Contents

List of Illustrations ix

Overture 1
Jonathan D. Hill and Jean-Pierre Chaumeil

First Movement:
Natural Sounds, Wind Instruments, and Social Communication
1. Speaking Tubes: The Sonorous Language of Yagua Flutes 49
Jean-Pierre Chaumeil
2. Leonardo, the Flute: On the Sexual Life of Sacred Flutes among the Xinguano Indians 69
Rafael José de Menezes Bastos
Jonathan Hill
4. Hearing without Seeing: Sacred Flutes as the Medium for an Avowed Secret in Curripaco Masculine Ritual 123
Nicolas Journet
5. Flutes in the Warime: Musical Voices in the Piaroa World 147
Alexander Mansutti Rodríguez
6. Desire in Music: Soul-Speaking and the Power of Secrecy 171
Marcelo Fiorini

Second Movement:
Musical Transpositions of Social Relations
Marc Brightman
8. From Flutes to Boom Boxes: Musical Symbolism and Change among the Waiwai of Southern Guyana 219
   Stephanie W. Alemán

9. From Musical Poetics to Deep Language: The Ritual of the Wauja Sacred Flutes 239
   Acácio Tadeu de Camargo Piedade

10. The Ritual of Iamurikuma and the Kawoká Flutes 257
    Maria Ignez Cruz Mello

    Ulrike Prinz

12. An “Inca” Instrument at a “Nawa” Feast: Marubo Flutes and Alterity in Amazonian Context 301
    Javier Ruedas

13. Arawakan Flute Cults of Lowland South America: The Domestication of Predation and the Production of Agentivity 325
    Robin Wright

C O D A:
   Historical and Comparative Perspectives

14. Sacred Musical Instruments in Museums: Are They Sacred? 357
    Claudia Augustat

15. Mystery Instruments 371
    Jean-Michel Beaudet

    Contributors 395
    Index 401
This book aims to produce a broadly comparative study of ritual wind instruments (flutes, trumpets, clarinets, and bullroarers) that are subject to strict visual and tactile (but not auditory) prohibitions and that are found among indigenous peoples in many areas of Lowland South America. The type of prohibition can vary from one group to another but primarily affects certain categories of persons more than others, which is why these wind instruments are often described, however inadequately, as “sacred” or “secret” instruments. Although there have been intensive studies of this kind of instrument and their music, understood as ritual objects and voices that condense a myriad of different relations in specific contexts, there have been no attempts to bring these isolated studies together into a more global, comparative perspective that goes beyond more documented areas, such as northwestern Amazonia and the Upper Xingu region and that integrates a diversity of approaches from anthropology, ethnomusicology, ethnolinguistics, and museum studies. Here we have assembled recent and ongoing research in these fields from a variety of ethnographic contexts (northwestern Amazonian, Upper Xingu, Guianas, Orinoco, Mato Grosso, and others) where we find sacred wind instruments played in pairs or trios.

The chapters are organized into two sections. Part 1, “Natural Sounds, Wind Instruments, and Social Communication,” contains
six essays that explore the complex ways in which ritual wind instruments are used to introduce natural sounds into human social contexts and to cross the boundary between verbal and nonverbal communication. The interplay of lexicality and musicality in the playing of sacred wind instruments is often regarded as a privileged means for human communication with, or impersonations of, mythic beings, such as the spirit-owners of forest animals, fish, birds, and plants. Part 1 explores the highly diverse ways in which indigenous South American peoples (Yagua of Peru, Kamayurá of Brazil, Wakuénai of Venezuela, Curripaco of Colombia, Piaroa of Venezuela, and Nambikwara of Brazil) have developed these interminglings of musical sound and verbal form and meaning to construct unique cultural poetics of ritual power. At the same time, the essays demonstrate how these culturally specific ways of integrating sounds and meanings are closely associated with animals, birds, fish, and other natural species. Flutes, trumpets, and other wind instruments are often named after natural species, and their sounds are said to be directly connected to the eating, mating, and other behaviors of animals.

The general theme of “seeing” versus “hearing” cuts across the entire spectrum of naturalized, lexicalized musical sounds and is prevalent throughout Lowland South America. In many cases, women and uninitiated children are forbidden to see ritual flutes and other aerophones yet are allowed or even required to hear the music of these instruments and are in some cases even expected to “converse” with them. Keeping instruments out of women and children’s sight but not their hearing also allows male flute players to use the sounds of their instruments to disguise their voices, the sounds of which would easily allow women to identify the men who made it.

The essays in part 2, “Musical Transpositions of Social Relations,” explore some of the ways in which ritual wind instruments and their music enter into local definitions and negotiations of
relations between men and women, kin and affine, and insiders and outsiders. Starting with case studies among the Trio, Wayana, and Waiwai of Guiana, a comparative sociological perspective emerges through three studies of ritual flute music and women’s ritual singing among the Wauja and Mehináku in the Upper Xingu region of Brazil; the Marubo of Brazil; and four Arawak-speaking groups in widely separate regions of Brazil. The playing of aerophones in ritual and secular contexts is frequently associated with shamanic powers of curing and purification; relations between mythic ancestors and their human descendants, both living and dead; and relations between kin and affines. Although for the most part ritual flutes and other aerophones are used to evoke concepts of stability and continuity through celebrating natural and social processes of rejuvenation, the adoption of “Inca”
flutes among the Marubo serves as a foil of “otherness” that indirectly defines “true” or “authentic” Marubo cultural practices.

We conclude with a short section, or “Coda: Historical and Comparative Perspectives,” consisting of two essays, a study of sacred wind instruments in a European museum and a commentary on the ethnographically based studies in parts 1 and 2. What happens to the meaning of ritual wind instruments that have been removed from an indigenous social milieu and placed in museums? Although such preservation of sacred artifacts could be understood as a simple process of alienating them from their original meanings, the study of sacred instruments collected in the northwest Amazon by early twentieth-century German ethnologists and placed in the Museum of Ethnology in Vienna, demonstrates a more complicated process in which sacred meanings are still highly salient.

Several generations of anthropological researchers in Lowland South America have reported on the importance of wind instruments and their music in collective rituals and ceremonies. Yet only in the last thirty or so years have anthropologists trained as ethnomusicologists gone into the field with the specific goals of recording indigenous music and understanding how the production of musical sounds is situated in people’s everyday social and economic activities, their forms of political organization and history, and their ways of conceptualizing nature and cosmos. A 1993 overview of the ethnomusicology of Amazonia concluded that “substantial works on the topic can be counted on the fingers of one hand” (Beaudet 1993: 527, our translation) and included two studies of vocal music among Gê-speaking peoples (Seeger 1987; Aytai 1985), one survey of Nambikwara music (Halmos 1979), and two works on music of the Tupí-speaking Kamayurá (Menezes Bastos 1978, 1989). By 2000, this list had grown to include major new studies of music among the Warao (Olsen 1996), Arawak-speaking Wakuénai (Hill 1993), and Tupí-speak-

Indigenous Ritual Wind Instruments in the History of Western Imagination

Carrying out research on the ritual role of wind instruments in Lowland South America inevitably implies an interest in the ideas and representations found in the accounts by the first European observers. We know, in fact, to what extent these “instruments of the shadows,” as C. Lévi-Strauss (1966) termed that group of instruments played mostly at night, influenced the first chroniclers of the conquest as well as later eyewitnesses in their views of American Indian religion. In the course of history, there were many interpretations of such ceremonies. They have captured the attention of travelers and missionaries alike since the seventeenth century and, more recently, that of ethnographers. The first descriptions saw these rituals as a “religion of the devil” or a false religion at the service of evil forces—an appraisal destined to discredit at once the indigenous beliefs in view of the nascent evangelizing project.¹ The name Yuruparí (jurupari) has often been given to these rituals, since they were already known in many parts of Amazonia as “Yuruparí feasts” during colonial times. The term refers to a mythical hero’s name of Tupí-Guaraní tradition and was adopted by the first missionaries, who rendered its...
meaning as “the devil” in the Catholic religion. Thus any rituals using wind instruments prohibited to women were systematically described in the literature as “Yurupari feasts” or “feasts of the devil.”

We owe to the Jesuit Samuel Fritz the first precise accounts of the existence of such ritual performances in the Amazon at the end of the seventeenth century, namely, the ritual of Guaricaya among the Yurimaguas. In Fritz’s accounts of these rituals, we find the main characteristics that, beginning in the nineteenth century, were reported in the “Yurupari feasts” of the northwest Amazon: secret flutes, visual prohibition for women, ritual flagellation, etc. (Porro 1996, 137–41). Let us read what the missionary wrote:

Remarkable is the fact, that I at this time found out in this village of the Jurimaguas, which is that in a revelry that they were making, I, from the ranch where I was lying, heard a flute played, that caused me so great terror, that I could not endure its sound. When they left off playing that flute I asked what it meant, and they answered me, that they were playing in this manner, to Guaricaya, that was the Devil, who from the time of their ancestors came in visible form, and took up his abode in their villages; and they always made him a house apart from the village within the forest, and there they brought him drink and the sick that he might cure them. Finally enquiring with what kind of face and form he came, the chief, named Mativa, answered: “Father I could not describe it, only that it is horrible, and when he comes all the women with their little ones flee, only the grown-up men remain, and then the Devil takes a whip that for this purpose we keep provided with a leather lash made of the hide of a Sea-Cow, and he flogs us on the breast until much blood is drawn. (Edmundson 1922: 61)

This description emphasizes an element that we encounter today in many Amazonian cultures: the curative power of the flutes (see the Wauja, this volume). This fact suggests a direct and ancient relationship between shamanism and the flute rituals, whose
“breath” or music (or the simple act of seeing them) had the power to cure certain illnesses. Among the contemporary Kalapalo, it is said that many people (including some women) have been cured of serious illnesses by the sacred flutes:

In the Kalapalo village, several individuals are designated *kagutu oto*, by virtue of having been cured by the playing of trumpets during a severe illness. These persons are responsible for announcing when the trumpets are to be played, seeing that there are men to play them, keeping the *kuakutu* (trumpets) in repair, making payment to both players and specialists, and storing the trumpets in their houses when they cannot be played. (Basso 1973: 61)

Among the Bakairi, in contrast, the sacred flutes aid shamans in contacting their own helper spirits: “The spirit that then appeared to him [a shaman apprentice] instructed him how to make a flute which he kept in the sacred flutes house, and gave him a special tune by which he could always call his spirit helper. The novice had then to prove himself by curing some sick person or by finding lost property. If he were successful he became a recognized shaman” (Oberg 1953: 75).

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the Jesuit José Gumilla wrote about the sacred flute rituals. He related it this time to the funerals held by the Saliva of the Orinoco basin. His testimony is remarkable because it establishes the relationship between the flutes and the treatment dispensed toward the dead and because of his precision in describing the instruments, of which he left us a curious graphic representation (Gumilla 1758: 303–10, and plate facing page 303; Mansutti Rodríguez 2006: 11–12). In 1782, another missionary, Jesuit Felipe Salvador Gilij, connected the flute ritual among the Maypure with a kind of “cult to the serpents” (Gilij 1987: 234–38), although later sources talk about a cult toward plants. Alexander von Humboldt, the first scientist to travel to the Arawak region of the Upper Orinoco, described the use of the *botuto* trumpets as part of the ritual of propitiating...
fruits. According to him, the shamans would often play the sacred instruments under palm trees to secure their fertility (Humboldt 1822: 336–39). Humboldt also saw the cult of the botuto as the locus for a possible political transformation of these societies toward hierarchical or more complex models. Humboldt’s study of the Arawak ritual flutes is important in that it initiated studies in the field. As it is well known, Humboldt was acknowledged as the most influential scientist of his time. His works were long considered one of the main sources of scientific knowledge on South America. They were also thought to have had a great impact on the development of modern anthropology, at least in North America, in the early twentieth century. Humboldt’s pioneering work inspired a series of investigators of Amazonia throughout the nineteenth century, especially the German naturalists Carl Friedrich von Martius and Johann Baptist von Spix, and later the German ethnologists Karl von den Steinen, Paul Ehrenreich, Max Schmidt, Konrad Theodor Preuss, Theodor Koch-Grünberg, and Curt Nimuendajú—all of whom followed Humboldt’s steps in becoming interested in indigenous music and ritual.

The first reference to the cult of the Yuruparí as such comes from the writings of Alfred Russell Wallace, who traveled on the Vaupés River in 1850 and 1852 and witnessed the ritual (Wallace 1853). After his testimony, the description of this cult on the part of travelers, missionaries, and ethnographers that explored this region became commonplace (Hugh-Jones 1979: 4–5; Orjuela 1983: 45–69). Koch-Grünberg (1909–10), in particular, became notable in this field when he undertook several trips to Amazonia between the years 1898 and 1924 that allowed him to witness several Yuruparí ceremonies. The recordings of flute music and songs that he made during these trips are the earliest sound recordings from the region.2

During this same period, the outpouring of scientific interest in sacred wind instruments from Amazonia and other regions of the American tropics spilled over into western literature and pop-
ular culture. Oscar Wilde, for example, included a very detailed listing of indigenous musical instruments from Latin America in his novel *The Picture of Dorian Grey*.

He collected together from all parts of the world the strangest instruments that could be found, either in the tombs of dead nations or among the few savage tribes that have survived contact with Western civilizations, and loved to touch and try them. He had the mysterious *juruparis* of the Rio Negro Indians, that women are not allowed to look at, and that even youths may not see till they have been subjected to fasting and scourging, and the earthen jars of the Peruvians that have the shrill cries of birds, and flutes of human bones such as Alfonso de Ovalle heard in Chili, and the sonorous green jaspers that are found near Cuzco and give forth a note of singular sweetness. He had painted gourds filled with pebbles that rattled when they were shaken; the long *clarin* of the Mexicans, into which the performer does not blow, but through which he inhales the air; the harsh *ture* of the Amazon tribes, that is sounded by the sentinels who sit all day long in high trees, and can be heard, it is said, at a distance of three leagues.” (1926: 200–201)

Despite the exoticism and romanticism in Wilde’s literary account of Latin American musical instruments, his list demonstrated a relatively precise knowledge of these artifacts and their social and geographic origins.

Many interpretations of these musical instruments and the ceremonies in which they are played have since been put forth, each one evidently answering to the pressing questions and views common to the times when they were raised, without nonetheless exhausting the theme of the flute rituals. People have seen this ritual as a cult of the ancestors (Goldman 1963), albeit suspecting a certain Andean influence, as well as a rite of passage related to the context of an “initiation into a secret men’s cult” (Hugh-Jones 1979: 7), or simply as a ritual of masculine domination associated in one way or another with the institution of “the men’s
Rejecting all these theses, Reichel-Dolmatoff (1989) proposed his version of the Yuruparí as a rite oriented first and foremost toward the promulgation of exogamy. Recently, the first native ethnographic account of the distinct types of the *dabacuri* flute rituals belonging to the Desana were published by two Desana authors, an accomplishment that entails, without a doubt, the most comprehensive and detailed study of the flute rituals among the Desana (Diakuru and Kisibi 2006).

Nowadays, the tendency is not to consider the flute rituals as a cult of the ancestors or as a symbol of masculine domination, but more as a ritual of growth and fertility that associates both masculine and feminine elements. But more than any other cultural manifestation, the flute rituals could not be extricated enough from the dominant paradigms or prejudices that marked all the distinct historical times, from its definition as a religion of the devil until the more recent interpretations about fertility. In spite of the lack of agreement, it seems there is at least a point of consensus among authors concerning the hypothesis of the Arawak as the center and main axis of diffusion of the sacred flute ceremonials in Lowland South America.

We should remind ourselves that in South Americanist studies, the theme of secret flutes and associated rituals has played an important role in the great classifications by cultural areas in the 1950s, as in the case of the *Handbook of South American Indians* (1946–50). In the model adopted by the editor of the *Handbook*, Julian Steward, the demarcation between the so-called northwest Amazonian tribes and the Montaña tribes follows in a certain way the line marking the presence of this presumed cult of the sacred flutes.

**Instrumentarium Amazonia**

Before entering into a more detailed consideration of the religious and other meanings of ritual wind instruments and their music, we begin with a brief summary of the instruments themselves. Following the lead of Curt Sachs and Erich von Hornbos-
musical instruments can be classified into four broad families according to the manner in which they produce sound. Membranophones, or drums and related instruments, create sound through vibration of a membrane caused by striking or rubbing. Cordophones are stringed instruments on which sounds are produced through striking, rubbing, or plucking a stretched cord. Idiophones, such as rattles and log drums, produce sound by striking or rubbing solid materials without the use of strings or membranes placed under tension. Aerophones are wind instruments in which sound is produced by the passage of a stream of air across the edge of an orifice or through a valve.

A complete survey of indigenous South American musical instruments is provided in *Musical and Other Sound Instruments of the South American Indians: A Comparative Ethnological Study*, by Karl Izikowitz. It is immediately clear that aerophones and idiophones are the two families of instruments most highly developed among indigenous South American peoples. As for cordophones, Izikowitz (1970: 201–206) lists only simple musical bows from Patagonia and eastern Peru and some violins introduced among the Warao, lowland Quechua, and a few other groups by missionaries during the colonial period. However, it appears that the geographic distribution of musical bows and European violins is somewhat broader than Izikowitz believed and extends across an arc from southern Bolivia, where the Weenhayek use musical bows and the Guaraní play violins, and as far north as the Shuar of eastern Ecuador (Beaudet, personal communication, 2007). Likewise, membranophones are relatively scarce in South America, and “The great majority of them are nothing but copies of European military drums” (Izikowitz 1970: 165). Percussive or struck idiophones, however, are much more numerous and well developed in South America and include many kinds of wooden drums, jingle and hollow rattles, and stamping tubes (Izikowitz 1970: 7–160). Aerophones, or wind instruments, are still more numerous and diversified than the percussive idiophones and
include many kinds of valve instruments (trumpets and clarinets) and an even larger variety of flutes (Izikowitz 1970: 207–410).

The family of aerophones breaks down into three broad groups, called “free” aerophones, valve instruments, and flutes. Our primary interest is in exploring wind instruments through which a stream of air is directed into a closed space and made to vibrate either through a valve (clarinets and trumpets) or by splitting the air column against the edge of an orifice (flutes). The case studies include examples of most of the major kinds of valve instruments and flutes listed in Izikowitz’s typology: “simple” and “complex” trumpets, clarinets without stops, flutes without airducts (both with and without stops), and duct flutes (with and without stops).

The most common form of valve instrument in Lowland South America is the trumpet, or a hollow, often tubular resonator with a relatively large aperture into which the lips are tightly compressed and a stream of air causes the lips to vibrate in a valve-like manner. Simple trumpets, or single tubes lacking separate mouthpieces, include the bark trumpets found mainly north of the Amazon River and made by wrapping bark spirally into cone-shaped resonators held together by a framework of sticks attached to the outside of the resonators. In Burst of Breath, we find these bark trumpets among the Wakuénai/Curripaco/Baniwa of the Upper Rio Negro region (see essays by Hill, Journet, and Wright), the Yagua (see Chaumeil), and Apurinã (Ipuriná) (see Wright and Augustat). Complex trumpets, or ones in which a separate mouthpiece or embouchure is attached to a tubular resonator, are represented by surubi (catfish) trumpets of the Wakuénai/Baniwa/Curripaco. In these unique trumpets, a woven basketry tube is covered with melted resin and then attached to a separate mouthpiece (see Hill). Other complex trumpets are the Piaroa trumpets using clay vessels as resonators (see Mansutti Rodríguez) and “roarers,” speaking tubes or megaphones used in rituals among the Yagua (see Chaumeil) and Wayana (see Brightman). Figure 1 shows the geographic distribution of complex trumpets in Lowland South America.