

ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS



FE 4213

VOL. 2

# MUSIC OF GUATEMALA

Recorded and Edited by Jacques Jangoux





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MUSIC OF  
GUATEMALA

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Jacques Jangoux

SIDE 1

FIESTA DE NUESTRA SENORA DE LOS ANGELES:  
NEBAJ - IXIL INDIANS

1. Pito, chirimia and big drum in procession
2. Two old men singing in procession
3. Marimba - Indian musicians from Nebaj
4. Two marimbas from near Aguacatan
- 5 & 6. Marimba of the "Baile Vaquero"
7. Ladino musicians from Cotzal playing marimba
8. Drum and pito, #1
9. Drum and pito, #2
10. Bells of the church during procession

SIDE 2

FIESTA DE SAN MATEO:  
SAN MATEO IXTATAN - CHUJ INDIANS

- 1, 2, 3, 4. Violin and guitar at market,  
restaurants and bars
- 5, 6, 7. Marimba, played by 3 musicians at a bar
8. Old woman praying in the church
9. Drunk woman singing at a bar
10. Two marimbas playing at church
11. Drum and chirimia

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

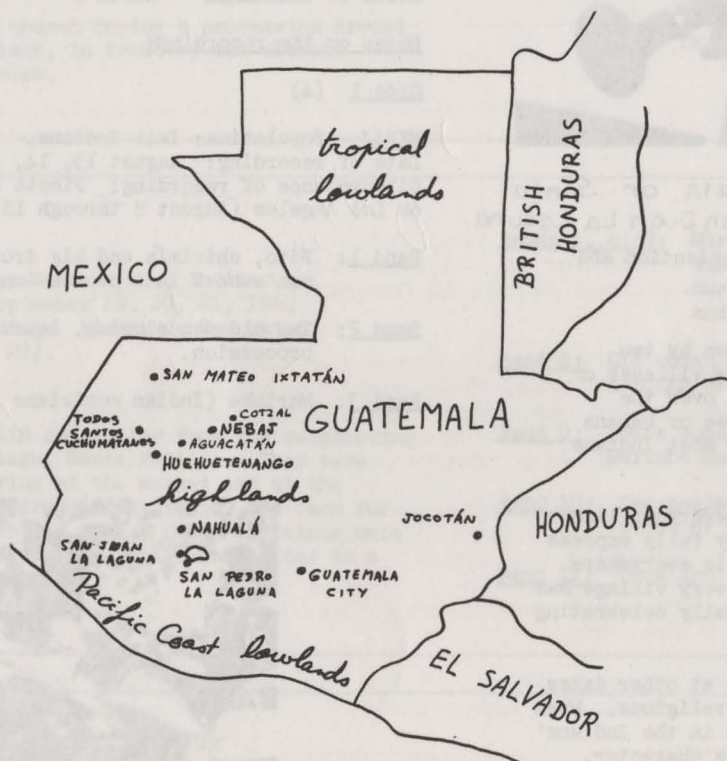
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ETHNIC FOLKWAYS FE 4213



# MUSIC OF GUATEMALA / VOL. 2



## MUSIC OF GUATEMALA

Recorded in 1964 by Jacques Jangoux editing, notes, and photographs by Jacques Jangoux.

The music presented in this album is typical of rural Guatemala. Most of the inhabitants of this area are Indians of Mayan descent, but almost everywhere in the Guatemalan countryside one can also find Ladinos: persons, of whatever descent, who speak Spanish in their homes and have adopted the Ladino way-of-life, which is mostly Spanish. Mostly ---because both the cultures of rural Guatemala are the result of the confrontation over several centuries of two very different civilizations, the indigenous Mayan, and the Western, introduced by the Spanish in the 16th century. Both cultures have borrowed traits from the other, and this is nowhere more evident than in their music, which is a mixture of European, Indian, and perhaps also African elements.

Physically Guatemala may be divided into three areas:

- 1) the tropical Northern Lowlands, where the Mayan civilization reached its peak, but now sparsely inhabited;
- 2) the temperate Central Highlands, the home of most of the present-day Indians; and 3) the tropical lowlands of the Pacific Coast, the site of intensive banana and coffee cultivation.

The Indians of the highlands live in scattered settlements. The mountainous terrain makes communication difficult and life is usually hard. The men farm, working corn and bean fields on the mountain slopes, corn being the staple in their diet. The women usually remain at home, attending to domestic chores like cooking, spinning cotton, and weaving.

The poor communication has tended to isolate the



villages, allowing each to retain its own identity. Each village has its own patterns of cloth, for example, and often even its own "personality" and psychology. All villagers are usually alike, however, in their shyness and distrust of foreigners -- perhaps because all are isolated, perhaps because all



Chirimia player from Nahualá or Santa Catarina, Ixtahuacan, in San Juan La Laguna.

have experienced a long period of colonization and oppression.

The isolation of the villagers is broken by two things: going to market, often in other villages or towns, where they meet people from all over the country; and going to work in the coffee or banana plantations on the Pacific Coast where most Indians work for several months of the year.

While music is a part of the Indians' everyday life, it is only during the fiestas that they fully express their musical heritage. Then the air is everywhere full of music. At least once a year every village has a big fiesta lasting several days, usually celebrating the patron saint of the village.

There may also be additional festivals at other dates to celebrate other occasions, usually religious. Most of their music is therefore associated in the Indians' mind with religion, and has a religious character.

Festivals follow a typical pattern. There are processions through the street of the village, often accompanied by musicians. Another common feature are "bailes," plays in which dialogue and dancing alternate, performed by masked dancers. Many of these bailes, as for instance the best known, the "Baile de la Conquista," were written by Spanish missionaries to replace in Catholic religious festivals the dances that the Maya performed during their religious festivals. Every festival is also accompanied by praying and burning of incense in the church, the firing of "cohetes" (fireworks or rockets), and drinking and dancing to marimba music at the cantinas (bars) where aguardiente (sugar cane alcohol) is sold.

Guatemalan music is sometimes vocal and, more often, instrumental. Guatemalans consider the marimba their national instrument. It is a large wooden xylophone with resonators, usually played by three or four musicians, although a small one may be played by only one person. The origin of the marimba is un-

known, but it may have come from Africa with the negro slaves. Other popular instruments are the chirimia, a double reed instrument like an oboe; and the pito, a kind of flute. Both are usually accompanied by one or two drums, which can be of various sizes. The dancers in the "bailes" usually have gourd rattles, sometimes replaced (as in Todos Santos) by bells. In a few villages, the Indians manufacture and play violins and guitars.

The selections presented in this album are mostly Indian, with a few Ladino pieces. The Indians are all Maya, and belong to the Tzutuhil, Ixil, Mam, Chuj, and Chorti linguistic groups.

Jacques Jangoux

MUSIC OF GUATEMALA - Album 2

Notes on the recordings

Side 1 (A)

NEBAJ - Population: Ixil Indians.

Date of recording: August 13, 14, 15, 1964

Circumstance of recording: Fiesta de Nuestra Señora de Los Angeles (August 8 through 15)

Band 1: Pito, chirimía and big drum carried on a man's back in a procession.

Band 2: Two old men singing, later in the same procession.

Band 3: Marimba (Indian musicians from Nebaj)



Marimba,  
San Mateo, Ixtatán



Band 4: Two marimbas from near Aguacatán.

Bands 5 and 6: Marimba of the "Baile Vaquero" also called "Baile del Torito". The rattles of the dancers are heard, as well as the sound of exploding cohetes (rockets or fireworks).

Band 7: Ladino musicians from Cotzal playing marimba at a bar, for social dancing. Mostly couples of Indian men were dancing. This is typical Ladino music.

Band 8: Drum and pito. Cohetes are heard in the background.

Band 9: Drum and pito (the musicians are not the same as in band 8).

Band 10: Bells of the church during a procession around the market place, in front of the church. Numerous cohetes.



Baile Vagüero, Nebaj

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Side 2 (B)

SAN MATEO IXTATAN - Population: Chuj Indians.  
Date of recording: September 19, 20, 21, 1964  
Circumstance of recording: Fiesta de San Mateo (September 18 through 22).

Bands 1, 2, 3, 4: Violin and guitar from the neighboring village, Santa Eulalia. They were playing at the market and at the comedores (restaurants) and bars for 5 cents a tune. Other musicians were seen playing violin and guitar in a procession.

Bands 5, 6, 7: Marimba (3 musicians) playing at one of the cantinas (bars) where the Indians go during the festival to drink aguardiente and dance.

Band 8: Old woman praying in the church. She was holding several candles in each hand.

Band 9: Drunk woman singing at one of the cantinas. Marimba music is heard in the background.

Band 10: Two marimbas (4 + 3 musicians) playing in front of the church.

Band 11: Drum and chirimía.

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- Band 8: Old woman praying in the church. She was holding several candles in each hand.
- Band 9: Drunk woman singing at one of the cantinas. Marimba music is heard in the background.
- Band 10: Two marimbas (4 + 3 musicians) playing in front of the church.
- Band 11: Drum and chirimia.
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