The Chilean Way to the Andes: Music, Politics and Otherness

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In this paper, I give an overview of how popular music opened the way to Andean culture in Chile—culturally speaking, a non-Andean country. To do this, I focus on the long decade of the sixties, by which I mean from the late fifties to the early seventies, and the development of Chilean *nueva canción*, or "new song."

Despite the dominant presence of the Andes Mountains in Chile, the country's identity as an "Andean" nation, culturally speaking, has never been secure. As a nation ruled by Spanish, British and German descendants, with a majority of the population consisting of creoles and mestizos with no roots in indigenous Andean communities or cultures, "Andean" identity has in fact often been resisted by Chilean nationalists. The War of the Pacific (1879-1884), however, fought between Chile, Peru, and Bolivia, dramatically changed the political boundaries of the west coast of South America. At the end of the war, Chile had won new territories in the north that definitively made it an "Andean" country—but again, only geographically; culturally and economically, the Aymara people who inhabited the highlands of the new Chilean territory did not integrate easily with the Chilean nation.

Though the Andean region encompasses a wide variety of local cultures and languages, the mountains themselves have served as a natural path to integrate that diversity. This happened first during the Inca Empire, which built roads to link their expansive territory; and then again during the Spanish colonial era, whose rulers used those same Inca roads to administer their own empire. In time, these roads would also allow interaction among dominated Andean cultures. The Inca and the Spanish thus transformed the Andes into the dorsal spine of South America, through which Quechua and Catholic influences spread. These influences now form the common threads of the music and culture of a vast region, which covers the north of Chile and Argentina, most of Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador, and the south of Colombia. As a consequence, throughout this whole area, we find descending pentatonic scales, predominant binary rhythms, speeding cadential tempos, common indigenous, mestizo and Western instruments, the practice of carnival, and the worship of the Virgin Mary and patron saints.

Until the mid 1960s, however, Chileans were not systematically exposed to this sort of music from the Andes. From the early 1930s to the late 1950s, there were occasional musicians from Peru and Bolivia who toured Chile, performing Andean music at night clubs, theaters and radios in Santiago. In 1940, the Chilean catalog of RCA Victor also offered 35 recordings of "Felipe Rivera and his Orquesta Típica Boliviana," as well as 14 recordings of "Alberto Ruiz and his Lírica Inca Boliviana" (see also Rios, this volume). Those records included a mix of Andean genres, such as *bailecitos*, *cuecas*, *waynos*, *yaravíes*, *tarkeadas*, *kaluyos* and *pasacalles*. Nonetheless, this Andean presence in the Chilean musical market only reflected the increasingly international music scene in the

country, where many different voices from different people (not just Andean) made their way into the music industry. In this process, a representation of the Other took place, which had begun in the 1920s with the initial attraction for the exotic. A good example of this tendency was the Peruvian "exotic" soprano Yma Sumac, who toured Chile in 1944, three years before she settled her career in the United States.[1]

The sporadic presence of Andean music in the Chilean musical scene at this point was not enough to have an influence on local musical practices. It was the beginning of research on the folk music of the Aymara and mestizo communities of the new North of Chile, started in the early 1950s, which opened the way to integrate Andean influences in the country as a whole. This research, started by folklorist Margot Loyola, gave Chilean popular musicians new materials to develop a music which, having folk roots, appealed to the changing musical market of the sixties. Andean music was also coming to Chile from Argentina at this point, where a folklore boom had been taking place since the early 1950s. This gave Chilean audiences an even greater opportunity to increase their familiarity with the new sounds of Andean "folklore." By the 1960s, Chilean progressive sectors also found in the music of the Andes a living symbol of cultural integration, a political ideal promoted by the Latin American Left during this period that also fit with opposition to the political influence of the United States. Folk music research and its influence on popular song with folk roots, then, gave visibility (or audibility) to other landscapes, cultural practices and people, who were in turn promoted on a more massive scale by the national music industry. This helped Chilean audiences to articulate an idea of Andean "Otherness" based on music, in which popular music moved from representing the Other as *exotic* to representing it as *typical*.[2]

Two names stand out in this first wave of representing Andean Otherness in Chile: Raúl de Ramón (1929-1984) and Rolando Alarcón (1929-1973). De Ramón, who collected musical instruments and folk costumes from all over Latin America, recorded his own versions of Andean music from Ecuador and Creole music from Perú in 1959, and would later provide a model for the nueva canción group Inti-illimani. Alarcón, on the other hand, created new songs based on Andean genres, such as the *wayno* (called *trote* in Chile), and the *cachimbo*, an instrumental dance derived from the *zamacueca*, from the former Peruvian region of Tarapacá. Alarcón was a school teacher and a folk researcher concerned with the preservation and diffusion of folklore, so in his songs, the *typical* representation of the Andean Other become more *cultural*. Songs such as his "Si somos americanos" (1964) also express the popular idea of unity provided by the cohesive force of the Andes. Alarcón realized this idea not only in the content of the lyrics, but also by the use of different Andean strumming patterns and the use of an "Andean ensemble" of guitar, *kena* (end-notch flute) and *charango* (10-string mini lute) to perform a song musically based on the cachimbo, a genre normally played by piano, accordion or brass bands (see Figure 1).

[1] More information on the presence of Bolivian and Peruvian music in Chile until 1950 is contained in González and Rolle 2005; and González, Ohlsen and Rolle 2009.
[2] More information on the musical articulation of "otherness" in Chile is contained in González 1997.

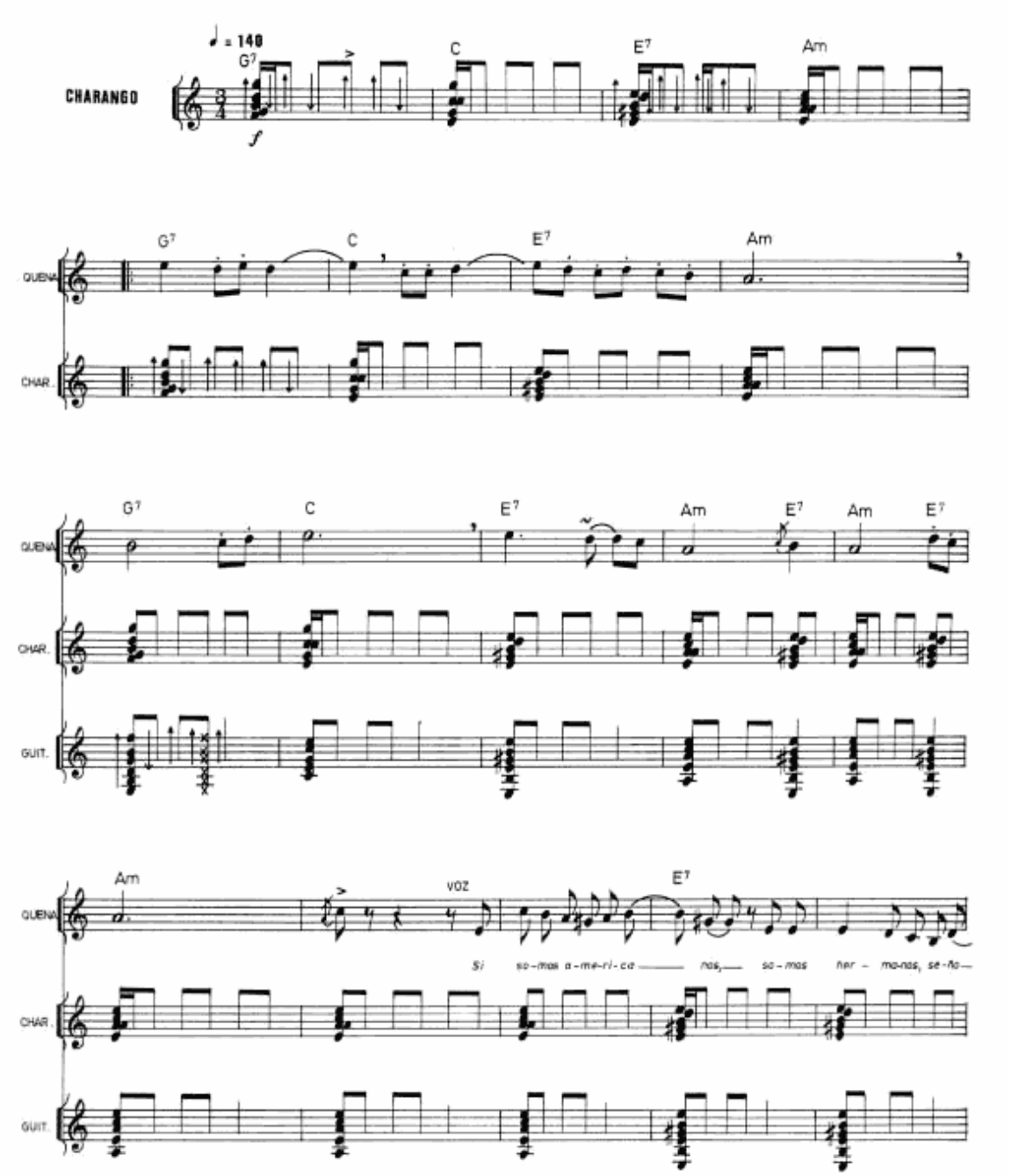

Figure 1a: "Si somos americanos" (1964) by Rolando Alarcón (first page). Santiago: SCD, 1998.

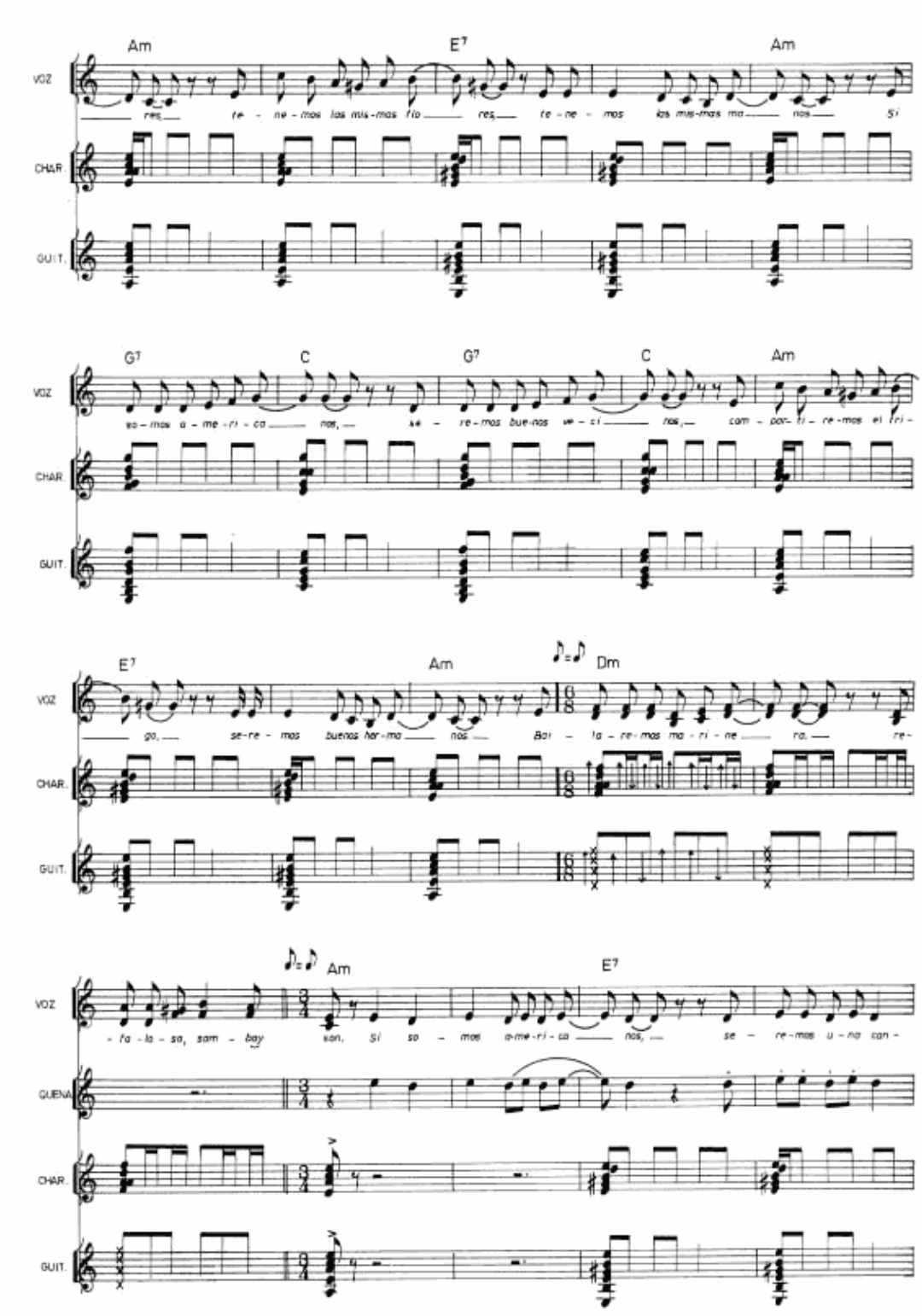

Figure 1b: "Si somos americanos" (1964) by Rolando Alarcón (second page). Santiago: SCD, 1998.

The first Chilean songs with Andean roots made their way into the nationally-popular song contest at Viña del Mar in the mid-1960s, and with this, the Andean style definitively entered the Chilean music and entertainment industry. Hernán Alvarez and Sofanor Tobar obtained the first prizes in Viña del Mar with their *cachimbos* "Mano nortina" in 1965 and "La burrerita" in 1966, respectively.[3]

The definitive change, however, from the *typical* to the *social* and *political* representation of the Andean Other developed not in Chile, but in Paris by Chilean musician and folklorist Violeta Parra and her children Angel and Isabel. There, they learned how to play the charango and the kena from Bolivian musicians living in France, as well as from Gilbert Favré, a Swiss clarinetist who played the kena with vibrato, developing a new performing style which became common to Andean music groups from urban settings. With these instruments and this experience, a characteristic element of Andean otherness was now in the hands of Chilean musicians, which made them the new authority in the representation of this otherness. The Parra family returned to Chile in 1964, using these instruments to perform and compose new songs, while also introducing them to other musicians, including Victor Jara and Rolando Alarcón.

Free of ties or fidelity to any particular Andean tradition, the Parras combined Andean instruments with those from different regions of Latin America, and also used them to play and compose non-Andean music. The well known song "Gracias a la vida" by Violeta Parra, for instance, is based on the *sirilla*, a 6/8 genre from the south of Chile of Hispanic origin, but it was composed and performed on the charango, which became Violeta Parra's trademark instrument in the 1960s. Her last LP, *Las Últimas Composiciones* (The Last Compositions), shows her on the cover playing the charango, creating one of the most remembered images of Violeta (see Figure 2, following page).

Started by Violeta Parra, Rolando Alarcón and Victor Jara, and developed by Quilapayún (1965), Inti-illimani (1967) and also the Andean-rock band Los Jaivas (1969), Andean Otherness was now being incarnated by Chilean musicians themselves playing Andean instruments, incorporating them into the core of their performances, and integrating them with a wide variety of influences from other indigenous, black and mestizo traditions in Latin America. By incarnating a socially marginalized Other, and giving it visibility (or audibility) through songs and performances, Chileans musicians vindicated this Otherness, and in doing so, created the Chilean "New Song."

Victor Jara (1932-1973), singer-songwriter and theatre director, was a key figure in the development of the political and artistic impulse of Chilean nueva canción. Jara contributed to this development both in his solo career and as the artistic director of the musical groups Quilapayún and Inti-illimani. In his solo performances, Jara included Bolivian repertoire as a way to give variety, vitality, and happiness to his shows, which were otherwise full of songs with social content, protest, and sadness. As a theatre director, Jara composed incidental music for the plays he directed, creating an ensemble with instruments he could play, always searching for their new musical possibilities. These instruments were mainly Andean, but also from other regions of Latin America.

[3] See chronology of Viña del Mar song contest in Gálvez 1988.

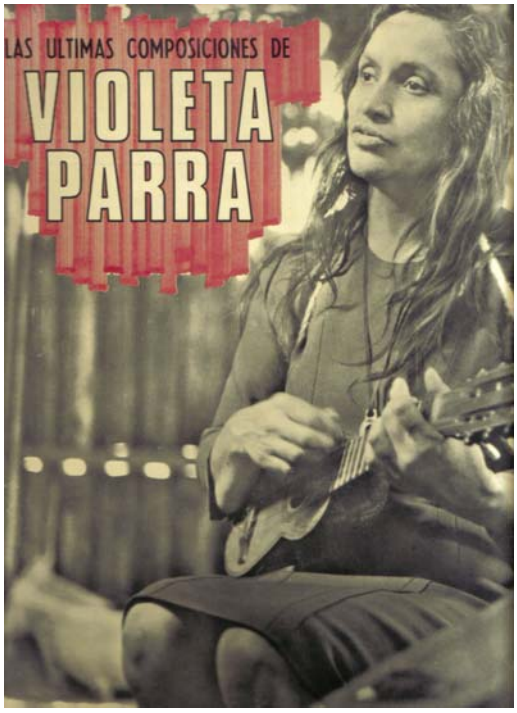

Figure 2: LP *Las últimas composiciones,* Santiago: RCA Victor, 1967.

His instrumental work "La partida," for instance, recorded by Inti-illimani in 1972, is scored for kena, charango, two *tiples* (a type of metal stringed guitar), two standard guitars, *bombo* (Andean bass drum), tambourine, maracas, claves and tubular bells, primarily instruments of Andean, Creole, and Caribbean origins. Jara also uses this unusual blending of instruments from different cultural settings in a non-idiomatic fashion. In this work, we find harmonic pedals and chromatic harmony, and the use of harmony as instrumental color. This modernist impulse in the development of a popular music with folk roots is another feature of the Chilean nueva canción.[4]

In 1966, the group Quilapayún began recording and performing Aymara music from Bolivia and Argentina, as well as their own "Andean" music, such as "El canto del cuculí" (1966) by Eduardo Carrasco, "El pueblo" (1966) by Angel Parra, and "Ñancahuazú" (1968) by Patricio Castillo. Inti-illimani did the same beginning in 1969, but recording even more Andean repertoire. The group's first LP includes four Bolivian and three Ecuadorian songs, while the second (1970) includes five Argentinean songs with Andean roots. Like Quilapayún, Inti-Illimani also started composing their own Andean music, such as "Tatatí" (1971) and "Alturas" (1973) by Horacio Salinas.

Quilapayún and Inti-illimani, then, developed and expanded upon a path opened by Violeta Parra, Rolando Alarcón and Víctor Jara with the creation of Chilean nueva canción. This path had four basic components:

[4] See score of "La partida" in Acevedo 1996.

- the expression of the cultural unity of Latin America
- the vindication of a marginal Otherness
- the blending of different musical traditions
- the modernization of folk song

As we have seen, Quechua and Aymara music were central in accomplishing this endeavor.

The performance, vindication, blending, and modernization of Andean music by nueva canción artists have brought the Andes closer to the Chilean people, and allowed them to integrate traces of Andean culture into their own identity. This gave Chileans a sense of being part of the *Patria Grande*, the Large Fatherland, while increasing their social sensibility towards the precarious condition of a marginalized Other. There is no revolution without songs, Chilean president Salvador Allende pronounced after being elected in 1970. And, we have to add, without Andean songs.

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