

# **SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE MARIMBA IN GUATEMALA**

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## **Prologue**

More than a decade ago, when I began systematizing my research in the field of ethnomusicology, referring to the marimba, I mentioned that studying this instrument in Guatemala required special attention, and that the most important issue of study was not its origin and evolution, but its social development in the country. This past decade has only served to confirm, in concrete terms, the initial hypothesis.

In the final moments of drafting this report, the key figures in this social history of the marimba, the master musicians from Jocotenango—Rafael Ibarra, Juan Sajché, Cristóbal Hernández, and José Luis Sánchez Carcúz—died in a traffic accident. Additionally, in the same year, the great master Fabián Betancourt<sup>1</sup> in Quetzaltenango was killed by criminals. This tragic year leaves its mark on the research; however, these deaths passed into history, with the nation unaware of what was lost. Our effort is dedicated to them, to the masters who make this history of sounds possible. May this work serve, above all, as a call to reflection on how, if we neglect our pillars of identity, we risk losing an important part of ourselves in the marimba.

At the same time, we want to thank "Casa Laru-Duna" and its director Sylvia Shaw for their unconditional support in allowing us access to the database and for the use of computer equipment, as well as José Chaclán from the 'Garcia Pelaez' Archdiocesan Historical Archive for his valuable contributions and support towards the development of this work.

## **Introduction**

This work briefly covers some aspects of the origins of the marimba. Attention was focused on theories about its development in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Subsequently, various epistemological approaches to the marimba were identified. A brief section has been included on the marimba among the indigenous people of Guatemala, which, although not the specific focus of this research, helps to understand the social contexts in which this instrument has developed.

This first part concludes by providing a description of the mentioned instrument and its particular characteristics in the fields of acoustics and timbre.

The second part of the work begins with a section titled 'New Archive References', which provides keys for a chronological organization of the marimba and for characterizing its social function during the colonial period. Next, there is a review of other sources about the marimba established in the 17th and 19th centuries. Of particular importance is the placement of the marimba during the independence era with ideological functions. Before delving into the development of the double marimba, mention is made

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<sup>1</sup> He died in 1992 at the age of 89, while serving as the director of the music school of the municipality of Quetzaltenango. He played the marimbas Princesita and the one belonging to the Hurtado brothers.

of the instrument in the first specific treatise on music in Guatemala. With this context established regarding the instrument's evolution, reference is made to the transition from the diatonic to the chromatic marimba and its new role within Guatemalan society. Understanding the double marimba in the early 20th century, the musicians, families, and international tours of marimba ensembles, allows for a better understanding of the important role it played, following its transformation, within mestizo groups.

Finally, reference is made to the instrument and the builder, records, playing techniques, popular and classical repertoires, with particular emphasis on its rhythmic characteristics. The dispersion of the double marimba to other cities in southern Mexico and Central America is established, along with its historical significance or relevance in these areas. There is also mention of the controversy surrounding the marimba in Guatemala, which is more of an ideological issue than a historical one. A brief reference to the marimba in literature cannot be omitted, as the instrument has been a favored "muse" for the creative endeavors of writers in this country.

"Marimba y Sociedad" is the final reference where, in the form of conclusions, the leading role played by the marimba among the mestizo or Ladino society of Guatemala at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one is established.

We are also pleased to present a comprehensive bibliography on the subject, including both primary and secondary sources. We are not aware of a greater effort undertaken in Guatemala. May it serve at least as an initial contribution to understanding the development of a history that has yet to be written.

It is important to emphasize that this report constitutes the first part of the research project, which has been confined to desk work. The recovery of this collective memory, from another perspective, to help understand the history of the marimba in Guatemala in a more comprehensive manner, remains to be developed.

## **About the Origins**

### **Asia**

There are various theories about the origin and evolution of the marimba in the world. The evidence of Asian lithophones and subsequent xylophones appears to be the oldest representations in this regard. On the island of Bali, south of Java, there are reliefs depicting a table xylophone. The 'Gamelan' (Javanese lithophone) is the best version to understand this Asian xylophone (Vela: 1962: 93-94).

The performance of this instrument occurs within highly significant ritual contexts such as the 'Wayang' ceremonies, which have strong magical content. Furthermore, its performances always involve a team of multiple instruments. Acoustic characteristics like suspended keyboards, mallets, and, of course, interpretative techniques are also specific and characteristic of the Asian region (Castañeda Paganini: 1951:26-29).

### **Africa**

Given the great popularity that this 'balafon' has in different parts of Africa, where it is even called 'Imba' in some places, or with other prefixes resembling 'marimba', a name also used by a community in Angola. Some theories also suggest that it arrived in

Africa via Asians and continued to evolve there. In some organological aspects, these African marimbas have more similarities with those of Mesoamerica. We refer to the gourd resonators and their covering. In Africa, this is done with spider web material, whereas here it is done with fabric made from pig intestines. Of course, we are referring to structural similarities in the field of organology (O'brien: 1982:72).

On the other hand, it is suggested that the marimba we play today came through African slaves. This theory is based on the absence of reliable pre-Columbian evidence of its existence and on certain organological similarities. Fernando Ortiz, the distinguished Cuban ethnologist and musicologist, left us in his "Afroamericana Marimba" a series of physiological possibilities of the instrument in question, in Africa and America. Given the quality of Ortiz's work and its relative obscurity in Guatemala, a review of his findings seems necessary. In his research, he demonstrates the Bantu linguistic root of the word marimba and points out the suffix 'imba', which means 'to sing' (Ortiz: 1971: 9-43).

### **American**

There is no American theory regarding the origin of the marimba in America, particularly in Mesoamerica. Both Chiapas, Mexico, and Guatemala have insisted on claiming paternity of the mentioned instrument. Undoubtedly, the version by Armas Lara (1970) is the most well-known, but we cannot consider it or its derivatives due to lacking scientific validity.

Some mention the 'Tun' or 'Tunkul' as the instrumental predecessor of the marimba. Indeed, both instruments share quite similar organological principles. Some suggest that this facilitated the later invention of the marimba, but one should also consider the possibility that knowledge of this instrument - the 'Tun' - facilitated the adoption of the marimba. And for those who excessively associate it with the Maya, the 'Tun' is not a late instrument in their cultural development. Could it instead be a borrowing or imposition from the Aztecs?

There is another theory that mentions the development of the marimba as a pre-Columbian instrument. This theory interprets the appearance of a mallet-played marimba in the 'Ratlinxul' vase from the Chama area. The suggestions of the marimba among the Maya and its appearance in Maya epigraphy, similar to those of Armas Lara, are developed but lack academic credibility.

### **The marimba in dictionaries**

Vela gathers the following definitions: From the Real Academia Española (1925): "The marimba is a type of drum used by blacks in some parts of Africa." And as an Americanism: "Tympanum, musical instrument (acbabal, tamboril), composed of several uneven strips of wood or glass, arranged from larger to smaller on two strings or ribbons and played with a kind of mallet."

The Enciclopedia Espasa (also cited by Vela: 1962:19) provides a slightly more accurate description than the previous one: "... A musical instrument used in the Congo. It consists of sixteen gourds of different sizes arranged on two plates, which the performer carries hanging from their shoulders. Each of the gourds has an opening formed by cuts or small pieces of thin and resonant wood that are struck with drumsticks."

Kaptain includes the following versions of marimba in dictionaries: Joaquín Peña in the "Labor" Dictionary of Music (cited by Kaptain: 1991:33) has two definitions for the word marimba. The first mentions the instrument originating from the Congo and brought to America by Africans. The instruments have sixteen gourds of different cuts. The other reference to the marimba is about the Mexican Marimba, which is described as a xylophone with twenty-one (21) keys. Some other updated dictionaries on music, while mentioning the marimba developed in Guatemala, provide examples and contextual information for the development of this instrument based on the marimba in Mexico.

Undoubtedly, more varied definitions of the marimba could be found in general and specialized dictionaries, but so far, the best known is what is captured in the "New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments" (1984:877-888), where a comprehensive and concise attempt to establish a broader definition of the marimba is made thoroughly.

In this dictionary, there is an article by George List and Linda O'Brian that captures the spirit already expressed in an article by Linda O'Brian, which clearly leans towards the theory of the African connection of this instrument in Mesoamerica. They also strengthen their proposal by referring to the African origin of the term marimba. Undoubtedly, the primary contribution in this field is that of Fernando Ortiz.

Curt Sachs, the father of comparative musicology and author of the organological charts used today, explains that this idiophone underwent different transformations in acoustic principles involving shaking, clashing, and direct striking, steps that also required the evolution of certain acoustic principles of the instruments used. Supported by a vast arsenal of organological knowledge and through meticulous analysis of its acoustic and timbral principles, he indicates the probable African origin of the marimba.

### **The marimba for the indigenous people of Guatemala**

Undoubtedly, the simple or diatonic marimba was initially associated with indigenous groups. If it appeared during the colonial period so frequently associated with the church, it was because the church used it with special interest for the conversion to Christianity of the various social groups in the country, among whom the indigenous people are the majority.

At the end of the last century, the first German ethnologists in their work in the region included the marimba as an instrument of particular importance (Sapper: 1897). Subsequently, throughout this century, the country received a series of American anthropologists whose main concern is the study of the indigenous groups inhabiting the country. It would be lengthy to enumerate these anthropologists who include, in their monographs, the role of the marimba within indigenous society. Most of these works, such as those by Dr. McBride, Oliver La Farge, Charles Wisdom, and Lilly de Jongh Osborne, have been translated by the Guatemalan Seminar for Economic and Social Integration. I will not dwell on this topic here, as it is not of particular interest in the research, but it is important to establish that if the marimba underwent adoption and early stages of recreation, these occurred among the Maya groups of Mesoamerica. This instrument is associated with magical and religious ritual contexts, occupying a different position within indigenous society compared to mestizos or Ladinos.

## **Description of the instrument**

There are various descriptions that have been made about the marimba. Many of these will be found throughout this work. Additionally, there is a series of descriptions about the types of marimbas that existed prior to the one now known. Among these is the 'Marimba de tecomates' or 'Arco', named for having gourd resonators and featuring an arch to assist in suspending the instrument by the player and thus facilitate its use while in motion. Later on, these marimbas were equipped with a stake to be played in a fixed position. Subsequently, the marimba was attached to a table, allowing for more secure suspension and easier playing. During this time, there was also a transition from using gourd resonators to wooden resonators, imitating the earlier style. The earliest simple marimbas, regardless of resonators and suspension tables, had three octaves. With the creation of the chromatic marimba, the instrument expanded from five and a half to six and a half octaves, while the 'Requinta' had five octaves.

The structure of the marimba in general terms is as follows: Rosewood keyboards (*Platymiscium dimorphandrum* L. SM) pierced by a cord and assisted by pegs to prevent direct resting on the table. Modern marimbas have suspension holes on the sides placed at their nodal points. Previously, some keyboards had suspension holes on the faces of the keys, a principle that also originates from Africa. Additionally, some keys ended in a cross shape at their ends. Both examples can still be observed in some ancient marimbas and in keyboards kept by marimba players (Arrivillaga: 1993).

In the central part of the table, there hang resonators of different sizes corresponding to the keys. These resonators, whether made of gourds, metal, bamboo, or wood, have holes at the bottom crowned with wax rings that are attached, on the outside, with membranes made of pig intestines. These membranes function as mirlitons and produce the characteristic "buzzing" sound known as "charleo."

The internal structure and other characteristics of marimbas are more complex than those described here. If you wish to delve deeply into these features, you can consult the work by Arrivillaga and Chocano (1983).

## **Historical References on the Marimba in Guatemala**

### **New Archive References**

Even though the primary concern was not to create a detailed chronology of the marimba in Guatemala, a significant portion of the efforts has been focused on obtaining new references that can guide towards a new chronology. In Mexico, historians concerned with the history of this instrument have apparently found the earliest reference. However, this document has been viewed with much skepticism by researchers. Written by Pedro Gentil de Bustamante and titled "The Christianization of the Indians of Santa Lucia, 1545" (cited by Hernández: 1975:13), it mentions an instrument called "Yolotli" with very particular characteristics that they consider a precursor to the marimba. This instrument bears a strong resemblance to earlier African xylophones.

In the case of Guatemala, most studies have relied on the citation of the priest Domingo Juarros. Some others have made reference to new documents, but the veracity of these is unknown.

This research project focused on searching for references from primary texts in the Archivo Histórico Arquidiocesano 'García Peláez' since a significant portion of the references regarding the development of art and 'culture' during the colonial era were closely related to religious events. The results are satisfactory and have allowed the assembly of this chapter titled "New Archive References." Undoubtedly, it will be necessary to explore other archives of great importance such as the Archivo General de Centro América, where undoubtedly, by working with this documentation center, a more precise chronology could be established regarding the development of the marimba in this part of the continent.

Regarding the reference made by Domingo Juarros when recounting the inauguration of the Cathedral of Santiago de Guatemala in 1680, he notes: "The 'encamisada' was seen entering accompanied by many servants with four-wick torches that illuminated the square and streets through which they passed: there were a troop of drums, drums, clarions, trumpets, marimbas, and all the instruments used by the Indians" (Juarros: 1981:385).

Having clarified this 17th-century reference, a new one was found referring to the presence of the marimba in the Church of Santo Tomás, Chichicastenango, noted in the pastoral visit conducted by Archbishop Francos y Monroy on April 3, 1786 (Section 3, box 70, folio 224-V AHAGP). This evidence, notably important, confirms that the marimba was an instrument used both within and outside the church during specific celebrations. Although Francos y Monroy does not mention its use, the mere fact that it was part of the temple's inventory highlights the influence that the instrument had as a cultural focal point during this time.

In 1810, the existence of a marimba player known as Narciso Martínez is highlighted, who carried out his work in Tegucigalpa (Mercedarian Archive, F 29-V, 1810). Referring to the occupation of marimba player demonstrates the importance of this activity within the cultural sphere of the time. Later, close to the process of the Spanish Empire's disintegration, there is a record of payment of 'three pesos, one real, for a marimba player and drummer' between 1810 and 1820 (Church of El Carmen Archive, dated 1819-20, Folio 33 V). Additionally, in the aforementioned reference, it indicates that both men, the marimba player and the drummer, played at the church gate accompanied by the 'tun and chirimía' for the festivities of the Christ of Esquipulas. There are also records of wage payments for these musicians during other festivities.

In 1821, an interesting piece of news was found indicating that the Cathedral acquired a "marimbita" with "decently embedded pieces" for 20 pesos, purchased for Maestro Godínez's choir (AHAGP, Section 1, box 9, folio 5 V). Later on, the following news was discovered: "...in Lanquín, the parish priest, because today is the Holy Lent (March 1, 1859), there was a large attendance and considerable rejoicing, which was referred to by the music performed last night by the natives in front of an advanced instrument, the marimba, and other common instruments" (AHAGP, Section 3, box 63, Miscellany 1842-1911).

Before continuing, it is important to clarify the closely intertwined role that the marimba played within the church. Used as an instrument to promote conversion to the gospel, it undoubtedly fulfilled its purpose and that is why it was used with such dedication

by the conquering friars. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, the marimba was found in a close relationship with the church, which did not continue throughout the 19th century, as will be seen later on.

## **Other sources for marimba**

### **XVIII and XIX Centuries**

The degree of development that the marimba had in this country has led many researchers to express clear concern about its origin, evolution, and development. Thus, throughout this century, works have been written from different perspectives that contribute new understandings about the evolution of the marimba. The research will rely on the most credible sources. Víctor Miguel Díaz (1928:54) states that by the year 1737, the marimba was widely spread among the indigenous population. He mentions further: "...At that time, in various indigenous settlements, one could see some marimbas, such as in the cantons of San Gaspar and Jocotenango (of the city of Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala), with each instrument played by an individual... (referring to the Paseo de Santa Cecilia in 1737) and it is noteworthy the noise made by the players of chirimías, whistles, drums, sambumbias, marimbas with gourd resonators, and many other indigenous instruments..."

In the last third of the 18th century, the marimba is mentioned by Lic. Antonio de Paz y Salgado (1747) as a widely prevalent instrument of the time. He mentions that on the occasion of the erection of the Church of Guatemala, the marimba ensemble played a significant role in highlighting the event.

During the period from 1773 to '76, and on the occasion of the city's relocation to the Valle de la Ermita, Víctor Miguel Díaz again mentions: "...Marimba was scarcely played in Mixco and in the small village of Las Vacas... On the occasion of the completion of the aqueduct from where water came from Pinula, they celebrated this event with the musical accompaniment of the marimba, which became popular in Santa Inés, San Miguel Petapa, Villa Nueva, and other towns." (1928:530).

Fray Carlos Cadena (1793) mentions that on the occasion of the proclamation of Carlos IV, exactly on November 22, 1792, when the Seal and the Royal Decree were brought in, and on the 23rd, during the custody ceremony, an orchestra and the musicians from neighboring areas participated, with the marimba being the main instrument.

To conclude the 19th century, an interesting note by Jesús Carranza (1897) was found, stating the following: "... Meanwhile, while dancing to the rhythm of the marimba, while the bride and groom are locked away, the guests and family continue to jump, shout, and dance to the rhythm of the marimba... Today's marimba has undergone many transformations, but its airs lack the national charm and sentiment of the old marimba called 'Tzumtottom,' made of tecomates and quite rustic, yet with sweet tones, especially when accompanied by its pastoral and melancholic tunes. With this music and the 'tun,' the ancient Indians held their festivals and dances; it may be monotonous, but the little flute and the marimba are so melancholic that they seem like a cry of the soul, evoking their ancient gods and their Mames."

In the previous note, it is noteworthy that it refers to the national charm of the rustic marimba made of tecomates, contrasting it with the transformed marimba of that time.

It was found that in 1870, in the Frailesca region of Chiapas, Mexico, there was a marimba played by three Black individuals. According to historian Flavio Guillén (cited by Rodas:1971), Fray Bartolomé de las Casas introduced this instrument to the mentioned area. David Vela (1984), in an interesting article published by Chenoweth, supports the theory of the African connection of the marimba in Chiapas. He references the works of Yurchenko and Selvas, demonstrating that the repertoires in this region have a mestizo character. As early as 1801, an article in the *Diario de México* referred to the marimba as distinctive and unique to Chiapas and Guatemala.

In this regard, the search for information about the development of the marimba in Guatemala cannot disregard the information pertaining to the region of Chiapas or other countries in the Central American area, because during its consolidation as an instrument in the colonial period, all these regions were part of a single territory.

This chapter concludes with a reference made by the traveler William T. Brigham in 1887, which states: "...Upon returning to the Hotel, we heard a marimba and encountered a religious procession." This note refers to the procession of the Immaculate Conception on December 8 in the city of Guatemala, which departed from the Temple of San Francisco.

### **The marimba in the independence era**

According to a document written by Pedro Molina (referred to by Vela: 1962), it mentions that Doña Dolores Bedoya, Bacilio Porras, and others played music and set off fireworks in the square to attract the people, uplift their spirits, and express the joy of the people in proclaiming independence from Spain on September 15, 1821. Jorge Taracena (1980) emphasizes that: "...The use of fireworks and music on September 15, 1821, had the true objective of seeking popular proselytizing support to favor the middle classes, who were the ones behind this movement... In the circumstances of the independence movement, the marimba was never considered politically to be the national instrument." He goes on to mention that in references to these historical dates, classical historians like Marure, Montúfar, Coronado, García Granados, among others, make no mention of the marimba's participation in this event. It is important to mention that at that time, the marimba was classified by the middle classes as an instrument of indigenous people.

### **The first treaty about music**

It is not until 1878 that the first specific treaty on music in Guatemala appears, written by José Saenz Poggio. In Chapter Eight, he focuses on indigenous music. Referring to the marimba, he says the following: "...The marimba, a kind of piano but without keys for half-tones. There are seven-octave marimbas made of wood, steel, or glass. When struck with mallets, these vibrate like piano strings, and the gourds or square wooden tubes on which these keys are placed act as the soundboard or resonating box of a piano. To raise or lower the pitch, indigenous people use small round lead weights that they attach with wax to the underside of the keys. To play sharp or flat notes, they



strike the keys at their edges using only the body of the mallets." (Saenz Poggio:1878:79-80).

The previous mention is important as it is part of a specific treaty on music. It is also important to highlight that during that time, the marimba continued to be referred to as an instrument of the indigenous people. Undoubtedly, by that period, it was also played by mestizos (ladinos) who were working diligently to convert this diatonic marimba into a chromatic instrument that, in their view, would be superior to the indigenous instrument. The possibility of having a chromatic instrument would allow them to approach Western repertoires more closely, reproduce and recreate music of this nature more easily, and differentiate themselves from the indigenous population.

### **Development of the double marimba since the end of the XIX century**

Undoubtedly, by the end of the last century, the popularity of the marimba as a musical instrument was widespread among both indigenous people and mestizos. In various regions of the country such as Quetzaltenango, Totonicapán, Huehuetenango, San Marcos, and Chiapas in the Highlands; Antigua Guatemala (Jocotenango), Guatemala City in the central plateau, and Cobán in the Northeast, the marimba was subjected by different mestizo specialists to processes of evolution that satisfied their new musical expression needs. There are reports that by 1875, the first trials of double marimbas or 'cuaches' had become widespread in many parts of Guatemala. Díaz (1928:528) indicates that during the Corpus Christi celebration at the Church of Concepción in 1875, a 'cuache' marimba was played. It had been constructed in the capital by Manuel López and José Chaequín, natives of Jocotenango, Sacatepéquez. David Vela disagrees with the previous data, mentioning that it was presented in the capital on March 22 and 26, 1874, and constructed by Antonio Perea and Samuel Loarcazar.

The attempts to create double marimbas were numerous as previous versions did not meet the musicians' demands. In this regard, there are several different versions attributing the creation of the double marimba, increasingly polarized between the Chiapas region and Guatemala.

It was Julián Paniagua Martínez (1981:20) who, aware of the difficulties faced by marimba players and supported by his brother Santos Paniagua, suggested to Sebastián Hurtado (originally from Almolonga, Quetzaltenango) in the year 1896 the advantages of constructing a keyboard with characteristics similar to a piano. Vela refers to a narrative by Paniagua: "Both Hurtado and his colleagues presented objections, but every time I met with the marimba players, I reiterated my suggestions, clearly explaining the advantages of having a perfect and complete instrument."

Before Hurtado made the modification to the keyboard suggested by Paniagua, and shortly after the liberal revolution of 1871, Sebastián Hurtado toured the entire Mexican Republic with his marimba, accompanying the activities of the 'Treviño' circus with his music. Upon his return, he sold his marimba to the 'bel' Circus, and back in the country, according to statements given to journalist Rodolfo López Lima, Celso and Sebastián Hurtado expressed their desire to build the double marimba. Shortly after, the

first prototype appeared, which initially had a range of only three octaves, and he gifted it to his brother Vicente Hurtado.

Julián Paniagua, in a manuscript published by the Guatemalan Association of Authors and Composers (1981), recalls the first occasion he observed the double marimba: "Finally, after about five or six years, during the celebration and anniversary of September 15, 1901, I had the opportunity to listen to a chromatic marimba played by the Hurtado family; then I approached to see the instrument and was pleased to see that my advice and instructions had borne fruit." This patriotic celebration took place in front of the Municipal Palace of Quetzaltenango and was performed by Arnulfo, Celso, Jesús, and Mariano Hurtado, all sons of Sebastián Hurtado.

According to Carlos Castañeda Paganini (1951), the double marimba was first showcased in the capital city by the Hurtado family during the celebration of President Manuel Estrada Cabrera's birthday on November 21, 1899. On this occasion, they performed the "Xelajú" waltz and the "Manuel Estrada Cabrera" paso doble.

In the Chiapas region, the dates of the transformation to the double marimba also vary, but everything seems to point to Corazón de Jesús Borraz Moreno, born in San Bartolomé de los Llanos (now Venustiano Carranza), who transformed the double marimba based on sketches by his uncle Mariano Ruperto Moreno, an organist and violinist, around 1896. Apparently, Borraz Moreno did not patent his work, and in 1897, two well-known marimbists from Chiapas, David Gómez from Tuxtla Gutiérrez and Mr. Archila from Villa Flores, observed the mentioned instrument while passing through Venustiano Carranza on their way to Comitán. Later, some people saw David Gómez playing the chromatic instrument and mistakenly believed he was one of its creators. Previously, in 1885, Benjamín Roque had introduced two keyboards to the marimba, one hanging over the other in such a way that it could be played in two keys. However, the instrument did not function properly. María del Carmen Sordo Sodi (1972) mentions that the creator of the chromatic marimba was Lucas Paniagua.

It's important to highlight that later, in 1916, Francisco Santiago Borraz invented a smaller marimba called the "Requinta," also known in Guatemala as the "Tenor." In this regard, Santiago Borraz's contribution went beyond the invention of the "Requinta," as it became an indispensable part of the marimba ensembles known today.

### **Double marimba at the beginning of the XX century**

In Guatemala, during the period of Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920), the marimba was imposed in official events. It became a symbol of the middle class and the coffee growers of the west. The composition "La Flor del Café" became the new anthem of these middle classes and the emerging coffee bourgeoisie.

In 1905, Maestro Federico Guzmán, one of the first builders of double marimbas in the capital, won a gold medal and diploma for presenting a double marimba of his own making at the industrial exhibition organized by the Instituto Central de Varones. David Vela noted that, besides the excellent finish of this marimba, it showed innovation by having the sharps keys aligned with the keys of the diatonic tones. This marimba was acquired to be taken to Chiquimulilla in the same year, which is also when the first double

marimba arrived in the Department of San Marcos from Quetzaltenango. The latter version has not been confirmed. It's also important to note that in the Chiapanecan marimba, the chromatic tones are arranged like a piano, unlike in the Guatemalan marimba where they are placed above and at one end of the diatonic tones.

## **International Tours of Marimba Ensembles**

### **Musicians and families**

As can be observed below, the family condition was a key element in the reproduction of the musical tradition. This trait persists to this day, and apparently, the family has been a refuge for the preservation of this tradition.

In 1908, the Hurtado brothers embarked on their first tour with the double marimba in the United States. Coincidentally, it was during this time that the United Fruit Company began its economic activities in the country. In 1909, Jesús Castillo consecrated mestizo music with his work "Fiesta de Pájaros," specially created to showcase the qualities of the double marimba. In a second tour of the Hurtado Brothers to the United States under the direction of Mariano Valverde in 1915, they performed at the Guatemala Pavilion at the San Francisco Exhibition, later traveling to New York and Canada. Additionally, this marimba recorded thirty selections of its repertoire for the "Victor Talking Machine Co.," which contributed to the fame of their work. In May 1944, after 28 years of absence, Celso Hurtado returned bringing with him a new version of marimba, a product of the fusion of his traditional knowledge of marimba construction and the support and influence of the technology available in the United States. The characteristics of this marimba are more like those of a xylophone. On May 12 of that same year, Maestro Hurtado held a concert at the Lux Theater in Guatemala City, showcasing his talent to which the public responded positively. Around that time, the marimba company of José Ovalle and sons, from Quetzaltenango, with Gabriel Chinchilla as representative, also toured the United States. "Los Chintos" marimba of Carlos and Jacinto Estrada gained great Central American fame, and by 1916 under the guidance of Manuel Leal Vela, they began a tour of North America and were later hired by Roberto Nanne in New York. They recorded several discs with much acclaim for the "Victor Talking Machine Co." These musicians began with Federico Guzmán, an excellent marimba player and builder who, along with his sons, had one of the most sought-after ensembles in the early 20th century. In the case of "Los Chintos," Carlos Estrada eventually married Hazel M. Johnson in 1926, an occasion that allowed him to gain recognition in the United States where he was considered a great music virtuoso. José Bethancourt also arrived in the United States around that time, having achieved fame as a marimba player and radio announcer. (Vela:1962)

On March 15, 1916, Maestro Higinio Ovalle offered a concert of 'classical' music for President Estrada Cabrera, performing works by Liszt, Rossini, Jesús Castillo, and Ovalle himself for the first time. He began his musical training with the Marimba Estrella Altense and brought worldwide fame to the marimba "Maderas de mi Tierra." In 1968, he represented Guatemala in the Mexico Olympics and was awarded a Medal of Honor by President Lic. Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. An interesting note must be included that during the time of Adolf Hitler, Paul Joebbels, Minister of Propaganda of the fascist regime, repeatedly used a marimba that toured Germany. The musicians in this group were Armando Torres, José Gracia, Leopoldo Barrientos, Rogelio Rivera, and Andrés Cañas,

who were performing in Berlin under threat of being forcibly taken and threatened with imprisonment in a concentration camp if they did not perform. (Contreras Velez:1968)

The marimba groups "Azul y Blanco" and "La Joya," led by the Quiroz Brothers under Ricardo Quiroz's direction, embarked on a tour of Europe in 1923, visiting London, Paris, Berlin, Belgium, and Spain. Other marimba groups formed by families such as the Bethancourt, Piedra Santa, Salazar, and Ovalle families from Quetzaltenango; the Avila family in Totonicapán; and the Barrios, Orozco, Juárez, and Bautista families in San Marcos also gained increased fame and toured Mexico and Central America.

Additionally, some Mexican ensembles like "Las Aguilas de México" also undertook significant tours in Europe.

David Gómez Jr., who became a marimba virtuoso in the 1920s, organized a marimba ensemble composed of Alvaro López Vásquez, Jesús Jiménez de la Cruz, and his brother Arturo Gómez. They toured the United States and northern Mexico.

### **The instrument and the constructor**

Due to the extensive nature of the topic concerning the acoustics and timbre in musical instrument construction, particularly in the case of the marimba, only a few renowned builders, custodians of a long tradition, will be mentioned. It is pertinent to note that there is a close relationship between the performer and the builder-performer, and given that it was in these Mesoamerican regions where the marimba evolved into the double keyboard, the longevity of their constructions today continues to be highly valued abroad. Both Chenowet (1964) and Vela (1962) refer to the distinguished builder Mr. Rosendo Barrios from Guatemala City as the most representative and important builder of double marimbas during this century. Today, this tradition is maintained by his son Mario Barrios.

In the fieldwork carried out in different areas of Mesoamerica, various marimbas from this construction house have been found. There are also reports that they currently have significant international demand. As asserted at the beginning, rather than a fully developed and finished chapter, this serves as a call to attention for future researchers.

### **The instrument and its records**

The large marimba ensembles are composed of two marimbas, one called 'Grande' and the other 'Requinto' or 'Tenor'. In the 'Grande' marimba, the registers are referred to as 'Bass', 'Harmony', 'Melody', 'Treble' or 'Piccolo', while in the 'Requinto', the registers are called 'Treble tenor' or 'Piccolo', 'Middle tenor', and 'Bass Tenor'.

This is the most common formation for what is known as 'Pure Marimba'. Throughout this century, the 'Double Bass' was added, followed by the 'Drum kit', and finally some winds, but according to critics, performers, and the general public, these forms are quite distant from what is known as 'Pure Marimba'.

### **Execution techniques**

Estas técnicas varían según la posición, puesto o registro dentro de la marimba. A la vez, se encuentran supeditadas al tipo de bolillos o baquetas que se usarán según

el registro correspondiente. Regularmente los músicos tocan con dos o tres baquetas y sólo algunos expertos llegan a tocar hasta con cuatro y más baquetas. Sin embargo todavía no se ha estudiado de manera definitiva los aspectos claves de la ejecución que permitan hablar de una manera más amplia sobre las técnicas de interpretación.

## **Repertoires**

Before the invention of the double marimba, the most cherished repertoires consisted of 'Sones' and 'Zapateados'. With the creation of the 'Double Marimba', the repertoires expanded to include rhythms such as 'Waltzes', 'Polkas', 'Marches', 'Danzones', 'Guarachas', 'Pasodobles', 'Schottisches', and during the second decade of this century, other rhythms were added such as 'Blues', 'Foxtrot', 'Jazz', rhythms popular in the major cities.

## **Classical works**

As mentioned earlier, the transition to the chromatic marimba aimed to provide access to the performance of classical piano works. Transcriptions of certain classical pieces were also made to be played on the marimba. Furthermore, composers like Jesús Castillo created works with a universal vision infused with regional character. Later on, Jorge Sarmientos, a Guatemalan composer, introduced the marimba into concert halls, demonstrating through his work the enormous potential of this instrument. His work was premiered in Guatemala by the Belizean-Guatemalan musician Fernando Morales Matos. Morales Matos, who has been based in Jalapa, Veracruz, Mexico for over a decade, has continued to explore and develop the marimba. Finally, Joaquín Orellana has reimagined and brought the marimba into new expressions within a contemporary language.

## **Dispersion of the double marimba to other cities**

### **The marimba in Southern Mexico and Central America**

As mentioned in the section on the transformation of the marimba, it is very likely that this phenomenon occurred simultaneously in different parts of Mesoamerica. Additionally, the spread was dependent on established communication routes. Arrivillaga (1991) demonstrates the arrival of the first double marimba in Petén in 1910 from Alta Verapaz, led by Vicente Narciso. Narciso (1913) leaves valuable notes in his writings to understand the development of this instrument in the northern part of the country. He also includes part of the repertoire that this marimba played, featuring classical works such as "The Merry Widow," "La vie de plaisir," marches by Suppé, waltzes by Waldteuffel, Hemmerle overtures, as well as other rhythms like marches, Two Steps, concert pieces, waltzes, and shotis.

However, the social development of the double marimba in Petén is not the same as in the rest of the country, and this can also be noticed in its melodic and rhythmic expressions (Arrivillaga:1991).

In the same year, the double marimba arrived in Costa Rica from Guatemala, and it is assumed that it passed through this route to Nicaragua beforehand. It is known that since 1785 (Rojas:1989:16), the marimba in Costa Rica already existed and was associated with the activities of the church in Orosí. These were also known as 'arched

marimbas,' which were played by a single musician. Salazar (1988) masterfully recounts in his work not only the influence of the Guatemalan marimba within Costa Rican marimba, but also how the simple marimba evolved throughout its colonial history in the Guanacaste region and the Central Valley. His work includes valuable organological observations about the variations of the marimba in Costa Rica.

Although the precise arrival of the double marimba via Guatemala in Nicaragua has not been definitively determined, works like those of Scruggs (1989) have demonstrated the cultural significance and deep popular roots that the arched or simple marimba has in the central plateau of that country.

In southern Mexico, from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, specifically in the states of Veracruz, Oaxaca, and Tabasco, the marimba also plays a role of great importance. This has been studied in detail by Garfias (1983:189) and Chamorro (1984:221), who provide a broader dimension of the instrument. In the Yucatán Peninsula, the marimba is also deeply rooted as a traditional instrument and is used primarily in vaquerías (traditional Yucatecan fiestas). In the emerging state of Quintana Roo, there is also a marimba tradition undoubtedly imported from Yucatán and supported and promoted by the relationship with the marimbas from Petén. Due to political problems in Guatemala over the last decade, many Guatemalans had to seek refuge in Mexico, Belize, Honduras, among other places. It has been verified that many marimba groups in these countries welcomed their Guatemalan colleagues. In Belize, Garfias (1983) refers to the development of some marimbas such as the one in San José Socotz, which was found to have had a relationship in its early years of formation with the Belizean master Fernando Morales Matus. Nowadays, the marimba "Diosa del Amor" from San Francisco Petén has frequently promoted music in Belize.

In the southern hemisphere, on the Pacific coast, specifically in the area of Chonta, a border region between Colombia and Ecuador, the marimba has also been found to be played by groups of African descent. Coba (1981:238-240) has thoroughly discussed the situation, development, as well as the acoustic and timbral characteristics of the marimba in Ecuador.

### **About the marimba's controversy**

There is no interest in conducting an exhaustive analysis of the controversy surrounding the marimba in Guatemala. Rather, it is of interest to portray the concern of certain social groups to appropriate and falsely claim ownership of the instrument, in the pursuit of developing false pillars of identity. Throughout 1977, various groups of writers maintained their attention on the importance of constructing a monument to the marimba. Differing opinions, primarily based on ideological grounds, demonstrated that scientific and academic knowledge about the origin, evolution, and the role it played in Guatemalan society were pushed into the background amid this discussion. Julio Fausto Aguilera, one of the writers who opposed the character intended for this monument and the lyrical-poetic discourses surrounding it, managed to approach more precisely what is sought as a focus of identity in this instrument. However, the rest of the writers radically disagreed with his position and opted to support a false nationalism. Readers interested in knowing the outcome of this controversy can refer to the work of Mario López Mayoral (1978).

## **The marimba in literature**

The marimba has also been a source of inspiration for singing and exalting nationality and identity. Even though literary creation does not use strictly scientific parameters to reflect this identity, it can be observed that literary works referring to the marimba also have a marked tendency to create a false paternity around it. It is surprising the quantity of poems, stories, and novels where the marimba appears. These constitute the majority of works, rather than academic concerns to clarify the origin, evolution, transformation, and the role this instrument plays within Guatemalan society.

## **Marimba and society**

As observed, the marimba in Guatemala underwent a transformation of its characteristics, which allowed it to fulfill the development of new repertoires for new social occasions and new classes. From the marimba made of 'tecomates' or its variants, with functions and contexts deeply established in the Mayan world, to the mestizo double marimba, required the most profound reworkings.

Undoubtedly, the development of the double marimba was a result that occurred in different points of the region, almost simultaneously. The history has already been outlined, and rather, we are interested in emphasizing that much of what is observed here has a Central American impact.

The development of this double marimba not only allowed for the incorporation of new repertoires but also, on the international stage, proposed new musical forms. Known groups, as noted, traveled to Europe, the United States, and South America where they introduced the instrument developed with great success. The development of the marimba in the USA was largely due to the impact and teaching of some Guatemalan and Mexican masters in this country.

The degree of popularity that the instrument achieved among mestizos within this process continued to grow. Through it, the leading groups of society spoke, constructed their discourse, and built much of their social relationships. In the culmination of the appropriation of the instrument by a segment of society, there was an attempt to create a new voice of nationality that authentically replaced those European values that were either lacking or being imitated. It is no coincidence that this beautiful history ends or begins to conclude with Jesús Castillo, undoubtedly the best exponent of nationalists in music. At that time, the bourgeoisie did not have to fabricate a false paternity for the instrument; in a more intelligent and enlightened manner, they made it their discourse. Today, the state is unable to reclaim the remnants of this tradition.

With the development of the double marimba, a requirement was fulfilled, more than an ambition for erudition. There was a need to expand repertoires, gain access to new works, and create many others. 'Fox Trot', 'Pasos dobles', 'Swing'—the rhythms of the metropolises were reproduced in our dance halls. Cinemas and later circuses had their large marimbas, which later became orchestras. The Teatro Colón itself had one.

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## **Hemerography**

DECLARACION SOBRE OBLIGADO DE MARIMBA

-La Aurora: 11/12/1845.

LA MARIMBA DE LOS LEON

-La República: 22/4/1910

¿QUIEN INVENTO LA MARIMBA?

Felipe Estrada Paniagua

Diario de Centro América: 16/5/1911

¿QUIEN MEJORO LA PRIMITIVA MARIMBA?

-Diario de Centro América: 27/9/1911

¿DONDE TUVO SU ORIGEN LA MARIMBA?

-Manuel Aldad y Ganero

Diario de Centro América: 16/1/1914

MARIMBA LA GUATEMALTECA

-Diario de Centro América: 13/11/1915

LA GIRA ARTISTICA DE LOS MARIMBISTAS HURTADO CON EL MART- PIANO Y EL AUTOCTONO

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UNA MARIMBA GUATEMALTECA LLEVARA A EUROPA ARDIENTES NOTAS INDIGENAS

-El Imparcial: 3/3/1923

LA MARIMBA

-Revista Alma América: 1934.

LA FLOR DEL CAFE:

Eufonio Covas

- El Liberal Progresista: 12/12/1940

MARIMBA CUACHE

El Liberal Progresista: 10/5/1941