Musical Memory and Chile's Late 20th Century

Maxam A.B. Daniels

University at Albany, State University of New York

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Musical Memory and Chile’s Late 20th Century

Thesis presented to the Department of History, State University of NY at Albany, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in History.

Maxam A.B. Daniels

Research Mentor: Alexander Dawson, PhD.

Research Advisor: Michael Taylor, PhD.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the significance of musical experiences for understanding the evolution of leftist culture across the late 20th century and contemporary era in Chile. An analysis of the musical experiences of leftist prisoners during the Pinochet era and contemporary protests finds that traditional politico-economic narratives are insufficient for explaining the cultural evolution of the Chilean left. Daily musical experiences across these eras suggest that there may be a long-term cultural habit within the Chilean left that utilizes music for expressing dissent and sustaining solidarity. Political prisoners of the Pinochet era were found to clandestinely use songs to preserve their culture. It is also suggested that musical experiences are culturally important for both political prisoners and modern protestors due to a shared cultural common ancestor. Furthermore, this thesis challenges the existing historiography's emphasis on the nueva canción genre of protest music, as other forms of quotidian musical experiences are important for understanding the social history of Chile’s late 20th century. This analysis supports a call for a 'decentering' of Chilean history, incorporating the wider experiences of ordinary Chileans.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. 2

Acknowledgments ................................................................................................................................. 3

Table of Contents .................................................................................................................................. 4

Introduction ............................................................................................................................................. 6

Historical Context ................................................................................................................................. 7

Historiography ....................................................................................................................................... 9

Music and Memory ............................................................................................................................... 11

Modern Music ....................................................................................................................................... 28

Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................. 36

References ............................................................................................................................................. 39
List of Figures

Figure 1 — Map of Chile Showing Regions Where Prisoners Were Held
Figure 2 — Picture of the Hard-Boiled Eggs Band
Figure 3 — Jorge Peña Hen’s Unfinished Jail Melody
Figure 4 — Street Poster from Santiago
Figure 5 — Frame of Inti-Illimani’s 2019 Performance
Figure 6 — Guitarists on the Steps of the National Library in Santiago
Figure 7 — Víctor Jara Depicted as a Christian Martyr in Santiago Street Art
Introduction

Domingo Lizama was arrested at his workplace. He was a porter in Chumpullo, a small logging village outside the city of Valdivia in October 1973. After being tortured by the military, Lizama was sentenced to five years in Teja Island. The camp for leftist political prisoners was meant only to house 400 inmates. It swelled to over thrice that. To sustain themselves, Lizama and his fellow inmates sang (2017a). His small account is one of many which make up the understudied social history of Chile’s late 20th century. By in large, most monographs covering the era focus on politico-economic narratives. The contemporary situation was described well by Schlotterbeck, who called for a “decentering” of the era’s “history, moving it away from Santiago and national political actors” (2018, 6-7). How, then, can stories like Lizama decenter Chile’s history?

Lizama is not alone in considering music as important for memory, which can be seen as common in Chilean culture. Musical experiences therefore offer a glimpse into Chile’s social history. A recently created archive especially enables this task. Founded in 2015, Cantos Cautivos maintained by Katia Chornik documents the testimonies of political prisoners’ “musical experiences” in Pinochet-era political detention centers (Cantos Cautivos 2015). Cantos Cautivos’ testimonies have brought forward the voices of many like Lizama who were not heard before, yet were present at a critical point in Chile’s history. These prisoner testimonies are furthermore interesting to examine given their possible relation to recent leftist protests in Chile, which widely featured the use of music. The musical experiences of Pinochet-era political prisoners show that traditional politico-economic narratives are not enough to explain the
cultural evolution of Chile’s left across the Allende, Pinochet, and contemporary eras; quotidian musical experiences were also important in allowing this culture to evolve and sustain itself.

**Historical Context**

The politico-economic history of Chile’s late 20th century is important for the context behind both prisoner testimonies and modern Chilean culture. On November third, 1970, Eduardo Frei handed over the presidential sash to Salvador Allende. The inauguration was the start of Allende’s term as the first democratically elected Marxist president in Latin America. Sworn in with a slim plurality of 37% of the vote, Allende inherited a political atmosphere open to moderate reforms due to a troubled economy. In 1965 only 5% of owners controlled 85% of Chile’s arable land. From 1950 to 1959 the real-wages of farmworkers dropped by 5% (Francis 1973, 17). From 1966 to 1970 economic growth halved and inflation soared to 30% (Winn 1986, 62). GDP per capita only exceeded 1,000 current USD for the first time in 1971 (World Bank 2024). Frei, a Christian Democrat, was elected on a reformist platform in 1964, but many of the Frei Administration’s goals were only partially met. In one example, over 200,000 new housing units constructed by the government materialized into nothing more than cement foundations with basic plumbing (Francis 1973, 24).

Allende’s *Unidad Popular* (Popular Unity, UP) coalition, divided between various strains of liberalism, socialism, and communism, sought more radical reforms. Following Allende’s election, a socialization wave took place. Grassroot seizures often outpaced UP’s own goals and drove the revolutionary process themselves. In 1971, less than a quarter of socialized firms were fully incorporated into the public sector (Winn 1986, 228). Conservative opposition soon overtook the revolutionary process. On September eleventh, 1973, the Chilean military conducted a coup that ushered in seventeen years of dictatorship under General Augusto
Pinochet. Thousands of Chileans were killed, imprisoned, or exiled, and most of the UP-era reforms were reversed.

The total number of victims of the Pinochet regime is not known. Nevertheless, it is impossible to refute the prevalence of widespread state violence. Meade found that there were eighty detention centers in Santiago alone (2001, 127). The Rettig Report notes that many detention centers, especially in the immediate wake of September eleventh, were “transitory” in nature, including normally bureaucratic sites like the Ministry of Defense, contributing to the difficulty in having an exact number of victims. In one instance, over 7,000 political prisoners were temporarily held in the National Stadium in Santiago (The National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation 1991, 181-182). A later presidential report found that the number of “qualified” cases of political imprisonment and torture under Pinochet was just shy of 30,000 victims, and that 61% of cases came from outside the Santiago Metropolitan Region (Comisión Presidencial Asesora para la Calificación de Detenidos Desaparecidos 2011 6, 24). Lizama was one of the many victims of this violence.

On March eleventh, 2022, Chilean President Gabriel Boric of the left-wing Social Convergence party stood for his first speech from La Moneda. Boric commemorated Allende’s memory in front of a cheering crowd, concluding: “As Salvador Allende predicted almost fifty years ago, we are once again, compatriots” (2022). President Boric is not alone in feeling ideation for Chile’s Cold War era politics since the country’s transition to democracy in the 1990s. Boric was elected after several years of mass protests shook the nation. In one demonstration on October twenty-fifth, 2019, a million protestors took to the streets in Santiago
alone. One journalist noted that the crowd sang the UP slogan “the people, united, will never be
defeated” (Sherwood and Ramos Miranda 2019).

Thus, three historical periods in Chile are important for consideration. The first is an era
of left-wing reformism which took place during the 1960s and early 1970s. The second is an era
of right-wing state violence, which repressed the ability of leftist culture to operate during the
Pinochet dictatorship of 1973-1990. The third is the modern state of Chilean culture, which has
emerged since the process of re-democratization. The majority of testimonies by Lizama and
others interviewed by Cantos Cautivos were made by people who lived through all three periods,
but are reflecting on the Pinochet and Allende eras during the modern democratic period. These
three historical periods define significant shifts in Chilean society, and are crucial for
understanding the creation, preservation, and maintenance of prisoner testimonies.

**Historiography**

The most numerous literature on Chile’s late 20th century are politico-economic
histories, with little focus on the specifics of social history. For the Allende Era, works include
Francis’ quantitative political analysis of the 1970-1973 election, *The Allende Victory* (1973);
Feinberg’s political analysis of the factors which led to Allende’s victory, *The Triumph of
Allende* (1972); Israel Zipper’s survey of political factions during the revolution, *Politics and
Ideology in Allende's Chile* (1989); Kaufman’s analysis of the United States’ State Department’s
role in overthrowing Allende, *Crisis in Allende's Chile* (1988); Moss’ polemic defense of the
Chilean military’s coup, *Chile's Marxist Experiment* (1973); Oppenheim’s comprehensive study
of the history of Chilean politics from the 19th century to the 21st century, *Politics in Chile

Little has changed since Schlotterbeck made her call for more social histories covering Chile’s late 20th century in 2018. Given this lack of scholarship, it merits the creation of more works on the subject. Furthermore, none of the major social histories published so far focus on musical experiences as their main subject. Chornik notes, “music has had a limited place in Latin American cultural studies scholarship dealing with topics relating to the Pinochet regime” (2018, 2). By focusing on the musical experiences of prisoners, a novel form of decentering Chilean history from the high-level politics of La Moneda and the White House can be achieved.

**Music and Memory**

The 1960s in Chile saw the creation of a new genre of popular protest music, *nueva canción* (new song). *Nueva canción* singers were often affiliated with the UP coalition before 1973, and anti-Pinochet politics after the coup d'état. An exemplary *nueva canción* song is “We Shall Prevail” (“*Venceremos*”) by Claudio Iturra and Sergio Ortega, reflecting the political themes often explicitly found in the genre:

“We shall sow the lands of glory, /
socialism will be the future, /
everyone together shall make the history, /
to achieve, to achieve, to achieve. //” (Quilapayún 2024).

An alternative version of the song was used directly as an anthem by UP and modified the above verse to be directly about Allende:

“If the just victory of Allende, /
the right would like to ignore, /
all the determined and brave people /
shall rise up like a man. //” (Quilapayún 2024).

Emblematic of these explicitly ideological lyrics, Carrasco et al. found that *nueva canción* musicians were seen as “intrinsic” to the development of Chilean socialism by both Allende and the Communist Party of Chile, who sought to expand their societal impact (2022, 379-380). McSherry argued that *nueva canción* represents a Gramscian, counter-hegemonic movement, and that exiled singers played an essential role as spokespersons against the Pinochet regime (2015, xix; 2017, 27). Similarly, Pino-Ojeda contended that post-Pinochet *nueva canción* has been central to Chile’s social re-democratization (2021, 188). Against this current, González argued that despite the academic and foreign prevalence of *nueva canción*, the genre is relatively not as popular with contemporary Chileans themselves (2016, 79-80). What cannot be denied is the cultural prevalence of *nueva canción* singers during the late 20th century in Chile.

The most famous *nueva canción* singer, the communist Víctor Jara, was appointed Cultural Ambassador by the UP government and executed by the Pinochet regime. Read and Wyndham described Jara as most similar to a “Bob Dylan, John Lennon or Pete Seeger,” but that none are fully an “apt” comparison (2016, 24). Other foundational musicians include the Parra family, Inti-Illimani and Quilapayún.¹

However, Chilean musical experiences were not limited to use by the major *nueva canción* singers. Political Prisoners also engaged with music. The examination of Pinochet-era

¹The Parra family is known for having several famous musicians such as Violeta Parra (1917-1967), Ángel Parra (1943–2017), and Javiera Parra (b. 1968). Inti-Illimani and Quilapayún are bands formed in 1967 and 1965. Both groups are still active as of March 2024.
political prisoner testimonies shows that traditional *nueva canción* songs became recontextualized from their brief position of power during the Allende period into a response against state oppression, becoming an avenue for prisoners to sustain themselves and their leftist cultures. However, *nueva canción* songs were not alone. A narrow focus on *nueva canción* fails to capture the totality of relevant musical experiences, which recontextualized songs from a diverse range of genres. Moreover, many of the *nueva canción* songs which were important for prisoners were ones that are not traditionally political. These musical experiences were just as important for sustaining leftist cultures among prisoners, despite their lack of traditional political content. This is not to say that *nueva canción* was unimportant to prisoners, in fact the opposite is true. What is key is that the available testimonies point to *nueva canción* songs as only a plurality of important musical experiences.

In discussing how musical experiences preserved culture, several pieces will be explicated in detail. “To Be Seventeen Again” (“Volver a los dieciséis”), a folk song popularized by Violeta Parra; “I Can Trust the Lord” (“Puedo confiar en el Señor”) a hymn; and “Three White Lillies” (“Tres bancos lirios”), a children’s song will be discussed first. Their experiences can be seen as important specifically for their song’s *lyrical* content. The love song from the Spanish Civil War “How We Resemble Each Other” (“En qué nos parecemos”), “Moments” (“Los momentos”) by Eduardo Gatti, “Ode to Joy” by Beethoven, the cantata “Santa María de Iquique”, “Return, Return” (“Volver, Volver”) by Fernando Z. Maldonado, and “Return” (“Volver”) Carlos Gardel will be discussed next. These musical experiences serve as examples where the *performance* of musical experiences is important. Following this discussion,
a cursory overview of other relevant testimonies will be given by location. It is also important to note that the examined testimonies come from geographically diverse locations. Individuals who were imprisoned in most Chilean regions are represented (Figure 1).

*Figure 1: Map of Chile showing regions where prisoners whose testimonies are examined were imprisoned (orange) versus regions where no prisoners were held (blue). The orange regions from top to bottom are Arica y Parinacota, Tarapacá, Coquimbo, Valparaíso, Metropolitan Santiago, Libertador General Bernardo O'Higgins, Maule, Araucanía, Los Ríos, Magallanes y de la Antártica Chilena. The distance between Arica y Parinacota and Magallanes y de la Antártica Chilena is over 3,000 km.*

It might seem strange to include a song popularized by Violeta Parra when the argument being made is that themes greater than *nueva canción* and the ideological battles surrounding the Allende era were important. There are two important points shown by including “To Be Seventeen Again” and other *nueva canción* songs. The first point is to establish the basic
recontextualization from the Allende to Pinochet eras. The second point is that *nueva canción* songs are important because they include neglected themes themselves. Two testimonies recount “To Be Seventeen Again”: one by David Quintana García and one by Gabriela Durand. Quintana was imprisoned in Rancagua in 1973. He remembered fondly several songs that he associated with his actions as a member of a UP coalition university brigade, chief among them “To Be Seventeen Again”. Singing the songs reminded the prisoners of when they were “together with the people” (2019a). Additionally, David remembered it being funny that the guards—some of whom were illiterate—could not understand the subliminal messages in their songs, nor realize that they had made “a library of Marxist books” (2019b). Durand by contrast was ridiculed by guards to sing “To Be Seventeen Again” while blindfolded in Cuartel Central Borgoño in 1980. Durand claims they chose a UP era song specifically to traumatize her, but in reality, she “even felt inspired for a moment” due to the act of singing reminding her of her comrades who were also imprisoned (Durand 2015). To establish some familiarity with the song, here is part of its fifth verse:

“Love is a whirlwind /
of primeval purity /
even the fierce animal /
whispers its sweet trill /
it stops pilgrims /
it liberates prisoners / ” (Quintana 2019a).

Despite being by Violeta Para, it is clear that “To Be Seventeen Again” is one of the less political *nueva canción* songs, yet it is still apparent why it would be comforting for political
prisoners. The human emotion of “love” is exalted. Love—not political figures or ideology—has the power to liberate prisoners. Thus, while still being a UP song, an important theme is likely this connection to love as a liberating force. Additionally, the song shows the important recontextualization which took place. Quintana particularly recounts how he would sell Parra’s records to “spread the music[...], more than to make money” (2019a). “To Be Seventeen Again” transformed from a song in a government-supported genre that was openly shared, to a message of hope within the confines of a prison for Quintana, who once facilitated the spread of the song.

“I Can Trust the Lord” is a hymn Sigifredo Ramos Vásquez remembered being sung in Temuco Jail in 1973. Ramos described the song as a “battle anthem” for “the much yearned-for freedom and justice” (2016). Examining a stanza of the song confirms the non-political, religious lyrics:

“I can rest /
I can rest /
knowing that Christ /
will give me his mansion /” (Ramos 2016).

Ramos provides a simple explanation for why the prisoners of Temuco focused on religious themes: “Protest songs were forbidden, so we had no other option than to sing religious songs.” (2016). Again, it is also clear why these non-political themes could be comforting for prisoners. “I Can Trust the Lord” delivers the message that despite his derelict situation, Ramos can rest and await the promised better future of Christ’s mansion. Thus, similar to how basic themes of love shined over politics in “To Be Seventeen Again”, religion shines over politics in “I Can Trust the Lord” for its use as a tool for memory.
Returning to Lizama, he mentioned that a children’s song was important to his aesthetic memory, “Three White Lillies”. The song is about an angry horse rider trampling a garden:

“Why do you destroy my garden? /
Unhappy horse rider /
I don’t want my flowers /
be hurt by you /
[gibberish] / ” (Lizama 2017a).²

“Three White Lillies”, like many children’s songs, is not explicitly political and instead features a fictional scenario with playful lyrics. Lizama, however, makes his intended metaphor clear. “Really”, he explained, “the squaddies” were the ones who trampled Chile. Importantly, Lizama also accounts that the prison guards caught onto the metaphor and punished them for singing the song (2017a). “Three White Lillies” shows again that themes other than Cold War politics were important avenues for the memory of political prisoners. In fact, Lizama’s story highlights an instance where not only the prisoners themselves recognized this, but also members of the oppressive state apparatus of the Pinochet regime.

“How We Resemble Each Other”, “Moments”, and “Ode to Joy” were remembered by Scarlett Mathieu, who was imprisoned in the Santiago prisons of Londres 38, Tres Álamos, and Cuatro Álamos in 1974. She remembered the singing of two now disappeared members of MIR. Scarlett listened to Juan Chacón sing “How We Resemble Each Other” through her solitary confinement window in Cuatro Álamos. Máximo Gedda sang in Londres 38. The other songs were sung by a women’s choir in Tres Álamos as their “anthems.” The choir

²The word used for horse rider in the song is jinete which can also refer more specifically to a light cavalryman.
sang even if they were punished by the guards for being too subversive. Scarlett said, “these songs were very important and significant for all.” and that she “tried to remember the names of the people” (2019a, 2019b).

Mathieu’s testimony shows three instances, in separate prisons, where musical experiences were used to communicate culture between prisoners. Juan Chacón and Máximo Gedda let Mathieu feel a connection to the other prisoners, even while in solitary confinement. Their singing overcame a strict physical barrier which would normally prevent prisoners from interacting with each other. More directly, the prisoner choir of Tres Álamos created a group with shared musical experiences through their performances. Importantly, *nueva canción* was not the only genre important for their collective experience. Also, key is the fact they endured collective trauma—the punishment from guards. This trauma likely further entrenched their shared cultural understanding.

The cantata of “Santa María de Iquique” was performed in 1975 by students of Alfonso Padilla Silva, some who went on to form the prison band The Hard-Boiled Eggs in Concepción Regional Stadium Jail (Figure 2). Padilla taught himself how to formally read music with a smuggled music theory textbook, slowly transcribing the cantata over 2 months. “Santa María de Iquique” recites a story of the 1907 Santa María School Massacre, when the Chilean military killed over 2,000 men, women, and children to crush a strike. It was popularized by Quilapayún in 1969 (Padilla 2019). A rendition of the epic work takes over half an hour to perform. Looking back at his songs, Padilla commented that “Each time we engaged in artistic activity— with all the difficulties and limitations imposed by our difficult circumstance— it was an affirmation of humanity and life. Each accomplishment represented a small victory over the dictatorship.”
(2014b). Padilla’s assertion of his musical performances as giving life is key to how these experiences enriched the prisoners. Through music, he could learn, share, and achieve a small sense of normalcy in his prison life. Furthermore, by singing “Santa María de Iquique” he achieves a nod to a past even further back than the reformist era, while still alluding to the era through the cantata’s association with Quilapayún. A nod which remembers a massacre by the Chilean military, without directly touching the 1973 coup.

![Figure 2: Picture of the Hard-Boiled Eggs provided by Héctor Salgado (17 years old, third from the left to right). The photo was taken by a photographer who was sent to Concepción Jail in 1974 to take passport photos for prisoners set to be exiled. Padilla had already been exiled to Finland (Salgado 2019).](image)
According to Jorge Montealegre, the tango “Return” (“Volver”) was sung by his cellmate Pollito Fonseca in Chacabuco in 1974. Montealegre recounted how the prisoners enjoyed the dark humor as Fonseca sung the line “that twenty years is nothing” (“que veinte años no es nada”). Thirty-nine years later, on the anniversary of Allende’s death, the two returned to their former prison. This time, Fonseca sung “Return, Return” (“Volver, Volver”) by Mexican ranchera artist Fernando Z. Maldonado while observing Chacabuco (Montealegre 2015). Montealegre’s experiences represent an interesting example of music being used in both the Pinochet and contemporary eras to convey a connection. The sense of returning shifted from the dark humor associated with possibly returning home, to the somber feeling of returning to their former prison. In these experiences, the simple sense of returning is what is powerful, not traditional politics, nor even a work of nueva canción.

Even among the limited testimonies, there are too many musical experiences to explicate each song in-depth, however hopefully the discussion so far has provided enough grounding for the rest of this chapter. To provide more examples, a survey of other musical experiences will be given, organized by location. These further musical experiences reinforce the already discussed themes of resignification, diversity, and cultural evolution.

During a Christmas Celebration in Concepción Regional Stadium, Padilla played “The Cigarette” (“El cigarrito”), a song by Víctor Jara without political lyrics in order to give a “tribute to him and to his example, and also to all the fallen comrades.” Another prisoner sang “The Soldier” (“El soldado”) by Violeta Parra (2014b). At a different time, prisoners sang modified versions of Facundo Cabral’s “I’m not from here” (“No soy de aquí”) and Robustiano Figueroa Reyes’ “Woman, child and friend” (“Mujer, niña y amiga”) modified with optimistic
lyrics (2014a). On Christmas of 1974 the band played a concert which included Joan Baez’s “We Shall Overcome” sung in English (2014c).

Lizama mentioned in another instance that a line from Quilapayún’s “The Wall” (“La muralla”) was changed from “Who is it / the colonel’s sabre / close the gate!” to “Pinochet’s sabre”. He also noted changing the line “The people united will never be defeated” from Quilapayún’s famous song to the pun “The people united will drink Leche Nido” (“El pueblo unido jamás será vencido” to “El pueblo unido toma Leche Nido”) (2017b).³

An anonymous prisoner of Isla Teja in 1973 remembered hearing songs by Víctor Jara, Quilapayún and Inti-Illimani. In particular, they identified with “Luchín” and “I Remember you, Amanda” (“Te recuerdo amanda”) by Jara (Anonymous 2018). “Luchín” is about Luchín, a child Víctor Jara adopted, and “I Remember You, Amanda” is a song about Jara’s parents. Both songs highlight the importance of daily family relationships, rather than politics.

Pedro Mella Contreras was arrested at 32 years of age. His testimony covers his time in prison from 1986 through 1989. During this time, he was imprisoned in Enclosure CNI on Pérez Rosales Street and Isla Teja.⁴ In 1987, Mella also spent time in the South Santiago Center of Preventative Detention, over 800 kilometers to the north. In Valdivia, CNI agents would play Roberto Carlos’ “A Million Friends” (“Un millón de amigos”) while torturing prisoners (2019d). Mella sang Víctor Jara’s “The Apparition” (“El aparecido”) for therapy, as well as to let other prisoners know that he had not been executed. In 1987 his brother visited him and gave Mella a cassette tape of “The Letter” (“La carta”) by Violeta Parra (2019a, 2019c). In Santiago, Mella

³Leche Nido is a brand name of powdered milk owned by Nestle.
⁴CNI is short for National Information Center, a secret police agency that operated in Chile from 1977 to 1990.
gifted his partner a cassette of Pablo Milanés’ “The Brief Space Where You Are Absent” ("El breve espacio en que no estás") while she visited him in a prison hospital (2019b). Commenting on the role of music during his prison time, Mella said that “Víctor Jara had already passed away, but one appropriates the song and makes it one’s own story,” and that “When I listen to these songs now, I return to that time. These are things that happened to us, and we have always said that memory is alive. [...] History has to be told as it was, and we don’t want it to happen again. With memory, there is history!” (2019a).

Sergio Reyes Soto was detained in Dawson Island Prisoner Camp in 1973 and 1974. In a rebuke of the term cantos cautivos, he declared that his music was not “captive” but rather that “revolutionary songs imbued us with a sense of freedom”. He recalled often singing “They Say the Homeland Is” (“Dicen que la patria es”), a song popularized by Quilapayún pleading for soldiers to not shoot their fellow civilians (Reyes 2015).

Eduardo Ojeda was imprisoned on Isla Dawson in 1973, the day of the coup. After holding a bonfire to honor Salvador Allende, the prisoners were forced to work on constructing the Río Chico camp. A prisoner named José regularly sang “Balderrama” popularized by Mercedes Sosa. Ojeda recalled the lines “Where will we end up / if Balderrama closes?” (“¿dónde iremos a parar / si se apaga Balderrama?”) were particularly poignant (2015a). Another prisoner named Lanfranco got away with singing Victor Jara’s “I Remember You, Amanda” multiple times (Ojeda 2015d). Eventually, Ojeda was part of the formation of the rock band 5

5Pablo Milanés is a Cuban singer associated with nueva canción and nueva trova.
“Alpha 4” to perform for the other prisoners (2015c). Lastly, he recalled the Serbian song “Far Away” (“Tamo daleko”) was important to many prisoners who had Yugoslav heritage on Dawson Island (Ojeda 2015b).

Lucía Chirinos was imprisoned in Buen Pastor, La Serena in 1973 and 1974. In one instance, Chirinos played “We Shall Prevail” on accordion, joined by a crowd of female prisoners. As guards were walking over to punish them, she switched to playing the National Anthem, forcing the guards to stand at attention. The crowd sang the ending lyrics of the National Anthem, “[Chile will be] a refuge from oppression”, with “rage”, before switching again to the anthem of Chile’s police. Chirinos remembers that this made the guards burst out laughing and decide to leave the crowd alone (2016b). Chirinos also reported the importance of religious songs to the inmates, and how she taught others to sing “Dona Nobis Pacem”. While imprisoned, she took Catholic communion for the first time (Chirinos 2016a).

Eliseo González and Jorge Peña Hen were imprisoned together in La Serena in October 1973. Peña, a famous composer, made ink with the phosphorus from matchsticks and his spit (Figure 3). He produced an incomplete classical melody before being murdered by the military. Peña’s death strongly affected the other prisoners, leading González to teach the others how to sing. Later, the prisoners would listen to music using smuggled in radios and a television. González mentioned that there was a conflict between the “intellectuals or pseudo-intellectuals” who did not care for genres such as corridos, and working-class prisoners who did not like to listen to classical music in La Serena. Reflecting on their mourning of Peña, González said that they practiced “resilience” (González 2016).
María Marchant was a chemistry student imprisoned in Buen Pastor in 1973 and 1974. She remembered that the women would regularly sing “What Will the Holy Father Say” (“Qué dirá el Santo Padre”) while other prisoners were being taken away to be tortured. Marchant remembered Lucía’s singing, as well as the fact that a radio was smuggled into the prison which played Radio Moscow (2016a, 2016b).

Servando Becerra Poblete was one of the 7,000 people imprisoned in the National Stadium immediately after September eleventh. Later, he was sent to Chacabuco Prisoner Camp.
Becerra recalled reciting “The Crux of the Matter” (“La madre del cordero”) by Tito Fernández, in both locations. In Chacabuco, other prisoners nicknamed Becerra “Venancio” after a character in the song (Becerra 2014).

Luis Cifuentes Seves was imprisoned in 1973 and 1974 in the National Stadium, then Chacabuco. He was a member of the prisoner band Los de Chacabuco, organized by nueva canción singer Ángel Parra. Los de Chacabuco composed several original songs. “Lucky Devil” (“El suertúo”) is about a prisoner who arrived in Chacabuco from the National Stadium and survived (2014c). “The Cocky Fellow” (“El puntúo”) subtly made fun of the guards (2014a). Other songs he remembered as important to his time in prison include Mercede Sosa’s “Creole Mass – Gloria” (“Misa criolla - Gloria”), Quilapayún’s “How We Resemble Each Other” (“En qué nos parecemos”), “From the Poplars I have Come, Mother” (“De los álamos vengo, madre’) by renaissance composer Juan Vásquez, and “Morning Has Broken” by Yusuf Islam (2014b; 2015a; 2015b).

César Montiel, a communist who was detained in Colonia Dignidad and Melinka Prisoner Camp in 1975, commented that it was typical for him and his lover, Carmen, to listen to the “typical songs” of bands like “Quilapayún and Inti-Illimani” before being arrested (2022b). While imprisoned, Montiel’s memory shifted away from nueva canción works. In Melinka, sailors forced the prisoners to recite military anthems such as “Trim the Sails” (“Brazas a ceñir”), music he coldly referred to as “their songs” (2022c). In Colonia Dignidad, Montiel

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6Colonia Dignidad was a rural religious commune founded by German minister Paul Schäfer near the city of Parral.
recalled that guards would play Tchaikovski’s “Swan Lake” and Georgie Dann’s “El Bimbó” while torturing prisoners. Montiel reported that he was “still psychologically troubled because of the uncertainty we faced” (2022b, 2022a). The one song Montiel mentions transcending the division of before and after his imprisonment is the love song “Under My Skin” (“A flor de piel”) by Julio Iglesias. Montiel and Carmen associated the song with their relationship, and DINA prison guards would sing it to each of them in their separate cells (2022d).  

Claudio Durán Pardo was imprisoned in Tres Álamos and Melinka. He said that the military “took control” of “music”, “particularly that which had been symbolic of the presidency of Salvador Allende.” The traditional panpipes, charangos, and quenas went from “the ‘sonorous trinity’ into the void of oblivion, prohibited for being subversive.”. After 8 months in Tres Álamos, Durán found a quena that he would play in the afternoon, “always improvising melodies”. At one point, prisoners from the women’s section of the prison instructed the male prisoners to “Tell the man who’s playing the quena, which from here can be heard clearly. . . to continue playing” (2014). In Melinka, Durán created a cuatro with fellow prisoners in order to imitate Violeta Parra’s music (2015).  

Roberto Navarrete was imprisoned in the Cárcel de Santiago from November 1973 until April 1974. During his time there, he decided to join a male choir which sang religious songs. At first, Navarrete was reluctant to join due to being a “complete Atheist”. Nevertheless, he enjoyed

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7DINA is short for National Intelligence Directorate, a secret police agency which preceded the CNI.
8A charango is a type of stringed instrument, whereas a quena is a type of flute. Both are associated with indigenous Chileans.
9A cuatro is a type of string instrument invented in the Caribbean.
singing in the choir and performing for the non-political prisoners. They sang songs such as “Oh Saving Victim” (“O salutaris Hostia”), written by Thomas Aquinas in Latin (Navarrete 2015).

Luis Madariaga was imprisoned in Cárcel de Valparaíso from 1974 until 1978. Whenever a prisoner was released from jail, their fellow inmates would sing them farewell with the Spanish version of “Ode to Joy”. Madariaga believed that the rite “was a powerful source of strength, solidarity and ironclad brotherhood, created during those long months in captivity, seeking an outlet for our hearts. I believe that that experience left a mark on all of us.” (Madariaga 2016).

Carolina Videla was imprisoned in Cárcel Pública de Arica in January 1989. For eleven days of her prison time, she was placed in solitary confinement. She listened to other prisoners watch a soap opera, which played Antônio Marcos’ “Why does the afternoon cry” (“Por qué llora la tarde”). Videla commented that when she hears the song, she remembers her “time in prison,” and that “I see memory as an exercise to give new meanings to the past. As the years go by you give it a different meaning or understand it differently” (Videla 2018).

To synthesize the discussed songs, the musical experiences had by political prisoners during the Pinochet era contain themes and genres far more expansive than the narrow politico-economic debate most of the historiography reflects. Genres alone included hymns, children's songs, pop, nueva trova, rock, Yugoslav folk, racnhera, tango, US folk, military anthems, classical, renaissance, and original pieces by the prisoners themselves. Even when expected nueva canción songs were sung, they can be explicated further from the centralized ideological debate towards other themes important for their recontextualization. These musical experiences were just as important or more important for memories of the Allende era as nueva canción for
many prisoners. In some cases, such as Lizama’s this importance arose from needing to express political feelings in inexplicit lyrics. In other cases, the importance of these musical experiences arose from the songs or act of singing themselves. One implication of these acts of musical memory is that forms of leftist political culture were allowed to exist among political prisoners despite the severe state oppression. These musical experiences allowed for a sharing of cultural values among prisoners, and in rare cases, the outside world, as in the example of Mella. Lastly, prisoners used multiple strategies to create musical experiences ranging from the resignification of well-known nueva canción songs, to the creation of original pieces through clandestine methods.

**Modern Music**

When the 2019–2022 protests rocked Chile, musical experiences were similarly important to leftist protesters. In the new context of a democratic Chile where public protest is tolerated by the state, these musical experiences often took the form of massive demonstrations in the street with far larger communities than what existed in prison camps. Similarly, in an era of greater globalization, even more forms of experiencing music were present. Another key difference between the Pinochet and modern eras is that songs are allowed to be more explicitly political. However, these experiences still often nod back to the Allende and Pinochet eras, with large (but not total) importance given to nueva canción. Similarly to the musical experiences of leftist political prisoners, these modern experiences can be analyzed for both their lyrical and performed content.
Muerdo, a Spanish singer, performed a popular remix of Cuban singer Pablo Milanés’ “I Will Walk the Streets Anew” (“Yo pisaré las calles nuevamente”), mourning Allende and the other dead of Santiago (Muerdo 2020). These lyrics are sung over footage of the 1973 coup intermixed with footage of the 2019-2022 protests:

“I will walk the streets anew  
That were bloody Santiago  
And in a beautiful, liberated plaza  
I will stop and cry for the absent” (Muerdo 2020, 00:20-00:46).

Originally written in 1976, the song’s connotation has changed. At first, “I Will Walk the Streets Anew” could be seen as a solemn vow for the future of a liberated Santiago. Singing the song in 2020 altered the importance of the future tense, as the act of singing itself becomes a form of walking Santiago’s streets in the present. The song changed from a message about the future during the Pinochet era into a mournful message of nostalgia in the present context. Similarly, Muerdo’s cover altered the lyrics of Milanés’ song to further emphasize the importance of Allende. After the line, “And this song will be the earthly song / to a life reaped in La Moneda,” words from Allende’s final speech can be heard, most notably “History is ours and is made by the people” (Muerdo 2020, 02:14-02:51). This inclusion of Allende’s speech creates an even stronger nostalgia in the song, and by mourning Allende through highlighting his dedication to people’s history creates a paradox. Allende is an exalted political figure, but he is exalted since he forwarded values outside stereotypical political histories—history is made by the people, not figures like Allende.
“Democracy” (“La democracia”) was a pop song by Chilean-Mexican singer Mon Laferte in 2022. Part of the chorus of Laferte’s song has the following lyrics:

“Someone explain to me what happened /
(For democracy, democracy) /
I’m confused or someone lied to me /
(For democracy, democracy) /
Where did it go? Who stole it? /
(For democracy, democracy)” (Laferte 2021, 01:12-1:30).

“Democracy”, as the title suggests, is a political song insinuating that Chile has lost (or perhaps never had) democracy. Comparison of then president Sebastián Piñera’s government to Chile’s antidemocratic past was a common theme of the 2019–2022 protests, and can be seen in other mediums such as street art (Figure 4). It is likely that Laferte herself was making a nostalgic callback to Pinochet’s coup by asking who stole democracy. While more explicitly political, Laferte’s work is similar to some prisoner songs in its indirect reference to the president of Chile, instead of directly calling out the office. The resignification of Pinochet from simply a dictator to also an insult also seems to be another noteworthy change from the previous to the contemporary eras.
Figure 4: Street poster from Santiago associating then-president Sebastián Piñera with Augusto Pinochet. The poster uses a line from the US TV show Pawn Stars to say “Piñera or Pinochet? I don’t know Rick, they look the same to me” (Gordon-Zolov and Zolov 2022, 25).

Another interesting case of modern resignification is the 2019 song “Fuck tha Police a la Mapuche” (“Fuck tha police a lo mapuche”) by the rap band Wechekeche Ñi Trawün (WÑT). Instead of modifying a traditional Chilean song, instead this work is heavily inspired by the song “Fuck tha Police” by US rap group N.W.A. WÑT combines this foreign influence with both Chilean and Mapuche culture to highlight police brutality against the Mapuche. In describing their song, WÑT writes that they sing against the “pigs that shoot the backs of Mapuche youth, that strikes greengrocers in Temuco, that abuse and humiliate peddlers, [...] because the Mapuche have the memory of resistance” (Wechekeche Ñi Trawün 2019). “Fuck tha Police a la Mapuche” highlights an important theme that has been neglected from many political narratives of recent Chilean history, which is the issue of Mapuche rights. Additionally, it highlights the globalized setting in which musical experiences are drawn from in service of memory and cultural sharing. While political prisoners also combined foreign and indigenous elements in their musical experiences, often times they were not expressed in as politically explicit ways. Similarly, although political prisoners were able to use foreign songs, excepting the few cases of exiled musicians, prisoners during the Pinochet era were not able to share their musical experiences outside of Chile. By contrast, WÑT posted “Fuck tha Police a la Mapuche” on YouTube, where anyone with access to the internet can find it.
The YouTube channel Red Prensa Libre Antofagasta (RPLA) remembered the anniversary of September 11th in a manner similar to WNT’s cover. The video, uploaded on September 12th, 2020, depicts protestors parading and clashing with Chilean police at various spots in Antofagasta. In the video, a banner which says “no one is forgetting, memory of the fallen. 11 September.” can be seen (Red Prensa Libre Antofagasta 2020, 00:16-00:16). Playing over the video’s scenes are rap songs and the instrumental of “Bella Ciao” (Red Prensa Libre Antofagasta 2020, 01:52-02:22). RPLA’s video shows another example of recent Chilean protestors relying on a globalized mix of artistic works to express their memory.

As mentioned, another way in which modern musical experiences differ from their counterparts in Pinochet era prisons is the sheer quantity of individuals which take part in performances. A key example of this is when thousands of Chileans sang with Inti-Illimani the UP-era anthem “The People United” (“El pueblo unido jamás será Vencido”) in the Plaza Baquedano of central Santiago (Figure 5). The chorus sung by a choir of thousands reads as:

“And now the people /
That rises in the fight /
With the voice of a giant /
Yelling: Onwards! / /
The people united will never be defeated. /
The people united will never be defeated. /” (Inti-Illimani 2019, 00:58-01:17).
Figure 5: frame of Inti-Illimani’s 2019 performance of “The People United Will Never Be Defeated” in the Plaza Baquedano (Inti-Illimani 2019).

A similar example of a public musical experience tied to the 2019–2022 protests is when a large group of guitarists gathered on the steps of the National Library in Santiago to sing Víctor Jara’s “The Right to Live in Peace” (“El derecho de vivir en paz”). An image of the event is shown below (Figure 6). Interestingly, despite becoming an anthem of the 2019 Chilean protests, “The Right to Live in Peace” is an ode to Ho Chi Minh:

“Uncle Ho, our song /
Is the fire of pure love /
It is the dove dovecot /
Olive tree of the olive grove /
It is the universal song /
Chain that will make triumph /
The right to live in peace.” (Música Espacio Kuyen 2019, 01:50-02:22)

Unlike the small scale of prison songs, these public protests capture a stronger, sublime sense of culture. Singing songs with thousands of others communicates a powerful euphoria. A euphoria repressed out of leftist circles during the Pinochet era. Both songs also represent an interesting case of recontextualization. “The People United” went from an anthem of UP, to being used as a tool for survival by Lizama during the Pinochet era, to once again a public anthem of protests during the democratic era. “The Right to Live in Peace” transformed from a protest song against the Vietnam War into a modern protest anthem. Jara’s song appeared not
only in music, but also in street art (Figure 7). However, there is currently no record of prisoners singing Jara’s song.

Figure 7: Víctor Jara depicted as a Christian Martyr in Santiago street art 2019 with the slogan “The Right to Live in Peace” (Gordon-Zolov and Zolov 2022, 48).

Conclusion

Musical experiences present two challenges for the current historiography of Chile’s recent history. The first challenge relates to Schloterbeck’s and Chornik’s concerns that the social and musical history of Chile remains an understudied topic, despite the amount of information available to study. The second challenge harkens back to González’s argument that the historiography has overfocused on the importance of nueva canción in relation to all themes and types of music appreciated by Chilean musical experiences.

For the first challenge, considerable evidence was presented that music is primarily important to the social history of the Chilean left. Leftist political prisoners during the Pinochet
era and modern leftist protestors both lean on musical experiences as a primary way to express protest and sustain their culture, even if modern protestors use music in more politically explicit ways. Moreover, the Chilean left during its brief tenure in power during the Allende era promoted music as a primary way to help convert Chilean society to a socialist culture. This aspect of Chilean social history is almost completely ignored by the historiography due to its focus on political-economic narratives. Moreover, these politico-economic histories lack any evident ability to explain why music reoccurs as important. Explaining why musical experiences have been important to leftist cultural evolution in several historical contexts would require more research. The simplest explanation is that there is a shared habit within Chilean culture that emphasizes the importance of protest music. This cultural habit seems relatively more important to the evolution of the Chilean left than it does to other leftist cultures. Traditional political histories can explain the order of Chilean societies from the Allende, Pinochet, to modern eras, but they have provided little answer to how the Chilean left managed to survive the severe state oppression which sought to destroy their culture. Quotidian musical experiences, at least in the case of political prisoners, appear to be one of the habits which enabled this survival.

For the second challenge, Lizama’s children song, Ramos’ hymn, and Peña’s self-composed classical work all fall outside the purview of what has been studied concerning leftist Chilean musical history. None of these works, among others, were nueva canción. This similarly extends to the modern era, where new genres such as rap and pop occur as important for consideration. While nueva canción is important, there are many other musical experiences that prisoners and leftist protestors utilized. McSherry’s characterization of nueva canción as Gramscian also seems to be too narrow a focus. Even if a diverse folk genre that was once
promoted by the government could be seen as purely counter-hegemonic, such a claim misses
the diversity of musical experiences used to counter hegemony in Chilean history.

More research needs to be done to explain the relationship musical experiences of
Pinochet-era prisoners have with modern leftist protestors. There seems to be a connection where
some prisoners carried experiences they considered important out of their cells and into their
lives as once again freed persons as in the case of Mella. These freed prisoners may have
influenced Chilean politics upon their return to civil life due to Chile’s transition to democracy.
Moreover, the Cantos Cautivos project itself represents an act of remembrance by these former
prisoners, through the publicly available curation of experiences deemed important for memory.
There is a problem with solely relying on this explanation. Many of the musical experiences of
modern leftist protestors involve different songs than what prisoners themselves experienced.
This holds true for the original works by leftists, the diverse songs they drew from, and the
narrow focus of nueva canción. While “The People United” has clear appearances in all three
eras discussed, “The Right to Live in Peace” does not. Given the available evidence, there can
only be an educated guess that the musical experiences of prisoners had a wider impact on the
culture of the Chilean left. Additionally, the recontextualization of songs in musical experiences
among both prisoners and modern Chilean protestors could be explained by a common ancestral
culture rather than a direct evolutionary line from prisoner’s musical experiences to modern
leftist culture. Perhaps this ancestor was the government-sponsored artists of the Allende-era,
however an earlier origin has not been ruled out.

Fifty years on since September eleventh, many laypersons, academics, and politicians
remember the giants of Chile’s 20th century rather than the experiences of ordinary Chileans like
Lizama. What this exploration into past musical experiences suggests at its most basic is that
there is more to explicate in the field of 20th century Chilean social history. Rather than remembering the man, there may be more value in remembering what Allende emphasized in his final speech: “History is ours and is made by the people” (Allende [1973] 2021).
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