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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Experimental Music: Reimagining Roots, Identity and Singing

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts

in

Contemporary Music Performance

by

Mariana Flores Bucio

Committee in charge:

Professor Susan Narucki, Chair
Professor Amy Cimini
Professor Victoria Petrovich
Professor Wilfrido Terrazas Perez

2025

The Dissertation of Mariana Flores Bucio is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2025

DEDICATION

To my husband and daughter
—Miguel and Eleonor, the loves of my life—
for being my home, my strength, and my inspiration;
for giving me the will to believe, and filling my days with love, tenderness, and joy.

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VITA

- 2019 Bachelor in Music, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California
- 2021 Master of Arts in Music, University of California San Diego
- 2025 Doctor of Musical Arts in Contemporary Music Performance, University of California San Diego

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Mexperimental Music: Reimagining Roots, Identity and Singing

by

Mariana Flores Bucio

Doctor of Musical Arts in Contemporary Music Performance

University of California San Diego, 2025

Professor Susan Narucki, Chair

Mexperimental Music: Reimagining Roots, Identity and Singing is a creative research project that was born from the need to explore the ongoing question "Who am I?" and the desire to research and express my identity. Within a context of experimentation, improvisation, and composition of arrangements – and as a process led by intention, care, respect, historical

awareness, and acceptance – the project engages with Mexican traditional musics that had been my companions since childhood through my family’s musical heritage. These musics include *ranchera* song, *modern mariachi*, *bolero*, *son jarocho*, *son istmeño*, *son de artesa*, and *corrido*, and have become strong references for my musical taste, vocal techniques, and expressive idioms. In this paper I aim to share the motives behind this project and the creative process, as well as the challenges I faced while creating the experimental arrangements that composed the *Mexperimental Music* concert performed on April 6th, 2025.

INTRODUCTION

Mexperimental Music: Reimagining Roots, Identity and Singing is a project that emerges from my six years journey at UC San Diego. It is an exploration of the ongoing question: "Who am I?" and an expression of my personal identity under constant discovery and transformation.

Born in Mexico, I identify as Mexican. Yet, being part of a country as vast and culturally diverse as Mexico makes understanding Mexicanness—or Mexican identity—a complex journey. Chavela Vargas, a Costa Rican-born singer once said, "Los mexicanos nacemos donde nos da la chingada gana" ("Mexicans are born wherever the hell we please"). This statement, although very informal, is incredibly powerful, as it expresses how identity – in this case Mexican identity – is both malleable and intentional, honoring the agency behind how it's lived. I believe Mexican identity is something learned, chosen, and shared, not necessarily in this order, and is an ongoing concept in transformation.

Since childhood, I have sung Mexican traditional music shaped by the nationalism that influenced Mexico during my grandfather's youth, a repertoire deeply rooted in my family musical tradition. This repertoire has profoundly contributed to shaping my musical taste and practice. Through the years, I have been exposed to a wide range of music genres, from *Latin genres, pop, rock, jazz, and electronic music* among others, through mass media and my borderland context (Tijuana and Ensenada), together with *classical music and experimental music* through educational contexts.

Inspired by the creative UC San Diego Music Department Community, and as a deep personal response to the questions "Who am I?" and "What resonates most with my identity?", I started developing what I called *Experimental Mexican Traditional Music*, or *Mexperimental*.

This project explores traditional musics from diverse cultures of Mexico and offers an opportunity to push the boundaries of how they are performed and experienced. By placing these musics in dialogue with experimental musical idioms—and by exploring the varied colors my voice can produce to transition between styles—*Mexperimental* seeks to reimagine their sound, the ways they resonate with those who engage with them, and the expressive possibilities of my own singing.

For my Doctoral of Musical Arts final concert, I chose to create and perform experimental arrangements of a selection of my favorite songs from diverse Mexican cultures: *Son de Artesa*, *Son Jarocho*, *Son Istmeño*, *Bolero*, *Ranchera*, and *Modern Mariachi*. Additionally, I ventured into composition by creating an experimental *corrido* inspired by the life of my grandfather, Cuco, and writing an introductory *décimas*, a traditional poetic form.

The arrangements for this concert emerged from a year-long creative journey, shaped through musical workshops with my collaborators. While I, Mariana Flores, provided the structure and initial musical ideas to explore each song, the final arrangements are the result of a collective creative process, with a significant amount of improvisation, reflecting the unique contributions of everyone involved. I'm deeply grateful for their creativity and dedication, which brought these pieces truly to life.

In this paper, I share a bit of my family history as a way of shaping my exploration of identity. I also provide context and background information about the musical traditions I explored throughout the project, followed by a detailed description of my creative process in developing *Mexperimental Music: Reimagining Roots, Identity, and Singing*. Finally, I reflect on the process and outcome and outline my aspirations for carrying this project forward.

Chapter 1 INHERITED MEMORIES, STORIES AND SHAPING MY IDENTITY

Many of my earliest childhood memories involve singing—either accompanied by my dad or listening to my family sing together. I grew up surrounded by the shared joy of music. It was common for my grandfather to pick up the guitar and lead us all into song—from humorous corridos like *Juan Charrasqueado*, where he made us repeat the line “*sin calzones, sin calzones, sin calzones*” (without underwear, without underwear, without underwear) between verses, to the passionate songs of José Alfredo Jiménez, one of his idols and a legendary figure in Mexican ranchera music. These memories deeply shaped my sense of identity.

My grandfather Cuco loves to tell stories about his life, and I deeply enjoy hearing and imagining every detail he shares. He tells them with pride, and through his words I feel how important those experiences have been in shaping our family’s collective identity.

What follows is a series of stories—of my grandfather’s life, my family, and myself—woven into a single narrative that highlights the key moments I believe have shaped my personal identity up to this point.

My paternal grandfather, Cuco, was born in 1942 in Juchipila, a municipality in Zacatecas, central Mexico. When he was five years old, he moved with his parents and siblings to Mexicali in search of better job opportunities. Upon arrival, the family found work as cotton pickers in the surrounding fields.

At just six years old, my grandfather began working alongside his family. Their days started early, leaving at 5:00 a.m. and working until 5:00 p.m. It was exhausting labor. To make the hours pass more pleasantly, the cotton pickers would sing as they worked. My grandfather recalls that they mostly sang *corridos* and *rancheras*, the musica genres most often heard on the radio at the time. He often mentions that his mother, my Nana (great-grand mother) Luisa, had a

beautiful voice and loved to sing. When my grandpa tells this story, I immediately feel an empathetic connection to the need to sing, and a special bond with the repertoire he recalls.

Years later, while he was still picking cotton and singing in the fields, the man responsible for weighing the cotton sacks said to him, “Hey, Cuco, you sing well. How about we form a trio?” The man also sang and played guitar. My grandfather agreed. He began attending primary school in the mornings, working in the fields in the afternoons, and performing in a trio at bars in the evenings to help support his family financially.

My grandfather built a vast repertoire by performing with the trio across a wide range of musical genres—*modern mariachi*, *son jarocho*, *son istmeño*, *bolero*, *corridos*, and *rancheras*. He learned many of these styles by ear, listening closely to the radio at a time when the Mexican government actively promoted such genres as part of a broader effort to shape a unified national identity throughout the 20th century (Moreno, Y. 1989; Jáuregui, J. 2012; Flores, M. 2021). From that moment on, he fell in love with music and never stopped singing or playing.

My grandfather has dedicated his entire life to music and teaching. He studied to become a teacher, specializing in art education, and went on to teach many generations of children to sing and play guitar and mandolin. Over the years, he also founded important *rondallas*¹, first in Mexicali and later in Ensenada after moving there in 1990.

For him, music was never just a profession—it was a way of living in community, a source of expression, and nourishment for the soul. He passed on these values, along with his musical knowledge, to his students and family with great care. He taught his children to sing the

¹ “In contemporary Mexico the term *rondalla* typically refers to an all-male chorus who accompany themselves with guitars [...] The origins of such groups, [...] are claimed to date back to the Spanish *tunas* and their antecedents in the Spanish colonial period” (Rockell, 201) Nowadays, there are mixed or all-female *rodallas* as well.

repertoire he had learned in his youth, and as they became parents themselves, that knowledge continued to pass, preserving and expanding our family's musical heritage.

I was born into the third generation of singers in my family. My grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins all sang *ranchera music*, *boleros*, *sones*, *modern mariachi* and many of the same repertoire my grandfather carried forward. Surrounded by this musical environment— and with the devoted support of my father, and his own creative musical spirit—it felt both natural and inevitable for me to integrate myself into the vibrant musical tradition my grandfather had cultivated.

What began as a family activity gradually transformed into my professional path. Alongside my work as a solo singer specializing in various forms of Mexican Traditional Music – always coached by my father –, I began formal classical training at the age of eighteen to pursue a degree in Music with an emphasis on Bel Canto at the Autonomous University of Baja California in Ensenada. It was an entirely new musical world for me. At first, the contrast in style and vocal register felt unfamiliar—strange, and even a little funny. But over time, I became more comfortable using my head voice and gained greater control over my instrument. I fell in love with the process of discovering not only a vast new musical context, but also new aspects of my own voice.

Between 2013 and 2019, while earning my degree, I was introduced to contemporary, improvised, and experimental vocal music through different workshops in Ensenada and Tecate, Baja California. These included the Experimental Voice workshop led by Carmina Escobar during the International Festival Canto entre Piedras (FIBEP) 2015; an improvisation workshop led by Wilfrido Terrazas as part of the V Semana de Improvisación La Covacha in 2018; the Contemporary Music Ensemble class led by Álvaro Díaz at UABC in the same year; and the

improvisation workshop led by Ana Isma Viel at UABC. I fell in love all over again—with the realization that there was still so much to discover. I was captivated by the sonic possibilities of contemporary music, and I knew I wanted to follow that path.

The accumulation of these experiences—the power of storytelling and the inspiring communal memories of my family—has formed the foundation of my personal identity, one that continued to evolve during my years at UC San Diego and will keep transforming.

THE QUESTION “WHO I AM?”

As I mentioned earlier, musical nationalism shaped the cultural and musical environment of my grandfather’s youth, influencing the repertoire that became central to my family’s identity. In what follows, I offer a brief insight into nationalism, the questions I’ve faced while engaging with the topic, and the ways it has challenged and shaped my sense of identity.

First of all, I want to offer a few lines that express the complex and diverse cultural identities Mexico conveys, and the impossibility of unifying such a vast, large, and diverse territory under a single identity.

The three original roots of Mexico—Native American, European, and African—are not a mixture that produced a homogeneous culture, but rather distinct cultural strands, intertwined in different proportions throughout the vast Mexican territory. At the same time, these different cultural identities contribute and enter into dialogue, sharing what is theirs and receiving what is foreign. This results in personal multi-identity among community members, based on diverse cultural identities rather than fixed and separated ones (Ramos, V.H. 2003). These statements break the nationalist Mexican imaginary and the myth of a homogeneous mestizo country.

Curiously, it wasn't until I arrived at UC San Diego in 2019 that I learned about Mexican nationalism and the influence of Mexican radio on Latin American and world music—even though these significant events in Mexican history had deeply permeated my own life and that of my family.

I'm deeply grateful to Wilfrido Terrazas for his enlightening class on Mexican music, and to Juan Rubio for his class on Latin American music. Through these experiences, I learned that Mexico is a multicultural country—not the culturally homogeneous nation often portrayed by nationalism through mass media and education. I came to understand that the traditional genres I was familiar with, such as mariachi and trio music, actually originate from distinct regions, each with their own sounds, instruments, and cultural expressions.

The cultural nationalist movement promoted the music, dance, clothing, and traditions of diverse regional cultures across Mexico in an effort to homogenize the identity of the entire nation (Moreno, 1989). Although it began before my grandfather was born, the movement gained strength during his childhood and youth. In the years that followed, it continued to shape the cultural life and identity of the next generations.

I found myself in the complex position of being born Mexican, from a borderland, singing repertoire with a historical and cultural origin far from my immediate reality. I was a Mexican who believed her identity was firmly defined since childhood, only to realize it was largely shaped by a political agenda that aimed to homogenize an entire nation. These ideas deeply conflicted me.

How does this cultural diversity manifest in Ensenada, my hometown, and specifically within my own family? I've asked myself many times: now that I understand the traditional origins of the Mexican music I sing—those songs that once felt intrinsically mine—can I still

claim them as part of my identity? At the same time, living in a border city shaped by cultural exchange beyond Mexican territory has deeply permeated my life.

As I mentioned earlier, my personal journey as a musician has been shaped by diverse influences. At one point, I saw these influences as separate threads representing different stages of my life—some even disconnected from my Mexican identity. A few years ago, I came across an article by Víctor H. Ramos titled *Does a Latin American Identity Exist? Myths, Realities, and the Versatile Persistence of Our Continental Being*. In it, Ramos argues that Latin American identity is rooted in a shared history and ancestral civilizations, nourished by common struggles and cultural paradigms. He describes Latin identity as an ideological commitment—a bridge that enables dialogue between different civilizations and cultures. (Ramos, V.H., 2003)

Ramos also discusses the concept of personal and social pluridentity among Latin Americans: a continuously evolving sense of self shaped by constant cultural exchange. The individual is never static. (Ramos, V.H., 2003)

The characteristics Ramos attributes to Latin America are clearly visible within Mexican territory. Mexico's multiculturalism fosters a dynamic pluridentity in its people, which makes Mexican identity complex and constantly changing. This article brought clarity to my understanding of who I am as a Mexican and how I express that identity through music.

While I am aware of the negative consequences of the Mexican nationalist movement, I approach it with reflection rather than rejection. We cannot undo the past, nor should we attempt to erase it; instead, we must accept, acknowledge it, and engage with critical conversations with it. Although I may not feel aligned with the goals of the nationalist movement, I recognize that it shaped entire generations. It became their lived reality, deeply influencing their personal and

cultural identities—identities that were passed down through generations and now form part of the foundation of who we are today. My family’s history is a clear example of this.

That is why my musical exploration approach is always led by intention, care, respect, historic awareness, the acceptance of the past, and the continuous exploration of the present. I bring back Chavela Vargas, the Mexican by choice, to take her as inspiration and say: I choose to celebrate and share my complex Mexican identity. I follow the need to continue sharing my Mexican music, mine because it was inherited. And just as naturally, in a multicultural context, my Mexican identity continues to transform. I am interested in expressing those changes through my music, very personal changes because every Mexican's life is different, even though we share common history and paradigms.

THE TRADITIONS EXPLORED IN THIS PROJECT

For the *Mexperimental Music* project, I chose to explore a selection of my favorite songs from diverse Mexican cultures: *Son de Artesa*, *Son Jarocho*, *Son Istmeño*, *Bolero*, *Ranchera*, and *Modern Mariachi*. I approached this repertoire from a place of deep connection and familiarity, using it as a comfortable foundation from which to depart.

In addition to these musical traditions, I ventured into composition by creating an experimental corrido inspired by the life of my grandfather, Cuco, and by writing an introductory *décima*, a traditional poetic form.

In this section I will share a brief description of each tradition I explored, together with an insight of the specific musical pieces I chose.

Décimas:

Décimas are rhymed verses that arrived in the Caribbean and the eastern coasts of Mexico from Spain. The name "décimas" comes from the word "diez"-ten-, as it consists of ten lines with the rhyme scheme "abbaaccddc," with the last syllable of each line rhyming. This form of poetry deeply rooted itself and became an essential expressive form in various traditions of Mexico, particularly in coastal areas such as Tamaulipas, Veracruz, and Yucatán, as well as in some western regions like Michoacán and Jalisco. (Rodriguez, A. 2022)

Son de Artesa:

The *artesa* is a wooden platform on which couples dance, commonly barefoot, during *fundangos*. This *son* originates from the Costa Chica region of Mexico, along the Pacific coast between Guerrero and Oaxaca. The *Son de Artesa* is an Afro-Mexican tradition that fell out of practice in the mid-20th century and was at risk of disappearing entirely. Three decades later, it resurfaced thanks to two institutional efforts aimed at its revival (Ruiz, C. 2018).

The musical characteristics of *Son de Artesa* are similar to those of other *sones* from different regions: string instruments and percussion accompany rhythms that alternate between 3/4 and 6/8 meter. The instrumental ensemble associated to *Artesa* included two or more of the following instruments: *cajón*, *tambor*, *violin*, *bajo quinto*, *guacharrasca* and *jarana* (Ruiz, 2018). I chose *Arenita Azul* because of its tender and symbolic lyrics about identity. The lyrics describe blue grains of sand discovered after a rainy night. The singer asks this sand of a different color, "Are you Cuban?" The sand replies, "No." The singer then asks, "Are you from Veracruz?" and again, the sand says, "No." The final question is, "What do you want to be?"—to which the little grain of sand replies, "I am a butterfly."

Son Jarocho: “*La Bruja*” and “*El Coco*”:

The following *sones* belong to the *jarocho* tradition from southern Veracruz. As mentioned earlier, they share some musical characteristics with the *Son de Artesa*, but there are notable differences. The primary string instruments in this tradition are *jaranas* of various sizes and the *leona*, which is larger and plays bass lines. Dancers in the *Son Jarocho* tradition perform *zapateado* wearing shoes and dance on a *tarima* (wooden platform), unlike the common barefoot dancing on the *cajón* in *Son de Artesa*. Other instruments commonly used include the *marimbol*, the *cajón* and *quijada de burro* – a percussion instrument played by striking the dried jawbone of a donkey, creating a rattling sound from the teeth (Sturman, J. 2015).

Each *Son Jarocho* consists of a melodic line, call-and-response structures, and a general thematic frame, though this is not always strictly followed. Typically, verses are sung to a repeating melody, but the *versador* or *pregonero* (lead singer) is free to compose their own verses and improvise melodies. One singer might introduce a verse, and another responds—sometimes repeating it faithfully, or echoing it with melodic variation (Kohl 2014, Sturman, J. 2015). Most of this information I learned for the first time through oral tradition and direct participation in performance that involved *Son Jarocho*, collaborating with members of the *jaranera* community².

² I have had the pleasure of collaborating with various *jaraneros* on different projects. One notable example is my work with the *Tequio Jarocho group*, especially its leader, Jorge Castillo—who is also the founder of the international festival *Fandango Fronterizo*. Our collaboration took place during my concert *Morena del Alma*, held in September 2019 at CECUT Tijuana. Another example of my learning through oral tradition includes several meaningful exchanges with Marcoz López, leader of the Pajaro Pinto Jarocho group in 2020.

Son Istmeño: La Martiniana:

I chose the famous Son Istmeño from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca: La Martiniana, to start the low energy section. As it speaks of death, it is a son that is often associated with the Day of the Dead. The Son Istmeño, except for the instruments, shares the same musical characteristics as the other sones. The Son Istmeño is traditionally performed by wind bands or accompanied by guitars. Another important instrument in the Isthmus tradition is the marimba, and it can be played by multiple marimba players on the same instrument simultaneously. (Sturman, J. 2015)

Bolero:

Bolero is a romantic genre that speaks directly to the heart. Although it originated in Cuba, it found fertile ground in Mexico, especially in places like Mérida, Yucatán, due their geographic closeness and its commercial close relationship. The *bolero* traveled through theater companies, musicians, and printed scores, blending naturally with other Caribbean rhythms such as the Colombian *bambuco* and Cuban *habanera*. Together, these styles helped shape the repertoire of the *trova yucateca* (Madrid 2013).

In Mexico, *bolero* took on a distinct sensibility. Its lyrics are often bold and passionate, full of longing and vulnerability—words that dare to speak the most intense emotions yet do so with elegance and restraint (Pireda 2017). Over time, it was performed in a wide variety of formats: from intimate guitar duets to elaborate orchestral arrangements. The 1950s saw the rise of the *trío romántico*, a formation made famous by Los Panchos after their success in New York in 1948, where layered vocal harmonies and lyrical delivery became central to the genre's identity (Madrid 2013).

Bolero's expressive potential also made it adaptable. During the first half of the 20th century, it was arranged for mariachi alongside other traditional genres like *ranchera*, *corridos*, and *huapango*, becoming part of the soundscape broadcast across Mexico by mass media (Jáuregui 2012). Later, orchestral boleros reflected urban sophistication, weaving in elements of jazz, U.S. big band, and classical harmony to create something lush and cinematic (Tapia 2007; Madrid 2013).

Canción ranchera:

Consolidated in the 1940s, the *canción ranchera* is a musical genre intended to evoke rural Mexican identity. After the Mexican Revolution, it gained strength as a nationalistic effort to foster devotion and loyalty to the nation by institutionalizing the figure of the *charro cantor* – Charro singer – through mass media. José Alfredo Jiménez, singer and composer, played a key role in shaping this *ranchero* discourse. (Jáuregui, 2012; Díaz-Santana Garza, 2025)

Typically accompanied by guitars as the leading instrument or mariachi ensembles, its melodies in $\frac{3}{4}$ time signature are often simple, allowing the lyrics—and the singer's voice—to carry the emotional weight. Themes such as love, heartbreak, longing, and pride dominate the genre, often from a male perspective, conveyed through dramatic vocal ornamentation like glissandos, rallentando, wide vibrato, and a lamenting timbre (Jáuregui, 2012; Díaz-Santana Garza, 2025) Gesture, gaze, breath, and phrasing become essential tools for storytelling. (Broyles-González, 2025).

The song I chose to explore is “Amanecí otra vez” by José Alfredo Jiménez, one of Mexico's most iconic ranchera composers. Canción ranchera gained widespread visibility through *comedia ranchera* films and radio broadcasts during the early 20th century (Broyles-González, 2025). At that time, cinema and radio worked hand in hand, and film plots often

revolved around musical performances. Archetypal characters—such as the heartbroken, drunken charro, the charming romantic lead, or the proud hero giving a serenade—regularly performed rancheras on the scenes (Moreno, 1989). Alfredo Jiménez himself appeared in several films, contributing not only his voice but his persona to the genre’s mythos.

Corrido:

The *corrido* is a musical, literary, and social expression that focuses mainly on the lyrics and is typically accompanied by one or two guitars, and in some cases a guitar with one or two other instruments. Its earliest records date back to the 19th but its most productive period was between 1910 and 1930 during and after the Mexican Revolution. (Alviso, 2011)

As a form of narrative expression, the *corrido* remains relevant today; it tell stories. Some corridos narrate the lives of presidents, military figures, and politicians – such as *El Corrido of Don Venustiano Carranza* or *General Pancho Villa* – while others are about everyday stories that reflect the social conditions of their time, such as *La Yunta* or *La Matamaridos – the husbands killer*. (Alviso, 2011; Lira, A. 2013).

In his article *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, Alviso shares that some researchers view *corridos* as a kind of oral newspaper, while others argue that although *corridos* often respond to recent events, their purpose is not to spread news but to interpret, celebrate, and dignify events already familiar to their audiences (Alviso, 2011).

Chapter 2 METHODOLOGY AND PROJECT DESIGN

In this section, I will address how I conceptualized and structured the musical performance, the workshops, and the collective creative process. I will also describe my individual creative process as the leader of the project, and the collaboration with the creative team.

PERFORMANCE DRAMATURGY

Mexperimental Music: Reimagining Roots, Identity and Singing, is a show designed to be a platform for expressing my transforming personal Mexican identity. It offers a space to connect with diverse Mexican traditional musics through experimental musical approach. Through this work, I share a vulnerable and intimate view of how it is that we can experience belonging, nostalgia, roots, celebration, ritual, spirituality, family and home, elements that I continually observe in many Mexican musical cultures, and that I deeply resonate with.

For visual inspiration, I collected pictures that I felt evoked the essence of the show, as I was imagining. I created a mood board to clarify my thoughts, my emotions, and my aspirations, and to define the general concept of the show *Mexperimental Music*. In general, the mood board portrayed images of joy, vibrant colors, loving people, nature, and a variety of emotions. [See Figure 1 for reference].



Figure 1: Mood board

Secondly, I decided on the overall shape of the performance. I used an energy distribution curve, which is a visual representation of a musical event's energetic contour - a concept created by Wilfrido Terrazas (Terrazas, 2021) - to represent the show's energy journey, which for me, is deeply linked to the emotional journey. [See Figure 2 for reference]

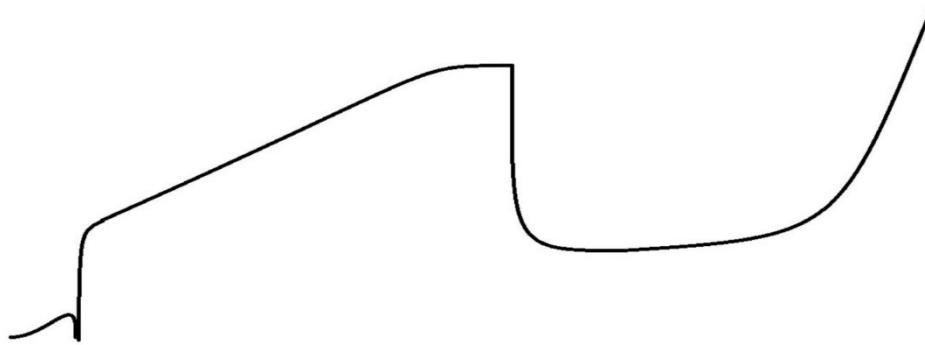


Figure 2: Energy Distribution Curve

After deciding the overall shape of the performance, I defined the repertoire. In fact, Mexican traditional repertoire that I love inspired some of the decisions for the overall shape. For

example, I was extremely interested in creating a version of *Son Jarocho "Bruja"* that portrayed a character of a woman that inspires wisdom, freedom, strength, and spirituality, and that need inspired the drop in energy in the middle of the show. I integrated the energy distribution curve and the repertoire selection to craft the performance's dramaturgy.

I visualized my concert with a calm energy introduction. The goal of the introduction of this project was to create an atmosphere of a kind welcoming vibe that would invite the audience to be present, to engage actively with the performance and to feel part of a loving community. To achieve this, I decided to write three decimas. The first decima was meant to welcome everyone and present myself and the concert, the second decima was intended to present each of the performers, and the last one, in English, was a decima with words of love and appreciation for my mentors, collaborators, and audience members. [*Décimas* to the left, were used in the concert version]

VERSION DELIVERED

En esta tarde tan pura
el alma vibra al cantar,
conmovidos vamos a dar
música que nos perdura.
Soy voz de esta aventura
con amigos a mi lado
de un talento desbordado
para la música sincera.
Disfrutemos la primavera
de este arte amado.

TRANSLATED VERSION

On this pure, serene afternoon,
The soul vibrates with song.
Moved, we share the music
That will endure lifelong.
I am the voice of this adventure,
With friends by my side,
Overflowing talent,
For music sincere and wide.
Let us enjoy this springtime
Of our beloved art.

Natalia, violín y jarana
Myra también en el violín,
Wilfrido de aliento sin fin
David, trompeta que engalana.
Camilo y Kosuke, el latir,
marcan ritmos que despiertan
Edwin y Andrew conectan
armonías que son raíz.
Natalia, electrónica sutil,
con su magia nos deleitan.

I am grateful to my friends,
mentors, and collaborators,
for being noble cultivators
of dreams now shared in the end.
From you my faithful witnesses,
I draw my strength and guiding fire.
To my team, whose dreams inspire
whose boundless talent lights the
way
and to the audience here today,
I give my heart with pure desire

Natalia, violin and jarana,
Myra joins on violin too.
Wilfrido, a breath unending,
David, a trumpet that shines anew.
Camilo and Kosuke, the heartbeat,
Mark rhythms that awake.
Edwin and Andrew connect,
Harmonies rooted for the music's
sake.
Natalia's subtle electronics feed
Magic that helps us all create.

Estoy agradecida con mis amigos,
mentores y colaboradores,
por ser nobles cultivadores
de sueños compartidos al fin.
De ustedes, mis fieles testigos,
extraigo mi fuerza y mi fuego.
A mi equipo, cuyos sueños inspiran,
cuyo talento ilimitado ilumina mi
camino,
y al público aquí presente,
les entrego mi corazón por completo.

The following part quickly increases the energy of the performance to the point of having a climax at the end of the section. It portrays very festive music from *Son de Artesa*, and *Son Jarocho* traditions, and it expresses joy, celebration, fun and freedom. From the *Son de Artesa*, I chose to explore the song *Arenita Azul*, and from *Son Jarocho*, *El Coco*.

After the climax, I decided to have a drastically drop in energy with the opportunity to explore spiritual moments, a sense of something greater than us, intimacy, love, pain, and passion. To have all this palette of emotions, I chose a very diverse set of songs: I started with *La Martiniana* from the *Son Istmeño* tradition, then *La Bruja* from the *Son Jarocho* tradition, to then transition to *Un poco más*, a *Bolero* by Álvaro Carrillo, and *Amanecí otra vez*, the famous *ranchera* song by José Alfredo Jiménez.

Towards the end of the performance, after an exciting emotional journey, I wanted to bring everything together—almost like a resolution or a moment of reflection—to clear the energy and gently lift it into a calm, intimate, cozy, and warm space. These feelings are deeply inspired by my family traditions, my grandfather's life, and the sense of belonging I experience with them, and how proud, safe, and fulfilled I feel as part of my family, and what it feels like being at home. For this section, inspired by the storytelling power of the *corrido* tradition, I proposed an experimental take on the genre where a video recording of my grandfather speaking about his life functioned as the lyrics of the *corrido*. I composed different melodies played by double bass, guitar, flute, and violin, in which the accompaniment was meant to be played simultaneously with the video projection.

The very end of the performance was thought to be the highest peak of energy of the show, a grand celebration of the journey. A festive, joyful and communal final moment to have

fun, and fully enjoy the shared experience. For this section I chose to explore the *modern mariachi huapango*, *La noche y tú* by Rubén Fuentes.

STRATEGIES AND LOGISTICS. PLANNING OF THE PROCESS.

Choosing the right team was a challenge but everything came together beautifully in the end. The repertoire selection came from diverse musical traditions, and while some of them share some instruments, each has distinct instrumentation and stylistic approach. I wanted to preserve key instruments from each tradition with the capability to function in different musical contexts. Additionally, I sought to create a balance between traditional sounds and experimental idioms. To achieve this, I needed musicians who played instruments found within the musical traditions I chose to explore, could contribute to a balanced orchestration, were familiar with Mexican traditional musics, open to exploring sound through experimental improvisation, and/or experienced in experimental idioms.

I decided that the band would be composed by a double bass providing harmony support, acoustic guitar – commonly found in *Bolero* and *Ranchera* music –, various percussion instruments (marimba, cajón, drum set, shakers, etc.), a trumpet – iconic instrument in *modern mariachi* music –, flutes representing wind instruments from diverse music traditions, the *jarana jarocha* – a key instrument in *Son Jarocho* –, and violins, which are integral to modern and traditional mariachi music and *Son Huasteco* or *Huapango*. These instruments would not only help me to stay close to each musical tradition but also provide them the flexibility to explore and expand their boundaries and stylistic possibilities.

I felt incredibly lucky that most of the musicians I collaborated with on this project were part of the UC San Diego Department of Music community, and that I was able to bring in two

external collaborators to complete the ideal team. Each of them possesses extraordinary talent, an amazing creative mind, and a kind soul.

I invited the UCSD grad student Andrew Crapitto to play double bass. His extraordinary musicality and ability to navigate different styles – from delicate classical music to wild contemporary music – along with his creativity in composition and improvisation, were characteristics that contributed greatly to my project. On guitar, we had Edwin Montes, from Ensenada, Mexico, who I first met during my undergraduate studies at UABC. His expertise in Jazz and Bolero music, combined with his remarkable musicality and versatility across genres, his proficiency in harmony, and experience with contemporary and improvised music, made him the perfect guitarist player for this project.

Due to the large set of percussion instruments I required, I invited two percussionists. One of them was Camilo Zamudio, an exceptional musician with deep knowledge of Latin American rhythms and fantastic way of grooving. His powerful playing charisma, energy and his fantastic intuition, creativity and good taste for improvisation made him an essential match for this project. He primarily played a drum set of his own design and various shakers.

The other percussionist was Kosuke Matsuda, a musician that I have wanted to collaborate with since the moment I met him and saw him perform. His sensibility and musicality are truly magical, complemented by his precise and skillful technique, capable of achieving the most exquisite sounds and dynamic range. He was in charge of playing the marimba – with which he played a beautiful solo in La Martiniana, a highlight of the concert, that brought the tenderness, spirituality, and beauty that the performance needed – and other wood percussion instruments like the cajón, bongos, clave and shakers.

I had the honor of working closely with Professor Wilfrido Terrazas. From Ensenada, Mexico, he is a faculty member in the UCSD Department of Music, and one of my advisors. Through his direct involvement in the creative process and performance, he gained deep insight into my project and provided invaluable guidance. His expertise in improvisation, mastery of flutes, and extensive musical experience in performance and composition, significantly supported and strengthened my work. On the trumpet, David Aguila, a UCSD alumnus and skilled player. His ability on improvisation, refined listening skills, knowledge in audio production, and his immense variety of colors in his sound, greatly enriched our musical exploration.

I wanted to include violin in my project, seeking both a traditional folk-style sound and the pure tone more commonly found in a concert setting. At the same time, I wanted musicians with experience in improvisation, capable of adapting their sound and open to exploring the boundaries of their usual performance style. With this in mind, I decided to invite Myra Hinrichs and Natalia Arroyo. Myra, a UCSD graduate student, contributed immensely to the project with her clear and virtuosic playing, her exquisite sound through long tones and harmonics, and her experience in contemporary and improvisational music. Natalia, also originally from Ensenada, traveled from her current home in Canada to share her vast expertise in the *Son Jarocho* tradition, acquired through years performing with the renowned *Jarocho* group *Son de Madera*. Alongside her remarkable musicality, her experience with improvisation, combined with her versatility in violin, singing, and *jarana jarocho*, added invaluable depth to the project, and my own singing interpretation of the *Sones Jarocho*.

I wanted to incorporate effects and non-acoustic sounds into my project to enhance and convey key moments in the dramaturgy of the performance. These elements work as expressive

tools, shaping the atmospheres and highlighting significant transitions within the work. I invited Natalia Merlano Gómez because I knew her creative mind, knowledge with electronic music devices, refined sonic taste, and her approachable personality would bring precisely the qualities I was looking for this project.

I envisioned the musical part of this project to be worked over the course of a year, structured over two workshop periods, followed by a final rehearsal period towards the final performance on Sunday, April 6th, 2025.

WORKSHOPS AND CREATION OF THE ARRANGEMENTS

WORKSHOP 1

The first workshop took place on October 20th and 22nd. I decided to explore six songs during this workshop period. On the first day, we worked on *El Coco*, *Arenita Azul*, and *La Martiniana*, and on the second day, we explored *Un poco más*, *Amanecí otra vez*, and *La noche y tú*. I sent everyone two versions of each song ahead of time—this was both to start familiarizing them with the traditions and to highlight how diverse the instrumentation and performance styles can be for a single song, as preparation for our first meeting.

In the workshops, we listened to each song together and briefly analyzed them. I shared the key elements of each tradition that I wanted to preserve or use as inspiration for our explorations. We played the songs straightforwardly and as close to the traditions as possible—to get them into the body. Then I shared drafted scores with basic ideas to explore, most of them with information about form and textures.

We tried them, we discussed them, changed them, tried them again, brainstormed other ideas, we tried those, and so on.

The workshops were more enlightening than I expected, especially when certain ideas didn't work. It was the first time I heard the ensemble, and through trying and occasionally succeeding, I learned about orchestration, balance, functionality of instruments within this relationship between Mexican traditional and experimental music in creation.

As an example, I initially thought I would divide the percussion roles by giving Camilo the groove and traditional playing, while assigning Kosuke the role of noise maker, atmosphere shaper, gesture creator, and marimba soloist. But after the first workshop, I realized this wouldn't work—the groove drew all the attention, and everything else was barely ornamentation, with very little potential to gain focus.

So instead, I decided to separate them by instrumentation: Camilo played percussion instruments with bright, and metallic timbres, while Kosuke focused on wooden sounds, aiming for a more folk-inspired character. With this decision, I had the opportunity to maintain the groove while exploring sound qualities with both percussionists playing as one multilayered team.

By the end of the first workshop, we had a great amount of beautiful material to curate and adjust for the development of the arrangements. I also had several areas and even complete songs that would require me to rethink my strategies to make them work and shine as I envisioned.

ARRANGEMENTS, COMPOSITION, AND WORKSHOP 2

The second workshop took place on March 17th, 18th, and 19th. Between the first and second workshop, there was a five-month window that I used to reflect on the work we had done and to begin shaping the arrangements we would explore in our next workshop. I focused first on the songs that worked easier during the first workshop. This way I felt more confident deciding how to move forward with the arrangements, using the elements that had worked well.

For example, *La Martiniana* and *Amanecí otra vez*, in my opinion, had the most successful explorations during the first workshop, and by successful, I mean that the strategies we used aligned well with what I wanted to portray with each one. The melancholy, nostalgia, love, and slow tempo are characteristics present in these songs, and I found them easier for me to explore, and expand.

These characteristics are also present in the *Son Istmeño La Llorona*, and the *Bolero Adoro* by Armando Manzanero – songs that I work with in my initial explorations towards Mexperimental Music project³. The experience, along with the emotional and pacing similarities, deeply helped inform the more recent project's creative process.

In the following paragraphs, I will share a description of the creative process behind each arrangement, moving back and forth between the arrangement period, the second workshop, and the final version – beginning with *Amanecí otra vez*.

³ Project 1: *La Llorona Project: Aproximación Experimental a un Son Istmeño* was recorded and premiered at the 1st COARTS Festival on September 24, 2020. The ensemble featured Kathryn Schulmeister (double bass), Joseph Bordeau (percussion), and Professor Wilfrido Terrazas (flute).

Project 2: In Juliana Gaona's second DMA recital, held on May 25, 2022, at UC San Diego, we created a cycle of songs titled *Arrangements of Latin American Canciones*. The program included five pieces from the Latin American music repertoire, among them *Adoro* by Mexican composer Armando Manzanero.

AMANECÍ OTRA VEZ

Amanecí otra vez has a special place in my heart. My aunt Cuquita used to sing it often at the concerts organized by my grandfather Cuco in Ensenada. As a five or six year-old child, I loved how she would make the mariachis stop so she could hold a nearly 10-second-long note in the middle of the song – everybody, excited, would cheer her with claps and whistles. Later, when I was teenager, the song became part of my own repertoire, and I deeply enjoyed singing it, as I considered it an extremely tender example of the deep love, admiration, and peace a couple can feel by being present and enjoy the beauty of an everyday simple moment. This memory was an important component to how I envisioned the arrangement of the song.

I decided to draw inspiration from three musical styles for this arrangement: traditional ranchera song accompanied with guitar, mariachi ranchera song highlighting violins and trumpet, and experimental music idioms, such as use of harmonics, detachment from tonality, and relaxation of metered time.

The arrangement started with an introduction that is very close to mariachi tradition. After a fermata, I sang the first verse accompanied by Edwin on guitar, playing chords in arpeggios. Both of us performed in a very loose and floating way, with plenty of space between phrases, and with no clear tempo.

The full band joined for the second verse and chorus, with a sound inspired by mariachi tradition. As we reached the end of the chorus – right at the spot where my aunt Cuquita used to pause the mariachis – we transitioned into a section of soft, long and distant notes, with gentle harmonics floating around, and with no defined key center. In this section, I wanted to evoke the calm of watching the sunrise quietly through the window, from a place of warmth and safety. It

was almost as if time had stopped, floating and enjoying that happy moment. I hummed distant and delicate melodies over this texture.

The next part of the song changed a few more times during the second workshop, as the ideas I established in the arrangement and the transitions did not feel complete when we tried them together. The original idea I had was that everyone would fade out while I started singing the next verse of the song accompanied by Edwin in guitar, but this time with a fixed and clear tempo. I wanted to evoke a nostalgic ranchero style, like the style found often in a nostalgic or contemplative scene of a mid-20th century Mexican movie⁴. This would be followed by a solo trumpet with guitar accompaniment, to lead to the chorus and verse again, and then a solo guitar ending.

After trying my arrangement's first version during the second workshop, I felt the transitions were not working – too many events happening, all of them distinct and contrasting. I also found that the lack of coherence between these elements was distracting and conflicted with the sense of calm, peace, love and tenderness I was aiming to evoke.

We decided to lean into the idea of long notes. We expanded the section where they were originally placed and introduced them in other parts of the song, using them as a unifying element.

To recapitulate: the piece begins with a mariachi-style introduction, followed by a loose and spacious first verse with guitar accompaniment. Then comes the second verse and chorus, again in mariachi style, leading into the long tones with harmonics. [See Figure 3 for reference]

⁴ Example: Antonio Bribiesca's brief guitar performance in the Mexican movie *Rossana* (1953) exemplifies the nostalgic traditional Mexican guitar stylings in movies at the time (Bribiesca, 1953)

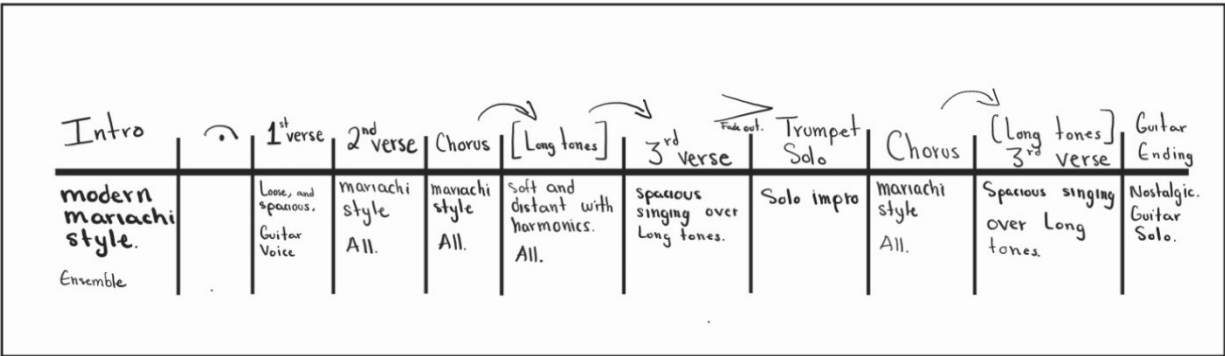


Figure 3: *Amanecí otra vez*, arrangement's diagram.

Instead of fading out, the long tones continued as I sang the next verse over them, with plenty of space—just like in the beginning. As the verse reached its end, the ensemble gently faded out, making room for Edwin's solo guitar moment, inspired by the nostalgic *ranchero* style I mentioned earlier.

There was a feeling of gradually entering into another dimension, where time was elongated – drawn from the idea of the quietude of watching the sunrise in silence. To continue this relaxation of time and space, I asked David to play an unaccompanied trumpet solo. I envisioned this as the most spacious moment played by one of the most iconic instruments in modern mariachi. Afterwards, we gently repeated the chorus in mariachi style, resuming the original tempo, arriving again to the long tones section. Over the long notes, I continued with the final verse. Edwin closed the song with a short, simple and calm solo, as everyone else gradually faded out.

The final arrangement worked well. By skipping the multiple fading outs and choosing to play the long tones in multiple places, gave the arrangement a sense of continuity and overall coherence.

LA MARTINIANA

After finishing *Amanecí otra vez*, I continued with an arrangement of the *Son Istmeño La Martiniana*. It is traditionally performed by wind bands or accompanied by guitars, and is often associated with marimba playing (Sturman, J. 2015). As *La Martiniana* speaks of death, it is often associated with the *Day of the Dead*. Its text is deeply nostalgic and hopeful, as it speaks of someone asking a girl or woman not to cry when they die, but instead to sing a *son*—for through that song, they will live on forever. I aimed to explore ways of expressing the spirituality and celebratory essence that this *son* inherently conveys, while preserving the character of its traditional accompaniments.

During the second workshop, the arrangement changed in form — meaning that while the elements of the arrangement I did worked well, I explored a different order and introduced more repetitions to create smoother transitions and give each section space to shine. In the end, I decided on a new sequence.

The original son has two section – one melody for the verses, that we can call “A”, and another for the chorus, that we can call “B”. The arrangement consists of multiple repetitions of these melodies, approaching them progressively in different ways each time.

The arrangement took shape in the end as follows: Kosuke began with a solo—a longing, slow, and spacious version of melody A on the marimba. The room filled with his sound, enhanced by a generous amount of electronically added reverb. After two repetitions, I entered with the first verse, singing melody A twice in the same slow and spacious mood, while Kosuke shifted to playing sporadic countermelodies in response to my voice. Gradually, the rest of the ensemble began contributing airy, delicate sounds, leaving ample space between each gesture.

All this section was immersed in reverb, evoking a sense of a wider space – a moment of spirituality, nostalgia and lament.

We continued into section B, and the reverb gradually diminishes throughout to slowly arrive to a more earthy world vibe. In this part, I sang the chorus while the ensemble maintained the established texture—except for Natalia. With her violin, she began to play the chorus as well, not quite together, yet not completely apart. Our melodic lines seem to swim around each other – what Wilfrido Terrazas would describe as *acardenchado style*, in reference to *Canto Cardenche*⁵. Everything leading up to this moment serves as a spacious prelude to the son.

Afterwards, we played the complete form of the son at a calm pace, inspired by the *sones Istmeños* typically accompanied by guitar alone. The structure is presented as follows: an intro with melody A (without me), and Section A twice and Section B with singing. I wanted to present the *son* as close to the traditional sound as possible, to create a clear contrast with the prelude and the section that follows.

Suddenly, we had the full band playing as loud as possible, and at a faster tempo, to mimic the sonority of a *Banda oaxaqueña*. I wanted to suddenly bring in the celebratory aspect of the tradition, as if we were in the middle of a town festival. They play the complete form once and then repeat it—but when they arrive at Section B, the tempos of each player gradually begin to diverge, and the shape of the melody begins to decompose. At the same time, the sound slowly becomes quieter. [See Figure 4 for reference]

⁵ *Canto cardenche*, is a traditional genre from La Laguna region, a semi-desert region in the north of Mexico. It is sung a Capella without any instrumental accompaniment, and it is polyphonic, mainly with three voices. It is interpreted with freedom regarding time signature or rhythm, so *cardencheros* can make pauses between phrases if they like and prolong notes if they feel like it. The tradition is characterized by being very spontaneous (Vazquez I, Portillo R. , 2002)

Marimba Solo	1 st verse	1 st verse.	Chorus.	Intro.	2 nd verse and Chorus	Parade Section.	Walking away. <small>Fade out.</small>
Melody "A" (x2) Reverb. Longing.	Melody "A" marimba and Voice. Reverb	Melody "A" Marimba and voice continues. Ensemble with airy sounds. Reverb.	Melody "B" Voice and violin ocaríenchado style. Marimba continues. Ensemble continues. Reverb off.	Melody "A" Son Istmeño style. Ensemble	Melody "A" (x2) and Melody "B" (x2) Son Istmeño style All.	Melody "A" (x2) Melody "B" (x2) Melody "A" (x2) Ensemble Loud! Banda Oaxaqueña style.	Melody "B" (x2) Diverging tempo decomposing melody fading out gradually Ensemble.

Figure 4: *La Martiniana*, arrangement's diagram

I wanted to create a sonic effect that evokes the image of a walking *Banda oaxaqueña*, like a parade drifting farther and farther away. But instead of simply fading into the distance, the sound begins to disintegrate—as if the world itself were slipping away, becoming blurrier, unstable and even intangible. The ending, worked simply beautifully, as it contrasted with the stability and predictability of a constant groove throughout the long middle section, achieving the unstable and ephemeral affect desired mentioned before.

ARENITA AZUL

La Martiniana marks the drop in energy within the overall dramaturgy of the performance, while *Amanecí otra vez* concludes the low-energy section that leads into the rest of the show. With those arrangements completed, I decided to build the rest of the program in sequence, using *Martiniana* and *Amanecí* as reference and arrival points.

Although the show began with an introduction of *décimas*, I didn't work on writing that poetic form until the end of the musical creative process. Instead, I began with the first song of the show, *Arenita Azul*.

Arenita Azul is a *Son de Artesa*—an Afro-Mexican musical tradition that has strong connection to coastal life, where commonly comes alive during celebrations and joyful community gatherings on the beach. People dance on large wooden platforms, or *tarimas*, called *Artesas*, whose shape is inspired by the hulls of overturned boats (Ruiz Rodriguez, 2010). Percussion is the main instrument accompanying the voice and dance in *Son de Artes*—sometimes serving as the only one.

I wanted to honor the joyful and danceable music, while bringing into the space the coastal context in which the musical tradition lives. I realized during the first workshop that the groove would be the key element in this arrangement—as soon as we stopped the groove, trying, for example, to replace it with loud and busy noise, the energy would drastically drop, and with it, the sense of dance. Therefore, for the arrangement, I decided to keep the groove going throughout—sometimes as the leading character, and sometimes as background.

During the second workshop, very few details changed— things like balance, who would cue the exit of the improvised section, and the length of the improvised parts. But the overall shape, form, and elements remained the same.

The arrangement goes as follows: Camilo began the son at the drum set, establishing the groove. Then, Natalia and Myra on the violins, and Wilfrido on the flute, played two repetitions of a short introductory melody I composed, while the rest of the band played harmony and groove as accompaniment. Afterwards I sang the chorus and the first verse of the song straightforwardly while everybody else played improvised accompaniment over the harmony of the song.

LYRICS:

Arenita azul
 de 'onde salió
 anoche cayó l'agua
 la destapó
 Ere cubana?
 no soy cubana
 ere jarocha?
 no soy jarocha
 qué quiere ser mi maí?
 soy mariposa

TRANSLATION:

Blue sand,
 Where did you come from?
 Last night, the water fell,
 Unveiling you.
 Are you Cuban?
 I am not Cuban.
 Are you Jarocho?
 I am not Jarocho.
 What do you want to be, my dear?
 I am a butterfly.

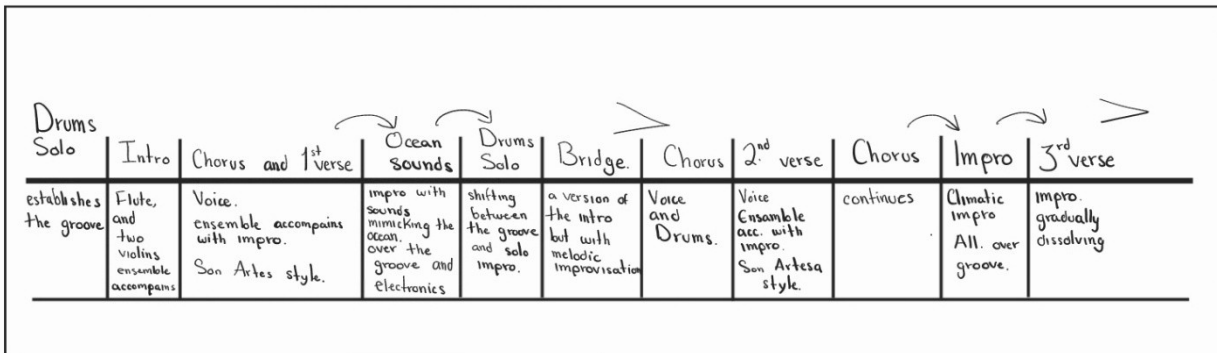


Figure 5: *Arenita azul*, arrangement's diagram

Here is where I brought in the coastal context of this musical tradition. As soon as I sang the last phrase of the first verse—“Soy mariposa” (I am a butterfly)—and sustained the final vowel, we transitioned into a section of sounds meant to mimic the ocean, with the groove still playing in the background. Vocally, I improvised using sounds like “shh,” “ffff,” “gggg,” “ssss,” and “hhhha,” among others, shifting dynamics to evoke the waves. Other instruments created

percussive, prolonged, shaky textures or low, airy tones. Natalia Merlano contributed with electronic improvisation, also inspired by the sounds of the sea. [See Figure 5 for reference]

In this section, I try to convey a broader view of the music we are playing—not only through its melodies, rhythms, harmony, and lyrics, but also through an interpretation, abstraction and metaphor of the soundscape in which this tradition lives, highlighting the idea of a wider understanding of musical tradition, seen within its context as a unified cultural element.

Gradually, everyone faded out while Camilo, with the groove, faded in and began shifting from the groove into a solo improvisation. He maintained energy throughout, with occasional reminiscences of the groove, with the goal of allowing the percussion to shine —honoring the importance of this element in *Son de Artesa*. When he finished his solo and he was ready to move forward, Camilo cued everyone to start the song from the top.

This time, instead of playing the introductory melody I composed, Natalia on violin and Wilfrido on flute engaged in a responsorial improvised duo, following the original harmony, while the rest of the ensemble provided the accompaniment. After that, I sang the chorus accompanied only by Camilo on his drum set. When we reached the second verse, everyone joined in, building energy toward the climax of the *son*.

As soon as I arrive once more at the phrase “Soy mariposa” in the chorus, we broke in a climatic improvisation, based on high energy and joy, while Camilo continued playing the groove, with improvisation intertwined. I began singing the last verse but this breaking the lyrics, rhythms and melody down, “Desde que te fuiste no he visto flores, ni los pajaros cantan, ni el agua corre” – Since you left, I have not seen any flowers, nor do the birds sing, nor does the water run”.

Inspired by the sadness the final lyrics portray, we gradually fragment our sounds and dissolved the improvisation, lowering the energy until there is no sound left.

EL COCO

This song was a real challenge for me. It has very little melodic material—as is common in *Son Jarocho*, where the melody is meant to be embellished and repeated with different lyrics of your choice (Sturman, 2015). Additionally, it's highly festive and rhythmic, and any interruption to the groove results in a significant drop in energy—even more than in *Arenita Azul*—due to the fast and continuous flow of the phrasing.

During the first workshop, this piece didn't quite come together. All the explorations we tried ended up sounding comedic rather than joyful. As I mentioned, it was difficult to experiment with the material without disrupting the energy of the groove.

I realized that the strategies I initially proposed didn't work because they came from an unconscious idea to produce something “experimental” and different, which led to superficial changes to the son. I reflected on the intuitive needs and connection I felt with the other pieces that inspired the arrangements and aimed to let go the urge of altering *El coco*.

For the second workshop, I brought a simpler version that stayed close to tradition. I wrote my own lyrics, inspired by the style found in Los Folkloristas' version, and opened space for melodic improvisation – especially in the bridge. Natalia, drawing on her expertise in *Son Jarocho*, provided helpful feedback and advice that helped us tighten the style of the *son*. She also played violin in the intro and bridge, *jarana jarocho* during the verses and chorus, and sang verses in response to my singing, just as it's done in the musical tradition. I proposed a creative ending, including a section for me to improvise right before the close. The arrangement didn't

change much after the workshop, as I felt the simplicity and small exploratory details around the *son* worked really well.

This is how the final version of the arrangement unfolds: It begins with the traditional introductory melodic line, played by all the melodic instruments and supported by the rest of the ensemble. Then I began singing verses one and two, with Natalia responding— as is customary in the tradition. When we arrived at the chorus, everyone sang “coco” every two measures while playing the accompaniment, as I sang the chorus lines. Below I share the lyrics I composed for the section I just described, to give an idea of the mood of the son:

LYRICS:

el coco vino a decirme
que la muerte me buscó
que la muerte me buscó
el coco vino a decirme

y yo le dije sonriendo
que cantando me encontró
en la UC San Diego
y de mí se enamoró
ay morena mía
ya vengo por ti
me dijo la parca
y yo le respondí

TRANSLATION:

The coco came to tell me
that Death was looking for me,
that Death was looking for me,
the coco came to tell me.

And I told him smiling
that through singing she found me
at UC San Diego,
and there she fell for me.
“Oh, my morena,
I’ve come for you,” she said.
And I replied to La Parca,
singing, “She’ll find me instead.”

ay bella huesuda
ponte ya a bailar
quédate un ratito
yo te vo'a cantar

“Oh, beautiful skeleton,
come now and dance,
stay just a while,
I’ll sing you a chant.”

Bailó la calaca
y también cantó
todita la noche
nunca se cansó

La calaca danced
and she sang too,
all through the night,
without tiring anew.

todo el esqueleto
la flaca movió
ya ni se acordaba
para qué volvió.

The skinny one swayed,
her whole skeleton moved.
She forgot entirely
why she had come through

After the chorus, everyone played the intro again, and right after Natalia improvised a melody on top of the repeating harmony of the intro, whose loop continues until she is ready to move forward. Then we sang new verses and chorus lines—keeping the same harmony and form.

As soon as I reach the end of the chorus, I began improvising with the lyrics and melody, expressing feelings of joy, celebration, and freedom, while everyone else continued singing “coco” every two measures. Whenever I feel it’s time, I transitioned from my improvisation into singing “coco” as well, and one by one, the others gradually stop playing their instruments.

In the end, we were all singing “coco” every two measures, unaccompanied, as a rhythmic ostinato, until I gave the cue for our final “coco” to close the *son*. This sudden silence sets the stage for the dramatic drop in energy that follows—with the spacious, ethereal introduction of the next *son*, *La Martiniana*. [See Figure 6 for reference]

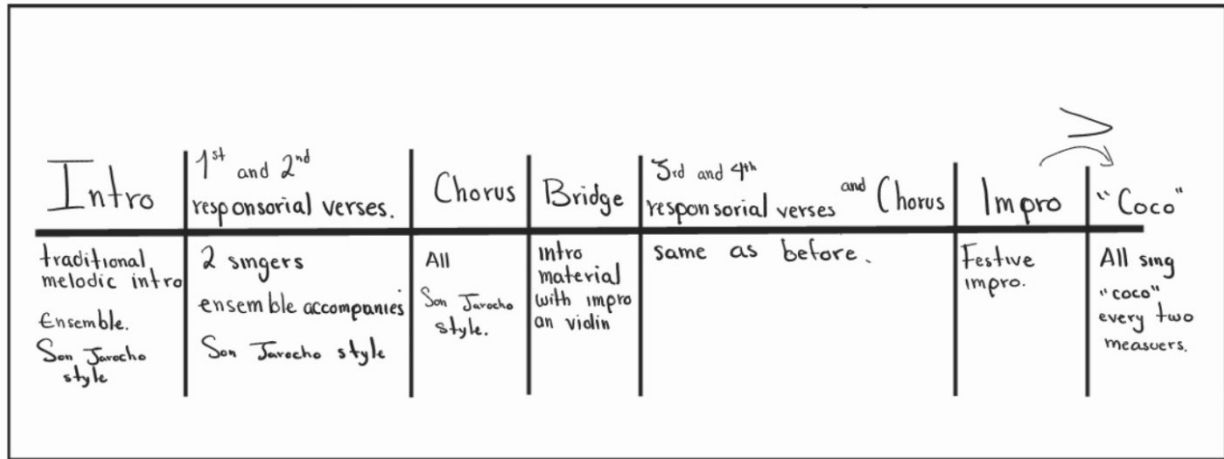


Figure 6: *El Coco*, arrangement's diagram

LA BRUJA

La Bruja is a *Son Jarocho* with a slower pace in contrast with *El Coco*, with a closer resemblance to the *Son Istmeño*, *La Martiniana*. It followed *La Martiniana* in the program of my show, and its arrangement continued with the ethereal, spiritual, and spacious atmosphere established by the previous *son*. In this arrangement, I once again leaned on Natalia’s expertise in *Son Jarocho*. She played violin and *jarana jarocho* and sang in a role similar to her participation in *El Coco*—providing vocal responses, rhythmic texture, and a deep connection to the tradition.

La Bruja—“The Witch”—in its traditional versions, features lyrics that recount various encounters of the narrator with the witch. These moments are often described as beautiful or

vulnerable, where she captures the narrator and draws them into mysterious nighttime rituals. She transforms them into objects, frightens them, drains their energy, kisses them, makes them fly, and more. The stories are often infused with erotic undertones, portraying the witch as a seductive and mysterious figure.

I wanted to experiment with the theme of the song, drawing inspiration from the alternative title *Mujer Antigua—Ancient Woman*—used by the *son jarocho* group Son de Madera, which Natalia Arroyo used to perform with. I was interested in portraying a witch who embodies strength, wisdom, spirituality, tenderness, sensuality, and power—situated within a nocturnal world of nature, moonlight, and subtle reference of the Mother Nature figure.

I invited the singer and poet Alfa Tao to collaborate with me to create new lyrics for our version. After a meeting of discussion about the style and theme of the son, and after workshopping some attempts, she came up with a beautiful text whose style lives in between verse and prose. The text goes as follows:

ORIGINAL TEXT:

Ay, la bruja es energía
que emana del centro de la tierra
de la sabia de las plantas que arrullan
los rayos de sol en sus estomas
Sabia mujer de pies descalzos
camina dejando huella
con garbo el cuerpo al andar
pechos de via láctea
que alimentan los arrullos y los sueños

TRANSLATION:

Oh, the witch is pure energy
rising from the center of the earth,
from the sap of plants that lull
sunbeams through their stomata.
Wise woman with bare feet,
she walks leaving a trace,
her body graceful in motion—
breasts of the Milky Way
nourishing lullabies and dreams.

Ay qué bonito es soñar
a las dos de la mañana
que la bruja desciende
por los tallos del maizal
mientras del silencio brota la luna plena
alumbra los pasos que la mujer siembra de
día
y campos fértiles florecen bajo un cobijo de
cielo.

Oh, how beautiful it is to dream
at two in the morning,
as the witch descends
through the stalks of the cornfield.
From silence, the full moon blooms,
illuminating the steps the woman sows by
day,
and fertile fields blossom beneath a
sheltering sky.

Inspired by this beautiful text, I began to shape an arrangement as follows: with electronically added reverb, everyone gradually faded in using airy sounds and soft gestures, creating a mysterious and spiritual atmosphere that subtly suggests the key of C minor. After a few seconds, I delivered Alfa's complete text through an improvisation that flowed between singing and speaking. Once I finished delivering the text, the reverb cut out, and we began the *son*. Through this prelude, I aimed to clearly depict the character I was going to start singing about.

Natalia played the traditional introductory melodic line, accompanied by Edwin on guitar and Andrew on double bass. For the verses, I rearranged Alfa's text to fit the traditional melody, and for the choruses, I wrote my own lyrics portraying the witch—drawing inspiration from Alfa's text.

After the intro, we performed the *son* in a way that stayed close to tradition: verse, response, verse, response, chorus. Then Wilfrido played an improvisation on bass flute, accompanied by the ensemble, which led us into a full repetition of the *son*.

As we reached the final chorus, the energy built, culminating in the lines: “*Me agarra la bruja, me lleva al campo, me da su ternura, me cubre en su mano*” — “*The witch grabs me, she takes me to the fields, she gives me her tenderness, she covers me in her mantle.*” At that moment, the reverb was triggered, and I began an improvised *vocalis* while the rest of the ensemble produced airy, soft sounds. Together, we gradually faded out.[See Figure 7 for reference]

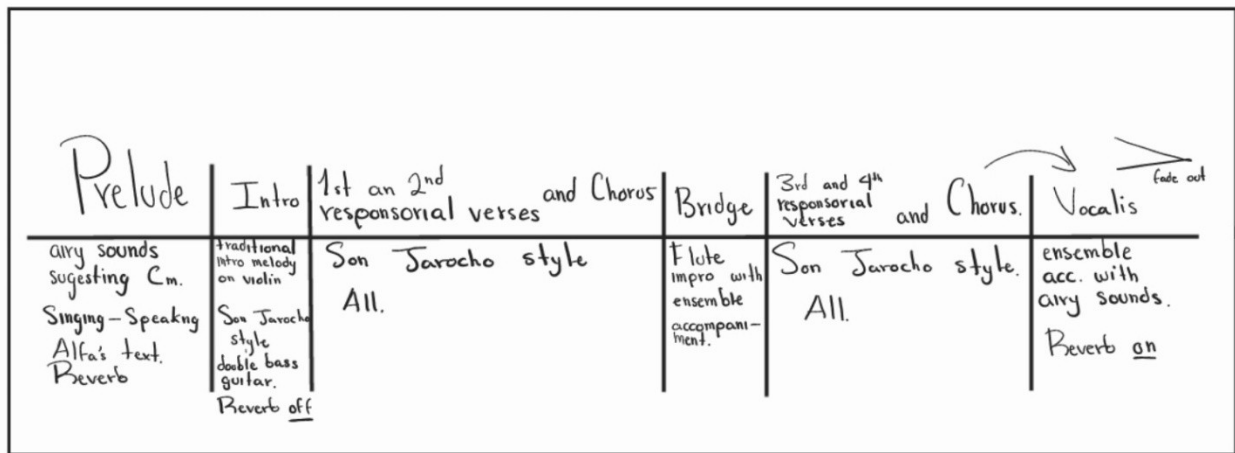


Figure 7: *La Bruja*, arrangement's diagram

UN POCO MÁS

This bolero is one of my favorites. The entire piece is a longing and elegant plea—living in the emotion of that moment of despair to hold onto an instant of intimate love, just a bit longer, before parting ways.

Leaning on the mid-20th-century tendency to blend bolero music with jazz – due to the big influence of jazz music through mass media and the Bolero’s immense popularity of at the time (*Mexico Histórico*, n.d.) – , drawing from the Bolero trio format, and Trova Yucateca, I built my arrangement in service of the emotional depth of the lyrics and the romantic elegance that characterizes bolero.

The creative process for this arrangement was smooth and open to collaboration. I was clear about the emotions and styles I wanted to portray, as well as the strategies for experimentation. But the form, the length, and even who would play what remained open from the first workshop. In the second workshop, we explored different orders, soloists, and duos—guided by what the performers felt like doing and what they brought to the piece—until we reached the version that felt complete. I provided the basic original chord progression of the bolero, but since I wanted a jazzier harmonic approach, I asked Edwin to contribute with his jazz expertise by creating a chord progression of his own taste, as well as a solo guitar introduction.

I will now go on to describe the final arrangement. Edwin started with a solo guitar introduction of his authorship, inspired by the *requinto* melodic style typical of the Bolero trio format. I entered singing the first verse, accompanied only by Edwin. We followed each other without a strict tempo, flowing calmly, phrase by phrase.

As I began the second verse, the rest of the ensemble joined in, with percussion, bass, and guitar leading the accompaniment. Both Camilo and Kosuke were playing: Camilo on drum set, and Kosuke on bongos, which he played with more presence, as bongos are among the most common percussion instruments in bolero music. Additionally, Wilfrido played shakers the entire arrangement, instead of flute, to add rhythmic texture.

We continued into the chorus in the same style, which already conveyed a combination of the trio format and traditional *Trova Yucateca*— expressed through instrumentation (guitar, bongos, shakers), slow tempo, and accompaniment style—alongside the established blend of bolero and jazz, reflected in the harmonic progression, instrumentation (trumpet, drum set, double bass), and vocal style.

Afterwards, we essentially played through the form multiple times using different strategies, which I will describe below— drawing inspiration from the “trading” section of a jazz jam session, where performers take turns soloing over the harmonic structure of a standard tune (Pinheiro, 2011). [See Figure 8 for reference]

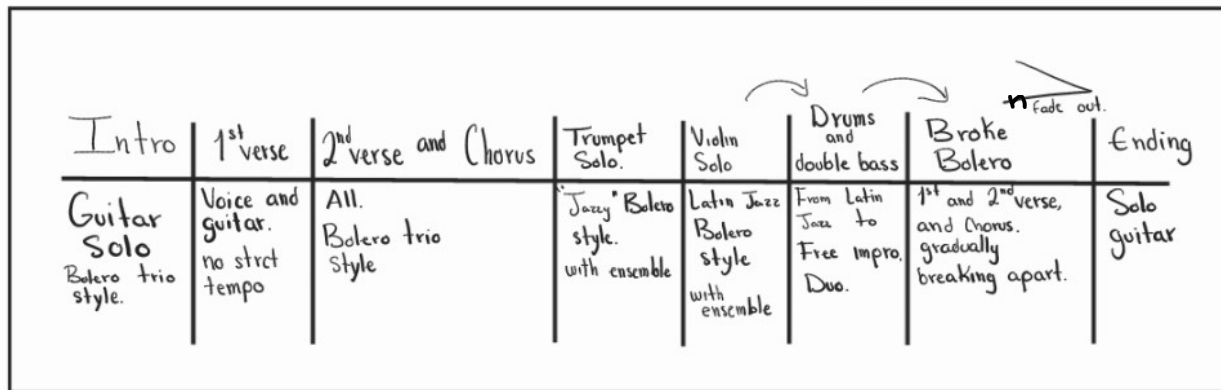


Figure 8: Un poco más, arrangement's diagram

The first solo is played by David on muted trumpet, in a jazzy style, while the accompaniment remained in the same mood. Then Natalia took a turn on violin, playing a slightly faster solo over a Latin jazz groove, with the drum set gaining prominence over the bongos.

Camilo and Andrew followed with a duo that began with just guitar accompaniment and eventually transitioned into the two playing together. This duo gradually broke the groove to explore experimental idioms, with sporadic hints of the bolero.

The overall idea behind the bolero arrangement was based on the character's emotional journey. The plea is introduced at the beginning, leading to an intimate love moment that is prolonged for *un poco más* "a little bit more". This prolonged moment turned to be unsustainable, and everything began to break apart. In the end, the plea came back – now as the character's only and final source of hope - while knowing that it won't work. Although the emotional content, as I mentioned, was clear to me from the beginning, the final form—decided after the second workshop—brought clarity to the dramaturgy and strengthened the intention behind each section.

The final section, where the plea comes back, I called it the "Broken Bolero" part. Here, we played the complete form while gradually breaking apart, with emotional gestures that depart from the original melody. The texture gradually became emptier: the first verse was accompanied by the full ensemble, but the rest of the form was played only by the rhythmic section and me. Edwin closed the bolero with a brief guitar solo, following the natural decay of the arrangement's final energy.

Following *Un poco más*, *Amanecí otra vez* came next in the program, moving into the ranchero and mariachi style.

CORRIDO DE J. REFUGIO FLORES MEJÍA, EXPERIMENTAL CORRIDO

Taking advantage of the narrative nature of the corrido, I wanted to compose one about my grandfather Cuco to tell the story of his life and musical journey, which is a strong foundation for my family's musical heritage and inspired my exploration of my cultural and personal identity, as well as my research on Experimental Mexican Traditional Music.

The creative process for this composition is described next. I began by interviewing my grandfather and recording both audio and video. I also captured him singing and playing songs on his guitar—pieces he felt personally connected to. He performed *corridos*, *sones*, and songs that became popular during the first half of the 20th century in Mexico through radio broadcasts.

With his permission, I curated approximately 45 minutes of raw material into a three-minute video. Visually, it shows him speaking, playing, and singing with his guitar. I designed the audio to give focus mainly to his speaking voice, with moments of him singing and playing guitar appearing sporadically in the background. The audio also includes radio tuning effects and soft white noise that fade in and out, suggesting the influence of mass media during my grandfather’s youth—an influence that permeated our family’s musical culture. [See Figure 9 for reference]



Figure 9: *Experimental corrido*, picture of Mexperimental Music performance.

I envisioned my grandfather’s speaking voice as the lyrics of the corrido, telling his own story. To accompany it, I composed eight bars of a bass line with a chord progression designed to loop, open for elaboration and reinterpretation. I also wrote seven different melodic lines—each a cell of eight or sixteen bars—that could be played either simultaneously as a duo with another performer or one after the other, in any order the performer wishes. The accompaniment was conceived for bass (playing the bass line), guitar (with the chord progression), and violin and flute (performing the melodic lines).

I planned this moment to offer space for reflection, connection, openness, calm, and homage—a pause within an intense emotional journey through the show, right before lifting the energy into a joyful and celebratory ending.

LA NOCHE Y TÚ

La Noche y Tu is a huapango by Rubén Fuentes is a festive composition for modern mariachi. The original version features iconic, elegant, and joyful melodies for trumpet, and virtuosic passages for violins—which I kept, along with all the lyrics— but I rearranged the order of the elements. [See Figure10 for reference]

Intro: Theme 1, 2 and 3	1 st Vers	Theme 1 and 2	Chorus	Theme 3	Bridge: Theme 1, 2 and 3	2 nd verse	Impro	Ending: Theme 2
Ensemble modern mariachi style	same as before with voice	Same as before, ensembe only	Same as before with voice	Same as before, ensemble only	Violin impro on top. Huapango style	Modern mariachi style All	Loop on Theme 2 with impro on top. All	Played and Sang once.

Figure 10: *La Noche y Tu*, arrangement's diagram

I organized the iconic melodies as Themes 1, 2, and 3. We presented them as an introduction, one after the other. Then I sang one verse, followed by Themes 1 and 2, then I sang the chorus, and we played Theme 3 again. With this, I presented the themes twice and included one verse and chorus.

After that, we went back to Themes 1, 2, and 3. I asked Natalia to improvise a violin solo over Themes 1 and 2, inspired by the violin solos found in traditional *huapango, son huasteco*. After her solo, I sang one more verse, and then we went straight into Theme 2, which we looped to have fun by improvising freely and festively over, until I sang the melody of the theme to cue everyone to finish the *huapango* together.

As you can notice, this arrangement includes several jumps back and forth between its elements, which—although challenging for performers to follow, especially due to its fast tempo—creates a sense of dynamism and rapid progression that helps build up the energy up. And this was how the performance ended.

FINAL REHEARSALS

During the workshops we spent a lot of time curating the strategies for each piece, and we had little time to go through the complete form of the pieces. The final rehearsals happened on April 2nd, 5th, and 6th with the performance on the last day in the afternoon. Rehearsals helped us to get more familiar with the arrangements, especially the form of each piece.

During the last rehearsals, we also tried the *décimas* for the first time, accompanied only by *jarana jarocho*, as in their traditional context. The *décimas* worked well, since the structure was very straightforward.

VISUAL ASPECT

While music is at the heart of my project, I am deeply aware of the powerful role that visual elements play in expressing and contextualizing the world music inhabits. For this, I am passionate about collaborating with designers whose expertise can help me bring my artistic vision to life with greater beauty and strength.

I had the privilege of collaborating with Maricela Alaniz, a master's student in the Department of Theatre and Dance at UC San Diego, whose participation was recommended by my advisor and renowned theatrical production designer Victoria Petrovich. I also initiated a collaboration on light design with Jessica Flores, Production Manager at the Department of Music, whose support helped shape the visual atmosphere of the show. [See Figure 11 for reference]

SET DESIGN

Maricela Alaniz supported the spatial arrangement of performers on stage, responding to my desire of creating a sense of community – which was a challenge given the number of musicians and the size of the percussion sets involved. She also proposed multiple set design options based on what we believed was available through the Department of Music, only for us to later discover that some of those resources didn't exist anymore. Despite these unexpected obstacles, Maricela adapted with grace—solving problems and improvising a set design that featured veils hanging from the ceiling, framing the central projection at the back of the stage. Her solution beautifully supported the performance in the end.

LIGHT DESIGN

For the light design, I shared with Jessica a sense of what each song was about, along with my vision of lighting to be inspired by the passage of a day. It began with the warmth of a sunny day at the beach singing *Arenita Azul*, and laughing with *El coco*, followed by the beautiful sunset of a spiritual *Martiniana*. As night fell, the moonlight washes the stage while singing *La bruja*, and an intimate moment singing a plea for *Un poco más* in a late night. From there, a tender sunrise shared with your partner, transitioning to a cozy morning hearing stories from your grandfather. The day cycle closes with the vibrant energy of celebration of another day with joy singing *La noche y tú*. Jessica designed stunning lights for the show, drawing from color palettes related to each hour of the day and making beautiful transitions between them.



Figure 11: Visual aspect reference, Mexperimental Music performance's picture

PROJECTIONS

I aimed to provide context to each song through projections, guiding the audience by offering them visual reference to connect with the lyrics and the emotions being expressed. I also wanted to bring out cultural aspects of the traditions that might not be conveyed through music only. To create these videos, I used free online visual materials, carefully selecting and editing them to support the narrative and atmosphere of each piece.

Next, I will share selected images captured from moments in the projected videos, briefly explaining how each one relates to the corresponding musical piece.

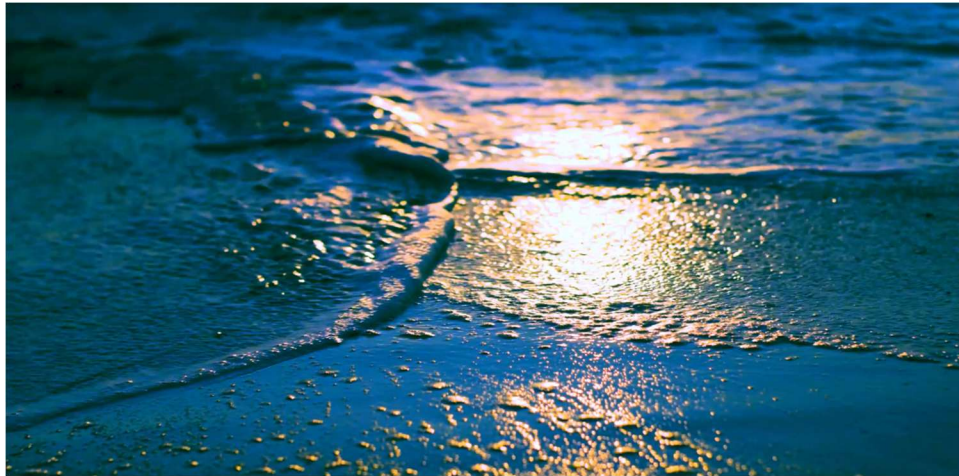


Figure 12: *Arenita Azul*, picture from the projected video

The image above is a moment of the video projected while *Arenita Azul* – little blue sand – is performed. Colored in blue, echoes the title of the song, and the beach evokes the coastal context where the *Son de Artesa* tradition lives. [See Figure 12 for reference]



Figure 13: *El Coco*, picture from the projected video

During *El Coco*, a dancing skull pulses on the screen—rotating, suddenly approaching, and shifting colors. This video reflects the playful relationship many Mexican traditions have with death; a theme clearly echoed in the lyrics of *El Coco*. [See Figure 13 for reference]

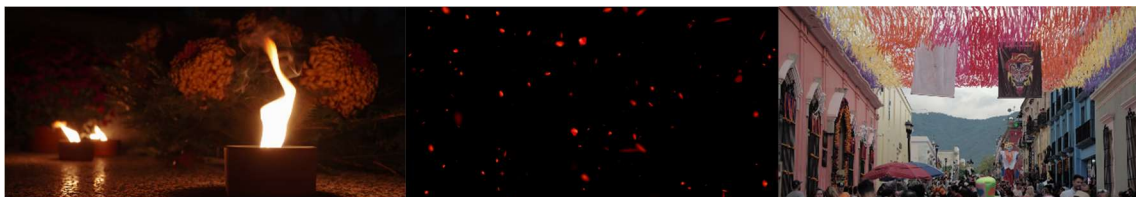


Figure 14: *La Martiniana*, three-picture sequence from the projected video

The three images shown above capture key moments from the video projected alongside the performance of *La Martiniana*. The first image, featuring candles and *xempasúchil*—the traditional Day of the Dead flower—is projected as Kosuke and I perform the ethereal prelude. During the son, inspired by versions with guitar accompaniment, petals of *xempasúchil* fall gently across the screen. Finally, as the ensemble mimics a walking *banda oaxaqueña*, a series of video clips depicting a Day of the Dead festival is projected, evoking a communal and celebratory spirit. [See Figure 14 for reference]



Figure 15: *La Bruja*, three-picture sequence from the projected video

The pictures above are a selection of moments from the video projected during *La Bruja*. The imagery evokes the mysticism, power, and beauty of the witch, framed within the nocturnal world that the son talks about. [See Figure 15 for reference]



Figure 16: *Un Poco Más*, three-picture sequence from the projected video

Un poco más was accompanied by a video of smoke that progressively changed throughout the piece, gradually evolving into a more abstract and expressive form. Through these images, I aimed to convey the ephemeral yet powerful emotional experience at the heart of this love story – shared through this piercing moment. [See Figure16 for reference]



Figure 17: *Amanecí Otra Vez*, picture from the projected video

In *Amanecí otra vez*, I embraced simplicity with a six-minute take of a sunrise framed by an open window, letting in the fresh morning air. The image invites a sense of quiet presence, echoing the peacefulness and pleasure that defines the spirit of the piece. [See figure17 for reference]

After *Amanecí otra vez* comes my grandfather's corrido, whose corresponding image is presented in the section describing the arrangement.

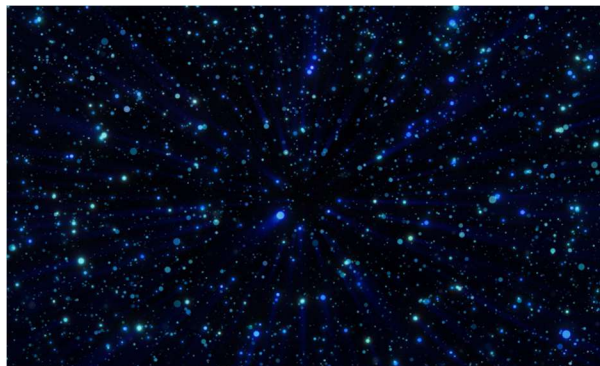


Figure 18: *La Noche y Tu*, picture from the projected video.

At the end, I use a video with shimmering dots to represent the starry night described in *La noche y tú*. [See Figure 18 for reference]

AFTER SHOW PERFORMER'S INSIGHTS

Curious about the experience of others, I invited collaborators to share their thoughts, feelings, and perspectives about the creative process of *Mexperimental Music*. I want to give space in this paper to those voices, to reflect multiple points of view and provide a fuller picture of the process leading up to the *Mexperimental Music* concert.

In the following section, I will share a few quotes by some of the performers who collaborated with me on this project. I am truly grateful for their commitment to the project and for their collaboration in my research before, on and after the show.

Myra Hinrich:

“Cool things that happened in *Mexperimental*: I loved being thrown into the new-to-me "genre" of Mexican music. I don't have much knowledge of Mexican musical idioms or languages, but I was in an experimental music environment which is pretty comfortable. This set up gave me new frontiers to explore and learn about, but within a safe space. It was also awesome to collaborate with Mexican musicians who had different skill sets than mine, I learned a lot from Natalia and Edwin and Willy and you! I think some of the most exciting music I've heard recently is "border" music – where it exists between categories, or makes its own category. *Mexperimental* was able to draw on all of the genres and musical languages of the musicians that were participating.

Collaborating all together was also super interesting. I wasn't sure what would happen with all those people in the room, but I think you chose really thoughtful musicians who knew when to speak up and when to listen. It was also interesting how hard it was to make each song different. I think when we were first meeting each piece was experimented on in the same kinds

of ways, but after more time together (and time apart, which is also important) we were able to find more variety and nuance.

Challenges: I had kind of a warped sense of timeline because I didn't make it to every workshop! But it was hard to remember what happened at the previous meeting (maybe this is a personal problem haha!).”

Natalia Arroyo:

“Being part of the Mexperimental Music project, as part of Mariana’s DMA recital, was truly a gift. I think part of my role was to bring a connection to traditional Mexican music, adding that color to the arrangements. At first, it took some time for the music to open up, but through rehearsals, everyone found their space to contribute and improvise. The musical diversity and unique background of each musician deeply enriched every piece. Most importantly, Mariana’s guidance—both musically and personally—made the whole process feel embraced, creating a generous space to explore and share.”

Wilfrido Terrazas:

“I think experimentation and collaboration are simply integral components of all kinds of music making. In the process of preparing the Mexperimental show I believe every participant brought their expertise and experience to be added to the imagined vision that Mariana wanted us to realize. That communal effort, guided by her vision, was what set the floor for the project to exist and thrive. I have worked with Mariana for several years now, and having seen her development as an artist during her time at UCSD has been such an inspiration for my own music making. I feel that, in a way, we have walked a parallel path in these last few years. What

I mean is that she was very interested in finding ways of bringing Mexican folk traditions into conversation with experimental music practices since the beginning of her UCSD journey. And her journey opened possibilities for my own work that I didn't realize were possible before. In that sense, I would say that my role in the project was not so much as a mentor but rather a creative partner there to support Mariana's vision. I also had a great and fun time LOL.

This project is an important arrival point in Mariana's artistic growth but it is also clearly a part of a much longer journey that will keep going for her, I am sure. One major lesson of the project is to have understood the need to workshop the repertoire rather than rehearse it. The project really blossomed through trial and error, and many ideas were discarded along the way. So, when I say that Mariana had a vision for the project I do not mean she had everything figured out. Quite the opposite! And that sense of humility and capacity for wonder and discovery really guided her efforts. Being open and willing to try different things really paid off. Therefore I believe that in her future endeavors this important learning should/will be her guide. Experimentation, improvisation, horizontal collaboration, adaptation!”

CONCLUSION

The overall experience of creating and producing *Mexperimantetal Music: Reimagining Roots, Identity and Singing* was profoundly enriching. Structuring the project around two workshops with time in between for reflection, adjustment, and creation proved to be an invaluable strategy—one I plan to adopt for future creative journeys.

The project demanded a significant level of self-exploration, which allowed me to deepen my understanding of who I am as a performer: my motivations, my artistic values, and the kind of artist I aspire to become. Through this process, I came to recognize a holistic approach in my practice—an experimental attitude toward tradition rooted in care, respect, and the intention to remain truthful to myself and the cultures I interacted with.

Initially, I imagined that the final result would be a fusion of Mexican Traditional Music and Experimental Music, as though the latter were a fixed genre with defined boundaries. Instead, my focus shifted: rather than blending styles, I found myself *exploring* the expressive potential already embedded within traditional Mexican music and using experimental tools to amplify those voices.

This reorientation felt honest and transformative. Rather than “using” the songs to convey new ways of interpretation, I centered my attention on each song and reinterpreted them from a place of empathy and intimate connection. That act of reinterpretation, of honoring what was inherited in the pieces while giving space for my personal and cultural identity expression, became the soul of the project.

I am proud of the result. While the creative process was at times deeply challenging, the performance itself felt natural, grounded, and true to my spirit. Audience members described the show as “fun,” “personal,” “truthful,” “heartfelt,” and “refreshing within the context of UCSD’s

concert programming.” These reactions affirmed that the work resonated beyond academic theorization—it reached people.

Looking ahead, I aim to continue refining my research and creative process, especially in articulating the intentions behind each arrangement with greater clarity. I’m also eager to further develop the experimental *corrido*, as I believe it holds a lot of opportunity areas—particularly in uniting its multimedia and live elements in more cohesive and compelling ways, with the sole goal of sharing my grandfather’s story with more potential for evoking connection, care, empathy, and sense of belonging and home.

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