—particularly in Panamanian musical historiography—as static and culturally homogenous. As discussed above, *conjunto* musicians very often adopted and developed performance practices that suited them and their audiences, and were not necessarily constrained by a limited set of musical possibilities.

Features that we might attribute to *cumbia* performance traditions would have certainly been discernable in the singing style and instrumental techniques and patterns played by the musicians. Unfortunately, due to the lack of representative recordings the foregoing transcription necessarily precludes an analysis of performance style and for this reason many of the prominent features of the *cumbia* tradition become less accessible. That said, it is possible to highlight the vocal sections of this composition as characteristic of most *cumbia* vocal performances, which typically feature one-sentence vocal refrains that become repeated indefinitely. While many the songs performed by violin *conjuntos* feature verses of varying lengths (as illustrated above), almost all of the compositions include a short chorus that may be repeated indefinitely.

⁷⁵ Personal communication, November 2007.

Important performance settings

According to most accounts, violin *conjuntos* performed in a variety of settings the majority of which catered to community dances or *bailes*. Among rural Azuerense populations, *bailes* were a widespread form of entertainment that occurred relatively often. This was due to the fact that they typically occurred in conjunction with various types of celebratory occasions tied to calendrical cycles (i.e., patron saint festivals, carnival celebrations and annual holidays), farming cycles (i.e., post-harvesting) and lifecycles (e.g., birthdays, marriages, etc.). It is as part of a *junta*, however, that the role of a *baile* as an event inviting large-scale participation becomes most apparent.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, a *junta* is a form of shared labour that follows principals of mutual reciprocity. Given that many subsistence farmers in the Azuero peninsula relied on labour-intensive slash-and-burn agriculture, the *junta* (as well as other forms of shared labour) was an important survival strategy. The *bailes* coinciding with these events played an important role in coordinating the arrival and ensuring the participation of its members. As rural Panamanian society became increasingly affected by the modernizing effects of the twentieth century, subsistence farming steadily came to be replaced by commercial agriculture and a reliance on wage labour. In the Azuero peninsula, however, subsistence farming—as well as the *junta*—would continue well into the 1970s and was also common in rural communities founded by Santeño migrant farmers outside the Azuero region (see Heckadon-Moreno, 2006).

Porras's essay is likely the earliest description of a *junta baile*, significant in that it provides a basic outline of some the formal characteristics of a *baile* that we see replicated over the course of the twentieth century. Porras begins his account of a *junta* with a

description of the events leading up to the *baile*. Porras describes the *baile* as a festive occasion where people arrive at dusk wearing their dancing best. The site of the *baile* is an enclosed or semi-enclosed, arbour-like structure called an *enramada*. As people begin to arrive and food and drink preparations get underway, the *enramada* becomes a hive of activity and “a place of real festivity” (1944:14). The dancing portion of the *baile* does not begin until nightfall, at which point, Porras writes, “the lights, in lanterns, begin to illuminate the vast space of the *enramada* and the musicians let some sounds escape from their instruments” (*ibid.*). Porras notes that the dancing lasts until daybreak and is immediately followed by the labour portion of the *junta* (*ibid.*).

In this account Porras provides a basic timeframe for a *baile* as well as a chronology of events. Wardrobe preparations appeared to be rather elaborate and began at least a day in advance of the actual *baile*—which in addition to imparting a degree of formality to the proceedings may also account for the reason the *baile* occurred before rather than after the physical labour of the *junta* proper. Wardrobe intact, *junta* members began to arrive at the site of the *baile* around dusk (circa 6:00 PM) at which point food and drink preparations got underway. The dancing portion of the event began at some point after nightfall (circa 6:30-7:00 PM) and continued until daybreak (circa 5:00-6:00 AM). Thus, the dancing took place within a twelve-hour timeframe and almost entirely at night. While more contemporary accounts indicate that the *baile* would typically take place after (rather than before) the labour portion of the *junta*, in all other respects Porras’ remains a remarkably accurate description of a *baile* timeframe even after its commercialisation a half century later.

Porras’ description of the locale in which a *baile* takes place is important as it highlights the significance and use of a particular space in creating the appropriate

environment for community dancing. According to Porras' account, all of the events associated with the *baile* took place within or around an *enramada*, a structure that likely not only provided shelter in the advent of rainfall, but also served to focus the events within a particular and delimited physical area. After nightfall when the dancing began and the gas lanterns were lit, the *enramada* became the centre of activity, creating an environment marked by physical proximity and a sense of spectacle. The use and intended purpose of a structure (presumably) large enough to ensure the continuation of a *baile* in the event of rain is revealing as it not only speaks to a degree of community investment typically associated with a *baile* (that serve to distinguish it from other forms of rural music-making), but also highlights the way that *bailes* were often meant to encourage large-scale participation and community involvement.

My use of the term community “investment” here is meant to denote a commitment of time (including preparation), participation and resources. Given what we know of twentieth century *juntas*, it is likely that the *junta* organizer (called a “*patrón*”) would have been responsible for organizing certain aspects of the *baile*, such as providing some or all of the food and drink, choosing the location for the event and preparing the venue. Porras’ account makes clear, however, that the *junta* participants themselves also contributed to the event by assisting in the preparations of specific kinds of food and drink. Moreover, all participants contributed to the efficacy of the event by their investment in appropriate clothing and participation as dancers. From this we can infer that a *baile* was a relatively formal social affair that required an investment of time and resources by all its members. In the context of a *junta*, a *baile* served a very clear function in that it brought people together,

coordinated labour (often according to age and gender), and ultimately segued to (or followed) the larger community project.

The relative formality of a *baile* vis-à-vis other forms of collective music making has often struck observers as significant. Referring to the generic *bailes de tambor*, a term which sometimes becomes conflated with other historically current/widespread dance practices, Revilla Argüesa writes:

These types of *bailes* are held in open places: patios, field, under arbours, etc., and for few people. Due to the growth of the population [i.e., *baile* participants?] it has been imposed that they begin dancing [these *bailes*] in closed places, calling them—falsely according to Zárate—*bailes típicos*, *bailes de curacha* or *pindines*. (1987:129)

With respect to venues, a number of my informants told me that early *bailes* took place in *casas* (houses), *salas* or *salones* (living rooms), and *casas de quincha* (rural houses built of composite materials of mud and wood). According to Ceferino Nieto, *bailes* originally happened in homes that could accommodate a large group of people.⁷⁶

Possibly the most notorious aspect of the rural *baile* was the prevalence of violent confrontation between male dancers. Even as early as the late nineteenth century, a *baile* was known as a place to settle scores and perhaps create new ones (see Porras, 1944:12). Often violence resulted as a consequence of a practice called “*pichón*” (literal meaning unclear), where a man could take another man’s (dancing) partner by tapping the man on the shoulder and saying the word “*pichón*.” The practice was in itself part of the accepted *baile* etiquette insofar as it was done appropriately and by no means excessively. However, if proper decorum was not observed the act of *pichón* was interpreted as challenge to fight. Fighting of

⁷⁶ Personal communication, December 2007; also Miguel Jaén Herrera, personal communication, December 2007.

this nature typically involved double edged, hilted knife and injuries ranged from superficial wounds to fatal stabbings.⁷⁷

Liquor consumption is also associated with rural lifeways in general and rural *baile* in particular. Heckadon-Moreno notes that alcoholism was fairly common among the rural populations of Tonosí—the southernmost district of Los Santos—particularly during the tenure of the Tonosi Fruit Company (1925 to circa 1930), which provided a source cash-based employment. During this time, he writes:

Alcoholism, the old problem of the countryside, became worse among the men. The *cantinas* proliferated to serve the workers [...] there were six *cantinas* in the town of Tonosí; today [i.e., 1983], with a population of more than double there are three. Every Saturday on payday, *bailes* were held where the workers and peasants would spend their money. (2006:97)

The advent of Panama's commercial liquor and beer industry as well as a shift towards a cash-based economy throughout the Panamanian interior played a major role in the eventual commercialisation of the rural *baile* (which I discuss in Chapter 4). What is important to recognize here is that liquor consumption had been a part of *baile* events long before its commercialisation in the first decades of the twentieth century.⁷⁸

One of the most defining features of rural *bailes* as far as early historiographers were concerned was the type of dancing that took place. Compared to the circle dances and choreographed couples dances of the *bailes de tambor*, independent couples dances featured a greater degree of physical contact between dancers. The close physical proximity between dance partners—not to mention its implication to normative gender relationships—is a prominent theme in the discourse and serves to distinguish the rural *baile* setting from other forms of social dance. Garay offers one of the earliest descriptions of independent couples

⁷⁷ For more information on the subject of violence in rural *baile* settings see Heckadon-Moreno, 2006:239-243.

⁷⁸ Porras, for example, specifically mentions the consumption of a (normally) alcoholic beverage called “chicha” during the *junta baile* in addition to other festive occasions (see Porras, 1944:18).

dances or “*bailes apersogados*” (tethered dances) as he called them, which he suggests involved a particular dancing configuration where the couples “hold each other by the hand [or] the waist” (1999:294; see also p. 143). Garay’s choice of term “*apersogado*” is significant as it not only intentionally connotes a sense of heightened physicality between the dancers, but by singling out the physical link between the dancers above other potentially defining characteristics also creates a caricature of what was likely a multiply differentiated dance practice. Similar terms such as “*agarrado*,” “*amanojado*” and “*pegado*” (each suggesting a state of being “held,” “tied,” and “glued” together, respectively) appear frequently in conjunction with descriptions of *baile* dance practices in later historiography and with similar effect (see Zárate and Zárate, 1962:150; and Zárate, 1996:14). What is important to note here, however, is that while variously denotive of a general *baile* dance practice, none of these terms refer a specific dance style per se, but rather a very basic dance configuration.

While not altogether lacking, compared to other forms of dance, couple dancing remains a generally “under-studied phenomenon within the already marginal field of dance scholarship” (Kaminsky, 2011:125). This is doubly true for *música típica popular* couple dances, which (in tandem with their attendant musical practices) have largely been omitted from Panamanian folk (or even popular/commercial) music-dance historiography. Aside from what I have discussed thus far, to date I have found no written documentation on the formal characteristics of rural independent couples dances. When I brought up the topic of independent couples dances with my informants, some were able to recall with some degree of certainty a few general features of the history and performance of this particular dance practice. Boris Duran, a well-known director of folkloric dance troupes or *conjunto típicos*,

told me that to his understanding this dance form was originally marginalized due to its association with bawdy houses and *cantinas*. *Cantinas* were (and for the most part still are) drinking establishments catering to an almost exclusively male clientele. Women who frequented these establishments are remembered today as prostitutes or at best “libertine.” Duran told me that in this setting “one danced, as they would say, ‘*amanojado*’.”⁷⁹ Another *conjunto típico* director, Bolivar De Gracia, described the same dance as “*agarraó*” (a regional colloquialism for *agarrado*).⁸⁰

When I asked both Duran and De Gracia to describe the dance, they offered a similar demonstration by placing their right hand around an imaginary waist and extending their left arm to shoulder height. The dance position they succinctly demonstrated was one they were certain I was familiar with: the man places his right hand on the small of his partner’s back and grasps her right hand with his left hand, holding it just below (his) shoulder height; and the woman places her left hand on her partner’s right shoulder. This particular dance position is characteristic of the waltz, polka, and foxtrot as well as a wide range of North and South American and European popular dance practices. Duran was careful to add that while this form of dancing was considered to be somewhat scandalous in its time, it was nevertheless imperative that some distance be maintained between the respective couple’s torsos and thighs, and at no point did they come into contact.

Contemporary accounts of early Azuerense independent couples dances suggest that heteronormative gender relationships (broadly shared, presumably) played a key role in the way these dances (and its musical accompaniment) came to be perceived in relation to Azuerense social differences. Differences in dance practice—as viewed through the lens of

⁷⁹ During this interview Duran also referred to the dance as “*baile pegaó*” suggesting the interchangeability of these terms (Duran, personal communication, December, 2007).

⁸⁰ De Gracia, personal communication, February, 2008.

‘permissible’ heteronormative behaviour—had clear associations with social space and place (e.g., the *cantina*, *salon*, etc.). Marta E. Savigliano has made a similar case for Argentine tango, writing:

The worldwide popularity of the tango has been associated with scandal: [since it involves] the public display of passion performed by a heterosexual couple, the symbol of which is a tight embrace and suggestive, intricate footwork. (Savigliano quoted in Fischer, 2004:48)

Both the diversity of musical styles performed by violin *conjuntos* and their close association with independent couples dances represent two of the more distinctive features of this practice within the Azuerense context. As I have suggested above both of these features are often cited by Panamanian folklorists as a means to distinguish and marginalize the rural *baile* setting from what they regarded as vernacular forms of rural music-dance culture. The association of independent couples dances with a sense of heightened physicality and perceived deviations from traditional gender norms also became permanently linked to the *baile* setting and the accordion *conjuntos* that followed. In this respect, the increasing mass popularity of independent couples dances throughout the first half of the twentieth century was regarded as a significant development in rural social dance practice, and provided an impetus for vernacularist scholarship and ideology. In addition, while independent couples dances receive frequent (albeit, cursory) mention in mid-twentieth century Panamanian musical historiography, there is very little information on the actual dances themselves, such as their footwork, holding conventions, stylistic differences and aesthetic associations. This particular omission is revealing when contrasted by the efforts by Panamanian folklorists to document (often through detailed transcription of dance movements and analyses) the group and round dances of the Azuero region.

In time, rural *bailes* would become semi-commercial affairs, yielding profits to the individuals directly involved in their organization. This shift would have a profound impact on *conjunto* practices and eventually allow musicians to earn a living through *baile* performances. The basis for the *baile*'s commercialisation appears to be linked to gradual shift to a cash-based economy, which allowed enterprising organizers (formerly *junta* "patrones" and now "empresarios") to earn profits through the sale of liquor and other services (such as instituting a dancing fee for male dancers). Once the *baile* was expected to generate profits, the type of investment expected of *baile*-goers became one of a financial nature. It is interesting to note that the commercial *baile* would retain many of the participation-enabling features of its purpose-driven counterpart, commercialisation notwithstanding. Most notably, commercial *bailes* would continue to be held in appropriate (e.g., covered) venues, include food and drink, and regularly incorporate a number of practices borrowed from the mutual aid institutions of rural Santeños—such as appointing an *abanderado* (flag bearer) and the exchange of *peones* between *empresarios*. In this way, the commercial *baile* maintained a number of important links to rural (Azuerense) society even with the gradual decline of subsistence-based lifeways.

An account of what a commercial *baile* may have been like in the 1930s and afterwards was provided by my eldest informant, Pedro Dominguez (b.1913). His account is significant as it provides a glimpse into this transitional phase in *música típica popular*'s development. I met Dominguez while conducting interviews with residents of the small town of La Candelaria (located along the south eastern coast of the Azuero peninsula). He was not a musician, but instead an avid *baile*-goer. For much of his life, Dominguez worked as a labourer-for-hire in the immediate vicinity of La Candelaria. He attended his first *baile*

around the age of 25 (i.e., circa 1938) and continued to do so for a number of years afterwards. Being a very small township, La Candelaria hosted one *baile* per year in conjunction with its *fiesta patronal*. In order to attend more *bailes*, Dominguez recalls having to travel on horseback to the nearby townships of Paraiso, La Palma, and Pocrí—all located approximately within a 10 kilometre radius of his hometown. The trip was somewhat arduous and given the bad conditions of the roads typically took an hour to accomplish. I asked Dominguez if it was customary to take a woman to a *baile* and he told me that this was not the case for him. Usually he would go accompanied by a male cousin. He assured me, however, that upon arrival at the *baile* there were always women whom he could ask to dance.

As a form of periodic entertainment, attending a *baile* represented a substantial albeit affordable investment for a non-salaried labourer such as Dominguez. Dominguez earned 5 *reales* (i.e., 25 cents) for a day's work of “*tirando machete*” (slashing with a machete). Expenses accrued at a *baile* were typically well below \$1—i.e., the equivalent of 4 days' wages. For Dominguez, the primary expenses included a dancing fee or “*taquilla*” and the cost of liquor. The “*taquilla*,” he noted, applied only to male dancers and cost 5 *reales*. After paying the *taquilla* a man could dance all night. A bottle of sugarcane liquor commonly known as *seco* was the popular drink of choice and cost 3 *reales* (i.e., 15 cents).

Dominguez would typically arrive at a *baile* after nightfall around 7:30-8:00 PM. These *bailes* often featured well-known violinists accompanied in most cases by a guitarist, and a “*maraca*”⁸¹ player. Dominguez recalled with some satisfaction that he often had the opportunity to attend *bailes* that featured a relative of his, Cedeño de la Rosa, on violin. Compared to the surrounding townships of Paritilla, Pocrí, Paraiso, and La Palma, Candelaria

⁸¹ Given Dominguez's use of the singular form, this instrument was most likely a güiro/*churrucha*.

had relatively few *bailes*. Dominguez credits this to the small size of the town. Dominguez would generally leave the *baile* between 2:00 and 3:00 AM, usually “*bien humado*” (well inebriated), and begin the hour-long return trip to La Candelaria. To the best of his knowledge, Dominguez believes that the *baile* tradition as he experienced it existed before he was born. He noted that the musicians who would play in La Candelaria were generally from the town itself reflecting an understanding of this particular township relative to others as an economical and cultural backwater.

In this description we can see that early commercial *bailes* bore many similarities to their *junta* predecessors: both occurred within general timeframe, offered similar amenities and featured the same forms of social dancing. The primary distinction, however, is that the exchange between participants was now cash-based instead of labour-based. While this change would have a significant impact on the development of the music and lives of the musicians, the incentives for large-scale participation remained unchanged: the success of a *baile* continued to be measured on the basis of the number of dancers/*junta* participants it attracted.

Early commercialisation and professionalism

Historically, violinists are remembered as the primary creative personalities within the violin *conjunto*. Violinists not only commanded attention as the sole melodic instrument within the *conjunto* (a role it shared with a lead vocalist in later years), but many composed a substantial number of instrumental and later vocal compositions that have entered the *música típica popular* repertory. Early twentieth century violinist-composers such as Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramírez (1902-1988), Abraham Vergara Cedeño (1905-[undetermined]) and

Clímaco Batista Díaz (1907-[undetermined]), to name just a few, are still remembered today and continue to inspire new recordings of their work. By comparison, very little is known about the percussionists and even (female) singers who accompanied these musicians, and, as such, much of the written and oral history of early *conjunto* musicians is primarily about violinists.

The large majority of the early violinists who contributed directly to the development of *música típica popular* were from small villages and hamlets throughout the Province of Los Santos. While not usually well educated in the traditional sense, many violinists, however, received varying degrees of formal musical training and some were able to read and write music using standard musical notation. Chico Purio, for example, was from the small hamlet of Purio (from which he got his nickname) and studied music and violin with a teacher by the name of Juan Gómez. Gomez was originally from Colombia, but eventually settled in the town of Pocrí. Gomez taught Chico Purio for a period of six months, after which point the young pupil purportedly learned all he needed to become a great musician (see Amaya, 1996:47). Facility with music notation was unusual for rural musicians and continues to be uncommon among *música típica popular* musicians today. Its use by Santeño violinists remains an exception to the norms of popular/non-Western Art music-making in Panama.

Some of the more in-demand violinists led highly peripatetic and itinerant lifestyles, often travelling from village to village performing for the many community-based/organized *bailes*. Associated with the itinerant lifestyle of these musicians was a reputation as philanderers or *mujeriegos* (womanizers), heavy drinkers, hopeless and at times tragic romantics, and regularly penniless. With respect to issues of musical transmission and the

dissemination of individual compositions, there is some indication that musical notation in conjunction with itinerant and seemingly carefree lifestyles were important factors. Drawing on ethnographic research he conducted for his thesis, Amaya outlined for me some of the ways in which these musicians' lifestyles and musical training structured their creative interaction. The following conversation/interview took place in the town of Las Tablas and focuses specifically on the relationship between violinist-composers Abraham Vergara Cedeño, Chico Purio and Colaco Cortez.

Eráclides Amaya: Before there wasn't this professional jealousy. [Violinist-composers] would meet, they did this. Chico was from Purio. Have you been to Purio?

Sean Bellaviti: No.

E.A.: [...] Well, Purio is located almost before you arrive to Pedasí.

S.B.: Okay.

E.A.: Are you familiar with [the town of] San José?⁸²

S.B.: Yes.

E.A.: Well, to talk about music you have to go to San José.

S.B.: Is that so?

E.A.: So, the now the late Coláco Cortez was from the area of Canajagua, however, he moved over here on the side of Guararé. And they without telephone—because there was no telephone during this time—communicated somehow by messages, by *rasones* [colloquialism]... *Rasones* are messages that one sends with someone; verbal messages. [...] So they would meet sometimes in San José, sometimes in Purio, sometimes in Guararé... All three.

S.B.: The three musicians?

E.A.: And since all three composed and were... Do you know the meaning of the word "bohemian"?

S.B.: Yes. Were they like that?

E.A.: They would come without obligations and without anything. With a small bag with two, three changes of clothes in it...without ironing and without anything. "I'm going to where Abraham lives," "[let's go] over there." Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday...

S.B.: Playing music?

E.A.: Playing music and [makes gesture of someone drinking].

S.B.: *Chupando* [colloquialism for drinking liquor]?

E.A.: [...] You learned [the term] "*chupando*" over here? [Laughs] And so they would exchange pieces. "Look, I have composed a piece and I wonder what you think of it." And they gave them [away]; they exchanged them.

⁸² Abraham Vergara Cedeño is one of several well-known musicians from the hamlet of San José near Las Tablas.

Chico Ramírez made it up to the third grade of elementary school [...] and he wrote music.

S.B.: Yes?

E.A.: [According to an acquaintance of Chico Purio, Chico Purio] was working on the mountain [...] and he [i.e., the acquaintance] said he was over there on the mountains and suddenly they saw [Chico Purio] take a... Do you know what a *churraca* [i.e., a term for gourd] is? Well, it's like this [points to the musical instrument of the same name] but bigger. The farmers/peasants use it to carry water.

S.B.: Is that so.

E.A.: A *tula* [i.e., another term for gourd], a *churraca*.

S.B.: Yes.

E.A.: When it is green you can scratch on it.

S.B.: As in write?

E.A.: With a knife.

S.B.: Yes.

E.A.: And [Chico Purio] would arrive with a machete. [...] [The acquaintance] says that he would [write out] the five lines on a green gourd [...] and would write [musical] pieces on it.

S.B.: He could write using notation?

E.A.: [...] Chico learned to write [text] only a very little—he would draw his name—but he learned [to write] music.

S.B.: Okay.

E.A.: And from [his teacher] Chico Purio learned [to play] music both by ear and by using notation. Afterwards he would bring the gourd from out in the field and he would arrive with a piece written. He would transcribe [the piece] and would exchange it [with other violinist-composers].⁸³

Despite some of the negative connotations associated with this stereotypically “bohemian” lifestyle, all indications suggest that these early violinist-composers were loved and respected by their friends, family and regional audience-bases. Writing specifically about Chico Purio, Amaya reveals something of the romantic appeal of these musical journeymen. “In his compositions,” Amaya writes,

one can appreciate the feelings of the man from the countryside, who does not use refined words to express what he feels. A rustic musical work, beautiful for its rustic quality, sincere and immense, [and] the inspirational product of the man who attended no other conservatory than that which was offered by the birds—with their natural, melodious trill—in the mountain and the daily gatherings within the “*bajareque*” [mud walls] of a peasant hut. [A man] who did not know literary theory, but in the

⁸³ Amaya, personal communication November, 2007.

moments when the axe and machete permitted recreation, cultivated the art which God, the Supreme Creator, brought to the world. (1996:25)

Essentialist language aside, Amaya's laudatory paragraph makes allusions to the situated and therefore significant relationship of these musicians to a specific social-cultural demographic and geo-cultural space. Most notably (and subtly suggested in the foregoing), was the fact that these musicians performed and composed dance-music that was very much in vogue among rural populations and regularly addressed specific themes and issues that directly related to the lifeways of rural, subsistence-farming populations of the region.

The various links between rural Azuerense audiences and the peripatetic lifestyles of early *conjunto* practitioners is also evident in the lyrics of early *conjunto* repertoire. *Conjunto* vocal repertoire addressed a range of topics which in many ways had a direct connection to the lives and everyday experiences of their composers and the rural Azuerense populations they catered to. For the purpose of this discussion I organize this repertoire into three general topical themes, which together account for the majority of song texts included in Appendix

A. In no particular order these are as follows:

- tribute songs
- rural lifeways and landscapes songs
- romantic love songs

In my discussion of song texts I give special consideration to romantic love songs. This is because the topic of romantic love is by far the dominant theme of not only the violin *conjunto* repertoire, but also that of the accordion *conjuntos* to the extent that it is possible to highlight the theme of romantic love a prominent if not defining feature of *música típica popular* compositional practice in general. Also important is the fact that romantic love songs often expressed sentiments of separation, loss and nostalgia, which I argue in later chapters,

came to index the experiences of rural migrants and also found their parallel in the reactionary/nostalgic tendencies of twentieth century Panamanian nationalist sentiment.

Following is a closer look at these three categories.

The songs I label as “tribute songs” pay homage to a particular place, person and/or occasion. For example in the composition titled *Doctor Arroyo*, its author Chico Purio praises the skill and kindness of a (presumably) local physician known as Doctor Arroyo. The song’s text is organized into three sections, with the final two sections serving as short, memorable choruses which likely would have been repeated multiple times. Following is a transcription of all three sections:

*Sí sé que el doctor Arroyo sí cura bien
panameño especialista, que no hay nadie que
cure como él;
ya estaba yo sin esperanzas de mejorarme,
a mi casita, allí fue a buscarme
el doctor Arroyo que me curó. [Repeat]*

*Vamos, vamos, vamos todos
a que nos cure el doctor Arroyo. [Repeat]*

El doctor Arroyo sí cura bien. [Repeat]

Yes I know that Doctor Arroyo can heal well
a Panamanian specialist, there's no one quite
like him;
there I was without hope of getting well,
to my small house, there he sought me out
Doctor Arroyo healed me.

Let's go, let's go, let's go everyone
to the one that cures us, Doctor Arroyo.

Doctor Arroyo, yes he heals [us] well.

Other examples include tributes to particular businesses (e.g., *Club tableño, Jardín gloria* and *Farmacia elena*), people (e.g., *Norma y su pollera* [Norma and her pollera]) and local towns and townships (e.g., *Socabón en Canajagua* [Socabón in Canajagua]). Based on contemporary practices, there is the assumption that songs paying homage to particular people and businesses were commissioned works for which the composer received remuneration of some form.

“Rural lifeways and landscapes songs” tend to be situational and specific to a particular geo-cultural demographic. Often the subject of these compositions are localized at the sub-regional level and (as one Bachelor’s thesis reads) “cite geographical features of our towns, such as: mountains, rivers, villages and places that give the composition a realistic vision/dimension” (Escobar and González, 1993:125). Chico Purio’s composition *La creciente del Río Muñoz* (Chico Purio) offers a good example of this. In this song the protagonist (presumably the composer) describes his/her experience of being caught in a cloudburst in the village of Lajamina (located in the south-western quarter of the Azuero peninsula) along the banks of the Muñoz River. Following are the two verses that comprise the vocal sections of this composition:

*Estaba yo en Lajamina
cuando cayó el aguacero;
cuando dispuse venirme,
el Río Muñoz estaba lleno.*

*De agua sucia y espuma
que corría por la canal;
se llevó el puente del palo,
y no lo pude yo cruzar.*

I was in Lajamina
when the cloudburst began;
when I was able to come,
the Muñoz River was full.

Dirty water and foam
ran through the canal;
it washed away the wooden bridge,
and I could not get across.

In this example, the composer describes a specific event and landmarks (i.e., Lajamina, Río Muñoz, and the wooden bridge) that would be familiar to his local audiences.⁸⁴ Similarly, other songs describe situations that were part of rural, subsistence farming lifeways, such as those suggested by the following song titles: *Se me murió la yegua* (My mare died), *Mollito y su caballo* (Mollito and his horse).

⁸⁴ Other examples of include *Barranco del Río Muñoz* ([The] ravine of the Muñoz River), *Milagros* (Chico Purio [filial love]) and *Valle Rico*.

Part of the lore and affective appeal of violin *conjunto* compositions is the understanding that many (if not the majority) of the songs performed by violin *conjuntos* are biographical or autobiographical in character. Chico Purio, for example, was renowned for this and (to quote one of his contemporaries) “in his pieces, he almost always narrated histories and experiences of his own and those of his friends” (Didimo Vergara quoted in Amaya, 1996:54). This was often true of his romantic love songs which identify individuals by name, such as *Chico quiere a Deya* (Chico loves Deya) and *Edicta no me quiere*⁸⁵ (*Edicta* doesn’t love me).

The compositions I include under the heading of “romantic love songs” comprise the majority of the examples listed in Appendix A and address the topic romantic love between a man and a woman. Despite the relatively focused nature of the topic, these songs are in fact remarkably varied and address a wide range of scenarios possible within accepted (heterosexual) norms of romantic love.

Almost all romantic love songs involve narratives told from a male perspective. Gender distinctions are often explicitly stated in the text and may also appear in the song’s titles as is the case with *A Rosalina que no me espere* (Don’t wait for me Rosalina), *Lucy Jaén* and *Claudina*, among others. In the song *Claudina* the protagonist addresses his eponymous intended by using emotionally heightened, melodramatic language and metaphors, which are characteristic of the rhetorical conventions of *música típica popular*. In the second verse, for example, the protagonist states:

⁸⁵ See Amaya, 1996:110.

*El alma la tengo muerta.
No he dejado de quererte.
Claudina si voy a verte,
no me cierres la puerta.*

My soul is dead.
I have not stopped loving you.
If I go to see you Claudina,
don't close the door on me.

Very often romantic love songs creatively incorporate references to feelings of longing, loneliness, and nostalgia to heighten the emotional impact of a lover's appeal. Separation resulting from and compounded by physical distance is a common scenario. In *El arbolario* (The reckless traveller), for example, sentiments of longing accompany references to physical separation and "aimless" wandering, as is illustrated in the following excerpt:

*Si supiera cual fuera la salvación
del martirio tan grande
que sufre mi corazón.
Voy sin rumbo en este mundo
buscando mi consolación.*

If I knew what could be my salvation
from this [intense] martyrdom/torment
from which my heart suffers.
I go aimless in this world
searching for my consolation.

In songs such as *Soy de mi negra* (I belong to my [black] woman) and *Te sigo amando* (I Continue Loving You), feelings of nostalgia and longing are also tied to the passage of time. The chorus section of the latter, for example, includes a lover's lament that sings:

*Yo para ti, tú para mí.
Ah! Que siga el tiempo, siga volando.*

Me for you, you for me.
Ah! As time continues, continues flying.

Songs linking ideas of physical and/or temporal separation appear frequently in narratives of unrequited love, of which there are many.⁸⁶ These songs regularly involve a situation in which the protagonist journeys to see the object of his affection and is ultimately rejected. In Chico Purio's composition *Edicta no me quiere* (Edicta does not want/love me), the travel narrative is established over a series of three short verses/refrains in which the narrator 1) states his intention to travel to a specific village, 2) laments that his romantic interest "Edicta" does not want/love him and 3) declares never to make the journey again:

<i>Yo p Paritilla me voy maana.</i> (2xs)	I am going to Paritilla tomorrow. (2xs)
<i>Yo no s,</i> <i>Por qu Edicta no me quiere a mi.</i> (2xs)	I don't know, Why Edicta does not want/love me. (2xs)
<i>Yo ms nunca vuelvo a Paritilla,</i> <i>Porque Edicta no me quiere.</i> (2xs)	I will never return to Paritilla, Because Edicta does not want/love me. (2xs)

In this example, the poignancy of rejection is heightened by the journey undertaken by the protagonist—an association that would have not have been lost on rural populations acquainted with the experiences of traveling on horseback or on foot over the often inhospitable terrain of the Azuero peninsula.⁸⁷

Just as the idea of unrequited love represents an emotional discontinuity or distancing between two individuals, so to do travel narratives provide a fitting analogue to experiences

⁸⁶ Some examples of romantic love songs that discuss the topic of unrequited love include *Chico quiere a Deya* (Chico loves Deya), *Amor perdido* (Lost love), *Hombre sin alma* (Man without soul), *Me voy a cazar con otra* (I am going to marry somebody else), *Mi ser querido* (My loved one) and *Traicin* (Betrayal).

⁸⁷ Other examples of romantic love songs that include references to travel and physical separation include *A Rosalina que no me espere* (Don't wait for me Rosalina), *Abreme la puerta que me voy* (Open the door because I'm leaving), *Cielito Lindo* (Beautiful heaven [a term of endearment for a woman]), *Claudina*, *Dejame ir con ella* (Let me go with her), *Esta noche te bass [sic] conmigo* (Tonight you go with me), *Las flores del camino* (The flowers of/on the path), *Me voy pesaroso* (I leave sorrowfully), *No te vayas* (Don not leave), *Nunca me desprecies* (Never despise/spurn me), *Por que causa me dejaste?* (For what reason did you leave me?), *Se fu y me dej* ([She] went and left me).

of physical separation heightened by the challenges of rural travel. Musicians knew this well as they were one of a small minority who regularly traveled from village to village performing for *bailes*. Over time, peripateticism would increasingly come to shape the idiom as it developed over the course of the twentieth century and work to establish links between communities over increasingly greater distances.

While travel narratives were mainly intra-provincial, beginning around the 1940s we also begin to see references to movement or migration beyond regional boundaries. This is true of the song *La linda Ballesteros* (The beautiful Ballesteros) which includes a refrain that sings “*Se va la linda Ballesteros para Panamá*” or “The beautiful Ballesteros is leaving for Panama.” In this song, “Ballesteros” is the name of a woman and her destination is the nation’s capital of Panama City. Another example is the song titled *Me voy de mi tierra* (I am Leaving My Land⁸⁸), which while not referencing any place in particular uses words like “lejana tierra” (distant land), “destierro” (exile), and “desdichado” (wretched) to describe an experience of migration rather than a journey:

Me pongo triste y lloro cuando recuerdo

ese lejana tierra donde naci.

Será que ya el destino

me hace el destierro de por aquí?

I become sad and cry when I remember
that distant land where I was born.

Could it be that destiny
has made me an exile over here?

Me voy muy pronto y triste ya de mi tierra,

porque yo sé que nadie me quiere a mí.

Será que soy el hombre

más desdichado de por aquí?

Very soon and with sadness I am leaving my
land,

because I know that no one wants/loves me.
Could it be that I am
the most wretched man over here?

⁸⁸ “Land” in this case is analogous to the term “country” without the obvious national connotations.

In this example, related motifs of migration and nostalgia are couched within the rhetorical conventions and poetic vocabulary of romantic love songs. In later *música típica popular* compositions, the subject of one's love for their homeland and romantic love would become increasingly intertwined and provide a means for indexing the experience of intra-national migration over the course of the twentieth century. What is important to note here, however, is that the rhetorical conventions adopted and adapted by later composers find their roots in the musical practices of rural populations living in the Azuero peninsula.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have traced the early developments of the genre that would later be called *música típica popular*. In particular I have focused on those features of *conjunto* practice that might be thought to be the most stable in that they came to form a permanent part of the genre as it developed over the course of the twentieth century. Of particular importance here is the role that performance practices connected to the *baile* and *junta* institutions played in forging connections between *música típica popular* and Azuerense society and culture. While the institution of the *baile* was arguably the product of a rural demographic reliant of various systems of labour exchange for their survival, the repertoires and music-dance styles enjoyed by *baile* participants confirm that rural-identified audiences were not untouched' by cultural developments occurring in other parts of Panama at the time. Despite the physical isolation of the peninsula, Azuerense audiences and *baile* goers had musical tastes similar to their urban/*capitalino* counterparts. At the same time the labour-oriented and social character of *junta bailes*, peripateticism among *conjunto* musicians and the textual themes of *conjunto* repertoire all succeeded in establishing strong links to Azuerense populations that would

persist even after *música típica popular*'s commercialisation and pan-national massification.

In later chapters I endeavour to show how these links formed a critical link for understanding the music's relationship to the ideologies of both first and second theme Panamanian nationalism.

PART II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF *MÚSICA TÍPICA POPULAR* (1940s TO THE 1990s)

In Part II I discuss the development of *música típica popular* beginning with the appearance of the accordion as the lead instrument in the *conjunto* ensemble. Three key and interrelated themes constitute a central and recurring focus of this section. First is the topic of Panamanian nationalism, which while remaining closely aligned to the project and challenges of early twentieth century nation building was continually shaped by social, political and economic developments taking place throughout the twentieth century. An important point I aim to show is that while certainly problematic, *música típica popular* was continually implicated in discourses of Panamanian musical nationalism mainly by means of its relationship to the Azuero peninsula/*interior* and tangible links to Panamanian *música folklórica*. Not coincidentally, I show that *conjunto* practitioners themselves often contributed to this process by cultivating a decidedly Azuerense identity, which among other things was heightened by twentieth century migration patterns in the region. In this context, *música típica popular*'s particular mapping in relation to dominant Panamanian geo-cultural narratives draws on its perceived alignments to both first and second theme nationalism.

The second theme concerns the commercialisation of *música típica popular*, which I show significantly aided in bringing practitioners into increasing contact with developing communications technology and institutions—such as national liquor companies and radio

broadcasting—and fostered a growing reliance on new performance technologies. In particular, I focus on the affect of commercialisation on the performance practices and (professional) lifestyles of its practitioners as well as *música típica popular*'s (often oppositional) mapping in relation to other forms of traditional (read non-commercial) music.

The third theme deals with the topic musical mixing, hybridity or “*fusión*” (fusion)—as it is often referred to by practitioners—which was not only a prominent feature of *música típica popular* (which distinguished it from other local/regional genres), but also served to establish links to urban- (i.e., from Panama City) and transnational-identified musical practices and their attendant demographics. In Panama and among *música típica popular* practitioners, strategies of musical innovation were overwhelmingly metropolitan in orientation, and often represented both a distancing from *interiorano*/rural-identified musical practices and identities, and an engagement with transnational musical culture. Both the *música típica popular*'s identification as a commercial and hybrid practice served to align it closer to notions of musical cosmopolitanism generally associated with urban populations.

Each chapter of Part II (numbering 3 to 6) addresses what I consider to be the more salient issues affecting *música típica popular*'s development between the 1940s and 1990s. In Chapter 3 I revisit the topic of Panamanian nationalism and social, political and economic development, and in particular examine its impact on rural societies. In Chapter 4 I provide a detailed outline of the genre's development between the 1940s and early 1970s, examining in particular its development as a commercial and increasingly hybrid musical practice as well as its various alignments to urban and transnational musical culture, and continued regional identity. In Chapter 5 I outline of the various performance modalities that have come to characterize *música típica popular* as a relatively coherent musical practice/genre. In Chapter

6 I continue my outline of *música típica popular*'s development between the 1970s and 1990s and examine the role played by innovation strategies and creative personalities in shaping local performance practices and identities.

CHAPTER 3

MID TO LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

PANAMANIAN NATIONALISM AND SOCIETY

As the Republic approached its mid-century mark, many of the sharp dualities that marked the Panamanian social order remained largely unchanged and firmly entrenched in the national imagination. It is my understanding that Szok's central argument that early twentieth century Panamanian nationalism reflected a "divided identity"⁸⁹—characterized as progressive and liberal on one hand, and reactionary and nostalgic on the other—maintained its relevance. Despite several significant changes to Panama's political structure during the mid-twentieth century, Panamanian nationalist sentiment (as expressed by the nation's cultural elite/intelligentsia) was not fundamentally altered, but occasionally modified.

In his examination of twentieth century Panamanian militarism and its links to populist movements and sentiment, for example, historian Carlos Guevara Mann (1996) adopts the theoretical apparatus of "legitimacy"—defined variously as "the populace's generalized satisfaction with the political *status quo*"⁹⁰ and "the quality assigned to a political system by popular consensus"⁹¹—as a contingency for the state's political continuance. Mann shows that, in Panama, political *legitimacy* (or more precisely *illegitimacy*) can be gauged by the rise of militarism, a history he argues that was neither

⁸⁹ Szok, 2001:62.

⁹⁰ 1996:xv.

⁹¹ *Legitimacy*, Mann adds, "indicates the populace's agreement that the political system is acceptable and viable for the fulfillment of the objectives of the state; in consequence, it generates a sense of loyalty and respect for the political system" (1996:xvi).

exclusive to the Panamanian situation nor the product of institutional militarism of the mid-twentieth century. While isthmian militarism can be traced back to the collapse of the colonial regime (a political system that until its demise was, in fact, *legitimate*), its twentieth century manifestation was often tied to the issue of U.S. hegemony in Panamanian economic and political affairs. It is here we can discern a degree of overlap—both in terms of the cause and effect—with the ambiguities characteristic of official Panamanian nationalism as articulated in the preceding chapter.

Panama's dual-themed nationalist paradigm maintained its relevance due to the nation's economically vital and yet politically tenuous relationship with the United States. One of the effects of this relationship was a general disenchantment with nineteenth century liberalism, fueling the rise of populist sentiment that came to characterize mid-twentieth century Panamanian politics. Stanley Heckadon-Moreno argues that “Panamanian populism” accompanied the “crisis of liberalism” and was characterized by the belief that it was the

responsibility of the state to protect the weakest sectors such as the labourers and farmers that could not compete with groups that were economically more powerful [...]. Other key values of the populist movements of the time was nationalism, the idea of ‘Panama for the Panamanians’ that sometimes resulted in xenophobic manifestations. (Heckadon-Moreno, 2006:107-108).

This form of populist nationalism also manifested itself in anti-American/imperialist sentiments of the time (see *ibid.*). In the years immediately preceding WWII, Panama experienced a heightening of U.S. military presence on the isthmus. As part of both nations' mutual involvement in the war effort, the Panamanian government “agreed to lease the United States 134 sites in the republic [and] extend the leases only for the duration of the war plus one year beyond the signing of the peace treaty” (Meditz and Hanratty, 1989:33). While this arrangement resulted in a number of minor U.S. concessions, the military bases

exacerbated the longstanding problem of Panama's right to territorial sovereignty. The post-war period was a particularly tumultuous one for Panamanian politics, and regularly marked by violent protests. Continued U.S. military presence following the end of WWII was regularly met with strong opposition by the public sectors.⁹²

Concomitant with the social upheaval fueled by nationalist sentiment, Panamanian society also faced a number of challenges to the class-based social structure on which it was founded.⁹³ Having retained their hold on Panamanian politics for quite nearly the entirety of the republic's existence, the ruling oligarchy increasingly faced challenges to their traditional right to rule. The majority of these challenges came from the middle class sector who in turn strove to politicize the popular sectors so as to achieve their own political ends. Mid-twentieth century populist and reactionary nationalism found expression in the anti-U.S., xenophobic and often racist ideology of the *panameñista* movement, and political agency with the ascendency of the movement's leader Dr. Arnulfo Arias Madrid to the position of president for the first time in 1940. Arias broke from political tradition in that he was a middleclass Panamanian from Penonomé, Coclé and visibly mestizo.⁹⁴ Reflecting the attitudes of others of similar social standing, Arias sought to remove the barriers that hindered (middleclass) social mobility and professional advancement. As president, "Arias aspired to rid the country of non-Hispanics, which meant not only North Americans, but also West Indians, Chinese, Hindus, and Jews" (Meditz and Hanratty, 1989:32).

⁹² See Guevara Man, 1996:83 and Meditz et al, 1989:34

⁹³ See Priestley, 1987:7-10 for a succinct outline of mid-twentieth century Panamanian class structure.

⁹⁴ The only other such president prior to Arnulfo was his brother Harmodio who was elected to the presidency in 1932.

The *panameñista* movement both strengthened and received strength from Panama's nostalgic and Hispanic-oriented national identity. Referring to the cultural work done by nationalist historians, poets and musicians (as well as folklorists), Peter Szok writes:

Such cultural politics might seem harmless if they had few or no social consequences, but, in fact, this cultural campaign served to foment intolerance. The intellectual efforts to restrict or narrow the nation soon resulted in similar undertakings within the isthmus' political life. (Szok, 110)

As an "overtly nationalist and anti-imperialist leader," Arias "utilized the customs of the interior to bolster his political standing" (Szok, 2001:13). Evidence of the Arias' populist front is suggested by a recording of a song titled *El líder panameñista* by the young *música típica popular* accordionist Alfredo Escudero. While *música típica popular* song texts rarely featured overt political commentary, it was occasionally co-opted by political leaders and movements who sought to capitalize on its mass appeal and *interiorano* affiliations.

Conspicuous for their absence from Panamanian political life were the peasant/farmer sectors that resided in Panama's rural countryside or *interior* and remained in many ways economically, technologically and physically removed from the other class sectors. Distinctions between rural and urban Panamanians remain strongly marked with the canal and Canal Zone serving as a constant reminder of where the focus of the nation's modernization was located. The centralization of the nation's economy along the narrow trans-isthmian corridor was, as we have seen, not new and created a situation in which the majority of the Panamanian elite were urban-based.⁹⁵

With the rise of twentieth century Panamanian populism and militarism—culminating with the revolution of 1968—both rural and urban Panamanian society would undergo a radical transformation. It is my understanding, however, that despite the changes affecting

⁹⁵ See Meditz et al, 1989:46.

the nation at this time, mid-twentieth century Panamanian nationalism and dominant notions of national identity were not fundamentally altered, albeit occasionally modified.

Omar Torrijos and popular nationalism (1968-1970s)

On October 11, 1968 the National Guard overthrew Arnulfo Arias' third constitutionally elected government and soon afterward became Panama's first institutional military dictatorship (Guevara Mann, 1996:99). After an initial power struggle, Colonel⁹⁶ Omar Torrijos Herrera emerged as the undisputed leader and would retain power until his untimely death on July 31, 1981. For various reasons discussed below, Torrijos' dictatorship—which has been described as a combination of authoritarianism, populism, and personalism (see Guevara Mann, 1996:115)—would have a significant impact on rural Panamanian society and traditional culture, and consequently *música típica popular* as well.

Much of Torrijos' success as a dictator and politician can be attributed to his ability to negotiate a middle ground between the various extremes—e.g., “‘left’ and ‘right,’ black and white” (Priestley, 1986:40)—of Panamanian politics, which was enabled by his cultivation of a strong *campesino* constituency. Torrijos' balanced political approach is most evident in the nature of his relationship with the U.S. and Panama's ruling class. In his dealings with the U.S., Torrijos frequently worked to conceal Panama's dependency “behind a veil of nationalist rhetoric” (Guevara Mann, 1996:131) while at the same time guaranteeing U.S. interests in the canal.⁹⁷ With this strategy Torrijos avoided alienating Panama's

⁹⁶ Torrijos would later promote himself to the rank of Brigadier General.

⁹⁷ During his tenure, Torrijos effectively renegotiated the canal treaty, and among other things succeeded in establishing a termination date for the U.S. control of the canal. Despite a brief lull of activity regarding the canal issue as Torrijos consolidated his power, negotiations with the United States were resumed in 1971. These

traditional oligarchy even as he garnered support among the sub-oligarchy through “anti-‘oligarchic’ and nationalist discourse” (Guevara Mann, 1996:121), declaring famously in 1970: “Having finished with the oligarchy, the Panamanian has his own worth with no importance to his origin, his cradle, or where he was born” (Meditz and Hanratty, 1989:45).

In his effort to create popular base of support, Torrijos’ dictatorship would have a profound impact on peasant society and contribute to the increasing inclusion of this lowest social class into the nation’s political, economic and cultural life. Torrijos himself was an *interiorano* from province of Veraguas and also visibly *mestizo* in Panama. As a politician, Torrijos actively cultivated a rural constituency which formed a popular base for his government. Historians Sandra W. Meditz and Dennis Michael Hanratty observe that Torrijos’ “effort to secure political support in the rural sector was an innovation in Panamanian politics [as] the campesinos traditionally have had little concern with national political issues” (Meditz and Hanratty, 1989:46). Land redistribution, loans for “small” farmers, the creation of commercial farming cooperatives known as “*asentamientos campesinos*” (peasant settlements) were just some of the co-option and clientelist strategies adopted and perfected by Torrijos’ government.⁹⁸ While the *asentamientos* proved ultimately unsuccessful as commercial ventures, they did create new networks of rural migrant communities many of whom hailed from the same province, district or town. Some of these communities became permanent audience-bases for traveling *conjuntos* and the promotion of Azuerense music and culture.

negotiations culminated in the Panama Canal Treaty and the Treaty Concerning the Permanent Neutrality and Operation of the Panama Canal of 1977.

⁹⁸ See Priestley, 1986:55-56 for a discussion of the political and economic motivations behind Panama’s agricultural reform.

It was often in the pursuit of popular consensus building that *música típica popular* was sometimes co-opted for political means. Torrijos was famous for his personal approach to governance particularly as it concerned the rural sectors. As the “patron,” Torrijos often “maintained direct contact with his clients at the grass roots (the settlers) and enjoyed their confidence” (Priestley, 1986:68). In order to do this, he traveled regularly “by helicopter to villages throughout the interior to hear their problems and to explain his new programs” (Meditz and Hanratty, 1989:45). An interesting example of this was told to me by accordionist Dorindo Cárdenas who recalled that Torrijos would sometimes ask a rural community “ ‘Tell me, what can I offer you?’ and the public would shout in chorus: ‘What we want is that you bring us Dorindo Cárdenas.’ ” Cárdenas remembers being quite moved when he heard this, because he considered Torrijos a personal friend and a fan of his music. Often Torrijos would sponsor an entire *baile* and on one occasion even flew Cárdenas in his personal helicopter to a particularly inaccessible community.⁹⁹ Personal friendship aside, however, Cárdenas credits his mass popularity at the time as the reason for his involvement in Torrijos’ campaigns and recalls that Torrijos always paid for the services of his *conjunto*.¹⁰⁰

In addition to instances of institutionalized migration (as in the case of the *asentamientos*), a number of other social factors taking place at the time contributed to widespread internal (i.e., intra-national) migration of rural populations to urban centres (namely Panama City) as well as to other previously uninhabited areas of the isthmus. While internal migration was felt throughout the Panamanian interior, it was particularly pronounced in the Azuero peninsula and (as I discuss in the subsequent chapter) significantly

⁹⁹ The location was the town of Río Sereno (Chiriquí) on the occasion of its official inauguration (circa October 18, 1970).

¹⁰⁰ Cárdenas, personal communication, November 2007.

contributed to the mass popularity of *música típica popular* beyond its traditional regional boundaries. Following is a closer look at Azuerense and in particular Santeño migration patterns.

Internal migration

While it is generally accepted wisdom that the provinces of Los Santos and Herrera experienced an unusually high rate of migration, little research has been done to explain the reasons behind the migration process and the types of social relationships it engendered. An exception is Stanley Heckadon-Moreno's (2006 [1983]) excellent case study of early to mid-twentieth century rural society in Tonosí, the southernmost district in the province of Los Santos—which informs much of the following discussion. As part of a larger study, Heckadon-Moreno shows that in Tonosí (and presumably in other parts of the peninsula), migration often occurred as a result of dwindling resources due to land-intensive subsistence farming practices and competition from commercial agriculture and cattle ranching. Heckadon-Moreno notes that migrants often established (what I refer to as) satellite communities¹⁰¹ in distant areas within the national territory,¹⁰² which was a process that was greatly facilitated by an extant culture of mutual exchange and reciprocity, among other factors.

Beginning in the 1930s, traditional society within the district of Tonosí as well other parts of the southern Azuero peninsula underwent a number of significant changes that effectively transformed the region from a relative haven for subsistence-based livelihood to a

¹⁰¹ I use the term “satellite communities” here to refer to new communities formed by migrants from the same province, district or town.

¹⁰² See Heckadon-Moreno, 2006:42).

site of increasing migration. Heckadon-Morreno's study cites three important factors that contributed to the migration of peasant farmers from the southern Azuero peninsula: 1) the arrival of the American owned Tonosí Fruit Company 1924, which assumed control of vast tracts of land in the southern part of the peninsula (approximately 90% of the arable land in the Tonosí District); the economic impact of WWII, which created new jobs in the terminal cities of Panama City and Colón; and diminishing resources as a result of land-intensive cattle ranching in the 1950s, which not only replaced (subsistence-based) agriculture as the dominant form of livelihood, but also led to the region's rapid transition to a cash-based economy. While these three factors affected rural populations in different ways, the result tended to be similar, that is: a general migration (or in some cases expulsion by another name) of rural populations from the Azuero peninsula to other parts of the isthmus.

The steady increase of migration from the Azuero peninsula is amply reflected in the censuses taken at ten-year intervals between 1930 and 1980 for the Province of Los Santos as shown in Table 3.1. Census data indicates that rather than showing a normative increase, population growth within the Province of Los Santos steadily declined between 1950 and 1980, and reached a nadir of negative “2000” between the 1970 and 1980 census reports. Such an intensive migration understandably had an impact on rural Azuerense culture and lifeways, and (as discussed in the following chapter) is reflected in the texts and performance practices of accordion *conjuntos*.

Year	1930-1980	1930-1940	1940-1950	1950-1960	1960-1970	1970-1980
Population growth	29,000	8,000	12,000	9,000	2,000	- 2,000
Growth percentage	50-99.9%	20-29.9%	20-29.9%	10-19.9%	Less than 10%	- 3%

Table 3.1: “Population growth” and “growth percentage” for the province of Los Santos between 1930 and 1980 (c.f. fig. 19.2 in Instituto Geográfico Nacional Tommy Guardia, 1988:76)

Migration away from the peninsula tended in two general directions: on the one hand Panama City and on the other remote and hitherto uninhabited areas of the country. In the former case, rural migrants moved to the capital in search of wage-paying jobs. In keeping with the traditional mutual aid networks, many of them settled in the same neighbourhoods—such as San Miguelito located on the outskirts of Panama City—and quickly came to constitute a viable audience-base for visiting *música típica popular* groups. In the latter case, rural subsistence farmers relocated to unpopulated and forested areas within the Panamanian territory. While the phenomenon of rural-to-rural migration gained momentum by the *asentamientos*, it was more closely linked to Panama’s modernization and the construction of all season roads in particular.¹⁰³

The feasibility of rural-to-rural migration was also contingent on community-oriented subsistence farming strategies. Heckadon-Moreno observes that in the case of intra-provincial relocation,

migration was done on foot, according to the traditional Santeño system where an individual establishes him/herself where he/she already has relatives, *compadres* [lit. godfathers] or friends. These social networks are of vital importance to learn the advantages of the area, and as a source of mutual assistance in the difficult initial years of colonization, when the risk and sacrifices are the highest. Labour is obtained through [informal] institutions such as: the ‘*junta*’, the ‘*peonada*’ and the ‘*pión dáo*’. (2006:113)

By all accounts, inter-provincial migration was very much the same as their intra-provincial counterparts. In the inter-provincial context, new migrants created territorially dispersed

¹⁰³ See Heckadon-Moreno, 2006:115-116.

Azuerense enclaves in the form of satellite communities in which migrants regularly maintained cultural and economic links with their home province.¹⁰⁴

Azuerense musical traditions and *música típica popular* in particular played a role in maintaining the provincial identities of these migrant communities. As I have argued in the preceding chapter, music (and in particular violin *conjuntos*) played an important role in mutual aid subsistence strategies such as the *junta*. Therefore it is not surprising that the increasingly mobile accordion *conjuntos* would cultivate an audience-base among rural (and eventually urban) migrant communities. It is this relationship between Azuerense *música típica popular* musicians and the social and cultural geography of the Panamanian territory that becomes an important theme of the following discussion of mid-twentieth century performance practices.

¹⁰⁴ This history remains enshrined in the names of these satellite communities, many of which were named after towns in Azuero—e.g., Nuevo Tonosí (Province of Colón) and Union Tableña Superación Campesina (Province of Panama).

CHAPTER 4

ACCORDION *CONJUNTOS* AND THE COMMERCIALISATION OF *MÚSICA TÍPICA* *POPULAR*

Around the late 1940s and early 1950s, *conjuntos* began to replace the violin with the button or diatonic accordion. This development is often regarded as one of the most significant events in *música típica popular*'s history as it preceded and arguably contributed to an era of unprecedented mass popularity for the genre at a multi-regional level. Aided in part by changing social patterns of the time, *música típica popular* evolved from a primarily sole-regional genre to a pan-regional musical practice. The music's increasing mass appeal also contributed to its intense commercialisation and eventual standardization at the level of performance practice and instrumentation. Due to the 'non-traditional' aspects of the developments in the genre during this period, *música típica popular* was often criticized by the nation's cultural elite and in some cases provided an impetus for projects of cultural revival and revitalisation.

The transition from the violin to the accordion

The early history of the accordion in the Azuero peninsula is not clear and questions regarding where it came from and how it came to be affordable for local musicians remain part of an ongoing debate. Conventional wisdom has it, however, that European-made

accordions made their way to the isthmus via Colombia around the mid- to late nineteenth century and afterwards.¹⁰⁵ Prior to its incorporation into the *conjunto* format, many of my informants told me that the accordion had been associated almost exclusively with *cantinas*: drinking establishments catering primarily to peasant and working class men. In this context, an accordionist and often a *tambor* player would entertain patrons with performances of well-known tunes of the time. Due to its connection to the *cantina*, accordion music had associations of vulgarity for some and for this reason was not immediately accepted by the upper and middle classes who resided in the townships or *pueblos* of the Azuero peninsula. The instrument, however, quickly became a favourite among dancers in rural communities and by the early 1960s completely replaced the violin as the primary melodic instrument within the *conjunto*.¹⁰⁶

The transition from the violin to the accordion ushered in an era of unprecedented commercial popularity for *música típica popular* as well as other forms of identifiably *interiorano* music. This was likely the result of the introduction of the accordion into the *baile* setting, which simultaneously led to the decline of the violin as the popular instrument of choice—a fact that was mourned by Panamanian folklorists and galvanized projects of cultural revitalisation. This transition, however, can properly be credited to the violinists themselves who recognized the instrument’s popular appeal and made the switch to the

¹⁰⁵ For example, Augusto Vergara (brother of the famous accordionist Victorio Vergara) told me that his father bought his first accordion in the early 1920s from Colombian sailors docked in the peninsula’s Mensabé port (personal communication, April 2008). Ceferino notes, however, that by the 1950s accordions were being imported directly from Germany by Panamanian retailers (personal communication, April 2008; see also Vargas, 2003 and Brenes, 1999:331 for additional information on the topic of the accordion’s history on the isthmus).

¹⁰⁶ Zárate and Zárate, 1962:150.

accordion.¹⁰⁷ The most important of these individuals was Rogelio “Gelo” Córdoba (1916–1959), a violinist-turned-accordionist from the small town of Mogollón, Los Santos.

Popular accounts as well as Gelo’s recorded output identify him as an exceptional accordionist and composer who—along with his *conjunto El Plumas Negras*¹⁰⁸—in the 1950s was one of the first accordionists whose *bailes* attracted large numbers of dancers and the first accordionist to release commercial recordings. So impressive was Gelo’s popularity that he is sometimes credited with the invention of *música típica popular*.¹⁰⁹

According to violinist Miguel Jaén Herrera, Gelo’s repertoire was primarily *cumbias*, one of several subgenres of the violin tradition.¹¹⁰ In addition to his musical abilities, Gelo’s popularity was highly contingent on a number of specific events taking place in Azuero at the time. Victorino “Nano” Córdoba observes that during the mid-1940s (circa 1946 and possibly before), Gelo would play every year in a *cantina* in Guararé—likely in conjunction with the town’s patron saint festival, which as of 1949 came to be celebrated in conjunction with the *Festival de la Mejorana*. Relative to other forms of entertainment taking place, these performances were relatively low key affairs during which time Gelo was accompanied by a single *tambor*.¹¹¹ It was during one of these performances that Leonidas Cajar, the director of a well-known folkloric dance troupe also called a “*conjunto típico*” (albeit without any specific reference to *música típica popular*), invited Gelo to sit in with his group. The audience responded well to this presentation and according to Córdoba, this was the

¹⁰⁷ Amaya refers to these musicians as “transitional musicians between the violin and accordion in the Province of Los Santos” (Amaya, 1996:38).

¹⁰⁸ The name translates as “The Black Feathers” and is reputed to be a reference to the dark(er) skin of the group’s first (female) singer Celia Cedeño from Pedasí, Los Santos (Vargas, 2003:111).

¹⁰⁹ Fito Espino, personal communication, December 2007. Similarly, one author states:

What is indeed recorded in the history of our *música típica* and in the mind and heart of many Panamanians and especially those from Los Santos; is that Rogelio “Gelo” Córdoba was the one who popularized *música típica*, using the accordion. (Vargas, 2003:111)

¹¹⁰ Personal communication, December 2007.

¹¹¹ Córdoba, personal communication, December 2007.

beginning of Gelo's career *and* the accordion *conjunto* tradition. The following year during the *Festival de la Mejorana*, Gelo was invited to play with other musicians (likely performing for *bailes* rather than the festival proper) and eventually with his own group.¹¹²

Cautioning against an overly simplistic account, however, Ceferino Nieto observes that the transition in performance modalities was also gradual and that its eventual success was contingent on a number of local factors. Foremost among these was the fact that it was violinists themselves who became accordionists *and* due to their familiarity with the music they were able to capitalize and expand on an existing audience-base.¹¹³ In addition to Gelo, other violinists that made the transition to accordion and constitute some of *música típica popular*'s founding practitioners include Cebero "Ceberito" Batista, Dorindo Cárdenas and Ceferino Nieto. Nieto (who was born in 1937) began playing violin at the age of 8. Inspired by Gelo's success, he decided to switch to the accordion, saying:

at 12 years old I changed to the accordion, because the [popularity of the] violin was already declining [...]. At this point, people did not really like violin music *and* the accordion came along [when] Gelo Córdoba recorded his first disc. [...] And so from there I began practicing the accordion and I developed quickly. And so begins the new stage of Ceferino [the accordionist], which brought him to the zenith of popularity.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Victorino "Nano" Córdoba, personal communication, December 2007. Similarly, Fito Espino observes that Gelo became well known because he would play during important regional celebrations (such as *La Fiesta De Las Tablas* and the *Festival de la Mejorana*) at least five times a year (personal communication, December 2007).

¹¹³ Ceferino Nieto says:

The transition was [more successful] because we were violinists who took up the accordion. If it was the inverse, a violinist and someone else began playing the accordion who didn't know how to play [...] the situation would be different. (Personal communication, April 2008).

Among the first important accordionists, Nieto names Rogelio "Gelo" Córdoba, Claudio Castillo, Pitín Tello (my spelling), Horacio Villareal, Adonio Sandoval, Tito Quintero, Tito Alemano and Vito Cardose. Following these Nieto identifies these individuals as the "second wave" of accordionists who began performing in the 1950s including himself, Severito Batista, Rogelio Cruz, Tito Cruz, Victorino "Nano" Córdoba and Dorindo Cárdenas. Later accordionists included Roberto "Fito" Espino, Roberto "Papi" Branda, Teresín Jaén, Alfredo "Fello" Escudero, Chalino Nieto (Ceferino's brother), and Chilo Pittí among many other lesser known musicians (personal communication, December 2007).

¹¹⁴ Personal communication, December 2007.

Similarly, Dorindo Cárdenas began learning the violin at the age of 12 and switched to accordion in his early twenties.¹¹⁵

The attraction of rural audiences to the accordion as a lead instrument in a relatively established performance practice is a matter of some speculation. According to a number of my informants, the widespread appeal of the accordion could be attributed to its loud sound and increased harmonic possibilities. It is also likely that musicians and audiences in Panama's rural interior found the instrument's mechanical qualities and enhanced acoustic and musical possibilities to be an apt visual and sonic parallel to the modernizing processes of the mid-twentieth century, as one author observes: "the violin was losing its strength in the face of the thrust of modernism" (Vargas, 2003:108). The possibility of the accordion to serve as a symbol of modernization is also suggested by its contrast with the violin. *Conjunto* musician Simon Saavedra notes that the term "*culacha*" [my spelling] was often used to denote violin-led *bailes* that catered to people, typically from *el campo*/the field, who were not "in the category of" (hip to) the "new" accordion music "because the accordion was entering new, a new stage." When pressed to define "*culacha*," Saavedra says it was associated with "the people of the second [i.e., lower] class." The accordion, he adds:

was an innovation that was coming. It was low [in status] as an instrument that [certain] people did not value. When they became aware that it was more sonorous than the violin, it had more [...] arpeggio[s], [was] more [...] invigorating. Because the violin is a melodic instrument, a single note. The accordion had two [...] and then three rows [of buttons]. So the three row accordion filled the audience more and they liked what they heard because it had more sonority.¹¹⁶

While on one hand the accordion was seen as a form of musical and social progress, it also presented a number of limitations particularly in terms of its stylistic versatility and

¹¹⁵ Vergara, 2006:55.

¹¹⁶ Personal communication, April 2008. Saavedra's account also echoes those of Graeme Smith's (1997) informants in his study of the popularization of the accordion in Irish traditional music.

associated dance practices. Miguel Jaén Herrera suggests that early criticism of the accordion was the result of limitations and changes to dance practices in vogue at the time. He notes that unlike the violin, the accordion repertoire did not include foxtrots and *pasillos* (not to mention polkas and waltzes).¹¹⁷

It is probably because of stylistic limitations that the accordion *conjuntos* are commonly thought as ushering in a new era of *conjunto* dance practice: one that was largely embraced or “*agarrada*” and where the couples held each other (too, for some) closely. This, however, as was discussed in Chapter 2, was not entirely true. While the accordion repertoire was largely limited to *cumbias*, its associated dance practice had been already established by the violin *conjuntos*. According to Boris Duran, the violin and accordion dance styles were in fact identical; the only major difference being that the early form of “*agarrada*” dancing was with one hand on the waist on one hand clasped and held at shoulder height whereas the later practice (circa 1970s) increasingly involved the man placing both hands around the woman’s waist.¹¹⁸ Similarly, Fito Espino observes that with the arrival of the accordion, the manner of dancing was simply transplanted from the violin tradition with the dancers placing one hand around the waist and one hand holding that of their partner’s.¹¹⁹

As the new accordion *conjuntos* began to develop a following among dancers in the Azuero peninsula, they also began to be the ensemble of choice for communities outside of the region, many of which were made up of Azuerense migrants themselves. Well-known accordion *conjuntos* are generally credited with the proliferation of *música típica popular* throughout the national territory. This expansion, however, was gradual and inextricably linked with the twentieth century migration patterns of rural Azuerenses.

¹¹⁷ Personal communication, December 2007.

¹¹⁸ Personal communication, December 2007.

¹¹⁹ Personal communication, December 2007.

Migration and Azuerense identity formation through music

Azuerense migration resulting from a number of key social-economic factors created a widely dispersed audience-base for *música típica popular conjuntos*. It was often within the context of displaced/satellite Santeño communities that the genre came to serve as a marker of (Azuerense) regional identity. Similarly, *música típica popular* compositions (adapting well-established tropes of romantic love) indexed the experience of rural migration especially as it related to experiences of loss and nostalgia. Like the Santeño violinist-composers before them, the advent of an increasingly geographically dispersed audience-base significantly shaped the lives of professional accordion *conjunto* musicians and further aligned the genre with the more cosmopolitan-identified facets of Panamanian culture and popular nationalism.

Many of my informants have highlighted migration from the Azuero peninsula to other parts of Panama as an important factor in the genre's inter-regional dissemination and eventual national popularity. According to these accounts, migration appears to have had two important effects on *música típica popular*. One, it contributed to the creation of strong links between the music and Azuerense culture and identity. Both the music and the performance practices of *música típica popular* musicians became increasingly identified with sentiments of nostalgia for one's place of origin. Two, *conjuntos* tended to reside within the Azuero peninsula and travel increasingly greater distances to reach their audience-bases. Increasing peripateticism significantly shaped the lives and lifestyles of professional musicians and necessitated a greater reliance on technology as well as commercialisation or a need to turn a profit.

The advent of migration not only impacted the lives of the migrants, but also the musicians who performed for these communities. One of the interesting aspects of *música típica popular* practice is that the musicians rarely became migrants themselves, choosing instead travel to remote communities and retain homesteads in the Azuero peninsula. As we have seen in Chapter 2, peripateticism was the norm for professional musicians within the Azuero region and around the late 1950s, both violin¹²⁰ and especially accordion *conjuntos* began performing regularly for dances or *bailes* outside of the peninsula.

A territorially dispersed audience-base significantly impacted the lives of professional musicians. The most successful *conjuntos* traveled increasingly further distances often by car or bus—which they either rented or eventually owned. The construction of all-season roads in many cases facilitated mobility, but also created other problems. Vehicular accidents were especially common among professional *conjuntos* that often traveled at night following a long performance. Among the musicians who met their demise while on the road were accordionists Ceberito Batista (who died in a car crash when returning from a *baile* that lasted until sunrise¹²¹), José Vergara, Pepo Barria and numerous others. My informants often cited faulty maintenance and physical exhaustion as the principal cause for these accidents. In order to mitigate the dangers of constant travel, Lino Francisco observed that Dorindo Cárdenas was the first *conjunto* owner to contract a driver so that the musicians would not have to drive after performances.¹²² This soon became common practice for those *conjuntos* who could afford to do so and helped to mitigate the problem somewhat.

¹²⁰ Miguel Jaén Herrera noted that a number of violin *conjuntos*—such as those of Clímaco Batista Díaz and Juan Molina, among others—regularly performed outside of the region of Azuero, contradicting the dominant view that accordion *conjuntos* were the first ones to tour. The timeframe, however, was relatively late in *música típica popular*'s history and likely occurred between the late-1940s or early-1950s (personal communication, December 2007).

¹²¹ Vargas, 2003:112.

¹²² Personal communication, December 2007.

As discussed above, the circumstances under which rural populations relocated to different parts of the country created communities of migrants that actively maintained connections with their region, province and town of origin. And it is with the advent of migration (particularly Santeño migration) that *música típica popular* readily took on a pronounced regional identity as well. The overwhelming majority of well-known and commercially successful *conjuntos* came from the Azuero peninsula and maintained a permanent residence in that area. This concentration of musicians within a particular geographical region was due in part to the fact that the peninsula constituted a traditional performance territory and many musicians continued to perform in the area. This was the case for Roberto “Papi” Brandao, who being the son of Azuerense migrants, was born and raised in Panama City, but relocated to Las Tablas in his early twenties to establish himself as a professional musician. “I moved here,” he told me, “because I was already professional. I played *bailes* so it was more convenient for me to be here. Because over here there were more *bailes*.¹²³ Similarly, Ceferino Nieto migrated to Panama City to work in a perfume factory as a wage labourer, but eventually moved back to Chitré once he established himself as a professional musician.

As musicians began to earn a substantial portion of their income performing for *bailes* outside of the region, familial ties and simple economic pragmatism became less convincing reasons for their continued residence in the Azuero peninsula. Nicolas “Nico” Espinosa and Lucho De Sedas, for example, were two *conjunto* owners who were not from Azuero,¹²⁴ but moved there once establishing themselves as professional musicians and (especially in the case of the latter) performed extensively outside of the region as well.

¹²³ Personal communication, January 2008.

¹²⁴ Espinosa is from the Province of Chiriquí and De Sedas from the Province of Panama.

Being affiliated with the Azuero region had much to do with creating links to a particular cultural territory and musical history. Like the practice of naming new towns after places in the Azuero peninsula (e.g., Nuevo Tonosí in the Province of Colón and Palmira in the Provinces of Colón, Panama and Chiriquí), owners often named their *conjuntos* after places in Azuero. For example, among the *conjuntos* listed in the daily newspaper La Critica in 1972 are names like “Ritmo Santeño” (Santeño Rhythm), “Inspiracion Santeña” (Santeña Inspiration), “Aires Tableños” (Tableño Melodies), “Orgullo Santeño” (Santeño Pride) and “Aires De Azuero” (Melodies of Azuero), among many other similarly iconic names.¹²⁵

The relationship of *música típica popular* with the Azuero region, as well as its role in maintaining provincial identities among migrant communities, is often expressed in the verses and refrains of songs at the time. As with the intra-regional violin tradition, song texts were mediums for cataloguing and indexing the experience of being Azuerense and an Azuerense migrant in particular. Themes of loss, displacement and nostalgia appear often and are frequently couched the within the established romantic love song narrative.

Adapting established narratives of romantic (and often unrequited) love, song texts regularly linked emotional separation with actual physical separation. Scenarios of separation from one’s lover or intended are the most common. Perhaps the most famous of these is the song titled *Adonay*, which became a hit for Ceferino Nieto in the early 1970s.¹²⁶ Not unusual for *música típica popular* musicians during this time, *Adonay* was a cover of a well-known *cumbia* composition written and recorded by Colombian musician Julio Erazo. In this song the theme of migration is couched within well-established rhetorical conventions of unrequited romantic love. The protagonist in this song is a man whom having left his

¹²⁵ Including the *conjuntos* listed here, La Critica mentions performances by over seventy *conjuntos* over the course of the 1972 publication year.

¹²⁶ An advertisement in La Critica mentions this tune as one of Nieto’s current hits (June, 3, 1972, p. 19).

hometown returns only to discover that his intended (Adonay) has married another. The lyrics of the verses are sung as a lament in the first person.¹²⁷ Each verse is followed by a refrain in which a feeling of poignancy is reinforced by the call-and-response between the pleading of the lead vocalist/protagonist and reiteration of the single word “Adonay” by the chorus:

Lead: *Por qué te casaste*
Chorus: *Adonay?*
L: *Por qué no esperaste*
C: *Adonay?*
L: *Te sigo queriendo*
C: *Adonay.*
L: *Te iré persiguiendo.* (2xs)

Lead: Why did you get married,
Chorus: Adonay?
L: Why didn’t you wait,
C: Adonay?
L: I still long for you,
C: Adonay.
L: I will pursue you.

A heightened sense of the permanency of the separation is also a distinguishing feature of the compositional narratives of this period—vis-à-vis those of the earlier violin *conjuntos*—which evoke the experience of migration, particularly rural-to-rural migration. An example is the song titled *Candida Rosa*,¹²⁸ in which the eponymous migrant is said to have left and “never again to return.” Similarly, another song titled *Margarita* (performer and author unknown¹²⁹) links sentiments of extreme sorrow (e.g., “I remember Margarita and I feel like crying, I remember Margarita and I cannot console myself”) and abandonment (e.g., “and so I remain abandoned and alone”) with the permanency of the separation, where again the eponymous migrant has “left never more to return.” The poignancy of the narrative

¹²⁷ See Appendix B for a transcription of the lyrics of *Adonay*.

¹²⁸ In this example I reference a live recording by Alfredo Escudero, which due to the presence of an electric bass was recorded at some point after 1970.

¹²⁹ This example is cited in Schara, 1985:50.

is reaffirmed by a terse refrain, which indicates the hopelessness felt by the protagonist, who sings:

*Oye Margarita,
Oye Margarita,
a mí me dan ganas de llorar.
Oye Margarita!*

Listen Margarita,
listen Margarita,
I feel like crying.
Listen Margarita!¹³⁰

During this time we also begin to see links in both the music's sound and repertoire to a specific engagement with urban culture, which fostered alignments with urban- and transnational-identified commercial musical practices (this is discussed in some detail below). Similarly, romantic songs combined references of migrant experiences of urban life to the established narratives of loss and nostalgia. The song titled *Lucy* by Yin Carrizo, for example, is framed in the common protagonist appeal to his lover (in this case the titular character Lucy), who we learn lives in an unnamed city “alone” and in “solitude.” Following several verses there is a memorable refrain which reiterates the connections between loneliness and suffering, and its relation to an urban and likely foreign environment, singing:

*Ay, Lucy querida!
Te vas a quedar
solita y sufrida
en esta ciudad.*

*Ay, Lucy [my] love!
You will remain
alone and suffering
in this city.*

Other songs variously celebrate urban migration (e.g., *Para Panama con Chano* [see Appendix B]) or index feelings discrimination (e.g., *Me miran con malos ojos* [see Appendix B]) and the experience of being a cultural outsider in one’s own country (e.g., *A mi nadie me conoce porque soy de la montaña* [Nobody knows me because I’m from the mountain]). In

¹³⁰ See also *Margarita no me quiere* (Margarita doesn’t want/love me) in Appendix B, which describes a similar sense of hopelessness resulting from permanent separation.

most cases the songs' lyrics often identify one's place of origin as both a basis for prejudice and source of solidarity.

While the songs performed by accordion *conjuntos* also continued to address similar themes as those associated with the earlier violin tradition (see Chapter 2), the large majority focused on themes of romantic love. Over time, both the experience and metaphor of travel became increasingly interconnected and normalized within this song writing tradition. A good example of this is found in Dorindo Cárdenas' cover of a famous Colombian *cumbia* titled *Cero 39* (Zero 39), which the song's narrative identifies as a license plate number. Illustrative of the continuities between these two traditions, Cárdenas' rendition remains faithful to the lyrics of original with one notable exception. In the third line of the second verse of the original composition, there is the phrase “*Se la llevó el maldito taxi*” (“The damned taxi took her away”) for which Cárdenas substitutes the word “taxi”—a decidedly urban form of (short distance) transportation—for the ubiquitous “*carro*” or “car” (see transcript below). This change, while subtle, effectively *allows* for the possibility that the narrative could be interpreted as evocative of a more permanent separation analogous to (*or exactly like*) that of migration (see Appendix B for a transcription of the lyrics).¹³¹

Recording and broadcasting technology

Música típica popular musicians regularly took advantage of communication technologies to further their commercial interests. Similarly, this technology connected musicians—many of whom lived in the rural *interior*—with transnational musical trends and developments. Radio

¹³¹ It is interesting to note that in a recording of this song (n.d.), Alfredo Escudero also uses the word “*carro*” instead of “taxi.”

broadcasts and recording technology introduced *música típica popular* musicians to transnational musical styles while at the same time became a means of disseminating their own music within the national territory. With very few exceptions, however, recording and broadcast technologies did not lead to the promotion of this music at the transnational level.¹³²

As noted in Chapter 1, commercial radio arrived relatively late to the isthmus (i.e., between 1932 and 1934) as a result of broadcasting restrictions. While radio broadcasting and receiving technology was initially available to urban populations (i.e., in Panama City and Colón), it quickly spread to the Panamanian interior and became an important point of contact between rural populations and urban/transnational musical culture. Violinist Miguel Jaén Herrera, for instance, remembers listening to some of the earliest radio broadcasts in Los Santos (circa late 1930s and early 1940s) on portable receivers that were powered by car batteries and regular batteries.¹³³ Boris Duran observes that between the 1940s and 1960s, “there was a period when people listened a lot to Cuban and Mexican music. The period of the boleros [and] the big *orquestas*” including groups such as “La Rumba Casino” and “Casino De Playa.” Duran also notes that music associated with Mexican *charro* culture and singers like Miguel Aceves Mejia and Jorge Negrete were particularly popular during the 1940s and 1950s.¹³⁴ Similarly, *conjunto* singer Catalina Carrasco remembers that during the early 1960s, “People really liked the music of the national *orquestas* that played pieces that

¹³² One notable exception might be found in Colombia, where *música típica popular* musicians sometimes traveled, participated in festivals and formed relationships with Colombian *cumbia* and *vallenato* musicians.

¹³³ Personal communication, December 2007.

¹³⁴ Personal communication, December 2007.

were heard on radio [and had a] Caribbean influence, above all Cuban and from the Dominican Republic.”¹³⁵

While it is clear that radio broadcasting gave rural audiences access to a relatively wide range of transnational musical genres, Cuban music would eventually have the greatest impact on early accordion *conjunto* practice. When I asked Duran why *música típica popular* was not significantly influenced by Mexican music, he suggested that prominent wind/horn instrumentation of Mexican groups was less compatible with *música típica popular* than the percussion-heavy Cuban music.¹³⁶ Duran’s suggestion that similarities in instrumentation and aesthetic orientation were significant factors in the integration of Cuban music appears to be corroborated by the performance practices of the musicians themselves, which I discuss in some detail below. It is clear, however, that musical affinity was not the only reason why *música típica popular* musicians identified with Cuban music and that rural engagement with Cuban dance music was not limited to radio broadcasts alone. Cuban-derived practices permeated the music of the violin *conjuntos* (e.g., *danzón cumbia*) as well as the *orquestas nacionales* and later *combos nacionales*¹³⁷—groups which *música típica popular* musicians emulated not only in terms of their sound, but also in their presentation style.

The impact of commercial radio broadcasting on the development of *música típica popular* is suggested by the fact that its introduction to Panama coincides quite closely with the integration of Cuban-derived percussion instruments and performance techniques within the accordion *conjunto* performance practice. The hypothesis that radio may be primarily responsible for *música típica popular*’s “modernization” (as it is sometimes referred to) is

¹³⁵ <<http://biblioteca.prensa.com/contenido/2001/02/42233031.html>> (accessed November 10, 2010).

¹³⁶ Personal communication, December 2007.

¹³⁷ See, for example, Buckley (2004) and <http://www.ishmaelreedpub.com/archives/interviews/staples_byirving.htm> (accessed November 10, 2010).

also supported by the accounts of musicians themselves, who in addition to other media, used radio as a source for musical inspiration. A number of musicians I interviewed credit radio broadcasts with their own introduction to and sustained engagement with transnational musical styles. Ceferino Nieto, for example, notes that while the vast majority of the early accordion *conjuntos* played *cumbias*, he also listened to Cuban music and learned to play it “by ear” from radio broadcasts and commercial recordings. He cites his particular interest in Cuban music—and a “fantastic ear”—as an important catalyst in his development as a professional musician, explaining:

When I began playing accordion I liked the *orquestas* that [played] Cuban *son*. [...] For example, I played *Mercedes Ven* [sings melody]. I would play this. And one time I was playing in Guararé and I played this piece and Gelo [Córdoba] came to see me play. And he heard this and told me he’d like to learn it. So I went to Las Tablas that week [...] and I taught it to him. Because before there weren’t any [tape] recorders or anything like that and one had to teach by ear. And I taught him and he went onto play it in *bailes*. [...] I [also] learned it and later played it and it became famous. I became famous with this piece *Mercedes Ven*.¹³⁸

While broadcasting technology initially presented an important means by which rural populations and musicians alike came into contact with transnational musical styles, recording technology also became a means of promoting *música típica popular* beyond regional borders. The beginning of Panama’s recording industry is often credited to Gervasio García, a Spanish national resident in Panama City who bought the Panamanian branch of the Victor Talking Machine Co. in 1907.¹³⁹ As early as 1909, García reportedly began recording Panamanian musicians and repertoire associated with the Azuerense musical

¹³⁸ Personal communication, April 2008. Similarly, Fito Espino notes that he performed a number of Cuban *son* classics and noted that the *son* repertoire adapted well to *música típica popular*. Around 1965 he recorded a cover of a Cuban song titled *El huérfanito* (e.g., The little orphan boy) taught to him by a Santeno violinist called Donatilo Vergara—who also played the Cuban standard *Sibonay* and composed a number of pieces that Espino covered. What is particularly interesting about this account is that in addition to a shared interest in Cuban dance music repertoires by Azuerense musicians, this music also came to be integrated within the violin tradition at that time (Personal communication, December 2007).

¹³⁹ Argüesa, 1987:185.

practices (e.g., songs like *El tambor de la alegría* and *Pegadita de los hombres*, among others)¹⁴⁰—it is not clear, however, which (if any) of these early recordings were realized for commercial use. According to Antonio Díaz, the first Panamanian record label was founded in 1947 (taking the name of its founder Orlando Mocci Martínez). It was followed the next year by GRECHA—an acronym for Grabaciones Eléctricas Chacón (Chacón Electric Recordings)—founded by popular radio deejay/emcee Salustiano “Tano” Chacón.¹⁴¹ Among Chacón’s first recordings were performances by Gelo Córdoba and violinist Italo Herrera and their respective *conjuntos*.¹⁴² While Córdoba reportedly was not paid for a number of these recordings, it is likely that he recognized the commercial opportunities and prestige afforded by this new media and participated anyways.¹⁴³ “During that time,” Díaz writes, “recordings commanded respect. One did not record just anybody and those who [were recorded] had to be truly great.”¹⁴⁴ Ceferino Nieto observes that Córdoba’s exceptional talent notwithstanding, his enduring reputation as *música típica popular*’s first great accordionist can be largely credited to the fact that “he recorded first.”¹⁴⁵ Grecha made 500 copies of Córdoba’s first recording of the instrumental composition “Chitré”¹⁴⁶ and in the process contributed significantly to the musician’s popularity outside of the region.

¹⁴⁰ Susto, 1974:5 (I am grateful to Mario García Hudson for directing me to this important text).

¹⁴¹ Historian Mario García Hudson notes that some of his informants (i.e., Lucy Jaén and Italo Herrera) have suggested that Chacón may have began making commercial recordings as early as 1947 (personal communication, April 2008).

¹⁴² According to Díaz, Grecha’s earliest discs were recorded in Las Tablas using a portable recording device (See Argüesa, 1987:187).

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Antonio Díaz quoted in Argüesa, 1987:187.

¹⁴⁵ Personal communication, April 2008.

¹⁴⁶ The title of this composition references the capital town/city of the Province of Herrera and was composed by Alberto Rodríguez (see Ecos del panama de Ayer [Discos Tamayo 2003, CDT-403]).

As a record label, Grecha was mainly active in the 1950s.¹⁴⁷ In addition to recording a wide range of contemporary genres, the label regularly recorded *música típica popular* musicians including Roberto “Papi” Brandao, Claudio Castillo, Dorindo Cárdenas, Fito Espino, Ñito Lasso, Enrique “Quique [also Kike]” Subía and José Vergara, among others. While *música típica popular* was neither the only nor primary musical style recorded by Panamanian labels, its appearance on the first Grecha recordings suggests its significance to the development of the local recording industry.

The next important Panamanian label was Artelec, which was founded in the mid-1950s. While I have not found many *música típica popular* recordings from this label (which is not to say that they do not exist), one of its founders Edilberto Luna went on to establish the Luna label. Luna featured many of the same musicians promoted by Grecha and likely filled the void left by that company when it ceased to exist in 1960. These early labels established the infrastructure and modus operandi for the production and promotion of Panamanian music recorded in Panama. Later companies such as Discos de Panama (or Padiscos) and Discos Istmeño (which were particularly active in the 1970s and 1980s) established the means to press seven-inch phonograph discs nationally.¹⁴⁸

As *música típica popular* increased its mass appeal and profitability—particularly for the owners of *conjuntos* (by and large accordionists), *baile* organizers/*empresarios* and liquor companies—*música típica popular* musicians came to have a greater stake in the creative process and production of commercial recordings. Often with financial assistance from the *cervecerias*, some musicians established their own record labels and/or produced their own

¹⁴⁷ Mario García Hudson, personal communication, April 2008.

¹⁴⁸ Up until this point, Panamanian record labels had to rely on companies in New York, Cuba, Puerto Rico, México and Colombia for the manufacture of phonograph discs (Antonio Díaz quoted in Argüesa, 1987:187).

recordings.¹⁴⁹ During the 1960s, Dorindo Cárdenas and his brother Ñopo Ordoñez founded ORCA (an initialism for Ordoñez and Cárdenas), and brothers Tin and Lito Decerega along with accordionists Yin Carrizo and Ceferino Nieto founded DECATO (another initialism) in 1963. To my knowledge, ORCA and DECATO were the first labels devoted exclusively (or quite nearly so) to promoting *música típica popular*. In addition to Cárdenas, the Orca label released recordings by Osvaldo Ayala, Fito Espino and Ñato Monga. Similarly, accordionists Fito Espino and Roberto “Papi” Brandao produced a number of their own recordings under the Grabaciones Fito and Grabaciones Brandao labels, respectively.

One of the important aspects of the advent of commercial recording technology is that it created tangible links between *música típica popular* and transnational musical styles and in the process came to structure and shape the sound and development of the genre. Between 1950-1955 *música típica popular* recordings were reportedly released as 78 rpm phonographs¹⁵⁰ or “victrolas” as they are sometimes remembered.¹⁵¹ The preferred format, however, quickly became the seven-inch, double-sided 45 RPM phonograph, which became the principal medium between the 1950s and well into the 1980s. The duration of each side of these discs was approximately three minutes, which became the default duration of a (recorded) *música típica popular* song.

The sale of commercial recordings typically did not generate substantial profits for *conjuntos*, however, they soon came to be regarded as an essential component to commercial success. In 1959, for example, Dorindo Cárdenas first recorded two songs for radio airplay titled *Santiago de la Anastacios*¹⁵² and *Pueblo nuevo*, which were released the following

¹⁴⁹ Eduardo Chan, personal communication, March 2008.

¹⁵⁰ Mario García Hudson, personal communication, April 2008.

¹⁵¹ Miguel Jaén Herrera, personal communication, December 2007.

¹⁵² A tribute to the town/district in Chiriquí where Cárdenas first got his start.

year¹⁵³ as the “A” and “B” side of a 45 RPM disc, respectively.¹⁵⁴ Cárdenas told me that the idea to make this recording was Fringo Villareal’s—an *empresario* from Las Tablas who among other things owned a *toldo* called the Royal Gin as well as his own record label. Villareal’s record label Sello Villareal financed the project and kept all the proceeds from the recording. Given that this was Cárdenas’ first recording, he and his band were not paid and recorded for the sake of “publicity.”¹⁵⁵

Radio and jukeboxes are also cited as the primary means of dissemination *música típica popular* recordings. Fito Espino remembers, for example, that during the 1950s a radio program called La Voz Del Pueblo featured performances by *música típica popular* musicians every Friday night and was possibly the only radio station in the capital that played the genre.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, Serafina “Serín” Barrios told me that as a teenager she learned how to sing *saloma* by listening to *música típica popular* on the radio.¹⁵⁷ From the perspective of the performers, radio airplay was an important means for *conjuntos* to cultivate a national audience and—as a result of (presumably legal) payola—to literally promote their music. Typically *conjuntos* relied on sponsors such as *empresarios* and *cervecerias* to pay the sometimes prohibitively high costs of regular radio airplay—an investment which would later be recouped through liquor sales at *baile* performances. This economic arrangement tended to prioritize the commercial viability of the *baile* setting as a condition for *música típica popular*’s mass popularity.

¹⁵³ Yini Cárdenas, personal communication, December 2007.

¹⁵⁴ See Díaz B., 1997:20.

¹⁵⁵ Dorindo Cárdenas, personal communication, December 2007. See also <<http://biblioteca.prensa.com/contenido/2001/02/42233031.html>> (accessed November 10, 2010).

¹⁵⁶ Fito Espino, personal communication, December 2007.

¹⁵⁷ Personal communication, February 2008.

Jukebox technology was also an important way of promoting recordings, particularly from the 1960s to the 1990s. Known in Panama as “*jubox*” or “*traganiquel*” (roughly translated as “nickel-eaters”), these devices could be found in most drinking establishments (i.e., *cantinas* and *jardines*) throughout the country. As a result of increasing demands for commercial recordings, Discoteca Kathia was established (circa 1960s-1970s) as a distribution company which supplied discs to commercial retailers, discotheques and jukebox owners.¹⁵⁸

The large majority of early *música típica popular* recordings were recorded in Panama City and often in radio and television studios. Recording sessions typically occurred late at night. Long time recording engineer, Eduardo “Balito” Chan—who began working for the RPC¹⁵⁹ television station in 1968—recalls: “When the television station began playing the national anthem at 1:00 in the morning the musicians would be waiting [in the studio] to record.”¹⁶⁰ Similarly, Lino Francisco (*tumbadora* player for El Orgullo Santeño) noted that during the 1960s he would record at the Channel 2 television station from midnight onward.¹⁶¹

As Panama’s recording industry became established in Panama City, *música típica popular* (like other forms of commercial music) was recorded in permanent recording studios with greater frequency. In most cases, these studios were owned or contracted by a particular record label, which paid for the production costs of the recording and the manufacturing of

¹⁵⁸ Discoteca Kathia later came under the control of the record label Discos Tamayo owned by Colombian national Rodrigo Escobar Tamayo (Eduardo Chan, personal communication, March 2008).

¹⁵⁹ Beginning as a radio station, RPC (Radio Programas Continentales) began television broadcasts on March 14, 1960 (<<http://www.rptv.com/historia.html>> [accessed December 1, 2010]).

¹⁶⁰ Eduardo Chan, personal communication, November 2007.

¹⁶¹ Personal communication, December 2007.

the discs. In other cases, the musicians themselves (often with the financial assistance of *empresarios* or *cervecerias*) managed the production of their recordings.

The advent of commercial *música típica popular* recordings placed the music in increasingly closer contact with other commercial styles. As the genre grew in popularity, *música típica popular* records were played on radio, *traganiqueles/jukeboxes* and in large discotheques alongside other recordings of genres in vogue at the time. The heightened proximity enabled by recording technology provided a context for musicians and aficionados alike to assess the relative merits (and weaknesses) of what they heard and respond accordingly.

It is important to note that the potential of recording and broadcasting technology to shape musical practices (be it for better or for worse) was not lost on the nation's musical/cultural intelligentsia. Writing in the first decades of the twentieth century, Narciso Garay recognized the impact that recording technology had on popular perceptions of vernacular musical practices and by extension national/regional identities. He writes:

It was recently when the Victor company, manufacturer of phonographic discs, set for the first time the definitive shape and indelible melodic lines of the *mejorana* [...] it did so this time with art and fidelity, respecting the regional aesthetical norms, and without introducing the accompaniment of violins, flutes, contrabass and other instruments of the European orchestra that without consultation appear on its recordings of *tamboritos*. (Garay, 1999:273)

Similarly, in his discussion of the seeming ubiquity of the *tamborito* or *tambor santeño*, Manuel and Dora Pérez de Zárate write: "The radio, television and high schools have contributed greatly to this diffusion" (1962:24). It is in this sense that broadcasting technology not only became a means of introducing rural populations to transnational music, but also contributed the diffusion and development of rural musical styles, both vernacular and non.

National liquor companies

In addition to recording and broadcasting technology, the development of Panama's liquor industry played an important role in the promotion and commercialisation of *música típica popular*. Recognizing the opportunity to market their products to rural audiences, Panama's newly minted national liquor companies worked hard to monopolize aspects of the rural *baile* setting and in the process regularly co-opt well-known and well-liked *conjuntos* (typically by offering some form of remuneration in exchange for exclusivity) as part of their marketing strategy.

Panama's liquor industry began in the first decades of the twentieth century and by 1939 fell under the monopoly of one single company: the Cervecería Nacional (National Beer Company). It would appear that from quite nearly the outset, the commercialisation of liquor had a direct impact on rural lifeways and the *baile* setting in particular. According to Eráclides Amaya, the connection between *música típica popular* and the liquor industry was a logical one that capitalized on a well-established tradition of drinking and dancing. "Panamanian traditional music," he reminded me, "has never been separate from liquor. Where there's no liquor, there's no *baile*." Amaya went on to explain that with the commercialisation of liquor and tandem outlawing of homemade brews, *bailes* became less informal. In order to organize a successful *baile*, an organizer now had to insure the participation of the local company outlet that would provide sufficient liquor for the event.¹⁶² It is also likely that most, if not all, (legal) liquor transactions were cash-based and in this way also contributed to the commercialisation of the *baile* setting itself in the sense that part

¹⁶² Amaya, personal communication, November 2007.

of the transaction necessarily involved a monetary exchange in addition to labour and other forms of traditional/local currencies.

The Cervecería Nacional's monopoly ended in 1958 with the founding of Cervecería del Barú, who through creative and often nationalistic ad campaigns (for example, two of their beers were named “*Soberana*” [i.e., Sovereign] and “*Panama*”) as well as aggressive marketing strategies managed to gain control a portion of a relatively fixed national market. The relationship between these two companies was often highly aggressive. As part of their marketing strategy, each became directly involved in many of the events where liquor was sold and consumed, including musical performances. A common tactic of the *cervecerías* was to broker exclusivity agreements with specific venues (e.g., *jardines* and *cantinas*) and performers in exchange for financial remuneration and/or institutional support of some kind (e.g., print advertisements and radio airplay). Due to their mass popularity and association with the increasingly lucrative *baile* events, *música típica popular* groups were often the targeted by these companies as part of their marketing strategies.¹⁶³

An example of the symbiotic relationship between *conjuntos* and *cervecerías* is illustrated in a typical liquor advertisement shown in Plate 4.1. This example is a portion of a newspaper advertisement promoting products of the Cervecería Nacional. Pictured in this advertisement are a number of *música típica popular* accordionists/bandleaders and their

¹⁶³ Describing this phenomenon, Amaya explains that by the 1970s “the *cervecerías* began contracting musicians on an exclusivity basis, [that is] there were musicians who were exclusive [to a particular *cervecería*]. If I as an *empresario* wanted to hire a *conjunto*, the *conjunto* would tell me “I am exclusive to such-and-such a *cervecería*, so where I perform you must sell only this product. And if you, in order to build your *jardin*, have some kind of contract with the competition, then I don’t know what you’re going to do. However, for my performance you have to sell the product that I represent.” And these artists were being paid annually (I know of figures that go from forty thousand dollars to sixty and eighty thousand dollars yearly) to do this, for exclusivity” (personal communication, November 2007). Similarly, Luis Carlos “Chivo” García (bassist for Los Plumas Negras) observes: “Many musicians sought the financial backing of the *cervecerías* for support and publicity” and *cervecerías*, in turn, used the *conjuntos* to promote and shape their own (popular) “image” (personal communication, 2008).

respective *conjuntos*, all of whom were popular at the time. In each case, the accordionist and many of musicians are shown holding a bottle of the company's most popular beer brands (i.e., TAP, Balboa and Atlas). The caption on the top reads “YOUR FAVOURITE MUSICIANS PREFER IT AS WELL.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Other musicians that appear in the advertisement include “Yin Carrizo (Viva Panamá)” and “Chilo Pitty [sic] (Sentimiento Campesino)” —NB: the name “Chalino Nieto (Primavera)” appears in the bottom left-hand corner.



Plate 4.1: Cervecería Nacional newspaper advertisement (*La Critica*, May 1, 1972:7)

The involvement of the *cervecerías* in the performance practices of *conjunto* musicians both directly and indirectly contributed to—or rather enabled—their increased reliance on technology, and by extension shaped *música típica popular*'s transregional popularity and connection with transnational music. Sponsorships provided the capital to buy busses and expensive equipment such as electronic instruments and amplification systems. Similarly, the commercialisation of the *baile* setting also created opportunities for *conjuntos* to acquire capital. While these resources created opportunities for musicians to modernize their sound and thereby expand their performance-base, it also created barriers for aspiring musicians who soon found *música típica popular* increasingly inaccessible without some form of financial assistance, be it private or corporate. In this way, the *cervecerías* functioned as the genre's gatekeepers of sorts, dictating at times which musicians would receive (seemingly essential) institutional support and which would not.

Instrumentation and instrument technology

Continuing a tradition of technological engagement and innovation, *música típica popular* instrumentation developed in sync with specific transnational styles (i.e., Cuban and Cuban-derived dance orchestras and Colombian *costeño* music). Narratives of instrument-technology engagement generally highlight a dialectical relationship between traditional expectations and urban/modernist-identified aesthetics. In other words, while musicians attempted to modernize their sound (often to gain a competitive edge over their contemporaries and to broaden their audience-base), they were also careful to not alienate their core audience-base. Furthermore, both amplification and instrument technology helped musicians to forge tangible links specifically to urban-identified and transnational music and

performance modalities. Following is a close examination of the impact these two forms of technology had on *música típica popular*'s musical and commercial development.

Amplification technology and aesthetics

The use of amplification technology by *música típica popular* musicians appears to be closely linked to the growing popularity of the genre, which resulted in changes in the genre's principal performance context: the *baile*. In the early 1950s a *baile* could number in the hundreds, ten years later the same event could attract as many as 1000 dancing and paying couples. Farm houses and town halls were no longer adequate performance spaces and enterprising event organizers or *empresarios* began to hold *bailes* in specially designed venues known as *toldos* and *jardines* that were equipped with a small stage and a large dance floor. Larger audiences required increasingly powerful sound-systems, which in turn represented a substantial financial investment for professional *conjuntos*.

Early amplification systems were reportedly simple affairs and limited to only a few instruments. Victorino "Nano" Córdoba, for example, notes that prior to the introduction of a permanent singer, amplification was reserved for the accordion and guitar.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, Cárdenas remembers that early *conjuntos* "used three microphones: one for the accordionist and the singer"¹⁶⁶ and presumably the guitar (see the photo shown in Plate 4.4). While the mic'ing logic would appear to favour the quietest instruments in the band, it also reveals something of the *música típica popular* aesthetics in which the accordion and lead vocalist

¹⁶⁵ Personal communication, December 2007.

¹⁶⁶ Zárate [undated].

are prioritized (as far as volume is concerned) as the two most important components in the *conjunto* and its sound.

The introduction of amplification technology is usually credited to the need/desire to host larger *bailes*, which placed *conjuntos* at odds with ideas of vernacular performance aesthetics. One traditionally-minded author José Antonio Vargas notes, for example, that amplification technology came to be used because the *bailes* simply became too large; bemoaning:

All of this magic crumbled with the population explosion, so that the fun left the small room in exchange for larger spaces. The party moved from the mud house to the huge corrals/enclosures. [An increase in size] created a demand for a louder voice (i.e., music) for the dancers, thus leading to the incorporation of the microphone and speaker; technology that came to undermine the beauty of the natural sound of the violin. (Vargas, 2003:108)

As Vargas suggests, the use of amplification technology is generally seen as antithetical to the development and continuation of vernacular Panamanian music due to its links to commercialisation—a position that echoes that of Manuel and Dora Pérez de Zárate cited earlier in Chapter 2 (see Zárate and Zárate, 1962:150).

Vargas' espousal, however, of the common assumption that amplification was only used by accordion *conjuntos* (and not the ostensibly more vernacular violin *conjuntos*) is mistaken. While it may be true that accordion *conjuntos* performed for larger audiences than their violin counterparts ever did, they were, however, not the first to use amplification technology. Miguel Jaén Herrera, for example, notes that violin *conjuntos* began using amplification systems in the 1940s and, when necessary, he himself would rent a sound system from a musician in Las Tablas called Bernardo Díaz.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Díaz went by the nickname “Negro el Cojo” due to a short leg which caused him to walk with a limp. He was married to Eneida Cedeño who later divorced him for Dorindo Cárdenas (Miguel Jaén Herrera, personal communication, December 2007).

As Jaén's account suggests, early (violin) *conjuntos* typically did not own their own amplification systems and had to rent them from local businessmen/*empresarios* usually for a fixed rate. The cost of renting one of these systems was substantial and typically covered by the owner of the *conjunto*—who in turn included the expense in the group's performance fee. Ceferino Nieto, for example, remembers that he earned approximately \$30 for some of his earlier *bailes* (circa 1950s). From this fee he would pay \$15 for the rental of the sound system and the rest he would use to pay for transportation as well as his musicians and himself. The sound system at that time, he remembers, was relatively small and included two microphones—one for the accordion and the other for the (female) singer—an amplifier and speakers. Nieto would usually rent his sound systems from a businessman in Chitré called Yevara who, due to demand, would often require fifteen days advance notice.¹⁶⁸

Similarly, *conjunto* musician Simón Saavedra told me that early sound systems consisted of two microphones and occasionally an external pickup for the guitar, a basic tube amplifier and two “horn” loudspeakers.¹⁶⁹ Saavedra notes that while sound systems quickly became the norm—reputedly to allow people to “hear” the music better and even made it sound “more beautiful”—sometimes they were simply not available (or likely affordable) and *conjuntos* had to make do without them.¹⁷⁰ Over time, however, it became the norm for professional *conjuntos* to own their own sound systems, which became in itself a visual and sonic (i.e., as in louder) symbol of commercial success. It is in this second respect that sound systems would come to be regarded as not simply necessary to the efficacy of a *baile*, but (as Saavedra suggests) integral to the aesthetic experience as well.

¹⁶⁸ Nieto, personal communication, December 2007.

¹⁶⁹ Roberto “Papi” Brandao claims to be the first *conjunto* director to buy and use “box” speakers (personal communication, January 2008).

¹⁷⁰ Personal communication, April 2008.

Experimentation with amplification technology also played a role in the eventual integration of electro-acoustic instruments the mid-1960s and early 1970s, specifically the electric guitar and eventually the electric bass. The inclusion of the electric guitar appears to have been more closely linked to experimentation with amplification technology rather than musical/stylistic innovation. Saavedra remembers that when he started performing guitar in the mid-1960s with Victorino “Nano” Córdoba’s *conjunto*, “the electric guitar did not exist yet.” Rather, like the accordion, the instrument was amplified by using a microphone or an external pickup (called a “*contacto*” or “*diamante*”). According to Saavedra, guitarist for Dorindo Cardenas, Noel Duran was the first to use a proto-electric guitar in the early 1970s. Saavedra notes that the instrument was purchased in Colombia and was basically a regular (acoustic) guitar with a pickup/microphone attached. The use of the electric guitar proper by *música típica popular* musicians followed one or two years later.¹⁷¹ While my informants have not suggested that inclusion of the electric guitar significantly affected the instrument’s role in the ensemble, it is nevertheless possible to draw parallels between the *combos nacionales* (which often included an electric guitar) and the *conjuntos*, at least in terms of presentation.

Changes to conjunto instrumentation and instrument technology

Like other forms of performance technologies, albeit somewhat earlier, *conjunto* instrumentation played an important role in creating tangible links with other transnational and urban-identified genres. Around the mid-1930s and throughout the 1940s, *música típica* underwent significant changes in its instrumentation and performance modalities. Many of

¹⁷¹ Simón Saavedra, personal communication, April 2008.

these early changes speak to the strong influence of popular Cuban dance music on other Latin American musical practices; an influence that, as was the case in Panama, could be linked to transnational processes as mediated through touring musicians, commercial recordings, and radio airplay.

As I have already noted, Cuban music was broadcast regularly on Panamanian airwaves from the mid-1930s onward. While commercial recordings and radio airplay are sometimes cited as important points of contact between rural musicians and Cuban dance music, a number of my older informants have also suggested these influences could be experienced firsthand somewhat closer to home. One of the points of close encounter between local musicians and transnational music, musicians, and associated modes of presentation and performance was through visiting *orquestas* (orchestras) from the nation's capital. *Orquestas* were large ensembles modeled after their contemporary Cuban counterparts and featured an assortment of wind instruments, guitar and/or piano, upright bass, and number Afro-Cuban percussion instruments as well as lead and backup singers.

In an interview Victorino "Nano" Córdoba recalled that Panamanian *orquestas* would perform regularly for society dances throughout the 1940s in his home town of Guararé. These performances by visiting *orquestas* were significant namely in that they afforded local musicians an opportunity experience Cuban- and Caribbean-derived musical practices up close and gave them the chance to observe the construction of foreign-made instruments and associated performance techniques. According to Córdoba, these *orquestas* contributed to a gradual "modernization" of *música típica popular* as manifested by the increasing use of a lead (predominantly female) singer, integration of Cuban percussion instruments, the use of increasingly powerful sound systems and the eventual inclusion of the bass into the *conjunto*

format.¹⁷² Perhaps the most tangible impact that the real-time interaction between *orquesta* and *conjunto* musicians had on *música típica popular*'s development can be seen in the way that *conjunto* practitioners replicated with a remarkable degree of accuracy both the construction and performance techniques of the Afro Cuban percussion instruments (and the timbales in particular).

The integration of Cuban percussion instruments, specifically timbales and *tumbadoras* (also known as *tumbadoras conga* or conga drums), was likely one of the most significant changes in *conjunto* instrumentation. Both the timbales and *tumbadora* (re)established tangible links between *conjunto* performance practice, and both Cuban-identified and influenced transnational styles in vogue at the time. Similarly, changes in instrumentation reflected a desire to emulate well-known Cuban groups. While the majority of *música típica popular* musicians I interviewed agree that the timbales and *tumbadoras* were incorporated from other musical traditions, there is often little consensus (especially among younger musicians and aficionados) about where these instruments came from and how they came to be integrated into the *conjunto* format.¹⁷³ Among the older informants I interviewed, however, there is a general consensus that these instruments came directly and/or indirectly from Cuba. That is to say that among Azuerense musicians, transnational connections provided not only exemplars of the instrument itself, but also suggested ideas of how the instrument was to be played. When I asked Dorindo Cárdenas, for example, where the timbales came from, he told me “from Cuba.” When I asked what he meant, he said “[among the Cuban groups] I admired most was the Sonora Matancera. [...] Since I was a

¹⁷² Personal communication, December 2007.

¹⁷³ Given the similarity in instrumentation, it was common for my informants to point to contemporary Colombian *vallenato* groups as the logical or obvious precursor to accordion *conjunto* instrumentation and instrumental practice.

child I came to regard it as something very complete and [...] with talent.”¹⁷⁴ Cárdenas noted that before beginning his own group, a number of bandleaders, including Toñito Saenz, Gelo Córdoba and Claudio Castillo had already begun including timbales in their *conjuntos* throughout the 1940s. So it was that by the time he began performing for his first *bailes* on violin in 1948, Cárdenas was “obligated” to bring timbales. When I mentioned to him that some musicians believe that timbales imitated the Colombian *caja* drum, Cárdenas noted that this was simply not the case.¹⁷⁵

Although the precise timeframe and circumstances of the inclusion of Cuban percussion in the *conjunto* line up remains a relative mystery, a number of informants cited the 1940s as a likely timeframe for their inclusion. The earliest date was provided by one of my eldest informants Miguel Jaén Herrera who told me that he began playing timbales in his brother’s violin *conjunto* at the age of 13 (i.e., circa 1940). His brother, he noted, included the drums in order to model his group after “*orquestas caribeñas*” (Caribbean orchestras) from Panama City, which routinely performed for *bailes de salon* in the townships of the province of Los Santos. Jaén Herrera was not the first *conjunto* timbale player (a distinction he believes belongs to a musician by the name of Ilario Bultron from Guararé), which would seem to suggest that the instrument was already being played by local musicians prior to the 1940s.¹⁷⁶

Lacking either the means or opportunity to purchase foreign-made timbales, musicians from the Azuero peninsula fashioned similar membranophones from readily

¹⁷⁴ Personal communication, November 2007.

¹⁷⁵ Personal communication, November 2007.

¹⁷⁶ Personal communication, December 2007.

available materials. Based on iconographical data and informant descriptions,¹⁷⁷ Panamanian-made timbales appeared to have been remarkably accurate replicas of those used by Cuban groups of the same period, which were smaller in diameter than contemporary timbales and in Cuba would be referred to as *pailitos* or *timbalitos*. The original timbale setup consisted of two timbale drums and a cowbell (see Figures 4 and 5). Ceferino Nieto notes that in the beginning “no one owned foreign[-made] timbales. We made them here.”¹⁷⁸ Timbales were typically made by local tinsmiths and artisans. Common materials included car fenders, milk canisters (often stolen) and wood for the shells, and cow or deer hide for the heads.¹⁷⁹ The heads were likely attached to the shell by means of a counterhoop. Early tuning systems varied. Ceferino Nieto remembers that the earliest timbales were fitted with a single “bolt” (i.e., lug and tension rod), which would alter the tension of the head.¹⁸⁰ Like the Sonora Matancera, Azuerense timbales were played directly on the skins of the drums using a technique known (both in Cuba and Panama) as *baqueteo*.

It was the job of the *conjunto* timbalero to also play a cowbell in specific sections of a song in a manner that was very similar to his Cuban counterparts. In the context of La Sonora Matancera, the timbalero typically alternated between the timbale drums and the cowbell. With some exceptions, the former were usually played during the verse-type sections of the first half of the song, and the latter during the chorus/refrain (i.e., *coros*) and instrumental

¹⁷⁷ By the time I began my fieldwork, this instrument had long ceased to be used by *conjunto* musicians—replaced instead by the larger, imported timbales used by salsa musicians today. And while it was rumoured that some of these early timbales still existed, I have not been able to locate one to date.

¹⁷⁸ Personal communication, December 2007.

¹⁷⁹ Simon Saavedra (personal communication, April 2008), Agusto Vergara (personal communication, April 2008), Ceferino Nieto (personal communication, December 2007) and Guliermo Juarez (personal communication, December 2007).

¹⁸⁰ Nieto noted that this system was only partially effective and often the head would have to be further tightened during the course of a performance by holding a burning sheaf of dry corn husks momentarily below the membrane so as to increase the tension and raise the pitch. Eventually (as Figures 4 and 5 illustrate), additional lugs and tension rods were used to more effectively control the skin tension (personal communication, April 2008).

(i.e., *mambos*) sections of the second half, resulting in a prominent binary verse-chorus song form typical of the style. Similarly in the *conjunto* context, the cowbell also came to mark the open-ended, refrain sections of the *dánzon cumbia* song form (see analysis of *Edicta no me quiere* in Chapter 2), and was absent during the through-composed verse sections. In this respect, the timbales and particularly the cowbell's integration into the *conjunto* format appeared to have been facilitated by synchronicities in compositional form and performance style between two related, albeit relatively distinct musical traditions. Moreover, as I noted in Chapter 2, the timbre and timekeeping function of the cowbell was also similar to that of the triangle used by early violin *conjuntos*, providing another sonic/musical link between Cuban transnational and rural Panamanian musical practices.

Like the timbales, early *conjunto* cowbells were made by local artisans to the specifications of the musicians. Nieto remembers that the “cowbell was made here out of tin, thick tin.”¹⁸¹ Similarly, Kevin Mata recalls seeing cowbells made from corrugated metal used for building roofs.¹⁸² By means of cutting and soldering, the bell would be shaped and then articulated to the shell of the right-hand timbale drum via a bolting mechanism of some kind.¹⁸³ The arrangement of the (larger and smaller) timbale drums relative to the cowbell would eventually become a signature of the Panamanian style. Unlike the Sonora Matancera, it eventually became standard practice for *conjunto* timbaleros to connect the bell to the larger of the two drums. If the drummer was right-handed, then the larger drum would be placed on the right-hand side. While all the musicians I interviewed told me that this configuration had always been the norm, it is possible to see, for instance, in Plate 4.5 that this was not always the case as Nieto’s timbalero used a configuration that is identical to that

¹⁸¹ Personal communication, April 2008.

¹⁸² Personal communication, December 2009.

¹⁸³ Ceferino Nieto, personal communication, April 2008.

of the Sonora Matancera. The reason for the unusual standard *conjunto* timbale configuration is not clear; however, over time it became integral to producing the patterns that came to define *música típica popular* while at the same time limiting the integration of alternate techniques (e.g., salsa and vallenato) played on the more conventional configuration (i.e., with the large drum to the left).

The inclusion of the *tumbadora* (i.e., *tumbadoraconga* or conga drums) was similar to the timbales in the sense that these drums were featured prominently in Cuban music and were made in the Azuero region by local artisans.¹⁸⁴ With respect to the timeline, Jaén Herrera believes that the *tumbadora* were not used by violin *conjuntos*, but were included within the accordion *conjuntos*.¹⁸⁵ Dorindo Cárdenas on the other hand, noted that when he performed his first *baile* on violin in 1948, other *música típica conjuntos* had already begun to use *tumbadora* in their line-up. For this event he recalls, however, he used the smaller Santeño *tambor* (likely a *repicador* or *pujador*), which is thought by some to have been the logical precursor the *tumbadora*.¹⁸⁶ Orgullo Santeño *tumbero*, Lino Francisco noted that these early drums were made in the Azuero peninsula and in particular the town of San José, Los Santos. Like the Santeño *tambor*, the shells of the drums were made from a hollowed-out log and the heads from deer or cow hide. Unlike the *tambor*, however, *tumbadoras* were

¹⁸⁴ Initially only one *tumbadora* replaced the Panamanian tambor. Sometime afterwards a second, possibly smaller, *tumbadora* was added.

¹⁸⁵ Miguel Jaén Herrera, personal communication, December 2007.

¹⁸⁶ Like Cárdenas, Ceferino Nieto and Victorino “Nano” Córdoba agree that some violin *conjuntos* also used *tumbadoras* (Cárdenas, personal communication, November 2007; Nieto, personal communication, April 2008; Córdoba, personal communication, December 2007).

bolt-tuned.¹⁸⁷ Despite the similarities, Francisco noted that the *tumbadora* playing style is different from the *tambor* and he could not say why this was the case.¹⁸⁸

Early *conjuntos* experimented with the use of one or two *tumbadoras* and eventually most ensembles opted for a two drum configuration in which a substantially larger, left-hand drum (along with the guitar) provided a kind of bass-function in the ensemble. In this respect, Nieto observes, that while the construction early *tumbadoras* resulted in part from the lack of imported instruments, the process also allowed musicians to tailor the instruments in sync with local aesthetic sensibilities, noting “Over there [i.e., Cuba] they didn’t come this big. So we would have them made this big so that they would provide the bass.”¹⁸⁹

The practice of building these instruments would cease around the 1970s in tandem with the increasing earning potential of professional *música típica popular conjuntos* and the accessibility of foreign made instruments. However, the *patrones* or rhythmic patterns and performance techniques, such as the practice of playing on the skin of the timbale drums (a technique known as *baqueteo*), would continue unto the present day and constitute some of the most prominent sonic markers of *música típica popular*.

Presentation

While *música típica popular* was undeniably identified with rural, *interiorano* culture in general and the Azuero peninsula in particular, many musicians worked hard to promote a decidedly modern and urban image. The reasons for this are varied and arguably include a

¹⁸⁷ Nieto observes, however, that like the timbales, the heads of early *tumbadoras* often had to be further tightened through the use of a heating implement of some kind, such as a fire or (lit) light bulb (personal communication, April 2008).

¹⁸⁸ Lino Francisco, personal communication, December 2007.

¹⁸⁹ Personal communication, April 2008.

desire to mitigate a number of social barriers that had traditionally marginalized the genre and to appeal to the modernist and upwardly mobile aspirations of their rural constituents. Among other things, *música típica popular* iconography and presentation style became a forum for the promotion of increasingly non-vernacular associations and identities.

Victorino “Nano” Córdoba credits second-wave band leaders, such as Ceferino Nieto and Dorindo Cárdenas, with gradually modernizing the *conjunto*. This process is connected with their increasing exposure urban-identified music and is evident in the permanent inclusion of a female lead singer. While earlier *conjuntos* had often included a female singer during their performances, her role was often limited to singing *saloma* melodies and in many cases she was not an “*integrante*” or (permanent) “member” of the group.¹⁹⁰ Córdoba credits the permanent inclusion of a lead female vocalist within the *conjunto* format to a desire to emulate the prominent role of the lead vocalist found in the *orquestas nacionales*, which sometimes performed in a ballroom in Guararé—currently the Hotel Aida.¹⁹¹ In addition to the accordionist, the female (saloma and often lead) vocalist became an important focal point for audiences. Retired singer, Serafina “Serín” Barrios, for example, noted that female singers were expected to dress elegantly for performances and in many cases dance while singing.¹⁹² Similarly, Ceferino observes that in the early years “the feminine figure of the group” was the only person in the *conjunto* who performed standing up.¹⁹³

A talented singer was often seen as essential to a *conjunto*’s commercial success and indeed, many of the most famous groups are remembered for their lead female vocalists—

¹⁹⁰ In addition, female singers were notoriously underpaid (Mario García Hudson, personal communication, April 2008).

¹⁹¹ Personal communication, December 2007.

¹⁹² Personal communication, February 2008.

¹⁹³ Personal communication, December 2007.

such as Eneida Cedeño (Dorindo Cárdenas), Leonidas Moreno (Alfredo Escudero) and Catita Carrasco (Yín Carrizo)—and their names appear frequently in conjunction with the promotion of their respective *conjunto*—such as on record disc labels (see Plate 4.2) and newspaper advertisements—and along with the accordionist performed at the front of the stage (see Plate 4.3).



Plate 4.2: In keeping with standard practice, Peregrina Fries is listed as singing lead (i.e., “Canta”) on this 45rpm recording of Ceferino Nieto’s composition *Mi linda Yeya*



Plate 4.3: Victorio Vergara (on accordion) flanked by his lead singers: Lucho De Sedas (to the left on guitar) and Lucy Quintero (early 1970s)¹⁹⁴

Similar to instrumental innovations, *música típica popular* musicians used performative posturing to gain a competitive advantage over their peers. One facet of performance presentation that continues to inspire discussion among aficionados and musicians concerns who were the first performers to play standing up on their respective instruments. Prior to the 1960s, the accordion, timbales and *tumbadora* (and by some accounts the guitar) were played sitting down (see Plates 4:4 and 4:5). This playing position was not unique to *conjuntos* and one can see the drummers of La Sonora Matancera also playing similarly in early video footage. Ceferino Nieto is one of two musicians credited to being the first accordionist to perform standing up—the other being Ñato Monga. Nieto recalls that his decision was a strategic one designed to shift the image of the group away from conventional norms. He recalls: “Since I had many aspirations I noticed that (sitting

¹⁹⁴ Photo courtesy of Lucho De Sedas.

down) looked very orthodox and I said ‘Well, I’m going to play standing up.’”¹⁹⁵ Nieto achieved this by adding a second strap to the accordion so as to anchor the instrument more firmly to his shoulders and this soon became common practice for all accordionists. Roberto “Papi” Brandao recalls that he began performing standing up in the 1960s, but the other *conjunto* instrumentalists did not. He credits himself with the decision to insist that everyone in the *conjunto* performed standing up, a decision he attributes to a desire to “enliven the audience more” by allowing the musicians become more animated when they performed.¹⁹⁶ By the 1970s (and possibly earlier) it became the norm for all members of a *conjunto* to perform in this way.



Plate 4.4: Dorindo Cárdenas (second from the left) and El Orgullo Santeño performing for 11th *Festival de la Mejorana* (1960)¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Personal communication, December 2007.

¹⁹⁶ Personal communication, January 2008.

¹⁹⁷ La Mejorana...Es Para Siempre, September 2000, p.21.



Plate 4.5: Ceferino Nieto (second from the left) and Bella Luna (circa early 1960s)¹⁹⁸

Wardrobe choices were another area in which musicians and at times entire *conjuntos* crafted their public image. Unlike the *conjuntos típicos*/dance troupes, *música típica popular* musicians did not wear the “*típico*” (or typical/vernacular) dress wear of the Azuero provinces but rather wore clothing that was more in keeping with urban fashions, such as dress pants and shirts for the men and dresses for the women. We can see this in the posed photographs of El Orgullo Santeño (Plate 4.4) and especially the Conjunto Bella Luna (Plate 4.5), where the male performers appear wearing similarly matching outfits. A number of band leaders, including Ceferino Nieto, would occasionally have their male performers wear matching outfits, which created visual linkages with the image of the *orquestas* and *combos nacionales* from Panama City. For Lucho De Sedas, the image one presented through clothing was an important factor in a *conjunto*’s success. When he joined the *conjunto* of

¹⁹⁸ La Mejorana...Es Para Siempre, September 2000, p.21.

Ulpiano Vergara (at the time a young and relatively unknown accordionist from the town of San José, Los Santos) in 1980, he made a point of changing their image, which he described as “very *campesino*” (i.e., very peasant-like). When I asked him why he did this, he replied: “To be different. So that we could, how should I put it, *actualizarnos* [lit. update ourselves] like modern people, not like the *campesino*. [...] ‘We have to modernize [our image],’ I would say.”¹⁹⁹ De Sedas observes that performers such as himself, Ceferino Nieto and Osvaldo Ayala made an effort to “dress like artists” and keep in touch with the latest fashion trends. From an early age, De Sedas cultivated an image that was decidedly “urban” and by his own reckoning resembled the “afro” outfits worn by the *combos nacionales* (see Plate 4.6).

¹⁹⁹ Personal communication, August 2008.



Plate 4.6: Luis Rey “Lucho” De Sedas at 17 years of age²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Photo courtesy of Lucho De Sedas.

Another way in which *música típica popular* musicians “updated” their image was by incorporating elements of showmanship into their performances. In addition to creating a sense of spectacle, this was also a means of establishing a sense stylistic identity both at the level of the individual *conjunto* and performer. Fito Espino’s timbale player Guillermo Juarez, for example, notes that one of his trademarks was playing cymbal-type figures on the corrugated tin roofs of *toldos* and *jardines*. He would do this during climactic points in the performance when the audience (as well as the band) was feeling the effect of the liquor and the music. Eventually what began as a performance gimmick became so successful that, he recalls, Espino added an actual cymbal to the timbale’s configuration.²⁰¹ In a similar display of showmanship, accordionist Victorio Vergara was famous for doing a particular (and rather acrobatic) jump while he was performing. This became a trademark of his to the extent that a photo similar to the one shown in Plate 4.7 appeared on a compilation album of his, titled “Te Hare Feliz” (“I’ll Make You Happy; 1995). Similarly, accordionist Ñato Monga was famous for being especially animated when he played and for incorporating quirky dance moves into his performances. He describes his performance style is “*alegre*” and adds that he incorporates “movement and dancing [...] because that is what people like.”²⁰² His reputation for dancing while playing the accordion is one of the reasons he is regularly cited as the first accordionist to perform standing up.²⁰³ Contemporary *conjunto* musicians often attribute expressions of exuberance such as those mentioned above to an understanding that *música típica popular* is “*alegre*” or happy music and that this should also be conveyed

²⁰¹ Guillermo Juarez, personal communication, December 2007. Ceferino Nieto’s timbale player Andres “Ñato” Tito Rios was also known to play on the roof during the course of a performance (Nieto, personal communication, December 2007).

²⁰² Personal communication, March 2008.

²⁰³ Lucho De Sedas, personal communication, January 2010.

performatively through their demeanor and stage mannerisms (a topic I take up in greater detail in Part III).



**Plate 4.7: Victorio Vergara and performing his trademark jump
(Reyes Monrroy, 1998:125)**

It is important to remember that an engagement with contemporary and identifiably urban musical and performance sensibilities is one of the hallmarks of *música típica popular*, which preceded the arrival of accordion *conjuntos* and is evident in the repertoire and dance practices violin *conjunto* practice. As I have already argued, this particular aesthetic orientation is linked to the participatory imperative of the *conjunto* performance practices, which over time shifted from being a means of enabling community participation to a means of ensuring commercial viability (see my discussion of the *junta* in Chapter 2). It is also possible to draw parallels with the *conjuntos típicos* (folkloric dance troupes) who, while capitalizing on their strong associations to Panamanian vernacular musical culture also included substantial elements of spectacle into their presentational style (e.g., choreographed dance routines and stylized regional outfits). Accordion *conjuntos* were well aware of the commercial potential such an identity afforded and pursued it actively and openly.

Musical vernacularism and the folklorization of the Azuero peninsula

While the folk revival of the 1940's maintained a predominantly antithetical stance towards the genre, *música típica popular* musicians did capitalize on the cultural cachet their association with the region afforded them. Many musicians regularly straddled perceived vernacular and cosmopolitan boundaries, and at times used the folk establishment to further their aspirations as popular/commercial musicians.

When Manuel Zárate founded the *Festival de la Mejorana* in September 1949, it is clear that one of his main goals was one of cultural revitalisation connected to Azuerense vernacular music and cultural practices, which he believed were in serious need of “rescue.” Less evident, but by no means unimportant, was the relationship of *música típica popular* to emerging ideas of Panamanian musical nationalism or *música folklórica* (folkloric music). As discussed in Chapter 2, discourses of Panamanian vernacular music during the early to mid-twentieth century regularly positioned *música folklórica* in an ostensibly oppositional relationship to *música típica popular*. Much of this discourse focused on the perceived dangers of the commercialisation and subsequent dilution (i.e., “bastardization” and “adulteration”) of vernacular musical culture. Even two decades after the *Mejorana* Festival, *música típica popular*’s mass popularity and clear connection to Azuerense culture represented what amounted to a threat to Panama’s musical identity, as suggested in the following observation by Manuel and Dora Pérez de Zárate:

The *agarrado* [i.e., independent couples] dances that utilize the music of *cumbias santeñas* are [...] the most widespread model of popular entertainment today and possibly very soon will become the new type of [...] national dance. (1962:150)

While folkloric music discourse prioritized the *differences* between vernacular-identified practices and *música típica popular*, it also had the opposite effect. *Música típica popular* was a clear musical hybrid (especially in terms of musical style and instrumentation) and as such there was no denying its similarities and cultural and historical continuities with Azuerense *música folklórica*—similarities and continuities which were inevitably affirmed and reaffirmed through discourses of musical (in)authenticity.

In addition to the ideological linkages created by the discursive strategies and rhetorical style of Panama’s cultural intelligentsia, around the mid-century point and onwards

música típica popular performers became increasingly linked to the activities of cultural revitalization projects. The *Mejorana* Festival, for example, indirectly created opportunities for *música típica popular* musicians to perform often in the *cantinas* or for the *bailes* that occurred every night after the proceedings of the festival proper. Gelo Córdoba, Ceferino Nieto and Victorino “Nano” Córdoba were among a number of *conjunto* musicians who gained recognition while performing for *bailes* in Guararé during the festival celebrations—which attracted unusually large numbers of visitors to this normally quiet town.²⁰⁴

The tendency of the festival to also capitalize on the mass popularity of *música típica popular* is suggested by the inclusion of an accordion competition in the festival’s program in 1959. The competition was named the *Concurso de Gelo Córdoba* after the famous accordionist who had died that year. While contestants were required to perform in a ‘traditional’ setting (likely in the style of the *conjuntos típicos folklóricos* or folkloric dance troupes), the competition became an important rite of passage for aspiring as well as established *música típica popular* accordionists. The significance of the event in showcasing new (*música típica popular*) talent is suggested by the large number of winners who went on to establish commercially successful *conjuntos*. Ceferino Nieto was the first accordionist to win this competition, in which 18 other accordionists also competed.²⁰⁵ Among the winners who also owned well-known *conjuntos* are Roberto “Papi” Brandao (1960 and 1962), Victorino “Nano” Córdoba (1961 and 1963), Alfredo Escudero (1965), Uruguay Nelson (1966), Osvaldo Ayala (1967), Carlos Cleghorn (1977), Maximino Moreno (1980), Victor Bernal (1981) and Dagoberto “Fito” Espino (1982), among many others.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Victorino “Nano” Córdoba, personal communication, 2007 and <<http://www.critica.com.pa/archivo/092498/opiayer.html>> (accessed November 13, 2010).

²⁰⁵ Personal communication, 2007.

²⁰⁶ La Mejorana...Es Para Siempre, September 2000, pp. 14-15.

Another important phenomenon that effected Azuerense musical practices (including *música típica popular*) was the advent of folkloric dance troupes or *conjuntos típicos*, who through the creative and often stylized combination of music, dance and regional clothing, served to promote Azuerense music-dance forms outside of the region. According to Edgardo A. De León Madariaga, the first *conjunto típico* to perform in the capital between 1925 and 1930 was directed by a Tableño by the name of Silverio “Chiche” Broce and featured an unusual combination of instruments including flute, violin, guitar and mandolin, which accompanied dancers dressed in traditional clothing.²⁰⁷ Later dance troupes also came from the Azuero Peninsula—and the towns of Las Tablas and Tonosí in particular—and included the *Conjunto Aires Tableños* (directed by Bolívar De Gracia), *Conjunto Canajagua* (directed by Edgardo A. De León Madariaga and Norma H. de Testa), and *Conjunto Tonosí* (directed by Antonio Díaz). De León Madariaga observes that these groups “traveled far from the country with the purpose of displaying the *pollera* [a regional woman’s dress] and other elements of our folklore (dances, songs, musical instruments and so forth).”²⁰⁸ Curiously, the instrumentation (which later also came to include Santeño *tambores*, *churrucas* [the more common synonym for “güiro” in Panama] and/or marracas, and accordion) and choreographed dance routines adopted by these groups were not particularly representative of vernacular performance practices as articulated by Panamanian folklorists. They were deemed acceptable, however, under the rubric of *proyecciones folklóricas* (i.e., folkloric projections), which attempted to convey the spirit and beauty of rural traditions to an increasingly broad-based (and often urban) audience.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Edgardo A. De León Madariaga quoted in Revilla Argüeso, 1987:160

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ The inevitable interplay between notions of authenticity and creative inauthenticity as it occurs within the contexts of *proyecciones folklóricas* is a topic that is not taken lightly and is often discussed in terms of social

The case of one of the most famous dance troupe directed by guitarist and violinist Leonidas Cajar is illustrative of the sometimes symbiotic relationship that existed between *música folklórica* and *música típica popular* performance practices. Cajar formed his first dance troupe at some point during or before 1940 presumably with the intention to perform choreographed presentations of Azuerense vernacular music-dance practices. Over a short period of time, Cajar's became of the most well-known and influential *conjunto típicos* in Panama's history. During the 1940s, his dance troupe was already performing in concert settings both nationally and internationally. On August 10, 1947, for example, the group was advertised as performing at the Teatro Edison (Edison Theatre) in Panama City. The event was titled “Desfile de Melodías Americanas” (Parade of Melodies/Songs of the Americas) and featured a number of well-known performers in addition to Cajar’s group, which for this event was dubbed the “Conjunto Folklórico Nacional” (National Folkloric *Conjunto*).²¹⁰ The same newspaper includes advertisements for a number of performances in 1949, including a performance at the *Teatro Encanto* (Panama City) for an event titled “Noche Interiorana” (*Interiorana* Night), which promised “vistosas polleras” (showy/spectacular *polleras*) and performances of *tamboritos*, *cumbias*, *mesanos* and *puntos*: “All the flavour of our countryside in one unique show!”²¹¹

responsibility. Dora Pérez de Zárate (1996), for example, expresses concern about the potential of misguided music-historic representations to (mis)inform ideas of Panamanian identity. On various occasions she repudiates in the strongest terms those musicians who attempt to play traditional Panamanian music (i.e., “our” music) on foreign instruments, the result of which is a musical caricature that no longer resembles its original (p.7). Zárate, for example, highlights an instance where the *caja santeña*—a descendant of the Spanish military drum (i.e., *redoblante*)—was used inappropriately by contemporary dance troupes dedicated to the preservation (“protection”) of Panamanian folkloric traditions. She notes that these troupes can influence national and regional self-conceptions and warns that they “would do well to fight for what is theirs and showcase their own [musical] forms with the same determination as that done by the groups for folkloric protection [i.e., groups devoted to the authentic replication of traditional, regional music-dance forms]”²⁰⁹ (p. 6).

²¹⁰ La Estrella de Panama, August 10, 1947, p.10.

²¹¹ La Estrella de Panama, September 9, 1949, p.11.

The connection of Cajar's *conjunto* to (official) Panamanian cultural nationalism and its attendant associations with ruralness/*interioran*ess was, as illustrated above, part of its popular image. In other instances, the *conjunto* is cited as "AL MAXIMO EXPONENTE DE LA MUSICA FOLKLORICA PANAMEÑA" (The maximum exponent of Panamanian folkloric music)²¹² and linked to the "resurgence of our national folklore."²¹³ In 1949 the *conjunto* also traveled to Costa Rica where they performed for President-elect, Otilio Ulate's swearing in ceremony. In addition to the ceremony, one newspaper article observes, these "national artists performed in different Costa Rican theatres and took part in various radio programs."²¹⁴

Benefiting from their role as national cultural ambassadors—a position rarely afforded to *música típica popular* performers—Cajar's group served to promote Azuerense music to an increasingly dispersed audience-base. Victorino "Nano" Córdoba observes that Cajar's group toured regularly throughout the Panamanian territory²¹⁵ and similarly Dorindo Cárdenas notes that as one of the more mobile performers, Cajar was primarily responsible for promoting Azuerense music in Chiriquí—one of Panama's two westernmost provinces which became an important performance base for Cárdenas himself.²¹⁶ Cajar's national/trans-regional mass popularity presented performance opportunities for Azuerense musicians,²¹⁷ some of whom went on to perform with established *música típica popular* *conjuntos*—a transition that was somewhat facilitated by Cajar's choice of instrumentation, which often included an accordion and (according to one account) on rare occasions timbales.

²¹² La Estrella de Panama, September 14, 1949, p.8.

²¹³ La Estrella de Panama, September 1, 1949, p.1.

²¹⁴ La Estrella de Panama, November 6, 1949, p. 1 (my italics).

²¹⁵ Personal communication, 2007.

²¹⁶ Personal communication, 2007.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

and *tumbadoras*.²¹⁸ Notable Cajar alumni include Catalina “Catita” Carrasco (singer for Yin Carrizo), Rufino García (singer and *churruca* player for Dorindo Cárdenas), Rufino Córdoba (*conjunto* accordionist)²¹⁹ and Claudio Castillo (*conjunto* accordionist),²²⁰ among others.

By the mid-twentieth century, the exportation, promotion, and eventual ubiquity of Azuerense culture was well on its way thanks to the endeavours of prominent Panamanian folklorists and cultural architects (such as Manuel Zárate and Narciso Garay) as well and the grassroots efforts of migrants from the Azuero peninsula. In 1962, Zárate and Zárate observed that the *tamborito* or *tambor santeño* (as they were wont to call it)

is practiced in the entire Republic, with the exception of those areas in which reside groups not yet assimilated in the general culture, such as indigenous [peoples] and recent migrants from the Antilles. (1962:20)

Música típica popular performers profited from the cultural cachet of the Azuero peninsula. While *música típica popular* could be and was effectively performed by non-Azuerenses (Chilo Pittí being an example of a successful *conjunto* leader/accordionist from the province of Chiriquí), it is no coincidence that the vast majority of the popular/commercially successful *conjuntos* came from the provinces of Los Santos and Herrera. Connections to the peninsula, as noted above, were also reinforced by *conjunto* naming practices and the tendency for *conjuntos* to maintain residence within the Azuero region.

While the relationship between *música típica popular* and official Panamanian nationalism was largely mediated by its perceived (dis)connections to *música folklórica*, occasionally the genre’s broad appeal also facilitated alignments with popular Panamanian nationalism. Omar Torrijos’ hiring of Dorindo Cárdenas and his *conjunto* is one such

²¹⁸ Victorino “Nano” Córdoba, personal communication, 2007.

²¹⁹ Victorino “Nano” Córdoba, personal communication, 2007.

²²⁰ <<http://www.critica.com.pa/archivo/091598/opiayer.html>> (accessed 26/02/2010).

example. Occasional international performances by *música típica popular conjuntos* are also hint at the music's potential to evoking feelings of national pride. In 1972, for example, Cárdenas flew to New York to "animate," as one newspaper put it, "every punch and every movement"²²¹ of boxer Roberto "El Mano de Piedra" Duran's legendary lightweight title fight against Ken Buchanan. Duran himself was from Guararé which likely made Cárdenas' presence particularly fitting, as is suggested by a newspaper caption that read:

PANAMA AND AZUERO PREVAIL INTERNATIONALLY!...
ROBERTO DURAN
WORLD LIGHTWEIGHT CHAMPION!
DORINDO CARDENAS
INTERNATIONAL ACCORDION CHAMPION!
Two figures with deep roots in the Panamanian *pueblo* [i.e., people/country]!...
TODAY and TOMORROW²²²

Conclusion

By the late 1960s *música típica popular* had achieved a measure of standardization in terms of instrumentation and performance practice. This music was now largely performed by *conjuntos* that maintained a fixed six-person line up and generally managed to turn a profit for each performance. *Conjunto* instrumentation had also become similarly standardized and, with the exception of the accordion and the *churruga*, featured instruments that had arrived to the isthmus during the first half of the twentieth century. In terms of its mass popularity, the genre had become a national phenomenon and by 1972 one newspaper (*La Critica*) alone named over seventy different *música típica conjuntos* actively performing in almost every province of the country over the course of that year. By the mid-1970s, however, the genre

²²¹ *Critica*, 01/07/72:03. Similarly, Fito Espino noted that Omar Torrijos once flew his *conjunto* to Maracaibo, Venezuela (likely in 1972) to support a boxing match involving the Panamanian boxer Ernesto "Ñato" Marcel (personal communication, December 2007).

²²² *Ibid.*

had reached its first high water mark and experienced a decline in popularity largely attributed to the competition created by the growing—and increasingly inter-regional—popularity of the *combos nacionales* (national bands) and *discotecas móvil* (mobile discotheques/clubs), which is a topic I take up in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 5

MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY *CONJUNTO*

PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

Prior to the inclusion of electro-acoustic instruments, the accordion *conjunto* format consisted of a diatonic accordion, a guitar, timbales, (one or two) *tumbadoras* and a *churruga* as well as a female *saloma* singer. Additional lead and background vocals were performed by the (traditionally male) instrumentalists. This particular format was prevalent from the late 1940s/1950s to the early 1970s and its associated performance modalities by and large constitute the norms for *música típica popular* as it is practiced today. In this chapter I examine the musical elements and organizing structures that account for the music's sound and aesthetic appeal. In particular, I outline the specific roles of each instrument within the *conjunto* and their relationship to each other and the organizing framework of the genre, its respective subgenres, and the compositional form.

***Música típica popular* subgenres**

As I have argued in the preceding chapter, versatility in terms of musical genres was one of the defining attributes of the *baile* setting and violin *conjunto* performance practice. This attribute arguably continued into the accordion-based practice, however, with some variation. Rather than performing a myriad of contemporary music-dance genres (such as foxtrots, waltzes, polkas and so forth), the accordion *conjuntos* performed almost exclusively the

genre known in Panama as *cumbia*, which became constantly adapted and reworked to include elements of other musical genres. In this sense, when understood in terms of shared musical-sonic traits, the label of *música típica popular* is in many ways synonymous with the *cumbia* practice—or what I will theorize as “genre” below—albeit, a very particular one.

Despite the general confusion in naming practices associated with *conjunto* musical repertoires, there is a certain degree of consensus among *conjunto* practitioners regarding the key formal differences (i.e., subgenres) that together constitute what we might call a *música típica popular* “genre.”²²³ Among the most consistent markers for categorical differences are instrument ostinati and their mutual relationships. Also important are a number of musical and extra-musical (especially dance) features which are regularly referenced by practitioners as relatively significant markers of categorical differences. The following is an outline and brief description of the four subgenres that form the basis of the vast majority of the *música típica popular* repertoire:

1. *Cumbia agarrada*: performed at a moderate tempo in duple meter and danced *agarrada* or embraced/held. This subgenre is by far the most common of the *conjunto* repertoire and includes genre mixtures such as *danzón cumbia*, etc.
2. *Cumbia suelta*: performed at a fast tempo in duple meter and danced *suelta* or “loose” or apart.
3. (*Cumbia*) *paseból*: performed at a slower tempo in duple meter and danced *agarrada*. According to one informant, *paseból* is a variant of Colombian *paseo* in which the (Panamanian) timbales take on the role of the (Colombian) *caja* drum. This subgenre is sometimes tweaked and given the name of *cumbia Chorrerana*.²²⁴
4. *Cumbia atravesado*: performed at a medium-to-fast tempo in compound duple meter and danced *suelta*.

In this outline, formal categories are typically the result of a unique (in the local context) combination of a limited number of musical (and extra-musical) parameters. In this sense, the four subgenres have features in common and at the same time are defined by

²²³ See Alan F. Moore (2001) for a succinct outline of conventional usages of the terms “genre” and “style.”

²²⁴ Kevin Mata, personal communication, 2010.

important differences in terms of musical structure and instrument performance roles. In the majority of the cases, each subgenre involves a relatively unique combination of instrumental ostinati, however, very rarely does a change in subgenre imply a corresponding change in *all* the ostinati. The vertical alignment between the various instrumental ostinati is understood in terms of a composite rhythm and is discussed below.

Composition/song form

Like the *danzón cumbia* example discussed in Chapter 2, *música típica popular* compositions are often constructed around sectional forms wherein a number of (melodically) unique and discrete “sections” are played in sequence over the course of a composition’s performance. For the purpose of this study, formal units identified as “sections” are primarily determined in terms of their constituent melodic material. My use of the term “section” is meant to encompass terms such as *verso/verse* and *estrofa/strophe*, which practitioners use informally to denote the (melodically-determined) components of a given composition.

While the given sections of a *música típica popular* composition tend to unfold sequentially (rather than alternately/strophically), repetition at both the supra- and sub-sectional level is an important component of form for the genre. For example, the melodic material of a given section is typically repeated a number of times before proceeding to the subsequent section. Moreover, repetition at the sub-sectional level is often not fixed, but rather determined according to the contingencies of a given performance context and audience expectations. In this way, certain sections can be understood as open-ended and others as through composed. An additional point of (melodic) repetition in nearly all

performances is the convention of preceding each vocal section with an identical instrumental section wherein the vocal melody is played on the accordion.

Melodic repetition at the supra-sectional level always occurs in live performances via the practice of performing the compositional unit twice in its entirety. This practice is largely absent in recording practice, which was likely due to the time constraints imposed by 45 and 75 RPM discs. Performing a composition twice creates an added dimension to structural expectations, in which the second iteration of a composition is often longer and more emotively intense than its precursor. I will have more to say on the relationship between compositional form and the aesthetics of the live performance context in Part III.

Superimposed over the sectional form of a *música típica popular* composition is a marked binary framework created by an additional sectional grouping called the *baqueteo* and *rumba*, which dictates the ostinati played on the instruments. The “*baqueteo*” section derives its name from the technique of playing on the skins of the timbale drums—which is also what the term refers to in Cuban timbale practice—whereas in the *rumba* section the *baqueteo* technique is largely and notably absent. The sonic and rhythmic changes provided by the timbales are also paralleled by subtle changes in the ostinato patterns of the other instruments in the *conjunto*. In this sense, the categories of “*baqueteo*” and “*rumba*” may also denote specific rhythmic patterns which, when considered as a whole, result in specific composite ostinati.

While the shift from the *baqueteo* to the *rumba* section primarily implies a change in ostinato configurations, the resultant binary framework also serves to organize other aspects of a performance. In most performances, the *baqueteo* section precedes the *rumba* section. Exceptions include instances where a brief *rumba* section serves as an introduction—a

practice which became common in later years—or compositions that alternate *baqueteo* and *rumba* sections. Overall the *baqueteo* section is more restrained than the rumba section, creating in every *música típica popular* composition a sense of tension and release, which becomes expressed in various ways in the performance practices of the musicians and the dancers as well. The *baqueteo* section is usually performed during the (close-ended) verse-type sections and involves little-to-no instrumental extemporization.

The *rumba* section on the other hand is the climactic portion of a performance, and in live performances the second iteration of this section is generally more intense and often slightly longer than the first. The palpable excitement generated by the *rumba* section can be attributed to a number of causes, the foremost of which is simple anticipation created by the binary form structure. The *rumba* section contrasts with the *baqueteo* section predominantly in that it is open-ended and organized around a single or series of short melodic refrains or choruses, which may be repeated indefinitely. Additionally, the *rumba* section may also involve a certain degree of instrumental extemporization in which the accordion plays improvised or improvisatory-type melodies and the percussion instruments add fills in key points of the performance.

Performance roles

Performance roles within the *conjunto* are generally instrument-specific. Similarly, the formal attributes of the genre, subgenres and binary *baqueteo-rumba* forms serve to structure their mutual relationships within the context of the compositional unit. Following is an outline of some of the key formal characteristics of the various musical roles in a *conjunto*.

Vocals

Typically a *conjunto* features three distinct vocal roles: 1) lead vocal, 2) backing vocal/s and 3) *saloma*. It is the job of the lead vocalist to sing the main narrative portions of the song as well as the refrain. Traditionally it was common that the lead vocal part be sung either by the (traditionally male) accordionist or the female singer, however, other members of the *conjunto* may double as lead vocalists as well. Most lead vocal melodies tend to be sung in the higher range of a singer's tessitura. Backup vocals are usually reserved for the refrain portion of the song and are usually sung by members of the *conjunto*.

Saloma singing is one of the more unique elements of *música típica popular* and finds its roots in various forms of both male and female rural Panamanian music-making.²²⁵ In the *conjunto* setting, the *saloma* part is always sung by a female vocalist. *Saloma* melodies usually occur during transitional points in the form (such as during specific interludes) and during the open-ended *rumba* sections. In general, the *saloma* singer shadows the melody of the accordion creating a heterophonic texture between the two voices. *Saloma* is often sung in the singer's 'head' voice and/or the conjoining range between the head voice and chest voice so as to achieve a kind of yodeling effect. In general, *saloma* vocal technique involves large melodic leaps and florid melodies sung to (lexically) nonsensical vocables or stock words and phrases such as "Ay 'ombe!" (Oh, man!), "Me voy en la mañanita" (I'm leaving in the morning), "mi vida" (lit. "my life"; a term of endearment), *moreno/a* (mulatto man/woman), "oiga" (listen), among others.

²²⁵ For more information on *saloma* and *grito* practices see Garay, 1999:264, Revilla Argüeso, 1987:139-142 and Zárate and Zárate, 1999:26.

Many of the earliest saloma singers were originally part of the violin *conjuntos* and later became mainstays of accordion *conjuntos*.²²⁶ Perhaps the most famous of these was Eneida Cedeño ([circa] 1923-2006) who first sang with violinist Francisco “Chico” Purio and later became a member of El Orgullo Santeño.²²⁷ Other important *salomadoras* include Gladys Mitre, Catita Carasco and Estercita Nieto (sister of Ceferino Nieto and a member of his *conjunto*).

While female singers were the primary vocalists of early *conjunto* practice, over the years male lead vocalists became increasingly common. The vocal timbre of male lead singers is often a matter of personal style and can vary from the quasi-belcanto singing of Osvaldo Ayala, the nasal, clear and high-pitched singing of Lucho De Sedas and the timbrally dense and “rough” sounding styles of Dorindo Cárdenas and Alfredo Escudero. As in other aspects of *música típica popular*, personal style tends to trump technical proficiency as criterion for effective singing. For example, I have often heard Cárdenas and Alfredo described as poor singers by *música típica popular* standards. Nonetheless, both of these vocalists are also praised for the individuality of their singing styles, which by contemporary tastes seem evoke ideas of authenticity and ‘tradition’ (a topic I shall examine in greater detail in Part III).

Accordion

Like the violin before it, the accordion has taken on the role of the principle instrument/voice in the *conjunto*. Additionally, the accordionist also became with few exceptions the owner

²²⁶ Roberto “Fito” Espino, personal communication, December 2007; and Miguel Jaén Herrera, personal communication, December 2007.

²²⁷ <<http://www.critica.com.pa/archivo/03292006/nti01.html>> (accessed 13/10/2010).

(called *dueño*) and star performer of the *conjunto*. Reflective of the importance of this instrument within the ensemble, the accordion was one of the first instruments to be mic’ed and (along with the vocals) is often the loudest instrument on recordings.

The three-row button accordion has been the instrument of choice at least from the 1950s onward. On this instrument there are three major and relative/diatonic minor keys that are especially effective and an accordionist typically tries to master all of them. Within this particular three-key configuration accidentals are at a premium, making minor keys particularly challenging. Difficulties aside, many *música típica popular* tunes are in fact performed in minor keys, which—as my informants often reminded me—is a characteristic of the genre that distinguishes it from other (button/diatonic) accordion practices (namely Colombian vallenato, which is usually performed in major keys).

Música típica popular accordion practice is primarily melodically driven and only rarely does the instrument have an accompaniment role within the ensemble. Typically the accordion performs all of the melodies within a composition including those performed by the lead vocalist and female *saloma* singer. In the case of the former, the accordionist typically plays an instrumental rendition of the lead vocal melody as a kind of prelude to the vocal lead rendition. In the case of the latter, the female singer and the accordionist perform the same melody in loose heterophony. As the leader of the ensemble, the accordionist also dictates the length of the open-ended sections and signals the end of each individual performance. As a result, many of the accordion melodies begin with a “pick up” or anacrusis relative to a particular section.

Timbales

In Panama as in Cuba, the term “timbales” is the name for a specific pair of membranophones as well as a synecdoche for a composite instrument upon which are attached—by means of a stand—these two drums and additional percussion instruments. Taking their cue from Cuban *conjuntos* such as La Sonora Matancera, the timbales used by *música típica popular conjuntos* included two timbale drums and a single cowbell.

The first Panamanian-made timbale drums were smaller in diameter than their contemporary variants—or, based on extant iconographical data, identical to the *pailitos/timbalitos* used by the Sonora Matancera. Typically these were hoisted on a stand and played sitting down. The timbale setup included two drums, one slightly larger than the other. Over time (if not from the onset), the larger drum—which is called the *bajo* (i.e., bass)—came to be positioned to the right of the drummer, and the smaller drum—the *quinto*—to the left. This particular drum arrangement continues to this day and differs from most other timbale traditions (e.g., salsa, vallenato, etc.). The timbale apparatus always included a cowbell, which would usually be attached to the shell of the *bajo* drum with the open end of the bell facing the drummer.

The timbale patterns combine four basic strokes: 1) open tones, 2) muted tones, 3) rim shots, and 4) a muted side-stick technique. The basic *cumbia agarrado* timbale *baqueteo* and *rumba* ostinati are notated in Figure 5.1—with the *baqueteo* ostinati beginning as an anacrusis on beat four.²²⁸ The *baqueteo* pattern and corresponding performance technique appears to be fairly consistent on the recordings and among the drummers I observed performing and/or interviewed. Variations are regarded as a matter of personal style and are

²²⁸ While a ‘cut time’ (i.e., 2/2) meter best represents the principal accent hierarchy, I refer to quarter note “beats” to simplify my explanation of the rhythm.

played consistently by their respective drummers. Two variations to the basic pattern are shown in Figure 5.1 (see the timbale notation legend in Appendix C). In this example I have included two versions of the *baqueteo* ostinato with the first being the most common and the second representative of an older style. In these examples, variations occur on the upbeats where drummers either omit selective upbeats and/or vary their stick technique. The prominent accents and corresponding performance technique is consistent in all examples.

The timbale *baqueteo* pattern is a one-bar ostinato consisting of a series of alternating right-hand/left-hand stick strokes that together outline the underlying rhythmic pulse. The right hand plays downbeats using a type of rim shot technique where the drummer strikes both the rim and skin of the drum simultaneously creating a kind of “cracking” sound. The first three strokes of the right hand (i.e., beats 1, 2, and 3) are played on the smaller, higher pitched drum and the fourth stroke (i.e., beat 4) is played on the larger, lower-pitched drum. In the left hand the drummer plays a series of quieter upbeats on the small drum using a cross-stick technique where the drummer places the stick horizontally across the skin of the drum and raises and lowers the right side of the stick so as to produce a slightly muffled tone. The left hand is also used to vary the tone of the right hand strokes by creating either muffled tones by keeping the left hand on the skin of the drum or “open” tones by removing the left hand.²²⁹ The timbale *baqueteo* ostinato is pulsatile with a prominent downbeat feel and is often vocalized as “ta-ka ta-ka ta-ka *ta*-ka” with an emphasis on the second (underlined) “ta” and a slightly lowered pitch inflection on the final (italicized) “ta” (an onomatopoeia for the *bajo* drum stroke).

²²⁹ This particular technique for creating distinctions between muffled and open tones is borrowed from the Cuban *danzón* tradition and, not coincidentally, is the same technique used by timbaleros for the Sonora Matancera.



Figure 5.1: *Cumbia agarrado* timbale ostinati

The basic *rumba* ostinato is played mainly on the cowbell, with the timbalero playing filler strokes on the skin of the drums. The shift from the timbale *baqueteo* to the cow bell results in a very noticeable change in timbre, which serves to prominently distinguish the *baqueteo* section from the *rumba* section. In this context, the *rumba* section is sonically marked by a shift from hits on the skin/rim of the timbales to the cowbell—or more appropriately a timbral shift from (drum) skin to (cowbell) iron. The basic *rumba* timbale ostinato features a series of prominent downbeats played on the cowbell. Filling in the underlying pulse are a number of softer upbeats played on the skin of the large and small drum.

Additional ostinati (generally) specific to the various subgenres of *conjunto cumbia* practice are shown in Figures 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4—with variations labelled as “A” and “B,” respectively. While each subgenre has its own relatively unique timbale ostinati, there is a great deal of similarity in the general performance technique. Namely, the *baqueteo* and *rumba* sections always entail a shift from the skin of the drum to the cowbell, respectively. In the case of the *cumbia atravesado* *baqueteo* patterns, the drum strokes emphasize the first, third and fifth eighth-notes of the (6/8) meter, creating a hemiola or two-over-three effect in relation to the metrical accents—or “*tiempo fuerte*” (strong time) as my informants call it—of the compound-duple meter.



Figure 5.2: *Cumbia suelta* timbale ostinati



Figure 5.3: *Paseból* timbale ostinati



Figure 5.4: *Cumbia atravesado* timbale ostinati

Tumbadora

While the presence of the *tumbadora* drums, like timbales, suggests a direct link with Cuban musical practices, unlike timbales, their performance techniques are actually quite dissimilar. In early *conjuntos*, the *tumbadora* provided not only rhythmic support, but (along with the guitar) provided a bass-type function. This is because the left-hand drum was very large in relation to its smaller, regularly sized counterpart. In a manner similar to other local hand-drumming traditions, *conjunto tumbadoras* are played using a flat hand technique—rather than the *masacote* or heel-toe technique used by Cuban *tumbadora conga* drummers—and involve a combination of strokes that are either played on the edge or in the centre of the drumhead. Also in contrast to *masacote* technique, *conjunto tumbadora* ostinati typically are not pulsatile, but rather tend to play sparser figures that emphasize specific points in the metre. As Figures 12, 13 and 14 illustrate, points of coincidence between the various

(subgenre-specific) *tumbadora* ostinati tend to occur around beats 2 and 4 of the measure, which represent important accent points in the overall composite rhythm (see the *tumbadora* notation legend in Appendix C). In the case of the *cumbia atravesado* ostinato (see Figure 5.8), the main points of emphasis are on the first and fourth eighth-note of a 6/8 meter, which coincide with the *tiempo fuerte* (i.e., strong time) or metrical accents of the compound-duple meter. While general distinctions between the *baqueteo* and *rumba* ostinati exist between the various *tumbadora* ostinati, these are neither as pronounced nor as consistent as those of the timbales.



Figure 5.5: Cumbia agarrada tumbadora ostinati



Figure 5.6: Cumbia suelta tumbadora ostinati

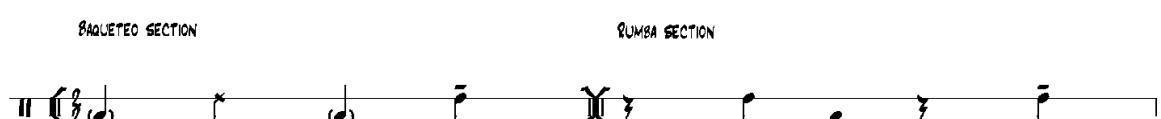


Figure 5.7: Paseból tumbadora ostinati

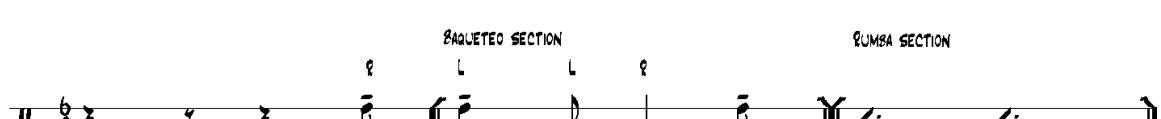


Figure 5.8: Cumbia atravesado tumbadora ostinati

Güiro/churruga

The piercing sound of the *churruga* situates it in the higher end of the ensemble's frequency spectrum, making it a very prominent part of the *conjunto* sound. Prior to the introduction of metallic scraped idiophones, the *churruga* was made from an oblong gourd native to Panama. This instrument is played with a metal scraper that is scraped against the serrated side of the gourd, which gives the instrument its characteristic timbre. The *churruga* is generally played evenly and, in the case of duple meter, with down-strokes coinciding with downbeats and up-strokes with upbeats (see Figure 5.9, “*baqueteo* section”). Distinctions between the *baqueteo* and *rumba* sections are not very common on older (i.e., pre-1970s) recordings, however, sometimes the *churruga* player will vary the ostinato during *rumba* section—usually by omitting the first and third up-strokes (see Figure 5.9, “*rumba* section”)—so as to create a point of contrast with the preceding *baqueteo* section.

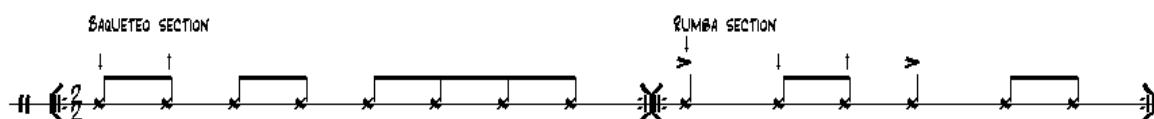


Figure 5.9: Duple meter *churruga* ostinati

In *cumbia atravesado*, the alternating down-strokes and up-strokes create a hemiola effect in relationship to the *timepo fuerte* (see Figure 5.10).



Figure 5.10: Cumbia atravesado *churruga* ostinato

Guitar

In early *conjunto* practice, the guitar provided both a bass function in the ensemble as well as rhythmic-harmonic accompaniment. On the large majority of the recordings by these *conjuntos*, the guitarists can be heard using a finger picking technique called *bordoneo*—which contrasted with the strumming or *charrasqueo* techniques heard in more traditional settings, such as in *cantadera* performance practice. While it is not clear how the *bordoneo* technique came about, many of my informants link the technique to the bass function of guitar.²³⁰ At some point during in the *música típica popular*'s development, the guitar transitioned from a strumming technique to a picked technique. Early recordings add some insight to this process. On the recordings made by Gelo Córdoba y Las Plumas Negras in the early 1950s, for example, one can hear the guitarist play a proto-*bordoneo* technique, which combined both strumming (notated as a slash and indicating only rhythmic accent) and bass note, which was plucked with the thumb. An example of this technique is shown in Figure 5.11, which is an excerpt taken from a recording of Gelo's composition *Carretera canajagua* (e.g., [The] Canajagua highway). Here the harmonic rhythm is indicated by the chords notated at the beginning of each bar, which become realized using the strumming technique. Noteworthy in this example is the placement of the “bass” notes on beats 2 and 4, and their relation to the harmonic rhythm, which precedes (rather than follows) the bass movement. Both these features would become characteristic of early and later *bordoneo* practices, respectively.

²³⁰ Miguel Jaén Herrera, personal communication, December 2007.



**Figure 5.11: Bordoneo excerpt from “Carretera canajagua”
as recorded by Gelo Córdoba Y Las Plumas Negras**

The *bordoneo* technique heard on most early recordings—i.e., those recorded before the inclusion of the electric bass—is completely finger picked/arpeggiated and combines a “bass” part (played by the thumb) with an accompaniment part (generally played with a combination of the thumb, index and middle fingers). A generic *bordoneo* ostinato is shown in Figure 5.12. Like in the previous example, the “bass” notes are played on beats 2 and 4, and subsequent to the corresponding harmonic change. The “accompaniment” or filler part is played in a higher register and generally arpeggiate the given chord.

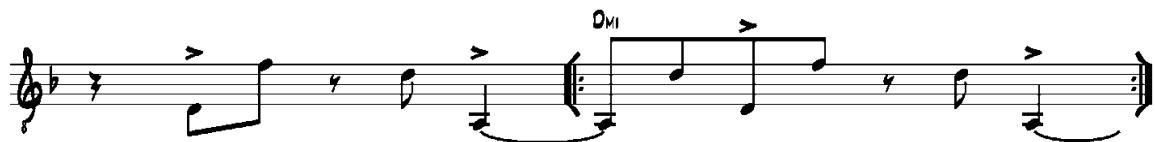


Figure 5.12: Standard *bordoneo* pattern

Most variations of this standard pattern omit certain accompaniment notes rather than change the rhythmic-harmonic paradigm. An example can be heard on a recording of Gelo Córdoba’s famous composition *El mogollón* recorded by Dorindo Cárdenas and his *conjunto*, which is played at a fast tempo (i.e., 260 BPM) as a *cumbia suelta* (see Figure 5.13).

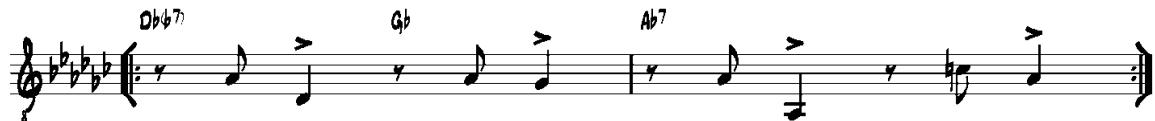


Figure 5.13: Simplified *bordoneo* pattern

A less common variation of the standard *bordoneo* pattern is one which leaves the rhythmic paradigm intact, but limits bass part to one note per bar and places it a beat ahead of the harmonic rhythm (See Figure 5.14).



Figure 5.14: Common variation of standard *bordoneo* pattern

Minor variations in addition to those mentioned here certainly exist and are often understood to be a matter of personal style.

Composite rhythms

As a result of the various ostinati that constitute the bulk of *conjunto* instrumental practice, a *conjunto*'s sound is very much contingent on the interplay between a number of relatively discrete rhythmic and melodic patterns. As the foregoing discussion of instrument-specific *conjunto* performance practices makes clear, individual ostinati have varying degrees of structural significance on their own—for example, the rhythmic patterns and voicing of the component parts of the timbales very clearly demarcate the *baqueteo* and *rumba* sections whereas those of the *churruga* and the guitar generally do not. It is, however, in their combination that various ostinati acquire structural significance within the context of performance. The paradigmatic notations in Figures 5.15 to 5.18 are meant to highlight the mutual relationships integral to *conjunto* ostinato practice. The overall pattern or groove that results from the combination of the various ostinati is what I refer to as the “composite rhythm.”

Musical score for the Baqueteo section of *cumbia agarrada*. The score consists of four staves: GUITAR, TIMBALES, TUMBADORES, and CHURRUCA. The GUITAR and CHURRUCA staves contain lyrics. The score is in 2/4 time, B-flat major. The first section is labeled "BAQUETEO SECTION (A)" and the second section is labeled "BAQUETEO SECTION (B)".

Figure 5.15: Composite rhythm for *cumbia agarrada*, baqueteo section

Musical score for the Rumba section of *cumbia agarrada*. The score consists of four staves: GUITAR, TIMBALES, TUMBADORES, and CHURRUCA. The GUITAR and CHURRUCA staves contain lyrics. The score is in 2/4 time, B-flat major.

Figure 5.16: Composite rhythm for *cumbia agarrada*, rumba section

Musical score for the composite rhythm of *cumbia suelta*. The score consists of four staves: GUITAR, TIMBALES, TUMBADORES, and CHURRUCA. The GUITAR and CHURRUCA staves contain lyrics. The score includes three sections: BAQUETEO SECTION, RUMBA SECTION (A), and RUMBA SECTION (B).

Figure 5.17: Composite rhythm for *cumbia suelta*

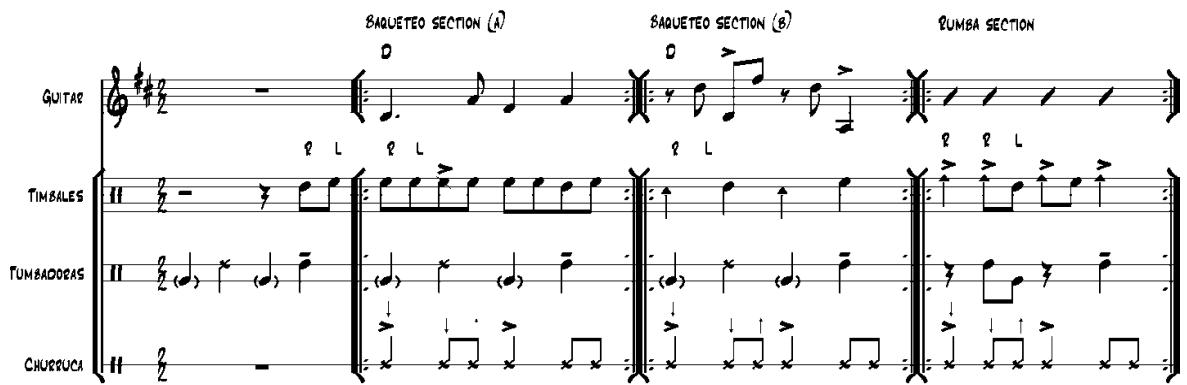


Figure 5.18: Composite rhythm for *cumbia paseból*

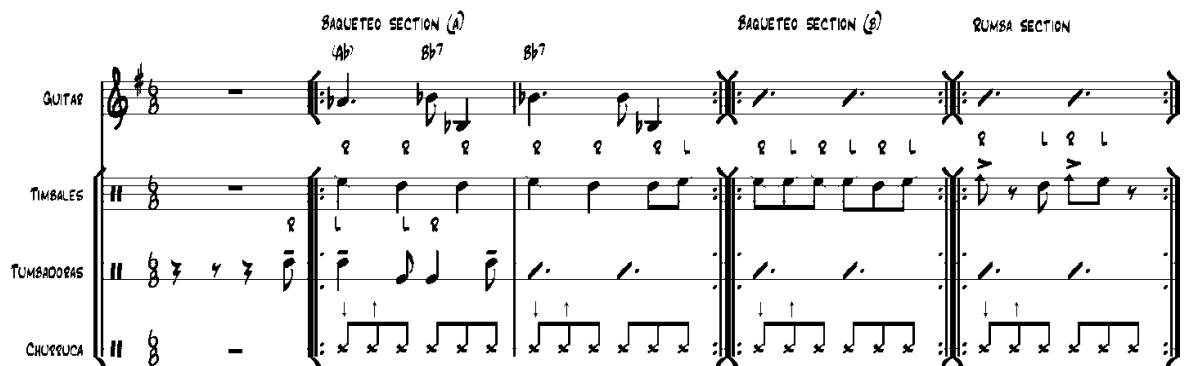


Figure 5.19: Composite rhythm for *cumbia atravesado*

The following is an analysis of Chico Purio's composition *El arbolarío* as performed and recorded by Dorindo Cárdenas and El Orgullo Santeño (pre-1970s). In this analysis, I highlight the relationships between the various ostinati/patterns that characterize *música típica popular*. I also highlight the relationship between musician/instrument roles and compositional form, particularly the binary *baqueteo-rumba* framework.

Analysis of *El arbolarío*

A complete transcription of *El arbolarío* is included in Appendix D. Characteristic of recordings of its time, the quality of the recording makes it sometimes difficult to distinguish the component parts of the overall sound.²³¹ For accuracy's sake, therefore, I have either noted or omitted ambiguous information and focus principally on what is clearly audible. Overall, I believe both the recording and transcription are a useful representation of a relatively archetypal *cumbia agarrada* performance.

Form

The form of *El arbolarío* is sectional. In this transcription, the sequential relationship of each individual section is indicated by an uppercase alphabet label—positioned at the beginning of each section. Each section is also identified by an additional label which distinguishes instrumental sections—called “Interludes”—from vocal sections—called “Verses.” *El arbolarío* is, by *música típica popular* standards, a relatively short composition consisting of four Interludes and one Verse. The whole composition repeats in its entirety—beginning on the last beat of b. 85—which was unusual for recording practices, but was (and continues to be) the norm for live performances.

The sectional form of this composition is instrumental in structuring various levels of melodic repetition as well as establishing a sense of drama within the composition and overall performance. As a general rule for the *música típica popular*, melodic repetition is a

²³¹ The specific recording of *El arbolarío* that I transcribe and analyze here was generously given to me by Kenny Alexander Pérez (a *conjunto* composer, *locutor*, radio deejay and *música típica popular* collector). Like many extant *música típica popular* recordings, it is (likely) a multiple generation copy of an original 45 RPM record, preserved today in MP3 format.

means of creating moments of tension and release over the course of a composition's performance. Similarly, melodic repetition almost invariably tends towards dramatic build and an increase (rather than decrease) in excitement. It imparts a sense of forward momentum to all performances and as a result each repetition tends to be more intense than the first.

In *El arbolario*, melodic repetition occurs on multiple levels of the form—that is to say over greater and lesser temporal durations—and together works to structure the dramatic arc of the composition/performance. Repetitions that occur over increasingly greater lengths of time tend to be more teleologically-oriented as they serve to create a sustained sense of tension and anticipation. In general, this occurs in the introductory section of the composition and in particular between the “Verse” sections and their preceding “Interlude (Pre-Verse sections).” The first section consists of a 12 bar melodic theme (bars 2 to 13) that gets repeated in its entirety (see bars 14 to 25). While the introductory section is by no means the most intense part of the composition, it does achieve a sense of release approaching and during the second repetition—as suggested most notably by the *gritos* (bars 12-14) and a *tumbadora* fill (bars 18-20)—which establishes a point of contrast with the more subdued Pre-Verse and Verse sections.

I use the label of “Pre-Verse” to identify a common practice of playing the melody of the verse sections on the accordion prior to the (sung) verses themselves. In general, both the Pre-Verse and Verse sections tend to represent a general “low” and tension-building point of the composition, and are characterized by a general lack of extraneous material such as percussion fills, ostinati variations and vocal flourishes (i.e., *grito* and *saloma*). The focus, of course, is on the vocal melody and subject of the text. As *música típica popular* developed,

this section became the focus of innovation strategies and later compositions began to include increasingly more verses.

Contrasting the macro repetitions just described are the more groove-oriented, micro or refrain-type repetitions of the melodies of Interlude III and IV, which can also be understood as a type of instrumental chorus or refrain. Both of these sections feature a four-bar melody—performed on the accordion and shadowed by the *saloma* singer—which is repeated with minor variations (see bars 49-53, 65-69, 121-125 and 141-145). The relatively short melodic refrains and multiple repetitions are characteristic of open-ended sections, which may be repeated over and over again as the musicians (or in almost all cases, the accordionist) see fit. Open-ended sections are invariably located at the end of the composition-proper and coincide at some point with the *rumba* half of the binary *baqueteo-rumba* form—as happens in Interlude IV/Interlude IV'. Typical of *música típica popular*, the melody of the accordion anticipates the transition to-and-from (potentially) open-ended sections—including the cliché melodic ending in the final two bars—making additional cues (visual or otherwise) unnecessary and establishing the accordionist the clear leader of the ensemble.

The open-ended, refrain-based sections are undisputedly the climactic point of the composition, which has as much to do with their coincidence with the *rumba* portion of the composition as it does with their relationship to the preceding sections. As noted above, the vast majority of *música típica popular* compositions are structured around a specific binary form, which more properly organizes the interlocking ostinati of instruments within the ensemble rather than a composition's melodic structure. Similar to the pattern of tension-and-release associated with the genre's sectional forms, the *baqueteo* rhythm occurs first and

creates a clear point of contrast with the climatic *rumba* rhythm, which coincides with the final sections of the composition and the final portion of the performance (i.e., Interlude IV/IV'). The shift from the *baqueteo* to the *rumba* rhythm is telegraphed by the fills rhythmic variations played on the timbales and *tumbadoras* (see Interlude III/III'), which serve as a signal for the dancers to execute a series of short spins and transition to a slightly more intimate dance configuration and animated style.

Finally, the near verbatim reiteration of the composition in *El arbolarío* also offers a glimpse of the type of macro repetitions typical of live performances. As I have already noted, repetitions tend towards an increase of intensity and this (recorded) performance is no exception. In this example, both Interlude III' and IV' are longer than in the composition's first iteration. Increasing the length of the open-ended sections—that is, by adding more repetitions—is a common strategy for further intensifying the sense of climactic release in a given performance.

Ostinati and instrumental relationships

With the exception of the accordion and the vocals, *música típica popular* instrumental practice tends to be heavily oriented toward ostinato-based performances. The resultant sound is, as discussed above, one of a composite rhythm where one or more changes in component ostinati can indicate significant structural change to the overall ostinato. In *El arbolarío*, we can see that among the ostinati-playing instruments, both the guitar and *churraca* maintain their initial patterns throughout the whole performance while the *tumbadora* and timbales alternate between two specific patterns. In keeping with performance norms, these changes occur in specific sections of the form (i.e., the open-ended

sections or Interlude IV/IV') and thereby establish the two-part *baqueteo-rumba* formal structure of the composition. In every case, the resultant composite rhythm is one bar in length with an emphasis on beat four. This emphasis is one of rhythmic coincidence and pitch distinctions (i.e., tonic accent where, in this case, the point of emphasis is a lower pitch). Characteristic of performance practices of the time, the guitar does not anticipate the harmonic rhythm across the bar-line, but rather outlines each chord for the duration of the bar.

In addition to the ostinato figures that constitute the composite rhythms discussed above, the transcription also reveals a number of important relationships between individual instruments within the ensemble, specifically the accordion and *saloma* melodies, and the non-ostinato figures of the timbales and *tumbadoras*. As is the norm for *música típica popular*, the *saloma* melodies in Interlude III/III' and IV/IV' follow loosely those of the accordion. Their relationship can be described as heterophonic, with the *saloma* "shadowing" or embellishing the simpler melodic lead played on the accordion. The degree of coincidence between the two melodies is often a matter of a singer's individual style. The *saloma* singer on this recording is Eneida Cedeño, who was known for her often florid melodies and high falsetto singing voice. Nearly all of the vocables and vocal slides are not clearly distinguishable on this recording, and what remains is a rather general outline of her vocal performance. In this example, Cedeño performs well within her range and shadows the accordion quite closely.

The timing between the rhythmic flourishes (called "*repiques*" or "fills") played on the timbales and *tumbadoras* is also indicative of the close relationship between these two instruments. As suggested above, breaks in the ostinato patterns are often closely connected

to the compositional form and are meant to accentuate points of transition or create a sense of build. In every case, the fills are not played in tandem, but rather alternate between the two instruments. The result is something of a call-and-response relationship between these two instruments.

Among other things, *El arbolario* highlights the fact that *música típica popular* is a form of dance music in which the compositional unit serves primarily as a framework for performance. Its integrated sectional and binary framework (which is a characteristic of the majority of *música típica popular* compositions) serves to structure the performative experience not only for the musicians, but (as we will see in Chapter 12) the movement and interaction between the dancers as well. The typical dramatic arc of this composition facilitate this type of participation by providing a degree of familiarity and generating dramatic interest by an extended, albeit quite specific, use of (melodic) repetition.

CHAPTER 6

MUSICAL “EVOLUTION” AND “REVOLUTION,” AND IMPORTANT GENRE INNOVATORS

Following an initial wave of popularity, *música típica popular* began to decline as it was forced to compete with the newfangled *combos nacionales* and *discotecas móvil* (mobile discotheques/clubs). Despite this setback, the genre continued to make inroads into urban demographics through established strategies of stylistic fusion and innovation particularly through an engagement with instrumentation and sound technology. Largely credited to what is often referred to as the “modern” and “revolutionary” sound of brother-and-sister *conjunto* owners and performers Samy and Sandra Sandoval, *música típica popular* experienced a second surge in popularity in the early 1990s, the effects of which are felt to this day.

Música típica popular’s decline in popularity in the late 1970s is often credited to the rise of the *combos nacionales* and club culture. As noted above, the designation of *combos nacionales* was given to groups of generally seven or more musicians that performed a range of styles generally associated with Cuban influenced *música tropical* and salsa as well as American R&B. Typically linked to urban, Afro-Panamanian or (Panamanian) *afroantillana* culture, these groups performed for a dancing public often in contexts similar to those of *música típica popular conjuntos*—i.e., for commercial *bailes* often held in *toldos* and *jardines*. Similarly, Panamanian *discotecas* also catered to a dancing public and played a variety of musical styles most in vogue at the time.

Based primarily on informant accounts, both of these phenomena appear to have been immensely popular forms of entertainment in Panama's urban centres and rural-identified interior alike—especially during the 1970s and early 1980s—and represented a significant form of competition for *música típica popular* performers. Priding himself on his ability to adapt to changing trends, Roberto “Papi” Brandao noted that he was the first *empresario* to run a “mobile” *discoteca* in the Azuero region. As the following interview illustrates, the transition from *conjunto* owner to club owner was a gradual one and facilitated by a degree of overlap with *conjunto* practice in terms of technology and performance contexts.

Sean Bellaviti: When did you retire [as a professional accordionist]?

Roberto Brandao: In the 1980s. What happened is I retired because in the 1970s I began a mobile *discoteca* [called Sonomundi].

SB: Did you begin after you retired?

RB: No, I still had a *conjunto* and played accordion, however, I also had a mobile *discoteca* [which] used the same sound system of the *conjunto*. But this changed. [...]

SB: So yours was the first *discoteca* over here?

RB: Yes, here in Azuero.

SB: And where was it located?

RB: No, we went everywhere.

SB: [...] And did you operate in *toldos*?

RB: [...] In *toldos* and *jardines* as well.

SB: Using the *conjunto*'s sound system?

RB: No, I began that way, but afterward things changed. What happened was during this period I was getting more contracts for the *discoteca* and none for the *conjunto*. So I left the *conjunto* and focused on the *discoteca*.²³²

Like Brandao, Fito Espino also retired in the early 1980s—a decision he also credited to the waning interest in *conjunto* music particularly on the part of youth culture at that time who, as he put it: “were not interested in *la típica*.²³³

It is during this time of waning popularity that we see a strong emphasis placed on strategies of musical innovation and the development of the “*innovador/a*” or “innovator” as

²³² Personal communication, January 2008.

²³³ Personal communication, January 2008.

the quintessential creative personality among *música típica popular* practitioners. When investigating the history of the genre during this time—which with few exceptions is an oral one—one increasingly encounters narratives that prioritize these individuals. Musical change and development is frequently discussed on a number of musical, social, and cultural fronts and in terms of categories of presentation, instrumentation and genre mixing or “*fusión*” (fusion). Typical of genesis narratives in general, these categories are often organized as a series of firsts and linked to the innovations of particular individuals.

In the following sections of this chapter I examine the particular innovation strategies undertaken by a number of widely recognized “innovators” and the effect that these strategies had on the *música típica popular*’s particular social and cultural identification. In particular, I show that innovation strategies were often designed to enhance and increase one’s mass popularity or at least render a particular performer and *conjunto* more commercially successful within a particular (often urban) demographic. In their ability to establish variously tangible synchronicities with other (often foreign/transnational) genres, innovations also became a means of connecting *conjunto* practitioners with a broader urban- and cosmopolitan-identified audience base, which challenged the *música típica popular*’s nearly exclusive association with *interiorano* geo-cultural imaginaries. This intersection between music and place forms an important analytic in understanding the significant role played by Panamanian nationalism in understanding the genre’s historical development.

Early innovators and innovations: Ceferino Nieto, Roberto

“Papi” Brandao and the introduction of the electric bass

As we have seen in previous chapters, much of *música típica popular*'s early development can be firmly linked to an engagement with urban-/metropolitan-identified cultural practices as expressed through practices of genre mixing or fusion. However, it is not until the mid-century mark that we begin to get a sense of a growing awareness of the idea and practice of innovation as an important means of differentiation among *música típica popular* practitioners. Being identified as an innovator was often seen as a means of improving one's chances of commercial popularity, above all in Panama City, and in time would also come to ensure the permanence of one's legacy and relevance to the genre after they retired.

Following is a look at the early development of *música típica popular* innovators and innovative-identified practices.

Most narratives of the *música típica popular*'s innovation history usually begin with Ceferino Nieto who arguably was the first musician to effectively incorporate the idea of being an innovator as part of his popular persona. “I have always been an innovator,” Nieto tells one interviewer:

The accordion only had a single strap so I fastened two handkerchiefs and others to support the accordion and I played it standing up, the word spread and everyone began playing standing up. I was the first to introduce the bass because I went to Colombia and saw and heard that they sounded good. [...] I used the contrabass and I was criticized in the newspapers.²³⁴

Among his other innovations Nieto also claims to be the first bandleader to incorporate a cymbal in the timbale setup, an innovation which he borrowed from *orquesta* instrumental

²³⁴ <<http://biblioteca.prensa.com/contenido/2001/02/42233031.html>> (accessed November 10, 2010).

practice.²³⁵ Arguably his most important innovation, however, was his inclusion of the electric bass into the *conjunto* lineup; an innovation which dramatically changed the sound and image of the *música típica popular* ensemble and created audible synchronicities with other transnational and urban-identified commercial genres.

In this particular case, Nieto's claim to innovation is largely based on the (by most accounts, likely) presumption that he was the *first* *conjunto* owner to purchase and perform with an electric bass. In an interview, Nieto noted that he originally included the electric bass in his *conjunto* so as to gain the upper-hand over his friend and professional rival Dorindo Cárdenas. As the story goes, Nieto was scheduled to perform “*mano a mano*” with Cárdenas in Panama City for carnival weekend. The event was the inauguration of a *toldo* and at the time was considered a prestigious and high profile engagement. Twenty days prior to the performance, Nieto says he “secretly” traveled to Baranquilla, Colombia and purchased an electric bass and case for \$1100 (U.S.). Upon his return, he told his then guitarist to learn to play the new instrument by listening to Colombian records and imitating the bass patterns—Nieto contracted another musician to play the guitar. As Nieto anticipated, the electric bass was a big success with the dancers and had the added advantage of leaving the rival band sounding weak by comparison. This second point is interesting as it is illustrative of the strategic use of instrumentation and innovative practices by *música típica popular conjuntos* as a means of enhancing their own mass popularity often at the seeming expense of others. As I will discuss shortly, the successful (i.e., permanent and widely imitated) introduction of the electric bass into the *conjunto* lineup and performance modalities can arguably be credited to a number of other factors and individuals connected to Panama's recording and broadcasting industries, however, Nieto's strategic and timely—that is, earliest—use of the

²³⁵ Nieto, personal communication, December 2007.

instrument is significant in terms of how it formed part of his performance legacy and helped to reinforce his reputation as a genre innovator.

The inclusion of the electric bass changed not only the sound, but also the image of the *conjunto*. To begin with, it augmented the size of the *conjunto* from a six to a seven-person ensemble (six men and one woman). Along with the electric guitar, the electric bass also made *conjuntos* increasingly reliant on foreign-made technology to realize basic musical goals—a phenomenon that visually and sonically reflected the increasing earning potential of *música típica popular* musicians themselves. Most significantly, however, electro-acoustic instruments enhanced the possibilities for musical connections and audible synchronicities between *música típica popular* and other transnational and urban musical practices. These possibilities were not lost on genre practitioners who soon began to incorporate the electric bass in their commercial recordings as well.

Recording technology and the recording process itself was also an important factor in the inclusion of the electric bass and its role within the *conjunto* ensemble. The original decision to make a commercial recording using this instrument is credited to Brandao who, along with his *conjunto*, in 1972 recorded a 45 RPM disc that included a *tamborera* version of Wilie Colon's salsa hit *Murga de Panamá* and a *cumbia agarrado* composition titled *Viva Panamá* on its “A” and “B” sides, respectively. As an owner of a discotheque in Chitré (Herrera), Brandao was familiar with the disadvantage of not using a bass. He recalls, “I listened to the [Colombian] recordings and the recordings sounded nice and full” whereas *conjunto* recordings did not.²³⁶ This discrepancy can be attributed to the perceived lack of a bass function in the *conjunto* sound, which at the time was provided by the guitar and/or a greatly enlarged *tumbadora* drum. While this had been standard practice arguably since the

²³⁶ Personal communication, January 2008.

1930s and 1940s, the absence of a prominent bass part in the *conjunto* sound came to be perceived as a problem when compared to other (often non-Panamanian) recordings.

Eduardo “Balito” Chan, who was the recording engineer for this recording session, describes earlier bass-less *conjunto* recordings as “thin” and lacking “weight.” When compared to the other recordings that were played on “the big *traganquel*,” Chan adds:

all the foreign recordings sounded weighted because they used a bass. [The musicians would say,] “Listen, the national [i.e., Panamanian] recordings don’t have weight, they [sound thin].” And they didn’t understand that it was because the lack of the bass. I said, “No, what’s happening is that you all are not using [a] bass and this is what fills the loudspeaker.²³⁷

Chan’s foregoing observation supports the likelihood that the inspiration to include the bass came from recordings, and foreign ones at that. To address the perceived lack of a bass function, on Chan’s recommendation Brandao hired bassist Clarence Martin (an established *orquesta* musician and director based in Panama City) to record and possibly create the bass parts for both recordings.²³⁸ Jocelyne Guilbault (1993) describes a similar process where “Antillean music groups of the early eighties were forced to develop a ‘sound that could compete with imported foreign music’” (Gilbault quoted in Frith, 2000:312; see also Guilbault, 1993:209-210). One of the implications of this process is the analytical realization that “once musicians enter the international music market their music is shaped by new kinds of nonlocal forces” (Frith, 2000:312). In Panama, this process was rather more one sided, as musicians consumed transnational music, but catered to an ostensibly local (i.e., national/regional), albeit often transnationally-oriented consumership.

Likely due to the commercial and musical success of Brandao’s recording, by the mid-1970s, the electric bass was a permanent fixture in *conjunto* instrumentation. Typical of

²³⁷ Balito Chan, personal communication, November 2007.

²³⁸ For this recordings Martin used an electric upright bass known as a “baby” bass (Roberto “Papi” Brandao, personal communication, 2008).

conjunto performance modalities, the bass assumed an ostinato role within the ensemble. Some of the earliest (and most common) bass ostinati took on a decidedly Cuban/*música tropical* flavour by incorporating the ubiquitous *tresillo* rhythm shown in Figure 6.1.



Figure 6.1: *Tresillo* rhythm

Limited to a single 4/4 measure, this early bass line typically emphasized the root and dominant tones of a given chord as is shown in the example in Figure 6.2, which (perhaps not coincidentally) is also the ostinato rhythm played by Martin on both of the 1972 recordings.



Figure 6.2: Example of the *tresillo* bass ostinato as played on *Adonay* (recorded by Ceferino Nieto circa 1972)

The *tresillo* bass ostinato was also adapted to fit the 6/8 *cumbia atravesado* meter, albeit with the notable difference that bass players started to anticipate the harmonic rhythm by a third of a bar (i.e., one quarter note). An example of this “anticipated bass” (see Manuel, 1985) style is shown in Figure 6.3 and represents a relatively early precursor of salsa-type bass lines in *música típica popular*.



Figure 6.3: Example of a *cumbia atravesado* bass ostinato as played on *Chitré la berracera* (recorded by Ceferino Nieto, undated)

A further modification that became widely used was to alternate the standard *tresillo* ostinato with one that was slightly busier on the *rumba* section. A common *cumbia agarrado* “*rumba*” bass ostinato is shown in Figure 6.4 and is built on the *cinquillo* rhythm—an important rhythmic cell in *música típica popular* ostinato practice. This slightly altered bass line is structurally important as it reinforces the distinction between the two-part *baqueteo-rumba* form, and singles out the latter *rumba* section as a focal point in the composition and/or performance. As I discuss in Chapter 9, it was often this section that was regarded as the most amenable to instrumental innovation strategies and genre mixing.



Figure 6.4: Example of a *cumbia agarrado rumba* section bass ostinato as played on *Amada mia* (recorded by Victorio Vergara circa mid-1970s).

The bassist is Lucho De Sedas

It is important to note here that the introduction of a bass also changed the role and performance modalities of the guitar within the ensemble. Following the inclusion of the electric bass, the guitar *bordoneo* part was modified so as to not clash with the lower register pitches played by the bass.²³⁹ The solution was to substitute the lowest three strings of the (six-string) guitar with the highest three, thus allowing the guitarist to maintain the original right and left hand figures while eliminating the clashing lower pitches. While the tuning of the instrument was often a matter of personal choice,²⁴⁰ the ostinato and general *bordoneo* fingering and picking technique tended to remain the same. An example of this modification is given in Figure 6.5, which is an excerpt from a recorded performance. In addition to

²³⁹ Eduardo “Balito” Chan, personal communication, November 29, 2010, Panama City.

²⁴⁰ An example of guitar tuning was given to me by Lucho De Sedas’ son Juan Diego De Sedas, who noted that his father usually tunes his guitar as follows: 1st string is “E,” 2nd “B,” 3rd “G,” 4th “D,” 5th “A,” and 6th “E” (personal communication, November 2010).

eliminating the lower register of the instrument, contemporary performances often anticipated the harmonic rhythm by a factor of a beat, which further emphasized the fourth beat of the measure as an important point of coincidence in the composite rhythm.



Figure 6.5: Example of a guitar *bordoneo* ostinato as played on *Amada Mia* (recorded by Victorio Vergara circa mid-1970s)

Major innovators: Osvaldo Ayala and Lucho De Sedas

Over time, other accordionists, such as Brandao, had followed in Nieto's footsteps, however, none did it as successfully as Osvaldo Ayala. Born in 1952, Ayala began playing accordion at the age of 7 and was considered a musical phenomenon by his early teens. Often citing Dorindo Cárdenas as a major influence, Ayala made his first recordings with the Orgullo Santeño under the ORCA label, which Cárdenas co-owned. By 1970, Ayala "managed to attract the best dancers [and] above all young people"²⁴¹ and as far as *música típica popular* was concerned, became the "principal personality of the entertainment centres in the entire breadth and width of the Republic" (Revilla Argüesa, 1987:178). Like Nieto, much of Ayala's mass popularity rested on a well deserved reputation as a consummate musician and creative innovator. In 1972, for example, Ayala "was named the director, accordionist and singer with the greatest ticket sales [i.e., most popular among dancers] and who has

²⁴¹ <<http://biblioteca.prensa.com/contenido/2001/02/42233031.html>> (accessed November 10, 2010).

revolutionized folklore by incorporating popular music within Panamanian traditional [music].”²⁴²

Among his important innovations, Ayala is often credited with popularizing *música típica popular* among urban audiences and thus leading to its gradual acceptance by Panama City’s middle and upper classes. While Ayala’s was clearly not the first *conjunto* to perform in Panama City, their music and performance style did have a broader appeal (particularly in terms of social and economic class) than previously was the case, which served to modify common perceptions of *música típica popular* as a strictly *interiorano* practice. Prior to the mid-to-late 1970s, *conjuntos* traditionally performed in *toldos* and *jardins*: semi-enclosed venues that catered to Panama’s rural peasant classes and recently-urbanized working classes. By instituting a number of key changes to the form and presentation of the music, Ayala is believed to have made *música típica popular* more appealing the nation’s more affluent classes.²⁴³

Drawing on transnational genres in vogue at the time, such as the Cuban *bolero* for example, Ayala significantly expanded the verse sections of the *música típica popular* song form so as to “tell a story” as he puts it—for this he is sometimes referred to as the first male singer of the genre. “Before it was more *saloma*,” Ayala recalls:

When I began in 1970, I changed the format. In general, men didn’t sing in [*música típica popular*], it was the women. [And the female singer] would sing in a very special way called *saloma*, which is part of [Panamanian] folklore. So I had a new proposition. I had songs with stories and sung by a man. I was 18 years old and I began to record and sing [on the recordings], and people liked this type of change.”²⁴⁴

Ayala was also known to perform in a suit and claims to be the first musician to insist that his band wear matching uniforms. This attention to presentation gave him access to the city’s

²⁴² La Critica, 20/01/72:12

²⁴³ Eráclides Amaya, personal communication, 1 November 2007.

²⁴⁴ Personal communication, July 2006.

nightclubs, and likely for this reason Ayala's was the first *conjunto* to perform in the prestigious *Club Union* in Panama City.

In terms of musical style, many of Ayala's important contributions are often linked to his approach of combining or creating a “*fusión*,” as he likes to call it, of *música típica popular* with other genres. Among his key innovations Ayala is credited with the expansion of the timbale kit/set-up and the integration of a number of melodic/rhythmic patterns from genres such as salsa and *vallenato*. One of his additions to the timbale apparatus was to include an electronic bass drum or *bombo*, which was played by the drummer's right foot using a pedal controller. This timbale add-on gained wide acceptance by *conjunto* timbaleros and became played in fills and during the *rumba* sections (creating a further point of contrast with the *baqueteo* section). Timbale player, Victor “Chino” Lescure had just joined the group when Ayala included the *bombo* in 1994. Following is an excerpt of an interview in which Lescure explains some of the motivating factors for the *bombo*'s integration:

Sean Bellaviti: Where did the idea [of including the *bombo*] come from?

Victor Lescure: You know, Osvaldo [Ayala] likes to innovate and listen...and [included] a *bombo* to fill out more, fill out the music more [...].

SB: Do they use [the *bombo*] in *vallenato*?

VL: The *bombo* [rhythm] is not [used] in *vallenato*.

SB: Is this something Panamanian?

VL: Osvaldo included it after we alternated [i.e., played alongside] with a *vallenato* [group] here in Panama and the bass player [...] gave me an idea to at least support the breaks or the fills on the cymbal with the *bombo*. [That is,] with the cymbal and *bombo* at the [same] time. [sings an example]²⁴⁵

While most (commercial) *vallenato* groups did in fact use a *bombo*, Lescure's suggestion that the *bombo*'s integration was a local phenomenon refers specifically to how it came to be integrated into the timbale ostinato. Lescure noted that in Ayala's *conjunto*:

²⁴⁵ Victor “Chino” Lescure, personal communication, 9 November 2007.

The *bombo* [rhythm] is continuous because Osvaldo wants it continuous. Afterward the Colombians included *bombo*. The Colombians have *bombo*, however, their *bombo* is not continuous, it [is used only] during the breaks.²⁴⁶

As Lescure notes, the *bombo* is usually played continuously, throughout the (duple meter) *rumba* sections. Its ostinato coincides with the 1st and 3rd cowbell strokes or beats 1 and 3 of a measure—see Figure 6.6 below.

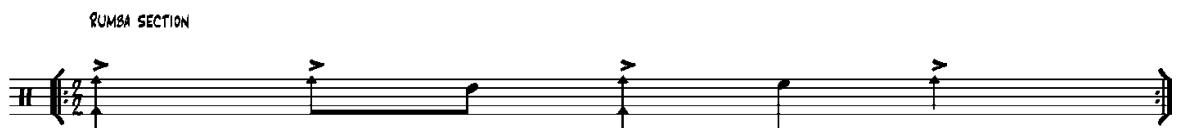


Figure 6.6: Cumbia agarrado, rumba secton timbale ostinato with bombo

The case of the *bombo*'s inclusion into the *conjunto* timbale apparatus underscores the singular significance of the *música típica popular* genre in the fusion process. While the *bombo* likely had an established association with another genre (i.e., vallenato), the instrument's introduction and use within the *conjunto* ensemble was not a case of wholesale appropriation, but rather involved a careful consideration of its merits relative to the *conjunto*'s particular style and established genre conventions. Ayala suggests as much when he notes that the instrument's incorporation was intended to give the music "more weight," and measures its success on the basis of its overwhelming acceptance by genre practitioners, pointing out that "Today, even the purest and most orthodox of *música típica* musicians use the *bombo*."²⁴⁷ The issue of maintaining *música típica popular*'s identity while at the same time trying to expand its potential limits is of central importance to *conjunto* practitioners who, as I discuss in Part III, have come to depend on it as a condition for professionalism.

As noted in various points in this chapter and those preceding, musical change and innovation strategies are regularly understood as representative of an engagement with

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Personal communication, 2008.

urban—and by extension transnational and cosmopolitan—culture, which in Panama’s particular geo-cultural landscape was traditionally located in Panama City. Musical innovations, usually realized through established strategies of stylistic “fusion” and instrument changes and/or modifications, had the potential to become markers of urbanity and serve as a means of undermining longstanding rural or *interiorano* stereotypes. Similarly, the lives and cultural histories of the practitioners/innovators themselves also became a means of enhancing the symbolic efficacy of innovative practices. During an interview in the town of Chitré (Herrera), I asked Ayala what were the reasons for his musical innovations and he responded:

I’m from here in the interior, but I grew up in Panama [City]. So I didn’t only listen to *música típica [popular]*; I listened to a lot of salsa, a lot of rock ‘n roll, twist, what was [in vogue] during this time. So this gives me a wider range and allows me to do things that are not normally done in *música típica [popular]*.²⁴⁸

As Ayala suggests, in Panama during the latter half of twentieth century (and certainly earlier), the experience of living part of one’s life in an urban environment was seen as important to broadening one’s knowledge of other (transnational) musical genres. This was also the case for another of the *música típica popular*’s recognized innovators, Lucho De Sedas. Being neither a (recognized)²⁴⁹ accordionist nor from the Azuero peninsula, De Sedas represents both an anomaly and an exemplar of the ontology of the dominant creative personality within the genre, and his case merits special consideration.

Like Ayala, De Sedas was a great singer (reputedly one of the *música típica popular*’s finest) and also one of the very few non-accordionists who successfully led his own *conjunto* called Los Selectos (i.e., The Selected Ones). As a bandleader, singer and composer, some of De Sedas’s important contributions include expanding the role of the

²⁴⁸ Ayala, personal communication, July 2006.

²⁴⁹ While De Sedas is not a professional accordionist, he does play the instrument exceptionally well.

(male) lead singer—often by adding multiple verses to his own compositions—and combining various well-known genres in his music.²⁵⁰

Born in 1953 on the outskirts of Capira (province of Panama), De Sedas was one of the few *música típica popular* stars who were not from the Azuero region. As a young boy, De Sedas began singing well-known and commercial genres (such as Mexican *rancheras*) which he heard played on the radio and on jukeboxes in local *cantinas*. In some instances he even earned money by singing popular songs for the patrons of local cantinas. Coming from a poor family, De Sedas often worked as a child shining shoes in Panama City. It was then that he discovered that he made more money when he sang for his customers, and in some cases this landed him a spot on Panamanian television shows and radio programs. From the age of nine on to his early teens, De Sedas made a number of appearances on Panamanian television shows and radio programs.

For De Sedas, singing provided him with the possibility to improve his financial and socio-economic standing, which was an important catalyst in his becoming a professional singer. “He decided to earn more money,” reads his biography, “to improve the economic situation of his family,” and adds: “Lucho did not miss the smallest opportunity to showcase his marvelous talent, which resulted in good and honest profits” (De Sedas Amaranto, p.10). De Sedas’ initial contact with *música típica popular* began as a young teenager when he would hear well-known *conjuntos* from the province of Los Santos perform for *bailes* in Capira. On one such occasion, De Sedas made the acquaintance of guitarist “Tito” Osorio who played in Alfredo Escudero’s *conjunto*. After accompanying De Sedas on the guitar,

²⁵⁰ Much of the following discussion of De Sedas’ life makes reference to numerous (often informal) conversations we had dating back to 2005 as well as a concise unpublished biography written by his wife Leda De Sedas Amaranto between 1988 and 1990. Among other things, De Sedas Amaranto’s biography reveals something of the process behind De Sedas’ development as a musician and professional *conjunto* performer.

Osorio noted the young man “had a good voice and talent” and purportedly asked him “why he didn’t he dedicate himself to learning *música típica [popular]*, which would give him good profits” (*ibid.*, p.12). It was then that De Sedas decided to make *música típica popular* his primary focus.

Prior to performing with professional *conjuntos*, however, De Sedas performed semi-professionally in a local *vallenato* group. De Sedas’ broad musical interests (aided in part by his particular cultural background and urban upbringing) *and* lack of knowledge of the *música típica popular* genre was considered unusual, and distinguished him from most other *conjunto* musicians. “Lucho was not [originally] a *música típica [popular]* performer,” reads his biography:

but decided to become involved; so, thinking always of his future and strong desire to succeed as an artist, he recognized the opportunity *música típica [popular]* afforded and learned from people knowledgeable of this form of musical art. (*ibid.*)

Almost immediately (i.e., June of 1971), De Sedas became the bass player and eventually the lead singer for Las Plumas Negras, a new *conjunto* owned/directed by a young accordionist from La Candelaria (Province of Los Santos) named Victorio Vergara. As a member of Victorio’s group, De Sedas began to establish his reputation as an innovator. For example,

Lucho began to propose new rhythms and styles to Victorio; guiding himself always along the *típica* line, but always according to his own taste. At this time he began to sing his own compositions and [came to be known] as Victorio’s vocalist. (*ibid.*, p.14)

De Sedas remained with Victorio’s *conjunto* until August of 1980, at which point he became the lead vocalist and guitarist for accordionist Ulpiano Vergara’s (no relation to Victorio) *conjunto* “Ritmo de Panama” (Rhythm of Panama). Despite being less established than Victorio, Ulpiano’s *conjunto* offered De Sedas more artistic liberty, which allowed him to develop his style and become “a true star” within the genre (*ibid.*, p.18). According to his

biography, De Sedas lost no time in improving both the image and style of the new *conjunto*, noting:

Shortly after Lucho joined this group they decided to change the name to ‘Los Distinguidos’ [i.e., The Distinguished Ones]. Being a man of considerable talent and intelligence, Ulpiano took into consideration Lucho’s skills, and individual and original style; skill, style and talent that took him to the top. It was in this way that the new style of music, which was easy to sing and dance to, developed. (*ibid.*, p.18)

As noted already, De Sedas also recommended the *conjunto* wear matching outfits and made a conscious effort to present himself as an “artist” (see Chapter 4, Plate 4.6).

I include this brief account of De Sedas’ early development for a number of reasons—not the least of which was his contribution and significance to *música típica popular*. First, De Sedas’ experience of becoming a *música típica popular* musician speaks to the relationship of the genre and its practitioners to other musical practices. While De Sedas clearly learned from peers, his abilities as a performer are more often attributed to “talent” (a word which appears often in his biography), which he cultivated from an early age and in a decidedly urban setting. Moreover, De Sedas’ abilities as a performer were initially expressed and established by performances outside of the *música típica popular* genre, which presents a reversal of the developmental norm for most practitioners. Second, while De Sedas was a clear outsider to both the Azuero region and (as his biography makes clear) the *música típica popular* practice, this does not appear to have been a major hindrance, but rather an asset. De Sedas’ status as an urban resident and non-Azuerense allowed him to experience other (urban- and transnational-identified) musical styles in a manner that was not always possible for *interiorano* musicians, but often desired all the same. It is here that De Sedas development is similar to those of *música típica popular*’s other innovators and creative personalities, such as Ceferino Nieto (who listened to radio broadcasts and

recordings) and Ayala (who was an Azuerense living in Panama City and experiencing urban musical culture). While De Sedas' decision to take up residence in Las Tablas does speak to the genre's strong regional identification, his initial outsider status did not appear to pose a hindrance to his becoming a professional and identifiably *música típica popular* practitioner—De Sedas' legitimacy as a practitioner has not (to my knowledge) been questioned. Also, the fact that De Sedas' ostensibly unconventional development was not only seen as acceptable but also a definite asset to bandleaders such as Victorio and Ulpiano, is in keeping with the ethos of musical hybridity that has historically characterized the *música típica popular* genre.

Samy and Sandra Sandoval and the resurgence of *música típica popular*

While strategies of innovation helped to broaden the appeal of *música típica popular* by aligning it closer to urban and transnational musical culture, the genre did not experience a significant resurgence in commercial popularity until the arrival of accordionist Samy Sandoval and his sister and vocalist Sandra Sandoval in the mid-1990s. The Sandovals made it their mission to revolutionize *música típica popular* by combining it with other (often transnational) musical genres. While the practice of genre fusions is—as we have just seen—by no means unusual, the degree to which these two musicians made it part of their popular image is unique. Their music and instrumentation (especially their use of electronic drums and unconventional percussion instruments) combined elements of salsa and merengue as well as traditional/vernacular and commercial Afro-Panamanian music.

The Sandovals began their careers by modeling themselves after an established *conjunto*, in this case Samy's idol Alfredo Escudero and Los Montañeros. Los Montañeros were very well received especially in rural areas and even by the 1980s had already cultivated a reputation as traditionalists and (as I have often heard people say) exponents of the “*verdadera*” or true *cumbia*—itself a reflection of the recent modifications to the genre. As a nod to their own traditionalist orientation and stylistic connection to Escudero's *conjunto*, the Sandovals originally named their *conjunto* “Ritmo Montañero” (i.e., *Montañero Rhythm*) and later “Los Patrones de la *Cumbia*” (i.e., The Masters of the *Cumbia*). Both names effectively conveyed their admiration and commitment to the music of Los Montañeros—whose repertoire they often played during their early live performances—as well as vernacular Azuerense music in general.

In addition to providing a sense of aesthetic orientation, Los Patrones' (traditional) stylistic orientation and explicit relationship to an established *conjunto* provided the fledgling artists with an initial audience-base. Samy observes that in the beginning, his music was not always well received (particularly in his home province of Herrera), however, when he performed in areas where Los Montañeros performed consistently, things were different. Samy explains:

when we went to play in the [rural areas] we did good *bailes* of eighty and up to one hundred couples, which for us was something extraordinary. And you know why this was? [It was] simply because over there, in remote areas, they liked Alfredo's hot *cumbia*. (Pérez Saavedra, 2000:138)

Samy's observation describes a well-established paradigm in Panama in which *conjuntos* tend to be well received in specific geo-cultural territories (e.g., towns, provinces and regions) and less so in others. On the whole, the relationship between a *conjunto* and a performance territory is often thought to be predicated on the perception of a *conjunto*'s

particular style as being relatively ‘traditional’ or ‘innovative.’ In this case, Samy is alluding to a common understanding that Escudero’s “hot *cumbia*” (read traditional style)—and by extension, his own initial approach as well—appeals to more rural constituencies.

In the early 1990s, the Sandovals teamed up with Christian García, a producer and composer from the city of Colón. Thanks in part to García’s radical vision for the group, Los Patrones drastically changed their sound. With respect to his music, Samy explains: “For me, the biggest transformations were [in the area of] rhythm, stage choreography and [creating] a music that was much more active” (Pérez Saavedra, 2000:158). Los Patrones often incorporated a number of urban-identified musical styles such as salsa and merengue into their music. Stylistic innovations such as these often required adapting the techniques and pattern-specific roles of *conjunto* instrumentation. While maintaining for the most part the seven-person *conjunto* line-up, Los Patrones relied increasingly on an expanded timbale set up (which came to include electronic drums/pads), altered/adapted ostinati and unconventional compositional forms to achieve their aesthetic goals.

Their (live) performance presentation was similarly revolutionary as it added an increasing element of “*show*” (to borrow their use of the English-language term) in a “concert”-like style that was generally absent (or less developed) in most other *música típica popular* presentations. Their stage performances included among other things flashy lighting as well as semi-choreographed dance routines. Sandra’s lively and provocative dancing became one of the group’s most recognizable trademarks and made her one of *música típica popular*’s biggest female stars. Samy was also equally animated when he played accordion, a skill he credits to being able to recognize and respond to audience reactions. “I achieved this style of playing the accordion, dancing, jumping and singing,” he says:

during a stage; a long period of time where Sandra and I were *evolucionando* [i.e., evolving] simultaneously. [I]t was a period where we were only [popular] in the countryside of Coclé and nowhere else in the Republic. (Pérez Saavedra, 2000:145).

Their first album with García at the helm, titled “El Patrón de la *Cumbia*” (1995), was a big success by Panamanian standards, selling over 20,000 copies²⁵¹ and catapulted the young performers to national stardom. Focusing on their creative approach vis-à-vis the norms of the genre, one columnist wrote: “Their music has a different style. It has a bit of salsa, reggae and *típico*; as they say, they put a little bit of everything to reach everyone.”²⁵² Another described their performance style as having “a catchy rhythm, a lively choreography and a Panamanian sound.”²⁵³ Summarizing the group’s impact on *música típica popular* at the time, Panamanian sociologist Milcíades Pinzón Rodríguez noted the following at the time:

The 1990s presented a change in accordion music: the interpretive model of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s was exhausted by the 1990s, which explains the salsa boom of the 1980s and at present, both in the Azuero region and the country. The peak of the accordion revolution is being led by the Sandoval siblings. They have managed to capture the signs of the times [and] renew the accordion [...], which in some way began with Osvaldo Ayala, Lucho De Sedas [albeit in] a more timid manner.²⁵⁴

The public’s and critics’ interest in the group’s modern sound as a result of specific innovation strategies came as no surprise and in fact *was* exactly the reaction Los Patrones had hoped for. “It was always my intention, my interest,” Samy states,

to see that *música típica* [popular] became, how should I say, stronger [...] musically speaking. That it sounds stronger; that it acquires the strength of pop music [...] without disturbing or altering its traditional base. As we add drums, as we add new arrangements. However, when you listen... “This [is] *típico*, this is Panamanian but it sounds like pop music...” Like other genres have done, such as salsa and vallenato as well.²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ Pérez Saavedra, 2000:163.

²⁵² La Prensa, January 20, 1996.

²⁵³ El Universal De Panamá, April 10, 1996, p.B8.

²⁵⁴ <<http://biblioteca.prensa.com/contenido/2001/02/42233031.html>> (accessed November 10, 2010).

²⁵⁵ Samy Sandoval, personal communication, October 2007.

With a change in musical style came a change in performance territories. As was the case with Ayala and even Nieto, the “modern” sound of Los Patrones endeared them to audiences in Panama City and *because* of this to some degree they came to be viewed as a “national” phenomenon. One reporter describes this transition as follows:

With their first CD ‘El patrón de la *cumbia*’ and the song *Brindemos por lo muerto*—which played on the radios in the top spots for seven months—these artists revolutionized *música típica [popular]* in the metropolitan area. Everything began with the promotion of their first CD and a press conference, from then on all of Panama knew who these young people were: the driving force behind a modern *interiorano* rhythm hitherto known only in Chiriquí and Coclé.²⁵⁶

The case of Los Patrones and their connection to an older *conjunto* and pre-established performance territory is not unusual. Many up-and-coming *conjuntos* today follow a similar modus operandi. It is also interesting to note that while Los Montañeros remain immensely popular in rural areas, Los Patrones are generally regarded as the more successful *conjunto*. While measurements of popularity are notoriously difficult to gauge, the subjective quality of popularity and its alignment with urban culture emphasizes an enduring dislocation between the nation’s centre and its periphery or *interior*. As a general principle, however, territorial limitations represent a financial hindrance regardless of any attendant rural or urban associations. That is to say, while it helps to achieve a degree of mass popularity in Panama City, professional *conjuntos* must cultivate multi-regional performance territories as a condition for professionalism. For this reason *conjuntos* carefully manage their image, and performance and musical style and to conform to the aesthetic demands of their target demographics—this will be discussed in considerably greater detail in Chapter 11.

Due to their particular innovation strategies and degree to which they made it a part of their popular persona, the Sandovals became polemic figures within their musical

²⁵⁶ El Universal De Panamá, April 10, 1996, p.B8.

community: being both loved and adulated by some, and dismissed and criticized by others.

Much of the criticism they received tended to focus on their non-traditional musical and performance style, which some believed irrevocably changed the idiom for the worse. In an interview with Bolivar De Gracia, I was told that “Panamanian” (which I took to mean Azuerense) dance practices should reflect a certain Spanish grace and elegance—which he referred to as *donaire*—and not, as he put it:

the *donaire* of Sandra Sandoval, because this is black. This is completely black. This is not *lo nuestro* [i.e., Panamanian], I’m very sorry. You can record this and pass it on wherever you like. I am very sorry, but she has reduced/diluted everything that is the *donaire* of the Panamanian woman. She has reduced it [and] blasphemed it.²⁵⁷

I include Bolivar’s forceful commentary here not so much as to show the relationship of this music to Panama’s complex racial politics, but rather to demonstrate an important facet of *música típica popular* discourse: one in which musical change is constantly evaluated against the backdrop of musical nationalism and regional political, social and also racial identifications.

This ideological posturing is also evident in the discourse adopted by proponents of musical ‘evolution’ and ‘modernization,’ who often credit Los Patrones with rescuing *música típica popular* following its decline in the 1970s and 1980s. Few it seems can argue with Lino Francisco’s assertion, for example, that if not for the Sandovals, “the *discotecas* would have finished off *música típica [popular]*.²⁵⁸ Similarly, Luis Sandoval—Samy and Sandra’s father and former manager—said the following regarding the critics among their professional peers:

Although they malign [Samy and Sandra], however, they never talk about the reality; they never mention that [they] were the ones that saved them, because all these musicians were on the wane due to the *discotecas*. Wherever [the musicians]

²⁵⁷ De Gracia, personal communication, February 2008.

²⁵⁸ Personal communication, December 2007.

performed, the *discotecas* crushed them, everywhere. Today the situation has changed and it is now the *conjuntos típicos* that overwhelm the *discotecas*, and this has benefitted the musicians as well as other forms of traditional expression. (Pérez Saavedra, 2000:145)

By citing the ostensibly positive effects of popularity (be it inter-regional, inter-generational, inter-social class and so forth) and commercial success, the Sandovals have effectively turned the paradigm on its head by arguing that far from being detrimental, innovation strategies are/were in fact crucial to the survival of not only *música típica popular*, but other forms of Azuerense vernacular/folkloric music as well. This position speaks to the particular relationship between *música típica popular* and ideas of musical nationalism as mediated by Azuerense folkloric music. This, for example, is reflected in an excerpt of a speech by García, made on behalf of the Sandovals and addressed to the Asociacion Nacional de Acordeonistas/National Association of Accordionists (Anacor)—which counted many *conjunto* accordionists as members—in which he states:

there are factions that are trying to misinform the public and trying to make it look as if we are taking bread away from others. This is not our idea. What we want is that everyone work together to rescue *música típica [popular]*.²⁵⁹

Supporting García's statement is the fact that the Sandovals continue to go by the name of the "Patrones de la Cumbia." And while the name certainly suggests an element of irony, it also reflects a continued desire to be seen as rooted within a particular (read local, Panamanian and/or Azuerense) practice. This need for a sense of tradition is, as we will continue to see, is often a key component of effective musical hybridity among *música típica popular* practitioners.

²⁵⁹ Christian García quoted in El Panamá America, January 21, 1996.

In the following section I analyze a well-known song by Los Patrones titled *Gallina fina* and demonstrate the particular innovation strategies adopted by this ensemble and in some cases by other *música típica popular* practitioners as well.

Analysis of Gallina fina

Gallina fina was a breakthrough song for the Sandovals. It was released in 1995 to great national success and even garnered a degree of international recognition.²⁶⁰ Its title means “fine” or “elegant hen,” the name given to the female counterpart of a fighting cock and an apt metaphor for an assertive and independent woman as personified by Sandra herself.

Gallina fina is an interesting example of the type of stylistic mixing that had come to define processes of innovation, change and development—often described with words like “modernization” and “evolution”—within the *música típica popular* genre. It combines a number of unusual instrumental techniques (such a ‘slap’ bass and guitar strumming) and an unconventional form with identifiably *música típica popular* performance practices (such as a prominent timbale *baqueteo* ostinato). The cumulative effect is a decidedly hybrid and certainly unconventional sound in which the various components are combined with varying degrees of intensity and recognizability. One style, however, known in Panama as *congo* and associated almost exclusively with (colonial) Afro-Panamanians living in the province of Colón, is featured very prominently in this performance and represents a clear attempt at combining two identifiably regional practices. Some of the *congo* markers include characteristic drumming ostinati and percussive sounds, and call-and-response singing. A

²⁶⁰ This song, for example, was featured in the soundtrack of the blockbuster film “The Tailor of Panama” (2001).

complete transcription of *Gallina fina* is included in Appendix E. In the following discussion, I highlight and distinguish significant stylistic changes and continuities relative to the *música típica popular* genre as a whole and the Sandovals in particular.

Form

In keeping with genre norms, *Gallina fina* is organized around a sectional form, albeit one in which certain sections become repeated in their entirety in subsequent sections of the song. Where this composition breaks with traditional form is in 1) its lack of clear *baqueteo-rumba* organizational structure and 2) the inclusion of a rubato introduction and 6/8, *congo* rhythm outro. The introductory section of the composition (i.e., “Interlude Ia” and “Ib”) begins in a rubato rhythm and following a band break segues into an *a tempo*, duple meter. The inclusion of rubato or ballad introductions and endings is something that is fairly common in Colombian vallenato (not to mention a myriad of North American popular genres), but is rarely used in *música típica popular*. One of the primary reasons for this that it is not danceable and is more properly suited, as a number of my informants suggested, to “*música de concierto*” or “concert music”—something which commercial vallenato is and which Los Patrones’ music often aspires to become. The abrupt change in meter from duple to compound duple in the end of the song (i.e., bar 271) would also be awkward in a *baile*/dance setting. In this setting, un-danceable sections dramatically shift the focus from the dancers to the performers. While this shift is sometimes seen as beneficial to raising the profile of the performers (e.g., as “concert” entertainers), it also runs the risk of alienating the dancers, and for this reason seldom occurs in live settings and even recordings—this issue is examined in greater detail in Chapter 12.

The lack of a clear *rumba* section is another move away from local dance practices and effectively substitutes the pronounced (and predictable) dramatic arc of traditional forms with one that is considerably more consistent and gradual. While one cannot be certain as to what the Sandovals and García's precise intentions were at the time, this modification does align the composition closer to the open-ended, call-and-response forms of African-derived musical practices—such as (traditional) *cumbia* and *congo* musical traditions—which finds its parallel in other aspects of composition's melodic organization.

Replacing the predictable *baqueteo-rumba* form is a relatively extended use of call-and-response between the lead vocals and the background/chorus singers. As I have already noted, this type of call-and-response is particularly common in (African derived) folkloric musical practices such as the music/dance drama tradition called “*congo*.²⁶¹ While the Sandovals' use of a clear call-and-response between a vocal lead and chorus is slight compared to local other practices (e.g., *tamborito*, *cumbia*, etc.), it is a technique that is not often used in *música típica popular* and for this reason stands out as unique. Instances of this type of call-and-response are found in Verse I and II/II' as well as between the two lead vocalists in Verse IV/IV'.

Relative to the norms of the genre, the form of *Gallina fina* is unique for a number of reasons. First, while it does feature a general alternation between verse- and chorus-like sections, it lacks the alternating *baqueteo* and *rumba* sections that characterize the large majority of *música típica popular* compositions. Second, it features an unusual degree of call-and-response between the lead vocalist and chorus. Both of these features are not

²⁶¹ Describing the importance of call-and-response to *congo* performance practices, Ronald Smith writes: On the whole, Congo style incorporates spontaneous variation and improvisation [*sic*] into its core. There are, however, conservative forces within compositional practice which counteract this tendency. [One] of these factors [is] the call and response style, which rest[s] heavily upon the ostinato (refrain) of the chorus. (Smith, 1976:280)

necessarily characteristic of Los Patrones' style, however, they do highlight the unusual degree of experimentation that was going on at the time.

Ostinati

In keeping with the norms of *música típica popular*, *Gallina fina* is predominantly ostinato-based. Typical of the type of innovation that had come to characterize the genre, strategies for stylistic fusion/modification generally involve adaptations to traditional ostinati and the resultant composite rhythms. This is noticeable in the patterns played by the percussion instruments, which in this case operate outside of the typical *baqueteo-rumba* format. In many ways it is not clear whether this song is performed in either a *baqueteo* or *rumba* rhythm, or even whether these distinctions apply. The most prominent *baqueteo* marker is the pattern played by the timbales, which is played the skins of the drums rather than on the cowbell. The *tumbadoras*, on the other hand, play a number of two- (i.e., bars 19-20 and 206-207) and four-bar patterns (i.e., bars 126-129 and 238-241) that bear only a slight resemblance to traditional *tumbadora* ostinati—e.g., the emphasis on beat four on the second half of the two bar pattern shown in bars 19-20. While transitional moments signaled by relatively complex *tumbadora* and timbale fills do exist in predictable places—such as during “Interlude” and/or “Pre-Verse” sections (i.e., “Interlude IV” and “Interlude IV” through “Interlude VI [Pre-Verse IV]”—these are not followed by significant alterations to the composite rhythms as would happen during a shift from *baqueteo* to *rumba* or vice versa.

In addition to the percussion instruments, the bass and guitar parts present interesting variations to common performance modalities. The ostinato played on the bass is a modification of the common *rumba* bass ostinato (see Figure 6.3 above). One of its most

striking features of this ostinato, however, is its anticipation of the harmonic rhythm on beat four of the preceding bar, which aligns it closely to the anticipated bass style used in commercial salsa and gives the overall composite ostinato a decidedly salsa feel. A further modification is the use of the slap bass technique (indicated by an inverted accent marker [i.e., “\”] over the slapped notes), which is atypical of the genre. The guitar part is unusual as it substitutes the common *bordoneo* technique for a strumming or *charrasqueo* technique. The use of a *charrasqueo* technique was in itself not usual given that by the time this recording was made (and possibly several years earlier), *conjunto* guitarists had already begun to use a *charrasqueo* technique on the *rumba* sections, which provided an additional point of contrast with the *baqueteo* sections. The lack of a *bordoneo* technique, however, is in itself unusual and contributes the ambiguity between *baqueteo* and *rumba* distinctions.

Another important feature of the song’s soundscape is the substitution of the traditional gourd scraper for a metal *churraca* (sometimes also called güiro or güira), which had become common practice by the time this song was recorded, but nonetheless continued to inspire comparisons with commercial merengue and vallenato. The timbale player also uses an electronic cymbal sample (triggered most likely by a pad mounted on the timbale stand). Electronic drums such as this have become a standard feature of most *conjuntos* today and are particularly associated with the music of Los Patrones as well as Osvaldo Ayala.

Genre fusion and inter-regional connections: *congo* music

As noted above, *Gallina fina* is in many ways considered to be a *fusión* of *música típica popular* with aspects of *congo* musical practices. Among most prominent *congo* markers are the 6/8 ostinato that ends the song (bars 271-272), a consistent unison handclapping sound

and the call-and-response between the lead and chorus singers described above. The final ostinato of this song is performed in the style of a characteristic *congo* “*atravesado*” (also “*atravesáo*”). In this case, the pattern normally played on the *caja* is adapted for the timbales, which employs a standard *baqueteo* technique. Similarly, the congas play the *seco/jondo* part characteristic of the *atravesado* compound-duple meter (see Smith, 1976:275). Unison handclapping by various members of the chorus is an important feature *congo* performance practice (as well as *tamborito* and other Panamanian folkloric practices). “In addition to the strong accents which are played by the *caja*,” Ronald Smith notes:

the handclapping of the women’s chorus reinforces the main subdivisions [of the meter]. Often at the beginning of the composition, the handclaps only mark the first beat of each measure [...] When the composition has reached a state of [tempo] equilibrium, the women clap only on the main subdivisions of the measure. (Smith, 1976:268, 269)

The sound of unison handclapping sound is likely produced by using an electronic sample and occurs consistently on the downbeat of every other measure beginning on bar 19.

Typical of fusion/innovation practices, certain sounds and performance techniques connote with varying degrees strength specific performance traditions, histories and nominal and regionally-identified musical styles. That is to say, their particular meaning/s is often contingent on specific performance and discursive contexts. In this case, the efficacy of various sonic markers to reference *congo* performance practices (which has features in common with other local folkloric practices) is enabled through their combination, both in terms of the sheer number of references used—in this case three—and the way they become integrated into the overall soundscape and structure of the music—e.g., the isolation of the two drum ostinato in the final 6/8 segment. In the case of *GallinaFina*, the association is reinforced by a number of extramusical features including a music video (likely released in

tandem with or shortly after the recording) which shows Los Patrones performing for a *conga* dance troupe in the vicinity of iconic landmarks of the colonial city of Portobello, and the professional practices of the performers themselves. As I have noted already, in *conjunto* practice, innovation strategies were often a means of expanding a performer's audience base, which among other things were connected to geo-cultural regions or performance territories. In this case, the clear references to *congo* practice can be seen as a means of broadening the *conjunto*'s audience base and performance territory by appealing to Afro-Panamanians resident in the province and city of Colón—traditionally an untapped demographic for *música típica popular conjuntos*. Perhaps confirming the effectiveness of this strategy is the widespread reputation that Los Patrones remain very well received in the province of Colón and among Afro-Panamanians audiences.²⁶²

Conclusion

In Part II I have outlined some of the most significant developments in *música típica popular*'s early and formative history, a timeframe spanning approximately 60 years. In particular, I have focused on changes in *conjunto* instrumentation and performance practice and have suggested ways in which practices of musical appropriation—often tied to a national and transnational pan-Caribbean musical culture—contributed to the genre's pan-national popularity and at the same time problematized its connection to mid-twentieth century Panamanian national identity. While populist-oriented political movements linked to the rise of Panamanian militarism (and Omar Torrijos in particular) served somewhat to

²⁶² While I have not had an opportunity to travel with Los Patrones to this region and see their performances firsthand, I had often heard this opinion expressed by a number of my informants.

mitigate the reactionist and xenophobic tendencies of Panama's Hispanophile national cultural identity, ideas of musical vernacularism associated with the Azuero region and culture continue to be highly relevant to contemporary *música típica popular* discourse and practice.

PART III

CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

Part III differs from previous Parts mainly in that its focus is on the contemporary practices of *conjunto* practitioners and, as such, relies heavily on information and research methodologies that might be described as ethnographic in nature. In this portion of the study I draw principally on my experiences as a participant-observer, and formal and informal conversations with *música típica popular* practitioners and aficionados. The aim here is to develop an understanding of what it is *conjunto* practitioners *do*, both in their capacity as the primary exponents of the *música típica popular* genre and as individuals who also earn (or aspire to earn) a living principally through live performances. In the process I make an effort to show how the discursive practices (performances and conversations) of contemporary *música típica popular* practitioners *continue* to be informed by the same processes that shaped Panamanian nation and expressive culture over the course of twentieth century and earlier. By considering the relationship between the performance practices, discursive practices and popular identities of the performers themselves I aim to examine the ways in which notions of *música típica popular* convention/genre sensibilities both informs and is informed by issues of Panamanian national identity.

Part III divides into six chapters (numbering 7 through 12), each of which seeks to shed light on a specific aspect of contemporary *conjunto* performance practice. In Chapter 7 I introduce the main analytic and theoretical issues and themes of Part III. These include an

understanding of the *conjunto* in terms of its role as both a musical ensemble and commercial business, a discussion of the related concepts of genre and style and their specific applications to this study, and an introduction to the specific (professional and semi-professional) *conjuntos* discussed in Part III. In Chapter 8 I examine the *conjunto* as a business, detailing both the economic factors regarded as essential to the commercial viability of the unit and its close economic relationship to the commercial *baile*. Chapters 9 and 10 focus on the *conjunto*-as-ensemble paradigm, examining the way in which individual *conjuntos* are meaningfully differentiated in terms of notions of style, which serve to inform ideas of performance and compositional practices—discussed in Chapter 9 and 10, respectively. In Chapter 11 I address the topic of *conjunto* professionalism (in this case specific activities critical to the way *conjunto* professionals earn their living), focusing on the peripatetic practices of professional *conjuntos* and the way this activity informs an understanding of musical practices in relation to broader nationalist discourses of isthmian geo-social and geo-cultural identity. In the final chapter I examine the performance practices of professional *conjunto* practitioners as well as the role that performance contexts play in informing various understandings of performance style and conventional practices. In particular I focus on the genre's relationship to the *baile* institution, which I argue is pivotal to understanding how notions of the genre and style meaningfully intersect with established discourses of Panamanian music-cultural vernacularism and cosmopolitanism.

CHAPTER 7

THE *CONJUNTO* UNIT

My first introduction to *música típica popular* coincided with my first trips to Panama. As it also happened, the first people to introduce me to this music were practitioners themselves who soon became friends and later informants in this study. During my initial stay, these individuals often assumed the role of musical guides; they not only took me to my first *bailes*, but also directed my eyes and ears toward particular areas of performance practice and patiently acclimatized me to what was a remarkably fascinating and (particularly at the time an) unfamiliar environment. While my understanding of this music is undoubtedly marked by my own subjectivities as a musician/researcher—i.e., both informing and informed by my own (pre)conceptions of this practice—I also owe a great deal to these individuals as well as these early experiences in shaping my ideas.

From the very beginning I found my attention continually being directed toward the ensemble unit and the accordionist in particular—who, I learned, was the front-man (for indeed nearly all of the accordionists I met were male) and owner of his respective *conjunto*. As a researcher anxious to acquire a basic understanding of *música típica popular*, I took comfort in the realization that with few exceptions all the groups tended to be configured similarly—in fact, remarkably so—and that the musicians seemed to have very prescribed performance roles. Likewise, all *conjuntos* performed what I was given to understand to be a

singular musical genre that, despite the ambiguities surrounding its name, was at its core a hybridized variant of Panamanian “*cumbia*.”

Soon I also learned that *conjuntos* were relatively fixed ensembles, comprised of musicians and support personnel who earned the bulk of their living through live performances in dance settings known as *bailes* and that these were largely catered to by a limited number of professional *conjuntos*.²⁶³ My research was further facilitated by the fact that a significant number of both professional and semi-professional (see below) *conjuntos* were based out of Las Tablas, which I soon made my own home-base as well. Thanks to the introductions provided by my friends/informants/guides, I was soon invited to travel with a number of professional *conjuntos*, accompanying them on their weekly multi-*baile* tours or “*giras*” as they were called. These trips often lasted for four days or more and entailed a good deal of travel and long performance hours—which I found to be both tremendously exciting and physical exhausting. *Bailes* tended to be geographically dispersed throughout the Panamanian territory and the venues the musicians performed in could only be relied on to provide basic shelter, a stage and electricity. As a result, the *conjuntos* were remarkably self-sufficient, owning all of the necessary equipment for making (loud) music as well as their own means of transportation. The insights afforded by these behind the scenes experiences confirmed for me what is for many common knowledge: professional *conjuntos* were both an ensemble and a business and its performers were both musicians and employees.

While recognizing common practices seemed to come easily, the same could not be said about the details that were said to make one *conjunto* different from another. It was

²⁶³ I use the term “professional *conjunto*” to identify a working ensemble in which *all* of its members make their living entirely or quite nearly entirely off the proceeds of *conjunto*-related activities.

made clear to me early on that all *conjuntos* were not the same; some, I was told, sounded more “*tradicional*” (traditional) than others and each had their own individual “*estilo*” (style), a quality that most listeners could recognize instantly. During my stay in Panama, my musician friends occasionally monitored my progress at recognizing basic elements of style by playing different recordings and having me guess the *conjunto*. Over time, I was often complimented on my steadily improving abilities in this area, which was encouraging. My good friend and *conjunto* bassist Jorge Jaén, however, also reminded me on several occasions that as a cultural outsider I would most likely never come to fully appreciate and understand the subtle and yet important differences that differentiated one *conjunto*’s style from another or sonically linked them to broader categories of region and variously shared stylistic identities. Over the course of my research I often had cause to ponder Jaén’s statement as I learned that although similar in many ways, *conjuntos* are also multiply and complexly differentiated and processes of differentiation had implications that extended beyond the purely musical.²⁶⁴

Since my interest lies with how *conjuntos* cultivate multiply differentiated musical identities in a genre-based scene by positing a relationship between notions of style and genre, and the creative processes by which they are shaped it is necessary to pay close attention to the overlaps and tensions between these terms—both in terms of how they have been theorized by scholars and the way in which local usages have informed my own thinking. I should mention, further, that this analysis is informed by looking at the *conjunto*

²⁶⁴ My own experiences and subjectivities also frequently highlighted the issue of listener competency, which is a topic which I do not address in great detail in this present study. This is, however, a valuable point of inquiry and future studies would benefit from asking such questions of whether local audiences hear subtle differences? What aspects of performance other than sound inform notions of style for listeners? What sorts of assumptions to musicians make about their own audiences ability to perceive differences and how does that inform their musical choices?

as both a musical ensemble and business enterprise, thus requiring distinct—albeit often overlapping and nested—areas of inquiry. In keeping with the broader aims of this study, finally, the following chapters endeavour to bring these concerns to bear on my developing analytical framework for understanding how specific *conjunto* identities and notions of a common musical practice intersect with dominant understandings of Panamanian nationalism and cultural imaginaries.

The *conjunto* as a musical ensemble

As musical ensembles, all *conjuntos* share a number of important characteristics. As discussed in Chapter 4, all claim a common history that owes a debt to the pioneering efforts of Gelo Córdoba and his contemporaries, who for most practitioners are regarded as the founders of the genre as it is understood today. The basic instrumentation of the *conjunto* has also become similarly standardized and, following the inclusion of the electric bass, has remained largely intact since the early 1970s. Finally, much like their violin-led predecessors, this standardized *conjunto* continues to be the *baile* ensemble par excellence.

Yet despite their many similarities, for fans and practitioners of the genre no two *conjuntos* are quite alike. The music and sound of each *conjunto* is differentiated in a variety of ways and to varying degrees in terms of a myriad of musical and extra-musical criteria. Among the most commonly cited are the relative uniqueness of the *conjunto*'s “*repertorio*” (i.e., composition-based repertoire) and performance style or *estilo*. Important to this study is understanding the way in which musical differences become discursively linked to a number of interrelated extra-musical features, including relationships to specific performance territories and audience demographics, and notions of popularity; features that overlap with

professional concerns and which in combination tend to be viewed as ensemble-specific. In the following chapters I endeavour to show how the formation of varied and variously individualized musical and creative identities (be it at the level of genre, *conjunto* and/or individual musician) both informs and is informed by a broader series of social collectivities across which notions of Panamanian national identity are imagined.

Informed by professional concerns as well as creative interests, discourse surrounding *conjunto* practice (and, indeed, the music itself) often highlights a tension that exists between 1) notions of shared musical practices and 2) the need/desire to differentiate individual musicians, ensembles and groups of ensembles from one another. In other words, *conjunto* practitioners find it important to be identified as practitioners of the *música típica popular* genre while at the same time distinguishing themselves in various ways from other genre practitioners. By examining how ideas of genre and style are discussed these tensions become apparent and, in fact, also form a theoretical basis for understanding how *conjunto* performance practices connect to broader ideas of Panamanian musical and cultural identity (which is discussed at length particularly in Chapters 11 and 12).

The development of the *conjunto* as an ensemble is inextricably linked to the continued evolution of a compendium of shared and relatively coherent musical practices that can productively be called a musical “genre.” My understanding of genre is one which presupposes that notions of musical practice and convention are socially and historically produced, involve a degree of consensus among practitioners, and for this reason are subject to change. To cite William F. Hank, genres frequently extend beyond the purview of purely formalist analysis and

can be defined as the historically specific conventions and ideals according to which authors compose discourse and audiences received it. In this view, genres consist of

orienting frameworks, interpretive procedures, and sets of expectations [...]. (Hanks, 1987:670).

As is the case in Panama and certainly elsewhere, musical genres derive strength and discursive traction through repetition, a process that is aligned with Alan F. Moore definition of generic conventions as “socially constrained” (2001:441). This recognition of the socially constructed nature of generic formations and sensibilities necessarily undermines notions of genres that are overly fixed and tends rather to view the subject as complexly situated and transformative.

Such is the approach adopted by Keith Negus (1999) who—in his examination of the interrelationships between the business strategies of entertainment industry corporations and processes of genre formation—stresses

the significance of genre cultures as an unstable intersection of music industry and media, fans and audience cultures, musician networks and broader social collectivities informed by distinct features of solidarity and social identity. (p.174)

Far from being circumscribed, for Negus genres are understood as dynamic, socially constructed (“genre cultures”²⁶⁵) and experienced within broader, often overlapping social-cultural *milieux* (“genre worlds” [p.4]). Elsewhere he writes,

Musical genres do not fill eras, nor do they continue neatly along the path of progressive development—being born, maturing and then dying. They arise out of and are actively made through dialogic—or perhaps polylogical—movements through time but also in space. (1999:162)

This dynamic and multi-dimensional aspects of genre formations is, indeed, something that is readily apparent in *música típica popular*, which perhaps more than most has proven remarkably resistant to facile categorizations.

²⁶⁵ Negus provides the following definition of “genre cultures” as “an unstable intersection of music industry and media, fans and audience cultures, musician networks and broader social collectivities informed by distinct features of solidarity and social identity” (1999:174).

Having traced the development of *música típica popular* as a genre (in the above sense) over the course of the twentieth century, it is clear that the *conjunto* unit has become central to the way that this music not only does, but also is supposed to sound, look and mean. The extent that the *conjunto* can be understood as the enabling institution for the (re)production of a coherent set of musical practices is informed by an understanding of the historical processes that shaped its development. In the preceding chapters I have endeavoured to show something of the transformative character of *música típica popular*, as a particular process of genre construction or way of thinking about practice wherein specific types of ensembles emerged as definitive. Specifically, I have focused on changes in the use of instrument technologies and their attendant performance modalities as well as the role of recording and broadcasting technologies in the production of notions of convention that frequently extended beyond relatively circumscribed geographical, cultural and social boundaries. We have seen that over the course of the twentieth century, transformative processes have occasionally been perceived by some as illegitimate and aberrations or “abominations” of vernacular music, which among other things contradicted notions of a culturally homogenized rural *interior*. For others transformative processes and techniques were understood as logical and necessary to creative development of the genre as legitimated through ideas of innovation and modernization.

Adopting a more formalist perspective, I have also identified a number of formal characteristics common to *música típica popular* musical practices as a whole. Chief among these are specific compositional paradigms, performance roles and ostinato-based performance modalities. While potentially misleading on their own, formalist descriptions such as these feed into the notion that genres are most readily identified by practices which

everyone does/did (or is presumed to do/have done) and which tend to be prioritized according to their relative specificity to a single genre. Therefore, despite their demonstrated fluidity generic conventions also impart a sense of permanency, tradition and common practice.

As it concerns contemporary *conjunto* practice, genre appears to be a pragmatic given (albeit a conceptual uncertainty). That is to say that *música típica popular* is seemingly coterminous with a compendium of shared knowledge and performance competencies presumably expected of *any* active practitioner. All professional timbaleros, for example, have a strong knowledge of *baqueteo* practice and all guitarists can perform the *bordoneo* technique—practices which in turn have become defining attributes of the genre. Similarly, *conjunto* practice as a whole bears certain resemblances to Will Straw's (1991) notion of a “scene” (singular) in which surface dissimilarities (e.g., range, variety and variance) are subsumed within expectations, often related to genre, shaped by a particular formation of music participants²⁶⁶; making the notion particularly useful in accounting for the overlaps between *música típica popular* and *música folklórica* or salsa. For instance, on one hand it is generally assumed that timbaleros have competencies in Azuerense folkloric (hand) drumming traditions such as *tamborito*. While this is not necessarily a pre-condition for professionalism (e.g., professional *conjunto* timbaleros do not usually perform *tamborito* nor have I been told that this is an essential skill), it does come to reaffirm links between *música típica popular* and vernacular histories and practices in a manner similar to the way a degree of fluency in bebop techniques from the 1940s is assumed of most contemporary jazz musicians. On the other hand, while the same cannot be said about their competency in other timbale traditions such as salsa and vallenato, such competencies are nonetheless coveted

²⁶⁶ See Straw, 1991:373.

skills particularly for *conjuntos* trying to establish a reputation and a sense of stylistic identity as musical innovators. The point being that *música típica popular* is—like most if not all genres—meaningfully situated in relationship to others (be they in a manner that is oppositional, oblique or overlapping). Moreover, it is these relationships that often form the basis for specific aesthetic tensions and orientations necessary for establishing a basis for meaningful differentiation among genre practitioners.

The idea that *conjuntos* are not evaluated equally, commonalities notwithstanding, is key to understanding the interplay that exists between notions of genre and style. Certainly people have personal preferences and some groups are considered better than others. More crucially—and not unrelatedly—particular *conjuntos* are regarded by both practitioners and aficionados as being more “traditional” (a term I examine in Chapter 9) than others or more invested to asserting claims to creative innovation (i.e., “*innovación*”) than others. More to the point, *conjuntos* actively construct difference (i.e., the notion that meaning is not produced in isolation, but is the result of some relationship) through their actions and in the process strive to cultivate complexly differentiated and often locally unique performance identities. And while such an activity is by no means a defining characteristic of *conjunto* practice, it is, however, perceived as critical to the groups long term (economic and artistic) success and longevity.

This process, which applies to individual musicians (particularly accordionists) as well as *conjuntos*, tends to hinge on particular notions of “*estilo*.” Indeed, stylistic affiliations and the means by which they come to shape performance/performer identities are understood by *música típica popular* practitioners to be fundamental to the commercial success of the *conjunto* and its constituents. And, importantly, while not without some contestation, a wide

range of stylistic differences is embraced and in fact desired, without threatening the general acceptance among Panamanians of *música típica popular* as a cohesive, albeit highly varied, genre.

Much has been written on the topic musical style, which among other things has been discussed as “a system of codes and conventions” (Moore, 2001:435; also Feld, 1982:3 and 1988) as well as “a range or series of possibilities defined by a group of particular examples” (Pascal, 2007)—definitions which overlap considerably with scholarly definitions of genre. Further, in everyday usage and in much scholarship, genre and style are used interchangeably. However, treating the terms as different, I argue, points to important aspects of *conjunto* practice. Thus, for the purposes of this study, my understanding of style is somewhat more limited and focuses on its critical intersection with notions of genre. I posit that style is means of establishing continuities between performance practices in ways that differ from genre in terms its area of reference. As I see it, style is an ideological construct that generally does not undermine the coherence of genre (and, in fact, can and often does reaffirm important continuities by valorizing differences/fusions/hybrids that work or fit), but in fact helps to establish points of (non)coherence between participants at ever greater degrees of idiosyncrasy, specificity and detail.

In an effort to mitigate the confusion that tends exists between the use and understanding of the terms “genre” and “style,” Moore identifies the portability of stylistic markers as one of its defining characteristics. Genre and style, he writes, are “not hierarchically but orthogonally related” (2001:441); meaning that while both categories may (or may not) cover similar musical ground, their differences are one of relationship, emphasis, and nuance. Style, he argues, “refers to manner of articulation of musical gestures”

whereas “[g]enre refers to the identity and context of those gestures” (2001:441). More to the point with respect to the question of content, Moore writes,

in its concentration on how meaning is constituted, genre is normally explicitly thematized as socially constrained. Style, on the other hand, in its emphasis on technical features and appropriability, frequently simply brackets out the social [...] or at least regards this realm as minimally determining, where it is considered to operate with a negotiable degree of autonomy. (2001:441)

Moore’s distinctions are useful particularly as they speak to the role of consensus—through (widespread) repetition—specifically in the production of generic sensibilities. However, it is important to remember that while they may often appear to be idiosyncratic, notions of style addressed in this study are also very much socially determined—as suggested by the fact that the attainment of an individual style typically goes hand in hand with commercial success and all its trappings. In this context, salient parameters of style are marked by defining criteria that span continua of the personal and specific to the general and broadly shared musical conventions and practices. This position is echoed by Graeme Smith (1997) who notes that in the case of Irish accordion playing, style

can incorporate the audible results of instrumental technique, regional differences of repertoire and technique, as well as personal, idiosyncratic, and expressive musical approaches. (Smith, 1997:434)

The development and cultivation of a relatively distinct musical identity is often regarded as essential to the stability and longevity of a *conjunto*—for which the stakes are high given that *conjuntos* are a means of economic security for professional musicians. Moreover, the uncertainties of a practice that involves a great deal of specialization—particularly in areas of genre, live performance and a reliance on one specific performance setting—demands a degree of flexibility particularly in terms of style and management strategies. In order to operate effectively within the *música típica popular* scene, *conjuntos*

(as ensemble units generally comprised of pragmatically like-minded individuals) strategically manage their performance practices and images so as to maintain their relevance as widely popular and commercially viable entertainers. This can be seen in the way *conjuntos* promote themselves, avail themselves of specific forms of broadcast and print media, and cultivate relationships to particular performance demographics differentiated in terms of geographical and perceived cultural and socio-economic affiliations. In this context, notions of style are understood to be key variables in ensuring professional success and longevity.

The interplay between notions of genre and style also informs and is informed by ideas of how musical creativity is realized and understood within *conjunto* practice. Negus' study is important in this respect as it shows that musical creativity often occurs in close relationship to genre expectations and that these in turn are shaped by people and institutions working "within and across" the realm of cultural production (1999:173). For Negus,

the conditions within which musical creativity can be realized [are] shaped as much by formal organizations, occupational roles and corporate production techniques as by the broader genre cultures across which music is made circulated and given meaning. (1999:175)

In this way music industry personnel can be understood as "cultural intermediaries" (Bourdieu, 1986), connecting artists and audiences in meaningful ways. Counterpointing his ideas with those of other writers on the topic, Negus reminds us that creative processes connect to notions of genre in various ways, some operating "within changing conventions" and others moving "across the boundaries of genres" (1999:181)—both ideas being linked to notions of "creative conventions" (Finnegan, 1997) and "creative confrontations" (Hannerz, 1996), respectively. Ultimately, creative processes inform and are informed by the broader social collectivities that give them shape and meaning; moving "within or across musical

genres,” Negus concludes, is therefore “more than a musical act: it is a social act” (1999:183).

In *conjunto* practice, creative processes form the basis for notions of style and their relationship to ideas of genre. Styles are created differently; some performers stake claims on the edges and borders or points of overlap with other genres—and in the process occasionally redefine the boundaries of genre itself. Others serve to emphasize subtle differences that are comfortably situated within genre conventions and expectations in an arguably pragmatic effort to differentiate themselves from other ensembles and performers within the scene. In spite of their seeming dissimilarity, both strategies are effective in creating key points of difference and establishing aesthetic orientations. As I will show in Chapter 9, these orientations are, in practice, often situated within intersecting notions of genre ‘traditions’ vis-à-vis ‘innovations’—notions that have come to cast certain practitioners as relative “*tradicionalistas*” (traditionalists) or “*innovadores*” (innovators), respectively, and like all genre conventions are subject to change and/or may be modified if necessary.

Discourses of style also contribute to specific *conjunto* cultures and help to prioritize certain individuals (and their attendant performance roles) over others as the primary architects and spokespersons for creative activity. Accordionists and composers are often two such individuals. Within the ensemble, the accordionist is the undisputed star performer (playing the majority of the melodic material and avoiding ostinato-based roles, *inter alia*) and reputed visionary/innovator in areas of creative development. While operating outside of the *conjunto* unit, in their role as the (nominal) authors of some of the more tangible attributes of a *conjunto*’s style (i.e., an identifiably unique musical repertoire) composers become an important part of the creative process and the formation of a *conjunto*’s stylistic

identity. Like the accordionist and composer, individual members of the *conjunto* may also stake out similar claims to musical creativity, however, these tend to be subsumed within the needs of the *conjunto*, contributing to a sense of solidarity and shared stylistic vision for the group as a whole.

It is important to remember that despite of their contribution to the relative stability (and professional security) of ensemble formations, style-based musical identities are neither static nor isolable, but are intertextually situated and always subject to (re)interpretation. At various points in the following chapters I highlight the role of performance contexts, in particular, as frameworks for the continual reshaping of musical identities. Performance contexts often create opportunities for creative juxtapositions and (re)articulations—as can happen when two *conjuntos* perform *mano a mano* or alongside a folkloric ensemble.

Conjunto practitioners are aware of these possibilities and regularly take advantage of any opportunity a particular performance context may offer for improving their popular image.

A final issue I wish to highlight concerns genre labelling. As far labelling conventions are concerned, the genre identified in this study as “*música típica popular*” is conceptually ambiguous, and conspicuously so. That is to say, while aficionados have no difficulty recognizing the sound of *música típica popular* when they hear it, their reasons for identifying it as such as well as the terminology the use to do so is considerably less straightforward. The term “*música típica*” is the one most often used in the genre’s promotion and (colloquial) discourse. As a label, however, its denotative purpose is limited as it is also a synonym for number of related (albeit ostensibly distinct) musical practices that fall under the rubric of *música folklórica*—e.g., *tamborito*, *mejorana*, *cumbia*, etc. While I have not heard practitioners complain about the overlap per se (in fact, I argue in Chapter 12

that quite the opposite is the case), I have often been reminded that this ambiguity hampers the promotion of *música típica popular* to cultural outsiders and international audiences—creating a situation in which the label’s meaning is contextually determined requiring the use of additional (and often equally ambiguous) signifiers such as “*bailable*” or “*popular*.¹⁹

The *conjunto* as a business

Contemporary *conjuntos* constitute the principal—often sole—socio-musical organization wherein professional *música típica popular* musicians earn their livelihood. Professional musicians are members of a single *conjunto* at any given time and may remain with one *conjunto* for the span of their professional careers. Since *música típica popular*’s inception a number of practices have come to ensure the integrity of this unit making it a very stable *nexus* (Packman, 2009 discussed below) as far as bands are concerned. As I have argued throughout the dissertation, the relative fixity of the *conjunto* unit is directly connected to the tandem commercialisation of the *baile* setting and professionalization of *música típica popular* practitioners.

Perhaps one of the most compelling reasons to focus on professionalism is that (to my knowledge) all professional *conjuntos* are in fact commercial enterprises or “*empresas*” (businesses), which, in keeping with Panamanian labour laws, involve economic incentives and contractual agreements that ensure the effective (and continued) cooperation of *all* of their constituents. A *conjunto* “*dueño/a*” (owner) is contractually obligated to provide payment to his/her “*integrantes*” (i.e., those members of the *conjunto* who are *not* the owner) for services rendered. For the most part, *integrantes* are treated as wage labourers who are paid on a per-performance basis and usually after every performance. While this form of

remuneration constitutes the bulk of an *integrante*'s income, the livelihoods of *integrantes* are additionally safeguarded by social security laws which, among other things, entitle them to health benefits, vacation pay, sick leave, a pension and severance pay in the case of unwarranted dismissal. While I have witnessed occasions in which these provisions were not maintained in their entirety, for the most part this was not the norm. Moreover, these provisions are important as they contribute to the fixity of the *conjunto* unit often by keeping power imbalances in check.²⁶⁷

Considering a *conjunto* as a commercial enterprise must also take into account the role of personnel who are not musicians, but nonetheless integral to the effectiveness of the unit. While contemporary *conjuntos* are largely made up of performers (the accordionist/owner plus six musicians), they have also come to include additional personnel/employees as well. These include an emcee known as a *locutor*, a sound engineer, two or more drivers, and one or more stagehands/roadies. For the most part these individuals tend to be less visible in the promotional and presentational aspects of the *conjunto*, but are nonetheless accorded the status of *integrantes* and entitled to the same benefits in terms of job security as the musicians.

The inclusion of non-musicians in the *conjunto* has become standard procedure and is designed to meet specific demands of contemporary performance practices. Following is a brief outline of their titles and job descriptions.

²⁶⁷ For example, given that benefits and wages tend to increase with seniority, it is often not to an *integrante*'s economic interest to quit one *conjunto* for another, thus ensuring a degree of 'loyalty' to the *conjunto*/business. Similarly, owners cannot dismiss their employees casually without running the risk of economic reprisals, a situation which sometimes renders senior *integrantes* 'indispensable' by default. Such arrangements contribute to the relative fixity of the unit thereby ensuring its readiness and reliability *both* as a musical ensemble and commercial enterprise.

- *locutor*: responsible for “*animando*” or “enlivening” the *baile* in between performances. In general this entails delivering a nonstop monologue for periods of ten to twenty minutes at a time and occasionally interacting with the audience when called to. In practice these individuals are always men and are differentiated from other emcees with the designation of *locutor de baile* (*baile* emcee).
- sound engineer: responsible for the maintenance and running of the *conjunto*’s sound system, and often assists in and supervises its setup and dismantling. The sound engineer typically remains behind the mixing board once performances begin and is expected to attend to any technical problems that may arise during the course of a performance.
- stagehand/roadie: responsible for setting up and dismantling the *conjunto*’s sound system and musical instruments. In addition, this individual may often be employed to collect the “dancing fee”—known as a *taquilla* or *taq*—during the course of a *baile*, for which they are usually paid a commission by the *baile* organizer known as the *empresario*.
- driver/s: primary responsibility includes driving the *conjunto* to-and-from performance destinations. Additional responsibilities may include vehicle maintenance and assisting in setting up and dismantling the sound system and instruments. In order to mitigate the onset of fatigue, the driver is prohibited from drinking alcohol while on the job and is expected to sleep in the vehicle during the course of a *baile*. These individuals are usually licensed as commercial drivers in accordance with Panamanian transportation laws and the terms of the motor vehicle’s insurance agreement.

As the foregoing job descriptions suggest, the exigencies of earning a living through *baile* performances have intensified the demand for reliable access to, and control of, specific (and often expensive) forms of enabling technologies. In addition to specialists in specific kinds of sound production technologies (i.e., musical instruments), *conjuntos* also require specialists in the management of transportation and sound enhancing and amplification technologies as a condition for commercially viability. Specific musical instruments, a powerful sound system (with all of its accessories) and vehicle/s are not only necessary to the *conjunto*'s operation, but essential to the successful (re)production of the sounds and performance choreographies that have come to define the genre. As a result, contemporary *conjuntos* have become increasingly in control of the management of their own affairs as far as access to technology is concerned. *Conjunto* owners no longer rent essential equipment for live performances and generally come to own their means of transportation (usually a bus and a car), musical instruments and sound systems—as failure to do so would severely compromise the viability of the unit as a commercial enterprise. Also, through careful fiscal management, *conjuntos* manage to exert a large control over their own promotion, often independently financing the production and dissemination (usually via radio airplay) of their own recordings. Moreover, the implementation and use of enabling technologies not only mark the lives (and bodies) of *conjunto* members (e.g., constant travel coupled with long performance hours typically result in fatigue and hearing loss), but is also marked by social and economic factors that have led to the prioritization of certain technologies as necessary and essential, and others as not.

By examining the professional practices of *conjunto* units, this study aims to shine a critical light on the quotidian practices of working musicians—sometimes referred to as

musical “journeymen/women”—and their associates as both constitutive of and necessary to the formation of musical identities typically in relation to style and usually within the constraints of genre. In theorizing the relationship between the various individuals who come to form and/or interact with what I call the “*conjunto* unit” I have found the idea of a “musical nexus” developed by Jeff Packman (2007, 2009 and 2011) to be especially useful. Similarly, Negus’ (1999) analysis of the role of corporations in production and consumption of commercial music is particularly resonant with *música típica popular* in Panama, especially in relation to issue of genre and style. In the following I examine each individually and suggest their applicability to the present case study.

Packman employs the concept of a “musical nexus” as an approach to theorizing the organization of musical ensembles among professional musicians in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil. The musical community Packman analyzes is one that is characterized by a high degree of flexibility both in terms of (genre-based) musical competencies and band affiliations. As an analytical construct, a nexus reveals a degree of stability in what would otherwise appear to be a varying and unpredictable working environment. The term nexus is used in lieu of other less precise socio-musical designations—such as a “band”—and is defined as “a semi-stable entity that typically revolves around one or sometimes several key figures, or nexus principals, who are often musicians, but might also be producers, club owners, or managers” (2009:93). “A nexus,” Packman tells us, “is best thought of as a grouping of select participants within a music scene who are brought together for the purpose of making music and making money” (*ibid.*).

Coming to terms with the ramifications, both practical and theoretical, of earning a living through music making is arguably Packman’s chief concern here. He observes that for

many professional musicians in Salvador, “the single most compelling reason for multiple affiliations is that in general, no single nexus has enough work to fully support the musicians involved” (2009:93). As a result, he concludes, “two key characteristics of any musical nexus” are as follows: “(1) that interchangeability of personnel is very much the norm, and (2) that the musicians who participate, especially as nonprincipals, typically do not have an exclusive commitment to it” (2009:93).

Musical nexuses bear a number of important similarities *and* differences to *conjunto* practice. First and foremost, *conjunto* performers are similar to nexus participants as they can readily be understood as “lenders of services” (Packman, 2011:421). That is to say, while practitioners (particularly accordionists) can cultivate a star image—a form of cultural caché that, particularly in the West, has come to be associated with providing long term dividends as suggested by the expression of having “made it”—and for a time can command impressive fees, there are precious little guarantees that this will continue for even a portion of one’s (potential) professional career. As such, *conjunto* musicians are engaged in an everyday struggle of earning a living where the stakes are high and job security is at a premium. Second, like nexuses *conjuntos* are not made up of “equally committed partners”—what Packman uses to define as a “true band” (2009:92)—but involve uneven working relationships. It is the owners or *dueño/as* of *conjuntos* who stand to gain (and lose) the most from any particular enterprise owing largely to their having invested the capital necessary to the *conjunto*’s operation. As such, *conjunto* owners (who are almost always also accordionists) come to control nearly all aspects related to the running of the *conjunto* and for this reason are ostensibly the only truly indispensable member/s of the group/business; in other words they are “nexus principals.” The nexus analytic is useful here as it helps to

reveal specific working relationships and strategies that have developed as a result of professional requirements.

Professional *conjuntos* can productively be understood as musical work “nexuses” in the manner theorized by Packman. However, they exhibit any number of tendencies that differ dramatically from the majority of the formations he discusses. One of the principal differences is that, while Packman's collaborators typically worked with multiple nexuses at once, with the commercialisation of *música típica popular*, *conjunto* work has come to provide a primary if not sole source of income for many *conjunto* “integrantes”—i.e., musicians *and* support personnel. As a result, *conjuntos* are characterized by a high degree of stability particularly in terms of personnel, commitment to one single nominal musical genre, and catering to one principal performance setting. As I have noted above, all these factors contribute to the stability of the *conjunto* unit as a condition for commercial viability. What is more, a number of professional attitudes and strategies have become endemic to the practice—even in instances where the conditions for professionalism are lacking—through a process wherein professional *conjuntos* work to remain professional and commercially viable, and ‘semi-professional’,²⁶⁸ *conjuntos* strive to become professional often by imitating the practices of professional *conjuntos*. Thus, two key characteristics of *conjunto* nexuses are, therefore, (1) that unchanging lineups are the norm (although some interchangeability of personnel is at times necessary), and (2) that the musicians who participate typically have an exclusive commitment to it. As such, *conjuntos* are exemplary of stable, committed nexuses (rather than the more loosely bound types common in Bahia). On the other hand, *conjuntos* differ from what Packman calls “true bands”—in the ideal sense, the most stable

²⁶⁸ I use the term “semi-professional” to refer to a *conjunto*'s whose members earn only a part of their living through *conjunto* work. It should be emphasized that the term is my own, which I adopt for the purpose of analyzing and clarifying specific economic differences among *conjunto* practitioners.

and democratically organized type of nexus—owing to unequal and very clearly demarcated relationships related to significant concerns including artistic and economic control that exist between *dueño/as* (i.e., nexus principals) and *integrantes*.

In order to remain professional in a scene that is traditionally an unpredictable profession, *conjuntos* manage their business affairs carefully in order to remain commercially viable and competitive. Negus highlights the need to manage “problems of risk” (1999:173) as a principal concern of the corporate organizations at the heart of the type of the entertainment “industry” he examines. While Negus’ study of (specific) corporate organizations is carefully nuanced and detailed, he is less clear on how the unit of the “corporation” (a term that is used interchangeably with “business” or “company”) functions as an analytical category in itself that may (or may not) be distinguished from other forms of commercial enterprises. This is somewhat problematic given his frequent positioning of corporate organizations as “mediators” between fields of production and consumption, which—despite his effort to minimize the “conflict between commerce (industry) and creativity (the artists)” (24)—often locates the musicians at their periphery.²⁶⁹ While it is not my intention to re-theorize the corporation *per se*, I focus on the ways in which the professional practices of *conjuntos*, like Negus’ corporations, highlight “the more *formal* ways in which knowledge about consumers is collected, produced and circulated and how this informs strategic decision-making and repertoire policies” (19; my italics). By doing so, I am theorizing the “the *conjunto*” as both a stable nexus and an important locus for not only musical production, but also business management and strategizing. By controlling the

²⁶⁹ The musicians, after all, are the individuals passing through the “gate/doorways” and along the “corridors” of corporate organizations, to borrow Negus’ analogy (see p.177).

means of production, *conjuntos* themselves constitute an industrial sector by default, competing directly with other *conjuntos* for a share of a relatively fixed market.

Describing the scene: Six professional *conjuntos*

During the time I was conducting my fieldwork in Panama I was able to identify six fully professional *conjunto*'s. Not coincidentally, these six were also regarded by the large majority of my informants as the most popular *conjuntos* at the time and came to be important features of the local musical landscape as I experienced it. In Table 7.1 I have listed each *conjunto* by name and outlined a number of identifying features, which I discuss in brief below.

<i>Conjunto</i> /business Name	Accordionist	Owner/s	Inauguration year	Home-base	Noted audience-base/s	Style
El Orgullo Santeño (EOS)	Dorindo Cárdenas	[same]	1957	Las Tablas, Los Santos	Chiriquí	Traditional
Los Montañeros (LM)	Alfredo Escudero	[same]	Mid-1960s	Las Tablas, Los Santos	Azuero region, Coclé	Traditional
Los Plumas Negras (LPN)	Nenito Vargas	[same] and Victorio “Toyito” Vergara and members of cooperative	Early 1970s, Vargas et al take over in 1998	Las Tablas, Los Santos	Veraguas, Panama City	Variable
Los Distinguidos (LD)	Ulpiano Vergara	[same]	Early 1970s	San José, Los Santos	N/A	Variable
Ritmo Santeño (RS)	Osvaldo Ayala	[same]	Late-1960s	Panama City, Panama	Panama City	Innovative
Los Patrones de la Cumbia (LPC)	Samy Sandoval	[same] and Sandra Sandoval	Mid-1980s	Chitré, Herrera	Chiriquí, Coclé, Panama City, Colón	Innovative

Table 7.1: Professional *conjuntos*

As I discussed in Chapter 2, *conjunto* naming practices are part of an established tradition that variously denote and connote Azuerense culture and (political) geography. This is true of nearly all of the ensembles listed in Table 7.1, Los Distinguidos (LD) being the exception. Moreover, in keeping with customary naming practices, the professional *conjuntos* listed above are identified by the name of the owner/s followed by the name of the ensemble, which is generally understood to refer to the *integrantes* (e.g., Dorindo Cárdenas y El Orgullo Santeño). For the remainder of this study, I will refer to *conjuntos* by their ensemble names using the acronyms listed above.

Also in keeping with customary practices, the accordionists of these six *conjuntos*/businesses are also the owners. Among these, Cárdenas, Escudero, Vergara and Ayala are (to my knowledge) the sole owners. LPC is jointly owned by siblings Samy and

Sandra Sandoval—an unconventional arrangement that was insisted on by their father and former manager early on in their career.²⁷⁰

Another important aspect in characterizing professional *conjuntos* is their inauguration date. This is of interest because the journey to becoming a professional *conjunto* traditionally requires several years and sometimes a decade or more to accomplish, which is likely owing to the fact that *música típica popular* is still primarily consumed as live dance music and, as such, *conjuntos* must cultivate their following largely in person on the *baile* stage (rather than on television or via other forms of mass entertainment media). The relative age of the *conjunto* as well as the accordionist can also serve to map older ensembles as more “*tradicional*” (traditional) than newer ones. EOS exemplifies this tendency, where the group’s accordionist/owner’s unusual professional longevity is often touted as a mark of his (and by extension, his *conjunto*’s) iconic status (see Chapter 12).

Yet another important aspect of how *conjuntos* characterize themselves and are categorized in relation to the scene is their “home-base.” I use the term to refer to the location where the *conjunto* owner/s retain their principal homestead and where the band bus and equipment is stored when the *conjunto* is not working. The home-base is also the general location where most of the *integrantes* tend to live as well as the site of the *conjunto*’s departure at the beginning of a *gira* and point of return at the end—making the band bus a frequent sight along the roads leading to-and-from the home-base.

²⁷⁰ LPN, however, is an unusual case in terms of *conjunto* business models. This *conjunto* was founded by accordionist Victorio Vergara who through considerable effort managed to bring his group from regional to national renown. Vergara earned a reputation as one of Panama’s most well-received and well-liked *música típica popular* performers and when he died unexpectedly in 1998 he was accorded what was tantamount to state funeral. Normally the loss of a *conjunto*’s star would spell the end for a *conjunto*, however, following a period of mourning and the consent of the *integrantes*, Manuel “Nenito” Vargas (the *conjunto*’s lead vocalist and former guitarist) decided to take over accordion duties and along with Vergara’s son (Victorio “Toyito” Vergara) became a principal owner of the *conjunto*. In an unprecedented break from tradition, Vargas and Vergara offered the *integrantes* a minor share of the *conjunto*’s profits, making them in effect part “owners” of the group—a financial arrangement that has been described to me as a type of “cooperative.”

As discussed in Chapters 8 and 11, home-bases not only structure the quotidian practices of the *conjunto*, but also reaffirm ties to particular geo-cultural territory/ies. Traditionally the majority of professional *conjuntos* were located in the Azuero peninsula and the Province of Los Santos in particular, which is still the case today. The only exception is RS who despite their name is the only group whose home-base is not only located outside of the Azuero region but the *interior* altogether, lending credence to the idea that the band caters primarily to urban audiences.

In terms of territory and population, Panama is a relatively small country so as a general principal *conjuntos* need to cultivate a territorially dispersed audience-base in order to be commercially successful. This is true for all of the groups listed above who perform with varying degrees of frequency for communities located throughout the length and breadth of the Isthmus. Having said that, however, *conjuntos* do tend to develop performance and touring patterns that are distinct from those of others. EOS and LM, for example, perform infrequently in Panama's major urban centres (Panama City in particular) and are said to be more in demand among rural communities. This perception tends not only to reinforce their status as “traditional,” but also the notion that they are less widely popular than other groups—a topic I will address in brief below. RS, on the other hand, has a reputation of playing primarily to urban audiences in Panama City, which would support the alternate claim that they are innovative and tilt perceptions of popularity in their favour—yet, I have also heard practitioners describe this group’s territorial and demographic limitations as commercial setback as (contrary to popular opinion) some of the more lucrative contracts are generally to be had outside of metropolitan settings. Examining the relationship between

perceived geo-cultural alignments between *conjuntos* and their audience-base/s is the subject of Chapter 11.

Attachments to particular performance territories can also be cultivated through specific performance strategies. LPC is an example in this respect. Beginning as an LM cover band they managed to cultivate a following in territories where LM enjoyed considerable popularity. This form of ‘piggybacking’ continues to be practiced by less established/semi-professional *conjuntos* (which I discuss briefly below).

As I have been arguing, all of these concerns come to bear on the constitution of a *conjunto*’s (and to lesser degree, its musicians’) musical identity. Most significant, and not separate from the above, is the question of style. In Table 7.1, I include the descriptors of “traditional,” “variable” and “innovative” as very general indicators of the ensemble’s primary stylistic orientation. As generalizations therefore, they are not meant to preclude the fact that *conjuntos* are multiply and complexly differentiated—there would be few situations that I am aware of in which, for example, the opinion that similarly categorized *conjuntos* (say, EOS and LM) ‘sound the same’ would be considered anything less than uninformed. Moreover, I do not view these relationships as being inflexible, but rather my understanding is one that is synchronic and based on (notions of) shared genre conventions. That is to say, for example, that “traditional” *conjuntos* today may have begun with an investment as “innovators” (EOS being case in point) and by the same token previous genre “innovations” have become today’s genre “conventions.” In this context, “traditional” and “innovative” represents two extremes of a continuum wherein creative processes can be understood in terms of 1) an adherence to genre norms and 2) a tendency to push the boundaries of genre conventions through practices of genre mixing/fusion. “Variable” points to a central position

along this continuum. In Chapter 9 I will consider more carefully the way different *conjuntos* position themselves with respect to these notions and what that positioning sounds like.

Compared to the other ensembles, for most musicians and listeners EOS and LM have come to represent the most ‘traditional’ performers of the genre. While markers of tradition are not easily isolable and untangled from other aspects of performance practice, they can come to include the use of particular compositional paradigms, specific ostinati and composite rhythms—i.e., components of the genre have become historicized through recordings and enstoried in discourses of performance conventions. RS and LPC on the other hand, have actively cultivated a reputation as innovators, representing for many the extremes to which the genre may be modified. Innovation is very often a process of integrating or fusing aspects of other genres (e.g., salsa, pop, merengue and vallenato) into a *predominantly música típica popular* sound. LPN and LD are two ensembles that have generally avoided genre extremes and for this reason are categorized as “variable.” Both ensembles regularly incorporate the innovations pioneered by others, however, tweaking them in various ways so as to make it their own. The process is one of relatively subtle changes where, in the case of LD for example, a style could come to be described as “salsafied” and so forth.

Again, it is important to remember that generic orientations and styles are not fixed, rather they are (re)produced through repeated performances with varying degrees of nuance and variability. EOS, for example, were not always traditionalists and at various points in their long career had pushed the boundaries of the genre. Their status as a “traditional” *conjunto* is one they acquired overtime and partly as a consequence of their unusual professional longevity. Moreover, all *conjuntos* perform tradition,’ which as I will show is

often brought into sharpest relief when genre boundaries are most conspicuously tested and transgressed.

Not listed on Table 7.1 are notions of the relative popularity of each *conjunto*. Notions of popularity are important to *conjunto* practitioners as they are not only understood to be indicators of a group's commercial success, but, when positive, are also seen as a form of justification for their continued employment as live entertainers (and vice versa). For these reasons, *conjuntos* actively compete with each other and employ various strategies to be perceived as the top band. As I will show Chapter 11, notions of popularity are variously and often ambiguously defined and in practice seem to be determined as much by perceptions of success and consensus as by any form of objective and quantifiable data—such as number of gigs per month/year, etc.

While generally reticent in discussing the details of their economic affairs with non-*conjunto* members (not to mention an inquiring ethnomusicologist), professional practitioners in my experience had a general idea of where they stood in relation to other groups as far as commercially-measured popularity was concerned. Top groups perform between 5 to 7 nights a week for months at a time and command fees that can exceed \$4000 per-*baile*. Less in demand groups perform 3 to 4 times a week and earn between \$1000-\$2000 per-*baile* and occasionally more. Based simply on these criteria, LD were tenuously the most popular *conjunto* followed closely by LPN and LPC. LM were an anomaly given that despite their territorial limitations they reputedly enjoyed a good deal of commercial success and by some accounts were as popular as the aforementioned groups. EOS and RS were generally said to belong to the latter earning bracket.

Semi-professional conjuntos

Prior to becoming professional, many contemporary *conjuntos* were semi-professional,²⁷¹ meaning that members earned only part of their income through *conjunto* affiliation. Similarly, certain *conjuntos* may have been professional at one point in their history, but overtime may have lost the momentum and following they once had and revert to semi-professional performers or retire completely. In order to establish themselves and gain a competitive advantage over their peers, many of these semi-professional *conjuntos* cultivate affiliations with established/professional *conjuntos*.

In Table 7.2 I list some of the semi-professional *conjuntos* whom I had the opportunity to know and whose *bailes* I had attended. In many ways these *conjuntos* had much in common with their professional counterparts—for example, all owned their own sound system and musical instruments, and in some cases their own touring bus. Perhaps the most important difference between semi-professional and professional groups is that the former regularly performed ‘covers’ of the latter’s repertoire and (with the exception of those labelled as “varied,” whose stylistic orientation was not made clear to me²⁷²) imitated their style closely (see “Noted influence” column). While the performance practices of these *conjuntos* remain beyond the scope of this study, I will often have occasion to refer to them in juxtaposition to professional practices.

²⁷¹ In Panama and among *conjunto* practitioners, the term “professional” was frequently used to connote more than just economic concerns, but also frequently overlaped in areas of performance aesthetics (where a “professional” *conjunto* was a “good” *conjunto*, and so forth). Here, however, my use of the terms “professional” as well as “semi-professional” is considerably more restricted to areas of *conjunto* finances and particularly the idea of economic self-sufficiency.

²⁷² Unlike most other semi-professional groups, these groups did not seem to have a strong affiliation with any one (professional) *conjunto*. While they did perform “covers,” from what I could tell these were varied and not limited to the repertoire of one established *conjunto*.

<i>Conjunto/business Name</i>	Accordionist	Owner/s	History	Home-base	Noted influence
El Orgullo de la Montaña	Eráclides Amaya	[same]	Established	Las Tablas, Los Santos	LM
Brisas de la Montaña	José “Chichi” Barrios	[same]	Established	Las Tablas, Los Santos	LM
El Orgullo Tonosíeno	Máximo “Chimino” Moreno	[same]	Established	Las Tablas and Tonosí, Los Santos	LD
Los Triunfadores	Jonathan Chaves	[same]	New	[unknown]	LPN
Grupo Manantial de Amor	Vladimir Atencio	[same]	Established	Santiago, Veraguas	LPN
Sensación Santeña	Alejandro Solís	[same]	New	Las Tablas, Los Santos	varied
El Simpatía Musical	José Olmedo Pérez	[same]	New	Las Tablas, Los Santos	LD
Ritmo Guararé	Dario Pití	[same]	New	Guararé, Los Santos	varied

Table 7.2: Semi-professional *conjuntos*

Conclusion

In this chapter I have made an effort to outline some of the main analytic and theoretical issues that will permeate the discussion to follow. In so doing I have also highlighted the principal goals of this final portion of the dissertation. These are summarized briefly below.

In keeping with the central theme of this study, the principal goal of this chapter is to outline a set of theoretical tools and analytical foci for examining the relationship between contemporary genre conventions and dominant Isthmian geo-cultural imaginaries. To this end (and following the advice of my guides/informants) I have chosen the *conjunto* unit as a central analytic for this portion of the study. As one of several potentially isolable parameters of *música típica popular* performance practice, examining the socio-musical inner workings of the *conjunto* nexus forms an attractive proposition for a number of reasons. This is principally due to the multivalency of this particular nexus as both a *business* and *musical*

ensemble, which necessarily requires an analytical approach that considers music production in relation to other socio-economic factors. *Conjuntos* (and exclusive membership to a particular *conjunto*) also constitute an important conceptual category for differentiation among *música típica popular* practitioners as based on ideas of *estilo* vis-à-vis conventional practice (i.e., genre). For these reasons *conjuntos* form a particularly dense area of study wherein various discourses—and their attendant fields of (individual, local, regional and national) reference—intersect and mutually constitute one another.

In the following chapters I endeavour to show that—as part of the process of making (or even aspiring to make) a living—the specific economic and musical strategies adopted by *conjunto* practitioners speak to a particular conceptualization of *música típica popular* in relation to dominant ideas of Panamanian nationalism that can be characterized as flexible and pronouncedly ambiguous. This is especially evident in the way practitioners envisage their affiliations to particular geo-cultural and socio-economic territories and their attendant audience-base/s (Chapter 11). However, it also plays out in other areas as well including the relative stability of the *conjunto* nexuses (particularly in terms of personnel/employees, instrumentation and other areas of performance practice); the cultivation and promotion of (ideally) “original” *estilos* and composition-based repertoire; the ambiguity surrounding the genre’s name; the significance an Azuerense home-base coupled with the need and symbolic significance of endemic peripateticism; and the intensely competitive nature of *conjunto* work. I contend that all these factors reflect and contribute to the internalization of longstanding ideas that can productively be traced back to the goals of “first” and “second theme” Panamanian nationalism.

CHAPTER 8

CONJUNTO ECONOMICS

In this chapter I examine informants' common assertions that a *conjunto* is as much a business enterprise as it is a musical ensemble. A central implication of this idea—and one that will receive particular attention in subsequent chapters—is that economic concerns (rather than, say, aesthetic ones) lie at the centre of many important extra-musical *and* musical considerations faced by active *conjunto* practitioners. The issue of *conjunto* economics is examined using two analytical perspectives, which also serve to organize the two principal sections of this chapter. One perspective emphasizes the economics of professional *conjuntos*, that is, *conjuntos* which provide a living income to all of its members. Here, operational and start-up costs are tallied and weighed against potential returns, thus providing a detailed outline of the factors critical both to a professional *conjunto*'s commercial viability and professional sustainability. The other perspective involves a consideration of the economic workings of a commercial *baile*. Again expenses are weighed against potential returns so as to provide a picture not only of the economic stakes involved, but also the role *conjuntos* are expected to perform in order for a *baile* to be commercially viable and profitable.

A central aim of this chapter is to develop an understanding of the *conjunto*—both a business and ensemble—as an analytical focus that can be used as a basis for examining specific intersections between *música típica popular* and Panamanian national and geo-

cultural identity. Following my analysis of the *conjunto* unit (i.e., Chapters 8-10), in chapters 11 and 12 I demonstrate that important ideas relating to musical style (such as its connection to specific Isthmian territories and performance contexts) are often informed by an understanding of *conjunto* working practices, real or perceived commercial success, performance territories and audience demographics. Understanding how *conjuntos* operate as businesses is, for the purposes of this study, ultimately a means for better discerning the links between *música típica popular* and the ideological threads of first and second theme Panamanian nationalism. The reader should note that all financial sums discussed below specifically reference *conjunto* economic practices as I observed them and/or as they were explained to me between October 2007 and May 2008. All sums are given in U.S. funds, which is legal tender in Panama.

Conjunto economics

A *conjunto*'s finances are highly centralized around its given "owner/s" (called the "dueños/as") who by assuming the majority of the economic risks (accrued through operational and start-up costs) also stands to gain the majority of the profit. *Conjunto* employees (called *integrantes*) on the other hand are paid a fixed fee on a per-performance basis. Uneven economic relationships aside, all *conjunto* practitioners can be regarded as short-term employees, where the *integrantes* lend²⁷³ their services exclusively to the *dueño/a* who then must lend the *conjunto*'s services (including their own) to *baile* organizers (called

²⁷³ I use the term here in reference to Packman (2011) who notes that the majority of musicians who participated in his study identified themselves as "lenders of services," where in a manner similar to professional *conjunto* musicians "They work as sidemen/women earning fixed fee for each performance" and as a result often had to endure conditions of "minimal employment security in a capricious and competitive music market" (p. 421).

empresarios). Ultimately, however, neither the *integrantes* nor owner get paid unless a performance takes place. Thus, the economic success and commercial viability of any *conjunto* has a close connection to the number of (paid) performances they do for any given period of time. For the *integrantes* who receive a fixed fee for each performance the connection is relatively direct and invariable whereas for the group's owner other factors (such as overhead costs) come into play. However, in practice economically healthy *conjuntos* perform often and it is very rare for professional *conjuntos* to perform less than three performances per week or twelve per month.

Payment scales

Conjunto owners receive the net profits generated by the *conjunto*. All of their employees earn the bulk of their pay on a per-performance basis. Pay scales vary from individual to individual and are generally contingent on each person's role within the *conjunto* as well as their relative seniority within the business. In general, performers earn more than support personnel such as sound engineers, drivers and stagehands/roadies.

Among the performing *integrantes*, the lead singer/s always earns the most and in general the percussionists are paid the least. Following is a breakdown of the average pay scale relative to roles within the ensemble:

- lead singer: \$200-\$300 or more
- *saloma* singer: \$80-\$120 or more
- bass and guitar: \$50-\$80
- *locutor* (emcee): \$40-\$70
- timbales and *tumbadoras*: \$40-\$60

- *churraca*: \$30-\$50 (likely more if also singing *coro*)

Among the support personnel, pay scale is based on specialization—itself often related to availability of skills and/or occasionally informal certification. Sound engineers tend to earn the most given that their specific skill set was one that is developed over time and, typically, through on-the-job training. Most learn their trade through (informal) apprenticeships, sometimes beginning as stagehands and learning by watching and assisting an experienced sound engineer. Similarly, *conjunto* drivers generally need to have commercial licenses in accordance with Panamanian transportation laws, and are paid accordingly. Stagehands/roadies are generally not considered specialists, nor are they regarded as highly skilled (despite the fact that many do have intricate knowledge of, for example, instruments, lighting and sound systems) and are the lowest paid *integrantes*. Following is a general outline of payment scales for support personnel.

- sound engineer: \$50-\$100
- drivers: \$30-\$40
- stagehand/roadie: \$10-\$20 (and occasionally a percentage of the *taquilla* sales)

Given that performances tend to occur at night and continue until the early morning, it is unlikely that a *conjunto* will be able to perform more than once a day. It is my experience that professional *conjuntos* tend to work a minimum of three times a week as any less would affect the group's total earning potential as well as pay scales. Most professional *conjuntos* do in fact work much more; 20 to 30 performances a month, for example, are not unusual.

<i>Conjunto</i> job description	Pay scale per performance	12 performances per month	16 performances per month	20 performances per month	24 performances per month	28 performances per month
Lead vocal	\$200-\$300	\$2400-\$3600	\$3200-\$4800	\$4000-\$6000	\$4800-\$7200	\$5600-\$8400
<i>Saloma</i>	\$80-\$120	\$960-\$1440	\$1280-\$1920	\$1600-\$2400	\$1920-\$2880	\$2240-\$3360
Sound engineer	\$50-\$100	\$600-\$1200	\$800-\$1600	\$1000-\$2000	\$1200-\$2400	\$1400-\$2800
Guitar and bass	\$50-\$80	\$600-\$960	\$800-\$1280	\$1000-\$1600	\$1200-\$1920	\$1400-\$2240
<i>Locutor</i>	\$40-\$70	\$480-\$840	\$640-\$1120	\$800-\$1400	\$960-\$1680	\$1120-\$1960
Timbales and <i>tumbadoras</i>	\$40-\$60	\$480-\$720	\$640-\$960	\$800-\$1200	\$960-\$1440	\$1120-\$1680
<i>Churruga</i>	\$30-\$50	\$360-\$600	\$480-\$800	\$600-\$1000	\$720-\$1200	\$840-\$1400
Driver	\$30-\$40	\$360-\$480	\$480-\$640	\$600-\$800	\$720-\$960	\$840-\$1120
Stagehand/roadie	\$10-\$20 ²⁷⁴	\$120-\$240	\$160-\$320	\$200-\$400	\$240-\$480	\$280-\$560

Table 8.1: *Conjunto* employee pay scale

Table 8.1 provides a general overview of the individual pay scales of *conjunto* employees as well as picture of what they may earn through performances in a given month. These figures show that both within a specific *conjunto* and between different *conjuntos* pay scales vary considerably and are largely contingent on two critical factors: 1) one's job or role within a *conjunto* and 2) quantity of performances per week, month or year. To understand what these earnings mean within Panama it is useful to note that at as of the end of 2007 Panama's minimum wage was just over \$300 per month.²⁷⁵ While it was my experience that most people I met living and working in the Azuero peninsula tended to earn less, this figure does serve to illustrate the point that (with the exception of the stagehands/roadies) professional *conjunto* employees earned a decent-to-good income and some were capable of earning exceptionally high incomes.

Importantly, such is the impressionmost outsiders have of *conjunto* employees, who are generally perceived as being rich and well off. While this may be true for some

²⁷⁴ This number does not include earnings from *taquilla* sales, which by most accounts ranges from \$10 to \$20 per *baile*.

²⁷⁵ \$310 for small businesses and \$325 for large businesses (see UPI.com, <<http://espanol.upi.com/Economia/2007/12/11/Salario-minimo-en-Panam-supera-por-primeravez-300-dlares/UPI-41361197386340/>> [accessed July 14, 2011]).

(particularly owners/accordionists and lead singers), many present and former *integrantes* have reminded me that on the whole *conjunto* work involves limited job security and a generally poor and sometimes hazardous lifestyle. These factors, in turn, tend to offset the benefits of a (potentially) above-average income. As I discuss at length in Chapter 11, *conjunto* members work long hours and face a number of challenges associated with the high degree of peripateticism demanded of their profession. Moreover, as lenders of services a *conjunto* offers precious little guarantees of regular employment for even a portion of one's (potential) professional career.

Conjunto performance careers vary considerably from several years to decades leading right up to retirement (which tends to be around the age of sixty). This situation, I have been told, exists for a number of reasons, including a culture that does not appreciate or "remember" its artists and an industry that does not (or cannot) sufficiently protect and capitalize on the rights of the author. In order to mitigate the likelihood of financial crises brought on by short careers, many practitioners in fact actively invest their earnings (such as buying operational farms and restaurants) as a way to make money in ways other than selling their time (which is ultimately finite).

Start-up costs and critical investments

In addition to qualified personnel, a *conjunto* must also have at its disposal specific kinds of equipment in order for the business to operate efficiently if at all. The idea that certain types of technology (and the activities they enable) are not only necessary, but critical to both the business and performance enterprise are broadly shared by *conjunto* practitioners and

become reinforced through convention. In practice, all *conjuntos* must provide equipment that will enable activities within the following three areas:

- *music production technology*: acoustic, electro-acoustic and electronic musical instruments, and instrument amplifiers.
- *sound enhancing technology*: sound system (i.e., amplifier, speakers, mixer and associated paraphernalia such as microphones, cables, etc.)
- *transportation technology*: retrofitted bus/es and (usually) one or more cars

Table 8.2 lists the inventory of the equipment owned by all professional *conjuntos* as well as an estimate as to its cost. It is important to remember that all the items listed in Table 8.2 are, today, understood to be critical (if not essential) as they are expected to be provided by the *conjunto* for quite nearly every performance they do. Consequently, acquiring the necessary equipment to perform represents a substantial financial investment for any *conjunto* owner. This is especially true for new or prospective *conjunto* owners where the challenge is one of acquiring the capital to make this initial investment—be it either through loans and/or profit from early performances. Once the investment has been made, capital must then be reserved for the equipment's maintenance and eventual replacement. It is important to note that the vast majority of this essential equipment must be imported by retailers usually located in Panama City. This situation tends to increase the equipment's retail value and, as a result, places additional financial strains on new/aspiring *conjuntos*.

Equipment		Estimated itemized cost	Total estimated cost
Music production tech.:	5 to 10 or more accordions	\$4,000-\$12,000	
	electric guitar and amp.	\$400-\$1,000	
	bass guitar and amp.	\$400-\$1,000	
	tumbadoras and stand	\$600-\$1,400	
	timbale apparatus	\$500-\$1,500	
	churraca	\$50	
Total production tech. cost:			\$5,950-\$16,950
Sound enhancing tech.:	mixing board and effects	(N/A) ²⁷⁶	
	main and monitor speakers	(N/A)	
	amplifier/s	(N/A)	
	paraphernalia	(N/A)	
Total enhancing tech. cost:			\$20,000-\$60,000
Transportation tech.:	touring bus	\$30,000-\$60,000	
	car/jeep	\$5,000-\$10,000	
Total transportation tech. cost:			\$35,000-\$70,000
Total equipment cost:			\$60,950-\$146,950

Table 8.2: *Conjunto* equipment inventory cost

On the one hand, this arrangement has (at the very least) the potential to increase the accessibility of *conjunto* careers especially for aspiring *integrantes*—for whom talent and core performance competencies constitute principal prerequisites. On the other hand, a *conjunto*'s high (often prohibitively so) start-up costs—where, as commodities that must be bought by aspiring owners, essential sound production and transportation equipment remain relatively rare and expensive—has reportedly limited the number of working *conjuntos* as well as active *conjunto* practitioners at any given time. Moreover, the economic exigencies resulting from a *conjunto*'s operational costs coupled with the restraints of a limited market has further limited the potential for operational *conjuntos* to become economically self-sufficient. On the whole, therefore, the uneven division of start up costs among *conjunto* members has contributed to the formation of a relatively closed system, which mainly benefits a limited number of professional practitioners.

²⁷⁶ N/A = not available. In this case the estimated totals reference lump sum costs provided by my informants.

The fact that *conjuntos* are individually owned businesses has more than a cursory connection to issues of performance practice and, in fact, actively justifies the nexus paradigm as centred around a (commonly single) nexus principal. Specifically, the expectations that *all* essential equipment be bought and owned by the owners—rather than, say, divided equally between the individual members of the group—has served to reinforce the instrumental hierarchies one finds in the ensemble. As I will discuss in Chapter 9, within a *conjunto* an overwhelming degree of creative authorship and control is normatively ascribed to the accordionist who is commonly (albeit, not always) the group's/business' owner. The reasons for this appear to have a musical basis, being typically linked to the prominent and predominant melodic role of the accordion (see Chapter 4). However, in the few cases where the owner was not the accordionist, (such as was the case with Lucho De Sedas and is the case with Sandra Sandoval), these individuals often spoke with the same authority as their accordion-playing counterparts particularly as it concerned the ensemble's stylistic orientation. This would suggest that the role of owner within the *conjunto* is based more on economic differences between members than on conventional instrumental roles and ensemble hierarchies, even though these factors very often overlap. The following sections provide a brief outline of *conjunto* equipment inventories and their related uses as listed in Table 8.2.

Music production technology

Conjunto instrumentation is quite standardized and always includes the instruments and instrument accessories listed Table 8.2. It should be noted that in addition to the basic timbale apparatus, *conjuntos* will often include (at an added cost) additional

instruments/attachments such as another cowbell, one or more *claves*/jam blocks and an array of electronic drums (e.g., *bombo*, toms and snare drums). As far as instruments go, acquiring an acceptable number of accordions constitutes the most substantial financial investment. Professional *conjuntos* usually have ten or more accordions, which (depending on the ability of the player) provide a greater degree of flexibility in terms of key centres and timbre. In general, a decent quality instrument usually costs around \$800 and a good quality one in excess of several thousand dollars.

With the exception of the *churruga*, all *conjunto* instruments and instrument amplifiers tend to cost several hundred dollars or more each depending on a number of factors (e.g., quality, new or used, etc.). Based on my observations and (informal) informant accounts, a likely estimate of the total cost of musical production start up technology would range from \$6000 to \$20,000.

Sound enhancing technology

Conjuntos are equipped with large and sophisticated sound systems that are used for a number of interrelated musical-sonic reasons, such as controlling individual volume levels (i.e., mixing) and manipulating aspects of instrument/vocal timbre (e.g., reverb, equalizing, etc.). To accomplish this, all *conjuntos* own, rent or otherwise employ a stereo sound system that includes the following items/uses:

- multi-channel mixing board: generally around 20 channels; effects may be included in the mixer or hooked up separately.
- main speakers and monitor speakers:

- main speakers are housed in (unarticulated) speaker cabinets according to three frequency ranges informally identified as “high,” “middle,” and “low” or “bass.” Speaker cabinets are usually organized in identical pairs, which are then positioned at opposite ends of the stage (either stacked or hoisted by cranes and winches) facing the audience.
- monitor speakers are housed in compact (articulated) cabinets and are positioned on the stage facing the performers.
- Powerful amplifier/s

Historically and today the most important function of a sound system is to amplify live performances so as to cater to increasingly larger audiences. As a general rule *música típica popular* is played and enjoyed at a high volume. Typically, the amplifiers used by *conjuntos* are measured in the thousands of watts, and a system capable of producing 10,000 watts of power is generally said to be adequate for most performance situations.²⁷⁷

Powerful sound systems provide a means of negotiating performance spaces by providing a sense of ‘presence’ in what are often large performance venues and very often are used competitively between *conjuntos*—where the loudest band is thought to gain a competitive edge on their rivals. While I have not measured the decibel count of *conjunto* performances, in my experience (both as a dancer/audience member and performer) the volume is always sufficiently loud so as to cause tinnitus and short-term hearing loss. Consequently, substantial long-term hearing loss is pervasive among *conjunto* professionals

²⁷⁷ Carlos “Jerez” Donoso, personal communication, 2008; Alexander Nieto, personal communication, 2008.

who are necessarily exposed to loud music on a regular basis and have limited access to preventative measures (such as earplugs or in-ear monitors).²⁷⁸

It is in this respect that sound systems (and indeed sound production technology in general) provide a tangible link between issues of *conjunto* economics and musical sound and style—or as one owner put it well when he noted: “you can have the best sound engineer, but if you are limited with your equipment [the music] is not going to sound the way you want it to.”²⁷⁹ Among the practitioners I spoke with, most seemed to agree that the sound system played a clear and above all practical role in the ensemble’s success in that it allowed them to play music at a very high volume with a relatively good quality (that is, without obvious distortion, feedback, and so forth). Likely for this reason most practitioners saw a strong correlation between cost and quality where the most expensive sound system was generally the best.²⁸⁰

Having said that, there is a sense that owning a sound system (and, for that matter, hiring a sound engineer) is important in that it allows the group to maintain a degree of consistency in its sound from performance to performance, which matches other instances (such as with personnel) in which stability is prized over variability. Samy Sandoval, for example, once turned down what appeared to be a prestigious offer to open for a “Dominican merengue singer” principally because he would not have access to his own sound system. He added that without experienced control of his group’s sound system it was very likely that they would sound weak by comparison and, thus, possibly generate negative publicity for the

²⁷⁸ In-ear monitors are generally unaffordable and unpractical for most musicians, and earplugs are, in my experience, generally unavailable in the Azuero region.

²⁷⁹ Jonathan Chavez, personal communication, 2008.

²⁸⁰ When asked to compare sound systems, for example, most informants cited the highest wattage count as an indication of which *conjunto* had the “best” sound system and/or (quite literally) *sonido*/sound.

group.²⁸¹ As this example suggests, at the very least sound systems are regarded as vital to mediate between musical production and consumption—where well-played music becomes amplified in a manner that is consistent and reliable. More importantly still, they are not only critical to achieving commercial viability, but are often crucial to a *conjunto*'s ability to perform the genre (as well as one's particular style) successfully.

Not coincidentally, acquiring an effective sound system can represent a major investment for an owner—who either buys the entire sound system as a unit or pieces it together as finances permit—and in general the make, model and specific configuration of sound systems vary from *conjunto* to *conjunto*.²⁸² While I have not been able to get precise information on the cost of a decent/effective sound system, it has been suggested to me that a conservative estimate would be anywhere between \$20,000 and \$60,000 or more.

Transportation technology

Conjunto musicians spend a considerable portion of their professional lives on the road, literally traveling the length and breadth of the isthmus in an effort to cater to their territorially dispersed audience-base. In order to do this efficiently and reliably, they must have access to vehicles capable of transporting both personnel and equipment over long distances and sometimes precarious terrain. Vehicles and the forms of mobility (e.g., multi-*baile* tours or “*giras*”) they enable constitute a crucial means by which *conjuntos* engage

²⁸¹ Samy Sandoval, personal communication, 2008.

²⁸² LPN's sound system, for example, generally includes the following main speaker/cabinet configuration: two high, four middle and two bass speakers, and one “sub-bass” speaker. For larger *bailes* they will also use an additional middle speaker and sub-bass speaker. LD uses three high, two middle and two bass speakers. Semi-professional *conjunto* La Orgullo de la Monataña uses a three tiered sound system that has a total of 400 watts high speakers, 800 watt middle speakers and 3000 watt bass speakers. Semi-professional *conjunto* Orgullo Tonosieño uses a smaller articulated four-speaker configuration that combines the high and middle frequencies in two identical cabinets and also includes two additional bass speakers.

their audiences *and* earn a living, and in the process become implicated in a larger discourses concerning Panamanian nationalism as organized around a well-defined centre-periphery geo-cultural paradigm (i.e., locating Panama City at the centre and the *interior* at the periphery). In the following I outline briefly the nature of a *conjunto*'s investment in specific vehicles—focusing in particular on their chief use as means of transporting personnel and equipment—and reserve my examination of the role this technology plays in creating links between the genre and inter-regional identities for Chapter 11.

While earlier *conjuntos* often rented rather than bought their means of transportation, this is no longer the norm. Professional and often semi-professional *conjuntos* own their own vehicles, which usually include a bus and a jeep or sports utility vehicle. Reinforcing the *dueño/integrante* hierarchy, typically *conjunto* owners travel in jeeps and the employees and equipment travel in small-to-medium size buses. The interior of *conjunto* buses are almost always custom retrofitted so as to maximize space capacity. Retrofitting usually entails partitioning a bus in half with the equipment located in the rear section and the passengers in the front section. By increasing a vehicle's space capacity, retrofitting serves to lessen transportation costs, however, exacerbates the effects of travel fatigue by providing accommodations for more passengers than originally intended by the manufacturers.²⁸³

Purchasing and retrofitting a vehicle/s is expensive. Informal accounts put bus costs plus custom retrofitting anywhere between \$30,000 and \$60,000 or more. The cost of a

²⁸³ Retrofitting is quite common in Panama, where commercial bus owners usually try to accommodate as many passengers as possible. As an alternative to the single touring bus system, some *conjuntos* (such as RS and LPC) have opted for two medium size vans: one to transport the *integrantes* and the other the equipment. This system is advantageous as it allows the musicians to avoid waiting around for the equipment to be unpacked and set up before a performance, and repacked afterwards. The disadvantage is that the system is less cost effective as the owner must now hire an additional driver or travel with the personnel.

reliable jeep is likely between \$5,000 and \$10,000 and up. New and semi-professional *conjuntos* sometimes make due with a single bus that transports all the personnel (owner included) and equipment. When a *conjunto* owner cannot afford to buy a bus, one will be rented on a per-performance basis.

The substantial financial investment required to purchase this technology serves as an indication of the importance of peripateticism to the *conjunto*'s success as a business, where while all *conjuntos* may not travel to the same destinations, *all* must cultivate multiple and territorially dispersed audience-bases in order to be commercially viable. Partly for this reason vehicles (and buses in particular) can become a source of pride for a *conjunto*; serving as a clear index of for commercial (and presumably musical) success. This is suggested by the practice of decorating the vehicle's exterior panels and windows with the owner's and *conjunto*'s names as well as catchphrases and slogans associated with group.

Operating expenses and (potential) income

Every performance a *conjunto* does involves a minimum operating cost, which the owner must recoup before making a profit. Typically a professional *conjunto* can charge anywhere between \$1,200 and \$3,500 per-performance and sometimes in excess of \$4,000. *Conjunto* performance rates are based on a number of factors the projected attendance of a given event, day of the week (weekends cost more than week days), and the location of the event. Most crucial with respect to event location is the distance a *conjunto* must travel to get there and the conditions of the trip (i.e., cost increases with distance and/or inaccessibility).

Overhead costs, however important, are less vital to the rate a *conjunto* can charge for a performance. When it comes to negotiating pay rates a *conjunto*'s reputation is arguably its

most valuable asset. This is because the large majority of a *conjunto*'s clients are themselves trying to turn a profit by hiring the *conjunto*. Thus an *empresario*'s principal concern is typically whether or not a *conjunto*'s rates are proportional to the revenue their performances will generate (e.g., will their event be well attended, etc.). If a *conjunto*'s performances have a reputation of being well-attended in a given area and among a given patronage, it is likely they can command a higher rate. For the same reason these *conjuntos* also tend to get the first call for the larger/more well paying *bailes* taking place on the weekend and even the smaller *bailes* taking place during the week.

As a general rule, therefore, the *conjuntos* that have reputation of being the most in demand tend to command the highest fees and perform most often. Less in demand *conjuntos* (and semi-professional *conjuntos* in particular) necessarily charge less. As a result they tend to be hired for smaller weekend *bailes*—where it is assumed an *empresario* is either unable or unwilling to invest in a more expensive group—and tend not to play during weekdays when *bailes* are scarce. This variability in performance settings and performance fees means that *conjuntos* incomes tend to vary from performance to performance. This, however, does not directly affect the income of the *integrantes* (who are paid a fixed fee per performance), but only that of the *conjunto*'s owner/s (whose earnings are based on a *conjunto*'s net profits).

Estimated *conjunto* operating expenses and profit margins are shown on Table 8.3, which are calculated on a per-performance basis. An important variable when calculating operating expenses is the distance of a performance relative to the *conjunto*'s home-base and/or whether or not a *conjunto* will have to spend a night away from their home-base. This distinction is shown in the columns labelled “Local performance” and “*Gira* performance.” A local performance is one in which a *conjunto* may leave and return to their home-base

immediately prior and after a performance, respectively. *Gira* performances are those which require the *conjunto* to spend a night away from their home-base, which is usually because the location of the following day's performance is located inconveniently in relation to the home-base. On these occasions the owner must pay for the employees' sleeping accommodations (usually in an inexpensive hotel) and meals (i.e., called *viaticos* or per diems). *Gira* performances are usually located further away from a *conjunto*'s home-base thus increasing a *conjunto*'s fuel expenses. In my experience the majority of performances are best described as "Gira performances."

Per-performance operating expenses				
	Local performance		Gira performance	
Per-performance operating expenses	employee payments ²⁸⁴	\$600-\$940	employee payments	\$600-\$940
	gas	\$20-\$40	gas	\$40-\$80
			hotels (\$6-\$8 per employee)	\$66-\$88
			per diems (\$5 per employee)	\$55
Total expenses:	\$620-\$980			\$761-\$1,163
Total gross income (i.e., <i>conjunto</i> performance fee):	\$1,200-\$3,500			\$1,200-\$3,500
Total gross income minus operating expenses:	\$580-\$2,520			\$436-\$2,337

Table 8.3: *Conjunto* operating expenses and profit margins

In Table 8.3 we see that professional *conjuntos* require substantial capital both for the owners that operate them and the *empresarios* that hire them. Thus, as a general rule *conjunto* owners always command some fee for their group's services and *empresarios* rarely hire *conjuntos* for recreational purposes alone (as might be the case, for example, with a *tamborito* or *murga* ensemble), but rather for economic gain. Substantial operating expenses notwithstanding, *conjuntos* can also generate substantial returns for their respective owners. In Table 8.4 below, I provide a picture of what *conjunto* revenues might total over the span of a month.²⁸⁵ The important variables to consider when calculating increasingly long term revenues include 1) the number of performances within a given timeframe and 2) gross income minus operating expenses. As I have noted above, the number of performances per month vary from *conjunto* to *conjunto* and from month to month. Moreover, operating expenses and gross incomes also vary from *conjunto* to *conjunto* and performance to performance. In the end, the most representative values are likely those listed as the “mean

²⁸⁴ “Employee wages” assume the following personnel/roles: lead vocal, *saloma*, sound engineer, guitar, *locutor*, timbales, *tumbadoras*, *churruga*, two drivers, and a stagehand/roadie as listed in Table 8.1. Given that most *conjuntos* have only six performers in addition to the accordionist, the bass role has been omitted for the sake of a more representative figure.

²⁸⁵ The figures listed in Table 8.4 are based on multiple (and largely informal) conversations with professional *conjunto* practitioners.

average” of the *conjunto*’s “gross income minus operating expenses,” which account for fluctuation in terms of net income relative to the number of performances per month.

Conjunto/owner performance revenue						
	Single performance	12 performances per month	16 performances per month	20 performances per month	24 performances per month	28 performances per month
Gross income	\$1,200-\$3,500	\$14,400-\$42,000	\$19,200-\$56,000	\$24,000-\$70,000	\$28,800-\$84,000	\$33,600-\$98,000
(mean average)	\$2,350	\$28,200	\$37,600	\$47,000	\$56,400	\$65,800
Gross income minus operating expenses	\$436-\$2,520 ²⁸⁶	\$5,232-\$30,240	\$6,976-\$40,320	\$8,720-\$50,400	\$10,464-\$60,480	\$12,208-\$70,560
(mean average)	\$1,478	\$17,736	\$23,648	\$29,560	\$35,472	\$41,384

Table 8.4: Conjunto revenue estimated on a monthly basis

From the initial returns listed on Table 8.4, an owner must also subtract additional operating expenses which are paid out on a periodic (e.g., monthly, annual, etc.) basis. These include a number of relatively fixed expenses such as income taxes, vehicle insurance/s, equipment maintenance and employee benefits. While I was generally unable to elicit exact figures from my informants, it is fairly common knowledge among practitioners that employee benefits not only constitute a substantial expense for *conjunto* owners, but also provide a measure of job security for employees. This is particularly true for “senior” employees who over the course of their employment (and in keeping with Panamanian labour laws) will have accrued substantial pension benefits, pay raises and severance payouts that will have to be meted out should they be fired without just cause. In this way, *conjunto*, employee benefits tend to increase job security as owners may simply not be able to afford to

²⁸⁶ Net income values are based on the smallest and largest net income values listed on Table 8.3.

let an employee go.²⁸⁷ This particular employment policy is by no means unique to *conjuntos*, but is in fact typical of most businesses with a salaried workforce.

Additional expenses faced by *conjunto* owners vary, with some being more flexible and others taking the form of necessary investments. These include various forms of paid publicity such as radio airplay and commercial recordings. It is common practice for *conjuntos* to pay radio stations to play their recorded material, sometimes buying an entire segment of time on one or multiple radio stations during which the radio deejay will play their music exclusively.

An additional area that must be considered is the role of Panama's *cervecerías* and *licoreras* (beer and liquor companies) in *conjunto* business practices. As I have explained in Chapter 4, Panamanian beer and liquor companies played a significant role in the genre's commercialisation often by offering incentives for *conjuntos* to agree to perform only in venues where their products were sold. While not all *conjuntos* entered into such agreements, many of the most well-known *conjuntos* were exclusive to one particular company at various points of their careers. When discussing the present influence that these companies exert over *conjunto* economic practices most informants (and *conjunto* owners in particular) were reticent to divulge details of their relationship to any one company—assuming such a relationship evenexisted in the first place. For the most part it would appear that practices of exclusivity were less common than they used to be. This, I have been told on various occasions, can be credited to the fact that Panama's liquor/beer companies have generally avoided *conjunto* sponsorships in preference for entering into exclusivity agreements with the venues where their product is typically sold, namely *cantinas* and *jardínes*. Another

²⁸⁷ In order to mitigate the effects of this form of job security, EOS, for example, now “liquidates” and rehires its new members on an annual basis, thus avoiding the problem of mandatory pay raises based on seniority (Jorge Jaén, personal communication, 2008.).

reason may be attributed to the potential risk an exclusivity agreement poses to the economic success of the *conjunto* by actually limiting their performance opportunities.²⁸⁸ While the waning interest on the part of Panamanian *cervecerías* and *licoreras* in acquiring a direct stake in the economic affairs of individual *conjuntos* has not seemed to have a strong impact on professional *conjuntos*, many new and prospective *conjunto* owners have often complained that the lack of economic support traditionally provided by these companies has made starting up a *conjunto* an increasingly uncertain and unattainable prospect.

The potentially high earning capability of professional *conjuntos* coupled with high start up costs and diminishing (direct) involvement of the *cervecerías* and *licoreras* has effectively limited the number of active *conjuntos* while at the same time enhanced the degree of control accorded to the unit leader or *dueño/a*. Today, the owners of successful/professional *conjuntos* have the means to pursue both their own professional/commercial and artistic objectives often in a setting of intense competition between their professional counterparts. Examining the nature of the commercial and competitive strategies adopted by these *conjunto* owners as well as their implicatedness with Panamanian national and geo-cultural imaginaries will be the subject of the four chapters that follow. Suffice it to say at this point, however, that the economic control wielded by *conjunto* owners (almost always accordionists) has also contributed to their role as the principal spokespeople for their respective *conjuntos* and, often, for *música típica popular* as a whole.

²⁸⁸ One informant, for example, described a situation that took place during the early 2000s when at the height of their popularity LPN turned down an offer of sponsorship by the Azuerense liquor company Varela Hermanos and instead accepted one from their direct competitor Carta Vieja, a company based in the province of Chiriquí. In response Varela Hermanos chose to sponsor LD who at that time was reportedly not the most popular of the professional *conjuntos*. As history would have it, Varela Hermanos turned out to be the more successful of the two liquor companies and, according to this particular informant, LD also benefited from their success and arguably replaced LPN as the most popular/commercially successful *conjunto* (anonymous informant 1, personal communication, 2007).

As I will discuss in Chapter 9, this authority accorded by uneven group economic relationships translates into areas of musical sound and style—where the owner is the presumed architect of the *conjunto*'s particular “*estilo*.” It is these individuals who make (or are said to make) all decisions concerning the *conjunto* and as a result (just as in areas of business especially in areas where musical production and mobility are concerned) *conjunto*'s are stylistically nimble and versatile, readily adapting to shifting tastes and trends of their various and graphically disparate audience bases. The resemblance between the business and ensemble are in this way closely linked to the social structure of a *conjunto* as centred around the nominal and actual ‘owner.’

Baile economics

In the foregoing I have suggested that a *conjunto*'s social organization is closely linked to the issue of ownership and the economic differences and expectations it engenders. In the following section I examine similar relationships found in commercial *baile* practices and in particular the similar role of the *empresario*. Like *conjuntos*, *bailes* are often centred around a single individual, but rely on broad participation and coordination to achieve commercial viability. By gaining an understanding of *baile* economics it is my aim to develop a deeper understanding of *conjunto* practices (particularly in terms of the role of a single, nominal genre and the need for mobility and technological self-sufficiency), which I argue are closely connected.

A *baile*, as I refer to it here, is a public and/or community-based event in which the principal attraction is a *conjunto* performance. As a general rule, a *baile* is an event that is meant generate income for the individual/s responsible for its organization. Most *bailes* are

organized by one or more individuals called *empresarios*. Occasionally, however, schools, committees or social clubs may also organize *bailes* as a form of fundraising. Uncommonly, a *baile* may also be a sponsored event in which case the primary objective is to garner notoriety for the sponsoring individual/s or institution (i.e., political figure, commercial business, government institution, etc.).

As a commercial enterprise, *bailes* generate revenue through the sale of specific goods and services, which are paid for by the patron/end-user. While most sale transactions tend to maintain a fairly direct line between the producer and consumer, the *empresario* does operate as type of retailer or middleman and normally receives a percentage of all the profits accrued during a *baile*.²⁸⁹ For the most part, all individual goods and services sold at a *baile* tend to net relatively low profits for the *empresario*. From this we can see that in order to generate a profit, baileorganizers often employ a high volume/low-return business model (i.e., high numbers of patrons paying relatively low fees). Moreover, they rely on *conjuntos* to draw those large numbers of patrons. For this reason, *bailes* are highly participatory and always open to all members of the public,²⁹⁰ many of whom are residents of rural communities or low-income urban districts/neighbourhoods.

Most *bailes* take place between 6:00 in the evening to 5:00 the following morning.²⁹¹ While *conjunto* performances are ostensibly a *baile*'s main draw, *bailes* will also typically feature additional forms of entertainment such as a *cantadera* and sometimes a deejay,

²⁸⁹ This contrasts with other types of performance practices (such as salsa and reggaeton), where organizers rely on the perceived mass popularity of the performers to generate corporate funding in exchange for publicity.

²⁹⁰ Children being the exception in this case and are usually escorted off the *baile* premises around 10:00 PM.

²⁹¹ Occasionally a *baile* will take place between 6:00 PM and 12:00 AM, in which case it is called a *saraó*. Most *saraó* take place on Sundays prior to the commencement of the work week.

cockfights and *juegos de toro* (literally “bull games”) or some other rodeo-style event.²⁹² It is through the considered combination of these various entertainment forms that *empresarios* strive to increase their profit margins and/or mitigate their losses, which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 12.

A successful *baile* is often the product of months of preparations. Typically a *baile* will be hosted by event organizers such as an *empresario* or some form of organizing body—i.e., a committee composed of colleagues, friends, and/or family. It is the job of the event organizer(s)/*empresario(s)* to hire both the band and venue, pay for publicity, and guarantee the presence of all the necessary amenities essential to the event’s aesthetic and commercial success. Ultimately, the *empresario* shares in all of the profits (or losses) associated with the *baile*.

Among the *empresarios* I met, all were men and most were moderately well off and had strong connections to their town-based communities either as land and/or business owners. Most *empresarios* earn their income from other ventures and typically organized a *baile* once or twice a year, usually in and around the vicinity of the town they lived in. Professional *empresarios* were fewer in number and tended to rely on affiliations to specific *conjuntos* rather than communities. Ulpiano “Panito” Vergara (son of LD owner Ulpiano Vergara), for example, was one such individual who worked exclusively with LD and organized a substantial portion of their performances. While his *bailes* had a reputation of being well attended (hence profitable), a number of *conjunto* practitioners I spoke with credited this not only to his business acumen, but also to the fact that LD were exceptionally popular at the time. The suggestion being in this case that the challenges of organizing

²⁹² On some occasions a *baile* may take place in conjunction with or as part of a larger event such as a *fiesta*, *fieria* (an exhibition or fair) or patron saint festival, which typically feature a variety of attractions and forms of entertainment.

successful *bailes* without strong links to particular communities would be greater with *empresarios* working with most other (i.e., less popular) *conjuntos*.

While the rise of professional *empresarios* (such as Vergara) are a testament to the vitality and earning potential of the *baile* tradition, their typically close connection to a specific *conjunto* speaks to the continued importance of local players, customs and traditions in the realization of most successful *bailes*. In addition to being a kind of Panamanian tradition, *bailes* have historically been marked by localism as suggested by the role of the “*abanderado*” (standard-bearer) in the past, the continued (and largely symbolic) giving and receiving of *peones*, and the coincidence of many *bailes* with local patron saint festivals, *ferias* and other forms of communal celebrations. In Chapter 2 I argue that it is this connection between practitioners and locality that provides an important basis for imagining the genre’s unique and often ambiguous relationship to some of the pronounced binaries that continue to inform Panamanian geo-cultural and national identity particularly.

Both as a commercial enterprise and performance setting, a *baile* can take on various shapes and forms depending on a number of factors including the location in which it takes place, the occasion for which it is organized, and the capacity of the venue and its infrastructure. All of these variables have an impact on the types of goods and services available, the event’s overall structure (i.e., duration, sequence of events, participants, etc.) and its potential profit margins. In certain respects, however, *bailes* tend to maintain a strong degree of similarity from one to another as most *empresarios* tend to follow a similar *modus operandi* in their effort to organize successful *bailes*. In the following I tally those expenditures that I found to be pervasive in *baile* management. In the process I also discuss

the practical purpose of specific features of a *baile* (i.e., various amenities and services), which I will examine further in relation to performance practices in Chapter 12.

Baile operating expenses

It is the responsibility of the *empresario* to coordinate with the various service providers so as to provide the various amenities necessary not only for a *baile* to take place, but also for it to be commercially viable and profitable. In Table 8.5 are listed the typical expenses an *empresario* must cover in order for a *baile* to take place. These are organized under three categorical headings indicating specific services and amenities: 1) publicity, 2) music related and 3) venue related. In the far right column is included an estimate of the actual costs accrued by the *empresario*. Below I provide a brief outline of the various expenses listed in Table 8.5.

Expense category		Estimated cost
Publicity	media publicity	N/A
	peones (circa \$50 each)	\$50-\$500
Music related	<i>cantadera</i> and sound system ²⁹³	\$600-\$850
	<i>música típica popular conjunto</i>	\$1,200-\$3,500
Venue related	<i>toldo/jardín</i> rental	\$500-\$2,000
	tables (circa 50¢ each) and chairs (circa 25¢ each) rental	\$15-\$75
	labour (each paid \$10)	\$100-\$200
	security	N/A
	backup generator	\$50-\$100
	liquor license (if necessary)	N/A
	Total estimated cost	\$2,515-\$7,225

Table 8.5: *Baile* operating expenses

²⁹³ *Cantadera* performances generally feature two instrumentalists—such as two guitarists or a guitar and violin—and two or more *décima* singers. In general the instrumentalists are paid around \$100 each and the singers around \$150 each. In addition, the *empresario* must rent a small sound system and a sound engineer, which together will typically cost around \$100.

Publicity expenses are generally accrued by the *empresario* prior to the event itself. Media publicity for the event can take the form of newspaper and/or radio ads as well as posters and banners posted in the vicinity of the *baile* venue. Typically an advertisement will include the name of the featured *conjunto*, the *cantadera* singers, the time and location of the event, and possibly the name of the *empresario*. On some occasions, an *empresario* will pay a radio station to broadcast both the *cantadera* and a portion of the *conjunto* performance live, so as to attract additional patrons. A second expense involves payment of *peones*, which are meant to guarantee the participation of other *empresarios* (or at least a proxy) at one's event. A single *peón* generally represents an investment of \$50 and usually an *empresario* will purchase anywhere between one to ten *peones* for a single event. As far as *baile* economics are concerned, *peones* represent neither a financial loss nor a gain as they operate on a *quid pro quo* basis (see Chapter 2), however, they are useful as the presence of other *empresarios* at one's *baile* adds an element of prestige to the event itself, which is understood to be good for business.

Music related expenses include the cost of hiring a *conjunto* and a *cantadera* group as well as renting sound equipment for the latter. While not strictly necessary, very frequently a *baile* will feature a *cantadera* performance prior to the *conjunto* performance. Typically a *cantadera* (as the performance event is also called) will begin around sunset (circa 6:00 PM) and continue until the commencement of the *baile* proper (i.e., between 9:30 and 10:30 PM). Many *empresarios* have told me that they consider *cantaderas* to be essential to a *baile*'s commercial success, particularly in rural areas where the practice remains especially common. The reason is that a *cantadera* audience will typically remain seated throughout the course of a performance (often in groups of family and friends) and thus are more likely to

pay the fee for the use of tables and chairs, and order liquor (such as *seco*, rum or whisky) in larger quantities. In terms of *baile* economics, *cantaderas* are significant as they represent a potentially significant source of income for a relatively small investment. However, there are musical/stylistic implications as well where more so called traditional *conjuntos* are thought to appeal more to the same demographic that go to *cantaderas*, which in Panama is usually imagined as rural and *interiorano*. This relationship, and its implications to notions of *conjunto* style and geo-cultural/social relationships, is examined further in Chapter 12.

Contracting a professional *conjunto* is typically the most substantial investment an *empresario* must make. The *conjunto*'s performance fees are always agreed on beforehand and often months before the *baile* will take place. Usually a written contract is signed between the two parties wherein it is stipulated that the *empresario* must agree to pay the *conjunto*'s fee regardless of whether or not the *baile* is financially successful.

Venue related expenses are those connected to the site in which a *baile* takes place. On the whole, both the venues and their attendant functions have changed little over the years. The large majority of *bailes* continue to take place within permanent and semi-permanent structures called *jardines* and *toldos*, respectively. These are semi-enclosed buildings consisting of a tin roof supported by pillars and cement or wooden floors. This design is important as it includes a number of important functions such as providing for adequate ventilation and cover from rainfall (a must in Panama's tropical climate), and a large open space for dancing. Most venues in which *bailes* take place must have a dance floor that can accommodate at least 400 dancers at any given time and be able to provide covering to 500 patrons or more, as failure to do so would significantly compromise the commercial viability of the event. Most venues are in fact much larger and regularly

accommodate in excess of 1000 dancers. In addition, the venue must also include a raised platform for the musicians to perform on and an electrical outlet to power the equipment and a few lights. Typically all beverages are sold within the venue with the food stands (called *fondas*) located immediately outside. If an *empresario* intends to charge an entrance fee—as is normally the case—then s/he must see to it the entire site is cordoned off so as to limit access to one particular entrance point.

If an *empresario* does not own a *jardín* or *toldo* then one must be rented. A conservative estimate of *jardín* and *toldo* rental fees range between \$500 to \$2,000 depending on the venue's size and location as well as the day of the week in which the *baile* will be held. Additional expenses accrued by the *empresario* include the following expense categories:

- Tables and chairs: these will usually be rented by the *empresario* at an estimated cost of 50¢ per table and 25¢ per chair, and then re-rented individually to the patrons for a profit.
- Labour: in general an *empresario* must hire between 10 to 20 or more employees at an estimated rate of \$10 per employee. Among other things, the employees are responsible for serving the beverages and collecting the entrance and dancing fees, and table and chair rental fees.
- Security: three or more police officers are always hired to police a *baile* and deal with any violence that might take place among patrons.
- Backup generator: this is almost always rented in the event of a power failure so as to ensure the *baile*'s continuation.
- Liquor license: an *empresario* may need to secure a temporary liquor license at a cost

if the venue does not have one that meets the requirements of the event.

Service providers and sources of revenue

As a commercial enterprise, a *baile* provides its patrons with a relatively specific number of goods and services, which in turn will directly generate a profit not only for the event organizer/s, but the various manufacturers and service providers involved. As we have seen above, some of these items/services come at an expense (and potential economic loss) to the *empresario*, and others are provided free of charge and represent a source of potential income free of any economic risk. In Table 8.6 are listed the specific goods and services that are sources of revenue at a *baile*. These items are organized according to four categories labelled as “dance related,” “venue related,” “food and drink” and “other,” and are discussed below.

Revenue source		Itemized end-user cost	
Dance related	<i>taquilla</i> or dancing fee (per dancer)	\$5	
Venue related	entrance fee	\$1 (occasionally more)	
	rentals	table (single) chair (single)	\$1 50¢
Food and drink	alcoholic beverages	beer (bottle)	50¢-60¢
		<i>seco</i> (bottle)	\$10
		rum (bottle)	\$13
		whiskey (bottle)	\$21
	non-alcoholic beverages	soda (bottle)	50¢
		water (bottle)	\$1
		“energy drink” (can)	\$1
	food vendor fees (per <i>fonda</i> vendor) OR		\$50-\$100
	net-profit of food sales (<i>fonda</i> , etc.)	<i>sancocho</i> (serving)	\$2.50
		<i>carimañola, empanada</i> , etc. (serving)	25¢
		potato salad, etc. (serving)	\$1
		meat skewer (serving)	25¢
		grilled meat and yucca (serving)	\$2
Other	<i>peón pagado</i> (single)	\$50 or more	
	<i>padrino/a</i> sponsorship (per performer)	\$150-\$300	
	<i>abandorado/a</i>	N/A	

Table 8.6: Baile revenue source

“Dance related” revenue refers to income generated by charging all of the male dancers a one-time dancing fee called a “*taquilla*” or colloquially “*taq.*” A *taquilla* usually costs the patron \$5 or in some cases more depending on what the *empresario* feels is appropriate.²⁹⁴ *Taquilla* sales are generally expected total or exceed the *conjunto*’s fees (approximately between 240 and 700 *taquillas*) and as a result *conjunto* musicians often describe a *baile* as being “*bueno*” or “*malo*” (“good” or “bad,” meaning economically “successful” or “unsuccessful”) based on their estimate of the total number of dancers on a

²⁹⁴ A *taquilla* is small, ticket-like paper stub whose design is unique to the specific *baile* event and is printed in limited (albeit sufficient) quantity by the *empresario*. Immediately before dancing commences, the *empresario* will distribute the *taquillas* to the individuals charged with their sale, keeping a tally of the exact number distributed and to whom. Throughout the course of the *baile* the *taquilla* sellers will monitor the dance floor, collecting payment from the male dancers and stapling the ‘stub’ on the lapels of their shirts—which becomes a form of proof of payment. Once the *baile* ends or is nearly ended, the sellers will hand over the sales and the remaining/unsold *taquillas* to the *empresario*, who, in turn, once it is determined that there are no discrepancies will them will pay them a (pre-arranged) commission.

given night. In this and other respects, (live) *música típica popular* remains strongly identified as music for dancing.

“Venue related” revenue refers to a one-time entrance fee paid by all patrons in order to access the site of a *baile* (which is usually cordoned off by a permanent or makeshift fence). Most entrance fees are \$1 per patron, however, occasionally an *empresario* may charge more if s/he feels it makes good business sense. Once inside the venue, a patron may choose to rent a table and chair from the *empresario* each at a cost of \$1 and 50¢, respectively.

Revenue generated from the sale of food and drink can be a significant source of income for an *empresario/s* and must be carefully coordinated with a host of product suppliers and service providers. Alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages are almost always supplied by one of Panama’s *cervecerías* and liquor companies. This service is provided at no expense to the *empresario* on condition that s/he will only sell that company’s products. After the *baile* has ended the *empresario* will reimburse the *cervecería* for all products sold at a wholesale rate (as well as return all empty beer bottles as well as any extra inventory) and keep the profit. The alternative and less attractive scenario is for the *empresario* to buy all products in advance and run the risk of running a deficit or a surplus in inventory. On Table 8.6 are listed the typical beverages sold at a *baile*. Beer and *seco* (a Panamanian sugarcane liquor) are generally the most commonly consumed drinks and are sold in large quantities over the course of a *baile*. Based on the relatively low retail/end-user cost of beer and liquor (and considerably lower profit margins), an *empresario* typically must sell several thousand bottles of beer and close to one hundred bottles of liquor to generate a profit.

The food at a *baile* is usually provided by independent vendors. These are always

chosen by the *empresario* who in turn will charge a fixed fee or a cut of the profits in exchange for permission to sell their goods on site. Typical *baile* fare is made in makeshift kitchens called *fondas*, which prepare a range deep fried foods, rice and soup over open fires. In addition smaller vendors will also sell grilled meats and boiled yucca prepared on site. In general, the sale of food and/or vendor fees does not generate substantial profits for the *empresario*, but is nevertheless regarded as an essential amenity at any *baile*.

Long established practices of gift-giving between *empresarios* known as “*peones*” (listed as “other” in Table 8.6) constitute a relatively minor (albeit prestigious) source of revenue. The giving and receiving of *peones* is a *baile* tradition that is generally observed by most *empresarios*. Economically speaking, a *peón* (which generally amounts in \$50 in cash or liquor sales) should not represent a financial gain or loss as it is based on a principal of equal exchange (see Chapter 2). Less common is the tradition of *padrino/a* (godfather/mother) sponsorships and the practice of naming an *abandorado/a* (standard-bearer). In the case of the former, a member of the community may sponsor a portion of the event (such as one or more *cantadera* singers) in exchange for being recognized in all advertisements and throughout the course of the *baile* as an official sponsor. In the latter, the *empresario* in consultation with members of his/her community will choose an *abandorado* from a neighbouring community. This individual will usually be a prominent and well-off member of his/her community and is expected among other things to attend the *baile* in the company of an entourage in exchange for the honour of being named the *abandorado*. In this case the *empresario* will profit economically from any sales incurred by the *abandorado* and members of his/her entourage.

Conclusion

In this chapter my aim has been to provide a basis for understanding the theorizing that follows. My central point here is that much significant *conjunto* activity is organized, strategized and governed by economic concerns. What should be clear is that in addition to being ensembles, *conjuntos* are businesses and a means by which their members can earn a livelihood. What is more, *conjunto* economics display a very close relationship to one specific performance context/commercial enterprise (i.e., the *baile*), which though it may vary in various particulars also can be shown to be fairly standardized and reliant specific business strategies.

Briefly, both *bailes* and *conjuntos* can be characterized by relatively high operational costs, which have both the potential to generate substantial revenues or losses for a limited number of investors, namely the *empresarios* and *conjunto* owners, respectively. As such neither enterprise is undertaken casually, and great care is taken to ensure their mutual commercial viability. In addition, high volume/low-return business strategies mean that both *bailes* and *conjuntos* must cater to an increasingly large number of patrons/audience members requiring the use of sophisticated (and expensive) sound systems and personnel to operate them. Finally, all of these factors effectively contribute to the territorial dispersion of *baile* sites and the (physical) mobility of *conjunto* units.

In the following chapters I shall have reason to reference *conjunto* economics even as I focus on issues that on their surface may appear to be specific to the objectives of the *conjunto-as-an-ensemble*. In fact, I will show that the relationship between the genre's mapping, individual *conjunto*/practitioner styles, and first and second theme Panamanian nationalism are closely connected to the demands of professionalism. This is perhaps clearest

in the way that travel and relationships between a specific *conjunto* and their territorially dispersed audience base are at the base of *conjunto* performance identities—where as it concerns issues of stylistic orientation, where *conjuntos* play can be just as important as what they play. Also important is the close connection between *conjunto* practice and its relationship to a single nominal genre, which is closely linked to the fact that *conjuntos* mainly cater to a specific form of live performance (i.e., a commercial *baile*). While the relationship between *conjunto* economics and notions of Panamanian nationalism often appear to be overshadowed by issues aesthetic concern, the point is that many (if not the vast majority) of the ostensibly musical decisions *conjuntos* make have an economic component.

CHAPTER 9

CONJUNTO PERFORMANCE STYLE

In this chapter I examine the issue of musical style as it is understood in relation to ideas of genre among *música típica popular* practitioners. Among its most important attributes, style, I argue, forms a critical basis for meaningful *differentiation* between *conjunto* practitioners: it is that *quality* that simultaneously establishes relationships of (sonic/aesthetic) similarity and difference among a host of (potentially undifferentiated) genre practitioners. The broader argument, which I take up in Chapters 11 and 12, is that notions of musical style (and ideas of genre upon which they are based) are shaped by and at times actively inform specific ideas of Panamanian geo-cultural and national identity.

Among *conjunto* practitioners and aficionados, ideas of shared performance conventions and the potential for genre sensibilities abound aplenty. As I have shown in the preceding chapter, *conjunto* ensembles operate primarily as dance bands that cater to a specific commercial dance setting called a *baile*. This relationship between *conjunto* performance practice and the *baile* performance setting is in many ways a practical one. It is connected to performance economics and logistics, which previously contributed to *música típica popular*'s commercialisation and intra-regional appeal, and is currently foundational to the way professional musicians earn their living. The centrality of the *conjunto* (ensemble) nexus and the standardization of its attendant performance practices are also connected to a similar standardization of the *baile* setting (which is a focus of Chapter 11 and especially 12),

which among other things bears the mark of the *música típica popular*'s twentieth century commercialisation. The demands of commercial dance practices have become implicated in the production of a number of marked symmetries between ensembles. These, in turn, have come to form the basis for notions of broadly shared conventions necessary for creating a sense of a musical genre. It is in this regard that style, as a basis for establishing (or discussing and conceptualizing) difference, becomes a key concern.

While genre sensibilities can be understood to embody notions of broadly shared musical conventions, stylistic sensibilities form an important basis for understanding how musical practices become meaningfully differentiated among genre practitioners. Among *música típica popular* practitioners, moreover, stylistic differentiation is often based on ideas of musical authenticity and creativity, which regularly extend beyond purely musical features and overlap with ideas of Panamanian geo-cultural and social formations—ideas that are ultimately rooted in established discourses of (first- and second-theme) Panamanian nationalism. Also significant is the way that stylistic formations, and the creative impetuses that drive them, are founded on clear ideas of genre and its significance to the professional wellbeing of my informants.

As I shall discuss below, discourses of style and/or meaningful differentiation are very often couched in ideas of creativity, originality and authorship or the lack thereof (i.e., imitation). Among *conjunto* practitioners, creativity or being recognized as a creator is generally a positive attribute. However, not all creative endeavours succeed be it in aesthetic or commercial terms. Not surprisingly *conjunto* practitioners strive to develop styles that

work very often by actively seeking to distinguish themselves from other ensembles all the while still remaining consistent with the broader genre conventions.²⁹⁵

Through their actions and modes of organization, therefore, *conjunto* practitioners also actively construct difference and in the process strive to cultivate relatively unique performance identities that are almost always centred around the *conjunto* nexus and particularly its accordionist and/or owner. Again, as I have endeavoured to show in previous chapters, over the course of *música típica popular*'s history the *conjunto* unit has come to be regarded as integral to the successful reproduction of the genre—making it difficult, in other words, to successfully perform the genre outside of a *conjunto* setting. Notions of musical style (and the ‘constraints’ of genre within which they are negotiated) often highlight the role of the ensemble unit and the competencies of its members as an important locus for identity formations. They also involve questions of authority, such as who has the right to stake a claim in the discourse? Who decides whether a style is more or less derivative/original or traditionalist/innovative? In this chapter I theorize the relationship between the *conjunto* as a unit and the individuals considered (by myself and my informants) to be the primary enablers of the *conjunto*'s style, namely *conjunto* musicians (i.e., the performing members of specific *conjuntos*) and the composers who generate the repertoire *conjuntos* perform.

Within a *conjunto* setting, authority to shape stylistic development is not shared equally among all its members. Accordionists as well as singers (especially if they are

²⁹⁵ In seeking to understand “the specific circumstances through which any recorded work or musical practice can be realized and received as creative in the first place” (Negus, 1999:179), Negus perhaps comes closest in describing the type of creative work undertaken by *conjunto* musicians. Drawing on the work of other scholars (i.e., Finnegan, 1997; Hannerz, 1996), Negus has pointed out the strong correlation between creative fulfillment and genre, be it by working “within identifiable and recognizably familiar genre codes and conventions” (*ibid.* 180) or “to break the codes and genre rules and move across the boundaries of genres” (*ibid.* 181). While both approaches, he suggests, are linked to differing concerns and aesthetic impulses, they nevertheless reaffirm one of his central points: musical creativity is a social act and (more often than not) a multiply mediated activity.

owners²⁹⁶) have more impact on the mapping of the ensemble's style. These individuals are typically the most prominent and vocal exponents of a *conjunto*'s stylistic vision (featured prominently in interviews and so forth), generally share in the credit of any innovations linked to the *conjunto*, and with few exceptions are indispensable. Not coincidentally the authority that accordionists command in areas of performance discourse is closely matched by their (traditional) control of the *conjunto* as a business enterprise. Most other performers may claim and/or are accorded a supportive role in the development of a shared stylistic identity. In some cases this may be viewed as a positive where professionalism and dedication to one single and shared style becomes a means for asserting a measure of stylistic authority and ownership within the characteristically uneven working relationships of a *conjunto*. For many, however, this situation is perceived to place limits to the degree of individual creativity and the cultivation of an individual stylistic identity. For this reason, as I suggest in Chapter 12, a number of young performers are contemplating careers outside of the *música típica popular*. Again, this relationship mirrors and is critical to the development of *conjuntos* as commercial enterprises where the *conjunto* owner also has the final say in all of the business' economic affairs.

Conjunto repertoire has become an important marker not only of its style, but also its identity as a professional performance entity. *Conjuntos* rarely if ever record *música típica popular* compositions previously recorded by another *conjunto*. Established professional *conjuntos* base their repertoires on compositions that are generally viewed to be "their own." New and/or semi-professional *conjuntos* often perform music associated with other *conjuntos* and for this reason are often seen as derivative or lacking an individual style. Acquiring and developing "original" repertoire involves a measure of collaboration (as well as a negotiation

²⁹⁶ Two examples include Sandra Sandoval (LPC) and Lucho De Sedas (Los Selectos).

of creative authority) between a *conjunto* and a composer. Composers are not necessarily members of the *conjuntos* they write for (although some are), even so there often exists an understanding (on the part of composers and the *conjuntos* they write for) that the collaboration is most effective when both parties have overlapping or similar stylistic sensibilities. The role of the composer and how it further informs an understanding of style is the subject of Chapter 10.

While the idea of “*estilo*” as my informants envision it and as I have come to understand it, is a broad and composite category that extends to many areas of (typically) performative interest (such as dress and choreography), more often than not the term was used in conjunction with statements of an individual’s and/or *conjunto*’s musical sound. In this chapter and the following I shall limit my discussion to the more obviously musical/sonic aspects of style formations, which in subsequent chapters I link to broader categories of territory and professional and performance practices.

This chapter is organized in four sections. First I outline an analytical framework for conceptualizing local understandings of *estilo* in relation to performance conventions (or genre sensibilities). Second I examine the decisive (and unparalleled) role the *conjunto* nexus plays in the development of style-based formations. In particular I focus on the (characteristically uneven/undemocratic) relationships within the *conjunto*—which tends to prioritize the creative role of the accordionist/owner over that of the individual *integrantes*—and the paradigms that are thought to govern the creative process. In the third section are outlined and examined two differing and oft cited approaches whereby *conjunto* practitioners are said to develop an effective (i.e., original and commercial) musical style. Here I identify music-specific *approaches* for the development of particular style formations. In the final

section I conclude with a brief outline of the broader implications of style formations (as discussed and examined in the following chapters).

Stylistic orientation and individuation

In an effort to develop an understanding of the role of style as a means of differentiation between *música típica popular* practitioners, I wish to highlight two interrelated conceptual paradigms that I have found to be foundational to this issue. The first emphasizes the idea that the *música típica popular* is constituted by a host of musical practices and performance modalities some of which are regarded as more characteristic of the genre as a tradition rooted in Azuerense musical vernacularism (e.g., *música folklórica*, “the true” *cumbia*, etc.) while others are more representative of its links to cosmopolitan-identified musical culture and musical transnationalism—most commonly expressed in terms of practices of musical innovation and genre mixing/*fusión*. Notions of traditionalist and innovative form an important aesthetic binary within the genre; each positioned, for illustrative purposes, on opposite ends of a continuum representing the tenable limits of the genre—presumably outside of which the genre ceases to exist as such. While I will argue that no single musician or ensemble is understood to be entirely or solely innovative or traditional, I will aim to show how (through a strategic prioritization of particular performance modalities over others) *música típica popular* practitioners can effectively orient their particular style along this continuum.

In brief, stylistic orientation will refer to the way in which *música típica popular* practitioners seek to cultivate a relatively unique identity within this *particular* aesthetic continuum, where, while certainly not a given, notions of traditional/innovative very often

form a mutually exclusive designation among local performers. Most importantly, I argue that stylistic orientations are very much about creating meaningful (i.e., tangible, coherent, etc.) connections to particular aesthetic orientations (i.e., traditionalist and innovative) that not only serve to organize the limits of the genre, but are also tied into notions of Panamanian geo-cultural identity (discussed at length in Chapter 11).

The second concept addresses the premium placed on specific notions of stylistic originality between genre practitioners. On the whole (and often irrespective of any particular innovative-/traditionalist-identified orientation), performance style is also very much about establishing a sense of individuation between practitioners of the genre as well as individual *conjuntos*. In this context, the idea of individuation is based on a belief that certain *conjuntos* are more unique or original than (or, conversely, derivative or imitative of) others. Among *música típica popular* practitioners, notions of stylistic originality—or *heightened* stylistic individuation, as it might be termed—are often based on claims of creative ownership of a particular performance domain such as framework (e.g., composition), musical parameter (e.g., ostinato) and/or some combination thereof (e.g., a particular composite ostinato specific to a composition); each thought to mark the *conjunto*'s overall sound and performance approach as more or less unique and *conjunto*-specific.

Among *conjunto* practitioners today, notions of stylistic individuation are also conceptually reified by the practices of new/semi-professional *conjuntos* who are said to imitate established/professional *conjuntos*—i.e., perform in *their* style and perform *their* repertoire—as part of a process of developing their own style. In the following I show that imitation practices provide a conceptual basis not only for marking some *conjuntos* as original and others as not, but also for understanding the symbolic significance of *conjunto*.

professionalism, which many practitioners regard to be a strong indication of a highly individuated performance style and also its outcome. Stylistic individuation can therefore be understood as a process in which the most desirable (albeit not necessarily the most common) trajectory involves a transition from a relatively attenuated to a relatively heightened degree of stylistic individuation. Significantly, stylistic individuation is also thought to parallel a similar transitional process in which semi-professional *conjuntos* become fully professional and commercially successful.

I propose that both stylistic orientation and individuation form distinct albeit interconnected modes of understanding important processes of style-based differentiation among *conjunto* performers. The relationship that exists between the two is not one of simple parallelism (e.g., it is not a given that an innovative orientation will result in a heightened individuation, and so forth), but rather, as I suggest in Figure 9.1, orthogonal. The “orientation” continuum (represented on the horizontal axis) indicates the strategy that *conjuntos* adopt in forming their particular identity. The “individuation” continuum (represented on the vertical axis) represents the outcome (that is, the degree of success) of any particular strategy.

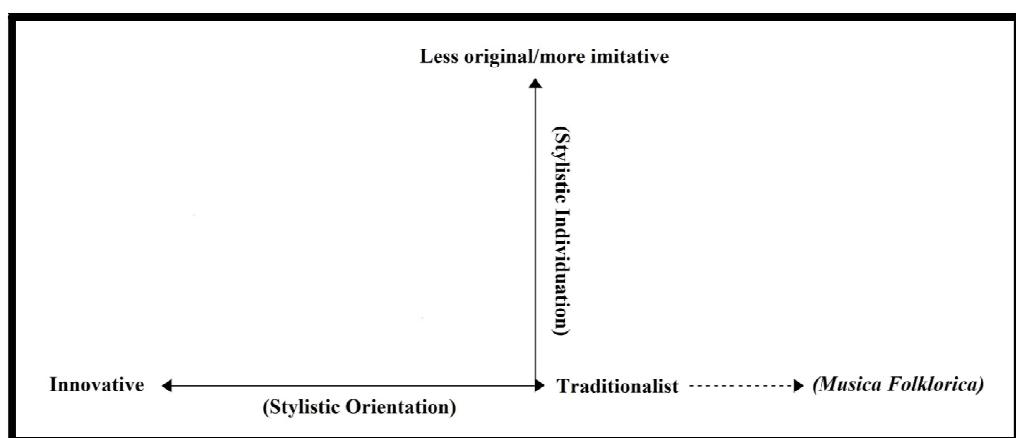


Figure 9.1: Stylistic orientation and stylistic individuation

In my consideration of how notions of stylistic orientation and stylistic individuation provide a framework for understanding the role of musical style as a basis for differentiation among *música típica popular* practitioners it is important to note that the style-based sensibilities I examine are fairly circumscribed within notions of genre. Thus I am less concerned with whether or not style-based attributes are able to transcend generic categories. Rather, my interest is in how style allows for meaningful articulations within a range of performance modalities and aesthetic sensibilities that have come to constitute to varying degrees of specificity and conventionalism the *música típica popular* genre. As I will argue, this has implications not only for the identities of *música típica popular* musicians and audiences, but also how the very boundaries of the genre are defined. This is particularly important given that most professional practitioners claim competency within one nominal genre and *all* make their living by performing it (or an accepted manifestation of it).

Traditionalist and innovative stylistic orientations

On the face of it, a traditionalist orientation suggests an emphasis on roots and origins. When practitioners and/or audiences identify themselves or others as “traditionalists” they often emphasize connections to older musicians and performance practices—some of which may have initially been perceived as innovative, but gradually became a part of conventional practice. While all musical discourses exist in relation to notions of history, traditionalists often claim a connection to a *particular* “tradition” that is often perceived as being the oldest and most representative (i.e., distinctive) of the genre as a whole. While generally considered to be generically distinct, Azuerense musical vernacularism or *música folklórica* tends to be regarded as forming the roots of *música típica popular* and especially traditionalist-identified

practices. In the latter case this association is often expressed by the use of essentialist terms such as “*the música típica*” or the “true” Panamanian *cumbia* (represented on Figure 9.1 as the “*música folklórica*” end of the continuum). The notion that *música típica popular* can embody a sense of “tradition” was (as I have noted already) arguably made possible by changes in performance practices that were understood as innovative (many taking place subsequent to the late 1960s) as well as a growing sense of what constituted the critical and indispensable elements of the genre (such as the *baqueteo* and *bordoneo* techniques among others).

Innovation on the other hand suggests a different orientation. In *música típica popular*, “*innovación*” or “*modernización*”—as it is often called—is commonly thought to have been brought about deliberately by individuals seeking to expand the range and performance possibilities of the genre. More often than not, genre “*innovadores*” (as they are also frequently called) have sought to bring about change by blending elements of other genres with *música típica popular*—which, if successful, still remained the dominant and nominal genre. This type of genre mixing or hybridity is often referred to as “*fusión*” (fusion) by practitioners. And while the term may evoke a sense of contemporaneity to many, the practice itself forms an integral part of *música típica popular*’s historical development, at times actively reinforcing ideas of an underlying shared convention/genre as well.

Like genre, notions of style—as well as the particular orientations identified in this study as “traditionalist” and “innovative”—are produced and shaped through discourse (speech and writing) and discursive practice (e.g., musical performance, reception, etc.). As such, they can and do form the basis for specific musical collectivities based on sense of “affinity”—linked, for example, to “personal predilections and affective responses [and]

sheer sonic attraction” (see Shelemyay, 2011:374)—between other stylistically-likeminded practitioners and aficionados. For the musicians who (for reasons ranging from musical taste to economic self-sufficiency) are often deeply invested in a particular orientational identification, intrapersonal relationships (both real and imagined) provide a sense of musical community and validation in what is otherwise a highly competitive and at times segmented professional performance *milieu*. In this respect ideas of style and stylistic orientation begin to take on the appearances of a “scene,” albeit in the more local and less obviously externalized sense of the term, where local cultural politics, expressive practice and economics form the basis for broader *conjunto* activities and collectivities.²⁹⁷

Designations of “traditionalist” and “innovative” should be understood as located on opposite ends of a continuum where they serve to organize individual stylistic orientations, musical tendencies and aesthetic sensibilities. As such, neither are absolute categories in themselves, but rather form a basis for establishing important continuities and discontinuities—i.e., differentiation—between the various individuals (and most notably nexuses and nexus principals) responsible for the re/production of the genre. The case of accordionist/*conjunto* owner José “Chichi” Barrios is illustrative of this relationship. In an interview Barrios explained that he began by imitating the styles of a number of established accordionists, but noted that his personal style has “always been very similar to Alfredo [Escudero’s].”

José Barrios: [Alfredo] is very *típico* [i.e., traditional] and I am also very *típico*; I like folklore very much. Alfredo loves folklore and protects [it].

Sean Bellaviti: Something like a traditionalist?

JB: Exactly. That’s how it is. [...]

SB: I was speaking with another musician, Eráclides Amaya, who is also like this.

²⁹⁷ Additional studies that are pronouncedly local in their examination of “scene” and scene-type musical activities include Shank (1994), Packman (2009 and 2011) and Mark DeWitt (2009).

- JB: Yes, he is another who really likes to uphold *the cumbia*—the *cumbia* from here.
- SB: Who are the musicians that are the most this way?
- JB: Dorindo [Cárdenas] and Alfredo; and among the new [musicians], Eráclides [Amaya] and myself. There are a number [of musicians] who like (very much) to uphold *the cumbia*. There are [also] many who play a different rhythm—Samy [Sandoval] being an example. They are more...
- SB: Why, then, are they [i.e., LPC] called the “masters” of the *cumbia*?
- JB: Well, people do not share that opinion because for some years now they have distanced themselves from *the cumbia*. They play beautifully, but in a different rhythm. This is because of the youth and so forth; they want to innovate and do something... But [when it comes to] *cumbia*: Alfredo.²⁹⁸

In this interview excerpt, Barrios highlights the significance of style as a means of differentiation, which allows him not only to identify his close connection to one particular musician, Escudero—whom he regards as a model for his own performance style—but others as well (i.e., Cárdenas and Amaya) with whom he shares a number of key values—i.e., upholding “*the* [read authentic] *cumbia*” and a “love” of Panamanian folklore. Similarly, his particular stylistic orientation is also meaningfully positioned at a distance from genre innovators (e.g., LPC) whom, he suggests, have moved away from traditional practices (again, “*the cumbia*”). In describing his particular orientation, Barrios makes references to specific people, *conjuntos* and nominal musical practices that are combined and provide the framework wherein his particular orientation is thought to be coherent and socially meaningful.

Barrios’ account is noteworthy as it indexes a number of widely accepted ideas about the way in which specific *conjuntos* have come to embody particular stylistic orientations. Among the six currently professional *conjuntos* in Panama, RS and LPC are most often identified as exemplary innovators, both being credited as having successfully implemented a number of important innovations that, for the most part, reveal a propensity for genre

²⁹⁸ Personal communication, 2008.

mixing/fusion. On the other hand, EOS and LM are often cited as exemplary traditionalists, an attribute that seems to be principally based on their professional longevity—where to a certain extent a sense of ‘tradition’ developed around them—rather than on their adherence to particular forms of Panamanian vernacular music. In contrast to these four *conjuntos*, LPN and LD are rarely cited as exemplary of either orientation and seem to maintain a comfortable middle ground within this binary framework. It should be emphasized, however, that these categorizations and characterizations speak to a general orientation that is frequently adjusted and modified depending largely on performance contexts. Thus (as I will discuss in chapters 11 and 12), no particular *conjunto* style is especially removed from the discourses that have come to shape the genre as a whole particularly in relation to ideas of Panamanian nationalism and cultural identity.

The frequency with which my informants identified these particular *conjunto*-style alignments would seem to suggest that either stylistic orientation is an especially stable condition or musical identity. This, however, is not always the case especially for professional *conjuntos* who must adapt their sound and style not only in dialogue with contemporary preferences, but also in relation to specific performance contexts. In practice, all *conjuntos* actually tend to maintain a flexible relationship to their given and/or assumed stylistic orientation, which they can modify if or when necessary. Osvaldo Ayala, for example, has noted that his *conjunto* as well as those of his contemporaries have the ability to adapt their style depending on the audience, in his case performing more “orthodox” one night and adding more “salsa” another—again, I shall revisit this particular form of stylistic variability below and in Chapter 12.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁹ Personal communication, 2008.

This is also true of individual musicians working within a given *conjunto*. Such is the case with Ivan Herrera, timbalero for EOS (an ensemble generally regarded as traditionalist), who describes his personal performance style as “more traditional” and “more centred around the fundamental rhythm of Panamanian *música típica*.” His style as he describes it, not coincidentally, is closely aligned with that of his respective *conjunto*’s traditionalist reputation. When I asked him, however, if he ever incorporates salsa techniques into his playing as other innovative-identified timbaleros do, he replied: “Sometimes [...]. You have to do it because if the audience likes something, they like it. If people like a [particular] salsa rhythm you have to add that rhythm.”³⁰⁰ Other informants have noted similar contradictions between theory and practice, which seems to suggest that discourses of style in fact do cultural work by actively constructing the very thing they set out to describe.³⁰¹

That modes of style-based differentiation be not only coherent, but also flexible is critical to the idea of style I aim to develop here. For professional *conjuntos*, the economic imperative of earning a living is often seen as a motivating factor for modifying particular stylistic alignments, which in some cases—such as the one described above—are specific to particular performance situations. Similarly for new and semi-professional *conjuntos*, cultivating and modifying particular stylistic orientations is an important part of a process of stylistic individuation whereby these groups seek to increase their chances of commercial success. Vladimir Atencio (accordionist/owner of Grupo Manantial de Amor), for example,

³⁰⁰ Personal communication, 2007.

³⁰¹ In addition, the historicity of technological evolution also tends to undermine notions of traditionalism and innovation as absolute categories. The cumulative effect of numerous developments in sound production and recording technology serves to mark music performed and recorded today from music performed and recorded several years and decades earlier. All the *conjuntos* that perform and record today are in various ways “contemporary” or “modern.” All professional ensembles sound in various ways “contemporary” and there is no mistaking, for example, a performance by EOS recorded in 1970 with one recorded in 2006. These issues will be explored further in relation to discourses of style connected to *conjunto* performers and *conjunto* composers below.

noted that while innovation is a means for newcomers to achieve a measure of artistic recognition and commercial success, it is also a form of risk taking akin to “taking a step and not knowing what you’re going to step on.” “Traditional” aspects of *conjunto* instrumentation and performance modalities (e.g., *saloma*), he explained,

are little details that for people who believe in the tradition and grew up during this time don’t want changed. If they want change, it’s just a little and we include it by experimenting whether it works or not.

Atencio added that one “can have [their] own style without making these [i.e., innovative] changes;” and, if deemed necessary, in his experience specific musical innovations should best be incorporated incrementally and with care so as to not “lose the essence of traditional *música típica*” and/or “end up on the bottom,” commercially speaking.³⁰² As Atencio points out, particular stylistic orientations come with their own attendant pros and cons that are more or less specific to each *conjunto*. And while these categories may make a degree of sense when describing the performance tendencies and general aesthetic sensibilities of specific *conjuntos*, in practice all *conjuntos* can tend to tailor their orientations to suit particular musical requirements and performance expectations.

Flexibility in orientation is often key not only to a *conjunto*’s potential for economic and artistic success, as Atencio points out, but also for an individual musician to secure employment as an *conjunto integrante*. Individual stylistic preferences of *integrantes*, I have sometimes found, are not necessarily always aligned to that of the *conjunto*, nevertheless there is an expectation on the part of *conjunto* accordionists/owners that they acquire the competencies necessary to reproduce, and at times contribute to, the *conjunto*’s particular and (ideally) highly individuated style. Even accordionists, who generally do not differentiate between their individual style and that of their *conjunto* (both being regarded as

³⁰² Personal communication, 2008.

one and the same), will claim a degree of competency in a range of traditionalist- and innovative-identified performance techniques, which they can avail themselves of should the need arise. These issues are examined in greater detail at various points below.

Stylistic individuation: imitation and originality

Stylistic individuation refers to the idea that style—in its capacity of enabling critical differentiation—is ultimately about the achievement of a unique and original musical identity that in practice is often *conjunto*-specific. Among *conjunto* practitioners, stylistic individuation is often understood in relation to two specific and interrelated ideas. First is the notion that a heightened degree of individuation is a positive attribute, which may denote a sense of artistic achievement and accomplishment. Thus there is usually an expectation that one will seek to transition from an imitative (e.g., attenuated) to a progressively more original (e.g., heightened) degree of stylistic individuation. In practice, however, this may not necessarily be the case as many semi-professional *conjuntos* will openly imitate the style of another for much or even all of their careers. In the cases in which imitation strategies are understood to be part of the processes of developing a sense of heightened stylistic individuation, it is often for the following reasons: 1) it creates links between new/unknown *conjuntos* with established (professional) *conjuntos* and their audience-bases thus providing the former with a source of much needed revenue and a performance platform, and 2) it provides a solid musical basis for developing an original style often through a process of mixing or *fusión*.

Also important to the idea of stylistic individuation is the notion that an original style is a critical pre-requisite to commercial success and is thus ultimately validated by

commercial success. To date I have not encountered a situation in which a fully professional *conjunto* (namely the six discussed in this study) was said to lack a sufficiently original style. On the other hand, all the semi-professional *conjuntos* I interviewed were generally reserved in making claims to stylistic originality. Rather their position was often described in terms of a transitional process from “imitators” to “artists.” The picture that emerges is one in which all professional *conjuntos* are thought to have an original style and semi-professional *conjuntos* generally not. The common sense is that professional *conjuntos* are professional/economically self-sufficient because they *are* original (or, originality is what enabled their success). Critical thinking, on the other hand, would suggest that because a *conjunto* is professional/successful, they *are* original. The suggestion that success (especially economic self-sufficiency) can come to be implicated in shaping what originality means would seem in part to account for the imitation strategies commonly employed by aspiring and/or semi-professional *conjuntos*.

As discussed in the previous chapter, LPC were arguably the first *conjunto* to successfully employ imitation as a means, among other things, of cultivating an initial following within a highly competitive and commercial performance milieu. Today, most semi-professional *conjuntos* follow a similar modus operandi, i.e.: performing the repertoire and performing ‘in the style of’ an established *conjunto* while developing the creative skills, acquiring the means and cultivating a following that will enable them to perform their own material and be remunerated for it. The practices and discourses of semi-professional *conjunto* practitioners provide in this case a useful framework for understanding processes of stylistic individuation as well as the value placed on ideas of originality and artistry. Understanding why new *conjuntos* begin by imitating established *conjuntos* not only

highlights a number of challenges specific to new *conjuntos*, but also brings into sharp relief the broader discourse of stylistic individuation and its perceived relationship to *conjunto* economics. Following is an examination of the various factors that compel aspiring *conjuntos* to imitate.

Financial need is one of the primary reasons why new *conjuntos* begin as imitators. José Olmedo Pérez (accordionist/owner of El Simpatía Musical), for example, describes the experience of beginning a *conjunto* as a “*lucha*” (fight). “It is very difficult to engage the public with your own music,” he says, “And without support—imagine it!—without support from anybody, without a sound system, without a vehicle, without an individual identity.” In Pérez’s case, he modeled his own style and that of his *conjunto* on that of LD. In the following interview excerpt he describes the experience in terms of a transitional process that he regards as instrumental to the group’s artistic development and increase in mass popularity:

Olmedo Pérez: I began [performing] in the style of Ulpiano Vergara who is very famous at the moment. I began with his style, playing his songs [...] so that people would hear me. Now, however, I’m developing my own style little by little.

Sean Bellaviti: Is Ulpiano Vergara like an idol for you?

OP: Yes, because he is very famous at the moment. He already has an artistic career here in Panama of over 35 years [and] everybody knows him. So I began by playing his music and little by little I’m becoming known for my own compositions and those of my friends; we’re making our own arrangements now. And now it’s a style that belongs to me. [...] Little by little as the years pass people will begin to know who José Olmedo Pérez is. This is very difficult, very difficult.³⁰³

In addition to mitigating financial challenges, imitation is also thought to provide new *conjuntos* with a musical basis for developing their own individual style. One informant described it as part of a creative process where a *conjunto* develops (broad-based) competencies in other styles prior to developing their own; he explained:

³⁰³ Anonymous informant 2, personal communication, 2007.

when the group [i.e., Sensación Santeña] started it imitated other genres, other music and musicians. For example, the style of Ulpiano [Vergara], the style of Victorio [Vergara] and other musicians including Dorindo [Cárdenas] and in that way we developed our own style.³⁰⁴

Faustinito Pérez (churruga player for Sensación Santeña) suggested that stylistic individuation may be brought about through a process of stylistic syncretism or mixing various elements of other styles so as to create a style that is unique and *conjunto*-specific. As this musician explains in the following interview excerpt, imitation can be a means to that achieving that goal:

Faustinito Pérez: We [i.e., Símpatia Musical] are trying to develop our style now that we have been doing this for a little while—it's been about six years. So, here in Panama, within *música típica* it is relatively difficult because people always recognize the big artists like Dorindo Cárdenas, Ulpiano Vergara, Victorio Vergara, Nenito Vargas—people like that who have a long history [*trayectoria*]. What we do as a young group is adapt/mould ourselves to their style and perform our pieces and develop a mixture [of styles] so that (God willing) further ahead we will have our own style. [...] We began by imitating and we are still imitating. [...]

Sean Bellaviti: Is this something every new group has to do?

FP: Exactly, in order to rise.³⁰⁵

As I discuss below, this form of stylistic mixing or “*fusión*” is a critical strategy employed by many *conjunto* musicians to establish connections and alignments to a particular stylistic orientation, which may become a part of their individual and/or respective *conjunto*’s stylistic signature. The point I wish to emphasize here, however, is the heightened sense of awareness under which this activity may be undertaken especially by new *conjuntos*. By openly aligning oneself with another *conjunto* and/or individual musician, one not only advertises their artistic goals and stylistic orientation, but also reaffirms the existence of an underlying distinction between imitators and originals.

³⁰⁴ Faustinito Pérez, personal communication, 2007.

³⁰⁵ Personal communication, 2007.

While imitating an established *conjunto* may help new *conjuntos* develop their own style and get through the difficult first years, it is rarely seen as an end in itself. And although many *conjuntos* do eventually perform covers and are considered imitators for much or all of their careers, most nevertheless aspire to achieve a degree of mass popularity in their own right and enjoy the economic benefits that come with it. It is in this respect that imitation may, over time, come to be regarded as an impediment to a *conjunto*'s commercial success, which is believed to be contingent on the development of an original style. Samy Sandoval came to this conclusion early in his career; he says, "after much analysis and observations, I realized that I was not accepted by the public because my style was a faithful copy of Alfredo [Escudero] and what I did was play all of his music" (Pérez Saavedra, 2000:138). Similarly, Sandra Sandoval notes that she was frequently criticized for the way she sang, which was exacerbated by the fact that she was an imitator. "People were ruthless, to put it mildly," she recalls,

and I received a thousand criticisms mainly for the fact that I only sang *saloma*, no lyrics, and to make matters worse I was an imitator, which worked against me because all imitators eventually lose if they do not change at some point and become creative. (Pérez Saavedra, 2000:243)

The solution, Samy says, was "to create our own style that would gain acceptance by the public" (ibid. 160).

Samy and Sandra's sentiments are overwhelmingly shared by members of semi-professional *conjuntos*. When I asked a number of young musicians what they believed their respective *conjuntos* had to do to in order to become "popular," their answers often focused on the limiting aspects of imitation. For Oscar Bernal (timbalero for Sensación Santeña), the solution was simply "not to imitate" and noted that for his part, he played the timbales in a

style was his own and not derivative.³⁰⁶ Edward Atunez (bassist for Sensación Santeña)

expanded on the idea by noting that “every *conjunto* must cultivate their own music and image to get ahead;” a mandate, as he went on to explain, that requires patience and persistence particularly in the highly competitive *música típica popular* scene:

Edward Atunez: Given that right now there are the big musicians who are at the summit, I think that further ahead—between four and five years—we [i.e., Sensación Santeña] will be able to live off music. [...]

Sean Bellaviti: So what does a new group like yours have to do to reach the level of the other [big groups]?

EA: For me, before anything else [one needs] a good group with their own music [who are] not imitating any musician who is already up there [i.e., famous]. You have to have your own music because when these musicians finish and retire people are going to incline towards the music of others. Because these musicians are not going to disappear—the idols from before will remain—however, people will look for new [performers] who have their own music. So I think it is important to familiarize people with one’s own music so as to be there when the big musicians retire.³⁰⁷

Atunez’s reference to professionalism is particularly significant as it speaks to the relationship notions of stylistic individuation share with ideas of *conjunto* popularity and commercial success; a relationship that in various respects is understood to be a causal one.

The need for heightened stylistic individuation was generally not a central concern for those of my informants who belonged to successful (e.g., professional) *conjuntos*. Most tended to regard stylistic originality to be a given when discussing their music and at times were even dismissive or bewildered of the fact that aspiring *conjuntos* imitated at all. This, however, does not undermine the fact that both *conjunto* professionals and semi-professionals share similar ideas about the importance of stylistic individuation particularly as a condition for commercial success. Take, for example, the following commentary by Osvaldo Ayala who observes that neither his *conjunto* nor those of his contemporaries began

³⁰⁶ Personal communication, 2007.

³⁰⁷ Personal communication, 2007.

by performing covers. “This is bad,” he says, “Why [perform] covers? I began and never did covers.” Rather, “[w]hat one needs to be is persistent and produce music that is good, creative and that is not a copy. I believe what is innovative becomes popular; it cannot be a copy.”³⁰⁸

While Ayala’s pointed commentary may fail to take into account the way *conjunto* economics have changed over the course of forty-plus years, it does express a common attitude among all practitioners, namely that imitation (or for that matter being labelled an “imitator”) is not only a negative attribute, but also ultimately an impediment to commercial success. Moreover, it also points to the fact that the practice of imitation and its attendant discourse does conceptual work particularly in reinforcing the idea that professional *conjuntos* have an original style and semi-professional *conjuntos* generally do not. The ideological continuities that exist between the imitators and imitated can be understood as one that is mutually reaffirming and at times mutually beneficial as is implied in the following statement by Sandra Sandoval:

I realize that I am frequently imitated and I find this to be a good thing because it tells me that people like what I am doing and so they imitate me. That pleases me because it is proof that they like what I do. (Pérez Saavedra, 2000:306)

One aspect of style which is often prioritized often above all others is the need for original (i.e., previously unrecorded) repertoire. Indeed, acquiring and recording new material is a major step in a *conjunto*’s metamorphosis into “original” artists and for that reason I devote the following chapter to the subject. It is important, however, to note at this point that while my informants cited repertoire often—partly, I suspect, because it is a parameter that is easily isolable in conversation and whose original status could be taken at face value—few seemed to suggest that *estilo* could be reduced to repertoire alone. As

³⁰⁸ Personal communication, 2008.

discussed in the penultimate section, style touches on a number of music-structural parameters as suggested by the well-known fact that even *conjuntos* with original repertoire can fail to become economically self-sufficient (i.e., one of the telltale signs of a highly-individuated style). Prior to doing so, however, I examine in more detail in the following section the strong connection between a style and *conjunto*, and the creative implications it has on the various individuals who make up the unit.

The role of the *conjunto* in the formation of style-based identities

Among *música típica popular* practitioners, discourses of style often prioritize the *conjunto* as the principal locus for style-based identities. That is to say, while notions of stylistic individuation do extend to the level of the individual practitioner (e.g., as is often the case for accordionists/owners), more often than not *conjunto* musicians are understood to be variously complicit in the (re)production of a style that a) is specific to their given nexus and b) may or may not overlap with their own individual musical tastes and interests. The relationship of the individual practitioner to the nexus frequently involves an interplay between two specific ideas regarding the production of *conjunto* styles. On one hand there exists the notion that it is the accordionist who determines the group's style and that the other musicians play a supportive role in the realization of that style. This notion is a particularly prevalent one and is often connected with both an understanding of a specific *conjunto*'s history and the role of the accordionist as not only a musician, but also its owner and chief musical-stylistic architect. Somewhat in contrast to this idea, some of my informants have argued for an alternate model in which the *conjunto* is imagined as an aggregate of many unique styles specific to each individual within the ensemble, which when combined form

one coherent and collective style. This notion of a collective *conjunto* style can provide a basis for *integrantes* to exercise and/or assert a measure of creative agency in a musical practice that is otherwise very much centred around the personality and role (e.g., musical, directorial, etc.) of the accordionist. While both ideas represent relatively contrasting ideas of the relationship between the *conjunto* and its members vis-à-vis notions of a group style/stylistic identity, they also tend to reaffirm the importance of the *conjunto* nexus itself as the principal locus for style-based identities. The following two subsections examine these two points of view in greater detail.

Conjunto style as an extension of an accordionist's style

The significance of the accordionist as the principal exponent and architect of a *conjunto*'s style has a historical basis and is rooted in the violin tradition where the violinist came to be regarded as the star performer and principal focus of a performance. The role of a singular star performer within the *conjunto* paradigm would continue and gain traction within the accordion tradition particularly as *conjuntos* came to emulate the urban-identified *orquestas* and expand the role of the (male) singer in particular. The special position accorded to the accordionist within the unit has both a musical and extramusical basis: the accordion is arguably *the* principal voice in the ensemble—performing all of the melodic material and generally abstaining from ostinato-based roles—and is also the nominal and actual owner of the business, making him/her one of the few individuals who are truly indispensable within the ensemble.

Given the accordionist's unique position of control within the *conjunto* it is not surprising that most informants tend to single out this individual as the source and/or

architect of their respective *conjunto*'s style. In this respect a *conjunto*'s style is sometimes characterized as an extension of the accordionist's individual style, which becomes adopted and realized by each individual member of the *conjunto*. This is especially true for (younger) musicians performing in older, more established groups where there is an expectation that they will adapt to the accordionist's style regardless of whether or not they identify with that particular style themselves. In an interview with *tumbero* Orlando Ortíz, for example, he explains that when performing with LM he often tailors his approach to suit Alfredo Escudero's traditionalist style, which in his case means limiting himself to specific ensemble roles and performance techniques. "I can do more than you imagine," he told me between performances, "but I don't do it because of [my] discipline and respect for *the Panamanian cumbia*." Ortíz describes his role within this ensemble as primarily one of providing "accompaniment," which he distinguishes from other moments in a performance that he feels he is more at liberty to develop his own material and showcase his own personal style:

I express myself in the precise moment that I invent the fills, counter strokes, muffled strokes [and] free strokes. [...] Who knows, maybe I can do more than what you see, however, the music—*cumbia*—doesn't lend itself to many things [as does] reggae, merengue [and] salsa because... You have to be very careful for *lo nuestro* [i.e., what is ours], the autochthonous Panamanian *música típica*, which is *cumbia*. So I play the original [*cumbia*] and do what I can in the precise moment and return and enter with the adequate *rumba* [e.g., rhythmic pattern/ostinato].

Ortíz's cautiousness in areas of genre mixing and palpable reverence for "autochthonous Panamanian *música típica*" is closely linked to Escudero's reputation as a traditionalist and the connection to notions of musical vernacularism implied by that particular orientation.

As the foregoing suggests, Ortíz's performance approach is not only one that is specific to the needs of the ensemble (in his case he is expected to fulfill an accompanist role), but also circumscribed and guided by what he perceives to be Escudero's

particular/individual style. For many *conjunto* musicians, these criteria form an important basis for understanding their particular role within their given nexus. Bassist Jorge Jaén, for example, noted on a number of occasions that working in EOS required a very conscious and deliberate decision on his part to adapt to Cárdenas' particular style, which, like Ortiz, involved a minimal degree of overlap with his own musical interests. Similarly, one young semi-professional timbalero noted that his *conjunto* placed no expectations on developing an original style given that their “music [was] one of imitation.” Instead, his job was “to find different rhythms from Alfredo [Escudero], from Ulpiano [Vergara], from Osvaldo [Ayala]” depending on the composition being performed.³⁰⁹ In all of these instances, notions of stylistic individuation are not only firmly centred around the *conjunto* nexus, but also around the accordionist/owner of the given nexus.³¹⁰

While most *conjunto* musicians recognized that the accordionist, by virtue of his/her role within the ensemble and stake in the business, often has a significant control of a *conjunto*'s sound, some also suggested that this control tended to obscure those contributions made by other members of the ensemble. Guitarist Joel “Negro” Quintero for example, notes that in the case of his ensemble, LPC, Samy often works closely with the percussionists in developing the patterns and composite rhythms specific to the group and at times to a given composition. In his capacity as an arranger, Samy also occasionally offers advice on issues of harmony; however, as it concerns the application of these ideas to the guitar, he adds, “the rhythm and flavour are mine, [just] me. No one taught me this, I do this.” Quintero describes

³⁰⁹ Atanasio Vergara Nuñez, personal communication, 2007.

³¹⁰ The fact that the stylistic preferences of the individual *integrante* are generally secondary to those of the owner/accordionist would seem to create the conditions where musicians may become stylistically ‘pigeonholed’ as a result of their professional track record. Certainly Ortiz’s statement that he can “do more” would suggest that at the very least the onus is on the musician to advertise their stylistic versatility. On the other hand, I am aware of many musicians who moved from innovative- to traditionally-oriented ensembles and vice versa (Jorge Jaén, for example, performed several years with Lucho De Sedas innovative-identified *conjunto* before becoming a member of EOS).

his relationship to the *conjunto*'s stylistic “evolution” as a combination of fortuitous and productive synchronicity. He notes, for instance, that when incorporating elements salsa into the *conjunto*'s style the group borrowed heavily from the *combos nacionales*, which were ensembles that he had been listening to since childhood—Quintero cites Roberto y sus Zafras and Los Mozambique in particular as important personal influences. In another instance he observes that his own guitar style and *charasqueo* technique in particular have been described as having a “Haitian” quality,³¹¹ an attribute that fits well with the group’s reputation for genre mixing and “fusions.” While Quintero’s personal style appears to have a strong correlation with that of his *conjunto*, he observes, however, that the creative process was neither a case of intentional genre mixing nor particularly collaborative:

I worked hard to dedicate myself to [developing] one style and I achieved it! It was afterwards that I realized I was playing both styles, Haitian with *tipico*. In reality, however, I never thought I was playing [Haitian-sounding] music. [...] I was inventing this for me. [...] No one was involved in the moment that I was doing this. This was me inventing.

Quintero adds that sometimes even his own *conjunto* (and Samy Sandoval in particular) initially had difficulty accepting some of his ideas.

While Quintero’s observations suggest that he is—or at least perceives himself to be—actively engaged in the *conjunto*’s stylistic development (particularly in terms of their innovative orientation), he is also aware that this is generally not something that is well recognized by the general public. Quintero notes that the traditional role of the accordionist/owner as spokespersons for their ensembles may have something to do with it. “Those of us who are the musicians,” he says matter-of-factly, “shouldn’t be doing interviews. They [i.e., the owners] are always the ones that do the interviews.” Quintero’s outlook is one that is shared by many *integrantes* who, while reticent to openly criticize the

³¹¹ Quintero was not specific aspects of his *charasqueo* were “Haitian” in character.

conventions upon which their livelihood is dependent, have suggested that the *conjunto* paradigm poses a significant barrier to their own musical and professional self-determination. Edwin Vergara (bassist for RS), for example, has suggested that the issue is connected to performance roles within the ensemble where the *integrantes* are often thought to provide a supporting role in relation to the accordionist. “The accordion carries all of the rhythm,” he pointed out, “so it’s possible that [people] do not talk about us [i.e., the other musicians/*integrantes*] because one has to stay behind the accordionist. For that reason they do not talk about the bassist [or] guitarist.”³¹² Similarly, José “Joseito” Quintero (guitarist for LM) noted that the *conjunto* ensemble paradigm offers very limited opportunities for *integrantes* to be recognized as something more than a nexus participant, stating:

the only way an *integrante* (like me or a bassist) can stand out or becomes famous like the accordionist, is to be very good at standing out. For example, if the singer plays *churraca* or the guitarist is a singer and is famous, or the accordionist doesn’t sing [...], that’s the only way to standout, because they sing. But as long as you are a guitarist, a *tumbero* or “so and so back there,” you’ll always stay there.³¹³

The group dynamics Quintero is referring to are familiar to all *conjunto integrantes* and suggest that notions of stylistic individuation that actively emphasize the integrity of the nexus are also liable to conceal creative work carried out by its constituent members typically by conferring the majority of the credit onto specific individuals such as the accordionist and in certain respects lead singers.

Uneven relationships such as those described above are a prominent feature of *conjunto* performance sensibilities, where often there is at least a tacit understanding among musicians of the accordionists/owners’ authority. The implications of idealizing the *conjunto* as ‘one man show’ are varied and must be understood in relation to the *conjunto* business

³¹² Personal communication, 2007.

³¹³ Personal communication, 2008.

model—where the owner retains near complete control of the *conjunto*'s economic affairs thus ensuring the ensemble's readiness and effectiveness (see Chapter 8)—among other things. Having said that, however, *conjuntos* are by tradition and/or design remarkably stable units and while minimal, *integrantes* do have a degree of control of their economic affairs (such as job security discussed in Chapter 8). Not coincidentally, as I show below, some *integrantes* do envision alternate creative paradigms in which they are understood to take an active role in the development of their particular *conjunto*'s musical style.

Conjunto style as a collective of many styles

The notion that a *conjunto*'s style is a combination or collective of multiple individual styles serves, among other things, to promote the idea that *conjunto* musicians/*integrantes* exercise a measure of creative agency in both the *conjunto*'s and their own individuation processes. In this context, notions of a collective style are based on the belief that each musician in a *conjunto* can cultivate a performance style that is uniquely theirs and through cooperation can contribute to the development of their *conjunto*'s style as well. When discussing their relationship to an ensemble style in these terms, musicians tend to emphasize the importance of teamwork and the development of common aesthetic goals. LPN *integrantes* Eury De La Rosa and Luis Carlos "Chivo" García described the process as one of "adaption." "Every group has their style," explained De La Rosa, and García added "Their musical style."

Eury De La Rosa: Our style is *alegre* [i.e., happy, exciting], romantic... Within the *alegria* is romanticism and romanticism is a danceable style. All of this combined produces a result and the result (thanks to God) has been a success.

Sean Bellaviti: What are the elements that are "*alegre*"?

EdlR: The emotion that the members contribute.

Luis Carlos García: The spice![laughs]

- SB: The movements, the dancing...?
- EdlR: For instance, Luis Carlos has his own style of playing bass among other things. And Rufinito [i.e., Rufino García Jr.] with his *churraca*, *alegría*,[unclear] and...
- LCG: His own style as well.
- EdlR: Nenito [Vargas'] way of singing, which thanks to God has been very well liked. So, all of these complementing [elements] have assisted in our acceptance by the public.³¹⁴

Like Quintero, both De La Rosa and García believe they have some say in the production of their *conjunto*'s unique style. Furthermore, the creative process they describe is one of heightened collectivity in which each member of LPN is thought to be integral to the group's stylistic identity. While generally not the norm, the case of LPN represents a more democratic approach to style formations, where the *conjunto*'s style is believed to be created more collectively than other groups and in the process also reaffirms the integrity of the nexus within the sphere of *música típica popular* performance practices. Not coincidentally, LPN are also economically more democratic than others *conjuntos*, operating in certain respect as what their *integrantes* describe as a "cooperative" (see footnote above).

As the foregoing suggests, discourses of style often incorporate ideas about creativity, particularly as understood in terms of notions of originality. It is in this way that the *conjunto* is understood by many to constitute an important locus for style formations as it establishes the boundaries and possibilities for the production of meaningful differences. The conventional organization of *música típica popular* is such that for most musicians to contribute to style formation—be it their own and/or that of an ensemble—and ultimately influence the genre itself, they have to work with a *conjunto*. Freelancers are few and (with the exception of composers) generally lack influence and authority where style is concerned.

³¹⁴ Personal communication, 2008. Timbale player Edwin Quintero was also present during this interview, which took place in the *conjunto*'s bus before a *baile*.

Such appeared to be the case for retired singer/*salomera* Serafina “Serín” Barrios who notes that on many occasions throughout her career she was sought out perform with *conjuntos* on an ad hoc basis—usually filling in for the regular singer when they could not make a particular performance. Barrios credited her success on these occasions to her ability to adapt to the *conjunto*’s (pre-established) style as well as that of its *salomera* to the extent that sometimes the audience “did not notice that another musician was singing.” Following is an excerpt of our conversation in which Barrios answers my rather pointed question about her role as an imitator.

Sean Bellaviti: When you sang with these groups did you imitate the way the [regular] singer sang?

Serafina Barrios: Yes, I imitated them.

SBel: So when you played with Dorindo [Cárdenas] you imitated Eneida Cedeño?

SBar: Yes.

SBel: And when you played with Victorio [Vergara]?

SBar: Lucy Quintero. [...]

SBel: So you didn’t have your own style?

SBar: No, there I didn’t add my own style.

On the other hand, Barrios noted that the only times in which she performed in her “own style” were with *conjuntos* in which she was a member or on the occasions in which she participated in recording a composition for “the first time.”³¹⁵

Barrios’ experience and/or perception of the expectations placed on non-*conjunto* members addresses a number of relevant issues related to the notion of style as a *conjunto*-specific attribute, namely the importance of membership to a particular nexus as a condition for participating in its stylistic development as well as the role of recording technology in the historicization of specific stylistic attributes—which I will examine below in connection with *conjunto* compositional practices. Thus on the one hand, while freelance musicians exist,

³¹⁵ Personal communication, 2008.

they are given little space for input and are generally expected to conform. Moreover, it would appear that the very large majority of *música típica popular* musicians get the bulk of their work by playing in *conjuntos* precisely because freelance work is not the norm nor (as we have seen in Chapter 8) particularly economically viable. On the other hand, however, the more general point I endeavour to make here concerns the role of the *conjunto* as the principal locus for the production specific style formations *regardless* of whether it is perceived primarily as an extension of the accordionist's style or a collective of many individual styles. It is in this respect that notions of style also parallel those features of *conjunto* economics that contribute to the integrity and stability of the nexus.

Practical approaches to developing an individual style

In the foregoing I have endeavoured to show how notions of stylistic orientation and individuation have come to embody particular values that are said to inform the musical choices made by *conjunto* musicians. While most of my informants had no difficulty in describing in general terms the qualities that made one *conjunto* different and/or similar to another, very often musicians found it difficult to articulate the specific musical characteristics presumed to be at the basis of these distinctions. The reason for this, I was often told, is that *conjunto* musicians acquire performance competencies “*empíricamente*” (empirically), through observation, experience and informal instruction. Most it seemed found little use for a strictly codified music-theoretical language or, for that matter, the notation-based jargon used by musicians trained in conventional (Western European) music theory. However, as my informants described the musical qualities that meaningfully distinguished one performance style from another, it was assumed that these qualities were in

some sense present in the sound and structure of the music they performed and listened to.

The following, therefore, aims to identify through a limited number of examples the practical *approaches* (rather than an inventory of musical traits) used by musicians in the development of particular style formations.

Central to most every discussion of style is the idea that the creative process is one of mixing elements found both within and without the genre so as to create something new and unique. The term used most often by my informants to describe this idea was “*fusión*” or “fusion,” which was variously used to denote a particular musical parameter (e.g., “*Esto es un fusión*” or “This is a fusion”) or creative process (e.g., “*Estoy fusionando...*” or “I am fusing...”). “*Fusión*,” it seemed, had many applications, however, here I will discuss just two which I have found to be central to the notion of style formations. One is the idea that the styles of individual *música típica popular* practitioners can be combined in various ways so as to create one’s own style. The other is the idea that performance modalities and conventions specific to other (i.e., non-*música típica popular*) genres can also become combined with established genre conventions so as to create so called ‘new’ sounds and potentially contribute to the formation of an original style. In the following, I will refer to these two approaches as “fusions of style” and “fusions of genre,”³¹⁶ respectively, and show that while similar, both approaches also have implications to notions of stylistic individuation and orientation that are relatively unique to each.

³¹⁶ Both in terms of concept and nomenclature, I owe a debt to Benjamin Elon Brinner’s excellent chapter on the topic of “musical mixtures” (2009:215-264) in which he also uses the phrase “fusions of styles.” In Brinner’s case, however, his use of the term “style” is more analogous to my use of the term “genre”—which is a distinction that appears to be less critical to his analysis as it is to mine.

Fusions of styles

The idea of “fusions of styles” is meant to highlight the role that conventional/genre-based practices play in the individuation process or, rather, a creative approach that draws primarily on the conventions that have come to constitute the *música típica popular* genre. This approach is one that is said to have been adopted by a wide range of *música típica popular* practitioners including those who have established reputations as innovators. Such is the case with Osvaldo Ayala who in addition to incorporating aspects of other genres into his music—upon which his reputation as an innovator is largely based—also drew inspiration from specific *música típica popular* practitioners whom he admired greatly. “When I was a child,” Ayala recalled,

I listened to a man who has since passed away called José Vergara (who was also happened to be from my parents’ hometown). José Vergara was a great musician and great accordionist. Dorindo Cárdenas was also someone I always admired. I admired him as a human being and special person, *and* also as a great accordionist. For me Dorindo Cárdenas is one of the best accordionists Panama ever had.³¹⁷

Similarly, in an interview Ceferino “Kako” Nieto described Samy Sandoval’s formative process as one of broad-based imitation and “mixing” of many accordion styles so as to develop his own individual style. “If you listen to Samy before he was famous,” Nieto told me,

Ceferino Nieto: he played identical to Alfredo Escudero. [...] Samy was very intelligent. Have you heard [accordionist] Yín Carrizo play?
Sean Bellaviti: Yes.

CN: Well, Yín Carrizo was very famous and [accordionist] Teresín Jaén as well as various other musicians. So Samy began practicing their music and mixing each of their styles. He got this from Dorindo [sings an example of an accordion melody while miming the way Dorindo’s frequently creates strong dynamic accents by squeezing the accordion bellows in an almost jerky way] and things from Alfredo Escudero.

SB: So in [Samy’s playing] one can hear influences from all over the place?

³¹⁷ Personal communication, 2008.

CN: Perhaps today not so much because [...] he has developed his own style.
SB: But before it was more noticeable?
CN: Before you could notice it a bit more. Also, [he] is very skilled at hiding it, [but] if you are a musician you can notice it: "Hey, this is from Ceferino Nieto. This thing is from Alfredo. This is Dorindo's and this is Teresín's."
[laughs] You know how this is, it worked for him.³¹⁸

Osvaldo's and in particular Nieto's observations not only highlight the notion that stylistic individuation can result from the product of creative exchange between genre practitioners (*cum* genre conventions), but also highlight the role of stylistic fusion or mixing as a means of enabling a *heightened* sense of individuation between related styles. As Nieto describes it, the idea of stylistic fusion draws on the assumption that individual styles are to some extent transferable; they can be learned and emulated. More importantly he highlights the common assumption that exact replication or imitation of a particular style is rarely an end-goal in itself, but rather a means to the end of achieving a heightened sense of stylistic individuation. The idea that one can claim creative ownership to a particular style-based formation as implied, for example, in Nieto's assertion that "This is Dorindo's" and so forth. In this context, the act of "mixing" and combining a wide range of variously individuated performance styles becomes a way of weakening or even "hiding" (rather than strengthening or revealing, as might reasonably be supposed) the links to one's musical influences and degree of one's creative indebtedness.

The idea that imitating *and* combining multiple styles is often a necessary part of the creative process of stylistic individuation is one that is shared by many, and in particular young and aspiring, *conjunto* musicians. In some case the approach is one that is adopted a number of members of a *conjunto* and becomes in effect a means of creating a collective style. Faustinito Pérez, for example, notes that when his *conjunto* began "it imitated other

³¹⁸ Personal communication, 2007.

genres, other music and musicians,” which he says included “the style of Ulpiano [Vergara], the style of Victorio [Vergara] and other musicians including Dorindo [Cárdenas].” “It is in that way,” he adds, that the *conjunto* developed its “own style.”³¹⁹ In a similar account, Pérez (bassist for El Simpatía Musical) notes that his *conjunto* has been in the process of working out their “own style” since its inception around six years prior. He describes the process as “relatively difficult” given that Panamanian audiences “always recognize the big artists like Dorindo Cárdenas, Ulpiano Vergara, Victorio Vergara, Nenito Vargas—people like that who have a long trajectory [i.e., performance history].” Pérez explains the *conjunto*’s creative strategy in the following terms:

- Pérez: What we do as a young group is mould ourselves to their style and perform our pieces and work out a mixture [of styles] so that (God willing) further ahead we will have our own style. [...] We began by imitating and we are still imitating. [...]
- SB: Is this something every new group has to do?
- P: Exactly, in order to make it.

When I asked Pérez what some of the more salient aspects of his *conjunto*’s “style” were he identified their “rhythm”—noting that the group’s timbalero uses a second “salsa cowbell” in addition to the standard (single and larger) cowbell—and the style of their accordionist who, he adds, had at one time imitated the accordion styles of “Victorio, Nenito, Osvaldo [and] Alfredo,” but “now [...] has his own style.” Upon further inquiries, Pérez noted that rather than discrete elements, it is the combined effect of the resultant “mix” of different instruments and performance styles that give a style its most defining qualities—reminding me “that is why they call it a ‘conjunto’.”³²⁰

As Pérez and others have suggested, identifying the precise markers of an individual style is challenging as it runs counter to the holistic sensibilities thought by *conjunto*

³¹⁹ Personal communication, 2007.

³²⁰ Personal communication, 2007.

practitioners to be essential to achieving a successful stylistic fusion or mix. Tellingly, these challenges also speak to the idea that stylistic fusions are often an effective means of camouflaging (rather than highlighting) its own development/creative processes. Based on my experiences and interactions with *conjunto* practitioners I would suggest that stylistic individuation, if and/or when it can be identified, is very often the result of instituting slight variations to a variety of established—i.e., generic and, in turn, often variously individuated—performance conventions *or* combining these conventions in a unique way. Following is a look at one particular stylistic formation that is illustrative of the fusion of style approach.

A case study: The *cinquillo* bass pattern as a marker of *conjunto* style

An example of the fusion of style approach can be observed in the role of individual bass patterns in defining the particular sound and style of LPN, a *conjunto* whose stylistic orientation I have already suggested is located somewhere at the centre of the genre's innovative-traditionalist continuum. As I have discussed in Chapter 5, *música típica popular* bass lines tend to be highly patterned in the sense that they are generally organized around a (usually one-bar) rhythmic ostinato and voice each chord or sequence of chords in a given chord progression similarly. Moreover, like most ostinato-based instrumental practices characteristic of the genre, changes in the bass pattern tend to be organized around the pervasive binary *baqueteo-rumba* compositional. For these reasons and in these respects bass

patterns are often stable elements of a *conjunto*'s sound—tending to recur from composition to composition—and as such are implicated in sensibilities of style.

That attributes of LPN's style extended to the role of the bass was confirmed for me on one occasion when EOS bassist, Jorge Jaén was asked by LPN to fill in for their bassist Luis Carlos “Chivo” García who could not make a particular *baile* performance. While traveling with the group to the *baile* I asked Jaén whether the gig required any special preparation on his part. He noted this was not the case given that as a long time fan of the group he was well acquainted with their repertoire *and* García's particular bass style.³²¹ True to form, Jaén did play differently than when I had seen him perform with EOS and in several important respects, which I will discuss now.

In this case study I will focus on LPN's use of a specific bass pattern that I call the “*cinquillo* bass pattern” (see Figure 9.3 below), which is predominantly featured during the rumba section of their *cumbia agarrado* repertoire. Among its formal characteristics are its ostinato function, rhythmic-metric structure which is organized loosely around the *cinquillo* rhythmic cell (see Figure 9.2 below), melodic-harmonic voicing (alternating between a root position tonic chord and 2nd inversion dominant chord) and manner of articulation (generally detached and staccato). The *cinquillo* bass pattern is of particular interest here both in terms of its significance to the genre as a whole and LPN's style in particular, which I discuss in turn below.

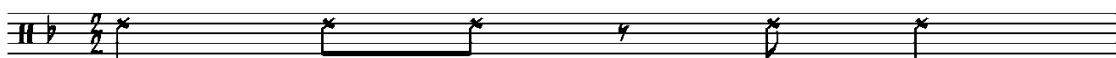


Figure 9.2: Cinquillo rhythmic cell

³²¹ Personal communication, 2007.



Figure 9.3: Sample LPN bass pattern played during the *rumba* section of *cumbia agarrado* repertoire

Bass patterns organized around or outlining the *cinquillo* rhythmic cell were originally a feature of commercial Colombian vallenato that became a part of *conjunto* bass practice around the mid- to late 1970s. *Conjunto* recordings from that period suggest that the approach was likely pioneered by long time EOS bassist Hernán Vergara (1935-2006) who, as an alternative to the *tresillo* bass pattern—famously featured on Roberto “Papi” Branda’s recording of “Murga de Panama” (see Chapter 6)—began to incorporate *cinquillo*-based patterns in both the *baqueteo* and especially *rumba* sections of the group’s *cumbia agarrado* repertoire. Vergara’s punchy and often staccato playing (which was not unlike his Colombian vallenato contemporaries) complimented Dorindo Cárdenas’ highly accented and rhythmically driven accordion style and soon became a feature of the *conjunto*’s sound and style. Given the group’s exceptional mass popularity at the time, Vergara’s style came to be widely imitated by many *conjunto* bassists and can be heard on numerous recordings of *cumbia agarrado* repertoire from the late 1970s onwards.³²²

While at one time denoting an engagement outside the genre, due to its broad acceptance by *conjunto* practitioners the *cinquillo* bass approach soon became a feature of the genre to the extent that today it is often associated with an older more traditionalist style. Among contemporary professional *conjuntos*, only EOS and LM continue to feature the

³²² While EOS are not usually credited as innovators per se (and it is possible that Vergara copied the bass line from another *conjunto* bassist), they were often instrumental in determining which innovations would become mainstream. Lucho De Sedas, for example, pointed out that during their heyday EOS were trendsetters among genre practitioners and added “once Dorindo included a bass everyone else did the same” (personal communication, 2010).

cinquillo bass approach (among others) during the *baqueteo* and *rumba* sections of their *cumbia agarrado* repertoire whereas in the music of RS and LPC (the genre's archetypal innovators) it has been phased out all together. This transition of the *cinquillo* bass pattern from "innovation" to "tradition" is illustrative of the transformational processes that are central to the idea of genre as embodying a sense of (broadly) shared convention, relative to which my discussion LPN's bass style is firmly situated.

LPN is unique from other *conjuntos* in that the *cinquillo* bass pattern is featured in quite nearly every *cumbia agarrado* composition they perform, which (in contrast to other *conjuntos*) constitutes the large majority of their total repertoire. When considered in isolation, this bass pattern would seem to suggest a strong traditionalist orientation and possibly a degree of indebtedness to EOS—the original innovators in this case. However, when considered in terms of its placement within the larger composition its meaning is rather different. This can be observed in Figure 9.4, which shows excerpts of the *baqueteo* and *rumba* bass patterns featured in two compositions by EOS and LPN, respectively—chosen here because they are illustrative of each ensemble's approach to *cumbia agarrado* bass practice in general. Having noted already strong similarity between each *conjunto*'s *rumba* bass patterns, I will focus on their respective *baqueteo* bass patterns. EOS's *baqueteo* bass pattern differs from its *rumba* counterpart particularly in terms of its voicing and slightly more legato phrasing, however, its rhythmic structure is still very much organized around the *cinquillo* rhythmic cell notable in its coincidence on beats "1," up-beat of "2," up-beat of "3" and "4."

In the case of LPN, however, the contrast between the *baqueteo* and *rumba* bass patterns is much more pronounced not only in terms of the former's voicing and (legato and

sustained) articulation, but particularly in its general avoidance of the *cinquillo* rhythm altogether. In fact, this *baqueteo* pattern is one that is purposefully characteristic of a rock ballad bass approach making it particularly well-suited to the group's use of ballad-inspired compositional techniques during the *baqueteo* sections of a composition (this will be discussed in the following chapter). As such, it is also denotive of an innovative orientation in that it is located (at this point in the genre's history) at the periphery of the host of shared conventions that have come to connote with varying degrees of specificity the *música típica popular* genre.

The musical score is presented in a black-bordered box. It contains two sets of bass line patterns, each with two sections: Baqueteo and Rumba. The top section is titled "DOBLE TRAICIÓN" BASS EXCERPTS PERFORMED BY EOS. The bottom section is titled "POBRE TONTO ENAMORADO" BASS EXCERPTS PERFORMED BY LPN. Both sections show bass lines on a staff with a clef, key signature, and time signature of 2/4. Chords are indicated above the notes. In the Baqueteo section of 'Doble traición', chords include CMI, CMI, G7, G7. In the Rumba section, chords include Bb7, Eb, Bb7 SIMILE..., Eb. In the Baqueteo section of 'Pobre tonto enamorado', chords include Eb, Eb, GMI, GMI. In the Rumba section, chords include Bb7, Eb, Bb7 SIMILE..., Eb.

Figure 9.4: Bass patterns played on two compositions performed in the *cumbia agarrado* subgenre by EOS and LPN, respectively³²³

³²³ The excerpts listed in Figure 9.4 are found on the following recordings: “Doble traición,” *Espejos del alma*, 2006; “Pobre tonto enamorado,” *Diferente*, 2007. Note: to facilitate comparison the excerpts taken from “Doble traición” have been transposed from the key of “Ab” to “Eb” and the pitches up an interval a perfect fifth.

In trying to understand the significance of this particular performance parameter within the context of intra-genre/inter-style exchange, it is necessary to embrace a number of assumptions shared by most *música típica popular* practitioners. The first common assumption is that LPN (like *all* other professional *conjuntos*) is an exponent of the *música típica popular* genre *and* has a style that is highly individuated so as to distinguish them from *all* other *conjuntos*—something that cannot be assumed of most semi-professional *conjuntos*. As such, the expressions of style that I refer to here are those which are meaningfully situated within the referential framework of the *música típica popular* genre, which as I have argued is often conceptualized in terms of notions of innovative and traditionalist orientations. The second assumption typical of most *música típica popular* practitioners is that features of style are to some degree present (or tangible and potentially detectable) in a *conjunto*'s musical output. I highlight these assumptions not to establish a set of analytical guidelines, but rather (and quite to the contrary) to emphasize the fact that the interrelated concepts of genre and style are, in their particulars, fundamentally subjective and as such may fare poorly when subjected to the scrutiny of structurally-oriented analytical models. That said, however, while musical analysis may fail to account for the entire phenomenon particularly as an evolving process (and certainly one that is noticeable/perceivable to my informants), it is capable of offering a glimpse (however ephemeral) of this particular form of musical exchange in action, which is my present objective.³²⁴

By examining the various implications of LPN's use of the *cinquillo* bass pattern it is possible to come to some conclusions about the fusions of style approach and its ability to

³²⁴ Shannon Dudley has identified a similar ‘gap’ between musical analysis/analyst and experience, noting that “the ultimate determining factor in where boundaries between genres and styles are drawn is the perception of musicians and listeners” (1996:296). Similarly in her case, the value of musical analysis “is in its power to make very important distinctions of musical sound (distinctions that are based on popular principles of evaluation and classification) and to sort these out from other factors in the reception of music” (*ibid.*).

inform ideas of stylistic orientation and individuation. When considered in isolation, the *cinquillo* pattern may denote not only a degree of indebtedness to EOS (the initial innovators), but also an engagement with the performance modalities that have become constitutive of genre sensibilities and, in this case, a traditional orientation. As such, it is reasonable to assume that LPN's use of this pattern would tend to have an attenuating effect as far stylistic individuation is concerned. What is important here is the understanding that fusion strategies are a way to mask these linkages. The fusion strategy adopted in this case is one that plays out within the binary *baqueteo-rumba* framework of a standard *música típica popular* composition. In this context, the ballad-style bass ostinato accompanying the *baqueteo* section creates a strong point of contrast with the more (traditionally-oriented) *cinquillo* ostinato pattern used in the *rumba* section. This fusion of two relatively different bass lines problematizes any strong correlation to a particular innovative and traditionalist orientation, and seems to be evocative of De La Rosa's earlier description of the *conjunto*'s style as a combination of "romanticism" and "alegria" (see above). Also important is the fact that while each individual parameter is not particularly unique (and in fact may be said to be quite derivative and/or strongly/conservatively rooted in genre convention), the combined effect is one that is specific to the group to the extent that LPN have, as Jaén implied when he subbed in for their bassist, cultivated a particularly unique and certainly recognizable bass style.

Fusions of genre

At its most basic, the turn of phrase "fusions of genre" refers to the practice of combining elements of two or more different genres so as to create a style that is new and unique. In

practice, however, genre fusions very often entail much more than a basic mixing of elements. As demonstrated at various points in this study, the practice of combining performance modalities of other genres is arguably as old as the *música típica popular* genre itself and is regarded by most practitioners to be an important catalyst in the genre's overall development over the course of the twentieth century. Having already provided a number of practical examples in previous chapters of how aspects of other genres have come to form part of conventional practice, I will now focus on its goals particularly in relation to the formation of style identities.

I will begin this discussion by citing at an excerpt of an interview with Osvaldo Ayala, in which he touches on a number of issues that I have found to be fundamental to the idea of genre fusions as employed by *conjunto* practitioners. As I have noted already, Ayala is largely regarded as one of the genre's most prolific innovators and, as the following excerpt suggests, he was well versed on the topic:

Sean Bellaviti: In terms of instrumentation, how do you see *música típica*? Is it vernacular music or has it always been a music that had something to do with the experience, so to speak, of being in a land of transit?

Osvaldo Ayala: I believe that it is principally a music with folkloric roots, but what we play is definitely neither folklore nor vernacular [music]. It is popular *música típica* with [other] elements—sometimes percussion instruments from salsa or, perhaps, soca or any other rhythm.

SB: So it always had this interchange?

OA: Yes. We can see that, for the moment, it's the dancer who likes [this music]. So we keep the dancers in the forefront and if we do something that we see they like we continue down that path.

SB: What do you think of the idea some people have that there exist forms of *música típica [popular]* that are more traditional than others?

OA: Yes, there are, even though many of the groups... We could say, for example, that Alfredo Escudero is for me one of the musicians most connected³²⁵ to traditional *cumbia*. However, when we go to what we call the “*rumba* [section]”—what in salsa is called the “*mambo*” [...]—they [i.e., LM] also add a little bit of salsa, which they call “*salsa montañera*.”

³²⁵ Ayala uses the term “*pegado*,” which literally means “glued” or “stuck.”

- Therefore, no one can say that they themselves are playing it [i.e., *cumbia*] exactly the way it is. Now no one does it that way.
- SB: However, it seems that at the same time there is a conception of what is *típico* and what is salsa.
- OA: Correct. [...] One can hear my group's [style of] salsa in certain songs more than others. However, if we are going to play for an audience that is strictly orthodox when it comes to the pure *música típica*...
- SB: What type of audience is that?
- OA: In my hometown of Paritilla [province of Los Santos], for example. If people like pure *cumbia*, then I play it that way—"plain" as we say.
- SB: So does that mean that the whole *conjunto* has to change and adapt?
- OA: We all change and play the music they like.³²⁶

In this interview Ayala references two important and correlated ideas central to ideas of genre fusions, namely 1) the efficacy (be it in practical/economic or aesthetic terms) of any particular mixture is often contingent on the prioritization of one single nominal genre—in this case, *música típica popular*—and 2) while fusions may eventually become conventions, thereby expanding the limits of the genre, the process very often relies on and also contributes to essentialist ideas regarding which aspects of the genre are thought to be immutable and should not be changed. Following is a closer look at these two ideas.

Ayala makes an important point when he notes that practices of genre fusions are quite common among *música típica popular* practitioners and not necessarily indicative of an innovative orientation per se. *Música típica popular* "traditional" or otherwise, he reminds me, is "neither folklore nor vernacular" music given that many of its conventions trace their roots to other (non-Panamanian) genres. That the most "traditional" exponents of the genre (i.e., LM) are understood to incorporate elements of salsa in their music is not only a testament to this fact, but also speaks to an established use of genre fusions as a means of enhancing and contributing to the development of one single and principal genre. In this context, the aesthetic goals underlying the process of genre fusions are more oriented toward

³²⁶ Personal communication, 2008.

convention in the sense that they place a premium on sensibilities of incorporation and blend (rather than pastiche or strong contrast, for example) in determining the efficacy of the mix. The reasons for this, as Ayala suggests, may be more practically than artistically motivated, and determined by audience expectations and performance contexts (a topic I address in greater detail in Chapter 12). So while traditionalists may claim a strong affinity to an established performance tradition and innovators less so, in practice all *conjuntos* can and do employ genre fusion strategies as part of their engagement with *música típica popular* conventions.

My second point is that an important part of any fusion strategy is developing an understanding of what exactly is being mixed. This is especially true for *conjunto* practitioners who, as I have just pointed out, are expected to maintain identification with the *música típica popular* genre even as they experiment with sounds and practices thought foreign to it. While in this particular interview Ayala does not specify what aspects of the genre he does *not* change, he does allude to the issue on a number of occasions such as when he suggests that his *conjunto* can, when necessary, perform in a more traditional (i.e., “plain/plain,” “pure” or “orthodox”) style. This awareness of genre conventions speaks to an important outcome of genre fusion strategies. While they are frequently understood as a means of expanding the limits and performance possibilities of the genre, in practice the process of fusing genres—as well as its success—is contingent on a shared understanding of what are perceived to be the most traditional or immutable elements of the genre. The presumption being that without these elements, *música típica popular* would cease to be perceived as such.

Not surprisingly, therefore, it has been my experience that among my informants, those who were actively engaged in mixing genres also tended to be the most vocal about what they regarded to be the defining and essential features of the genre. Thus by actively seeking change, genre innovators also actively construct and redefine the very boundaries which define the genre by identifying those aspects of the genre that they regard to be most idiomatic, unique and “traditional.” While this process might be seen as somewhat paradoxical in the sense that in its capacity of expanding the limits of (accepted) genre conventions, it is key to remember that fusions of genres not only rely on notions of tradition for their efficacy, but actively construct them as well.

In effect, musical change—especially one that is motivated by a desire to innovate—often demands an intimate understanding of not only what is being changed, but also what *has* to remain unchanged in order to maintain *the* genre. This is especially true in the case of strategies of genre mixing/*fusion*, where there is always a possibility (undesired, in the case of *conjunto* practitioners) that one genre will be confused for the other. What is more, these strategies, especially in the hands of performers with authority, actively construct the limits for defining the genre itself, not only based on stasis/tradition, but, perhaps counterintuitively, change.

In an effort to unravel the confluence of these two particular ideas—i.e., 1) that *música típica popular* remain the dominant/nominal genre and 2) the tendency of fusions to rely and indeed construct highly essentialist ideas of what constitutes the dominant/identifying traits of the genre), I will continue to examine the role of *conjunto* compositional form and in particular its role in structuring particular instrumental performance modalities. Here I will focus on the performance practices of *conjunto*

timbaleros and in particular their engagement with timbale traditions said to be associated with other genres and salsa in particular.

A case study: Timbale performance practices

While (as I have pointed out at various points in this study) fusion strategies are not limited to any one instrument or ensemble role, for various reasons the timbale does make a particularly interesting case study. Historically, practices of genre mixing have had a strong relationship to the timbale apparatus, both in terms of the development of the instrument and its attendant performance modalities. In certain respects the timbale apparatus has proven to be especially amenable to practices of genre mixing. Much of this can be credited to its development as a composite instrument to which, in addition to the original two-drum and cowbell configuration, are added-on (by way of stands and attachments) various other percussion instruments. Common additions include cowbells of various sizes, woodblocks (called “*claves*”), electronic drums (played on controller pads and pedals) and cymbals.³²⁷ More often than not these additional instruments are featured during the *rumba* section, which in turn has come to be regarded by *música típica popular* practitioners as the point in a composition in which instances of genre mixing and stylistic individuation are most pronounced. This, in turn, has come to highlight the significance of the *baqueteo* section and

³²⁷ Possibly the first addition to the basic two-drum/one-cowbell timbale setup was a medium size cymbal. Further research is required with respect to identifying the introduction of the use of the cymbal in *música típica popular*. Based on contemporary practices, the cymbal is mounted on a stand and placed just behind the large drum. If a second cymbal is used, it is either placed in front or just to the left of the timbales. To my knowledge, all contemporary *música típica popular* groups include at least one cymbal as part of the timbale configuration and its usage is reserved for “*repique*” (percussion “fills”) and “*cierre*” (band or percussion “breaks”).

timbale *baqueteo* pattern (from which the section derives its name) as an iconic marker of the *música típica popular* genre.

While the inclusion of additional percussion instruments to the timbale apparatus is often understood in terms of an engagement with outside genres, it is the manner in which they are played and integrated into established composite ostinati that is regarded as critical to their efficacy within the genre. In the following I address this issue by examining the use of salsa performance techniques by *conjunto* timbaleros. In particular I focus on the way that salsa has come to inform specific ideas of *conjunto* timbale performance practice mainly by providing a reference point for gauging important continuities/similarities and discontinuities/dissimilarities between the two timbale traditions, and thereby identifying those aspects which are regarded as less and more idiomatic of any one genre, respectively.

Since the 1970s, *conjunto* musicians have regularly turned to the musical genre known as salsa for ideas in their own innovative practices. Rooted in Cuban traditions such as *son* and *rumba*, salsa has come to be identified as a pan-American musical practice, largely created, performed, and listened to by Latin Americans resident in both South and North America. While it is possible to regard the impact of salsa on *música típica popular* as a continuation of the influence that Cuban music has had on the genre's early development, there are some significant differences to take into consideration. First, the degree to which salsa can be understood to embody a sense of shared conventions is sometimes problematized by the genre's increasingly transnational character. *Música típica popular* practitioners listen to salsa that is produced and identified along various geo-cultural continuums, such as salsa from New York, Puerto Rico, Colombia, and Panama, which may call into question what is meant by the term salsa. Perhaps most importantly, given the

timbale's particular historical development within *música típica popular*, aside from playing the same instrument, *conjunto* timbaleros seem to have little in common with their salsa counterparts as far as performance modalities are concerned. When accounting for these differences, *conjunto* practitioners often reference salsa as a kind of base-line practice from which not only to gauge the development of their own performance conventions, but also to determine those elements that have come to define convention itself.

When considering the relationship between salsa and *música típica popular* one obvious point of overlap is the fact that genres use the same instrument—i.e., the same general type of drums (i.e., commercially produced timbales) as well as cowbells, cymbals and more recently woodblocks. Performance continuities such as these not only provide a basis for imagining a shared history between the two genre-based practices, but also an ideological framework for understanding the significance of various discontinuities as well. Among the most commonly cited differences between the two timbale traditions is the prevalent use of the *baqueteo* technique by *conjunto* drummers as well as the absence of the *cascara* technique of playing on the shells of the drums and their unique configuration of the (larger and smaller) timbale drums. Here salsa serves as a reference not only for understanding the development of the *conjunto* timbale convention, but also for determining which aspects of this convention are unique to *conjuntos* and, thus, unmistakably generic. For contemporary *conjunto* timbaleros, however, the comparison is not always a favourable one and *conjunto* timbale practices tend to be regarded as a relative anomaly among timbale traditions. Highlighting the significance that salsa is thought to have on timbale practice as a whole, Amilkar Vasquez (a multi-percussionist who played with a salsa group from Las Tablas), for example, described the development of *conjunto* timbale practices as “mixture”

of various and relatively disparate Cuban and Cuban-derived performance practices that early *conjunto* drummers incorporated and adapted by imitating “salsa” musicians. The *baqueteo* pattern, he suggested, was “a kind of *cascara*” to which the “mambo” cowbell pattern was added after the fact. This seemingly haphazard approach to the development of one of the genre’s foundational practices also resembled Vasquez’s description of Samy Sandoval’s current approach to genre innovation, where he says:

What happens is that he is mixing other types of music on the accordion. He’s not playing strictly *típico*—or rather *típico* in the way it is understood here in Los Santos. He’s playing [Panamanian] *congo* rhythms on the congas [...] and this and that. And sometimes he includes some *guaguancó tumbaos* [e.g., rhythms] because he heard it recently.³²⁸

I cite Vasquez’s opinions here as they are shared by many of my informants, some of whom—taking salsa’s audible Cuban roots *and* pronounced Cubaphilic mapping as an indication of its older (read original and more authentic) provenance—have often described the *baqueteo* technique as “incorrect” and/or a “poorly imitated” version of Cuban music. Among my informants, only Dorindo Cárdenas and Ceferino Nieto (two of my eldest informants) seemed to acknowledge the possibility that the *conjunto baqueteo* technique and pattern is (as I argue in Chapter 5) a very well preserved example of an older timbale practice popularized by the Sonora Matancera in the 1930s and, as such, would also suggest that the *baqueteo* has more in common with the *martillo* pattern played on bongos in contemporary salsa ensembles than (as Amilkar and others have suggested) the timbale *cascara* pattern. Ironically, it is precisely due to its unknown origins and dissimilarity to contemporary timbale practices that the *baqueteo* technique has now come to be understood as one of the more defining markers and, in turn, essential components of the *música típica popular* genre (I shall revisit this topic shortly).

³²⁸ Personal communication, 2007.

While the salsa-connection has in certain respects come to mark the *conjunto* timbale practice as a relative anomaly among timbale traditions (e.g., salsa, vallenato, Latin rock, etc.), the differences between salsa and *música típica popular* has also proven to be a productive source for innovation for *conjunto* drummers. This idea is supported by a notion shared by many *conjunto* practitioners (and percussionists in particular) that competency in salsa performance practices is a useful tool *specifically* for developing one's own individual and/or a *conjunto* style.³²⁹ While a number of musicians are said to have developed competencies in salsa by listening to commercial recordings (as in the case Joel “Negro” Quintero discussed above), some have also developed competencies by playing in salsa bands (e.g., Ceferino “Kako” Nieto) and taking lessons with established salsa musicians (e.g., Christian Quintero). LPC timbalero, Andres “Huesito” Navarro, for example, took lessons with a salsa musician in Panama City. In his case the lessons were paid for by Samy Sandoval as a condition for his joining the *conjunto*. During an interview where several members of LPC were present, Navarro explained the underlying rationale behind Samy’s decision to have him study salsa; without any suggestion of resentment Navaro stated:

[The *conjunto*] didn’t believe in my work because the [timbalero before me] was very good. So I had to match him or surpass him in order to keep the work. There were many who [auditioned], so when Samy chose me he sent me to a salsa musician here in Panama.³³⁰

Navarro went on to explain that the lessons were not meant to have him become a salsa timbalero per se nor improve his abilities of conventional *conjunto* timbale practices, rather their purpose was to provide him with specific tools and techniques that at the very least

³²⁹ LPC tumbero Gustavo “Tavo” Flores, for example, noted that he often relied on Ceferino “Kako” Nieto’s experience as a salsa pianist when incorporating salsa techniques into his own playing. Highlighting a degree of selectivity in his approach, Flores told me that he did not use the “*masacote*” technique favoured by salsa percussionists, but (like salsa musicians) has included a third *conga* drum into his setup. Flores added: “I’m not a *salsero*, but more or less with what [Nieto] showed me we started to [use the third drum] in [our] pieces” (Personal communication, 2007).

³³⁰ Personal communication, 2007.

would allow him to conform to the group's particular stylistic orientation and (ideally) add to it as well. This was confirmed by Ceferino "Kako" Nieto who, being present during this conversation, pointed out that Navarro was already an established *conjunto* timbalero when he joined the group, and added:

Our group does many shots, many changes and Huesito had to work a lot. In fact, he knew how to imitate the timbalero we had before, but given that [he was now a member of the group] it was necessary he add his own part. [...] His own style.³³¹

In describing the role that salsa has come to have in the development of an individuated style, many *conjunto* practitioners tellingly used the term "*salsiada*" (salsafied) to identify a particular way of playing *música típica popular*: one which effectively blends or integrates elements of salsa with established *conjunto* conventions. Important to the present discussion is the way the term has come to denote a shared understanding of the uneven relationship between the two genres and/or primacy of a singular genre, which I argue is a fundamental principle of *conjunto* fusion strategies in general. This subtle albeit important distinction was initially lost on me and took some explaining on the part of my (often longsuffering) informants. Following is one such instance:

Sean Bellaviti: Do you go to Ulpiano's bailes?

Informant: Of course.

SB: Why?

Inf: I like his music.

SB: What aspects of his music do you like?

Inf: As long as it is *salsiada* music, I'm happy.

SB: What music?

Inf: Salsa, or that has salsa.

SB: Okay. That *has* salsa?

Inf: "Feeling."

SB: But salsa as in *salsa*?

Inf: [sings percussion example] Music with salsa.

SB: [...] But the *baqueteo* doesn't exist in salsa, correct?

Inf: No. You are understanding salsa music as in *salsa*. [I mean] salsa in the *típico* style.³³²

³³¹ Personal communication, 2007.

As this informant suggests, the meaning and use of the term “*salsiada*” is emblematic of the approach to fusions of genres adopted by *música típica popular* practitioners in general, particularly in terms of the way it suggests a prioritization of a single nominal genre and its unequivocal *conjunto* identity—for example, I have not yet heard of a case of *típico*-ified salsa. In this context, terms such as “salsa” or “*música salsiada*” are often used to distinguish particular performance styles within the *música típica popular* genre. For example, these terms are often (although not exclusively) associated with more innovative oriented groups—such as Ulpiano Vergara, Samy and Sandra Sandoval, and Osvaldo Ayala—and often refer to the use of faster tempos, flashier percussion breaks and, in particular, the *combination* of specific salsa timbale patterns and techniques with extant drumming conventions. In the following I provide a brief look at some of the techniques used by *conjunto* timbaleros in developing a *salsiada* style as well as some of the challenges associated with fusion strategies in general.

In practice, developing a *salsiada* sound and style often involves approaches of mixing specific salsa-identified performance modalities with conventional *conjunto* practices. As it applies to the timbales, this approach often involves integrating (generically) new timbale techniques, patterns and ostinati with existing ones. The effect is one that is appreciated in terms of relationship to a given composite ostinato, whose execution necessarily involves exploiting the polyphonic capabilities of the timbale apparatus and the (limb) independence of the performer—important features of timbale performance modalities in general. For this reason, the underlying aesthetic goal is often one of achieving an effective blend between the constituent ‘parts’ come to shape the composite ostinato.

³³² Christian Quintero, personal communication, 12 November 2007.

The markers of a *salsiada* style are often most pronounced in the addition of specific percussion instruments to the timbale apparatus. Two such additions, for instance, include the use of an additional (smaller and brighter-sounding) cowbell and one or more plastic woodblocks or “*claves*” as they are usually referred to. The inclusion of the additional cowbell has been used by timbaleros to emulate the rhythmic pattern typically performed on a handheld cowbell called a “bongo bell”—so called because it is normally played by a salsa bongo player during mambo and chorus sections of a song. An example of this technique is shown in Figure 9.5, which is an excerpt of the timbale rumba *ostinato* taken from a live performance by LD timbalero Rodrigo Vergara. In this example, Vergara employs both the larger and smaller cowbells to create the two-tone effect normally achieved in salsa by alternating between the open and closed ends of the bongo bell. Part of the efficacy of this pattern can be attributed to the way it combines the established convention of accenting the main metric accents (called “*tiempo fuerte*” or strong time) on the larger cowbell in the right hand with the new technique of playing a more rhythmically dense smaller cowbell part in the left hand.



Figure 9.5: *Salsiada rumba* pattern performed by Rodrigo Vergara³³³

A similar combination of (composite ostinato) parts can be seen in the use of the woodblocks. The idea to add one or more *claves*/woodblocks to the timbale apparatus is generally credited to Osvaldo Ayala. Lescure notes that Ayala “brought me the red [i.e., large] *clave* first and afterwards the blue [i.e., small] one. And now with both one can do a

³³³ Performance excerpt, 2007.

series of fills on the *clave* that sound good.”³³⁴ Like their salsa counterparts, several *conjunto* timbale players also use the instrument to play the two bar *clave* ostinato pattern. Usually this will happen during the more *salsiada* parts of the *rumba* section and becomes integrated into the composite *rumba* pattern in various ways—see Figure 9.6. Returning to the issue of the individual versus the *conjunto*, while it is clear that Lescure had some part in developing of the way the *claves* are performed, there is a strong tendency on his part and others to cite Ayala as the principal innovator. In general, I have found this to be the norm rather than the exception.



Figure 9.6: *Clave pattern played on the clave/woodblock*³³⁵

As I have noted above, fusions of genres tend not only to prioritize notable continuities between specific performance practices, but tend to highlight important discontinuities as well. Most importantly, ideas of genre fusions reveal that it is often the differences between *conjunto* performance practices vis-à-vis those of other (sometimes related) genres that come to constitute *música típica popular*’s most iconic and defining features. Not coincidentally, I have also found that practices and discussions of genre innovation, while embracing change, also served to identify those aspects of *conjunto* practice that were regarded as the most ‘traditional’ and characteristic of a traditionalist orientation. Such is the case with the timbale *baqueteo* pattern and technique, which for many *conjunto* practitioners has come to be understood as genre-specific and, thus, an

³³⁴ Personal communication, 9 November 2007.

³³⁵ Performance excerpt, 2008.

important marker of *música típica popular* itself. Discussing his goals as an innovator, Samy summarized the issue nicely when he said “It is very difficult to know what *not* to change” (my italics), and added:

What we [i.e., LPC] have never changed is the *baqueteo* (the timbale *baqueteo*); we always keep it. However, when I want to add a [trap] drum set [I ask myself] “how does one add the drums without getting rid of the *baqueteo* or so that the *baqueto* doesn’t get in the way [of the drums] or vice versa?” This is something that requires a lot of thought.³³⁶

Like Samy, Lescure suggested that the importance of the *baqueteo* is best understood in its absence. He noted, for example, that when performing outside of Panama for non-Panamanians Ayala sometimes added a trap drum set, in which case the music sounded more like “rock.” “With the drums,” he added, “it’s another rhythm. It’s no longer the *baqueteo* rhythm.”³³⁷ When I asked him what all *conjunto* timbale styles had in common Lescure again singled out the *baqueteo*, replying:

The *baqueteo* is essentially all you have to do. [...] The foundation of the timbales is the *baqueteo*. [sings the *baqueteo* pattern] The *baqueteo* [as in to] hit the skin [of the drum] with sticks. Following [the *baqueteo*] comes the *rumba* rhythm, the bells, and the change to the natural *repiques*.³³⁸

By identifying *rumba* technique as representative of the instrument’s “natural” *repiques* or drum strokes, Lescure not only suggests that the differences between *baqueteo* and *rumba* timbale performance modalities are not only determined on the basis of their relationship to each other, but also to that of a broader (intra-genre) timbale tradition. In this context, *baqueteo* technique stands out not only as an anomaly among timbale traditions, but also a unique feature of the *música típica popular* genre.

³³⁶ Personal communication, 2007.

³³⁷ Personal communication, 2007.

³³⁸ Personal communication, 2007.

In describing the significance of the *baqueteo* as a critical and immutable feature of *música típica popular*, many of my informants singled out its perceived differences from other (contemporary) timbale traditions. Performing the main ostinato figures on the skins (rather than the shells) of the drums is one such prominent difference. In most other timbale traditions, such as salsa and *vallenato* for instance, this technique is largely reserved for fills and shots, and principal ostinato strokes are generally played on the shell of the drum—a technique known as *cáscara*—or on cowbells. Another distinctive aspect of the *baqueteo* pattern is the way in which it requires the timbalero to arrange the smaller and larger drums. Again, unlike most timbale traditions *conjunto* timbaleros position the smaller drum to the left of the larger drum, which gives the drummer's right hand easy and unencumbered access to the larger drum used to play the open bass tone on the final downbeat of the ostinato. Both of these features of *conjunto* timbale performance modalities serve to mark the *baqueteo* as foundational to conventional practices precisely due to their (perceived) dissimilarity from other timbale traditions. In this capacity, the *baqueteo* can also serve to identify the genre as a unique and decidedly Panamanian phenomenon. This is illustrated in the following interview excerpt in which Navaro also suggests a functional link between the *conjunto baqueteo* to salsa *cascara* techniques/patterns.

Edwin Andres Navaro: The normal [part of *música típica popular*] is the *baqueteo*, which is very Panamanian. The Puerto Ricans call it *cascara*, however, we play the *baqueteo* on the skins.

Sean Bellaviti: Is this a particular sound?

EAN: It is a particular sound that is specific to us over here [i.e., Panamanians].³³⁹

For many practitioners, the *baqueteo* pattern retains associations with an older *conjunto* tradition and as such is considered a core aspect of the genre. Also significant is the fact that the *baqueteo* technique as such also appears to many informants to be a *música típica*

³³⁹ Personal communication, 2007.

popular-specific trait that is not repeated in other genres, making it an arguably indispensable feature of the genre and potent marker of uniquely Panamanian music. Accounting for changes and developments in timbale performance practice is complex and may be tied to the spatial configuration, timbre, and timekeeping role of the instrument within the ensemble. Furthermore, timbale performance discourse in *música típica popular* is tied ideas of transnational musical and cultural exchange: one which acknowledges vague relationships in terms of the genre's early musical development to more deliberate appropriation couched within notions of stylistic evolution and modernization.

Conclusion

As demonstrated at various points in this study, notions of what constitutes the *música típica popular* genre are neither static nor identical; rather, they are continually subject to change and (re)interpretation. Over the course of the twentieth century, *música típica popular* has come to variously represent an engagement with non-traditional (read urban and transnational) culture and more recently a form of vernacular Panamanian music, which draws on ideas of a culturally homogeneous, rural Panamanian interior. Discourses of style are similarly historicized and critically intersect with notions of genre specifically in terms of their alignment and overlap with trends and tendencies that structure genre conventions broadly. Foremost among these are the performance markers I term ‘traditional’ and ‘innovative,’ which are meant to suggest a particular performance approach and aesthetic orientation, and do not (at least for the moment) constitute a form of music or subgenre on their own.

CHAPTER 10

COMPOSERS AND COMPOSITIONS

As discussed in Chapter 2, the role and title of the composer is one that developed early in *música típica popular*'s history. Some of the earliest and most iconic compositions in the genre were written by violinists who, likely not by coincidence, were also star performers. While the identity and meaning of a composition is always subject to change, its connection to a specific author *and* performer/*conjunto* remains remarkably consistent. These connections were initially enabled through the use of notation and later with the advent of commercial recordings, which often named the composer on the sleeves and liner notes of 45 RPM and LP discs, and sometimes audibly on the recording itself. The maintenance of links between the composer, the composition and the performers—often mediated through recording technology—is part of a larger process in which professional and aspiring professional *conjuntos* strive to amass a catalogue of original material as a means of establishing a sense of artistic identity (or heightened stylistic individuation) and thereby increasing their chances for commercial success.

The role and identity of a composition and a composer is productively understood in terms of attendant formal expectations, which in Panama (and certainly elsewhere) are often linked to categories of genre. In Panama, the title of “composer” (i.e., *compositor/a*) is one that is applied to individuals working within a number of genres and the expectations associated with the term can vary. For example, a composer of *música culta* (Cultured music)

is not only expected to specify the important melodies and underlying harmonic framework of a given composition, but also its form, length and often orchestration as well as provide a prescriptive representation in the form of standard notation. On the other hand, a composer of *décimas* writes only the text and assumes the melody and harmony to be a given.³⁴⁰

Existing manuscripts of early compositions that would come to be identified as belonging to the *música típica popular* genre (some of which I discussed Chapter 2) show that a composer typically composed the principal melodies and often the lyrics of a piece of music.³⁴¹ Chord indications are usually absent, but (given that the genre generally tended toward specific diatonic harmonic progressions) were likely implied by the melody. A general outline of the form is usually indicated by listing specific melodic segments in a specific sequential order. Indications as to their exact repetition, however, are generally absent suggesting that these compositions were meant to be enabling frameworks for performances that accompanied independent couples dancing, and because of this they tended to be dynamic and durationally flexible and (potentially) unpredictable.

In many ways the creative expectations and prescriptive limitations that applied to early composers continue to be relevant today. Lyrics and melodies remain central concerns for contemporary composers whereas issues of form and instrument performance modalities are part of the creative domain of *conjunto* performers. Similarly, in lieu of standard notation (which came to be a relic of the violin tradition) contemporary transmission processes more often than not have come to include the use of prescriptive recordings (called “demos”) as a

³⁴⁰ For this reason, *décima* composers only copyright the text and not the music of their compositions. A *décima* composer may, however, indicate a composition’s accompanying *torrente* (i.e., a set tonality and chord progression) by noting it in a footnote.

³⁴¹ Much of the repertoire of the violin *conjuntos* was instrumental to which lyrics were sometimes added by later performers as is the case with *Los sentimientos del alma* (music by Chico Purio Ramírez and lyrics by Leonidas Cajar) and *Sombrero ocueño* (music by Toñito Saenz and lyrics by Alfredo Escudero) (Eráclides Amaya, personal communication, November 2007; Dorindo Cárdenas, November 2007).

supplement to in-person, aural/oral transmission practices. Among other things, demos have become an important part of the compositional process as they are a means of communicating creative intention. After listening to a demo the musicians will arrange, perform and ultimately record the composition for commercial dissemination and consumption. This process is one of exchange and collaboration between composer and *conjunto* which privileges the commercial recording as the representative “composition.”

One of the interesting aspects of the genre is the sheer amount of recordings of original compositions that exist. Professional *conjuntos* have been regularly recording and releasing commercial recordings since the 1950s and the practice has only intensified with the commercialisation of digital recording technology in the mid-1990s. During the course of my fieldwork, for example, each of the six professional *conjuntos* had released an album (in the form of a Compact Disc/CD) in the span of a year.³⁴² Each album contained over ten tracks and only one, to my knowledge, had been previously recorded.³⁴³ A perusal of my own limited collection of over 2500 recordings of individual songs also reveals very little overlapping repertoire between *conjuntos*.³⁴⁴ The reasons for this prolificacy not only highlights the role of recording technology in the genre’s development and (national) proliferation, but also the role of the composition as an important marker of a *conjunto*’s individual identity.

All *conjuntos* strive to acquire original repertoire, which becomes part of their musical legacy once they record it. For new *conjuntos*, this is no easy feat as both original

³⁴² This does not include a number of albums that I was aware of that were also recorded by semi-professional *conjuntos*.

³⁴³ LPN rerecorded *Regresa Pronto* (originally recorded by EOS) as a tribute to Dorindo Cárdenas’ golden jubilee as a professional musician (*Diferente*, Los Plumas Negras, independent release, 2007).

³⁴⁴ Lucho De Sedas is a notable exception who upon establishing his own *conjunto* often rerecorded a number of his own compositions that were made popular by other *conjuntos* with whom he previously performed.

(i.e., previously unrecorded) compositions and access to recording technology requires capital. For this reason *conjuntos* often begin as imitators, performing other *conjuntos'* (recorded) repertoire while developing their own sound in preparation for their own commercial recording debut. If and when a *conjunto* manages to record an album, usually consisting of ten or more original compositions, it is considered to be a major step in their development from imitators to ‘artists,’ and (potentially) from semi-professional to professional performers.

This transition is an important one for all new *conjuntos* and the topic came up often during my interviews with young musicians. Following is one such instance where some of the members of *Ritmo Guararé* explain the challenges they face as a new *conjunto*. The following interview excerpt took place while the musicians were in a studio recording their first album. As usual, the accordionist, Dario Pití, often spoke for the rest of the musicians and on behalf of the group³⁴⁵:

Dario Pití: As a new group we use songs by other artists.

Sean Bellaviti: You have to do this?

DP: We have to do this.

SB: It's normal?

Musician: Initially, then we add our own songs.

SB: Okay. And how are you going to acquire your own songs?

DP: From composers here in Panama.

SB: Do you have pay for this?

DP: At the moment no, but when we become famous yes. In the mean time they help the artist.

SB: The composers do this?

DP: Exactly, but they will recuperate it in the future.

When asked whether a *conjunto* could make a career performing compositions recorded by other *conjuntos*, the musicians noted that it was possible but that it would be viewed as “plagiarism” or “an imitation,” one musician adding “it wouldn’t be good, but many [new]

³⁴⁵ Pití as well as most of the *integrantes* were in their early twenties at the time this interview took place.

groups do it.” The reasons they and others perform covers, I was told, is because it creates opportunities for new *conjuntos* to perform right away, but it is also tends to limit the *conjunto*’s commercial potential. “It’s easier,” one musician explained:

- DP: There are some new musicians that only play the music if LPN...
- Musician: To get more contracts, more *bailes*.
- D.P.: The important thing [however] is to create one’s own music.
- SB: Why?
- DP: [Laughs] Because then you will be known for yourself. At the moment you don’t make money because you’re not known, but in the future yes and it will be because of you. Not because “I’m going to Dario’s *baile* because he plays music of Ulpiano [Vergara], Nenito [Vargas] or Osvaldo [Ayala].” No, better yet “I’m going to [hear] Dario because he plays good and beautiful music.” It is better to be known that way.
- SB: Yes.
- DP: Not to be known as an imitator, but for your music. [...]
- SB: If you don’t record it is it your music?
- DP: No.

The challenges faced by new *conjuntos* such as Pití’s speak to the importance of compositions both in the formation of a *conjunto*’s identity and as a means for commercial success. A *conjunto*’s need for an identifiably ‘original’ product is not in itself unusual, but is in fact quite typical of musicians performing in numerous other (commercial) genres. Also, the notion of what constitutes an original product/recording is not limited to the history of a composition per se, but rather its perceived connection to the genre. In the past *conjuntos* have not shied away from reinterpreting and rerecording compositions from other genres (such as vallenato, Cuban *son* and salsa as well as *tamboritos*) with varying degrees of success. What does appear to be relatively unique is the conspicuous lack of overlapping repertoire *within* the genre, which points to a special relationship between the composer and *conjunto* in particular as mediated by commercial recordings.

Over the course of the *música típica popular*’s history, commercial recordings have become not only musical artifacts serving to document performance achievements and

legacies for posterity, but also a means for accessing specific forms of communications technology such as radio, television and jukeboxes. Today, commercial recordings continue to structure the performance practices of professional *conjuntos* particularly in terms of repertoire choices. All professional *conjuntos* perform exclusively compositions that they previously recorded or (in some cases) will soon record. The relationship between commercial recording technology and performance repertoire highlights issues of authority and ownership pertaining to compositional practice. For *conjuntos*, “original” compositions (as such they are called) come to form one of the more readily identifiable aspects of their sound, and recording a composition becomes a kind of flag-planting gesture where the work is marked as a type of artistic property in and of itself. For a composer, not coincidentally, having one’s composition recorded is an important rite of passage, which speaks not only to an individual’s competency in the creation of *conjunto* repertoire, but also his/her skill and knowledge in negotiating a *particular* creative process in which the final outcome is contingent on a *conjunto*’s involvement.

By exerting control over a limited set of musical parameters (i.e., melody, lyrics and harmony), composers must by necessity of convention concede a degree of creative control to the performers—perhaps in manner that is greater to that of *música culta* composers and lesser to that of *décima* composers. At the same time, *música típica popular* composers believe that their work has a lasting and significant impact on the final product (i.e., the commercial recording), shaping important formal characteristic as well as stylistic orientation. As such, both composers and performers are selective in the relationships they choose to cultivate, recognizing that certain types of compositions—and by extension

individual compositional styles and/or competencies—are more or less suitable to specific *conjunto* styles.

The compositional process

With the phrase “compositional process” I refer to the development of a composition from its inception through its realization as a commercial recording. An examination of composition as a process reveals among other things that core musical competencies and creativity are only part of a larger set of skills that individuals identified as composers must acquire. To be effective, composers must not only be able to create the formal elements of a composition, but also develop the skills and social networks necessary to communicate their vision to potential performers and negotiate the terms for a composition’s eventual realization as a commercial recording and identifiably ‘unique’ artistic product. Following is a general outline of contemporary compositional processes followed by closer examination of two relatively distinct compositions.

The relationship between a composer and the *conjunto* nexus is not fixed in the way it is for performers. Rather, composers cultivate relationships with multiple *conjuntos/nexuses* that are based primarily on affinities of musical style and are not contingent on membership to the unit per se. As such the compositional process is in many ways a social one, being largely contingent on the effective communication of musical ideas and stylistic orientations. As freelancers, composers must build relationships with the *conjuntos* they write for, which often entails attending *bailes*, meeting with individual performers in person and creating representative recordings of their compositions. In addition, composers also cultivate

relationships with their peers (i.e., other *conjunto* composers) with whom they discuss ideas, receive critical feedback and expand their network base.

In the following I examine the compositional process in terms of six general “phases,” which not only serves to structure my analysis but also outlines a *series* of creative and social actions that (with varying degrees fixity) has come to define compositional procedure within the genre. These are outlined in Figure 10.1 and are discussed below.

1. Inspiration for a composition	autobiographic or biographic, or occasionally hypothetical
2. Core compositional process	usually done alone
3. Refining	usually done among other composers
4. Transmission	in person and by recording a demo with varying degrees of detail and expertise
5. Relinquishing the composition to the performers	composers generally receive the bulk of their remuneration at this point
6. Arranging, performing and recording	generally the musicians perform the composition a number of times before recording it

Figure 10.1: Six phases in the compositional process

Inspiration for a composition

It is my experience that there is a general consensus among *música típica popular* practitioners and especially aficionados that more often than not composers write because they are inspired (rather than required) to do so and that this inspiration is grounded in real life experiences—said be either biographical or autobiographical in character. In many cases these notions are given a measure of credence by the composers themselves, who often downplay the more mundane aspects of their craft (such as networking) in preference to ideas that promote the composer as a ‘naturally’ gifted/artistic and ‘creative’ specialist. In the

following I aim to show that more importantly still, these ideas are rooted in early constructions of the nature of the *música típica popular* compositional unit (as a narrative [presumably] rooted in some lived experience), which arguably continue to have an impact on a composition's reception, affective potential and aesthetic merit.

The compositional process is different for every composer, but often centres around the telling of a story that both the composer and his/her audience can relate to. Composer Santiago Gutierrez, for example, described his process as one of “authentic inspiration.” “I get inspired authentically—it’s a gift I was born with,” he explained:

There are many ways to become inspired depending on the phases of life one is living. Whether you are suffering [...] or somebody tells you “look, I’m suffering because of this” [or] “this happened to me.” If someone tells me a story, I interpret it; I can make music and I can give an account of what it is.³⁴⁶

The role of the composer-as-story-teller is a convention that dates back to the violin tradition and among other things, brackets the lyrical content of a composition as an important part of the aesthetic experience. “Behind every composition there is a story,” observes composer Eráclides Amaya, “we all know this. The issue therefore is how capable the writer is in effectively projecting this story to the listener.”³⁴⁷ In this sense, composers are often evaluated in terms of their ability to interpret and give musical expression to a specific (and presumably lived) experience.

While earlier compositional narratives addressed a relatively broad cross-section of topics—including tributes to specific individuals or places, and rural lifeways and landscapes—specific to a particular geo-cultural demographic (e.g., Azuerenses and later Azuerense migrants), contemporary compositional practices have come to address the theme of romantic love almost exclusively. References to particular geo-cultural and social

³⁴⁶ Personal communication, 2008.

³⁴⁷ Personal communication, 2008.

demographics also tend to be deemphasized in hopes of appealing a more diverse audience-base. Contemporary narratives are often about unrequited love and may dabble in subjects that are deemed *risqué* and potentially damaging for any real-life protagonists. For this reason, many composers I spoke to were often cautious when explaining the stories behind a composition and sometimes denied the existence of one altogether.

While traditionalists have criticized this shift as both limiting and a reflection of the genre's increasing commercialisation, other (particularly younger) composers have suggested that an emphasis on romantic narratives creates musical links and productive synchronicities with other musical genres and in the process establishes creative continuities among *música típica popular* practitioners well. While living in Las Tablas, I got to know three younger composers—Jorge Jaén, Roberto Carlos Castillo and Miguel Angel Vergara—who in addition to being close friends also shared many of the same tastes in music, which came to shape their approach to composition. Over the course of many conversations, all three composers regularly pointed out the overlap between the romantic narratives of Colombian vallenato and those of contemporary *música típica popular* compositions—noting, as Jaén put it, that both are “more than anything else about love.”³⁴⁸ As a genre, vallenato appealed to these composers for a number of reasons including its successful exportation beyond its national borders and incorporation of non-traditional elements such as ballad-style writing—achievements which were sometimes said to elude *música típica popular* practitioners. At the same time, the activity of reconfiguring and recontextualizing ostensibly disparate generic markers was not only about crossing boundaries, but also tended to affirm particular stylistic identities and innovative orientations within the genre (which in the preceding chapter I have argued is characteristic of *fusion* practices in general). All three composers often expressed

³⁴⁸ Jaén, personal communication, 2007

their admiration for innovators such as Osvaldo Ayala and Lucho De Sedas, who to their understanding were not afraid to break with tradition if creatively compelled to do so. When explaining his own engagement with romantic narratives, for example, Jaén noted:

Before *típico* [there] was more *saloma* and less lyrics. [...] Before there was lots of *saloma*; the woman sang more *saloma* and the man sang only a little until the 1980s when Osvaldo Ayala changed the whole history. [...] Osvaldo Ayala was the first who began to interpret songs with lyrics. Romantic [songs] that told stories of love. And was well received and then the other musicians did the same. This is what Osvaldo Ayala implemented here.³⁴⁹

Such forms of discourse not only point to the social construction of generic categories, but also the plurality of historical narratives upon which they are based and which, in turn, come to be used a means of validating particular performance biases and stylistic orientations. Consequently, despite (or because of) its non-traditionalist/innovative orientation, the compositional approach adopted by these composers represents an engagement with the compositional conventions of the genre as understood as part of an established tradition innovation and cross-genre experimentation—which I discuss in more detail below.

The ways in which romantic narratives have historically been gendered also serve to reinforce the notion that compositions are grounded in lived experiences. *Música típica popular* canons are dominated by male composers who are often cast in the role of bohemians and wanderers; that is, a decidedly male stereotype which productively finds its parallel in the rhetorical conventions used to describe rural twentieth century migration experiences. Like early violin composers, the (generally male) Azuerense migrants mentioned in mid-twentieth century *música típica popular* compositions were intimately familiar with the experience of physical separation and its sentimental associations. Here, sentiments of unrequited love are inextricably interwoven with narratives of physical

³⁴⁹ Personal communication, 2007.

separation from the territory and landscape/s of one's birth; associations which came to define the experience of Azuerense migration within the national context and popular imagination (see Chapters 2 and 4). While references to physical displacement appear with increasingly less frequency since the 1980s and 1990s, narratives of romantic love continue to feature predominantly male protagonists—sometimes regardless of whether the lead singer is male or female—and thus corroborating the notion that there exists a connection to the lived experiences of composers and their (male) acquaintances.

The subject of the compositions performed by LPC is in certain ways an exception. This *conjunto* is unique in that its star performer is its lead singer Sandra Sandoval, who built a reputation of singing songs that are commonly described as going “*en contra de los hombres*” (“against the men”). Not coincidentally, Samy Sandoval noted that the group regularly performs songs composed by female composers (most notably Carolina Alonso De Pérez), who he believes have a greater insight into female experiences of romantic love.³⁵⁰ Sandoval’s observation suggests that while these compositions are gendered differently (i.e., more representative of a “female” experience), they are nonetheless inspired by actual experiences.

My point is that traditionally compositions were written by men and their lyrics also featured male protagonists. Together these features (in addition to the more recent phenomenon of women composers writing for Sandra Sandoval) tend to reaffirm the pervasive notion that composers write from personal experience. This idea is promoted in extant *música típica popular* literature (e.g., Amaya, 1996) and, as noted above, by the composers themselves. Furthermore, *música típica popular* practitioners go to rather great lengths to inform the public of the composer’s identity by listing his/her name in the liner

³⁵⁰ Samy Sandoval, personal communication, 2007.

notes of commercial recordings as well as stating it audibly during the composition's recorded and live performances. The degree to which the public is not only cognizant of the identity of the composer, but also assumes the songs' narratives are (auto)biographical in nature has been suggested to me by the composers themselves who (as in the case of Jaén detailed below) are often questioned about the stories behind their compositions and also frequently solicited to write songs about other people's experiences. The (presumed) connection between experience and compositional narrative is important as it serves to reinforce the link between composer and composition—a link that with the advent of recording technology becomes tested and subsumed within notions of style connected to the *conjunto* responsible for the composition's arrangement and realization as a commercial recording. In the end the composition becomes identified with the *conjunto* as well as the composer

Core compositional process

Once inspired to write, a composer then sets out to create the lyrics, melodies and underlying harmonic progression, which will come to constitute the core elements of a composition. In general, the composers I spoke to found it difficult to verbalize the act of composing emphasizing that it was intensely personal and unpredictable, and often accomplished in solitude. This was certainly true of Jaén who politely turned down my request to join him when he was composing. Jaén recounted to me with a certain degree of admiration how Lucho De Sedas and Ulpiano wrote some great compositions while traveling in the band bus to a performance, but noted that for him the process was different. Jaén liked to compose alone in his bedroom with the curtains drawn.

Each composer it seemed developed an approach that worked for them, and in general no single approach was considered particularly correct or incorrect. The inscrutability of compositional activities, true as it may be, also tend to reaffirm the notion that composition was an innate talent and that the composer, as Amaya put it, “was not just anybody.”³⁵¹ Here, the highly personal nature of the compositional process serves to reinforce the mythology surrounding the composer, where issues of gender, nation/region and inspiration all converge on the idea of the presumed experiential basis to this type of creative work. Despite their differences, however, certain commonalities existed. For example, most composers tend to begin with a general narrative theme in mind and go about act of composing by choosing an appropriate environment (usually one that is devoid of certain distractions) and vocalize their ideas either through singing or humming while accompanying themselves on an instrument (usually a guitar or accordion). While most composers described the process as a holistic one (“it just happens”), others were more specific as to the techniques they found most useful. Amaya, for example, notes that he *always* composes the melody first and then adds the lyrics—an approach that he believes allows for stronger melodic development and is more in keeping with the tradition of the genre (discussed below). Similarly, Vergara prefers to first hum a melody to a specific chord progression (which he plays on the guitar) and then write the lyrics.³⁵² Castillo described his approach as somewhat more unpredictable, noting that he may or may not use a guitar, and added that it can take him anywhere from an hour to several days to write a song.³⁵³

Genre and style considerations also come into play during the creative process. As noted above, Jaén, Castillo and Vergara often look to *vallenato* as well as Latin pop/rock

³⁵¹ Personal communication, 2007.

³⁵² Personal communication, 2006.

³⁵³ Personal communication, 2007.

ballads for creative inspiration especially where melody and harmony are concerned. All three of these composers, for example, have told me that they write their compositions as if they were “*baladas*” or ballads, which the performers then rework into *música típica popular* arrangements. As I discuss below, this compositional procedure enables a particular treatment of the melodic setting of the text (i.e., one which is less rhythmically dense and more vocally oriented), which also provides an important point of contrast with what are perceived as older and traditionally-oriented compositional practices.

Refining

Unlike *conjunto* musicians, whose creative endeavours exist within a context of professional competition and a sense of group loyalty, composers often develop working relationships with their peers that are predicated primarily on friendship, shared musical interests and reciprocity. Once a composition is completed or nearly completed composers will often show their work to their friends or other composers for critical feedback and validation.

Among the composers I got to know well in Las Tablas, these exchanges usually occurred in informal settings and seemed (at least at first) to be more a product of fortunate coincidence rather than premeditated design. Many of the composers shared the same friends and met each other often and regularly. Since many of their friends also worked with *conjuntos* in various capacities, they would usually get together during the early part of the week, which is when *conjuntos* tend to be less busy. These get-togethers were usually spontaneous, intimate (3 to 6 people) and informal, often took place in someone’s house or in a local *cantina* and generally involved a good deal of drinking—for this reason these

occasions were sometimes jokingly referred to as *chupatas*, derived from the Spanish verb *chupar*: to soak up or to drink.

While the purpose of hanging-out was not presented as anything more than entertainment (i.e., a chance to blow off steam and have a good time), it did provide an opportunity for these composers to showcase their new compositions and receive critical feedback. Often they would bring a rough recording of a new composition recorded on a tape recorder or cell phone to play for their friends. These exchanges always had a feeling of intimacy and exclusivity to them. By showcasing their composition to their peers, the composers also prepared for the next step of finding a *conjunto* who would want to record it. In many cases the composer would receive advice on which *conjunto* was best suited to arrange and perform his composition as well as which *conjuntos* were looking for compositions.

Transmission

When a composition is completed it becomes the job of the composer to communicate his/her vision to prospective performers in the hopes that it will eventually become realized as a commercial recording. This invariably involves a good deal of networking especially between the composer and accordionist/owner—upon whom usually rests the responsibility of deciding what compositions the *conjunto* will record. Given that nearly all performers play by ear, composers typically rely on face-to-face encounters supplemented by a basic recording of the composition (i.e., demo) to showcase their work.

The role of a demo is to provide a clear and accurate representation of the basic elements of a composition, which has come to include the melody, harmony and text as well

as a general outline of sequential order of the various sections of a song. A demo, therefore, has a similar function to a score in that it provides a basic outline of a composition which the performers then “*interpretan*” (interpret) according to their own stylistic vision and understanding of the genre. Most demos I have listened to tend to be created with minimal consideration for sound recording quality and performance abilities. Usually a composer would sing the principal melodic sections or “parts” (as they are sometimes referred to) of a composition while accompanying him/herself on guitar or accordion. If the resources are available, however, some composers would create more representative demos by recording them in home studios and soliciting the help of additional musicians. While this was not the norm, it did suggest that better quality demos may positively impact the chances of a composition being accepted and later performed and recorded by a *conjunto*. Most composers and musicians, however, tended to focus on content rather than quality when assessing a demo’s merits. Eury De La Rosa (composer and guitarist for LPN), for example, observed that some demos (and in turn, compositions) are more complete than others, joking on one occasion that a mutual friend always handed in “crude” demos that required a greater degree of refining on the part of the members of the *conjunto* in their capacity as “arrangers.” This, however, was not necessarily a problem given, as De La Rosa explained, that a *conjunto*’s style is “a complement of the composer, the arranger and the group.”³⁵⁴

Composers, in fact, often create demos with the knowledge that the *conjunto* will interpret them according to the conventions of the genre and through the lens of their own individual style. Composer Amable “Mabín” Moreno noted that demos as such are effective because the composers are knowledgeable of both the “style” of the musicians and “*patrón*” or “pattern” of the genre, which he defines as “the rhythms appropriate for this music.”

³⁵⁴ Personal communication, 2008.

Moreno observes that in order to be effective, composers must “frame” their compositions in relation to specific (and sometimes multiple) genres and stylistic orientations. “When I want to give Ulpiano Vergara a song,” he explains,

I write it based on his style and record it in his style then he learns it. He doesn’t need a score. He listens to it on a cassette and looks for [i.e., lifts] it on the accordion and there are the notes. However, we have an international [stylistic consideration]³⁵⁵ as well which is to write a song that suits both our music and can be sung by an international salsa or merengue singer. This too is to play with style.³⁵⁶

Creating a demo is part of a larger process of soliciting performers and communicating musical intention, which is almost always realized in person. For composers who live in the Azuero region, networking is fairly easy as face-to-face meetings can be arranged without too much difficulty. I have occasionally accompanied composers (demo in hand) to an accordionist’s house and after the proper introductions were made the two would begin to discuss the possibility of recording the composition at some later date. For composers who live outside the region, networking often required taking advantage of the mobility of *conjuntos*.

Bailes often provided such opportunities, allowing composers to meet accordionists and discuss potential collaborations. Not coincidentally, *bailes* were also the places where I most frequently met composers who did not live in Las Tablas. It was at one such *baile* in the remote town of Metetí in the Province of Darién that I first met Gutierrez. Gutierrez had made the trip from a considerable distance to meet Nenito Vargas (who along with LPN was performing that night) and was gracious enough to answer a number of my questions before the *baile* started. The first group to record one of Gutierrez’s compositions was LM, and he describes the initial encounter as follows:

³⁵⁵ Moreno uses the phrase “corte internacional” or “international court” here.

³⁵⁶ Personal communication, 2007.

Santiago Guteirrez: Once at a *fiesta* I sang one of my pieces a capella for Alfredo Escudero.

Sean Bellaviti: When? During the *baile*? After the *baile*?

SG: After the *baile*, when [the musicians] were on a break. I sang him one of my pieces and he liked it and told me that he was interested in recording it. And that's how it started.

SB: Did [Escudero] learn it that night or did you have to record it?

SG: No, [...] afterwards I recorded it singing with the guitar on a cassette and from there he learned it.

SB: And where did this happen? Was he on tour in this area?

SG: No, at that time I was in Panama City and I went to a *fiesta* over there...

SB: [...] So, do you do the same thing with other groups?

SG: Yes, with the other groups as well one must record the composition for them on a cassette or CD. I write the lyrics and the music and all they have to do is arrange it a little bit and learn it.

I was able to witness the networking process firsthand when after our interview Vargas approached Gutierrez and asked him “do you have a song for me?” Gutierrez replied to the affirmative and then proceeded to sing the new composition for Vargas a capella.

Relinquishing the composition to the performers

After the merits of a composition are ascertained, an accordionist and/or *conjunto* owner/s must then come to agreement with the composer as to the terms under which they will record his/her composition. Traditionally compositions were given to *conjuntos* in exchange for the prestige of being cited—during performances, on recordings and/or on the sleeves of records—as the composer of a particular piece. Financial remuneration, if and when it existed, tended to be worked out on an ad hoc basis and in general did not generate significant economic dividends for the composer. This is largely still true, especially for new or unknown composers who gift their work in the hopes of gaining exposure and accreditation. However, most established composers expect to get paid for their work.

Usually a composer receives a lump sum payment in exchange for the permission to record and perform his/her composition. One-off payments can vary and generally range from \$100 to \$500. Occasionally certain *conjuntos* will pay more for a composition if they believe it has exceptional commercial potential. In 2005, for example, Ñato Monga told me that LPC paid him \$1050 for his composition *La Raspadura*, which went on to be a big hit the following year.³⁵⁷ The development of Panamanian copyright laws and the establishment of organizations responsible for their enforcement have created the possibility for the composer to receive additional remuneration after the composition is recorded and performed. Royalty payments, however, have a reputation of being inconsistent and often amount to less than the initial lump sum payment. *La Raspadura*, for example, which was an exceptional commercial success, brought in annual dividends for the composer totalling \$28 (2006), circa \$100 (2007) and circa \$150 (2008).³⁵⁸

When considering who will record their compositions, established composers also take into account the potential effect of a *conjunto*'s style and reputation on that of their own. The relationship between a composer and a *conjunto* is a symbiotic one that has the potential to inform and shape not only individual musical identities and (perceptions of) stylistic orientations, but also other aspects of their professional life and livelihoods. Both Amaya and Jaén, for example, have made it clear that they write for specific *conjuntos* whose style is compatible with their own and also note that in most instances they do not make a lot of money from the *conjuntos* they principally write for. Jaén usually earns several hundred dollars per composition and Amaya often did not charge for his compositions. Their relationship to their respective *conjuntos*, however, does have indirect benefits. Jaén, for

³⁵⁷ Ñato Monga, personal communication, 2008.

³⁵⁸ Ñato Monga, personal communication, 2008.

example, told me that he is sometimes solicited by new *conjuntos* who recognize his name on LPN and RS recordings and want his name featured on their album. Given that Jaén's reputation and stylistic orientation is well established and the new *conjunto*'s is not, he is able to name his price, which—if he chooses to do so—could be substantially more than what he is paid by professional *conjuntos*. Amaya, on the other hand, has owned a semi-professional *conjunto* since 1979, which mainly performs covers (i.e., previously recorded compositions) of LM. Being a featured composer on a number of LM's commercial recordings has solidified his reputation as an exponent of that *conjunto*'s particular style and traditionalist orientation.

Arranging, performing and recording

As noted above, composition and transmission conventions suggest that a good deal of creative work goes into a composition after it passes from composer to *conjunto*. Typically the process of realizing a basic composition is one that is usually referred to as “arranging” and “interpreting.” Vergara, for example, describes a composition as a “base” upon which the performers build an “arrangement.”³⁵⁹ While some composers may work with the *conjunto* or at least the accordionist in working out the “arrangement,” the majority will usually at this point relinquish creative control to the *conjunto*.

Given that most professional *conjuntos* do not have formal rehearsals,³⁶⁰ new repertoire is typically arranged and perfected in the context of live performances and, if feasible, the recording studio as well. The initial task of realizing a composition poses the

³⁵⁹ Personal communication, 2006.

³⁶⁰ LPC are an exception in this respect and are said to hold rehearsals on a semi-regular basis.

biggest challenges for the accordionist and lead singer,³⁶¹ who between them must be able to perform all of the melodic and lyrical material of a composition for any performance to take place. Ostinato players tend to be able to learn the basic elements of a composition such as its form and harmonic progression very quickly and usually just by listening to the demo once. The initial process of arranging a composition is facilitated by a strong knowledge of genre conventions and mainly involves deciding how and when individual melodic/harmonic parts will become repeated, much of which (as I show below) tends to be fairly standardized. For these reasons new compositions can be performed quickly with little-to-no formal preparation. Debut performances usually take place at the end of *bailes* when the audience has thinned out and the majority of the dancers have gone home. Perfecting an arrangement, however, is accomplished after repeated performances and sometimes in the recording studio—which while allowing for more nuanced communication between the musicians, has the disadvantage of being expensive.

After a composition is recorded and begins to be played regularly in *bailes* and on radio and jukeboxes, a composer is then in a position to collect royalties for their work when and if they exist. Remuneration of this form is a fairly recent phenomenon for *música típica popular* practitioners and is largely credited to the work of the *Sociedad Panameña de Autores y Compositores*—Panamanian Society of Authors and Composers (SPAC)—who at various points in its nearly 40-year history have successfully lobbied the Panamanian government to amend and institute a number of important copyright laws that affected *música típica popular* practitioners directly. Despite its achievements, however, there is a general consensus among practitioners that SPAC still has a ways to go especially in the areas of collection and equitable distribution of performance and recording royalties. Royalty

³⁶¹ It should be noted that these roles may also be performed by the same individual.

payouts, I was often told, are inconsistent, impractical and insubstantial. Copyrighting a composition is in itself a challenge for composers living in the Azuero region as one must typically make a trip to Panama City both to register their composition—by providing in a recording of the melody and transcription of the lyrics—and collect payouts. Simon Saavedra, for example, noted that he is not sure what royalties he is entitled to, but believes they are not worth the trip to the SPAC office to collect them.³⁶² Some composers, however, do take advantage of this service, which according to Moreno has contributed to the “commercialisation” of composition by making it more than just a hobby and a source of financial remuneration for some composers.³⁶³

Perhaps more important than the forms of recognition and remuneration offered the composer by Panamanian copyright institutions are the ones accorded by the composition’s performers themselves. While *conjunto* owners may not always pay for the use of a composition, they are highly conscientious of crediting the composer whenever possible. This often occurs in the context of a *baile* where it is customary for the *conjunto’s locutor* to announce the name of the composition and composer immediately before each performance. Additionally, the performers themselves will also mention the composer’s name during the course of the composition’s performance. Usually this will occur in the form of a ‘shout out’ where usually one of the singers will say the phrase “*Inspiración de...*” (i.e., “Inspiration of...”) followed by the composer’s name. The composer’s name is almost always enshrined on the liner notes and labels that accompany *música típica popular* recordings. All these factors point to an important distinction between *música típica popular* and Panamanian folkloric musical traditions in that the case of the former importance given to who composes

³⁶² Personal communication, 2008.

³⁶³ Personal communication, 2007.

a piece of music whereas in the latter the composer is said to be anonymous. Moreover, the prioritization of the composer suggests that regardless of the fact that there is a kind of social authorship at play in what I have theorized as the compositional process, older more conventional (Western) notions of composer as author seem to have some traction.

Summary: composition/composer and arrangement/arranger(s)

In my foregoing outline of the compositional process I have endeavoured to show the ways in which *música típica popular* practitioners (i.e., musicians *and* composers) tend to view the creation of arguably one of the most definitive and tangible markers of an original style. By focusing on process as relatively loose sequence of actions one gets the sense that “compositions” are gradually constituted and take shape as creative control is passed between the “composer” to the “arrangers”/performers. For *conjunto* practitioners, the archetypal compositional product/artefact is one that has completed all six stages; beginning as an original “inspiration” in the composer’s mind and finally emerging as a commercial recording, immutable in its linkages between composer, composition and *conjunto*. In reaching this (ideal) stage, my informants recognize specific roles and activities thought critical to bringing a composition to full term. In the final section of this chapter I will examine these roles in greater detail and at this point provide only brief outline. Based on the foregoing it is possible to say that the “composer” is the individual credited with original inspiration for the composition, which typically comes to be appreciated on the basis of its biographical or autobiographical character. While this individual may come to rely on the help and creative input of his/her peers, in the end s/he will assume the credit for creating the key melodies and lyrics, general form (specifically distinctions between the *baqueteo* and

rumba sections) and chord progressions—component parts of a composition that are deemed to be immutable. At this point one has a proto-composition, valuable principally in its *potential* to become realized on the *baile* stage and ultimately as a commercial recording. The arranger/s (who are usually some or even all the performing members of a *conjunto*) not only realize the composer’s vision (i.e., the proto-composition usually transmitted as a demo), but also make necessary contributions particularly in areas of melodic ornamentation, the inclusion of the *saloma*, small-scale adjustments in form (such as adding an introduction) and the particular realization of the various ostinato parts. Once this stage of a composition’s development is completed ideally it should be possible to identify traces of both the composer’s *and* *conjunto*’s individual style and particular stylistic orientation.

Compositional Process as framework for the interplay between style and genre

The ideas that inform composition as an inspired and experientially informed creative endeavour are also understood by *conjunto* musicians and composers to organize the sounds and structures that come to constitute the compositional product. That is, as frameworks for musical performance (which indeed is a defining attribute of the open-ended, dance-enabling *música típica popular* compositions), composers not only believe that specific aspects of their compositions will remain unchanged throughout the course of many (recorded and live) performances, but also bear the mark of their own stylistic orientation. It is here that my emphasis on the socially-mediated and processual nature of *música típica popular* compositional practice diverges somewhat from the more pervasive idea of the composition

as a relatively fixed and predetermined musical work. That is, while composers concede an element of creative control to the *conjunto*/arranger, common sense ideas about what constitutes a composition dictate that the influence of the composer is indelible, permeating, as it were, the more critical aspects of a composition's component parts and stylistic mapping.

In order to illustrate this idea and its framing within genre conventions and *música típica popular* aesthetic discourses, I analyze below two relatively contrasting compositions. The first is titled *El aguardiente y yo* and was composed by Amaya and recorded by LM in the early 1980s. When discussing his work, Amaya frequently refers to his general musical sensibilities as “traditionalist,” which often contrasts with what he and others have come to understand to be contemporary practices. The second is titled *Pobre tonto enamorado* and was written by Jaén and recorded by LPN in 2006. As noted above, Jaén’s compositional approach often involves a combination of innovative techniques (such as *balada*-style writing) with more conventional approaches, making it more representative of contemporary performance practices.

El aguardiente y yo

I met Amaya while I was living in Las Tablas in 2007. At that time he was employed as a school teacher and owned a semi-professional *conjunto*, which performed several *bailes* per month. Both Amaya’s compositional approach and performance style is very closely aligned to notions of tradition that are reflected in performance histories and forged through a longstanding relationship Alfredo Escudero and LM, for whom Amaya frequently composed.

Amaya's approach to composition is one that is explicitly informed by his understanding of older practices and his own traditionalist orientation. This is reflected in the fact that Amaya cites violinist-composers and in particular Chico Purio Ramírez not only as his primary influences, but also, in his understanding, the representative practitioners of the genre. He cites these individuals as not only the "pioneers of composition," but their work as the benchmark of a good composition. Amaya explains:

For a long time there was a kind of fear—I assume—on the part of a lot of people who in earlier years were already knowledgeable about music. Because there was a saying that "a composer was not just anybody." Moreover, I know of many musicians who came later and threw away many of their own [compositions]. They would compose, but when they compared their composition to those composed by these masters they themselves would denigrate [their own compositions]. They thought they were not at the level of [the masters'] compositions.

Amaya sees his own engagement with longstanding compositional practices within the genre as significantly shaping his development as a composer, noting that it was not until numerous attempts that in 1979 at the age of 18 he felt he wrote a composition that was worth recording.³⁶⁴ By expressing a respect for the "masters" of the genre, Amaya also sees his creative work as belonging to a larger tradition which he shares with other contemporary composers whom he calls "traditionalists," naming among others Dorindo Cárdenas, Ceferino Nieto, Yín Carrizo and of course Alfredo Escudero.

Compared to other composers I spoke with, Amaya was exceptionally articulate about his compositional approach, highlighting two areas in particular that marked his work as traditionally oriented. First he believes that there should be no less than four basic "parts" of a composition. By "part" Amaya refers to the basic melodic sections of a composition that

³⁶⁴ This composition was titled *Amandote de lejos* (Loving you from afar) and represented a major catalyst in Amaya's development as a composer. Not only was it his first composition that was recorded, but it was also a major success—LM reportedly had to play it by popular demand three times in a single *baile*.

invariably become repeated in various ways when arranged and realized in performance.

Again, earlier practices form the basis for his understanding here:

I have never written a piece of two or three parts. [The early composers] always composed a piece consisting of a minimum of four parts, sometimes five. [...] Recently I was playing a piece [performed?] by Alfredo Escudero that only had three parts and that was it![...] Mine always have a minimum of four, five or six.

Second, he believes that the melody must be composed *before* the lyrics—which in turn are set to the melody, not vice versa. This approach is informed by Amaya’s understanding of the genre’s history. Citing Chico Purio Ramírez’s iconic composition *Los Sentimientos del Alma* as an example, he noted that many early compositions were entirely instrumental and the lyrics were added after the fact. Amaya notes that this compositional procedure allows for the creation of stronger, more “logical” melodies—something he believes is conspicuously absent in contemporary compositions. “Before, pieces were composed without words,” he explained, “everything one wanted to express was done through music. That’s why [people ask] today ‘why do the older pieces have more *feeling* [English term] than those written today?’ ” When I asked what he meant by “feeling” he replied

They were better; they were more musically expressive than those of today. [Say] you are smitten by a girl and I tell you “I hope that when you have some time—because [composing] is not like fixing a refrigerator [...]—you will become inspired and write her a piece.” And you are going to tell her everything you feel, but without lyrics.

The belief that a melody on its own can serve a programmatic function not only guides Amaya’s particular compositional procedure (i.e., melody before text), but also suggests that his creative process—while certainly personal and to some extent idiosyncratic—is informed by a *sense* of a shared understanding of what music means (in this case, quite literally) as informed by his own understanding of *música típica popular* history and ‘traditional’

practice. By highlighting his role as the principal author of the most salient aspects of the composition's formal structure, Amaya (in this case the nominal composer/author) actively solidifies his position as a creative authority which he then shares with the *conjunto* responsible in the composition's realization.

During one of our interviews, Amaya offered *El aguardiente y yo* as a representative example of his compositional style. On this occasion, he identified the basic “parts” of the composition by playing them once on the accordion so that I would recognize them when listening to the representative recording performed by LM. His approach was similar to that adopted by other composers when showcasing their compositions to prospective *conjuntos* and/or recording them as representative demos. Like most *música típica popular* musicians, Amaya’s performed from memory³⁶⁵ noting (verbally) the transition of the various “parts” as well as the beginning of the *baqueteo* and *rumba* sections as he played them. While I did not get to speak with Amaya about his particular transmission process, his sparsely accompanied and truncated performance of the basic elements of the composition (i.e., melodic segments/“parts” performed in sequence) was characteristic of approaches to transmission described by other composers and demos I listened to and served as an indication of those aspects of the composition that most directly concerned the composer.

In Figure 10.2 I provide an outline of the basic “parts” of *El aguardiente y yo* as Amaya explained them to me. The melody, lyrics and chords of each “part” are based on the representative recording by LM. Together these “parts” constitute the basic melodic material of the composition and its subsequent arrangement by LM, which I will discuss below.

³⁶⁵ Amaya reminded me on several occasions that he was a “*músico empírico*” (empirical musician), meaning that he played ‘by ear’ and did not read or write music using standard notation.

SUB GÉNRE: CUMBIA AGUARDADO
= 96

EL AGUARDEINTE Y YO

PERFORMER: LM

PART I

HE VE - NI - DO DE - CI - DI - DO'A COM - PO - NER U - NA SE - LEC - CION QUE SEA SO - NI - TA DE - DI -

CA - DO AL PUE - BLO QUE ME DIO'A NA - CER Y DON - DE TEN - GO'A MI MA - DRE - CI - TA HOY LE

PI - DO'A DIOS QUE TIE - NEEL GRAN PO - DER QUE SI YO TU - VIE - RA QUE MO - RIR. QUIE - RA DE -

JAR - MEEN MI TIER - RA LIN - DA PA - RAE - STAR SIEM - PREEN LOS DES - TIER - SO. QUIE - RA DE - JAR - MEEN MI TIER - RA LIN -

- DA PA - RAE - STAR SIEM - PREEN LOS..

PART II

LEAD: GMI D7 D7 GMI
QUE SIEM - BREN FLO - RES EN MI TUM - BA. Y LE RIE - QUEN CON A - GUAR - DIEN - TE. QUE SA - QUEN

GMI D7 D7 GMI
- U - NA SUE - NA CUM - BIA Y QUE SAI - LE TO - DA LA GEN - TE.

PART III

GMI GMI GMI/Bb D7/A GMI
ON REPEAT

PART IV

D7 GMI D7 GMI
ON REPEAT

Figure 10.2: Main parts of *El aguardiente y yo*

True to form, *El aguardiente y yo* consists of four discrete melodic parts two of which have an accompanying text. The story told by the lyrics is a familiar one of displacement and a longing to the “land” of one’s birth—see for a complete transcription and translation of the

lyrics based the original *conjunto* recording by LM see Appendix G. By evoking the theme of displacement the subject of the composition is unambiguously connected to narrative traditions within the genre and as such speaks to a specific migration experience the details of which I have discussed in some length in Chapter 4. Much of the narrative is told during the first part of the composition, which Amaya admits is a fairly recent development albeit one that is sanctioned by convention and does not represent a radical departure from genre conventions for innovation's sake, noting: "Traditionally we rarely included lyrics in the introduction—the first part [of the composition]—then it turned out that we felt it they belonged there."

In keeping with genre conventions (some of which I have already described in Chapter 2), the arrangement of the composition is considerably longer than otherwise indicated on paper. This is achieved by various forms of repetition of the individual parts, which often alternate between instrumental and vocal renditions of the melodies. Figure 10.3 shows an outline the form of the composition as it was first recorded by LM. For clarity, each (sequential) grouping of repetitions is labelled as a "section" and I have included an indication as to the number of repetitions and where "baqueteo" and "rumba" sections begin.

- Section 1 (*baqueteo*)
 - Part I instrumental (2xs)
 - Part I vocal
- Section 2
 - Part II instrumental (2xs)
 - Part II vocal
 - Part II instrumental
 - Part II vocal
 - Part II instrumental
- Section 3
 - Part III instrumental (4xs with *saloma*)
- Section 4
 - Part II instrumental
 - Part II vocal
 - Part II instrumental
 - Part II vocal
- Section 5 (*rumba*)
 - Part IV instrumental (8xs plus ending, with adlib and *saloma*)

**Figure 10.3: Outline of the form of *El aguardiente y yo*
(recorded by LM circa early 1980s)**

The arrangement shown in Figure 10.3 is a relatively standard one, showcasing a number of arranging conventions that are characteristics of the genre. The alternation between instrumental and vocal renditions of the melody is standard practice and dictates that the instrumental rendition precedes and sometimes bookends its vocal counterpart. This is true of nearly all *música típica popular* compositions and (as I have noted above) allows for the development of quick, on-the-spot arrangements of new compositions. In general, the composition's basic form (and underlying narrative) remains intact where each "part" is repeated a number of times and then proceeds to the next one (i.e., "section"). Nearly all arrangements end with a rumba section, which being open-ended allows for the lengthening of an arrangement during live performances as circumstances may dictate (see Section 5/Part IV). Arranging conventions such as those shown here point to the role of genre in mediating the creative exchange between composer and *conjunto*/performers particularly as it concerns

areas of form and the use of repetition and variation techniques, which are usually not specified by the composer but assumed to be a relative given.

The composition's melodic setting of the text not only reflects Amaya's compositional procedure, but also his understanding of traditionalist oriented compositional models. The melody shares many of the same characteristics observed in Ramírez's *Edicta no me quiere* discussed in Chapter 2. Overall, it is rhythmically dense—coinciding often with the underlying rhythmic pulse—and includes considerable amount of disjunct melodic motion. Conspicuously and nearly entirely absent is the repetition of discrete melodic pitches (i.e., static melodic motion), which one would expect to find in more strophic-type melodies. The outcome would appear to confirm Amaya's (well founded) belief that many of the early *cumbia* and *danzón cumbia* compositions were first instrumental and the text was included after the fact.

Pobre tonto enamorado

Pobre tonto enamorado provides a useful counterpoint to Amaya's pronounced traditionalist orientation particularly in its use of ballad-style techniques. As noted above, Jaén, Castillo and Vergara and as well as a number of other well-known composers often develop their compositions as "ballads," which are then reworked as *cumbia agarrado* arrangements. This technique is thought to have been pioneered and perfected by *vallenato* composers whose commercially recorded compositions are often seen as compositional models and are a source of creative inspiration. Figure 10.4 shows an outline of *Pobre tonto enamorado*'s basic "parts," which form the basis for its arrangement.

SUB GENRE: CUMBIA AGARRADO
♩ = 96

Pobre Tonto Enamorado

PERFORMER: LPN

PART I

1
Te CON - FIE - SO.
QUE TE HE OL - VI - DA - DO.
NOE -

6
xi - STE EN - MI MEN - TE.
NO PIEN - SES MAS EN MI.
SIE - RES

10
PAS - TE DEL PA - SA - DO.
AHO - RA QUE VIE - NES AE - XI - GI - R.
No HAS NO -

14
TA - DO
QUE MEHE CAN - SA - DO.
No SE

18
DEA - QUE - LLOS MO - MEN - TOS
QUEA TU LA - DO FUI FE - LIZ.
TU RE -

Figure 10.4: Main parts of *Pobre tonto enamorado*

22 Ab Bb7

CUE - DO LO HE BOR - SA - DO. NO SE SI TE CO - NO - CI.

26 PART II F#M I Ab Bb7 Bb7

DILE AL QUE ES - TAA TU LA - DO. QUENO HA - BLE MAS DE MI. LO NUES - TRO HATER - MI -

31 F#M I Ab Bb7 Bb7

NA - DO. YA TU NO EX - IS - TES EN MI. PO - BRE TON - TOE - NA - MO -

35 F#M I Ab Bb7 Bb7

SA - DO. AHO - RA LE TO - CA SU - PRIR. SEL TIEM - PO NO HA BOR -

39 F#M I Ab Bb7 Bb7

SA - DO. LO QUE TU SIE N - TES POZ MI

43 PART III E I G7 C#M I C#M I

DI - LE'A EL QUE SUS - O - FEN - SAS NO ME MU - MI - LLA - RO - N. QUE EL A -

Figure 10.4 (cont.): Main parts of *Pobre tonto enamorado*

Figure 10.4 (cont.): Main parts of *Pobre tonto enamorado*

In terms of the composition as it was envisioned by the composer, *Pobre tonto enamorado* is similar to *El aguardiente y yo* in a number of ways including its length and the way it is arranged. Important differences, however, can be found in the subject and melodic setting of the text, which in the case of *Pobre tonto enamorado* come to frame ballad-style writing with more traditional compositional techniques. I will examine both of these features below.

The subject of the text reflects two common trends in contemporary practice that are more characteristic of an innovative stylistic orientation: 1) a focus on the theme of romantic love (often at the exclusion of other subjects) and 2) an avoidance of specific references to a

single geo-cultural demographic—for a complete transcription and translation of the lyrics see Appendix G. As noted above, both trends speak to an engagement with specific transnational and conventional compositional practices (namely those of vallenato and ballad forms, and the pioneering efforts of early genre innovators, respectively)—a topic I take up again in Chapter 12.

One of the challenges faced by contemporary composers is to come up with an original and fresh perspective on a topic that is already the subject of numerous other compositions. As discussed in Chapter 4, this is often achieved by a reworking of the various paradigms as well as the many permutations associated with (heterosexual) romantic love. Jaén’s composition characterizes this approach particularly through its use and reworking of rhetorical conventions associated with narratives of unrequited romantic love. As the title suggests, *Pobre tonto enamorado* (i.e., Poor fool in love) addresses the theme of unrequited love, however, the “fool” in this narrative is not the protagonist as one would expect. The narrative develops within a fairly common framework of a love triangle involving a protagonist, his former lover and her current lover or possibly husband. The story is told in the first person and unfolds as a one-way conversation between the protagonist and his former lover, who, having left him for another, is now forced to contemplate a future with someone she can never truly love. The song ends with the pithy observation that her “worst punishment” will be to live with someone (i.e., the “poor fool in love”) who is oblivious to this fact thus providing a sense of justified retribution for the jilted lover/protagonist and presumably the listener as well.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁶ While it is important to note that the text and underlying narrative of *Pobre tonto enamorado* is certainly open to more interpretations than the rather conventional one mentioned here (as explained on various occasions by its composer), I am less inclined to account for the possible contradictions arising from the composition’s reception. Rather, what I am trying to do is show how Jaén’s treatment of the composition’s

The closest that the text gets to grounding narrative within some sense of an actually lived experience, and by extension a particular geo-cultural context, is in the suggestion that the protagonist could possibly be a musician or even the composer. The protagonist's assertions, for example, that "love cannot be bought with money" and "I will teach him how to love you and conquer you" evoke common stereotypes of the bohemian composer/musician as someone lacking in material possessions but otherwise gifted (i.e., passionate, socially adept, etc.). However, while Jaén made it clear to me that the composition's narrative is completely fictional and the product of his own creative invention, he noted that people frequently asked him whether the story was autobiographical and he supposes that many people believe that it is. Jaén's account of the composition's reception is significant as it illustrates the way that the interplay between notions of traditionalist and innovative orientations comes to reference ideas related to the traditional role of the composer-as-storyteller versus a more recent tendency to avoid explicit references to particular geo-cultural landmarks and demographics.

In the foregoing I have made the case that while the theme of (unrequited) romantic love has an established history within the genre, contemporary composers are often more inclined to understand it in reference to other popular, transnational genres such as vallenato and pop/rock ballads. The fact that Jaén's composition can be interpreted as a narrative based on personal experience and at the same time argued that it is not speaks to how both perspectives draw on (and in turn, reveal a flexibility with) genre conventions and stylistic orientations I term "traditional" and "innovative."

lyrics is in keeping with some of the markers of an innovative orientation (as outlined in the previous paragraph).

Examining the melodic setting of the text also reveals further alignments with contemporary practices. There are a number of indications to suggest that the first three Parts of this piece were written as a ballad whereas the last two were written as a *cumbia agarrada*. In the first three parts the melody is quite sparse; melodic phrases tend to unfold over a greater number of beats and rarely exceed five syllables per-measure. The shape of the melodic line is also more characteristic of a vocal—rather than instrumental—melody in that it is primarily made up of a combination of static and conjunct melodic motion. Pitch redundancies (i.e., static melodic motion) allow for greater lyrical flexibility and would also suggest that neither the melody nor the text is particularly fixed or subservient to the other. This is particularly evident in Parts I and II where the melody is strophic and subdivides into two strophes (indicated by a dotted bar line), respectively. In each case the melody is sometimes varied to accommodate variations in the number of syllables in each strophe—compare, for example, bar 5 with 17, 10 with 22, and 26 with 34.

In contrast, the melodies of Parts IV and V are very much characteristic of the *cumbia agarrado* tradition and the work of “traditionalist” composers. Some of the more noticeable markers include a substantially greater degree of rhythmic density and coincidence with the underlying rhythmic pulse—as illustrated on the score by longer eighth-note sequences—as well as an increase in disjunct melodic motion. The distinction between the ballad and *cumbia agarrada* approach is also reflected in the composition’s arrangement/interpretation by LPN, which is outlined in Figure 10.5.

- Section 1 (*rumba*)
 - Part V instrumental (5xs with *saloma*)
- Section 2 (*baqueteo*)
 - Part I instrumental (1/2xs)
 - Part I vocal
 - Part I instrumental (1/2xs)
 - Part I vocal
- Section 3
 - Part II instrumental (1/2xs)
 - Part II vocal
- Section 4
 - Part III instrumental
 - Part III vocal
 - Part III instrumental
 - Part III vocal
- Section 5 (*rumba*)
 - Part IV instrumental (2 and 1/2xs with *saloma*)
 - Part IV vocal (2xs)
- Section 6
 - Part V instrumental (10xs plus ending, with *saloma*)

**Figure 10.5: Outline of the form of *Pobre tonto enamorado*
(recorded by LPN in 2007)**

For the most part LPN's arrangement is based on a conventional treatment of repetition where individual Parts become repeated—alternating between vocal and instrumental renditions of the melody—while the sequential arrangement of the parts remains intact. In this arrangement, however, Parts IV and V are further differentiated from those preceding in that they coincide with the *rumba* sections and so provide a significant point of contrast during the composition's performance. LPN take further advantage of this distinction by beginning the arrangement with a comparatively brief iteration of Part V so as to effect an additional point of contrast with the subsequent *baqueteo* sections, which would traditionally begin a composition.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁷ This is an arranging (rather than compositional) technique that has come to be used by many ensembles with increasing frequency as a means of creating additional points of contrast in what is a fairly standardized compositional framework.

On the whole, this composition as well as its arrangement achieves is an effective *blend*³⁶⁸ of two relatively distinct compositional techniques. To most genre participants, it is likely that this composition would be regarded as a representative example of contemporary genre practices, being neither overtly innovative (although it does draw on a *tradition of innovation*) nor particularly representative of older practices. At times, however, its key ingredients could be separated from the overall blend to showcase performance continuities and competencies with other genres. This happened rather pointedly on a handful of occasions when, as a kind of coda or reprise, LPN would end this composition as a pop/rock ballad, which I discuss in connection with performance contexts.

When attempting to identify those aspects of a composition that are not only understood by the composers to be permanent, but also an indication of a particular stylistic orientation, like my informants I find it necessary to prioritize particular musical parameters over others as a marker of a specific (older/newer) performance tradition. In particular, I have highlighted the use of disjunct melodic motion and rhythmic density as features of older, iconic compositions (such as *Edicta no me quiere* discussed in Chapter 2) that are often absent in contemporary compositions. While composers do not use these terms, Amaya does describe a compositional procedure that prioritizes melody over text, which for him is a defining characteristic of his Traditional style. Jaén and his friends on the other hand develop their compositions as “ballads,” which *conjuntos* then arrange to suit their own (*música típica popular*-identified) musical style. This approach often results in a melodic setting of the text that differs primarily in its use of static and conjunct melodic motion, and longer

³⁶⁸ I use this term in a manner similar to Benjamin Elon Brinner (2009) who—in describing “important aspects of musical fusion [and] the conceptual space within which the work of mixing is done” (p.217)—describes “blend” as “a spectrum from contrastive to integrative, from stark juxtapositions of musical styles that foreground differences to seamless integration, where difference is elided into synthesis” (p.218).

durational values—pointedly illustrated when LPN play only portions of this composition as a ballad (as noted above and discussed further in Chapter 12). In prioritizing these particular compositional characteristics it is important to note, however, these are conscious decisions on the part of the composers and should not be taken as an indication of performance limitations.

Conclusion

Compositional processes inform and are informed by notions of conventional practices that have become the basis of the *música típica popular* genre. Not all composers, however, understand, interpret and engage with the limitations and possibilities of the genre in the same way. Variations are not only the norm, but are important means for differentiating one composer and/or compositional style from another or as more or less traditionalist or innovative in orientation. Perceptions of a composition's or composer's stylistic qualities do not exist in isolation from performance conventions. Rather, compositions are frequently tailored to suit a particular *conjunto*'s stylistic orientation and composers often write for *conjuntos* whose style is believed to be similar to their own. As such the relationship between the two is understood to be critical to the formation of creative identities based on stylistic differences and similarities deemed essential to a *conjunto*'s artistic success and commercial survival.

CHAPTER 11

CONJUNTO PROFESSIONALISM AND PERIPATETICISM

In this chapter I address the subject of *conjunto* professionalism and its critical intersection with longstanding Panamanian geo-cultural imaginaries. This chapter is organized around two general and related themes, one of which is addressed in the first section and the other in the following two sections. In the first section I examine the convention of a *gira* (i.e., tour) because it is the most common form of *conjunto* work and because it is critical to realizing the economic imperative of cultivating a geo-socially diverse following—i.e., a consumer-audience-base among territorially disparate and seemingly socially distinct audience demographics. My analysis of a *gira* focuses principally on activities that may seem quotidian and extramusical in character, but in fact are central to music making in *música típica popular* professional practice. In the following discussion two activities and associated environments emerge as central to the experience of *conjunto* employment: 1) providing for the entertainment of patrons of commercial *bailes* and 2) traveling to the various destinations of a *gira*. I contend that both activities are significant as they not only appreciably organize and shape both the lives and lifestyles of *conjunto* professionals, but also discourses connected to the activities of professional *conjunto* musicians in relation to ideas of place and space.

In the second and third sections I examine the significance of peripateticism among *conjunto* professionals. In particular I address the issues of why professional *conjunto* members travel, where they travel and how this activity informs and is informed by various (and at times contested) understandings of *conjunto* practices in relation to broader nationalist discourses of isthmian geo-social and geo-cultural identity. In particular I examine the significance of the particular locations and audiences for whom *conjunto*'s perform, specifically the way in which these factors are thought to provide an indication (or sway perceptions) of a *conjunto*'s degree of acceptance and financial success—or “popularity” by other names—and also particular stylistic orientation.

My research shows that while *conjuntos* strive to maintain diversity in performance locales and their resident audiences, each *conjunto* tends to put a different emphasis on different locales. Very often *conjuntos* will cultivate a number of what I will refer to as “audience-bases”: i.e., general areas such as towns, cities and/or provinces (and usually but not necessarily in the same venues) where *conjuntos* perform frequently and presumably for the same general and resident audiences.³⁶⁹ The relationship between *conjuntos* (including their individual style and perceived stylistic orientation) to their audiences and performance locales is implicated in a larger discourse concerning Panamanian nationalism as organized around a well-defined centre-periphery geo-cultural paradigm (i.e., Panama City at the centre and the *interior* at the periphery). The expectation being that innovative-identified *conjuntos* perform in urban centres and their traditionalist-identified counterparts in more rural areas.

³⁶⁹ My understanding and use of the term “audience-base” resonates with Packman’s idea that in addition to musicians, “producers, club owners or managers” can also be understood as nexus principals (2009:93). The implication here is that like musicians, their employers, for instance, can be understood as participants or principals of other nexus-type formations centred around particular venues and locales. “What happens is that there are networks of musicians, support personnel, producers, etc. and more complete nexuses that overlap, conflict, and interact in various ways” (Packman, personal communication, 2012).

The emergent relationship, I argue, is meaningfully problematic, ambiguous and oblique; often locating practices of *conjunto* professionals at the interstices of two (seemingly) geo-cultural opposites within the Panamanian territory.

It should be noted here the overlaps and noticeable differences between professional and semi-professional *conjuntos* as it pertains to the following discussion. In the previous chapters I have defined and examined professionalism in various ways. In most cases professionalism can productively be defined in economic terms in cases where all constituents earn all or the large majority of their income through *conjunto* activities—which (and significant to the issue of peripateticism) is largely through (live) *baile* performances. In Chapter 9 I have also shown that professionalism intersects with ideas of stylistic individuation, where all economically self-sufficient *conjuntos* are also understood to have a heightened level of stylistic individuation—and vice versa for semi-professional *conjuntos*. It should be pointed out, however, that while *conjunto* professionals place a high premium on professionalism (and are generally highly conscientious of the economic goings-on of their peers/competitors) there is not always a hard distinction between professionals and non-professionals particularly in terms of performance practices.³⁷⁰ Keeping these factors in mind, it is accurate to say that much of what is discussed below pertains specifically to the activities of economically self-sufficient (i.e., professional) *conjuntos*, and to a lesser degree and less consistently to those of semi-professional *conjuntos*.

³⁷⁰ My use of the term ‘semi-professional’ is meant to reflect this issue by suggesting that most-to-all *conjuntos* aspire to full professionalism, often emulating the activities and conventions of professionals, and cultivating and/or acquiring the means for professionalism (i.e., gear, original repertoire and commercial recordings, audience-bases, etc.).

***Conjunto* professionalism**

Constant and extended travel to-and-from performances as well as to-and-from one's home-base is a prominent feature of professional *conjunto* work. For this reason, on one hand *conjunto* professionals can be said to lead highly peripatetic lifestyles, spending a substantial portion of their (professional) lives on the road and away from their family and homesteads. On the other hand, they cannot be described as being fully itinerant either, as all maintain permanent homesteads (the majority located in the Azuero region) to which they return when not performing. *Conjunto* peripateticism is, therefore, largely organized around a recurring cycle of departure and return to-and-from the unit's point of origin and nominal home-base.

Professional *conjuntos* typically perform between three to five *bailes* per week. Depending on the location and proximity of one *baile* to the next, the *conjunto*'s owner may either choose to return to the group's home-base (i.e., the locale where the *conjunto* owner and usually many of the *integrantes* maintain their primary residences) or spend a day or more away. In general, the latter scenario—called a “*gira*” or tour—is the most common given that *bailes* are more numerous toward the weekend (i.e., Thursday through Sunday) and are typically located some distance from a *conjunto*'s home-base. As such, *gira* itineraries tend to follow a predictable pattern: they begin and conclude at the *conjunto*'s home-base, and involve traveling to specific performance sites on a daily basis. In the following I provide a general outline of the key facets of *conjunto* professionalism in relation to the various activities of a *gira*.

Travel

Travel to-and-from various and territorially-dispersed performance sites has long been a feature of the *conjunto* profession. The distances traveled over a course of a *gira* are relative to the number of *bailes* performed and the relative location of each performance site. In my experience, most professional *conjuntos* generally perform a maximum of one *baile* per night, average a minimum of three *bailes* per *gira*, and travel in excess of 1000 kilometres over the course of a single *gira*. The *integrantes* of LPN (one of the busier *conjuntos*), for example, estimate that they perform on average 20 to 25 *bailes* per month, which they say corresponds to approximately a distance of 5,500 kilometres.³⁷¹ These very general statistics aside, traveling statistics vary largely on the distance between the location of a *conjunto*'s home-base and a *baile*, and from one *baile* location to another. Suffice it to say, however, that travel (and very often extended travel) is a feature of nearly every *baile* performance.

For the large majority of *conjunto* professionals, traveling entails riding in medium-sized buses used to transport both the *conjunto*'s *integrantes* and equipment. The interiors of these vehicles are almost always retrofitted so as to 1) create a separate compartment in the rear of the bus to safely stow the equipment and 2) allow for additional passenger seating in the front. In many cases practicality (i.e., economy) is said to supersede comfort, and *integrantes* sometimes describe their seating arrangements as “tight” and/or increasingly uncomfortable over an extended amount of time, which I also found to be often the case. Some *conjunto* owners, however, have (at an additional expense) sought to improve the traveling conditions of their *integrantes* by providing air conditioned passenger interiors, reclining seats and a television. In some cases an additional vehicle (and driver) is also used

³⁷¹ Various members of LPN, personal communication, 2008.

so as to allow the performers to travel separately from the equipment. While more expensive, this configuration is particularly beneficial to the performers as it allows them to avoid hanging around while the equipment is being assembled and dismantled, thus considerably reducing *baile* arrival and departure times.³⁷² In contrast, most *conjunto* owners travel separately from their *integrantes*, usually in their own jeep—which is both faster than the bus and travels independent of the *conjunto*'s equipment thus reducing their travel times between performances and allowing them to arrive at and depart from each venue well before the rest of the group.

A number of important social interactions tend to take place when a *conjunto* travels, some of which are limited to the members of the group and others are of a more public nature. Access to a *conjunto*'s bus is usually limited to its respective members only, and outsiders, including friends and family, are generally not allowed to board without the owner's express permission. This is due to a number of factors one of which includes restrictions on the vehicle's insurance policy, which generally only covers *conjunto* employees. Another is a consideration of the passengers' general privacy and comfort—“privacy” in this case of course being relative term and applied to the interactions of *conjunto* members with non-members. Within the confines of the *conjunto* bus, personal space and independence is often at a premium, and ordinarily private and/or independent activities (such as changing one's clothes, using the toilet and eating) must take place in coordination with the other passengers. For these reasons, *conjunto* professionals strive to maintain a good rapport with their fellow *integrantes* and any disputes between individual members tends to be resolved as quickly as possible so as to limit its effect on the group as a whole. In addition, the bus also provides a place for *integrantes* to socialize amongst

³⁷² This is the case with RS and LPC.

themselves, discuss any grievances they may have with the owner and, in his/her absence, decide whether any decisive action should be taken.

In contrast to the privacy afforded *integrantes* within the bus, the vehicle itself can also bring the activity of traveling into the public sphere. A *conjunto*'s bus is easily identifiable by labels on its exterior panels identifying the *conjunto* and owner by name; effectively advertising to onlookers the group's immediate whereabouts and presumed industriousness as an entertainment outfit. In general I have found *integrantes* to be conscientious of the fact that as they board and exit the bus their presence frequently does not go unnoticed, and for the most part they tended to avoid any behaviour that could be interpreted by onlookers as offensive, rude or otherwise incongruent with the *conjunto*'s image as an operational and amicable unit.

In this study I have frequently found it productive to regard professionalism—in the sense of economic self-sufficiency—as a relatively quantifiable factor that organizes and differentiates *conjunto* activities in significant ways. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that success (economic, musical/artistic, etc.) can also be performed and that certain activities are key to mapping an ensemble as professional. Traveling is certainly one such activity; being a necessary precursor and successor to performance, it is a testament of a *conjunto* at work and, presumably, that is in demand. *Conjuntos* take care to advertise their mobility by decorating the panels of their buses and having the *locutor* announce the dates and locations future performances over the course of *baile*. It is my experience that even members of *conjuntos* who are not that busy are usually positive about their work schedules and, when questioned, will frequently offer details about upcoming performances to avoid

giving the impression of not having work.³⁷³ The number of dancers at a *baile* is also a benchmark of a *conjunto*'s economic and artistic success. Musicians will usually describe a *baile* as “*bueno*” or “*malo*” (good/bad) depending on how many *taquilla* were sold on a given night. More often than not, it was my experience that most informants would also view dancers statistics in a positive light (i.e., *baile* success ranged from “good” to “very good”) and “bad” *bailes* were rarely discussed openly or in the presence of strangers.

These various mappings of *conjunto* professionalism resonate closely with Packman's idea of “working to work,” i.e.: the development of “the complex of activities necessary to build a musical career” (2011:415). “[I]n many instances,” Packman explains, working to work is just as—if not more—crucial to earning a living as a musician as more conventionally conceived musical competences. This is because success and often survival depend not only on what and who you know, but also on how others know you. (438)

While the foregoing examples of “working to work” among *conjunto* practitioners seemed to be directed largely to the general public—rather than to other freelancers, as was often the case in Salvador—the general impetus and goals appear to be similar.

Performance

The large majority of a *conjunto*'s performances take place in the context of a commercial *baile*. Usually the *integrantes* will arrive at the site of the *baile* 1.5 to 2 hours in advance of the performance, giving the driver, roadie and sound engineer enough time to set up the *conjunto*'s sound system and instruments. Typically the owner will arrive at some point thereafter and, in consultation with the *empresario*, determine the best time for the *conjunto*

³⁷³ Similarly, Jon Fredrickson and James F. Rooney (1993) have noted that freelance classical musicians will regularly position themselves as ‘busy’—and in some cases busier than they really are—so as “maintain an illusion of success” (36).

to begin its performance—that is, ideally when the venue appears to be approaching its full capacity. Once the performance begins, the *conjunto* drivers are expected to retire to their respective vehicles and try to sleep until the *baile* ends. This is to ensure that they will be as rested as possible when the group travels to their next destination, and for this reason they are also prohibited from consuming alcohol while thus employed.

A *baile* performance will usually take place at night beginning anywhere between 10:00 to 11:00 PM and continuing until 4:00 to 6:00 AM.³⁷⁴ The *integrantes* are always paid at the end of a performance after which point the owner will usually leave (i.e., circa 1/2 hour after the *baile* ends). The *integrantes* will leave the venue after the equipment is stowed in the bus, which usually takes over an hour to accomplish. Following a performance, a *conjunto* will travel either to a hotel close to the site of the following night's *baile* or to their home-base. While all the *integrantes* will usually fall asleep during this particular leg of the *gira*, most do not describe the bus as conducive to proper rest and once in the hotel will usually sleep well into the afternoon.

A *baile* performance constitutes a particularly heightened point of interaction between a *conjunto* and their fans as it is in typical performance venues such as *toldos* and *jardines*, and in front of a paying audience where the unit's image and professional reputation is most at stake. On these occasions, professional etiquette demands that performers dress appropriately (often with the male *integrantes* wearing matching shirts provided by the owner) and conduct themselves in a respectable manner both on and off stage. In addition, *all* the *integrantes* are expected to be affable and good mannered

³⁷⁴ Some *bailes*, called *saraos*, begin in the early evening (circa 6:00 PM) and end around midnight. These usually occur on Sundays so as to allow patrons time to rest in advance of the work week. Sometimes a *baile*, either by design or chance, will end at dawn or at some point thereafter in which case it is referred to as an “*amanecida*” or “*amanecia*” (literally “daybreak,” similar to “all-nighter”).

particularly in their interactions with patrons, and failure to do so can be considered grounds for employment probation or even termination.

When on stage, *conjunto* performers are not only expected to execute their various sound producing roles in the ensemble, but also to have fun doing it or at least make it appear that way. Most *conjunto* musicians agree that *música típica popular* is very much about having a good time. And while many told me that they genuinely enjoyed the experience of performing—particularly when the audience is responsive and dancing—most also admit that this can be challenging especially when one is tired, sick or simply worried and distracted, as one *integrante* explained:

You know, in every company there are always problems. [...] Sometimes we have argued over a plate of food, a band uniform or some other silly thing; [which is] the result of the stress from working a lot, not eating well and not resting well. [...] But after a short while, however, we are hanging out again. [...] Within any polemic there always exists a rapport [with one another]. When we go to work, however, we leave all this behind and do our job. [...] You have to be [happy], because people are paying to have fun.³⁷⁵

In many cases a positive attitude can mean the difference between a mediocre and inspired performance, and given that their reputations are on the line, most *conjuntos* try to make every performance count.

Professional lifestyles, challenges and hazards

While not necessarily the most arduous form of employment, *conjunto* work and attendant lifestyles do involve a number of particular challenges, risks and hazards that to varying degrees have come to characterize the profession. Chief among these is chronic fatigue,³⁷⁶

³⁷⁵ Eury De La Rosa, personal communication, 2008.

³⁷⁶ Irregular sleeping patterns, extended travel and long performances hours are oft cited reasons for fatigue among *conjunto* personnel. While seemingly innocuous, traveling, as one retired *integrante* succinctly put it,

and physical injury or fatality resulting from vehicular accidents³⁷⁷ and violence encountered in *bailes*.³⁷⁸ A number of specific social and environmental factors linked to the *baile* setting also can impact the lives of *conjunto* professionals, such pervasive severe hearing loss from loud volumes; long- and short-term health problems resulting from poor or dangerous working conditions³⁷⁹; and substantial alcohol consumption as a result of drinking to stay awake or accepting numerous “*brindis*” (toasts) over the course of a night.³⁸⁰ In addition,

“wears you down” (Simon Saavedra, personal communication, 2008)—an assessment that I personally found to be amply true. The same can also be said for *baile* performances, which, when accompanied by a lack of sleep and long hours on the road, often leaves performers exhausted. *Conjunto* professionals deal with fatigue differently. Samy Sandoval, for example, notes that when he is on the road he adheres to a regimented sleeping schedule (sleeping from 6:00 AM to 12:00 PM) and whenever possible tries to take a nap in the afternoon so as to be as well-rested as possible when his work demands it (personal communication, 2007). Similarly, Jorge Jaén notes that when on the road he avoids meeting up with friends as much as possible as not to encroach on time that should be spent resting (personal communication, 2007). When sleep is simply not enough, a number of informants noted that performers often resort to drinking strong (and sugar-rich) liquor such as rum and *seco* so as to “not feel tired” while performing, which is also said to contribute to cases of alcoholism among *conjunto* professionals (Jorge Jaén, personal communication, 2007; also Rufino “Rufinito” García, personal communication, 2008). In some cases, particularly in the past, recreational drugs such as cocaine have also been used reportedly for similar reasons.

³⁷⁷ Vehicular accidents represent a serious danger for *conjunto* professionals as evidenced by the large number of injuries and fatalities among *conjunto* practitioners. Fatigue is often cited as the principal cause for most roadside accidents, followed by hazardous driving conditions, faulty vehicle maintenance, human error and/or negligent drivers, and sheer bad luck—which is exacerbated by the large amount of time *conjuntos* spend on the road. While all professional *conjuntos* hire professional drivers to mitigate this problem, accidents are still common. A number of *conjunto* drivers I spoke with cited both noisy environments and generally uncomfortable sleeping conditions—such as sleeping in a hot jeep or bus parked within earshot of a *conjunto*’s powerful sound system—as limiting one’s ability to rest properly. In addition drivers will also only get between 4 to 6 hours of sleep between two major legs of a daily *gira* itinerary (i.e., traveling to-and-from a *baile*), which will begin to take a toll on a driver when repeated over the course of several days.

³⁷⁸ *Bailes* also frequently become hazardous working environments as patrons are often drunk and in some cases become aggressive and physically violent. In their dealings with problematic individuals, *conjunto* personnel generally take great care to avoid confrontation whenever possible. Common strategies are either to ignore patrons who appear to be quarrelsome or rely on non-performing *integrantes* to tactfully diffuse the situation. When violent behaviour seems eminent or occurs, the lead singer or *locutor* normally alert the police officers hired to police the event over the PA system. While the presence of armed police officers have significantly curtailed the occurrence of serious injuries and fatalities in *bailes*, *conjunto* professionals are frequently at risk of being manhandled, punched or otherwise struck by improvised projectiles (beer bottles being the most common). In these situations their main recourse is to take cover—e.g., behind the stage or a table—and wait until the police officers have dealt with the situation.

³⁷⁹ Performers often cite dusty performance venues, shaky and/or poorly constructed stages, and frequent exposure to the elements (e.g., rain, heat, humidity, etc.) as a result of performing in semi-enclosed *toldos* and *jardines*, which result in number of specific health complications and/or physical injuries (e.g., respiratory problems and broken bones are common).

³⁸⁰ In Panama, refusing a *brindis* can be perceived as offensive and, as one *integrante* noted, patrons are liable to “get mad if you don’t drink” (Rufino “Rufinito” García, personal communication, 2008). Over the course of

conjunto professionals also lament the toll that long and frequent absences take on their relationships with their family and friends,³⁸¹ whom they often see less than their fellow *integrantes*.³⁸²

Each of the foregoing, in turn, can be linked to both peripateticism and the conditions of *baile* performances themselves. Moreover, significant professional challenges not only seem to contradict the genre's "*alegre*" or good time aesthetic (which performers are expected to express through smiling, physical gestures and lively interaction with the audience both on and off the stage), but also underscore the critical importance of travel and perceptions of travel to a *conjunto*s survival and success.

Peripateticism and performance territories

In the foregoing I have outlined what it entails to be a *conjunto* professional, focusing in particular on how both the *baile*—as a commercial enterprise, working environment and

a career, persistent alcohol consumption can not only be detrimental to one's health, but (particularly in cases of alcoholism) also one's personal and professional relationships.

³⁸¹ Edwin Vergara (bassist for RS) explained that in his case he did not have it that bad as he usually performed Friday to Sunday. In the case of *integrantes* of busier *conjuntos*, such as LPN, he noted that their family would literally have to "follow them around" in order to spend time together (personal communication, 2008). Such is the case with Luis Carlos "Chivo" García (bassist for LPN) who noted that his family and particularly his children miss him a good deal, adding "when they see me leaving the house with my suitcase, oh boy!" (personal communication, 2008). A peripatetic lifestyle is also frequently blamed for a culture of philandering among male professionals and even economic insolvency as a result of multiple child support payments.

³⁸² Male *conjunto* personnel and performers in particular have an arguably well-deserved reputation of being "*mujeriegos*" (womanizers), a title that is often reserved for a man who is romantically involved with multiple women, often in different provinces and townships, at the same time. While few of my informants would admit to being womanizers themselves, many were quick to point out individuals who were. In general, womanizing is regarded with cautious amusement; while *integrantes* will often joke between them about who is the "biggest" womanizer of the group, there is also an opinion that the behaviour can result in a number of unwanted consequences. Jorge Jaén noted, for example, that arguments over women are the most common reason for rifts between members of a *conjunto* (personal communication, 2007), some of whom I have known not to speak to each other for several weeks and even months. In another case, one singer (who shall remain anonymous) told me that even though he was well-paid, he still struggled to support his family and make child support payments. As a result, he said, he often worried that his voice may one day give out and that he would no longer be able meet his financial obligations (anonymous informant, personal communication, 2007).

social event—and travel significantly shape the lives and working practices of *conjunto* professionals. In the following I examine the economic basis for *conjunto* peripateticism and its relationship to longstanding Panamanian geo-cultural imaginaries.

To understand the relationship between performance destinations/*bailes* and a home-base is also to understand what motivates *conjunto* professionals to travel. In addition to the economic incentive to perform for as many *bailes* as possible, two additional concerns are particularly relevant. One is the significance of the home-base as a site of practical and symbolic importance to *conjunto* professionals. Practically, the home-base provides a geographical ‘bookend’ for any journey wherein the final leg of any itinerary is the return trip. Similarly, the home-base contributes to the teleology of a *gira*, which for most professionals begins and ends in the Azuero peninsula—a site of historical and symbolic importance to Panamanian cultural nationalism. In this respect, *conjunto* professionals do not ‘follow the work’ as is the case, for example, of itinerant performers working in circuses or cruise ships. Instead, *conjuntos* constantly travel to multiple sites of short term employment and inevitably return to their home-base.

Conjunto and *baile* economics, in tandem with performance aesthetics, also play an important role in determining *who* is in a position to profit from *música típica popular* performances. As discussed in Chapter 8, the substantial resources, both in terms of finances and qualified personnel, necessary not only to start a *conjunto*, but make it operational and commercially viable effectively limits the number of *conjuntos* deemed qualified to meet the demands of a commercial *baile*. Similarly, the substantial financial investment (and potential financial risks) associated with organizing a *baile* tends to favour those *conjuntos* with a reputation of drawing large audiences. Both these factors combined are seen as conducive to

creating monopoloid conditions where a small percentage of *conjuntos* are contracted to perform for the majority of *bailes*—which, not coincidentally, is also an important condition for *conjunto* professionalism *ipso facto*. Thus, professional *conjuntos* members and their principals (i.e., owners/accordionists) in collaboration with *baile* organizers are uniquely empowered not only to represent the *música típica popular* genre, but actively construct it. It is here that we find a critical connection between commercial success and notions of stylistic individuation (as outlined in Chapter 9), where *all* professional *conjuntos* are thought original when it comes to issues of musical style and their engagement with genre constructions.

The relationship of routes and audience-bases to isthmian geo-cultural imaginaries

While peripateticism is a given for all *conjunto* professionals, the destinations and routes taken by each can vary. *Conjuntos* tend to perform in places they have performed before and for this reason have come to view their consumer-base as one of loosely defined audience-bases linked to particular townships, cities and/or entire provinces. Territorially circumscribed audience-bases can provide a *conjunto* with a source of regular, albeit intermittent, employment, which, when distributed over a number of territorially dispersed locales, significantly contributes to the group's overall economic success. Similarly, territorial limitations as a result of limited audience-bases can also tend to curtail a *conjunto*'s overall commercial potential. In either case, however, specific geo-cultural affiliations regularly inform perceptions of a *conjunto*'s mass popularity and stylistic

orientation, and in this way represent a point of critical intersection with notions of musical style and broader geo-cultural imaginaries.

An audience-base is a loose category that for the purposes of this study is defined as a relatively specific locale where a *conjunto* is contracted to perform regularly and which in turn usually requires that they be hired by multiple *empresarios* and, most importantly, that their *bailes* be well attended. Situations in which these conditions are met are taken as a strong indication that a *conjunto* has a loyal following within the given area—such is the case with the locales listed under the heading of “Noted audience-base/s” in Table 7.1.

For *conjuntos*, an audience-base is an asset that usually comes after considerable investment and repeated performances. Competition between *conjuntos* also typically results in one *conjunto*’s repeated success within a particular area being seen by *música típica popular* practitioners as limiting for another. Not coincidentally, this phenomenon is sometimes described by practitioners in terms of “territories” “belonging to” or “conquered by” a specific *conjunto*, suggesting a sense physicality that comes from the experience visiting and revisiting particular areas so as to cultivate a loyal and ideally exclusive fandom.³⁸³ In the following excerpt, for example, Samy Sandoval describes LPC’s first audience-base as a milestone in the *conjunto*’s career, the significance of which is contextualized in terms of its consequences to his professional rival, Victorio Vergara (i.e., LPN).

My first and truly successful *bailes* were in the province of Coclé, specifically in the countryside of Antón and Penonomé. Here our songs were recognized, people liked everything we recorded and our *bailes* were full—and now they were no longer eighty couples, but one hundred fifty couples. To be honest, at the time we dominated the areas of Antón and Penonomé to the extent that not even Victorio [Vergara] could reach [i.e., perform in] the province of Coclé. (Pérez Saavedra, 2000:140)

³⁸³ It should be noted that while certain *conjunto* will claim that a particular ‘territory’ (i.e., audience-base) is ‘theirs,’ there is no expectation that another must abstain from performing there if an opportunity arises.

LPC's reputation as LM imitators was also an important factor as it allowed them to develop an initial following in this particular area as well (see Pérez Saavedra, 2000:138). Proven effective at least in this case, the strategy of acquiring an initial audience-base by imitating a locally successful/well received *conjunto* has become the paradigm that most aspiring *conjuntos* follow today.

Despite appearances to the contrary, *conjuntos* are fiercely competitive and this competition also comes to define certain performance territories. In response to potential rivals, for example, owners of successful *conjuntos* sometimes try to limit access of other (especially up-and-coming) *conjuntos* to 'their' audience-bases. One way is by refusing to perform *mano a mano* (i.e., in alternation) with another *conjunto*—which can be an opportunity for new groups to gain valuable exposure particularly in the difficult early stages. Performing on the same stage is tantamount to an endorsement of one *conjunto* to another, which arguably benefits the least well-known *conjunto* the most. A number of semi-professional musicians I have spoken with have complained that established groups simply do not give new *conjuntos* "un chance" (literally "a chance"), which some informants have suggested had previously not always been the case. One radio deejay noted, for example, that the founder of LPN, Victorio Vergara, "did not care if someone was more popular than someone else, he gave everyone an opportunity," adding: "Sadly, however, neither Ulpiano [Vergara], Alfredo [Escudero], Samy [Sandoval] nor Nenito [Vargas] do this. [...] [N]ow no one is given *un chance*."³⁸⁴ In another instance, the owner of a professional *conjunto* expressly forbade a semi-professional *conjunto* (noted for imitating the former's style and performing for the same audience-bases) to perform his *conjunto*'s repertoire, forcing the

³⁸⁴ José Ribaldes, personal communication, 2008.

latter to seek permission directly from the composers. Scenarios such as this one, which are rarely discussed in public, contradict the culture of conviviality thought to exist between *conjuntos* and highlight a particularly heightened sense of territorialism that pervades professional practices.

While connoting a sense of exclusivity, in practice audience-bases are rarely limited to one single *conjunto*, as several *conjuntos* may share the same audience-base/s or have audience-base/s that overlap with those of another *conjunto*. Instances of overlap are commonly credited to similarities in style or stylistic orientation as is commonly the case between *conjuntos* regarded as imitators and imitate-ees. I witnessed this overlap firsthand, for example, while attending a *baile* by El Orgullo de la Montaña in a rural area on the outskirts of the town of La Madera, province of Coclé. Given the location of the *baile* coupled with the fact that this particular (semi-professional) *conjunto* imitates the traditionalist style and repertoire of LM, I assumed the audience to be fans of LM as well, and indeed many were. During the course of the performance, however, one patron, recognizing that I was a foreigner, told me that if I liked what I heard then I should definitely return when LPC were performing, as they were, in his opinion, a much superior group. This statement came as a surprise not only for the reasons mentioned above (i.e., the rural location and traditionalist orientation of the visiting *conjunto*), but, in retrospect, because I had come to internalize a number of widely held assumptions about the relationship of style and territory, namely that (following their metamorphosis from traditionalists to innovators) LPC's style appealed mainly urban audiences and that rural-identified audiences liked the traditionalist styles championed LM and EOS. Evidently for this individual and likely for others, this was not the case.

Critical intersection between performance territories and Panamanian geo-cultural imaginaries

The role that style plays and/or is deemed to play in the formation of audience-bases and its attendant notions of (mass) popularity is a complex one that has important connections to Panamanian national and geo-cultural identity. This is particularly evident in the way that Panama City has become pivotal to structuring a number of important binaries connected of rural-urban and centre-periphery/*interior* specific to the isthmian territory. Panama City has a special significance among *música típica popular* practitioners. Similar to the way the Azuero region represents an idealized place of provenance and point of return for nearly all *conjunto* professionals, so too has Panama City long been a performance destination for aspiring *conjunto* performers. Many *conjuntos* (and accordionists/owners in particular) credit their renown to having, at some point, performed successfully for audiences in Panama City. A common success story is one that tells of a new *conjunto* who, having cultivated a modest following in the *interior*, finally achieve national fame by endearing themselves to *capitalino* audiences. Samy Sandoval, for example, pinpoints his *conjunto*'s sudden “boom” in popularity to having successfully performed for a televised show called “El Encuentro de Acordeones” in Panama City (Pérez Saavedra, 2000:154, 155). Similarly, Dorindo Cárdenas and Ceferino Nieto both consider their first (and sometimes competitive) engagements in the nation’s capital during the week of carnival to have been critical to their initial success. Such is also said have been the case with Victorio Vergara who, according to one author,

...began his rise to fame with Lucy Quintero [the *conjunto*'s female singer] and little by little earned [the acceptance of] the residents of the capital and managed to reach

the well-established *jardínes*. Before that, however, he had to win over the large masses of dancers that patronized the famous *toldos* where artists like Teresín Jaén had earned/won a spot.³⁸⁵

While most of these narratives imbue the experience of hitting it big in the capital with a sense of magic and mystique—with *capitalino* audiences acquiring the role of national arbiters of musical taste and success—there is also an undoubtedly practical side to the phenomenon. Panama City has long been the hub for the state’s communications media (especially radio, television and print media), and recording technology and distribution infrastructure; all useful promotional tools for the cultivation of a national/inter-regional fandom. For similar reasons social events in the capital, including *bailes*, have a reputation of being better publicized and more likely to be mentioned in society forums than those in the *interior*, providing an additional source of publicity for successful performers.

Practical considerations such as these, however, are only part of a larger picture; one that has clear connections to longstanding isthmian social and cultural imaginaries organized around a pronounced centre-periphery geo-cultural schema. As I have shown in Chapter 1, Panama City has been literally at the centre of Panama’s cosmopolitan identity, with the trans-isthmian thoroughfare marking a symbolic boundary between the nation’s urban-identified *capitalino* and rural-identified *interiorano* cultures. For much of the Republic’s history, the nation’s capital has been an important locus for transnational musical exchange in Panama, facilitated not only by trans-isthmian comings and goings, but also by its connection to the country’s communications media infrastructure, universities and cultural institutions. In contrast, the territories located outside of the trans-isthmian corridor, that is, the so called *interior*, are seen as the center of Panamanian vernacular culture as represented by the iconic *orejano* or *campesino* stereotype with its attendant associations to rurality,

³⁸⁵ Ariosto Velásquez, *Nuestra Tierra*, March 14, 2002, p.5.

(unchanging) tradition, national folklore and *mestizo* identity.³⁸⁶ *Música típica popular*, I contend, is meaningfully located in the interstice of these mutually affirming albeit contrasting national imaginaries—where ideas regarding the organization of the Isthmian territory are not always reflected in the performance and economic realities of *conjunto* practitioners. The very persistence of this dissonance between perception and practice is, in my opinion, important as it reveals some of the foundational ideas upon which national imaginaries are constructed.

One such dissonance is found in the way that (performance) affiliations to metropolitan audiences are thought to influence and effectively construct notions of *conjunto* popularity within Panama. In Panama there exists an idea especially among urban *música típica popular* aficionados that says, as one radio deejay put it, “If you are popular in the capital, then you are popular in Panama.”³⁸⁷ While a *capitalino* following is certainly something to be desired, most *conjunto* professionals will agree that such a following is neither a guarantee for commercial success nor a particularly reliable indication of a broad-based/inter-regional following on its own. In fact, I argue that as it concerns *conjunto* performance economics the existence of identifiably multiple and territorially disparate audience-bases (as well as the peripateticism they engender) effectively undermines notions of Panamanian cultural homogeneity, *capitalino*-/urban-based or otherwise. Ceferino “Kako” Nieto, for example, explained that at present LD are very “popular” in Panama City, which might give the impression that they are popular throughout the country. He added, however, that LPC are actually more popular in the provinces of Colón, Chiriquí and Veraguas, where

³⁸⁶ Tellingly I have often heard the Azuero peninsula referred to as the “cuna del folklor” or cradle of folklore.

³⁸⁷ Jorge Aquiles Domínguez, personal communication, 2008.

they perform more often and more successfully.³⁸⁸ Here, Nieto highlights the particular role and marked territorialism of audience-basesas a means of measuring a *conjunto*'s overall "popularity." While "popular" is an ambiguous term in Panama as elsewhere, more often than not—as Nieto suggests—it is a local gloss for economic success—from economic self-sustainability/professionalism moving upward. His suggestion that despite the likelihood that LD and LPC perform the same number of times albeit in differing locals (i.e., Panama City and elsewhere, respectively), one group has garnered a reputation of being busier than the other reveals the entrenchment of ideas regarding Panamanian cultural homogenization connected to *capitalino* attitudes and tastes—a connection which from the perspective of *conjunto* practitioners is often tenuous and misleading.

While complex, there is a strong correlation between the size of a *conjunto*'s following and their potential for commercial/economic success. This is because *conjunto* professionalism is very much contingent on large-scale audience participation and in-person *baile* patronage. It is principally for these reasons that territorial limitations have come to constitute an economic disadvantage regardless of the prestige conferred to a particular metropolitan and/or *capitalino* audience-base. In other words, being limited to a particular territory, even a prestigious one such as Panama City, also limits economic return for *conjuntos*. A comparison of LM and RS, two *conjuntos* who are believed to share very little overlap in terms of audience-bases/performance territories, is illustrative of this principle. LM have a strong and reputedly exclusive following among rural-identified audiences—particularly those living in sparsely populated farming communities located throughout much of the Panamanian territory—whereas RS performs principally in Panama City as well as in a number of provincial capitals (e.g., David and Las Tablas). Strictly in terms of performance

³⁸⁸ Personal communication, 2007.

revenue, LM is widely considered by professionals to be the more successful of the two *conjuntos*, performing on average more *bailes* and for larger audiences. Differences in audience demographics—which in turn are often attributed to each *conjunto*'s respective stylistic orientation (a topic I shall take up shortly)—is said to have an effect on their earning potential, where on a per capita basis metropolitan populaces are thought by *conjunto* practitioners to constitute a proportionally smaller viable audience-base than their rural-identified counterparts (attending fewer *bailes* on average).³⁸⁹ In general, however, the most economically successful *conjuntos* are those that have managed to cultivate multiple audience-bases, in *both* rural townships and major urban centres—as is the case for LD, LPN and LPC.

Thus, while it helps to be an audience draw in Panama City, professional *conjuntos* must perform tend to cultivate multi-regional performance territories as a condition for economic self-sufficiency and possible sustainability. The bottom-line is that the *conjuntos* with more audience-bases tend to perform for more *bailes* and therefore make more money. What is interesting, however, is that these factors do not always conform to *perceptions* of success or mass popularity, which (as noted above) tend to equate an urban—and particularly *capitalino*—following with a national following and greater economic rewards.

Significant as well is the way in which perceptions of stylistic orientation are frequently aligned with dominant Panamanian geo-cultural imaginaries of a culturally homogenized *interior*, and culturally dynamic, cosmopolitan and urban ‘centre’ (see Chapter 1). This alignment is perhaps most evident by the way that a traditionalist orientation is frequently linked with a rural/*interiorano* audience-base and an innovative orientation with

³⁸⁹ It should also be noted that as of yet I have not found any indication to suggest that *bailes* taking place in metropolitan areas pay substantially more or less than those taking place in more sparsely populated areas.

an urban/*capitalino* audience-base. This idea, by no means a new one, is accorded a measure of credibility based on the professional practices of a *select* number of *conjuntos*, namely EOS, LM and RS—the former two being widely recognized as traditionalists with principally rural-identified audience-bases and the latter being accepted across Panama as innovators with principally urban-identified audience-bases. Generally embraced correlations between categories of style and the presumed homogeneity of these two demographics have an obvious fit with the centre-periphery paradigm mentioned earlier. Take the following account, for example, in which Agustín “Cuco” Villareal—in the laudatory manner of a radio *locutor*—explained to me some of the particulars of Alfredo Escudero and LM’s style and performance practices:

Alfredo “Fello” Escudero: a man tied to customs and tradition. Alfredo Escudero is a man from the area [i.e., the Azuero peninsula] who maintains *the cumbia*—the true Panamanian *cumbia*—and is [connected to] the peasantry and people who appreciate *cumbia*. Alfredo “Fello” Escudero is also a musician who has always maintained a certain level [of popularity and performs] outside [the region] and principally in [the province of] Panama, and here in the province of Herrera, especially in the areas of Los Pozos, Las Minas and Ocú³⁹⁰ [as well as] Llano de Piedra³⁹¹ and the among the peasant sector of Los Santos.³⁹²

While the specifics of Villareal’s account do ring true—LM do indeed perform in the aforementioned locales with a frequency characteristic of an audience-base—what is significant is the degree to which he assumes a connection between stylistic orientation and specific audience-bases. A degree of selectivity and a tendency toward simplification (particularly by positing simple binary relationships) is a prominent feature of this type of reasoning. A similar example can be found in a chapter of an undergraduate thesis in which the author identifies and compares two phases in the history of “*música típica*”: the earlier

³⁹⁰ Townships located in central Herrera.

³⁹¹ A township in northern Los Santos.

³⁹² Personal communication, 2007.

labelled as “*música típica tradicional*” (traditional *música típica*) and the later as “*música típica urbana*” (urban *música típica*). Discussing the transition from one phase to the other, the author writes:

música típica was considered by many, especially young people, as the music for the people in the country’s interior, for “old people,” for “cholos;” however, this idea will disappear little by little. The first radical changes can be [found] in [...] “Los Patrones de la *Cumbia*.” Following these [changes], the rest of the *típica* groups began to copy this new model. (Ricord, 2001:42)

According to this author, “*música típica urbana*’s” important distinctions (i.e., “radical changes”) include instances of musical hybridity (e.g., the Dominican *churraca*, electronic drums, etc.), which, as I have already shown, is problematic given that this particular form of hybridity is neither a more recent nor specifically “urban” phenomenon.

The point I wish to make here is concerned less with the issue of whether or not there actually exists a correlation between specific stylistic orientations and geo-social/cultural demographics broadly defined, and more with the issue of how these perceptions come to reify a particular centre-periphery nationalist paradigm and, in turn, also come to structure the formal and informal discourse of the genre as a whole. First, this perception is an extension of a longstanding and demonstrably problematic discourse—most notably articulated by noted Panamanian folklorists—regarding the relationship of musical tastes and attitudes to a bifurcated national territory. In this discourse, instances of *interiorano* musical cosmopolitanism, including *música típica popular*, were often regarded as aberrations rather than a genuine form of cultural expression (see Part I) and consequently was largely omitted from much of early (and even contemporary) Panamanian musical historiography. This discourse was openly critical of what its exponents perceived as non-vernacular/cosmopolitan musical expressions, and as a result contributed to the production of

marked asymmetries between *capitalino* and *interiorano* populaces where equally authentic expressions of musical cosmopolitanism effectively conferred a measure of prestige to urban-identified audiences and musicians. Today, this is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that innovative *conjuntos* such as RS and LPC (and formerly EOS) tend to be beneficiaries of governmental support and nominations as exponents of the genre to outsiders/non-Panamanians.

Ultimately, the ideological basis of these perceptions is suggested by the fact that on the whole, general correlations between stylistic orientation and geo-cultural/social demographics tend to ignore the multiplicity of audience-bases typically cultivated by professional *conjuntos*. And while there may be a sense that urban-identified audiences do not respond well to traditionalist styles (as evidenced by the fact the EOS and LM perform infrequently in Panama City), the converse is certainly not true. Case in point is the performance strategy of the genre's arguably three most in-demand *conjuntos*: LPN, LD and LPC. Each of these *conjuntos* actively performs throughout much of the Panamanian territory and has cultivated multiple audience-bases in *both* rural- and urban-identified settings. From a purely economic point of view, this performance scenario is not only desirable but arguably essential.

In the foregoing I have argued that the oppositional stereotyping of a culturally dominant, cosmopolitan-oriented *capital/centre* versus a vernacular-oriented *interior* is problematic as it contradicts the day-to-day realities of working *conjunto* practitioners. Yet, not only do these stereotypes continue to exist and are felt by practitioners, but it appears that some practitioners benefit from them and (as I discuss in the following chapter) are complicit in their promotion. The perceived relationship between music and isthmian geo-cultural

imaginaries is significant as it is a point of critical intersection between *música típica popular* and facets of Panamanian nationalism and national identity.

Perhaps most significantly, this discourse effectively (re)creates links between *música típica popular* and broader nationalist discourses. Specifically, *música típica popular* discourse frequently acknowledges the music's unique (and perhaps uneasy) overlap with longstanding geo-cultural binaries of centre-periphery, *capitalino-interiorano*, and (urban-identified) cultural cosmopolitan and (rural-identified) vernacularism. As I strive to show in this chapter and in those previous, *música típica popular* tends to be regarded neither as an expression of musical-cultural vernacularism akin to Panamanian *música folklórica* nor a more or less 'genuine' product of urban-identified musical cosmopolitanism—such as was arguably the case, for example, with the *combos nacionales*. The genre's naming practices, continued Azuerense identity and, now, attendant commercial imperatives effectively problematize its alignment to these particular binaries. By examining the relationship of *conjunto* professionals to their respective audience-bases two pictures of the genre emerge. On one hand, the peripatetic practices of *conjunto* professionals suggest that *música típica popular* is performed and consumed throughout the Republic, and across social and (regionally-identified) cultural boundaries, making it arguably a particularly national phenomenon. The picture being one of a genre that, to quote Cheville et al, has effectively "invaded every corner of the Isthmus" (1977:116). On the other hand, *conjunto* peripateticism also reveals that both the genre's production and consumption are meaningfully and multiply differentiated. *Conjunto* professionals do not see themselves as catering to a single undifferentiated audience-base of simple genre aficionados, but rather recognize multiple and territorially specific audience-bases whose main distinctions are

based on a perceived affiliation with a particular *conjunto*. In this way, notions of musical style, a quintessential *conjunto* marker, not only inform particular professional practices, but are also susceptible generalized categorizations based on consumer tendencies (real or imagined) that find alignment with broader national imaginaries.

Conclusion

In summary, *conjunto* peripateticism not only significantly shapes the performance regimen of professional musicians, but also underscores a complex relationship between the genre, and the literal and ideological configuration of the Panamanian territory. While we have seen that in the process of being professional, all *conjuntos* travel, however, they do not necessarily travel to the same locations; certain *conjuntos* are more popular—i.e., they perform for more *bailes*—in certain areas than others. While it may be a matter of speculation why and how affiliations to specific audience-bases become established in the first place, it is clear that they are seen as having an impact on a *conjunto*'s image and identity particularly as it concerns perceptions of popularity, more or less traditional or modern, parochial or metropolitan, and so forth.

CHAPTER 12

CONJUNTO PERFORMANCE PRACTICE AND DISCOURSES OF PANAMANIAN NATIONALISM

In this chapter I examine the performance practices of (mainly) professional *conjunto* practitioners as well as the role that performance contexts play in informing various understandings of performance style and conventional practices. In particular I focus on *música típica popular*'s relationship to the *baile* institution, which I argue is pivotal to understanding how notions of genre and style meaningfully intersect with established discourses of Panamanian music-cultural vernacularism and cosmopolitanism. Critical here is the idea that local conceptions of what constitutes tradition and innovation are not static, but flexible and often determined by performance context. The consequences of this notional give are demonstrably varied. On one hand, *conjunto* performers can take advantage of *música típica popular*'s mass (albeit national) popularity to link the genre to the populism sometimes associated with vernacularist discourse. On the other, the genre's seemingly cosmopolitan sensibilities and urban appeal—which, in turn, is largely contingent on practices and discourses of musical *fusión*—appears to be undermined by the genre's anonymity beyond its national borders.

This chapter is organized in three sections. In the first section I examine the *baile* institution as a setting for various and particular forms of musical and social interaction. Specifically I focus on the relationship between several forms of entertainment taking place

at a *baile* and the interaction between musicians and their audiences. I argue that the setting of a *baile* and the dance practices it enables have contributed to a certain standardization of *conjunto* performance practices and also formed the basis for how the genre is understood, appreciated and enjoyed. In the second section I examine two specific and unusual performances, which provide a glimpse of the various ways in which notions of style and genre become subsumed within the broader category of Panamanian and in particular Azuerense cultural vernacularism. In the final section I examine the seemingly remarkable case of the *música típica popular*'s anonymity beyond its national borders, which serves to highlight the genre's relationship to notions of Panamanian musical cosmopolitanism. One important theme that recurs throughout this chapter is the idea that as a result of *baile* economics and social dance practices, the commercial *baile* can be understood to have a stabilizing influence on various aspects of *conjunto* performance practices. It is precisely this standardization of *conjunto* performance practices that has significantly shaped the genre's relationship to notions of Panamanian vernacular and cosmopolitan identity, which I examine in second and third sections of this chapter, respectively.

An examination of *baile* as performance context

Baile performances are the principal way in which *conjunto* professionals make their living and where the large majority of *música típica popular* aficionados not only experience this music live and in person, but arguably also enjoy it to its full potential. For this reason, in order to understand the significance of the genre in Panama it is essential to understand its relationship to this particular performance context. In the following I provide an outline of some of the more important features of a commercial *baile* that can be shown to have a direct

impact on the genre's performance practice and reception. My aim here is to provide a basis for understanding the way the *baile* has come to shape and structure various aspects of *conjunto* performance practices and in turn become a basis for understanding *música típica popular*'s relationship to broader discourses of Panamanian national cultural identity.

In examining the social, musical and commercial phenomenon that is the *baile* one is forced to consider its ability to inform a myriad of different experiences, responsibilities and expectations. For the *empresario* whose job it is to oversee every aspect of the event, the *baile* may seem like a jigsaw puzzle in which all the component pieces must be carefully accounted for and assembled in their proper order. For the musicians and deejays hired to provide entertainment for a particular segment of the event, a *baile* may feel like a marathon where each one must take off where the other left off. For the *baile* patron a *baile* is above all an experience to be enjoyed both for its individual component parts and the way these come together to produce a cohesive entertainment experience.

In the following I begin with the puzzle—outlining some of the principal components of a successful *baile*—and conclude with an overview of the *baile* as an experience examining the interconnectivity of the various music- and entertainment-related components.

Outline of the key components of a baile

Location

The large majority of *bailes* take place in venues called *toldos* and *jardines*: semi-enclosed structures consisting of a tin roof supported by pillars and cement or wooden floors. These venues are often registered businesses and most days out of a year operate as drinking establishments otherwise known as *cantinas*. Their principal use, however, is to provide a

site for performing and dancing to live music. To this end, a *toldo* or *jardín*'s single most important feature is its large, unobstructed dance floor located at the center of the building. These venues tend to vary in size, however, most have a capacity of between 800 to 2000 people, and many can have capacities in excess of 5000 people. *Toldos* and *jardines* are found throughout Panama and even the smallest of villages will have at least one or two.³⁹³

Somewhere at the venue's periphery are located a stage for the performers and a countertop for serving alcoholic beverages. The height of the stage is variable and tends to range from .5 to 1 meter (stages over 1 meter in height are also used, albeit less frequently). While stage platforms can vary in size, certain consistencies exist and contribute to particular uniformities in *conjunto* presentational formation and stage organization. Most stages, for example, are rectangular in shape and rarely measure less than 6 metres in length and 2.5 in width. This shape and (minimum) size allows *conjunto* performers to position themselves in two rows along the length of the stage.³⁹⁴

Bailes are very often crowded environments characterized by the hustle and bustle of many dancing couples and are sometimes a site of violent exchange between patrons. Very often the stage serves the function of creating a physical barrier between the performers (and expensive performance equipment) and the audience. In this context, the stage allows the performers to exert a measure of control over the type of interaction they have with their audience.³⁹⁵

While the stage can be understood to enhance the spectacle of a performance by

³⁹³ Las Tablas, for example, which has a population of 8000, has by my count at least twenty *toldos* and *jardines*.

³⁹⁴ The stages upon which musicians perform vary considerably in terms of design. Some are built on an ad hoc basis and may be constructed from readily available materials such as wooden planks laid over plastic beer cases, cinder blocks or construction scaffolds. Others are built of more durable material (e.g., cement and/or wood) and may form a permanent feature of the venue.

³⁹⁵ Female performers in particular limit their interaction with *baile* patrons by sometimes remaining on the stage until the *baile* ends.

providing the audience with an unobstructed view of the performers, a *música típica popular* performance is less appreciated as a visual experience than a sonic one. The venue has something to do with this. *Bailes* are generally dimly lit environments, which is said to provide the dancers with a measure of privacy (I shall discuss this in more detail below). Depending on its size, in general the venue will be lit by no more than two or three (40-60 watts) tungsten light bulbs, one of which is usually suspended over the stage. On many occasions I noticed that the stagehands took care to shield the audience from direct light by placing a piece of cardboard to the side of the light bulb facing the audience.

Forms of musical entertainment

As it is referred to in this study, a *baile* is an event that features a live performance by one or more *música típica popular conjuntos*. However, while a *conjunto* performance represents the main musical attraction, a *baile* may (and very often will) feature other forms musical entertainment as well. Among the most common are a *cantadera* and/or a deejay hired to play commercial recordings of various genres often by request. Additionally, albeit less commonly, a *baile* may also feature performances by other ensembles such as *murga* (mixed percussion, brass and woodwind ensemble used mainly to accompany carnival parades), *tamborito* (mixed vocal and drum ensemble performing repertoire by the same name) or a *conjunto folklórico* (dance troupe accompanied by accordion and various drums).

Like the *conjunto*, all forms of entertainment at a *baile* are designed to attract patrons. However, while the *conjunto* may generate substantial revenue for the *empresario* through the sale of “*taquillas*” (dancing fees/tickets), most other forms of music are thought to generate a profit by creating the right atmosphere for social drinking. It is in this respect that

the *cantadera*, in particular, may play a significant role in determining the financial outcome of a *baile*.

A *cantadera* is a sung performance of pre-composed/memorized and extemporized *décima* poetry or groups of *décimas* called *versos*/verses. The personnel and overhead costs associated with a *cantedera* are considerably less than a *conjunto* and generally feature two or more singers accompanied by small ensemble of usually two musicians—e.g., two guitarists, a violinist and a guitarist, or, less commonly, a *mejoranera* player and a violinist. Like (live) *conjunto* music, *cantadera* performances elicit various forms of engagement from an audience. Lyric structure plays a role as *cantadera* performances involve complex poetic forms, the logic of which may not be fully appreciated until the conclusion of a given “*torrente*” or standard “song”,³⁹⁶ thus demanding a good deal of focused listening.³⁹⁷ As a result, *cantadera* audiences will usually remain seated throughout a performance and will interact frequently with the performers often by applauding or shouting words of encouragement after the performance of each individual *décima*.

Patrons of a *cantadera* will usually arrive at the *toldo/jardín* in the early evening, pay the prescribed entrance fee and rent a table and chairs somewhere in the vicinity of the stage. Usually attendees listen to a *cantadera* in the company of friends and family. Social drinking is an important part of this experience as well as a significant source of revenue for the *empresario*. Having access to a table, patrons will often order liquor by the bottle (*seco*, rum

³⁹⁶ *Torrentes* function as frameworks for *décima* performances, each determining the general tempo, specific chord progression and general melody of a given performance, and in some cases a particular theme or topic (e.g., love, nature, rural life-ways, etc.). Each individual *torrente* performance may last between ten to twenty minutes or even longer, with the entire *cantadera* usually lasting between four to five hours. For an outline of Panamanian *décima* texts and performance practices see Zárate and Zárate, 1999.

³⁹⁷ I was frequently reminded of this fact where when attending a *cantadera* I was often (and repeatedly) told by well intentioned audience members that I must “really listen” to the lyrics if I wanted to fully appreciate the performance. On the other hand, such admonishments were not given during *conjunto* performances where the aesthetic focus shifted more to dancing.

and whiskey being the most common), which is served with a bucket of ice and plastic cups.

While contemporary *cantadera* practice is largely commercialised (e.g., many of its practitioners earn their living from live performances and some also produce commercial recordings), in terms of its reception it is very much understood to be celebration of vernacular/*interiorano* culture and regional identity. Some of the more overt markers of Panamanian vernacularism can be found in the context of live performances where it is customary for singers—and indeed for many male members of the audience—to wear *sombreros pintados/pintaó* (lit. painted sunhats) while performing.³⁹⁸ In addition, the texts of *décimas* frequently address themes associated with rural-identified lifeways, regional folklore and rural-identified landscapes and nature—all familiar tropes of Panamanian *música folklórica*/musical vernacularism.

The sense of traditionalism associated with *cantaderas* also intersects with ideas of the role of stylistic orientation among *conjunto* professionals. Musically/performatively speaking, while *cantadera* and *conjunto* performers do not interact in a performative way, their relationship is sometimes understood to hinge on issues of stylistic orientation. *Cantaderas* are said to be more frequent in *bailes* taking place in towns located in the Panamanian interior and are thought to attract an older demographic. For this reason, the more traditionally oriented the style of the *conjunto* the more it is thought to be a better fit for a *cantadera*. Consequently it is my experience that *cantaderas* were less common in the *bailes* performed by RS, LPC and LD, vis-à-vis their professional counterparts.

³⁹⁸ This *sombrero* has long been an iconic symbol of Panamanian national (in particular *interiorano* and *campesino*) identity, and *cantadera* performers use it to great effect. Depending on the way the hat is worn the performer can emote a range of particular moods and attitudes (e.g., aggressive, honest, unaffected, etc.) that come to nuance the more competitive elements of the performance.

In various respects the *baile* institution has come to shape and in effect standardize *conjunto* musical practice. *Conjunto* performances always follow a *cantadera*. Typically *conjuntos* perform on average three songs an hour and between fifteen to twenty songs per *baile*. All *conjuntos* perform a combination of (slower) *cumbia agarrado* and (faster) *cumbia atravesado* and *cumbia suelta* compositions, with the former constituting the majority of their repertoire. (Songs performed in the *paseból* subgenre are less of a commonly shared feature, with some *conjuntos* playing them relatively consistently and others not at all) One of the most distinguishing features of live (*baile*) performances is the length of each individual performance. This is due mainly to the fact that each composition is played twice in its entirety as well as a tendency to lengthen the *rumba* sections of most songs. While *conjunto* musicians often complain that this practice is an unnecessary redundancy (which, as I discuss below, they argue alienates non-*baile* going audiences), there is also a sense that compositions performed in this way have come to develop their own teleological framework that exists separate from the recorded composition. This can be readily observed in the performance lengths of each individual sections, where the second iteration is usually longer than the first thus creating a sense of build and effectively complicates the idea that the second repetition is largely a redundant one. Standard *música típica popular* recording practice (which does away with the second iteration of the form) as well as the opinions of the musicians themselves would seem to suggest that the needs of dancing and non-dancing audiences are, in this respect, dissimilar. However, live performances have their enthusiasts among certain radio audiences and are even converted into recordings by enterprising radio deejays.

Within the context of a *baile*, the interaction between a *conjunto* and their audience appears to be largely predicated on the assumption that the musicians' job is to cater to the dancers. It is in this respect that *conjunto* performances are commonly viewed by performers as an anomaly when compared to concert-style performances taking place both within Panama and abroad—a topic I address further below. At a *baile* the act of dancing remains the strongest indication of an audience's appreciation (or lack thereof) for the music. When asked why they preferred the music of one *conjunto* over another, dancers will often highlight issues related to musical style. While most dancers I interviewed did specify what made one style different from another, most noted that the music of their favourite *conjunto* was more "bailable," or danceable, than those of others and that this formed an important part of the music's aesthetic appeal. The strong relationship between music and dance is also particularly noticeable by the general lack of other forms of performer-audience interaction such as applause or direct (verbal) communication. As I show in a subsequent section, recently there has been some effort to change this and to treat the *baile* as a concert performance, however, this is certainly not the norm and many *conjunto* professionals derive great satisfaction in performing for packed dance floor.

Role of the *locutor*

As soon as a *conjunto* finishes performing their first song, the *conjunto*'s locutor begins the first of a series of monologues each lasting around 10 to 12 minutes and concluding at the beginning of next performance. Within the context of a *baile*, the role of the *locutor* can be best described as a combination of entertainer and announcer. As an entertainer, the *locutor*'s job is to *animar* (i.e., animate) the audience between each song while the musicians take a

break. This includes providing a non-stop (extemporized) monologue during which s/he may discuss current events, mention individual patrons by name and sometimes engage in a conversation with any patrons who may choose to approach the stage.³⁹⁹

As an announcer, the *locutor* is principally responsible for providing publicity for the *conjunto* and the *empresario*. This includes notifying the audience of the *conjunto*'s upcoming activities (e.g., performances, recordings, etc.), naming those individuals and/or companies who had a hand in organizing the *baile*, and mentioning any other future activities the *empresario* may be involved in (i.e., upcoming *bailes*, etc.). In addition the *locutor* will also mention the name of each composition and its composer prior to every performance, reaffirming here the links between composer and composition, and *conjunto* and composer (see Chapter 10). During the course of a monologue, a *locutor* will mention his/her *conjunto* and the names of the *baile*'s organizer/s and sponsors frequently and always in laudatory terms. For the *conjunto*, in particular, this is a way of promoting a particular image of the group as successful and stylistically individuated.

Social dancing

Bailes generally involve gatherings of hundreds-to-thousands of people, the majority of whom will participate as dancers—especially if they consider the music to be first-rate. Social dancing at this scale has had and continues to have a substantial impact on the development, organization and economics of a *baile* as well as the performance practices of *conjuntos*—who, compared the other forms of entertainment found at a *baile* (e.g.,

³⁹⁹ A *locutor* typically speaks in an oratorical style characteristic of radio emcees (which many professional *conjunto locutores* are) and uses language that is generally laudatory and formal. Given that both the *conjunto*'s and *empresario*'s image and reputation is directly at stake, the intention behind each monologue is to provide a relatively 'safe' form of entertainment that is free of controversy. For this reason all *locutores* refrain from the use of profanities as well as any colloquialisms that may be deemed in poor taste by their audience.

cantadera), draw and cater to the largest crowds and generate the most substantial revenues for the *empresario*. The importance typically placed on dance by *conjunto* practitioners is not only limited to *baile* economics, but also reflects particular and local understandings of its close relationship *música típica popular*. Crowded dance floors, for example, speak to the affective power of dancing itself as an important part of the *baile* experience and, as musicians and aficionados frequently claim, the basis for *música típica popular*'s aesthetic appeal.⁴⁰⁰ While more recently some performers have sought to shift the focus from the dancers to the *conjunto*—citing the music's seeming non-exportability *intra alia* (discussed the third section of this chapter)—the importance of social dancing continues to be hugely important both to the *baile*'s economic success and efficacy as an entertainment experience.

Having already discussed the connection of dance to the economic inner-workings of a *baile* (see Chapter 8), in the following paragraphs I look closer at the dance practice itself, focusing in particular on those features and organizing principles that are of particular concern to *conjunto* performers and aficionados. Here I draw principally on my own observations and conversations with other dancers as well as my own (sometimes clumsy) attempts to find a dance partner. While *música típica popular* dancing employs a basic two step (like salsa), learning the basic steps proved challenging given the tight, mirrored footwork between dance partners and the high rate of mobility around the dance floor. More challenging still was learning the un-/soft-spoken gender norms that appeared to govern many important interactions taking place both on and off the dance floor.

Música típica popular is largely (and nearly exclusively) danced in coupled

⁴⁰⁰ One informant tactfully explained “There are people [i.e., foreigners] who enjoy *música típica popular* by listening to it, but they don’t enjoy it totally because they don’t know how to dance to it” (Carlos [guitarist for *El Orgullo de la Montaña*], personal communication, 2007). Jorge Jaén, on the other hand, was considerably more direct, reminding me often and in no uncertain terms that I could only fully appreciate the music I was studying if I knew how to dance to it.

formations between members of the opposite sex. This feature has led to the particular and pronounced emphasis on the significance of (heteronormative) gender roles governing social interactions at a *baile*. The connections between social dance and ideas of gender commonly highlight the significance of *bailes* as a place for individuals of the opposite sex to meet and potentially form romantic liaisons; becoming, in effect, “a gateway to sexual and romantic partnering” (Kaminsky, 2011:125). More often than not, it is the degree of physical contact between partners that has been the focus of not only “*interiorano*” dance historiographers (see Chapter 2), but also my informants. Notions of physicality and intimacy are contextual and reference specific dance practices.

Much of *música típica popular* is danced in an “*agarrado*” or “embraced” configuration, which lends itself to the types of dance floor interactions thought by *baile* goers to be romantic in character.⁴⁰¹ While physical contact between partners is a given, *agarrado* dancing is frequently understood in terms of transitions to varying degrees of physical intimacy. Informants, for example, frequently distinguish between two possible embrace positions termed, among other things, “formal” and “informal,” which are equated with a lesser and greater *degree* of physical contact, respectively.⁴⁰² The “formal” configuration is generally regarded by my informants to be an older way of dancing. Here the man places his right hand on the small of his partner’s back, grasps her right hand with his left hand and holds it just below (his) shoulder height. The woman, in turn, places her left

⁴⁰¹ Alternatively, certain *música típica popular* subgenres are danced in what is called a “*suelta*” or “loose” (i.e., un-embraced) configuration. In this case partners dance in close proximity but without touching. A ‘skipping’ footwork technique, exuberant gestures (e.g., spinning, waving one’s arms, etc.) and a high rate of mobility around the dance floor all serve to mark *suelta* dancing and its accompanying *música típica popular* subgenres—i.e., “*cumbia suelta*” and “*cumbia atravesado*” (see Chapter 5)—as particularly festive and convivial, and less (obviously) romantic than its *agarrado* varient. The *música típica popular* subgenres that allow for *agarrado* configurations (namely *cumbia agarrado* and, less frequently, *paseból*), however, generally constitute the large majority of a *conjunto*’s repertoire.

⁴⁰² Additional terms for the “informal” configuration include “four arm dancing” (Maria Jaén Cano, personal communication, 2007) and “dancing on a tile” (Virginia Aguirre, personal communication, 2007).

hand on her partner's right shoulder. In this configuration the couple's torsos generally do not touch. The informal approach involves the man placing both of hands on the small of his partner's back and the woman placing her hands on the man's shoulders or behind his neck. In this configuration the couple may dance cheek-to-cheek and their torsos will touch.

The physical dimensions of the dance floor, consistently dim lighting and the loosely coordinated movement of the throng of dancing couples also create conditions for increasing (or abating) a sense of physical intimacy. These possibilities arise from the constant counter-clockwise movement of the mass of couples on the dance floor, which if seen from a bird's-eye view resembles a giant rotating wheel with the dancers on its outskirts traveling notably faster than those nearer the centre.⁴⁰³ It is in the centre of the dance floor that the more informal/intimate dancing tends to take place. This, I have been told, is due to the fact that the central area is thought to afford a greater degree of privacy as the bodies of other dancers offer a form of cover from would-be onlookers. Furthermore, being at the centre of the axis of rotation, the centre of the dance floor also allows the couple to dance in place, further enabling a greater degree of physical intimacy.

As romantic “gateways,” *bailes* allow dancers to take advantage of a range of flirtation “techniques” (Kaminsky, 2011:125) the result of which are contingent on a process of negotiation between partners.⁴⁰⁴ The idea is one of communicating intention and

⁴⁰³ By my estimate, the dancers located around the dance floor's outskirts will travel on average one kilometre during a single dance. The dancers located at the very centre of the dance floor, on the other hand, have the option of dancing in place should they choose to.

⁴⁰⁴ It is important to point out here that while gender norms are usually important to the way a particular dance is understood and practiced, the fact that the dance is gendered in particular ways should not be taken as a given. “Categories like gender,” Deborah Kapchan (2006) reminds us, “are rarely defined directly; rather, attitudes about gender (and other nominal categories, including race, ethnicity, class, and subjectivity) are mediated by indexical relations—that is, by signs that point outside themselves to historically determined associations, stances, and acts” (362). Similarly, Kaminsky points out that while the leader-follower relationship is important to couple dancing—where “If the bliss of the twosomeness is to be maintained on an

acquiescence, which in this case is gendered in specific (and predictable) ways. Most informants, for example, recognize that it is the man's responsibility to initiate various forms of interaction, beginning with inviting a woman to dance, assuming the lead on the dance floor and dictating the particular dancing configuration as well as the position of the couple on the dance floor.⁴⁰⁵ Women on the other hand are regularly ascribed the role of 'follower,' however, their role is not a passive one. Women are said to have the right of refusal and, beginning by accepting the invitation to dance and agreeing to the degree physical intimacy on the dance floor.⁴⁰⁶ It is my experience that these roles are not usually reversed, and sometimes for obvious reasons. For example, women will rarely ask men to dance as that could be perceived as an financial imposition given that men are required to pay the dancing fee (called "cuota," "taquilla" or "taq"). For some men, however, the initial decision to dance can seem like a financial risk where the likelihood of finding multiple dance partners is not always optimal. A group of men I met drinking at the bar at a *baile*, for example, explained that while they were "good" dancers, being of "humble" means they stood less of a chance of not only finding a dance partners, but partners who would dance with them more

unpredictable dance floor, there can be only one will to act at a time"—in the case of Swedish *polska*: "The partners are leader and follower by necessity, male and female by tradition" (2011:129).

⁴⁰⁵ One friend explained this flirtation 'technique' to me with reference to her son whom she noted with some amusement, was not only a good dancer, but was also especially 'skilled' at gradually leading his partner from the outskirts to the centre of the dance floor (Maria Jaén Cano, personal communication, 2008). Virginia Aguirre further notes that the physical distance between two dancers diminished over time and by the mid-1960s couples were already holding each other close with their arms around the other's back. "These people," she added, "always sought the centre of the dance [floor]" (Personal communication, 2007). For my part, I occasionally encountered resistance from partners when (in a desire to avoid the fast-paced dancing taking place on the outskirts of the dance floor) naively I attempted to direct them the centre of the dance floor.

⁴⁰⁶ One young female dancer noted, for example, that while she will usually go to *bailes* with friends, it is not a given that she will dance with them. She expects men to take the lead in inviting her to dance noting "I can say 'yes' or I can say 'no'." "If [I see] a man doesn't know how to dance, I say 'no'" (female dancer, personal communication, 2007). Another case of female agency on the dance floor includes the now infamous practice of "*pichón*," where by saying the word "*pichón*" a man could request/demand to dance with another man's partner. While the *pichón* was rumored to be a catalyst for male violence, according to Virginia Aguirre (a female informant in her 60s), the decision was ultimately the woman's (personal communication, 2007). In another example, Boris Duran notes that as early as the 1970s a man could, in mid-dance, begin dancing cheek-to-cheek, but only if he did not encounter "resistance" from his partner (Duran, personal communication, 2007).

than once. One pointed out that in his case, he preferred to invest in a *taquilla* only when he brought his wife, adding “because she will dance with me all night and never say no.”⁴⁰⁷

(Gendered) dance floor interactions and expectations also have a recognizable and significant impact on *conjunto* (live) performance practice. For example, finding a woman who will not only accept an invitation to dance, but also consent to increasing degrees of physical intimacy is by most accounts a time consuming process. Long performances involving two iterations of the form make this easier, as one informant explains: “As a dancer, I think this is better because if you have a good partner, well, logically it would be nice to stay there! [laughs].”⁴⁰⁸ Similarly, the importance of the pervasive binary form of *música típica popular* compositions is suggested by the way in which they are encoded in contemporary dance practices, where during the transition from the *baqueteo* to the rumba section a couple will often execute a series of spins while maintaining the same dancing configuration. It is also during this transitional point in the performance that many couples will also switch from a formal to an informal dancing configuration, thus marking the *rumba* section as point of heightened intimacy within the context of an individual performance/dance. Similarly, the dim lighting of *baile* venues and increased physical contact between dancers are often connected to the more general process of the genre’s commercial development, which, as Bolivar De Gracia points out, “brought the *cantina* into the *baile*. ”⁴⁰⁹ In this respect, music and dance are frequently understood in terms of overlapping ideological and discursive frameworks, which despite some of its negative associations continue to reflect the *baile*’s principal role in enabling various forms of community-oriented social interaction. Ultimately, music and dance are strongly linked

⁴⁰⁷ Three men at a *baile*, personal communication, 2007.

⁴⁰⁸ Alexander Nieto, personal communication, 2008

⁴⁰⁹ Personal communication, 2008.

through shared aesthetic expectations. And it is through accounting for these expectations that we begin to gain an understanding of the genre's particular standardization.

Concluding this section is an examination of how all the component parts of a *baile* come together to provide a coherent entertainment experience. Later in the third section of this chapter I argue that the fact that social dancing remains so intertwined with *música típica popular* performance aesthetics is often seen as a testament of the music's popular appeal and potential to become a form of Panamanian musical nationalism. Conversely, the close relationship to dance has also called into question the music's cosmopolitan character which would see *música típica popular* be converted into “*música de concierto*” or concert music.

Outline of a baile as a sequence of events

Having looked at component parts of a *baile* individually, following is an examination of how these various parts come together to form a coherent *baile* experience. What I strive to show here is the relationship of the various musical and dance practices that have come to characterize the *baile* as a relatively fixed sequence of events and unified musical, social and participatory experience. For the purposes of this discussion I will follow a typical *baile* timeline, beginning with the *cantadera* and concluding with the *conjunto* performance. Among other things, the close relationship between these various events/performances reveal what *conjunto* practitioners have described as a strong degree of fit between the *baile* setting and performance practices it seems to enable and certainly facilitates.

The *cantadera*: 6:00–10:00

The *cantadera* usually begins around sunset and/or when the *empresario* decides a suitable number of patrons have arrived. As a performance practice and social experience, the *cantadera* is marked by a strong sense of familial and community participation and engagement in the performance proceedings. Once within the performance venue, friends and family gather around tables, order bottles of liquor and generally take a keen interest in the singers' performances. At this time the *empresario* also assumes a more visible role in the proceedings; often taking a seat in front of the stage and frequently acknowledged by the singers who will improvise portions of *décimas* in his/her honour. Toward the end of the *cantadera*, an *empresario* may also be feted in the form of a performance known as the “*verso de la botella*” (the bottle verse), which is a cue for those patrons (usually other *empresarios*) who may wish to pay their *peones* in the form of bottles of liquor (usually rum or *seco* purchased *in situ*). These are then brought to the stage and delivered with considerable fanfare to the *empresario* in person. In terms of cost to revenue ratio, the *cantadera* has the potential of having the highest revenue margin (especially so if the *empresario* draws a large number of *peones* and well wishers).

The final performance of a *cantadera* is called the *contraversia* (controversy) or *gallino picáo* (the name of the accompanying *torrente*/standard song from), which pits two or more singers in a competition of wit and poetic dexterity. The end of the *contraversia* signals the end of the *cantadera* and is a cue for the *conjunto* performers to take their place on the stage. At this point the venue will undergo a somewhat dramatic transformation as the lighting is readjusted to an appropriately dim level. *Música típica popular* dancing can be vigorous and require mobility, therefore tables and chairs are normally pushed to the far side

of the building so as to create a large and unobstructed dance floor.⁴¹⁰ During this time the *conjunto* musicians will do a line check and tend to any last minute adjustments to their instruments (which had been set up previously by the support personnel).

Baile and conjunto performance: 10:30 until early morning

Conjuntos generally begin performing between 10:00 and 11:00 PM. Their first performance is always a short instrumental piece—called the “*tema de presentacion*” or “presentation piece”—which allows the sound engineer to check the levels and lets the dancers know that the *baile* is about to begin. After this brief musical introduction the *locutor* may say a few words and then announce the title and composer of the following composition, which is the cue for the musicians to begin playing the first full-length song/composition of the *baile*. It is at this point that the dancers will begin to move en mass onto the dance floor and usually after a minute the dance floor will reach close to its maximum capacity for that particular event.

The first two hours of a *baile* is perhaps the most important for the *conjunto* in terms of exposure and potential for (positive) publicity. During this time the *baile* will be at its fullest and in many cases the *empresario* will have also hired a local radio station to broadcast the early part of the performance live. As a result, *conjuntos* will usually perform repertoire from their latest album and the length of the individual performances as well as the *locutor*'s monologues are generally kept tight, each lasting between ten to twelve minutes and segueing seamlessly into the other.

⁴¹⁰ Musicians take this aspect of the pre-performance preparations seriously, sometimes stating their concern over the loudspeakers for all to hear should the *empresario*'s floor staff fail to provide a suitably large and unobstructed dance floor.

Bailes are generally crowded and noisy environments with large numbers of people gathered within a confined space and generally going about their own business. However, as performances follow monologues in steady succession, so do the various social interactions that distinguish a *baile* from other forms of music-dance practices. Perhaps the most noticeable of these is the movement of bodies within the space of the performance venue and the area of the dance floor. At the beginning of every performance many of the dancers will immediately move onto the dance floor so as to take full advantage of the ten minutes-plus time allotted with their particular partner—moving, as always, in a general counter-clockwise direction around the circumference of the dance floor. As the performance continues, often a number of men will continue going from table to table asking women to dance. If the *baile* is well attended and a man is persistent, it is very likely he will eventually find a partner and join the growing number of dancers on the dance floor.

The practice of performing every composition twice is also thought to facilitate in this process as it allows for more time for potential dance partners to make each other's acquaintance and partake at least once in the loose choreography that has come to characterize the dance practices associated with the *baqueteo* and *rumba* sections, respectively. The ideal time to begin a dance is during the *baqueteo* section of a composition/performance. At this point in the performance the dancing tends to be more formal, which gives the new couple a chance acclimatize to each other's dancing style and, if so desired, develop the rapport necessary to increase the degree of physical intimacy between them—particularly in terms of their dancing configuration and position on the dance floor. The most exciting part of a dance is arguably the transition from the *baqueteo* to the *rumba* sections, which is signaled by the *repiques* played on the percussion instruments as well as

the *rumba* section melody played on the accordion and shadowed by the *saloma* melody. During this time the movement on the dance floor increases appreciably as all the couples will execute a series of spins all the while maintaining their general counter-clockwise direction and *agarrado* (embraced), configuration. This transition is relatively brief (lasting half a minute or less) and may be followed by a switch to the informal dancing configuration, which typically accompanies the *rumba* section.

Dancing not only provides the means by which professional *conjuntos* earn their living, but also forms the basis for much of the interaction that goes on between the performers and patrons at a *baile*. *Conjunto* audiences typically express their appreciation and approval of the music through dance participation and a full dance floor is always the clearest indication of a successful performance. Unlike *cantadera* audiences, however, *conjunto* audiences will rarely clap after a performance and the large majority of patrons will not approach the musicians during the course of a *baile*. Groups such as LPC and LD that sometimes have a devoted group of fans gathered in front of the stage (ala rock concert) appears at least for the moment to be the exception to the norm. In most *bailes*, however, there are always a number of patrons (usually friends, and established and prospective *empresarios*) who will want to speak with the performers and/or offer them a *brindis* or toast. When this happens, the performers will often go out of their way to acknowledge their fans and benefactors usually by mentioning them by name over the PA during the course of a performance.

A song and individual dance will end once the accordionist plays the two and a half bar cliché melody that signals the end of the composition proper. When this happens the dancers will promptly clear the dance floor and the *locutor* will position him/herself on the

stage and begin a largely extemporized monologue. During this time the area of the dance floor will remain generally empty and most of the patrons will congregate along the venue's periphery or around the area/s where beer and liquor is being served. Most will be engaged in conversation or the activity of purchasing food and drink from the various outlets located within and outside the venue. Despite the seeming inattentiveness on the part of the audience, most *locutores* I interviewed believed they commanded the attention of a substantial portion of the audience. In addition, the constant commentary provided by *locutores* also contributes to maintaining the appropriately animated mood and atmosphere of a *baile* once the music stops—a function that is particularly noticeable in its absence as sometimes was the case when venues experienced a temporary power outage, during which time the sense restlessness on the part of the *baile* attendees seemed palpable.

Around the time that a *baile* reaches its three-quarter mark (i.e., circa 3:00 or 4:00 AM) many of the patrons will be drunk and some will begin to leave. Correspondingly the number of the dancers on the dance floor will also begin to steadily decline. Due to the smaller audience in attendance (and perhaps feeling the effects of several *brindis*), it was often at this point in the night that I noticed the performers took more liberties with their performance routines. Overall, each performance of an individual song tended to become longer (most lasting between fifteen to twenty minutes or more) and the pacing between each performance tends to slow down. When lengthening a performance the musicians generally left the *baqueteo* sections intact and extended the vocal refrains and accordion improvisations of the *rumba* sections. Generally the second iteration of the *rumba* section was longer than the first (usually by a factor of one to three minutes), thus imparting a sense of anticipation and dramatic build to the performance as a whole, which contradicts the

notion that *baile* performances can be reduced to simple iterations of a fixed composition.

The latter portion of the *baile* was also the time when *conjuntos* performed new repertoire as a form of rehearsal prior to an upcoming recording session.

In addition to lengthening the performance framework of standard *música típica popular* compositions, oftentimes the musicians would add a second shorter performance as a kind of coda or postlude to the performance-proper. Most of these performances appeared to begin spontaneously—with usually one or two musicians playing a few bars of a piece and the rest of the band joining—and usually involved forays into unconventional *baile* genres (often salsa, rock-ballad and *tamborito*). When this happened, the dancers would almost always clear the dance floor and watch from the sidelines. While these performances-in-miniature appeared to be playful in character and were not taken seriously by the dancers, they were also moments in a *baile* in which *conjuntos* would showcase their competency in other genres and at times reveal something of their own particular stylistic orientation and approach to genre innovation. LPN, for example, was particularly fond of reprising a number of their ballad-inspired compositions as rock-ballads, which highlighted in quite literal terms the innovative practices of a number of their composers. In these performances, the composition was played in a half-time “feel” where the rhythm of the accompaniment (i.e., the main metric accent or beat) was played twice as slow in relation to the original harmonic and melodic rhythm. In Figure 12.1 is illustrated an excerpt of LPN’s performance of *Pobre tonto enamorado* as a rock-ballad. In this transcription the quarter-note beat structure remains intact relative to which the harmonic and melodic rhythm is effectively doubled. Much of this composition’s the effectiveness within the rock-ballad genre can be credited to its melodic structure, which combines static melodic motion with varied (i.e., less

rhythmically dense) rhythmic durations. Each of these features is characteristic of the *balada* compositional approach adopted by innovative composers such as Jorge Jaén and others, and in the case of this composition is specific to the melodic material coinciding with the *baqueteo* sections. Revealing something of the composer's original intentions, LPN only performed the *baqueteo* section and omitted the *rumba* section when reprising this composition as a rock-ballad.

Figure 12.1: Excerpt of *Pobre tonto enamorado* performed as a rock-ballad by LPN⁴¹¹

The length of a *baile* is generally not fixed and is largely determined by the number of dancers remaining on the dance floor. As a general rule, *conjuntos* will continue playing until there are only a small portion of dancers remaining on the dance floor (generally somewhere between ten to thirty couples depending on the size of the *baile*). Once the accordionist has determined that the *baile* has ended, s/he will cue the musicians to begin playing the *cumbia atravesado* composition known as El Mogollon, which always concludes every *baile*. Usually all the remaining patrons will make a last effort to join the other dancers on the dance floor and the performance will usually last around ten minutes. Once this

⁴¹¹ Live performance, 2007.

performance ends the *baile* is officially over, however, the *empresario* may continue serving liquor well into the morning if patrons are still drinking.

In the foregoing I have outlined some of the important ways in which the *baile*—as a commercial enterprise, entertainment experience and a context for music and dance performances—comes to organize various aspects of *conjunto* practice. In the process I have also endeavoured to show that it is performance contexts themselves that are important to shaping the way musicians, their music and style is perceived. Mediated by factors of economy and aesthetics, as I discuss below the close relationship between *conjunto* performance practice, and the *baile* setting and social dance is of central importance to understanding both *música típica popular*'s local/national massification and reception, and its potential to be exported beyond its national borders.

Performing style and genre

As I have shown above, *baile* performances reveal a very close fit between performance context and practice, and in various ways have come to represent the ultimate expression of *música típica popular*. While certainly less frequent, professional *música típica popular* musicians do engage in a variety of paid performances activities that lie outside of the commercial *baile* setting, which can provide opportunities to showcase the music and/or a *conjunto*'s individual style in ways that are less dependent on the formalities and structures of dance practice, and in some cases more in keeping other forms Panamanian (commercial) music. I have found that these unconventional performances also provide opportunities to more fully appreciate the range of meanings *música típica popular* can assume particularly in relationship to ideas of Panamanian music-cultural nationalism and cultural geography.

In the following I examine two such performances, each of which demonstrate the various links between the genre, its practitioners and ideas of Panamanian musical vernacularism. The first is a film shoot undertaken by EOS, which I argue relies predominantly on the group's (traditionalist) stylistic orientation and individuation in the promotion of particular nationalist vision. The second is a concert performance by LPN, which while also showcasing a particularly traditionalist view of Panamanian musical culture, relies less on the group's particular musical identity and instead draws on ideas that are presumably common to all genre practitioners.

EOS music video film shoot

On November 2, 2007 I was invited by EOS to attend the film shoot of a music video that was being filmed for Panama's annual *Teleton*—a national charity/fundraiser for disabled children. The timing of this project was portentous as it coincided with Dorindo Cárdenas' golden jubilee as a professional musician and to some extent was also meant to commemorate this milestone in his career. Like other *música típica popular* music videos I had seen, the film was shot in one specific location and featured the *conjunto* performers miming their various roles in the ensemble to a prerecorded track. Given that the *Teleton* was a charity meant to benefit children, the video also included a cast of five children who would pose and dance alongside the musicians. The location of the shoot was a colonial-era country estate located just outside of Las Tablas known as the Finca Pausílipo (Pausílipo Farm), a site of regional and national significance as it was once owned by Belisario Porras, Panama—a Santeño and one of the leaders of Panama's late nineteenth century independence movement (see Chapter 2)—and is now a national museum/monument. The

music for the video was a standard *cumbia agarrado* composition that referenced the *teleton* in the lyrics and which the *conjunto* recorded nearly two weeks prior.

I arrived at the Finca Pausílipo with Cárdenas just before noon. At this point some of the *integrantes* had not yet arrived and the “film crew” (consisting of a cameraman and an assistant), I was told, were still making their way by car from Panama City. All of the members of the young cast, however, had been there for some time and (with the help of their parents) were busily making some last minute adjustments to their wardrobe. The children, I noticed, were dressed in traditional Santeño dress; the girls donning *polleras* (one-piece dresses) and *tembleques* (ornate hair pieces), and the boys *camicillas* (white linen dress shirts) and *cutarras* (leather sandals). In addition, each boy also had a mustache drawn on his face and a miniature (and fake) machete strapped about his waist; creating (much to the delight of many of the adults present) a perfect caricature of the iconic *campesino* of the central provinces.

The production of the *Teleton* video was coordinated and overseen by Aida Díaz, who was present throughout the shoot and also had a role in developing the concept for the video. Having deduced from the location and the children’s outfits that this video was intended to capture some of the more iconic features of Panamanian folkloric traditions, I took advantage of the momentary lull in activity to ask Díaz if she could explain the vision and goals behind this project. Díaz pointed out that this project had two principal objectives. One was to raise both awareness and funds for the *teleton*, which would be accomplished through broadcasting the video on national television and its sale in DVD format. Since the charity is meant to address the plight of disabled children in Panama, she added that for this reason the music video would “include children who, while not disabled, are united from

their heart with the other [disabled] children.” The second objective was to commemorate Cárdenas’ professional anniversary. In explaining the significance of this moment in Panamanian musical history, Díaz said “I believe Dorindo deserves this and much more. Fifty uninterrupted years of bringing our folklore to the national and international level [...] as Panamanians we have to cherish this.”

By linking Cárdenas’ golden jubilee commemoration with the *téleton*, it became clear that Díaz envisioned a project of national importance, both in terms of its scope and symbolic value. The relationship with the *Teletón* meant that the video was guaranteed a national audience—“there is a *teleton* committee in every province,” she told me—and by the same token, Cárdenas’ fame had long surpassed regional borders and had reached “a national level.” In developing the concept for the video, Díaz felt that the occasion should highlight Cárdenas’ Santeño heritage, traditionalist orientation and cultural contributions particularly in the area of what she identified as Panamanian “folklore.” To this end she indicated that the location of the shoot was chosen particularly for its symbolic value, which she explained as follows:

Aida Díaz: The video is a projection that is meant to be a [form of] social work for the benefit of Panama/Panamanians. So, taking into consideration the nature of this work and that we are Santeños, what we want to do is make a contribution. So we have chosen historical sites that are ours so that...

Sean Bellaviti: [That are] Santeño?

A.D.: Exactly; the province [and its] history and folklore.

When asked to identify what were the important markers of Santeño “folklore” Díaz singled out “the artists” (presumably because many of them were Santeño) and the children’s wardrobe as well as Cárdenas’ outfit, which she said would include a “*camicilla*” and “*sombrero*.”

In explaining her understanding of Cárdenas' status as an icon of Santeño “folklore” it became clear that more often than not Díaz was referring to something more than a regional phenomenon. In discussing the goals of the project, for example, she pointed out that the *teleton* video presented an opportunity for Santeños like Cárdenas and herself to “promote *lo nuestro* [what belongs to us],” which she defined as “*the* folklore, *the* tradition, customs” (my emphasis). The *teleton*’s national scope and nationalist purview provided a catalyst for this particular form of cultural work, as she went on to explain:

I have always noticed that the *teleton* continually features videos and advertisements with reggae music or other types of music, but I have never seen *lo nuestro*. So the idea was since we are in the middle of Dorindo’s golden jubilee, everything he does goes to support *his* [spoken emphasis] celebration. So we also wanted to [do] this. [...] Since the golden jubilee has worked to enhance our autochthonous goal in what is folklore, and so we create this mixture of the music.

Díaz’s choice of terminology and rhetorical style—such as her reference to ostensibly Santeño “folklore” in the singular form (i.e., “*the* folklore”) or use of the common turn of phrase “*lo nuestro*” as its semantic equivalent—suggests the commonly held idea that Panamanian vernacular cultural identity is an extension of Azuerense culture. In this respect, her views were closely aligned with (and indeed informed by) those of the likes Narciso Garay, and Manuel and Dora Pérez de Zárate, who can be counted among some of the early architects of Panamanian cultural nationalism (see Chapter I).

On the other hand, Díaz’s understanding of Cárdenas and presumably his music (both unequivocally aligned with *música típica popular*) as “folkloric” was, in my experience, somewhat unusual. While some of my informants may have used the term “*música típica*” when referring to “*música folklórica*,” the opposite was seldom the case. It is important to point out, however, that while Díaz’s choice of terminology was unconventional, she certainly did not see it that way. Moreover, I got the sense that the themes presented in the

video were, for all intents and purposes, obvious ones that would be easily grasped by its national viewership.

Filming began around 1:00 PM and continued for the better part of the afternoon. The person contracted to shoot the video was Francisco Pascual, an experienced cameraman who had worked with a number well-known *conjuntos* on similar projects. For this shoot Pascual used a single lightweight digital camera that was mounted on a tripod and could easily be repositioned as needed. He also brought a boom box which was used to provide an audio reference for the actors and allow them to synch their movements and gestures in time with the prerecorded/diagetic music.

Similar to other *música típica popular* music videos I have seen, this video was filmed as a sequence of brief segments that would later be edited into a series of even shorter clips that would be reassembled and sequentially reordered. Each segment generally involved a change in actors as well as scenery, which meant moving the camera to a different area of the Pausílipo. In order to create further element of visual detail (and perhaps to compensate for the lack of a second camera), Pascual sometimes filmed the same segment from multiple points of view, which would also be edited and reassembled during the post-production phase. Thanks in no small part to Pascual's experience, the filming process proceeded rather quickly and between five to eight segments were filmed every hour.

During the shoot the *integrantes* were usually filmed in pairs, playing their instruments, and smiling and dancing in place as they would during a *baile* performance. Many of the *integrantes* had participated in music videos before and likely for this reason required little coaching from Pascual or Díaz. The children, on the other hand, were often filmed dancing or posing as a group. During these moments, Díaz was always on hand

instructing the children on the proper way to dance a particular folkloric dance routine or how to emote for the camera. On various occasions, for example, the girls were told to hold up their *polleras* slightly and sway in time to the music, and the boys were told wave their *sombreros* in the manner characteristic Azerense folkloric dance practice. Díaz also favoured the use of emphatic gestures—such as raising their hands in tandem to particular cues in the music—and sometimes asked the children to sing during parts of the *rumba* section of the recording that featured a children’s choir—a sonic marker included to provide an element of fit with the *teleton* project.

As the film shoot progressed it became clear that the segments that featured Cárdenas were more numerous than those of the other participants. Throughout the shoot Díaz and Pascual took great care to capture Cárdenas in a variety of poses and settings; at times he was filmed singing and playing accordion on his own or with his (adult) son Adonis, or posing with the children. In addition to highlighting of the charitable goals of the *teleton*, the presence of the children worked to index some of the themes connected to Cárdenas’ golden jubilee celebration. Appearing alongside the septuagenarian musician, the children provided a visible and fitting reminder of Cárdenas’ impressive professional longevity and thus (re)affirmed, as Díaz suggested, his status as a regional/national icon and musical traditionalist. A similar intergenerational motif played out between Cárdenas and Adonis in both the visual and sonic elements of the video. When recording the music for the *teleton* video some weeks earlier, Cárdenas thought it best to alternate the accordion part with his son. Several individuals present at that recording session suggested that this was a symbolic ‘passing of the baton’ from father to son, and some also worried that both accordionists’ styles were too similar that effect would be lost on the listeners. During the shoot Pascual

made sure to film Cárdenas and Adonis miming their respective accordion parts separately so as to establish a clear connection between the sound and the musician—and thus perhaps compensate for Adonis’ purportedly attenuated stylistic individuation. In discussing the professional relationship that existed between Cárdenas and his son, Díaz pointed out that this phenomenon “did not happen often,” and added that together they symbolized a “duo of experience and youth.”

The relationship that Díaz and Pascual endeavoured to establish between Cárdenas and the various tropes of Santeño cultural identity (e.g., the historic location and “folkloric” wardrobe and dance) was, for me, one of the most compelling aspects of the video, not so much for its novelty, but rather for its seeming conventionality. When asked if making a music video such as this one was an unusual occurrence, Cárdenas pointed out that he had been making music videos for approximately twenty years and noted that in some he was featured “in a folkloric environment such as this one” and in others “as a popular artist.” Cárdenas’ choice of words struck me as significant as, in contrast to Díaz, he did not claim (nor has he claimed in our other interviews) to be a folkloric artist per se; rather, the connection, he suggested, was primarily contextual and tied to the film medium. I was impressed nonetheless by the ease with which Cárdenas—the “popular artist”—could assume the role of folkloric icon, and more impressive still was the fact that there was nothing in the music to suggest that this was a particularly ‘traditional’ or folkloric project. Pascual provided some insight into the matter by suggesting some of the associations were part of the *música típica popular*’s attendant filmic conventions. When making videos, he explained it is essential to remain within the norms. In *típico* you cannot stray too far. [...] Seventy percent of the time you have to include something about nature [and] the elements; something *típico*. For example, this house [i.e., one of the buildings of the

Pausílipo] may appear unremarkable, but really it has a history. [...] So we must integrate these things subtly.

What Pascual suggests (and Cárdenas implies) is that as a genre, *música típica popular* has a strong regional identity and as such, I would add, shares an overlap with other expressions of *interiorano* culture and Panamanian vernacularism, such as (Azuerense) *música folklórica*, for example. The fact that Cárdenas is a bona fide traditionalist, Pascual explained, only helped to reinforce this connection:

What happens is that not all of the national musicians really play music that is one hundred percent *típica*. Some have made modifications. Dorindo, at least, is one that maintains *the tradition* and Alfredo [Escudero] as well.

As I went about my business of conducting interviews it seemed to me that the denotive ambiguity of the genre's nomenclature itself also reinforced the sense of musical vernacularism playing out in front of the camera. For example, even though Pascual was careful not to conflate "*folklórico*" with "*típico*," when he stated that a "*típico*" music video should "include [...] something *típico*," there was really no way of knowing without further clarification whether in the latter case he meant "genre-specific" or "typical/traditional," or perhaps both. This particular form of semantic confusion also permeated my interactions a small group of onlookers made up of parents and friends of the *conjunto*. When learning that I was a foreigner interested "*música típica*," my new acquaintances were constantly directing my attention (and my camera) toward the moments in the proceedings that showcased what Díaz had identified as the more salient markers of "*the folklore*" (e.g., the children's costumes, Cárdenas' outfit and the buildings of the Pausílipo), and pointedly away from the activities of the *integrantes*—who, tellingly, were the only participants not wearing Santeño dress. I had experienced this particular misunderstanding often where when explaining my interest in "*música típica*" most people assumed I meant "*música folklórica*." In this case,

while perhaps blurred, for those in attendance the distinctions between “folklore” and “música típica” were still present and meaningful.

In the final analysis the coherence (and cohere-ability) of the various ideological strands and symbolic tropes combined for the specific purposes of the *teleton* video relied in part on *música típica popular*’s established regional/*interiorano* identification and largely on the traditional persona and stylistic orientation that Cárdenas had cultivated over his long career. That is to say that while most any other *conjunto* would be able to have been able to engage in the symbolism and pageantry associated with Panamanian folkloric practices, it is doubtful that most *conjuntos* aside from the most traditional ones could have achieved the same ideological impact as Cárdenas and EOS had. It is here that we see the particular ideological alignments to notions of musical vernacularism established through the cultivation and promotion of a traditionalist orientation.

LPN concert performance

On February 20, 2008, LPN was invited to perform for a concert series hosted and sponsored every year by the Autoridad del Canal de Panamá (Panama Canal Authority; ACP) called the “Programa cultural del verano” (Cultural program of the summer). This particular concert was titled “Noches típicas: Un tributo a nuestro folclor [sic]” (“Traditional nights: A tribute to our folklore”)⁴¹² and would be broadcast on national television. As the concert’s title suggested, the show would feature selections of Panamanian *música folklórica* and/or *música*

⁴¹² The other three concerts were titled “Noches Familiares: Las nuevas voces de Panamá,” “Noches Juveniles: Herencia Afroantillana” and “Tarde Infantil: Diversión y fantasía.”

típica performed by a cross-section of ‘Panamanian talent.’⁴¹³ It was this ‘and/or’ relationship in particular between the musical practices identified as *música folklórica/típica* and *música típica popular* that was of particular interest to me. In keeping with events sponsored and promoted by government agencies the concert was meant to showcase a pluralistic and inclusive vision of Panamanian vernacular practices, which in Panama were often imagined along regional lines. As such, it could only be assumed that *música típica popular* fell into that category in some capacity. Nevertheless, it remained to be seen on what basis. In any case, given the role of the host institution as a government agency and the content of the show, it was clear that the concert was an instance of musical nationalism at work and a celebration of some of the distinguishing features of (official) Panamanian national identity. The fact that a *música típica popular conjunto* would be featured in this event offered a unique (and somewhat rare) opportunity to observe a particular nationalist vision of the genre.

The concert took place on the grounds of the ACP building in Panama City. For this occasion the organizers had set up a large stage with multicoloured lights and a colourful backdrop; all indications that the performances would be treated as a show or concert rather than a *baile*. Most of the audience of several hundred was seated on the hill leading up to the ACP building and a number of folding chairs were placed directly in front of the stage for the show’s elderly attendees. To my knowledge the concert was fully sponsored by the ACP and was also open to all members of the public at no charge. Ricuarte Villareal (a folklorist who would also perform that evening) pointed out that this was important as it was a way for the

⁴¹³ El Faro: Revista informativa de la Autoridad del Canal de Panamá (February, 2008:2; <<http://www.pancanal.com/esp/noticiero/el-faro/pdf/elfaro-20080229.pdf>> [accessed February 24, 2011]).

ACP to give back to the “Panamanian community,” both in terms of providing “a cultural space” for the general public and paid work for the performers.⁴¹⁴

The concert began shortly after nightfall and featured a series of presentations, each showcasing a particular ensemble and music-dance practice presumably falling under the *folklórica/típica* category. In addition to LPN, the concert included performances by a *conjunto típico* (folkloric dance troupe) accompanied by a small ensemble made up of an accordion and the Santeño three-drum combo of *caja*, *tambor repicador* and *tambor pujador*; a *cantadera* featuring three singers accompanied by a guitarist and violinist; and a carnival-themed presentation that featured dancers accompanied by a small *murga* ensemble. With the exception of LPN, all of the performances represented a moderately-to-highly stylized variant of the music-dance being referenced on the stage. The large majority of the performers, for example, were dressed in regional outfits that were appropriate to the genre being performed (e.g., *polleras*, *sombreros*, *camicillas*, etc) and all of the dances were meticulously choreographed in advance and performed in close synchronization with the music. Similarly, the *cantadera* performances were limited to two *torrentes* with each abbreviated to one quarter of its usual length—a type of performance that one singer called a *décima “de orden”* borrowing the term used by folklorists to describe the performances rural performance practices in more urbane settings (such as in the salons of the well-to-do Azuerense town dwellers).⁴¹⁵

LPN’s performance lasted close to 45 minutes and featured a selection of their most recent and well-received compositions. Taking up my place among the audience I noticed that their presentation bore many resemblances to their *baile* performances while also

⁴¹⁴ Personal communication, 2008.

⁴¹⁵ Karen Peralta, personal communication, 2008.

featuring a number of important differences. All of *integrantes* wore their usual matching shirts as they would in a *baile* and performed in their characteristically animated style, some dancing in place and gesturing to the audience. Each song was played much as it would in a *baile* setting. Yet the performance was limited to a single iteration of the form rather than two. Due to the time constraints of the concert setting, there were no breaks between the songs and as a result the *conjunto*'s *locutor* was largely absent from the proceedings. Instead, Nenito Vargas (the *conjunto*'s accordionist) spoke directly to the audience and announced the title and name of the composer before each individual song's performance. This particular form of interaction (which would be normatively reserved for the *locutor*) was somewhat unusual as was the round of applause that followed every song, bestowed by a visibly attentive audience. When the members of LPN had finished performing they were approached by members of the audience, most wanting to have their photos taken with the *conjunto* and some asking for autographs. This kind of interaction between the *conjunto* performers and their audience was something I seldom witnessed in a *baile* setting (where the dancers usually did not speak directly with the musicians). In a concert setting, the *conjunto* performers are framed somewhat differently than in the more purpose-oriented dance-type setting of a *baile*. Here the performers are accorded a greater degree of celebrity status, they remain the sole focus of the audience and they are perform for a more widespread (television) audience. These factors very likely contributed to the audience's attitudes and modes of interaction with the performers.

Following the performance, I spoke briefly to Vargas. His responses to my various questions about the significance of this concert and the way that it differed from his usual *baile* performances reflected the sort of pragmatism that seemed in keeping the particular

concerns and priorities of an active *conjunto* professional. Vargas noted that while he personally preferred performing for dancers, he appreciated the shorter performance hours; pointing out:

[For] one presentation they pay you well, forty minutes, forty-five [minutes], you don't kill yourself too much. Imagine, these [*baile*] presentations begin at 10:00 at night, its 5:00 in the morning, 6:00 in the morning and one is still playing! One leaves dead, however, we enjoy it more.

In addition to being a source of paid work, Vargas indicated that the televised performance was also a means of raising the *conjunto* public profile “at a national level” and allowing access to viewers who would not normally “go to the *festivales bailables* [e.g., dance festivities or *bailes*].” Vargas also observed that concert setting affected the *conjunto*’s performance in various ways. He noted, for example, that he felt compelled to play more “*cumbia suelta* pieces [...] to keep the audience active, alive,” and added:

if you show up with five or six of these romantic *agarraó* [i.e., *cumbia agarrado*] pieces people are going to fall asleep [...] because they are not dancing. So you have to play an *agarraó* with a *suelta*.

This was something I had not noticed during the performance, but to hear Vargas tell it, it made plenty of sense: while *cumbia agarrado* pieces allowed for more intimate dance configuration, the livelier (and faster) *cumbia suelta* created more of a spectacle for a less physically active audience. Vargas’ keen attention to his audience was not uncharacteristic of a *conjunto* professional and even extended to beyond his immediate performance setting. In explaining the rationale for performing each song only once, for example, he noted that television viewers were an important consideration, stating:

if you play someone a song for fifteen minutes they're going to get bored sitting in front of the television watching. So practically [each song] lasts only six, seven or eight minutes at the most.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁶ Personal communication, 2008.

Vargas and presumably the other *conjunto* performers were conscientious of the impact of their unconventional performance setting and adapted their performance practices accordingly. One of the *cantadera* performers summed it up quite nicely by noting that “professionals” operate in what he called “another world or what is known as the *toldos* and *jardines* every weekend.”⁴¹⁷

While Vargas provided valuable insight into the relationship between performance context and performance practice, he seemed less concerned with the relationship between the *conjunto* or *música típica popular* genre to the nationalist objectives of the concert. My interviews with members of the *conjunto típico*, however, proved somewhat more revealing. In describing the artistic goals of the concert, for example, Villareal (the folklorist/performer mentioned earlier) pointed out that the performances were meant to be interpreted as a “*proyección*,” or projection, of “Panamanian cultural expressions”; that is, they were meant to capture the spirit as well as many formal elements of the conventional (read authentic) practice, while providing an element of spectacle for an ostensibly unconventional audience and performance context. In this respect LPN was a notable exception, as Villareal went on to explain:

Ricaurte Villareal: What Nenito [Vargas] played continued to be what he plays in the regular *jardines* [and] *bailes*.

SB: So he’s doing the same thing?

RV: The same thing. There isn’t a variation. He continues to adhere to the same standard of the [regular] events he plays.

While Villareal’s assessment seemed not to take into account the various ways in which the *conjunto* did indeed adapt their performance practices to suit the performance context, in certain respects it also seemed to ring true. In marked contrast to the other groups, for example, LPN did not engage in the pageantry of folkloric ‘projection’ (as was the case, for

⁴¹⁷ Richard Rodriguez, personal communication, 2008.

example, in the *teleton* music video) and as a result theirs was perceived and promoted by the concert organizers and my informants as a faithful representation of a performance practice which boasted territorially widespread, mass participation within Panama. For example, in describing the differences between the performance by LPN and the *conjunto típico*, folklorist and choreographer Elisa De Céspedes pointed out that the former was “the dance of the people; the *popular* dance [my emphasis],” whereas the latter was a stylized expression of “the gamut of folklore,” based on which she added her “choreography” all the while “respecting the tradition.”⁴¹⁸

In certain respects, the general consensus among the folklorists that LPN, through their avoidance of any obvious pageantry, were in fact performing their own version of Panamanian musical vernacularism seemed to ring true. *Conjunto* performers seldom don traditional dress nor do they call their own music “folkloric.” Moreover, both Villareal and de Céspedes’ identified *música típica popular*’s close link to the *baile* institution as an expression of (popular) Panamanian vernacularism and, in turn, a measure of the genre’s authenticity as a decidedly Panamanian phenomenon. For these individuals, LPN’s performance was not a *proyección* (and therefore still removed from the cultural revitalisation movement of the early twentieth century), but was nevertheless perceived as a genuine or ‘authentic’ expression of a popular and decidedly Panamanian music-dance practice. While complex, the type of authenticity that was being promoted here was one that established links the ideals of Panamanian musical vernacularism, such as the genre’s well-established reputation as an accompaniment to social dance and the perception that the unusual performance context notwithstanding, the performances themselves remained unchanged. Here we have an example of the type of tightrope act *conjunto* musicians face on

⁴¹⁸ Personal communication, 2008.

a regular basis. Despite their strong commitment to one genre and, typically, one style, *conjunto* performances are frequently evaluated on the basis of a differing—and at times contradictory—set of “rules” (see Turino, 1993:156-157) each generating their own set of meanings and methods of validation. Negotiating and indeed exploiting musical “borders” (see Holt, 2007:151) is something of a specialty of *conjunto* musicians who, very likely due to the high economic stakes involved, are very much aware of the multiple discourses surrounding their music.

Another connection between Panamanian musical vernacularism and *música típica popular* could be made on the basis of their mutual connection and history to the Azuero peninsula and Azuerense culture. While the concert was promoted as a celebration national folklore, all of the genres on display that night had more than a cursory connection to the Azuero peninsula. This was especially true of the music, dance and performance tropes of the *conjunto típico* and *cantadera* performances, both of which have a long and well documented historical connection to mestizo-identified populations living in the Azuero region. Equally important was the lack of identifiably Afro-Panamanian and indigenous musical practices, which seemed incongruent with the concert’s purported aims of (geo-)cultural inclusivity. This symbolic (geo-cultural) imbalance was not addressed during the show nor did it come up in my interviews with the performers. The fact that it was not openly acknowledged, however, seemed to reinforce the Azuero region’s importance to Panamanian cultural imaginaries, as is suggested in the following exchange with De Céspedes:

SB: Where are you from?
Elisa De Céspedes: I’m Panamanian.
SB: From the Capital?
EdC: Yes, I’m from the Capital, I’m not from the interior. Because *the* folklore was born here in the Capital and later it became popular in the interior.

What is interesting here is not only the unusualness of De Céspedes' claim, but the fact that it questions the common presumption that folkloric authenticity is contingent on an *interiorano* heritage. Among other things, a perceived *interiorano* heritage is one of the ways in which *música típica popular* becomes aligned with Panamanian cultural nationalism, which for various historical, cultural and social reasons has accorded a special significance to the cultural practices taking place in Panama's central provinces (Chapter 1).

The fact that the music LPN played was called “*música típica*” or “traditional music” provided another, albeit somewhat more tenuous, connection to the theme of cultural vernacularism promoted by the concert. It was my experience while conducting interviews that the genre’s label itself seemed to imply a relationship to other forms of traditional music *a priori*. While none of my informants confused the terms “*música típica*” (as *música típica popular*) with “*música folklórica*”—the latter term being reserved mainly to denote the music played by the *conjunto típico* and during the *cantadera*—some performers felt compelled provide an explanation as to why the music played by *conjuntos* was called and, for some (such as the ACP concert organizers), conceived of as ‘traditional.’ For example, during an interview with Chavelo Moreno, the accordionist accompanying the *conjunto típico*, he noted that the music he played was called “*música folklórica*.” When I asked him whether it could also be called “*música típica*,” he replied:

Chavelo Moreno: Well, there is a relationship—a strong relationship—but folklore comes from... It’s something that is born [here].⁴¹⁹

SB: So is it different from what [LPN play]?

CM: Totally. [Their music] is something that is has been—how should I put it—modified to put it one way.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁹ Moreno uses the Spanish term “*nato*” here, which literally means “born,” but in this context also be interpreted as “vernacular,” “native” or “authentic.”

⁴²⁰ Personal communication, 2008.

While Moreno's account seems to set *música típica popular* apart as a "modified" practice, it also posits a relationship based on origins and presumably overlapping performance modalities. The similarity in the names implies that a relationship exists and should be accounted for. Thus, *música típica popular*'s denotively ambiguous label contributes to its inclusion within the discourse of Panamanian musical vernacularism—which, ironically, is a discourse that had long repudiated it.

Several elements came into play on the night of the ACP concert that served to highlight the particular relationship of the genre to notions of Panamanian identity. One was *música típica popular*'s particularly close connection to the *baile* institution, which created a basis for its understanding as an inter-regional and uniquely Panamanian phenomenon, and expression of contemporary and popular vernacularism. A second factor in highlighting the interrelationship between *música típica popular* and Panamanian cultural nationalism was the music's strong alignment with Azuerense vernacular culture, which, while not directly acknowledged, was an underlying theme of the concert and by extension Panamanian music-cultural nationalism, thereby creating a sense of fit between the various performances that night. Finally there was issue of the genre's name, which frequently provided a semantic and symbolic entry point for its (admittedly tenuous) inclusion in discourses of Panamanian musical nationalism as suggested by the folklore/*típica* theme of the concert.

One of the interesting aspects of this concert was the way it promoted ideas of genre over any particular group identity or stylistic orientation. This was suggested by the concert's title as well as promotional material that accompanied the concert series. The ACP, for example, posted the following review of the concert series in their monthly newsletter *El Faro*:

Típico, rock, pop, reggae and tropical music all formed part of the season, and this plurality was also evident among the audience. Hundreds of young people and adults came every night to dance and sing to the rhythm of their choice.⁴²¹

This general emphasis on the broader categories of genre (such as “*música típica*,” “*cantadera*,” etc.) in lieu of specific personalities/performers seemed appropriate given that the ACP was providing a public service and as such it was incumbent on them to be sensitive to issues of cultural pluralism. As a result, the role of LPN within the context of the concert was primarily that of representing a particular genre and in this capacity it was likely that any number of other *conjuntos* could have been equally appropriate and effective.⁴²² This issue is significant as it suggests that the expressions of musical vernacularism noted above are not necessarily unique to any one particular *conjunto*, but rather represent part of the range of interpretive possibilities and performative identities that are part of *música típica popular* as a whole and, thus, available to *all* genre practitioners.

Summary

In the two foregoing ethnographic accounts I have argued that notions of style and genre intersect with and mutually inform those of Panamanian musical vernacularism and geo-cultural identity. In the first case, Cárdenas’ traditional stylistic orientation and iconic status was pivotal in his capacity to be seen to embody various ideas of Panamanian cultural vernacularism being presented in the music video. In the second case, however, the connection was more contingent on widely shared ideas of *música típica popular* itself, such

⁴²¹ El Faro: Revista informativa de la Autoridad del Canal de Panamá (March, 2008:9; <<http://www.pancanal.com/esp/noticiero/el-faro/pdf/elfaro-20080324.pdf>> [accessed February 24, 2011]).

⁴²² Vargas confirmed this when he noted that the audience that night was “mixed,” in the sense that it included both fans and people who would not normally attend his concerts. Similarly, being a sponsored event the *conjunto* did not have to concern themselves with *taquilla* sales, their job was ‘simply’ to show up and perform (personal communication, 2008).

as its connection to Azuerense musical culture, and a sense of authenticity stemming from the immensely popular and widespread *baile* institution. In both cases, the genre's connection to Panamanian musical vernacularism, however, was not entirely unambiguous. This point is effectively illustrated by the denotive ambiguity of the genre's label and its ability to both connect and disconnect *música típica popular* from other more established forms of Panamanian vernacular music (e.g., “*música folklórica*”).

Intersections between genre, style and musical transnationalism

It had been suggested to me on various occasions that *música típica popular* enjoys a special kind of popularity in Panama. On one hand it does not have the broad-based transnational following as is the case with other locally popular genres such as pop/rock, reggaeton and salsa. Moreover, *conjunto* practitioners do not boast the same number of album sales nor do they command the type of adulation normally given to the star performers of many other commercial genres. On the other hand, when it comes to the sheer quantity of live performances and the revenue these performances generate for the various individuals involved, *música típica popular* success remains unparalleled in Panama. According to *música típica popular* composer Amable “Mabin” Moreno, much of the genre’s success in this regard is due largely to its connection to commercial *bailes*:

reggaeton [is] listened to a lot, especially by young people, however, the concerts themselves do not draw many people—I know this by experience. On the other hand, about seventy percent [of the population] listens to *música típica* and this same seventy percent attends the events and goes and dances. So it is a real seventy percent. In the meantime you listen to the radio and everyone is listening to reggae. But when you put on a reggae concert—at least here, today—one thousand people won’t show up. [...] It would have to be during carnival or a big event, but [reggae]

doesn't have an assiduous and close following.⁴²³

As Moreno points out, *música típica popular*'s close association with the *baile* institution and its attendant reception practices has allowed it to flourish as a commercial practice all the while maintaining a relatively low media profile in relation to other commercial genres both in Panama and abroad.

For many of my informants, *música típica popular*'s seeming transnational anonymity was simply incongruent with its local/national popularity. This was especially true for groups whose members thought their innovative stylistic orientation would provide them with the means for reaching a broader, more cosmopolitan audience-base. In the following I examine the issue of the genre's international anonymity by focusing on the accounts of the practitioners themselves. Over the course of my research I have found that this issue gave rise to varying ideas and opinions concerning the genre's role in and engagement with Panamanian musical cosmopolitanism. For some informants, the issue has little to do with the music and likely more to do with a number of practical factors affecting Panamanians and *música típica popular* practitioners as a whole. For most, however, the music and in particular its attendant reception modalities also affected the genre's potential to be exported. While solutions to the problem of exportability are varied, there is certainly a consensus among *conjunto* performers regarding what the problems are. Chief among them is the idea that the genre's success and local mapping as dance music, and tandem dependency on the commercial *baile* setting is in various ways incompatible with transnational commercial development; that in effect (and ironically so) the music's commercial character has rendered it less cosmopolitan than traditionally had thought to have been the case. By focusing on the issue of transnationalism this section sheds light on the

⁴²³ Personal communications, 2007.

way that the genre is frequently discursively framed and perceived by practitioners as a sometimes aspiring, contested and/or potential expression of Panamanian cosmopolitanism.

Extramusical factors

For some of my informants the issue of the *música típica popular*'s exportability has less to do with the quality music itself and more to do with the fact that the performers lack the means to adequately promote the music abroad. Amable "Mabín" Moreno, for example, noted that while "there is good production in the musical aspect and the musicians enjoy a very beautiful repertory," he added, "I believe our music lacks a showcase to be able to export it."⁴²⁴ Similarly, Joel "Negro" Quintero noted "It's not [about] quality [...], what is needed is to exploit it more, as in take it out of here [i.e., Panama]. The thing is that nobody takes *típico* abroad." According to Quintero, the challenge is that unlike vallenato, *música típica popular* lacks the support of record companies and agents who were both interested and capable of promoting the music outside of the country.⁴²⁵

Noteworthy in the foregoing commentary is the suggestion that the issue of the genre's exportation lies outside of the music itself and has more to do with its particular national affiliation. This idea is reminiscent of Ronald Smith's assessment of Panamanian nationalism as suffering from what he calls "special anonymity;" that is, while internationally famous for its turbulent politics, inter-oceanic canal and unique natural resources, Panama's cultural-expressive forms remain virtually unknown outside of its own borders.⁴²⁶ Osvaldo Ayala has indicated as much when he noted that unlike other nationally-

⁴²⁴ Personal communication, 2007.

⁴²⁵ Personal communication, 2008.

⁴²⁶ Smith, 1998:770.

identified genres such as vallenato and merengue, *música típica popular* lacks an initial transnational audience-base given the fact that “Panamanian migration has been very small.”⁴²⁷ “Aside from the fact that the music is good,” Ayala explains:

there are millions of Colombians around the world. [...] In the United States, for example, there are one or two million Colombians. We [on the other hand] are only three million Panamanians in the whole country.⁴²⁸ Those Panamanians who have emigrated are very few and the majority are in Florida and New York. I don’t believe there are more than two thousand in Florida and maybe ten thousand in New York. However, ten thousand compared to the half million Colombians and one million Dominicans.⁴²⁹

Labelling discourse

Conjunto musicians regularly link their inability to properly export their music to the ambiguity of the music’s name. First and foremost is the understanding that the term “*música típica*”—in a manner similar to its English-language equivalent “traditional music”—can connote something of an umbrella category and, therefore, cannot unambiguously differentiate the music performed by *conjuntos* from other musical practices located within its referential ambit. While it is my experience that this ambiguity is sometimes experienced by local audiences (see above), it is thought to be particularly acute where foreign audiences are concerned—for whom the term is can connote a range of musical practices while referring to none in particular. During a conversation with several musicians about this issue, Jorge Jaén noted bluntly that the genre “does not have a name because in every country there is *típico*. ”⁴³⁰ Luis Carlos “Chivo” García, who was also present, expanded on Jaén’s general point by recounting an anecdote (well known among *música típica popular* musicians) of

⁴²⁷ Personal communication, 2008.

⁴²⁸ At the time Panama’s population was closer to four million.

⁴²⁹ Personal communication, 2008.

⁴³⁰ Personal communication, 2007.

when LPC performed in Miami for the well-known Spanish-language variety show called “Sabado Gigante.” García explained that during the interview following their performance the show’s host, Don Francisco, “asked Samy [...] what music they played and he said it was ‘*música típica*,’ [to which the host replied] ‘What type of *música típica* if in [every] country there are many types of *música típica*?’ ”⁴³¹

Jaén and García’s is a common refrain among *conjunto* practitioners and suggests that *música típica popular*’s strictly national (rather than transnational) following plays a role in its label’s mapping as problematic and undesirable. This situation is not particularly unique to *conjunto* performers, being also prevalent in situations where musical practices are shown to expand from a local to increasingly trans-local consumership. For example, Fabian Holt observes that “categorization” is more “vital to distribution [...] in mass-culture contexts” than “small-scale local networks” (176). Similarly and on the flipside, Simon Frith (2000) shows how the label of “world music” was a specific marketing strategy whereby “the sounds of *other* people [...] were sold to British record buyers” (305; my italics). As is the case for *conjunto* practitioners, while the denotive ambiguity of the “*música típica*” label arguably serves its practitioners well in the national context, its potential for unwanted confusion is particularly exacerbated in situations where contextual clues are missing, as would very likely be the case whenever cultural outsiders are concerned.

Perceived ambiguity of the music’s label also foregrounds the tensions of its particular relationship to (official) Panamanian musical nationalism. While alternate interpretations do exist, on the whole *música típica popular* does not align well with the tenets of official Panamanian musical nationalism as outlined by early historiographers (a situation I have credited to practices of extensive musical mixing, the use of foreign

⁴³¹ Personal communication, 2007.

instruments and its suggestion of *interiorano* musical cosmopolitanism). Sandra Sandoval suggests as much when she notes the way that transnational flows tend to heighten the relationship between music and nation, and, in particular, its dialogue with other nationally-identified musical genres:

I believe that we must work seriously to ensure that our music makes it ever more effectively abroad; that Panamanian music becomes known here and beyond our borders. Samy and I have even thought about changing the *música típica* name so as to avoid saying [when asked], for instance: “What is your music called?” and we reply “*música típica*.” This cannot continue, because Vallenato is called vallenato; bachata has its name; Batchata; merengue has its name, and in Panama all we say is ‘*música típica*.’ (Pérez Saavedra, 2000:313-314)

The perceived inability of the “*música típica*” label to denote a (specific) Panamanian musical practice resonates closely with Holt’s idea of “music at the borders,” which actively questions “why some musics of the *country* are marginal in discourse on music of the *nation*” (2007:151). In their role of enabling critical differentiation, genre categories (and labels) simultaneously include and exclude. Holt offers the case of labels such as “world music” and “world beat,” which he suggests serve to indicate “[t]he continued existence of the distinctions between American and non-American music as well as Western and non-Western music” (156). For similar reasons, the particular case of *música típica popular*’s exclusion from Panamanian musical nationalism becomes particularly acute in instances where national identity and transnationalism converge.

This relationship is possibly best illustrated by the existence of the term “*pindín*,” which (unlike “*música típica*”) unambiguously denotes for contemporary Panamanian audiences the sounds and performance practices of what I refer to in this study as “*música típica popular*.” While the term has some currency (particularly the Panama City-based national press and *capitalinos* in general), it is almost never used by active and former

conjunto practitioners. When asked why this is the case, my informants invariably pointed to the historical usage of the term as a pejorative label for an undifferentiated compendium of rural-identified—read inauthentic/non-vernacular—musical practices (see Chapter 2). Reflective of more contemporary attitudes of *música típica popular* practitioners themselves, Eráclides Amaya notes that the term “*pindines*” was the

pejorative name given by cultured *capitalinos* [i.e., people from Panama City], almost always lovers of all things foreign, to the genuine product of the fusion of the Afro-Antillean, Spanish and indigenous cultures. (Amaya, 1996:35)

The issues cited by Amaya and others are rooted in a history of discrimination directed toward the Panamanian “*interiorano*.” Their strong ambivalence to labels with pejorative connotations reflects this and speaks a certain fear regarding the power of names as not only being potentially “predictive of what those entities are to become” (Livingston, 2001:20), but also to further solidify its status as a “music at the border.” Occasional initiatives to fix the naming problem (as far as exponents of transnationalism are concerned)—such as a campaign undertaken by Osvaldo Ayala to (re)name the genre “*ritmo de Guararé*” (rhythm of Guararé)—have for similar reasons been unsuccessful.

The fact that *música típica popular* practitioners lament the lack of a clearly identifying label and yet actively resist attempts to ascribe it one is suggestive of the ways in which generic conventions (and ambiguities) are socially constructed. As we have seen, discourses of *música típica popular* have traditionally existed in a particular tension with meta-notions of Panamanian national identity wherein the genre’s various links to Azuerense musical and cultural identity are counterpointed and often problematized by its ties to musical transnationalism, commercialisation and urban/metropolitan-identified cosmopolitanism. It is my experience that practitioners are well aware of the range of

connotative possibilities afforded by the genre's labelling practices and readily take advantage of the potential for conceptual ambiguity to reinforce links to multiple and at times seemingly contradictory performance histories. In addition, I argue that more than reaffirming negative stereotypes, clearly denotative labels heighten the potential for the genre's exclusion from particular historical discourses (by imagining it as an other), which suggests why they continue to be avoided. Given the connotative potential and ambiguities of the genre's labelling conventions, performance contexts and presentational strategies are often important variables in creating the possibility for a shared (however limited and/or variable) understanding of the genre particularly in relation to other performance conventions, an issue to which I will return.

With respect to the perceived challenges associated with bringing *música típica popular* to a transnational audience, it appears that there is little to gain from present labelling practices—and indeed a number of practitioners (namely Ayala and the Sandovals) have made efforts to rectify the problem. The fact that it persists also reaffirms the idea that if the denotive ambiguity of the genre's label has any benefit, it is in its ability to create connections with Panamanian musical vernacularism (rather than cosmopolitanism).

The role of innovation strategies and problematizing the baile

While the problem of the *música típica popular*'s international anonymity may be thought to result from issues related to its local (and extramusical) environment, a number of my informants have also suggested that the answer to the exportability question lies in the music itself, which they believe must be tailored to suit the expectations of non-Panamanian audiences. This idea has gained some traction given that historically the most innovative

conjuntos—such as RS and LPC, and earlier EOS—have been the ones to perform (almost always through government assistance) outside of the country. The underlying premise is often one that assumes that for the genre to become transnationally accepted it must incorporate features of other (similarly transnational) genres all the while maintaining its own individual identity; in other words, achieving an effective ‘fusion of genres’ as defined in Chapter 9. Samy Sandoval suggests as much when he states:

I [will] consider myself a made man [...] when we have taken Panamanian *música típica*—which is our fundamental concern—to where we want to take it, which is abroad, that its merits will be recognized abroad. From there on out I'll feel like a successful person. (Pérez Saavedra, 2000:213)

In the case of LPC, Samy notes that innovation has always been a means to “compete with international music.” Among the specific “changes” thought essential to achieving this objective, Samy cites the following:

Change the rhythm of the music, make it faster, more vigorous, adding electric drums, keyboard—I add keyboards sometimes on the recordings—have the musicians dance on stage, choreography, certain adjustments to the lighting, *show* [English term]; everything, everything you can do and this has allowed us to perform alongside foreign groups and sound good. (Pérez Saavedra, 2000:160)

In the foregoing, Samy not only places a premium on innovation as a means of cultivating a transnational audience base, but also lists the specific types of changes that he regards as important to achieving that goal. On this list we find a number of innovations (e.g., faster tempos, electronic drums and to some extent choreography) that have become identified both with the group’s own particular style and the innovative tendencies of genre practitioners as a whole. In this respect, the innovative process Samy describes is one that resembles and in certain respects is a continuation of the genre’s earlier transition from a rural-/*interiorano*-identified genre to one that assumed a closer alignment to urban Panamanian (and in particular, *capitalino*) musical culture (as discussed at length in Part II).

Significant to the present discussion, however, are the items on the list that are less characteristic of the group's routine live (*baile*) performances, which suggests a degree of discontinuity with conventional performance practice and innovation strategies. In particular, Samy's emphasis on extra-musical parameters associated with performance spectacle or "show" (such as group choreography, lighting and even the use of unconventional instruments such as the keyboard) is important as it highlights performance practices that are normatively downplayed in the dance-oriented *baile* setting. In the following I will focus the seeming discontinuity between conventional (*baile*) performance practices and innovation strategies as related to ideas of local and trans-local, respectively.

While most performers tend to agree that *música típica popular* has the potential to be exported, many noted that the challenges lay in its modes of production and consumption within Panama and in particular within the context of the *baile*. Many musicians have criticized and/or lamented the fact that the performative requisites of the *baile* setting have placed limitations on the type of changes that might make the music more accessible to transnational audiences. Samy has often made known his feelings on this topic, stating on one occasion that in order to "internationalize *música típica*" one must consider the effect of performance conventions, he explains:

I feel that *música típica*, in terms of how we [i.e., LPC] represent it, should not be limited to *bailes* and nothing more; rather it should branch out into other ventures/enterprises that in one way or another support it. However, we can [also] reinforce the image, we're working on this. I also think about other things that are a little bit more special and they involve raising *música típica*, at least for ourselves, so that instead of being dance music it becomes concert music. And I want to get there; to become a concert musician and play two, two and a half to three hours, and leave the audience satisfied with a great concert.⁴³²

The "concert" or "show" aesthetic that Samy is referring to is one that tends to prioritize the

⁴³² Pérez Saavedra, 2000:183.

element of spectacle and places the performers at the centre of attention. Both are performance parameters that tend to be downplayed within the context of dance-driven *baile* performances.

Samy's emphasis on what might be called a concert aesthetic is significant namely in terms of how it appears to differ from *baile* performance conventions. While a number of *conjuntos* have succeeded in performing in concert-type settings and/or for non-dancing audiences (as in the case of the concert performance described above), for the most part attempts to concertize the *baile* have generally met with mixed success. I observed this firsthand while attending *bailes* where LPC or LD was performing, where it had become commonplace for a number of the younger patrons to stand near the stage and sing along with the music and applaud after every performance. This phenomenon—which the performers sometimes referred to it as “*haciendo bulla*” or generally “making a racket”—was generally regarded as a positive indication of the groups' mass popularity (and arguably an indication of the *baile*'s concertization⁴³³), however, it also had its drawbacks. By not dancing, however, these patrons were cutting into traditional forms of *baile* revenue (namely *taquilla* sales). In an effort to make these *bailes* more commercially viable, on a number of occasions I observed that the *empresarios* compensated for this lack of income by increasing the entrance and *taquilla* fees sometimes close to double of the standard rate.

The phenomenon of “*haciendo bulla*” underscores some of the challenges faced by professional genre practitioners as they attempt to break with *baile* conventions in the pursuit of achieving greater alignment with ostensibly transnational performance practices. In the case of LPC, this would suggest that the group's innovations were having the desired effect

⁴³³ Samy, for example, credits the fact that members of his audience preferred “to look rather than dance” as the impetus behind LPC's *Evolución* concert, which took place in the *Teatro Anayansi de Atlapa* in 2002 (Pérez Saavedra, 2000:214).

insofar as Samy's goal of becoming a "concert" performer was concerned. Samy makes this point, for example, by noting that the preference of members of his audience "to look rather than dance" was an impetus behind LPC's *Evolución* concert, which took place in the *Teatro Anayansi de Atlapa* in 2002—a soft-seat concert theatre in Panama City (Pérez Saavedra, 2000:214). The fact, however, that *baile* patrons behave similarly during performances by LD, a group not particularly known for being innovators, would suggest that the relationship was not quite so straightforward.⁴³⁴ More importantly, this form of performer-audience interaction also suggests that attempts to change the performance dynamics of a *baile* at the expense of the dancers are likely to have significant (and possibly unwanted) economic consequences. It is my experience that *conjunto* performers are well aware of this issue and are generally cautious of engaging in any activity that might alienate the dancers, be it through inappropriate stage lighting, unusual instrumentation or the performance of non-genre-based repertoire (such as rock-ballads, salsa, etc.). The varied and problematic (economically, at least) behaviour of contemporary *conjunto* audiences also suggests an encounter (or clash) of divergent musical "affinities" (Shelemay, 2011:373), in this case linked to the particular tastes and proclivities of the local-/*baile*-oriented 'dancer' and transnational-/concert-oriented 'listener.' These affective links make this encounter all the more conspicuous given, as Kay Kaufman Shelemay argues, that an "affinity community" tends to actively seek "its own dispersal across boundaries as well as engagement by large groups" (*ibid.*, 375).

The central importance of the *baile* to both the genre's identification and sustainability as a commercial practice is reflected at times by its perceived incompatibility

⁴³⁴ Ulpiano "Panito" Vergara (LD's principal *empresario*), for example, observed that this behaviour was typical of LD's *bailes*, but noted that it "doesn't have an explanation" (personal communication, 2007).

with transnational-identified performance modalities. For some performers the aesthetic ‘chasm’ that is perceived to exist between *baile*-going Panamanians and (generally) concert-going foreigners is simply too wide to be bridged by established innovation strategies; both are *different* audiences requiring *different* performance strategies. For example, like Samy, Osvaldo Ayala also advocates musical innovation as a means of enhancing the genre’s appeal to non-Panamanian audiences and cultural outsiders, stating:

It is necessary to make some changes especially when exporting the music. You have to do a few things for the benefit of the people who are not necessarily Panamanian and don’t understand our idiosyncrasies. You have to make international music, however, respecting the roots from where it comes. It’s Panamanian identity.⁴³⁵

Where Ayala differs from Samy, however, is in the exclusivity of his approach. For Ayala the strategy is one of adopting innovation techniques that are context appropriate, noting that when performing outside of Panama he incorporates “other musicians,” uses “a bigger band” and does “different things” such as adding “[trap] drums.” Victor “Chino” Lescure makes a similar observation and further problematizes the issue of the music’s generic identity in the following interview excerpt where he explains the role of the *conjunto*’s female singer when RS performs abroad:

Victor Lescure: [Ayala] has her sing *coro*. [...] But she doesn’t sing *saloma*. At least when we go to Miami there are many Panamanians who have heard music with *saloma*. Then we have to perform with *saloma*.

SB: Because there are Panamanians?

VL: Because there are many Panamanians. At least it’s different if we go to Europe and play music for *them* [i.e., Europeans]. [Then] we don’t use *saloma* because they have not heard our music. So, we bring them our music—that is, *típico*—but now in another genre. Because it reinforces the group [and so] we add keyboard or we can add acoustic drums. In Europe even more, so as to compete with other [groups].

SB: When you do these things does it still sound like Panamanian music?

VL: Now it doesn’t.

SB: What is it then?

⁴³⁵ Personal communication, 2006.

VL: Now it sounds more like rock by Carlos Vives.⁴³⁶

Lescure's observations highlights the role of innovation strategies as a means of excising performance modalities that are perceived as incongruent with outside expectations and in the process also reveals a sense of pronounced discontinuity between the perceived aesthetic preferences of foreign and Panamanian audiences. The more genre practitioners seek to address this disparity, the more it seems to problematize notions of performance authenticity and the ability of the *música típica popular* to be recognized as a relatively discrete, coherent and decidedly 'Panamanian' musical genre.

Conclusion

By way of a summary I will conclude this chapter with an interview with a young *integrante* named Lari.⁴³⁷ In this interview, Lari describes the challenges faced by *conjunto* practitioners who envision a career beyond the limits of conventional practices, namely at *bailes* within the borders of Panama. In the following I quote from this interview at length as it not only provides a unique *integrante* perspective, but also serves to tie together a number of argumentative threads addressed in this chapter.

Lari is a lead singer in his early twenties and is an *integrante* of a semi-professional *conjunto*. At the time of this interview I had only known Lari for a short while, but we soon formed an easy friendship. Many of Lari's friends were also young *conjunto* practitioners with whom I spent many an evening listening to and discussing their favourite *música típica popular* and vallenato recordings played on the jukeboxes in the various

⁴³⁶ Personal communication, 2007.

⁴³⁷ This name is a pseudonym used to avoid revealing the speaker's identity. Personal communication, 2006.

cantinas we frequented. The following interview began with a series of open-ended questions where I asked Lari to tell me about himself, his musical goals, professional aspirations and so forth. In response to my questions, Lari offers a remarkably candid picture of the challenges facing a young *conjunto integrante* and aspiring innovator, and in the process addresses a number of issues pertinent to the focus of this chapter. In particular Lari highlights the dampening effect audience expectations are thought to have on the genre's outward/innovative development, which in his opinion is in issue tied to generational musical tastes and affinities for particular stylistic orientations (or what he describes as the likes and dislikes of "traditional people"). At various points in this interview, and towards the end in particular, Lari also offers a veiled critique of the *conjunto*-nexus paradigm itself (as well as his *integrante*/non-nexus principal status) as an additional barrier to his own creative/artistic and professional self-determination. Throughout this interview one gets the sense that Lari is modestly hopeful that he will be able to achieve his musical goals as a *conjunto* practitioner even as he considers a musical career outside *música típica popular* altogether. In this respect, Lari's point of view is aligned with those of other genre practitioners who see conventional performance models and practices at odds with the goal of musical transnationalism.

After exchanging a few pleasantries, the interview began by me asking Lari to "explain his musical vision." Following is a transcription of the more relevant portions of this interview interspersed with my own analytical commentary.

Lari: I am experimenting with an international project with [a friend of mine]. We're looking to see what we can do with this [and] we're going to try and see how it goes for us. If not I will have to return the *típico* genre, which is what I have always done.

Sean Bellaviti: Do you feel you will always have a place in *típico*?

L: Yes, of course. [...] I think if I stick with the *típico* genre I believe nothing bad will happen and eventually I'll become famous.

The “international project” that Lari is referring to is a venture he undertook with some of his musician and composer friends to record a series of demos featuring their original compositions performed as rock ballads. The aim was to use the demos to showcase their music and talent to an international (and at the time, unspecified) cast of music industry agents and producers in the hope of securing some form recording and/or distribution deal. From this excerpt we can see that the career Lari envisions for himself is one that is either within or without the *música típica popular* genre. For Lari, transnationalism offers an attractive alternative to *conjunto* work, even though he feels confident that he will be able to find work (and perhaps feel musically fulfilled) with *conjuntos* should things not work out.

Lari’s uncertainty of his particular involvement in any one single musical genre recalled an earlier conversation we had where he expressed feelings of dissatisfaction with the current state of *música típica popular*. I reminded him of this and asked if he could describe some the challenges he faces both as an aspiring innovator and genre practitioner:

Música típica has modernized a lot, however, what I want from *música típica* is something different—what can I tell you, by adding a piano or a couple of acoustic guitars. The public, however, doesn’t see it that way if you get what I mean, because when you do something different people already begin to say “No, you’re damaging *música típica*” or what have you. This is what I would do.

I’m in a group right now that (how should I put it) lacks a lot musically speaking, but it’s alright as it keeps me busy for the moment making some money, singing and learning little by little. [...]

In the foregoing, Lari makes it clear that as a *conjunto* practitioner his interests lie squarely on the innovative side of the genre’s stylistic orientation continuum—a position which, as he implies at the end of this excerpt (and had stated on other occasions), is at odds with that of his current *conjunto*. Lari is interested in fusion and creating “something different” by

experimenting with non-conventional performance modalities. In describing the potential challenges posed by his particular artistic vision, Lari notes that he runs the risk of being perceived as inauthentic or may even stand accused of “damaging” the genre by members of his target (Panamanian) audience. As I have noted above, this dilemma is one that is experienced by most genre practitioners who employ innovation strategies be it as a means for achieving a heightened sense of stylistic individuation and/or a reconciling the differences between a national and potentially transnational performance practice.

Our conversation continued by examining this issue further:

Sean Bellaviti: In your opinion, why is it that the tradition is so strong that people don't accept these sorts of changes? [...]

Lari: Well, it is the very same public who are accustomed to this. If you notice, young people today are going to *bailes* by Ulpiano [Vergara] whose music is music with salsa, exciting [i.e., *alegre*] music. Whereas, if you go to [a *baile* by] a musician like Dorindo [Cárdenas] you'll only find people of a certain age. So if you tell a girl who is 18 years old “let's go to a *baile* by Dorindo,” [she'll say] “No, why would I go there? I'll be bored and fall asleep. Let's go to a *baile* by Ulpiano, which has more salsa and so forth.” There are a lot of traditional people and the older musicians are very traditional. Among the new musicians there are some who are very traditional, [however], I am not traditional; I like what I call variation, the modification of the music, “let's add something here and add something there...” I think this has something to do with the time period I'm living in. I'm living in a time where the music [i.e., *música típica popular*] is very advanced. Who knows, perhaps the older people—traditional people—support traditional [music] because it was part of their time; they lived in the traditional period, [the period of] Dorindo, Teresín [Jaén] and Yín Carrizo. I didn't live during this time; I'm living in my time, the time of modernized music where [for example] one listens to the fusion of *típico* with reggaeton.

Here Lari reaffirms his desire to become a genre innovator (specifically by employing ‘fusion of genre’ strategies) and suggests that it is the genre's conventional audience (i.e., the “public”) itself that represent a significant obstacle to attaining that goal. In describing the character of this relationship he is sensitive to the fact that the genre's reception is marked by heterogeneity, some consumers (for reasons, he suggests, of age/socio-historical

subjectivities and/or aesthetic preference) embrace musical “variation” and “modification,” and others do not. To Lari’s dismay, however, it seems as if a critical percentage of that audience favours the more traditional styles and, for this reason, are thought to be disinclined to ‘adapt with the times’ or assist in maintaining the genre’s contemporary (e.g., “modernized”) relevance. What that might be is suggested in the following excerpt, in which Lari intuits the general direction of my next question:

Sean Bellaviti: Do you think this music has potential to...?

Lari: Yes and it even has international potential! Bachata, vallenato, salsa, merengue; these are international [genres] so why not *música típica*? [...] One musician who has done this the most is Samy Sandoval—Samy and Sandra. They have a musical vision that extends even [beyond Panama]. Let’s see what happens. However, if you go to one of Samy’s *bailes* you’ll see many people standing close to the stage. People don’t dance, [rather] they treat it like a *show* and many people criticize them for this. [...] What damages the music are people—traditional people, people without vision.

SB: Are they the majority?

L: I would say about seventy percent. [laughs] And while the new audiences and musicians don’t [change], we will keep on doing the same thing.

SB: And you don’t think this is good?

L: It is not good because we are going to stagnate; we are going to be stuck in doing one thing and it doesn’t have to be like this.

For Lari as for other innovative-oriented genre practitioners, transnationalism forms the yardstick for measuring *música típica popular*’s progress and continued relevance as a commercial genre. This position holds to the idea that if *música típica popular* is truly a popular national genre (as indeed it appears to be) then its mass popularity should logically extend beyond its national borders just as is said to have been the case with other similarly nationally-identified genres such as Dominican bachata and so forth. While Lari reserves the brunt of his critique for the traditionalists among the genre’s current audience base, he also expresses a common ambivalence about the *baile* institution and its seeming incompatibility with a concert aesthetic. His mention of LPC’s contribution to transforming the *baile* into a

concert or “show” (and the backlash it generated) suggests an awareness of the challenges posed by going against conventional (live) performance and economic practices in the hopes of achieving an evermore broad-based and transnational appeal.

Conventional audiences and performance practices, Lari suggests, are not the only challenges to his particular innovative vision. While describing the impetus for his international project Lari also (cautiously) suggests that the *conjunto* paradigm is also an issue:

This is something we are interested in doing... Already I feel our talent can be used for something more. I will tell you with all sincerity that I feel stuck in *música típica*. Or if not stuck, I wonder whether I will be able to be somebody. And you have to realize that for all international artists it has not been easy reach where they are today—it cost them a lot. And so I think that through sacrifice, determination, faith [and] heart [...] you can do something with your life. So, we have this vision and I hope it works out well.

Like most *integrantes*, Lari avoids criticising his *conjunto* openly, however, this sense of being “stuck” is one I had heard expressed by other *integrantes* who felt limited by the *conjunto*-nexus paradigm, characterized by a disproportionate attention and artistic control traditionally accorded to the accordionist/owner/nexus principal. Not being an accordionist himself, Lari laments the fact that he will likely not achieve his artistic goals (and become a star) as a *conjunto* practitioner.

What is key here is the feeling that genre conventions (be it in sound, performance practices, reception and audience participation, ensemble organization, and more) seem to be at odds with transcending national borders which, paradoxically, is itself central to success within them. Lari’s admission to feelings of liminality—which I have argued is the result of *música típica popular*’s particularly *ambiguous* connection/s to Panamanian music-cultural identity—resonates with Holt’s suggestion that “music at the borders” has a tendency to be

forgotten or eclipsed by other genres that are firmly implicated “in discourse on music of the nation” (see Holt, 2007:151, 180). Curiously if we follow Holt’s reasoning—as well as the implications of Lari’s musing on the challenges associated with conscious musical change—then it seems likely that the musical conventions and aesthetic values associated with *música típica popular*’s traditionalist (rather than, and again paradoxically, innovative) orientation offer the genre its greatest chance of success at becoming an identifiably Panamanian musical export.

Lari’s deeply personal account is one that highlights the issue that contemporary performance practices (and their attendant economic structures) do indeed pose impressive barriers to musicians seeking to enhance their chances for achieving widespread recognition and commercial success particularly within a transnational context. In the process it also reveals an understanding of the genre in relation to broader notions of mass popularity and cosmopolitanism in Panama: namely that despite its many ties to transnational genres, *música típica popular* remains popular only in Panama. Ironically the popularity of the *baile*, which I have argued has come to link the genre to notions of nationalism and Panamanian vernacularism, has increasingly problematized the genre’s connection to transnational musical flows and non-Panamanian audiences.

CONCLUSION

CRITICAL INTERSECTIONS

A number of interrelated themes, concerns and interests have guided and shaped this study.

One, however, remains central. That is, the aim of developing a greater understanding of the relationship between contemporary expressions of *música típica popular* (variously defined) and the historical processes, events and discourses that have contributed to its development and that of Panamanian nationalism and nationalist sentiment in a number of its guises.

Doing so has necessitated grappling with ideas and projects regarding the Isthmian territory that spanned half a millennium of the region's political, cultural and social history. It has also required accounting for and analyzing over a century's worth of musical historiography (devoted largely to the theme of Panamanian musical vernacularism), first-, second- and third-hand published and ethnographic accounts of musical practices and performance contexts, and musical 'texts' of various kinds; all argued here to have contributed to the development *música típica popular* as it is understood, performed and enjoyed by practitioners and aficionados today.

Needless to say, the size and scope (as well as the significance) of this project has a strong correlation to the breadth and quality of extant critical research on the topic of Panamanian nationalism and, in particular, musical history. In seeking to fulfill the aims of this study I have occasionally relied heavily (yet, I trust, not overly so) on a comparatively limited body of what I regard as foundational writings on topic of Panamanian nationalism

(Szok [2001] and Soler [1977 and 1986]), twentieth century Panamanian politics (Guevara Mann [1996] and Priestley [1986]) and rural society (Heckadon-Moreno [2006]), and Panamanian (vernacular) musical historiography (Rivera [2006] and Szok [2001, 2012]). These studies greatly assisted in the completion of what would have otherwise been a seemingly overwhelming undertaking. In most cases, however, key data and arguments had to be gathered and developed for the specific purposes of this study—constituting in some cases an initial line of inquiry. Needless to say, while unprecedented in scope, this study is far from exhaustive and hopefully will serve to galvanize further critical interest in the musical cultures of what is likely one of Latin America's most geopolitically unique and oft overlooked national territories: the Isthmus of Panama.

Panamanian musical nationalism and music-making in Panama

Both Panamanian nationalism and *música típica popular* have the quality that they change not only over time, but also with critical perspective. Sometimes they appear as seemingly solid and dependable categories with clear analytical applications, while at other times their foundations grow increasingly shaky and contours nebulous. This plasticity is not surprising if one assumes (as I and others have done) that these particular notions are socially constructed, culturally relative and very frequently imagined. Also not particularly surprising is the general shape and dynamism of nineteenth and twentieth century Panamanian nationalism, especially when considered in relation to other nationalist movements having taken place in postcolonial Latin America. What does appear to be particular to the Panamanian context, however, is the way in which first and second theme Panamanian nationalism represent an exaggeration of other similarly Liberalist-driven, postcolonial

nationalisms of the time. Indeed, Panama's political, economic and literal 'landscape' is exceptional in its very embodiment of the seeming contradictions—what Peter Wade (citing Nairn, 1977) refers to as the Janus-faced relationship between "progressive modernity" and "the legacy of tradition" (2000:4-5)—inherent in nineteenth and twentieth century nation building; with the interoceanic canal and the largely undeveloped *interior* being the geographical correlates of first and second theme nationalism. Significant to this study is the way that these relationships and correlations were made increasingly explicit the writings, taxonomies and political biases of the Republic's early musical intelligentsia and historiographers.

While it is tempting to view early projects of cultural revitalisation undertaken by these individuals as wholly aligned to the values and goals of second theme nationalism (as perceptibly nostalgic and reactionary), this view is incomplete. It is my contention that vernacularist discourse primarily served to reinforce the ideals of first (*rather than second*) theme nationalism by establishing a clear oppositional binary that extended not only to geography, but musical culture as well. *Interiorano* musical authenticity became mapped in terms of locality and avoidance of what was perceived as 'foreign' dance-music and instruments. Musical cosmopolitanism, in turn, became equally territorialized and located primarily in the nation's capital, with urban *capitalinos* being the rightful progenitors of all forms of musical mixing and transnational engagement.

That these influential historiographers not only argued what Panamanian *interiorano* (read vernacular, folkloric and national) music *should* be, but what it *should not* be is suggested by their treatment of violin and accordion *conjunto* music-dance practices. With reactions ranging from disinterest to visceral condemnation, *música típica popular* was

conspicuously located at the interstice of several binaries: its practitioners were *interioranos* from the Azuero peninsula who performed what could only be regarded as a mixture (as suggested by terms such as “bastardized,” “hybrid,” “adulterated,” “fusion” and “modern”) of both foreign- and vernacular-identified dance-music practices. I argue that it is this particularly ‘inauthentic’ mapping of *música típica popular* in relation to *both* dominant nationalist imaginaries that contributed significantly to the way *conjunto* practices have come to be understood, be it in terms of performance, reception, commercialism/professionalism and affective potential.

In the interest of promoting a vision of an Isthmian *interior* that was culturally homogeneous, unadulterated and unaffected by early twentieth century modernization efforts, Panamanian musical historiographers frequently marginalized (be it by selective indifference or active criticism) *conjunto* music and dance practices by casting it as a relative anomaly as far as Azuerense cultural expression was concerned. However, based in part on their own accounts (not to mention those found in Belisario Porras’ pivotal essay “El Orejano”) as well as those of later generations of *conjunto* practitioners, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the musical interests of rural-identified Azuerense populations did not differ significantly from their urban-identified counterparts. Indeed, my outline and examination of early violin *conjunto* repertoire, instrumentation, dance practice and performance contexts emphasizes this point. What is more, with the tandem advent of the *baile*’s commercialisation and increasing accessibility of Panamanian communications media and technology, practices of musical mixing on the part of *conjunto* musicians continued and/or were adapted to forge strategic links to urban-identified and transnational musical practices (such as Cuban popular music and later salsa and *vallenato*) and *capitalino*

audiences. These ‘links,’ often in the form of musical sound and presentation, I argue, served to establish variously tangible synchronicities with other (often foreign/transnational) musical genres, which challenged *música típica popular*’s nearly exclusive association with *interiorano* geo-cultural imaginaries.

Seemingly despite the best efforts of early musical historiographers, *música típica popular*’s relevance to discourses of Panamanian musical nationalism did not significantly diminish, but rather seems to have increased over time. Moreover, the consideration of why notions of (official) Panamanian nationalism have come to play such a prominent role in *música típica popular* discourse (and, hence, this study) can also be found, in part, within the pages of Panamanian musical historiography. This is because music-dance practices of violin and accordion *conjuntos* constituted an intrinsic part of the process of nationalist identity formation, where it served to galvanize efforts of cultural revitalisation and rescue. This is particularly noticeable in the (written and cultural) work of husband and wife team, Manuel and Dora Pérez de Zárate whose preoccupation with *conjunto* activities, I argue, was motivated not so much for its perceived differences, but rather for its perceived *similarity* to and *rootedness* in Azuerense (again, read national) vernacular-identified music-dance practices. In the end it was these selfsame folklorists who contributed to *música típica popular*’s continued relevance to notions and ideas of Panamanian musical nationalism: by fixating on the music’s differences they also highlighted its similarities, be it its undeniable connection to *interiorano-/Azuerense-/campesino*-identified culture and lifeways, problematic nomenclature or uncanny similarity to “*the*” (i.e., vernacular) *cumbia*.

Seemingly by chance and by design, connections to prominent themes of Panamanian musical vernacularism were also cultivated and maintained by *conjunto* practitioners

themselves. Territorialism and regionalism, I argue, played a hugely important role in understanding the music's relationship to *interiorano* and particularly Azuerense cultural imaginaries. Moreover, an analysis of the thematic content of *música típica popular* song texts also speaks to a close relationship between performers and Azuerense audiences, which were grounded in (lived) experience and location. Moreover, *conjunto* practitioners frequently adapted their practices (be it in terms of lyrical themes, repertoire and accessibility) in ways that were in sync with challenges faced by twentieth century Azuerense migrant farmers. At the same time these musicians also benefited from the cultural cache their continued association with the Azuero peninsula afforded them, and actively promoted the vision of *música típica popular* as a decidedly Azuerense music—*conjunto* naming practices, home-base locations and accordionists' participation in the *Concurso de Gelo Córdoba* are all cases in point.

Genre, style and fusión

As I have noted already, *música típica popular* is not a typical musical nationalism—in that unlike most other Azuerense-identified musical practices, it has not been universally embraced as a form of musical nationalism. And yet many of its most defining attributes and affective qualities reveal strong links to ideas regarding the social-cultural makeup Panamanian nation *and* its place within the isthmian territory. Describing this particular relationship as ‘complex’ is not untrue, but certainly trite—for how could an *imagined* community be anything but complex? In certain respects, however, Panama’s particular version of musical nationalism is remarkable in that it is *exceptionally* inadequate in accounting for the way in which *conjunto* practices have come to be understood in relation to

broader national imaginaries. The process of coming to terms with the particular and at times challenging aspects of Panamanian nationalism has undoubtedly directed my particular focus toward notions of genre and style, and informed my understanding of these categories as fluid, dynamic and above all, socially constructed.

My central point in this regard is that, if nationalist paradigms compel us to view Panama's overall musical mapping as the product of oppositional tendencies (which I argue they do), then *música típica popular* seems to be positioned somewhere in the middle: that is, its mapping is as ambiguously cosmopolitan as it is vernacular. Coming to terms with the performance conventions and aesthetic values thought to be shared by the majority of *conjunto* practitioners is one way of gaining insight into the ways in which these performers actively negotiate and very often exploit their particular niche within Panama's nationalist vision. While demonstrably dynamic and continually evolving, genre sensibilities rely on precedent and are therefore both a testament to and product of specific social-historical processes and discourses. Having examined the principal historical moments, themes and discourses affecting the music's development over the course of the twentieth century in Part I and II, in Part III I shift my focus to the notion of style and its attendant attributes (termed *orientation* and *individuation*) as a way of making clear the music's connection to historical precedent, convention and above all *conjunto* identity formation.

For my informants, the idea of style or “*estilo*” is one that exists in close relation to genre sensibilities—as embodying notions of broadly shared conventions—and allows for meaningful differentiation between genre practitioners. In this context, discourses of style come to reference and shape notions of musical authenticity, change and creativity, which in turn reflect specific ideas of place (e.g., Azuerense identity, performance territories, etc.).

Isthmian music-cultural geography (namely the *capitalino-interiorano* paradigm), and ensemble roles vis-à-vis *conjunto* economics (e.g., “nexus principals”/the accordionists/owners, composer, *integrante*, etc.). It is also for these reasons that shared ideas of a conventional or genre-based practice—including its perceived significance to economic wellbeing of my informants—are foundational to the way stylistic formations and the creative impulses that shape them are understood and discussed in this study.

In this respect, the guiding framework of the *orientation* and *individuation* orthogonal axis is a tool developed for understanding important processes of differentiation among genre practitioners and their broader implications. As we have seen, discourses of orientation intersect closely with ideas of related genres, genre borders and their artistic and creative transgression. While also couched in ideas of artistry and creativity, among *conjunto* musicians, discourses of *individuation* are nevertheless very much centred around *conjunto* professionalism and economic self-sufficiency.

As noted above, coming to terms with the importance of style-based identity formations among genre practitioners (and between *conjuntos*) requires an understanding of the particular socio-political forces, processes and contexts that led to the genre’s development as a commercial music. The processes of *música típica popular*’s commercialisation have been such that a relatively modest number of practitioners (i.e., members of professional *conjuntos*) can earn decent to exceptionally high incomes performing what has come to be regarded as a single genre. Critical, however, to the economic success of *conjunto* practitioners is the genre’s particular function as an accompaniment for social dance—which an examination of the seeming mundane activities of professional *conjuntos* (e.g., *giras*, *baile* economics and essential technologies) makes

particularly clear. Commercial *baile* dance practices, therefore, are in my estimation one of the most compelling reasons why *conjunto* practitioners place such a high premium on developing an original and readily identifiable style. The critical importance of the commercial *baile* has made it so certain features of the music remain more or less constant, and where any change is neither taken lightly nor easy to ignore (be it successful or not). The rub is that the demands of *baile* performance require a relatively high degree of stasis and standardization (read at times as “tradition”) between musicians, whereas the economic stakes promote the use of strategies that allow *conjuntos* standout from their competitors (i.e., other *conjuntos*). While not always the antidote, strategies of musical mixing or *fusión* helped in negotiating the unpredictable periphery *or* predictable centre of a given musical genre.

Musical mixing/fusión

Through their focus on *differences*, Panamanian historiographers cemented *música típica popular*’s particular relationship to Panamanian national cultural identity; whether perceived as problematic or productively ambiguous, an emphasis on differences necessarily implied the existence of similarities. *Conjunto* practitioners were themselves part of the music’s identification process (e.g., taking umbrage with proposed name changes, etc.) and arguably no other performance parameter illustrates this better than the techniques and discourses surrounding the idea of musical mixing or, more appropriately, *fusión*.

While creating a musical “*fusión*” of various types is not necessarily the only approach to creativity, change and/or (most significantly) identity formation available to *música típica popular* practitioners, it is by far the most common. Whether it is thought to

involve a combination of elements strictly within or without of the genre (what I term “fusion of style” and “fusion of genre,” respectively), *fusión*, I argue, is central to processes of stylistic individuation among *conjunto* practitioners. Historically, *fusión* brought about significant changes in audience demographics and social-cultural perceptions while at the same time maintaining important connections. We see this in the case of early *cumbia* hybrids (e.g., *danzón cumbia*, etc.), unprecedented in their ability to bring together an increasingly wider range of performance modalities, and later in the strategies adopted by the genre’s recognized “innovators” and “revolutionaries.”

In trying to account for the significance of this particular approach to the types of style mappings prized by *conjunto* practitioners (i.e., either traditionalist or innovative in orientation, but always highly individuated), several facets strike me as particularly salient. One, strategies of musical *fusión* (and especially fusions of styles) are arguably more significant in their ability to produce meaningful difference—i.e., create a sense of *heightened* stylistic individuation—specifically by *blurring* (rather than reinforcing) stylistic sources. Two, while expanding genre borders and/or a heightening of stylistic individuation is a significant outcome of (successful) *fusión*, ironically its impact is perhaps most notable in how genre norms are reinforced as a result. This is possibly best illustrated by the fact that notions of genre “tradition” (from which traditionalist-orientations derive their affective strength) are often discursively produced through fusions of genre, which necessarily prioritizes those aspects of the genre regarded as immutable.

Professionalism and peripateticism

A consideration of the isthmian territory (variously imagined along political, social-cultural and physical lines, and discussed at length in Chapter 1) and movement within it is critical to understanding both the day-to-day activities of *conjunto* practitioners and the way these inform local understandings of *música típica popular* in relation to broader Panamanian imaginaries. As I have shown, contemporary *conjunto* practitioners travel considerably and for a number of important and practical reasons—most connected to the demands of earning a living by performing (live and in person) at *bailes*. My analysis of the *gira* focused principally on the practicalities of *conjunto* peripateticism and its central importance to *conjunto* economics. What is more, the centrality of live performance to *conjunto* practice as well as its attendant discourse serves to heighten the symbolic effect of their movements. As such my analysis also focused on the particular patterning and teleology of a *gira*, which I argue serves to strengthen links to specific and varied Panamanian geo-cultural imaginaries.

The patterning of a *gira* is one that involves travel to-and-from a number of specific performance locals, some of which come to constitute semi-permanent audience-bases and contribute to perceptions that a *conjunto* has achieved a degree of mass popularity within a particular geographical area (termed “performance territory”). Significant here is the way in which constructs of musical style come to be implicated in *conjunto* travelogues, where a *conjunto*’s degree of stylistic individuation and, in particular, stylistic orientation is presumed to be the guiding factor in their localized reception. My research suggests that while the majority of professional *conjuntos* discussed in this study actively cultivated multiple and territorially disparate audience-bases, more often than not their performance activities have come to be understood (typically by non-practitioners) in predictable ways.

That is, *conjuntos* with more traditionalist orientations tended to be aligned with a rural-identified *interiorano* audience-base, whereas more innovative ones with an urban-identified *capitalino* audience-base. This type of oppositional, *capitalino/interiorano* cultural stereotyping finds its roots in early Panamanian musical historiography—relying heavily on selective reportage, oversimplification and a presumption of geo-cultural homogeneity—and on the whole contradicts the day-to-day realities of working *conjunto* practitioners.

While the mass appeal of *música típica popular* as a whole (specifically within the Panamanian territory) is not usually questioned by Panamanians, the geo-cultural mapping of stylistic orientation remains conceptually contested territory. On one hand, the seeming contradictions implicit in *gira* patterning would suggest that links between *capitalino*-identified musical cosmopolitanism and *interiorano*-identified musical vernacularism remain strong and continue to be the product of longstanding, traditionally institutionalized nationalist discourses. On the other hand, it is clear that *conjunto* practitioners are aware of the range of meanings associated with their professional activities and often benefit from them and are complicit in their promotion. Perhaps most significant is the fact that *conjunto* performance destinations seem to confirm and cultivate—and/or test and problematize—presumptions regarding *interiorano* cultural homogeneity and *capitalino* (cosmopolitan) cultural dominance. It is on this basis, I argue, that *conjunto* peripateticism comes to be implicated in discourses of a nationalist character.

Another important aspect of a *gira*—and indeed the phenomenon of *conjunto* peripateticism as a whole—involves its particular teleology or, rather, a consideration not only of movement about (a nationally circumscribed) *space*, but also a sense of *place* within it. For the very large majority of professional *conjuntos* a *gira* will begin and end in the

Azuero peninsula, which is where they maintain their home-base and nominal point of residence. As I have endeavoured to show throughout this study, this is not a coincidence. In keeping with its particular and sustained veneration as the “*cuna*” or cradle of regional (*writ national*) vernacular culture, the Azuero peninsula has become part of the mapping of *música típica popular* and its practitioners as authentic. In this respect, home-bases not only structure the quotidian practices of the *conjunto*, but more importantly, actively reaffirm ties to this particular geo-cultural area. *Gira* cycles serve to reinforce these ties in a manner similar to *conjunto* naming practices, promotional strategies (such as decorating the exterior panels of busses, *locutor* monologues, etc.) and nostalgia-themed *música típica popular* song texts. Each solidifies linkages to the Azuero peninsula (as well as a broader Azuerense diaspora) and established vernacularist tropes and discourses in the process.

My focus on *conjunto* peripateticism is also meant to contribute to the broader issue concerning *música típica popular*’s particular mapping in relation to ideas of nation and national territory. To this end I argue that constructs of musical style, that quintessential marker of *conjunto* identity, not only informs particular professional practices, but is also susceptible to generalized categorizations based on consumer tendencies (real or imagined) that find alignment with broader national imaginaries. Very often the correlation is an uneasy one where *conjunto* peripateticism can appear to both reaffirm *and* contradict longstanding Panamanian geo-cultural imaginaries founded on presumptions of *capitalino-interiorano* cultural homogeneity.

Ambiguity and its consequences

In their 1962 monograph, “Tambor y socavón,” Manuel and Dora Pérez de Zárate make an interesting pronouncement. Referring specifically to accordion *conjunto* music and dance practice, they observe that it has become “the most widespread model of popular entertainment today,” and add: “possibly very soon [it] will become the new type of, frankly, national dance” (Zárate and Zárate, 1962:150). Despite the intended purpose of this statement (that is, as a clarion call meant to galvanize efforts of *interiorano* cultural revitalisation), it seems in some respects to have become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Not only has *música típica popular* been effectively exported throughout “every corner of the Isthmus” (Cheville et al, 1977:116), but—due largely to concerted efforts of nationalist-minded historiographers such as Zárate and Zárate to exclude the music from taxonomies of Panamanian vernacular music—it has continued to maintain a degree of relevance to discourses of Panamanian musical nationalism and vice versa. Be that as it may, however, what Manuel and Dora Pérez de Zárate, and their contemporaries likely could not predict was the particular way in which *música típica popular* would become (un)aligned with their particular musical mapping of the Isthmus: that is, neither fully vernacular or cosmopolitan, but rather doggedly ambiguous in this respect. This particular ambiguity has arguably served practitioners well in their efforts to cater to local audiences, but the same cannot be said about their efforts to export the music beyond national borders. Perhaps surprisingly, the attention it has garnered from English-language academics (and particularly ethnomusicologists) has been equally lacklustre.

As I have noted from the onset of this study, remarkably little scholarship exists on the topic of Panamanian music in general and nearly none at all on *música típica popular*—

which to this date has not been the subject of a peer-reviewed journal article, much less PhD dissertation or monograph. Places in which one would likely expect to find information is in country-themed studies, where there is a reasonable expectation of inclusivity and comprehensiveness, yet the very large majority fail to provide even the most basic information. Why this is so is not certain, but in some cases does seem to reveal similar ideological parallels with *música típica popular*'s local treatment and mapping. In what follows, I examine portions of two well-known country-surveys in which there appears a "Panama" entry. The first is the *Garland Encyclopaedia of World Music* (GEWM) and second, *Grove Music Online*.

Neither the term "*música típica popular*" (or any other synonym for that matter) nor a discussion of the musical practice appear in the GEWM entry. Needless to say, this lapse is surprising and particularly so if one considers the genre's immense local popularity, the publication's broad focus and the author Ronald Smith's (1938-1997) expertise on the topic of Panamanian musical practices (e.g., a number of his publications are listed in this bibliography). While the author's exact intentions (e.g., whether he considered the practice be sufficiently 'Panamanian' to merit inclusion, etc.) will likely remain a matter of speculation, his particular analytic frame is revealing. Specifically, his precise musical mapping of the isthmus seems to suggest a close alignment with influential isthmian musical imaginaries (namely those promoted by early Panamanian musical historiographers), which may also account for the lacuna in question.

In linking music with nation—which, indeed, is a defining characteristic of the GEWM (see p. xi)—Smith relies on the familiar pairing of culture, ethnicity and territory. In Panama, Smith suggests, "music, dance, and verbal traditions, associations and personal

preferences are often based on ethnic origins and cultural traditions associated with a particular group” (p.771). Principal among these are “Amerindians,” “Spaniards” and descendants of “African slaves” whose various forms of cultural expression Smith terms “Native American,” “mestizo” and “Afro-Panamanian,” respectively (*ibid.*). In his outline of a Panamanian geo-musical map, Smith identifies the “central provinces” (i.e., Coclé, Herrera, Los Santos and Veraguas) as centres for “mestizo” ethnicity and culture as well as the epicentre of Panamanian “folkloric traditions” (pp.771-772).

What should (now) be clear to the reader at this point is the strong correlation between Smith’s musical mapping of the isthmian territory and that of Narciso Garay, for example. Most notably, while Smith admits to a certain degree of cultural mixing (e.g., unlike Garay, he does not write off the *tamborito* as a representation of Spanish culture), this mixing does not seem to transcend notions of musical “tradition” (what I refer to as vernacularism) and their particular ethnic continuities.⁴³⁸ In fact for Smith, the role of geography is mediated through musical associations that are based more “on ethnic origins and cultural traditions associated with a particular group” rather than on regional alliances (p.771). As I have argued, this particular organizational paradigm (as predicated on notions of *interiorano* cultural homogeneity) has greatly facilitated in the inclusion of a number of varied musical practices within the pantheon of Panamanian musical vernacularism—but not *música típica popular*. It is in this respect that Smith’s musical mapping, inclusions and omissions reveal an ideological continuity to music’s role in the project of Panamanian nation building and the potent geo-cultural imaginaries it engendered.

⁴³⁸ In this respect Smith writes: “For music, dance, and verbal traditions, associations and personal preferences are often based on ethnic origins and cultural traditions associated with a particular group. Every ethnic group that forms part of the fabric of Panamanian cultural identity has added something of importance to the mixture” (p.771).

One paragraph of the Grove “Panama” entry is devoted to the topic of “*música típica*.” Yet despite its brevity, it is remarkably comprehensive. For example, the paragraph’s author, ethnomusicologist T.M.Scruggs, makes the unprecedented and, in my estimation, long overdue observation that “*música típica*” is the “principal form of Panamanian popular music.” Also true is his claim that the music shares a history with “Colombian *cumbia* and *vallenato*” and has achieved “widespread [national] acceptance.” Particularly compelling, however, is his suggestion that “[e]xtensive urbanization” brought about by influential performers (including “Sandra and Sammy [*sic*] Sandoval”) and an “urban dwell[ing]” audience-base all “helped to establish *música típica* as a national genre.” The suggestion that this particular musical practice is a “national” one obviously carries symbolic and authoritative weight—not to mention offers a clear rationale for its inclusion in this particular country-specific survey. So it is what Scruggs means by the term “national genre” that is of interest here.

For obvious reasons of scope, one has to take Scruggs’ interpretation of the term “national” somewhat on faith; he does, however, offer a number clues. First, Scruggs suggests that contemporary (i.e., urbanized) *música típica popular* ensemble practice developed from an “earlier rural instrumentation.” The connection (and distinction) between the older/rural and newer/urban variants seems rather straightforward, where an ensemble of an “accordion, a triangle, one or more *tambores* and a *caja*” transitioned into one “typically incorporating drum kit, bass, guitar and the indispensable button accordion.” The suggestion here appears to be that *música típica popular*’s particular urbanization process involved a gradual development from a presumably established (likely vernacular) instrumental practice to one that evinced ever greater degrees of (instrumental) hybridity. My ethnographic and

historiographic research, however, suggest alternatives. Namely, the development of contemporary, mainstream *música típica popular* practice is not limited to either ensemble—and in fact, it is quite possible that neither was particularly critical to the evolution of the genre.⁴³⁹ Supporting this assertion is the fact that hybridity in terms of instrumentation and genre-based repertoire was not only a defining feature of the music's earliest documented antecedents, but also a perceived threat to notions of *interiorano* cultural homogeneity and dissimilarity to *capitalino*-/urban-identified expressions of musical cosmopolitanism.

Another point Scruggs makes that seems to support the “national genre” claim concerns the nature and degree of musical hybridity that came to characterize contemporary *música típica popular*. After noting the music’s shared history (as in “[r]elated to” and “influenced by”) with Colombian genres, he makes an interesting observation. “[M]úsica típica,” he writes, “has tended to eschew the [Colombian] *cumbia*’s integration of brass sections and other influences from salsa and other Caribbean music.” He then adds: “In general, *música típica* performers in Panama retain a more folk-rooted style and instrumentation.” Again, the article’s limited scope makes it difficult to determine the context in which Scruggs is making this particular (and not necessarily inaccurate) comparison with Colombian (popular) *cumbia*. Indeed, *conjunto* ensembles *seldom* deviate from their seven-person, six-instrument format; the music *does* sound different from salsa in many respects; and so forth. However, it is equally difficult to ignore not only the resemblances between this assessment and the ethos and performance aesthetics of what I have termed the music’s “traditionalist” orientation (where a perceived connection to musical roots, origin and [unchanging/vernacular] tradition remains central), but also its contradiction

⁴³⁹ The former being more characteristic of the stylized *conjunto típicos* and the second of *conjunto* forays into ‘concert’-type performance settings (namely LPC’s 2002 concert in the *Teatro Anayansi de Atlapa*, Panama City).

or at least avoidance of the music's continued (and often problematic) engagement with specific Caribbean-identified and derived musical practices.

I cite both of these examples not only to emphasize the need for further critical research on the topic Panamanian popular music in general and *música típica popular* in particular, but also to illustrate the strength, resiliency and indeed widespread discursive traction of Panama's dominant geo-cultural imaginaries and first-/second-theme nationalist paradigm. *Música típica popular* is not a typical case of musical nationalism and at some points of its history has been regarded as just the opposite. It is this uncertainty that makes it particularly salient as a musical practice and research focus. It is safe to say that no musical practice of comparable (mass) popularity matches it in its ability to so effectively problematize Panama's dual-themed nationalist paradigm. Both *música típica popular*'s historical development and contemporary practice reveal the productiveness resulting from its particular and longstanding entanglement with Panamanian nationalist imaginaries, and significance to Panamanian national (and particularly vernacular) music-cultural self-identity.

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APPENDIX A

VIOLIN CONJUNTO VOCAL REPERTOIRE

The following songs are organized alphabetically by song title:

1. *A Chico Purio no lo quieran* (They do not want/love Chico Purio)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody by composer (includes a date of 1980, which maybe the composition date)

Theme: Autobiographical and likely romantic love; genre listed as a *danzón*

[Song text NA]

2. *A Rosalina que no me espere* (To Rosalina that she doesn’t wait for me)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Amaya, 1996

Theme: Romantic love (in which the protagonist tells his intended not to wait because he is going to Coiba, an island famous for its prison).

*Chorus: Díganle a Rosalina que no me espere,
que voy p'a' Coiba. [Repeat]*

3. *Ábreme la puerta que me voy* (Open the door because I'm leaving)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Amaya, 1996, transcription and a recording by Dorindo Cárdenas

Theme: Romantic (likely unrequited) love and intra-provincial travel; Amaya suggests that this song is about romantic love (Amaya, 1996:92)

[1st refrain] Ábreme la puerta, que yo mañana volveré. [Repeat]

*[2nd refrain] Ay! Ábreme la puerta que me voy;
mañana or pasado volveré. [Repeat]*

4. *Adelante los espero* (I'll wait for you ahead)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Batista Marciaga and Jurado Rodríguez, 2001 and Amaya, 1996

Theme: life lesson (persevere); *cumbia atravesado* genre

*Tienes que echar pa' alante,
si quieras llegar primero;
tiene que echar pa' alante,
que adelante los espero.*

*Tienes que echar pa' alante,
ye tienes que irte riendo
tienes que echar pa' alante
camino les voy abriendo*

5. *Ahora mismo me dices cuando* (Now tell me when)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody

Theme: likely romantic love; genre listed as a *danzón*

[Song text NA]

6. *Amor perdido* (Lost love)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody, includes composition date of 1950

Theme: romantic (likely unrequited) love; genre not listed

[Song text NA]

7. *Barranco del Río Muñoz* (The ravine/dell of the Muñoz River)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Amaya, 1996

Theme: environment and rural lifeways; *danzón cumbia* genre

*De muchacho te dije un canto;
pero ya se te olvidó. [Repeat]*

*Acordate lo que te dije,
allá en el barranco del Río Muñoz;
dejame la ropa sucia,
porque mañana la lavo yo. [Repeat]*

8. *Chico Purio se va* (Chico Purio is leaving)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody possibly by composer

Theme: autobiographical; genre not listed

[Song text NA]

9. *Chico quiere a Deya* (Chico loves Deya)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Batista Marciaga and Jurado Rodríguez, 2001, transcription by composer and recordings by Dorindo Cárdenas

Theme: romantic love; genre listed as a *danza*

*Chico quiere a Deya no ‘más
Chico da con ella, verás. (Repeat)*

*Ay!, ‘ombe...
Chico quiere a Deya. (Repeat)*

10. *Cielito Lindo* (Beautiful heaven [a term of endearment for a woman])

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Amaya, 1996

Theme: romantic love and nostalgia; *cumbia* genre

*Quisiera hablarte, pero no puedo decirte
que mientras viva, cielito, no te podré olvidar;
pero: Qué haremos cuando nos vemos en esos casos?;
cielito lindo, mejor déjate amar.*

*A veces pienso que es porque tú no das momento;
quiero que vuelvas para contigo poder hablar;
estoy viviendo desesperado de tanto amarte,
sin esperanza de que me quieras ya.*

*Sé muy bien que te han prohibido
que conmigo converséis;
dale gusto a tus amigos,
pero a mí no me olvidéis.*

Ay!, cielito lindo, yo te quiero. [Repeat]

11. *Claudina*

Composer: Escolástico “Colaco” Cortez

Source: Batista Marciaga and Jurado Rodríguez, 2001

Theme: unrequited love, rural travel and baile

*El baile está muy alegre
hay muchachas bonitas
me acuerdo de Claudinita
aunque no halla más mujeres*

*El alma la tengo muerta.
No he dejado de quererte.
Claudina si voy of verte,
no me cierres la puerta.*

*Yo no voy donde Claudina
porque me cierra la puerta
por delante la cierra*

My soul is dead.
I have not stopped loving you.
If I go to see you Claudina,
don't close the door on me.

por detrás me doy la vuelta

12. Club tableño

Composer: Clímaco Batista Díaz

Source: Recording by Dorindo Cárdenas and transcription of melody

Theme: tribute; genre not listed

[Song text NA]

13. Conchita, ven (Conchita [likely term of endearment], come)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Amaya, 1996

Theme: romantic love; *danzón cumbia* genre

*Hace tiempo que busco con locura
un corazón amante y pasional,
y un alma buena que me comprendiera,
y una boquita dulce y qué besar.*

*Vamos a bailar, Conchita, ven;
Conchita, ven, mi vida. [Repeat]*

Title: *Cuando es que bolbemos* [sic]⁴⁴⁰ (When will we return)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody, includes composition date of 1937

Theme: likely nostalgia and separation; genre listed as “*danzón tonadas*”

[Song text NA]

14. Dejame ir con ella (Let me go with her)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody; includes a composition date of 1945

Theme: autobiographical and likely romantic love; genre listed as a “*danzón tonadas*”

[Song text NA]

15. Doctor Arroyo (Doctor Arroyo)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Amaya, 1996 and transcription of melody

Theme: tribute to a person; likely written late in the composer’s life when he was suffering from an extended sickness; genre listed on transcription as danzon.

*Sí sé que el doctor Arroyo sí cura bien
panameño especialista, que no hay nadie que cure como él;
ya estaba yo sin esperanzas de mejorarme,*

⁴⁴⁰ The title may also be “*Violin cuando es que bolbemos.*”

*a mi casita, allí fue a buscarme
el doctor Arroyo que me curó. [Repeat]*

*Vamos, vamos, vamos todos
a que nos cure el doctor Arroyo. [Repeat]*

El doctor Arroyo sí cura bien. [Repeat]

16. Desesperado (Desperate)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody by composer; includes a composition date of 1940

Theme: likely romantic love; genre listed as a *danzón*

[Song text NA]

17. Edicta no me quiere (Edicta does not want/love me)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Amaya, 1996 and transcription of melody

Theme: unrequited love and rural travel; *cumbia* genre

Yo pás Paritilla me voy mañana. (2xs)

I am going to Paritilla tomorrow. (2xs)

*Yo no sé,
Por qué Edicta no me quiere a mí. (2xs)*

I don’t know,
Why Edicta does not want/love me. (2xs)

*Yo más nunca vuelvo a Paritilla,
Porque Edicta no me quiere. (2xs)⁴⁴¹*

I will never return to Paritilla,
Because Edicta does not want/love me. (2xs)

18. El Arbolario (The wanderer)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Amaya, 1996

Theme: travel and nostalgia; *danzón cumbia* genre

*Arbolario, en el mundo lo pasaré
sin consuelo en la vida,
siquiera para vivir.
Esta pena que me embarga
mejor yo quisiera morir.*

*Si supiera cual fuera la salvación
del martirio tan grande
que sufre mi corazón.
Voy sin rumbo en este mundo*

If I knew what could be my salvation
from this [intense] martyrdom/torment
from which my heart suffers.
I go aimless in this world

⁴⁴¹ Text taken from Amaya, 1996:109.

buscando mi consolación.

searching for my consolation.

19. *Esta noche te bass [sic] conmigo* (Tonight you go with me)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody; includes composition date of 1933

Theme: likely romantic love; genre listed as a *danzón*

[Song text NA]

20. *Farmacia Elena* (Elena Pharmacy)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody

Theme: tribute; genre not specified

[Song text NA]

21. *Guayabo* ([possibly] Heartbroken)

Composer: Clímaco Batista Díaz

Source: Recording of composer and transcriptions of melody

Theme: likely unrequited love; genre listed as a *cumbia*

[Song text NA]

22. *Hierba Buena* (Good grass)

Composer: Escolástico “Colaco” Cortez

Source: Batista Marciaga and Jurado Rodríguez, 2001

Theme: agriculture and romantic love

*Yo sembré una hierba buena
donde el agua no corría
la [?]egaba y la regaba
la mata no florecía*

*El amor que puse en tí
en una rama quedó
vino un fuerte remolino
rama de amor se llevó*

23. *Hombre sin alma* (Man Without Soul)

Composer: Claudio Castillo

Source: Batista Marciaga and Jurado Rodríguez, 2001

Theme: romantic betrayal; features a female protagonist/narrator.

Engañada estaba toda mi vida

*porque siento tu dulce amor,
pero al pasar la fe y la ternura
sólo me queda la decepción.*

*Cuando te vi hombre de mi alma
no me dijiste que eras así
para tenerme ahora sufriendo
qué poquito me falta para morir.*

*No quiero un hombre sin alma
que me mate el corazón.
Primero me dan cariño
y después me dan traición.*

I don't want a man without soul
that breaks my heart.
First [he] gives me affection
and then [he] betrays me.

24. *Ileana*

Composer: Clímaco Batista Díaz
Source: Transcription of melody
Theme: likely tribute; genre not listed

[Song text NA]

25. *Jardín Gloria*

Composer: Clímaco Batista Díaz
Source: Transcriptions of melody
Theme: tribute; genre not listed

[Song text NA]

26. *Junior Tableños*

Composer: Clímaco Batista Díaz
Source: Transcription of melody
Theme: likely tribute; genre not listed

[Song text NA]

27. *La creciente del Río Muñoz (The swell of the Muñoz River)*

Composer: Francisco "Chico Purio" Ramirez
Source: Amaya, 1996
Theme: rural landscape and tribute; *cumbia* genre

*Estaba yo en Lajamina
cuando cayó el aguacero;
cuando dispuse venirme,
el Río Muñoz estaba lleno.*

*De agua sucia y espuma
que corría por la canal;
se llevó el puente del palo,
y no lo pude yo cruzar.*

28. La Leña de Zeñón

Composer: Clímaco Batista Díaz

Source: Transcription of melody

Theme: likely tribute; genre not listed

[Song text NA]

29. La Linda Ballesteros (The beautiful Ballesteros)

Composer: Abraham Vergara

Source: multiple recordings

Theme: romantic love, inter-provincial travel and migration; composition is an unofficial national anthem and is a mainstay in both *música folclorica* and MTP practices (a testament to their common history). La Linda Ballesteros might apply to any one of multiple rural-urban migration routes that had as a final destination, Panama City. Here the experience of separation is particularly poignant as it set within the common trope of romantic love.

Se va la linda Ballesteros para Panamá.

The beautiful Ballesteros is leaving for Panama.

Se va la linda que yo quiero para Panamá.

The beautiful woman that I love is leaving for Panama.

*El consuelo que me queda, yo me voy detras.
(2xs)*

My only consolation is that I will follow her.
(2xs)

30. La luz de venus (The light of Venus)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody; includes a composition date of 1950

Theme: unknown; genre not listed

[Song text NA]

31. La vieja borracha (The old drunk woman)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody

Theme: situational and rural lifeways; genre listed as a *danzón*

[Song text NA]

32. Las flores del camino (The flowers of the path)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Batista Marciaga and Jurado Rodríguez, 2001 and Amaya, 1996

Theme: romantic love and rural landscapes

*Ven aquí, ven acá y te diré
todo lo que yo siento por ti;
porque yo te quiero, y tú a mí, no;
y yo no sé por qué será.*

*Son las flores del camino
que me hacen recordar;
cuando yo me acuerdo de ella
me dan ganas de llorar.*

*Son las flores del camino
que me hacen recordar. [Repeat]*

33. Los sentimientos del alma (The feelings of the soul)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez (music) and (lyrics) Leonidas Cajar.

Source: Amaya, 1996, transcription (possibly by composer, which includes a composition date of 1928) and numerous recordings.

Theme: unrequited love and nostalgia; genre listed as *danzón*; note that at one point the author uses the word “cabanga,” which connotes nostalgia and homesickness.

*Porque te quiero con el corazón,
tú me desprecias al sentirte amada.
Así es la vida, nadie está completo;
cuando se quiere, más se desengaña.
Ay, qué fracaso tengo en el amor!*

Why do I love you with my heart,
you...
That is life, nobody is complete;
when...
Oh! What...I have in love!

*Fue lo único malo que creo
que dispuso Dios;
que se entregara toda la vida,
y que en pago recibamos
un desengaño en el corazón.*

*A mí sí me están matando
los sentimientos del alma;
morena del alma mía,
me estoy muriendo de cabanga.*

*Son los sentimientos del alma;
morena de mi vida, son del alma.*

34. Lucy Jaén

Composer: Clímaco Batista Díaz

Source: Batista Marciaga and Jurado Rodríguez, 2001 and transcription of melody

Theme: romantic love

*Como verde de mar sereno
son tus ojos bellos Lucila
ojos que obligan a ver de lleno
lo bueno que hay en la vida.*

*A mí me desesperan
los ojos de Lucila
Yo no pudriera estar
si Lucy no me mira.*

35. Margarita no me quiere

Composer: unknown

Source: LM recording titled “Los que nos pasa a los hombres” (date not listed)

Theme: unrequited love and intra-provincial travel

*Lead: Margarita se fue pa'... [unclear]
Chorus: Me dejo solito en la montaña
L: Yo no se se ella volverá
C: Ya mi corazón le estraña*

Margarita left for... [unclear]
She left me alone in the mountains
I don't know if she will return
Already my heart misses her

36. Martha

Composer: Clímaco Batista Díaz

Source: Transcription of melody

Theme: likely tribute; genre not listed

[Song text NA]

37. Me voy a cazar con otra (I shall marry another [woman])

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: (partial) transcription of melody

Theme: likely unrequited love; genre listed as a *danzón*

38. Me voy de mi tierra (I am going from my land)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Amaya, 1996:141 and transcription of melody; includes a possible composition date of 1940.

Theme: travel and nostalgia (note how a song of migration readily takes on a romantic theme)

*Me pongo triste y lloro cuando recuerdo
Ese lejana tierra donde naci.
Será que ya el destino
Me hace el destierro de por aquí?*

I become sad and cry when I remember
This distant land where I was born.
Could it be that destiny
Has made me an exile over here?

Me voy muy pronto y triste ya de mi tierra,

Very soon and with sadness I am leaving my

*Porque yo sé que nadie me quiere a mí.
Será que soy el hombre
Más desdichado de por aquí?*

land,
Because I know that no one wants/loves me.
Could it be that I am
The most wretched man over here?

39. *Me voy mañana* (I am going tomorrow)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Dorindo Cárdenas, Orca s.a. [45rpm] and Amaya, 1996

Theme: Romantic love, travel (likely migration), and nostalgia; *cumbia* genre

*Verse: Mira mi amor qué triste estoy!
Dolor y pena en mi alma llevaré.
Mira cómo ya mañana me voy,
Solo mi recuerdo te dejaré.
Lejos de ti voy a vivir,
y qué pena tan grande pá los dos!
Mira que mañana voy a partir,
mejor que me vaya sin el adiós.*

*Verse: Look my love how sad I am!
Pain and sorrow I will carry in my heart.
See how already tomorrow I am leaving,
All I'll leave you is my memory.
Far from you I am going to live,
And what tremendous sorrow for both of us!
See how tomorrow I am going to leave,
It's best I leave without saying goodbye.*

*Refrain: Ay, yo me voy lejo mañana.
Ay, yo no tengo quién me quiera. (2xs)*

*Refrain: Ay, I am going faraway tomorrow.
Ay, I don't have anyone who wants/loves me.
(2xs)*

40. *Me voy pesaroso* (I leave sorrowfully)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody

Theme: romantic love; *danzón cumbia* genre

[Song text NA]

41. *Milagros*

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Amaya, 1996

Theme: tribute (filial love); *cumbia* genre

*Porque Milagros vino del cielo;
yo lo sé.
Porque milagros trajo un consuelo,
sí señor;

Milagros, te estoy cantando;
mira que en tus ojos yo estoy observando
que eres muy virtuosa por el amor.

Porque Milagros te bautizaron
ay qué bien!,
bendito nombre sea el de Milagros!,*

sí señor;

*Milagros prenda adorada;
quiero que me brindes a mí una mirada
para ver si calmas mi corazón.*

42. *Mi Ser Querido* (My loved one)

Composer: Claudio Castillo

Source: Batista Marciaga and Jurado Rodríguez, 2001

Theme: romantic love, a *baile* and infidelity; features a female protagonist/narrator.

*Tengo un sufrimiento grande
con el padre de mi hijo
tanto como yo lo quiero
y sé que no lo he comprendido.*

*Yo te pido que me escuches
porque quiero hablar contigo
que tú vuelvas a mi casa
un favor que yo te pido.*

*Esta noche estoy bailando; estoy gozando
Esta noche estoy bailando y bailo con mi ser querido.*

*Esta noche estoy bailando
con el padre de mi hijo
y aunque nadie me lo quita
yo también lo sé decir.*

*Ay! muchacha no me quites
este hombre que anda connigo
porque si no lo consigo
para mi será muy triste.*

43. *Mollito y su caballo* (Mollito and his horse)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody

Theme: likely tribute and/or rural lifeways; genre not indicated

[Song text NA]

44. *No te vayas* (Don’t you leave)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Amaya, 1996

Theme: romantic (likely unrequited) love; *cumbia* genre

*Mirala cómo se va
diciendo que no me quiere;
me gusta cuando me miras
con esa picardía que tienes. [Repeat]*

*No te vayas sin decirme
que me quieras un poquito;
mirá que quedo solito,
y sólo no quiero morirme.*

*No te vayas sola, mi vida;
yo quiero quedarme contigo.
Quédate conmigo, querida,
yo, sin tu cariño, no vivo. [Repeat]*

45. Norma y su pollera (Norma and her pollera [dress])

Composer: Clímaco Batista Díaz

Source: Transcription of melody

Theme: likely tribute; genre not listed

[Song text NA]

46. Nunca me desprecies (Never despise/spurn me)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Amaya, 1996 and recording by Dorindo Cárdenas

Theme: unrequited love and travel; *danzón cumbia* genre

*Yo te vengo a decir
que no bailes mas;
cuando te digo nos vamos,
nos vamos, mi vida,
es porque te quiero.*

*Yo quisiera saber,
si sales a bailar;
cuando te digo nos vamos,
nos vamos, mi vida,
sin ti yo me muero.*

*Amorcito mío,
yo voy y regreso,
pero te confieso
te llevo en el alma;
yo me voy mañana,
pero no te olvido,
porque te he querido*

con toda mi alma.

*Chorus: Nunca, nunca,
nunca me desprecies. [Repeat]*

*Nunca, nnca, nunca, mi vida,
nunca me desprecies. [Repeat]*

47. *Ojos de pastora* (Shepherd girl eyes)

Composer: Clímaco Batista Díaz

Source: Transcription of melody

Theme: likely romantic love; genre not listed

[Song text NA]

48. *Recuerdo eterno* (Eternal memory)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody

Theme: nostalgia; genre listed as a danza

[Song text NA]

49. *Por que causa me dejaste?*

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody

Theme: unrequited love; genre listed as a danza

[Song text NA]

50. *Rodando por el mundo* (Traveling around the world)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Amaya, 1996

Theme: travel; *danzón cumbia* genre

*Rodando por el mundo
así será el destino;
andar por los caminos
desde que yo nací.*

*El mal que me persigue,
rodar para encontrar
el paradero mío
para poder estar.*

*Rodando por el mundo,
solito he de quedar.*

*Rodando por el mundo,
sin tener con quién gozar.*

51. Se fué y me dejó (S/he went and left me)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody by composer; includes a composition date of 1937

Theme: likely unrequited love; genre not listed

[Song text NA]

52. Se me murió la yegua (My mare died)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Amaya, 1996

Theme: satirical and rural travel; *cumbia atravesado* genre

*La yegua se murió
la víspera de San Juan;
ahora me jodo yo
sin tener en qué montar.*

*La yegua se me murió
no he sabido cómo fue;
ahora me jodo yo
que tengo que andar a pie.*

*La yegua, la yegua,
la yegua se me murió. [Repeat]*

53. Separación (Separation)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody

Theme: likely unrequited love; genre listed as a *danzón cumbia*

[Song text NA]

54. Socabón en Canajagua (Socabón in Canajagua)

Composer: Clímaco Batista Díaz

Source: Batista Marciaga and Jurado Rodríguez, 2001

Theme: regionalism and nostalgia

*Desde el fondo de mi ser
este canto ha brotado
como mi llanto al nacer
mi Canajagua amado*

Desde lejos te miramos

*como retazo de cielo
y por eso te cantamos
con orgullo y anhelo*

*En tu cima se levanta
la nueva torre del INTEL
se ve desde Peña Blanca
también desde La Miel.*

*Viejo cerro Canajagua
quiero a tu cima llegar
para beber de tus aguas
y allí poder cantar.*

*Luce muy bien,
Canajagua con su INTEL*

55. *Soy de mi negra* (I belong to my black woman)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Amaya, 1996, recording by Dorindo Cárdenas and transcription of melody

Theme: romantic love and nostalgia; *danzón cumbia* genre

*Oye lo que estoy cantando
que es para tí, negra querida,
porque yo te sigo amando,
y te amaré toda la vida.*

*Pero aunque pasen mil años,
soy tuyo, negra querida;
porque aunque pasen los años,
no te olvido, mi querida.*

*Sabes que yo te quiero
y por eso es que voy a cantarte,
porque sé que yo la quiero
y ella no quiere consolarme.*

Title: *Sufriendo mis penas*

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody by composer; includes composition date of September 1930

Theme: autobiographical and likely romantic love; genre not listed; includes a three section/strophe form

[Song text NA]

56. *Te sigo amando* (I continue loving you)

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Amaya, 1996

Theme: romantic love and nostalgia; *danzón cumbia* genre

*El tiempo se va volando;
pero yo siempre te sigo amando.
Un dia que pasa en la vida,
un paso muy grande que voy logrando;
porque es uno que se vive
y pues otro menos que va faltando.*

*Yo para ti, tú para mi.
Ah! Que siga el tiempo, siga volando.
[Repeat]*

Me for you, you for me.
Ah! As time continues, continues flying.

*Quisiera ser como el aire
que aroma a rosas te trae cantando;
meciendo tu hermoso pelo
y tu linda cara siempre besando;
después que yo esté contigo,
que siga el tiempo, siga volando.*

57. *Talanquera*

Composer: Clímaco Batista Díaz

Source: Recording by Alfredo Escudero and transcription of melody

Theme: likely a tribute; genre listed as *danzón cumbia*

Chorus: *Talanquera, talanquera, talanquera.*

58. *Te daré me corazón (I will give you my heart)*

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Transcription of melody

Theme: romantic love; genre not listed

[Song text NA]

59. *Traición (Betrayal)*

Composer: Francisco “Chico Purio” Ramirez

Source: Amaya, 1996

Theme: romantic (unrequited) love and betrayal; *cumbia* genre

*Mira que te quiero tanto
que por tí me atrevo a morir;
yo pienso que ya mi alma
no tiene dónde más sufrir.*

*Corazón, quiero saberlo
si te vas conmigo pronto;
no me tengas más de tonto,
te lo digo por consejo.*

*Yo no te doy más dinero
porque tú a mí noquieres;
la plata me la has quitado,
y me dices que no se puede.*

*Dame la platita que te dí;
ay!, mira que quedaste mal conmigo.
Dame la platita que te dí,
a las buenas o a las malas te consigo.*

60. *Valle Rico*

Composer: Clímaco Batista Díaz

Source: Two transcriptions of melody

Theme: tribute; genre listed as a *cumbia*

[Song text NA]

APPENDIX B

SELECTED EXAMPLES OF MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY ACCORDION *CONJUNTO VOCAL*

REPERTOIRE

The following songs are organized alphabetically by song title:

1. *Adonay* – as recorded by Ceferino Nieto

Verse I:

*Adonay, por qué te casaste Adonay?
Adonay, por qué no esperastes mi amor?
Adonay, por ti se formó mi pasión,
Por ti corre siempre veloz
La sangre de mi corazón*

Adonay, why did you get married Adonay?
Adonay, why didn't you wait my love?
Adonay, I am passionate for you,
For you the blood in my heart
Always runs fast.

Chorus:

Lead: *Por qué te casaste*
Chorus: *Adonay?*
L: *Por qué no esperaste*
C: *Adonay?*
L: *Te sigo queriendo*
C: *Adonay.*
L: *Te iré persiguiendo. (2xs)*

Lead: Why did you get married,
Chorus: Adonay?
L: Why didn't you wait,
C: Adonay?
L: I still long for you,
C: Adonay.
L: I will pursue you.

Verse II:

*Yo sé bien que no podrá olvidar.
Yo sé bien que tú te tendrás que acordar,
Que mis besos han jugueteado tu piel.
Yo soy la mitad de tu ser,
Recuérdelo bien, Adonay.*

I know well that you will not be able to forget.
I know well that you will have to agree
That my kisses have played [with] your skin.
I am half of your being,
Remember it well, Adonay.

(repeat chorus)

2. *Margarita no me quiere* (*Margarita doesn't want/love me*) – as recorded by LM

Verse

Lead: Margarita se fue pa' [...] (unclear)
Chorus: Me dejo solito en la montaña
L: Yo no se se ella volverá
C: Ya mi corazón le estraña.

Margarita has gone to [...].
She left me alone in the mountain.
I don't know if she will return.
Already my heart misses her.

Refrain

Margarita no me quiere!
Yo si quiero Margarita!

Margarita doesn't want/love me!
I do want/love Margarita!

3. ***Lucy*** – as recorded by Yin Carrizo (following is only a transcription of the first verse and a refrain)

Verse 1

En la distancia hay una colina.
En la colina hay una ciudad.
En la ciudad de la altura andina
se encuentra Lucy en la soledad

In the distance there is a hill.
In the hill there is a city.
In the city of the height of the Andes
one finds Lucy in solitude.

Refrain

Ay, Lucy querida!
Te vas a quedar
solita y sufrida
en esta ciudad.

Ay, Lucy [my] love!
You will remain
alone and suffering
in this city.

4. ***Para Panama con Chano (To Panama [City] with Chano)*** – as recorded by Teresín Jaén (likely recorded some time before 1970). This largely instrumental composition features a single call-and-response refrain between the lead (female) vocalist and (male) chorus, which sings:

Lead: Me voy con Chano
Chorus: Para Panama
L: Eje u oiga
C: Para Panama

I'm going with Chano
To Panama [City]
[saloma vocables]
To Panama [City]

5. ***Me miran con malos ojos (They look at me with evil eyes)*** – as recorded by LM (recorded sometime prior to 1970). This song is organized around a single verse-refrain structure (which becomes repeated in its entirety on the recording) and while some of the lyrics are not clear given the recording quality, the general account of regionally- and socially-based prejudice is quite clearly illustrated in the following transcript:

Verse

[...] no soy de aqui
por esto me miran con malos ojos.
[...] no tengo plata
y por esto me miran con mala cara.

[...] I'm not from [around] here
so they look at me with evil eyes.
[...] I don't have money
and for that they look at me with an evil
face.

Refrain

Por esto me miran con malos ojos. [repeat] For that they look at me with evil eyes.

6. **Cero 39 (Zero 39)** – as performed by Dorindo Cárdenas:

Verse I:

*Cuando yo venía viajando
Viajaba con mi morena
Y al llegar a la carretera
Ahí me dejo llorando*

Chorus:

*Ay, lo que me duele, lo que me duele,
Lo que me duele, válgame Dios.
Cero-39, cero-39,
Cero-39 se la llevó! (2xs)*

Verse II:

*Rosita se fue llorando
Y a mi esa cosa me duele. (2xs)
Se la llevó el maldito carro,
Aquel cero-39! (2xs)*

(Repeat chorus)

Verse I:

When I was traveling,
I traveled with my *morena* (brown woman)
And when reaching the road,
There she left me crying

Chorus:

Ay, what/oh it hurts me, what hurts me,
What hurts me, God help me!
Zero-39, zero-39,
Zero-39 took her away! (2xs)

Verse II:

Rosita left crying
And this hurts me. (2xs)
The damned car took her away,
That zero-39! (2xs)

(Repeat chorus)

APPENDIX C

TIMBALE AND TUMBADORA NOTATION LEGEND

Timbale notation legend

The legend consists of six staves of musical notation, each with a specific symbol at the beginning of the staff and a corresponding drum name below it. The symbols are: 1. Left/Small Drum (a vertical bar with a dot at the top). 2. Right/Large Drum (a vertical bar with a dot at the bottom). 3. Rim Shot (a vertical bar with a diagonal line through it). 4. Cross Stick (w/o touching edge) (a vertical bar with a horizontal line through it). 5. Cymbal (a vertical bar with an asterisk at the top). 6. Snare (a vertical bar with a dot at the bottom). 7. Tom 1 (a vertical bar with a small circle at the top). 8. Tom 2 (a vertical bar with a small circle at the bottom). 9. Tom 3 (a vertical bar with a small circle at the top). 10. Tom 4 (a vertical bar with a small circle at the bottom). 11. Small Cowbell (a vertical bar with an upward arrow at the top). 12. Large Cowbell (a vertical bar with an upward arrow at the bottom). 13. Open end (a vertical bar with two small circles at the top). 14. Closed end (a vertical bar with two small crosses at the top). 15. High Woodblock (*clave*) (a vertical bar with two small crosses at the top). 16. Low Woodblock (*clave*) (a vertical bar with two upward arrows at the top). 17. Bass Drum (a vertical bar with a small circle at the bottom).

Left/Small Drum Right/Large Drum Rim Shot Cross Stick (w/o touching edge)

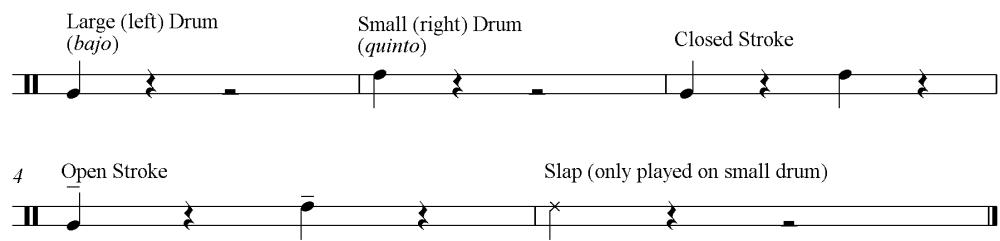
5 Cymbal Snare Tom 1 Tom 2

9 Tom 3 Tom 4 Small Cowbell Large Cowbell

13 Open end Closed end High Woodblock (*clave*)

16 Low Woodblock (*clave*) Bass Drum

Tumbadora notation legend



APPENDIX D

TRANSCRIPTION OF *EL ARBOLARIO*

EL ARBOLARIO

COMPOSER: FRANCISCO "CHICO PURIO" RAMIREZ
PERFORMER: DORINDO CARDENAS Y EL ORGULLO SANTENO

$\text{♩} = 103$

VOICE (MALE)

VOICE (FEMALE)

ACCORDION

GUITAR

GUIRO

TUMBADORES

TIMBALES



A INTERLUDE I (INTRO)
SAQUETEO

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUIRO

TUMB.

TIMB.

Q7 F#I F#II F#I

SIMILE...

PARTIAL SAQUETO PATTERN

SIMILE...

SIMILE...

Music score for six instruments: VOICE, V., ACC., GTR., GUITO, TUMB., and TIMB.

The score consists of four measures. Measures 1-3 are identical, featuring sustained notes or rests. Measure 4 begins with a FMI chord. The vocal line starts in measure 4 with eighth-note patterns. The guitar (GTR.) and bass (V.) provide harmonic support. The timbales (TIMB.) play eighth-note patterns throughout. The conga (GUITO) and tumbadora (TUMB.) provide rhythmic foundation.



Music score for six instruments: VOICE, V., ACC., GTR., GUITO, TUMB., and TIMB.

The score consists of four measures. Measures 1-3 are identical, featuring sustained notes or rests. Measure 4 begins with a CMI chord, followed by a G7 chord. The vocal line starts in measure 4 with eighth-note patterns. The guitar (GTR.) and bass (V.) provide harmonic support. The timbales (TIMB.) play eighth-note patterns throughout. The conga (GUITO) and tumbadora (TUMB.) provide rhythmic foundation. A dynamic marking "ff" is placed above the vocal staff at the start of measure 4.

(EL ARBOLARIO)

*SECTION REPEATS WITH
SOME VARIATIONS*

15

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

FMI

FMI

FMI

FMI

TUMBADORA FILLS



19

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

FMI

FMI

FMI

Q7

25

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

CMI G7 CMI



[8] INTERLUDE II (PRE-VERSE I)

26

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

CMI G7 FMII FMII

[8]

30

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR. FMI FMI G7 CMI

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.



34

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR. CMI G7 G7 CMI

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

6

C VERSE 1

(EL ARBOLARIO)

38

VOICE LA - RIO'EN EL MUN - DO LO PA - SA - SE S - IN CON -

V.

ACC.

GTR. CMI C G7 FMI FMI

GUISO C

TUMB.

TIMB.

42

VOICE SU - LO'EN LA VI - DA SI - QUIE - RA PA - RA VI - VIR. TA

V.

ACC.

GTR. FMI FMI G7 CMI

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

(EL ARBOLARIO)

7

46

VOICE PE - NA QUE ME MAN - DA(?) ME - JO^b YO C7 SIE - RA MO - RIS.

V.

ACC. REFRAIN MELODY

GTR. CMI G7 G7 CMI

GUIRO

TUMB.

TIMB.



50 D INTERLUDE III

VOICE - - - -

SPOKEN: "A MI NADIE SE CONDOLA, MI VIDA!" SALOMA MELODY...

V.

HEY!

ACC. C7 G7 G7 CMI

GTR. D

GUIRO

TUMB.

TIMB.

54

VOICE
V.
ACC.
GTR.
GUITO
TUMB.
TIMB.

CMI G7 G7 CMI

OT - AUA!



58

VOICE
V.
ACC.
GTR.
GUITO
TUMB.
TIMB.

CMI G7 G7 CMI

TUMBADORA FILLS

62

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

OOEH! HEY!

REFRAIN MELODY

CMI G7 G7 CMI

TIMBALE FILL



E INTERLUDE IV RUMBA

66

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

OJ - AUAI

RUMBA PATTERN

SIMILE

PARTIAL RUMBA PATTERN

SIMILE

73

VOICE
V.
ACC.
GTR.
GUISO
TUMB.
TIMB.

OO - WEI
Bb Eb Bb Eb
TUMBAODA FILLS

≡

74

VOICE
V.
ACC.
GTR.
GUISO
TUMB.
TIMB.

OJ - AUA
Bb Eb Bb Eb
TIMBALE FILLS

78

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.



82

COMPOSITION REPEATS

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

OM-BE!

HEY!

CMA

TUMBADORA FILLS

12

87 **F** INTERLUDE I' (INTRO)
BAQUETEO

(EL ARBOLARIO)

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR. **F**

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

CMI FMI FMI FMI

PARTIAL BAQUETEO PATTERN SIMILE SIMILE

OM - BE!

91

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

FMI FMI FMI G7

85

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

CMI G7 CMI



98

G INTERLUDE II' (PRE-VERSE I)

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

G

CMI G7 FMI FMI

102

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

FMI FMI G7 CMI



106

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

CMI G7 G7 CMI

110 **H** VERSE I' (EL ARBOLARIO)

PIE - RA CUAL FUE - RA LA SAL - VA - CION
DEL MAR -

GTR. **H**

TUMB.

TIMB.



114

TI - RIO TAN GRAN - DE QUE SU - FRE MI CO - SA - ZON.
Voy SIN

GTR. **FMI** **FMI** **G7** **CMI**

TUMB.

TIMB.

118

REFRAIN MELODY

CMI G7 G7 CMI



122

I INTERLUDE III'

SALOMA MELODY...

CMI G7 G7 CMI

126

SPOKEN: "TU TIENES LA CULPA, MI VIDA!"

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUITO.

TUMB.

TIMB.

CMI G7 G7 CMI



130

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUITO.

TUMB.

TIMB.

CMI G7 G7 CMI

134

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

CMI G7 G7 CMI

OOEH!



138

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR.

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

CMI G7 G7 CMI

HOM-BE AI-YA!
(UNCLEAR)

REFRAIN MELODY

J INTERLUDE IV' (OUTRO)
RUMBA

(EL ARBOLARIO)

142

142

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR. **J**

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

PARTIAL RUMBA PATTERN

RUMBA PATTERN

SIMILE

SIMILE



146

146

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR. **J**

GUISO

TUMB.

TIMB.

150

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR. B♭ E♭ B♭ E♭

GUITO

TUMB. TUMBADORA FILLS

TIMB. TIMBALE FILLS



154

VOICE

V.

ACC.

GTR. B♭ E♭ B♭ E♭

GUITO

TUMB.

TIMB.

158

HEYL

TUMBORA FILLS



162

AY-OJALAU!

OJA!

Musical score for orchestra and choir, page 22. The score consists of seven staves. The first three staves (VOICE, V., ACC.) are empty. The ACC. staff has a dynamic marking of f . The next three staves (GTR., GUITO., TUMB.) have musical notation. The GTR. staff has dynamic markings of ff , f , ff , and f . The GUITO. staff has dynamic markings of ff , f , ff , and f . The TUMB. staff has dynamic markings of ff , f , ff , and f . The last staff (TIMB.) has dynamic markings of ff , f , ff , and f . The tempo is marked 166 .

APPENDIX E

TRANSCRIPTION OF *GALLINA FINA*

GALLINA FINA

COMPOSER CHRISTIAN GARCIA
AS PERFORMED BY SAMY AND SANDRA SANDOVAL
AND LOS PATRONES DE LA CUMBIA

$\text{J} = 110$

A INTERLUDE IA (INTRO)

VOICE *FREELY...*

VOICE

ACCORDION

GUITAR *G7 G7 G7*
(STRUMMING)

BASS

CHURRUCAS

TUMBADORAS

TIMBALES

AUX. PERCUSSION



VOICE

VOICE

ACC. *CMI CMI CMI*

GTR. *G7 G7*

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

A TEMPO...

15

VOICE

VOICE

Acc.

GTR. G⁷

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

B INTERLUDE 1B (INTRO CONT.)

17

VOICE

VOICE

Acc.

GTR. G⁷ (A = PALM MUTE) G⁷ G⁷ CMI CMI CMI

BASS EIGHT FALL TRIPLET FIGURES COINCIDE WITH ACC. MELODY

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB. SAC PATTERN SIMILE...

AUX. PERC. BASIC 1 BAR PATTERN ELECTRONIC UNISON CLAPPING SOUND

(GALLINA FINA)

3

23

VOICE

VOICE

ACC.

GTR.

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

CMI CMI G⁷ G⁷ G⁷ G⁷

NOTE NOTE

29

VOICE

VOICE

ACC.

GTR.

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

CMI CMI CMI CMI G⁷ G⁷

NOTE NOTE

35

VOICE

VOICE

ACC.

GTR.

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.



44

SAMY:
MEHAN CON

VOICE

VOICE

ACC.

GTR.

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

C VERSE 1

47

VOICE: -TA-DO QU-E TE SIE-N-TE-S SO-LA. YAHAS-TAEN LAS NO-CHES. CA-MA ME LLO.
CA-SA-JO!

Acc.

GTR.

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

=

52

VOICE: SAS. ME-HAN CON-TA-DO QUE TU VI-DAES UN TOR-MEN-TO YA-HO-SA QUE NO ME TIE-

Acc.

GTR.

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

59

CHOSES TE RE - VUEL - CAS DE DE - SE - OS Y SE CO - MEN - TA POR QUE SIA - UN ME -
CA - RA - TO!

G7 G7 CMI CMI C7b9 C7b9

60

QUIE - RES AN-DAS HA - CIEN - DO CO - SA - S'QUE NO DE - SES

FMI FMI Bb7 Bb7 G7 G7

(GALLINA FINA)

Musical score for 'GALLINA FINA' featuring eight staves. The vocal line includes lyrics: "RA - DRE SA - DE ES COE ME - NE RA - STA QUE LO PIER - DE, SON". The instruments include Accordion, Guitar (Gtr.), Bass, Church Organ (Chur.), Tambourine (Tumb.), Timpani (Timb.), and Auxiliary Percussion (Aux. Perc.). The key signature is B-flat major.

D INTERLUDE II (MINOR VARIATIONS ON SECOND REPETITION)

Musical score for 'INTERLUDE II' featuring eight staves. The vocal line starts with a rest followed by a melodic line. The instruments include Accordion, Guitar (Gtr.), Bass, Church Organ (Chur.), Tambourine (Tumb.), Timpani (Timb.), and Auxiliary Percussion (Aux. Perc.). The score includes markings: 'TUTTI SHOTS 1ST TIME ONLY', 'SIMILE...', '1 BAR PATTERN', 'SIMILE W/ VARIATIONS...', and 'BASIC 1 BAR PATTERN'. The key signature changes to C minor.

81

VOICE
ACC.
GTR.
BASS
CHUR.
TUMB.
TIMB.
AUX. PERC.

CMII CMII G7 G7 G7 G7

82

VOICE
ACC.
GTR.
BASS
CHUR.
TUMB.
TIMB.
AUX. PERC.

CMII CMII CMII CMII CMII

1. 2.

2-SAR-PATTERN (CONT.)

E INTERLUDE III (PRE-VERSE II)

VOICE

VOICE

ACC.

GTR.

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

SIMILE w/MINOR VARIATIONS...

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

SANDRA:

F VERSE II

100

VOICE

VOICE

ACC.

GTR.

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

HA - BLEN. QUE HA - BLEN. QUE HA - BLEN. QUE HA - BLEN.

QUE DI - GAN LO QUE QUE - RA.

GRO

106

VOICE
DI - GAN LO QUE QUIE - RA.
QUE YO SOY, QUE YO SOY GA - LLI - NA FI - NA, NO PA - RA CUAL - QUIE - RA. YO
CA - RA - JO!

ACC.

GTR. G7 CMI CMI G7 G7 CMI

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

112

VOICE
SOY GA - LLI - NA FI - NA, NO PA - RA CUAL - QUIE - RA. QUE QUIE - RA.
CA - RA - JO!

ACC.

GTR. CMI G7 G7 CMI CMI

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

G INTERLUDE IV

117

SAMY:
SON. SON!

117

SON. SON!

CMI G7 G7 CMI CMI G7

TUMB. & TIMB. FILLS OVER BASIC GROOVE PATTERNS

AUX. PERC.

123

123

G7 CMI CMI G7 G7 CMI

FILLS NOT CLEAR

ELECTRONICA CYMBAL

129

VOICE
ACC.
GTR.
BASS
CHUR.
TUMB.
TIMB.
AUX. PERC.

CMI G7 G7 CMI

H INTERLUDE VA (PRE-VERSE IIIA)

NA - DE

SIMILE...

BASIC 4 BAR CALL/RES. PATTERN

VOICE
ACC.
GTR.
BASS
CHUR.
TUMB.
TIMB.
AUX. PERC.

CMI G7 G7 CMI CMI G7 G7 CMI

VERSE IIIA

141

SA - SE LO QUE TIE - NAME SOKUP SINGER: HA - STA QUE LO PIER - DE.
HA - STA QUE LO PIER - DE.

Acc.

Gtr.

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

Chords: CMI, G7, G7, CMI

145

- STA QUE LO PIES DE NA - DIE SA - SE LO QUE TIE - NE.
NA - DIE SA - SE LO QUE TIE - NE.

Acc.

Gtr.

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

Chords: CMI, G7, G7, CMI

J INTERLUDE VR (PRE-VERSE IIIb)

149

NA - DIE

SAMY:

VOICE

VOICE

Acc.

GTR.

BASS

(NOTE: SLIGHT VARIATIONS)

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

VERSE IIIb

157

SA - BE LO QUE TIE - MBLE BACKUP SINGER: HA - STA QUE LO PIER - DE. YHA -

HA - STA QUE LO PIER - DE.

ACC.

GTR.

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

161

VOICE - STA QUE LO PIER DE NA-DIE SA-BE LO QUE TIE-NE.
 VOICE - - - -
 ACC. - - -
 GTR. CMI G7 G7 CMI
 BASS V V V V V V V V
 CHUR. // // // // // // //
 TUMB. // // // // // // //
 TIMB. // // // // // // //
 AUX. PERC. // - - - -

K INTERLUDE IV

165

VOICE - - - -
 VOICE - - - -
 ACC. - - -
 GTR. CMI G7 G7 CMI G7 G7 CMI
 BASS V V V V V V V V
 CHUR. // // // // // // //
 TUMB. // // // // // // //
 TIMB. // // // // // // //
 AUX. PERC. // - - - -

L INTERLUDE VI (PRE-VERSE IV)

173

VOICE

VOICE

ACC.

GTR.

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

DI-ME QUE ME
SAMY:

CMI G7 G7 CMI CMI G7 G7 CMI

M VERSE IV

181

QUIE-RES SANDRA: DI - ME QUE ME A - MAS. QUE_ TE HA-GO FAL - TA.

VOICE

ACC.

GTR.

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

MALE BACKUP SINGER:
QUI- TO. QUI- TO. QUI- TO. QUI- TO. QUI- TO.

CMI G7 G7 CMI CMI G7

(GALLINA FINA)

17

SECTION REPEATS WITH MINOR VARIATIONS

187

SAMY:

VOICE: ES U-N'A-MOR BO-NI - TO. DI-ME QUE ME QUI-RES. SANDRA: DI - ME QUE ME A - MAS. QUE_ TE HA-GO

VOICE: ES U-N'A-MOR BO-NI - TO. UN *p*-*p*-*p*-*p*. O-TRO PO-QUI- TO.

Acc.

GTR. G7 CMI CMI G7 G7 CMI

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

188

MALE BACKUP SINGER:

VOICE: FAL - TA. ES U - N'A - MOR BO - NI - TO.

VOICE: *p*-*p*-*p*. *p*- QUI - TO. PO - QUI - TO Y ES U - N'A - MOR BO - NI - TO.

Acc.

GTR. CMI G7 G7 CMI

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

N INTERLUDE III (PRE-VERSE II)

SANDRA: *que*

197

VOICE

ACC.

GTR.

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

CMI G7 G7 CMI CMI G7 G7 CMI

O VERSE II

205

VOICE

ACC.

GTR.

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

HA - BLEN. QUE - HA - BLEN. QUE - HA - BLEN.
DI - GAN LO QUE QUIE RA.

CMI G7 G7 CMI CMI G7

2-SAR-PATTERN (CONT.)

SIMILE...

211

VOICE
ACC.
GTR.
BASS
CHUR.
TUMB.
TIMB.
AUX. PERC.

QUE YO SOY, QUE YO SOY GA - LLI - NA FI - NA, NO PA - RA CUAL - QUIE - RA, YO
DI - GAN LO QUE_ QUIE - RA, CA - RA - JO!

G7 CMI CMI G7 G7 CMI

217

SECTION REPEATS WITH MINOR VARIATIONS

VOICE
ACC.
GTR.
BASS
CHUR.
TUMB.
TIMB.
AUX. PERC.

SOY GA - LLI - NA FI - NA, NO PA - RA CUAL - QUIE - RA, QUE_ HA - BLEN, QUE_ HA - BLEN,
CA - RA - JO!

CMI G7 G7 CMI CMI G7

223

VOICE: QUE_ HA - BLEN. QUE_ HA - BLEN. YO
DI - GAN LO QUE_ QUIE - SA. QUE DI - GAN LO QUE_ QUIE - SA.

Acc.: - - - - -

GTR.: G7 CMI CMI G7 G7 CMI

BASS: V V V V V V V V

CHUR.: II / / / / / / / /

TUMB.: II / / / / / / / /

TIMB.: II / / / / / / / /

AUX. PERC.: II - - - - -

229

VOICE: SOY GA - LLI - NA FI - NA. NO PA - RA CUAL - QUIE - SA. YO
CA - RA - SO!

Acc.: - - - - -

GTR.: CMI G7 G7 CMI

BASS: V V V V V V V V

CHUR.: II / / / / / / / /

TUMB.: II / / / / / / / /

TIMB.: II / / / / / / / /

AUX. PERC.: II - - - - -

233

VOICE SOY GA - LLI - NA FI - NA, NO PA - RA CUAL - QUIE - RA.
VOICE CA - RA - TO!

Acc.

GTR. CMI G7 G7 CMI

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

P INTERLUDE VI (PRE-VERSE IV)

VOICE SAMY:
ME QUE ME

VOICE

Acc.

GTR. CMI G7 G7 CMI CMI G7 G7 CMI

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB. (NOTE: SLIGHT VARIATIONS)
BASIC 4 BAR CALL/RES. PATTERN

AUX. PERC.

SIMILE...

Q PRE-VERSE IV'

VOICE: QUIE-RES, SANDRA: DI - ME QUE ME A - MAS. QUE_ TE HA-GO FAL - TA.

VOICE: DI - ME QUE ME A - MAS. QUE_ TE HA-GO FAL - TA.

ACC.

GTR.

BASS: CMI G7 G7 CMI CMI G7

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

MALE BACKUP SINGER:

SAMY:

SECTION REPEATS WITH MINOR VARIATIONS

VOICE: ES U-N'A-MOR BO-NI - TO. DI - ME QUE ME QUIE-RES, SANDRA: UN DI - ME QUE ME A - MAS. QUE_ TE HA-GO O-TEO PO - QUI - TO.

VOICE: ES U-N'A-MOR BO-NI - TO. UN DI - ME QUE ME A - MAS. QUE_ TE HA-GO O-TEO PO - QUI - TO.

ACC.

GTR.

BASS: G7 CMI CMI G7 G7 CMI

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

257

MALE BACKUP SINGER:

VOICE FAL - TA. ES U - NA - MOS BO - NI - TO.

VOICE es - es - es - QUI - TO. PO - QUI - TO Y ES U - NA - MOS BO - NI - TO.

Acc.

GTR. CMI G7 G7 CMI

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

261

INTERLUDE VI/PRE-VERSE IV'

1. 2.

VOICE

VOICE

Acc.

GTR. CMI G7 G7 CMI CMI

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

266 **S** INTERLUDE VII (OUTRO) FADES OUT

1.2. | 3. | $\text{J} = \text{J}.$

Acc. { CMI G7 G7 CMI CMI

GRE.

BASS

CHUR.

TUMB.

TIMB.

AUX. PERC.

APPENDIX F

TRANSCRIPTION OF THE LYRICS TO

EL AGUARDIENTE Y YO

& POBRE TONTO ENAMORADO

El aguardiente y yo:

Part I

*He venido decidido a componer
una selección que sea bonita.
Dedicado al pueblo que me dio a nacer
y donde tengo a mi madrecita.
Hoy le pido a Dios que tiene el gran poder
que si yo tuviera quemorir.
Quiera dejarme en mi tierra linda
para estar siempre en los destierro.
Quiera dejarme en mi tierra linda
para estar siempre en los [...].*

I have come with the intention to write
a selection that is pretty.
Dedicated to the town of my birth
and where I have my [little] mother.
Today I ask God who has the great power
that if I was to die.
I want to be left in my beautiful land
to remain forever in exile.
I want to be left in my beautiful land
to remain forever in [...].

Part II

*Lead: Que siembren flores en mi tumba.
Chorus: Y le rieguen con aguardiente.
L: Que saquen una buena cumbia.
C: Y que baile toda la gente. [repeat]*

Let them plant flowers on my grave.
And water them with *aguardiente*.
Let them play a good *cumbia*.
And let all the people dance.

Part III

[instrumental]

Part IV

[instrumental]

***Pobre tonto enamorado:*⁴⁴²**

Part I

*Te confieso,
que te he olvidado.
No existes en mi mente,*

I admit
that I've forgotten you.
You're not on my mind,

⁴⁴² Original transcription of the lyrics taken from
<<http://www.planetadeletras.com/index.php?m=s&lid=170466>> (accessed December 11, 2009).

*no pienses más en mí.
Si eres parte del pasado,
ahora que vienes a exigir.*

*No has notado
que me he cansado.
No sé de aquellos momentos
que a tu lado fui feliz.
Tu recuerdo lo he borrado,
no sé si te conocí.*

I don't think of you anymore.
You are part of the past,
now you come making demands.

Haven't you noticed
that I'm tired.
I don't of those moments
that I was happy by your side.
I've erased your memory;
I don't know if I knew you.

Part II

*Dile al que está a tu lado,
que no hable más de mí.
Lo nuestro ha terminado,
no existes más en mí.
Pobre tonto enamorado,
ahora le toca sufrir.
Si el tiempo no ha borrado,
lo que tú sientes por mí.*

Tell the one that's by your side
not to talk about me anymore.
What we had is over,
you no longer exist within me.
Poor fool in love,
now it's your turn to suffer.
If time has not erased
what you feel for me.

Part III

Dile a el que sus ofensas no me humillaron.

*Que el amor con el dinero no puede
comprar.
Que para amarte y conquistarte voy a
enseñarlo.
Le hace falta solo
lo que yo tengo demás.*

Tell him that his offences have not
humiliated me.
That love cannot be bought with money.

I will teach him how to love you and
conquer [i.e., woo] you.
Now all that he needs
is what I have on top of that.

Part IV

Mucho te quise y me hiciste sufrir.

*Gracias a Dios que ya te he olvidado.
Tu peor castigo será vivir
con un pobre tonto enamorado.*

As much as I loved you, you made me
suffer.
Thank God I've forgotten you already.
Your worst punishment will be to live
With a poor fool in love.

Part V

[instrumental]

APPENDIX G

LIST OF BAILES ATTENDED

BETWEEN 2007 AND 2008

1. 11/10/2007 – EOS, Las Tablas, Los Santos
2. 12/10/2007 – EOS, San Félix, Chiriquí
3. 13/10/2007 – *Conjuntos* of Abdiel Nuñez and Raul Santos (mano a mano), Arraiján, Panama.
4. 14/10/2007 – LD, Las Tablas, Los Santos
5. 15/10/2007 – LPN, Penonomé, Coclé
6. 18/10/2007 – EOS, Río Sereno, Chiriquí
7. 19/10/2007 – EOS, Gomez, Chiriquí
8. 21/10/2007 – LPC, Chitré, Herrera
9. 25/10/2007 – LPN, Las Tablas, Los Santos
10. 26/10/2007 – EOS and LPN (mano a mano), Penonomé, Coclé
11. 28/10/2007 – *Conjuntos* of Oscar Carrasco, Alejandro Solís, and Victor Ballestro (mano a mano), Las Tablas, Los Santos
12. 03/11/2007 – Eráclides Amaya, (Madera) Penonomé, Coclé
13. 04/11/2007 – LD, Chitré, Herrera
14. 08/11/2007 – LD (concert setting), Panama, Panama
15. 09/11/2007 – EOS and RS, San Miguelito, Panama
16. 10/11/2007 – Chimino Moreno, Maria Chiquita, Colón
17. 23/11/2007 – Vladimir Atensio, (Carate) Las Tablas, Los Santos
18. 24/11/2007 – LM, (Corotú) Chitré, Herrera
19. 25/11/2007 – LD and José Olmedo Pérez, Pedasí, Los Santos
20. 30/11/2007 – Dario Pití, Las Tablas, Los Santos
21. 01/12/2007 – LPN, San Miguelito, Panama
22. 14/12/2007 – Alejandro Solís, San Isabel, Los Santos
23. 16/12/2007 – LPC, Las Tablas, Los Santos
24. 16/12/2007 – LPN (sunrise *baile*) Los Santos
25. 01/01/2008 – LD, (El Cocal) Las Tablas, Los Santos
26. 05/01/2008 – EOS, Macaracas, Los Santos
27. 15/02/2008 – LPN, Panama, Panama
28. 16/02/2008 – LPN, Camping Resort, Panama
29. 18/02/2008 – LPN, Metetí, Darien
30. 20/02/2008 – LPN (concert setting), Panama, Panama
31. 24/02/2008 – LPN, Llano de Piedra, Los Santos
32. 08/03/2008 – EOS and LPC (mano a mano), David, Chiriquí
33. 13/03/2008 – RS (concert setting), David, Chiriquí
34. 15/03/2008a – LD and Binomio de Oro de América (mano a mano), David, Chiriquí

35. 15/03/2008b – EOS, LPN and LPC (mano a mano), David, Chiriquí
36. 28/29/2008 – Vladimir Atencio, Tortí, Panama
37. 29/03/2008 – Vladimir Atencio, Panama, Panama
38. 30/03/2008 – LM, Tortí, Panama
39. 04/04/2008 – EOS, Feria de Colón, Colón
40. 05/04/2008 – LPC, San Miguelito, Colón
41. 26/04/2008 – LPN, La Villa de Los Santos, Los Santos
42. 03/05/2008 – LD, La Villa de Los Santos, Los Santos
43. 03/05/2008 – LPN and LPC (mano a mano), La Villa de Los Santos, Los Santos