

Curating La Nueva Canción: Capturing the Evolution of a Genre and Movement.

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16. Curating la Nueva Canción: Capturing the Evolution of a Genre and Movement

Melissa Gasparotto

The Nueva Canción protest music movement is an increasingly popular topic of study at universities around the country, a development which has made college and university library collections in this area a necessity. How does the library go about developing a collection with such varied social, political, and regional manifestations? As research trends move towards amalgam scholarship such as cultural studies and ethnomusicology, it becomes increasingly difficult to adequately identify and serve scholarly research needs. Combined with the increasing importance of primary source material in the undergraduate curriculum, a clear collection development dilemma arises: How to cover all the bases for such a wide-ranging area of study as Nueva Canción? This is the primary concern of this paper. I will be outlining the collection strategies I have been using as I develop a multimedia collection in Nueva Canción for New York University Libraries, addressing techniques for defining the user population, identifying current research trends, and locating and filling gaps in the existing collection. I am particularly interested in considering these strategies in the context of a movement that was forced underground for some time, and will pay close attention to the ways in which the changing character of the movement—from traditionalist revival to political statement to underground resistance movement throughout the 1950s, '60s and '70s—is reflected in the nature of materials available on the subject, and therefore informs the way collections can be assembled.

Historical Overview of Nueva Canción

Nueva Canción is a politically motivated music movement that had its greatest flowering in the 1960s and '70s throughout Latin America, especially in Chile and Argentina. The form emerged out of a folklorist revival spearheaded by Violeta Parra in Chile and Atahualpa Yupanqui in Argentina, who traveled through their countries collecting, performing, and recording traditional songs. Parra mentored many of the singer/songwriters who would go on to develop the Nueva Canción into its own distinct sound based on the traditional music of Chile. Her children, Angel and Isabel Parra, were particularly

influential in this regard, founding the music salon La Peña de los Parra, where many of the most famous singers of the Nueva Canción Chilena would first perform, among them Víctor Jara.

In the late 1960s, a number of Nueva Canción artists wrote and performed songs in support of Salvador Allende and his proposals, which disparaged the politics of the right. During the three years after Allende's election to the presidency of Chile in 1970, the Nueva Canción movement became even more political, seeing the production of such albums as Inti-Illimani's *Canto al programa*, which detailed governmental programs of the Popular Unity coalition.

Its close association with the political left would be Nueva Canción's downfall after the Pinochet coup of 1973. Víctor Jara was assassinated in the days following the coup, and many others were forced into exile, including Rolando Alarcón, Inti-Illimani, and Quilapayún. In addition to the dismantling of the largest Nueva Canción record label, DICAP, including the destruction of many of its records and archives, traditional instruments commonly showcased in Nueva Canción were banned. Concerts of musicians who stayed in the country were prohibited. The Pinochet regime takeover is typically seen as the end of the Nueva Canción Chilena movement, as artists within the country were forced to move away from a form associated with leftist movements, leading to the creation of what came to be known as the Canto Nuevo. Three years later, the Nuevo Cancionero Argentino was subject to censorship as well. These two events pushed Nueva Canción outside the Southern Cone, where it took root all over the Americas, jumping on the bandwagon of nascent folklore revivals elsewhere.

But cultural production surrounding the Nueva Canción continued in Chile under different guises. It is on this segment of the movement that I will focus later on.

Identifying the User Population

As mentioned before, Nueva Canción is seeing a resurgence in popularity as an area of scholarly study in the United States. A Google search limited to .edu websites turned up over eight hundred results. The themes represented in these results range widely from sociological surveys to cultural studies to literary analyses of lyrics by individual performers. While many of the academic courses deal specifically with the Nueva Canción Chilena, a large number of academic treatments contextualize the movement as an instance of worldwide political import, broadening the scope of the topic still further. This was an early indication that any collection in Nueva Canción would have direct relevance to multiple fields within the university.

From this list of .edu results, I surveyed thirty course descriptions and syllabi. Seventy-seven percent of courses dealing with Nueva Canción were undergraduate level and 23 percent were graduate level (see chart A). Approximately 35 percent of the undergraduate courses were offered within Spanish

departments, half of those were culture courses, the other half language acquisition courses. A significant number of undergraduate offerings in the topic were music courses (30%). The remainder was spread throughout multiple departments including anthropology (9%), interdisciplinary freshman seminars (9%), Latin American studies (4%), sociology, and history (chart B).

Chart A: Nueva Canción in the Classroom

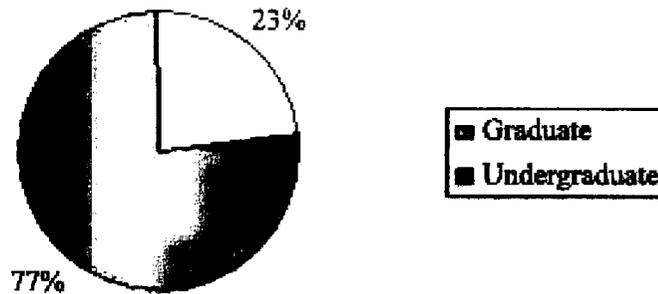
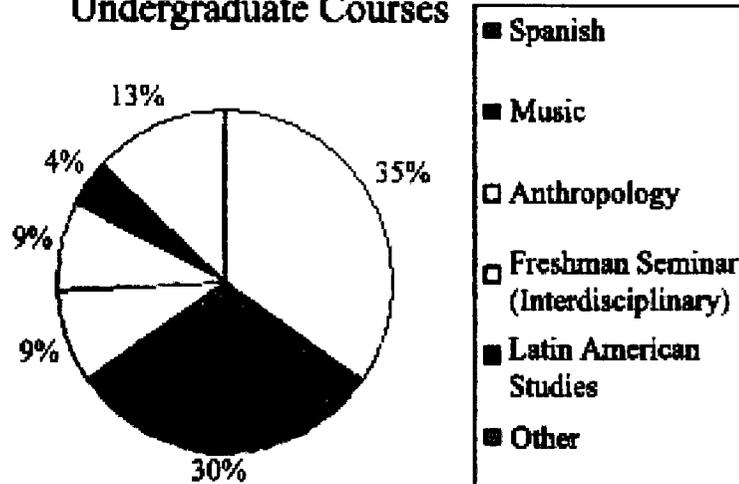
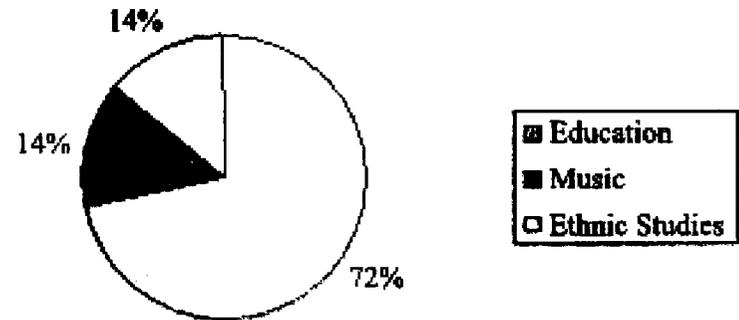


Chart B: Nueva Canción in Undergraduate Courses



The graduate course offering analysis provided a rather surprising finding: a number of the surveyed courses are taught in graduate education departments and use Nueva Canción as a lesson plan theme for middle and high school students (chart C). Notable for its absence is any indication that the Nueva Canción movement is studied in the context of political science departments. A surprisingly large number of the .edu website results were personal home pages of students and faculty with a nonacademic interest in the topic. One has only to search for Violeta Parra or Quilapayún on YouTube to get a feel for how popular this music still is outside academia as well.

Chart C: Nueva Canción in Graduate Courses



Current Research Trends

With this general overview of the user population in hand, and knowing that the largest user group is the undergraduate student body, I went back to undergraduate syllabi to gather more information about what types of materials were used most frequently. Predictably, song lyrics emerged as an essential focus. Whether lyrics are used to analyze the political content in a cultural studies course, local dialects in a language learning course, or daily life in the 1960s and 1970s for a sociological survey, they are key materials for scholarly engagement of Nueva Canción. Typically, however, research into the movement as a whole was found to be superficial and did not require materials more in-depth than the average university collection would already have. General reference works on music in Latin America were cited most frequently.

As would be expected for graduate level and faculty research trends, the literature review revealed a deeper level of analysis of Nueva Canción. This

research draws from highly specialized monographs, university and nonprofit reports and white papers, and primary source materials such as documentaries, song lyrics, and interviews with Nueva Canción artists.

Identifying Gaps in the Collection

After determining who would be using the collection and for what purposes, I began to survey the existing collection to see where it could be deepened. After conducting a thorough literature review, I had compiled a substantial bibliography of monographs and journals. A key discography in Nueva Canción was also relatively easy to identify through a literature review, with certain artists and record labels appearing frequently. Cross-referencing these lists with the existing collection was the first step in identifying important gaps.

Also emerging from the literature survey was a perceived gap in nonprofit and university reports and white papers. Scholarly studies in Nueva Canción rely heavily on reports issued by private groups such as CENECA; however WorldCat searches show that few libraries hold these reports, and many of the publishers are now defunct. However, their importance to the study of Nueva Canción should not be overlooked. As Bernardo Subercaseaux notes in his 1984 report, *La industria editorial y el libro en Chile (1930–1984)*:

Debido a las restricciones y al control ideológico que se da en la Universidad, desde 1973 surgen (o se desarrollan) fuera de ella numerosos Centros de Estudios Privados, algunos de los cuales cuentan con amparo jurídico o institucional de la Iglesia. . . . Su factor común es una fuerte vocación democrática, lo que se traduce—en el contexto autoritario—en disidencia. En cuanto a publicaciones esta producción se expresa (hasta junio de 1983) básicamente en documentos de trabajo mimeografiados, y, una vez que termina la censura previa, en documentos de trabajo y en libros. (109)

I checked WorldCat for publications produced in Chile during the heaviest period of censorship, 1973–1983. An analysis of the results shows that, within Chile, the *sole published format* for scholarly writings on Nueva Canción during the first decade of the Pinochet regime was the nonprofit working paper or report. This information provides librarians with a key focus for deepening resources.

For nonscholarly materials, my observation has been that magazines are the only source of material published within Chile during censorship dealing with Nueva Canción. Interviews with exiled performers began appearing in some Chilean magazines, including *La bicicleta* and *Ramona*, toward the end of the censorship period. This information also gives librarians a concrete way to focus on deepening collections.

Another gap was identified after learning of the interest in Nueva Canción as a topic of middle and high school lesson plans prepared by graduate students in education programs. There is a perceived need for children's materials to aid

these education programs. University libraries may want to consider the inclusion of materials on Nueva Canción that may not be scholarly in nature and can be used for the purposes of youth education. At the very least, this facet of the study of Nueva Canción suggests that librarians may want to contact faculty and/or graduate students in the education program on campus to inquire what types of materials would be most useful for their purposes.

Other gaps included musical scores and visual materials such as documentaries.

Filling the Gaps

Fortunately for libraries needing to develop a collection in Nueva Canción, the music itself is seeing a revival, with many of the discographies of importance to the movement being reissued by large music labels. This has meant that comprehensive audio collections are relatively easy to acquire. The entire discographies of Víctor Jara and Violeta Parra have been reissued in the past ten years, and core Nueva Canción artists such as Inti-Illimani, Mercedes Sosa, and Silvio Rodríguez are still releasing new discs, while their older works remain in print. Additionally, music labels that specialize in Nueva Canción, such as Alerce, have put discographies in Nueva Canción and Nueva Trova online. A small number of musical scores are also available through vendor catalogs. These resources have applicability both to students in music programs, as well as those needing lyrics.

Key journals also emerged in my literature review, with titles such as *Latin American Music Review*, *Ethnomusicology*, and *Latin American Research Review* containing the most relevant articles. These publications are widely available in print and electronic formats. A number of now out-of-print Chilean magazines that are widely unavailable in print or microform have been digitized by the Biblioteca Nacional de Chile and can be accessed on the library's website. Unfortunately, however, only selected articles have been made available online. If the Biblioteca Nacional has no further plans to digitize full print runs of these magazines, perhaps they would make a good choice for inclusion in LANIC's Latin American Open Archives Portal, or as a LAMP microfilming project. The fact that these magazines represent one of only two sources of materials on Nueva Canción produced within Chile during the censorship period gives them added value to scholarly library collections on this topic, and a collaborative effort to make them more widely available takes on additional importance.

I stated above that private research institute and university reports and white papers from the Americas, and particularly from Chile, are key resources in this field, although few libraries in the United States hold them. While the Biblioteca Nacional de Chile has digitized several of these reports, they have not digitized the most important documents. Browsing vendor catalogs supplied others. Ultimately, however, developing a comprehensive collection in

privately issued reports retrospectively is nearly impossible. Again, a collaborative effort with the Biblioteca Nacional may be the only way to make these resources more widely available.

A small number of documentaries surrounding the Nueva Canción have been produced. Although most are easily available through vendors, some have fallen out-of-print. Attempts to contact distributors regarding availability proved unsuccessful. In one instance, a documentary survived only on 16 mm film at the New York Public Library. An attempt to contact the rights holder in an effort to have the film copied to another format was also unsuccessful. This suggests that deepening film resources may pose the most persistent problem to comprehensive collecting in Nueva Canción.

Conclusion

The most useful finding to come out of this investigation has been the awareness that even libraries without the resources to obtain rare materials can still construct a solid foundation of materials in Nueva Canción rather easily. The core bibliography and discography are by-and-large still in print and available through normal vendor channels. These materials can be supplemented through free online resources such as the Biblioteca Nacional de Chile Memoria Chilena website. For the library interested in deepening a collection further, two key focuses have emerged: working papers and magazines published within Chile between 1973 and 1983. It is my hope that this information can assist in building the collaborative efforts that will be necessary to assure that these resources are made more widely available to interested libraries.

APPENDIX

Discography

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