

[More From This Issue](#)

[Current Issue](#)

[Back Issues](#)

[Guidelines](#)

Vol 8(1), Mars 1, 2008  
mi40008000262

## The Use of Music in Guarani Shamanistic Rituals

Deise Lucy Oliveira Montardo, interviewed by Gustavo Gattino

By Gustavo Gattino [\[Author bio & contact info\]](#)



### Editors Introduction

Voices Interview Editors Barbara Wheeler and Leslie Bunt have invited me to introduce this interview between Gustavo Gattino, a Music Therapist from Brazil, and Deise Montardo, an anthropologist, who has studied the shamanistic rituals of the Guarani, an indigenous people who live in South America. Some of our readers may recognize the Guarani from the movie "The Mission," which was a beautiful feature film, starring Jeremy Irons, and Robert DeNiro, about the plight of the Guarani in Brazil around 1750, when Spain and Portugal fought over Guarani territory. Many of the Guarani were slaughtered or taken into slavery.

Our editors asked me to introduce this very special interview because of my own personal and scholarly background as an indigenous person. In particular, they have asked me to comment on "shamanistic rituals." In 1977, I participated in the Salish Guardian Spirit Dance Ceremonial, the community shamanistic rituals of the Musqueam people, as part of my own graduate studies in anthropology/ ethnomusicology/psychology. These studies are documented in my first book, *The Mythic Artery* (1982) and greatly influenced the concepts in my second book, *The Field of Play* (1989). Both of these texts have now been incorporated into a recent and more expanded text, published by *Barcelona Publishers* titled *Music and Life in the Field of Play: An Anthology* (2006).

When I asked the shaman why these ceremonials were called "Winter Ceremonials" and performed in the winter, he told me that humans are in-standing creatures and therefore make efficient use of air. Therefore, it was our responsibility to dance and sing in the winter to sustain the Earth's energy for other creatures and plants. It makes a lot of sense. In this interview, you will see similar ideas.

In fact, Mircea Eliade, in his comprehensive study of shamanism around the world, suggests that because shamanism was known by so many cultures from very early in our human existence, and continues today, it may be one of the constants of our human development. Each time we give careful consideration to the shamanistic rituals of a tribe that utilizes their rituals in contemporary time, we are discovering important pieces to the puzzle about how to survive on thrive on this Earth. Shamanism is often referred to as "soul flight." And through this interview, indeed, we have an opportunity to discover the healing rituals of the Guarani through words on a page, if not the type of soul flight, exactly, that characterizes the rather dramatic activity of shamans in enduring rituals.

Influenced by the Enlightenment, many of these mystical practices were outlawed by

### Related Articles

Wheeler, Barbara & Bunt, Leslie (2008).

[Voices Welcomes Interviews](#)

governments, which is certainly the case with the rituals I studied myself, the Salish Guardian Spirit Dance Ceremonials. Thank goodness these rituals were able to survive underground. And in the 1970s, when I did my research, they were part of the tremendous revitalization of Native societies in Canada.

I offer my sincere thanks to Gustavo Gattino for offering this interview in Voices. Hopefully, it will provide a rich platform for discussion and dialogue about how our ancient tribal practices are still relevant today in music therapy. Enjoy!

Carolyn Kenny

## The Guarani Society

The Guarani Society is a traditional indigenous group that has lived in South America for almost 3000 years. This Society has territories in countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay. In the past during the Spanish and Portuguese colonization the Guarani Society lost many territories. The influence of the Guarani Society in the context of Latin American culture is present in their language, music and musical instruments, dance, and everyday life.

Music has a central position for this indigenous group. There is a link between music and health and music is an essential component in the healing processes within the Guarani shamanistic rituals. There are many Guarani concepts and perceptions about music, healing process and health that could be used in Music Therapy (Gattino, 2007). In this way, the experiences and conceptions of the Guarani can aid the music therapist to understand more about music, health and the healing process in the clinical context.

For eight months the Brazilian anthropologist Deise Lucy Oliveira Montardo lived with three Guarani subgroups: Kaiová, Mbyá and Nhandeva. She wrote her thesis about music and shamanism within the Guarani Society. This interview will explain the basic elements relating to music, health and Guarani Shamanism. First, I will describe this research using the words Montardo published in the abstract of her thesis:

The central focus of my study is the music of the shamanist rituals conducted by the Guarani Kaiová, of the Tupi-Guarani linguistic trunk. The three sub-groups of Guarani in Brazil have a total of 40,000 people. The field study had a total duration of eight months during which I lived in the homes of my Guarani Kaiová, Nhandeva and Mbyá informants in the Amambaí and Pirajuy regions in Mato Grosso do Sul State and Mbiguaçu and Morro dos Cavalos in Santa Catarina State. I present a narrative of the life story and of the initiation to Shamanism of the woman who was my principal informant, Odúlia Mendes.

I call attention to how, both in her life as well as in the Guarani creation myth, song and dance are the route through which takes place communication and encounter with the divinities and ancestral creators, and which makes viable the continued survival of the Earth. Through an analysis of the musical material, the words to the songs and the ritual choreography I explore a series of factors of native musical theory. I identify two distinct genres, one related to prayer and the other to war. In the performance analysed, the shaman who conducts the ritual exhorts the participants to listen. In one genre, prayer is related to a sense of health. While they listen, sing and dance there is a polyphony of voices; those of the shaman, the gods and the participants, which alternate while the route is followed. The other genre is accompanied by choreography of fighting and movements of attack and defence that are described by the informants as a training of warrior skills. The Guarani have 500 years of contact with the West (Montardo, 2002).

## Interview

**Gattino:** Could you describe the most essential healing elements in a Guarani shamanistic ritual?

**Montardo:** One of the curative elements existing in the rituals is the aspect that I call prophylactic. These are individual treatments that include music, phytotherapeutic remedies and general advice. But, during the ritual, the collective element also contributes to the notion of a preventative cure. The people sing and dance in order to communicate with their divine gods and protective spirits. Bodies and the ground itself are cleansed and strengthened during the rituals.

There are two musical sorts of songs in the Guarani Shamanistic rituals: the sort of prayer and the sort of war. This sort of prayer evokes devotional feelings and the respect for the Gods. The Guarani society asks for physical and mental health in the sort of prayer. Also they invoke the nature survivor and ask for forces to defend the Society's ideals and traditions. In the sort of War, the Guarani make fight choreographies, attack and defense movements that serve as a training for the warrior's formation. The texts of the songs stimulate the preparation to face challenges and obstacles in the Guarani way of life. Below are two musical examples that illustrate the type of songs used in the Guarani Shamanistic Ritual: *Odúlia 2-N7* and *Odúlia 3- N7*. These song names have been stipulated by Montardo, where in *Odúlia* it's the Shaman woman who is in charge of the the ritual. These examples are derived from the Kaiová Shamanistic Ritual which was witnessed by Montardo. The first song belongs to the sort of pray and the second to the sort of War. The first stave represents the part for the *mbaraka* (a type of rattle) played by the Shaman. The second stave depicts the vocal part which is sung by the Shaman and all the participants. Finally, the third stave represents the part for the *takuapu* (a type of rhythm baton), played by women participants. *Takuapu* is the instrument that supports the rhythm in all these songs. These following examples have been extracted from Montardo's thesis.

**Odúlia 2- N7**

♩ = 104

**mbaraka**

**voices**

**takuapu**

Ko ñe' - e a-mon-do - ko ñe' - e he

a - mon - do - ko ñe - é he Tu - pã u - pe

A - mon - do - ko ñe' - é A - mon - do - ko ñe' - é he A - mon - do - ko

A - mon - do - ko ñe' - é he Tu - pã - va ru - vi - cha u - pe he A - mon - do - ko A - mon - do - ko ñe' - é he

Tu - pã u - pe A - mon - do - ko

a e a e e a e e e ka - tu

Figure 1: *Odúlia 2- N7* score

**Odúlia 3- N7**

♩. 89

**mbaraka**

(continuum)

**voices**

a ei ai ee aii 5x

**takuapu**

**Figure 2: Odúlia 3- N7 score**

**Gattino:** Can you say something about the values of the music in the shamanistic ritual?

**Montardo:** In the existing literature about the Guarani Society value of the word Ñe'ê (meaning sou, in the Guarani language) is often emphasized. To stand upright and to speak are the elements that characterize the nature of a person as conceived by the Guarani. When a child starts to walk and to speak, he is characterized as an individual. This is considered to be correct. However, If we give our attention to the value of music in the Guarani rituals, we will see that the word Ñe'ê is accompanied by music. It's not only a word, but it is a language including music. The musical instruments also "speak" and "teach". The people learn and "study" (the Guarani verb used to talk about the Shaman learning through the music). For example in the initiation the dreams are very important because many songs have been learnt when the person is sleeping. Dreams are very important to all and throughout the entire life. In the Guarani musical context this importance is crucial. It's necessary to emphasize that the word "dream" does not exist in the Guarani language. For the Guarani people dreams are the things that they see and they hear when they are sleeping. The compositions and the individual songs occur at these moments.

The words utilized in the Guarani musical context can be explained within the text of *Odúlia 2- N7* and *Odúlia 3 – N7*, quoted above. The translations are approximations of Guarani language and they are other possible translations.

Odúlia 2- N7  
 I send this word, this message  
 The God of Rain, Thunder and Ray  
 The Lord, the superior of *Tupās* (Gods)  
 Accompany our being way  
 I send this word, this message  
 The God of Rain, Thunder and Ray  
 The Lord, the superior of *Tupās* (Gods)  
 Thus, in this manner

Odúlia 3- N7  
 Balance, deviate, shun your body, my sister  
 Without to feel sorry for anybody  
 Hear well what my sister is

In the Guarani ritual music there are two principal instruments that play in the ceremony. According to Guarani mythology, the sun and the moon play two instruments: the *mbaraka* (the rattle) and the *takuapu* (the rhythm baton). Thus, these instruments have a holy value. The *mbaraka* always is executed by Shaman and by men, while the *Takuapu* is executed by women. Also, the children dance with the *yvyra* (a dancing baton). Below are pictures of the *mbaraka* and *takuapu*.



**Figure 3: Mbaraka**



**Figure 4: Takuapu**

**Gattino:** What actually happens during the shamanistic ritual?

**Montardo:** Well, to answer this question, I will draw on something from my doctoral thesis:

"Through of Mbaraka: Music and Guarani Shamanism", a little ethnographic study where I tried to demonstrate what I understood about the ritual. For me, this question is not only about discussing Guarani rituals, but rituals in general. This is a question that relates to our existence on this Earth. What happens in the rituals? I can describe the choreographies that I saw and the songs I heard. I can tell that the ritual is connected to the rising Sun, beginning at sunset and finishing at sunrise.

As the participants move through the ritual they find ways to meet the gods. In this way they fight with beasts and fight to surpass obstacles. I think that the answers are much more than what I was able to learn.

The Guarani Shamanistic ritual is organized according each subgroup. One overview will be described with the Kaiova Shamanistic ritual entitled *Jeroky*. There are many types of *Jeroky*, however and here is an explanation of the stages of the quotidian *Jeroky*.

1. The participants arrive on *Jeroky Rupa* (ritual space) and make a reverence to the *jeroky marangatu*, (holy altar, located on central point of *Jeroky Rupa*).
2. *Mymby* played by Shaman husband (blow musical instrument), that marks the beginning of the ritual.
3. Prayer songs and choreographic execution.
4. War songs and choreographic execution.
5. Final song and the closing of the ritual.

The Shaman commands the execution of the songs and choreographies. The choreographies and their respective variations occur according to new information that the Shaman receives from the deities. One example of choreography will be explained in the next lines. It's an example of *yvyra'ija* (war songs with fast choreographies). In this example, the participants surround the altar (*yvyra marangatu*) and pass the *mbaraka* under the knees, right and left, alternately.

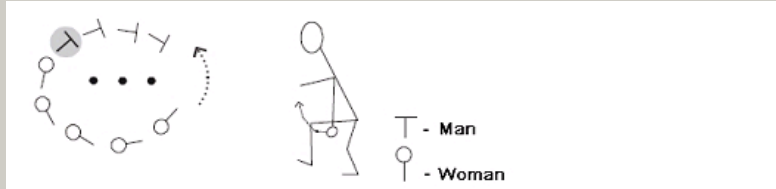


Figure 5: Yvyra'ija choreography scheme and picture

**Gattino:** What are the principal attributes of the Guarani shaman?

**Montardo:** The ideal is the performance of the Shaman couple. Not necessarily husband and wife but it could be mother and son or father and daughter. Also, the couple works with ten assistants (five men and five women). The model of Guarani social organization is based on the big family, in other words, the grandmothers and grandfathers with their sons and daughters-in-law, or daughters and sons-in-laws, and their grandsons, all like boughs of potato plant. The philosophy concerning speaking with the grandsons is the same as used in the development of the potato. Therefore, the responsibility of the elderly couple is to take care of the family, in moral terms and of their health. The couple gives advices, treats and insults in some cases.

**Gattino:** What are the functions of Guarani shaman in the shamanistic ritual?

**Montardo:** He has the function of teacher and master. He decides upon the repertoire to be used and takes care of the group. He organizes and takes care of the objects that are used and the ritual place.



Figure 6: Kaiová Shamanistic Ritual in the begging moments



**Figure 7: Jeroky Rupa**

## Closing Comments

From day to day the Guarani Society fights to survive, because they are losing their territories and, for the majority of people, their importance in the postmodern context. Certain initiatives such as Montardo's research give a new chance for other people to know and to learn about the Guarani wisdom. Music Therapy professionals can collaborate with this mission, thereby giving new hope to the survival of Guarani.

## References

Gattino, G.S. (2007). Contributions of Guarani Music and Shamanism to the Latin American Music Therapy. In *III Latin American Music Therapy*, Chile University, Santiago.

Montardo, Deise Lucy Oliveira (2002). *Through of Mbaraka: Music and Guarani Shamanism*. Doctor Thesis. College of Letters, Philosophy, and Human Sciences (FFLCH), USP, São Paulo.

---

### To cite this page:

Gattino, Gustavo (2008). The Use of Music in Guarani Shamanistic Rituals: Deise Lucy Oliveira Montardo, interviewed by Gustavo Gattino. *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy*. Retrieved from <http://www.voices.no/mainissues/mi40008000262.php>

### Moderated discussion

*Add your comments and responses to this essay in our Moderated Discussions. Contributions should be e-mailed to either **Joke Bradt** or **Thomas Wosch***

View contributions on this essay: [yet no contribution]

### Guidelines for discussions



©2008. VOICES. All rights reserved