

The Confluence of
Folkloric Maraca Performance and Contemporary Artistry:

Assessing the Past, Present, and Inspiring the Future

by

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ABSTRACT

Venezuelan maraca playing is largely unknown to musicians with Western Art Music backgrounds. While some composers utilize the instrument and its associated performance practices, the resources available to learn about the subject are limited and scattered. Through research, observations, and studying with correspondences, this document will explore the vastness of Venezuelan musical concepts and maraca techniques to seek out common goals and generate a resource that is accessible to musicians and musicologists. A large part of this research will focus on the Contemporary Music in the Western tradition that has been inspired by Venezuelan maraca playing. I will explain the context in which this music is commonly found and how to apply it to a contemporary setting. The individuals I interviewed span a variety of backgrounds and expertise. All have extensive experience in Venezuelan maraca traditions. Their individual points of view will give unique perspectives to help affix the music of the past to the creation of music in the future. The limited resources on this subject inhibit education, performance quality, new music, and further research. Ultimately, my document and recordings will provide imperative examples to help develop a greater understanding of an understudied Venezuelan art form.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

First and foremost, this document focuses on Venezuelan maraca playing as it is used in Contemporary Western Art Music. In order to describe the preparation through which a performer must go, a cultural and folkloric context will be shown to provide a logical approach to maraca vocabulary. This is not research based on an in-depth ethno-musicological residency, and any intention would go beyond the scope of this document. However, there are a number of selected examples that have been transcribed for purposes of understanding the functions and roles of each instrument. This is a necessary step in developing a maraca vocabulary for performers and composers alike.

The purpose of this research is to create and inspire new art. This document evaluates recent works that already exist in Contemporary Western Art Music and the relationship with their folkloric heritage. A few works that have laid the foundation for this to happen are retraced to understand an approach to their performance and construction; and a composition written by the author is included which demonstrates how these theories can be put into practice. Technique and exercises are included not necessarily as a meticulous pedagogical resource, but rather, as a tool to realize this type of performance. Because much of the instruction exists as an oral tradition through a master-apprentice relationship, creating a methodology to this would realistically take many

years of studying abroad and one-on-one training with a master *maraquero*. This, of course, is not the priority of this document either. Many topical angles will be covered in an effort to understand an environment and initiate critical thought. Some of these areas will be perspectives of ethno-musicology, pedagogy, compositional analysis, sociology and a notation system proposal. The most important consideration that follows is the confluence of a folk and contemporary art form. Nonetheless, respectfully creating art by using the traditions of their indicative cultures is – and should *always* – be the most important consideration when developing anything of this nature. It is the author's hope and intention that any associations made to the Venezuelan or Brazilian culture in this document have been in intellectual deference – and this extends to art created in this same vein.

CHAPTER 2

FOLK MUSIC SETTING

Although this chapter will largely focus on the maracas' role in the folkloric music of Venezuela, other instruments of the ensemble will be included because of the significant relationship that exists between them. The presentation would only be fragmentary if the music of the entire ensemble were not discussed along with the maraca part. Developing and understanding the collision of folkloric and contemporary practices requires cognition of the ensemble members' roles, its music, and how it functions as a whole.

Instrument Fabrication

Venezuelan maracas are quite different from typical Latin Percussion rawhide or plastic maracas sold by most music manufacturers. Rawhide maracas, which are the most commonly found fabrication of maracas today in the United States, tend to be larger in size and a different shape; thus requiring different techniques to produce a consistent sound. Maracas constructed in Venezuela of the *joropo* style are typically hand made and are beautifully crafted instruments. The shell of the maraca is made from the fruit of *totumo* trees (or *taparo*), which grows into a sphere. The maker picks the fruit off the tree when it reaches the desirable size – this is why some maraca gourds are larger than others. The material inside the *tapara* (gourd or calabash) is often from the seeds of the

capacho plant.¹ These seeds are dried and hardened, thus creating the perfect material for resonating the inside of the *tapara*. Often the maracas are called *capachos* because of the important use of this plant's seeds.² Figure 2.1 shows the gourd broken open and two different types of seeds. The small seeds on the left are often called *espuma'e sapo* (frog eggs), however, they are seeds and not actual frog eggs. Their small size produces a softer sound beating the inside of the *tapara*; and with less residual effect, the resultant quality is a much cleaner and a tighter sound. The *espuma'e sapo* are much easier to control and they give a distinct sound quality to the instrument.

There are certainly many variations for fabricating the maracas – each version serving a different purpose for a different kind of music and ensemble. Consequently, this instrument carries broad implications on the style of music, as well as its associated region of the world. The artists that use Venezuelan maracas delineate certain brilliance in performance that can be attributed to the construction of the instrument, its sound, musical style of *joropo*, and virtuosic implications.

¹ Stephen Patrick Primatic, "Maracas in the Venezuelan Joropo: A Proposed Pedagogical Notational System." (D.M.A. diss., University of Georgia, 2004), 8-9.

² Alcides Rodriguez of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, interview by author, 26 March 2011, Atlanta, video recording.



Figure 2.1. Inside of maraca gourd and seeds of the *Capacho* plant.

It is the nature of the gourd shape that gives the Venezuelan maracas the ability to produce a dependable sound from the top and bottom of the gourd. This is particularly unique to *joropo* maracas, giving it the ability to access a range of timbres from virtually any part of the inside of the gourd. Unlike plastic or rawhide maracas, the *maraquero* can vary the inflections of *joropo* maracas based on technique and the musical performance. These maracas can fit within an ensemble without overpowering its sound, but sharply articulating its rhythm. This instrument has a different nature than its counterparts, which gives it a flexibility and advantage as a tool for expression.

Musical Dance Styles

Much like many cultures around the world, the folkloric music in Venezuela is mainly for dancing. While this document is not going to describe the movements of the dances, it will discuss the music associated with the tradition. The maracas fit in a complex rhythmic motif along with other instruments of the ensemble that strongly support the instrument or vocalist performing the melody. In order to understand the patterns of the *maraquero* and their musical mindset, an understanding of the participating instruments (and their role) must be established.

Transcriptions of recordings from some of the most respected Venezuelan and Colombian musicians are shown to give the scholarly individual a visual concept of how the ensemble interacts. Using musical notation developed as a component of Western Art Music, the transcriptions will demonstrate a limited concept incomparable to actual audio or visual recordings of the music. But the use of notation, however limited, can be a supportive agent for research and memory that rote teaching cannot achieve. The use of notation will also allow for newcomers to Venezuelan folkloric music to discover this music without spending their early life immersed in the culture.

The folkloric music of Venezuela as it is heard today stems from the past centuries of cultural integration and commingling. While many genres of music exist in Venezuela, this document will carefully examine the *joropo* and the Venezuelan *merengue* (not to be confused with the

Dominican Republic *merengue*). Both of these genres have played a significant role in the development of virtuosic maraca playing, allowing many opportunities for the performer to demonstrate technical skill, musical individuality, and improvisation that seems to profoundly parallel concepts of folk traditions and a cultural music in the United States: jazz. This genre in the U.S. relies heavily on its ability to form an ensemble at any given moment with newly acquainted musicians. These newly acquainted musicians will perform “standards” with each instrument having the possibility of improvising. This means that as a musician, you are required to know the traditional melodies, styles, forms, and techniques of your specific instrument; and individuality demonstrate this by improvising. The same idea is true for the folkloric music of Venezuela to be discussed: improvised music to a level of virtuosity.

In addition to these two styles of music from Venezuela, two ensembles are used as exemplars in these styles of playing: *Grupo Cimarrón* and *Ensamble Gurrufío*. Serving as musical guides for this author, they helped develop an understanding of *zoropo* and *merengue*. They were chosen for their virtuosity, musical representation, and musical connection to folk music and its contemporaneous use. Furthermore, the *maraqueros* of each group –Omar Edgar Fandiño Ramírez of *Cimarrón* and Juan Ernesto Laya of *Gurrufío* – are premier examples of modern maraca playing. While Maximo B. Teppa is known as a master *maraquero*

of the old style, Juan Ernesto Laya has initiated a modern style seen with most contemporary *maraqueros*.³

Other *maraqueros* performing in this style that are worth noting include Wilmer Montilla and Manuel Rangel. These two performers can be heard on many recordings and are among the most sought out *maraqueros* in Venezuela. Though they are not necessarily associated with a specific group like Ernesto, Montilla and Rangel provide their own style of high caliber performing. Ernesto's style of playing has been the major influence for this document – all technique, notation, scores, and recordings included use his playing as the model for their approach.

Joropo & Grupo Cimarrón

The Venezuelan *joropo*, as stated earlier, is a very popular traditional dance. It is considered the national dance of Venezuela despite its early negative association with being evil and perverse.⁴ *Joropo* is representative of Venezuela's national identity and highly integrated into their culture today. The musical aspect of this tradition continues to evolve by new, innovative and virtuosic ensembles, raising this style of performance to a new level of art.

³ Alcides Rodriguez of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, interview by author, 26 March 2011, Atlanta, video recording.

⁴ Javier Bolívar. "A Guide for Perception of Venezuelan Styles: Joropo, Vals, and Merengue." (Master's thesis, Bowling Green State University, 1997), 11-12.

Three distinct forms of *Joropo* found in separate regions of the country are: *joropo oriental*, *joropo llanero*, and *joropo tuyero*. Each style can be found on the northeastern coast, the plains, and the central region, respectively.⁵ This document will focus on the musical styles of *joropo oriental* and *joropo llanero* since both involve a virtuosic level of playing from the *maraquero*. *Joropo tuyero* is the only style in which the *maraquero* also sings, thus reducing the level of activity from the maraca part. Each of these styles of *joropo* is dependent upon where they are found within the country, though this is not always limited to the borders of Venezuela. *Joropo llanero*, literally translated *plainspeople*, extends to parts of bordering Colombia. The *llanero* is often thought of as a cowboy or farmer since the geographical area lends itself to that sort of lifestyle.

The instrumentation of contemporary ensembles fills the roles of melody, accompaniment, bass, and rhythm. As Western musicians, we can immediately understand what we hear when approaching Venezuelan music thanks to this familiar hierarchical structure. Although the more folkloric ensembles tend to adhere to a set instrumentation without substituting newer instruments, the contemporary ensembles are much more flexible and creative when it comes to instrumentation. Typically, the accompaniment is played by the *cuatro*, the double bass (*contrabajo*) supports with the bass part, and the rhythm is played by the maracas. The

⁵ Báez, Aquiles and Robert Koch, liner notes to *The Venezuelan Clarinet (El Clarinete Venezolano)*, Alcides Rodriguez, Alcides Rodriguez Productions 700261303055, Compact Disc, 2010.

cuatro, when compared to the guitar, is a smaller-bodied instrument with only four strings. The instrument is related to the Brazilian *cavaquinho* and shares a homogeneous sound quality. The *cuatro* is probably just as important as the melody since the instrument plays a pivotal role having both harmonic and rhythmic qualities. This accompaniment instrument and the maracas must be meticulously coordinated in order to create a stable rhythmic structure for the middle range of the ensemble. The melodic instrument is often different for each specific ensemble. Contemporary ensembles will often use flute, harp (*arpa*), mandolin (*mandolina*), *bandola*, or singers to perform the melody.

The *joropo* is always metrically in three counts, or two counts (in compound meter) depending upon your perception. It can be heard in a three-four time signature, with strong implications on a six-eight time signature. Instead of using a generic musical assumption, three transcribed excerpts are provided in order to demonstrate qualities shared among each ensemble. The musicians performing these transcribed examples are Venezuelan, all except for *Grupo Cimarrón*, who are Colombian and demonstrate how the music travels across borders. The maraca notation in Figures 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 are simply to describe the accentual emphasis to each measure and how it fits with the ensemble. It is not intended to show any nuances that a particular *maraquero* may use – maraca notation will be discussed in detail later in the document.

In Figure 2.2, the *arpa* (harp) contains a hemiola as part of the melody. This is consistent with many melodic instruments as a rhythmic device. The interesting rhythmic contrast is the macro-three versus the micro-three. The macro-three is referring to the hemiola, or any rhythm that takes several bars to hear its entirety. It is usually a simple motive but is not necessarily bound by measures. The micro-three emphasizes each meter by its syncopation. However, in figure 2.2, the rhythm appears to stress the downbeats of every other measure (mm. 5-8). Perhaps the emphasis of every other downbeat is structurally similar to the alternating pattern of macro and micro rhythms. The macro and micro concept also seems to apply to the pitch material being used: macro rhythms correspond with arpeggios while micro rhythms correspond with conjunct movement. This demonstrates the great significance of rhythm in *joropo* throughout the ensemble. Improvisation is highly valued as an experiment in rhythmic dexterity rather than sophisticated melodies. *Joropo* provides the framework necessary for this type of improvisation to become a reality.

0:00" Los Dimantes performed by
Grupo Cimarrón

♩. = 76

The musical score for "Los Dimantes" is written for four instruments: Arpa, Cuatro, Maracas, and Bass. The time signature is 3/4, and the key signature has one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked as ♩. = 76. The score is divided into three systems of five measures each. The Arpa part has a melodic line with some chords. The Cuatro and Maracas parts have a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Bass part has a simple bass line. Chords A7, D, and G are indicated above the Cuatro staff in various measures.

Figure 2.2. Excerpt of *Los Dimantes* performed by Grupo Cimarrón.

Figure 2.3 is an important example because it illustrates a *seis por derecho*, or “six to the right.”⁶ Notice that this example is written in six-eight rather than three-four meter. Either one is technically correct since folk music is rarely written down in the first place. But the six-eight does seem to draw attention to the *cuatro* and maracas because of their rhythmic groupings. All the voices except the melody are engaged in the

⁶ Edward Harrison, “Joropo Maraca Playing,” *Modern Drummer* (October 1989): 76.

same relationship as other *joropo* styles except that everything is displaced one quarter-note. The melody, as anticipated, is moving in and out of the theorized time signature.

0:40" Seis por derecho performed by
Cheo Hurtado

♩. = c. 70

The musical score for "Seis por derecho" is written for four instruments: Arpa, Cuatro, Maracas, and Bass. The time signature is 6/8, and the key signature has one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked as ♩. = c. 70. The score is divided into three systems, each containing four staves. The Arpa part has a melodic line with some rests. The Cuatro part has a rhythmic pattern with chords A7, D, G, and A7. The Maracas part has a steady eighth-note pattern. The Bass part has a simple bass line.

Figure 2.3 Excerpt of *Seis por derecho* performed by Cheo Hurtado.

Many artists including *Ensamble Gurrufío* and Alcides Rodriguez have recorded “El Cruzao”. Figure 2.4 is an excerpt from Rodriguez’s version; however, the melody and style usually remain the same for many recordings. This melody tends to use the macro and micro concept as the

earlier example (figure 2.1). Of course the alternation of these patterns are not the same as before, but their occurrences are rather clear.

written by
Ricardo Sandoval
performed by
Alcides Rodriguez

El Cruzao

0:00"
♩. = c. 84

Clarinet in Bb

Cuatro

Maracas

Bass

Cl.

Cuatro

Maracas

Bass

Figure 2.4 Excerpt of *El Cruzao* performed by Alcides Rodriguez.

It is easy to see the structural patterns that support the melody in these examples. Examining the common traits of similar music, we can begin to understand the important elements that define a *joropo*. This music extends across borders as evident by the same elements in use by Colombian and Venezuelan musicians. Although, it should be understood that these transcriptions focus more on an accurate depiction of the melody and bass, while avoiding many of the embellishments in the *cuatro* and maracas. In addition to the accompaniment patterns that usually

indicate meter, rhythmic emphasis, and harmonic progression, the melody can also deconstruct the sense of established structure. Measure ten of figure 2.5 shows an ambiguous priority of the time signature in three-four or six-eight. If the meter is in three, then the rhythm appears on all strong beats of the measure except every other down beat. If the meter is in six, then the rhythm is reminiscent of an African bell pattern.⁷ Neither one really seems to make things any easier than the other – it tends to create new problems when trying to decipher syncopation issues interpreted using one time signature (figure 2.6).

0:00" El Cruzao written by
Ricardo Sandoval
performed by
Alcides Rodriguez

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 84$

Figure 2.5 Melodic excerpt of *El Cruzao*.

Figure 2.6 Metrical comparison of *El Cruzao*.

gankogui from *Atsia*

7 hi 12 x x x x x x x x ||

low 8

There are two, very important qualities to notice about all of these examples. First is the accompaniment patterns used by the maracas, *cuatro*, and bass. There is an innate pairing of the maracas and *cuatro* because of their rhythmic nuances. In the maraca notation used in figures 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4, there is a noticeable pattern of 2 + 1 or *right-right-left*. The third note of the pattern is played with a different hand and is to be heard differently. Just like the *cuatro*, where the third note of the pattern is played as a muted stroke and only produces a rhythmic quality. This pairing remains consistent with the *Seis por Derecho* style of music – the pattern shifts one note so the muted stroke is at the beginning. The bass complements the middle and high frequency sounds with its rhythmic interaction as well. In figures 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4, notice that the bass part almost always plays when the muted *cuatro* stroke and single stroke of the maracas do not. The few exceptions of this are when the bass player embellishes a line by playing all three quarter notes in a measure.

The other important quality is the similarities in melodic construction. With immersion into the Venezuelan culture and listening to this music almost every day for years, one could certainly be able to determine if a melody is fit for *joropo* or not. When examining the melodies included in this document, it does not take much effort to see the musical devices common to them all. This is now discovering a foundation for improvising. Later in this document, when technique and transcriptions are discussed, it will become clearer in understanding the

mindset of the performer. The techniques used to create logical transitions and musical artistry will be familiar because of its interaction with common melodic devices. This concept is very much parallel to a jazz drummer and their interaction with the melody and its commonalities across the genre. The role of the *maraquero* becomes two-fold, just like the *cuatro*. The maracas now must interact with the melody while maintaining the rhythmic nuances and stability of the ensemble.

Grupo Cimarrón is an excellent example of the *joropo* as it exists in Colombia. This ensemble was founded by Carlos Rojas Hernández to preserve the tradition of *música llanera*. As the consultant in educational development to the Music Division of Colombia's Ministry of Culture, Rojas has played a crucial role in research and education of this folkloric music.⁸ Because of the educational approach to the formation of this ensemble, *Grupo Cimarrón* has produced two Smithsonian Folkways recordings: *Sí, Soy Llanero: Joropo Music from the Orinoco Plains of Colombia* (2004) and *¡Cimarrón!: Joropo Music from the Plains of Colombia* (2011). The personnel were different for these two recordings with the exception of Rojas.

Created by ranching people with a love of cattle, horses, music, and dance, the *joropo*'s driving rhythm and percussive stringed-instrument sound draw from centuries-old Spanish, African, and New World musical traditions that contributed to the region's unique *mestizo*

⁸ Daniel Sheehy, liner notes to *Sí, Soy Llanero: Joropo Music from the Orinoco Plains of Colombia*, Grupo Cimarrón, Smithsonian Folkways 40515, CD, 2004.

(mixed) culture.⁹

Cimarrón's motives are to preserve a folk tradition from rural communities. A lot of their work has been recorded and documented by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. A remarkable step in folkloric research it has brought deserved attention to a marvelous art form.

Merengue & Ensamble Gurrufío

The Venezuelan *Merengue*, like the *Joropo*, is a dance. But this particular *merengue* is not to be confused with the Dominican Republic *merengue*, which has a very salient emphasis on each strong beat. The Venezuelan *Merengue* is performed with a distinct lilt and has caused much debate among scholars about the correct notation of this style of music.¹⁰ This became a popular dance in Caracas during the 1920s that spread to many parts of Venezuela.¹¹ Although it has not experienced the popularity of *joropo*, the Venezuelan *Merengue* has become a sophisticated and virtuosic art form with many contemporary Venezuelan ensembles adopting this difficult style of music into their performances.

⁹ Carlos Rojas and Daniel Sheehy, liner notes to *Sí, Soy Llanero: Joropo Music from the Orinoco Plains of Colombia*, Grupo Cimarrón, Smithsonian Folkways 40515, CD, 2004.

¹⁰ Javier Bolívar, "A Guide for Perception of Venezuelan Styles: Joropo, Vals, and Merengue" (Master's thesis, Bowling Green State University, 1997), 18.

¹¹ Báez, Aquiles and Robert Koch, liner notes to *The Venezuelan Clarinet (El Clarinete Venezolano)*, Alcides Rodriguez, Alcides Rodriguez Productions 700261303055, CD, 2010.

The issue of notation ranges from many different interpretations but the common agreement is that there is an emphasis on the first and fifth note. The emphasis may be understood as an accent or an elongation, but the meter is considered to be irregular, which remains consistent with accompanying the irregularity of the dance.¹² This demonstrates the paradox of music notation since it is largely unable to capture the nuances of rhythmic interpretation that occur on a micro-fractional level. But on the other hand, using music notation to transcribe this folkloric music can give performers and composers, especially of the Western Art tradition, an assimilation of a music developed outside of their accessible culture.

Figure 2.7 illustrates the three common interpretations of the *merengue* notation.

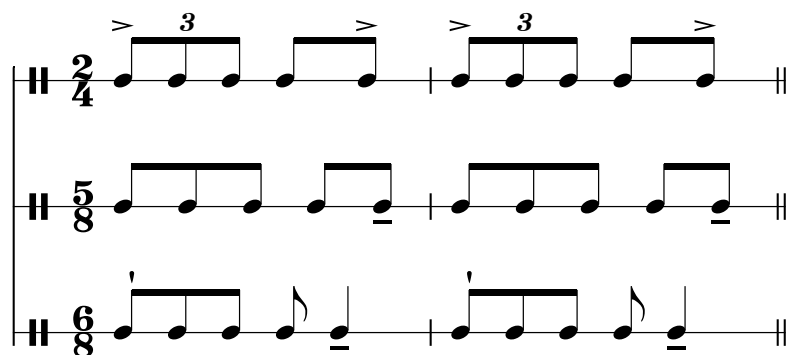


Figure 2.7 Metrical interpretations of the Venezuelan *Merengue*.

Perhaps the actual Venezuelan *Merengue* is a combination of all of these, or maybe it lies somewhere in the “cracks” of these different examples. If the *merengue* is related to the *joropo*, then maybe it is appropriate to

¹² Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, *La música folklórica de Venezuela* (Caracas, Venezuela: Monte Avila Editores, C.A., 1977), 222-24.

understand the *merengue* as a “cut-off” *joropo* – this would give a greater emphasis for the interpretation that the music is in five-eight with a lilt that musical notation is unable to capture. For the sake of consistency and how the contemporary music fits metrically, this document will be notating the *merengue* and all transcribed examples of it in five-eight.

Ensamble Gurrufio established themselves as one of the premier groups representing modern-day Venezuelan folkloric music. The group features an astounding knack for virtuosity and allows for individual members to display that skill by embracing improvisation in their performances. The group has evolved over time but are most known for being a quartet: flute, *cuatro*, maracas, and upright bass. The performers are Luis Julio Toro, Cheo Hurtado, Juan Ernesto Laya, and David Peña respectively. This group has extensively toured internationally and released many recordings. Each member has a distinct style and extreme virtuosity of their own. In particular, Juan Ernesto Laya has had an exceptional solo career with evidence of winning the first place prize as the best maracas player at the International Festival of Music from the Plains, held in Villavicencio, Colombia between 1995 and 1998.¹³ His brilliant solo performance seen at the beginning of the video of their fifteen-year anniversary inspired many in the development of a musical style on maracas. In addition to using the video performances as a resource, this document closely follows prime examples of *merengue* recorded and

¹³ Ensamble Gurrufio, “Juan Ernesto Laya.” <http://ensamlegurrufio.com.ve/> (accessed February 23, 2011).

performed by *Ensamble Gurrufío*. These examples include titles, “Ay Compa’e” (*merengue*) and “El Conejito” (*merengue*). *Joropo* music is fairly easy to obtain. Many recordings by Venezuelan artists are available in the United States through online sources; and many of these recordings will have some of the best *maraqueros* performing on them (Juan Ernesto Laya, Wilmer Montilla, and Manuel Rangel). However, performances of Venezuelan *merengue* are more difficult to find and for this reason, *Ensamble Gurrufío* was chosen to represent more *merengue* music than other the other selected musicians.

“Ay Compa’e” is the first recording you hear when visiting *Ensamble Gurrufío*’s website. This is very indicative of the group’s mantra and contains a large palette of expression by the *maraquero*. First, it establishes a five-eight pattern that Laya will use for most of the tune and other *merengues*; second, Laya demonstrates an alternative *merengue* pattern to accompany new musical material; last, the ensemble explores music in four-beat patterns rather than the traditional five or three/six.¹⁴ This recording provided much of the vocabulary and inspiration for realizing a contemporary maraca performance. After meticulous transcription and diligent practice, the author has incorporated all three of these patterns into his performance of Javier Alvarez’s *Temazcal*.

¹⁴ See Chapter 3, *Transcriptions* for the maraca patterns.

Ay Compa'e

0:05" performed by
Ensamble Gurrufio

♩ ≈ 170

The musical score for 'Ay Compa'e' is presented in two systems. The first system shows the initial measures with a tempo marking of approximately 170 beats per minute. The second system continues the melody and bass line. The notation includes various rhythmic values such as eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests, characteristic of the 5/8 time signature. A '8va' marking is visible in the first measure of the bass staff, indicating an octave shift.

Figure 2.8 Melody with bass from “Ay Compa’e.”

“Ay Compa’e” has an arpeggiated melody that clearly defines the three-plus-two groupings within each five-eighth measure (figure 2.8). The simple nature of the melody offers the space of rhythmic embellishment from the other performers, especially in the bass. While it is easy to understand what the *maraquero* is playing with this melody, it is also easy to hear when the pattern is ornamented with rhythmic resourcefulness. As expected, the *cuatro* is closely aligned with the maracas. Since the maracas give a clear three-plus-two pattern, the *cuatro* also gives the same pattern with an occasional muted stroke marking the beginning of these groups (figure 2.9).

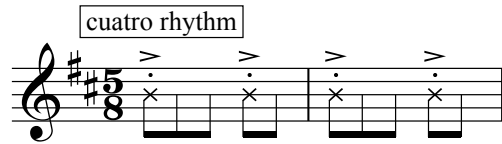


Figure 2.9 Occasional implied *cuatro* rhythm from “Ay Compa’e.”

Peculiarly, this rhythmical phenomenon in Venezuelan *merengue* produces some strange interpretations of the odd five-eight meter. These anomalies may simply be a matter of aesthetics; perhaps *merengues* are performed with enthusiastic pushing from the bass. This would be much like American jazz bands, in which case the saxophones all may play behind the beat in order to create a classic Count Basie swing feeling. But if you notice how the melody and bass line up from figure 2.8, it seems to suggest that the bass is wildly deviating from any sort of five-eight grouping. There are rhythmically unison moments that assure the listener that the ensemble is still intact, but what are the musical roles here? Three possible hypotheses could be at work here:

1. The transcription is exactly what was intended and the role of the bass player has been elevated to a dexterous level, elevating folkloric music with contemporary technical skill. This would also suggest that the bass player is given much more freedom since the rest of the ensemble appears to be showing a clear division of five-eight.
2. The bass player is merely pushing the tempo and playing ahead of the beat. Therefore, an adjusted and accurate transcription would be represented by figure 2.10.

3. The true Venezuelan *merengue* comes from a sense of intuition that is an abridged *joropo*. This *merengue* only exists as a derivative of *joropo* and should not be understood in five-eight; perhaps a rhythmic clairvoyance that occurs as a musical phenomenon. If this is the case, then the shortcomings of musical notation are exposed.

0:05"
♩ ≈ 170

Flute

Bass

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Ay Compa'e". It consists of two staves: Flute (treble clef) and Bass (bass clef). The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 5/8. A tempo marking of "♩ ≈ 170" is present. The score is divided into three systems. In the first system, the Bass staff has a measure with a dotted quarter note and an eighth note, which is highlighted with a red box. In the second system, the Bass staff has two measures with eighth notes, both highlighted with red boxes. In the third system, the Bass staff has two measures with eighth notes, both highlighted with red boxes. The Flute staff contains various melodic lines throughout the piece.

Figure 2.10 “Ay Compa’e” with adjusted bass rhythm marked by red boxes.

Consider the adjusted bass rhythm from figure 2.10. The sections that have been altered now match the rhythmic inflection as well as the harmonic development. This adjustment now satisfies Western music’s theoretical practices much better than the original. But is this an incorrect hypothesis? Is this presumption to satisfy the expectations of a particular audience and musicological literacy, or is this idea steeped in Venezuelan culture? Has this adjusted transcription merely exploited and devalued an art form that another culture has perfected? Perhaps this is the simple

beauty and mystique of the Venezuelan *merengue* and why it is so captivating to a listener. The uncharted nature of this style and the inability to illustrate it is what makes this music so winsome.

“Ay Compa’e” has also been recorded with *Orquesta Sinfónica Gran Mariscal de Ayacucho*.¹⁵ This had to be arranged to add the orchestral backgrounds but the original version that *Ensamble Gurrufío* performs is left largely intact. When comparing the bass part in this version to the one transcribed from figure 2.8, it is heard much more clearly in a five-eight pattern. The part is identical in many sections but the version with orchestra gives a better indication of metrical effect. This bass pattern is what one may have predicted: emphasis on beats one, three, and five for each measure. The bassist’s decision to depart from his extensive embellishments suggests that it was based on securing a cohesive performance with a larger ensemble.

The other *merengue* taken from *Ensamble Gurrufío* is “El Conejito.” While the melody is not as simple as “Ay Compa’e,” it still denotes the quintessential three-plus-two pattern of the Venezuelan *merengue*. The entire ensemble keeps to a typical pattern that outlines each five-eight measure. This, in contrast to “Ay Compa’e,” could possibly be due to the fact that “El Conejito” has much more space in the melody, which may alienate the listener if the bass player is too adventurous with

¹⁵ Ensamble Gurrufío, *Orquesta Sinfónica Gran Mariscal de Ayacucho*, Caracas, Venezuela FD 25299388, Compact Disc, 1999.

his rhythms. Intriguingly, the melody from figure 2.12 is heard before the melody from figure 2.11. Figure 2.11 also happens to be the main melody throughout the tune, which is where figure 2.12 has derived the material for its retrograde quality. This clever use of a musical device gives evidence of the talented arranging capability of *Ensamble Gurrufio*.



Figure 2.11 Main melody with *cuatro* rhythm from “El Conejito.”

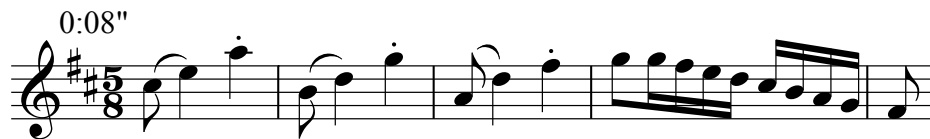


Figure 2.12 Retrograde motive before the main melody from “El Conejito.”

A significant quality about both of these *merengues* – “Ay Compa’e” and “El Conejito” – is the role of the *cuatro*. Figure 2.11 shows how the muted accents fit within the five-eight meter. As mentioned before, the maracas and *cuatro* share an intrinsic relationship as the core of the ensemble. This relationship should quickly be observed in order to understand the rhythmic feel, as well as highlight phrases and their cadential moments. The importance of knowing the melody is to aid in developing a musical maraca performance. A performance based on demonstrating one’s vast vocabulary certainly does not have musical intentions, but sculpting that vocabulary to accompany a musical melody

has artistic quality. This artistic quality should regularly be the aspiration, whether it is folk music or contemporary music.

CHAPTER 3

TECHNIQUE

Rather than suggest very particular techniques that close off any chance of different interpretations, this document will present many different understandings of technique in addition to their nuances. The Brazilian *caxixí* will shortly be discussed because of its similar idiom to the Venezuelan maracas. With no formal pedagogical resources available to teach technique or interpretation, instruction was traditionally passed down from a master to an apprentice. Over months (and sometimes years), student *maraqueros* listen and imitate to master their instrument. In stark contrast to the formal training that a typical Western musician could receive, it is extremely difficult to capture the granular time frame on which a detailed technical approach so heavily relies. However, percussionists often reap the benefits of both worlds – formal training on certain instruments while still living on the edge of the musical evolutionary process:

The notion is that the forces of nature are more brutal at the edges of a communal population; therefore they exact a great need on the part of individuals on the fringe to adapt. At the edge everything is rawer and less certain: space seems larger but poorly mapped, possibilities appear greater but are only vaguely defined. I could not stop myself from making the leap. In the community of musicians, were we percussionists necessarily more adaptable because we were living at the edge of the herd?¹⁶

¹⁶ Steven Schick, *The Percussionist's Art: Same Bed, Different Dreams* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 79.

In essence, percussionists are constantly faced with new dilemmas. Instrument set-ups, mallet choices, or even the musical notation itself change from piece to piece. The technique of the Venezuelan maracas offers new dilemmas as well, including the musical notation (or lack thereof) and controlling inertia in order to control articulations.

Physical Space – Visual Appeal

Performing on an instrument that gives little to no resistance is often one of the biggest kinesthetic challenges a percussionist must overcome. Idiophones that fully enclose their initiating implements (rattles, maracas, shakers, etc.) are among the most difficult instruments to manipulate. A snare drum resting on a non-wavering stand voids the effect of gravity, but the performer can allow the sticks to work with gravity. Different combinations of the implements and tension of the skin produce different kinesthetic results. Although these percussion instruments require a physical space to navigate them, it is rare that the navigation is so interconnected with inflecting the sound as in the case of Venezuelan maracas. The physical space around the performer becomes a palette of colors and is not sharply concentrated on a horizontal plane. The visual aspect is just as much a part of producing sound as is the physical technique.

The physical toll on a performer's body can certainly have a negative effect. With the absence of true resistance, most of the motion

will be initiated from the elbow or some part of the body, and this constant redirection can quickly fatigue a performer. But by observing the laws of physics and remembering early lessons on snare drum or timpani, one will quickly learn: the slower the speed, the larger the motion – the faster the speed, the smaller the motion. As well, large motions should be related to large muscle groups and small motions to small muscle groups. Shifting muscle groups gives the chance for rest and reenergizing; this is a key element with any performance art.

Playing the Venezuelan maracas is exceptionally kinesthetic – there is nothing to aim for, nothing to tune, and nothing to necessarily prepare beforehand. Sometimes the sound is slightly altered for a visual variance on the technique. The facets of sight and sound are so affixed to one another that audio recordings are aesthetically inferior (even with highly virtuosic playing). This is not necessarily a visual aid in entertainment quality, but truly a visual aid in artistic quality.

Caxixí

The *caxixí*, although not found in the Venezuelan tradition, are similar to maracas in a number of ways. Just as the maracas currently exist at the edge of an art form previously set in motion, the *caxixí* exist near this juncture thanks to certain musicians: Naná Vasconcelos by providing a framework and a direction for this ancient instrument; and Dr. Gregory Beyer for his use of *caxixí* in *Bahian Counterpoint* modeled after

Steve Reich's *Electric Counterpoint*. This is certainly not a comprehensive list since the focus of this document is not on this instrument, but for the purpose of expanding an instrument's purview, the author has specifically included these two musicians. From discussions with Beyer, the author discovered that the inspiration for the technique to play *caxixí* in *Bahian Counterpoint* originally came from Vasconcelos. Although Naná Vasconcelos did create new settings and music for folk instruments of Brazil, it is Greg Beyer that continues to push the instrument (particular the *berimbau* and its companion, *caxixí*) into new spheres of contemporary music. With *Bahian Counterpoint*, Beyer has successfully adapted a modern compositional style and technique to an ancient Brazilian instrument with deep roots to Africa. This is important because it meets at the middle of Brazilian and Western Art musical languages. It is a familiar introduction for demonstrating the vast capabilities of a folk instrument. Intriguingly, the entire second movement of Beyer's work is composed of 'non-pitched' sounds, with a rhythmic foundation provided by the *caxixí*. This substantiates the concept of the *caxixí* being 'mature' enough to be explored in its own work of art, rather than a single movement. Maracas appear to have followed a similar path before a solo with electronics work was written. But unique to *caxixí* is that the instrument typically does not exist as a stand-alone part in an ensemble the way Venezuelan maracas do. Perhaps this is where further experimentation is appropriate to explore new possibilities.

The technique required to perform the second movement of *Bahian Counterpoint* is shown in figure 3.1. The specific sound quality produced from the *caxixí* requires a calculated control of the angle and weight of the instrument. This is unlike the way it is used to accompany *berimbau*, which is usually one basket in the same hand that holds the *baqueta*, limiting the precise timbral inflections that *caxixí* are capable of producing. The materials used to make a *caxixí* basket are what allow it to have distinct articulations. Typically, the instrument's construction consists of woven materials joined with a small gourd bottom. The accents are easily heard because of the bright timbre produced with the beads against the gourd; while the subtler and less defined sound of the beads striking the woven materials are in sharp contrast to the accent sounds. Forward and backward movements will easily produce accents while turning the instrument sideways will give it a subdued texture.

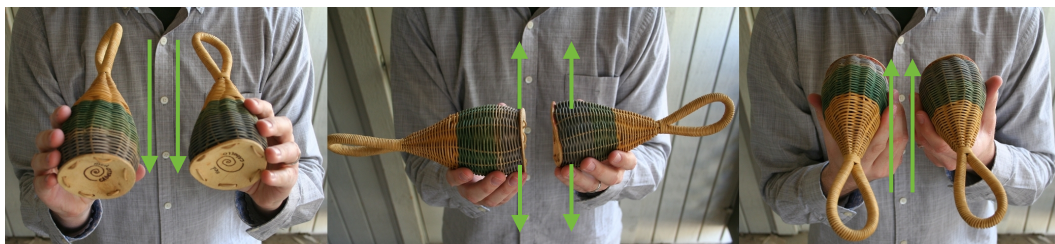


Figure 3.1 Pictures describing *caxixí* motion.

Movement two of *Bahian Counterpoint* requires the execution of this unique technique applied to *caxixí*. In the musical score, however, the notation does not appear to be so unique (figure 3.1). Thankfully, through the meetings and instruction with Beyer on his work, the author was able

to gain an understanding of this technique without prior knowledge. There are only three types of articulations required of the *caxixí* for the entirety of movement two. However, the performer will only play accented and non-accented notes, while excluding the tenuto articulations in the solo part. The unique textures of the *caxixí* baskets greatly assist in realizing this accent pattern from figure 3.2. Assuming that beats one, two, three, four and their half-way points are performed with a forward motion, then all of the accents will be a down-stroke with natural gravitational pull. But, that means all of the others (*e* & *a*) are up-strokes occurring at the top of the velocity arc. This can provide a natural human element to playing the instrument and give it an identity – as opposed to each articulation strictly in time and distorting the sense of strong beats. Problematically, the accents that coincide with the up-strokes are weaker for two reasons: 1) they do not have gravitational pull and momentum working in tandem, and 2) the instrument itself is now facing away from the listener. Of course this can be solved with strategic microphone placement, but an instrument made of earthly materials such as the *caxixí* should have a pedigree of inherited stage presence. However, performers can wisely make use of the prodigious visual aspect of playing percussion in order to make up for what could be considered a technical flaw. After all, this is almost as much of a visual art as it is an aural one.



Figure 3.2 Measure two of movement two of *Bahian Counterpoint*.

For Performers

The paradigmatic formula for performers to learn something is repetition. Often this early practice involves habitual, rigid movements with very little to do with music itself. The goal is usually to be able to develop a skill set that can be called upon and delivered accurately at any moment. This skill set will ultimately become the musician's emissary of musical expression after the metaphysical and somatic repetitions integrate. But developing these skills and techniques with a pedantic routine will help articulate the expression of the human mind.

Exercises

This section will demonstrate some material used to address specific techniques and articulations. A practical approach to developing a consistent sound is to use methods and sources generally used for other percussion instruments; but adapting them for the maracas. Using a portion of Ted Reed's *Syncopation*, one may find a symmetrical approach to developing down-strokes and up-strokes for both hands.¹⁷ Figure 3.3 concisely explains the notation for the exercises. The top line is given to

¹⁷ This idea is attributed to Greg Beyer.

the right hand and the bottom line is given to the left hand. For both hands, the down-strokes land *on* the line while the up-strokes are above the line.

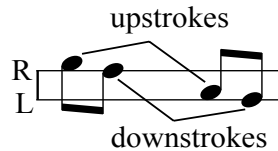


Figure 3.3 Explanation of notation for maraca exercises.

Certainly, this is exceedingly simplified and does not take into account many of the other strokes, combination of strokes, or nuances that would be difficult to notate in the first place. But for the sake of kinesthetic development of the basic strokes, this method is preferred.

Using the exercises taken from Ted Reed's *Syncopation*, the repetition that each hand receives will greatly reinforce the motion required to produce a consistently articulated sound.¹⁸ The major focus of activity is to achieve a pointed sound, without unwanted noises before or after the main attack. Figure 3.4 shows how to coordinate the rhythms in order to suit the maraca techniques. These exercises should be practiced with a metronome and along with music.

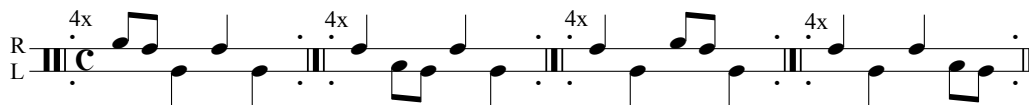


Figure 3.4 Rhythm from *Syncopation* applied to maraca technique.

¹⁸ Ted Reed, *Progressive Steps to Syncopation for the Modern Drummer* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., 1996), 10.

Practicing with a metronome will help to understand how much inertia to use in order to create an even and balanced sound. This is also the time to experiment with the amount of space needed to play the instrument – use the most space possible depending on the speed to help develop control and a full sound. Practicing along with music will force the *maraquero* to become flexible with the weight of the seeds as well as develop the ear, splitting the focus between the maracas and the music recording. Because this instrument is so heavily based on the muscle memory of weight and inertia, it is important to not only develop the ear, but also develop the subtle changes in momentum that may occur during live performance. Once again, kinesthetic development is very important in order to make mid-air adjustments to the momentum of the seeds.

Controversially, rigid practicing of up and down-strokes may prove to be of some use during the early stages of learning to play the instrument. Getting used to a motion that one has never executed may create a certain stage of infancy, or time period of impractical emphasis in order to flatten out the learning curve. This is the purpose of the exercise from figure 3.3 with an accompanying metronome.

A more realistic adaptation of *Syncopation* exercises is shown in figure 3.5. Instead of starting with an up-stroke (figure 3.4), it begins with a down-stroke while the other hand immediately responds with an up-stroke. This is common in *joropo* and *merengue* patterns in Venezuela. Problematic strokes for the maracas are often the very first one, and it is

the second stroke (down) that is naturally a stronger sound. The down-stroke is where the seeds are at rest and become settled; and achieving a consistent, pointed sound will probably progress much more quickly than the up-stroke. It will sometimes be useful to practice an exercise that deliberately forces a strong up-stroke, like figure 3.4. Antithetically, the first stroke on the snare drum is often the strongest, and players have to develop the second stroke (or rebound).

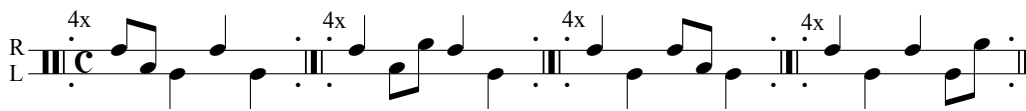


Figure 3.5 Rhythm from *Syncopation* with different ‘sticking’.

This is not an exhaustive application to these exercises by any means, but it should provide some basic material to start. A useful way to practice these exercises is to make sure the down-strokes are a single, staccato sound – keeping the seeds from first striking the top part of the gourd, resulting in what may sound like a grace note. However, some may disagree that this is even a practical way to approach maraca playing. Essentially, it comes down to the learning style of the aspiring *maraquero*. Preparation for a contemporary work requires a potpourri of resources and techniques that are often void of pedagogical tradition. With many years outside of Venezuelan culture and without a maraca master, a Western musician must procure what is available.

Transcribing and Imitating

Transcribing is learning a new language. Language, as we understand it, is filled with inflections, emphasis, mood, and tone. As humans, we acknowledge that these details of speech are lost when they are written on paper. But the shortcomings of writing are just as compromising as the shortcomings of illiteracy. Perhaps an exaggerated viewpoint, but in many ways this holds true for music. Transcribing is a portal into the musician's mind and can not only help decipher what is being played, but can help understand why it was played and the importance of where it was placed.

A particular instance in this practice is analyzing what Juan Ernesto Laya played in "Ay Compa'e" seen in figure 3.6. Example one is established as the predominant maraca pattern for five-eight and is used for most of *Ensamble Gurrufio's merengues*. Two is used as a variant on this pattern, particularly when the flute sustains a quick ostinato on a single note in its high register. Three is exceptional in that it is not in a *merengue* nor *joropo* meter. This example is also evocative of the *guiro* pattern in a Cuban *cha-cha*.

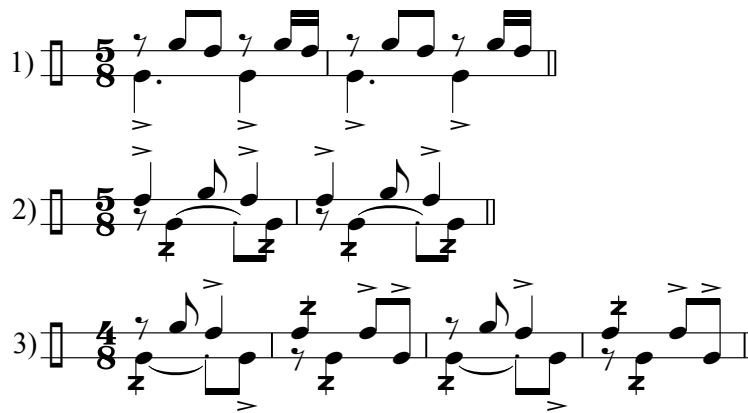


Figure 3.6 Three maraca patterns used in *Gurrufío*'s "Ay Compa'e."

Transcribing is undoubtedly important, but imitating is another element of this idea. Imitating gives the musician a chance to understand the mechanics of technique and sound. Practicing a transcription along with its recording is part of this process of imitation. To hear and feel the music within your body helps to solidify the direction of each musical phrase. Imitating the physical motion of another performer can help jumpstart new discoveries with technique and sound. Changing patterns to accompany a new musical idea develops a musical consciousness to a new style and new technique. Through this new, evolving intuition, one may begin to develop a distinct way of playing for contemporary maraca performance.

Figure 3.6 carries a lot of significance because it shows examples of new meters outside of the traditional *zoropo*. Modern performance in the Western practice will certainly encompass explorations of these different meters. Since this instrument has been moving from an accompanying role

to a solo role, using these resources will help develop a lyrical approach to maraca playing.

CHAPTER 4

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC SETTING

Contemporary composers certainly have not omitted maracas when considering percussion orchestration. The ancient instrument has been included in Western Art Music compositions for decades but no standardized notation or technique existed. Most composers had to develop their own notation for its use while performers had to invent techniques to render the composers' intentions. Given the many centuries the maracas have been in use, in whatever form they existed, their development by most composers was nominal at best. Composers frequently created music based on what they could physically do with the instrument or what they have seen another performer do. With limited access to resources about Venezuelan maracas, it is understandable why such an old instrument has floundered in an otherwise flourishing musical environment. Before 1984, a significant piece of music that featured this instrument did not exist. As was so often the case, pieces written by compositional pioneers required technical and musical innovations, like the developments in instrument design and performance practice. Performers often rely heavily on composers to expand the capabilities of their instruments and to develop advanced techniques for expressing new music. By becoming engaged and proactive musicians in a creative world, however, we no longer have to wait for others to push the limits of our art. In this particular case, the tradition of virtuosic maraca performance is

well established, if somewhat isolated, and available to provide a basis for any new developments that may occur. The obvious problem is having access to this tradition and gaining an understanding of the culture from which it derived in order to respectfully bring it into a contemporary Western Art Music setting.

Maracas in Percussion Works

The ratio of chamber to solo use with maracas is undoubtedly disproportionate weighted toward chamber music. This should come as no surprise since it has mainly been used as a simple, additive element. Besides the instances in which maracas have been used in well-known chamber works – Edgard Varèse’s *Ionisation* and George Crumb’s *Music for a Summer Evening* – composers have utilized this instrument in a solo manner. In Akira Nishimura’s *Concerto for Timpani and Five Percussionists*, the solo timpanist is asked to use maracas in place of mallets during the final section of the piece. First, the soloist uses the maracas independent of the timpani, and then moves to playing a similar pattern on the heads of the timpani. The way the maracas are used would indicate that the performer would want to use a pair with durable encasings, which would not be a gourd-constructed pair from Venezuela. Nishimura’s soloist replaces mallets with maracas to add a texture to the sound in a skillful way. It is not necessarily a virtuosic display of maraca dexterity, but a more significant illustration than prior works.

Despite the attention given to this ancient instrument in contemporary works, it has essentially been limited to accents, non-accents, and shake rolls; that is, until Javier Alvarez's *Temazcal* came into existence. With the new sophistication of performing *Temazcal*, this created a paradigm shift for the interpretation of maraca playing. This paradigm introduced a new folk tradition to percussionists – through a contemporary aesthetic. Some have taken on the responsible process of using contemporary maraca techniques to re-develop the parts from influential contemporary percussion works like *Ionisation*.

Ed Harrison has often given clinics on a new performance style for the maraca part from Edgard Varèse's *Ionisation*. He has rewritten some of the 'stickings' in order to produce a more accurate realization of what Varèse wrote (figure 4.1). A typical first encounter with maracas is to use them in a similar way as sticks or mallets – "air drumming" is probably most appropriate to describe this. Of course on the end of the sticks are the attached dried plant materials with the seeds inside. This motion (back to front) of the seeds produces a distinctly different sound from the seeds hitting top to bottom. Cleverly, Harrison combines these strokes to change the timbre of the instrument, but more importantly it can provide much needed volume when surrounded by twelve other performers with multi-instrumental setups. He also uses this motion to bring out the accented notes. In conjunction with the new sound, a movement within the position

of the hand must take place. As before, the visual impact has proven to be a viable one.

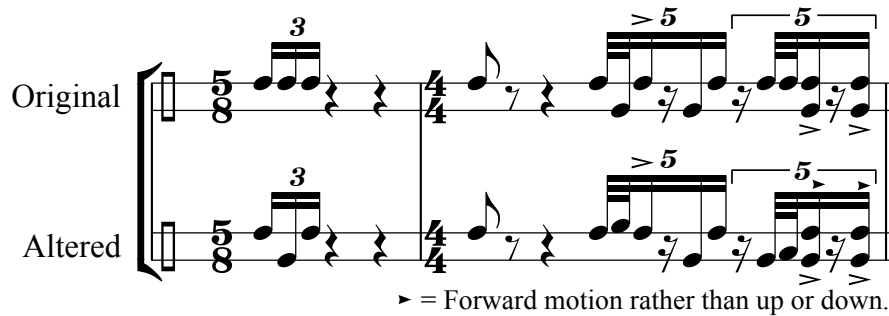


Figure 4.1 Excerpt of original/alterd notation from Varèse's *Ionisation*.

Between rehearsal numbers eight and nine of *Ionisation*, it is clear that Varèse's intentions are to create a rhythmic unison throughout the ensemble based on a high-low relationship.¹⁹ Each player that takes part in the unison rhythm does so on a pair of instruments.²⁰ The maracas are customarily paired as a high-low affinity but that quality is very subdued. For this reason, the maraca part can be altered to optimize the technique and rhythm, while minutely affecting the ensemble's overall frequency architecture. The rhythm will become much more accurate, which is crucial during this part of the score. Other moments in the music emphasize color, texture, and sustenance but this particular moment emphasizes rhythmic strength.

This may spark new debate among the "purists" who wish to not disturb the posthumous works of composers. But this is rather an issue

¹⁹ Edgard Varèse, *Ionisation*, (New York: Colfranc Music, 1934), 10-12.

²⁰ Players 3, 4, 7, 8, and 9 partake in this rhythmic theme. The high-low instrumental groups are: bongos, military/field drums, Chinese woodblocks, maracas, and piccolo/snare drums.

about knowledge and resources. *Ionisation* is a formidable example of a composer writing beyond his time or resource – Varèse created a work of art that can be revisited with modern innovation in order to create a new and accurate realization.

Javier Alvarez' *Temazcal*

Temazcal (Burning Water) was written in 1984 and was recorded by Luis Julio Toro. Currently, he is much more known for his flute playing with Ensamble Gurrufío rather than his work as a *maraquero*. However, it is unclear whether Javier Alvarez, a native of Mexico City, had been exposed to *joropo* folk music while living in southern Mexico. But Toro and Alvarez encountered each other in London while Toro was studying flute at the Royal College of Music. This gives evidence of the ever-present culture in Venezuela and that folk instruments/traditions are continuing to evolve in a modern culture.

The inspiration and techniques employed in these pieces are mine, yet the influences of other music I have heard and practiced over the years will perhaps be noticeable to the listener. I am not particularly interested in recreating that music but rather, learning from those aspects – playing techniques, timbre, phrasing, rhythm – which attract me. Of all those, I find rhythm to be the most alluring musical profile.²¹

This explanation is quite accurate in describing an experience with *Temazcal*. Rhythm is created in fascinating ways from the Venezuelan maraca traditions and Alvarez was evidently aware of this through his

²¹ Javier Alvarez, liner notes to *Papalotl: Transformaciones Exóticas*, Saydisc Records, England CD-SDL 390, CD, 1992.

collaborating with Luis Julio Toro. It is certainly evident that playing techniques, timbre, phrasing, and rhythm all exist at the forefront of the music in *Temazcal*. Furthermore, Alvarez has extended the reaches of the instrument with his creation of the electronic accompaniment part. He continues his explanation of his music with this:

At times, however, it is only a sound or timbre idea that is taken from the solo instrument and then expanded – sampled and sequenced – by means of the electronic instruments. Mostly, I ask the players to produce the sounds that feel more natural for their instruments and leave the samplers and synths to play the more “unusual” sounds.²²

To realize Alvarez’s compositional idea, it is sufficient to say that the overall concept is that the electronics are an extension of the solo instrument. But as a Western musician with no prior solo maraca repertoire, what is considered a “natural sound” of this instrument? Well, Alvarez does include a photo of the type of maracas he suggests for *Temazcal* and rhythmic patterns to be combined to create new ones (figures 4.2 and 4.3).

²² Ibid.



Figure 4.2 Photo of maracas included with *Temazcal* materials.

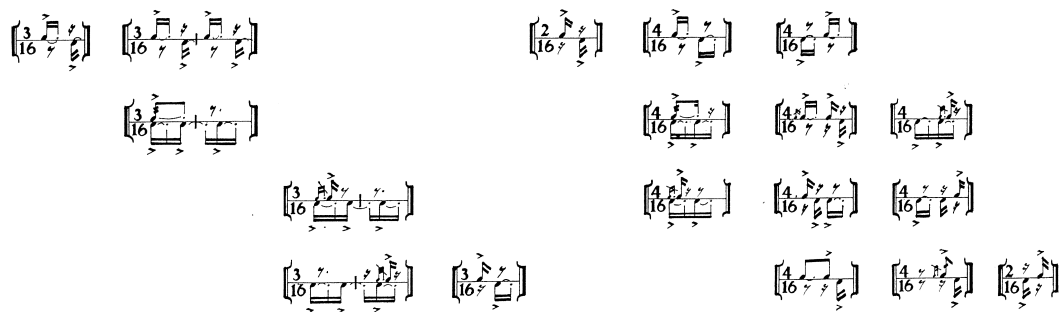


Figure 4.3 Rhythmic fragments from *Temazcal*.

The information found in the score certainly does not give instructions on how to play this instrument, nor provide resources to find out how. But this is not unusual since the majority of percussion repertoire does not include information on how to play all the instruments included in the score. Moreover, Alvarez suggests that this piece is highly improvisational and the rhythmic patterns he includes in the score need to “...be combined freely to create larger rhythmic structures/accenuation

patterns. Further variation and ornamentation of these patterns is desirable and left to the performer”²³. Where does one acquire the vocabulary for variation and ornamentation of these patterns? The examples in the score are very limited and do not indicate technical challenges for playing the maracas, nor do they address any nuances that may be available with the instrument. The dilemma is that there is not a predetermined (and agreed upon) system of notation that exists for technical training of this instrument. But with many systems of musical training for Western classical musicians, there are many strategies devoted to providing exercises and technical approaches to instruments. For example, there are hundreds of method books devoted to teaching the snare drum that range from extremely basic to extremely advanced. When a percussionist is given a piece of music that includes snare drum (*Scheherazade* for example), there is a wealth of information on performance practice, technique, and specific styles and trends regarding that particular piece of music. To be fair, an orchestral standard like *Scheherazade* has generations of tradition and aesthetic opinions.

How should *Temazcal* be approached? Where is the information on performance practice? More importantly, what kind of musician is meant to perform this piece? Perhaps the divisions between classical and folk music traditions are becoming blurred as evidenced by the musician this piece was written for: Luis Julio Toro, a classically trained flutist with a

²³ Javier Alvarez, *Temazcal*, (London: Black Dog Editions, 1984), 2.

knowledge of his native Venezuela's folkloric traditions. More on this idea of *globalization* will be discussed in a later chapter.

The first logical step in realizing *Temazcal* is to develop a fundamental vocabulary in order to create a convincing performance. After using multiple areas of research, one could eventually discover the vast and ever-changing world of Venezuelan maraca playing. Most of the resources available in the United States exist in *YouTube* videos and a select few individuals with experience in the Venezuelan folk music tradition. With some recordings becoming available, learning this kind of music has become similar to the early years of American Jazz – no training available except for listening and imitating. But *maraqueros* like Juan Ernesto Laya, Wilmer Montilla, and Manuel Alejandro Rangel provide principle examples of the contemporary trends in Venezuela.

After developing a comfortable vocabulary, one can start to make sense of the rhythmic fragments found in the instructions of the score. Although this notation is vague and largely left up to the performer's interpretation, it does provide some insight into Alvarez' compositional thought process. Since *Temazcal* is highly improvisational, the performer becomes a part of the compositional process. The maraca part can be as predetermined or as impromptu as the performer desires – within certain logical limitations. It would be highly recommended to understand the structure of the electronic accompaniment in order to create a convincing marriage of the solo and electronics. The recording of *Temazcal* that

accompanies this document was realized with the help of a rhythmic transcription of the electronic part. It is heavily influenced from the approach that Greg Beyer discusses in his article, “Performing Javier Alvarez’s *Temazcal*.”²⁴

One of the biggest challenges when performing with electronic accompaniment is convincing the audience that the live part is leading the ensemble: the live performer(s) and the electronics. In essence, a solo with electronic accompaniment is chamber music. Chamber music is ideally an interactive endeavor rather than unidirectional, so a performer must overcome the seemingly stale, inhuman, and unforgiving quality of the accompaniment. As compelling as an accompaniment part may sound, if its details are not embraced then it becomes exponentially difficult for the audience to perceive the ideas as anything other than scattered, unorganized thoughts. Understanding the electronic part in detail and convincing the audience they are hearing chamber music are two of the greatest challenges of *Temazcal*.

The transcription of the electronic part serves a dual purpose. One is to provide an accurate depiction of what is happening – in order to lead the accompaniment; there must be an understanding of when and where it will go. Another is that a transcription offers microstructure in visual, aural, and kinesthetic senses. The listening is tested by the work of notating. Listening, interpreting, comprehending, and finally regurgitating

²⁴ Greg Beyer, “Performing Javier Alvarez’s *Temazcal*,” Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois, 4-9.

the information will be affirmation that active listening is working. It is a constant trial and error with transcribing but it develops stronger connections in the mind. If one tries to familiarize them self with the accompaniment merely by listening to it a thousand times (in the car, at home, at work, while jogging, while sleeping, during commercials, etc.), this will not always give the most accurate representation of what is heard. Certainly the human mind is capable of repeating routines almost flawlessly, but only listening and not translating into an outward expression, this memory is essentially incomplete. Without a transcription, the mind is really only learning the approximated length of time between segments. We naturally do this all the time; otherwise jet lag would be nonexistent. To give a performance of *Temazcal* a year later, the only memory of those time segments will have rapidly decayed and kinesthesia will be of no help. However, if the memory has a reliable transcription to decipher, the mind has to create compartments for the details within the electronic score. This will not decay as much over time, and kinesthetic memory can rely more on a memory that has proved accurate.

After memorizing the rhythmic transcription of *Temazcal*'s electronic part, the next step is to begin constructing the solo maraca part. The first half of the piece is very intricate and sectionalized so it creates defined borders with quick interjections. These ideas often return in a familiar form but at different lengths. In the recording, you will hear the

maracas reflect the return of familiar material by matching what was performed in an earlier section. Both parts, maracas and electronics, are working together to reinforce the musical material being recycled.

The first two pages of the score to *Temazcal* contain the material used in the first half of the piece. Besides the introduction, the **A**, **B**, and **C** motives return throughout this sectionalized part of the work. The motives appear as interpolations rather than a linear path. These motives begin interjecting quicker and quicker as it goes through the piece. Because the motives are instantaneously recognizable, it makes sense to develop a maraca part that fits this model as well. Notice in the recording that the solo maraca part matches the motives by performing similar material that was used when each motive was first introduced. This reinforces the unique nature of the **A**, **B**, and **C** motives. Alvarez cleverly designed these sections with their own identity: defined pitch becomes elusive with each additional motive. Also notice how the maraca performance and the motives from the accompaniment roughly correspond (figures 4.4 and 4.5). Imagine if the solo part never changed with (or against) the accompaniment – it would seemingly defeat any musical logic. All three motives have a specific identity within the solo part; and that part can vary within each specific identity. By emphasizing transitions, it will let the listener know when a new section is coming and will further assist the perception of chamber music. Varying the ends of sections can give the impression that the soloist is leading the ‘ensemble’ by setting up the new

section – however irregular and unpredictable the new sections appear, the soloists can quickly prepare the listener by creating clear and coherent transitions. This plays a large part in creating a musical maraca solo.

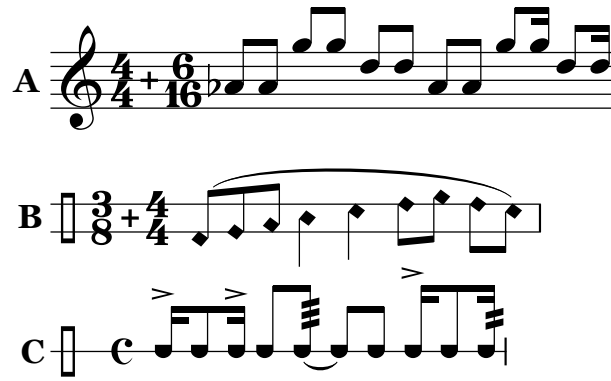


Figure 4.4 Transcribed representations of each motive.

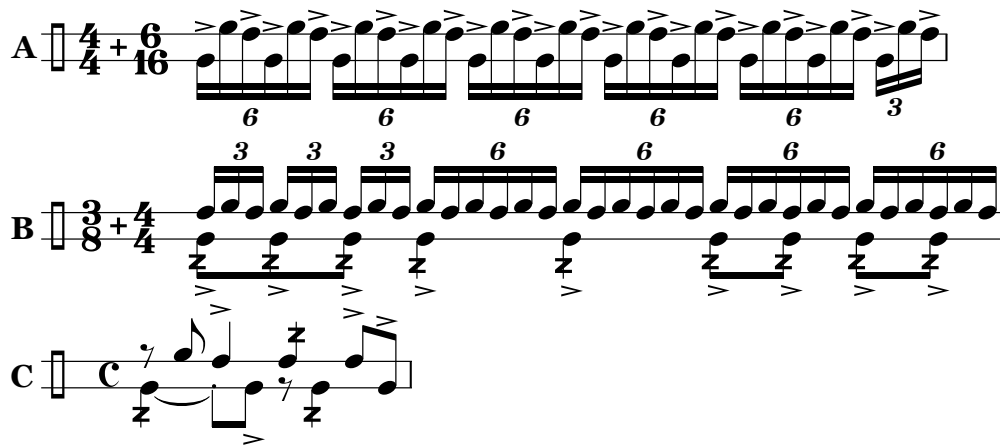


Figure 4.5 Maraca solo parts with corresponding motive.

With limited technique, limited vocabulary, and a limited dynamic range, there are very little options when it comes to developing an intriguing performance of *Temazcal*. In time, the limited technique and vocabulary can be broadened, however the dynamic range of the instrument will most likely remain the same unless the performer is manipulating the amplification of the maracas. The soloist in *Temazcal* is

essentially a composer at first. Alvarez gives some starting points in hopes that they will be combined and expanded, but as a maraca soloist/composer, there is much constraint on the resources and ideas to use. This may be reminiscent of John Cage's early percussion music, which was composed using limited resources (instruments) and limited techniques. However, Cage still left us with a large body of percussion ensemble literature and influenced much of the percussion music today. Here is the inspiration for creating a musical performance of *Temazcal*: become an innovative designer of sound and constantly seek to expand that idea through new learning. With the ever-evolving technology of communications, it should only get easier to find new sources of information. The twenty-first century musician must become an assimilator of old and new ideas to forge a future of art.

Ricardo Lorenz's *Pataruco: Concerto for Venezuelan Maracas and Orchestra*

The first ever concerto for maracas was commissioned by the Chicago Sinfonietta for the percussionist Ed Harrison. Harrison had spent a year as the timpanist with the *Orquesta Sinfónica de Venezuela* (Venezuela Symphony Orchestra) in Caracas. It is during this time where he met *maraquero* Maximo Teppa after first seeing him perform in a restaurant. Because of Harrison's experience with a symphony orchestra,

it seems inescapable that the idea of a maraca concerto would arise; and Ricardo Lorenz was the composer that finally realized this idea.

The concerto is certainly of the styles in the Classical genre. It still carries a lot of implications, as it is almost always a piece for solo and orchestra with three movements. In past centuries, there seemed to be a great divide between the ‘solo-worthy’ instruments and the ones that were not. Of course, there are many concertos with orchestra written for violin, cello, or piano solo. But in some way, to many informed music enthusiasts at the time, this legitimized the instrument’s expressivity, versatility, range, and virtuosity. However, the true nature of these parameters was focused on the melodic facet of these particular instruments. Which, of course, would exclude most percussion instruments from being considered in this idealized group (for the majority of people).

Most of the modern-day concertos for percussion have bent the rules. They are not always in three movements (Alan Hovhaness’s *Fantasy on Japanese Wood Prints*), the traditional harmonic structure is ignored (Joseph Schwantner’s *Concerto for Percussion and Orchestra*), audience participation is required (Michael Daugherty’s *UFO*), and most obviously – the soloist is not exclusively performing on pitched instruments (Russell Peck’s *The Glory and the Grandeur*). The form, harmonic structure, and audience interaction is not really a surprise; most music of the twentieth century had already broken these rules in laying the groundwork for these later pieces. However, in many instances, the percussion soloist has

followed the traditions of the concerto from centuries before. Usually there is some combination of pitched and non-pitched instruments on which the percussionist performs, but even the non-pitched instruments will usually have a gradation of low to high. Most composers cannot resist using this in a thematic way, which essentially becomes melodic. To be accurate, the percussion concertos of the twentieth century have utilized much more color and timbre than before. But still, this gives Ricardo Lorenz almost no template with which to construct a maraca concerto.

Imagine the challenges Lorenz must have faced in creating *Pataruco*. The maracas from the Venezuelan and Colombian tradition have neither implications of pitch nor any pronounced fluctuations in timbre (the fluctuations are very subtle). One could envision the parametrical challenges of creating a captivating solo. Lorenz's notes about the solo part reveal a little more about how he wrote this work:

...After consulting with Ed Harrison, and after studying Javier Álvarez *Temazcal*, the only other score I know to incorporate this specific performance technique, I decided to approach the maracas part by notating the resulting rhythmic patterns rather than by notating the intricate mechanics that must take place in order to create the desired effect (as in the case of Álvarez's *Temazcal*). Therefore, the solo part is meant to be performed by percussionists experienced in this particular style of maracas technique and it will make sense only to such percussionists.²⁵

The solo part was actually more of a transcription from Ed Harrison's performance. This project was certainly a strong collaboration between

²⁵ Ricardo Lorenz, *Concerto for Maracas and Orchestra*, (Maryland Heights, MO: Lauren Keiser Music Publishing, 1999).

composer and performer rather than a composer-dissemination of music (figure 4.6). In many ways, this is how new music is often created. Try to picture George Crumb writing music in a dark corner, struggling to dream up the sounds produced from many of the extended techniques he has used. It would be nearly impossible without the collaborations he had with many performers. This type of correspondence is special and creates an integral piece of repertoire – a work that is optimized for performance and a work that is closely related to the physical possibilities and composer’s intentions without sacrifice.

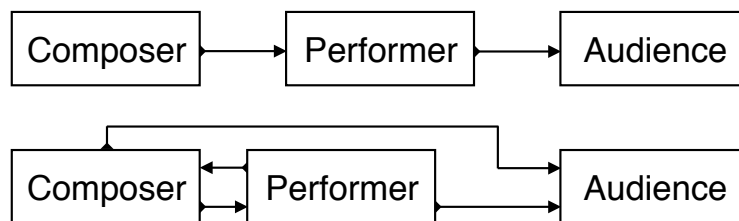


Figure 4.6 Disseminative vs. collaborative relationships.

Most of *Pataruco* is in triple meter, clearly a direct adaptation from *joropo* in order for the maracas to have a natural backdrop environment to perform. However obvious it may seem that Lorenz was aware of the *joropo* meter, the music does not necessarily indicate that it is actually a *joropo* – at the very least those indications are much more subtle than they could have been. Actually, most of this concerto seems to fit with common orchestral treatment in regards to rhythm, texture, harmony, instrumentation, and technique. With the absence of a clear and repetitive

melody – since the soloist would normally play this in the first place – the scoring is not that radical. But Lorenz still uses the modern-day symphony orchestra as his agent of expression, as well as the subtle references to *joropo*.

The harp excerpt from figure 4.7 comes from the first instance of a clear mention to *joropo* in the piece. It seems fitting that this would start with the harp too, since the *arpa* (harp) is often used in *joropo* as the main melodic voice of the ensemble. The bass pattern is added to the harp part to give a further indication that Lorenz understood the importance of the *joropo*. One must not forget the influence *Temazcal* had on him too: there is an obvious *joropo* at the end of the piece where Lorenz's harp excerpt may have derived.²⁶ The harp's typical ornamentation of harmonic outlines and bass patterns both exist here which sets up a great situation for the maracas to feel at home.

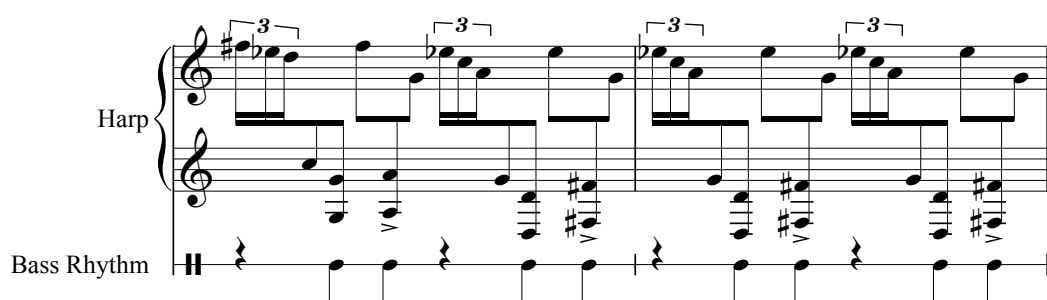


Figure 4.7 Harp excerpt from *Pataruco* (mm. 62, 63) and bass rhythm.

Lorenz uses aspects of Venezuelan folkloric music to reshape composition for the symphony orchestra. He did not merely transcribe the *joropo* for orchestra, he used some of its structure for compositional ideas

²⁶ Ibid., 19.

– Lorenz immediately generates a connection to the audience with culture and familiarity, while using source material from an unfamiliar tradition.

Music for Botany (2011)

“The whole point of creating music for me is to give voice to things that aren’t normally given voice to, . . .”²⁷ This is essentially experimentalism: wanting to hear things that have never been heard or often are not heard. The maracas and *caxixí* are given this voice for this work.

Music for Botany came about as a practice in blending and reworking music for a specific purpose. This is not necessarily groundbreaking, but in an effort to create new music, the author of this document has used a model of Steve Reich’s *Music for Pieces of Wood* for the inspiration of the composition. The notes taken from the score explain this relationship:

I chose the name *Music for Botany* as a direct correlation to Steve Reich’s *Music for Pieces of Wood*. The structure of this piece is obviously very similar to Reich’s piece, but all the components of *MFPOW* have been replaced by shakers (entirely made of plant materials). The two different instruments used (maracas and *caxixí*) are a blending of their corresponding countries (Venezuela and Brazil). The word ‘botany’ is a Latin root of *botánica* and *botânica* therefore a common ground of two languages. At the beginning is the Venezuelan merengue pattern played on maracas, which gradually resolves to the *joropo* pattern during the last structural section. The *caxixí* are very capable of creating punctual accents and are used as the additive devices.²⁸

²⁷ Thom Yorke, *Pitchfork Interview* (16 August 2008); quoted in George A. Reisch, ed., *Radiohead and Philosophy: Fitter Happier More Deductive*, vol. 38, *Is Radiohead the Pink Floyd of the Twenty-First Century?*, by George A. Reisch (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 2009), 3.

²⁸ Jeremy Muller, “Music for Botany,” score, 2011.

The thematic pattern in *Music for Pieces of Wood* comes directly from an earlier work of Reich's called, *Clapping Music*. Fascinatingly, this pattern is a sequential and symmetrical cycle: 3+2+1+2. All the subsequent patterns are derivatives of the original (figure 4.8).

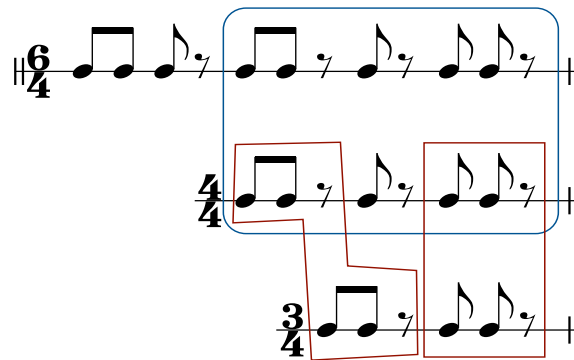


Figure 4.8 Rhythmic analysis of *Music for Pieces of Wood*.

The steady pulse of the first clave to enter in *Music for Pieces of Wood* is replaced in *Music for Botany* by the *merengue* pattern on maracas. Then a similar thematic pattern is superimposed over the maracas, which is used as the basis for *Music for Botany*; but the rhythm has been altered to fit the playing technique of *caxixí* (figure 4.9). Essentially, the pattern is elongated from the original idea in order to come across clearly. The cyclic theme is used for the entire piece with each motive deriving from the previous one. This, of course, creates a complex system of rhythmical interplay.

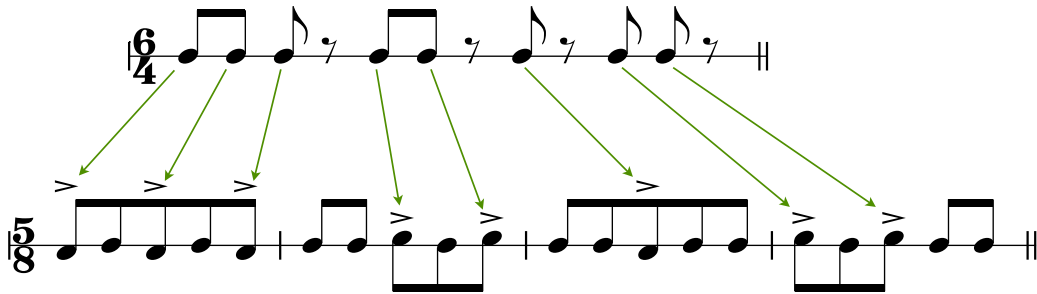


Figure 4.9 Thematic comparison of *MfPW* vs. *Music for Botany*.

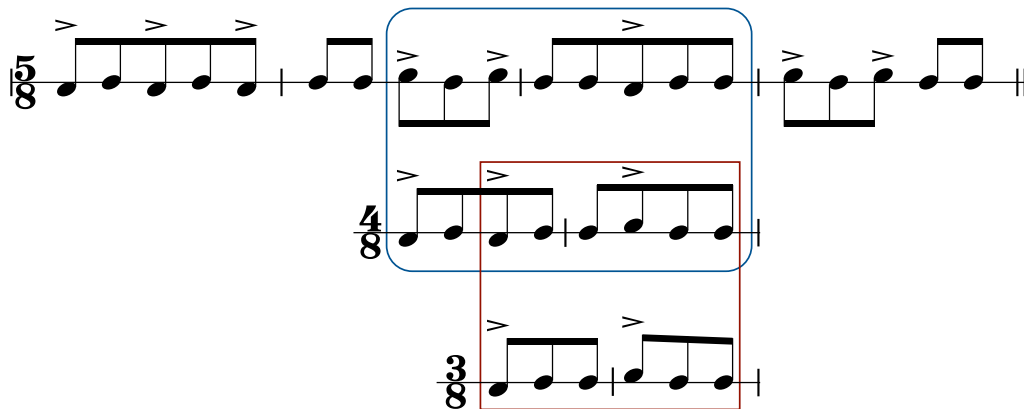


Figure 4.10 Rhythmic analysis of *Music for Botany*.

Music for Pieces of Wood modulates time signatures from six to four to three – each section with its own distinct acclimatization (figure 4.10). With each shift, the information becomes compressed ever so slightly while increasing the intensity of activity. The listener's perception can easily shift later on in the piece as the pattern becomes simpler and less memorable. Reich deconstructs the original cyclic pattern until it becomes an aural phenomenon: essentially the de-emphasis of any one particular eighth-note distorts the perspective of rhythmic groupings. This

paradox of perception is a fascinating quality and can make it difficult for the audience to find a *common reality*.²⁹

In *Music for Botany*, the time modulation moves from five to four to three. Although the same process occurs with rhythmic compression and intensive activity, the important element is the shift from *merengue* to *joropo*; or from the Brazilian *caxixí* to the Venezuelan maracas. The *merengue* pattern played by the maracas is soon covered up by the 3+2+1+2 accent pattern heard in the *caxixí*. This tends to negate the maraca part giving the emphasis to the *caxixí* and a non-Venezuelan musical style. Throughout the course of the piece, the instruments gravitate towards rhythmic patterns that exist in a *joropo*.

The ambiguity of two or three (6/8, 3/4) is strong in *joropo* and one of the fascinating elements of the melody. Because of this phenomenon, it gently lends itself to aural ambiguities when listening to minimalism, especially in the vein of Steve Reich, and particularly, *Music for Pieces of Wood*. This is essentially what happens during the resultant patterns of the three-eight sections from *Music for Botany* (figure 4.11). The phenomenon is approached from different perspectives – different customs – and the boundary that once was thought to exist, now becomes only a matter of point of view and interpretation.

²⁹ *Common Reality* is referring to experiencing music the same way at the same time. With a shift in perception, each person may understand the start of the pattern at different moments.

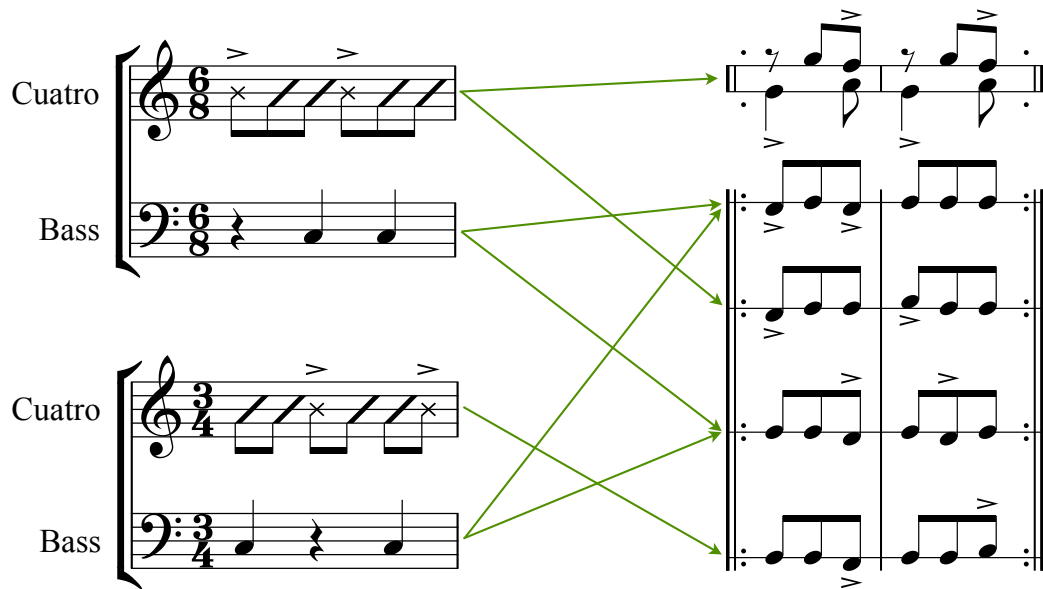


Figure 4.11 Two styles of *joropo* compared to 3/8 from *Music for Botany*.

With the three pieces presented in this document – *Temazcal*, *Pataruco*, and *Music for Botany* – the author has given evidence of different musical styles the maracas are capable of: 1) complex, interlocking techniques accompanied by experimental electronic sounds, 2) an archetypal concerto with orchestra, and 3) an adaptation of a twentieth-century work combined with Venezuelan folk elements. While these three are not the only works that involve solo maraca playing, they each exemplify a unique musical perspective and show the versatility, and flexibility, that maracas and *caxixí* can produce. It is the author's wishes that this potential would be recognized and artists will continue to explore these sounds of granular acoustics.³⁰

³⁰ *Granular Acoustics* is an invented term derived from the concept of granular synthesis in digital audio whereby the manipulations of very small parts change the overall sound. Similarly, the seeds in maracas can be manipulated to create different patterns and textures.

For Composers

Western Art music has generally been dominated by the influence and legacies of its composers for centuries. It is not very often that a virtuosic performer is recognized over a brilliant composer; and the composers that were virtuosos are usually praised for their lasting musical output rather than great performances. Much of this could attribute to the fact that Western European music had been documented centuries before the advent of audio recording technology. However, even with today's technology, the composers of Western Art music are considered the architects of the musical city we live in. This demonstrates how human nature highly values the creative mind over physical ability. Therefore, works for maracas like *Temazcal*, *Pataruco*, and *Music for Botany* should not be the small limited output this instrument has seen so far. The experimentation of this instrument has only just begun. Notation is often the common tool (although only one of the tools) to bring this exploration into a tangible idea. However limited notation can be, there is the benefit of indicating how much, or how little, freedom a composer will allow.

Modern Notation

The twentieth century has seen many new musical ideas and those ideas are often expressed with the innovation of notation. Thanks to progressives like Igor Stravinsky, Karlheinz Stockhausen, John Cage, George Crumb, and many others, the limitations of musical notation has

redefined what is possible and demonstrated the advantages of having a highly interpretable score.

While there really is not a standard notation system for maracas, there have been many different ideas presented.³¹ Starting with two classic works, Edgard Varèse's *Ionisation* and George Crumb's *Music for a Summer Evening (Makrokosmos III)*, these use a simple notation while maintaining separate lines for each hand.³² Each line receives standard articulations commonly found in music: accents, trills, slashes, etc. With Javier Alvarez's *Temazcal*, this idea seems to take a natural step forward, especially since this piece is based on the idea of a maraca solo. Alvarez still utilizes the distinction of each hand (figure 4.12), in this case on both sides of a single line, but he sometimes replaces the note heads with a staccato marking while preceding it with a slur. This notation seems to be much more accurate by using a slur – it visually implies there is some sort of cyclic motion involved when playing these patterns.

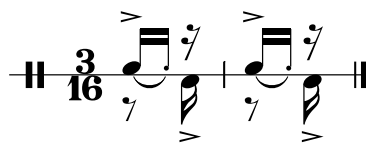


Figure 4.12 *Temazcal* maraca notation.

³¹ The notation presented was more or less because *something* had to be used since there was no prior existing example – as opposed to the notation being used for the specific purpose of developing a system.

³² Stephen Patrick Prismatic, "Maracas in the Venezuelan Joropo: A Proposed Pedagogical Notational System" (D.M.A. diss., University of Georgia, 2004), 18.

Ed Harrison, of the Chicago Lyric Opera, also developed his own system of notating that he uses in his article for *Modern Drummer*, “Joropo Maraca Playing.”³³ It is a pedagogical way of notating maraca strokes since the large majority of the readers would not have any prior knowledge of *joropo* maraca playing or Venezuelan musical traditions whatsoever. Harrison notates up and down strokes with arrows above the specific note (figure 4.13).³⁴ There is an agreement on the inherent flaws and limitations of notation in general, but manuscript can serve a valid purpose if there is a desire by creative minds to come up with a solution. Often the misconception is that notation is meant to replace the oral traditions of learning an instrument, but the goal here is for a composer to be able to express his or her ideas through notation, and broaden any written capabilities if there is a need. This should be approached from the standpoint of assisting the folkloric traditions.

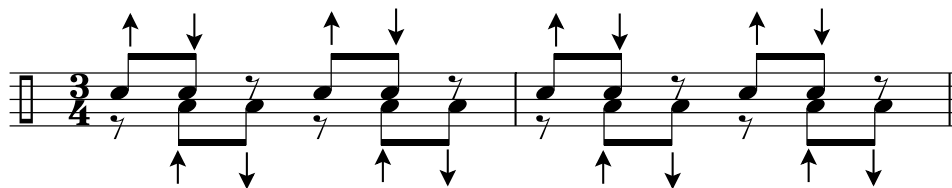


Figure 4.13 Ed Harrison’s maraca notation.

Stephen Primatic proposes the most elaborate notational system in his doctoral dissertation. He uses specific parts of the stave and different

³³ Edward Harrison, “Joropo Maraca Playing,” *Modern Drummer*, October 1989, 74-78.

³⁴ In a conversation with Ed Harrison on April 25, 2011 he acknowledged that this notation does not adhere to any nuances or flow of performance technique and understands the hazards in creating such a system.

note heads to correspond to the specific sounds and strokes produced by the maracas. This is by far the most complex and probably the most difficult to learn. The stroke names he developed were based on working closely with *maraquero* Ismael Querales to understand the multitude of possibilities. Primatic's research includes a video recording of Querales and *maraquero* Juan Ernesto Laya, to come up with a vocabulary of stroke types that include:

1. arc
2. forward/backward
3. *ordeño*
4. *ordeño* maraca alternate right hand
5. drumstick
6. doorknob
7. maraca strike
8. dice
9. *escobilleo*
10. wrist tremolo
11. wrist flick tremolo
12. *enlasao*.³⁵

Some of these strokes have common names in Venezuela that *maraqueros* agree upon, while other names Primatic decided on himself with a

³⁵ Stephen Patrick Primatic, "Maracas in the Venezuelan Joropo: A Proposed Pedagogical Notational System" (D.M.A. diss., University of Georgia, 2004), 70-71.

heuristic strategy from the physical motion. As figure 4.14 shows, most of the strokes show two note heads that correspond to both hands.

Occasionally only one hand is altered in the stroke type or the stroke may only apply to a specific type of shake roll.

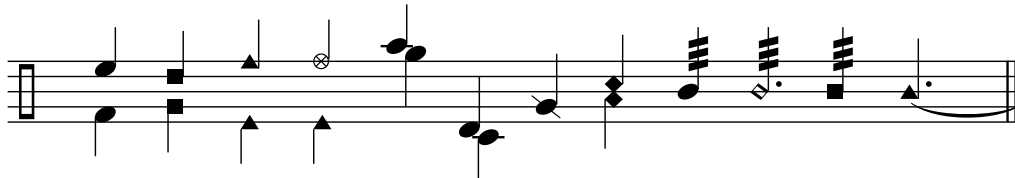


Figure 4.14 Dr. Stephen Primatic's maraca notation system.

Since Greg Beyer's use of *caxixí* has been discussed earlier, his notation of this instrument is worth examining. The *caxixí*, being quite idiosyncratic, can be just as detailed as the notation allows. The performer has the decision to create distinct timbres by using the gourd enclosure or the woven basket walls that contain the seeds. Often these two changes in sound have a natural volume change that occurs as well. Perhaps this is why Beyer only needed to indicate accents in *Bahian Counterpoint* and *Vou-me Embora* rather than using a different line or space on the staff (figures 4.15 & 4.16). In *Vou-me Embora*, he does explore the dexterity of each hand holding a *caxixí*, and he uses separate note heads to represent each instrument. While this piece focuses on the notion of the *berimbau* soloist, movement three shows the adroitness required of the performer and signals to the idea of virtuosity. The music increases in activity with the intensity of the melody and the progressively complex solo with *caxixí* leading into the fourth movement. If any written piece of music has ever

alluded to an idea of *caxixí* as its own capable, solo-styled instrument it would be *Vou-me Embora*. It clearly becomes the dominant texture at one point in the score – compared to *Bahian Counterpoint* where it essentially ends up as a background texture. Some of the techniques for Venezuelan maraca playing could be applied to *caxixí* in which there may need to be a more detailed notational system.

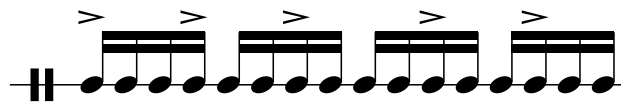


Figure 4.15 Notation of *caxixí* from movement II of *Bahian Counterpoint*.

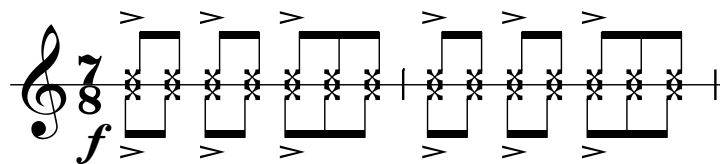


Figure 4.16 Notation of *caxixí* from movement III of *Vou-me Embora*.

Suggestions of Notation

Using a combination of the previous notational systems, the author proposes a system that utilizes those systems' strengths. While maintaining a clear and visual approach for indicating the rhythm, the author's system also implies a certain motion involved with the maraca strokes. One common denominator of these notational systems is that they all use a separate line or space to distinguish which hand is playing what part. This is not that surprising, after all, each hand is technically holding a single capable instrument – as opposed to playing a single percussion

instrument (snare drum, timpani, xylophone) with two different implements. Using this general agreement, the notation can be reduced to two lines. Ed Harrison's use of arrows is important in understanding how the maraca stroke is very specific – vertical movement rather than horizontal movement. To simplify his use of arrows, up-strokes will be represented above the line while down-strokes will be represented on the line; the implication here is that each time the maraca moves upwards, it will eventually land on the line of the staff (figure 4.17). This eliminates the necessity of arrows or any other kinds of symbols that are not commonly used in scores.

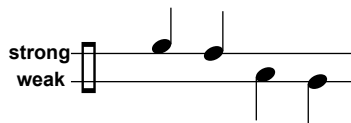


Figure 4.17 First stage of maraca notation.

Javier Alvarez seems to best visually represent the physical motion of a maraca stroke with his notation using slurs and replacing the note head with a staccato marking. Applying this method to the author's method takes the detail a step further (figure 4.18). The down-strokes and the actual rhythmic implications immediately become apparent when reducing the size of note heads of the naturally weaker, up-strokes. Finally, using slurs can subtly demonstrate the perpetual motion of the maracas. For visual learners, this can be very important in their development as performers so figure 4.19 shows the last application of Alvarez's notational method to the author's. This time, it demonstrates how a typical *joropo*

pattern would start, and continue, visually embodying common maraca strokes. The slurs help show to how the motions overlap, which is noticeable when watching a *maraquero*, but can take a great deal of time to finally embrace the tactility of the pattern. Hopefully, the notation will reinforce this idea in a linear fashion to provide another perspective. The issue here could be the redundancy of the slurs – too much use could clutter up the score making everything much more difficult to read.

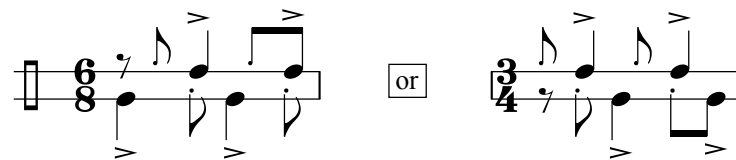


Figure 4.18 Second stage of maraca notation.

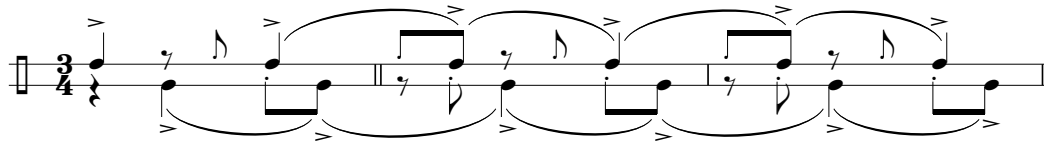


Figure 4.19 Third stage of maraca notation.

For rolls, this notation could be endless. Figure 4.20 includes three basic rolls that are used in the author's performance of *Temazcal*. The *escobilleo* roll is notated with a standard 'buzz roll' slash. This seems to best represent the legato sound created by the seeds sliding against the inside wall of the gourd. The times when the *escobilleo* roll is extended, a 'pig-tail' symbol is added to the notation. Visually, the maraca appears to be spinning in place while performing this technique, as might be

expected; a symbol closely resembling this motion is used to notate it. Lastly, the standard trill is used to notate what might resemble a drag rudiment. This is a short sound that is usually very difficult to sustain.

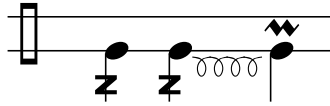


Figure 4.20 Maraca rolls.

Similarly, a suitable notation system for the *caxixí* is worth considering. With Beyer's notation, he only indicates accents, which are to be achieved by throwing the instrument forward or backward against the gourd. This is really the only way conceivable to produce accents so his notation does not appear redundant. However, in an effort to remain consistent with the maraca notation, the author trusts that a written representation of the motion of the instrument is a necessary redundancy that will reinforce the visual performance. In *Music for Botany*, the notation shown in figure 4.21 is used for the *caxixí*. There are moments when the *caxixí* are used in a similar fashion to the Venezuela maraca movement; starting at measures sixty-seven, one hundred and one, and one hundred and eight-teen.

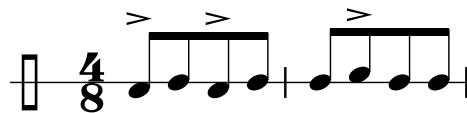


Figure 4.21 Notation of *caxixí* from *Music for Botany*.

This document is not intending to establish a standard system of notation, but rather to explore notation as a resource for understanding

another culture's folkloric tradition. Musicians in Western music practices often have the ability to use notation as their bridge to other music practices. Attempting to develop a benchmark of notation and performance technique may be exploiting the music of Venezuelan society; expediting learning that includes skill and historical background should always be avoided. Perfecting an art form obviously takes many years (often a lifetime) and ignoring this time often degrades and devalues the art itself; devalued art misrepresents a culture and its people.

CHAPTER 5

GLOBALIZATION AND ITS EFFECT ON MUSIC

With easier access to cultures from around the world, musicians now have an unprecedented knowledge of a variety of music.

Percussionists are affected and naturally more knowledgeable of such circumstances, being that they are often asked to perform on instruments that may or may not be available in the United States. The musical tradition of the contemporary percussionist does not come from a single area of the world or a single continent of composers, like many of their orchestral instrument counterparts. Rather, percussionists have the opportunity to try to best understand these instruments of “exoticism,” or simply use the knowledge stemming from their own cultural upbringings and rites to decode the techniques and sounds buried within the instruments themselves.

Culture is Allusion

Percussionists are like the guinea pigs of music. Any instrument that does not fall into the classification of – *bowing, blowing, plucking, or striking* usually falls on the percussionist’s shoulders to perform (or learn how to perform). These new sounds/instruments are then systemized into the *miscellaneous* classification, which ultimately means this is trumped by the *percussion* classification. This naturally leads to experimentation and in time, leads to experimentation on a more sophisticated level. With

composers seeking new sounds, the ever-expanding consortium of *percussion-classified* instruments will no doubt continue. Many percussionists have embraced this idea and taken on the task of spearheading the proficiency to create a model for others to follow. But without a strong cultural connection to the music performed in the United States, what aspect of the non-Western European instrument/music should be most preserved and transliterated?

Hypothetically, if the audience does not understand a North-Indian *tihai* – if the audience does not understand the use of *berimbau* in *capoeira* – if the audience does not understand ceremonial *doumbek*, then the cultural connection is not there. This is certainly not a prerequisite to perform such music; after all if an American composer used a *tihai* in their music, the audience would not necessarily be disconnected – especially since it would be in an avant-garde format. That would leave structure, technique, and sound color.

A question that each music listener must ask is: “Is cultural significance a priority?” For example, consider the heated debates and controversy surrounding the issue about whether skateboarding should be added as an Olympic sport. Skateboarding has developed as a hobby rather than a competitive sport; so many people view this topic as regarding territory and tradition. It has developed into its own community that brings a certain image of lifestyle about who you are – familiarity. The music heard in the United States almost always has a cultural reference

attached to it as a way of familiarity. When an artist borrows ideas from an outside culture, it is usually under the umbrella of familiarity: a particular style of music. Familiarity is where we find a standard or expectation.

Altering a music that is of cultural significance to the particular audience is an effective and educational way of introducing an unfamiliar idea. Using an unfamiliar style of music to change the perception of the listener is not always as effective. This is less of a business model and more of a directional change; in other words, the point here is not to reach a particular audience in hopes of selling a product. Changing the art is more compelling than changing the location of the art; changing what already exists is usually more understood than just introducing a new idea to listeners with no reference to the culture. Why? It is a result of familiarity.

Consider the quote used in Simon Frith's argument:

To grasp the meaning of a piece of music is to hear something not simply present to the ear. It is to understand a musical culture, to have 'a scheme of interpretation.' For sounds to be music we need to know how to hear them; we need 'knowledge not just of musical forms but also of rules of behaviour in musical settings.'³⁶

Creating new art is skateboarding. Relocating folkloric traditions is adding skateboarding to the Olympics.

³⁶ Derrick F. Wright, "Musical Meaning and Its Social Determinants," *Sociology* 9(3) (1975): 424, 428; quoted in Simon Frith, *Performing Rites* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 249-50.

Abstract to Corporeal

Performers are often the incarnation of a musical idea. Without a written or recorded tradition, the abstract needs a vessel for its advocacy. With popular music, this tends to be the actual recording, which represents the complete version that fully manifests the conceptual intent. The performers are considered pivotal in the music's creation that is often the case in folk music too. Art music, however, is often valued as a composer's creation. The written work is only disturbed and misinterpreted when it becomes a performance. Each recording or live performance of the work is its own realization and essentially is one version of the artwork. But the real version exists as a visual notation. This is where folk music and art music collide: their own concepts of embodying a metaphysical idea. Perhaps the value of written music will shift to a more collaborative effort between composer and performer, thus observing the union of ideas over the instructing of ideas. This paradigm shift has had some momentum in the twentieth-century largely based on works created as algorithmic frameworks. These frameworks allow the performer to sculpt their own realization of the work placing them in a crucial role for the development of the work. One could argue that Javier Alvarez's *Temazcal* is an example of this framework compositional style: the score gives non-linear patterns for the performer to assemble and largely utilizes unconventional musical notation. But the usual trend of valuing masterworks over frameworks continues as an instinctive human

desire. Masterworks create benchmarks and expectations that develop into standards – standards become familiarity.

Many composers have written their own manifestos about music and global influences. In order to satisfy certain curiosities by listeners, they may explain their approach to composition using a method of outsourcing their material for new ideas. Some have been outwardly negative towards this notion for good reasons – the tendency of this trend is to show disrespect and benightedness towards the representative culture or tradition. But that is certainly not always the case, and in some instances using a global influence – typically non-Western means – can bring respect and understanding to that specific culture by creating new art.

Musical Confluence

A famous example of the globalization of music comes from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when Janissary music from Turkey was integrated into compositions by Mozart and Beethoven. Cymbals, bass drums (*tambors*), and even timpani are modern adaptations of ancient wartime Turkish instruments.³⁷ They are now viewed as staples of the orchestral percussion section. For decades, composers reorganized these instruments and sounds until many of these ideas were exhausted. Like a rude awakening, one can hear this

³⁷ James Blades, *Percussion Instruments and their History* (Westport, CT: The Bold Strummer, LTD., 1992), 265-67.

juxtaposition of culture in the early nineteen-thirties with Amadeo Roldán's *Rítmicas No. 5 & No. 6* and Edgard Varèse's *Ionisation*. Two works constructed exclusively of percussion instruments for the first time – two composers of similar backgrounds. Roldán uses an intelligible connection, quickly discernable to a specific culture with his work; in this case Cuba. Varèse brings together many different cultural influences only by interest in their sound. The mélange of timbres suppress any intimation of hierarchy or reference to a specific influence.

He [Varèse] was the first to write directly for instruments, giving up the practice of making a piano sketch and later orchestrating it. ...These mannerisms do not establish sounds in their own right. They make it quite difficult to hear the sounds just as they are, for they draw attention to Varèse and his imagination.³⁸

Over fifty years later, Javier Alvarez composes *Temazcal* – an undeniable influence from a specific tradition, and an experiment and fascination with new sounds. The way musicians consciously use their influence has certainly enlarged over time. This document describes this global influence on music by fitting performers and composers into three categories. Each category represented in figure 5.1 is laterally movable to allow for the flexibility of encompassing any of the groups – sound, structure, technique, and tradition. Arrows at the end of both axes imply the indefinite appending of musical ideas and influence. One's influence is difficult to sketch, no matter if it is on a conscious or subconscious level. It is nearly impossible to determine the subconscious inspiration that might

³⁸ John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 69.

unknowingly find its way through a composer's aesthetic. For this reason, one must rely solely on superficial concepts or conscious intentions of the composer – if those intentions have been recorded for others to learn.

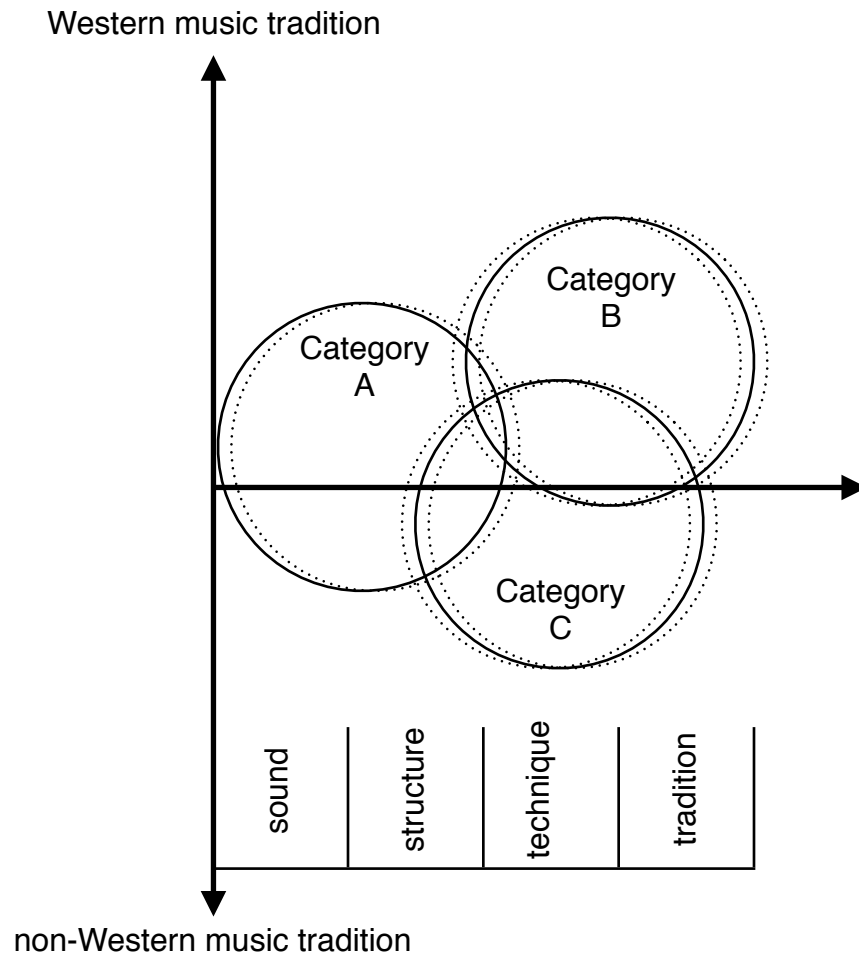


Figure 5.1 Diagram of musical influence intersection.

The first category (A) is a performer who has been raised in the Western Art tradition, or as part of his/her environment, and their main focus of study has been music from Western Europe and the United States (possibly including popular music). Through their training, they discover

new music outside of the contemporary music style – this discovery may have been through an intriguing instrument or the first-time listening of a folk music. They now decide to pursue this instrument in its most primitive or utilitarian way in order to discover even more, how important the music and instrument has been to a certain ethnic group or nationality for generations. It is only then when they may or may not seek to tap into this music to create something new in the traditions of contemporary Western Art music. Some performers/composers of this category would include:

- Greg Beyer: Has studied the Brazilian *berimbau* and played the music of its most natural and common setting. Also he has written a work *Bahian Counterpoint* modeled after Steve Reich's *Electric Counterpoint* and the concerto *Vou-me embora* to create something new for the progression of music in the United States.
- Ed Harrison: Spent a year as the timpanist with the *Orquesta Sinfónica de Venezuela* (Venezuela Symphony Orchestra) in Caracas while studying with the master *maraquero*, Maximo Teppa. Since then, Harrison has become the leading proponent in *joporo*-style maraca playing in the United States with his clinics, performances, and the premiere of the first concerto for Venezuelan maracas.

The second category (**B**) is a performer who also has grown up in the Western Art tradition and their main focus of study has been music from Western Europe and the United States (even possibly including popular music). Through their search of new composers and music, they come across a piece that may involve a unique instrument, or an instrument that has previously not been conceived to the level the music has raised it. The composer and/or performer may know some about the styles and tradition from which the instrument is most prominent, but the greater concern and purpose is to create a new contemporary piece of art and the new instrument is used for its new sound to listeners and performers of contemporary art music. Examples of this are mainly from composers:

- Edgard Varèse, *Ionisation*: uses many instruments from non-Western sources but only to draw on new sounds, colors, and timbres. Makes a clear attempt to disembark from their nostalgic associations of rhythms and playing techniques.³⁹
- Steve Reich, *Drumming*: inspired by the perpetual Ghanaian drumming but does not use their instruments or necessarily their traditions of music. *Drumming* is based on a single rhythmic idea that propels the entire piece.⁴⁰

³⁹ Edgard Varèse, *Ionisation*, (New York: Colfranc Music, 1934).

⁴⁰ Steve Reich, *Writings on Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 63-67.

- Iannis Xenakis, *Rebonds* and *Okho*: *Rebonds* calls for woodblocks, bongos, toms, bass drums, and tumba but *Okho* is for three djembes. Xenakis uses the instruments as a unified color/timbre as he tends to group instrument by fabrication (skins, woods, metals) and this is greatly reflected in his compositions. He has dedicated himself to the art of writing for a single timbre for percussion and calls for instruments of other nations and ethnic groups to add to a single group of already existing skins, woods, or metals. His music is not the exploration of exponential colors, but the exploration of processes, architecture, and mathematics through performance.⁴¹

The third group (C) is typically a composer that may or may not come from another culture with its own rich musical traditions and developments, but they either are trained in these traditions or grow up surrounded by it. They find an interest in Western Art music and incorporate the music they know by the region they have been raised, into a new perspective on contemporary music:

- Javier Alvarez, *Temazcal*: Scored for maracas and electronics but the unique thing about this piece is that it allows for a lot of improvisation. The composer suggests the style in which the maracas are to be played.⁴²

⁴¹ Iannis Xenakis, *Formalized Music: Thought and Mathematics in Composition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), 204-18.

⁴² Javier Alvarez, *Temazcal* (London: Black Dog Editions, 1984).

- Amadeo Roldán, *Rítmicas No. 5 & 6*: Although Roldán was born in Paris, he moved to Cuba to study music theory. His *Rítmicas No. 5 & 6* were one of the earliest works to percussion ensemble and featured a Cuban folk influence.

Edgard Varèse, Steve Reich, and Iannis Xenakis

These three composers have each given unique contributions to music in regards to their treatment of non-Western musical traditions.⁴³ Varèse's use of new sounds, Steve Reich's use of processes, and Iannis Xenakis's use of mathematics and structure show different approaches to this concept. With the combination of *Temazcal*, *Pataruco*, and *Music for Botany*, and the study of Varèse, Reich, and Xenakis's works, perhaps a clearer picture will emerge as to a direction in which to apply this concept. The three works discussed earlier in this document all take a similar approach to their source material when compared to Varèse, Reich, and Xenakis.

A great example of Edgard Varèse's work is *Ionisation* – the instrumental palette extends far beyond the scope of the common orchestral percussion instruments. Varèse chooses these instruments strictly for their timbral spectrum in order to create a variety of color combinations. Steven Schick refers to these combinations as “groups of affinity” with many instruments possessing multiple timbre qualities that

⁴³ This is by no means an exhaustive exploration of contemporary composers that have applied these non-Western influences.

fit into more than one group.⁴⁴ Varèse's ambition deals with thematic expansion of each instruments' color, needless to say, using as many sounds as possible would be of primary importance in the construction of this work. While he does not focus on a single sound per se, he extracts the instruments from their cultural references to connect them to new allusions. This is not focusing on a single culture or tradition like *Temazcal* may appear to do – this is expanding the breadth of the instruments themselves, ironically, this is also what *Temazcal* does.

Steve Reich's interests in the globalization of music lie within the subtle structures of non-Western music. This is what he adapts from other music in order to avoid imitation and mask the type of influence, or source material, that may appear superficial to the listener.⁴⁵ He proposes using the thought processes of other music rather than their iconic sound. Reich expresses his dissuasion towards using non-Western music as new sounds from program notes included in *Writings on Music*: "Those of us who love the [non-Western] sounds will hopefully just go and learn how to play these musics."⁴⁶ Certainly Edgard Varèse and John Cage loved these sounds but instead added the sounds to the enrichment of percussion.

Iannis Xenakis's works are brazenly steeped in algorithmic, stochastic, and statistical music. His interests are clearly mathematic and

⁴⁴ Steven Schick, *The Percussionist's Art: Same Bed, Different Dreams* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 38.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁶ Steve Reich, *Writings on Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 51.

are often strict with his wishes for colors of sound. The groups of sounds or instruments are usually separated by their compositional function or timbre. In *Psappha*, this is apparent by the instructions in the score – instrument groups A-F.⁴⁷ *Rebonds* calls for bongos and a tumba although they are grouped with skins to interface with the woodblocks. *Okho* is scored for six different sounds/techniques while using djembes. His composition *Atrées* that uses maracas, even groups the instrument in the *percussion class*.⁴⁸ While Xenakis has written for many instruments that are not found in Western music traditions, he presumes that their sound fits into a specific timbre category used for composing.

With *Temazcal*, Javier Alvarez has shown how he can focus on a single sound and expand it into a composition based on the interlocking processes of folkloric technique. He is certainly interested in the particular sound, but only as a focal point for the surreal placement of a *joropo* ensemble. Similarly, in Ricardo Lorenz's *Pataruco*, the structural processes of the *joropo* are faintly present in the orchestra while they are pronounced in the maraca soloist. Finally, in *Music for Botany*, the structural source material from the Venezuelan *merengue* and *joropo* are embedded within the work – much to the desire of Steve Reich's sentiments. However, while the particular sound of the maracas is what initiates the work, the homogeneous sound of the *caxixí* is what ultimately

⁴⁷ Iannis Xenakis, *Psappha* (Paris: Salabert Editions, 1976), 9.

⁴⁸ Iannis Xenakis, *Formalized Music: Thought and Mathematics in Composition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), 137.

prevails, affiliating the timbres and disguising the instrumental focus that would reference a specific folkloric tradition.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Venezuelan musical traditions have clearly made an impact on Western Art Music. With a few exceptions, there has not been a significant break-through for *joropo* maracas since *Temazcal* was written in 1984. But most musicians would assent to this work introducing Venezuelan folk music to an avant-garde world of music. *Temazcal* essentially has set the tone for similar works to follow. The early development of percussion solos experienced these same types of growing pains. In 1956 John Cage finished his percussion solo, *27'10.554" for a Percussionist*. A few years later, in 1959 Karlheinz Stockhausen wrote *Zyklus*. With the Morton Feldman's *The King of Denmark* (1964), the percussion world will not see another solo of this magnitude until Iannis Xenakis's *Psappha* in 1975 – over ten years later. Similarly, these early percussion works incorporated some variety of indeterminacy: Cage, Feldman, and Xenakis all utilized non-specific instrumentation but provided categorical restrictions; Stockhausen used segments of indeterminate flourishes and the performer chose where to start in the cycle. Javier Alvarez instructs the performer to piece together the short motifs suggested in the score; the arrangement of the musical material is largely up to the discretion of the performer or particular performance – indeterminacy.

The early percussion works were frameworks that required the performer to make many strategic decisions before ever rehearsing a note.

However, we view these early works as the foundation of percussion solo literature. *Temazcal* is fundamentally no different from these early works. The performer must undertake much investigating in order to make many crucial resolutions. This has become a large part of percussion performance practice, very much unlike any other instrumental tradition. Percussionists should continue to embrace this progressive way of music making because it summons the artistry within the performer. The transformation of the music from an idea into a collective experience is a critical step in the realization of a composition; and with the performer's decision-making it can become an extraordinary act of expression.

Folkloric music has become another step in the percussion literature lineage by creating framework compositions. Twenty-first century technology allows the musicians to make musical and imaginative decisions to realize these works. These decisions are not unlike preparing for many other percussion works: organizing a set of toms, constructing a stand to mount instruments, building a new instrument, deciphering new musical notation, learning new techniques, choreographing movements, etc. The musical lexicon continues to grow. From *teponaztli* to *temazcal*, a pre-Colombian ancient culture is embedded in modern folkloric traditions. Thanks to certain composers who have tapped into this influence, the history now lies just below the surface of the music.

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