



## Analyzing Venezuela's Folk-baroque Fusion Music

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A recent trend in Venezuelan music merges traditional folk genres and Baroque or Renaissance classics into unique fusion compositions. The creators of these pieces are small ensembles of academically trained classical or jazz musicians whose typical repertoire consists of virtuosic renditions of Venezuelan folk standards or original compositions within established folk genres. The fusion pieces tend to exploit musical similarities between a specific traditional composition and a European classic. Examples include the use of Bach's *Air* from the Third Orchestral Suite as a slow introduction to a *Gavan* arranged for choir (both source melodies begin with a long sustained note that leads to a cascading melody), and El Cuarteto's morphing of Luis de Narváez's *Diferencias sobre Guardame las Vacas* into a *Polo Margariteño*. The unique challenge for analyzing these types of pieces lies in recognizing the ways in which each source work reshapes and recasts the other, not just by altering its harmony, rhythm and form, but also by transforming each's original cultural context.

The subject of my paper is a piece entitled *Polo Barroco*, recorded in 2001 by oboist Jaime Martinez and the Ensemble Gurrufio. It intertwines parts of Marin Marais's variation set on *La Folia*—arranged for oboe, cuatro, maracas and bass—and an original set of variations on the *Polo Margariteño*, a folk genre associated with Venezuela's Margarita Island. The piece also contains two original variations on *La Folia*, composed by Martinez as links between *Folia* and *Polo* sections. Example 1 contains the portion of Marais's variation set that is used in the *Polo Barroco*. Example 2 shows one verse of a typical *Polo Margariteño*.<sup>1</sup> Figure 1 presents a map of the piece. My analysis treats in turn large-scale and local harmony, rhythm and meter, form, and meaning.

(1) Harmonically, *La Folia* nests the relative major between i-V-i in the tonic minor. The *Polo Margariteño* moves repeatedly from the tonic major to the relative minor, returning to the tonic major at the beginning of each new verse. This harmonic kinship allows each of the two source works to emerge effortlessly from the other, an effect that is enhanced when thematic distinctions are mitigated by parallel diminution techniques applied to both themes. The harmonic kinship also facilitates a transforming juxtaposition of Marais's second *Folia* variation when it emerges over the antepenultimate e-minor chord of the first *Polo* variation, enacting what feels like a large-scale pre-dominant prolongation within the *Polo*.

<sup>1</sup> Note that the lyrics are highly variable, and often improvised in this genre; the accompaniment usually includes mandolin, and sometimes bass, in addition to the given cuatro; the rhythmic divisions within the two-measure melodic units may be triple, duple, or ambiguous; and the pre-dominant harmony in the relative minor may be any one of a number of chords or progressions.

(2) Marais's piece projects a clear triple meter throughout all but two of the 23 variations. The *Polo Margariteño*, like most Venezuelan genres, is anchored metrically by the *cuatro*, playing the pattern shown in Figure 2. While Marais's setting of *La Folia* can accommodate itself to a two-measure *cuatro*-rhythm accompaniment like that used in the *Polo Margariteño*, doing so fundamentally disturbs Marais's stately triple meter on at least two levels. First, the shorter rhythmic cycle of the *cuatro* divides the *Folia* measure in half, and second, the *cuatro*'s ambiguous subdivisions further divide the half-measure into either three or two parts. One can hear both types of disturbance by comparing Marais's second variation in the original version (Example 1, the variation labeled "III") with the setting presented in *Polo Barroco* (Example 3). The *cuatro*-rhythm's persistence in *Polo Barroco* also creates a permanent multilevel hemiola that allows for rhythmic manipulation in multiple dimensions.

(3) The *Polo Barroco* assimilates the strophic processes of both source works, and their narrative variation trajectory, into a large ternary form, by making use of key changes, composed transitions, and the thematic-harmonic contrast between *Polo* and *Folia*. The first large section is expository, the second is developmental, and the third provides a triple return. The synergy between the variation narrative and the overarching three-part form creates a compelling form for the *Polo Barroco* that is more than either piece could achieve by itself.

(4) Beyond issues of harmony, rhythm, and form, there are a number of issues raised by the combination of the two source works. These include the way the piece suggests an historical narrative about the origins of the *Polo Margariteño*, and the reverse appropriation that imports classical elements into a folk genre. I examine these and other issues by drawing upon musical evidence within the piece and conversations with the composer.

**EXAMPLE 1**

39 *Les Folies d'Espagne* 3)

Marin Marais

The musical score for 'Les Folies d'Espagne' by Marin Marais is presented in three systems. Each system contains a treble and a bass staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The first system, labeled 'I', begins with a forte (f) dynamic. The second system, labeled 'II', begins with a piano (p) dynamic. The third system, labeled 'III', also begins with a piano (p) dynamic. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Example 2

Polo Margariteño

The musical score is written in 6/8 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of three systems of music. The first system (measures 1-4) shows the vocal line starting with a whole note followed by a half note, then a half note with a slur over it, and finally a quarter note. The lyrics are "El can - tar - tiene sen - ti - do, el can -". The Cuatro accompaniment begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of eighth-note chords. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the vocal line with a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, and a half note with a slur. The lyrics are "tar tie - ne sen - ti - do enten - di - mien - to y ra - zón". The Cuatro accompaniment continues with eighth-note chords. The third system (measures 9-10) shows the vocal line with a whole rest followed by a half note. The lyrics are "La bue -". The Cuatro accompaniment continues with eighth-note chords.

El can - tar - tiene sen - ti - do, el can -

5  
tar tie - ne sen - ti - do enten - di - mien - to y ra - zón

9  
La bue -

Cuatro

Example 3


The musical score for Example 3 is arranged in four staves. The top staff is for the oboe, the second for maracas, the third for cuatro, and the bottom for bass. The piece is in 3/4 time and D major. The oboe part features a melodic line with some grace notes. The maracas play a steady rhythmic accompaniment. The cuatro provides a complex harmonic texture with many chords. The bass line is simple, following the harmonic structure.


Figure 1. A chart of the *Polo Barroco*.

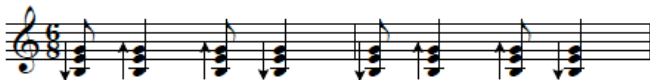
	0:00	0:20	0:59	1:12	1:55	2:16	2:32	2:50	3:00	3:50	4:11	4:25	4:31	4:47	5:02	5:21
	Folia theme	Marais variation n 1	Xy	Polo theme x4	Polo variation 1 x 2	Marais variation 2	Martinez Folia variation	Polo variatio n 2	Polo variatio n 2 x 5	Polo variatio n 3a x2;	Polo variatio n 3b x2 (truncated)	Xy	Marais variation 23 (24)	Martinez Folia variatio n 23 (24)	Polo variatio n 4 x2	Polo pre-theme
oboe	3/2: 68	3/2: 78	X	3/2: 90 (closing measure 12/8)	3/2: 90	3/2: 90	12/8: 120	12/8: 120	X	X	X	X	3/2: 90	3/4: 180	12/8: 120	3/2: 90
cuatro	X	6/4: 156 12/8: 104	3/2 and 4/2: 78	6/4: 180 12/8: 120	6/4: 180 12/8: 120	6/4: 180 12/8: 120	6/4: 180	6/4: 180 12/8: 120	6/4: 180 12/8: 120	12/8: 120	3/2: 90 6/4: 60 (lens toward 180)	3/2: 90, 2/2 90, then 6/4/12/8 (180/120)	6/4: 180 12/8: 120	6/4: 180	6/4: 180 12/8: 120	6/4: 180 12/8: 120, then ends with hemiola
maracas	X	X	X	12/8: 120	12/8: 120	12/8: 120	6/4: 180*	12/8: 120	12/8: 120**	12/8: 120**	12pulsas	3/2: 90	12/8: 120**	6/4: 180*	12/8: 120	6/4: 180, then 12/8: 120
bass	X	6/4: 156 12/8: 104	3/2 and 4/2: 78	6/4: 180	6/4: 180 12/8: 120	6/4: 180	6/4: 180	6/4: 180, then 12/8: 120	12/8: 120, some 3/2	unclear	3/2: 90, then 6/4: 60	Eight half-note beats (	6/4: 180	3/4: 180	6/4: 60, some hemiola	6/4: 180 then ends with hemiola
Key(s)	d-F-d	d-F-d	-> D7	G-e	G-e	e-G-e	e-G-e	G-e	G-e	D-b	D-b	-> A7	d-F-d	d-F-d	G-e	G-e


\*beats are divided half-quarter, sounds like dotted half=60.  
\*\*includes some measures divided into two parts with no clear subdivisions (as dotted-half=60)

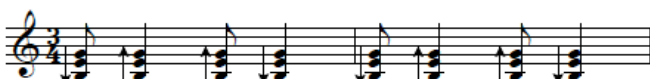
Figure 2

Uninterpreted *cuatro* rhythm 

Metric interpretation induced by parallelism 

Without *tranca'o* 

Metric interpretation induced by pitched downstrokes 

Without *tranca'o* 

**Joseph Lubben** is Associate Professor of Music Theory at the Oberlin College Conservatory near Cleveland, Ohio (USA). He holds a PhD in Composition and Music Theory from Brandeis University, and has taught at the University of Notre Dame, the Universidad Central de Venezuela, and the Universidad Simón Bolívar. From 1998-2000 he was a Fulbright Senior Scholar to Venezuela. His previous publications have revolved around Heinrich Schenker's middle period, and have appeared in *Music Theory Spectrum*, the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, and as part of the *Tonwille* translation for Oxford University Press. His more recent unpublished work focuses on folk music of Venezuela, and theories of rhythm and meter inspired by that repertoire.