



Sounds of the Wonder City

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Background

- The sonic environment that an individual lives in varies greatly between different urban settings and within one urban area, creating unique soundscapes (Southworth, 1969)
- Man-made sounds can be organized, like music, or disorganized like construction noises, but both have effects on the observer
- Brass Band music is an example of organized man-made sound which is important to the soundscape of the city of La Paz, Bolivia especially during festivals like Gran Poder or Entrada Universitaria
- There is very little research published on the Bolivian brass band tradition, even though it is very popular in the region and has great cultural significance to residents of La Paz and Bolivian Heritage as a whole (Ritter, 2008)

Abstract

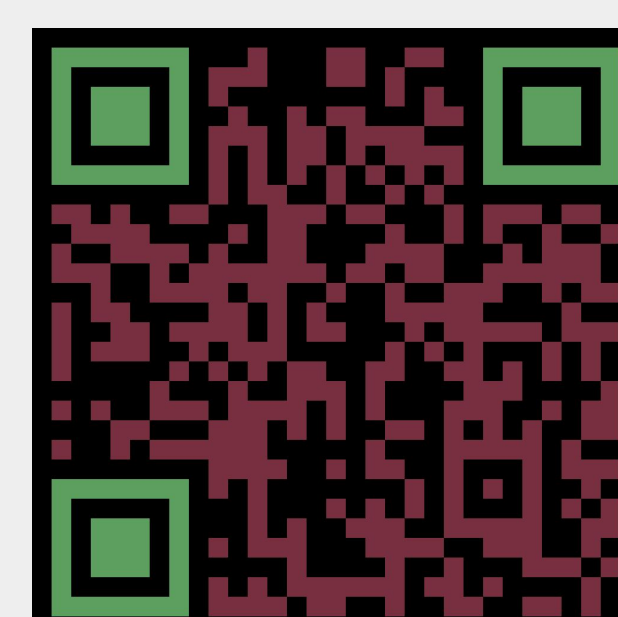
Brass bands are present throughout Bolivian festivals and are a notable component of the sound environment in La Paz. These brass bands are semi-professional and consist of community members which organize for performances like the festivals of Gran Poder and Entrada Universitaria. Through performances of traditional Bolivian dance music like the morenada, diablada and caporales, they have established significant ties to Bolivian heritage. This project seeks to answer questions about who can and cannot participate in these ensembles, how they contribute to a sense of community, and how these ensembles will evolve. In this project qualitative data was gathered on the nature of these performances through both written sources and video/audio sources. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with academics and participants in Bolivian brass bands. Through the project it can be determined that the nature of these ensembles are primarily community-oriented and culturally expressive, rather than a performance-based ensemble

References

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Methods

- Research occurred in 2 phases: literature review and interviews
- I read and took notes comparing and contrasting existing information and published works on the history of brass bands, the musical history in Bolivia, and cultural heritage of Bolivia
- I also watched videos of Bolivian brass bands performing via Facebook and Youtube, noting any observations or prevalent themes
- Listened to a professional album of Bolivian brass band works
- I then conducted semi-structured interviews with an expert in brass bands, a native of La Paz, and a participant in brass bands in Bolivia



Results

- Observations have linked Bolivian brass band music with cultural dances and important festivals in La Paz, these bands are even hired to perform at weddings and large private parties
- By observing the bands it was noted that these bands intentionally play behind the beat and are prone to tempo fluctuations, additionally performers do not subscribe to standard western tuning practices like agreement of frequencies
- Interviews have established that brass band participation is closely related to fraternity membership
- Interviews revealed that members do not have formal training and learn by rote from older more experienced members of the band
- Further research should attempt to transcribe brass band music to caporales, morenada, and diablada dances as a means of protecting intangible cultural heritage and harmonically analyzing practices of brass bands in greater depth

Conclusions

- Brass bands serve the role of a social group where music is a medium to collaborate with community members, this is important because this suggests a more functional role of these bands by facilitating interactions between members of the community, because of the fraternal nature of these groups, they are hard to internally study, which is likely a factor that contributes to the absence of writings on brass bands in Bolivia
- Despite brass bands having colonial ties to Europe, brass bands in Bolivia are distinctly Bolivian styled in the uniforms they wear and music they play which contrast greatly with the European brass band tradition which is characterized by military regalia and competition, instead there is greater connection to second-line music in the Southern United States which hints at a similar history

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