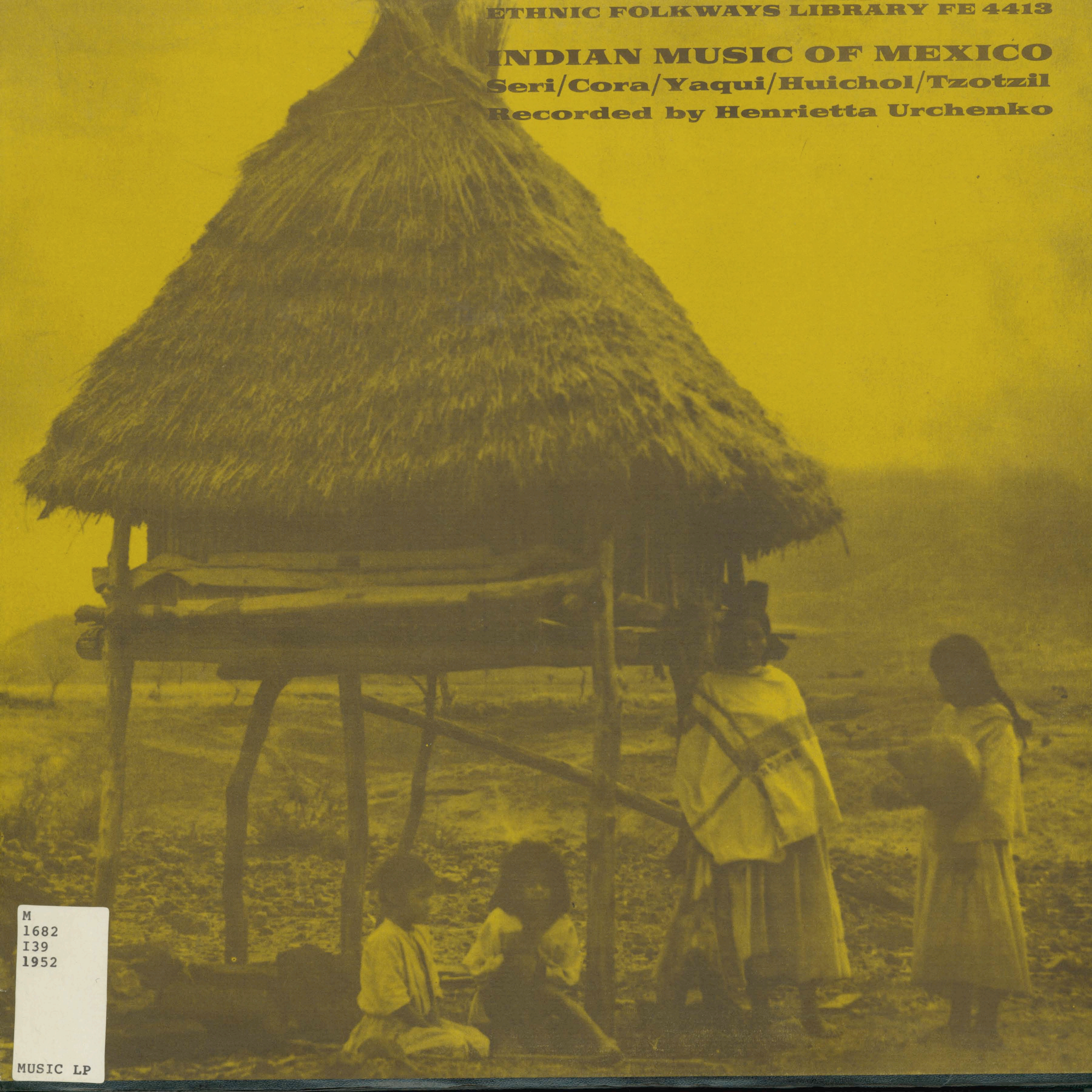


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INDIAN MUSIC OF MEXICO

Seri/Cora/Yaqui/Huichol/Tzotzil

Recorded by Henrietta Urchenko



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MUSIC LP

TZOTZIL--FIESTA MUSIC
 TZOTZIL--BOLONCHON
 TZOTZIL--FIESTA SONG
 TZOTZIL--SONG FOR ST. PETER
 YAQUI--PASCOLA DANCE
 YAQUI--DEER DANCE
 HUICHOL--PEYOTE DANCE
 HUICHOL--SQUASH DANCE
 SERI--RELIGIOUS SONG
 CORA--HARVEST CHANTS

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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SERI - DESEMBOQUE, SONORA MEXICO

INDIAN MUSIC OF MEXICO

INDIAN MUSIC OF MEXICO

Introduction and Notes on the Recordings
by Gordon F. Ekholm
and Henrietta Yurchenco

The Indians of Mexico were conquered by Spaniards in the 16th century and have now been living and mixing with these "alien" people for over 400 years. Because they originally existed in very large numbers, they were not submerged and destroyed as were many of the Indian tribes of the United States, and Indian blood exists in large proportion in the present Mexican population. Indian culture, on the other hand, has largely disappeared. In religion, social organization, and in most technological fields European traditions have over-powered those of the Indians and have in most cases replaced them.

Although this is the general picture, the racial and cultural intermingling of European and Indian has not proceeded everywhere in Mexico at quite the same rate, and it has been relatively slow in those more mountainous, arid, or remote regions less attractive to the dominant culture. It is in such areas that we now find those communities we can refer to as Indian--Indian, that is, because Indian blood predominates, Indian languages are still spoken, and their ways of life include some components of aboriginal custom. A recent study has shown that approximately 27 per cent of the total Mexican population belongs to Indian communities who think of themselves and are thought of by others as being communities apart from those of the Mexicans.

For parts of Mexico we have some knowledge of the nature of Indian music as it existed previous to the Spanish Conquest. We know from the 16th century accounts that music played an important role in all kinds of religious ceremonies and from the same sources and from archaeological finds, we know what kinds of musical instruments were used. These included drums of several types, the two-toned wooden gong (teponaztli) and the upright drum with skin head (huehuetl), as well as clay whistles and flutes, rasping bones, and conch shell trumpets. These would indicate that native music was overwhelmingly rhythmic in character with little tonal variation. Stringed instruments were unknown except for the single-stringed musical bow which had a limited distribution among the more primitive tribes.

It is not strange that native Mexican music has so largely disappeared when we consider how systematically and successfully the Spaniards of the Colonial period proceeded to eradicate the pagan religions with which it was so closely connected. At the present time most Indians are Catholics and their ritual as well as their secular music is the same as that of their Mexican neighbors. It is only among a few groups, such as those included in these selections, where one can find some retention of aboriginal elements.

The Seri are one of the most primitive groups of Mexico. Numbering at present not more than about 200 individuals, they are the remnants of several related tribes native to Tiburon Island and the shores of the nearby mainland of Sonora. Like a number of other native groups who formerly lived in this arid coastal area and on the Peninsula of Lower California across the Gulf, they

were without agriculture and lived the precarious life of hunters and fishers and gatherers of wild foods. All of these groups, except the Seri, have disappeared, as usually happens when the more primitive peoples come in contact with European civilization. Probably it is due only to the isolated position of Tiburon Island which has allowed the Seri to exist up to the present time.

Little is known of Seri music. It is reported that dancing consisted of a solo performance on a plank laid over a shallow pit, while several singers sat by beating or rattling anything convenient. It is also reported that rattles were made of gourds and of cocoons. The latter is a custom found among various tribes of northwestern Mexico. Certain large cocoons, with a pebble in each, are tied in long strings about the legs and give a dry, rattling sound during the dance.

The Yaqui are the northernmost of a group of related tribes known collectively as the Cahita, formerly living along the coastal lands of southern Sonora and northern Sinaloa in northwestern Mexico. They are a farming people occupying for the most part the extremely rich river bottom lands along the lower reaches of the Yaqui River. Even at the time of the first Spanish entradas in the 1530's they were known as particularly effective warriors and they have added to this reputation in many bloody encounters with the Spanish and Mexican authorities lasting up to quite recent times. Despite this opposition, however, the original Yaqui cultural pattern has largely disappeared with very few either material or spiritual elements remaining.

The dances of the Yaqui are among the best known and spectacular of those of any Mexican Indian group. Dancing occurs at all of their fiestas, most of which are on Christian holidays and occur in connection with Christian rites. The accompanying music is largely of European or Mexican origin as are, of course, the harp and violin which are among the instruments most commonly used.

The Huichol and Cora live in the remote mountain districts of the State of Nayarit in the western highlands of Mexico. The two groups are related linguistically and culturally, but the Huichol have taken on less of Mexican custom than the Cora and retain considerably more of their aboriginal culture. Both groups are agriculturists and also have cattle. The Huichol are especially noted for the picturesque costumes worn by the men; these include elaborately embroidered girdles and bags and a tri-cornered flat straw hat decorated with flowers and feathers. Embroidered bags are also worn as ornaments, with one or more strings of them--too small to be of any use--tied about the waist.

Huichol religion and ritual are an elaborate complex of aboriginal and derived custom, in which dancing and music play an important role. Singing by a shaman is most common, either without accompaniment or with a drum, the latter a large instrument of the huehuetl type very similar to that used in pre-conquest times in Mexico. Other instruments are gourd rattles and notched deer scapulae and the violin and guitar, the latter two being important in certain ceremonies but more commonly used for purely secular music as they are by Mexicans in general.

The Tzotzil are a Maya speaking people, living in the highlands of the state of Chiapas in southern Mexico and are generally similar in

appearance and in customs to the other Maya groups which extend from Chiapas through the highlands of Guatemala. Tzotzil culture preserves many Pre-Conquest elements, but the music is clearly derived from early European sources. This is particularly true of their processional music used during religious ceremonials.



HUICHOL - HUILOTITA, JALISCO MEXICO

SIDE I, BAND 1: TZOTZIL--FIESTA MUSIC. The harp music of the Tzotzil is among the most charming of Indian Mexico. The harp, like other stringed instruments, is made by local artisans. It is tuned according to our major scale except that the seventh tone is generally tuned a half step lower. Most harps have thirteen melody strings and four, five, or six base strings. Although these instruments are well made and have a most delicate tone, they do not keep their pitch for long. Tzotzil musicians spend a good deal of time tuning up, for they are most sensitive in this regard.

SIDE I, BAND 2: TZOTZIL--BOLONCHON (Tiger-man, what a long beard you have!) This song is one of the most popular in the region, and though originating from the town of Zinacantan is sung everywhere. This is unusual because the Tzotzil do not readily accept things from outsiders, even from neighboring villages. Bolonchon is performed here by several men's voices, accompanied by a guitar and harp. The falsetto heard here is only rarely encountered in Indian Mexico.

SIDE I, BAND 3: TZOTZIL--FIESTA SONG. This is unusual processional music played on a trumpet, reed flute and drum, and reminds one of Spanish processional music. Each instrument has great independence and follows its own improvisational pattern even though all three adhere to the same basic melody and rhythm. The style is contrapuntal in character, as is the vocal music of this region.

SIDE I, BAND 4: TZOTZIL--SONG FOR ST. PETER.

Father San Pedro
Do me three favors
And give me three blessings
Don't abandon me on the road
For now I go to my house to sleep
So please
Don't let anything happen to me
And if I wake tomorrow
I will thank God.

Each saint has his own special song. Although these are familiar to everyone it is the fiscal, the Catholic priest's assistant, who knows them best of all. In this recording the fiscal of the town of Chamula sings assisted by his wife, a rare occurrence as women seldom sing in this region for any formal occasion. It is sung as a canon, one voice alternating with the other, the style typical of this region.

SIDE I, BANDS 5 and 6: YAQUI--PASCOLA DANCE. This is music to accompany the Pascola dance, done by a specially-trained group of dancers who perform at all Yaqui fiestas. It is a simple dance performed by masked men dancing one after the other and alternately to two bands of musicians, one band playing the harp and violins, as in this selection, the other the drum and flute. The violins are locally made and are of European style, while the harp appears to be of an early Spanish form which has been retained since early times.

SIDE II, BAND 1: YAQUI--PASCOLA DANCE. This is the flute and drum combination as played in the other portion of the Pascola dance. Both instruments are simultaneously employed by one performer, the drum struck by a stick held in the right hand while the flute is held in the left and played in a different rhythm from that of the drum. The rhythm gains speed as the dance proceeds and periodically drops down to a slower tempo.

SIDE II, BAND 2: YAQUI--DEER DANCE. The Deer dancers perform along with the Pascola dancers at all Yaqui fiestas. They have a varied repertoire of dances, both serious and comic, in which a dancer mimics a hunted deer. Deer antlers are fastened to his head and he has large gourd rattles in his hands which he shakes continuously. The movements of the deer are realistically imitated as he grazes and then throws up his head and looks about or violently leaps away, always with the tense nervousness of a frightened animal.

Three or four musicians accompany the Deer dancer, playing on notched rasping sticks and the water drum and all singing the deer songs in unison in rather low-pitched voices. The rasping stick is a notched strip of wood played by placing one end on an inverted half gourd and rubbing it with another stick. The water drum is a curious instrument, consisting of a half gourd floated with the open side downward in a wooden bowl of water and beaten in time to the rasping sticks.

Free translations of two fragments of Deer Dance songs are as follows:

The mountain grass
Moved with the gently blowing breeze
And whistled softly.
The grass grows on the mountain top
And blows with the wind.

Deer, deer, deer,
Coyote is hunting you.
Place yourself in the water,
No harm will he do to you.

SIDE II, BAND 3: HUICHOL--PEYOTE DANCE. The eating of the narcotic peyote root is an important feature of Huichol religion and an expedition far to the north is made every year during the dry season to obtain it. The peyote cult has its special fiestas when singing and dancing may continue for many hours. The chant heard here recounts one of the many myths of the tribe and is sung without instrumental accompaniment. A shaman performs assisted by two singers and with the occasional participation of all those

assembled, while the dancers beat out the rhythm with their feet.

SIDE II, BAND 4: HUICHOL--SQUASH DANCE. An important fiesta for the Huichol is that to celebrate the ripening of the first fruits, occurring toward the end of the wet season in November. Singing and dancing, accompanied by the drum, may go on for a number of days.

SIDE II, BAND 5: SERI--RELIGIOUS SONG. The song in this recording was said to be religious in nature, but information as to its use or significance is lacking.

SIDE II, BANDS 6 and 7: CORA--HARVEST CHANTS. These two chants are part of a large repertory of songs sung during the harvest fiestas. They are sung during the preparations of the feast and for the dancing which goes on all night. The singer, a native priest or shaman, accompanies himself on an instrument called the mitote, a word which also signifies dancing. The mitote consists of a long hunting bow with a gourd resonator. The tauntly strong bow is set on a gourd which rests on the ground, the performer holding the two together with his foot while striking the string with two wooden sticks.

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