

# Traditional Vallenato Songs Arranged For Two-Voice Children's Choir

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## Abstract

Choral singing is a musical sample that is quite practical when it comes to being interpreted in a community since it can be performed only with human voices or it can be accompanied by an instrument. In the present study, an analysis of the songs of the traditional vallenato genre was carried out, mainly covering its melody and its rhythmic structure, for the creation of two-voice arrangements for a children's choir and their transcriptions, and in this way apply strategies for their recovery. On the other hand, it seeks to start from this to implement the traditional Vallenato choral singing taking the new generations as a reference, that is, in schools, foundations and communities. To achieve that from the youngest population a new boom of the traditional vallenato reappears and is established in the following generations.

**Keywords:** arrangement, coral, vallenato, traditional, childish.

## 1. Introduction

This study aims to contribute through four Vallenato arrangements for children's choir while preserving traditional Vallenato music for new generations. As a musical genre deeply rooted in Caribbean and national culture, Vallenato has significantly shaped regional identity.

The work stems from academic research. The first chapter presents fundamental information including objectives and justification. A historical framework follows as vital context. The methodology section details the musical adaptations with formal analysis to better contextualize each composition. Selected songs form the core material for this work.

The methodological design draws from formal education and training. Appendices include sheet music for the four selected pieces - newly arranged as two-voice children's choir repertoire. These arrangements aim to enrich traditional Vallenato music while respecting its cultural principles, essence, and defining characteristics.

Vallenato music embodies the cultural identity of Cesar, Guajira, and Magdalena departments. It has accompanied celebrations nationwide, narrating stories of rural values,

nature, love, and more. The genre has also evolved through fusions with other musical and symphonic styles. Understanding Vallenato's origins, seven key characteristics, rhythms, and representative artists is essential before creating two-voice choral arrangements of this emblematic Cesar region genre.

Deeply woven into regional life, Vallenato music permeates local festivals, celebrations, and community spirit. For these Colombian departments, it remains profoundly significant and representative, with most residents strongly identifying with the genre. The absence of traditional Vallenato arrangements for children's choir motivated this exploration into choral adaptations. The project seeks to present Vallenato music nationally and internationally through this novel choral format while maintaining its authentic essence.

## **2. Methodology**

The methodology employed is qualitative, involving data compilation and analysis, while also being descriptive as it seeks to specify properties and characteristics of musical analysis. This research approach enables the investigator to understand experiences, opinions, perspectives, thoughts, and lived realities from which valuable information can be derived. Additionally, the deductive research method is applied, which helps draw significant conclusions - meaning that by thoroughly analyzing the whole, specific theories can be established.

In this study, the deductive method is further utilized to examine the musical pedagogy resources of Zoltán Kodály. This represents an experimental research-creation project, which "operates on the premise that predictions about musical behaviors can be made by systematically observing and comparing the musical behaviors of representative individuals or groups" (Zuleta, 2014). The work develops within the research framework of music, pedagogy and culture under the music program of the Faculty of Fine Arts.

## **3. Data Collection Techniques**

To ensure effective and meaningful data collection for this study, the following research instrument was employed:

- Interview: This instrument was employed to gather necessary data directly from participants' perspectives. It allowed interviewees to share their personal experiences, viewpoints, emotions, perceptions, anecdotes, and knowledge about the subject matter.

## **4. Results**

A repertoire of 4 representative traditional vallenato songs was selected. Four two-voice choral arrangements of traditional vallenato songs were created for children's choir, with the purpose of preserving traditional vallenato music for new generations. This process required

careful listening and analysis of traditional vallenato music to select the most appropriate works for these new choral arrangements. Special consideration was given to choosing the most representative works of the genre and selected composers. The chosen compositions were: "La casa en el aire", "Alicia Adorada", "Matilde Lina", and "Mírame fijamente".

- **La casa en el aire (1952)**

**Composer:** Rafael Escalona

**Rhythm:** paseo

**performer:** Carlos Vives

**Género:** Vallenato

**A. Historical context:** Escalona composed this work for his young daughter, determined to "build her house in the air" so that anyone wishing to see her would have to fly and reach great heights - "to see her in the vastness" - with the intention of protecting her from womanizing and chauvinistic men by placing her in an unreachable place where few could go. (Luna, 2015).

**B. Rafael Escalona Biography:** Rafael Calixto Escalona Martínez was born in Patillal, Cesar, on May 27, 1927. He was the seventh of nine children in the household formed by Clemente Escalona Labarces, a colonel in the Thousand Days' War, and Margarita Martínez Celedón. At fifteen, he composed his first vallenato song, followed by 85 more compositions. His melodies not only reconstruct his own life but also that of the old Magdalena department, a contribution that elevated vallenato music to become the identity card of an entire region. Escalona received numerous tributes, decorations, and served as a diplomat, though perhaps his greatest recognition came from his 'cousin' Gabriel García Márquez, who stated that 'One Hundred Years of Solitude was nothing more than a 350-page vallenato.' (Samper Pizano, D., n.d)

- **Alicia Adorada (1968)**

**Composer:** Juancho Polo Valencia

**Rhythm:** Son

**Key:** C

**Performe:** Alejo Duran

**Género:** Vallenato

**A. Historical Context** One of Juancho Polo's most significant works, reportedly composed after the burial of his wife Alicia Cantillo, who died from preeclampsia during pregnancy. Requiring urgent medication, Juancho Polo traveled to obtain medicine but returned days later after a celebration to find his wife had passed away. (Meza, L. [2008]. Historia de Alicia Adorada [E. McCausland, Interviewer]).

**B. Juancho Polo Valencia Biography:** Juancho Polo Valencia (September 18, 1918 – July 22, 1978) was a vallenato troubadour and composer born in Concordia, Cerro de San Antonio, Magdalena. At 24, he adopted the surname "Valencia" in honor of his favorite poet, Guillermo Valencia from Popayán. His accordion mentor was Francisco "Pacho" Rada. Remembered as a wandering peasant musician, he performed in traditional abarcas (sandals) and sombrero vueltiao (woven hat), his polarizing lyrics evoked strong emotions. His most enduring work, *Alicia adorada*, became iconic through Alejo Durán's recordings – Durán admitted the song brought him to tears whenever performed. (Newspaper Article, 2018).

- **Matilde Lina (1970)**

**Composer:** Leandro Díaz

**Rhytm:** paseo rápido

**Performe:** Leandro Diaz

**Génre:** Vallenato

**A. Historical Context:** "Matilde Lina," one of maestro Leandro Díaz's most notable compositions, reflects his deep romantic inspiration from nature, channeling his affection into song. Despite his visual impairment, he developed profound feelings for her even though she was married, ultimately forging a meaningful friendship. (Díaz, 2022).

**B. Leandro Díaz Biography (1928-2013)** Born February 20, 1928, in Alto Pino, Lagunita de la Sierra – a district of Hato Nuevo, La Guajira – to parents Abel Duarte and María Ignacia Díaz, Leandro was one of sixteen siblings. In childhood, his family relocated to Tocaimo (San Diego, Cesar), later settling for decades in the town center before moving to Valledupar (Cesar's capital) in the 1980s. He died at 85 on June 22, 2013, from renal failure after being admitted to Clínica Cesar with abdominal pain and respiratory distress. (Acosta, L., 2017).

- **Mírame fijamente (1970)**

**Composer:** Tobías Enrique Pumarejo

**Rhytm:** Merengue

**Performe:** Carlos Vives

**Génre:** Vallenato

**A. Historical Context** Ricardo Gutiérrez conducted research on this composition, finding: "There indeed exists a 1963 film titled *La Reina de Chantecler*, where Sarita Montiel revived the version successfully sung by Raquel Meller: *Mírame siempre*, composed in 1922 by Spanish composer José Padilla, with lyrics similar to Tobías Enrique Pumarejo's *Mírame fijamente*." (Gutiérrez R.G., 2004).

**B. Tobías Enrique Pumarejo Biography:** Tobías Enrique Pumarejo (August 8, 1906 –

[death date if available]), born in Valledupar, Cesar, Colombia, was a vallenato musician and composer. He completed his secondary education up to fifth grade at the Liceo de la Universidad de Antioquia in Medellín during the 1920s, where he received his primary academic, poetic, and musical influences. Alongside friends Pedro Castro Monsalvo, Celso Domingo Castro Trespalacios, and Ovidio Palmera, he formed a magdalenense orchestra. During this period, "Don Toba" (as he was affectionately called by close acquaintances) composed his first song. He subsequently experimented with underdeveloped musical styles like pasillos, waltzes, rancheras, paseos, sones, puyas, and his specialty, merengues. His genre versatility was prodigious. Notable achievements include:

- Serving on the jury of the first Festival de la Leyenda Vallenata
- Becoming the first vallenato artist to perform without instruments
- Pioneering as both composer and singer of the genre
- Opening doors to Valledupar's new musical wave (Páez, L., 2020).

## **5. Analysis of Selected Traditional Vallenato Repertoire**

The original works were analyzed to determine arrangement keys, considering vocal ranges and techniques. Objectives included exploring new sonorities through counterpoint, onomatopoeia, etc., while ensuring singability and performability by respecting vocal limits. Arrangement techniques drew from:

- Jesús Alberto Rey Mariño (Basic Manual for Choral Adaptation and Arrangement)
- Alberto Carbonell Jimeno (arrangements of Colombian Caribbean music)
- María Olga Piñeros Lara (Introduction to Vocal Pedagogy for Children's Choirs)
- Alejandro Zuleta Jaramillo (Basic Program for Children's Choir Direction)

## Presentation and Analysis of the Arrangements

OBRA	TONALIDAD	FORMA	PROGRESIÓN ARMÓNICA
<b>La casa en el aire</b>	D mayor	Introducción	I-V-I
		Estrofa	I-V:  iii-VII6-ii-V-I:
		Coro	I-vi-ii-V:
		Estrofa (coro) Esta estructura se repite 3 veces.	
<b>Alicia Dorada</b>	G mayor	Estrofa	I-IV-I:
		pre.coro	vi-V-IV-I:
		Coro	vi-V-IV-I:
		Estrofa-pre-coro-coro. esta estructura se repite 2 veces	
<b>Matilde Lina</b>	E mayor	Estrofa	I-vi-V/ii-ii-V-I
		Pre-coro	I-ii-V-I
		Coro Se repite desde el principio 4 veces	I-IV-V-I-vi-IV-V-I
<b>Mirame Fijamente</b>	E mayor	Coro	I-I#m7b5-V6/4-I-vi-ii-V-I:
		Estrofa	I-ii-I-ii
		pre-coro	IV-V-I-vi-ii-V-I:
		Esta estructura se repite 4 veces	

### • **La casa en el aire**

The original work "La casa en el aire" is written in G major. For this project, the arrangement has been adapted to D major in 4/4 time to accommodate the vocal range of children's choir (ages 7-10), whose ideal tessitura—according to María Olga Piñeros (2004)—spans from

Bb (first line) to C (third space). The arrangement begins with an introduction (measures 1-4):

**La casa en el aire, introduction (1-4).**

The arrangement begins at a slow tempo with a tonic D major harmony. In measure 2, a first inversion dominant E7 chord resolves to the fifth degree (A major), creating an "airplane flight" sonority. The melodic development enters in unison at measure 5, continuing through measure 9. Measures 10-11 feature the second voice performing a chromatic motion - characteristic of traditional vallenato bass lines - within a comfortable range for children. This section employs the following harmonic progression:

- F# minor (iii)
- C# major in first inversion (VII6)
- E minor (ii)

At measure 12, the second voice introduces diminution imitation to add dynamic contrast. From measures 14 to 21, the second voice maintains rhythmic consistency while imitating in parallel thirds.

**Figure 2. "La casa en el aire," measures 7-21.**

(Iván, E. 2023)

• **Alicia Adorada.**

The original work is written in D major with a 2/2 time signature. For this arrangement, it has been transposed to G major. The arrangement begins in measures 1-3 starting with G (I), moving to the subdominant in measure 4. The voices move in unison, returning to the tonic (G) in measure 5. Notably, in measures 2 and 4, the second voice performs a diminution

imitation on the first beat while the text alternates between two phrases: "Dios no tiene amigos" and "Dios vive en el aire," echoing the main melody's lyrics. In measure 7, the voices imitate in thirds before returning to unison by measure 9.

**Figure 3. *Alicia adorada*, measures 1-9.**

# Alicia Adorada

Composer: Juan Polo Valencia  
Arreglista : Ivan Escobar

**Instrumentation:** Two voices (I and II) and piano/organ.

**Key and Time:** G major, 4/4 time.

**Dynamic Markings:** *mf*, *p*, 1., 2.

**Text (Lyrics):**

co mo Dios en la tie rra no tie nea mi gos — co  
co mo Dios — no ti ene\_a mi gos —  
mo no tie nea mi goan da\_en el ai re — ai re tan to le pi do\_y le pi  
Dios — vi ve en\_el ai re — co la ai re yo — le pi do le pi  
do ay om be siem pre me man da mis ma les ma les po bre mi\_A  
do ay om be sien pre me man da mis ma les ma les po bre mi\_A

Iván, E. (2023)

In measures 11-12, the voices progress in thirds harmony. Measure 13 (second beat) returns to unison before reintroducing thirds imitation in measure 15. Measures 11-19 establish a vi-V-IV-I harmonic progression, repeated until the verse section.

Measures 20-23 alternate between degrees I and V with parallel thirds harmony. Measure 24 (first beat) introduces fourths imitation, subsequently reverting to thirds imitation with the vi-V-IV-I progression that concludes the piece.

**Figure 4. Alicia adorada, measures 20-31.**

20 *mf*  
I: a llaen flo res de Ma ri a \_\_\_\_\_ don de to el mun do me quie re \_\_\_\_\_  
II: a llaen flo res de Ma ria \_\_\_\_\_ don de to el mun do me quie re \_\_\_\_\_

24 *p*  
I: yo re pa ro alas mu je res ay ombe y no veo Ali cia la mi a  
II: yo re pa ro alas mu je res ay ombe y no veo Ali cia la mi a

28 *mp*  
I: mi a po bre mi a li cia a li cia do ra da yo te re cuer doen to das mis pa  
II: mi a po bre mi a li cia a li cia do ra da yo te re cuer doen to das mis pa

Iván, E. (2023).

• **Matilde Lina**

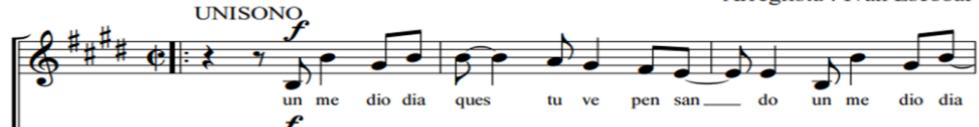
Originally performed by maestro Leandro Díaz in Bb, this arrangement has been transposed to E major (2/2 time) for optimal vocal comfort and distribution. A minimalist approach highlights the main melody: measures 1-3 begin in unison, while measure 4 introduces a lullaby-like countermelody in the second voice evoking environmental soundscapes. The second voice returns to the principal melody in unison at measure 7.

**Figure 5. Matilde Lina, measures 1-11.**

**Matilde lina**

Composer : Leandro Diaz  
Arreglista : Ivan Escobar

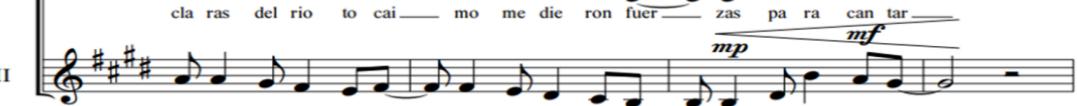
UNISONO

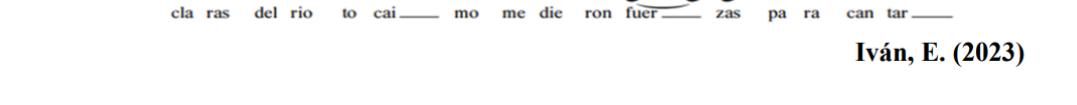
I 

II 

I 

II 

I 

II 

Iván, E. (2023)

Measures 1-11 employ a I-vi-V/ii-ii-V-I progression to enhance harmonic richness. The texture shifts to unison in measure 12, followed by a I-ii-V-I progression in measure 13 with parallel thirds imitation through measure 16. The unison returns in measure 16, while measure 17 reintroduces thirds imitation - now in the second voice using characteristic vallenato bass rhythm patterns as illustrated below:

**Figure 6. Matilde Lina, measures 16-23.**

2

Matilde lina

16

I

II

20

I

II

y co mo na da te ni a la a pro ve che en el mo men to

y co mo na da te ni a en el mo men to

y co mo na na da te ni a en el mo men to

Iván, E. (2023)

The image shows measure 17 of the second voice replicating the traditional bass pattern while echoing phrases from the main melody.

• **Mírame Fijamente**

This arrangement incorporates elements bridging traditional and academic music. Originally in B♭ major (6/8 time), the adaptation transposes the work to E major. Measures 1-3 feature a II#m7b5-V6/4-I progression, creating a distinctive harmonic color (see Figure 7). Measures 5-6 employ imitative counterpoint using thirds.

**Figure 7. Mírame fijamente, measures 1-3.**

Score

Mirame Fijamente

Compositor :Tobias Enrique Pumarejo

Arreglo: Ivan Escobar

8

mf

I

II

mi ra me fi ja men te has ta se gar me

mi ra me <sup>1</sup> fi ja men <sup>2</sup> te has <sup>2</sup> ta se <sup>3</sup> gar <sup>3</sup> me <sup>4</sup>

Ivan, E. (2023)

Measures 9-15 maintain unison between voices. In measure 17, the second voice introduces dotted quarter notes - a contrapuntal technique known as "one note against many" (nota contra varias notas). Measure 18 features the second voice transitioning to a distinct melodic line. The voices return to unison in measures 20-21, followed by imitative counterpoint in thirds beginning at measure 22.

**Figure 8. Mírame fijamente, measures 12-25.**

**Figura 8, mírame fijamente. compás 12-25**

**Measures 12-15 (Unison):**

I: *mi ra me con a mor o con e no jo pe ro no de jes nun*  
 II: *mi ra me con a mor o con e no jo pe ro no de jes nun*

**Measure 16:**

I: *ca de mi rar me*  
 II: *ca de mi rar me*

**Measure 17:**

I: *ca de mi rar me*  
 II: *ca de mi rar me*

**Measure 18:**

I: *por que qui ro mo rir bajo tus o jos*  
 II: *por que qui ro mo rir bajo tus o jos*

**Measure 19:**

I: *cuan do me mi ran su boa los cie lo por que tus o jos*  
 II: *cuan do me mi ran su boa los cie lo por que tus o jos*

**Measure 20:**

I: *cuando me mi ran su boa los cie lo por que tus o jos*  
 II: *cuando me mi ran su boa los cie lo por que tus o jos*

**Measure 21:**

I: *cuando me mi ran su boa los cie lo por que tus o jos*  
 II: *cuando me mi ran su boa los cie lo por que tus o jos*

**Measure 22:**

I: *son dos es tre llas que me ilu mi na guar do el luce ro*  
 II: *son dos es tre llas que me ilu mi na guar do el luce ro*

**Measure 23:**

I: *son dos es tre llas que me ilu mi na guar do el luce ro*  
 II: *son dos es tre llas que me ilu mi na guar do el luce ro*

**Measure 24:**

I: *son dos es tre llas que ya no pue do vi vi sin e lllos*  
 II: *son dos es tre llas que ya no pue do vi vi sin e lllos*

**Measure 25:**

I: *son dos es tre llas que ya no pue do vi vi sin e lllos*  
 II: *son dos es tre llas que ya no pue do vi vi sin e lllos*

**Measure 26:**

I: *son dos es tre llas que ya no pue do vi vi sin e lllos*  
 II: *son dos es tre llas que ya no pue do vi vi sin e lllos*

**Measure 27:**

I: *son dos es tre llas que ya no pue do vi vi sin e lllos*  
 II: *son dos es tre llas que ya no pue do vi vi sin e lllos*

**Measure 28:**

I: *el y ca mi ni to de siem pri ma ve ra*  
 II: *el y ca mi ni to de siem pri ma ve ra*

**Measure 29:**

I: *el y ca mi ni to de siem pri ma ve ra*  
 II: *el y ca mi ni to de siem pri ma ve ra*

**Measure 30:**

I: *el y ca mi ni to de siem pri ma ve ra*  
 II: *el y ca mi ni to de siem pri ma ve ra*

**Section 2:**

**Mírame Fijamente**

**D.S. al Fine**

**Measures 31-32:**

I: *el y ca mi ni to de siem pri ma ve ra*  
 II: *el y ca mi ni to de siem pri ma ve ra*

## **5. Discussion**

The creation of two-voice arrangements of traditional vallenato songs for children's choirs significantly contributes to both the preservation of vallenato music and its teaching in educational contexts. The study initially focused on selecting four representative songs of the genre: "La casa en el aire," "Alicia Adorada," "Matilde Lina," and "Mírame fijamente." These works are not only emblematic of vallenato but also possess pedagogical potential that can help children connect with their cultural heritage. The importance of this study lies in the ability of musical adaptations to keep vallenato traditions alive among new generations. By integrating these songs into children's choir repertoires, a sense of cultural identity is fostered, and appreciation for traditional music is promoted. This approach aligns with previous research highlighting music's role in education and cultural identity formation in youth (Zuleta, 2014).

However, limitations were encountered, including the selection of a limited number of songs that may not fully represent vallenato's diverse repertoire, potentially restricting the generalizability of results. Additionally, implementation in specific educational contexts may vary, affecting the effectiveness of the adaptations. An unexpected finding was some educators' initial resistance to incorporating traditional music into their programs, suggesting ongoing challenges in valuing folk music compared to more contemporary genres.

For future research, expanding the song repertoire and exploring the inclusion of other musical genres in educational settings is recommended. Longitudinal studies assessing these arrangements' impact on children's musical and cultural development over time would also be valuable. Collaboration with local educators and musicians could further enrich the adaptation process, ensuring selected works resonate with students' experiences and contexts.

In conclusion, this project not only contributes to vallenato preservation but also opens space for reflection on music education in childhood. As research and practice advance, exploring how music serves as a vehicle for cultural identity and meaningful learning in new generations remains essential.

## **6. Conclusions and Recommendations**

For this project's implementation, carefully reviewing the methodology and resources used to adapt vallenato songs for children's choirs is advised. The age and skill level of participating children should also be considered to ensure song appropriateness and accessibility. As Olga Piñeros suggests in her book, the ideal vocal range for children aged 7-12 spans from B-flat on the first line to C in the third space. The arrangements carefully considered tonality for voice distribution, featuring distinct second-voice melodies to enhance dynamism and appeal for children.

Overall, this study presents an excellent opportunity to foster appreciation for traditional music and encourage children's participation in cultural activities. It proposes two-voice arrangements of traditional vallenato songs for children's choirs, primarily aiming to enrich repertoires with culturally significant music while promoting engagement with traditional arts. Based on experimental research-creation methodology and drawing from Zoltán Kodály's musical pedagogy, this project offers valuable insights for those interested in traditional music and childhood music education.

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