

## **~KIRAIÑIA (Long Flutes)**

### **An ethnomusicological documentary about music, communication and memories of the Cubeo Emi-Hehénewa**

~KIRAIÑIA (Long Flutes)

36:02 min, Pamie (aka. Cubeo) and Spanish with English subtitles. Dir. Juan Castrillón. United States, 2019.

“I did the documentary film not because I wanted to do a documentary film. The documentary film is an outcome of being with the camera during fieldwork” (Juan Castrillón, Interview May 2020)

The documentary film *~KIRAIÑIA (Long Flutes)* evolved from Juan Castrillón’s (director and producer) ethnomusicological fieldwork and doctoral research project with the Amazonian Cubeo Emi-Hehénewa community in Southern Colombia. *~KIRAIÑIA (Long Flutes)* is about the process of building a *long house* and its corresponding musical tradition of making the flutes, the preparations for the performance and the performance itself. The viewers follow the steps of getting the *~kiraiñia* flutes back from its depository on the ground of a stream, rebuilding them, remembering the dance steps and teaching them to the younger generation, up to the performance itself at the end of the film.

Castrillón says that his goal is to generate a feel for the daily life of the community, as well as to show the array of alternative possibilities of ethnomusicological filmmaking. Castrillón refers to his project as an artifact which ought to call his audience into an interactive reflection on the film.

The film displays the community members’ many diverse and subjective pieces of memory. Whilst showing different conversations with and between community members, the camera allows the audience to witness the passing down of knowledge and memories from one generation to the next. Thus, the documentary’s storyline leads from the process of the *~kiraiñia* flute making, the collective memory of the dancing tradition, to the performance itself at the end of the film. The film gives an insight into the tradition of the *~kiraiñia* and the knowledge and diverse memories of individuals of different generations as well as into how they interact with each other and their environment. Each member is introduced by their first name and responsibility within the community, creating a strong bond with the viewer.

Castrillón uses elements of audiovisual media to give a detailed but also well-reflected glimpse into the lives and musical traditions of the Cubeo Emi-Hehénewa. At the beginning of the film, he draws attention to the various difficulties of the ethnomusicological and anthropological transfer of knowledge. Moreover, he underlines that the following scenes should give a feeling

for the community and its tradition rather than “the truth”. He also deals critically with his role as narrator and producer. Castrillón makes it clear that the documentary should rather be understood as a film, than a depiction of reality. Marco Kircher says that documentary films create a reality that seems to be true and real due to the documentary's invisible authority of truth. This authority is created through the clear, understandable and seemingly uninterrupted filming process, which the viewers often accept as a given truth which they happened to be witnesses to (Kircher 2012). Castrillón deconstructs this unquestioned authority of the documentary genre for example by letting the audience hear "Luz..., Cámara..., Acción!" (Lights..., Camera..., Action!), which draws them right into the filming process. The film concentrates on the diversity and subjectivities of different memories and voices, partly in a fragmented manner, instead of comparing or unifying them. Castrillón lets people tell their stories in their own way and voice. The camera accompanies that. The community members tell and explain their tradition to one another in a relaxed and rather humorous manner. Castrillón creates a balance between people's own voices and the correlating background information through written and spoken comments for the viewers' better understanding. The documentary film focuses on the memories and the gaps of the memories. Those gaps can also be seen in the use of music. At the start of the film, there is a black screen and the viewers only hear the music of the *~kiraiñia*. In the end of the film the setting is flipped - the viewers see a performance in which only the first part is shown alongside its music. The rest of the performance is without diegetic music. Instead Ernesto's (a community member, healer and storyteller) background voice gives some informative details on the performance and the viewers must remember the music from the documentary's beginning.

The viewers get a feeling for the community and an insight into the tradition of the *~kiraiñia*, its making and performance. The focus is on the multiplicity so that with every additional viewing the spectators can discover additional details in the film, its conversations, comments, editing, etc. The film becomes a subjective expedition. These details confirm the complexity of the Cubeo Emi-Hehénewa's culture and communication, which can't be completely explained and represented in a film. Castrillón is effectively decolonizing his ethnomusicological fieldwork (and shows us how it can be done) by reflecting particularly self-critical on his position as a filmmaker and by providing this “filmic pipeline” for the Cubeo Emi-Hehénewa's own voices and stories. His filmwork shows in practice what ethnomusicologist Thomas Solomon reflected on as follows: “[...] ethnomusicology can not only learn from postcolonial studies, but also make a significant contribution to it” by adding “[...] a more embodied, experience-based perspective to postcolonial studies.” (Solomon 2012).

In summary, the documentary *~KIRAIÑIA (Long Flutes)* gives an interesting and exciting insight into the tradition of the *~kiraiñia*, the life of the Cubeo Emi-Hehénewa, their ways of communicating and remembering, as well as their interaction with each other and their

environment. The film offers many ways to be read by its viewers, who may or may not have previous knowledge in the respective fields of research. The audience will be moved to reflect and perhaps smile, be curious and interested in Amazonia's Indigenous peoples as well as in related ethnomusicological and anthropological topics. This documentary is part of Juan Castrillón's doctoral project and will thus be shown to the public only after May 2021. The students of the Seminar "Introduction to ethnomusicological Amazonia research in the context of Gender and Decolonial Studies" (lecturer Nora Bammer) are thankful to Juan Castrillón and the Cubeo Emi-Hehénewa for this thought provoking and insightful preview as well as for the online Q&A session that the filmmaker provided!

Review by Lynn Louisa Abel (BA Musicology, BA Theatre, Film and Media Studies)

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**Solomon, Thomas:** „Where is the Postcolonial in Ethnomusicology?“, in: Nannyonga-Tamusuza, Sylvia; Solomon, Thomas: *Ethnomusicology in East Africa: Perspectives from Uganda and Beyond*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers 2012, 216 – 251.

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#### **ABOUT THE CUBEO EMI-HEHÉNEWA**

The Cubeo Emi-Hehenewa clan is a native Amazonian community living in the Uaupés River Valley in Southern Colombia (an area known as Northwest Amazonia). This community shares linguistic and social features with other Tukanoan speaking groups of the Colombian Uaupés, and the Alto Rio Negro in Brazil. The academic interest for the music of these communities began after Theodor Koch-Grünberg visited the region at the beginning of the twentieth century (Koch-Grünberg 1909). He recorded sounds of ~kiraiñia long flutes (also called yapurutú) in wax cylinders; recently, some of these recordings were digitized and released by the Ethnographic Museum of Berlin (Koch and Ziegler 2006). Decades after Koch-Grünberg's work pioneered ethnographic research in the region, the American anthropologist Irving Goldman produced two monographs about the Cubeo (Goldman 1979, 2004), which included a dedicated analysis on the musical performance done in collaboration with ethnomusicologist Marina Roseman. Recent ethnographic descriptions about Cubeo rituals and expressivity have been published by the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut of Berlin (Kraus, Halbmayr and Kummels 2018).

Text by Dir. Juan Castrillón, Ethnomusicologist

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