



Handout - Quitiplás Teacher's Guide

Region of origin: Barlovento, Venezuela

Background: Music had always been an act of communing and communication between the Afro-Indigenous peoples of the early Venezuelan state especially helping in the aid of communicating how to escape slavery. As a result, playing traditional drums was prohibited, but resilience to these prohibitions developed anyway and through the relationship that early Afro-Venezuelans had with nature, they were able to construct their instruments in secrecy, hiding their “bamboo drums” in their bags as they traveled within their communities.

Quitiplás music is used in rituals and religious ceremonies, to transmit stories from generation to generation, as well as to sing and dance as an offering to thank the generosity of the saints and gods. Quitiplás songs are of a call and response nature: one voice makes a short melodic phrase and other voices echo that phrase. This call-and-response nature extends to the rhythm as well where a central rhythmic pattern is typically played, and the other drummers then improvise new patterns over the original.

Musical Characteristics: These “bamboo drums”, or Quitiplás, are idiophones. Idiophones are instruments that produce sound by using themselves as resonators through the striking of, or vibration of their own bodies, without the aid of an outside resonator or element. Examples of an outside element could be a drum mallet, a gourd (underneath a marimba key), an amplifier or the skin of a drum. Like cymbals, and castañuelas, Quitiplás produce sound and tone with only the strike of its body against something else. Another example of the idiophone family are the “bamboo tambou” from Trinidad and Tobago which eventually gave rise to steel drums.

The Quitiplás family unit of drums are made up of three members: The first, the Quitiplás (for which these drums are named after) has the highest pitch tone, and is able to pierce through the ensemble. The second is a wider and taller bamboo, is called the Prima. The Prima has the middle sound and is more connected to the spectrum of the human voice. The third is the Pujao, which has a wider body, generates a deeper sound, acting as bass. The Prima and Pujao both have two tones and can alternate between them by creating closed and open resonating blows, produced by covering the upper opening of the bamboo with one's hand as the drum hits the ground.

There are four qualities of sound that exist within the Quitiplás ensemble. Since the Quitiplás consists of four or five bamboo tubes that are played simultaneously by three or four people, each tube in the Quitiplá drum has its own repertoire of rhythms and accents; each of the below qualities could be applied in understanding the capabilities and dimensions of these drums. When played together, the tubes create a polyrhythmic, dynamic sound. The qualities:

altura/pitch (high, med or low)

time (duration, long or short)

intensity (hard or soft)

timbre (sound characteristic - for example, recognizing a guitar vs. voice, violin vs drum)



Ultimately, in a Quitiplás ensemble, what each member is “saying” with their drums is more important than focusing on the act of performance.

Quitiplás family of drums (in order from top to bottom): Quitiplás (top two), Prima, and Pujao



Musical Activity: With the Quitiplás ensemble there are many patterns, or “musical conversations” that could exist between players of the drums. This is polyrhythm, a characteristic central to understanding Quitiplás. These polyrhythms develop naturally, usually through improvisation around a static pattern. As a result, there are no set, or specifically codified ways to play Quitiplás. What’s important is the relationship of the sounds to each other. For the sake of understanding the musical relationship between sounds and rhythms that the bamboo drums can produce, we will follow the notation below for this lesson. Please note that the pitch changes are notated using accents above the note.

♩. = 70

Quitiplás	
Prima	
Pujao	

Lyrics for song: *Ya están sonando, vengan a ver, los quitiplás de María Belén.*