

MUSIC IN THE LIFE OF THE AZTECS

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THE AZTECS

THE seven tribes of the Aztecs, like the Israelites of old, came "out of the wilderness." They came from the north, from Aztlan, "a land of famine and death," toward the end of the eleventh century, and overspread the fertile valleys of the terrestrial paradise of Anahuac, the present-day valley of Mexico. A fierce warrior race, their Moses was the god Huitzilipochtli, born of the virgin Coatlicue, whose voice, sounding from the recesses of his holy ark, directed their wanderings beneath the crystal skull-dome of the sky. The Aztec invaders assimilated the culture of Toltec and Maya predecessors, grafting many of its refinements on their own savage stock, and in time produced a civilization rich in beauty, individual and fantastic.

When the City on the Lagoons, Mexico-Tenochtitlan, was founded in 1325, it was a mere cluster of huts. When Montezuma I, the greatest *tlatohuani* or king the Aztecs ever had, died in 1469, the magnificent Great Temple or *teocalli* of the war-god Huitzilipochtli rose above a sea of houses and palaces; the Aztec sway extended far beyond the valley plateau of its origin; and the kings and *caciques* of many lands paid him feudal homage. Montezuma II, in 1519, when Cortez landed in Mexico, had changed his title from king to emperor, he was addressed like the Akhæmenian kings of Persia, as *hueitlatoani*, "Lord of Lords," and the Aztec banners had been carried to the furthest provinces on the Mexican Gulf, to distant Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala. Over practically all those Indian races whose one hundred and eighty-two idioms represent as many tribes, the Aztec monarch ruled.

THE GODS OF ANAHUAC

The Aztec culture complex, however, was weighed with religious inhibitions of the stone age. The gods of Aztec mythology harked back to savage creative instincts millions of years old, when the first Reindeer Men passed over the edge of the Asian world to the American continent by the land bridge which then occupied the Behring Straits. "The dim sketch which is the

basis of all ethics" in early man, in the case of the Aztecs had followed those aleatory laws which determine *mores*, and had in the fulness of time blossomed out in a pantheon of divinities representing a mixture of sanity and extravagance, of the noble, horrible and grotesque.

Andrew Lang has well said "A less lovely set of Olympians than the Aztec gods it is difficult to conceive," and in the character of most of the purely Aztecan divinities lurks something of the cold, unmoral cruelty of the pre-historic savage, "a thing with the brain and heart of an alligator yet fashioned after God's own image." Even the earth as a whole was deified by the Aztecs as a monster, as Biart puts it, "provided with mouths at every articulation—mouths filled with blood."

High above the three hundred odd gods of the Aztec pantheon (not counting the "four hundred gods of *pulque*" and countless Rabbit-gods of fertility), was God *Teotl*, the supreme sun-god. But though prayers were chanted in his honor four times by day and by night, Tonatiuh, the Sun, had no temple and no sacrifices. The Aztecs had found him ruling the Toltec skies when they reached Anahuac, and though they honored him in song, their own specific sun-gods, Huitzilipochtli, "Hair of the Sun," the Hummingbird-god, who ruled the heavens in spring and summer, and Tezcatlipoca, the Shining Mirror, the winter sun-god, absorbed Tonatiuh's sacrifices.

In the Aztecan cities, beside the temples of their own deities rose those of the gods of subject tribes and peoples, also honored and sung. For the Aztecs were a tolerant people. Their gods, none of whom said, "Thou shalt have no other gods but me," were liberal-minded deities. The flood of sacred song which poured continually from the *teocallis* of the Aztecan cities mingled amiably in a universal hymn of worship, no matter how addressed individually. The Tarascans gave one of their gods "the bum's rush" out of his heaven because he was an habitual drunkard, but on earth no Aztec dreamt of destroying choristers because they were chanting the glory of some divinity Toltec, Totonac, Chichemec, Huaztec, Miztec or Zapotec.

In Tenochtitlan the church-music of Huitzilipochtli flourished at the expense of that of Quetzalcoatl, a Toltec god who came first in the hearts of the Cholulans, Aztecan subjects; but those who worshipped Quetzal were not persecuted. Aztec theologians did not ask the subject Tepanecans to revise their ritual chants and delete those in honor of Xiutecutli, the "Old, Old Fire God," whose black-green-yellow image was dear to their hearts; nor did

the high-priest of Mexico quarrel with the Zapotecan high-priest anent the canonical music of the latter's temple service. Latitude in preferential worship of any one god went hand in hand with obligatory reverence for all the gods, though the circle of toleration was banded by inescapable rituals of which music was the chief means of expression. The worship of the gods lived from chant to chant, was upborne on the airs of Anahuac in a linked chain of devotional singing which never ceased.

Its traditions gained in power as they aged. Huitzilipochtli, when he had ascended into heaven after directing the wanderings of the Aztec hordes from his ark, had left behind a crude wooden image of himself, painted blue, and this was esteemed more holy than all later images wrought in stone. Similarly the ancient ritual chants in the archaic Nahua idiom were considered more potent than the new ones by the *ometochtli*, composers of festival hymns for the recurring temple celebrations.

In these chants the rude and melancholy imagination of the race expressed itself in exacerbant music, priests singing, drums beating in complicate rhythms, thousands of dancers circling around a central point, slowly, then with increasing speed until they whirled "like a sun of many colors, torn into a spiral, like a star newly born."

This dance, like its music, was never secular; it was not cultivated as an art, but performed as a rite. And these festivals all inculcated a sense of the merely relative value of the individual human life. They stressed the blood-thirst of the gods, which must be appeased, and tribal unity in the blood-soul—human and divine—common to most Amerinds. An idea of what these things meant to the Aztecs helps remove their music, like their morals, from the realm of the purely fantastic to the comparatively sane.

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THE LILY OF MICTLAN

Once the lily was grey and odorless. Then Mictlan-Teculi, the Lord of Death, dipped it in the dark stream which flows through his land of shadows, and it turned into the fragrant, silver-glistening flower that rose along the lagoons of Tenochtitlan. Yet in the fulness of its bloom it must return to Mictlan-Teculi, for in the end all that which is beautiful must return to the Lord of Death. So runs the Aztec legend.

Like the Mexican lily, the curiously beautiful civilization of the Aztecs, compact of animalism and spirituality, tenderness and blood-lust, delicate refinement and matter-of-fact grossness, poetic sensitiveness and cannibal piety, has returned to Mictlan, the domain of all vanished loveliness. Four hundred years have passed since the Aztec empire perished; not withering on the sapless stalk like other cycles of culture, but lopped in full flower. In its externals, in any event, it can know no renaissance.

Yet four hundred years after the Conquest the descendants of the multiple Indian tribes which made up the Aztec empire continue to breed true to race; and even the *mestizos*, the half-breeds, revert to the stronger, darker Indian blood strain. D. H. Lawrence declares, "there is some Indian quality which pervades the whole. . . . And all the efforts of white men to bring the soul of the dark men of Mexico into final clinched being, has resulted in nothing but the collapse of the white man." The lily of Mexico resists hybridization; it evades the influence of a foreign pollen. Similarly the Mexican reverts to ancient type, his vision is introspective, as was that of his ancestors.

THE INDIAN BLOOD-SOUL

This "Indian quality" of the Mexican is a biologic inheritance, the instinctive clinging to primitive belief in the "blood-soul." All humanity, in the evolution toward a higher development, strives for a mystic union with God, with the Divine. The further it ascends in this direction the more spiritual become its revelations. But the Indian tribes of Central America, in general, and the Aztecs in particular, while the externals of their civilization took on rich and varied forms of material beauty, were in essence primordial. They responded only to the urges of the "blood-soul"; the "spirit-soul," speaking by and large, did not exist for them.

It was music, evanescent and volatile, passing away in the moment of expression, yet ever renewed in it, which bound together with its liquid tonal cement the elaborate ritual, musical and terpsichorean, in which the Aztec priesthood had crystallized the worship of their gods. The importance of music in Aztec life was due to the fact that Aztec life, religiously speaking, was "through-composed." Aztec polytheism provided divine causation, rule and regulation for every detail of existence, from the cradle to the grave and beyond. Even folk-melody—lullaby, war-song or occupational ballad—did not escape the religious inflection.

All the business of life moved within a framework of minutely prescribed ritual acts and festival observances, in which music and the dance were linked with impressive display.

The Chinese in their evolutionary process made their most definite stop at that specific feature of the "ghost-cult," known as ancestor worship, common to all pre-historic humanity; and for all they have progressed beyond it in Taoism and Buddhism, it is still the idea which dominates the race. Among the Aztecs, the cult of the blood-aborring god Quetzalcoatl represents only a minor, partial spiritual ascent. They made redemption through blood and human sacrifice the point of emphasis, and centered their cult around them. Blood-sacrifice became the outstanding feature of the Aztec religion, and its chants and hymns, like our own Christian ones (though these dwell on the blood of redemption only in a figurative sense) were full of it.

In Mexico the Aztec priests controlled all education, songs and prayers, music and dance, painting, national legend, religious dogma, medicine, conjuration, the drawing of ideographic signs and of phonetic hieroglyphics; and Rätzels's statement "Where religion is the whole of immaterial life, it means that all intellectual life is frozen fast," is admirably illustrated by Aztec culture. In vain the gentler hymns sung by the *quaquiles*, the Toltecan monks of Quetzalcoatl, the "Green-Feathered Serpent" god of the Toltecs, who repudiated human sacrifice, sought to free the souls of the men of Anahuac for a new gospel of light and joy. They were overpowered by the thunder of the great snake-skin drums, the *wewetts* of Huitzilipochtli and Tezcatlipoca, the gods of war and fate, the drinkers of blood, whose music whirled the Aztecs "back to . . . a bygone cycle of humanity . . . the oldest, darkest recesses of the soul," a soul that dwelt in the pulse of the body's vital tide, the "red jewel-water."

For the same Aztecs who revered Quetzalcoatl as the Azure Planet, worshipped Tezcatlipoca as the breath of life personified. And for the Aztecs the breath of life, in Lawrence's words, harked back to "the innermost, far-off place of the human core, the ever-present, where there is neither hope nor emotion, but passion sits with folded wings on the nest and faith is a tree of shadow."

AZTEC "COMMUNITY MUSIC"

Since, aside from greater sacred celebrations, every twentieth Aztec day was a festival day, and all Aztec life in general was musically ritualized, the ritual symphony was practically concurrent

with their existence: they lived their music and religion to an extent we can hardly realize.

In our days the "community" no longer exists either in the medieval or in the Aztec sense. Nor can it well be revived socially or artistically, in spite of the hue and cry of those devoted to the revival of community pageantry, of community music and of community art. The Aztec cult ruled Aztec life to a far greater degree than the medieval Christian Church influenced the Christian community.

That vast truncated pyramid, the Great Temple of Mexico, with twin towers like Notre-Dame, loomed above the city of Tenochtitlan as a Gothic minster overshadowed a medieval town, and among some two thousand other *teocallis*, "houses of God," three hundred and sixty reared towers to the sky. The enormous number of Aztec priests, whose elaborate hierarchy was headed by two supreme pontiffs, of whom the High Priest was the head of religion throughout the empire, followed ideals of asceticism; and so intimately and indissolubly were the aims of royalty and religion identified that there were no clashes of authority between kings and pontiffs like those occurring between popes and emperors of the Middle Ages.

Aztec communities were unified in religious belief, life habit and social tradition: there was no room for schism, and the emperor and kings of Mexico shared in the reverence paid the gods.

The modern "community festival" and pageant has nothing in common with either the great Aztec ritual spectacles or the medieval mysteries. Both of these last represented a single-minded fusing of collective devotional spirit. Aside from the fact that the modern community itself is a pseudomorph, it is not even artistically unified, to say nothing of religious unity. A more or less collective effort motivated by socially or financially important groups forces a "pageant" or other art drive temporarily over the so-called "community" top.

Of that propaganda of verbal idealism, often camouflaging ulterior personal or commercial motives in modern "community" art endeavor, the Aztecs were happily ignorant. The only axes their song leaders had to grind were sacrificial knives, and their community music was a spontaneous expression of genuine community feeling. It did not (as is so often the case in our own civilization) represent the galvanic ululations of an exhumed corpse. The great sacral festivals of the Roman Church in Catholic lands; the "revival" meeting in purely Methodist settlements; the religious springtide orgies of African blacks and Australian "black

fellars” (though their angles of approach differ) offer the nearest comparisons to the sacred community celebrations of the Aztecs.

Lucien Biart says: “The music of the Aztecs was unworthy of so cultivated a people. . . . Drums, flutes, even conch-shells accompanied the hymns, sung in the temples, which were chanted in a sing-song manner fatiguing to European ears.” But “unworthiness” in music, as in other things, is a purely relative term. Expressing the Indian ideal of “the old, terrible blood-unison of man,” Aztec music united the emperor, whose tributary kings carried his litter barefoot, and the breech-clouted *tlamama* who acted as a porter in Tenochtitlan’s streets or as a stevedore on its wharves. The term “unworthy” does not apply to a music which expressed its makers’ group psychology with an intensity Christian liturgic music to-day seems to fail to convey.

It was non-harmonic melodically, but not rhythmically; and it had to the full what Natalie Curtis has defined as the most distinctive characteristic of New World music, “a rhythmic pulsation of the voice on sustained notes somewhat analogous to the effect produced on the violin when the same note is sounded several times during one stroke of the bow.” The melodies it hatched from the nest of rhythm were brief, reiterate tunes of a five-tone scale. Its orchestras knew nothing of the string tone, and this spiritual tonal element which lends a loftier psychic quality to the chant developed out of the incantational cry and the biologic rhythm of the drums was lacking in Aztec *materia musica*.

Yet, though in its deploy of massed choruses and wind ensembles Aztec music clung to the unison melody of the tribal horde, it drew fine distinctions between the sonorities of its percussives, monkey-, puma- and human-skin drums and the *teponastli*, a variety of xylophone “whose sound” Carmargo, on the evidence of his own ears, tells us “may be heard at a distance of half-a-league, blending with the notes of the drum in a strange and soft harmony.”

In the Aztec community festivals drumming, dancing and singing were combined in a free counterpoint of independent rhythms. This, like all other Indian ritual music, was not an outer reflection of life, but an integral cause. The drum was the instrument and song (vocal and instrumental) the substance of its form, and, like the dance, not alone the expression of the Indian soul, but the bridge over which it crossed from the known to the unknowable.

In the ritual dance as in their music the Aztecs acknowledged the inspirational psychology of numbers, three to four thousand

dancers (irrespective of musicians) taking part in the great ritual dance-festivals.¹ Lawrence has admirably given the "feel" of these elaborate performances in which color actual (brilliantly painted faces, gorgeous feather-costumes and head-dresses) color in rhythmic movement, and color in tone were directly applied in

the old, barefooted, absorbed dancing of the Indians, the dance of downward-sinking absorption . . . the dance of the Aztecs and Zapotecs and Huicholes . . . indigenous to America; the curious, silent, absorbed dance of softly-beating feet and ankles, the body coming down softly but with deep weight upon powerful knees and ankles, to the tread of the earth . . . the women stepping softly in unison

This dancing, carried along on vast tides of unison sound—boy and girl choirs, deep-voiced priestly choruses, drums high and low, tenor flutes and bass conches—continually recurring, deeply cherished, expressed a community feeling, an emotion spiritual and racial, single-minded past question. Only if we can imagine the savage mingling of throbbing wind-tones (clay ocarina whistles, trumpets of copper and silver, flutes of bone, reed and crystal) with the pulsing of the human chorus, a mass of sound floating on the varied rhythmic ground-basses of the percussives and the dance-beat, can we grasp what one enthusiast for this vanished civilization meant when he cried: "Tenochtitlan is a bloodied and desecrated tapestry over which the Spaniards swarmed insatiate! . . . They seized its beauty and it died."

RITUAL SACRIFICE AND MUSIC

In the interests of compression we may sum up the Aztec ritual life symphony in four movements, each of which is a specific development of the theme of redemption by blood. The Aztec babe entered life to the war-whoop uttered by the midwife to show that its mother had borne her hour of travail like a hero and had "captured a prisoner," i. e., the child. Its own first wails were drowned by a magic chant to avert ill luck. Yet the religious mortality of infants in Anahuac was high, for a certain proportion among those who escaped the diseases to which child is heir, fell victim to the belief that Tlaloc, the god of rain and fertility, demanded infant sacrifice.

The green emerald, the *chalchihuitl*, was sacred to this deity, who presided over the lovely subterranean water-paradise of Tlalocan. Yet his reputed fondness for the "red jewel" (as the

¹Probably the only dance of the kind unaccompanied by music was in honor of Tetoinnan, the earth goddess, which female physicians and midwives danced in utter silence.

Aztecs euphuistically termed the human heart) of children, led parents to suffer them to be laid upon his altars with real satisfaction: their passing redeemed the family crops from danger of draught, and the children could look forward to a happy hereafter. The families of death-fated Aztec children accompanied them to the altar singing and dancing, and the more bitterly the little victims wept, the better were the prospects of bringing in the sheaves at harvest time.

It should be said that most Aztec children had a pleasanter festival in store. The *tocoztl*i spring feast of greeting to the new seed was also known as the "Festival of Child Drunkenness." Let the reader stifle his cry of horror. Motivation is everything in life, and this festival was an important musical ritual. It is true that the Aztec wedding guest was allowed to drink his fill if he kept it modestly hidden from public view, and the gilded youth of Montezuma's Tenochtitlan were not rounded up by the Aztecan police. Ordinarily, however, drunkenness in adults was punished by death and women inebriates were stoned.

But religious intoxication is well-nigh as old as the human race. Boys and girls of twelve, children of the poor and middle classes, danced on their sacred May-day in the public squares of the Aztec cities, to the sound of drum, flute and sacred song, and "this orgy of the unripe symbolized Nature, young and immature, in Spring." As they danced "until they were drunken and shameless," handing each other bowls of *ocltli*-wine, from whose foam rose a flower, they did so with a sense of keeping holy the sabbath day. While the little commoners block-danced in the street, the children of princely and noble families danced before the Emperor Montezuma, in one of the countless courts of his great *teapan*, his palace of pink stone.

Let him who would be the first to cast a stone at these children remember that their church¹ expressly prescribed that they make the acquaintance of the Dionysiac motive thus early in life, and practically experience the deep interconnection between musical and alcoholic exaltation which is not confined to the Aztecs.

¹Be it said that the Aztec clergy was reputed for its sobriety. Even the three hundred and three *pabas* or priests of Tezcatzoncatl, god of wine (also known as Teotlahuiani, "He Who Submerges" or, as we might say, god Blotto) on their deity's festival, after they had chanted a long ritual in his honor and their throats may well have been dry, rose to heroic heights of abstinence. The three hundred and three gathered about a huge jar of agave-wine on the god's altar. In it were three hundred and three reeds—but only one of them was hollow! The priest who secured the hollow reed had the right to empty the jar. One wonders whether he approached his Gargantuan task with thrill spirituous or spiritual, and whether the white herons' feathers which adorned his hair maintained their ritual angle upon its completion.

FLOWERS AND BLOOD

The Aztecs had a curious faculty for pairing the noble and the horrible. Mothers who died in child-birth were raised to the skies as *ciuateto*, "divine women," there to greet Tonatiuh, the Sun, at noon and accompany him with song and dance to the gate of the West. Yet these divine singers of the golden midday by night lurked as vampires at the crossroads, doing little children whom they might meet to death in monstrous fashion.

Likewise a love for music and for flowers—two purely æsthetic emotions—went hand in hand beneath the skull-dome of the Aztec sky with sacrificial blood-lust. Coatlicue, "The Skirt with the Viper," the sanguinary god Huitzilipochtli's virgin mother, was the goddess of flowers, and garlands of yucca-blooms and acacias, roses, carnations and orchids adorned those who assisted at the hetacombs of war-captives slaughtered in her son's honor.

To Aztec ears the traditional chant that the *toplitzin*, or sacrificing priest intoned after opening the breast of the human victim on the altar with his obsidian knife, tearing out the heart and offering "the palpitating trophy" to the idol, was the musical quintessence of holiness. We must not let current notions anent human sacrifice blind us to the truth of D'Alvilla's statement that "there is not a people that has not practised this custom at some period or other of its history. Romans, even Israelites, differ, in this matter, from the negroes of our own times in nothing save the object they assign to this kind of sacrifice."

To us the juxtaposition of blood and flowers in connection with Huitzilipochtli's sacrifices might appear grewsome, its musical connotations appalling, did we not remember that all ideas of ransom and redemption by human sacrifice hark back to such stone age procedure, and that the Old Testament is permeated with the idea of the blood covenant and its ritual. To this day, Lumholtz avers, the Tarahumari Indian of Mexico "never kills another except when drunk, for as he says, 'the blood is God's' ". If we bear this in mind the flower-cult of these fierce kings and *caciques*, which made them value blossoms beyond feather-dresses, emeralds, turquoises and gold, "the excrement of the gods," is not so incompatible with their religious practices. We can understand how it was that an ambassador at Montezuma's court regarded a bouquet of orchids from his palace-gardens as the most costly gift he could receive.

Huitzilipochtli's altars were ensanguined during most of the year with the red jewel-water of war-captives, slaves and children

bought for sacrifice. Yet one of his feasts, "The Incensing of Huitzilipochtli," seems to have been innocent of blood. On this day the god's image, to the sound of pious hymns, was escorted from a small shrine to the Great Temple by six hundred youths and as many maids of the noblest Aztec families. The boys wore warrior dress of feather-work, green, blue, crimson, black and yellow. Their hair was braided in locks and hung with golden bells. The god's image placed in a corner of the Temple Court, the priests tied the boys and girls lightly together by the wrists, arms over each others' necks (symbolic of the relation between the sexes), and the ritual dance began.

The musicians—in unconscious anticipation of Baireuth's hidden pit—were placed so that they could be heard but not seen. Holding roses and golden rattles in their fettered hands, the adolescents whirled in rhythm, the sun flashing from feathers, gold and gems, to the sound of the *teponastli*, "the singing drum" and the chanted chorus, in whose music throbbed the unison of the blood tie which made these fledgling aristocrats one with the plebeian multitude watching them.

It was while the Spaniards dominated Tenochtitlan through Montezuma, their prisoner, that the feast of the "Incensing" was held for the last time. As the dance was at its height the Spaniards filled the temple gateways with pikeman, while others with sword and battle-axe raged among the unarmed boys and girls, slaughtering them mercilessly, together with priests and musicians and—contemners of the bloodshed on Huitzilipochtli's altars—turned the Temple dance-court into a crimson lake. Long after the conquest sad ballads of the great slaughter were sung in the Aztec villages.

AZTEC MILITARY MUSIC

The third movement of this symphony may well bear the title "Military Intermezzo," seeing that the Mexican army was as much a religious as a secular institution; more so, in fact. Huitzilipochtli, as Mexitli, was the Aztec Lord of Hosts, the army was practically the church militant, and its music temple-music drafted for use on the battle-field.

The "line" regiments of the regular army seem to have consisted of some 8,000 men (Cortez uses the expression "Mexican colonel"), divided into companies of 400 men, each commanded by a captain. The martial impedimenta of these Aztecan dough-boys (aside from shield, bow and arrow, javelins and wooden sword with inset obsidian blades hung from their wrists), consisted

merely of a breech-clout. The rest of their uniform was painted on their bodies and faces. There were also Aztec pikemen, who handled an eighteen-foot copper-tipped pike, like the Macedonian *sarissa*. Every company had a company flag and every regiment its military bands.

The authorities here cited—Clavigero, Clark Wissler, Ramusio—agree only in specifying that the Aztec military band was composed of drummers, conch-players and whistlers, without further details; save, perhaps, that rattles made of tapir-bladders filled with pebbles were used to frighten the Spaniards' horses. That their attack was lusty is vouched for by Cortez, who declares that when they "struck up," it sounded "as though the heavens would cave in." The *élite* regiments¹ of "Eagles" and "Jaguars" who composed the emperor's bodyguard wore quilted cotton armor coats, helmets with plumes and a kind of sporran of feathers. The feathered sporrans of each individual company were of the same color, red, white, yellow, blue, and the officers wore cuirasses and helmets overlaid with gold and silver, and costly feather dresses. No doubt the musicians in these regiments were uniformed in keeping with the rank and file, and looked down on their companions of the "line" as in more civilized lands.

The battle-chant—though not all the *conquistadores* recognized it as such—was a feature of every Aztec battle. Since the conquest of territory was more or less incidental, and the Aztec army in reality a species of altar-guild whose first duty was to capture sacrificial victims for the shrines of Huitzilpochtli and his comrade gods, the "Onward, Aztec Soldiers" was probably a temple hymn which had "seen red" and ended by running amok on the battlefield.

It is not strange that the Spaniards listened to the Aztec battle-hymn with a prejudiced ear. They speak of "the horrible music of the Mexicans . . . their wild howling before the fight"; and one observer declares:

During battle the Indians dance and sing uninterruptedly. Now and again, in addition, they raise a horrible howling and whistling, and those who are not yet accustomed to these noises and savage actions cannot help but be afraid.

Bernal Diaz has come nearest to an actual description of their whooped battle-hymn, if so it may be termed:

¹Advocates of compulsory military training in the American college might be surprised to learn that the Aztecs surpassed their fondest ideals. "In Mexico City were two kinds of schools, those for religious instruction and those for military training." And these boys who slept in barracks at night studied only military subjects in their colleges.

I remember that when we discharged our arms, that the Indians made a great whistling with clamors and cries . . . and that then they sounded trumpets large and small, whistling and crying and saying *Ala lala, ala lala!*

The Aztec regiments entered their home towns with bands playing when returning from a victorious campaign and, like the Moslem warrior who dies on the battlefield, the Aztec soldier was translated directly into paradise. Even as a "prisoner sacrificed by the enemy" he was sure of the sun-god's heaven, and it is pleasant to reflect that Mexico's last fighting emperor Guatemotzin may have benefited by his faith in this belief, when Cortez judicially murdered him by hanging him from a tree.

The destroying angels who ascended from Aztec battlefields rated no golden harps in their hereafter; yet with their faces ritually painted red, white and black, their wind and choral ensembles each morn celebrated the rising of the day-star with hymns, concerts and dancing, in a heaven much like Dante's *paradiso*, where music was wedded to light and motion to delight the soul. Even their final end was musical, because "after four years of this glorious existence," they were privileged to flit through the clouds as birds endowed with harmonious voices and brilliant plumage, free to sing in heaven or on earth as they might prefer.¹

The booming thunders of the huge serpent-skin drum on the top of the Great Temple of Mexico, and of the war-drums on the other *teocallis*, toward the end of the siege of Tenochtitlan, had decidedly gotten on the nerves of the doughty captain Bernal Diaz. He repeatedly speaks of the "accursed drum, and cries" and says, "that which the Mexicans did by night in their great, huge *cues* (towers) was to play their damned drum, and I say again that its sound was the most accursed and sad that might conceivably be made, sounding for a great distance; and they played other and worse instruments."

Yet this drum which rang the knell of a demoniac idolatry in the Spaniard's ears, and their savage battle-chants and cries helped the Aztec soldiery to die cheerfully by the thousands for the sake of the gods they adored, and to secure them a free pass into a heaven where they were sure of an eternity as *coloratura* humming-birds. After all, in sacred as in secular music, it is not

¹The Tlaxzaltecs held a species of Presbyterian doctrine of the "elect," social distinction being at a musical premium, and the souls of the nobly born inhabiting the bodies of singing birds, while those of the common herd were condemned to dwell in the bodies of tuneless tumblebugs.

so much the music itself that matters; it is what it may mean to those who make or hear it.

When Antonio de Caravajal slew the two drummers in the topmost shrine of the Great Teocalli of Mexico and hewed asunder Huitzilipochtli's great war-drum, Aztec military music gave its death-rattle. "Its last hollow beat was flung upward to the nocturnal stars like a human cry, a dying people's cry of terror!"

FOOD FOR THE GODS

The Aztec war-drums were those of Huitzilipochtli, but their ancestor was the magic snake-skin drum of Tezcatlipoca, the Shining Mirror god, whose compelling tones once had sent the people of Cholula dancing willynilly over an abyss into nothingness. Blood ran as red, if not so frequently on Tezcatlipoca's altars as on those of his brother god. The golden ear of his image inclined ever toward the smoke-clouds of burnt-offering and the drip of jewel-water which came to it transformed into prayers. One must not forget that the Aztecs had all the Amerind insensibility to pain; that to them death was not so terrible as to us; and that used from childhood to seeing blood spilt—usually to music—they shed their own as if it were a superfluous liquid.

Tezcatlipoca's greatest feast of blood communion with his people began ten days before the event with a shrill terra cotta flageolet solo by a priest, a melody of a type Stravinsky unconsciously may have duplicated in the Charlatan's initial solo in "Petrouschka." Every morning for ten days the flageolet thus called the faithful to prayer, and on the tenth day god Tezcatlipoca was slain in honor of god Tezcatlipoca.

The paradox is only apparent. Each year the handsomest, physically most perfect Aztec prisoner of war was ritually "raised up"¹ as the human personification of Tezcatlipoca on earth. Outfitted with a suite of eight attendant youths and four lovely girl-brides, each bearing a goddess' name, for one brief year the slave lived the life of a god. To him no house was barred and all was permitted him. His one task was to learn to play on his flutes, of which he had a number, certain melancholy ritual airs; love songs the wind of his flute might blow as it listed, without compulsion.

Dancing and blowing his flute, the flesh and blood Tezcatlipoca passed along the streets of Tenochtitlan, his left leg painted

¹The practise of "raising up" a living man in the stead of a dead one was common to many Amerind peoples and was customary among the North American tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy.

black to the thigh, golden bells tinkling on collar and sandals, long white turkey-feathers in his hair, followed by his wives and escort. The days and nights of his last week were an uninterrupted round of wine, women and song, and on his ritual year's last hour, upon a temple-pyramid altar, the high-priest spilled his "jewel-water." As he ascended the pyramid he stopped at each step and against its sharp edge broke one of the crystal flutes whose music had charmed his days. Nothing could more picturesquely symbolize that music is the very soul of even a god's "jazz" life.

The arms and thighs of the defunct god (like the flesh of other victims slain or "blessed for sacrifice") was *kosher* in a peculiarly sacred way. After the priests, and the boys and girls of the schools and seminaries had danced and sung at the festival, the remains of the human Tezcatlipoca, choicely cooked and seasoned, steamed on the tables of the nobles, who said grace before this meat with sacramental unction.

Since music entered intimately into these anthropophagic rites we must, for her fair name's sake, remove the stigma which unjustly rests on the Aztec custom of eating "food for the gods." Historians who should be better informed¹ often ignore the fine distinctions which obtain in cannibalism. The well-informed anthropologist, like Lamartine, knows that *Tous nos goûts sont des réminiscences*. Sumner and Kellog, in their "Science of Society" are positive that "cannibalism by no means goes with degradation of physique or character, is not correlative with destitution or lack of meat-food; human flesh is eaten more generally for religious reasons; and traces of its former employment are very widespread, indicating a condition in the remote past verging on the universality of the practise among all races."

Cannibalism may be inspired purely by family affection. A Samoan chief refused to embrace Christianity because he feared, if he did, his body would be eaten by worms, not by the members of his family, who loved him. But cannibalism in parts of Australia, where "a man who has a fat wife is afraid to let her go anywhere alone," is very different from eating man as holy food.

The sacramental cannibalism of the Aztecs was motivated by sincerest devotion. In the market-places of the great cities, the *tl'aaltzin*, "The Well-Washed Ones," adolescent youth and maids garnished with garlands, were sold to furnish *pièces de résistance*

¹Carleton Beals has censured their "... 100 per cent emotional abhorrence of Indian sacrifice," rightly remarking, "... the practise of human sacrifice involved a lofty genesiac conception, far more pristine than ours in this twentieth century, when we chained our gods to the caissons of nationalism for the slaughter of millions."

for Aztec religious feasts. Yet the Aztecs ate them as innocently as Christian children devour strawberries at a Sunday school festival, for the *tlaahtzin*, ritually purified and dedicated, were "food for the gods." Our own beautiful spiritual doctrine of transubstantiation, whereby we partake of "the body and blood" of the Deity and thus enter into communion with Him, is rooted in the same ancient belief which led the Aztecs to take and eat with identical but more materially direct devotion.

Nor is it strange that when purchasers drew near, the sacramental meat of the Aztecs chanted its own praise in merry music, to the sound of flutes; that wreathed with blossoms, it sang on its way to their mouths. The Zapotecan and other girls who thus voiced their swan-songs knew that their death would be swift and painless, and that in the capacity of victims to the gods they would enter at once into paradise.

The sacrifice of the human Tezcatlipoca and the ritual eating of his body, in particular, was a climaxing expression of the Indian idea of communion between the divine and human. His blood, flowing down the sides of the black obsidian altar, returned to its source, "the great blood-being"; it typified the blood of the individual flowing back into the reservoir from which he had received it as a loan.

QUETZALCOATL

Passing mention has been made of Quetzalcoatl, "The Green-Feathered Serpent" god. Teotl, Tezcatlipoca, Huitzilipochtli, Tlaloc, Centeotl, Mictlan-Teculi (and others more) ranked higher in Aztec general estimation than Quetzalcoatl. This pacifist Toltec god who refused human sacrifice, preferring butterflies and flowers, was a kind of diminished seventh in the Aztec chord divine. To begin with, he was "naturalized," not "native-born." A god of love and peace, conceived of the spirit of Teotl, born of the virgin of Tula, he had been admitted to the Aztec pantheon, but his cult was entirely cast into the shade by those of the gods of war and fate.

He had his worshippers—there were anti-vivisectionists among the Aztec *pabas*—but they were a minority. And the Aztec emperor, nobles, priests and the majority of the people, though they identified the blonde Cortez with the blonde Toltec saviour-god, because of an ancient prophecy, loved and feared the wooden image of Huitzilipochtli, lance and shield in hand, more than the resuscitate Quetzalcoatl who rode out of the West on a "deer-

monster," as the Aztec called the horse, and whose followers used lightning in their blow-guns.

Yet Quetzalcoatl, the diminished-seventh god of the Toltecs, in a measure resolved the harsh, acerb harmonies of purely Aztec music into a loftier, more spiritual cadence of consonant beauty. The Toltecs claimed that he had first taught men to sing, his very voice being music; that whenever he raised it in the gardens of his silver and mother-of-pearl palace in Tula, the song-birds flocked to learn a new song. He showed the Toltecs how to play the *huehell*, the deer-skin drum, which skilled fingers can make weep or rejoice, and invented the slitted *tenopastle*, a xylophone whose murmur is the soul of tender melancholy.

Yet though these gentler, more tuneful percussives were taken over into the Aztec orchestra, the blood-rhythms of Huitzili-pochtli's and Tezcatlipoca's harsher *wewells*, snake-skin drums, dominated and submerged their tone.

An old legend declares that when Quetzalcoatl was driven from Tula, all the song-birds followed him into exile; but crossing the icy ranges of the Sierra they were stricken by a snow-storm and died. Passing from its Toltec birthplace, Quetzalcoatl's gentler gospel and tenderer music died (save as they became identified with certain more limited human or decorative urges) among a people whose religion made for the marble heart and the stone age ear. Quetzalcoatl's influence, musically exerted, was practically restrained to "secular" music, though Aztec life was ritually so inhibited and controlled that (as in the case of most of the ancient peoples of the East) much we now regard as secular was sacred.

MUSIC AS AN ADORNMENT OF AZTEC LIFE

We have used the term Aztec to embrace the whole Aztecan culture area, though it cannot yet be said just how far north and south the full series of Aztec traits was diffused. To the east the Tlascalans, to the west the Michoacoans, to the north, Tarascans, Otomi, and still further Chichlimecans, Huichol, Cora, Mayo, Yaqui, etc., had a culture intermediate between the Aztec and the Pueblo Indians. To the south the Mixes, Zoque, Chiapanecs and Zapotecs again shaded off, culturally, into savagery. Within this general Aztecan cultural area (as, more or less, in all the other cultural areas of the New World), we find that music could not give expression to any nobler, loftier, more spiritual conception of love because, as Bandelier puts it, "woman was little better than

a costly animal," and "the most degrading epithet which could be addressed to any Mexican, aside from calling him a dog, was that of woman."

Sex and war were the principal motives in Aztec life, and sex activity was religiously motivated. The love-goddesses of the Aztecs were many: Xochiquetzal, goddess of love and flowers, of sensuous pleasure and offal; Ixcuina, goddess of confession and absolution, also a divinity of lighter love; Tlazolteotl and her four sisters; the Huastec Mayæul, a fertility goddess with four-hundred breasts, and other fertility goddesses without number. Yet as the poetry of the Indian, to borrow a happy phrase of Schoolcraft's "is the poetry of naked thought," so their love seems to have been sentimental principally in a sensuous way. Sympathy, chivalry, faithfulness, all those higher qualities which the "tabloids" of our own day prove characteristics of our own superior *ars amoris*, seem to have been lacking in Aztec love.

Naturally this exclusively sensuous viewpoint underlay their love-music. With religion stressing sex rather than soul, and justifying license, it is not strange that among the Indians "most of their chants in relation to the other sex are erotic, not emotional." Some Aztec love-poems are charmingly expressed, for example:

I know not whether thou hast been absent;
I lie down with thee, I rise up with thee,
In my dreams thou art with me.
If my ear-drop trembles in my ears
I know it is thou moving within my heart.

And yet Brinton insists that the Aztecs had but "one word to express every variety of love, human and divine, carnal and chaste, between the sexes." While their poetry supplied a rich obligato of verbal embellishment, its theme was inevitably of the earth, earthy. The love-flute of our own Chippewas or Cherokees was of plain sumac or cedar-wood, that of the Aztecs fashioned of crystal and silver, or a human thigh-bone, gold-encrusted and emerald-set. Yet neither the young brave of old Tellico on the Mississippi, nor the youthful "Eagle" of Tenochtitlan, when they blew the flute at dusk, sighed out a love's unrest of the soul. Sahagun has preserved the Aztec father's admonition: "My son, repress thy sensual appetites. Wait until the young girl whom the gods have destined for thy wife reaches the right age to marry her." Yet when a lad joined in the chorus of "The Sweet-Smelling Ones" (the girls kept in the great state-honkatonk of Tenochtitlan for the convenience of the regiments in garrison there), he still

could feel that his vocal efforts had "benefit of clergy"—of the priests of Xochiquetzal.

In general, it may be said that Aztec music which had no specific religious motivation was largely decorative, and thus it fitted into the complex fabric of life like the turquoise inlay of an Aztec dancing-mask into its gold. Boys and girls attended public schools (*techputcalli*) at an early age, and like little Athenians of Pericles' day learned to sing their country's patriotic hymns and songs there. Girls of the aristocracy were educated in convent schools and seminaries (*calmecoe*) where music was prominent in the curriculum, and pious Aztec priests acted as singing-, drumming- and flute-teachers.

Special academies where music and eloquence were taught flourished, and according to Sahagun the "professional talent" in any great town was easily available, since in its *miscoacali* or "House of Music" gathered all the singers, players and dancers to participate in the performance of new compositions or the religious dance-spectacles. On the advent of the Spaniards the Aztecs were taking the first timid steps toward the development of music in the drama, as an art, rather than as ritual.

Medieval astrologers have claimed that somewhere in space is a *stagnum oblivionis*, a "pool of forgetfulness," where the years of the past and all that in them was, to their very sound, float about like clouds in the sky, and could be recalled by one who knew the magic spell. If we recall from the *stagnum oblivionis* an echo of that fulness of musical sound which accompanied the everyday activities of the Aztec metropolis, it may convey some idea of the decorative rôle of music in Aztec life.

THE AZTECAN STREET CONCERT

Tenochtitlan's "Main Street" ran from a southern causeway across the lagoons the length of the city. The palaces, public buildings and temples which lined it were built of rose-colored stone, boasted porticos with jasper and porphery columns, and were interspersed with gardens. Off from it stretched the streets of brick houses of the commonalty. Canals ran through all parts of the town and brought the produce of the country direct to the four great city markets.

Even before dawn were heard the songs of the rowers, fishermen, hunters, slaves, bringing food to the city in their canoes, and at sunrise—announced by the booming of metal gongs from the temples—the city was bathed in a flood of sound. From the

teocalli tops the voices of temple singers floated down from the heights, "as threads of color sink downward into still waters." Only—the human tides of the Aztec city streets were never "still."

Music sounded from the palaces of the nobles (who kept their own "Court" orchestras, like the Austrian magnates of Haydn's time) out into the thoroughfares. In market-places and alleys rose the musical cries of venders and hawkers (musical, "for the Aztec language is sweet and harmonious to the ear"); the songs of the *tlaatzin*, the roll of temple drums announcing some religious festival. No Aztec Jannequin or Charpentier had recorded the street-cries of the Tenochtitlan bazaars, yet they all had their "cries," the venders of turtle-eggs, of the big moles called *tuzas*, the sellers of white fat manguey-worms, still a favorite Mexican dish, and the pepper-hawkers. Merchants chanted the praises of manuscripts and feather paintings of wild beasts, roasted grasshoppers or jewelled flutes made of human bones, and all their cries were threaded by the tinkling of bells.

Passionately fond of the bell-tone were the Aztecs, and its tinnabulation filled Aztecan streets with gracile sound. Some old chronicler has said, not with entire truth: "They are a folk of dancers, priests and children, who would rather hold silver bells in their hands than swords." Little bells of clay and bronze tinkled on the wrists, ankles and necks of the poor, while golden bells, *coyoli*, hung from the collars and were strung on the sandals of the Aztec lords and princes. All the city was filled with this incessant, pleasing shrilling of the bells, not in the sense of Lati-mer's saying, that "bells inform heaven of the necessities of earth," but as a vague, formless music which lent a charm to life.

And always, from time to time, processions swept the city streets with a wave of tone. "Eagle" and "Jaguar" regiments marching into town after a victorious Guatemalan campaign, preceded by their military bands; priestly cortèges intoning hymns; the "Lord of Lords" himself, passing in procession from palace to temple in his litter. Before him would go his own musicians, minstrels who flung silver balls up into the air and caught them as they fell in basins of copper. Each ball struck a different note, tenor or bass, and with them the minstrels sang a melody.¹

Or, suddenly, to the bellow of conches, shrill of flutes and rattle of tortoise-shell tambourines the wild whirl of the half-naked priests of Tlaloc would tear through the streets, as leaping

¹When Montezuma came out of Tenochtitlan to meet Cortez for the first time, these minstrels of ball and basin played in advance of him and set the Spanish harquebusiers laughing because the melody they played was just like one the farmers in Old Castile sang when they spread manure on the fields.

and bounding, they scourged themselves with aloë-thorns, in time to the music which was to make them see visions and dream dreams.

Even the quarter of "The Sweet-Smelling Ones" added its peculiar quota to the general concert of sound, for these girls (Bernal Diaz, who tells us, heard them) chewed gum, *chiclé*, so incessantly as they went about their business, that "the noise of their chewing sounded like the rattle of castanettes." Nor did darkness bring cessation of musical sound in Tenochtitlan and other Aztecan cities, for the hours of the night were blared forth by conch-shell trumpet calls which rolled sonorously from the temples over the sleeping city and its lagoons.

THE SPANIARDS AND AZTEC MUSIC

Not many years after the Conquest, Aztec music—natural and cultivated—seemed to have died away on the Mexican air, just as a few radiant feather-dresses and jewels, a few *codexes*, a few glorious ruins are all that remain of the Aztec civilization as a whole, for to the Spaniards the Aztecs remained savages, despite their rich cultural achievement. Tenochtitlan's four market-places, so Cortez wrote the Emperor Charles V, were each "four times the size of the great market-place of Seville." In them these "savages," to use Cortez' word, had commodious *axixcalli*, "comfort stations," neatly hedged by tall palisades and hidden by low-growing palm trees in an age when King Henry III of France was forced to issue an ordinance (August, 1578), commanding that the feces be swept from behind doors, off the stairs and out of the rooms before he rose in the morning, in order to make the royal palace of the Louvre safe for his royal step.

But the fanatic and ignorant *conquistadores* regarded Aztec music as well as Aztec *axixcalli* with scorn.¹ The fact that race and religious consciousness subtly persist in the people's songs, however, was practically recognized by the priests sent from Spain to make Christians of the conquered Indians. Says Torquemada: "The Indians are no longer allowed to sing their ancient songs because they are full of diabolic reminiscence." And Sahagun adds: "The devil's own pitfalls are these songs, the plot he has

¹Exaggerating a little, one might say that these warriors, worthy of Homer, knew less than the mathematical horses of Erbeheld (which aroused Mæterlinck's admiration), and possessed less trend toward philosophy than Landseer's humanized and well-nigh spiritualized dogs. . . . To ignorance, allied with religious fanaticism, and an absolute lack of intellectual curiosity, on the part of soldiers as well as clerics, men of letters as well as magistrates, it is due that the great empires, Peruvian and Aztecan, have disappeared without leaving traces of their unique civilizations." R. Blanco-Fombona. *El Conquistador Español del Siglo XVI. Ensayo de Interpretación*. Madrid, 1922.

hatched on earth so that they might be used in his service, in his temples, as lauds."

Later, a more intelligent policy on the part of the Church encouraged Indian converts to transfer the identity of the gods and goddesses of the Aztec pantheon to the persons of the Trinity and of the saints. This was the easier since the splendid ritual and ceremony of the Aztec church had prepared the Indian for the pomp of Roman worship. The Indians, however, accepted the outer forms without penetrating into the inner meaning of the white man's faith. The Indian horse allowed itself to be led to the water of salvation, but it did not really drink. To the Indian the Christian gods are still "foreigners"; they are not gods of his own race, of his own blood, with the cinnamon-colored skin-pigment an Indian god should have.

In Mexico as well as Peru, long after the Conquest, concessions had to be made to the Indian sense of religious propriety. Humboldt says: ". . . in the province of Pasto, on the Andean ridge, I saw Indians, masked and hung with bells, dance wild dances around the altar, while a Franciscan raised the Host." Even in the sacred musical dance-spectacles which the Spanish *padres* made an edifying feature of worship in the Mexican Church, in "The Last Judgment," the "Ballet of the Serpent" (St. George and the Dragon), and others more, totemistic jaguar-skins and echoes of Aztec ritual and hymn were mingled with Christian prayer and benediction. The same *Indio* who bowed his head in the adobe village church at mass might belong to one of the Indian secret societies like that of the "Dancers of Totolitzli," formed to preserve the old race heritage of music and dance, and whose members were initiated in a cave at the foot of the Azuzco volcano.

On the surface of modern Mexican Indian life floats an amorphous music, a music *mestizo*, half-breed, and R. and M. D'Harcourt hold the foreign impenetration responsible for the seeming lack of "any save Spanish and Italianate rhythms and melodic formulas in the examples of so-called "Indian" music hitherto collected and examined."¹

But in reality, the Indian blood current runs in the veins of the modern Mexican as it ran in those of his Aztec forbears; neither Indian music nor the Indian blood-soul has changed. The Yaquis—more typical of the warlike Aztecs of the Conquest than

¹Even in the pretentious government monographs published by the *Dirección de Antropología Mexicana*, and devoted to the valley of Mexico, the examples of indigenous music given are Spanish rather than Indian.

their own descendants, mainly offspring of the non-fighting castes—still combine a love for music and flowers with a passion for pedal scalping, for lifting the soles from errant white feet. The modern Mexican indifference to bloodshed and to death, its lack of concern for the life of the individual, is a purely Indian inheritance.

In Santo Domingo, in Oaxaca, is a splendid baroque church. Its bells of gold and silver bronze, which once called the Indians to worship have vanished, as has the domed vaulting of the organ-loft ceiling, extending in all directions innumerable leaves of gold, and the gold and silver altar vessels. Yet in neighboring Juchitin the Indians still venerate "as though it were a god," the sacred "Tree of the Little Hands," its red flowers shaped like a hand with inward bent fingers.

In Santa Maria de Tule is an archaic silver trumpet which the bugler of a troop of Cortez' horse brought there. A recent traveller heard a Zapotecan Indian playing the old trumpet song of *his* race on the Spanish bugle. And even the trumpet's tone had "gone native," for the hearer adds: "It was quite unlike anything one hears to-day—clear, mournful, barbaric—without a trace of European ancestry."

Throughout Mexico the Indian blood comes more and more into its own. In the struggle between Church and state in present-day Mexico it may seem strange to us that the great mass of the Mexican Indian population did not rise in defence of what is generally accepted as its faith. The sad truth is that the devoted labors of priest and missionary in the course of four hundred years have not really moved the alien Aztec soul. Frans Blom, only two years ago, wrote: "Four hundred years of Spanish rule, four hundred years of Catholic missionizing have not been able to stamp out the worship of the ancient gods in the ancient way . . . the deeper religious current is of an older form." Nor can the worship of the ancient gods in the ancient way be disassociated from its music. This music must still exist, must still be cherished. Before those secret altars where the copal-smoke of adoration still rises to the ancient gods, there still must echo, on occasion, the sound of ancient ritual hymns.

A HIDDEN FOLK-MUSIC TREASURE

To assemble and reconstruct the autochtone music of the Aztec and Indian past calls for the labors of a musical Viollet-le-Duc like Hornbostel. The treasure is there, but it cannot be

raised by the traveller, archæologist or anthropologist; the treasure-hunter who would unearth this hoard must be a musicologist.

The genuine Madonna—so far as the Mexican Indians are concerned—is the Virgin of Guadalupe, for she is of their race, a “red” Madonna, an *India*—and something more. On her festival day some fifty thousand Indians from all parts of Mexico gather at her shrine, wherein flower-fragrance drowns the odor of incense. In his heart the Indian identifies *la Guadalupeana* with Tonantzin, “Our Mother,” of the Aztec skies, worshipped time out of mind on the same spot. As late as 1853 the clergy allowed the Indians, clad in the feather-dresses of Montezuma’s day, to dance in the cathedral proper, but soon after the Archbishop of Mexico forbade “these diversions in which they formerly indulged in honor of Tonantzin.”

So now the Indians, on the evening of *la Guadalupeana*’s feast-day, wearing face-masks, dance the old Aztec ritual dances in the cathedral enclosure, and under the influence of the “four hundred little gods of *pulque*” the spirit of the ancient ritual chants pulses in the hymns of ante-Conquest times. It is there, and at the festivals of Indian villagers throughout the land, that the traces of the olden sacred and social music which expressed the indigenous peoples of Mexico must be sought. This music, which does not yet seem to have been recorded, is still the carrier of race ideals, the fluid tonal amber in which they have been traditionally handed down for centuries. If collected, it might lend actuality to what little we now know about the rôle of music in olden Aztec life.¹

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No doubt, when the autochtone music of Central America is some day exploited, it will be found to stress in tone the Indian

¹Readers who may care to go more deeply into the subject of ancient Mexican music are referred, in addition to such standard sources as Cortez’ “Letters,” Sahagun, Torquemada, Bernal Diaz, Acosta, Las Casas, Oviedo, Herrera, De Solis Prescott, etc., to Lucien Biart’s, “Les Aztèques”; E. Stucken, “Die Weissen Götter”; D. H. Lawrence, “The Plumed Serpent”; Rätzl, “Völkerkunde”; N. Curtis, “The Indian’s Book”; Carmargo, “Historia de Tlascala”; C. Seler-Sachs, “Frauenleben im Reiche der Azteken”; Lumholtz, Rep. Int. Congress Anthrop., 1893; F. X. Clavigero, “Historia antica del Messico”; Clark Wissler, “The American Indian”; G. B. Ramusio, “Raccolta delle Navigazioni e Viaggi, Venice, 1554;” Bandelier, “Social Organization and Mode of Government of the Ancient Aztecs”; D. G. Brinton, “Essays of an Americanist”; Frances Densmore, “The American Indians and Their Music”; A. von Humboldt, “Essai politique sur le Royaume de Nouvelle Espagne”; R. and M. D’Harcourt, “La Musique des Incas et ses Survivances”; Herbert Corey, “Among the Zapotecs of Mexico,” Nat. Geogr. Mag., May, 1927; Frans Blom and Oliver La Farge, “Tribes and Temples: Record of an Expedition to Middle America, Conducted by Tulane University, La., 1926.”

feeling for the transitoriness of all earthly things, the feeling which permeated all Aztec culture, that, where there is no emptiness, with skin, rind or vault to form it, there is no life. For "in the innermost human core" of the Mexican Indian to-day passion still "sits with folded wings on the nest and faith is a tree of shadow." In words accredited to Quetzalcoatl the thought has been expressed in musical metaphor by Stucken, in his prose epic, *Die Weissen Götter*:

There is a magic of magics in the hollow, the empty, the formless. . . . All life is wine in a wine-skin, marrow in a bone, jewel-water in a sacrificial basin. . . . Hold the sea-shell to your ear and you will sense it! Because the flute is hollow it breathes joy and sorrow and has life. The king of all musicians inquires as to the thickness of the slave's skin which forms his drum-head; if the skin tears the drum dies. . . . The nut-kernel grows in the nut-shell, a human community in a single belief. Death is the shattering of the bowl, so that new bowls may come into being, for not even the blue bowl of the sky endures.

This, in the main, was the Aztec philosophy of life, such were the ideas which underlay its music, always a part of and not an art-projection out of that life. Less poetically articulate, perhaps, these ideas must still echo in the unrecorded music which reflects the Mexican Indian soul to-day.