

## HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

# LATIN AMERICAN PERFORMING ARTS

*Susan Smith Nash, Ph.D.*

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## DANCE

**Overview** Latin America is known for its dances, both folkloric and ballroom, which exert a deep and highly diverse influence on dance forms and practices throughout the world. In Latin America, dance was originally used as a vital part of religious practices, particularly those that incorporated shamanistic rituals with transformation and animal spirits. Later, during colonial times, dance was used as in Europe in conjunction with social events. The use of dance in conjunction with religion persisted as well, and many dances were developed in conjunction with religious ceremonies, especially Carnaval. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, formalized dances were developed for social dancing, which also incorporated competitions. Dance establishes ties to unique subcultures and is incorporated in everyday life, and is vibrant, relevant, and constantly evolving.

## ANCIENT PERIOD

### Mesoamerica

**Masked Dances:** Early dances were included in shamanistic rituals, with dancers wearing masks that represented animals such as in the Yaqui Baile de Venado (Yaqui - deer dance) and the Maya Baile de Nagual (Deer Dance).

**Totonac Voladores** (Flying Pole ceremony): As a part of a religious ceremony, young men ascended a tall pole where they suspended themselves with ropes tied around one leg and hung upside-down from a platform. They twirled around the pole. In other variations of the dance, they plunged 80 feet to soar like birds.

**Owl Dance:** In Mayan culture, the Owl is a symbol of death and a messenger of the underworld. In the Owl Dance, the dancer wears a feathered cloak and paints his face to represent the knowledge that comes from the “inframundo” (underworld).

## POSTCLASSICAL PERIOD

### Mesoamerica

**Animal Spirit Dances** (Toltec and Aztec): As in the case of the masked dancers of the Yaqui and the Maya, Toltec and Aztec dancers wore elaborate costumes of animal skins, spectacular accessories, feathers, showy headdresses. To intensify the experience, the dancers often held rattles (maracas, for example) in their hands and put on rattles made of nutshells on their ankles.

### South America

**Qhapaq Ch'uncho** (Peru): This dance reenacts encounters and skirmishes between the Antisuyo rain forest peoples and the Incas. The dance costumes include macaw feathers to symbolize the rain forest.

**Ukuku** (Peru): The main dancer wears a stringy coat that represents an animal's pelt. He is a trickster figure, and dances randomly and out of sync with very tightly choreographed dancers.

**Huayno** (Peru and Bolivia): This is an Andean dance which has become very popular. The male dancer invites the woman to dance by either offering his right arm or placing his handkerchief on her arm. The dance enacts courtship, and the music that accompanies the Huayno brings together typical Andean instruments, including the quena (flute), siku (panpipe), harp, accordion, charango, and guitar.

#### EARLY MODERN PERIOD (Colonial)

##### MesoAmerica Folkloric Dance

**Jarabe Tapatío** (Mexican Hat Dance): Perhaps the most famous Mexican folkloric dance, the Jarabe Tapatío is danced to music performed by mariachis. Like many folkloric dances, the dancers enact courtship and contains elements that made it controversial in its early years in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The man wears the traditional charro outfit, while the woman wears a heavily embroidered blouse and a voluminous and also heavily decorated skirt, which she moves with wide, rhythmic sweeping motions.

**Son Jarocho** (Veracruz, Mexico): “Jarocho” refers to the culture and people of the Veracruz coastal area of southeastern Mexico. The “son” (meaning “sound”) is the music, and in this case, it is known for its energetic, intense, complex rhythms. Perhaps the best known *son jarocho* is “La Bamba” and also “Cascabel” (rattlesnake). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCBhicHcFvY>

**Danza de los Viejitos**: (Dance of the Old Men) is a traditional dance in the state of Michoacan, Mexico. It harkens back to Prehispanic times, and it is related to rituals to honor “old man” God and its execution is very humorous as the dancers enact the parts of the elderly people and in doing so, ironize their own helplessness. The performance involves a kind of tap dance, with rhythms that relate to conquest.

**La Danza de los Quetzales** (Mexico) : The dancers wear enormous headdresses of feathers, and they carry hand-held rattles. The music includes drums and flute. The meaning of the dance has to do with encantations and transformation.

**La Danza Huehues** (Mexico): Also known as Danza de los Viejitos: This is a humorous dance that uses the more serious religious dances as a point of departure. The main dancer is the “Diablo” or devil, who is a picaresque trickster figure. There is also the “Huehuentzi” (the oldest”) who wears a beard and a mask. The men wear black pants with a vest or jacket, masks, boots, tie, handkerchief, gloves.

**La Danza de los Chinelos** (masks / disguises): Originating in the state of Morelos, the Danza de los Chinelos is characterized by elaborate sequined, feathered, and fringed headdresses and brightly colored wooden masks. The costumes are very striking for their highly sequined and embroidered costumes and headdresses that feature appliques (similar to Molas from Panama). The dance is typically performed during Carnaval.

**Arrieros** (Mexico): A tribute to history in which dancers enact the drovers who guided mule trains with their merchandise and silver. The mule-drovers worked in central Mexico and followed the Camino Real from the highlands to the coast during the 16<sup>th</sup> through the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The dancers wear white shirts, white pants, and highly embroidered scarves, belts, and vests.

**Jarana Yucateca** (Yucatan Peninsula): Easily identified by its 6/8 meter, the Jarana Yucateca features dancers in traditional Yucatecan embroidered loose blouses (huipil) and long white (and also highly embroidered) skirts. The men wear white shirts, Panama hats, and white pants. The dance is colonial in origin and celebrates mestizo culture. The music, descending from colonial “sones,” is renowned for being vibrant, joyous, raucous, with brass instruments such as trumpets, trombones, and cymbals.

**Las Vaquerias** (Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico): A popular festival dance that dates back to the colonial era in cattle-raising areas of the Yucatan. The dance is usually performed during the Patron Saint day parades in villages. In the festivals, women and men dress in typical Yucatecan embroidered dresses. The performances are punctuated by someone in the crowd who shouts “Bomba!” upon which the dancing stops, and one dancer must recite a verse to his partner.

## South America and Caribbean Folkloric Dance

**Bomba** (Ecuador): The full name of the dance is the “Bomba del Valle del Chota (Ecuador).” The result of blended African, Spanish, and indigenous influences, the dance is very sensual and flirtatious, in which the woman dances around her partner, who is bent on seduction. She wears loose, wide skirts, and balances a bottle of spirits on her head as she dances. The dance evokes a great deal from the time of slavery.

**Cumbia** (Colombia): Originating in Colombia, the cumbia has become very successful and has penetrated almost all of South America. The music fuses indigenous PreHispanic melodies with African rhythms and Spanish forms. The dance features women with wide, flowing skirts, usually red and white, while the man wears a white shirt, white pants, with a red bandanna and a red belt.

**Galerón** (Colombia): The Galerón Llanero derives from plains áreas between Venezuela and Colombia, and is a very joyous dance which involves intricate footwork reminiscent of Spanish flamenco. In the dance, the man pursues the woman and attempts to tie her with his bandanna, as she flirtatiously stays just outside his reach. The main instruments in the music are the harp, the cuatro, and maracas. When performed, there are generally six couples.

**La Cueca** (Bolivia, Chile, Argentina): Found in many parts of South America, the “cueca” enacts courtship, flirtatious evasions, and contains elements of the Spanish fandango. In Chile, the cueca has become the national dance, and there are competitions for all age groups, beginning with very young children. The cueca became quite popular in the early 19th century, and in Chile, the outfits are traditional Chilean dress, where the colors blue, red and white predominate. The woman wears a flowered dress, and the man wears the “huaso” black hat, white shirt, flannel poncho, riding pants and boots. The man and woman face each other, hold their handkerchiefs in the air and move with each other. They do not touch, but waive the white handkerchief as they dance with each other.

**Guaranía** (Paraguay): A dance performed with the “Guaranía” form of music, the women and men wear traditional Paraguayan outfits which feature wide skirts, hand-tatted lace and crochet panels (nanduti). The music is a derivation of polka, with harp, guitar, and bass guitar. The men typically wear white hats, white pants, red shirts, and blue belts.

## 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY (Modern)

**Bachata** (Domenican Republic): Emerging in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Bachata is danced to music that blends European, African, and indigenous musical traditions. It is similar to the Cuban bolero, and featured highly stylized choreography. The bachata has become very popular in many communities, with “sensual bachata” and the rise of bachata competitions.

**Cha Cha Cha** (Cuba): A highly energetic and stylized dance of Cuban origin which is performed to a very characteristic rhythm, the Cha Cha Chai s stunningly popular with dance clubs, proms, and competitions.

**Mambo** (Cuba): An Afro-Latin dance which originated in Cuba with Arsenio Rodriguez, a composer and musician. The dance was invented by Perez Prado, and became very popular in the 1940s and 50s in Havana, Mexico City, and New York City. At first, the dance form was very improvisatory, but later became standardized in order to penetrate markets and appeal to ballroom dancing constituencies.

**Merengue** (Dominican Republic): The official dance of the Dominican Republic, the merengue is a ballroom dance in which two dancers hold hands and perform a series of rapid moves, maintaining a closed position.

**Salsa** (Caribbean): With possible origins as the Cuban son, the current salsa is extremely popular, and has penetrated virtually all of Latin America. It is a social dance, and the movements are very easy to learn, which makes it ideal for gatherings, parties, and contests. The salsa is a relatively new genre, as it originated in the 1970s in New York, mainly as a hybrid fusion of son, cha cha cha, and mambo.

**Samba** (Brazil): Danced to music in a quick 2/4 time, the samba is an energetic African-Brazilian dance form that evolved from African rhythms and movements. The samba originated in Rio de Janeiro in the early 20th century. It

is often danced during Carnival, and the dancers wear dramatic costumes with elaborate headdresses, beaded dresses, and brightly colored feathers.

**Tango (Argentina):** Originating in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Argentina, the tango achieved extreme popularity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century where it was danced in tango-themed dance clubs in Argentina and Uruguay. The dance is a fusion of Spanish and African slave traditions, and it originated in the working-class neighborhoods of Buenos Aires and Montevideo. There are many different types of tango, but all have the typical accordion and small concertina (bandoneon), which are used for melody as well as the characteristic tango rhythmic stylings.

### Discussion/Questions

1. The Spaniards who saw the indigenous peoples dancing witnessed nothing like anything they had seen before. It wasn't just the costumes, which were, in their own way, very different. It was the way the dancers wore masks and painted their faces and bodies to transform themselves in truly frightening representations of animal spirits and gods. What was different about the indigenous peoples' way of dancing in comparison with the dancing of the Europeans?
2. What was the purpose of using animal masks and skins in PreHispanic dance?
3. Describe the influence of three different dance forms that became popular during colonial times.
4. Select three modern dance forms and discuss their similarities and differences.

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## MUSIC

**Overview** Tied to dance in many cases, Prehispanic music was a sacred art for the Incas and used to communicate with the divine world. It was also used in conjunction with dances that represented shamanistic rituals to transmit the energy of animal spirits. After the arrival of Europeans, musical forms explored different types of fusions between European, indigenous, and African music. Many musical forms are associated with dance, and others embrace cultural heritage. Composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century often incorporated folkloric elements, including rhythms, chord progressions, and melodies.

### ANCIENT PERIOD

**Mesoamerica** Music was an important part of the religious ceremonies and social life. The musical instruments were often shaped from materials found almost intact in nature: conch shells, three-hole flutes, drums created from skins stretched on frames, or created from hollow nuts. Rattles created from nuts and seedpods were also used.

**Andean music** Prehispanic music in the Andes consisted of chants blended with different types of instruments, many of which were flutes. The flutes include panpipes (can be very large, with many pipes), and also quenenas, which are smaller and have notched ends. Both are made of aquatic hollow cane plants. Drums are also prevalent.

### EARLY MODERN PERIOD (COLONIAL)

#### **Central America and Caribbean Folkloric Music**

**Ranchera** Traditional Mexican music often performed by mariachis or norteros, which often has a theme of love, patriotism, or nature. They have been influenced by polkas, the waltz, and also the bolero. They include the “grito mexicano” (Mexican shout).

**Punta** Music from the Garifuna people of the Caribbean who arrived in Central America in the 1790s. Their music is a blend of Spanish and African rhythms and forms.

**Corrido** A ballad, or narrative song. The themes are often about legends, the stories of criminals, doomed love, and revenge. A popular example is *La Cucaracha*.

**Conjunto jarrocho** This is a kind of “son” (which is a mixture of Spanish and indigenous music).

**Banda** Loud, polka-like music played by brass bands (tuba, trumpet, trombone) that derive from the military bands in the 1860s in Mexico, during the Second Mexican Empire. The origins are from Polish emigrants who settled in Sinaloa. For what it’s worth, they often seem very out of tune.

**Mariachi** A characteristically Mexican musical form, the Mariachi emerged near Guadalajara (Coquila) and has influences from Spain, Portugal, and France. The mariachi ensemble consists of a guitar, violin, large bass guitar (guitarón), a vihuela (a small guitar-like instrument) and a trumpet. Mariachis perform at weddings, anniversaries, and events.

**Nortero** Popular music that is often found in northern Mexico and southern Texas, which includes accordion. The polka elements reflect the influence of German and Polish miners who arrived in the early 1800s.

### South America and Caribbean Folkloric Music

**Milonga (Argentina)** Originating in the Rio de la Plata area of Argentina in the 1870s, milonga music often deals with love and dreams. It is characterized by punctuated rhythms and the use of small hand-held accordians (bandoneons).

**Zamba (Argentina)** A form of music that originated in the Salta area of Peru, but then was further developed in Argentina. It is a slow dance in three-quarter time, and is often danced in the streets of Argentina and in folklore festivals.

**Diablada (Bolivia)** The “Dance of the Devils” originated in Bolivia and is performed during Easter (Semana Santa). The dancers wear elaborate costumes and there is traditionally a dance representing the war between good and evil, luz entre tinieblas (light and dark).

**Cumbia (Colombia)** A musical form that began as a courtship dance in the Caribbean areas of Colombia and Panama. Similar to salsa, the cumbia blends Amerindian and European instruments. It has spread throughout Latin America.

**Reggae (Jamaica)** Originating in Jamaica, reggae has come to be associated with island culture as well as Rastafarian philosophy. Reggae was popularized by Bob Marley and it blends ska, calypso and rhythm and blues.

**Guaranías (Paraguay)** Developed in the 1920s in Paraguay by José Asunción, Guaranías are a music form that are sentimental and express nostalgia for times past and lost loves. They feature the harp, guitar, bandoneon, and a singer.

**Sanjuan (Ecuador)** Incorporating Quechua musical instruments and forms, the Sanjuan is a music form found in Ecuador primarily in Quechua communities. It is played on traditional instruments.

**Samba (Brazil)** Associated with Brazil and Carnival, the Brazilian samba has its roots in West Africa and in the religious practices. The samba has a “batucada” rhythm, with an emphasis on percussion and a distinct rhythm and meter. The samba is now considered the defining musical genre of Brazil.

**Cueca** (Chile) The national dance of Chile, the Cueca blends together Spanish and indigenous musical instruments, and includes several European musical instruments: Guitar, drums, accordion, harp, Chilean guitarrón, violin, mandolin. It reflects the Chilean gaucho culture, with rhythms that reflect Spanish flamenco.

**Andean music** Huaynos and others include tambores (drums), quena (panpipe), cavaquinho, rattles, Andean flute, maraca, charango.

## 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY (MODERN) PERIOD

### Composers

Alberto **Ginastera** (1916 – 1983, Argentina) Alberto Ginastera was influenced by his teacher Aaron Copland, and like Copland, he incorporated folkloric musical elements and indigenous instruments.

Antonio Carlos **Jobim** (1927 – 1994, Brazil) Jobim was born in Rio de Janeiro and was well known for incorporating the bossa nova music in orchestral works.

Manuel **Ponce** (1882 – 1948, Mexico). Ponce was a scholar of Mexican folk music and he incorporated the elements into classical guitar and orchestral compositions.

Ernesto **Lecuona** (1895 – 1963, Cuba) Lecuona wrote more than 600 pieces, mainly for the piano, and incorporated traditional Cuban songs into his own. Many of his compositions, such as Malagueña and Andalucía, became standards.

Heitor **Villa-Lobos** (1887 – 1959, Brazil) Born in Rio de Janeiro, Villa-Lobos is the best-known Brazilian composer, and his use of dissonance, indigenous melodic and rhythmic elements within traditional classical Western forms influenced many composers.

### Discussion/Questions

1. The Spaniards received a surprise when they encountered the music of the indigenous peoples. It was nothing at all like European music, and what is more, the instruments were utterly different. The Spaniards were quick to denounce the music as being of the devil, because it often accompanied dances and rituals (including human sacrifice and self-mutilation). Further, the instruments were often made of bone, skin, and shells. Describe some of the musical instruments and how they were used.
2. Music could be considered a kind of technology, a mechanism / sound machine that influences the human brain to move it into different emotions and states of consciousness. Pre-Hispanic music was used in conjunction with religious rituals, to the point that individuals entered into a trance-like state. The music associated with Carnaval could also be considered a technology of consciousness as well. Describe how and why the music associated with Colonial festivals altered the attendees affect and states of consciousness.
3. When the Spanish brought their music to Latin America, many different fusions occurred. Compare and contrast the different Latin American music forms that are associated with dance and which have clear European influence.
4. Modernism, nationalism, and a pride in the nation's indigenous heritage were major influences on musical composition in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century. Who are some of the main composers of 20<sup>th</sup> century Latin America, and what are they famous for?

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## THEATRE

**Overview** Latin American theatre as an art form has an interesting history. Before the arrival of the Europeans, narrative forms of performance and religious rituals constituted the theatre of the Maya, Aztec, and Inca, and they generally took the form of dance. The dancers enacted the roles of gods and of critical points of time in their history, and the dances themselves may have culminated in sacrifice and ritual blood-letting. Later, after the Conquest by the Spanish and the repression of indigenous religion, many of the Catholic holidays and traditions began to incorporate some of the dance and theatric traditions of the past. At the same time, European literary influences were felt, resulting in a more formal European tradition of drama as well. The two paths – folklore and formal – have continued to the present day, with efforts to preserve folkloric dance (and theatre) forms, while adopting the formal and often avant-garde theatre of Europe.

## ANCIENT

**Maya:** The Maya incorporated dance and performative art in their religious ceremonies. They wore elaborate costumes of feathers, headdresses, paint, rattles, spears, and more to depict the gods and events. The rituals corresponded to specific points in the Maya calendar, and the goals were twofold: to “merge” with the god spirit and allow that spirit to enter the body; and second, to please the gods and maintain balance in the universe. The rituals often ended in blood-letting and sometimes human sacrifice.

## POSTCLASSICAL PERIOD

**Aztec:** The Aztec calendar consisted of 18 months, and each had a number of days dedicated to the devotion and appeasement of the gods, in particular to the sun god, Huitzilopochtli. The sun god, Huitzilopochtli, required blood sacrifice in order to conquer the forces of the night (and darkness), and so the rituals (which were performative enactments and could be considered theatre), were elaborate and invariably ended in human sacrifice.

**Inca:** The most important Inca rituals (and performative enactments) took place in the “huacas” – the locations in the earth where each tribe supposedly emerged from the earth after the bearded giant from the stars buried a clay figurine that transformed into people. Each “huaca” corresponded to a specific star or constellation that was thought to be their place of origin, and thus the Inca truly considered themselves to be people from the stars. The rituals and theatrical enactments would include the carefully preserved mummified remains of their ancestors, whom they dressed in finery and even fed. The most important festival was the Inti Raymi (Sun Festival) event.

## EARLY MODERN PERIOD (Colonial)

**Patron Saint Days:** The Conquistadors established a church in every town, and it served as a point of control and cultural cohesiveness. In establishing Catholicism, the Europeans were able to subsume the indigenous religions, and also tacitly acknowledge the fact that the native beliefs never really died. Each community had a patron saint, which not only corresponded to a saint in the Catholic Church, but also often took on attributes of indigenous gods. Thus, the parades, dances, and performative enactments represented a profound fusion of European and indigenous belief systems. The celebrations take place once a year, and are typically a week long, and filled with parades, rituals, dances, and end with fireworks that include religious symbols.

**Carnival / Semana Santa:** The week before Easter became one of the most important festivals in Latin America, and represents a profound fusion between the European and indigenous traditions. In Europe, Mardi Gras and other festivals take place, with parades and performances that center around the idea of a sin-penance cycle. In Latin America, the tradition incorporates personae who resemble many of the ancient deities, namely sun gods, feathered serpents, and animal spirits (jaguars, snakes, condors).

**Brazilian Carnival:** In Brazil, Carnival is dominated by African influences, not only in dance and music, but also in rituals that incorporate symbolic acts derived from West African religious practice, which merged with Catholicism to become Santería. The core belief of the African religion is that there is divine energy in the world that takes expression through the worship of deities and through music, dance, and ritual. The dances, costumes, and

expression of Brazilian Carnival are a performative enactment of that belief, and designed to instill procreative, regenerative energy in the participants.

**Carnival in Oruro, Bolivia: Dance with the Devil.** One of the most unique of the fusions of indigenous and Catholic beliefs, the performative rituals of colonial mining town of Oruro, Bolivia, include the famous dances with the devil, which dramatically enacts the conflict between good and evil, light and dark. The performances include extremely elaborate and colorful costumes. La Diablada (Dance of the Devils) emerged from the miners who revered and feared “El Tio” (god of the underworld) would punish them for sharing their devotion with the Virgin Mary. So, to honor and please El Tio, the miners decided to dress as Diablos (devils) and dance in the festival. The Diablo costumes feature horned masks, velvet capes, and costumes with sequins and gold embroidery. Their boots contain elaborate designs of snakes.

European-Influenced Formal Theatre:

**Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz:** The Mexican nun who wrote poetry and philosophical essays, also wrote three plays: *The Pawns of a House*, *Love Is More a Labyrinth*, and *Second Celestina*. They were performed in the 1680s in conjunction with celebrations for the viceroyalty. The plays are well-respected for their structure and form, which incorporate many of the tropes of European plays, including mistaken identity, love doomed by fate, and more.

## 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

**Patronage and “Actos”:** Many one-act plays, or “actos” were written and performed in conjunction with celebrations of the viceroys and governmental officials of Latin America. Actos were also written and performed in the church as “morality plays” and “virtue / vice” plays, similar to those in the Middle Ages. Their function was to educate largely illiterate indigenous populations about Biblical stories and parables.

**Folkloric Theatre:** Preserving the performative arts of Latin America gained momentum after nations became independent from Spain and during the costumbrista movement. The cultural patrimony became newly important, not only intellectually and artistically, but as a great source of economic development in the form of the development of national identity. Performative art blended religious devotion with an emerging local and national pride. The energies were also used for recruiting soldiers for wars.

## 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

**Marco Antonio de la Parra (Chile):** Best known for his play, *Lo crudo, lo cocido, lo podrido* (The Raw, the Cooked, and the Rotten), written in 1978, de la Parra attacks what he sees as corrupt and ultimately mediocre politicians and the overall political system. The play features three protagonists who come to a restaurant where their conversation reveals them to be not the great men they are thought to be, but instead, shallow, cruel, even sadomasochistic. De la Parra’s other works continue the same themes, and also attack consumer culture and the invasion of alien pop culture.

**Roberto Ramos-Perea (Puerto Rico):** Born in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, Ramos-Perea has written numerous plays as well as essays and columns. His most-acclaimed works, *Miéntame Más* (*Lie to Me Some More*) and *Morir de Noche* (*To Die by Night*) have been widely performed. *Miéntame Más* explores the impact of unethical medical experimentation and the ultimate uselessness of revenge.

**Rodolfo Santana (Venezuela):** The author of more than 80 works of art, Santana first won recognition on the stage for *La Muerte de Alfredo Gris* (The Death of Alfred Gray). His work has also been made into movies, such as *El caracazo*, *Travelling Companion*, and more. His work explores the nature of relationships and perception.

**Eduardo Rovner (Argentina):** In one of his most lauded works, *Tinieblas de un escritor enamorado* (*Darkness of a Writer in Love*), contains echoes of the surrealist tradition of the Boom and Post-Boom writers. In it, the protagonist, Ernesto, enters into an altered state of consciousness (either post-death or in a fantasy) and then embarks on a quest for a long-lost love. In the labyrinths and catacombs of the psychological netherworld, converses with people along the way and explores the nature of connections, the past, and the essential fragility of true love.



**Guillermo Schmidhuber (Mexico):** Considered one of Mexico's most important writers, Schmidhuber's plays build on his literary research, which includes work with long-lost manuscripts of Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz that he discovered and translated. His play, *Los Héroes Inútiles (Useless Heroes)* three soldiers in the Mexican Revolution find themselves trapped in someone else's aspirations, and instead of being able to rise and achieve their dreams, they are trapped in banality and mediocrity.

**Maritz Núñez (Peru):** In addition to writing plays, Maritza Núñez has received acclaim for her works of poetry. Her play, *La Niña de Cera (The Wax Child)*, is a play in two acts which explores the life of Chilean poet and educator, Gabriela Mistral. The play touches on the wrenching childhood and traumatic formative events in Mistral's life and how she used the tragedies to transform herself.

**Nelson Rodrigues (Brazil):** Originator of the concept of the "Theatre of the Unpleasant," Rodrigues was born in Recife, northeast Brazil, and then moved with his family to Rio de Janeiro, where his father owned a newspaper. Covering stories for his father's paper, Rodrigues was exposed to many aspects of Brazilian society, and in doing so, he formed a philosophy of theatre in which he believed it should hold a mirror to society and reveal, with unflinching honesty, its true state.

**Ariel Dorfman (Chile):** In *La Muerte y La Doncella (Death and the Maiden)*, Dorfman explores what could happen when a victim of torture encounters her torturer. She kidnaps him, and then contemplates subjecting him to the same tortures he exacted upon her. In a move reminiscent of *A Clockwork Orange*, Schumann's Death and the Maiden is the work always played during the torture sessions, with deep psychological consequences.

#### Discussion/Questions

1. When the Spaniards arrived in MesoAmerica, they were shocked to see the enactment of what could have been theater, religious rite, or a dance festival? Which was it? There may have been relatively benign or happy performances, but they were not what caught the Spaniards' attention. They were riveted by the torture, dismemberment, and death, performed as a spectacle. The Spaniards were undoubtedly familiar with bloody fight-to-the-death bullfights. What would make these enactments different?
2. When the Europeans and the African slaves inhabited Latin America, they brought their own traditions. However, the traditions did not stay completely intact. Instead, they began to incorporate aspects of many cultures at the same time. Select a few examples and analyze how the blend of cultures made them into a theatrical / performative event that could satisfy the need to resolve the painful history of the Conquest.
3. The formal theatre of the Europeans was often enacted for very different purposes than the popular folkloric theater and performance. The European theatre when performed in Latin America did two things. First, it reinforced cultural dominance and the authority of the crown and the viceroyalty. Second, with plays that enacted Biblical history, the church was able to teach the stories from the Bible, and at the same time, were able to teach moral lessons. How might some of the European traditional theatrical forms have been also coopted and subtly subverted? Please give at least two examples.
4. The plays of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been very political, with messages that could be dangerous because they enact political repressions, kidnapping, torture, and the efforts of a military dictatorship to suppress dissent or resistance. Consider the examples of the plays that have political themes and discuss whether they stand up as works of art rather than propaganda. Why or why not? How can they be meaningful during times of peace?

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## CINEMA

**Overview** Latin American films have been widely recognized for their rich diversity, innovative themes, and ability to move audiences. While almost all nations have had filmmakers who have developed works in many genres, the bulk of Latin American filmmaking has been concentrated in Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil. All have experienced varying degrees of influence from social, political, and economic movements, and they also incorporate national and regional culture and folklore. The result has been a film tradition is identifiable and richly satisfying.

**Origins** The first filmmaking efforts in Latin America were inspired by the Lumieres Brothers in France, and they tended to focus on capturing objects in motion. For example, the first Argentine film was *La Bandera Argentina* (*The Argentine Flag*), which involved a large Argentine flag waving in the breeze of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires. In Mexico, the short films were those documenting battles of the Mexican Revolution. In Brazil, the first short films were inspired by the Lumiere brothers as well as Thomas Edison, and showed such things as the arrival of trains, young people dancing, and passengers disembarking.

**Genres** Latin American cinema has been instrumental in helping develop its own versions of classic genres such as documentaries, musicals, and romances. Musicals that feature folklore and regional music were not only popular in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina, but found enthusiastic audiences throughout the world. The often harsh explorations of poverty, social inequality, and political corruption have also been a feature of Latin American cinema. The very popular long-running telenovelas (Latin American soap operas) resulted in a new form of consciously and often rather ironically melodramatic romance.

## MEXICO

**Mexican Cinema** Mexico's rich cinematic tradition when audiences flocked to see Mexican screenings of Thomas Edison's one-minute kinoscope films such as *Arrival of a Train*. Salvador Toscano Barragan is generally considered to be the first Mexican filmmaker. He created a film version of the novel, *Don Juan Tenorio*, and then went on to film battles during the Mexican Revolution. Inspired by European film-makers, Mexican directors and film studios received a huge boost when U.S. and European film-makers had to severely curtail their activities due to rationing of celluloid and other materials. Mexican studios, which had no such restrictions, were able to produce films, and they found an enthusiastic global export market. The Mexican studios, as in Hollywood, focused on creating bankable stars and screenplays with wide appeal. What resulted was the "Golden Age," launched by Maria Candelaria, and followed by hundreds of high-quality movies produced by well-funded studios who relied on a domestic network of movie theaters and a well-developed export market. After decades of pre-eminence the Mexican film industry declined in the 1970s, but experienced a resurgence in the 1990s and 2000s with films that probed the human condition, made great satirical statements about politics and "progress," and took intellectual and aesthetic risks to parallel the literary world. Standouts include *Amores Perros* and *Pan's Labyrinth*.

**Mexico's "Epoca de Oro" (Golden Age): 1933 – 1964** Because of the relative paucity of U.S. and European output during the late 1930s and 1940s, Mexican films were embraced by enthusiastic audiences who enjoyed the studios' output, which ranged from adaptations of famous films (for example, Ramon Gallegos's *Dona Barbara*), comedy (such as the films of Cantinflas), romance (Maria Candelaria), and musicals that featured rancheras (*Siempre Tuya*). Many of the films explored social issues such as the problems of rural poverty and systemic prejudice against indigenous peoples. The studio system generated a number of well-liked stars, which included Dolores Del Rio, Pedro Infante, Jorge Negrete, Maria Felix, and Cantinflas.

**Maria Candelaria** (dir. Emilio Fernandez, 1944) Starring Dolores del Rio and Pedro Armendariz, Maria Candelaria explores issues of true love, romance, social inequality, prejudices against the indigenous peoples of Mexico, and the natural beauty of the Mexican countryside. It was the first Mexican film to win the First Prize (Palme d'Or) at Cannes.

**Cantinflas** (Mario Moreno) (1911 – 1993) The comical "Everyman" of the underclass, Cantinflas often played the quick-witted scamp from society's underclass who exposed "polite society" as pompous, and whose activities often made him a champion of the underdog. He was well-known for his costume (sagging pants, frayed shirt, ragged towel over his shoulder) and for his way of speaking quickly but saying nothing, and for his comical dancing. Cantinflas made more than 50 films, primarily working with the director Miguel M. Delgado.

**Maria Felix** (1913 – 2002) Maria Felix achieved great fame and recognition during the Golden Age of Mexican cinema. Known as a fascinating femme fatale, Maria Felix was often referred to as “La Dona” after her character in “Dona Barbara” (1943). With a total of 47 films, many of which were distributed in multiple countries around the world,

**Pedro Infante** (1917 – 1957) When it was announced that Pedro Infante had died in a tragic plane crash near Merida, Yucatan, the entire nation plunged into mourning for their beloved actor and singer. He often portrayed a hero in his more than 60 films, and as such, he embodied the qualities that Mexican (and indeed, global) audiences admired: a loyal and courageous friend, a devoted family member, and a passionate and impassioned lover. His range of songs made him very popular as well, and many of his recordings continue to be considered standards even today.

**Jorge Negrete** (1911 – 1953) Born in the historic mining town of Guanajuato, Jorge Negrete entered a prestigious military academy when he was a young teenager. There, he distinguished himself not only for his academic excellence but for his musical talent. Negrete trained as an operatic singer, where he met his initial success. Negrete later began singing music of mariachis. He also embraced acting, where he often acted the part of heroes who could also sing. He appeared in more than 40 movies, and helped develop the “charro” (Mexican cowboy) singing tradition. When he died from complications of a sudden illness, his fans were devastated.

**Dolores Del Rio** (1904 – 1983) Dolores Del Rio was born in Durango to parents who had been wealthy during the time of Porfirio Diaz, but who lost everything during the Mexican Civil War. Dolores fled with her mother to Mexico City, where she received an education in a Catholic private school. Del Rio was unusual among Mexican actresses in that she first achieved fame and fortune in the U.S. in Hollywood. Later, she returned to Mexico, where she acted in numerous films in genres that included romance, adventure, musical, and comedy. Del Rio was considered one of the all-time beauties of the cinema. She made more than 50 films.

## ARGENTINE

**Argentine Cinema** Historically, Argentina has been considered one of the top three countries in Latin America for cinema, along with Mexico and Brazil. The first Argentine movies were silent shorts, made in the manner of the Lumiere Brothers. Later, Argentine film-making blossomed during Argentina’s “Golden Age” which extended from the 1930s and into the 1950s. In the 1960s, the French “New Wave” (Nouvelle Vague) emphasized an art-house sensibility and explored the way the camera could reflect and problematize identity and reality. During the military dictatorship, most filmmakers found it safest to focus on comedy. However, after the return to democracy in 1983, filmmakers began to probe the themes that had been off-limits, with a resulting surge in movies that addressed political atrocities (torture, the “disappeared”), as well as social problems. At the same time, film adaptations of literature of the “greats” such as Cortazar and Borges were made. Argentine cinema continues to be highly respected, and to receive prestigious awards.

**Argentina’s “Third Cinema”** (1950s and 1960s) For many, the “First Cinema” consisted of escapist spectacles, and the “Second Cinema” was focused on self-absorbed “auteur” works. However, a “Third Cinema” followed on the heels, and even though they were not commercially as successful as the first and second phases, they were important. During the 1960s and 1970s, a Latin American film movement emerged that had as its core mission to expose the evils of neocolonialism and capitalism. While its core values may have been political, the resulting works are most known for their exploration of psychological conditions, and the consequences of exile and estrangement. One of the most influential of the “Third Cinema” directors is Fernando Solanas, whose works are often overtly political.

## BRAZIL

**Brazilian Cinema** The early development of Brazilian cinema was slow, and the dominant genre, the chanchada (burlesque musical comedies), were popular, but not considered serious art. Later, in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, the chanchadas achieved even more popularity, and their emblematic star, Carmen Miranda, was adored by many. In the 1960s and 1970s, the “Cinema Novo” emerged as a more “serious” movement. Cinema Novo changed the focus of Brazilian cinema from entertainment, to works that explore social inequality in Brazil, neorealism, working class /

middle class. The song, “The Girl from Ipanema” (written by Antonio Carlos Jobim and performed by Astrud Gilberto and Stan Getz) captures the emotional elements of beauty and sadness, an anticipation of nostalgia.

### **Carmen Miranda** (1909 – 1955)

Carmen Miranda, born in Portugal but relocated to Rio de Janeiro when her parents emigrated to Brazil. Miranda embraced opera and music, despite her parents’ disapproval. Miranda entered show business as a singer, but quickly showed her flexibility by acting and dancing for “chanchada” movies, and for participating in Carnival (Mardi Gras). Her most famous films featured Miranda in all the roles she loved: singing, poetry, and dancing. Miranda quickly became well-known as a “Brazilian Bombshell” instantly recognizable by her tall headdress replete with tropical fruits.

**Brazilian “Cinema Novo” Movement** (1960s and 1970s) Influenced by the French New Wave, Italian Neorealism, and Soviet cinema of the 1960s, the Brazilian Cinema Novo (New Cinema) changed the focus of films from big-budget musicals, comedies, and adventure to one that encouraged a freedom of aesthetic, political, and ideological expression. Led by director Glauber Rocha, the movement probed rural poverty and social inequality with a style that was resolutely avant-garde. His development of an “aesthetics of hunger” brought together the literal and the metaphorical. Rocha’s film, *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* (*God and the Devil in the Land of the Sun*) (1964), follows the fate of people in rural areas during a time of drought. The film is characterized by a combination of realism and symbolism, and seeks to encourage the audience to question the prevailing cultural values. The film’s use of hand-held cameras and its disturbing violence gave it authenticity, and also encouraged other filmmakers to take risks.

### Discussion/Questions

1. While the first cinematic experiments took place in France and in the United States, where the focus was often on whimsical explorations of science fiction, such as in the case of *Voyage to the Moon*, in Mexico, film was used to chronicle important aspects of its history. What are some of the ways in which Mexican filmmakers sought to use film to chronicle their unique history as a nation, and also to make people aware of the heroes of the Mexican Revolution?
2. Mexico’s Golden Age was fueled by a time of relative peace and prosperity following the Mexican Revolution and also a surge in demand for their films, due to the fact that American and European filmmakers were not able to continue during World War II due to rationing of film and other supplies. The Golden Age made international stars of many Mexican actors. Who were some of the main actors and actresses in Mexico’s Golden Age? What were they known for?
3. Brazilian and Argentine filmmakers have long been lauded for their willingness to tackle very difficult social issues. In Brazil, the influence of 1960s French filmmaking (*nouvelle vague*) was very intense, and it resulted in films that featured rather unlikely heroes who were often of the underclass. In Argentina, films exposed the military dictatorship and the disappearance of youth who dissented. Describe films that explored social issues and evaluate their impact.

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