

Finding a Paraguayan Voice: The Indigenous Language Guarani in Performances of Paraguayan Female Singers

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Abstract : This paper focuses on the use of the indigenous language Guarani in Paraguayan popular song and on some key interpreters born between the 1930s and 1980s. It analyses two representative musical genres of Paraguay, the Polka Paraguaya and Guaranía. The lyrics of these genres follow one of four poetic-linguistic forms: to be entirely in Guarani, entirely in Spanish, bilingual (alternating verses in Guarani and Spanish), or in Jopará; the last being a form where words of both languages may be mixed in a single verse. Through these forms, the lyrics alternate and combine the indigenous voice with the one introduced with colonisation, in turn reflecting how Guarani seems to constantly transit, to and from, between a position of disdain and of value within Paraguayan society. Through analysing recordings of Polkas, Paraguayas, and Guaranías, it identifies three styles of singing adopted by female singers who include these genres in their repertoires, namely Paraguayan classical folk, Paraguayan folk, and Paraguayan pop-folk. This analysis is informed by a pilot study which consisted of online interviews with several Paraguayan artists, revealing significant aspects of their backgrounds and musical influences. In addition, it draws on autoethnographic approaches, building on the experience of the music researcher and singer. From a decolonising perspective, the paper brings together the distinctive voices and sounds expressed in popular songs from a marginalised country, language, and gender.

Keywords : female singers, Guarani, Paraguayan song, performance

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