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From Soccer Chant to Sonic Meme: Sound Politics and Parody in Argentina's "Hit of the Summer"

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Abstract: In early 2018, a protest chant against Argentine President Mauricio Macri became so widespread that journalists called it the "hit of the summer." Originating in soccer stadiums, it soon spread in other formats as musicians transformed it into countless parody videos in a process I call a "sonic meme." This involved first transforming mass culture (a march) into vernacular practice (a soccer chant), and then transforming that chant, in turn, back into mass-mediated popular music. The latter process was parodic not in the sense of profaning high culture, but rather transformed the already profane into the higher prestige register of music-as-art or music-as-commodity.

Résumé : Au début de l'année 2018, une chanson contestataire visant le président argentin Mauricio Macri fut à tel point diffusée que les journalistes la qualifièrent de « tube de l'été ». Née dans des stades de football (soccer), elle se diffusa si rapidement sous d'autres formes que les musiciens en firent d'innombrables parodies en vidéo, dans un processus que j'appelle un « mème acoustique ». Cela impliquait tout d'abord de transformer un élément de culture de masse (une marche) en pratique vernaculaire (un chant de supporters de football), avant de refaire passer ce chant dans la musique populaire des médias de masse. Ce dernier processus était parodique, non au sens d'une profanation de la culture élitiste, mais au sens que cela faisait passer ce qui était déjà profane dans le registre plus prestigieux de la musique artistique, ou de la musique commerciale.

On March 4, 2018, the Argentine public television program *Cocineros Argentinos* (Argentine Cooks), typically a popular and uncontroversial cooking show, became the subject of a minor political scandal. In keeping with the day's theme of Italian cuisine, the program had a live band playing interstitial music when coming back from a station break. The guest musicians, an accordion-fronted ensemble called the César Pavón Orkesta, played a brief

This article has accompanying videos on our YouTube channel. You can find them on the playlist for MUSICultures volume 47, available here: https://bit.ly/MUSICultures-47-OBrien. With the ephemerality of web-based media in mind, we warn you that our online content may not always be accessible, and we apologize for any inconvenience. All videos that are accessible in this playlist will appear marked with the symbol †, see also Appendix A.

minor-key melody in a jaunty, 6/8 tarantella rhythm. Guillermo Calabrese, the program's host, shouted in approval, "*¡Es el hit del verano!*" ("It's the hit of the summer!").† There was no further comment during the program about those brief 16 seconds of instrumental music, but there was no need. As bandleader Cesar Pavón later recalled, "As soon as I left the set, I said, 'This is going viral for sure … it's like slapping the President in his own house'" (interview, June 29, 2018). Pavón's instinct proved correct. By the next day the segment had indeed gone viral; journalists had called the musical selection "polemic" (Ardió Twitter: Polémica porque en la TV Pública tocaron la canción contra Mauricio Macri 2018) and wondered whether the television program was "picking a fight with" President Mauricio Macri (TV Pública: ¿mojada de oreja de Cocineros Argentinos a Mauricio Macri? 2018). The melodic fragment parodically dressed up as an Italian folk dance, which Calabrese had called the "hit of the summer," was not in fact a new chart-topping pop song, but rather a patriotic march from 1973 called "*Es tiempo de alegrarnos*" ("It's time for us to get happy") that expressed a wide-eyed optimism for a country that had recently emerged from a military dictatorship. Yet in the intervening years, that original meaning had been nearly lost and had become irrelevant. To Argentine audiences in 2018 the melody conveyed a different, unambiguous message: *Mauricio Macri, you son of a whore*.

The transformation of a patriotic march melody into a signifier for obscene protest involved several stages of musical re-use, remediation, and re-signification, in ways that blurred the boundaries between mass culture and folk culture. Folklorist Dorothy Noyes observes that parody as a folk practice involves the "distortion of familiar things" in which the audience experiences a "double take of recognition and estrangement," frequently as a profanation of hegemonic culture (2014: 143, 144). Yet the distortion of the familiar melody that became ironically known as the "hit of the summer" in Argentina in 2018 is a more complicated story. It began as a piece of mass-mediated pop music; the first stage of its distortion involved its adoption into the anonymous vernacular oral tradition of football chants, where the melody had become a contrafactum for a variety of insulting epithets as early as the 1970s. While many such football chants maintain an intertextual signification with the source melody, deriving at least some of their meaning from the listener's familiarity with the original, by the time soccer fans fashioned the chant "*Mauricio Macri, la puta que te parió*" ("MMLPQTP") in 2018, the melody's origin was largely forgotten. This was a parody perhaps only in the sense that early European composers wrote Parody Masses: it was a recycling of musical materials, but one devoid of mockery (of the musical source, at least) (Falck 1979: 4).

The next step in the parodic transformation, on the other hand, certainly did depend on the audience's recognition of the distorted original. The César Pavón Orkesta's parodic transformation of the melody into a tarantella was one of dozens of similar musical re-imaginings of the same melody that emerged within a few weeks in the late (austral) summer of that year, a time when tens of thousands of Argentines were in the streets protesting President Macri's political agenda. Drawing on an analysis of musical performance, viral videos, online discourse, and ethnographic interviews with the protagonists, I will trace a genealogy of this phenomenon, which I call a *sonic meme,* exploring the ways in which these iterations of an originally innocuous melody become re-signified, first as invective and then as parody. Furthermore, I argue that Noyes's configuration of parody is helpful, but not entirely adequate to account for the kinds of transformation and re-signification at work here. Specifically, the political content and humour latent in the viral meme-ification of the melody do, in Noyes terms, depend upon the distortion of the familiar. But this parody is not merely the profanation of hegemonic or sacred texts. By examining the sonic texts of these viral videos, it becomes clear that the "familiar" original is itself already profane: it is the obscene soccer chant "MMLPQTP," not the march "Es tiempo de alegrarnos." Furthermore, as professional musicians began to engage in this parodic practice, mediating and distributing their performances in the same media infrastructure they share with the commercial culture industry, the "hit of the summer" occupied a complex ontological space both inside and outside that industry, generating real economic consequences for the participants without accumulating exchange value itself.

Origins of a Melody

In 1973, Raul Fernández Shériko Guzmán was a young aspiring pop songwriter who had moved from his native province of Santiago del Estero, Argentina to Buenos Aires in pursuit of his career. While he developed the catalog of songs that would comprise his first solo album, to be released under the artistic name Shériko, he realized that Carnival was approaching, and decided that he needed to create a song "that was festive and happy … I didn't think about [deposed Argentine President Juan D.] Perón or anything" (interview, June 20, 2018). He began to develop a lively, minor-key march with optimistic lyrics appropriate to the occasion:

Toquen trompetas y matracas al compás
Suenen los pitos y las palmas sin cesar
Cantemos todos, la tristeza hay que olvidar
La vida pasa, ¡no te pongas a llorar!

Veo a mi pueblo que otra vez vuelve a reír
Es mi país que ha comenzado a revivir
Atrás quedaron las tristezas y el dolor
Vuelven los días de dicha y felicidad.

Play trumpets and rattles to the beat
Play whistles and clap without end
Let's all sing, we must forget about sadness
Life goes on, don't cry!

I see my people begin to laugh again,
It's that my country has begun to live once more,
Sadness and pain were left behind,
The days of good fortune and happiness return.[1]

In between the song's Carnival debut and the album's production, however, Shériko saw an opportunity to more deliberately align the song with the political zeitgeist. In a recent interview, he remembered:

> I was preparing [the song] for Carnival, but by chance, in terms of popular taste, it just blew up … I was looking around, and thinking "how beautiful, how beautiful," until it occurred to me when somebody said, "Perón is coming back, Juan Domingo Perón is coming back on this date." Beautiful, I thought, that people will take [the song] another way. (Interview, June 20, 2018)[2]

Shériko had been raised in a Peronist household but had grown up during the period in which the former populist leader lived in exile after being deposed by a 1955 military coup. By 1973, a succession of military dictators had mismanaged the country sufficiently enough to lose their grip on power and had reinstated democratic elections. Perón returned from exile amidst a wave of popular support; the crowd that came to greet his airplane was estimated at over three million, and he won re-election the following year with 67 percent of the vote (Romero 2013: 204). Shériko's "Es tiempo de alegrarnos"† was released in 1975, its sanguine innocence a reflection of the fleeting popularity of Perón's

last term. Neither the sentiment nor the party's dominance would last long. Perón died on July 1st of that year and was succeeded by his third wife and former vice-president Maria Estela "Isabelita" Martinez de Perón. Isabelita herself was deposed by a military junta the following March, ushering in a dictatorship that would reign until 1983 and would become infamous for its human rights abuses, including state-sponsored terrorism, torture, and murder (Feitlowitz 2011). During the dictatorship, Shériko found his career stymied when government censors banned his album from the airwaves, and he went into exile, ultimately spending several years in Mexico. While the ban effectively ended the commercial success of "Es tiempo de alegrarnos" in Argentina, it did not remove the song from the public sphere. Rather, the melody remained in public memory, decontextualized and nearly anonymous, as a part of the popular canon of soccer chants.

Soccer Chants and Public Memory

Cantitos — chants or songs consisting of new lyrics composed to the melodies of popular songs (contrafacta) — are an integral aspect of soccer fan culture in many countries in Europe and Latin America (Schoonderwoerd 2011; Hoy 1994). Argentine soccer fans are especially well known for the ubiquity, intensity, and aggressively insulting nature of the cantitos that they sing without pause throughout the duration of a match (Herrera 2018; Parrish and Nauright 2013).

Shériko recalled to me that even before he left Argentina, he had heard the opening melodic fragment from the verse of "Es tiempo de alegrarnos" transformed into a chant by supporters of several local soccer teams, with generally inoffensive lyrics such as "*Y dale Boca, que tenemos que ganar*" ("Let's go Boca [Juniors], we have to win") (interview, June 20, 2018). Later variants would frequently insert an opposing player's name before ending the fragment with the words "*la puta que te parió*" ("the whore who birthed you"), a common obscenity in the Argentine vernacular equivalent to the English "son of a whore." The same lyrical fragment would prove useful in other contexts of antagonistic public confrontation outside the soccer stadium. During Argentina's economic crisis in late 2001, banks froze customers' assets and shut down to prevent a bank run; Shériko recalled with pride hearing groups of "grandmothers [and] grandfathers banging on the doors of the banks and screaming [singing] '*Abran la puerta, la puta que los parió*'" ("Open the door, the whore that birthed you") to the melody of his song (interview, June 20, 2018).

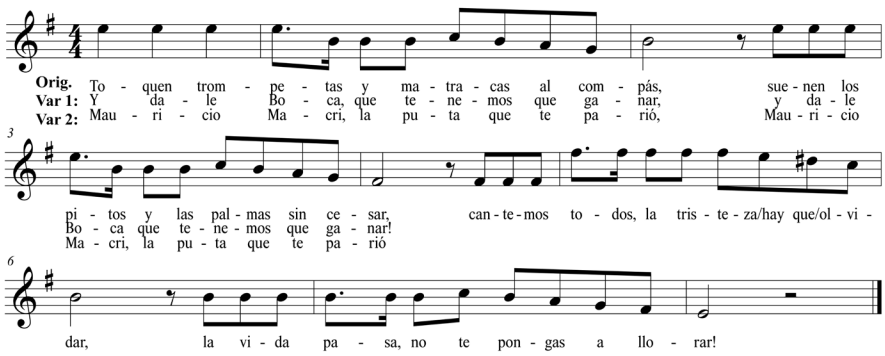

Fig. 1. The original melody and lyrics to the A section of "Es tiempo de alegrarnos." Contrafacta of the melody used as soccer stadium cantitos appear as Var. 1-2.

Seventeen years later, the chant that would come to be called "the hit of the summer" would recycle the same formula, using the name of the sitting president. "Mauricio Macri, la puta que te parió" ("MMLPQTP") seems to have first emerged spontaneously during a February 4, 2018 soccer match between Boca Juniors and San Lorenzo (González 2018). Prior to his career in national politics, Macri served a lengthy tenure as president of the Boca Juniors club, and he is still strongly associated with that team. Thus, when San Lorenzo fans were frustrated by what they perceived to be a biased referee's calls, Macri became the metonymic target of their ire.

Of course, resentment about unfair soccer arbitration may help to account for the origin of the "MMLPQTP" chant, but it does little to explain the chant's subsequent explosive popularity among crowds with no particular investment in that fateful soccer game. It is unusual for rival fan clubs to reuse each other's cantitos, since clubs pride themselves on the originality of their lyrics and the breadth of their repertoires. It is just as unusual for clubs to sing about topics such as national politics, as the ethos of intra-club solidarity — and just as importantly, antipathy toward rivals — outrank the class-based and partisan affinities that might unite rival fans in other contexts. In fact, inter-club antagonism has become so violent and dangerous that, since 2013, visiting teams' fans are not permitted to attend games in the stadium.

Yet in this case, San Lorenzo's rival team River Plate's fans sang "MMLPQTP" the following week during their own match against Boca Juniors, and shortly thereafter it became a truly mass phenomenon. By early March, journalists had chronicled what was now waggishly being called the "hit of the summer" sounding en masse in at least 28 different sports stadiums, on the street, in nightclubs, in theatres and music venues, and by frustrated

passengers in a subway station waiting for a delayed train (González 2018).[3†] The unprecedented spread of the obscene chant owed more to the country's embattled political climate, of course, than to Argentines' allegiances to soccer teams. Yet the vernacular practice of voicing obscene abuse to popular melody would not have happened without the well-ingrained stadium culture where it was common practice.

Many scholarly accounts of cantitos have emphasized the intertextual relationship between a cantito's text and the words and/or cultural significance of its source melody. Fans have composed chants that echo the sound of church bell chimes close to their home stadium (Schoonderwoerd 2011), have made contrafacta of songs by rock bands seen as emblematic of the fans' own class and political identities (Alabarces 2015), and have otherwise played upon the original words and meanings of their melodies in ways that echo Noyes's account of parody as "revoicing the familiar" (2014: 144). While the source material itself is typically not the object of mockery, the barbs can be sharpened or feelings of group solidarity heightened by the collective "sounding-in-synchrony" of songs that rely upon specific in-group musical knowledge (Herrera 2018).

These rich semiotic possibilities notwithstanding, the case of "MMLPQTP" illustrates that such dense intertextual meanings can attenuate over time. In the first weeks of the cantito's ascent to hit status, most Argentines had no memory of the melody's origin. News media published articles reintroducing Shériko and "Es tiempo de alegrarnos" as interesting, nearly forgotten trivia starting in the first week of March, nearly a month after the cantito (re)emerged (¿Cuál es la versión original del hit del verano dedicado al presidente? 2018; ¿Cuál es la canción que dio origen al hit del verano contra Mauricio Macri? 2018). Thus, while the melody remained familiar, the now unambiguous sentiment it expressed was, for most of those who sang and heard it in early 2018, entirely uncoupled from the song's feel-good, pro-government origins. This deep historical irony went largely overlooked.

Political Context

The "hit of the summer" emerged at a moment in which Argentine politics were being practiced in ways that were especially polarized and acrimonious. Macri was elected in November 2015 as a neoliberal candidate whose platform consisted largely of dismantling the policies of the centre-left Peronist administrations that preceded him. Even Macri's party name itself — *Cambiemos* (Let's Change) — reflected its platform as fundamentally anti-Peronist. Macri's administration instituted stiff austerity measures that cut subsidies to utilities, mass transit, and

gasoline (Raszewski and Cohen 2017), and laid off large numbers of public sector workers. Owing partly to the increasing cost of energy, the basic cost of living ballooned. The inflation rate for Macri's first year in office was 40 percent, the worst in 25 years, and the following year it was 23 percent (Cué and Centenera 2017; Cué 2017a).

The Macri administration also differed sharply from its Peronist predecessors in its approach toward controlling protest and social unrest. Over the first two years of Macri's administration, massive mobilizations of teachers' unions, truck drivers, and other labour groups clashed with federal police, often violently (Bronstein and Misculin 2018; Cué 2017b; Green 2017). Macri's Minister of Security, Patricia Bullrich, was an especially outspoken advocate of giving police forces carte blanche to use violence to control the social order, and police used this freedom frequently. One human rights watchdog group

Fig. 2. ©Fabián Prol. Used with permission.

identified more than 700 cases of Argentines killed by police forces during the first two years of the Macri administration, the greatest number by far since Argentina's return to democracy in 1983 (CORREPI 2017). During the third week of February 2018, as "MMLPQTP" resounded within soccer stadia, more than 40,000 protesters gathered in central Buenos Aires to protest the latest round of austerity measures (Agencia AFP 2018). The chant's leap from the stadium to the street was perhaps inevitable.

Meanwhile, the authorities responsible for controlling discourse within the stadium seemed, at least briefly, inclined to suppress the chant. The Executive Committee of the Argentine Football Association met and discussed whether to invoke the league's anti-discrimination rules, originally intended to curb anti-Semitic, homophobic, and xenophobic chants, in order to temporarily suspend games if fans sang "MMLPQTP" (Argentina: Referees Consider 'Temporarily' Suspending Soccer Matches Over Anti-Macri Chants 2018). Ultimately the committee decided against suspending games, but even the threat of censorship seems to have rankled and provoked Argentines who remembered the country's dark and recent history of authoritarian rule. As "MMLPQTP" became more pervasive, while the melody's original lyrics had been largely forgotten, the newer obscene text was now so closely associated with that melody that the words themselves had become unnecessary. Political cartoonist Fabián Prol saw this potential early on; in a cartoon he published on February 28, a referee consults by phone with Macri: "They're not singing the lyrics, Mr. Pesident [*sic*]. They're only humming the music. Should I suspend anyway?" (Fig. 2). Musicians quickly came to the same realization, and "MMLPQTP" was primed for its transformation into a new kind of mass popularity. In Argentina's summer of 2018, hit status was conferred not by radio airplay, but by the proliferation of viral memes.

From Hit Song to Sonic Meme

Juan Roleri seemed an unlikely candidate for superstardom via scandalous political viral video. At 29, he had already distinguished himself as one of the foremost classical pianists of his generation in Argentina, having completed advanced studies in Switzerland and performed tours of Europe, Africa, and South America. When I met him at a café in June 2018, he was soft-spoken and self-effacing, dressed in neatly pressed slacks and a grey sweater vest that would not have been out of place on a bank teller. He described himself not as particularly anti-Macri, but as a non-partisan "free thinker, with family and friends from all the political parties," and a "diplomatic guy" whose studies

abroad had included sponsorship by the Swiss embassy (interview, June 8, 2018). He was, however, also an ardent lifelong supporter of the Argentine soccer team Racing Club and attended their February 27th game against Brazil's Cruzeiro. News had broken that morning that the national referees' union was debating suspending games where "MMLPQTP" was sung, an idea that struck Roleri as "stupid" (interview, June 8, 2018). When Racing fans started the chant at the game, Roleri tweeted a brief video, captioned "I swear it wasn't me." The following morning, Roleri remembered, "it occurred to me to tease, to make a joke at a couple of Macri-supporting friends, via WhatsApp. So I made a video of the stadium song, turned into classical music" (interview, June 8, 2018).

Roleri's performance is a set of variations upon a theme, in which he passes a truncated version of the "MMLPQTP" melody through a pastiche of neo-Romantic pianistic textures, from Chopinesque arpeggios and Lisztian octaves to a delicately expressive Alberti bass.† Roleri posted the video to Twitter around 9:30 in the morning; by the time he finished his daily practice routine around noon and picked up his phone again, it had gone viral. He was inundated with requests for interviews and messages of support from anti-Macri politicians. Former President Cristina Kirchner's attorney wrote to request a copy of the mp3 file to use as a ringtone. Roleri obligingly posted a copy of the file to a public sharing site for anyone to download, bemused to have found such enthusiastic support among politicians and media figures, including many whom he did not hold in similarly high regard.

Perhaps the greatest tribute to Roleri's creation, however, came in the countless acts of "iterative vernacular creativity" through which viral videos are transformed in participatory online culture (Burgess 2014: 93). Some users simply downloaded Roleri's audio and combined it with existing video of other famous piano performances, suggesting that the pianist playing a subtle, delicate instrumental version of the obscene chant was actually Vladimir Putin,† soccer star Lionel Messi,† or the feline half of Tom and Jerry.† Musicians, on the other hand, seized on the humour of hearing the familiar melody dressed up in the conventions of a new genre, and realized the same formula was just as effective when the genre was something other than classical piano. A hundred parodic flowers bloomed: by early March, versions of "MMLPQTP" circulating via Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter had transformed the melody into (among others) ska,† cumbia,† heavy metal,† tango,† and the Argentine folk dance *chacarera*.† And of course, in the highest-profile iteration of this game, the Cesar Pavón Orkesta performed their tarantella version of the hit live on national public television a few days later. Although some of these versions included vocals that retained the obscene lyrics (a slow blues version† proved especially popular), many were instrumental. One such video even played on

the expectation of censorship by pairing a Brazilian Carnival-style instrumental samba rendition with superfluous "subtitles" providing the purported text: "Mauricio Macri, la la la ra la la la."† By this point, the meaning of the melody had become so entrenched that audiences heard the words clearly, singer or no.

Macri critics also encouraged the spread of the hit by sharing their knowledge via the internet, creating an impromptu community of online pedagogy (Miller 2012). Musicians posted versions of the "MMLPQTP" melody in Western staff notation and guitar tablature as well as how-to-play tutorial videos in order to help others with less musical training join in the game. Strategies of teaching at a distance in order to encourage greater levels of creative participation in protest movements have been recently used successfully in Japan (Manabe 2015) and Wisconsin (O'Brien 2013), but, unlike those cases, "MMLPQTP" tutorial videos and transcriptions seemed primarily interested in encouraging further online, rather than co-present, participation. In this regard, the proliferation of "MMLPQTP" functioned as a sort of sonic meme.

The term "meme" was coined by Richard Dawkins (1976) to account for the way that a basic unit of information or an idea might be reproduced and passed on via processes analogous to the transfer of genetic material. Here, however, I propose the term "sonic meme" to draw an analogy with the more contemporary popular usage of the term, to refer to user-generated humorous content — generally captioned images — shared online. Meme sharing sites often provide templates to help users easily generate variations on a theme. Similarly, users could easily take the template-like musical framework (melody, chords, rhythm) for "MMLPQTP" and modify it to individually create unique variations on the theme, whose meaning is only fully intelligible to audiences familiar with the source material. Thus, "MMLPQTP" genre-crossing videos functioned as a different sort of parody than the "MMLPQTP" stadium chant did. While both involved the re-use and re-signification of the existing melody, the soccer chant's meaning did not depend upon recognizing the source material; it was sufficient for the melody to be familiar enough to allow fellow fans to join in. In order to hear the joke (or, for Macri supporters, the offense) in the melody rendered as a neo-Romantic solo piano piece or a lively accordion band tarantella, one needed to understand that the melody in question was not, in fact, "Es tiempo de alegrarnos," but rather "MMLPQTP."

In Juan Roleri's version this distinction is audible, even without the context. Shériko's original melody to the A section of "Es tiempo de alegrarnos" (Fig. 1) is a four-bar phrase in which the second phrase ends on the dominant chord; the melody does not fully resolve to the tonic until the end of the second phrase. Roleri plays only the opening phrase of the melody, but resolves the final

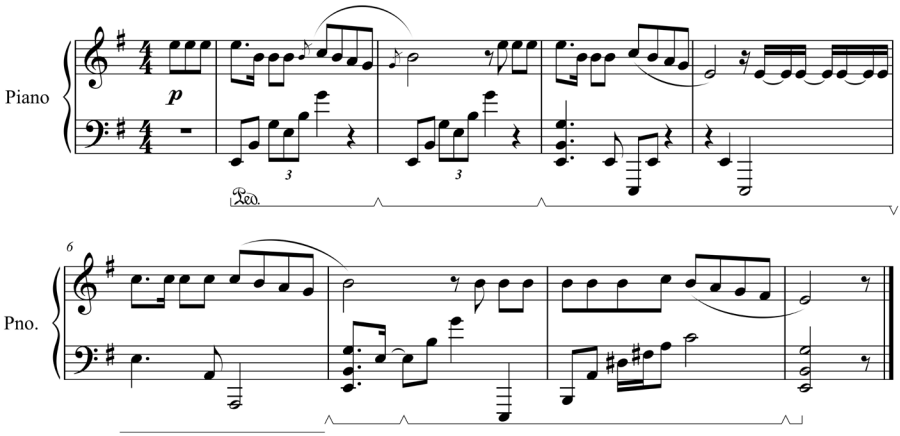

Fig. 3. Opening phrases to Juan Roleri's "MMLPQTP" variations. Transcription by Maxx Bradley.

note a step lower to the tonic (Fig. 3). This was not a case of Roleri intentionally altering an original composition, but rather a trained musician's replication of the "wide tuning" and indeterminate pitches that often characterize soccer chants (Herrera 2018: 482). Roleri explained to me:

> I'm 29 years old; the original song, from '78, I never got to know it … I did this by oral transmission, which has its defects. In the stadium, they don't sing that semitone.[4] So did I, if you'll permit me, commit an error with respect to the original melody? Yes. But did I commit an error with respect to the stadium melody? No. (interview, June 8, 2018)

Transforming an obscene soccer chant into a piece of classical (or folk, or popular) music is certainly a parodic gesture, but it does not obey the conventions by which parody often operates. Noyes identifies several types of parody including "blasphemous acts of desecration" and the "gleeful obscenity of children's parodies," which "reveal the news of a differential perspective while uncovering the less consensual dimensions of social orthodoxies" (2014: 143-44). Such political acts of parody often work by profaning hegemonic, sacred narratives. The memetic transformations of "MMLPQTP" reveal a different sort of parodic process: in this case, the familiar is always already blasphemous, and the humour lies in dressing that obscenity up in the respectable trappings of music-as-art. Journalists who baptized the chant as "the hit of the summer" were participating in the same game, by discursively situating the sound not as public noise, but as a commodity within the culture industry.

After the Hit: Viral Remediation and its Discontents

Journalists and musicians alike adopted the language of the seasonal pop music consumption cycle (Edwards 2016) to describe the spread of the "MMLPQTP" phenomenon as the "hit of the summer," but in fact the nature of its popularity was both more ephemeral and more complicated than that of a typical summer hit pop song. Part of this complication stemmed from the unusual ways that "MMLPQTP" existed both inside and outside the economic and cultural infrastructure of the commercial music industry.

Fans originally transformed "Es tiempo de alegrarnos" into a soccer chant contrafactum (or more accurately, a series of different contrafacta depending on the team and the occasion), through a process that a Birmingham School-style sociological approach to studying popular culture is well suited to understand (Fiske 1991; Hall 2006). Through a creative, deliberate misuse of a mass-culture commodity (a patriotic pop song), fans created new and disruptive meanings and counter-narratives. However, the cultural capital they generated out of this creative labour had no economic exchange value, as neither fan performers, nor the songs' original composers, ever earn royalties on soccer chants, however popular they may become. Yet the transformation of "Es tiempo de alegrarnos" into "MMLPQTP" is more than the creative re-use of a commodity because of the ontologically vague nature of music as a commodity. Unlike a pair of blue jeans that may be ripped or a safety pin that may be creatively repurposed as an earring (Hebdige 1979), pop songs are intangible (and not to be confused for the physical recordings of those songs), infinitely repeatable, and reproducible. By the time the melody to "Es tiempo de alegrarnos" had been absorbed into the corpus of recognizable tunes for soccer fans to re-compose, in a sense it was no longer Shériko's song, but rather an anonymous folk song, ready to be re-signified with the team affiliation or political sentiments of its adoptive co-creators. One of the recent transcriptions of the melody uploaded to the popular score-sharing website musescore.com expressed this belief succinctly, listing the composer as "*El Pueblo*" (The People) (Fig. 4).

Nonetheless, while soccer chants may behave more like oral tradition folk songs than pop songs, the same is not necessarily true for user-generated videos. When "MMLPQTP" left the soccer stadium, it re-entered a mediascape (Appadurai 1996) where it behaved every bit like a contemporary hit pop song, inspiring user-generated covers or versions shared on social media sites (López Cano 2018). While many of these videos were created by amateurs with little interest in the commercial music industry, some of the most interesting protagonists of this phenomenon were professional musicians themselves. Shériko, Juan Roleri, and César Pavón all made their living as musicians prior

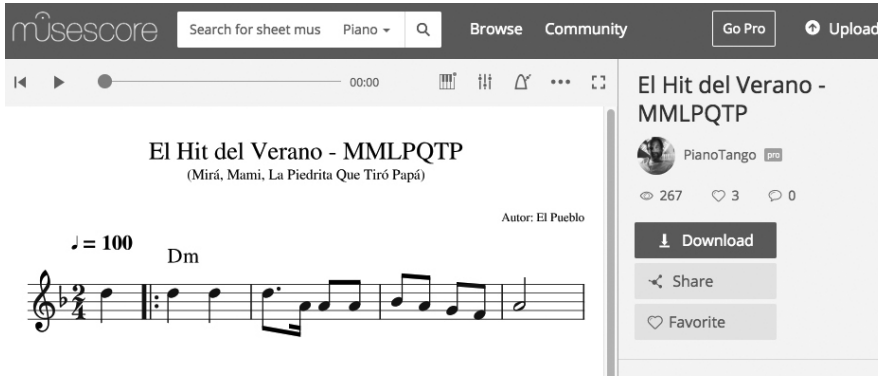

Fig. 4. "MMLPQTP" score as shared on www.musescore.com

to the summer of "MMLPQTP," and as of this writing all of them continue to do so. And while none of them set out to make an obscene soccer chant in any way central to their own careers or identities as professional musicians, their participation in the hit-of-the-summer phenomenon brought unprecedented attention to each of them. As the cycles of schizophonic mimesis[5] (Feld 1996) and viral distribution amplified and echoed each of these musicians' creations, they often did so in ways that limited those musicians' own agency to represent themselves as public, political, and musical subjects. They were all keenly aware of the tensions, potential benefits, and pitfalls of this relationship, although they diverged substantially in their responses to it.

Ironically, the professional musician whose own voice was least present in the "MMLPQTP" phenomenon was the one who expressed the most thorough and uncomplicated joy and sense of ownership in the song's success. Shériko never benefited economically from his pop song's consecration into the cantito canon, nor from its second life as a viral hit political protest song. Furthermore, many of the soccer fans, protesters, and musicians who took up the melody were apparently unaware of his role in its genesis. Nonetheless, he told me, sitting down at the family computer to hear his melody sung and played in new and unexpected versions gave him a "tremendous, priceless satisfaction, because you say to yourself, 'I did that, without knowing it would happen'" (interview, 20 June 2018). It doubtless helped that Shériko shared the anti-Macri sentiments that "MMLPQTP" expressed (he remembered singing a version of the melody with similar lyrics to applause at a Peronist event a year prior). The singer also planned to embrace the unanticipated period of renewed interest in his past work in order to restart his recording career. At the time of our interview, just four months after the first journalists released public

interest stories "discovering" the true composer of "MMLPQTP," Shériko had completed two full new studio albums, his first in several decades, which he planned to release in the near future (interview, June 20, 2018).

Juan Roleri, a respected young classical pianist and pedagogue, faced a dilemma familiar to many professional classical musicians: the general public's lack of interest in his art. The pianist was well aware of the irony when what he had intended as a simple musical joke between friends suddenly garnered him a level of public interest greater than he had achieved during several successful years as an internationally performing soloist. Therefore, he turned down opportunities to appear on major media outlets:

> It's a level of exposure that was difficult to manage, and I had to clarify that it was just a joke, and that nobody's going to make politics out of that. When they invited me on to radio programs … the truth is, I studied in Switzerland for three years, I spent two years traveling around the world giving concerts, and you want to invite me to talk about a musical joke? I'll pass. If you want to talk about my career, let's talk about my career; if you want to talk about a joke, I'll pass. I don't want to come on your program, thanks. (interview, June 8, 2018)

Perhaps even more frustrating for Roleri, the video's popularity had less to do with his fine musicianship (although the video is certainly funnier because of it) than with the anti-Macri political ideology audiences ascribed to his performance, an ideology he did not share. Roleri created a theme and variations on "MMLPQTP" not to protest Macri, but to humorously protest the threat of censorship. He was surprised (perhaps naively) by the speed and extent to which the video spread via Twitter, and in the wake of its viral success he found himself pre-emptively apologizing to the parents and students of his private piano school, many of whom he assumed to be Macri supporters. He did not report suffering any professional setbacks, however, and discovered with relief that all his professional contacts "took it for what it was, a simple joke, and not a political statement" (interview, June 8, 2018). Many of the video's fans, on the other hand, clearly understood it to be both.

César Pavón's career, by contrast, seems not to have escaped unscathed. When I interviewed him nearly four months after he played the hit on *Cocineros Argentinos*, the accordionist remained busy with gigs and students at his accordion school, and he had just returned from a month-long European tour. But his orchestra had not been booked again on the cooking program. Nor, given that the program's host had publicly apologized for the performance, did he expect

ever to be called again. Prior to the "MMLPQTP" tarantella performance, Pavón's group had been invited on *Cocineros* at least once or twice a year for the past decade, and while these bookings did not make up a substantial portion of his income, they certainly provided a national audience larger than that of many venues interested in booking an accordion ensemble specializing in Balkan and Italian folk music. Pavón also said that the first six months of 2018 had been a "catastrophic" time of uncharacteristically few private bookings, although he suspected this had little to do with the *Cocineros* appearance and more to do with the dismal economy (interview, June 29, 2018). Like Roleri, Pavón dodged numerous requests for interviews following his performance of the hit, after trying and failing to channel journalists' interest into a platform for him to talk more broadly about his band and professional career. Although he played the hit out of shared frustration over the political and economic situation in the country, he was concerned about the ramifications for his career if he were to go on record verbally confirming the political discourse that his musical performance had seemed to suggest:

> I've been working with bands, making albums, and nothing like this phenomenon ever happened to me before. So I asked myself, do I take advantage [of the opportunity to be interviewed] or don't I? Because it could work out in my favour, or it could work against me. So I was scared, and I said, this could catapult me or bury me. And faced with that doubt, I'll keep working like I have been and not say anything. Really, I didn't want to say anything because I'm not a political activist. I'm an artist, a musician, I teach all day, weekends I have one, two, three shows, tours … and I have two kids, a wife, so I don't consider myself an activist … On the other hand, people were happy that I played that song on TV. So they have me as a hero … Everyone asked me, "Hey, but did you plan to play that or did they tell you [to play it]?" As if to say, "If he planned to play it, he's a hero, and if he played it because they told him to he's a fool." (interview, June 29, 2018)

Pavón chose to turn down all requests for interviews at the time. He ultimately accepted my request for an interview several months later, partially because he felt that the danger of professional consequences had passed as public outrage over the incident had diminished in the interceding months, and partially, he said, because I was a foreign scholar and expressed interest in the full scope of his musical career and not only the *Cocineros* "MMLPQTP" affair. He decided that it was time to set the record straight about his role in the decision to play the hit.

> The truth is I never thought about playing the song, logically, least of all on this government's public television station, because it worked out well to be able to go on TV and show my music. I know that if I play that, they won't call me ever again. So I'm walking through the halls of the station before going on — what I'm not going to say is which one [of the program's two hosts] said it, no? One of them, in the green room, says to me … "Hey, would you be up for playing the hit of the summer?" That's the truth. I say — recalculating, I think about it — and say, "Sure, of course." "Nah, nah, I was kidding," he says, "can you imagine if we played that?" [laughs] … When the program began, we went to commercial break, came back, went to break again, and on the second break he says to me, "Hey, throw the hit of the summer in on this break." I say, "Are you sure? They're going to fire us all." (interview, June 29, 2018)

Pavón asserted his own agency in deciding to participate in the "hit of summer" phenomenon, and he cast that decision as both informed and prescient of the lack of agency he would have once the performance was broadcast.[6] While they laughed about it at the time, both Pavón and the program's producers were keenly aware that choosing to play that minor-key melody, even transformed into a lively tarantella, was likely to have damaging consequences for their careers.

Conclusions

Ultimately, the phenomenon of Argentina's viral "hit of the summer" illustrates the potential and limits of musical parody as political protest. The widespread proliferation of viral iterations of the sonic meme, as well as the unambiguous political message they conveyed (even despite the wishes of some of the meme creators, such as Roleri), were a result of the symbiotic combination of local, oral-tradition vernacular practices with the newer digital infrastructure for mass media production and sharing. Argentina has a robust tradition not only of soccer chanting, but also of public, highly visible political protest, including the silent protest of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* against the human rights abuses of the military dictatorship (Taylor 1994), and the roadblocks and *cacerolazos* (mass protests consisting of banging on pots and pans) of the early 2000s (Gordillo 2012). What has been less frequent in Argentina's political protest movements, though, is laughter.

The culture and infrastructure of participatory media culture (Jenkins 2006), on the other hand, is rife with practices of cultural creation, use, and re-use meant to comment humorously on current events, from remixing and autotuning news segments to "sweding"[7] movies and other forms of digital performance (Gratch 2017). The technologies of home digital audio and video recording, broadband internet, and social media were pervasive and readily accessible in most of Argentina by the late 2010s. This infrastructure and the accompanying practices of participatory media culture provided a new means by which individuals could participate in protest at a distance, in a register that deflated the power of officials to curtail or repress more explicitly political speech as they might have in the soccer stadium or the street. Nonetheless, the platform that parodic sonic memes provided Macri critics was also a somewhat attenuated form of political discourse. Linda Hutcheon has observed that parody is often "doubly coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies" (2006: 101). In this case, the parodic transformation "upward" of obscene chant into music-as-art or music-as-entertainment, rather than blaspheming the sacred, provided at least some of the participants with the partial cover of an excuse that what they were doing was, as Juan Roleri characterized it, merely a musical joke. His disavowal was perhaps easier and more credible because of the distance between his "MMLPQTP" fantasia and his typical performances: no one would confuse a cell phone video of the artist in his home, distributed over Twitter, for a serious pianist's concertizing. On the other hand, the closer the practice of parodic re-use began to drift back into the mediatized, higher prestige spaces of the official culture industry, the greater the stakes. Cesar Pavón was punished not merely playing the "hit of the summer," but for doing so in a prestigious, government-supported, national venue — in short, treating it not like a protest chant but like a hit song. Thus, it was engaging in a form of parody that sought not to profane, but rather to elevate, that truly made the melody's transformation politically dangerous. In the right hands, parody is serious business.

Appendix A

YouTube Playlist:

Cesar Pavon Orkesta plays "El hit del verano" on Cocineros Argentinos: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXfeqgI6Qk4

Shériko; "Es tiempo de alegrarnos": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BUA-G-idK4U

Compilation of soccer stadium "MMLPQTP" chants: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lIh6MbV-fM&t=4s
"MMLPQTP" protest in subway station: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2MboNyZy3U
Juan Roleri's classical theme and variations: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CI3CZWoGXE

Juan Roleri as Soundtrack to Videos:

Vladmir Putin: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4QAagehocM8
Lionel Messi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lWn4q56JjoU
Tom and Jerry: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAq0j6oc67Q

MMLPQTP as Genre-bending Sonic Meme:

Ska: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tWI2LIbwSU
Tango: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWHMC0PBnjw
Tango II: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FljQIPCfBx0
Chacarera: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hm02qBqDmHU
Chacarera II: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsjwHidTue4
Metal: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6pHiqNUj9Q
Metal II: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FD7jPsDXMOs
EDM: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFRiUjgwyk4
"Subtitled" Brazilian carnival: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YONOFxQEuiY&t=32s (Not available in the *MUSICultures* playlist; accessible through this link.)
Blues: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMQi6EdsK3o
Violin/piano theme and variations: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7O7oHSPgNhA
Paraguayan harp: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzvG7vRb560
Charango: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLWHZmYRIWw
Mariachi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6kGUbF3BUU8

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Notes

1. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are by the author.

2. Shériko's own recollection of this chronology was somewhat at odds with recorded history. Shériko maintained in interviews both with me and with several journalists that he wrote the song in 1975. Yet he also clearly remembered performing it prior to Perón's return to the country, which took place in June 1973.

3. A video compiling eight of these events was uploaded to YouTube on February 24, 2018 and is, as of this article's revision, still available (MMLPQTP - Todas Las Versiones de 'El Hit Del Verano' Juntas 2018).

4. The difference is actually a whole tone, but Roleri's point is clear.

5. Feld coined the term "schizophonic mimesis" to broadly refer to the possibilities of sonic (re)production made possible through the splitting of a sound from its acoustic source. Here I refer to all the ways in which people and technologies created echoes, distortions, and transformations of Shériko's original melody.

6. Although *Cocineros Argentinos* is filmed live in front of a studio audience, like many live television programs it is edited and broadcast later.

7. Sweding is the act of re-making a commercial film, typically using amateur actors and low-budget production values. The term was introduced in Michel Gondry's 2008 film *Be Kind Rewind.*

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