

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

La Marimba Esmeraldeña:

Music and Ethnicity on Ecuador's Northern Coast

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Master of Arts


in Ethnomusicology

by

Jonathan Larry Ritter

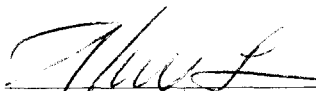
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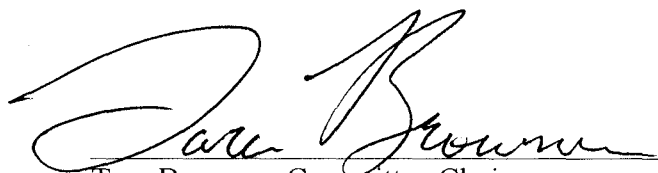
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Timothy Rice



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Steven Loza



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Tara Browner, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

1998

*A Petita Palma, Alberto Castillo, y su  
grupo “Tierra Caliente”  
con cariño*

*y*

*a todos los marimberos quien han  
continuado esa hermosa tradición*

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

La Marimba Esmeraldeña:  
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Professor Tara Browner, Chair

For more than four centuries, Afro-Ecuadorian life in the coastal province of Esmeraldas was marked by its isolation and resistance to dominant highland political and economic powers. This autonomy was reflected musically in the marimba dance, which operated on a local level as a social and religious event to enact cultural and gender mores in a ritual form. In the 1950s the province of Esmeraldas came under increased scrutiny by Ecuadorian highlanders, and a trio of processes— industrialization, nationalism, and tourism—converged to radically alter the Afro-Ecuadorian economic, cultural, social, and musical way of life. The impact of highland nationalism, and the efforts to forge a single “Ecuadorian” identity, played a substantial role in the decontextualization of the marimba dance and its current status as a folklore event, divorced from its earlier expression of community values.

This thesis will place musical change in the Esmeraldas province in the larger context of these economic and political transformations. The history of marimba performance reflects the multiple ways that Afro-Ecuadorians have incorporated and resisted the directions imposed upon them by dominant, hegemonic forces. New movements, such as the undercurrent of black ethnic nationalism running through a recent marimba festival in Esmeraldas, are reformulating the parameters of Afro-Ecuadorian musical space. Nevertheless, the increasing hum of the global economy and the continued presence of Esmeraldas within the Ecuadorian state ensure that outside economic and cultural forces will continue to shape and mediate the Afro-Ecuadorian musical sphere.