

## Folkway

One hundred and twenty-five years of life of the first "History of Music in Guatemala"

Fernando Urquizú







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In 1878, the essay entitled "History of Music in Guatemala from the Spanish monarchy to the end of 1877" by José Sáenz Poggio was published in our country.\(^1\) One hundred and twenty-five years of useful life have passed since that little book, a pioneer in Latin America whose contribution grew to the point of still being in force as a basic source in the approach and study of this branch of art.

This presentation is a synthesis of the written review. It begins with the presentation and scope of its main editions, examines its content, and concludes with an analysis of its validity in the historiography of music.

The first edition of the essay was printed at the La Aurora printing house, following a presentation style similar to that of other publications from the second half of the 19th century in Nueva Guatemala.<sup>2</sup> It was a small print run, unidentified in the text, but it was highly appreciated within Guatemala's intellectual circles. Evidence of its reach is the noticeable influence on Rafael Vásquez's work "La Historia de la Música en Guatemala" (The History of Music in Guatemala), 3who did not cite it directly, but its influence is obvious in the organization of the discourse as well as in the data it offers, expanded to the year 1929 when the original manuscript was completed and published in 1950



1. Cover of José Sáenz Poggio's book, "History of Music in Guatemala from the Spanish Monarchy to the End of 1877." Printed by "La Aurora," Guatemala, 1878. Also reproduced in: General History of Guatemala; Foundation for Culture and Development. Amigos del País Publishing House, Volume IV. Guatemala, 1997. pp. 684.

We find a different circumstance later in the book *Las BellasArtes en Guatemala* (Fine Arts in Guatemala) by Victor Miguel Diaz,<sup>4</sup> published in 1937, which copied the information taken from Sáenz Poggio without citing the source, enriching it and occasionally illustrating it with photographs that complement the material evidence of the discourse handled by both writers.

José Sáenz Poggio's original publication was cited by leading intellectuals of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, making it a valuable collector's item in private libraries. It gradually disappeared from public libraries, but was made available again to those interested in a new edition published by the Guatemalan Geographical and Historical Society, which compiled it in its periodical "Anales"5 which allowed for its preservation, distribution, and exposure in the second half of the 20th century. The next edition dates from 1997, when it was reprinted as a book under the auspices of the

Guatemalan Directorate of Art and Culture. <sup>6</sup> This new presentation made it available to another generation interested in learning about the history of music in Guatemala. A foreword by Manuel Alvarado Coronado was added, but it does not include new information about the author and his work.

The two reprints cited are faithful reproductions of the original text, demonstrating its usefulness and permanence in national culture.

## Historia de la música guatemalteca Desde la monarquia española, hasta fines del año de 1877 JOSÉ SAENZ POGGIO

2. Cover of José Sáenz Poggio's book, History of Guatemalan Music from the Spanish Monarchy to the End of 1877, Cultura Publishing House, Directorate of Art and Culture, Guatemala, 1997.

The content of the work must be analyzed based on the intellectual climate of the country at the time it was organized and published. The final discourse of the first edition of 1878 appeared a few years after the first coffee dictatorship was established in the republic's government and anticlerical liberal ideas began to take root, leading to the establishment of a new "liberal constitution" in 1879, which remained in force until 1944.

By then, there must have been a climate of conflicting views in the intellectual world of the time, a circumstance that helps to understand the quote that opens the book's exposition, when in the Prologue, the author invokes "Decree No. 192, issued by the President of the Republic, General J. Rufino Barrios, and countersigned by the Secretary of the Interior, etc., Graduate José Barberna, guarantees my work free from all persecution. The expression of thought through the press is free."

These introductory words illustrate the unfavorable position of Sáenz Poggio, who was neither protected nor attached to the regime that had been in power in the country since 1871, but was aware of his rights and well respected in intellectual circles. Had this not been the case, he might have disappeared from the scene, unnoticed, along with his work.

In this part of the text, we can also see the essential content of the work and what the author considered to be his contribution to the history of music, when he states: "In this small work, I have done nothing more than present the facts as they happened, occasionally expanding on some considerations about the different branches of art"

An analysis of the prologue and subsequent review of the work allows us to infer a narrative of themes and events based on data obtained from a bibliographic investigation of the universal history of music, which is expanded upon with quotes from authors and other local sources,<sup>9</sup> developed with their comments.

To conclude the prologue, he presents the objective of his writing: "That my work might be of some use to Guatemala is the only desire of its youngest son." He ultimately achieved this goal, as his work was written one

hundred and twenty-five years ago and is still a primary source of knowledge in studying national music.

In the general development of the discourse, he started from an idealistic definition: "Music is the voice of the soul; it is like a universal language that harmoniously expresses all the feelings of creatures. Music, with its sweet vibrations, which are born in heaven and spread across the earth, penetrates directly into the heart."11 He linked this to its usefulness in five different contexts of society and man, seeking to clarify this with the following invitation to the reader: "Let us study its uses, and they themselves will guide us to a clearer understanding of its importance and necessity. There are five main ones, namely: music in the temple, music in the military, music in the theater, music in private society, and music, finally, in the midst of solitude."12

These chapters were expanded with four additional ones covering different topics: Music schools, Music in the various departments of the Republic, and Music of the indigenous people. The format of these chapters is similar to that of the first five. All of them contain interesting contributions to the history of music in Guatemala and are worth analyzing in detail.

Chapter I. Music in the temple. This chapter provides a brief history of the role of music in Christian worship worldwide. It begins with and biblical times ends European romantic music, which ties in with local cathedral music. How the topic is presented makes it easy to see how the author handles specialized literature world on history, art history, and music history.13

The contribution of the work begins with the development of the history of the "Organ" as part of this chapter, in a similar way to music, but with the difference that in this part of his work, he already cited his sources of knowledge.

It begins with a description of the biblical origin of this musical instrument in the time of Jubal, citing the Bible, <sup>14</sup> providing academic support for his work and an idealistic order to his narrative, following the script of the previous topic until addressing the issue at the national level, where we find his core contribution to the section on the history of Guatemalan music, which consists of: bibliographic citations, descriptions of sites, and references to names; elements that become valuable data when he describes the development of the organ and other musical instruments in Guatemala at that time.

After explaining the presence of many musical instruments in Nueva Guatemala, Sáenz Poggio attempted to document the evolution of music and other arts during the period of Spanish colonization in the ancient kingdom of Guatemala (1524-1821). He used two direct testimonies in the form of long transcriptions of documents, unpublished at the time, taken from the chronicles of the religious figures Domingo Juarros and Francisco de Paula García Peláez, writtenin 18 respectively. 15

The first recounts the inauguration celebrations of third cathedral the the of city Santiago de Guatemala. which took place 1680. It describes the dances. theatrical soirées. performances. and participation of various groups in musical accompanying the different religious and civil events. The second consists of a chronological summary of the musicians who served in the chapel of the cathedral

of the old kingdom. Neither of the two manuscripts was commented on or expanded upon by Sáenz Poggio, but they give the reader a general idea of musical life in the old capital of the kingdom and its subsequent transfer to Nueva Guatemala.

They place the reader in the scene where the author could have located these manuscripts, since he clearly states that they are "unpublished" <sup>16</sup> and in this situation they could only have remained in the archives of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Guatemala, currently called Francisco de Paula García Peláez, a situation that is reinforced by other citations such as the work written on the occasion of the "Canonization of San Pedro Pascasio," a report written by Núñez in 1673. <sup>17</sup>

The chapter concludes with a collection of data about musicians and groups in this branch of art in Guatemala. It presents the first fairly complete biographies for their time of the chapel masters of the Metropolitan Cathedral, which it opens with a note clarifying his position regarding them: "The kinship that binds me to most of the music teachers in Guatemala should silence me; but all impartial people who have been eyewitnesses to the events I describe here will do me justice, seeing that I am exaggerating in any way, and that perhaps I am even softening them."18 The introduction precedes a very complete profile of the Sáenz family, beginning with key biographical details in the life of teacher Vicente Sáenz, the first musician to leave the Hispanic school to incorporate patterns of enlightenment into the field and the root of this dynasty of great musicians, who lived through the relocation from Antigua to Nueva Guatemala.

It then shows the academic and musical careers of his ancestors Benedicto Sáenz and Benedicto Sáenz (son), the latter a teacher, musician, and composer who introduced romanticism and made great transformations in the patterns of traditional music in our environment (see his portrait available in 4).

The data is accompanied by citations of the main compositions of each author and others, where newspapers and printed materials were used, whose references were correctly cited, and serve as clues for new research to locate compositions and expand knowledge about the role of these personalities in national culture. 19

The notes of the great teachers of the 19th century were added to with other names of musicians, composers, arrangers, teachers, and instrument makers, and the existence of a "little book on philharmonic concepts" written by teacher José Escolástico Andrino was detailed. These are references for initiating new research that will allow for the full identification of the creative work of most of the names cited by Sáenz Poggio and revalued to the point of making the compositions available on compact discs. <sup>20</sup>

Chapter II, Military Music, is developed in a similar way to the previous chapter, starting from a romantic idealistic concept: "music brings out warlike feelings, awakens courage and bravery."21 It then provides a bibliographical account of its development in Europe, linking it to Guatemala in the 19th century.

Particular attention is paid to the development of the Martial Band, which was the main group in charge of providing

auditory follow-up to the public activities of the liberal government, from where it successfully moved on to the Catholic religious processions. This special characteristic made it cover a very varied repertoire that covers: patriotic hymns, military marches, triumphal marches, funerals and popular marches with full validity, until today, in the national identity.

This aspect could have been determinant in the two authors that approached the subject in the first half of the 20th century, who also dedicated special interest to the subject in their works, updating the data of their writings; but we must not forget that, on average, these works were also written under some pressure from the coffee growers' new liberal governments that had not left the political power and the function of this type of music continued almost without alterations since the times of the liberal reform of 1871.

Band music continues to play a very active role in the popular collective imagination in urban and rural centers, perhaps for this reason it had been marginalized from special studies, even though there are countless recordings of this musical genre in the local market, especially of funeral marches that accompany the country's famous processions, whose historiography could be spun, to a great extent, thanks to the pioneering contribution of Sáenz Poggio's work.

However, the core of this part of his writing is the subtopic "Military music in Guatemala"24, because it objectively demonstrates the true origin and development of the most important musical genre for the coffee growers' liberal regimes whose bases would have emerged from the 'Conservative' governments, especially the one presided over by General Rafael Carrera, between 1844 and 1865.

When reading this chapter and linking it with previous one, one immediately understands the introductory words of the prologue that precedes Sáenz Poggio's work, 25 because the development of these themes made it evident that the progress of art during the liberal administration that began in 1871 was not necessarily a reflection of the progress of the State, achieved as a result of the rise to political power of new power groups made up of coffee growers that brought about structural changes in the form and organization of the government during its administrative management, which included as fundamental factor the adoption of a positivist thought in the teaching and reproduction of the system of ideas.<sup>26</sup>

In this chapter Sáenz Poggio also leaves clear data about the foundation and organization of the Escuela de Sustitutos (military school of musicians) and Banda Marcial de Guatemala with state level, for which foreign teachers were brought in to support this specialization, but at the same time it demonstrates that such academic qualification was already of high level on behalf of the national teachers, also existing exceptional cases like Benedicto Saenz (son) who even had already succeeded in Europe and Mexico, which, had demonstrated in the previously mentioned biography and that has been an important reference to locate later his works and even his portrait.

In Chapter III he developed the topic "Music and theater". This theme is presented in the same way as the previous chapters, with special emphasis on the construction, inauguration and main representations that "El Teatro Carrera" had had in Nueva Guatemala, for which he made use of journalistic quotes of the time.<sup>27</sup> In this section he shows how the maximum temple

of national art in those days of liberal government when the work was written before 1878, this building had been a priority of the conservative government, "verifying its inauguration on the night of October 23, 1859, on the eve of the birthday of His Excellency the President" General Rafael Carrera.

After describing all the richness the construction of the building, its library and sumptuary arts that it housed, he clarifies that the country had not gone into debt to realize it and ennoble it, he adds as the main function of the construction, to transport people for a few hours to "Paris, the homeland of civilization."29 These broad explanations had as main objective of the author, to demonstrate that the basis of reproduction of the system of ideas with a non-religious character, would have already been given formally and was nothing new or novel; as well as the advance of enlightenment and French positivism base of the local bourgeois ideology with which the oligarchy felt identified before having expanded with the emerging group with the Liberal Reform of 1871, integrated by the coffee growers.

Then closes the section with the citation of the members and specialty in each instrument of the "Orquesta de Guatemala", the root of what would be today "La Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional" but it is very important to perceive that the detail of the names of its members as teachers already formed, for that time with much experience in handling a repertoire of non-religious genre, which emphasizes the demonstration of the existence of another body of music with a broad repertoire before the liberal government of Barrios.

In chapters IV and V, music in private society and music in solitude, we find a

In chapters IV and V, music in private society and music in solitude, we find a subjective point of view of the author regarding the topics addressed with valuable data for the history of daily life in the country between 1850 and 1878, he refers briefly to dances, social gatherings and people's attitudes towards music which he comments "in the past they were very frequent in our beautiful capital, they have diminished a lot, as well as serenades." Which manifests a decline in the ludic customs of music that the author considered good and declined during the liberal regime.

Chapter IV, the music schools, was developed according to the historical scheme handled in the exposition of the book, it refers to the formation of a Music School in 1875 by the teacher Mr. Juan Aberle, assisted by the supreme government but it was closed due to the war the following year.<sup>31</sup> It was later reopened and refers to the failure of the government of Barrios in this first instance, which becomes more evident with the census of

1868, affirming that in that year there were more than 1500 pianos in the capital, also exalting the role of the music teachers and instruments of the Conservatory period. This panorama is concluded in the following chapter "Music in the different departments of the Republic", where he refers laconically to the existence of Military Bands in some of them, an account that reinforces a sense of decline in this branch of art in the liberal regime.

Chapter VII, music of the indigenous people, is very interesting since it presents an inventory and description of the instruments that he considered descended from the ancient inhabitants of our country, which he approached with great seriousness, accepting his limitations in the knowledge of the indigenous society that he does not glorify, but rather tries to understand it in its limitations.



3. Diploma of the Industrial Artistic Exhibition of the Society of Artisans of Guatemala, dated in Guatemala November 1883. In the upper part of this document, we can read the slogan of the liberal government of the period (1873-1885) presided by General Barrios "Guat. Porteje las artes a la sombra de la paz". The images of the same represent an allegory of the sciences and arts of the time.

However, in the revision of this part of the book, we must keep in mind that this ethnic group constituted the base of the political party known in the field as "Conservative", which defended the prolongation of the Spanish regime, without Spain. Therefore, it supported the system of indigenous communal lands and those of the Catholic Church that the liberal coffee growers intended to confiscate in order to convert them into farms for the cultivation of this grain. This circumstance allows us to better appreciate Saenz Poggio's point of view on the subject, since we have identified his ideology and political affinity.

Chapter IX has no title but presents, in my opinion, an elegant slap in the face dedicated to the liberal government of Justo Rufino Barrios. Expressed in the following apology "My intention has not been to offend anyone, but rather to try to be useful in some way." ... "In the future, another pen, superior to mine, will correct these lines, thus perfecting the little that I have already done".<sup>32</sup>

Saenz Poggio, knew that his writing was irrefutable proof of the solid foundations left for national art by the conservative government of General Rafael Carrera. For this reason, it could be considered subversive, because it ridiculed the slogan of the liberal government of Barrios "Guatemala protects the arts in the shadow of peace"<sup>33</sup> that tried to evidence the progress of science and art, which would have been achieved after the reorganization of the economic foundations carried out under his administration.

As for the academic and political life of Saenz Poggio we know very little, consulted primary sources such as: General Archive of Central



4. Engraving showing the portrait of Benedicto Sáenz (son) contained in the work by Enrique Anleu Díaz. History of music in Guatemala, National Typography, Guatemala, 1986. p. 168.

America, the newspaper library of this archive, National Library, Library of the Academy of Geography and History, Library of the University of San Carlos and others it was impossible to locate more data about this character and even his original work does not exist in these enclosures but in private collections. It is probable that its high cost as a collection item is the main reason for the scarcity of this edition, which was spread thanks to the faithful copies mentioned above.

This author has no other writings that have been found until today, it is likely that the work, now under study, was encouraged to make it by his political co-religionists of the Conservative party who knew of his ability and access to the topic by knowing his kinship and ideological identification with the great teachers of music Vicente and Benedicto Saenz son (the latter was also a deputy to the constituent assembly) and were considered fathers of this branch of the national art. The work was, undoubtedly, a hit to the official intelligentsia that acted in political function of the government of the day; circumstance that also leads us to another explanation of the little circulation of the book, which must have been in such a bad taste, to welcome it in a world sustained under the liberal bourgeois philosophy.

On the other hand, Sáenz Poggio himself states in this respect: "To tell the truth, I could not call myself a writer in any way, and with so much less reason, that this is my first prose that I give to the press"34, which makes it probable that it was also the only one. So far, there is no biography of this character; his academic profile can only be deduced after examining his work, which reveals a fairly solid general culture with an emphasis on knowledge in the humanistic field. A special detail is the use of his second surname to identify his full name in the work, which gives the idea of his maternal family's lineage or a sense of distinction of kinship of a traditional conservative family with Italian emigrants, family ties that gave social prestige at the local level.

Dicente Vaënz

Benedicto Saenz

Signatures of the teachers Bicente (sic) and Benedicto Sáenz son. Who according to the work of José Sáenz Poggio were the promoters of modern music in Guatemala. As for the work's scope in the second half of the 20th century, we can infer it in its use as a primary source in two works of great impact in our cultural world: History of Music in Guatemala, by Enrique Anleu Díaz, published in 1986, and the General History of Guatemala, published in 1997. 35 The first one enriches Sáenz Poggio's work with new images, which support his stories a hundred years after their initial publication, giving new proof of their veracity (4) and the second one made the initial cover of the work available to the readers on page 684, revaluating its contribution to the general history of our country. His influence in specialized writings is an obligatory point of departure as we can see in other studies that are also very widespread in our country.36

Despite the publication of new later contributions to the History of Guatemalan Music from the Spanish monarchy until the end of 1977, by José Sáenz Poggio, it continues to be fully valid to the extent that it has demonstrated the

veracity of the stories and knowledge it provides, which have not yet been consumed, demonstrating its usefulness as the first point of reference in the study of this branch of art one hundred and twenty-five years after its first printing.



Consecrated Image of Jesus Nazareno de la Merced to whom the teacher Benedicto Saenz son dedicated a short misere Mei Deus that marked the introduction of romantic music in the traditions of Lent and Holy Week in Guatemala.

**Quotes** 

- 1 José Sáenz Poggio, "History of Guatemalan Music from the Spanish monarchy to the end of 1877", La Aurora Printing House, Guatemala, 1878. It will be quoted as the first edition of the work whose cover is available in Fig. 1.
- 2 The presentation cover of the small books was made with the same caliber of paper as the printing, changing only the color of it. The printing of this sheet followed a pattern that included the name of the book in the upper part,



- the name of the author in the central part followed below by a vignette and in the lower part the name of the printing house and its location in the city, without missing the year of publication (No. 1) which can be compared with other contemporaries from other printing houses.
- 3 Rafael Vasquez, *History of Music in Guatemala*, National Typography, Guatemala, 1950. It is very strange that this author has not quoted Sáenz Poggio's book. A reasonable explanation may be his political identification with the liberal coffee growers' governments that were in charge until
- 4 Victor Miguel Diaz, las Bellas Artes en Guatemala (Fine Arts in Guatemala), National Typography, Guatemala, 1937.
  - 5 José Sáenz Poggio, "History of Guatemalan Music from the Spanish monarchy to the end of 1877", Annals of the Society of Geography and History of Guatemala, Year XXII, Guatemala, C. A. March-June 1947. Volume XII. pp. 6 to 54.
- 6 José Sáenz Poggio, History of Guatemalan Music from the Spanish Monarchy to the end of 1877, Publishing House Cultura, Art and Culture Department, Guatemala, 1997. (See Fig.2) From now on, quotes from this work should be compared with this edition, which on page9 states that the original 1878 printing of the Aurora printing house has been respected.
- 7 Ibid., p. 9.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 The sources that served as the basis for the construction of the speech are available in subsequent quotes.
- 10 Jose Saenz Poggio, Ob. Cit. N° 6. p. 9.
- 11 Ibid. p. 13.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 At this point I could not specifically quote the books that influenced the author but it is easily noticeable when reading page 14 of the book as he quotes facts and proper names from the book signing that he did not consider necessary to quote but he did quote others as we will see later.
- 14 The Bible Gen.4. v.21. This quote already offers us a chronological order of the author that starts from the "Divine sense of music".
- 15 Jose Saenz Poggio, Ob. Cit. N° 6. pp.17 to 25. In his work he transcribed parts of unpublished writings which he conveniently quoted and which were later published. Domingo Juarros, Compendium of the history of the kingdom of Guatemala. 1500-1800. The first volume was published in Guatemala in 1802 and the second volume in 1818. In 1827 an English version was

- published in London by John Baily Bracrot. The second local edition dates from 1937. According to the introduction of the Piedra Santa edition, signed by the historian Horacio Cabezas, which includes the expansion of Tratado VII. The manuscript by Francisco de Paula García Peláez was published by the Society of Geography and History of Guatemala in 1946.
- 16 Ibid. p. 17.
- 17 Ibid. p. 23.
- 18 Ibid. p. 26.
- 19 The book *New notes for the study of funeral* marches in Guatemala, by Fernando Urquizú, USAC, 2003. 2003. pp. 127 to 131. It presents evidence of their role as directors of Procession Bands. It also shows the fundamental role played by Vicente and Benedicto Sáenz son in the changes from the Hispanic repertoire to the French romantic repertoire. It can also be consulted: *The historical and social outline of the music in Guatemala* by Enrique Anleu Díaz, edited by the General Direction of Fine Arts of Guatemala. 1978.
- 20 The data that appear in this part of the work have served as a starting point for new and innovative research that has expanded the data on the teachers who made musical instruments and great composers who were not well known in the field. See *The Organ as a Musical Instrument and a Work of Art in Guatemala*, by Fernando Urquizú, USAC. 1991. *Music of the 18th and 19th centuries in Guatemala*. By Igor de Gandarias, USAC. 2002. Recording available in C.D. ISBN 99922-45-31. 2002. The original writing of *Philharmonic Notions* was later located in the Republic of El Salvador by researcher Igor de Gandarias.
  - 21 Jose Saenz Poggio, Ob. Cit. N° 6. p. 42.
  - 22 The works were referred to in quotes 3 and 4.
  - 23 For further information on the topic, please refer to the book mentioned in quote 19.
- 24 Jose Saenz Poggio, Ob. Cit. N° 6. pp. 45 to 50.
- 25 Ibid. p. 9.
- 26 The background and development of the changes in philosophy on this particular topic can be extended by reading ""Positivist philosophy in the history of Guatemala (1871-1900)" by Artemis Torres, USAC, Guatemala, 2000, pp.207 to 220.
- 27 Jose Saenz Poggio, Ob. Cit. N° 6. pp. 54 a 66.
- 28 Ibid. p. 66.
- 29 Ibid. p 54.
- 30 Ibid. p. 71.
- 31 Ibid. p 74.
- 32 Ibid. p. 82.

ento veinticinco años de vida de la primera "Historia de la Música en Guatemala"

- 33 The slogan of General Barrios' government "Guata. Protect the arts in the shadow of peace" heads a diploma, printed in Salvatierra's lithography, Guatemala, 1883 (See annex Ill. Fig. 3). It also shows the liberal ideas in symbolic images of that time in relation to the development of the sciences and fine arts.
- 34 Jose Saenz Poggio, Ob. Cit. N° 6. p.11.
- 35 Enrique Anleu Diaz, History of Music in Guatemala, National Typography, Guatemala, 1986. General History of Guatemala, Foundation for Culture and Development. Amigos del País Publishing House, Volume IV. Guatemala, 1997. Pp 683,690.
- This influence is evident in works such as: The organ as a musical instrument and work of art in Guatemala 1524-1991, Fernando Urquizú, USAC. Guatemala, 1991. Guatemalan National Music Repertoire of the 18th and 19th centuries, Igor de Gandarias, USAC. Guatemala, 2002. New notes for the history of funeral marches in Guatemala, Fernando Urquizú, USAC. Guatemala 2003. Which have extended the names and references of the work of Saenz Poggio, following the traces of an unfinished history because it was still living at the end of the 19th century.

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