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La Nueva Canción and Its Significance

During the 1960s and 1970s, profound political changes were taking place in Chile and in other parts of Latin America. New political and social movements of students, workers, peasants, urban shantytown dwellers, and other groups mobilized to demand rights and political inclusion along with deeper democratization and structural changes in elitist systems. The 1960s were marked by the Cuban Revolution and the war in Vietnam, and many young people in Chile, as in other countries, were strongly anti-imperialist and in favor of progressive social change. These popular movements coalesced to form a powerful force that was instrumental in electing the democratic socialist Salvador Allende president in 1970. Allende's goal was to preside over a peaceful, constitutional path to socialism in Chile. He served for three turbulent years, attempting to implement a program to reduce social inequalities, until he was overthrown in the U.S.-backed military coup of 1973.

Political and Social Context

In Chile in the early 1960s, social divisions were severe. Some 25 percent of the population had access to sewage services, and only 10–11 percent of rural populations had supplied drinking water. In 1960, 16.4 percent of the population was illiterate.¹ Tens of thousands of people had built crude, leaky shacks to live in on the outskirts of Santiago that lacked plumbing, running water, and electricity. Workers had few rights and lived in overcrowded

tenements, shantytowns, or single-room company housing; miners lived in company towns near the mines, enduring harsh conditions. In the 1950s and 1960s, workers in the textile mills labored in humid, hot air full of cotton dust, with poor wages, tyrannical managers, no job security, and threats of violence by company thugs. Women were paid 30 percent less than men for the same work, and some found themselves subject to the “affections” of the boss.² Workers could be fired arbitrarily and lose their company rooms.

By the 1960s, *las poblaciones*—the shantytowns around Santiago—had swollen in number. Unemployed peasants and workers had flocked to the capital looking for work in several major waves of urbanization, and by the 1950s, they were organizing, demanding basic services and labor rights. Wealthy families that had ruled the provinces for generations owned huge tracts of land. Relations between the large landowners and the peasants in the countryside were semi-feudal, although capitalist mechanization was beginning to penetrate, reducing the labor necessary on the estates. In the mid-1960s, the large estates controlled 80 percent of all agricultural land, even though they made up only 7 percent of farms, while small farmers (37 percent of all farms) occupied only 0.2 percent of available land.³ The *patrón* of the large estates provided basic housing (usually without electricity or plumbing) and a company store (with inflated prices), and sometimes a chapel, a school, or a clinic, but peasants and rural workers often were paid in scrip rather than cash. They were punished if they tried to obtain goods elsewhere. Moreover, the votes of the peasants belonged to the *patrón*, a mechanism that kept conservative politicians in power for generations.

Students and workers, increasingly militant in the 1960s, called for nationalization of Chile’s natural resources. U.S. copper giants controlled the export sector, and Chile was dependent on the foreign exchange earnings provided by copper. U.S. corporations held private investments worth \$1.1 billion in Chile in 1970, and the country’s steel, copper, electricity, oil, and transport systems relied on replacement parts and machinery from the United States.⁴ University students were also engaged in struggles to reform the university and to reorient its mission toward solving national problems, including Chile’s underdevelopment and the exclusion of the popular sectors. Idealistic students traveled to remote areas of the country to share their skills in the spirit of social solidarity and political commitment. Women began to demand respect and equality and assume new roles in the political and social movements. Chile was changing, from the major cities to the most remote rural areas.

La Nueva Canción, or New Song, was born in the midst of these major social, political, and economic transformations in Chile and in the world. Young musicians created new forms of politically aware and socially conscious music, rooted in Latin American folk traditions, that spoke to the

struggles and aspirations of the time. The lyrics were poetic and stirring; the music, a haunting blend of indigenous wind and stringed instruments—some dating from the ancient Inca empire—and little-known Latin American musical forms. The music was emotional, ethereal, ancient and modern at the same time, combining folk roots with original innovations. *La Nueva Canción* also embodied an alternative worldview: that of a socially just future for millions of Chileans who had long been politically and socially excluded. That is, New Song was part of, and expressed, the social reality of Chile and, more broadly, of Latin America, and the radical-democratic and socialist projects of the era. The new music first found a broad audience among politicized and socially aware students, but it soon spread to other sectors, including unionists, rural workers and campesinos, and shantytown dwellers around Santiago. New Song was enmeshed with the mobilizations and ideals of the time, both reflecting and contributing to the deep political and social change that marked the era.

In this book, I argue that *la Nueva Canción* played a key role in mobilizing and uniting people in a common cause. The music helped to motivate and sustain the political and cultural participation of hundreds of thousands of people and gave voice to the rising social demands in Chile. The art and music of the time captured the ethos of expanding counterhegemonic movements: movements that challenged entrenched power relations in Chile, the dominant, or hegemonic, system of power. This hegemonic system and its challengers are discussed below in the context of the theories of Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist from the early twentieth century who wrote extensively on the importance of cultural power in maintaining exclusionary, elitist capitalist systems.

New Song musicians drew from folk rhythms and instruments of Latin America, transcending borders, to create original songwriting and musical departures: modern, complex arrangements and harmonies (including multiple voices and dissonant notes), instrumental interludes, and poetic lyrics that spoke movingly of the burning social and political issues of the day. As the musicologist Rodrigo Torres described the New Song musicians, “Their art is a dynamic art, evolving permanently; it begins with tradition and transcends it.”⁵ José Seves, originally of the group Inti-Illimani and then with Inti-Illimani Histórico,⁶ explained that New Song was “inspired by older Chilean and Latin American musical and poetic frameworks, giving birth to a new song, more current and modern in its elements but maintaining the original essence.” The musicians essentially reinvented and modernized Latin American folk music, creating new musical genres. The lives of Latin America’s humble people—*el pueblo*—were highlighted, lives that had been ignored previously. The young musicians combined sounds and instruments from Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Cuba, Peru, Venezuela, and Argentina,

as well as Chile,⁷ playing the instruments and adapting the music in ways that were, finally, distinctively Chilean. The ancient indigenous instruments from the Andean regions of South America—the bamboo flute called the *queña*; the mystical pan pipes known as *sicus* in the Aymara language (or *zampoña* in Spanish); the *bombo legüero* drum; the lute-like *charango*, made from an armadillo shell—produced one signature sound of *la Nueva Canción*: Andean music. *La Nueva Canción* also incorporated campesino styles and rhythms from Chile’s countryside and other traditional music from other Latin American countries.

Most of the young musicians were talented and prolific songwriters; indeed, a central contribution of the New Song movement was the wealth of original music created by the artists, reshaping the musical culture of Chile. “You had to compose songs, write lyrics with political consciousness. This defined *la Nueva Canción*,” said the singer-songwriter Ángel Parra, son of the groundbreaking folk singer and composer Violeta Parra, known as the “mother” of *la Nueva Canción*, and a giant of the movement himself.⁸ “It was the political situation that stimulated us to write songs, what was happening every day in those years[;] the situation itself nurtured our songs. . . . We were like reporters, some more like ‘pamphleteers,’ some more poetic, some more idealistic, but we were all reporters of a social reality. . . . We realized the dream of Simón Bolívar with our music: we sang Chilean music with instruments from many Latin American countries.” The musicians also wrote songs of love, of tenderness, and of hope, said Ricardo Venegas of the emblematic group Quilapayún.⁹ “There were no limits in *la Nueva Canción*,” he added. “We were open to various musical styles.” Seves stressed that beyond the political songs, there was a “variety of themes aimed at describing more broadly the characteristics of *lo chileno* [the Chilean essence or reality] and, by extension, the Latin American. . . . [The music] constructed a self-image or self-visualization.”¹⁰ The songs spoke to people’s lives, and New Song incorporated multiple instruments and developed instrumental music, something new in Chilean popular music, Horacio Durán, an original member of Inti-Illimani (now of Inti-Illimani Histórico), pointed out.¹¹

The musicians were motivated by their passion for the music and by the spirit of the era; they were independent, socially and politically committed, and militant. Many musicians joined parties of the Left, especially the youth organization of the Partido Comunista Chileno (Communist Party of Chile; PC), known as Juventudes Comunistas (Young Communists) or La Jota. Chile’s political system, for various decades of the twentieth century, had been relatively open to parties across the political spectrum, including Marxist parties. The PC—which so alarmed Washington in these Cold War years—had a long history of democratic participation in Chile, interrupted several times when it was proscribed by the government (in such

periods, the PC operated under other names). Members of the PC had served in Congress and in government ministries. The PC had deep roots in the unionized working class and in the cultural life of the country. In the 1950s and 1960s the PC was a strong proponent of deepening Chile's democracy by incorporating excluded social sectors (shantytown dwellers, workers, peasants) and promoting a popular, democratic revolution by peaceful means.¹² The party was a strong supporter of Allende's vision of a constitutional and democratic road to socialism. Many beloved poets, intellectuals, and artists were PC members or sympathizers, including the Nobel Prize winner Pablo Neruda; the poet (or, as he preferred, anti-poet) Nicanor Parra; the musician-composers Víctor Jara and Violeta Parra; and many others. While not all of the musicians of *la Nueva Canción* were affiliated with La Jota, virtually all were of the Left. The movement was by no means monolithic, however. Just as the musicians played different styles and genres of music, they also held different political and artistic ideas. This at times led to debates and differences, both artistic and political, within the movement.

Many artists of *la Nueva Canción* criticized the increasing influence of rock-and-roll music from the United States and Europe, seen as a cultural invasion that was extinguishing Chilean traditions, as well as the "typical folk music" of Chile, a form of commercialized folk that portrayed the countryside in an idyllic light. The power of the oligarchy was reflected in this *huaso* music. (The term *huaso* [horseman] symbolized the values of the owners and foremen of Chile's large estates.) Groups such as Los Cuatro Huasos (formed in 1927) and Los Huasos Quincheros (formed in 1937) popularized this form of music. While much of it was pleasant to hear, it painted an idealized portrait of life in the haciendas, without hunger, illiteracy, disease, cruelty, or misery or any mention of the hierarchical, semi-feudal, and authoritarian power relations that existed between owner and peasant. Such "typical" folk exalted the values of the landowning class in conservative ways: male dominance (*machismo*), family, God, and country.¹³ This was the Chilean music that dominated the airwaves and Independence Day celebrations in September. Until the 1960s, singers and dancers who performed this music dressed in the costumes of the landowners. The peasants were rarely visible, but when they were, they were portrayed as happy and content with their lot. The upper classes valued this "typical" Chilean folk and the refined music of Europe.¹⁴

The New Song movement represented a rising challenge to this hegemonic conception of life in Chile. Culture became an arena of political contestation and hegemonic-counterhegemonic struggle—that is, a struggle between the dominant, or hegemonic, political, economic, and cultural system and ascendant popular movements that challenged those relations of power—although the musicians of *la Nueva Canción* were not necessar-

ily conscious of this.¹⁵ In essence, *la Nueva Canción* began to contest, and reconfigure, the elite, exclusionary sense of identity that prevailed in the dominant culture. The music played a crucial role in building a broader, more inclusive vision that valorized Chile's, and Latin America's, working and peasant classes, *el pueblo*.

The Roots of *la Nueva Canción*

The media and the upper classes of Chile generally scorned the authentic music and art of Latin America's rural and working classes and indigenous peoples, deeming them of little value. As Thomas Turino points out, "The greater institutional support for, and value placed on, elite arts as opposed to popular and so-called folk arts [marks] class distinctions."¹⁶ In the 1960s, many young people began to link this cultural domination with oligarchic rule and U.S. imperialism. The young artists also rejected the notion of music as a commodity or a commercial endeavor. Following earlier pioneers of socially conscious folk music, especially the Argentine singer-songwriter Atahualpa Yupanqui and the Chilean Violeta Parra, the New Song musicians sought their own roots among the peoples of Chile and Latin America. Their music was part of a rediscovery of the significance of Latin America and its popular cultures. New Song communicated a new set of values of popular power, solidarity, and social justice in the struggle against underdevelopment and oppression. There was an enormous sense of recognition and validation of the music among Chileans, despite the fact that New Song was largely absent from the mass media. The music and the lyrics captured the sorrows, the suffering, and the hopes that ordinary Chileans were actually living and experiencing. The songs made visible the social injustices in the rural and urban areas, incorporating the large majority of Chileans. New Song represented a novel form of political communication in the country. It reflected the rise of new social sectors and movements and the rapid transformation of Chilean society, a new society being born within the old.

Musicians such as Violeta Parra and her children Ángel and Isabel, along with Víctor Jara, Rolando Alarcón, Patricio Manns, Aparcoa, Lonquimay, Los Curacas, Tiempo Nuevo, Los Amerindios, Inti-Illimani, Quilapayún, Payo Grondona, "Gitano" Rodríguez, Tito Fernández, and Illapu, among many other soloists and groups, made up the New Song movement (although there is some debate about whom to include in *la Nueva Canción*). They were simultaneously social communicators, historians, teachers, organizers, and translators of popular aspirations. They consciously sought to recapture and renovate Chilean and Latin American traditions and music as part of an effort to build a different consciousness and way of life, an effort that grew to reflect enormous hope and energy. The very names of the musical

groups, drawing from indigenous languages, and their “look”—for example, the ponchos they wore—validated the invisible history of Latin America. The lyrics of many of the songs spoke of the lives of urban and rural workers and their aspirations for freedom, self-determination, and social justice; of forgotten struggles of workers against powerful landlords or bosses; of the suffering of the marginalized. That is, the music expressed the lived human experience of large sectors of society who lacked a voice or official recognition. As the movement grew, the very act of bringing thousands of people together in stadiums and other popular venues created new forms of communication and assembly, a sense of unity, and new environments of social criticism in Chile.

Apart from the dominant culture reflecting the interests of the powerful, the campesinos, the workers, and indigenous communities had always had their own cultural expressions. Yet much traditional folk music tends to be repetitious, even monotonous; as Turino has shown, folk music was born in participatory and egalitarian cultures. The social function of the music was to encourage participation and a communal ethos.¹⁷ The New Song musicians “urbanized” and made more complex indigenous Andean music as well as other folk forms, such as campesino music from the central and southern regions of Chile. New Song musicians created sophisticated combinations of five or six instruments and added innovative chord structures and progressions; complex forms of harmony; and changes in tempo, rhythm, or key. As Ricardo Venegas of Quilapayún noted, “The folk songs in their purest form are, let’s say, musically less interesting. What has to be done is to take some elements, work with them a little, change the rhythm or the melody, add a stanza to make them more interesting. These songs are very simple, even monotonous, because people sang them that way: they were used in ceremonies or wakes, such as the song ‘Rin de Angelito.’ . . . Musically they were monotonous. You have to elaborate, really re-creating the songs. . . . This is what Violeta [Parra] did.”¹⁸ The New Song music communicated a connection with the authentic lifestyles of *los pueblos* of Latin America, and an alternative to the coldness of capitalist market relations.¹⁹ Within the Chilean Left there was also a legacy of radical-popular songs from the Italian resistance and the Spanish Civil War. (Thanks to the efforts of the government of President Aguirre Cerda and the diplomat Pablo Neruda, a number of Spanish Republicans had escaped from the fascist onslaught in Spain and settled in Chile.) New Song musicians recorded some of these songs in the 1960s, along with songs from the Mexican revolution.

The folk music of Chile’s countryside changed form as one traveled from the North to the South, with different variations of *la cueca*, the traditional music and dance of Chile, for example. But the unstylized music of the rural and urban working classes was not considered art until it was “discov-

ered” in the 1940s and 1950s by forerunners of the New Song movement—especially Margot Loyola, Violeta Parra, Gabriela Pizarro, and Héctor Pavez—who collected Chilean folk songs and brought them to urban audiences. Moreover, in the 1950s and 1960s Chile’s changing society provided a transformed political, social, and cultural context within which folk music and art were newly valued. Chilean folk music and dance began to be sung, performed, and recorded by individuals and groups such as Cuncumén, a music and dance troupe directed by Loyola whose name in the Mapuche language means murmuring water,²⁰ and Millaray, a group led by Pizarro that performed music from the island of Chiloé. In the 1950s and 1960s, emerging popular movements were hungry for authentically Latin American music and dance that spoke to their experience and evoked their roots. Keith Sawyer points out that forms that once were not considered art (e.g., folk music) can become appreciated as art when the sociocultural system changes.²¹ The rise of the New Song movement and other, similar movements around the world was linked to the political spirit of the 1960s. Global transformations and new political winds were accompanied by reawakened interest in folk music and art; politically conscious movements embraced them as a means of asserting Latin American identity and resisting the barrage of U.S. cultural exports.

Interest in popular music (music of the people) and similar folk revivals were appearing throughout the Americas in this period. Atahualpa Yupanqui was an early forerunner and a giant in Argentina, despite being persecuted by the Peronist government for his communist politics. Mercedes Sosa and Armando Tejada Gómez, among others, were folk singers who founded *el Nuevo Cancionero* in Argentina in 1963. In Cuba, Carlos Puebla, Pablo Milanés, and Silvio Rodríguez were central figures in *la Nueva Trova*; in Uruguay, Daniel Viglietti and Alfredo Zitarrosa popularized Uruguayan folk music; in Brazil, Chico Buarque created a wealth of socially conscious songs. “*La Nueva Canción* was really a continental phenomenon,” said Eduardo Carrasco, musician and director of Quilapayún.²² “In Brazil, in Argentina, Ecuador, Cuba, [and] later in Nicaragua, there were similar movements everywhere, a new culture of protest music, political music. It was part of a larger cultural movement that included the ‘Latin American boom’ in literature—Julio Cortázar, Mario Vargas Llosa, Gabriel García Márquez, magical realism, Casa de las Américas. The movement became global; in fact, we had contacts with musicians in Europe, in the United States, such as Pete Seeger and many others. . . . Our roots were in Latin America as a whole.” In the 1950s and 1960s in the United States, too, there was a revival of folk music that drew from the class-conscious songs of Woody Guthrie and included Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, and the early Bob Dylan.

In Chile, the New Song movement became particularly important

because it was deeply fused with powerful, organized political and social movements in the struggle for structural change. The music expressed political critiques and alternative visions of the future in a popular form, critiques and visions silenced by the mass media and conservative governments. New Song helped to create, unite, and sustain political and social communities that were politically active and significant. Gradually, as the music filtered north, it entranced and inspired people in Europe and the United States, as political polarization in the Cold War, big power interventions, and spreading capitalist penetration provoked popular and leftist reactions worldwide.

The Culture of Participation

By the late 1960s, an unprecedented sense of involvement and participation was growing in Chile, in a nascent “people’s culture” that was accessible to everyone, even the tens of thousands who could not read or write. Many young people were interested in folk or rock guitar, influenced by the Beatles and by Chilean rock-and-roll and popular song known as the *Nueva Ola* (New Wave).²³ The New Song musicians also helped to bring folk music and guitar playing to masses of people in Chile. Suddenly everyone was involved—or wanted to be involved—in artistic expression, creativity, singing, and collective music making, and everyone played guitar or wanted to learn. Joan Jara, a dancer who participated in the movement (and the wife of the celebrated *Nueva Canción* singer Víctor Jara) wrote: “It was an incredible upsurge of creative activity in people who had never before been encouraged to express themselves and in an age where radio and television tended to turn people into passive listeners. The song movement was now much more than a group of well-known artists. It seemed a whole people had learned to sing.”²⁴

José Seves described his trip to the South of Chile as a student, organized by the State Technical University (Universidad Técnica del Estado; UTE), to teach guitar to scores of students in the spirit of popular education of the time:

It was part of the autonomy of the university to promote this sort of initiative. . . . The Technical University was a state university, with many branches throughout the country. We in Valdivia were the last center, but there was a lot of territory to the South. One of the things we did, before and during the government of the Unidad Popular [Popular Unity; UP], was to go to an *escuela de temporada* [seasonal school], as it was called, in the summer. Professors went from each of the engineering specializations, and a school was set up for a month or two. I went or someone from the *peña* in Valdivia went [*peñas*

were intimate cultural centers where folk music was played] to create a dance group or teach guitar. We taught guitar while others taught electrical repairs in the house, basic but important. The final product was the creation of a site with university programs. . . . Once we went to an *escuela de temporada* that was very isolated, near Puerto Aysén. . . . The time that we went from UTE, Valdivia, the courses were full. I remember having a class of one hundred guitar students. I spent the whole day with my hands on the guitar, teaching groups of twenty at a time. The guitars in the local music stores were completely sold out.²⁵

Culture was increasingly democratized during the 1960s and under the UP government (1970–1973) as it became an arena in which masses of people could, and did, participate.

Violeta Parra, a woman of humble origins in the countryside who knew the struggles and afflictions of Chile's poor, played a crucial role in the emergence of *la Nueva Canción*.²⁶ She began to sing about the lives of ordinary Chileans, including the indigenous Mapuche of the South, in a way that was unusual and riveting in the 1950s. As explained by Max Berrú, an Ecuadoran by birth who moved to Chile as a student and became an original member of Inti-Illimani:

In *la Nueva Canción*, one must recognize a fundamental figure, Violeta Parra, because Violeta, after doing a long investigation of the music of the campesinos, began to compose songs of the countryside, where she speaks of the life of the rural people: their frustrations, their disappointments, their struggles. . . . She was a woman who was an incredible artist, who wrote in a way that was simple but very profound. Moreover, she taught us the rhythms of other countries. She taught us instruments of other countries. She opened up a musical world to those of us who formed part of this movement.²⁷

Similarly, Horacio Salinas of Inti-Illimani (and later of Inti-Illimani Histórico) said:

La Nueva Canción has a soul, which is essential, without which one cannot imagine this movement, and that soul is Violeta Parra. . . . [W]hat she did in the 1950s and 1960s in Chile was simply to transform all song. . . . It's the testimony of an incredible artist who knows the reality of Chilean music and, through her compositions, transformed completely the idea we had of what folkloric song, the patrimonial song of Chile, is. After Violeta, a completely new page was written in the history of the music of Chile. *La Nueva Canción* can-

not be imagined without this personality, without Violeta [Parra], because what she did was open the profound, huge window toward creation, departing from the music called “folklore” and introducing the life of the people, the history of the people, through the themes of her song. Until then, the music called folklore—Chilean music, in quotation marks—was *una música paisajista* [a scenic view of the countryside], bucolic music, with some songs that were very pretty, but that gave no space to the people, the history of Chile.²⁸

The New Song movement continued this focus on the lives of peasants and workers and the injustices committed against them by landowners and bosses.

The emerging social-political progressive movement in the 1960s, of which New Song was a key part, had a deeply democratic view: that all people were creative; that all should have the freedom and opportunity to learn and practice music and the arts as means of self-expression and collective creativity. The music was embedded in new, egalitarian social relationships: all people were recognized as equal and valuable in an altered environment of respect and social equity, a life-changing event for peasants and workers who previously had been invisible, marginalized, and excluded. Suddenly, control of the culture and its power to reach masses of people was escaping the hands of the elite. People involved in the struggle for social change had found a means to harness the profound powers of mass communication inherent in song, as part of a counterhegemonic movement that defied the existing structures of power. The music not only empowered people who were learning to play. It also stirred the fires of resistance. It spoke of the indomitability of the human spirit and the historical ability of masses of people to create social change. The music offered a critique of the inequalities of capitalist society and the distortions of dependency and imperialism and expressed the yearning for a new socially oriented society.

The Music of Commitment

The New Song movement came “from below,” arising naturally and spontaneously from multiple cultural and artistic influences and popular roots. It was not organized in any top-down way; nor was it led or directed by any entity or political party, although the PC and La Jota provided important opportunities and support for the movement. Many of the young musicians were informally trained or self-trained, although a few studied at the University of Chile’s Conservatory of Music. I use the term “movement” in this book to capture the sense of a decentralized mobilization of artists, without formal leadership or headquarters, but loosely united in a recognizable and common cultural effort and political cause.

The origins of the New Song movement lay in the passion for the music among the youth of the 1960s generation, their social consciousness and political commitment, and their fascination with discovering the rich heritage of Latin American music. “There was a very deep cultural change,” said Horacio Durán, “and it never was an organized movement, not at all: it was an artistic movement, undefined politically, without an organization. New Song was a very spontaneous movement. It developed like those great rivers that begin with small streams and tributaries and become a powerful flow.”²⁹ Similarly, Jorge Coulon, another founding member of Inti-Illimani, wrote that *la Nueva Canción* had no “headquarters, departments or infrastructure, there was never a meeting or an attempt to form an organization. . . . Neither was the music a homogenous expression of genre or style.”³⁰ As John Street points out, however, institutions and networks “are key to creating what can often seem to be ‘spontaneous.’”³¹ During the course of my research, a central area of inquiry was the relationship of the music and the New Song movement to political institutions.

Another transformative development in the 1960s was the changing social role and self-perception of that role by artists, musicians, and poets in movements for social change. Popular musicians, artists, dancers, and theater groups began to rethink their place in society and the purpose of their art. Many decided to dedicate their art to advancing the interests of *el pueblo* and representing their voices—to take their art beyond the individual and into the social domain. Most important, they decided to engage and motivate people to participate in culture themselves by learning to play an instrument, sing, paint, or act in theater troupes. Seeing themselves as intellectuals and activists as well as artists, they infused their art with social content and revolutionary commitment.³² In the spirit of collective effort, and reflecting the socialist and radical-democratic values of anti-individualism and anti-consumerism, “people’s artists” came together to bring their art to the people and create a popular culture that reshaped the identity of the nation. Víctor Jara gave up a successful career as a theater director because he realized that his songs and his guitar reached masses of people in ways the more exclusive theater did not.³³ In groups such as Quilapayún and Inti-Illimani, the presentation of the music itself reflected solidarity and a collective ethos: no one was a “star,” and all sang, often in call-and-response forms, in unison, or in harmonies that included all the voices. The black ponchos of Quilapayún and the red ones of Inti-Illimani presented a dramatic, unified appearance and an egalitarian spirit. The poncho expressed Latin American identity; it was traditionally worn by the campesino, not the landowner, thus connoting unity with the campesinos and working classes.³⁴ The indigenous names of many of the groups were a stark contrast to the English-language names of many Chilean rock soloists and groups such as Peter Rock and Los Blue

Splendor, who often also sang in English, and of the “typical” folk groups, which often used the term “Huasos” in their names. The New Song musicians and artists participated in political activities alongside their art in ways that were massive and new in the country.

In addition, the cultural explosion of *la Nueva Canción* interested conservatory-trained classical musicians and composers such as Luis Advis, Sergio Ortega, Gustavo Becerra, Fernando García, and Celso Garrido, among others. They began working with the young people creating New Song, blending the classical and the popular for the first time, fusing elements of each together to produce an original, more complex, stirringly beautiful form of popular music in Chile. For example, Luis Advis, a composer who was not a political activist, worked closely with New Song musicians to create intricate and emblematic works such as *Cantata Santa María de Iquique* (released by Quilapayún in 1970), a set of songs, with a spoken narrative, that told the story of a massacre of miners and their families by security forces in 1907, and *Canto para una Semilla* (Song for a Seed; recorded by Inti-Illimani and Isabel Parra in 1972), a unified work that put to music Violeta Parra’s autobiographical *décimas* (poetry derived from Spanish tradition, with stanzas of ten lines and specific rhyming patterns). These works incorporated symphonic, folk, and indigenous elements, producing a unique and exquisite hybrid of musical styles. This sort of collaboration was another key part of the explanation for the burst of creativity that characterized the era.³⁵ Overall, it was a time of optimism, joy, creativity, discovery, and experimentation; of social mobilization and public involvement; and of significant democratic advances in Chile. It seemed that the barriers to the full expression of humanity were being overcome.

The New Song movement became closely linked to socialist Salvador Allende’s presidential campaign in 1969–1970 and the impressively broad UP coalition, which united a number of leftist and center-leftist parties. “Culture Won’t Be for a Few—It Will Be for All” was a slogan of the Allende campaign. Allende’s “Forty Measures”—the first points of his political program—contained a clause (number 40) on the new concept of culture for the masses of people. The New Song movement played an important role in popularizing Allende’s program and his candidacy.

Analyzing the New Song Movement

What was the relationship between global and state-level structures that were in a state of flux and the explosion of creativity that took place, particularly in Chile but also around the world in the fields of art and music? This book explores the relationship between the political transformations of the 1950s and 1960s and the appearance of new cultural forms—not only *la Nueva*

Canción but also experimental projects in theater, dance, poetry, literature, painting, and playwriting that reached large numbers of people. There was a veritable explosion of creativity in the 1960s and early 1970s in Chile, and I argue that the splintering of old social hierarchies and the rise of political actors “from below” was linked to the emergence of new forms of creativity and of popular culture. These interrelated phenomena were the result of rapidly changing global and national political-economic structures and new democratic openings pushed “from below” by people in many walks of life.

The world was changing rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s. The Cold War reflected deep ideological and political divisions and produced many “proxy wars” in the developing world. The Cuban Revolution of 1959 awakened a passion for radical social change, especially among young Latin Americans. Rapid technological change was transforming societies, as well. Television provided national and global visual links for the first time, connecting the world’s nations ever closer and increasing awareness of events in other countries. (Television came to Chile in 1962.) Faster means of communication and transportation became available worldwide, producing new globalized trading and investment patterns and facilitating travel for individuals. Multinational corporations seeking natural resources and new markets spread worldwide. A number were engaged in rebuilding Europe after a large influx of public money via the Marshall Plan; many were already strategically placed in the developing world. In Chile, as elsewhere, shifting power structures opened opportunities for actors “from below” to express themselves and transform their societies.

Cultural expression is closely bound to democracy and liberty, and in the 1960s fresh winds of freedom were blowing. In Chile, the reformist government of Eduardo Frei Montalva was in power—unlike in nearby countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Bolivia, where military coups and regimes marked the 1960s—resulting in more openings for political participation and protest. In addition, the spirit of collaboration and collective effort and rejection of individualism, identified with capitalist competition, of the 1960s stimulated the creative surge of the time. Political parties in Chile—especially the centrist Christian Democrats and the leftist Communist Party and Socialist Party—influenced and provided infrastructure and organizational resources to emerging social and political movements. As formerly excluded social sectors were freer to participate, speak, read, communicate, protest, and organize, the creativity of ordinary people was unleashed. Workers, shantytown dwellers, peasants, and students demanded entry into the elitist political system and gradually gained a larger political voice. At the same time, there was a burst of cultural and artistic innovation.

Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist cultural analyst, noted that passions are stirred in an era of social mobilization—and passions are a crucial

source of creativity. Gramsci's writings and insights provide a useful framework for understanding the New Song movement. I draw on his ideas in this book as a means of understanding the political power of culture and how cultures can be transformed. How is cultural change related to economic and political change?³⁶ Gramsci was interested in the questions of how knowledge is produced and how certain ideas become "normal" or "common sense" in society. He saw that new artists appeared through the stirring up of "passions and human warmth" and that they would "be born from the movement."³⁷ Gramsci linked, for example, the rise of the opera and the novel "with the appearance and expansion of national-popular democratic forces" in Europe in the eighteenth century.³⁸ Similarly, I argue that the rise of New Song was linked to the surge of popular power and participation in the 1960s.

In my interviews, a number of New Song artists and musicians said that they had only reflected the dramatic conditions they were experiencing, that they themselves were not catalysts for change.³⁹ I find this assertion to be overly modest, however. Indeed, I see the musicians as crucial agents of cultural change. The New Song movement was a significant democratizing force, a key component of the larger organized popular movements for social and political transformation in Chile. The movement opened new channels for political participation and expression of demands "from below." The power of the musicians to attract masses of people, reach across class lines, tap human emotions and reach rational minds, and create a sense of unity and social bonding, combined with their representation of an egalitarian ideal and an alternative future, changed people's hearts and minds and helped to build a powerful movement. Their "music of commitment" made a socially just society seem attainable and possible. All of these elements demonstrated the innate political power of music. Gramsci's theories, presented in the next section, shed more light on the significance of that power.

The musical presentations and concerts of *la Nueva Canción*, large and small, were a unique part of the political history of the era. They did not simply reflect or articulate the politics of the time; they helped to *create* the politics of the time, and embody it. As John Street notes, the Woodstock music festival not only reflected the times in the United States; it created history—it was a seminal political event in itself.⁴⁰ He also argues that politics and music are inextricably linked: music "forms and shapes the feelings and passions which animate political action."⁴¹ That is, the New Song musicians were political as well as cultural actors, creating collective experiences and political unity through their music. The music was a catalyst for social change and political action; it expressed new, counterhegemonic norms and values.

Under Allende, some of the emblematic soloists and groups, such as Víctor Jara, Inti-Illimani, Quilapayún, and Isabel Parra, became semiofficial

cultural ambassadors, performing throughout the world to communicate through their music Chile's bold social experiment. The musicians were an organic part of the broader progressive movements of the era that succeeded in changing—if only partially and temporarily—the system of domination in Chile. After the 1973 military coup, the musicians in exile, who were prohibited from returning, became actively engaged in opposition to the Pinochet regime. They traveled worldwide, performing in massive concerts, keeping alive the memory and promise of the UP, and communicating the horrors of the dictatorship, thus helping to inspire an important international solidarity movement.

In discussions of the roots of the cultural innovation of this epoch, Chilean artists and musicians pointed to a number of important causes. The photographer Antonio Larrea noted the environment of freedom and experimentation that existed as old and ossified barriers broke down.⁴² The New Song musicians Ernesto Parra, formerly of Los Curacas, and Mario Salazar, formerly of Los Amerindios, separately highlighted the sense of new political possibilities in the 1960s that allowed people to hope and to dream—human emotions crucial for the creation of art.⁴³ Horacio Salinas spoke of the realization that “people power” might succeed in electing Salvador Allende and a government of popular unity that would transform the country.⁴⁴ José Seves described the sense of wonder and pride as the artists discovered the rich musical traditions of Latin America, its instruments and rhythms, providing people with a sense of motivation, awakening, and identity with Latin America's cultural heritage.⁴⁵ Another important source of the burst of creativity was the proximity of many artists in Santiago, allowing close working relations and collaboration. The artists collaborated freely and selflessly, without competition, composing songs together, playing, experimenting, and improvising together, searching for new talent to promote, and teaching and learning musically from one another. All of these factors are crucial and demonstrate the intertwining of structural and individual transformation, the complex interrelationships between global and national shifts and social and personal change.

I do not suggest that the *Nueva Canción* movement was the only democratizing actor during this period in Chile. There were many, as the society underwent rapid political transformation. The central question, in my view, is not which actor was most important in the broad democratization movement in Chile, but how various institutions and actors interacted, interfaced, and cooperated, producing dramatic political change. What was the relationship between the emergence of the musical movement in the mid-1960s and key institutions? This book examines the role of the *peñas*, universities, political parties, the Catholic Church, and government administrations in the sweeping sociopolitical changes of the era and, specifically, how they

interacted with the New Song movement. While the musicians created the music, they were involved with and influenced by institutions, as well as by the larger environment, the ethos of the 1960s. Key institutions provided a range of opportunities and sustenance to the musicians, helping to bring them to new audiences and to diffuse the music. As suggested, one important institution was the Juventudes Comunistas, or La Jota. La Jota created a new record label to record and distribute New Song, first called JotaJota, and later Discoteca del Cantar Popular (Discothèque of Popular Song; DICAP). The label began producing records that commercial labels found too political. In a short time, DICAP became a hugely successful venture,⁴⁶ playing a decisive role in disseminating *la Nueva Canción* by building a parallel structure to bypass commercial record labels.

Ricardo Venegas of Quilapayún spoke about the reciprocal and collaborative interrelations between the revolutionary youth of La Jota and the musicians:⁴⁷

There were links [between *la Nueva Canción* and La Jota]. There was an intellectual approach that informed us. We were serious in our study and analysis; it wasn't unserious or "light" what we were doing. To be part of La Jota meant that one was obligated to study. . . . That militancy was important for *la Nueva Canción*, but the music was never seen as an instrument of the party. Never, no. There was a strong identification, but the musical movement was independent. Not all the musicians of *la Nueva Canción* were members of La Jota. . . . La Jota was very open. . . . The relation between La Jota and the musicians was good. It had to do with the utopia we young people dreamed of then: to change the society, to make a better world.