

The Impact of the West in Latin American Music

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INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time, music was the same for all. Speculatively speaking, the whole world, that is, Adam and Eve, shared the same musical ideas at one point in early history. There was unity and homogeneity among the emerging cultures of the world. With the passage of time, civilizations expanded all across the world, and their beliefs, traditions, and culture changed as they kept moving on.¹ This diaspora opened the ground for an immense amount of different ideas, rhythms, sounds, and, in general, music. Whether religious, ceremonial, or merely vernacular, every single musical element (melody, harmony, rhythm, form, texture, timbre, etc.) that has ever been thought of is an expression of human creativity.² Every single one of these expressions has contributed and will continue to contribute to the vast realm of the world of music.

The Importance of the Western Impact in World Music

Some of the most significant achievements that music has reached occurred in Europe. This area of the world evolved into what we consider “The West.” This is a gigantic concept by itself, and it is even more difficult to define the music of a cultural unit so large and complex, and vaguely delimited. Some definitions to the term may suggest that Western music is simply the music produced in Western societies, or the music with which members of Western societies identify themselves. Surely those may be clear and direct explanations, but at the same time they are too all-encompassing.³ As an overall and more precise explanation, Western music can be

¹ Walter Wiora, *The Four Ages of Music* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1965), 18-21.

² Harold Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 14.

³ Bruno Nettl, *The Western Impact On World Music: Change, Adaptation, and Survival* (London: Schirmer Books; New York: Collier Macmillan, 1985), 4-5.

considered as a system of sound that gravitates around the life, culture, ideas, concepts, institutions, and practices of Western societies. However, in spite of the hundreds of positive things that the West contributed to the world, and not necessarily just in music, there is a dark corner in the wide room of expansion and growth. Remembering the circumstances in which such growth took place is always important when we address the great impact that the West has had in the world. Most of the great civilizations, empires, and ancient kingdoms owe their growth and expansion to conquest and colonization. Sadly, but truly, these last two concepts carry with them a heavy burden of war, violence, power, and political interest. Once we have made the distinction of such factors, avoiding biased opinions is imperative to maintaining an objective perspective on the overall impact of the West, which, according to history, has been far more positive than negative.⁴

Western thought aided music with a solid foundation of planning, structure, style, and control. However, the West represents a blatant wall of ideological imposition for many cultures around the world. This paper will argue that the West impacted music in such a positive way that it transcended history, religion, and culture. **The influence of Western technology and thought was fundamental in the development and preservation of pre-colonial musical styles in Mexico and Latin America in spite of the negative political, religious, and cultural factors that conquest and colonization represent historically. In addition, Christianity is the most prevailing and important element given by the Western civilization to all colonized and conquered areas, as the Christian Church played an important role in the musical syncretism that occurred because of the cultural clash between the Spanish Colony and the**

⁴ Nettl, *The Western Impact On World Music*, 6.

Indian community. The purpose of this paper is to contrast the different conceptions on the conquest of Latin American cultures and its consequences, whether positive or negative.

THE TRANSCENDENCE OF MUSIC

Opportunity in the Midst of Chaos and Evil

For many historians, scholars, and natives, the conquest of lands such as Africa, the Pacific Islands, or the Americas was merely political. Dozens of texts and quotes from the conquerors of the Americas can be compiled and used in arguing that the reason why the evangelization of the New World was so violent was because they were forcing salvation upon the conquered, even if it was against their own will.⁵ Why then, did such a violent evangelism occur when the main purpose of the Gospel is to love each other? Was it really about evangelism? Was it about the land, resources, power, or gold? As a matter of fact, none of those questions should exert weight upon truth. Even in the midst of self-interest, lies, and chaos, and even beyond any lies that the conquerors could have thought up in order to hide their real intentions for conquest, the opportunity for truth found a way. In the midst of chaos, music found a way. In the midst of evil, the Gospel found a way.

Music Is Universally Communicative

Music is not a universal language. However, music is universally communicative. Semiotics is the study of signs and systems of signs. Utilizing semiotics as an adapted term for music, we can define a sound created by an instrument - whether it is the plucking of a string, the vibration of a reed, or a percussive strike - as a neutral symbol⁶ with no inherent meaning, yet

⁵ Luis N. Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 218.

⁶ Terry E. Miller and Andrew C. Shahriari, *World Music: A Global Journey* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 4.

still music. If the sound, or “symbol” is neutral, no moral, ethical, or emotional value can be attributed to it. However, music is not only created by instruments. The sounds created by the vibration of the vocal folds can also be music. A human cannot only create sound and music with his voice but can also articulate words; therefore, emotional value can be easily attributed to it. I am an instrumentalist, and I embrace and foster the incredible appeal that woodwind instruments have. Nevertheless, there is something in the human voice that appears so inherently intimate to the human soul that emotion can be effortlessly transmitted and understood by any listener, even if it is in a different language. Just as crying, the human voice - in the form of a song - can be as appealing as other fundamentally human forms of emotional communication, hence, almost every human will perceive it the same way.⁷ Communication does not necessarily have to be written. Therefore, music is universally communicative.

Music Will Transcend

It is the critical emotional appeal that makes music so powerful. Consequently, this power causes deeply-attached musical practices to be uncontainable, allowing music to go beyond the boundaries of language, culture, and even religion. One of the reasons why music can transcend so easily is because it can be spontaneously created and memorized. The human brain enables music to be transmitted through generations, cultures, religions, ethnicities, languages, distances, and ages. It survives in the lowest, coldest, most miserable conditions. Whether a particular song, rhythm, or tune is performed on a slave ship, at a funeral, at a concert, at a party, or before a battle in war, music will be learned and it will travel. Although it carries content, music is not contained in a piece of paper, nor is it contained in a recording; music will transcend.

⁷ Miller and Shahriari, *World Music*, 3.

God and His Creation

The wellness of humankind has always been jeopardized by our own fallibility. However, by the mere perfection of the Creator, humanity was still made in His image (in Latin, *imago Dei*). Is God an artist? The beauty of His creation suggests His own artistic expression as well. We find it in the design of shapes in landscapes, natural and physical phenomenon, all the colors in nature, and many other natural elements. In the same way, God's artistic expression is easily distinguished by musicians in the law of acoustics and its surrounding laws of physics. It is not only a matter of miscellaneous perfection, but of creativity, *imaginativity*,⁸ and art. One of the biggest privileges that humankind has received as part of the creation, and also through the same *imago Dei* concept, is the ability to be creative and imaginative as well. Such creativeness implies some sort of responsibility towards God. In caring for our world, we have the responsibility to use the arts and every other dimension of life for the glory of God and for the benefit of others.⁹

Just as music can be enormously complex, it can also be diminutively simple. Because of its simplicity, it should not be bound by social function. In fact, if we take the same creativeness and imagination that was granted to humans – *imago Dei* – into consideration, music does not even have to have a function other than to glorify God. It is a pure expression of human creativity. Music, especially song, has evoked and sustained worship since the beginning. It touches us to the bone and shapes how we talk to God and how we perceive that God talks to us.¹⁰ A musical outburst of the soul should have the same importance for the creator, whether it

⁸ Allen Schantz, *Music, the Arts, and the Bible* (Lakewood: Aesthetic Arts Press, 2015), 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰ Michael Hawn, *One Bread, One Body: Exploring Cultural Diversity in Worship* (Wisconsin: The Alban Institute, 2003), 113.

was commissioned to a *Kapellmeister* in Leipzig, or thought of in a holding deck on a slave ship. If the concept is applied to the secular, music's function is to communicate, not to interpret. Whoever is listening to such musical creation can be influenced, and even persuaded, by the environment in which this music is being played, such as a ceremony, a concert, a ritual, a party, or simply a spontaneous improvisation. However, musical expressions that belong to a specific culture – like a Hindu *raga*¹¹, for example –, or a song that was written for a specific person, do not necessarily have to be interpreted or understood by the listener because that is not its function.

Among all of the common forms of art that we know (poetry, sculpture, painting, etc.), the most powerful and influential form of art in the history of the world is music. In his comparison of the arts, Dr. Allen Schantz affirms that “[m]usic is an *aesthetic vessel* that may stand on its own or carry a variety of different contents” because of its independent nature, which can be used by itself or hold different subject matter. In contrast, “[i]t would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to overlay [a] painting with different subject matter or with no subject matter at all.”¹² In the words of Walter Pater:

*All art constantly aspires to the condition of music.*¹³

After salvation, music is one of the greatest gifts that God has given to humankind. Consequently, and in many instances, societies across the globe have successfully rendered their tribute to God through the arts in all its different expressions, and more specifically through music. However, many other societies and cultures did not go the same way.

¹¹ Miller and Shahriari, *World Music*, 98-107.

¹² Allen Schantz, *Arts in the Key of Joy: Aesthetic Excellence in Action* (Lakewood: Aesthetic Press, 2013), 17-18.

¹³ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (London: MacMillan & Co, 1901), 135.

The Fall and the Diaspora of Musical Creativity: World Music

Chronologically analyzing the course of human history, we can deduce that music had a unified beginning. It was not necessarily a unique event that “started” music but rather diverse origins of rhythm, melody, and timbre in a smaller geographical area with mostly the same religious foundations.¹⁴ Nonetheless, this unity was extremely brief. After Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden, the human race started spreading from somewhere in the Middle Eastern region across Africa and Asia. The first account of a musician mentioned in the Bible appears in Genesis 4:21, where a certain “Jubal” is described as the father of all who played stringed instruments and pipes (NIV). According to the Old Testament’s narrative, the lineage of Jubal must have intercepted, or even been of the same lineage as that of Noah and his family, for the flood¹⁵ swept away everyone else on earth. After Noah and his family started re-multiplying, early civilizations started to settle across minor Asia, Europe, and Africa, and several groups of Nomads began to slowly populate further regions of eastern Asia, across Beringia and the American Continent.¹⁶ As soon as these nomadic groups and civilizations spread across the earth, and because of the human natural tendency to stray from God, multiple ideologies, traditions, cultures, and worldviews were developed. By the coming of Christ, several forms of polytheism, pantheism, and paganism had already flooded the religious foundations of many civilizations, such as the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Persians, Chinese, Aztecs, and Mayans. Along with all these different cultures and religions, a whole plethora of rhythms,

¹⁴ Wiora, *The Four Ages of Music*, 17-18.

¹⁵ Genesis 6-9, New Living Translation.

¹⁶ Robert D. Morrit, *Beringia: Archaic Migrations Into North America* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).

instruments, chants, and early music emerged as a by-product of the same creativity and imaginativeness that Jubal was credited for thousands of years before.¹⁷

THE WEST AND THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF ITS IMPACT

Hellenistic Thought and Rationalism

Even before the birth of Christ, hundreds of cultural collisions and meshing had occurred across the globe. Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, war and conquest are not unique to the Western hemisphere. The Israelite conquest of Canaan in the 13th century BC,¹⁸ the Assyrian conquest of Israel in 722 BC,¹⁹ or the Babylonian conquest of Judah in 532 BC²⁰ are just a few examples of major historical conquests that began to shape the world as we know it today. The Roman Empire played an important role in the history of the West, as it was the first empire to unify two or more cultures in the old Europe. After its fall in 476 AD, and after the death of Jesus Christ, the northwestern part of the Old World came to depend on itself as the Mediterranean experienced division between the Western and Eastern Roman Empire, Latin and Byzantine culture, and the Western and the Eastern Church. While trying to maintain its independence between Huns and Arabs, and while the rise of the Roman Catholic Church and Charlemagne's empire took place, the Western community started to develop its own culture and

¹⁷ Philip Bohlman, *World Music: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 11-16

¹⁸ Joshua 1-10, New Living Translation.

¹⁹ 1 Chronicles 5:25-26, New Living Translation.

²⁰ 2 Kings 24-25, New Living Translation.

style, with its own unique musical art.²¹ Deeply influenced by the Hellenistic school of thought, this newly-shaped Western community developed a culture of unprecedented philosophical thought and rationalism.

Christianity and The Gospel

Due to its geographical location, this Western community was directly impacted by the death of Jesus Christ and His message. Places like Rome, Sicilia, and Puteoli in Italy; Crete; Thessalonica, Athens, Philippi, and Corinth in Greece; Antioch and Ephesus in Turkey; and even Spain had direct contact with the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul. Although at that time the Western identity was yet to be shaped, Western Europe had some of the first encounters with the Gospel. The growth and expansion of the West did not occur only because of the Hellenistic development of rationalism. In fact, it was rationalism that propelled a desire for a deeper and structured understanding of the Gospel, which resulted in a society of Gentiles who adopted salvation, or more specifically, Christianity as the official way of living. The Western community began to exponentially grow, and with it, the Church began to expand as well. Hundreds of years of theological doctrine development took place with thinkers such as Augustine of Hippo, Anselm of Canterbury, and Thomas Aquinas.

Along with all of these theological advancements, music began to play an essential role in both secular and liturgical settings. During the Medieval Era (ca. 450 – 1400 AD),²² many genres and musical styles arose thanks to the role that music played in the church. The origins and evolution of early medieval styles, such as the plainchant, took place as the Christian tradition both encouraged and reinforced this practice through the singing of hymns and through the

²¹ Wiora, *The Four Ages of Music*, 126

²² Mark E. Bonds, *A History of Music in Western Culture* (New Jersey, Pearson Education, Inc, 2013), 17-19.

systematic recitation or singing of psalms and other passages from Holy Scripture.²³ In addition to being recited or sung, the five fixed texts of the church service, known as the Mass (*Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei*), gradually became a vehicle for composed music.²⁴

Technology and Contributions in Music

The earliest preserved notated musical compositions date from the beginning of the 10th century. Notation emerged gradually in different forms from different places.²⁵ The constant innovations and vast number of musical compositions written by the middle of the 13th century resulted in the creation of more complex and effective notation systems, such as the Franconian and Petronian systems.²⁶ Indubitably, music notation was a product crafted by the Western community. More objectively, this process of growth, development, and progress not only in music, but also in the arts, continued to contribute to cultural aspects of the Western society and promoted the evolution and creation of new aesthetic artistic styles. Music and other arts in Western Europe developed over time in the following stylistic periods with these approximate dates: Renaissance (1450AD – 1600AD), Baroque (1600AD – 1750AD), Classical (1750AD – 1825AD), Romantic (1825AD – 1900AD), and Avant-Garde (1900AD – 1975AD).²⁷

²³ Ibid., 25

²⁴ Schantz, *Music, the Arts, and the Bible*, 14.

²⁵ Bonds, *A History of Music in Western Culture*, 29.

²⁶ Ibid., 70, 71.

²⁷ Schantz, *Music, the Arts, and the Bible*, 17.

The Western community aided music with many tools that helped its development. In 1501, Ottaviano Petrucci published the *Odhecaton*, the first book of music printed by movable type, only 50 years after the publication of the Gutenberg Bible.²⁸ The expansion of this fine art required musicians to be more prepared and qualified in their craft. Another important contribution from the West was a culture of discipline and excellence among performers and composers. The art and technique of playing a musical instrument came to consist of a set of skills that needed to be developed for years. Only the most proficient musicians achieved public recognition and official positions. In the same way, instrument-making became an art of precision, perfection, and craft. Mechanical advancements during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance gave Western society the ability to produce instruments with higher quality. In conclusion, “Western musical art was impregnated as no other with the scholarly and, in the broad sense, scientific theory. In mensural rhythm, in the rules governing tonality, in harmony it was rationalized through and through.”²⁹ The major-minor tonal system developed into what musicologists call common-practice, and it was so coherent and intelligible that once a group of people was exposed to it they would immediately adopt it as the norm.³⁰ The world of tonality was set over the instruction of reason in concepts and written signs. Nowhere else in the world was music so objectively inspired by reason.³¹

THE WEST AND THE NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF ITS IMPACT

Colonization and Conquest

²⁸ Bonds, *A History of Music in Western Culture*, 94.

²⁹ Wiora, *The Four Ages of Music*, 127.

³⁰ Schantz, *Arts in the Key of Joy*, 171-173.

³¹ Wiora, *The Four Ages of Music*, 127.

Even when it comes to noble acts, humans tend to shift the direction of a kind purpose in order to fulfill personal desires or satisfaction. People in the West, as well as every other newly-converted Christian, were given a specific task: to go to all the corners of the earth, and make disciples of all nations.³² The work of Jesus Christ and His Good News became a central part of the lives of new believers across Europe. However, our natural tendency to stray from God is important to take into account. Every king, monarch, and priest that has ever lived was human, and had a human nature, which means that, at least at some point in his/her life, the decisions made for the good or the growth of his/her kingdom/castle/nation/army/church were imperfect. Once again, our nature is sinful, avaricious, hostile, selfish, and idolatrous.³³ From the time of Abraham, there has always existed conflict regarding possessions. Although Western Europe was a pioneer in development, science, and the spread of the gospel, it is not exempt from one of the oldest conflicts in the history of humankind: land and power. Apart from the land of Israel, Europe has gone through more violent and geo-political changes than any other place in the world.

The Fight over Power and Political Interests

The root of warfare and political issues lies in a very simple concept: the more land one controls, the more power he has. Power, for instance, does not only entail authority and command but also money and possessions. In a utopian world, the role of authority is to be servants of God and to punish evildoers:

For the authorities do not strike fear in people who are doing right, but in those who are doing wrong. Would you like to live without fear of the authorities? Do what is right, and they will honor you. The authorities are God's servants, sent for your good. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid, for they have the

³² Matthew 28:18-20, New Living Translation.

³³ Galatians 5:19-21, New Living Translation.

power to punish you. They are God's servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong. So you must submit to them, not only to avoid punishment, but also to keep a clear conscience.³⁴

Unfortunately, this was not the case for every authority who ruled over a portion of land, or a group of people. The desire and hunger for more money, more possessions, more land, or more power is a by-product of our human nature, and it can easily be taken into action with the proper resources.

Death, Violence, and Ideological Imposition

The power that an empire or kingdom had over another empire was generally not exercised through political speeches or economical agreements but rather through war, colonization, and conquest. Some of the most outrageous genocides in the history of the world were fueled by the thirst for power and domination over an inferior country, kingdom, or even race.

Many of these historical conquests resulted from racial and cultural clashes. While the entire Western community was growing and expanding, many other communities across the globe had already started that same process, though they developed differently in religion and ideology, they were much more secluded, and their growth was much slower than that of the Western community. For the conqueror, conquest meant more wealth and power. For the conquered, conquest meant the loss of their own essence and identity. Conquest represented blatant imposition and loss. Conquest almost obliterated the importance of the accomplishments and differences, the particular traditions, symbols, customs, languages, and institutions of other cultures.³⁵

³⁴ Romans 13:3-5, New Living Translation

³⁵ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 15.

The Loss of Culture

The conquest of the Americas, one of the most important events in the history of the world, serves as an example of conquest that contains elements of self-interest, power, and evangelization. Though discovered 489 years before by Leif Erikson,³⁶ Columbus officially discovered the “New World” by accident in 1492. According to the writings of Bartolomé de las Casas, Columbus’ original plans were to reach the Grand Island of Cipango (Japan), and the land of India.³⁷ As Luis N. Rivera, explains it, “[t]he lands found by the Admiral, as well as their inhabitants, were confused within his fantasies, myths, utopias, ambitions, and feverish messianic provincialism.”³⁸ In addition to Columbus’ unintended success, all activity and intention after discovering new lands was strictly accompanied by a naturally logical act: expropriation.

In Columbus’ own words to the Spanish Royalty:

Since I know that you will be pleased at the great victory with which Our Lord has crowned my voyage, I write this to you, from which you will learn how in thirty-three days I passed from the Canary Islands to the Indies, with the fleet which the most illustrious King and Queen, our Sovereigns, gave to me. There I found very many islands, filled with innumerable people, and I have taken possession of them all for their Highnesses, done by proclamation and with the royal standard unfurled, and no opposition was offered to me.³⁹

Whatever the intentions of Columbus and the Spanish Kings were, one thing surely happened: eventually, the arrival of Western civilization in America resulted in the total or partial loss of land, possessions, traditions, religion, and folk art of the indigenous cultures of the continent. What were Spain’s actual intentions after the surprising discovery of a land where

³⁶ Hjalmar Holand, *Explorations in America Before Columbus* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1958), 37.

³⁷ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 4-5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁹ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 4.

technology, rationalism, and the West in general had not arrived? As a controversial disclaimer for the Spanish, a series of theological and juridical debates took place during 1512 and 1513 and culminated in the release of a document of decisive importance for understanding the religious ideology of the conquest of America: *El Requerimiento* [The Requirement]. *El Requerimiento*, a document that was to be read to all native communities upon their initial encounters with the Spanish colonizers, demanded the natives to pledge obedience to the Catholic Monarchs and to convert to Christianity. If they refused, they were victimized and enslaved.⁴⁰ Due to its exceptional geographical characteristics, the newly-discovered American continent was like the Promised Land, full of resources, space, and gold. For the Spanish, this could mean only two things: America was either a gold mine with a few Indians in the way, or a land full of souls to win for God. According to historical data, the intentions of Spain were somewhat noble: the purpose of their conquest was to bring all of the native Indians out of their polytheistic traditions and into salvation.⁴¹ As described by José de Acosta, 16th-century Jesuit Spanish missionary:

Without doubt, and experience confirms it, the barbarians are of a servile nature, and if you do not make use of fear and compel them by force [...] they refuse to obey. What should be done then? [...] It is necessary to use the whip. [...] In this way they are forced to enter salvation even if it is against their will.⁴²

Deciding whether Spain was pro-religion, or pro-self-interest becomes each individual's prerogative.

HISTORICAL CONQUESTS: CULTURAL CLASHES AND LOSSES

⁴⁰ Ibid., 32-33.

⁴¹ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 65.

⁴² Ibid., 218.

Sadly, the Spanish conquest of the New Spain (Mexico) and Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic) has not been the only instance in which Western civilization expropriated a portion of land with already existing cultures. Usually, colonization and conquest meant war if the indigenous habitants of the region in dispute showed any degree of resistance or opposition. The conquest of the Native American Indians in the northern part of the continent serves as a brief, but vivid, example of loss, massacre, and imposition. British and other European colonies almost completely annihilated thousands of Indian tribes all across northern America from the creeks of the Rio Grande up to the cold winters of Lake Michigan. People like the Mohawks and the Sokokis in the northeast coast of today's United States were almost completely exterminated (ca. 1670) in essence, and their identity, traditions, and religious ideas were obliterated as well.⁴³

Almost simultaneously, thousands of African slaves were brought to numerous Caribbean and South American sugar cane plantations by the Spanish, the British, the Portuguese, and, in later years, the Americans.⁴⁴ These African slaves, most of them taken directly from the western coast of Africa,⁴⁵ not only suffered the imposition of Western ideologies but were also subject to a nearly complete loss of identity by being thrown onto islands that were thousands of miles away from their homelands. In fact, modern-day political boundaries in Africa are the product of European and American (United States) colonialism throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1884 and 1885, officials from German, British, French, and Belgian governments claimed territorial rights to most of central and southern Africa at the Berlin Conference. Consequently, decades of Western colonial domination left significant havoc on

⁴³ Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (New York: Norton, 1976), 313-326.

⁴⁴ William Dudley, *American Slavery* (San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, Inc., 2000), 38.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

African religious life, governmental structures, and languages. The Berlin Conference was decisive in Africa's political history, particularly for the Congo region.⁴⁶

The loss of identity that slaves and colonized Africans suffered through their displacement gave them an opportunity to fulfill the naturally human desire to flourish, to overcome, and to express some of the artistic characteristics mentioned earlier, such as creativeness and imagination. Eventually, such sufferings gave rise to musical compositions that years later would become the aesthetic foundations of innumerable rhythms and styles across the Caribbean, Mexico, Central and South America, and even the United States. In many of these instances, colonization itself did not bring excruciating war and destruction. Fortunately, for some historical instances of colonization, violence and massacre did not play an important role. However, cultural clash is inevitable. Western civilization (especially British and American missionaries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) also heavily influenced Oceania and the Pacific Islands. Both missionaries and colonial governments radically transformed the cultural traditions of many populations throughout this continent. However, the Northern Territory in Australia is home to more than 30,000 Aborigines who still maintain cultural practices.⁴⁷

Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean experienced a kinder and gentler historical colonialism. Even though Spain was the first European colony to claim possession over the island, the French were the ones that settled and brought Roman Catholicism with them around the mid-nineteenth century. By 1797, English Protestants took control of the islands and

⁴⁶ Miller and Shahriari, *World Music*, 329.

⁴⁷ Miller and Shahriari, *World Music*, 63.

abolished slavery. All of these factors were highly reflected in the arts and provided a more relaxed environment of growth and appreciation.⁴⁸

The Bahamas are another historical example where colonization was negative but not violent. The island of Guanahaní in the Bahamas was the first piece of land sighted by Columbus in 1492, but it was not a deserted island.⁴⁹ European disease quickly killed all of the Arawaks, the island's indigenous group. Although first discovered by Columbus, the British government asserted its control over the islands during the eighteenth century. Like many other countries in the Caribbean, the Bahamas were flooded with thousands of African slaves brought by the British. After economic prosperity had declined, British-descent residents decamped from the island, leaving an African descent population at an exorbitant percentage of more than 90%. As a result of British ruling, many hymns and spirituals commonly known in the south of the United States were brought to these islands along with thousands of slaves. Music was impacted by the high influence of the Baptist Church, which greatly emphasizes congregational participation, energetic singing, and emotionally-improvised sermons.⁵⁰

Cuba is an example of colonization that ended in invasion but also led to adaptation. Thinking he had reached the shores of India, Columbus sighted the island of Cuba during his first trip in 1492. Just as it had previously happened in the Bahamas, Columbus did not find a deserted island.⁵¹ The Tainos and Arawak were the indigenous people of Cuba previous to the arrival of the Spanish. After its colonization in 1511, the Spanish forced native people to work in gold mines,⁵² a project that Columbus had thought to be King Solomon's mines, whence came

⁴⁸ Ibid., 393-394.

⁴⁹ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 4.

⁵⁰ Miller and Shahriari, *World Music*, 404-407.

⁵¹ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 3-4.

⁵² Miller and Shahriari, *World Music*, 407.

the gold that built God's temple in Jerusalem.⁵³ Rebellion, disease, and starvation reduced the native population down to 5000 survivors. Due to its fertile soil, and thousands of square miles of sugar cane plantations, African slaves arrived in 1522 under Spanish command. Interestingly, the Spanish permitted African slaves to maintain tribal groups and therefore part of their culture. Centuries later, conflicts between Spain and the United States over the island led to the Spanish-American war in 1898. Cuba remained under American control until 1902, the year of Cuba's independence. After several regimes of dictatorship and corrupt tyrannies, Fidel Castro and the iconic "Che Guevara" led the revolution in 1959.⁵⁴

The study of ethnomusicology shows how culture makes its way through sometimes incredibly different civilizations over time and place.⁵⁵ Musical evolution is mainly achieved by cultural fusion, not infusion. For many decades, Cuba's music has been so distinctive because it successfully blended Western and African musical traditions. Santería, which is a syncretic religion that blends African practices with Roman Catholicism, is an example of the cultural fusion between the West and its conquests. This same blending phenomenon occurs in music. When two different musical tenets converge, a "musical syncretism" is likely to occur. The "musical syncretism" that occurred in Cuba resulted in the sensation that came to be called the "Latin styles." African rhythms mixed with Western melodies and harmony resulted in genres such as the Cuban *son*. Originally consisting of a small ensemble – a *tres* guitar, maracas, and claves – the Cuban *son* occupied a point that balanced African and Western musical traits. Consequently, it became the forefather of most music that is now denominated as "Latin." Many other styles and genres arose from these original syncretic roots. Because the development of

⁵³ Consuelo Varela, *Los Cuatro Viajes: Testamento* (Madrid, Spain: Alianza Editorial, 1986), 292-293.

⁵⁴ Miller and Shahriari, *World Music*, 407-408.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

Cuban music was fully entangled with dance, Latin ballroom dance reinforced the growth and popularity of these newly evolved “Latin styles.”⁵⁶ It was this musical syncretism that allowed music to evolve even when surrounded by chaos.

MEXICO: THE BIRTH OF A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Any and every single aspect of a culture can be obliterated by the nature of force. If one were to examine the purposes of the Spanish, and of the Europeans in general, several hard questions would arise: Did the Europeans have the right to take possession of and conquer the lands and inhabitants of the New World? Were the wars against the indigenous nations that did not accept Spain’s temporal and spiritual sovereignty just? Can the colonists force the indigenous peoples to work in the extraction of mineral resources? Are the natives free or servants by nature? Are they noble savages or vicious idolaters? Do they have culture or are they uncivilized? Does conversion precede colonization, or vice versa?⁵⁷ At first, the answer to each of these questions might seem obvious, but the careful study of the origins of a culture is necessary before making any assumptions. Mexico was the cradle of a people who were shaped and molded because of a cultural clash.

Music in Pre-Cortesian Mexico

The first inhabitants of Mexico were those of nomadic nature that crossed the Behring Bridge approximately 20,000 years ago. Frequently mistaken as a pyramid, the archaeological site of *Cuicuilco*, which means "place to dance and to sing," is the oldest testimony of the development of dancing and music in America. Research shows that this site is older, by a few

⁵⁶ Miller and Shahriari, *World Music*, 408-412.

⁵⁷ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 200.

centuries, than the Christian era (crucifixion of Jesus Christ).⁵⁸ The first indigenous group of the territory, the Olmecs, became a mother civilization to other sub-cultures in the region, like the Teotihuacana, Zapoteca, and Maya civilizations.⁵⁹ The Mexicas, later known as the *Aztecs*,⁶⁰ were the last ones to arrive at the Valley of Mexico in 1325. They were able to expand their domain over the land as no other culture ever has in Mexico.⁶¹ The festivities of ancient Mexicans, especially the Aztecs, were ruled by their calendar, which was divided in eighteen months of twenty days each. Each month of the Aztec calendar was dedicated to a specific god. One of the most important characteristics of the monthly celebration was the music. Because musicians provided religious settings for offerings, pilgrimages, and sacrifices, they were considered privileged civilians.⁶²

Whistles, ocarinas, log drums, and flutes were some of the common instruments among pre-cortesian Mexicans, including not only the Aztecs but also many other sister cultures.⁶³ Every afternoon, boys and girls were required to go to *Cuicacalco* (a music and dance school). This demonstrates that this culture had a high regard for these arts. A mistake in performance was penalized with death.⁶⁴ If we take into account that the Aztecs had thirty-four religious festivities in one year, and they celebrated each festivity with great splendor, with some festivities lasting for several days, we can conclude that a significant portion of their time was spent in preparation for the celebration: overwhelming proof of their religiosity.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Guillermo Orta Velazquez, *Breve Historia de la Música en México* (Mexico City: M. Porrúa, 1971), 20.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁰ Enrique Krauze and Hank Heifetz, *Mexico. Biography of Power: A History of Modern Mexico, 1810-1996* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1998), xx.

⁶¹ Orta Velazquez, *Breve Historia de la Música en México*, 30.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 32-54.

⁶³ Orta Velazquez, *Breve Historia de la Música en México*, 102-116.

⁶⁴ Armando Torres-Chibrás, *José Pablo Moncayo: Mexico's Musical Crest* (Cologne: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2009), 2.

⁶⁵ Orta Velazquez, *Breve Historia de la Música en México*, 55.

Music was an essential language in the lives of the Aztecs. As previously stated in this paper, music is a social language implemented by people from childhood, used to communicate and identify with the genitor group. Musical awareness is present in each individual before the development of speech; therefore, it is intimately tied to the aural language. All of these characteristics were present in the daily life of the Aztec culture.⁶⁶

Conquest and Colonization: A Bad Perspective

Columbus designated his sighting of the land inhabited by the Tainos and Arawak in Cuba, the Mayans in the Yucatan peninsula, and the Aztecs in central Mexico as the “discovery of the New World.” However, the appropriateness of the term “discovery” is quite problematic. The territories that the Spanish reached had already been discovered and inhabited many centuries earlier by natives.⁶⁷ Tenochtitlan, the great Aztec city in the heart of Mexico, did not die from natural death but was violently slaughtered by Cortes’ sword. Enemies and traitors allied to destroy the city. Aztec warriors defended its walls and fought, surrounded by dead bodies, for ninety days without water or food. Everything ended when a shotgun explosion terminated the very last defenders of the city and Emperor Cuauhtémoc was made prisoner.⁶⁸ It was an honorable termination of such a warrior culture. After the bloody battle, the stink and destruction of the land was so unbearable that Cortes moved his headquarters to Cuernavaca.⁶⁹ The conquest was sanguinary, brutal, and vicious. Still, not everything was lost; the remaining Aztec civilians had yet to undergo a much larger and significant encounter: culture clash.

⁶⁶ Lourdes Turrent, *La Conquista Musical de México* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993), 186.

⁶⁷ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 4.

⁶⁸ Fernando Benítez, *La ruta de Hernán Cortés* (Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, 1950)

⁶⁹ Turrent, *La Conquista Musical de México*, 115.

Mexico's Musical Conquest: The Middle Point between Perspectives

Hernan Cortes landed his forces on the shores of Mexico in 1519 and had conquered the Aztecs by 1521.⁷⁰ However, since Columbus' arrival thirty years before, the Spanish had run into a breathing and growing Aztec culture that happened to receive the first seed of Western music in the New World. Along with eleven other Franciscan friars, Pedro de Gante arrived in the city of Texcoco in 1522.^{71, 72} It was in this city (Texcoco) where the friar Pedro de Gante founded the first Western arts school in the American continent in 1523.⁷³ The Aztecs were highly trained performers, and those first friars that came to Mexico soon discovered their talent and dedication.⁷⁴ However, there were two obstacles that needed to be overcome, one after the other: language and then religion. In order to decipher the language of the Aztecs, the friars played with the little Indian children, and through signs and notes they were able to learn Indian words and their meanings. Later, friars tried to socialize with older family members but were unsuccessful. Even though the musical formation that the Indians had previously acquired was indigenous, it served as the fertile soil that contributed to the successful implementation of this new music school in the New World carried by the friars.⁷⁵ The opening of the St. Francis Temple was the first celebration where indigenous groups were actually eager to participate. It was the first Christian festivity that the Indians celebrated.⁷⁶

Ironically, this celebration resulted from certain attractive forms of external worship, like music, that consequentially brought a friendly response from the Indians towards the friars. This

⁷⁰ Krauze and Heifetz. *Mexico. Biography of Power*, xx.

⁷¹ Turrent, *La Conquista Musical de México*, 117.

⁷² Orta Velazquez, *Breve Historia de la Música en México*, 144.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁷⁴ Torres-Chibrás, *José Pablo Moncayo*, 2-4.

⁷⁵ Torres-Chibrás, *José Pablo Moncayo*, 2.

⁷⁶ Turrent, *La Conquista Musical de México*, 119.

friendly approach extended past children and their families to the whole population.⁷⁷ From the beginning of the Spanish Colony, the most effective medium of communication between the friars and the Indians was the education of the children. The friars rightly believed that those who had not yet received any kind of instruction would easily accept a new religion.⁷⁸ Slowly, but surely, the Spanish had started to penetrate, shape, and cultivate a hybrid group of Indians. The friars lived among the Indians in order to show them a new lifestyle.⁷⁹ In short, the friars established relationships with the Indian community through the Aztec children. They gained the Aztec parents' trust by educating their children. It was this first generation of young, converted Indians that the Spanish designated as the elite Indian community. Altogether with the friars, this group demolished altars, destroyed idols, and built the first music schools annexed to monasteries. Even though the doors of the Catholic Church were not yet opened to Indians, they lived around it and got used to such an environment.⁸⁰ It was the Franciscan friars of the Catholic Church who established a good relationship between the Spanish and the Indians, which opened the door for musical syncretism.

Education and Evangelization: A Good Perspective

The Spanish who conquered America came from diverse social standings. Each of them was able to listen to the varied sonorous expressions of the indigenous people of the New World. Some of them were amazed by the richness of the Indian music and their ability to dance. Others viewed it as a pagan cult centered around the Indian gods. Whatever the perspective of the government or the Church was, music and dance were strong factors that made the conversion of

⁷⁷ Ibid., 121.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 122.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 123.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 156.

the Indians possible. The Spanish colonization of Mexico and the Aztecs concluded in incredible artistic results.⁸¹ For the Indians, the musical language and their ceremonies were symbols of closeness to their gods. What could the friars do but accept such rituals and use them to glorify the one true God?⁸² Once more, we encounter a phenomenon in which music and dance are intertwined with a different ideology, resulting in a religiosity different than the Spanish Catholicism: musical syncretism.

Colonial authorities embraced and fostered the Indian musical practices because this kind of worshipful expression was also an essential part of 16th-century Spanish values.⁸³ The encounter that occurred between the Indians and the Western musical language modified the Indian's own understanding of music, specifically regarding the technicality of the art, harmony, melody, and rhythm. Such understanding was so influential that the Indians adopted Western instruments and started to construct melodies based on Western musical scales.⁸⁴ The course of history granted the Aztec Indians an opportunity to flourish and transcend chaos, conquest, and colonization. Again, cultural fusion, not infusion, brought this evolution. The talent and dedication of the Indians blended perfectly with the specificity and structural order of Western music without neglecting Indian traditional roots. The most notable result of evangelization was the preservation of the Indian musical language. Thanks to the educational methods of the friars, the musical conquest did not destroy the social structures that made the practice of music in Indian communities possible.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Turrent, *La Conquista Musical de México*, 188.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 189.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁸⁵ Turrent, *La Conquista Musical de México*, 192.

CONCLUSION

Conquest, a Necessary Evil?

Both the conquered and the conqueror have the opportunity to be objective, since giving way to the wrong perspectives would be a fatal mistake. Negative aspects (perspectives) exist and persist, sad though they may be. They cannot be changed or reversed. Every culture should adopt, by default, a perspective that aims towards an optimistic future, whether their history consisted of chaos or victory. In general, most cultures have adopted this perspective. The overcoming and flourishing across nations is evident in our fallen world. However, considering the impact of two clashing cultures is equally important because the pain caused by this impact was an essential element of growth. Entire nations have suffered the pain of loss and imposition, with outcomes that were larger and much more positive than new political boundaries. In the midst of chaos and violence, music can still flourish. Its power and transcendence allow it to give way to growth, community, and, as we have seen in the Mexican culture, evangelization. The Gospel has found a way. Consequently, Christian musicians have a responsibility to engage in proper doctrine, knowledge, and care, by which we can become rightful “enliveners” of culturally conscious worship. As musicians and worshippers, we must engage with people, not manage them.⁸⁶ God is actively committed to the flourishing of the world, a commitment that envisions a glorious future. We can be sure of this commitment when we examine events that occurred throughout the life, death, and resurrection of the Word made flesh: Jesus Christ. When this commitment ends – when Christ’s second coming occurs – we will see nothing less than the final transfiguration of the fallen cosmos played out for us.⁸⁷ “[...]All nations will come and

⁸⁶ Hawn, *One Bread, One Body*, 115-116.

⁸⁷ Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 219.

worship before [Him], for [His] righteous deeds have been revealed.”⁸⁸ “[...] [His] blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”⁸⁹

The inventions that the West produced due to technological advancements were nothing but tools to make music better, helping to preserve and document it, but not to produce it. Western civilization impacted the global community by helping it to understand the way in which music is grounded in the sonic order. Basic acoustics, physics, consonance, dissonance, and harmonic series are some of the terms coined by Western thought.⁹⁰ Music can be enormously complex. The West has shown us that music is not an abstract concept because it has order and structure. However, music can also be diminutively simple and ethereal. Humanity has been granted an extraordinarily diverse order, a multitude of particularities, a multiplicity that is part of creation’s God-intended glory. There is profound order held together in Christ.⁹¹ It will not fall. It will not fail.

The West occupies a special place in this world. Walter Wiora expresses it best by saying:

*Western music has done for mankind something similar to what Greek sculpture, architecture, logic, and mathematics did: it strongly set forth classic fundamentals of universal character. In no other culture has songlike melody been so developed and brought to prominence, and nowhere to the same extent have architectonic forms been built out of pregnant motifs and themes. Pregnance of this sort, as in geometrical figures, no less than rationality in simple numerical relations, is one aspect of universal validity. This above all explains the diffusion of Western music today in all parts of the earth. Its ‘world empire’ rests essentially upon its immanent universality.*⁹²

⁸⁸ Revelations 15:4, New Living Translation.

⁸⁹ Revelations 5:9, New Living Translation.

⁹⁰ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 226-230.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁹² Wiora, *The Four Ages of Music*, 127-128.

Human fallibility creates conflicts that God never intended for us to have. Since the beginning of time, the fight over power has led many civilizations to ruin. Conquests and colonization have occurred over the entire face of the earth since Biblical times, and it has provoked some of the bloodiest encounters in history. However, the first civilization that embraced the Good News of the Gospel became an intercontinental force: the West. Even though this Western civilization contributed to the same problem of power and political interests, its contributions in rational thought, scientific theory, philosophical inquiry, and especially music were so impactful and benevolent that most countries in the world would not know the name of Jesus if not for the West. The cultures that were conquered by the Western civilization encountered pain, loss, and death. Nevertheless, they developed their own understandings of music, the arts, and creativeness, and they evolved because of this encounter. Despite its many mistakes and flaws, the West gifted the world with immense progress and growth, but most importantly, the West embraced, fostered, and spread the name of the Author of Life: Jesus Christ. Because of our human nature, we will continue to struggle in our mission of taking the Church and the Gospel to those who have not heard the name of Jesus, but our Lord is faithful, and all the powers of hell will not conquer the Church of Jesus Christ.⁹³

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⁹³ Matthew 16:18, New Living Translation.

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