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Audio education in Ecuador: an overview of the Music and Sound Production program at Universidad de las Artes.

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ABSTRACT

Universidad de las Artes is the first publicly funded arts university in the country, situated in Guayaquil – Ecuador. The Music and Sound Production program, part of the School of Sonic Arts (*Escuela de Artes Sonoras*), has been running for its 5th year, with the first cohort of students already graduated. This text will give a clear overview of the history of the program and how it's becoming the leading music production program available in the country. This paper also contains an overview of the current academic program, where it shows a brief explanation of the curriculum and how it has evolved during the first years. Also, how it follows the school's perspective of teaching, focusing on interdisciplinary practices, new technologies and a decolonized thinking. As well as, having an impression of its five itineraries or pathways that students can take. Furthermore, it will take a look into the admission process, the articulation with the other programs, its infrastructure and the future of the program.

1 Introduction

After the 2010 new Higher Education Law, approved by congress, Ecuador entered in a higher education reshape. In 2013, the law for the creation of Universidad de las Artes was approved by congress.[1] The creation of Universidad de las Artes, also known as UArtes, was part of the new four “emblematic” universities. The main focus of these new universities was to respond a forgotten demand on specific topics. Yachay Tech, an experimental science and technology university;

Ikiam, the university of the amazon region “focused on the development of knowledge, science and quality training for the conservation and sustainability of natural resources”[2]; UNAE, the national education university; and Universidad de las Artes, the only art dedicated university in Ecuador.

UArtes opened its doors on 2014 with pre-college course for 3 degrees: Film, Literature and Musical Arts. Having Visual Arts and Performing Arts programs starting in 2015. [3-4] Nowadays, the University compromises of 6 schools: Sonic Arts (music), Literature, Film, Performance Arts, Visual

Arts and a Postgraduate school; with 8 undergraduate and 3 postgraduate programs.

The institution main mission is to “To train professionals in the arts with full mastery of their field, an open spirit to interdisciplinary principles and practices, critical thinking and transformative social awareness to generate an artistic production that contributes to the expansion of knowledge, the promotion of culture and the development of the Ecuadorian society and creative economies.”[6]

UArtes is based in Guayaquil, the main port city in the country. A city that wouldn't have been everyone's first choice to open an art university. Not because there wasn't an art movement in the city, but most of the public and private art programs were located in Quito, the capital; and most of the art movement was ‘apparently’ happening there. Apparently, because that was not the case. The project is located in the middle of downtown, reclaiming and readapting old government buildings: the governance, old Internal Revenue Service and old banks. As well as in the facilities of Instituto Superior de Artes del Ecuador, known as ITAE, a technological institute of higher education where a few associate degrees, related to art were taught, this institute that was later attached to UArtes.

2 Escuela de Artes Sonoras

The Escuela de Artes Sonoras (EAS) or School of Sonic Arts in Spanish, started with one Music program: Artes Musicales y Sonoras. A program focused in music performance and the professionalization of musicians from different backgrounds. The program defined what the school's perspective would be. In an interview¹ made to Dr. Andrey Astaiza, Director of the school, he explained that the program does not seek hyper-specialization, nor an instrument specialist. But musicians with vast understanding of music in many fronts like pedagogy, performance and composition. This would allow graduates to ease their integration into the industry's workforce. Something that translated into the music production program too.

¹ Interview made to Dr. Andrey Astaiza. 13/02/2021

3 The music production program

In 2016, following the attachment of ITAE to UArtes, a plan was set in place to transfer the associate degree students into the bachelor programs. Current and graduated students were offered the chance to homologate and transfer their credits from the Sound and Music Production Associate Degree program into the bachelor's degree in music and Sound Production, giving birth to the program.

According to Dr. Ramiro Noriega², president of the university until 2020, in an interview made by the author, the main goal of transforming that program into the bachelor's degree was to recede from a pure-tech based teaching into a more artistic approach. Where the program would comply to the principles of the Higher Education Law and the Ecuadorian constitution. As well as, pushing the student body into newer creative practices and artistic research.

According to the registrar's archive, the program that started in the fall semester of 2016, had 220 students enrolled across the different semesters. This happened because a lot of the courses the students took at ITAE were homologated and they were placed in the according year of study.

4 First curriculum

The program and the first curriculum were approved by the Ecuadorian Board of Higher Education on May 18, 2016.³ Making this program the first of its kind in the public university system and one of the very few in Latin-American.

The Music and Sound Production program is comprised of 8 semesters plus one additional semester to develop their final project, following the higher education regulations at the time the program was presented. The first curriculum was developed to qualify students as fully competent music producers and as studio engineers. Giving them all technical and music theory foundation during their

² Interview made to Dr. Ramiro Noriega. 15/03/2021

³ Consejo de Educación Superior resolution: RPC-SO-19-No.306-2016

first year, followed by a development of competencies in the craft of studio sound recording, mixing, arraigning and producing. As well as, essential knowledge in the field of acoustics and music business.

The program is also envisioned within the same concept of the school and the university, to develop artist professionals endowed with many tools to cultivate their craft. Not only the production of records but related multidisciplinary music or sound creation practices.

All the undergraduate degrees offered at UArtes have a general studies branch, where students from all programs take courses on transversal studies of art, like art history, art philosophy and aesthetics, interdisciplinary creation laboratories, among others. These courses complement the academic development of the student throughout their student career. At the same time, they encourage the interaction and cooperation in between schools, creating spaces for interdisciplinary creation.

The program also has 5 specialization pathways to choose from their 5th semester. The first one, the general pathway, has a mixture of courses that complement music and sound production practices, such as radio production, songwriting and a new technology laboratory. The second option is Sound Production for Film, where the students learn the craft of production and postproduction of audio for moving image. The third option is Sound Design and Innovation, focused on sound and music creation processes with new emerging technologies. The fourth option is Sound Production for Performing Arts, this path is focused in sound creation and sound production practices for theatre and dance. The final option is the Live Sound Engineering Path, concentrated in the studies of live performance sound production, recording and stage managerial practices. As noticed, these pathways respond to a direct collaboration with the other programs at the university.

5 2018 review

After 4 semesters, the program managed to graduate its first 7 students, all of them from the homologation process from ITAE, that's why it

happened faster than the music program. This allowed the school to make its first curriculum review,[5] making some fine adjustments in the content of some classes, arraignment in the class order in the curriculum and credit/hour distribution. Now, changes were made taking into account 2 years of experience, achievements, information and new infrastructure development.

During 2021, the school is working on its curriculum validity renewal with the Board of Higher Education. For this new curriculum review, the new 2018 Higher Education reform has to be taken into account. It will allow students to be finished with the program (including the final project) in 8 semesters. The updated law also limits the number of pathways to 3 and lowers the amount of credits/hours needed to graduate.

Work has started on this front, with now more facilities and infrastructure, there is a chance to rethink course contents, turn more classes into practice-based ones and raise autonomous practice time for students. This last point became really important for this new review, as most faculty agree, that students need more time to produce more and diversify their practice, in both during class and in their coursework.

6 School and teaching perspective

Escuela de Artes Sonoras has a strong perspective on their teaching focus: Interdisciplinary practices, new technologies and decolonized thinking.

Within the Music production program, it's been tackled in different ways. First, some specialization paths have a straight link with other programs like Dance, Theater, Visual Arts and Film. Where most coursework involves some kind of interaction with students from the other programs to be fulfilled.

Also, students are able to take some classes in other programs like Literature, Visual Arts and Film; specially classes were Music Production faculty teaches in the other programs, as they will always have a very musical or sound approach to them.

In some class projects students are encouraged to invite peers from the other courses to take part in their projects, could be as lyricists, designers, actors, music video directors and producers.

In some classes like Recording Techniques I and II, students are encouraged to find projects outside the university, this allows the University to further its reach into the city's music community and to become a pivotal agent in the growing industry; as well as, giving students real industry contact, the push to generate or find new projects and immerse themselves into the growing industry.

It's safe to say that the program and faculty is always trying to keep updated with new emerging technology. This program has the highest number of classes that involve technology in campus, being the recording studios the center of most of them. On top of the usage of the campus facilities and the comprehensive learning of software and hardware related to music and sound production, students are encouraged to seek new practices in the different fields of audio. For example, the use of new technologies for music composition like computer assisted composition software, new distribution means like Expanded Experiences (XR) and Interactive audio in videogames, music performance and sound installations.

On the other hand, decolonized thinking is one of the main focus and one that stands out compared to other music production programs in the country. EAS is not catalogized as a jazz school, nor a commercial music, nor a classical conservatoire; it brings students from all musical backgrounds and it is a place where their musicality and way of understanding music collides. Even though western music is still being taught, there is no exclusion in the teaching of Ecuadorian and Latin-American music taught from a non-western perspective, following the lines of inclusion of interculturality and understanding of music from a decolonized perspective. In music production, it could be quite hard to undergo this kind of teaching, as technology is in the center of it all, highlighting that the production of music is a new topic that started just last century. The program tries to encourage faculty to use examples, projects and bibliography from abroad and use it within our context; to inspire students into re-thinking music production as Ecuadorians and Latin-Americans. Also, applying common teaching methodologies but with our music

and our native instruments. For example: in arraigning class, instead of making a 4 voices string arraignment, create a 4 voices andean woodwinds one.

7 Admissions process

The Ecuadorian Secretary of Education, Science and Technology (Senescyt) has a universal admission process for all programs in the higher education public system, that compromises of a general aptitude test. On top of that, some universities have their own internal process. UArtes, having very specific art degrees, where applicants' abilities can't be determined by the general aptitude test, have their very own process for each one of the degrees offered.

In the case of Music and sound Production, there are two stages of this process. The first one is the presentation of the application folder, that is made entirely online. This application folder must contain: the applicant's resume, copy of their ID or Passport, a motivational essay, a filled questionnaire and a video showcasing their creative work as a musician or producer, plus a document with the detail of the video. These folders are reviewed by the program's admission committee, formed by faculty members.

If accepted by the committee, the applicant will go through the second phase, an in-person interview, audition and written test of basic music theory. During the interview the applicant is asked about their experience in music, production and studio familiarity. In their audition they are asked to perform two contrasting pieces in their instrument of choice; as well as, do a simple melodic and rhythmic reading exercises. This allows to understand their level of musicality. The written test contains simple music theory exercises like notes, intervals and chord recognition; scales and key signatures; and music notation questions. For our program, regarding previous music studies, some students come from the different conservatoires around Ecuador, some from private music classes, but most of them self-taught.

At the completion of the second phase all grades are weighted and between 25 to 30 students are accepted

to enroll in the program each intake; one in April, (Spring) and one in October (Fall). Some of them will be offered a place directly to 1st semester but some of them will have to enroll to a pre-college music theory and general studies leveling course before enrolling to the 1st semester.

8 Demographics

The following data was retrieved from the University's academic management system which the author has access to.

As it happens in most of the music production programs, there is an unbalanced number of female applicants, having more male students throughout all the semesters. The school and university have been trying to balance the admission process with affirmative actions for female and minority applicants. Sadly, at the time of the writing of this text, the music production program had only 28 female students out of the 204 enrolled in the Fall semester of 2020. Making the least equalitarian program in the university. (see table 1) The school is trying to tackle this by diversifying their recruitment tactics and creating more pre-college activities specially to reach female applicants.

Program	Female	Male	Total
Dance	94	36	130
Film	87	130	219
Literature	124	51	176
Musical Arts	58	137	195
Music Production	28	176	204
Pedagogy in the Arts	33	32	65
Performance Arts	86	52	140
Visual Arts	210	183	394

Table 1 Program enrollment according to genre (Fall Semester 2020)⁴

Our students come from all over Ecuador, but the majority come from Guayas province As in the rest of the university around 80% of our students come from the lower two quintiles of the society and are recent graduates of the public high school system.

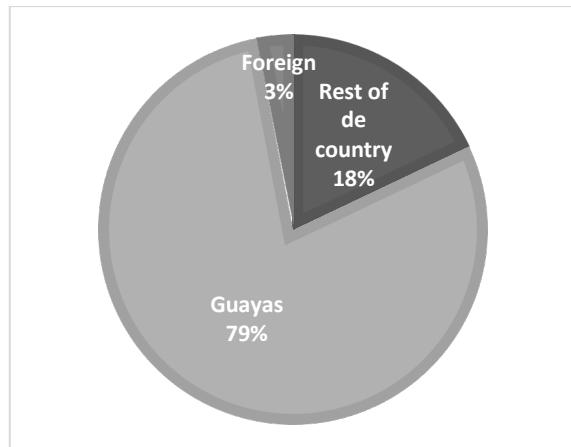


Table 2 Student's place of origin⁵

9 Facilities

The university has up to date facilities for music and sound production for their students. Distributed in different buildings in downtown Guayaquil, the students have at their disposal a medium scale recording studio (Estudio A) with 3 live rooms, and a control room fitted with a 48-channel analogue console. A second smaller studio (Estudio B) with two live rooms and a vocal booth. Both studios placed in MZ14 a building dedicated for art production and innovation. At the main building (Gobernación) there are another two studios, one dedicated for foley and VO recording that also works as a 5.1 edit suite. The other one, a medium size dubbing stage fitted with a 5.1 monitoring system and a hybrid audio post-production desk. At the same building the university has 4 audio editing suites, 6 individual instrument rehearsal spaces, one big ensemble room and a small recital hall. At Tábara building, there are two more ensemble rooms, keyboard room, an instrument building workshop and two 15 iMac computer rooms with music production software and peripherals. Further plans are being made to reconstruct and readapt another government building to develop more spaces for the performing arts and music programs.

⁴⁻⁵ Data retrieved from UArtes Academic Management System

10 Achievements

During the 4.5 years of the program we have had surpass a few milestones. One of them, was to have our faculty members as founding members of AES Ecuador, as well as having students start the UArtes Student Chapter, which has been really active since its creation. Also, students have been very active in the AES student competitions in Ecuador, Latin America and the main AES Convention having students as finalists and winners, showcasing the development of the program and their abilities learnt at UArtes.

On 2018, the school started Conferencia de Audio y Sonido del Ecuador (CASE), Ecuadorian Audio and Sound Conference in English. In close partnership with AES Ecuador the first conference was made with 16 masterclasses and 2 concerts in 2 days. In 2019, UArtes and AES Ecuador made CASE the country's main event in sound and audio, gathering audio professionals and students from all over the country and region. There were 30 masterclasses, 6 workshops, an exhibition space, 3 concerts, as well as the Ecuadorian student recording competition. [7][8]

Additional, attending one of the main pillars of the school within the music creation using new technologies, mMAT was born. Minga Multimedia de Arte y Tecnología is a multidisciplinary event that gathers a variety of workshops, concerts and installation exhibition. Most of the artwork developed are interdisciplinary music/sound driven pieces. Benefiting from the dialogue between the 7 programs in the general studies classes and projects born from the new technologies' classes within the school. Ranging from sound installations to live dance/music performance.

In 2019, the 5th edition was held in MZ14, with 6 concerts with international guest from Argentina, Germany and Colombia and a gallery exhibition with pieces made from students from the Music School and the Visual Art School.[9]

11 Final Thoughts

The program and the university have developed to become a pivotal point in the city's music and art scene and became a satellite hub for the rest of the country. It has restarted the scene by bringing around 1.5k students that have embraced and reshape the city cultural offer and demand.

During the Covid-19 pandemic has been a difficult struggle to continue with some of the classes, having all practice-based lectures turn into online classes and without any studio time for students. Now, students and faculty will be able to slowly ease back into the recording studio, having online lectures from the studio and practice time for students to develop their work. The pandemic hit really hard to our student body, as said before, most of our students come from the two lowers quintiles of the society, making it really hard for them to get the necessary tools for some of the classes and without access to some of our facilities.

Without a doubt the program is still to see a lot more to come, new. Infrastructure development, the updated curriculum and why not the develop of a master program to further the studies of our graduates.

The program is also attracting more students from newer backgrounds and musical capabilities, since the big rise of Latin-American reggaeton artists and beat-makers a lot more students are interested in music production and the crafts associated. It is also making faculty rethinking and include these new practices and genres into their lectures. Hopefully in a couple of years, alumni would disrupt the growing Ecuadorian music industry as producers, mixers, beat-makers, recording engineers and artist.

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