



2
0
2
0

RMMSC

**Rocky Mountain Society for Music Theory
American Musicological Society, Rocky Mountain Chapter
Society for Ethnomusicology, South West Chapter**



Beyond The Canon: An Analytical Study Of Metrical Dissonances and Hypermetric Irregularity in Música Norteña/O De La Frontera

Mario Yuzo Nieto

University of Northern Colorado

Abstract

A long-standing requirement for earning a music degree from an accredited university is contingent upon successful completion of coursework in a specific department of music known as music theory. And despite the plethora of benefits for studying music theory, the curricular & instructional model itself is commonly described by a significant number of participants as being rather daunting, in relation to coursework in other music classes, and even lacking in practical application to one's artistic life or one's future career in music (with the exception of most music theory and/or composition majors). This gap in student motivation and engagement, when it comes to their theory coursework, is as unfortunate as it is self-perpetuating. However, findings from this study reveal that perhaps the original intent of music theory is in/of itself the true access point for students to connect and appreciate even its driest sides.

By presenting an innovative framework of music theory pedagogy to simply supplement current curricular/instructional models, this article aims to address the elephant in the room that currently afflicts traditional music theory schooling. To accomplish this, analytical techniques from classical music theory were synthesized and applied to a non-canonical/dominant genre of music, Norteña, in order to investigate changes in student engagement/motivation. The implications of this research suggest that 1) incorporating more genres of music that exist beyond the canon, and 2) expanding the framework of music theory/education to focus more on creating for the future and less on merely preserving the past (much like visual arts education does) will increase motivation, access and engagement for students' regarding the academic sphere of music.

Keywords:

Music theory, music analysis, ethnomusicology, multicultural music education, non-dominant music, culturally responsive music pedagogy Los Tucanes de Tijuana, "La Chona", Música Norteño.

Most of those involved in the contingent of people privy to the song ““La Chona”” recognize its tremendous popularity in Mexican culture (especially for N. Mexicans/Norteen@s).¹ From quinceañeras² to senior singles parties, the song has become an international phenomenon, transcending culture with music from them “dirty...enchilada”³ “wetbacks”⁴ of N. Mexico. And yes, the inclusion of a crass statement here is also intentional. It is meant to demonstrate how the dominant paradigm of whiteness in the U.S. attempts to govern cultural norms in order to maintain its almighty privilege in the face of losing its majority population within a few years.⁵ This very paradigm normalizes a pedagogical philosophy quick to dismiss a song like this or a genre like norteen@ because deep down, the U.S. has been conditioned to negatively stereotype Mexican culture/music and its often overlooked diversity: at once conflating its distinct music/culture with that of all of Latin@ America, while reducing the totality of the styles of the central/southern Americas as simply oompah music Mexicans took from Germany.⁶ And as culturally insensitive as these sentiments may sound, there are actually morsels of truth to them (e.g. the ironic nature of stereotype threat).

Thus, the aim of this study will focus on transforming harmful assumptions like these. This will be accomplished by placing norteen@ music in an advanced analytical framework of music theory in order to illuminate some of the highly intellectual components of a highly

¹ The use of the @ sign here is meant to imply linguistic gender neutrality in the Spanish language by applying both the male “o” and the female “a” word-endings simultaneously. This will show up elsewhere in this article.

² The word *quinceañera* refers to a large-scale celebration of the transition to womanhood, signified in Mexican culture by a girl’s 15th birthday.

³ Teo Armus, “‘Then Why Didn’t You Stay in Mexico?’: A Latino Dad was Interrupted by a White Man at Meeting about Racism in Schools,” *The Washington Post*, Feb. 4, 2020;

https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/02/04/schools-racism-mexico/?fbclid=IwAR2Eu3RBSffngDF0Fn6Eb3qm30-gSIFSP1UkNlbZlcrKT_5W0f64IKJXh4w

⁴ “Morgan Whitaker, “GOP candidate defends use of ‘wetback’ slur,” MSNBC, October 5, 2013; <http://www.msnbc.com/politicsnation/gop-chris-mapp-defends-racial-slur>

⁵ Vicki R. Lind and Constance L. McKoy. *Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education: from Understanding to Application* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 33.

⁶ Alejandro L. Madrid, *Music in Mexico: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 78–80.

marginalized, yet unmistakably sophisticated genre typically overlooked in school-music settings. Ultimately, the key findings point to an absolute necessity for both its inclusion, and the inclusion of a plethora of musics/genres commonly ignored by the academically elite spheres of formalized music education and beyond.

Sin Fronteras:⁷ “La Chona” Around the World

After randomly stumbling upon “La Chona” via my Facebook feed, I began noticing the tremendous popularity of this song amongst many Mexican@ and Chican@ communities. I became aware of an online article entitled “7 Videos That Prove ‘La Chona’ Can Start a Party Anywhere.”⁸ In his post, Eduardo Cepeda displays a diverse palette of YouTube videos portraying widely-varied, yet equally appreciated contexts with “La Chona” as the focal point. From a video depicting a large group of decidedly Russian soccer fans celebrating the World Cup by dancing/singing to “La Chona” in the streets, to clips of major celebrities like Snoop Dogg boogying down to the song in the privacy of his own tour-bus, this post sculpted a clear image of “La Chona”’s universal appeal—an affinity that by no means is isolated solely to ethnically Mexican people who love norteñ@, but emerges as an international phenomenon! Why though?

Música Norteñ@

As a proper noun, the word Norteño refers to folks from Northern Mexico, and as a genre of music, *musica norteña* literally translates to English as “northerner music” or more

⁷ In a translation from Spanish to English, the phrase “sin fronteras” means “without borders.”

⁸ Eduardo Cepeda, “7 videos that prove “La Chona” can start a party anywhere,” *Remezcla*, <https://remezcla.com/lists/music/la-chona-can-start-a-party-anywhere/>, 2019.

specifically, music from the borderland region between Mexico and the United States—like an approaching codetta in sonata form: the closer we move towards it, the more blurred the line becomes.⁹ Authentically norteamerican musical groups such as *Los Tucanes de Tijuana* undoubtedly embody the concept of living “sin fronteras” / existing as a “crossroads.”¹⁰ This is especially apparent in the compositional design of the song ““La Chona”” with its ability to transcend language/culture/time/space in both its naturally universal appeal and its ability to avoid the nearly inevitable phase of annoyance upon the repetitious playing of instantaneously catchy music.

An English translation of the lyrical poetry (see Figure 1) written by Los Tucanes frontman and lead-composer, Mario Quintero-Lara, sheds light on the deeper contextual meaning of the composition. A narrative is constructed of a woman (“La Chona”) who revels in her identity as an excellent, but carefree dancer, taking pride in her involvement in a bar-culture that consists primarily of the celebratory and often debauchorous consumption of alcoholic beverages followed by promiscuous behaviors. A surface-level explanation of a “Chona” describes a person who is the “most wild woman of the party”; however, as a colloquialism it goes further to describe such an individual as someone who “embraces the walk of shame” so to speak.

⁹ Dr. Michael Oravitz, class lecture attended by author, December 2019.

¹⁰ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The new Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987), 119.

Figure 1. Lyrics to ““La Chona”” with English translation

La Chona¹ de Los Tucanes de Tijuana	Wild Woman by The Toucans of Tijuana
[A: Intro] (hablado) Y arriba yo, mi apa, y la Chona!	[A: Intro] (Spoken) Up with me, my dad, and la Chona!
[B: Verso] Contare le historia de una famosa persona. Todos la conocen con el apodo de Chona. Todos la conocen con el apodo de Chona.	[B: Verse] I'll tell you the story of a famous city person. Everybody knows her and La Chona is her name. Everybody knows her and La Chona is her name.
Su marido dice ya no se que hacer con ella. Diario va a los bailes y se compra una botella. Diario va a los bailes y se compra una botella.	Her husband is crying, he doesn't know what to do. Daily, she is dancing and spending on her booze. Daily, she is dancing and spending on her booze.
Se arranca la banda con la primera cancion. Y la chona luego luego busca bailador. Y la chona luego luego busca bailador.	The band has started, they're playing the first song. La Chona is ready, looking for a dancing boy. La Chona is ready, looking for a dancing boy.
La gente la mira y le empieza a gritar. Bravo bravo chona nadie te puede igualar. Bravo bravo chona nadie te puede igualar.	People are watching and they're all singing aloud. "Bravo Chona no one can dance as good as you." "Bravo Chona no one can dance as good as you."
[C: Coro] Y la chona se mueve, y la gente le grita. No hay mejor que la chona, para la quebradita. Y la chona se mueve, al ritmo que le toquen. Ella baila de todo, nunca pierde su trote	[C: Chorus] And La Chona is moving, and the people are yelling. No one is like La Chona, dancing the <i>quebradita</i> . ² And La Chona is dancing any rhythm they're playing, Music of any kind, she never loses her trotting.
¹ Usually thought to be the "most wild woman of the party," but as a colloquialism it goes further to describe such an individual as "embracing the walk of shame" as some might say (Garcia, 2019).	
² A Mexican dance that involves a male and a female dancer. The male dancer lowers the female backwards almost to the point where she touches the floor.	

Formal Music Theory Analysis

Music theory scholar David Beach identifies “three major stages” in the analytic process: (a) formal design; (b) motivic organization—harmonic, melodic and metric; and (c) contrapuntal structure.¹¹ Perhaps an investigatory approach conducted through these frames will lead to a clearer explanation for the *Chona Phenomenon*.

¹¹ David Beach, “The Analytic Process: A Practical Demonstration (the opening theme from Beethoven's Op. 26),” *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 28 (2014), 8–9.

A) An Analysis of “La Chona”’s Formal Design according to Beach’s concept indicates that the structural form of the song is most like a 7-part rondo according to dominant structures of Classical formal analysis.¹² Both the rondo and the song by Los Tucanes contain “a principal thematic idea, the...‘refrain’ or ‘theme,’ [that] alternates regularly with two or more contrasting passages.”¹³ However, despite being most congruent with the commonly known seven-part rondo, “La Chona” has a slightly different structure that one could interpret as an ABCA’ BCA” form, rather than the prototypical ABACABA organization inherited in seven-part and sonata rondos.¹⁴ Also, on a broader level, one could hear BC as a single, once-recurring musical idea, thus creating the prototypical rondo form of ABA’BA”. In the following segments, these musical sections will be detailed mindfully in order to represent *Norteñismo*¹⁵ as responsibly as possible regarding non-Western cultures in the dominant Eurocentric loci in which the song will be examined.

Phrasal Presentation in the Opening Theme / Section {A} of “La Chona”

The A-Section {A} is conceptually similar to a “head” in jazz. Heads are commonly known to consist of a fairly catchy main musical motif or theme interspersed between solo-improvisational sections; presented and repeated one or more times throughout a jazz tune; and utilized consistently to open/close a song but are frequently heard at least one other time in a tune.¹⁶ Similarly, the primary theme contained in the Section {A} of “La Chona” is performed on

¹² Beach, “The Analytic Process,” 8–9.

¹³ William Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form: An Approach for the Classroom* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 642.

¹⁴ Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form*, 642.

¹⁵ Dr. Adriana Nieto (professor of Chicana/o Studies MSU Denver) in discussion with the author, November 2019. *Norteñismo* is Spanish for Norteño identity and culture.

¹⁶ Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 63.

the lead norteco instrument—the accordion—and both opens and closes the song (see Figure 2 below), repeating with slightly different phrasing for each return.¹⁷ But this opening theme might just be the most fascinating part of the whole composition, to be discussed below.

By returning to the proposed Classical framework of analysis, a question arises: Does “La Chona”’s “loose-knit”¹⁸ opening theme function more as a sentence or period when placed in the context of formal classical analysis? In-depth theoretical analysis suggests that the opening theme here performs slightly more like a *sentence*, than its cousin the *period* (although it exhibits aspects of both). This is due in large part to an absence of any identifiable cadential material existing between an initial basic idea [b.i.¹] in mm. .075-3, and a contrasting idea [c.i.¹] in mm. 4.75–7 (see Figure 2 markings below in red).

Figure 2. Score sample for Section {A} of “La Chona” with analysis; original handwritten transcription by Mario Yuzo Nieto.

¹⁷ These variations can be heard in Sections {A’} and {A”} but are not represented in Figure 2.

¹⁸ William Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form: An Approach for the Classroom* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 203. “Loose [knit] organization promotes structural *instability*.”

La Chona by Los Tucanes de Tijuana
(transcription by Yuzo Niwa)

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the piece "La Chona" by Los Tucanes de Tijuana, transcribed by Yuzo Niwa. The score is written on five staves, with the top two staves for the vocal line and the bottom three for guitar accompaniment. The music is in 4/4 time. The score is annotated with various labels and lines. A green box labeled "Hypermetric Misalignment" points to a melodic phrase in the vocal line. A purple box labeled "Displacement Dissonance!" points to a dissonant interval in the vocal line. A yellow box labeled "V7/IV: G Mixolydian" points to a chord in the guitar accompaniment. A red box labeled "W.C." (Cadential Conclusion) is at the end of the piece. Other labels include "[B.i.1]", "[C.i.1]", "[C.i.2]", "[B.i.2]", and "[C.i.2 (cont')]". The score is marked with measure numbers 4, 8, and 12.

According to Caplin, a cadence here between [c.i.¹] and [c.i.²], even a half or very weak cadence, is necessary for this section to be approximately identified as a *period*.¹⁹ On the other hand, since the organization of the {A} begins with an initial basic idea [b.i.¹] and is then followed by two (2) contrasting ideas in a row [c.i.¹ & ²]²⁰—rather than the single (1) c.i. found in archetypical *sentences*²⁰—all before its return back to the 2nd basic idea [b.i.²], ending finally with the cadential conclusion following 16+ measures of melodic/harmonic content (marked “[W.C.]” in Figure 2 above)—its structure complicates its ability to fit into either of these categories with certainty.

¹⁹ Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form*,” 35–41 and 73–79. A sentence lacks a cadence at the end of its first phrase while a period does not.

²⁰ Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form*,” 35–41 and 73–79.

Referenced earlier, Caplin's text *Analyzing Classical Form* provides insight regarding the inability of "La Chona" to fit perfectly into traditional concepts of phrase structure. Because when viewed through an alternate lens, one could argue that it has some loose resemblances to certain aspects of *sentential* design, rather than *periodic*, considering its 2nd basic idea [b.i.²] comes back after its 2nd contrasting idea [c.i.²] and cadences at the end—which is reminiscent of common options for "presentation phrase" design.²¹ Either way, the various {A} sections are still slightly incongruent to working definitions of the sentence or period according to Caplin. From this understanding, however, the necessary cadence between the periodic pseudo themes, labeled the *antecedent* and *consequent* of a period, obviously must be ignored. And the formulaic construction here contrasts even further with Classical definitions of *sentential* design because the phrase does not end with a normative "continuation" or "continuation-cadential phrase" most common to sentences, and instead repeats [b.i.¹] and adds a cadence to conclude it. Harmonically, the accompanying parts in {A} establish the G tonic throughout on the G⁷ chord (I^{Mm7}), but the phrase does not conclude with the perfect authentic cadence (PAC) or proper V-I harmonic motion necessary to accurately identify it as a *period*.²²

B) Contrapuntal Structure of {A}. Instead of the necessary PAC mentioned above, the A-section's cadential material hinges upon its continued emphasis of the G⁷ chord (a I chord with a flat 7th in G major: so G B D F natural) throughout the first 15 bars. Even though its ending does not contain all ingredients necessary to be identified as a genuine PAC, according to academic music theory rules, it still can be interpreted as cadential.²³ This is due to: (1) the melodic material of the accordion part sustaining the F (^b7) for three measures, particularly during b.i.²

²¹ Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form*," 35–41 and 73–79.

²² Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form*," 35–41 and 73–79.

²³ Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form*," 15.

(m. 12–14), which is preceded by the vague suggestive iii° chord (B diminished) spelled out by a sixteenth-note anacrusis or pick up measure of B to D to the sustained F natural in the accordion’s lead melody, and underscored by the constant D-F-G line in the bass (at once slightly reminiscent of the dominant function $\text{Dm}11$ and the tonic I^{b7}); and (2) the final trio of three accented G major chords, harmonically/metrically-unified between all instrumental parts in mm. 16, during which both the bass and accordion move from a subtonic (F) to the tonic (G), all while the guitar loses its previously-emphasized F natural—which ALL suggests a slight modal shift from the original impression of a more dissonant G Mixolydian to the decidedly consonant G Ionian (e.g. the G Major home key). Thus, the melodic/harmonic material presented in mm. 16 does in fact have a cadential function due in part by the bass/soprano subtonic(s) resolving by step (although creating “part-writing errors” of parallel octaves²⁴), combined with the phrasal dominant-to-tonic conclusive harmonic sequencing.

Motivic Organization P. 1: Metrical Dissonances *Section {A}*

In a transformative book entitled *Fantasy Pieces* that explores meter and expression in the music of Robert Schumann, Harald Krebs coins the concept of “metrical dissonance.”²⁵ Here, Krebs defines the idea of “metrical dissonance” or MD as musical moments of “conflict against the primary meter as it is represented by the bar lines and the time signature.”²⁶ Inspired by this departure from the normal “hypermeter” of a song—e.g. the “meter beyond the level designated by the bar lines” (Krebs, 2011, p. 185)—the concept of MD can infuse music with an

²⁴ Dr. Reiner Krämer (professor of music theory, UNCO 2020), in-class discussion with author, Nov. 2018.

²⁵ Harald Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁶ Harald Krebs, “Meter and Expression in Robert Schumann’s Op. 90,” in *Rethinking Schumann*, edited by Roe-Min Kok & Laura Tunbridge (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 185.

unconventional dimension of tension/relaxation in the meter, having a similar effect as the more normalized concept of harmonic tension/resolution (typically heard in the form of cadential material). Furthermore, Krebs' (2011) model of "metrical dissonance" (MD) takes on two basic forms: 1) displacement dissonance (DD) involving "the association of congruent but nonaligned durational layers"; and 2) grouping dissonance (GD) arising from "the association of different groupings of pulses, that is, the association of incongruent layers" (p. 183). Could an analysis of the A-section's MDs (and subsequent resolutions) listed above be the key to unlocking the Chona Phenomenon?

Cross examination of the opening theme presented in {A}, reveals the presence of "displacement dissonance" (DD) that subconsciously/intrinsically adjusts an auditor's acuity of hypermetric regularity. Judging by Los Tucanes' placement of the repeated contrasting idea in the opening phrase—see Figure 2 above, labeled [c.i.²], mm. 8.25—Charles Hasty's "theory of projection"²⁷ contends that both the advanced and novice listener would expect the D to land on beat one (1) of measure nine (or 9.25), however, since that D has been displaced to fall on beat three of measure eight [8.75], the mind of the listener is subconsciously confused for a moment, because in a very short amount of time, it naturally "projects" or confuses beat three with beat one (see Figure 2: "Displacement Dissonances" highlighted in purple). This is because "projective...potential is realized if and when there is a new beginning [of previous thematic musical content] whose durational potential is determined by the now past first event."²⁸ In "La Chona," Los Tucanes' acordeonista/accordionist Alfredo González momentarily alters the audience's perception of "projective potential" and/or "hypermeter" with his lead melodic line by waiting two beats to begin 2nd c.i., thus creating the momentous MD of {A}. The cadence, then,

²⁷ Charles Hasty, "Meter as Projection," in *Meter as Rhythm* (New York: Oxford, 1997), 275–293.

²⁸ Hasty, "Meter as Projection," 84.

begins six (6) beats late—as the convention of gestural utterances of basic ideas occur in steady, two-measure units—whereas, the “normative” restatement would begin with a pickup to measure seven.²⁹

Additionally, this displacement of [c.i.²] creates added tension, thus forming a moment of “hypermetric misalignment” (HMA).³⁰ During instances such as these, the “hyperdownbeat” of one motivic instrumental/voice part unfolds in metric opposition to another concurrent musical part/s.³¹ On one hand, the bass line’s motivic material during {A} is modally G Mixolydian (over G Major, see Figure 2 above) and composed of a terrifically repetitious set of quarter note tonics falling on beats 1 and 3, which are both immediately followed and preceded by a pair of eighth notes moving from D–F natural. A notated representation is highlighted in yellow and displayed in the Bass section of Figure 2, specifically in mm. 1 and/or 9 where the line is actually notated instead of being represented by the long set of repeat signs that follow as written in the score. This contrasts with the everchanging perception of the “hyperdownbeat” regarding the accordion’s phrasal rhythm of both c.i.’s, wavering between the metric articulation of the anacrusis on a weak beat, and the ensuing rhythmic accent on a strong beat immediately following its anacrusis. Not to mention, as indicated in mm. 9 in the transcription above (see Figure 2 above), the change in the voicing from a 4/2 position to a 7 position regarding the guitar’s G⁷ chord is evidence that there is a “marker” (so to speak) at m. 9 that demarcates the hypermetric downbeat that is being “danced upon by the accordion” so to speak.³²

However, as evidenced on recording as it is in transcription, the seemingly trite repetitious nature of Mario Moreno’s bass line highlighted here only adds to the song’s

²⁹ Dr. Michael Oravitz in editorial commentary on this paper, January 2020.

³⁰ Krebs, “Meter and Expression,” 186.

³¹ Krebs, “Meter and Expression,” 193.

³² Dr. Michael Oravitz in editorial commentary on this paper, January 2020.

complexity. Plunging even deeper into this beloved low-register accompaniment reveals its hidden identity as a multi-tasker. And yet, the unfortunate truth remains: a repetitious accompanying line such as this becomes too often stereotyped as “intellectually simple” or trite in normative music school contexts: deemed inferior for the likes of academia and/or by college-educated musician-types.³³

In reality, Moreno’s seemingly “simplistic” bass line is multidimensional in nature. More specifically, it establishes the hypermeter of {A} by rhythmically accenting the G on strong beats 1 & 3, leveraging the tonic to maintain an extreme level of “projective regularity,”³⁴ while simultaneously maintaining the {A}’s mixolydian modality by continuously revisiting the b7 of G major (namely the F natural) with each subsequent upbeat on the “&s” of beats 2 and 4 throughout the section (see the selection circled in yellow in Figure 2 above). And bassist Moreno does this all while creating the initial moment of HMA with the guitar rhythm as mentioned above. Furthermore, the subtlety of the guitar’s chordal/harmonic phrasal rhythm is encompassed in Quintero Lara’s uninterrupted upstroke-picking-style, naturally illuminating the notes of the most high-pitched strings of his *pasaye*³⁵ classical acoustic/electric guitar’s upper harmonic register, while emphasizing the &s of beats one (1) and three (3) respectively. And in the spirit of being culturally responsive, Quintero Lara’s “guitar” here is specific type called the *bajo quinto* amongst Nortén@s—a derivative to the more standard *bajo sexto* with a similar setup to the standard 12-string guitar but with only five pairs (or 10-strings) across the fretboard instead of six pairs of strings: basically as if the low E-string pair were missing from a standard

³³ Randall Everett Allsup, “Music Teacher Quality and the Problem of Routine Expertise,” *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 23, no. 1 (2015): 1–24.

³⁴ Wallace Berry, “Metric and Rhythmic Articulation in Music,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 7 (1985): 10.

³⁵ Los Tucanes de Tijuana, *Me Robaste el Corazón*, Fonovisa Records, compact disc.

12-string guitar.³⁶ And like the borderland / la frontera identity of Norteno@ itself, like two rivers, these two incongruent melodic parts come together to create a confluence; a polyrhythmic aural formation arising out of the interplay of a continuously replenishing call-and-response instrumental landscape. These seemingly “unintellectual” parts ultimately form a highly conversational, harmonically polyrhythmic musical accompaniment ascending from the sonic intercourse between two metrically disparate melodic profiles superimposed upon each other.

Like a *responsorial* communicated between the bajo quinto (guitar) and the electric bass accompaniment here, this interplay also function to infuse Los Tucanes’ norteña/o tradition with an originally Colómbian, but popularly Norteño/Tejano style of dance and music (popularized in N. America in the 1980s and 90s by Selena Quintanilla) known as *cumbia*.³⁷ However, the song diverges somewhat from a pure *cumbia* style in that it omits crucial rhythmic material played on the *güiro* in authentic *cumbia* contexts.³⁸ This traditional instrument is played by essentially scraping a metal hair-pick back and forth rhythmically upon a cylindrical aluminum washboard—but it is often maintained on hi-hat or shaker when an actual *güiro* is not available. Without going too far into detail, the important thing to note is that a percussive instrument maintains a specific set of 3 sixteenth-notes expressed onomatopoeically as “Ćhu, chúcu Ćhu, chúcu Ćhu...” or counted in N. American as “1, and-a-2, and-a-3...” respectively.³⁹ And although this event further expands upon the *Chona Phenomenon*, it does not yet fully explain it.

³⁶ Catherine Ragland, *Música Norteña: Mexican-Americans Creating a Nation Between Nations* (Temple University Press, 2009), 122.

³⁷ Manuel Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-class Music* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1985), 202.

³⁸ Alejandro Madrid, *Music in Mexico: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 63–64.

³⁹ Madrid, *Music in Mexico*, 64.

Nevertheless, the juxtaposed bass line's natural rhythmic propensity to maintain regular or "predominant hypermeter,"⁴⁰ and the guitar's harmonically/metrically syncopated phrasal composition here, reveals that "La Chona"'s "opening theme" contains compounding dimensions of theoretically-complicated musical dissonances (as presented in Figures 2 and 3, mm. 1–16). But this level of phrasal complexity is generally deemed to be a sole function of the European "masters" maintained in the music of the Academe, even though MD and resolution exists in even the earliest Guinean/Malian W. African highly rhythmic music.⁴¹ However, even the staunchest music theory academics would have trouble arguing against the enormous genius involved in composing a 16+ bar passage of music with two different types of MDs, namely "grouping dissonance" and momentary "hypermetric misalignment," that is not only accessible but highly engaging to general audiences and music aficionados alike.⁴²

Figure 3. Author's analysis of {B}.

⁴⁰ Gretchen Horlacher, "Bartók's 'Change of Time': Coming Unfixed," *Society for Music Theory* 7, no. 1, (2001): 2.

⁴¹ Richard Nidel, *World Music: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 38–42.

⁴² Krebs, "Meter and Expression," 186.

Handwritten musical score for "Verse 1" with annotations. The score includes staves for VO (Vocal), Guitar, Bass, and Accordion. The lyrics are in French. Annotations include a blue circle around the first measure, a purple circle around the second measure, and a blue circle around the third measure. A red box labeled "Cadential Repetition" is placed over the first two measures. A blue box labeled "Plagal Cadence vs. Neighboring Harmonic Motion?" is placed over the third measure. The score is divided into sections: [Antecedent] bi_A, D Maj., [Consequent] bi_c, G Maj., and [2nd x].

Furthermore, the phrasal regularity of the combined bass/guitar accompaniment juxtaposes with a hypermetric accent on a weak, syncopated beat created during the onset of the accordion's initial phrase rhythm (see Figure 3 circled in blue and purple respectively). This becomes apparent upon analysis of the accordion's anacrusis (aka "pick-up note/s") of [c.i.¹] highlights on the "&" of four in mm. 4, as compared to the same anacrusis of [c.i.²], except that here it highlights on the "&" of two (mm. 8)—resolving metrically in the following measure by returning the metric articulation to the downbeat or "the one (1)" during [b.i.²] (see Figure 2 "Displacement Dissonances" in purple above). Theory scholar Gretchen Horlacher describes this "change of time" as a shift of our "notion of what the meter might be" by displacing the listener's hypermetric perception of the metrically-accented downbeat (as with mm. 8) within a

very short time span.⁴³ Additionally, holding the D natural or harmonic 5th of G major for a full 1.5 bars (m. 6.15–7 and again in m. 9.45–11.2) in the lead accordion melody easily confuses the listener’s perception of hypermeter almost instantaneously, because that D lasts long enough for one to understandably misplace where beat one (1) is, momentarily complicating the actual hypermeter with the perceived hypermeter and furthermore, causing {A} to feel like it ends later than one would expect/hope...or earlier in the case of {A’}. Add an almost painfully steady and repetitive bass/guitar “harmonic rhythm” (as described above), and this “displacement dissonance” gains an increased appearance on paper while simultaneously sounding more obscured or normalized within the phrase.⁴⁴

Motivic Organization P. 2: The Momentous Functionality of a Tripartite Resolution

As mentioned previously, the opening accordion theme in {A} concludes with cadential material found in mm. 16 that could be described as an “agogic arrival” (see Figure 2 above marked “W.C.” in red).⁴⁵ Might this single measure of the song contain the necessary information needed to finally explain the *Chona Phenomenon*? Considering the double metrical resolution of both the HMA between the guitar/bass rhythms and the DD created by [c.i.²] of the

⁴³ Horlacher, 5.

⁴⁴ Berry, 10.

⁴⁵ Oravitz, (2019). The term “agogic arrival” literally means the emergence of metric (or hypermetric) accentuation, but is used amongst music theory scholars to describe the addition of musical material leading up to a structural cadence, used by masters and layman composers alike, often used to signal a cadential arrival and has been known to momentarily displace the listener’s ‘projection’ of the arrival of an important cadence. One of the main defining features of an *agogic arrival* occurs when a song seems to instantaneously switch from a musical landscape characterized by fast note-rate values, to a sonic condition comprised of long notational values, often held over the measure/s. For example, when you hear Mozart trilling for a few measures on one note before cadencing, you have probably come across an agogic arrival. And although it functions along the same lines as a “deceptive cadence,” the agogic arrival, however, is more concerned with metric projection rather than the more typical harmonic/melodic function of the former. Nevertheless, the *agogic arrival* can be leveraged to build tonal energy while simultaneously delaying the gratification of a protectively-realized cadence for the listener while creating a relatively short moment of prolonged tension for the listener, which like “La Chona,” makes the inevitable cadence feel that much sweeter than it would have felt had it merely realized your hypermetric projection for you.

opening accordion theme; combined with the harmonic resolution/cadence (marked “W.C” or weak cadence in Figure 2 above) from the tonally “unstable” mixolydian modal material of (or G^7 over B^o), and the harmonic shift to the stable/resolute G Major chord. This amalgamation here forms a trifecta of consonance: at once progressing from an area of triple metrical/harmonic tension (HMA + DD + the emphasized F natural with its subtle minor hints in the I^{Mm7} chord = dissonance³) to a harmonically-resolute cadence that functions in tandem with a state of complete metrical-re/alignment.

And it is this THREE-FOLD RESOLUTION that most effectively explains the Chona Phenomenon (yay)! In an analysis of the {B} section that immediately follows this triple-resolution in mm. 16 (see Figure 2 above), the section’s diatonically-melodic/harmonic consonance paralleled with its rhythmic regularity of hypermeter, combine together to characterize {B}. Upon merging of the suggested modal shift—implied in the movement from the mixolydian mode to the dominant Ionian or G-major—together with the harmonically resolute cadence and the paired “metric resolutions” the DD and HMA in the last measure of {A}, something magical happens with the onset of the {B} section.⁴⁶ This is felt in its almost grotesquely consonant vocal line (both metrically *and* harmonically), comprised of a simple/repetitive “phrase rhythm”⁴⁷ and melodically characterized by a series of diatonically/metrically consonant $\frac{1}{8}$ th note, chord tones (mainly) that make up the vocal phrase. And the bass/guitar accompaniment is also quite metrically consonant and maintains a resolute harmonic function with a set of repeating authentic cadences moving from the V to I chord repeatedly. But the main point of all of this analysis of {B} in Figure 3 is to seal our

⁴⁶ Krebs, “Meter and Expression,” 186–7.

⁴⁷ William Rothstein, “What Is Phrase? What Is Phrase Rhythm?” in *Phrase-Rhythm in Tonal Music* (New York: Schirmer Books. 1989), 3–14.

understanding of the absolute harmonic, metric, and melodic consonance of this secondary section.

Consider how this intellectually complex, aurally seamless moment of pure musical genius unfolds: 1) it begins with the presentation of a remarkable trio of melodically/rhythmically tense dissonances that define {A}; 2) it is followed by the phrase's subsequent tridimensional resolution in m. 16 (harmonic + DD + HMA); and 3) it culminates in the extremely fortuitous juxtaposition between the multidimensionally dissonant, yet aurally pleasing²³ opening theme of {A}, and the comprehensively consonant {B} section, characterized by simple/predictable phrase rhythms of the diatonic lead vocal melody and the hypermetric regularity maintained between all instrumental and vocal parts. Furthermore, it is not just this multileveled resolution that makes song so magical, but how this trifecta of tension is prolonged to the very last possible moment before it releases into an entirely musically consonant {B} section—not to mention, the complexity and “pleasing suppleness” to the vocal line, given its six-bar phrasing (2-bar antecedent phrase + 2-bar consequent phrase + 2-bar restatement consequent to make 6)—all combining to make it nearly impossible for anyone to refrain from cracking a smile and moving their body to the phenomenology that is “La Chona” by Los Tucanes.

Intentionality of Metrical Dissonances in “La Chona”

Short of conducting an in-person interview with accordionist Alfredo González on his deliberate use of hypermetrical displacement during the opening theme of “La Chona,” one can only speculate on the purposiveness of his implementation of this rhythmic device. But after deep/active listening and extensive research, it would appear as though this musical choice was

at least somewhat intentional. And this statement is not just as an attempt to elevate perceptions about the intellectuality of music beyond the canon. Rather, it comes from examining the song through the combined perspective of performer/analyst, such that the accordion theme of every {A} section—as represented on studio recordings and in live performance—should be considered semi-improvisational because its main theme is played slightly differently each time, regarding metric placements of basic/contrasting ideas and total durations of held/tied whole notes. For example, the phrase in the 2nd {A} i.e. A' on the studio recording contains no MDs (both c.i.'s land on beat 1) and cadences starting on beat 3 of its twelfth measure which eliminates the need for the added $\frac{6}{4}$ measure (as opposed to the original cadence beginning on beat 1 of m. 16), whereas the lead melody in {A''} is identical to {A} minus the two-beat transitional anacrusis measure of $\frac{2}{4}$ between {A}/{B}, since it moves directly into {C} instead.

But it should only be considered semi-improvisational since each {A} contains consistent melodic, phrasal, and cadential profiles across versions. Therefore, it would appear that González intentionally displaces the meter, but in an improvised fashion by merely over-anticipating and/or hesitating to begin or end presentation/continuation material by a few beats, and then simply cuing the trio of accented-quarter-notes in real time to signal the cadence. Furthermore, an immersion in Norteno via countless playlists on Spotify/YouTube, reveals some additional occurrences of MDs and/or extended hypermeter contained in this genre. For example:

- I. *Bajara de Oro* by Ramon Ayala & Cornelio Reyna—MD in a few accordion ritornellos.
- II. *El Tucanzo* by Los Tucanes de Tijuana—extension of hypermeter by accordion theme that creates an added $\frac{6}{4}$ measure that occurs regularly throughout the song. Surprisingly, this goes rather unnoticed to the listener, as opposed to most occurrences of irregular meter.

III. *La Puerta Negra* by Los Tigres del Norte—grouping dissonances via vocal phrasing.

Considering this handful of examples along with numerous occurrences of MDs throughout the continuum of musical genres in Mexico, Latin America, and beyond, it is quite likely that González intentionally employed this device, however, it is unlikely he knew the effect it would finally have.

Conclusion and Future Implications for Research

Thus, the three interdisciplinary levels of musical resolution provided in m. 16 cause listeners everywhere to experience an advanced level of musical tension and subsequent release in just under 3 seconds: the likelihood that such a multifaceted musical resolution will generate a similarly large effect on the general music consumer in a different song is unlikely. And this statement is not meant to be a to suggest that noone else but Los Tucanes possesses the ability/creativity to write a phrase structure that matches the complexity of the {A} of “La Chona,” but rather, it is meant reinforce obvious intellectual complexities of a song/genre that might otherwise be overlooked, especially in academia. Which begs the question: Why/how have we not expanded music education *beyond the canon* of western music, when studies like this only begin to scratch the surface at the endless possibilities non-canonical music has to offer, namely the infinite combinations of sounds that form all of the breathtaking songs and genres on our planet ignored by the Academy, most of which could lend themselves magnificently to formal analysis? What other hurdles await and what else will be needed for music education as a whole to finally shift it’s thinking and to embrace/implement a whole new world of possibilities such as this? Why do we insist on the continued denial of access to “open forms” of music

education: not only to our youth, but to those students who have a spectacularly virtuosic backgrounds in say *non*-Western styles of music but who have never dreamed of applying to music school: mainly because of fear of auditioning in non-familiar styles of music (like Classical for many) or of passing music theory class.⁴⁸ But to the very “purveyors” of academic knowledge themselves—the professors/scholars leading the force in the preservation of these outdated traditions—why imprison yourself and everyone else in such a limited spectrum when an infinitely expansive one is just waiting to be explored? If it is fear of change, fear of the unknown, or of being forced to throw out everything you learned to teach things that are considered “low-art” in relation to the “advanced palate” obtained through rigorous training in the Academe? Fear not, for as Karl Marx so poignantly, “you have nothing to lose but your chains!” And when the composition you began (upon reading this article) finally comes to life, dancing off of the page and into the audience of listeners there to hear *your* latest expressions of emotion, you can thank me to the wind, and I’ll receive it with humility and appreciation for your self-incurred growth!

⁴⁸ Lind & McKoy, 25–35.

References

- Allsup, Randall Everett. "Music Teacher Quality and the Problem of Routine Expertise". *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 23, no. 1 (2015): 5-24.
- Anzaldúa, G. *Borderlands/la frontera: The new Mestiza*. San Francisco, CA: Spinsters/Aunt Lute. 1987.
- Armus, Teo. "“Then Why Didn’t You Stay in Mexico?”: A Latino Dad was Interrupted by a White Man at Meeting about Racism in Schools," The Washington Post, Feb. 4, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/02/04/schools-racism-mexico/?fbclid=IwAR2Eu3RBSffngDF0Fn6Eb3qm30-gSIFSP1UkNlbZlcrKT_5W0f64IKJXh4w
- Beach, David. "The analytic process: A practical demonstration. The opening theme from Beethoven's Op. 26." *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 28 (2014): 7-25.
- Berdan, F. F. "Mesoamerica: Mexica." In *Encyclopedia of Mexico: History, Society & Culture*, edited by M. S. Werner. London, UK: Routledge, 1998.
- Berliner, Paul. *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Berry, W. "Metric and rhythmic articulation in music." *Music Theory Spectrum* 7 (1985): 7-33
- Caplin, William Earl. *Analyzing Classical Form: An Approach for the Classroom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Cepeda, E. "7 videos that prove ‘La Chona’ can start a party anywhere." *Remezcla* (2019). Retrieved from <https://remezcla.com/lists/music/la-chona-can-start-a-party-anywhere/>
- Garcia, E. From Spanish to English: A discussion of the descriptor, "La Chona". *Pink Hawks Rehearsal*. Talk presented at a discussion at "Firetruck Red," November 2019. Denver, CO.
- Hasty, Christopher. "Meter as projection." In *Meter as Rhythm*, edited by Christopher Hasty, 275-293. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Horlacher, G. G. "Bartók’s ‘Change of Time’: Coming unfixed." *Society for Music Theory* 7, no. 1 (2001): 1-8.
- Kerman, J. "How we got into analysis, and how to get out." *Critical Inquiry* 7, no 2 (1980), 311-331. Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/1343130
- Krebs, Harald. "Meter and expression in Robert Schumann’s op. 90." In *Rethinking Schumann*, edited by Roe-Min Kok & Laura Tunbridge, 183-205. New York, NY: Oxford. 2011.

- _____. *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Lind, Vicki R., and Constance L. McKoy. *Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education: From Understanding to Application*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Los Tucanes de Tijuana. ““La Chona”.” Lyrics by Mario Quintero-Lara. On *Me robaste el corazón*. Hollywood, CA: Fonovisa Records, 1995. CD.
- Madrid, A. L. *Music in Mexico: Experiencing music, expressing culture*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Nidel, R. *World Music: The Basics*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2005.
- Oravitz, M. *Analyzing Classical Form: MUS 603 lecture notes*, November 11, 2019. Greeley, CO: University of Northern Colorado.
- Peña, N. H. *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-class Music*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1985.
- Ragland, C. *Música Norteña: Mexican-Americans Creating a Nation Between Nations*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009. Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14btdjr
- Rothstein, William Nathan. “What is phrase? What is phrase rhythm.” In *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music*, edited by William Nathan Rothstein. Ann Arbor, Mich: Musicalia Press, 2007.
- Schachter, C. *Unfoldings: Essays in Schenkerian theory and analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Whitaker, Morgan. “GOP candidate defends use of ‘wetback’ slur.” MSNBC, October 5, 2013. <http://www.msnbc.com/politicsnation/gop-chris-mapp-defends-racial-slur>

