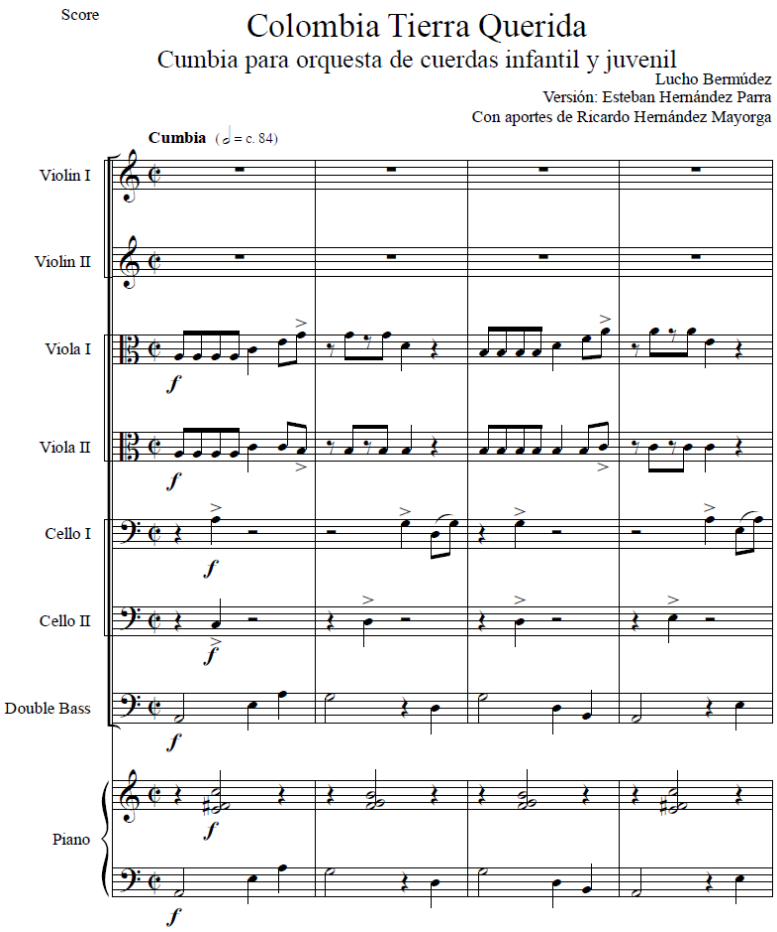
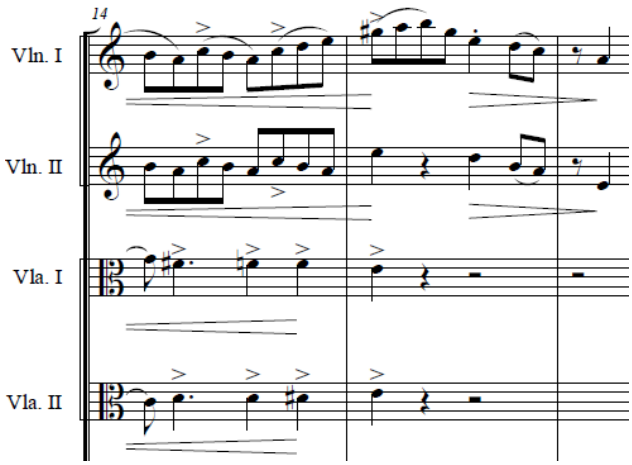
I will address how approaching rhythmic complexities through contextualization and embodiment (singing, tapping instruments, and dancing) allowed for working on challenges of reading cumbia rhythms from a transcription, and connected our students emotionally to the stories around the music through enjoyment and action; delving into the technicalities of how this "Colombia Tierra Querida" arrangement in particular, opens a space for bowed strings learning that can be approached *otherwise*, through what I call academic+oral methods.



Example 1: **First page of my arrangement of Lucho Bermúdez's cumbia "Colombia tierra querida," adapted for multi-level youth string orchestra. Complete score and recordings can be found at the RAY website under the cumbia section in RAY: Bridges plays Colombian musics.**

As shown in Example 1., the use of accents emphasizes the syncopation of the opening motive in the violas and creates motion with a bright second beat on cellos and piano. Following accentuation of the last upbeat in the violas aims to emphasize syncopation and shape the phrasing of the motive to convey *sabrosura* though collaboration amongst the two viola lines. The celli alternate entrances on measures 2 and 4, which, in a sort of response to the melody on violas, creates a sense of bigger four-bar units. Fingerings are thought to be simplified for the bottom lines, so that students who are still not playing accidentals that require them to reframe their handshape[1] can still participate. In an effort to democratize access to this arrangement -so that all our students could participate-, I approached these technical particularities from my knowledge of their academic education. This meant that each part has a simplified line, offering two different options, being Violin 1, Viola 1, and Cello 1, the more intricate regarding, rhythm, accidentals, and string crossings. This is also evident when the violins play the main melody of the verse:



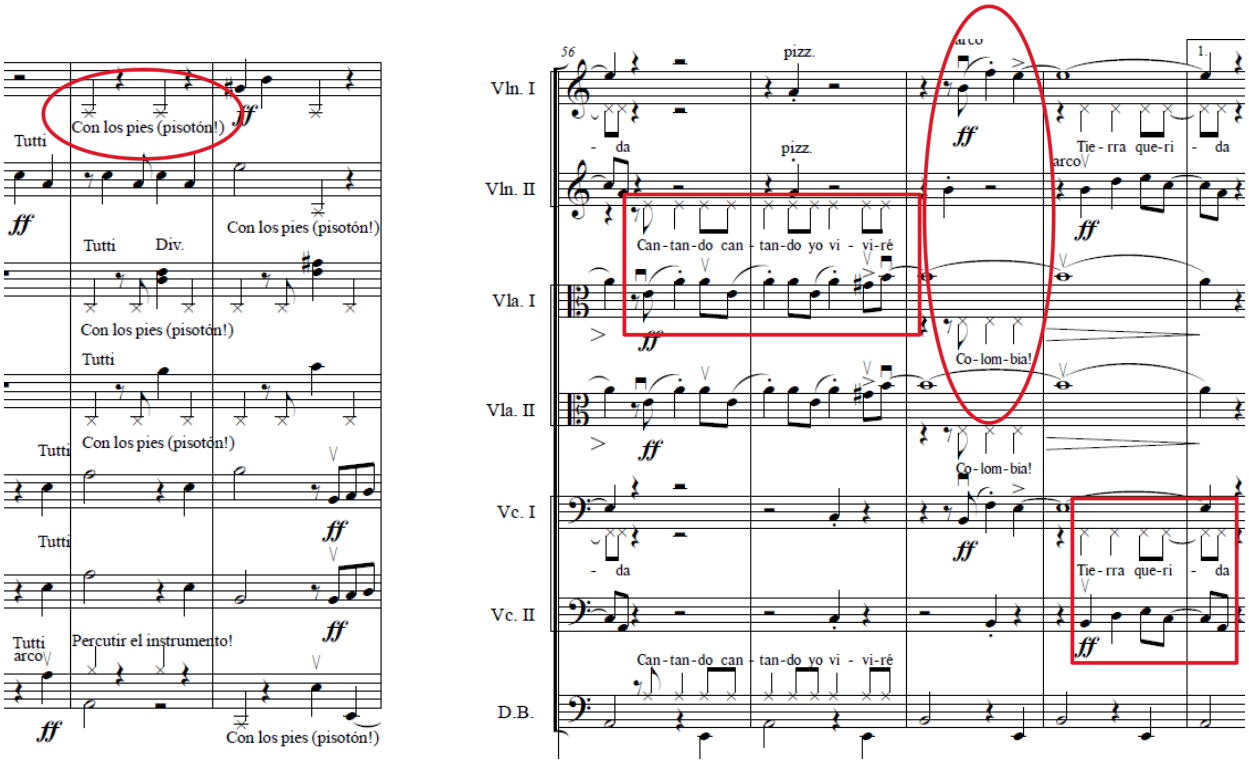
Example 2: **Multi-level approach to chromatism and string crossings in cumbia.**

[1] It is common practice in academic methods for bowed strings to build tactile memory through sequential framing of the handshape. Since these instruments do not have frets, the introduction and repetition of certain fingering patterns create consistency in finding the pitches on the fingerboard.

As seen on Example 2, despite the technical simplification on fingerings, accidentals, and string crossings between parts 1 and 2, rhythmic complexity through the positioning of accents and syncopations is present on all parts; as I mentioned earlier, these elements particular to cumbia allow for approaching a more diverse rhythmic training and, despite this representing a challenge when approaching learning by notation (refer to the initial performance video in Figure 1), using oral practices like singing/dancing while playing can help students embody the rhythm feel.

Another attempt to embody the rhythmic accentuation in the performance of this cumbia, was to include singing, stomping, and tapping on the instruments. This brought in aspects from the Afrodiasporic interconnectedness of cumbia, where singing and dancing are common practice when *musicking*. Through the exercise of embodying polyrhythms (see Example 3 below) and singing to each other's line, we were able to learn from common oral practices Afrocolombian musicians use to entrain to a sense of time and play with *sabrosura*. As a way of conjoining these oral practices with academic ones, I added vocals and percussive notations intentionally linked to each part, a set of resources inspired by Mimi Zweig's String Pedagogy curriculum[2] where they are used for body balance and feeling the pulse:

[2] Available at: https://stringpedagogy.com/



Example 3. Excerpts including simultaneous singing, stomping, and tapping on instruments. Highlighted in red are the stomping/tapping lines and how they line up with the sung lyrics.

After sensing how our students were struggling in learning these written rhythms with the added embodied component, I remembered how I also struggled playing this Cumbia in Colombia when I was a teenager trying to read from the score, even with knowing the original song well beforehand. Approaching these pieces through singing, movement, and listening became fundamental to understanding the rhythmic patterns, as well as the gestures and affects connected to them. In addition to having the visual reference of the rhythmic notation, I translated the words verse by verse, conducting when they were sung and played on each instrument.

The understanding of the diction for bowing articulation beyond written accents and relying on a conductor through imitation and repetition by rote were aspects of traditional conservatory education I had used before; although this time, the students' initial mix of discomfort and excitement of *musicking* in a different way generated an empathetic response to the *sabrosura* I was embodying for them.

My students connected *emotionally* by listening to the story of how enslaved African peoples and their descendants resisted by dancing cumbia in small steps despite their chained feet, it was surprising to some of them that even under those inhumane circumstances, joy through movement was a practice of resistance, not only to be able to bear such conditions, but to also get physically ready for the moment of self-liberation. The Bridges students danced and dared to sing *with* me in a non-native language (for most of them Spanish was either a second language, or they were still learning the very basics), embodying the relationship between the basic cumbia step and the melodic lines we were singing as call and response.

This conjunction of academic+oral learning practices, where none is perceived as a superior truth, creates a space for learning within the difference (Robinson, 2020). This approach values forms of musical knowledge associated with marginalized peoples while honoring their cultural resistance and allows for a conscious amplification of their musics through *sabrosura*.

Teaching this cumbia through listening and dancing with the contextual knowledge of whose bodies, and in which situation, the dance steps come from, is key to honoring the collective memory of Afrocolombian peoples and *re-cognize* (Albán Achinte, 2009) their cultural heritage through rhythm. A social practice like dancing is often foreign to academic music training, and communal active listening can shift the learning focus

from the skill of note reading to an emotional connection with the music. Joy, excitement, curiosity and respect have been present every time I introduce this piece through a group dancing session. I believe the act of connecting collectively and emotionally through rhythm is reclaiming a space taken away in the academic conservatory tradition.