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Mexica Music

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Mexica Music

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Mexica Music

Introduction

In 1521, a thunderous roar filled the newly discovered city of Tenochtitlan¹ (te-nosh-tit-lan), but this was not thunder. This was the sound of gunfire and obsidian clubs hitting metal chest plates. This was a war between the conquistadors from Spain and the Mexica² (Me-shi-ka), inhabitants of Tenochtitlan. The outcome of this war would determine the survival of the Mexica; either they take back their civilization, or they become slaves to the invading conquistadors. In the end, the Mexica managed to defend their city of the invading forces; but an unlikely ally assisted the Spaniards.

Small pox was never introduced to the Mexica before the Spaniards arrived, and this plague gave the Spaniards the opening to conquer the city. With Tenochtitlan now barely standing, conquistadors ravaged the once great city for their own greedy needs. After they had their fill, they set their eyes on the civilians and the forced labor they could extract from the people. First thing to do was to eliminate the citizens' identity by demolishing their history, language, lifestyle, and also their music. The conquistadors, thinking they could erase the Mexica's identity, destroyed the Mexica written records and any other documentation that might remind the Mexica of their fallen civilization. Even though they do not have a documented form of evidence to educate the world about their civilization, the Mexica have the next best thing to educate future generations: passing down their traditions with word of mouth.

¹ Located in present day Mexico City.

² The original name of the Aztecs and origin of the name of Mexico.

Their civilization might have been left in ruins, but the Mexica spirit could not be broken by a group of thugs who wanted to destroy an already thriving culture. As centuries pass on, the Mexica influence is still living strong in the 21st century: mostly in both Mexico and the United States. We might listen to lectures in our esteemed universities in this country about the history of the Mexica, but the music is rarely taught or even mentioned at all in a school curriculum. The best way to experience these rhythms and melodies are in the powwow ceremonies. In a powwow,³ these tribes that come together to educate each other about their lost culture with passed-down traditions. When they come together and share their music, its influence spreads to rebuild the lost empire: not physically, but mentally.

Mexica History

Before we learn about this society's music, first we must know about the history of the civilization. The Mexica first started off as a clan of mercenaries for other tribes and became masters of warfare. As they became more and more desirable as a clan, the surrounding tribes wanted to merge and become a stronger unified tribe. A Mexica ruler asked permission to a leader of another tribe to marry his daughter to become one grand nation. As the wedding was coming near, the Mexica priests skinned the princess and wore her skin to present it to her father. It is still a mystery why the priest decided to do that type of ritual, but that event became a turning point in Mexica history. Even though the Mexica were a strong

³ A meeting of 500 native tribes to sell instruments or educate the masses of their tribe.

tribe, they could not hold their forces back from the opposing tribe; and they were forced into exile in central Mexico (*500 Nations*).

Now on the run from the tribe leader and his forces, the Mexica were in exile in the deserts of Mexico. While traveling in exile, they observed the ruins that were left behind by old empires. Before the Mexica became exiled, Mexico had a few reigning empires that built gigantic temples in their time. At one point, these kingdoms were the ruling power; then for some reason the temples were abandoned, and the empire broke into smaller tribes. With these old ruins, the Mexica merged their religion with the deities of the old kingdom using the evidence left behind. One major feature that came with this merger was the deity Quetzalcoatl (Ket-sal-koa-tl), or the feather serpent. They even adapted the belief that Quetzalcoatl had departed upon a voyage from which he would return (*500 Nations*). Quetzalcoatl is a major character to the Mexica belief, but there are more characters in this theology.

Five Suns

The Five Suns is the creation story of the Mexica and the adventures of the deities trying to create a world where the inhabitants can worship them. In the span of these created worlds, the god who is in control transforms into the sun and watches over the population. Even though these suns end and the occupants are destroyed, the Mexica believe it is a part of life and see it as a new beginning of an adventure (“Aztec Creation Story”).

In the creation story, life did not start with a big bang or a deity demanding light; it all started with a dance. Ometecuhtli (o-mè-tè-ku-w-tli), also known as Omecihuatli (o-mè-s-wa-tli), is the creator god of everything: from the earth to other gods that create life or maintain elements around life. An interesting aspect of Ometecuhtli is that it is not one god, but it is two gods joined into one. Ometecuhtli is a balance of everything, and it can represent two sides of everyday life to create one deity. Ometecuhtli is usually represented as a grandfather and grandmother, but it is also seen as the good and evil, the light and the dark, or even life and death (“Aztec Creation Story”).

As Ometecuhtli danced together in the empty space of the universe, it created the four direction deities, also called the Tezcatlipocas (tes-kat-li-po-kas). The Tezcatlipocas are called Huizilopochtli [wi-si-lo-po-ch-tli] (south), Quetzalcoatl (east), Tezcatlipoca (west), and Xope Totec [sho-pe tò-tec] (north). These Tezcatlipocas are responsible for creating life when they are developing their world. Before all of that, they first have to overcome one major obstacle, and that problem is called Cipactli (si-pa-k-tli) (“Aztec Creation Story”).

Cipactli is a fish and crocodile hybrid that became a destroyer of all creation and managed to eat everything the Tezcatlipocas created. So the Tezcatlipocas went to war to kill the monster eating their creations. Eventually they killed it and built the cosmos on top of its body. The body was separated into thirteen levels ranging from the domain of the gods to the land of the living to the realm of the dead. The first and top level is the domain of Ometecuhtli; the seventh level is where earth is residing; and the rest of the levels are the land of the dead. With this completed, it

was time for the gods to create the world along with the people to worship them (“Aztec Creation Story”).

Tezcatlipoca was in charge of the first creation, and he constructed giant humans that ate acorns. While his creations lived on earth, Tezcatlipoca was watching over them in the form of the sun. While Tezcatlipoca controlled the earth with his creations, Quetzalcoatl made plans to take over the sun. So Quetzalcoatl knocked down Tezcatlipoca out of the sky and started to destroy the earth. He forged and sent jaguars to destroy and devour the inhabitants of Tezcatlipoca. This became the end of the first sun, and now it became Quetzalcoatl’s turn to take over the next sun (“Aztec Creation Story”).

In Quetzalcoatl’s sun, he shaped humans that were normal size, unlike Tezcatlipoca’s creation. In this sun things were going fine; but little by little, the people became corrupted and disgraceful. When Tezcatlipoca saw this behavior, he turned the people to monkeys and Quetzalcoatl sent a hurricane to blow them away. This became the end of the second sun, and Tlaloc (t-la-lòk) became the next creator of life (“Aztec Creation Story”).

Tlaloc was not a Tezcatlipoca, but he was a creation of the Tezcatlipocas as the god of rain and water. He took over the next sun along with his wife, Xochiquetzal (sho-chi-ke-t-sal), and everything was going fine until Tezcatlipoca did the mischievous act of kidnaping Tlaloc’s wife away from him. Now depressed, Tlaloc refused his godly duties and refused to give his creation a drop of rain. The people begged and begged him to give them rain, but he refused and decided to destroy his creation with a rain of fire. Then another god, Calchuhlicue (kal-chu-w-

tl-i-kue), the goddess of the water, developed the fourth sun. She controlled the sun, until Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl, being tricksters, took down the sun and this caused a giant flood to destroy everything again (“Aztec Creation Story”).

With all of this destruction, the gods decided to come together and create a world they could agree on. So they sent Xoloitzcuintli⁴ (sho-lo-its-ku-in-tli) to retrieve the bones of the destroyed past creations from the underworld. When this was collected, the gods had to sacrifice their own blood to create the living people. With the people now created, the question now was who will take over the sun for the world. A braggart god, Tecuciztecalt (tè-ku-ste-ka-lt), wanted to take over sun, but he hesitated to jump into the sacrificial fire. So the gods chose Nanahuatzin (na-na-wa-t-sin), a very humble god, to take over the sun, and he did not hesitate to jump into the fire. Tecucitecalt (te-ku-s-te-ka-lt) followed him, and it caused a problem by creating two suns for the earth. To dim one of the suns for humans to survive, a rabbit was thrown to Tecucitecalt, and this developed the moon with the shape seen (“Aztec Creation Story”; *The Five Suns: A Sacred History of Mexico*).

This is the creation story of the Mexica, and this shows how they use influences of their environment to create their own beginning. Why is it important to know this information of the Mexica? The Mexica would use music to tell their stories and use instruments to represent a certain sound effect; music is also used to call on to the gods to enter in the celebrations in which they are honored. This was part of their society, music is very important to them and they treated it with respect.

⁴ This is the original name of the Mexican hairless dog.

The Rise and Fall of the Mexicas

In the myth, the Mexica believed Quetzalcoatl was a god in human form, and, uniquely, he had white skin. Eventually, the myth foretold that he would come back at a certain date from his voyage in the Gulf of Mexico. Before that happened, the Mexica predicted they would find the place they were meant to settle when they found an eagle landing on a cactus while eating a serpent (*500 Nations*).

Years later, they found that symbol they were waiting for, but the big problem was that the sign occurred in a small island in the middle of a lake. This coincidence gave the Mexica the incentive to build their empire on top of this island. The island was very small, but this did not deter them; they started to build on top of the already existing island to create one of the biggest cities in America: Tenochtitlan. This was done by adding plant and wood foundation on top of the river and making the island bigger than it was (*500 Nations*).

After reigning for a few centuries, the Mexica have created one of the biggest empires in the Americas. That was until August 1521, the Mexica were expecting Quetzalcoatl to return from his voyage. Instead Hernan Cortes arrived for a mission of retrieving gold and developing a new empire. Cortes arrived on a perfect day, where he was able to trick the Mexica of thinking he was their god. After the Mexica saw through the lies, they revolted and drove the conquistadors away, until small pox became the real victor in this war (*500 Nations*).

Role of Musician in Society

Before continuing, everything that was learned western music theory has to be forgotten for the Mexica music theory. When the records were destroyed, the music notation and theory was destroyed; so we do not know how they used to write their music and there is no evidence to reference their findings. Any instrument that has been collected has survived the destructive force of the conquistadors or it was recreated by memory.

In Tenochtitlan, musicians were used every time the people needed music for their celebrations. Due to musicians being in charge of religious ceremonies to communicate to the gods, they held a major placement in the Mexica hierarchy (Pedelty 23). Even though they were near the top of the social ladder, the king still had overall power on how society was dictated. With this much importance in the civilization, musicians had to make sure every instrument and compositions were treated with respect. Even if one note was misplayed in a ceremony, this could translate to a bad omen, and the participator was killed for his mistake (Pedelty 23). The musicians had to make sure everything was on point back in the old days because of the repercussions of the gods, but for contemporary Mexica musicians, it is a little bit different.

Even though the musician in the present do not have to worry that the gods are going to destroy life as we know it, the instruments are still treated with the same respect as back then. The instruments are still created with natural elements as nature is respected as a gift from the gods. In other cultures, instruments may be made with metal or other materials that have to be manufactured. This approach is

unlike that of the Mexica, in which instruments are collected from their surroundings and are shaped to create tones. Even for those instruments that incorporate animals, the animal is blessed and thanked for its sacrifice after it is killed.

Role of Instruments Used in Battle

Throughout human history, warriors used music to announce to their enemies that they were arriving. The Americans are known for using the military snare and flutes when coming to battle in the early stages of the country. The military personnel in recent memory have used bagpipes to give honor to the fallen soldiers in their ceremonies. When it comes to the Mexica, they have used their instruments for a psychological purpose.

In battle, the Mexica would wear clay flutes small enough to carry around their neck. Most of these flutes can vary in sound, but the flutes have a specific job: to bring fear to their enemies. One type of flute is the death whistle, and it cries like a human screaming at the top of their lungs. This flute ranges in size, but the one that is used in battle is typically smaller than the palm of the hand. The next type of flute is the jaguar flute, and it is easily described as roaring like its namesake. This flute is small enough to carry around the neck, but it is much bigger than its counterpart. This form of music can seem odd to understand in the context of battle, but it is effective.

This tactic can determine who will win the battle by the impact of these sounds on the opponent's psyche. If a line of warriors would collectively blow their

flutes, this could send a message that death is coming the way of their opponents. Imagine a few hundreds of soldiers blowing death screams or jaguars coming their way; this image can impact the subconscious of the enemy, depending on the flute used in warfare. With the death whistle, listening to hundreds of screams can give the image of the enemy inflicting havoc and death coming towards the listener. This can terrify the soldiers who would believe this would happen to them if they did not surrender to the enemies. The jaguar whistle can have a different effect than the death whistle. Instead of being frightened of what their enemy is going to do to them, they are now on their toes thinking a jaguar is coming their way. Jaguars are stealthy creatures and can jump out of nowhere, so people have to watch their backs whether the warning is real or not. Whatever instrument is used in combat, the opposite side will either be scared and running for their lives or standing and facing the danger that is heading their way.

Instruments and Compositions

In pre-Cortesian time, the Mexica kept record of everything in their society, including music. When Cortes reached the city and started to dismantle the civilization, the first thing he did was burn the paper scrolls and destroyed the stone tables that hold records of the society. This was a ploy to demolish the Mexica and their identity in an attempt to control the people. For a few hundred years in Mexico's history, Spain controlled the people, but with all of their efforts, nothing could break the rich culture of the Mexica people.

The Mexica shaped their culture based on their environment; in a way, they borrow things that come from nature. That is why the majority of these instruments emulate natural sounds. They know by collecting these sounds, they cannot be selfish and take nature for themselves. So they can only borrow nature in these instruments and treat it with respect as if it is a gift of the gods (Montoya).

In the present, there are not a lot of Mexica rhythms or instruments used in recent compositions. One good example is the 1936 composition by Mexican composer Carlos Chavez. Chavez's second symphony, titled *Sinfonia India* or Indian Symphony, pays homage to native roots from his grandfather (Schwarm 2). This composition is a blend of European instruments with Mexica rhythms. The rhythms may not come directly from Tenochtitlan but from the neighboring tribes that were around the grand empire. Some of these tribes include Hichol people from western Mexico, Yaqui from Sonora, and Seri people from the Gulf of Mexico (Schwarm 3).

Another example of Mexica compositions is best shown in the 1995 film *Mi Familia/My Family*. The film is about a man immigrating to the United States from Mexico and raising his family in American society. In the soundtrack, Gregory Nava, the director of the film, wanted to include examples of music that can relate to every generation in Mexican-American history. So he included the compositions from the native band Los Folkloristas and their Mexica inspired music. One of their songs, "Rosas De Castilla," is an old Nahuatl⁵ (na-wa-tl) poem created after the conquest of Tenochtitlan, and the singers harmonized with each other to create this composition. The next song, "Konex Konex" (Ko-nesh Ko-nesh), is a traditional

⁵ One of the traditional native languages used in Mexico, mostly used in the Mexica civilization.

instrumental piece that derives from the Mayan traditions. The piece uses a high-pitched flute that carries the melody of the song and what sound like Ayoyotes⁶ (a-yo-yo-tès) and other clay flutes to play as background instruments.

Another setting these compositions can be seen in is playhouses, like el Teatro Campesino, where present Mexica-influenced plays are performed. El Teatro Campesino exhibits plays mostly written by the Chicano playwright, Luis Valdez, but every winter they perform one of two plays: *La Pastorela* and *La Virgen del Tepeyac*. In those plays, they employ the instrumentalist Noe Montoya for his expertise of Mexica and other Mexican instruments. In these plays, Noe Montoya uses these instruments for background purposes or to expand more on the music that was originally written by Daniel Valdez, Luis Valdez's brother.

There are sprinkles of Mexica-inspired compositions floating around, and not a lot of people know they have survived. The majority of the pieces that are performed are used in Mexica ceremonies or to protest for Mexican issues. In these Mexica presentations, the performers play the same collection of songs that only require the Huehuetl (we-we-tl) and dancers with Ayoyote seedpods. These compositions were originally passed down from generation to generation, and they are commonly used in every Mexica dance group. Even these days, people have not written these pieces down on paper to pass down; the majority of people learn from watching the drummers in the group and copying. These musicians follow each other to learn and master these rhythms on their instruments for a performance.

⁶ Seed pots that have hard shells. When hollowed out and hit together, they sound like water or bones chattering.

According to Noe Montoya, it is important to just play the instrument with confidence.

Huehuetl



(Fig. 1)

The Huehuetl is a main instrument in Mexica music, and it is seen in ceremonial rituals. It has become such an essential instrument in the music that a collection of musicians, dancers, and singers is called a Huehuetitlan [we-we-tit-lan] (Pendelty 19). The average Huehuetl drum is about four feet tall and two feet in diameter with three sound holes in the base. The sound holes are shaped as thunderbolts to symbolized the large noise the drum is going to make to Mother Earth. Around the drums, there are designs carved on the wood that illustrate the four Tezcatlipocas or depict other Mexica symbolisms like the Sun Stone⁷ design. The drumhead is traditionally made of deer, jaguar, or any other type of skin the makers were able to retrieve (Montoya).

When playing the Huehuetl, the instrument keeps the instrumentalist and/or the dancers in time with the composition. The best way to describe the sound it

⁷ Also known as the Mexica Calendar and it demonstrates the calendar the Mexica follow at their time. Also seen on the title page.

produces is as an orchestral bass drum, but it can produce more sounds than usually played. The most common way of playing it is hitting the skin, but it can also be hit on the rim to give a music piece more high frequencies of the same drum rhythm. Even the drumstick can vary depending on the musician; the most popular way of playing is with regular rounded off drumsticks. There have also been musicians that use mallets with a rubber head or that decide to play with their hand; any form can be played depending on the musician (Montoya).

Teponaztli



(Fig. 2)

The Teponaztli (tè-pon-as-tli) is the second-most-used instrument in traditional Mexica music, but it is also the least common instrument in today's compositions. When the empire was flourished, the Huehuetl and the Teponaztli were the two most important percussion instruments played during the ceremonies (Pedelty 17). It is possible that the Huehuetl played the low-end frequencies and the Teponaztli filled the higher frequencies. In today's arrangements, this instrument is hardly seen in ceremonial dances because the Huehuetl is the main focus in these

ceremonial dances. Some dance groups do not have the instrument or enough instrumentalists to play the instrument.

Unlike the Huehuetl, the Teponaztli can vary in size; it can be as small as two feet or it can be as big as a giant tree trunk. Traditionally, they are made of solid wood trunks, but they are also created out of bamboo for a different tonality. The size and material of the Teponaztli may differ, but all of them have two slits, sometimes referred to as tongues, that produce one distinctive tone on each side. Depending on the composition, both slits can be played individually or played at the same time. The performer is not restricted to only playing the instrument on the slits; just like the Huehuetl, it can be played on other locations of the drum. One place that it can also be played is on the rim of the drum. There are even some Teponaztlis that have leather covering on each end to extract another tone from the drum (Montoya).

The tools of playing also facilitate a variety of ways to express a tone you want to have the Teponaztli produce. Traditionally, the musicians used mallets with rubber ends to give a flat and rubbery tone to the composition. When the performer wants a sharper and woodier tone, they can just use simple wooden rods for a mallet. If the composer wants an even sharper tone in their music piece, a deer antler can be used, and this gives it a water drop effect (Montoya).

Ayoyotl

(Fig. 3)

Ayoyotl (a-yo-yo-tl) are shakers that are made from the Ayoyote seedpods, and when they are collected it gives it a boney rattle. With its distinctive sound, it is also commonly known to other groups as huesos.⁸ The Ayoyotes are known to become poisonous when the seed is extracted; but if treated with respect, the seed will not poison the musician (Montoya). During celebrations, huesos are worn around each leg, but a small amount of Ayoyotes can be tied to a stick and be used like a maraca. A maraca can also be made with a small gourd filled with seeds for a hand shaker. Most regularly, every dance group uses the huesos as leg shakers for the performance.

⁸ Spanish translation for “bones.”

Ayotl



(Fig. 4)

Ayotl (a-yo-tl) is an interesting instrument because it uses the shells of turtles to produce a unique sound. Once the shell is hollowed out, the musician places the shell upside down to reveal the belly; this is how the instrument is played. Compared to many other Mexica instruments, there is no one primary way to play this instrument. If the instrumentalist decides to pick one side of the shell, that tone will not carry on the other side of the shell. Many variations of tones can be played with this instrument, it and can also be polyphonic. By adding two or more different size turtle shells next to each other and playing them at the same time, it will have a different color (Montoya).

Just like the Teponatzli, this instrument can be played with many types of mallets. The most common playing technique is with the deer antler, which recreates the sound of drops of water. This can be different than the outcome of the Teponatzli. The Teponatzli creates a sound like water dropping on top of a hollow wood; meanwhile, the Ayotl can recreate water dropping onto a bowl of water. Another option is to use rubber or wooden mallets on the Ayotl to have a different timbre (Montoya).

Tecciztli



(Fig. 5)

The Tecciztli (te-k-s-tl-i) is the original name for a conch shell in Nahuatl, but it is regularly known as la concha.⁹ The Huehuetl may be the important instrument that keeps the music in time, but la concha is important to start the piece. If the instrumentalists do not have a concha, they cannot begin the ceremony. La concha is played mainly in the introduction section of the ceremonial blessing song, known as El Permiso (Montoya).

El Permiso, translated to the permission song, is played before the dancers start the ceremony. Playing la concha in the introduction section can be interpreted as a calling for the gods to interact in the ceremony. After la concha is blown, the rhythm is played, and this beat is shared with every group so they can ritually begin the ceremony. Even though the instrument is played only once in the piece, the position in which the instrument is placed has to be set in a respectful way. The respectable way of placing la concha is by putting the sound hole to the ground because la concha has a feature that resembles a woman's private part (Montoya).

⁹ Spanish for a Conch Shell.

So it is placed with the sound hole down to the earth to cover it up when it not played.

Other instruments are taken from nature and manipulated to create these sound qualities. But la concha can be taken out from the beach and played after only cutting the swirl for the mouthpiece to fit the performer's personal mouth shape. After that, no tuning or further adjustments are needed to play this instrument. The size and density of the shell does not matter as long as it creates a large roar (Montoya).

Flutes



(Fig. 6)

The Mexica have a wide range of flutes that are made up of diverse materials and timbres. The Mexica have created a lot of unique flutes made up of wood, clay, and even human bones. The wood and bone flutes have a simple frame with the usual window and finger holes that are similarly seen in a recorder frame. When it comes to clay flutes, they are formed into different shapes and sizes to bring out different notes. When the Mexica were holding records for their civilization, the musicians might have kept a detailed description on how to construct these

instruments and how to tune them. But with the empire in ruins, have to rely on oral tradition or excavations to find these instruments and bring back those old sounds that have not been heard for hundreds of years. The following varieties of flutes have their own characteristics and express their own unique tone (Montoya).



(Fig. 7)

This little flute pictured above is a simple high-pitched flute that fits very easily in the palm of the hand. This instrument may only have four pitches to play, but dancers in the middle of the dances can easily play it (Montoya).



(Fig. 8)

This flute is an interesting interpretation of a wind sound effect; the difference is that it plays a pitch. The large body gives it a wide airy effect, and it can be a smooth, yet mysterious sound (Montoya).



(Fig. 9)

This little flute only has two tones, which are performed either with the finger covering or not covering the tune hole. This flute is another high-pitched instrument, and it can be used to mimic a bird (Montoya).



(Fig. 10)

This flute is in the shape of a coatl¹⁰ (ke-t-sal) and has a circular form that has the blown air go around. This instrument has four notes that can be played with its round shape (Montoya).

¹⁰ Nahuatl word for snake or serpent.



(Fig. 11 & 12)

These instruments are different sizes, but they both share a common theme in being polyphonic. The bottom tune hole has the same measurement, and the other sound holes on the top have different placements to play different notes (Montoya).



(Fig. 13)

This jaguar paw shaped is another polyphonic instrument, but it is simpler to play than the other polyphonic flutes. Each paw has a window with a tune hole that the musician can block to change the note. A unique characteristic is that the mouthpiece shares three holes to blow into (Montoya).



(Fig. 14)

This quetzal flute may look similar to its smaller counter-part, but it expresses more than the other flute. The mouthpiece is similar to the jaguar paw flute, but this flute's mouthpiece is big enough to play one or all the holes at the same time. Each opposite end of the mouthpiece plays a note different from the other. The middle hole is used as a drone tone, and when these are played together create a distinct polyphonic instrument with a suspension tone (Montoya).

Sound of Wind



(Fig. 15)

As stated earlier, the Mexica would borrow sounds that are naturally in the environment and use it in their compositions. Many sounds are unique in Mexico,

but one sound is familiar on planet Earth: the wind. In order to recreate this sound, instrument builders form a small clay pot and place a mouthpiece on the side. When played, the sound hole is covered and the movement of the performer's hand manipulates the sound. If there is a small opening and it is blown lightly, it can be mistaken for wind escaping a cave opening. If it is blown and the hand rapidly moves and retracts slowly, it can emulate a windstorm or hurricane (Montoya).

Sound of Jaguar



(Fig. 16)

Jaguars are commonly seen in pre-Cortesian Mexico and were often encountered by the Mexica civilization. The jaguars were represented as an outfit for warriors to wear during battle, and their skin was used for their instruments. With all of these elements incorporated into the society, the jaguar is an important animal to the Mexicas. So the Mexica figured out a way to recreate the sound for their musical pieces (Montoya).

The jaguar flute stands a few inches tall, and the majority of these flutes are sculpted as a jaguar head. Inside the flute, there are two chambers to create the sound. The first chamber is on top of the mouthpiece, and it is shaped as a sphere so

the air that is blown into it can whistle before it is transferred to the next chamber. When the air reaches the next chamber, the sound hole needs to be blocked by the musician. With the movement of the hand, like the wind flute, determines the sound the flute will express. When the hand opens and closes slowly, it emulates a jaguar warning a subject that it will attack. If the hand opens quickly and slowly closes, it imitates a jaguar roaring at danger. If the musician starts rolling their tongue while blowing, the flute will create a growl that is similar to a jaguar warning a treat to not get near (Montoya).

Human Sounds

The Mexica may have borrowed every type of sound in their outer domain, and they also created instruments that came from themselves. The most notable human instrument is the death whistle, as introduced earlier. Making this instrument comes in two parts: the first is creating the screech for the whistle and the second is to create a chamber to enclose the whistle ball. Rolling a ball of clay about two to three inches in diameter forms the whistle ball. Then the ball is split in half to hollow it out, and the two pieces together are put back together. After, a small hole is drilled to the top of the ball to provide just enough space to blow into it sound the screech. Then rolling another ball about twice the size of the whistle ball creates the next chamber. The next step is cutting a small part of the new ball to allow enough room to place the whistle ball in-between the cavity. After, the compartment is hollowed so the air can travel out of the hole. Eyeholes are drilled next, and if the performer becomes artistic, they make a face for the flute. The final

step is putting both pieces together and starting to play the instrument. This instrument works like the wind and jaguar flute, so the player's hand has to cover the sound hole and move to animate the effect (*How To Make an Aztec Death Whistle*).

Conclusion

Music is an art form that connects to all cultures and is a great tool to educate people about how a historical society was living. Since few people know the history of the Mexica and the music they produced, it is important to share this information from this once great civilization. Some of this information was saved from destruction, but because the majority of the population became ignorant of this history and adapted to Spanish lifestyle, this knowledge was not passed down to the masses. Luckily, the Mexica had a few people interested in their own history who decided to pass down these traditions of an empire in ruins with almost no history to reference to and with the majority of the people who have Mexica ancestry lost to their own culture. The music can be the first step in igniting a person's interest in the Mexica culture and reigniting this lost culture.

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