

Music and National Identity in Ecuadorian Pasillo

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the Ecuadorian style of music, pasillo, and how it has shaped and been shaped by Ecuadorian identity. Music is a part of every human culture, throughout the whole world and throughout human history. People make music, and that music sounds very different in different times and places. But music always reflects an aspect of who people are as individuals, as well as broader trends of culture, time, and place. Through comparing and contrasting historical and modern perspectives on Ecuadorian pasillo, this paper explores the importance of studying the relationship between music and identity and how music is a defining factor in the shaping of a culture. The paper describes how the genre of pasillo reflects Ecuadorian identity, both individually and nationally. The paper first details the history of pasillo and how artists in the early to mid-1900s shaped its significance and popularity. By citing musical examples and scholarly research, this section analyzes how pasillo rose to the title of “national music” and how it has impacted Ecuadorian culture. The paper then shifts to focus on how Ecuadorians engage pasillo today, and the contexts in which it is performed. Based upon recent fieldwork in Ecuador, this paper will describe how pasillo continues to influence individuals and their identity today, and how pasillo continues to act as an Ecuadorian national music.

Keywords: pasillo, Ecuador, national identity, culture, music

1. Introduction

The genre of pasillo is often traced back to the early nineteenth century, with connections and influences from Portugal, Colombia, Germany, Spain, and/or Venezuela.¹ While there is some debate among scholars about the true origin and influence of Ecuadorian pasillo, it is often stated that a Colombian pasillo developed simultaneously with, or prior to, this music style in Ecuador.² Scholars point to 1822 when Ecuador gained independence from Spain as the time when Ecuadorian pasillo began to develop independently of others.

However, as pasillo continued to develop, it bore a resemblance to the European waltzes from which it may have originated. The word “pasillo” itself is a diminutive form of “paso” (step) and is said to be reference to the jump-like waltz steps of the dance that accompanies many early pasillo songs.³ The popularity of the Austrian waltz in the nineteenth century may have also aided in this influence, but Ecuadorians developed their own style that had resemblances with the dance styles of yaravi or sanjuanito.⁴ Regardless of the level of influence from outside countries, the Ecuadorian pasillo had begun to fully take shape as its own genre by the end of the nineteenth century.

2. Historical Context

2.1 Early Pasillo as Folk Music

Over the years of development, pasillo has been classified as folk music, as popular music, and as national music. Each of these categories has demonstrated the flexibility and growth of this music style, and represents the multiple subgenres and branches of pasillo. The titles of national and popular music were given later in the 1900s, as technology helped to more mass produce and lengthen the reach of this music. Traditionally, early pasillo music was considered folk in nature, and even though the title eventually changes to simply 'national music, modern day pasillo still contains these folk characteristics. Ecuadorian composer and musicologist Segundo Luis Moreno described how pasillo aligns with folk styles

(a) the pasillo is notated sometimes by persons other than the original composer or composer/performer; (b) the transcriber will often change an original composition to suit his or her own tastes; (c) the transcriber will often remain anonymous; (d) repeated performances of a given pasillo result often in melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic alterations; (e) performance given without a notated score encourage additional alterations; and (f) spontaneous performances necessitate on-the-spot composing.⁵

Pasillo is also largely community-based; instead of being sung just for one individual or dedicated to one individual, these songs are often for a neighborhood and community at large. The content, while personal, is meant to be shared and passed on. While the earliest forms of folk pasillo were solely instrumental, the form of pasillo as vocal music with accompaniment quickly became the standard for the genre.⁶

Originally this content was bitterer than the modern songs. The early twentieth century pasillo was classified as *canciones de maldicion* [songs of damnation] as their lyrics depicted an unfaithful woman using terms such as “shameless whore” and “daughter of vice.”⁷ This is prominently displayed in the song “A mis amor pasado” (to my past love) by Julio Flores. The lyrics hold back no emotion, and state

“I know you well, shameless whore/I understand your miserable existence/ You are the daughter of vice, you are cunning/and you ideal is abominable sin/ you made your body a commodity/that you exchanged for gold at high prices/and you partook in pleasure in the orgies/when you were only fifteen years old.”⁸

This is characteristic of many songs men would compose and sing about being scorned by a loved one. The content and lyrics of these *canciones de maldicion* painted the men as faultless and right, and the women as the instigators of pain and wrongdoing. Another song, “El alma en los labios” (The Soul on the Lips) was originally a poem by Medardo Angel Silva about his lost lover, and was then turned into a song by Francisco Paredes Herrera after Silva’s suicide. The original poem is more consistent with a declaration of love, however Herrera changed the lyrics a bit to reflect the anguish caused by a woman. Below is a comparison of the change from the poem to the song in the first stanza.

El alma en los labios – Silva

El alma en los labios – Herrera

When of our love, the flame of passion,
you contemplate extinguished in your breast,
because for you alone I hold my life dear,
I shall take my life on the day I lose you.⁹

When you get tired of always deceiving me
And contemplate with horror your lying words
You will see the wrong you’ve done yourself by
deceiving me
The man who loved you with all his heart¹⁰

As both the poem and song continue on, similarities are apparent between the two. However, clear distinctions from a song of affection to a song of damnation are also apparent. Instead of lamenting lost passion and contemplating suicide, the song calls for the woman to consider the horrors and wrongs she has committed. Both demonstrate a man wholly in love with the woman, but the latter lyrical reaction demonstrates the traditional characteristics of folk pasillo.

This composition choice of changing a poem is also consistent with the style of early pasillo compositions. Pasillo is frequently defined as “a poem set to music.”¹¹ While it may seem redundant as music is often poetic, pasillo composers would actually take an already written poem by an Ecuadorian poet and compose their own melodies and

harmonies to those lyrics. As already noted, sometimes artists preferred to take some creative license with these poems and alter the lyrics to suit their own artistic vision and emotions.

Musically, the melody of pasillo is characterized by syncopation and hemiola patterns. There often are only two or three motivic patterns, and they resembled a basic triple-meter waltz-derived pattern consisting of two eighth notes followed by an eighth rest, and then some combination of eighth and quarter note pairings. The tempo can be fast or slow, and pasillo is almost always traditionally composed in a minor key.¹² Due to its waltz-like nature, pasillo songs are also composed in $\frac{3}{4}$ time and follow an ABA or ABC form. Later, more modern compositions included an introduction section or chorus of 4 to 8 bars, and more compositions in major keys were heard.¹³ The harmonic accompaniment for the folk style of pasillo is based upon a simple triadic chord progression centered around I and V and modulations only occur in passing if at all.

2.2 Pasillo's Rise to National Music

While early pasillo was considered more folk in characteristics, as time and technology continued there was a shift and people began to see it more widely considered as the national music of Ecuador, that is, music by Ecuadorians and composed for the Ecuadorian culture and community. The concept of a national music also includes elements of regional identity and pride in one's country and community. A similar pattern of folk music's evolution and social importance is similar to the Tijuana's Nor-Tec music found in Alejandro Madrid's article,¹⁴ however, pasillo reflects this regional identity and love through lyrics that depict the beauty and wonders of Ecuador.

However, a music's rise to national status is not always that straightforward, and pasillo had a long way to come from its original folk form. Around the 1920s, the upper class elites sought to redefine their national identity to reflect their high standards of ideology and values and fit with the modernist times. Musicologist Ketty Wong states:

Musical genres raised to the level of national symbols represent the aesthetic values of the upper middle classes and undergo cleansing processes to eliminate textual and musical features that point to undesirable ethnic, class, or regional differences within a nation. Musical genres raised to national status are standardized according to the elite's cultural aesthetics so that one particular version becomes the official national music.¹⁵

There is often a power dynamic between class levels in society, and the upper classes are the people who ultimately get to decide what will continue to thrive in their culture and what will be changed. The elitists of Ecuador did just that. They took these *canCIONES de maldicion* and turned them into "classy" songs that idealized the perfect woman by using modernist poetry for lyrical content instead of scorning her. The earlier pasillo poems were found from poets named the *generacion decapitada* (Beheaded Generation)¹⁶ whose poems were often sadder and more melancholy in nature, and many of these poets ended their lives tragically early. However, the modernist poems were often more optimistic and romantic in tone, and helped shape the change of pasillo. An example of this change in lyrics can be demonstrated best with the lyrics from the song "La divina cancion" (the divine song) by Nicasio Safadi. The first stanza of his pasillo is

At the bottom of your balcony I sing to you, my love/the sweet and heartfelt song of pain;/wake up, I beg you, my never-forgotten darling,/wake up and listen, beloved woman,/to my song of love¹⁷

Immediately one can notice the change of mood the artist has about the woman in his life, as words such as "beloved", "darling", and "my love." There is no longer a bitterness of a scorned lover, but the gentleness of someone who wishes to woo his lost love. They kept to the traditional musical characteristics of early pasillo, but transformed the lyrics to be more beautiful and lovely.

While these romantic lyrics were a large part of the elitist pasillo, lyrics that focused on Ecuador itself as the idealized woman became widely popular as well. Not only were people hearing songs about women, but now songs about a love and the incomparable beauty of their countryside and landscape. This style of lyrics, as well as the rise of mass media, helped push pasillo to the title of national music in 1930.

This year marked the first time that an Ecuadorian artist recorded Ecuadorian music abroad. The group Dúo Ecuador, comprised of Nicasio Safadi and Enrique Ibañze Mora, went to New York and recorded 38 songs for Columbia Records, most of which were specifically composed for that trip.¹⁸ The most notable song from that recording is "Guayaquil de mis amores" (Guayaquil of my loves) and was one of the first pasillos to have lyrics devoted to a city and a landscape. This song sparked a transition into the exploration of pasillos with this new style of lyrics, and was instrumental in shaping Ecuadorian identity. The recording of these songs may have been simply a strategic business move, but to Ecuadorians it was deemed international praise for pasillo and therefore Ecuador as a country. The

widespread audience for this music helped the world to recognize pasillo as an essential element of identity for Ecuador.¹⁹ Similar songs by other artists began to pop up including “Guayaquil, portico de oro” (Guayaquil, Golden Portal) by Carlos Rubira Infante and “Alma Lojana” (Soul of Loja), a well-known standard in the repertoire of many pasillo artists. These songs sang praise of other cities in Ecuador to continue to support this national pride and romanticized view of a home.

Radio was also critical in the mass distribution and rising popularity of pasillo with stations such as El Prado and Hoy Cristo Jesus Bendice (HCJB). The latter had a program called “La Voz de los Andes” (The Voice of the Andes) in the early 1940s through the 1960s that helped to transmit popular pasillos throughout the Americas.²⁰ However, this station was run by North American Protestant radio and television missionaries and was supportive of the elites change in pasillo lyrics. HCJB sought to be Christian and educational, and took the sad “songs of damnation” and other popular music of the time and turned them into more positive messages. These changes often included 1) replacing words like “enfermos de cansancio” with “felices y dichoso” (sick with fatigue to happy and blissful), 2) creating new texts showing the people’s love of Ecuador, and 3) new texts with educational intentions like singing about how farming and harvest works.²¹ Similar to the shift from folk to national, HCJB didn’t change the musical composition and characteristics of pasillo, simply the lyrics. It continued to reflect the aesthetic values of the elites instead of the lower class, and because of its wide audience continued to spread and increase the popularity of pasillo as an Ecuadorian music style.

The next significant shift for pasillo came in the 1970s and 1980s. These decades brought about a growth in Ecuador’s economic and industrial structure which resulted in increased modernization, industrialization, and urbanization.²² Many workers who had difficulties getting by out in the fields moved closer to urban areas to take new and better jobs opening there. During this time of transformation and population migration, pasillo began to shift and change again. New working-class music called rocolera emerged as an expression of mestizos and the working class population explored new identities in urban areas. Rocolera is characterized by its music and lyrics meant for coping with heartbreaks and deep feelings of despair and betrayal, similar to the bitter styles of early pasillo songs.²³ Subsequently, many pasillo pieces composed during the 1970s and 1980s were not considered “national” music but instead was simply called pasillo rocolera. The elites may have dismissed this music as not fitting the “national” identity, but it fit the cultural identity of the working class at the time. The struggle between pasillo rocolera and pasillo national reflects the complexity of identity and nationalism being mental constructs that follows the dynamics of the person in power and the struggles of different classes.²⁴ While many Ecuadorians would consider pasillo rocolera to be national music, reflective of the everyday life, only the elitist pasillo is considered “the” national music, because they are the people in power whose aesthetic is most dominantly recognized.

2.3 Notable Early Artists

At the tail end of the elitist pasillo and near the start of pasillo rocolera, Julio Jaramillo thrived as a musician. He was born in Guayaquil in 1935, and many of his songs center around the beauty of that city and his homeland.²⁵ Jaramillo’s first recording was at the early age of 16, and he soon began recording with other famous artists before branching out on his own. His repertoire focuses mostly on pasillo, but also includes other genres well-known to Ecuadorians, making him versatile and widely loved in style. These songs were romantic in nature and often about Guayaquileno identity, and his suave persona and creativity put him on a pedestal similar to Elvis in North America. Jaramillo rose to fame mostly in the late 50s, and the development of jukeboxes and LPs greatly helped his popularity. By the time of his early death at age 42, he had produced 300 LPS, and being mass-produced and widely distributed helped increase his significance to the identity of Ecuadorians.²⁶ After his death, October 1st (his birthday) was declared “National Pasillo Day” in honor of the musical impact he had.²⁷

Another influential musician of the time was Carlota Jaramillo, who had no relation to Julio. She was born in 1904, and was one of the first women to make her name known in pasillo. In 1922, Carlota Jaramillo and her sister Inés participated in an amateur musician contest at the Teatro Sucre.²⁸ The sisters were the only women to compete, and solidly beat out all the men for first place and the prize. This gained her the publicity she needed to begin making her own music, and eventually she was produced on the radio station El Prado in 1929 with her would be husband and composer Jorge Araujo, and later produced her first record “Amor Grande y Lejanos” (Love Great and Far) in 1938. Carlota Jaramillo was given the name “Queen of the Ecuadorian Pasillo” due to her great interpretation of classic pasillo pieces, as well as her excellence in performance of new ones composed by her or her husband.²⁹ She died in 1987, but her legacy of providing a voice and role model for women in music still lives on.

3. Modern Day Pasillo

During January to February of 2019, I spent eight weeks in Quito, Ecuador. During that time, I talked with two musicians and many other Ecuadorians in everyday places, such as taxi drivers. I tried to reach out to two more musicians, but was not successful in finding a time to meet them and instead exchanged emails to gain information about pasillo.

I learned that pasillo today is still an important genre in Ecuador and still linked with national identity, but it is not as popular or widespread as it was in earlier times. The pasillo of the 1950s is still listened to and heard in backyards and group gatherings, and the music of this era is considered as definitive for of this music style. The 1960s and 1970s brought about a new way of thinking and new styles of music that took this traditional folk style and revamped it to sound more contemporary and fit with the musical styles of the day.³⁰ Now, similar trends are happening. Ecuadorians I talked to explain that modern day artists are taking traditional pasillo songs and lyrics and adapting them to sound more contemporary and upbeat and marketable to the youth of today. One taxi driver in Quito, when I asked him about modern day pasillo, responded by stating how today's artists should not be classified as composing new pasillos; they are simply reworking previous pasillo songs instead of composing "true" new pasillo songs.³¹

This modern pasillo reflects the time signature and rhythms of the traditional styles, but changes instruments, tonality, and lyrics. Contemporary pasillo often includes more major key signatures and happier sounds than earlier pasillo. The instruments have expanded to use of the electric guitar, percussion instruments, and often a piano or synthesizer. These instruments aid in the new soundscape that fits modern pop music and is designed to appeal to the younger generations. The lyrics sometimes reflect those of traditional pasillo songs as the contemporary often reuses old lyrics or composes new lyrics in a similar style. There is still a sense of sadness, sentimentality, and longing, but it reflects modern understandings of those emotions. However, these new pasillos can contain lyrics that are more dramatic or include language that is "not nice about females or relationships"³² as a musician I interviewed explained it. Instead of sounding beautiful, poetic, and romantic, modern pasillo is sometimes now crass and gaudy in style. While several people described modern pasillo to me in this way, I was not able to find a song that demonstrated this tendency.

Modern pasillo is also the only pasillo style still broadcast on radio stations and able to be listened to easily by the public. HCJB has a program still dedicated to *musica nacional* that allows listeners to hear pasillo written in the traditional time period. Many Ecuadorians do not count either of these versions as true pasillo, but admit that they are the only styles broadcast widely on radio stations.

While it may be heard on the radio, modern pasillo is not a huge musical genre. There are not as many songs, defining or well-known characteristics, or artists actively seeking to compose in this style. According to older Ecuadorians I talked to, the significance of pasillo can be lost on the most recent generations, and so the drive to continue producing this music has died down. It was surprising to discover the lack of continued development of this musical genre, and to recognize that after the 1950s creation of this music took a dip. Modern day pasillo exists, but it is a small existence that is not near as largely impactful or important to the current lives of Ecuadorians and so the genre as a whole is slowly disappearing.

This is not to say that traditional pasillo is completely dying out, as those songs and style are still heard and experienced in a variety of more commonplace settings. Groups of friends will get together to celebrate a birthday or have another form of party. My roommate in Ecuador went to a party her work was hosting to honor the departure of one of their coworkers who had worked there for fifteen years. Somewhere near the middle of the party, two of the guests there took out their guitars and another grabbed bongos as they began to play a variety of *bombas* and *pasillos*. Most of the Ecuadorians present know these songs by heart and are ready to embrace the sentimentality of the lyrics as they encounter the bittersweet feeling of a beloved coworker leaving. There is an interesting juxtaposition between some of the pasillo *tempos* sounding quick and upbeat in contrast to the sentimentality of the lyrics, but the importance is on the tradition of singing *pasillos* more so than the lyrics matching the exact situation they are being sung in. Street musicians will also sometimes play pasillo songs as they are widely familiar to the passerby. Traditional pasillo may not be as commercially broadcast as the modern pasillo, but it is still encountered and experienced often in the common areas of life.

3.1 Current Artists

Even though not many artists are producing modern day pasillo, there are still modern day musicians that are keeping this genre alive in their reinvented way. One notable artist who has done a lot of albums featuring pasillo is named

Juan Fernando Velasco. His websites lists how he is one of the most recognized pop artists native to Ecuador, and also how he has won numerous platinum and gold records as well as two nominations for the Latin Grammys.³³ Velasco is incredibly well known in Latin America and has released seven albums in his music career thus far.

One example of his continuation and reinvention of pasillo is with the song “El Aguacate” (The Avocado). This song was originally composed by Cesar Guerrero³⁴, though there are many questions about the time and significance of its composition, but it was then made popular in the 50s to 60s by Julio Jaramillo. This song became one of his more frequently performed and propelled this specific pasillo to be a favorite of many Ecuadorian people. Its popularity as a traditional, favorite pasillo song inspired Velasco to do a cover of it in his own style, and include it on his 2010 album “Con Toda el Alma” (With All the Soul). So far in the course of his career Velasco has performed many of Jaramillo’s original songs, but “El Aguacate” has continued to be the most well-known. As is often characteristic of Velasco’s modern pasillos, the lyrics are exactly the same that Guerrero wrote and Jaramillo performed. What is not consistent, however, is that the qualities of instrumentation of Velasco’s version feel similar to that of Jaramillo’s. Velasco uses an electric guitar during his performance in contrast to plucked, distinct twang of Jaramillo’s acoustic, but it is still solely a guitar and a slower tempo used. He also keeps the song in a more traditional minor key.

Velasco has not composed his own original pasillos in this more modern style but does cover a variety of Jaramillo’s original songs and includes a more reinvented update to a handful of them. While Velasco typically has pasillos more consistent and less drastic in change from the traditional, his song “Sendas Distintas” (Different Paths) provides a fresh take that is more representative of modern pasillo than traditional. Jaramillo’s original is performed with an acoustic guitar and more rhythmically bright and crisp mandolin and violin. Velasco’s keeps a similar rhythm and tempo as the original, however his guitar is softer and the violins used in his recording have a smoother, more legato sound to them.

Another modern artist that the Ecuadorians I talked to spoke highly of is Paulina Tamayo. Paulina Tamayo was born in Quito, Ecuador and began singing and being recognized as a singer at age five.³⁵ She released her first album in 1969, but her most notable albums came later, in 2014 and 2016. These albums, “Ecuador en mi Corazon” (Ecuador in My Heart) and “A Lo Grande Con la Grande” (The Great with the Great), feature songs that sing the praises of Ecuador and contain pasillos that lament the loss and sadness of being separated from one’s country. Tamayo has gone on multiple tours in both North and South America that have helped to increase pasillo’s audience and gain popularity and recognition for her songs praising Ecuador as a country.

One such song is entitled “Collar de Lagrimas” (Necklace of Tears). The lyrics start off by saying “So, it will be my destiny to leave, full of grief weeping away from my homeland away from my mother and my Love.”³⁶ This pasillo continues on to speak of great sadness and tears spilt over the separation from her homeland, and that only in her songs does she remember. Her lyrics are very poetic and beautiful and speak of a deep longing and call for remembrance of Ecuador.

Musically, this pasillo starts off with a pan flute, which while less popular was still characteristic and used in traditional pasillos. The plucked guitar then comes in to provide accompaniment to the pan flute, however it begins to deviate from the traditional style as more stringed instruments and chimes provide other embellishments during the instrumental opening. The lyrics, tempo, and tonality resonate with traditional pasillo, but the complex instrumentation separate it as its own modern version of this style.

Another notable pasillo by Tamayo is called “Parece Mentira” (It’s Unbelievable), and this pasillo reflects the lyrics of many of the traditional male artists’ songs in lyrical content. It was often common for this male-dominated genre to sing of the loss of a woman they loved, and in “Parece Mentira” Tamayo sings of the sadness of and pain of losing a love that had sworn to be with her forever.³⁷ The instrumentation of this pasillo stays much closer to traditional pasillo than some of her other songs, and provided significant ground for her establishment as a pasillo singer. As the traditional genre was almost only comprised of male singers, Tamayo took that style and lyrics and turned it into a genre she too could participate in and succeed in. She has gone to great lengths to help preserve this genre and create her own lyrics and music that reflect this style while still allowing it to be flexible and represent her individual identity in connection with her national identity and the identity of her people.

3.2 Pasillo as Modern Identity

There are not a large number of popular artists outside the ones mentioned above who are composing a lot of new pasillos, but this does not necessarily mean that this genre is dying or waning in significance. There is significance in recognizing that these aforementioned singers and others are reproducing traditional songs in an attempt to help keep that part of culture alive. Particularly artists like Juan Fernando Velasco, who recreate the music as closely to the

original as they can to continue to pay tribute to these songs and artists. Even for the artists who are less careful about recreation, there is still importance in any form of recreation. One artist I spoke with mentioned how pasillo can become jazzy in a sense, as everyone plays them how they want with improvisation and style changes from person to person.³⁸ However, even with these stylistic choices, there are always underlying characteristics truly representative of the traditional style.

The other musician also felt more optimistically about the new, modern pasillo than other Ecuadorians do. While many Ecuadorians feel that pasillo is a dying genre that is being lost on the youth of today, this particular musician views it as a salvation for their music. Pasillo is not a widely produced music style outside of Ecuador, and this modernized pasillo is viewed as a “sacrifice” of the folkloric³⁹ style and commercialization of it, in order to allow for more widespread production and salvation of the tradition.

This is not to discredit the fear that pasillo is slowly dying out. One teenager that I talked with a couple times often described pasillo as “old people music”⁴⁰ and something he does not often seek out to listen to. It should be noted that the adolescents that I talked to *knew* what pasillo was, and could sing along to many of the songs (such as “El Aguacate”), but did not thoroughly appreciate the music style and considered it sad and weird. They could recognize that this genre was important, but it is not important to them. Some older Ecuadorians mentioned how it can be the trend for youth to not understand the importance of or enjoy pasillo music, but begin to appreciate it when they get older. It contains emotions and significance that is not fully understood until older, and at the stage of life that these adolescents were at, they found no modern identity or connection to it. When people are young, they often are still struggling to understand their own identity in relation to a small circle of peer influence and cultural experience, and it is difficult to grasp what their identity on a national and cultural scale is, or what the heavy significance of that can be. This demonstrates the need and importance for current artists to continue to incorporate new/current themes in their music, while maintaining the traditional pasillo style. For the young generation to learn and appreciate Ecuador’s traditional music, composers need to be creative and work towards making music that appeals to young people so this music is not forgotten or dies out.⁴¹

I asked my Spanish tutor if she knew about this genre and had any thoughts about the talk that it is a dying genre. Her response was very impassioned, as she was incredulous that people would say that pasillo could die out. She firmly stated that it could never disappear because it is “our music” and “a way to identify our feelings and our country.”⁴² While she also describes it as sentimental and melancholy, she strongly believes that that is why it is so important; because it acts as a platform to connect with and understand emotions, cultural pride, and identity. Her sentiment is echoed by a taxi driver I talked to. After he explained to me the history of pasillo and its presence in modern society, I asked him if it was a music genre he enjoyed and listened to. He laughed and said “I have to like it, it is my culture.”⁴³ He went on to explain that he does indeed enjoy it musically, but feels mostly connected to it and driven to like it because it is so important to him as an Ecuadorian. This music is not just music, it is an identity. There is such a rich history in this music’s development, and also a significance that it is music that is considered truly Ecuadorian. While it was influenced by other countries and cultures originally, there is a lot of pride surrounding it as people talk about how it differed from the Colombian style and became a part of Ecuador.

Music in general is very important to people in Ecuador. There are a large amount of street musicians playing when you walk down any of the main squares, people bring instruments to parties to play and sing in fellowship together, and there are a variety of dance styles that have sprung from traditional music that are still preserved. While the case could be made that music is present and important in most societies, it is important for its communal purpose in Ecuador. Whenever I truly experienced this music or talked with people about it, it was often mentioned in tangent with the group setting or its importance to all Ecuadorians, not just individuals. Part of the importance of this music as a national music style is its unification and recognition across the country and its people groups. While it maybe is not uniting all people in Ecuador under a common interest and emotion, it still unifying in smaller social settings and creates feelings of connection to one’s cultural and community in smaller concepts.

Pasillo is also important to Ecuadorian identity in terms of the emotions expressed in these songs. Many Ecuadorians that I talked to hold this conviction that an important part of their culture is this trait of sentimentality and recognizing sad, nostalgic emotions as part of their culture. There is a subconscious promotion of the expression of these feelings and learning to embrace and accept their role in society. When looking at art on a broader sense than just music, it can be noted that one of the most important museums in Quito to Ecuadorians is “La Capilla del Hombre” (The Chapel of Man). This museum features the artwork of a well-known Ecuadorian artist, Oswald Guayasamin. This museums website summary says

“La Capilla del Hombre” is a Cultural center that arises in response to the need to pay homage to the human being, to its peoples, to its identity. It is a space that invites to the reflection of the history from the point of view of Latin America, with our achievements and suffering, to project us to the future. A better future,

united and fair to ourselves. It identifies with the dispossessed of the earth, the discriminated peoples, the women, the children, the victims of the wars and the tortures of all species⁴⁴

Like pasillo, this museum is important to their cultural identity as they reflect upon the sadness and suffering in the history of their people. But instead of dwelling on and being consumed by this sadness, they use it as a way to provide hope for a better future and a longing for something better. Pasillo expresses similar, albeit more muted, emotions as the songs sing of loves lost (both in terms of women and the country) but from the lens of remembering a good thing, or looking forward in hope of something better. Traditional pasillos can contain a major key refrain that reflects this hope, before returning back to the minor key. The modern identity of Ecuadorian people still holds fast to these ideas of emotions and meditation on sadness and sentimentality.

4. Global Importance

While pasillo may only represent the identity of Ecuadorians, it is important on a global aspect in terms of understanding global identity. Ecuadorians are not necessarily unified in their understanding of a national identity, but there is something about the pasillo style and their pride in it truly being *their* music, that helps to connect individual identities into a broader one. Even younger teenagers who do not actively enjoy or seek out pasillo are easily caught up in singing along at parties in the spirit of camaraderie. There is a beauty in that connection and spirit that should be considered on a global perspective, as conversations about the importance of music, the preservation of music, and the teaching of music are talked about and considered.⁴⁵

Even though there is debate about if pasillo is dying out as a music genre or not, it is still necessary to consider the impact that would happen if it did. Because there is the possibility and potential trend that pasillo is slowly dying out, it should be treated as an “endangered” music when considering the importance of studying this music and thinking about its role as a national identity for these people.

Not much research has been done concerning the impact of the death of a music style, but music can be considered and studied in a similar manner to language. The language of a people group communicates their history, cultural practices, and emotions in a way that other languages cannot, and in a similar sense pasillo is communicating history, cultural ties, and emotions that reflect this people group’s identity more so than other music. Bud Lane, the vice chairman of the Siletz tribal council, was interviewed to talk about the significance of the loss of their language. Lane explains how when this language dies out they are essentially losing the people’s view of the world, and their view of how the world came to be for them.⁴⁶ Pasillo represents a view of Ecuador and its history, and for its people provides a view of love, loss, and sentimentality that is only fully expressed through this music. Lane continues on to say how every culture has their own worldview, and different ways of looking at the world. When a language, or music, dies it signifies also the loss of culture and worldview that is connected to them.⁴⁷ No culture’s worldview is superior to another, but all should be held as equally important and necessary in the shaping of the world at large.

Talking with Ecuadorians in common settings showed that pasillo stands as a tangible symbol of Ecuadorian identity for many people, and as a reflection of their national pride and emotions about their country and their brethren. This music provides a unique look into the ideas and emotions that Ecuadorians hold to be important and unique to their culture, and it is something that the rest of the world should be actively seeking out and searching to better understand. If this genre does indeed die out, these people lose a symbol of unity to their country. The loss of their music can also be described as a loss of a link to the past, and therefore a loss of cultural place and purpose in relation to historical significance and future growth.⁴⁸ While Ecuadorians would still be able to communicate in their native tongue, and share and spread ideas and emotions on a verbal level, there is something uniquely special and unifying about music that would be felt as a hard loss from this culture.

Music has a way of bringing people together and expressing emotions that are otherwise hard to put to words. Pasillo became known as Ecuador’s national music for a reason. The content prominently features songs of love for country and community, and helped act as an agent for allowing the world to see a glimpse of the beauty of this country and this culture. It is music about Ecuador truly developed by Ecuadorians, to become a music that they feel reflects their identity and represents their talents and culture.

5. Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Dr. Mark Peters for his tireless support and critiques in the original writing of this paper and the subsequent enthusiasm for similar topics that followed. The author also appreciates the Maurice Vander Velde Scholarship Award for the financial support to complete this project and the many Ecuadorians who dealt with the endless questions and offered their beautiful country and culture as a home for the brief period of time.

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