

Mariachi and Western Art Music in the Preparation of Future Teachers: Nurturing the Bimusical Complexities of Mexican-American Students

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Carlos moved his fingers up and down the fretboard of his guitar as he plucked out the notes of Niccoló Paganini's Sonata (Op. 3, No. 1). The piece was one of several classical guitar selections that comprised his senior recital, a capstone project for his music education degree. He executed the Paganini with ease, and it was evident that he was thoroughly at home with his guitar. Even though Carlos had been studying classical guitar and its European repertoire, the second half of his recital entailed a musical potpourri of Mexican, Mexican American, and Latin American pieces that included his guitar accompaniment to several vocal solos within the context of a mariachi ensemble, a Conjunto duet featuring Carlos on the accordion, and a Paraguayan folk song involving a vihuela, guitarrón, and Carlos on a traditional harp. This senior recital reflected the musical experiences that Carlos had begun at the age of six, and was a culmination of his mix of experiences as an American student of Mexican heritage with an ear to music in other parts of Latin America as well. Carlos evidenced a bimusical sensibility in his capacity to perform music of Europe and of Mexico (and then some), thus coming to terms with distinctive styles that were central to the dualities of a "blended" musicianship. As he performed with the nuances of these styles, it was the hope of his professors that he would also one day teach the nuances of these styles to others.

In 2016, Hispanics were the largest minority group in the United States, constituting almost twenty percent of the nation's population. Sixty-three percent of Hispanics were of Mexican origin, making them the largest minority among the various Hispanic subgroups. In Texas alone, there are ten million people of Mexican ancestry (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Mexican Americans are the largest subgroup of Hispanics in Texas, which naturally aligns geographically

with the proximity of Mexico just south of the U.S. border. Within the Texas public schools, Hispanics account for fifty-two percent of the over five million students enrolled (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

Students of Mexican American ancestry are constantly navigating between musical and cultural spheres that are present within their daily lives (Soto, 2012). They develop bicultural, bilingual, and bimusical competencies in order to participate successfully in two different cultural spheres. Within their families and communities, they are enculturated into Mexican ways of doing and being, and in ways of expressing themselves in language and through the arts. Enculturation is a way of learning music informally, outside of formal school programs, where the learning is occurring naturally through observation and imitation and through regular and consistent interactions within families and neighborhoods (Campbell, 2018). Mexican American students are typically enculturated musically within the valued expressions found in their Mexican-American homes, communities, and via other means offered to them for exploration of their ancestral roots. Before children arrive to school for their first kindergarten classes, and while they are making their way over the years through the school system, they may well know deeply the music of mariachi, *son jarocho*, *conjunto*, *banda*, and other musical styles and forms.

Music educators and ethnomusicologists have recognized the importance of connecting home musical cultures to formal school learning, to allow students new musical horizons while also continuing to support the musical sensibilities that are forged within their homes and families. Campbell explained that, “The world of children at home, in their local communities, and even as it is constructed at school, is a complex auditory ecosystem that deserves attention and continued study by those who concern themselves with children’s learning and development in music, including the web of social processes that are rich with musical content that helps to shape children’s expressive selves” (2018, p. 106-7). Other scholars have recognized bimusicity as a noble goal of the balance of experiences in school and outside of school, though the postulations are more easily proclaimed than they are put to practice (Anderson & Campbell,

2010; Campbell, 2004; Higgins, 2012; Schippers, 2010). The acknowledgment of including a student's home musical culture falls in line with the tenets of multicultural education (Banks & Banks, 2004) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018; Lind & McKoy, 2016).

Multicultural education is a process that seeks equity and equitable access to an education that reflects a student's racial, ethnic, and social-class group (Banks & Banks, 2004). For a half century, the principles of multicultural education have pressed teachers to pursue change that can reach beyond far content integration (for example, the inclusion of one song from China, or Ghana, or Mexico) to deep and all-encompassing change in all aspects of the school environment (Banks, 2009). The term "Culturally Relevant Teaching" was coined as a result of study of the inadequate and impersonalized education of African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1995), the goal of which was to guide students to succeed academically while maintaining their cultural integrity. If music educators adhere to the six principles of culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2018), then they would incorporate the home musical cultures of students in order to develop positive identity development and to feel included and "normal" in a classroom that is a reflection of who they are culturally. Bimusicality is entirely relevant to multicultural education and Culturally Relevant Teaching on many levels, and suggests that students who are raised in one realm of cultural knowledge at home can be educated in a second knowledge at school when teachers attend to the ways in which the two realms of cultural knowledge are distinctive, yet also overlapping and complementary.

Bimusicality

Through his personal observations of Western-trained student musicians who were also learning Javanese and Balinese *gamelan*, Japanese *gagaku* and *nagauta*, Persian music, and South Indian music, ethnomusicologist Mantle Hood long ago noted the possibilities for musicians to acquire musicianship of multiple cultures (1960). He coined the term "bimusicality" to refer to the capacity by some to be technically proficient in two musical systems, to be able to hear and discern the musical logic of two cultures, and to be able to perform in two different musical systems. In other words, being bimusical is the ability to perceive, perform,

and understand another musical system in relation to the context of the music and its place in culture and community (Palmer, 1994; Rice & Garfias, 2011; Titon, 1995). Others have noted dimensions and meanings of bimusicality, including G.L. Clements (2008), who claimed that bimusicality occurs on a continuum that involves performance in two cultures and an understanding of the music in its original context, and Teicher (1995), who posited, on the study of the bimusical Indian children who could perform Karnatic and Western music, that becoming bimusical allows a person to “transcend the cultural and musical limitations of both cultures, so that the new musical/cultural learning is facilitated by a wider range of underlying musical and cultural concepts” (p. 78). The intrigue of bimusicality in our literature is both long-standing and continuing.

Within music education practice, Anderson and Campbell (2010) advocated that music teachers should teach musical styles from more than one culture so that students will develop an intercultural and interracial understanding, and can become bimusical or even “multimusical.” By listening to, thinking, and “doing” more than one musical culture, students can grow a greater musical flexibility and become better musicians overall. Music educators have found themselves challenged with ways and means for developing musicality and of reckoning with bimusicality and “multimusicality” too. They are recognizing that an increasing number of students are arriving to school with home musical cultures intact (Soto, 2012), and that in learning a second musical culture, typically Western classical music, they are in line for developing a bimusical identity (Soto, 2012). Still, the home culture of these students is rarely honored, and as they develop knowledge and skills for Western classical music, their interest and appreciation for the music of their home and family may well diminish. Without the support of music educators, the potential of bimusicality can go unrealized and the music of home, family, and community may slip away and become devalued by students due to the absence of that music in institutionalized learning.

This paper examines the bimusical complexities of Mexican American students in a university program committed to the education of diverse populations of students, many of

whom identify as Mexican-American and/or Hispanic. It seeks to explore the nature of bimusicality from the perspective of selected university students (and their faculty) of Mexican heritage who have been influenced by the musical genres of their home even as they are also engaged in developing knowledge and skills of Western classical music. The enculturation by these university students into listening, singing, and playing music of their home culture, in particular within the realm of mariachi music, is briefly chronicled, and their experiences are noted in order to understand how their musical taste, cultural knowledge, and skill-sets are shaped. For these students who become proficient in Western European art music, it is of relevance to note their personal-familial history and deep resonance with mariachi music. Likewise, the perspectives of two university professors, both of Mexican ancestry, are also tapped in an attempt to understand the processes and challenges of fostering Mexican-American music within a university program that was first launched as solely focused on Western classical music studies. Three undergraduate music education majors and two university faculty members in the Latin Music Studies area, all of whom identify as Mexican American, were observed across the course of an academic year of undergraduate music studies with attention to the following four questions:

1. In what musical genres are you proficient and what has been your involvement with each genre throughout your life?
2. What issues and/or obstacles have you encountered as you move between the different musical genres?
3. What kind of musical, financial, and emotional assistance have you received either from your school or home community that has enabled you to be bi- or multi-musical?
4. What types of learning and performance strategies do you utilize when functioning in each musical genre you are proficient in?

Context

Mariachi as a First Musical Culture

Growing out of an oral folk tradition in Mexico, mariachi music on both sides of the border has evolved over time with the addition of instruments and song styles. It spread from Mexico into Texas and the American Southwest, into Mexican-heritage communities across the U.S., and into its current status as a popular global music genre. This genre of music has been a staple of the musical landscape of Texas since the early part of the 20th century (Dickey, 2016). Even though the mariachi musical genre has been taking hold in public school music education since 1970 and is a big part of the soundscape across the state of Texas, it was not until 2007 that the University Interscholastic League (UIL) allowed mariachi ensembles to participate as a Medium Ensemble in the Solo and Ensemble events that take place in the 28 UIL regions in Texas (Sheehy, 2006; “UIL Medium Ensemble,” 2016). UIL piloted the first-ever State Mariachi Festival in San Antonio, Texas in 2016, and the number of participating ensembles has risen 30% in the last two years. The proliferation of mariachi ensembles at middle and high school schools across the state of Texas has led to an increase of musicians who are entering university music education programs with mariachi experience.

Research Site

The research site was a large public four-year university located in Central Texas between Austin and San Antonio. In a real sense, the research site also became the culture under study, particularly the programs in music teacher education and Latin Music Studies, both of which are housed in the university’s School of Music. There were over 39,000 students enrolled at the university at the time of the research, and the enrollment of music majors was approximately 600 undergraduate and graduate students. With Hispanic-identified students as approximately 33% of its enrollment, the university was officially designated in 2011 as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). The Latin Music Studies area included two mariachi ensembles and two salsa ensembles, offering a Masters of Music in Latin Music Performance in either a Mariachi or Salsa track. Prior

to this study, the School of Music offered a Master of Music in Music Education with a Mariachi Emphasis, but that degree plan had been discontinued by the time of this research; in its place, a Mariachi Minor for undergraduate music education students was introduced.

The Mariachi Minor program incorporated a Mariachi vocal studio where students studied vocal music in both Western classical music and mariachi styles, a community youth mariachi program that served children in kindergarten through 8th grade, and the Mariachi Feria (a mariachi festival for middle and high school students). There was also a Summer Estudio course for in-service mariachi directors who represented programs from around the state. Music education students included those who were proficient in mariachi through earlier experiences prior to university studies. Vocal majors were offered the opportunity to study mariachi repertoire and style in their private studio lessons. Students who performed with the top mariachi ensemble also participated in teaching in the youth mariachi program and assisted teaching within the various masterclasses and workshops with middle and high students.

Method

A case study with embedded units was utilized in order to gain an understanding of the lived experiences and performance strategies of university students and faculty who identify as Mexican American, in order to determine the nature of their bimusical sensibility (Yin, 2018). The culture of this uniquely crafted mariachi program housed in the Latin Music studies area was in question and served as the case study which revealed effective fostering of home and school music, and in particular the balancing of Mexican heritage and Western classical music studies. The music education students and faculty were participants in the mariachi program and served as the embedded units allowing analysis of each subunit individually as well as between and across the different subunits (Baxter & Jack, 2010; Yin, 2018). The paradigm of case study research was selected in order to fully understand the meaning of bimusicality, the experiences and processes that surround and shape it, and the musical pathways that allow students and faculty to be successfully bimusical. Data collection included observations, interviews, and an examination of material culture over the course of one academic year.

Nonparticipant observations of 22 ensemble rehearsals, six performances, three studio lessons, and three senior recitals gave an insight to the students' and faculty members' musical abilities in real time as they utilized both classical and mariachi instrumental and vocal pedagogies. Participant observations of the students in the researcher's undergraduate elementary methods university class over the course of two semesters for a total of 56 ninety-minute class sessions enabled the researcher to understand how the students used their knowledge of both musical traditions and applied it to elementary methods pedagogies and lesson design. It also revealed their understanding of Western classical music and of European and Mexican children's folk song culture (Alder & Alder, 1994; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Silverman, 2006).

Formal and informal interviews that were related to their bimusical experiences were conducted in order to gauge the musical proficiencies of students and faculty, and to discern their bimusical sensibilities (Creswell, 2018). Formal structured interviews, based upon the guiding questions, were conducted three times throughout the year with the participants, each for approximately 60 minutes. Almost three hundred informal exchanges in classes, during office meetings, before and after music lessons, rehearsals, and performances added further insights (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Material culture consisted of assignments in an elementary music methods course, written requirements in studio lessons, markings by faculty and students in notated scores, information from a course webpage, performance advertisements and concert programs, articles about student performances, and related Facebook posts made by students and faculty in the Latin Music Studies area (Creswell, 2018). Summaries of material culture were written down and included in the field notes of participant and nonparticipant observations and interviews.

All video recorded observations and formal interviews were transcribed. These transcriptions, the observation field notes, the informal interview notes, and summaries of material culture were open-coded into categories that emerged from the data. These categories were organized into themes that aligned with the research questions and other categories that emerged from the data. Each subunit was analyzed completely which then allowed comparisons between and across the multiple subunits of the students and faculty. Themes that emerged from the set of subunits were

then comprehensively analyzed through the overarching questions set forth in the case study (Yin, 2018). Observations, interviews, an examination of material culture, and member checking allowed for triangulation of the data in order to validate the conclusions of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

Positionality of the Researcher

Over the course of this research project, my own positionality allowed me particular insights and interpretations, and even access to information. I am an experienced professor of music education at a large public university, charged with teaching the elementary music methods course as well as coordinating student teaching placements and supervising the internships. The methods course spanned the academic year, and the three students who participated were enrolled in the course both fall and spring terms. The Latin Studies faculty were colleagues of mine; I served with them on university committees and shared the teaching and advising responsibilities for these three students. We worked together on matters related to the curriculum and scheduled performances. I also culturally identify as Mexican American.

Bimusical Findings

Developing Bimusicality

This case study details three university music students and two university faculty of Mexican heritage. Student and faculty profiles will offer biographical descriptions of their musical life, and pathways that led them from their early musical development to their current capacities. Critical to the descriptions are indications of their navigation between musical genres and systems in determining their bimusical identities.

Francisco (Student, Trumpet)

Francisco transferred into the university for his junior year as an instrumental music education student and completed his degree three years later. He considered himself a first-generation Mexican American and played trumpet and guitar as well as performed on trumpet and sang in the mariachi ensemble. Even though he was born in the United States, he did spend part of his childhood in Mexico before moving back to Texas. He culturally identified with mariachi and

explained that he grew up along the Texas-Mexico border. He participated in both the band and mariachi ensemble while in middle and high school. He also played in professional and school mariachi ensembles while attending community college before he transferred.

Francisco was an excellent trumpet player; he was selected to perform in the top mariachi and wind ensemble and perfected his playing through Western classical trumpet repertoire in his studio lessons. He participated in the mariachi ensemble, Latin Jazz ensemble, concert band, wind symphony, jazz band, brass choir, and orchestra while at the university. Even though he participated in a variety of different genres, he felt most comfortable in mariachi and then in the Western classical music traditions. The support of his family and music instructors at the public school and collegiate level allowed him to make it to a four-year university and to complete a rigorous music education program. After graduation, Francisco secured a teaching position, and is currently teaching mariachi at a high school and middle school in a town close to the university.

Maria (Student, Vocal Music)

Maria transferred to the current university during her junior year from a community college in San Antonio, Texas. She was also a first-generation Mexican American student who was born of two parents from Mexico and was raised in San Antonio. Her primary instrument was voice but she also played violin in the mariachi ensemble. She culturally identified with the mariachi genre. She mentioned several times that she grew up listening to mariachi, norteña, and Tejano music at home and at school, in her community, and at family events. She remembers singing Mexican folk songs like *De Colores*, *The Itsy Bitsy Spider* in Spanish, *Las Hojitas de los Árboles* and *Pica Pica Piedra* (It game). She recalled her dad singing mariachi songs to her mom every morning and listening to her sister practice mariachi music at the home.

Maria performed in the elementary choir and sang in high school choirs and continued singing Western classical music as she sang in choirs at her community college. She also sang in a “Mariachi Church” choir, which is common in Mexican American communities; in these settings, a mariachi ensemble replaces a traditional church choir. She performed in the Chamber Choir, Concert Choir, and University Singers while enrolled at the university. She also took classical

music voice lessons when she was enrolled in community college and was able to add mariachi to her vocal lessons when she transferred. She was taught by a bimusical faculty member in the Latin Music Studies area that trained her in singing both classical and mariachi music. Her senior recital was a combination of classical and mariachi music, although she felt much more proficient with the mariachi genre. She mentioned that her family members, individual music professors (like her vocal teacher in community college and at the university), mariachi director, and other professional musicians gave her the support necessary to walk the path of being a music major who specializes in mariachi. She became a middle school mariachi teacher in San Antonio and the director of a San Antonio community college mariachi ensemble after she graduated from college.

Carlos (Student, Accordion, Guitar, Harp, and Vocal Music)

Carlos was also a native of San Antonio, Texas and a third-generation Mexican American. His parents and grandparents grew up in various parts of South Texas, and he had great grandparents from Mexico. Carlos first attended one of the largest music schools in Texas and in the country. Unfamiliar with the college process or how a school of music functions, coupled with a lack of experience with formal classical music training, he struggled to get accepted into the music program as a classical guitar performance major. He attempted to become a music education major, but was not accepted because his primary instrument was guitar. Because of financial aid and family issues, he decided to transfer to this university for his junior year, bringing him closer to home. He auditioned on guitar for a Bachelor of Arts degree but then auditioned on harp for the mariachi ensemble. He later switched to a music education degree with a choral emphasis even though his primary instrument was guitar.

Conjunto music surrounded Carlos while he was growing up, and he was taught about Conjunto and Tejano music from his musical grandfather who had no formal music training. He began accordion lessons when he was six years old. He recalls his grandfather paying seventy-five dollars for an accordion that was being sold on the side of a road. Carlos began performing with conjunto groups as a young child which has continued throughout his life. He began playing mariachi music

as a junior in high school. He culturally identified with Conjunto, Tejano, and mariachi music even though he was proficient in several other musical styles that are a part of his musical identity.

While completing his degree he participated in the top mariachi and salsa ensembles, University Singers, various Jazz combos, and the classical guitar ensemble. He played professionally in Conjunto and Tejano groups, Country, Americana, Rhythm and Blues, Swing, Jazz, and Salsa groups when he was growing up and while completing his degree. He considered his primary instrument to be accordion but also felt very proficient in guitar and harp. He was also a proficient singer and played other instruments such as the vihuela, guitarrón, violin, and bass guitar. He studied classical guitar while enrolled at the university and took two semesters of vocal lessons in mariachi and classical genres with one of the Latin Music Studies faculty members. Carlos was a very accomplished musician who had performed with many Conjunto legends and famous mariachi musicians; he considered himself multimusical, functioning successfully in diverse musical genres. He decided not teach full time and worked part time as a mariachi instructor in South San Antonio and performed in various genres around the United States and Mexico.

Jose (Faculty, Percussion)

This was the 24th year that Jose had been teaching at this university, which was his alma mater for his bachelor's and master's degrees in Percussion Performance and Composition. He was born into a musical family living in San Antonio, Texas. He was a second-generation Mexican American. His father was the founder and director of the mariachis called *Mariachi Chapultepec*. His mother was a famous mariachi and conjunto singer and was even inducted into the Tejano and Conjunto Hall of Fame. He began his musical career in high school when he was accepted into the band program to play drums in ninth grade. He was proficient in all types of percussion instruments and musical styles as well as in all the instruments of the mariachi ensemble. He participated in concert bands, mariachi percussion, drumline, Latin Jazz ensembles, Salsa ensembles, Mariachi ensembles, Tejano ensembles, R & B, Funk, and Rock groups, has taught Steel Pan, and even traveled to Bali to learn Gamelan. Jose played with popular salsa ensembles in the Central Texas area including *La Predilecta*, *Naningo*, *Tony Guerrero*, *Orquesta Tradition*, *El Tumbao*, *Mochate*,

Son Playado, and *Colao*. He also served as music director of the *Mambo Kings* of San Antonio. Even though Jose had a passion for Salsa music and Latin percussion, he culturally identified and felt most connected with the mariachi genre.

He has directed multiple salsa and mariachi ensembles for over twenty years, as well as the youth mariachi ensemble, percussion ensembles, and marching percussion at the university level. Jose's salsa ensemble received the "Best Blues, Pop, & Rock Recording" Downbeat Music Award in 2007 and the "Best Salsa/Merengue Group of the Year" from *Premios a la Musica Latina* from 2005-2007. In addition, the university's top mariachi ensemble had won first place at the Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza 11 out of the 12 times they competed. The mariachi ensemble has been hailed as one of the best in the state, and is known around the country to be a high quality ensemble situated in a fantastic educational program. Both the mariachi and the salsa ensembles have performed at international festivals in Chile, Europe, and Mexico.

Jose has managed to overcome many institutional barriers and funding limitations in order to build a degree-granting Latin Music Studies area from scratch. He credited his success to the support of his family, his high school and university music teachers, and various School of Music professors that allowed him to learn, study, and teach multiple genres in addition to traditional Western classical music. His experience in multiple genres gave him the skills to be successful as a performer and master teacher when working with university and school-aged students.

Alicia (Faculty, Vocal Music, and Violin)

Alicia had been adjunct faculty for eight years for the Latin Music Studies area. She grew up in San Antonio, Texas and was born into a musical mariachi family. She was a second-generation Mexican American and a fourth-generation mariachi musician. Her grandfather was a mariachi pioneer and her godmother helped create some of the earliest university and school mariachi programs in the country in the late 1960s. She clearly culturally identified with the mariachi genre, amassing more than 25 years of experience in mariachi performance. She began singing mariachi as a young child and continued singing in professional groups through her public education

schooling. She obtained bachelor's degrees in both vocal performance and music education and then obtained a master of music in music education from this university.

She taught vocal lessons in both the mariachi and classical genre in the evenings and ran several masterclasses and vocal sectionals throughout the school year. She also assisted Jose in picking out music, had family members complete the arrangements for competition pieces, assigned solos, and worked with the staging and other stylistic elements of the performances. She was also a full time elementary music teacher that completed one level of Kodály certification coursework. She was both proficient in both the mariachi and classical vocal genres and could play and teach the violin and other instruments from the armonia section.

She was a former member of the *Mariachi Campanas de America*. Alicia has also performed Western classical, jazz, salsa, and Broadway music throughout her performing career. She was very active as a clinician and adjudicator for mariachi vocal workshops, festivals, conferences and universities throughout the United States. Her private vocal studio was highly sought after and had a long waiting list comprised of students and professional musicians. Her vocal students regularly placed highly in the Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza vocal competitions and have won "Best of Show" awards in other mariachi festivals and competitions. Alicia also worked with recording artists who have received Grammy nominations. She credited her family, individual music teachers, and other professional musicians for giving her the support and mentorship for her success as a musician, performer, and master teacher.

Strategies for Switching Between Two Genres

The students and faculty employed a variety of strategies in learning and teaching music, given partly that the music genre and particular work required it. Their unique strategies were evident, too, when switching between mariachi and classical musical genres. Below are strategies that emerged through interviews and observations at studio lessons and rehearsals.

All students and faculty discussed the importance of learning proper playing techniques for their instrument in order to be a healthy and proficient musician in either genre. Jose, the trumpet player, explained his proficiency and commented that, "I took lessons in both genres to

better facilitate the transitions.” Maria concurred with this when she mentioned that she had taken lessons and attended master classes in both genres to better facilitate transitions between genres. Jose, the faculty director, said, “Percussion fundamentals allowed me to switch between the different genres.” This was evident in Maria’s vocal studio lesson. Alicia, her studio teacher, led Maria through traditional classical vocal warm-ups on the piano. Alicia spoke at length about the importance of correct posture as she taught elements of the Alexander Technique to her students and discussed the importance of vocal health. These same Western classical vocal warm-ups were also employed by Maria as she led the entire mariachi in several vocal warm-ups at the beginning of the rehearsal. She would sit at the piano with the students in a semi-circle while she gave them feedback on their warm-ups and *coros* to improve their group sound.

Learning the Western classical instrumental and vocal traditions provided proper performance techniques that could prevent injuries. Maria said, “Some people also don’t belt out the mariachi tunes correctly and can injure their voice. That is what happened to me.” She was referring to the damage she had done to her vocal chords before she got to the university because she was not taught how to sing the mariachi songs correctly. Her community college choir director mentioned that she should not perform mariachi because it was damaging her vocal chords. Maria began studying with Alicia, the mariachi vocal faculty member, and had to change the way that she sang, get evaluated by a doctor, and implement a regimen in order to heal her vocal chords. The faculty member trained in both classical and the mariachi genre saved her vocal chords. Alicia felt it was her classical training and good technique that allowed her to cross over to different musical genres like Mariachi, Country Western, and Broadway. It also helped her save her voice when she began teaching elementary music. She feels strongly that classical singing fundamentals are important in order to be able to sing other genres correctly, even if singing in a different timbre.

Students and faculty spoke of technical issues they had to remember when switching between the genres. Francisco, the trumpet player, said, “I have to change articulation from ‘ta’ to ‘da’ when playing classical music because my tongue is heavier because of mariachi.” He also said,

“I tell myself to be delicate with my tone and my tonguing.” Carlos mentioned that, “I have to focus on the vowels when I am singing in both the classical and mariachi genres.” He commented how they are different depending on the language and style of song. Additionally, he added that, “I also have to remember the specific vibrato style for each of the song styles in mariachi and all of those are different from the vibrato used in classical singing. There is more experimentation and variation of vibrato when singing mariachi music.” This issue came up several times in mariachi rehearsals as Alicia and Maria helped coach the soloists. They discussed how the vibrato would change within a song depending on the part of the song or the song style. Maria mentioned, “I try not to sing too heavy when singing classical music. I also can sing too quietly when singing mariachi music.” Maria also spoke of the accommodations that she has to navigate when using a microphone during mariachi performances, and the increased use of staging and hand motions common in mariachi performances as compared to her classical performances.

Students mentioned certain warm-up routines and learning practices that were different depending on the genre they were going to play. Francisco, the trumpet player, mentioned, “Warm-ups are different in each genre. I need to listen to the song first in mariachi because not everything is written and I need to figure out the style. I don’t listen to the piece first when learning a classical piece.” Francisco is referring the different ways in which listening is utilized in the different genres. He attempts to play the classical piece by sight-reading and then following up with listening to a recording of the piece he is playing. Because mariachi music is often just a template of the music to be performed and does not include all the stylistic elements within the sheet music, listening is essential to get the style and flavor of a mariachi piece. In fact, all students referred to their course website which included each piece of music they were learning with links to different recordings of each piece. Maria referred to her warm-up strategies and said, “I warm up in the range that I will sing in classical. I do a lot of lip trills when warming up in mariachi because that genre comes more natural to me.” This statement speaks to the type of music being performed and its correlation to the warm-up routine, but it

also highlights cultural familiarity mixed with experience and comfort within a specific genre.

Christopher Small (2011) noted that, “The nature of the uniform says something about the nature of the collective identity” in his book *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (p. 54). Not only was this collective identity of being a mariachi musician and Mexican American clearly demonstrated in formal performances that included uniforms, it was also expressed by students in their interviews. A typical black tuxedo or dress that is required for a classical performance is very different from a mariachi *traje* (Spanish word for suit), which is a uniform with elaborate stitching and *botonadua* (decorative buttons), *mono* (bow tie), *botines* (ankle boots), and a *cinto pitiado* (belt and bucklet). There is also a sombrero, hair bow, and heavy makeup for the females. This transformation, very different from classical concert attire or everyday wear, seems to help the brain to make the switch before the music even begins. The students transformed into different performers once in their uniforms, as evident by the exuberance in their facial features (which included full smiles), by their hand gestures, and their use of authentic *gritos* (Spanish for a scream that is interjected during a song performance). These same behaviors were observed during rehearsals and student recitals. Jose, the mariachi director, always completed a full run through of a show with their *trajes* because students increased their energy and performance level when fully dressed. Both Maria and Carlos spoke about the importance of uniforms and how it impacts their transition between genres. Maria expressed, “My outfit changes help me perform the correct style of music when switching from classical to Mariachi.” Carlos discussed, “Putting on a tuxedo or a *traje* helps my brain make the switch between different genres.”

These experiences demonstrated the importance of receiving musical training in both the mariachi and classical genres in order to facilitate proper playing and singing techniques that avoid injury. Students employed a variety of strategies that included different warm-ups, changes to their performance technique, stage presence, and uniforms in order to switch between classical and mariachi music. These strategies may be unique to situations in which students are singing or performing on similar instruments in both genres (as is the case with

trumpet), and could be somewhat different for students who play different instruments when switching between genres (e.g., vihuela, guitarrón).

Bimusicality in Action

Francisco discussed many of the positive benefits of learning both mariachi and classical music. He said he was a more well-rounded, better musician and was more marketable for gigs in the real world, and that he was excited that he could teach more than one music genre to his future students. He also felt that learning fundamental playing techniques in classical music (trumpet) enabled him to be a better Mariachi musician, and that memorizing mariachi music made learning and playing the music easier because he was free to focus on stylistic elements. He spoke of the difficulties of learning multiple genres and said, “You focus on style too much and do a negative transfer (play mariachi in your classical lesson)... It is difficult to go between the two genres with the timbre and embouchure changes.”

Maria felt that, “It is important to learn correct technique when learning to sing. I thought I could sing mariachi before, but my teacher had to reteach me... By performing different genres of music you learn different ways of making music and can pass that on to your students.” She also said, “It helps to learn how to sing classical music because I learned correct vocal technique for singing both genres,” and proudly added, “I learned how to function in both genres of music and I am a better musician because of it.”

Carlos commented on his own sense of “being multi-musical.” He said, “You are a better musician because of your ability to adapt and to hear different elements in the music. Your ears are open because you learned in different ways.” He said that, “A gig will lead to another gig and that can lead to a bigger gig,” when he was discussing the frequency in which he acquired gigs on the side either before, during, and after he graduated from school. He expressed that he was grateful because, “You don’t stay close minded. When you stick to just one, that is all you know. You can’t go in other directions musically. I am able to adapt to the different styles in music, especially singing in different languages.” He did express frustration about being typecast and said, “You can get stereotyped into a certain genre of music.” This was a common theme among

all the students and faculty. They all felt that peers and colleagues either made comments or references that inferred the diminished status of their musicianship because they were considered a “mariachi” music education student. They all fought hard against being labeled as “just” a mariachi musician. They felt that they had to prove themselves and faced insecurities in their academic and studio classes, classical ensembles and lessons, and in their behavior around the school.

The faculty directors discussed the various ways in which they saw the benefits of teaching multiple genres and having students grow musically from being bi- or multi-musical. Jose stated, “I have not met a single person that cannot tell me that at the end of one semester or a year or two years that either salsa or mariachi didn’t make them a better performer period, including a better classical musician.” He argued this was the case because, “The level of individual responsibility for the execution of your music is so much higher in these two ensembles that it requires them to execute the music on a level they do not do in classical music. There is nowhere to hide. It makes you or breaks you.” He further elaborated, “The rhythms and syncopations of these two genres makes you a much better reader so that when you go back and read wind symphony music it is like reading sixth-grade music.”

Alicia conversed about the various ways teaching mariachi music has helped her students. She said, “Learning mariachi music in public schools allows students to learn about their culture, gives them something to be successful at, and it keeps them busy.” She also referenced that the students who were learning mariachi and classical music have more teaching opportunities when they graduate. This was evident by the number of available teaching positions in either choral or mariachi programs in the central and north Texas area. Jose often received calls and emails asking for potential graduates who could fill certified full-time mariachi teaching positions in Texas and other states in the U.S.

Bimusical Musings

It was clear that students and faculty members were more expressive when performing mariachi music because they could connect to the music through their cultural and family tie to

the genre. They all acknowledged that there was more motivation to learn, practice, and perform the music because of this connection. Even though they loved being a musician, this passion did not transfer to the classical Western music that they played in their ensembles in public school and university settings. This was also revealed when their demeanour changed as they performed in their *trajes*. Research has shown that motivating classrooms enable students to feel respected and connected to others, understand the relevance of their learning experiences, are challenged and successful, and are able to grow authentically in personal and socially valued ways (Brophy, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ginsberg, 2015). Allowing students to study their home musical culture that represents their cultural and musical identity enables them to engage authentically within the educational setting and does not require them to assimilate in order to be successful (Gay, 2018; Lind & McKoy, 2016).

Participation in multiple music genres has been shown to increase knowledge and performance skills in a person's primary musical culture (Blacking, 1987; Haddon, 2016; Hood, 1971; Krüger, 2009). The students and faculty members described here all employed a variety of performance and learning strategies when switching between the different musical genres. Students and faculty members acknowledged how important it was to experience this and pass along this helpful information to students who might be encountering some of these issues as they themselves switch between different musical genres.

Both the students and faculty members were all performing mariachi music outside of school settings while they received their public and university education. The faculty members and several students acknowledged that family and community members taught them how to sing or play their musical instruments within their culturally identified genres. It was these close family and community bonds that enabled them to study their craft and to become so successful. This love and support enabled these musicians to become proficient and to excel within the music educational system at the public school and university level.

Even though these two faculty members and three students were successful in getting through a school steeped in the Western classical music tradition, they were outliers rather than

the norm. It is difficult to measure how many students fall between the cracks or never make it in the door. All the participants mentioned that they met resistance in their quest to complete their studies and to fulfill program expectations in fields like band, choir, or orchestra. Some students met prejudices from music teachers who were from the classical genre; in these cases, students reported receiving pressure to quit performing mariachi music. Students found it difficult to master two different types of musical genres and would have liked to be able to focus more on their mariachi music for two primary reasons. First, they intended to seek out a full-time mariachi teaching position, and second, the genre was culturally familiar. Despite the difficulties of being proficient in multiple genres, all of the students and faculty who participated in this study felt that this challenge made them better musicians and created more opportunities for them (Bakan, 1993/4; Haddon, 2016). This was evident from the number of outside performance opportunities and job offers that were available to the participants. All were grateful that they were able to successfully navigate a system that usually excludes their music and culture.

Recommendations

The rich experiences of the faculty and students of this case study has cast a light on some important issues that are present in public school and university programs that are created to train musicians solely in Western classical music traditions. It is important to offer a variety of musical genres to attract diverse student talent, to allow students to interact with music they culturally connect with, and to offer a rich array of ensembles. These values align with some of the primary underpinnings of the Manifesto proposed by Sarath, Myers, and Campbell (2007) that advocates for change in the undergraduate preparation of music majors. University music programs that allow studies in more than one musical culture can increase the musical flexibility of students as performers, innovators (composers and improvisers), and teachers (Campbell, 2018; Sarath, Myers, & Campbell, 2017). All participants felt that bi-musicality (and even multi-musicality) should be a goal of the music education curriculum at all levels. It is evident that music educators should open up more pathways towards getting a music degree in order to

diversify the university student population and the genres that they represent.

Furthermore, there need to be more financial and academic supports for students who participate in non-traditional ensembles like mariachi in high school or who are transferring in from a community college. Research has demonstrated that Hispanics are underrepresented in music education programs because they have issues of access and retention (Elpus & Abril, 2011; Fitzpatrick, Henninger, & Taylor, 2014). The majority of the students who participated in mariachi at this Central Texas university were Mexican or Mexican American students who were often in need of assistance figuring out processes related to admissions, auditioning, and securing financial aid in order to enter the university. These students are representatives of the Hispanics that encompass the majority of students enrolled in Texas public schools. These issues need to be addressed in order for Hispanic students to have a pathway into higher education and to obtain equitable access toward earning a music education degree.

All of the students in this study were transfer students, which raised some additional hurdles. The credits they transferred in affected their financial aid in a way that restricted them from enrolling in too many ensembles or extra courses beyond those required for their degree. A couple of the students found the academic rigour of the university hard to adjust to, especially as there was no time to settle in and acclimate to the new educational pressures. Transferring in extended their graduate timeline a year or two, causing an increased financial burden.

Music faculty need to understand the unique skills and time commitments required of students who are participating in multiple ensembles, especially with mariachi. In this case, the mariachi ensemble typically had eight to twelve performances a semester along with numerous master classes and workshops. Furthermore, all students were required not only to play an instrument in the mariachi ensemble, but to sing as well. They must memorize their music and are often learning between twenty to forty songs a semester as opposed to the traditional six to twelve pieces of literature required for band, choir, and orchestra concerts.

The mariachi ensemble counted as a chamber ensemble credit but not as a required major ensemble credit. This added extra time and financial commitments from the students because

they had to participate in one major ensemble in addition to a mariachi ensemble. Additionally, instrumental music education students were required to enroll in marching band for several semesters in addition to their major ensemble and mariachi ensemble.

This study revealed that some vocal teachers speak negatively about mariachi singing and may encourage their students not participate in mariachi, citing vocal chord damage that is often attributed to the difference in singing styles. What this attitude fails to acknowledge, though, is that vocal injury is avoidable through proper instruction. Damaged vocal chords emerge because of improper singing technique and a lack of public address (PA) or amplification equipment in mariachi performances. It is imperative that mariachi singers work with a vocal coach that can teach them singing techniques that will not cause damage. Because mariachi directors are often not trained in vocal pedagogy specifically, they are often unaware of problems that can develop when ensemble members sing mariachi music without proper technique.

All participants described several negative interactions that they had with faculty at one point or another about the worthiness of being in or directing a mariachi ensemble. Based on the ideas of Culturally Responsive Teaching described earlier in this paper, faculty should instead consider the benefits offered to students when they are afforded the opportunity to participate in different types of ensembles. First, students may be more marketable when they graduate. Second, performing as a multi-musical musician is known to benefit students' overall musicianship, as described earlier. While it is true that fostering bi-musical or multi-musical skills will likely result in a decrease in the amount of time and energy that is devoted to classical lesson material, students will also develop musical flexibility as they become more proficient as a result of their experiences in multiple genres. Moreover, recognizing and including the musical cultures that form the basis of every student's particular enculturation incorporates tenets of Culturally Responsive Teaching, which should be a critical component of university-level music teacher education programs. Teachers must take into account the familiar musical experiences of students and be willing to lay them alongside the study of Western classical music

and its performance pedagogy. Facilitating multi-musicality at the university level would serve as a model of how secondary school programs and community music ensembles could be structured to serve the needs of all who participate.

Keywords

Bimusicality, bicultural, mariachi, music, university, musical genres

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