FROM TRADITION TO INNOVATION: THE DEVELOPMENT OF PASILLO IN COLOMBIAN PIANO REPERTOIRE

by

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Introduction

This research aims to address the historical evolution of pasillo compositions that are originally written for piano, focusing on understanding how the genre has transformed over time. Pasillo, a traditional Colombian music genre with deep cultural roots, has evolved significantly since its inception. Understanding this evolution requires a detailed examination of its piano repertoire, which reveals how composers have contributed to its growth and transformation. This research is important as it will illuminate the genre's progression, reflect on the cultural shifts that influenced its development, and provide a comprehensive overview of its impact on Colombian and Latin American music.

Central questions guiding this research include:

1. How has the pasillo genre evolved in its piano compositions over different historical periods?

2. What are the key characteristics of pasillo piano music from different time periods, and how have these characteristics changed over time?

3. How have composers such as Fulgencio Garcia, Adolfo Mejia, Carolina Calvache, and Victor Agudelo contributed to the development of pasillo for the piano?

4. In what ways do historical and cultural contexts influence the compositional style and techniques used in pasillo piano music?

5. What role has the pasillo played in the broader context of Colombian and Latin American piano music?

This research will focus on analyzing piano compositions from various historical periods, specifically those published for piano and originally composed in this format, excluding arrangements. By examining the works of significant composers, including Fulgencio Garcia, Adolfo Mejia, Carolina Calvache, and Victor Agudelo, this study will track the evolution of pasillo and provide insights into how it has been shaped by cultural and historical factors.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to enhance our understanding of pasillo music's historical development, its impact on Colombian musical heritage, and its broader implications for Latin American music. By tracing the evolution of this genre through its piano compositions, I aim to contribute valuable knowledge to the field of performance and offer a deeper appreciation for the pasillo's role in Colombian and Latin American musical traditions.

Chapter 1: Echoes of the Waltz: The Genesis of Pasillo

To truly understand the vibrant tapestry of Colombian pasillo music, one must first trace its origins to the elegant salons of the early 19th century. Here, amidst the burgeoning independence of the Nueva Granada, a transformation was underway, with the European waltz gradually replacing the contradanza española as the favored dance of the elite.

The waltz, with its roots in European peasant dances, had ascended to prominence in 19th-century urban centers, eventually finding its place in the refined realms of opera and symphony. It was more than just a dance; it was a symbol of modernity, a marker of nationalistic fervor, and a signifier of social status. In Colombia, the waltz was embraced by the urban elite, gracing their salon dances and embodying their aspirations for cosmopolitan sophistication.

Yet, as the 19th century unfolded, a distinctively Colombian voice began to emerge from the European influence. Around the 1800s, a new dance form, the pasillo, began to take shape. The very name "pasillo" hints at its character, derived from "paso," the Spanish word for "step," and referring to the small, intricate steps that define the dance. This evolution was, in part, a response to the desire for a dance that better suited the courtly atmosphere of the time. Popular dances like the torbellino, bambuco, and guabina, with their more "plebeian" character, were deemed unsuitable for the refined salons.

Pasillo, then, became a creative reimagining of the European waltz, molded by local tastes and sensibilities. While the bambuco embraced a fusion of indigenous and European elements, pasillo retained a more urban and European essence. This adaptation involved a livelier tempo, and the incorporation of melodic accompaniments that highlighted Colombian musical characteristics, gradually forging a new path. Pasillo also grew beyond its purely functional role as a dance, evolving into a form that could be appreciated instrumentally.

By the mid-19th century, this quest for a distinct Colombian identity was evident in the way the waltz was being referred to: "waltz del país," "waltz nacional," "waltz colombiano," and even "waltz del cachaco." Two primary forms of pasillo emerged in these early years: a slower, more romantic expression, and a faster, more festive one. The 3/4 time signature of the waltz was retained, yet the Colombian pasillo distinguished itself through a more relaxed tempo and a structure often characterized by 16 bars, in contrast to the more lively, 32-bar structure of the European waltz. Early Colombian waltz pieces often featured two sections: a stately, measured opening, and a more energetic second part known as the "capuchinada," marked by lively footwork and spirited expression.

This emerging sense of national identity is further illustrated by the adoption of the term "waltz de la tierra" (waltz of the land) to describe the pasillo, as seen in *El poeta Soldado*, a work published in Bogotá in 1881. The transformation of the waltz into the pasillo was a nuanced process. As Alberto Urdaneta observed, the pasillo allowed for a more energetic dance experience than the traditional waltz, yet without the agitation or extravagance of some other forms. It's also suggested that the European waltz may have entered Colombia through the eastern border with Venezuela, further shaping its evolution.

Regardless of these debates about its origins, the pasillo firmly established itself as a vital part of Colombia's musical identity. The pasillo took on various forms, each with its own distinct character and purpose. The "pasillo fiestero," purely instrumental, became a staple of popular celebrations, performed by town bands during festivals and religious events. In contrast, the "pasillo lento," either vocal or instrumental, became associated with serenades and social gatherings, its melodies expressing the sentiments of love and courtship.

The instrumentation used to perform pasillo reflects this diversity of expression. String trios featuring guitar, tiple, and bandola, "estudiantinas" that added percussion

instruments like the tambora, chucho, and cucharas to the string trio, and wind bands with their trumpets, saxophones, flutes, clarinets, and other instruments, all contribute to the rich soundscape of pasillo.

Throughout its history, many composers have embraced the pasillo, contributing to its evolution and legacy. Figures like Fulgencio García, Jorge Añez, Carlos Vieco, Luís A. Calvo, and José A. Morales are among the most recognized. In the Huila region, composers such as Luís Alberto Osorio S., Jorge Villamil Cordovez, José Ignacio "Papi" Tovar, and Guillermo Calderón P. have also played significant roles in shaping the pasillo tradition.

The enduring influence of pasillo is evident in contemporary compositions as well. The pasillo *Ana Beatriz*, for example, is a "pasillo fiestero" that seeks to capture the energy and tenderness of its namesake through its musical structure and harmonic language.

The pasillo's transformation from its roots in the European waltz to a distinctly Colombian art form is a narrative shaped by adaptation, innovation, and cultural self-definition. More than a stylized dance, the pasillo evolved into a vehicle of national expression, mirroring the country's historical shifts and artistic aspirations. As Andrés Fernando Velandia Martínez observes, this genre moved beyond its folkloric and rural associations to embrace the aesthetics of the romantic miniature, becoming a legitimate vehicle of professional musical expression in early twentieth-century Colombia.[1] Composers such as Emilio Murillo, Adolfo Mejía, and Antonio María Valencia infused the genre with harmonic nuance, structural clarity, and lyrical intensity, thus elevating it into the realm of piano repertoire that paralleled European romantic traditions.

[1] Andrés Fernando Velandia Martínez, *El pasillo para piano como muestra de la miniatura romántica en la música colombiana de principios del siglo XX* (Undergraduate thesis, Universidad Pedagógica Nacional de Colombia, 2020), 1–3.

In the chapters that follow, I will explore this transformation by analyzing representative works that reveal how the pasillo evolved in form, harmony, and stylistic conception. These musical case studies will illustrate the contributions of key composers and illuminate how the genre continues to resonate within today's cultural and musical landscape.

Deconstructing the Pasillo Rhythm: Time Signature, Tempo, and Patterns

Though it remained in 3/4 meter, the pasillo introduced rhythmic patterns far more complex than those found in the European waltz. A characteristic figure - two eighth notes followed by an eighth rest - provides a rhythmic push that interrupts the smooth lilt of a traditional waltz. Syncopation and hemiola are frequently used, particularly at cadences or transitions, adding tension and drive. These rhythmic gestures, many of which mirror Afro-Colombian and indigenous rhythmic practices, help define the pasillo's unique identity. In some regions, these patterns create an almost polyrhythmic effect, lending the pasillo a dynamic unpredictability that contrasts with the symmetrical elegance of its European ancestor.

Example 1-1: Pasillo rhythm

Regional variation has further enriched the genre. While the Colombian pasillo tends to be bright, rhythmically crisp, and harmonically akin to the Viennese style, the Ecuadorian pasillo, shaped by indigenous Andean musical forms like the *yaraví* and *sanjuanito*, leans toward introspection and melancholy. Ecuadorian pasillos often feature slower tempos, more rubato, and a heavier use of dissonance and modal harmony. Melodic lines in Ecuador frequently resemble vocal laments, suggesting a deeper tie to oral folk traditions. The contrast

between these two national styles - both springing from the same historical root - underscores how profoundly local cultures can shape a shared musical form.

Example 1-2: Pasillo rhythm (Variation)

This divergence also becomes evident in the realm of piano music. Colombian piano pasillos often incorporate virtuosic passages, spirited rhythms, and dynamic contrasts that recall the concert waltz tradition of Chopin or Liszt. In Ecuador, by contrast, piano pasillos may be more meditative, emphasizing expressive phrasing and harmonic nuance. Yet in both countries, the adaptation of the pasillo to the piano has opened new avenues for technical and artistic exploration.

The piano, with its expansive sonic palette and dynamic flexibility, became an ideal vehicle for reimagining the pasillo's expressive potential. Originally rooted in vocal lyricism and plucked string traditions such as the guitar and tiple, the pasillo underwent a significant transformation when adapted for the keyboard. Composers employed imaginative techniques to emulate guitar-like textures in the left hand - using broken chords, arpeggios, and syncopated accompaniment patterns - while preserving the cantabile nature of the melody in the right. This transfer demanded not only technical ingenuity but also a reconfiguration of the genre's formal and aesthetic language.

As Andrés Fernando Velandia Martínez explains, this pianistic reinterpretation aligned the pasillo with the stylistic ideals of the romantic miniature: compact forms, evocative titles, and an emphasis on expressive immediacy and sentimentality. The pasillo,

thus, transitioned from a folkloric dance into a vehicle for introspective and refined musical statements, often favored by the urban elite and performed in domestic salons and concert settings.[2] The rhythmic vitality of the dance - now filtered through syncopation, hemiolas, and dynamic contrast—was preserved and reimagined in a context that highlighted the piano's lyrical and harmonic capabilities. These innovations elevated the pasillo into the realm of art music, allowing it to flourish not only as a nostalgic symbol of Colombian identity but as a genre of academic and pedagogical relevance.

In modern pedagogy, piano pasillos have proven useful in developing both cultural awareness and technical control. Works like Oriol Rangel's *Estudios de Pasillo* and Daniel Vega's *Estudio en forma de pasillo. Tormenta* are designed to reinforce finger independence, rhythmic precision, and stylistic nuance. Other compositions incorporate a range of expressive techniques - legato, staccato, glissandi - that challenge students while rooting them in a tradition that is both national and transcultural. Even digital platforms have embraced this repertoire; the *Piano Pasillo Colombiano Kontakt Library*, for instance, catalogs these techniques and highlights the role of the genre in shaping modern Colombian piano pedagogy.

The pasillo's adaptability has allowed it to transcend its origins without losing its soul. It speaks simultaneously to the urban and the rural, the traditional and the contemporary, the private and the public. From the European salons of the early 1800s to the conservatories and concert halls of today, pasillo has continually reinvented itself while preserving its rhythmic essence and expressive clarity. In doing so, it has become not only a genre but a cultural statement - a musical emblem of Colombian identity and resilience.

The chapters that follow will trace this evolution in detail through the analysis of

[2] Andrés Fernando Velandia Martínez, *El pasillo para piano como muestra de la miniatura romántica en la música colombiana de principios del siglo XX* (Bogotá: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional de Colombia, 2020), 2–3.

specific works for piano. These compositions, by figures ranging from Fulgencio García to Carolina Calvache, will reveal how pasillo continues to evolve across generations. By examining their formal structures, rhythmic features, harmonic language, and performance practices, we will see how this genre, once born of imitation, has become a profound act of musical self-definition.

Chapter 2: Main Composers and Their Contributions

This chapter provides an in-depth look at the contributions of composers who were instrumental to the development of pasillo in piano repertoire. Composers to be studied include:

- Fulgencio Garcia: His life, works, and influence on pasillo, with a focus on "La Gata Golosa."
- Adolfo Mejia: His contributions to the genre, blending academic and popular styles.
- Carolina Calvache: Her contemporary approach to pasillo, fusing it with modern musical elements.
- Victor Agudelo: His innovative and avant-garde approach to pasillo compositions.

Fulgencio García: A Pioneer of Pasillo

Fulgencio García was born in Purificación, Tolima, on May 10, 1880, and passed away in Bogotá on March 4, 1945. García's musical journey began under the tutelage of Pedro Morales Pino, a prominent musician from the Valle del Cauca region. García proved to be an exceptional disciple, perhaps the most talented of Morales Pino's students. His career unfolded in Bogotá, where he resided from a young age and honed his skills as a master of string instruments, particularly the bandola. García's talent extended beyond performance; he was also a gifted composer, creating pieces that would become staples of the pasillo repertoire.

García's musical career included participation in various ensembles, reflecting his versatility and his integration into Bogotá's musical life. He was part of the “estudiantinas” (instrumental Colombian ensembles) of Emilio Murillo and his teacher, Pedro Morales Pino. Additionally, he lent his talents to groups such as the Estudiantina Bogotá, alongside

colleagues like Arturo Patiño, Alejandro Wills, and Ignacio Afanador, and the Arpa Nacional ensemble led by Jerónimo Velasco. These experiences enriched his musical perspective and provided a platform for his own compositions.

La Gata Golosa: A Classic Pasillo

While García was an accomplished instrumentalist, his most significant contribution lies in his compositions, particularly his instrumental works. Among these, "La Gata Golosa" holds a place of honor. Composed in 1912, this pasillo initially carried the name "Soacha." The story behind its renaming is a charming anecdote that reveals the close relationship between music and everyday life in Bogotá.

The pasillo was renamed in honor of a well-known restaurant in Bogotá, a favorite gathering spot for musicians and poets associated with the La Gruta Simbólica movement. Originally named "Gaite gauloise," meaning "Gallic gaiety" in French, the restaurant's name was colloquially transformed into "La Gata Golosa" ("The Greedy Cat") due to the difficulty locals had with the French pronunciation. The pasillo "La Gata Golosa" was played so frequently at this establishment that the name eventually stuck, replacing the original title. This renaming not only gave the piece a memorable title but also connected it to a specific cultural and social context in Bogotá.

"La Gata Golosa" is more than just a musical piece; it's a cultural symbol that evokes early 20th-century Bogotá. It reflects the city's social life, where "chicherías" (establishments selling "chicha," a traditional fermented drink) were popular meeting places. The pasillo's cheerful rhythm and catchy melody have made it a beloved piece in the Colombian musical repertoire, appreciated across generations.

Other Notable Works and Legacy

While "La Gata Golosa" remains García's most famous pasillo, he composed other notable works that contributed to the pasillo genre. These include instrumental pasillos such as "Vinotinto," "Coqueteos," "Castilla," and "Toño," showcasing his skill in crafting melodically rich and rhythmically engaging pieces. His compositions also extended to bambucos, another important Colombian musical form, with pieces like "Qué nos importa," "Bien mío," and "El destemplado." Other works include "Luna de miel" (gavota), "Diciembre" (march), and "Beatriz" (danza), demonstrating his versatility across different musical genres.

Fulgencio García's contribution to Colombian music goes beyond his individual compositions. He played a vital role in shaping the pasillo genre and popularizing it within Colombian society. His works, particularly "La Gata Golosa," have become part of the cultural fabric of Colombia, evoking a sense of national identity and nostalgia. García's music continues to be celebrated, and his influence is evident in the ongoing appreciation and performance of his pasillos. García was a pivotal figure in the history of Colombian pasillo. His mastery of the bandola, his talent as a composer, and his ability to capture the spirit of Colombian culture in his music have secured his legacy. "La Gata Golosa" remains a testament to his genius, a pasillo that has transcended time and continues to resonate with Colombians. García's contributions have enriched the pasillo genre and cemented his place among Colombia's most important musical figures.

Adolfo Mejía: Bridging Tradition and Impressionism in the Colombian Pasillo

Adolfo Mejía Navarro, a name that still evokes pride and admiration in Cartagena, was a composer and pianist whose musical heart beat with the rhythms of Colombia, yet whose artistic vision extended far beyond its borders. Born in Sincé, Sucre, in February 1905,

but deeply rooted in the culture of Cartagena, Mejía's life was a testament to the power of musical fusion. His legacy encompasses both academic compositions and popular expressions, forever enriching the landscape of Colombian music, particularly the pasillo.

Mejía's early life was steeped in music. His father, Adolfo Mejía Valverde, a versatile artist, instilled in him a love for the art form. The family's move to Cartagena when Adolfo was eleven proved to be a pivotal moment, igniting his passion for music amidst the city's vibrant cultural scene. In Cartagena, Mejía thrived in a rich musical environment. He immersed himself in various musical groups, including the Estudiantina Revollo, the Orquesta Eureka, and the Jazz Band Lorduy Orchestra, considered Colombia's first jazz orchestra. His intellectual curiosity led him to master several languages, and his bohemian spirit drew him into circles where art and philosophy intertwined. While proficient in various instruments, his true devotion lay in composition, especially for the piano.

Mejía possessed a unique ability to weave together the threads of popular music from the Atlantic coast with the sophistication of academic training. Musicologist Ellie Anne Duque aptly described his talent as the capacity to "unite in his work the knowledge of the vivid practice of popular music from the Atlantic Coast with the academic elaboration achieved through a musical education acquired with stumbles in the attempts." This fusion defined his musical style, evident in his diverse works, ranging from fandangos and chandés to danzones and the beloved bolero "Cartagena."

Adolfo Mejía’s composition *Pequeña Suite* not only earned him critical acclaim but also secured a scholarship to study in Paris - a turning point in his artistic journey. There, he encountered the influential world of French Impressionism, particularly the music of Debussy

and Ravel, whose harmonic language and aesthetic would leave a lasting imprint on Mejía's own compositional voice.[3]

While in Paris, Mejía studied music history with Nadia Bonneville and composition with the renowned Nadia Boulanger, whose students included luminaries such as Alberto Ginastera, Darius Milhaud, and Aaron Copland.[4] However, as Miroslav Swoboda clarifies in his thesis *La Obra del Compositor Adolfo Mejía: Armonía Expresada en Paisajes Sonoros y Humanos*, the Bonneville cited in earlier investigations may in fact have been Andrée Bonneville, also known for teaching Gabriel Charpentier.[5]

Mejía's contributions to the pasillo genre are particularly noteworthy. Pieces like "Aquella Vez," "Tiene Caché," and "Candita" showcase his refined melodic and harmonic sensibility. Among his pasillo compositions, "Preludio Aguas," "Campanas," and "Pasillo Eb" stand out as examples of his innovative approach:

- *Luminosidad de Aguas* (Luminosity of Waters): This prelude likely reflects Mejía's impressionistic leanings, painting a musical picture of water's fluidity and light through its harmonies and pianistic textures. It suggests a contemplative exploration of the pasillo, moving beyond its traditional dance form.
- *Campanas* (Bells): In this piece, Mejía likely incorporates bell-like sounds, perhaps through specific chord voicings or melodic figures, bringing an evocative and picturesque quality to the pasillo.

Mejía's creative output was extensive and diverse. His catalog includes piano works like "Luminosidad de Aguas," "Campanas," and "Pasillo Eb," along with bambucos, and

[3] Alvaro Jose Angulo Julio, *Colombian Composer Adolfo Mejía: Four Works for Small Ensembles* (DMA diss., Louisiana State University, 2017), 9.
[4] Ibid., 8.
[5] 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 Bolívar, 2015), 98.

waltzes. He also composed orchestral works, choral music, band pieces, chamber music, and popular songs, including the celebrated bolero "Cartagena."

Adolfo Mejía passed away in Cartagena on July 6, 1973. His influence, however, remains vibrant. The Conservatorio of the Institución Universitaria Bellas Artes y Ciencias de Bolívar (Unibac) and the Teatro Adolfo Mejía in Cartagena stand as testaments to his enduring legacy. In 1970, he was awarded the National Music Prize from Colcultura and an honorary doctorate from the University of Cartagena, further solidifying his place as a musical luminary.

Adolfo Mejía's ability to synthesize popular and academic musical languages, his mastery of the piano, and his profound sensitivity to the Colombian musical spirit make him a composer of immense importance. His works continue to be rediscovered and celebrated, ensuring his lasting contribution to Colombia's musical heritage.

Carolina Calvache: A Contemporary Voice in Pasillo with *Te Agradezco*

The rich tapestry of Colombian pasillo continues to evolve, woven with new threads by contemporary musicians who honor tradition while pushing its boundaries. Among these innovative voices, Carolina Calvache stands out as a composer who seamlessly blends the essence of Colombian rhythms with modern musical expressions. Her work, including the pasillo "Te Agradezco," demonstrates a profound respect for the genre's heritage and a bold vision for its future.

Born in Cali, Colombia, in 1985, Carolina Calvache's musical journey began at the early age of six at the Antonio María Valencia Conservatory. This foundational training in her hometown laid the groundwork for a multifaceted career. She earned her degree in Music from the Universidad del Valle in 2008, further solidifying her academic grounding in music.

Calvache's pursuit of musical excellence led her to the United States, where she was awarded a scholarship to the University of North Texas. There, she earned a master's degree in Jazz and Composition in 2010. This immersion in jazz, combined with her earlier classical training, became a defining element in her unique compositional style. In May 2024, she achieved her doctorate in Jazz Composition from the University of Miami, culminating her academic achievements with the thesis "Panamerican fusion in composition: Where jazz, classical, and pan-Latin music meet." This academic pursuit underscores her dedication to exploring the intersection of diverse musical traditions.

Calvache's musical output is characterized by its breadth and versatility. Her album "Sotareño" (2014), recorded in New York City, is a testament to her ability to fuse Colombian rhythms with contemporary jazz sensibilities. Her song "La Última Vez," performed by Chilean artist Camila Meza, garnered her an Independent Music Award, showcasing her talent to create compelling music that resonates across genres.

Her compositions span a wide array of musical forms, including solo pieces, duets, chamber music, studio orchestra works, and big band jazz compositions. Calvache's work also includes notable commissions for brass instruments, which have gained international recognition. A prime example is "Trombonsillo," recorded on the album "Ethereal" (2017) by Achilles Liarmakopoulos of Canadian Brass. This piece achieved global success and has become a standard in the trombone repertoire, even being included in the Associate Board of Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) syllabus.

Recent commissions further highlight Calvache's prominence in the contemporary music scene. These include "Kava," for the principal trumpet player of the Colombia Symphony Orchestra; "Sunrise Suite," for Ricardo Carvalhoso, a tuba player with the Berlin Philharmonic; and "Encuentros," written for Sebastián Cifuentes, a trombonist with the Qatar

Philharmonic Orchestra. Her upcoming work for trombone and orchestra is set to premiere with the Jackson Symphony Orchestra in March 2025, demonstrating her continued creative momentum.

Te Agradezco: A Pasillo of Gratitude and Innovation

Within Calvache's diverse body of work, her pasillo "Te Agradezco" offers a unique perspective on the genre. Composed in 2024 in Cali, Colombia, this piece is dedicated to Jaime Henao, her first mentor, the person who initially showed her how to merge classical influences with jazz harmonic structures. This dedication reveals the personal connection and artistic inspiration that inform her approach to the pasillo.

"Te Agradezco" is deeply rooted in the Colombian pasillo tradition while also incorporating Calvache's signature blend of influences. The piece is written in 3/4 time, the hallmark of the pasillo, but it also features moments where a 6/8 feel emerges. This rhythmic interplay is achieved through the grouping of eighth notes in threes, while their value remains constant, creating a subtle yet effective rhythmic complexity.

The structure of "Te Agradezco" is characterized by three interwoven sections that create a dynamic and emotional journey. The first section is described as joyful, rhythmic, and playful, capturing the lively spirit often associated with the pasillo. The second section takes on a slower and more moving character, expressing a sense of sadness. This emotional shift is then resolved in the final section, which is romantic, rhythmic, and evocative. The entire piece unfolds over approximately five minutes, a concise yet powerful exploration of the pasillo form.

Carolina Calvache's "Te Agradezco" exemplifies her ability to honor the tradition of the pasillo while infusing it with contemporary sensibilities. Her work contributes to the

ongoing evolution of Colombian music, demonstrating its capacity to resonate with audiences across generations and musical backgrounds.

Victor Agudelo: Avant-Garde Innovations in Pasillo Compositions

Victor Agudelo, born in Colombia in 1979, has emerged as a prominent composer whose work intricately weaves traditional Colombian musical forms with contemporary avant-garde techniques. His innovative approach to the pasillo exemplifies his ability to fuse indigenous rhythms with modern compositional methods, thereby redefining the genre's boundaries.

Growing up amidst the rich musical traditions of Colombia, Agudelo was immersed in genres like bambuco and pasillo from an early age. This foundational exposure is evident in his early compositions, where he began experimenting with these traditional forms. His formal studies at Universidad EAFIT in Medellín further deepened his understanding of Colombian musical heritage, providing a platform for his future innovations.

Agudelo's avant-garde treatment of the pasillo is marked by several key innovations:

- Rhythmic Exploration: While the traditional pasillo maintains a steady 3/4 rhythm, Agudelo experiments with polymetric structures and irregular time signatures. This approach challenges the conventional danceable nature of the pasillo, transforming it into a more abstract musical form.
- Harmonic Expansion: Departing from the diatonic harmonies typical of traditional pasillo, Agudelo incorporates extended tonalities and atonal passages. This harmonic exploration adds layers of complexity and unpredictability to his compositions.
- Textural Innovation: Agudelo utilizes contemporary techniques such as prepared instruments, unconventional playing methods, and electronic elements to create

unique textures. These innovations provide a fresh sonic palette while still echoing traditional pasillo motifs.

A poignant example of this synthesis is his piano work *Doce gotas de rocío para Diana* ("Twelve Dewdrops for Diana"). Composed as No. 10 in the second volume of his etudes, this piece is described by Agudelo as an "etude in patience." It marries the delicate rhythmic character of the pasillo with a sophisticated palette of modernist compositional tools, offering a distilled meditation on sound, form, and time.

Unlike Agudelo's more overtly folkloric works, *Doce gotas de rocío para Diana* is not a celebration of dance but a quiet reverence for sound itself - an invitation to listen patiently and deeply. It reveals the composer's capacity to evoke the essence of Colombian musical identity through abstraction and reduction, reminding us that innovation can also be an act of delicate, contemplative distillation.

Through works like this, Victor Agudelo challenges the expectations placed on Colombian composers. He does not simply preserve tradition - he reframes it, offering a vision of pasillo not just as heritage, but as a vibrant source of modern musical thought.

Chapter 3: Musical Analysis

This chapter will delve into a detailed musical analysis of key pasillo compositions, focusing on specific examples that illustrate the genre's evolution and the unique contributions of Garcia, Majia, Calvache and Agudelo.

Fulgencio García: *La Gata Golosa*

La gata golosa is a beloved instrumental composition by Fulgencio García. Originally titled *Soacha*, the piece was later renamed in reference to a well-known 24-hour establishment in Bogotá. Despite its tongue-in-cheek origins, which hint at a place known more for its sensual distractions than its culinary offerings, the composition has secured a lasting place in the national repertoire. García himself famously described it as music "donde se pasa la vida más alegre y más sabrosa" - where life is most joyful and flavorful - a sentiment that captures both the spirit of the piece and the broader cultural resonance of the pasillo.

At first glance, *La gata golosa* may appear as a simple salon dance, but a closer look reveals a sophisticated layering of rhythmic complexity, melodic character, harmonic color, and formal design. The work not only reflects the hybrid musical aesthetics of the time but also stands as a testimony to how Colombian composers like García transformed European dance forms into deeply local expressions of national identity.

- **Rhythmic Structure: Between Waltz and Andean Pulse**

The rhythmic identity of *La gata golosa* is rooted in the 3/4 meter of the European waltz, yet it is shaped by a distinctly Colombian sensibility. Unlike the evenly weighted triple time of its European predecessor, the pasillo rhythm emphasizes asymmetry and forward motion. A defining characteristic is the subtle de-accentuation or omission of the second beat

- often replaced by a rest in the left hand or a lighter articulation - which creates a sensation of syncopation and playfulness.

In *La gata golosa*, this rhythmic foundation is enriched with creative variations. The piece frequently opens phrases with an anacrusis, lending the music a feeling of anticipation and natural propulsion. These upbeats serve as melodic impulses and often lead into hemiola patterns, where the underlying triple meter temporarily gives way to duple groupings. This rhythmic ambiguity - common in pasillo phrasing - adds excitement and elasticity, reinforcing the dance-like yet unpredictable quality of the genre.

- **Melodic Design: Lyricism Rooted in the Andes**

Melodically, *La gata golosa* carries the expressive imprint of the bambuco, another foundational Andean genre. The melodic lines are predominantly diatonic, shaped by small intervallic steps and built with clear, vocal-like phrasing. These gestures reflect an oral musical tradition, where melody is as much about the contour and pacing of speech as it is about pitch and rhythm.

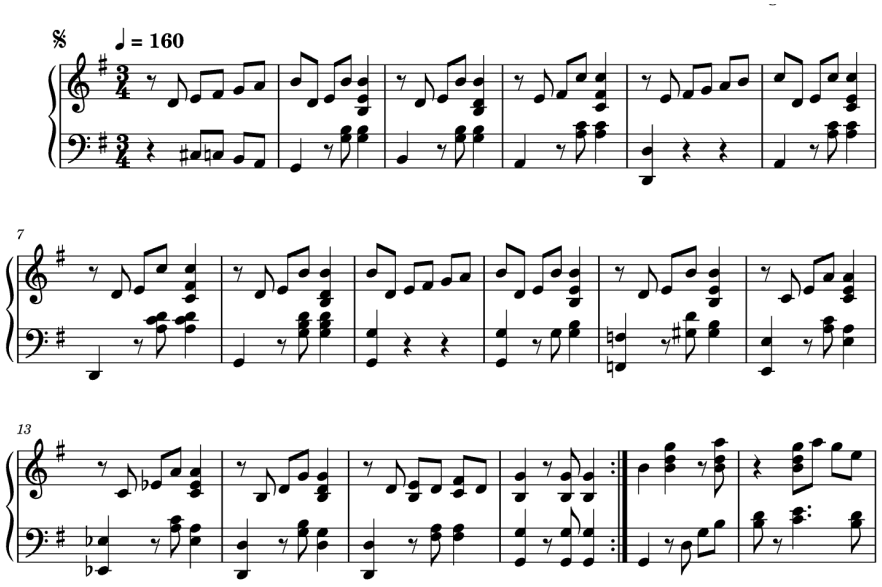
Phrases often conclude with a distinctive rhythmic cadence, typically a dotted quarter note followed by a rest and a final cadence gesture of an eighth note into a sustained quarter. This phrasing device gives the music its sense of closure while maintaining rhythmic momentum. Additionally, the frequent use of anticipatory gestures at the start of phrases reinforces the sense of forward drive and mirrors the improvisatory nature of Andean folk performance.

Notably, these melodic impulses sometimes culminate in brief emiolatic patterns, where rhythmic groupings briefly challenge the meter before returning to its regular pulse.

These moments, subtle yet effective, help articulate sections of the form and infuse the melodic writing with rhythmic tension and resolution.

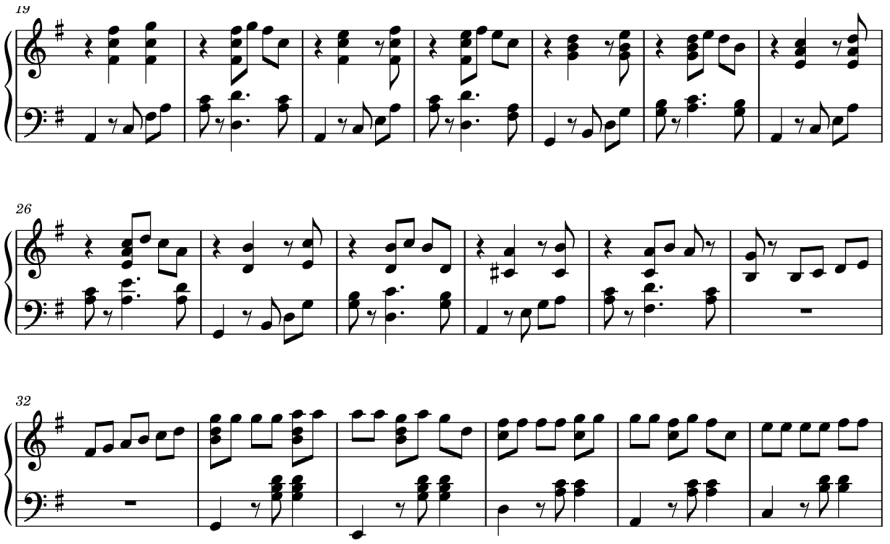
The melody of *La gata golosa* exhibits a compelling balance between conjunct motion and expressive intervallic leaps, often grounded in Andean vocal aesthetics.

Theme A opens with stepwise motion, punctuated by leaps of sixths and sevenths, generating a lyrical but rhythmically alert line. The common tone E functions both as a pivot and a passing note across phrases. Phrasal endings frequently feature rests on the downbeat, followed by an eighth and a concluding quarter - a rhythmic cadence that signals closure while keeping the pulse alive.



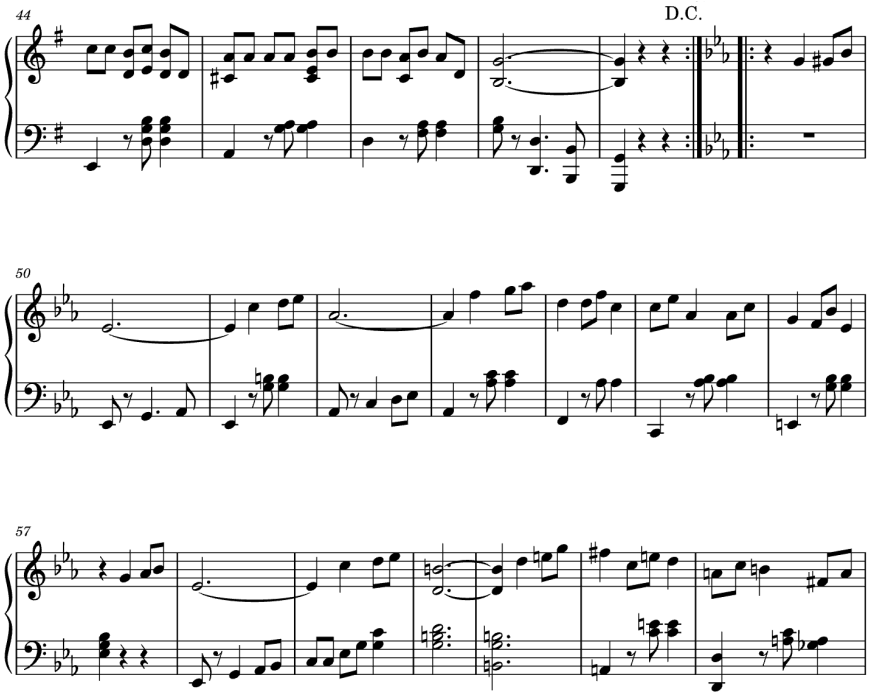
Example 3-1: Garcia, *Gata Golosa,* mm. 1-18

Theme B introduces ascending minor thirds and further emphasizes syncopation. Phrases begin on weak beats and avoid downbeats altogether, with melodies constructed around four eighth-note groupings, followed by descending thirds. This gives the section a restless, off-balance quality that contrasts with the poise of Theme A.



Example 3-2: Garcia, *Gata Golosa*, mm. 19-37

Theme C brings a sense of repose. In Eb major, the melody features descending fifths, diminished intervals, and stepwise progressions, imparting a sense of tonal wandering and resolution. As the piece returns to G major, the melodic writing returns, using familiar notes (C, Eb, D) to guide the listener home.



Example 3-3: Garcia, *Gata Golosa*, mm. 44-63

Throughout the piece, García uses melody to shape emotional pacing - poised and playful in Theme A, mischievous in Theme B, and serenely lyrical in Theme C.

- **Harmonic Language: Functional Tonality with Expressive Flexibility**

While *La gata golosa* is grounded in traditional tonal harmony, García's harmonic choices reveal a willingness to move beyond conventional progressions. The piece oscillates between major and minor modes, with smooth modulations to both closely and distantly related keys. Unlike standard classical modulations, which often follow functional relationships, the harmonic shifts in this pasillo are largely guided by melodic direction and expressive contrast.

These modulations are not always to the relative minor or dominant but often to mediant or submediant regions, adding subtle color without breaking the tonal coherence. This fluidity allows for nuanced expression within a traditional framework and reflects the performative traditions of Colombian salon music, where reinterpretation and reharmonization are part of the creative process.

Though chromaticism is used sparingly, when it appears - usually in transitions or cadential passages - it adds expressive weight and dramatic contour to the otherwise diatonic setting. The harmonies serve the melody first and foremost, yet they enrich it with just enough complexity to maintain the listener's interest throughout.

García's harmonic approach is rooted in diatonic tonality, but not confined by it. His use of traditional progressions is enlivened by inventive modal shifts and secondary dominants, revealing the expressive range of the pasillo form.

In Themes A and B, G major serves as the tonal center:

- It revolves around a straightforward I - V - I progression.

- It introduces a minor subdominant (C minor) - a striking chromatic color - resolving with I - V7 - I, giving depth and lyricism to the refrain.

Theme B is harmonically more active. Dominant prolongations, such as A7 (V/V) leading to D7 (V) and ultimately back to G (I), demonstrate García's command of secondary dominants as structural and expressive tools.

Theme C begins in Eb major, a distant key from G major. The modulation occurs via C minor, which functions as iv in G and vi in Eb, allowing a smooth transition. After the detour, the return to G major is marked with a final perfect cadence (D7 - G), reaffirming tonal unity at the close.

This tonal trajectory - from the home key to a flat submediant and back - is a hallmark of the Santafereño pasillo, adding emotional range and surprise without straying from the genre's harmonic vocabulary.

- **Formal Organization: A Living, Breathing Structure**

The formal structure of *La gata golosa* is a prime example of the flexibility and diversity found in pasillo compositions. While many pasillos adopt a ternary or compound ternary form, García's piece reveals a tripartite structure that might be interpreted as A - B - A′, or even as a variation of A - B - C depending on the performance version. It is not uncommon for interpreters to repeat or ornament sections, vary the accompaniment, or reharmonize returning themes - practices that reflect the music's roots in both composition and improvisation.

García's design reveals an architectural sensibility that balances motivic unity with sectional contrast.

1. Theme A (mm. 1 - 18) functions as a refrain and is divided into three parts:

- *A1* (mm. 1 - 4): A clear, singable motive introduces the melodic material.
- *A2* (mm. 5 - 8): A continuation that develops the opening idea.
- *A3* (mm. 9 - 18): A broader phrase with repeat signs and a navigational jump (from m. 15 to m. 52 on the reprise) that leads toward Theme C.

2. Theme B (mm. 17 - 34) expands the harmonic and rhythmic palette. It consists of seven motivic segments (B1 - B7), with a variant (B7) leading into the return of Theme A.

3. Theme C (mm. 35 - 50) offers a conclusive contrast. This section, organized in four parts (C1 - C4), modulates to Eb major before returning to G major in a final affirmation of the piece's tonal home.

This flexible form allows performers to shape their interpretation dynamically, highlighting the playful returns and harmonic excursions while maintaining a sense of overall cohesion.

- **Expressive Character and Performance Practice**

The interpretative demands of *La gata golosa* go beyond technical fluency. Pianists must approach the piece with a sensitivity to its historical and stylistic context. Its joyful and teasing nature - implied not only by its title but also by its rhythmic verve and melodic playfulness - calls for a light touch, elegant phrasing, and a dance-like lilt. Rubato is welcome, especially in transitions or phrase endings, as long as it enhances the natural flow of the music.

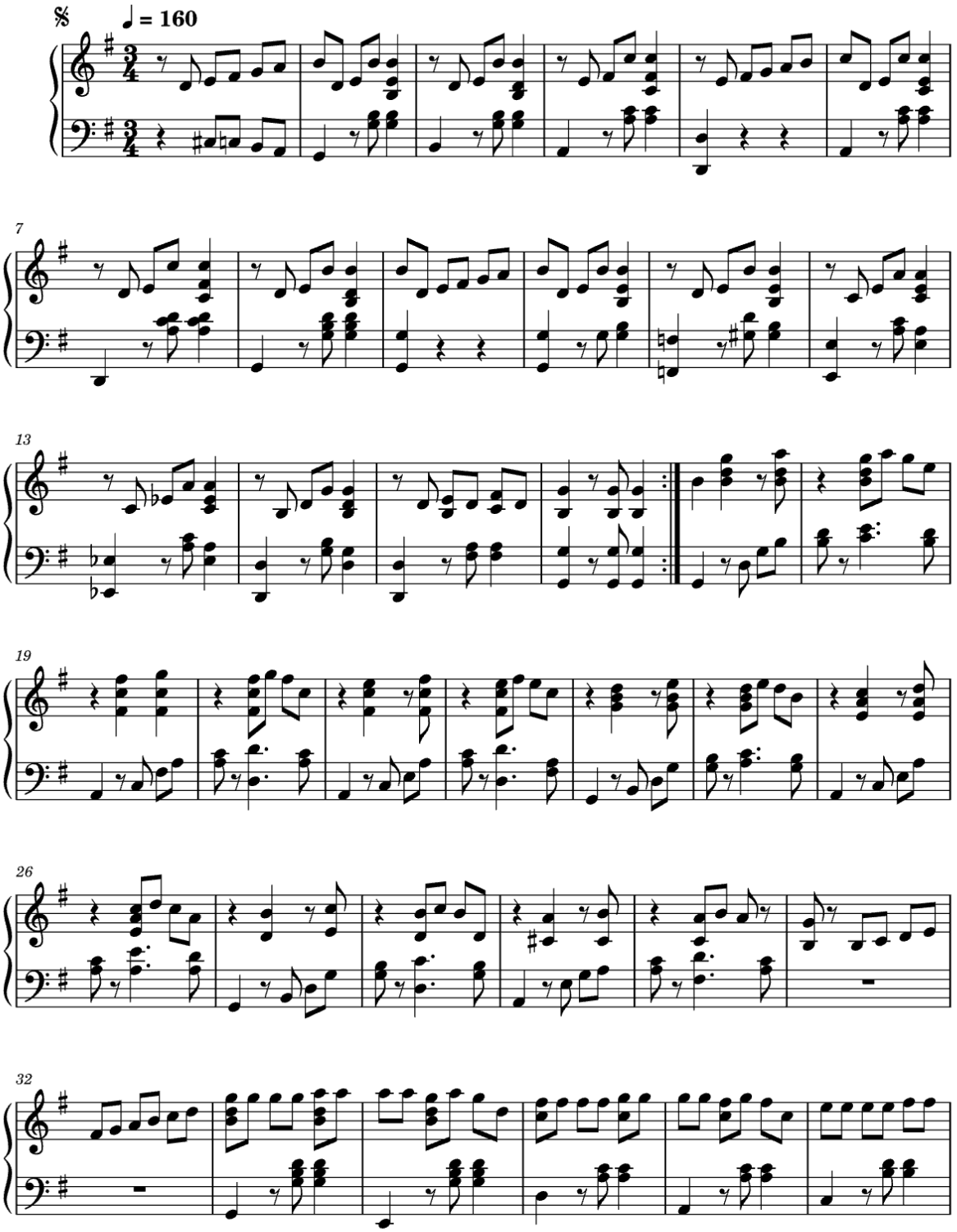
Performers may also introduce their own ornamentation or dynamic contrasts, reflecting the piece's origins in live salon settings where interpretation was inherently

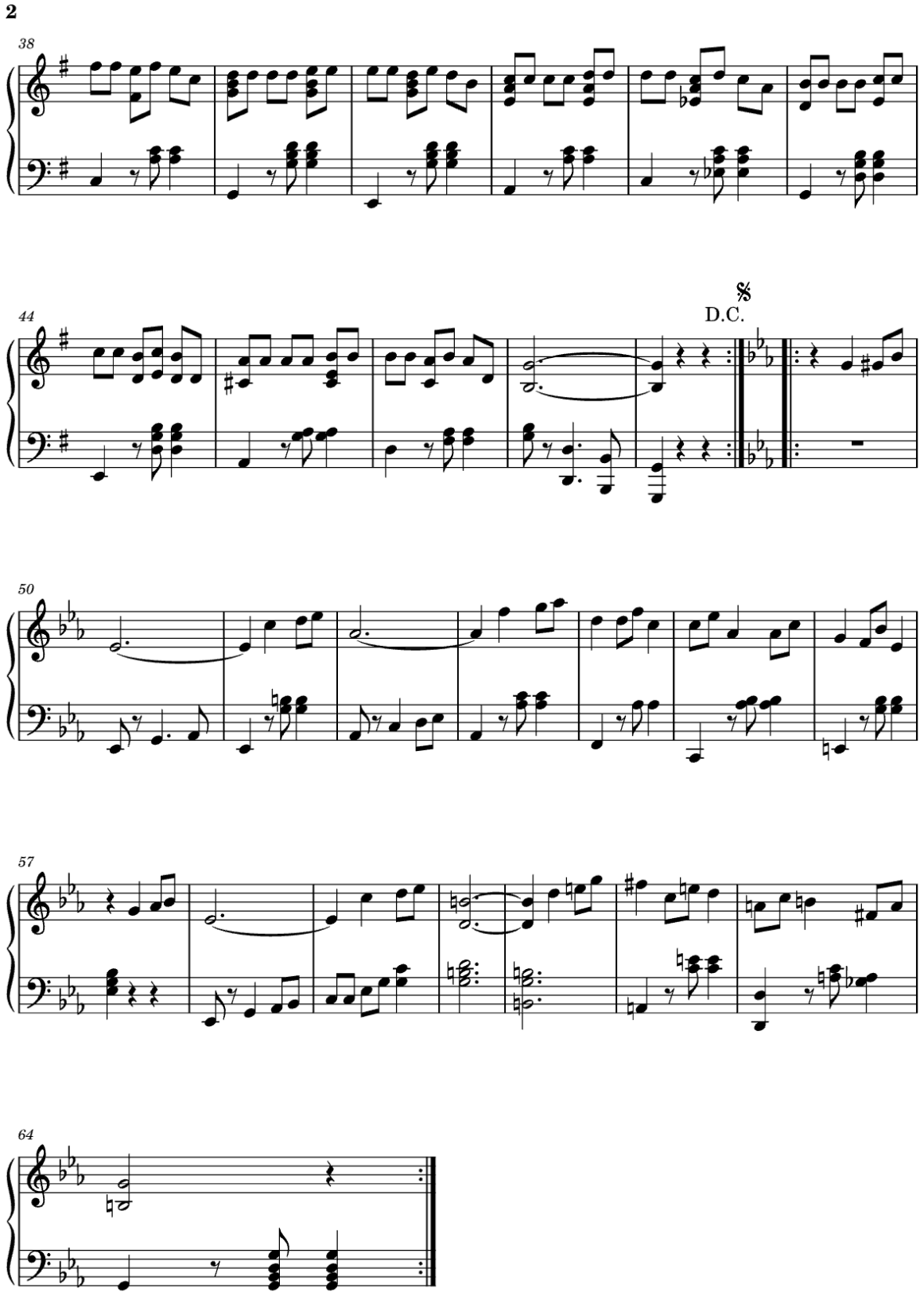
personal. The balance between right-hand lyricism and left-hand rhythmic clarity is essential, as is the ability to bring out the subtleties of hemiola and syncopation without sacrificing structural clarity.

The absence of explicit performance instructions in the score encourages interpretive agency. The performer becomes a co-creator - shaping rhythm, color, and phrasing in response to the music's subtle invitations.

Pasillo

Fulgencio Garcia





Example 3-4: Garcia, *Gata Golosa*, mm.1-64

Adolfo Mejía: Prelude *Luminosidad de Aguas* (Luminosity of Waters)

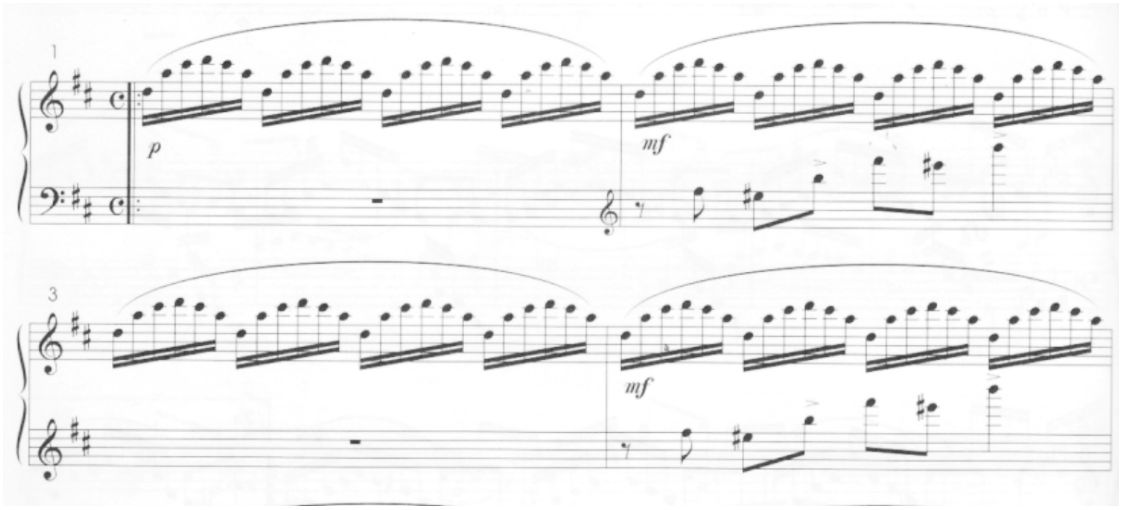
Adolfo Mejía's prelude, often referred as *Luminosidad de Aguas* (Luminosity of Waters) is a vivid sonic tableau that captures both the fluid essence of water and the nuanced color palette of French Impressionism. Composed following his transformative stay in France in 1939, the prelude reflects the deep artistic imprint left by his studies at the École Normale de Musique in Paris, where he took composition classes with Nadia Boulanger - celebrated mentor to figures like Aaron Copland and Alberto Ginastera - and music history with a professor likely identified as Andrée Bonneville. Mejía immersed himself not only in rigorous academic training but also in the bohemian artistic culture of Paris, performing for radio stations, participating in a group led by Rose Cornasse, and developing a close friendship with fellow Colombian Eduardo Lemaitre. These experiences deepened his harmonic vocabulary and sparked his interest in modal textures, suspended harmonies, and orchestral fluidity. In *Luminosidad de aguas*, Mejía channels the Impressionist legacy through shimmering ostinati, modal inflections, and harmonic ambiguity - compositional hallmarks enriched by his Parisian exposure and later infused with Colombian sensibility and poetic lyricism.[6] Dedicated to the celebrated Spanish harpist Nicanor Zabaleta, who premiered the work during a visit to Colombia, the piece unfolds through three large sections - A, B, and C (recapitulation) - each constructed around a distinct harmonic and motivic identity yet unified by recurring gestures and a modal-impressionist aesthetic.

- **Section A: Ostinato Textures and Lydian Atmosphere**

The opening of the prelude introduces a delicate, rippling ostinato in the upper voice - a sixteenth-note sextuplet figure oscillating between D, A, and C#. The resulting sonority, anchored by the D - C# major seventh interval, immediately establishes a modal hue: the

[6] Alvaro José Angulo Julio, *Colombian Composer Adolfo Mejía: Four Works for Small Ensembles* (DMA diss., Louisiana State University, 2017), 8–9.

Lydian mode, whose raised fourth scale degree provides a sense of ethereal suspension. This modal reference evokes a lineage that includes Debussy and Ravel, whose works often rely on Lydian and other modal inflections to transcend traditional harmonic gravity.



Example 3-5: Mejia, Prelude, mm.1-4

Above this ostinato, Mejía layers a melodic figure composed of F#, E#, and B, stated in two octaves. This introduces an unresolved tritone (E# to B), resisting resolution and fostering an atmosphere of harmonic ambiguity. These intervallic choices, particularly the tritone and major seventh, play a central role in defining the piece's coloristic palette.

Soon after, the left hand contributes a second melodic layer, based on the fifth mode of the pentatonic scale beginning on F#. This scale (F#, A, B, C#, E) reinforces the modal aesthetic while deepening the motivic development. Instead of treating the pentatonic scale as a fixed structure, Mejía uses it fluidly, allowing its notes to emerge and recede organically within the evolving harmonic texture.

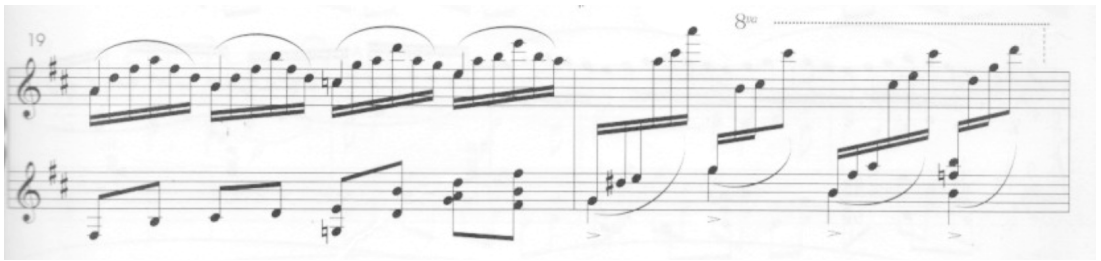
From measure 10 onward, the music undergoes a process of tonal migration. Both ostinato and melodic material descend through different tonal centers with minimal variation in internal intervals - a technique known as parallel voice leading. Sometimes the original

major third interval is transformed into a minor third, subtly altering the color without disrupting the flow. These passages embody what Vincent Persichetti called "tonal mixture," where chromatic alterations or shifts in mode blur traditional boundaries of major and minor harmony.

- **Section B: Quartal Harmony, Harmonic Series, and Modal Polyphony**

A dramatic shift occurs in Section B with the introduction of quartal harmony - a defining element of modernist language. In measures 15 and 16, chords built entirely of perfect fourths create open, floating sonorities that depart from functional tonal progressions. This vertical construction of sound is reminiscent of twentieth-century works by Hindemith, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky, yet here it is softened by Mejía's fluid phrasing and dynamic nuance.

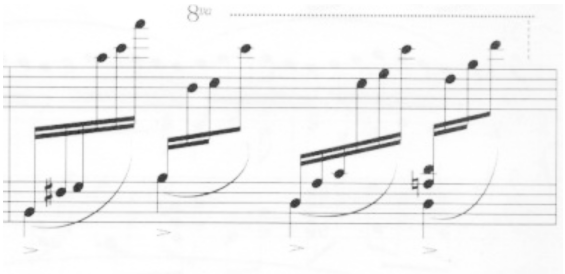
As the section progresses, the pentatonic material resurfaces, now harmonized in exact parallel fourths or shifted by minor thirds. The interplay of modal content with intervallic parallelism enriches the texture. In measure 19, coloristic expansions emerge: ninths and thirteenths are introduced through added tones (such as the B minor add9 and Cadd13 harmonies), enhancing the harmonic complexity without adhering to traditional dominant-tonic expectations.



Example 3-6: Mejia, Prelude, mm.19-20

These chords serve dual roles: they both elaborate the modal centers and offer moments of expressive suspension, mimicking the shimmer and distortion of light on water. The left hand occasionally presents quartal structures in inversion, such as ascending (E - A - B) or descending (E - B - A) shapes, producing contrast between verticality and linearity.

In measure 20, Mejía incorporates sonorities derived from the harmonic overtone series. The G - D# augmented fifth interval implies harmonics 7 and 11, intervals associated with the whole-tone scale and non-Western tuning systems. This gesture, paired with a melodic ascent through G, A, C#, and E, constructs a Lydian tetrachord that adds resonance and directionality.



Example 3-7: Mejia, Prelude, m. 20

- **Modal Exploration and Motivic Expansion**

The following measures delve into an intricate tapestry of modal transformations. Measure 21 introduces the fourth pentatonic mode on F# in descending form (F#, E, C#, B), immediately followed by a descent through the G Phrygian mode down to F#. Mejía displays an uncommon fluidity in navigating between modal systems, favoring stepwise motion and smooth transitions over abrupt modulation.

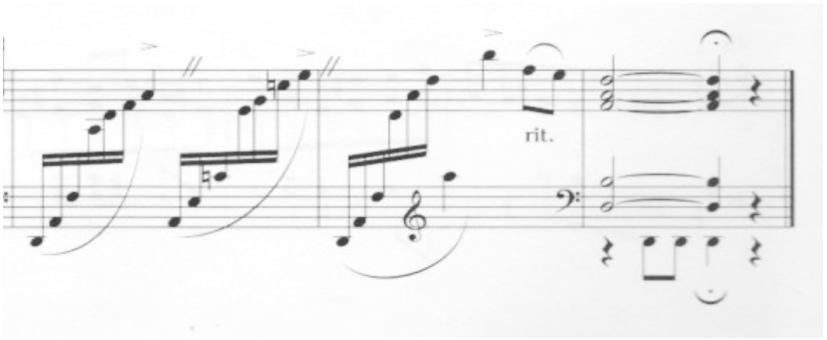
Measure 22 presents an augmented fourth chord composed of notes drawn from harmonics 6, 8, and 11 - a vertical structure defined by Persichetti as characteristic of

twentieth-century harmonic vocabulary. This sonority, while unfamiliar in traditional tonal practice, feels entirely natural within the sonic landscape Mejía constructs.

In measure 23, a melodic-harmonic pattern is transposed across three pitch centers - E, D, and B - maintaining intervallic identity. This parallel structure is echoed an octave lower in measure 25, creating a symmetrical framing and reinforcing the modular nature of the material. Here, one finds a true fusion of modal repetition and harmonic development.

- **Section C: Reexposition and Textural Unification**

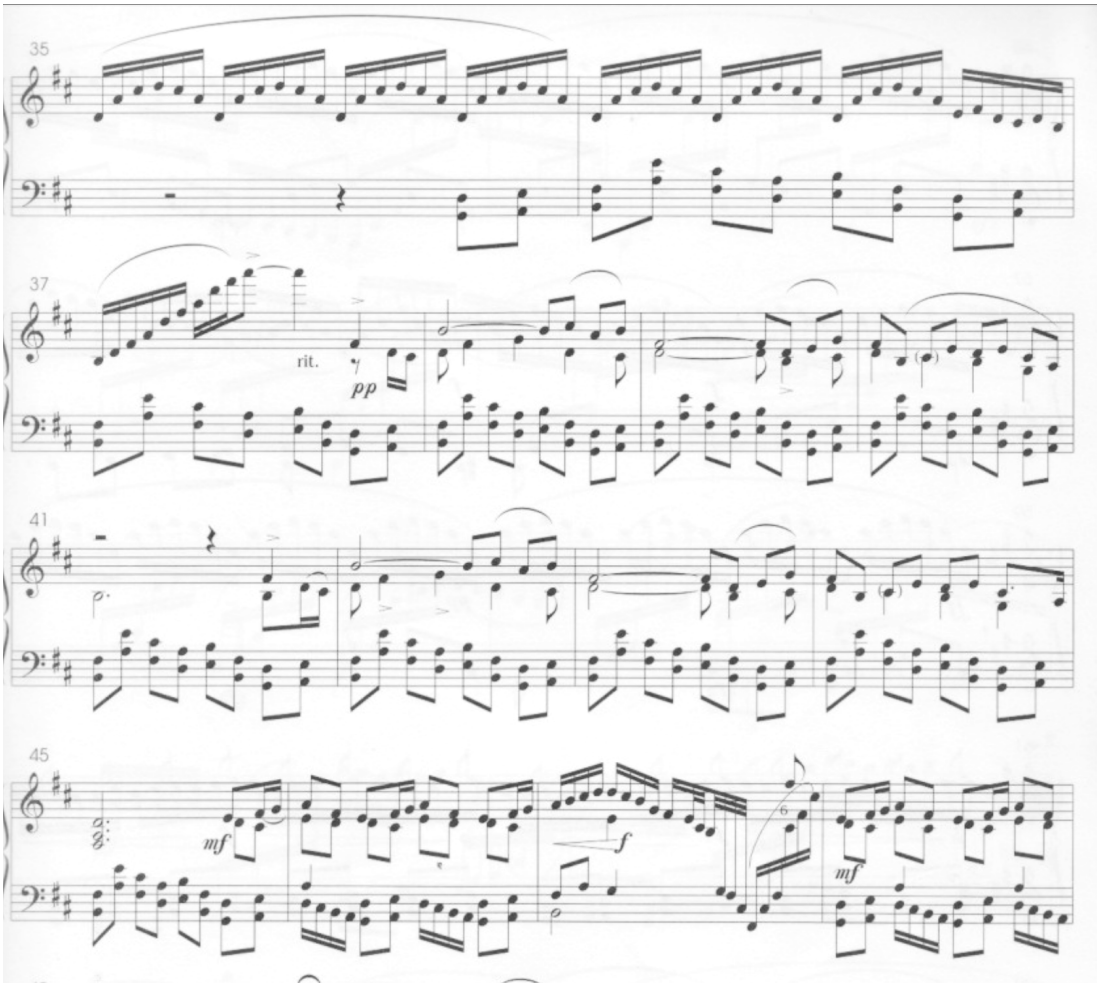
In the final section, Mejía recalls earlier themes within a reconfigured modal setting. Measure 78 pairs a D major triad (serving as the tonic in a Mixolydian context) with a subsequent A minor triad (acting as a modal dominant). This unusual tonic-dominant pairing draws upon ancient modal theory rather than tonal hierarchy, grounding the music in a broader historical lineage.



Example 3-8: Mejia, Prelude, mm.78-80

Between measures 35 and 52, a striking ostinato in parallel fifths dominates the left hand, while the right hand spins lyrical motivic fragments above. As Adrián Camilo Ramírez observes, Debussy's use of parallel fifths, fourths, and octaves - reminiscent of medieval organum - serves not merely as a stylistic flourish but as a structural tool that evokes a sense of temporal suspension and harmonic purity. These open intervals contribute to what Ramírez

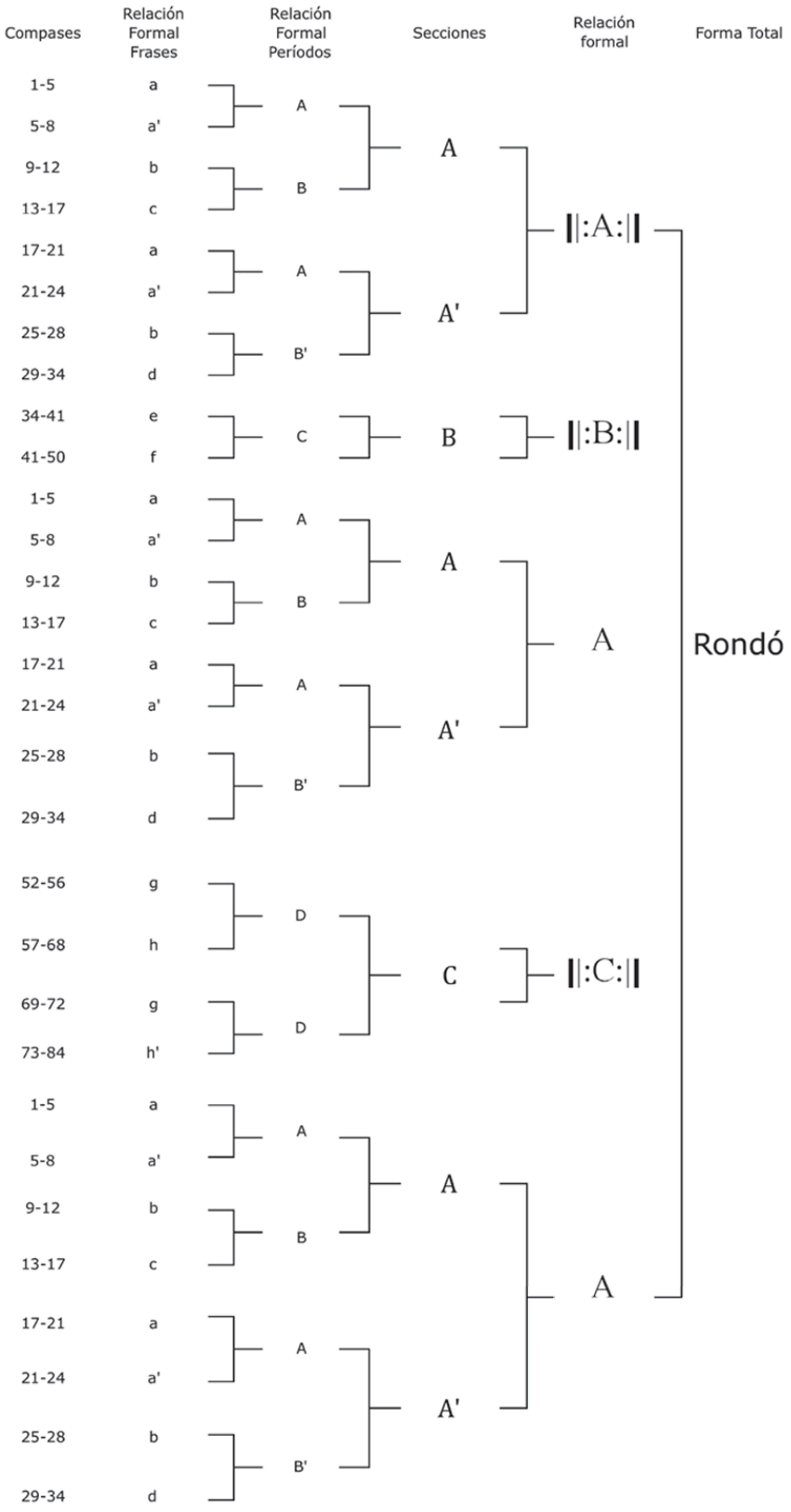
describes as a “return to a remote past,” grounding Debussy’s harmonic language in a sonorous space that transcends conventional tonal progressions and highlights his break from Austro-German traditions.[7]



Example 3-9: Mejia, Prelude, mm. 35-48

This ostinato, harmonically static but rhythmically alive, provides a sense of rootedness even as the melodic content shifts fluidly above it. It is precisely this balance - between stasis and motion, between vertical sonority and linear flow - that defines the impressionist voice of Mejía’s writing.[8]

[7] Adrián Camilo Ramírez, *Debussy: otro camino al atonalismo*, *Música, cultura y pensamiento* 2, no. 2 (2010): 121.
[8] Leonardo Zambrano Rodríguez, *Una visión analítica gramatical-musical de las piezas para piano de Adolfo Mejía* (Medellín: Universidad EAFIT, 2012).



Example 3-10: Mejia, Prelude, form

Adolfo Mejía's *Luminosity of Waters* is more than an homage to the French impressionists - it is a carefully woven study in modal color, harmonic ambiguity, and timbral fluidity. Through layered ostinati, rich modal intersections, and harmonic experimentation drawn from both traditional and overtone-derived systems, the piece creates a sonic tableau that echoes the undulating rhythms and visual shimmer of flowing water.

As Leonardo Zambrano Rodríguez observes in his analysis of Mejía's piano writing, the composer frequently employs open fifth chords, modal mixtures, and textures built from wide arpeggios and parallel fourths. These elements create an impressionistic soundscape that balances rhythmic clarity with harmonic ambiguity.[9]

A hallmark of Mejía's style is his use of chords without thirds, ancient modal scales, and blurred harmonic outlines - features that generate what Zambrano describes as a "suspended sonority," evoking both medieval resonance and modern uncertainty.[10]

Indeed, through *Luminosity of Waters*, Mejía articulates a distinct voice within the impressionist idiom - one that bridges the traditions of European harmonic innovation with the poetic sensibilities of Latin American modernism. This prelude not only enriches the Colombian piano repertoire but also contributes a nuanced perspective to the broader canon of twentieth-century musical impressionism.

Adolfo Mejía: *Pasillo Campanas* (Bells) in B Minor

In Adolfo Mejía's *Pasillo en Si menor* - commonly referred to as *Campanas* (Bells) - the pasillo becomes more than a stylized Colombian dance. It is transformed into a personal and poetic meditation that reverberates across continents and centuries. Through a subtle synthesis of Colombian musical idioms, modal harmonic language, and a narrative formal

[9] Leonardo Zambrano Rodríguez, *Una visión analítica gramatical-musical de las piezas para piano de Adolfo Mejía* (Medellín: Universidad EAFIT, 2012), 56.
[10] Ibid., 18–19.

design, Mejía crafts a work that evokes the spectral presence of bells - those sonic totems of memory and mourning. The piece suggests both a nostalgic echo of Andean landscapes and a cosmopolitan awareness of late-Romantic European aesthetics. Whether consciously or not, Mejía's writing resonates with the bell symbolism in Rachmaninov's oeuvre and the rhythmic tensions of Brahmsian phrasing. These affinities hint at the composer's intellectual and emotional dialogue with the musical languages he may have encountered during his studies in France, a cultural hub where such aesthetic traditions were still deeply felt in the early twentieth century.

- **Form**

The work unfolds in a cyclical five-part structure reminiscent of a rondo, though personalized by subtle variations and expansions. The form follows this pattern:

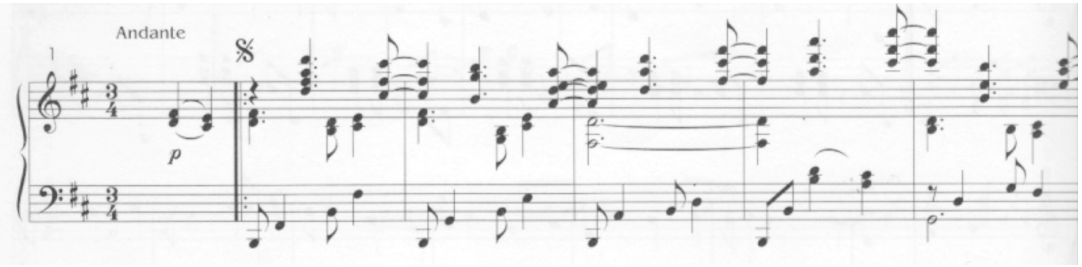
||: A | A' :||: B :|| A | A' ||: C | C' :|| A | A' ||

At first glance, this may suggest a predictable return to the main theme, but closer inspection reveals a far more nuanced interplay of harmonic color, thematic development, and structural asymmetry. Each return of the A material is slightly transformed, creating a recursive architecture that mirrors the tolling of a bell: never exactly the same, yet always familiar - repetitive yet evolving. In this way, Mejía's formal design supports the poetic undertone of "campanas," where structure serves as a metaphor for memory.

- **Section A: Modal Tones and Motivic Bells**

The opening A section (*Andante*) presents an asymmetrical and melodically repetitive period that exudes both simplicity and sophistication. Harmonic functions - tonic, subdominant, and dominant - are shaded with modal color, particularly the Aeolian mode. The tonic chord is tinged with a minor seventh, while the dominant appears in its minor form. This choice blurs the expectations of tonal resolution, evoking a sense of openness and

ambiguity. The cadence at the end of the first phrase is interpreted as authentic, yet it defers finality.



Example 3-11: Mejia, *Campanas*, mm. 1-5

The second phrase develops this modal landscape further, incorporating chords such as minor dominant and flat seven to deepen the harmonic texture. An expansion through rhythmic acceleration leads to a plagal cadence, ultimately concluding on a dominant chord. Here, the inclusion of the leading tone introduces a flash of tonal recollection, as if the bell momentarily finds its pitch before fading again into modal mist. This dominant chord - complete with added 7th and 9th - acts almost like an orchestral swell, illuminating the expressive potential of harmonic dissonance.

The A' subsection is nearly identical until the complementary phrase, which diverges through the use of a double dominant and a stronger cadential resolution. Interestingly, before the final cadence, Mejía inserts a IIb chord—another moment of modal borrowing that undercuts tonal predictability. This rich harmonic treatment imbues the opening section with both restraint and resonance, much like the carefully gauged overtones of a bronze bell.

Rhythmically, the A material is defined by a motive introduced with an acéphalic (headless) ictus, creating a sensation of rhythmic suspension. The motive unfolds in two distinct registral layers - middle and upper - providing vertical and timbral contrast. Though the written rhythms are seemingly straightforward, the expressive weight of each gesture lies

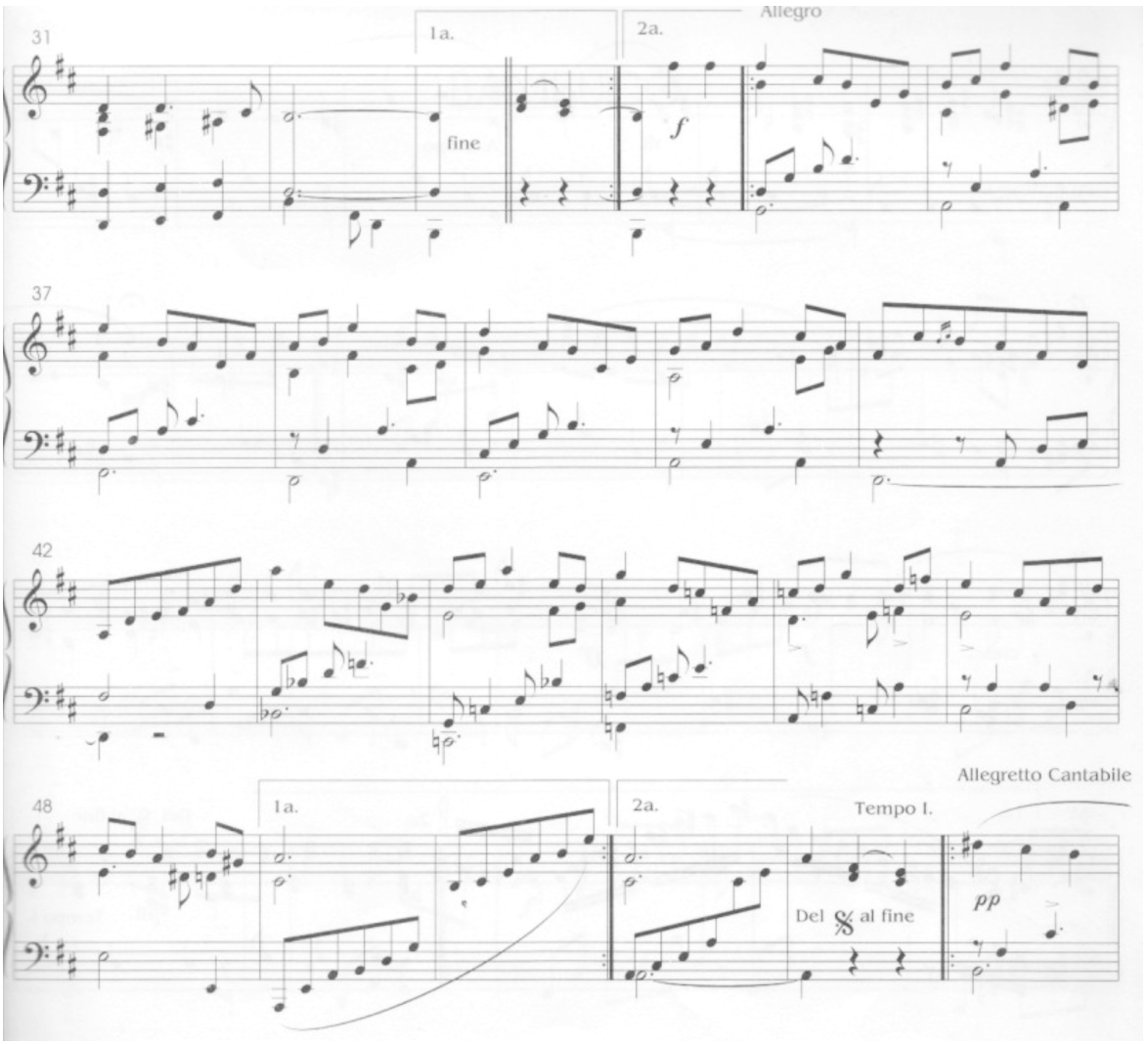
in its auditory perception and pianistic articulation. The anacrustic character and the overlap of melodic contours between registers conjure the layered decay of a bell's resonance - a sonic metaphor embedded within the score.

- **Section B: Lydian Mode and Modulatory Dance**

The B section (*Allegro*) shifts both tempo and tonality, moving to G major (the submediant of B minor) before modulating to A major. This tonal pivot is handled with sophistication, creating a brightening of the harmonic field without changing the notated key signature - an effect that evokes the shimmering ambiguity of the Lydian mode. In fact, the inclusion of a C# in G major (acting as a raised fourth) confirms a Lydian inflection, reinforcing a luminous, modal clarity amidst the rhythmic animation.

This section introduces a symmetrical, modulatory period. The harmony is constructed with major seventh chords on both tonic and dominant, enhancing the resonance and spaciousness of the texture. A temporary detour to G lydian precedes the final modulation to A major, mediated by a pivot chord (II6 in G lydian = I6 in A major). The resultant cadence - conclusive and perfect - is rendered even more satisfying by its harmonic preparation.

Melodically, this section presents a new motive that retains the anacrustic rhythm but introduces a varied intervallic structure. Occasionally, rhythmic substitutions - such as a quarter note becoming two eighths - occur, and the final intervals shift between major and minor thirds depending on harmonic context. This thematic flexibility within a stable rhythmic identity mirrors the earlier bell metaphor: the same bell, struck differently, yields new colors.

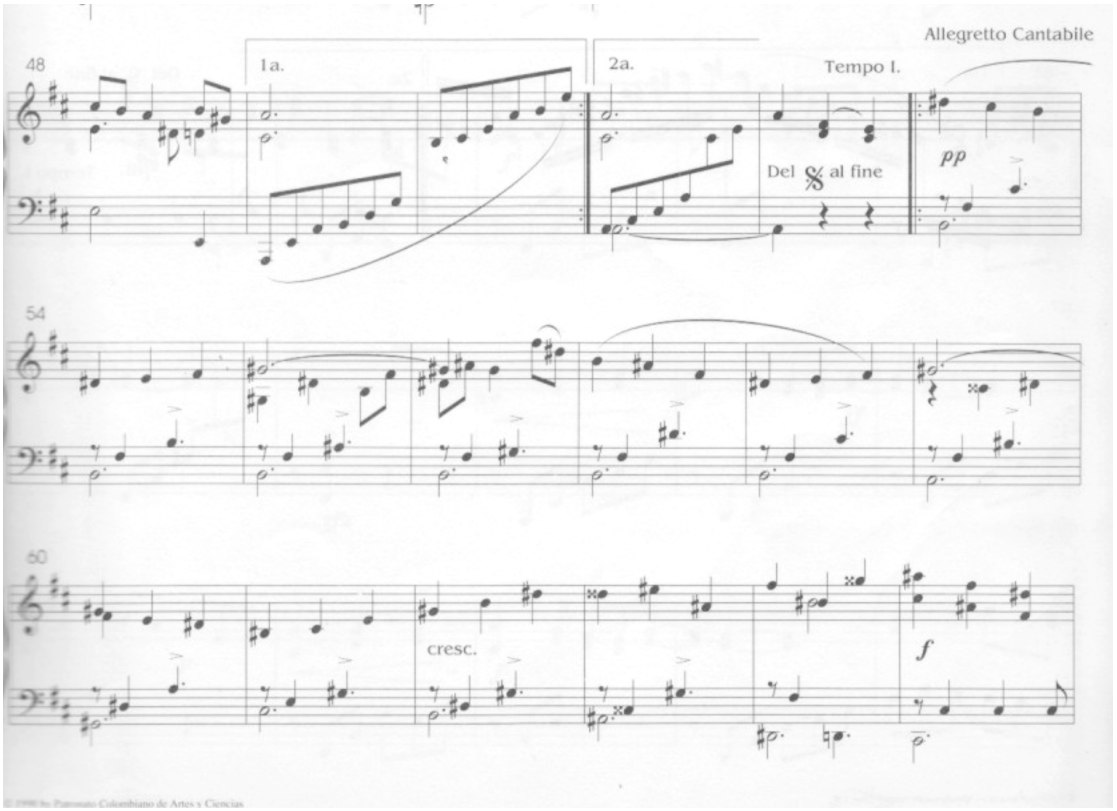


Example 3-12: Mejia, *Campanas*, mm. 31-53

- **Section C and C': Lyrical Veil and Rhythmic Ambiguity**

Marked *Allegretto Cantabile*, the C and C' sections introduce a remarkable shift - not just in key (B major, the parallel major of the home key) but in mood and texture. The harmonic rhythm slows, granting each chord more expressive space. The lyrical motive of this section is astonishing in its economy: a chain of three quarter notes, consistent in rhythm yet mercurial in pitch content. Sometimes stepwise, sometimes arpeggiated or intervallically jagged, the motive adapts like the partials of a bell tone modulated by distance, material, and force.

It is in this section that Mejía's writing flirts with rhythmic ambiguity, reminiscent of Brahmsian practice. The layering of phrase groupings, harmonic ellipses (non-resolving secondary dominants), and syncopations create a gentle but persistent uncertainty about metrical boundaries. The listener may feel the beat shifting underfoot, as if the musical floor itself had softened - a trait often found in Brahms' intermezzos and lied accompaniments.



Example 3-13: Mejia, *Campanas*, mm. 48-65

In the second phrase of C, the harmonic rhythm increases (now one chord per bar), and Mejía introduces several secondary dominants that elide their expected resolutions. The musical line opens like a window toward another tonal region, only to close it abruptly. In C', Mejía resolves one of these tensions, guiding the listener through a perfected cadence that prepares the return to the final iteration of A.

These rhythmic and harmonic strategies demonstrate a deep awareness of late-Romantic European art music traditions. Mejía's time in France - a place where composers like Debussy, Ravel, and Fauré were part of the ambient intellectual air - likely exposed him to the aesthetic ideals of textural nuance, harmonic richness, and temporal ambiguity. While Colombia's pasillo tradition provided the idiomatic seed, it is this broader cosmopolitan soil that allowed Mejía's work to flower in such unexpected ways.

- **Texture, Technique, and Interpretation**

Throughout the work, the texture remains largely homophonic, with a clear melody supported by an accompaniment. Yet Mejía frequently divides this accompaniment between both hands, demanding agility and control from the performer. Traditional pasillo rhythms serve as a baseline, but they are often reimagined, displaced, or ornamented in ways that highlight the pianist's expressive toolkit. In the final section, the characteristic rhythmic pattern all but dissolves, giving way to freer figurations that resemble improvised gestures rather than set formulas.

This elasticity - textural, rhythmic, and harmonic - is what renders *Campanas* not only a masterwork of the Colombian piano repertoire but also a cultural bridge. It tolls with the memory of local dances and childhood echoes, while simultaneously ringing with the aesthetic sensibilities of the European concert hall. Like Rachmaninov's *The Bells*, Mejía's *Campanas* is not merely an imitation of sound, but a symbolic invocation - an architecture of memory rendered in tone.

Campanas is a pasillo of profound resonance. In its carefully crafted structure, modal richness, and expressive ambivalence, it reveals the hand of a composer deeply attuned to both his national identity and the aesthetic possibilities of global modernism. Adolfo Mejía's musical bell tolls not in isolation but in conversation - with the Russian mysticism of

Rachmaninov, the rhythmic subtlety of Brahms, and the poetic ethos of the pasillo as lived memory.

In the end, the piece suggests that the bells we hear in music are never just about sound - they are about place, time, and identity. And in *Campanas*, they toll for the convergence of Colombia and Europe, tradition and innovation, silence and resonance.

Carolina Calvache: Pasillo *Te Agradezco*

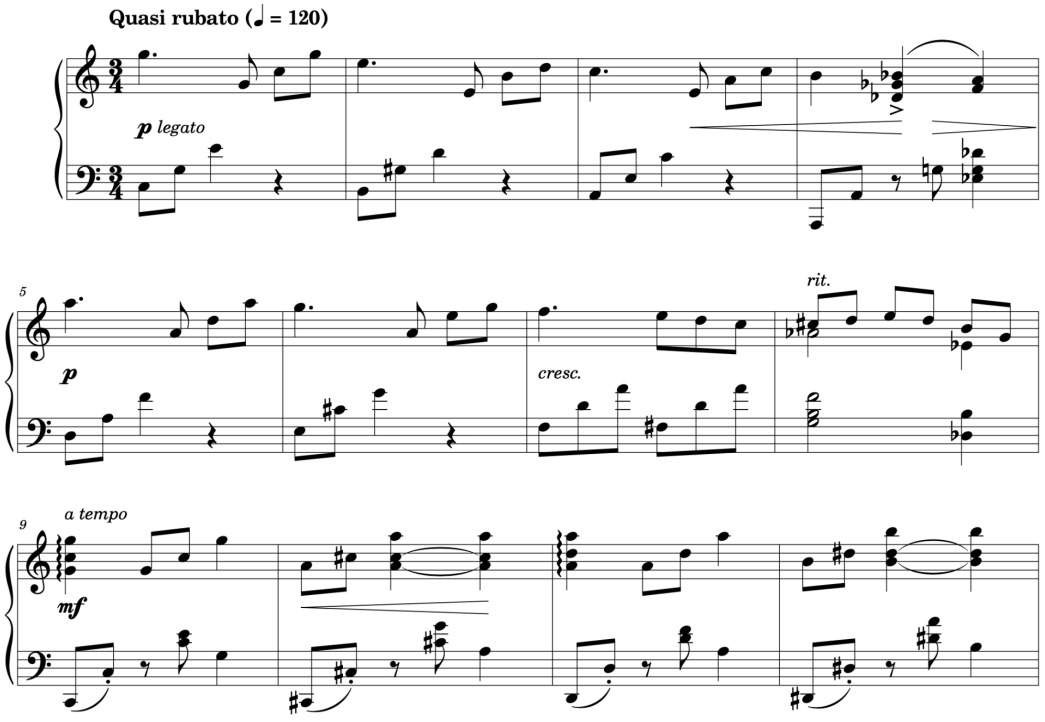
In the evolving landscape of 21st-century Colombian piano music, few voices ring with the clarity, innovation, and emotional transparency of Carolina Calvache. A composer and pianist born in Cali and later trained in the United States, Calvache merges Colombian musical traditions with the harmonic sophistication of jazz and the expressive fluidity of modern concert music. Her *pasillo Te Agradezco* is one of the most compelling examples of this synthesis - a piece that does not merely restate tradition but reimagines it through a deeply personal lens.

At the heart of *Te Agradezco* lies a gesture of gratitude. Written as a tribute to her mentor Jaime Nao, the piece is a musical thank-you, its title “I thank you” conveying both intimacy and reverence. But beyond the personal, this pasillo also represents a larger aesthetic mission: to honor Colombian musical identity while expanding its expressive range. In this single work, Calvache compresses years of training, cultural memory, improvisational freedom, and compositional daring, creating a pasillo that is both homage and innovation.

Calvache’s profile as a composer is central to understanding the piece. Trained as a classical pianist in her youth, she later moved into the world of jazz, completing graduate studies in the United States and ultimately taking up a faculty position at the University of Central Missouri. Her musical identity resists compartmentalization - she is as comfortable

writing for brass ensembles as she is composing lyrical ballads or modernizing folk idioms. She chooses not to follow traditional conservatory composition paths, deliberately avoiding what she sees as the "damage" of overly academic training. Instead, she privileges intuition, oral tradition, and improvisation - methods that resonate with her Colombian heritage and with jazz's spirit of spontaneity.

Calvache composes with a method deeply connected to the voice. Her creative process typically begins at the piano, singing aloud melodic fragments until they crystallize into complete ideas. This approach is evident throughout *Te Agradezco*, which unfolds with the natural ebb and flow of speech or song. Rather than imposing a rigid structure, she allows the form to follow an emotional arc - emerging from introspective stillness, growing into lyricism, darkening into melancholy, and ultimately returning to a celebratory pulse.

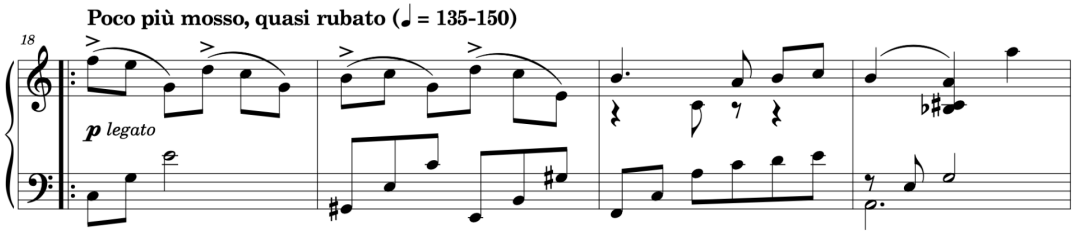


Example 3-14: Calvache, *Te Agradezco*, mm. 1-12

The formal outline of *Te Agradezco* resists neat categorization. Beginning with a rubato introduction that stretches across the first seventeen measures, the piece evokes a

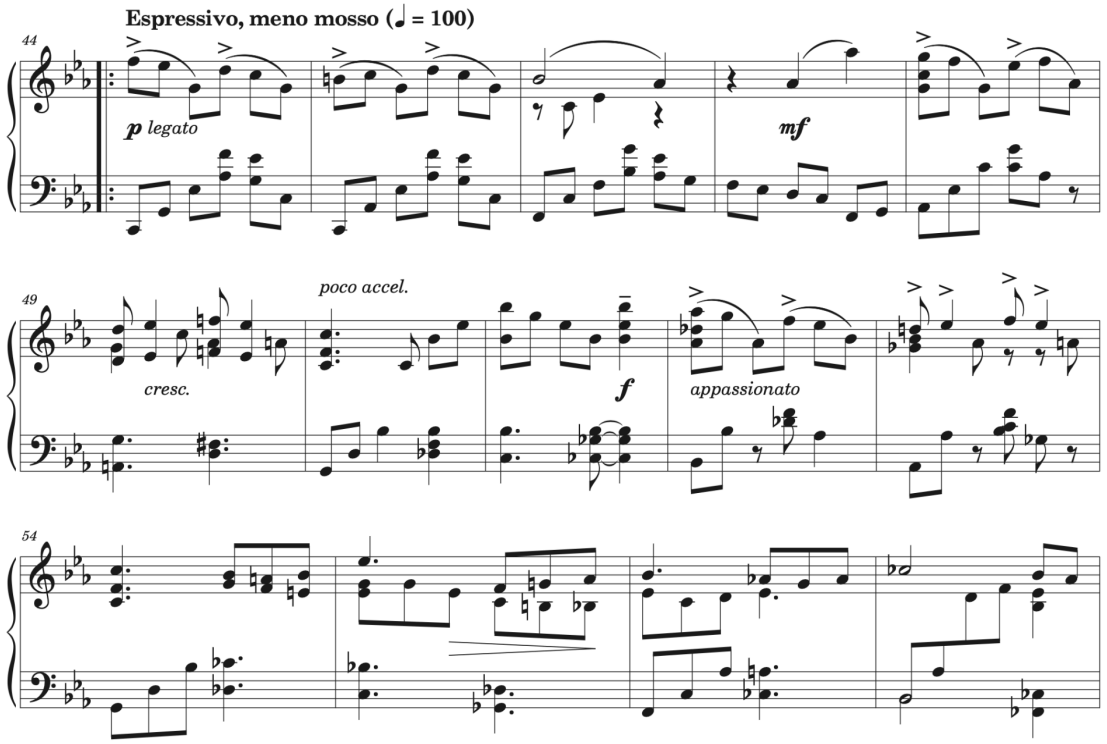
sense of suspended time, like a private reflection whispered before the music begins to move. This section features arpeggiated textures and harmonic ambiguity, inviting comparisons to jazz preludes or even impressionist nocturnes. The left hand lays out floating harmonies, while the right hand sings with unmeasured freedom - there is rhythm, but it breathes.

At measure 18, a subtle shift occurs. The tempo settles slightly, the left hand begins outlining traditional *pasillo* accompaniment patterns, yet the rubato quality remains. The music now exists in a liminal space: still reflective, but anchored. This balance - between rhythmic clarity and expressive freedom - is one of Calvache's most striking contributions to the genre. The *pasillo* pulse is respected, but never a constraint.



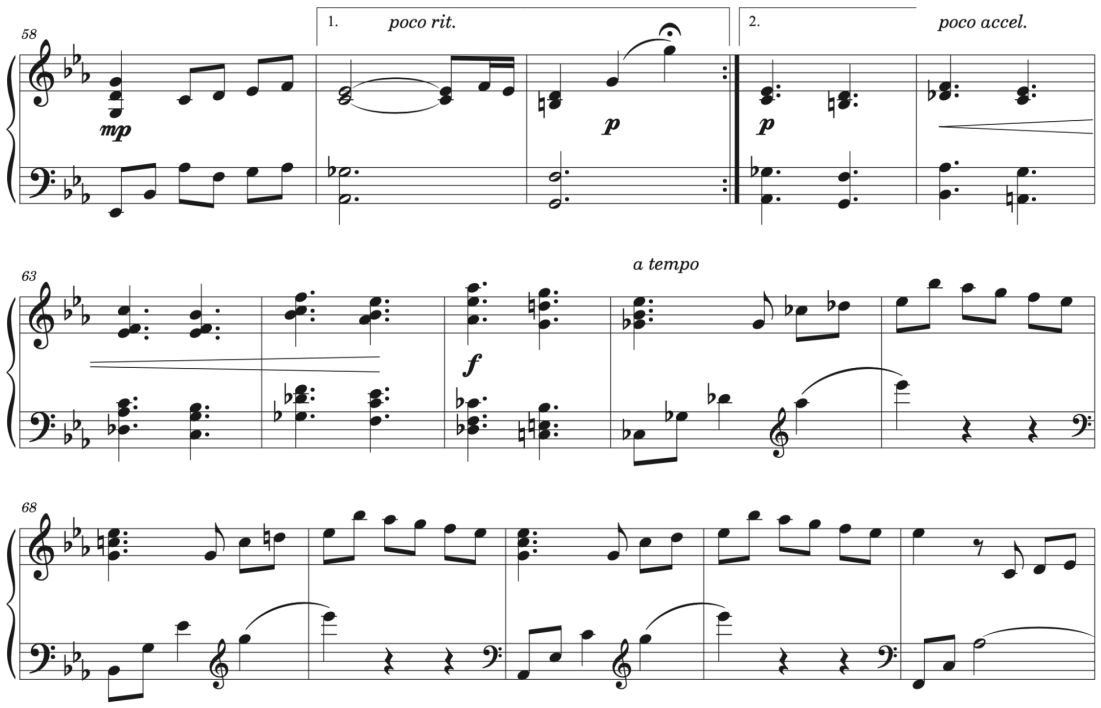
Example 3-15: Calvache, *Te Agradezco*, mm. 18-21

By measure 44, the piece descends into a more introspective tone as it modulates to C minor. Here, the tempo slows, and the textures thin. This section suggests not a festive *pasillo* but one colored by nostalgia or longing. Calvache herself describes this as a *pasillo lírico*, a lyrical *pasillo*, in contrast to the genre's more typical association with upbeat salon dances. The darkness of the harmony and the softening of the tempo pull the listener inward, suggesting a quiet emotional weight that words might fail to express.



Example 3-16: Calvache, *Te Agradezco*, mm. 44-57

Then, beginning at measure 62, the music regains momentum. It accelerates gradually, finding steadier footing and settling into a clear pulse by measure 74. From this point forward, the piece embraces the *pasillo* dance rhythm more overtly, culminating in a final section marked *a tempo danzabile* - danceable tempo - at measure 120. The work ends not in melancholic introspection but with an uplifting affirmation, a return to rhythmic clarity and celebratory spirit. This arc - from stillness to motion, from personal to communal - is both musical and narrative, tracing a journey of gratitude through sound.



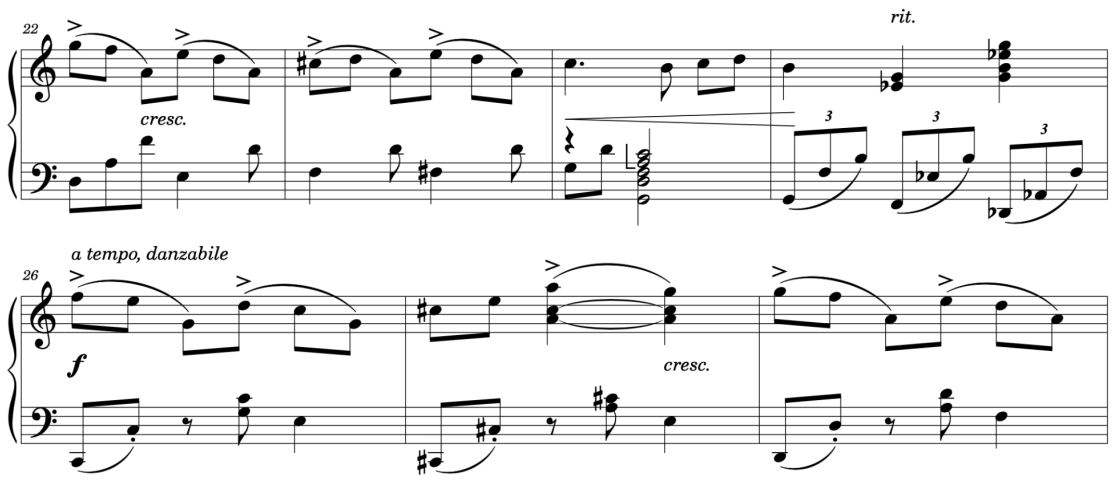
Example 3-17: Calvache, *Te Agradezco*, mm. 58-72

Harmonically, *Te Agradezco* stands apart from the diatonic simplicity often associated with early *pasillos*. Calvache's jazz background is fully on display here. The piece begins in C major, but the tonal center is never static. Throughout the work, she uses extended chords - 7ths, 9ths, 13ths, altered dominants - alongside modal shifts and chromatic sidesteps that suggest the influence of pianists like Bill Evans or Fred Hersch. One particularly evocative moment appears around measure 32, where an Ab7 chord - a tritone substitution - prepares the dominant, only to resolve with unexpected color. These harmonic detours are not functional in the classical sense; they operate like brushstrokes in a watercolor painting, creating atmosphere rather than direction.

Calvache's harmonic imagination is grounded not just in jazz but in a hybrid Colombian identity. She cites Adolfo Mejía's *El Pincho* as a formative influence - especially the way Mejía's unexpected chords and modal juxtapositions opened her ears to new possibilities. This kind of "jazziness" within a Colombian frame becomes the essence of her

voice, especially in works like *Te Agradezco*, where Colombian dance forms serve as a canvas for chromatic exploration.

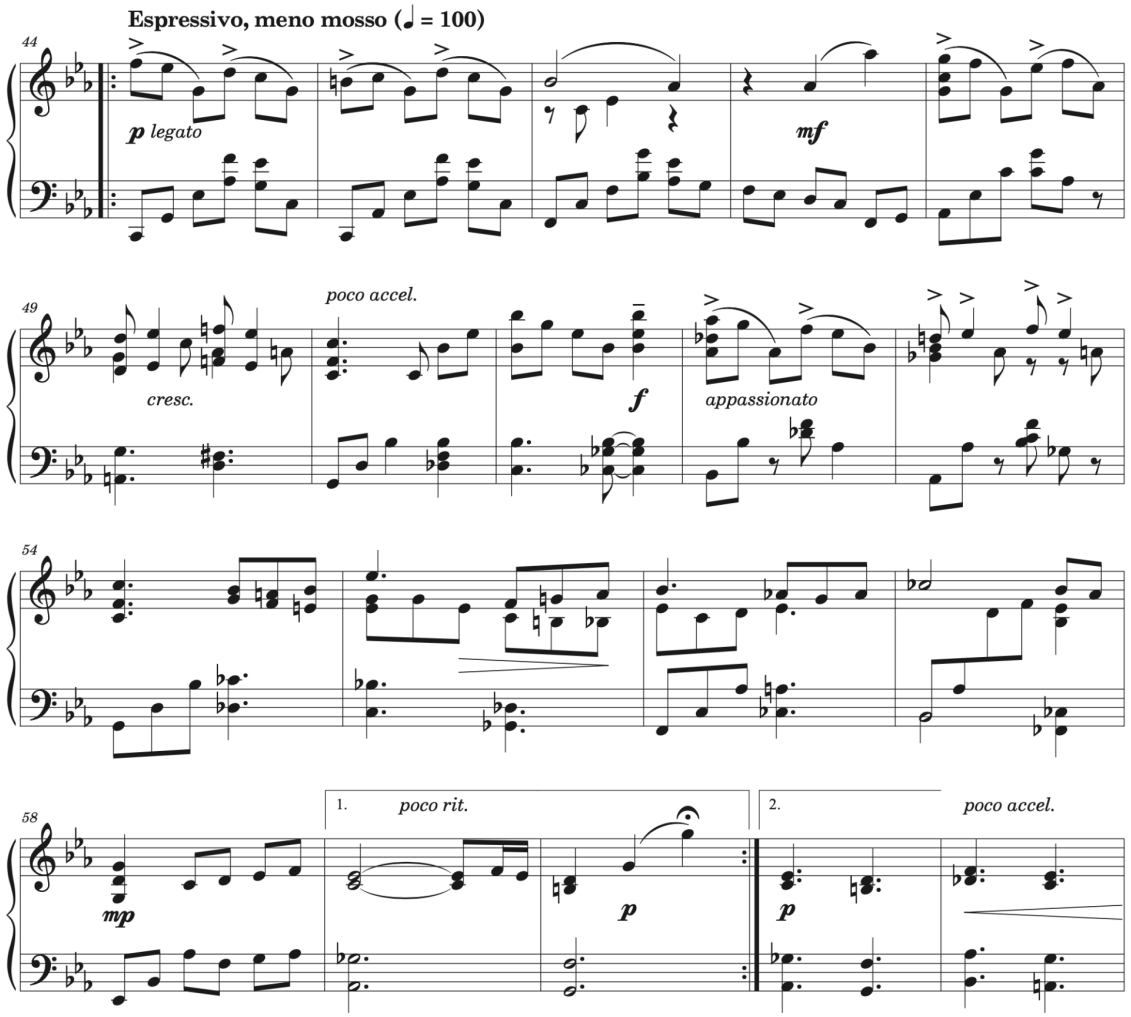
The rhythmic dimension of the piece is equally nuanced. While Calvache references the traditional *pasillo* rhythm - with its characteristic syncopation and rests - she constantly manipulates it. In the opening, rhythm is obscured by floating triplets and sustained phrases. By measure 9, the *pasillo* pattern begins to emerge more clearly, but it is never mechanical. She introduces rhythmic ambiguity through tuplets, cross-rhythms, and irregular phrasing, reminiscent of Brahms's metric play or jazz's flexible swing. In measures 25- 26, for example, triplets are layered against duplets, creating a friction that feels both spontaneous and intentional.



Example 3-18: Calvache, *Te Agradezco*, mm. 22-28

This constant oscillation between rhythmic definition and elasticity mirrors the emotional landscape of the piece. It allows the music to breathe - to stretch in moments of reflection, and to dance when joy returns. Rather than being bound by the *pasillo* tradition, Calvache uses its rhythm as a starting point, a space to explore rather than a mold to fill.

Texture and counterpoint in *Te Agradezco* also deserve attention. While much of the piece unfolds in a melody-and-accompaniment format, Calvache incorporates brief but effective moments of imitation and voice interplay. In these passages, musical lines converse across the keyboard, adding depth and inner motion. These contrapuntal gestures, though subtle, suggest a composer who is not only expressive but technically refined, capable of layering complexity without sacrificing intimacy.



Example 3-19: Calvache, *Te Agradezco*, mm. 44-62

The following table illustrates the ways in which Calvache's *Te Agradezco* both honors and departs from the traditional pasillo. Her work serves as a bridge between heritage and innovation, redefining the genre through a contemporary and deeply personal lens.

Aspect	Traditional Pasillo	"Te agradezco" by Carolina Calvache
Form	Strophic (A–B–A or A–A–B–A)	Flexible, song-like with returning motives
Tempo Structure	Generally uniform tempo throughout	Multiple tempo changes: rubato, lyrical, and animated sections
Harmonic Language	Tonality-based, diatonic harmony with occasional modal inflections	Jazz-influenced harmony, extended chords, tonal ambiguity
Melodic Style	Ornamental, folk-like melodies with predictable phrasing	Highly lyrical, vocally inspired, singable melodies
Inspirational Source	Folk dances, popular serenades	Dedicated to her jazz mentor and inspired by her mother
Performance Practice	Written primarily for salon performance	Designed for concert performance, adaptable for jazz or classical recitals
Publication	Published through regional or state-sponsored editions	Self-published and maintained by the composer
Compositional Process	Often composed at the piano or adapted from vocal versions	Melody and jazz-style chord progressions (lead sheet), then arranged pianistically

Figure 3-1: Comparison Table

Importantly, *Te Agradezco* reflects Calvache's broader philosophy about music and identity. She has repeatedly emphasized that her Colombian heritage is not something to downplay in international settings - it is her strength. Living and working in New York

helped her realize this, prompting her to reclaim Colombian forms like the *pasillo* as sites of innovation. Her work now travels internationally, appearing in university syllabi and being performed across disciplines, yet she retains complete control over its dissemination. This is not just artistic independence - it is cultural stewardship.

Her entrepreneurial spirit is also central to her role as a contemporary composer. She self-publishes, creates her own videos, and envisions future projects that blend educational, artistic, and entrepreneurial goals - including a piano book of lyrical recital pieces. As she prepares to direct ensembles and teach composition at the university level, she is helping shape a new generation of musicians who understand music not just as craft, but as identity.[11]

Te Agradezco, then, is more than a composition - it is a manifesto. It asserts that Colombian music can be lyrical, jazz-inflected, formally complex, and emotionally rich. It affirms that gratitude can be both personal and cultural. And it shows that the *pasillo* - once a salon dance of the 19th century - can speak in the language of modernity without forgetting its roots.

Through this work, Carolina Calvache does not simply participate in the tradition of Colombian piano music; she rewrites its possibilities. Her voice is one of bridge-building - between past and present, between Colombia and the world, between discipline and emotion. In *Te Agradezco*, the *pasillo* becomes not only a dance, but a conversation - one in which lyricism, rhythm, and harmony say, again and again: thank you.

Victor Agudelo: *Doce gotas de rocío para Diana*

Among the most inventive voices in contemporary Colombian composition, Victor Agudelo (b. 1979) has carved a distinctive path that merges folkloric sensibility with

[11] Carolina Calvache, interview by Juan Sebastián Avendaño, video call, May 2025, transcript in possession of the author.

avant-garde experimentation. Trained at Universidad EAFIT in Medellín, Agudelo's artistic language is grounded in the rhythmic contours and expressive gestures of traditional Colombian genres such as bambuco and pasillo, yet he continuously subjects these materials to bold formal reconfigurations. A profound example of this synthesis is *Doce gotas de rocío para Diana* (*Twelve Dewdrops for Diana*), a three-minute piano miniature that encapsulates his compositional ethos: intimate, intellectually rigorous, and richly metaphorical.

Appearing as the tenth etude in the second volume of his solo piano collection, Agudelo describes the work as an "etude in patience," a phrase that gestures both toward its meditative pacing and its pedagogical intentions. Unlike conventional etudes that emphasize technical virtuosity or speed, *Doce gotas de rocío para Diana* invites the performer - and by extension the listener - into a space of quiet attention, where time is stretched and musical gestures acquire symbolic weight. According to the composer's own annotation, the piece draws rhythmic influence from the pasillo, yet it abandons traditional metric frameworks in favor of chronometric and metronomic notation without barlines, allowing temporal elasticity and interpretive nuance to dominate the listening experience.[12]

This abstraction of rhythm lies at the heart of Agudelo's transformative engagement with the pasillo. Traditionally defined by its 3/4 meter and danceable lilt, pasillo has long carried associations of salon elegance and national identity. In *Doce gotas de rocío para Diana*, however, this identity is distilled to its essence - present not in overt metric markers but in the pulse-like recurrence of gestural motifs that evoke the rhythmic breath of the genre without anchoring it to its historical form. The result is a pasillo that floats, a genre refracted through a prism of temporal ambiguity and structural concision.

The compositional architecture of the work is remarkably precise. It opens with four

[12] Andrés Gómez Bravo, "Tendencias e Influencias: An Overview of Piano Music by Composers Associated with EAFIT University, Medellín, Colombia," *RICERCARE Revista del Departamento de Música*, No. 08 (Julio–Diciembre 2017): 17

carefully constructed chords, each comprising six notes. These chords, taken together, present all twelve chromatic pitches, introducing the twelve-tone row that will serve as the harmonic and melodic DNA of the piece. Their construction is highly symmetrical: the second chord complements the pitch content of the first; the third and fourth invert the hand position of the first two, respectively. Agudelo not only embraces the serialist tradition but uses it as a canvas to enact poetic restraint - each chord, despite its theoretical rigor, is voiced for resonance and color, not density or complexity for its own sake. This textural economy aligns with the work's metaphorical title, in which each musical event is akin to a dewdrop - ephemeral, glistening, and self-contained.[13]

Following the introduction, the twelve-tone series is gradually unfolded through a carefully paced alternation of harmonic and melodic material. Each new melodic note is preceded by a six-note chord derived from the opening sequence, articulated in a pasillo-like rhythmic figure. This alternation occurs twelve times, completing the row, but the technique avoids mechanical repetition through variations in register, articulation, and rhythmic grouping. Notably, Agudelo employs rhythmic notation based on duration in seconds rather than traditional rhythmic values, which allows the performer to interpret each moment with sensitivity to phrasing and decay rather than to a fixed beat. The rhythmic figures evoke the feel of eighth notes, triplets, and sixteenth notes, yet remain uncoupled from the constraints of traditional meter.

Stylistically, the work draws on pointillism, synthetic scales, polychords, and free twelve-tone technique, further distancing it from the tonal lyricism historically associated with Colombian salon music. Pianistically, it requires a heightened sensitivity to touch and resonance. The performer must manage chords that alternate between staccato and legato, and

[13] Andrés Gómez Bravo, "Tendencias e Influencias: An Overview of Piano Music by Composers Associated with EAFIT University, Medellín, Colombia," *RICERCARE Revista del Departamento de Música*, No. 08 (Julio–Diciembre 2017): 17

make nuanced use of the una corda pedal to shade dynamics and control overtones. As such, the etude functions as both a compositional and performative study in economy and control. Its technical demands lie not in physical agility, but in the psychological discipline required to sustain stillness, tension, and clarity through restraint.

Despite its abstract language, *Doce gotas de rocío para Diana* remains profoundly Colombian. Rather than quoting folk melodies or traditional forms, Agudelo embeds the pasillo's spirit deep within the structure of the piece. Its breath-like pacing, its oscillation between unity and fragmentation, and its invocation of the natural world through metaphor all speak to a deeply rooted cultural awareness. In this way, Agudelo does not reject Colombian tradition - he reframes it, presenting pasillo not as a fixed stylistic artifact but as a flexible, evolving medium. His modernist vocabulary becomes a vessel for introspection, a means of expressing the Colombian identity in a global and contemporary language.

Ultimately, *Doce gotas de rocío para Diana* exemplifies Agudelo's capacity to balance rigorous technique with poetic imagery, structural logic with intuitive resonance. It is a work that resists easy categorization: at once etude, miniature, and philosophical statement. In transforming the pasillo from a dance into a meditation, Agudelo asserts the continuing vitality of Colombian musical identity - an identity not bound by nostalgia, but animated by innovation.

Chapter 4: Comparative Study

This chapter presents a comparative analysis of the musical works discussed in the previous chapter. The aim is to draw direct comparisons between the approaches of Fulgencio García, Adolfo Mejía, Carolina Calvache, and Victor Agudelo to the pasillo genre. By examining their respective compositions, we can discern distinct stylistic characteristics and trace the evolution of pasillo over time. This comparative study will also shed light on how each composer's work reflects and contributes to the broader narrative of Colombian identity.

National Echoes - Colombian Identity Through the Pasillo

In the development of Colombian art music, the pasillo has served as both a mirror and a vessel for the expression of national identity. This chapter offers a comparative reflection on how three composers - Fulgencio García, Adolfo Mejía, and Carolina Calvache - have each engaged with the pasillo not only as a musical form, but as a canvas on which evolving narratives of Colombian identity have been projected. Their works illuminate the interplay between folk roots and art music, between tradition and innovation, and between the local and the global. As such, these composers participate in a broader aesthetic and cultural conversation akin to what Venezuelan composer Ricardo Lorenz describes as *transculturation* - a dynamic process through which music becomes a site of mutual cultural exchange, agency, and resistance.

- **Fulgencio García: The Joyful Pulse of the Santafereño Identity**

Fulgencio García's *La gata golosa* stands as a vibrant emblem of early twentieth-century Colombian musical nationalism. Rooted in the urban salon culture of Bogotá, the piece reflects the popular spirit of a capital city in transition - still linked to its European colonial past, yet pulsating with distinctly local flavor. While García's harmonic

language draws from European tonal traditions, his rhythmic inflections and melodic phrasing are unmistakably Colombian. The piece's characteristic pasillo rhythm - with its syncopations, anticipatory gestures, and asymmetric meter - functions as a sonic assertion of national particularity.

In *La gata golosa*, identity is expressed through the transformation of European waltz structures into a localized idiom rich with Andean sentiment. Its playful cadences, hemiolas, and pastoral melodic lines, often shaped by speech-like phrasing, mirror the vernacular tone of the Santafereño pasillo. García's composition, despite its salon refinement, celebrates the culture of everyday Colombians. By referencing a famed Bogotá gathering place in its title, the work links musical style to urban mythos, creating a sense of place and collective memory. Thus, García's pasillo becomes more than a dance - it becomes a portrait of Colombian modernity in its nascent form.

- **Adolfo Mejía: Sounding Memory, Displacement, and the Interior Nation**

If García captures the public joy of early Colombian identity, Adolfo Mejía's *Campanas en Si menor* and *Luminosity of Waters* engage the pasillo and Andean textures as sites of introspection and poetic memory. Mejía, a cosmopolitan composer with ties to European modernism, brings an impressionist and late-Romantic sensibility to Colombian themes. In *Campanas*, the pasillo idiom is reimagined through cyclical formal structures, modal ambiguity, and rhythmic suspension - evoking the tolling of bells as both literal sound and symbolic metaphor. The piece does not proclaim national identity outwardly but rather internalizes it, revealing a more meditative and layered relationship to place.

Mejía's harmonic palette, steeped in modal interchange and delayed cadences, suggests a Colombia shaped as much by its geography as by its emotional memory. His use of repetition, transformation, and ornamented recurrence in *Campanas* mimics the echo of

memory and the ritual of cultural remembrance. The pasillo here becomes an elegiac expression - less a celebration, more a resonant call to heritage.

His *Luminosity of Waters*, though not a pasillo, continues this trajectory. Through impressionist textures, pentatonic modes, and quartal harmonies, Mejía conjures a Colombian identity that is fluid, borderless, and cosmopolitan. As Ricardo Lorenz would argue, this is not an abandonment of national sound, but a reassertion of it within a global aesthetic - a transcultural gesture that reclaims modernism as a space for Latin American agency.

- **Carolina Calvache: Gendered Voice, Diasporic Poetics, and Global Hybridity**

In *Te Agradezco*, Carolina Calvache articulates a twenty-first century pasillo - one that speaks from within the Colombian diaspora, informed by jazz, classical composition, and emotional autobiography. Her work moves beyond genre constraints to offer a personal, fluid, and temporally flexible narrative. In contrast to García's joyful rhythm and Mejía's bell-like introspection, Calvache's pasillo expands the expressive range of the form by incorporating harmonic language rooted in jazz and temporal structures that mirror internal emotional states.

Calvache's pasillo expresses identity through gratitude and memory, rather than festivity or nostalgia. The work's polytemporal design - its shifting meters and flexible tempos - mirrors the fluidity of diasporic belonging. Her harmonic world, rich in extended tertian chords, modulates not to assert tonal clarity but to follow emotional shifts. In doing so, Calvache engages in what Lorenz terms a "semantic recontextualization" of Western syntax: she speaks in the musical language of jazz and classical music, but with the semantic inflections of her Colombian heritage.

This transformation also reveals a gendered voice in the pasillo tradition - an intimate, dialogical voice that prioritizes nuance, gratitude, and personal expression. Calvache, like other contemporary Latin American composers, refuses to be defined by nationalistic caricature or exoticist labeling. Instead, she embraces hybridity as her mode of authenticity.

- **Transculturation and National Identity**

The trajectory traced by these composers - Fulgencio García, Adolfo Mejía, Carolina Calvache and Victor Agudelo - reflects the evolution of Colombian identity from nationalism to cosmopolitanism, from communal festivity to personal reflection, and from fixed cultural boundaries to fluid transcultural exchanges. García's pasillo articulates a nationalist joy rooted in urban folklore, capturing the collective spirit of early 20th-century Colombian society. Mejía's compositions move beyond festive nationalism to embrace a transcendent, introspective identity shaped by memory, loss, and the contemplative aesthetic of Latin American modernism. Calvache's work, meanwhile, bridges Colombian roots with jazz-infused globalism, embodying the complex, diasporic identities of a new generation of Latin American composers trained and living abroad.

As Ricardo Lorenz argues, transculturation in music is not mere fusion - it is an act of representation and agency, a negotiation of identity that repositions composers within and against dominant cultural narratives. For Lorenz, transculturation "entails the circulation of ideas in both directions, resulting in an interdependent network of mutual influences," challenging both Eurocentric historical paradigms and the exoticizing gaze often cast on Latin American art music.[14] He critiques the way Latin American composers have historically been placed in a position of "limbo" - neither fully inside the Western canon nor outside of it, often stereotyped through reductive nationalist or folkloric lenses.[15] Instead, Lorenz urges a

[14] Ricardo Lorenz, *Voices in Limbo: Identity, Representation, and Realities of Latin American Composers* (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2000), 93
[15] Ibid., 4–5.

focus on the semantic richness and originality Latin American composers bring to the shared syntactical system of Western art music - a reterritorialization that foregrounds difference without marginalization.[16]

In this light, García, Mejía, Calvache and Agudelo contribute to a reconceptualization of Colombian musical identity by reimagining the pasillo as a site of cultural dialogue - with Europe, with memory, with jazz, and with global modernity. Their works resist the reduction of Colombian music to folkloric pastiche or nationalist tokenism; instead, they assert a self-defined artistic voice that is neither exotic nor derivative, but multifaceted, evolving, and critically engaged. As Lorenz puts it, the goal is not national emancipation through music, but rather "social and racial equivalence" within the broader fabric of global art music - a demand for visibility on their own terms, without surrendering to the binary of center and periphery.[17]

[16] Ibid., 40
[17] Ibid., 91–95

Category	Fulgencio García	Adolfo Mejía	Carolina Calvache	Victor Agudelo
Representative Work	La gata golosa	Campanas en Si menor, Luminosity of Waters	Te agradezco	Doce gotas de rocío para Diana
Time Period	Early 20th century	Mid-20th century	2004	2002
Cultural Context	Urban Bogotá salon culture; early nationalism	Cosmopolitan introspection; memory and modernism	Diasporic voice; female perspective; jazz/classical fusion	Regional synthesis; contemporary reflection on identity
Musical Style	European tonal harmony with Andean rhythms	Impressionist and late-Romantic influences	Jazz harmonies, lyrical phrasing, polytemporal flow	Modern aesthetic with advanced techniques and hybrid timbres
Rhythm and Meter	Syncopated pasillo rhythm, hemiolas, salon dance feel	Rhythmic suspension, bell-like pacing, modal ambiguity	Shifting meters, flexible tempos reflecting emotional states	Traditional syncopation with rhythmic displacement and complexity
Use of Harmony	Functional harmony with local inflections	Modal interchange, extended tonal ambiguity	Extended tertian chords, emotional modulations	Twelve-tone row
Form	Modified ternary/dance-inspired	Cyclical, meditative forms	Through-composed with formal elasticity	Through-composed
Treatment of Pasillo	Localized idiom shaped by urban folklore	Reflective reinterpretation as memory and soundscape	Personal narrative using pasillo as expressive framework	Pasillo reimagined with hybrid timbres and formal depth
Expression of Identity	Joyful nationalism, linked to place and collective life	Interiorized nationalism; Colombia as emotional landscape	Diasporic, hybrid, and intimate expression of belonging	Synthesis of regional and national identities in contemporary terms

Transcultural Aspects	Transformation of European waltz into Colombian idiom	Modernist globalism with Latin American voice	Jazz/classical idioms reinterpreted through Colombian lens	Bridges classical tradition with modern Latin American idioms
Overall Contribution	Establishes pasillo as national emblem	Elevates pasillo to poetic-symbolic art music	Reclaims pasillo through modern hybridity and personal voice	Expands pasillo with contemporary language and regional fusion

Figure 4-1: Comparison Table

Conclusion

The evolution of pasillo in piano compositions mirrors Colombia's broader cultural journey - from its colonial echoes to a confident assertion of national and artistic identity. Initially conceived as a stylized dance in 3/4 meter derived from the European waltz, the pasillo began its life in the piano repertoire during a period of national consolidation and artistic self-definition in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Composers such as Fulgencio García shaped the earliest expressions of the genre for piano, using lyrical melodies, syncopated rhythms, and formal structures that retained the elegance of the salon while grounding them in the sounds of Andean Colombia. García's *La Gata Golosa* exemplifies this period: rooted in tonal harmonies, ornamented with hemiolas, and shaped by speech-like phrasing that reflected both the urban identity of Bogotá and the nostalgic sentiment of a growing Colombian nationalism. These early pasillos, typically light-hearted and rhythmically vibrant, transformed folk idioms into cultivated works for intimate settings, securing their place in the canon of national art music.

Over time, the genre matured in complexity and expressive range. In the mid-20th century, Adolfo Mejía brought the pasillo into conversation with French Impressionism and Romantic lyricism. His piano works, such as *Luminosidad de Aguas* and *Campanas*, expanded the pasillo's harmonic vocabulary and formal design, weaving modal ambiguity, quartal harmonies, and cyclical structures into the genre. Mejía's pasillos are no longer just dance pieces but musical meditations—evocative tone poems that reflect Colombia's cultural pluralism and artistic ambition. He retained the rhythmic essence of the pasillo, but tempered it with poetic restraint, chromatic coloration, and an exploratory harmonic palette that moved the genre beyond the salon and into the domain of concert art.

The turn of the 21st century ushered in further transformation, as composers like Carolina Calvache and Victor Agudelo reimagined the pasillo through highly individual lenses. Calvache's *Te Agradezco* offers a striking example of how jazz-inflected harmony, rubato phrasing, and emotional arc can deepen the genre's expressive possibilities. Her pasillo incorporates tempo shifts, modal detours, extended chords, and a formal narrative that feels as much like an art song or a jazz ballad as it does a traditional dance. Here, the pasillo becomes a language of gratitude and introspection, a vehicle for contemporary expression rooted in personal and cultural memory. Victor Agudelo, by contrast, approaches the pasillo as a point of departure for avant-garde experimentation. In *Doce gotas de rocio para Diana*, he deconstructs the genre's rhythmic foundation through polymeter and inserts modern harmonic language. His work reflects a Colombia in conversation with the global avant-garde - fractured, experimental, and richly layered.

Throughout these transformations, key characteristics of the pasillo - triple meter, syncopation, melodic lyricism, and expressive cadence - have remained identifiable, even as their treatment has shifted. In the early period, melody and rhythm were paramount, often tied to folk and dance traditions. Mid-century compositions began to explore timbral subtleties, harmonic ambiguity, and formal expansion, while contemporary approaches have embraced hybridization, improvisation, and symbolic meaning. Each era reflects a distinct stage in Colombia's cultural history: the early nationalists seeking identity, the modernists seeking sophistication, and the postmodern voices asserting pluralism and complexity.

Historical and cultural contexts have deeply shaped these stylistic evolutions. The early pasillo emerged during a time of nation-building, when composers sought to define a distinctly Colombian voice. Later developments occurred in tandem with increased global connectivity, the influence of French and American music, and the rise of conservatories and international study. Political currents, technological changes, and social shifts all left their

mark, encouraging composers to embed layers of meaning, innovation, and resistance into their music. For example, Mejía's experience in Paris allowed him to filter Colombian dance through an impressionist lens, while Calvache's immersion in New York jazz culture gave her the tools to approach the pasillo as a form of lyrical storytelling. Agudelo, deeply influenced by contemporary art music, uses the pasillo not as a constraint but as a challenge - a frame to be pushed, deconstructed, and reassembled.

In the broader context of Colombian and Latin American piano music, the pasillo has played a vital role. It is both a place of tradition and a catalyst for innovation. In Colombia, it stands alongside the bambuco and cumbia as a foundational genre that encapsulates regional identity and artistic possibility. Its adaptability has made it an ideal medium for pedagogical use, concert performance, and intercultural dialogue. Across Latin America, where national dances have similarly evolved into emblematic piano works - from the Argentine tango to the Venezuelan joropo - the pasillo holds its place as Colombia's answer to this phenomenon: a dance turned discourse, a rhythm turned reflection. Through its piano literature, the pasillo tells a story not just of musical development, but of how a nation hears itself - across time, region, and imagination.

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Addendum

Appendix A

Transcript of Interview with Carolina Calvache

Conducted by Juan Sebastián Avendaño via video call
May 2025

Spanish

Carolina:
Hola. Juan. ¿Cómo estás?
Espérate que yo aquí... ¿Escuchas bien ahí?
¿Tú dónde estás?
Juan:
Sí, bien oigo. En mi apartamento, en Oregón.
Se ve súper bien.
Acabo de comprar un nuevo piano. Está recién traído, fue gratis y quería donarlo, y yo simplemente pagué para que lo movieran.
Aquí donan mucho.
Carolina:
¿Y tú estás hace cuánto en Estados Unidos?
Juan:
Yo llegué en el 2017, hice mi maestría en música en Western Michigan, como entre Chicago y University of Michigan, en una ciudad pequeña que se llama Kalamazoo.
¿Tú cuánto llevas aquí?
Carolina:
19 años.
Estoy esperando el contrato, pero acabo de conseguir un trabajo.
Juan:
¡Felicitaciones! ¿Qué trabajo vas a tener?
Carolina:
Se llama Assistant Professor en la University of Central Missouri, a una hora de Kansas City.
Juan:
¡Guau, felicidades! Es difícil conseguir esos trabajos.
Yo también estaba en ese proceso, mirando posiciones todos los días.
¿Y vas a ser profesora de jazz o de qué?
Carolina:
Sí, voy a dirigir un ensamble de jazz y dar clase de composición.
Empecé con música clásica, pero desde los 15 empecé a investigar sobre jazz.
Después de la pandemia volví a la universidad y terminé el doctorado en jazz.
Yo sentía que mi manera de componer no era lo que enseñaban en composición clásica.
Yo nunca estudié composición formalmente, y siento que eso me dio libertad.
En jazz hay como más apertura para diferentes estilos.
Yo me hablé un poco con Mario Gómez Viñes, profesor y compositor en Cali y EAFIT, y me decía algo similar: que no quería dañar la manera natural de componer del estudiante.
En jazz hay más flexibilidad, y uno puede hacer esa mezcla con otros estilos.
Por ejemplo, este trabajo nuevo también me permite explorar eso.
La gente en Missouri es muy dulce.

Antes pensaba que no podía dejar Nueva York, pero después de vivir en California, en las montañas, me di cuenta que puedo ser feliz en muchos lugares.

Juan:

La naturaleza en Oregón también es hermosa.

¿Y Colombia? ¿Dónde la dejas?

Carolina:

Mi familia está allá. Siempre estoy viajando. Ahorita voy en julio.

Toda mi familia está en Cali.

Juan:

¡Qué bien!

Y felicidades por tu trabajo, y por todo lo que estás componiendo últimamente.

Vi lo de la obra para orquesta y trombón—¡grandes ligas!

Carolina:

Gracias.

Vamos a lo nuestro.

Juan:

Te envié algunas preguntas.

Por ejemplo, ¿por qué elegiste el pasillo?

Carolina:

Mi mentor de jazz, Jaime Henao, viene de una familia tradicional.

Él me enseñó sus composiciones y adaptaciones con jazz, y seguí esa línea.

El pasillo me parece elegante, y me conecta con cosas como Chopin.

Además, es rápido, se presta para la improvisación.

Juan:

¿Ese maestro fue el de tu pregrado?

Carolina:

No.

Tenía como 14 años cuando escuché jazz por primera vez, y pregunté quién sabía sobre eso en Cali. Me recomendaron a Jaime Nao.

Él tenía un grupo que se llamaba Río Cali.

Juan:

¿Y el pasillo que estoy estudiando se lo dedicaste a él?

Carolina:

Sí.

Me gustó usar diferentes tiempos, libertad para hacerlo lento o rápido.

Juan:

Estoy estudiando esos pasillos para un documento que estoy escribiendo.

Carolina:

Para mí el pasillo es como cantar, como una conversación.

Juan:

¿Te inspiraste en alguna canción para componer ese pasillo?

Carolina:

Tal vez.

Mi mamá siempre cantaba en la casa.

Mucho bolero, música de plancha.

Esas melodías tan claras se me quedaron.

Juan:

Sí, la estructura estrofa/repetición del pasillo es muy de canción.

¿Compones primero melodía o armonía?

Carolina:

En ese pasillo fue como un lead sheet de jazz.
Melodía y armonía juntas, después escribí la parte de piano.
Y una gran influencia fue Adolfo Mejía.
Escuché *El Pincho* y me cambió la vida.

Juan:

¡Ah! Estoy tocando tres piezas en un recital, dos de Mejía.
Bonito saber que fue inspiración para ti.
¿Tocabas esos pasillos al piano?

Carolina:

Claro.
Toqué piano clásico hasta los 15.
Y la música de Mejía está bien escrita para la mano.

Juan:

¿Él era caleño también?

Carolina:

No, era de Cartagena.
Y eso se siente en la influencia caribeña, del jazz.
Él estudió en EE. UU. y Europa, con Boulanger.

Juan:

Sí, se nota en la armonía.
Esa conexión con el jazz está ahí.

Carolina:

Estoy tratando de investigar si *El Pincho* fue compuesto antes o después de su viaje a EE. UU.
Eso lo quiero rastrear.

Juan:

Sí, hay que mirar bien.
Aunque la información no está muy clara.
¿Y cómo ha sido tu proceso compositivo últimamente?

Carolina:

Depende del proyecto.
Para trombón, por ejemplo, hice secciones líricas tipo jazz ballad.
Trabajo con muchas ideas, pero cuando quiero algo melódico, pienso como lead sheet.
Y sí, canto. Canto y toco al piano.
Improviso y conecto la voz con mis manos.

Juan:

¿Cantas en tus conciertos?

Carolina:

No, pero lo hice por primera vez el miércoles pasado.
Estaba rearmonizando canciones y me enamoré de una.
Tuve que cantarla en el concierto.

Juan:

¡Qué bien!
Vi un video tuyo con César y Betty.

Carolina:

Ah sí, esa pieza la tocaron en Seattle Opera.
Es una canción que también rearmonicé.
Me encanta mezclar lo popular con lo clásico.

Juan:

¿Tienes planes de publicar solo piano?

Carolina:
Sí, muchos me lo han pedido.
Estoy haciendo versiones de piezas para solo piano.
También me comisionaron una pieza para ABRSM, pero no acepté que se quedaran con todos los derechos.
Prefiero self-publish.
Juan:
Sí, proteger los derechos es importante.
Y los videos también—vivimos en una sociedad visual.
Carolina:
Totalmente.
Quiero expandir mi publisher, hacer más videos.
El visual importa para conectar.
Juan:
¿Y cómo te ha transformado vivir en EE. UU.?
Carolina:
Sobre todo Nueva York.
Es duro pero inspirador.
Aprendí a reconocer mi voz, mi diferencia.
Lo que me hace única es mi raíz.
Y este país me ha enseñado a colaborar, a pedir ayuda, a conectar.
Juan:
Sí, el mérito acá se valora.
Carolina:
¿Tienes más tiempo? ¿Alguna pregunta más?
Juan:
No quiero quitarte tiempo.
Pero sí, la estructura del pasillo parece canción.
En tu álbum hay algo raro en el sotareño…
Carolina:
Eso fue un error.
Juan:
En el compás 18, los acentos enfatizan la melodía?
Carolina:
¡Correcto!
Juan:
Gracias por responder.
Es que estoy escribiendo un documento.
¿La versión vieja del pasillo tenía errores?
Carolina:
Sí, pero la tocan bastante.
Aunque sería bueno que me contactaran si ven errores.
Juan:
Yo tenía miedo de contactarte, parecía imposible.
Pero en jazz eso es diferente.
Carolina:
Sí, por eso no estudié composición clásica.
Los compositores vivos estamos aquí para conversar.
Carolina:
Qué bueno haber hablado contigo.

Me gradué y la universidad me contrató.
Quiero seguir enseñando música colombiana.
Juan:
¡Perfecto!
Podríamos hacer algo juntos, una masterclass.
Tenemos un buen programa de jazz acá también.
Carolina:
Claro que sí.
Gracias por todo este espacio.
Juan:
Nos hablamos. Te debo un café.
Carolina:
Nos vemos. ¡Chao!

English

Carolina:
Hi, Juan. How are you?
Hold on a second here... Can you hear me okay?
Where are you?
Juan:
Yes, I can hear you well. I'm at my apartment in Oregon.
It looks great.
I just bought a new piano. It was freshly delivered—it was free, so I just paid to have it moved.
Here, people donate a lot.
Carolina:
And how long have you been in the U.S.?
Juan:
I arrived in 2017. I did my master's in music at Western Michigan, kind of between Chicago and the University of Michigan, in a small town called Kalamazoo.
How long have you been here?
Carolina:
19 years.
I'm waiting on the contract, but I just landed a job.
Juan:
Congratulations! What job are you going to have?
Carolina:
It's called Assistant Professor at the University of Central Missouri, about an hour from Kansas City.
Juan:
Wow, congratulations! Those jobs are hard to get.
I was going through that process too, checking for openings every day.
And will you be teaching jazz or something else?
Carolina:

Yes, I'll be directing a jazz ensemble and teaching composition.
I started with classical music, but around age 15 I began exploring jazz.
After the pandemic, I returned to university and finished a doctorate in jazz.
I felt that my way of composing didn't align with what was taught in classical composition.
I never formally studied composition, and I feel that gave me freedom.
Jazz allows for more openness to different styles.
I had a conversation with Mario Gómez Viñes, a professor and composer in Cali and at EAFIT, and he said something similar—that he didn't want to ruin a student's natural way of composing.
Jazz has more flexibility, and you can mix it with other styles.
This new job will also let me explore that.
The people in Missouri are really kind.
I used to think I could never leave New York, but after living in the California mountains, I realized I can be happy in many places.

Juan:

Nature in Oregon is beautiful too.
And Colombia? What about that?

Carolina:

My family is still there. I'm always traveling back. I'm going in July.
My whole family is in Cali.

Juan:

That's great!
And congrats on your job and everything you've been composing lately.
I saw the piece for orchestra and trombone—big leagues!

Carolina:

Thank you.
Let's get to our main topic.

Juan:

I sent you a few questions.
For example, why did you choose the pasillo?

Carolina:

My jazz mentor, Jaime Henao, comes from a traditional family.
He taught me his compositions and how he adapted them with jazz, and I followed that path.
Pasillo feels elegant to me, and it connects me with things like Chopin.
Also, it's fast, which lends itself to improvisation.

Juan:

Was that mentor from your undergraduate?

Carolina:

No.
I was about 14 when I first heard jazz, and I asked around to see who knew about it in Cali. Someone recommended Jaime Henao.
He had a group called Río Cali.

Juan:

And the pasillo I'm studying—did you dedicate it to him?

Carolina:
Yes.
I liked using different tempi, the freedom to make it slow or fast.
Juan
I'm studying those pasillos for a document I'm writing.
Carolina:
To me, pasillo is like singing, like a conversation.
Juan
Did you draw inspiration from any particular song when composing this pasillo?
Carolina:
Maybe.
My mom always sang around the house.
A lot of boleros, romantic pop music.
Those clear melodies stuck with me.
Juan:
Yes, the verse-repetition structure of pasillo is very song-like.
Do you compose melody or harmony first?
Carolina:
For that pasillo, it was like a jazz lead sheet.
Melody and harmony together, then I wrote the piano part.
And a major influence was Adolfo Mejía.
I heard *El Pincho* and it changed my life.
Juan:
Oh! I'm playing three pieces in a recital, two by Mejía.
Nice to know he was an inspiration for you.
Did you play those pasillos on the piano?
Carolina:
Of course.
I studied classical piano until I was 15.
And Mejía's music is well written for the hand.
Juan:
Was he also from Cali?
Carolina:
No, from Cartagena.
And you can feel the Caribbean influence, the jazz.
He studied in the U.S. and Europe, with Boulanger.
Juan:
Yes, you can hear that in the harmony.
The jazz connection is definitely there.
Carolina:
I'm trying to find out if *El Pincho* was composed before or after his trip to the U.S.
That's something I want to trace.
Juan:
Yes, it's worth digging into.

Though the information isn't very clear.
So how has your compositional process been lately?

Carolina:

Depends on the project.
For trombone, for example, I wrote lyrical sections, like a jazz ballad.
I work with many ideas, but when I want something melodic, I think in lead sheet format.
And yes, I sing. I sing and play the piano.
I improvise and connect my voice with my hands.

Juan:

Do you sing in your concerts?

Carolina:

No, but I did for the first time last Wednesday.
I was reharmonizing some songs and fell in love with one.
I had to sing it at the concert.

Juan:

That's wonderful!
I saw a video of you with César and Betty.

Carolina:

Oh yes, that piece—they performed it at Seattle Opera.
It's a song I also reharmonized.
I love blending the popular and classical.

Juan:

Do you have plans to publish solo piano music?

Carolina:

Yes, many people have asked for it.
I'm working on solo piano versions of some pieces.
I was also commissioned to write something for ABRSM, but I didn't agree to give them full rights.
I prefer to self-publish.

Juan:

Yes, protecting your rights is important.
And videos too—we live in a very visual society.

Carolina:

Totally.
I want to expand my publishing, make more videos.
Visuals are key for connection.

Juan:

How has living in the U.S. transformed you?

Carolina:

Especially New York.
It's tough but inspiring.
I learned to recognize my voice, my uniqueness.
What makes me different is my roots.
And this country taught me to collaborate, to ask for help, to connect.

Juan:
Yes, merit is valued here.
Carolina:
Do you have more time? Any other questions?
Juan:
I don’t want to take up too much of your time.
But yes, the structure of pasillo feels very song-like.
In your album, there’s something odd in *El sotareño*...
Carolina:
That was a mistake.
Juan:
In measure 18, do the accents emphasize the melody?
Carolina:
Correct!
Juan:
Thanks for answering.
I’m writing a document.
Did the old version of the pasillo have errors?
Carolina:
Yes, but it’s still performed often.
Though I wish performers would contact me if they see errors.
Juan:
I was afraid to contact you—it felt impossible.
But in jazz, it’s different.
Carolina:
Yes, that’s why I didn’t study classical composition.
Living composers are here to talk.
Carolina:
It’s been great talking to you.
I graduated, and the university hired me.
I want to keep teaching Colombian music.
Juan:
Perfect!
We should do something together—maybe a masterclass.
We’ve got a great jazz program here too.
Carolina:
Absolutely.
Thanks so much for this time.
Juan:
We’ll be in touch. I owe you a coffee.
Carolina:
See you. Bye!