
VOCAL ESSENCE  Music Press



Jorge Cózatl
Xtoles

MUSIC RESOURCE GUIDE
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Xtoles Music Resource Guide

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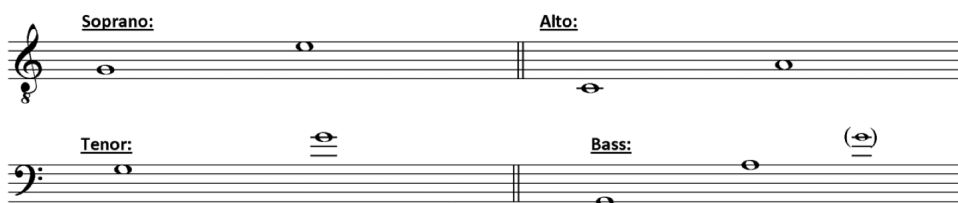
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Xtoles

Jorge Cózatl (b.1973)

Difficulty Level

Xtoles (SATB, divisi) layers simple rhythmic and melodic motives to create a rich texture that is much more intimidating on the page than in rehearsal. Each section's tasks are consistent, straight forward, and the divided entrances are expertly prepared. With a harmonic and melodic vocabulary almost entirely pentatonic and standard adolescent voice ranges (the piece would be easily transposed upwards to adjust for a young bass section), this is an excellent piece for high-school or early collegiate groups eager to explore indigenous Mexican music and non-traditional vocal techniques.



Composer's Notes

There is a difference among musicologists about when *Los Xtoles* was created. Some of them say that it is the oldest Mayan song known and was chanted by warriors in praise of the Mayan Sun God, while others say that it is a piece from the late 19th century. In any case, this is a wonderful Mayan folksong based on a pentatonic melody. Since most popular songs were learned by heart, and passed from generation to generation, there are at least two versions of the same song and this arrangement integrates both melodies in two specific environments. The introduction is “the call,” an imitation of a caracol (conch shell), and the idea is to recreate and mix the pre-Hispanic instruments, including: ocarina (flute made of mud), maraca (shaker), quijada de burro (donkey jaws), tambores (drums) and the tunkul, a hollow log with two tongue-like grooves carved out and played with a stick.



Composer Biography

Born in Mexico City, Jorge Cózatl started his musical studies at the age of six at the National School of Music. He is well-known as a composer, conductor, and singer. As a composer, he is known for his vocal arrangements of Latin American folk tunes. His work has been performed in the USA, Cuba, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, Greece, Russia and Europe; his works have been recorded by ensembles in the Mexico, Canada, Austria and the U.S.A.

As a conductor, Mr. Cózatl has directed numerous children's choirs in Mexico, acts as Artistic Director of the Niños Cantores de Tepotzotlan, and was invited to conduct the Femenine Choir of the Reihnische Musikschule in Cologne, Germany. He was also the choral director at the world premiere of the opera *En susurro los muertos* by Gualtiero Dazzi at the Festival Music Scene de la UNAM.

As a baritone, Cózatl has performed with numerous ensembles including Schola Cantorum de Mexico, Mexico National Choir and Mexico's Chamber Choir. He has performed both in Mexico and abroad and is featured on recordings in the series *Mexico Baroque*.

Text/Translations

K'ay yum K'in

Conex conex palaxen
xicubin xicubin yokolkin,
Conex conex palaxen
xicubin xicubin yakatal.

—*Traditional Mayan text*

Song to the Sun

*Let's go guys
the sun is setting,
Let's go guys
the night is coming.*

—*English translation*

Canto al Sol

*Vamos muchachos
el sol se oculta,
Vamos muchachos
la noche llega.*

—*Spanish translation*



Student learning to play conch shell in rehearsal of Xtoles

Pronunciation Guide

Xtoles [chi-tol-les]

K'ay yum K'in [kai-yoom-keen]

Conex [koh-nesh]

Palaxen [pah-le-shen]

Xicubin [shee-koo-been]

Yokolkin [yoh-kol-keen]

Yakatal [yah-kah-tal]

Musical Analysis of XTOLES

| | | |
|---------|------------|--|
| m.1-8 | “The Call” | Imitates conch shell through unison G, meter/rhythm blurred overlapping voices create timbre that builds and fades |
| m.9-44 | Version 1 | Xtoles melody 1 presented by solo/small ensemble in unison, freely m. 19 – T/B add a drum imitation ostinato accompaniment m.35 – Altos add to drum imitation ostinato |
| m.45-83 | Layering | Divisi parts add in own ostinato pattern T2, B2, A2, S2, A1, T1, B1, S1 Each is unique rhythmically, some are pitched, some unpitched |
| m.84-99 | Version 2 | Xtoles melody 2 sung by S1 over the other 7 ostinato figures m.92 – T1/T2 present harmonized version over B1/B2 drum open 5ths m.96 – Women add rhythmic patterns and Xtoles melody 1 to men |
| m.100 | Version 1 | Xtoles melody 1 sung by S1 over the other 7 ostinato figures m. 110 – S1 adds their ostinato layering figure to close section |
| m.113 | Coda/Call | Final statement of “Song to the Sun” text on C-G-D open chord Chordal texture with exception of A2 with “the call” figure from m.5-7 |

Legacy of Mayan Culture

Text

This ancient melody and text originates in what we think of as Mexico, but it is definitely not in Spanish. Ask students to translate the English text into Spanish for those that might be studying the language, or more informally, ask students to offer specific Spanish words for sun, song, guys, night — all of which may be familiar to them. Discuss the idea of indigenous versus colonized language both in Mexico (where does “Spanish” come from?) and in the United States (English!) as well as the similar timeframes of colonization (Christopher Columbus was Spanish).

Extension: *Bring in a history teacher to facilitate discussion on specific colonial politics, events, and historical figures that resulted in the United States mostly speaking English while some parts of Canada speak French and the large majority of Central and South American speak Spanish or Portuguese. Find the exceptions to these in local, regional and hemisphere-wide peoples.*

Form

The phrase lengths of each of the “versions” of the *Xtoles* melody are quite different (10 and 8 measures, respectively) while the ostinato patterns are usually 2 or 4 measures long. This mathematical layering grows more complex with each distinct rhythmic contour. Similarly, Mayans are particularly respected for their sophisticated mathematical, astronomical and calendar-related calculations. Predicting phases of moon, equinoxes and solstices, eclipses, calculating the orbit of Venus, developing a 365-day/52 week calendar and grasping the profound importance of zero — introduce students to this awe-inspiring legacy through the following handout on pages 8–11.

Extension: *Discuss apocalyptic references to Mayan calendars emerging in pop culture. Mayans underwent a startling decline in population and abandonment of major cities in the eighth or ninth century C.E. (the medieval era in western Europe). Ask students to research theories as to why this prominent and proficient people experienced such a “collapse” (as it is often called) of their society so suddenly, choose or invent their own theory and perhaps ponder what events might lead to a modern civilization’s decline or even disappearance.*

Did you know?

While the vast majority of Mexicans speak Spanish, it is not recognized as an official language by the Mexican government. 68 indigenous languages (including eight Mayan languages) are official state languages and their use in government documents, public communication and continuous preservation is seen as a national priority. At least six million people still speak Mayan languages today.

Indigenous Instruments

Timbre

In the program notes for *Xtoles*, composer Jorge Cózatl identifies the indigenous instrumental sounds he is trying to recreate with voices. Using web-based video clips and images, audio recordings or the real thing (band director, local music instrument store or global market, your own students, community members), give your students a visual and aural illustration of each of these vital pieces to the *Xtoles* puzzle. Ask students to match the instrument with their ostinato pattern and discuss what kind of breath support, vocal color, articulation and dynamics best serve the sonic goal.

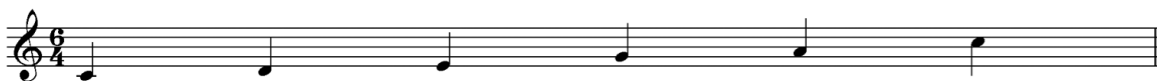
Extension: In rehearsal (and potentially performance), ask students to physically represent the instrument their voice is imitating through gesture and movement or to play “air” maracas/conch shell, etc. Embodying the physical sensation of performing on percussion instruments will enable students to more instinctively create the percussive vocal effects the composer intends.

Extension: Discuss, display, or demonstrate indigenous instruments from other cultures around the world. What similar characteristics do they share? What are the unique aspects? How do indigenous instruments differ from standard “classical” instruments? What makes an instrument indigenous?

Extension: Partner with an art or industrial tech instructor to make instruments similar to the ones imitated in this piece (or other indigenous instruments). Use local, natural materials whenever possible paired with found objects, items destined for the trash or recycle bin along with clay, paper-mâché or other more labor-intensive and artistic ventures.

Melody

The melody of *Xtoles* is completely pentatonic (with the brief exceptions of the “call” at both the opening and closing of the piece with the F# leading tone). Indigenous music of many cultures is pentatonic in melodic structure. Discuss with students the structure of a pentatonic scale (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th scale degrees of a major scale) and help them identify that structure in the two distinct melodies and any pitched accompaniment figures by using solfege, numbers or letter names.



Extension: Listen to music examples from folk and classical traditions that use the pentatonic scale (lists of repertoire ideas are widely available on the internet). Give students the opportunity to improvise on the piano (black keys = pentatonic scale), Orff instruments (with only the pentatonic pitched bars for maximum success), other instruments or their own voices.

Extension: Compare the pentatonic scale to the blues scale (sometimes considered an indigenous creation of the African American culture) and the distinctive sound it creates through slight variation to a “minor pentatonic” scale.

Ritual and Rite

Purpose

Ancient Mayan music was for ritualistic purposes exclusively as far as historians understand the culture, never for entertainment or diversion. So, too, then *Xtoles* was meant for a rite of some shared significance in Mayan society. While many contemporary sources point to *Xtoles* as a warrior's dance, the earliest sources for the melody refer to it quite clearly as a ribbon dance. Ribbon dances originated as fertility dances and have



many similarities to western Maypole dances. Discuss with students this traditional dance that is present in cultures across the world, where, like traditional Western Maypole dances, men would wind and unwind ribbons around a pole. Different colored ribbons are attached to the top of a pole whereupon each dancer holds a different ribbon and dances around the pole together, interlacing the ribbons. The dancers then dance in the opposite direction to unwind the ribbon. Today, Mexican ribbon dances are most often performed by men during religious fiestas.

Extension: Have students make lists of rituals or rites that are part of their lives — at the family level (birthdays, holidays, meals, etc), as part of their religion (weddings, funerals, liturgy, etc) or even as part of our shared civic experience (fireworks on July 4th, national anthem at sporting events, etc). Ask students to reflect what those rituals and rites communicate about our family, religion or societal values and norms.

Rhythm

From the list of rituals and rites your students have compiled, note how many of them involve physical motion. Standing, sitting, gesturing and — probably most common of all — walking in some sort of ceremonial procession often defines the beginning and end of these events. So, too, *Xtoles* can serve as a procession for your singers in rehearsal and in performance. Ask students to march in place to the steady quarter-note beat that starts in m.19 and continues unabated till the final three bars.

Extension: Students can use *Xtoles* to process into the performance space and get to the stage or risers area. Alternatively, students could process off the stage and surround the audience as they sing. Two passages of drum imitation could theoretically be repeated *ad libitum* until singers are positioned and ready to move on to the next section (m.19-22 and m.33-34, although the altos could join in with their percussive addition and merely delay the soprano entrance until the director's cue).

Mayan Civilization

Vocabulary

Equinox – An astronomical event occurring twice a year (the autumnal equinox and vernal equinox) when day and night are approximately the same length

Hieroglyphic – An ancient method of writing using pictures and symbols

Mesoamerica – A term that describes the area of Mexico and Central America before the Spanish conquest

Solstice – An astronomical event occurring twice a year when the day is longest (summer solstice in the northern hemisphere) or when the day is shortest (winter solstice in the northern hemisphere)

The ancient Mayans are one of the most famous **Mesoamerican** civilizations, known particularly for their advancements in astronomy and writing. The Mayans were one of the few indigenous civilizations centered in one geographic area, but unlike other civilizations such as the Aztec, the Mayans lived in independent city states, not as one centralized empire.

The earliest Mayan civilizations are believed to have originated from approximately 1800 B.C.E.:

- Stonehenge construction begins in Britain
- Joseph (of *Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* fame, whose life is described in Genesis, great-grandson of Abraham)
- 500 years before Queen Nefertiti and King Tut in Egypt but 750 years after the Great Pyramid of Giza
- 1,000 years before the first Olympic Games in ancient Greece
- 1,300 years before Buddha and Confucius
- 1,500 years before Plato & Socrates
- 1,750 years before Julius Ceasar, Cleopatra, and King Herod

The early Mayans supported themselves through farming crops such as corn, beans, squash, and cassava (a carbohydrate-rich plant similar to the potato in culinary traditions around the world — Africa, India, Asia, and South America — it's where tapioca comes from!).

The Mayans reached their peak during the Classic Period, a 600-year period which started in 250 C.E.:

- 250 years after Christ's birth
- 200 years before Attila the Hun's rule
- 225 years before the fall of the Roman Empire
- 300 years before Muhammad's birth

During this time many large cities were home to elaborate plazas, temples, palaces, pyramids and athletic courts as the Mayan population grew to 2,000,000. Like many ancient civilizations, the Maya were religious people who worshipped gods related to nature including gods of the sun, moon and corn. The Mayan pyramids, famous for their stepped shapes, were central to the religious rituals performed to honor the gods and are decorated with detailed inscriptions and carvings.



Mayan Civilization

“El Castillo” (The Castle)

This huge step-pyramid served as a platform for the temple at the top where human sacrifices took place. It has staircases of 91 steps on each of the four sides (all these added together plus one more step to get to the temple makes 365, the number of days in a year.)

During the Classic Period, the Mayans made sophisticated advancements in the sciences. They developed a 52-week calendar system based on a 365-day year:

| | | |
|--------------|---|--|
| 1 year (tun) | = | 18 months (winal) x 20 days (k'in) per month |
| | = | 360 days per year |
| | + | Wayeb (5-day period of uncertainty, bad luck, demonic forces) |
| | = | 365 days |
| 20 tuns | = | k'atun (40 years) |
| 20 k'atuns | = | bak'tun (400 years) |
| 13 bak'tuns | = | Mayan Long Count (5,126 years) ending 12/21/2012 (winter solstice) |

They also made great strides in astronomy, predicted the phases of the moon, estimated times of the equinox and solstice, predicted eclipses, and calculated the orbit of Venus. They created an advanced calculating system and were the first people to expound upon the concept of zero. In addition to advancements in the sciences, the Mayans developed a sophisticated hieroglyphic writing system incorporating over 800 glyphs that they used in art and in paper books. Similar to Egyptian hieroglyphics and the Japanese language, figures can represent specific syllables or entire words.

Mayan Hieroglyphs

Some time between the late eighth and ninth century, the Mayan civilizations began to disappear. Scholars today are unsure of the reason for the Mayan decline. One possibility is that constant warfare between the smaller states led to the breakdown of the larger Mayan civilization. A second hypothesis is that there may have been a significant environmental change such as a severe drought. Finally, scholars wonder if the population may have grown too large for the land to sustain. Whatever the reason for the sudden decline of the Maya, they are considered Mexico's most advanced indigenous groups.



“El Castillo” (The Castle)



Mayan hieroglyphs

Indigenous Instruments



Conch Shell, flutes from Chupícuaro, Guanajuato, 400BC-200AD (National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico)



Wooden flute, shakers and bone rattles from the collection of Sabina Covarrubias

Unlike music performed for entertainment today, music in Pre-Hispanic Mexico was only used in rituals; it was never played or sung for fun or as entertainment. Music was used to express the ideas of the group, never the feelings of an individual. A different piece of music existed for each day and ritual, which meant that musicians were highly trained. They were required to learn the traditional ritual music and expected to compose new pieces. If a musician made a mistake in his performance, the mistake was often met with a death sentence. The importance of music in rituals also resulted in musicians being highly respected within society.

Instruments played an important role in indigenous Mexican music but were never played unless they accompanied singing. Traditional instruments were primarily ones that could be struck such as drums or rattles or instruments that were blown into such as flutes; there were no stringed instruments before the arrival of the Spanish. These instruments were made from local materials such as wood, bone, shell, animal skin, or plants. Some instruments such as the Aztec teponaztli and huehuetl were considered gods or idols and required sacrifices to be made in their honor to maintain their sacred power. It is believed that instruments were tuned, and it would appear that virtually identical instruments were used in the different tribes throughout the country although they were known by different names.

While there is no known method of musical transcription for indigenous music, based on the reports of conquistadors and Spanish missionaries, it is believed that melodies were almost exclusively pentatonic.

Instruments were a vital component to the successful performance of traditional rituals. Conquistadors frequently commented on the extraordinary and intimidating nature of these unfamiliar instruments in their writing. Some instruments included:

- Clay, bone, wooden and reed flutes
- Notched deer and human bones and sticks
- Whistles and conch shells
- Clay, gourd and bone rattles
- Drum of inverted gourd suspended on water

Ritual and Rite



Illustration: Mayan artist's depiction of "Bloodletting," ceremonial piercing or cutting of bodies to collect blood for rituals.

In Pre-Hispanic Mexico, agriculture was the main source of food and place of work for most indigenous Mexicans. Women took care of domestic chores such as raising children and maintaining the home. Men hunted and went to battle. Both genders created objects for the home; women would weave, spin and embroider, while men created wooden objects.

Sacrifices were at the center of life for many indigenous tribes. There was a sacrifice for every day of the year and every important event. The Aztec, or Mexica people, believed that rituals were necessary to repay the Gods for their sacrifices in creating and sustaining the earth and its people. Without ritual sacrifices, the Aztec believed that life on earth would end in catastrophe; there were serious repercussions if rituals were missed or performed incorrectly.

Mainly performed by the upper class, scholars believe that sacrifices were also used to keep social order. Society's morals were communicated through stories of various gods and were often used to keep women and the lower classes within the expected social constructs. Sacrifices were also used to intimidate foes. These human sacrifices were brutal and bloody, not infrequently ending in dismemberment or cutting the heart from the chest cavity. The upper classes would use this display of brutality as scare tactics for neighboring tribes as well as the Spanish conquistadors.

Being a human sacrifice was looked upon as a privilege. Often the person chosen for sacrifice was honored for some duration of time previous to the ceremony and bestowed with gifts and food only enjoyed by the upper class. These rituals, however, were viewed differently by the various participating groups; the classes or neighboring tribes that were frequently used as the human sacrifice may not have viewed the rituals in the same light as those performing them, although many people accepted sacrifice as an integral aspect to sustaining life.

Did you know?

Just like the American Indian tribes of the United States, the indigenous tribes of Mexico have their own unique histories and rituals. There are some similarities between the tribes, but it is important to remember that each group is unique. Different indigenous tribes have different gods, languages, rituals, lifestyles, art and architecture among so many others. Keep in mind that just because one tribe practices a certain tradition, it does not necessarily mean that all indigenous Mexicans partake in that tradition too.

Suggested Resources

Books

Musical Ritual in Mexico City by Mark Pedelty

An in-depth study of music in Mexico City from the Pre-Hispanic era through 2002.

Eyewitness Travel Mexico by Nick Inman

A colorful travel guide published by Dorling Kindersley (DK) that provides concise summaries of general information such as Mexican history, people, architecture, and festivals.

Ethnic Music by Lesley Nystrom

A resource guide compiled by the Minneapolis Public Schools showcasing various ethnic music from around the world. The section on Mexican music traces musical trends through the three musical periods. The book provides student activities, songs and a list of resources for teachers.

Music in Mexico by Robert Stevenson

A detailed look at Mexican music focusing particularly on Pre-Hispanic music and Mexican opera.

Music in Aztec & Inca Territory by Robert Stevenson

*Available in print or online, this volume traces the initial transcriptions and descriptions of Aztec and Incan music by European colonialists and the affects that conquest had on indigenous music traditions through the 18th century including an extensive discussion about the *Xtoles* melody.*

Internet Resources

PBS: Cracking the Maya Code

<http://www.pbs.org/teachers/connect/resources/6097/preview/>

This informative, fun and interactive website includes an interactive map and an activity in reading Mayan hieroglyphics.

The Rise and Fall of the Maya Empire

<http://www.history.com/topics/maya>

This website is part of the History Channel's resources about the Maya. It includes numerous videos and links to information about pyramids and Mayan hieroglyphics.

U.S. Department of State

<http://www.state.gov/p/wha/ci/mx/>

This site provides detailed information and statistics about present-day Mexico.

History Channel

<http://www.history.com/topics/mexico>

This extensive site includes photos, videos and information about Mexico in general, the history of indigenous groups in Mexico, important events in Mexican history and politics and Mexican culture.