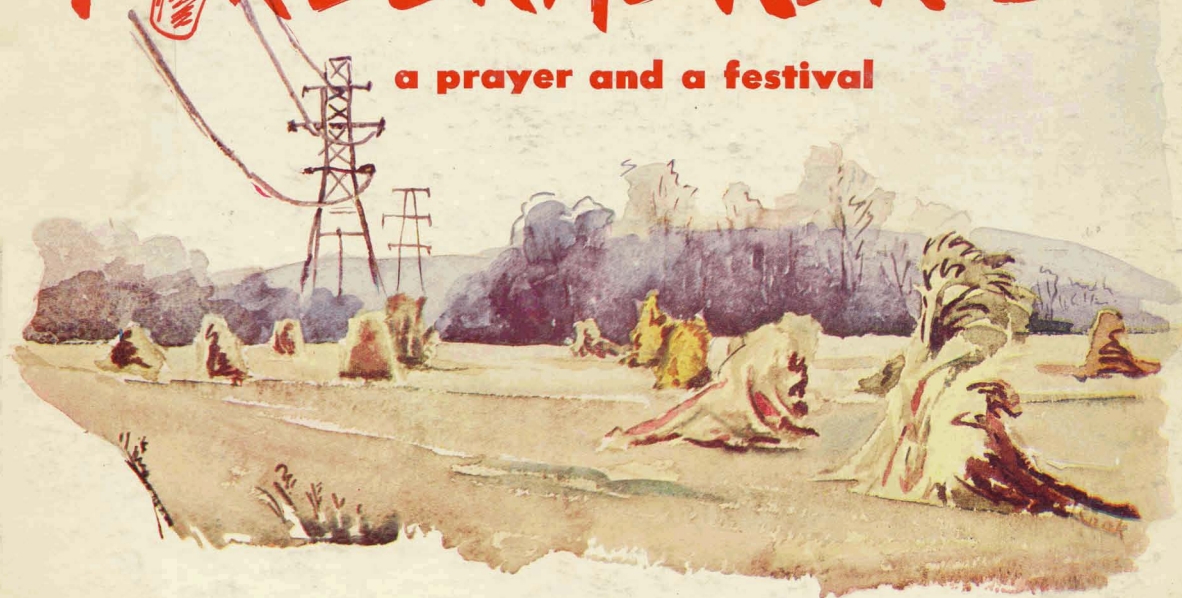


RR
Road Recordings

MEXICAN FIRECRACKERS

a prayer and a festival



***PRAYER--** Fertility prayer by Indian man and woman
in empty earthen-floored church, Chamula, Mexico

***FESTIVAL--** Church bells and Firecrackers before dawn, Ajijic, Mexico

Collected by Sam Eskin

a prayer

At the end of the paved Pan American highway near *San Cristobal de las Casas* in the state of Chiapas, Mexico, the Guatemala border is only a few bumpy hours away over the construction. To the left is an even worse dirt road lurching in the direction of Yucatan and the Gulf. Last year Sam Eskin went up this road.

Only ten or eleven miles to the north he encountered the village of *Chamula*. Here *no se habla español*; like most of this area it is Indian,—a village, a few houses around a church, the suggestion of a *zocalo*. Why *Chamula* was established here is no longer apparent. Over the centuries life has moved around and away from *Chamula*; burro paths that wind off into the mountain country in all directions are overgrown.

Looking for native music, Sam started off to locate *el presidente* in order to get information about the country. He got no further than the earthen-floored church, for a strange and eerie babel was issuing from its direction; it was apparently empty, yet not at service.

So in electric-powerless *Chamula*, Sam Eskin sat down with a spring-wound machine unobtrusively in the rear of the church and recorded the mesmeric singsong of an Indian man and woman in a fertility prayer.

This privileged communication never could have been recorded with the knowledge and consent of the village people, but its hypnotic warmth envelopes the stark poverty and isolation, this praying for a son, here at the end of the road.



and a festival

*Ajijic**, on the shores of large *Lago de Chapala*, in the state of Jalisco, near Guadalajara is much more sophisticated than *Chamula*. In fact these two communities are perhaps extreme examples representative of the real Mexico. Fishing and agriculture are the mainstays of *Ajijic*, but the lake is drying out as did Mexico City's lake centuries ago. A determined attempt is being made to attract the American tourist, for as the lake goes, so goes the

agrarian economy.

"I was rudely awakened at three or four in the morning. The uproar was really deafening. I reached out from my bunk and flipped the tape machine on, set level and dozed off again. Fifteen minutes later firecrackers started going off, and sleep was no more that night..."

Thus speaks Sam Eskin of the events leading up to the festival, where he recorded from a patio near the *zocalo* or square. The patio belonged to a friend of his who operates the

Scorpion Club.

"Strangely enough," says Sam, *"El Escorpion's patio was infested with black widow spiders."*

In Mexico one religious festival follows closely on the heels of another. One never knows at what moment all heaven will break loose with church bells, firecrackers, singing, mariachis, brass bands. The entire populace along with roosters and dogs are swept on into the contagious festival spirit.

E. C.

*pronounced *Abeehee*

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