

NOTES ON MUSIC AND DANCE IN PETEN

Alfonso Arrivillaga Cortés

Introduction

The material now presented, in a certain way, is a continuation of the article "*Marimbas, Bandas y Conjuntos Orquestales del Petén*", presented before Popular Tradition No. 82/1991, of the Center for Folklore Studies. Although it has its own independence, we consider the aforementioned and the present one as complementary articles. A historical reference is made to "ballroom dancing" and the current situation of these dances is defined at the end.

Then reference is made to the sound contexts of the music within the "Traditional Festivals". Also included is a section on Electronic Ensembles, which play an important role in the town festivals in this region. In the case of Chicleros Music, more than an exhaustive description of them, a call is made.

This vision of dance and music in Petén is extended to the *Mopán* ethnic group and finally some of the *Mopán*, *Kekchi* and *Chole (Lacadon)* instruments are pointed out. As a curiosity that well exemplifies the dynamics and musical influences in the region, a brief story about the copy of a Stradivarius violin is included.

Sound expressions such as those of the Itzaes or other musical remnants of ethnic groups, now extinct in Petén, have not been considered. Regarding the music of the Kekchi and its situation in its dispersion north of Verapaz to Izabal, south of Belize and Petén, a report is being prepared that will undoubtedly expand the information on these important musical expressions in Petén.

EL PETÉN: HISTORICAL TOWNS



Historical Towns of Petén and Connection Areas. It is a reference instrument for a more complete reading of the text.



Church of San Francisco Petén, formerly known as "Chachaclun" (red earth); In front is the ancient ceiba tree, witness to historical events of this important town. The architectural characteristics of this church correspond to those of other historic towns in Petén. See in the background houses mostly with guano roofs and a few others with Zinc.

Photographer: Antonio Vadillo Era: 1920-40. Marco Tulio Castellanos Pinelo Collection. Collection rescue and management: Casa Larú Duna. Sylvia Shaw A.

Ballroom Dances

Ballroom dances occurred in ancient times and judging by the writings and information, they were those practiced by the wealthiest groups in society. The valuable work of Don Vicente Narciso, referring to these dances, points out the following:

"El Danzante" is almost never invited to a dance. He glimpses the moment of entry in the street at the beginning of a piece: he dances it in its entirety, leaves his partner in their unchanged place and goes back out into the street together with the other dancers. He already knows that the lady does not change the seat she chose from the entrance. On the street he drinks some liquor, but not on behalf of the party. The most common thing is to drink plenty of water to replace the great loss due to sweat caused by the weather and dancing... The dance halls are greatly favored by the ladies who almost always fill them completely, occupying all the seats; a circumstance that forces the dancer and the lyricists (marimberos) to remain in the street. (Narcissus: 1913:37)

Later, it expands on information about ballroom dances, referring to their arrangement, presentation and the social contexts that arise in this regard.

The dancer appears in a shirt, wearing suspenders, well perfumed and holding a large handkerchief to change with the bride or to wipe off the inevitable sweat. This guy is popular and does not belong to the high class. The dancer is helpful and gallant: he distributes sweets and cookies to the ladies (the ladies do not dance and occupy a separate cabinet), he brings water to those who are thirsty and if he finds a favorable opportunity, he changes his hat trying to improve. The dancer has the obligation to dance the first piece with the bride. The dancer may well be, however, a green old man who can no longer hide his old age, or a beardless young man: both extremes that are commonly accepted. The dancer is prepared from early childhood in mime or *compás*, since parents organize special dances for children on birthdays; and this is how the Petenero dancer lives, in an atmosphere of continuous celebration, from the cradle to old age, (Narciso: 1913:38).

Don Federico Pinelo in his "*Relación de cosas sobre Ciudad Flores, Petén*", points out that, regarding the dances, all the corresponding etiquette of the case was preserved. They danced waltzes, *danzones*, mazurkas, *shoties*, gallops, *quadrillas* and *zapateados*. The latter were performed at the beginning, intermission and end of the dance. Raúl Vásquez Franco, relates the following anecdote regarding the dance:

"...The political leader, Don Clodoveo Berrges, in one of the many joyful parties, ordered that the first to get tired dancing that rhythm of the moment, would pay the hefty bill, being the first to get tired. At the dances, the Ladies were invited to dance, the gentleman carrying a handkerchief in the palm of his hand, so that there was no direct contact between the couple. (Vásquez Franco: 1975:21).

Popular dances

Don Federico Pinelo, indicates in his "*Relación de cosas sobre Ciudad Flores, Petén*", that the marimba was used for popular and religious festivals because it was louder. Furthermore, he says that it was also danced with violins, bandurrias, clarinets, flutes and accordion, and, it seems that these were sometimes fused with the marimba. In fact, the group "*Alma Itzalana*" currently incorporates the marimba or the xylophone into its instrumental music. But also, Federico Pinelo notices that during the break in the middle of the dance, the ladies, ladies and gentlemen, sang accompanied by guitars. Then, the marimba broke the silence with the trendy *zapateado*: Huachinango, Fandango, Barreño, Telele or else Agua Tibia.

Nery de León López, commenting on the anecdotes of Don Eusebio Góngora, says that the dances were divided into two types: those of "*Gala*" and the "*Corrientes*". The first ones were held in Doña Benigna Pineloy's house, and all kinds of composure had to be maintained. The guests had to attend properly dressed and the women, extremely covered. He indicates that the use of the silk scarf between the hands by the

couples was to avoid all contact. The regular dances were held in the house of Mr. Leonardo Castellanos and these differed from the previous ones, in that the clothing was less ceremonious but in them, all types of composure were maintained. Almost all the informants mentioned the "cuadrilla" dance, deducing from the description given that this dance is also known as "Square Dance", which was so fashionable, especially in the Caribbean area. Likewise, it has been identified as an ancient dance among the Garifunas of Belize and Honduras. Rafael Romero Sosa indicates that within the framework of the El Cristo Negro Festival, the "cuadrillas" were danced on the corners and the dance was made up of different figures.

La Chatona y el Caballito

The panorama of dances, as could be identified, is broad and a large part of them has fallen into disuse. La chatona, (also known as La Mojiganga or La Muñecona), and El Caballito are, apparently, the most popular dances today in the towns near the lake and, according to information, they have been practiced since ancient times. Both characters have their musical piece that identifies them, in addition to dancing to the traditional music repertoire. These dance expressions are usually accompanied by the Masked People, who are nothing more than characters from popular tradition. (Arrivillaga: 1987).

Los Huastecos

Regarding the dance of *Los Huastecos*, Pedro Navarrete gives the following description:

"...This one has its pieces and songs and they speak, they have their history... The Huastecos, are ladies who make the braiding with colored ribbons and then take it off (it means that they undo it), beautiful things, you ... Doña Pabla Vda. de Góngora adds "...And one dressed in black held a stick that they surrounded with ribbons and singing to the Lord of Esquipulas they braided it..., and he accompanied himself with marimba and they learned the pieces from the ancestors and the girls dressed as Inditas when they danced the Huasteco" (Personal information: Heredia Vda. de Góngora: 1985).

The Huastecos dance has fallen into sad disuse, however some groups have attempted to revalue it, such as the Youth Folklore Group that was directed by Professor Oscar Morales, who unfortunately died (1992) at the height of his career. This dance in question is a variant of the 7 Pairs of France and is found under different names throughout the continent and the Caribbean. The best: for Guatemala it is the "Flower Dance" of San Juan Sacatepéquez and the "Maipoll" (maypole), danced by the Garífuna in Livingston and in some places in southern Belize, in an area closer to Petén .

“...the Huachinango” has stops that invite the man to relate some apparent verse that they called “Bombas.” Pinelo collects another text, referring to Huachinango, Fandango and Barreño.

“Fandango has female singers. I remember one that was sung in three voices by Doña Luisa López and the sisters Manuela and Angelina Méndez. She said like this:

*“Si tal hubiera sabido que salías a bailar,
hubiera regado flores por donde ibas a pasar.
Ay, ay, ay, ay, Hay amor sin segundo
ya está libre el mundo por la libertad”*

From *Barreño* I also remember the following song, in real octave:

*“Ahora si que está bailando la rosa con el clavel.
La rosa riega más flores, y el clavel las va a recoger.
El Barreño si, si, si. El Barreño no, no, no.
¿Qué dice el Barreño? Que tiene calor.*

They improvised these songs to laugh and dance” (Pinelo: 1975:66).

Pinelo also indicates that the “Huastecos” dance was sung and danced around a stick, apparently *ceibito*, and that a woman who knew how to pronounce Mayan sang:

*“Debajo del ceibo cush tipugue-yen,
te saco el cebo
“Chismajisaten” (etc.)”*

Dary collects the following text, regarding the Dance of the Huastecos in La Libertad:

*“Cuando yo era vaquero,
comia requesón
Ahora que no lo soy,
sólo como pishtón” (Dary: 1986:57)*

Los Shoties

In this regard, Rafael Romero Sosa says the following:

“...These were *zapateados*, each couple made their figures, but this was lost. Before, men with their gold scarves and women with their black felt scarves attended the parties. The men sang and the women answered. They did that on every corner or they sang a duet” (Romero: 1986: interview).

This suggests that although the introduction of these rhythms was initially to the delight of the wealthy classes, it did not take long for these expressions to be adopted by the popular classes. It is significant that these dances were practiced in the street and not in the hall.

Dance Rhythms

Juan Baños (1985) also referred to the dances of "King Herod", "Christian King" and "Moorish King" and that these performances took place in the City of Flores, Petén.

Music in the patron saint festivities

Little is known about the cycle of Petén Festivals and even less about the cultural expressions that are immersed in it, such as music. San José, it is customary for the so-called "Procession of the Holy Skull" on November 1 and at around 7:00 p.m., songs and prayers are given (Gálvez Mis:1984:21). In reality, the skull ritual is a remnant of a festival of the ancient Itzaes. This has been little studied. Ixpasha for the Skull is what the residents offer to these "Calacas" that circulate on the street.

San Benito

Miguel Angel Méndez Zetina, referring to the music of San Benito Petén, says the following:

"...The dances danced by its inhabitants such as "*La Cuadrilla*", "*Nish*", "*Agua Tibia*", "*Las Mariposas*", "*La Cerveza*", "*La Mazurka*", "*los Xotis*" remain in this ancient environment, performed on Marimba". (Méndez Zetina: 1984:17).

Dolores

Regarding Dolores, Petén, there is an interesting note about its sound expressions that occur on August 6, on the eve of the festival in honor of San Cayotano, patron saint of this town:

"...With all the Mayordomos gathered at eight thirty at night, they finished the Holy Rosary and began the dance where one, two or more *reales* were paid, at twelve at night a tasty and succulent dinner was given to all the present, at two in the morning the musicians played ancient and beautiful sounds that the Mayordomos and the priosetes (*guachimanes*) danced. On the 7th it was dawn and at ten in the morning they went down to drink coffee at the house of the owner of the day, at that same moment the election and coronation of a Mayordomo took place, so that he could help in the celebration of that same day next year. This act was called "Butler of San Cayetano". In these festivals it is customary to make representations of Charlemagne, "Moritas" (women), comedies at night, dance of "*La Vaca*", "*Chatona*", "*Caballito*" and

representations of the devil, dwarfs, the "*Galopa*" and the "*Fandango*" dance that had a dialogue through the famous "*Bombas Yucatecas*" that said:

*"De lejanas tierras he venido
arrastrando mi capote
solo para verte a ti,
cabeza de zopilote".*

(and the ladies answered)

*"Anillo de oro macizo
que al mar se me cayó,
hombre sin oficio,
para qué lo quiero yo".*

(Méndez Zetina: 1984:36)

La Libertad

Corroborating the information about the *bombas* and other rhythmic genres, Vicente Narciso comments regarding the town of La Libertad the following:

"...Our first impression in La Libertad, we have with a procession of flowers carried by all the gentlemen of the population at the same time and in which they form a formation, admiring the genius and wide freedom that is enjoyed here, revealing of social well-being. In this demonstration we get to hear some of our old bombs: poetic improvisation that long ago fell into disuse because it had degenerated into indecent. "Bomba was a fandango companion, and both belonged to the galante genre." (Narcissus: 1913:82).

La Pasión River Basin

Vicente Narciso, referring to the hamlets located on the La Pasión River, states that he found them celebrating the Festival of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which is a Mexican tradition and another example of the clear influence of Mexicanism in the region. and this is corroborated using the currency in those localities, which was the Mexican currency. The note also includes observations about the Petén Titular Festival where some masked men called "Monifatos" (uglies from the Verapaz party) appear and the marimba accompanied by a drum. He then mentions how the neighbors fight because their day of celebration is the brightest. There are those who burn more gunpowder or dress more "Monifatos"; try the loudest dawn, even blowing totzes (snails). Then at night, "Rosario de Marimbas". The painstaking work of Vicente Narciso includes a compilation of verses for the celebration of the Titular Flower Festival and for the celebration of the Black Christ Festival in Petén.

Flores City: Black Christ

The Ciudad Flores festival, which coincides with the departmental festival, has been the only one that has been able to be worked on in greater detail. In it, it was possible to establish, within the ethnography of the festival, the importance of music, the role and status that it has within the celebration. The most important musical expressions recorded are: the marimba music for the dance of "La Chatona" and "El Caballito", as well as for "Los Duendes" and whose musical repertoire is basically traditional popular. The band also performs music for the turns of "La Chatona", of the same type of the traditional popular repertoire, in addition, he performs marches for the Black Christ processions of Esquipulas de Petén. There are also prayers and songs that accompany the pilgrimages, the music of religious services and some other casual musical expression (serenade), basically forming the body of music of said festival. (Aivillaga:1987).

San Luis

In San Luis Petén; The sound expressions vary and here you can see instruments such as the shawm and the drum, playing a fundamental role in the music of this community's celebrations. This is also valid today for Poptún and other towns in the La Pasión river basin and is probably a product of the strong Kekchí immigration to those places. Likewise, San Luis has the only town with a Mayan-Mopan population today.

About repertoires

Below is a list of Petén authors and some musical pieces, many of which have a score and have been published in the magazine "Petén Itzá":

From Filadelfo Cano "*Lolita Pellecer*", "*Flores Peteneras*", "*Vima del Carmen*", "*Pesadilla de Amor*", "*Cumbia Petenera*" and "*Melba*". From Rolando G. Ruiz Fernández: "*Luna Petenera*" (*bolero*), "*Morena Guatemalteca*" (*Paso doble*) and "*Serenata Campesina*", winner of second place in the National Art Festival promoted by the University of San Carlos of Guatemala, on November 18, 1987, and whose music was performed by the musical group "Los Phoenix". From Arcadio Morales Berger: "*Preciosa Islita de Flores*" and "*El Rosal y la Mujer*". From Asisclo Alvarado Vásquez: "*Canto a mi Petén*". From Rafael Romero Sosa: "*No sé*" (*blues*), "*Tristezas Peteneras*" and many others. From Yolanda Benitez de Góngora: "*Petén*" y "*Tikal*" (*son*). From Edmundo Solís: "*Escucha*".

Electronic musical ensembles

The musical expressions in Petén have remained in tune and in common agreement with the music that is transmitted through the media and from there have proliferated what were called for a time "Electronic Ensembles", which are basically

composed of bass, drums and electric guitar. Sometimes they have a piano and electric organ, as well as their vocalist. “Los Phoenix” from San Benito and Flores Petén, its director being Manuel Tager. This group has performed on different occasions in other parts of Guatemala and Belize. “*El Combo Maya*” emerged with the name “*Los Guayacanes*” and currently its director and owner is Heleodoro Penados. “Los Astros” also from San Benito Petén, its director is Manuel Gaucha, in addition to being its founder. Poptún, there is the “Gral. Luis García León” military base complex, as well as the “Sangre y Fuego” complex (Conjoints: 1973). However, it should be added that the music heard in the Caribbean (via Belize) is the one with the greatest impact in Petén (as in Izabal) and has been widely accepted, as have many Belizean groups such as “Song City”. Band”, “Young Cencecction”, among others. These electronic groups play, above all, within the framework of the patron saint's festivities and the most common rhythms are Reggae, Soca, Calypso, Punta, among others, which proves the clear influence of the rhythms of the Caribbean, coming from Belize.

The music of the *chicleros*

Little is known about the aspects of *chicle* culture and even less about its traditional music. Judging by their conditions and ways of life, musical instruments are not usually very bulky, these being the guitar, the violin and, in the best cases, the accordion and, of course, the voices. There are reports that, in the first years of chicle exploitation, chicleros played small, bowed marimbas, but this has fallen into disuse. They also develop verses or songs like “*Kolonte*” or “*El venadito*”, which we only mention now.

Other musical instruments

La caja (the “box”)

Francisco Navarrete, referring to the “box” points out:

“...The box has always been played with the Band and the Marimba in the Posadas, also accompanied by 'chinchines' and clay whistles.” (Navarrete: interview 1985)

Furthermore, it states that the marimba was played accompanied by the “chirimia”, a situation that could not be corroborated but that already has its precedents in other regions of the country where this instrument has been replaced by clarinets or saxophones. In this regard, Don Juan Baños stated that he once accompanied the marimba “La Verapaz” with his clarinet, although this phenomenon is probably isolated from another. Baños adds, referring to the 'box', that it had a screw system, and was executed by Miguel López. Sometime later, another 'box' arrived that was already made of metal. Don Benito Poot also manufactured the wooden box and there is still a copy that accompanies the “La Voz del Pueblo” marimba since other

marimbas such as “La Diosa del amor” currently use a snare drum of industrial origin. We also found a box made with a gas cylinder and, like all domestic ones, with deerskin.

Federico Pinelo, referring to the use of the box in the contexts of music for masses, says the following:

“...In those times, at the end of the mass, a very joyful dance accompanied by snare drums... The performers gave an animated roll so that the musicians could prepare to change sounds...” (Pinelo: 1975)

The “tambora”

Juan Baños indicates that an instrument known as “Tambora” was also played and that it was performed by Don Miguel López, in the “Moors” dances that took place in front of the Theater. The drumsticks of this instrument were covered in leather, although they could be seen in 1985, they practically had the shape of a small mallet. Don Cruz Reinoso was known as a drum maker.

The violin

There is an interesting anecdote about the origin of a “Stradivarius” violin in Petén and around it musicians who played an important role in the development of music are mentioned, which is why the most outstanding part of this passage will be reconstructed with the information obtained, especially, from Don Trinidad Romero.

Don Trinidad Romero Sosa began in the art of the violin with his partner Humberto Penados Chávez, supported by Dr. Miguel Angel Talavera, brother of a well-known violinist and pianist, as well as a mechanic. Manuel Cario Cano sold a violin to Dr. Talavera so that the two new students could study the aforementioned instrument. This violin had been obtained by Cario Cano from Don Wilfrido Moreno, a Belizean musician who had been working in Petén on several occasions since 1920. Trinidad Romero managed to corroborate that; indeed, it was Don Wilfrido Moreno's since between 1947-49, they met at Tony Rosa's house in Cayo and he was able to recognize his instrument and even asked him to play it. In 1982, as a promoter of the FYDEP, Colonel Villagrán Rivas, collected objects of material culture with historical content to set up an exhibition in Petén, and when the instrument arrived at the exhibition, the public realized that it was a “Stradivarius”, which is why Even the Press came to report the news. (Gálvez Mis, Martínez Herrera:1983, Méndez:1983:). We had the opportunity to observe this instrument and, despite not being a Stradivarius, it is a copy of an “Antonio Stradivarius”, made in Germany and which arrived via Belize.

El caracol

The “*Totoes*” - sea snail trumpet - (*Strombus gigas*), were also used to play at the beginning of some marches or dances, as reported by Pedro Navarrete. Due to the immediate shortage of snail shells, a bottle broken from the base has been used for the

mouth of the instrument. In some areas where cattle have arrived, horns are also played as a trumpet.

The *chirimia* and the drum

The *chirimia* is an instrument that has a mouthpiece made of corozo palm; The body of the instrument is made of cedar wood. It is accompanied by a “tamborón”, also made of cedar wood, hollowed by burning and with patches of deer skin which require prior preparation. In some cases each patch corresponds to a male and a female, varying its tone and context of execution. In other regions of the country, the instrument that accompanies the “*Pito*” - “Flauta de Carrizo” - is also known as “Tamborón”. Because Petén is close to the Verapaces and has maintained close contact with it, it is assumed that the instrument arrived by this route for more than a century. This group, in addition to being played at the Patron Saint Festivals, performs its music for the rituals of corn planting and harvesting. Today, its most direct bearers are the Kekchís (1846) in his writings mentions the use of the *chirimía*, even among the Lacandons.

The shell of “huehue” -armadillo-

On some occasions the shell of an armadillo is usually executed or rather scraped to produce accompaniments. This has fallen into strong disuse.

La tigrera

This instrument was reported some time ago (Arrivillaga: 1975), and its use in context has not been reported. Its use is attributed to the Lacandons. It consists of a “chujo” - pumpkin or tecomate - that has in one of its mouths a patch of deer skin from which a rope emerges, inside the body, covered with black beeswax and that, when it is rubbed, it produces a quite peculiar sound. It is said that this sound is that of a roaring tiger. From this it follows that the mother tiger goes out to look for it and from a tapesco, the hunter waits for its prey to dazzle it and shoot it.

Conclusions

Initially we must remember that this work has a descriptive character and in a certain way is “Continuation of another” (Arrivillaga: 1989). The enumeration of the dances implicitly demonstrates the importance of ballroom dances in the Petén of yesteryear, and their splendor since the end of the last century and the first decades of this century. The persistence of dances such as Shotíes, Mazurcas and others, tell us about the strong influence of European music on the peteneros mestizos. The existence of troubadour texts or verses for their music. It also tells us about a cultural presence of a Hispanic character and today clearly mixed. In a very panoramic way, some references to the music within the patron saint festivals are given, but this more with the intention of supporting information for later work.

The lists of authors and compositions have the interest of testimony about Petenera musical production. We cannot ignore the reference to electronic ensembles since, in addition to being part of the sound context, today they play an important role in festivals. Regarding *chiclero* music, we must consider what is limited since these expressions have been little studied.

Finally, we point out some other instruments in Petén, but this is not exhaustive in terms of instruments of the Kekchies since we only mention the Chirimía and Tambor and not their marimbas, their Xoly Tambor, the Cuah or Small Drum and even less the harp, violin and guitar ensemble, so popular among them. Regarding Kekchi music, as we initially pointed out, we are preparing a separate work. We then refer to the drum and the box, instruments also of importance in the Petenera Musical Tradition. Regarding the snail, we are interested in highlighting its importance as an instrument of convocation and that it is often known, but not taken as a musical instrument. The same happens with the shell of the armadillo and the tigress, of which there are also few references.

In this sense, this work can be understood as another attempt to demonstrate the richness of the musical and dance phenomenon in Petén.

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Interviewed Teachers

JUAN BAÑOS CHAVEZ (82 years old, 1985).

Originally from Flores, Petén.

Already in 1918, he had started teaching himself music. He played saxophone, clarinet and flute in addition to being a composer and participant in a moment of Peten music. He was a contemporary and maintained an academic relationship with teachers of the stature of Marcial Andrino and the distinguished teacher Jesús Castillo.

PAULA HEREDIA VDA. DE GONGORA ALDANA (86 years old, 1985).

Originally from Flores, Petén.

Marimba performer, witness to the development of the chromatic marimba in Petén. Vda. By Don Eusebio Góngora, renowned master of the marimba.

PEDRO NAVARRETE (80 years old, 1985).

Originally from San Benito, Petén.

A musician, he learned from his father, also a musician and marimba maker. He played in La Banda and in several marimbas of great importance.

TRINIDAD ROMERO SOSA

Originally from Flores, Petén.

Distinguished musician, clarinetist and violinist, he played in the band and is co-founder of the Alma Itzalana Orchestral ensemble.

RAFAEL ROMERO SOZA (1928)

Musician, composer and researcher of Petenero traditions, he has written several articles on popular traditions and is the author of the Petenero songbook. He is the founder of the musical group Alma Itzalana. His father, Inocencio Romero, was also a musician and composed some pieces in the Mayan Language.