

THE INDIAN MUSIC OF CHIAPAS, MEXICO VOLUME 2



ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4379

# MODERNA MAYA





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**SIDE ONE:**

Band 1: METONTIC CHRISTMAS

Small guitar, violin, trumpets, bells, small drum and voice

Band 2: CHALCHIUITAN CARNIVAL

Large trumpets, small drums, 3-hole flute, and shouts

Band 3: SAN BARTOLO VENUSTIANO CARRANZA,  
Fiesta de San Bartolo

3-hole flute, large drum, small drums, large trumpets

Band 4: SAN BARTOLO VENUSTIANO CARRANZA,  
Fiesta de San Bartolo

2 guitars, violin and large harp

Band 5: HUISTAN, Fiesta De Miguel

Small drums, large drum, and 3-hole flute

**SIDE TWO:**

Band 1: TENEJAPA, MAJOSIC CARNIVAL

12-string guitar, violin, large harp, and voices

Band 2: TENANGO

Guitar and violin

Band 3: PETALCINGO, Fiesta de Ascencion

2 guitars and violin

Band 4: TILA, Fiesta De Santa Lucia (Christmas)

2 guitars and violin

Band 5: GUACITEPEC

Mandolin, guitar, and flute

All selections recorded live at actual fiestas in Indian communities, 1972 to 1974

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

Flora Edwards

Naomi

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

COVER PHOTO BY JOHN ATTINOSSI

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

**MODERN  
MAYA**

THE INDIAN MUSIC OF CHIAPAS, MEXICO

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET VOLUME 2

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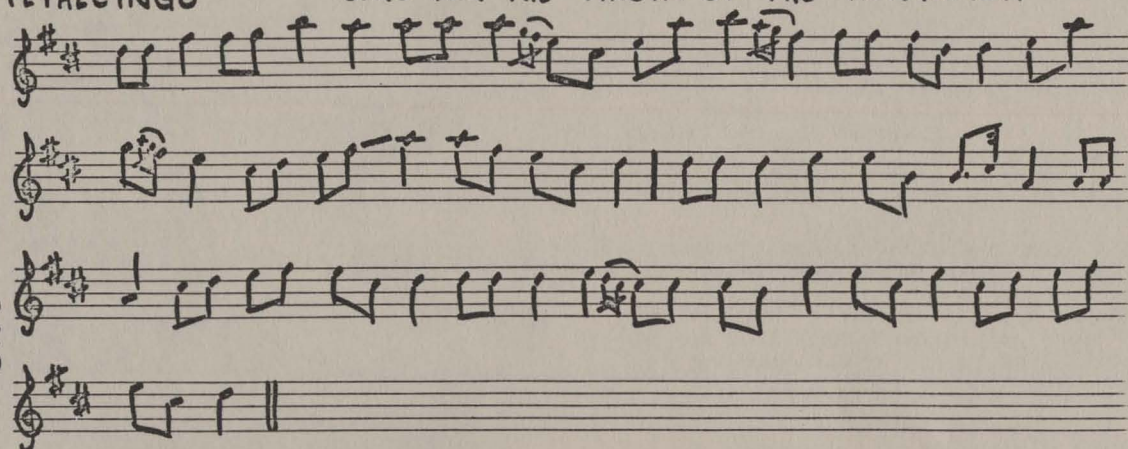


# MODERN MAYAN VOLUME II

by Richard Alderson

PETALCINGO      SONG FOR THE VIRGIN OF THE ASCENSION

SIDE TWO Band 3



Photograph by John Attinassi



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 sheep-herding, 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 language as the "Real Speech" and their music as the "Real Song". Anyone who wears different clothing or who speaks differently is regarded as a foreigner no matter what his origin.

The four languages spoken here; Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Chol, and Tojolabal, 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.



Photograph by John Attinassi

Music is played on instruments either fabricated by the musicians or by a special craftsman within his community or from a neighboring one.



Photograph by Alan Turner

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 Tzotzil 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.





Photograph by Richard Alderson

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. Heard here is a Christmas Eve service from Metontic, an independent Tzotzil community north of Chamula (Band 1).

The Tzotzil speakers of San Pablo, Chalchuitan have remained less influenced by Spanish and Mestizo culture than perhaps any other group heard on this recording. They are conservative and proud. Heard here is a boisterous carnival parade (Band 2).

The Tzotzil 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

in the famous murals of Bonampak. Band 3 and 4.

The Tzotziles 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 5.

The Tzeltals of Tenejapa - Mahosic are indigenous farmers, growing a great variety of fruits, vegetables, and grains. They are strong runners and walkers. They celebrate their version of the Carnival Fiesta with great abandon and vulgar humor. Band 1, Side 2.

The remaining Tzeltal speaking groups of Chiapas are represented by a violin and guitar duet and by an unusually refined instrumental group from Petalcingo. Bands 2 and 3, Side 2.

The Choles of Tila speak a language close to ancient Mayan roots. Their music, however, is complex and varied with a strong 16th century European flavor. Heard here is the accompaniment to the famous Quetzal Feather dance. Band 4, Side 2.

Finally, musicians from Guacatepec (Tzeltal) performing music of a more modern flavor with a homemade mandolin unique to the area. Band 5.

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 & 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. (Perhaps church bells, heard every-

where in all communities, 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 musically into this land of original American art.

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