



History of the Marimba in Baja Verapaz and Other Indigenous Instruments



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INTRODUCTION

The primary goal of researching the history of the marimba in Baja Verapaz is to present it from its origins, highlighting that it has been a part of social, communal, and personal life throughout time, transforming successive generations.

It became the instrument that identifies Guatemala and is part of the national folklore; therefore, every Guatemalan has the patriotic duty to know it, and national students should not only be familiar with its history but also maintain enthusiasm for learning to play it. Educational authorities should be responsible for providing students with opportunities to have a marimba at every school so it can be introduced at the primary and secondary levels. If high school students have a mandatory English course, why not a marimba course?

Licenciado Carlos Ramiro Asturias Gómez, a distinguished marimba researcher, has shared with me an excellent didactic resource on the history of the marimba, for which I am grateful, and I have drawn the following contributions from that document:

Perhaps no other instrument in the world has sparked as many conflicting opinions, legends, and myths about its origin as the Guatemalan marimba.

The book *Anthology of the Marimba and The True Evolution of the Maya Marimba (Antología de la Marimba y la Verdadera Evolución de la Marimba Maya)* by our researcher Asturias Gómez is categorized as

a historical document, indicating that the Marimba has a pre-Hispanic origin. Asturias Gómez writes about ancient Maya music, much like other sacred musical instruments, as a form of gratitude and invocation to the great spirit, rooted in pure Guatemalan identity, like trumpets and the marimba, our most faithful exponents of that musical-cultural magnificence.

The marimba was invented in three cultures. The oldest, the African marimba, known as Balafón, Mbila, Njimba, and Timbila, followed by the Asian marimba, also called Gambag Kong, Gambang Kajú, Gamelan, and in Thailand, Pong Lang. The most representative of the African marimbas is the gourd marimba of the Chopi people.

The most recent in human history is the Mesoamerican Maya marimba.

The oldest documented name is "marimbah," originating from the Maya-Quiché language and reported by Abate Brasseur de Bourbourg in his Quiché grammar.

We can affirm that the Guatemalan marimba is distinct from the Asian and African marimbas.

Characteristics of the modern marimba include the mallets, the keyboard, and the key cover, which was added at the end of the last century. Our national instrument does not need to be struck forcefully to produce sound; it has a natural tone produced by the resonance of hormigo wood, primarily used in the keyboard's construction.

The origin and evolution of the marimba are inherently Mayan; therefore, the Congress of the Republic declared it the national instrument among the country's patriotic symbols.

The tecomate marimba was embraced through the Catholic faith as a Guatemalan folkloric instrument.

It is said that the marimba de hoyos had a cavity beneath it, and rattlesnake rattles were affixed to its boards with resin. These rattles vibrated to produce musical notes when struck

with two mallets tipped with black wax. These sorrowful sounds, as if from a desperate bird singing a lament for its offspring, were accompanied by an animal-skin drum.

When this instrument became known to the Dominican friars—who were already familiar with the tecomate marimba due to their missions in Africa—and recognizing the impracticality of transporting a marimba requiring a hole in the ground, they suggested musicians place tecomates under the keys and remove the snake rattles, deeming them contrary to Mayan culture.

In his important document, *Licenciado* Carlos Ramiro Asturias Gómez writes that through the initiative of Congressman *Licenciado* Rafael Téllez, Decree 66-78 was issued, declaring the marimba the national instrument in its first article. Lic. Asturias Gómez states: "I spoke with Architect Augusto Vela, Minister of Culture, to emphasize the importance and responsibility we had as a people and government to preserve the world's only commemorative forest, known as the Sonorous Forest."

A decree declares, in its first article, that the hormigo tree is part of Guatemala's cultural heritage, naming it the marimba tree, the tree of culture, and the tree of peace. Thus, the marimba is both a national instrument and a patriotic symbol, as established by Decree 33-99.

Licenciado Asturias deserves gratitude for his additional significant contributions.

THE MARIMBA IN GUATEMALA.

BY ALFONSO ARRIVILLAGA CORTÉS Y
RAMIRO CHOCANO, MEXICAN.

This work considers and analyzes the transition from the simple marimba to the double marimba, specifically the transformation from a diatonic keyboard to a chromatic one, as well as the leap between the indigenous marimba and the

ladino marimba, or between rural and urban marimbas.

Theories on the Origin of the Marimba. The marimba first appeared in the Old World. Hom Bostel asserts it originated in Burma, spreading from there to Africa, India, and Indonesia. Lavauden claims that the marimba was known to the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Greeks.

Regarding the marimba's origin, three theories stand out:

Asian:

The materials and acoustic principles used in its construction point to an Asian origin.

African:

African marimbas bear the greatest resemblance to the Mesoamerican version, particularly in their tecomate resonators and the use of covering materials. In Africa, spider web silk is used, while in Guatemala, pig intestines are employed.

Americana:

It is especially prominent in Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico.

Geography of the Marimba:

Originating in Africa, the marimba likely spread through Lower Egypt, crossed the Red Sea and the Mediterranean and is believed to have become a musical instrument for Indigenous peoples. The African marimba was introduced to the Americas after Columbus's arrival. By the 17th century, it was found in the Antilles and Brazil. Instruments have also been discovered among the Native Americans and in the Guianas.

The native marimba lacked a resonating box and consisted of a series of small sonorous sticks or planks arranged on a tonal scale. Later, one or more resonating boxes were added, possibly starting with a simple cavity in the ground. This marks the origin of the "marimba de

hoyos," as explained by Licenciado Asturias Gómez.

The xylophone, balafon, or marimba was known in Europe before the colonization of the Americas. This confirms that Africans, particularly those from Congo, were familiar with it long before being brought to the Iberian Peninsula as slaves. Today, the balafon remains an instrument played by Polish, Russian, Tatar, and Cossack farmers, as noted by Comettat.

In Cuba, it refers to the children's instrument known as the "Trompa" or "Birindao."

Historical Lectures on the Marimba in Guatemala: Colonial Period

In 1680, Domingo Juarros observed a ceremony featuring drums, clarinets, trumpets, and marimbas.

By 1786, the marimba was present in the Church of Santo Tomás in Chichicastenango. It is noted that by 1819-1820, both the marimba player and the drummer performed during the festivities for the Lord of Esquipulas.

In 1821, a marimba with inlaid feet was purchased.

In 1859, in Lanquín, Alta Verapaz, a priest introduced the marimba for Holy Lent celebrations on May 1.

In 1737, during the procession of Santa Cecilia, tecomate marimbas were played.

Between 1773 and 1776, during the relocation of the city to the Valley of La Ermita, marimba music was seldom heard in Mixco and the small village of Las Vacas.

In 1897, Jesús Carranza humorously wrote about wedding celebrations: while the newlyweds were locked away, the guests and family continued to jump, shout, and dance to the rhythm of the marimba.

In 1870, a marimba was performed by three Black musicians. Historian Flavio Guillén

from Mexico mentioned that Fray Bartolomé de las Casas introduced the marimba, and in the *Diario de México*, it was described as unique to Chiapas and Guatemala.

On September 15, 1821, Doña Dolores Bedoya brought fireworks and marimba music to the park to encourage the events leading to independence.

At that time, the marimba was classified by the middle classes as an instrument for Indigenous people.

In 1878, the first specific treatise on music in Guatemala appeared, authored by Don José Sáenz Poggio. He wrote: "Of the music of the Indians, the marimba." By the end of the 19th century, the marimba with "cinchos" (bands) began to be played in the Verapaces. Later, the marimba was accompanied by the "violón" (a large string instrument), which led Ladinos to pay greater attention to its development.

By the late 19th century, the marimba was widespread among Indigenous people, and mestizos had also begun to play it. It was already being performed in Quetzaltenango, Totonicapán, Huehuetenango, San Marcos, Chiapas, Antigua Guatemala, Guatemala City, Salamá, and Cobán.

In 1875, the first experiments with double marimbas or "marimbas cuaches" had become common in many parts of Guatemala. According to Díaz (1928), during the Corpus Christi festival at the Church of La Concepción in 1875, a "marimba cuache" was played. This instrument had been built in the capital by Manuel López and José Chaequín, both from Jocotenango, Sacatepéquez.

A document by Celso A. Lara Figueroa, gifted to me by the esteemed Licenciado Ramiro Asturias Gómez, is titled: *Culture and National Identity in Guatemala: The Marimba (Cultura e Identidad Nacional en Guatemala, La Marimba)*. It supports the general assertion that Guatemala is multiethnic and multicultural. Culture, therefore, is understood as the complex set of

elements that preserve and synthesize the collective experience accumulated by a people throughout their historical journey.

Within popular culture, there are different levels:

Traditional popular culture, proletarian culture, peasant culture, and mass culture.

The origin of the marimba, agreed upon by researchers, traces back to Africa. The marimba is a shared historical model throughout Guatemala. Its development has been gradual:

- Starting with the "arco" (arched) marimba, legs were added to allow multiple players to perform simultaneously.
- The keyboard was expanded to include five, six, and eventually seven octaves, requiring a fourth player.
- Tecomates were replaced by wooden boxes, improving resonance.

At the end of the 19th century, the Quetzaltenango teacher Sebastián Hurtado revolutionized the instrument, enabling it to play any type of music and thus spurring its further development. When discussing the crisis of the Guatemalan marimba, it undoubtedly refers to the *ladino* and especially the *urban* marimba.

Without waiting for a catastrophe in the education system, it is crucial to integrate marimba instruction into the country's education. This integration should not be isolated but rather framed as part of popular culture, the foundation of national culture. This is a summarized account of what Licenciado Celso A. Lara Figueroa wrote.

In *Prensa Libre* on April 30, 2000, an article by Nancy Avendaño, with photographs by Raúl Barreno, referenced marimba players and builders. A summarized version of the article follows:

For the Hurtado family, a dynasty of marimba players, their passion for the instrument

began 170 years ago when Toribio and Sebastián learned to play the *tecomate* marimba with Indigenous people from Cantel.

Wotzbelí Hurtado Mazariegos is the last surviving member of a lineage that delighted and made Guatemalans dance for over a century. Wotzbelí recalls, "The Indigenous people were demanding; they wanted us to play quickly." They provided music for *cofradía* festivals. Men would carry the marimba as they moved through the streets while they played. They performed pure marimba music and combined it with wind instruments. The Hurtados recorded popular dance music, national and European classical pieces, *sones*, and waltzes. They also appeared on various television programs, both in Guatemala and Mexico.

At the time, Wotzbelí was 78 years old, and his wife Alicia was 90 years old.

On the *Prensa Libre* page dated Thursday, March 16, 2000, the article "*A Century of Double Marimba*" (*Un Siglo de Marimba Doble*) by Hugo Chacón and Carlos Loarca states:

Amid traditionalism and modernism, the double marimba marked 100 years since its first concert at the Central Park. This concert was performed by the Hurtado brothers' marimba in celebration of then-President Manuel Estrada Cabrera's birthday.

The article includes a section titled: *Cultural Achievement (Logro Cultural)*.

The *cuache* or double marimba is one of the most important artistic and cultural creations made by Guatemalans throughout their collective history, according to Celso Lara, Director of the Folkloric Studies Center at the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala.

Most historians agree that, at the end of the 19th century, composers Julio Paniagua and Sebastián Hurtado designed, developed, and built the first double marimba.

There is no evidence that the marimba existed in Guatemala before colonization.

However, there were instruments associated with the *tun teponastle* (a slit drum).

César Augusto Gálvez Navas, known as "Checha," owner of the *India Maya* marimba orchestra, states that adapting the single marimba to the double was a significant advancement. The double marimba can play classical, semi-classical, select, popular, and folkloric melodies and adapt to string, keyboard, and wind instruments.

While historians assert the importance of preserving traditional Guatemalan folk music, César Augusto emphasizes that modernism should not be overlooked. He attributes the success of *India Maya Caballeros* to this blend. He adds, "As the *huiteco* saying goes: 'I don't care if the marimba is from Africa, Mexico, Honduras, or Guatemala—I care about the sentiment it evokes.'"

The AGAYC, through Licenciado Carlos Ramiro Asturias Gómez, summarizes that the only remnant of the Maya in the modern marimba is the simple keyboard and the key covers.

History of the Marimba in Baja Verapaz and Other Indigenous Instruments Salamá, Baja Verapaz.

Salamá has been the cradle of outstanding musicians. In the past, as you walked through its quiet streets, you could hear the delicate and refined notes of a violin, the melancholic tones of a marimba, or the romantic lament of a guitar's strings drifting out from the windows of some houses. From this environment emerged figures such as Manuel Gómez, Rafael Morales, Esteban Mejía, Bartolo Rodas, Joaquín Mejía, Carlos Mejicanos Reyes, Rafael Rizzo, Mariano Gómez, and other prominent musicians who, over the years, elevated Salamá to become the most important city in terms of music. Thanks to them, the land of Tezulutlán gained renown.

The first double marimba to arrive in Salamá was *Ecos del Valle*, a sentimental awakening for the town. It was a gift from Don Lázaro Chacón, a former president of Guatemala,

constructed in the late 19th century. Among its players was Don Carlos Mejicanos, who became the ensemble's director in 1937. By 1944, the marimba had deteriorated. During the administration of Colonel Castillo Armas (1955), a new marimba was sent via Colonel Antonio Estrada Sanabria, then Director of the National Police. This marimba was the old *Maderas de mi Tierra*, which had toured extensively, including the United States and even Russia. On its return, it was seized in Cuba along with its performers. After diplomatic efforts, it was returned and brought to Salamá, where it was renamed *Ecos del Valle*. The history of this marimba is marked by both triumphs and tragedies.

The marimba players were salaried members of the Civil Band, yet they performed with the marimba voluntarily. Some were willing to play; others were not. The marimba was managed by the Municipal Government, but the Departmental Governor often directed it to perform at official social events. Over time, due to heavy use, the marimba fell into disrepair and became inactive.

Don Carlos Mejicanos, a musician, and Professor Elizardo Urizar Leal, Director of the Escuela Tipo Federación and now a Doctor of Pedagogy, requested the marimba, and it was entrusted to them. They reassembled a mixed-gender marimba group and began cultural tours across various departments of the country, where they were warmly received. They also performed on T.G.W. and Radio Progreso, receiving positive feedback.

When these individuals left their official roles, the group lost support and disbanded. After a period of silence, the marimba returned with renewed enthusiasm. Its members played a wide variety of music, accompanied by instruments such as a double bass, drums, saxophone, and trumpet. They enlivened social events, particularly at the departmental fair honoring Saint Matthew the Apostle. They also performed serenades, especially for the birthday of Maestro

Joaquín Mejía, Director of the Civil Band and the marimba.

With time, the marimba players were tasked with performing in municipal fairs across the department, under orders from the Governor. However, they often felt disheartened, as they had to carry the marimba on their shoulders to educational centers or official events in Salamá. They also endured uncomfortable journeys on truck beds over poor roads, which led to further damage to the marimba, rendering it beyond repair.

The remnants of the marimba were left to rest in large cardboard boxes in a corner of the Departmental Government building. This marked the end of the marimba known as *Ecos del Valle*. Sadly, many of its performers passed away, while others are still alive to recount its triumphs and tragedies. Among them were Rubén Monzón, Julio Muñiz, Carlos Mejicanos, and Ruperto García—who, according to Don Mardoqueo Herrera, was the only one who played the double bass using solfege. Other names include Isidro Mejicanos, Manuel Meza, José Toribio Marroquín, Pablo Conde, Hermelindo Conde on drums, Cruz Mendoza with the saxophone, as well as Don Juan Carlos Rodríguez, Arnoldo Guzmán, Eduardo Guzmán, Luis Rodas, Crescencio Rivera, and Joaquín Mejía. Between 1985 and 1988, notable performers included Director Lucio Godoyo, Guadalupe Tobar on double bass, Hermelindo Conde on drums, Inocencio Rivera on bass, Mateo Leonardo at the center, Abilio Moya on piccolo, and Feliciano Melgar on requinto. The tenor was performed by: bass Domingo Xicay and baritone Arnoldo Guzmán.

In 1994, efforts to rebuild the marimba were renewed, and spearheaded by the members of Casa de Cultura Salamateca. They contacted marimba builders from Carchá in Alta Verapaz, but the cost was prohibitive, and the project was abandoned. Later that year, under the leadership of Professor Otoniel Fernández and with the authorization of Governor Hugo Arnoldo Conde

Prera, the marimba was reconstructed by craftsman Rafael Arriola for a modest fee of 300 quetzals. Its relaunch was celebrated with a concert by members of the military zone's *Flor Nacional* marimba group, directed by Colonel Julio René Prado. The concert was a resounding success.

After this event, the marimba was stored away. Later in 1994, seeing that it was unused, Mayor Carlos Reyes gifted it to INEBE (a basic education institute – Instituto de Educación Básica con Orientación Ocupacional). At this point, the marimba ceased to exist as *Ecos del Valle* and became a concert marimba played by young students. Under the direction of music teacher Héctor Manuel Xoyón, the students initially learned traditional sones and made an impressive debut with a pure, double marimba.

Over the next five years, they embarked on tours, winning first place at the *Corazón de Hormigo* marimba contest in Escuintla and participating in both the first children's festival in Antigua Guatemala and the second national and first international festival in Salamá, B.V. Their extensive repertoire included folk, popular, and academic music.

Historical records indicate that between 1000 and 1100 CE, a polychrome vase depicting a marimba was created. The marimba lacked a stand or resonance box. This artifact, found in Chamá, Cobán, also featured a cofrade beside the marimba. Today, this vase is housed at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, cataloged as 7701-NA, from the Chixoy-Chamá period (1000–1100 CE). According to composer Rafael Arriola, it was of Christian origin.

Don Eusebio Guzmán was both a marimba player and a craftsman, creating both single and double marimbas. He left two marimbas in Petén and one in Puerto Barrios. Among the single marimbas he delivered were those sent to Cobán, Purulhá, Cuilapa, and Santa Rosa. His double marimba, *Amerindia*, was often played at weddings and other social events. Among those who performed with him were

Valerio García, Margarito Vásquez, and Isidro de las Rosas. This was around the year 1940.

Don Eusebio left an unfinished marimba due to his poor health. This marimba, a single type, had been commissioned by Don Gabriel Vásquez. His son Arnoldo completed it and showed his father the boxes while he was bedridden. Upon seeing them, Don Eusebio said, "The work is very good; now you can make a better living."

Don Eusebio was born in 1897 and passed away in 1955. Arnoldo, like his father, is both a marimba player and a marimba craftsman, creating single and double marimbas. He sources the hormigo wood for his creations from La Tinta and Pazos, municipalities in Alta Verapaz.

Arnoldo crafted a single marimba called *Lira Maya*, which is accompanied by drums and five marimba players, performing at various social events. Arnoldo played with the marimba of Zacapa, toured Honduras, and spent five days in Managua, Nicaragua, but returned to Salamá due to his father's critical health. All his siblings also play marimba: Salvador, Eduardo, Manuel, Josefa, and Francisco. Francisco, an investigator in the field of nature, has a studio and marimba workshop at his home, where he teaches classes ad honorem with the *Marimba Salamá*.

To support his teaching activities, he sought assistance from ADESCA (Support for Cultural Decentralization – Aporte para la Descentralización Cultural), which provided a double marimba. This instrument, crafted in San Pedro Carchá, Alta Verapaz, by Don Pangam Toc, bears the name *Zalamchuyya* (in the Achi language). Additionally, the *Marimba Salamhá*, already considered a symbol of Salamá, was used by an organized group of prominent individuals who performed concerts in the city park, including Dr. Eder Sandoval and Professor Salvador Guzmán.

Over time, this marimba fell into disuse and came under the care of the Casa de la Cultura. Eventually, Professor Francisco Guzmán took it

over for teaching purposes, instructing numerous young students.

Throughout Salamá's musical history, several single marimbas stood out. Around 80 years ago, Don Félix Gómez played his marimba, inventing his pieces and rehearsing them during events to perfect them. This was around 1935. In 1930, "Uncle Tolo" Rodas, known throughout the town, owned a marimba named *Salamateca*. "Uncle Lalo" owned a marimba called *Chapinlandia* during the same era. Don Chanito's marimba was named *La Periquita* and was nicknamed "the feather-footed one (Pies con Plumas)."

Don Hermelindo Conde owned a marimba called *La Flor Blanca*, charging one quetzal per hour for his performances. In the village of El Tempisque, a marimba was played by some indigenous performers who charged fifty cents per hour.

Today, in the El Calvario neighborhood, Señor Tino's marimba charges fifty quetzals per hour, while Señor Oscar Ortiz's marimba, played by three musicians, charges seventy-five quetzals per hour. Chelayo, a well-known figure in the town, carried his marimba around his neck, performing freely at the church in the village of San Ignacio for novenas and cofradías, playing all day without expecting any payment.

Don Feliciano Reyes was the owner of a small single marimba. Around fifty years ago, Félix López owned a marimba made with bamboo boxes. During this era of single marimbas, a man named Ricardo and Don Rubén Castro also played their marimbas.

Don Gerardo Leal's marimba was called *Belquis*. Don Félix Bautista's marimba was named *Josefita*, crafted by Don Eusebio Guzmán. Don Tulio Morán had a marimba called *La Esperanza*.

Between 1945 and 1950, during the department fair days, a man walked around with a marimba strapped to his neck, playing simple pieces. At that time, electricity was scarce as the

National Electrification Institute (INDE) did not yet exist. Between 1940 and 1970, "zarabandas" were held; these were groups of Indigenous people who danced while others played simple marimbas. These zarabandas began at seven in the evening and ended at seven the next morning. They were part of the fair days and originated from the municipality of San Miguel Chicaj. Eventually, they disappeared completely.

Simple marimbas enlivened the "ocote" dances, named so because in neighborhoods far from Salamá's town center, the sound of a marimba would break the nighttime silence in the wee hours. We, as kids back then, were drawn to the rhythmic aroma of hormigo wood. Upon arriving at the scene, we would find a lively party illuminated by the soft glow of burning ocote resin torches in the house's courtyard.

Regarding the double marimba, I have already mentioned some of its history. Additionally, there was *Sonrisas Infantiles*, part of the Federation Model School when its director was Professor Elizardo Urizar Leal, now a Doctor of Pedagogy. In 1957, children around six years old played in this ensemble: Eder René Sandoval Martínez (now a medical doctor) on drums, Carlos Urizar, Julio Dubón on bass, Chimica Mejicanos on the violón, Francisco Mejicanos, and Professor Salvador Guzmán. Other members included children Mariano Gómez Prera, Fulvio Alirio Mejía Milián, Arnoldo Muñiz, and Amílcar Mejicanos, among others.

For the *Salamhá* marimba, already introduced, I will name additional members: Professor Miguel Ángel Herrera San José on drums, Julio Dubón in the center, Crescencio Rivera on the violón, triple player Dr. Eder Sandoval, Eduardo Guzmán on bass, Francisco Guzmán, his brother Arnoldo, Fulvio Alirio Mejía Milián, and Rafael Arriola López.

There was a double marimba initially used by the military zone in Cobán and later in Puerto Barrios. Its debut performance was during the marimba festival in Quetzaltenango, after

which it was brought to Salamá for military use under the name *Flor Nacional*. Before coming to Salamá, it participated in marimba festivals in El Salvador, Honduras, and Belize. While in Salamá, it took part in a four-marimba festival, drawing a large audience.

The marimba played at all social and official events within the military zone and some public social events. Its members included: Director Víctor Manuel de la Cruz García, Miguel Ángel Salguero, Manuel Antonio Ávila, Armando Toc, Jorge Franco Hernández, Adolfo Ramírez Estrada, Juan Leonardo Cante, César Benjamín Caballeros, and Miguel Ángel Vásquez. This marimba, built by Oscar Dávila, was operational until 1983. Its activity ceased after the internal war ended, the Peace Accords were signed, and the military zone was dissolved. Military personnel were relocated to the capital, and the *Flor Nacional* marimba was likely moved to Guatemala City. Despite community requests to retain the marimba, the request was denied, and the ensemble disbanded.

The National Police Marimba was formed by recent graduates of the Rural Normal School No. 4 in Salamá who joined the police force. The police chief wanted cultural representation and founded the ensemble, taking advantage of job vacancies. For three years, this marimba performed numerous concerts. Its members were: Director Francisco Guzmán Valdez, violón Romeo Fernández, bass Humberto Reyes, center Vicente Xitumul, triple José León López A., piccolo or requinto Timoteo Santos, tenor bass Arnoldo Guzmán Prera, tenor center Germán Hernández Santos, drums Eleodoro Conde Juárez, and singer Aníbal Guzmán. However, a change in police leadership led to the ensemble's decline, as the new chief disapproved of the members not participating in regular shifts. Members were reassigned or left the force, and the marimba deteriorated, with its parts, including the keyboard and legs, gradually disappearing.

The fourth simple marimba to come to Salamá belonged to Don Feliciano Reyes. Another double marimba, from the early 20th century, was played by Don Francisco Arriola, who taught for free, as he was retired.

In addition to this double marimba, they bought another one, according to the teacher and principal of the school, Aura Judith Martínez de Milián, and professor Mario López Conde, who also participates in teaching the marimba. It was built in the municipality of Alta Verapaz, Carchá, and cost them Q. 18,990.00, with the drum set costing Q. 3,000.00. The first marimba was purchased in Tactic, Alta Verapaz, and was built by Mr. Flavio Trujillo. The second marimba is named "Expresión Normalista" and is also a double marimba.

Professors Guzmán and López Conde are responsible for teaching this instrument, while Don Obdulio Mejicanos teaches drumming ad honorem. A student from this educational institution, originally from San Miguel Chicaj, Baja Verapaz, also helps teach marimba playing. The ensemble performs at all cultural and social events at the school.

The double marimba *Migdalia Azucena* has existed for three years, owned by Don Max García Turcios, who gifted it to his daughter, after whom it is named. It began performing in 1998 and is valued at Q.25,000. Its director, Arnoldo Guzmán Valdez, not only plays but also builds marimbas.

The ensemble includes violón Inocencio Rivera de León, bass Rafael García Turcios, center Elizardo Muñiz, piccolo Miguel Salguero, tenor bass William García Turcios, second tenor bass Migdalia Azucena, tenor center Arnoldo Guzmán Valdez, tenor piccolo Francisco Guzmán Valdés, and drummer Don Obdulio Mejicanos.

This group performs concerts in Salamá and the municipality of San Jerónimo, Baja Verapaz. It charges 250 quetzals per hour within Salamá and 300 quetzals per hour outside the municipality.

Lastly, there is the double marimba of the Bachán brothers from the San José neighborhood.

Colonel Bautista, who was the police commissioner in this city, attended a meeting of commissioners in Quetzaltenango, where the Minister of the Interior was present and handed over a marimba. The Ministry asked who wanted it, and Colonel Manuel Bautista immediately brought it to Salamá, founding the group in 1984. Their first public performance was on September 12, 1984. The founding director was the professor and marimba player Francisco Guzmán Valdéz. The performers were: Adolfo Ramírez Estrada on tiple, Timoteo de los Santos on piccolo 1%, Vicente Xitumul Morente on center harmony, Humberto Reyes Guillermo on bass harmony, Romeo Fernández Valdéz on contrabass, Israel Eleodoro Conde Juárez on drums, Arnoldo Guzmán Prera on bass tenor, Guzmán Hernández de los Santos on center tenor, Rolando Soria on second piccolo, and Aníbal Guzmán Cano as the singer. When a new commissioner came into office, he didn't like the activity and canceled its operation around 1988. The marimba, which was named "Sultana de las Rosas," was destroyed in the second section here in Salamá.

In the villages of the Salamá municipality, they play simple marimbas with four players, in San Juan Tempisque, Las Limas, and other villages.

Other Musical Instruments: The Mayans, during their festivities, carried their idols in procession to the temple square, where they danced to the sound of drums, chirimías, tunes, and other instruments, played ball games, and engaged in other entertainments. As the reader can see, these instruments have been played in Baja Verapaz since ancient times. Numerous warriors charged into battle to the sound of trumpets, teponaztles, conch shells, and other noisy instruments. Cortez sailed along the Polochic River, and some indigenous people led him inland, where they heard the sound of drums

and trumpets. The poor indigenous people were celebrating a festival, unaware of the danger that threatened them.

Fray Bartolomé de las Casas made his peaceful entry into all of Tezulutlán, beginning with the reign of Zamaneb, singing to the accompaniment of the hoarse and melancholy teponaztle. During the session of September 15, 1821, Doña Dolores de Bedoya and Don Basilio Porras unexpectedly took charge of buying fireworks and bombs, which were set off in the Plaza de la Constitución. Mrs. Bedoya de Molina also hired musicians to play cheerful pieces whenever the shouts for freedom grew louder. This was recounted by Licenciado Arturo Valdés Oliva in his book *Caminos y Luchas por la Independencia*. Although marimba music is not directly mentioned, it is believed that simple marimba music was played, as other historians do mention it.

In another chapter of his book, Licenciado Valdés says that in 1627, the town council received the new president, Don Diego de Acuña, and organized a grand celebration with infantry salvos, two carriages, a colloquy, music from the fiesta del pañol, bullfights, masquerades, jousting games, plays, and fireworks. Although it only says "music," it is important to note that indigenous instruments were already being played. According to the dictionary, the word "autochthonous" refers to the original inhabitants of a country in which they live.

Taken from two pages of *Prensa Libre*, *Mosaicos*, July 30, 2000. Written by Nancy Avendaño and photographed by Carlos Sebastián.

For the Mayans, music was a vital language. They used it for hunting, rites, and ceremonial celebrations, as well as to communicate with their gods and in warfare. Alongside trumpets, skulls are depicted, and next to the rattles are maracas. This is how some murals from the Mayan era are stamped, indicating that music was present during wars.

Music was also found in sacrificial rituals, communication with the gods, and events related to science. Many whistles imitated the cries of monkeys, birds, leaves, and the wind. There is a possibility that Mayan music had aesthetic purposes. These instruments can be found in the *Popol Vuh*. This was stated by musician and anthropologist Alfonso Arrivillaga. Mayan musical instruments included whistles, flutes, drums, scrapers, and rattles, as well as trumpets, maracas, and double-bottomed bowls. They were made of ceramic, some from copper, clay, bone, and seashells. They are depicted in decorative figurines, such as those of old women, ballplayers, birds, jaguars, monkeys, deer, owls, bats, and mythical creatures.

Mayan drums varied in shape and size, some were conical, pedestal-shaped, and hemispherical, and others resembled a cup. The upper part was covered with a monkey, jaguar, or deerskin, while the lower part was left uncovered. The greatest diversity is seen in the whistles, which had direct or indirect blowing mechanisms, two, four, or six-finger holes, and one or two resonating chambers.

In Salamá, drums are played for religious festivals. The player sits on a small wooden stool, accompanied by the pito player. They also accompany processions that march through the main streets of the city. During the processions, one man carries the drum on his back while another plays it with a wooden drumstick, with a rubber-wrapped tip on the upper end. For Christmas celebrations, Baby Jesus is carried on a small altar through the streets, accompanied by a small drum, two or three of them, and two conch shells are also sounded. We can see that since the Mayan era, the drum, conch, and whistle were already in use. Many Catholic people accompany Baby Jesus on his journey.

Mr. Higinio was a drummer many years ago; no one knows the date of his death. Mr. Antonio López has been a drummer since 1957, and his brother Crescencio played the pito until his unfortunate death two years ago. They lived

in the Santa Elena neighborhood of this city. Now only Antonio remains, already advanced in years. Mr. Julio Antonio López tells me that along with his brother José Domingo, they learned to play the drum and pito twenty years ago, taught by Don Pedro Pereira, a drummer. They play these instruments during religious events at the door of the parish church or chapels.

Other drummers like Don Cupertino Ortiz, who lived in the Agua Caliente neighborhood and played the drum during the regional dance of the Mazates, have unfortunately passed away. Don Cleto Reyes from the Las Piedrecitas neighborhood has also passed away. Don Chelayo was a popular character; to some, he was indifferent, to others, a subject of mockery, but few respected him. Once, while wearing a red shirt, someone said to him: “Hey Chelayo, are you against the government?” He replied, “And against all the guanacos!” He played the pito, chirimía, and harp. Nowadays, only the drum and pito are played.

PURULHÁ

In this municipality, gourd marimbas were played, perhaps the only place where this instrument was known. It was found in the villages of El Repollar, Sachut, and Pansal. The simple marimbas found in this municipality are not from the main town but from the villages, and on Sundays, they come to the town to liven up the holy mass in the parish church. There are also double marimbas, like the one owned by the Fernández brothers from the village of Panzal.

The Quichés have a double marimba, and they come down to town on Sundays to liven up the mass.

The folkloric dances *El Costeño* and *Los Mazates* are accompanied by a simple marimba. The López brothers, who live in one of the hamlets, own a simple marimba. León Chiquín is a simple marimba player. Likewise, Don Juan López Faustino Mus had a simple marimba played by his children. The simple marimba of the Temú family is still active. The municipality

has its pure double marimba, which has been in use for three years. It doesn't have a name yet, as the municipal council members need to agree on one. It was purchased by Mayor Don Sebastián Castro for Q.8,000.00 and was made in the municipality of Carchá, A.V.

Mr. Arturo Fernández Izaguirre was teaching marimba performance in 1999, but due to a lack of students, the lessons did not continue. Currently, there are eight marimba players. Don Arturo Paredes, a marimba player and marimba maker, left behind a legacy. He taught several generations of young people, but unfortunately, he passed away around 1930.

The size of the gourds (tecomates) in the marimba varies to produce different sounds.

As for other instruments, they are no longer played. The drum, whistle, and chirimía no longer exist. The harp was the string instrument played back in the 1940s and 1950s. There was also a time when the flute was played, but no one remembers the exact years.

It's worth noting that Las Casas prepared a didactic religious poem in Quiché and composed the music for it, which was to be sung to the sound of indigenous instruments, allowing them to enter the lands of Tezulutlán. As the reader can see, these instruments could very well have been the tun, drum, chirimía, or the atabales.

José Milla says in his work that the indigenous people fought to the sound of trumpets, teponaztles, and conch shells. These are the same instruments still used today during religious festivals in most of our municipalities.

SAN JERÓNIMO:

Here lives Mr. Juan José Avendaño, born in the municipality of Sanarate, but as he says, “I'm from San Chomo.” He has been a marimba player for thirty years. He learned to play it from Mario Hernández, who was his teacher and is still alive. He brought his first marimba from Sanarate, named *Estrella de Oriente*, which cost him one thousand one hundred seventy-five quetzals. Three years ago, he bought another

simple marimba in the village of El Cacao for one thousand quetzals, named *Estrella Verapaz*, and it is played by four marimba players along with the drummer. They liven up social events for a fee of sixty quetzals per hour.

There are other simple marimbas, one in the lower neighborhood of the municipality. Here in town, there is a simple marimba that has been played for ten years, named *Ecos del Recuerdo*.

The municipality has its marimba for giving concerts to the population; it is a double marimba named *Azúcar Morena*. It cost thirteen thousand quetzals and was made in San Pedro Carchá, in the municipality of Alta Verapaz. Thirty years ago, the local government had its double marimba, which was unfortunately destroyed; its name was *Venus*.

There are simple marimbas in the villages of Los Ocotes, Santa Bárbara, El Astillero, and El Cacao.

As for other indigenous instruments, they stopped being played long ago. The large drum, whistle, flute, and chirimía are no longer known.

During the colonial era, the tun was played. In the account found in the *Brief Historical Sketch of San Jerónimo, B.V.*, by historian Víctor Flores Lucas, who has unfortunately passed away, one part says:

"There were men hired for the trades of founders, blacksmiths, bricklayers, adobe makers, brickmakers, as well as silversmiths and musicians..."

In another part, it says: "There are customs and traditions of the natives, such as the presentation of dances in which an ancient instrument like the tun was used to liven up the authorized festivities by the administration of the Hacienda, although the rhythm was essentially African..."

Let us remember that Fray Bartolomé de las Casas brought Africans for the heavy labor of the Hacienda.

SAN MIGUEL CHICAJ

It is a municipality predominantly inhabited by indigenous people, making it well-versed in marimbas, all of which are simple. I arrived in this municipality around 1954 as a schoolteacher. It was thrilling to hear the sound that emanated from the hormigo wood, played by three or four musicians. It could be heard during the *cofradía* festivals, the feast of Saint Michael, and the celebration of the country's independence. During its fair in September, zarabandas were always celebrated with simple marimbas, playing endless *sones* that began at seven in the evening and ended at six the following morning.

Sadly, these zarabandas, with their Indigenous and alcohol-infused essence, disappeared completely due to internal conflict.

Today, the marimba is still heard in the neighborhoods and during community and religious events. There is a marimba ensemble that participates in Catholic Masses. One of the marimbas is called *Reina Chicaj*.

The first person to own a simple marimba was Don Federico Sandoval, who has since passed away. In San Miguel, there are approximately ten marimbas, including in the village of San Gabriel, and all of them play *sones*. Marimba owners include Don Juan Vásquez and Don Alejandro Oxlej. There are also *son* marimbas dedicated to the Virgin Mary and Saint Michael.

Unfortunately, sound systems have replaced the marimba, not only in this municipality but also throughout the rest of the department.

Regarding the drum, tun, chirimía, and adufe, these instruments are still played during religious festivals.

Don José María Temú Xitumul has been playing the drum since 1936 when he traveled to the capital to perform with his drum during the presidency of Jorge Ubico. He still participates in the September parades, dancing and playing his

drum, sometimes on floats. He is a widower, has eight children and grandchildren, and is currently 81 years old.

RABINAL

Rabinal is one of the municipalities with many marimbas, primarily playing *sones*. The first simple marimba that appeared was that of the Jerónimo Sis brothers, around 1930, followed by the marimba of Don René Chacón Leal, who formed a marimba ensemble to play a double marimba owned by the municipality, around the 1950s. The Jerónimo brothers, following tradition, formed their simple marimba ensemble called *Rabinal Achí*.

There are other marimbas for playing *sones*, such as *Rabineralita*, *La Norteña*, *Alma Sonora*, *Ishtía Quezalteca*, and *Flor del Naranjo*. The latter is a double marimba owned by the municipality, and directed by Don Julio Antonio Díaz Pérez.

There is a simple marimba with its respective instruments belonging to the Shantúy Ordóñez brothers, who live in Zone 2 of this municipality. The Hernández family from the village of Pachicá has a simple marimba completed with instruments. Don Gilberto Jerónimo is the master director of the simple marimba of his brothers. Mr. Julio is a marimba player and marimba maker, but unfortunately, his sons, who used to play, have passed away.

There are more marimbas, all used to perform *sones*. Altogether, there are thirty-three. They play in all religious festivals and folk dances at various times of the year.

Regarding instruments such as the *tún*, *chirimía*, flute, and drum, they are still played today during religious festivals, especially in *cofradías*. In the conquest of New Spain, Bernal Díaz del Castillo recounts that on one occasion, when they were fighting the natives, the sound of drums and trumpets could be heard, and voices shouted: *Alalá, Alalá*. From this, it is deduced that trumpets have continued to be played through inheritance, mainly in the *Rabinal Achí*

dance. In more ancient times, the trumpets of Jericho appeared, although they were used for warfare in that era. In the Book of Revelation, six angels are depicted blowing trumpets, with a religious purpose. It is worth noting that trumpets are only used in that municipality. Friar Francisco Ximénez, in his work *History of the Province of San Vicente de Chiapas and Guatemala (Historia de la Provincia de San Vicente de Chiapas y Guatemala)*, tells us that when the natives went to war, they brought their musical instruments, such as drums, which were also used to celebrate their idols.

In Palín, a municipality in the Department of Escuintla, the Majority Age Festival is celebrated with marimba, *tún*, and *chirimía*, making it clear that throughout Guatemala, the marimba and indigenous instruments are played. Just as in one of the villages of Jalapa, the indigenous people of Xalaán dance to the rhythmic beat of the *tun*.

Don Mario Ayala, a native of Rabinal, and Don Juan Cruz organize all the folkloric events that give life and renown to Rabinal.

There is the dance of the *negritos*, which is celebrated on Christmas Eve and New Year's, and they dance to the rhythm of a small, square drum called *atabal*. This small drum was played by the indigenous people, the Quiché Achí, as referenced by Friar Francisco Ximénez in his work, *History of the Province of San Vicente...*

“When the idol's procession was over, on an altar next to the stone where they were to sacrifice men, they placed the *atabales* next to them...”

In the history of Central America, Don José Milla says: “The Indians of Guatemala went to the city of Zamanab, and at night, they saw how the Indians of Zamanab began to sing with the accompaniment of the deep and melancholy *teponastle*, the stanzas composed by Fray Bartolomé de las Casas...”

In another part of his history, Don José Milla states: “The Indians carried their idols on

litters to the spacious courtyard of the temple, where to the sound of atabales, chirimías, tunes, and other instruments, they danced and played ball...”

The reader can see how long these instruments have existed, inherited by our indigenous people. And they will continue playing them for many years to come.

GRANADOS

There are simple marimbas, such as the one called *Alma Sentimental*, belonging to the García brothers, who have been performing for forty years with their marimba, which they bought in the department of Huehuetenango. There is another marimba with the same name, acquired in Santa Eulalia, Huehuetenango. They play pieces at weddings or quinceañera celebrations, and it is their tradition to perform a son at the end of the celebration. In fact, at all social events in the department, a son is played as a signal that the event has ended.

As for the drum, flute, chirimía, and tun, these instruments are not played because the population lacks indigenous people, who are the ones that use them.

CUBULCO

In this beautiful municipality full of color, folklore, sashes, and traditional skirts, with the tezuleros Indigenous people, where Patron Saint Santiago defends them with his miraculous sword, superstition is part of their everyday life. In their Catholic rituals, they dance to the beat of the amanecida.

In a municipality that has had between two hundred and three hundred marimbas throughout its history, its simple son marimbas have always stood out. The marimba players perform them at religious festivals, especially on the Day of the Dead, when most of these historic marimbas come together. The *Huehueteca* marimba, owned by Don Rufino García Cruz, has existed for forty years. All the simple marimbas mentioned are for playing sones. *Francisco*

Rodríguez Sunún's Marimba has been around for thirty-five years; *Sonora Watzilep*, also from Rodríguez Sunún. *La Chimalteca* by Don Manuel Centes Santiago, from Barrio Santiago, is thirty-five years old. *Pablo Teletor's Marimba*, from San José el Rodeo, has been around for thirty-two years. *Agapito Cevallos Ruiz's Marimba*, from Aldea Chovén, is thirty years old.

Felipe Camajá's Marimba, from Aldea Pachojop, is thirty years old. *Reina Cubulera*, by the Alonzo brothers, has been around for twenty years. *Juan Gómez's Cofradía Marimba* has thirty years of existence. *Guatemala Marimba*, by Juan Zolomán Avila, from Barrio Santiago, has been around for twenty years. *San Miguel Aguacatán Marimba* by Gregorio Pérez, from Chisantiago, has been around for twenty years. *Reina Cubulence*, by Vicente Jerónimo from Estancia, has been around for fifteen years. *La Cubulerita*, by Celestino Cente Calo, from Colonia El Naranjo, has been around for fifteen years.

La Flor Cubulence, by Francisco García López, from Barrio San Miguel, has been around for twelve years. *Sebastián Gomez Rodríguez's Marimba* has been around for ten years. *San Miguel Aguacatán Marimba*, by Gregorio Pérez, from Chisantiago, has been around for ten years. *India Marimba*, by Antonio Alvarez, has been around for seven years. *La India Cubulera*, by Don Mario Taperia Rodríguez, has been around for eight years. *Ecos de mi Tierra*, by Diego Camajá Chico, from Caserio Las Vegas, has been around for ten years. *Francisco Hernández's Marimba*, from Aldea Pachojop, has been around for five years. *Huehuetenango Marimba*, by the Teletor Ajualip brothers, has been around for ten years. *Don Lorenzo Lus Raymundo's Marimba* has been around for three years. *India Maya Cubulence*, by Esteban Reyes, from Santa Rosa, has been around for three years. *Macario Rosales's Marimba*, from Aldea Chimachó, has been around for three years. *Cecilio Ajualip's Marimba*, from Aldea Chimachó, has been around for one year. *Esteban García's Marimba*, from Aldea Patzijón, has been around for one

year. *Alma Cubulence*, by the Rosales brothers from Xún, has been around for one year. *Rolando Córdova's Marimba* has been around for four months.

The reader can see that the desire to play our musical instrument remains strong among the people of Cubulco, with new marimbas constantly emerging. The only double marimba is *Flor del Durazno*, owned by the current municipality, whose mayor is Professor Rolando Rivera Gómez. There were also simple son marimbas like *Ecos del Selegua*, by Mr. Ernesto de Paz. *La Chorchita*, by Mr. Arnoldo Melchor. Mr. Jerónimo Rosales played the flute, and Mr. Pablo Rodríguez played the chirimía in the dance *El Cortés* or *La Conquista*. The tún, drum, and chirimía are played at religious festivals, cofradías, and processions that pass through the main streets of the town. It is part of the life of the indigenous people, wrapped in the smoke of copalpón to the sound of teponastles.

Fray Francisco Ximénez says the following in his work *History of the Province of San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala*: "It was about the part of Cubulco, bringing them out and gathering all the villages of this nation to the place where they are today because they were very cornered in the mountains called Miau and Nimcabul... the conquest, as we know, was done peacefully, and the indigenous instruments contributed greatly to the enchantment of peace." When mentioning Cubulco, Fray Francisco says: "There would be a need for some Indigenous people who knew how to play chirimías, sacabuches, or flutes among the singers..." It should be remembered that this type of music and singers contributed with Fray Bartolomé de las Casas and other friars to achieve the peaceful conquest of Verapaz, around the year 1536.

SANTA CRUZ EL CHOL:

This municipality, somewhat distant from the departmental capital, Salamá, has many attractions, to the point that several people have sung about it. Within the department, there is Professor Erwin Homero Mansilla Escobar, who,

in a fragment of his musical poem *Mi Cholito*, says:

When I arrive at my Cholito
I feel so very happy,
It's a town so beautiful
That it honors my country...

Oh my Cholito
Beloved of my heart,
I pray that you are blessed
By the Virgin of Conception

Mr. Samuel Reyes Mayén told us that there was once a double marimba in the municipality, gifted by his brother Bernabé, who requested it from President Enrique Peralta Azurdia. Bernabé was the driver for the President. Unfortunately, this marimba was destroyed, and there has not been another *Reina Cholence* marimba; only the memory remains. Currently, there are three marimbas: *María Concepción* by Mr. Alfredo Arévalo and the one owned by Mr. Leonardo Garrido, which perform pieces as simple marimbas. Don Cruz López's marimba plays sones for the religious celebrations in honor of the Blessed Virgin of Conception.

There was an international marimba, but it ceased to be played and completely disappeared after all its players passed away.

El Chol has its own history, as Fray Francisco Ximénez said: "The name of that province of Santa Cruz was raised high to worship Christ, a cross made for penance." From this, it is deduced that it was later called El Chol and is now known as Santa Cruz El Chol.

Like everywhere else in the department, they played instruments like the drum, the flute, and the chirimía. In this municipality, they still play the drum and flute. At first, the accordion was played for the Feast of the Virgin of the

Rosary in October. The drum is played by Mr. Vitalino Grades during the festivities of the Virgin of Conception.

As I conclude my research on the marimba in Salamá, I include a recently founded marimba, that of the roadwork zone in this city. Sponsored by the Ministry of Communications and Public Works, with the enthusiasm of Mr. Amilcar Ascencio González, Chief of this roadwork zone, this marimba is called *Salamhá* while the Ministry sends its own, and it is under the direction of Maestro Angel Elizardo Muñiz Nájera, a native of El Chol. The ensemble consists of young musicians from Salamá.

The marimba is purely traditional, and it debuted in Salamá on February 18, 2001.

The performers were trained as marimba players at the *Tzalam Chwi yá* Marimba Academy, under the guidance of Professor and marimba player Francisco Guzmán Valdéz.

Poets also exalt the symbol of the marimba. From that hormigo wood and the sonorous murmur of its keys, metaphors, similes, and many literary figures arise; from the marimba come beautiful musical pieces and touching poems.

PRAYER

(For the Marimba)

By Enrique Ardón. Written in 1981.

The marimba, whole and complete,
It no longer sounds as it once did,
Its wooden keys no longer ring
With the same vibrant tone.

The marimba, whole and complete,
It no longer sounds as it once did,
Its wooden keys no longer ring
With the same vibrant tone.

The natural feeling
Firmly rooted in its past,
Once preserved in this

The Indigenous instruments have been lost.

Today, it plays in shame.
Amid shouts and discordant sounds,
With instruments that clash,
Ignored and humiliated.

The marimba and its mission,
Lonely, pure, and serene,
Have lost their tenderness;
Their expression has been silenced.

Do not ruin it with trumpets,
Drums, or maracas,
Saxophones or rattles,
Saxophones or rattles,
Not even tambourines.

For patriotism, without sorrow,
For decency or respect,
Our sonorous keyboard
Should always play alone.

Through the hands of a Quiroz,
Or a Hurtado, their followers,
May it sound as it once did,
May its voice be heard again.

For the Quetzal is sad,
And Guatemala, in its essence,
Feels the cruel absence

Of its marimba, no longer there.

This prayer calls for its rebirth:

May it rise alone, pure,

And sound with sweetness,

For the people always love it.

ECHOES OF THE VALLEY

(The author of this poem, unfortunately, is unknown)

It is a night of concert in the park of my town,
And the notes of the marimba are singing to the valley;

And the notes of the marimba are singing to the valley,

The lark with which I recite the joys of Salamá.

It must be *Ecos del Valle* filling the air with my verses,

To sing of the beautiful *salamateca* that I adore;

My heart beats with the pulse of the jungle,

As the marimba plays its melodies for the children of Verapaz.

The echo of my marimba makes my valley sing,
And in those songs, I sense the birth of roses.

It is the marimba of my homeland, unfolding its regional harmonies,

To release, in rhythms, the colorful soul of Salamá.

The evening, painted with the enchantment of sad winds,

Sometimes sways gently to the notes of the marimba.

And when there are languid laments in my evening,

This marimba also sings the sad echoes of our valley.

I will pause on the regional path of my marimba,

And the echoes of the valley will cradle the memories you carry;

It will offer the garlands of my town in innocent *guarimbas*,

And in Verapaz's echoes, the song of Salamá will always remain.

ANCIENT MARIMBA OF GUATEMALA

By: Pedro Benjamín Ramos San José

Marimba, wood of hormigo,

My heart swells

At the sound of your melodious voice,

You sing softly across the blue fabric

Of my homeland

Marimba, fragments of mountain

In the clear morning,

You sing glimmers of light

To the rhythm of twinkling stars.

From your Indigenous body,

Flow graceful melodies

The little ones dance to

At the break of dawn

Marimba, full of life,

Majestic marimba,

In your resonant notes

Beats the heart of Guatemala

Fireflies illuminate
Your dusky keys;
A torrent of restless butterflies
Dances across your
Singing wooden body

Maya marimba,
Moonlit in silver hues,
Keys spilling cascades of notes,
With the music of nightingales,
You rest in the hammock of time

Marimba, dressed in the velvety
Plumes of the beautiful Quetzal,
Caressed by the whispers
Of the fresh morning breeze

The motmot bird
Shapes your keys
With its lilting song.
Your notes weep
In the silent jungle.

Our ancestors
Birthed a language of wood,
And thistles simply extinguished,
Bathed the sorrowful songs
Of Hunahpú and Ixbalanqué.

Crystal-clear rivers
Feed your infinite life,
Where you sing

On dazzling mornings,
And in dreamy twilights,
Your keys slumber on the grass
Of the Virgin Mountains

Marimba, how I admire your origin,
When your melodies fill the air,
The silence of ancient trees
Ignites under the sunset's glow.

Marimba, National Symbol,
Carved from the verdant mountains,
Shaped with the hands of artisans,
Reclining on the immaculate petals
Of the White Nun Orchid

Marimba of the land,
An ancient lady,
African marimba,
The Quiché nobility
Rests in your embrace
And dances to the rhythm
Of your melodious song

You sleep in the heart of the mountains,
With the joyful fluttering
Of vibrant birds,
Your resonant melodies
Of early morning birds
Awaken the smile of dawn

Rustic village marimba,
You sing at sunrise,
Bathed in the smoke

Of Indigenous copal resin.
 Your notes, in the festivity's mirth,
 Adorn themselves with multicolored huipiles,
 Scattered in your path with music
 Of early risers breaking the silence

Precious wood,
 Crafted in the carpentry
 Of the cool mountain,
 The woodpecker
 Draws stars from the firmament
 To fill your rhythmic body,
 Where the mockingbird,
 On festive days,
 Gargles in your dusky keys
 Of the marimba

Maya marimba, Indigenous and pure,
 Simple yet beautiful,
 Wanderer of the world,
 The pearly stars
 Shine their light
 To make you great among the greats.
 That is why I call you:
 The Ancient Marimba of Guatemala

THE CHIRIMÍA

By César Izaguirre

An instrument of sorrow: such is the one that
 murmurs
 The deeply Indigenous poetry, an instrument
 Well-versed in melancholy
 Of those tragic times, of those bygone days.

Oh, the boundless grief that burdens a somber
 race,

This fallen race, orphaned of joy,
 That instead of songs, offers the laments of its
 chirimía.

This race that bears its burden with meekness,
 That has learned to endure in the face of
 heartbreak

Sheds not a single tear. Yet it knows how to
 express its sorrow,

When it recalls its past, a blend of tears and
 defiance,

Through the silent notes of its chirimía.

DITIRAMBS TO THE SOUND OF THE MARIMBA

Pseudonym Vax (Unknown Name) (Fragments)

First Song

I come from a town
 Made of marimbas,
 Stitched with chirimías,
 With a passport of drums...

First, the marimba was born;
 Then came my people...
 Until I discovered the marimba,
 And then it became
 A part of me,
 A marimba devotee...

Second Song

My heart escapes its cage
 And transforms into a melody
 That loudly sings the sins

Of a race that bears indignities...

Third Song

I grew up among marimba players,
Those who worked the miracle of the
instrument,
And those who perfected each note
With the precise brush of their ear...

Fourth Song

Marimba,
You shaped me with your song,
A shorthand for the mountains...
Marimba,
Essence that bursts the soul,
My marimba,
Mother marimba!

Fifth Song

Marimba,
A multitude that draws in loneliness,
Unites it, and transforms it,
Until it becomes music.
Your voice, enchanting marimba,
Blender of mysteries...

Sixth Song

Marimba,
Whose notes unravel
The thread of emotions...
Wandering marimba,
Traveling from hut to hut,
From town to town,
And from one celebration to the next...

Seventh Song

In this, my fair,
I've longed to praise
Your birdsong trills,
Your nymph-like laughter,
Your awakening dreams,
Your hymn of mallets...

Marimba de Tecomates

(Fragments)

Pseudonym: Saquiribal (Unknown Author)

I am the child of the marimba,
Of the tún and the Tzijolaj,
And a shack of palopique
Awaits me there in Joyabaj...
Marimba of the marimba player,
Tell me, who gave you your tune?
—I was played by a sailor
With moonlight and sunshine rays...
Marimba of Guatemala,
I long to drink your song.
—If you wish to taste my melody,
You must be a son of the land...
Marimba of gourds (tecomates),
Stay with me for a while.
—Here I am, my little one,
With my guarimbas of hormigo...
And when I return to your side
With my boj and my mat,
I'll sing you a love song,
Marimba of gourds (tecomates)...

POEM TO TECÚN UMÁN

By Miguel Ángel Asturias
(A small fragment)

Tecún Umán of the war drums,
Echoes tributing the storm,
In the reverberations of the drums,
Hide coverings of rawhide,
Inside, in between, and out,
Leather of the great drum: bon, bon, borom,
Bon borom, bon, bon, borombon.
A thunderous sprinkling strikes,
Giant kernels rattling within the hollow echo,
Unfolding the tenopastle
Tepompón, tepompón, tenopastle,
Tepompón, tepompón, tepompón...

Pedro Benjamín Ramos San José.

San Mateo Salamá, Baja Verapaz,
Kingdom of Tezulutlán. In the Valley of Peace
and fragrant roses. Year 2001. I express my
deepest gratitude to the individuals whose
contributions were invaluable to this research.

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