

FUNdamentals: Colombian and Venezuelan Maraca Techniques

Presented by Dr. Andy Miller



Venezuela and Colombia are neighboring countries in South America. Although the Meta and Orinoco Rivers that run through the Eastern Plains of Colombia and Western Plains of Venezuela create the political boundary between these two countries, the people inhabiting these dusty, cattle farming regions, share a lot of culture in common. In both countries, virtuoso harp, cuatro, and maraca players carry the songs of the *llanos* (plains) at folk festivals throughout the geographic region. Along the Caribbean coast of Colombia, the sound of the *Maracón* is heard in the heartbeat of Colombian *Cumbia*.



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Maracas Llaneras - Technique

The *Maracas Llaneras* are an instrument played in the Eastern plains of Colombia and Western plains of Venezuela. They form the rhythmic foundation in the traditional *zoropo* ensemble along with the harp, cuatro, and percussive *zapateado* of the dancers. The songs of *música llanera* often talk about life, love, and the hard work of cattle ranching on the grassland plains.

The maracas are made from the shell of a small dried gourd (totumo) and filled with *Espuma e' sapo* or *capacho* seeds and closed off by securing a wooden handle through the gourd. The seemingly simple construction of the maracas belies their highly expressive musical language in the hands of a virtuoso *Maraquero*.

There are five basic movements that create the articulations of the maracas llaneras:

1) *Golpe abajo* - Downward motion resulting in a dry articulation.

<https://vimeo.com/501579186>

2) *Golpe arriba* - Upward motion resulting in a dry articulation.

<https://vimeo.com/501579313>

3) *Floreo* - Quick oscillations in a forward/backward motion in the wrist resulting in fast tremolo figures.

<https://vimeo.com/501579306>

4) *Escobilla'o* (continuous) - Circular motion in the wrist either clockwise or counter clockwise resulting in a sustained legato articulation.

<https://vimeo.com/501579199>

5) *Escobilla'o* - Lateral motion of the forearm across the front of the body resulting in a quick legato articulation.

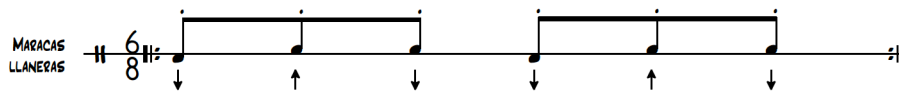
<https://vimeo.com/501579216>

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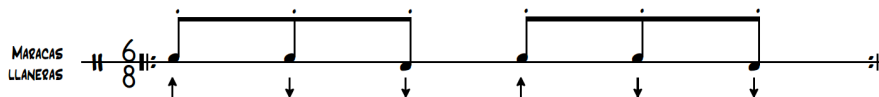
Maracas Llaneras - Rhythms

There are two basic rhythmic systems used in *joropo llanero*.

Por Derecho - <https://vimeo.com/501579295>

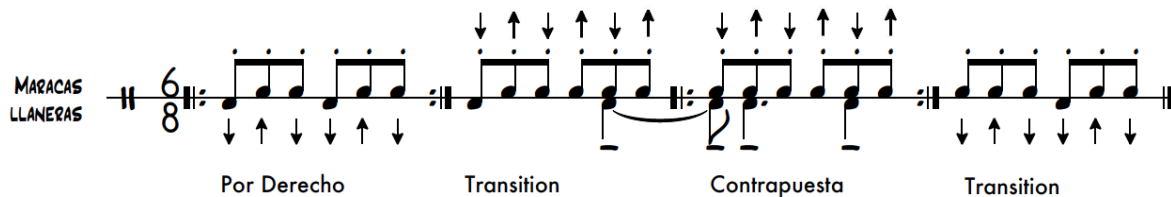


Por Corrio - <https://vimeo.com/501579253>

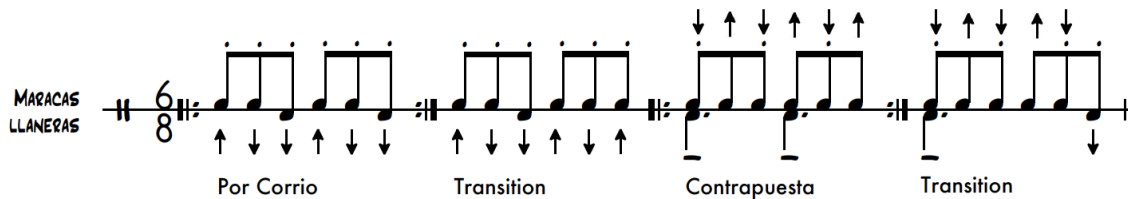


Within these systems there is a second rhythmic formula called *tiempo contrapuesta*.

Por Derecho - Contrapuesta - <https://vimeo.com/501579269>



Por Corrio - Contrapuesta - <https://vimeo.com/501579223>



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Maracón - Technique

The *Maracón* is an instrument played throughout the Caribbean coastal region (*La Costa*) of Colombia. It is most likely of Kogi Indigenous origins, along with the *Gaita* flutes of the region. The *gaitas* and *maracón* are accompanied by three African descendent drums – the *Tambor Alegre*, *Llamador*, and *Tambora* – to form the *Gaita* ensemble renown for playing *Cumbia*. In this music, the mixing of Indigenous, African, and Spanish influence creates a rich Tri-Cultural musical heritage.

The *maracón* is constructed much in the same way as the *maracas llaneras*, only much larger. The *maracón* is traditionally played by the accompaniment *gaita macho* player and takes a keen coordination to play both instruments fluently at the same time.

There are four basic movements to create the articulations of the *maracón*:

- 1) Downward motion resulting in a dry articulation

<https://vimeo.com/502019963>

- 2) Upward motion resulting in a dry articulation

<https://vimeo.com/502019992>

- 3) Lateral motion of the forearm across the front of the body resulting in a legato articulation

<https://vimeo.com/502019977>

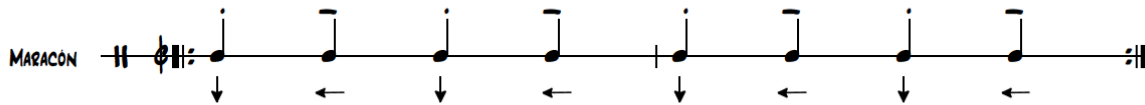
- 4) Quickly oscillating rotation of the forearm and hand around the shell of the *maracón*

<https://vimeo.com/502019997>

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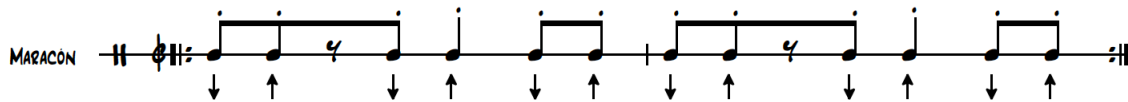
Maracón - Rhythms

There is one basic rhythm played by the maracón for all of the song forms played by the Gaita ensemble including: Cumbia, Porro, Puya, Gaita Larga, and Merengue. This basic rhythm is the glue that holds all of the instruments together and contributes to the concept of *Asunto* - tight and orderly playing among the ensemble.

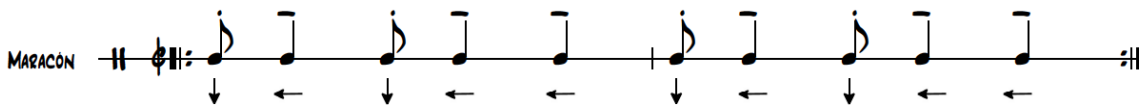


There are many variations that are played in improvisational conversation within the ensemble

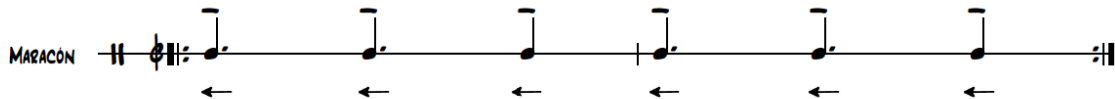
Variation 1



Variation 2



Variation 3



This video demonstrates these variations and others while also playing the gaita macho.

<https://vimeo.com/501910665>

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Listening

Cimarrón! Joropo Music from the Plains of Colombia. Smithsonian Folkways. 2011.

Sí Soy Llanero: Joropo Music from the Orinoco Plains of Colombia. Smithsonian Folkways. 2004.

Y Que Viva Venezuela! Maestros del Joropo Oriental. Smithsonian Folkways. 2009.

Suena Maraquero. Juan Ernesto Laya. EBD Records. 2009.

Maraqueros

Omar Fandiño (Colombia)

Alexis Soto (Venezuela)

Fernando Torres Ramirez (Colombia)

Edmar Casteñada (Colombia)

Manuel Rangel (Venezuela)

Francis Lara (Colombia)

Juan Ernesto Laya (Venezuela)

Grace Loscano "Orito Cantora"
(Colombia)

Method Book

5 Movements are the key: Venezuelan maracas method. Manuel Alejandro Rangel. Maraca Records. 2016. www.manuelmaracas.com

Purchase Maracas

www.manuelmaracas.com

www.maracashop.com

*A special thanks to Fernando Torres Ramirez and Francis Lara for sharing this beautiful music with me and for so generously teaching me the art of maraca playing.

Andy Miller | www.andymillerpercussion.com | andymiller.percussion@gmail.com