CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE PUERTO RICAN CUATRO TRADITION: REFLECTIONS ON CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

A dissertation submitted to the College of the Arts of Kent State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE PUERTO RICAN CUATRO TRADITION: REFLECTIONS ON CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE PRACTICE (164 pp.)

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The *cuatro* is a ten-stringed lute that has played an integral role in the shaping of Puerto Rican cultural identity, where it is regarded as a highly revered symbol of national identity. The cuatro appeals to certain values that are considered fundamental for the perpetration of Puerto Rican culture. The instrument has become an object that Puerto Ricans strive to preserve and maintain in everyday culture. In this dissertation, it is theoretically approached as a sign that has been attributed cultural meaning, thus becoming a symbol.

This dissertation examines the continuity and change of the Puerto Rican cuatro tradition and focuses on the role fulfilled by the instrument in contemporary performance practice. It traces the historical path of the cuatro while emphasizing on the impact of contemporary performance practice for the instrument's continuation and transformation. Although the dissertation stresses how the cuatro remains as a symbol, it is also concerned with new scenarios and locations for cuatro performance in order to demonstrate how its performance practice away from Puerto Rico has been crucial for the continuation of a cuatro tradition.
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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The Puerto Rican *cuatro* is a ten-stringed lute that has been frequently used in the island’s folk and popular music expressions since the first half of the twentieth century. Its shape as well as number of strings has changed from a keyhole-shaped lute with four strings to a violin-shaped with ten strings. In spite of these changes, the instrument has kept its name cuatro (Spanish for four). A clear organological definition of the instrument and an account of why the ten-stringed instrument used nowadays kept the name cuatro are lacking in the sources consulted. One of the publications that alludes to the possible origins of the name is presented in *La Gran Enciclopedia de Puerto Rico* (1976). In the entry about Puerto Rican folk music, the author refers to an idea suggested by musicologist Peter Gramme, who proposes that the name cuatro is derived from the Arabic *al quatr* and has no relationship with the instrument’s number of strings. For Gramme the cuatro is derived from the vihuela and was named as such because Moors assigned the name *al quatr* to any stringed instrument that accompanied the sitar, the predecessor of the guitar.¹ From the consulted sources, this is the only place where the name cuatro is mentioned to be related to the Arabic *al quatr*.

The cuatro has played an integral role in the shaping of cultural identity of Puerto Rico, where it is regarded as a highly revered symbol of national identity. This position as a cultural symbol of Puerto Rico is due in part to the historical and political circumstances of the island. Tracing the origins of the instrument and identifying it with the historical background of the

island provide further evidence of the cuatro’s uninterrupted existence. The colonial status of Puerto Rico has generated a strong nationalist discourse that has celebrated, throughout the years, the island’s unique cultural heritage, which includes the Spanish language, religion, and folkloric music. The current colonial status of Puerto Rico is a result of the island’s invasion by the United States (U.S.) during the Spanish American War of 1898. Since then, Puerto Rico still maintains its status as an unincorporated territory of the United States and its residents are granted U.S. citizenship as birthright.

As an overseas possession of the United States, the island of Puerto Rico has been exposed to a massive influx of American capitalism, laws, and customs unequaled in other Latin American countries. The direct and indirect U.S. colonial, legal, economic, political, and cultural presence along with the island’s complex political status has actually strengthened the sense of peoplehood among Puerto Ricans. The colonial condition of Puerto Rico has significantly affected the way its people perceive their nation and nationality and how their culture is represented. The island is a self-defined community of people who share a sense of solidarity based on a belief in a common heritage while claiming divergent political rights, from self-determination to full incorporation to the U.S. The persistent colonial status has raised a strong awareness for nationalism among Puerto Ricans. This cultural awareness is manifested through the peoples’ pride in their indigenous musical expressions.

The association of musical expressions to nationalism has been a common topic in the field of ethnomusicology. In his article “Nationalism in Latin America” Thomas Turino


\[\text{3} \text{ Jorge Duany, \textit{The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 4.}\]

discusses the nationalist discourse in Latin America from the 1820s to the 1970s, where the nation is conceived as a unit “with a corresponding increased emphasis on cultural nationalism and reformist transformations of subaltern cultural and musical practices.”\(^5\) A similar situation also occurs in Puerto Rico with the institutionalization of the cuatro by the government and the validation of its practice as a national expression.\(^6\) Nationally, the cuatro has always been associated with the jíbaro (peasant). The valorization of the cuatro in the hands of the jíbaro has to do with its inclusion in a discourse of Puerto Rican nationality and pride.

The term jíbaro has been historically associated with musical practices generally labeled as “música jibara,” a genre equivalent to Puerto Rican folk music, which includes cuatro performance and the cultivation of a wide range of song forms.\(^7\) In his discussion of the concept of nation, Richard Middleton argues that folk music practices have been categorized not only as authentic forms of expression but as a means to validate cultural identity.\(^8\) This is also true of the Puerto Rican jíbaro music as it has been used, especially through song lyrics, to legitimize ideas of nationalism and cultural authenticity. This assertion is sustained by the image of the jíbaro and his musical expressions being a visible representation of the nationalist discourse in Puerto Rico. For instance, Raquel Rivera has discussed how the cultural nationalist discourse, which is a direct response to U.S. colonialism, has been used to define Puerto Rican culture. Rivera mentions that a basic tenet of all cultural nationalists is defending, celebrating, or nourishing the

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\(^6\) This phenomenon is further discussed in Chapter 3.

\(^7\) A variety of song forms are practiced in Puerto Rican folk music. The singer of this tradition, known as “trovador” performs a wide range of songs that are paired with specific musical styles usually played with cuatro, guitar and percussion instruments. One of the most popular forms is the décima, a type of improvised song. The décima structure is further discussed in Chapter 3.

national culture, a struggle that has most often been described as preserving and nurturing Puerto Rican customs and traditions—the ‘roots’ of Puerto Rican culture.⁹

The position of the cuatro as a national symbol, at the core of Puerto Rican culture, reinforces the fact that its performance practice enables connections and secures ties between the instrument and an increasing awareness of national identity among Puerto Ricans living on the island and elsewhere. National discourse engaged by Puerto Rican artists often stresses ideas about nationhood and identity, and emphasizes the island’s distinctiveness in order to perpetuate and celebrate cultural heritage. The jíbaro, considered a symbol of Puerto Rican identity, permeates folk music expressions, where its image is applied in lyrics to represent Puerto Ricanness or when cuatro players identify their music and/or themselves as jíbaros to denote the authenticity of their musical practices. For example, the title of the Grammy-nominated album of the group Ecos de Borinquén is Jíbaro hasta el hueso, which translates as “Jíbaro to the bone.”¹⁰ The lyrics of this song declare that the singer does not forget his roots, and that the uniqueness of his Puerto Rican heritage makes him jíbaro to the bone. (See Appendix A for complete song lyrics in Spanish and English).¹¹

Destilo melaza  
I distill molasses

de puertorriqueño,  
Puerto Rican style

bajo el caribeño  
Beneath the Caribbean

sol que nos abraza.  
Sun that embraces us

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¹⁰ Ecos de Borinquen, Jíbaro hasta el hueso, Smithsonian Folkways SFW405046, CD, 2003.

Única es mi raza
con orgullo expreso,
mi canción es beso
que a mi tierra estampo,
porque soy del campo
Jíbaro hasta el hueso

My race is unique.
Proudly, I express that
My song is a kiss
That marks my land,
For I am from the country,
Jíbaro to the bone.

The following example is an excerpt of the décimas "Sabor a nuestra cultura" by Omar Santiago Fuentes. In this verse, the cuatro is described as jíbaro and as a bridge between the past and future traditions.\(^{12}\) The cuatro is conceived as an authentic carrier of folk music expressions that accentuates Puerto Rican culture.

Ese cuatro ajibarado
nació de nuestra madera
y hace más de un siglo era
tiple doliente afinado.
Es un puente entre el pasado
y la tradición futura
Puerto Rico hecho ternura
regalándonos con diez
cuerdas sonando a la vez
sabor a nuestra cultura.

That cuatro jíbaro
was born out of our wood
more than a century ago
it was a tiple doliente\(^\text{13}\) in tune.
It’s a bridge between the past
and future traditions
Puerto Rico made tenderness
giving us ten
strings sounding at once
taste of our culture.

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\(^{13}\) The tiple doliente is a model of the Puerto Rican tiple which originated in the central area of Puerto Rico, in the towns of Orocovis and Morovis. The contemporary version of the tiple is inspired on the tiple doliente and it has five strings and a characteristic square shape.
The examples above demonstrate that more than a historical figure, the jíbaro is an agent of cultural practices and a bearer of Puerto Rican identity. Even though Haas defined it as “an ignorant, superstitious, pathetically poor country peasant on American soil,” the jíbaro works as a symbol that rightfully represents Puerto Rican culture and nationalist ideologies embedded in musical practices. This study focuses on the continuity and change of the Puerto Rican cuatro from its use by the jíbaro to the contemporary performance practice in order to discuss how it manifests multiple meanings and representations of Puerto Rican culture, as well as how the instrument is performed, disseminated and used to preserve the concept of a cuatro tradition.

Theoretical Framework

Judging by the frequent use of the cuatro in folk music expressions, and its embodiment as something that Puerto Ricans strive to preserve and maintain in everyday culture, I assert that the instrument serves as a popular image that bestows to the islanders a powerful representation of cultural identity. The cuatro’s denotational aspect or its referential meaning as a symbol of Puerto Rican music and culture will be explored through symbolism as a theoretical concept.

In the book *Antropología do Simbólico*, Mesquitela Lima introduces the concept of symbolic anthropology as a domain where the symbol resides as a cultural creation. The symbol, continues Lima, “acts simultaneously over the spirit and over our senses to amalgamate ideas and emotions in the same dimension.” The symbol acquires a specific meaning and represents, in a certain cultural context, a feeling, an action or an attitude. This project is grounded in the idea that the cuatro appeals to certain values that are considered fundamental for the perpetration of

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16 Ibid., 48.
Puerto Rican culture. It can be deducted here that Lima emphasizes the effect of the symbol over the spirit and the symbol’s impact on the individual. For him, symbols generate emotions and sensations as they coexist within the individual and within society. As such, Lima suggests that symbols are communication tools that make a worldview possible by propitiating consensus and identification. The reason for which this research focuses on symbol rather than sign is on the former’s capability to create meaning in the realm of people’s interpretation and understanding.

In the field of musicology, symbolic analysis has also been approached from the perspective of semiotics, or the study of signs. The writings of Charles Sanders Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure, two thinkers who shaped symbol theory as originally applied to linguistics, provide a basic definition of the concept of sign. According to Peirce, a sign is something, which stands to somebody in some respect or capacity. Peirce based his sign structure on a three-part model, which includes sign, object and interpretant. This model implies that the sign addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign or a more developed sign. While Saussure described a two-part model of the sign, composed of the signifier or the form, which the sign takes, and the signified or the concept it represents. “The sign is the whole that results from the association of the signifier with the signified.”

However, the work of Charles Morris further develops on the processes on which something functions as a sign. According to Morris the general concept of semiosis offers a groundwork for understanding the major forms of human behavior and the interrelationships of such forms through the study of signs. Semiotic sustains three kinds of relations: to persons, to objects and to other signs. These three sign relations investigate the three dimensions of semiotic:

18 Ibid, 99.
pragmatics, semantics and syntactics. Morris defines semantics as the relation of signs to objects, while syntactics is concerned with signs and sign combinations as they are subject to syntactical rules.

The concept of pragmatics deals directly with signs as interpreted. Morris defines pragmatics as the study of the origins, use and effect of signs. The term focuses on the relation of signs to their users, and deals with all the psychological, biological, and sociological phenomena which occur in the functioning of signs. This research applies the concept of pragmatics given its correlation with a level of interpretation. However, it is important to note that pragmatics does not operate independently from the semiotic field, in which signs also relate to other signs. Pragmatics is applied here in order to study the relationship between the cuatro as a sign to its users and to order systematically the results, which come from the study of this particular dimension of semiosis. Morris indicates that pragmatics presupposes both syntactics and semantics to discuss adequately the relation of signs to one another and to those things to which they refer their interpreters. From the standpoint of pragmatics, the cuatro functions as a sign that generates multiple meanings and relations with its interpreters. These meanings are constructed from the cuatro's position at different historical instances, by its important role within the realm of jíbaro music and its function in the making of Puerto Rican identity.

By orienting my research on Lima’s consideration of the symbol as a cultural creation as well as on Morris’s concept of pragmatics, I seek to establish the relationship between the instrument as a symbol and its users as it deals with all the psychological and biological phenomena that occur in the functioning of signs. Even though the dissertation is focused on how the cuatro remains as a symbol, it is also concerned with new scenarios and how cuatristas

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manage the cuatro as a symbol as they reach out to a broader audience outside the Puerto Rican context.

The cuatro as a symbol

This dissertation examines the effects of the cuatro’s institutionalization as well as its dissemination across time and space. This process was influenced by the radio and recording industry and propelled by the government’s role in the institutionalization and diffusion of the instrument as an authentic Puerto Rican cultural expression. Sections of this dissertation delve into the ways in which the cuatro continues to be a powerful tool in creating a sense of community and in shaping collective identity. Cuatro performance carries a sense of cultural belonging by synthesizing local experiences, shared memories and ideas about traditional culture.

This study is concerned with the development of the cuatro, its popularity and association with cultural identity. It also explores the continuity of this instrument as well as how the instrument changes, and considers the many ways the instrument is utilized in today’s performance practice. The analysis of continuity and change in the cuatro tradition is contextualized in time, as it encompasses aspects beyond musical performance that are critical for identity formation. As a powerful symbol, the cuatro helps to solidify identity and belonging to a particular group. By tracing patterns of continuity and change, as reflected in the cuatro tradition, this research explores the ways in which contemporary performance practice introduces new scenarios for its continuation and transformation. As Christopher A. Waterman mentions,

Adequate accounts of musical continuity and change must deal to the extent that sources, and scholarly competence allow, with relationships among patterns of musical sound and performance behavior, cultural symbolism and value, social
transaction and ideology, and the material forces that encourage or constrain particular forms of expression.\textsuperscript{21}

Given the inherent representation of the cuatro with notions of authenticity of Puerto Rican expressions, this research is also concerned with how the cuatro and its music reflect tradition and identity. Bohlman mentions that,

\begin{quote}
In the twenty-first century, music narrates the nation in hybrid forms, and musical genre moves across historical, geographical and linguistic borders, generating new processes of narration by mixing the old with the new.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

Bohlman’s statement carries validity in the presence of the cuatro within geographic and linguistic borders as we find it being played in Puerto Rico, the United States mainland, Hawaii and the Canary Islands. The exploration of cuatro performance away from Puerto Rico will be examined from a postnational perspective. In the words of Ignacio Corona and Alejandro Madrid, “such an angle would allow us to recognize cultural formations as ‘glocal’ phenomena where global and local motivations coexist…”\textsuperscript{23} Cuatro performances outside of Puerto Rico are generally accepted as innovative and as occasions that exalt the distinctiveness of Puerto Rican musical expressions. The new meanings of contemporary cuatro performance are determined in part by the production, distribution and consumption of its product in new settings. In May 2015, Russian guitar player Yuri Nugmanov performed the piece \textit{Concierto Criollo} for cuatro and

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{21}

\bibitem{22}

\bibitem{23}
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orchestra, composed by Ernesto Cordero, with the Saratov Philharmonic Orchestra.\footnote{Puerto Rican cuatro player Millito Cruz premiered Concierto Criollo in Cuba, 1988. Another example of a piece written for cuatro and orchestra is Paisajes by Sonia I. Morales. The piece was originally commissioned by the Puerto Rican Cultural Association of Dayton and premiered by the Dayton Philharmonic in September, 1997.} The performance was announced on Puerto Rican Television Channel 6 with the headline “The Puerto Rican Cuatro Sounds in Russia for the First Time.”\footnote{My translation of the headline in Spanish, “Por primera vez suena un cuatro Boricua en Rusia.”} This headline boasts about the instrument being played away from Puerto Rico. The fact that the cuatro was used to perform a work by a Puerto Rican composer validates its acceptance in Puerto Rico. An interesting question to explore is “what would be the reaction and media response if the cuatro were used to perform Russian music?” This example sustains the belief that the cuatro is instilled with nationalism. The performance in Russia is not perceived as a threat to national culture, but it is rather conceived as an opportunity for the advancement of the instrument that exposes its Puerto Rican uniqueness to the world.\footnote{A video of the performance posted on YouTube by Yuri Nagmanov has positive comments, most of them from Puerto Ricans expressing national pride for the performance. Accessed from, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMPUwRqF4sM} This example speaks to what Alejandro Madrid and Ignacio Corona say about the importance of music in the global era. The authors mention that music “may be produced under very specific circumstances that grant it particular local significance, but consumed under completely different conditions that in turn help redefine its meaning.”\footnote{Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid, eds., \textit{Postnational Musical Identities}, 5.}

Therefore, the diffusion, transformations and significance of cuatro musical production in time, space and social contexts, guide the course of this research. However these realities are not new for cuatro performance, as cuatro players have been dealing with hybridity and innovation while remaining true to their notions of culture, identity and nation. For example, cuatro recordings that deal with international repertoire and with musics outside of the Puerto Rican folklore are conceived as new forms of authenticity. For instance, the suggestive album titles of
renowned cuatrista Edwin Colón Zayas, such as *El Cuatro más allá de lo imaginable* (The cuatro beyond imagination) and *Siguiendo hasta el infinito* (Towards infinity), demonstrate the many possibilities for the instrument when it is opened to other repertoires and styles outside its local domain.

In her study of the American banjo, Karen Linn mentions that “a musical instrument is more than wood, wires and glue; the essence of the object lies in the meanings the culture has assigned to it.”28 When the cuatro is considered as a symbol, it encompasses more than music making, which includes varying contexts of meanings and interpretations. The cuatro as a symbol becomes meaningful among people who play the instrument or ascribe value to it as a musical object within specific social contexts. In the book *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music*, Raymond Monelle quotes Neubauer and provides a comprehensive and relevant description about the meaning of music:

> Music, in fact, is a tissue of relations only. A single note has no meaning. Musical sounds are empty characters, meaningless arbitrary signs that acquire significance only within a structure that man imposes on the infinite continuum of sounds.29

Neubauer suggests that the attribution of meaning in music depends on the “life experience” of the composer, musician and listeners involved in the musical process. Whenever life experience is mentioned the cultural context is implied. Recognizing the cuatro as a symbol implies the multiplicity of interpretations and meanings ascribed to it; thus, the significance of this analytical tool is centered in its ability to reveal the meaning that is absent from the music itself. Furthermore the meaning of music stands as a sign whose significance is subject to interpretation.

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The meaning achieved after its interpretation is not univocal or universal since it is derived from the singularity of the music maker’s vécu, –sum of life experiences within a cultural context. On that account, music as a social phenomenon produces an indefinite number of perceptions and interpretations; its analysis as a sound object cannot be separated from the cultural context. In the present study, the consideration and the analysis of the musician’s life experiences will shed light on the understanding of continuity and change in the tradition of the instrument. Life experiences will also portray different perspectives on the way the cuatro is perceived, its use and repertoire, and ultimately on how musicians handle changes in the musical product.

Ideas about the cuatro cannot be disassociated from the experiences of the listeners and performers, and their distinct understanding of the instrument. Reflecting on the musician’s life experience will provide referential information that alludes to all other aspects surrounding the cuatro as a means of musical expression. In the case of music making on the cuatro, this theory will be approached with the intention to understand the various levels of meaning present in contemporary performance practice, and to consider how ‘life experience’ affects the way the cuatro tradition is being carried out through performance among young and old musicians on the island and elsewhere.

One of the key questions of this research is to answer why present-day cuatro performance practice is the way it is and how cuatro music reflects the formation of Puerto Rican cultural identity. As Kazadi wa Mukuna mentions, “the final goal of the field of ethnomusicology, is to contribute to the understanding of humans in time and space through their musical expressions.”30 Thus, to understand the current status of the instrument will ultimately lead us to better comprehend its maker and the complexities that surrounds him. Specifically, to

understand Puerto Rican music implies understanding such other factors as politics, colonialism, and an unprecedented migration to the U.S.

According to Alan Merriam,

Music is a product of human behavior and has structure, but its structure cannot have an existence of its own divorced from the behavior which produces it. In order to understand why a music structure exists as it does, we must also understand how and why the behavior, which produces it is as it is, and how and why the concepts which underlie that behavior are ordered in such a way as to produce the particularly desired form of organized sound.\(^{31}\)

Kazadi wa Mukuna proposes a model based on this definition of music whose main objective is to find the significance of music located beyond the sonorous element. The present equation contains two elements, where music is the known element, and the unknown portion of the equation exists underneath layers of various phenomena of an individual influencing his behavior (My translation from Portuguese).\(^{32}\) The following pyramid constitutes the esthetic paradigm of Merriam’s model as proposed by Kazadi wa Mukuna.\(^{33}\)

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\(^{32}\) Kazadi wa Mukuna, op. cit., “Sobre a busca da verdade na etnomusicologia,” 15.

\(^{33}\) Idem.
Ethnomusicological analysis proceeds from the known (music) to the unknown (where we come from: family, society, neighborhood). This research takes cuatro music making as the known fact that unveils other not-so-apparent aspects that need further analysis, such as how the cuatro and its music is perceived by society, how it shapes national discourse, and how it helps to perpetuate the idea of Puerto Rican nationhood. In order to accomplish a comprehensive analysis of music in ethnomusicology we have to target the music as an immanent level of meaning that leads into some other levels that involve the analysis of the society.

Following this paradigm, it can be concluded that as a sign, music provokes an indefinite number of perceptions and interpretations. As a sound object, however, its analysis cannot be separated from the cultural context because, as Morris suggests, without interpretant behavior there is no signification. The field of ethnomusicology does not seek to focus on the analysis of

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34 From my notes in the class Introduction to Ethnomusicology taught by Kazadi wa Mukuna on August 29, 2007.
music as an abstract entity, but rather to analyze music within a cultural context in order to understand its creator.

The ultimate objective of this research is to take the contemporary performance practice of the cuatro as a symbol, which will be the “known” end of the equation. The application of Kazadi’s esthetic paradigm assists in the exploration of the unknown of the equation as it scrutinizes the society, paying attention to the instrument’s instances of continuity and change. As Geertz affirms, the whole point of a semiotic approach to culture is to aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live, so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them.\(^{35}\) Therefore, considering the current trends in cuatro music making, this research analyzes the many settings in which cuatro performance is currently practiced in order to better understand the culture that produces this growing and transformative musical phenomenon.

Chapter Two

THE ORIGINS OF THE CUATRO

European Influence

The Spanish colonization of the Americas began in 1492. Christopher Columbus arrived in the Caribbean, on his first voyage in 1492, making landfall in Cuba and Hispaniola. The Greater Caribbean includes the islands within the Caribbean Sea as well as coastal areas of Central and South America, including countries with a common cultural and economic history, such as Belize, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana. The Caribbean comprises three main island groups: the Greater Antilles, the Lesser Antilles and the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos archipelagos. The Hispanic Caribbean is a group of nations that includes Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. These islands share common ties to Spain, including the Spanish language, and Catholicism, which have a significant influence on all three. The archipelago also manifests a deep-rooted tradition of music making, religious practices, and cultural legacies together in a network of social structures that has been generally perceived as a cohort of islands sharing a common heritage. However, each of these insular nations has followed its distinctive historical and cultural path. The history of the Hispanic Caribbean area has its own challenges due to the large number of states and islands in the region, all of them with their individual histories. Thus, “the contemporary Caribbean is a changing vision of blended histories and cultures, and insularity has given them distinct histories, cultures, environments and identities.”

The publication of the book General History of the Caribbean, commissioned by The

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United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), marks “an instance of the change in cultural policy which resulted in a shift in emphasis from the common heritage of all mankind to acknowledging the diversity of cultures.” Spanish colonization brought to the New World peoples, plants, animals, and technologies from Europe and across the globe. Iberian merchants, missionaries and mariners brought to the Americas some of their musical instruments, particularly chordophones from the lute family that were popular in Spain during the sixteenth century. In this process, non-Europeans also encountered the alien instruments and practices of Europe, and assessed them in accordance with their own musical systems. From the available written resources, it is possible to deduce a general overview about the historical development of the cuatro and the description of its function in today’s folk music expressions. It is important to consider the role of the European instruments within the Puerto Rican context because the cuatro is a product of such cultural interactions.

The Spanish vihuela was one of the European chordophones that arrived in Puerto Rico during the early years of Spanish colonization. According to Juan Sotomayor, the Spanish vihuela was first introduced in Puerto Rico in the year 1512. The term vihuela was originally applied to a variety of stringed instruments: the *vihuela de peñola*, played with a quill as a plectrum, the *vihuela de arco*, played with a bow, and the *vihuela de mano*, plucked with the fingers and thumb. The first half of the sixteenth century was a significant period for the course of chordophone history in Spain, as the country witnessed a sudden and short-lived explosion of compositions and publications for the *vihuela de mano*.

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4 Juan Sotomayor Pérez, *Cuerdas de mi tierra: una historia de los instrumentos de cuerda nativos de Puerto Rico* (Moca, Puerto Rico: Juan Sotomayor Pérez, 2013), 145.
The sixteenth-century vihuela that flourished in Spain as well as in Spanish colonies had
gut strings usually arranged in six or seven paired courses (double strings with the pairs tuned in
unison or to an octave.) Vihuelas came in a variety of shapes, sometimes oval, like the lute, but
increasingly they were waisted; with either a sharp – as in the bowed viol family today – or a
gentler curve in the middle of the body. In Spain, the vihuela occupied the courtly place that the
lute enjoyed elsewhere in Europe, but the vihuela was also favored by a rising bourgeoisie bent
on self-cultivation and musical appreciation. The vihuela was more easily manufactured than the
lute, generally smaller, possibly cheaper, and arguably more easily held and played. Nonetheless,
after having been extremely popular in Spain throughout the sixteenth century, the vihuela
“seems to have disappeared rather suddenly, to be replaced by its smaller relation, the guitar.”
James Millward states that the idea of a vihuela displacement, due to the popularity of the guitar,
is a misconception incurred by focusing on names rather than the things they represent. During
the sixteenth century, the popularity of the vihuela de mano even overshadowed the lute in
Spain. The European lute, an instrument introduced to Europe by the Moors during the
occupation of Spain from 711 to 1492, is described as:

A fretted, finger-plucked instrument, tuned in fourths around a third, used for
polyphonic as well as monophonic playing, and associated to its own system of
notation; it has five courses or pairs of strings, always double, and nine frets on the
neck making the distinction of notes with the application of the finger.

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5 Juan Sotomayor Pérez, _Cuerdas de mi tierra_, 244.
6 Idem.
7 Wolfgang Freis, “Perfecting the Perfect Instrument: Fray Juan Bermudo on the Tuning and
8 Christopher Page, “The 15th Century Lute: New and Neglected Sources,” _Early Music_ 9, no.1
Lutes Arrive in Puerto Rico

The written records at the archives of the Casa de la Contratación de Sevilla provide evidence of the musical instruments that were imported to the island of Puerto Rico between 1512 and 1517. They included 18 vihuelas, 36 clusters of strings and one guitar.9 A songbook from 1508, used on the island of Puerto Rico by the bishop Fray Ambrosio de Montesinos during the early years of colonization, suggests that during that period in Spain, musical instruments were true to the religious function of music. This suggestion implies that at the time of colonization, musical instruments were mainly used for sacred purposes, but their role gradually changed as they were reinterpreted, i.e., assigned secular functions and incorporated into the musical expressions in the New World. Across the Americas it is observable that the native people used the European chordophones as inspiration to create their own versions. Expanding on the specific case of Puerto Rico, José Reyes Zamora points out:

European chordophones were constructed out of individually carved wooden pieces. This process required certain skills, tools and appropriate materials. The creole devised the way to emulate the European chordophones, and created in a rustic way the cuatro, the tiple and the bordonúa. This is the reason why we state that our instruments emerged from the wish and the need to reproduce the sound of the Spanish chordophone, but with limited resources.10

During the first years of Spanish colonization, there were three identifiable chordophones in the Americas: the Spanish vihuela with six strings, and the four and five-stringed guitars, which were also named vihuelas, without the distinction, common in Spain, of naming the instrument vihuela del pueblo (people’s vihuela).11 Ercilia Moreno Chá argues that:

[I]n Latin America chordophones underwent three kinds of processes: imposition,
adoption and innovation. Chordophones relating to the Catholic church were imposed, and this determined that, at an initial stage, such chordophones as the violin, the rebec, or the harp did not register changes of significance in the New World (except for the logical replacement of building materials). But some features changed significantly when they reached other environments and were used for repertoires outside the church…

One of the earliest publications to discuss Puerto Rican customs during Spanish rule is *El Gíbaro* by Manuel Alonso. First published in 1849, this book consists of a collection of narratives depicting the customs and traditions of the jíbaro. In the book, Alonso describes different types of dances and alludes to the musical instruments that were in use when he mentions that, “…the complete orchestra included one bordonúa, one tiple, one cuatro, one carracho and maraca.”

Whereas Alonso describes in detail the dances that were in fashion in the late eighteenth century, he only lists the instruments without commentary. Although the cuatro, the tiple and the bordonúa have been historically regarded as the exclusive components of the Puerto Rican jíbaro orchestra, other sources mention that the vihuela was also in use. In his memoirs, Alejandro Tapia y Rivera (1826-1882) notes:

> At nighttime there were *parrandas* of people from different social strata who visited one house after the other singing and playing the country’s rustic instruments: the cuatro, vihuela, tiple, guitar and bordonúa. (My translation)

In the specific case of Puerto Rican music it is necessary to consider the encyclopedic volume dedicated to music in *La Gran Enciclopedia de Puerto Rico*, especially the section entitled “Música popular hasta finales del siglo XIX.” Héctor Campos Parsi, editor of the volume, addresses the Spanish-derived musical traditions and mentions that the ensemble of folk music

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13 Manuel Alonso, *El Gíbaro* (San Juan: Editorial Plaza Mayor, 2007), 75. (My translation)
14 A *parranda* is a Puerto Rican tradition associated with the Christmas season. A group of musicians gather together for a surprise visit by showing up at a house to play music.
instruments is derived from the stringed instruments that were popular at that time: the guitar and
the vihuela. According to Campos Parsi, these instruments were incorporated into the musical
tradition of the mountain region since the beginning of the seventeenth century. The music styles
associated with the region are essentially Spanish in terms of form, technique, and sound, and
their interpretation is mostly improvisatory. This encyclopedic entry is merely descriptive;
therefore the evolution of the instrument and its association to other Spanish models such as the
vihuela is not discussed or analyzed.

In his book Cuerdas de mi tierra, Juan Sotomayor examines the use and development of
the vihuela in Puerto Rico, and proposes that what is called a bordonúa nowadays is really
descended from the Puerto Rican vihuela. This suggestion is sustained by the nineteenth-century
descriptions provided by Tapia y Rivera and Francisco del Valle Atiles. Sotomayor argues that
the vihuela adopted the name bordonúa and survived throughout the twentieth century. The fact
that the cuatro coexisted with other native chordophones, such as the tiple, the bordonúa and the
vihuela, definitely influenced the instrument’s development and its function as a melodic
instrument. In a personal interview with Juan Sotomayor, the author asserted that finding the
origins of the bordonúa and its relation to the vihuela “was probably my best discovery in the
whole book.” Even though Sotomayor’s research with el Proyecto del Cuatro is primarily
focused on the cuatro, Sotomayor notes that “…the tiple, vihuela and bordonúa were of equal
importance. The cuatro was never played as a solo instrument, always played with
accompaniment, so we decided that we were going to investigate all four instruments.”

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17 Juan Sotomayor, interview by Noraliz Ruiz, Moca, Puerto Rico, December 30, 2014.
18 Ibid.
Early Cuatros

Puerto Ricans have come to know the cuatro because of the work of cuatristas (cuatro players), who have been performing with the instrument and passing along the tradition generation after generation. Interestingly, the history of the cuatro has been shaped by the contributions of cuatristas to the instrument’s catalogue of repertoire and by the considerable number of recordings that encompass the instrument’s discography. Written accounts on the history of the cuatro are very limited; therefore, the analysis of the instrument’s continuity and change depends in great part on the interpretation of the instrument’s repertoire and discography, the examination of its performance practice and the consideration of its mode of transmission.
The history of the cuatro can be divided into two main phases: 1) the emergence of a four-stringed cuatro, now referred to as the old cuatro, which eventually turned into eight strings in four courses; 2) the rise and popularization of the modern cuatro with ten strings in five courses. The following photograph shows a replica of the old cuatro. In the online photo galleries of the Puerto Rican Cuatro Project, there is a picture of musician Tuto Feliciano (1926-2005) holding a four-stringed cuatro. The image was taken circa 1936 in Yauco, Puerto Rico. According to Feliciano, the instrument was still played in 1950 by himself and others exclusively around the Yauco region. He complained of its musical and technical limitations and admired the versatility of the modern ten-stringed form.\(^\text{19}\)

Figure 2-2: Four-stringed cuatro

Source: A replica of the old cuatro, made by Vicente Valentin in 1992. From Juan Sotomayor’s collection. Photograph by the author.

The amount of documentation on the old cuatro is not sufficient to establish a clear timeline of evolution. The earliest written mention of a Puerto Rican cuatro is presented in 1828 in the newspaper La Gaceta de Puerto Rico. An article announcing the fifth anniversary of the Cádiz Constitution stated: “In the parish church of the town of Corozal performs an orchestra that includes two violins, two cuatros, piano and guitar.” The pairing of the cuatro with other European instruments seems unusual, given the instrument’s historical association with the jíbaro, and with other plucked lutes. However, the relation to other European instruments cannot be disregarded or taken as an isolated event because in the late nineteenth century, the cuatro was integrated into the ensembles of Puerto Rican composer Juan Morel Campos (1857-1896). Early in the twentieth century the cuatro appears in the chamber ensemble Arte y Amor of composer José Ignacio Quintón. Gerardo Vechini alternated between the cuatro and the euphonium in Quintón’s chamber ensemble, which also included bass, flute and cello.

During the early years of the twentieth century, the old cuatro with four strings was slowly replaced by an eight-stringed version. This type of cuatro was popularized by some of the most notable cuatro players at the time. Cuatristas like Norberto Cales, Heriberto Torres, Tito Báez, Tuto Feliciano, Roque Navarro and Neri Orta performed the cuatro with eight strings in four courses. Even the contemporary cuatro player Edwin Colón Zayas mentioned in an interview with Juan Sotomayor that his first cuatro was an old eight-stringed model that belonged to his father. The shape of the eight-stringed cuatro also evolved, moving from the keyhole model, to adopting a guitar-like form, with a waisted line and a curve in the middle of

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20 My translation. La Gaceta de Puerto Rico, November 12, 1828.
21 Juan Sotomayor discusses how Morel Campos incorporated the cuatro into chamber ensembles and military bands. For more information, see Juan Sotomayor, Cuerdas de mi tierra, 148.
22 For more information, see Noel Allende Goitia, “Los avatares de la melancolía: una mirada a José Ignacio Quintón y su tiempo,” Resonancias, 5-6, no.10-11 (2005-06).
23 Proyecto del Cuatro, Las Entrevistas del Proyecto del Cuatro, 160. (My translation.)
the body. In figure 2-4, Heriberto Torres holds an eight-stringed cuatro, an instrument that he actively played during the 1920s.

Figure 2-3: Cuatro player Heriberto Torres

Source: http://www.cuatro-pr.org/es/node/131

The popularization of the eight-stringed model in the first decades of the twentieth century suggests that it gradually replaced the four-stringed version. However, what appears to be a clear path of evolution is challenged by the reference to a five-stringed cuatro described by Francisco del Valle Atiles in 1887. This early reference implies that different types of cuatros – with four, eight and ten strings– were in use concurrently at some point during the transitional years from the nineteenth to the twentieth century.

Del Valle Atiles affirms that the stringed instruments are derivations of the guitar and the
bandurria. The tiple is defined as a “small guitar with five strings, which offers the peculiarity of having the first and the fifth strings tuned to the same tone, the cuatro has five pairs of strings, and it is tuned and played like the bandurria.”  

24 Del Valle Atiles expands on the description of these instruments with this critical statement:

None of these instruments is constructed with an artistic and rational idea, their little material value make jíbaros able to construct them, but most of the time they employ inappropriate materials... The idea of guitar making still presides, but the lack of materials and resources available to construct them as the models brought by the Spanish, affected the imperfection of the Puerto Rican versions.  

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The modern cuatro

The jibaro music tradition of Puerto Rico is also described in “El cuarteto típico,” (the typical quartet) an article included in La gran Enciclopedia de Puerto Rico volume on music. The author indicates that the quartet is composed of guitar, tiple, bordonúa and cuatro, and that these instruments were rudimentary copies made in the seventeenth century as Puerto Ricans were probably emulating Spanish vihuelas, guitarras and guitarrillos. In the encyclopedia’s entry, the cuatro is described as having ten strings, arranged in pairs. The tuning of the instrument is described as known today, B-E-A-D\textsubscript{1}-G\textsubscript{1}, with the first two courses of strings, B and E, tuned in octaves while the other three octaves are tuned in unison.

What became known as “the modern cuatro” is a ten-stringed model that was popularized and gained widespread acceptance after the 1930s. The following figure from circa 1898 to 1910 is the oldest pictorial evidence, available at the moment, of a ten-stringed cuatro in five courses. 

Cuatro player Eusebio González Ocasio “El Indio de Sabana Grande” holds a ten-stringed

\begin{footnotesize}

\footnotemark[25] Idem.
\end{footnotesize}
cuatro, with the keyhole shape of the old four-stringed model.

Figure 2-4: Eusebio González Ocasio “El Indio de Sabana Grande” holds a ten stringed cuatro

Source: www.archivofotograficodepuertorico.com

In the book *Historia de la Canción Popular en Puerto Rico*, Pedro Malavet Vega affirms that by the nineteenth century the cuatro already had five pairs of strings. Malavet Vega quotes the essay by Francisco del Valle Atiles published in 1887, in which the instrument is described as having five courses of strings. To clarify what has been known about the instrument’s number of strings, Malavet writes,

This distorts what Cristobal Santiago sustained, and the incorrect information provided to Héctor Campos Parsi by cuatro player Norberto Cales which was published in *La Gran Enciclopedia de Puerto Rico*. Both of them affirm that Heriberto Torres from Yauco, was the first one to use double strings or pairs of strings around 1917. The description provided by Francisco Del Valle Atiles puts into question the “modernity” of the ten-stringed cuatro attributed to Efraín Ronda, Francisco López Cruz and Guillermo Martínez.26

Del Valle Atiles mentions that these simple instruments provided the basic accompaniment for the jíbaro song styles, villancico and the aguinaldo.

The inception of the modern cuatro has been associated with the popularization of Spanish estudiantinas, musical groups that toured widely in the Americas during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Paul Sparks defines estudiantina as:

In university towns such as Salamanca it was customary, at certain times of the year, for students to dress up in national costume and perform traditional songs with guitars and bandurrias, believing that this would guarantee good luck in the forthcoming examinations; such groups of musicians, roaming the streets, were known as estudiantinas. In 1878 or a little earlier, several bandurria players and guitarists in Madrid formed themselves into a professional group, known as the Spanish Students.\(^{27}\)

*La Estudiantina de Figaro* performed in New York and Boston (1880), México (1882), Chile (1884), Venezuela (1886), Cuba (1881) and two stops in Puerto Rico (1881 and 1894). The prolonged success of estudiantinas and their appearances in Puerto Rico leads Juan Sotomayor to believe that there is a connection to the incipient modern cuatro. There is also a noted correspondence between the role and status of the bandurria and the one that later acquired the cuatro. Paul Sparks mention that during the first half of the nineteenth century, the role and status of the bandurria in Spain was very similar to that of the mandolin in Italy; a high-pitched, plucked instrument, used by ordinary people throughout the country for serenading, sometimes with tremolo technique, and usually together with the guitar.\(^{28}\)

The modern cuatro, which adopted a violin shape, flourished in Puerto Rico in the twentieth century, at a time of political transition, economic transformations and U.S. control over the island. The instrument features characteristics of other stringed instruments from Spain, Italy and the United States. Similar to the mandolin and the bandurria, the modern cuatro has

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\(^{28}\) Ibid., 24.
metal strings and is tuned in intervals of fourths. The name cuatro, given to the current incarnation of the instrument, is a new instrument different from the four-stringed version that was performed by the jibaro in the eighteenth century. The old cuatro was tuned A E A D (from low to high) and the modern version BEADG. Puerto Ricans assigned the same name to a new instrument embodiment. The relationship of names to musical instruments is particularly prone to semantic and phonetic shifts as the instruments change over time, move from place to place, and encounter cognate instruments and terms.29 There are other instances in music history of similar cases, the best example of this phenomenon being the Sumerian word *pan-tur*, “bow small,” which sprouted a vast evolutionary tree of names for bowed instruments, plucked instruments, and drums.30

The new version of the cuatro was driven by a desire to elevate the humble instrument, a change motivated by the evident success of the mandolin at the time as well as by the dissemination of violin-shaped mandolins in Puerto Rico and the presence of violin makers in the central and northern parts of the island.31 The diffusion of the modern cuatro and its favorable reception in Puerto Rico was due in part to the work of player Ladislao Martinez, who was responsible for the debut of the instrument in radio shows in Puerto Rico in the 1920s. In addition to its success on the radio, the cuatro took off in the growing recording industry in New York City during the first decades of the twentieth century, a time period that will be discussed in depth in the next chapter. The first published cuatro teaching method was also produced in

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30 Frederic V. Grunfeld lists some of the names of musical instruments derived from the word *pan-tur*: pantur, pandore, mandore, mandola, mandolin, vandola, bandurria, bandore, banjo, tanbur, tunbur, tunbura, tamboura, domba, tambour, and tambourine.
31 Juan Sotomayor, Cuerdas de mi tierra, 176.
New York City by cuatrista Efrain Ronda in 1937. The method, titled *La Antorcha* (Spanish for torch), is written in Western music notation; it features author’s notes in both English and Spanish and includes playing techniques and repertoire for both models of cuatro: the old four-stringed and the modern ten-stringed model. In the introduction to the second edition of the book, fourth impression from 1965, Ronda recognizes the changes present in cuatro music and the need for innovation and fusion with other genres. Ronda recognizes that,

“...music, like many other facets of live (sic) has undergone vast changes. The advent of Rock ‘n Roll has provided a type of music which is particularly suited to youth. In recognition of this, I have composed and included a Rock ‘n Roll piece in this edition.”

Figure 2-5: Book cover, *La Antorcha* Cuatro Method

Efrain Ronda also stressed the fact that he was writing the book from New York by acknowledging North Americans and Latin Americans in the United States “with whom I have

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shared so much of my life.” The publication of this book in New York City supported the growing interest for the cuatro in the United States and demonstrates how the city has been an important locale for cuatro innovation, even at the initial stages of cuatro dissemination in the first half of the twentieth century.

This chapter provided an historical overview on the origins of the cuatro. The forthcoming chapters examine the instrument’s traditional and symbolic functions and the presence of issues of identity as observed in contemporary performance practice in order to discuss how cuatristas are consciously maintaining and continuing cuatro performance practices. Although the radio and recording industry have had an impact on the growing popularity of the modern cuatro, it is relevant to consider how the Puerto Rican government has part in the instrument’s institutionalization and eventual positioning as national icon.

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33 Efrain Ronda, La antorcha, iii.
Chapter Three

INSTITUTIONALIZATION: THE CUATRO ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL

The jíbaro music genre can be considered a marker for Puerto Rican folk music expressions. The cuatro’s popularity within the realm of jíbaro music has to do with its long-standing presence accompanying folk singers. Equally important is the cuatro’s instrumental repertoire, which continues to be written and performed by a cadre of virtuoso cuatristas. Some of the most challenging contemporary cuatro repertoire is still being written in European forms such as paso doble, mazurka and waltz, but whenever they are performed in the setting of a jíbaro ensemble or orquesta jíbara, they become and sound Puerto Rican. Although the cuatro’s affiliation to jíbaro music legitimizes its Puerto Ricanness, its Spanish root remains undeniable. This chapter examines the notions about the jíbaro and his music that permeate official discourse and the inclusion of the cuatro in the government’s cultural agenda. It is important to point out that cuatro music has been historically linked to the criollo and recognized as a product of mestizaje; therefore it has been far removed from Afro-Puerto Rican musical practices. Noel Allende-Goitía argues that:

In Puerto Rico, the articulation of an intellectual discourse, and particularly a historical discourse about music making, retains ideologies that have built a Puerto Rican essentialism from a racial imagination that constitutes the afro-descendant as other.¹

The elevation of the jíbaro as the quintessential Puerto Rican is examined here because of its implications in the construction of a homogeneous Puerto Rican identity. However, the conception of a homogeneous Puerto Rican identity is based on a fallacy of racial, cultural and

¹ Noel Allende-Goitia, Las músicas otras: Puerto Rico, el Atlántico afrodiaspórico y otros ensayos de estudios culturales de la música (San Juan: Ediciones Clara Luz, 2014), 70. (My translation).
class equality, and cuatro performance has been used to both perpetuate and contradict this misconception.

Scholars have presented various arguments regarding the concept of jíbaro, its etymology and when and how it began to be used in Puerto Rico to define peasants or rural farmers. In an article from 1936 titled “The Jíbaro: An American Citizen,” William Haas refers to the jíbaro as “an ignorant peasant…with very limited cultural influences.”

Within the context of these pejorative assertions about the jíbaro, a question to consider will be how the jíbaro profile has been treated throughout history, to the extent that it reaches the status of symbol of national identity, becoming a timeless character, bearer of patriotism and cultural value, or as historian Lillian Guerra states, “the center of the Puerto Rican soul.”

The following postcard published by the newspaper El Boletín Mercantil de Puerto Rico has the label Music of the Poor, and captures a group of people gathered around two musicians in a humble residence. Although I cannot confirm that the chordophone shown is a cuatro, it is clear that the image denotes the association of jíbaro music with the poor. The two musicians in the picture are barefoot and it is also noticeable that all of the subjects in the photograph are dark-skinned subjects. This image may also speak to what Angel Quintero Rivera has argued about the misconception of the jíbaro as a white, rural farmer from the mountains. Quintero Rivera has refuted the location of the jíbaro on the island, which is commonly associated with the mountainous area, mentioning: “the jíbaro world of escape was different from the slave plantation, but not necessarily in the height of the mountains.” Quintero continues, “To say that jíbaro music comes from the mountain is clearly a myth; which is different from saying that it is

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4 The newspaper El Boletín Mercantil was printed in Puerto Rico from 1839 to 1918.
music from the hinterlands, or from the rural area of cimarronaje.”

Figure 3-1: Postcard labeled “Music of the Poor”

Source: Puerto Rican Digital Library, University of Puerto Rico

Francisco Scarano mentions that during the pivotal years of the independence wars (1810-1825) in Spanish America, the delineation of ethnic construction and creole self-identification was evident. The delineation of ethnic space was in this case based on the practice, common in many parts of the world, of elevating a mythologized peasant to the status of a national icon. Jíbaro imagery has appeared repeatedly in different instances of Puerto Rico’s social, cultural

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5 Angel Quintero Rivera, *Salsa, Sabor y Control: Sociología de la Música*, (Ciudad de México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2005), 225. (My translation)

and political history. For example, during the political campaign of 1939, Luis Muñoz Marín became known as the political leader who brought together nationalist, socialist and modernist strands in Puerto Rican life into a pragmatic populist movement. Concerned with the plight of the poorer classes, especially the jíbaros, the campaign brought Muñoz Marín face to face with a segment of the population that had been traditionally considered wretched, sickly, aloof, and morally suspect. Muñoz Marín, architect of the unique commonwealth status, was the first popularly elected governor of Puerto Rico in 1948. His electoral campaign constituted the first historical instance in which the jíbaro class was empowered with some sort of political agency, this definitely “led to a powerful change in national ethos and political life in Puerto Rico.”

Figure 3-2: Luis Muñoz Marín Campaign Postcard


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7 One of the earliest references to the jíbaro figure appears on Manuel Alonso’s El Gíbaro, published in Barcelona, 1849. This publication consists of a series of vignettes about customs filled with descriptions of Puerto Rican traditions.

8 Nathaniel Córdova, “In his image and likeness: The Puerto Rican jíbaro as political icon,” CENTRO Journal 17, no.2 (Fall 2005): 173.

9 Ibid.
In this campaign postcard, Luis Muñoz Marín is depicted as imagining the jíbaro, whose “ghostly” figure is shown in the photo. The caption states: “Your votes for el Partido Popular Democrático will not count as votes in favor of independence or statehood, nor will they count as votes for any other future form of political status…”

Muñoz Marín’s campaign and electoral triumph, with his election to the Senate in 1940, marked a new political era, and the establishment of cultural parameters that came to permanently delimit Puerto Rican national identity and the categorization of the jíbaro group as bearers of authentic Puerto Ricanness. Even the insignia of Muñoz Marín’s political party, the Partido Popular Democrático, incorporates the image of the jíbaro wearing a straw hat along with the words: bread, land, freedom.

Figure 3-3: Insignia of the Popular Democratic Party (PPD)

Source: http://ppdpr.net/informacion/

The establishment of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (ICP) in 1955 suggested the government’s step towards the definition of a national culture. The institute’s mission is to

\[10\] Nathaniel Córdova, “In his image and likeness: The Puerto Rican jíbaro as political icon,” 170.
promote, preserve, enrich and disseminate the cultural values of Puerto Rico by perpetuating a wide and deep knowledge about them. The creation of the ICP was a component of a project called Operation Serenity, one of three principal governmental projects implemented by Muñoz Marín’s cabinet. The other two political programs of Muñoz Marín were the economic program Operation Bootstrap and Operation Estado Libre Asociado, which was the entryway to the constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico on July 25, 1952.

Operation Serenity was meant to fulfill the spiritual needs of a people whose political and economic needs were being taken care of by the commonwealth and Operation Bootstrap. This operation was concerned with the preservation of Puerto Rican cultural heritage and “it marked an important moment in the development of Puerto Rico’s cultural nationalism, involving a romanticization and purification of culture by reference to an idealized past.”

Jorge Duany mentions that since 1898, national identity in Puerto Rico has developed under and often in outright opposition to U.S. hegemony. In Puerto Rico, cultural nationalism became increasingly disengaged from political nationalism and identified with populism after World War II. Luis Muñoz Marín was a key figure in that ideological transition. The idea of creating the ICP came from a proposal that Muñoz Marín received from Arnold Miles, an American officer working at the time at the federal Bureau of the Budget, who stated, “What more real or more noble motivation can there be for the people as a whole or as individuals than their determination to preserve for themselves and their children’s children all that has been good

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11 Luis Muñoz Marín is widely known as the father of modern-day Puerto Rico. He served as the island’s first elected governor from 1948 until 1965.
13 Ibid., 34.
in the cultural heritage of the Island?” Miles also adds, “This memorandum, in its attachments suggests one program which can make a contribution.” Miles’ proposed program was titled “The Preservation of the Cultural Heritage of Puerto Rico.” In 1955, Governor Muñoz Marín presented a legislative action to create a public corporation for the preservation and development of the cultural heritage of Puerto Rico. In that same year, the House of Representatives and the Senate voted and approved the project and under Law 89 the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture was created. The first appointed director of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture was Dr. Ricardo Alegría, an anthropologist and at the time, professor at the University of Puerto Rico. Alegría directed the ICP for eighteen years (1955-1973). For Alegría, culture served as a synonym for nationality and the spiritual values that he believed characterized Puerto Rican culture. According to Arlene Dávila, official cultural policy served a foundational purpose, where the discussions of Puerto Rican society were reconciled by the presentation of a “folklorized view of the nation whose main manifestations were the rapidly disappearing agrarian society with its customs and folklore.”

Alegria’s vision of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture is represented in the institute’s official seal, commissioned to Puerto Rican artist Lorenzo Homar. A circle that encloses the “three races” that make up the Puerto Rican man: the indigenous Taíno, the Spanish and the African. Alegría used the mixing of the three races as the basis of his construction of Puerto Rican identity. The mixing, implied in the concept of mestizaje, is used to disguise Puerto Rican identity.

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15 Quoted in Carmen Dolores Hernández, Ricardo Alegría: Una Vida (Guaynabo: Editorial Plaza Mayor, 2002), 156.
16 Arlene M. Dávila, Sponsored Identities, 38.
Rico's multiracial composition under apparent homogeneity. The image of la *gran familia puertorriqueña* or great Puerto Rican family became further solidified in the twentieth century as members of the creole elite sought to establish their Puerto Rican identity in opposition to their new colonial power, the United States.\(^{19}\) The emphasis on mestizaje in the national discourse pretends to portray harmonious race relations by overlooking the role of African slavery, and thus denying blackness and racial conflicts in Puerto Rico. Individual and collective silences of African-derived cultural heritage, ancestry and history are intricately linked to Puerto Rican's denial of racialized domination as a fact of life.\(^{20}\)

Transatlantic slave trade was made legal in the Spanish Caribbean in 1501. Puerto Rico received approximately one percent (around 100,000) out of the ten million enslaved Africans that were taken to Latin America and the Caribbean over the course of three centuries. This seemingly paltry figure takes on greater significance when we consider the small size of the island and the overwhelming presence of Africans relative to the various other ethnic groups who have populated Puerto Rico through the years.\(^{21}\) Jiménez Román discusses how the racial composition of the island was of concern for the Spanish from the earliest years of colonization. The Spanish implemented in their colonies an elaborate caste system, which included less caste terms due to the absence of Indians in Puerto Rico.

\(^{19}\) Arlene Torres, "La gran familia puertorriqueña 'ej prieta de beldá' (The Great Puerto Rican Family is Really Really Black)," in *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean: Social Dynamics and Cultural Transformations*, eds. Arlene Torres and Norman E. Whitten (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 295.


A 1581 report on the Island population listed more than twice as many Blacks, *mulatos* and mestizos as there were whites.\(^\text{22}\) From the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, the island's population was predominantly composed of people classified as *pardo, mulato* or negro. Although a process of whitening was propitiated through the promotion of European immigration to the island, especially during the nineteenth century open door policy, some scholars argue that there was an insignificant growth in the number of those classified as white.\(^\text{23}\) Ultimately, the caste system delineated a racial hierarchy that defined the superiority of the Spanish and anyone else inferior and powerless. These practices had a lasting effect over contemporary national discourses where mestizaje overshadows blackness.

According to L. Antonio Curet, while the three-root or hybrid model accomplished its goal in popularizing a Puerto Rican homogeneous identity, in practice the Spanish is far more emphasized over the other two roots."\(^\text{24}\)

![Figure 3-4: Official seal of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture](http://www.icp.gobierno.pr/)

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\(^{22}\) Miriam Jiménez Román, *Un hombre negro del pueblo*, 12.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 26.

The seal itself encloses Alegría’s notion of mestizaje. Like many mestizaje myths in Latin America, Puerto Rico’s embraces homogeneity and claims that these three strands have merged into a single ethnicity, the “Puerto Rican.”25 Dávila contends that as in other colonial and postcolonial contexts, the idea of mestizaje and racial syncretism has amounted to an inclusive ideology of exclusion that hides the unequal valorization of its racial components under the trope of racial mixture.26

The notion of Puerto Rican racial democracy pervades the realm of music making, where African-derived expressions are reduced to a historical past. This reduction operates alongside the whitening of other national symbols (such as the jibaro) documented in traditional Puerto Rican scholarship as a light-skinned peasant of Spanish heritage.27 Cuatro music making has also been considered a product of these racial mixtures—although its Spanish root has been stressed. Given the fact that African-derived musical expressions are commonly related to drumming, the cuatro has remained distant from a plausible African influence.

However, the cuatro's undeniable African root is discussed by Angel Quintero Rivera in the article "The Camouflaged Drum: Melodization of Rhythms and Maroonaged Ethnicity in Caribbean Peasant Music," where the author establishes that runaway slaves populated rural Puerto Rico in the eighteenth century. This runaway or cimarrón ethnic amalgam began shaping a rural society around the axis of their fugitive nation.28 Quintero makes an interesting proposition by noting that the word jibaro, used in Puerto Rico to name the country-folk developed in rural formations since the late eighteenth century, was used in Cuba as a synonym

26 Ibid., 69.
of cimaroon dog. Quintero suggests that camouflage, a vital aspect in maroonage, is part of jibaro music, a field where drumming is disguised.

The rhythms, basically African and Afro-Arabic, are separated from the drums, which identified plantation music. The polyrhythmic combination was established in the interplay of other instruments: the guitar, our native lute- cuatro, the scraper - güiro and human voice.29

In the article, Quintero presents some musical examples that illustrate the rhythmic similarities between cuatro's melodic phrases in jibaro music and the rhythmic patterns of bomba. The recognition of a camouflaged cuatro presents a fascinating proposition about its African configuration that needs further analysis. The notion of a camouflaged cuatro breaks with dominant discourses that tend to over emphasize the instrument's Spanish heritage.

The notion of mestizaje even influenced what the ICP validated as folk music and musical expressions were evidently part of the cultural agenda of both Alegría and the ICP. Folk music and the concept of jibaro are correlated, almost symbiotic elements. From his low-class social position, the jibaro has been venerated as a principal agent of cultural advancement. It is not surprising that Muñoz Marín worked together with Ricardo Alegría in the preservation of these popular symbols. The genre known as jibaro music encompasses authenticity, creativity, a narrative that openly exposes the essence of Puerto Ricanness and a cultural tradition that surpasses the passage of time. The cuatro is an essential element of jibaro music: the instrument considered a Puerto Rican invention entails Puerto Ricanness and uniqueness.

When appointed Director, Alegría began identifying, studying and promoting the manifestations of popular art, and he was interested in the revival of “traditional” instruments like the cuatro and the bordonúa. The word traditional should be used carefully mainly because the institute’s vision was precisely to enforce the practice of this kind of music and promote its

29 Quintero Rivera, The Camouflaged Drum, 33.
cultural significance. Alegria was responsible for the establishment of a program aimed to revive the cuatro, and his work with the cuatro encompasses different areas: promotion of instrument construction, the publication of a method of cuatro learning written by Francisco López Cruz and the implementation of a systematic program of group cuatro instruction.

The rise of American pop culture motivated cuatro preservation. In the 1950s, the electric guitar was gaining popularity on the island, and Alegría considered it a threat to Puerto Rican national culture. Alegría mentions:

People told me that I was crazy, it was the electric guitar era, people would not be attracted by the instrument. Nowadays people are very enthusiastic about the cuatro, there are young cuatro makers and the demand for the instruments is so high that we are importing instruments from Japan and Spain.\(^\text{30}\)

These efforts were enclosed within the ICP’s agenda for creating and disseminating Spanish-language educational programs, Puerto Rican scholarship, music, theater, film and the visual arts. One of the efforts of the ICP to promote the cuatro’s dissemination was a cuatro construction contest.

\(^{30}\) My translation from Carmen Dolores Hernández, *Ricardo Alegría: Una vida*, 198. I would like to point out that importing cuatros from Japan and Spain is not necessarily something to be proud of. This statement from Alegría seems odd, especially because part of his mission was to stimulate and help artisans and thus to promote the sophisticated art of instrument making. The instrument making in Puerto Rico has been regarded as a high craftsmanship and the work of instrument makers should be recognized. Imported instruments that are made in factory lines do not equal a handmade one.
Figure 3-5: Poster for an instrument making contest sponsored by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, 1978.\(^{31}\)

Source: http://bibliotecadigital.uprrp.edu/

The ICP agenda for the cuatro was implemented by Francisco López Cruz, who led the ICP Program of Folk Music. Francisco López Cruz was a guitar player who left the island for New York in the 1920s. While in New York he continued to play the guitar along with other Puerto Ricans who were performing and creating a vibrant scene of popular music in the city. In 1935, López Cruz went to Puerto Rico to perform with el Cuarteto Victoria, a renowned ensemble of popular music whose members were Davilita, Rafael Hernández and Rafael

Rodriguez. After performing with Cuarteto Victoria, he decided to stay in Puerto Rico and continued his education at the University of Puerto Rico where he obtained his bachelor’s degree. Later on, López Cruz completed a master’s from Columbia University and a doctorate from Universidad Central de Madrid. His dissertation *La música folklórica de Puerto Rico* was published by Troutman Press in 1967 and is still considered a milestone in the field of Puerto Rican folk music.

It is important to emphasize López Cruz’s educational background and musical career because the popularization of the cuatro and the establishment of a program of group cuatro instruction was mainly his responsibility. A special issue published by the Cultura del Sur bulletin stated:

> When people thought that the Puerto Rican cuatro was declining and on its way to turning into a museum’s piece, Paquito went hands on, and wrote his masterpiece, a method for teaching the Puerto Rican cuatro. With this method he started to teach every Saturday at the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, this noble creole instrument, descendant of the Spanish vihuela. The results are now visible, the cuatro is alive and we have young cuatro virtuosi. 32

The Saturday cuatro classes established by López Cruz began in the year 1965 and continue to the present day. According to the Foundation Francisco López Cruz, the classes began with a total enrollment of thirteen students. Throughout the 1970s, there were around two hundred students enrolled per semester. When Dr. López Cruz passed away in the year 1988, the teachers who were working with him at the time decided to preserve his teaching method and legacy and institute the Foundation Dr. Francisco López Cruz, Inc. Currently, the Foundation keeps a program of Saturday classes for around 400 students.

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López Cruz’s cuatro method is the second book for cuatro learning written in Western music notation. It established basic parameters for cuatro technique and included scales and a variety of repertoire, most of which were folk songs from different countries, as the book’s repertoire is not completely Puerto Rican. Although there are many options for cuatro learning nowadays, the foundation remains an important and respected institute for cuatro teaching and for the preservation of the cuatro tradition. The foundation’s seminal work for the advancement of the instrument is reflected in their motto: Pioneers of cuatro teaching. My first contact with music learning was at these Saturday cuatro lessons. I began studying López Cruz’s cuatro method when I was eight years old. The cuatro curriculum was organized into a five-year
program that emphasized music sight-reading, while discouraging learning by rote. At the end of each semester, each group presented a musical piece in a fashion that followed the European orchestra setting. All of the students sat down in a semi-circle and read music sheets from music stands while the cuatro teacher led the group as a conductor.

I clearly remember the spirit of authenticity that permeated the foundation. Besides the cuatro, the only other instruments that were played were the guitar, providing harmonic accompaniment, and percussion instruments, like maracas, bongos and güiro. Over my five years as a student in the Foundation, I cannot recall the performance or even the presence of a foreign instrument on the premises. In contrast with the exclusive use of the cuatro and the guitar, the repertoire was more flexible and transcended geographical limits. Due to the scarcity of cuatro repertoire notated in sheet music, it was usual for students at the Foundation to play adaptations of classical repertoire, in many cases arrangements for flute, whose register is compatible with the cuatro. Thus, one of the first pieces I learned to play in the instrument was Bach’s Menuet in G. European repertoire is not foreign to the cuatro as it has been historically associated with European genres such as the waltz, the mazurka and the polka.

The contribution of López Cruz to the development of an instrument tradition is evident and indisputable. The year 2015 marks the 60th anniversary of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture and the 50th Anniversary of the Foundation Francisco López Cruz. Both institutions were instrumental for the popularization of the instrument, and their trajectories attest to the long-standing cuatro tradition in Puerto Rico.
Figure 3-7: 50th Anniversary logo of the Foundation Francisco López Cruz

Source: [http://clasescuatro.com](http://clasescuatro.com)

Figure 3-8: 60th Anniversary of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture

Source: [icp.gobierno.pr](http://icp.gobierno.pr)
The 60\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the ICP was dedicated to African heritage in Puerto Rico. The celebration may suggest that the ICP is moving away from the monolithic and homogeneous idea about Puerto Rican identity on which it was founded. The official discourse in Puerto Rico did work in favor of the cuatro and the instrument has definitely been more visible and exposed than the African-derived musical traditions on the island. The cuatro has been present in the ICP’s agenda through construction and performance contests whereas the expressions of \textit{africanidad} in Puerto Rican culture have not been equally represented.\textsuperscript{33}

While Francisco López Cruz focused on the teaching and learning of the cuatro via his systematic approach, other cuatristas were also perfecting the art of playing, recording outside of Puerto Rico and developing an idiosyncratic voice for the cuatro. The increased popularity of the instrument in Puerto Rico, and in the United States, as Puerto Ricans settled in the country, helped the construction of a binding association between the instrument and a symbolic expression of Puerto Rican culture.

The next section explores the popularization of the instrument, its main performers, its appearances in crucial recordings and the eventual development of a cuatro canon.

\textsuperscript{33} The place of the African component in Puerto Rican culture has been discussed by Arlene Dávila (2001), Jorge Duany (2001), Miriam Jiménez Román (2001), among others.
Chapter 4

CUATRO PERFORMANCE IN PUERTO RICO AND THE UNITED STATES

The cuatro is currently undergoing a significant rise in popularity. Learning how to play the cuatro is now more accessible due to the proliferation of mass-manufactured cuatros. These instruments – especially made in China – are readily available through the main online retailers, such as Amazon or EBay. The cost of a cuatro for beginners is approximately $89. Instructional video lessons on how to play the cuatro are available online through web sites such as cuatristas.com and 4Jibaro Online Music Academy, and many professional cuatristas are also teaching via Skype.

These tools of teaching and learning enhance the instrument’s mode of transmission and make the possibility of learning the cuatro available to anyone around the globe. Evidently, the growing popularization of the cuatro and its proliferation does not depend on institutions of formal instruction; neither is the island acting as the only center for cuatro music production.

The increased interest in cuatro learning is taking place at a time when there are more Puerto Ricans living in the United States than on the island. By 2012, the most recent year for which data are available, there are 4,970,604 Puerto Ricans living stateside and 3,515,844 million Puerto Ricans residing on the island, representing a population swing of nearly 1.5 million over a decade.\(^1\) Although tradition is perceived as stemming from and having close ties to particular localities, the relationship between tradition and place is questioned when a single tradition is maintained, developed and changed by people in several different geographic

Consideration of human mobility, and of migrants as carriers of traditions to different places, has expanded the commonly accepted ethnomusicological frame of reference of studying music in its cultural context. This shift in emphasis has led to questions about the continuity of elements of traditions in new contexts, and the ability of music to retain its identity away from the culture from which its sprang. Charles Seeger mentions that tradition comprises those phenomena exhibited in the inheritance, cultivation and transmission, of a body of practice, or way of doing something in a society. Seeger proposes to view a musical society as operating in three dimensions: in extent throughout the geographical area occupied by a society; in depth, throughout the social mass; and in duration throughout its span of life. Tradition implies both the totality of extant works and human artifacts and the totality of accepted conceptions, attitudes, inclinations, tastes and habits. This is why it must be defined dynamically and not statically, as a living reality, changing and in motion, in which new elements arise while others decline in the course of history.

Matthew Gelbart states that tradition in musical terms or otherwise has always required patrolling and defending against elements from outside its idealized domains. Puerto Rican cultural traditions shape the island’s unique cultural heritage and reaffirm people’s identity. As mentioned in Chapter Three, cuatro performance and education was propelled in the 1960s as an initiative of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (ICP) and its nation-building project. Those government efforts definitely served to connect the cuatro with Puerto Rican cultural roots. However, the instrument has been overtly used to play international repertoire, classical music

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2 This phenomenon has been discussed by Ramnarine in a study about Indian music in the diaspora. "Indian music in the diaspora: Case studies of 'chutney' in Trinidad and in London," 133.
and other popular genres. The ability to perform different repertoires and styles, beyond Puerto Rican folk music, has become essential among professional cuatristas. Innovation and experimentation are perceived as intrinsic to cuatro performance. This duality is examined here with various examples, from early cuatro recordings that featured particular instrumentation (such as the ones recorded in New York City in the 1920s), to other ensembles that emulate the Western orchestra. These examples are used to demonstrate that cuatro innovation has been persistent and that it functions independently from dominant notions about culture and music as expounded by official institutions in Puerto Rico.

After completing the five-year cuatro program at the Foundation Francisco López Cruz, I became a member of the foundation’s representative ensemble, the Orquesta Jíbara. The Orquesta Jíbara performs only instrumental music. Its configuration of around 25 members, with the cuatros organized in sections like a chorus or large orchestra, allows the performance of instrumental music with a special focus on the musical arrangements. The orchestra’s sound features a special approach to the concept of voicing and results in rich harmonic and melodic renditions of traditional mazurkas, danzas, waltzes, etc. The cuatristas from the Orquesta Jíbara all read music scores and the performances have no room for improvisation.
Interestingly, this emblematic orchestra challenges the general conceptions of how cuatro music should be – as the Orquesta Jíbara does not accompany singers, nor do the players get to perform any solos. Even though the ensemble is known as orquesta jíbara, the jíbaro folk music genres such as the seis and the aguinaldo are not the only repertoire performed by the orchestra, nor do the members dress up in folkloric attires to highlight any traces of a jíbaro figure. This modern jíbaro orchestra, which is characterized by its international repertoire and complex musical arrangements, contrasts with the traditional definitions of jíbaro music, like the one Donald Thompson includes in his book *Music in Puerto Rico: A Reader’s Anthology*:

>The construction of these instruments obeys no rational artistic concept; their little material value requires that the jíbaros themselves must make them usually using inappropriate tools. As imperfect as they are they can produce agreeable sounds. Skilled hands draw pleasant melodies from these crude instruments despite the serious difficulties which they must certainly present. Players exist who with surprising mastery display their skills in producing amazing melodies, especially on the cuatro. Accompanying himself with these crude instruments the jíbaro

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6 The author, Noraliz Ruiz, holds the bordonúa. Last woman from left to right.
sings his languid and erotic ballads, or during the Christmas season his animated villancicos.\(^7\)

It is valid to examine the historical change of the instrument’s role, function and performance, including the wide spectrum of contemporary cuatro performance practices, especially those coming from the island and the contrasting manifestations they include, as well as the role of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture in determining what is and what is not “authentic.”

From the cuatro’s incursion into the orchestra setting, to accompanying the symphonic orchestra, to being played in a rock band, it seems that the only element that persists in the tradition is the use of the instrument itself.\(^8\) The instrument’s versatility and universality challenges its national epithet. Cuatro music is no longer a fixed category, and cuatristas away from the island are making music from that premise. In cuatro music there is longing for the homeland and praising of the jíbaros, but cuatristas away from Puerto Rico are also innovating as opposed to preserving a fixed tradition. While cuatristas on the island keep setting performance standards that are followed by cuatristas in the U.S., the instrument has also been adapted and developed to give meaning to new forms.

The current place of the cuatro in Puerto Rico, the continental U.S. and Hawaii may be analyzed in light of earlier ethnomusicological and folklore research methods by tracing the geographic and temporal diffusion of cuatro construction, repertoire, technique and other standard practices. For instance, Bruno Nettl, a prominent author in the field of ethnomusicology, stressed that the study of an individual piece of music is also concerned with the history, diffusion and geographic distribution of songs.


\(^8\) These other instances of cuatro performances will be analyzed in Chapter Five.
Musical content moves from one culture to another; we know this well even from non-Western cultures, from the diffusion of Peyote songs among dozens of North American Indian peoples in the last hundred years...

From this quote it is clear that early ethnomusicological research examined the dissemination or diffusion and variation of a musical expression in an attempt to reconstruct the history of that music. Popular images of Puerto Rican identity have been thoroughly deterritorialized and transnationalized over the past few decades. As Flores has suggested, Puerto Ricans live on either side of a divided border that they transgress and remap continually in their everyday language, popular music, visual arts and creative literature. The diaspora has mobilized standard concepts of the nation, culture, language and territory on the island and elsewhere. Therefore, this research takes on cuatro performance as a fluid musical entity that has been shaped in multiple localities and not exclusively in a homeland. In the field of ethnomusicology, the term of locality has been guided by two relationships: first the characterization of musical styles and performance practices in relation to local history, environment and culture; and second, the representation of musicians or communities sustaining local musical traditions in relation to an assumed authentic cultural identity that has been formed and ensured by Puerto Ricans on the island and moved in the diaspora.

Considering other examples of Puerto Rican music and the role of the diaspora in its dissemination, Frances Aparicio analyzes the notion of locality, as she discusses the impact that the extensive Puerto Rican diasporic communities have had in the development of salsa. In her book *Listening to Salsa*, Aparicio recognizes salsa music as “a metaphor for race, class and

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gender conflicts within the diverse Puerto Rican communities, as well as across Latin America, the United States and the international scene."\textsuperscript{12} I would like to further reflect on the idea of diverse Puerto Rican communities on the island and in the United States and identify cuatro music making as also emerging out of these dispersed spaces and from an identifiable zone of cultural interaction as defined by the cuatro.

Cuatro music making is, then, set into motion and distributed within extended communities that move away from the island of Puerto Rico as a center of production. The concept of zones of cultural interaction as defined by Kazadi wa Mukuna can be applied to cuatro diffusion.\textsuperscript{13} A zone of cultural interaction is a geographic space in which an instrument is accepted as part of the catalog of musical instruments. The cuatro has also broadened its zone of cultural interaction and has been adopted into other musical expressions outside of Puerto Rico. Shelemay’s concept of musical communities could be applied in this context given the fact that the cuatro is being practiced in dispersed locations among communities of musicians united by national ties, political ideals, religion or musical enjoyment. In her study of music making among Ethiopian-American communities, Shelemay theorizes that there are three main domains in which Ethiopian musical activity supports and even helps generate collectivities that she defines as communities of descent, dissent and affinity. By descent communities are those united by shared identities, whether they are grounded in historical fact, are newly invented, or emerge from some combination of historical circumstance and creative transformation.\textsuperscript{14} I consider that


cuatro music making on the island and in the United States has been shaped by processes of descent, because the cuatro moves beyond a role of cultural symbol to perform the identity being claimed by people abroad, serving in the process of community formation to establish, maintain and reinforce their collective Puerto Rican identity.

Shelemay’s communities of dissent are defined as emerging from minority groups or from those considered to hold subaltern status within a larger society. Communities of dissent are based solely in opposition and emerge through acts of resistance against an existing collectivity. Cuatro music making generates communities of dissent as many musicians preserve Puerto Rican folk music practices in opposition to U.S. cultural hegemony. For example, Grupo Mapeyé is an island-based ensemble that has publicly expressed affiliation with oppositional politics and particularly for the cause of independence for Puerto Rico. In a personal interview, Tony Mapeyé expressed that, “some doors were closed for us by people who do not understand the cultural dimension of the work that we do.”

**Cuatro Communities**

Nationalism has been intrinsic to cuatro music making regardless of the location where it is practiced, in Puerto Rico or by Puerto Ricans in the United States. When looking at cuatro performance practice, is an island/mainland divide noticeable? It is important to consider that historically cuatro performance has also been practiced out of the island. For this reason I am concerned with the musical creativities, new performance spaces and new musical sounds of practices maintained on the island and elsewhere. To approach cuatro music in the U.S. as a

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15 Grupo Mapeyé was founded by cuatro player Tony Mapeyé in 1978. Over the last thirty years the group has cultivated jíbaro genres, and cuatro performance practice has been raised to a new level by notable cuatristas such as Neftali Ortiz, Eddie López, Tony Mapeyé, Arnaldo Martínez Zayas, Modesto Nieves and Christian Nieves. The group, which is also known as la Orquesta Criolla Nacional, has been very active in Puerto Rico and internationally.

16 Personal interview, July 5, 2014.
separate entity would imply the transplantation of a stable and clearly defined musical expression into a new location. Rather, it is my interest to underline how the music has been developed in the United States and how cuatro performance practice there has been crucial in the shaping of a tradition. For this reason, it is essential to consider the impact of Puerto Rican migration in the United States on musical production.

As indicated by 2012 U.S. Census data, over a million stateside Puerto Ricans migrated across state lines. This extraordinary rate of mobility is higher than the rate for the population of the United States as a whole, or for any other major ethnic group. These migration patterns evidence the fluctuation and assure the formation of Puerto Rican cultural centers in the U.S. In the case of the cuatro it means the expansion of a tradition and the unfolding of new ways of interpretation. The instrument is definitely not circumscribed to the island limits. Inevitably, the instrument has evolved in the hands of cuatristas in the U.S. The new arrivals formed communities that are committed to the preservation of Puerto Rican social identity and cultural traditions.

Jorge Duany mentions that the Nuyorican (a Puerto Rican from New York City) experience has already produced ample evidence that migration does not necessarily lead to full assimilation into the dominant U.S. culture. On the contrary, Puerto Rican migrants to the United States often believe that they can preserve their culture of origin and stay close to their identity as Puerto Ricans. From the first waves of Puerto Rican migration to the United States, the cuatro has also evolved, developed and transformed in the hands of cuatro players away from the island.

Although is not common knowledge, it is a fact that the first commercial recordings

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18 Duany, The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move.
featuring the cuatro were performed and produced in New York City. During the first four decades of the twentieth century, recordings of Puerto Rican music were largely produced in New York City, rather than in San Juan. Jorge Javariz mentioned in his article “50 años de música en Puerto Rico” that a great part of what we today call Puerto Rican music was written and recorded in New York. In 1916, the Victor Recording Company recorded Quinteto Borinquén in New York. The ensemble was composed of: mandolin (José López Rivera), guitars (Francisco Paniagua and Alberto Mitchell) cuatro (Joaquín Rivera) and violarina (Felipe Rodríguez). According to research conducted by the Puerto Rican Cuatro Project, the great cuatro players Ládi and Efraín Ronda asserted that Joaquín Rivera Gandía was one of the best cuatro players of his time. Also known as "El Zurdo de Isabela,"(Lefty from Isabela) Rivera was one of the most versatile Puerto Rican cuatristas of the early twentieth century, and probably the first to ever play the cuatro on a recording. Some of his New York City recordings survive, particularly those recorded on the 10-stringed cuatro with the group Estrellas Boricuas. Joaquín Rivera was born in 1882 and died in either Arecibo or Santurce in 1925. This photo presents Joaquin Rivera standing in the center, holding a violin-shaped cuatro.

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Heriberto Torres was another prolific cuatro player who developed his career in New York City during the early stages of commercial recordings. He recorded with Los Jardineros, one of the most active Puerto Rican folk music groups based in New York.

Shortly after his arrival in New York in 1927, Heriberto appeared in radio shows and concerts. In the summer of 1928, he was featured in live performances on WHN (760) Kc with the Porto Rican String Quartet.
In the image from left to right: Enrique Dorrego (director and cellist); Heriberto Torres, cuatro; Luis Cotto, mandolin; and Ramiro Medina, guitar. Torres also recorded in 1928 for the Columbia label with Grupo Borinquen of Rafael Hernández, and also with the incipient Hispano label with Grupo Estrellas Boricuas in 1929. Presumably during this year he met a businessman named Arturo Catalá Torre, who was Puerto Rico’s representative of the New York-based OKeh Phonograph Corporation. Catalá was the owner of the San Juan-based record store El Jardín del Arte. Torres worked as a driver at the South Puerto Rico Sugar Company until 1927, when he moved to New York and started playing with Trío Borinquén of Rafael Hernández. While both were in New York, they settled the agreement that allowed the foundation of the group Los Jardineros. One of the most important aspects that came with the recording agreement of Los Jardineros was that it was meant to be a product to be exported to Puerto Rico. The recordings were mainly consumed in Puerto Rico. Thus, the musical bridge within New York and San Juan

21 Ruth Glasser, The Best of Los Jardineros, CD booklet.
22 Sotomayor, Cuerdas de mi tierra, 150.
was built and getting stronger. The first recording session of Los Jardineros took place on August 9, 1929.

With Los Jardineros, Torres, also known as “El mago del cuatro” (The cuatro magician) played an eight-stringed cuatro. In the year 1928, Torres became a member of the Porto Rican String Quartet, an ensemble that included the following instrumentation: bass, cuatro, mandolin, and guitar. From November 23, 1929 to August 15, 1930, Heriberto Torres recorded more than 100 songs with the group Los Jardineros for the label Okeh. Los Jardineros cultivated a variety of genres such as plenas, boleros, danzas, mazurkas, fox trot, paso doble, seises and aguinaldos, thus “revealing the diversity of the early Puerto Rican music scene on the island and in New York.”

In October, 1929 Heriberto Torres had a disagreement with Catalá and left the group. After leaving Los Jardineros, Heriberto Torres continued to be active in his own groups, one of them named Los Bohemios Puertorriqueños. Torres died in a car accident in 1931. The active careers of cuatristas Heriberto Torres and Joaquín Rivera in New York during the first decades of the twentieth century are evidence of the parallel development of the instrument away from the island, while still keeping its ties to Puerto Rican identity. When it comes to defining and redefining folklore, a set of cultural materials and their privileged relation to the identities of individuals and groups must be conceptualized. Folk music depends on a community to shape it and give it voice. The voice of the cuatro is now more deterritorialized as the instrument is adopted in other settings for reasons that go beyond a national sentiment. In Hawaii, for example, a zone of cultural interaction defined by the cuatro is apparent given the instrument’s important role in “kachi kachi” music. Even though the conventional lead instrument in kachi kachi is the

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23 From The Best of Los Jardineros CD booklet.
24 Philip Bohlman, The Study of Folk Music, x.
tenor guitar, the cuatro has gradually replaced it. Tenor player George Ayala Sr. told Ted Solis that he began using the cuatro again because “it was more jíbaro.”25 One implication of this change from the tenor to the cuatro appears to have been a greater emphasis upon fast scalar and single-note figurations as well as exposure to the modern Puerto Rican cuatro, along with increased communication with Puerto Rican cuatro players.26

Figure 4-4: George Ayala Sr. holds a tenor and a cuatro


Still in Hawaii, another contemporary cuatro player Wally Rita, who leads the band Wally Rita y los Kauianos, said in an interview that:

“Actually, ‘Los Kauianos’ was a band back in the ‘70s and ‘80s,” Rita said, noting that Angel Santiago Sr., of the original Los Kauianos, is the one

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26 Ibid., 139.
responsible for teaching him kachi-kachi music in the first place...“He was my mentor. I am Portuguese, not Puerto Rican at all.”

The fact that Rita plays the cuatro and does not identify himself as Puerto Rican distances the instrument from its strong national affinities and situates it within a tradition developed in a diasporic context that draws upon diverse cultural and musical elements. The proud assertion of new identities and the subtle transformation of “ethnic” materials and musical choices is a reflection of the variety of identities adopted by individuals.

Mike Balles, another cuatrista from Hawaii, who identifies himself as Hawaiian-Puerto Rican, has been playing the cuatro for forty years. However, he claims not to perform kachi kachi but a variety of Latin and Puerto Rican music. Balles is a self-taught cuatro player. He started playing with other cuatro players in Hawaii but in the early 1980s, started his own group, Mike Balles y sus Latinos Escogidos. In the 1990s, Balles reconfigured his group to be formed by the members of his family. His chosen “Latinos” are now his Japanese wife and kids. It is very interesting that Balles chose the term “Latinos” for the group name, especially when he defines his music as “Hawaiian and Puerto Rican.” I asked Balles why he called the group “chosen Latinos” and he mentioned, “I don’t remember why I chose it. But the name implies that we play music that is not only Hawaiian.” Mike’s rationale reflects what Ted Solís has discussed about Puerto Rican music in Hawaii. Solís affirms that “through musical culture, this community takes advantage of the shared heritage of its members, thus demonstrating the power of music to foster a sense of belonging and identity.”

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28 Diversity in musical choices and overlapping identities are general features of what Slobin (1993) terms intercultural network in his survey on the ways in which music travels to different parts of the world.
has grappled with the complexities of its ethnic self image vis-à-vis broader ethnic identity categories such as Hispanic or Latino.”

Figure 4-5: Mike Balles and his family of musicians, *Mike Balles y sus Latinos Escogidos*


Another interesting aspect of Mike’s formation as a musician is the close relationship he had with the renowned New York-based cuatrista Yomo Toro. In 1991, Mike’s band opened a concert for Yomo Toro, who was responsible for the popularization of the cuatro in salsa music. Yomo performed the instrument with the popular 1970s salsa group the Fania All Stars. Yomo was so impressed by Mike’s performance that before leaving Hawaii he gave Balles his personal cuatro as a gift. That was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. Mike says that he learned most of his technique and repertoire listening to Yomo and speaking with him.

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Last year cuatro player Quique Domenech posted a Facebook status that read, “*no importa el intérprete donde suena el cuatro suena Puerto Rico,*” a phrase that translates as “regardless of the musician, wherever the cuatro is played, it is Puerto Rico sounding.” There are no current limitations for instrument performance practice away from Puerto Rico.

While living in the United States I came to realize the important role that cuatristas on the mainland play in the instrument’s historical development, a fact that is not openly discussed in Puerto Rico. Even though I grew up in contact with the instrument tradition in Puerto Rico, I noticed that there is a tendency among musicians in Puerto Rico to highlight its practice as island-centered. The work of talented cuatristas in the United States remains unnoticed. It is fulfilling to see collaborations between island-based and United States based cuatro players taking place in the United States (for example at the Chicago Cuatro Festival, California Cuatro Festival, and others.) Hopefully these collaborations will motivate cultural policymakers in Puerto Rico to also connect with the Puerto Rican musical talent in the United States and elsewhere.
Chapter Five

THE PUERTO RICAN CUATRO FESTIVAL IN CHICAGO

Cultural policies are defined by Garretón as the set of activities and initiatives aimed at satisfying the cultural needs of a community, developing a symbolic and expressive field that generates shared perspectives of social life.\(^1\) The field of cultural policy is not understood as being exclusively exercised by the government, but also pertains to other agents such as community organizations, civic movements and private corporations. The involvement of the private sector and individuals in the case of cultural production in Puerto Rico has been thoroughly discussed by Mareia Quintero in the article “Debates identitarios y capital simbólico: Políticas culturales en torno a la música tradicional puertorriqueña,” in which the author explores strategies and initiatives among musicians in Puerto Rico geared towards the preservation, transmission, diffusion, and development of musical traditions. This chapter explores the impact of community organizations and private corporations in the current localities for cuatro performance.

Cuatro performance is commonly categorized as a traditional musical expression that articulates discourses that go beyond a mere musical performance to construct many modes of signification. The phenomenon of cuatro performance and the politics of belonging and nationalism it generates could be analyzed through Ana Maria Ochoa’s explanation of the current recontextualization of sounds, which involve the localization of global sounds and the globalization of local ones. Ochoa proposes that in the politics of belonging, musical genres

(traditional or popular) are deployed in order to articulate a) ties to place, b) communicative and communal ideals of spontaneity and affect that have been historically associated to an aesthetics of orality, and c) an ascribed sense of deeply felt identification.²

Current localities for cuatro performance are as dispersed as the Puerto Rican population itself, but these locales come to represent enclaves with strong ties to ideas about nation and Puerto Rican identity. Although several cultural festivals—that may or may not incorporate cuatro performance—are celebrated on the island throughout the year, one of the largest cuatro concerts nowadays takes place annually in the city of Chicago.

**The Puerto Rican Arts Alliance**

In the summer of 2013, I started noticing a prominent display of press coverage for the Chicago Cuatro Festival, scheduled for November 2013. It was evident that the institution in charge of organizing the event had a marketing plan in place for the festival’s promotion. In late June 2013, I received a postcard with a "Save the Date" for the annual festival. The Chicago Cuatro Festival is presented by the Chicago-based institution The Puerto Rican Arts Alliance (PRAA), an organization founded in 1998 to increase awareness, knowledge and access to the arts by the Puerto Rican community and to provide a venue for emerging artists and musicians to showcase their talents. According to the institution’s mission statement, PRAA is dedicated to preserving Puerto Rican culture by maintaining our traditions, promoting our arts, providing educational opportunities in arts programming and cultivating pride in our heritage for future generations.³

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Just after receiving the festival’s "Save the Date" postcard, I started reading more news and notifications about the festival via Facebook, Twitter and articles in newspapers from Puerto Rico. The fifteenth edition of the Chicago Cuatro Festival in 2013 had an additional component that sought a collaboration and learning experience between cuatristas in Chicago and Quique Domenech, a well-known cuatrística based in Puerto Rico. The program called the International Connections Project was made possible through a grant in the amount of $40,000 that the MacArthur Foundation awarded PRAA. The MacArthur Foundation website states that the award “supported an international collaboration with the Puerto Rican Philharmonic Orchestra and Quique Domenech, a master musician and teacher of the cuatro.”

This project was a one-year effort to connect young emerging artists to their cultural roots and music. Seven members of the Chicago Cuatro Orchestra, between the ages of 17 and 24, traveled to Puerto Rico to

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participate in a series of classes with Quique Domenech and other events, such as a visit to the studio of cuatro luthier Jaime Alicea. An article in Puerto Rico’s newspaper Primera Hora stated that the students’ visit took place in an effort to cultivate cultural diversity and keep the instrument alive away from the island. The historical path of the Chicago Cuatro Festival proves that in fact the instrument’s tradition is maintained in Chicago with an institution that hosts the most notable cuatro event currently taking place in the U.S. In an interview with Carlos Hernandez, President of PRAA, the history of the Chicago Cuatro Festival was described in detail:

The festival began in 1998 at the Roberto Clemente Community Academy High School located in what was once the heart of the Puerto Rican community. Since the beginning, PRAA has been the organizer of the Cuatro Festival. However, there were many community volunteers in its early years that played a key role in launching this effort. Originally the festival served as one of PRAA’s principal programming efforts to promote Puerto Rican culture. The idea of the festival was brought to PRAA by a group called the Chicago Cuatro Orchestra whose focus was to create a Puerto Rican Cuatro Orchestra that could perform at such an event and have PRAA establish a year-long cuatro educational music program that could feed into those efforts. Many years have gone by and PRAA now continues to teach youth and children how to play the cuatro, guitar and violin. We have also created an ensemble of our own called Taller PRAA and have partnered with many other music groups.

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6 Carlos Hernandez, emailed to Noraliz Ruiz, September 29, 2014.
It is evident that the Chicago Cuatro Festival emerged from a community’s desire to showcase, preserve and maintain Puerto Rican traditions in the United States. As Puerto Ricans in the United States strive to preserve their cultural identity, musical expressions and the arts in general have come to represent the field from which many areas of Puerto Rican cultural production is perpetrated. Carlos Hernandez further discussed the origins of the festival by stating:

Prior to PRAA National Cuatro Festival efforts, cuatro simply meant folk music to the Puerto Rican community in Chicago. Today, the meaning of cuatro has expanded beyond Puerto Rican folk music that is typically played during the Christmas holidays. PRAA has been a catalyst for cuatro music to be appreciated more profoundly by younger generations of Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican children. Our interest has always and continues to be one of offering a music forum that allows cuatristas to expose Puerto Rico’s national instrument to our community and other Latinos and non-Latinos. We have played a major role in the United States to revolutionize what cuatro means for everyone beyond our traditional borders.  

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7 Carlos Hernandez, emailed to Noraliz Ruiz, September 29, 2014.
The organization is committed to the community at large by providing free music programs to children from local public schools. These educational music programs do not exclusively serve a Puerto Rican population; this was confirmed in a recent interview broadcasted by the Latino network Univision Chicago. On November 10, 2014, Univision aired a short interview about PRAA’s school programs. In the video, a young student from Guatemala identified as Kiara Avendaños talks to the reporter about her experience as a cuatro student. Kiara said: “Sometimes I think, I’m Guatemalan, do I have to be Puerto Rican to play a Puerto Rican instrument? And it’s not like that, children can decide what type of music they want to play.” Kiara’s statement in the Univision segment challenges the categorization of the cuatro as solely Puerto Rican. The young student’s experience could be analyzed in light of Feld’s idea about the commonplace and ubiquitous place for music given “the intensified circulation of what historically have been considered local musics everywhere.”

The young student is implicitly aware of the transnationalism of the instrument and the globalization of a music that is still considered as local and national. Clearly, the cuatro’s incursion into the school and the community through PRAA’s educational programs is making the instrument accessible to a wider audience, one that is not necessarily Puerto Rican. Even if the repertoire that PRAA’s students are learning is Puerto Rican, the instrument’s success in these programs indicates it is suitable for group music instruction and that it transcends its Puerto Rican boundaries. I asked Carlos Hernandez about the diverse programs PRAA is conducting and their impact. Hernandez mentioned:

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PRAA provides a number of arts and music educational programs. Among them are the Taíno Project, Studio Arts and Exhibition Program, The Three Kings Festival and our Latin Music Project program. It is through our Latin Music Project that we offer annually cuatro lessons to 300 Chicago Public School students and our community. All of our programs are free and open to the public.10

PRAA is grounded on community service, and this is manifested through the number of programs managed by the institution and the magnitude of the Cuatro Festival they annually organize. It is certainly a comprehensive and yearlong program dedicated to cuatro instruction and performance.

**The Fifteenth Cuatro Festival**

In the year 2013, after reading advertisements and articles about the festival’s line up and pre-concert programs such as the International Connections Project, I decided to attend the event. The fifteenth edition of the festival in 2013 was definitely a milestone for the organization, because for this special occasion PRAA put together an ambitious concert program. Upon entering the Harris Theater in downtown Chicago one could perceive the involvement of community members in the organization of the event. In the theater’s lobby, local artisans were selling their creations: from necklaces to art prints with Puerto Rican iconography. Volunteers were also actively engaging with attendees selling raffle tickets and hosting booths with information about PRAA’s community programs. That first impression of a community-organized event was overshadowed as soon as I started reviewing the concert’s program handed to me at the entrance by a theater usher; a 72-page program filled with advertisements that range from local restaurants to politicians, insurance companies and banks. At that point, I perceived that the event relies on corporate sponsorships and that a festival of this extent needed an

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10 Carlos Hernandez, emailed to Noraliz Ruiz, September 29, 2014.
organizational structure that involved more than community volunteers. The financial corporation BMO Harris Bank was the principal sponsor of the fifteenth Chicago Cuatro Festival. A message from the bank’s CEO printed in the concert program states:

BMO Harris Bank is honored to support the Puerto Rican Arts Alliance and the 15th Annual Cuatro Festival, a unique event that pays tribute to the rich cultural heritage of the Puerto Rican people. This celebration helps to ensure the preservation of Puerto Rico’s artistic legacy, which is such a vital part of the diverse communities BMO Harris Bank serves.\textsuperscript{11}

Although BMO Harris was the main sponsor for the 2013 festival, the program also included messages from Illinois Governor Pat Quinn and the city’s Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who were both co-chairs of the festival’s 15th anniversary committee. Full page ads from major corporations such as Wintrust Community Bank, Commonwealth Edison (ComEd), Allstate, McDonald’s, Goya, Telemundo Chicago, Boeing, Quaker, ABC7 Chicago, Popular Community Bank, Univision Chicago, StateFarm, Walmart and Southwest Airlines were included in the festival’s program. Evidently, funding from the private sector is essential for the implementation of PRAA’s annual cuatro festival. As stated in the message from PRAA leadership, “we planned and executed a successful capital campaign in spite of the tough economic times. Thanks to our friends and donors, who have assisted us in making this possible.”\textsuperscript{12}

The 2013 edition of the festival featured three musical acts by The Chicago Cuatro Orchestra, The Philharmonic Orchestra of Puerto Rico and cuatrista Quique Domenech and his group Tré. The participation of the Chicago Cuatro Orchestra was relatively brief. The local group, mostly composed of young performers, played a twenty-minute set of a variety of traditional music and some popular holiday tunes commonly associated with the tradition of

\textsuperscript{11} Puerto Rican Arts Alliance, \textit{Cuatro Festival Concert Program: 15th Anniversary Celebration} (Chicago: PRAA, 2013).

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
The director of the ensemble, Orlando Rivera, and one of the orchestra’s singers were constantly reminding the audience that the group had an upcoming concert in December of 2013. By inviting the audience to another performance, the members of the group were implicitly suggesting that they were not satisfied with the short music set they were playing and that in the forthcoming performance the audience would get to hear a full concert by the Chicago Cuatro Orchestra. The performance of the Philharmonic Orchestra, although outstanding, did not involve cuatro performance. The ensemble mostly played popular repertoire from Puerto Rico and Latin America, and people responded positively to their presentation especially to songs from the popular repertoire such as “El Cumbanchero” by composer Rafael Hernández and a medley of songs by Bobby Capó.

The third part of the program also involved the orchestra’s participation in supporting and accompanying the performance by Quique Domenech and Grupo Tré. The festival’s stage served as a platform for the debut of Domenech with his Grupo Tré, a pop music project featuring singers Mayda Belén and Edgar Ríos. Tré even played covers of pop and rock songs such as “Next time I fall in love” by the rock group Chicago and songs with religious lyrics such as “Creo en Dios.” The fact that the island-based cuatro player was performing more covers and pop songs than the standard and traditional cuatro repertoire was unexpected as it deviates from the festival's music program. Puerto Rican trovadores and décima improvisers, the Villanueva brothers (Ricardo and Eduardo) joined Domenech and pleased the audience with the interpretation of improvised décimas. Even though I was observing the concert from a fieldwork

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13 This term refers to the repertoire that is commonly performed during Christmas time. These songs are associated with the practice of playing songs at family reunions or when a group of people gathers to give surprise visit to a friend with live music. The practice could be compared to Christmas Caroling.

14 A décima refers to a song form that generally consists of forty-four lines (an introductory four-verse stanza followed by four ten-line stanzas). In Puerto Rico and many other countries of Latin America there is a tradition of singing improvised verses following the décima structure.
perspective I was not expecting the main act of the cuatro festival to be the debut of the pop music group Tré and the public announcement of the group’s record contract with SonyMusic.

The concert also included the presentation of the International Connections Project, with eight cuatristas playing an instrumental version of “Los Carreteros,” a well-known piece composed by Rafael Hernández, along with Domenech and the Philharmonic orchestra. The overall impression I got of the 15th Chicago Cuatro was the complex operation that it involves along with a year-round fundraising campaign to support the educational programs sponsored by PRAA in Chicago. The festival per se takes place in a state of the art theater, not a typical venue for cuatro performance, in which musicians have the opportunity to perform in a formal concert setting. Carlos Hernandez says that the festival’s main attraction is the “high caliber music production that goes into executing a first class concert.”

The 16th National Cuatro Festival

In 2014, PRAA introduced a new logo and name as part of the festival’s rebranding. The word “national” was added to the festival’s name. I started receiving promotional materials in early August and the impetus of their rebranding campaign was noticeable.

15 Carlos Hernandez, emailed to Noraliz Ruiz, September 29, 2014.
The guests for the 2014 festival were the Chicago Cuatro Orchestra and New Jersey-based cuatrista Gabriel Muñoz and his group Melodías Borinquenás, and from the island Los Cantores de Bayamón and Edwin Colón Zayas and his group Taller Campesino. The 2014 festival was also held at the Harris Theater in Downtown Chicago, in November 7, 2014. I was able to attend and experience the festival and there were some differences in terms of organization, concert program, and sponsorship between the two latest editions of the festival.

The Chicago Cuatro Orchestra was the opening act and started their participation with a performance of the popular rock song “Hotel California” arranged for cuatro. I noticed, like the previous year, that during their presentation, one of the singers repeatedly reminded the audience about an upcoming performance scheduled for December, 2014. The recurrent invitation to another event confirms that although the Chicago Cuatro Orchestra was crucial in the early years of the festival, the institution works independently from PRAA. A visit to the Chicago Cuatro Orchestra website reveals that the group is in fact an independent institution:
The Chicago Cuatro Orchestra is a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit community music program serving directly the city of Chicago. The Chicago Cuatro Orchestra was founded in 1996 with the purpose of creating a cultural program to preserve Puerto Rico’s national instrument, the Cuatro, and to begin the tradition of a Cuatro festival in Chicago.16

Moreover, the orchestra’s website also states that:

The future plans are to duplicate the Cuatro program in different cities of the U. S. A., and to create a national Cuatro program network. With this network in place, The Chicago Cuatro Orchestras’ qualified staff will train music teachers, and will expand the program all over United States, creating one day, The U. S. National Puerto Rican Cuatro Orchestra and Festival.17

PRAA’s festival was renamed this year as the National Cuatro Festival and the Chicago Cuatro Orchestra also lists as an objective the implementation of a national festival. In spite of that competing objective, there is a clear intention among these Chicago-based organizations to expand their programs, reach out to a broader audience and claim a national space for the cuatro. I would like to highlight that based on the two performances I have observed, the Chicago Cuatro Orchestra serves as the principal showcase of young Chicago cuatro talent at the festival.

The 2014 National Cuatro Festival featured Gabriel Muñoz and Melodías Borinqueñas. Muñoz is a professional cuatrista who grew up in New Jersey. At the festival, Muñoz performed a diverse repertoire, which included vocal and instrumental traditional pieces. Particularly interesting was the performance of the décimas “El cuatro puertorriqueño,” which he wrote and also sang. Cuatristas do not commonly sing while playing the cuatro; this practice makes Muñoz stand out from ordinary performers. Throughout his participation, Muñoz was truly excited about being part of the festival and in a personal communication he expressed:

17 Ibid.
I have mentioned in the past that Edwin Colón Zayas has revolutionized the Puerto Rican cuatro as we know it several times over. He is by far my all-time favorite cuatrista and a major inspiration. I was in disbelief when asked to open for Edwin. A musician of his caliber can be intimidating. But I am truly excited to share a stage with one of the greatest cuatristas of our generation.\textsuperscript{18}

Muñoz’s appearance was definitely the revelation of the 16\textsuperscript{th} National Cuatro Festival. I hope his participation prompts the festival’s organizers to always include emerging cuatro talent from other areas of the United States in the program.

The participation of Edwin Colón Zayas was simply exceptional. The audience enjoyed his fast solos, display of virtuosity and the synchronicity of his ensemble, especially the effortless collaboration with his brother Billy on the guitar and his sister Emma on the guiro.\textsuperscript{19} Colón Zayas played different genres and singer Victor Manuel Reyes joined them for the traditional song forms of \textit{seis} and \textit{aguinaldo}. When Edwin Colón Zayas concluded his 40-minute performance, almost two hours into the program, the audience was ecstatic.

The festival’s closing included the display on stage of an enormous Puerto Rican flag. Overall, the 16\textsuperscript{th} National Cuatro Festival was a complete spectacle that revalidated PRAA’s strength as a community organization and its ability to attract the support of corporate sponsors to continue their efforts. In addition to cuatro performance, this year’s edition was dedicated to the 65\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, also known as the Borinqueneers.\textsuperscript{20}

The National Cuatro Festival’s recognition of the Borinqueneers, popularly known as “our heroic regiment,” instilled the festival with more patriotism and nationalism and reaffirmed that the festival is first and foremost a celebration of Puerto Rican culture. This year PRAA also

\textsuperscript{18} Gabriel Muñoz, emailed to Noraliz Ruiz, September 24, 2014.
\textsuperscript{19} A percussion instrument, its body is a hollow gourd with parallel notches cut in one side. It is played by rubbing a stick or tines along the notches.
\textsuperscript{20} The Borinqueneers are the only active-duty segregated military unit in US history, made up mainly of Puerto Rican soldiers. The regiment was awarded a Congressional Gold Medal in June 10, 2014.
celebrated another major accomplishment, as the organization received an Emmy Award for a documentary about the 15th Cuatro Festival produced by Telemundo Chicago. The award in the category of Outstanding Achievement for Arts/Entertainment Programming was presented to PRAA’s director during the 2014 festival.

As of 2010, the state of Illinois had 196,913 Puerto Ricans, ranking 9th of 50 States. The Cuatro Festival helps to create and sustain a recognizable Puerto Rican identity in the City of Chicago. The existence of the festival and the presentation of renowned cuatro musicians allows for the staging of cultural identity and connects the audience to their Puerto Rican roots. Moreover, PRAA’s slogan of “uniting people through culture,” promotes the power of music bringing together not just Puerto Rican people but cuatro enthusiasts from other countries. As a matter of fact, the promotional poster of this year’s festival conveys a message of a collective renewal of interest in Puerto Rican traditional music as the cuatro is being disseminated to a national audience. The poster image suggests the continuation of the tradition in the United States and its ties to Puerto Rico. Evidently, there is a sense of pride in belonging to a culture that emerges from a minority group and the festival allows the contextualization of Puerto Rican music and its performance as something special and of merit.

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The poster’s elements, the Puerto Rican flag as a background for a cuatro and the maps of Puerto Rico and the United States, may suggest that the cultural ground of the instrument is also defined by the contributions of cuatristas on the island and across the Puerto Rican communities in the United States. The National Cuatro Festival remains as the principal cuatro annual event in the United States in terms of audience, location, sponsorship and program. Another comparable cuatro event worth mentioning is the California Cuatro Festival, an event that took place for five consecutive years but has been inactive since 2011.

Other Localities for Cuatro Performance in Puerto Rico

In Puerto Rico, the Puerto Rican Cuatro Festival (Festival del Cuatro Puertorriqueño), sponsored by the Professional College of Engineers and Land Surveyors of Puerto Rico (Colegio
de Ingenieros y Agrónomos de Puerto Rico), has been celebrated consecutively for 44 years. The engineer Julio M. Laabes founded the festival in 1970. After his death, his widow Teresita de Laabes continued with the organization of the festival. The legacy of the Laabes family continues with the celebration of the annual festival with the support of the professional college of engineers. The cuatro festival is an all-day cuatro concert that takes place on the third Sunday of May. Therein, the oldest Cuatro Festival from Puerto Rico is also made possible with the support of a non-governmental institution.

Figure 5-5: Official poster for the 5th Cuatro Festival, May 13, 1974

In terms of government efforts, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture has organized La Fiesta Nacional del Cuatro Puertorriqueño (The National Cuatro Celebration); its eight edition took place on December 14, 2014.
Since 2012, the *Fiesta nacional* is part of another cultural festival and interdisciplinary arts project known as *La Campechada*. A government-sponsored event fully dedicated to the cuatro does not exist in Puerto Rico.

Since 2012 the “Fiesta del Cuatro,” has served as the stage for the winner of the annual *Audición nacional de jóvenes cuatristas* (National Cuatro Audition Contest) to play alongside experienced cuatristas at la *Fiesta del Cuatro*. The National Cuatro Audition is a cuatro contest sponsored by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, targeted at young cuatro players between the ages of 12-17.

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22 La Campechada was originally organized by the Puerto Rico Museum of Art’s (MAPR) as an exposition dedicated to the 18th century Puerto Rican painter José Campeche. The art exhibit was titled “Campeche: Mito y realidad” (“Campeche: Myth and reality.”) The ICP and the government subsequently took over the project upon determining that it represented a cultural reengineering tool with an important calling to artists and public sector representatives to actively participate in the island’s cultural movements. The help received from public funds assigned through the ICP turned the initial concept into what is now considered one of the island’s most important cultural events. Aponte Angela, “‘la Campechada’ Event Promises Economic Bonanza,” *News is My Business*, November 15, 2013, accessed December 13, 2014, [http://newsismybusiness.com/campechada-promises-economic/](http://newsismybusiness.com/campechada-promises-economic/).
Both events, *Fiesta nacional* and *The National Cuatro Audition*, represent current government’s efforts to promote, preserve and expose the cuatro tradition by highlighting contemporary cuatro players. These two cuatro projects directed by the government seem minimal considering the number of laws approved by the Senate of Puerto Rico that seek the advancement of the cuatro through its performance, education and dissemination.

The following is a summary of recent laws related to cuatro preservation issued by the government of Puerto Rico:
1. Law No. 154, June 27, 2003 declares the Puerto Rican Cuatro as the National Instrument of Puerto Rico.

2. Law No. 50, April 11, 2002, declares November 17 as the Day of the Puerto Rican Cuatro and of Don Tomás “Maso” Rivera Morales.

3. Law No. 14, January 4, 2000 declares the last weekend of August as the official days to celebrate the *Fiesta Nacional del Cuatro Puertorriqueño*.

Cuatro music plays an important role in the articulation of nationalism, particularly at a time when globalization heavily influences the re-articulation of local identities. Regardless of the location of cuatro musical production, on the island or in the United States, the underlying discourse of its performance refers to the same pragmatic aspect of analysis where the instrument keeps a strong national association to Puerto Rico. As discussed in Chapter Three, although the government became involved with cuatro performance and dissemination, nowadays its performance practice and localities are being directly supported by the private sector.

Mareia Quintero has suggested that instead of advocating for an idealized apolitical sphere, it is important to recognize the political dimension of culture and to conceive cultural policy as a fundamental aspect that transcends any disputes for democratizing society, transforms imaginaries, and establishes new links among people.\(^\text{23}\) It is interesting that the motto “uniting people through culture” has been used by the National Cuatro Festival in Chicago as it works for the preservation of Puerto Rican culture in the United States while sharing it with the community at large. The motto reflects that although a strong tie to Puerto Rico as place is maintained in cuatro performance practice in both Puerto Rico and the United States, there is an awareness of

the potentiality of the cuatro to appeal to a non-Puerto Rican audience within the multi-cultural composition of the United States.
Chapter Six

INNOVATION AND CONTINUITY: YOUNG CUATRO PLAYERS

In the book “Poetics of Music,” Igor Stravinsky states that “a real tradition is not the relic of a past irrevocably gone; it’s a living force that animates and informs the present... Far from implying the repetition of what has been, tradition presupposes the reality of what endures.”¹

This chapter explores cuatro music as produced by young players. I propose that cuatro performance practice has been and continues to be a part of a dynamic, inclusive and flexible tradition. In regards to the topic of change in music, Merriam proposes that:

Music changes within what seems to be a culturally determined framework... No matter where we look, change is a constant human experience; although the rates of change are different from one culture to another and from one aspect to another within a given culture, no culture escapes the dynamics of change over time.²

Changes in cuatro performance practice are not only apparent, but a conscious course of action that many cuatristas take nowadays as they perceive that change contributes to the continuation of the tradition. Stravinsky suggested that tradition “appears as an heirloom, a heritage that one receives on condition of making it bear fruit before passing it on to ones descendants.”³ This chapter explores the particular cases of ten cuatristas who are consciously working with the tradition and “making it bear fruit,” opting to transform old practices, and thus prompting a multidimensional landscape for Puerto Rican folk music. Young and versatile cuatro players with a highly developed playing technique, repertoire knowledge, improvisational skills and with some experience at composing and arranging, are weaving Puerto Rican current

² Merriam, The Anthropology of Music, 297.
³ Igor Stravinsky, Poetics of Music: In Six Formal Lessons, 74.
musical history. In Puerto Rico, it is common to see young players accompanying veteran singers as well as collaborations taking place between established cuatristas and emerging talent. Island-based cuatrista Benjamín José Laboy Ruiz, is an active performer and composer. At age 24, this musician has many accomplishments and just recently joined the well-established group *Ecos de Borinquen*. Laboy Ruiz’s performance practice involves both, tradition and innovation, two distinctive qualities that are inherent among young players. At his young age, Benjamín has received many awards and recognitions; he is the four-time winner of the Danza Composition Contest sponsored by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture with *Los pasos de mi abuelo* (2010), *Gotitas de cristal* (2012), *La noche de tu partida* (2013) and *Amor de plata* (2014). About winning these contests, Benjamín states that:

I feel honored and proud of receiving the awards. It motivates me to continue growing and making new music because it is a contest in which accomplished maestros and fellow musicians and composers participate. These compositions are preserved (at the National Archives) so other people can appreciate and learn them. It makes me very happy to know that other fellow cuatristas are learning my music… Because music is to be shared and performed and also to contribute to the legacy of Puerto Rican history.

Benjamín was able to play the instrument away from Puerto Rico during the years 2013 and 2014 when he attended the Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya (Esmuc) as he was completing a masters of music in film composition. At that time he played the cuatro during the Sunday mass at the Basilica Sagrada Familia in Barcelona. He mentions that he was able to make arrangements of Catalanian music for the cuatro.

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4 Ecos de Borinquen was founded by singer (trouvador) Miguel Santiago in 1980. One of the most popular albums of the group is *Jibaro hasta el hueso*, produced under Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, which was nominated for a Grammy in 2004.

5 Benjamín Laboy Ruiz, email communication with author, 12 January, 2015. (My translation)
Even though Benjamín has taken the instrument into new directions, he notes:

There is a tendency to preserve the instrument, and this does not allow the instrument to evolve, thinking that it is just to play the traditional seis and aguinaldo. I disagree with this way of thinking because if we see the cuatro just like any other instrument, we have a tool to create a musical language and we could also use it to connect with other people around the world.\textsuperscript{6}

Benjamín was musically trained at the Conservatory of Music in Puerto Rico. He obtained a bachelor’s degree in music education and cello. I asked him about how his cello training influenced his cuatro performance and compositional approach and he remarked: “When I started studying cello, I was able to understand different forms and music styles as well as how to create and express a musical language. I learned and realized the importance of communicating something with music.”\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{6} Benjamín Laboy Ruiz, email communication with author, 12 January, 2015. (My translation)
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
Benjamín’s career as a cuatrística delves into tradition and innovation and he expressed concern with the instrument’s dissemination. He notes that:

The current interest on the instrument in Puerto Rico is very important for the development of our own culture. Social media help us promote the instrument out of the island and we should take advantage of this opportunity and show the instrument to the world.\(^8\)

The continuation of the cuatro tradition is bearing fruit through the work of young cuatristas like Benjamín, who are constantly performing and also contributing repertoire to our contemporary cuatro catalog. Benjamín’s award winning danza *Amor de plata* is included in Appendix B.

In Puerto Rico, I also interviewed four other young cuatro players pursuing undergraduate degrees in music with a concentration on cuatro performance at the Conservatory of Music in Puerto Rico and at the Interamerican University of Puerto Rico. At the Conservatory, cuatro performance is part of the program in Jazz and Caribbean Music. Admission into the cuatro performance program at the Conservatory requires passing an audition that includes: a test on sight singing and improvisation skills, knowledge of major and minor scales, a non-traditional or international piece and the performance of two pieces of the traditional cuatro repertoire, playing one of each of these two groups of musical styles:\(^9\)

- danza, fox trot, mazurka and pasillo
- guaracha, seis or aguinaldo with an improvised section.

At the Interamerican University, cuatro performance is part of the undergraduate program in Popular Music. Admission into the program requires passing an entrance examination in music

\(^8\) Benjamín Laboy Ruiz, email communication with author, 12 January, 2015. (My translation)

theory and sight singing and instrument performance. Students who do not pass the entrance examination are given the option to take introductory music courses that will prepare them to begin the regular undergraduate curricular map. After interviewing four undergraduate students, and by examining the sequence of courses offered as part of the bachelor’s degree at both institutions, I can conclude that learning traditional cuatro repertoire is not the main focus of the curriculum. The curriculum at both institutions is heavily oriented to jazz performance and popular music.

A male cuatro student from the Conservatory (Student A) said that “I took a course in music from Puerto Rico, but it’s a history class, here we do not learn to perform the traditional seis or aguinaldo, that’s something we learn individually.”10 Although the cuatro is now part of a higher education curriculum, this does not mean that the students are trained to play the more traditional music forms of the cuatro repertoire like the seis or aguinaldo.

The existence of cuatro programs in higher education does not assure that what people perceive as a foundational cuatro repertoire is being learned and preserved. Cuatro education at the college level contributes to the reinterpretation of the instrument through the contact with other musical and cultural elements. The inclusion of the cuatro into college programs brings about another aspect to the contemporaneity of cuatro performance practice and to the fluidity of the cuatro tradition as “its content is redefined by each generation and its timelessness may be situationally constructed.”11 Student B, a male cuatro student at the Conservatory of Music expressed that “here we are in an academic environment, sort of disconnected from jíbaro music.” This student felt the need to put more attention to a traditional repertoire and mentioned:

10 Interview with student at the Conservatory of Music, digital audio recording, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 17 August, 2014.
I got to a point where I found myself playing a lot of modern music and classical repertoire, and it was important to learn more of our oral traditions because when I first started I was exposed to a modern repertoire by great and living cuatro players like Edwin Colón, Neftali Ortiz, Modesto and Christian Nieves while now I’m exploring my roots by listening to Nieves Quintero, Panchón among other cuatro players.  

Student A from the Conservatory mentioned that he tries to keep a balanced, diverse repertoire by studying both jazz and Puerto Rican folk music.

Sometimes I ask my classmates to play Puerto Rican folk music with me, and I realize that it is not being taught. We do not learn to play seis, but we need to keep it alive because it is part of our roots and who we are.

At the Interamerican University, two female cuatro students further explore the place of traditional music within a higher education environment. Student C mentions:

The college curriculum is designed in a way that the cuatro is fully incorporated to jazz and popular music. It is not about folk music because one grows up with that. I learned seises and aguinaldos before coming here. What we learn at the college level, is to bring the cuatro into a different repertoire, like jazz, samba and salsa.

In the case of this student, she learned music notation at the college level. She admits that she wants to “stay away from the tradition by innovating and learning new genres.”

A second, female student at Interamerican University (Student D) clearly stated that her objective as a cuatro student is:

To experiment with other music genres, while keeping our traditional music into perspective, and to fuse old and new styles. The cuatro has been underestimated, it is very versatile, I do not like people looking at it as an instrument just used to play holiday music during the Christmas season.

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12 Interview with student at the Conservatory of Music, digital audio recording, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 17 August, 2014.
13 Interview with student at the Conservatory of Music, digital audio recording, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 17 August, 2014.
14 Interview with student at the InterAmerican University of Puerto Rico, digital audio recording, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 18 August, 2014.
Another relevant aspect discussed with these four college level cuatro students was their conception of ideas of nationalism and cuatro performance. Student A asserted that he got interested for the instrument per se, “I have never seen it as something exclusively associated to patriotism. I see the cuatro as a means of expression not necessarily attached to national pride.”

Whereas Student B from the Conservatory mentioned:

I am a musician that ended up playing cuatro. I do not see the instrument as the flag for Puerto Ricans. I feel better without those self-imposed pressures. There are people that do not identify themselves with jíbaro music. There are Puerto Ricans who do not know what a cuatro is, and I cannot judge them and say they are not Puerto Ricans.

Student C from the InterAmerican University said:

The cuatro represents where I come from. If I move to the United States, I will take the instrument with me because it represents who I am. My identity is manifested through the cuatro and if I live away from Puerto Rico it will take another meaning and value.

Student D is focused on using the cuatro in a religious context. “In the scene of Christian music in Puerto Rico there are no other female musicians completely dedicated to praise God with this instrument and that is my objective, as well as to become a music teacher.”

With the instrument being part of the academic programs at the college level, many music festivals celebrated throughout the year and other institutions dedicated to providing cuatro classes, cuatristas on the island are constantly exposed to cuatro musical production. The scenario is different out of Puerto Rico where cuatro students take private cuatro lessons or enroll in online virtual schools that help them connect with a cuatro community. It is important

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16 Interview with student at the Conservatory of Music, digital audio recording, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 17 August, 2014.
17 Ibid.
18 Interview with student at the InterAmerican University of Puerto Rico, digital audio recording, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 18 August, 2014
19 Ibid.
to consider the role of cuatristas outside of Puerto Rico in the shaping of contemporary cuatro tradition. To what extent do they innovate and/or keep looking back to island-based cuatristas to follow the cuatro tradition?

In New Jersey, cuatro player Iriana Alvelo, born and raised in the U.S., learned to play the cuatro via the online school cuatristas.com and with private cuatro teachers. About her experience she mentions:

My grandfather is a cuatrista in Puerto Rico and he inspired me to learn. I saw him playing at my house one day when he came to visit from Puerto Rico and I was mesmerized by it and was hooked on it ever since! It has become a part of who I am now.  

Alvelo suggests that social media has provided her with a space to be in contact and exchange ideas with other cuatristas on the island: “I have built relationships with a lot of them just based on our love for the cuatro and I think that is great! I had the privilege of being able to meet my idol and teacher on cuatristas.com, the cuatrista Maribel Delgado.”

Another cuatro player who learned to play in the United States is Alejandro Negrón. Born and raised in Brooklyn, Alejandro’s musical training was influenced by cuatro teachers in New York and, eventually, by playing with other musicians. His first teacher in Brooklyn was Quique Ayala:

I learned to play the cuatro with the old guys that came from Puerto Rico. They had an idea of what cuatro performance should be and its sound. The old guys did not like those cuatro players that played a non-Puerto Rican repertoire. Thanks to my teacher, Quique Ayala, I was able to meet many musicians, like Israel Nieves, Juan Maldonado and Tito Baez, who taught me a lot of music. I really learned music with them and after that, I was able to join and make music with other musicians and groups in East Harlem (El Barrio) with groups like Los Pleneros de la 21, Yerbabuena and Raquel Rivera.

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21 Ibid.
From my conversation with Alejandro, it seems that musician and luthier Tito Baez, influenced his musical formation:

He was really nice with the musicians, he fixed our cuatros at reasonable prices. Tito Baez was the link to many other cuatro players, he was very knowledgeable and close to the tradition and his house was like a meeting place for New York cuatro players, when he passed away in 2007, cuatristas in New York lost a friend and an important resource for cuatro music. 23

Alejandro Negrón played the cuatro in the recording *Los 7 salves de la reina* by Raquel Z. Rivera and her group *Ojos de Sofía*. On that album, Alejandro Negrón participated as composer, arranger and cuatro player. *Ojos de Sofía* is a neo-folk project founded in New York that combines both tradition and innovation through the merging of Puerto Rican music, particularly jíbaro and bomba, with Dominican salves and bachatas.

Figure 6-2: Cover art of the album *Los 7 salves de la Magdalena*

Source: Image scanned by the author

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23 Interview with Alejandro Negrón, digital audio recording, New York, 24 August, 2014.
Alejandro Negrón is no longer actively playing the cuatro as he is now fully dedicated to his career in social work. However, he notes that he keeps listening to his favorite cuatro players: Edwin Colón Zayas, Neftalí Ortiz and Christian Nieves.

Among the small niche of cuatro players currently active in the United States, Gabriel Muñoz is probably the most prolific. Muñoz was born in Utuado and came to New Jersey when he was two years old. Muñoz started playing the cuatro at age 14 when he saw a performance by Alvin Medina, another young and virtuoso cuatro player. In addition to being attracted by the sound of the instrument, Muñoz mentions that “… knowing it represented the culture and entire heritage of my country gave me more inspiration to learn how to play the cuatro.”

Although there is not a circuit of cuatristas living around his area, Muñoz is making music with two groups performing folk or as he notes “cultural music from Puerto Rico.” Gabriel has recorded three albums: Para todo el año (2011), Entráme en tu adoración (2011) and Preludio de Lymarie (2014).

Even though it is important for Muñoz to maintain a traditional repertoire, his first two albums are religious, with Christian and devotional lyrics. On his most recent album Preludio de

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24 Gabriel Muñoz, emailed to Noraliz Ruiz, New Jersey, April 13, 2014.
Lymarie (2014) Muñoz presents his instrumental compositions *Preludio de Lymarie* (Prelude), *Deseo Verte* (guaracha), *Lo que nos une* (danza), *En la plaza de Utuado* (guaracha) and *Tu presencia* (Mazurca). Muñoz also recorded J.S Bach Cello Suite No. 1 and Prelude BWV 999 and *Llanto Taino*, a composition by the prominent cuatrista Nieves Quintero. Muñoz’s music reflects both tradition and innovation as it has become the standard approach among young cuatro players. Gabriel Muñoz demonstrates an impeccable playing technique, improvisational skills and interpretative quality that is manifested through the diverse types of genres he performs.

Muñoz discovered the cuatro after watching Alvin Medina performing it; at the time Muñoz was 14 years old and Medina was 15. Alvin Medina became Muñoz’s teacher and lifelong personal friend. Medina started playing the cuatro at age six, he mentions that it was a natural gift and as he grew up he started studying and experimenting with other genres: “When I learned classical music I started applying that music into the Puerto Rican cuatro. I learned from cuatristas in Puerto Rico. The really good ones are living on the island.”

Alvin teaches private cuatro lessons at his home and also via Skype. He’s currently on tour playing guitar, and cuatro, with the popular Dominican bachata singer Romeo Santos. Even the New York Times critic Jon Caramarica took note of the use of the cuatro in the Dominican bachata during a concert at the Yankee Stadium on July 11, 2014 by stating:

> At one point, he implored Alvin Medina, his cuatro player, to “make love to this guitar.” (A cuatro is a smallish guitar that contributes to bachata’s signature pleading sound.) Later, he repeated the desire, with stronger language and more pelvis thrusts.

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25 Interview with Alvin Medina, digital audio recording, New York, 6 June, 2013.

Migrant Cuatroistas

Cuatro player Charlie Rodríguez moved from Puerto Rico to Virginia in the year 2006. Rodríguez is currently working full time as a certified public accountant but he is an active cuatro player. Charlie Rodriguez teaches private lessons and also manages a popular YouTube channel, Cuatro Zone, where he shares his own videos playing cuatro as well as pictures and video clips from cuatro players in Puerto Rico. Rodríguez posted his first YouTube video in 2006, and mentioned that it is a great tool to share music with others. Charlie and his brother Alvin were students of renowned Puerto Rican cuatrista Tomás “Maso” Rivera. He started
learning many musical pieces by rote and by observing his teacher. Rodríguez showed great interest for learning the cuatro and became Rivera’s assistant. From 1989 on, he traveled with Maso Rivera to different towns in Puerto Rico to teach cuatro. In 1991 when he started college at the University of Puerto Rico Bayamón, he founded the group Café Prieto with the purpose of disseminating Maso’s music as well as his teaching philosophy “to teach a child is to teach a nation.” In the year 2004, Rodríguez recorded the album *El cuatro sin fronteras*. In this album, Charlie proves the versatility of the instrument: “I always had the idea to contribute in taking the cuatro away from exclusively folk music and from Christmas music. Nowadays there is more acceptance, it is played throughout the year, even played by Ricky Martin, and the instrument is very versatile.”

**Mario Cancel**

In the fall of 2013 I met in New York cuatro player and ethnomusicology student at Columbia University, Mario Cancel. Cancel moved from Puerto Rico to New York in 2010 to pursue a master’s degree at New York University. In our first email communication, Mario shared some links to his work, including a special appearance of his project *El jibarito urbano* (urban jíbaro). In one of his videos, Mario makes the revealing and provocative statement that has also been the object of analysis by ethnomusicologist Raquel Rivera. In the video, recorded at the Fundación Nacional para la Cultura Popular in Puerto Rico, Mario Cancel plays a cuatro model, custom made by luthier Freddy Burgos in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico. His cuatro is hollow body, and with six strings (rather than 10 strings). In that same performance Mario explains the nature of his different kind of cuatro. Mario says that the cuatro originally had four strings and it

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27 Interview with Charlie Rodriguez, digital audio recording, New York, 26 March, 2013
was called cuatro, then it had 4 pairs of strings and it was still a cuatro. At the end of the nineteenth century another pair of strings was added and the instrument was still called cuatro. He then stated, “change is the tradition.” Mario is intentionally attributing new functions to old forms. He challenges the notions of what a tradition should be and performs the cuatro in light of a new context. Mario Cancel is an active singer-songwriter who uses the cuatro as his means for accompaniment. The music he writes is very influenced by the Nueva Canción song movement developed in Puerto Rico in the 1960s.

Figure 6-5: Mario Cancel's cuatro collection

From left to right: A traditional ten-stringed cuatro and a twelve-stringed cuatro both made by Jaime Alicea, six-stringed electric cuatro made by Freddy Burgos. Photo by Ariel Zavala.

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Mario lived in the United States during a period of his childhood, from age four to nine. He had an inclination for music, took recorder lessons at school, while at home his mom introduced him to the nueva canción movement. When he arrived in Puerto Rico at the age of nine, English was practically his first language and he used music to validate his Puerto Ricanness. When he started his formal music training at the Escuela Libre de Música in Puerto Rico, a middle school and high school that specializes in music education, he chose the cuatro as his principal instrument because he knew it was considered Puerto Rico’s national instrument. About deciding to study cuatro, Mario mentions: "...it was a symbol of political independence. Millito was playing “Verde Luz” to showcase the instrument and that ended up convincing me to choose it over the flute (which I would eventually study)."\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{31} Mario Cancel, emailed to Noraliz Ruiz, October 27, 2015.
And because for Mario, the cuatro was a symbol of political independence: Millito was playing “Verde Luz” to showcase the instrument and that ended up convincing him to choose it over the flute (which he would eventually study).

Although many cuatro players in Puerto Rico begin their formation by learning jíbaro music, in Mario’s case, the cuatro came via the New Song movement. Therefore, the repertoires that are considered foundational for cuatro players were not part of Mario’s formative years. At school, he took lessons with cuatro player Millito Cruz, a teacher who supported his musical interests. In a personal interview Mario affirms that:

In class there was not an emphasis on folk music, and I think that is because Millito Cruz is also a guitar player. He brought in the guitar perspective and taught me a diverse and innovative repertoire. The Jazz Real Book was the second textbook my teacher brought to class.

Mario’s latest project is an album done in collaboration with Puerto Rico’s rap and hip-hop artist Recluso. The instrumental album titled Cancel/Recluso was released in November 2014. On the album, Recluso provides a rhythmic base whereas Cancel infuses those beats with the sound of a cuatro at times processed with sound effects that complement his fast, intricate melodic passages.

Figure 6-7: Cover art of the album Cancel/Recluso

Source: https://recluso.bandcamp.com/
Some of the songs in *Cancel/Recluso* make a direct reference to jíbaro music; that is the case of *Jíbaro, Jíbaro, Jíbaro* which builds on the melodic motive of *Seis Mapeyé*.

Figure 6-8: Principal melody of Seis Mapeyé

![Seis Mapeyé](image)

Matthew Gelbart asserts that because of its association with a cultural nation, tradition would later pick up broader connotations: it would become a buzzword for any shared origins used to reify and codify abstracted folk works – and a testing ground through which to certify those works as authentic cultural remnants.\(^{32}\)

The negotiation between tradition and innovation and the intersection with national music has been constant in cuatro discography. Thus, it cannot be conceived as a recent or an isolated phenomenon but rather as an overlapping trend that transcends geographic space (i.e. occurring on the island and in the United States,) age groups and ideas. Although current cuatro performance practice is developed as a musical phenomenon that does not exclusively adhere to folkloric genres, it still carries some traits of the traditional music stream because the instrument and its use have been fueled by conceptions of nationalism. In the specific case of Puerto Rico,

cultural nationalism, crafted as official discourse during the era of Luis Muñoz Marín, pretended to be the common element of Puerto Rican identity.33

I argue that continuity exists in cuatro music as it is amalgamated with the traditional jíbaro styles as well as mainstream ones such as rock, bachata and salsa, and that it consequently attracts larger audiences while retaining connections to national identity. To further support this idea, let us consider three musical examples, from three respected and innovative cuatristas: Nieves Quintero (1931-2000), Yomo Toro (1933-2012) and Christian Nieves (b.1981). Even though this dissertation emphasizes recent cuatro music production, it is imperative to look at the paramount cuatro productions that were innovative and challenged the conventions of traditional Puerto Rican music. I will examine three examples of cuatro performance to substantiate that the cuatro has been historically used as a vehicle to negotiate tradition and innovation.

In the year 1963, cuatro player Nieves Quintero, who moved to New York in the year 1950, recorded the album Cuerdas de Oro del Caribe. The album presents an overall experimental approach. The sound of the cuatro itself has a characteristic electronic sound, with a peculiar reverb effect that was probably due to the access to recording technology in New York. The album mainly features non-Puerto Rican musical pieces like the jazz standard “All of Me,” the Brazilian “Tico Tico no Fubá,” and Johann Strauss’ Anniversary Waltz. One can infer that producing cuatro music in New York provided a creative freedom that was less feasible in Puerto Rico. These musical creativities are evidenced in the track list as well as in the suggestive album cover that features Nieves Quintero wearing a suit and a naked woman holding the guitar.

33 Martín Cruz Santos, Afirmando la nación...: Políticas culturales en Puerto Rico (1949-1968) (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2014), 64.
Nieves Quintero was the first cuatrista to record the popular song Beer Barrel Polka (translated as *El Barrilito*), which became a standard piece for cuatristas. The song was also later recorded by Maso Rivera and Edwin Colón Zayas. An innovative cuatrista, Nieves Quintero clearly applied jazz harmonies to the folk sound of the cuatro. In an interview with Juan Sotomayor for the Puerto Rican Cuatro Project, Nieves Quintero mentioned:

> I gave the cuatro certain American influence, a different flavor. I always kept in mind that I wanted to play the cuatro in another way, different from Ladí and Sarrail Archilla. What inspired me was the American music that I listened to in New York.

Nieves surely opened many possibilities for the next generation of solo cuatro players. The album *Cuerdas de Oro del Caribe* is a full-length cuatro instrumental album, followed by

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34 El Barrilito was later recorded by Maso Rivera (1974) and Edwin Colón Zayas (1992)
35 Interviews of the Puerto Rican Cuatro Project, 97.
the album *Solitario* from 1966, which includes a selection of tracks that are closer to the Puerto Rican popular music repertoire with danzas, paso dobles and boleros. These instrumental recordings definitely contributed to defining the cuatro as a solo instrument and set a precedent for instrumental cuatro performance.

**Yomo Toro**

Among the most successful albums in the history of the popular salsa record label *Fania Records* were the albums *Asalto Navideño*, volumes 1 and 2. On these albums, trombone player and bandleader Willie Colón, alongside cuatro player Yomo Toro, were able to merge salsa with Puerto Rican folk music and produce an album that became a classic in the history of Christmas music and salsa. According to César Miguel Rondón in *The Book of Salsa*, “Willie achieved his basic goals through instrumentation: Toro provided the traditional element, while Willie added the New York sound.”

These albums are more than a fusion of traditional Puerto Rican music and salsa; they represent the label’s huge commercial success and a solidified entry point into the Latin American market. In these records, Yomo Toro demonstrated the versatility of the instrument and that Puerto Rican folk music was able to appeal to a larger market. Throughout the album Toro plays a variety of traditional seises, aguinaldos and folk melodies. The album opens with the performance of a traditional *Seis Chorreao* which serves as melodic ground to a narrated presentation of the album and each of the musicians.

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Christian Nieves

One of the names that currently resonates within the circle of young cuatristas is Christian Nieves Maldonado. His work is highly regarded and respected by other young cuatristas, both on the island and in the diaspora. His appearance on Ricky Martin’s album *Unplugged* in the year 2006 represented an important turning point for the popularization of the cuatro. Christian Nieves recorded the cuatro on some of the most popular tracks of the album, “Tu recuerdo” and “Pégate.” The song “Tu recuerdo,” featuring Spanish singer La Mari from Chambao, reached number one on the U.S. Latin Charts. On this song, Christian Nieves plays a remarkable cuatro solo that incorporates elements of a traditional Aguinaldo Jíbaro at the
beginning and ends with a variation over an Aguinaldo Orocoveño. The album debuted number one on the U.S. Latin Charts on Billboard 2007.

Figure 6-12: Melodic motives of traditional Aguinaldo Jíbaro and Aguinaldo Orocoveño

With his appearance on this album, and with the twist he gave to traditional forms, Christian Nieves validates the cuatro as an instrument that has the ability to appeal to younger
audiences by further removing it from the ordinary folk music circles. However, Christian’s style of cuatro playing, characterized by an impressive plucking speed, and a diverse improvisational language heavily influenced by world music, is founded on his proven knowledge of traditional cuatro repertoire. Christian Nieves Maldonado is the son of renowned cuatrista Modesto Nieves, an influential cuatrista who has established and developed a characteristic style clearly expressed in the large body of repertoire that Modesto Nieves has composed: more than one hundred compositions, among them mazurcas, danzas, waltzes, fox trot, and other Latin American music genres.

Although the musical production of Nieves Quintero, Yomo Toro and Christian Nieves occurred at different historical periods and locations, their impact on cuatro music history reaffirms that tradition is always constructed in the present. According to Linnekin, tradition is a conscious model of past lifeways that people use in the construction of their identity.\(^\text{37}\) The reassessment of traditional values and the reconstruction of the tradition can be discussed just by considering that on each of the examples described in this section the cuatro still operates as a Puerto Rican cultural symbol. In some cases the reference to its symbolic meaning and its connection to the island is evident, as in the compositional approach of Benjamín Laboy or in the folk melodic motives present in the work of Christian Nieves. The references to Puerto Rican music are subtler in some other cases, as in the six-stringed cuatro of Mario Cancel or in the religious music of Gabriel Muñoz. The immersion of the cuatro in salsa music, particularly with the work of Yomo Toro, confirms the lasting effect of innovation for the cuatro’s continuity because his music remains a staple for the cuatro repertoire.

Contemporary cuatro performance manifests that tradition is constantly being reinterpretated and, even though cuatristas agree that there is a foundational repertoire and key musical styles, current performance practices are infused with innovation. The musical content of the past is modified and redefined according to a modern reality.
Chapter 7

THE MUSICAL COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN THE CANARY ISLANDS AND PUERTO RICO

The cultural dynamics between Spain and Puerto Rico have been commonly approached as a one-way cultural contact. As discussed in previous chapters, there is a historical emphasis on the arrival and transformation of Spanish traditions in Puerto Rico, especially in the use of lutes on the island. However, these musical traditions, products of Trans-Atlantic cultural exchanges, can also be examined as a two-way cultural phenomenon. Puerto Rican musical traditions, including cuatro performance, are also returning to Spain where the music is combined with local expressions to create new practices.

This chapter considers the ongoing musical collaborations between Puerto Rican and Canarian musicians as an instance of a two-way cultural contact and as an example of musical hybridity. García Canclini defines hybridization as “socio-cultural processes in which discrete structures or practices, previously existing in separate form, are combined to generate new structures, objects and practices.”1 Although the collaborations taking place between Canarian and Puerto Rican musicians are relatively recent and do not represent a dominant trend, it is important to examine them closely as they reference the historical ties that bind the Canary Islands and Puerto Rico. It is also relevant to study how these collaborations are taking place and the new musical products that are being created. While the musical result of these collaborations is considered a hybrid product, the processes by which these musical practices emerge are analyzed through the concept of communities of affinity. According to Kay Kaufman Shelemay,

communities of affinity emerge from individual preferences and “musical affinity can be driven by sheer sonic attraction, whether based in a desire for the familiar or search for the new.”

This chapter features fieldwork conducted in the Canary Islands in July 2014, when I was able to travel along with the Puerto Rican folk music ensemble Grupo Mapeyé to a series of concerts and presentations on the island of Gran Canaria.

The historical relationship between the Canary Islands and Puerto Rico began during the years of Spanish colonization. The first contact can be traced back to the year 1511, but it was in the year 1569 when Canarians were officially authorized to travel to Puerto Rico. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was a migratory movement from the Canarian archipelago to Puerto Rico as the islands were an important link for the commercial exchanges of Spain with the Americas.

Figure 7-1: Map of the Canary Islands

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4 Ibid.
The Canarian archipelago is one of the seventeen autonomous communities that form the Spanish nation. The archipelago consists of seven islands located in the Atlantic Ocean, off the southwest coast of mainland Morocco.

The commercial activity between the Canaries and the Indies was prohibited during the first half of the seventeenth century. However, from the year 1663 onward, vessels that were en route to Cuba were required to embark five or six families in Puerto Rico.\(^5\) Any Canarian vessel engaged in commercial activity was required to transport five families of five or more members for every 100 tons of commercial products.

The Canarian families arriving in Puerto Rico were exempt from paying taxes for a period of ten years. However, this commercial regulation did not bring to Puerto Rico the expected number of Canarian settlers because the vessel proprietor was allowed to pay a certain amount of money for each ton of products that did not correspond to a family on board. Between 1681 and 1702, fourteen families from the Canary Islands migrated to Puerto Rico. In the year 1695, Juan Fernandez Franco de Medina, the Mayor Sergeant from Tenerife, was named Governor of Puerto Rico in return for transporting the fourteen families.

Santana Godoy estimates that between 1720 and 1733, Puerto Rico received 799 Canarians; and argues that it is the destination with the highest number of settlers during this period.\(^6\) The presence of Canarians in Puerto Rico gradually grew and the last official expedition took place in the year 1759, when a vessel en route from Tenerife to Santo Domingo was forced...

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to dock in San Juan. After this date, the arrival of Canarians in Puerto Rico was semi-illegal. Estela Cifre de Loubriel discusses the conditions that stimulated Canarian migration to Cuba and Puerto Rico:

Canarian migrants were offered uncultivated lands, free transportation or a transportation fee to repay in installments, tillage, dairy and drag cattle, seeds, support until the lands bear fruit, housing or assistance for its construction.

During the eighteenth century new towns were founded in Puerto Rico, and there was Canarian influence in each of them, to the extent that Canarians were directly involved in the foundation of the Puerto Rican towns of Manatí, Mayagüez and Vega Alta. Cultural festivities such as the Festival de Mascaras de Hatillo (Mask Festival) also have Canarian roots. The town of Hatillo, located in the northern coast of Puerto Rico, was founded in 1823 by the Canarian, Agustín Ruiz Miranda.

Although the historical ties between the Canary Islands and Puerto Rico are evident, there is minimal documentation accounting for similarities among the musical expressions of both archipelagos. Over the last twenty years, musicians from the Canaries and Puerto Rico have been in close contact and there is a noticeable effort at representing, creating and appealing to the shared cultural and musical traits of both locations. According to Valeriano Ramos, many musicians have been cultivating a variety of Puerto Rican music genres in the Canary Islands. In his article titled "Canarios y Puerto Rico: Canto compartido, canto de unidad," Valeriano Ramos lists some of the Puerto Rican popular songs recorded or incorporated into the Canarian

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8 Estela Cifre de Loubriel, La formación del pueblo puertorriqueño, (San Juan: Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, 1995), 60. (My translation)
9 The Hatillo Mask Festival began in 1823, and was imported by immigrants from the Canary Islands. The masks are fashioned and based on the biblical story of King Herod.
For instance, popular Puerto Rican songs such as *El mar y el cielo*, *Piel Canela* and *Isadora* were performed by the group Los Sabandeños and singer Alfredo Kraus popularized *Preciosa* and *Lamento borincano*.

In the summer of 2014 I was able to visit the Canary Islands along with the musicians of Grupo Mapeyé and experience the increased interest and positive reception of Puerto Rican folk music in the region. During this visit I documented performances by Grupo Mapeyé along with renowned folk musicians from the Canary Islands, and learned about the musical connections and collaborations between Puerto Ricans and Canarians.

Figure 7-2: Official promotional flyer for the Puerto Rican Week at Gran Canaria

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Although I was aware of the albums that cuatrista Edwin Colón Zayas has been releasing in collaboration with Canarian musicians and the appearances of Puerto Rican musicians on the Canarian TV show, Tenderete, I was not previously aware of the extent and significance of the musical collaborations and the bridges that historically and musically connected the Canary Islands and Puerto Rico.\footnote{Tenderete is a TV show broadcast in Spain by TVE (Televisión Española). The show presents music groups that gather to play music from the Canary Islands. It has been aired for more than 40 years and it is considered cultural patrimony for the Canarians. “La Provincia: Diario de Las Palmas,” accessed February 10, 2015, \url{http://ocio.laprovincia.es/tv/noticias/nws-259572-tenderete-sonido-tierra.html}.}

The development of the current cultural intertwining between the Canary Islands and Puerto Rico has been strengthened by the practice of the décima genre, which is well received in both localities. The décima is a poetic form that adheres to a precise poetic and syntactic structure. In Puerto Rico as well as in the Canary Islands, Cuba and many South American countries, the décima tradition is practiced as an improvised form. Improvised décimas often follow the form of espinela, a type of poetry named after the Spanish poet Vicente Espinel (1550-1624). The form of the décima espinela consists of ten lines in octosyllabic meter with the consonant rhyme \textit{abbaaccddc}.

Figure 7-3: Stanza from Vicente Espinel’s \textit{Diversas Rimas} (1591) to illustrate the poetic structure of the décimas.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Suele decirme la gente},
\textit{que en parte sabe mi mal},
\textit{que la causa principal}
\textit{se me ve escrita en la frente.}
\end{quote}
Y aunque hago del valiente,
luego mi lengua desliza
por lo que dora y matiza,
que lo que el pecho no gasta
ningún disimulo basta
a cubrillo con ceniza.

The poetic form of the décima provides the principal source for a type of song that is performed, in Puerto Rico, in the form of seis.\textsuperscript{12} The cuatro, as discussed earlier, is a crucial component of the music ensemble that performs these musical forms by accompanying the trovador, or décima singer. In the Canaries, the décimas are also cultivated as an improvised genre but they are performed in the form of \textit{punto cubano}.\textsuperscript{13} Thus, in the Canary Islands the same poetic structure is musicalized and arranged with the characteristic style that is practiced in Cuba. The singer of \textit{punto cubano} known as \textit{repentista} is accompanied by an ensemble of chordophones that may include instruments from the lute family such as guitars, Spanish lute, laudino and bandurria. These plucked lutes have a primary role since they are used to perform the base melodic motive characteristic of punto. Cuban punto arrived in Canarias in the eighteenth century, but acquired more relevance during the twentieth century, a period of significant migration of Canarians to Cuba. Some historians argue that \textit{punto cubano}, as practiced in the Canaries, is a circular phenomenon, moving back and forth from the Canaries to

\textsuperscript{12} The aguinaldo is another type of song cultivated in Puerto Rico. Its poetic structure is known as \textit{decimilla}, which consists of ten lines of six syllables each.

\textsuperscript{13} In the article “The Guajira between Cuba and Spain: A Study in Continuity and Change,” Peter Manuel defines \textit{punto cubano} as a genre that comprises certain distinctive ways of singing verses, with standardized melodic and accompanimental patterns.
Cuba. In Spanish, this tendency is generally defined as *de ida y vuelta* or a song form of the departure and return.

There are two conflicting theories about the specific origin of the punto cubano, one that defines it as a Canarian invention taken to Cuba, and a second theory that proposes a Cuban creation introduced to the Canary Islands. Maximiano Trapero, a renowned scholar who has investigated the tradition of the décimas in the Canaries and across Latin America, does not accept or reject either of these theories as it is an issue that requires further research. According to Trapero, if the punto is a Canarian invention, “the first Canarian emigrants brought to Cuba the form of singing décimas, where it was established as a Cuban genre and was named punto guajiro.”[^14]

José Orta Ruiz proposes a Canarian origin of the punto cubano by arguing that in Cuba the punto is cultivated in areas that have been related to Canary settlement such as Pinar del Río, Matanzas and Las Villas. Samuel Feijoó has explored the concept of the return of the décima, from Cuba to the Canarias. Canarian emigrants who return to the Canaries between the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century were carriers of the cultural customs learned and practiced in Cuba, among them the décima, already developed as a popular song for improvisation or for the transmission of traditional poetry. Trapero summarizes his position by stating: “All things considered, the Canarian-Cuban décima or Cuban-Canarian décima should be understood as a circular genre, and not just one that departs or returns.”[^15]

Canarian singer Yeray Rodríguez agrees with this perspective, stating that:

> Two traditions that are one. It has been an ongoing debate, did the punto cubano leave, arrive or was it already here… I think it is unworthy to spend energy in that…


[^15]: Ibid., 393.
controversy, but let be a part of a battle for persistency of something that we should feel as ours and that constantly reminds us that we all come from everywhere. In the specific case of the close ties between the Canaries and Cuba, the music genre that flourishes is a testimony of the similarities that bind us.\footnote{Pedro Grimón, Marcos Hormiga, and Yeray Rodríguez, \textit{Propuesta: La décima en Canarias} (Silboarte, 2006), accessed February 27, 2015, \url{http://www.silbogomero.com.es/multimedia/0001/0001/dir_k5b/yerayr.pdf}}

Figure 7-3: Melodic example of punto cubano

\begin{center}
\textbf{Punto Cubano}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.7\textwidth]{punto_cubano.png}
\end{center}

The circularity of the punto cubano, as a song form of departure and return (\textit{de ida y vuelta}) is a quality that cannot be minimized as it illustrates the mobility of the population and the dissemination of musical practices as they persist and become new musical forms. The musical collaborations between Canarians and Puerto Ricans can also be considered as a circular phenomenon and can be examined from that premise.

Evidently, the décima has paved the way to a musical and cultural linkage among many Latin American countries, but since 1992 an interesting correspondence has been evolving between \textit{repentistas} from the Canaries and \textit{trovadores} from Puerto Rico. In 1992, the International Symposium of Décima Researchers and the \textit{Festival de Decimistas} took place in Las Palmas. Puerto Rican trovador Roberto Silva participated in the event, marking the first
official representation and visit of a Puerto Rican trovador to Canarias. José Luis Martín Teixe, musician and researcher, also attended in representation of the island of La Palma, Canary Islands. Martín Teixe became very involved with Puerto Rican folk music and was the one responsible for the production of what became the first album recorded in the Canaries that included Puerto Rican folk music. The album of the group *Los Nuevos Compadres* incorporated Puerto Rican seises, puntos cubanos, guarachas and sones. The album was edited by the Center of Canarian Popular Culture and features the Cuban lute player Fernando Murga, popularly known as “Murguita.” Four of the tracks included in the album are classics of jíbaro music: *Esdrújula*, a seis chorreao composed by Puerto Rican trovador Germán Rosario, *Todo lo tenía postizo* in the style of seis marumba and *Las chicharroneras* in a seis veracruzano, both also composed by Germán Rosario; and * Mujeres de mi tierra*, a seis habanero by trovador Luis Miranda, whose lyrics are adapted to the Canarian culture by Martín Teixé and Fernando Murga. Even though the album pays tribute to Puerto Rican folk music, the cuatro is not present in any of the Puerto Rican music tracks as the album is arranged for guitar and Spanish lute.

Figure 7-4: Album Cover of Canarian music group Los Nuevos Compadres

![Los Nuevos Compadres Album Cover](source: Album Cover of Canarian music group Los Nuevos Compadres)
After the release of this album, the group changed its name to *Son, seis y punto* and published a second album titled *Controversiando*.\(^\text{17}\) The name of the group makes a clear reference to the genres of Puerto Rican seis and the Cuban son and punto. Different from Martín Teixe’s first album, this one featured Puerto Rican genres performed by Grupo Mapeyé. The album was recorded in 1998 and also features Edwin Colón Zayas on the cuatro.

Figure 7-5: *Son, seis y punto* cassette cover

![Son, seis y punto cassette cover](http://fonotecadecanarias.org/en/canarias-musical-punto-cubano/)

\(^{17}\) The term is derived from a décima style in which two singers compete by demonstrating their improvisational talent.
Martín Teixé prompted a musical phenomenon that has been in constant development since its inception. More collaborations between musicians from the Canary Islands and Puerto Rico continue to be released. Yeray Rodríguez, a notable repentista, scholar, and the host of the TV show Tenderete from 2007-2009, also initiated various collaborations with musicians in Puerto Rico. Rodríguez participated in the album Alégrate es Navidad, produced in Puerto Rico by Decimania, where he sang a seis titledComo cualquier boricuano. Yeray is also featured on an album by trovador Omar Santiago and sang a special décima on the album Ritual de Fiesta by Grupo Mapeyé. In terms of a direct contact with the cuatro, Yeray coproduced an album in 2010 with cuatro player Edwin Colón Zayas, titled …una misma tradición (“…the same tradition”). The ellipsis in the album title, as well as the lack of a classificatory label, suggests that the music contained in the album belongs to the same musical tradition.

The elements can appear distinct and foreign to each other, but what Yeray Rodriguez and Edwin Colón Zayas are crafting is interchangeably one musical tradition that binds Puerto Rico and the Canary Islands.

On the album, Yeray Rodriguez calls for that shared tradition linking the islands and devises along with Edwin Colón Zayas a merge between the musical genres from both localities. Among these newly amalgamated Puerto Rican and Canarian music there is the Seis folia titled Como cualquier otra tierra. 

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18 The folia is a popular dance style of Portuguese origin practiced in the Canary Islands.
The first track of the album *Una misma tradición* reveals the purpose behind that collaborative music project between Canarians and Puerto Ricans. Equally important and revealing is the way in which Yeray Rodriguez approaches the Puerto Rican cuatro. Yeray Rodríguez narrates:

Puerto Ricans confess to a cuatro what Cubans or Canarians tell a lute. The cuatro is their national instrument that is used to play seises and aguinaldos. The Puerto Rican cuatro is in very few hands as happy as it is in the hands of Edwin Colón Zayas. The cuatro surrendered to Edwin and does not hide from him any of its corners or possibilities. Edwin is capable of holding Puerto Rico on his hands and the island sounds every time he plays a cuatro… This album features décimas, the ones we sing as punto cubano, but in Puerto Rico know how to dress in multiple ways. The décimas contained here are being expressed for the first time as seises and décimas, genres that are Puerto Rican but are already Canarian…

Yeray Rodríguez also praises Edwin Colón's ability to play the Canarian timple and that along with Canarian musician David León, they honor Canarian music. The album “contains a

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19 Translated from the first track of the album *Una misma tradición*. 
tradition that does not live as apart as suggested by the maps.” The first track concludes with a décima sung in punto cubano in which Yeray reaffirms the parallel musical traditions of the Canaries and Puerto Rico.

*Aunque se empeñara el mar en ponerse justo en medio.*

Although the sea insisted

*Ahora el mar en ponerse justo en medio.*

Although the sea insisted

*No le quedó más remedio que volvernos a juntar.*

It had no choice

*Como uno y otro lugar vuelven la vida canción.*

But to bring us together.

*Como uno y otro lugar vuelven la vida canción.*

Like one place and the other

*Como uno y otro lugar vuelven la vida canción.*

Turn life into a song

*Aunque cambie el diapasón y como el verso decimos unos y otros vivimos una misma tradición.*

Although the fret board

May be different

And like a verse we state

That we all live

The same tradition.

Puerto Rico and the Canaries have been cultivating and disseminating their relatively recently discovered musical affinity. In Puerto Rico each year, Decimania organizes *La semana del trovador,* a week-long event that groups singers and décima improvisers from Cuba, Latin America and the Canary Islands. The event has been taking place for the last six years and musicians from the Canaries are part of the list of guests who each year visit Puerto Rico to perform, collaborate and exchange ideas that strengthen the cultural bridge between the Canary Islands and Puerto Rico.

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Other recent collaborations between Puerto Rico and the Canaries include the album *Conversando* of tiple player David León featuring Edwin Colón Zayas. In this album, released in 2014, the cuatro is fused with Canarian traditional music, jazz and pop music.

Figure 7-7: Promotional poster of the presentation of David León’s album featuring Edwin Colón Zayas


Another major event that took place in 2014 was the Puerto Rican Week in Gran Canaria and the concerts of Grupo Mapeyé at the Cuyás Theater on July 4 and 5, 2014. During the concerts and performances that were part of this celebration, I was able to recollect and
document some of the characteristics present in the performance practice of Canarian and Puerto Rican musicians. While in Gran Canaria, I witnessed the effortless hybridization of musical genres from the Canaries and Puerto Rico. It is important to point out that even though this musical merge is relatively recent (tracing back to those first recordings by Martín Teixé,) the musical product of Canarians and Puerto Ricans sounds like a highly developed and defined genre. Since the décima is the force that drives this collaboration, the Puerto Rican cuatro as a plucked lute coexists easily with the Canarian timple and the Spanish lute, serving melodic passages, melodic ornamentations and harmonic progressions that fuse the characteristic sounds of both musical traditions.

Puerto Rican Grupo Mapeyé had two official concerts scheduled in Gran Canaria; however, the musicians were involved in music making every day of our twelve-day stay. During this period of time, I was able to conduct some fieldwork, while joining Mapeyé in a variety of activities. We visited many small towns, houses, cultural centers and restaurants and in every occasion Grupo Mapeyé brought their instruments to play along with Canarian musicians. Away from the formalities of a theater setting, musicians from different backgrounds, professionals and aficionados were organically amalgamating Canarian and Puerto Rican music. There was a common understanding between the musicians from the Canaries and Puerto Rico and it was the conception of merging two musical traditions that are similar and share the same origins.
One of the key figures in the movement of Puerto Rican music in Canary Islands is Yeray Rodriguez, who not only improvised brilliant décimas but also switched effortlessly from the lute to the cuatro, and played along with Grupo Mapeyé a variety of seises and aguinaldos.
While in the Canary Islands I was able to perceive that there is a community of like-minded musicians who are overtly enthusiastic about Puerto Rican music. Singers, repentistas, lute and timple players were equally fascinated by Puerto Rican music, and their songs and conversations often referenced the historical ties and a shared Puerto Rican and Canarian heritage that cannot be forgotten. Puerto Rican musicians corresponded to those references by also recognizing our Canarian descent and acknowledging our similarities (for example that the Spanish accent of Canarians and Puerto Ricans sounds similar.) I would like to exemplify some of those instances in which during my visit to Canarias, trovadores and repentistas sang about the shared Canarian-Puerto Rican heritage.

During the first concert of Grupo Mapeyé at the Cuyás Theater on July 4, 2014, Omar Santiago opened his Aguinaldo Jíbaro with the following improvised stanza. What this verse reveals and reinforces is the binding of Canarias and Puerto Rico

*Que inmensa alegría*  It is a great joy

*volver a Las Palmas*  to come back to Las Palmas
y ver tantas almas and see so many souls
con la sangre mía with my blood.

Canarian singer Yeray Rodríguez sang décimas that alluded to the similarities among both islands. The first lines of the décimas pose the following question:

¿Por qué se parecen tanto? Why are they so alike?
¿Por qué se parecen tanto? Why are they so alike?
Si es que están tan distanciadas If they are so far apart
las islas afortunadas The fortunate islands
y la isla del encanto. And the enchanted island?

In the same décima Yeray Rodríguez then expresses how lucky we are for being able to reconnect our shared history.

Y es porque a mi parecer And it seems to me
y es porque a mi parecer And it seems to me
somos y así lo comparto That we are and thus I say
dos hijos de un mismo parto Two children of the same birth
separados al nacer. Separated when we were born.
Cada cual tuvo que hacer Each had to make
suya una esquina del mar A corner of the sea its own.
el tiempo quiso borrar Time wanted to erase
aquella unión sabia y fuerte That wise and strong bond
pero para nuestra suerte But luckily
nos hemos vuelto a encontrar We have rediscovered each other.
nos hemos vuelto a encontrar. We have rediscovered each other.
After singing those décimas, Yeray Rodríguez addressed the audience and expressed that he was “extremely happy because his people was enjoying what he has been able to enjoy so many times. The magic of a country that is so close to us. Tonight, we are making a dream come true.” The audience at the theater warmly responded to Rodríguez’s statement and welcomed the musicians. Yeray Rodriguez then proceeded to present the cuatro to the audience. “We will listen to an intimate and thrilling setting with this magnificent duo of father and son, two virtuosos of the Puerto Rican chordophones.” Christian Nieves on the cuatro and his father Modesto on the guitar played what Yeray presented as “two musical pieces that are also related to the Canarian tradition: a waltz and a paso doble.”

Figure 7-11: Modesto and Christian Nieves performing at the Cuyás Theater, Gran Canaria

The audience listened attentively to Christian and Modesto Nieves, as they played the waltz Renata with a soft and impeccable sound, and the audience responded with emotion and applause when the duo plucked their strings to the up-tempo Paso Doble Espresso pa’ Christian,

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21 Translated from digital recording.
22 Ibid.
composed by Puerto Rican cuatro player Eddie López. After a standing ovation, Yeray Rodríguez addressed the audience and presented Canarian timple player Domingo El Colorao, who was about to join the cuatro players. Rodríguez exclaimed: “Puerto Rico has a wooden heart and it is the cuatro, while Canarians’ wooden heart is the timple. Together they will make these hearts beat at the same time.”

The trio performed three musical pieces, a mazurka, which is one of the common genres and two pieces from the Andean repertoire: El pajaro campana and El pájaro chogüi.

Figure 7-12: Canarian timple player Domingo "El colorao" performing with Modesto and Christian Nieves

Photo: Ariel Zavala

This moment was climatic in the concert; for the first time the audience heard the configuration of timple and cuatro. The previous décimas and songs performed at the concert promoted the similarities between the islands; now the audience got to listen to the instruments that represent these countries played together.

Despite all the attempts at recognizing our similarities and singing about them in improvised décimas, I think this performance that grouped together these lutes was a clear

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23 Translated from digital recording.
example of the hybridization and affinity that is portrayed in the performance of Canarian-Puerto Rican music.

I also had the opportunity to interview a Canarian cuatrista from the island of Tenerife, Jorge Mendoza de la Rosa. His story is relevant because he has deliberately chosen to play the cuatro and currently plays it in specific Canarian ensembles. Mendoza de la Rosa started his musical formation with the timple when he was 11 years old. He then became interested in learning other lutes like the guitar, the Venezuelan cuatro, the Cuban tres, the bandurria and the lute. He dedicated more time to the study of the lute and was part of an orchestra of plucked lutes conducted by Silvestre Alvarez.

I asked Mendoza de la Rosa about his initial years as a cuatro player and how he became interested in the instrument and he said:

Perhaps, this is the question that I feel the most compelled to answer because the Puerto Rican cuatro has marked my life so deeply. The cuatro has become a way of life for me. I met Yeray Rodríguez in a performance on my island, Tenerife. He was accompanied by David León on the guitar and Edwin Colón Zayas on the Puerto Rican cuatro. On that day began my journey with the cuatro. Meeting Edwin in person was a defining moment in my life and I will always remember it. After that first encounter I became interested in Puerto Rican folk music. Edwin has helped me in my learning process. We still keep communication and I will always be grateful for his support and encouragement.24

Mendoza de la Rosa is fully devoted to learning how to play the cuatro and learning its specific Puerto Rican repertoire. About his learning process Mendoza mentions:

As I mentioned before, the cuatro has become a way of life. I practice the instrument every day and I try to know and learn all of the styles and genres of Puerto Rican folk music, for example all types of seises, aguinaldos, mazurcas, danzas, plenas and guarachas.25

24 Jorge Mendoza de la Rosa, email communication with author, 2 February, 2015.
25 Jorge Mendoza de la Rosa, email communication with author, 2 February, 2015.
Mendoza de la Rosa plays the cuatro and the lute with the ensemble *Jóvenes cantadores*, a folk music group from Tenerife. Although Mendoza de la Rosa primarily plays the lute, he also incorporates the cuatro into the ensemble’s repertoire. He said that, “At first people did not know about the cuatro and assumed it was another instrument of their traditional lute family, but nowadays the instrument is getting more popular in the islands, and even some luthiers are making cuatros.”26

Figure 7-13: *Jóvenes Cantadores*, ensemble from Tenerife. The Puerto Rican cuatro can be seen on a stand on stage.

Source: https://www.facebook.com/JovenesCantadores

Mendoza de la Rosa is committed to learning the Puerto Rican cuatro. He says that the popularization of Puerto Rican folk music in the Canaries is in part due to the work of Yeray Rodríguez, who is “bringing Puerto Rican music into the Canarian stage.” In his deep admiration for Puerto Rican cuatro players, Mendoza de la Rosa is able to mention the names of the many cuatro players who influence him, from historical figures such as Nieves Quintero, Maso Rivera

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26 Ibid.
and Ladi to the young and active cuatro performers Maribel Delgado and Christian Nieves, among others.

Figure 7-14: Jorge Mendoza de la Rosa playing the cuatro with Yeray Rodríguez and guitar player Eduardo Hernández

The adoption of the cuatro in the Canary Islands and the frequent contact between Canarian and Puerto Rican musicians could be classified at first as a case of hybridization. It is a fact that the voice of the cuatro is deterritorialized as the instrument is adopted in other locations, like the Canaries, for reasons that go beyond a local and national sentiment. Notwithstanding, the sole application of the idea of musical hybridity is questionable in the case in point given that the actual intensified circulation of what historically have been considered local musics is now quite commonplace and ubiquitous and the disaggregation of the elements of these musics into sonic features to be sampled and interspersed with, between and onto other types of music, has become
increasingly standard in and across different genres.\textsuperscript{27} The cuatro has been an object of hybridization in many other instances, for example played in salsa music or in rock music.\textsuperscript{28} However, the reception of Puerto Rican music in the Canary Islands brings about more than just a case of hybridization. It is evident that the impulse to create a hybrid means of expression or to step towards new audiences originates in a dynamic historical situation. The collaboration between Canarians and Puerto Ricans provides a new interpretation of the common and shared aspects between both localities, such as migration, heritage and island living, all of which drive the development of this cultural intertwining. As Martin Stokes argues, hybridity is an innovative aspect of cultural globalization; it is a new form of authenticity that stresses the local as a field of reactive adaptation to globalization.\textsuperscript{29} Even at times of cultural globalization, it is pertinent to stress the role of the local and to keep in perspective that these collaborations are happening because of the efforts and initiatives of individuals in both locations.

The series of concerts, presentations, workshops and recordings that are taking place is also a product of the affinity that brings musicians from these two island regions together. Therefore, this product could be considered an example of what Shellemay articulates as musical affinities. Shellemay states that affinity emerges first and foremost from individual preferences, quickly followed by a desire for social proximity or association with others equally enamored. Music proves to be a particularly powerful mechanism for catalyzing affinity communities, in which straightforward aesthetic and personal preferences may, but do not necessarily, intersect

\textsuperscript{27} Ana María Ochoa Gautier, “Sonic Acculturation, Epistemologies of Purification and the Aural Public Spheres in Latin America,” Social Identities 12, no.6 (2006): 806.
\textsuperscript{28} The previous chapter discusses the case of cuatro music in the catalog of popular salsa label Fania, and its representative orchestra The Fania All-Stars.
with other powerful diacritica such as ethnic identity. Affinity generally joins an individual to others engaged with a musical style or tradition, so that the individual becomes part of “charmed circles of like-minded music makers drawn magnetically to a certain genre that creates strong expressive bonding.”³⁰ Clearly, the décima song form is the driving force behind these circles of music making. These emergent musical practices confirm the circularity of the décima and other musical genres, and also manifest that their continuity is generating new musical forms being practiced from one end of the Atlantic to the other.

As long as Canarian musicians like Yeray Rodriguez, Jorge Mendoza de la Rosa, and others keep playing the cuatro, adopting Puerto Rican styles of music and incorporating them into the local repertoires, a new musical community will become apparent. It is important to keep examining closely this phenomenon and to document the dynamic and growing affinity community of Puerto Rican and Canarian music.

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Chapter Eight

CONCLUSION

The fact that this research traces an identifiable Puerto Rican cuatro tradition implies the strong presence and visibility of the instrument in Puerto Rican musical expressions. Cuatro performance has been adapted, reinterpreted and transformed throughout the years but its Puerto Rican root remains at the forefront of the instrument’s practice. Regardless of the evident changes the cuatro has gone through, its most renowned performers continue recognizing and celebrating the unique instrument’s ties to Puerto Rico. The cuatro is shifting from the island as its center of production, and is being performed in new localities, not necessarily related to Puerto Rico. However, the instrument’s association with a concept of nation is still evident, even when played in non-folkloric contexts, such as in jazz, salsa and classical music.

As a cultural object, the cuatro still operates as a symbol because it enables collective identification within the Puerto Rican cultural context. Nowadays, it is also able to appeal to a wider audience because the work of cuatrístas has also contributed to decontextualizing the instrument as solely Puerto Rican. The application of symbolism and pragmatics as theoretical concepts facilitates the understanding of the crucial role that the interpretants have played in the making, transmission and continuity of a cuatro tradition and in the valorization of the cuatro as a powerful cultural symbol. This study also reveals that even though the institutionalization of the cuatro resulted in certain conventionalities in terms of its practice and exclusive association with folk music, these political efforts definitely had an impact on the Puerto Rican musical and cultural ethos, where the cuatro has kept its place as one of the most dominant and cherished musical symbols. These institutional actions had a lasting impact on the way the cuatro is perceived on the island. Notwithstanding, the continuity of the cuatro among Puerto Ricans in the
U.S. cannot remain unnoticed. As confirmed with this research, cuatristas in the United States did pioneering work for cuatro performance practice, from recording to performing, and are still making a difference by exposing the cuatro to a broader audience that is not exclusively Puerto Rican. Thereafter, the political status of Puerto Rico has made an impact in the preservation of traditional performance practices as cuatro playing is seen and considered as one of the authentic and unique Puerto Rican expressions that define the island’s idiosyncrasy. The changes in the cuatro tradition are reflected in the sophistication of cuatro performance as a highly esteemed art, thus the high performance standards that have been established by cuatristas around the world are assisting in the dissemination and valorization of cuatro performance. Historically there has been an overemphasis on the discourse of cuatro and folklore but one cannot deny that it has a prominent place in popular music. From the early salsa recordings of Yomo Toro to its inclusion in pop hits by Ricky Martin, the cuatro has a definite place in popular music, and this tendency will persist. Undergraduate cuatro programs at the institutions of higher education in Puerto Rico are also defining new possibilities for the instrument and promoting that its performance should go beyond traditional repertoires.

The production and consumption of a Puerto Rican cuatro repertoire on the island and in the diaspora brings Puerto Ricans together and symbolizes their sense of collectivity and place. With more Puerto Ricans living in the United States than on the island, the Puerto Rican population stateside keeps creating, innovating and showcasing the cuatro in major events as festivals, some of which attract cuatro music enthusiasts from Puerto Rico and the United States. One of the results of this project is precisely that it reveals and acknowledges the contributions of cuatro players outside of Puerto Rico in the construction of a more globalized and less island-centric cuatro performance practice.
The traditional enclaves for cuatro performance have been redefined. As evidenced, the government is not actively involved in the dissemination of a cuatro tradition anymore, while the private sector, individuals and community organizations are engaged with the preservation and transmission of the instrument. A broad zone of cuatro cultural interaction has been determined. Instead of a local, folkloric instrument, the cuatro is a global instrument. The process of globalization has allowed for its adoption in other localities, where the instrument has acquired new musical roles in traditional and popular music. The collaborations between island-based and U.S.-based cuatro players taking place in the United States, especially at Puerto Rican music festivals, are common and frequent. Ideally these collaborations will encourage cultural policymakers in Puerto Rico to also connect with the Puerto Rican musical talent that is based and evolving in the United States and elsewhere. The cuatro maintains its epithet of Puerto Rican but has proven to transcend geographical borders and to adapt to new musical settings. The folk music stream associated with the cuatro has expanded to include new variations and characterizations of its traditional forms. Cuatristas and composers are devising a new musical language, one that demands musical knowledge and mastery of technical skills, which is patent in the new cuatro repertoires. Communities of cuatristas are redefining the sounds of contemporary folk music, shaping in the present a tradition that endures and manifests the complexities of the Puerto Rican reality.
Appendix A: Lyrics and translation of the décimas Jíbaro Hasta el Hueso

Yo nací en la sierra
Allí me crié
Allí me quedé
Labrando la tierra.
Porque ella encierra
Todo mi embele.
Al mundo confieso
Doquiera que voy
Orgulloso soy
Jíbaro hasta el hueso.

I was born in the sierra,
There I grew up,
There I stayed,
Plowing the lands
That surround
All of my captivation.
Wherever I go,
I confess proudly
To the world
That I am jíbaro to the bone

Yo sembré Tabaco
Plátano y yautía
La cosecha mía
Cargaba en un saco.
Si hoy me destaco
Y vivo en el progreso
No olvido por eso
Del mundo que vengo
Soy por mi abolengo
Jíbaro hasta el hueso.

I planted tobacco,
Plantains and yautia,
And carried my crop
In a sack.
Though today I do well
And live in progress,
I never forget
The world I came from;
I am, because of my ancestry,
Jíbaro to the bone.

Tengo mi caballo
Allá en la pradera.
Voy a la gallera, el domingo
Y juego mi gallo.
No he sido vasallo
De quien tiene un peso.
Es bajo mi ingreso,
Pero me lo gano;
Soy un borincano
Jíbaro hasta el hueso.

I have my horse
There, on the meadow,
I go to the cockfights on Sundays
And fight my cock.
I’ve never been subordinate
To someone with money.
My income is small
But I earn it;
I am Borincano,
Jíbaro to the bone.

Destilo melaza
De puertorriqueño,
Bajo el caribeño
Sol que nos abraza.
Única es mi raza
Con orgullo expreso,
Mi canción es beso
Que a mi tierra estampo,
Porque soy del campo
Jíbaro hasta el hueso.

I distill molasses
Puerto Rican style
Beneath the Caribbean
Sun that embraces us
My race is unique.
Proudly, I express that
My song is a kiss
That marks my land,
For I am from the country,
Jíbaro to the bone.

Appendix B: Amor de plata, composition by Benjamín Laboy Ruiz
"A mis padres, José y María, en su 25 Aniversario, por la libertad del amor que los une... "
GLOSSARY

aguinaldo – a type of song derived from the Spanish villancico. A principal genre of jíbaro music. There are different types of aguinaldos, each one with a defined melodic line. Many aguinaldos are named after the hometown where they got popularized. For instance, aguinaldo cagüeño, orocoveño, isabelino, etc.

bandurria – Spanish chordophone of the lute family with five double courses of strings, tuned in fourths.

bolero – a song and dance form that originated in Cuba in the nineteenth century. The form is derived from the Spanish bolero that flourished in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

bordonúa – Puerto Rican chordophone, larger than the cuatro. It was part of the jíbaro orchestra. Contemporary models have ten strings, tuned in fourths. Recent research by the Puerto Rican Cuatro Project questions the origins of the bordonúa and proposes that what we know as the bordonúa today is really a vihuela.

cimarronaje – marronage. Slaves who escaped plantation life, usually with the assistance of other runaway slaves, and formed maroon settlements, also known as quilombos.

cuatro – Puerto Rican chordophone of the lute family, regarded as the national instrument. Contemporary models have five double courses of strings tuned in fourths. B-E-A-D₁-G₁. The first two pairs are tuned in octaves, while the other three octaves are tuned in unison.

cuатrista – a cuatro player.

danza – a Caribbean derivative of contra dances introduced from Europe in the late eighteenth century. In Puerto Rico, the genre is regarded as a high form of Puerto Rican art music.

folia – one of the oldest musical themes. It is also a dance of Portuguese origin that was popular in Europe from the sixteenth century. The folia is part of the folk musical expressions of the Canary Islands where it is practiced as a song and dance, performed with bandurrias, lutes, guitar, timple and tambourine.

guaracha – Cuban musical genre of singing and dancing.

güiro – a percussion instrument. It consists of a gourd and a scraper. Also known as carrachó or güicharo.

kachi kachi – a variation of Puerto Rican jíbaro music found in Hawaii.
**mazurka** – the European, nineteenth century social dance of Polish origin. It was adopted in Puerto Rico and preserved its characteristic simple triple meter with an accented second beat. Instrumental mazurkas are an essential part of the cuatro repertoire.

**parranda** – Puerto Rican musical festivities during the Christmas season. A group of musicians gather together for a surprise visit by showing up at a house to play music.

**plena** – a Puerto Rican percussion–driven genre. With a song-and-refrain form, the genre was used as a vehicle to express the joys and vicissitudes of the community. Hand drums, known as *panderos*, play specific percussive patterns.

**punto cubano** – also known as punto guajiro, folk music from the Western and Central provinces of Cuba. The punto is based on the poetic structure of the décima, which is often improvised.

**seis** – a variety of melodies or motifs that are used to accompany improvised lyrics. Francisco López Cruz defined the seis as the backbone of Puerto Rican folk music. Many seises are also named after towns on the island, seis fajardeño, seis Dorado, etc.

**tiple** – a five-stringed, small plucked lute from the Canary Islands. Common tuning is GCEAD.

**tiple** – the smallest of Puerto Rican traditional lutes. Different models of tiple were in use in Puerto Rico, each with a characteristic size and tuning. The instruments were representative of an island region: tiple requinto de la montaña, tiplón, tiple doliente, etc.

**vihuela** – A lute that flourished in Spain in the sixteenth century. Vihuelas came in a variety of shapes, sometimes oval, like the lute, but increasingly they were waisted; with either a sharp –as in the bowed viol family today– or a gentler curve in the middle of the body.

**villancico** – a song type of Spanish descent, it is similar to the Christmas carol, with religious lyrics and traditionally sung during Christmas.

**violarina** – a plucked violin
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