Andean Music, the Left, and Pan-Latin Americanism:  
The Early History

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In late 1967, future Nueva Canción (“New Song”) superstars Quilapayún debuted in Paris amid news of Che Guevara’s capture in Bolivia. The ensemble arrived in France with little fanfare. Quilapayún was not well-known at this time in Europe or even back home in Chile, but nonetheless the ensemble enjoyed a favorable reception in the French capital. Remembering their Paris debut, Quilapayún member Carrasco Pirard noted that “Latin American folklore was already well-known among French [university] students” by 1967 and that “our synthesis of kena and revolution had much success among our French friends who shared our political aspirations, wore beards, admired the Cuban Revolution and plotted against international capitalism” (Carrasco Pirard 1988: 124-125, my emphases).

Six years later, General Augusto Pinochet’s bloody military coup marked the beginning of Quilapayún’s fifteen-year European exile along with that of fellow Nueva Canción exponents Inti-Illimani. With a pan-Latin Americanist repertory that prominently featured Andean genres and instruments, Quilapayún and Inti-Illimani were ever-present headliners at Leftist and anti-imperialist solidarity events worldwide throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Consequently both Chilean ensembles played an important role in the transnational diffusion of Andean folkloric music and contributed to its widespread association with Leftist politics. But, as Carrasco Pirard’s comment suggests, Andean folkloric music was popular in Europe before Pinochet’s coup exiled Quilapayún and Inti-Illimani in 1973, and by this time Andean music was already associated with the Left in the Old World. This is rarely mentioned in the extensive Nueva Canción literature, which limits our understanding of the movement’s success in Europe and other sites. Addressing this lacuna, this paper chronicles the early history of Andean folkloric music in Europe to elucidate how this music was initially linked with the Left and pan-Latin Americanism. Paris was at the center of this transnational story.

Andean Music in Paris in the 1950s

Performances of South American folkloric music were few and far between in the French capital until Los Guaranís arrived in 1951 with the Latin American folklore company founded in Buenos Aires by Spanish dancer/choreographer Joaquin Pérez Fernández. Notice the many Andean skits in their 1951 program at a Parisian theater (see Figure 1). Musical accompaniment was provided on this occasion by the Paraguayan group Los Guaranis, whose repertory included Andean songs from Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia and,
Ballets de L’Amerique Latine

Théâtre Marigny program (Paris, May 23, 1951)

(1) Indians in Saturday’s Fair—Cuzco, Peru -“in the city of the Incas” where “Indians sell fruit next to ancient temple ruins”

(2) Chicha and Tondero -A “mestizo love dance”

(3) Paraguayan Nights - Love songs in Guarani

(4) Two Brothers - With “authentic Indian vestments from Oaxaca”

(5) Tabasco Port -Featuring the Mexican zapateo dance

(6) Peruvian Suite-A: Yaraví B: Huayno C: Kachapampa, War Dance

(7) Over There, Far Away and a Long Time Ago!—
(set in the Argentine pampas of the 1840s)

(8) Adoration to the Divine Cradle -[not specified]

(9) Of Black Velvet -Depicted “the love and immense sadness” of Andean indigenous peoples from Otavalo, Ecuador.

(10) Bailecitos de la Tierra -Presented the “sadness of Kolla Indians from northern Argentina, simple souls full of nostalgia. Descendants of a grand race whose splendor has been lost to history”

(11) Tango from 1900

(12) Ritual Fire Dance -By Manuel de Falla

(13) Panamanian Witchcraft -Cumbia, punto, gallina and tumborito

(14) Michoacan, Land of Dreams—With the viejitos dance

Figure 1: “Ballets de L’Amerique Latine” concert program, Paris 1951
especially, Northern Argentina, such as the famous **carnavalito**\(^3\) “El Humahuaqueño” which was one of Los Guaranís’ biggest hits in Europe. Los Guaranís settled down in Paris, and by the mid-1950s their popular rendition of “El Humahuaqueño” had spawned cover versions in French (as “La Fête des Fleurs”), English (as “Kiss Me Another”) and even in Swedish (“Kyss Mig Pa Mandag”). The original title and lyrics of “El Humahuaqueño” refer to the town of Humahuaca, Jujuy, which is located on Argentina’s northwest border with Bolivia.

Los Guaranís had learned much of their Andean repertory in Buenos Aires, where the Paraguayan group resided in the late 1940s before coming to Europe. Cosmopolitan Buenos Aires may seem like an unlikely place to hear Andean music, but since the 1920s Argentine folkloric musicians based in Buenos Aires had often performed Andean genres under the rubric of “Northern Argentine music,” mainly **carnavalitos**, **bailecitos** (a **zamacueca**-variant) and **yaravís**. Andean music was thus included in Argentine folkloric repertory. In a related development, early twentieth-century Argentine art music composers referenced Andean lifeways which were often constructed as Argentine survivals from the Incan past. At a grander scale, and surely influenced by Peruvian intellectuals José Carlos Mariátegui and Raúl Haya de la Torre, during the 1930s Argentine intellectuals like Ricardo Rojas envisioned Andean culture as the possible basis for an authentic pan-Latin American identity decades before the Nueva Canción movement was born. Peruvian anthropologist Zoila Mendoza (2004) has recently documented how elite Argentine interest in Andean/Incan music directly led to the founding of Luís Valcárcel’s “Misión Peruana de Arte Incaica,” which debuted in Buenos Aires in 1923.

About six years after the Misión Peruana’s concert in Buenos Aires, Bolivian musician Alberto Ruíz Lavadenz traveled to the Argentine capital where he performed for several years in the **peña** (folk club) scene, recorded for RCA-Victor, and became most likely the first Bolivian musician to successfully integrate himself into the folklore scene of Buenos Aires. Ruíz mainly performed with his group Lira Incaica, which in 1933 was featured on an Argentine radio program named “Incamérica,” organized by an association of Argentine composers, writers and newspapermen (see Figure 2). Ruíz passed away unexpectedly in 1939, and about three years later Peruvian “Inca soprano” Ima Sumac and Moises Vivanco came to Buenos Aires with Peruvian **kena** (end notch flute) soloist Antonio Pantoja and Bolivian **charango** (10 string mini-lute) virtuoso Mauro Nuñez. Pantoja and Nuñez both left Vivanco’s group in 1942 to settle down in Buenos Aires, and a few years later Mauro Nuñez became the fictive uncle of future charango superstar Jaime Torres.

But the most prominent exponent of Andean music in Buenos Aires throughout the 1940s and early 1950s was undoubtedly the famous Argentine group Los Hermanos Abalos, whose early hit “Carnavalito Quebradeño” referenced Jujuy’s emblematic Humahuaca mountain pass. Of elite background, Los Hermanos Abalos were from the Argentine department of Santiago del Estero, where a dialect of Quechua is widely spoken. The Abalos brothers moved to Buenos Aires in the early 1940s and founded “Peña Achalay”

\(^3\) *Carnavalito* is the Argentine term for the Andean **huayño**.
Figure 2: The Bolivian group Lira Incaica and the Argentine association “Incamérica”
and “Peña Achalay Huasi” in the upper class neighborhood of Barrio Norte. Los Hermanos Abalos’ rural Argentine repertory included Andean genres which they played with one or two kenas, a charango, guitar and bombo (or caja, types of Andean bass drums). This instrumental configuration would later become the standard Andean folkloric conjunto (ensemble) line-up in Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, France and many other sites worldwide in the 1960s and 1970s.

Los Hermanos Abalos directly influenced Los Incas, the group featured on Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel’s “El Cóndor Pasa” single in 1970. Los Incas was founded in Paris circa 1955 by Argentine kena soloist Carlos Ben-Pott, Argentine charango player and second kenista Ricardo Galeazzi (who was also a jazz bassist), and Venezuelan singers and guitarists Elio Riveros and Narciso Debourg. Galeazzi left Los Incas a few years later; his place was taken by Argentine charango player and classical pianist Jorge Milchberg. The members of Los Incas first learned how to play Andean music in Paris—not in South America—at this cozy Left Bank locale named L’Escale (see Figure 3).
By the mid-1950s this was the place to go to listen to Latin American music in Paris. Although Andean folkloric music was present at L’Escale since the mid-1950s, musicians actually from the Andean region would not arrive in Paris until Los Jairas of Bolivia came in 1969 followed by countless others, such as Los Ruphay in 1972. It was thus primarily Argentine musicians—mainly from Buenos Aires—who introduced Parisians to Andean music during the 1950s and 1960s.

Like Los Guaranís, Los Incas played genres from many Latin American countries, but specialized in Argentine and Venezuelan genres from the musicians’ home countries. In terms of Andean songs, their 1956 debut LP (see Figure 4) included standard Northern Argentine repertory such as “Carnavalito Quebradeño” by Los Hermanos Abalos, the unattributed cueca “La Boliviana” and the bailecito-version of “Dos Palomitas” known in Argentina as “Viva Jujuy.” Los Incas often accompanied dancer Paul Darnot (present on this 1956 album cover) in Latin American skits reminiscent of Los Guaranís’ collaborations with Pérez Fernández.

Figure 4: Album cover of Los Incas’ Chants et Danses D’Amérique Latine (1956)
As you’ve probably surmised, few Parisians associated Andean music with the Left in the 1950s and early 1960s. Indeed, Latin American music generally meant “fun times.” Of course Chilean singer/songwriter Violeta Parra had briefly resided in Paris during the mid-1950s and early 1960s, but very few Parisians knew about her socially-committed songs until the late 1960s. Ángel Parra related to me his mother’s frustration with the apolitical Latin music scene of Paris and how this directly motivated the Parra family to found the overtly political “La Peña de los Parra” and “La Carpa de la Reina” in Chile after leaving France in 1965. The Parra family’s pioneering role in the Chilean Nueva Canción movement is well-known. The Parra family was also instrumental in the early incorporation of Andean instruments and genres into the early Nueva Canción movement. Violeta Parra and her Swiss romantic partner Gilbert Favre had actually first encountered Andean music in Paris as performed by Los Incas, whom Ángel Parra played with on a few occasions. While in Paris, the Parras also ‘discovered’ the Venezuelan cuatro and other Latin American instruments and genres which the family brought back to Chile and used as emblems of Nueva Canción’s Pan-Americanist project.

Unlike the Parra family, the fun-loving Los Machucambos were extremely popular in France in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Specializing in Latin American music, and with members from Costa Rica, Spain and Italy, the Paris-based Los Machucambos scored several hit singles in France, including “La Bamba” and the cha-cha-cha “Pepito Mi Corazón.” Well-known French musicians likewise recorded carefree Latin numbers, and by circa 1960 L’Escale’s clientele included French celebrities such as Brigitte Bardot, who occasionally sang with Los Incas and befriended founding member Narciso Debourg (see Figure 5, following page).

By the late 1960s, Latin American folkloric music in general and Andean music in particular had acquired new meanings in France. Now Andean music and the Left were intimately linked. What accounted for this development? President Charles de Gaulle’s Latin American policy was one important factor. In the mid-to-late 1960s, De Gaulle was trying to create a “third bloc” that could challenge the U.S.S.R. and, especially, the USA. As part of this strategy, he personally reached out to Latin American leaders during a ten-country tour in 1964 that included stops in Argentina and Bolivia. De Gaulle denounced imperialism throughout this tour. Then he dramatically withdrew France from NATO the next year and publicly attacked U.S. policies in Vietnam. This anti-U.S. stance was extremely popular in France, and De Gaulle’s “third bloc” project indexically linked being ‘anti-U.S.’ with being ‘pro-Latin America.’ Surely realizing this, ARION/Barclay of France recorded albums of Latin American folkloric music during De Gaulle’s 1964 tour, including an “Argentina” LP featuring Paris-based Argentine kena soloist Alfredo de Robertis along with “Bolivia” and “Peru” albums by Los Calchakis (see Figure 6, following page).
Figure 5: Brigitte Bardot and Los Incas member Narciso Debourg

Figure 6: Los Calchakis’ album *En Bolivie*
Unlike Los Incas, Los Calchakis specialized almost exclusively in Andean music. Los Calchakis was a Paris-based group led by Buenos Aires musician Héctor Miranda with his French wife Ana María Miranda, who was a classically-trained soprano. Los Calchakis’ kena soloist in the 1960s was French musician Guillaume de la Rouge, a.k.a. “Guillermo de la Roca,” who had first encountered Andean music in Buenos Aires. About a year after ARION/Barclay released Los Calchakis’ “Bolivia” and “Peru” albums, Philips of France issued their own “Bolivia” and “Peru” LPs in 1966 featuring Los Incas, who had already recorded the “El Cóndor Pasa” track later overdubbed by Simon and Garfunkel. “El Cóndor Pasa” also appeared on Los Calchakis’ “Peru” album. French singer and actress Marie Lafôret added lyrics and recorded “El Cóndor Pasa” as “La Flûte Magique” in 1965 and as “Sur le Chemin des Andes” in 1966.

Many Parisians were thus introduced to Andean music and instruments at a time when anti-U.S. sentiments were high and De Gaulle was reaching out to Latin America. The Cuban Revolution had already linked Latin America with Revolution, and reflecting this association French actress Valérie Lagrange launched her singing career in 1965 with La Guerilla, an EP with two Andean tracks accompanied by Los Incas whom she often performed with in the mid-1960s. The “La Guerilla” single, by famed songwriter Serge Gainsbourg, rhymed “guerilla” with “tequila” and “guerillero” with “sombrero.”

Che Guevara’s Bolivian exploits of 1967 explicitly linked the Andes with Leftist Revolution. Bolivia, for the first time, was front page news worldwide for months on end. Parisians avidly followed the unfolding saga—especially the Bolivian military’s arrest and imprisonment of French intellectual Régis Debray. His well-known book Revolution in the Revolution? had already been issued by Francois Maspero, a Leftist French publishing house whose 1967 catalog included the collection Songs of Rebellion and Testimony from Latin America, with works by Atahualpa Yupanqui of Argentina, Daniel Viglietti of Uruguay, Carlos Puebla of Cuba, Nicolas Santa Cruz of Peru and other artists, along with a poetry book by Violeta Parra titled Popular Poetry of the Andes. Reflecting the times, French chanson singer Jean Ferrat had hit singles in 1967 with the pro-Fidel Castro songs “A Santiago de Cuba” and “Guerilleros,” and by this time French folk music superstar Hugues Aufray had added Andean numbers to his repertory, which up to this point mainly consisted of Bob Dylan covers. 1967 was also the year that the Cannes film festival awarded two honors to Jorge Sanjinés’ social realist Bolivian film Ukamau (“That’s How It Is” in Aymará), which has a kena leitmotif.

The next year Parisian university students and the police violently clashed in May of 1968, especially on Bloody Monday. Che Guevara was an anti-establishment emblem for many French students, and a Che statue was hastily erected at the Sorbonne amid the fighting. Before long the Che Guevara anthem “Hasta Siempre Comandante” (Until Forever Commander) by Cuban musician Carlos Puebla was an obligatory number at L’Escale and other Left Bank venues that featured Latin American music, such as La Candelaria and La Romance. French record company Chant du Monde quickly released two LPs in 1968 by Atahualpa Yupanqui, who a Le Monde writer romantically portrayed as an “Indian revolutionary.” Also in 1968, French singer/actress Marie Lafôret recorded Yupanqui’s “Le Tengo Rabia al Silencio” while Chant du Monde issued the album.
“Canción para Mi América” by Uruguayan musician Daniel Viglietti. The famous title track of Canción para Mi América (Song for My America) features the recurrent lyric “Give Your Hand to the Indian.”

A growing French fascination with “the Indian” articulated with a dramatic upsurge in interest in Andean folkloric music. The Paris-based Los Calchakis suddenly had a hit record with La Flûte Indienne (The Indian Flute), an all-instrumental Andean music album issued in 1967 and followed the next year with La Flûte Indienne Volume II and other Barclay LPs including Flûtes, Harpes et Guitares Indiennes. Philips immediately countered with Los Incas’ Unreleased [Tracks] and Los Incas’ Early Hits as Barclay prepared to release Toute L’Amérique Indienne by Los Calchakis. Unlike Yupanqui and Viglietti, Los Incas and Los Calchakis did not explicitly reference Leftist politics during the late 1960s, which broadened the appeal of Andean folkloric conjunto music among the French population and thus maximized the flûte indienne vogue.

Reacting to this trend, Jean-Pierre Bluteau and his friends created the all-French Andean folkloric group Pachacamac in 1969. By the next year Pachacamac were accompanying French pop singers Maurice Dulac and Marianne Mille, whose guerilla-themed hit single “Dis à Ton Fils” (“Tell Your Son”) peaked at Number Six in June of 1970 as Simon and Garfunkel’s “El Cóndor Pasa” single was debuting in France’s Top Twenty. “Dis à Ton Fils” added French lyrics to the Andean tune known as “Italaquenita” in Bolivia and “Quiaqueñita” in Argentina. Dulac and Mille scored another hit single a few months later with “Libertad” (“Liberty”)—set to the Incan fox trot “Virgenes del Sol” (“Virgins of the Sun”). Andean music and the Left were by now firmly linked together in the French imagination, which explains why the 1971 “Che Guevara single” recorded by Los Machucambos paired Carlos Puebla’s guajira “Hasta Siempre Comandante” with the Peruvian huayno “Recuerdos de Calaguayo.”

Also in 1971, Flûte Indienne Vol.4 by Los Calchakis was the fourth best-selling album in France during the month of October—ahead of John Lennon’s “Imagine” and the Rolling Stone’s “Gimme Shelter.” Film director Costa-Gavras hired Los Calchakis for the soundtrack of State of Siege, a political thriller which denounced U.S. foreign policy in Latin America and exalted the Tupamaro guerrillas of Uruguay. With perfect timing, State of Siege hit the movie theaters in 1973—the year that military coups installed right wing dictatorships in Uruguay and Chile. State of Siege was actually filmed in Chile shortly before Pinochet’s coup. By the next year, the formerly apolitical Los Calchakis had recorded the hit album Songs of the Rebellious Poets, and the now-exiled Chilean Nueva Canción ensembles Quilapayun and Inti-Illimani were spreading their message of pan-Latin American solidarity and anti-imperialism to receptive European audiences already familiar with this type of music and message.

Conclusion

In this paper I have chronicled the early history of Andean folkloric music in Europe and examined how this music was initially linked with the Left and pan-Latin Americanism. Counterintuitively, the long-term development of folklorized Andean music in
cosmopolitan centers greatly facilitated its incorporation into the Nueva Canción movement as an index of rural authenticity. The same process typically occurs in the construction of national musics. In La Paz, for example, Andean folkloric conjuntos similar to Los Calchakis, Los Incas and Los Hermanos Abalos emerged as the main type of Bolivian *música nacional* (“national music”) ensembles for the first time in the late 1960s and early 1970s in tandem with the transnational developments outlined in this paper (see Rios 2005). But returning to the theme of pan-Latin Americanism, the case of Andean folkloric music is reminiscent of salsa’s emergence as a pan-Latino emblem, which also occurred in the early 1970s after a long period of transnational articulations (see Waxer 1994). The substantial musical differences between Andean folkloric music and salsa have perhaps obscured the processual similarities, which might also explain why World Beat scholars who study the Paris scene neglect to mention that Andean music’s association with “Leftist Revolution” pre-dates the marketing of similar imagery by World Beat labels specializing in Afro-pop.

In closing I think it is important to note that urban Bolivians and Peruvians in general responded in quite different ways to the Southern Cone-dominated Nueva Canción movement of the 1970s. In Peru, Velasco’s populist military regime promoted Nueva Canción through the National Institute of Culture, which sponsored concerts in Lima by Victor Jara, Daniel Viglietti and Mercédes Sosa, and fostered the creation of Peruvian Nueva Canción ensembles through the state-supported “Taller de la Canción Popular” (“Popular Song Workshop”). Local groups modeled after Quilapayún and Inti-Illimani soon appeared, and this type of Andean music acquired the name *música latinoamericana* (“Latin American music”) in Peru (Oliart and Llorens 1984). A similar development occurred in Mexico City in the early-to-mid-1970s during the left-leaning administration of Luís Echeverría (Zolov 1999: 225-233).

Unlike their Peruvian counterparts, however, urban Bolivians in general did not look favorably upon the use of Andean instruments and genres in the Nueva Canción movement. In terms of the political conjuncture, Bolivia had shifted from left to right in 1971 with the establishment of Bánzer’s military dictatorship which lasted until 1977. Consequently Nueva Canción artists from the Southern Cone did not perform in Bolivia during this period. Perhaps more importantly, by the early 1970s urban Bolivians had constructed Andean folkloric conjunto music as “*música nacional*”—not as “*música latinoamericana*”—and consistent with this nationalist construction Argentine and Chilean Nueva Canción musicians came under constant attack in Bolivian public discourse for stealing “our national music,” a discourse which I have analyzed in other forums (Rios 2003, 2004). In my view, the Nueva Canción movement’s differing receptions in Bolivia and Peru reveals fundamental differences in their respective nation-building projects. But that is something to explore in another paper.

**References Cited**


