



MODERN MAYAN / THE INDIAN MUSIC OF CHIAPAS, MEXICO

MODERN MAYAN

The Indian Music of Chiapas* Mexico

Side One

STEREO

- Band 1 Todos Santos, Chamula
- 2 Trumpet Choir, Carranza
- 3 String Quartet, Carranza
- 4 String Trio and Vocal, Zinnacantan
- 5 Tiger Stone Song, Zinnacantan
- 6 Song of Peace, Chalchiutan
- 7 New Years Prayer, Chalchiutan
- 8 Drums and flute, Huistan

Side Two

STEREO

- Band 1 Ladies Dance Tenejapa
- 2a Catarina Sone, Majosic
- b Bull Dance, Majosic
- 3 Kosh, Kosh Avakan Kanan Chi, Tenango
- 4 Flute and Drum, Tenango
- 5 Majestic, Petalcingo
- 6a Good Friday Service, Tila
- b Carnaval, Tila
- 7 Senor de Tila, Tila

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The Indian Music of Chiapas* Mexico

RECORDED BY RICHARD ALDERSON

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4377

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Recorded & Edited by RICHARD ANDERSON

Side One

- Band 1: San Juan Chamula, Nov. 1972
Chamula guitar music for the fiesta of Todos Santos and young Chamula woman praying over the grave of her dead husband.
- Band 2: Fiesta of San Bartolo, Venustiano Carranza 1972.
Music for "Trumpet Choir". Three large valveless trumpets, and large and small drum.
- Band 3: Fiesta of San Bartolo, Venustiano Carranza, August 1972.
String Quartet. Two guitars, violin, and large harp.
- Band 4: Fiesta of San Sebastian, Zinnacantan, Jan. 1973.
String trio and three part harmony. "Real Song" or "Little Maria".
- Band 5: Fiesta of San Sebastian, Zinnacantan, Jan., 1973.
Large guitar, violin, log drum, and rattle, "Tiger Stone Song".
- Band 6: Chalchiuitan, Carnaval, Feb. 1974.
Small violin and guitar, with chant. "Song of Peace".
- Band 7: Chalchiuitan, Carnaval, Feb. 1974.
Two man prayer. "New Year's Prayer".
- Band 8: Huistan, Fiesta of San Miguel, 1974.
Three drums and small flute.

Side Two

- Band 1: Tenejapa Center, Fiesta of San Alonzo 1972.
Violin and large bass guitar, "Ladies Dance".
- Band 2a: Majosic, Tenejapa. Carnaval, Feb. 1972.
Large guitar, harp, and violin, "Catrina Song."
- 2b: Majosic, Tenejapa. Carnaval, Feb. 1972
Large guitar, harp, violin, two drums flute, and voices. "Bull Dance".
- Band 3: Tenango, Aug. 1974.
Guitar, violin, and voice, "Kosh, Kosh Avakan Kanan Chi".
- Band 4: Guacitepec' Sept. 1974.
Large flute, drum, mandolin and guitar.

- Band 5: Petalcingo, 1972.
Two guitars and violin. "Majestic".
- Band 6a: Tila, 1971.
Large flute and drum. Good Friday services.
- 6b: Tila, 1971.
Two drums and large flute. Carnaval music.
- Band 7: Fiesta of "El Senor de Tila" 1971.
Two guitars and violin.

All selections recorded live at actual fiestas in indian communities.

This music was recorded by Richard Alderson, a New York City recording engineer who lived in Chiapas for six years. During this time he befriended many groups of local indians and studied and recorded their music. Mr. Alderson also plays indian music on several instruments. Frequent broadcasts of his recordings on local government radio are greatly appreciated by the indian themselves. Mr. Alderson wishes to thank the following persons for their aid in making these recordings:

Flora Edwards
Lic. Angel Robles
Dr. Denis Breedlove
Dr. John Attinassi
Dr. Francesco Pellizi
Dr. Ulrich Koehler
Antun Osil of Majosic, Tenejapa
And all the indigenous musicians and people of Chiapas.

Modern Mayan Music

The music of the indigenous people of the southern Mexican state of Chiapas reflects many varied influences, past and present.

These people are subsistence farmers, with sheepherding, cattle raising, hunting, and handicrafts as secondary occupations. Their diet consists of maize (mostly in the form of tortillas) and beans. Vegetables, fruit, and meat are occasional supplements. Hot chile peppers are eaten with every meal. Coffee, sugarcane beer (chica), and homemade rum are consumed regularly. Rum or "posh" drinking is an integral part of all celebrations.

Because of the rugged, mountainous terrain and lack of roads and communication, each community, even within the same language group, has its own distinct outlook. They refer to their music as the "Real Song" and their language as the "Real Speech". Anyone who wears different clothing or who speaks differently is regarded as a foreigner no matter what his origin.

The four languages spoken here; Tzoztil, Tzeltal, Chol, and Tzotzilabal, all share their basic Mayan roots with both Aztec and Spanish borrowings. A song may express the pantheistic catholicism peculiar to these people, with many loan words from the Spanish, or it may be a modern version of an ancient Mayan incantation, mysterious and obscure today.

Ritual, social, and religious expression are viewed as one concept by these people. This is the "custumbre" or custom. Music is always performed in the context of "custumbre", never for its own sake. Many members of the community spend much time and expense practicing "custumbre".

The musician may be any member of the community who can attain the skill to practice 'custumbre' through music. The musician may enjoy his work, but always it is an obligation or duty. He is paid in food and drink when performing, otherwise he must support himself with other work.

Music is played on instruments either fabricated by the musician himself or by a special craftsman within his community or from a neighboring one. The double-skinned drum, 3-hole flute, and all string instruments are all based on 16th century European models as none of them are known to have existed in the Americas before the arrival of the Spaniards. Other instruments of cheap commercial manufacture are purchased in "Ladino" or non-indigenous towns. Only two instruments played today are of pre-columbian ancestry, the rattle or "Sonaja" and the log drum or "Teponaztle".

The Chamulas are a Tzoztil speaking group living in the cool altitudes near San Cristobal las Casas. They make harps, guitars, and violins of various sizes. They are used by themselves and sold to other groups. These instruments are made entirely by hand with the most primitive of tools. Pine and cherry wood found in close proximity to their village is used. They are sold for approximately 60 pesos or \$5.00 apiece. As they are flimsily constructed and unvarnished, they last only a few years and are replaced. The sound produced is weak but pleasant, and they require great skill and patience in tuning. Often when an instrument is being initially tuned for the day, the musician takes a mouthful of liquor and sprays the entire guitar or harp, thereby tightening joints or pegs. While the Chamulas are important as instrument makers, their own music is rich in melody and poetry. The Chamulas are considered by other groups to have invented music. The Chamula song, "Bolon Chon" is the best known indigenous melody amongst other indians and "Ladinos" throughout Chiapas. It is often heard, slightly changed, played by other groups. The Chamula women are adept at voicing prayers in a style ageless and unaffected by recent culture. Band One.



Bass Guitar from TENEJAPA



The Izoztzil speaking people of Venustiano Carranza are unique in that they live entirely within the confines of a "Ladino" town, while maintaining their indigenous culture. Their music is unlike any other in the region. The large drum which accompanies the trumpet choir is said by them to have been made by the "Holy Father" himself. The guitars, harp, and violin were all made in Carranza and are of excellent craftsmanship. One can easily sense a close relationship between this trumpet music and the trumpeteers in the famous murals of Bonampak.

Bands 2 and 3.

The Zinnacantecos, a Izoztzil speaking tribe living near San Cristobal, maintain a rich set of "customs" and their music reflects this. They are the only group to practice part singing or harmony. They also employ the log drum, l'en l'en, or leponatzle, an instrument of pre-columbian origin. This instrument is regarded by them to be an actual god and is kept well guarded and tended in its own house. In recent years the Zinnacantecos have been making their own hardwood violins, improved over the Chamula model. Bands 4 and 5.

The Izoztzil speakers of San Pablo, Chalhuitan have remained less influenced by Spanish and Mestizo culture than perhaps any other group heard on this recording. They are conservative and proud. The ritual chant and prayer heard on bands 6 and 7 are typical examples of practices common amongst all modern Mayans.

The Izoztiles of Huistan are the only tribe in the area who continue to wear a large diaper-like garment of ancient origin instead of European style trousers. Their drumming is unusually syncopated and incisive for the area

and exceptional three-holed flute artistry is heard here. Band 8.

The Izeltales of Tenejapa are indigenous farmers, growing a great variety of fruits, vegetables, and grains. They are strong walkers and runners. A unique instrument, the "kin", a large bass guitar, is heard here. They celebrate their version of the Carnival Fiesta with great abandon and vulgar humor. Band 1 and 2, Side 2.

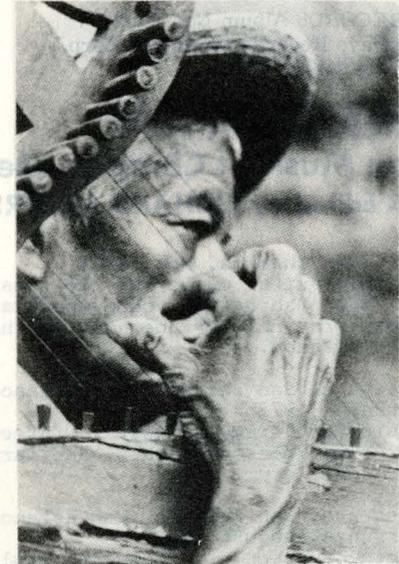
The remaining Izeltal speaking groups of Chiapas are represented by musicians from Tenango performing a mysterious shepherds dance (band 3) by a haunting solo on the large seven-holed flute from Guacitepec (band 4), and by an unusually refined instrumental group from Petalcingo playing a dance of recent origin. Bands 3, 4, and 5.

The Choles speak a language close to ancient Mayan roots. The large, three-holed flute song heard here is typical of music played in Indian communities on Good Friday. The Chol town, Tila, houses a famous, miraculous black Christ, "El Senor de fila". The complex and formal violin selection which ends this recording is



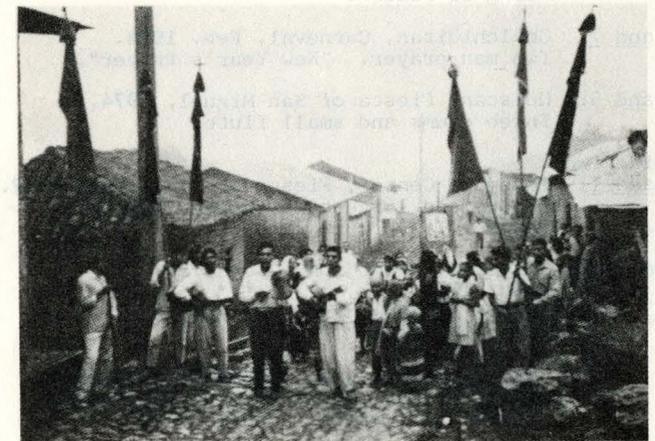
his special music. Bands 6 and 7.

Listening to modern Mayan music poses several problems. This music grew out of 16th century European foundations on one hand, and on the other it is unlike any other music anywhere. The European influence has been working continuously in indigenous life and consciousness from conquest times up to the present, yet there is a strong presence of the ancient Mayan spirit surfacing in the style and rhythms of this music today. Thus the tonal modulations in this music are simple and repetitive, and the harmonies are rudimentary. The rhythms, however, are complex and unrelated to European models or greatly transformed from them. The intonation, while based on the diatonic scale and peculiarly close to fixed western pitches, is subtly different from what any western musician would play.



Harpist from MAJOSIC, TENEJAPA

(Perhaps church bells, heard in every community, maintain the regularity of pitch). Finally the context of this music is completely different from the world as we know it, necessitating the opening of our ears to another place and time. However, the rewards are great when the borders are crossed music ally into this land of original American art.



Procession with Musicians, TILA CHIAPAS