

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Miguel Iturrado and the Dawn of a Violin Culture on the Isthmus: A New View into the Musical Landscape in Nineteenth-Century Panama

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Abstract

In this article, I argue that the musical landscape in Panama during the nineteenth century was much more active, diverse and globally connected than previously observed by authors of traditionally accepted music historiography of the country. Particularly, I discuss the heightened activity in the second half of the century through primary sources concerning violinist Miguel Iturrado (d. 1879). I further argue that the violin culture fostered by Iturrado and his contemporaries became a solid platform for cultural exchange which allowed for the development of early-twentieth-century music production in Panama. I conclude that the flourishing of numerous *fin-de-siècle* concert violinists, as well as the advent of the violinist-composers of dance music now known as the Azuero School in the first third of twentieth-century Panama, are directly related to Iturrado's –and his colleagues'– musical and cultural achievements.

The 1800s in Panama were socially and politically effervescent. Independence from Spain in 1821, increased regional commerce, the construction of the transisthmian railroad, the start of work on the canal, armed conflict – life was hardly uneventful.¹ However, its cultural activity, and music in particular, has been largely overlooked in the historiography. In this essay, I discuss Panama's musical landscape in the later nineteenth century through analysis of primary sources, focusing on the life and work of Panamanian violinist Miguel Iturrado (d. 1879). His musical activities are collected in several contemporary sources, yet all but ignored in traditional music historiography. Iturrado is one of several locally born musicians whose deeds and potential influence on the subsequent development of a musical landscape in Panama have gone unnoticed by key authors throughout the twentieth century. The isthmian country separated from Colombia in 1903, and the first authors to address the telling of its musical history favoured an account of the nineteenth century which focused on overseas-driven social transformations which paved the way toward sovereignty. The result strongly emphasizes the contributions of immigrants, this as part

¹ Alfredo Castillero Calvo, 1821: *La independencia de Panamá y su época* (Panama: Editora Novo Art, 2021); Marixa Lasso, "Race War and Nation in Caribbean Gran Colombia, Cartagena, 1810–1832", *The American Historical Review* 111/2 (2006): 336–61; Marixa Lasso, "La Crisis Política Posindependencia: 1821–1841", in *Nueva Historia General de Panamá*, Vol. 2, ed. Alfredo Castillero Castro (Panama: Editora Novo Art, S.A. y Comisión Panamá 500, 2019), 137–59; Aims McGuinness, *Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

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of a conscious effort to dissociate from its immediate Colombian ancestry and to build a 'romantic' past for Panama deeply rooted in *fin-de-siècle* traditions from the countryside.

I argue, based on primary sources and a critical analysis of Iturrado's career as a leading dance musician, that Panama's musical and cultural landscape in the nineteenth century differs considerably from those painted in traditional music histories. Sources include traveller's chronicles, primarily those by Theodore Johnson (b. 1818), Édouard Auger (dates unknown) and Jenny White (1835–1867), as well as newspaper articles, reviews and advertisements from *El Panameño* and *The Star and Herald*,² ecclesiastical records from the city and not least importantly, the Díaz Family's oral history as collected in 1915 by violinist and composer Narciso Garay Díaz (1876–1953). Analysis of these sources reveals an active and cosmopolitan musical landscape in nineteenth-century Panama that sharply contrasts with the customary histories woven by twentieth-century writers. I further argue that the violin-led culture spearheaded by Miguel Iturrado became the ground from which flourished both a prominent generation of Panamanian concert violinists and also the composers of the Azuero School,³ authors of a prominent violin dance repertoire with long-standing consequences in Panama's popular music.

Panamanian concert violinists born in the late 1800s – such as Alfredo De Saint Malo (1898–1984), Manuel Arias Hidalgo (1861–1926), Antonio Gáez (b. ca. 1890) and Narciso Garay, to name but a few – are indeed responsible for creating or leading active platforms for music performance as well as training institutions whose ramifications extend to this day and some even transcend Panamanian borders. Soon after, along Azuero's eastern coast, Artemio De Jesús Córdoba (1895–1988), Francisco 'Chico Purio' Ramírez (1903–1988), Escolástico 'Colaco' Cortez (1904–1976) and Clímaco Batista (1907–1978) created a substantial repertoire of violin dance music which, I suggest, can be traced to the salon dance platform cultivated by Iturrado and his contemporaries. The Azuero School repertoire, composed largely in the first decades of the twentieth century, became the basis for most modern popular dance music in Panama.⁴ This significant corpus of pieces, preserved through notation, recordings and oral tradition, is considered a strong part of a 'Panamanian' identity by its practitioners and by the folklorists who study it and keep it alive through various strategies of conservation. I conclude that these two relevant phenomena, significant themselves in the development of modern musical culture in Panama, are the consequences of a musical landscape shaped largely by the work of locally born violinist Miguel Iturrado and by the community that supported, cared for, and praised him in nineteenth-century Panama.

Searching for a Forgotten Panama

The story of Panamanian music – as it has been told for decades – begins late in the nineteenth century at the hands of immigrants.⁵ The curtain usually rises with the arrival in

² *The Star and Herald* went through different phases of ownership and mergers, its name changing consequently in both the English and Spanish versions. Throughout this article, I will cite the name used in the issue where the source material appears.

³ Samuel Robles, 'Los Sentimientos del Alma: Cultural Dialogue and the Multiple Origins of Panamanian *Típico*', *Popular Music* 42/2 (2023): 164–95.

⁴ Robles, 'Los Sentimientos del Alma'; Sean Bellaviti, *Música típica: Cumbia and the Rise of Musical Nationalism in Panama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Edwin Pitre-Vásquez, 'Veredas sonoras da Cúmbia Panamenha: Estilos e mudança de paradigma' (PhD diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 2008).

⁵ Eduardo Charpentier Herrera, *La banda republicana: Orígenes y trayectoria a través de un siglo de labores*, 2nd ed. (Panama: Impresora Nacional, 1969); Jaime Ingram, *Orientación musical*, 4th ed. (Panama: Universal Books, 2002); Erik Wolfschoon, *Las manifestaciones artísticas en Panama: Estudio introductorio y antología* (Panama: Editorial Universitaria, 1983).

the 1860s of French bandleader Jean Marie Victor Dubarry (1831–1873), who was appointed chief of the principal military band of Panama City and founded a training school for the musicians under his charge. Not long after that, in the 1890s, German consul and violinist Arthur Köhnpcke (b. 1849) landed on the isthmus and taught notable Panamanian musicians such as Alfredo De Saint Malo and Narciso Garay. Cuban emigré Lino Boza (1840–1899) and his family were famed bandleaders, educators and arrangers who contributed to the building of local repertoire with several dance pieces and marches in their catalogues. Lino's nephew Maximo Arrates Boza (1859–1936) was especially instrumental in the development of important musical institutions at the turn of the century, namely the Banda Republicana, thus stewarding Panamanian music-making into a new era at the dawn of the Republic. After the 1903 separation from Colombia,⁶ Spanish-born organist Santos Jorge Amatriain (1870–1941), who had been chapel master of the Archdiocese since his arrival in 1889, became the author of the new country's national anthem with recycled music from his 1893 *Himno a Bolívar*. The march was selected through public acclaim to accompany the new lyrics by Jerónimo De La Ossa (1847–1907), much to the delight of the local community, already familiar with the melodies.⁷ Jorge's contribution as author of the national anthem seems to neatly fit as closing seal for a narrative of foreign builders of *fin-de-siècle* Panamanian music history, offered by Charpentier and reiterated by Jaime Ingram and Erik Wolfschoon.⁸

While the compositional output and performances of these musicians are essential to consider when approaching the construction of a Panamanian musical landscape at the turn of the century, the foundational narrative focused largely on foreign agency has tended to overlook the role of local musicians in the creation of an urban musical culture. This active musical platform predates the kick-off point of the traditional story by at least a century.⁹ Popular music is not addressed or discussed in any of the accounts from twentieth-century authors, therefore erasing the rich history of cultural exchange and global awareness whose protagonists were local musicians. As primarily a performer, bandleader and composer of dance music, Miguel Iturrado and the highly influential musical platform built by him and his contemporaries largely fell through the cracks. Traditional music historiography – the little that has been produced – seems to suggest that close to nothing musical happened in Panama during the time when the isthmus was part of Colombia (1821–1903), during the Spanish colony (1513–1821), or even in the pre-Columbian era.¹⁰ Conventional twentieth-century histories of Colombian Panama centred on the neglect and even disdain from Bogotá which, in the assessment of the authors who penned them, was reflected in a barren cultural and social landscape.

⁶ Fernando Aparicio, “Alcanzamos Por Fin La Victoria”: Tensiones y Contradicciones de 3 de Noviembre de 1903’, in *Nueva historia general de Panamá*, Vol. 2, ed. Alfredo Castillero Calvo (Panama: Editora Novo Art, S.A. y Comisión Panamá 500, 2019), 591–627.

⁷ Samuel Robles, ‘Un himno para Santos Jorge’, *Revista España* (2023), https://multimedia.corprensa.com/multimedia/catalogos/2023-10-12/Embajada_Espana/14/.

⁸ Charpentier, *La banda republicana*; Ingram, *Orientación musical*; Wolfschoon, *Las manifestaciones artísticas en Panama*.

⁹ We have, for example, a receipt for the performance of music during the funeral service of Bishop Francisco De Los Ríos y Armengol in the Cathedral of Panama by the Chapel under Thomas Sánchez Espejo dated 28 November 1776 (Archivo General de la Nación: CURAS-OBISPOS, SC.21.4,D.53 fol. 548).

¹⁰ Noteworthy exceptions occur in the work of archaeologist Richard Cooke, with subsequent unpublished findings of pre-Columbian wind instruments by Juan Guillermo Martin and Carlos Fitzgerald in the archaeological site of Panama Viejo, plus ongoing work by Julia Mayo and Carlos Mayo at El Caño archaeological site; see Richard Cooke et al, ‘Panamá prehispánico’ in *Nueva historia general de Panamá*, Vol. 1, Part 1 (Panamá: Editora Novo Art, S.A. y Comisión Panamá 500, 2019). Even though reports are either scarce or unpublished, their findings, along with archaeological artefacts in other Panamanian collections and sixteenth-century Spanish chronicles during the early conquest reveal unequivocal music production long before the arrival of Europeans on the Isthmus.

Juan B. Sosa (1870–1920) and Enrique J. Arce (1871–1947) wrote the book which perhaps contributed the greatest to this view in the collective imagination of Panamanians, including future scholars. Their 1911 *Compendio de Historia de Panamá* was adopted as the official source text for the instruction of Panamanian history in all schools of the new country.¹¹ In their ten chapters concerning Panama's Colombian period, the authors focus on a genealogy of political authorities, secession attempts by various factions from across the social spectrum and larger key events such as the construction of the transisthmian railroad in the 1850s and the French canal attempt by Ferdinand De Lesseps. These events, due to the scope and purpose of the volume, are covered only through discrete political causes and consequences, without diving into social history and only tangentially discussing society and culture. Their work greatly influenced subsequent writings about the nation's history, including the widely disseminated *Libro Azul de Panamá* and *Panamá en 1915*.¹² These were distinct efforts by the young government in order to portray Panama as a key player in the region, separate from Colombia, sovereign, with a culture of its own. The nation that is Panama after 1903, one could surmise from these readings, did not owe its modernity and progress to any cultural or social development during the Colombian period, but rather to the fact that Panamanians were able to secede from it and govern their own destiny away from social and administrative abandonment.

If Panama as a state within the Colombian republic was neglected through political isolation, frequent internecine conflict, shortage of resource allocation, preclusion of social mobility and little commerce, then it must follow that there was poor education, no production of art and consequently, no significant progress. This view, however, has cast a shadow on any actual political, social and cultural growth during the period in Panama, which has subsequently loomed over the popular imagination of local historians.¹³ More recently, however, scholars have begun to explore several aspects of the Panamanian long nineteenth century from various disciplines, uncovering a period of profound social change, significant political advancement and cultural effervescence, indeed quite different from the traditional narrative.¹⁴

Apart from Narciso Garay, who was himself born in 1876, writers of Panamanian histories had until recently made but passing references to locally born musicians of the nineteenth century or before.¹⁵ We can find notable exceptions in the work of historian Alfredo Castellero Calvo, who alludes to several musical events such as parades, social dances, religious ceremonies and processions in the context of in-depth analyses of topics as diverse as wars, religious colonization, commemorations, the quest for independence, or the history

¹¹ A note from the Secretary of Public Instruction reproduced in the frontispiece of the work attests to this. Such a validation would guarantee a wide distribution of the book, as it was used as school textbook and source of reference (See Juan B. Sosa and Enrique J. Arce, *Compendio de historia de Panamá* (Panama: Casa Editorial del Diario de Panamá, 1911).)

¹² Juan D. Arosemena, *Panamá en 1915* (Panama: Diario de Panamá, 1915); William T. Scoullar, *Libro azul de Panamá* (Panama: Latin America Publicity Bureau, 1917).

¹³ Félix Chirú Barrios, 'Políticas de Memoria y Conmemoraciones En El Panamá Colombiano', *Anuario de Estudios Centroamericanos* 48 (2022): 1–21.

¹⁴ Alfredo Figueroa Navarro's pioneering study, *Dominio y Sociedad en el Panamá Colombiano (1821–1903)* (Panamá: Impresora Panamá, 1978), is perhaps the first of this trend, which has since been followed by several studies in nineteenth-century Panamanian politics, society and culture. See, for example, Castellero Calvo, 1821, Omar Jaén Suárez, *Migraciones y redes internacionales: Panamá, Ecuador, Perú, México, Nicaragua, Cuba, Filipinas, estudio de caso del siglo XVIII al XX: Icaza* (Panamá: Editora Novo Art, S. A., 2021), and Barrios, 'Políticas de memoria'.

¹⁵ While Charpentier, Wolfschoon and Ingram do mention Iturrado in their afore-cited works, they all draw from Garay's article of 1915, often verbatim, without a citation and without offering details from further archival research.

of food in Panama.¹⁶ Both Garay and Castellero Calvo, drawing from oral sources and from an 1849 travel chronicle by Theodore Johnson, respectively, mention a Panamanian-born violinist whose public career sprang in the late 1840s.¹⁷ The musician performed music for dance, theatre, church and protocol and had achieved so much popularity on the isthmus by 1850 that he was affectionally nicknamed ‘Paganini’ by his fellow citizens after the Genovese virtuoso. Miguel Iturrado, born ‘from the people’ with an ‘irresistible calling for music’¹⁸ – likely in the populous Panamanian suburb of Santa Ana –¹⁹ was, according to Garay, taught to play the violin by his own great uncle, Ramón Díaz del Campo y Soparda (b. 1805) in the early 1840s.²⁰

No sources suggest that Iturrado was a virtuoso in the customary sense of the term. Panamanian audiences were no strangers to virtuosic performances – pianists Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829–1869) and Henri Herz (1803–1888), as well as violinists José White (1836–1918) and Ernesto Camillo Sivori (1817–1834) were among the most distinguished virtuosos to perform in town while touring between North and South America, or traveling between the East coast and California. Many Panamanians in the city were also surely familiar with Niccolò Paganini’s virtuosity, his career highlights and the legends surrounding his persona – newspapers from around the world were readily available in Panama during the nineteenth century, for a then largely bilingual audience.²¹ The nickname ‘Paganini’ was more likely the result of a profound esteem conferred on Iturrado, and therefore not to be correlated with Niccolò Paganini’s style, technique, virtuosity or choice of repertoire. Iturrado was surely the best violinist his co-citizens knew, and the nickname they gave him should be read as a term of endearment within a culture where people are often known best by a witty soubriquet than by their given name, and not as association or comparison. Iturrado quickly became a staple in balls and public entertainment events as well as in the church, and soon made waves in newspaper articles, traveller chronicles and letters, leaving lasting repercussions on subsequent generations of Panamanian violinists.

A Lively Soundscape

Music historiography has been silent concerning the volume and variety of activity in Panama during most of the nineteenth century. It is important to state that there is no doubt that events in the latter half of the century such as Gold Rush travel, the ensuing construction of the transisthmian Railroad and the French canal initiative had profound

¹⁶ Alfredo Castellero Calvo, ‘Teatro, Libros y Espectáculo En El Panamá Barroco’, in *Nueva Historia General de Panamá*, Vol. 1, Part 3, ed. Alfredo Castellero Calvo (Panama: Editora Novo Art, S.A. y Comisión Panamá 500, 2019), 1211–61; idem, 1821; Idem, *Conquista, Evangelización y Resistencia* (Panama: Editora Novo Art, S.A., 2017); idem, *Cultura Alimentaria y Globalización: Panamá, Siglos XVI al XXI* (Panama Editora Novo Art, S.A, 2010).

¹⁷ Narciso Garay, ‘El arte en Panamá’, in *Panamá en 1915*, ed. Juan Demóstenes Arosemena (Panama: Diario de Panamá, 1915), 212–15; Castellero Calvo, *Cultura Alimentaria y Globalización*, 320. See also Theodore Johnson, *Sights in the Gold Region and Scenes by the Way* (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1849).

¹⁸ Garay, ‘El arte en Panamá’, 213.

¹⁹ Although Iturrado’s ecclesiastical baptismal certificate has not surfaced, all of his other life events are recorded at the ecclesiastical archive of Santa Ana Extramuros parish (see Figure 2). Additionally, public records show him as proprietor of a house in the *Calle del Matadero* (Slaughterhouse Street), which was part of Santa Ana district (see ‘Catastro Definitivo’, *Gaceta de Panamá*, 19 March 1876, p. 2).

²⁰ Garay, ‘El arte en Panamá’, 213.

²¹ Basil Hall, a Captain for the Royal Navy, arrived in Panama in February of 1821. He recalled his surprise upon finding that most people he met in Panama City, once he set foot on the dock, spoke English. Furthermore, Hall noted the fact that, even though he had been sailing to several ports along the Pacific coast of South America, it was in Panama when he finally got to read English newspapers and thus learn of current events from North America and Europe. See Basil Hall, *Extracts from a Journal, Written on the Coasts of Chile, Peru, and Mexico* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1825), 144–7.

consequences in the development of an artistic culture in *fin-de-siècle* Panama. However, historians and music researchers have frequently overlooked the lively musical landscape before 1850, one that is obliquely referenced by historian Alfredo Castellero Calvo.²² Miguel Iturrado was born into this active, rich and diverse musical landscape. It is where he developed an interest for music and where then he worked throughout his life. In this section I show, through discussion of contemporary sources, that Panama City's inhabitants did indeed produce a dynamic musical culture. A survey of chronicles, newspaper articles, advertisements and archival sources, allows us to reconstruct the very early stages of Miguel Iturrado's public career. The violinist-bandleader skilfully navigated a diverse Panamanian musical environment, as he swiftly became one of its key figures and a point of reference for his contemporaries.

The first mention of Miguel Iturrado in print comes from a US investor who, like thousands of would-be prospectors and traders, was travelling to California at the outset of the Gold Rush of 1849.²³ Theodore Johnson is credited as being the author of the first published relation of the voyage from the eastern coast of the United States to California via Panama in the context of the Gold Rush. According to his account, Johnson arrives with his party in Panama City on the evening of 21 February 1849 after the arduous crossing of the isthmus by riverboat and mule. Early the next morning, he was awakened by cannon salvos and band music. Johnson soon learned that these were part of Washington's Birthday festivities offered by the city in honour of the US community and diplomats.²⁴ The Governor of Panama provided the principal local military band for the morning parade, as well as the use of the East Battery, as reported by *The Panama Star* on its inaugural issue. Johnson, watching and listening from his room, was moved by 'the inspiring strains of *Hail Columbia* from a full military band' which led some 'three or four hundred Americans' through the narrow streets of Panama. Mr. Jansen, the owner of the American Hotel (Figure 1), offered a concert and dinner to culminate the festivities.²⁵ Johnson's welcome in Panama was indeed filled with music.

Throughout his stay, Johnson would experience many more instances of music-making, including solemn organs at the Cathedral, a Protestant service at the US Consul's residence, daily Catholic processions and several instances of military bands on parade. In the context of this active sound landscape, the music which captured Johnson's attention the most came from a dance and variety band which played regularly at the American Hotel. 'They performed opera music, overtures, polkas, waltzes, marches, &c., of the best modern composers, and all in the most perfect style'. Johnson then points to the leader of the ensemble, a man known as 'Paganini', claiming 'he was, in truth, one of the best violinists we ever heard'. Miguel Iturrado's band catered to their mostly US audience by opening and closing their evening's performances with *Hail Columbia* and *Yankee Doodle*, known national airs 'which were enthusiastically cheered with the regular American hurrah'. Johnson was so impressed with Iturrado and his band that he hired them 'one lovely evening to serenade the Governor, our consul Mr. Nelson, and the American ladies in town'.²⁶

Johnson's narration reveals an effervescent Panama where the soundscape is as vigorous as it is diverse. His depictions of daily band music in the streets, which is also attested to in contemporary newspapers,²⁷ together with the mention of the Governor's military

²² Castellero Calvo, *Cultura Alimentaria y Globalización*, 306–26.

²³ McGuinness, *Path of Empire*.

²⁴ Johnson, *Sights in the Gold Region*.

²⁵ 'To our American friends in Panama', *Panama Star*, 24 February 1849, 1; Johnson, *Sights in the Gold Region*, 48.

²⁶ Johnson, *Sights in the Gold Region*, 76.

²⁷ See, for example, 'An Incident', *The Panama Star*, 5 December 1851, 2

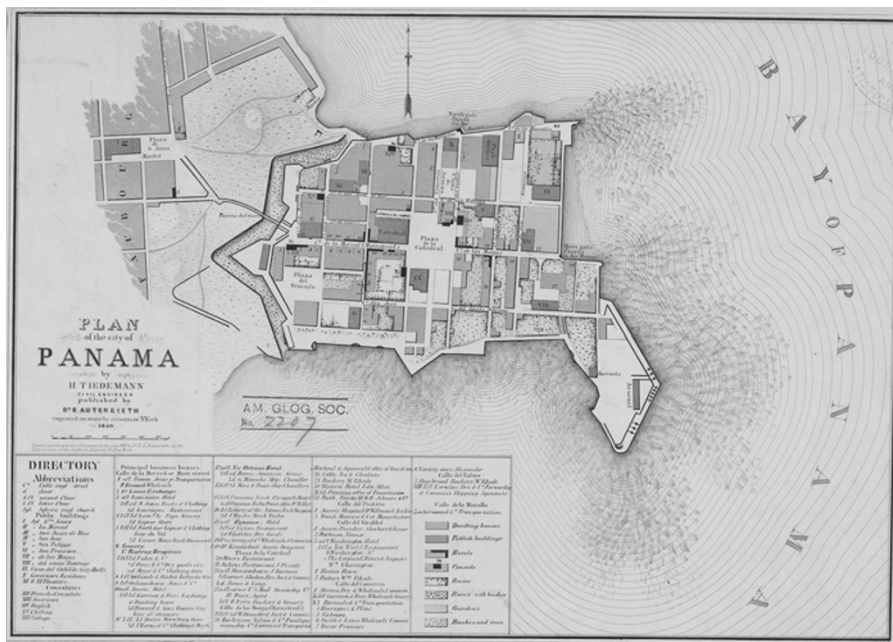


Figure 1. Tiedemann 1850 Plan of Panama Walled City, showing San Felipe Quarter and a section of the suburb of Santa Ana Extramuros. American Geographical Society Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, public domain.

band, contrasts with the histories offered by Charpentier and Ingram, who seem to suggest that the first official band in the city is the one led by Jean Marie Victor Dubarry.²⁸ The Frenchman arrived in 1867, well after the Gold Rush-related events took place. As earlier records continue to surface, it becomes evident that band music was indeed present in the city even before the start of Panama's Colombian period.²⁹ Military bands were an integral part of the Spanish royal armies' and navy's protocol, discipline and communication, in peace as well as in war.³⁰ Considering that Panama City was a busy transit route for goods, minerals and officers of the crown and clergy throughout the colonial period, military bands provided a quotidian soundscape that was normal and abundant. Band music became, as in many important cities during the long nineteenth century, a fixture in celebratory and protocolar events.³¹ This suggests that the streets where Miguel Iturrado grew up were filled with band music to announce daily events such as the rounds for changing of guards at dawn and evening and also for special occasions, of which there were many: religious feast days, civil commemorations, proclamation of local and national decrees, arrivals of foreign dignitaries and diplomats and national holidays, to mention but a few.

²⁸ This was the Banda de Música de la Guardia del Estado Soberano; Charpentier, *La banda republicana*.

²⁹ A power of attorney dated 7 January 1813, for instance, mentions Manuel Morel, a clarinetist for the Permanent Battalion (*Batallón Fijo*) based in Panama City (Archivo General de la Nación SAA-I.10.24.57, fols 337–338).

³⁰ Carlos III, *Ordenanzas de S.M. Para El Régimen, Disciplina, Subordinación y Disciplina de Sus Ejércitos* (Madrid: Despacho Universal de la Guerra, 1768); Carlos IV, *Ordenanzas Generales de La Armada Naval* (Madrid: Imprenta de la viuda de Don Joaquín Ibarra, 1793).

³¹ See announcements of the celebrations of Independence from Spain in *El Panameño* (29 November 1852), (28 November 1853) and (23 November 1855). See also the decree on the promulgation of the Constitution of 1812 in San Felipe and Santa Ana (Archivo General de la Nación, GOBIERNO:SAA-I.15.21).

Another important account of music in the transoceanic route during the Gold Rush period is offered by French adventurer Édouard Auger, who crossed the Isthmus in 1852 enroute to California. Auger arrived on the north coast of Panama and, like Johnson, began the crossing by boat up the Chagres River until he reached Cruces, where mules would take him, his companion and their baggage south to Panama City. While in Cruces, Auger witnessed a funeral cortège for a young boy, led through the streets by three musicians: a violinist, a fifer and a drummer. They played, Auger recalls, a 'most happy' local dance piece instead of a dirge. Once the procession reached the church, the music continued on during the entire ritual.³² Auger's observation suggests that already in 1852, the violin was part of the popular culture of the Panamanian hinterland. Fifes and drums would have been present in all municipalities in light of their long-standing use as military and civilian signalling and ceremonial devices.³³

Auger remained in Cruces for a few days before resuming his journey to the city by land. Upon arriving and discovering that he had lost his connection to San Francisco, Auger was forced to stay in Panama City until his shipping agent could arrange for a new vessel. During this time, Auger attended the daily Vespers at the Cathedral, where he heard the female choir singing 'canticles on the melodies of *sainetes* and *zamacuecas* with violin accompaniment'.³⁴ The author also enjoyed a performance of 'an English play by amateurs of the city' led by a 'director without a troupe'.³⁵ Auger is no doubt referring to Mateo Furnier y Compañía, a theatre company which was quite active during the time and whose performances featured live music and which often performed original works written by Furnier to commemorate special occasions.³⁶

Auger's account from a few days in Panama City reveals that there was indeed much cultural activity across platforms and social groups. Quite relevant for our purposes, his observations tell the story of a Panama where the violin was a common fixture in the highest urban circles as well as in the rural hinterland. The lively violin music that Auger heard in different social and religious contexts, which to his sensibilities sounded like dances, can be quite revealing. I suggest that the violin – and the dance music associated with it – had been a part of Panamanian popular culture for long enough to have been incorporated into the conservative Catholic church by the early 1850s. While we cannot affirm that Miguel Iturrado was the protagonist in any of the events that Auger witnessed, it is not unreasonable to suppose that he was the sole violinist at the evening services of the Cathedral, since we do know that he was employed by the church.³⁷ Notwithstanding, Auger's chronicle invites us to revisit mid-nineteenth century Panama as an active artistic centre, where lively dance-like music flowed between social circles and across platforms at the hands of violinists.

³² Édouard Auger, *Voyage En Californie* (Paris: Librairie de L. Hachette et Cie., 1854). See also D.B. Bates, *Incidents on Land and Water* (Boston: James French, 1857), 87–8 for a similar account of a child's burial with celebratory music in Panama City.

³³ Carlos III, *Ordenanzas*.

³⁴ Auger, *Voyage en Californie*, 85. *Sainete* and *Zamacueca* are commonly used in this period to refer to any locally cultivated dance.

³⁵ Auger, *Voyage en Californie*, 85–6.

³⁶ *El Panameño*, 12 October 1851: 1 headlined verses by Furnier to commemorate 'the reestablishment of peace in the Republic' as part of Independence festivities, see also (1 December 1850): 3, (22 July 1852): 3, (25 July 1852): 3 and (2 December 1852): 3 for other examples of performances of either known or original plays by Mateo Furnier y Cía.

³⁷ Garay recalls that his own grandmother was a contributor for the music for the *Novenas* and sung high masses at the Church of La Merced, the parochial see of the city. Chapel Master and organist José de los Santos Benítez, singers J.M. Victor Dubarry and Valentín Bravo and Iturrado on the violin were considered the 'General Staff' (*Estado mayor*) of church music toward the 1860s (See Garay, 'El Arte En Panamá').

The year following Auger's travel through the Isthmus, Miguel Iturrado led the band which accompanied the performance of the Ravel Family Circus. An advertisement which ran on page 2 of the *Panama Star* on 12 and 13 November, announced the international traveling company while featuring Iturrado's participation: 'An efficient band under the direction of the well-known PAGANINI will be in attendance to contribute to the evening's entertainment' (emphasis in the source).³⁸ Even though the advertisement seeks attendance to an event with international artists, it is clear that by this time Iturrado was esteemed enough in the city to be highlighted within the announcement of one of the best-known traveling circus companies from the period.³⁹

Among the most cited primary sources concerning social history in nineteenth-century Panama are the letters from New York socialite Jenny White and later compiled and published by her mother, Rhoda. White married prominent Panamanian businessman Bernardino Del Bal in New York in 1863 and shortly thereafter set out to his hometown of Santiago de Veraguas, 250 kilometers west of the capital city. While in Panama City, the Del Bals attended a number of social functions, including private parties and large public balls. An accomplished pianist and singer herself, White provided accounts of the music she heard throughout her time in Panama. One of the main events the couple attended was a ball offered by the Peruvian consul, which White described as similar to those she experienced in New York society, not only because of the splendour on display by the hosts and the notability of the guests, but also because of the music they danced to. The person in charge of conducting the 'very good' band for the evening was a musician, 'who plays so remarkably on the violin that he is known only as Paganini – a name given him some years since in compliment of his proficiency as violinist. All musical artists who have passed through have complimented him highly'.⁴⁰

White reports that her host, Julián Sosa, informed her that Iturrado charged two dollars an hour, while the band would cost altogether seventy-five dollars for the entire affair. The ball was kicked-off with a pyrotechnic display at sundown, and continued through dawn. That means Iturrado would have taken home some twenty US dollars at the end of the evening, which is equivalent to the purchasing power of five hundred US dollars of today. This amount is half of what the top music official – the leader of the principal military band – earned in a month, according to contemporary documents cited by Eduardo Charpentier.⁴¹ Beyond monetary compensation, Iturrado's celebrity status is suggested through a curiosity mentioned by White: 'Paganini had to be sent for and sent home in a carriage, for he was indisposed!'⁴² In a two-district, rather small, city –about 10,000 inhabitants– with marked social distinctions, travel by carriage was indeed a luxury, and this is reflected in White's surprised observation.⁴³ Not long after the Peruvian consul's ball, an even larger affair was given in honour of Spanish vessels on a scientific mission which had recently made land on the isthmus, the first since the Independence of 1821. Once again, Iturrado was at the front

³⁸ 'Ravel Family Circus', *Panama Star*, 12 November 1853, 2

³⁹ The Ravel Circus toured extensively throughout Europe and North America. Its most notorious star, Jean-François Gravelet (known as Blondin) crossed Niagara Falls a number of times on tightrope, while simultaneously taking photographs of his audience, carrying someone on his back, or while performing stunts with a chair. See Dominique Denis, 'Jean-François Gravelet, dit Blondin', *Circus-Parade.com*, accessed 7 November 2023, www.circus-parade.com/2021/02/20/jean-francois-gravelet-dit-blondin/ and Trav S.D., 'The Ravel Family', *Travalanche*, accessed 7 November 2023, <https://travsd.wordpress.com/2012/11/08/the-ravel-family-2/>.

⁴⁰ Rhoda White, *Memoirs and Letters of Jenny C. White Del Bal* (Boston: Patrick Donahoe, 1868).

⁴¹ Charpentier, *La banda republicana*, 24.

⁴² White, *Memoirs and Letters*, 88.

⁴³ See Figueroa Navarro, *Dominio y Sociedad*, for a complete analysis of society, social mobility and politics in Panama during the 1800s.

of the orchestra leading from his violin, but this time the local band was expanded by the Spanish Admiral's 36 musicians.⁴⁴

White passed away in Santiago from yellow fever a mere four years after the above events. During this time, she enthusiastically gave her time as a musician by singing, playing the piano, and coaching the musicians at the parish of Santiago Apóstol. While in Santiago, White described several occasions in which music was present, always showing deep admiration for the local's talents. Music was a part of everyday life not only in Panama City, but also in the countryside, be it in yearly or periodic events such as carnivals or bull-fights, or the more common serenades which were presented as a sign of respect. White even recalls a choral composition she wrote for the festivities of the Blessed Virgin Mary.⁴⁵ For her first Holy Week in Santiago, White attended the Good Friday service, for which she had been asked to sing the *Stabat Mater*. White complied after 'hastily' arranging a setting of the sequence accompanied by 'an admirable violin player'.⁴⁶

The soundscape painted by Jenny White both in Panama City and in Santiago is one with not only vibrant musical activity across platforms, but one that is also diverse, globally connected, and produced by people who were certainly devoted to it. White even mentions that Panamanians were 'passionately fond of music',⁴⁷ a statement which articulates her descriptions of music-making in the capital as well as in the countryside. Her two encounters with Iturrado are a testament to the violinist's celebrity as dance musician by this point in his career. Furthermore, I would suggest that the violinists she heard in Santiago, including the one who performed on Good Friday with her, are indicative of how widespread the instrument and violin instruction was by the 1860s throughout Panama. The violin had become, I propose, a platform for cultural exchange.

While several violinists were observed during religious ceremonies, the music is constantly described as dance music, or dance-like. The one professional violinist we know by name, Miguel Iturrado, is actually known to have performed both, seemingly to the delight of his listeners. I contend that violinists in nineteenth-century Panama such as Iturrado were using their versatility and their knowledge of current regional and global repertoire in order to transport musical traits –such as rhythms, melodic gestures, and performance styles across genres and musical stages. I suggest that this practice, and the popularity of musicians like Iturrado, produced a violin-led culture in Panama and its hinterland which eventually spawned generations of concert violinists, dance violinist-composers, and an entire tradition of popular dance music.

Iturrado's Last Ten Years

The final decade of Miguel Iturrado's life was quite active. Contemporaneous writings suggest that the esteem the citizens of Panama had conferred upon him only grew with the years. Above all, sources show Iturrado as the undisputed leader among dance musicians of the capital city, particularly in his final years. Study of these sources reveals the importance of dance music in many aspects of life, outside of the ballroom as well as inside. As we have seen above, even in religious events, the music is frequently described as dancelike. As an active dance music performer in the city, Iturrado would have likely incorporated elements from dance forms into music for worship. He would have likewise incorporated dance styles and the 'music from the best modern composers'⁴⁸ into his own compositions

⁴⁴ White, *Memoirs and Letters*, 98.

⁴⁵ White, *Memoirs and Letters*, 219.

⁴⁶ White, *Memoirs and Letters*, 184.

⁴⁷ White, *Memoirs and Letters*, 86.

⁴⁸ Johnson, *Sights in the Gold Region*, 76.

of which, regrettably, none survive.⁴⁹ The fact that sources suggest that Iturrado was in great demand as a dance musician, but was also heard in a number of other musical contexts, is key to considering the connections between his musical activities and the diverse and rich violin culture which emerged in the *fin de siècle*.

Public balls were frequent, and Miguel Iturrado seems to have been present at most major important dances in Panama during the 1870s, whether they were official or private affairs. An example is his performance at the residence of J.H. Leverich in the city of Colon.⁵⁰ There are records of him performing for a special ball for the attendees of French violinist Monsieur Greffi's recital at the Club de Panamá, a ball offered in honour of rear admiral Murray and the officers of the USS Pensacola, and a grand event in honour of businessman Manuel Lozada Plisé. In these reports Iturrado is dubbed 'the inimitable', 'the renowned', and 'the celebrated Panamanian Paganini'.⁵¹

A few months before his death, while suffering from the unknown illness that would ultimately end his life, Iturrado performed at two balls for the officers of the USS Lackawanna and the USS Adams, both of which were in Panama on diplomatic missions. The USS Adams ball was offered by the US Consulate, on land in March of 1879, and the Lackawanna ball was on board ship in February of that year. By this time, the *Star and Herald* staff writers reported that the music for the events had been in charge of 'the now celebrated', 'our immortal Paganini'.⁵² During Iturrado's lifetime, there are no instances in the media of other dance musicians – or any other local musicians, for that matter – referred to in such terms. Accolades range from stating the fact that he is 'well known' to openly declaring him (metaphorically) immortal. No other musician appears nearly as often in the media, at least not by name.⁵³ It is important to reiterate here that his nickname does not refer to Niccolò Paganini's virtuosity, style or repertoire, but rather is an affectionate deference to a local violinist whose ability seems to have far surpassed that of any of his contemporaries.

Iturrado continued his appearances outside of the ballroom as well. One such performance was quite eventful. In November 1869, the International Circus Company visited Panama for a number of performances. The *Star and Herald* reports an incident which occurred during the climactic moment of one of these evenings:

Miss Marie's 'Jump of Life' nearly had the opposite effect. As the acrobat fell down, she grazed our Maestro Conductor Miguel Iturrado, throwing him toward the edge of the stage, causing light injuries to his face and wrecking his violin. Even so, the musicians in the orchestra played better than the night before.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Garay presents Iturrado mainly as a composer, even mentioning a waltz of his called *Brisas del Mensabé* (*Breeze of Mensabé River*) which the author claims 'is still in the current repertoire'. Efforts to uncover music by Iturrado have been unfruitful, as is the case with other written material produced in Panama City in the nineteenth century. A programme performed in an outdoor evening band concert in 1889 includes the mazurka *A orillas del Mensabé* (*On the shores of the Mensabé River*), recorded as by an unknown composer (*Nomen nescio*); see 'Retreta', *Estrella de Panamá*, 6 April 1889, 3. Further inquiry on this mazurka may reveal whether the composer was Iturrado, as there are no mentions of other dance pieces from the period with *Mensabé* in the title.

⁵⁰ The *Star and Herald* reported that 'music was performed by the strings from Panama, conducted by our Paganini'. See *Star and Herald*, 15 April 1878, 3.

⁵¹ See 'El Club de Panamá', *Estrella de Panamá*, 25 March 1874, 2; 'Muy lucido quedó el baile', *Star and Herald*, 4 April 1877, 3; and 'The Grand Hotel', *Star and Herald*, 22 June 1878, 2.

⁵² 'Marine Notes', *Star and Herald*, 6 March 1879, 2; 'U.S.S. Lackawanna', *Star and Herald*, 24 February 1879, 2.

⁵³ This considers *El Panameño* (1849–1857) and the *Star and Herald* (1848–present, under different names), the two newspapers which ran in Panama City between Iturrado's first appearance in print through Johnson and his death in 1879.

⁵⁴ 'Compañía Internacional', *Star and Herald*, 10 November 1869, 3.

Respect for Miguel Iturrado and his musical and leadership skills are evidenced here not only from the fact that his musicians were able to play satisfactorily even through a dangerous accident, but also because of the affection with which he is referred to: 'our Maestro'. This, together with the records explored above, suggests that he was considered a symbol of the city, their very own 'legendary' musician.

Not all written sources are entirely flattering, a fact evidenced in an editorial review from Italian singer Luisa Riva de Visoni's recital, where Iturrado was a guest artist, though we are not told of the capacity in which he performed:

Mr. Iturrado played his violin part regularly, taking into consideration the little time he had for rehearsals. Iturrado has a natural disposition and he needs only to study, to work diligently in order to be able to play compositions of merit. Why does he not?⁵⁵

While Garay declares that Iturrado learned to play the violin from Ramón Díaz Del Campo y Soparda, the above review seems to contradict this. It is possible nonetheless that he was started on the instrument by Díaz Del Campo, and then continued to learn on his own.⁵⁶ The review suggests that Iturrado could indeed read music, as he could perform with internationally acclaimed artists with but a few rehearsals. However, it is quite probable that his ability on the instrument favoured the music he performed the most, which consisted primarily of dance music. While it is not clear what the author of the review understands by 'compositions of merit', the context would suggest that they refer to concert music. Apart from accounts of operatic excerpts, sources do not indicate that Iturrado approached standard European violin repertoire or had any formal instruction therein. He focused, rather, on the music which was most on demand in his city's daily soundscape.

Panama's 'Principal Musical Celebrity'

In June of 1879, a Monsieur Bonet, leader of the 'Compañía Atletas de Ambos Mundos', a local troupe of acrobats and variety artists, organized a special charity performance in order to raise funds to cover the costs of Miguel Iturrado's illness. Half of the evening's ticket would be given to Iturrado's family. The 'known Panamanian violinist, Miguel Iturrado (a) Paganini' was enduring 'a long illness'. Mr. Bonet assured the readers of the *Star and Herald* that the show would be 'varied and entertaining', and that he had no doubt that 'the Panamanian public will come *en masse* to remedy the necessities of Mr. Iturrado'.⁵⁷

In spite of these efforts, Miguel Iturrado passed away in the suburb of Santa Ana outside the walls of Panama City, on the night of 25 June 1879. He received a High Cross funeral on the same night at no cost to his family (Figure 2) – an honour reserved for upper clergy and for those who could afford a sung high mass, double bell tolls, four priest accompaniment, coffin, incense, and full ecclesiastical vestments. His obituary was run by the *Star and Herald* on 26 June – in spite of the artist having passed after closing time – and again on July 3. The text is consistent with the esteem shown to Iturrado by both visitors and locals throughout his career, and a celebration of one who embodied the city's pride and identity (Figure 3):

Mr. Miguel Iturrado passed away on the night of the 25th of the current month, after a prolonged illness. With the death of Mr. Iturrado, Panama loses its principal musical celebrity; since without ever leaving Panama, or having studied under any teacher,

⁵⁵ 'Señora de Visoni', *Star and Herald*, 31 July 1869, 3.

⁵⁶ *El Panameño*, 28 November 1852, 1. Ramón Díaz Del Campo y Soparda was the Treasurer of Panama City and a member of the church and city hall music commission for the Independence Day celebrations.

⁵⁷ 'Compañía Atletas de Ambos Mundos', *Star and Herald*, 18 June 1879, 3, and 19 June 1879, 3.

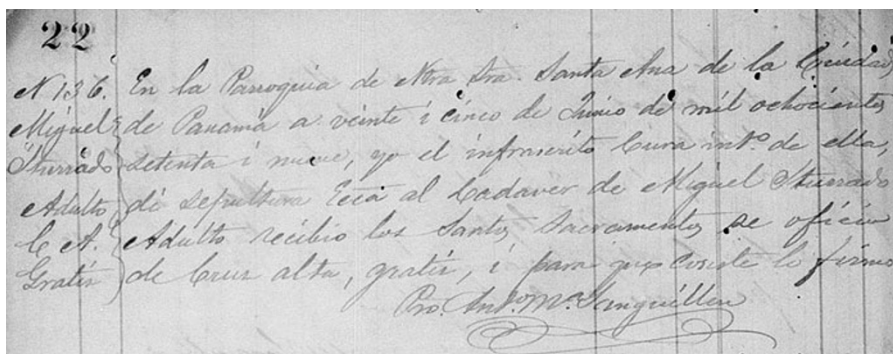


Figure 2. 'In the parish of Our Lady of Santa Ana of Panama City, on the twenty-fifth day of June 1879, the undersigned officiated ecclesiastical burial ceremonies on the body of Miguel Iturrado ... with free high cross' (translation mine), Archive of the Church of Santa Ana Extramuros, burials, July 25, 1879.

he came to acquire such perfection on the violin, which earned him the honourable nickname of *Paganini*. We offer our condolences to his loved ones (Translation mine, emphasis in source).⁵⁸

Iturrado was survived by his wife, María Antonia, and a daughter, Angelina. The impact that Iturrado left on the musical life of Panama may not be easily quantified, but it is possible to extrapolate it through analysis of the surviving music that Panamanians made in subsequent decades and also through study of the musicians who flourished in following generations. I propose that the musical landscape in the early nineteenth century was significantly transformed by the work of Iturrado and his contemporaries, through the development of an active, globally informed, and musically skilled platform based largely on dance music. While the music performed by him and his musicians in many of the instances cited above is European in origin and quite current, creolization of these dances was a widespread phenomenon in the circum-Caribbean, one that Panama certainly embraced.⁵⁹

Although observers such as Johnson or White only mention Iturrado in connection with European-influenced music performances, the violin also functioned as a platform for cultural exchange in rural and suburban context, as suggested by Auger's depiction of a rural funeral. It is quite reasonable to infer from the popularity and esteem ascribed to Miguel Iturrado that his violin could be heard in unreported private affairs – religious and secular – closer to his home in the suburb of Santa Ana and in the immediate hinterland of the city, where the music would have certainly responded to grassroots traditions. Based on the few ethnographic sources we have from the period, these would include a call-and-response

⁵⁸ 'El señor Miguel Iturrado', *Star and Herald*, 26 June 1879, 3.

⁵⁹ See Nanette De Jong, 'An Anatomy of Creolization: Curaçao and the Antillean Waltz', *Latin American Music Review* 24/2 (2003): 233–51; Johannes Riedel, 'The Ecuadorean "Pasillo": "Musica Popular." "Musica Nacional" or "Musica Folklorica"?' *Latin American Music Review* 7/2 (1986): 1–25; and Jocelyne Guibault, 'A St. Lucian "Kwadril" Evening', *Latin American Music Review* 7/1 (1985): 31–57, for regional examples. For more about creolization of European dances and emerging local dance forms in Panama, see Robles, 'Los Sentimientos del Alma', 164–95.

PESAME.

El señor Miguel Iturrado murió en la noche del 25 del corriente, al cabo de una prolongada enfermedad.

Con la muerte del señor Iturrado pierde Panamá su principal celebridad musical; pues sin haber salido de Panamá, ni estudiado con ningún maestro, llegó a adquirir tal perfección en el violín, que le valió el honroso sobrenombre de *Paganini*.

Les damos el pésame a sus deudos.

Figure 3. Obituary for Miguel Iturrado published by the *Daily Star and Herald* on 26 June 1879.

spontaneous communal music called *tamborito*,⁶⁰ *cumbias*, *pasillos*, and creolized versions of European and Caribbean dances.⁶¹

The written record suggests that Miguel Iturrado was a leader within a thriving artistic scene, which, in spite of constant social and political turbulence, continued to grow in activity and quality in order to meet the social demand of an expanding commercial and travel centre. Analysis of this corpus of extant written sources from the period reveals that Iturrado was indeed the protagonist in the construction of a violin-led musical culture in Panama later in the century and beyond – a culture that produced generations of violinists and composers who arguably became themselves the pillars of Panamanian music of the twentieth century, from concert circles to outdoor popular dance venues.

Land of Violinists

The violin continued to be ubiquitous in Panama's musical circles after Iturrado's death. Canadian physician Wolfred Nelson (1846–1913), for instance, recorded in the 1880s how spontaneous dancing accompanied by drums would be enhanced by a violin⁶² in a scene

⁶⁰ Samuel Robles, 'Tambor y Mejorana', *Per Musi* 42 (2022): 1–21, doi:10.35699/2317-6377.2022.40211.

⁶¹ Matilde Obarrio de Mallet, *Sketches of Colonial Life in Panama* (New York: Turgis and Walton, 1915); Belisario Porras, 'El Orejano', *Papel Periódico Ilustrado*, 1 March 1882; Wolfred Nelson, *Five Years at Panama* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1891).

⁶² See Nelson, *Five years at Panama*, 61–2. Nelson wrote that 'if a violin can be secured, that is ecstasy and no mistake' in the context of a common hinterland Friday night celebration. Shortly after, Nelson declares that burials



Figure 4. 'Fiesta Popular en el Hatillo' (c. 1890), photography by Carlos Endara, public domain.

which calls to mind Carlos Endara's famous photograph of ca. 1890, titled 'Fiesta popular en El Hatillo' (Popular party at El Hatillo, Figure 4). Nelson also visited the island of Taboga, by then a popular day-trip destination for the citizens of the capital. 'If a dance was in order' during one such outing, 'native musicians were secured on the island with violins and guitar'.⁶³ There were surely other musical forces flourishing in the city. Military bands performed weekly (and sometimes bi-weekly) outdoor evening concerts in the most frequented public spaces of Panama City.⁶⁴ This created a platform for composers to showcase their creations and also for audiences from across social strata to be acquainted with international orchestral repertoire, arranged for the band.⁶⁵ Although band concerts were becoming a popular way for Panamanians to enjoy a wide variety of music during the 1880s, the violin continued to be a fixture in dance venues and concert halls. I discuss in this section how the violin-led culture built by Iturrado and his contemporaries provided fertile soil for the following generations of violinists. They in turn, played significant roles in the development of concert and dance music scenes in Panama's twentieth century.

Two key indicators help to identify the burgeoning violin culture on the isthmus. The first of these is the increase of opportunities for formal violin instruction on offer in the city as well as in the country. This occurs in the final third of the nineteenth century as demand for players increases in all platforms. Both local and foreign instructors appear. This was true in rural areas as much as in urban centres. As to the former, Chitré native

in Colombia were 'simple and almost in keeping with our own ideas', comparing the ones he witnessed in Panama to a child's funeral cortège he had seen in Guatemala. Yet his description of the Guatemalan burial is strikingly similar to Auger's description from Venta de Cruces cited above. Nelson's observation also contrasts with the afore-cited Bates' account of a child's funeral in Panama in the mid 1850s. It is possible that such traditions had been abandoned by the time of Nelson's arrival for sanitary concerns since, in both cases, the children's bodies were carried uncovered by mourners.

⁶³ Nelson, *Five years at Panama*, 73.

⁶⁴ Charpentier, *La banda republicana*.

⁶⁵ As a notable example, Panamanian composer Roque Cordero (1917–2008), the son of a cobbler, credits these outdoor concerts (or *Retretas*) as the spark that ignited his love for music; see Robles, 'Tambor y Mejorana'.

Cecilio Rodríguez (ca. 1854–1928) took advantage of seminary instruction in order to pursue his violin studies, first in Colombia, then in Europe.⁶⁶ North of Azuero, in Santiago de Veraguas, Dionisio Águila (b. ca. 1860) was a well-respected dance and church violinist at the turn of the century.⁶⁷ Both founded schools in their respective hometowns and were responsible for teaching generations of violinists. Manuel Arias Hidalgo, likely a pupil of Rodríguez as a child, was born in Parita, Azuero (approximately 13 kilometers from Chitré). Arias obtained a scholarship to study violin in Milan at an early age. He became a touring soloist across Europe and the Americas. His musical skills even as a 27-year-old ‘reveal[ed] uncommon gifts’ on the violin.⁶⁸ Arias Hidalgo settled in Santiago, Chile, where he continued to teach until his death.⁶⁹ Other instructors are reported by oral tradition, such as Juan Bautista Gomez (b. 1885),⁷⁰ whose life fell into obscurity but remains alive through legend. His students became the pioneers of the Azuero School, famed performers and composers of thousands of dance pieces during the first third of the twentieth century, now considered a traditional music canon.⁷¹

In the capital city, the arrival of German violinist Arthur Köhpcke allowed for a new generation of young musicians who grew up listening to violins in ballrooms, religious services, and protocolar events to train formally on the instrument. His students included Narciso Garay and Alfredo De Saint Malo, largely considered founding figures of Panamanian concert music of the twentieth century. Garay, who continued studies at the Brussels and Paris Conservatoires, penned several pieces for violin and piano, including the first known violin sonata by a Panamanian. He returned in 1904 to found the first conservatory and symphonic orchestra in the now sovereign country of Panama.⁷² From these platforms, Garay taught several young violinists who would themselves become multiplying agents: Saint Malo, Adriana Orillac (1887–1948),⁷³ Antonio Gáez, Demetrio Brid (b. 1890), Richard Neumann (1883–1957) and Köhpcke’s own son, Hans, to name but a few. Of these, Saint Malo would be the top pupil. Saint Malo toured extensively as soloist throughout the world and had a long-lasting musical partnership with French composer and pianist Maurice Ravel.⁷⁴ Spanish organist and composer Santos Jorge, who served as chapel master at the Cathedral, also had violin students since his arrival in 1889.

A second key indicator of the popularity of the violin may be found in print advertisements starting from the mid-1850s. As early as 1854, La Botica de Santa Ana (Santa Ana Apothecary) advertised violin strings and windings.⁷⁵ The same announcement ran for several years and was joined progressively by the competition. Haaz Hermanos, for example, offered violin strings as well as parts for the guitar in an ad placed adjacently to the Botica’s.⁷⁶ The advertisement of violin parts suggests that the instrument’s reach at least in the capital city and its hinterland was widespread enough by the time of the construction of the railroad to require a running supply from competing businesses. If there were

⁶⁶ José Antonio Vargas, ‘Transición Del Violín al Acordeón’, *Revista Lotería* 447 (2003): 105–18.

⁶⁷ Clotilde Ramos, personal communication, Santiago, Veraguas, Panamá, 26 August 2021.

⁶⁸ ‘Concierto’, *La Estrella de Panamá*, 13 October 1888, 2.

⁶⁹ See Nestor Porcell, ‘Manuel Arias Hidalgo, un talento panameño desconocido’, *Revista Lotería* 222 (1974): 58–60. Although Porcell affirms that Arias’ date of birth is ‘approximately 1863’, baptism records show that Arias Hidalgo was born on 7 August 1861; see ‘Bautizos’, Archivo Parroquial de Santo Domingo de Guzmán de Parita, entry for January 19, 1862.

⁷⁰ ‘Bautizos’, Archivo Parroquial de Pocrí, entry for June 28, 1885.

⁷¹ Evelio Ramírez, personal communication, Purio, Los Santos, Panama, November 19, 2021.

⁷² The National Conservatory of Panama is named after Garay: *Instituto Nacional de Música Narciso Garay*.

⁷³ Orillac also began piano studies with Garay. She later became a distinguished international soloist.

⁷⁴ Eduardo Charpentier Herrera, *Sinfónica, Ópera y Zarzuela En Panamá* (Panama: Litho Impresora Panamá, 1975), 28–35.

⁷⁵ ‘Botica de Santa Ana’, *El Panameño*, October 20, 1954, 3.

⁷⁶ ‘Haaz Hermanos’, *El Panameño*, 30 November 1856, 3.

indeed sufficient violinists for there to be parts on offer, then the generations born from this period onward, such as Cecilio Rodríguez, Manuel Arias Hidalgo, Narciso Garay, Saint Malo, and others, would have certainly grown up in a culture where the violin was heard frequently and whose main performers were well-respected and admired. The care and esteem conferred upon Miguel Iturrado is evidence of this admiration. Availability of parts, the propagation of formal instruction throughout the country, and the subsequent emergence of numerous proficient instrumentalists with international acclaim, show that Panama was becoming a land of violinists toward the *fin-de-siècle*, as a consequence of the cultural platform built by Miguel Iturrado and his contemporaries. A question arises at this point: does Panamanian music from the ensuing generation show any evidence of influence from this platform of cultural exchange?

The Azuero School

The twentieth century brought about dramatic changes for Panama. In 1903, the country parted from Colombia in the aftermath of the French Canal failure and the Thousand Days War, one of the largest civil conflagrations in Colombian history.⁷⁷ As Panamanians attempted to comprehend themselves as a sovereign people, a conscious attempt was made by the governing elite to create a 'romantic' Panama, one that was not connected with Colombia, but which rather emanated from 'ancient' traditions of Panamanian field and mountain dwellers. This entailed a necessary valuation of the cultural artefacts that rural Panamanians produced. Narciso Garay played a central role in this process through the publication of his *Tradiciones y cantares de Panamá* (1930), a book-length ethnographic study which includes several transcriptions of folk music and texts, many of which became models for artists from the cities and canon for succeeding rural artists.⁷⁸

Of particular interest to our current purpose is the repertoire of *pasillos* and *danzones* composed in the Azuero peninsula on the pacific littoral during the first half of the twentieth century, which comprises thousands of pieces. Azuero was linked to the capital by maritime commerce through routes established centuries earlier and which are still used today (Figure 5). The violinists who composed these dances had been taught by some of the emerging instructors from the nineteenth century discussed above: Cecilio Rodríguez, Dionisio Águila, Juan Bautista Gómez, among others. Initially, the many *danzones*, *cumbias* and *pasillos* would be performed in open-air venues and private houses during feast days with a small ensemble comprising of one or two violins, guitar and maracas, and catering to local demand.⁷⁹ Artemio De Jesús Córdova, Francisco 'Chico Purio' Ramírez, Escolástico Cortez, Clímaco Batista and several others produced a large array of dance pieces unified by instrumentation, compositional style, purpose and performance practice. As the popularity of these composers and performers grew, so did their influence on the construction of Azuerense identity.

The previous instrumental dance music considered as traditionally Azuerense, *cumbias* and dance *mejoranas*, was described and copied by Garay in *Tradiciones*. It was also performed on the violin, rabel, or on locally made fiddles and accompanied by guitar, *mejorana*, or

⁷⁷ Aparicio, 'Alcancamos Por Fin La Victoria'.

⁷⁸ I explain this project of resignification in the first decades of the new republic, and how Narciso Garay, among others, played roles in presenting an idealized version of Panamanian identity rooted in the country, linking rural traditions to a 'distant' past in a similar manner as composers such as Alberto Williams did in Argentina, in, Samuel Robles, 'Las transcripciones de Narciso Garay y la construcción de un paisaje musical panameño en el siglo XX', *Fronteiras* 41 (2023): 240–76.

⁷⁹ Evelio Ramírez, personal communication, Purio, Los Santos, Panama, November 19, 2021.

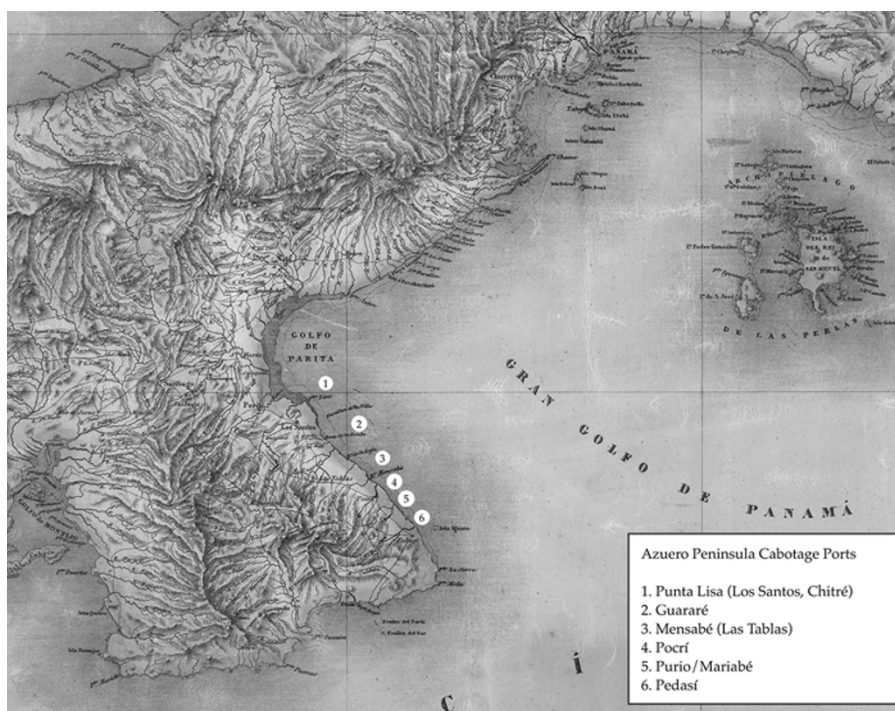


Figure 5. Carta Corográfica del Estado de Panamá (detail), Manuel Ponce De León, 1864, Corographic Commission. Cabotage ports in use throughout the 1800s along the Eastern coast of Azuero peninsula have been indicated by the author. David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford University. Used with permission.



Example 1. Traditional cumbia from Azuero, transcribed by Narciso Garay (*Tradiciones y Cantares de Panamá*, 1930): 198. The melody is repeated for the duration of the dance.

bocona.⁸⁰ Dances were spontaneous and the music features simple melodies and harmonies, with only few exceptions parting from a tonic–dominant oscillation. Traditional *cumbias* relied heavily on short phrases that would be repeated several times with little or no variation (Example 1), while dance *mejoranas* rely on melodic formulas delivered over a stock two- or three-chord progression. Traditional violinists use a bowing technique derived from rabel playing, where at least one string is used as a drone. To facilitate this, bridges are carved flatter than on a classical violin and bows habitually gravitate toward the fingerboard. Bowstrokes are usually a combination of *détaché porté* and *flautando*, except for occasional legato for pairs of notes. Tremolo double stops for dance openings and endings are also customary. The instrument is held low on the shoulder – sometimes even resting on

⁸⁰ The *mejorana* and the *bocona* are cordophones of the lute family made locally in Panama. They are used both in accompanying and melodic roles.

the chest – and the left wrist is turned to support the weight of the violin, the music consequently remains in the first position and makes little use of the fourth finger. There is also little if any vibrato in traditional violin performance. This type of *cumbia* is now only commonly performed in distant rural communities, while the dance *mejorana* is only preserved by a handful of troupes.⁸¹

The repertoire of the Azuero School – which started with the music of Guararé's Artemio de Jesús Córdova – differed from these previous *cumbia* traditions of the Peninsula in four key ways, which I argue were adopted in the region through increased contact with Caribbean and European dances via Panama City and performance styles and instruction in both music theory and classical violin technique. These, I suggest, are the result of the violin culture established in the nineteenth century by Iturrado and his contemporaries. First, dance music became actual compositions, set dances, the structured works of individuals who became themselves known as creators. 'Old *cumbias*', on the other hand, were anonymous and composed of repetitions of formulas as seen in [Example 1](#). Second, composers allowed for an active dialogue to occur with other dance forms of the circum-Caribbean, in opposition to the elite's agenda to consciously build a pure, 'romantic nation', based upon an imagined common link to the rural country. This reveals the desire of composers to connect with the world beyond political boundaries, which I propose is enabled by the global connections established through Miguel Iturrado's musical platform during a critical time of change, social mobility and increased contact with travellers in Panama. Third, dance pieces were now notated, in response to – and perhaps also causing – the new, more complex structures. Notation made them easier to preserve and to spread. Finally, though no less relevant, the unified style traits and performance practice of the repertoire are clearly related to the salon dance tradition and repertoire of nineteenth-century Panama City, with social customs which were derived from formal dance protocol.⁸²

I offer Cordova's *pasillo* *Así soy yo*⁸³ ([Example 2](#)) as an illustration of the above points. Azuero School composers usually notated melody and chords, much like a lead-sheet. While they and other violinists read music, guitarists usually did not, so they were free to develop accompanying figures based on their own previous experience and the requirements of the style at hand. I have incorporated a realization of the guitar accompaniment for this example, based on common *pasillo* practice, in order to show the reader the resulting structure and musical interaction in the style. Far from being an anonymous formula used for spontaneous dancing, Cordova's music forms a planned structure usually responding to nineteenth-century set dances intended for planned social events. The sectional structure often features period phrases and is certainly intended as an authored composition. The *pasillo*, a creolized version of the waltz popular across the circum-Caribbean, is a prime example of the mapping of musical traits from European dance forms to new local ones.

The sectional form, as is the case with set dances, helps dancers orient in the steps. The trio in the parallel major, a common feature in Azuero compositions, provides variety in intensity and in character. A similar transport of sectional structure, melodic design and harmonic complexity occurs in the development of other circum-Caribbean dances, such

⁸¹ I have observed these *cumbia* practices in mountainous regions of Azuero such as Los Pozos and Macaracas, as well as in the Cordillera Central (central mountain range) in the north of Coclé Province, particularly in the towns of Pajonal, El Águila and San Miguel, to name a few. Dance *mejorana* is practiced for special occasions in the mountainous region of Veraguas. The music is taught orally and reflects Garay's observations from his 1930 publication (see Garay, *Tradiciones y Cantares*).

⁸² Celia Moreno de Arosemena, *Remembranzas de La Villa de Los Santos* (Panama: Universidad de Panamá, 2004).

⁸³ The only surviving autograph of *Así soy yo* is in the private collection of Córdova's family. Composition date is not known, though the style is consistent with the repertoire he produced in the 1920s and 1930s.

Example 2. *Así soy yo*, pasillo by Artemio de Jesús Córdova. Reproduced with permission from the Córdova-Segstán family, guitar accompaniment realization by the author.

as the *danzon*, which in Azuero became the *danzon cumbia*.⁸⁴ Since Azuero School melodies are composed by classically trained violinists, they will usually involve third, fourth and fifth position shifting as in the trio of *Así soy yo*. Bowing is also quite more diverse, requiring several techniques and providing diversity of tone in order to perform richer phrasing. An Azuero-style violinist may play the four slurred quavers in bar 37 using legato bowing, but the same player might also use *portato* for variety in a repetition. In spite of leveraging the use of multiple bow strokes, Azuero-style violinists will also resort to styles typical of the 'old *cumbia*' practice, such as *sul tasto* bowing, *détaché* and double-stop drones. While the new melodic, rhythmic and harmonic complexity dictates that the music be written down for ease of transmission and teaching, players will certainly contribute stylistic elements from traditional *cumbia* playing as well as from their classical training in order to enrich their performances.

The use of these traits made the music interesting and memorable for dancers and listening audiences, for whom Caribbean and European set dances were very much still a part

⁸⁴ The pre-history and development of the *danzon* has been studied by Madrid and Moore, Malcomson, and Manuel, among others. While key rhythmic aspects have become clear markers of modern *danzon*, elements from set dances such as the *contradanza* are audible evidence of their culturally diverse past. See Hettie Malcomson, 'The Routes and Roots of Danzón: A Critique of the History of a Genre,' *Popular Music* 31/2 (2011): 263–78; Peter Manuel, *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009); and Alejandro Madrid and Robin Moore, *Danzón: Circum-Caribbean Dialogues in Music and Dance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). For a discussion on Panamanian *danzon-cumbia*, see Robles, 'Los Sentimientos del Alma'.

of their social life until the first decades of the twentieth century. Azuero School creators and performers became esteemed public figures and, quite often, local legends.⁸⁵ This, I suggest, cemented the *cumbias*, *danzones* and *pasillos* of the Azuero School first into local consciousness, then into national identity, as can be seen in rural celebrations of today and even in the music of modern popular artists.⁸⁶ We have seen how a solid dance music platform was developed throughout the nineteenth century with Miguel Iturrado at the forefront. The popularity of the violin resulted in the flourishing of formal instruction in urban and rural settings, several newly trained violinists soon followed. This, as evidenced by the appearance of violinists-composers such as Córdova, Ramírez, Batista, and Cortez, carried particular strength in the Azuero peninsula.

I propose that the vast repertoire by Azuero School composers in the first third of the twentieth century is a consequence of the active, culturally diverse, and globally connected musical landscape led by Iturrado since he first appears on stages in the mid-1800s. The global network of which Panama's ports were important nodes, which influenced the repertoire Iturrado performed and was acknowledged by those who witnessed it, enabled the next generation of violinists-composers to incorporate elements from several musical traditions practiced in Europe and in the circum-Caribbean, linked first by commerce and tourism and later by radio broadcasts.⁸⁷ Salon dance styles and their accompanying protocol flowed through maritime connections to the port towns of rural Azuero, where the music found fertile soil in the hands of young, resourceful, and aptly trained violinists. These artists saw an opportunity to create music to satisfy the new local demand for original salon-style dances. The new *danzones*, *pasillos* and *cumbias*, based on European dance harmonies of the waltz, polkas, mazurkas, and redowas performed in Panama by Iturrado and his contemporaries were now imbued with local performance practice and traits from circum-Caribbean dance forms which continuously arrived to Azuero by sea and then through airwaves. The effort soon developed into a massive corpus of dance music which, in a short time, became engrained into Azuerense and Panamanian consciousness.

Today, the violin is still considered a 'truly Panamanian' instrument. Musicologist Gonzalo Brenes featured it in his treatise on folk instruments, *Los instrumentos de la etnomúsica de Panamá*.⁸⁸ Several conservation strategies have flourished in order to preserve traditional violin dance repertoires and their respective performance styles. Festivals celebrate the violin, competitions honouring Azuero School composers abound. The Panamanian music composed for the instrument in the generation after Iturrado's death continues to be frequently performed and reinterpreted by popular dance groups and concert composers. Panamanians have, however, largely forgotten about Miguel Iturrado and some of his immediate successors, aside from isolated mentions as discussed here. They –

⁸⁵ Several violin competitions are still held today with the names of Azuero School violinists, the main ones being the Clímaco Batista competition in Las Tablas, the Colaco Cortez competition in Guararé and the Chico Purio competition in Pedasí, all concurrent with the local Patron Saint festivities. Along with preserving the repertoire, competitions are a platform for communicating audiences and young performers biographical and anecdotal details of the composers. In so doing, they contribute to the making of a tradition, in which these composers are often seen as legendary figures whose lives dance between reality and myth.

⁸⁶ Several compositions of Azuero School composers continue to be reinterpreted through performance and recordings into today. Clear examples are the recordings of Francisco Ramírez's *Los Sentimientos del Alma*, an Azuerense danzón which is discussed by Samuel Robles (See Robles 'Los Sentimientos del Alma').

⁸⁷ Recording and Radio not only enabled Caribbean music practices to directly influence composers in rural Panama, it also allowed for Panamanian products of musical hybridity to be exported to other cultural centres in the basin, such as Cartagena and Mexico. See Peter Wade, *Música, raza y nación: música tropical en Colombia* (Bogotá: Vicepresidencia de la República de Colombia, 2002) and Robles, 'Los Sentimientos del Alma'.

⁸⁸ See Gonzalo Brenes, *Los Instrumentos de La Etnomúsica de Panamá* (Panama: Autoridad del Canal de Panamá, 1999). Brenes originally presented this material at the first Interamerican Ethnomusicology Conference in Cartagena, Colombia, 1963.

Antonio Gáez, Juan Bautista Gómez, Cecilio Rodríguez, Dionisio Águila, and several others – can be credited with building the platform upon which much of the Panamanian music of today rests. Panamanian violin repertoire and performers become, then, quite a relevant avenue for future research, one which I am committed to pursuing and encouraging.

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