Musical Representations of the Gaucho and Immigrant: Navigating Identity within the Argentine Criollo Circus

Mitsuko Kawabata

University of Miami, m.kawabata@umiami.edu

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MUSICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE GAUCHO AND IMMIGRANT: NAVIGATING IDENTITY WITHIN THE ARGENTINE CRIOLLO CIRCUS

By
Mitsuko Kawabata

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of the University of Miami in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music

Coral Gables, Florida

May 2009
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Music

MUSICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE GAUCHO AND IMMIGRANT:
NAVIGATING IDENTITY WITHIN THE ARGENTINE CRIOLLO CIRCUS

Mitsuko Kawabata

Approved:

Deborah Schwartz-Kates, Ph.D.
Professor of Musicology

Terri A. Scandura, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Willa Collins, Ph.D.
Professor of Musicology

Paul Wilson, Ph.D.
Professor of Music Theory
The _circo criollo_, or Argentine native circus, arose as one of the most important forms of popular expression during the late nineteenth century. This performance context can serve as a site for exploring old and new constructions of Argentine identity that encompassed the lower and middle classes and included native and immigrant groups, particularly in Buenos Aires. Although the native circus contributed greatly to the creation of such an identity, little is known about the musical practices of the circus itself, including what types of music or dance were performed, the manner in which they were interpreted, and how the audience responded. This thesis therefore aims to bring to light these previously obscure circus traditions. It discusses the negotiation and conflict of power relationships that informs Argentine identity construction within this popular expressive medium. By examining the _circo criollo_ as a site of hegemonic power differentials, this study probes more deeply into the contradictions that underlie such a fragile yet persistent sense of incipient Argentine identity.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of my supervisor, Dr. Deborah Schwartz-Kates, who has supported me throughout my thesis with her great patience and knowledge. Along with her insightful suggestions, her studies have always stimulated my curiosity ever since I first read her work in Japan, which motivated me to study in the United States. I am also grateful to the other members of my committee, Dr. Paul Wilson and Dr. Willa Collins. With constant encouragement, Dr. Wilson gave me very helpful suggestions in my analysis and writing. In addition, I appreciate all of Dr. Collin’s comments, especially in our discussion of Chapter 2.

I also would like to thank my Japanese teachers at Osaka University, Professors Osamu Yamaguchi, Kazumi Negishi, Nobuhiro Ito, and Izumi Chiba, who sparked my enthusiasm for musicology itself and for Latin American music. I would like to acknowledge the members of Dr. Chiba’s music group, “Voces del sur,” with whom I performed a variety of Latin American music.

In Argentina, first of all, I would like to thank Héctor Lucci, who donated historical recordings of the native circus at the beginning of the twentieth century. His kind invitation to gather with other tangueros viejitos at his asado party in Buenos Aires provided a valuable and meaningful cultural experience. I am also grateful to many Argentine scholars. Héctor Aricó, a dance historian at the Instituto Universitario Nacional del Arte suggested a variety of interesting Argentine folk materials and taught me different dances. Finally, I would like to
thank Beatriz Seibel, an authority on theater history in Argentina, who gave me unpublished materials of her research on the circo criollo and on Argentine theatre history.

The families of Argentine traditionalists and circus groups greatly facilitated my research. They granted personal interviews, provided significant information, and above all, treated me as a member of their families. I would like to express my gratitude to the following people: Jorge Videla and his family from Buenos Aires, José Toro and his family in Tucumán, Andrea Maitia and her family in Tres Arroyos, and Alicia and Mecha Lombardelli, also in Buenos Aires. A community of Japanese residents who immigrated to Argentina also greatly helped my experience there. I would like to express my personal gratitude to Mitsuo Higa, Mitsuki and Neli Higa, and Sumako Aragaki.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends who have offered their support. I greatly appreciate the help of Roxane Pickens, who patiently checked and proofread my English, generously offering me her extra time. I am also grateful to my colleague at the University of Miami, Kelly Hiser, who also diligently checked my English. Most of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my parents, Kenji and Ayako Kawabata in Japan, who have supported me with their enormous affection and devotion and to whom this work is dedicated.
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Introduction

The *circo criollo*, or the native circus, arose as one of the most important forms of popular expression in Buenos Aires during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Circus actors in costumes of the *gaUCHo* (or the native horseman of the pampas) performed popularized rural music and dance on the stage. The *circo criollo* is considered the earliest vernacular spectacle to revive the declining gaucho traditions in the theatre. In the past, scholars have focused on such representations of Argentine identity from the perspective of the elite high culture. However, the native horseman also existed in a less refined setting in the *circo criollo*, where elite and mass cultures intertwined. This thesis aims to describe the native circus in further detail, focusing on its music. It strives to discuss negotiation and conflict within power relationships that relate to Argentine identity construction within this popular expression.

Research on the *circo criollo* was published in the 1980s with the landmark posthumous study of the Argentine folk revival movement by the Argentine musicologist, Carlos Vega. His research situated popular expressions within a historical context and offered a catalogue of genres performed in the circus: the *estilo, vitalita, triste, milonga, gato, pericón,* and *tango*.\(^1\) During the same period, Beatriz Seibel published an encyclopedic examination of Argentine theatre history.\(^2\) Together, Vega and Seibel devoted much effort to creating a list of music from

\(^{1}\) Carlos Vega, *Apuntes para la historia del movimiento tradicionalista argentina* (Buenos Aires: Instituto Nacional de Musicología “Carlos Vega”, 1981), 49-51. Except for the *estilo* and *triste*, these forms are all dance music.

\(^{2}\) Readers who are interested in this subject should consult Seibel’s *Historia del teatro argentino* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor), 2002.
the circus. Yet, neither the significance of the *circo criollo* nor its performative aspects were explored at all in their studies.

In the following years, other types of research by American scholars emerged, revealing a more nuanced understanding of the native circus. The American musicologist, Deborah Schwartz-Kates, referred to the *circo criollo* and the musical repertoire of the gaucho in a chapter of the book, *From Tejano to Tango.*³ Schwartz-Kates explored this popular expression as an intersection of urban and rural cultures with music representing the image of the gaucho. The American anthropologists, Micol Seigel and Ana Cara-Walker, also discussed the role of the *circo criollo* during the turn of the twentieth century.⁴ These two scholars examined the process of assimilation between the preexisting Argentine community and the new immigrant population within this popular expression. Schwartz-Kates, Seigel, and Cara-Walker contributed new insights into the construction of *argentinidad* (Argentineness) with their scholarship. Nevertheless, important questions remain about the specifics of circus performances as well as an analysis of their aesthetic, social, and cultural meanings.

Although the native circus contributed greatly to the creation of *argentinidad*, little is known about the musical practices that accompanied these presentations, including what kinds of music or dance were performed, how the musicians rendered these pieces, and how the audience responded. In addition, theater studies have ignored the musical elements of the *circo criollo* and information on recordings has been extremely limited. Despite this gap in our


knowledge, music was a significant component of the circus in evoking the rural setting of the gauchos. Additionally, the musical repertoires performed there mirrored the contemporary social situation. My thesis endeavors to fill in some of these scholarly gaps and to provide more detailed information on music in the circo criollo. I base my analysis on historical recordings as well as on my own field research with older people who still remember the circus. This fieldwork was conducted during two six-week periods in 2008 and 2009 throughout Argentine national libraries and local archives in Buenos Aires.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first aims to situate the native circus within the socio-cultural context of Argentine nationalism. To do so, it elucidates salient features of the tradición gauchesca, (or the tradition of representing the gaucho in the arts), especially in literary and musical sources. Using typical examples from each field, this chapter explains how Argentine artists and composers depicted the gaucho in their works. I focus on the Uruguayan actor, José Podestá (1858-1937), who established the two-part form of the circo criollo in Argentina, which began with an acrobatic display followed by a gauchesco drama. This chapter also briefly describes Argentine circus history, offers a biographical sketch of Podestá, and discusses the role of the native circus in conveying Argentine nationalism.

Chapter 2 focuses on the music used in the native circus. This chapter examines musical aspects of the circo criollo and analyzes five musical genres frequently performed there: the estiló, vidalita, milonga, gato, and pericón. In my thesis, I transcribe and analyze for the first time historical recordings dating from the 1900s. Through this process, I will offer more definitive information on music from the nineteenth-century stage and discuss its relationship with representations of the gaucho.
The final chapter discusses the construction of Argentine identity in the circo criollo. It investigates the theatrical character known as Cocoliche (a clownish parody of Italian immigrants pretending to be gauchos) and the way that this figure navigates between old and new Argentine identities. Focusing on performances featuring Cocoliche and the gaucho together on stage, I will discuss processes of integration and separation between new immigrant societies and preexisting Argentine communities. By examining the music of the popular circus as a site of negotiation and conflict of power differentials, I will probe more deeply into the contradictions that underlie constructions of a fragile yet persistent Argentine identity.
Chapter 1

The Contextual Setting of the Circo Criollo in the Tradición Gauchesca

Here I come to sing
to the beat of my guitar,
because a man who reveals
his extraordinary sorrow,
like a solitary bird,
consoles himself with singing

José Hernández, *Martín Fierro* (1872)

In the late nineteenth century, Argentina confronted the question of how to construct itself as a nation. After a long civil war period (1816-1880), political leaders fostered economic and cultural development in the style of European countries. Especially after Julio Argentino Roca’s 1880 victory in the Conquest of the Desert campaign, a progress-oriented group of leaders and intellectuals called the Generation of 1880 promoted rapid modernization through Europeanization. The ideals of this group were based on Social Darwinism, developed by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), that related to the concept of “cultural superiority.”

The members of this group applied this perspective to the modernization of Argentina and tried to change the cultural complexion of the country through European immigration and foreign investment, drawing mainly on capital from England. In order to alter and “improve” the racial composition of Argentine society, they first tried to exterminate the gaucho, by removing

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him from the pampas and by forcing him into battle with indigenous tribes. With the region now empty, they introduced the railway to unexplored areas. Finally, this generation used trains to bring European immigrants to the countryside, completing their efforts at promoting European cultural ideals. Ricardo Rodríguez Molas, Professor of History at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, metaphorically described the contemporary situation with the following statement: “The pampas ceased to be populated by gauchos and instead was taken over by gringos” (which he here defined as outsiders).

Yet, massive immigration (primarily from Italy and Spain) caused serious problems, mainly relating to Argentine economics, culture, and identity. As shown in Figure 1.1, between 1890 and 1914, more than 4,000,000 people immigrated to Argentina. As a result, the population in Buenos Aires in 1914 was 7,885,237. Of that number, 2,357,952 (or almost one out of every three people) came from another country. Influences of Europeanization appeared both in rural and urban areas and in elite and mass cultures. In Buenos Aires, Parisian-style elegant buildings that included theaters, hotels, and coffee shops, were built, and English sports, such as golf and polo, were played.

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7 The four main railway companies included: the Central Argentine Railway (from Buenos Aires to Rosario), the Buenos Aires Great Southern Railway (from Buenos Aires to the south), the Buenos Aires and Pacific Railway (from Buenos Aires to the southwest), and the Buenos Aires Western Railway (from the Buenos Aires to the Pacific Ocean). Imai Keiko, Study of Railway History in Argentina (Tokyo: Asia keizai kenkyujo, 1985), 50-76.


9 Solberg, Immigration and Nationalism: Argentina and Chile, 1890-1914, 36.

10 The old Colón Theater, which was located on the Avenida de Mayo, was inaugurated in 1856. This building is now the Banco Nacional. The present Colón Theater was built in 1908. Today, it is located on the 9 de Julio Boulevard.
On the one hand, people from the upper classes enjoyed the products and pasttimes of an imported European culture. On the other hand, the lower class suffered from an economically restructured society, since they had to compete for jobs against a massive immigrant population. Their antipathy toward the newcomers was reflected in the words, *танос* or *gringos*, which were disparaging names for immigrants, especially from Italy. However, the native Argentines could not resist the influence of immigrants on their culture, including changes in language and music. For instance, some urban popular songs had melodies with Italian dance rhythms and used the Argentine dialect, known as *lunfardo*, resulting from the mixture of Spanish with Italian.12

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12 For example, *laburar* (to work in *lunfardo*) is from the Italian word, *lavorare*. 
In rural areas, where the gaucho used to live, his lifestyle was forced to change because of modernization. Gauchos could no longer live as freely as previously; instead, they were now forced to work as wage earners. They worked as peones (ranch laborers), vaqueros (cowboys) in enclosed areas, or as carriers of various products between rural and urban regions. Interestingly, both European immigrants in search of property and gauchos in search of work went back and forth between the pampas and Buenos Aires. This migration consequently promoted cultural exchange between the two areas: the folk traditions came to Buenos Aires and European cultures came to the pampas.

Yet, the coexistence of migration and modernization created gaps between the real and ideal for the Generation of 1880. The first issue was that immigrants came primarily from agricultural areas in European countries and were not “civilized” people as Argentine political leaders expected. A second problem resulted from the size of the immigration movement, which led to a serious identity crisis as reflected in the following statement by the novelist José María Miró (pseudo. Julian Martel): “Now we do not even know what we are – French or Spanish, Italians, or English.”13 Political leaders therefore had to adjust their concept of argentinidad (or “Argentineness”) and create a new identity, which would be appropriate for the preexisting Argentine community as well as for the immigrants.

The cultural shift from the Europeanization to Creolization also related to the political tension between PAN (Partido Autonomista Nacional) supported by the conservative upper class and UCR (Unión Cívica Radical) upheld by the middle class. The members of the latter party,

constantly strengthened by newly arriving immigrants, continued revolutions to overthrow the government. The conservative elite class needed a symbol to dissolve the tension. For their purposes, the gaucho’s folk customs became symbolic of Argentineness. Revising the history of the native horseman and remodeling his customs as national traditions, they superimposed his ideals and values onto the new nation. This process of legendization culminated in the movement known as the tradición gauchesca that extolled and romanticized the native horseman. Whereas the government made the actual gaucho disappear, the idealized horseman became a theme in various art forms, including the visual arts, music, and theater. Among these cultural expressions, the circo criollo played a particularly significant role as a site of identity construction, since it emerged as the locus where rural and urban, as well as elite and mass cultures, intermixed.

To situate the circus in the socio-cultural context of Argentine modern history, this chapter illustrates and examines general discourses surrounding the tradición gauchesca, especially in literature. It interrogates the types of gaucho materials that were used and the way that writers portrayed the native horsemen in relation to this process of identity construction. Later, the chapter briefly describes Argentine circus history, along with the transformation of this popular expression and its role from independence to the late nineteenth century. Within this framework, I will focus on the content of the circo criollo and emphasize the contribution of the iconic Uruguayan actor and circus performer, José Podestá, who initiated the title role in the cornerstone theatrical production of the gauchesca drama, Juan Moreira in 1884.
The tradición gauchesca and the Representation of the Gaucho

The tradición gauchesca began in literature, following cultural efforts to protect the gaucho’s human rights. One early author who contributed to this art form was José Hernández (1834-86), who protested the injustice of modernizing forces that adversely affected the gaucho with his poem, *El gaucho Martín Fierro* (1872), followed by the sequel, *La vuelta de Martín Fierro* (1879). The plot of these poems was fictional, but it was nevertheless based on the real social situation of the native horseman. To enhance the sense of realism, Hernández used the typical gaucho poetic form of the *sextilla* (six-line stanza of octosyllabic verse), which was performed by the *payador* (or native gaucho-singer). Interestingly, what was created as a protest collection became wildly popular, enhancing the development of the tradición gauchesca in literature.

Prominent features of the gauchesca literature included: references to Argentine folk customs, romanticized images of the gaucho, and cultivated styles of literary expression. Many gauchesca poems and novels depicted the Argentine folk customs of the native horseman in rural areas, especially his lifestyle, music, and dance. For instance, *Martín Fierro* refers to gaucho dance music including a performance of the *gato* and *pericón* at a small grocery store known as a *pulpería* in Figure 1.2.

Hernández also uses vernacular verbal expressions of the gaucho that I highlighted in Figure 1.2: *empezaََ*o (empezado in modern Spanish), *changaََ*ndo (a small guitar of poor quality), and *pango* (confusion).
Another example of the tradición gauchesca in literature is the novel Juan Moreira (1879), by Eduardo Gutiérrez. This work was first published as a serial in the newspaper, La patria argentina, by the author’s brother, Ricardo Gutiérrez (1836-96). The plot was based on a real-life gaucho Juan Moreira, who was born in Matanza in the Province of Buenos Aires, who ran away as a criminal, and who in 1874 was killed by the police. In this novel, Gutiérrez described Moreira’s singing with his guitar, the archetypical gaucho instrument.

A second characteristic of romanticizing the gaucho, pervades this literary tradition and forms a core of the folk revival movement. In many literary works, the gaucho was depicted as a rebellious figure who fought for justice and as a masculine character who entered into friendships with other horsemen. The concept of a matrero (gaucho fugitive) also makes the literature more dramatic and enhances the masculinity of the main character. Both Fierro and

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14 Translated by the author.
Moreira become *matreros* because they kill people during duels. Yet, Hernández and Gutiérrez do not describe the gaucho as a murderer, but as a heroic figure, emphasizing his strength, manliness, and defiance.

The masculine bond between gauchos also forms a part of this tradition. The comic *gauchesca* poem, *Fausto: Impresiones del gaucho Anastasio el Pollo en la representación de esta ópera* (1866), by Estanislao del Campo, is a representative example. This comic poem used another type of gaucho lyric form, the *décima* (ten-line stanza of octosyllabic verse). The plot is based on a conversation between two gauchos, Don Laguna and Anastasio el Pollo; the former talks to the latter about his amazing experience while seeing Gounod’s opera *Faust* at the Colón Theater. In these comic verses, both the friendship and masculinity of the two gauchos are emphasized, as in Figure 1.3. This friendship between gauchos is also described in *Martín Fierro* and *Juan Moreira*; the amity among gauchos is a significant aspect of the narratives, since other gauchos assist them while they are escaping from the police.

**Figure 1.3. Verses 3-4 from Fausto, Part V**

15 Translated by the author.

-¡Qué vergüenza!
-¿Qué vergüenza!
-Puede ser:
-What a shame!
-It can be.
-Pero, amigas, confiesa
-But, my friend, confess
-Que a usté también lo entenece
-that you were also moved
-El llanto de una mujer.
-by a woman’s sorrow.

-¡Qué vergüenza!
-¿Qué vergüenza!
-It can be.
-Pero, amigas, confiesa
-But, my friend, confess
-Que a usté también lo entenece
-that you were also moved
-El llanto de una mujer.
-by a woman’s sorrow.

Cuando a usté un hombre lo ofiende,
When a man offends you,
Ya sin mirar para atrás,
without looking back
Pela el flamenco y ¡sas! ¡tras!
Stab the impertinent yah! ha!
Dos puñaladas le priende
Two stabs would get the man
The final feature in *gauchesca* literature is a cultivated style of writing. Authors who published *gauchesca* poems and novels were not gauchos, but intellectuals who came from academic literary backgrounds. Certainly, Hernández and del Campo used the typical gaucho poetic form, yet it is doubtful that the real gaucho could write with such sophisticated expression. This romanticized version of the gaucho had its critics. The Argentine poet Leopold Lugones criticized del Campo’s description of the gaucho for the following reasons: it was impossible for the actual gaucho to go to the Colón Theater and to understand the opera *Faust*, partly because the Colón was a symbol of the elite culture, which the actual gaucho could not afford.\(^{16}\) Additionally, Lugones notes the expression, *overo rosao* (dappled brown horse), found at the beginning of the poem and criticizes its use because the gaucho in rural areas would not have used such a horse as a means of travel.\(^{17}\)

Historical accuracy aside, the significant aesthetic details of the *tradición gauchesca* in literature are echoed in other art forms around the turn of the twentieth century. On the one hand, the spread of modernization transformed gauchos into wage-laborers; on the other hand the idealized gaucho image was nostalgically upheld by elite intellectuals. This perspective may relate to cultural sedimentation that the Generation of 1880 intended, which embodied the hierarchical view that the elite high culture should go down to the masses. Yet, as Schwartz-Kates has already pointed out in a chapter of the book, *From Tejano to Tango*, the *tradición gauchesca* was inseparable from the urban popular milieu.\(^{18}\) Furthermore, the


\(^{18}\) Deborah Schwartz-Kates, “The Popularized Gaucho Image as a Source of Argentine Classical Music,
popular power structure supported and even created this folk movement from the bottom of society, fostering a more real sense of the Argentine identity. In the following sections and chapters, I focus on the contemporary popular expression of that identity, as manifested in the *circro criollo*.

**The Socio-Cultural Context of the Circo Criollo**

The *circro criollo* played a central role in the construction of Argentine identity within the concept of the *tradición gauchesca*. The circus culture intertwined with the nation-building process in Argentina after independence and continued to unfold into the twentieth century. This popular expression joined together two different expressive forms: the European-style circus and the Spanish *sainete* which at first existed as two independent entities.

Prior to Independence, circus culture in Argentina was already established in the *rioplatense* area.¹⁹ For instance, in 1756 and 1757, the Spanish acrobats Arganda and Joaquin Duarte visited Buenos Aires to perform juggling, acrobatics, and magic.²⁰ In 1795, the Italian actor Francesco Orsi performed his circus with his Compañía de Volatines at the Coliseum.²¹ Programs of the early circus included acrobatics, puppet shows, musical performances by a small orchestra, choreographed finales, and pantomimes. At the same time, the Spanish

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²¹ Ibid.
sainete, a comic drama in one act, became popular in Argentina. These two cultural expressions were not yet combined with each other, but later converged in the two-part form of the circo criollo in which the first part is an acrobatic display and the second part is a gauchesco drama.

After Independence, the circus gradually acquired a more political character, since performances were used for patriotic celebrations following the Revolution. For instance, at the victory of General Manuel Belgrano in Tucumán on September 24, 1812, an acrobatic show was performed in the Plaza del Retiro for this purpose. Two years later, sainete performances began in Buenos Aires.\(^{22}\) These spectacles included nationalistic and patriotic stories combined with Argentine folk dances. In the sainete Las bodas de Chivico y Pancha (The Marriage of Chivico and Pancha), for example, folk dances known as the cielito, pericón, and media caña were all performed.\(^{23}\)

Because of the popularity of the circus, many European groups performed in Argentina when they toured Latin America during the 1820s. Between 1820 and 1826, the English clown Francis Bradley performed acrobatics and entertained the audience as a clown in his Olympic Circus.\(^{24}\) Bradley’s program included the number “Paisano a caballo,” which was a clownish performance on a galloping horse. This entertainer also performed the pantomime, “El rústico borracho” (The Rustic Drunk) and the comic show, “Payaso el bobo de una mujer”

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\(^{23}\) Beatriz Seibel, Historia del teatro argentino (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2002), 59.

\(^{24}\) In 1804, when Philip Astley (1742-1814) opened the Olympic Pavilion in London, and, in 1807, when Antonio Francconi (1738-1836) opened the circus theater known as the Olympic Circus in Paris, many circus groups began naming their circus, “Olympic.” Seibel, Historia del circo, 18-20.
(Silly Clown of a Woman). With the ending of the latter, actors performed the *fricassé*, which was a parody of a popular dance.

Between the 1810s and 1830s, the main venues for circus performances were the Coliseo (Coliseum) and the Circo de la Alameda (Circus of the Tree-Lined Road). However, in 1872 when the Parque Argentino was built by the English resident, Santiago Wilde, this place also became a popular location for circus performances. It was designed to imitate the Vauxhall area in London. The Parque Argentino had an English garden, a French style hotel, a dance hall, a small theater, and an arena large enough to accommodate a 1500-person audience.

In 1829, an Italian circus run by the Chiarini family came to Buenos Aires and performed in the Parque Argentino. The leader, José Chiarini was known for his Herculean strength and his instruction in acrobatics; his wife, Angelita, was known for her acrobatic feats. This Italian circus group included pantomime characters from the Comedia del Arte in their programs; such characters included Alrequin (played by José), Colombina (played by Angelita), and Pantalone (played by their son, Giuseppe). The Chiarini family hired Argentine actors to perform traditional folk dances.

After the 1830s, under the dictatorship of Rosas (1836-52), the Argentine circus fused several key elements together. These included the comic drama from Italy, clowns modeled on

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26 The Parque Argentino was located in the corner, surrounded by the present Viamonte, Córdoba, Uruguay, and Paraná Streets. Beatriz Seibel, *Historia del teatro argentino*, 83.

27 Castagnino, *Circo, teatro gauchesco y tango*, 15.

28 Yet, what kinds of dances were performed is still unknown. Seibel, *Historia del circo*, 21.
characters from England and France, acrobatic shows of international currency, and Spanish sainetes. For instance, in 1842, the Olympic Circus performed a pantomime and a simple sainete with a finale. During this period, the circus grew increasingly politicized with the creation of official government box seats and its use for the celebration of major civic events. These additions may relate to the fact that military and police bands often accompanied Argentine circus music.

During Rosas’s regime, native performers also became popular. For instance, Florencio Castañera and Francisca Peñaloza participated in the English company, Laforest-Smith, that opened its 1200-seat circus tent in Buenos Aires in 1834. Later, Castañera organized his circus, the Circo Olímpico, with other Argentine performers, including the clown Jaime and the female performers, Baldomera Viera, Manuela Donado, and Cattalina Manzanares.

When Rosas was defeated by the opposing party at the Battle of Caseros in 1852, a number of Argentine performers had to leave Buenos Aires, since their strong connection with him now endangered their lives. However, the popularity of the circus did not decline and circus groups from European countries kept visiting the city. These groups usually came to

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29 Schwartz-Kates, “The Popularized Gaucho Image as a Source of Argentine Classical Music, 1880-1920,” 4; During the same period, not only the circus group but also the opera group came to Argentina mainly from Italy and France. They performed in the Victoria Theater and the Argentino Theater. Gesualdo, *La música en la Argentina*, 125.


32 Laforest-Smith was located at the corner of the present Sarmiento and San Martin Streets.

Argentina as part of a tour, but some groups began staying in Buenos Aires longer and included an Argentine repertoire in their programs. In 1857, the circus of Heugenio Hénault and Giovanni Lippolis performed dramas related to gaucho themes at the Argentine Theater. This show consisted of eight spectacles; the last part was *El mate y los gauchos*, which represented gaucho customs on stage. In the same year, at the Victoria Theater, a Spanish *sainete* group accompanied by Santiago Ramos performed a comic drama, *El gaucho en Buenos Aires o sea todos rabian por casarse* (The Gaucho in Buenos Aires or Everybody Is Crazy to Get Married). The author of that drama officially remained nameless; however, it was a well-known fact that the person was really Estanislao del Campo, the author of *Fausto*. Apparently, these circus performances of the 1850s related to the *tradición gauchesca*. However, it is questionable as to what extent they tried to create gaucho customs in an authentic performance style. In fact, these circus and *sainete* groups were not from Argentina, but from other countries. The music used to evoke rural settings was composed by the Spanish director Ramos, who set the traditional “cielito” lyrics by Bartolomé Hidalgo (1788-1822) to the music of an urban popular tango. Considering this fact, the circus did not provide an “authentic” sense of Argentineness to the audience. Yet, these stage performances ultimately led to the inclusion of a native drama within the *circo criollo*.

In the late 1860s and 1870s, Argentina received more foreign circus companies; the five major groups were: the Hénault, Guillaume, Chiarini, Pablo Raffetto, and Hermanos Carlo

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34 Seibel, *Historia del teatro argentino*, 143.


circuses. With the exception of the Hénault and Guillaume, these groups came from Italy. Their programs included acrobatic displays, comic dramas, clown shows, and gaucho dramas. Among them, the Raffetto and the Hermanos Carlo greatly contributed to the establishment of the *circo criollo*. The former demonstrated comic dramas using the *italo-criollo* language (a mixture of Spanish and Italian), which reflected contemporary Argentine society. Even more importantly, the latter group, or the Hermanos Carlo Circus directly stimulated the use of the native drama in the Argentine circus.37

In 1884, the Hermanos Carlo troupe was looking for materials to use in its final performance at the Politeama Theater in Buenos Aires. It became interested in the bestselling *gauchesca* novel *Juan Moreira* by Eduardo Gutiérrez and decided to perform it as a one-act pantomime. The director of the theater, Alfredo Cattaneo, then asked the author of *Juan Moreira* to rewrite his novel as a pantomime. Yet, Gutiérrez initially declined the offer because, as he stated:

No, it cannot be. To represent Moreira, one needs a man who is a *criollo*; who knows well how to mount a horse; to act, sing, dance, and play the guitar; and, above all, who knows how to wield a: *facón* [rural knife]. In short, a “gaucho.” And in this company of foreigners, there is no one who possesses those qualities, which are essential to representing this hero.38

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38 “No, no puede ser. Para representar Moreira se necesitaría un hombre que fuera criollo, que supiera montar bien a caballo, que accionara, cantara, bailara, y tocara la guitarra, y sobre todo que supiera manejar bien un facón. En fin, un “gaacho.” Y en esta compañía de extranjeros no hay ninguno que posea esas cualidades tan necesarias para representar al héroe.” Cited in José J. Podestá, *Medio siglo de farándula*, ed. Osvaldo Pallettieri (Buenos Aires: Galerna, Instituto Nacional de Teatro, 2003), 50-51; Castagnino, *Circo, teatro gauchesco y tango*, 51.
The person whom Cattaneo immediately recommended to Gutiérrez was José Podestá (1858-1937), who was a leader of a prominent native circus family and known as the famous clown, “Pepino 88.”39 Gutiérrez agreed with this casting and the Hermanos Carlo Circus staged the pantomime of Juan Moreira. In Argentina, the premiere of this piece is regarded as the event that initiated the rise of the national theater.

Tellingly, Gutiérrez required the person who would act Moreira to have real “gaacho” skills, as well as musical talent. As we have seen, the gaucho theme had already been used in foreign circuses during the 1850s and 1860s. As in Ramos’s case, foreign circus directors had composed urban music for the gaucho performances. Yet, the premiere of the Moreira pantomime of the 1880 required a more “authentic” gaucho image. Indeed from this point forward, Gutiérrez’s representation would became the standard. In this way, the Argentine circus was transformed from a simple entertainment and political ceremonial performance to one of the major sites where national identity was both contested and created.

**José Podestá and Juan Moreira**

Considering the popularity of the circus in the late nineteenth century, many others besides Podestá could have performed Moreira. However, Cattaneo and Gutiérrez chose this Uruguayan clown for a reason. In order to understand their reasoning, it is important to consider the following factors: 1) how the selection of Moreira related to Podestá’s performance of “Pepino 88,” 2) the way that Podestá was considered a true “gaacho” in Gutiérrez’s estimation, and 3) the manner in which the idealized image of Podestá’s native horseman relates

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to the construction of *argentinidad*. To come to terms with these issues, I provide a biographical sketch of José Podestá and discuss his circus programs. Through such treatment, I aim to illustrate the contents of the native circus and situate the performances of the native horseman onstage within the *tradición gauchesca*.

José Podestá was born on October 6, 1858, in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay, as the fourth of nine children.\(^40\) His father, Pedro Podestá, and his mother, María Teresa Torterolo, were both originally from Genoa, Italy. After immigrating to Montevideo in 1846, the couple married and moved to Buenos Aires. They managed a small *almacén* (grocery store) on Chacabuco Street. However, in 1851, to escape the Argentine civil wars, the Podestá family returned to Uruguay, where their son José was born.

The young boy’s career began at an early age, as he practiced with a circus group close to his house. In 1872, he participated in a circus tour with his brothers and established his own troupe, the Juventud Unidad, which also included musicians. This troupe performed acrobatic displays at fiestas and shows.\(^41\) A turning point came in 1877, when Podestá started working with the company “40 Onzas,” founded by the Genoese director Pablo Raffetto. In this circus, actors performed comic dramas, in a similar style to foreign circus companies of the period.

This Italian circus mainly used Spanish, except in the performance of comic dramas, which deliberately employed *italo-criollo* dialects. For instance, Raffeto’s pantomimes and

\(^40\) His eight brothers, ranging from the oldest to the youngest: Luis, Jerónimo, Pedro, José, Juan, Graciana, Antonio, Amadea, and Pablo. Juan González Urtiaga, *Los Podestá: El teatro rioplatense a través de la gran familia* (Montevideo [Uruguay]: Talleres Productivos Protegidos de ONPLI, 2001), 9-10.

sainetes utilized criollo-genovesa (a mixture of Spanish and Genoese). When the Genoa-born Raffetto and a Portuguese clown talked to each other on stage, they mixed Argentine-accentuated Spanish, Portuguese, and criollo-genovesa. The audience, which included Italian immigrants, enjoyed the strange mixture of languages and the misinterpreted conversations. Since Podestá’s parents also came from Genoa, it was easy for him and his brothers to understand Raffetto’s talking and to participate in the performances. As we shall see, Podestá’s experiences later led to his creation of the criollo clown, Pepino 88, who also spoke italo-criollo languages as well as motivating him to develop a new character, Cocoliche, with an even closer resemblance to the immigrant which will be explained further in Chapter 3.

Meanwhile, Podestá continued training as a stage director and performer after his experience at the “40 Onzas.” He was already a seasoned circus actor who played the guitar, and he additionally learned music at the Escuela Banda Municipal in Montevideo. As shown in Figure 1.4, the brass band had become popular in the rioplatense area, partly because the military band and the police band had already accompanied circus music during Rosas’s regime. It thus became a custom to include such musicians within the circus.

In 1880, Podestá went to Buenos Aires again with his brothers to perform in what was called the “Rosso-Podestá,” which was the first circus group that Podestá and his brothers created. On May 22 of that year, the company made its debut at the Florida Theater in the Jardín Florida. The following year, Podestá returned to Uruguay and decided to create an

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42 Podestá, Medio siglo de farándula, 35.
43 It was located at the corner of present-day Florida and Paraguay Streets.
entirely new clown character. This effort led to the figure, “Pepino 88,” whose invention made Podestá’s name famous throughout Buenos Aires.44

Figure 1.4. Brass Band in Buenos Aires (ca. 1900)45

Podestá later explained the reasons for his clown’s name.46 As in common knowledge throughout the Spanish-speaking world, “Pepe” is a nickname for José in Spanish. Yet, the correct diminutive form of the word should be “Pepito,” not “Pepino.” According to Podestá, the inspiration for the nickname came one night when José was talking with his brothers in a dialect known as champurreado, or mixed Italian and Spanish. His siblings jokingly referred to him making fun of the family background as second generation Genoese immigrants, calling him “Pepino,” as if he were an Italian.47

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45 From the collection of Alicia Lombardelli, who kindly gave me permission to reproduce it here. It shows a section of Buenos Aires, close to present-day Recoleta.

José’s mother helped prepare the costume for this new character, which she fashioned out of white sheets and a stitched edge at the neck, pockets, and pants. On the shoulder, the words “El gran Pepino” were sewn in black ribbon. José thought this costume was too white for a stage performance and re-decorated it by using his father’s old frock. He doubled the black cloth, hollowed out circles, and attached four of them to his new costume. Since these together four circles looked like the number “88,” he derived his stage name from this design feature.

**Figure 1.5. Original Costume of Pepino 88**

As a clown, Podestá began anew, performing at the Raffeto Circus at the Politeama Humberto Primo circus tent on Cevallos Street. He produced many successful stage productions.

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48 Pepino 88’s costume is preserved in the Cervantes Theater in Buenos Aires. The photograph is taken by the author and reproduced by permission of the Cervantes Theater.

49 Cevallos Street is the present Louis Saénz Peña Street. The Humberto Primo tent once stood where the police building is now located.
performances, including pantomimes, acrobatics, and clown shows with comic songs and gaucho music. One of the songs that he presented at the Humberto Primo Circus was a décima, titled “El gaucho argentino y el gaucho oriental” (The Argentine Gaucho and The Uruguayan Gaucho) the text of which is shown in Figure 1.6.\(^{50}\)

**Figure 1.6. First Stanzas from “El gaucho argentino y el gaucho oriental”\(^ {51}\)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>El gaucho argentino</th>
<th>The Argentine Gaucho</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Les pido atención, señores, que la historia quiero hacer</td>
<td>Gentlemen, please give your attention to the story that I want to tell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>describiendo con placer, sin que me tiemble la mano,</td>
<td>describing with pleasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>del gaucho, nuestro paisano, ligado a nuestro destino,</td>
<td>without my hand trembling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>detallando con buen tino los azares de la vida del que en su</td>
<td>giving the detail with good judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patria querida se llama Gaucho Argentino</td>
<td>the fade of life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>El gaucho oriental</th>
<th>The Oriental Gaucho</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Señores, voy a contar en verso, pues que me place, la alegre</td>
<td>Gentlemen, I am going to talk in verse, which is my pleasure,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vida que hace el paisano enamorado, que teniendo a su cuidado</td>
<td>making life enjoyable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nada más que su bagual, anda cual otro zorzal de mata en mata</td>
<td>the compatriot falling in love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saltando y a todos enamorando; así es el Gaucho Oriental</td>
<td>what he cares about is nothing more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>than his horse, going like other thrush,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>leaping from bush to bush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and in everything falling in love;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That is the Gaucho Oriental.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In these lyrics, Podestá used the typical gaucho ten-line poetic form with the rhyme scheme (abbcccdde) and (abbbccdcd). Additionally, Podestá skillfully characterizes both types of

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\(^{50}\) The word “oriental” comes from the República Oriental del Uruguay. Since both Argentina and Uruguay originally belonged to the same Viceroyalty of La Plata, Uruguay, on the eastern border, was frequently referred to as the Banda Oriental. Many payadores from both countries performed in the circus, including Juan de Nava, Juan Pedro López, and José Madriaga.

\(^{51}\) Podestá, *Medio siglo de farándula*, 48-49. Translated by the author.
gauchos using language that is highlighted in the text above. For the Argentine gaucho, Podestá uses either serious or patriotic words such as “nuestro,” “destino,” “azares,” and “patria.” In contrast, for the Uruguayan gaucho, more pleasurable words or expressions related to horsemanship are used: “alegre,” “enamorado,” “saltando,” and “enamorando.” This contrast between Argentine and Uruguayan gauchos relates to the customary rural practice of the payada, which is a competitive form of recitation between payadores.52 Traditionally, two gauchos in turn recite décimas using rhythms of the milonga accompanied by the guitar; the contest continues for an extended time until one gaucho defeats his opponent.53

According to the Argentine investigator Victor di Santo, the payadores did not play in the circus until 1888.54 Yet, Podestá already demonstrated payador-like performances as “Pepino 88.” Moreover, even though he was the sole singer of “El gaucho argentino y el gaucho oriental,” he skillfully differentiated between Argentine and Uruguayan gaucho characters in the work. This type of performance demonstrated Podestá’s familiarity with gaucho customs.

Thus, the reason why Podestá was chosen to perform Moreira, were because he was a trained circus actor who knew how to behave, sing, and speak as a gaucho. Moreover, his ability to manage Italian and Spanish skillfully was essential, since the Hermanos Carlo was an

52 This competitive type of payada was performed by José Podestá and his brother Antonio in 1888. The title was “Contrapunto entre el payador argentino José Podestá y el payador oriental A. Podestá.” Seibel, Historia del Circo, 45.

53 Even now, this payada tradition is very popular in Argentina and Uruguay. The milonga rhythm accompanying the recitation also has features of both the milonga pampeana and the milonga uruguaya. The former consists of the rhythm and the latter has the rhythm).

Italian circus. Interestingly, before contracting Podestá, the Hermanos Carlo Circus desired to perform a *gauchesca* drama, but did not have the appropriate scenery, props, or costumes of the native horseman.\(^{55}\) The *facón*, which is a significant gaucho item (per Gutiérrez’s comment above), was made of paper and was broken at the end of the performance. For this reason, the Hermanos Carlos Circus entrusted the gaucho character of the performance to Podestá and his brothers.

This gaucho spirit was the most important factor affecting the casting. In response to Cattaneo’s invitation, Podestá and his brothers immediately began working on *Juan Moreira*. Figure 1.7 is the original costume used in the first *Moreira* performance.

**Figure 1.7. Juan Moreira’s Costume\(^{56}\)**

\(^{55}\) Podestá, *Medio siglo de farándula*, 53.

\(^{56}\) The original Moreira’s costume is preserved in the Cervantes Theater in Buenos Aires. The photograph is taken by the author and reproduced by permission of the Cervantes Theater.
Comparing this costume with another one for the same gaucho performance of *Martín Fierro* in 1890, as shown in Figure 1.8, Podestá elaborated and even more strongly emphasized the masculinity of the native horseman through using a more sophisticated *rastra* and *chiripá* and foregrounding his knife in the left hand.57

**Figure 1.8. José Podestá in Gaucho Costume**58

Because of the Podestá brothers, the pantomime *Juan Moreira* on July 2, 1884 ended with a great success; it was performed a total of thirteen times until the Hermanos Carlo Circus went to Rio de Janeiro. After these performances, *Juan Moreira* continued in popularity.

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57 This type of the gaucho is called the *gauchónorteño* (northern gaucho). Another type of gaucho is called the gaucho *sureño* (southern). Characteristic of this latter version is much wider pants, a *chiripá*, and a silk hat. This clothing was typical of gauchos from La Pampa or Buenos Aires provinces.

58 José Podestá wearing the gaucho costume for the 1890 performance of Martín Fierro. This portrait is preserved in the Cervantes Theater in Buenos Aires. The photograph is taken by the author and reproduced by permission of the Cervantes Theater.
The Podestá family toured Buenos Aires Province to perform this *gauchesca* drama in the late 1880s. Moreover, many other circus groups in Buenos Aires as well as in rural areas began producing *Juan Moreira*.\(^{59}\) With this popularity in 1886, Podestá added dialogue and transformed the *gauchesca* drama from a pantomime into a theatrical work. Table 1.1 compares the two versions. The left column illustrates the pantomime of Gutierrez, while the right shows Podestá’s theatrical version of the work with text.

### Table 1.1. Comparison of Two Versions of *Juan Moreira*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Juan Moreira (Pantomime Version)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Juan Moreira (Theater Version)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part I:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Act I:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Juan Moreira</td>
<td>1. La Alcaldía (The Municipal Hall)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Los amores de Moreira (Moreira’s Loves)</td>
<td>2. Pulpería de Sardeti (Sardetti’s pulpería)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Un castigo terrible (Terrible Punishment)</td>
<td>3. Casa de Moreira (Moreira’s House)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. El cacique (The Indigenous Chief)</td>
<td>4. Entrevista de Moreira y Julián (Meeting of Moreira and Julián)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. La pendiente del crimen (Headed toward Crime)</td>
<td>5. Casa de Moreira (Moreira’s House)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Un gaucho flojo (A Gaucho Coward)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Un encuentro fatal (A Fatal Encounter)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. El nido de desventuras (The Nest of Misfortunes)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part II:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Act II:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. El último asilo (The Last Asylum)</td>
<td>1. Moreira salva Marañon (Moreira Saves Marañon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. La vuelta al hogar (The Return Home)</td>
<td>2. Habitación de Marañon (Marañon’s Room)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. La fuerza del destino (The Force of Destiny)</td>
<td>[later eliminated](^{60})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. La soberbia del valor (The Haughtiness of Bravery)</td>
<td>3. Casa del compadre Giménez (The House of His Friend, Giménez)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. El gaucho Juan Blanco (The Gaucho, Juan Blanco)</td>
<td>4. Juzgado de Paz (Justice of the Peace)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. La policía en jaque (The Police in Check)</td>
<td>5. Pulpería de “La Paloma” (“La Palomita” Bars and Store)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. El Cuerdo (The Rope)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Jaque mate (Checkmate)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. El epitafio de Juan Moreira</td>
<td>6. Casa de baile (Dance House)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(The Epitaph of Juan Moreira)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. La daga de Moreira (The Dagger of Moreira)</td>
<td>7. Muerte de Moreira (Moreira’s Death)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{60}\) Podestá, *Medio siglo de farándula*, 57.
In Podestá’s version, the original sections that describe Moreira’s affections or gentleness (Section 2) and that contain Gutiérrez’s personal comments on Moreira (sections 17-18) are eliminated. Instead, the scenes that have cruel battles and folk music and dance are emphasized, as in the pulperia and dance house scenes.

With this change, Podestá added actual payadores to the drama, along with a new character, Cocoliche (an Italian immigrant figure imitating the gaucho). The payadores played the typical gaucho repertoire and recited poetry to the sound of with the guitar to evoke the rural setting where the native horseman used to live. Podestá also replaced the gaucho dance genre known as the gato, which was performed in the pantomime version, with a more patriotic pericón, responding to the historical appropriateness of the genre during a time of fervent nation-building as well as to the audience’s expectations. In contrast, Cocoliche appeared as a clown, imitating the gaucho to enliven the stage. With Cocoliche, Podestá thus integrated new theatrical elements, which had no connection to the preexisting Argentine culture, into this popular expressive medium.

Podestá’s contradictory reconstruction of the circo criollo raises the issue of what role music played in relation to this contradiction. To discuss this question fully, I will begin by focusing on musical aspects of the circo criollo in the following chapter. By transcribing and analyzing the historical recordings of this repertoire, I will inquire into the ways in which the native horseman’s music was represented.
Chapter 2
Music in the Circo Criollo

They say that when Santos Vega sang, it moved the audience in a powerful way, until the tears. Not only by his verses full of sentiment, but also by his strong and plaintive voice, which moved like a lament.61

Juan Maria Gutiérrez, El payador Santos Vega (1877)

In the circo criollo, music also played a significant role in the creation of argentinidad, since actors wearing the gaucho costumes presented Argentine folk music and dance to evoke idealized constructions of the nation. Along with these circus performers, real-life professional payadores, including Gabino Ezeiza (1858-1916), Alfredo Eusebio Gobbi (1877-1938), and Ángel Villoldo (1861-1919), also appeared on the circus stage. In the second part of the circus, devoted to the gaucho drama, they performed the old gaucho repertoire including song types such as the payada and décima.62 Moreover, within the payador’s performances, certain rural genres were consolidated into a national song repertoire of Buenos Aires. Both visually and acoustically, the circus thus foregrounded the image of Argentine tradition and displayed rural cultures to the urban public.

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61 “Cuentan que cuando Santos Vega cantaba, se connovía de una manera poderosa, entendiendo a sus oyentes hasta las lágrimas, no sólo por sus trovas, llenas de sentimiento, cuanto por su voz poderosa y sollozante, que connovía como un lamento.” Juan María Gutiérrez, El payador, Santos Vega (accessed, December, 2008) <http://www.clarin.com/pbda/ensayo/santosvega/b-603839.htm>.

The first part of the circus, devoted to acrobatics and comic clown performances, reflected the lifestyle of contemporary urban society. For instance, the character “Pepino 88” sang many pieces that depicted various events occurring in Buenos Aires. The lyrics satirized marriage, politics, and social problems, the latter including massive immigration within contemporary Argentine society. The second part of the circus, or the *gauchesca* drama portion, offered a sense of authentic rural traditions in the country. Contrary to the first part of acrobatic display, which related to the European style of the circus, the native drama specifically emphasized Argentineness, and circus actors in gaucho costumes performed various folk repertoires.

Coupling the clown’s satirical comic songs in the first part of the circus with the gaucho drama in the second, the *circo criollo* integrated old and new values within a single concept of *argentinidad*. Even given this apparent cohesion, however, the following questions remain: what circus music actually sounded like; how the sung clown repertoire reflected the contemporary Argentine situation literally and musically; and how scholars can account for both the similarities and differences between recordings of early twentieth century circus performances and later transcriptions of similar genres by folklorists and ethnomusicologists.

This chapter therefore focuses on these musical aspects of the *circo criollo*, based on historical recordings. It mirrors the two divisions of the circus itself. The first part of the chapter covers the Italianate comic clown songs mainly performed by “Pepino 88.” In this section, I will analyze the song lyrics and investigate how Podestá’s music reflected the content of the text, aided by transcriptions of his performances. The next part of the chapter explores the gaucho genres frequently performed in the theatrical part of the native circus: the *estilo,*
vidalita, milonga, gato, and pericón. Creating transcriptions of these early circus recordings, I will examine the musical genres and compare them with later transcriptions of Argentine ethnomusicologists. Through the analysis of both parts of the circus, I will probe deeper into the question of how its music relates to the construction of argentinidad.

Finally, since recordings in Argentina began in 1902, it is impossible to know what circus music sounded like before that year. Even afterwards, our knowledge of the tradition remains limited. However, while doing fieldwork in Argentina in 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, I obtained some historical recordings of early circus music dating from 1906-1912. These circus repertoires were performed either by circus actors, payadores, or the brass bands of the city. This chapter marks the first documented contribution to Latin American music studies and Argentine theatre Scholarship that transcribes actual music from the Argentine popular theater.

Comic Clown Music

In the circus, the clown is a typically comic character who portrays ludicrous antics and induces laughter through his humorous performances. Historically, he enacts that which is improper, embarrassing, astonishing, or shocking. At the same time, this figure plays a

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63 Between 1902 and 1909, recordings of circus music were mainly preserved on Edison wax phonocylinders. After 1904, phonograph recordings became more popular in Argentina. Héctor Lucci, Personal interview (Buenos Aires, 26 December, 2008).

64 All historical recordings that I am using in this chapter were provided by Héctor Lucci, who is a great Argentine music collector. He is also a former bandoneonist and tanguero (tango lover or dancer), who is knowledgeable about early circus music, including the tango.

leading role in guiding the audience and revealing what is happening on the stage. Through his enlivened performances, he eventually leads the entire show, at times by mimicking the mistakes that other actors make.

In Argentina, clown performances were very popular and many comic figures appeared, including Frank Brown, Tony Grice, and Bill Hayden from England; Medrano from Spain; and Arlecchino and Pedrolino from the traditional Italian Renaissance Commedia dell’arte of Italy.66 At first, the clown in Argentina signified a foreign-made character who performed humorous acts. As the circus developed a more distinctively Argentine flavor, however, this comic character also gradually became imbued with *criollo* characteristics, as exemplified by Pepino 88 and Tony Panchito.67 Their appearance was similar to that of the more European types of clowns, especially regarding their funny costumes: overly wide clothing, bald head, and occasional red nose. Yet, these *criollo* clowns established performances tied specifically to Argentina.

The application and implication of Argentineness to the circus was relevant in music, since the *criollo* clowns performed many comic songs. One interesting example was “Lo que yo he visto” (What I have witnessed) composed by Pepino 88. Figure 2.1 shows the first stanza of the song in which Pepino introduces himself to the audience and comically explains his gesture of wandering around the city to watch everything happening there. We can imagine the audience excitedly waiting for the clown’s description of what he would see next.

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66 Especially, Frank Brown (1858-1943) was very popular in Buenos Aires and often performed with Pepino 88 on the same circus stage. Seibel, *Historia del circo*, 38-44.

67 This comic character was performed by Simón Videla. The Videla family still has their circus school in the Monserrat area of Buenos Aires. See the webpage of Videla’s circus (accessed December, 2008) <http://www.escircocriollo.com.ar/system/index.php>.
In the following section, Pepino begins talking about what he has witnessed in the city: the marriages, politics, and social problems. He first describes the quarrel of an Argentine couple. In this case, the husband is complaining to his wife that she spends too much money for what she wants. In the end, her husband confesses: “I only wish to see you die, because the only thing you know is how to ask and ask.” With this black humor, Pepino 88 presents a biting satire on marriage. Later in the song, he mocks contemporary politicians. At first, the politician makes his speech in public and promises a rich and peaceful society, based on what he

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68 Here, the lyrics are based on the recording of the 1906 version of “Lo que yo he visto” sung by José Podestá. I also consulted the following book to transcribe the lyrics. José Podestá, *Canciones populares de Gran Pepino 88: para cantar con guitarra* 3rd ed. (Buenos Aires: N. Tommasi, 1912), 32-36.

69 “Yo solo deseo el verte morir, porque solo sabés pedir y pedir.”
is going to do. The humorous twist at the end occurs with Podestá’s following words: “[After the speech] the politician left for Congress, and over there … he did nothing …!!!” Finally, the most interesting section of the piece appears in the last part of this song, as shown in Figure 2.2 below.

Figure 2.2. Final Part of “Lo que yo he visto”

La otra noche un italiano
se peleó con la mujer;
Vani fora le decía,
non ti poso piú veder

The other night, an Italian
broke up with his woman;
Come outside, he told her
I can no longer keep seeing you

Figlia de un gran cane
que tú ere cativa
é tuto malgasta
de sera y manita

Daughter of a big dog [bitch]
You are evil
and all extravagant
from afternoon to morning

Per un ¡sacramento!
te voy á amazzar [sic]
niente tu guadaña
é sempre manyar.

By sacrament!
I am going to roll you like a bread
You don’t make any money
and you always eat.

Te manya narranca
le dulchi é banana
le pera e meloni
también le durani

You eat oranges
sweets and bananas
pears and melons
also peaches

Yo sempre lavoro
lei no fá mai niente
te voy a tagliar
tutti cuanti denti.

I always work
She does nothing
I will cut off
all of your teeth.

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70 “Luego fué al Congreso, y allí ... no hizo na...!!!” Podestá, Canciones populares de Gran Pepino 88: para cantar con guitarra, 32-36.

71 Podestá, Canciones populares de Gran Pepino 88: para cantar con guitarra, 32-36.

72 In Italian, the word “amazar” means to kill. However, in Argentine dialect, the word means to knead and roll like bread.
The remarkable thing in this stanza is the language used for the quarrel. As shown in Figure 2.2, they are using *italo-criollo*. There are two kinds of mixed words. The first type, such as *manya* (eat) and *tutti* (all) come directly from Italian; the second type, for example, *narranca* (orange), comes from a mixture of Italian and Spanish creating a totally new word. It is clear that José satirizes the contemporary situation of Buenos Aires where many Italian immigrants thronged. From the lyrics, one might develop an impression of lower class Italian immigrants who allude to common stereotypes such as: Italian men like to eat, Italian immigrants use Spanish, but cannot really speak it, and Italian women are much stronger than men. Considering the masculinity or manliness of the preexisting Argentine society, represented in the gaucho, the Italian women’s power here is very pronounced. José comically but symbolically depicted public disdain for the situation of the immigrant with his contemporary clown lyrics.

To know how the song actually sounded, the 1906 recording by José Podestá himself with the Orquesta Social Maestro Cheli provides significant information.\(^7^3\) The instrumentation consists of the guitar, flute, and brass band.\(^7^4\) The tempo is allegro, but not stable; it begins with a slower tempo and gets faster at the end of the song. The musical structure is very simple (introduction-song-interlude). After repeating the phrase of Example 2.1 twice as an introduction, the song starts.

\(^7^3\) Cheli also conducted the brass band or orchestra for the *sainete*.

\(^7^4\) Gesualdo, *La Música en la Argentina*, 177-80.
Example 2.1. Introduction to “Lo que yo he visto”

The basic melody is shown in (A) as shown in Example 2.2. After repeating this part twice, (B) starts and repeats four times. This melody modulates to the relative minor key from E major to C# minor in the (C) section. Afterward, the melody returns to the opening of Example 2.1 for the interlude. The next stanzas of poetry receive the same musical treatment.

Example 2.2. Podestá, “Lo que yo he visto” Melody

Apparently, the rhythm of repeated triplets come from the Southern Italian dance genre of the tarantella. As shown in Example 2.3, the singer continues without a break. Meanwhile, the clown has to keep singing this fast dance rhythm. In the recording, the orchestra plays the
actual melody, while Pepino sings the text in a rapid patter style approximating speech, since the
words come very fast in the style of a tongue twister.

Example 2.3. Full Transcription of “Lo que yo he visto”
At the end, the song becomes very slow, which shows prominent Italian opera influence. In other stanzas, the melody ends with a descending scale (D#-C#-B-A-G#-F#-E). In contrast, the last phrase ends with an exaggerated upward leap (B-F#) as shown in Example 2.4.

Example 2.4. Podestá, “Lo que yo he visto” Final Melody

Once the melody ascends from B to F#, Pepino holds his high voice longer like the Italian folk song canzone. Especially considering that this stanza is about an Italian couple in Buenos Aires, one might conclude that this canzone-like singing reflects the lyrics and the contemporary society in the urban area. By mixing the italo-criollo dialect, Italian musical elements, and the satirical lyrics, Pepino’s performance offered laughter to the spectators that included both native and new Argentine populations. By looking at the native clown’s parodies of new cultures influenced by Italian immigrants, the audience could access the contemporary social situation that this comic figure showed and could reduce their xenophobic views.

The Gaucho Repertoire

In the second part of the circo criollo, or gauchesca drama, actors performed folk music and dance related to the native horseman. Compared to the first part of the circus, which consisted of acrobatic performances, this dramatic section incorporated more serious subjects as well as more Argentine themes. Using typical rural settings like the pampas or pulperías,
actors dressed as gauchos performed stylized folk music and dance that were also popular in contemporary urban areas. Along with patriotism, these gaucho genres therefore represented values, customs, and ideals of traditional Argentine society.

To examine what gaucho music in the circus sounded like, I offer transcriptions of historical recordings performed by singing actors and brass bands in the early twentieth century. Transcribing these materials calls for a particular approach and method. In previous studies, Argentine musicologists Carlos Vega and Isabel Aretz greatly contributed to music scholarship in the 1940s and 1950s by their efforts to document musical practices in rural areas.\textsuperscript{75} Their transcriptions, based on field recordings, have provided much information about lyrics, melody, timbre, and instrumentation.

Yet, as Schwartz-Kates pointed out in her dissertation, these two Argentine musicologists mainly focused on the poetical divisions of the lyrics, which caused them to transcribe balanced periodic structures into irregularly shaped phrases and use frequently changing metrical schemes in their transcriptions.\textsuperscript{76} Moreover, Schwartz-Kates re-notated their transcriptions to preserve musical continuity, supporting a steady harmonic rhythm. In this section of the chapter, I follow Schwartz-Kates’s approach rather than Vega’s polymetrical configuration to convey the musical ideas of each genre more effectively.

\textsuperscript{75} Readers who are interested in this subject should consult: Carlos Vega, \textit{Las canciones folklóricas argentinas} (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Educación de la Nación, Subsecretaría de Cultura, Instituto Nacional de Musicología, “Carlos Vega,” 1965); Isabel Aretz, \textit{El folklore musical argentino} (Buenos Aires: Ricordi Americana, 1952).

In addition to problematical notations of meter and phrase, transcriptions by Vega and Aretz have two more issues: 1) exclusion of any instrumental introductions, interludes, and postludes and 2) different keys from the original. Yet, since the introductions and interludes offer significant information, including how gaucho music was stylized in the circus, I retain these two sections in my transcriptions. Also, since the choice of key suggests additional information, including the range of the circus actors’ voices, I reproduce the transcriptions in the original key of the recordings.77

The Gaucho Vocal Music

The Vidalita

The *vidalita* is a melancholy love song of the gaucho. The name of the genre derives from the word “vida” (life) that implies “my beloved.” Because of the etymological similarity, the *vidalita* is often confused with the *vidala*, which has closer musical similarities to the *baguala*. Historically, the *vidalita* prevailed throughout Argentina, especially in the pampas region. It was also performed in salons and social circles in Buenos Aires, which makes this genre an ambivalent one with both rural and urban connotations.78 On the one hand, this genre grew popular and was performed in the countryside; on the other hand, many classical composers published the *vidalita* in skillful stylized arrangements.79 According to Aretz, there

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77 Since the recordings analyzed here are very old, it appears that the key of some recordings may sound a half step higher or lower than originally performed.

78 Isabel Aretz, *El folklore musical argentino*, 133.

used to be four types of *vidalita*, known as: 1) *amorosa*, 2) *riojana*, 3) *serrana*, and 4) *andina*. The first, also known as the “*vidalita de Williams*,” features a harmonization in doubled thirds. It uses triple meter and has a guitar accompaniment. The latter three types are performed with the *caja* (small hand drum) in duple meter. One might suggest that the latter three genres are confused with the *baguala* or *vidala*, which has more indigenous influences.

The *vidalita* performed in the circus belongs to the first category. According to Vega, this subgenre had only one melody, but many versions of the lyrics. In the *circo criollo*, these different song texts were performed by Pancho Britos, José Podestá, Eduardo Bacia, and Eduardo Alba, to name a few. As shown in Table 2.1, Podestá’s version around the turn of the twentieth century and the transcription of the genre that Aretz collected in the field during the 1950s contain similar lyrics.

Apparently, the *palomita* here is a metaphorical expression for *vidalitá* or beloved, and the last part of the stanzas (the dove flew away) implies that the gaucho’s beloved left him. Though the original author of these lines is obscure, the lyrics were widely spread as the native circus became popular.

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Table 2.1. Comparison of Rural and Podestá Versions of the *vidalita*\(^{84}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rural version in the 1950s</th>
<th>Podestá version between 1880 and 1925</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Original lyrics</strong></td>
<td>Una palomita, <em>vidalitá</em>, que yo la crié.</td>
<td>Una palomita, <em>vidalitá</em>, que yo la crié.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cuando tuvo alitas, <em>vidalitá</em>, se voló se fué.</td>
<td>Y fue tan ingrata, <em>vidalitá</em>, que voló y se fué.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**English</td>
<td>A little dove, <em>vidalitá</em>, that I created.</td>
<td>A little dove, <em>vidalitá</em>, that I created.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>translations</td>
<td>When it grew little wings, <em>vidalitá</em>, it flew away and left.</td>
<td>When it became disagreeable, <em>vidalitá</em>, it flew away and left.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, a variant of these lyrics appears in the one-act zarzuela, *Todos somos unos* (We Are All One) as shown in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2. Comparison of Rural and Benavente Versions of the *vidalita*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rural version in the 1950s</th>
<th>Benavente version in 1904</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cuando tuvo alitas, <em>vidalitá</em>, se voló se fué.</td>
<td>Se juntó con otra, <em>vidalitá</em>, con olla se fué.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**English</td>
<td>A little dove, <em>vidalitá</em>, that I created.</td>
<td>A little dove, <em>vidalitá</em>, For me, I created.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>translations</td>
<td>When it grew little wings, <em>vidalitá</em>, it flew away and left.</td>
<td>It got together with other dove, <em>vidalitá</em>, with a pan, she left.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was written by the Spanish dramatist Jacinto Benavente (1866-1954), who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1922.\footnote{This zarzuela was premiered at the Eslava Theater in Madrid on September 21, 1907. Jacinto Benavente, \textit{Teatro} (Madrid: Librería de los Sucesores de Hernando, 1908), 63.} After his first trip to Argentina in 1906, Benavente created this \textit{zarzuela} based on multicultural conversations among Argentine, Spanish, Brazilian, and Muslim peoples.\footnote{Interestingly, the character who sings the \textit{vidalita} is not an Argentine gaucho but a Brazilian woman. Benavente, \textit{Teatro}, 126.} The appearance of these three sets of lyrics suggests that this version of the \textit{vidalita} was popular in theatrical performances throughout urban and rural areas and later was retained in the countryside, even after the urban version of the text disappeared.

Unfortunately, the 1907 recording of this genre, performed by the Banda de la Policía de la Capital Buenos Aires (Police Band of the Capital of Buenos Aires), is instrumental and does not indicate how the \textit{vidalita} was sung. Still, the recording offers significant information about how the genre was performed in the circus. The instrumentation consists of brass instruments (including trumpets, trombones, tubas, and euphonium); wood wind instruments (consisting of flutes and clarinets); and the guitar. Wind and upper brass instruments play the melody and the other low-pitched instruments play the bass line. The title is listed on the record label as “Palomita blanca” (A Little White Dove), which provides additional confirmation that the \textit{vidalita} performed in the circus was the same that appeared in Aretz’s transcription.

Musically, this \textit{vidalita} is very simple. The melody features a slow 3/4 meter, based on the rhythm \includegraphics{image.png}. Structurally, the traditional \textit{vidalita} follows a binary form, repeating both the A and B sections. In the recordings, the A and B sections are also repeated; in the second repetition, additional higher-pitched instruments are used as melodic doublings.
Harmonically, the *vidalita* relies on tonic, subdominant, and dominant triads, using the chord progression of V7-I for the A section and IV-I-V7-I for the B section as shown in Example 2.5. Tonally, the *vidalita* is based on the European minor scale, typically using a descending sequential line in the B section.

Example 2.5. A and B Sections of “Palomita blanca” (1907)

A section

B section

Comparing this recording with Aretz’s transcription as shown in Example 2.6, we can see that the melody and rhythm are almost the same. Only the B sections show different melodies in comparison to each other, but the two versions share the same descending lines from subdominant to tonic (A-G-F#-E in Example 2.5-b; C-B♭-A-G in Example 2.6-b).

Example 2.6. Two Sections from Aretz’s Transcription, Re-notated by Schwartz-Kates

A section

B section
The early-twentieth-century circus version and the mid-twentieth century-rural version show the same features in the melody, structure, harmony, and rhythm. However, the crucial difference between the two vialitas appears at the very end of the historical recording. To the theatrical version, a fast postlude is added as shown in Example 2.7.

**Example 2.7. Postlude from “Palomita blanca”**

The tempo here is almost twice as fast as the beginning. The chord progression is I-IV-I-V7, consisting of the same component in B section. After this part, a cadence appears by all the instruments as shown in Example 2.8, the entire transcription of *Palomita blanca*.

Since Aretz’s transcription does not include any information about a postlude, it is difficult to verify whether the postlude is only for the theatrical performance or part of a rural custom. However, it does appear that this postlude is intentionally added for the stage performance, since the rhythm, tempo, and melody are completely different from those in the previous A and B sections. Based on this and similar musical features, one assumes that the native circus stylized the rural gaucho repertoire, rather than providing an authentic representation of Argentine folk customs through music.
Example 2.8. Full Transcription of “Palmota blanca”
The Estilo

The estiló is a slow sentimental gaucho song accompanied by the guitar. The origin of this genre is obscure, but it was also known under the name of décima around 1800 because of its poetic structure. Through the early nineteenth century, the estiló prevailed throughout the pampas of Argentina and Uruguay, and, during the late nineteenth century, its popularity declined. Yet, it was revived around the turn of the twentieth century in the circo criollo. In this section, I describe general features of the traditional estiló and apply and compare it to the same genre performed in the native circus.

According to Aretz, the estiló can be divided into four subgenres: the 1) norteño, 2) cuyano, 3) litoral y del Uruguay, and 4) moderno. Apparently, the classification is contradictory, since the former three types are categorized by geographical location and the latter is defined by time period. Although Aretz explains that these categories refer to both geographical divisions and different musical features, she does not describe any criteria for this classification. Moreover, she does not provide enough explanation for the estiló moderno, simply stating that “the rhythm is influenced by the habanera and the milonga” and “this type of estiló is performed anywhere in the country.”

Schwartz-Kates, in a differing perspective, explains that the estiló is one of the most expressive gaucho genres, textually as well as musically. Tonally, the estiló typically moves from major to relative minor keys. For instance, if a phrase begins in F major, it modulates and

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87 Ventura Robustiano Lynch, Folklore bonaerense (Buenos Aires: Lajouane, 1953), 35-36.
89 Aretz, El folklore musical argentino, 152.
ends in D minor. The chord progression mainly consists of I, IV, and V triads in both major and relative minor keys. Along with these simple chords, the estilo often creates chromatic inflections. Poetically, the estilo typically employs the décima and musically follows a three-part form consisting of the sections: the tema, alegre (or kimba), and final as shown in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3. Structure of the estilo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Musical ideas</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tema</td>
<td>1-2 or 1-4</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Slow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alegre or Kimba</td>
<td>3-8 or 5-8</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Fast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Slow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tema section usually consists of lines 1-2 or 1-4; the alegre or kimba consists of lines 3-8 or 5-8; and the final section consists of lines 9-10. The musical idea of the tema and final sections are the same, creating the form ABA. An introduction by the guitar precedes the first vocal entrance, and interludes and a postlude follow successive sung stanzas. As the name alegre suggests, this middle part is usually faster than the other two sections, occasionally changing the meter. Each section of the estilo corresponds with the rhythms as shown in Example 2.9. The rhythmic patterns from (a) to (d) are used for instrumental introductions, interludes, and postludes. Rhythmic patterns of (e) and (f) often appear in the tema and final sections and are performed punteo (by plucking the guitar, usually with the thumb). The remaining patterns of (g) and (h) are used for the kimba section. Except for (e) and (f), each pattern is mainly played rasgueo (or using a strummed technique).
Example 2.9. Estilo Rhythms

In the circo criollo, the estilo was one of the preferred gaucho genres. A representative example is “La piedra de escándalo” (The Stone of Scandal) from the eponymous gaucho drama written by Martín Coronado (1850-1919). This drama was premiered by the Podestá circus on July 16, 1902, at the Apolo Theater in Buenos Aires.\(^91\) According to the cast list, as shown in Figure 2.3, the Uruguayan payador Arturo de Nava (1876-1932) also performed with the Podestá brothers.

Figure 2.3. Cast of Piedra de escándalo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters (Age)</th>
<th>Performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don Lorenzo (85)</td>
<td>Antonio Podestá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don Pedro (60)</td>
<td>Juan Podestá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pascual (36)</td>
<td>José Podestá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elias (26)</td>
<td>Humberto Scotti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonor (39)</td>
<td>Herminia Mancini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos (23)</td>
<td>José Petray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa (20)</td>
<td>Lea Coni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuel (23)</td>
<td>Pablo Podestá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alejo (28)</td>
<td>Arturo de Nava</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matea (50)</td>
<td>Esther Podestá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ciriaco (24)</td>
<td>Humberto Torterolo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{91}\) Seibel, Historia del teatro argentino, 353-54.
In the story, the estilo is sung by a young gaucho character, Manuel (performed by José’s brother, Pablo Podestá). The lyrics were written by Coronado and the music was composed by Pablo. As shown in Figure 2.4, this estilo is based on the décima and uses a typical romantic subject.

**Figure 2.4. First Stanza from “Piedra de escándalo”**

| Sobre el alero escarchao         | On the frosted eaves          |
| encontre esta madrugada          | of this dawn I saw            |
| una palomita helada              | a little dove frozen          |
| que el viento había extraviao.   | mislaid by the wind.          |
| Porque es tuya, la he cuidao     | Because it is yours, I cared for it |
| con cariño y con desvelo,        | with tenderness and with concern, |
| y la cinta color cielo           | and the light blue ribbon     |
| con que venia adornada,          | that decorated it             |
| al cuello la tengo atada,        | I tied around its neck,       |
| porque es cinta de tu pelo.      | because it is like the ribbon in your hair. |

In the stanza, the words Coronado uses include rural pronunciations, such as escarchao, extraviao, and cuidao. In these lyrics, the librettist also demonstrates the typical gaucho poetic form of abbaaccddc, which characterizes the old Spanish Renaissance poetic structure known as the décima espinela.

The 1906 recording of “Piedra de escándalo” provides an example of musical practices of the estilo in the native circus. It was sung by the famous Uruguayan payador, Ángel Villoldo. As mentioned earlier, this genre is traditionally accompanied by the guitar. In contrast, the circus version of the piece is performed by a small orchestra, consisting of brass,

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92 Translated by the author.
wind, and string instruments along with an *organito* (small organ) used for the *kimba* section.

This *estilo* begins with an introduction played by these instruments, as shown in Example 2.10.

**Example 2.10. Introduction to “Piedra de escándalo”**

This part is played in F major with a fast tempo in 2/4 meter. In the same introduction, the melody suddenly modulates to the parallel key, or F minor. The chord progressions in both keys consist of I-IV-I and I-V-I, respectively. Comparing the introduction with that of the 1954 field recording by Carlos Vega, as shown in Example 2.11, there are similarities and differences between the circus and rural versions.

**Example 2.11. *Estilo*, Guitar Introduction**

---

93 Transcribed by the author.
Both versions contain the typical rhythmic patterns of the *estilo* emphasizing the duple meter, illustrated in Example 2.9. Additionally the two *estilos* show the similar chord progressions (I-V). However, the musical form of ABA is not strictly followed as in the circus version. In the rural version, the *tema* section begins once the introduction finishes. In contrast, in the circus version, the same melody of the fast instrumental introduction and the vocal melody of the slow *tema* section appear in turns, as shown in a transcription of the entire piece in Example 2.12. Moreover, the introduction is divided into the two parts and used after each melody, creating a theatrical call and response effect between vocal and instrumental parts.

On the one hand, this *estilo* of the circus follows the traditional musical practices of the *estilo* to evoke the authentic rural setting of the native horseman. On the other hand, the piece fabricates an urban theatrical stylization of *estilo* elements with its irregular introduction and *tema* sections. Structurally, the restatement of the *tema* section is missing in the piece, which might suggest the stylization of the gaucho repertoire. A second transcription of a historical recording sheds further light on this stylized representation of the native horseman in the *circo criollo*.

Example 2.12. Full Transcription of “Piedra de escándalo”
Example 2.12. (continued)

The 1907 recording of another estilo, “Abajo la careta” (Under the Mask) provides an interesting example of the relationship between the gaucho and his music in the circus. This piece was performed in the sainete of the same title by the poet Enrique Buttaro, which the
Podestá brothers premiered at the Apolo Theater on May 30, 1901. The music was composed by José’s brother, Antonio Podestá. In this recording, the circus performer José Podestá and the movie actor Francisco Pablo Donadio (1888-1968) sing together. The introduction begins in A major with a fast tempo, as shown in Example 2.13.

Example 2.13. First Part of Introduction from “Abajo la careta”

This part is mainly played by brass and wind instruments and uses a different rhythm from that of the traditional estilo. Instead it resembles the urban genre of the tango. Right after this section, the melody modulates to A minor, and a more slow and melancholic part begins, as shown in Example 2.14.

Example 2.14. Second Part of Introduction from “Abajo la careta”

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94 The movie version was published in 1904. It was directed by Eugenio Py (1859-1924) originally from France. Antonio Podestá joined the movie production as a music editor. Seibel, Historia del teatro argentino, 342.
As Figure 2.13 and 2.14 suggest, the *estilo* and the *tango* are coupled in this piece. In the recording, the former is sung by Podestá and the latter is performed by Donadio. These two actors in turns sing the rural and urban genres. Right after Podestá finishes singing the *estilo* accompanied by the piano and the bass, Donadio begins singing the *tango* and the meter changes to 2/4, accompanied by a brass band as shown in Example 2.15.

**Example 2.15. Transition from the *estilo* to the *tango* in “Abajo la careta”**

Along with the musical transformation from the *estilo* to the *tango*, the key changes from A major to A minor. From the beginning, the two genres are performed differently by different people. This type of modal mixture cannot be found in earlier explanations of the classic gaucho repertoire, and thus it might emphasize a stylization of the traditional forms. At the end of the song, Podestá and Donadio, for the first time, sing together as shown in Example 2.16.

For the first two measures, Podestá sings the *estilo*. In the following measures, the two sing the ascending line (G to F) and keep their high voice at G and A like Italian opera singers.
Example 2.16. Final Part of “Abajo la careta”

The *estilo* was originally a typical gaucho song. Yet, as we have seen, in this circus version, this genre was highly stylized and was combined with the urban tango. Moreover, at the climax of the song, these two genres finally combined within an operatic kind of singing.

One might suggest that the combination of the *estilo* and *tango* in this piece exemplifies rural-urban migration as well as the transformation of the rural gaucho into the urban resident of the modern Argentine society. In fact, in “Abajo de careta,” the *estilo* appears first and the *tango* follows, which also might imply that the former represents the old Argentine world, while the latter suggests the new modern society. Thus, the *estilo* represented both the ambivalence between rural and urban, as well as between traditional and modern societies. The performance of the two circus figures singing together accordingly represents the historical and geographical dichotomies. In the following section, I will focus further on this dynamic through the transcription of the *milonga*.

The *Milonga*

The *milonga* is a song with a guitar accompaniment that is pivotally related to both the old and the new values of Argentine societies. It developed from geographical, cultural, and
historical confrontations between Buenos Aires and other regions. Compared to the previous two genres I examined in this thesis, the milonga is relatively new, appearing between 1850 and 1880. Some scholars, including Aretz, insisted that this genre originated before that period. But since the Argentine folklorist Ventura Lynch described this genre as a form of recent music in his 1883 eyewitness account of the gaucho, it appears that the milonga arose as a musical genre during the late nineteenth century.

Considering its historical context, this genre relates to the social conflicts that Argentina experienced in its modernization process, including exchanges between urbanization, immigration, and emigration, as described in Chapter 1. The milonga emerged out of these interactions, representing the developing urban popular culture influenced by immigrants on the one hand, and by old Argentine traditions on the other. This complex historical background makes the milonga a particularly difficult expressive form to classify.

Aretz divides the genre into two categories based on the purpose of the performance: whether it is for singing or for dancing. She does not explain other musical or contextual features of the genre; instead, she subtly implies that the milonga as a song relates to rural customs and the milonga as a dance anticipated the tango. Yet this categorization is too simple and does not clearly explain the characteristics of each genre, since dance music was occasionally performed with vocal accompaniment as well. A more nuanced analysis comes with Schwartz-Kates’s categorization of the milonga into the following three types: (1) an
instrumental or vocal work used to accompany dancing; (2) an improvised payada; and (3) a sentimental criollo song. She suggests that the first type eventually led to the tango, combining with other urban and cosmopolitan expressions including the habanera and the candombe (rhythmical percussive music with African roots). The latter two descriptions involve gaucho vocal performances and are classified based on the context of the performance and the degree of improvisation involved.

All three types of milongas existed on both sides of the Río de la Plata. Those on the Argentine side was known as the milonga pampeana and those on the Uruguayan side were known as the milonga uruguaya. The Uruguayan version of the milonga is the one that had the most impact on the circo criollo. In this venue, the milonga was often performed by payadores wearing gaucho costumes. The 1892 advertisement of the Podestá circus provides information about how important these gaucho singers were for the performances. In the middle of the poster, as shown in Figure 2.5, the name of the famous payador, Gabino Ezeiza, appears. Closely looking at the advertisement, under his name the following explanation is added: “He will sing some more songs that will be announced and improvise on themes that the audience suggests to him.”

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98 “Él cantará unas mas anunciadas canciones e improvisará sobre los temas que el público le indique.”
The latter performance, in contrast, alludes to her second definition since it represents a variation of the traditional *payada*, in which two gauchos challenged one another in improvising poetry based on *milonga* rhythms accompanied by the guitar. In the circus, Ezeiza thus also performed improvisationally, responding to the themes that the audience requested of him. This meant that the *milonga* lyrics contained a range of values from representing the nostalgic past as in the sentimental song to the satirical present as in the improvised *milonga*. Through a performance that mixed the traditional with the innovative, Ezeiza accordingly demonstrated his inventive musical talents as well as his understanding of the Argentine past.

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99 The poster is for the 15 March, 1892 performance of Juan Moreira by the Podestá circus, preserved in the Cervantes Theater in Buenos Aires. Photograph taken by the author, reproduced by permission of the Cervantes Theater.

100 Because of his ability to improvise the lyrics, the *payador* is also described as the *cantor repentista*, which literally means the improvising singer. Carlos Bonino, Personal Interview, Laborde (Argentina): January 12, 2009; Raúl Dorra, “El arte del payador,” *Revista de literaturas populares* 7/2 (January-June, 2007): 113.
The *milonga* has a basic structure. An instrumental introduction begins the piece. Then vocal stanzas alternate with intervening interludes (based on the introduction) until the final stanza of the piece and postlude is reached. After the introduction played by a guitar is heard, the song begins. Generally, the chord progression consists of I-V and performers occasionally add a simple melody to the introduction. The vocal part is either a song or recitation performed *rubato* over the stable rhythm of the guitar, as previously described. Milonga melodies either tend to feature repeated notes (as in Example 2.17 a) or gently undulating lines (as in Example 2.17 b).

**Example 2.17. Typical Melodic Contours of the Milonga**

![Example 2.17](https://example.com/example2.17.png)

Rhythmically, the melody moves freely, but it has a limited range. There are few sudden leaps of more than a fourth. Tonally, the melody of the *milonga* occasionally employs a mixture of minor and major modes. The fluctuation between principal and relative keys adds other effects to the genre, which I explain later. At the end of each stanza, a cadence consisting of the chords IV-I-V-I occurs, overlapping with the beginning of the next interlude (based on the same music as the introduction, as shown in Example 2.18).
Example 2.18. Typical Cadence of the *Milonga*

![Music notation](image)

In order to analyze the ways in which *payadores* at the turn of the twentieth century played this genre in the native circus, I will illustrate both types of *milonga* that Ezeiza performed there. An example of the sentimental *criollo milonga* can be heard on a 1914 recording of “El alma del payador “(The Soul of the Payador) recorded by Ángel Greco (1893-1938). This early source, sung by a professional Argentine *payador* provides significant information about the musical practices of the gaucho singer in the circus. The lyrics, written by the Argentine poet Rafael Obligado (1851-1920), reveal the typical gaucho theme of the legendary *payador* Santos Vega, as shown in Figure 2.6. In these *décimas*, the characteristic gaucho image is evoked, using typical imagery associated with his rural landscape and music.

The word “rasgueo” apparently invokes the instrument of the native horseman, the guitar. The description of the *payador’s* strumming the guitar in the night on the pampas conveys the two opposite feelings: sweetness and darkness. For instance, the first stanza begins with the peaceful setting as represented in the words “reposo,” “armonioso,” and “dulce.” At the same time, the lyrics contain sorrowful expressions, such as “endecha” (lament) and “tristeza” (sadness). The combination of the two different sentiments appears together in the word “amante tristeza,” as the gaucho describes sadness as his lover in pastoral terms that also

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101 Ángel Greco used to perform in the Podestá circus. In the 1910s, he was an active performer in the circus, and later recorded many tangos in the 1920s.
highlight the gaucho’s manliness. Obligado successfully depicts the traditional image of the native horseman as well as his masculinity.

Figure 2.6. First and Second Stanzas from “El alma del payador” (1914)

Cerró la noche. Un momento
quedó la Pampa en reposo,
cuando un rasgueo armonioso
pobló de notas el viento.
Luego, en el dulce instrumento
vibró una endecha de amor,
y, en el hombro del cantor,
llena de amante tristeza,
ella dobló la cabeza
para escucharlo mejor.

Yo soy la nube lejana
Vega en su canto decía
que con la noche sombría
huye al venir la mañana;
soy la luz que en tu ventana
filtra en manojos la luna;
la que de niña, en la cuna,
abrió tus ojos risueños;
la que dibuja tus sueños
en la desierta laguna.

Night fell. At the moment
kept the pampas in peace,
when a harmonious strum
filled the wind with notes.
Later, on the sweet instrument
an elegy of love sounded,
And, on the singer’s shoulder,
was a lover filled with sadness
She bent her head
to listen more closely.

I am distant cloud
Vega said in his song
that with the dark night
escapes to the coming morning;
I am the light in your window
that the moon shines in the bunch,
that the little girl in her cradle
opened your eyes smiling,
that which sketches your dreams
in the deserted lake.

In terms of the musical recording, Greco communicates through the *milonga* rhythm these values of the gaucho that Obligado described. The introduction begins with the chord progression V-I as shown in Example 2.19.
Example 2.19. Introduction to “El alma del payador”

The chords are played rasgueo and the single notes punteo. After this section is repeated, the song begins. While the guitar part continuously plays the milonga rhythm, the vocal part does not follow the exact rhythm. Especially the first four measures of the song begin with a slow tempo and are performed flexibly. The opening vocal line appears in Example 2.20.

Example 2.20. Beginning of “El alma del payador”

This very beginning of the lyrics evokes the rural setting of the pampas where the payador used to live. After this section, two opposite feelings, peacefulness and sadness, appear in the lyrics. Even so, the music echoes these contrasting sentiments by employing a mixture of minor and major keys that are perhaps associated with the newer form of the milonga.

In “El alma del payador,” the key frequently changes between C# minor and C# major, as shown in Example 2.21. In the middle section where the lyrics correspond to words expressing the “sweetness” or “love,” the melody is played in C# major.
Example 2.21. Modal Mixture in Melody from “El alma del payador”

Later, at the end of the song where the lyrics change from the sweetness to the sadness, the melody also suddenly changes to C# minor, as shown in Example 2.22. The alternation of the major and minor keys corresponds to the change of the lyrics.

Example 2.22. Full Transcription of “El alma del payador”
Another interesting example of the *milonga* is the 1910 recording of “Ansina mesmo la quiero” (As Such, I Love Her) composed and performed by the Uruguayan *payador* and circus actor Alfredo Eusebio Gobbi.\(^{102}\) “Ansina mesmo” in the title is an archaic Spanish expression for “así mismo,” and under the title on the record label, the piece is described as a *milonga-tangueada*. As this hyphenated description suggests, the piece has musical features that relate to both traditional gaucho music, or the *milonga*, and new urban music, or the *tango*.

The instrumentation of the *milonga-tangueada* consists of brass instruments seen in other circus repertoires, and the rhythms employed in this piece are the same as those of the typical *milonga*, as shown in Example 2.23.

\(^{102}\) In 1895, Gobbi came to Buenos Aires and started working in the Anselmi Circus, where he performed music and acrobatics. This circus performed several gaucho dramas including *Juan Cuello*, *Juan Soldao*, *Julián Giménez*, and *Juan Moreira* in different style from that of Podestá. Later in the 1900s, Gobbi went to Spain to perform the gaucho drama *Juan Moreira* with the Petray Brothers.
Harmonically, the chord progression of I-V also shares the same musical features of the *milonga*. Compared to Greco’s example, the melody of “Ansina mesmo la quiero” uses more intervallic leaps between the notes. While the melody seems to move more freely at times, the variety of musical ideas is also somewhat limited. For instance, in Example 2.24, the same motive is repeated seven times until the end of the song.

The lyrics of this *milonga-tanguedada* are still based on the *décima* and include typical gaucho themes or expressions such as: *carpincho* (an indigenous person with long hair) and *potranca* (pony). The story of the song comically tells how a *gauchito* tries to attract a woman who has caught his interest. This theme is similar to others portrayed in *sainetes* of the period, such as “El gauchito en Buenos Aires o sea todos rabian por casarse” by Estanislao del Campo, as described in Chapter 1. Due to these complex combinations of musical and textual features,
the *milonga* remains an ambivalent expression, connected in complicated relationships with rural gaucho customs and urban modern society.

As we have seen, one type of the *milonga*, performed by circus actors or *payadores*, provides rural settings and conveys traditional gaucho customs to circus audiences, occasionally incorporating newer features. At the same time, a second type of the *milonga* contains urban musical elements, although it still retains characteristics similar to the traditional genre. Considering these two different examples, the *milonga* appears to be an ambivalent expressive form that represents the gaucho’s migrations between rural and urban areas as well as Argentina’s process of transition from old to new societies.

**Gaucho Dance Music**

**The Gato**

The *gato* is a typical Argentine folk dance; its instrumental accompaniment can include the guitar, violin, accordion, and harp, and it sometimes will feature song lyrics. Currently in Argentina, a *ombo* (drum made of a hollowed log and heads from skins of cows or sheep) is typically used. Yet, in the early twentieth century, the *gato* was played mainly by the guitar. This dance music was widespread throughout Argentina during the nineteenth century and was danced in both the salon and in rural areas.103 Throughout the countryside, it was a preferred gaucho dance form, performed at fiestas or social gatherings. Its popularity was evidenced by a statement from the Argentine eyewitness observer of gaucho music, Ventura Lynch, who

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stated: “I believe that there would not be a gaucho anywhere who does not know at least how to strum a gato.”

Musically, Aretz divides the *gato* into sung and instrumental subgenres. Structurally, the *gato cantado* (or sung version) follows the form of its lyrics whereas the purely instrumental version relates more closely to its choreography. In terms of the dance itself, several variations exist in addition to the basic *gato simple*. There are the: 1) *gato cuyano*, 2) *gato con relaciones* (or *porteño*), 3) *gato con giro inicial*, 4) *gato polqueado*, 5) *gato encadenado*, 6) *gato correntino*, and 7) *gato patriótico*. In this section, I first describe the basic musical and choreographic features of the *gato simple* and later focus on the *gato cantado* performed in the native circus.

The *gato* is performed by either one or two non-embracing couples. The choreography corresponds to the musical structure of the genre, as shown in Table 2.4.

### Table 2.4. Choreography and Musical Structure of the *gato*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Choreographic Steps</th>
<th>Chord progressions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Palma</td>
<td>V-I-V-I or I-V7-I-V7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Melody A</td>
<td>Vuelta</td>
<td>V-I-V-I or I-IV-V7-I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Melody B</td>
<td>Giro</td>
<td>V-I-V-I or I-IV-V7-I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Interlude</td>
<td>Zapateo y Zarandeo</td>
<td>V-I-V-I or I-V7-V7-I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Melody B</td>
<td>Media Vuelta</td>
<td>V-I-V-I or I-IV-V7-I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Interlude</td>
<td>Zapateo y Zarandeo</td>
<td>V-I-V-I or I-V7-V7-I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Melody B</td>
<td>Giro Final</td>
<td>V-I-V-I or I-V7-V7-V7-I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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104 “Creo que no existirá un gaucho que no sepa por lo menos rascar un gato.” Lynch, *Folklór bonaerense*, 30.


As the instruments play the introduction, the dancers stand separated from each other and clap (in a gestures known as *palma*). At the end of the introduction, one of the musicians typically calls “adentro”, cuing the dancers that the dance is beginning (Table 2.5 below explains the following choreographic steps of the genre). Both male and female dancers execute the same dance steps, except for the *zapateo* and *zarandeo*: here, the male performer emphasizes his masculinity through his strenuous foot-tapping, while the female dancer shows her femininity by waving her skirt.

**Table 2.5. Choreography of the *gato*[^108]**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vuelta</th>
<th>Giro</th>
<th>Zapateo and Zarandeo</th>
<th>Media vuelta</th>
<th>Giro final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Vuelta" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Giro" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Zapateo and Zarandeo" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Media vuelta" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Giro final" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The word *vuelta* literally means a circle. Both dancers move in a large circle.*

*The dancers move in small circles around each other.*

*The male dancer performs strenuous foot-tapping motions, called *zapateo*. The female dancer moves in a diamond shape, waving her skirt, known as *zarandeo*.*

*The dancers move until they occupy their partner’s position (*cambio del sitio*), drawing a large semicircle.*

*The dancers move toward each other, drawing a small semicircle. Then, the dancers turn and face each other.*

[^108]: The male part is shown in a thick line and female part is shown in a thin line.

Musically, one of the unique features of the *gato* is its rhythm. It is performed by combining or alternating 3/4 and 6/8 meters, creating a type of hemiola, (or *sesquialtera*) as shown in Example 2.25 (a)-(b).

[^108]: This dance notation follows Berruti’s dance manual in 1954, since this type of description is still used in dance schools or academies in Argentina to learn the choreography.
Example 2.25. *Sesquialtera* and the *gato* Step

**The Rhythm of *sesquialtera***

![Diagram of sesquialtera rhythm]

**The Rhythm of the *gato* Step**

![Diagram of gato rhythm]

*L = left foot, R = right foot

This rhythmic pattern appears both in the melody and the accompaniment and, in the latter, it is more prominent. Interestingly, this rhythmic pattern corresponds with the dance step of the *gato*. The dancers snap their fingers (known as *pito*) in duple meter, but move their feet in triple meter. Moreover, the male dancer’s *zapateo* pattern, shown in Example 2.26, contributes complexity with its alternating of duple and triple subdivisions.

Example 2.26. Basic Rhythm of the *zapateo*

![Diagram of zapateo rhythm]

Along with the combination of *sesquialtera* and *zapateo* rhythms contained in the accompaniment to the melody, a variety of syncopated rhythms is also evident in the melody itself, as shown in Example 2.27. In this way, musically as well as choreographically, the *gato* uses a vigorous and animated rhythm.
Example 2.27. Rhythmic Patterns of the *gato* Melody

Melodically, both vocal and instrumental versions of the *gato* employ descending lines. Yet, the *gato instrumental* often features the third and fifth scale degrees with a triadic outline at the beginning of the piece. In contrast, the *gato cantado* melody uses more intervallic leaps within the descending line. The 1919 recording of the *gato cantado* by Arturo de Nava provides valuable information about how the vocal version of the genre was performed in the circus. Example 2.28 shows the introduction to this *gato*.

Example 2.28. Introduction to the *gato cantado*
This *gato* is accompanied by two guitars; while one plays the melody using a *punteo* technique, the other provides *rasgueo* V and I harmonies. The lyrics of the *gato* are based on a series of *coplas*, as shown in Figure 2.7 below.

**Figure 2.7. The Lyrics of the *gato cantado* by Arturo de Nava**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cuatro pies tiene un gato,</td>
<td>A cat has four feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cuatro la zorra</td>
<td>foxes four,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cuatro la lagartija,</td>
<td>geckos four,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dos la paloma.</td>
<td>doves two.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En mi casa hay un gato,</td>
<td>In my house, there is a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muy diferente</td>
<td>very unique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentro de la boca,</td>
<td>In his mouth,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tiene los dientes.</td>
<td>he has teeth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esta moza que baila,</td>
<td>This girl who dances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>merece un beso,</td>
<td>deserves a kiss,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y el que baila con ella</td>
<td>and whoever dances with her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que muerda un hueso.</td>
<td>bites a bone.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of two lines is repeated in the recording, as shown in the full transcription in Example 2.29. The lyrics are not Nava’s original, but rendered from those that were very popular around the turn of the twentieth century. The lyrics are generally based on the themes related to sexual or festive expressions, or relationships.\(^{109}\) According to the Spanish writer Ciro Bayo, the first stanza for the *gato cantado* performance customarily employed one of four or five variations; the next stanzas changed, depending on the audience.\(^{110}\) Nava’s recording shows that the *payadores* or musicians followed this *gaúcho* custom in the circus.

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\(^{110}\) Ciro Bayo, *Romancerillo del plata, contribución al estudio del romancero rioplatense* (Madrid: V. Suárez, 1913), 87.
Example 2.29. Full Transcription of the *gato cantado* by Arturo Nava
The Pericón

The pericón is a patriotic dance, performed by non-embracing couples with light blue and white handkerchiefs, in the configuration of a circle or other shapes. This dance was originally performed in rural areas around the time of Argentine independence, when gauchos fought in the Revolutionary and Civil wars. This genre briefly lost its popularity during the second half of nineteenth century. Yet, it was revived through the native circus and the gauchesca movement around the turn of the twentieth century.

The Argentine dance historian Héctor Aricó categorizes the pericón into the following two types: pericón antiguo and pericón del circo. The former was popular in the countryside or salons in the northeast region of Argentina until the creation of circo criollo in the late nineteenth century. The latter circus version gained its popularity after the 1884 Juan Moreira performance by the Hermanos Carlo and Podestá Brothers. Afterward, the choreographed circus version of the pericón spread to rural areas. The pericón del circo can be further divided into two types: the pericón nacional (or pericón argentino) and pericón por María. The former is a general type of pericón with a patriotic sentiment, and the latter designates a specific piece by Antonio Podestá, one of José Podesta’s brothers.

111 The light blue and white colors are the same as those of the Argentine flag. Pedro Berruti, Manual de danzas nativas, 191-204.


114 Berruti, Manual de danzas nativas: coreografías, historia, y texto poético de las danzas, 204.
Argentino Theater). The success of this performance later contributed to the diffusion of his piece as a differentiated type of *pericón*.  

The *pericón* has a unique choreography that reflects its patriotic or nationalistic sentiment. Both the female and male dancers utilize dance step in triple meter. From these, they elaborate various complex figures whose names relate to the shape of the dance. These include the *espejito* (little mirror), *pabellón* (flag), and *molinete* (windmill) as shown in Table 2.6.

**Table 2.6. Choreography of the *pericón***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Esepejito</th>
<th>Pabellón</th>
<th>Molinetes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Esepejito" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Pabellón" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Molinete" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The dancers stand in two lines with male dancers inside. If the male dancer stands at the left side of his partner, he holds her right arm above her head and her left arm behind their backs.

The female dancers outside and male dancers inside go counter-clockwise, holding their scarves like a tent. Women have light blue scarves and men have white ones. During this formation, the *bastonero* shouts loudly “Viva la patria” and the other dancers respond by exclaiming “Viva!” Usually this formation occurs at the end of the performance.

The female dancers gather close to the center and circle around, holding hands. During that time, the male dancers wait in two lines snapping their fingers over their heads.

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115 In fact, after this premiere, many scores of this piece were published. Seibel, *Historia del teatro argentino*, 327.

116 Contemporary *pericón* performance at the local traditional festival in Argentina. The Photograph taken by the author, Laborde (Córdoba Province), 9 January, 2009.
The person who leads the choreography is called the *bastonero* and he cues the dancers to change formations by calling “Ahura” (Now).\(^{117}\)

From the choreography, a patriotic sense of the *pericón* is conveyed. It appears especially while shaping the *pabellón* figure; during which dancers typically shout “¡Viva la Patria!” In the Podestá’s circus, the words of the *bastonero* were sometimes based on the following *copla*, as shown in Figure 2.8.

**Figure 2.8. Pericón Stanzas by José Podestá**\(^ {118}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Señores bailarines</th>
<th>Gentlemen dancers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rompan parejo,</td>
<td>Separate from your partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y dándose las manos</td>
<td>and give your hands to her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>formen espejo.</td>
<td>to form the <em>espejo</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rompan contramarchando</td>
<td>Stop countermarching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>con atención</td>
<td>Give me your attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preparando las mozas</td>
<td>preparing your ladies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el pabellón</td>
<td>for the <em>pabellón</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pabellón de la patria</td>
<td><em>Pabellón</em> (flag) of the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forme el paisano,</td>
<td>form the <em>paisano</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enseguida un saludo</td>
<td>continue the greeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pañuelo en mano</td>
<td>with a scarf in your hand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Musically, the only original instrument that accompanied the *pericón* was the guitar. Following European immigration, the accordion appeared; other versions were performed by brass bands. Melodically, the *pericón* is very simple and repeats the same phrases with a slow tempo in triple meter. It is characterized by a recurring intervallic content and dotted rhythms.

\(^{117}\) “Ahura” is an old expression for “ahora,” which means “now.”

\(^{118}\) Podestá, *Medio siglo de farándula*, 96-97.
Harmonically, the chord progression is generally based on a continuous pattern of tonic-dominant harmonies (I-V). The bass line continuously moves by arpeggiated major and minor thirds.

Because the choreography and its nationalistic gestures are highly significant in the pericón performance, it seems that musical aspects are not well-explored in previous studies. For example, both Aretz and Schwartz-Kates explain the pericón in relation to the other similar genres, such as the cielito and the media caña. Yet, the genre is unique especially within the circus and can be analyzed more specifically. Among the details to explore are whether the pericón simply consists of a single repeated pattern of the same musical idea and why such a “simplistic” pericón could become so popular for reasons other than its patriotic sentiment. Historical recordings of the pericón provide valuable information that addresses to these questions.

The first example of the pericón is “Sangre criollo” (Argentine Blood), composed by Alfredo Eusebio Gobbi and performed by the Orquesta Típica Criollo of José Domingo Pécora (1890-1981) in 1908, as shown in Example 2.30. The instrumentation of Pécora’s orchestra consists of violin, guitar, bandoneón, and flute, which interestingly corresponds to that of the early tango. This orchestral pericón shows the typical chord progression of I-V and the repeated pattern of a single musical idea.

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120 Pécora was a classically trained composer, violinist, and director of the tango.
Yet, at the end of the piece, the melody and meter suddenly change as shown in Example 2.31. The melody is more syncopated and the tempo is much faster than in the previous section (Example 2.30). In this new section, the choreographed steps of the pericón explained in Table 2.5 do not fit. This prompts a question of what kind of performance was added to the end of the pericón in the native circus.
The 1912 recording of the “Pericón por María” composed by Antonio Podestá provides some keys to answer the question. It is played by the orchestra Boceto Lirico National with the conductor Gaetano Grossi. For the performance of this piece in the circus, the organito (small organ) shown in Figure 2.9, with a sound similar to an accordion was used.

**Figure 2.9. The organito Used for “Pericón por María”**

This version of the pericón also shows the typical chord progression of I-V and the repetition of the melodic pattern shown in Example 2.32.

**Example 2.32. First Part of “Pericón por María” by Antonio Podestá**

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121 The orchestra Boceto Lirico Nacional often accompanied circus music especially for the Podestá family.

122 The photograph is taken by the author and reproduced by permission of the Cervantes Theater. Taken by author.
The choreography of this piece is suggested by the voice of the bastonero that was also recorded with the orchestral performance, which states: “Rompan. Formen espejito, ahura” (Break; form espejito, now!) In the final repetition of the rhythmic pattern, a completely different musical section appears as in “Sangre criollo.” After the IV-V-I cadence, a fast section is added, as shown in Example 2.33.

Example 2.33. Final Section of “Pericón por María”

Interestingly, right before this fast section, the bastonero shouts “zapateo,” meaning that the circus actors with gaucho costumes begin the strenuous steps after the patriotic pabellón formation. Considering the similarity of the musical structure of this final section to that of the “Sangre criollo,” we can assume that the zapateo performance was intended, which is unusual for a pericón performance. Also, this part is unusual for pieces with rhythmic characteristics of the tango. One might assume that reason for the genre’s popularity is because the native circus efficiently stylized this patriotic dance to avoid the simple recurring pattern. Also, this popular expression celebrated the image of the strong nation musically as well as figuratively by combining the patriotic pericón with the masculine zapateo performance. Thus, the audience consolidated their sense of identity through the national image that the circus actors displayed on the stage.
As we have seen, the *circo criollo* offered both comic musical performances and folk music and dance simultaneously: while the clown’s comic songs satirically depicted the contemporary social situation, the gaucho repertoires were involved in the revitalization of Argentine tradition. Analyzing the folk music and dance reveals how circus actors followed and even exaggerated the authentic music and dance of the native horseman as well as how those performers arranged and remodeled the traditional repertoire by combining it with contemporary urbanized popular expressions. Certainly the circus is a form of entertainment and arranging various types of music enlivened the audience, which included both native Argentine people and new immigrants from other countries. However, the question of how the circus could navigate between these old and new populations remains. In the following chapter, I will discuss this central aspect of the circus and its music as it relates to the consolidation of Argentine identity, focusing on the cultural dynamics and the integration of national sentiment that the country experienced.
Chapter 3

The Creation of *Argentinidad*

Hey you, don’t be so Italian and take Christ from us! Explain to me where have you ever seen a Neapolitan gaucho?

*A un cocoliche*, Avenir Rossel

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, a comic character wearing gaucho-like costumes appeared on the circus stage. In the *circo criollo*, the main role of this figure, Cocoliche, was to enliven the performance.123 Often speaking an *italo-criollo* dialect, he mimicked the native horseman’s attitude and behavior.124 Anticipated by comic characters who spoke Italian-accentuated Spanish in the Raffeto and Videla circuses, Cocoliche marked the arrival of an ambivalent character who straddled traditional and immigrant societies, navigating the two worlds to enhance the concept of a unified Argentina.

The creation of Cocoliche here and elsewhere directly related to a process of creolization in Argentina during the turn of the twentieth century, which highlighted cultural negotiations between diverse groups and the integration of these peoples into a coherent national whole. This socio-cultural redefinition helped solve the national identity crises brought on by a massive influx of immigrants into Argentina between the 1890s and the 1910s. In the *circo criollo*, this redefinition first appeared in the representation of the gaucho as an “authentic”

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traditional symbol; the later addition of Cocoliche further contributed to this process. These two male figures mimicked one another and performed both traditional and nationalistic expressions together on the same stage. The end result of their joint appearance was an assimilation of the values and identities of both characters by their audiences. While the gaucho’s performance centered on the ideals of the nation, Cocoliche acted as a cultural mediator to help viewers adjust to the concept of a revised sense of argentinidad for both native Argentines and new immigrants.

Although this comic character played such a significant role in the construction of Argentine identity, little is known about his music. This chapter, therefore, focuses on his identity and cultural function through an examination of his musical performances in the native circus. The first section describes Cocoliche’s persona and the cocolichismo movement which features this figure in arts, literature, and music. The following section will examine Cocoliche’s songs including the contemporary urban tango, by analyzing both song lyrics and historical recordings. Through a comparison of his performances with those of gaucho actors and payadores, I elucidate unique features of Cocoliche’s representation of argentinidad. The final section of the chapter discusses the circo criollo as a site of both the negotiation of, and the conflict between, power differentials in the construction of Argentine identity, highlighting the complex social, political, and cultural matrix that helped redefine what it meant to be Argentine.
Cocoliche: The Comic Character with Double Identities

Cocoliche was invented by the Podestá circus for its 1890 *Juan Moreira* performance. At the scene of the rural festival, Jeronimo Podestá, one of José’s brothers, improvisationally spoke with a new Italian performer from Calabria whose name was Antonio Cocoliche. On the stage, this Italian actor’s comic use of the *italo-criollo* language captivated the audience and led to the performance’s huge success. Because of the positive reception of this comic figure, Podestá later added the new character to his *gauchesca* drama—an addition that did not exist in Gutiérrez’s original version of *Juan Moreira*. At this point, the new character did not have a proper name. When Celestino Petray, another Italian actor who had just returned from Patagonia Province, joined the Podestá circus, he helped make the *cocoliche* character a standard figure in the circus. Petray performed this comic character, using an exaggerated version of the *italo-criollo* language. With his great popular success, this character was consolidated with the name of Cocoliche.

In the *gauchesca* drama, Petray’s version of Cocoliche appeared on the stage wearing a gaucho-like costume with a useless, skinny horse. In this scene, a gaucho, performed by Jeronimo Podestá, questioned this character: “Hey, my friend, Cocoliche. Where did you come from this early in the morning?” Petray answered in the *italo-criollo* language: “I came from the Patagonia Province with this wonderful horse.” Jeronimo then asked the stranger’s name. Petray proudly answered with a statement and a challenge: “My name is Francisco

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125 Micol Seigel, “Cocoliche’s Romp: Fun with Nationalism at Argentina’s Carnival,” 42.

126 Cocoliche became so popular that other circus groups followed the Podestá circus and began using this comic character in their performances.

127 “Vengue de la Patagonía co este parejere macanuto, amique” If it is in Spanish, it would be “Vine de Patagonia con este caballo macanudo, amigo.” Podestá, *Medio siglo de farandula*, 62-63.
Cocoliche. I am very criollo to the marrow of a bone and to the shank of a marrow. My friend, do you want to make a bet?\textsuperscript{128}

This figure is very different from the typical idealized gaucho character, who has a strong horse in the pampas, speaks Spanish with a native accent, and displays his masculinity throughout the performance. In contrast, Cocoliche has a worthless horse, speaks a typical \textit{italo-criollo} dialect, and displays his foolishness by imitating the native horseman in a comical way. Interestingly, Cocoliche introduces himself not as an Italian immigrant, but as a gaucho. He refers to his useless horse as a “wonderful horse,” thus mocking one of the essential gaucho items.

Additionally, this comic figure says that he came from Patagonia Province, which is located in the southern part of Argentina and stereotyped as a poor and barren land overrun by Italian immigrants. This point of origin is in contrast to the pampean region where the gaucho used to live.\textsuperscript{129} Petray himself had recently been in the southern area, and he knew the real \textit{tanos acriollados} (creolized Italians) who were living there; thus he was able to craft a seemingly authentic performance.\textsuperscript{130} Combining Antonio Cocoliche’s previous performances and his experience with Italian immigrants from rural southern Argentina, Petray created a popular comic figure who was further refined by José Podestá for the circus.

Visual images of Cocoliche from this era are limited. Figure 25 shows the most typical and well-known illustration of this figure from the Podestá circus.

\textsuperscript{128} “Ma quiame Franchisque Cocoliche, e songo cregollo gasta lo giiese de la taba e la canilla de lo caracuse, amique, afficate l parada. If it is in Spanish, it would be “Me llamo Francisco Cocoliche y soy criollo hasta el meollo del hueso y la canilla del tuetano, amigo, aposta la apuesta.” Podestá, \textit{Medio siglo de farandula}, 62-63

\textsuperscript{129} The southern part of Argentina has a large population of indigenous tribes.

\textsuperscript{130} Seibel, \textit{Historia del circo}, 131.
The *cocoliche* character in the picture wears attire similar to that of the gaucho, including a hat, *poncho*, and *facón*. Moreover he holds a *mate* (gourd containing a highly caffeinated Argentine tea), which follows the typical gaucho custom. Of course, this gaucho imitation is deliberately imperfect. A close examination of the picture yields the following prominent details: the hat is the wrong style; the *facón* is larger than normal size, giving the impression that this is an imitation; and the *bombilla* (metal-made straw for drinking *mate*) is excessively long. This style of mimicking of the native horseman was especially known as a *gaño namaracho* (makeshift gaucho).

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131 The photograph is located in the archives of the Insituto Nacional de Estudios de Teatro in Buenos Aires.

This stage personage gained huge popularity and launched the *cocolichismo* movement, which in turn created a separate literary genre. The *literature cocolichesca* included novels, comic dramas, and *sainetes* that depicted Cocoliche as a main character. For example, the Argentine novelist, playwright, and actor Carlos Mauricio Pacheco (1881-1921) uses the *cocoliche* character in his *sainete*, *Los disfrazados* (The Disguised), first performed at carnival in 1906. Other characters in this theatrical performance included a gaucho, clown, skeleton, and *paisano* (worker from the country).

At the very beginning of this comic drama, gaucho and *paisano* actors performed *décimas*. When the third *paisano*, who was still a boy and tried to show his gaucho spirit, finished his *décima*, Cocoliche appeared on the stage and began singing. In contrast to the previous character’s native songs, Cocoliche performs a parody of one of the most typical Ibero-American children’s songs, “Arroz con leche” (literally rice with milk) in the *italo-criollo* language, as shown in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1. Comparison of Traditional and Cocoliche Versions of “Arroz con leche”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The traditional version</th>
<th>The <em>cocoliche</em> version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arroz con leche,</td>
<td>Arroz co leche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>me quiero casar</td>
<td>me quiero casar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>con una señorita</td>
<td>co una morochita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de San Nicolas</td>
<td>qui sparanza!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The original Spanish lyrics read, “Milk Porridge, I want to marry a girl from San Nicolas.” In the *cocoliche* version, however, the lyrics are modified for comic effect. For example “con” (with) in Spanish are replaced to “co.” Additionally, the original lyrics speak of a “señorita”
from San Nicolas, but in the cocoliche version these lines are changed to a “morochita qui sparanza” (dark-brown girl, what a hope!). During this opening scene, Cocoliche also mocks the little paisano who is trying to show his gaucho spirit. Yet, although he taunts this traditional rural character, he also engages with Argentine culture by singing a popular Latin American children’s song.

Through native gestures, including singing playful songs and drinking a mate, Cocoliche shows his commitment to Argentine culture. Paradoxically, as he tries to follow gaucho customs, his efforts inadvertently emphasize his Italian-national background. The American anthropologist Ana Cara-Walker explains the paradox that Cocoliche embodied: the character was neither gaucho nor Italian, yet at the same time he was both. She further discusses how Cocoliche’s ambivalence functioned as both a disguise for assimilation as well as an attempt at dissimulation (rejection of Argentineness) among Italian immigrants. Therefore, this figure could aid in the construction of new hybridized Argentine identities on both sides.

Cara-Walker’s argument presents additional questions and concerns; how Cocoliche’s navigation of dual identities (as a native Argentine and an immigrant) applies to his music in the circus and how his comical behavior on the stage relates to his implicit role in identity construction. In order to examine this comic figure’s role in the process of national reconciliation more closely, I will analyze his music and song lyrics with respect to these questions in the following section.

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Cocoliche’s Repertoire

Cocoliche appeared in both the acrobatic section and the *gauchesca* drama of the native circus. In the former, he performed songs drawn from the comic and contemporary urban repertoires; in the latter, he imitated sung gaucho musical traditions. The 1892 advertisement of Juan Moreira (Figure 2.5) provides evidence of Cocoliche’s participation in both the initial acrobatic part of circus and in the native *gauchesca* drama. The poster introduces the character’s name as Francisco Cocoliche. It advertises his circus act as “el Napolitano criollo y sus travesuras” (The Neapolitan *Criollo* and His Pranks), thus supporting the notion that Cocoliche participated in the acrobatics section. Later, his theatrical performances appear sandwiched between the patriotic gaucho *pericón*, and the appearance of the legendary *payador*, Gabino Ezeiza.

Cocoliche’s repertoire emphasized music from three genres: comic songs, mock-gaucho music, and contemporary urban songs such as the *tango*. Each of these genres embodied his role in the circus of enlivening the audience and navigating representations of national identity. An analysis here of Cocoliche’s comic songs and mock-gaucho repertoire can be contrasted with Pepino’s comic songs and gaucho repertoire, as explained in Chapter 2. In the case of the *tango*, this chapter compares Cocoliche’s version of the genre with criollo performances. By analyzing these musical examples, I thus examine Cocoliche’s ambivalent position as it relates to his representation in the circus.\(^\text{134}\)

\(^{134}\) Because my search for historical recordings of Cocoliche comic songs is still under investigation, I focus my analysis here on the song lyrics.
Cocoliche’s Comic Song

Because the main role of the cocoliche’s performance is to encourage laughter with his humorous acts, comic songs are a significant element of his work. The lyrics of his songs typically employ the italo-criollo language as seen in other comic songs in the native circus. Within this comic repertoire, “El vendedor ambulante” (The Peddler), composed by José Podestá and published in 1897, is an interesting example. The song lyrics show similar features to the other comic songs by Pepino 88. In this song, Cocoliche acts as an Italian peddler who came to Argentina to sell fruit as shown in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2. First Part of “El vendedor ambulante”

Qui compra, qui compra,  Who buys, who buys,  
La rica frotita  The delicious fruit  
Moy linda e barata  Very beautiful and cheap  
pé la siñorita  for the lady  
Narranca, manana,  Orange, apple,  
sandiba, melone,  watermelon, melon,  
sirguela, damasco,  plum, apricot  
Dorano, e pelone,  peach, and pear,  
Veñite, veñite  Come on, come on  
Señore mercante  Mister, Merchant  
Que tengo de tutto  I have all  
E per tutti cuanti  for everybody

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135 Juan González Urtiaga and José J. Podestá, José J. Podestá y “Pepino el 88” (Montevideo: Centro de Estudios de Teatro Rioplatense, 1994), 58-59.

136 The setting of this character especially relates to the socio-historical context, in that many immigrants were working as peddlers in Buenos Aires around the turn of the twentieth century. While many immigrants stayed in Buenos Aires, a great number of them went back and forth between Argentina and their countries for business reasons. Argentine people ridiculed their going back and forth between Argentina and Italy and called them golondrinas, which literally meant swallows. Jorge Fernández and Julio César Rondina, Historia argentina (Santa Fe, Argentina: UNL, 2004), 273.
At the beginning, Cocoliche cries out for attention and lists the names of fresh fruits in the *italo-criollo* idiom. This part of the song is similar to the last stanzas of Pepino’s song “Lo que yo he visto,” as explained in Chapter 2. In the previous comic song, an Italian couple hurls insults at each other and the Italian wife provides a laundry list of what her husband always eats: “narranca” (oranges), “meloni” (melons), and “durani” (peaches). With the use of this distinctive language, and with his parody of fruitsellers (in large, immigrants) Podestá comically depicts new Italian arrival to Argentina.

Cocoliche’s song also suggests his ambivalent stance in the native circus. It appears at the end of the song. Here, Cocoliche bids farewell to Argentina, leaving for his country, Italy. This type of “despedida” (farewell) is also a common way of ending a piece within the Ibero-American song tradition. Like many other aspects of Podestá’s performance, the significance of the despedida is ambivalent since it refers to both his farewell to the circus audience and to Argentina in general, as shown in Figure 3.3.137

**Figure 3.3. Final Part of “El vendedor ambulante”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yo pienso en ser rico</td>
<td>I think of being rich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per decar de trabacar</td>
<td>to quit working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E andarme con la familia,</td>
<td>and leave with my family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A l’italia a descansar,</td>
<td>for Italy to take a break.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entunce cume in cailaife</td>
<td>Then, just as in the café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E mucho petagone</td>
<td>and many people in Patagonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ríendome de tutti cuanti</td>
<td>laughed at me about everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La cantare esta cancione:</td>
<td>to them, I will sing this song:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

137 The Argentine *payador* Arturo de Nava recorded this song, which was published by Victor in 1907. Unfortunately, this recording has not yet been located. The translation seems to be odd, but it follows the original lyrics.
Figure 3.3. (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>América linda</td>
<td>América linda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me tierra querida</td>
<td>Me tierra querida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunde vendí tanta</td>
<td>donde vendí tanta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narranca putrida.</td>
<td>Narranca putrida.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahora te saludo</td>
<td>Ahora te saludo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feliche ya so</td>
<td>Feliche ya so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E viva la patria</td>
<td>E viva la patria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que rico ya estoy</td>
<td>Que rico ya estoy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adío ya te dico</td>
<td>Adío ya te dico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Señore mercante</td>
<td>Señore mercante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adío señurita</td>
<td>Adío señurita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adío tutti cuanti.</td>
<td>Adío tutti cuanti.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apparently, the lyrics are very ironic.  At first, Cocoliche celebrates Argentina as “América linda” (beautiful America) or “Me tierra querida” (My beloved land).  Right after that, when the word “pútrida” (rotten) appears, the meaning of the previous words is transformed. Cocoliche’s apparent affability changes into antipathy with his reference to wealth gained by selling many “rotten” oranges to the Argentine people he previously had characterized as belonging to his “tierra querida.”  Cocoliche appears to have shown friendliness only in order to become rich.  At this point, Cocoliche ridicules the Argentine people, even though he continues to pay tribute to them with his Italian accentuated Spanish.  

The cocoliche’s complex sentiments toward Argentina and Italy culminate in the phrase: “Viva la patria.”  This expression is especially ambivalent and raises the question of which country Cocoliche celebrates.  Considering that this character is an Italian figure, the “patria” described here might refer to his home country, Italy.  On the other hand, the exclamatory phrase “viva la patria,” is a typical nationalistic expression of Argentina as seen in pericón
performances. Another possible interpretation is that Cocoliche is mocking the typical nationalistic expression of Argentina, in favor of his “real” home country. Given the socio-historical background of Italian peddlers at the time, it is ambiguous whether the cocoliche makes this patriotic comment to celebrate or mock his host country, or both. His ambivalence toward both countries is indeed specific to Cocoliche’s performance.

The Mock-Gaucho Repertoire

Cocoliche also created his own versions of the typical gaucho genres examined in Chapter 2. For example, he often parodied the gaucho’s sentimental songs, including the vidalita and the milonga. The vidalita was an especially preferred genre that reflected his humor and satire. Since this melancholy love song consisted of only one melody, as Carlos Vega explained, a variety of song lyrics could be added. In multiple versions of the vidalita-cocolichesca, the comic Italian figure transforms the melancholy character of this genre into a comic or satirical display.

The first example of this transformation can be seen in the piece, “Vidalitas cantadas port un tano” (Vidalitas Sung by an Italian), written by Juan de Nava, as shown in Figure 3.4.138

De Nava follows the vidalita’s typical poetic form of a six-line stanza and employs the typical italo-criollo dialect. Moreover, the most important word, “vidalita,” is intentionally misspelled as “vedaletá.” Still, the sorrowful and romantic sentiment of the original vidalita remains.

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138 Juan de Nava was a well-known Uruguayan payador who lived around the turn of the twentieth century, contemporary with the Argentine payador, Gabino Ezeiza. The two legendary singers competed in a famous payada in 1884. The famous circus actor, Arturo de Nava, is Juan de Nava’s son.
The idea of the little dove’s flying away in the first stanza is typical of the lyrics associated with the genre. Yet, the second stanza sounds hilariously funny, as if Cocoliche is a bird catcher, who preserves stuffed animals, like a taxidermist. Also, in the final line, the lyrics show an obvious Italian feature by the phrase, “borracho cun grapa,” a reference to the cocoliche character’s drunkenness by the Italian liquor grappa. The tragically sad ambiance of the vidalita established in the first stanza thus suddenly transforms into a comic setting.

The transition between melancholy and comic features in Cocoliche’s vidalita appears in the next example, “Vidalitas … cocolicheras” by the Argentine actor Napole Gocoliche. In de Nava’s earlier version, the lyrics show similarities with modern Spanish. Yet, here, Cocoliche employs a more complex type of italo-criollo dialect, highlighting both similarities and differences between Italian and Spanish, as shown in Figure 3.5.139 For example, the most important word, “vidalita,” is replaced by another expression, “voroletá,” which sounds similar, but does not make any sense in either language.

Figure 3.5. First Part of “Vidalitas ... cocolicheras” by Napole Gocliche

Yo teniba uno rancho,  I used to have a ranch,
Voroletá…                    my beloved…
Pé la angosta irocha;       for the tender Argentine woman.
Donde gatorraba,            where I used to dance the gato
Voroletá…                   my beloved.
Có la mia morocha.          with my lady…

Lo ciete chanchito,         The seven pigs,
Voroletá…                   my beloved…
tanto comelone;            eat a lot.
cá tragan polenta,         They swallowed corn flour
Voroletá…                   my beloved…
y hata mancarrone.         until they get old.

Apparently, Cocoliche follows the traditional poetic form of the *vidalita* and depicts the
typical image of the Argentine countryside. For example, the first line begins with the
description of the rural landscape of the pampas region. The words “rancho” (ranch) and
“gatorraba” (dancing the gato) are very specific to gaucho customs. Yet, Cocoliche’s
ambivalent stance toward native Argentine culture appears in the following stanza. Cocoliche
describes the way that pigs eat in the ranch right after the melancholy setting of the pampas. In
a sense, the character’s description of pigs is more “real” in actual rural life, but is totally
opposite from the romantic setting of the pampas as seen in the traditional *vidalita*. By
combining the typical gaucho poetic form with the description of real rural life, Cocoliche
comically and satirically mocks traditional gaucho culture. This juxtaposition simultaneously
reveals his engagement with the culture of the native horseman and his anti-Argentine
sentiment.
As we have seen, Cocoliche here reveals his ambivalent stance in the mock-gaucho repertoire. He follows the gaucho culture by using traditional musical genres, yet he parodies or even “insults” the customs of the native horseman by replacing Spanish with an Italian-mixed language and by substituting mocking words. Beneath his gaucho-like attire and comic behaviors, Cocoliche hides a subversive character under an Argentine cultural mask.

**Cocoliche and tango**

The final *cocoliche* genre comes from the contemporary urban music setting and specifically involves the *tango*. Currently this genre is typically described as one of the most representative in the Argentine repertoire. However, around the turn of the twentieth century, the *tango* did not have such an international reputation. Instead, the genre increased its popularity among the middle and lower classes in urban areas, partly because the lyrics of the *tango* mirrored and satirized the social situation in Buenos Aires. In the circus, Cocoliche included this new contemporary urban genre within his comic performances.

The 1912 recording of “¿Ma qui fú?” (But who was that?) is an interesting example of how Cocoliche performed the *tango*. The music was composed by the famous Argentine *tango* director, Aruturo de Bassi (1890-1950), and was performed by the Argentine *sainete* director and *cocoliche* actor, Carlos Mauricio Pacheco. In the recording, Pacheco sings, accompanied by a guitar. At the beginning, he strums the strings in triple meter with the chord progression of I-V-I, as shown in Example 3.1.
Example 3.1. Introduction of “¿Ma qui fú?” by Carlos Pacheco

After this introduction, Pacheco shouts the lyrics of the title, “Ma qui fú” and the following phrase, “tango de música criolla” (tango of Argentine music), to emphasize that this is “Argentine” music. In spite of his emphasis on the Argentine character of the piece, however, the song begins not in Spanish, but in a strongly Italian dominant form of the *italo-criollo* language. Pacheco repeats the sentence, “ma qui fú,” three times at the beginning and continues with “¿Ch’ha tirado la piedra?” (Who threw the stone?), as shown in Figure 3.6. In the lyrics, Cocoliche complains that somebody threw a stone and broke his glass window. Later, he assumes that the person might be a boy whose nickname is “Rulito,” and who sells magazines or newspapers on the street. Yet, Cocoliche does not have any solid evidence of this, so he furiously continues asking the question: “¿Ma qui fú?”

Figure 3.6. First Part of “¿Ma qui fú?” by Carlos Pacheco

| ¿Ma qui fú? | Who was that? |
| ¿Ma qui fú? | Who was that? |
| ¿Ma qui fú? | Who was that? |
| ¿Ch’ ha tirado la piedra? | Who threw the stone? |

| Para mi, para mi, para mi, todo vi Que a roto el vidrio que esta en la vidriera | For me, for me, for me, I saw everything. Who broke this glass that is in the window. |

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140 “Rulito” is diminutive of “Rolo,” which means person with curly hair.
Musically, the vocal melody begins in E major and consists of the typical tango rhythm as shown in Example 3.2.

**Example 3.2. First Part of “¿Ma qui fú?”**

The chord progression consists of I and V. In the middle part, the melody modulates to C# minor, as shown in Example 3.3. This key alternation is typical of the tango. In this middle part, the guitar plays a simple rasgueo in duple meter. After this section, the melody returns to the opening E-Major phrase, creating an ABA’ form. In the A’ section, Cocoliche sings more excitedly and his voice is more speech-like.
“¿Ma qui fú?” seems to be just a comic song, in which Cocoliche clownishly shows his anger with a neighborhood boy. Yet, by closely examining the song lyrics, one finds complex power differentials relating to the ethnic conflict between the native and new immigrant societies. The image of Rulito, a news boy in the lyrics, relates to the emergence of a wide variety of periodicals or magazines. Many families in Buenos Aires from lower class, including immigrants, let their children sell these papers. The children were called “canillitas,” which derives from the Spanish word, “canilla,” referring to the tibia of the feet and arms. In urban areas, the “canillita” was a symbol of those newspapers and many tango composers published pieces based on this subject.¹⁴¹

Specifically, Cocoliche refers to the names of the magazines that Rulito is selling: *P.B.T.* and *Caras y caretas*. At the time, both magazines were very popular as weekly comic magazines. The former was founded in 1904 by the Spanish journalist and poet, Eustaquio

¹⁴¹ Those tango pieces include “Canillita” (1903) by Osmán Peréz Freire, “Caras y caretas: canillitas” (1928) by Enrique Saborido, and “Canillita, canillita” (1928) by Tomás de Bassi.
Pelicer (1859-1937), and was famous for its caricatures. The latter was also established by Pelicer and was published between 1898 and 1941. The Galician painter José María Cao Luaces (1862-1918), who was thought as a founder of the Argentine caricature, always illustrated the front cover, as shown in Figure 3.8 in the next page.142

Figure 3.7. The Front Cover of Caras y caretas (1910)

One of the most prominent features of these magazines is a combination of satirical humor and serious political concerns. The humorous parts include vignettes and dialogues of the cocoliche character and the gaucho.143 In some stories, both the cocoliche and the gaucho

142 The Spanish illustrator Manuel Mayol (1865-1929) also contributed his caricatures to these magazines.

mock each other, employing and mixing *italo-criollo*, mock-*italo-criollo*, gaucho dialect, and mock-gaucho languages. Another outstanding characteristic of these magazines is that they include columns to portray the characteristics of various groups, including immigrants and indigenous peoples. This section consists of brief explanations and pictures of those people in authentic costumes. It is obvious that these illustrations were biased by exoticist representation to a certain extent, but at the same time, they reflected the multicultural situation of the city.

In the setting of the song lyrics, the Rulito who might have thrown the stone is a newsboy, which means he had access to the information or news of the multiculturalism that these magazines illustrated. Given that the boy distributed those magazines that contained Argentina’s multicultural image, one might also assume that the setting of Rulito’s stone throwing suggests the conflict between the native Argentine community and new immigrant society as represented by Cocoliche. Since the *canillita* is associated with these publications, Rulito’s behavior suggests the multiculturalism that those newspapers or magazines propose is contentious.

Although the lyrics deal with a complex problem, this *cocoliche’s* tango does not sound serious. The melody basically remains in major keys. Also, it relates to Pacheco’s singing style. At the end of the song, he cries out the phrase, “¿Ma qui fú?” almost out of tune. The reasons of the comical sense of the song are because Rulito is just a child, the person who threw the stone is obscure, and Cocoliche is a simple comic figure. Thus, as in the title of the piece, the song protagonist repeats the interrogative “¿Ma qui fú?” blurring, and hence obscuring the conflict between old and new Argentines.
Negotiation and Conflict in the Construction of Argentine Identity

As we have seen, Cocoliche reveals an ambivalent stance between native and immigrant societies in Argentina through a variety of circus music. He alternately follows traditional Argentine cultural forms, such as the tango and vidalita, at the same time that he ridicules them. When examining these contradictory behaviors, Cara-Walker points out the paradox that Cocoliche embodied. He was neither gaucho nor Italian, yet at the same time he was both. She concludes that this figure mediated socio-cultural differences to reconcile both old and new Argentines to a new way of life.\footnote{Cara-Walker, “Cocoliche: The Art of Assimilation and Dissimulation among Italians and Argentines,” 62.}

Certainly, an analysis of the cocoliche repertoire in the previous sections reveals this political stance. Yet, such a position prompts further questions about Argentine identity construction in the circus, including what the coexistence of the gaucho and Cocoliche meant; what mediated their interaction on the stage and with the audience; and why Cocoliche was characteristically portrayed as a clown. To answer these concerns, I will turn to a discussion of the complex power differentials navigated by Cocoliche in the structure of the circo criollo.

In order to think about the above questions, a major factor to consider is that the audience included both immigrants and Argentine nationals. Since the circus already had a long history, a widespread dissemination, and an established popularity, people from all socio-economic classes attended these performances. Indeed, the coexistence of the gaucho and Cocoliche on stage structurally mirrored the cultural background of the audience. Immigrants self-identified with Cocoliche’s humorous patterns of speech, at the same time that native Argentines nostalgically related to the native horseman as they recalled better times in the
past. Additionally, the reciprocal mimicking of the gaucho and Cocoliche through language, attire, music, and ambiance provoked much laughter, subliminally encouraging the audience to think about who, as Argentines, they really were.

On the stage, gaucho actors intentionally pretended to treat Cocoliche as their friend, or as an authentic gaucho. For example, in Juan Moreira, a gaucho first greet to the cocoliche character by saying: “Hey, my friend, Cocoliche.” Yet in reality, the two characters are not close friends, and the gaucho ridicules the italo-criollo language of the Italian immigrant figure. In contrast, Cocoliche appears on the stage as a comical but cynical dramatic counterpart. Compared with performances of the native horseman, who represented Argentina’s past, Cocoliche’s behaviors create challenges to the traditional Argentine legacy. In fact, this Italian immigrant figure tells the native horseman that he is very Argentine with a gaucho spirit to the core. The cocoliche character’s management of these two identities—gaucho and Italian—issues a challenge to all the members of his audience, along with the other gaucho actors on the stage and the native and new Argentine national spectators, by raising the question of what authentic Argentineness really is.

In his performance, one of Cocoliche’s most important features is his ability to portray a clown with the mask of an Italian immigrant. As I described at the beginning of Chapter 2, the clown is a main significative component of the circus. His role is to enliven the audience as well as to control the entire presentation. In fact, Cocoliche performers were usually star actors or directors of the circus, since as many abilities were required for this role as for the native

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145 Podestá, Medio siglo de farandula, 62-63.

146 Ibid.
gaucho, including the ability to speak the italo-criollo language, portray comic gestures, and perform Argentine music. Even in the gauchesca dramas, the cocoliche character appeared on the stage not as a supporting actor, but as a controlling figure to manage the atmosphere in the circus tent. His enjoyable performances served to soothe the tension created by some of the cruel scenes in the gauchesca drama. Also, his comical behaviors excited the audience whenever they became bored with the traditional gaucho story.

Cocoliche’s clownish performances resolved the tensions not only between the stage and the audience, but also between old and new visions of Argentina. As seen in Pacheco’s “¿Ma qui fú?” the song lyrics of the cocoliche repertoire directly reflected the social conflict among various groups in the city. Cocoliche’s exposure of such tensions might startle or even embarrass any members of the audience who had anti-immigrant sentiments or prejudices against various non-criollo ethnicities. Yet, this comic figure skillfully transformed the satirical tension into laughter through his humorous gestures, including the italo-criollo language represented in dialogues and in music. Wielding the power of laughter as mediator, Cocoliche navigated the audience’s emotion, sentiment, and imagination with an eye toward the integration of multicultural values into a consolidated vision of Argentina.
Conclusion

This thesis has illuminated hegemonic power differentials and the processes of constructing Argentine identity in the *circo criollo* within a socio-cultural setting, particularly by examining historical recordings and song lyrics of both the gaucho and Cocoliche repertoires. These two main characters challenged each other’s identities in this popular expression, while revealing their complicit relationship in co-creating a new meaning of *argentinidad*.

Representation of these two main figures differed in the reality and fiction. In the real world, the gaucho was a main character represented in the dramatic portion of the *circo criollo*, but he was an unsubstantial figure in actuality. In the process of Argentina’s societal modernization, the native horseman had ceased to exist. Yet, this figure stood on the stage as a national symbol, emphasizing his idealized quality and thus was viewed as a representation of Argentine tradition. In contrast, the existence of Cocoliche was more substantial and real. His *gaucho mamaracho* attire or ambiance might be fictitious, but a variety of immigrants actually existed on the street contemporary with the *criollo* circus. Yet, in the ideological world, or the dramatic portion of the circus, the *cocoliche* was presented as an unreal imitation of the “authentic” native horseman.

Based on the two pivotal positions between real and ideal values and actual and virtual representations, the coexistence of *gaucho* and *cocoliche* provided the transmission of an idealized sense of Argentineness to middle and lower-class Argentines, including natives and immigrants. The music directly reflected this complex relationship of the two characters.
The gaucho music was performed to represent the authentic traditional image of the past, but the genres performed were, in fact, influenced by contemporary urban popular music, which reflected the mixture of native and immigrant populations. Cocoliche’s repertoire included the plaintive *vidalita* of the native horseman, but with deliberately altered lyrics that mocked the native society. By politically and performatively managing the song lyrics and their musical components, the gaucho and *cocoliche* repertoires influenced each other. The audience simultaneously looked at the gaucho and *cocoliche* figures and listened to their musical repertoires—a collection that comprised a complex mixture of old and new musical genres. Thus, the music was a vehicle of the assimilation process for old and new Argentine societies. Through representing and performing the gaucho and *cocoliche* figures together in the circus, both natives and immigrants gradually integrated with one another, thereby forging a new Argentine identity.

After the rise of film industry in the 1930s and 1940s, the native circus diminished in popularity. Interestingly enough, it was precisely because the *circo criollo* succeeded in fostering cultural assimilation that precipitated its decline. Once both European immigrants and native-born Argentines effectively forged a modern cultural identity, they no longer needed the native circus to fulfill that role. Still, the gaucho, an unsubstantial figure on the actual landscape, has remained on the stage as a symbol of Argentine tradition. In contrast, Cocoliche, a more realistic persona of Argentine society at the turn of the twentieth century, disappeared from theatrical performances. After enacting an ambivalent identity on the stage, this comic figure took off his Italian immigrant mask, both literally and figuratively, and stepped into a new role within a culturally integrated Argentine society.
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