

Recovering the Sound of Early Nineteenth-Century Bolivian Song

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In J. Sloboda (ed.) (2023) *The Songs of Pedro Ximénez Abril y Tirado (1784-1856)*. Guildhall School of Music & Drama. <https://www.gsmd.ac.uk/the-songs-of-pedro-ximemez-abril-y-tirado-1784-1856>

In Spanish America, the early nineteenth-century insurgencies and wars of independence mark a historical rupture between the long period of colonialism and a new era in which national cultures coalesced. Each country develops a distinct history, but most share key developments, including the secularization of society, the challenge of forging political relationships with European countries, the United States, and regional neighbors, and the awakening of interest in the pre-Hispanic heritage. As such, the nineteenth century encompasses a complicated, turbulent, and often contradictory period in Latin American history. Among these many contradictions is the vogue for bourgeois European, especially French, culture among Latin American *criollos* (Americans of Old World heritage) in the decades following independence.

Concepts such as *indigenismo* and *mestizaje* eventually helped define Latin American nations in the early twentieth century, but these were not yet part of discourse in the early nineteenth century, when the colonial *casta* system still informed social hierarchies. Nonetheless, several Enlightenment projects had already begun to draw attention to the uniqueness of the natural and cultural history of the Americas. Driven by Aristotelian knowledge building, collecting, and a Cartesian sense of nature's wonder, such projects found in the Americas a marvelous world that remained less spoiled than Europe. Among these projects was the compilation of the *Códice Trujillo del Perú* following Bishop Baltasar Jaime Martínez Compañón's pastoral visit to remote areas of his diocese in 1782-1785. The codex includes over fourteen hundred water color sketches of local peoples, customs, plants, and other aspects of natural history and geography as encountered in northwestern Perú. It even features the rudimentary transcription of twenty musical pieces, including dances and *cachuas*, performed within indigenous, *criollo*, and African-Peruvian communities. These short pieces have recently experienced a revival in the early music performance community. Martínez Compañón also collected pre-Hispanic antiquities, some of which were remitted to Spain. See an image from the *Códice Trujillo del Perú* that depicts a popular dance here:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Codex_Compañón_página_149.jpg.

Alexander von Humboldt's visits to the Andean region, central New Spain, and Caribbean between 1799 and 1804 also raised awareness of the Americas. Accompanied by indigenous guides and European researchers, Humboldt studied the natural geography and history of the Americas and later published the widely-read *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* in 1811 which, among other observations, advocated for the independence of the viceroyalties and the emancipation of slaves. See an idealized Ecuadorean landscape with Humboldt and his retinue at the foot of the Chimborazo Volcano in a painting by Friedrich Weitsch (1758-1828):

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Humboldt-Bonpland_Chimborazo.jpg

The history of music in nineteenth-century Latin America is fully inculcated in these contradictions and international relationships, but evidence for the discovery of the pre-Hispanic past and appreciation of the indigenous present remains somewhat evasive in most surviving scores created prior to twentieth-century modernism. The general trajectory of Latin American music history forged by scholars sees public opera and amateur salon culture replace the ritual of the Catholic Church as the locus of art music in the nineteenth century. Revealing the important role of women amateurs and touring foreign professionals, these studies largely concentrate on the *criollo* public, which is the context of most surviving sources. Indeed, among the musical practices that emerge as significant in the *criollo* sphere of nineteenth-century Latin America are the creation of large repertoires of secular songs, including patriotic songs influenced by the music of revolutionary era France, the rise of professional and amateur brass bands and, mostly in the second half of the century, the establishment of local music shops that sold sheet music and instruments. Some popular genres trace their roots to the nineteenth century, but more historical research could be undertaken regarding the interrelationships among folkloric, commercial, and elite song genres in that period.

Despite these interesting developments, the period between approximately 1810 and 1850 remains understudied in Latin American music history, and few surviving compositions are known to the public beyond specialist circles. A closer look at surviving sources suggests a complicated musical legacy that varied by institution, nation, and the activities of individual musicians. As such, we might approach the music scene via different lenses including those focusing on the continued presence of the Catholic Church, on the emergence of a music market for sheet music, and the question of how the indigenous past and present might contributed to art music of the period. It is also fundamentally necessary to stress that shifting the locus of art music away from the Catholic Church releases it from the theological rhetoric and social hierarchies it was bound to express as part of liturgical enactment.

In the colonial period, the cathedrals had been powerful, elite institutions, and those of Mexico City, Puebla, Guatemala, Lima, and La Plata (Sucre) counted among those with the most robust musical activity. Indeed, at Mexico City Cathedral, Spanish-born chapel master Antonio Juanas (c1762-c1821) was likely the most prolific composer in the colonial Americas in any period, with about 450 works written between about 1792 and 1815. Only a handful of these are recorded today, as performing groups have traditionally given preference to older and more provocative repertoires, and Juanas is a clear example of how the early nineteenth century is neglected. In Perú and Bolivia, an extraordinary younger counterpart to Juanas is the *criollo* musician Pedro Ximénez Abril Tirado (1784-1856), hereafter “PXAT” or “Ximenez Abril,” a prolific composer who, unlike Juanas, wrote popular salon music and orchestral works in addition to church music. José Manuel Izquierdo König, in his online *Catálogo de la obra de Pedro Ximénez Abril Tirado* (version 1.2, December 2015), has defined the number of formal surviving works by PXAT at 280, although that number excludes much of his copious output of commercial salon music, which survives unevenly.

Born in Arequipa, Perú, PXAT worked as a local musician in his birth city until moving to independent Bolivia in 1833. About forty years old at the time of Peruvian independence in 1824, PXAT navigated a turbulent period of history in which he found success as a church musician later in life, after the wars of independence. He settled in the relatively wealthy city of Chuquisaca in 1833 (Chuquisaca was known as “La Plata” during colonial times and since 1839 has been called “Sucre”), where he served as cathedral chapel master at a time when many other cathedrals in Latin America had already disbanded music chapels to conserve resources. Chuquisaca was known at the time as a *criollo* culture center with an active community of musical amateurs.

Writing in standard European genres such as the Divertimento, Sonata, Symphony, and Mass, Ximénez Abril’s works pieces for various combinations of strings, piano, guitar, and voices flourished in his adopted nation of Bolivia, and he was able to take advantage of new possibilities in trade and commerce by publishing a collection of one hundred guitar minuets overseas in Paris in 1844, although he does not seem to have traveled there personally. Also proficient on the violin, cello, organ, and fortepiano, PXAT’s role as a composer for guitar invites comparison with his Iberian contemporary Fernando Sor (1778-1839), who did spend considerable time in Paris. Like Sor, PXAT wrote in mainstream European instrumental genres, yet his music does not approach the level of virtuosity for which Sor became known, nor does it use the extended techniques that connect Sor’s music with the violin schools of Giovanni Battista Viotti (1755-1824) and Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840). To the contrary, there is a certain directness and earnestness to PXAT’s compositions that evokes the intimacy of the salon and the dignity of the amateur performer. Some of the pieces have deeply felt, sentimental accompaniments with a Haydnesque sense of refinement, which is remarkable for a composer who did not train in Europe. It has been often remarked that PXAT wrote songs on an unusually wide variety of European and American poets, an indication of the erudition of the composer.

Aside from this slate of classical genres in which Ximénez Abril worked, he also cultivated art songs titled *yaravi* or *jaraví*. These are especially compelling today, as they form an especially early repertoire of music that references a traditional indigenous genre in otherwise European style art music. The *yaravi*, a song tradition with roots in pre-Hispanic Inka culture with lyrics in Quechua, is deeply representative of the cultural legacy of Perú and Bolivia. Susan Thomas writes in *Oxford Music Online* (formerly *Grove’s Dictionary*) that the *harawi* is a sorrowful song of Quechua speaking people with roots in pre-Columbian Inka culture that older indigenous women sing together in a high vocal range and in a heterophonic texture. Other scholars have noted that there can also be an intensely joyful aspect to the *harawi* as well, that it would often be sung together with flutes, and that the genre has transformed substantially over time.

The musical characteristics of Ximénez Abril’s songs evoke those of the pre-Hispanic genre to some extent, despite their classical packaging with fortepiano accompaniment. Given that the theme of loss recurs in traditional *yaravies*, it might not be surprising that PXAT titled his setting of the poem “¿A dónde vas, dueño amado?” (“Where are you going, my keeper”), which is precisely on that topic, as a *yaravi*. This haunting, melancholy song with delicate fortepiano accompaniment is written in the minor mode using a relatively high vocal melody that on one

hand resembles songs by Franz. Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), such as “Oh tuneful voice” (1806), or perhaps those of Carl Loewe (1796-1869). Yet on the other hand, the song sounds nothing like those composers due to its sparse texture, and placement of the fortepiano accompaniment in a lower range than the voice, instead of in the same range. The poetic text, with lines such as “El alma sin ti no vive” (“My soul does not live without you”) speaks of personal loss, and the plaintive melody is simple, yet takes unexpected turns within its high tessitura. Hear Rafael Montero and Carole Cerasi perform the song as Track 14 of the recording in this collection.

Much might be written regarding the authenticity of Ximénez Abril’s *yaravies* in the context of the indigenous cultures of early nineteenth-century Bolivia, as the music clearly expresses influences from multiple directions. Even if all of the harmonies and melodic figurations of the accompaniment proceed from European classicism, unnotated aspects of the music, such as timbre and performance practice, might reveal a sense of sonic hybridity not necessarily detectable from the notes themselves. Indeed, to me, it matters less whether the notes of PXAT’s *yaravi* songs are of indigenous origin or not, and more how the works resonate in sensibility with Peruvian and Bolivian culture in the past and present. Thus, what could songs such as “¿A dónde vas, dueño amado?” have sounded like in the early nineteenth century, and how can some of that be recaptured today?

We do know that European fortepianos were available in Bolivian cities like Chuquisaca, and likely included models similar to the fairly delicate square fortepianos popular in Austria and England at the end of the eighteenth century. Ximénez Abril writes fairly simply for the fortepiano, with a fairly narrow range and a clear separation between rhythm in the left hand and melodic figuration in the right. Not surprisingly, sometimes the fortepiano accompaniments seem suitable for the guitar, and perhaps that is the instrument PXAT would have used. That said, there is little to suggest that the fortepiano accompaniment would have differed greatly from what similar music would have sounded like in Europe at the time, say in a salon performance of Haydn’s “Oh tuneful voice” in early nineteenth-century London.

How the voice sounded, however, is a more complex question, as aesthetic preferences of Peruvian and Bolivian musicians may have been influenced more by the songs they heard around them at all levels of society than by singers trained in European *bel canto*, who would have remained few and far between in the Americas during the first half of the century. In discussing contemporary instrumental music in Andean villages, Thomas Turino has identified a “dense sound quality” comparable to an organ to which local musicians aspired as ensemble players, a sound that differs from the clearer textures often preferred by European and North American musicians (Thomas Turino, *Moving Away from Silence: Music of the Peruvian Altiplano and the Experience of Urban Migration*, University of Chicago Press, 1993, pg. 55). Other scholars have noted the high tessitura of Andean folk singing and that some singers tend to imitate the sounds of *sikuris* (pan-pipe ensembles) or other instruments with their voices. Might the original singers of PXAT’s art songs embraced certain sonic aspects of traditional song – a thick sound, elements of heterophony, gender ambiguity, imitation of folk instruments, and of course the high range – in their performances, especially in those pieces titled *yarawí*? Are

there practices of ornamentation and placement of the beat that differ from, say, Haydn, including the possibility of subtle heterophony?

PXAT's songs, of course, are neither indigenous folk music nor European art songs; rather they are art songs created in elite milieux within independence-period Perú and Bolivia, regions that cultivated fashionable European genres, yet may have done so in ways evocative of locality. This is a milieu distinct from colonial-era church music. The high tessitura (perhaps best reproduced by an haute-contre, countertenor, or lyric soprano) and references to the *yarawi* make this hybridity clear and point to the urban, *criollo* context of the repertoire, rather than to a rural indigenous context. As such, the music exists in a social category betwixt and between the European and the indigenous, a blending of categories that a *criollo* person such as PXAT might have experienced himself during his life in a time of political transition. In a fascinating book, Michelle Bigenho links attention to pre-Hispanic artifacts to central ideas surrounding to the formation of the modern Bolivian nation, stating that "the pursuit of indigenous authenticity is a principal site of contemporary Bolivian politics" (Michelle Bigenho, *Sounding Indigenous: Authenticity in Bolivian Music Performance*, Macmillan, 2002, pg. 23). She continues, writing that such referencing of the indigenous is ironically "a political and cultural current... in which mestizo-Creoles have used references to indigenous cultures to bolster a national or regional identity (pg. 97)."

To me, Bigenho's lens through *criollo* culture of the period marks the ideal point of departure for imagining how a performance today might embrace the unique hybridity of PXAT's works, and celebrate both their European and indigenous American roots without exaggeration. As such, these pieces have themselves become artifacts of the initial post-Hispanic period when the Latin American nations were beginning to appreciate their own heritage. In my view, a historically informed approach to this would pair a period fortepiano with a singer who might also have proficiency in other Andean musics, and thus might be able to achieve a hybrid sound world based upon training in both environments. In other words, the performance practice would not pastiche either the indigenous or the European, but would rather present both heritage elements in a synchronous, refined, and artistically compelling way.