

Encuentro Centroamericano “Listening for Central America”

Conference Organizers:

Bernard Gordillo Brockmann, Visiting Scholar, UCR Music Department

Walter Aaron Clark, Director, Center for Iberian and Latin American Music

Sponsored by:

The CHASS Dean's Office, the Center for Ideas and Society, the Center for Iberian and Latin American Music

Department of Music

University of California, Riverside

April 17, 2026

PROGRAM

Morning Session, INTS 1113 Symposium Room, 9:30 AM–12:15 PM

Opening Remarks

Walter Aaron Clark, Director, Center for Iberian and Latin American Music

Jonathan Ritter, Chair, UCR Department of Music

Bernard Gordillo Brockmann, Visiting Scholar, UCR Department of Music

Panel I (Jonathan Ritter, moderator)

Transformations of Form and Meaning of the Dance of the Marimba in Western Nicaragua Over the Last Half Century. T.M. Scruggs (Independent Scholar)

Troubling the Binaries: Renewed Neo-Traditionalisms in 2020s Garifuna Commercial Music. Amy Frishkey (University of Texas, San Antonio)

¡El Salvador Vencerá!: Luis López Ayala, El Grupo Anastacio Aquino, and Solidarity with Central America in Los Angeles, 1981–1982. Fernando Rios (University of Maryland, College Park)

Playing Through the Chaos: Performance Redundancy in Panamanian Carnival Bands. Sean Bellaviti (Toronto Metropolitan University, Canada)

Lunch, 12:15 PM–2:00 PM

Afternoon Session, INTS 1113 Symposium Room, 2:00 PM–4:15 PM

Panel II (Bernard Gordillo Brockmann, moderator)

Before the National Symphony: Orchestral Ensembles in San José, Costa Rica, 1890–1940. María Clara Vargas Cullell (Universidad de Costa Rica)

Not Mine: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and the Ethics of Inclusiveness. Ileri Chávez-Bárcenas (Bowdoin College)

The Propaganda Fide Convents: Promoters of Western culture in Latin America through devotional songs. Luis Díaz-Santana Garza (Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, Mexico) and Sonia Medrano Ruiz (Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, Mexico)

Evening Event, UCR ARTS, downtown Riverside, 7:00 PM

In Conversation with Carlos Mejía Godoy (Bernard Gordillo Brockmann, host)

Globally renowned Nicaraguan revolutionary singer-songwriter Carlos Mejía Godoy talks (and sings) about his life, music, and Nicaraguan history.

PRESENTER ABSTRACTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

***Transformations of Form and Meaning of the Dance of the Marimba in Western Nicaragua Over the Last Half Century.* T.M. Scruggs (Independent Scholar)**

From 1985 to the present day, I have continually documented the folk-rooted music of the marimba de arco trio and the dance it accompanies in the Masaya region in western Nicaragua. From the 1960s on the dance and music complex has been promoted as a touchstone of "authentic", unique Nicaraguan cultural heritage. The Masaya-based dance moves have continually been counterposed to regional variations and especially the interpretations created by 1980s national "folk ballets" based in the capital city Managua. My dissertation research centered on the music, but I became aware that the intense national argument over the valid reproduction of the tradition actually ignored musical changes and focused instead on aspects of the dance, especially variations of the footwork. Accordingly, I moved to augment my still photography and audio recording to include filming with the then newly available Video 8 technology.

With the introduction of neo-liberal economic policies and the end of the U.S. economic war, the dance and music complex began a gradual transformation and a more extensive popularity within Masaya that has engendered a new debate over authenticity. In this paper I trace the changing transformations of performance of the Dance of the Marimba and the changes in sociocultural meaning that the local population expresses with its annual recreation over several decades.

T.M. Scruggs has taught at the University of Texas at Austin; Universidad Centroamericana (Managua, Nicaragua); Florida International University (Miami); Universidad de los Andes (Mérida, Venezuela); and from 1994-2009 was the token ethnomusicologist at the University of Iowa where for a time he also directed the Latin America Studies Program. His research focuses on the use of music and dance to construct identity and effect socioeconomic change. He has pursued field work in Nicaragua continually since 1983; his last visit was in 2025. He has published extensively on Central American music and dance in audio, video, and print format, being the principal contributor and consultant for major reference works on the subject. His album of field recordings, *Nicaraguan Folk Music from Masaya*, was nominated in 1988 for the

Independent Label awards in both the category of Best Liner Notes and Best World/International release. His publication on Liberation Theology-inspired masses, primarily on Panama and Nicaragua, received the Society for Ethnomusicology's Jaap Kunst Prize for the most significant article published in 2005. He maintains, however, that his highest distinction has been receiving the appellation "El Marimbero Gringo" ["The Gringo Marimbist"] from Carlos Mejía Godoy, Nicaragua's leading musician.

Troubling the Binaries: Renewed Neo-Traditionalisms in 2020s Garifuna Commercial Music.
Amy Frishkey (University of Texas, San Antonio)

The success of the 2007 album *Wátina* ("I Called Out") by Andy Palacio and the Garifuna Collective, followed shortly after by Palacio's untimely death at age 47, significantly altered the popular music landscape of the Afro-indigenous Garifuna of the Central American Caribbean coast. By garnering international accolades and gaining Garifuna music a resounding audibility within the world music industry, it launched a new "Garifuna world music" (GWM) genre that codified refigurations of traditional genres such as *parranda* and *hünguhüngu* for Euro-Anglo audiences as a "timeless" music for "the soul," not "the hips," under the guidance of Belizean Catalan producer Ivan Duran. While the Collective still performs its brand of neo-traditionalism today, its reach since 2020 has become as local, national, and hemispheric as global, taking its place alongside less purist and more kaleidoscopic neo-traditional acts representing a younger generation of Garifuna with no less of an interest in global attention. My presentation engages an important theme of ethnomusicological studies of Black American music – creative tensions between tradition and innovation – by examining the diverse takes on neo-traditionalism offered by Garifuna musicians Gen-Z and younger. As confirmed by ethnographic research conducted in the current decade, these musicians bypass Duran's neoliberal route to Global North recognition in a few respects. First, they simultaneously embrace U.S.-influenced individualism, through personal branding and sound, and the Garifuna value of mutual dependence (*machularadi*), through regular joint concerts within the Garifuna Central America-U.S. diaspora and the fostering of community fandom and support. Second, they hear past, and thus neutralize, the binary oppositions endemic to GWM in their embrace of its ambassadors – Andy Palacio and Aurelio Martinez – as repositories of musical *traditionalism* (not *neo-traditionalism*) since childhood, resulting in reverential acts -- such as giving songs from *Wátina* the traditional drumming-and-dance-ensemble treatment – alongside commercial releases and performances that privilege the acoustic and the digital in equal measure.

Amy Frishkey is an Assistant Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of Texas at San Antonio. She specializes in Afrodiasporic music of the Americas with a focus on the Central American Caribbean. Her first book, *Navigating Neo-Traditionalism in Garifuna Popular Music* (Lexington Books/Bloomsbury 2027), explores neo-traditionalism in Afro-indigenous Garifuna commercial music as a space for negotiating the influence and impact of neoliberal multiculturalism upon Garifuna communities and as a point of intersection with Black American musical legacies. Reflecting an additional research interest in relationships between musical vocality and coherence, Amy is also in the planning stage of a second book project on meanings and categorizations surrounding the Global North construct of the passaggio between "head" and "chest" vocal registers, approaching it as a "border zone" that reveals tacit sociocultural values and priorities. Prior to her current position, she taught at University of Redlands, UCLA, UC

Riverside, and UT Austin, and worked for a decade in the background music industry designing music strategies for retail and hospitality spaces belonging to brands such as Macy's, Olive Garden, and Lenscrafters. New research interests include arts along the Belize-Mexico border and the implications of "unlidded" hearing for music research.

¡El Salvador Vencerá!: Luis López Ayala, El Grupo Anastacio Aquino, and Solidarity with Central America in Los Angeles, 1981–1982. Fernando Rios (University of Maryland, College Park)

Los Angeles represented the center for Salvadoran protest music activity in the years of the U.S.-Central America Solidarity Movement (1981–1992), which reflected the city's large Salvadoran community. This paper examines the emergence, internal political dynamics, and transnational dimensions of Los Angeles's Salvadoran *nueva canción* scene from 1981 to 1982 through the activities of Luis López Ayala. An ex-member of El Salvador's major *nueva canción* act Banda Tepehuani and various rock bands, López left his home country for Mexico with the former ensemble after the outbreak of the Salvadoran Civil War, and by early 1981 had settled in Los Angeles. Within a few months, López fully integrated himself into the Solidarity Movement's local music scene, a development facilitated by his ties with one of the FMLN's five organizations, the Resistencia Nacional or RN. By the end of the year, the RN provided López with funding to record with El Grupo Anastacio Aquino the LP *¡El Salvador Vencerá!*—the first Salvadoran *nueva canción* album released by a U.S.-based ensemble. The RN also coordinated for López a national tour in which the leading Mexican *canto nuevo* artist Gabino Palomares operated as the headliner. As this paper demonstrates, an examination of López's activities and recorded output at this critical early juncture in the history of the US-Central America Solidarity Movement reveals the remarkable extent to which the nascent Salvadoran *nueva canción* movement of Los Angeles drew from models developed in El Salvador, which afforded musicians such as López with artistic opportunities while also serving as constraints.

Fernando Rios is Associate Professor in Ethnomusicology at the University of Maryland, College Park. Until a few years ago, his research focused on the music of the Andes, culminating in the book *Panpipes & Ponchos: Musical Folklorization and the Rise of the Andean Conjunto Tradition in La Paz, Bolivia*, which was published by Oxford University Press. His current book project explores the musical and political activities of U.S.-based Salvadoran artists and their allies in the US-Central America Solidarity Movement (1981–1992).

Playing Through the Chaos: Performance Redundancy in Panamanian Carnival Bands. Sean Bellaviti (Toronto Metropolitan University, Canada)

In this paper, I analyze the performance redundancies that allow two competing (horn-and-drum) *murga* ensembles to successfully manage the uncertainties of the chaotic environment that is Carnival in the Panamanian town of Las Tablas. I begin by discussing the concept of performance redundancy as I have developed it through ethnographic interviews with *murga* musicians and by situating it in relation to issues of competency, performance expectations, and the severe demands that competitive Carnival performances place on performers' bodies. I then outline the redundancies built into *murga* ensembles—including doubling instruments or hiring two musicians to play one instrument—as well as the preparations and precautions musicians take to manage the

grueling five days of Carnival performances. This is followed by an analysis of a selection of field video recordings (2017–2026), which illustrate a variety of situations in which performance redundancies compensate for inevitable moments when musicians drop out, often for reasons beyond their control.

As a strategy that enables murga musicians to outplay their rivals (while enduring the jostling of a raucous throng of Carnival-goers) I argue that performance redundancy provides a lens for examining the meanings and social importance accorded to Carnival competitions. In particular, I argue that, in addition to their practical function of sustaining musical sound and performance in chaotic circumstances, performance redundancies also express an ethos of excess that permeates almost every aspect of Las Tablas' Carnival celebration.

Sean Bellaviti is an Adjunct Professor at Toronto Metropolitan University and an Associate Fellow of the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean at York University. He has written on the development of musical nationalism, genre studies, the inter-relationships between music, territory, and ethnicity, especially as informed within the Panamanian and broader Latin American context and, most recently, Toronto's Latin American community. Bellaviti is also active as a salsa and jazz pianist, arranger, and band director.

Before the National Symphony: Orchestral Ensembles in San José, Costa Rica, 1890–1940.
María Clara Vargas Cullell (Universidad de Costa Rica)

Having a stable symphony orchestra was an aspiration that emerged in Costa Rica in the mid-nineteenth century, when opera companies began arriving in the country. This goal, however, was not achieved until 1940, when the National Symphony Orchestra was founded. In the preceding decades, however, numerous musical groups referred to as orchestras were active in San José. This study examines these ensembles by distinguishing among three types: small groups known as *orquestinas*; orchestras of intermediate size; and ensembles that, due to their instrumental composition and repertoire, may be considered symphonic, although they did not always reach the typical size of such groups. All of them played an important role in Costa Rican social and cultural life, participating in social gatherings, lyric-dramatic performances, and silent film screenings, as well as in dances, banquets, and religious and political ceremonies. The research is based on information gathered from newspapers and concert programs of the period, which were systematically compiled into a database. By documenting the types of ensembles active during the period and the contexts in which they performed, this study brings renewed attention to ensembles and musicians that have largely been forgotten in the country's musical history.

María Clara Vargas Cullell stands out for her multifaceted career. With the groups Syntagma Musicum, Ganassi —National Music Award winners in 2009 and 2013, respectively— and the Phoenix Bassoon Quartet, she has performed numerous recitals and recorded several compact discs. She has also appeared as a soloist with orchestras in Costa Rica and throughout Latin America. As a researcher, she publishes in academic journals, newspapers, and books. Her work *From Fanfares to Concert Halls* received the National History Award in 2004. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Music and a Master's degree in History from the University of Costa Rica, a Licence d'Enseignement de la Musique from Université Paris VIII, and a Diplôme Supérieur de Clavecin from the Schola Cantorum de Paris. In 2011 she received a Fulbright Visiting Researcher

Award and in 2012 a Research Grant from the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service). She was the producer of the chamber music season *Una Hora de Música* (1984-1990) and organizer of the Costa Rican International Early Music Festival (2008-2019) and the María Clara Cullell International Piano Competition (2000-2021). She served as a faculty member at the School of Music, where she was Director (2003–2011) and later Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Costa Rica (2015–2023). She is currently a full member of the Academy of Geography and History of Costa Rica.

***Not Mine: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and the Ethics of Inclusiveness.* Ileri Chávez-Bárcenas (Bowdoin College)**

Moves to correct the Eurocentric bias of early music history and to recover the works by women and composers of color have propelled the four-part *romance* “Madre la de los primores” into wide circulation as a purported composition by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Yet no documentary evidence identifies Sor Juana as a practicing musician, much less a composer. This paper examines how the piece’s modern reception among amateur, academic, and professional ensembles, has often relied less on sustained engagement with Sor Juana’s writing than on projecting present-day aspirations to foreground marginalized voices onto tenuous or nonexistent documentation. Sor Juana’s irresistible status as a cultural symbol has effectively pressed her into service as a composer, with the *romance* valued primarily through the presumed gendered and racial identity of its alleged author. However well intentioned, such tokenistic gestures can displace the careful attribution, source criticism, and contextual analysis owed to any repertoire, and they frequently proceed without meaningful dialogue with existing Sor Juana scholarship.

Recentring the evidence, I turn to the original manuscript in the Archivo Histórico Arquidiocesano de Guatemala. Its cover page references the villancico “De hermosas contradicciones,” a text written by Sor Juana for the feast of the Assumption in Mexico (1679), likely set to music in Guatemala by a local composer or adapted as a contrafactum to an existing piece. In contrast, the *romance* “Madre la de los primores” written in honor of Santa Teresa, belongs to a devotional tradition that flourished following her beatification and canonization in the early seventeenth century. I argue that the Guatemalan source situates the *romance* within a broader Teresian commemorative repertoire, redirecting analysis from authorial mythmaking to local practices through which women’s writing circulated in sound. This perspective rethinks early modern musical value and recognition, showing how women’s texts could accrue authority through performance, adaptation, reuse, and communal celebration, even when musical authorship remained anonymous.

Ileri Chávez Bárcenas is a musicologist specializing in the cultural and sonic landscapes of early modern New Spain, with a particular focus on vernacular song traditions across Spanish-speaking territories in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Her research integrates historical and anthropological methods with the study of literature, religion, and early music paleography to investigate how the performance of vocal music in public festivals is informed by constructs of race, social hierarchy, and structures of power in viceregal societies. She is Assistant Professor of Music at Bowdoin College and holds a Doctorate in Musicology from Princeton University and a Master of Arts in Religion from Yale University. Her book, *Sounding Race, Identity, and Devotion*

in Puebla de los Angeles (Oxford University Press) and its companion recording by La Boz Galana and Concerto Scirocco (Outhere Music) are forthcoming in 2026.

***The Propaganda Fide Convents: Promoters of Western culture in Latin America through devotional songs.* Luis Díaz-Santana Garza (Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, Mexico) and Sonia Medrano Ruiz (Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, Mexico)**

The “Old Alabados” are songs that have remained part of the popular tradition of various Latin American countries since the 17th Century. After being disseminated by the Valencian friar Antonio Margil de Jesús during his many travels through New Spain, this praise and its variations continue to be performed today, promoting Catholic faith and hope, especially in rural activities and during funerals. According to a 19th-Century Mexican dictionary, an Alabado is a “Hymn sung in honor of the sacraments; the character of the Alabado should be tender and passionate, but filled with the most mystical expression and the purest recollection.”

In this presentation, we will examine the hymns of a songbook from the Hacienda of San José del Maguey, Zacatecas, which employed approximately nine hundred workers in 1914. This hacienda boasts a church dedicated to Saint Joseph, and the number of hymns preserved is remarkable. Through various sources, we will conduct a comparative study with hymns performed in several Central American countries, aiming to understand the convergences and divergences among these songs that constitute a shared cultural region. We will also highlight the role of the Propaganda Fide colleges in disseminating Western culture in the New World.

Luis Díaz-Santana Garza is a full professor at the school of Arts of the Autonomous University of Zacatecas and a member of the National System of Researchers. He holds a Bachelor’s degree in Music, a Master’s degree in Humanities, and a Doctorate in History. He has published articles in *Diagonal*, *Acta Musicologica*, *American Music*, and the *Journal of Beatles Studies*, as well as nine books, including *Between Norteño and Tejano Conjunto: Music, Tradition, and Culture at the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Bloomsbury 2021) and *Cultural History of the Guitar in Latin America* (Vernon Press 2025). He is member of the International Musicological Society and the Society for Ethnomusicology, and organizes the annual Colloquium “Musical Research in the Regions of Mexico.”

Sonia Medrano Ruiz is an associate professor at the school of Arts of the Autonomous University of Zacatecas. She holds a Master’s degree and a Doctorate in History. In 2021, she published her book *Traditional Orchestras in Mexico: From Invention to the Consolidation of a Tradition*. She has published articles in journals such as *Diagonal* and *El Artista*, as well as chapters in various books. She is currently a member of the National System of Researchers and holds the PRODEP Profile. As a singer, she has recorded Mexican and Latin American music from the 18th to the 21st centuries.

INVITED CONFERENCE ORGANIZER

Bernard Gordillo Brockmann, born in Nicaragua, is a Visiting Scholar in the Department of Music at the University of California, Riverside. He is a historian and musicologist of the Americas, with an emphasis on culture, colonialism, and power. His book project, *Canto de Marte*:

Music, Culture, and US Intervention in Nicaragua, 1909–1933 (under contract with Oxford University Press), explores the cultural impact of early twentieth century US political paternalism, fiscal and financial protectionism, and military occupation in Nicaragua. In development, his second monograph will examine a history of sound and colonization in California. He serves as Central America area editor of the *Grove Dictionary of Latin American and Iberian Music*, and as Associate Editor of the journal *Diagonal: An Ibero-American Music Review*.

Bernard has recent and forthcoming journal articles in *Ethnohistory* and *Pacific Historical Review*, as well as chapters in edited volumes with University of California Press, Cambridge University Press, and Oxford University Press. His writings have appeared in *The Public Historian*, *Yale Journal of Music & Religion*, and *Bulletin of the Comediantes*. He has been a 2025 UCLA Chancellor's Award for Postdoctoral Research Nominee, and a recipient of the 2017 Ingolf Dahl Memorial Award in Musicology from the Northern California and Pacific-Southwest Chapters of the American Musicological Society.

Prior to his current appointment, Bernard served as a Chancellor's Postdoctoral Scholar in the Department of History at the University of California, Los Angeles, and as a Postdoctoral Associate and Lecturer in the Yale Institute of Sacred Music at Yale University. He holds a PhD in Music from the University of California, Riverside, and graduate degrees in music performance from Indiana University, Bloomington, and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, England. As a professional harpsichordist, he has performed with numerous musicians and ensembles in the Americas and Europe, including the Los Angeles Philharmonic.