Hidden music from the Caribbean
collected from the shores and islands

- Jarana & Harp  from Vera Cruz
- Lebanese ud  from Port au Prince
- Huastecan Trio  from Vera Cruz
- Tiroro’s Drums  from Haiti
- “Calypso” Band  from Jamaica
- Asturian Bagpiper  from Vera Cruz
This is a miscellany of music collected in the Caribbean area and the east coast of Mexico. It does not represent related cultures nor is all of the material here presented indigenous to this melting pot area.

The ud player from Lebanon was transient in Port-au-Prince; we have included him simply because he was there and seemed worth recording.

But see what happens to negro music in Jamaica when you hear Cousin Jamie, Redhead and Tomate. Here is the current (1954) calypso idiom where the Negro has wrought his charm upon the English language.

Tiroro is something else, again. A discussion of his music by composer Henry Cowell appears on #5005. Tiroro may be called a truly native drummer of Haiti as he plays the veritable rhythms of his people.

Harp and Jarana: Huastecan songs. Like many of their counterparts from the coasts of Veracruz and Guerrero, from Michoacan and Jalisco, these huapangos(1) or sones from the Huasteca region(2), owe most of their musical roots to Spain, as well as the poetic form of many of their texts. However, in this marvelous tropical region whose people are a mixture of Tobosos, Tepehuan, Nahoa, Otomi and Huastecan Indians with varying proportions of Spanish and some French settlers, the Spanish outlines have been infused with new colors and shadings to a degree that the result is no longer Spanish. The virile rasgueo, stroked rhythms, of the big, warm-toned huapanguera guitar and the little, high-voiced, passionate five-stringed jarana, forming an exciting rhythmic counterpoint to the violin's musical ornamentation and to the tense flight of the falsetto singing. The singing, while probably derived from the high Asturian vocalisation — which in its turn is a relic of the Moorish invasion in Spain, is unique probably in the world, having developed characteristics which distinguish it from all other types of vocalisation that use a very high male register, and which express to perfection the impassioned phrases of love and the exaltation reached in the height of the marriage and birthday fiestas when the huapangos are sung and danced to.

The bagpipe recorded in Vera Cruz was played by a native of Asturias, Spain, who had lived in Mexico for thirty years. Certainly this instrument, the gasta, is not native to Mexico, but neither was the harp or the Jarana or the marimba or guitar.

(1) Probably derived from a combination of nahuatl words meaning roughly "place with wood over it" — i.e., huapango. Spanish corruption of cuahapangue, from cuauihuitl — wood, or something made of wood; ipan — on top of, above; and co — suffix meaning place where, location. All this refers to the platform of wood, or tarima, which is erected for the huapango, and on which the people dance.

The dancers form in two lines facing each other, men on one side and women on the other. There is no physical contact between the sexes. At the end of each huapango, the men and women sit on rough wooded benches on their respective sides of the tarima, or wooden platform. When the next number is going to begin, the men get up first, each one going over in front of the girl he wants to dance with and bids her hand for this dance. During certain parts of the dance, the two lines (men and girls) change sides. At the moment in which the men and women pass each other during this change, there is a brief opportunity to express some endearing phrase or even propose marriage, as there is still very little opportunity in small remote towns for a lover to talk openly to his beloved, and his best opportunity is often during the gaiety and comparative freedom of a huapango fiesta. Often the singers start veritable contests of improvisation around the theme of some girl that they both want to marry; these contests often ending in a duel with machetes or pistols, although this sort of emotional outburst is now on the wane.

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