

Community Music in Puerto Rico

Authors : Francisco Luis Reyes

Abstract : The aim of this multiple-case study is to explore the intricacies of three Community Music (CM) initiatives in Puerto Rico. This research will focus on the teaching and learning dynamics of three of the nation's traditional musical genres, Plena, Bomba, and Música Jíbara, which have survived for centuries through oral transmission and enculturation in community settings. Seldom have these community dynamics been studied, and neither have the learning processes been recorded. Therefore, my research intends to elucidate how music education practices within these three CM settings preserve and promote traditional music in Puerto Rico by offering instruction in the art forms. Accordingly, the research question for this project is; how is music education carried out in Puerto Rican CM initiatives that foster and preserve the country's traditional musics? This study examines the CM initiatives of La Junta, in Santurce (Plena), Taller Tambuyé in Rio Piedras (Bomba), and Decimania (Música Jíbara), an initiative that stems from the municipality of Hatillo. In terms of procedure, 45-60 minute semi-structured interviews were conducted with organizers and administrators of the CM initiatives to gain insight into the educational philosophy of each project. Following this, a second series of 45-60 minute semi-structured interviews were undertaken with CM educators to collect data on their musical development, teaching practices, and relationship with learners. Subsequently, four weeks were spent observing/participating in each of the three CM initiatives. In addition to participant observations in these projects, five CM learners from each locale were recruited for two one-on-one semi-structured interviews at the beginning and end of the data collection period. The initial interview centered on participants' rationale for joining the CM initiative whereas the exit interview focused on participants' experience within it. Alumni from each of the CM initiatives partook in a 45-60 minute semi-structured interviews to investigate their understanding of what it means to be a member of each musical community. Finally, observations and documentation of additional activities hosted/promoted by each initiative such as festivals, concerts, social gatherings, and workshops were undertaken. This research employed a multiple-case study approach in three locations. These locales were selected considering what has been asserted by case study theorists, who recommend choosing cases with predictably similar results for the benefit of the analysis process. Data collection consisted of participant observation, narrative inquiry, historical research, philosophical inquiry, and semi-structured interviews. Data analysis for this research involved relying on theoretical propositions, which entails comparing the results—from each case and as a collective—to the arguments that led to the basis of the research (e.g. literature review, research questions, hypothesis). The comparisons to the theoretical propositions were made through pattern matching, which requires comparing predicted patterns from the literature review to findings from each case. Said process lead to developing an analytic outlook of each CM case and a cross-case synthesis. The purpose of employing said data analysis methodology is to present robust findings about CM practices in Puerto Rico and elucidate similarities and differences between the cases that comprise this research and the relevant literature.

Keywords : community music, puerto rico, music learning, traditional music

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