

Adaptations of Traditional Vallenato Songs in Paseo Style for Classical Guitar Performance

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Abstract

Nowadays there is a shortage of vallenato musical repertoire to be performed by classical guitar. This generates a situation that fosters disinterest and uprooting regarding Vallenato cultural heritage. Indeed, the objective of this project is to develop adaptations of traditional vallenato songs on the air walk for interpretation on the solo classical guitar. This proposal is made with two purposes: one of them is to strengthen interest in the interpretation of traditional vallenato on the classical guitar, reinforcing aspects such as identity and roots in the genres of the region; The other is to provide material for teaching in various faculties or musical schools in Valledupar. This research is carried out from an applied quantitative methodology. Taking as a sample 4 specific songs on the air walk, the arrangements for the classical guitar are developed, and with these a material for pedagogical purposes is designed and published. When choosing the songs that make up the sample, the fact that they belong to traditional vallenato is taken into account. The chosen pieces are: Matilde Lina, La Gota Fría, Compae' Chipuco and La Casa en el Aire. Once the repertoire to be used has been defined, the main melody of the pieces is transcribed in a digital music writing program (Sibelius). Subsequently, musical arrangements are made taking into account the following criteria: harmony, melody, rhythm and instruments of the genre. The result is material with adaptations of traditional Vallenato songs for interpretation on the solo classical guitar. It is concluded that these arrangements strengthen the interest, research projection and cultural richness of Vallenato folklore, and allow a deepening, improvement and expansion of the contents or academic inputs in the city of Valledupar.

Keywords: Didactics, Constructivism, Classroom outside the classroom.

1. Introduction

Vallenato stands as one of Colombia's most emblematic musical genres, renowned for its rich musicality and deep cultural roots in the country's Caribbean coast. However, few vallenato compositions have been adapted for classical guitar performance, revealing a significant gap in both academic knowledge and formal dissemination of the genre.

This study aims to adapt traditional vallenato songs for classical guitar interpretation. The research begins by contextualizing the problem through an examination of the need for such adaptations, followed by establishing clear objectives. Subsequently, the investigation's academic, theoretical, practical, social, and cultural relevance will be substantiated.

The work compiles international, national, and local research precedents related to adapting traditional genres (such as bolero, tango, vallenato, and other Colombian traditional music styles) for classical guitar. Theoretical boundaries will be established through key concepts including musical adaptation, vallenato, paseo rhythm, and classical guitar technique.

Methodological criteria will be thoroughly detailed, encompassing the research approach, instruments employed, along with the study's type, focus areas, and developmental stages. Findings will present the song selection process, classical guitar adaptation methodology, and resulting academic materials. The study concludes with comprehensive findings and recommendations derived from the investigative process.

1.1 Methodological Approach

This research employs a qualitative methodological approach, focused on examining and analyzing specific cases and particular aspects of reality through an in-depth understanding of their qualities, forms, and attributes. Unlike quantitative methods that prioritize variable measurement and generalized results, qualitative research involves the investigator as an active participant in knowledge production, contributing interpretive and analytical skills along with personal expertise and perspectives. This approach requires direct, engaged, and participatory interaction with the phenomena and subjects under study (Guerrero, 2016).

The qualitative framework was selected because the musical adaptation process required close examination of four specific cultural artifacts - the traditional vallenato songs chosen for classical guitar transcription. As researcher, I assumed a participatory and creative role, analyzing the inherent musical qualities of each selected composition while producing both artistic and academic materials (sheet music).

The study implemented documentary research methods, defined as a systematic process of inquiry involving data collection, organization, analysis, and interpretation of information related to a specific subject. This method constructs knowledge through critical engagement

with existing documents, theses, scientific articles, and reports that form the theoretical foundation of the research area. Knowledge emerges through careful reading, analysis, reflection, and interpretation of these materials (Morales, 2013).

Documentary research proved essential for developing the musical adaptations, requiring thorough review and analysis of theoretical concepts within the framework of Music Theory and Modern Harmony as presented by Herrera (2007). The methodology facilitated examination of both the technical requirements for guitar transcription and the cultural significance of preserving vallenato through academic musical formats.

2. Results

The selection process identified four songs with significant recognition in traditional vallenato music throughout Valledupar and the Caribbean region. Two key criteria guided the repertoire selection: belonging to the vallenato paseo style and demonstrating substantial popularity within the city and region.

"Matilde Lina," composed by Leandro Díaz and first recorded in 1970 by Rodrigo Oñate, stands as an emblematic vallenato classic renowned for its narrative richness and melodic beauty (El Tiempo, 2022). The adaptation uses Carlos Vives' 1994 version from his album "Clásicos de la Provincia," originally in E-flat Major with 2/2 time signature. This interpretation features diverse musical arrangements that provide valuable material for guitar adaptation.

The second selection, "La Gota Fría," was composed in 1938 by troubadour Emiliano Zuleta Baquero during a well-documented rivalry with accordionist Lorenzo Morales. Achieving national fame beyond its regional origins (BBC Mundo, 2015), the adaptation draws from Carlos Vives' 1994 recording (same album) in B-flat minor with 2/2 meter. Its allegretto tempo presents distinctive technical challenges for guitarists.

"Compae' Chipuco," both a song title and the nickname of Antonio Guerra Billones (a La Guajira native who migrated to Valledupar), expresses profound local pride through lyrics by José María "Chema" Gómez Daza (Atuesta, 2020). The adaptation uses Los Hermanos Zuleta's 1985 version from their tribute album to Pedro Castro, set in A-flat Major (2/2).

The final selection, Rafael Escalona's 1954 composition "La Casa en el Aire," metaphorically expresses paternal devotion to his daughter Ada Luz (BBC Mundo, 2015). The adaptation references versions from the tribute album "Homenaje a los Grandes Compositores de la Música Tropical Colombiana Volumen 3," originally in D Major (2/2), notable for its guitar-oriented arrangements.

2.1 Musical Adaptation Process

Each song underwent individual adaptation following selection and analysis. "La Casa en el Aire" was transposed to G Major (originally D Major) to better accommodate the guitar's range,

maintaining its andante tempo and ternary structure (introduction, A-B-C-A). Melodic transcription used Sibelius software, prioritizing technical playability while preserving the composition's essence. The transposition to G Major optimized the melodic line's tessitura for classical guitar performance.

Figure 1.

Original melodic line of *La Casa en el aire*



Source: Original creation (2024)

The previous image shows that at the beginning of section B, specifically in the red-marked measures, the melody rises significantly. While these notes can technically be played on guitar, they typically serve climactic moments of heightened intensity - which this musical passage hasn't yet reached. This consideration motivated the transposition to G Major.

Figure 2.

Adapted melodic line of *La Casa en el Aire*



Source: Original work (2024)

With the main melodic line established, harmonic analysis was conducted. The introduction follows a I-vi-ii-V-I chord progression, while sections A, B and C feature the characteristic vallenato cadence of I-V-I. For the bass line development, the aforementioned harmony was

maintained - typically placing the root note on strong beats and either the fifth or passing tones leading to the next chord on weak beats.

Figure 3.

Melodic line of *La Casa en el Aire* with bass accompaniment



Source: Original work (2024)

The bass line incorporates rhythmic patterns characteristic of the vallenato paseo's snare drum (caja) technique. Following the bass development, additional voices were integrated into the arrangement using thirds and sixths intervals to enhance harmonic density and textural richness.

Figure 4.

La Casa en el Aire with added voicings.



Source: Original work (2024)

This excerpt from section C demonstrates the bass line in measure 43 employing another characteristic snare drum (caja) rhythmic pattern - as previously mentioned - while the main melodic line in measures 42 and 44 features thirds accompaniment. This voicing technique is commonly used in vallenato guitar performance.



Figure 5.

La Casa en el Aire with added thirds and rhythmic patterns

Source:

Original work (2024)

Following the addition of harmonic voices, right and left-hand fingerings were notated for performance execution.

Figure 6.

La Casa en el Aire with fingering indications

Source: Original work (2024)

As shown in the figure, the introductory section features open positions with arpeggios, where the bass notes emphasize the downbeat of each measure. The fingering was carefully designed to ensure both performer fluency and melodic prominence throughout the phrases.

The adaptation of Matilde Lina is set in E Major at 80 bpm (andante), following a ternary form (A-B-A-C-A). The main melody was transcribed using music notation software. While the original key was E-flat Major, E Major was selected for its more comfortable bass positions

(5th string A and 6th string E), facilitating both the melodic development and harmonic voicings.

Harmonic analysis revealed the following progressions:

Section A: I – IV – V – I – VI7 – ii – I

Section B: I – VI7 – ii – V – I

Section C: I – V – I – VI7 – II – V – I

The bass line was then incorporated using the same adaptive techniques applied in previous arrangements, as demonstrated in:

Figure 7.

Matilde Lina with bass line addition

Source: Original work (2024)

The arrangement process continued with the addition of a secondary accompanying voice to specific motifs and phrases, enriching the piece's texture, followed by the incorporation of fingering notation.

Figure 8.

Matilde Lina with added voicings

The musical score shows two measures of a vallenato style piece. Measure 6 starts with a whole note (indicated by a large circle) followed by eighth-note pairs. Measure 8 follows a similar pattern. Blue circles highlight specific notes in the eighth-note pairs, likely indicating harmonic tones. Fingerings are marked above the notes: measure 6 has (1) over the first note and (5) over the fifth note; measure 8 has (3) over the first note and (4) over the fifth note. Measure 6 also features a bass note with a circled '5' below it. Measure 8 has a bass note with a circled '1' below it. The key signature is A major (three sharps). Measure 6 has a dynamic 'p' (piano). Measure 8 has a dynamic 'f' (forte). Measure 6 has a tempo marking 'CIV' above the staff. Measure 8 has a tempo marking 'CVI' above the staff.

Source: Original work (2024)

The previous figure illustrates measures 6 and 8 featuring whole-note chord tones as harmonic accompaniment.

Regarding fingering, performers may encounter technically demanding passages requiring careful study. Representative examples include:

Figure 9.

Matilde Lina - Section A fingering suggestions

The musical score shows a section of the piece starting at measure 13. It features a series of eighth-note pairs. Fingering suggestions are shown above the notes: measure 13 has (1) over the first note and (4) over the fifth note; measure 14 has (0) over the first note and (4) over the fifth note; measure 15 has (2) over the first note and (1) over the fifth note; measure 16 has (1) over the first note and (0) over the fifth note. The key signature is A major (three sharps). Measures 13-16 have a dynamic 'p' (piano). Measures 13-16 have a tempo marking 'CIV' above the staff.

Source: Original work (2024)

This passage in section B (measures 13-14 specifically) features an unconventional open position that, while technically viable, rarely appears in standard repertoire. The fingering was maintained with the bass note on B because:

It produced superior auditory results

It preserves the characteristic vallenato convention of emphasizing the chord's fifth on the final beat (as previously noted)

Figure 10.

Matilde Lina - Section B fingering recommendations



Source: Original work (2024)

In this "solo" passage of section C, the upper image reveals a consistent open second string appearing mid-measure. This technical decision serves dual purposes: the open string not only fits harmonically but also facilitates fingering during the guitar's rapid, flowing motifs characteristic of this passage.

The C section additionally incorporates appoggiaturas in measures 44 and 46. While notationally clear, their performance requires implicit articulation techniques rooted in vallenato performance practice - specifically, the quarter notes should be slightly shortened before their written duration to produce the genre's characteristic dry attack.

Figure 11.

Matilde Lina - Section C fingering suggestions

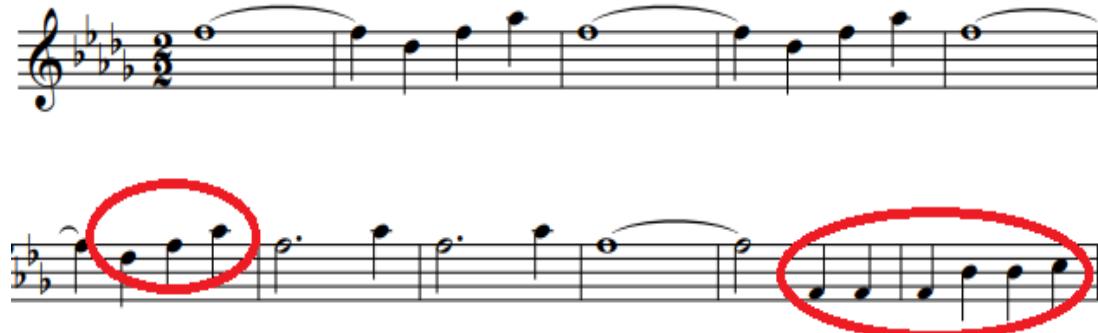


Source: Original work (2024)

The adaptation of La Gota Fría is set in E minor at 90 bpm (andante tempo) following a ternary structure (introduction, A-B-C sections, and coda). Originally composed in B-flat minor, the transposition to E minor was determined by two key factors: first, the new key optimally utilizes the guitar's open strings which naturally belong to this tonality; second, the B-flat minor version placed the main melody in an uncomfortably low register, complicating voice redistribution.

Figure 12.

Original version in B-flat minor



Source: Original work (2024)

Figure 13.

Adapted melodic line of La Gota Fría



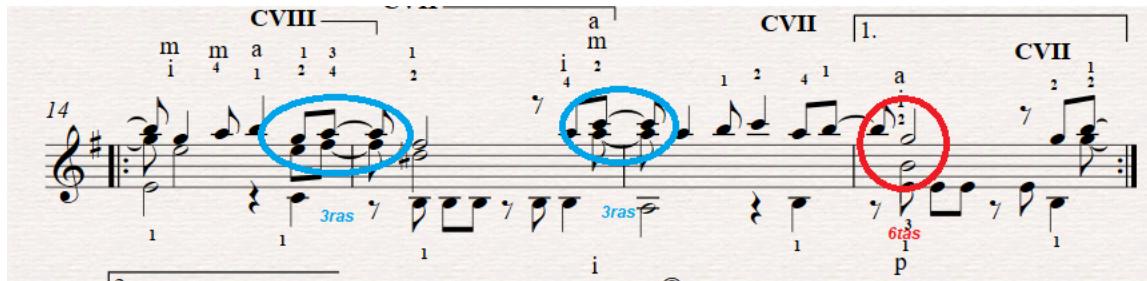
Source: Original work (2024)

Harmonically, the introduction remains anchored in the tonic (Em). Section A follows a i-V7-i-V7-iv-i progression which repeats, while Section B briefly modulates to the relative major (G Major) through a I-V-I progression repeated twice before returning to the original key with the i-V7-i sequence. Section C mirrors Section A's harmonic structure, and the coda replicates Section B's pattern. The bass line development followed the aforementioned progressions using

the same methodology as previous adaptations. Additional voices were incorporated through thirds and sixths intervals to enrich the harmonic texture.

Figure 14.

La Gota Fría with bass line and accompanying voices



Fuente: creación propia (2024)

En cuanto a la digitación hay algunos puntos clave dentro de la pieza que hay que tener en cuenta. Al igual que en la adaptación anterior, las negras que están después de las apoyaturas se apagan antes del tiempo de dicha figura.

Figura 15.

La Gota Fría, sugerencias en la digitación de la parte A.



Source: Original work (2024)

The fingering presents several crucial technical considerations throughout the piece. Consistent with prior adaptations, quarter notes following appoggiaturas require premature damping to achieve the characteristic staccato articulation essential to authentic vallenato performance practice.

Figure 16.

La Gota Fría - Section A fingering recommendations



3. Conclusion

The fingering was meticulously designed to optimize performer accessibility.

The Compae' Chipuco adaptation is set in D Major at 80 bpm (andante tempo) with a ternary structure (introduction, A-B-C-A-B sections, and coda). The original A-flat Major tonality was transposed to D Major to resolve impractical bass positions, now utilizing open strings (4th-D, 5th-A, 6th-D). Notably, the 6th string was detuned a whole step (E to D) to enhance tonal depth and structural emphasis through its darker timbre.

Harmonically, the introduction and sections A-B share identical progressions:

Section A: I-IV-V-I Section B: IV-I-V-I Section C: I-V-I-IV-I-V-I Coda: I-V-I Following established adaptation methodology, bass lines and accompanying voices (employing thirds/sixths) were developed, followed by fingering notation that yielded successful technical solutions.

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