

The Militant Song Movement in Latin America: Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina

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Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s underwent a profound and often violent process of social change. From the Cuban Revolution to the massive guerrilla movements in Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Colombia, and most of Central America, to the democratic socialist experiment of Allende in Chile, to the increased popularity of socialist-oriented parties in Uruguay, or para-socialist movements, such as the Juventud Peronista in Argentina, the idea of social change was in the air. Although this topic has been explored from a political and social point of view, there is an aspect that has remained fairly unexplored. The cultural—and especially musical—dimension of this movement, so vital in order to comprehend the extent of its emotional appeal, has not been fully documented. Without an account of how music was pervasively used in the construction of the emotional components that always accompany political action, any explanation of what occurred in Latin America during that period will be always partial. This book is an initial attempt to overcome this deficit.

In this collection of essays, we examine the history of the militant song movement in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina at the peak of its popularity (from the mid-1960s to the coup d'états in the mid-1970s), considering their different political stances and musical departments. Throughout the book, the contribution of the most important musicians of the movement (Violeta Parra, Víctor Jara, Patricio Manns, Quilapayún, Inti-Illimani, etc., in Chile; Daniel Viglietti, Alfredo Zitarrosa, Los Olimareños, etc., in Uruguay; Atahualpa Yupanqui, Horacio Guarany, Mercedes Sosa, Marian Farías Gómez, Armando Tejada Gómez, César Isella, Víctor Heredia, Los Trovadores, etc., in Argentina) are highlighted; and some of the most important conceptual extended oeuvres of the period (called “cantatas”) are analyzed (such as “*La Cantata Popular Santa María de Iquique*” in the Chilean case and “*Montoneros*” in the Argentine case). The contributors to the collection deal with the complex relationship that the aesthetic of the movement established between the political content of the lyrics and the musical and performative aspects of the most popular songs of the period.

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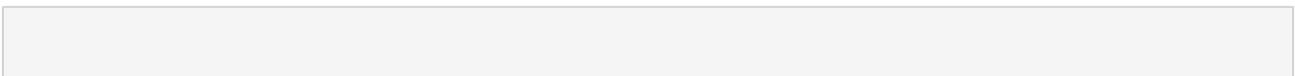
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Editorial Review

Review

When Salvador Allende was elected president of Chile in 1970, a banner proclaimed, 'There is no revolution without songs.' And Latin America was rife with revolutions from the 1950s through the 1970s, especially Chile, Uruguay, Peru, Argentina, Colombia, and parts of Central America. Readers living elsewhere and not caught up in these revolutions are unlikely to know the songs thus spawned, and since many of them were ephemeral and topical, few are heard today. Vila has collected nine chapters by specialists covering Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina. . . . Although some contributors have an intermediate degree in musicology, all specialize in nonmusical areas. Thus, the writers discuss militant songs in relation to complex political movements. Still, this volume is mainly about songs and their meanings, perhaps to paraphrase Mendelssohn, 'songs without music.' The approach is factual and ethnographic, not obscured by postmodern theory, but also extremely detailed and thus challenging for nonspecialists. Summing Up: Recommended. Graduate students, researchers, faculty. (*CHOICE*)

Pablo Vila's introduction to *The Militant Song Movement in Latin America: Chile, Uruguay and Argentina* succinctly defines the complexities of a movement whose narration differs across the three countries discussed in the book. . . . Drawing upon valuable historical resources, interviews and a vast repertoire of songs, the book is a valuable reference that highlights not only the role of the singers in this enduring movement, but also the political dimension that is allowed to preserve its emotive aspect. A movement that 'has outlived the historical conditions that engendered them,' as Nancy Morris states in her contribution, the relevance of the militant song, epitomised in particular by the Chilean experience of memory in relation to the epoch, needs a constant regeneration to avoid the pitfalls of the political periphery. (*The Argentina Independent*)

Challenging the tendency to treat the musical practices surrounding the dictatorships of the Southern Cone as a single and unified cultural movement, this collection draws its strength from the many analytical and ethnographic perspectives of its contributors. The fact that the book is written in English is of particular value as it offers international audiences a chance to enter the nuanced and even at times contradictory narratives shaping the history of Latin American militant song. . . . The book is a must-read for scholars and students interested in politicized musical movements in Latin America. The collection also offers valuable perspective to anyone interested in the global political movements of the mid-twentieth century, as the addressed themes can be connected in many compelling ways to the political song movements of North America and Europe from the same time period. Through the carefully selected chapters, one gains both an understanding of the global influences informing these song movements and of the unique local contributions that shaped the rich histories of militant song in the Southern Cone. . . . Whether they read through it as a comprehensive and diverse study of politicized song movements in Latin America, consult it as a reference book for scholars of militant song, or use it as a teaching tool, readers will not be disappointed with the contents of Vila's collection. Each chapter is thoughtfully constructed and the translated chapters are carefully edited to read smoothly. (*Journal of Folklore Research*)

A first-rate team of scholars from a variety of disciplines has produced a comprehensive and insightful collection of essays documenting the role that politically-committed singers and songwriters played in providing a soundtrack for popular left-wing movements in the Southern Cone over the course of several tumultuous decades in the twentieth century. The book will be an invaluable resource for students and scholars interested in exploring the relationship between artistic expression and political action in Latin

America. (David Spener, Trinity University)

This collection brings together new scholarship on the fascinating relationship between arts and politics in Latin America's most dramatic period of hope and unrest. It is both a tribute and a contemporary critical reflection on the protagonists and participants of an important cultural movement in the 20th Century Cono Sur. (Patricia Oliart, Newcastle University)

The Militant Song Movement in Latin America addresses a significant gap in the literature on popular song. Previous studies on the music of protest in South America were piecemeal. Now, the prominent scholar of Latin American popular music Pablo Vila has edited a diverse collection of critical essays on militant song in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina with a focus on the 1950s to the 1980s. It was a period when singing and performing music were integral to the urgent debates and grass roots movements playing out in spaces of terror and of solidarity. This volume breaks new ground in research on the period and should prove indispensable to those interested in Latin America or in popular music more generally. (Frederick Moehn, King's College London)

The Militant Song Movement in Latin America examines the history of the militant song movement in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina, considering their different political stances and musical deportments. The book analyzes the complex relationship that the aesthetic of the movement established between the political content of the lyrics and the musical and performative aspects of the most popular songs of the period, while highlighting the contributions of the movement's most important musicians.

About the Author

Pablo Vila is professor of sociology at Temple University.

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