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# Guest Editor's Note

BERNARD GORDILLO BROCKMANN
Yale Institute of Sacred Music

A nineteenth-century observer once described Central America as a region cast in shadows. They made the observation in contrast to Mexico, where there was light to otherwise be appreciated. I have often reflected on this description of Central America as a shadowy region, a place about which little is known or understood, so often subsumed as an appendage to Mexico or hidden on some imagined periphery of Latin America. Much of the anglophone world's apparent knowledge of Central America is the result of historical mediation through U.S. foreign policy, media coverage, and the news cycle. This has certainly been the case for recent memory. But it has also been a reality for the last 200 years, beginning with Central American Independence from Spain in 1821 and the subsequent geographic interest in the region by world powers throughout the nineteenth century, particularly Britain, France, and the U.S. The dream of constructing an interoceanic canal across the isthmus, the long-anticipated *estrecho dudoso* (doubtful strait), preoccupied these powers, as much as local governments themselves, who stood to benefit from controlling the principal conduit for global maritime trade across the American continent. This foreign gaze has been both a blessing and a curse for Central America, a haunting prior to and since the realization of the Panama Canal, indelibly marking the cultural, political, and economic destinies of each country. The Monroe Doctrine and its many presidential corollaries, often defined in terms of U.S. regional security concerns, has also come to bear on the development of Central America as part of a greater Caribbean Basin. Today, our knowledge of the region stems from these and other international processes and a host of many more local ones, underscored in no small part by Pan-Americanism and the rise of globalization. Yet there is much to learn well beyond the headlines, especially as regards the social and cultural history of each country and their shared paths.

The study of music in Central America has been rare within music research as a whole. Surveys of music in Latin America by Nicholas Slonimsky, Otto Mayer-Serra, Gilbert Chase, Isabel Aretz, Roque Cordero, and Gerard Béhague partially covered the region beginning in the 1940s. It was Cordero, a noteworthy Panamanian composer, who offered an unprecedented insider's view with his article "La música en centroamérica y Panamá" (*Journal of Inter-American Studies*, July 1966). These surveys remained the only general and accessible sources published through the 1970s, and there have been no similar broad attempts to cover the region since then. More recently, the textbooks *Musics of Latin America* (Robin Moore and Walter Aaron Clark, eds.) and *Experiencing Latin American Music* (Carol A. Hess, ed.) have introduced students to Central America as a vibrant and distinct region yet interconnected with the rest of the continent. To these, I would add studies by country from the last few decades, covering subjects from the early modern era through the present day, and exploring not only the isthmus but its diaspora. Among scholars committed to these endeavors are Dieter Lehnhoff, Omar Morales Abril, Andres Amado, Juan G. Francisco Cristobal, and Diane Oliva (Guatemala); Amy Frishkey and Lauren Poluha (Belize); Robin Sacolick and Fernando Rios (El Salvador); T.M. Scruggs and Amanda Minks (Nicaragua); Susan Campos-Fonseca, María Clara Vargas-Cullell, and Tania Camacho-Azofeifa (Costa Rica); and Sean Bellaviti and Melissa Gonzalez (Panama).

It is a remarkable fact that music in Honduras remains all but unknown to anglophone research. The above resources might imply that Central America has been of relatively significant interest to music scholarship, yet this pales in comparison to other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. Nevertheless, it is in the shadows of knowledge that many possibilities and room for research are to be found.

It is my honor and pleasure to serve as guest editor of this special issue of *Diagonal: An Ibero-American Music Review*. As a musicologist whose research focuses Central America, part of a broader expertise in music of Latin America and the Caribbean, I am grateful for the opportunity to gather together the work of scholars who graciously accepted my invitation and produced rich, novel findings. Susan Campos Fonseca explores the multivalent sonic branding of the nation in Costa Rica via decolonial sound studies. Sean Bellaviti examines the Panamanian *danzón-cumbia* through structural analysis and cultural impact. Employing quantum theory, postcolonial and new materialist feminisms, and ritual technologies, Robin Sacolick looks at Salvadoran composer María de Baratta and her ballet *Nahualismo* in seeking to redefine the Indianist work as "strategic preservation." Amy Frishkey situates the role and place of Garifuna musical neo-traditionalism within the world music industry. And Christine Wisch reviews Bellaviti's recent book on Panamanian *Musíca típica*. I would like to thank Walter Clark for envisioning this special issue and for inviting me to serve as its guest editor. The articles, essay, and review contained herein are a testament and contribution to a growing literature on music and musicians in Central America. It is through this collective effort that we shed more light on the isthmus and might yet look to eventually cast away the shadows.