

Creating an Audio-Visual Archive in Cañar, Ecuador

Creación de un archivo audiovisual en Cañar, Ecuador

Judy Blankenship

Fotógrafa documental, archivista comunitario

Allison Adrian

St. Catherine University

Resumen

La creación de un archivo comunitario es un esfuerzo colectivo que involucra a una variedad de personas e instituciones, desde los creadores de los materiales (fotógrafos, académicos, documentalistas, periodistas, músicos) hasta los expertos técnicos que configuran los materiales dentro del archivo y crean medios de acceso. La fotógrafa y autora Judy Blankenship, vive en Cañar, Ecuador, desde 1992 y ha contribuido con su material fotográfico, en colaboración con muchas personas e instituciones, incluida la etnomusicóloga Allison Adrian, quien trabajó, en 2016, entrevistando a músicos cañaris, para crear documentales cortos sobre la música y la cultura cañari. El siguiente artículo describe sus roles y relaciones laborales con la comunidad cañari, para ello, discuten el propósito de las colecciones de archivo audiovisual y describen elementos de la música y la cultura cañari. Sus materiales digitales se pueden encontrar alojados en el Instituto Quilloac en Cañar, Ecuador, y en línea, a través de AILLA, el Archivo de Lenguas Indígenas de América Latina de la Universidad de Texas en Austin.

Palabras clave: Archivo comunitario Cañari, fotografía documental, etnomusicología, indígena

Abstract

The creation of a community archive is a collective effort involving a variety of people and institutions, from the creators of the materials (photographers, scholars, documentarians, journalists, musicians) to the technical experts who configure the materials within the archive and create avenues for access. Photographer and author Judy Blankenship, having lived in Cañar, Ecuador since 1992, has contributed materials and created collaborations with many individuals, including ethnomusicologist Allison Adrian who worked in 2016 interviewing Cañari musicians and creating short documentary films about Cañari music and culture. In the following article, they describe their roles and working relationships with the Cañari community, discuss the purpose of archival collections, and describe elements of Cañari music and culture. Their materials can be found at archives housed at *Instituto Quilloac* in Cañar, Ecuador and online through AILLA, the Archive of Indigenous Languages of Latin America at the University of Texas in Austin.

Keywords: Cañari Community Archive, documentary photography, ethnomusicology, indigenous

Authors' Introduction

We, two *extranjeras* from North America, collaborated with one another to research Cañari culture with the blessing of Cañari leaders who wished for more globally-accessible knowledge, recognition, and scholarship of their culture and music. One of us is more interested in documentary photography, the other in music. Judy is the best-versed in Cañari life and paved the way for Allison's acceptance into the indigenous communities around Cañar.

Our methods are quite similar: we talk to people, participate in experiences and cultural events such as weddings, fiestas, *wasipichanas*, healings and rituals. We observe, film, photograph and record, and finally we analyze and share our results.

We write about Cañari culture because we find it valuable and it adds to our common understanding of humanity. It is especially interesting to compare Cañari belief systems to the Euro-American cultural contexts we experience as North Americans. Like many indigenous cultures, Cañaris generally demonstrate a communal approach to life and think of themselves as interconnected with their communities and natural environments.

It's exciting to see younger generations, especially within indigenous communities, motivated to learn and share their knowledge with the world. Those in the arts and humanities are well-positioned to contribute by helping to create resources, record and share collected materials that remain under-recognized or researched.

Judy Blankenship's Narrative

Introduction

I came to Cañar for the first time in 1992 as a volunteer on a research project with a team of Ecuadorian social scientists from Cuenca, where I was living at the time. Previously I'd worked in Central America for a Canadian NGO as a documentary photographer and adult educator, but after six years there I wanted an unpaid "sabbatical" year, when I could work independent of any institution. My husband and I looked at a map and chose Ecuador because it was a small and peaceful country with numerous indigenous groups.

(Mistaken) Methodology

My plan was simple, if naive: I wanted to document the daily life of an indigenous community in the Andes Mountains. I would give back photographs for each person or group photographed and record oral narratives to accompany the photographs. I imagined we would live in the heart of this theoretical community, maybe even without electricity or running water. (Among my many mistaken assumptions at the time: that folks would want their photos taken or their lives recorded, that they would want me to live among them, or that their communities would lack basic services such as electricity or running water.)

My task with the research team back in 1992 was to train two young Cañari men in documentary photography and oral history skills. Every other week I traveled to Cañar to give a lesson in the field, photographing and recording; alternate weeks Antonio and José Miguel came to Cuenca for a lesson in my darkroom. Slowly, Michael and I made friends with the young men's

families; and then with a wider local Cañari group who had created a foundation to preserve indigenous technology.

(Improved) Methodology

My academic background is in social work and education, but my approach to taking photos was that of visual anthropology, a concept I'd come across when I studied photography at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto, Canada, in preparation for working in Latin America. My goal when I came to Cañar was to be the "village recorder" or "memory maker" with my cameras, photographing everything I saw, or that my "hosts" would allow me to see: houses inside and out, tools, food, clothing, rituals, portraits of individuals, families, and groups. I also wanted to record oral histories, narratives to augment the images, particularly with elders. Taken together, my goal was to create a collaborative ethnography, or "the scientific description of the customs of individual peoples and cultures" (Collier and Collier, 1986, p. 26).

But for all my good intentions, I could not (then or now) freely take photographs. If I walked around Cañar alone with a camera, women in the market turned their heads away, children ran, one time a man in a field shook his fist at me. But the moment that really made me question my methodology was the day I sat beside a mother on a grassy roadside, watching her children coming up the road from school. A perfect photo! I asked the mother if I could bring out my camera, assuring her I wouldn't give anyone but her the photo. She thought a minute before saying, "No, because what will you do with the negatives?"

At that moment I realized that my western-based perspective was at the heart of the problem. I was working from a linear framework – camera, film, darkroom, negatives, print for mother, print for posterity. But the mother was thinking how to protect her children from the evil eye of the camera, or a neighbor's jealousy, or that someone with an image of her children could "create mischief." At the same time, I was surprised that she had sophisticated knowledge of film and negatives. I used to think that the camera was a tool that captures a moment of reality, of truth - but I soon learned that every culture creates its own perceptual worlds. Two people looking at the same image can and do see an entirely different reality (Bogre, 2019).

Also, when I look back on that time, I realize how obviously I stood out as a stranger in this place: a tall thin "gringa" carrying a heavy backpack filled with a tripod, two cameras, flash, tape recorder, film, sweater, hat and gloves, and energy bars. It's no wonder adults were wary of this overloaded intruder and children ran from this alien creature.

Having taken almost no photos that first year, we decided to stay in Ecuador a second year, living weekends in Cañar. And slowly, patiently, I learned a more appropriate method of image-making that seems so obvious to me now. If I wanted to document the Cañari culture, it had to be from the inside, collaborative, working as partners with the people and indigenous organizations. So I relaxed and let folks teach me how they wanted to be photographed – posed in their best clothes on a leisurely Sunday, not working in the field; proudly holding a saint in a procession through the countryside, not sitting passively in the church; at work as a nurse in a community clinic, not in the kitchen cooking *cuyes*; waiting for a warm sunny day to pose, not when the cold was aggravating arthritic joints. I also recorded narratives, whether fantastical or real (I recall the 100-year-old man describing flying to Quito as a condor). These were the photos and recordings Cañaris wanted - their perspectives, their validation - and they ultimately held value for me because we were making a visual and audio history together (Chiriboga, and Caparini, 1994).

Sharing Audio-Visual Materials

Sharing audio-visual materials did present some problems for me, however. Although it was never my intention to sell my photos, I also learned not to share portraits of individuals. The men and women I so carefully photographed considered their images belonged to them alone, not to me or anyone else. In the early years I did make a few exhibits in the U.S., Canada and Ecuador, but I eventually felt that even selecting which images to show publicly of a culture not my own, was not my right. However, although I did contribute photos to local organizations of fiestas, parades and other public events, I had no control over how those images were used. I saw them on posters, billboards, on social media and on personal websites.

Although my initial focus was making portraits of individuals and their domestic surroundings, I soon realized that other sorts of images interested the Cañari people. For example, a photo of a field with a mountain backdrop might mesmerize an elder remembering what that field looked like when he was a child, recalling his parents planting corn with a *yunta* (yoked plow). In the same photo, an elderly woman might look hard at the mountain, describe its mythic character and ask if I would please make a set of photos of the mountains surrounding Cañar. I began to look beyond my own narrow point of view.

There were also times I wanted to photograph but was not allowed – an engagement ritual where my husband was asked to act as godfather, but I was not invited – or taking out my camera would have violated a sacred or private moment. One example was *el cinco*, or five days after a death, when the family washes the clothes and belongings of the *difunto* in a river to be dried in the sun on the riverbank. Then there were other photographs I did take that might best never be seen - a newborn baby dead in a casket on an altar, in a poor country house where I was a visitor, but the parents had not requested a photo. These are ethical issues that any documentary photographer must consider, wherever in the world she is working.

Over the next ten years my husband and I kept returning to Cañar with independent research projects—six months here; a year there. Through that time, two of my original students had opened Estudio Inti, a photo business that operates today. I taught photography workshops with indigenous women around Ecuador, from the Amazon to the coast; and in Cañar I photographed cooperatives, sports, fiestas, strikes and political campaigns. In 2005, I published my first book about our life in Cañar (Blankenship, 2005). That same year we bought a small piece of land, built a house, and decided to live in Cañar for six months every year. Living there, I finally began to gain the confidence within communities to be invited to document what I had dreamed of doing in the 1990s: births, deaths, funerals, marriages, and baptisms. Always in collaboration with those I photographed, always with permission, always sharing the results.

Figure 1. Collage of photographs



Source: Blankenship (2005)

Results

With time, I was able to generate other documentary projects for what I began to call our “community archive.” I coordinated the translation into Spanish, and then Quichua, of a book by two Danish anthropologists who lived in the village of Juncal in the 1970s (Fock and Krener, 2020). The book was about daily life and filled with photographs, and both versions were distributed free to every person in the community, who gained access to an ethnographic record of their village life from almost 50 years ago. The anthropologists also sent nearly 1000 scanned photographs for the archive. Peace Corps volunteers who’d served in Cañar in the 1960s sent photos, slides and memories that became a precious record and witness to the conflictive era of agrarian reform when few if any Cañaris owned cameras. Later, working with an elder, *Tayta* Antonio Quinde, who was a community organizer in that period, we recorded over 40 oral histories with leaders and others of their memories of the agrarian reform in Cañar (1968-72).

Figure 2. Collage of Photographs



Source: Fock and Krener (2020)

Another project close to my heart was printing and scanning of hundreds of glass-plate negatives of a traditional studio photographer who for fifty years documented the life of the townsfolk of Cañar (Rigoberto Navas, 1911-2001). His scanned and printed photographs were shown in the local cultural center, to the great delight of those *Cañarejos* who found versions of themselves as a child in a first communion pose, or wedding portraits of their parents or grandparents, long gone.

Figure 3. Results of Scanned Glass-Plate Negatives



Source: Rigoberto Navas (1911-2001)

Conclusion

Today, almost 30 years after first coming to Cañar, my focus as a photographer has radically changed, as has Cañar. I no longer need to document marriages, baptisms and fiestas, or make portraits, because almost everyone has a cell phone to create their own stories – posted on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Migration and remittances have democratized access to equipment, technology, Internet, and communication. Now, I call myself a “community archivist” and my work is organizing my audio-visual materials, and those of others, to make an historical record, a “memory bank,” that I hope captures a cultural and societal landscape of Cañar from 1940 to the present.

On a local level, we have created the *Archivo Cultural de los Cañaris* at *Instituto Quilloac*, a comprehensive K-14 school that serves the indigenous and wider communities. In the library, called the *Centro de Memoria Colectiva*, digital photos, videos and music recordings are available to students, teachers, researchers and community members, with librarian/archivist Antonio Guamán, always on hand to help.

On a national level, the Instituto de Patrimonio Cultural has supported our work with the Rigoberto Navas collection and will incorporate it in their archive. In the United States, the Archive of Indigenous Language of Latin America (AILLA) at University of Texas in Austin houses the Cañar digital collection, including that of Dr. Adrian, ex-Peace Corps volunteers, and others who have so generously shared their photos and recordings with our Cañari archive.

Finally, I couldn't have done this work over the decades without a rotating group of talented visitors and enthusiastic collaborators: students, teachers, social activists, artists and researchers, working together with local Cañari leaders, organization and community members for the benefit of all. ¡Mil gracias!, ¡yupaychani!

* * *

Dr. Allison Adrian's Narrative

Introduction and Literature Review

I arrived in the southern highlands of Ecuador for six months of ethnomusicological research in 2016 after having conducted extensive preliminary research. Even so, I was surprised at how different indigenous highlander music from the area sounded from existing scholarship on Andean music. As there was virtually no scholarship on Cañari music at the time, everything I had read and listened to reflected Andean music as performed in Peru, Bolivia and Northern Ecuador (Meisch, 2002; Olsen, 1980; Rios, 2012; Ritter, 2002; Romero, 1990 & 2001; Schechter, 1992 & 1999; Stobart, 1994; Turino, 1993 & 2007).¹ I had imagined that Cañari music would sound somewhat similar. However, there were no panpipes; there were no harps; and Cañari vocal timbre could not be characterized as high-pitched, nasal or falsetto like much of Quechua music.

The first large musical event I recorded was *Fiesta de San Antonio*, Cañar's patron saint day. As I tried to both film and audio record the proceedings, a tall order on my own, I was also jocularly rammed at random moments by dancers dressed as "crazy cows". As if this was not enough of a challenge, it was nearly impossible to record the music "on its own" because the three primary ensembles - an accordion band, a flute band, and a brass band - all played at the same time.² Even with a doctorate in music and more than a decade of experience with ethnomusicological research, I wondered if I was up for this challenge.

Materials and Methods

An ethnomusicologist approaches the study of music through the people who make it, primarily using interviews to understand music passed down through oral tradition. Thanks to Judy Blankenship, a trusted figure in Cañar, I was connected with important indigenous leaders at the bilingual (Spanish/*kichwa*) school in Cañar, *Instituto Quilloac* who supported my work to document and contextualize Cañari music-making within the guidelines we collaboratively established. Once endorsed by indigenous elders in the community, Cañari musicians agreed to interviews with me. I noticed many assumed I would spend no longer than 10 minutes with them, taking a picture of them in their best Cañari clothing, and asking a few questions. My interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, leaving some to scramble to care for their animals and fields. Many jokes were likely made in *kichwa* about the weird gringa asking questions whose answers were obvious to most Cañaris. Faced with my stubborn curiosity, interviewees endured my questions as I began to learn, unlearn, and redevelop a framework for understanding music-making in the context of the Cañari Andes.

My job was quite simply to experience the music and *fiestas* myself and listen, ask questions, record, and analyze the information shared with me. I elected to film my work so that Cañari musicians could represent Cañari music themselves, though I was still mediating the content by filming and editing the footage. I filmed all of my interviews and gave back hard copies to all

¹ The lack of scholarship on Cañari music is surprising given that Cañaris are one of the largest of indigenous groups of Ecuador. Musicologist and Ecuadorian composer Segundo Luís Moreno makes mention of Cañari music occasionally in his writing (1949, pp. 113-116). Fortunately, a team led by Ecuadorian ethnomusicologist Dr. Diana Patricia Pauta Ortiz is working to analyze and document Cañari music.

² I would later learn that this dense sound of overlapping and intermingling music groups and styles is intentional. It is an auditory signal for the experience of communal, celebratory joy.

interviewees per Judy's suggestion. After editing my footage to create three short documentaries, a community screening was held to ask for feedback and approval before posting them online. With the community's approval, the films were then posted on YouTube where the many Cañaris who have migrated can view them. All of my files are now accessible through a community archive at the library of *Instituto Quilloac* in Cañar, in addition to the Archive of Indigenous Languages of Latin America [AILLA] at University of Texas, Austin. An album of audio recordings with liner notes in Spanish and English is also accessible on SoundCloud.³ The liner notes contain some of the first translations of primarily *kichwa lalay* and *haway*⁴ song lyrics into Spanish and English.

Results and Discussion

Whereas Cañari music sounded different from Andean music I had heard before, I eventually understood the approach to musical practice to be aligned with Quechua aural philosophies. For example, Cañari music is primarily vocal, like most Quechua music north of Lake Titicaca. Furthermore, Cañari music exhibits “intensive and extensive repetition” and an aesthetic preference for “dense sound” (Turino, 1998). Music is played seasonally; musical styles and instruments change according to the agrarian cycle (and the Roman Catholic calendar).⁵ Finally, like indigenous people across the globe, Cañari musical practices and celebrations demonstrate syncretism given the influence of Cañari, Inca and Spanish cultures.⁶ For example, Catholicism and animism coexist in lyrical content, aesthetic preferences, and song structures.⁷

Lalay Raymi

Such juxtapositions of belief systems are on full display in the celebration of *carnaval* or *Lalay Raymi*, a week-long event that corresponds with Catholic pre-Lenten festivities in February or March and is also associated with *Pawkar Raymi*, a Quechua tradition marking the period of flowering and fertility in the agricultural cycle. The song form - *lalay* - that corresponds with the festivities is indicative of the syncretic blend of animism and Catholicism that animates Cañari music.

Lalays

Lalays are strophic in form and intensively repetitious, with subtle variations in melody and rhythm. Sung at a uniformly loud volume, *lalays* exhibit little in the way of dynamic contrast. The rhythmic patterns of both the *caja* and the *lalay* melody are “swung” like most rhythmic patterns of Andean music, with a limping ostinato of a sixteenth note followed by an eighth note.

³ See the album *Música Cañari: Indigenous Music from the Highlands of Ecuador* (2020) on [SoundCloud](#).

⁴ A work song associated with the harvest of wheat and corn in May and June, around *Inti Raymi* - or the Inca Festival of the Sun. Scholarship on *haway* is extremely limited except for some translations and a brief description of Cañari *lalay* by José Pichisaca, Antonio Quinde, and Andrés Mayancela in 1986-1987. Raúl Romero, an ethnomusicologist in Peru, published recordings and liner notes featuring *haylli* (also spelled *waylli*), a Peruvian indigenous call-and-response song performed during “communal agricultural fieldwork” (2013, p. 4). *Haylli* may be related to *haway* given the shared communal agricultural context and the call-and-response form found in both, which is unusual in the Andes.

⁵ See Stobart (1994) and Turino (1993). Unlike regions of Lake Titicaca and the southern Andes, Cañari musicians do not make strong wet-dry associations with instruments, though certain styles of music correspond to agricultural cycles - for example, singing *lalay* around the time of *carnaval* or *Pawkar/Lalay Raymi* or *haway* during *Inti Raymi*.

⁶ The layered knowledge or *mestizaje* of many Andean groups is discussed at length in Howard and Stobart's *Knowledge and Learning in the Andes: Ethnographic Perspectives*.

⁷ Roman Catholic church officials superimposed Catholic celebrations over indigenous ones. For more information, see Turino (1993, p. 97 and p. 106).

Almost all *lalay* melodies consist of just three different notes: a first- or second- inversion triad sung in descending contour, and occasionally incorporating the accompanying lower octave.⁸ The best-known *lalay*, titled “*Papa Santo*” [“Holy Pope” in Spanish] or “*Maymanta Shamuni*” [*kichwa*], informs the listener of the lengths the *carnavalero* has gone to visit the home, at one point indicating that the singer has a sacred mandate from the Pope in Rome, lending the highest (Catholic) authority to their actions. At the same time, the lyrics paint a natural environment in which mountains (*Chimborazo* - the tallest mountain in Ecuador) and volcanoes (*Carihuairazo*, a volcanic caldera) are alive and personified in an animist fashion. In many *lalays*, including “*Vida*” and “*Chitu*,” the lyrics begin with praise for Jesus and the Virgin Mary and then go on to the primary text in which dialogues with animals like rabbits and birds feature prominently.

Figure 4. Lyrics and Translation of Lalay “Papa Santo” / “Maymanta Shamuni”

| Kichwa | Spanish | English |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Alabemos taytito</i> | <i>Alabado sea taytito</i> | |
| <i>Alabemos mamita</i> | <i>Alabado sea mamita</i> | Bless you, kind father |
| <i>Alabado Jesús Cristo</i> | <i>Alabado Jesús Cristo</i> | Bless you, kind mother |
| <i>Virgen María Taytitu</i> | <i>Virgen María Taytitu</i> | Bless Jesus and the Virgin Mary |
| <i>Alabado Jesús Cristo</i> | <i>Alabado Jesús Cristo</i> | Bless Jesus and the Virgin Mary |
| <i>Virgen María Taytitu</i> | <i>Virgen María Taytitu</i> | |
| Ñukamari shamuni | <i>Yo estoy viniendo</i> | I am coming |
| <i>Desde papa santomanta</i> | <i>Desde papa Santo</i> | By the order of the blessed Pope |
| <i>Desde tierra virgenmanta</i> | <i>Desde tierra virgen</i> | From the virgin, sacred land |
| Ñukamari shamuni | <i>Yo estoy viniendo</i> | I am coming |
| <i>Lalayditu rurashpa...</i> | <i>Haciendo lalay...</i> | singing lalay... |
| ... <i>Papa postilla llukchishpa</i> | ... <i>Saque la postilla del Papa</i> | ...I possess the official note of the Pope |
| <i>Llakta llakta shamuni</i> | <i>Vengo por las comunidades</i> | I come by way of many communities |
| <i>Sukta killa lamarta</i> | <i>6 meses por oceano</i> | Six months by ocean |
| <i>Sukta killa pajonta</i> | <i>6 meses por el pajonal</i> | And six months by land |
| <i>Sumaymana balsita</i> | <i>Linda cajita</i> | Oh, beautiful drum |
| <i>Sumaymana kajita</i> | <i>Linda cajita</i> | Oh, beautiful drum |
| <i>Urkitulla chunkashka</i> | <i>Escondido por el cerro</i> | Hidden by the mountains |
| <i>Llakta llakta shamuni</i> | <i>Vengo por las comunidades</i> | I come to the many communities |
| <i>Ama piñarinkichu</i> | <i>No se enojará</i> | Don't be angry |
| <i>Taytitutlla persona</i> | <i>Taytito persona</i> | Dear father |
| <i>Mamitalla señora</i> | <i>Mamita señora</i> | Dear mother |
| <i>Urkitulla chunkashka</i> | <i>Escondido del cerro</i> | Hidden by the mountain |
| <i>Tayta Chimborazota</i> | <i>Por el Tayta Chimborazo</i> | By Father Chimborazo (a mountain) |
| <i>Saludashpami pasani</i> | <i>Pase saludando</i> | I pass by greeting |
| <i>Mama Carayrazota</i> | <i>Por Mama Carehuayrazo</i> | By Mother Carihuairazo (a caldera) |
| <i>Saludashpami pasani</i> | <i>Vengo saludando</i> | I pass by greeting |
| <i>Sonayari balsita</i> | <i>Por favor suena balsita</i> | Please ring out, little drum |
| <i>Sonayari kajita</i> | <i>Por favor suena cajita</i> | Please ring out, little drum |

Note: Lyrics transcribed (in kichwa) by Marcos Aguayza, translated to Spanish by Marcos Aguayza, translated to English by Rebecca Gibson and Allison Adrian.

Source: self-made

⁸ Listen to Pedro Solano in “Yupachani” for an example using a second inversion triad whereas Juana Chuma in “Toro” uses a first inversion triad in descending melodic contour. Listen to *Música Cañari: Indigenous Music from the Highlands of Ecuador* (2020) at this [link](#).

voice

caja

Source: self-made

The Role of the *Caja* at Lalay Raymi

The *caja*, a wooden, hand-held, double-sided drum with a loose snare typically about 8-12” in diameter, is the most omnipresent and potent instrument of the season. The medium-pitched *caja* is typically paired with a low-pitched voice, and is balanced out by a sharp and high-pitched *pingüillo* - a vertical duct flute associated with fertility - creating a dense texture that resonates through the mountainside for two consecutive days. The *caja* is wrapped around the hand and struck on its side, its timbre is both shrill and resonant, its rhythm unceasing, yielding limited aural space for someone to hear the tune it accompanies in the communal setting of *Lalay Raymi*, when hundreds of *cajas* are being struck in the same vicinity.

Figure 6. Pedro Solano Plays a Caja While Singing a Lalay for the Yachac at Lalay Raymi in 2016



Source: Allison Adrian (2016) [courtesy]

A good *caja* should emulate the brilliant sound of the golden drum belonging to the benevolent deity of *Tayta Carnaval*⁹ who walks among Cañaris only during *carnaval*, descending for the evening to bring them good luck if they have demonstrated generosity. If they have not - in the physical form of a banquet at their home offered to friends, family and other *carnavaleros* who pass by - *Tayta Carnaval*'s contrasting spirit, *el Yarkay* or *Cuaresmero*, brings bad luck or more specifically, continues the cycle of unbalanced relationships (between family members and between Mother Earth and humans) that has already yielded meager offerings this year. A visit from *el Yarkay* threatens to deepen the family's scarcity in both a relational and material sense.

⁹ For more information on *Tayta Carnaval*, see Niels Fock and Eva Krener (1977), "Good Luck and the Taita Carnaval of Cañar." More information on Andean Carnival, music, and animist and Catholic belief systems see Turino (1983, pp. 94-99 & pp. 107-108) and Stobart (1994), specifically on *sirinus* (p. 45).

The most sonorous and powerful *cajas* hold within them air charged with energy gathered within potent environments - preferably a waterfall or around *wakas* - natural areas considered spiritually sacred (Solano, 28 February 2016). This brings the drum to life and imbues it with a soul, making it potent enough not only for robust communication across the human world, but also endowing the drum with the ability to penetrate the natural and spiritual environments *carnavaleros* encounter every year. Violinist Antonio Guamán (2016) explains, “The *caja* is the spirit, the force that guides you”. It is the truest of companions, helping to find the way along dark and winding paths at night and emboldening single players who encounter a love interest to announce their affection by “ringing out as loudly and brilliantly as it can” (Solano, 28 February 2016). *Carnavaleros* even offer *chicha*¹⁰ and liquor to their *caja* throughout the two days, ensuring their drum is satiated so that the sound remains ripe. A strong *caja* can help a player better compete for love, underscoring the player’s strength and virility, and also keeps *carnavaleros* safe during the suspension of rules that accompanies the celebration of *Lalay Raymi*.

Gender and Performance Practice of *Lalay* Carnaval Today

While singing *lalays* during *carnaval* goes back as long as Cañaris can remember, there is renewed interest in *lalays* and playing the *caja* due to the foresight of leaders at the indigenous organization TUCAYTA (*La Tukuy Cañar Ayllukunapa Tantanakuy*), who initiated a communal celebration in 1989 after noticing decreased oral transmission within Cañari families. In this respect, the tradition of celebrating *Lalay Raymi* is both old and new: in the past, many of the rituals were exclusively male; however, women are now encouraged to learn to play the *caja* and sing *lalays*. They assist in transmission expansion and help preserve a distinctively Cañari *carnaval* lest it be superseded by the primarily *mestizo carnaval* festivities that feature getting doused with foam (*cariocas*), soaked with water, and sprayed with flour.

Although it was unusual for women to sing *lalays* in public before the 1990s, they were the keepers of *lalay* poetry and musicianship because they judged hundreds of them every *carnaval*, assessing players in order to decide whom they would invite within their home to feast on their family’s spread. The best known *lalay* singers are deceased women who passed on the tradition to men who now sing them publicly, though they know far fewer *lalays* than their elders did.¹¹ As in most Andean music, instrumental music is thought of as a male domain. If females engage in music-making, it is frequently in the role of vocalists, though males also dominate vocally in the context of *lalays* in Cañar.

Music and Emotion

Emotional associations in Cañari music are communicated by tessitura.¹² A singer reaching the upper limits of their range denotes a more wistful affect than a vocalist singing comfortably within or below their natural range. Additionally, a slower tempo or a tune without meter, as in the case of *solahuay* - sung at a roof-raising gathering - can be an indication of sorrowful sentiment.¹³ In the case of *solahuay*, the high tessitura of the vocalists combined with lack of

10 Slightly fermented corn juice/beer prepared among Quechua communities.

11 One of the most revered *lalay* singers was Maria Francisca Solano Mayancela, a woman who chose not to marry or have children and dressed and behaved in a conventionally masculine rather than a conventional feminine way. Another revered *lalay* singer was Juana Chuma Pichisaca.

12 Rather than mode as is common in western approaches to music. See Turino (1993).

13 Listen to a *solahuay* sung by sisters Francisca and Ancelma Solano at this [link](#).

meter underscore emotional lyrics that relay information about the challenging context and dangerous work associated with the construction of a house in an area and era without accessible or abundant material resources.

Music and Innovation

Most Cañaris are deeply respectful of music considered “ancestral.” Energy is spent on de-colonizing or repositioning musical and cultural traditions to become more autochthonous or ancestrally Cañari and energizing younger generations to learn Cañari repertoire and styles like *lalay*.¹⁴ Intercommunal informal competition between indigenous communities at *Lalay Carnaval* has spurred interest from many youth who are selected to learn song texts and sing in public on stage to represent their community.

Cañaris exhibit robust musical imagination and innovation; however, the reception of “new” approaches to Cañari music can be complicated and controversial. Synth-heavy techno versions of traditional music - like the *cuchunchi*, an improvised poem about marriage accompanied by violin and drum - keep the dance tradition accessible to wedding parties while also eliminating the “live” aspects of music performance and the traditionally improvisational approach. Furthermore, as a new generation of Cañaris have studied music at university, tuning preferences that allow musicians to access a wider array of repertoire have replaced the tuning system used by their parents. Specifically, a preference among older Cañaris for loosely tuned “unisons” (at times more than a quarter tone apart) that add to the density of texture has made musical collaboration with younger generations of Cañaris difficult. Given that many of the younger musicians are closely related as uncles/nephews if not father/son, I initially assumed that a popular band made up of 30-year-old Cañari musicians, *Yanantin*, frequently played with a popular older ensemble called *Nukanchik Kawsay*. However, I learned that they had *never* played together, not once, given their divergent tuning. Younger musicians adeptly incorporate a wider variety of global sounds such as jazz, blues or heavy metal into their musical compositions. As these genres appeal more to a “listening” audience than a “dancing” one, younger Cañaris both dazzle and bewilder their elders as the intention of the music is not the traditional goal of Cañari music-making: collective dance.

Conclusion

We are indebted to Cañari musicians and leaders for supporting our research about Cañari music and culture. Everything we learned, most elders already know. It is an honor to be included in Cañari community events and to be invited to research Cañari culture.

It is our greatest hope that the materials we have compiled help to create a more robust record of Cañari culture, and assist in contextualizing the culture and history of the area, with the intention that the archival materials help Cañaris and *all* Ecuadorians and Latin Americans better understand the rich musics, histories, and cultures of the nation and the continent. The collection weaves together historic and present-day images from North American and Ecuadorian scholars, journalists, and photographers. It includes the “active voices” of community members in the form of video and audio documentary work.

We especially hope that educators might use the materials within the archives to inspire students to learn more about Ecuadorian cultures. Finally, it is important that Cañari communities

¹⁴ Lynn Hirschkind persuasively argues that it is quite unlikely that direct lineage to Cañaris could exist given the violence with which they were met by both Incas and Spaniards alike.


- both those living in Cañar and those living in the diaspora - have access to images, music, and oral histories, to assist in the development of a more robust account of indigenous knowledge from which to inform their lives.

There is exciting work waiting for arts- and culture-lovers in Ecuador. Educators have the power to influence a broader and deeper connection to the many cultures present in contemporary Ecuador. We hope the resources created inspire educators and students to pursue their own projects to learn more about the vast musical and cultural worlds that exist all around all of us.

References

- Bogre, M. (2019). *Documentary photography reconsidered: History, theory and practice*. Routledge.
- Blankenship, J. (2005). *Cañar: A year in the highlands of Ecuador*. University of Texas Press.
- Chiriboga, L. and Caparini, S, eds. (1994). *Identidades desnudas: Ecuador 1860-1920: La temprana fotografía del indio de los Andes*. Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales, Ediciones Abya Yala y Taller Visual: Centro de Investigaciones Visuales.
- Collier, J., and Collier, M. (1986). *Visual anthropology: Photography as a research method*. University of New Mexico Press.
- Vallderama-Fernandez, R. and Escalante-Gutiérrez, C., eds. (1996). *Andean lives: Gregorio Condori Mamani & Asunta Quispe Huamán*. University of Texas Press.
- Fock, N. and Krener, E. (2020). *Juncal: Ecuador mamallaktapi runa kawsayta paktachin*. Municipio de Cañar. [Previously published in Spanish, in 2013, as: *Juncal: una comuna indígena en Ecuador*. Municipio de Cañar y Casa de la Cultural “Benjamin Carrión,” Núcleo del Cañar].
- Guamán, A. (31 March 2016). Personal interview.
- Hirschkind, L. (1995). History of the Indian population of Cañar. *Colonial Latin American Historical Review*, 4(3), 311-342.
- Howard, R. and H. Stobart. (2002). *Knowledge and learning in the Andes: Ethnographic perspectives*. Liverpool University Press.
- Krener, E. and Fock, N. (1977-78). Good luck and the taita carnaval of Cañar. *Folk* (19-20), 151-170.
- Meisch, L. (2002). *Andean entrepreneurs: Otavalo merchants and musicians in the global arena*. University of Texas Press.
- Moreno-Andrade, S. L. (1949). *Música y danzas autóctonas del Ecuador*. Fray Jodoco Ricke.
- Música Cañari: Indigenous music from the highlands of Ecuador*. (2020). Produced by Allison Adrian. SoundCloud.
- Olsen, D. A. (2002). *Music of El Dorado: The ethnomusicology of ancient South American cultures*. University Press of Florida.
- Pauta, D.P.; Mansutti, A.; Vásquez, M.V.; and Duchi, J.A. (2021). *Los Tundunchil: mama danza y wawa danza Cañari*. UNAE: Universidad Nacional de Educación del Ecuador.
- Pichisaca, J.; Quinde, A.P.; and Mayancela, A.Q. (1986-1987). “Expresión del jahuary: Origen y leyenda del Jahuary.” Monograph.
- Rios, F. (2012). The Andean conjunto, Bolivian sikureada, and the folkloric musical representation continuum. *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 21(1), 5-29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17411912.2012.641408>
- Ritter, J. (2002). Siren songs: Ritual and revolution in the Peruvian Andes. *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*. 11(1), 9-42.
- Romero, R. R. (1990). Musical change and cultural resistance in the central Andes of Peru. *Latin American Music Review/Revista de Música Latinoamericana*, 11(1), 1-35. <https://doi.org/10.2307/780356>
- Romero, R. R. (2001). *Debating the past: Music, memory, and identity in the Andes*. Oxford University Press.
- Romero, R. R. (2013). *Peru: Andean Music of work, life, and celebration*. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.

- Schechter, J. M. (1992). *The Indispensable Harp: Historical development, modern roles, configurations, and performance practices in Ecuador and Latin America*. Kent State University Press.
- Schechter, J. M. (1999). *Music in Latin American culture*. Schirmer.
- Solano-Falcón, Pedro (28 February 2016 & 21 June 2016). Personal Interviews.
- Stobart, H. (1994). Flourishing horns and enchanted tubers: Music and potatoes in highland Bolivia. *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 3, 35-48.
- Turino, T. (1993). *Moving away from Silence: Music of the Peruvian altiplano and the experience of urban migration*. University of Chicago Press.
- Turino, T. (2007). *Music in the Andes: Experiencing music, expressing culture*. Oxford University Press.

 [Volver al índice](#)