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Colombian Composer Adolfo Mejia, Four Works for Small Ensembles

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COLOMBIAN COMPOSER ADOLFO MEJIA,
FOUR WORKS FOR SMALL ENSEMBLES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

in

The School of Music

by

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ABSTRACT

The present document is a requirement for the Doctoral of Musical Arts degree at Louisiana State University.

First, I will present the biography of the Composer Adolfo Mejía, ordered in five different cities where his career was developed.

Later, I will describe some aspects of Colombian traditions. I do this with the intention to better understand the composer and some of the pieces entitled with indigenous dance and rhythmic names from different parts of the country. There will be an emphasis on two regions out of six, those more closely related to Mejía’s life.

In the same way, I will present a list of the works composed by Mejía. This is not by any means conclusive nor definitive. It is the result of combining the dates of composition, their instrumentation, and the availability of their scores.

Additionally, I will make a performance edition of four of his compositions. Similarly they are all chamber music: two of them for two violins, cello and piano, another one for just cello and piano, and lastly an original composition for violin and piano, for which I have made a simple transcription for cello and piano. These pieces are short in length but rich in content. In them, one finds traditional rhythms in a more sophisticated style.
INTRODUCTION

Very little information about Adolfo Mejía has been written in English. During the course of this investigation only limited material was found publicly available, and it all describes the same insufficient information about the composer. Even though the information is accurate and enlightening at first, it becomes frustrating in its repetition and limitation. Those sources are for example *The International Dictionary of Black Composers*, and the online resources of *Naxos Music Library* and the *Oxford Music Online*.

In a different way, a great deal of his biography has been made public only in Spanish. Several investigations have been conducted in search of this uncommonly heard master of music, and as result, a handful of documents such as dissertations and monographs are now also available. This obviously demonstrates an increased interest by the academic community, not only researching details about the composer but serving to invite future generations to do the same. Ultimately this will give him a more accurate and renowned place in the history and evolution of Colombian music. That served as motivation to develop the present project.

The research of Colombian scholars such as Fernando Parra, Leonardo Zambrano, Hernan Salazar and Miroslav Swoboda are perfect examples of such efforts. They all have in common the guidance and support of Enrique Muñoz, who clearly has become the most important investigator of Adolfo Mejía. Muñoz, has published the books, *Viajero de Si Mismo*, and *La Musicalia de Cartagena*, which serve as milestones in the research and deep understanding of this brilliant musician.

Likewise, Manuel Mejía, son of the composer, and Ms. Margarita Insignares, granddaughter of the composer and Director of the “Adolfo Mejía Foundation”, have collected and provided me with first-hand personal information about Adolfo Mejía.
Also, an investigative group, Interdis, released a documentary entitled Viajero de Mi Mismo, which has received the awards of “Best Cinematography” in USA, “National Prize of Journalism” in Colombia, and “Best Documentary International” in UK.

The biographical content of my document is a modest summary of these previous investigations. And thanks to them, Mejía is slowly acquiring more attention and cultural value not only in Colombia but around the continent and the world. Proof of this for example, is that the most prominent concert hall in Cartagena is now named “Teatro Adolfo Mejía”.

In Argentina, Cordoba Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of Colombian Maestro Hadrian Avila recorded Mejía’s most famous work, Pequeña Suite publicly available on Youtube.¹

The Colombian Embassy in Russia and the Tolstoi Museum recently organized the concert titled “Partituras Redescubiertas” [Rediscovered Scores] where the music of Adolfo Mejía and two other Colombian Composers was performed by Russian musicians. According to the press released by the diplomatic institution, there were comments after the event that clearly showed the positive impact of these composers on the international audience.²

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BIOGRAPHY

Adolfo Mejía Navarro was born on February 5, 1905 in San Luis de Sincé, a small village in the department of Sucre that is known today just as Sincé. His parents were Adolfo Mejía Valverde, a guitar player, goldsmith and watchmaker, and Francisca Navarro Iriarte, a singer of a popular style of music with origins in African-American traditions known as “Tambora” or “Bullerengue”.

Since he was very young, Adolfo Mejía Navarro was captivated by the music he heard on his father’s guitar and he would later teach him how to play it and the fundamentals of music theory.

When Mejía was 8 years old, he started playing in serenades and familiar reunions with his father and other important musicians from Sincé, among them, Manuel Romero, Marcial Martinez and Mariano Rodriguez.

Manuel Romero was a flute player who studied in Cartagena. Mariano Rodriguez, was a Spanish Priest in the Catholic Church of Sincé, and also played the violin. Marcial Martinez was a trumpet player in the army and created the first musical ensemble in Sincé, called Armonia de Sincé [Harmony of Since].

When Mejía was 11 years old, he wrote a composition entitled “Primicias,” which seemingly was a successful hit on every event he was asked to play. Unfortunately, there is no copy of this music.

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3 Enrique Muñoz, *Adolfo Mejía: Viajero de sí Mismo* (Cartagena, Ediciones Pluma de Mompox, 1994), 34
4 Fernando Parra, “Contextualización De La Pequeña Suite De Adolfo Mejía” (master’s thesis, National Conservatory of Colombia, 2015), 9
The Priest became an important influence in Mejía’s life for several reasons. First, he gave him violin lessons, and he also persuaded the little boy to learn how to play the flute with Mr. Romero. Mejía assisted the priest in the church as an altar boy and this allowed the two of them to develop a friendship through which the boy got introduced to poetry, painting and Spanish literature. But, most importantly for the future of Mejía’s career, the priest was the person that advised and encouraged the family to send the little kid to Cartagena because he was showing intellectual and artistic abilities that needed to be expanded and developed in a more challenging environment than the small village was offering at the time.

Still in Sincé, Mejía became aquatint of the great Spanish violinist Pablo de Sarasate, singer Enrico Caruso, guitarist Andres Segovia, among other important musicians from that period. Priest Rodriguez used to call him “Pequeño Sarasate” because Mejía’s evident virtuosic skills at playing the guitar reminded him of the brilliant violinist.⁵

**Cartagena**

Adolfo Mejía Navarro and his Mother arrived in Cartagena in 1916, and resided with Francisca’s relatives. Later on, they moved to the house of Benjamin Orozco, a violinist who lived in the ancestral neighborhood of San Diego. Ladislao Orozco, son of Benjamin, also played the violin, and soon the two kids developed a brother-like friendship, that became just stronger as they grew up.

Still a little boy, Mejía was part of the choir in the San Pedro Claver church, conducted by Jesus de Sanctics, an Italian musician who incidentally also taught in the Musical Institute of Cartagena where Mejía was a student for a short time later on.

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⁵ Fernando Parra, “Contextualizacion De La Pequeña Suite De Adolfo Mejía” (master’s thesis, National Conservatory of Colombia, 2015), 8
The institute was created in 1889\(^6\) under the direction of Lorenzo Margottini, who had brought to Cartagena the Italian musical tradition of important Italian composers: Palestrina, Corelli, Scarlatti, Donizetti, Rossini, among other important figures from the National Academy of St Cecilia in Rome.

Mejía, then considered that the western training was limiting his development of his own traditional roots, and consequently decided to leave the institute. Nonetheless, he registered at Eusebio Velez’s Academy, to learn Piano but to play it in a popular style. This decision permitted him devote himself to the bohemian soul, already existent in Cartagena.

In the 1920s Mejía became that character already described in most of the investigations made about him, that of a man dressed in a white suit with black tie, but holding the coat on his shoulder. He walked the neighborhood of San Diego with his guitar, alternately speaking Arabic, Greek, German, French, Italian and English. He was also an avid reader and writer of poetry. Spending nights at the beach until sunrise, he would sneak into friends’ houses to play on their pianos and surprise them at any hour.

As he was nurtured by this atmosphere, Mejía joined several groups such as the “Lorduy Jazz Band”, “Eureka Jazz Band”, and “Estudiantina Revollo”. He played the guitar, the piano and even made arrangements and new compositions for the popular ensembles. In spite of the fact that he was no longer an official student, he continued to develop his artistry (both as a musician and a writer), his techniques and skills through contact with friends such as Ladislao Orozco, Angel Maria Camacho, Luis Carlos Lopez, and Jorge Artel, all of them important figures in Cartagena’s social life. They all met frequently and created “El Bodegon”, an

\(^6\) Fernando Parra, “Contextualizacion De La Pequeña Suite De Adolfo Mejía” (master’s thesis, National Conservatory of Colombia, 2015), 10
organized group of intellectuals and artists in which Art, the Bohemian life style and pure friendships were developed.

**New York**

In 1929, Angel Camacho went to New York to start a new band. He also played with the International Antillean Brunswick Orchestra, the band that played with Rafael Hernandez Camacho, the famous Puerto Rican musician. Camacho, was the one that encouraged Mejía, who recently had married Rosa Franco, and his friend Ladislao Orozco to go to New York City to explore new directions, and also to take advantage of the growing music recording industry. There, they eventually recorded several albums with different orchestras, and thus the Caribbean folklore expanded thanks to this dynamic duo.

In New York, Mejía (Guitar) formed the Albeniz trio, with Terig Tucci (mandolin) from Argentina and Antonio Frances (bandola) from Cataluña. They rehearsed at Tucci’s house, which had a beautiful view of the Central Park. This was undoubtedly an inspiring situation for them to exchange their multicultural ideas.

Some of Tucci’s compositions are based on traditional dances from Colombia, regardless of that fact he never went there. Mejía also composed a song entitled “Aquella Vez” in the rhythm of Tango (traditional Argentinean style). “Danza Mora”, from his Spanish Suite for wind band, is a good example of his continued interest in music from Spain. That interest began

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7 Enrique Muñoz, *Adolfo Mejía: Viajero de si Mismo* (Cartagena, Ediciones Pluma de Mompos, 1994), 39
8 Ibid, 40
within the first moments of study with the Priest Rodriguez and was expanded through his interaction with Antonio Frances.

Due to the Great Depression of 1933, Mejía returned to Colombia. He stayed for few months in Cartagena where he finally met his first daughter, Livia, who was conceived just right before he had left for the United States in 1929.9

**Bogota**

A Few months later in that same year, Mejía was hired as a Librarian by the National Symphony Orchestra in Bogota. This position required the librarian to not only organize and prepare the scores for the musicians, but to know well how to make arrangements and musical adaptations for symphony orchestra.10

At the same time, Mejía became a student at the National Conservatory, where he received education in Harmony, Counterpoint and Music History with the most important scholars from that institution, Gustavo Escobar, Jesus Bermudez, and Andres Pardo Tovar respectively.11 The conservatory was directed by Antonio Maria Valencia, another important character in the development of Music in Colombia. During this period he began contributing to the Nationalistic Style from the Republican Era, a trend characterized by the combination of indigenous traditional rhythms with symphonic elements and European influences, dating back to the beginning of the XIX century.

During that century, only two operas were composed in Bogota, Colombia, *Ester* in 1874 and *Florinda* in 1880, both composed by Jose Maria Ponce de Leon (1846-1882) a Colombian

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9 In the documentary *Viajero de Mi Mismo*, Livia says they met when she was 7 years old.
composer who studied with Gounod, in Paris, where he learned the European norms especially for religious music.\(^\text{12}\)

In Bogotá Mejía transformed himself from a composer of traditional songs for popular bands to a creator of more serious symphonic works with elements from the traditional folklore. The piece “Pequeña Suite” becomes the very first symphonic composition that includes a traditional air from the Caribbean, a Cumbia.

With this work, he won the “Ezequiel Bernal” prize in 1938. The first prize was shared between Mejía and his teacher at the National Conservatory, Maestro Jesus Bermudez Silva. The prize permitted him to travel in 1939 to France, to study at Ecole Normale de Musique.

**France**

There, he took classes of music history with Nadia Bonneville and composition with the famous Nadia Boulanger—known to be the teacher of other great composers such as Alberto Ginastera, Darius Milhaud, and Aaron Copland among many others. In the thesis: *La Obra Del Compositor Adolfo Mejía: Armonía Expresada en Paisajes Sonoros y Humanos* [The Work of Adolfo Mejía: Harmony Expressed in Sound and Human Landscapes], Miroslav Swoboda commented that the Bonneville commonly referenced in previous investigations was possibly Andree (also professor of Gabriel Charpentier) and not Nadia.\(^\text{13}\)

Eager to take advantage of this opportunity, he thirstily continued to develop his skills as orchestrator, and instrumentalist. According to Swoboda, Mejía joined a group directed by Rose Cornase, played for Broadcasting Stations in Paris, and was able to enjoy the Parisian bohemia.

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\(^\text{12}\) Gerard Behague, *La Musica en America Latina,* (Caracas, Venezuela, Monte Avila Editores, 1983), 232

\(^\text{13}\) Miroslav Swoboda, “*La Obra Del Compositor Adolfo Mejía: Armonía Expresada En Paisajes Sonoros Y Humanos*” (master’s thesis Universidad de Bellas Artes y Ciencias de Bolivar, Cartagena, 2015), 98
with his friend Eduardo Lemaitre, another Cartagenean enrolled in Law School at the Paris University.\textsuperscript{14}

After WWII started in 1939, Charles Koechlin let Mejía stay with him at his Chalet at Ville-sur-Mer for a short time. From there, Mejía went to Italy where he finally took a ship heading for Brazil.

Confirming Mejía’s establishment as a serious and successful musician, Leopold Stokowsky invited him to conduct the Latin American Symphony Orchestra in Brazil. After that, he traveled around the continent for short periods, finally returning to Colombia in 1940.

\textbf{Returning to Cartagena}

Mejía at this point was hired at the Musical Institute of Cartagena to teach Harmony and Guitar, and at this point he made the decision to stay in Cartagena for the rest of his life. Ironically, this is the same institute from where he had quit his studies earlier in his career. He taught there for over 25 years.

In 1945, Mejía Co-founded ProArte, a cultural association created to promote concerts and all kind of artistic events enhancing the culture of Cartagena. To these concerts were invited artists such as Andres Segovia, Yehudi Menuhin, Nikita Magalov, Misha Elman and many others.

In 1948, Mejía composed the anthem \textit{Viva Colombia, Soy Marinero} [Long live Colombia, I am a Sailor] for the naval academy of cadets, where he was also their Band

\textsuperscript{14} Miroslav Swoboda, \textit{“La Obra Del Compositor Adolfo Mejía: Armonía Expresada En Paisajes Sonoros Y Humanos”} (master’s thesis Universidad de Bellas Artes y Ciencias de Bolivar, Cartagena, 2015), 97
Conductor. Later, in 1955, this institution honored the composer as a “Knight of the Naval Order Almirante Padilla” because of his distinguished service.

The University of Cartagena granted Mejía the title of Doctor Honoris Causa in Humanities in 1970. The song “El Tropelin”, depicting profane topics, was chosen as the Anthem of the institution, even though Mejía did not compose it with such purposes. The same year, the Colombian Institute of Culture (Colcultura) awarded him with the Premio Nacional de Musica [National Prize in Music].

Unfortunately, during this period Mejía had a cerebral thrombosis that forced him to stay at home for over three years without contact to the exterior world and completely musically inactive. At age 68, on July 6 of 1973, the composer died, the victim of a heart attack.
TRADITIONAL MUSIC FROM COLOMBIA

Colombia is geographically subdivided into six different regions, each one presents specific characteristics which distinguish them from each other. These regions are known as Insular, Caribbean, Andean, Orinoco, Pacific and Amazonas.

Given the geography and their climatic conditions in the country, each region develops different customs that are reflected all aspects of Colombian life, namely, the spoken accents and speed of their speech, their celebration of festivities, the preparation of their food, the clothing they wear, and their artistic expression through dance and music.

The Insular region covers the islands of San Andres and Providence on the Atlantic Ocean, and the islands of Malpelo and Gorgona on the Pacific. The music from the islands in the north is heavily influenced by Caribbean rhythms such as Soca and Calypso. The ones from the south are influenced by the music from Ecuador.

On the east, Orinoco shares a border with Venezuela. Their specific genre is called Joropo, a festive style played with harp, bandola, cuatro and capachos, and is danced by couples.

Of all the regions in the country, the pacific, on the west, is the one with the strongest presence of inhabitants of African origin. The most noticeable musical style is Currulao, which is played with marimbas and other percussive instruments.

Amazonas, in the south, shares borders with Ecuador, Bolivia and Brazil. Very small population in general can be found in this region, due to the fact that it is mainly jungle, so the musical influences are indigenous to the native cultures. Their musical output mainly employ a variety of rustic wind instruments and percussion instruments in their rituals.
The Andean region, is located in the center of the country landlocked by the other regions. *Bambuco* and *Pasillo* are the two most prevalent styles in this part of the country.

The Caribbean region is located in the northern coast of the country, and has access to the Caribbean Sea. The most characteristic rhythms from this area are *Vallenato*, *Cumbia* and *Porro*, but due to this location, other rhythms such as the Cuban *Danzon*, are commonly found in this region’s music.


> The musical folklore of Colombia is derived from Spanish, Negro and Indian sources. The Spanish influence is strongest in the melodic inflection of country dances. The Negro element enters strongly in the percussive rhythms of Colombian popular music. The monotonous chants of the Indians survive in their primeval solemnity in the interior.\(^{15}\)

Emirto de Lima (one of the most influential musicians in the Caribbean coast during the turn of the XIX century, and author of the book, *Folklore Colombiano* published in 1942), was quoted by Slonimsky as follows:

In Colombian Music we find elements of the culture of three races that have passed through Latin America. Listening to the beat of a drum, one conjures up a picture of African slaves driven down the coast during an era now happily past. In the dolorous chants of the Indians of the Amazon region, there is the wistfulness of the aborigines, who express their yearnings in the melancholy sounds of the flutes. And when a dapper boy, or a young lady of Santander or Cundinamarca, picks up a guitar and recites a sentimental ballad one is transported as if by magic into ancient Spain. What a delight it is to recapture in these rhythms, chords, dissonances, accents, and gambols, the aura of the old romance, the passions and ardors of bygone days.\(^{16}\)

William Gradante, in the seventh chapter of the book, *Music in Latin American Culture*, explains:

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\(^{15}\) Nikolas Slonimsky, *Music of Latin America*, (Ney York, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1945), 166

\(^{16}\) Ibid
Like all Latin American Nations, Colombia is comprised of a multitude of cultural groups, each creating, performing, and preserving its own musical traditions. Such groups include relatively isolated African-American villagers inhabiting the Atlantic and Pacific lowlands; Native American groups scattered from the Guajira peninsula in the north, through the central Andean core, to the vast grassland and jungle expanses of the Amazon and Orinoco river basins in the south and east; predominantly Hispanic mestizos populating towns and small cities throughout the eastern plains and Andean highlands; and citizens of all racial and ethnic combinations crowding into a rapidly growing number of cosmopolitan metropolises both in the Andes and along the Caribbean coast.\textsuperscript{17}

**Music from the Caribbean Region**

**Porro**

*Porro* is traditionally performed by wind bands with roots in the military brass ensembles originating in the XIX century on the northern coast, especially in the *departamentos* of Sucre and Cordoba. It can either be sung or merely instrumental. The harmony of *Porro* is rather simple, tonic, dominant, allowing for instrumental improvisation in a fashion similar to that of a Dixieland Band.

The instruments commonly used to play *Porro* are trumpets, trombones, tuba or euphonium, and percussion (bombo, snare drum, cymbals).

During the international popularization of Latin Music around the 1930s, (to which Mejía greatly contributed during his first trip to New York) the style’s orchestration transformed, adding woodwind instruments such as clarinet and saxophones.

Its duple meter\textsuperscript{18} is very similar to the Cuban *Danzon* and many other Caribbean dances that use the popular rhythmic cell known as “Clave”. Certainly, these dances have an intrinsic

\textsuperscript{17} Jhon Schechter, *Musica in Latin American Culture*, New York, Schirmer, 1999

\textsuperscript{18} In some cases can be marked in 2/4 or a fast 4/4.
invitation to dance, or at least to keep the listener’s foot tapping the beat. FIGURE 1 shows how several styles from the Caribbean converge in the use of this pattern.

Figure 1. Rhythmic Patterns of Caribbean Dances

The most influential popular composer and performer of this rhythm in Colombia was Lucho Bermudez who also composed Bambucos, Pasillos, and Cumbias.

He was particularly known for his Porro compositions, arrangements, performances and recordings, as well as for his virtuosic improvisations on the clarinet. Bermudez took the sound of the rural folk wind band and polished it into a sophisticated cosmopolitan style that became popular among Colombians of all social classes.¹⁹

¹⁹ Mark Brill, Music of Latin America and the Caribbean, (Upper Saddle River, NJ, Prentice Hall, 2010), 270
Cumbia

This dance is heavily influenced by Africans but, as many other styles from the country, it is heavily inspired by native population as well. The proper way to dance it obliges the flirtatious couple to keep the feet on the ground, as a representation of the slaves attempting to shed their shackles. Cartagena, Santa Marta and Barranquilla, served as ports for the slaves to enter the country. They were then moved to different regions from there, consequently influencing and blending with other populations.

According to Susanna Friedman, Professor of Music History at the National Conservatory in Bogota, and author of the chapter titled “Cumbia: A Dance From Colombia’s Caribbean Coast” found in the book “Music in Latin America and the Caribbean”, the most characteristic feature of dancing a Cumbia is the women carrying lit candles in their hands “creating a focus around which the dancers rotate”.20

In the same chapter, Ms. Friedman continues:

Partly as a result of socioracial discrimination, cumbia did not surface in 19th-century academic compositions by Colombians as did the Andean bambuco. Cumbia was first incorporated into the symphonic repertoire in the Pequeña suite (1938) by Adolfo Mejía Navarro (1905-73), a composer from the northern department of Sucre who traveled to New York in 1930 and was influenced by George Gershwin. At the close of the twentieth century, however, orchestras often perform arrangements of popular cumbias by academic composers of distinction, among them, Blas Emilio Atehortua (b. 1933) and Francisco Zumaque (b. 1945), a costeño who studied with Adolfo Mejía Navarro and Nadia Boulanger.

Cumbia is a strongly syncopated style in 2/4 meter, very seductive and sensual. The traditional instruments are, Tambora (a big low sounding drum with two heads, and played with sticks), Llamador [caller] (a higher pitched instrument played with bare hands in repetitive patterns), and Alegre, also played with hands is the instrument controlling the improvisatory performance.

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20 Malena Kuss, *Music in Latin America and the Caribbean*, (Austin, TX. University of Texas Press, 2007), 473
aspects on top of the *Tambora* and *Llamador*. In addition to these three basic instruments one can usually find either *maracas* or *güiros* added.

The melodies are played by *Gaitas*, which are woodwind instruments divided into *Macho* and *Hembra* [male and female] vocal registers. The *Gaita Macho* has only 2 holes and provides minimal harmonic base. The *Gaita Hembra* has 5 holes allowing for richer melodies.

Nowadays, modern Colombian *Cumbia* includes more instruments such an electric bass, which customarily follows a harmonic/rhythmic pattern in which the root of the chord is played in a quarter note and the 3rd and 5th degrees of the chord are played on the two following eighth-notes. (See FIGURE 2)

![Figure 2. Cumbia’s Pattern](image)

**Vallenato**

*Vallenato* is a rhythm that can be divided into other four unique styles. Depending on their tempo, these range from the faster, *Puya*, and *Merengue*, to the slower, *Paseo* and *Son*. Regardless of this specific rhythmic distinction, *Vallenato* has been historically played on *Acordeon*, *Caja*, and *Guacharaca*, which are explicit representation of European, African and Native’s heritages, respectively.

Throughout time, modernization has made participants of the electric bass, piano, different percussive and wind instruments. Nowadays, and extremely popular, this rhythm in all its variants can be heard everywhere in the country, including improvised *serenatas* on the beach (creating a romantic atmosphere for tourists), on the radio, and in important festivals such as the
one called “Festival de la Leyenda Vallenata”, (celebrated annually in the city of Valledupar, Cesar).

The rhythmic differences and peculiarities seen in these dances, are just a small taste of what the Caribbean Region offers. For instance, geographically, this region has beaches, deserts, high mountains with permanent snow, rivers and valleys, all compacted in no more than 52 sq. miles.

All that served Mejía as foundations for his personality, and nurtured his passion for his cultural roots and homeland.

**Music from the Andean Region**

Terms such as *Musica Folklorica, Musica Tipica*, or simply *Musica Colombiana* (folk music, typical music, Colombian music, respectively) refer to the kind of music proper from the provincial Andes, not the urban centers. Spanish, and African influences combined with Indian influences generating the typical rhythms known as *Pasillo, Bambuco*. The European influence can be identified in the more melodic construction of this music and the instruments employed to play the country dances. The percussive instruments and rhythmic tendencies came from Africa.

The music from the Andean Region is played with the typical instruments *Guitar, Tiple* and *Bandola*.

*Bandola*, similar to a *Mandoline*, is like a banjo for which a plectrum is needed. Its role is to play the melodies, usually using *tremolo* to sustain the long-held notes. In some cases these instruments can have 14 or 16 strings. The *Tiple* (tē-plā) is described as a “small guitar”. It has twelve steel strings, organized equitably in four sets, each set containing three strings tuned to the highest pitches of the guitar, E, B, G, D respectively.
The way these instruments are tuned can be seen in FIGURE 3:

Figure 3. Tuning of Traditional Instruments

This tuning allows the Tiple to produce a robust tone that perfectly accompanies the melodies. It is also common to hear the Tiple marking the beat as well. Usually strumming six eighth-notes per measure, the Ti Lista [Tiple player] uses a technique known as Machetazo [strike with a machete], a practice where specific strums within the measure are accentuated creating a noticeable rhythmic pattern. The Machetazo is executed by tamping the strings with the hand opened immediately after the strum. This term is also known as “Chop” in bowed strings playing.

Bambuco

Bambuco is probably the most popular rhythm in this region, conceived to express the common feeling of the population, and is normally sung rather than just instrumental. Due to this nature, its harmony is simple, tonic and dominant chords are repeated throughout the entire song.
From the book “Music of Latin America and the Caribbean”\textsuperscript{21}, chapter 7 entitled “Colombia and Venezuela”, describes how to dance this traditional dance:

The dance has the requisite advances by the man and rejections by the woman, but inevitably ends with the successful union of the two. A red handkerchief is an obligatory prop in the playful movements of the dance. The steps are vigorous and precise and include the flamenco-like zapateado. Dancers wear traditional folk costumes, including flower garlands in the woman’s hair, while the man wears the typical white sombrero.

And later on, in the same chapter, explains the following about the instrumentation:

In its earliest forms, the country [dance] bambuco was performed with cane flutes called chirimias, accompanied by drums and raspers called carrascas. In the nineteenth century, guitars, lute-like bandolas, and small triple guitar were added, and the dance was also adopted by the string orchestras of the urban elite, which infused it with the characteristics of elegant salon music, such as prominent flutes and percussion.

About its popularity, the same author explains:

By the 1920s, it had become popular throughout Colombia and thereafter in other parts of Latin America, including Central America and Mexico, though it never reached the international popularity that coastal styles such as cumbia and vallenato later achieved. Still later, it became infused with popular styles, both foreign and domestic, including salsa, jazz, and rock. Bambuco also became an important element of Colombia’s nationalist art music movement, and its presence in Colombian concert halls is still felt to this day…Important festivals have emerged, notably the Festival Nacional del Bambuco, held every June during the feast of St. John the Baptist.

In a traditional Bambuco, the introduction is merely instrumental, and its musical material equally serves as interludes, or bridges between stanzas. Its meter is somehow ambiguous, debating its nature between 3/4 and 6/8. This ambiguity rests on the fact that the beat sometimes feels in 2, and sometimes in 3 depending on the accentuation and placement of quarters and eighth-notes. Thus, for some composers, it is easier to write Bambucos in 3/4, but Mejía preferred to compose Bambucos in 6/8 and many of them were composed for piano and other instrumental ensembles. (See FIGURE 4)

\textsuperscript{21} Mark Brill, Music of Latin America and the Caribbean, (Upper Saddle River, NJ, Prentice Hall, 2010), 260
Figure 4. Measures 9-12, Bambuco in E Major

Pasillo

Depending on its tempo, *Pasillo* can be found in two different styles, a purely instrumental one in a faster tempo, and a slower one meant to be sung.

The difference between the sung and instrumental *Pasillos* is well explained by William J. Gradante:

“Clearly, the instrumental *Pasillo* is quite different from the sung *Pasillo lento* [slow *pasillo*], and should probably be considered a genre unto itself. While the latter is performed slowly and deliberately for optimum expression of its emotional texts, the former is traditionally performed as fast as the musicians can render it… instrumental *pasillos* are sectional, comprised of from two to four sections, almost always in contrasting keys, but usually cadencing in the original key…”

The style is highly characteristic and its rhythm does differ clearly from that one of the *Bambuco*. Basically, *Pasillos* emphasize the first and fourth eighth-notes of the measure, creating a syncopated pattern (See FIGURES 5, 6). Meanwhile, *Bambucos* pattern is formed by joining fifth and six eight-notes into a quartet note that serves as upbeat to the first eighth-note in the next measure. (See FIGURE 7).

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22 in the seventh chapter of *Music in Latin American Culture*:
Figure 5. Rhythmic Pattern of Instrumental Pasillo

Figure 6. Rhythmic Pattern of Pasillo Lento

Figure 7. Rhythmic Pattern of Bambuco

According to Nikolas Slonimsky, Pasillos are more closely attached to the traditions from Spain and Bambucos to Africa.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{23} Nikolas Slonimsky, \textit{Music of Latin America}, (New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1945), 166
A typical *Pasillo Lento* includes an instrumental introduction that features melodic elements from the core tune that will after be sung in the stanzas. Sometimes, the secondary section substitutes for this job as well. After an introduction, normally two voices sing the lyrics usually in parallel thirds or sixths, with occasional solos or responsorial parts. An instrumental interlude is common as well, which in most cases it is just a repetition of the introduction\(^\text{24}\).

The melodies in the introduction and interludes are usually played on the guitar while the *Tiple* strums chordal accompaniment, although these roles are perfectly interchangeable. During the vocal portion of the tune, the guitar combines bass notes from its three lower strings (4-5-6) with full chords from the higher ones (3-2-1).

The instrumental *Pasillo*, is sectional. Usually each section is repeated and with organic modulations to related keys, i.e. from tonic to dominant, or from the relative minor to tonic. After the final section, the music returns to the beginning, but without repetition, i.e. AA-BB-CC-ABC.

The common keys in which the majority of Colombian Music is played are A minor and E minor, and the reason for this is that the common harmonic progression (Tonic-Subdominant-Dominant) and the chords of their related major keys are easy to perform on the *Guitar, Tiple* and *Bandola*, therefore more accessible to the amateur musician. At the same time, given the limited number of harmonic changes, the traditional songs can be put together with little to no rehearsal time. In the event that the key needs to be changed to properly fit the singer, the instrumentalists use a device called *Capo*, which is easily attached on the instrument to either raise or lower the key as desired, eliminating the hassle or expertise of changing the chord patterns on the left hand.

\(^{24}\) This is common in *Bambuco* as well.
Both Bambuco and Pasillo are customarily performed by the Dueto Bambuquero.

On occasions, a Bandola is added to a Dueto Bambuquero, forming a Trio de cuerdas [String Trio], to perform the instrumental leading parts, while very rarely needing to sing a third voice. That would represent a harder task, to do both sing and play the melodic embellishments of the songs. Due to the nature of this instrument, a strumming chord is rather void, and instead the Bandolista elaborates the melody with tremolos, creating an illusion of longer notes.

Another ensemble known for performing traditional Colombian music is the Estudiantina, which is larger in number of performers, usually engaging three Bandolas, two Tiples and one guitar. While the number of instrumentalist is never the same, the performance practice is similar to the Dueto Bambuquero. This ensemble is ubiquitous in businesses, churches and schools, where still it is considered the best way to learn and preserve the traditional music, especially in this Andean region.
THE COMPOSITIONS BY ADOLFO MEJÍA

Adolfo Mejía was a prolific and versatile composer, conscious of the boundaries between Classical and Popular. This knowledge allowed him to easily compose in both styles, keeping them separate or combining them as he so desired. He was committed to let the world know where he came from, yet at the same time, intelligent and humble enough to embrace those styles that were not native to his culture.

Mejía dared to combine both traditional and classical styles in a way that no other Colombian composer had done by his time. As many studies reveal, other composers such as Jesus Bermudez Silva, were emerging with a more abstract nationalism. The type of musical nationalism that Mejía developed is direct, concise, (straightforward and clear) melodiously consonant, and as easily able to enjoy as any other aspect of Caribbean culture.

He composed several Symphonic works that proved his dominion at orchestration for large symphony orchestras. He had attained experience in this matter since the time worked at the National Symphony Orchestra—as librarian, arranger, orchestrator, and conductor—and also during his trip to Europe.

*Intima* [intimate], is probably his most “European” composition. Composed in 1941, right after his interrupted academic formation in France, it evidences a Wagnerian inspiration, and elements from the French Impressionism. Most importantly, it encourages the listener toward introspection, as its title indicates.

“*America*”, a highly descriptive symphonic poem composed in 1946, demonstrate his maturity as an artist. In this work, Mejía employs trills, tremolos, and modal melodies to depict sonorities that can tele-transport the listener to an aboriginal location on the continent. His
conception of what happened in America during the Colonization by Spain is reflected in this piece of art.

Mejía expressed his nationalism and even regionalism in his works. Proof of this was the fact that he opted for using traditional (even colloquial) Spanish language to title the pieces, and their movements, for those when it applies, for example, those in the *Pequeña Suite*.

With this suite, in three movements, the composer effectively and directly provides the listener a tour of the most characteristic dances in the country. The three movements are entitled *Bambuco*, *Cancion y Torbellino*, and *Cumbia*; rather than naming them with western music titles, already paying tribute to his roots.

Maestro Eduardo Carrizosa, one of the most important orchestral conductors from Colombia, commented on Mejía’s “*Pequeña Suite*”:

This is the artistic legacy and general abridgment of Colombian Music. I do not think it has been yet surpassed the way Maestro Mejía achieved a *bambuco* as he did. I think that Mejía accomplished what others composers like Uribe Holguin or Antonio Maria Valencia did not. One does not need to be purist to understand that what Mejía did is well done.\(^{25}\)

Mejía also dabbled in the film music industry, “*Musica para Una Pelicula*” was composed for the film “*Los Cuatro Palos de Gibraltar*”, by Aurelio Martinez Mutis. “*Preludio a la Tercera Salida del Quijote*” [prelude to the Quixote’s Third venture], another piece in one single movement, shows Mejía’s talent for describing scenes with music, this time making use of modal melodic gestures, and characteristic rhythms from Spain. This work was originally meant for the theatrical work of the same name by Aurelio Martinez Mutis.

\(^{25}\) *Viajero de Si Mismo*, film directed by Galina Likozova (2005)
The solo works for guitar and piano, those entitled Preludio, Bambuco or Pasillo, represent a standard in the musical development of those instrumentalists during their academic careers in institutions such as the National Conservatory of Colombia. And not surprisingly, they are also performed very often in recitals as a graduation requirement from such institutions.

In 1990, the Colombian Patronage for the Arts and Sciences printed and published a set of these works for Piano solo, in which they included: Preludios 1-4, Pasillos 1-4, Bambucos 1-2, Apuntes 1-2, Improvisacion, El burrito, Trini, Pincho, Manopili, and Valse Infantil. 26

Cartagenian pianist, Elvia Mendoza recorded the above mentioned pieces on a compact disc released in 2001, sponsored by the Banco de la República. 27

In the popular branch, Adolfo Mejía mostly derived inspiration from events or reunions with friends, occasionally even random people, to whom he often would make a piece on the spot. For most of these types of compositions, Mejía was not interested in building up nor publishing an extensive catalogue of works, a consistent practice he revealed by not signing the works and instead humbly just entitling them with the name of the dedicatees.

An example of this kind of works is Pincho, a dance for piano solo dedicated to his friend and student Agustin de la Espriella whose nickname comes from the reversal of the order of the syllables Cho-pin (pin-cho), when his friends jokingly compared him to the great musician from Poland.

Many of his compositions have been widely arranged for different instrumentation, especially those that are constantly performed in the traditional music festivals around the country. An example of this is Acuarela, orchestrated for wind ensemble but commonly played with the traditional string instruments from Colombia.

26 Patronato Colombiano de Artes y Ciencias, Adolfo Mejía: Obras Completas para Piano Solo, (Bogota, 1990)
27 Adolfo Mejía, With Helvia Mendoza (piano). Obras para piano. Colombia: Banco de la República, 2001, CD.
Mejía was also a successful and prolific composer of songs, and works for vocal ensembles. *El Tropelin*, the Anthem of the University of Cartagena, is a short piece for voices *a capella*. He is also the composer of the music for the *Anthem of Cartagena*, which is obviously known among Cartagenians. Equally, Mejía composed the *Himno de la Virgen Del Carmen*, which is the carnival/religious celebration in Cartagena every year in February.

Those, and other songs such as *Cartagena*, in the rhythm of Bolero\(^{28}\), and *Cartagena es Buena tierra*, a *Fandango*, are evident representation of Mejía’s passion and commitment to his city.

Mejía also composed for small instrumental ensembles, and his *Trio en Mi Menor*, for Violin, Cello and Piano, appears to be his most elaborated work for this kind of group.

*Mofa* [mockery], is a satiric piece for two violins, cello and piano which borders on musical chaos by mixing the main theme (a rather simple and plain one) with the different voices simultaneously. Here, Mejía jokes with intentionally “wrong” entrances of the instruments, to evidence the ridiculous personality of the piece.

**Works for Small Ensembles**

**Busca Mujer**

This work was originally composed in 1945 for a festive band. It describes popular scenes proper of Cartagena’s celebrations in November, when the local parades occur. Mejía decided later on to arrange this work for small ensemble, keeping its festive character in which musical elements from Porro, and other Caribbean dances can be perceived.

\(^{28}\) Lyrics are originally written by Leonidas Otalora.
Curiously, this song was recorded by the famous Gran Combo de Puerto Rico with the name of *Mascara de Gato*, in the 1980s, but the credits were attributed to a traditional motif from Panama. The lyrics given to the song are as follow:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish lyric</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Busca mujer</td>
<td>Women, look for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Una mascara de gata</td>
<td>a mask of a cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que yo saldre</td>
<td>that I will be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disfrázado de raton</td>
<td>disguised as a mouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No llores, prenda querida</td>
<td>Do not cry, dear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que no haya plata</td>
<td>that no silver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que bailando en la plazuela</td>
<td>and dancing in the square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aliviaremos la situación</td>
<td>we will alleviate the situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y así</td>
<td>And so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendremos paz y progreso</td>
<td>we will have peace and progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y arroz con leche</td>
<td>and rice pudding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A peso y dos pesos</td>
<td>at $1 and $2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Until today, the original music has not been recorded as the composer arranged it. Its harmony, presents the basic pattern V-I, which is very typical of this type of popular music. The song remains in G major in its entirety, with sporadic subdominant chords—i.e measure 11,

FIGURE 8—that enhance and embellish the melody.

![Figure 8. Measures 7-11, Busca Mujer](image-url)
The form presented in the manuscript held in the Colombian Patronage for the Arts and Sciences becomes ambiguous due to the DC-al-Segno sign marked in measure 48. If this sign was to be taken as it is indicated, the repetition will do the obvious and conclude on measure 19, where the segno is placed. There would be no other place to jump to. However, I believe that the sign should rather be DS al Fine. This way, the repeat will go from measure 48 back to measure 19, and will then lead to the very end of the piece on the second time around. Repeats can be taken on both runs, since we are not discussing a classical minuet form and the attractive feeling of the piece would invite one to do so as well.

The structure of the song can be explained as seen in FIGURE 9:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section:</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>Bridge</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>Closing idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale Degree:</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>V......I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(G Major)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9. Musical Structure of Busca Mujer

Whereas A presents the first motive, which is merely a duet in thirds between the two violins, simultaneously the cello and piano interact with them contrapuntally. Then, in measures 15-18 the cello, by the repeated D, builds up energy and tension, ultimately resolving into the B section where the motif is enhanced through syncopation. This syncopated rhythm is developed even more, but with new melodic material on section C.

It is important to mention the heavy content of contrasting dynamics, especially because the traditional popular song, played by the traditional bands (brass, wood winds, electronic pianos, electric bass, and singers) is not known for exploiting such dynamic contrasts. This then, was another important element that Mejía implemented in the sophistication of traditional rhythms.
Figure 10. Score: Busca Mujer
Busca Mujer

Adolfo Mejia

Violin I

Violin II

Cello

Piano

Vln. I

Vln. II

Ve.

Pno.
Candita

Recorded in 1999 by “Cuarteto Colombiano”—1 guitar, 2 bandolas [fourteen to sixteen string mandolin], and 1 tiple, arranged by Luis Fernando Leon Rengifo. It is a very popular song that is constantly and widely performed in the festivals that promote Colombian Music. It is not surprising that this tune is so popular due to its implicit bohemian air.

Candita, was composed in 1963 to honor Mejía’s friend and colleague Candita Rojas, a pianist who also held a position as a secretary at the Musical Institute in Cartagena. Mejía always found a place and moment to nurture his artistic soul, and it is known that Ms. Candita’s backyard witnessed uncountable reunions where intellectuals of the city gathered to discuss politics, music, history, art, literature, journalism, poetry and even gastronomy. The house is located in the neighborhood of Crespo, in Cartagena. In this neighborhood, the houses are known for having extended backyards that usually under the shade of fruit trees such as mango or guava serve as a perfect scenarios for social/familiar reunions.

Within this context, it becomes easier to imagine the friendship between Adolfo Mejía and Ms. Candita Rojas—the nostalgic mood of the song from the beginning shows a deep connection between them. The other sections depict a friendship where honesty, respect, partnership, and happiness were evident.

Presumably, Mejía wrote this piece, before he left to USA in 1963, and attached the following poem, which unfortunately loses its meaning and rhyme scheme in translation:

Hospitalario tu patio
Nos recibe en su regazo
Y por ser su nombre Cande
Lo llaman El Candelazo

Hospitable your yard
Receives us in its lap
And because her name is Cande
They call it El Candelazo
Candita is an instrumental *Pasillo* written in 3/4 in the key of B minor, arranged here by the composer for two violins, cello and piano. In this song, divided into three sections, Mejía cultivates a sentimental mood that progresses from B minor in the first section, to its relative key, D Major in the second and third sections. Traditional ensembles commonly play the first section in minor in slower tempi, highlighting the nostalgic character of the melody. The contrasting major mode sections are present with faster tempi.

Each section is repeated. The first section is 16 measures long, as is the second, but the third extends for a full 36 measures. (See FIGURE 11).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>1-17</td>
<td>18-36</td>
<td>37-72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11. Sections of Candita

In this song, Mejía combines the two trends described in the previous chapter on the *Pasillo Lento* and the *Instrumental Pasillo*. From the beginning of the song, Mejía gives the characteristic rhythm of *Pasillo Lento* to the violins and the rhythm of *Instrumental Pasillo* to the piano. (See FIGURE 12 next page)

The A section contains a sentence, 8 measures long, (a) ending on the dominant, repeating itself (a’) and then concluding in the tonic. On the repeat, the second ending—a scale from F# to C# written in rhythmic unison for all the instruments, creates a pivot to the next section in D Major.

The B section can be divided into three smaller phrases: b1 (measures 18-21), b2 (measures 22-25) which are connected by way of sequence, repeating the same melodic and rhythmic pattern first in D major and then in B minor. (See FIGURE 13).
Figure 12. Pasillo Lento and Instrumental Pasillo in Candita

The last phrase, b3 (measures 26-33) breaks the sequence by keeping steady quarter-notes and implementing two unexpected harmonic turns, first to the II\(^9\) (m. 30) and then in the next measure dropping to IIb\(^9\), (See FIGURE 14). Important to mention is the fact that the melody on violins is in D major regardless the accompaniment of the piano and cello which
follow a circle of fifths in B minor (B-E-A-D-G-C#-F#), this creates harmonic ambiguity in this section, possibly expressing the composer’s mixed feelings to his dear friend. For a general analysis of the structure of this song, see FIGURE 15).

Figure 14. Measures 25-31, Candita

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>A mm 1-16 (17)</th>
<th>B mm 18-33 (36)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrase</td>
<td>a----a’--------</td>
<td>b1---- b2---- b3-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>1-8 9-16</td>
<td>18-21 22-25 26-33 26-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony/</td>
<td>I    V    I    I</td>
<td>I--Sequence---- V    I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cadence</td>
<td>Key</td>
<td>Key</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B minor

D major

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>C mm 37-72 (73)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrase</td>
<td>c1---- c2---- c3---- c4---- c5---- c6---- c7---- c8----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>37-40 41-44 45-48 49-52, 53-56 57-60 61-64 65-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony/</td>
<td>I    V    I    I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cadence</td>
<td>Key</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Key</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D major

Figure 15. Structural Analysis: Candita
Figure 16. Score: Candita
**Oye**

This is another nostalgic instrumental song originally written for violin and piano. The structure of the song is a simple A-B form with customary repetitions. Both sections remain completely in A minor. The first section (A) has 16 measures, as a result of the repeat, the first phrase rises from tonic to Dominant where it remains (from mm. 4 to 8), via the circle of fifths. Typically the first time hangs in the dominant, returns to Tonic in the repeat, and then in the second ending cadences solidly in A minor at the fermata (m. 16). (See FIGURE 17).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chords:</td>
<td>i-V4/3</td>
<td>i6</td>
<td>iv-VI2</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>iv-VII7</td>
<td>III-VI7</td>
<td>ii-II</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i-V4/3</td>
<td>i6</td>
<td>iv-VI2</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>iv-VII7</td>
<td>III-VI7</td>
<td>ii-V7</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 17. Harmony A Section: Oye

Mejía could have used many other chords to accompany this phrase, but again, his choice effectively creates that mysterious/bohemian atmosphere that is so intrinsic to this piece. The harmonic rhythm also helps to build up the scenario, in fact, Mejía voices the bass line of the first two measures resulting in an inverted tonic by the second measure, thus creating a melodic direction which continues in measures 3 and 4. At this point in the phrase, he reverses that momentum and heads back to tonic, maintaining the same harmonic rhythm. (See FIGURE 18).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harmonic Rhythm:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 18. Harmonic Rhythm A Section: Oye

The second section (B) is also 16 measures long, and repeated as well. Here, Mejía departs from the original presentation of the A section melody (predominantly in eighth-notes),
toward new material, now combining sixteenths, triplets and thirty-second-notes to express this distinctive melody.

Thus, the melody itself invites freedom, as in a gypsy style. Regardless, the pulse must always be preserved, especially in those moments when both cello and piano share evocative gestures. An example would be measures 15 and 16, where the descending fast notes should be interpreted with the same agogic. Despite the settle differentiation. (See FIGURE 19).

Figure 19. Measures 15-16: Oye

The manuscript held in the Colombian Patronage for the Arts and Sciences presents the song as presented in FIGURE 20:

Figure 20. Structure of Oye as printed in the manuscript
If performed this way, the theme in the section B will be played 4 times in total, consequently I determined to reorganize the song as follow in FIGURE 21.

A

\[ \boxed{1-8} \quad \boxed{9-10} \quad \boxed{11-18} \quad \boxed{19-20} \quad \boxed{1-8} \quad \boxed{9-10} \]

Figure 21. Reorganization of repeats in Oye
Figure 22. Score: Oye
Oye

Composer: Adolfo Mejía
Transcription: Alvaro Angulo

Allegro Cadencioso

Cello

Piano

Vc.

Pno.

LH

53
Oye

Fine

Vc.

Pno.

rit. last time

54
Oye

Vc.  

Pno.  

17 1.

Pno.  

19 2.

D.C. con repetizione al Fine

55
Impromptu

This is the only piece known to be composed originally for cello and piano by Adolfo Mejía. Also listed as “Improvisacion” in the previous list, and it was arranged and published for piano solo in the book already mentioned.

It has two sections: the first one, (mm. 1 to 15) marked Andante, is in G minor, and the second one (mm. 16 to 29) in Bb Major, is indicated Piu Mosso.

Comparing the three main sources available, the most evident difference between them is in their structure. Helvia Mendoza plays the song in the form A-B-A, while the published score suggests AA-BB, as does the original manuscript. If this song is performed in the way notated in both the manuscript and the published version, the theme in first section would be heard 4 times. Considering that the whole section only lasts 15 measures, to hear its theme 4 times seems repetitive. To avoid that sensation, the first section can be performed just once, eliminating the repetition bars in measure 14. Another element that supports this suggestion is that both measures 14 and 15 are identical.

The published version for piano solo, includes an indication that shall not necessarily be taken into account. It suggests to add an upbeat F to the second section, in an attempt to equalize both rhythmic and melodic motifs of the two sections. However these two sections are not all that similar, as a matter of fact, the composer clearly establishes a different mood for each one by setting them in different rhythms, tonality, tempi and character.

---

29 Page 26
30 Patronato Colombiano de Artes y Ciencias, Adolfo Mejía: Obras Completas para Piano Solo, (Bogota, 1990), 32
31 The manuscript for cello and piano held in the Colombian Patronage for the Arts and Sciences, the score found in Adolfo Mejía: Obras Completas para Piano Solo, and recording of the piece for piano solo by Helvia Mendoza.
The first section in its minor mode serves perfectly the melismatic gestures decorating the melody and thereby creates a gypsy atmosphere. Visibly, Mejía’s relationship with the Arab immigrants in Cartagena, with whom he spoke in their native language must have inspired this air.

In general, Mejía selects for this piece a handful of interesting chords to accompany the rather simple melody, resulting in a somewhat dark and esoteric ambience. The employment of French Augmented Sixth chord in measures 2 and 4 supports this exoticism. (See FIGURE 23).

![Musical notation of the progression V- IV⁹-VI⁷- V⁷, in measure 7, creating tension not only by the steady pedal on D, but also through its syncopated rhythm.](image)

In the same measure 7, fourth beat, the note F# is missing in the original manuscript and the works for piano published by the patronage, a curious voicing omission. (See FIGURE 24).
Figure 24. Measures 6-8. Impromptu

In the second section, based on the use of such vocal ornaments in mm. 19 and 27, one can infer that this composition was originally written for piano and later adapted for the cello. (See FIGURE 25).

Figure 25. Measures 18-20. Impromptu
Figure 26. Score: Impromptu
Impromptu

Adolfo Mejia

Andante \( \frac{d}{4} = 90 \)

Cello

Piano

Vc.

Pno.

Vc.

Pno.
CONCLUSION

Adolfo Mejía was a versatile composer who adequately expressed his artistry in classical and popular styles. His music shows the love he had for his culture, and his interest for making it universal.

The four works presented here, show that Mejía aimed for a sophisticated way to reveal his cultural roots. Effectively, *Candita*, and *Busca Mujer* include traditional dances and rhythmic patterns from Colombia, expressing atmospheres intrinsically related to joyful/popular styles. *Impromptu* and *Oye* display more serious airs without abandoning the ever present Bohemian character of the composer.

Due to the fact that most of his work have not yet been published, it was necessary for me to make digital copies of the manuscripts using music notation software. This is a task that I invite other musicians to do as well, since some of the originals may be difficult to read. Given the accessible character of this music, any trained musician will be capable of adjusting forms, or even harmonies to their own criteria, as long as rhythm and melody pay fair tribute to the composer.

I decided to alter the structures of these pieces, following my intuition and evoking my privileged historical background, interpreting Mejía in such a way that would hopefully satisfy open-minded audiences. Ultimately, diversity (or variety) is characteristic of our personality in the Caribbean Region of Colombia, and as such we apply it into every aspect of our lives.

With this in mind, I encourage further projects to promote this Colombian musical pioneer and excellent exponent of the Caribbean culture.
BÉHAGUE, GERARD. *La Musica en America Latina (Una Introducción).* Caracas, Venezuela: Monte Ávila Editores, 1983.


KUSS, MALENA. *Music in Latin America and the Caribbean.* Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2007.


# Appendix

## List of Compositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Available C.P.A.S.</th>
<th>Date of Composition</th>
<th>Instrumentation</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Acuarelas Colombianas</td>
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<td>Aleluya</td>
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<td>1946</td>
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32 Colombian Patronage for the Arts and Sciences
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33 Colombian Patronage for the Arts and Sciences
34 Bambuco composed by Emilio Murillo, arranged for Orchestra by Mejía
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<td>1938</td>
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<td>Pincho</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Sara</td>
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<td>Sí ó no,</td>
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35 Colombian Patronage for the Arts and Sciences
VITA

Colombian Cellist, Alvaro Angulo, was born in Cartagena in 1983. His passion for music was passed down to him by his oldest brother, Marcelo, who used to be lead singer of folkloric/popular bands in their hometown.

At age 13, attempting to follow his brother’s steps in popular music, Alvaro initiated his study of piano and guitar with international teachers at the same institute where Mejía had studied in 1916. Motivated by Cuban cello professor, arranger and conductor Blas Rojas, he realized his true passion was for the cello and classical music at age 15.

Alvaro moved to Bogota in 2001 to study in the National Conservatory. There, he also played with the National Symphony and the Bogota Philharmonic Orchestras. In 2009, Alvaro took position as Associate Principal Cellist with the Cali Philharmonic Orchestra.

Alvaro has toured with orchestras around Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Peru, USA, and Venezuela, under the batons of great conductors such as Claudio Abbado, Dante Anzolini, Gustavo Dudamel, Valery Gergiev, Carlos Prieto and Benjamin Zander. He has played in Carnegie Hall and the most important concert halls of the continent with renowned soloist such as Joshua Bell, Lang Lang and Renee Fleming.

As a soloist, Alvaro has performed on multiple occasions in North and South America, and is frequently invited to give lectures and masterclasses around the continent.

Angulo holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Music with Emphasis in Chamber Music from the National Conservatory of Colombia, and a Master’s degree in Music Performance from Louisiana State University. For the Doctoral of Musical Arts degree, he anticipates graduation in May 2017.