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## Music, Ritual and Cosmology of the *Desana* and *Baniwa* People of the Upper Rio Negro, Amazon, Brazil: a Collaborative Research

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### Abstract

This paper aims to present the connection between the *Desana Guahari Diputiro Porã* and *Baniwa Hohodene* mythology and music. The *Guahari Diputiro Porã* sib originally lived along the banks of the Papuri River, a branch of the Uaupés River, in the Upper Rio Negro region. Nowadays, some people of the sib live in a small city called Iauaretê. The large *Baniwa* phratries called the *Hohodene* and the *Walipere-dakenai* live on the Içana River and its principal tributary, the Aiary. The mythology and musical repertoires are shared by these groups in different versions. The research was based on dialogues with a *bayá*, a chant specialist, in São Gabriel da Cachoeira and Iauaretê. The research was also based on a long-term relation with the *pajés* (shamans) of the Aiary River. Through interviews, tape-recordings and filming of healing sessions, and over three decades of learning about the Hohodene traditions, it shows the fundamental connection between collective identity, the sacred musical instruments, the mythology of origin of the clans, the dynamic process of creating and transmitting identity through music over the generations, and the collaborative ethnomusicological research process established among indigenous communities, research institutes, and NGOs. This work also presents aspects of the human origin through performance of the musical repertoire and rite. First the creation myths and the sacred flutes will be presented, followed by a description of the main *Desana* and *Baniwa* musical repertoires; some of them appeared at the same time as humans at the “Transformation Houses” –portals to the spiritual dimension of origins.

**Keywords:** Myth, Music, Amerindian People



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## Música, rito y cosmología en los *Desana* y *Baniwa* en Alto Río Negro, Amazonas, Brasil: una investigación colaborativa

### Resumen

Este artículo discute las conexiones entre la música y la mitología entre el sib *Desana Guahari Diputiro Porã* y *Hohodene*, en la región del Alto Río Negro. El sib *Desana Guahari Diputiro Porã*, originalmente, habitaba el Río Papuri, un afluente del Río Uaupés. Actualmente, una parte del sib vive en Iauaretê. Las fratrias *Baniwa*, denominadas *Hohodene* y *Walipere-dakenai*, viven en el Río Içana, un afluente del río Aiari. La mitología y los repertorios musicales son compartidos por los grupos de la región en distintas versiones. La investigación está basada en diálogos con el *bayá* –experto en cantos e mitos– ocurridas en São Gabriel da Cachoeira y Iauaretê. La investigación está basada, también, en larga vivencia con los payés (shamans) del Río Aiari. Través de entrevistas, grabaciones y videos y con más de tres décadas de aprendizaje de las tradiciones *Hohodene*, se presentan las conexiones fundamentales entre identidad colectiva y los instrumentos sagrados, la origen mitológica de los clanes, los procesos de creación y transmisión de la identidad través de la música por generaciones, y el proceso de investigación etnomusicológica colaborativa entre las comunidades indígenas, las instituciones de investigación y las ONGs. Este artículo también presenta aspectos de la origen humana través da la performance musical y ritual. Primer se presentan los mitos de creación y de las flautas sagradas, después, las descripciones de los repertorios musicales *Desana* y *Baniwa*. Algunos de estos repertorios han surgido en las Casas de Transformación –portales para las dimensiones espirituales del origen.

**Palabras clave:** mito, música, pueblos ameríndios

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## Música, rito e cosmologia *Desana* e *Baniwa* no Alto Río Negro, Amazonas, Brasil: uma pesquisa colaborativa

### Resumo

Este artigo discute as conexões entre a mitologia e a música dos grupos indígenas *Guahari Diputiro Porã* e *Hohodene*, na região do Alto Río Negro, Amazonas, Brasil. O sib *Desana Guahari Diputiro Porã* originalmente habitava o Río Papuri, um braço do Río Uaupés, na região do Alto Río Negro. Atualmente algumas pessoas do sib vivem em Iauaretê. As fratrias *Baniwa*, denominadas *Hohodene* e *Walipere-dakenai* vivem no Río Içana, um tributário do Río Aiari. A mitologia e os repertórios musicais são compartilhados pelos grupos da região em diferentes versões. A pesquisa se baseou em diálogos com o *bayá*, especialista em cantos e mitos, em São Gabriel da Cachoeira e em Iauaretê. A pesquisa também se baseou em uma longa vivência com os pajés (xamãs) do rio Aiari. Através de entrevistas, gravações e filmagens das sessões, e com mais de três décadas de aprendizado sobre as tradições *Hohodene*, são mostradas as conexões

fundamentais entre identidade coletiva, os instrumentos sagrados, a origem mitológica dos clãs, o processo de dinâmica da criação e transmissão da identidade através da música por gerações, e o processo de pesquisa etnomusicológica colaborativa estabelecido entre as comunidades indígenas, as instituições de pesquisa e ONGs. Este trabalho também apresenta aspectos da origem humana através da performance musical e do rito. Primeiramente serão apresentados os mitos de criação e das flautas sagradas, seguidos pela descrição dos repertórios musicais *Desana* e *Baniwa*, alguns deles aparecem nas “Casas de Transformação” –portais para as dimensões espirituais da origem.

**Palavras-chave:** mito, música, povos ameríndios

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The Upper Rio Negro region in Brazil, also known as the Northwest Amazon, is a complex culture area, consisting of four principal language families (eastern Tukano, northern Arawak, Maku and Yanomami), each of which includes various ethnic groups. The settlements of the Tukanoan and Arawak-speaking peoples are located predominantly along the riverbanks, while the Makuan and Yanomami-speaking peoples are situated in the forest. All of these peoples have been in contact with non-indigenous societies since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, and many live in urban centers, such as São Gabriel da Cachoeira, the municipal capitol of the Brazilian Upper Rio Negro.

The Tukanoan and Arawak-speaking peoples share many elements of their cosmologies and ceremonial practices, notably what has been called a “cult” of sacred flutes and trumpets, representing their first ancestors, fertility and growth, and the central values of their societies that are transmitted in initiation rites and exchange festivals. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to approximately the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the sacred flutes and trumpets –or, instruments– and related ceremonialism, along with ceremonial specialists (the chanters and the shamans) have suffered severe attack and repression from Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Only in relatively inaccessible communities have the indigenous peoples been able to continue performing the ceremonies and practicing their ways of living directly related to them. In most communities, if the sacred instruments were not abandoned altogether, then they were shrouded in hyper-secrecy in order to protect the deep cosmological knowledge and power inherent to them.

With the growing political movement among the indigenous peoples of the region, beginning in the 1980s, one of the key items on the indigenous agenda was cultural valorization, that is, the recovery of sacred musical instruments and everything related to them so that they could once again assume a place in the continuity of their cultures. In order for this to happen, non-governmental support organizations and anthropologists working with them had to demonstrate that the missionary repression was not only criminal, it would also have severe psychological and spiritual consequences for future generations of young people.

Related to this ‘re-valorization’ of traditions, ethnomusicologists and anthropologists, working together with indigenous peoples, have since the 1980s, sought to de-colonize the methodologies employed to study the symbolism and art of the sacred instruments, their relation to sacred sites, narratives of creation, and shamanism. Indigenous peoples have been at the forefront in this movement, by recording their narratives in the series of volumes called *Narradores Indigenas do Alto Rio Negro*, a unique collection of creation stories from all the 22 different ethnic groups in the region. In the 1980s, elders emerged amongst the *Desano*, *Tukano*, and others armed with notebooks filled with the transcriptions of their immensely detailed knowledge on their traditions. The NGOs organized workshops to train indigenous film-makers to film their own rituals and music, resulting in a series of DVDs and CDs that have been important in the process of cultural regeneration. Related to this has been the revitalization of traditional longhouses as spaces for the realization of healing ceremonies.

In understanding the meaning of the ceremonies with the sacred instruments,

anthropologists and indigenous leaders have provided the material for a holistic appreciation of their significance to cultural identity, reproduction and continuity. This is similar to the “decolonizing methodologies” described by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a Maori indigenous scholar from New Zealand, when she points to the importance of Music in the production of identity of indigenous cultures the world over:

[In] response to discussions about the significance of land to Maori identity<sup>1</sup>, [a Maori woman] described her own community as one held together by song rather than by territory. An Aborigine friend also made the comment that ‘we sing the land into existence’. For Maori there are several ways of identifying one’s indigenous ‘community’. One commonly used way is to introduce yourself by naming the mountain, the river, the tribal ancestor, the tribe and the family. Through this form of introduction you locate yourself in a set of identities which have been framed geographically, politically and genealogically (Smith 2012).

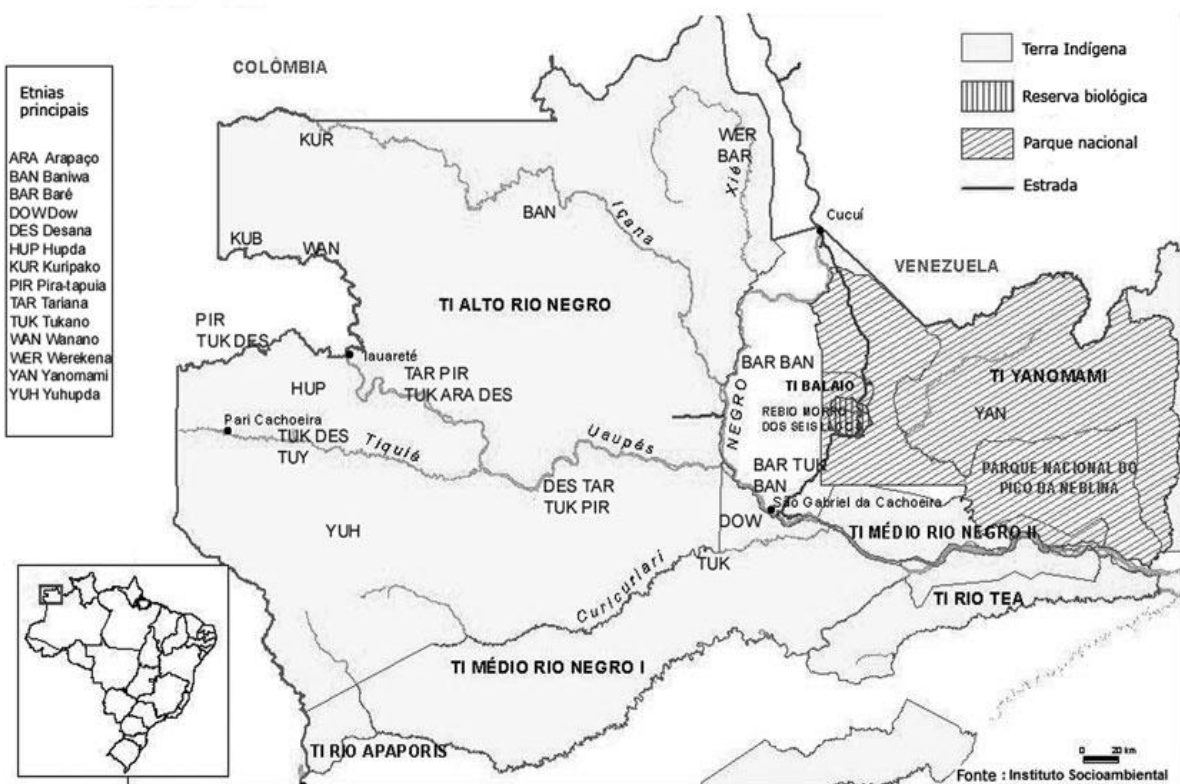
In the year 2010, the UNESCO declared that the knowledge of the sacred instruments, ceremonialism, and shamanism of the eastern Tukanoan-speaking peoples (specifically the *Barasana* and *Makuna* in Colombia) constituted a cultural heritage of humanity and could thus be protected by relevant international laws and accords. Throughout the past decade and a half, indigenous people, indigenists, and cineasts, have been documenting knowledge related to sacred sites and their importance for the creation stories and the sacred instruments throughout the Northwest Amazon region. Anthropologists and indigenists have been engaged in connecting indigenous peoples with their ceremonial pieces that were housed in museums many generations ago.

The particular situation of the *Hohodene Baniwa* of the Aiary River, like that of the *Desano*, illustrates how the interconnections among music, cosmology, creation, sacred geography, and shamanism have to be interpreted as a whole in order for non-indigenous audiences to appreciate their profound and unifying meaning. The instruments are a means by which the indigenous universe is created and reproduced over time. Unless that is recognized and protected, serious problems (such as suicide, alcoholism, despair) emerge, as attested by the recent journalistic investigation conducted in the city of São Gabriel on youth suicide (*A Pública*, <http://apublica.org/2015/05/sao-gabriel-e-seus-demonios/>).

We now turn to two case studies –the first from the eastern Tukanoan-speaking *Desana* and the second from the northern Arawak-speaking *Baniwa*– with whom we have been engaged in long-term collaborative research. Both the *Desana* and the *Baniwa* organize their societies into named social units from local settlements to clusters of ancestrally related communities called sibs, to hierarchically-ordered sets of ceremonial and/or linguistically related sibs called phratries. Barros’ research was conducted with the *Guahari Diputiro Porã* Sib of the *Desana*, and Wright’s research with the *Hohodene* sib of the *Baniwa*.

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies* critiques Western scientific methodologies, and discusses native/indigenous-based research methods.



Map of Alto Rio Negro. (<http://acta.inpa.gov.br/fasciculos/41-1/BODY/v41n1a11.html>)

### The *Desana Guahari Diputiro Porã Sib*

The *Desana Guahari Diputiro Porã sib* originally lived in a community called São João by the Papuri River on the borders between Brazil and Colombia. Due their need for education, salaried work, and health care, the community dispersed and today only the *bayá* (chanter shaman) Raimundo Galvão still lives there. Part of the group went to Iauaretê, formerly a large mission on the Middle Uaupés River, in the State of Amazonas.

Iauaretê is today an urban area with a population second only in size to the city of São Gabriel da Cachoeira. Most of the Iauaretê people come from indigenous groups which live in the Upper Rio Negro region. According to the DSEI (2012), the following ethnic groups live in Iauaretê: *Arapasso*, *Baniwa*, *Caboclo* (*mestizo*), *Desana*, *Hupda*, *Karapanã*, *Kubeo*, *Kuripako*, *Miriti-Tapuia*, *Pira-Tapuia*, *Siriano*, *Tariana*, *Tatuyo*, *Tukano*, *Tuyuka*, *Wanana*, *Yanomami*, and *Yurutí*. Approximately 177 of the city's inhabitants are *Desana*, which includes many sibs, such as the *Guahari Diputiro Porã*.

### The *bayá* Raimundo Galvão - Memories

The *bayá* Raimundo Galvão was born in São João<sup>2</sup>, on the Papuri River. Around 1978

<sup>2</sup> According to the *bayá*, the community was founded in 1970 by an Austrian priest, Norberto Hohenschirer. It was



there were only six people living in the community. Later, all but Raimundo decided to migrate to urban areas, such as São Gabriel da Cachoeira and Manaus in Brazil, and Colombia. There is another community called Santa Marta with which the *bayá* shares his knowledge, along with some people from Iauaretê. The *bayá* guards a deep knowledge in myths, ancient healing chants and prayers<sup>3</sup>, music, body painting and ancestral indigenous culture. He is considered a living treasure, and he has dedicated himself to passing all his wisdom to the people of his group and to finding ways to make ritual adaptations to the urban environment of Iauaretê. The *bayá* was already interviewed several times in São Gabriel da Cachoeira and in Belém, Pará. The remembrance of the past is a methodology key to this research because the members of the *Guahari Diputiro Porã* sib work to re-create ways of transmitting the *bayá* wisdom and traditional knowledge.

### The “Music and Myth of the Upper Rio Negro: Creation and Transformation of Humanity” Project

The “Music and Myth of the Upper Rio Negro: Creation and Transformation of Humanity” project seeks to understand the relations between music, sociability and myth among the people who live in the region. Because of the demographic, geographic and other dimensions of regional culture, a partnership was made with one of the five sibs of the *Desana* people, including the *Guahari Diputiro Porã* and some inhabitants of Iauaretê. Two researchers developed their work with the *ahãdeakü* musical repertoire at São Gabriel da Cachoeira, which helps to highlight the musical practices of both urban areas.

The partnership between the Research Group of Amazon Music and Identity (GPMIA) of the Federal University of Pará (UFPA) and the *Guahari Diputiro Porã* sib methodologically values the musical collaboration and dialog. The masters of that culture were invited to participate in a scientific event<sup>4</sup> held in Belém in 2013, including a round table as lecturers and artists. The *bayá* Raimundo Galvão, the musician Maximiano Galvão, and the *kumu* Ercolino Alves also gave speeches to the music students of the UFPA. During the event some meetings were called to discuss new projects to be developed by the UFPA and the indigenous group, such as a documentary on the history of the *Guahari Diputiro Porã* sib.

These masters participated in the process of presenting the results of several research projects through their public presentations at the event in Belém<sup>5</sup> and another in João Pessoa<sup>6</sup>, as researchers. Besides including these masters as “scientific researchers”, the members of the project promised to produce articles and books on themes related to the *Desana* musical practices; these are already published. Part of that material was given to the *Guahari Diputiro Porã* sib and to the organization that represents the indigenous people of the Upper Rio Negro

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named after the *bayá*, João. Before the arrival of the priest, the area was known as “Rola-Bosta”, name of an insect.

<sup>3</sup> The ancient prayers to heal sickness were created at the “transformation houses” where the ancestors emerged in mythical times; the *bayoaras* and *kumuá* have the power and knowledge of the prayers and chants.

<sup>4</sup> VI UFPA Forum of Arts Research.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> VI Brazilian Ethnomusicology Association Encounter, in Paraíba State.

region<sup>7</sup>.

The event promoted an exchange of knowledge between the university and those masters of indigenous culture about their daily activities in Iauaretê and São Gabriel da Cachoeira. That was possible because of the dynamic relationship between the *Guahari Diputiro Porã* sib and the researchers. In the usual ethnographic tradition, based on asymmetry between the researchers and the researched, the cultural “insider” question was not important to the establishment of the research. Such actions develop a dialog with the old “field research” (Cohen 2008, Sheleman 2008). Collaborative research in ethnomusicology has been developed by the Laboratory of Ethnomusicology at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, based on participation and action, as a horizontal relationship between researcher and native people on the project “Music, Memories and Sociability at Maré” coordinated by Samuel Araújo and Vincenzo Cambria (Cambria 2004). On the basis of “communitarian education”, Francisca Marques developed an ethnomusicological project in partnership with *sambadoras* and *sambadeiros* in Cachoeira, Bahia, resulting in the creation of the Laboratory of Ethnomusicology, and other actions of cultural preservation (Marques 2008). In the perspective of post-colonial studies, Marília Stein and the Guarany leader Vherá Poty have been developing an interchange of knowledge in many audiovisual projects through a Musical Studies Group, coordinated by Dr. Maria Elizabeth Lucas, at the Federal University Rio Grande do Sul, (Stein and Poty 2014). The Tikmu’un from Minas Gerais also are developing research and cultural activities in collaboration with research departments at the Federal University of Minas Gerais. Rosângela Tugny has participated in many collaborative projects with these people. José Jorge de Carvalho has been promoting theoretical discussions on decolonizing epistemologies at the University of Brasilia through the “Meeting of Knowledges Program”, supported by the National Institute for Science and Technology for Inclusion in Higher Education and Research,<sup>8</sup>. The “Meeting of Knowledges Program” aims to introduce traditional knowledge into the academy in trans- and interdisciplinary ways, inviting masters of traditional knowledge to teach for the college students. This experience started at the University of Brasília in 2010 and, in 2014, expanded to other Brazilian universities, including Federal University of Pará. The project also met in Colombia at the Javeriana University (Carvalho 2010). There are many experiences that show the protagonism of the native people or communities engaged with academic researchers, doing research for them and pointing to new goals for research projects.

The UFPA Laboratory of Ethnomusicology was founded in 2014 with the mission of promoting bridges between traditional knowledge and its masters, as well as the maintenance of an audiovisual archive, production of research on music in the Amazon and other extension activities.

The words “collaboration” and “exchange”, significant to the context of the Upper Rio Negro region, may be used to characterize the work of cultural masters, apprentices, and researchers. Recent articles by Miguel Garcia (2012) point to what the author calls an “Estética

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<sup>7</sup> Federation of Indigenous Organizations of the Upper Rio Negro - FOIRN.

<sup>8</sup> Instituto Nacional de Ciências e Tecnologia para Inclusão no Ensino Superior e na Pesquisa (Universidade de Brasília, DF).



de La Otredad”, a quest for a philosophical and aesthetical understanding of a given musical reality in an exchange of points of views between researcher and researched. Montardo (2011) also offers a collaborative experience among the *Baniwa* who live in a peripheral area near São Gabriel da Cachoeira, Amazonas. This work is founded on that philosophic referential.

In the VII Brazilian Ethnomusicological Association Congress held in Florianópolis<sup>9</sup>, many indigenous masters from Chile, Brazil, Colombia and Perú were invited to lecture and make artistic presentations. In many panel sessions, collaborative research projects involving indigenous people and ethnomusicologists took place. Audiovisual research and productions have been realized by indigenous researchers and filmmaker, in collaboration with anthropologists and ethnomusicologists (Poty 2012). During the VII ABET Congress held in Florianópolis (2015), the masters of traditional knowledge were invited to speak and to play music, as they wanted, besides participating in the round tables and conferences. It was an overview of Latin-American politics and musical soundscapes from the native’s perspective. The technical musical accuracy, dialogues with researchers and members of the academy, territorial and political conflicts, and other themes emerged from that experience. This indicates the direction of ethnomusicology research in Brazil.

An audiovisual production was realized through the collaboration between the Federal University of Pará and the *Desana*, a video report directed by the GPMIA and the UFPA Multimedia Laboratory<sup>10</sup>. Initially, the planned product was a book with several articles written by the members of the project. However, when the masters were in Belém they emphasized their preference for an audiovisual production. We already had some images and audio gathered from our travels. Mr. Raimundo Galvão wanted to speak about their genealogy and showed some pictures I took in 2005<sup>11</sup>. Unfortunately, we didn’t have the funds to bring the elders back to Belém another time; so, the entire direction of the final version of the video was done by the coordinator of the project and the staff of the UFPA Multimedia Laboratory. In the end, we produced one hundred copies of the DVDs, sent 25% to the *Desana* masters, and we made it available online at the UFPA repository. Some audio and film recordings are in the archives of the UFPA Ethnomusicology Laboratory; copies are also with the *Desana* people in São Gabriel da Cachoeira and Iauaretê.

### **The Musical Context in Iauaretê - Maintaining the Musical Practices**

Iauaretê is located a day’s trip by boat from the area where the *bayá* lives. The members of the *Guahari Diputiro Porã* living in Iauaretê develop an exchange of knowledge every time the *bayá* is visiting them or when they are visiting him. Mr. Maximiano Galvão and Erculano Alves (brother and cousin of the *bayá* Raimundo Galvão) are learning with him how to construct the traditional musical instruments and body adornments, as well as the musical repertoires and

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<sup>9</sup> VII Encontro da Associação Brasileira de Etnomusicologia, Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, 2015. [www.enabet-2015.ufsc.br](http://www.enabet-2015.ufsc.br)

<sup>10</sup> “Música e Mito no Alto Rio Negro: criação e transformação da humanidade”. Available at <http://www.multimidia.ufpa.br/jspui/handle/321654/1343>

<sup>11</sup> I took some pictures during the public release of Raimundo Galvão’s book held in São Gabriel da Cachoeira in 2005. I gave these pictures to the *Desana* later and they wanted to show some images from it in the new video.

myths. Mr. Galvão and Mr. Alves have begun to transmit that knowledge to their sons and nephews. The whole process occurred independently of the traditional rituals and was motivated by events such as the Festibal<sup>12</sup>, Indian Day (a national holiday celebrated on April 19), the urban festivities, and other activities sponsored by the local indigenous institutions.

Several musical performances of the masters and apprentices involving the *cariço*, *japurutú* and “mosquito” flute repertoires in Iauaretê were analyzed. The apprentices have the technical skills of playing and know the whole repertoire of their instruments. Up to that moment the apprentices had learnt nine songs of the *cariço* repertoire, and only three songs of the *japurutú* and “mosquito” repertoire.

### The Origins of the Human Race

The *Guahari Diputiro Porã* narrative of the origins of the human race was published in a book by the anthropologist Dominique Buchillet and the *bayá*'s father, Wenceslau Galvão (Galvão and Galvão 2004). The following narrative is based on that book and interviews with the *bayá*.

In the beginning only three creatures were living in the universe: *Bupu* (grandfather of the thunder), *Baaribo* (owner of sustenance), and *Bupu Magú* (*Bupu*'s daughter); these creatures were spirits. One day they were talking and decided to populate the universe; with magical spells and blessings they created a vagina in *Bupu Magú* and made her pregnant. *Bupu Magú* slept during labor and did not see the birth of her son, *Miriá Porã Masú*, master of the sacred flutes, and that is why women cannot see any sacred flute. *Miriá Porã Masú*'s body was filled with holes and when the wind (his breath-soul) passed through him, music was heard. He was responsible for the male initiation of the children, but he failed twice and the boys disappeared. Finally *Miriá Porã Masú* decides to keep the boys inside his body; however, one of them, *Gãi*, managed to escape and told his father *Abe* what happened. *Miriá Porã Masú* was then trapped by *Abe* and was killed in a fire. From his ashes a palm tree made of crystal, the *paxiúba*, burst forth; it was later given to the people of the Upper Rio Negro. The sacred flutes are made out of this palm tree. Much research has been done on this theme clarifying the relationship between the music and the creation of Humanity (Cayon 2010, Hill 2009, Hill and Chaumeul 2012, Mello 2013, Piedade 1998, Wright 1998, 2013).

### The Myth of the Sacred Flutes

After the emergence of the *paxiúba*, each ancestral group was responsible for its own male initiation rituals. *Abe* began to organize the initiation of his son *Kisibi*, who was supposed to wake up early in the morning, take a bath and go to the port to vomit<sup>13</sup>. From *Kisibi* vomit, two women, *Yuhusio* and *Diakapiro*, and a man, *Abe Kisibi*, were born. During *Kisibi*'s preparation for the male initiation, the women discovered the hidden sacred flutes, which were kept at the

<sup>12</sup> The Festibal is a tourist event sponsored by the city of São Gabriel da Cachoeira during the celebration of the Indigenous Week in April. According to Maximiano Galvão, there are some competitions among the diverse indigenous groups from the region and the winners present their traditional dances at the event.

<sup>13</sup> Vomiting helps purifying the body.

bottom of a small river nearby.

The women did not know what to do with the flutes so they introduced them into all orifices of their bodies until they started to make sounds. The Fish-people (*wai-mahsá*) also heard the sound and came to teach whoever was making it how to play the flutes; however, when they saw the women, they refused to say anything. The women started to hit them and the Jandiá fish was forced to teach them; in that way, the women began to multiply themselves in the world.

During that period, *Kisibi* and his cousin *Deyubari Gõãmu* were chasing the women in order to get the flutes, but they failed. However, one day they became invisible and got the *sîmîomî* and *porerõ* flutes. The women were punished with multiple sexual attacks.

### The Transformation Houses

The women were sent away, but they kept some adornments and other ritual objects. *Kisibi* e *Deyubari Gõãmu* began to chase them again from the coast of Brazil, beginning at Guanabara Bay (Rio de Janeiro), ascending the Amazonas and Solimões River, and finally entering the Rio Negro until they reached Colombia, where they found a hole from which the first ancestors of the *Guahari Diputiro Porã* emerged.

The whole trip was made in an “Anaconda canoe”, and they could see along the way many “transformation houses”, in which the blessings, the *kapiwayá* chants, the dances, all languages, the animals, the food, the musical instruments, such as the *cariço* and the *japurutú*, and the *dabokuri* ritual were created. In each of the “transformation houses” they stopped and made blessings, smoked and took off parts of their ‘clothes’ of invisibility. Little by little, they absorbed more fluids, becoming visible, and people were created after their visit in each house. Finally, at the last house, *Boreka*, the ancestor of the *Desana* people was created.

### The *Desana* Musical Repertoire

The musical tradition of the Rio Negro people is connected to the *dabokuri* ritual and to the rites of male and female initiation. The *dabokuri* ritual consists of an inter-community festival of crafted products and food exchange, and the assembling of communities of kin and affines. In Iauaretê, *dabokuri* rituals are organized when authorities from other indigenous groups are visiting; on those occasions, musical repertoires considered non-sacred are presented, such as the *cariço* and *japurutú*. The musical repertoires that are considered sacred include the *kapiwayá* male vocal and the *Miriá Porã* repertoires; the first one is performed only on a few occasions because only the *bayá* and the elderly know the melody, lyrics and choreography. The *Miriá Porã* songs, played by the sacred flutes, are not presented in those events because they imply the male initiation rite, which no longer is held there because of the missionary colonization process. The *ahãdeakü* female repertoire is also sung during the *dabokuri*, as well as in other festivals, for it is also considered a non-sacred repertoire.

People from the Upper Rio Negro region share some musical repertoires; however, each sib has its own repertoire of melodies, themes, choreographies, and language. To all of them, the *japurutú* instruments and the *kapiwayá* chants as well as all their adornments were created in the

“transformation houses”. The *Kapiwayá* repertoire cannot have their words, melodies, nor choreography altered, as related by Mr. Raimundo Galvão and mentioned by other researchers such as Chernela (1996: 82).

The *cariço* and *japurutú* repertoires consists of songs that are constantly renewed with themes from daily life; it can be played in non-ritualistic occasions and is a light and playful music. When Raimundo Galvão, Ercolino Alves and Maximiano Galvão were visiting Belém, the *cariço*, *japurutú* and *Kapiwayá* repertoire were presented and they displayed body ornaments, jaguar teeth belts, bark cloth skirts with *Desana* drawings, *acangatara* (headdresses with long tails) with parrot feathers, and body paintings. The performances were intended to establish the musical identity of the *Desana* people and *Guahari Diputiro Porã*, as well as to show the efforts of musical transmission that have been made in the community. However, the *Kapiwayá* and *Miriá Porã* repertoires cannot be taught yet, because the apprentices are not ready.

In the Upper Rio Negro region, the musical practice is closely related to the formation of a person’s identity through myths, rites, and arts.

### ***Hohodene Baniwa Sacred Musical Instruments as Producers of Identity***

In the mid-1970s, the *Hohodene Baniwa* of the Aiary River rarely performed their traditional *dabokuri* dance-festivals nor sang their traditional songs. All one could hear of music was either the ringing of the iron bell calling people to assemble or go to Catholic Mass, or the hymns of the evangelicals beginning in the pre-dawn hours of night. *Yapurutu*, *cariço*, and the sacred musical instruments, called *Kuwai* (or, *Yurupary*, in lingua geral) that are the “body” of their First Ancestors, were almost tabu to speak about, due to missionary colonization.

Thirty years later, that has changed in many villages, which today boast traditional style dance-houses where communities of kin and affine get together to dance, sing, and initiate their young children as their ancestors did. The chief of one community, called Itacoatiara-mirim, in the early years of this century actually expelled evangelical churches from the village and brought the full force of the *dabukori* (or, *poodali*) dance-festivals back into prominence in his newly-constructed “House of Knowledge”, a large longhouse where cultural events are now in full swing.<sup>14</sup> Another community, Ukuki, on its own initiative, constructed a large dance-house in 2008 called *Nakuliakarudapani*, “House of dance ornaments”, and filmed a major initiation ritual, *Kwepani*, when the sacred instruments called *Kuwai* were played. The following year, 2009, in the village of Uapui, a Shamans’ “House of Powerful Knowledge” (*Malikai Dapani*) was constructed to honor the pajés and their knowledge. That House was recently transformed into a traditional dance-house and cultural center dedicated to the memory of the *Hohodene* historical ancestor.

These examples show how cultural revitalization has been taking shape among the

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<sup>14</sup> Recently a film on “*Poodali*” was produced by the well-known cineast son of the dance-master Luis, at Itacoatiara-mirim.

*Baniwa*, after a long period during which the traditions were condemned and secret. The traditions of the sacred flutes and trumpets, as well as shamanism, suffered greatly during the missionary campaigns; consequently, there is a certain urgency in ensuring that the sacred knowledge be remembered and transmitted to the younger generations. The sacred instruments and shamanism, have everything to do with *Hohodene* and *Baniwa* ancestral identity, the transmission of that identity over the generations, and the very nature of the cosmos. The narrative traditions of *Kuwai* are central to understanding the *Baniwa* worldview. The sacred flutes and trumpets actually transmit the vital life-force that circulates throughout the cosmos. Pajés and dance-leaders manage the life-force by initiating new generations, seeking to sustain harmony in conviviality, while protecting and healing their communities.

Research conducted with *Hohodene* pajés and elders on numerous occasions over a thirty-year period, active collaboration in the foundation of ceremonial houses and the filming of the all-important initiation ceremonies from 2008-15, and collaborative research with *Hohodene* researchers into the relation of cosmology and ancient rock art (petroglyphs) constitute the basis for the following interpretations.

### Story and Meanings of *Kuwai*

The story of *Kuwai* among the *Hohodene* is similar in some ways to that of the *Desana Miriá Porã Masú*, but there are enough significant differences to recognize the traditions as separate. The *Hohodene* narrative –like other *Baniwa* narratives of *Yurupary* (Saake 1958)– tell of the conception, birth, life and “death” of *Kuwai*, the Child of the Sun Father, *Nhiaperikuli*, born from the mystical union of the latter with the first woman *Amaru*, whose body had to be opened so that the child could be born. The child was extraordinary, with a body perforated by holes from which came melodies and songs - the breath-soul of *Kuwai*. His father was astonished by the strangeness of his child, as well as the dangerous sickness and pain the child carried with it. So he and the men sent the child away, banished him to the forest and to the sky, where he grew up in solitude and isolation.

Figure 1 below is a *Hohodene* pajé’s representation of the “Body of *Kuwai-ka-Wamundana*” (or simply, *Kuwai*), that shows this mysterious being as consisting of both apertures along the outer covering of the body, and a series of sicknesses within. The apertures correspond to what would later become material sacred flutes and trumpets. They are *Kuwai*’s “voice” (sounds, melodies, songs, formal ritual dialogue) materialized into different shapes.

The major episode of the story relates the first initiation ceremony that was realized by the great spirit *Kuwai*, on four young boys collectively known as the *Malinali-ienipe*. The boys were gradually introduced to the powerful sounds of *Kuwai*, observing fasting restrictions for three dry seasons. Then a tragedy occurred when three of the boys broke their restrictions and were devoured by *Kuwai*, who had transformed into a monster. *Kuwai* later flew away to his place in the sky; his father, seeking to fix the catastrophe, called his son back down to perform the *kalidzamai* pepper chants, that mark the end of the initiation ritual. The sacred chants and the dance festival of *Kwepan* were realized for the first time; at the end of the festival, his father pushes him into a huge bonfire and *Kuwai*’s spirit ascends back to the sky. From the place where



*Kuwai* was burned a giant paxiúba palm tree burst out from the earth and connected to the sky. From this tree, the first sacred flutes and trumpets were cut; they are said to be the long bones of *Kuwai*, from his real body. With these instruments, initiation rites are performed today<sup>15</sup>.

In the story, the child's mother knew that the men had taken her child away, and she wanted her child back. Throughout the story, the men deceive the women fearing that they would take the dangerous powers embodied in *Kuwai* away, which would leave them helpless. This dread of being without an identity and inability to do anything at all is used as a justification for the secrecy ideology. According to the narrative, when the women did steal the flutes, the world became chaotically noisy, disordered, as a wild storm of poison darts shot out of the flute mouths. Once the Creator succeeded in taking back the flutes, he adorned them, and their melodious sounds, embodying the true attributes of 'personhood', were reproduced; so he then declared: "now people can take these and blow them".

In other words, the whole process of reproducing new generations of adults, and by extension, the entire universe, was complete when the Creator succeeded in replicating the melodic voice of his own child –the Creator breathed new life into his son's transformed body, making a replica in the flutes and trumpets of paxiúba palmwood, strong vines, and treebark. The powerful feather of the hawk called *Haawa*, when attached to the bodies of the flutes, opened them up to emit the "one and only" (*hnhawaakatsa*) true sounds of *Kuwai*, empowering all material forms and shapes with the creative 'burst-of-breath' (Hill and Chaumeil 2011).

*Kuwai* embodies both a concept of Multiple beings-in-One, and One Being-in-Multiplicity that is the Universe. The multiplicity is made up of the bodies of *Kuwai* ancestral spirits, each of which is very different, as the melodic sounds and noises they produce. Each ancestral spirit has its own 'body', but is also a part (arm, leg, and claw) of the universal Body that is *Kuwai*. All his sacred body together emits powerful music, sounds of the primordial spirit world. This world was made by the thought of the Creator father of *Kuwai*, the sun deity creator of all life, through knowledge and power transmitted as the "soul" of what would later become the very first ancestors, primordial beings with different shapes and forms that are often seen on the petroglyphs.

Considered altogether, the graphic representations of these primordial beings, chiseled in the boulders of many rapids in the Northwest Amazon, comprise a cultural memory of the primordial world, how it came into being, and the world-changing events that made the contemporary world that people live in the way it is. (Wright 2013, Xavier Leal 2008, Gonzalez-Ñáñez 2007)

### The Sounds of the Whips

In the performance of initiation rites today, the sounds of the flutes and trumpets along with the whips that were part of *Kuwai*'s body are what make the initiates and fruit-bearing palm trees grow. The whips break open the initiates' skin allowing the sounds to penetrate their heart-souls. With these sounds, there is growth and expansion; with *Kuwai*'s whips, plus the 'fire' of

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<sup>15</sup> The following analysis is largely based on points that are developed in greater detail in my article Wright (2015).

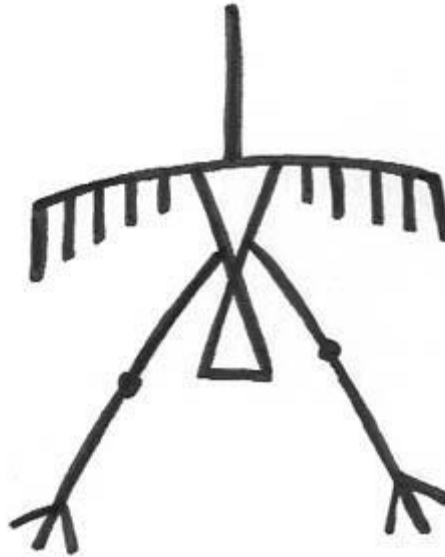
sacred pepper blessed (chanted over) in the final initiation rite, the initiates become immune to the potentially dangerous ancestral spirits (*Kuwainai*). Initiates are taught to control bodily needs by fasting and to become fully cultural beings by recognizing and experiencing the music of the sacred. In the story, *Kuwai* only revealed his music and power in small doses. (See full story of *Kuwai* in Cornélio 1999) When *Kuwai*'s melodies are played, today as in the beginning times, they are always accompanied by the sounds of whips slashing the bodies of the participants. In resisting the pain of the whips (not demonstrating pain through crying or even flinching), all life grows “with force” (quickly) and strength. This is why the men play the flutes and trumpets during the time of the ripening of the forest-fruits, at the base of the fruit-trees –in order to make them grow in abundance, as food for the initiates and whoever is “seeing *Kuwai*” (Hugh-Jones 1989, Maia 2008, Vútova 2013).

### Sacred Sounds, Growth and Personhood

The apertures, “holes”, in *Kuwai*'s body were externalized and materialized into the sacred flutes and trumpets after his sacrifice in the great fire. The sacred flutes were measured and cut from the great paxiúba palm tree; the Creator fashioned them in such a way as to replicate the melodic sounds of the original Body of *Kuwai*. His thorax became the great trumpets that bellow out the Jaguar Bone song that “opened up” the world, making it expand like a balloon to its present-day size.

The pajé's drawing below (Figure 1) positions the apertures in *Kuwai*'s body in such a way as to indicate an order, on both sides of the body, of named flutes and trumpets (each stick or oblong shape representing a long flute). From the meanings attributed to each of the flutes, we come to understand (1) what features or attributes of primordial ancestry are most significant, (2) what aspects of the primordial world and its powers were transmitted to all future generations, and especially (3) the vital importance of transmitting cultural memory. These meanings altogether constitute the shamans' understanding of the Universe and its dynamic processes of reproduction. By “reproduction”, it is not merely biological reproduction, nor the physical “body”; for, besides being parts of *Kuwai*'s primordial Body, they represent the nature and qualities of the Person, as understood culturally, of the collective “Self” (sibs and phratries), and of collective “Others” (affines, enemies).

A couple of examples will suffice to illustrate this interpretation, The drawing below comes from a petroglyph which displays the bodies of 2 flutes in the shape of 2 triangles connected together at their mouths, with a pair of “wings” and stick shapes that are the appendages of the White Heron, *Maali*. The entire shape corresponds to the body of the ancestral being *Maaliawali*, Young White Heron, which corresponds to the first two fingers of *Kuwai*'s paw and is always the first pair of sacred flutes that dance in the initiation ritual procession. The first pair of long flutes *Maaliawali* mimics the sound of a rattle being shaken followed by a high-pitched song of a white heron in flight.

Figure 1: *Maaliawali*

The trumpet called **Jaguar Bone**, *Dzauinaapa* is the thorax of *Kuwai*, or ribcage, *iwarudali*, the longest and most powerful of the trumpets that propitiate transformation in whomever or whatever the Jaguar Bone song is intended to change. In the narrative and in the drawing of *Kuwai-ka-Wamundana* reproduced below (Fig. 3), the 2 trumpets are contrasted with the wasp sound (*Aini*), produced by play instruments made by the first children initiates, and which were considered to be a “false *kuwai*, nonsense”. *Kuwai* himself contrasted these buzzing wasp flute imitations of the children with the truly powerful sound of Jaguar Bone that made the world grow and culture be reproduced.

Figure 2: *Dzauinaapa*

### Connections to Sacred Geography: Places of Transformation

The chants sung at the pepper blessing (*kalidzamai*) during initiation re-member (i.e., join

together) the Body of *Kuwai*, the parts of which are spread out over an enormous territory in the Northwest Amazon, corresponding to the area of all communities of northern Arawak language speakers. Furthermore, key places focused in the narrative of *Kuwai* are generally sites with numerous, extraordinary petroglyphs, the placement of boulders which must not be disturbed, powerful rapids and waterfalls, and other features of the ecology that not only re-member the details of the story but continue to be the sources of sustenance and life. Each ‘sacred site’ is ‘blessed’ by chanters to protect newly initiated adults from any potential sickness or harm associated with place. Ancestral flutes belonging to specific sibs are kept hidden in streams near the village site (which often are sites of historical settlements by the ancestors). This materializes the indelible link between the spiritual “Body of *Kuwai*” and a notion of ancestral territory that the phratry must guard against any outside intrusions.

The all-encompassing totality of *Kuwai*’s being, the powerful univocality of *Kuwai*’s sounds, the “powerful sound that opened the universe” (*limale-iyu*) is unique among Amazonian cosmologies for its capacity to encompass within its spiritual body the multiplicity and diversity of the material world. It is not difficult to understand why such a tremendous power should be kept a secret, too dangerous to handle; a potentially destructive creativity, or equally, a potentially creative destructiveness (as in regeneration), the spirit of *Kuwai* is obliged to remain hidden, yet it is the instrument by which all life is reproduced. The remarkable elaboration of this all-encompassing power demonstrates a truly complex metaphysics which this brief piece has barely scratched the surface.

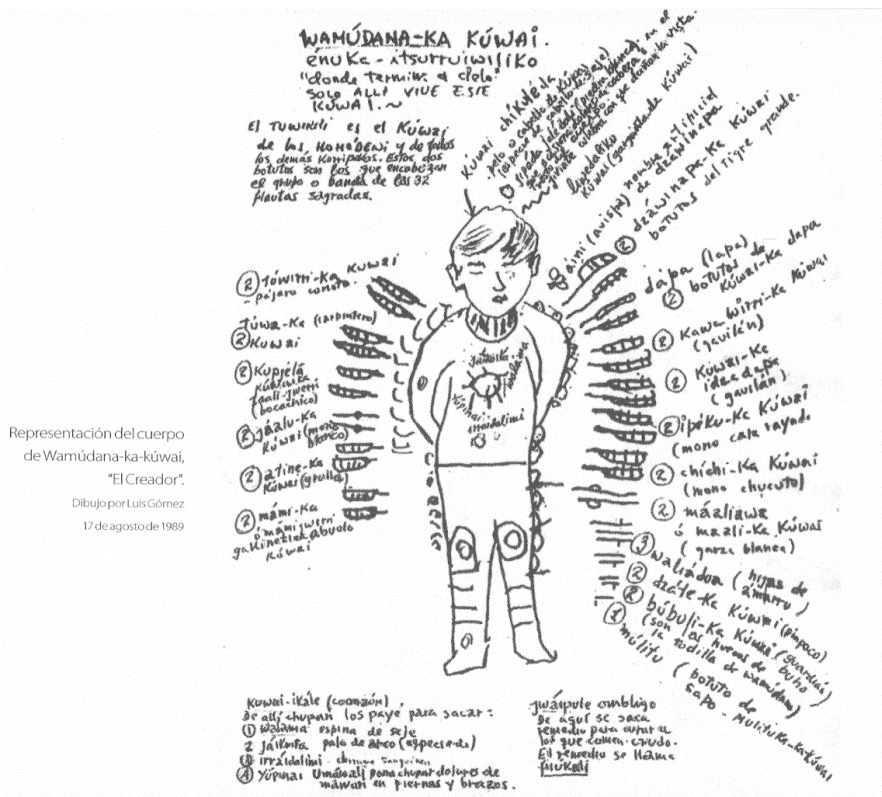


Figure 3: *Kuwa*

### Final comments

The relationship between music and myth in the South American Lowlands has been widely discussed in the recent anthropological literature. The centrality of music and its importance to culture has recently been articulated in research by Menezes Bastos (2013), through the concept of “artist-icity” and the statement that music works as a pivot in the “inter-semiotic network” of ritual.

The complex of sacred flutes also has been an important theme discussed in the ethnomusicological studies of Ameríndian music from Lowland South America. The publication organized by Hill and Chaumeil (2011) offers deeper reflections and research on the importance of this complex to the Amazonian region and its relationship to musical practice, mythology and sociability.

This intricate system –involving music, myth, identity and rituals– has been the focus of important efforts by the indigenous people to revive their traditions. The Northwest Amazon was, for centuries, violated by the colonization process to which it was quite vulnerable. Within the past several decades, the indigenous people have created strategies of conservation and regeneration of their traditions. In this sense, the collaborative research in this project worked to assist in producing knowledge in a relevant way.

In the *Baniwa* and *Desana* case, the musical experience and mythological perspective organize the self construction and the social life. The ancestral landscape offers the petroglyphs and sacred places where the primitive people emerged. There emerged, also, the cultural beings like music and medicines. Both sibs were involved in hard cultural change process and had been creating strategies to maintaining some of the diverse important aspects of their musical lives. In both cases, the musical repertoire related to the shamanism, the *Kuwai* or *Miriá Porã Masú* cult, were especially vulnerable. The other musical repertoires connected with non-solemn ceremonies or festivals, like *japurutú* or *cariço*, were absorbed in the urban context. In both cases, the elders are making efforts to share their knowledge which circumscribe many domains of the science (music, myth, dance, medicine, astrology). In those new contexts, play music is a political form of appropriation and actualization of the self construction and musical sense.

Collaboration between indigenous and anthropological researchers is most productive when work is done on multiple fronts: exploring the modalities of sound and voice in the narratives; exploring the meanings of rock inscriptions and petroglyphs in relation to cosmology and a larger sense of ethno-linguistic identity; exploring in depth the knowledge and power of ceremonial dance-leaders and shamans regarding the interconnectedness of music, ritual, and cosmology.

The *Baniwa* and *Desana* are fully engaged in the process of recovering their cultural traditions so that they will continue to be transmitted. Since music and the production of identity are so intimately connected in the Northwest Amazon, anthropological collaboration with indigenous researchers can contribute in a vital way to supporting native-initiated projects that valorize and revitalize traditional musical and ritual forms.



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**Biography / Biografía / Biografia /**

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