

RECORDED IN COLOMBIA BY JIM BILLIPP



ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4055

# Sacred and Profane Music of the IKA



Post-burial ceremonial washing of the hands



Dancing the CHICOTE after the procession of San Juan

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**SIDE A the Fiesta de San Juan**

1. CHICOTE accordion :54
2. CHICOTE accordion and guacharaca 3:58
3. CHICOTE accordion and guacharaca 5:34
4. CHICOTE accordion and guacharaca 6:38
5. CHICOTE accordion 3:32

**SIDE B aftermath of the Fiesta**

1. CHICOTE harmonica and narrative IKA song by Cayetano Torres 4:19
2. CHICOTE harmonica by Cayetano-Torres, narrative IKA song by Luís Villafana 5:13
3. Sacred IKA incantations and commentary by MAMO José de Jesus Villafaña 11:56

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RECORDED IN COLOMBIA BY JIM BILLIPP

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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Recorded and notes by Jim Billipp



Dancing the CHICOTE after the procession of San Juan

Photo: Jim Billipp

The IKA (people) are a group of some two thousand native South Americans who live farming and weaving on the southern slopes of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, an isolated mountain mass in the North of Colombia. Each year at the end of June hundreds of IKA converge from the surrounding hills on the village of San Sebastián de Rábago; they come to celebrate the Fiesta de San Juan. Among them are barefoot old women who have carefully walked the tortuous mountain paths for days in order to participate in the festivities.

San Sebastián is traditionally the greatest population center of the IKA; it is ideally located in a broad and fertile valley on the alto Río Fundación. Here they are at least sixty mudwalled houses with bright, newly thatched roofs of straw. They lie in neat rows inside an enclosing wall constructed of large fieldstones balanced lacyly to chest height.

There has been a Catholic mission at San Sebastián for generations, and those IKA who have attempted to maintain what is uniquely their culture have for years chosen

to live elsewhere, away from its influence. Yet I understand from IKA friends with whom I have come to the Fiesta that most of the respected IKA leaders, both religious and political, are in town. For most IKA the Fiesta de San Juan is important as a social event, regardless of its religious trappings.

The church looks like the surrounding IKA houses excepting that it is bigger and there is a wooden cross over the door, which opens on the town's central plaza. Here a crowd of several hundred has gradually gathered through the late morning and early afternoon. About two-thirds of those present wear traditional IKA clothing while the rest are dressed in 'civilized' style. Even most of the latter, however, speak the IKA tongue better than Spanish. A few uniformed Colombian soldiers are present on the sidelines, permanently deployed at San Sebastián to encourage courage order.

Inside the church it is dark and quiet. At the rear stands Saint John, three feet tall, on a portable platform lavishly covered with red velvet. He is carved of wood and painted, complete with hairsuit. Flowers and little carved sheep rest before him in velvet pasture; it is his day.

As the crowd grows in number it grows impatient: where is the priest? Hours pass slowly in waiting, the people are bored. The men have already begun to drink CHIRINCHI in anticipation of the unrestrained drinking and dancing that will follow the procession of the santo. Eventually discontent boils to the surface in the crowd and it is decided that if the priest doesn't appear before four o'clock (someone has a watch!), then the IKA will be forced to proceed without his direction. "After all," I hear it reasoned, "he's OUR saint."

The priest arrived, tying the sash on his white vestment, just as the crowd pressed in on the church. He had some explaining to do! The priest's embarrassment was obvious as he addressed his flock in impeccable Castillian: he was awfully sorry but he had been certain that it would rain in the afternoon, so he had performed the procession early in the morning. There had been barely enough manpower to carry the saint on a full circuit of the village!

The IKA were astonished, even angered. But the priest was quickly convinced that the santo wouldn't object to another outing, and he assumed his leadership role in the proceedings. So it happened that San Juan paraded twice through San Sebastián in 1976.

The Fiesta began in earnest after the second procession, there was much drinking of CHIRINCHI (a stiff sugar cane liquor), and everyone danced the CHICOTE in front of the church. CHICOTE means penis in the IKA language; that is the word they use to name both their simple two-step secular dance and the rollicking music to which it is danced. In the old days CHICOTES were played on a pair of flutes, male and female, accompanied by drums. Although these instruments are rarely seen today, the CHICOTE lingers at the edge of life in music, played on accordions brought into the mountains from Valledupar.

SIDE A of this record consists of CHICOTES that I recorded during the dancing at the Fiesta de San Juan, in San Sebastián. They are numbered 1 through 5, all are played on accordion. SIDE A CHICOTES 2, 3, and 4 also feature the playing of a raspy percussion instrument, the guacharaca. I have chosen to include the discussion in

Spanish heard on SIDE A CHICOTES 1 and 5 in order to provide the listener further insight into the conditions under which recording was done.

The IKA accordion player did not know me, he was upset by my appearance with a tape recorder. The first CHICOTE on SIDE A begins with me asking him if he wouldn't like a copy of the recording—"¿Quiere una copia?" Somewhat agreeable to my suggestion, he answers "también"—'alright'. I assure him that I will make him one, "bueno, le hago", implying that it should be in return for his cooperation in playing for it. His final comment before commencing to play is "¡seguro!"—'sure!'. The word is pronounced with a sarcasm underlining the acordeonista's doubt of the sincerity of my offer.

Side A band 5 opens with the accordion player warming up after a CHIRINCHI break. I reassure him that I will bring him a copy of the recording—"Le traigo una copia si quiere." He responds, "¿Cuándo vuelve?"—"When are you coming back?"

Here a bystander interjects, "el año, ¡nunca!"—"in a year, never!"

"No..." I reply, thinking of how easily the recording is duplicated, "¿usted pasa por el Valle de vez en cuando? Esto no es problema."—"Do you ever get down to Valledupar? This is no problem."

The acordeonista answers by going into yet another monotonous CHICOTE. Though drinking continues the Fiesta disperses after several exuberant hours. Only a few stagger to dance now in the darkening plaza before the church, where the door is closed.

All of SIDE B was recorded in the aftermath of the Fiesta de San Juan, in Prosperidad, which lies a day's walk to the West of San Sebastián. (It took us two days, we stopped to visit, eat and drink at many houses along the way.) My hosts here were my old friend Juanita Villafaña and her husband, don José de Jesus Villafaña. He is an elderly IKA medicine man, or MAMO.

The Villafaña's house at Prosperidad is only the most recently acquired of a number of far flung houses that Juanita and José de Jesus own, either independently or together. Land here was recently reclaimed for the IKA by the Colombian government. Before that the Church had title to this land and its produce fed the missionaries at San Sebastián. The Villafañas homestead here; they have planted crops, and their animals graze the steep forested slopes. When in Prosperidad they live in what was built to serve as a mission storehouse.

In the days immediately following my arrival at Prosperidad, waves of loud travellers stopped at the Villafaña's house to visit on their way home from the Fiesta. Drinking and arguing continued as the Fiesta spread back into the mountains, where it would last until the CHIRINCHI ran out.

SIDE B band 1 features my friend and travelling companion Cayetano Torres from Sogróme, playing a CHICOTE on my German harmonica. The grandchildren of don José de Jesus can be heard talking in the background as Cayetano introduces the music in the IKA language, of which I understand little. Then he plays the harmonica until he is interrupted at the microphone by the suitor of his sister-in-law, at which time Cayetano breaks out in traditional IKA narrative song. The song's lyrics are composed in the singing; in it Cayetano recounts his recent adventures.



IKA woman harvesting coca leaf. Her husband, right, does the pruning.



Young IKA man weaving a tunic.



IKA man lighting dried frailejón leaf offerings to cleanse the air of sickness.



IKA woman carrying offerings of burning leaves.

Photos by Jim Billipp

On SIDE B band 2 Cayetano again plays a CHICOTE on harmonica, this time the singer is Luis Villafaña, the youngest son of don José de Jesus. Luis has been singing for days and his voice is strained, he cannot maintain his usual falsetto. Luis starts and stops singing several times, lowering the pitch of his voice each time until he is singing quite well.

SIDE B band 3 is a collection of the secret medicine songs of don José de Jesus, the elderly MAMO, and his comments on them to me in charmingly poor Spanish. The songs, simply, are intonations of the IKA names for the plant, animal and spirit beings known to the medicine man. Through proper intonation of the names of things, the MAMO is able to summon the spirits of these things for consultation.

The first of these songs or incantations is not preceded by a verbal introduction, and it is interrupted twice by pauses and the singer's comments before it ends with the words "brazo santo, gena ni". This song invokes a santo or spirit being, perhaps more than one.

The next song ends with the Spanish words "rana, sapo rana". This has been the song of the frog or toad, these animals are sexual symbols in the IKA mythology of creation, which stresses fertility.

At this point don José de Jesus addresses me in Spanish; commenting on the rarity of this song form, and explaining that the knowledge of this type of song is restricted to the medicine men, each of whom interprets the songs in a distinctly personal manner. He says, "Pero éste el canto, yo creo que ninguno lo conoce. Ninguno ninguno...se conoce el MAMO. Pero cada quien canta es distinto distinto, no es casi igual." An English translation: 'But these songs, I don't believe that anyone is familiar with them. Nobody. The medicine men know them. But each one who sings does it differently, it is not quite the same.'

The song of the condor follows, introduced by the words "Ahora, vuitre. Ese macóndor."—'And now, the buzzard; (how did you say it?) that condor.' When speaking of the condor in Spanish the IKA invariably call it a buzzard—vuitre, although they recognize the difference between the species. The song ends with the exclamation "vuitre, ¡aye!"

There is no verbal introduction to the last of the incanta-

tions, which is the song of the tigre or mountain lion. Don José de Jesus again interrupts his singing to comment on it in the IKA language, which he then translates into Spanish for my benefit: "Que iba a cazar, que iba a comer. Que andaba cazando, cantaba así."—'He went hunting, in order to eat. He sang like that on the hunt.' The song is resumed and at the end I ask, "¿Eso para cazar?"—'That song is for hunting?' Don José de Jesus answers, "Que andaba cazando, ése es tigre."—'He was on the prowl, that is the mountain lion.'

The remainder of SIDE B band 3 is the old man's touching commentary on the disappearance of the form of song he has just displayed. In general his words can well be understood as a lament for the inexorable disintegration of IKA culture:

"Pero entre nosotros casi que no se costumbra ni a cantar, cantar no...y éso está olvidando. Eses los TETI de que es por aquí no comprende que quiere decir éses canto, ni conoce. Y ahora es canto no más y la música. De baile. El CHICOTE, el CHICOTE...éso. Hoy en día, no. No quiere aprender éso. Por éso lo están acabando éso. No sabe ni hijo mío, y ése el canto que estoy cantando y no sabe...y no le conoce. No le importa. ¡Si usted lo pone ése canto y pregunte, y no sabe qué es el canto que está cantando! Ni sabe, ni se sabe."

Translation: 'But among us it is not even customary to sing now, no singing...and this is being forgotten. Those IKA friends who live around here don't understand what these songs mean, they don't even know them. And now there is only (narrative) singing and the (accordion) music. Dance music, the CHICOTE, that's all. These days, no. Nobody wants to learn these things. That's why they are coming to an end. Not even my son is familiar with the songs I've been singing. It's not important to him. If you replay those songs for him and ask him, he won't even know what it is! He doesn't know them, he doesn't even know.'

The record ends with a sound very characteristic of the IKA; the old MAMO is chewing coca leaf and we hear the rubbing of the stick against his YO'BURU, a hollow gourd containing lime.

Jim Billipp