



Sounds of the Wonder City: La Paz, Bolivia

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to investigate how the sonic environment of the Bolivian capital city of La Paz is reflected and manifested in music. In order to build a profile of the sound landscape of the city, hundreds of sounds recorded throughout the city were analyzed for similarities and consistencies and rhythmic patterns. Moreover, Professional Bolivian musicians were interviewed regarding their subjective meanings of different sounds in their culture, as well as their approach to utilizing city sounds to narrate different philosophies through their music. This research will potentially depict the emotional value of sounds in the culture when used in a piece of music and how the soundscapes of La Paz affect the sonics of Bolivian musicians.

Introduction

- Music holds an important role in almost every culture. At the core though, all music is just a collection of sounds. What makes music different from random sounds are the patterns and known sequences of these sounds that are often culturally rooted in our society.
- Musical works are constituted by cultural-specific knowings. Listeners identify various musical patterns with specific emotions and then recognize those patterns and expressions in different music works. They ultimately end up feeling the emotions their culture identified the pattern with. (Elliot 2005)
- The sounds artists hear growing up, may often manifest in some form in the art they create. And all these sonic relations only exist in cultural contexts. It may or may not be a conscious songwriting or production decision. (Rubin 2023)
- It is possible to hear rhythms and melodies in sounds that may not be conventionally termed as music. (Anderson-Kunert 2019)
- Therefore, by investigating the music from the city of La Paz and the environmental sounds in the city, we can understand how different sounds can narrate different philosophies and how they hold importance in our emotional environment.

Methods

Research Questions:

- By examining the relationship between the music and musicians from La Paz, focusing on the sonic environments of the city, is there a relation between the sonic landscapes of the city and the sonics of the music of La Paz?
- How do the sounds in the music from La Paz, narrate different philosophies and emotional values?

Methods:

- Read books, articles and literature reviews to get informed about the potential relationship between sounds and emotions, about some of the ways musicians themselves try to represent their emotions through music, about previous creative projects that have used environment soundscapes as an instrument, and about the general background on how our environmental sonics play a role in our livelihood.
- Listened to the environmental sounds captured in the city of La Paz as the research data of Ms. Asturizaga's research to look for and observe any patterns, rhythmic or melodic.
- Listened and analyzed 35 famous and local musical recordings of musicians from La Paz who dedicated their pieces to honor the city to further my observations on how city sounds potentially manifest in the city music.
- Interviewed musicians from La Paz regarding the topic to better understand their experiences related to their sonic environments and their relationship with music and to potentially form a correlation between the two.

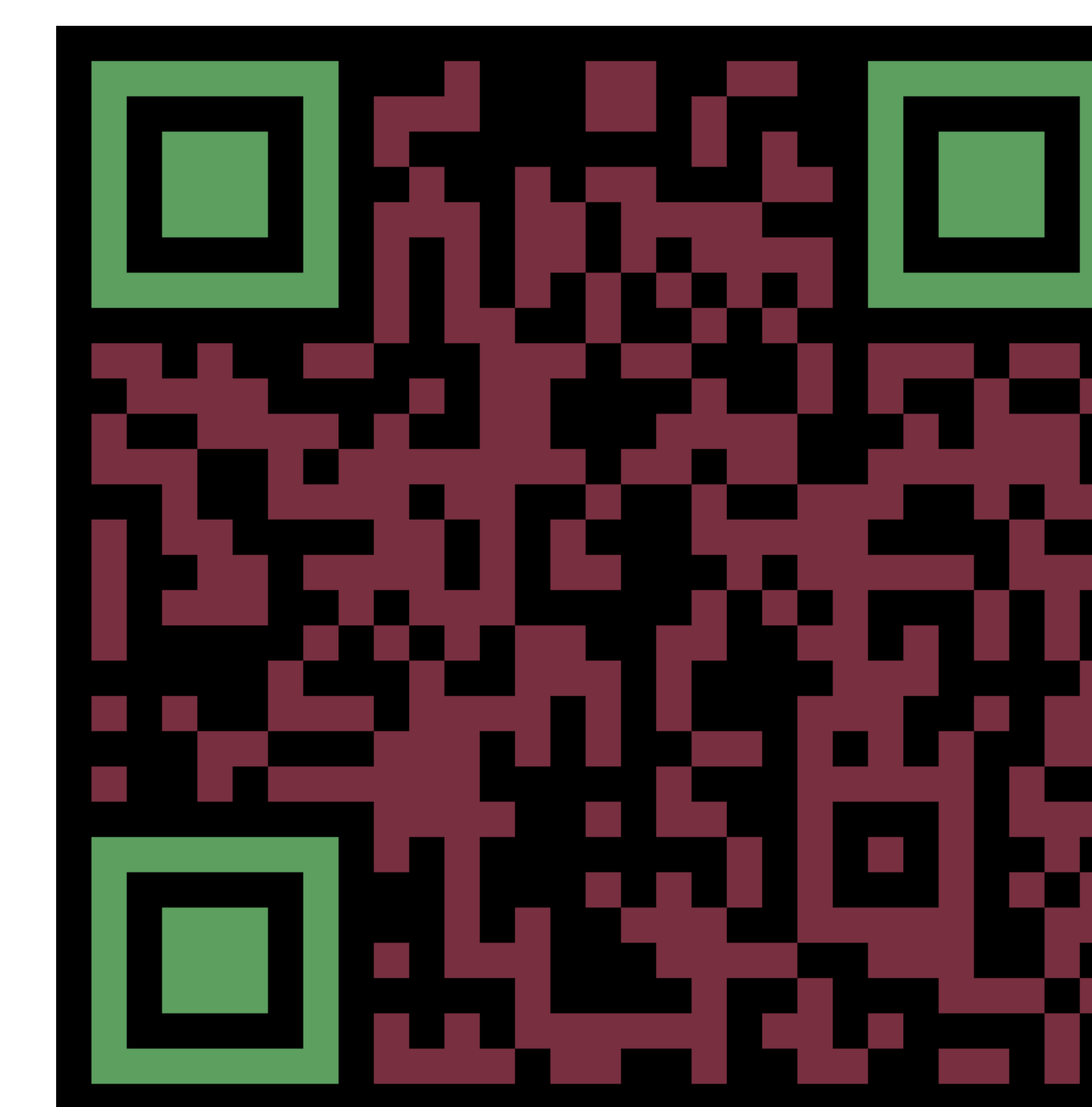
Findings

- Music makers, listeners, and their music exists in a cultural context. To represent an environment musicians often include historically rooted cultural sounds in their music. In the case of La Paz, Bolivia, those sounds include flutes and fast attack and release guitars.
- Listening to music made from an environment and to represent that environment may have the ability to emotionally transport listeners to those places, however cultural specific- knowings are required for that as a listener.
- Certain musical patterns are globally associated with musical expressed, hence their ability to emote may be greater than other musical pieces, however emotional context for a musical piece is very subjective.

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Music Samples



Data

Music Genre	Number of Songs	Instruments Used	Environment Sounds Used (if any)
Pop	15	Often fast attack and release high-pitched guitars and charangos, flutes, western drums	
Rock	6	Soft or Hard distorted guitars, western drums	
Ethnic	11	Pan flutes, Finger-plucked Charangos, ethnic percussion elements	In one song: Sounds of firecrackers and sounds of birds
Electronic	1	A mix of multiple instruments from all genres	
HipHop	2	Digital synth drums and samples of multiple instrument loops	

Music from La Paz which talked about the city itself, often used some signature sound design to represent the city. These sounds include high-pitched finger-plucked guitar usually having a fast attack and release and the Bolivian pan flute sound. Most of the flute sounds were used as staccatos but some also used them with a slow attack and release. A contrast observed often was how these dynamic sounds were often paired with slowly sung vocals.

References

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