THE INVENTION OF THE NATIONAL IN VENEZUELAN ART MUSIC, 1920-1960

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This dissertation explores the developments of art music in Venezuela during the first half of the twentieth century as an exercise in nation building. It argues that beginning in the early 1920s a nationalist movement in music emerged, which was not only determined by but also determinant in the construction of a concept of nationhood. The movement took place at a crucial time when the country had entered a process of economic transformation. The shift in Venezuela's economic system from agrarian to industrial in the 1910s triggered a reconfiguration of the country's social and cultural structures. Industrialization brought about a new type of culture in which individual loyalties to the nation became more apparent than ever before. The institutionalization of national culture took place not only within the government, through state policies of national integration, but also less formally within social organizations. At both levels, however, the process of institutionalizing national culture involved a great deal of cultural engineering and invention.

In art music, these dynamics took the form of a nationalist movement initiated by a group of native musicians in the city of Caracas around 1920. These musicians sought to modernize musical life in the country, which they saw as being old-fashioned in comparison to contemporary European music. In addition to creating a modern music infrastructure they sought to establish a national art-music culture. To that end, they set out to articulate a national ideology of music and to act on several nationalistic objectives: revising the narrative of the country's

music history, disseminating historical and ethnomusicological research, creating national policies on music and music education, and composing a nationalist musical repertoire.

By looking at those musical developments against the backdrop of social change, this dissertation seeks to illuminate the constructionist nature of musical nationalism in mid-twentieth-century Venezuela. In this light, the renovation movement is to be seen as a nation-building project made possible by constructing and solidifying new modes of cultural communication and new identifying marks of national culture.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores twentieth-century nationalism in Venezuelan art music as a project of nation building which was made possible by constructing and solidifying new modes of cultural communication and new identifying marks of national culture. The nationalist movement in Venezuelan music began around 1920 when a young group of native musicians set out to renovate art-music life in the country, which they saw as being outdated with respect to European music. A first goal of the renovation of art music involved the establishment of an organized symphony orchestra and choral society, the reorganization of musical studies in the city of Caracas, and the creation of a musical repertoire by native composers.

A second goal of renovation movement was the creation of a national art-music culture. This part of the process, however, was framed within the context of nation formation associated with the advent of industrialization. The establishment of the oil industry in the 1910s triggered a process of modernization that had an impact upon virtually every aspect of life in Venezuela, including the consolidation of the state system, the reconfiguration of the country's social structure, and the definition of the nation as a cultural entity. The latter aspect was of utmost relevance for the leaders of the renovation as it posed a challenge of colossal dimensions, namely, how to adopt a European art form in a postcolonial context, which rejected European

models in the process of its self-formation and self-definition.[1] In this dissertation, I argue that in dealing with this question the leaders of the renovation participated in a project of nation-building that sought to establish a Venezuelan musical identity, which could be expressed, recognized, and exalted through the European art-music language. This approach to nationalism assumes that nations are socially constructed artifacts. As such, they are the products of ruling elites who participate in the invention of traditions, which enable them to channel the energies of the masses. Thus, this study will approach the renovation of art music in Venezuela as an exercise in social engineering, a nationalist movement aimed at not only creating an art-music culture in the country but also bringing the people together musically.

This introductory chapter deals primarily with the constructionist nature of nationalism. It provides an examination of the current understanding of musical nationalism in Venezuela, both in the common consent and the scholarly literature, and offers a critique of the sound-determined view that has illuminated the definition of the term "musical nationalism" as it applies to the Venezuela. This critique is formulated in light of some relevant interdisciplinary literature on nationalism and also provides the theoretical frameworks for subsequent chapters of this study.

Chapter two explores the circumstances for nationalism in Venezuela, particularly in the context of industrialization during the twenty-seven-year government of Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-1935). Challenging some widely held assumptions regarding the topic of modernity in Venezuela, I argue that with the advent of industrialization and the subsequent consolidation of the state system, Venezuela entered a period of national unification which saw a flood of

[1] This, incidentally, is a prevalent question in the critique of Latin America modernity. On this topic, see Nestor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Mexico: Grijalbo, 1989).

invented traditions coming from several leading factions from different social and political spheres.

Chapter three looks at the leaders of the renovation, their social role as the engineers of the movement, and their participation in the creation of a national music infrastructure. It also looks into the public responses to the renovation and the social challenges the process posed. Chapter four examines the renovators' participation in the creation of a national music ideology. This involved not only the rediscovery, and the historicist revaluation of Venezuela's musical past, but also the formulation of a theory of authenticity that values local folklore as a source of national identity. These aspects are further elaborated in light of the renovators' efforts to promote these ideas among the masses and through their participation in the institutionalization of national music and music education policies.

Chapter five is devoted to the invention of national art music. It argues that during the early years of the renovation, composers struggled to write nationalist music because the people failed to recognize themselves in it. It was only after nationalist ideologies had been widely disseminated and national policies in music had been implemented that musical nationalism began to be recognized as an original art music style displaying identifiable Venezuelan traits. Incidentally, the rise of the nationalist style in composition coincided with the advent of a new generation of composers who had been trained under the leaders of the renovation. These composers were seen as the embodiment of the authentically Venezuelan because of their diverse origin and cultural background, which, I suggest, contributed to the legitimization and ultimate acceptance of the musical repertoire as representative of the nation.

1.1 MUSICAL NATIONALISM IN VENEZUELA

During a casual conversation with Venezuelan conductor Pablo Castellanos in May 2003, I asked his opinion about mid-twentieth-century musical nationalism in the country. I was particularly interested in his view for two reasons: first, as the music director of the Orquesta Filarmónica Nacional de Venezuela, he had championed the musical repertoire I was studying, and, second, he had been brought up surrounded by the key figures in the story I wanted to tell. I specifically asked about his father, the late composer Evencio Castellanos, who had been a pivotal figure in the rise of the nationalist school of composition in Caracas at the time. He responded bluntly: "Nationalism, we never had a nationalist movement in Venezuela." Castellanos went on to explain that his father and other composers had written music inspired by folklore, which people usually called nationalist music, but those efforts could not be referred to as nationalism in the sense of an organized movement. A nationalist movement, in his view, involved some kind of political agenda and implied a rebellious spirit among those involved in it, something he believed neither his father nor the other musicians in his circle had set out to do.

Castellanos's response did not surprise me because it was consistent with a prevalent view of twentieth-century art music in Venezuela that regards musical nationalism almost exclusively as the musical style of choice among a group of composers active in Caracas between 1920 and 1960. In this view, classically-trained composers drew from native culture in order to contribute original art-music works that could be linked to the idea of the nation. This view was also consistent with canonical conceptualizations of musical nationalism which define the term as an aesthetic reaction to the hegemony of German music, and to a lesser extent French and Italian music. As a well-known passage contends, musical nationalism "is based on the idea that the composer should make his work an expression of ethnic traits, chiefly by drawing on the

folk melodies and dance from his country and by choosing scenes from his country's history or life as subjects for operas and symphonic poems."[2]

According to this definition, "the national treasure of melodies, dances, etc." ostensibly provided composers in the periphery of Western Europe with the means to attain international recognition for their music.[3] Indeed, the musical compositions produced by Venezuelan composers toward the mid-twentieth century were nationalist by virtue of both their use of native folklore and their composers' intentions to contribute something original to the art music tradition. As composer Inocente Carreño (b. 1919) has pointed out, "using folklore became a tacit agreement among those of us who sought something to begin [composing]. We could not start by merely imitating Beethoven or Mozart."[4]

Furthermore, this rationalization has also informed the scholarly literature on the topic of musical nationalism in Venezuela. In the entry "Nationalism" for the *Enciclopedia de la música en Venezuela*, the country's most authoritative music reference resource, musicologist José Peñin refers to the nationalist movement of the mid-twentieth century as one in which composers used regional expressions of culture not as means of representing their citizenship but rather as a way

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[2] Willi Apel, *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), s.v. "Nationalism," by Willi Apel.

[3] Ibid. Over the past two decades, however, this conceptualization of musical nationalism has been contested and largely discredited on several grounds, including the deterministic assumptions upon which it is conceived without regards for the internal dynamics that could have shaped composers' creative attitudes, or the roles that the public plays in the acceptance of such works as national. On this see, for example, Deborah Schwartz-Kates, "The Gauchesco Tradition as a Source of National Identity in Argentine Art Music (ca. 1890-1955)" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1997) or Sue Tuohy, "The Sonic Dimensions of Nationalism in Modern China: Musical Representation and transformation," *Ethnomusicology* 45 no.1 (Winter 2001): 107-131.

Most significantly, this definition has been scrutinized for promoting a nationalist agenda in itself which places German music at the center of a system around which all other musical nations gravitate. This aspect has been fundamental to the development of the discipline of musicology and has shaped the historiography of western art music. For a discussion of how the concept of nationalism came to be central to German music, see Celia Applegate, "How German Is It? Nationalism and the Idea of Serious Music in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 21 no. 3 (Spring 1998): 274-296. For an interesting collection of essays dealing with the centrality of German musicology, see Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter eds., *Music and German National Identity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002).

[4] Inocente Carreño, interview by author, 8 July 2000, Caracas video recording.

of establishing a pattern of reception internationally.[5] Similarly, in a celebrated book on composer Antonio Estévez and his *Cantata criolla*, Hugo López Chirico argues that musical nationalism served Latin American composers as a means to attain a musical physiognomy of their own, one that would enable them to achieve universal attention.[6] Both Peñín and López Chirico see nationalism in Caracas not only as a musical style but also as a historical period. In their views, Venezuelan art music has always displayed certain attributes that can be identified with the nation. Nonetheless, between 1920 and 1960 these attributes became more prevalent not only in the music but also in the processes involved in its creation as well as in its reception. According to López Chirico, during this period native musicians worked determinedly on behalf of Venezuelan music, including studying the country's musical past and its folklore, and cultivating art music based on those sources.[7] For Peñín, one of the most significant aspects of the music written during this period was not just that it was based on native subjects but that the Venezuelan public came to recognize it as national.[8]

One objection to this method lies in its characterization of musical nationalism exclusively as a sonic phenomenon. The aesthetic principle that motivates composers to write art music based on folklore is seen here as determined by an ideal of novelty, one in which folklore was taken primarily as a source of original material.[9] Because of its focus on the sound, and

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[5] José Peñín and Walter Guido, eds. *Enciclopedia de la música en Venezuela* (Caracas: Fundación Bigott, 1998), s.v. "Nationalism," by José Peñín.

[6] Hugo López Chirico, *La cantata criolla de Antonio Estevez: Un análisis de la obra y su inserción en el nacionalismo musical latinoamericano y venezolano* (Caracas: Consejo Nacional de la Cultura, Instituto Latinoamericano de Estudios Musicales Vicente Emilio Sojo, 1987). For an account of the same rationalization in the English language, see Felipe Izcaray, "The Legacy of Vicente Emilio Sojo: Nationalism in Twentieth Century Venezuelan Orchestral Music" (D.M.A. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1996).

[7] López Chirico, *La cantata criolla*, 269.

[8] Peñín, "Nationalism," in *Enciclopedia de la música.*

[9] This aspect has been articulated by Carl Dahlhaus. In this light, during the nineteenth century the goal of universalism, which should govern art music, operated under a aesthetic principle that demanded composers to be original or else risk to be condemned as epigonists. On this, see Carl Dahlhaus, "Musical Nationalism," in *Between*

specifically on how folklore has informed the work of classically-trained composers, this view of musical nationalism has paid little attention to other internal dynamic factors that may have motivated composers to adopt these stylistic preferences.

In Venezuela, some of these factors become extremely significant when musical nationalism is placed, first, against the backdrop of the developments of art music that began to take place in the 1920s, and second, in the larger context of modernization that prompted Venezuelans to begin forging a new concept of the nation and national identity at the time. The first one of these contexts has been discussed extensively in the literature on twentieth-century Venezuelan music but the connections between those developments and the idea of musical nationalism have not been articulated systematically. It is widely accepted that the rise of nationalist composition in the country occurred as part of a process of musical renovation that started in the early 1920s. Around that time an emerging group of musicians began to react against what they regarded as outdated musical practices and frivolous musical models that had governed musical life in Caracas for over half a century.[10] Through the efforts of those musicians, particularly Vicente Emilio Sojo, Juan Bautista Plaza, and José Antonio Calcaño, the renovation of art music became a far-reaching project encompassing many different areas and spanning over four decades. This movement was responsible for introducing modern European music in the country, updating the musical infrastructure, training a generation of nationalist composers, starting systematic studies in the areas of music history and ethnomusicology, writing the history of music in Venezuela, disseminating music and ideas about music among the

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Romanticism and Modernism: Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century, transl. Mary Whittall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 97-8.

[10] José Antonio Calcaño, *La ciudad y su música: Crónica musical de Caracas*, 1st ed. (Caracas: Ediciones de la Biblioteca Central de la Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2001), 362-4.

masses and abroad, and participating in the creation of national policies on music and music education.

Because of their focus on the sound, scholars of Venezuelan music have generally overlooked the role that all these ramifications of the renovation played as part of a nationalist movement. Instead, the connection between the renovation and musical nationalism has revolved almost exclusively around the figure of Vicente Emilio Sojo, who, as a professor of composition at the School of Music in Caracas, was responsible for the training of the generation of composers that would produce the bulk of the nationalist compositions beginning in the mid-1940s. According to Fidel Rodríguez, Sojo's commanding musical authority, manifested through his control of the institutions and his students, epitomizes a leadership model that parallels that of nineteenth-century political *caudillos*.[11] Likewise, Felipe Izcaray has regarded Sojo as the "quintessential" figure in the rise of musical nationalism in composition because of his determination to have his students write music inspired by nationalist subjects.[12]

Other scholarly accounts have attempted to define musical nationalism on the basis of the native materials that Sojo's students chose in their compositions. Most extensively elaborated by José Peñín, this approach has proven extremely complex, and generated more questions than it provided answers because it deals with the concept of the nation as an all-encompassing entity involving geographic, ethnic, cultural, social, and linguistic factors.[13] In this model, a true national music can only exist when the nation's political boundaries coincide with the cultural ones that it seeks to represent. This presupposes a type of homogeneity (cultural, linguistic, ethnic, geopolitical, etc.) that, according to Peñín, is not useful in the Venezuelan context.

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[11] Fidel Rodríguez Legendre, *Música, Sojo y caudillismo musical* (Caracas: Fundación Vicente Emilio Sojo, Consejo Nacional de la Cultura, 1998).

[12] Izcaray, "The Legacy of Vicente Emilio Sojo," 1.

[13] Most notably José Peñín in his entry on nationalism in the *Enciclopedia de la música en Venezuela*.

Because the Venezuelan territory is constituted by a number of different cultural groups that do not necessarily share a sense of community with one another, Peñín suggests that alternate designations (i.e. criollism, regionalism, indigenism, etc.) may offer better results in dealing with Venezuelan music. Yet, the alternate approaches that Peñín proposes are still sound-based and neglect to account for the dynamic processes that prompted the composers associated with the renovation to adopt a style based on native elements.

A more useful approach to illuminating the connection between the renovation movement and musical nationalism in Venezuela has appeared in the work of Marie Elizabeth Labonville.[14] By focusing on the life and work of Juan Bautista Plaza, Labonville has approached musical nationalism not on the basis of how music can define the nation but rather how the nation can be defined musically. Her detailed accounts of Plaza's activities as a composer, journalist, musicologist, promoter, educator, and policy maker have shed significant light on the dynamics of musical nationalism. So, instead of problematizing the feasibility of a nationalist model in Venezuela, she regards Plaza's participation in the renovation of art music in Venezuela as a manifestation of musical nationalism itself. "Plaza lived during a period when Latin American nations were seeking intensively to concretize their identities," she declares, and those nations accomplished that "by exploring and exalting native culture." According to Labonville, "Plaza, like contemporaries in other Latin American lands, devoted his life to educating his compatriots

[14] Marie Elizabeth Labonville has approached the topic of musical nationalism in Venezuela by studying the life and work of one of the leaders of the renovation movement, Juan Bautista Plaza. On this, see her *Juan Bautista Plaza and Musical Nationalism in Venezuela* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); "Musical Nationalism in Venezuela: The Work of Juan Bautista Plaza (1898-1965)," (Ph. D. diss., University of California-Santa Barbara, 1999); and "Juan Bautista Plaza: A Documented Chronology; Catalogue of his Writings; Plaza and the Press," *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 38 (Septermber-December, 1998): 1-171. Juan Bautista Plaza had previously been the subject of another substantial and extensively documented biography by Chilean musicologist Miguel Castillo Didier, *Juan Bautista Plaza: Una vida por la música y por Venezuela* (Caracas: Concejo Nacional de la Cultura, Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones y Estudios Musicales Vicente Emilio Sojo, 1985). Plaza's almost compulsive instinct to preserve, organize, and document his own life has facilitated research and provided significant clues for the study of twentieth-century art music in Venezuela.

about Western art music and national folk music, building musical organizations and ensembles, and composing nationalist and non-nationalist works to build a native repertoire."[15]

Labonville's thorough examination of Plaza's work has provided valuable insights into the process of renovation and its nationalist basis. One of her most significant contributions is having blurred the line separating the renovation of art music from musical nationalism that had been so prevalent in previous scholarship and demonstrating that these two aspects were part of a single nationalist movement. Despite this, some other fundamental aspects that are critical in the formulation of a theory of musical nationalism in Venezuela, namely the socio-cultural goal of musical nationalism and the kind of internal and external pressures that triggered it, are not addressed in her historicism. As a matter of fact, consistent with the deterministic view of musical nationalism, as outlined in mainstream musicology, Labonville links the origins of musical nationalism in Venezuela to the expansionist wave of nationalism that had penetrated Latin America from Europe around the turn of the twentieth century.

This deterministic view has also undermined other scholarly accounts that have attempted to look into the socio-cultural dynamics of musical nationalism. In a biography of world-renowned classical guitarist and composer Antonio Lauro, Alejandro Bruzual has argued that Venezuelan musical nationalism occurred as the country entered a process of political democratization. In this light, musical nationalism began at the end of 1935 with the death of military dictator Juan Vicente Gómez whose authoritarian regime had been in place for twenty-seven years. The ensuing transition to democracy, Bruzual suggests, created new social conditions to which Venezuelan artists responded by turning their creative efforts to the country's new reality. Quoting from Bela Bartok's writing on nationalism and folksongs,

[15] Labonville, "Musical Nationalism," 1.

Bruzual traces a connection between nationalism and democracy suggesting that in Venezuela the latter brought about "the awakening of the sentiment of nationality," a phenomenon that in most nationalist contexts coincides with a rising interest in the study of folksongs. "It should not be taken as a curiosity, then," Bruzual proposes, "that the principal concern of the musicians of the renovation had been to learn and to explore the native, while the country assumed its fate in a process towards democracy, with the massive participation of the people."[16]

I believe, however, that this deterministic view of musical nationalism is misleading. In the first place, the group of composers associated with the creation of the nationalist style in Venezuela began to produce music based on native subjects in the late 1920s, nearly a decade before Gómez's death. Moreover, according to José Antonio Calcaño, the process of musical renovation began in the late 1910s.[17] In the arts, nationalism became evident as early as 1909, when a group of painters started to react against the traditionalism of the Academia de Bellas Artes, breaking away from the school and starting an independent movement known as the *Círculo de Bellas Artes*, which focused on the cultivation of native subjects.

Secondly, one of the most important contributions of nationalist theory has been to discredit the notion that nationalism is a phenomenon that occurs naturally. In this light, the "fate" of the nation is not to be determined by fate itself but instead through calculated nationalist programs that make the idea of nation look natural. Specifically in Venezuelan art music, the process of renovation can be seen as a part of a larger nationalist program that sought to bring the nation together not because of the transition to democracy—although largely facilitated by it—but rather at the critical point of intersection between modernity and culture.

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[16] Alejandro Bruzual, *Antonio Lauro, 1998* (Caracas: Fundarte, 1998), 116.
[17] Calcaño, *La Ciudad y su Música*, 364.

1.2 VENEZUELAN NATIONALISM

I refer to the renovation movement as a nation-building project not only because its goal was the creation of a musical style that could ultimately be identified as Venezuelan but also because it aimed at teaching Venezuelans how to recognize themselves in it. Thus, the essence of what is Venezuelan becomes significant insofar as the people are able to identify it as such. In music those elements were selectively appropriated, typically by drawing them from folklore, by the leaders of the renovation movement. These elements were then used as source material for the compositions, were written about in newspapers and other forms of print media, were discussed in public lectures, and were incorporated into the school systems, establishing thereby a collection of identifying marks of national culture.

This nation-building project was a necessary response to the modernization of Venezuela's economic system. When military dictator Juan Vicente Gómez, aided by a liberal elite, rose to power in 1908, he set out to restore international trust, lost through several decades of political upheaval in the country, and to attract foreign investment. The beginning of oil exploration in the 1910s and the consequent shift from an agricultural to an industrial economic model contributed dramatically to the consolidation of the country's economy and of the state as the center of power. In turn, these economic changes triggered a reconfiguration of the country's social structure and of its culture. Unlike previous attempts at economic modernization, most notably during the experiments at liberalism by Antonio Guzmán Blanco in the 1870s and 80s, industrialization had a direct impact on Venezuela's social structure as it created massive mobilizations from rural to urban or industrial environments. The cities, then, became the centers of confluence of an array of cultures coming in from the internal regions as well as from abroad in the form of technology and human resources. Thus, defining the nation culturally, and setting

up the mechanisms for its implementation, became a fundamental task of the ruling elites in their attempts at institutionalizing modernity.

At the political level, this nation-building project was summarized under the government's official motto, "Unión, Paz y Trabajo" (union, peace, and work). This doctrine sought to bring peace and unity to a nation devastated by nearly a century of wars among militias from different regions seeking to control the Caracas-based bureaucracy. It then used the resources provided by the new economic system to forge a national state where individual loyalties were no longer directed towards the regions but rather towards the nation. This was accomplished by integrating the nation both geographically and politically through a variety of efforts, including a vast network of roads and railroads, the creation of powerful national army, the strengthening of the bureaucracy, and the financial support of the national institutions. Likewise, Gómez introduced a social philosophy of ruling, a nationalist project influenced by positivist thinking, which justified his strong leadership and centralized control over the people. Officially known as Democratic Caesarism, this doctrine held that because of their cultural and ethnic heterogeneity Venezuelan masses were not prepared to rule themselves. As a society in transition, then, the people needed a strong leader who would advance them to a more stable stage of social development and subsequently to democracy. In the rhetoric of the doctrine, Gómez was nationalistically represented as the embodiment of such a strong leader, one capable of achieving the unfulfilled project of national unification that had been initiated by Simón Bolivar a century earlier.

Within the cultural realm, the process of nation-building took different but overlapping forms, including cultural and intellectual movements (such as the *Círculo de Bellas Artes* in the visual arts), informal associations (such as sports-related organizations), or a combination of

institutional and informal associations (such as the renovation of art music). These cultural nationalist movements were extremely important because, unlike the state nationalist project, these movements emerged at smaller socio-cultural units but frequently aimed at institutionalization at the national level. Though generally recognized by the state and often supported by it, either financially or as a tool for propaganda, these efforts were organized by a cultural elite (including government officials) and most often were intended to serve their own interests. This elite, therefore, was responsible for defining the concept of Venezuelan culture and for creating not only the symbols of cultural identity but also the mechanisms for their implementation.

The nationalist movement in Venezuelan art music took place within these dynamics. The movement towards renovation sought to introduce modern European art music in the country and to create a mass public for it. Central to this goal was the creation of a modern musical infrastructure (symphony orchestras, choirs, music schools, technology, etc.). In its effort to bring the people together and to gain legitimacy both in the country and abroad, the renovation movement turned to nationalism whose ultimate manifestation was expressed in the creation of a musical repertoire that could be recognized as Venezuelan. Nevertheless, in determining the marks of national identification in the music, nationalism participated in a much broader process of inventing traditions because no music-culture of a national scope existed in Venezuela at the time. Therefore, the musical elite participated in the invention of tradition by elaborating a discourse of authenticity which enabled them, first, to create national codes of cultural communication, and second, to stimulate musical composition adopting those codes. By the 1940s, an aspect that has been conspicuously overlooked in the scholarly literature, the renovation of music had established itself as a potent nationwide movement. At that time, not

only some of the leading musical institutions enjoyed full financial support from the state, but also the leaders of the renovation had put themselves in a position where they participated in the creation of national policies on music and music education.

1.3 THE MODERNIST PARADIGM

One of the most pervasive views in scholarship regards nationalism as a relatively recent phenomenon. It holds that the ideology, movement, and symbolism associated with the idea of the nation appeared with the events of the French revolution. But, as Anthony Smith has observed, the revolution inaugurated not just the ideology, movement, and symbolism of nationalism, it created "a new form of human community, a new kind of collective identity, a new type of polity and, in the end, a new kind of inter-state order."[18]

In chapter seven of his seminal 1964 book *Thought and Change*, Ernest Gellner proposed that nationalism should not be considered exclusively as a political phenomenon, but instead as a sociologically necessary phenomenon of the modern industrial era. He went on to explain that prior to industrialization the most common form of social organization consisted of small independent agrarian communities. These he described a self-contained units where people lived their entire lives, where literacy was irrelevant because the lack of interest in, or access to, the wider world, and where culture was local. In these communities people might have shared some interest or beliefs with their surrounding communities even though they might not have shared the same political boundaries. They might have been aware of political rulers, and even

[18] Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 47.

submitted to their rule, but it was unlikely that these communities and their rulers shared a common culture. In reality, Gellner points out, it was more likely that the rulers experienced a sense of common culture with other rulers in different political units instead of with the illiterate peasants over whom they ruled. Under these circumstances the nationalist principle would not have made sense.[19]

According to Gellner, industrial societies, on the other hand, impose certain behaviors among their members, which tend to encourage nationalism. In the first place, industrialization stimulates mobilization of various kinds: geographic, as workers are forced to move from one area of economic development to another; occupational, as people have to adapt to the various industrial means of production; and social, as the economy dictates the new patterns of social organization. Second, since the state had to secure the conditions for economic development, it came to play a more important role in social life: by establishing a system of free and compulsory education, the state equipped the population with the technical and conceptual skills demanded by the modern world.[20] Thus, as Ross Polle has observed, "if, in agricultural societies, the family and village provided all the training that most members of society needed, industrial society requires a specialized education apparatus. This will impose common forms of writing and speech, and provide the foundation for a common culture."[21]

For Gellner this common culture, particularly when administered through an education system, plays a crucial role as the cement of modern societies:

> Culture is no longer merely the adornment, confirmations and legitimation of a social order which was also sustained by harsher and coercive constraints; culture is now the necessary shared medium, the life-blood of perhaps rather the minimal

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[19] See chapter seven "Nationalism," of Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964).

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ross Poole, *Nation and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), 20.

> shared atmosphere, within which alone the members of the society can breathe and survive and produce. For a given society, it must be one in which they can *all* breathe and speak and produce; so it must be the *same* culture. Moreover, it must now be a great or high (literate, training-sustained) culture, and can no longer be a diversified, locally-tied, illiterate little culture or tradition.[22]

According to one influential theory, the processes for creating these common cultures, and hence binding societies, have much to do with social engineering and public imagination. Benedict Anderson has argued that print media, specifically in their vernacular national forms (newspapers, novels, magazines), have created print communities in which individual members may share a strong sense of cohesion even if geographically removed from one another. Thus, for Anderson, nationalism is a type of narrative in which the nation becomes an imagined political community. [23] Accordingly, the development of mass print media provided modern societies with the means to access a common knowledge from which they came to embrace a series of values and beliefs that were framed as to roughly align with those values and beliefs of the idea of nation.

Eric Hobsbawm has also emphasized the constructionist nature of nationalism, particularly in nationalism's reliance upon the public's imagination to form socio-cultural bonds. For Hobsbawm, however, the processes of creating those common cultures owe greatly to what he terms invented traditions. He defines invented traditions as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past."[24] As with Gellner and Anderson, Hobsbawm observes that this kind of

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[22] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell Univeristy Press, 1983), 37-8. Emphasis is his.

[23] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. rev. edition (London: Verso, 1991), 6.

[24] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

phenomenon is most common in modern times, particularly the nineteenth century when social transformation became more pervasive than any other time in history. This context encouraged the invention of traditions because the transformation of society weakened or destroyed "the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed."[25] In this light, modern societies responded to transformation by assigning new meanings to old practices, thus ensuring a historical continuity. According to Hobsbawm, these processes of inventing traditions are conspicuously illustrated in Europe in the decades before World War I through the institutionalization of a vast number of practices, including national festivals, state ceremonies, statuaries, sporting contests, folksongs, all of which sought to connect the citizens with a historical past.[26]

Invented traditions, then, are attempts to structure social life in modern contexts as invariant, a condition that was not necessarily characteristic of pre-modern societies which were more adaptable to change.[27] Therefore, as Anthony Smith states, invented traditions have been the product of social engineers "who forged the symbols, rituals, myths and histories to meet the needs of the modern masses, whom industry and democracy were mobilizing and politicizing."[28]

One of the advantages of using this paradigm for the study of nationalism is its inclusiveness. The purpose of invented traditions is to bring people together under a shared culture rooted in history. While states typically participate in the invention of traditions through institutionalizing them as part of a national culture, many invented traditions originate at the social level and often rather informally. Sports, Hobsbawm argues, are particularly effective forms of invented traditions in their potential for bringing together people according to specific

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[25] Ibid., 4.
[26] Ibid., 6.
[27] Ibid., 2.
[28] Smith, *Nationalism*, 81.

aims (i.e. regional, national, community, social class, etc.). Moreover, it is not uncommon for invented traditions that originate informally at the social level to become formalized at the political national level. The history of European art music, as associated with political nationalist movements during the late nineteenth century, has provided substantial evidence to attest this.

This dissertation aims at providing a new reading of musical nationalism in Venezuela by exploring art music in the context of fast social change taking place in the country at the time. By looking at the renovation movement against the backdrop of invented traditions I hope to provide a clearer view into the nation's social history, one informed by the dynamic processes shaping society. Specifically in music, these dynamics gravitated around the creation of a national musical identity and the struggles to establish it. The invention of the national in Venezuelan music involved not only solving the immediate need for defining the nation musically but also, in doing so, reinventing the nation's musical past in order to serve the purposes of the renovators.

2.0 THE INVENTION OF TRADITION DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In a chapter devoted to Latin America in his widely-known book on the "origin and spread of nationalism," Benedict Anderson proposes that the development of a print culture in the eighteenth century created the conditions for local identities to emerge.[29] According to Anderson, newspapers, in particular, contributed to create these cultural bonds because they enabled inhabitants of the territories where papers circulated to participate in the sharing of a public culture involving local news, social events, business transactions, and other forms of printed communication. While Anderson's claim regarding the role of newspapers in the creation of national forms of cultural communication before the beginning of republican life in the region has been questioned, and altogether dismissed for providing an anachronistic reading of Latin American social history, his constructionist model for nationalism has become influential, and has proven very fruitful for current scholarship in the region.[30] Indeed, as François-Xavier Guerra has observed, the creation of a print culture played a significant role in the consolidation of Latin American nations, most notably toward the later part of the nineteenth century when newspaper readership increased significantly and the political concept of *patria* became

[29] See chapter four, "Creole Pioneers" in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities.*

[30] For an insightful collection of essays that have challenged Anderson's historicism but have elaborated on his constructionist model, see Sara Castro-Klaren and John Charles Chasteen, eds., *Beyond Imagined Communities: Reading and Writing the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2003).

prevalent in printed political rhetoric.[31] But, as this dissertation seeks to illuminate, other important forms of cultural communication—namely official and religious celebrations as well as a plethora of visual forms, music, and popular entertainment—contributed to shape the formation and consolidation of Latin American nations as autonomous cultural communities and hence played a significant role in the creation of imagined communities.[32]

Furthermore, the consolidation of Latin American nation-states in the second half of the nineteenth century provided an important unifying and legitimizing force in the processes of nation-building. According to John Charles Chasteen:

> The onset of export-driven economic growth, a regionwide trend from the 1870s on, helped unify national elites. Export growth produced newly robust tax revenues. Providing resources necessary for the creation of social infrastructure and state institutions like effective national bureaucracies, school systems that reached beyond capital cities, and disciplined armies and police forces. New technologies of weaponry (such as long-range rifles), of transportation (such as railroads and steamships), and of communication (such as telegraph lines that connected Latin American capitals to Europe and to their own hinterlands) strengthened modernizing central governments.[33]

At the intersection of politics, culture, and social organization, however, these processes of nation building have met a great deal of tension and resistance. These traits have been apparent since the times of emancipation from Spain and have extended to the present. They have affected the ways in which Latin American nations have been represented both symbolically and in reality, and have had an impact on the development of modern nation states.

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[31] François-Xavier Guerra, "Forms of Communication, Political Spaces, and Cultural Identities in the Creation of Spanish American Nations," in Castro-Klaren and Chasteen, eds., *Beyond Imagined Communities*, 3-32.

[32] For an interesting study on the role of visual forms of cultural communication in state-building projects in Latin America, see Jens Andermann, *The Optic of the State: Visuality and Power in Argentina and Brazil* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007).

[33] John Charles Chasteen, "Introduction: Beyond Imagined Communities," in *Beyond Imagined Communities*, xvii.

In a leading book on the feasibility of modernist projects in Latin America, for example, Nestor García Canclini questions whether or not it is possible to deal with a concept of modernity in a region that has essentially failed in its attempts at modernization.[34] According to Canclini, since colonial times the socio-cultural objective reality of the region has reflected a hybrid behavior in which the modern, the traditional, and the cultured have intermingled, producing models of self-representation that differ significantly from the exogenous ones that encouraged those behaviors.[35] Thus, Latin American nations have been built against the backdrop of tensions created by the interactions of "hybrid" cultures caught between traditions that have not yet passed and modernity that has not fully arrived. The principal challenge Latin American nations have faced, Canclini argues, has been that of negotiating a democratic culture that avoids being overwhelmed by elite art and literature or by mass media and communication.[36]

From the point of view of nationalism, the narratives that make these hybrid cultures are constantly changing as they are reflective of the changes taking place in the social and political structures of nation-states. According to Canclini, in many Latin American contexts such changes were taken as means for nations to achieve modernity. In this light, the cultural synthesis that brought together national culture, articulated as part of a modernist discourse in post-revolutionary Mexico, for example, was largely supported "by a change in the professional relationship between artists, the state, and the popular masses."[37] Thus, as this dissertation will further argue, the issues at stake in building the idea of the national were not necessarily how Venezuela came to be organized culturally as a nation but rather what that concept of

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[34] García Canclini, *Cultural híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Mexico D.F.: Grijalbo, 1989), 13.
[35] Ibid., 14.
[36] Ibid., 15
[37] Ibid., 78.

Venezuelan nation meant to citizens of diverse social, regional, racial, and cultural backgrounds, particularly as the relationship of power shifted dramatically in the decades after 1910.

This chapter explores this dynamic interplay in Venezuela during the first half of the twentieth century in preparation for further contextualizing the nationalist movement in art music.

2.1 VENEZUELAN MODERNITY

One fundamental problem in the historiography of the first half of the twentieth century in Venezuela has been how to balance political ideas, economic development, and social mobilization with other important, yet anachronistic, marks of modernization such as national autonomy, national identity, and national unity. With the death of military dictator Juan Vicente Gómez in 1935 an official view of history appeared that set his regime in opposition to the ensuing civil democracy. In this light, Gómez has been portrayed as the consummate Venezuelan *caudillo*, a repressive and corrupt despot who built a base of power around the army and who ruled the country in a primitive fashion "as if it were a cattle ranch."[38] Mariano Picón Salas, an influential Venezuelan intellectual and one of the principal opponents to Gómez, proclaimed that Venezuela only entered the twentieth century after Gómez's death. This widely held view of modern Venezuela, founded upon democratic principles of freedom of thought, individual rights, and universal suffrage, however, has failed to recognize, among other things, that the vast economic development as well as the dramatic social transformation that took place in

[38] Julie Skurski, "The Leader and the 'People': Representing the Nation in Postcolonial Venezuela" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 1993), 136.

Venezuela during the Gómez years are also important marks of modernization. By defining Gomez's regime as the antithesis of democratic Venezuela, historians have downplayed the transformation that Venezuela underwent during Gómez's twenty-seven-year dictatorship from an impoverished agrarian country to a wealthy industrial nation.[39]

Furthermore, as recent scholarship has shown, this narrow definition of modernity has neglected the political dogmas of order and progress that had illuminated the country's nation-building projects since the independence movement in the early nineteenth century. In a 1990 article, Venezuelan historian Nikita Harwich Vallenilla contends that post-Gomez historiography has rejected the arguments for modernization set forth by Venezuelan positivists since the second half of the nineteenth century because they were produced as ideological doctrines during periods associated with autocratic regimes. "The changes in Venezuela's political life after Gómez's death," Vallenilla argues, "led to a rejection both of positivism's ideological propositions and of its ability to deal with the topic of political modernity. A widely accepted critical viewpoint has tended to define Venezuelan positivism as nothing more than a pessimistic, cynical, and reactionary interpretation of Venezuelan reality."[40]

Along these same lines, other scholars have suggested that Venezuelan modernity began during the government of Antonio Guzmán Blanco (who ruled for most of the 1870s and 1880s).[41] Indeed, Guzmán Blanco introduced a series of reforms intended to bring the country together in a fashion similar to modern European nations. In this light, Guzmán Blanco's policies

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[39] For a discussion of the scholarly debate on modernity in Venezuela in connection with the Gómez's historiography, see Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 69-75.

[40] Nikita Harwich Vallenilla, "Venezuelan Positivism and Modernity," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 70 no. 2 (May 1990), 328.

[41] See, for example, Luis Ricardo Dávila, *El imaginario político venezolano: Ensayo sobre el Trienio Octubrista 1945-1948* (Caracas: Alfadil, 1992), 57.

towards building infrastructure (roads, railway systems, waterworks, and public buildings) and promoting civil organizations are seen as signs of modernization.

But the problem with defining, and hence dating, modernity in Venezuela—or in any developing nation for that matter—has much to do with the historicism that has constructed Europe as the center of modernity. In this light, modernity is conceived as a unidirectional phenomenon spreading from Europe to the peripheries, which must assimilate and become modernized or else remain in a state of backwardness. Anthropologist Fernando Coronil has argued that as former European colonies, many developing countries have fallen into a historical limbo where they remain unable to find alterative paths. Thus, "the Latin American discourse of modernity, in its rejection of European domination but its internalization of its civilizing mission, has taken the form of a process of self-colonization which assumes distinct forms in different political contexts and historical periods."[42]

In Venezuelan republican history those processes of self-colonization are as conspicuous as are the different forms and variations they have assumed according to specific periods. They become apparent when studied as forms of invented traditions and, as such, they shed significant light on both Venezuelan historical processes and historiography. Moreover, they are particularly relevant when associated with one of the most important historical innovations of modernity, the nation, and its concomitant phenomena: nationalism, national identity, and national histories.

[42] Coronil, *The Magical State*, 73.

2.2 INDUSTRIALIZATION

When Juan Vicente Gómez came to power in 1908 Venezuela was in the midst of a struggle to maintain its status as a sovereign republic. A century of civil strife and an economic crisis caused by the fall of coffee prices (Venezuela's principal export) had weakened the state dramatically, making it unstable and at constant risk of losing its legitimacy. Just five years earlier, during one of the country's worst economic slumps in history, president Cipriano Castro suspended payments of the foreign debt, prompting an international crisis that involved a blockade of Venezuela's coastal line by the navies of England, Germany, and Italy and the bombardment of the city of Puerto Cabello.[43] Yet, when Gómez died after twenty-seven years of rule, Venezuela not only was a debt-free country, it was the world's largest oil exporter and the second largest oil producer.[44] Under Gómez, Venezuela became a modern industrial nation boasting a stable economy, a relatively good network of roads and railroads, international trust, one of Latin America's finest armies, and a solid state system.

Gómez, nevertheless, is best remembered for being a harsh dictator, the last in a century-long history of military *caudillos*. A wealthy rancher in the Andean state of Tachira, he joined forces with his fellow Tachirense Cipriano Castro in 1892. With Gómez as his financial supporter and his chief military strategist, Castro and his army marched to Caracas in 1899 to take control of the presidency, which had been vacated after the assassination of President Joaquín Crespo following eight years of escalating violence. As his second-in-command, Gómez became a crucial figure for Castro, especially for his military skills. In 1902-3 Gómez led

[43] On the blockade, see Kelvin Singh, "Big Power Pressure on Venezuela during the Presidency of Cipriano Castro," *Revista/Review Interamericana*, 29 (1999): 125-43.

[44] Judith Ewell, *Venezuela: A Century of Change* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 63.

government forces to defeat the largest caudillo uprising in history, thus consolidating his figure as a strong military leader.[45]

Gómez came to power after a bloodless *coup d'état* carried out while President Castro was in Europe receiving medical treatment in 1908. He had been receiving support from a liberal elite who opposed Castro's centralized power and economic monopoly and which saw in Gómez's leadership the qualities to restore order in the country.[46] Upon assuming control of the presidency, Gómez pledged to lead the country under strict constitutional order. He promised to bring peace and economic stability, and to unify the citizenry under a national character. He also promised to seek diplomatic solutions to the international conflicts that had been afflicting the country for decades.[47] These announcements not only brought a great deal of hope to Venezuelans but also signaled a dramatic shift in foreign policies as well as in the international view of the country. Indeed, following his takeover, Gómez reestablished relations with international creditors and initiated repayment of Venezuela's foreign debt. The growing confidence that Venezuela was finally entering a period of political stability was attractive to foreign investors and particularly to oil companies seeking to engage in long-term oil exploitation contracts.[48]

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[45] Known as the "Revolución Libertadora" (Liberating Revolution), the uprising was led by Venezuelan banker and Liberal leader Manuel Antonio Matos, who had put together an army of 16,000 troops under the financial support of U.S., French, and German private funds. Matos, who had been a financial leader during the liberal regime of General Antonio Guzmán Blanco between 1870 and 1888, sought to restore the power of the central region elite and to continue Guzmán Blanco's policies of allowing foreign capital to freely intervene in the country's economy. For a comprehensive account of the revolution and Castro's regime, see Brian McBeth, *Gunboats, Corruption, and Claims: Foreign Intervention in Venezuela, 1899-1908* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2001).

[46] Skurski, "The Leader and the People," 117.

[47] Irene Rodríguez Gallad, "Perfil de la economía venezolana durante el régimen gomecista" in *Juan Vicente Gómez y su época*, ed. Elías Pino Iturrieta (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1988), 71.

[48] Skurski,"The Leader and the People," 129.

In fulfilling those promises, however, Gómez participated in an ambivalent exertion of power, shifting between autocracy and liberalism. On the one hand, his vision to bring the country together was rooted in a long history of *caudillismo,* which relied upon force and repression as means to retain power. By creating one of Latin America's most powerful armies, Gómez swept away all traces of regional upheaval. He banned the establishment of political parties and established a secret police to seek after clandestine political movements. Many of his political opponents were forced into exile while many others were put in prisons where torture, starvation, and lack of sanitation were common.

On the other hand, Gómez believed that in order to fulfill his promises of bringing peace and putting an end to a century of anarchy, he needed to modernize the economy by attracting foreign capital and technology.[49] Most scholars agree that by aligning himself with foreign investors, Gómez was able not only to deal with the precarious state of the economy but also to strengthen his political control of the nation. Even though agriculture remained Venezuela's primary export throughout the 1910s, Gómez was aware of the economic potential lying in the subsoil. With the emergence of oil as a central commodity of capitalism and a growing international confidence in Gómez's ability to stabilize the country, Venezuela became an attractive site for investing. In the development of the oil industry the state participated as a landlord. It granted concessions to private parties (generally members of the economic elite) who in turn sold the concessions to international oil companies for drilling and extraction. The liberal policies that regulated oil exploitation offered favorable conditions to oil companies. A mining law that came into effect in 1910, for example, only required that companies operating the

[49] On Gómez's modernizing project, see Manuel Caballero, *El tirano liberal* (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1992).

concessions pay a minimum tax for land rent and for oil extraction.[50] Similarly, those concessionaries were exempt from import taxes.[51] The most significant early transaction, which marked the beginning of commercial oil exploitation in the country, came in 1913 with the purchase by the Royal Dutch Shell of two large concessions, which the corporation regarded at the time as its "most colossal deal."[52]

As foreign investment in the oil industry continued to grow, Gómez's government instituted new regulations in order to increase the state's sharing of petroleum profits. Between 1917 and 1922 the government introduced new tax regulations for extraction and exporting of oil. These changes were largely influenced by the nationalist efforts of the Minister of Development, Gumersindo Torres, who after studying the oil legislation of Mexico and the United Stated realized that Venezuela was entitled to a larger share of the profits obtained from oil exploitation. As a natural resource, he believed, oil was part of the national wealth and the state had an obligation to safeguard it.[53] In another effort to increase oil revenues, Gómez created in 1925 the Compañía Venezolana de Petroleo, which monopolized the selling of oil concessions to foreign investors and negotiated the terms of the concessions.

The increasing presence of foreign capital and international trust allowed Gómez to consolidate his regime and to establish a strong state system, which in turn had a profound impact upon the construction of the nation. Particularly, as the government became more involved in dealing with foreign investors, the state expanded into a complex system of

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[50] Coronil, *The Magical State*, 79.
[51] Ibid., 82.
[52] Quoted in Brian McBeth, *Juan Vicente Gómez and the Oil Companies in Venezuela, 1908-1935* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 12
[53] Coronil, *The Magical State*, 81.

institutions and rules designated to regulate oil exploitation and to administer its profits.[54] According to Fernando Coronil, under Gómez the state "underwent a metamorphosis," transforming from a weak and precarious national institution, constantly at risk of losing its stability and its legitimacy, into a body intimately tied to foreign investment, which enabled the state to exert its presence in the national territory.[55]

2.3 NATIONAL UNIFICATION

The presence of the state upon the national territory took various forms and served several purposes, most noticeably as a quest for national unity, national identity, and national autonomy. The developments in infrastructure, particularly in transportation and communication, allowed Venezuelans to move faster from one region to another and current news to quickly reach the national territory. Oil wealth paid for a complex system of highways that connected Caracas with the major industrial zones. New magazines and newspapers, some of which subscribed to international news agencies, began to circulate as early as 1909. More importantly, the advent of radio broadcasting in 1926 allowed news programs, concerts, children's programs featuring folkloric tales, history programs, and dramatic soap operas to reach a large portion of the national population.[56]

Along with the development of a national infrastructure, modernization triggered a reconfiguration of Venezuela's social composition. First, the transition from an agrarian to an

[54] This bureaucratic system was admittedly very corrupt and well-known for serving Gómez's personal interests and those of his acquaintances.
[55] Coronil, *The Magical* State, 76.
[56] Ewell, *Venezuela: A Century*, 80.

industrial economic system prompted the country's population to become mobile. The increasing decline in agricultural activity led to massive peasant mobilizations from rural to industrial areas, and the consequent appearance of a working class.[57] Urban centers, in particular, received the influx of rural population who, threatened by the government's lack of support of agriculture and attracted by urban economic development, began to settle in the main economic centers. A comparison of census figures for the years 1920 and 1924, for instance, reveals that the urban population in Venezuela's six largest cities went from 217,075 to 454,031 inhabitants, and continued to increase significantly thereafter.[58]

At the same time, the middle class appeared as an important social group not only as an indicator of the country's transition into a modern social order but also as the forging mind in the reorganization of the nation culturally. The middle class was a diverse group made of long-time city residents, foreign and native professionals, and uprooted individuals who moved to the cities from the internal regions. According to historian Federico Brito Figueroa, the middle class was a heterogeneous group that rose to prominence as the beneficiaries of the state's oil policies. As the number of oil concessions increased, the government created a system of benefices, which often entitled inhabitants of lands designated for oil exploitation to be compensated for the selling or leasing of their land. Typically, the transaction would secure these landowners a

[57] Federico Brito Figueroa, *Historia económica y social de Venezuela: Una estructura para su estudio* (Caracas: Dirección de Cultura Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1966): v.2, 419-20.

[58] In 1920 urban population accounted for 9% of the country's total 2,411,952 inhabitants. This percentage increased to 15% of a total 3,026,878 in 1926. Proportions of urban population according to subsequent census were 22% in 1936; 39% in 1941; 54% in 1950; 60% 1957. For Venezuelan census and demographics, see Brito Figueroa, *Historia económica y social de Venezuela.*

relative wealth which enabled them to relocate in urban centers and to be absorbed by the various emerging branches of the economy.[59]

But these new forms of social organization generated great cultural disruptions, as well. This is particularly revealing in light of the country's geo-cultural makeup. Venezuela's diverse geography has historically harbored cultural values that allow us to identify particular loyalties according to specific regions. On the basis of its geographical constitution, Venezuela can be divided into four well-defined areas: the northwestern lowlands, comprising the western shore of Lake Maracaibo; the northern mountains, constituting the northeasternmost extension of the Andes chain; the Central Orinoco Plains; and the Guiana Highlands in the southeast. These geographic differences have played a significant role in defining the lifestyles of the inhabitants of those areas. Prior to the advent of industrialization, those regions were kept relatively isolated from one another, which allowed their population not only to structure their communities according to their specific collective needs, but also to operate within a local belief system.[60] Because both the new working class and the new middle class consisted largely of uprooted individuals of diverse regional origin, they were faced with the challenge of reconfiguring their social structure and patterns of behavior in order to establish themselves as industrial societies. These two groups, however, reacted differently to the transition. Brito Figueroa has pointed out that the working class tended to group themselves according to their region of origin, therefore maintaining their community structure relatively free from alienation. This is significant, in that it suggests that the ambitions of former peasants were not to assimilate themselves as part of a

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[59] Brito Figueroa, *Historia económica,* v. 2, 409. For Venezuelan social history, see also Miguel Bolívar Chollett, *Población y sociedad en la Venezuela del siglo XX* (Caracas: Fondo Editorial Tropykos : Ediciones FACES/UCV, 1994).

[60] These regional loyalties are conspicuously exemplified in the political processes of the nineteenth century, characterized by constant warfare between regional factions for the control of the country, which typically installed themselves as bureaucracies of kinship once in power. Gómez's cabinet was particularly notorious for being overwhelmingly staffed with relatives and fellow Andeans.

new social order but rather to acquire some wealth and subsequently return to their places of origin and become landowners.[61] The middle class, on the other hand, tended to interact more actively with their surroundings. They formed themselves in urban environments into more integrated communities despite their apparent cultural diversity.[62]

The question of how this middle class became more integrated, however, is a complex one and it will be elaborated throughout this dissertation. The modernist paradigm of nationalism contends that literacy plays an important role as the cultural cement of modern societies. Through literacy, in the form of an education system (Gellner) and print media (Anderson), ruling elites began to devise new modes of cultural communication that allowed members of the middle class to imagine themselves as part of a national community. Eric Hobsbawm has referred to these practices of building up an identity as "social invented traditions."[63] Specifically, Hobsbawm has observed that in inventing these social or informal traditions the ruling elite (which may consist essentially of any individual or social group in charge of channeling the efforts of a collective) typically formulate their codes of cultural communication by drawing from a vast repository of local culture or history and adapting those to serve the collective. This bottom-up form of invented tradition is a convenient distinction in that it allows us to study the processes of identity formation at the level of small social groups. According to Hobsbawm, this type of invented tradition can occur at an organized level, take the form of a national movement, and even migrate into more institutionalized forms of invented traditions. The latter, however, usually falls under a top-down category, which Hobsbawm refers to as

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[61] Brito Figueroa, *Historia económica,* v.2, 422-3.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Hobsbawm, "Mass Producing Traditions in Europe, 1870-1914" in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 263. He also refers to them as "unofficial" or "informal" invented traditions.

"political invented traditions."[64] These usually are produced by states and administered in the form of political programs for the purpose of bringing the nation together.[65]

2.4 POLITICAL INVENTED TRADITIONS

Gómez's modernization project was summarized in the regime's official motto, "Union, Peace, and Work." Through a series of actions framed within this program, the state participated in the invention of a national imagination that promoted a view of Venezuela, both domestically and abroad, as a modern nation. These aspects constituted an important part of the political discourse of the period as well as the regime's propaganda:

> When the administration [of Gómez] is analyzed in the future, it will be inevitable to acknowledge that it created the modern Venezuelan army; implanted peace and order in a people that is essentially rebellious; cleaned the national finances by paying off [the country's] foreign debt; advanced public instruction greatly; connected the villages of Venezuela through wide roads and other communication channels; and, above all, exterminated the *caudillos*, that pernicious pest that constantly tainted with blood the glorious soil of the fatherland just to satisfy its personal ambitions.[66]

The program of "Union, Peace, and Work" promoted an image of modernity that sharply contrasted with the popular view of Gómez as an illiterate despot. The negative image of the dictator, however, was counteracted through an official rhetoric of progress as well as a body of theoretical work, which involved an in-depth reconstruction of Venezuela's social history where Gómez epitomized a transitional figure in the modernization process. Since his arrival into power

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[64] Also loosely referred to as "official" or "formal" invented traditions.

[65] For Hobsbawm's use of these distinctions see, "Mass Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914" in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition:* 263-307.

[66] "El benemérito Juan Vicente Gómez y nuestras instituciones armadas," *Revista del Ejército. Marina y Aeronáutica* 32 (1932): 808. Quoted in Catalina Banko, "Gómez: Construcción de Carreteras en Venezuela (1908-1935)," in *1ras jornadas de investigación histórica* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1991), 97.

Gómez aligned himself with a national intelligentsia, a "learned civil elite" associated with the opposition to Cipriano Castro. These individuals served as Gómez's advisors and participated actively in social and political debate as well as in public policy making. They were learned citizens, some of them educated abroad, who shared an interest in a line of positivist thinking introduced by some Venezuelan social scientists several decades earlier. Stimulated by European evolutionist theories, not only as a scientific tool but also as a philosophical doctrine, this group of intellectuals set out to review Venezuelan history and in the process analyze contemporary society. They were also responsible for producing an official doctrine of rule, which justified the harsh dictatorship of Gómez as a transitional step in a process leading to a popular democracy.

Two members of this elite, Pedro Manuel Arcaya and Laureano Vallenilla Lanz, were largely responsible for developing a body of historical and sociological theory dealing with issues of race, power relations, and social development. At the core of their model lay a view of the popular masses as a backward and unruly social group. They contended that over the centuries a combination of racial and geographical factors had shaped the general character negatively. Arcaya, a lawyer who served as Gómez's attorney general, minister of the interior, and ambassador to the United States, sought to explain that the backward character of the Venezuelan people was the result of centuries of conquest, colonial domination, and racial mixing. Drawing from Le Bon's evolutionary theories, Arcaya contended that through those experiences certain characters were instilled in the people, determining their evolution and forming their "national soul." For Arcaya, this national soul was in an earlier stage of evolution than its European equivalent.[67]

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[67] Arcaya published extensively during his lifetime (1874-1968). For a useful introduction to his work see "El sociologismo en Pedro Manuel Arcaya," in Arturo Sosa, *Ensayos sobre el pensamiento político positivista venezolano* (Caracas: Ediciones Centauro, 1985).

Laureano Vallenilla Lanz, who under Gómez occupied the presidency of the congress for twenty years, proposed that the key for the masses to emerge from this state of backwardness—and hence for an eventual national democratic project to be viable—was political leadership exercised through the mediation of a popular strongman who would channel the energies of the masses during the transition to a democratic order. Vallenilla Lanz laid down the bulk of these ideas in his influential 1919 book *Democratic Caesarism*, which became the regime's official doctrine of ruling.[68]

In elaborating this doctrine, Vallenilla Lanz shifted the focus of prevailing historiography from documenting heroic campaigns, legislation, and partisan disputes to problematizing the object of political struggle, namely, the people. He argued that the period of anarchy and political turmoil that followed the independence—which he extended to his own time—was directly related to the barbaric nature of the popular masses. He went on to propose that with strong leadership, exercised by an individual capable of influencing the people's imagination, Venezuela could be turned into a modern civilized nation:

> Our pueblo…located in the period of transition from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity…instinctively clusters around the strongest, the bravest, the wisest, around whose personality the popular imagination will have created a legend, which is one of the most powerful psychological elements of prestige, and from whom it expects absolute protection.[69]

In Vallenilla Lanz's revisionist account of history, Simón Bolívar epitomized the figure of the strong leader. As a man of profound knowledge of the people, Bolívar could communicate

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[68] A collection of earlier essays *Cesarismo democrático: Estudios sobre las bases sociológicas de la constitución efectiva de Venezuela* (Democratic Caesarism: Studies on the Sociological Bases of Venezuela's Effective Constitution) criticized imported political ideas such as popular democracy and humanism. It contended that those notions were too foreign to Latin American socio-historical realities.

[69] Vallenilla Lanz, *Cesarismo democrático*, quoted in Skurski "The Leader and the People," p. 27 (her translation).

effectively with the masses, who, in turn, responded with vehemence and understanding of the need for dictatorship.[70] By means of personal command over the people's imagination, this Democratic Caesar acted as a mediating figure between the barbaric masses and the civilized elite. As an invented tradition, this cult of Simón Bolívar was key in legitimizing Gómez's regime as well as in constructing a national identity for it emphasized the need for strong leadership while providing a reading of Bolívar's trajectory as an unfulfilled liberating project that found its continuation in the figure of Juan Vicente Gómez.[71]

Despite being formulated as a rational model of government in which the Democratic Caesar's role was fundamentally to lead the country in the transition to a modern social order, Gómez's practices of power seem to indicate otherwise. It is a commonplace in Venezuelan historiography to portray Gómez's regime as one of marked provincialism whose leader, an illiterate peasant, lacked the competence to lead the country towards modernity. However, as Julie Skurski argues, Gómez's rudimentary practices of power allowed him to forge a national identity and to assume an ambiguous personality that would gravitate between the elite and the people. In this light, Gómez's exercise of power following an agrarian model helped him imbue national life in a timeless order that resonated within the people.[72] Instead of governing from Caracas, Gómez settled himself in an *hacienda* near the city of Maracay in the central state of Aragua. By doing so, he strengthened his image as a man deeply concerned with the land. During the early years of his regime he implemented a number of regulations regarding land and

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[70] Vallenilla Lanz, *Cesarismo democrático: Estudios sobre las bases sociológicas de la constitución efectiva de Venezuela* , 2nd edition, (Caracas: Tipografía Universal, 1929), 281.

[71] Skurski, "The Leader and the People," 121.

[72] Ibid., 140.

agriculture that enabled him to create a vast agrarian bureaucracy while casting among the people a positive image of progress based on an agrarian model.[73]

At the same time, by ruling from a rural setting, Gómez distanced himself—at least in the eyes of the people—from Caracas's elite, which, in Venezuela's postcolonial context, can be seen as embodying an oppressing force. But Gómez possessed other attributes that made him a popular and even revered figure among the people. In the first place his mixed race and his rural upbringing made him the epitome of the national image. Second, his reserved personality and his reluctance to talk or appear in public set him apart from most Venezuelan *caudillos* and the elite. Finally, his open religious syncretism (combining elements of Catholicism and traditional witchcraft) was shared by the people who saw in him the incarnation of the popular spirit elevated to a supernatural dimension.[74]

These aspects of Gómez's government and personality were instilled in the population through the official program of "Union, Peace, and Work." In the people's imagination Gómez succeeded in this program because he had unified the national territory by means of infrastructure, he had swept all traces of military upheaval, and through his agrarian—and later oil—policies had set the nation's economy in motion. Through his connection with the land and the people he was able to create a sense of national identity, which, in spite of being modeled against the prescriptions of reason advocated by the positivist elite, helped bring the country together.

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[73] For Gómez's agrarian policies, see Luis Cipriano Rodríguez, "Gómez y el agro," in *Juan Vicente Gómez y su época*, Elias Pino Iturrieta, ed. (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1985). For an interesting discussion on Gómez's creation of an agrarian bureaucracy, see Doug Yarrington, "Cattle, Corruption, and Venezuelan State Formation during the Regime of Juan Vicente Gómez, 1908-1935," *Latin American Research Review* 38 (June 2003): 9-33.

[74] This representation of Gómez as a mythical figure still prevails in popular beliefs. His image is still venerated with devotion by people who lived during his regime. My paternal grandfather was a believer in the supernatural power of Gómez.

2.5 SOCIAL INVENTED TRADITIONS

At the turn of the twentieth century a sharp cultural gap divided the elite from the popular masses. While the city elite identified with the European academicism (both through imported art forms and domestic ones created after cosmopolitan models), the popular masses found their identity in local folkore. This cultural gap, however, began to narrow as modernity created new conditions for cultural exchange, and, hence, for social integration. While political invented traditions played a crucial role in the creation of a cohesive national community, the invented traditions emerging rather informally, in which the state had not direct participation, were equally significant.

This point raises the question of defining who were the agents in the informal invention of traditions and how those traditions got disseminated. The origins of these traditions are not always easy to trace. However, some of the most conspicuous ones clearly point towards elite groups and individuals (Gómez himself in some instances) as the principal architects of these informal invented traditions. Most advocates of the modernist paradigm of nationalism agree on the important role that elites play in creating the means for channeling the popular energies. Anderson, for example, argues that the idea of nation is a construction of an enlightened elite, which is disseminated to its citizenry in printed form. Indeed, print media was an essential tool for the Venezuelan intelligentsia of the period. Despite official vigilance and censorship, Venezuelan intellectuals enjoyed vast opportunities for publication during the Gómez regime. An influential cultural journal, *El Cojo Ilustrado* (The Enlightened Cripple, 1892-1915) had become since its founding one of the most prestigious periodical publications in Latin America, frequently publishing original writings by some of the continent's leading intellectuals including Rubén Darío, Ricardo Palma, and Miguel de Unamuno, as well as Spanish translations of well-

known works by European authors such as Charles Darwin, Rainer María Rilke, and Fedor Dostoievski. Though mostly associated with prevailing positivist views, *El Cojo Ilustrado* opened a platform for public intellectual exchange on social and cultural issues.

Among the publications that began to circulate during the Gómez regime, the journal *La Alborada,* founded in 1909 by Venezuela's foremost novelist and intellectual Rómulo Gallegos, became an influential model for future generations of Venezuelan intellectuals. Although *La Alborada* was only in circulation for three months, it opened a forum for the discussion of new topics such as politics and civil rights. Largely inspired by Gómez's promises to lead the country towards democracy, in the journal Gallegos criticized the country's traditional political leaders and parties because of their lack of political programs and the excessive corruption manifested in all branches of the government.[75]

After World War I, intellectual output in printed format increased significantly. According to Yolanda Segnini, by 1926 the number of periodical publications produced in Caracas alone surpassed two hundred journals, which covered a variety of topics and disciplines including arts, sciences, journalism, and humor.[76] Along with periodical publications, novels and short stories flourished during this period. Inscribed in the context of Latin American nationalist discourse of the interwar period, this literature sought to reformulate the basis of national identity by drawing on romantic, idealist, and spiritualist philosophies. As Julie Skurski points out, "these currents challenged the determinist evolutionary concepts that guided ruling groups in Latin America while valorizing the spiritual and instinctual dimension of life, which had long been

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[75] Ewell, *Venezuela: A Century*, 49.

[76] Yolanda Segnini, "Vida intelectual y Gomecismo," in *Juan Vicente Gómez y su época*, 177. Segnini provides a brief annotated bibliography of some of the most significant journals published in Caracas during Gómez's years.

disdained by liberal republicanism."[77] In this light, the Latin American discourse of authenticity posed as an alternative view of the region's identity which was broadly disseminated and enthusiastically received both domestically and abroad.

2.5.1 The Nationalist Narrative in Literature

Rómulo Gallegos's 1929 novel *Doña Barbara* epitomizes this trend as it imagines the peaceful unification of the nation's land and people. Published at a time when ideological opposition to Gómez's regime had increased dramatically, the novel tells an epic tale of struggle between the forces of civilization and barbarism in which Santos Luzardo (a cultivated urban lawyer) brings peace and legal order to the lawless plains ruled by Doña Barbara (a mestiza who personifies rural despotism). In the context of Latin America's promise to achieve national identity through a dynamic mixture of races, Gallegos's vision of the conflict between civilization and barbarism required that the elite become morally involved by guiding and, at the same time, allowing itself be transformed by the synthesis of reason and popular belief.[78] In *Doña Barbara* Gallegos exposes the flaws of both civilization and barbarism before attempting to solve the conflict: Doña Barbara, for instance, appeals to violence, illicit means, and witchcraft in order to achieve her goals of ruling the land. Santos Luzardo, on the other hand, lacks the knowledge of, and love for, the land that Doña Bárbara has usurped from him. In overcoming these pitfalls, Santos Luzardo aligns himself with the *llaneros* (peasants); and by doing this, he not only enlists local support and sympathy, which eventually help him defeat Doña Barbara by peaceful and legal

[77] Julie Skurski. "The Ambiguities of Authenticity in Latin America: Doña Barbara and the Construction of National Identity," *Poetics Today* 15 (Winter, 1994), 606.

[78] This is a type of socio-cultural dynamic that Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortíz has laid down in his model of transculturation. His seminal 1939 *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azucar* has become a very influential hermeneutic tool in recent work in cultural studies.

means, but also discovers the love for the land and nature. Furthermore, the clashes of civilization and barbarism come to cease in the offspring of Santos Luzardo and Marisela, the illiterate daughter of Doña Barbara whom Santos Luzardo educates in correct speech and good manners and whom he marries at the end of the story.

The story of *Doña Barbara* has been read in rather symbolic terms. One of the most common interpretations links the figure of Doña Barbara with Gómez himself. In this view, Doña Barbara's voracious appetite for power, her ruling by force and illicit means, and her ability to corrupt and exploit for her own benefit, were seen as allegorical of Gómez's regime. Conversely, Santos Luzardo was associated with a new cult of Simón Bolívar founded on the liberator's promise to elevate the people by means of education.

Gallegos published the novel at a time when public support for Gómez had been put to the test. In February 1928, a group of university and secondary education students turned a celebration of student week in Caracas into a public protest against the regime. Turned on by impassionate patriotic speeches where the leaders of the students called upon Simón Bolívar for help in liberating the country from oppression, students rallied for several days attracting popular support.[79] The government responded by arresting four of the student leaders. The arrests, however, precipitated a mass mobilization of students who in solidarity with those placed under arrest turned themselves in for imprisonment and, subsequently, the spread of public demonstrations in support of the students in cities throughout the country. Gómez receded and ordered the release of the students in what symbolically became the beginning of the end of autocracy in the country.

[79] For an account of the Student Week, see Skurski, "The Leader and the People," 185-96.

Even though Gallegos was not directly involved in the protests, he played a role in shaping the minds of many of those who participated in them. Since the early 1910s he had earned his living as a teacher and administrator in the public schools and by the year of the protests he was principal of the Liceo Caracas (one of the city's most important secondary schools) from which many students had been involved in the protests and mass jailing. He was a model teacher who believed in the positivist view that the elite should rule the people. However, he viewed this leadership not as an imposed discipline coming from above but rather, as Skurski points out, as a process of guided self discovery of their role within society "through didactic experiences and spiritually charged symbols," which enabled them to develop a civic character and individual responsibility.[80]

When the student protests took place, Gallegos was working on the manuscript of *Doña Barbara*. In fear that the novel could have been taken as being critical of the regime he chose to publish it in Spain, thus avoiding censorship in Venezuela.[81] When the novel arrived in the country it was already being recognized internationally. Spanish and Latin American critics hailed Gallego's piece as a literary classic as it had succeeded in going beyond prevailing Latin American literature of manners by penetrating into the rural heart of the nation from where it offered its critic of modernization through its denunciation of rural *caudillismo* and power relations.

Gallegos's novel, hence, appeared in sync with the movement towards political reform in the country and anticipated the movement toward democracy. As a metaphor for political conflict in Venezuela, the novel not only antagonized the dynamic forces involved in the

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[80] Skurski, "The Leader and the People," 206, 210.

[81] For an account of the circumstances surrounding the origin of the novel, see Juan Liscano, *Rómulo Gallegos y su tiempo* (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1969).

conflict, but also problematized the socio-cultural context of industrialization in Venezuela from the perspective of the new social makeup. In this light, *Doña Barbara* offered an alternate solution to the conflict of unruly citizenry as laid down by the positivists. Indeed, Gallegos's vision of bringing order to the Llanos by letting Santos Luzardo embrace the locals and learning from their experiences and culture sharply contrasted with the doctrine of Democratic Caesarism, which sought to instill obedience through discipline. As an invented tradition, this new prescription for constructing a national identity was a powerful tool for the new leading elites, for it was constructed from the bottom up, giving an unprecedented value to folklore and local culture, which ultimately had a strong resonance upon the masses. *Doña Barbara's* literary success lies on Gallego's ability to challenge prevailing narrative forms intended for an elite audience. He did this by creating a new form of cultural communication that ultimately contributed to closing the cultural gap between the popular and the elite.

Gallegos's critique of literary formalism, however, has to be seen as the tip of the iceberg in the dynamics of socio-cultural reconfiguration in Venezuela. During the years preceding the publication of *Doña Barbara* Venezuelan writers had been challenging some of the literary conventions, as well as writing in a language more reflective of their context. Teresa de la Parra's 1924 *Ifigenia*, for instance, though not a nationalist work, criticized gender restrictions in Caracas's society. A "diary of a young woman who wrote because she was bored," the novel offers a plea for women's liberation from social restraint. Gallegos's own 1920 *Reinaldo Solar* offers a more pessimistic view of Venezuela as it deals with the country's social and racial makeup, which he sees as negatively affecting the coming together of the people as a nation.

2.5.2 Nationalist Art

This critique of society and institutions was also manifested outside literary circles. In the early 1910s a group of artists associated with the Academia de Bellas Artes broke away from the traditionalism of the institution and established its own studio and set of guiding principles. Since its establishment in 1877, the state-funded Academia had been the center of artistic activity in the country, favoring a romantic style inspired by historical subjects.[82] Starting in 1909 some of the students in the Academia complained that the teaching methods and aesthetic theories of the faculty had become obsolete.[83] After a 1912 failed attempt to influence the Ministry of Public Instruction for a change in the Academia's leadership and curriculum, the students declared a boycott, which resulted in the closing of the school for several months and a number of students completely abandoning the institution.[84] On their own, these artists began to gather informally around the Plaza Bolívar (Caracas's central square) and adopted the collective name *Círculo de Bellas Artes* to further distance themselves from the Academia. They were joined by other artists and intellectuals (including Rómulo Gallegos) who shared their views about the need for art reforms in the country. A notable essayist and supporter of the *Círculo*, Leoncio Martínez, published in 1912 a series of newspaper articles in which he not only criticized the Academia's faculty and administration, accusing them of being mediocre, but also, as a manifesto of sorts, called upon the members of the *Círculo* to work on behalf of an art distinctively Venezuelan:

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[82] Incidentally, the founding of the academy was largely the result of a huge official movement to create a nationalist cult of heroes and history. Associated with the academy were the country's foremost painters, some of them trained in Europe (Arturo Michelena, Martin Tovar y Tovar) who were commissioned to produce an iconographic history of the nation's struggle for independence.

[83] Luis Alfredo López Méndez, *El Círculo de Bellas Artes* (Caracas: Editora El Nacional, 1976), 18.

[84] Ibid., 17-23.

> We must work, my dear comrades, for the art and for the fatherland. Let us make our art, a sincere Venezuelan art, taking advantage of the simple and amorous [elements] that surround us without appealing to exotic practices which do not adjust to our subjects and motivation. Because art is nothing else than to see and to transmute, to feel more deeply than the general feeling, to appreciate in the [people's] gestures a moment in their souls, and [to appreciate] in the environment the soul of the landscape, and to express and to execute, always free from influences other than our own, signifying first the personality of the individual and then the character of the race.[85]

Martínez's writings on art are symptomatic of the socio-cultural tensions building up as Venezuelans were trying to construct a national identity. His overtly patriotic tone, his rejection of "exotic" practices (by which he means the romanticized historicism prevalent in the aesthetics of the Academia), and his call to search for the national "soul" within the people and the landscape, sharply contrast with the evolutionist ideas of Pedro Manuel Arcaya who viewed the national soul as something that had to be tamed precisely through the type of academicism that Martínez opposed. In a remark that seems to be addressed to Arcaya, Martínez offers a constructionist view of the role of artists in building a national identity:

> Nations turn into unmistakable entities when their artists have succeeded in delineating not only the people's external features but also the deep rugged paths of the national psychology. This is why there are some who claim, somewhat timidly in my opinion, that a nation can only have representative artists when, through a very slow evolution, definitive traits have been settled. I, on the contrary, think that it is artists who go clearing out the multitudes and digging into the rich veins of beauty in the mines of the collective soul, just like miners in patient labor separate the much desired golden grain from quartz.[86]

In Martínez's view, that national soul was a source of authenticity that could be captured by the artist's sensitivity. "Our land, always gravid to the lust of the tropical sun," he proclaimed during the installation of the circle, "places before our eyes rustic models, landscapes of exciting

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[85] Leoncio Martínez "Ideas y Propositos," *El Universal* (4 September 1912) reprinted in Juan Carlos Palenzuela, *Leoncio Martínez, crítico de arte, 1912-1918* (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1983), 97.

[86] Ibid., 98.

vigor on the rise, astounding decorations to the unaccustomed retina, in the hazy nordic fog, in such an exuberance of light."[87]

Most of the painters associated with the circle did, indeed, go in that direction. They cultivated a style based not on an idealized view of the country's past but rather on the presence of everyday scenes and local landscape. One of the most prominent artists in the group, Manuel Cabré (1890-1984), began to make serious study of light precisely by exploring everyday scenes and landscape. From his early works Cabré became recognized as one the most important painters of the twentieth century in Venezuela. To this day, he is hailed as El Pintor del Avila for his many depictions of Caracas's great mountain and city landscape.

As a formal organization, the *Círculo de Bellas Artes* only existed for four years. Nevertheless, its members believed, and maintained afterwards, that they had succeeded in creating a national art. They also believed that their association was representative of the national character and the country's social makeup, which was manifested through the broad popular support they received. In a review of a 1915 exhibition, for instance, Martínez commented that, "from the noble lady to the most modest children of the people, they attended to see the paintings and the drawings; and they became interested in examining those works. And if [somebody] had cared to count the visitors in one day, the figures would have surprised us."[88]

Similarly, according to one of the circle's associates, Luis Alfredo López Mendes, those artists epitomized the youthful spirit of the time. They were "a rebellious but respectful" group, they knew and studied old masters and were aware of European trends, particularly impressionism, futurism and cubism. Yet, theirs was a kind of anti-elite movement whose members rejected being stereotyped as bohemians by "living normal lives with great love for

[87] Ibid
[88] Ibid., 169.

working, reading and daily baths."[89] They were regular people who "gave themselves to the surrounding *criollo* and vernacular world, which had been virtually ignored by the old and admirable national masters."[90]

This humanizing rhetoric that presents artists as ordinary citizens is significant for the invention of tradition, particularly in its connection with mass culture. Indeed, rather than being perceived as mere observers, artists become participants in the cultural processes, thus their personal experiences percolated into their creative output as a source of authenticity. For the promoters of the *Círculo de Bellas Artes*, the connection between the artists and mass culture was manifested not only from above in the form of a mass culture aesthetic but also, and more importantly, from below with the artists turned into an integral part of the cultural processes they attempted to portray in their work. In recounting the history of the group, for example, López Mendes, elaborates on the activities the group's involvement in popular pastimes, particularly baseball and bullfighting. He points out that they were sport fanatics not only as spectators but also as participants in amateur leagues of baseball as well as informal bullfight fundraising events.

2.5.3 Sports

Indeed, as Eric Hobsbawm has argued, the adoption of sports as a "mass proletarian cult" plays a significant role in bringing people together. In a dynamic that resonates with Benedict Anderson's contentions, Hobsbawm has pointed out, for example, that the topics of a day's sports match would typically provide a common ground for conversation between virtually any

[89] López Mendes, *El Círculo de Bellas Artes*, 31.
[90] Ibid.

two members of a social group, regardless of how they relate to one another.[91] While this form of imagined community may, and indeed often does, serve as a surrogate for local identity, it can also serve as a powerful tool for channeling the national imagination. Elsewhere, Hobsbawm has argued that team sports, particularly at the level of international competitions, have long been recognized as expressions of national character and struggle. "The imagined community of millions," he writes, "seems more real as a team of eleven named people. The individual, even the one who only cheers, becomes a symbol of his nation himself."[92]

At the turn of the twentieth-century, bullfights and baseball offered Venezuelans a channel to explore these possibilities. They participated in these dynamics by producing degrees of loyalty spanning from individual to various levels of collective identity including class, regional, political, and national ones. Bullfighting, which had existed in Caracas as early as the founding of the city itself in the late sixteenth century, had become, in the first decades of the twentieth, the city's most popular outlet for public entertainment.[93] By the 1920s Caracas boasted two major bullfight rings: The Circo Metropolitano de Caracas, opened in 1896, which could accommodate four thousand people, and the 1919 Nuevo Circo de Caracas, a modern plaza with twice the capacity of the former. Drawing large crowds on a weekly basis, the bullfights were events organized by private entrepreneurs who typically arranged seasons by contracting well-known international bullfighters as well as by acquiring the best animals bred in the country or occasionally importing the bulls directly from Spain.[94]

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[91] Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, 288-9.

[92] Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth,* Reality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1990), 143.

[93] Carlos Salas, *La fiesta brava en Caracas: Cuatro siglos de historia* (Caracas: Consejo Municipal de Distrito Federal, 1978), 15.

[94] Salas, *La fiesta brava en Caracas*, provides detailed information on most bullfighting seasons in Caracas during the first half of the twentieth century. An account from the 1930s, however, points out that the international

Bullfighting in Caracas was followed vehemently by a large segment of the population. Bullfighters enjoyed celebrity status: their photographs were displayed in public and private locales, newspapers devoted spaces not only for publicity of particular events but also for covering the visit of international figures, or to report on the social life or health of injured bullfighters. Writing for an Anglo-Saxon audience in the early 1940s, Olga Briceño articulated the role that the bullfighter played in bringing people together:

> In South America a famous bullfighter is the counterpart of a moving-picture star or a football or baseball hero in North America. He is the recipient of quantities of fan mail, proposals of marriage, and highly profitable offers from advertising agencies. His name is spoken with affection, and his exploits in his latest fights are known and discussed in the farthest corners of the country. Radios, phonographs, and young throats repeat to satiation songs that are written in his honor.[95]

The superstar status that some bullfighters achieved had significant implications for the invention of tradition. Many youngsters from the lower classes saw famous fighters as role models. Those fighters embodied the success that lower class individuals could achieve through hard work and heroic undertaking. This was manifested both symbolically in the pageantry and paraphernalia associated with the bullfights themselves as well as the kind of income that famous fighters generated. As Olga Briceño argues, the prospect of economic success and fame that the profession of bullfighting presented stirred up the imagination of the youth:

> Bullfighting in Venezuela and elsewhere in South America is a highly lucrative profession. A good *torero* can earn from four to seven thousand bolívares in a single afternoon; that is, twelve hundred dollars to eighteen hundred dollars. When one stops to think that a bank clerk makes scarcely four hundred bolívares a month for arising at seven in the morning and wearing himself out in office chairs, while a laborer earns only from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty by endless sweat and toil, it is easy to understand that there are hundreds

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bullfighters that the Caracas public typically saw were second-tier international bullfighters. See Thomas Ybarra, *The Young Man from Caracas* (New York: Ives Washburn, 1941), 242.

[95] Olga Briceño, *Cocks and Bulls in Caracas: How We Live in Venezuela* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1945), 142.

> of devotees who dream of becoming *toreros*. After a Sunday bullfight, it is entirely possible that every lad of the common people fancies himself as a new Belmonte. Later, he will resign himself once more to his bootblack's box until better times arrive; but he will have had his moment of dream of eagerness and greatness. Bullfighting is a profession for the lower classes. Aristocrats do not enter it.[96]

While a male-dominated sport, bullfights were geared towards a broad public. Impresarios normally promoted the fights as family events selling group or family discount tickets, offering band concerts preceding the main event, or even promoting the fights as benefit shows for charities.[97] Though typically not involved in the actual fights, women played an important role as supporters of the spectacle. They participated in the invention of tradition by acknowledging and feverishly approving or rejecting, sometimes in inappropriate social behavior, the skills of a particular fighter. As Briceño recalls:

> Although women stay away from cockfights, they attend bullfights in vast numbers, their bright dresses bringing splashes of color to the ring. Wealthy women of fashion occupy the boxes, across the front of which they sometimes hang Manila shawls. Forgetting their customary reserve and modesty, they reach a state of ecstasy, applauding, shouting, rising to their feet, protesting, flushed or pallid with excitement. On days when a famous fighter is appearing they carry flowers and after a fine bit of work toss them into the ring as he passes by.[98]

As an all-inclusive sport bullfighting allowed Venezuelans to imagine themselves as a unified community, which they did by participating in a cult of individual mastery. Yet, even though successful native bullfighters were revered as symbols of national or local pride, issues of local identity or loyalties became more apparent in team sports. The introduction of baseball in the last decade of the nineteenth century provided a form of mass entertainment that gradually turned into both a significant channel for identity and a very powerful symbol of the nation.

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[96] Ibid., 141.
[97] For an account of the bullfighting business in Caracas, see Salas, *La fiesta brava.*
[98] Briceño, 141.

Though different accounts exist as to how the sport was introduced in the country, it is generally accepted that baseball was introduced by a group of Venezuelan and Cuban players who settled in the country after a period of college studies in the United States. According to one source, in 1895 a group of Cuban émigrés along with other Venezuelan enthusiasts created the first organized team in the country, the Caracas Baseball Club.[99] The creation of this organization drew significant public attention generating a great interest in the sport as well as motivating the creation of other teams in the city and throughout the country. By 1902 there were several baseball teams in Caracas that played against each other regularly. Some of the best players were of Cuban origin. One of the most accomplished, Emérito Argudín, established the first baseball camp in Caracas where he taught the fundamentals of the sport. He was also responsible for founding the first Venezuelan periodical, *Base-Ball*, dedicated exclusively to the sport.[100]

Most observers agree that even though baseball was popular among every urban social group in the country, the makeup of the teams was reflective of the class structure of the period. According to Javier González, in the city of Caracas alone, some teams were made up exclusively of individuals of the upper classes (college students and young professionals) while others consisted of players coming from the lower working classes. Antagonism fueled some notorious rivalries between teams associated with one or another social group. Some of those rivalries (such as a famous one between the upper-class team Los Samanes and the lower-class Girardot) were as symbolic of a class conflict as they were a sport's competition. This becomes apparent in the rhetoric associated with the publicity of the games. A newspaper ad for a game between Los Samanes and Girardot in 1914, for example, promoted the event as the

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[99] Louis A. Perez, Jr. "Between Baseball and Bullfighting: The Quest for Nationality in Cuba, 1868-1898," *The Journal of American History* 82 no. 2 (September, 1994), 514.

[100] Juan Vicente González, *El béisbol en Venezuela: Un siglo de pasión* (Caracas: Biblioteca Nacional, 1996), 11.

"continuation of the conflict" between the two teams.[101] Furthermore, as González points out, those clashes took place not only on the field but frequently in the stands. In a particular game in 1914 between these same teams, "a large group of tattered young men," followers of the Girardot team behaved in a manner that made it very uncomfortable for both the public and the players.[102]

While class identity was a conspicuous factor in the makeup and public support of baseball teams in the city of Caracas, other expressions of identity, such as regional or even political ideologies, can also be observed in the types of rivalries that emerged around baseball circles in Venezuela. As early as 1915, baseball games confronting teams from the city of Caracas with others from the interior began to receive special press coverage. A particular rivalry between the Caracas team San Bernardino and the team Vargas from the neighboring port town of La Guaira was the subject of frequent newspaper and magazine articles.[103]

Despite the social antagonism that upheld these rivalries, baseball in Venezuela was a more socially integrated sport there than it was in the United States. Baseball offered the possibility of blurring class lines as the messages and metaphors of the nation permeated it. The connections between baseball and the nation began to appear as early as 1902. In October of that year, the local team Caracas Baseball Club played against an All-American team made up of crewmembers of the USS Marietta, a Navy gunboat assigned at the time to a mission in the Caribbean. These teams played two games, both of which not only received wide coverage in the local press but also attracted large crowds who came in support of the native team.[104] According to Leonte Landino, some of the local rivalries that emerged decades later had much to do with this type of native vs. foreign dichotomy. When the Venezuelan Association of Baseball was

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[101] *El Nuevo Diario* (7 November 1914) quoted in González, *El béisbol*, 17.
[102] *El Universal* (8 March 1915) quoted in González, *El béisbol*, 17.
[103] Ibid.
[104] *El Heraldo* (27 October 1902) quoted in González, *El béisbol*, 12.

created in 1930 to promote and regulate professional baseball tournaments in the country, Landino argues, a strong rivalry appeared between the teams Royal Criollos and Magallanes. The former team "was proud of only hiring Venezuelan players, while others started to look for 'importados' from Cuba and the USA."[105]

The growing public interest in baseball leading to the creation of the first professional league in 1930 can be seen in connection with the climate of political unrest as well as socio-cultural transformation affecting the country during this period. The massive incarceration of students in October 1928 had set off a period of increased repression and terror among the population. According to Javier González, sports offered one of the few recreational activities with which the government had little interference.[106] As a matter of fact, two of Gómez's sons were passionately attracted to baseball: they were involved with organizing baseball activities in the country and were also team owners.[107] For private entrepreneurs baseball offered a relatively low risk area for investment. Indeed, it was primarily private funds that financed the construction of modern ballparks.[108] Likewise, private sponsorship played a significant role in the professionalization of baseball, which, in turn, contributed to elevating the level of the sport. According to William McNeil, the appearance of professional baseball in Venezuela attracted many players from the Caribbean and the United States to the country. [109]

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[105] Leonte A. Landino "Baseball Around the World-Venezuela" online at iml.jou.ufl.edu/projects/Fall02/Landino/index.html (accessed 12 February 2008)

[106] González, *El béisbol*, 26.

[107] The *Liga Nacional de Béisbol* (National Baseball League) had been created in 1927 to regulate the different amateur tournaments taking place throughout the country. Its first president and vice-president were, respectively, Gonzalo Gómez and José Vicente Gómez. In addition to serving on the organization's board, the Gómez brothers owned their own teams, which were conspicuously associated with the regime. The team Paz y Unión, for instance, was named after the government's official motto "Unión, Paz y Trabajo." Another team, Independencia, was also named as to serve the regime's propaganda.

[108] One example is the modern Estadio de San Agustín near downtown Caracas, built by businessman Alfonzo Rivas in 1928. González, 25.

[109] William F. McNeil, *Black Baseball Out of Season: Play for Play Outside of the Negro Leagues* (North Carolina: McFarland and Company Corporation, 2007), 160.

It is widely accepted that the 1930s was a period of rapid growth for Venezuelan baseball. Javier González refers to this decade as the "Period of Consolidation" in the history of the sport in the country. As an invented tradition, I propose, baseball played a significant role in the consolidation of the nation during this critical decade when Gómez's dictatorship finally came to an end and the nation entered a slow process of transition towards democracy. Baseball allowed Venezuelans to imagine themselves as a national community as they saw themselves, first, participating in an internal culture of loyalty towards a specific team and later as part of an international voice. In 1930, the newly created Asociación Venezolana de Beisbol established the first national championship of first division—the first professional league—which not only elevated the level of the sport in the country as it attracted top players from abroad, but also created a mass culture of baseball. In March 1931, the first radio transmission of baseball in Venezuela inaugurated an era of live, mass access to cultural events without the need for physical presence in them. Most observers agree that some of the current rivalries originated precisely when baseball began to reach the masses in the early 1930s.[110]

But a concrete turning point in fully assimilating the tradition of baseball as an expression of national character came in 1941 when a Venezuelan team won the World Championship of Amateur Baseball held in Havana. After a series of games against national teams from Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Mexico, the United States, Panama, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic, the Venezuelan team faced the Cuban squad for the championship on 22 October. For the first time in the country's history a sports event had the effect of bringing the entire nation together. As Javier González points out, on that day "Venezuela halted to listen to the radio transmission

[110] The rivalry between the current teams *Leones del Caracas* and *Navegantes del Magallanes* is commonly held to have originated in 1931. It is important to note that in the dissemination of baseball as a form of mass culture, the first baseball cards consisting of individual player's pictures began to be issued as inserts in cigarette packages that same year. For details, see González, *El béisbol*, 29-30.

of the game. The council of ministers cancelled its scheduled session and declared a public holiday in private and public schools. Even retailers closed their doors."[111] He further adds:

> Venezuela won with a score of three runs against one, igniting an indescribable emotion in the entire country. The president of the republic, General Isaias Medina Angarita, decreed the twenty-second of October as a National Day of Sports. Scores of new teams were founded throughout the country. Everywhere people spoke of baseball, of the triumph of Venezuela."[112]

This association of baseball with the nation has proven crucial as an experiment in nation building. In Venezuela, this constructionist approach has helped not only institutions participate in the invention of official traditions such as the national day of sports, but also the people in finding a niche where they can identify themselves with a national character. Since it was first introduced in the country, baseball has been recognized in Venezuela as the national sport. Through the twentieth century, and to the present, baseball has played a significant role in bringing people together regardless of the economic or political situation. Unlike bullfighting, which has fallen in popularity due to a lack of mass-media promotion as well as anti-animal-cruelty activism, baseball has continued to expand to include not only amateur and professional organizations, but also as part of in-school and after-school programs for the youth. To this day, Venezuelans enjoy following dozens of native players who every year find their way into the North American major leagues. At the same time, Venezuelans are particularly devoted to the professional winter league which brings together some of the country's superstars between the months of October and February.

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[111] González, *El béisbol* 37.
[112] Ibid.

2.5.4 Radio

Starting in the 1930s the airwaves provided a powerful channel for the dissemination of this cult of sports as well as for the larger nation-building project. Radio broadcasting was introduced in Venezuela in 1924. That year an official license was granted to two business men in Caracas, Roberto Scholtz and Alfredo Moller, for the sale and rental of radio receivers and the set up of a broadcasting station.[113] According to the terms of the agreement, the station would rely on the rental and selling of equipment as its sole source of revenue. Similarly, it was to broadcast radio concerts by orchestras, bands, and solo singers as well as comedies, news, and government programs.[114] Following the 1928 student uprising, however, the station closed. The reasons for the closing vary from source to source but it apparently involved a combination of financial struggle and government pressure. In 1930 a more successful radio station, Broadcasting Caracas, began operations. This new station functioned on a commercial programming system but was also affiliated with the distribution of radio receivers.[115] Soon after the founding of Broadcasting Caracas, other commercial stations were created in the city and the interior, and by the mid-1940s there were approximately fifty commercial stations operating in Venezuela.[116]

From the outset, the programming of Broadcasting Caracas was varied and included classical and popular music, news, and the first radio soap operas.[117] This model was also adopted by most commercial radio stations, many of which incorporated transmissions of, and regular commentaries on, sports events, particularly, baseball, bullfights, boxing, and horse

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[113] Institute of Communication Research, Central University of Caracas, *Socio-Economic Aspects of National Communication Systems: III Radio Broadcasting in Venezuela* (Paris: Unesco, 1982), 3.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] *Socio-Economic Aspects of National Communication Systems*, 7.
[117] Mark Dinneen, *Culture and Customs of Venezuela* (Wetsport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), 75.

racing.[118] During the 1940s there were also numerous musical shows featuring international super stars such as Carlos Gardel, Pedro Infante, and Dámaso Perez Prado, as well as national singers and musicians.[119] For many native musicians, including those classically-trained at the School of Music, radio offered an outlet for public exposure and dissemination of their music. In some cases, musicians were able to launch national and international careers because of the opportunities that the radio afforded them. One such case, Alejandro Bruzual has pointed out, was the instrumental and vocal ensemble *Cantores del Trópico* (Singers of the Tropic), of which renown composer and guitarist Antonio Lauro was a member, started out as a radio music ensemble for the Broadcasting Caracas in 1935. The ensemble went on to become extremely popular not only in Venezuela but throughout South America primarily for its radio performances.[120]

Comedic shows and soap operas were also very popular in the 1930s and 40s and attracted the largest radio audiences in those days.[121] According to Mark Dinnen, one of the best known soup operas of the 1940s, *El derecho de nacer* (The Right to be Born), established a record for the largest number of listeners.[122] This kind of success, which incidentally was attractive to companies wishing to advertise their products during soap opera times, was crucial in the formation of a national imagination. A recent study on the evolution of radio in Venezuela published online has suggested that Venezuelan lexicon during the 1940s was dramatically affected by the language used in the radio, particularly the vocabulary used in advertisement and baseball. These influences, however, were not necessarily used for nationalist purposes but, on

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[118] Ibid., 76.
[119] Ibid.
[120] José Peñín and Walter Guido, eds. *Enciclopedia de la música en Venezuela* (Caracas: Fundación Bigott 1998), s.v. "Cantores del Trópico," by Alejandro Bruzual.
[121] Dinneen, *Culture and Customs*, 76.
[122] Ibid.

the contrary, often served as sources of cultural alienation. As a matter of fact, as the study suggests, one of the most significant influences upon Venezuelans' vocabulary of the period, was the adoption of a significant number of "Cubanisms."[123]

As a form of modernization, this was precisely the kind of dynamic that triggered nationalist reactions in Venezuela. As will be furthered discussed in this dissertation, the fast popularization of international music provoked some harsh reactions from the group associated with the renovation of art music, which saw these imported models as a threat to Venezuelan music.[124] This threat became a common topic in the nationalist rhetoric of art music renovation as well as in the revitalization of native popular and folk music.

Thus, radio was a powerful tool for channeling the national energies at least until the advent of television in the 1950s. The success of the radio industry, as Rubén Gallo has pointed out, was the result not only of its capacity to reach farther and faster than any other form of mass communication but also of its potential to reach a wider public.[125] With literacy no longer being a requisite, or at least not a pitfall, to gain access to a public culture, radio rapidly established itself as the principal agent for the dissemination of mass information. Indeed, in a country like Venezuela, with an illiteracy rate of about sixty percent of the population in the mid-1930s, radio became the most effective means to gather the nation.[126] Venezuelan governments began to recognize the importance of radio as a tool for reaching the nation in 1936. That year, under the

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[123] Yohana González and others, "La radio en Venezuela" online at http://www.monografias.com/trabajos14/radio-venezuela/radio-venezuela.shtml, accessed on 12/06/08.

[124] For example, Vicente Emilio Sojo, who criticized that in the 1930s Mexican and Cuban music had became prevalent among the Venezuelan public. On this see, Vicente Emilio Sojo, *Breves notas sobre algunos aspectos de la vida musical de una persona* (Caracas: Tipografía Principios 1964); reprint, *Revista musical de Venezuela* 21 (1987), 18.

[125] Rubén Gallo, *Mexican Modernity: The Avant-Garde and the Technological Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., Massachusetts Institute of Techonology Press, 2005), 125.

[126] The figures are for the year 1936. On this, see Banco Central de Venezuela, *Estadísticas socio-laborales de Venezuela: Series históricas 1936-1990,* Vol.2 (Caracas: Banco Central de Venezuela, 1993), 173.

government of Eleazar López Contreras, the country's first telecommunications law was enacted. It contemplated not only a series of regulations on radio communications but also recognized the importance of the medium for purposes of information and education.[127]

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In a nation that was in the process of forming a unified cultural community, radio could play an ambivalent role either as an agent of alienation or a unifier of national culture. Like sports, music provided a significant public ground for the construction of the national project in which the radio acted as an important outlet. Hence, from the perspective of invented traditions, the advent of radio also exerted a large influence upon the process of nation building and national consolidation.

The following three chapters deal with the process of inventing traditions in art music and the dynamics involved in such processes. As in baseball, art music in Venezuela was invigorated through the efforts of a group of enthusiasts who sought to introduce the latest trends in the country. They participated in the creation of an infrastructure and in laying down the mechanisms that ensure its welfare. They promoted and disseminated musical practices and sought official support, which began to increase when the government took notice of the potential of art music as a tool for channeling the energies of the masses. This became more apparent in the years following the death of Juan Vicente Gómez, as the new political leadership was actively engaged in rallying popular support through investing in the people, which was largely possible due to the fortified oil economy.

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[127] *Socio-Economic Aspects of National Communication Systems*, 5.

3.0 THE RENOVATION OF ART MUSIC

Most accounts of twentieth-century art music in Venezuela have the year 1918 as the beginning of modernization. According to this periodization, around that time a group of native musicians was introduced to some of the latest trends in European music through musical scores that had arrived in the hands of some foreign amateur musicians. The discovery of new music prompted these musicians to reflect on the state of art music in Venezuela. Like the artists associated with the *Círculo de Bellas Artes* had done a decade earlier, they began to question the institutions and their leadership for their old-fashioned academicism, which they regarded as being overtly sentimental to the point of banality with nothing relevant to contribute to the art-music world. As a result, they launched a process of musical renovation intended to elevate art-music life in the country to a level more in accord with European practices. The process involved not only their emergence as part of a new musical leadership but also their participation in the creation of a modern musical infrastructure. In what Fernando Coronil has referred to as "processes of self-colonization," the leaders of the renovation participated in the creation of an art-music culture in Venezuela that followed European models in its institutional and stylistic aspects but, at the same time, was reflective of internal socio-cultural conditions.[128]

[128] Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 73.

3.1 THE ARCHITECTS

The renovation of art music in Venezuela involved a large number of participants, including musicians, intellectuals, artists, and politicians. The three principal architects of the movement, however, were Vicente Emilio Sojo (1887-1974), Juan Bautista Plaza (1898-1965), and José Antonio Calcaño (1900-1978), three musicians who came of age in the 1910s. In their efforts to renovate musical life in Venezuela they touched upon virtually every aspect of music not only as a commodity but also as an artifact of nationhood, and for about four decades their influence was crucial for the country's musical developments. They were responsible for the creation of an art-music infrastructure, which materialized early on with the creation of the Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela and the Orfeón Lamas (respectively the country's first organized symphonic and choral societies) as well as with a series of curricular reforms introduced at the School of Music in Caracas.[129] They engaged in the study of Venezuelan folk music as well as in the history of the country's art-music tradition, which they set out to disseminate through lectures, conferences, and in scholarly and journalistic writing. Likewise, they composed music based on native elements and promoted the notion of musical nationalism as the style that art-music composition in the country ought to follow in order to make a significant contribution to modern art. Finally,

[129] For consistency in this dissertation, I use the generic term "School of Music" to refer to the only official school of music in Caracas until mid-twentieth century. The sources dealing with the school's history provide conflicting information regarding the school's name or the dates when names or curricular reforms were introduced. According to most sources, the school was established during the government of President Francisco Linarez Alcantara in 1877 as the music branch of the Instituto de Bellas Artes. This institution was renamed Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes in 1887 and consisted of an Academia de Música y Declamación (for the performing arts) and an Academia de Bellas Artes (for visual arts and architecture). In 1893 (or 1897 in other sources), the Academia de Música y Declamación was renamed Conservatorio de Música y Declamación. In 1915, the conservatory became independent from the academy and was renamed Escuela de Música y Declamación. It kept this name until 1941 when it was changed to Escuela Nacional de Música. With the establishment of a new preparatory school of music in 1945, the Escuela Nacional de Música was renamed Escuela Superior de Música and in 1947 it was given its current name, Escuela Superior de Música José Angel Lamas. On the school's history, see Maria Luisa Sanchez, *La enseñanza musical en Caracas* (Caracas: Tipografía La Torre, 1949) and *Enciclopedia de la música en Venezuela*, s.v. "Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes," by Walter Guido.

their political alignment enabled them to participate in cultural policy making and, ultimately, in the invention of official cultural traditions.

3.1.1 Vicente Emilio Sojo

The oldest in the group, Vicente Emilio Sojo, was born in the town of Guatire, some thirty-five miles east of Caracas, to a single mother on 8 December 1887. He described himself as coming from a family of farmers and artisans and took pride in his humble origins and the resources he appealed to in order to make a living (particularly, his twenty-nine years of work for a cigar company).[130] Even though Sojo claimed that he lacked a formal musical training, he has been documented to have received music lessons from his home-town's band director, Rómulo Rico, and, after settling in Caracas in 1906, at the School of Music, where he was enrolled in a course in harmony in 1910.[131]

In 1921 Sojo began teaching a course in theory and musicianship at the school and in 1936 he became the school's director. As head of the institution, Sojo set out to broaden the courses it offered, particularly in the areas of theory and composition studies for which he

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[130] Vicente Emilio Sojo, *Breves notas sobre algunos aspectos de la vida musical de una persona* (Caracas: Tipografía Principios, 1964); reprinted in Revista Musical de Venezuela 21 (1987), 13. On Sojo's life, see Felipe Izcaray, "The Legacy of Vicente Emilio Sojo: Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Venezuelan Orchestral Music" (D.M.A. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1996); Ana Mercedes Azuaje de Rugeles, "La ternura en el maestro Sojo," *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 22 (1987): 147-50; Inocente Carreño, "Vicente Emilio Sojo: Creador de arte y forjador de artistas," *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 22 (1987): 11-20; Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, "Dos evocaciones," *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 22 (1987): 149-58 and "Semblanza del Maestro Vicente Emilio Sojo," *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 24 (1988): 131-38; Felipe SanGiorgi, "El Maestro Vicente Emilio Sojo: vida y obra (fragmento)," *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 22 (1987): 77-102; Guido Acuña, Maestro Sojo (Caracas: Editorial Arte, 1986); Eduardo Lira Espejo, Vicente *Emilio Sojo* (Petare, Venezuela: Consejo Municipal del Distrito Sucre, 1977); Francisco Curt Lange, "El Maestro Vicente Emilio Sojo: Un animador y organizador decisivo del futuro musical venezolano," *El Universal*, 6 February 1939, reprinted in *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 22 (1987): 31-36.

[131] *Enciclopedia de la música en Venezuela*, s.v. "Vicente Emilio Sojo," by Felipe SanGiorgi. For Sojo's early musical training, see also José Peñín, "Régulo Rico, maestro de Sojo," *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 22 (1987): 35-73.

created a more comprehensive program leading to the degree of Maestro/a Compositor. Sojo took upon himself the instruction of all the core courses in composition and kept on teaching them until 1964 when he reduced his teaching load to half-time and stepped down as director of the school.[132] Similarly, in 1930 Sojo participated in the creation of the Orfeón Lamas and the Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela (two of the country's most influential musical organizations of the twentieth century). He was the music director of these two institutions from the outset and used them, especially the Orfeón, as a channel to promote Venezuelan music past and present.

As one of the chief architects of musical nationalism in Venezuela, Sojo's work was manifested on several grounds. First, he advocated for the study of Venezuelan folk music and folk traditions. As early as 1927 he began writing choral songs based on Venezuelan folklore. In 1937 he set out to compile and harmonize a large number of Venezuelan songs from the second half of the nineteenth century, which he deemed were in danger of being lost to the influx of foreign music.[133] Likewise, towards the end of the 1930s Sojo wrote a collection of songs inspired by Venezuelan nursery rhymes and children's folklore for the public schools. The first collection of songs, which was published by the National Ministry of Education in 1940, was followed by a number of similar collections by his students.[134]

A second area of Sojo's participation in the renovation movement involved the dissemination of music by Venezuelan colonial composers. The discovery in 1935 of a collection of over three hundred manuscripts dating from the late eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries sparked an interest in Venezuelan colonial music. Mostly sacred in character

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[132] Felipe Sangiorgi, "El Maestro Vicente Emilio Sojo: Vida y obra," *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 27 (1989), 95.

[133] Sojo, "Breves notas," 17-8.

[134] Vicente Emilio Sojo, *Diez canciones infantiles* (Caracas: Ministerio de Educación Nacional, Dirección de Cultura, 1940). On subsequent collections of songs, see Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, *50 años de música en Caracas: 1930-1980* (Caracas: Fundación Vicente Emilio Sojo, 1988), 79-109.

and scored for various vocal combinations and orchestra, the manuscripts confirmed a long-held belief that a strong musical movement had flourished in the city of Caracas in the decades preceding the independence war. Sojo, who in 1933 had brought together for the first time the Orfeón Lamas and the symphony for the performance of a mass by colonial composer José Angel Lamas, welcomed the newly discovered repertoire. He established an annual series of concerts featuring works by colonial composers, which lasted until the early 1960s when the Orfeón was dissolved.[135]

Sojo's most influential contribution to Venezuelan musical nationalism, however, occurred at the School of Music. As the director and chair of composition at the school, Sojo became a paradigmatic figure for most music students in Caracas. He encouraged his students not only to write music using elements of Venezuelan culture but also to become acquainted with other expressions of national culture, particularly literature and poetry.[136] As I will discuss in chapter five, Sojo exerted a tremendous influence upon his students' compositional choices, which in the case of some composers extended beyond their training years. He would suggest musical subjects, allusive titles, and even revisions to already finished works for the purpose of exalting national culture.[137]

Sojo's role as a leader of the nationalist project in Venezuelan music was crucial. He monopolized the musical institutions and along with Plaza and Calcaño solidified an exclusive association that had absolute control over all musical matters in the city of Caracas.[138] He

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[135] Ana Mercedes Azuaje de Rugeles, Maria Guinand, and Bolivia Bottome, *Historia del movimiento coral y de las orquestas juveniles en Venezuela* (Caracas: Cuadernos Lagoven, 1986), 29.

[136] Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, "Dos evocaciones," *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 22 (1987), 152.

[137] Inocente Carreño, Interview by author, 8 July 2000, Caracas, videotape recording. On Sojo's leadership, see also Fidel Rodríguez Legendre, *Música, Sojo y caudillismo cultural* (Caracas: Fundación Vicente Emilio Sojo, 1998).

[138] As a matter of fact, the control that these three musicians exerted upon the institutions and music life in the city became the subject of heated criticism in the press. The most vocal of their detractors was a former director

aligned himself with the political bureaucracies of the post-Gomez period, a relationship that brought in significant improvements to the musical institutions. He was a founding member of the *Acción Democrática* party and served in the national assembly formed after president Medina Angarita was overthrown, and later as a member of the parliament under president Rómulo Gallegos.

3.1.2 Juan Bautista Plaza

Juan Bautista Plaza was born in Caracas in 1898 to a long-established upper-middle-class family. He was brought up in a musical environment but he did not show any serious interest in music until his secondary school years at the Colegio Frances when he wrote a few piano pieces as well as a zarzuela, *Zapatero a tu zapato*, for the school. During his years at the Colegio Frances, an elite private school in Caracas, he also became interested in languages, literature, and astronomy but had no definite career plan. In 1916 he entered the Unversidad Central de Venezuela majoring in law, switching later to medicine before abandoning the university to pursue a musical career. In 1920 the Metropolitan Chapter of the Caracas Cathedral granted Plaza a scholarship to pursue sacred music studies in Rome in exchange for his commitment to serve as chapel master at the cathedral upon his return.[139]

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of the school of music, Miguel Angel Espinel, who for nearly two decades starting in 1930 published a number of articles denouncing what he perceived as a musical autocracy of unlimited power. He went on to coin the term "Philharmonic Trinity" as an allegory for the divine authority that three musicians had created for themselves. On the tirades of Miguel Angel Espinel and other detractors, see Marie Elizabeth Labonville "Musical Nationalism in Venezuela: The Work of Juan Bautista Plaza (1898-1965)" (Ph. D. diss., University of California-Santa Barbara, 1999), 557-603.

[139] For Plaza's life and work, see Miguel Castillo Didier, *Juan Bautista Plaza: Una vida por la música y por Venezuela* (Caracas: Concejo Nacional de la Cultura, Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones y Estudios Musicales Vicente Emilio Sojo, 1985) and Labonville "Musical Nationalism in Venezuela." A version of the latter study has recently been published as *Juan Bautista and Musical Nationalism in Venezuela* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

Plaza returned to Caracas in July 1923 and began a very prolific musical career encompassing not only a twenty-five year tenure as a chapel master of the cathedral but also a lifelong vocation as a composer, musicologist, music critic, promoter, educator, and cultural policy maker. Because of the broad scope of Plaza's participation in musical activities in Venezuela, and because he engaged in all these activities out of nationalist sentiments aimed at improving musical conditions in the country, Plaza's contribution to the formation of a nationalist movement in Venezuela was crucial.

As a composer, Plaza produced over 500 works. Roughly a third of his compositions are religious works intended for the cathedral's chapel. The rest consist of a variety of genres and styles, making his music very diverse stylistically. He wrote music in the style of Venezuelan popular music and incorporated elements of folk music into his more classically-conceived compositions. He wrote works of nationalist character where the connections to native subjects appeared by means of some programmatic reference. He also wrote music with no nationalist intentions and even experimented with avant-garde techniques late in his life.[140] As a musicologist, he became interested in Venezuelan colonial music in the early 1930s. He wrote critical and analytical accounts on compositions by colonial composers and began lecturing on the subject. Following the discovery of the collection of colonial music manuscripts, Plaza was appointed to organize, copy, and preserve the music. He also began to write scholarly articles on Venezuelan colonial music and musicians and to lecture on the musical developments in Caracas at the turn of the nineteenth century, which gained him international recognition in musicological circles.[141]

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[140] Plaza's music is discussed in chapter five of this dissertation.

[141] In 1942 he gave several lectures in the U. S. on Venezuelan colonial music, including a paper presented at the Greater New York chapter of the American Musicological Society. The following year *The Musical Quarterly*

Plaza was an avid writer and frequently contributed to Caracas newspapers and cultural magazines. His journalistic output dealt with a variety of music topics including Venezuelan and European music history, folklore, and musical nationalism. He also wrote concert reviews and musical criticism frequently dealing with the topic of musical life and music composition in the country. As a music promoter, Plaza was associated with the Orfeón Lamas and the Orquesta Sinfóniva Venezuela from their creation in 1930. For many years he was a member of the board of directors of these two organizations. He also contributed his own compositions to the ensembles and conducted them in performances. He was one of the founders and the director of the Asociación Venezolana de Conciertos, an organization that sponsored the performances of the symphony as well as chamber-music concerts by both national and international artists. He was interested in awakening a broad interest in art-music appreciation. He frequently lectured promoting musical performances in Caracas and, in 1939, started a series of radio programs on art music appreciation aimed at educating large audiences.

Plaza's contributions to music education were also crucial for the renovation of art music in Venezuela. In 1924 he started teaching a course in composition and harmony at the school and in 1931 he was appointed to the newly created chair in music history at the School of Music. His music-history course was open to anyone interested in the subject and his lecture notes continued to be used after Plaza had left his position.[142] In 1938 he began to assess the state of music education in the country. He complained that Venezuela was behind other Latin American

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published one of his articles on the subject and the Instituto Interamericano de Musicología in Montevideo, Uruguay, completed the publication of a collection of works by Venezuelan colonial composers, *Archivo de Música Colonial Venezolana*, which Plaza had edited.

[142] According to his brother Eduardo, Plaza's lectures on music history had a popular appeal and were even advertised in the newspapers. Likewise, Eduardo Plaza points out, transcripts of his music-history lectures continued to circulate among students at the school after his death in dead in 1965. See, Eduardo Plaza Alfonzo's prologue to Juan Bautista Plaza, *El Lenguaje de la música: Lecciones populares sobre música* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1966), 5.

countries and blamed the state for not having supported a musical education infrastructure. In 1942, the Minster of National Education commissioned Plaza to travel to the United States and Mexico in order to study music education methods in those countries and their feasibility in Venezuela. In 1944 he was appointed Director of Culture at the Ministry of National Education. In this position, Plaza set out to introduce a very comprehensive reform of the music education system, including the adoption of an elementary-school music curriculum, the creation of a new school of music in Caracas for the training of young musicians as well as school music teachers, and the reorganization of the old School of Music as an institution dedicated exclusively to advanced musical studies.

Through all of these activities Plaza participated in a nationalist project. He believed in music as a tool for bringing people together. In an article from 1917, in a rhetoric that resonated with current positivist thought, he dealt with the topic of national culture and the potential of music in channeling that notion:

> Of all the fine arts none like music possesses this faculty to such a high degree and, therefore, none like [music] contributes more effectively toward better unifying and binding together the sentiments of a race. From the best-known of our folk melodies to our glorious National Anthem, we find always the same form of expression, the same manner of feeling.
>
> Why, if our nation is so musical and our music so characteristic, do we not concern ourselves a little more with cultivating this sublime art and that which it typifies among us?[143]

These aspects of music, encompassing its appreciation, its cultivation, and its power to convey a sense of national identity, autonomy, and unity, were present in most of his musical endeavors for the following six decades. Unlike Sojo, whose principal contribution to nationalism took place at the School of Music and was most conspicuously manifested through

[143] Juan Bautista Plaza, "Nuestra música," *Patria y Arte* 1 (November 1917), 24. Quoted in Labonville "Musical Nationalism in Venezuela," 204 (her translation).

his teaching at the School of Music, Plaza's efforts were mostly geared towards reaching the masses and inculcating in them certain cultural values through which they came to recognize themselves as a unified national community.

3.1.3 José Antonio Calcaño

Like Plaza, José Antonio Calcaño was brought up in an upper-middle-class household in Caracas where he was born in 1900. A member of the city elite, his family had cultivated the arts and literature for generations. He grew up speaking English and Spanish at home and learned German at the Colegio Alemán Froebel in Caracas where he received his formal education, continuing later at the Universidad Central de Venezuela where he attended medical school. Calcaño started piano lessons at home at age four, cello at twelve, and between 1913 and 1925 he was enrolled at the School of Music in courses in theory and musicianship, piano, and theatrical declamation.[144]

By 1919 Calcaño was associated with a group of young musicians and intellectuals who credited themselves with introducing to the country the latest trends in European art music. He was responsible for coining the term "musical renovation" in association with the group's efforts to update art music in the country. According to Calcaño, this movement was a necessity among the younger generation of artists aiming at being current with Europe, because "Caracas's old

[144] For a biographical outline of Calcaño, see Walter Guido's "Cronología: 1900-1978" in José Antonio Calcaño, *La Ciudad y su música: Crónica musical de Caracas* 1st. Edition (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2001):419-520. For other biographical essays by Walter Guido, see José Peñín and Walter Guido, editors, *Enciclopedia de la música en Venezuela*, s.v. "José Antonio Calcaño," and "José Antonio Calcaño: Un músico integral," *Papel musical: Revista de Juventudes Musicales de Venezuela* 6 (November-December, 1990): 18-23. Also, see Rebeca Perli, *José Antonio Calcaño: Una biografía* (Caracas: Fundarte, 1994).

musicians of the time did not show any interest whatsoever for learning the new European trends," let alone any motivation to make their students aware of those trends.[145]

Calcaño was a well-educated man whose many interests were reflected throughout his career. During the mid-1920s he began to write newspaper articles on musical criticism as well as poetry and articles on literature and the arts. Between 1929 and 1946, he worked for the Venezuelan diplomatic mission in several posts, including civil attaché of the Venezuelan government to Switzerland, and Venezuelan consul to Dublin, and to St. Louis, Missouri. In addition to being an accomplished musician, Calcaño stood out for his work as a music critic and musicologist; the latter not only encompassed his work on behalf of Venezuelan music history but also his pioneer work in ethnomusicological studies in the country. His scholarly production was extensive but generally targeted towards a general public. In 1939 he published his *Contribución al estudio de la música en Venezuela*, a collection of essays on various topics of Venezuelan music, including colonial art music as well as folk and indigenous music. His *La Ciudad y su música* of 1958 is still regarded as one of the most comprehensive and authoritative accounts of Venezuelan music history. Intended for a general readership, the book recounts the development of music and musical life in Caracas while providing a chronicle of the city's life and history. Its good prose has been recognized not only through several official and scholarly awards, including the 1959 Municipal Prose Award and the 1960 Niels Sherover award for essays and scientific work, but also through its multiple editions and reprints.[146]

Calcaño also worked on behalf of Venezuelan music as a music critic. He wrote concert reviews and criticism in most newspapers and magazines in Caracas, and through his pen name,

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[145] Calcaño, *La Ciudad y su música*, 364.

[146] Calcaño, *La Ciudad y su música: Crónica musical de Caracas,* 1st ed., (Caracas: Conservatorio Teresa Carreño, 1958); (Caracas: Fundarte, 1980); (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1985); (Caracas: Ediciones de la Biblioteca Central de la Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2001).

"Juan Sebastian," he came to be recognized as one of the most authoritative figures in musical matters in the country.[147] Like Plaza, Calcaño was a very active public speaker. He lectured frequently and extensively. Starting in 1934 he drew attention to Venezuelan folk music after presenting a series of lectures on various folk musical genres and musical instruments.[148] As a promoter and organizer of music he engaged in a number of activities after resettling in Caracas from his diplomatic mission. In 1951 he founded and directed the Conservatorio Teresa Carreño, where he also taught music appreciation. Likewise, he presented frequent lectures on Venezuelan culture and music at the Universidad Central de Venezuela. In 1957 the Conservatorio Teresa Carreño produced a twelve-disc *Curso de apreciación musical*, which is still popular in Venezuela. He also began a television show entitled *Por el mundo de la cultura*, which gained him the prestigious Guaicaipuro de Oro award for the most distinguished TV show in 1957 and again in 1958.[149]

Calcaño's compositional output was not as extensive as Plaza's or Sojo's. Of the nearly sixty compositions that have survived, about two thirds consist of unaccompanied choral works, either original or arrangements of works by others.[150] Most of his compositions deal with national subjects but the style varies from folk-sounding works to more modern approaches to harmony and instrumental color. Despite his relatively small catalogue of compositions, his indirect involvement with the training of musicians at the school, and his extended absences

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[147] It was customary in the Caracas press at the time to write under a pseudonym. In the late 1920s, Calcaño wrote under "Victor Avila" before adopting "Juan Sebastian." His journalistic contributions appeared in several newspapers and magazines, including *El Heraldo, El Sol, El Impulso, El Universal, El Nuevo diario.* Despite his abundant contributions to those periodicals, no systematic catalogue of his writings exists.

[148] That year he gave a series of seven lectures on "The music of Venezuela" at the School of Music. The lectures were advertised in the press and commented upon by other critics, including Plaza. Versions of these lectures and other articles on Venezuelan folk music were included in his *Contribución al estudio de la música en Venezuela* (Caracas: Editorial Elite, 1939).

[149] Guido, "Cronología," 488-490.

[150] For Calcaño's catalogue of works, see *Enciclopedia de la música en Venezuela*, s.v, "Jose Antonio Calcaño," by Walter Guido.

from the country, Calcaño gained a reputation as one of the architects of the renovation primarily for his contributions as a critic and historian.

3.2 MUSICAL RENOVATION

In writing the history of twentieth-century art music in Venezuela, these musical leaders have referred to their own arrival in the musical scene in the 1920s as the beginning of "musical renovation."[151] The renovation was a movement towards improving music and musical conditions in the Venezuela. They viewed art music in the country as being obsolete with respect to Europe because of three fundamental aspects: the lack of a modern musical infrastructure, the overt sentimentalism that characterized music composition in the country and that had prevented it from progressing into more sophisticated styles, and the overall public neglect of art music.

At the turn of the twentieth century, musical life in Venezuela was centered primarily in Caracas and was confined almost exclusively to the Italian opera seasons that were presented sporadically by international companies and to the intimate practices of salon music. In a lighter vein, the weekly concerts put together by Banda Marcial Caracas, a wind ensemble originated as a military band, contributed to popularize operatic works as well as national airs by leading composers. Similarly, Venezuelan audiences were attracted to zarzuelas, which were frequently presented by both local and international companies in Caracas as well as in the country's other principal cities.

[151] José Antonio Calcaño, *La Ciudad y su música*, 364.

The absence of stable musical institutions in the country, such as concert organizations, symphony orchestras, or choral societies, hindered the existence of professional musicians, who typically depended on a combination of occasional jobs, teaching, and non-musical activities to make a living. Aside from the military bands, performance opportunities for musicians were ad hoc, in ballroom and zarzuela orchestras, small ensembles used to accompany silent films, and church services.[152] As for professional musical training, the School of Music in Caracas was the primary institution for musical studies in the country. It had been established in 1877 as the music branch of the Instituto de Bellas Artes. Through a series of administrative reforms during the remainder of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, the school underwent significant changes with regards to the programs it offered and the actual name of the institution.

Although courses in theory and composition were offered at the school, it was not until the mid-1930s, when Sojo became the director of the institution, that a comprehensive curriculum in composition was introduced. The generation of composers who preceded the group of renovation cultivated a musical style that had prevailed for several decades. The bulk of musical repertoire from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries consisted primarily of piano music. Some composers wrote significantly in the form of fantasies and rhapsodies on operatic melodies but most cultivated dance music including polkas, *danzas*, and Venezuelan *valses.* Particularly the *vals* (waltz) became the most cultivated genre among professional and amateur musicians.[153] According to José Antonio Calcaño, the *vals* was especially appealing to audiences and musicians because of its use of rhythmic patterns associated with folk dances,

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[152] Alberto Calzavara, *Trayectoria cincuentenaria de la Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela: 1930-1980* (Caracas: Fundarte, 1980), 20.

[153] Interchangeably referred to as *vals* or *valse*, this genre was the most prevalent form of art music during the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. On *vals*, see Mariantonia Palacios "Rasgos distintivos del valse Venezolano en el siglo XIX," *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 35 (September-December, 1997): 99-115; and *Enciclopedia de la Música en Venezuela*, s.v. "Vals," by José Peñín.

particularly *joropo*, which in combination with the European waltz produced very likable results among Venezuelans. Those rhythmic designs include abundant syncopations, which appear not only in the melody but also in the accompaniment; the melodic treatment of the bass line, which contrasts sharply with the rhythmic simplicity of the Viennese waltz; the juxtaposition of various rhythmic patterns; and the freedom with which musicians usually carry out the performances.[154] During the second half of the nineteenth century Venezuela's best known composers, including Felipe Larrazábal (1816-1873), Federico Villena (1853-1899), and Ramón Delgado Palacios (1867-1902), gained a reputation for their significant contribution to the genre. Their *valses* were frequently published both in the country and abroad and were widely circulated as collections or as individual pieces appearing as inserts in various cultural magazines and journals.[155] The popularity of the *vals* continued well into the twentieth century with virtually no stylistic or structural changes.[156] It expanded from the intimate salons to the open-air concerts offered weekly by the military bands in public squares. Therefore, by the time Plaza, Sojo, and Calcaño appeared in the public scene the musical leadership in the country consisted of composers who were highly regarded for their contribution to the Venezuelan *vals*, most notably Salvador Narciso Llamozas (1854-1940) and Pedro Elias Gutierrez (1870-1954).

3.2.1 Motivation for Renovation

The influx of technology and human resources Venezuela was experiencing when the renovators came of age had a direct impact on art music. José Antonio Calcaño has argued that the process

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[154] Calcaño, *La Ciudad y su Música*, 308.

[155] For music printing and music circulation during the nineteenth century in Venezuela, see Hugo Quintana "La empresa editora de música en la Caracas de fines del siglo XIX y principios del XX: 1870-1930," *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 35 (September-December, 1997): 117-153.

[156] For the style and structure of the Venezuelan *vals* see Mariantonia Palacios "Rasgos distintivos"

of renovation began in the early 1920s when native musicians inadvertently became acquainted with the latest trends in European music. According to Calcaño, during those years a number of amateur foreign musicians were assigned in the country to various diplomatic and corporate functions. Among them, Calcaño mentions the contributions of a Mr. Richter, a Scottish musician who had studied in Vienna with Arthur Nikisch, but who had emigrated to the United States after World War I. In the U.S., Richter worked as a bookkeeper for a cigarette factory which sent him to Venezuela in 1920 to work as an accountant for a subsidiary company. In Venezuela, Calcaño recalls:

> Richter met José Antonio Calcaño and, along with Doctor Manuel Leoncio Rodriguez and Francisco Esteban Caballero, began to get together to play string quartets. Richter, who besides being a violinist was a good pianist, one day took from among his papers the first volume of Debussy's preludes and played some of them. Calcaño borrowed the volume and, in a few days, the small group from Caracas became acquainted with that new music. This awoke an immediate enthusiasm and was the starting point of many other activities; they collected some [money] among themselves and ordered from France a good amount of works by Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, D'Indy, Roger-Ducasse, and some others. The majority of it was works for piano but some chamber music—trios, quartets—came as well.[157]

In addition to Richter, Calcaño makes reference to other foreign musicians who contributed to introduce modern music in Venezuela:

> Two other foreigners also figured in that story: they were the Dutchmen G. Witteveen and J. P. J. A. B. Marx. The former was a geologist and the latter a banker. Both were amateur pianists and in their homes several of our musicians used to gather to play chamber music…. In these meetings new composers became known also: the songs of Richard Strauss, some by Darius Milhaud or Eric Satie.
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> Around the same time, Djalma Pinto-Ribeiro Lessa came as a secretary of the legation of Brazil. He was a violinist who could have been a professional concert artist if he had chosen to do so. Lessa also introduced us to a large amount modern music, which further stimulated the orientation that was already being formed among us. It is necessary to also add the name of Yves Gaden, a young French violinist, half Bohemian and full of enthusiasm, who almost immediately

[157] Calcaño, *La Ciudad y su música*, 365-66.

> assimilated the Venezuelan temperament and during the years he passed among us was like one more resident of Caracas. He was another valuable link in that musical chain that was being formed.[158]

Along with the advent of foreign musicians who introduced modern music to the country, Calcaño points out that the arrival of phonographic recordings also contributed to the consolidation of the renovation movement. During the early years of recordings, he and his acquaintances frequently got together in private homes in order to hear orchestral music by Mozart and Wagner as well as the more recent composers. All these, he concluded, motivated native musicians to order music scores, books, and magazines from Europe and, at the same time, stimulated native composers to write music exploring modern sonorities.[159]

According to Calcaño these modernist trends were not well received by the older, more conservative generation of Venezuelan musicians who were not interested in modern music. In fact, he points out that the advent of new music generated "discussions in the press, disputes, gossip and intrigues."[160] Indeed, the advent of modernization and the rise of Plaza, Sojo, and Calcaño as the leaders of musical renovation brought about a generational antagonism in which the elder musicians began to be regarded by the lesser as an outdated or even ignorant generation. In a rhetoric that resonated with that of the *Círculo de Bellas Artes*, Calcaño made a rather pessimistic assessment of the state of art music in Venezuela at the turn of the twentieth century:

> In Europe, events of the greatest importance had occurred in the world of music. There had appeared the Russians with their new music; Wagner had started one of the most transcendental musical revolutions; impressionism had appeared in France; the English stood out, and even the sleeping Spain had opened her eyes, without Venezuelan musicians ever noticing any of that. From Guzmán until 1919

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[158] Ibid, 366.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid, 367. As will be further discussed in the next two chapters, Venezuelan press was receptive to public debates on Venezuelan music and musical leadership, particularly during the late 1930s and early 1940s.

> the most recent authors that native composers knew were Chopin, who had passed away sixty years earlier, the empty Gottschalk, and, in this century, they began to play the little piano pieces by Grieg, Godard, and Chaminade. All this reveals a sad disorientation.[161]

Juan Bautista Plaza had expressed some of the same concerns as early as 1921 when he was a student in Rome. In a letter to a friend he regretted the state of backwardness of Venezuelan music, which he suggested was largely due to laziness:

> I am sure that if a Pedro Elias Gutierres [sic], a Salvador Llamosas [sic] and so many other beautiful talents that we possess had come to Europe in their youth, and had received here a complete musical education, we would be perhaps the first of the South American countries in musical production. But our tropical indolence, that dreadful "laisser aller"—truly dreadful—that dominates us, has not permitted, nor will ever permit that the Venezuelan artist elevate himself by an elbow above the level of the saddest mediocrity.[162]

This critique of music and musical life in Venezuela constituted the basis for the renovation movement. It not only allowed the group of Calcaño and Plaza to create and awareness of the state of decadence of Venezuelan music with respect to Europe but also facilitated the creation of the mechanisms for renovation. At the same time, this critique allowed Sojo, Plaza, and Calcaño to consolidate their position as the new musical leadership in the country, which they did by applying their rhetoric of renovation to all aspects of music that concerned them, including sacred, concert, popular and folk music.

3.2.2 Renovation of Church-Music Practices

The earliest tangible signs of musical renovation appeared in church music about 1920. That year the Caracas Metropolitan Chapter granted Juan Bautista Plaza a scholarship to study sacred

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[161] Calcaño, *La Ciudad y su música*, 363.

[162] Juan Bautista Plaza, Rome, to Edgard Ganteaume Tovar, 14 July 1921, quoted in Labonville "Juan Bautista Plaza: A Documented Chronology; Catalogue of His Writings; Plaza and the Press" *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 38 (September-December 1998), 65.

music in Rome for three years (with a fourth year of funding if necessary) in exchange for a five-year commitment to work as chapel master and organist at the Caracas cathedral and as a teacher of sacred music at the seminary upon his return to the country.[163] As Plaza recalled the story, his granting of the scholarship was largely due to the efforts of Monsignor Ricardo Bartoloni, a Florentine priest, who between 1918 and 1922 was assigned as the secretary to the nuncio in Caracas.[164] A musician himself, Bartoloni had been director of the choir at the cathedral of Florence where he had collaborated with composer Lorenzo Perosi. In Caracas, Bartoloni was very enthusiastic about music, and helped organize performances of large scale sacred works by Perosi. At the same time, he became concerned with the practice of music in Venezuelan churches, which did not comply with the regulations implemented by Pious X in his 1903 *Motu proprio*. Upon Bartoloni's recommendation the Caracas Metropolitan Chapter initiated a series of reforms in sacred music, including sending Plaza to Europe to receive the proper training as a church music director.[165] Apparently, the choice of Plaza for the scholarship was Bartoloni's. The two had become acquainted at the Colegio Francés, where Plaza had attended secondary school and later worked part-time as a music teacher. Bartoloni believed that Plaza was one of the most promising young musicians in the city, and recommended that he be sent to Rome to study at the Pontificia Scuola Superiori di Musica Sacra.[166]

According to Marie Elizabeth Labonville, the needs for church music reforms corresponded to the prevalent state of corruption and abuses with which music was approached in the cathedral and other churches.[167] Gregorian chant was neglected and the great works of

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[163] Miguel Castillo Didier, 84-5.
[164] Juan Bautista Plaza, "A la memoria del Monseñor Bartoloni," *El Universal* 5 December 1933.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Labonville "Juan Bautista Plaza," 250.

vocal polyphony were abandoned in favor of operatic music and works based on the style of bel canto. Similarly, instrumental music had replaced the organ as the main instrumental force in church. Thus, reforming church-music was a comprehensive project that sought to implement the regulations of the *Motu proprio* and involved not only the cultivation of a specific musical repertoire but also the creation of the mechanisms to ensure the proper implementation of such regulations beginning at the Caracas cathedral and subsequently expanding to all churches.[168]

In July 1921 Archbishop Felipe Rincón Gonzalez approved a resolution aimed at implementing the mandates of the *Motu propio* in Venezuela. The resolution consisted of a series of regulations regarding musical practices at the Caracas cathedral and involved the appointment of a committee to ensure that those regulations were implemented by other churches as well. [169] Among other aspects, the resolution established that church musicians must be qualified by means of professional training, which included proficiency in Gregorian chant and classical polyphony. Church musicians were also required to share some Roman-Catholic beliefs and to possess an honest character, which was to be determined by the committee. As for the actual music, the resolution mandated that the majority of liturgical works were to come from the Gregorian repertoire or classical polyphony. More modern music could be performed so long as it was previously approved by the committee. The criteria for the use of other repertoire demanded that the focal point of music was to be the voice and that solo vocal passages should not predominate. Songs in the vernacular were accepted only during private or non-liturgical ceremonies. As for the use of the organ, performers were to be careful not to overpower the singers; similarly, organ interludes had to be approved by the committee. The use of other

[168] Ibid.

[169] For details on the 1921 reforms, including the entire text of the resolution, see Felipe Rincón González, "Comisión arquidiocesana de música sagrada," *Boletín Eclesiástico de la Arquidiócesis* 16 no. 7 (30 July 1921).

musical instruments was banned during the seasons of Lent and Advent. Organ could be used in those seasons but only to provide a soft accompaniment to the choir.[170]

Two years after the adoption of the resolution Plaza received his degree in Sacred-Music Composition from the Pontificia Scuola Superiori di Musica Sacra in Rome. He returned to the country immediately in order to begin his employment at the Caracas cathedral. His return to the country had been highly anticipated as he was regarded as the highest authority in sacred music. Venezuelan newspapers widely publicized his appointment at the cathedral as well as the situation leading to his employment and the series of reforms that he would implement in church music.[171] At 300 bolívares per month, Plaza's salary as chapel master and organist more than doubled that of his predecessor Pedro Arcílagos.[172] His duties at the cathedral involved conducting the choir during daily religious services in which liturgical song took place (Terce, Conventual Mass, Vespers), directing the metropolitan chapter choir during its participation in special services, preparing and directing the music for major church feasts, and maintaining the musical archive of the cathedral.[173]

As a church musician, and a devoted catholic, Plaza was committed to the musical regulations of the *Motu proprio*. He compiled a large collection of music for the cathedral consisting of Gregorian chants, sacred vocal polyphony from the sixteenth century, and more recent sacred compositions that were not influenced by secular songs or theatrical art.[174]

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[170] Rincón González, "Comisión arquidiocesana de música sagrada."

[171] Labonville, "Juan Bautista Plaza," 262.

[172] Archivo de la Catedral de Caracas, *Actas del cabildo* XXXVIII fols 276-277. Quoted in Castillo Didier, *Juan Bautista Plaza: Una* vida,132.

[173] Juan Bautista Plaza, letter to Archbishop Rincón González, Caracas August 1928. Quoted in Labonville, 266-68.

[174] For the *Motu proprio* regulations, see Robert F. Hayburn, *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music, 96 A.D to 1977 A.D.* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1979).

Similarly, during his twenty-five-year tenure as a chapel master he wrote over 150 works for the cathedral and encouraged his acquaintances to produce sacred works in the same lines.[175]

In addition to providing and supervising music for the cathedral, Plaza took a very active role in creating a public awareness of what church music should be like as well as the decadent state of music in Venezuelan churches. He addressed these concerns primarily through a series of newspaper articles, which began to appear shortly after his return from Rome. Some of the articles had an educational tone and dealt with specific musical works, their history, and their relevance to the catholic liturgy.[176] Some others were very critical of the state of religious music in the country, which he blamed on an incompetent musical leadership:

> In our numerous religious festivities we have never heard anything that comes directly from that splendid musico-liturgical source. The gravest of this, is that strict polyphony, along with Gregorian chant, is the music recognized as liturgical par excellence by the church. What is it, then, that we have heard to date in our temples? Something indescribable, not even worth talking about: the saddest caricature of liturgical music; a hybrid assembly of everything that most opposes the true sacred art, such as rigorously defined by the church in Rome. What we have always heard, what we will continue to hear for who knows how long, is everything but choral song, serious and sonorous: it is the orchestra, what is pompously called "the orchestra": an ill-combined instrumental ensemble that, when it is relatively numerous, completely drowns out the voices, which are the essential element of the sacred ceremony. And when [the orchestra] is poor, as it frequently occurs, it consists, for example, of these three "ineffable" instruments, whose "harmonious" effects of ensemble need no comment: an euphonium, a clarinet, and a violin! This suffices, however, so that often in the programs of whatever festivity there will appear printed in headlines the following suggestive—anti-liturgical—ad: "At 9 AM, Grand Mass, with full orchestra."
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> …sacred song must be a collective prayer—this is the impression it should always give—and not the occasion to have us hear, where there is no need to, the

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[175] Particularly Vicente Emilio Sojo, who had acted as interim chapel master when Plaza was in Rome, wrote a number of compositions for the cathedral. On Sojo's works for the cathedral see *Enciclopedia de la música en Venezuela*, s.v. "Vicente Emilio Sojo," by Felipe Sangiorgi.

[176] In September 1925, for example, on the occasion of a performance of Tartini's Stabat Mater, he published an article describing the piece and discussing the text. Juan Bautista Plaza, "El Stabat Mater de Tartini en la Catedral," *La Religión*, 12 September 1925. For a catalogue of Plaza's publications during this period, see Labonville, "Juan Bautista Plaza: A Documented Chronology; Catalogue of his Writings; Plaza and the Press," *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 38 (Sep-Dec 1998): 1-172.

> "beautiful" voice of tenor X or baritone Y, and much less, to torture us with the endless instrumental whining of out-of-tune bands. [177]

Though Plaza's criticism addresses music and musical practices in the church, it implicitly exposes the larger problems surrounding musical life in the country. He complained that the Venezuelan musical leaders at the time had not been faithful to the principles and values of music; instead, they had used music as a tool for self-promotion. He criticized the neglect of classical polyphony in churches in favor of an "orchestral cacophony." He accused church musicians of being ignorant of the meaning of sacred singing, which in his view "must always be a collective prayer."[178] In another article, Plaza used a similarly harsh tone to voice his opinion on the detrimental state of the organs in the country's principal churches. According to Plaza, there were very good instruments in the country; nevertheless, with the only exception of musician Ramón Delgado Palacios (1867-1902) who had studied organ in Paris, there were not musicians trained to play those instruments. Rather, Plaza argues, Venezuelan organists were essentially pianists who pretended that the playing technique of the organ was similar to that of the piano. Thus, he wrote, "this brought with it the consequences that such organs—some of which were built by no less than the Cavaillé-Coll house—once in the hands of those improvised organists…in a short time, and due to inappropriate use, lost their primary virtue: that of sounding like organs and not like great grotesque and out-of-tune boxes."[179]

During the early years of Plaza's professional career, he built a reputation for himself as a musical authority. This was manifested not only through the dramatic changes that music at the cathedral had undergone but also through his publicly stated opinions about music in general and

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[177] Juan Bautista Plaza, "El Orfeón Lamas en la Santa Capilla," *El Universal,* 25 November 1931. Reprinted in *La música en nuestra vida,* 286-7.

[178] Ibid., 287.

[179] Juan Bautista Plaza "Los organistas y el arte de la improvisación," *El Nuevo Diario,* 17 March 1932. Reprinted in *La música en nuestra vida,* 267.

music in Venezuela. Starting around 1927, he began publishing articles on a variety of musical topics in several newspapers and cultural magazines in Caracas, including *El Universal*, *El Nuevo Diario*, and *El Nacional*.[180] In these articles he dealt with music criticism, concert reviews, music history and appreciation, and more, thus solidifying his position as a musical authority and as an intellectual leader. Moreover, those articles allowed Plaza to channel his nationalist project, which in collaboration with Sojo and Calcaño, began to take shape in the early 1930s.

3.2.3 Renovation of Music Composition

To a large extent, the advent of Juan Bautista Plaza as well as Vicente Emilio Sojo and José Antonio Calcaño in the public scene during the 1920s heralded the end of old music models. They presented themselves as part of a generation of change by associating themselves with other like-minded musicians and intellectuals, by participating in the creation of new musical organizations.[181] Around this time, Plaza and Sojo began to write music that departed from the conservatism of their predecessors not only in musical style, but also in performing forces and technical demands on the performers. Because neither symphony orchestras nor organized choirs existed at the time, the renovators set out to create the conditions for orchestral and choral music to flourish by composing music for those ensembles as well as by promoting music for those forces.

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[180] For Plaza's contributions to newspapers and magazines, see Labonville, "Musical Nationalism in Venezuela" and "Juan Bautista Plaza: A Documented Chronology"

[181] As a matter of fact, the new music leadership gravitated in the same circles as the intellectuals and artists that had begun to challenge traditional aesthetics and political views. Juan Bautista Plaza, for instance, had written his *Himno de los estudiantes* (Hymn of the Students) for the Student Week of 1928 to a poem of Andres Eloy Blanco, a leading poet, and one of the chief organizers of the student's movement.

This process, however, was a gradual one and started as Plaza and Sojo collaborated at the cathedral. At the time Plaza returned from Rome, Sojo's music was regarded as controversial because he was experimenting with a chromatic musical language that had upset conservative composers.[182] Plaza thought of Sojo's music differently and often included his composition in the cathedral's services. He also had a great deal of respect for Sojo as a musician who understood religious music. In fact, Plaza often invited Sojo to sing with the metropolitan chapter choir during special services at the cathedral and other churches.[183] On occasions, these collaborations were major undertakings that drew significant publicity. One such event was a special service for Good Friday in 1929 at the Santa Capilla church in downtown Caracas. It involved the premiere of Sojo's *Las Siete Palabras de Cristo en el Calvario,* for soloists, chorus, and orchestra, during the service of the Last Seven Words at 3:00 PM. For this service Plaza wrote an extensive review in which he commended Sojo's music and described the work in detail against the backdrop of the liturgical occasion.[184] As was common in his writing, Plaza sought to educate his readers not only on the liturgical occasion—through elaborating on the day's scripture—but also on Sojo's compositional choices and general structure of the work. He also set out to contextualize Sojo's musical style by describing his treatment of counterpoint and its relevance to church music, which he esteemed highly because of the "spontaneity that can be noticed in its creation as well as the profound musical sentiment that inspires it."[185]

Sojo's musical style had by then evolved significantly from his early compositions. During the 1910s he wrote music in various genres including string ensembles, musical theater,

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[182] Sojo, "Breves Notas," 15.

[183] Juan Bautista Plaza, letter to Archbishop Rincón Gonzalez, Caracas, August 1928. Quoted in Labonville, "Musical Nationalism in Venezuela," 267.

[184] For details, see Juan Bautista Plaza "Las siete palabras en la Santa Capilla: Estreno de una obra del compositor Vicente E. Sojo," *El Universal*, 7 April 1929. Reprinted in Plaza, *La música en nuestra vida:* 303-309.

[185] Ibid., 305.

and sacred. His style during this period (Figure 1) was formally linked to the classical structures but was dominated by lyricism, which he articulated through contrapuntal textures to move around keys relying on common tones, and passing notes to smooth his transitions.[186]

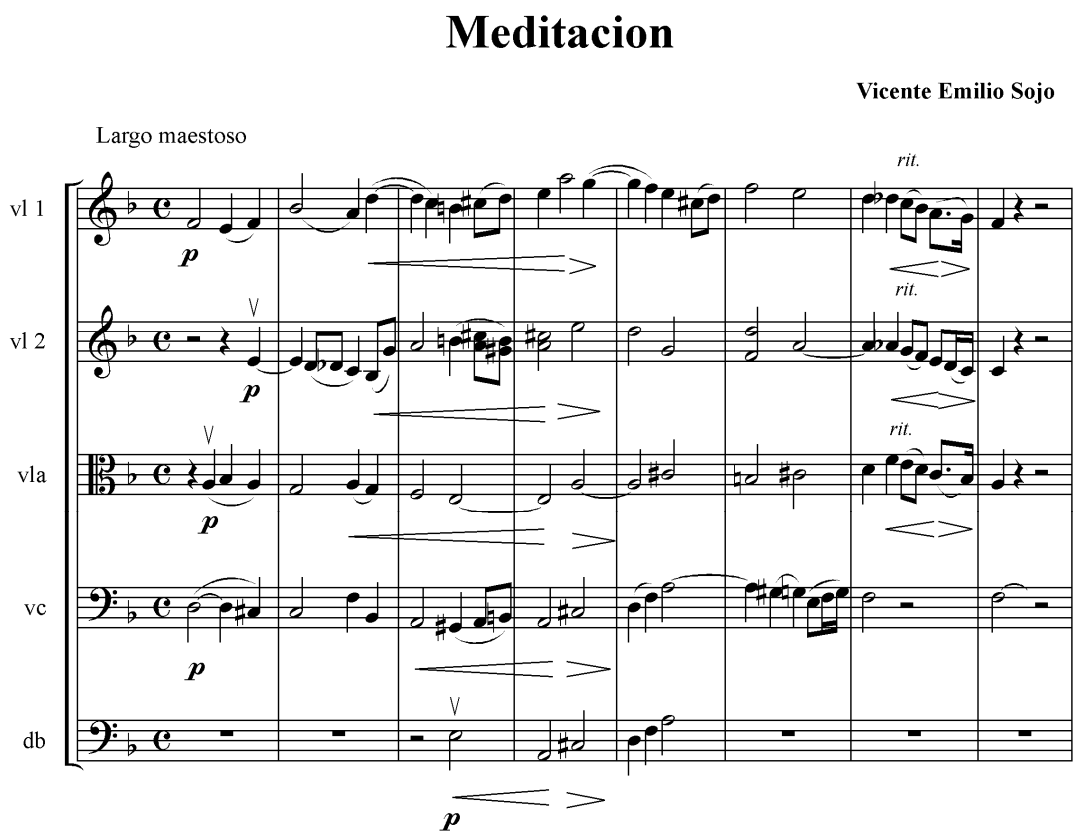

Figure 1. Vicente Emilio Sojo, *Meditación* (mm.1-8)

In the early 1920s, however, his harmonic language turned more chromatic, which Sojo attributed to his becoming acquainted with the music of Frank, Fauré, Debussy, and Ravel. According to Sojo, modern French art came to him as a revelation, "bringing to an end his classicist keenness."[187] In 1922 he started experimenting with chromatic harmonies in a series of sacred compositions, including the motets *Ave Maria* and *Panis Angelicus* (dedicated to José

[186] This is most evident in his *Meditación* (1911-12), *Treno* (1911-12), and *Cuarteto en Re* (1913). The latter Sojo himself described as a "recapitulation of his studies in counterpoint." Sojo, *Breves Notas*, 14.

[187] Ibid., 14-15.

Antonio Calcaño), and the following year completed one of his best known large-scale works, *Misa cromática*, premiered under Plaza at the Caracas cathedral on Maundy Thursday 1924, Sojo described the piece as one in which "chords intertwined with absolute freedom" and "melodic contours abound with intervals forbidden by the *Domines* of the genre."[188]

Sojo's biographer, Eduardo Lira Espejo, has observed that the *Misa cromática* stirred up a debate over acceptable musical practices, particularly with regards to sacred music.[189] He suggests that the work helped antagonize music composition in Venezuela as "other composers," meaning the elders, "did not share with Sojo the opinion that it was possible to sustain an entire piece with this new technique." He adds:

> The *Misa cromática* impresses by virtue of its majesty, with chords having a greater number of sounds than those traditionally associated with the triad freely woven into this score. Likewise, the melodic design unfolds independently, completely unfettered, giving way to intervals that the erudite condemn. The *Misa cromática* appeared as an expression of renovation, with an audacious manner of writing, firm and expressive, eminently musical, which shook the conceptions that governed those days in our environment.[190]

Some of these aspects can be observed in the opening measures of the mass through the predominant chromatic movement of the parts. Sojo's enharmonic spelling of the dominant chord in measure three (the bass moving down to Bb, instead of A#) enables him to move from the tonic b minor to A major, and then to g minor, before settling in b minor in measure 6 (Figure 2).

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[188] Ibid.. 15. Emphasis is his.

[189] Eduardo Lira Espejo, *Vicente Emilio Sojo* (Caracas: Concejo Municipal del Distrito Sucre, 1977), 88. Both Sojo and Lira Espejo make reference to a "heated debate" taking place over this mass. Thus far, however, the only piece of evidence I have been able to locate regarding this debate is Sojo's own testimony.

[190] Ibid.

Misa Cromatica

Kyrie **Vicente Emilio Sojo**

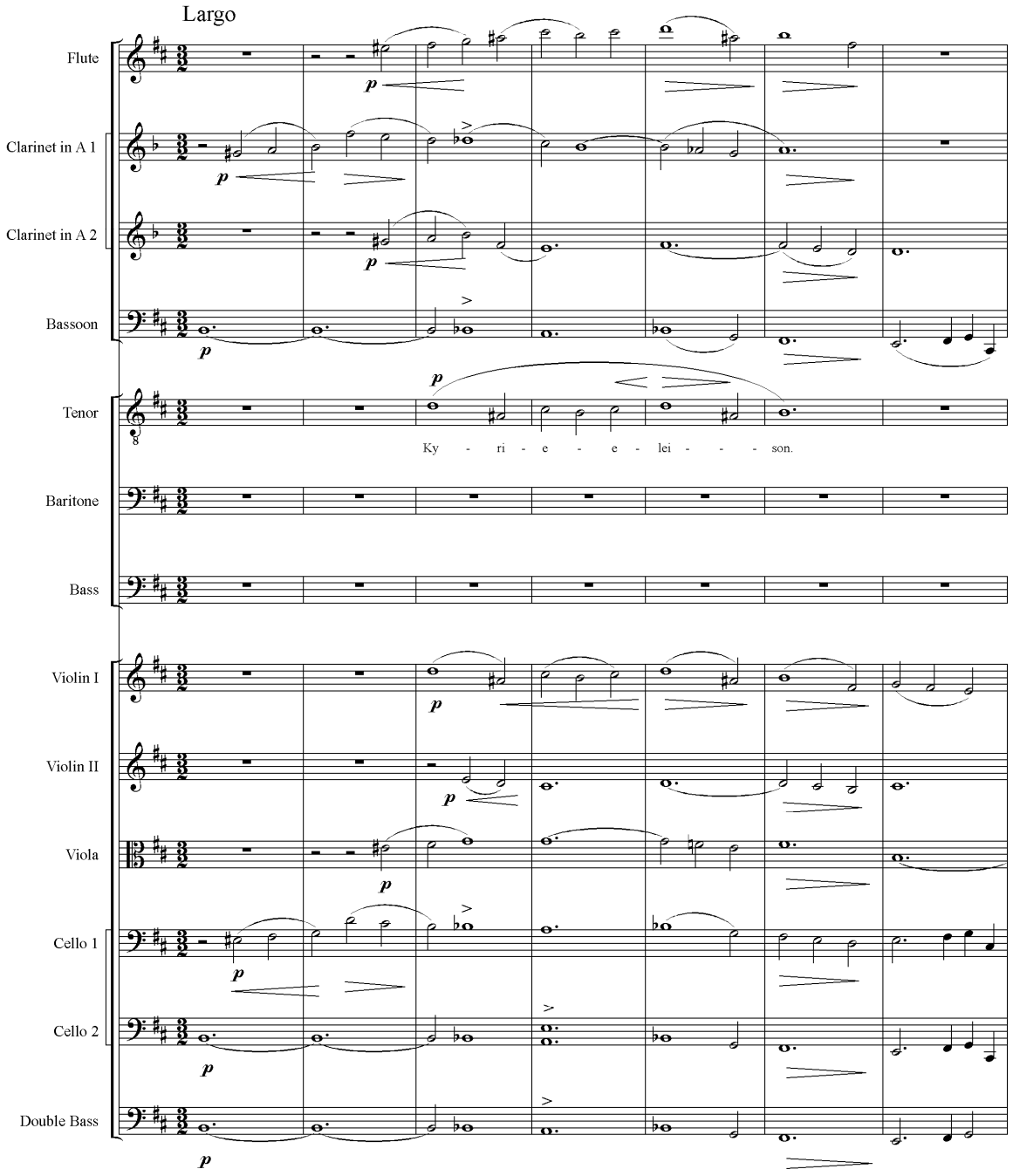

Figure 2. Vicente Emilio Sojo, “Kyrie” from *Misa cromática* (mm. 1-7)

This kind of coloristic approach to harmony made him one of Venezuela's most modern composers during the 1920s. Nevertheless, modern music composition in Caracas was still in its infancy and the conditions for the development of a modernist school in the country were not yet in place. While the church provided some of the mechanisms for the development of modern music, it also constrained the renovation movement because of the strict regulations it imposed upon the compositions. Outside the church, the School of Music was the only institution that actively supported art music but during the 1920s was controlled by the leadership the renovators were challenging. Thus, the renovation movement set out to create its own musical infrastructure.

3.3 MUSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The impact of new music, both imported and domestic, made necessary the creation of a music infrastructure for its dissemination. Most observers agree that a performance of Lorenzo Perosi's oratorio *La risurrezione di Lazzaro* in 1920 stimulated musicians to organize a permanent symphony orchestra. The idea soon materialized and in 1922 they created the Sociedad Filarmónica de Caracas. The society ceased its activities in the late 1920s but a new organization, the Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela, was created in 1930 and has, since then, been performing uninterruptedly to the present. Similarly, Caracas's musicians became interested in a capella choral singing after a 1927 performance in Caracas by an Ukrainian choir, which stimulated local composers to write multi-part unaccompanied folk and popular music, and eventually led to the creation of an organized choir, the Orfeón Lamas, for the performance of that repertoire.

As part of the process of renovation, these institutions were crucial in shifting the paradigms of art music in Venezuela because they enabled musicians and audiences to be exposed to a musical repertoire that had not been cultivated in the country consistently. At the same time, the institutions contributed to the consolidation of Sojo, Plaza, and Calcaño as the leaders of the renovation and the nationalist movement in music.

3.3.1 The Unión Filarmónica de Caracas

Vicente Martucci (1879-1941) was an Italian musician who had immigrated to Venezuela in 1897. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, he had been associated with the military bands in Caracas as well as with the administration of public events for the city. In 1920 he collaborated with Monsigor Bartoloni in organizing a performance of Lorenzo Perosi's oratorio *La risurrezione di Lazzaro*. The performance, which called for the largest orchestra and choir ever assembled in Caracas, was very well received by the public and had to be repeated a few days later.[191] This success inspired Martucci and other musicians to create a stable symphony orchestra in the city, which they accomplished two years later with the establishment of the Unión Filarmónica de Caracas.[192]

Historian Alberto Calzavara has argued that the creation of the Unión Filarmónica represented a significant step for musical life in the city. It was particularly relevant for the development of professional musicians whose orchestral experience was at the time limited to the opera and zarzuela seasons and to silent-film orchestras in movie theaters.[193] At the same

[191] Calzavara, *Trayectoria cincuentenaria*, 22. Conflicting documentation dates the performance to 1920 or 1921. Calzavara's account is based on the testimony provided by a descendent of musician Vicente Martucci.
[192] Ibid., 23.
[193] Calzavara, *Trayectoria*, 23

time, it offered an outlet for the performance of a different repertoire than was normally heard in the city. The Unión Filarmónica was officially established in February 1922 as a non-profit society with a board of directors elected annually by its members.[194] It welcomed both active and supporting members, all of whom would pay dues in order to cover the operating expenses of the organization. At the group's first business meeting, Vicente Martucci was elected president of the board (and eventually reelected for two more terms) as well as the musical director of the orchestra.

The Unión Filarmónica played its inaugural performance on 29 May 1922 at the Teatro Nacional. Though documentation of that performance is scarce, later evidence suggests that the group was well received and enthusiastically supported by the public. The first performance was followed by another concert two months later with a program consisting of works by Beethoven, Saint-Saens, Schubert, Rachmaninoff, and Richard Strauss. Similarly, a significant number of new members joined the society during that year.[195]

Vicente Emilio Sojo joined the society in August 1923, most likely as a supporting member. At the end of September, Martucci embarked on a six-month trip to Europe leaving vice president José Sarno as acting head of the society. Sarno, however, resigned that position shortly after he took office, which led to Sojo's election to fill the president's vacancy on an interim basis. According to Calzavara, during this time the group struggled financially because of the increasing operational costs and the failure of many of the members to pay their dues. Calzavara suggests that the financial difficulties may have contributed to further polarizing the institution and hence to Sarno's resignation. He goes on to suggest that Sojo assumed the

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[194] Minutes from first meeting, quoted in Calzavara, *Trayectoria*, 23.

[195] For details on the program and a list of the members who joined the society in 1922, see Calzavara, *Trayectoria*, 27.

leadership of the organization with fears of dividing its membership because of the seemingly divergent administrative and artistic goals of the group.[196] Though the extent of the crisis within the nascent organization is not clearly known, Sojo's reputation as a musical leader might have strengthened because of it. In an effort to cut the society's expenditures, he made arrangements with the director of the School of Music, Hilario Machado, to temporarily use the school for the meetings of the orchestra at no charge. Similarly, he contributed to alleviate the internal tensions that the failure of payment of membership dues had generated by forgiving those who were in default and starting an altogether new membership system.[197]

Sojo remained as president of the society until March 1924 when Martucci returned from Europe. According to Calzavara, Martucci and the members of the group were very satisfied with Sojo's work. After the annual elections that year, Martucci was confirmed as president and Sojo was elected vice president. The membership of the society continued to increase during that year. Juan Bautista Plaza joined the organization a few months after returning from Rome. Though he was most likely a supporting member who was not directly involved in the leadership of the society, he wrote an orchestral piece, the *Himno a Sucre* for chorus and orchestra, which, the group performed under his direction in December 1924.[198]

According to Calzavara the membership of the society had increased dramatically by this time. With almost a hundred instrumentalists of different skill levels, the administration agreed to split the orchestra into a large ensemble led by Martucci, and a smaller orchestra under Sojo.[199] Despite its relative success, the regular activities of the organization are only

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[196] Ibid., 28.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Labonville, "Musical Nationalism in Venezuela," 665-7.
[199] Calzavara, "Vicente Emilio Sojo y la 'Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela,'" *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 8 (May-August, 1987), 22.

documented to April 1926. Calzavara has pointed out that the board of directors elected that year may not have been interested in keeping records of the society's activities from that point on. In fact, the next entry in the registry of the society—Calzavara's main documentary source—is dated 26 January 1929. In it, by unanimous vote of the fifteen members in attendance at that meeting, it was decided that the society would be dissolved and its assets donated to a relief effort in the coastal city of Cumaná, which had recently been affected by an earthquake.[200]

3.3.2 Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela

A few months after the official dissolution of the Unión Filarmónica de Caracas plans were underway to create a new orchestra in the city. The idea of reestablishing a symphony orchestra, however, came from three musicians who had not been associated with the Unión Filarmónica. The oldest one, violinist Ascanio Negretti (1897-1949), had returned to the country in 1929 after completing his musical training at the Paris Conservatory. The other two, violinist Luis Calcaño (1907-1978) and flutist Simón Alvarez (1909-1986), received their musical training as well as degrees in engineering and law, respectively, in Caracas.[201] Sometime in 1929, they approached the director of the School of Music, violinist Miguel Angel Espinel (1895-1968), and invited him to become the director of the ensemble they were organizing, but Espinel declined because he wanted to concentrate on a student orchestra.[202] Espinel had studied in Germany and then France from 1922 to 1927. Upon his return to the country he was appointed director of the School of Music and remained there until 1930 when he resigned his position because of professional

[200] Calzavara, *Trayectoria*, 34.

[201] Rhazés Hernandez López, "Vida y milagro de la Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela," *El Nacional* 18 October 1947.

[202] Miguel Angel Espinel, "Vida musical. Crítica sui generis. Nuestros representativos. Un poco de historia, para que el lector juzgue," *La Esfera* 20 November 1936.

disputes involving Vicente Emilio Sojo over academic and ethical issues at the school.[203] The musicians, then, approached Vicente Emilio Sojo who had had experience with the Unión Filarmónica and had already become an influential personage within the School of Music. Indeed, some described Sojo as a crucial figure in the school. A review of the orchestra's first performance referred to him as the "heart and soul of the School of Music."[204] Logistically, he was a good choice for leading the orchestra as he had full access to the music facilities at the School of Music, where the orchestra would eventually meet for rehearsal. He also had authority over students' involvement with the orchestra.[205] Yet, as it became apparent in the criticism both negative and positive, Sojo lacked strong conducting skills, which incidentally, could also help explain why he was the second choice for the position.

The orchestra presented its inaugural performance on 24 June 1930 at the Teatro Nacional, led by Sojo and Martucci. The program included Weber's overture to *Der Freischütz*, Giuseppe Martucci's *Nocturne* Op. 70 (both conducted by Vicente Martucci), and Mozart's Symphony 34, two Bach arias for tenor and strings, and Beethoven's Symphony 1 (conducted by Sojo). Even though the orchestra had been conceived as a private endeavor, it was promoted from the outset with nationalistic and even official overtones. The first concert, for instance, was scheduled to coincide with the annual celebration of the Battle of Carabobo.[206] It was dedicated (Figure 3) "to the High Officials of the State; to the artists, literati, and the very cultured society

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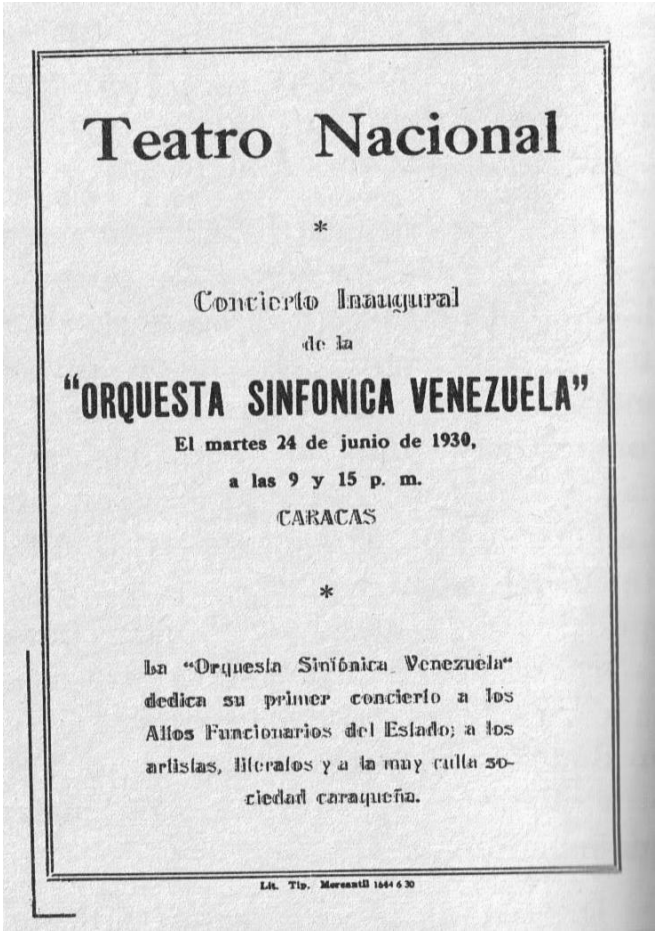
[203] Later, Espinel became the most vocal detractor of Sojo, Plaza, and Calcaño. For nearly two decades he wrote embittered articles criticizing their hegemony over all musical matters in the country. For a detailed account of Espinel's diatribes, see Labonville, "Musical Nationalism," 570-606.

[204] J. Orda. "El primer concierto sinfónico de Venezuela: Impresiones de un expectador extranjero," *ElUniversal* 25 June 1930. Quoted in Calzavara, *Trayectoria*, 47-8.

[205] As a matter of fact, Espinel cited Sojo's abuse of his authority to remove students from class in order to have them participate in non-school musical activities as one of the causes of his resignation. Espinel, "Vida musical"

[206] The Battle of Carabobo, near the city of Valencia, about 100 miles west of Caracas, sealed Venezuela's independence from Spain in 1821.

of Caracas."[207] Similarly, the publicity accompanying the performance was written in an overtly nationalist tone. In a review of the opening concert, a critic offered laudatory words to Sojo and the members of the ensemble. He described the performance as one that "must be inscribed in the history of Venezuelan music, like the Rubicon, in the sense of the development of musical culture in Venezuela."[208]



Teatro Nacional

*

Concierto Inaugural

de la

"ORQUESTA SINFONICA VENEZUELA"

El martes 24 de junio de 1930,

a las 9 y 15 p. m.

CARACAS

*

La "Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela" dedica su primer concierto a los Altos Funcionarios del Estado; a los artistas, literatos y a la muy culta sociedad caraqueña.

Lit. Tip. Mercantil 1644 6 30

Figure 3. Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela

(Inaugural Concert Program, Front Page Facsimile)

[207] Reproduced in *Sociedad Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela 1930-1955* (Caracas: Sociedad Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela, 1955), 12. Also in Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, *50 años de música en Caracas: 1930-1980* (Caracas: Fundación Viecente Emilio Sojo, 1988), 62.

[208] J. Orda, "El Primer Concierto."

Juan Bautista Plaza was largely responsible for promoting the orchestra as a symbol of national culture and patriotism. A week before the first performance, he published an article advocating for a symphony orchestra to disseminate symphonic literature in Venezuela. In the article he emphasized the importance of the ensemble not only as a channel for the promotion of national culture but also as a means to honor the fatherland on the centennial of the liberator's death:

> To create a national orchestra, a grand concert orchestra, a true symphony orchestra; and then, after much determination and not a few hardships, to make this orchestra be worthy not only of always preserving its genuine national character with patriotic pride, but also to contribute to the development of the artistic culture of our country; such is the commendable enterprise that a group of artists in our capital city has set out to accomplish recently…
>
> Thus, to create in Caracas a symphony orchestra that enables us to get to know through concerts that will take place more or less frequently the masterpieces of pure music, is one of the cultural undertakings with which we can honor more humbly the memory of our liberator in the centennial year of his death. But it is also necessary that our public collaborate with its generous enthusiasm to foment and to increase more and more the fervor with which that musical collective gives itself to offer hours of such an exquisite spiritual joy.[209]

In addition to underlining the nationalist mission of the orchestra, Plaza set out to criticize the state of art music in the country, which he believed was mediocre. Shortly after the orchestra's first concert he published another article dealing with his own reaction to the performance. In it, he congratulated the musicians and conductors for their "magnificent" job and expressed his satisfaction at seeing the enthusiastic response with which the public, "made up of elements from all social spheres," had received the performance. He pointed out that the concert had been presented "with all neatness and careful preparation that [the occasion] demanded," and because of that audiences responded with "ovations at the end of each of the pieces that composed the program."

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[209] Juan Bautista Plaza, "La Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela," *El Universal* 17 June 1930. Reprinted in *La Música en nuestra vida,* 231.

It is quite possible that Plaza was criticizing mainstream musical practices with this statement. It can be inferred from his tone that he was troubled by the music that was heard in Caracas; but, at the same time, he was pleased with the city's public which, through its approval of the symphony, had demonstrated that it knew "how to discern, with certainty, the ephemeral flashiness of so much false art that surrounds us, from that which because of its intrinsic real value deserves a just applause."[210] These aspects become more significant in light of the marked artistic resistance with which the orchestra had been received by other musicians, a sign of the polarization of music at the time. According to Alberto Calzavara, the orchestra had met from the outset with a hostile climate from a group of professors at the School of Music. It began with a ban on the school's students to join the orchestra and continued with the expulsion of the ensemble from the school premises where it had been meeting for rehearsals since its foundation.[211]

Despite the adverse beginnings, the orchestra continued to function and eventually consolidated itself as a modern cultural institution. Not surprisingly, the rising of the orchestra coincided with the consolidation of Sojo, Plaza, and Calcaño as the leaders of the renovation movement. In most scholarly accounts, this process of consolidation began following Gomez's death in 1935 with the government becoming more supportive of music. Indeed, some of the most crucial steps towards improving Venezuelan music during these years, including Sojo's appointment as a director of the School of Music in 1936 and the series of reforms in the school's curriculum, the orchestra becoming fully funded by the state in 1938, and Plaza's commissions to engage in work on behalf of colonial Venezuelan music and music education in

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[210] Juan Bautista Plaza, "La Sinfónica Venezuela: El concierto inaugural," *El Universal* 26 June 1930. Reprinted in *La música en nuestra vida*, 235.

[211] Calzavara, *Trayectoria*, 49

the country, occurred when the county entered a period of transition towards democracy. Yet, as a nationalist movement, the process of musical renovation seems to have been more responsive to the advent of modernization, which in the form of industrialization was reshaping the country's socio-cultural makeup, than it was to the particular political context. This aspect is generally downplayed or altogether neglected in Venezuelan music scholarship. In this light, Gómez's repressive regime is typically portrayed as unsupportive of the arts. In reality, while generally suspicious and not overtly enthusiastic about musical life, Gómez's regime was not all that indifferent to music. In 1934 the orchestra began to receive a subsidy from the ministry of public works, which, even if minuscule as Calzavara declares, contributed to the operational budget of the institution. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous chapter, the government was generally supportive of activities that exalted national culture and particularly the people. In music, this was most conspicuous through the government's support of the Orfeón Lamas, whose mission, incidentally, was to cultivate Venezuelan culture. On several occasions Gómez's himself sponsored performances of the group. Similarly, according to Sojo himself, the early concerts of the Orfeón were sponsored by the Ministry of Public Instruction, which also had provided the group with all sorts of benefits.[212]

3.3.3 The Orfeón Lamas

The Orfeón Lamas was conceived not only as a medium to modernize musical practices in the country but also as a channel for the promotion of national values. Named after Venezuela's most prolific colonial composer, José Angel Lamas, the society presented its inaugural

[212] Labonville, "Musical Nationalism," 633-35.

performance on 15 July 1930 in commemoration of the 339th anniversary of the founding of musical studies in Caracas.[213] In accordance with the ensemble's statutes, the program consisted of music exclusively by native composers. A cappella singing was a novelty in Caracas at the time. In fact, it had been Plaza himself who introduced this type of performing at the Caracas cathedral upon his return from Rome. According to Marie Laboville, these works stimulated other composers, including Vicente Emilio Sojo and Miguel Angel Calcaño (José Antonio's cousin) to write unaccompanied choral music to be used for the liturgy.[214] At the same time, these composers became interested in producing secular choral compositions intended primarily for their own entertainment.

In an article published on the occasion of the inaugural performance of the Orfeón Lamas, José Antonio Calcaño traced its origin to a series of events beginning in 1924. That year he and a group of musicians including Vicente Emilio Sojo, Miguel Angel Calcaño, William Werner, Juan José Aguerrevere, and Juvencio Ochoa participated in a pilgrimage observance in the neighboring town of Maiquetia. During the evenings they started to sing canons using improvised texts satirizing current events. Those spontaneous canons fueled the joking spirit of many of the young composers to produce more compositions in this style. Calcaño recalls:

> Suffice it to say that years later, around 1927, we had already composed, just for fun, a large number of infinite canons.
>
> That year, our joking canons, climbing up a step of the social ladder, "moved" from the neighboring towns to the streets of Caracas thanks to the single circumstance that Miguel Angel Calcaño had then acquired an automobile. In this car we would go out at night, three or four musicians, and then, we would start to sing our infinite canons, to which were added one composed by Juan Bautista Plaza, whose text made a special mention of our just about daily excursion. We were very much surprised by the interest shown by the passersby when they listened to the diminutive choir that traveled in the car; many said it sounded like

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[213] Juan Sebastián [José Antonio Calcaño], "Grán exponente de solidaridad artística nacional: El Orfeón Lamas. Su pintoresca historia. Su importancia en la vida cultural venezolana," *El Universal* 15 July 1930.

[214] Labonville, "Musical Nationalism in Venezuela," 612.

> an organ, and they stopped amazed listening to the singing that rapidly went away in the vehicle. Naturally, we continued in those amusements, almost with the deliberate purpose of melodiously "frightening" the people in the streets.[215]

Though the primary purpose of these early attempts at choral singing was just casual entertainment, the musicians soon found themselves working on more formal choral undertakings. According to Calcaño, around the same time Vicente Emilio Sojo wrote a short piece of popular character that was the first to move beyond the canon structure. This stimulated other musicians to write more serious pieces, producing a repertoire of about thirty works by the end of 1927.[216] Typically, they rehearsed in the sacristy of the Caracas Cathedral as some of them (including Plaza, Sojo, and M. A. Calcaño) were associated with the church's musical chapel. Their actual performances, however, took place predominantly in private social events.

Another important event leading to the creation of the Orfeón was the performance in Caracas by a Ukrainian men's chorus in 1927. Inspired by their exotic performance, which consisted of folk-music singing and dancing in regional costumes, the group of Sojo, Plaza, and Calcaño organized their own version of the "Russian Choruses" in order to participate in a masquerade during the carnival celebrations of 1928.[217] The "Russian Choruses" were made of Sojo, Plaza, Werner, and José Antonio, Miguel Angel, and Emilio Calcaño. Their performances consisted of visiting private homes wearing Ukrainian costumes and serenading their dwellers with Venezuelan songs. The event, which went on for several nights leading into Ash Wednesday on February 22, became the highlight of the celebrations that year. An anonymous reporter enthusiastically chronicled their performances:

> Apart from the perennial and jocund beauty of the ladies of Caracas, we believe that the most notable [thing] as regards masquerades in the carnival of

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[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Juan Sebastián, "Grán exponente de solidaridad artística nacional."

> 1928—and only with great difficulty could something more original and refined have ever been seen before—were the Russian Choruses or Ukrainian Choruses, comprised of maestros Vicente Emilio Sojo and Juan B. Plaza, the bass William Werner, and Messrs José Antonio, Miguel Angel, and Emilio Calcaño.
>
> …disguised as Russian peasants with their big furry caps, their huge beards, their shirts embroidered in bright colors, their short extra skirts, knickers, and high boots, they went for many nights—as though fulfilling a ritual mission of exquisite beauty—from house to house, to the principal homes of Caracas, bringing to them, [as a] cordial offering, the primitive emotion of music, the soul of folksong dignified.
>
> As a curious note we have left for last the manner in which the Russian Choruses presented themselves at each house they visited: alone in a closed automobile which one of them drove. On getting out they formed lines and entered solemnly stretching out on the ground a large Ukrainian carpet with strips in all colors, and on it they intoned their songs. They spoke not a word with anyone, nor appeared to pay attention to whatever was said to them; they did not smoke or accept gifts of any kind, not even a glass of water!
>
> They sang, they only sang of beautiful things, scented with the gentle breeze of the native soil, acknowledging the enthusiastic applause with genuflections. And they took their leave in the same way, saluting martially to the beat of a sort of hymn.[218]

The experience of the "Russian Choruses" motivated the musicians to create a mixed a cappella choir. Shortly after the masquerade they started to compose and arrange music for mixed choirs. On the occasion of the wedding of Miguel Angel Calcaño, in September 1928, Juan Bautista Plaza organized and directed an ad hoc SATB ensemble. For this event Plaza wrote several compositions, which, as Marie Labonville has observed, allowed him, and to some extent the other musicians, to learn about the "sonorous richness and expressive possibilities of a mixed chorus."[219] The experiments with mixed chorus resulted in an increase of musical repertoire, the majority of which was based on Venezuelan folklore.[220]

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[218] Unsigned newspaper article, "Los Coros rusos," newspaper clipping in Archivo Juan Bautista Plaza. Quoted in Labonville, "Musical Nationalism in Venezuela," 617-18 (her translation).

[219] Labonville, "Musical Nationalism," 621.

[220] Juan Sebastián [José Antonio Calcaño], "Grán exponente de solidaridad artística nacional"

By mid-1929 the group had constituted itself into a full-fledged choir and had begun preparations for its first formal concert.[221] On the night of its debut the fifty-eight-member chorus was conducted by Vicente Emilio Sojo and José Antonio Calcaño.[222] The program consisted of works by Plaza, Sojo, J. A. Calcaño, and Moisés Moleiro. In addition to Calcaño's article promoting the Orfeón on the day of the inaugural performance, a significant number of newspapers articles about the group appeared in those days.[223] These press reports dealt primarily with the positive response of the audiences as well as the remarkable accomplishment that the founders of the ensemble had achieved. They also commended the leadership of the group for their display of discipline. As one chronicler commented, "Tuesday night I became convinced—I just became convinced!—that we have always lacked good leaders among us… The masses, choral and otherwise, ask only for a baton: a good baton."[224]

The laudatory accounts of the performance were also offered with patriotic overtones:

> The Orfeón Lamas is one of the most pure, beautiful, and elevated artistic realizations of those that could constitute a genuine source of pride for the Fatherland.
>
> Magnificent is this tribute which the Venezuelan artists have paid to the Liberator in this centennial year, by carrying out in an irreproachable manner this firm and radiant expression of authentic national art.[225]

Or as another reporter proclaimed, "last's night's event in the National Theater—let us predict it without hesitation—will have a significance of enormous importance in the History of

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[221] Ana Mercedes Asuaje de Rugeles, María Guinand, and Bolivia Bottome, *Historia del movimiento coral y de las orquestas juveniles en Venezuela* (Caracas: Cuadernos Lagoven, 1986), 28.

[222] Ibid.

[223] Labonville (pp. 629-632) cites the following articles: "Acontecimiento artístico. Presentación del Orfeón Lamas," clipping in Archivo Juan Bautista Plaza identified as coming from *El Heraldo*, 15 July 1930; "El Orfeón Lamas se estrenará esta noche" clipping identified as coming from *El Impulso* (Barquisimeto, Venezuela) 15 July 1930; "El Orfeón Lamas (Primera carta)," clipping identified as coming from *La Esfera*, 17 July 1930; "Estreno del Orfeón Lamas," *El Universal* 16 July 1930; "Entre Col y Col: El Orfeón Lamas," *El Universal* 17 July 1930; "Presentación del Orfeón Lamas," *El Heraldo* (Caracas) 16 July 1930.

[224] L. S. "Entre col y col: El Orfeón Lamas," *El Universal*, 17 July 1930. Quoted in Labonville, "Musical Nationalism in Venezuela," 631.

[225] "Estreno del Orfeón Lamas," *El Universal*, 16 July 1930. Quoted in Labonville, 631.

Venezuelan Art, for it represents an effort of unusual grandeur, whose astonishing initial triumph is the pledge of future successes of incalculable consequences."[226]

The creation of the symphony and the choir brought new light to the musical life in Caracas. Those organizations introduced not only new musical sounds to city audiences but also new musical idioms that resonated with those audiences. During the 1930s, as the new and fast growing social groups in the city of Caracas were molding a collective identity for themselves, the orchestra and the Orfeón became important avenues for these new identities to be channeled. Thus a brief examination of the institutions and their participation in the city's social dynamics is called for.

3.4 THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PUBLIC AUDIENCE

Even though the nationalist movement in music was orchestrated and set in motion by the renovators, it was through public acceptance that the movement was ultimately legitimized. That is to say, the success of a nation-building project is contingent upon a group's recognition of itself as a community. The early years of the Orquesta Sinfónica and the Orfeón Lamas are particularly revealing of this relationship. Specifically, in light of their differing artistic goals, the simultaneous launching of the two organizations can be interpreted as two different experiments in inventing traditions. On the one hand, as Juan Bautista Plaza pronounced, the orchestra was created to promote "the masterpieces of the great symphonists and composers of instrumental music," a belief that implied that an art music culture in Venezuela had to be imported and

[226] "Presentación del Orfeón Lamas," *El Heraldo*, 16 July 1930. Quoted in Labonville, 631.

adapted to local conditions.[227] On the other hand, the Orfeón sought to explore art music from within, a notion laid down in the organization's mission "to work on behalf of Venezuelan musical culture, embracing all of [Venezuela's] musical genres."[228]

The inaugural performances of the orchestra and the Orfeón (respectively on June 24 and July 15, 1930) were widely publicized in the local press.[229] Those reports, generally written in overtly patriotic tones, focused on commending Sojo for elevating Venezuelan music to a higher status. In some cases, the comments were candid intended to connect the institutions and the music with a national spirit in accord with the state policies of national unification. In other cases, those comments made a direct connection to a distinguishable national art ("the art of the fatherland"). As a reporter wrote on the inaugural performance of the Orfeón:

> This for us [is] a new undertaking to extol the art of the fatherland in a pure, genetic form, disdained here until the present, and therefore unfamiliar to the public….
>
> Choral societies and choirs, universally enjoyed, have tremendous prestige in Spain…Hopefully the Venezuelan one, thanks to the noble efforts of maestro Sojo and his partners, will continue to progress and end up winning a high and well-deserved place![230]

Another reporter used a similar tone in an open letter to Sojo, published in the Caracas's newspaper *El Universal* the day after the inaugural performance of the symphony:

> I do not know if everybody has realized the importance of the first symphonic concert performed by [the orchestra] and conducted masterfully by our

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[227] Juan Bautista Plaza, "La Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela," *El Universal* 30 June 1930.

[228] Archivo Orfeón Lamas. Quoted in Ana Mercedes, Asuaje de Rugeles, *Historia del movimiento coral*, 28.

[229] Some of the reviews of the orchestra's and the Orfeón's first performances included: Juan Bautista Plaza, "La Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela" *El Universal* 17 Junio 1930, and "La Sinfónica Venezuela: El concierto inaugural," *El Universal*, 26 June 1930; J. Orda, "To Maestro Sojo," *El Universal* 25 June 1930; "La masa coral del Maestro Sojo," *La Religión* 15 July 1930; Juan Sebastián [José Antonio Calcaño], "Gran exponente de la solidaridad artística nacional: El Orfeón Lamas. Su pintoresca historia, su importancia en la vida cultural venezolana," *El Universal* 15 July 1930; "El Orfeón Lamas se estrenará esta noche," *El Impulso* 15 July 1930; J. Orda, "Primera audición pública del Orfeón Lamas," *El Nuevo Diario* 17 July 1930; "Entre Col y Col, El Orfeón Lamas," *El Universal* 17 July 1930; "Estreno del Orfeón Lamas," *El Universal* 16 July 1930.

[230] "La Masa coral del Maestro Sojo," unsigned clip in Archive Juan Bautista Plaza coming from *La Religión*, July 1930, quoted in Labonville, "Juan Bautista Plaza," 627. Her translation.

> well known and esteemed maestros [Vicente Emilio Sojo and Vicente Martucci.] They have laid down the first stone of the Temple where the spirit of the Venezuelan youth is to be cultivated….
>
> I present my greatest congratulations to the public who with its presence and frank applauses paid tribute to the courage and the morals of these forty musicians whose names should be engraved, one by one, over a commemorative stone.[231]

Both Plaza and Calcaño wrote about the historical significance of these inaugural performances. They, too, commented on the social importance of these organizations, and they called upon the population to support the concerts those groups offered. Two days after the concert Plaza published a review of the performance in which he reported on the positive reaction of the public and expressed his satisfaction at observing a diverse public present in the event:

> The favorable attitude of the large crowd which attended the National [Theater] the night before last, on the occasion of the inaugural concert of the Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela, is exceedingly significant. More than applause, ovations were heard at the end of every one of the numbers that made up the musical program of that concert. What, in fact, could this enthusiastic reception signify, if not that our public really knows how to take pleasure in a performance of pure art whenever it is presented with all the delicacy and careful preparation that it requires?...
>
> I must make public my sincere enthusiasm on observing the approval with which our public of Caracas—made up of elements of all social spheres—has been able to receive such an eloquent manifestation of art, thus serving to cooperate spontaneously and generously in the ever greater growth which, without a doubt, will take over the development of the artistic culture of our beloved capital.[232]

Despite the positive first public impression that the two organizations caused, Venezuelan audiences seem to have favored the Orfeón over the orchestra, at least during their first decade of life. Concert reviews during those years offered contrasting views regarding public interest in the Orfeón versus the orchestra. A critic reporting on the enthusiasm showed by the public in a 1933

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[231] J. Orda, "To Maestro Sojo," *El Universal* 25 June 1930.
[232] Juan Bautista Plaza, "La Sinfónica Venezuela: El Concierto Inaugural," *El Universal* 26 June 1930.

performance by the Orfeón, for instance, wrote that the group had "won the most convincing triumphs, and is one of the few things among us that has gained a total acceptance."[233] Indeed, the Orfeón quickly established itself as a social icon of sorts. Popular support for the group was manifested not only through the large audiences it drew to its performances, as reported in the press, but also through the financial sponsorship it received from a variety of public sources. In a 1937 interview, Sojo commented on how supportive the public was towards the Orfeón:

> Since one of the tenets of the Orfeón Lamas was that the performances were supposed to be absolutely free of charge, it turned out that when it was time to give a concert no funds could be counted on to pay the theater, the lights, the operators, etc….Then the most curious things were seen:
>
> On one occasion the [professional] baseball team "Magallanes" organized a special game to set aside whatever would be collected in that game in order to finance one concert of the Orfeón. On other occasions, appeals were made to what was then Broadcasting Caracas so it would cover the costs.[234]

The fact that the Orfeón developed this kind of relationship with such unrelated organizations suggests that the group was reaching audiences beyond the regular art-music public. In addition to the public support in Caracas, the Orfeón had started to travel to the interior where its performances were also well attended. In 1938 the group was invited to perform during the events commemorating the 400th anniversary of the Foundation the city of Bogotá, Colombia.

Conversely, the orchestra seems not to have received the enthusiastic public support that the Orfeón had. Plaza was bothered by this situation and publicly voiced his frustration on several occasions. In a 1934 newspaper article, for example, he complained about the low attendance at the concerts, which he perceived as an irony in light of the popularity that the orchestra seemed to enjoy:

> Our public has shown itself satisfied with everything that the Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela has presented to date. That, however, has been proven more in theory

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[233] Julio Morales Lara, "Notas al Orfeón Lamas," *El Heraldo* 6 December 1933.
[234] Vicente Emilio Sojo, "Vida y milagros del Orfeón Lamas," *Elite* 618 7 August 1937.

> than in practice. I mean to say that everybody speaks very highly of our fine orchestra; its concerts are enthusiastically praised; no one wants to miss the next one, and there is no one, in brief, who does not recognize that it is a work that deserves to live and which is essential to stimulate. But then, when one tries to find out how strongly such beliefs are rooted in the people, one soon realizes that such an enthusiasm and such a good spirit are nothing more than empty wordiness. In every case, such overflowing verbal enthusiasm turns out to be singularly disproportionate to what later must be observed in reality: more or less half the concert hall empty.[235]

Plaza believed that this public disinterest in the orchestra was largely due to the lack of a widely disseminated art-music culture. In this light, Plaza implies, Venezuelans were not accustomed to European art music; thus, even though they were supportive of the symphony, the musical repertoire that the orchestra offered was somehow incomprehensible to the audiences.[236] He recognized that the repertoire played a major role in attracting the public to the concert hall. As a matter of fact, he suggested in a 1936 article that the public's predilection for the Orfeón was linked to the folk-based musical repertoire it performed:

> The public has become very especially interested in the work of the Orfeón Lamas, praiseworthy choral society that to date has exclusively dedicated itself to disseminating the musical repertoire, largely inspired by folklore of our more recent composers: V. E. Sojo, José Antonio Calcaño, Mosiés Moleiro, Miguel A. Calcaño, the undersigned, and others. The Sinfónica Venezuela, subsidized by the current government, makes efforts to disseminate, above all, the great works of the past and present western symphonism. The quality of its performances improves every day; the public, however, has until now seen [the orchestra] with rather indifferent eyes.[237]

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[235] Juan Bautista Plaza, "¿Contará con buen público la Sinfónica Venezuela?" *El Universal* 24 February 1934.

[236] It was precisely this aversion to art music that motivated Plaza to produce a series of radio programs on music appreciation a few years later. See chapter 4 of this study for Plaza's radio programs on music appreciation.

[237] Juan Bautista Plaza, "Apuntes sobre la cultura musical de Venezuela," *Acción Liberal La Revista de Colombia para America* 41 (November 1936): 130. Reprinted in Plaza, *La música en nuestra vida,* 320.

Plaza's frustration over the lack of support for the orchestra grew stronger towards the end of the decade. In the first program of a radio series on music appreciation that he started in 1939 he complained about the overall "indifference" that audiences showed toward the orchestra:

> The tenacious efforts that we have been making to promote good music have not yielded effective results. Our public continues to demonstrate an almost total indifference towards any superior artistic manifestation that is offered them. If one wants a proof of this, it suffices to contemplate the hall of the Municipal Theater every time a concert of the Venezuelan Symphony Orchestra is presented. These concerts, sponsored by the government of the Federal District, take place once a month. In addition, they are free of charge, so that anyone who wishes to attend only has to ask for a ticket at the box office. Well then, far from filling up the theater, as it would naturally occur in any other place where good music is appreciated for what is worth, a large amount of seats in our Municipal [theater] remain empty, because people prefer either to stay beatifically at home or to go to the movies to watch a film that they might as well watch in a different occasion. Is it that [the public] does not like the type of music that the orchestra performs? Is it that people are afraid they might get bored? But, how could a person who has never bothered to attend such a concert know that?[238]

Regardless of the reasons why audiences in Caracas were not supportive of the orchestra during the 1930s, it is evident that as an invented tradition the symphony was not fulfilling the function of bringing the nation together. Considering, on the one hand, the prevalent nationalist sentiments that were present in virtually every aspect of life at the time—most certainly in intellectual and artistic life—and, on the other hand, the impact of imported technology, which through cinema and radio had introduced Caribbean music and Mexican movie stars into Caracas's households, it is feasible that the increasingly modern middle class in Caracas saw the European repertoire of the symphony as old-fashioned.

Indeed, it was only after the mid-1940s when the programs of the symphony started to include more music by Venezuelan composers that the public became more seriously interested in the symphony. Specifically, the interest coincided with the rise of a new generation of

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[238] Juan Bautista Plaza, *El Lenguaje de la música: Lecciones populares sobre música*, ed. Eduardo Plaza (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1966), 16.

orchestral composers who had been trained during the renovation. These composers wrote music in a nationalist style, favoring folksongs and regional landscape as their main musical sources. This approach to music composition had proven very successful in the repertoire of the Orfeón Lamas but had taken longer for composers to apply to the orchestra. Unlike the Orfeón, the orchestra did not have an original repertoire of works by native composers when it started in 1930, which most likely played a role in the public's failure to identify itself with the symphony. The fact is, however, that when works based on national subjects were programmed by the symphony, the public responses shifted dramatically. Reporting on the performance of one such nationalistic work, Antonio Estevez's *Cantata criolla*, during the first Latin American music festival in Caracas in 1954, Aaron Copland wrote, "Another discovery of the festival was 38-year old Antonio Estevez of Caracas. Eight thousand persons turned out to see him conduct his "Cantata Criolla" for soloists, chorus and orchestra, and shouted their approbation. He has written a flavorsome work, with felicitous touches of local color."[239]

The question, then, of why Venezuelan audiences were so enthusiastic about music inspired by national subjects is better answered not in a musical context but rather in the larger processes of inventing traditions taking place at the time. Nationalism, Gellner argues, is not an end but a means for homogenizing societies. The emerging modern Venezuelan society preferred an art-music style based on native subjects because they had been taught to recognize themselves in a national culture—an invented tradition in its own terms. So, Plaza's efforts to create an audience for "the great works of the past and present symphonism" were in this context compromised, if not superseded, by his own nationalist project.

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[239] Aaron Copland, "Festival in Caracas: Recent Venezuelan Event Was Devoted to Composers of Latin America," *New York Times* 26 December 1954.

4.0 THE INVENTION OF THE NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY

Along with creating a musical infrastructure, the renovators set out to define Venezuelan music. This part of their nationalist project consisted of formulating a nationalist ideology that looked into the country's musical past in order to rationalize the current state of music and to to project it into the future. They participated in this by producing a large body of scholarly and journalistic work, by reaching out to the broad population, and by engaging in public policy making. These activities led them to consolidate their positions as the country's foremost authorities in music, establishing a high reputation which to this date remains uncontested.

A first area of interest in the renovators' agenda was to write the history of Venezuelan art music. Approaching the country's music from the models of periodization used in Europe, they wrote a narrative of music history consisting of three periods: development, demise, and renovation. The first period, spanning from the last quarter of the eighteenth century to the first quarter of the nineteenth, was exalted in their history as the golden era of Venezuelan art music: a prosperous musical environment in the city of Caracas where music was created by native composers who were up to date with the latest trends in music composition in Europe. The second period, following the revolutionary war and ending around 1920, corresponded with European romanticism. This was frequently regarded as a period of musical decadence because composers were not able to advance Venezuelan music to a more progressive stage. Instead, composers remained in the shadow of the greatest accomplishments of European romanticism,

cultivating almost exclusively salon genres of which the renovators became harsh critics. The third period, the renovation, corresponded with the twentieth century and entailed an evaluation of the current state of music and a discourse about the conditions Venezuelans should meet in order to improve music composition and musical life in the country. In addition to the creation of a modern musical infrastructure, these conditions required that Venezuelans become educated in art music and national music, the latter being the product of the renovators' nationalist agenda.

As the nation itself was undergoing a rapid process of modernization, the renovators took this opportunity to define the role for music within this context. They elaborated a historical narrative that exalted a highly sophisticated art-music tradition, which flourished in Caracas during colonial times. Through systematic archival research and stylistic analysis, they pieced together a tale of musical comradeship and religious devotion resulting in a large repertoire of compositions which they promoted as part of the nation's musical heritage. At the same time, their discourse aimed at unifying national culture by promoting folk music as part of a national identity. The renovators pioneered ethnomusicological research, collecting folksongs, and then incorporating their findings into a nationalist discourse of authenticity in which folklore was used as an antidote for the damaging effect of imported popular music that was rapidly spreading through the airwaves.

Another important aspect in the creation of this national ideology was the consolidation of the mechanisms for its dissemination. Both the Venezuelan Symphony and the Orfeón Lamas, despite their relatively limited audiences, had opened important avenues for this. In 1939 Juan Bautista Plaza started a series of radio programs on music appreciation intended to educate the general public in art music. Similarly, the renovators set out to introduce curricular reforms in the public education system. In the late 1930s Vicente Emilio Sojo compiled a collection of

Venezuelan songs, which he arranged and harmonized for use in the public schools. In the early 1940s, Juan Bautista Plaza started a series of trips abroad in order to learn the latest methods in music education. In 1944 he was appointed Secretary of Culture, an office of the Ministry of National Education, where he oversaw all of the official programs on the arts and culture. Under his supervision, the ministry of national education introduced the most comprehensive reforms in the music education system that the country had ever adopted. These reforms included the adoption of music instruction at the elementary school level, the creation of a program in pedagogy for the training of music teachers for the public schools, and the establishment of a preparatory school of music where students received instruction on the fundamentals of music in preparation for admission to the advanced School of Music.

Although these individual aspects of the musical renovation took different shapes and aimed at different goals, the governing principle behind them was essentially the same: the invention of new codes of cultural communication that would enable Venezuelans to come together as a unified people under a shared musical past and a national folklore. This chapter explores those dynamics more closely.

4.1 THE EXALTATION OF COLONIAL MUSIC

In the early 1930s Juan Bautista Plaza began to lecture and to write articles on the topic of Venezuelan colonial music. Though these early pieces were primarily journalistic in nature, he took upon himself the task of clarifying some historical mistakes surrounding colonial composers and their music. This process, however allowed Plaza to engage in a systematic study of colonial

music leading to a significant body of scholarly work on the topic in later years.[240] The majority of his writings on colonial music deal with the musical developments in Caracas in the period between 1770 and 1811. During this time, a musical movement flourished around the figure of a native priest, Pedro Palacios y Sojo (1739-1799), who in 1770 established in the city a congregation of the oratory St. Philip Neri. Father Sojo came from a prominent family in Caracas associated with a wealthy elite attracted to the arts and particularly music. Frequent references to the informal musical gatherings in a ranch owned by Father Sojo outside the city of Caracas suggest that he was a very influential musical patron around whom the vast majority of both sacred and secular musical life in the city gravitated.[241] Indeed, there is strong evidence to connect Father Sojo with the most important Venezuelan colonial composers from two consecutive generations. In his last will, for instance, he bequeathed his inventory of musical instruments and some other personal property to several musicians.[242] Likewise, it is widely accepted that Father Sojo introduced native composers to the music of their European contemporaries, particularly Pergolesi, Mozart, and Haydn.[243]

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[240] Plaza's journalistic articles were published regularly in various Caracas newspapers and magazines, particularly in *El Universal* and *El Nuevo Diario*. His scholarly articles appeared in *Revista Nacional de Cultura* and *Elite.* For a detailed catalogue of Plaza's writings see, Marie E. Labonville, "Juan Bautista Plaza: A Documented Chronology; Catalogue of his Writings; Plaza and the press," *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 38 (September-December 1998): 1-171.

[241] A contemporary account on *Repertorio Americano* by a very prominent writer, Andres Bello, refers to Father Sojo as the founder of music in Venezuela.

[242] Father Sojo's will was the subject of a 1935 article by Juan Bautista Plaza who used it to partly reconstruct a biography of Father Sojo as well as other musicians associated with him. Plaza found the document in a "Registry of Testaments and other Dispositions" for the year 1799 housed in the archive of the Principal Registry in the Caracas. For Plaza's article, see "El testamento del Padre Sojo," *El Universal* 17 September 1935, reprinted in Juan Bautista Plaza, *La música en nuestra vida: Escritos 1925-1965* (Caracas: Fundación Vicente Emilio Sojo, 2000): 275-287.

[243] This claim, however, first appeared in some nineteenth-century accounts that are generally mistrusted for their lack of historical accuracy. The evidence linking the composers associated with Father Sojo with Pergolesi, Mozart, and Haydn is for the most part circumstantial and based primarily on a few surviving works by Pergolesi found in Caracas as well as on some common stylistic traits.

When Juan Bautista Plaza began to write about this topic he took issue with how nineteenth-century imagination had colored, and hence misrepresented, the history of colonial music. In a newspaper article from 1932, which was half a lesson on musical liturgy and half a critique of Venezuelan music historiography, he dealt with *Populе meus*, a well-known setting of the Improperia for the veneration of the cross during the liturgy of Good Friday by composer José Angel Lamas (1775-1814).[244] He began the article by discussing the liturgical context for the Improperia and by elaborating on other settings by Palestrina and Victoria before discussing Lamas's work. By calling the attention to the liturgical context, Plaza first argued that Lamas's work could not have been intended as a liturgical piece but rather as a sacred composition, motet-cantata, which was more representative of eighteenth-century practices. The fact that the work was scored for voices and orchestra, Plaza contended, suggests that the piece must not have been intended for performance during the liturgy of Good Friday, when instrumental music was strictly forbidden. He further argued that by setting only the first verses of the text (the *Populе meus* section) Lamas's work lacked all liturgical functionality as the high point of the Improperia text was actually in the ensuing reproaches. Based on these observations Plaza concluded that Lamas's *Populе meus* could have been performed as a religious work during the offices of the hours or in any other non-liturgical occasion but never during the Good Friday liturgy.

This broad approach to the liturgical and historical context of *Populе meus* enabled Plaza to launch a strong criticism of music scholarship and of prevalent music historiography in Venezuela. He drew attention to a long-established tradition involving the performance of Lamas's work at the Caracas cathedral during the liturgy of Good Friday. He condemned this

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[244] Juan Bautista Plaza, "El 'Populе meus.' Los Improperios de Oficio del Viernes Santo. Su interpretación musical por los grandes maestros de la polifonía vocal. Decadencia de la música sagrada a principios de siglo pasado. El 'Populе meus' de Lamas ¿Se ejecuta en Roma?," *El Nuevo Diario* 23 March 1932. Reprinted in Plaza, *La musica en nuestra vida*, 255-261.

practice not only because it revealed a great deal of ignorance among those in charge of providing the music for the liturgy but also because in adapting the tradition to the spirit of the day, Lamas's *Populе meus* had been degenerated to the extent that the piece was no longer "performed without vocals but by nothing less than the martial band." This, Plaza observed, was a practice that far departed from the models dictated by the Vatican. "We must convene," he denounced, "that this is a truly primitive custom."[245] According to Plaza, many of those customs were rooted in uninformed scholarship, which had even created legends around Lamas's work. He traced this practice back to the nineteenth century. An 1837 edition of the *Populе meus* falsely claimed that the work was traditionally performed on Good Fridays at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. This story, Plaza pointed out, snowballed as other accounts adorned it with fabricated details, such as how the work came to be known in Rome or how it had been incorporated into an exclusive collection of music in the Papal chapel. Plaza dismissed the majority of those claims for their anachronistic associations of church personalities with the introduction of Lamas's work in the Vatican.[246]

Plaza's attacks on prevalent scholarship were intended to clear up Lamas's piece from fallacious claims that had created a context of misrepresentation of the composer and his work. At the time when Plaza published this article the topic of colonial music was rather obscure. In fact, most of what was known then came primarily from the nineteenth-century sources he criticized.[247] Those sources provided a relatively significant amount of detail about composers, their work, and musical life in the city but lacked any source of documentation, which, according

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[245] Ibid., 258.
[246] Ibid.,
[247] Particularly an 1883 book by Ramón de la Plaza, which, at the time, was the only substantial account of Venezuelan music history. For details, see Ramón de la Plaza, *Ensayos sobre el arte en Venezuela* (Caracas: La Opinión Nacional, 1883).

to Plaza, suggested that most of those claims either came from the oral tradition or were altogether fabricated.

Moreover, the lack of musical scores had only contributed to obscure the topic of colonial music in Venezuela. In fact, in the early 1930s only a handful of compositions were known to exist. His early research on colonial music, however, triggered an interest in the topic among his peers and the general public. Following his first lectures and newspaper articles, musical manuscripts from colonial composers began to surface in private collections. The discovery of new works not only provided cause for public celebration but furthered archival research.[248] The most astounding of such discoveries came in 1935 when the director of the School of Music, Ascanio Negretti, found in a storage room in the school a wooden box containing hundreds of music manuscripts dating from the late-eighteenth to the early-nineteenth century. Partly because of his interest in the topic of colonial music, and partly because of a political connection with the newly-established government, the Ministry of National Education created a new position for Plaza in 1936, which put him in charge of overseeing the collection.[249] As the "Librarian and Archivist" of the school, Plaza was responsible for organizing, copying, and preserving the manuscripts. This new position also allowed him the possibility to engage in musicological research as well as to promote this music through concerts, lectures, and publications.

Plaza's first task in his new position was to painstakingly sort out the manuscripts consisting primarily of loose leaves of music for voices and orchestra.[250] He copied the manuscripts and prepared performance parts for the Orfeon and the orchestra. He was eager to

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[248] On the early discoveries, particularly in regards to Plaza's involvements, see Labonville *Juan Bautista Plaza and Musical Nationalism in Venezuela* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 182.

[249] Ibid., 184.

[250] According to a report by Francisco Curt Lange, the manuscript collection consisted of 230 religious works, 10 patriotic songs, a symphony, and an orchestral overture. Francisco Curt Lange "El Archivo de música colonial. Juan Bautista Plaza: Un auténtico musicólogo," *El Universal* 27 January 1939.

have this music published but the absence of a music printing industry in the country as well as the lack of financial support delayed the publication of these works a few years. In fact, it was only after Plaza was able to draw international interest to these manuscripts that he was actually in a position to get them published.[251] In 1939, the pioneer Latin American musicologist Francisco Curt Lange arrived in Caracas on a research trip. At the time, he was the head of the Inter-American Institute of Musicology, headquartered in Montevideo, Uruguay, and was travelling throughout the continent collecting materials for his research on musical Americanism. After becoming acquainted with Plaza and the manuscripts at the school, Lange began to write about Venezuelan colonial music, which he promptly dubbed "The American Musical Miracle."[252] By 1942, a selected group of these works was published jointly by the Ministry of National Education in Venezuela and the Inter-American Institute of Musicology. Under the general title *Archivo de Musica Colonial Venezolana*, the collection consisted of twelve of the most representative works in the archive.[253]

Through his work with the manuscripts and the publication of the collection, Plaza emerged as the leading musicologist in the country. He went on to study colonial music more systematically and through dedicated archival research he was able to flesh out the lives of several colonial composers.[254] In addition to his frequent talks, newspaper articles, and

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[251] Labonville, *Juan Bautista Plaza*, 185.

[252] Miguel Castillo Didier, "Cayetano Carreño (1774-1836): En torno a su cuna y su obra," *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 11 no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1990), 37.

[253] The collection was published between 1942 and 1943 and consists of twelve volumes, each on an individual work. José Angel Lamas is represented in the collection with three works (*Tres Lecciones para el Officio de Difuntos, Salve Regina,* and *Populе Meus*); Juan José Landaeta, Cayetano Carreño, and José Francisco Velasquez with two works each (respectively, *Pesame a la Virgen, Salve Regina*; *Tristis Est, In Monte Oliveti*; *Niño Mio* and *Tercera Lección de Difuntos*); and a work each by Juan Manuel Olivares (*Salve*), J. A. Caro de Boesi (*Christus Factus Est*), and Pedro Nolasco Colon (*Llorad Mortales*).

[254] In fact, the topic of colonial music occupied Plaza's mind to the end of his life. His last public lecture delivered at the Asociación Musical on 27 November 1964 dealt with colonial music. A transcription of the lecture was later published as "La música colonial venezolana al día con la europea," *Revista Nacional de Cultura* 27

participation in performances, Plaza set out to introduce this music in international scholarly circles through lectures and publications. In the spring of 1942, he travelled to the United States to present his research at various conferences and in formal lectures, including the Greater New York Chapter of the American Musicological Society, Eastman School of Music, Yale University, and Queen's College.[255] The following year he published an article in *The Musical Quarterly* based on these lectures.[256]

From his early lectures and articles Plaza began to outline two aspects of colonial music that became prevalent in the new historiography: first, that despite their marginal geographical location Venezuelan colonial composers had been up to date with the main currents in European models and second, that even though native composers had been influenced by European music, their music displayed characteristics that could be regarded specifically as Venezuelan. In light of his nationalist project, these two assumptions deserve special attention because they enabled Plaza to provide modern composers, intellectuals, and audiences alike a historical paradigm for the construction of their national identity. [257] In Plaza's view, Venezuelan music achieved a privileged level of sophistication during the colonial period. In his 1932 article on Lamas he emphasized that the *Populе meus* was a work of extraordinary musical quality in the spirit of its

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(January-June 1965): 44-49. Likewise, his last newspaper article was devoted to colonial music. Juan Bautista Plaza, "Un aspecto de nuestra música colonial," *El Universal* 20 January 1965.

[255] Labonville, *Juan Bautista Plaza and Musical Nationalism*, 188-9.

[256] Juan Bautista Plaza, "Music in Caracas during the Colonial Period: 1770-1811," *The Musical Quarterly* 29 n. 2 (April 1943): 198-213.

[257] These two notions became pervasive in Plaza's and, to a large extent, in Calcaño's, output. In fact, those assertions have illuminated a great deal of scholarship since Plaza's time and have remained mostly unchallenged. Some of the sources that have built upon these assumptions include Eduardo Lira Espejo, "Milagro musical venezolano durante la colonia," *Revista Nacional de Cultura* 1 (June, 1940): 67-82; Israel Peña, *El milagro musical de la Colonia* (Caracas: Instituto Nacional de Cultura y Bellas Artes, 1967); Walter Guido, *Panorama de la música en Venezuela* (Caracas Fundarte, 1978) and "Síntesis de la historia de la música en Venezuela," *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 1 and 2 (May-August, 1980 and September-December, 1980): 61-73 and 47-65; Alberto Calzavara, *Historia de la música en Venezuela: Período hispánico con referencias al teatro y a la danza* (Caracas: Ex Libris, 1987). In recent years other scholars have begun to challenge these assumptions based on comparative analysis of style. On this, see Juan Francisco Sanz, "Un acercamiento analítico a los compositores de la Escuela de Chacao," *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 33 (1996): 58-77.

time. Accordingly, "the grace and spontaneity of the melodic contour, the exquisite simplicity of the harmony, and, above all, the softness of the cadences at the end of the phrases, reveal that José Angel Lamas was perhaps the only Venezuelan musician of his time who was able to penetrate deeply into the spirit of the divine Mozart." [258]

This celebratory rhetoric increased during the late 1930s and 40s as the discovery of new manuscripts and documentary sources shed more light on colonial music. By the mid-1940s Plaza extended his laudatory remarks beyond Lamas to include the two generations of musicians associated with Father Sojo. He regarded this group of musicians as "a real school of music with national characteristics and a definite esthetic orientation."[259]

In his lectures and articles, Plaza typically linked the music of colonial composers with that of Pergolesi, Haydn, and Mozart. This connection allowed Plaza to elaborate two important aspects of his narrative of colonial music: First, it provided the groundwork for his rationalization of how Venezuelan colonial composers developed such a refined musical style, and, second, it served him to promote the notion that during the decades around the turn of the nineteenth century, Venezuelan composers were current with the latest compositional trends in Europe.

The question of how and where Venezuelan colonial composers received their musical training has puzzled scholars for nearly a century. Plaza was generally suspicious of nineteenth-century accounts, so he drew his assumptions from studying primary sources, especially those pertaining to Father Sojo and the oratory.[260] The lack of documentation regarding the musical

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[258] Plaza, "El Populeus," 260.

[259] Plaza, "Music in Caracas during the Colonial Period," 211.

[260] Sojo's own musical training, or even musical proficiency, cannot be documented from existing primary sources. His role with music appears to have been more of a patron and organizer than as an active musician or composer.

training in composition led Plaza to conclude that the first generation of colonial composers consisted of primarily self-taught musicians who eventually passed on their knowledge to subsequent generations. According to Plaza, the early generation learned from studying the works of European composers, particularly Pergolesi, of whom at least his *Salve Regina* in C minor was known in Caracas by the time Father Sojo established the oratorio.[261] Specifically regarding a setting of the *Salve Regina* by the earliest known colonial composer, Juan Manuel Olivares (1760-1797), Plaza argued that this work could have likely been modeled after that of Pergolesi:

> When these two pieces are compared one can observe certain similarities along with not so few differences. Indeed, the text in both pieces is divided into five sections, each of which is given an independent musical section. The airs or movements are arranged following the same pattern: two slow sections, a central Allegro, and two slow sections, the last of which is a Largo of reduced dimensions. We must also add that in the word 'suspiramus' Pergolesi uses the same style of vocal melody interrupted by brief pauses, just as it appears in Olivares's Salve. Regarding the succession of keys, though not the same in these compositions, they both share the common characteristic of featuring the main key only in the outward movements.[262]

This structural comparison enabled Plaza not only to connect the music of Olivares with the European musical tradition but also to suggest a context for colonial music in Caracas which accounted for the training of composers and the development of their musical style. Because no reference exists to composers active in Caracas at the time Father Sojo established his congregation, Plaza concluded that Olivares and other musicians of his generation must have been trained themselves in composition by studying—in some kind of chronological fashion—the music that Sojo brought back from Europe in 1770. From the study of composers from the

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[261] Plaza, "La música colonial venezolana al día con la europea," *Revista Nacional de Cultura* 27 no. 167-168-169 (January-June, 1965), 46.

[262] Plaza, "Juan Manuel Olivares: El mas antiguo compositor venezolano," *Revista Nacional de Cultura* 8 no. 63 (July-August, 1947), 15

past, namely Pergolesi, Olivares began to develop a personal style, which he would synthesize with more modern styles as he matured as a composer.[263] This, Plaza speculates, could help explain why Olivares's surviving music shows a stronger Italian baroque influence than that of the later generation of composers, which seems to have been more influenced by the Viennese classicism.[264]

According to Plaza, the second generation of composers—the group including José Angel Lamas, Cayetano Carreño, Juan José Landaeta, José Francisco Velasquez Jr., and Pedro Nolasco Colón—emerged "as a natural result of the enthusiasm Father Sojo, had imbued in the group of artists surrounding him."[265] Plaza portrayed them as cosmopolitan musicians who had the merit "of knowing how to assimilate the spirit of contemporary European music, the greatest exponents of which were Gluck, Haydn, and Mozart."[266] The question of how exactly those composers had assimilated European trends Plaza explained by elaborating on general stylistic features in the music by native composers. He wrote about how most mass settings generally followed the structural plan found in eighteenth-century masses by Haydn and Mozart. Particularly, he pointed out the fact that, as in their models, the Kyries, Glorias, and Credos of the Venezuelan masses tended to be divided into several sections, the last one of each always set to a fast tempo. Likewise, he observed that other sections of the masses such as the Sanctus and

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[263] He did acknowledge, however, that the influence of classicism was marked in Olivares's music. In his discussion of the *Salve Regina* he pointed out that Olivares's setting departed from Pergolesi's in that it revealed stylistic traits that were common in more recent European music. In regards to instrumental design, for example, Plaza argued that unlike Pergolesi's preferences for contrapuntal textures for a string ensemble, Olivares chose homophonic textures typical of the Viennese classicism and the Manheim symphonists. Ibid., 16.

[264] Plaza, "El Padre Sojo," *Revista Nacional de Cultura* 19 (September-October, 1957), 55-6. Incidentally, Plaza believed that some of the latter composers could have been students of Olivares. A manuscript page of a *Psalm for the Vespers of Our Lady of Mercy* in the Colonial Music Archive, for instance, attributes the work to "J. M. Olivares and a disciple." Facsimile reproduced in Juan Bautista Plaza, "Juan Manuel Olivares: El mas antiguo compositor venezolano," 5.

[265] Plaza, "Music in Caracas," 203.

[266] Ibid., 203.

Benedictus were closely united, and the Agnus Dei was typically short in both Venezuelan and European masses.[267] He further elaborated this thesis by pointing out some compositional procedures such as orchestration, nearly always approached using the standard Manheim model, and textural treatments with a marked preference for homophonic fabrics in which melodic orchestral material is almost exclusively given to the first violin.[268]

Despite his celebratory tone in regards to native composers modeling the structural layout of their works after major contemporary figures in European music, Plaza conceded that Venezuelan music lacked the complexities of harmony and counterpoint exhibited by its European models. He attributed this partly to the composers' lack of a systematic musical training and partly to the social conditions in which colonial composers labored, which did not foster a favorable environment for musicians to fully develop their artistic potential. This was evident not only in the governing class system which prevented non-white musicians (incidentally the majority of colonial artists) from holding employment in the cathedrals but also in the lack of competent performers, as suggested by the simplicity of the scoring in which only the first violins typically engage in some kind of technical display.[269]

In Plaza's views, however, these stylistic deficiencies were countered by a religious spirit that truly made this music stand out. "In spite of the poverty of their musical language," Plaza wrote, "these men knew how to express in music their deepest feelings of adoration, or religious fervor. Handicapped as they were by their sketchy education and the small musical means at

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[267] Ibid., 207.
[268] Ibid., 209-210.
[269] For a useful account of class and race relations in colonial Venezuela, see Winthrop R. Wright, *Café con leche: Race, Class, and National Image in Venezuela* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

their disposal for the realization of their work, they nonetheless managed to achieve amazing results."[270]

Furthermore, Plaza maintained throughout his career that Venezuelan colonial music exhibited certain characteristics that could be associated with a national soul. Despite his persistence on this thesis, he never fully elaborated it. Whether because it was an abstraction difficult to articulate or because he purposely left defining this national soul to his fellow Venezuelans, he insisted that "something" occurred at the intersection of history, identity, race, and culture that made this music express a national character:

> There is something in the music of our Olivares which not only is not derived from foreign sources, but that does not even belong entirely to Olivares himself. That something we could define as the intuitive expression of the colonial Venezuelan soul, or, at least, of the religious face of it, already very different from that which came to us from the mother land [Spain]. No matter how little attention one pays to our old colonial music, it will not be possible in any case that this music will be mistaken for musics arrived from other lands, no matter how numerous the similarities in style, form, or technical procedures can be found between the two. The content, the 'poetical basis' [of our colonial music], is very different [from foreign music], as is also different its realization, the 'practical basis,' conceived according to the possibilities of the medium and perfectly adapted to those possibilities. In the virtue or capacity of adaptation as well as in the admirable manner in which he was able to express the mystic pleas of the race's religious soul, lies, in our view, the principal aesthetic merit that the music of Olivares, and that of almost all of those who in their time followed his steps, has to offer.[271]

As part of his nationalist agenda, Plaza's words sought to exalt colonial sacred music as a source of identity, a type of music in which Venezuelans should be able to recognize themselves even though, on the surface, it had a European sound. This music should be a source of national pride as it showed that colonial composers, "despite the difficulty of communications between Caracas and Europe, were completely up to date with the music that then was made in the old

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[270] Plaza, "Music in Caracas during the Colonial Period," 211.
[271] Plaza, "Juan Manuel Olivares," 19.

continent."[272] Venezuelans, Plaza implies, had developed a musical personality of their own during the colonial period. Even though he struggled to elaborate this thesis, he and his colleagues agreed that whatever this personality might have been it was lost with the advent of republicanism.

4.2 CRITIQUE OF ROMANTICISM

For Plaza and his colleagues the renovation movement was largely about the restoration of the high artistic level that Venezuelan art music had enjoyed at the end of the colonial period. Since the declaration of independence from Spain in 1811 the country had entered an unsettling period of social and political turmoil that continued well beyond the end of the revolutionary movement in the 1820s. As presented in the historiography of the renovation, independence had a negative effect on the aesthetics of Venezuelan music, for it was precisely with the advent of the republican system that music composition stopped being current with Europe and entered a period of decadence.

The declining view of art music in Venezuela during the years of the independence war had already been articulated in nineteenth-century accounts. Ramón de La Plaza had, in fact, referred to the 1810s as the last decade of the "Father Sojo cycle."[273] In his account, during the revolutionary war many native musicians were suspicious of subversive activities and hence

[272] Plaza "La música colonial venezolana," 44.
[273] De la Plaza, *Ensayos sobre el arte en Venezuela,* 109.

were persecuted by the royalists.[274] He further claimed that under the social conditions of the republican system a lack of interest in the arts became apparent. The arts in this new system were regarded among the lower crafts and the term "musician" was even considered to be socially demeaning.[275]

While consistent with the notion of a "Father Sojo cycle," the historicism of the renovation provided a different picture of music during the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period. José Antonio Calcaño, for instance, set out to research musical activities in the country during the first half of the nineteenth century and found, contrary to De La Plaza's claims, that musical activities in Caracas flourished during the revolutionary war (1811-1821).[276] He recounts that during this period "over 150 performers" were active in the city, that several academies of music existed in which not just the fundamentals of music but advanced musical skills were taught, and that a very well supported philharmonic society existed.[277] Calcaño does credit native composers with participating in the revolutionary movement by writing patriotic songs and providing music for the independence cause and that many were persecuted, incarcerated, and executed, but in his view, musicians were not particularly targeted by the royalists as De La Plaza had claimed.

For Calcaño, the decline of music in Caracas beginning with the independence was not manifested in the city's musical life but rather in music composition. In his view, a series of dramatic circumstances, including the deadly war for independence, the devastating earthquake

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[274] He recounts an episode in which a number of musicians including the composer of the Venezuela's national anthem, Juan José Landaeta, were executed in public. De la Plaza, *Ensayos sobre el arte en Venezuela*, 103-4.

[275] Ibid., 111.

[276] Calcaño, *Contribución*, 22. Elsewhere, however, he admits that with the escalation of the independence war in 1813, particularly as the city of Caracas became a theater for the conflict, many city-musicians migrated to other regions while many others joined the revolution. On this, see Calcaño, *La ciudad y su música*, 114.

[277] Calcaño, *Contribución*, 11, 20-22.

of 1812, and the revolution of ideas that was reshaping Europe and America, had produced a "chaotic imbalance" in the minds of those composers who had been trained in the "resigned idyll of the colonial days."[278] Venezuelan composers, Calcaño suggests, became disoriented in this new environment and their creative processes, particularly in their connection with the classicist models of the Father Sojo group, were disrupted.[279] Thus, Calcaño claims, the period of decadence in Venezuelan music began. Since the classicist models were outdated both stylistically and as part of a socio-historical context, native composers began to look back to Europe for newer models. According to Calcaño, when the generation of the 1830s and 40s turned back to Europe, they found themselves struggling to reconnect because romanticism had already reshaped the European musical paradigms in ways that native composers were unable to assimilate. Occupied with the internal dynamics, Calcaño implies, native composers had altogether missed the critical process of transition towards romanticism that Europeans had experienced. Because of this, Venezuelan music "missed the first anguished cry against classicism. We missed the rebellion," Calcaño declares, "we missed the drive that enthroned the new expression. Here, the blooming garden of the eighteenth century found itself, suddenly flooded by the rain but we never had the storm."[280]

From the standpoint of nationalism, however, the extent to which native composers were unable, or deliberately chose not, to shape their music after contemporary European models should not be taken as coincidental. The ideas of revolution and freedom had been circulating among the white elites since the late eighteenth century, and even when the majority of

[278] Ibid., 26.
[279] Ibid., 27.
[280] Ibid., 45.

musicians were associated with the lower social classes they interacted closely with the elite.[281] Moreover, the fact that native composers contributed their music to the revolutionary cause suggests that they were supportive of the political movement for independence. From an aesthetic point of view, on the other hand, no evidence exists to suggest that native composers purposely abandoned current European stylistic trends in favor of their own musical idioms.

In the rhetoric of the renovation, neither the revolutionary ideas underlining the political movement for independence nor the aesthetic impulses of European romanticism had a direct impact on music composition in Venezuela during the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Juan Bautista Plaza and José Antonio Calcaño believed that native composers had succeeded in creating a simplified classical style embedded with local imagery, which was useful to them and to their audiences until the 1830s. Calcaño, for example, recognized that during this time Venezuelan composers were no longer current with the latest trends in European music; yet, he maintained that the native classicism was still full of vitality. He argues, "even if we were out of date, our temperament had not expired yet and our classicism of those years was far from being an empty form; our classicism never fell, as the European [classicism] did, in the deplorable decadence of the formula." [282]

Hence, Venezuelan music of the revolutionary period was tied to a colonial aesthetic, which, in turn, had emerged out of a natural connection between composers and their environment. Calcaño described this connection in a quasi-idyllic fashion:

> All the oeuvre of our classics corresponds to the colonial mentality. The tranquil environment of eighteenth-century Caracas, the peacefulness of the neighboring plantations, which our composers so frequently visited, and out of which the

[281] Though the extent to which musicians participated in the planning stages of the revolutionary movement is beyond the scope of this study, the intellectual circle surrounding Father Sojo had been associated with the movement. Father Sojo himself was related to Simón Bolívar's maternal family.

[282] Calcaño, *Contribución*, 45.

> bellicose shriek of the Caraca and Mariche [Indians] had completely banished; the desired serenity and the attained refinement had been infiltrated in the spirit of all. Everything that came from Europe was admired, their rules obeyed, and their aims adopted. One would enjoy peacefully of an artistic modality and a cultural attitude, already established and cured, which completely satisfied the aspirations of all.[283]

Though overtly celebratory of colonialism, this naturalizing approach was useful as a historiographical tool that enabled the renovators not only to extend the colonial period of Venezuelan music at least two decades beyond the actual end of political colonization, but also to radicalize the history of nineteenth-century music. Juan Bautista Plaza, in fact, used the same rhetoric to contrast the music of the Father Sojo group with that of the later generation. He writes, "unfortunately, in later periods, this lesson [i.e., an original style using European models], except in rare instances, was not taken to heart. The work of these men [Father Sojo's group] was born out of a natural harmony between the physical environment and the spirituality of the time. As with all good work, it filled the spiritual needs of its period." [284]

Therefore, in order to radicalize these two periods in Venezuelan music history, the renovators proposed the "missing link" theory, whereby native composers found themselves disoriented and struggling to find their voices within the stylistic codes of romanticism.[285] In this view, the late arrival of romanticism had a negative effect on Venezuelan music because, as Calcaño points out, it was no longer the revolutionary romanticism "titanic and overwhelming" associated with the "grand and throbbing symphony"; instead, he claims, "the romanticism that

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[283] Calcaño, *Contribución*, 24.

[284] Plaza, "Music in Caracas during the Colonial Period," 203.

[285] Calcaño elaborated this thesis in a chapter entitled "Eslabones ausentes" (Missing Links) in his *Contribucion al estudio de la música en Venezuela* and in his *La ciudad y su música: Crónica musical de Caracas.*

inundated our music, slightly late, was that of the little melancholy, that of the nostalgia and faintness, that of dismay and tears."[286]

During the mid-nineteenth century Venezuelan composers had moved away from the predominantly sacred genres of their predecessors in favor of salon music genres. They wrote romantic songs for voice and piano as well as various forms of piano music, including fantasies and rhapsodies on operatic tunes as well as dance pieces. This music was intended for amateur performers and was readily available in print, frequently disseminated as collections or published in cultural magazines and newspapers.[287]

In their assessment of salon music, the renovators took issue on what they saw as an overall lack of stylistic refinement, which departed dramatically from what colonial composers had accomplished. Both Plaza and Calcaño were eager to contrast the musical styles of the two periods and, in doing so, they became harsh critics of the nineteenth-century musical style, which they defined as overtly sentimental and lacking in substance. In a 1940's article for a cultural magazine in Caracas, for example, Plaza contrasted the two periods:

> When nowadays one serenely listens to the insipid musical repertoire cultivated by the generality of our [romantic] composers for so many years, it won't cease to surprise us how easily those musicians surrendered themselves to the vacuous sentimentalism of the time, an emotional attitude that could do nothing to inspire a grand and healthy art, free from scum and impurity. A noble art, purified, as the art which our colonial musicians accomplished, requires in order to exist, among other things, an absolute technical mastery of the sound matter. Those who throw themselves to compose only having vague notions of harmony and composition, as has been the case with many musicians of our late generations, cannot produce but rickety works, conceived indeed with very good and honorable intention, works perhaps very 'inspired' in the conception of their authors, but which in the end are completely unacceptable when they are scrutinized under a severe critical judgment.[288]

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[286] Calcaño, *Contribución*, 45.
[287] Labonville, "Musical Nationalism," 43.
[288] Plaza, "Pasado y presente de la música en Venezuela," *Crítica* 17 December 1940; reprinted as "La música en Venezuela" in Juan Bautista Plaza, *La música en nuestra vida*, 222.

In this and other pieces in which Plaza and Calcaño criticized Venezuelan musical romanticism, two themes recur that played a major role in their nationalist agenda:[289] first, the lack of a thorough knowledge of the fundamental principles of composition and compositional techniques from which the majority of Venezuelan composers had suffered since the mid-nineteenth century; and second, the lack of musical substance, which in the view of the renovators was a fundamental difference between the romantic and the colonial repertoire. The former was then extended in the rhetoric of the renovation to include a critique of cultural institutions and the social environment in which salon music was heard. The latter became associated with a source of national identity which had to be cultivated in order to restore the position that Venezuelan music had once occupied.

The renovators attributed the lack of systematic compositional skills of native composers—and hence the origin of the musical decadence—to the socio-cultural conditions reigning in Venezuela since the mid-nineteenth century. In this light, they presented the few composers whose music they thought worth studying as exceptions to the norms. "Except in the case of one or other composer of merit—a José Angel Montero, a Federico Villena, a Ramón Delgado Palacios," Plaza wrote, "the general aspect that is offered to us by the evolution of music in Venezuela during the last century and the beginning of this, is, thus, that of a gradual decadence."[290] This decadent state, Plaza argued, was directly linked to the institutions "In 1877

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[289] For other works in which Plaza and Calcaño criticized nineteenth-century Venezuelan music, see Juan Bautista Plaza "Apuntes sobre la cultura musical de Venezuela," *Acción liberal: La revista de Colombia para América* 41 (November, 1936): 129-131; "Music in Caracas during the Colonial Period," *The Musical Quarterly* 29 no. 2 (April, 1943): 198-213; "La música colonial venezolana al día con la europea," *Revista nacional de cultura* 27 nos. 167-168-169 (January-June, 1965). José Antonio Calcaño, *Contribución al estudio de la música en Venezuela*, (Caracas: Elite, 1939); *La ciudad y su música: crónica musical de Caracas* (Caracas: Conservatorio Teresa Carreño, 1958); *400 años de música caraqueña* (Caracas: Círculo Musical, 1967).

[290] Plaza, "Pasado y presente," 223. Plaza's article, however, generated a least one public reaction from another musician, Gabriel Montero, who among other aspects took issue on Plaza's criticism of nineteenth-century

the government decreed the creation of an Institute of Fine arts," he wrote. "What results have [that institution] produced in its sixty years of existence? Has it strongly influenced the improvement of our music culture? No, its effects have been as favorable as one should expect."[291]

This critique of musical leadership in the country can be extended to the larger socio-cultural context, which is most likely what Plaza suggested "one should expect." Indeed, his criticism of the main institution for the study of music in Caracas alludes to the socio-cultural context of modernization that began during the years of the presidency of Guzmán Blanco, which brought about a sumptuous lifestyle for the country's elite.[292] According to Calcaño, this context gave rise to a type of music that was "banal" in spirit, "formulaic" in structure, and of "bad taste," especially when compared to Venezuelan music of the previous period. In his view, "during the romantic period emerged the art of salon, which was intended as to brag in social gatherings, to gain the recognition of an 'artist.' The expression was often artificial and formulaic. There were concessions to the preferences of the public (almost always profane in music) which filled the living rooms. This caused a deviation in the [musical] orientation and an

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Venezuelan music and the School of Music in Caracas. In his rebuttal, Montero accused Plaza and the leaders of the renovation of criticizing nineteenth-century music in order to serve their own interests. For Montero's criticism of Plaza, see Gabriel Montero "Las actividades musicales en Venezuela," *Ahora* 21 July 1937 and "Nuestros grandes músicos de ayer: Algunos de los valores artísticos que dentro de su época supieron trabajar por la cultura de la patria," *La Esfera* 22 February 1941.

[291] Plaza, "Apuntes sobre la cultura musical de Venezuela," 319.

[292] As a matter of fact, Venezuelan governments starting in the second half of the nineteenth century had taken a certain interest in patronizing music. In 1854 president José Gregorio Monagas inaugurated the Teatro Caracas, where Italian opera seasons were presented. In 1866 another theater, Teatro Maderero, later renamed Teatro de la Zarzuela began to offer light opera seasons. During the alternating years of Guzmán Blanco, the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes and the Guzmán Blanco Theater (currently named Municipal Theater) opened. Likewise, the patriotic song "Gloria al bravo pueblo" by colonial composer Juan José Landaeta was decreed Venezuela's national anthem by Guzmán Blanco in 1881.

exaggerated cultivation of banal sentimentalism; while the reliance on formulas caused a regrettable neglect of the learning [of proper musical skills]." [293]

To counteract this decadent state, the renovators began to articulate a discourse of authenticity that took into account the lower social classes. This kind of rhetoric allowed them to single out specific composers and pieces from the period, which they believed had some kind of artistic merit. In particular, this was the kind of connection that led Plaza, Calcaño, and subsequent scholars to exalt the Venezuelan *vals*. According to Calcaño, "every time that the social art of our romanticism got in touch with the people, it produced works that reached farther. That was what happened with our *criollo vals*: the salons provided the European model and our popular genius disjointed it both in its technical aspects and in its expressive aims; thus the Venezuelan *vals* was created, one of the most interesting forms of music from that time." [294]

For the renovators, the Venezuelan *vals* was among the most significant sources of national culture that nineteenth-century music in the country had to offer. They saw these pieces as emblematic of a synthesis of the European conventions of the genre with elements of Venezuelan folk culture manifested through the seemingly improvised melodic design and the rhythmic complexities found in many of these pieces. Paradoxically, despite their harsh criticism of nineteenth-century music in the country, the renovators were more concrete in articulating what elements could be recognized as Venezuelan in the *valses* than they were with colonial music. Not surprisingly, however, two fundamental themes of their historiography lay at the core of their models for what true Venezuelan music should be like: a historical root and a connection with the people. This, as the following section elaborates, provided the basis of their nationalist music.

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[293] Calcaño, *Contribución*, 35.
[294] Ibid., 36.

4.3 DEFINING VENEZUELAN MUSIC

By the mid-1930s, Plaza, Calcaño, and Sojo had consolidated their positions as the foremost musical authorities in Venezuela. Their success in creating a musical infrastructure and a body of journalistic and scholarly writing was publicly recognized and they became the subject of frequent reportage by other journalists and scholars who praised them for their work on behalf of music in the country. Indeed, the pervasive nationalist sentiments that permeated virtually every aspect of public life at the time was noticeable in the work of these three musicians. As shown in the previous chapter, most of their efforts to create a national musical infrastructure were typically publicized in a rhetoric filled with nationalist overtones. Likewise, the writings on Venezuelan music from the past and present, particularly those by Plaza and Calcaño, were embedded with references to the national character of the music. Even in their critique of the state of art music since the mid-nineteenth century, Plaza and Calcaño relied on a connection between what was of artistic value and how that was connected with a national identity. This connection was most evident in cases in which the link was easily traceable such as in the *valses* and other folk-based pieces.

But in reflecting upon the role that native composers had played in the global art-music context, Plaza and Calcaño drew more heavily on nationalism. Paradoxically, this was the kind of approach through which they removed themselves from the Eurocentric views that had illuminated their historiography. In doing so, they started to look at the history of music in Venezuela not in the context of western art tradition but rather against the backdrop of Latin American culture. They believed that historically Latin American art had been overly reliant upon European models, which did not reflect the cultural reality of their region and, therefore, had nothing of value to offer to the mainstream. In 1939, Calcaño declared, “Latin American

and, hence, Venezuelan culture is fatally inscribed within the circle of Western European culture, and the center that generates that culture has never been in America. If Europe invents symbolist poetry, America will have symbolist poets; if Europe invents impressionist painting, America will have impressionist painters; and since Europe does not have today a defined musical style, we do not have one either." [295]

In a view that resonated with the Latin American nationalist discourse of the period, Calcaño and Plaza believed that the artistic disorientation underlining music composition in Venezuela was the result of composers' failure to express their own identity in music, which was precisely how other composers in the periphery of western art music had been able to enter the mainstream. For Juan Bautista Plaza, this was not just a matter of sheer patriotism—which, incidentally, was very much a part of everyday life at the time—but rather of composers being able to produce concert music that successfully incorporated elements of native culture and thus finding their way into the museum of art music.[296] Reflecting upon Heitor Villa-Lobos's participation in a music festival in Venice in 1938, where his *Suite Brasileira* had been performed along with a number of other pieces by renowned contemporary European composers, Plaza declared:

> Nowadays, it is possible to affirm that [Latin] American composers have virtually no other choice but to use the vernacular if they aim to contribute to satisfying with some degree of originality the fundamental demands of taste and musical spirit of the day…
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> …The Venezuelan composer cannot ignore the side of nationalism that contemporary music presents to us with such a variety of expressions. On the

[295] Ibid., 48.

[296] I am borrowing the metaphor of a music museum from J. Peter Burkholder's essay on the historicist mainstream that had created a museum-like culture around the 'great' works of art music. On this, see J. P. Burkholder, "Museum Pieces: The Historicist Mainstream of the last Hundred Years," *The Journal of Musicology* 2 (Spring, 1983): 115-134.

> contrary, he must know it well and he must work to add Venezuela to the other brother countries that have already begun to let their own voices be heard.[297]

But Plaza also believed that in the context of vast socio-cultural changes taking place in Venezuela at the time, producing a musical style based on national elements, let alone defining what Venezuelan music should be like, was a challenging task. He articulated this issue by isolating what he thought made Latin American music seem inferior to European music and by examining some of the internal political, cultural, and social dynamics that contributed to it:

> In my view there are three principal reasons which explain the relative inferiority of Latin American music when it is compared to modern European [music] based on national folklore (particularly Russian and Spanish). These are: first, the newness of our nations, which implies, of course, a national consciousness still poorly defined as far as artistic manifestations are concerned; in other words, we feel that our traditions are still not old enough to have rooted themselves in us with that irresistible force which is the essential condition for all artistic creation of a genuinely national nature. Second, the natural disorientation produced by the jumbled and heterogeneous mixture of the different ethnic elements which have come together on our continent, to which is added the variety of climates and regions. As long as the [Latin] American artist does not spontaneously feel singing within him the truly intimate, ancestral voices of his authentic race and of his native environment, his production will not go beyond being an artificial fruit, of a character [that is] intellectual rather than profoundly emotive. And third, the underdeveloped and rudimentary [nature] of artistic education in general and of music education in particular. To construct a truly serious and important work it is essential above all that we have the necessary training for it—and I am not only referring to the training we could call classical, but also to that required by our time, the precise historical moment we are living. It is not possible to be anachronistic, and much less so in art.[298]

Within the larger context of modernization, Plaza's remarks are particularly relevant because they expose the basic premises of the modernist paradigm of nationalism, namely, the recognition of the concept of the nation as something new. Thus, his three assumptions, and particularly their interrelation, deserve further exploration.

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[297] Plaza, "Urge salvar la música nacional," *Revista Nacional de Cultura* 2 (1938), 3.

[298] Juan Bautista Plaza, "Héctor Villa-Lobos: Su personalidad y su obra musical," *El Nuevo Diario* 1 May 1932. Translated by Marie Elizabeth Labonville.

4.3.1 The Invention of the Musical Past

As Plaza first suggests, in order for Venezuelan music to achieve a true national character, it was necessary to explore the country's musical past and extract from it the elements that better expressed Venezuela's national identity—in other words, inventing traditions by adapting old practices to new purposes. For the renovators, the knowledge of Venezuela's musical past, especially colonial music, was crucial in defining the sense of "national consciousness" that Venezuelan music lacked. According to Plaza, not until Venezuelans were able to recognize themselves in their musical past would a national character be attained. He writes, "although sometimes it is difficult to accept, the Venezuelan music of today is the offspring of the Venezuela of yesterday. And if a work of art contributes to give us the impression of this real affiliation it is because it is embedded with the *factors or expressive elements* that we do not doubt to recognize as expressive of something that belongs to us, that is, of something Venezuelan." [299]

Colonial music offered Plaza an avenue to explore these possibilities. He invited his audiences to know this music and to experience in it those "expressive elements" that constituted a part of the cultural heritage that would insert Venezuelans into a long musical past. As an invented tradition, it is interesting to note that in order to create a canon of Venezuelan art music, colonial compositions found a new niche no longer in the cathedral choir loft but rather in the Municipal theater, where they were now at the center of the musical programming of the Orfeón Lamas and the Venezuelan symphony. In other words, the functional works created at the turn of the nineteenth century in order to fulfill the musical requirements of the liturgy or other religious

[299] Juan Bautista Plaza, "Apuntes sobre estética musical venezolana," *Cubagua: Revista Literaria* 1 no. 5 (May, 1939), 12. Emphasis in the original.

occasions had now become the monuments of Venezuelan art music. This pattern of invented musical traditions, of course, does not differ from, say, the German revivalist movement of the mid-nineteenth century, but it certainly exposes the constructionist nature of nationalism. Thus, when Venezuelan twentieth-century audiences became acquainted with colonial music, they were presented not with functionally religious pieces but instead with works of art to be enjoyed for their beauty, recognized for their spirit, and revered as symbols of national allegiance.

Indeed, the success of the nationalist project was to be measured largely according to how the emerging middle classes that attended the performances of this music began to collectively experience a sense of historical connection with the music. In history, nationalism teaches us, lies the foundation of national unity. It is the cement that holds together the heterogeneous mass that comprises the nation. Plaza was well aware of this: "Either in the land or in history, which are the two main columns upon which the notions of the fatherland rests," he wrote, "are we to look for the *substratum* of all art that seeks to be truly autochthonous, national."[300]

4.3.2 The Invention of the National Folklore

Plaza's mention of the "land" as another "column" of the nation resonates with his second assumption regarding the "heterogeneous mixture" of local character, an element that in his view needed to be worked out in order for Latin American art music to be significant. Hence, as in the other arts and letters, local folklore became a powerful agent of musical nationalism. The pioneer of ethnomusicological research in Venezuela was José Antonio Calcaño, who in the early 1930s

[300] Ibid., 10. Emphasis in the original.

began collecting folksongs and indigenous instruments from various regions in the country. In his lectures and articles he frequently made allusions to the diversity and richness of Venezuelan folklore, and stressed that many of its artifacts and practices had existed since time immemorial. In an article on the Venezuelan maracas, for instance, he traced the origin of the instrument back to pre-Hispanic civilizations. He acknowledged that in the transition from indigenous to folk practices the cultural function of the maracas shifted from an artifact intended to channel the energies of a *piache* (tribe's healer) in highly ritualized curing ceremonies to a musical instrument used as a percussion layer in music for entertainment and play. Calcaño observes, nevertheless, that despite this functional difference, other important connections exist between these two traditions, particularly regarding the social role of the performer. In the first place, he points out that in contemporary folk practices the performance style of the maracas requires highly developed technical skills that are only acquired after a lengthy apprenticeship process involving an individualized relationship between the student and the teacher. According to Calcaño, this learning method closely resembles the training of *piaches* in indigenous societies, in which long hours are spent learning the healing rituals and chants and the use of the maracas. Second, because of such specialized skills, both folk performers and *piaches* enjoy a special social status for which they are respected and admired in their respective societies.

Calcaño suggests that a solid cultural continuity exists between these two traditions, which is evident in contemporary musical practices not only through the display of virtuosity by the performer but also in the mystical power of the instrument to excite the audiences. He writes, "it seems like the maracas have become the most characteristic or our *criollo* musical instruments; it seems as if [they] possess a special gift to excite the highest level of enthusiasm, and that a single popular celebration without maracas would be incomplete, and our enjoyment

could not be thoroughly fulfilled. One could even claim that a pair of maracas is the most Venezuelan thing there is in Venezuela." [301]

This kind of discourse, by which local conditions were granted a national character, allowed Calcaño to bring other ethnic, or particular regional, cultural practices into play and to use them to channel the collective imagination. In Calcaño's hand this approach became a very powerful tool for inventing traditions. His writings on folk music typically dealt with the history and evolution of music among particular groups of people, including African-Venezuelan, Native-Venezuelan, and peasant communities in the central plains. He was interested in tracing the evolution of their musical styles, in investigating indigenous instruments, and in studying the geographic distribution of Venezuela's music cultures. He also engaged in ethnographic research documenting musical events and transcribing music from various regions of the country.[302]

In his writing Calcaño highlights that Venezuelans are naturally endowed with a capacity to hear and experience this music in ways that are meaningful to them. His essay on the maracas is particularly revealing of this view. This approach also allowed him to turn the issue of national character into a cultural model operating at the level of the dichotomy of "self" and "other." He became critical of the scholarship on Venezuelan music that had been produced by foreigners because, despite its technical accuracy, it did not convey the cultural spirit of the music. Referring to the transcription of several Venezuelan folksongs published by a German anthropologist in the late-nineteenth century, for instance, he argued:

> With respect to the [airs] published by Dr. Ernst, they are transcribed correctly, but, since he only published the melodies, it is difficult for a musician who is not Venezuelan to judge them with authority, because what is most characteristic of those melodies is that even though they are written in a "three-four [meter]" they

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[301] Calcaño, "Las Maracas," in *Contribución*, 60.

[302] Several of Calcaño's ethnomusicological essays are compiled under the headings "Música indígena" and "Folklore" in his *Contribución al estudio de la música en Venezuela.*

> are to be accompanied in a "six-eight," and from the union of the melody with the accompaniment it is, consequently, that the typical rhythmic combination of such airs results.[303]

For Calcaño, it was precisely in the intrinsic element in the music—that which could not be transcribed but simply felt—where Venezuelan music was the richest. In this light, particular folksongs became very powerful cultural symbols, capable of evoking the most vivid images, atmosphere, and feelings of a people and its surroundings. Calcaño believed that a folksong could be seen as a surrogate for an entire group, its culture, and its geography, a vehicle for citizens to become members of a community without physically experiencing it. He recalls, "for anyone who does not know the central plains, the most faithful image of such an exceptional nature, of such a lively landscape, and of such a characteristic disposition, is not to be found in any literary description, photograph, or painting, but rather in a 'tono,' sung by legitimate plainsmen. The 'tono' reflects the spirit of that solitude full of life which scatters itself in all directions, in infinite prolongation." [304]

Calcaño's poetic celebration of the "tonos," inviting his readers to hear in these folksongs the spirit and nature of the plain's landscape, conspicuously reveals his constructionist agenda. In this light, "tonos" can be used to fill the geographic and cultural gaps that separate one region from another, the rural from the urban, and the local from the national. This kind of dynamic resonates with Plaza's call for defining national culture as they were intended to enable Venezuelans to imagine themselves as part of a homogeneous community. In the context of fast social mobilization, particularly in the post-Gómez period, traditions were invented rapidly and disseminating them became a priority for the architects of the renovation. According to Plaza's third assumption, the nationalist project's success depended very much on creating the

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[303] Calcaño, "Sobre el folklore negro," in *Contribución*, 87.
[304] Calcaño, "El 'tono' de los Llanos," in *Contribución*, 97.

mechanisms for disseminating the ideas about how to bring the nation together. This, as Plaza suggests, involved not only the preparation of composers at a high level of proficiency in art and folk music, but also educating the citizenry in recognizing the national in music and appreciating the universal in art.

4.3.3 The Invention of a National Public Culture

In most respects the renovators' efforts to promote their ideas about national music in the press and the radio, in books and scholarly journals, in lectures and conferences, and in their teachings at the schools had a pedagogical function. Educating Venezuelans in art music was a task that Plaza set out to do as early as he returned from Europe. According to Marie Labonville, upon his return from Rome in July 1923, Plaza began to seek out private students, offering lessons in musicianship, harmony, counterpoint, fugue, and composition.[305] In January 1924, he was named professor of counterpoint and harmony at the School of music.[306] Meanwhile, Sojo had been teaching theory and musicianship at the school for a few years. These early pedagogical activities did not necessarily imply a nationalist agenda, for teaching is virtually a requirement for most professional musicians, but they certainly contributed to prepare the renovators for eventually forging the nationalist movement from within the education system. This progression was most clearly revealed through the activities in which these musicians were involved during the 1930s and 1940s, including the establishment of new courses and the reforms to the curriculum in the School of Music, the production of a series of radio programs on music history

[305] Plaza advertised his private lessons in *El Universal* in October, 1923. On Plaza's early teaching, see Labonville, "Musical Nationalism," 321-325.

[306] Ibid., 322.

and appreciation, the creation of other schools of music, and finally, through Plaza's appointment as Secretary of Culture at the Ministry of National Education, to the implementation of a comprehensive national school curriculum in music.

Seen through the lens of nationalism, these activities on behalf of music education are crucial for the building of the nation. They are most significant not in relation to the development of art music life in the country, but rather as part of a broad project to bring the nascent modern nation together. The forging of a national culture, Ernest Gellner has argued, is a necessary condition of modern societies. It enables individuals to operate under a series of uniform codes of communication, which in turn contribute to the unification of the nation. Engineered by a national intelligentsia, this national culture is disseminated to the masses through a system of national education.[307] National culture, in this respect, becomes the means through which one gains membership to the national community. It supersedes the local, which has been selectively appropriated by the elite in order to invent the national.

4.3.4 Plaza's Music Appreciation Radio Programs

By the late 1930s the renovators had placed themselves in a privileged position where they not only participated in the creation of those codes of cultural communication but also played key roles in their mass dissemination. Plaza, in particular, stood out for his efforts to reach wide audiences and to educate them in both art music appreciation and Venezuelan folklore. In 1939 the governor of the Federal District, General Elbano Mibelli, commissioned Plaza to produce a series of weekly "half-hour" radio programs on music appreciation. The purpose of these

[307] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, 159.

programs was to "inform and orient" audiences on a variety of musical topics. The talks were to be conceived "with a didactical intention and worded in a language clean of all technicalities in order to make them accessible to a great mass of listeners."[308] Altogether, Plaza produced fifty-five programs which were broadcast in two series between 1939 and 1940.[309] They dealt primarily with topics in western art music, but frequently interpolated commentary on Venezuelan folk and art music, nationalism, and current musical events in Caracas.[310]

Plaza was enthusiastic at the program's potential for reaching large audiences. He believed that radio offered him an excellent opportunity for disseminating good music as well as a great channel for demystifying some of the common misconceptions surrounding it. He was explicit in his intent to make art music accessible to all, hence his choosing of the series' title, "Popular Lessons on Music." He devoted the first program to discussing the importance of art music as a part of the integral formation of individuals and the need to construct in Venezuela an art music culture, which in his view was a key component of a well-educated society. He reacted against the public's preference for popular music, which he deemed "frivolous" with little to offer to the cultivation of the human intellect. He explained that it was a mistake to regard art music as an abstract language only accessible to a privileged few, and complained that the mechanisms to make it accessible to all, namely a music education system, were not yet in place in Venezuela. He claimed that the lack of a musical education had led to an antagonized

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[308] Eduardo Plaza Alfonzo, prologue to Juan Bautista Plaza, *El lenguaje de la música: lecciones populares sobre música* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1966), 5.

[309] The programs aired at 9:30 PM on Mondays through Radio Caracas (formerly Broadcasting Caracas). Transcripts of the programs were never published during Plaza's lifetime. However, Plaza preserved the manuscripts which were later compiled by Plaza's widow, Nolita Perez de Plaza, and then edited for publication and prefaced by his brother, Eduardo Plaza, in 1966. On this, see Plaza, *El lenguaje de la música.*

[310] Labonville has observed that, in fact, as part of agreement between Plaza and the government of the Federal District, which funded the series, Plaza was required to dedicate the program preceding the Venezuelan Symphony monthly government-sponsored performance to the works to be played by the orchestra. On this see Labonville "Musical Nationalism," 348-351.

classification of music among the masses who would distinguish between classical music (an elite type intended for the concert hall that only a few understood) and popular music (an imported mostly-dance category coming from other Latin American countries that was accessible to all).[311] He proposed, then, that the public view his talks as a series of "educational dissertations on music." In a rhetoric in which he presented himself as a music evangelist of sorts, he call upon those who criticized art music as old-fashioned or incomprehensible to hear his message about the "great and beautiful treasures" hidden in the art-music tradition.[312] "A human being who allows his soul to be periodically saturated with all the harmonious vibrations that music can offer him," he wrote, "will never let himself be carried away by unhealthy or wretched passions."[313]

Plaza believed that art music appreciation was essential in the development of human sensitivity. Therefore, he advocated its cultivation, especially from a young age. He envisioned a society fully conversant in art music who would take pleasure in every opportunity offered them to experience it. He invited his audiences to allow themselves to become a part of the art music life that the city of Caracas had to offer. He started the programs expressing his frustration at the lack of interest in the concerts given regularly by the symphony. "Suffice it to say," he stated, "that when in the Municipal [theater] five or six hundred people at most gather [for a concert], that figure barely represents three or four per thousand of the urban population. That is to say, of every one thousand people living in Caracas and its surroundings, only three or four, at most,

[311] Plaza, *El lenguaje de la música*, 11-13.
[312] Ibid., 13.
[313] Ibid., 14.

have an interest in attending a concert of the Venezuelan Symphony, a free concert, besides, as I have said." [314]

Thus, from the beginning of the transmissions, Plaza set out to gain as many converts to art-music appreciation as possible. He carefully planned the themes of the weekly talks by focusing them on a single topic and providing diverse musical examples to illustrate his points. After the introductory program, for instance, Plaza devoted the following six programs to the topic of the song, each on a specific music tradition and context. In program two, he discussed the popular song, making a point to emphasize that songs were "the simplest and most primitive" of all genres. He provided recorded examples from native Peruvians, Russian popular, and Spanish nationalist songs, as well as African-American spirituals, pointing out how specific musical features were representative of the spirit of their people.[315] In a similar fashion, he presented the topics of the secular songs during the renaissance, the role of song in opera, song and instrumental music, the lied, and the French song, respectively in programs three to seven.

In dealing with specific music genres and styles, Plaza frequently incorporated Venezuelan music and composers to his discussions. This approach enabled him to exalt the contributions of Venezuelan composers while also promoting nationalist sentiments among his listeners. His discussion of the Venezuelan waltzes by Teresa Carreño and Ramón Delgado Palacios is framed within the topic of the nineteenth-century short piano piece, particularly in the context of the waltzes by Schubert, Chopin, and Brahms.[316] In other instances, he used the achievements of other composers—primarily Latin American and Spanish—to expose the

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[314] Ibid., 16.

[315] Ibid., 21-8. In the prologue to the book, Eduardo Plaza recounts that his brother used different sources of recorded music, including the collections "Antología sonora" and "History of Music in Sound," as well as performances specially organized for the programs. Ibid., 8.

[316] Ibid., 193-202.

deficiencies of Venezuelan music. Specifically in the programs dealing with musical nationalism or music in Latin America, he commented on the importance of native elements in the shaping of art works and invited Venezuelan composers to follow the example of the Spanish composers Albéniz and Falla in the musical capturing of the essence of their land.[317]

Even though the radio programs were only transmitted for two years, they had a powerful and positive impact upon Venezuelan audiences. As a matter of fact, during one of the last programs, Plaza himself observed that in the short period since the beginning of the transmissions, Venezuelans had become more interested in art music, as revealed by the increase in sales of recordings of classical music as well as in attendance to concerts. "If, with these lessons, we might have contributed, even in part, to implant in our people an inclination for good music," he wrote, "we would feel frankly proud and more eager than ever to continue this important campaign that we have undertaken on behalf of the musical art."[318]

4.3.5 The Music Education Reforms

While the radio programs offered Plaza an important outlet to reach mass audiences, over the years that followed he devoted a great deal of energy to creating and consolidating a far-reaching music education system involving improvements not only in the School of Music but also in the national public school system. In order to better familiarize himself with current trends in music education, he began to travel to North America and Europe starting in 1942. That year, as part of the same trip that took him to him abroad to promote Venezuelan colonial music, Plaza was commissioned by the Office of Culture and Fine Arts of the Ministry of National Education to

[317] Ibid., 79.
[318] Ibid., 221.

study the musical methods and music education curricula in the United States and Mexico. In addition to participating in a number of musicological conferences, he devoted a great deal of time to attending music education events, including participating in the biennial Music Educators' National Conference in Milwaukee as well as observing music education programs in Des Moines, Detroit, Rochester, and Mexico City before returning to Caracas.[319] According to Labonville, during this trip Plaza became very interested in the music education methods in the United States, particularly those dealing with music reading at an early age, which he believed constituted the basis of a solid musical culture. Likewise, he became very attracted to the Mexican system which placed strong emphasis on folklore.[320]

Upon his return to Venezuela, Plaza began to work towards improving music education in the country. He became critical of the public school system for not having the mechanisms in place to provide adequate music instruction, which he believed was essential for educating the citizenry in the appreciation of good music. In October, 1942, he wrote:

> In our schools—and only in some—the only musical practice that has managed to be introduced consists of teaching the smallest [children] to sing one or another school song, one or another hymn or to march to the sound of some march rhythm. The case of a Venezuelan child having the occasion to hear a little good music in school is very rare. [The schools] are not equipped with either teachers or [educational] materials necessary for that. As for awakening the interest in music among secondary school and university students, it is something that is not even conceived of among us, in spite of the magnificent example that other countries give us in this aspect of education.[321]

For the next few years, Plaza continued to voice his concerns about the need for music and art education reform. He had become a very influential figure in Venezuela's intellectual life not only for his broad knowledge of many subjects but also for his beliefs in a better society built

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[319] Labonville, "Musical Nationalism," 363-5.
[320] Ibid., 367-8.
[321] Juan Bautista Plaza, "Un concierto para niños," *El Universal* 24 October 1942. Quoted in, and translated by, Labonville, "Musical Nationalism," 389.

upon democratic principles. Since the death of Juan Vicente Gómez in 1935 the political climate had been favorable for the arts, and music in particular was more than ever benefiting from official support. This was most conspicuously manifested in the musical activities in which Plaza, Sojo, and Calcaño were directly involved. The two series of radio programs on music appreciation, for instance, had been fully funded by the Ministry of National Education. Similarly, regular performances by the Orfeón Lamas and the Venezuelan Symphony were sponsored by the government. But, despite the relatively positive impact that art was exerting upon society, political stability was undermined by the clashes of factions dividing the nation between a progressive democratic wing and a fascist brand aiming at restoring centralized power.

On October 6, 1944, concerned about the threats posed upon the incipient democracy, a large number of artists and intellectuals addressed a letter to the president of the republic, Isaias Medina Angarita, declaring their full support for the values of freedom that his government upheld.[322] Ten days later, on October 16, President Medina responded with a note of gratitude for the group's support reaffirming his commitment to democratic values.[323]

Juan Bautista Plaza was the first signer of the letter to the president which, added to his active role as a cultural leader, suggests that he might have drafted it himself. Though the relationship between Plaza and President Medina is not well documented, a striking coincidence makes the letter more significant, particularly in light of Plaza's work on behalf of music education: on the same day the president responded to the letter, Plaza was appointed Director of Culture, an office of the Ministry of National Education. As head of culture, Plaza was to

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[322] Incidentally, this political aligning is an important turning point for the development of art music in Venezuela because the state took a more active role as a supporter of the arts, thus facilitating the invention of tradition.

[323] Both letters were published in the Caracas's newspaper *El Nacional*. The texts are quoted in Labonville, "Musical Nationalism in Venezuela," 373-376.

oversee all cultural activities supported by the state, including publishing in the arts and humanities, coordinating research projects in national folklore, supervising all the arts education programs in the country, and serving as editor in chief of the *Revista Nacional de Cultura*, the nation's most important cultural journal.[324]

Plaza's appointment as director of culture allowed him an extraordinary opportunity to carry out his nationalist project. Immediately after taking office he set out to work on what eventually turned into the most comprehensive reforms in the music education system that the country had ever undergone. Those reforms included the adoption of a national school curriculum in music for elementary education, the incorporation of folklore into that curriculum, the establishment of a school for artistic education where music teachers for the schools were to be trained, and the creation of a preparatory school of music intended to prepare students for the advanced School of Music where professional musicians received their training. The reforms were adopted during Plaza's second year in the office. In an official communication published on 25 September 1945, the Minister of National Education, Dr. Rafael Vegas, disclosed the content of the reforms:

> This office deems that the development of music education in the country should attain the greatest breadth possible. The decided musical vocation, which the Venezuelan people have demonstrated in all times, and the importance of the cultivation of this art for the education of the individual, imposes the necessity of organizing said education in a methodical form. That is why the Office has judged it opportune to address itself to you with the purpose of making known to you the new bases it has projected for the reform of official music instruction in our country.
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> The aforementioned reform deals with several aspects, and the social and educational purpose that it pursues can be summarized in the following points:
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> a) To provide instruction of music by all means possible, especially to those who have natural aptitudes to cultivate this art and who desire to study it;
> b) To organize music instruction in such a way that it can encompass the greatest possible radius of social action;

[324] On Plaza's tenure as Director of Culture, see Labonville, "Musical Nationalism in Venezuela," 371-400.

c) To initiate that instruction beginning in primary school, in its double theoretical-practical aspect, employing didactic methods and procedures capable of awakening interest in music in all children and of facilitating and making theoretical learning more enjoyable;
d) To develop as many musical vocations as can be discovered, for the purpose of training the greatest number of competent musicians for the future;
e) To give music teachers who are fit to give efficient service in the field of music pedagogy the opportunity to work;
f) To tend toward maintaining alive in all social sectors the interest in quality music, and toward forming a public of listeners ever more cultured and numerous;
g) To promote the knowledge and dissemination of national music in its artistic and folk aspects from the classrooms of the primary school; and
h) To contribute by all means possible to the cultivation and elevation of the aesthetic sensibility of the Venezuelan people.[325]

These reforms, particularly as they relate to the invention of traditions, played a key role not only as a determinant of the future of music in Venezuela but also in defining what national music was to be like. On the one hand they were the materialization of Plaza's dreams about mass education in the fundamentals of music at a very young age, and on the other, the reforms created the mechanisms for introducing in the public school system a musical repertoire under the label "Venezuelan folklore." The latter was an aspect that had occupied the minds of the renovators for quite some time. In fact, they had attempted to introduce folklore into the public school system as early as 1937. That year, Vicente Emilio Sojo set out to compile and transcribe a large repertoire of traditional and popular songs, which along with a number of newly-composed children's songs of his, was intended to be disseminated through the school programs.[326] The origin of those songs was framed in an ongoing criticism that portrayed Venezuelan music as a victim of foreign musical models, which had become popular with the

[325] Rafael Vegas, "El Ministro de educación nacional informa sobre la reforma de la enseñanza musical," *El Universal* (Caracas), 25 September 1945. Quoted in Maria Luisa Sanchez, *La enseñanza musical en Caracas,* (Caracas: Tipografía La Torre, 1949), 30-1.

[326] These works were published in 1940 by the Ministry of National Education as *Primer cuaderno de canciones populares venezolanas*, *Diez canciones infantiles*, and *Cancionero popular del niño venezolano: 1ro y 2do Grado.*

advent of radio. Indeed, in 1938 Plaza complained about "broadcasting spreading everywhere [as] a corrupting ferment that slowly attacks the purity of our popular chants and destroys the musical traditions of our people."[327] Similarly, Sojo recalled that arranging and composing those songs was a necessity in light of the "Mexicanisms, Cubanisms, Argentinisms of the worst species" that had become part of the "so-called *cultural events*" of the public schools in Caracas.[328]

Sojo's arrangements of popular songs became a model for many of his students, as well as other native composers, to follow. For nearly three decades after the publication of the first collection, the Ministry of National Education continued to publish similar sets for distribution in the schools.[329] As an invented tradition, these collections became a very powerful tool for nationalism. This aspect is evident not only through the incorporation of the songs into the national school system but also in the songs themselves as well as the rhetoric associated with them. In the preface to the first collection, for instance, Vicente Emilio Sojo declared that the songs he had selected had a distinguishable Venezuelan character which anyone could recognize:

> The Venezuelaness of these songs can be adverted not only by a specialized critic but also by any Venezuelan who is used to hear the melodic unfolding, the rhythmic patterns of the accompaniment, the chord links, and the sentimental or playful intention of them.
>
> In the harmonization of these melodies we have attempted to make the piano emulate the strumming of the guitar. The interpolations of chromatic passing [tones] in plain harmony, as well as the persistence of certain ornamental patterns, especially in the slow songs, are procedures typical of our popular guitarists, whose intuition incites them to surround with sonorities the picturesque songs they accompany.[330]

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[327] Plaza, "Urge salvar," 4.

[328] Sojo, "Breves notas," 17-8.

[329] For a brief catalogue of the collections and their content, see Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, *50 años de música en Caracas: 1930-1980* (Caracas: Fundación Vicente Emilio Sojo, 1988): 79-109.

[330] Vicente Emilio Sojo, *Primer cuaderno de canciones populares venezolanas* Caracas: Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 1940.

Thus, Sojo invites us to hear certain musical elements in these songs as Venezuelan. He celebrated these pieces because they exposed "the expressive modality of [Venezuela's] vernacular song, which a foolish fashion had been relegating to the extent of replacing it with the most degrading exotic rhythms."[331] In this light, the songs became a source of national identity, which through mass distribution in the school system allowed Venezuelans to imagine themselves as part of a unified cultural community. As such, both the musical repertoire and the commentary accompanying the editions emphasize the role of diversity as a shaping agent of what Venezuelan music was. Typically, the collections include songs and genres gathered in different regions of the country. Often, the commentaries deal with the origin of the songs observing that the Spanish influence is notable in some of them but that they had been assimilated to form a national character.[332]

In the larger context of modernization, the 1945 reforms in the national school curriculum laid the basis for building up a public conversant with the newly created national cultural codes for music. The collections of popular songs, children's songs, or Christmas songs, once regarded as Spanish, *caraqueñas* (Caracan), peasant, and the like, were now considered Venezuelan songs, a type of dynamic that resonated with the fast-growing urban classes. At the same time, the reforms created the mechanisms for school children to be exposed to current pedagogical music techniques and hence, as Plaza hoped, to develop a love for good music. These techniques included the introduction of instrumental instruction, rhythm bands, fundamentals of music, and school choirs.[333]

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[331] Ibid.

[332] See, for example, R. Olivares Figueroa's preface to *Cancionero popular de niño venezolano*, vol 2. (Caracas: Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 1946), or *Aguinaldos populares venezolanos para la Noche Buena* (Caracas: Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 1945).

[333] Sanchez, *La enseñanza musical en Caracas*, 31-2.

At the level of formal musical studies, the reforms enabled the leaders of the renovation to expand the musical infrastructure and to reorganize musical studies. In the city of Caracas, this included dividing the National School of Music into two independent schools: the Escuela Preparatoria de Música and the Escuela Superior de Música. The former not only provided elementary music instruction to children who might eventually pursue advanced musical studies at the Escuela Superior de Musica but also was a center for training music teachers for the public school system. The latter, under the directorship of Vicente Emilio Sojo, became the center for advanced music studies in the country. Its mission was to train professional musicians at the highest possible levels in the areas of composition and vocal and instrumental performance as well as to serve as a center for the cultivation and dissemination of "the musical culture in all of its aspects."[334]

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Through their nationalist ideology the leaders of the renovation were able to create a musical image of the nation that recognized the importance of the country's art-music past and vernacular culture as the essence of its modern identity. In order to develop this nationalist ideology they embarked upon a series of efforts involving musicological research leading to the writing of a history of art music in the country, ethnographic studies for the documentation and preservation of folk music and traditional culture, journalistic endeavors whereby they voiced their opinions regarding all aspects of Venezuelan music, and, as in the case of Juan Bautista Plaza, cultural policy-making through his work on behalf of music education. As a cultural elite, they participated in the creation of new modes of cultural communication, and invented musical

[334] Ibid., 32-3.

traditions that enabled Venezuelans to imagine themselves as a unified culture with a long and rich musical history. This shared culture not only involved the diverse native elements evident in what was now regarded as Venezuelan folk but was also linked—as the following chapter will show—to the western art-music tradition, which had thrived in the country at the end of the colonial period.

5.0 THE INVENTION OF NATIONAL MUSIC

"Can there be a Venezuelan musical art that displays unmistakable national characteristics?" asked Juan Bautista Plaza in October 1938, "and, if so, what elements should serve as the primer to imprint its particular seal?"[335] These questions seem to have troubled Plaza that year. Musical composition had not kept pace with the process of renovation, which had strengthened significantly by then: the Orfeón Lamas had just returned from its first international performance in Bogotá, the Venezuelan Symphony was receiving some financial sponsorship from the government, Sojo had been appointed director of the School of Music, and Calcaño's *Contribución al estudio de la música en Venezuela* was in print. Yet, art-music composition, which lay at the core of the process of renovation, had not kept pace with the rest of the musical developments. As a matter of fact, aside from the choral works produced for the Orfeón Lamas, music composition in Venezuela seemed to have come to a halt after Plaza's *Sonatina venezolana* of 1934. Plaza's comments were symptomatic of his anxiety to produce high-quality art music based on national subjects, which he and the renovators believed was the path to the modernization of music composition in the country. During the first half of the 1930s they grew unsatisfied with their nationalist music because it was either too folk-sounding or else dismissed by critics who argued that the music was not sufficiently Venezuelan.

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[335] Plaza, "Apuntes sobre estética musical venezolana," Lecture, October 1938. Published in *Cubagua* 5 (May 1939). Reprinted in Juan Bautista Plaza, *La música en nuestra vida: Escritos 1925-1965* (Caracas: Fundación Juan Bautista Plaza, 2000), 27.

The renovators responded to these challenges by engaging in the study of and dissemination of folk music, by composing nationalist music that drew from the *joropo* tradition (the most widely-recognized Venezuelan musical genre at the time), and by forging an altogether new generation of nationalist composers which flourished in the latter part of the 1940s and the 1950s.This new generation participated in the invention of the national by virtue of their rigorous art-music training under Vicente Emilio Sojo at the School of Music. Sojo exerted a powerful influence upon these composers and exhorted them to write music exploring native subjects. Moreover, through the dynamic interactions between Sojo, the composers, and their socio-cultural context, as well as through Sojo's role as a leader of the renovation, a public image of these composers and their music appeared in which composers and music were represented as the epitome of the modern Venezuelan nation: a culturally unified national tapestry made up of an array of regional colors. In this respect, the variety of stylistic techniques through which the composers articulated their music (most apparent in their orchestral works), the diversity of native subjects they explored, and the manners in which those subjects were incorporated into their music were seen as subordinate to their nationalist intentions to create works of high artistic value. In other words, despite their marked conceptual differences these works were collectively regarded as a unified national style.

5.1 ANXIETY TO CREATE NATIONALIST MUSIC

The question of how to successfully create a nationalist musical idiom proved to be one of the greatest challenges of the renovation. As discussed in chapter two of this study, during the second decade of the twentieth century many Venezuelan artists and intellectuals began to create

a discourse of modernity that was reflective of the socio-cultural dynamics shaping the nation at the time. This discourse was progressive in its attempt to advance the arts and letters but, at the same time, revolutionary in that it was articulated from within, building outwards from the local but aiming at the universal. This kind of nationalist discourse, uttered from the perspective of the countryside, the folk, the everyday, made its entrance into music in 1930 through the choral works created for the Orfeón Lamas. Nationalist subjects had been cultivated by classically trained composers before this time, most notably by Pedro Elias Gutierrez, whose many hymns, patriotic marches and programmatic works for the Banda Marcial Caracas were highly acclaimed.[336] Likewise, Juan Bautista Plaza had written two works for mixed choir and orchestra¸ a hymn to the independence hero Antonio José de Sucre, and the symphonic poem *Las horas* for the centennial of Simón Bolívar's death.[337]Yet, these works, and even some of religious nature such as Vicente Emilio Sojo's *Requiem in Memoriam Patris Patriae,* also written to commemorate the Bolívar's centennial, were conceived as musical monuments to exalt the founding Fathers and the Fatherland from a historical perspective as opposed to as means of addressing the nation from the perspective of the common people.

The Orfeón offered a fresh approach to nationalism in that a large proportion of its repertoire consisted of works based on Venezuelan folklore or in a style that closely resembled it. In a lengthy article published the day of the inaugural performance of the group, José Antonio Calcaño described the motivation that drove native composers to write the works that would be performed that night:

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[336] Gutierrez was also a prolific composer of popular genres, many of which also found an important outlet in his band arrangements.

[337] The *Himno a Sucre* was written in 1924 for the celebrations of the centennial of the battle of Ayacucho in which, under the command of Venezuelan officer Antonio José de Sucre, was crucial in sealing the independence of South America. *Las horas* was written in 1930. This work is further discussed below in this chapter.

> Principally, the intention of carrying out a national labor prevailed in us on undertaking the composition of that repertory. From the study of our folklore arose the guidelines, the orientation of the stylistic character, of that group of compositions.
>
> I believe, and my partners also believe, that we have succeeded in creating a new Venezuelan musical style, exalting the songs and the musical spirit of our people to the point of bringing it to the category of art music. In this venture the study of and familiarization with our classical composers—very distinguished musicians who unfortunately are almost unknown in their fatherland—has been of great benefit.
>
> Sometimes we have only copied the melodies and harmonies of the folk, bringing the folk compositions to the Orfeón with all fidelity. These are pieces which appear in tonight's program without the name of the composer. Other times we have composed pieces which, although original, are of purely folk character, and are those which figure in the folklore section of the program. The others are compositions of a more refined and personal nature in which, nevertheless, the Venezuelan musical soul is observed strongly now in the harmony, in the rhythm, or in a phrase of the melody.
>
> This has been our purpose, perhaps grand in all its simplicity: to create a new Venezuelan musical style, giving it the greatest carats that are within our powers.[338]

Despite this overtly nationalist rhetoric, the task of establishing a position as art music composers cultivating a style that resonated with the people posed significant challenges for Calcaño and his circle. On the one hand, the basic premise of the renovation was to introduce newer musical idioms based on imported modernist models; on the other, nationalism was already a very prevalent force, powerful enough to neutralize any attempt at experimentation.[339] Juan Bautista Plaza was the most vocal in establishing the position of Venezuelan composers with regard to these aesthetic tensions. He believed in something he termed "the high artistic value of music," an intrinsic attribute of beauty that could exist in any musical idiom. He defended experimentalism and was critical of those who rejected modernism in music because

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[338] Jose Antonio Calcaño, "Gran Exponente de la Solidaridad Artística Nacional: El Orfeón Lamas. Su Pintoresca Historia. Su Importancia en la Vida Cultural Venezolana," *El Universal* 15 July 1930. Quoted in Labonville, "Musical Nationalism in Venezuela," 628 (her translation).

[339] Indeed, the chromatic language of Vicente Emilio Sojo during the 1920s had been received with a certain degree of hostility by the critics. On this, see chapter three of this dissertation.

they simply listened to music "under the influence of traditionalist prejudices to the extent of not being able to progress their listening sensibility to tune it up with what has made contemporary art possible."[340] In his view, even the most radical idioms could have a high artistic value but quite often required an ear trained to recognize it. While being respectful of the *avant garde* he also criticized those who jumped to experiment with music without possessing a solid knowledge of the principles and rules of European art-music composition. For Plaza, all great works of art were created by artists who had mastered and conquered "the academicism of stereotyped formulas."[341] He believed that it was precisely this ability to skillfully depart from traditional models that had led composers such as Debussy and Stravinsky to produce newer models that were more in accord with "the sensibility of the present time."[342]

For Plaza, those modernist musical models, which had departed from traditional musical "architecture" in their understanding of harmony, dissonance, rhythm, and color, had plenty to offer to Venezuelan composers.[343] He was convinced that those imported modern techniques could be successfully applied to the creation of a nationalist style. Indeed, he advocated for a nationalist modernism in the style of Manuel de Falla or early Stravinsky, whose music had been "conceived with very modern intentions but based on national folklore." This synthesis, he claimed, made their music "a prodigy of beauty and genuine art."[344] Plaza found a literary parallel to this kind of national modernist aesthetic in Rómulo Gallegos, whose *Doña Bárbara* was being recognized internationally. He estimated, however, that in order for Venezuelan composers to produce music of high artistic value, equivalent to the literary works of Gallegos,

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[340] Juan Bautista Plaza, "Evolución del principio constructivo de la música moderna," *El Nuevo Diario* 2 July 1932. Reprinted in Plaza, *La música en nuestra vida*, 315.

[341] Juan Bautista Plaza, "Consonancia y disonancia," *El Nuevo Diario* 18 July 1932. Reprinted in Plaza, *La música en nuestra vida*, 299.

[342] Plaza, "Evolución del principio constructivo," 313.

[343] Plaza, "Consonancia y disonancia," 301.

[344] Juan Bautista Plaza, "Concurso 'Victor' de música criolla," *El Nuevo Diario* 22 November 1929.

certain conditions had to be met: in the first place, composers ought to be versed in the traditional rules of composition and through "true artistic intuition" advance those traditional techniques in an original manner; and second, composers needed to study Venezuelan folklore in depth in order to capture "all the musical richness that it encompasses."[345]

In light of these conditions, nevertheless, the Orfeón repertoire only partially fulfilled Plaza's requirements for attaining a high artistic value. A significant portion of the repertoire consisted primarily of works of folk or popular extraction and, with a few exceptions, the pieces were not conceived as to exemplify modern art music but rather as refined expressions of native culture, at most.[346] Plaza himself acknowledged in 1934 that music composition in the country had yet to develop its full potential "with or without Venezuelanist tendencies."[347] That same year, José Antonio Calcaño, too, admitted that the Orfeón's repertoire had not achieved the "elevated stylization" they had originally intended. According to Calcaño, "the stylization had only been reached to an insufficient degree, so little, in fact, that those compositions can barely be considered as the individual work of a creative artist, because those could simply be mistaken for popular compositions."[348]

Thus, the stylization the renovators had aimed at had turned into a source of anxiety. The problem of how to synthesize successfully imported modernist musical languages and national culture so as to produce high quality art-music works that still could be recognized as Venezuelan music became a subject of struggle and debate for composers and critics alike. Not

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[345] Ibid.

[346] For a discussion of the Orfeón's repertoire and style, see Ana Mercedes Asuaje de Rugeles, Maria Guinand, and Bolivia Bottome, *Historia del movimiento coral y de las orquestas juveniles en Venezuela* (Caracas: Cuadernos Lagoven, 1986).

[347] Juan Bautista Plaza, Interview by Luis Carlos García "Juan Bautista Plaza, valor musical venezolano," *Elite* 9 no. 466 (18 August 1934).

[348] Juan Sebastian [José Antonio Calcaño, "La 'Sonatina Venezolana' de Juan Bautista Plaza," *El Nuevo Diario* 20 August 1934.

surprisingly, in the context of the country's modernization, the struggle involved not only issues of how to balance the imported and the native in composition but also how to define what exactly constituted the national.

In 1933 Juan Bautista Plaza became the subject of one such debate. In June of that year a critic published a newspaper article after an audition of Plaza's *Siete canciones venezolanas*. The critic, Pablo Domínguez, attacked Plaza's work for not being sufficiently Venezuelan. Plaza had written this song cycle the year before, modeled after Manuel de Falla's own set of seven Spanish songs. He commented that in those songs he sought to "capture the 'essence' of national folk music while avoiding folk citations."[349] Yet, Domínguez criticized the songs for their lack of reference to native culture:

> We have heard the songs offered to us as Venezuelan and we have remained a little less than confused…In effect, these songs of Plaza are not Venezuelan, or perhaps they are of a new type of Venezuelanism that we were not aware existed. They could be Russian, Japanese, or from any other place, but never Venezuelan. Why? Simply because they lack the rhythm, the national soul; because when one thinks the author is going to start breaking out into folkloric expressions the melodic invention turns out to be poor, very poor.[350]

Plaza defended himself by arguing that this critic, Pablo Domínguez, had only a very limited knowledge of what constituted Venezuelan folklore. The critic had claimed that because Plaza had neglected the only "little music that can be called Venezuelan, the *Joropo*," the songs could not be deemed Venezuelan.[351] Plaza replied that he did not incorporate *joropo* into his songs because *joropo* was a dance, not a song genre.[352] He viewed the critic's assertions as symptomatic of the public's lack of awareness of all that Venezuelan folklore encompassed. It

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[349] Juan Bautista Plaza, "Mis siete canciones venezolanas," *Clave: Revista Musical Venezolana* 2 no. 5 (August 1953), 6.

[350] Pablo Domínguez, "Las siete canciones venezolanas del maestro Plaza," *El Heraldo* 24 June 1933. Quoted in Labonville, "Musical Nationalism," 895 (her translation).

[351] Juan Bautista Plaza, "Mis siete canciones venezolanas," 6.

[352] Ibid.

bothered him that others failed to recognize that there was more to Venezuelan folklore than *joropo*, as the critic had claimed.

This kind of dynamic is relevant because it exposes the narrowness of the concept of Venezuelan music at the time when the renovators were starting to formulate their nationalist project, particularly in light of its constructionist nature. The question of how to define nationalist music was a question about defining what constituted the national in music. For urban groups, the national in music was exemplified in the *joropo* tradition, Venezuela's most widely disseminated folk dance genre at the time. For the renovators, the countryside offered untapped sources of folk music, which—through invented traditions—could be elevated to the category of national music. Within this framework, then, the success of nationalism in art-music composition in Venezuela was contingent upon two fundamental conditions: one, that the music was skillfully and creatively conceived so as to possess a high artistic value; and two, that Venezuelans were able to recognize themselves in the music.

These two aspects are particularly conspicuous in light of the nationalist repertoire of the 1930s. Of the three leading figures of the renovation movement, Plaza was the most prolific composer and the only one who, beyond choral works, wrote music in a nationalist style. Marie Elizabeth Labonville estimates that he wrote over 500 works, a third of which were sacred and the remainder secular works for a variety of vocal and instrumental genres.[353] His style is rather eclectic, suggesting his open-mindedness with regards to music but, at the same time, revealing his struggle to find his own musical voice. Indeed, he was a perfectionist who was never satisfied with his music. He did not think he had a talent for composition—in fact, he referred to himself as a music history professor—and believed that it was for others more talented than him to write

[353] Labonville, *Juan Bautista Plaza and Musical Nationalism in Venezuela*, 33.

music.[354] Yet, his musical compositions of the 1930s are the most emblematic of the Venezuelan nationalist repertoire of the decade. His works during this period reveal his firm interest in creating music of high artistic value in a style in which Venezuelans could recognize themselves.

In doing this, however, Plaza experimented with different compositional approaches, which made some consider his music to be too intellectual. Particularly when compared with the music of Sojo, Plaza's music was regarded as being overtly "cerebral" and lacking a sensibility of expression. In 1935 a critic contrasted these two composers as one (Sojo) who wrote music from the heart while the other (Plaza) wrote it from the brain:

> The Maestro of the black mustaches [Sojo] enters [composition] through the sphere of religious music, precisely the [music] which speaks most profoundly to the spirit…Justifiably is he the conductor of the Symphony and the Orfeón Lamas, because his classical temperament allows him to interpret the most renowned composer. [Composition of] national music has scarcely found welcome in Sojo's soul, while Plaza frequently avoids classical norms in order to immerse himself in the soul of our countryside. Since the music of Plaza is more cerebral than emotional, and vernacular music requires more heart than brain, we find that the compositions that explore national tunes, written by Plaza, lack that feeling capable of moving the soul of our people.[355]

Indeed, Plaza's experiments with musical nationalism during the 1930s led him to explore a variety of approaches to composition in which, as noted above, musical elements drawn from Venezuelan culture are not often easily recognizable. This is particularly evident in two of his symphonic poems from 1930, *Campanas de pascua* (Bells of Christmas) and *Las horas* (The Hours). According to Labonville, references to national culture in these two pieces appear in the imagery that the works evoke as opposed to the music itself.[356] In *Campanas de pascua*, for instance, these references are rather ambiguous and have generated scholarly debates

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[354] Diego Ussi, interviewer, "El hombre y su huella: Juan Bautista Plaza," *El Nacional* 24 September, 1950.

[355] Luis A. Oberto, "Figuras del pentagrama. Crítica sobre música," clipping in Archivo Juan Bautista Plaza identified as coming from *El Día* 9 September 1935. Quoted in Labonville, "Musical Nationalism," 898 (her translation).

[356] Labonville, *Juan Bautista Plaza and Musical Nationalism in Venezuela*, 150-53

as to whether certain elements in the music, including the prevalent bell-like figures and some of the musical themes Plaza chose, can be heard in connection to specific native referents. These aspects are more troublesome in light of Plaza's renaming of the piece when it was premiered in 1938. Labonville has pointed out that the original title of the piece, *Cerros de Catia al crepúsculo* (Hills of Catia at Twilight), had no connection with the Christmas season Plaza sought to evoke in renaming the piece for its first performance in 1938.[357] Yet, some scholars have re-contextualized the music by associating certain themes and rhythms with Christmas folksongs.[358] In the second symphonic poem from 1930, the nationalist associations are primarily manifested in the circumstances surrounding the origin of the work as well as the text to which it is set. Plaza wrote his "symphonic-choral poem" *Las horas* for the celebrations of Simón Bolívar's centennial in 1930.[359] He selected a text by Venezuelan poet Fernando Paz Castillo (1893-1981), in which the figure of Bolívar is exalted through an imagery of nature in a timeless dimension:

> *Son las horas del tiempo que recuerdan*
> *al hombre intacto que sintió en su frente iluminada*
> *el beso silencioso de los astros.*
>
> [Those are the hours of time that remind us
> of the untouched man who felt in his illuminated forehead
> the silent kiss of the stars].[360]

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[357] Plaza composed the work in 1930 inspired by the landscape of Catia, a recreation area around a lake in the west end of Caracas, which before being engulfed by the city was a popular day retreat for city dwellers. See Labonville, *Juan Bautista Plaza and Musical Nationalism*, 151.

[358] Some of the different assessments of the work include Rhazez Hernández López, "Un recuerdo para Juan Bautista Plaza," *El Nacional* 31 December 1968; Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, *50 años de música en Caracas* (Caracas: Fundación Vicente Emilio Sojo, 1988); Miguel Castillo Didier, *Juan Bautista Plaza: Una vida*, 464-468; and Felipe Izcaracy, "The Legacy of Vicente Emilio Sojo: Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Venezuelan Orchestral Music," D.M.A. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1996.

[359] Castillo Didier, *Juan Bautista Plaza*, 470.

[360] Juan Bautista Plaza and Fernando Paz Castillo, *Las horas: pequeño poema sinfónico-coral* (Caracas: Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones y Estudios Musicales Vicente Emilio Sojo, 1980).

Labonville has referred to these two works as examples of Plaza's "subtly nationalist" style. She describes the musical language of *Campanas de pascua* as one of contrasting styles at times sounding "impressionist by virtue of the harmonic language, orchestration, and parallel motion" and other times "reminiscent of the orchestral and harmonic style of Puccini."[361] Renowned Venezuelan musicologist Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, in fact, places *Campanas de pascua* in the category of neoclassical-impressionist and points out that the work is influenced by Italian verismo.[362] Moreover, Labonville asserts that the influence of Respighi is very conspicuous in the work. Plaza, she claims, had heard Respighi's *Fountains of Rome* while studying in Europe. Respighi's coloristic orchestration, particularly in his incorporation of the piano and celesta into the orchestral fabric, influenced Plaza in his own orchestration as manifested in his *Campanas*.[363] This Italian influence was also observed by Vicente Emilio Sojo in connection with *Las horas*. In his customary poetic language, Sojo referred to the piece as one in which Plaza developed the "lyricism" he learned in Rome. In *Las horas*, Sojo claims, this lyricism, "robust and mature," is evident: "in its vein runs the Italic sap from which it nourished."[364] Sojo does not elaborate on what those Italian elements are, but it might be inferred from his description of harmony and coloristic orchestration that they are linked to Respighi, as well.

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[361] Labonville, *Juan Bautista Plaza and Musical Nationalism*, 150.
[362] Ramón y Rivera, *50 años de música en Caracas*, 149.
[363] On this connection, see Labonville, *Juan Bautista Plaza and Musical Nationalism*, 151-2.
[364] Vicente Emilio Sojo, "Música y músicos venezolanos," *Elite* 27 December 1930. Quoted in Castillo Didier, *Juan Bautista Plaza: Una vida*, 471.

5.2 *JOROPO* AND THE NATIONAL

In contrast to these two compositions by Plaza in which the nationalist character of the works is undermined by the strong influence of European musical idioms, three others of his compositions from this period, the choral song *El Curruchá* (1929), the *Fuga criolla* for string orchestra (1931), and the *Sonatina venezolana* for piano (1934), have been recognized by audiences and critics as exemplars of Venezuelan music. From the viewpoint of nationalism, these are works in which the people have been able to recognize themselves musically. It should not be taken as coincidental, however, that in these three works Plaza drew from *joropo* as the principal source of native culture, which was widely accepted as a cultural symbol that allowed Venezuelans to imagine themselves as a community. Thus, in light of the invention of traditions, it is relevant to study how Plaza approached the composition of these works and how the works were perceived both as art-music compositions and as identifying marks of national culture.

Joropo is widely recognized as the country's national dance in virtually all reference sources on Venezuelan culture. In a seminal 1953 book on the genre, ethnomusicologist Ramón y Rivera referred to *joropo* as "the name that unquestionably defines before natives and strangers the essence of something purely Venezuelan."[365] In addition to a fast-paced couple dance, *joropo* also denotes the music to which the dance is set as well as the social event in which dance and music take place. The *joropo* tradition is widely disseminated throughout the country and the northern region of neighboring Colombia, but it is mostly associated with the culture of Venezuela's central plains region. In the plains, the music of the *joropo* is performed by an ensemble consisting of a diatonic harp, *cuatro* (small guitar), maracas and a singer. Typically the

[365] Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, *El joropo: Baile nacional de Venezuela* (Caracas: Ediciones del Ministerio de Educación, 1953), 9.

voice sings the main tune with the harp providing a melodic contour and the bass line. The *cuatro* normally provides the harmonic layer using complex strumming patterns which are further elaborated in the virtuoso rhythmic display of the maracas. Often, a *bandola* (a four-string lute) may substitute for the harp in playing the melodic contour. The music of *joropo* is characterized by its metric ambiguity with frequent shifts or juxtaposition of 3/4 and 6/8 meters as well as the constant use of syncopations in the different layers of sound. Depending on specific rhythmic and metric patterns, or the character of the texts, a wide array of stylistic variants exists, each of which is identified by a distinctive name or category.[366] (Figure 4 shows some common rhythmic patterns used in *joropo* music).

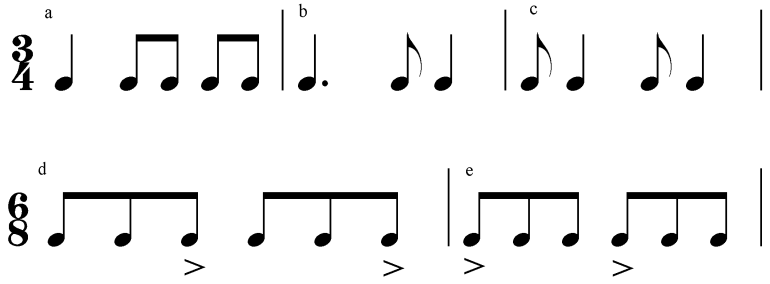

Figure 4. Common rhythmic patterns in *joropo* music

Most scholars agree that *joropo* may have originated from the Spanish *fandango*. The term *joropo* has been documented back to the eighteenth century.[367] By the latter part of the nineteenth century, classically trained composers began to write music resembling that of the *joropo* and by the turn of the twentieth century *joropo* had become a popular music genre in the cities. Many of those urban *joropo*s, including those by Pedro Elías Gutierrez, Francisco de

[366] In the central plains alone, the following are some of the classifications of joropo: seis por numeración, pajarillo, zumba que zumba, guacharaca, gaván, chipola, merecure, periquera, carnaval, quirpa, periquera, San Rafael, catira, paloma, gavilan, and corrio. On the categories of joropo, see Ramón y Rivera, *El joropo: Baile nacional*. A useful reference appears also in José Peñín and Walter Guido, *Enciclopedia de la música en Venezuela* (Caracas: Fundación Bigott, 1998), s.v. "Joropo," by Manuel Antonio Ortiz, Ricardo Sandoval, and Gladys Alemán.

[367] Ramón y Rivera, *El joropo: Baile nacional*, 9.

Paula Aguirre, and Carlos Bonet, were frequently performed in the open-air concerts offered twice a week by the Banda Marcial Caracas in the Plaza Bolívar as well as by other concert bands in the country's principal cities and large towns.[368]

By the late 1920s *joropo* was the most widely disseminated musical genre in the country. In this light, and considering also that ethnomusicological research in the country was in its embryonic stage, the *joropo* tradition provided Plaza and his fellow composers the most significant source of native materials to develop their nationalist style. Plaza's 1928 song *El Curruchá*, originally conceived as piece for leisure singing with "The Russian Choruses" (see chapter 3), soon became one of his most popular choral works based on *joropo*. In the song, scored for tenor soloist and male voices, a humorous text by Vicente Emilio Sojo is rapidly delivered by the tenor soloist while the vocal ensemble emulates the traditional instrumental accompaniment associated with the music of *joropo*. This connection with the *joropo* tradition is arguably the principal reason why Plaza's song has been received so favorably ever since it was composed. As discussed above, *joropo* was at the time widely accepted as an identifying mark of national culture. In that sense, the music itself had the potential to evoke not only an imagery of traditional sounds, folk instruments, and dance but also particular locales. A critic who in 1928 chronicled a performance of the "Russian Choruses" made a special comment regarding the use of *joropo* in those choral songs. He wrote, "separate lines are merited by the *joropo* in which, by means of a single choral suggestion, one hears distinctly, together with the voice that carries the verse, the strumming of the *cuatro*, the pealing of the maracas, the groaning of the *bandola*, and

[368] On *joropo*s as a popular music genre and particularly with regards to Pedro Elías Gutierrez and other composers, see Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, *50 años de música en Caracas*, 24-25; and *Música indígena, folklórica y popular de Venezuela* (Buenos Aires: Ricordi Americana, 1967), 54.

the bass strings of the harp—and in the imagination [one sees] the broad flatness of the plains stretching away, and the hut squatting at the foot of the stout *aragüaney*…It is truly a marvel!"[369]

Plaza's *El Curruchá* was conceived within this popular tradition of *joropo* as opposed to an art-music composition in a nationalist style. As a matter of fact, he later revealed that he never intended this piece to be regarded as an art-music work and even referred to it as "a little youthful sin" because of its overtly folksy sound.[370] But the use of *joropo* as a source of the native in his nationalist style certainly was in the mind of Plaza during these years. In his *Fuga criolla* from 1931, originally written for a string quartet but later arranged for string orchestra, he set out to apply the strict contrapuntal procedures of fugues to an original theme written in the style of *joropo*.

Plaza's nationalist intentions in this work are revealed not only in the title of the composition, and the indication "tempo di joropo" at the beginning of the score (Figure 5), but also in the rhythmic structure and accentuation patterns that can easily be traced back to variants of *joropo* music.[371] Some of these *joropo* rhythmic patterns appear as part of the motivic material in the *Fuga criolla* right from the start. The sixteenth-note figuration followed by the dactylic motive (with the last eight-note slightly accented) corresponds with a common strumming pattern in *cuatro* accompaniment of *joropo* music.

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[369] Unsigned newspaper article, "Los coros rusos," newspaper clippling in Archivo Juan Bautista Plaza, hand-dated 1928. Quoted in Labonville, "Musical Nationalism in Venezuela," 618 (her translation).

[370] Plaza, "Mis siete canciones venezolanas," 5.

[371] In the colonial system the term "criollo" or "criolla" denoted a white individual of Spanish ancestry born in the colonies. In Venezuela, the term was later appropriated to mean "native" or something of Venezuelan origin.

FUGA CRIOLLA

JUAN BAUTISTA PLAZA

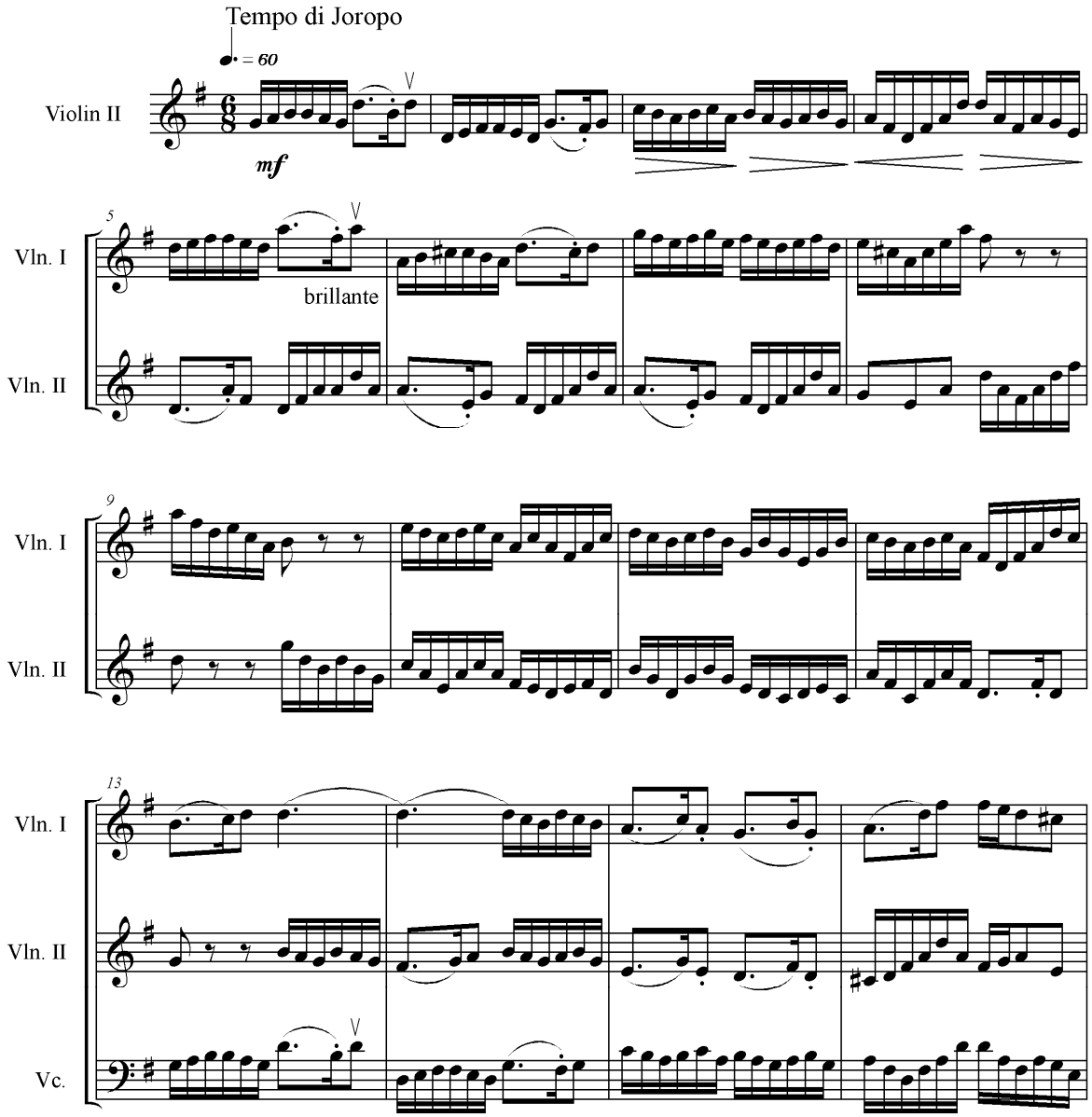

Figure 5. Juan Bautista Plaza, *Fuga criolla* (first page)

Some scholars, in fact, have acknowledged the connection between the motivic structure of Plaza's fugue and some common rhythmic patterns in *joropo* music.[372] Yet, others have argued that despite those rhythmic references, the work does not fully create a synthesis of native and European musical elements. Pioneer Latin American ethnomusicologist Isabel Aretz has pointed out, for instance, that Plaza's *Fuga criolla* does not effectively typify a nationalist style. According to Aretz, this piece "is a beautiful academic work, which shows us a composer of great skills and sensibility. His language is European, the product of his education, and it does not express nationalism as [that] of other composers of his generation or even those much younger composers."[373]

These comments by Aretz are significant not only because she sees Plaza's work through a neoclassicist lens—yet another facet of his eclectic style—but also because, in a view that resonates with the contemporary criticism of Luis A. Oberto discussed above, she exposes Plaza's struggle in his handling of native materials, which, she suggests, was undermined by his academicism. In other words, Aretz did not see Plaza fulfilling the task of creating an "elevated stylization of native elements." But, neither had any of the other composers associated with him, which is suggestive of the renovators' struggle regarding the feasibility of a nationalist style. Indeed, in his attempts at nationalism Plaza had produced works that were either too "folk-sounding," "too academic" or, as with his *Siete canciones venezolanas*, too abstract to expose its nationalist character.

These tensions to produce the great Venezuelan nationalist work were somehow alleviated in 1934 with Plaza's *Sonatina venezolana*. The work had been composed for Chilean

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[372] See, for example, Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, *50 años de música*, 148; Miguel Castillo Didier, *Juan Bautista Plaza*, 379-382; and Gerard Béhague, *Music in Latin America: an Introduction* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1979), 154-55.

[373] Isabel Aretz, "unpublished essay." Quoted in Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, *50 años de música*, 148.

pianist Claudio Arrau who premiered it on April 29 at the Municipal Theater in Caracas.[374] At its first performance the piece was very well received by the critics who celebrated Plaza's success in portraying the essence of the nation as well as the skills of the performer in bringing out those national elements. In a newspaper review following the performance, a critic commended Plaza's "inspiration and talent" and expressed his amazement at how Arrau "was able to capture the intimate sense, the true air, the authentic emotion of what is Venezuelan."[375] A few months after this performance, Calcaño published an extensive article in which he celebrated Plaza's *Sonatina*, for in this work Plaza had successfully accomplished the task of creating a work of "high aesthetic" while elevating Venezuelan folk elements to a new stylistic status without making them lose their identity:

> The first impression that the *Sonatina venezolana* gives (to those who know how to listen, and possess a developed and trained ear) is that of a piece in which the jubilant sentiment that animates the dances of our people boils with all its vivacity. This is the case because the *Sonatina* both in its technical elements as well as in its rich expressive aspect is deeply rooted in our folkloric music. However, in this piece the folkloric element has been elevated to an unusual degree of sublimation never seen in epochs past of our musical history. The organization of all the expressive process that develops throughout the piece clearly reveals the work of a cultivated and sensitive spirit that has been able to guide and to 'educate' the Venezuelan artistic vein as to create a high aesthetic without sacrificing in the slightest manner its characteristic type.[376]

For Calcaño, Plaza's greatest accomplishment with the composition was the creation of a modernist work in which native elements had been successfully elevated to the category of high art. He noted that this aspect had troubled Venezuelan composers for years because in their attempts to synthesize elements of folk music and modernist techniques they had only produced

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[374] The program also included the piece *Suburbio* by Venezuelan composer Juan Vicente Lecuna and *Criollerías* by José Antonio Calcaño. Castillo Didier, *Juan Bautista Plaza*, 388.

[375] Leo [Leoncio Martínez], "Postigos a la calle: Homenaje simpatico a la música venezolana," *La Esfera* 1 May 1934. Quoted in Castillo Didier, *Juan Bautista Plaza*, 390.

[376] José Antonio Calcaño, "La sonatina venezolana de Juan Bautista Plaza," *El Nuevo Diario* 20 August 1934.

works that were meaningful to Venezuelans but could not be seriously considered works of high artistic value. Calcaño points out that, "what truly borders on the astounding [in the sonatina] is to have achieved that elevated stylization with our own musical elements; because these [native elements] pose challenges that at first sight look insurmountable, when one attempts to deal with them within superior spheres, without having them lose their character. This is something that Venezuelan composers have been trying to accomplish for years but it is only now when it has been accomplished."[377]

According to Calcaño this stylization occurred in the *Sonatina venezolana* through four of the fundamental aspects of music composition, namely, harmony, melody, rhythm, and musical form. He went on to analyze the composition and to point out why this was so. In the harmonic design of the piece, he argued, Plaza kept a simple harmony throughout, relying exclusively on chord progressions and tonal areas that were common to popular music (see Figure 6). Yet, he constantly incorporated non-chord notes (particularly neighboring tones) into basic chords as to create harmonic colors that sharply departed from popular harmony while creating a modernist harmonic language. Likewise, Calcaño observes that the "intermittent melody" of the sonatina is in perfect agreement with the spirit of popular music for dance. This aspect, he points out, is not only common in the music of *joropo* where "the melody almost disappears at times within an arpeggio or in a rhythmic motive, to later emerge as a phrase in relief" but also reveals Plaza's sophistication in evoking through this technique the style of the "old harpsichord school." As for rhythm, Calcaño remarks that it constitutes the element in which "the expressive load of the composition is concentrated." He asserts that in the rhythmic design of the sonatina a number of rhythmic patterns associated with Venezuelan triple-metered

[377] Ibid.

dances derived from *joropo* converge in a "harmonious fusion" (Figure 6 right-hand measures 1, 9, 11, 17, 19 and left-hand measure 17). He further argues that it is precisely this rhythmic richness and flexibility that keeps the music fresh throughout without saturating audiences with the music's "lively incessant dynamic." In this respect, he sees Plaza's treatment of rhythm in a fashion analogous to Debussy's treatment of harmony for creating a desired mood. Finally, Calcaño describes the binary musical form of the work not only in connection with the common harmonic progressions found in Venezuelan popular music (I—vi—V) but also how this progression is then reversed to create a rounded binary form by which the work can be formally linked to the keyboard sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti.[378]

[378] Ibid.

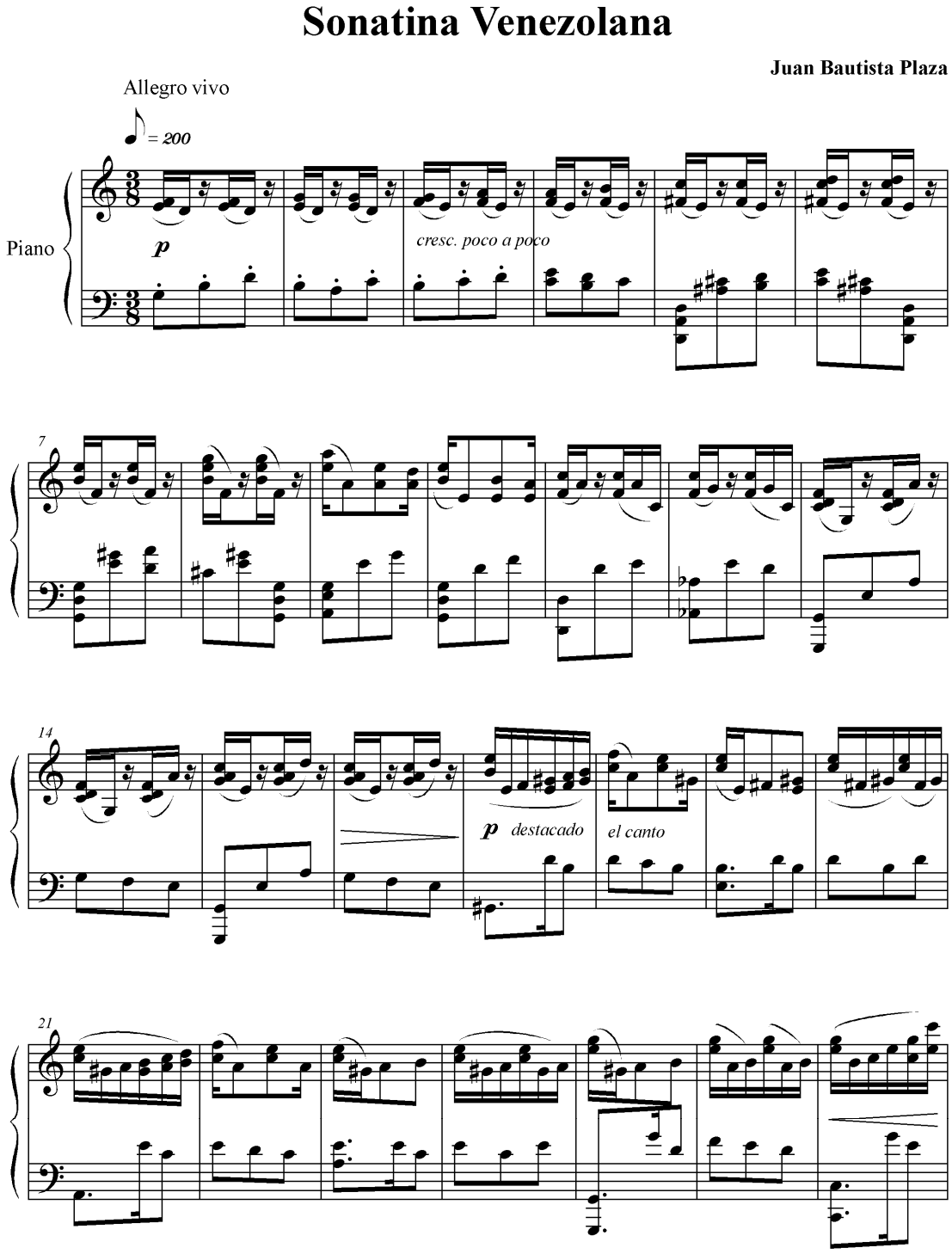

Figure 6. Juan Bautista Plaza, *Sonatina venezolana* (first page)

In describing the structural and procedural connection between Plaza's *Sonatina venezolana* and the eighteenth-century harpsichord style of Scarlatti, Calcaño also made a point to stress that such a fresh look at the past from the perspective of the present enabled Plaza to find a niche in the neoclassicist trend of modernist composition. Nevertheless, Calcaño argues that by looking into the Italian harpsichord style Plaza was not merely looking for a classicist model to emulate, but rather he was looking for the roots of Venezuela's triple-metered dances:

> Doubtless, that tripled-metered dance music [*joropo*] has in it the germs that spiritually connect it with the harpsichord style. That frame of seventeenth-century [sic] sonata fits marvelously with the fluid arabesque of our ternary dances. And if we carefully tracked down the origins of our musics, perhaps we would find at the bottom of our inquiries the influence of the old Italian school and its sister the early Spanish [school], blending together to influence some Castilian or Basque dances, which, once grafted with our Indian rhythms and our black songs, produced that masterwork of our rhythm: the *joropo*.[379]

Thus, by means of creating this dual relationship around *joropo* (i.e an unmistakable identifying mark of Venezuelan culture and a dance rooted in the eighteenth-century Italian harpsichord sonata) Plaza had succeeded in creating an art work of lasting value. In the rhetoric of Calcaño, *joropo* became a powerful tool for the invention of traditions, for it not only turned the genre into a powerful symbol of Venezuelan authenticity but also gave it a historical identity that enabled *joropo* to be projected outwards without being overtly exotic, yet distinguishably Venezuelan. But, at the same time, this rhetoric exerted a negative influence upon the nationalist project because it conceded the prominence of *joropo* as the only significant source of native music.

Indeed, these remarks by Calcaño coincided with his period of immersion into the country folk music, which, in this context, could be seen as a hastened attempt to collect new sources of national music. Moreover, it seems as though Plaza's accomplishments with the

[379] Ibid.

sonatina had eclipsed nationalist composition in the country as no other compositions of similar caliber appeared for the remainder of the decade. Certainly, Plaza himself became concerned about the lack of nationalist compositions in the latter part of the 1930s. His calls in 1938 and 1939 for native composers to write in a nationalist style reveal his own anxiety as to the future of composition in the country.[380] This anxiety could have been motivated by his inability to produce other works himself. In one of his 1939 music-appreciation radio programs on the topic of musical nationalism, he reflected on the ethnomusicological work of Calcaño and the potential that his findings could have in the creation of a nationalist art music style, particularly in light of what Spanish composers had accomplished through the study of folklore. "What Albéniz or Falla have accomplished in Spain," Plaza commented, "why could it not be done in our fatherland by a Venezuelan musician? It would be extremely significant if an outstanding composer of ours could artistically carry out a musical evocation of the plains."[381]

The answer to Plaza's pleas for composers to write in a nationalist style did not arrive until the mid-1940s. It did not come from the renovators themselves but rather from a new generation of composers who came of age at the time. Unlike the renovators, this new group of composers had been brought up in the context of social and cultural reconfiguration, and their music came to epitomize those dynamics.

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[380] Particularly as asserted in his newspaper articles from these years as well as his lectures and radio programs.

[381] Juan Bautista Plaza, *El lenguaje de la música: lecciones populares sobre música* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1966), 79.

5.3 THE NATIONALIST SCHOOL OF COMPOSITION

It is a commonplace in the historiography of twentieth-century art music in Venezuela to regard Vicente Emilio Sojo as the central figure in the creation of the nationalist style in composition. His most significant contribution to nationalist music, however, was not overtly revealed in his musical output but rather through his pivotal role making his composition students devote their efforts towards writing music in a nationalist style. He accomplished this by adopting a rigid teaching approach which, along with his control of the musical institutions, made him emerge as a figure of tremendous musical authority.

In January 1936, Sojo was appointed director of the School of Music. He had been on the school's faculty as a professor of theory and musicianship since 1921. During the 1920s and early 30s, he had consolidated his position as a musical leader by actively participating in the administration of the Unión Filarmónica de Caracas and then as a musical director of both the Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela and the Orfeón Lamas. As the new director of the school, Sojo set out to introduce a new curricular design in the institution. Particularly with regards to theory and composition, he transformed "the primitive course in harmony" into a comprehensive program in music composition.[382] Under the new curriculum, the traditional sequence of harmony and counterpoint, which had been taught in a two-year span, was turned into a large core program that included two courses in harmony, two in counterpoint, one in fugue, and five in musical forms, rhythm, melody, and orchestration.[383] This comprehensive curricular design enabled Sojo to ensure that the students enrolled in the composition concentration at the school acquired a

[382] Vicente Emilio Sojo, *Breves notas sobre algunos aspectos de la vida musical de una persona* (Caracas: Tipografía Principios, 1964); reprint, *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 21 (1987), 17.

[383] *Enciclopedia de la música en Venezuela*, s.v. "Vicente Emilio Sojo," by Felipe SanGiorgi.

thorough understanding of the principles of composition along the lines of European models. Despite his duties as the school administrator, composer, and music director of the orchestra and the Orfeón, Sojo took upon himself the instruction of all the courses in composition.

Sojo portrayed himself as a dedicated artist committed to discipline and morals. He maintained that his musical training was the result of his own hard and diligent work, most of which he had focused on studying the treatises on harmony, counterpoint and fugue by the Spanish Hilarión Eslava as well as by studying the great works of western art music.[384] His students referred to him as an intriguing figure. They saw him as an extremely knowledgeable man with a broad grasp of virtually any topic of scholarly interest, which along with his commanding physical appearance, most notably through his thick mustache and his ever accompanying carved cane, made him a rather intimidating person.

Sojo was known for his meticulous teaching methods. "We all knew of his stubborn obsession to inculcate knowledge," wrote one of his students.[385] According to one of his biographers, Eduardo Lira Espejo, Sojo's "classes had no time limit, and if someone did not understand an explanation he gave, he would approach the student with infinite patience and would not recede until the pupil had fully grasped the point."[386] One of his students, Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, has referred to Sojo as the quintessential mentor who educated his disciples not

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[384] Sojo, "Breves notas," 13. This thesis, however, has been contended by more recent scholars who have documented in some detail Sojo's early musical training in his hometown of Guatire as well as his training at the school of music in Caracas, which he entered in 1910. On Sojo's training, see José Peñín, "Regulo Rico, maestro de Sojo," *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 22 (May-August, 1987): 35-73.

[385] Inocente Carreño, "Vicente Emilio Sojo: creador de arte y forjador de artistas," speech delivered in the city of Guatire on 8 December 1986 during the beginning of Sojo's centennial celebration. Printed in *Revista Musical de Venezuela* 22 (May-August, 1987), 12.

[386] Eduardo Lira Espejo, *Vicente Emilio Sojo*, 2nd edition (Los Teques: Biblioteca de Autores y Temas Mirandinos, 1987), 122.

only in music but also in aesthetics and art history, and constantly engaged them in discussions about Venezuelan literature and poetry.[387]

Most observers describe Sojo's relationship with his students as that of a paternal figure who cared about their personal and professional needs. This analogy is very significant because it enables us to see Sojo not just as a musical mentor but rather in a more constructionist vein, as the forger of his students' identity as nationalist composers. As a social engineer, then, Sojo's nationalist task was a very specific one: to mold the next generation of composers as to consolidate a nationalist school in composition.[388]

Unlike the generation of the renovators, which consisted primarily of an old-time city elite,[389] the new group of composers typified the city's new social makeup: an uprooted, fast-growing, urban middle class. These new social dynamics were manifested in the school rather conspicuously. In a matter of fifteen years, from 1920 to 1935, the school enrollment had nearly quadrupled.[390] Indeed, the increase in the school enrollment was consistent with Caracas's growth in demographics during the same period, particularly in light of the influx of population coming from the country's internal regions.[391] Specifically with regards to composition students,

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[387] Ramón y Rivera, "Semblanza del Maestro," 134 and "Dos evocaciones," 152-3.

[388] A 1998 study by Fidel Rodríguez has articulated this facet of Vicente Emilio Sojo from a different perspective. He has set Sojo's authority over his students and the institutions against the backdrop of Venezuela's history of strong military leadership. Rodríguez provides a reading of Sojo as a Cultural Caudillo who exerted absolute control over the musical institutions and musical policies in the country. On this, see Fidel Rodríguez, *Música, Sojo y caudillismo cultural* (Caracas: Fundación Vicente Emilio Sojo, 1998).

[389] With Sojo perhaps being an exception by virtue of his origin and education but an example of assimilation to a higher social order.

[390] According to Maria Luisa Sanchez, there were 361 registered at the school in 1920. By 1935, the number of students enrolled at the school had increased to 1368. On this, see Maria Luisa Sanchez, *La enseñanza musical en Caracas* (Caracas: Tipografía La Torre, 1949), 35. Her figures, however, seem to reflect the total enrollment in the Instituto de Bellas, of which the school of music was a part. The institute consisted of two academies: The Escuela de Música y Declamación and the Escuela de Artes Plásticas. Though separated administratively from each other, they operated in the same building until September 1936 when the Escuela de Artes Plásticas moved to another location.

[391] As a matter of fact, the city's population had doubled during roughly the same period from 140,132 inhabitants in 1920 to 283,418 in 1936. On Caracas' demographics for this period see, Federico Brito Figueroa,

a list of graduates from Sojo's class between 1944 and 1950 reveals that the group had a geographically heterogeneous origin (Table 1). In this group only three out of the twelve composers were originally from Caracas, while the rest had been born in the interior and had moved to the city as youngsters or adolescents.

Table 1. Graduates of Sojo's Composition Class, 1944-1950[392]

Graduation Year	Name	Place of birth (Town & State)
1944	Antonio Estévez (1910-1988)	Calabozo, Guárico
	Evencio Castellanos (1915-1984)	Cúa, Miranda
	Angel Sauce (1911-1995)	Caracas, Distrito Federal
1945	Antonio José Ramos (1901- ?)	Carúpano, Sucre
1946	Inocente Carreño (1919)	Porlamar, Nueva Esparta
1947	Antonio Lauro (1917-1986)	Ciudad Bolívar, Bolívar
	Carlos Figueredo (1909-1986)	Tocuyito, Carabobo
	Gonzalo Castellanos (1926)	Canoabo, Carabobo
1948	Manuel Ramos (1915- ?)	Barquisimeto, Lara
	Blanca Estrella (1910-1986)	San Felipe, Yaracuy
	José Clemente Laya (1913-1981)	Caracas, Distrito Federal
1950	Andrés Sandoval (1924)	Caracas, Distrito Federal

The places of origin of these composers are significant, not only in consideration of the musical background of Sojo's students at the school but also, and more importantly, in their eventual participation in the invention of nationalist music. Indeed, while for the most part, this group of composers lacked a solid knowledge of the Western art-music tradition when they arrived at the School of Music, they possessed significant experience and training in the folk and popular traditions of their respective places of origin. Antonio Estévez, for instance, had since

Historia económica y social de Venezuela: Una estructura para su estudio (Caracas: Dirección de Cultura Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1966): v.2, 406, 531.

[392] After the class of 1950 there was a ten-year break for the next composition class to graduate.

his childhood been acquainted with the local musical traditions in his native town of Calabolozo, in the central-plains state of Guárico.[393] His father was an amateur musician who played the trumpet and the cornet and whom Estévez admired for his great talent for string instruments, particularly the traditional *cuatro*. In 1926, at age ten, Estévez joined the Guárico State Band as a saxophone player. After settling in Caracas in 1930, he became one of the youngest musicians ever to join the Banda Marcial Caracas.[394] Similarly, before he dedicated exclusively to classical music, Estevez was frequently sought by popular musicians in order to play music in clubs and private parties.[395]

Estévez's musical background was unique in that he had received some kind of formal musical training before entering the school. For other composers, however, the only musical knowledge they possessed when they arrived at the school was in folk and popular music. Inocente Carreño, for instance, was a very prolific composer of popular songs when he started to study with Sojo in 1936.[396] In a personal interview, he pointed out that by the time he entered the school he had hardly heard any classical music whatsoever. As a matter of fact, he described himself as being an "ignorant" who had never heard classical music before in his life.[397]

In other cases, composers kept parallel careers as both popular and classical musicians. World-renowned composer and guitarist Antonio Lauro even gained international recognition with his popular music trio Cantores del Trópico, with which he traveled extensively and made

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[393] José Balza, *Antonio Estévez: Iconografía, biografía e interpretación de la obra* (Caracas: Documentos de la Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1982), 5. Estévez recalled being particularly fond of folktunes and especially of the tunes associated with cow-milking at dawn.

[394] Ibid., 8.

[395] Ibid., 10.

[396] *Enciclopedia de la música en Venezuela*, s.v. "Inocente Carreño," by José Peñín. According to José Peñín, Carreño had written "no less than two hundred titles of popular music including valses, merengues, joropos, pasodobles, tangos , boleros, rumbas."

[397] Inocente Carreño, interview by author, 8 July 2000, Caracas, videorecording.

commercial recordings.[398] Even though Sojo was critical of imported popular music, he did not oppose his students being involved in it. On the contrary, he encouraged his students to explore popular and, more especially, folk music.

At the same time, the art-music training that these composers underwent was very rigorous. In addition to the comprehensive courses in composition, they were required to study music history with Plaza, as well as private lessons in an instrument of their choice and piano. Likewise, these musicians were required to sing in the Orfeón Lamas or, if they were proficient in an orchestral instrument, to play in the symphony.[399] But more relevant to his nationalist agenda, Sojo stimulated his students to cultivate a musical style that incorporated elements of folklore or native culture. This aspect he personally mentioned in his autobiography. He asserted that in his efforts to teach students to write music in a nationalist style, he himself set out to write music exploring national subjects. Specifically, he referred to the collection of children's songs that the Ministry of National Education had published in 1940, which was intended "to show his students how a new style of Venezuelan songs could be conceived."[400] Moreover, as composer Inocente Carreño has pointed out, it was common for Sojo to give current or former students nationalist subjects to develop musically, or even suggest revisions to already finished compositions.[401] Specifically, Carreño recalled his own tone poem *Margariteña*, to which Sojo recommended revisions be made, including renaming the work *Glosa Sinfónica Margariteña* as

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[398] *Enciclopedia de la música en Venezuela*, s.v. "Antonio Lauro," by Alejandro Bruzual.

[399] Alberto Calzavara, *Trayectoria cincuentenaria de la Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela: 1930-1980* (Caracas: Fundarte, 1980): 66-67.

[400] Sojo, "Breves notas," 18.

[401] Carreño, interview by author.

it was being prepared for its premiere in 1954, eight years after Carreño had graduated from Sojo's class.[402]

Sojo's determination to create a sense of national awareness among his students was compulsive and had an indoctrinating effect upon them. As another of his students, Antonio Estévez, has noticed, "Maestro Sojo was always very passionate about our identity as Venezuelan composers. He made us listen to his arrangements of old folksongs over and over. He was convinced that it was our mission to identify ourselves as Venezuelan composers and not as composers of other countries. For him, it was a motive of satisfaction when this identification became evident in our music by means of the incorporation of national melodies and rhythms or through some programmatic effect such as the depiction of a landscape."[403]

This kind of dynamics is one of the most significant aspects of musical nationalism in Venezuela and yet one of the most neglected by scholarship. It can be articulated as a twofold process that involves, on the one hand, Vicente Emilio Sojo as the indoctrinating figure who had absolute control over the composers, the institutions, and the ideology (the latter further elaborated and disseminated in the public sphere by Plaza and Calcaño). On the other hand, it values the younger generation of composers not only by virtue of their diverse origin and musical background rooted in the common people but also because in the discourse of the renovators this younger generation of composers is presented as a source of the authentically national. Therefore, these composers came to fulfill the renovators' pleas for a type of art music created by native composers that would depict the national landscape and character. In this light, it should not be taken as coincidental that some of the most celebrated nationalist works by the

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[402] Ibid.

[403] Antonio Estévez, interview by Felipe Izcaray, 22 March 1982, tape recording, Caracas; quoted in Felipe Izcaray, "The Legacy of Vicente Emilio Sojo," 213.

second generation of composers were at the time, and continue to be nowadays, those based on local subjects written by composers who were culturally or geographically connected to the topics dealt with in the musical compositions.[404] Moreover, this authority whereby composers brought the indisputably authentic into their musical compositions (an invented tradition in its own terms) was also an important avenue for the invention of the national as new agents associated with local traditions or folklore were incorporated into the fabric of national culture. This is not to imply that *joropo* was replaced by other musical genres. On the contrary, the *joropo* tradition continued to be explored consistently by most composers. What this invented tradition accomplished was the creation of alternate codes of cultural communication.

5.4 THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE NATIONALIST STYLE

Prior to the 1940s, Venezuelan composers had not written consistently for the orchestra. In fact, besides the religious compositions commissioned for particular ceremonial occasions, the catalogue of orchestral music by native composers did not exceed a handful of works.[405] In contrast, the group of composers who studied with Vicente Emilio Sojo had produced over fifty orchestral works by the end of the 1950s (see Table 2). Their preference for the orchestral medium was largely due to the influence of Sojo. In the first place, the composition curriculum at

[404] This is particularly conspicuous in works such as Inocente Carreño's *Margariteña*, Antonio Estévez's *Suite llanera* and *Cantata criolla: Florentino el que cantó con el Diablo*, Evencio Castellanos's *Santa Cruz de Pacairigua*, *Suite avileña*, *El Río de las Siete estrellas*, and Gonzalo Castellanos's *Antelación e imitación fugaz*, and *Suite caraqueña*. Some of these pieces are discussed below.

[405] Juan Bautista Plaza was by far the most prolific composer of non-sacred orchestral music with three tone poems, *El Picacho abrupto*, 1926, *Vigilia*, 1928, *Campanas de pascua*, 1930-38; his *Fuga criolla*, for strings, 1931; and two works for choir and orchestra, *Himno a Sucre*, 1924 and *Las horas*, 1931. Sojo had two short pieces from the 1920s, *Canción* and *Final* (the former an orchestral arrangement of an earlier work) and Calcaño wrote a fugue-like work, *El Gato*, which was premiered by the orchestra in 1932.

the school required that students write at least one symphonic work in partial fulfillment for their degree of Maestro Compositor. Second, since they were also trained to be orchestral musicians, they were significantly more involved with the medium, at least from the performer's viewpoint, than Sojo, Plaza, and Calcaño had been.[406] Third, as the musical director of the Venezuelan Symphony until 1949, and as a member of the board of directors thereafter, Sojo ensured that the compositions of his students would be programmed by the orchestra. In 1947 the symphony had become a professional institution fully funded by the state.[407] This financial stability allowed the orchestra to pay royalty fees to composers whose works were performed by the group as well as conducting fees when they were invited to lead the group.[408] Finally, increasing official support for the arts led to the establishing of several composition competitions starting in the mid-1940s. These awards, which carried substantial cash prizes, helped stimulate art music composition in the country not only because they constituted potential sources of income for composers but also because they ensured that award-winning works would be performed by the symphony.[409] Even

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[406] A 1944 concert program of the Venezuelan Symphony, for instance, lists the names of the following composers as members of the ensemble: Angel Sauce and Andres Sandoval (violins), Jose Laya (viola), Antonio Estévez (oboe), Gonzalo Castellanos, Antonio José Ramos, Evencio Castellanos (percussion). Reprinted in Calzavara, *Trayectoria cincuentenaria*, 66-67. Although not listed in the program, composer Inocente Carreño joined the symphony in 1940 first as a trumpet player and later as horn player. Similarly, composer Antonio Lauro joined the orchestra in 1947 as a percussionist. See individual entries in *Enciclopedia de la música en Venezuela.*

[407] The professionalization of the orchestra was largely the result of Sojo's connections with Rómulo Betancourt, a politician who was leading the junta that had overthrown president Isaias Medina Angarita in October 1945. Betancourt was the founder of Acción Democrática, a political party of which Sojo had also been a founding member.

The subvention that the orchestra received from the government that year (800,000 bolivares, roughly $250,000 US at the time) led the institution to undergo an administrative and artistic overhaul including a substantial increase to its payroll and the creation of thirty-two new instrumental chairs which were filled by musicians hired in Europe. On the professionalization of the orchestra, see Calzavara, *Trayectoria cincuentenaria*, 68-73.

[408] Inocente Carreño, interview by author.

[409] The *National Music Award*, for instance, was created in 1947 by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This competition, which was divided into several categories according to the performance medium, allocated the highest cash prize (5,000 bolivares; approximately $1,500 U.S.) in the category "Symphonic Work." In addition, the winner received a "three-month scholarship to study in a foreign country." See "Premios Nacionales," *Revista Nacional de Cultura* 60 (Jan-Feb, 1947): 177-78. Similarly, the *Vicente Emilio Sojo Award* was established by the composer himself in 1951 to further stimulate orchestral composition. In 1954 and 1957, the José Angel Lamas institution sponsored the Latin American Orchestral Composition Competition on the occasions of the First and

though the guidelines for the orchestral music categories of these composition competitions did not specify that the works had to subscribe to a specific style, it is conspicuously significant that during the 1940s and 50s the awards went predominantly to works of strongly marked national content (Table 2).[410]

The orchestral repertoire written by the second generation of composers did not subscribe to a specific symphonic genre. In general, composers favored free forms with certain preferences for rhapsodic designs such as overtures and symphonic poems as well as multi-movement symphonic suites (see Table 2). Additionally, several composers wrote three-movement concerti for their respective instruments of expertise. With the exception of Carlos Figueredo with five, and Andres Sandoval with one, no other composers wrote symphonies during these years. As for orchestration and performance forces, the composers wrote primarily for large orchestras, occasionally incorporating vocal soloists and choirs as well as folk instruments.[411]

Second Latin American Music Festivals. Cash prizes for these competitions were $10,000, $5,000, $5,000 U.S. respectively for the first, second, and third places. See Alejo Carpentier, "El Premio de Juán José Castro," *El Nacional*, 5 October 1954; and "Segundo Festival Latinoamericano de Música," *El Nacional*, 2 March 1957.

[410] Other categories, however, were geared towards particular national genres (i.e. "*joropo*s," "venezuelan songs" etc.). My assessment is based on an examination of the awards advertisement published primarily in the *Revista Nacional de Cultura* between 1947 and 1958.

[411] Most of these works were performed at least once by the symphony. A handful of those compositions, including the ones discussed below in this chapter, continue to be performed regularly both in the country and abroad and are available in printed format. The majority of those works, however, exist only in manuscripts which are held in private collections or in the archive of the Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela.

Table 2. Orchestral Repertoire by Sojo's Students, 1940s-1950s

Year	Composer	Work	Remarks
1942	Estevez, Antonio	*Suite Llanera*	
1942	Sauce, Angel	*Movimiento Sinfónico*	
1942	Sauce, Angel	*Concierto para Violín y Orquesta*	
1943	Sauce, Angel	*Obertura Sinfónica*	
1944	Castellanos, Evencio	*Concierto para Piano y Orquesta*	Graduation piece
1944	Estévez, Antonio	*La Rauda Novia del Aire*	Graduation piece
1945?	Ramos, José Antonio	*Concierto para Piano y Orquesta*	Graduation piece
1946	Carreño, Inocente	*El Pozo*	Graduation piece
1946	Castellanos, Evencio	*El Río de las Siete Estrellas*	
1946	Figueredo, Carlos	*Sinfonía N. 1 in D minor*	National Music Award (Honorable M), 1947
1947	Castellanos, Evencio	*Suite Avileña*	National Music Award (Honorable M), 1947
1947	Castellanos, Gonzalo	*Suite Caraqueña*	Graduation piece, Nat. Mus. Award, 1947
1947	Laya, José Clemente	*Suite Venezolana para Orquesta*	
1947	Laya, José Clemente	*Misa para los Negros Venezolanos*	
1947	Laya, José Clemente	*Sinfonieta sobre Temas Taurepanes*	Vicente Emilio Sojo Award, 1953
1948	Lauro, Antonio	*Cantaclaro*	Graduation piece
1948	Mescoli, Blanca Estrella	*Fantasía de Navidad*	
1948	Ramos, Manuel	*Impresión Sinfónica*	
1948	Sauce, Angel	*Jeovah Reina (cantata)*	National Music Award, 1948
1949	Estevez, Antonio	*Concierto para Orquesta*	National Music Award, 1949
1949	Figueredo , Carlos	*Sinfonía N. 2 in B flat*	
1950	Laya, José Clemente	*Pieza Monotemática Parichará*	
1950	Sandoval, Andres	*Sinfonía Venezuela*	
1950	Sandoval, Andres	*Tres Sonatas*	
1951?	Figueredo , Carlos	*Sinfonía N. 3*	Vicente Emilio Sojo Award, 1955
1952	Castellanos, Gonzalo	*Fantasía Cromática*	
1952	Figueredo, Carlos	*Sinfonía N.4 in G minor*	
1952	Mescoli, Blanca Estrella	*Estampas Sinfónicas*	
1953	Figueredo, Carlos	*Sinfonía N.5 "Sinfonía Venezuela"*	
1953	Laya, José Clemente	*Bolera*	
1953	Mescoli, Blanca Estrella	*Valse, Nocturno y Joropo en Fuga*	
1954	Carreño, Inocente	*Margariteña*	
1954	Castellanos, Evencio	*Santa Cruz de Pacairigua*	National Music Award, 1954
1954	Castellanos, Gonzalo	*Antelación e Imitación Fugaz*	Vicente Emilio Sojo Award, 1954
1954	Estevez, Antonio	*Cantata Criolla*	1954 Festival
1954	Laya, José Clemente	*Obertura Infantil*	
1954	Sandoval, Andres	*San Cristobal*	Vicente Emilio Sojo Award (Honorable M), 1955
1955	Carreño, Inocente	*Suite Sinfónica N. 1*	Vicente Emilio Sojo Award, 1955
1955	Lauro, Antonio	*Giros Negroides*	
1956	Carreño, Inocente	*Obertura Sinfónica N. 1*	Vicente Emilio Sojo Award, 1956
1956	Lauro, Antonio	*Concierto para Guitarra y Orquesta*	
1956	Sandoval, Andres	*Rapsódia para Piano y Orquesta*	
1957	Carreño, Inocente	*Aguas Crecidas*	
1957	Castellanos, Evencio	*Fantasía Sinfónica para Piano y Orquesta*	
1957	Castellanos, Gonzalo	*Fantasía Sinfónica para Piano y Orquesta*	National Music Award, 1958
1957	Sandoval, Andres	*Concierto para Clarinete y Orquesta*	Vicente Emilio Sojo Award, 1957
1957	Sauce, Angel	*Cecilia Mujica*	Vicente Emilio Sojo Award, 1957
1958	Carreño, Inocente	*Concierto para Corno y Orquesta*	Vicente Emilio Sojo Award, 1958
1958	Mescoli, Blanca Estrella	*Maria Lionza*	Vicente Emilio Sojo Award, 1958
1958	Sandoval, Andres	*Fuga de los Espíritus*	Vicente Emilio Sojo Award, 1958
1959	Pereira, Raimundo	*Movimiento Sinfónico*	

The orchestral style of twentieth-century Venezuelan composers is frequently described as being influenced by the coloristic sonorities of impressionist and post-impressionist idioms.[412] Indeed, Venezuelan composers typically took advantage of the timbral resources that the orchestra offered them, frequently experimenting with non-traditional instrumental techniques. This is not to say, however, that their musical language was impressionist altogether. The common view of Venezuelan orchestral music as being influenced by impressionism rests upon assumptions that have gained acceptance through sheer repetition. Most notably this view can be traced back to Sojo's self-description as Francophile, particularly in his being captivated by the music of Debussy and Ravel.[413] According to musicologist Juan Francisco Sanz, these assumptions do not accurately apply to Sojo's music, let alone the rest of the renovators, or the second generation of composers. In Sanz's view, some the most common compositional resources used by Debussy, including extended seventh- and ninth-chords, parallelism, or the use of pentatonic or hexachordal scales, are hardly ever present in the music by these composers. Quite the contrary, Sanz suggests, the musical style of Venezuelan composers is primarily eclectic, showing many different influences and trends spanning from post-romantic to neoclassical to serial.[414] Indeed, many modernist traits can be found in the music by the later generation of composers. One such trait is exemplified by Antonio Estevez's rhythmic disruptions and his percussive treatment of the orchestra in his *Cantata criolla*, a technique that could be linked to Stravinsky's idiom (Figure 7).

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[412] See, for instance, Hugo López Chirico, *La "cantata criolla" de Antonio Estevez: Un análisis de la obra y de su inserción en el nacionalismo musical latinoamericano y venezolana* (Caracas: Consejo Nacional de la Cultura, 1987), 271; also, see *Enciclopedia de la música en Venezuela,* s.v. "Evencio Castellanos" by José Peñín.

[413] Sojo, "Breves Notas," 14.

[414] *Enciclopedia de la música en Venezuela,* s.v. "Composición" by Juan Francisco Sanz.

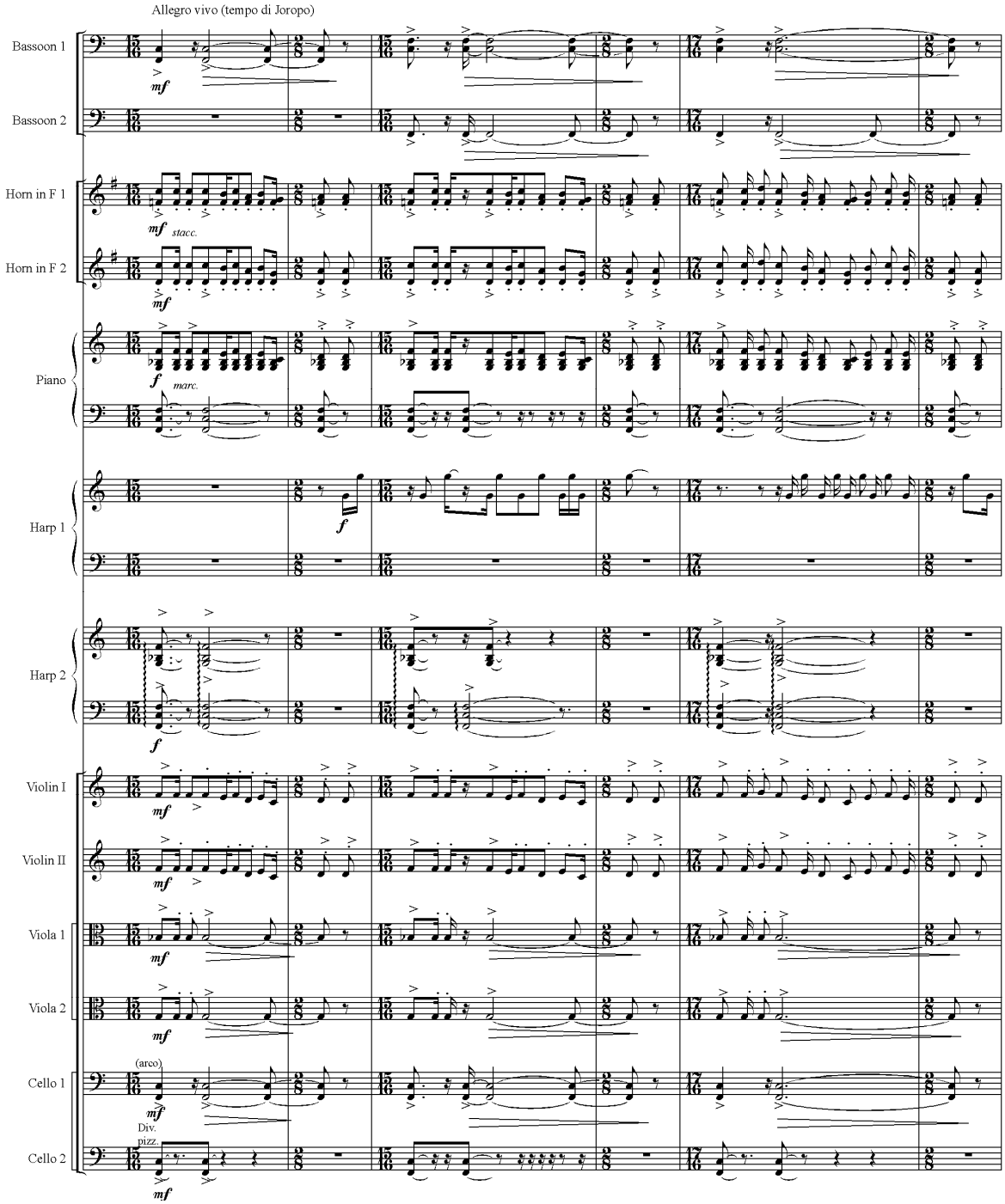

Figure 7. Antonio Estévez's *Cantata criolla* ("La Porfía" mm. 107-112)

Similarly, other composers would suggest ambiguity by juxtaposing rhythmic patterns and harmonic designs. An interesting example of this approach appears in the piece *Santa Cruz de Pacairigua* by composer Evencio Castellanos at measures 29-33 (Figure 8). Here, despite a

clear underlining beat, the sesquialteric relationship of the individual parts creates a sense of metrical ambiguity. Likewise, the celesta line (imitating the plucking of the open strings of the cuatro) departs from the main key of F to a secondary key area a tritone apart, thus undermining the tonal center of the section.

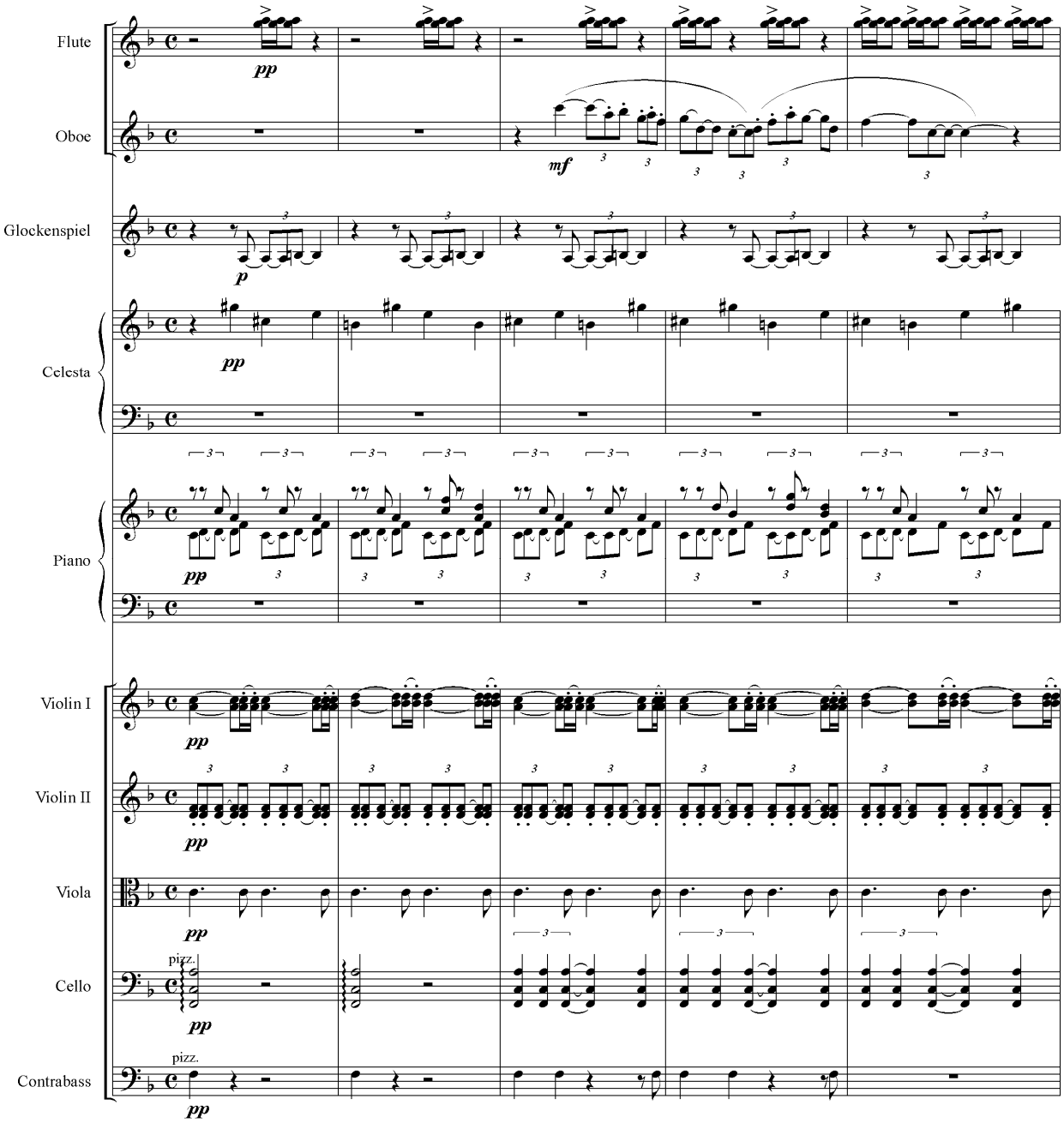

Figure 8. Evencio Castellanos, *Santa Cruz de Pacairigua* (mm. 29-33)

Composer Gonzalo Castellanos used modes as means to approach the stylistic eclecticism Sanz refers to. The first movement of his *Suite caraqueña* is constructed upon a modal theme (Figure 9).

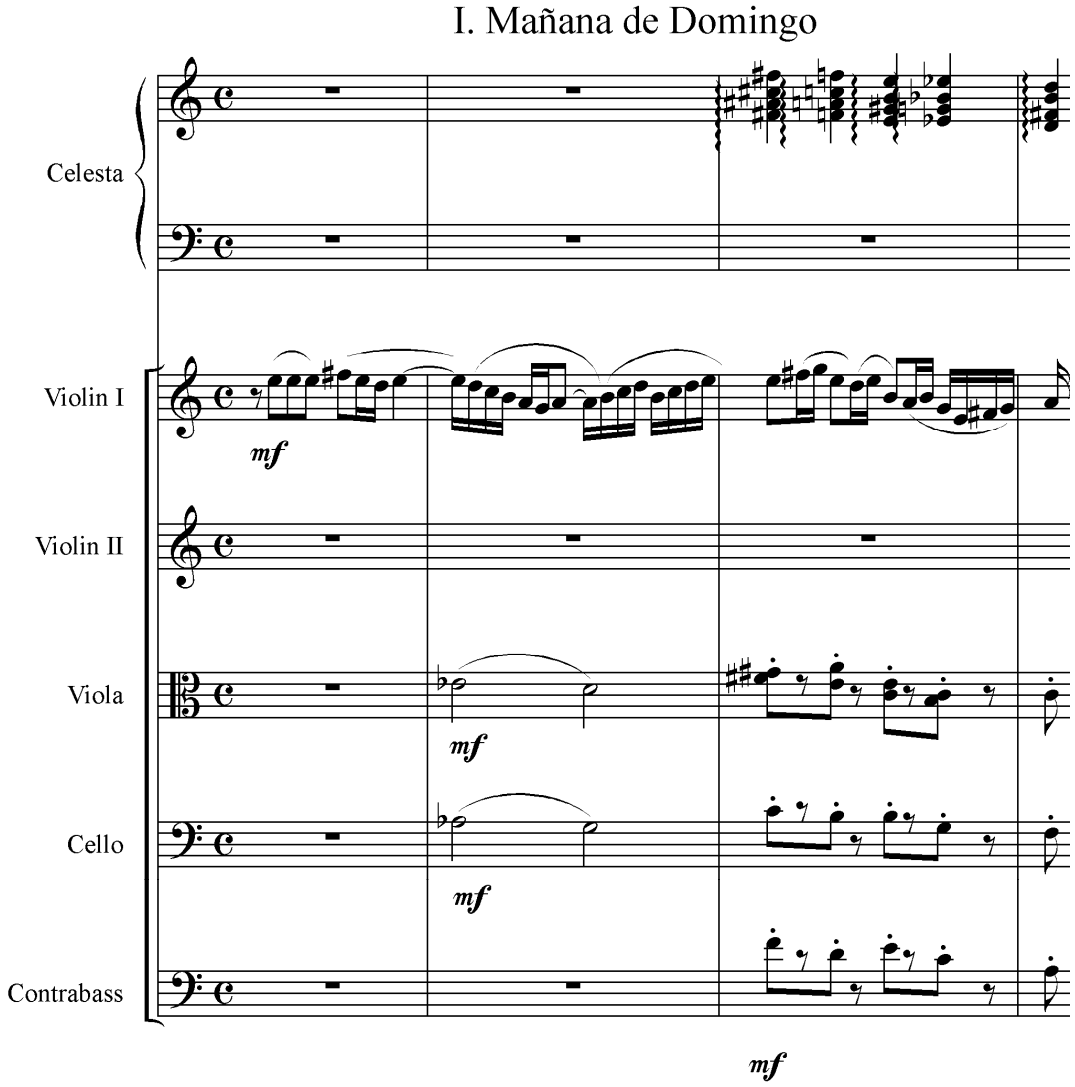

Figure 9. Gonzalo Castellano, *Suite caraqueña* (Mov. 1 "Mañana de Domingo" mm.1-3)

Approaching this repertoire as stylistically unified, as Sanz appropriately observes, may result in misleading interpretations. Nevertheless, in the public's imagination, scholarly accounts, and the composers themselves, this music has been portrayed as homogeneous. Commenting on the orchestral works by Venezuelan composers that were performed during the first Latin

American Music Festival held in Caracas in 1954, Inocente Carreño recalls, "almost all of this [music] possesses a particular seal, an unmistakable style, a common tie that unites [this music] and identifies it. It is the product of one single thought and of one single aesthetic concern. That is to say, it is an authentic school, in which, within the individualities of each of its members, there is a unity of style that makes this music a homogeneous whole."[415]

These comments by Carreño underline the pervasiveness of nationalism as a unifying force. The invention of the nationalist style in composition has prevented critics from radicalizing the stylistic differences in the music of these composers; instead, they have focused on essentializing its similarities. It was precisely through this nationalist critique that composers were able to successfully incorporate local subjects in their compositions and, in the process, to elevate them to the category of national culture. From this point of view, as Ernest Gellner has argued, nationalism has a naturalizing effect in that it makes cultural boundaries to expand so as to coincide with the political ones.[416]

For Venezuelan composers, the process of creating nationalist orchestral music by drawing from local subjects typically involved one, or sometimes a combination, of the following methods: A) direct quotations of folksongs in the orchestral works; B) the subconscious assimilation of native elements into the orchestral idiom; C) making references to native culture by means of providing a program; D) an intellectual process involving ethnographic work in order to capture the essence of folklore without actually quoting folksongs in the compositions but deliberately creating new music in the folk style; and E) using a historicist approach by looking not at folklore but rather into the country's musical past for models.

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[415] Inocente Carreño, "Vicente Emilio Sojo, creador de arte y forjador de artistas," 17.
[416] Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change*, 150-153.

These differences in approaches to musical nationalism not only reveal the diversity of musical philosophies among composers but also expose some of the dynamics and tensions involved in creating a nationalist style, all of which, however, reflect the constructionist nature of musical nationalism. According to composer Inocente Carreño, the use of folklore was a logical approach for him or others like him with little background in art music. He recalls, "it had been highly criticized that taking local subjects to make symphonic works out of them was an outdated trend. However, since we were beginning [to compose] we had to start with something....Using folklore became a tacit agreement among those of us who sought something to begin. We could not start by merely imitating Beethoven or Mozart."[417]

In describing the compositional process in his best known orchestral work, *Margariteña*, he indicated that it was primarily the folksongs that he heard in his native state that mostly influenced his choices of folk material.[418] Indeed, in this tone poem Carreño bases the entire thematic content of the work on folksongs from Margarita Island, in Nueva Esparta state, where he had been brought up. In a series of musical episodes, arranged in a rondo-like form, Carreño employs several different folktunes, including a play song, a work song, and a funeral song. He quotes all these tunes literally at first, and then elaborates them through various developmental procedures, particularly melodic fragmentation and counterpoint. The principal theme of the work is based on another folk song "Margarita es una lagrima que un querubín derramó" (Margarita [island] is a tear that a cherub dropped) which is developed as the piece unfolds and expanded in the climactic end of the composition. (Figure 10)

[417] Inocente Carreño, interview.
[418] Ibid.

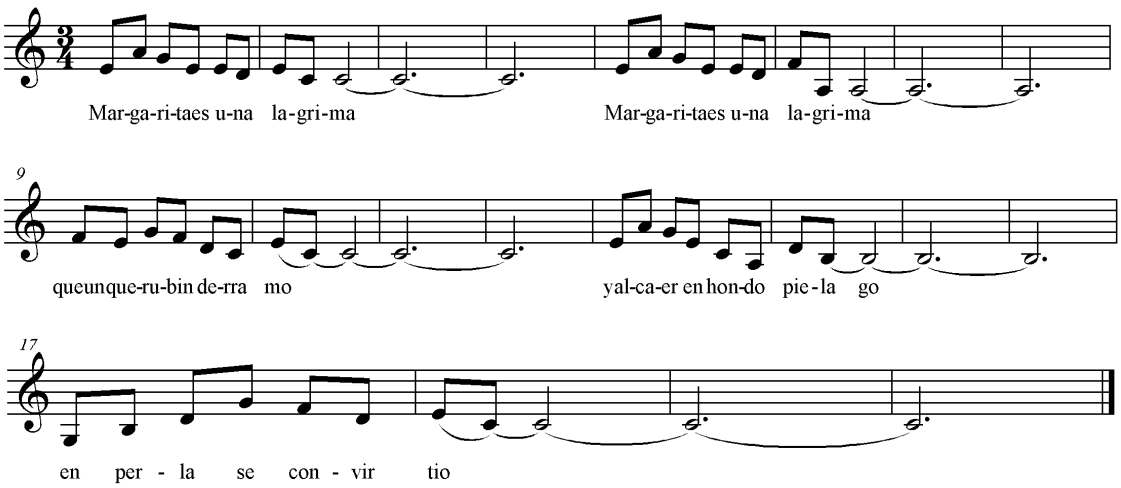

Figure 10. Folksong "Margarita es una lágrima"

As an invented tradition, this approach to composition is interesting because it departs from Plaza's prescribed models which encouraged field work and study of the sources of native culture and instead relied upon empirical experience. A contrasting approach is yet found in the work of composer Gonzalo Castellanos, who has described his nationalist style as one in which he engaged without a preconceived plan or agenda. As he recalls, "music is a universal language and whatever the composer adds [to it] is his own spirituality. My music, as many people think, has to do with Venezuela and its rhythms, but this is not something I set out to do deliberately. This reaction or effect is natural in me, and it is not the product of a fixed idea of borrowing from folklore."[419]

Castellanos's approach to nationalism, then, is more subjective than Carreño's in that it does not rely on quotations of folksongs but rather on the public's imagination to recognize his music as Venezuelan. He emphasizes the assumption that inherently Venezuelan characters are present in it, which are readily recognizable to audiences. Thus his music projects a Venezuelan

[419] *Enciclopedia de la música en Venezuela*, s.v. "Gonzalo Castellanos," by Walentyna Ziegert and Walter Guido.

sound that identifies him and allows Venezuelans to recognize themselves in it too. "I do use pre-existing songs as themes for my symphonic works," he claims. "I do not use gadgets, folk instruments, just to show myself to the public as a criollo. Of course, some of my compositions, especially the early ones, sound Venezuelan, not Chilean, or Danish, but Venezuelan."[420]

But, what exactly is this Venezuelan sound to which Castellanos refers? He implies that this sound is something that audiences can identify when exposed to it, but is this really something that occurs naturally as he believes? I propose that, quite the contrary, those Venezuelan characters do not occur naturally but are the result of invented traditions or traditions that are in the process of being invented. As discussed earlier in this chapter, finding that Venezuelan sound had proven troublesome for the renovators during the 1920s and 30s. Specifically, Plaza struggled to find his music recognized as Venezuelan because his audience was not able to identify the marks of Venezuelan culture he had imprinted in it. Historically and sociologically this is significant for several reasons: first, despite the ongoing process of industrialization occurring during the 1920s, Plaza's audience consisted primarily of a long-established city elite, who for the most part only recognized *joropo* music (incidentally, an urban tradition invented in the previous century) as the only national music. Second, the transformation of Venezuelan society during the late 1930s and 40s as a result of the massive migrations from urban to rural environments, as well as the increasing political democratization of the nation, created a more dynamic environment in which audiences were culturally more diverse but, depicted by nationalism as being homogeneous. Finally, specifically in music, it was ultimately composers who decided what the Venezuelan sound was. In the context of Venezuela's

[420] Gonzalo Castellanos, interview by Felipe Izcaray, 20 February 1996, Caracas, tape recording; Quoted in Felipe Izcaray, "The Legacy of Vicente Emilio Sojo: Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Venezuelan Orchestral Music" (D.M.A. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1996), 98.

modernization, the second generation of composers enjoyed a particularly privileged position as cultural leaders in that they embodied a double authority status: on the one hand, they were trained art-music experts, and on the other, by virtue of their links to the country's new socio-cultural makeup, they epitomized a source of the authentically Venezuelan.

From this point of view, the Venezuelan sound to which Gonzalo Castellanos refers has to be seen not as an inherent condition but rather as a socially invented tradition. This is particularly conspicuous in his early musical output. Because he purposely avoided direct folk quotations, he, like Plaza, drew on recognizable sources of national culture, namely *joropo*, in order to create his Venezuelan sound. Two of his early orchestral pieces, his three-movement *Suite caraqueña* (1947) and his *Antelación e imitación fugaz* (1954), are based on rhythmic structures drawn from *joropo*. In the last movement of the *Suite caraqueña*, Castellanos used rhythmic patterns resembling the *cuatro* strumming in *joropo* music as well as the rhythmic designs upon which *joropo* singers elaborate their tunes. In *Antelación e imitación fugaz* (originally named *Preludio and fuga* but later changed to its current title upon Sojo's suggestion) the references to *joropo* are somehow more ambiguous. Particularly the rhythmic and metric structure of the fugal section of the work has generated some scholarly discrepancies regarding the piece's links to *joropo* or rather *gaita*, the latter a popular dance genre with similar metric structure from the northwestern city of Maracaibo in Zulia state.[421] Unlike most nationalist pieces that use *joropo* rhythms in various layers of the musical texture, the *joropo*/*gaita* rhythms in *Antelación* occur primarily in the melodic layer. As Plaza's *Fuga criolla*, in which the *joropo* connection has also generated some scholarly controversies, the contrapuntal structure of the

[421] On the *joropo* approach, see Felipe Izcaray, "The Legacy of Vicente Emilio Sojo," 137. On the *gaita* reading, see *Enciclopedia de la musica en Venezuela*, s.v. "Nacionalismo," by José Peñín, and s.v. Gonzalo Castellanos," by Walentyna Domiter and Walter Guido. None of these claims, however, has been supported by a systematic analysis but rather based on empirical appreciation.

work demands certain restrictions as to the treatment of texture. Thus, the treatment of harmony in rhythmic block chords suggesting *cuatro* or harp strumming, a prominent feature in the *Suite caraqueña,* is to some extent compromised in *Antelación* in order to deal with demands of counterpoint. Therefore, on the basis of the melodic design alone, the piece lends itself to ambiguity when linked to Venezuelan folklore because both *joropo* and *gaita* share common rhythmic features, including frequent use of syncopations and hemiolas (Figure 11).

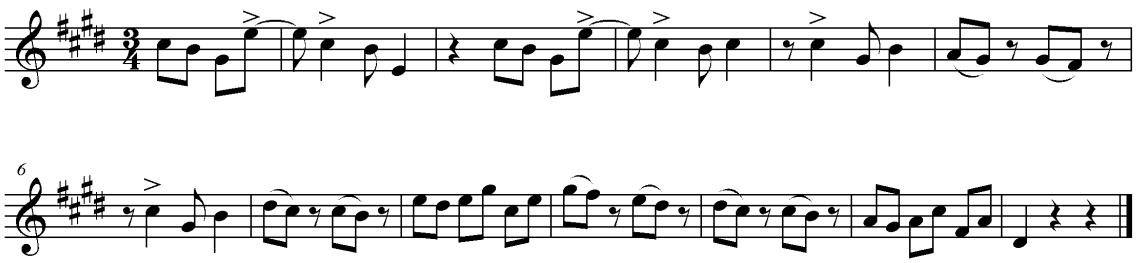

Figure 11. *Antelación e imitación fugaz* ("Allegro deciso" rehearsal no. 10)

Another approach Castellanos used in order to create a national connection was providing a program. This approach to musical composition, so prevalent in nineteenth-century nationalist movements in Europe, can arguably be considered the most unambiguous form of invented traditions in that it explicitly tells its audiences what to listen for and how to relate to it. Castellanos's *Suite caraqueña* is a musical depiction of three images of the city of Caracas ("Mañana de Domingo," "Nocturno," and "Danza") for which he provided the following program:

> Three picturesque portraits: The first depicts the special joy of a Sunday morning of fresh breeze, bell chiming, organ voices, which generously communicate their solemn vibrations to the air beyond the church boundaries; and the sun, larger and shinier than the sun of ordinary days, leaves its hiding place made of mountains to gild the valleys and to grant the day a festive mood.
>
> In the second portrait the night presents itself, fresh and filled with country fragrance. A propitious night to the sighing of virgins who gaze at the stars; the soft fluttering of night birds who did not forget their ill omen; a dark background

> of sulfurous brushstrokes, drawn by fireflies. Nightly peace…Sweet dream's piece.
>
> The third portrait is the predominant dance of Venezuela: the *joropo*. Reminiscence of guitarists strumming over bourdons on the upbeats prepare the entrance that, in the manner of the youth, make the straight and cadential melody of the 'golpe tuyero,' which has laid its roots in the barrios of Caracas. The dialogue becomes more robust with the expression of different timbres until the music reaches the intermission, brief rest for the dancers who immerse themselves in an ambiance of lively commentaries. The rhythmic schemes of the singers return towards the end of the festivity, and the *joropo* becomes gigantic and invades the air of the night.[422]

So, despite his contentions regarding an intrinsic character in the music that can be recognized as Venezuelan, Castellanos cannot avoid relying on an extra-musical connection in order to convey his nationalist purpose. The use of a program in conjunction with a large number of other musical and non-musical referents to local culture, proved a very successful resource for composer Antonio Estévez in his 1954 *Cantata criolla: Florentino el que cantó con el Diablo* (1954). The *Cantata* is a musical depiction of the Venezuelan central-plains folk legend of Florentino, a singer-poet, whose unmatched skills in improvising verses were tested by the devil in a singing duel known in the region as *contrapunteo*. The forty-minute work scored for tenor and bass soloists with orchestra and choir was written to a text by Venezuelan poet Alberto Arvelo Torrealba. Estévez had been interested in depicting the plains musically for some time. In fact, in his 1942 *Suite llanera* he had already explored several musical topics intended to evoke the plains. However, in the *Cantata* his plan was to recreate the full gamut of references to the folk legend, including the actual tale, the places, the sounds, the people and their beliefs. Throughout the piece, Estevez appeals to a number of musical signs that are referentially linked to the plains, including cow-milking songs and work songs, which he uses as leading motives to identify Florentino and the Savanna landscape. Other times, Estévez uses highly sophisticated

[422] Gonzalo Castellanos, *Suite sinfónica caraqueña* (Caracas: Consejo Nacional de la Cultura, 1991), 67.

forms of local folklore, such as the *contrapunteo* setting in which *joropo* takes place. Finally, Estevez gives relevance to the instruments of the orchestra that resemble those of traditional music. This is particularly remarkable in the second section of the piece where the harp and the maracas's virtuoso style of playing in the traditional music of the plains are intended to recreate an actual singing duel. Figure 12 shows Estévez's treatment of the orchestra in the style of the central plains *joropo*. The horns and clarinets imitate the *cuatro* strumming; the harp, piano, and upper woodwinds provide a melodic contour to the main tune, which is sung in this excerpt by the devil (bass); the lower strings and the left hand of the piano reinforce the *bordoneo* (bass line); and the maracas provides virtuosic rhythmic ornaments to the already complex musical texture.

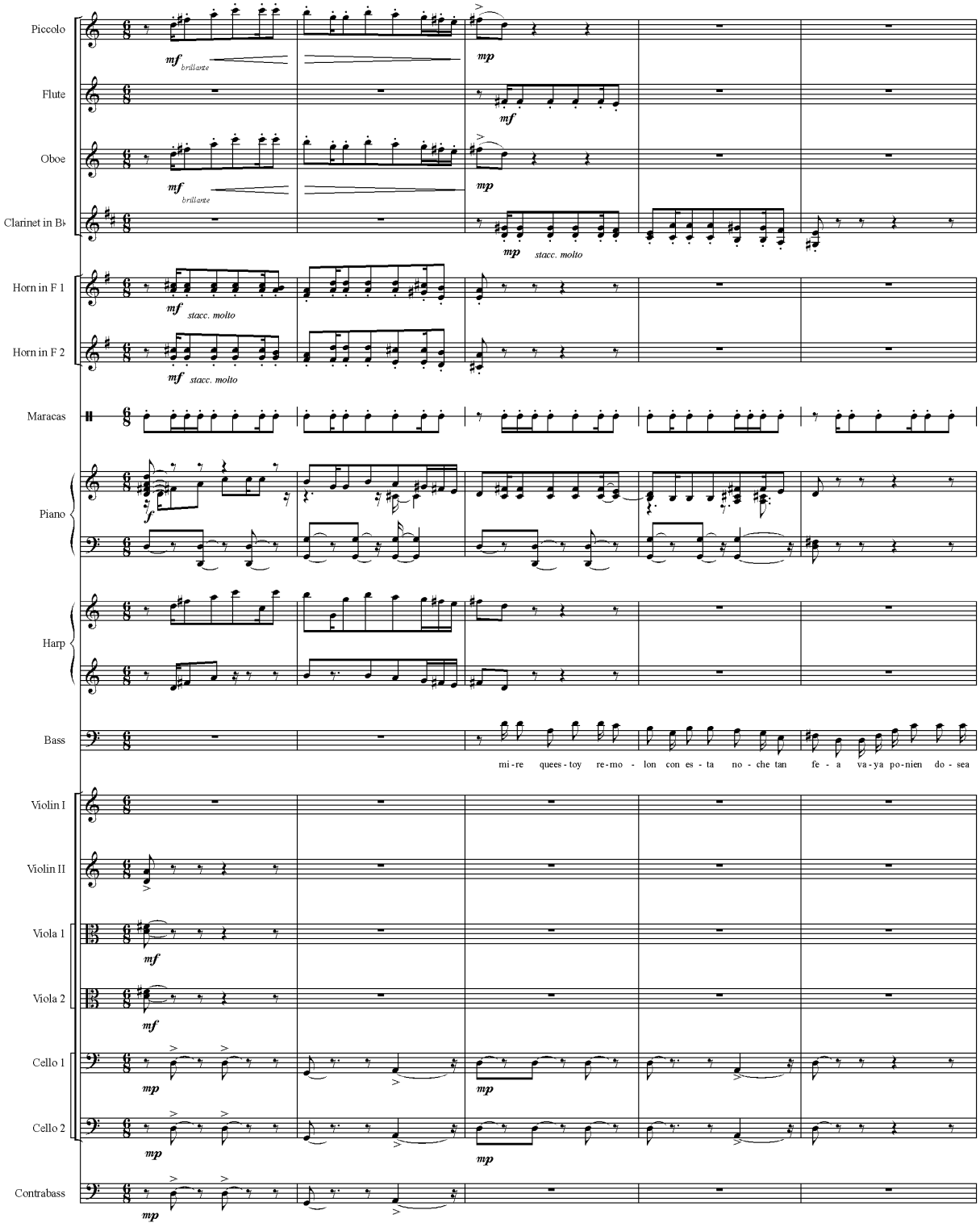

Figure 12. *Cantata criolla* (“La Porfía” mm. 231-235)

In the *Cantata criolla* Estévez committed himself to folkloric accuracy. This is manifested in the piece through the incorporation of referents to the culture of the central plains, which he not only knew from his upbringing in the region but also from researching it in preparation for the composition of the cantata. At the same time, Estévez conceived of the piece as a very intellectual work that could convey meaning at different levels. Elsewhere, I have discussed this piece as an example of musical transculturation.[423] In this process, Estévez not only creates a folk-sounding work of art music but also transforms elements of other musical traditions, namely Gregorian chant, in ways that makes them sound as folksongs. In the *Cantata* this is most conspicuous in the main theme of the "La Porfía" section (the duel). In this section the devil starts singing to a *joropo* tune based on the well-known sequence "Dies Irae" from the mass for the death (Figure 13).

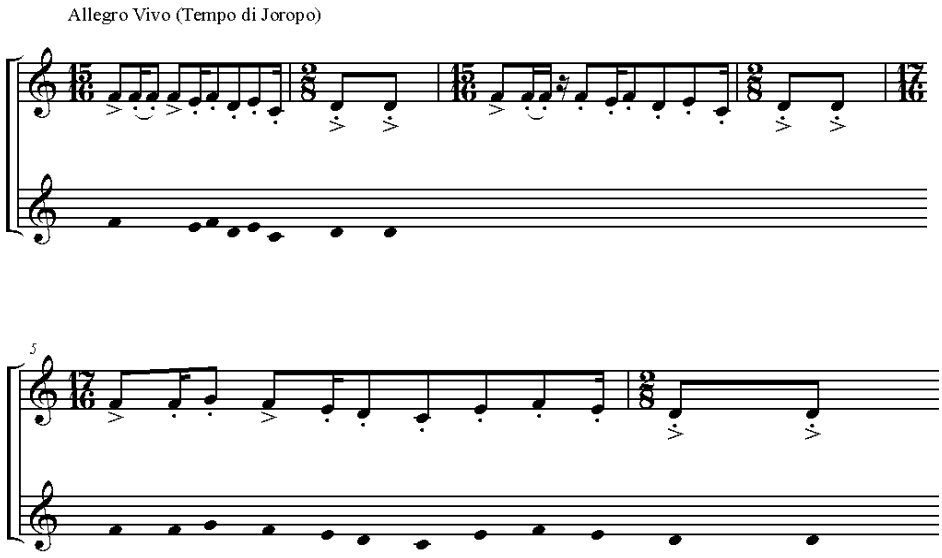

Figure 13. *Cantata criolla* ("La Porfía" mm. 1-6) Dies Irae theme.

[423] Pedro R. Aponte, "Antonio Estévez's *Cantata Criolla* and Musical Transculturation in Twentieth-Century Art Music in Venezuela." Paper read at the Capital Chapter Meeting of the American Musicological Society, Catholic University of America (31 January 2004).

This kind of relationship in which the work can be intelligible at different levels is most likely the reason why the *Cantata criolla* became such a popular work in Venezuela and perhaps the best known work by a twentieth-century Venezuelan composer abroad. When Aaron Copland heard this work performed in Caracas during the first Latin-American Music Festival in 1954, he was impressed not only by the quality of Estevez's work but also by the overwhelming response with which the public received the piece.[424] This ability of Estevez to convey meaning at different levels is one of the most fascinating, and yet, one of the least studied aspects of his life. He was a very creative artist, who did not limit himself to folklore as a source of original materials but who also experimented with the country's musical past. His 1949 *Concerto for Orchestra* was written as a musical homage to Venezuelan colonial composer José Angel Lamas, from whose *Populе meus* Estévez loosely quotes thematic material. According to Estévez, "the Concerto for Orchestra is nationalistic in the sense that I use a theme from the Populе Meus by excellent Venezuelan composer José Angel Lamas, to whom the piece is dedicated. Lamas was a good orchestrator, considering the instrumental forces he had at his disposal. I wanted my effort to a tribute to him. However, there are no more nationalistic elements in the work." [425]

Though more recent Venezuelan composers have returned to colonial music for music materials, this historicist approach to musical nationalism was not particularly favored during the 1940s or 50s. Unlike his *Cantata criolla*, Estévez's concerto was not a work that particularly resonated with his audiences. As Estévez's himself suggested, the piece was not nationalist by

[424] For Copland's review of Estevez's work, see his "Festival in Caracas: Recent Venezuelan Event Was Devoted to Composers of Latin America," *New York Times*, 26 December 1954.

[425] Antonio Estévez, interview by Felipe Izcaray 20 December 1981, Caracas, Valores Musicales de Venezuela y Latinoamérica, tape recording; Quoted in Felipe Izcaray, "The Legacy of Vicente Emilio Sojo," 196.

intention but rather by a calculated extension of what constituted the essence of the national drawn, in this case, from the nation's musical past.[426]

As shown above, the compositional techniques used by Sojo's students in order to create a nationalist style were all but uniform. Those techniques varied from one composer to another, and often within one single composer. Moreover, the individuality of composers seems to have been somehow shaped by local loyalties which occasionally became the subject of controversies among composers. Inocente Carreño, for instance, was particularly loyal to his Nueva Esparta identity. In describing the origins of his tone poem *Margariteña* he recalled an episode in which Antonio Estévez had expressed publicly his intentions to write a musical work based on the folklore of Margarita Island. Accordingly, Carreño became upset by Estevez's comments. "How is it possible," he denounced, "that Antonio Estévez, being from the plains, would write a work dedicated to Margarita before I, who am a Margaritan, do it? …Then, as I knew of the 'galerones' that my grandmother used to sing, of the lullabies, of the round and work songs, I set out to write" the piece.[427]

As Carreño implies, personal loyalties outweighed national ambitions in his compositional process. Estévez himself, despite his public statements about writing music inspired by other regions, was extremely loyal to the folklore of his native state. As a matter of fact, two of his best-known nationalist compositions, *Suite llanera* (of which the central movement, "Mediodía en el Llano," is most often performed separately) and *Cantata criolla*, are based on the folklore of his birthplace. At any rate, these expressions of musical nationalism

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[426] The *Concerto for Orchestra* was written as an assignment on variation form while Estévez pursued advanced studies in composition in New York with Vittorio Giannini. As such, the work can be linked to a neoclassical trend, which is manifested not only in the incorporation of thematic materials from Lamas's *Populeus* but also, and more conspicuously, in the structural design of the piece: the work consists of three movements named after, and developed according to, the traditional models of "Toccata," "Passacaglia," and "Ricercare."

[427] Inocente Carreño, interview by author, 8 July 2000, Caracas video recording.

reveal that ideologically the second generation of composers understood musical nationalism from a different or several different ideological perspectives than that of their forerunners. While they may or may not have been concerned with the role that Venezuelan music should play in the wider art music context, they were certainly preoccupied with creating an image for themselves and they did so by writing music in the way they felt compelled for that ultimate purpose. As composers, therefore, their participation in the invention of traditions occurred only to the extent to which they adapted old practices to new purposes. Yet, they played a pivotal role in the invention of the national as they were also part of the elite that disseminated the ideas about the musical compositions as a unified body of art music that was emblematic of the Venezuelan character.

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As part of the renovation of art music in Venezuela, composers set out to define what Venezuelan music should sound like. The basis for this definition required, first, that the works had to be articulated in a modern musical language and, second, that the music incorporated elements that could be identified as Venezuelan. The latter became a source of anxiety for the renovators due to the narrowness of the concept of national culture at the time. While working towards broadening the definition of national culture through engaging in ethnomusicological research and attracting the broadest possible public to the musical organizations, the renovators found relative success in the *joropo* tradition as a source of the national in their compositions. It was not until the next generation of composers came into the public scene in the mid-1940s, however, that the conditions for a nationalist style in art-music composition came to be fulfilled. As a very influential cultural leader and as the musical mentor of the new group of composers, Vicente Emilio Sojo set out to instill a nationalist aesthetic among his students who devoted their

energies to produce a large repertoire of orchestral music based on a variety of folk subjects drawn from various regional traditions.

Unlike the generation of Sojo, Plaza, and Calcaño, which had come of age during a period of centralized power dependent upon an agricultural economy, the second generation of composers emerged as the socio-cultural product of the modernizing wave that, in the form of industrialization and institutional democratization, had transformed virtually every aspect of life in the country. Unlike their predecessors, these musicians were conversant with local cultural codes of communication, which they incorporated into their nationalist musical style. Even though they constituted a culturally heterogeneous group, their collective musical output was considered a homogeneous expression of national culture. This construction was largely the result of their standardized training in art music, which, when combined with their background in local folklore, made them appear as authoritative figures in the public imagination. As such, they participated in the invention of the national by writing symphonic compositions, which drew from local culture but used different means for that end.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

One of the most fascinating aspects of musical nationalism, according to Ernest Gellner, is that it disguises itself in the form of modernity. The twentieth-century nationalist movement in Venezuela proves this assertion right. Musical nationalism in Venezuela was disguised as a process of renovation that sought to modernize art-music life in the country. As this dissertation has shown, the process involved much more than the creation of new musical conditions for art music and musicians, it was a carefully orchestrated movement towards making the people imagine themselves as part of a national community through the sharing of new forms of cultural communication. The nationalist movement remains in disguise because both scholarship and common consent continue to neglect the participation of the renovators in a nation-building project beyond the creation of a nationalist style in composition.

In order to get a clearer understanding of why mid-twentieth-century musical nationalism in Venezuela does not seem so apparent, we must locate it in the broader context of the country's modernization. In this light, it was not by accident that around 1918 the group of the renovation found itself learning the latest trends in European music from amateur foreign musicians. Those musicians were in the country at that particular time, because of the country's economic conditions. The renovation movement, then, occurred in the spirit of modernization brought about by the advent of European modern music in the hands of foreign musicians as well as

native artists, such as Juan Bautista Plaza, who returned to the country after studying music abroad.

The question of why modernization took the form of nationalism is better understood by taking into account that modernity aims at cultural homogeneity, which modern societies achieve through developing a national culture. The opposite of this would be colonization, where homogeneity, only serves the colonizer's interests instead of those of the colonizer. The invention and dissemination of a national culture became an important aspect of Venezuelan modernity. It was manifested through government's policies of national integration and took the form of a national infrastructure as well as a national ideology of ruling. The latter, particularly in its historicist aspect, reveals the constructionist nature of nationalism. In this light, Gómez was represented as the continuator of the democratic process that Simón Bolívar had started in the nineteenth century. Similarly, social groups participated in the creation of a national culture by developing a narrative of the national manifested more conspicuously in literature and the arts. Finally the rise of mass popular entertainment, and mass media for its dissemination, became powerful tools for nationalism. Particularly in the cities, sports played a significant role as the cement of society. Bullfighting and baseball provided the means for people to imagine themselves as part of a community and to develop loyalties around individuals (bullfighters) or regions (baseball teams), which could potentially, and often in reality, become loyalties to the nation.

The path of nationalism in Venezuelan art music was not different from any other cultural expression in the country. When Plaza, Sojo, and Calcaño began their work in order to improve the musical conditions in the country, they took a nationalist orientation not necessarily out of patriotic sentiments but rather as means to adapt their musical ideas to the needs of their

consumers. Specifically in music composition, writing music in a European style would have been a form of colonization of sorts, let alone a lack of ability to write original music. As a matter of fact, as Plaza had declared, the vernacular was the only way for composers in the periphery of Western Europe "to contribute to satisfy with some degree of originality the fundamental demands of taste and musical spirit of the day."[428]

But in order for composers to write national music it was not sufficient that they chose their musical subjects from the vast arsenal of native culture; those subjects had to be recognized as national by others. It was precisely at this stage that the leaders of the renovation movement played their most significant role in the invention of tradition. By engaging in the study of Venezuelan music history and by writing the new narrative of the country's musical past, they set out to promote a new notion of nationality and musical identity that had never before been so relevant in the country. More specially, when in the renovators' accounts of colonial music they spoke about the Venezuelan characters present in the compositions, they attempted to trace the idea of a distinctively Venezuelan style of art music to a historical past. Carl Dahlhaus has referred to this type of dynamic as the "retroactive effect," one that makes the old sound national in order to fulfill a modern nationalist agenda.[429] Moreover, by studying folklore and setting it against a historical background, the renovators connected the idea of local culture with a common past. Typically these connections referred to ethnic traits that would be essentialized as coming from either a native Venezuelan, African, or Spanish origin.

In their quest to make the masses aware of this national culture, the renovators took advantage of mass media. Both Plaza and Calcaño wrote extensively in newspapers and cultural

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[428] Plaza, "Urge salvar la música nacional," *Revista Nacional de Cultura* 2 (1938), 3.

[429] Carl Dahlhaus "Musical Nationalism," in *Between Romanticism and Modernism: Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century*, transl. Mary Whittall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

magazines. Likewise, in the 1930s Plaza conducted a series of radio programs on music appreciation to great success. His interest in creating a society well educated in music was well supported by the government, which enabled Plaza to undertake several trips abroad in order to learn the latest methods in music education and the possibility of their adaptation in Venezuela. Finally, when Plaza was appointed to the Director of Culture of the Ministry of National Education, he set out to introduce one of the most comprehensive reforms to the music education system in the country. The reforms included not only the creation of a new school of music in Caracas for the training of the youth as well as music teachers, but also the creation of a national school-music curriculum to be implemented at the elementary school level. On his own part, Vicente Emilio had started in the mid 1930s to collect a number of folk and popular Venezuelan songs which he harmonized for singing in the public schools. To those songs he added some of his own in the style of folklore and popular music.

This last form of invented tradition had proven to be a valuable resource for the renovators. The musical repertoire of the Orfeón Lamas had been created almost entirely upon the principle of folk-based music. But the singing of these songs in four-part harmony in a concert-like setting was far removed from the original context of those songs. How those songs came to be recognized as a source of the authentically Venezuelan was then the result of nationalist efforts that sought to ritualize and institutionalize those songs as part of a national heritage.

Ultimately, it was through the people's acceptance of those marks of national culture that the success of the renovation process was to be measured. During the 1930s the renovators struggled to compose because, on the one hand, they feared that they could not produce non-nationalist music that was good enough to compete with foreign art music, and, on the other

hand, native audiences were not recognizing their nationalist compositions as Venezuelan music. It was only with the arrival of the next generation of composers in the 1940s that nationalist composition began to be widely accepted by the Venezuelan public. The invention of the Venezuelan sound came about as the new generation of composers wrote pieces inspired by local folklore. Most of these works became representatives of Venezuelan music not necessarily for their sounds but rather for their programmatic content which was further legitimized by the composers' upbringing in the regions the works portrayed.

I believe that the principal contribution of this study to scholarship in Venezuelan music has been to show that musical nationalism occurred at the intersection of a number of factors operating at different spheres, including economic, social, cultural, and political. The complexity of musical nationalism as a phenomenon that goes beyond the realm of sounds can only be untangled insofar as scholarship begins to recognize that those other areas need to be taken into account. This is a problem that has undermined cultural studies in Latin America in general. "We need nomad social sciences, capable of circulating through the staircases that connect the floors [of academic disciplines]" pleads Nestor García Canclini in his critique of Latin American modernity.[430] As an academic discipline, the field of historical musicology has much to benefit from the body of scholarly work on nationalism that has been produced in the social sciences. I hope that this work opens a new platform for interdisciplinary scholarly inquiry on the topic of Venezuelan and Latin American musical nationalism.

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Musical nationalism in mid twentieth-century Venezuela was an invention carried out by a leading group of native musicians who sought to advance art-music in the country. The extent

[430] Nestor García Canclini, *Culturas hibridas: estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Mexico D.F.: Grijalbo, 1989), 15.

to which this nation-building project was successful is no doubt revealed in the current state of art music in the Venezuela. In 1974, a graduate of Sojo's composition class at the school of music, José Antonio Abreu, created a new music program of youth orchestras in Caracas. His vision, largely molded after Juan Bautista Plaza's own, was to create an art music culture in Venezuelan that would cut across all social and political boundaries. Thirty-four years later, the National Youth Orchestra System has an enrollment of 250,000 children who receive free music instruction and participate in various orchestral and choral programs. The system has been recognized as one of the world's most significant endeavors towards social development and similar programs are now being established throughout Latin American and the United States. As for the actual musical culture, the system has contributed to the creation of professional symphony orchestras in all Venezuelan cities. Caracas itself boasts five professional orchestras as well as other semi-professional groups. Performances are consistently well attended by a public made up of all social groups. Similarly chamber music and choral singing has flourished in Venezuela, largely under the support of the orchestra system. Folk music continues to be cultivated throughout the country. In recent years, a significant number of classically-trained musicians have become very successful at folk music, which, incidentally is nowadays taught at colleges and universities. At the grade-school level, folk music continues to be part of the national school curriculum and instruction on traditional instruments, such as the cuatro, is provided in many private and public schools throughout the country.

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