

Tembembe Ensamble Continuo

Laberinto en la Guitarra

Los Negritos

La mañana de San Juan
Hace el agua gorgoritos;
Cuando se van a bañar,
Salen los cinco negritos
Y se ponen a bailar.

Y una negra me dio un beso
Que me dejó enamorado,
Que los besos de las negras
Sabén a canela y clavo.

Jesús María que me espanta
Cómo hacen los negros pa' trabajar
Moliendo caña sin descansar, ja ja ja.
Gurumbé gurumbé gurumbé,
Que hace nublado y quiere llover.
Gurumbé gurumbé gurumbé
Que teque manequé chuchú mayambé.

Qué bonitos son los negros
Bailando la contradanza.
Con sus zapatitos nuevos

The Little Black Boys¹

The morning of Saint John
The water makes gurgling sounds;
When they go to bathe,
The five little black boys come out
And they start dancing.

And a black woman gave me a kiss
That left me in love,
As the kisses of black women
Taste like cinnamon and cloves.

Jesus Maria who scares me
How are black people able to work?
Grinding cane without resting, ha ha ha.
Gurumbé gurumbé gurumbé,²
That it is cloudy and wants to rain.
Gurumbé gurumbé gurumbé
Que teque manequé chuchú mayambé.

How beautiful are the black people
Dancing the contradanza.
With their new shoes

¹ The Latin American colonial repertoire includes songs that were meant to be depictions of the daily lives of various groups of people, among them indigenous people and people of African descent. While some have interpreted these songs as forms of musical expression belonging to these communities, it is more likely that these songs constituted musical representations by people outside of those communities. These depictions tend to be romantic and paternalistic in character, often celebrating an idealized colonial social hierarchy that privileged those of European heritage. Nevertheless, over time many of these songs have come to be appropriated by Afro-descendant and indigenous communities themselves out of a recognition that, however biased the lens through which these depictions are shown, these offer some of the few glimpses that we have into lives of people who were otherwise left at the margins of official colonial histories. The term *negrito* is a good example of this complexity. Although the literal translation, little black [boy/man/person], is certainly patronizing, it is also a commonly used term of endearment within Afro-descendant communities, and one that is featured prominently in contemporary forms of African diasporic musical practices in the Americas. It is important to point towards the multiplicity of meanings surrounding these and other terms associated with these repertoires, not as a means of excusing or dismissing the racialized nature of these songs, but as a way of emphasizing the legacy of colonialism in the Americas and its complex, contradictory and enduring consequences.

² In this song terms like *gurumbé*, *teque*, *manequé*, *acua*, *bembe*, etc. are onomatopoeic words that imitate strumming patterns associated with different dance genres. They are also meant to imitate the sound of various African languages like Yoruba and Fon that were spoken by African slaves and influenced local dialects of Spanish in the Americas, even though the languages themselves and the original meanings associated with some surviving words were quickly forgotten due to the extraordinary amount of social pressure that the colonial system exerted on people of color in order to forcibly assimilate them into the lower strata of a Spanish-speaking, Catholic society.

Y haciendo tanta mudanza,
O bailando bien sosiegos
Pegados panza con panza.

Jesús María que me espanta...

¡Lero lea!
Es nuestro primer concierto,
Y la dicha que nos gana.
¡Lero lea!
Lo tocamos con afecto
Universidad de Indiana.
Acua bembe serembó.

Jesús María que me espanta...

And making so much movement,
Or dancing calmly
While touching navels.

Jesus Maria who scares me ...

Lero lea!
It's our first concert³
And we are brimming with joy.
Lero lea!
We play it with affection
Indiana University.
Acua bembe serembó.

Jesus Maria who scares me ...

³ It is customary for a number of contemporary Latin American and Caribbean folk musical forms to embellish songs through the modification or addition of improvised verses that comment on present-day events, often in improvised manner. It is likely that such a practice stretches back a few centuries, as variants of the some of these contemporary song texts can be found in the colonial historical record. As part of their exploration of the connections between colonial era and contemporary musical repertoire Tembembe often incorporates this improvisatory practice into their performances. In this particular instance, the group is celebrating that this concert is the first time the group has been able to perform together since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jarabe

Hermosísima sandía, sí valedor,
Mi corazón te idólatra.
Mi corazón te idólatra, sí valedor,
Hermosísima sandía, sí.

Yo te he de cortar la guía, sí valedor,
Sin que lo sienta la mata.
Sin que lo sienta la mata, sí valedor.
Yo te he de cortar la guía, sí

Desde aquel dichoso día, sí valedor
Que mi amor dejó de verte,
Que mi amor dejó de verte, sí valedor
Se me acabó la alegría, sí valedor
Se me revela la muerte.
Dios para qué me daría, sí valedor
tanto amor para quererte, sí.

¡Sí valedor!

Jarabe⁴

Beautiful watermelon, yes worthy one,
My heart idolizes you.
My heart idolizes you, yes worthy one,
Beautiful watermelon, yes.

I will have to cut off the vine, yes worthy one,
Without the plant noticing it.
Without the plant noticing it, yes, worthy one.
I will have to cut off the vine, yes

Since that happy day, yes worthy one,
When my love stopped seeing you,
When my love stopped seeing you, yes worthy one
My joy is over, yes worthy one
Death is revealed to me.
Why would God give me, yes worthy one,
so much love to love you, yes,

Yes worthy one!

⁴ Literally meaning syrup, a jarabe in Mexico is also a term for a suite of short dances that are played back-to-back in quick succession and feature couple dancing with vigorous *zapateo* (shoe tapping).

El Cielito Lindo

Ciento cincuenta pesos, Cielito Lindo,
Daba una viuda,
Pa' que le pongan cuernos, Cielito Lindo,
Al señor cura.
Se los pusieron,
Y como era viejito, Cielito Lindo,
Se le cayeron.

Ciento cincuenta pesos, Cielito Lindo,
Daba otra viuda,
Solo por la sotana, Cielito Lindo,
De cierto cura.
Y el cura le responde
Con gran contento,
Que no da la sotana
Si no va dentro.⁵

Sweetheart

A widow once offered
One hundred and fifty pesos, my sweetheart,
To cuckold a priest,
My sweetheart.
The cuckold's horns were put on,
But as he was an old man, my sweetheart,
The horns fell off.

Another widow once offered
One hundred and fifty pesos, my sweetheart,
Just for the cassock, my sweetheart,
Of a certain priest.
And the priest responded
With great satisfaction,
That he would not give the cassock
Unless he was wearing it.

⁵ Archivo General de la Nación, México, Inquisición, vol. 1377 (1796).

La Lloroncita-Los Ympossibles

No lloren ojos hermosos,
no lloren pues se hacen mal,
y es lástima que dos soles
queden turbios por llorar.⁶

¡Ay! de mi, Llorona, que lloro y que gimo,
Que la causa de mi llanto
Es una prenda que estimo,
Y por eso lloro y canto.

De tarde se me hace triste
De noche con más razón;
Llorando se me amanece
Llorando se pone el sol.

¡Ay! llorar, Llorona!
Mi alma déjame llorar,
Que la causa de mi llanto
Es que nunca supe amar,
Y por eso lloro y canto.

The Little Crying One – The Impossibles

Do not cry beautiful eyes,
do not cry for they are made unwell,
and it is a pity that two suns
are left cloudy from crying.

Oh, poor me! Llorona, that I cry and that I moan,
That the cause of my crying
It is a sweetheart that I am fond of,
And that's why I cry and sing.

In the afternoon it makes me sad
At night with more reason;
Crying, the dawn breaks
Crying, the sun sets.

Oh! Cry, Llorona!
My soul, let me cry,
That the cause of my crying
Is that I never knew how to love
And that is why I cry and sing.

⁶ “Estrivillo” de las poesías amorosas de fray Joseph Ignacio Troncoso, Puebla, 1795. Archivo General de la Nación-México, Inquisición, vol. 1385.

El Fandanguito

Señores, ¿qué son es éste?
Señores, el fandanguito.
La primera vez que lo oigo
Válgame Dios, pero que bonito.

Y a remar, y a remar,
A remar en el río,
Que aquel que no rema
No gana navío;
A remar, a remar en el agua
Que aquel que no rema
No gana piragua.

Anoche soñé con focas, con delfines.
Mar su brisa.
No escondía mi sonrisa
detrás de algún tapabocas.
Mis dichas no eran pocas.
Andaba por muchos suelos,
también visité los cielos.
En un sueño todo cabe.
No era un hombre,
Yo era un ave
Que volaba por los sueños.

Y a la [v]ela, a la [v]ela y más a la [v]ela,
Golpe de mar
Barquito de vela,
Dime mi bien para donde me llevas:
Si para España o para otras tierras,
O a navegar al mar para afuera.

The Little Fandango

Gentlemen, what song is this?
Gentlemen, the fandanguito.
The first time I hear it
Good heavens, but how nice.

And to row, and to row,
To row in the river,
That the one who does not row
Does not win a ship;
To row, to row in the water
That the one who does not row
He does not win a canoe.

Last night I dreamed of seals, of dolphins.
The breeze of the sea.
I did not hide my smile
behind some face mask.
My joys were not few.
I was in the dumps,
I also visited the heavens.
Everything fits in a dream.
I was not a man,
I was a bird
That flew through dreams.

And to the sail, to the sail, and more to the sail,
Sea blow
Little sail boat,
Tell me my good, where are you taking me?
If to Spain or to other lands,
Or to sail out to sea.

La Iguana

Dicen que la iguana muerde
pero yo digo que no,
yo agarré una por la cola
Nomás la lengua sacó.

Iguana mía ¿pa' dónde vas?
Voy pa' la hacienda de Nicolás,
O será mentira o será verdad
lo que andan diciendo aquí o allá,
y si fuera cierto qué novedad.

A tarín tantea
A la gea gea
Qué iguana tan fea
Que se sube al palo
Y se columpea
Se vuelve a subir
Y se zarandea
Pone su huevito
Y cacaraquea
Se mira al espejo
Porque está muy fea
Haga usted lo mismo
Para que lo crea
A la gea gea
A la gea gea
Dicen que la iguana muerde
Pero yo digo que no.

Y una iguana se fue al agua
Pa' ver qué cosa veía.
Y el iguano le lloraba
Y al ver que ella no salía

Iguana mía ¿para dónde vas?
Voy para el pueblo de Soledad,
Será mentira o será verdad
En este pueblo no hay novedad,
Y si la hubiera poco será.

Que tarín tantea
A la gea gea
Que toca el mosquito

The Iguana

They say that the iguana bites
but I say no, it doesn't
I grabbed one by the tail
It just stuck his tongue out.

My iguana, where are you going?
I'm going to Nicolas's farm,
Either it will be a lie or it will be true
what they are saying here or there,
and if it were true what news.

A finch asks around,
(Sounding *gea gea*)
What an ugly iguana
That climbs up the pole
And swings
She goes back to climbing
And it shakes
Lays her little egg
And clucks about it
Looks at herself in the mirror
Because she is very ugly
You do the same
For you to believe
(Sounding *gea gea*)
(Sounding *gea gea*)
They say that the iguana bites
But I say no.

And an iguana went into the water
To see what she was seeing.
And the male iguana was crying to her
And seeing that she did not come out

My iguana, where are you going?
I'm going to the town of Soledad,
It will be a lie, or it will be true
In this town there is no news,
And if there were, little will be.

That the finch asks around,
(Sounding *gea gea*)
That the mosquito plays⁷

⁷ In this passage, the text references traditional instruments being played customarily. The *mosquito* is the second-smallest sized instrument of the *jarana* family, which is comprised of guitar-shaped fretted instruments of at least five sizes. *Guacharaca* is another term for a gourd scraper, a percussion instrument also known as the *güiro* in many

Como mosquitera
Toca guacharaca
Que guacharaquea
Toca la jarana.
Cómo jaranea
Toca la barroca
Y que barroquea.
Toca el marimbol
Que marimbolea
A la gea gea.
A la gea gea.
Y una iguana se fue al agua
Pa' ver qué cosa veía.

As a mosquito should
That the guacharaca plays
As a guacharaca should
That the jarana plays
As the jarana should
The the barroca plays
As the barroca should
That the marímbula plays
As a marímbula should
(Sounding *gea gea*)
(Sounding *gea gea*)
And an iguana went into the water
To see what she was seeing.

parts of Latin American and the Caribbean. The term *barroca*, short for *guitarra barroca*, is a reference to the vihuela, and the *marimbol* or *marímbula* is a type of thumb piano or lamellophone, an instrument comprised of a resonating wooden box with plucked metal tines similar to the African *mbira* or *kalimba*.