

## A MUSIC-IN-EDUCATION JOURNAL FROM BOLIVIA

BY BERTHA ELENA ARTERO PONCE  
(WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO FABIANA FIORILO)

*Bertolda was a visiting music teacher from Bolivia who enrolled in the Introduction to Music-in-Education course at New England Conservatory. As part of her final portfolio work for the course she agreed to keep journals on the evolving role of music in her home town of Cochabamba. She has since returned to her home in Bolivia and sends word of her application of music toward promoting intercultural exchange.*

Bolivia is a country of a wide diversity of cultures and languages. This is not only part of its richness, but also the main reason for its social disturbances and misunderstandings between people.

Presently Bolivia is going through one of the most important social changes in its history. The indigenous majority and its ideology is progressively acquiring an ever more important role in politics and governance and is challenging the centuries-old Western European monopoly of leadership. The challenge is to find the way to integrate all these cultures without the antagonism and bitterness of the past, but rather with mutual respect and acceptance of each other's autonomy and ideology. For that purpose we need to create an educational environment that is free of cultural prejudice and that encourages exchanges among the different realities and perspectives that are part of life in Bolivia. This cultural interchange will lead to better understanding among the nation's various peoples.

### MUSIC AS A MODEL FOR INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE

I believe cultural interchange should not be a hierarchical process, where a more powerful group, or a particular philosophy, is more dominant than the other. On the contrary, music is a way for people to communicate with each



*Students from the Laredo school in Cochabamba introduce Western music and Western musical instruments to their counterparts in Tutimayu. Here, a female Laredo student demonstrates the mechanics of stringed instruments.*

other, creating an important space that allows for the exchange of ideas and cultural differences. My team of music teachers is working towards achieving these goals and these exchanges between city children and those from the country. That is why our project is based on the idea of using music to promote these intercultural exchanges.

We are convinced that these kinds of projects can help develop self-esteem, particularly in those groups that historically have been made to feel marginalized. Thus, it is important that a fair and equitable exchange between city children and those from the country start with the concept that underestimating each other must be avoided.

This specific project aims to learn how to work on the development of abstract thoughts, beyond language barriers, since there are things that the spoken language cannot express. We know, for example, that music doesn't need a translation to a specific language because it is a language of its own; as such, music can reach beyond itself as a separate discipline and can transfer to other arts and even science. That is why we are working on the integration of all the arts without hierarchies, using music as an axis point. People can acquire knowledge about other cultures, their customs and way of life, without losing their own traditions and identities. This process must be accomplished with implicit thoughts about community and strong teamwork.

### THE QUECHUA PROJECT

The community that we are working with is located in a valley 14 miles from the city of Cochabamba. We are working with kids between 6 and 14 years old,

trying to help them develop independence and confidence, both as individuals and as a group. These children are "Quechuistas"; their language is Quechua, one of the official languages of Bolivia, though because of the political changes in the past 100 years many have become bilingual, adopting Spanish as a second language.

"Quechuistas'" lives are based on ancient agriculture traditions and beliefs. Their social organization is not hierarchical or individual; the idea of community and reciprocity is strongly represented in their daily activities. For example, in their way of thinking, it is natural and expected to share what they grow and harvest, an activity called "trueque." The most interesting aspect for us is the realization that their own musical organization is conceived with a strong sense of community and oral tradition, based on an agriculture calendar and strongly influenced with social and mythic issues, such as their belief that the leader of the community ought to be a musician.

One of the musical "Quechua" traditions involves the instruments called "tarkas" (percussion and wind instruments), which are used to accompany dances that belong to the rainy season (January - March). These natives used to believe that if you played "tarka" during another season, you could prevent natural disasters such as floods. Even if one is not a community leader or believes that tarkas can prevent flooding, one must be part of a group activity to acquire and develop social skills and especially to work as a team.

Another example is that they do not have the Western idea of a single person serving as the "composer" of the musical works; rather, they believe that melodies are picked up from, or inspired by, a "Sirino," a

kind of music goddess. Therefore, music is not composed but rather passed from one generation to the next through oral traditions, but with specific roles that each musician must accomplish. This community approach to music-making is also seen in the way the "Quechuistas" perform their music. They always play as an ensemble, constantly learning from each other, setting and complementing their melodic and rhythmic parts with what the other is doing or is planning to do. They think of music as a "cosmic vision" that has no beginning or end, but is rather like a continuous circular spiral that comes and goes and passes again. Indeed, at times it seems that it will never end! It is a representation of the timelessness of their own way of life; for the "Quechuistas" the past and the present are not different times, but one and the same.

Our project includes values adapted from "Quechuas" lifestyle, but it is really a model that can also be used with different peoples and cultures. This workshop integrates the three areas of arts: music, dance and painting. As pointed out before, music is not only the generator of dance and painting, but also the connector between them. The workshop is divided into three stages of work: the first is called *discovery*, the second is *definition*, and the last, *creation*. Each stage works in concert with all three areas of art and is connected with each other.

In this project, we have an open mind to new ideas, and whatever the results are, we do not discard them. Working with people who have a different language, culture, social and economic background, we aim to be mutually encouraging in facilitating creativity. This process in and of itself will show that we Bolivians can transcend our many social economic and political struggles and can work and learn together. ¶



*Top: As part of their cultural exchange, Tutimayu youth demonstrate to students from the Laredo School how to play the tarka, a traditional Quechan bamboo flute found throughout the Andes. Tarka melodies, arranged for string orchestra by Bertolda Ponce, were featured in concerts given by the Laredo youth string orchestra.*

*Bottom: The Laredo youth string orchestra, conducted by Mario Augusto Guzman Alvarado, prepares for their concert for Tutimayu students.*