
Juan Pablo González Rodríguez (2013)

Pensar la música desde América Latina

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Reviewed by Sarah Booker

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Much of current musicological scholarship is producing compelling, regionally based studies of musical trends. In his recent work *Pensar la música desde América Latina*, Juan Pablo González Rodríguez also takes a regional approach to Latin American musicology, examining twentieth-century Chilean music. The emphasis in this noteworthy work, however, is not to add to the growing corpus of Chilean music studies, but to call for a shift in the way that critics approach Latin American music. He promotes musicology but argues that when using a discipline developed in reference to European and North American music, the critic must do so with an understanding of the unique context of Latin America, a region where the tension and flow between erudite and popular culture is central to musical production.

Basing his argument on textual analysis, historical research, and involvement in the Latin American music community, González's book is a compilation of previously published and presented essays. While such a format can at times read as repetitive or disjointed, the overall

effect allows for a thorough analysis of recent criticism. The first half of the work offers an historical overview of relevant criticism, looking at the fields of musicology, academic criticism in Latin America, Postcolonialism, and popular music studies. In the second half of the book, the author offers several examples that focus on specific songs or cultural trends and that are meant to be exemplary of the approaches outlined in the first half of the book. Musicology studies should not be done from an exclusively literary or sociological perspective, but rather should have a more inclusive approach that takes into account the technical elements as well as the socio-political context, connecting linguistics, ethnography, sociology, and musicology (108).

The first four chapters—"Musicología y América Latina," "La revuelta multidisciplinar," "Escucha poscolonial," and "Los estudios en música popular"—can be considered as a cohesive unit. Scholarly work on Latin American music, the author points out, has traditionally focused on the dichotomies of the local/

regional and national/transnational and has been produced almost exclusively in Latin America. The problem he signals is that such an approach often results in the erasure of swaths of cultural productions, thus negating the heterogeneous nature of the region. Promoting the concept of Postcolonial listening, he validates the study of Latin American music as a way of understanding colonial tensions in Latin America. Maintaining his Postcolonial approach in the fourth chapter, González cleverly examines the academic focus on popular music in Latin America by considering past IASPM-AL conferences and their themes. He notes the strong presence of work on Tango, Rock, Samba, Rap, Chilean Nueva Canción, etc. and the ways in which such genres express and create national identity.

The following chapter, “De la canción-objeto a la canción-proceso,” serves to connect the two parts of the book. He begins by again examining the study of music in Latin America, arguing that the majority of such studies are from either a literary or sociological perspective, but, due to a lack of an interdisciplinary approach, they are unable to take into account the performance element or the evolution of orally transmitted texts. Over the course of the chapter, González thus introduces his proposed approach to the study of music: a song should not be considered as an isolated object, he argues, but rather a highly contextualized, evolving process.

Beginning with an examination of the transnational proliferation of a single song,

the remainder of *Pensar* is an analysis of Chilean music. In “Originales múltiples,” González examines the international circulation and evolution of *La marcianita*, originally composed in 1959 in Chile. His discussion highlights the tensions between Jazz and Rock and Roll as representative of generational tensions. Looking at seven renditions of the song, the author argues that while the song itself is the same, the multiple versions each have their own socio-political context, implying multiple originals. This is by far González’s strongest analysis of music that appears in the book; in it he most clearly demonstrates the interdisciplinary and transnational approach that he argues for in the earlier chapters of the book. His analysis combines a socio-political context with a highly technical—but readable—analysis of the music.

González dedicates three chapters to what he calls the Chilean musical avant-garde. In the first of the three, “Tradición, modernidad y vanguardia,” the author notes a significant shift in Chilean music in the 1950s and 60s in which the lines between high culture imported from Europe, popular, and national music begins to blur. He notes experimentation in form just as much in classical as in popular music, citing Nueva Canción for the way that it brings the folkloric to popular culture. Using *Los Jaivas* as his primary example in “Vanguardia primitiva,” González goes on to further discuss the intersection of North American-inspired Rock and Roll, Psychedelic Rock and the indigenous roots of the country. While the

overall structure of this chapter is strong, his use of the term “primitive” to refer to indigenous influences is questionable. The author concludes his discussion of Chilean avant-garde music by looking at the ways that popular art forms, such as music or theater, became vehicles of resistance to controversial political situations in his chapter, “Contracultura de masas.” He focuses on the space between high and low culture, noting the politics of inclusion and exclusion that arise in such musical fusions.

Three additional chapters, “La mujer sube a la escena,” “Raíces y globalización,” and “Construcción sonora de la nación” compose the remainder of González’s analysis. The first addresses the role of women in Chilean music while the second examines the global network in which Chilean music is located and the subsequent implications that this has on folkloric music. Considering the international conceptualization of Chile, González concludes his book with a discussion of Chilean composers, the canon and the sonic construction of national identity through music in “Construcción sonora de la nación.” While this concluding chapter addresses questions of national identity raised throughout his study, the book lacks a clear conclusion.

This is not a book that focuses on applying theories to Latin American music, but rather a text meant to reconsider and suggest critical approaches to the study of music in Latin America. González goes on to use Chilean music as an example

of Latin American music, thus providing a model for his proposed methods. In consideration of this objective, the author is highly successful. González’s writing is approachable and exhibits a depth of knowledge, though at times his analysis can read more like an inventory of critics or artists, which leaves the reader wishing for more analytic depth amid the overview of prevailing trends. This innovative book will appeal to critics studying Latin American music as well as general Latin American scholars looking for a fresh approach to their field of study.