

Contribution to be included in Category 3: Diversity in Musical Production.
Local/National Problems.

Music and Anthropology: agreements and disagreements *The Crisis of a Concept. Folklore between Music and Culture**

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*“Ancient fig tree sky, I see
your stars of constellated perfume,
your hummingbird without pause or break.*

*A child, a cosmonaut from ancient times
climbs to the tree top and suddenly I believe
that remote child has looked at me”*

Daniel Vidart “Dinosaurs Times”

Introduction

The story tells that all the traditional characters in the neighbourhood where there: the barman, everyone’s friend; the drunkard, friend of the barman; the anarchist shoemaker; the housewife, who sweeps as an excuse for gossiping, and the moody old man, Atanasio.

Atanasio was famous for being a grouchy old man, an effortless-earned fame. Every time the ball landed on his backyard, he returned it back but previously slashed it with the pocket knife that was always hanging from his keychain. A few years ago he got caught up in an endless fight with the block kids and that fight has almost become his reason in life.

Across the street from Atanasio, there was a fig tree which had been planted many years ago by an old friend and neighbour. When his friend passed away and although no one asked him, Atanasio started to watch over the tree. He never invited anyone with the fruit from that tree and therefore people started to steal as much figs as they could, while Atanasio watched them from his window and ran over across the street to kick them out. Little by little he became obsessed with the fig tree, the fig robbery and so he settled himself in front of the weak tree to protect its property against everything and everyone.

Somehow the children always managed to steal some figs but the watch became tougher. It came to a point where Atanasio’s protection for the fig tree was a round the clock job and it took up all his energies. The fig tree began to provide figs, which were supposed to be taken care of by Atanasio and could not even be consumed by him. And that is how he lived the rest of his life, watching over the fig tree and letting the fruit rotten away.

Today neither Atanasio nor the fig tree exists. A few months ago, Enrique, one of Atanasio’s grandchildren and a very close friend of the shoemaker, returned to the

country. When Enrique asked about his grandfather's last days, the old and already retired shoemaker could not remember who had died first, if the fig tree or Atanasio.

In our country, musicology and ethnic-musicology have developed in such a closed and restricted segment of society that any investigation about music to be carried out by other disciplines is interpreted as an intromission.

The purpose of this contribution is trying to prove how, from the anthropological point of view, it is possible to investigate "music" as well as human activity without the need for technical and musical analysis of performance, composition, or execution, but from a different perspective.

For that matter, we will first analyze some research made in our country that, although partially related to musicology or folklore, is of great interest for studying the development of national anthropology.

Its major interest is that it took place forty or fifty years ago, and since then little has been done as an attempt to apply anthropologic knowledge to musical analysis.

We claim therefore the possibility of an anthropological approach to the study of music. Similarly, we do not intend to displace musicology as a consequence, as we understand that both this and anthropology are different disciplines, independent knowledge sources, although supplementary at the same time.

The intent is not to waste efforts in preserving an object (music) and claiming it as our own but rather giving rise to different points of views about it (to share it).

Music, as well as figs, is still waiting.

Historical Development of Various Approaches from Social Sciences to musical folklore in Uruguay. Music as Folklore; Folklore as Anthropology.

The research on musical folklore in our country, although abundant, does not provide for an organized knowledge. Perhaps this characteristic goes beyond research on folklore and may be extensive to the Uruguayan academic world – at least as *social sciences* are concerned - which has not been able to establish long term research guidelines and programs. During his visit to Montevideo in 1955, French ethnologist Paul Rivet stated what to a large extent is still valid: "*they have peculiar ways that show up in scientific life and make them work on their own without been in contact with each other and sometimes are even unwilling to do so.*" (1955:12). These peculiar ways, this isolated creation of knowledge, occur both within each discipline and in the articulating space among them.

The earliest references to Uruguayan rural music can be found in Roberto Bouton's work during the first decade of the 20th century. In "*La vida rural en Uruguay*", this author, a rural physician living in Santa Clara del Olimar, in Treinta y Tres, describes rural life in great detail, including among other things house descriptions, clothing, games, traditions and beliefs, music, and dances. This work,

published after his death, consists of notes with no academic intent, and therefore the concept of musical folklore cannot be seen as a problem. This does not mean that Bouton's work is not of interest as a record of the various musical forms he identified that represent a significant background for the subsequent attempts of musical systematization in Uruguay.

In the academic field, the earliest works on musical folklore in our country were developed by Isabel Aretz in her book "*El folklore musical argentino*" published in 1952 where musical expressions common to our country and Argentina are described on the basis of 150 melodies registered in Durazno, Montevideo, Lavalleja and San José. This field research made in 1943 counted on the cooperation of Lauro Ayestaran, who since then devoted to a deeper study of these issues.

As a matter of fact, this researcher left the largest legacy on musicological research in Uruguay, while contributing a new anthropologic point of view to field research. Since 1943, and until his early death in 1966, Ayestarán recorded over four thousand musical registers throughout our country and left a great number of publications, which in many cases are even today the only referential source on these cultural expressions.

He never finished his project, "*Historia de la música uruguaya*" (he only published the first volume focused on indigenous and classical music) which was supposed to include a volume fully devoted to folklore in our country. Nevertheless, between 1944 and 1963 he published in the local press several articles focusing the various musical styles of folklore in our country. They were published in Montevideo in 1967 as one single volume entitled "*El folklore musical uruguayo*". These articles include orderly field registers with a description of the surveyed musical styles and illustrating examples.

This distinction made between folklore, indigenous and historical or classical music, provides us a guide on the direction followed by Ayestarán to define each one of his research areas. Within what he called folklore music, Ayestarán included: River Plata rural dances and songs (*estilo, cifra, milonga, vidalita*, among others); a Northern cycle (*chimarrita, carangueijo, tirana*, etc); ancient European songs (child songs), and the dramatic dances that eventually became what we presently know as *candombe*.

For the analysis of these cycles (which are similar to the cultural areas of the anthropologic theory), he handled different notions characterizing folklore as: orally transmitted (also called uncultured transmission); ancient, since "*no folklore is born by spontaneous generation*", and created and disseminated (as a folklore event) from the "peasant environment".

One peculiar feature of Ayestaran's work is his specific recording methodology: each recording reflecting the performance of musicians from all over the country, includes as well a dialogue with the performer and a card containing information on the people involved. Thus, these recordings become a true approach to a sort of *musical life history* of the performers. This is a highly valuable material for an anthropologic approach of music, which is still pending of processing and edition.

Ayestarán's professor, Carvalho Neto, followed his same path as to the characterization of folklore. The contributions of this researcher include *Folklore Floridense*), published in Lima, Peru, in 1857; *Folklore Minuano*, published in Florianópolis, Brazil, in 1958, and *La investigación folklórica. Fases y Técnicas* published in Montevideo also in 1958. These works do not exclusively relate to musical folklore but describe in general terms the various habits in the surveyed locations.

Instead, in his 1956 book *Concepto de Folklore*, Carvalho Neto analyzes and considers the folklore concept as a problem, as well as a science that is part of cultural anthropology. The folklore event is characterized for being traditional, functional, anonymous, spontaneous, common, surviving and collective.

This system of folklore identification has been criticized from different perspectives. However, it remains the only available way of proceeding in our country. Defining features may change, but the strategy to divide the study object into previously established dimensions (what is folklore and what is not, what is traditional music and what is not), is still the dominant way to confront this issue.

In her book published in 1994, *El cancionero norteco*, researcher Marita Fornaro criticized the criteria used by Ayestarán to arrange the Uruguayan musical folklore in the four cycles previously mentioned. She then proposed her own characterization of the music being considered. She distinguishes on one hand the "popular-traditional and orally transmitted expressions with a deep collective temporal nature", and on the other, the non-traditional popular creations "by famous authors, disseminated in hard copy but not fully included in what we might call "commercial imposition." (Fornaro, 1994:12-13). As we can see, Fornaro avoids the term "folklore" and prefers "traditional and non traditional popular expression". The distinction made by the researcher between both expressions, although following different criteria, would be based on the anonymity of traditional expressions (although it doesn't appear to be typical) as compared to the author's recognition in the case of non-traditional music; the same applies to the oral transmission of traditional expressions as compared to the printed dissemination of non-traditional ones.

As we see, since the 40's up to this date there has not been in our country much difference as to the way of approaching the study of folklore or traditional music. The strategy is, first, to establish a restrictive theory on what might be considered or not as folklore or traditional, and then go out into the field in order to determine what expressions will be studied or not as per the proposed definitions.

On the other hand, differences can indeed be found in the methodological approach. In Ayestarán's concerns we may detect strategies and registers of ethnic nature. As we mentioned before, his notes and recordings on the field are a first quality input for any interpretative work from an anthropologic perspective. As to present studies, although methodological definitions are similar, the results are strictly musicology-oriented. Perhaps this characteristic relates to how the research results are disseminated or to the academic-institutional evaluation requirements on which such research is based.

An example of a different approach to music research in our country we should mention the work of Luis Ferreira (musician and researcher) who exclusively focuses on

African-Uruguayan music (specifically *candombe*). In his research *La música afrouroguaya de tambores en la perspectiva cultural afro-atlántica* - published in the 201 yearbook of the Social Anthropology Department - he intends contributing to “the study of cultural transformations in general” through a formal analysis on how the *candombe* is played as compared to other Afro-American music.” (Ferreira 2001,42). His work provides for interesting approaches between musical analysis and anthropological theory, with a clear ethnic-musical orientation.

Music as a Anthropological Object

What we have considered so far is that research on music which is closer to what might be considered as an anthropological perspective. Nevertheless, the largest musical research music in our country has focused on the formal analysis. From this perspective, music segmentations have somehow been justified. This perspective of analysis of the musical phenomenon is related to the fact that researchers who have music in our country come from such a specialized discipline as musicology.

In this connection, our concern is to analyze the purpose for an anthropological study of music as a cultural expression, without focusing on the strictly (ethnic)-musical expressions. For such purpose we should answer three basic questions:

1. Can music be studied from an anthropological perspective?
2. How can music be studied anthropologically?
3. Why should music be studied from an anthropological point of view?

Can Music be studied from an Anthropological Perspective?

Traditionally, anthropology, both locally and internationally, has considered music as a marginal aspect of culture, as a research area that has been given up to specialists with a musicological background. This treatment results from considering music as a very complex and specific area and as an irrelevant aspect of the cultural complex.

The British anthropologist Ruth Finnegan has criticized the roll assigned to music by ethnic-classical music studies, stating that “*any ethnography should obviously include basic information such as relationship, social organization, ways of life, working assignment,, economic and political systems, religion, basic language characteristics, historic background, and perhaps some lesser attention to visual and plastic arts, but «marginal» and «specialized» aspects of culture such as musical performance or oral literature could be set aside as minor issues.*” (2002:2).

According to this author, this way of approaching a research on musical expressions is related to an ethnic concept of music. That concept -where music is understood and appreciated as per Western patterns and valued according to an evolutionist diagram which considers European classical music as the most outstanding expression and the basis for the assessment of any other expression- gives rise to the idea of music as a specialized and separated study area of the social world where it belongs.

Technical training is far from been unimportant, and in some cases is even necessary. However, it is not essential for a deeper analysis of music, that is, for an

analysis which is far beyond formal aspects and involves human relations and their role in music production. As an example, in both Western and non-Western societies music is part of social or personal ceremonies, placing this special time-space of the rite out of daily time and space. We may then conclude that anthropology *cannot* only apply to musical expressions within a general cultural framework but that music is also an expression that cannot be ignored by the cultural analysis.

How can Music be studied anthropologically?

From an ethnic-musicological perspective, the formal distinction among possible study objects is almost necessary, as the specialist should define to some extent what he intends to study. It would be tremendously difficult for this researcher to study “music” without classifying it in some way or the other. Thus, such definitions as folklore music, popular music or classical music become useful analysis tools for these experts as they allow for labelling music accordingly.

The anthropologist however, could do without this object segment whenever his concern shifts from the musical product (songs, melodies, scores) to the intertwined social relationships which use music as an excuse. In other words, music could be the “excuse” for the study of certain social relationships. This shifting also appears as an efficient alternative to set the limits of object of the anthropological study.

When strolling by Montevideo streets we find children that accompany their games with recent commercial songs instead of traditional child songs, or when in a bar we are surprised by the spontaneous sound of guitars, what deserves the greatest attention from an anthropologic viewpoint: the formal quality of repertoires or the specific social events of games and guitar playing? The chance to direct one’s attention to the expression of games or parties allows for analyzing music as the driver of a common communication force, or as the creator of a ritual time-space dimension for encounter, aside from ordinary time.

In order to work from this analysis perspective it is necessary to brush away some ideas that are deeply rooted in our common sense and in our academic education. First, the idea that “mass society” shapes people alike without giving the chance for collective or personal creativity; on the other hand, the idea of evolutionism which finds one only upward path from “rural traditions, rich in community impact, community ceremonies, even the impersonal urban and scientific features of modern times” (Finnegan, 2002: 4)¹

Such ideas have and will continue bearing a strong influence on the anthropological thought despite methodological precautions. Thus, the idea of a *past* that should be *rescued* from the merciless development of modernity quite frequently appears in many anthropological works. In this connection, the search for “folklore” does not represent an appropriate form of delimiting an object for anthropological research. Of course, this does not imply that morphologically characterized rhythms such as folklore may not exist any longer, and this characterization is not a valid method for delimiting the study object of musicology or ethnic-musicology. The need for rescuing these expressions is what continues to be the questionable idea. After all, Ayestarán himself stated that “*as per purely folkloric standards, to create is to deform in its highest and most noble sense*” (1967:21)

On the other end of the previous considerations there is a theory which conceives music as an expression of human beings that is guided and determined by social and cultural conventions. This theoretical option also involves the risk of reductionism while extolling a notion of art that is totally determined by the social relations and power.

The halfway between these two theoretical positions is, as in many cases, the best option for studying music. Finnegan mentions that *“it is difficult to write with both a social scientific outdistance and a precise personal appreciation for the human creativity that is implicit in the performance of artistic expressions. The permanent temptation is either not falling in the reductionism trap of only considering music as an epiphenomenon of social structure or slide to the opposite direction into the easily romantic interpretation of ‘art’”* (2002: 6). The author’s option is to focus on *“the active process – the conventional practice through which people collectively produced and experienced music”* (2002: 6), emphasizing what people do rather than their products.

Why Music be studied from an anthropological perspective?

The relationship between the rhythms studied by Ayestarán and the dance they were created for is an example and point of coincidence with the observations made from an anthropological perspective on the ritual role of music. When considering a serenade performance we might wonder what aspect deserves our greatest attention: the formal characteristics of the lover’s singing or, on the contrary, the role of music in the ritual of courtship. Probably both issues are interesting and will certainly provide a different kind of information.

The point here is neither over-valuing one type of analysis, nor under-valuing nor disregarding others. Clearly, as Finnegan states *“my point is not that a determined theoretical perspective should be right but the opposite: as well as in other disciplines there is a wide range of problems and possible points of view which the anthropologist interested in music may and should thoroughly consider.. Whichever we choose, we will be working into anthropology’s heart, not on its periphery.”* (2002: 9). This is an attempt to emphasize the importance of an anthropological analysis of musical expressions and the meaning of such analysis for a better comprehension of culture.

The anthropological study may provide important information about the social process driving to the creation and dissemination of music. It may be a contribution to unveil part of the mystery in human relations (or non-relations), that lead, as Ayestarán stated, a *gaucho* to create music in a *“guitar out of tune”*, further beyond any economic determinism or social value. This challenges the reductionism approach that turns music into a sort of tool for educational purposes or acting as social stabilizer, thus reducing it to one single portion of the economically and politically determined superstructure.

The analysis of the role played by music in society, as well as by art as a whole, can provide us better tools to try and comprehend the complex world of a culture other than ours and possibly better understand some aspects of our own. Recent research on musical anthropology shows that in other cultures music is one of the most important ways of building the universe and experiencing reality.²

Is Music study relevant to anthropology? Is anthropology – as a discipline- prepared for the analysis of music?

Although there are a few academic environments where there is room for these questions, it is a fact that anthropology seems to have neglected the study of music. In some cases this is excused by a sort of academic division of work, according to which musicologists or ethnic-musicologists should be “in charge” of *music*.

A more elaborated division left the analysis of Western music and “others’ music” to musicology, thus creating a geographical division: “the others”, understood as the countrymen from the Western society itself, should be studied by folklore. The others beyond the ocean, the primitive societies, should be the object of a study that would provide for the only consolidated intersection of anthropology and musicology: ethnic-musicology.

At this point, anthropology and ethnic-musicology undergo similar processes. Both started as disciplines that studied “primitive” societies and then leaned towards Western societies. In this shifting process of the study object, ethnic-musicology (as well as anthropology) focused on those aspects of the “Western” society which seemed more alike the exotic, traditional or primitive, even if considered “*remnants*” of such primitive world.

Ethnic-musicology was devoted to the study of popular music (or folklore) within the musical variety of contemporary society. So, in our country we may find different works on ethnic-musicology which refer to *candombe*, *murga* or *tango*. But we will hardly find works on ethnic-musicology about contemporary musical expressions or theatrical music or simply Western music, beyond general music styles.

Now, can just a geographical division lead us to this separation of research fields? What is the difference between anthropological analyses as compared to musicologist analysis?

This is the same question that the creators of the so-called anthropology of music ask themselves. The authors who research this line of work- which we still can’t consider as a sub-discipline by itself, although it increasingly appears as a much serious and consistent academic option – intend to place music as the core of study in a certain area of anthropology.

In a recently published article (2001) David Coplan tells us that “Music shouldn’t be studied within its context but *as* a context itself”. He develops an important and thorough analysis of anthropological conceptual development in connection with music. It is interesting to point out some similarities among the trends indicated by Coplan in this article, which can be found in academic development or in social research in our country.

The first common characteristic refers to the identification of the institutional space where the studies of music have been the object of greater emphasis. Coplan argues that “*it is quite possible that folklore experts and departments have made a greater contribution to the development and institutionalization of the anthropological study of music than anthropology departments themselves.*” (2001). This is valid for

Uruguay because, among other things, anthropology was “institutionalized” in 1976 and as we mentioned before, the bulk of music studies started developing a few decades before, as from the approach on folklore led by Ayestarán and Carvalho Neto.

Since the beginning of the study on musical development supported by the folklore departments, some universities in the first world have established a master degree on the analysis of musical performance (following the concept of performance of the British anthropologist Victor Turner) or have continued along the same line of study that we defined as anthropology of music.

Nevertheless the situation in our country is not even close to that. The state of studies on music – and we clarify and reiterate, from an anthropological perspective- are not very different from those in the 70’s, Lauro Ayestarán, considered to be the greatest researcher on Uruguayan music, passed away,.

It is difficult to identify the cause of this situation? Are there any anthropologists working on music? Yes, but from a clearly musicological perspective. We should name Marita Fornaro, current Chair of the Ethnic-Musicology Department at the Musical School of the University, anthropologist and musicologist. Also, Luis Ferreira, whom we have quoted before, a researcher who has worked on African-Uruguayan music. In both cases we find a detailed musicologist analysis, but the results of these researches are not close to the approach we define as anthropology of music.

We may dive into the possible causes of this divorce between music and anthropology, in the origin itself of the Anthropological Science Degree and its development up to present times.

As a matter of fact, the Anthropology Science Degree was created in 1976 during the military dictatorship while the University was occupied by the military. In that year’s curricular plan (in force until 1987), one of the second grade courses was Folklore (considered as a sub-discipline or “branch” of anthropology, where among other study areas music held a significant place). This six-hour weekly course was given during the fourth semester of the Degree and was common to the Musicology career in the same University.

When the democratic government finally took over, a new study plan was prepared in 1987 and was in force until the adoption of the present one in 1991. But the reorganization of the University also caused the division of the Humanities and Sciences School: first, the School of Humanities and Education Sciences was established independent and separated from the Science School. Other independent services were created as well, as the University Music School where the Musicology career was offered.

Since then, this sort of divorce which took place among both disciplines has been an irrefutable event in our country. This divorce, which does not only affect the academic-institutional area but also the production of knowledge: music research projects music in the School of Humanities are considered to be “outside the major research lines of work” which therefore hinders any possibility for their implementation. On the other hand, musicologists qualify anthropologists as “intrepid” because they dare to invade *their* field of study and consequently their work. They

certainly feel threatened by no other cause than ignorance on what an anthropological approach to music might be, which is undoubtedly far distant from a purely musicological analysis.

The shared figs

This has been a tight journey through studies on music in Uruguay. We have obviously emphasized the research that devoted an outstanding space to the socialization of cultural practice and its codes, because “even if music, as culture, is fundamentally placed in the individual psychology and emotions, its social qualities are become more important within the research program of the anthropology of music. (...) the anthropology of music consists of understanding people’s emotional and creative responses to the sound expression of human experience and sociability.” (Coplan, 2001).

Despite whatever we call it, the anthropology of music is just a preference. Our intention has been to claim a chance for the anthropological analysis of music. We think that we have presented both the different and supplementary elements with a strictly musicological approach.

We firmly believe that the development of studies on music require a joint work, an inter-disciplinary effort -or should we call it “in-disciplinary”?- among musicology, ethnic-musicology, anthropology and all the knowledge production areas that may have a say on it. The challenge of creating this type of working environments is in the hands of the new generations of researchers.

Music, as figs, keeps waiting.

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¹ In this connection, see the discussion by Jean-Claude Passeron and Claude Crignon, *Lo culto y lo popular* (1990, *Ediciones de la Piqueta*, Buenos Aires.)

² Along this line, see the works by John Blacking, *How musical is Man?* (1973, Seattle, University of Washington Press) or Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment* (1982, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press). Further details on the peculiarities of these studies may be found in the previously mentioned works by Ruth Finnegan and David Coplan.

Translated by Francisco Susena

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