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THE FOLKLORIC MUSIC OF GUATEMALA*

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Guatemala's folk music is the product of two contiguous rural cultures: the Ladinos, of Hispanic speech and musical heritage, and the indigenous people, of Mayan lineage, who constitute more than the fifty percent of the population and maintain one the strongest folk music traditions in Central and North America. (An isolated, very small and understudied group of Caribbean Arawaks, on the Gulf coast of Honduras, is musically related to other Afro-Caribbean populations.)

Ladino folk Music

Ladino folk music flourishes mainly in the larger Ladino populations concentrated in the urban centers, the southern coast (departments of Retalhuleu, Escuintla, Santa Rosa and Jutiapa), the eastern lowlands (departments of Chiquimula, Jalapa, El Progreso, Zacapa and southern Izabal) and in smaller enclaves in El Petén and in the mostly indigenous villages of the highland mountain range. Their music shows a long-standing pervasive influence from Spain, as well as, more recently, from other Latin American peoples, especially Mexico, Colombia, the other Central American republics and Caribbean

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countries, and the popular music in the United States. The direct influence of Mayan music on Ladino music is relatively small.

The Ladino folk repertoire is also performed by indigenous musicians, which they modify according to their own sense of aesthetics. At the same time, they maintain a musical tradition that hasn't been adopted by the Ladinos.

The Guatemalan marimba is the popular folk instrument and has become a national symbol of the republic after the independence. It is generally believed to be of African origins, introduced during the early Columbian period by African slaves. This view, which has created controversy, relies mainly on the similarity of the *marimba de tecomates* also called gourd marimba (the original form of the Guatemalan instrument) with the African xylophone, the African derivation of the word marimba and the absence of marimbas in the pre-Columbian America.

The gourd marimba is a xylophone consisting of a keyboard of parallel tuned wooden bars or percussion plates suspended above a four-legged trapezoidal framework by means of cords which pass through threading pins and through each key at their nodal point: beneath each key is suspended a tuned gourd resonator, whose base is attached to a ring of wax that encircles an aperture, a vibrating membrane made with pork intestine. This membrane functions as a *mirliton** or a sound modifier that produces a characteristic buzzing sound, called *charleo*, when the keys are played. The oldest form of this marimba, the *Marimba de arco*, which lacks legs and is carried by means of straps to the ends of the frame which are then passes around the performer's shoulders. The keyboard is kept from rubbing against the performer's body by an arched branch (bow), which is attached to the frame in the same plane as the keyboard. A later model has four legs and no bow. The keyboard, more or less diatonic, has nineteen to twenty-five keys. The pitch of each key can be raised during the performance by applying a piece of wax, sometimes mixed with pieces of lead, to the bottom of the key. For this reason, the marimbas are called marimbas de cera. The keys are played with mallets made of flexible wooden sticks, the tips which are wrapped with strips of raw rubber form a ball. The tips of the mallets used for the lower keys are soft, those for the upper keys are harder and smaller. One to three players hold one stick in each hand and one in the other. Chromatic accidents can be produced by hitting the extreme tip of the keys with the wooden tip of the mallet. Nowadays it is unusual for the gourd marimba to be played by Ladino's

Mirliton: a resonator used for color the tone.

musicians, as they prefer the more developed forms of the instrument.

The most ancient record of the marimba in Guatemala dates back to the works of the 17th century historian Domingo Juarros, who includes it amongst the instruments played by indigenous in 1680.

During the 18th century its use spread greatly among the indigenous people, and its presence is noticeable in public events, both religious and civil.

The growing popularity of the marimba amongst the Ladino population, in the 19th century resulted in the expansion of the keyboard to five, then to six and seven octaves, allowing the addition of a fourth performer. During the celebration of independence in 1821, the marimba took its place as the national instrument.

Throught the last twenty-five years of the 19th century, the *marimba sencilla* also called simple marimba, was developed, in which harmonic cajons -wooden boxes which resemble the *tecomates*-replaced the gourd resonators. In other aspects of the construction and tuning, the simple marimba is identical to the gourd marimba. During this period, the *marimba de cinchos* (steel marimba or iron marimba) also became popular, with metal keys and box resonators, used with guitar accompaniment. Other types of glass keys and tube and bamboo resonators were also developed.

The addition of chromatic keys to the diatonic keyboard was developed at the end of the 19th century, in 1894, and is attributed to Sebastián Hurtado. The name of this type is marimba doble also called chromatic marimba, is due to the double row of keys for the diatonic and chromatic tones. Unlikely the piano keyboard arrangement, in which the sharps are on the right of the corresponding natural note, in many Guatemalan instruments the sharps are placed directly behind the natural notes. The chromatic marimba is often played in pairs: the largest, the *marimba grande*, has a length of six and a half octaves (78 keys) and is played by four performers; the smallest, the *marimba cauche* (also called marimba piccolo, requinto or tenor), has length of five octaves (50 keys) and is played by three performers. To these two instruments are often added a three-stringed double bass, a snare drum to a bass drum, cymbals, accordion and wind instruments such as saxophones, trumpets and clarinets.

While the folkloric character of the chromatic marimba has been obscured by the influence of popular Latin and North American styles of instrumentation and repertoire, the simple marimba ensembles of the highland villages still conserve the traditional style

and repertoire.

Among the most widespread and popular musical forms is the *son guatemalteco* (also called *son chapín*), Guatemala's national dance. The *son guatemalteco* is played on the marimbas, singly or as part of an ensemble, and by sets of six- or twelve-string guitars, tenor guitar and maracas. The music accompanies a couples dance, which is danced without touching, emphasizing the son rhythm with zapateado which recalls the Spanish flamenco style.

The *son guatemalteco* is often sung by a duet, trio or quartet of male voices, with a text that generally consists of four-line, eight-syllable stanzas of pastoral or folkloric content. Each son contains two or three different but related melodies, which are repeated and combined more freely in the instrumental versions.

The *son Guatemalteco* is characterized by the following: it has a moderate to fast, 6/8 rhythm with accent on the third and fifth bars of the rhythmic line and zapateado, which allows for an occasional hemiola as in example 1; homophonic texture; major pitch; diatonic dominant melody; triadic harmony. An initial motive beginning in the fifth rhythm is common.

Also widely heard are corridos composed in the country, which are very similar to Mexican corridos in form and style. In Guatemala, corridos are sung with the accompaniments of six- and twelve-string guitars and sometimes with tenor guitars and harp, or marimba ensembles in which the corridos are most often performed as instrumental solos. The texts of the corridos are narrative and thematic, sometimes with political content, and may have 20 to 30 stanzas. The texts are often anonymous and are distributed in the form of leaflets in public places, so that when they are sung, they are adapted to already known melodies.

Guatemalan corridos are predominantly diatonic, in a major pitch, with a triadic harmony structure and a homophonic texture.

Corridos, rancheras and huapangos from the Mexican mariachi repertoire are also popular and are adapted to the instruments that form the marimba and strings ensembles of Guatemala, as is also the case with the waltz, the march and the Colombian cumbia.

Mayan folk music

The twelve linguistic groups of the Guatemalan Maya belong to

Zapateado: a Latin American dance marked by rhythmic stamping or tapping of the feet.

Mam, K'iche' and Q'eqchi' branches of the Maya family, inhabiting respectively the western highlands and the north central, south central and northeastern regions. Their traditional music displays stronger influence of the pre-Columbian and Spanish musical traditions of the colony than of more recent ones. The sacred conception of their ancestral heritage, the source of their mythologic, rituals, arts and music, is not conducive to the modification of traditional folk forms, and this is the motive for the preservation of music of some antiquity. Music is an essential part of public and private rituals and celebrations centered around the rites of transition and agriculture in both Christian and secular calendars. Notable in public events is the instrumental music that accompanies the numerous dance-dramas, which are generally performed in town fairs and in the frequent processions in honor of saints whose images are carried through the streets. Private ritual music, which is more abundant but less known, includes vocal and instrumental forms.

Information concerning the pre-Columbian music of the Mayan has been gathered from numerous archeological remains of musical instruments, of instrument representations and sculpture sets, painted vessels and murals, three pre-Columbian codex, and Mayan and Spain literature from the early colonial period that evidence the pre-Columbian civilization. Among the highland Mayas, a variety of ideophones and aerophones of the type found in pre-Columbian sources, whose musical style is still predominantly autochthonous, although they have little indigenous character, are still used in an integral way in indigenous rituals.

The *tun* (also called *c'unc'un* or *tunkul*) consists of a horizontal percussion tube with two vibrating reeds, generally called a slit drum, common in the highlands. The *tun* is played with mallets or smooth chub or rubber-tipped sticks and produces two pitches with an approximate interval of a fourth in the known examples. Sometimes two tunes of different sizes are played at the same time.

The tortoise shell gong is played with bones, sticks or chubs and is used by the Ixiles of the department of El Quiché in the Deer Dance ensemble, together with the *tun* and some long wooden, bark or metal trumpets. (A confusion emerges in the exegesis of the literature, because in the Quiché languages *tun* or *tum* mean both drum and trumpet). Also common is the use of the tortoise shell in the original Spanish Christmas processions, called *posadas*. A set of tunes and trumpets are used to accompany the ancient Rabinal Achí dance-drama,

of the Quichés of Rabinal. Archaeological ocarinas and *pitos* unheated by indigenous farmers are considered sacred and powerful and can be used in shamanic healing. Snail shell trumpets are also known but they are very rare.

In the dance-dramas and processional ensembles, they use metallic bells with clappers, rasps or bone scrapers and rattles in the shapes of vessels, with stick handles, made of gourd, ceramic or metal, filled with seeds or small stones that are called *chinchines*. It is common to find reed flutes combined with European type drums in processional ensembles. The flute called *xul* or *tzijolaj*, *pito* in the Spanish written sources, is a reed flute with an open lower lip, blown into the embouchure at one end, which generally has six tonal apertures and ranges from a few inches to a yard in length. The *k'jom* (Spanish drum, *tamborón* or *atabal*), consist of double -membrane cylinder, of European type, which has taken the place of the most ancient Mayan drums. A trumpet can be added to this ensemble or the *tun* can replace the *tamborón*.

The Tzutuhil and Cakchiquel people of the Lake Atitlán region use a reed *xul* which is played on its side, closed at the mouth by a hollow ball of black beeswax. In this hollow, snake rattles of the same name are inserted, and at the tip of the ball there is an opening over which a film of intestine is stretched to serve as a mirliton. This instrument, together with a small simple marimba, played by two men, is used on the Deer Dance in this area. Of uncertain origin are the zambomba, a friction drum with fixed bobbins, the *caramba* or *zambumbia*, a musical instrument composed of a single string stretched over a gourd resonance box played with a bow.

The stylistic features that predominate in the performance of these instruments are: 1) the complexity of the independent but interrelated rhythmic patterns with the instruments of the ensemble; 2) the heterophonic textures in which the main melodic voice is imitated by secondary voices within the possible extension of each of the instruments. This imitation can be almost simultaneous, as in the simple marimba, followed by the mirliton *xul* or delayed almost to the point of antiphony as in the trumpet duets; 3) fundamentally the characters are non-occidental tonal and harmonic, although with more or less residual Hispanic residual traces; and 4) formulaic motifs for the final beginnings annexed to the piece in contrasting or free rhythm.

Vocal music of a predominantly indigenous, musical and ritual character includes prayers and healing chants of the shamans and

midwives, sung in simple melodic formulas in their native language. The most elaborate melodies are known among the Tzutuhiles, whose dream-transmitted songs are accompanied by a five-stringed guitar (Example 2). Musically, these songs resemble the *son guatemalteco* modified however by asymmetrical rhythms and a free intonation typical of the indigenous style. Narrative songs, laments, courting songs, rain songs, sowing songs and magical songs correspond to the events of the human life cycle and the agricultural calendar. The partly improvised poetic texts of prayer chants and songs, preserve and transmit their native mythology.

The Spanish conquest of 1524 was quickly followed by an era of intense missionary activity lasting less than a century, with the concomitant introduction of instrumental music and ecclesiastical and secular Spanish styles to the highland groups. This period was followed by three centuries of relative isolation, during which elements of the Spanish culture, particularly music and religion, were modified and incorporated into the Mayan way of life.

The string ensembles of the central and northeastern highlands, called *zarabandas*, are derived from a colonial prototype and usually includes: 1) one or more rebecs, or violins, of three or four strings that carry the melody, some rustically constructed from half of a gourd, or of wood, with deerskin sides and played with a loose horsehair bow; 2) one or more six-stringed guitars or five-stringed tenor guitars or tiples, or the now disappearing twelve-string bandurria, bandola or mandolin; and 3) a harp, with a framework, diatonic, twenty-eight to thirty-two strings, with a hand-tempered action and a wide resonance box that is often percussed by a musician with a lined mallet, who alternately plays a snare drum. The harp can carry the melody or also the rhythm and accompaniment and can be played with a wooden plectrum. To this ensemble can be added an *adufe*, a square tambourine with a double membrane, which often has a bell inside, or an accordion. Also common are harp, violin or guitar solos with *adufe* accompaniment.

The typical indigenous gourd marimba is disappearing, although it is still used as a solo instrument or in combination with the shawm, an oboe introduced by the Spaniards, the *xul* and the *tamborón*. The simple marimbas, which are more numerous, are used for dances in festivities, processions and for certain dance-dramas. To these are added, when they are available, double basses, shawms, xules, saxophones, trumpets, accordion, snare drums and bass drums, cymbals, bells and, more recently, a male vocalist.

The zarabanda string ensembles and marimba ensembles share the same styles and repertoires, playing typical genres such as the son Guatemalteco, the son barreño and corridos. The shawm and drum ensembles accompany the Dance of the Conquest, still in force. Large ensembles of up to eight shawms, eight xules and four or five drums sometimes play for the big fairs.

Vocal music, which comes from Spanish liturgical music of the colonial era, is used for Catholic ceremonies that have been incorporated into Maya ritual. Examples of hymns, psalmodies and plainchant in Latin and Spanish have been found in some towns.

The son Guatemalteco

The terms, son Guatemalteco and son chapín (chapín. heavy sandal, surname given to Guatemalans) identify the national dance of Guatemala, which reflects its Spanish origin in its zapateado and its accompanying music. The son Guatemalteco son is played by marimba, zarabanda or guitar ensembles and is sometimes sung. The regional variants are numerous and distinguishable. Although characteristically they are expressed in metrical formulas, from fast to moderate, of 6/8, in some towns are found sones of 3/4, 2/4 or in complex and irregular metrical formulas. The son barreño, from the department of San Marcos, a local variant of the son Guatemalteco, has typical melodic motifs and a constant eight-note pulse in a slightly faster tempo.

Example 1

The musical notation for Example 1 is presented on a system of five staves. The first staff is labeled 'ex. 1' and contains a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 6/8 time signature. The melody is written on the second staff, which is labeled 'melody' and contains a treble clef. The bass guitar part is written on the third staff, which is labeled 'bass guitar' and contains a bass clef. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and bar lines, indicating a specific musical piece.

Example 2

Voice

Guitar

REX JYU' MUND REX JYU' RUCH'-LEW
 Green mountain of the world, green mountain on the face of the
 earth

N-KO-BYE' NA C'A NA-WC'A XAT JIN-K. PAL-BES N-KO-BI-NACHAWACH
 Hear us soon, for we remain, we walk

RUCH'LEW DIQS. (5) DIQS. ——— LAM-BRE MAR-NA-DI-NO AT.CO R
 upon the face of the earth, oh God, oh God----- Light of San Bernardino, you are

ZIGL AT-CO P. GLOR.
 in heaven, you are in glory.

usually
 ♩ = 120

1. NA-NA-NI NA-NA-NA NA-NA-NA NI YA YAN YAYA YAN.
 NA-NA-NA A-NA-NA NI - A NANA-NA NANA-NA NANA-NI NANA-NA
 NI NANI NA NI NA-NA NA-NA "XIMBJ CHA-NAA" NA XIMBJ CHA-NAA?

30