

A COLONIAL NAHUATL HYMN TO THE VIRGIN

Alfred E. Lemmon*

From Canada¹ to Argentina,² religious chroniclers wrote glowingly of how missionaries translated various Christian prayers into Indian languages and then set them to music. Beginning with Pedro de Gante in Mexico³ and Francisco Solano in Argentina,⁴ innumerable missionaries found music an invaluable aid in the conversion of the Indians to Catholicism. Perhaps, no missionary stated the case more simply than Juan María Salvatierra, who in asking to be sent to the missions, stated that his skills as a musician would be of immense value in his work among the natives.⁵ Yet, whether it be Northern Mexico, Brazil, or Paraguay only a handful of religious texts in Indian languages set to music survive.

Robert Stevenson in *Music in Mexico* surveyed the writings

* The author would like to thank Mrs. Martha B. Robertson of the Tulane Latin American Library for bringing this Nahuatl hymn to his attention. He would also like to thank Mr. Joseph Eugene Gibson and Ms. Catherine Thompson for their assistance.

¹ The following works give valuable information on Canada, the United States, and Northern Mexico:

Clement J. McNaspy, "Iroquois Challenge; Chant in Approved Vernacular", *Orate Fratres*, XXI, (May, 1947), 323-327.

Robert Stevenson, "Written Sources for Indian Music until 1882", *Ethnomusicology*, XVII, (January, 1973), 1-40.

—, "English Sources for Indian Music until 1882", *Ethnomusicology*, XVII, (September, 1973), 399-442.

David E. Crawford, "The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, Early Sources for an Ethnography of Music among American Indians", *Ethnomusicology*, XI, (May, 1967), 199-206.

Lincoln B. Spiess, "Instruments in the Missions of New Mexico, 1598-1680", in *Essays in Musicology*, (Indiana University Press, 1968), 131-138.

² Vicente Gesualdo, *Historia de la música en la Argentina*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Beta, S.R.L., 1961).

³ Ernesto de la Torre Villar, *Fray Pedro de Gante, maestro y civilizador de América*, (México: Seminario de Cultura, 1973).

⁴ Gesualdo, *Historia de la música en la Argentina*, 5-21.

⁵ Alfred E. Lemmon, "Jesuits and Music in Mexico", *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu*, XLVI, (1977), 195-196.

of the religious chroniclers of New Spain concerning music.⁶ Later, he did the same for Peru.⁷ Guillermo Furlong Cardiff did likewise for Argentina.⁸ Francisco Curt Lange has worked extensively throughout all of South America, especially Brazil.⁹ Yet, all of the above scholars, and others not mentioned here, have been slow to find musical compositions written in Indian languages. Innumerable chroniclers printed the texts of the songs, but few have the distinction of printing both the text and the music, as did the German Jesuit missionary in Chile Bernardo Haverstadt (1714-1781).¹⁰ Indeed, Haverstadt's musical illustrations call to mind Pierre Francois de Charlevoix's description of the manner of greeting a bishop or dignitary in a Guaraní village.¹¹ The musical ability of the Moxos, first cultivated by the Jesuits¹² and then by don Lázaro de Ribera,¹³ is

⁶ *Music in Mexico: A Historical Survey*, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1952), 1-51. Reprint by Apollo Editions, New York, no date given.

⁷ *The Music of Peru, Aboriginal and Viceregal Epochs*, (Washington: Pan American Union, 1959). For a summary of Stevenson's career see: Samuel Claro Valdés, "Veinticinco años de labor iberoamericana del doctor Robert Stevenson", *Revista Musical Chilena*, XXXI, (July-December, 1977), 122-134.

⁸ *Músicos argentinos durante la dominación hispánica*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Huarpes, 1945).

⁹ Prof. Lange is the "Dean" of scholars devoted to Latin American colonial music. A classified bibliography of his total output is being prepared for the *Inter-American Music Review*, 1, (January, 1979; 1).

¹⁰ *Chilidigu sive res chilenses vel descriptio status tum naturalis tum civilis, cum moralis Regni populique Chilensis, inserta suis locis perfetae ad Chilensem linguam manuactioni. Deo O.M. multis ac miris modis juvente opera, suptibus, periculisque Bernardi Haverstadt Agrippinensis quoudam Provinciae Rheni Inferioris primum Hortsmariae in Westphalia deinde in America Meridionalis Regno Chilense e Societate Jesu Missionarii*, 1777. Second edition prepared by Dr. Julius Platzmann, (Lipsiae: in aedibus B. G. Teubneri, 1883). In the 1883 edition, the texts for some 27 hymns appear on pages 582-599. In the *Pars sexta: (notae musicae ad canendum in clavichordio cantiones Partis tertiae a n. 650 usque ad n. 676)* appears the musical accompaniment. In the 1777 edition organ is specified in the introduction to *pars sexta* as opposed to clavichord in the 1883 edition. For a summary of Haverstadt's work see: Walter Hanisch, *Itinerario y pensamiento de los jesuitas expulsos de Chile, 1767-1815*, (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1972), 236-239 and 289-290.

¹¹ Haverstadt's Araucanian text, which begins *Acui ta in Mapu mo* (Number 673, page 597, 1883 edition) has this notation *Cantanda in Adventu Principis, Episcopi, R.P. Provincialis*. On the other hand, Charlevoix in his *Histoire du Paraguay*, (English edition, Dublin: 1769, volume 1, pages 274-275 describes how the arrival of such a dignitary would be greeted with such a musical tribute.

¹² Samuel Claro Valdés, "La música en las misiones jesuitas de Moxos", *Revista Musical Chilena*, XXIII, (1969), 7-30.

¹³ Mario J. Buschiazio, "La arquitectura de las misiones de Moxos y Chiquitos", *Anales del Instituto de Arte Americano y Investigaciones Estéticas*, Buenos Aires, V, (1952).

given adequate testimony in the cantata honoring María Luisa de Borbón written by Francisco Semo, Marcelino Ycho and Juan José Nosa. It has a special attraction for the linguist as it was written in their native tongue, and as the accompanying Spanish translation of the text survives.¹⁴ Juan Pérez Bocanegra provided an invaluable service when he published *Hanacpachap cussicuinin* in Lima in 1631. It is a "lady-day" hymn in Quechua, and was the first piece of polyphonic music published in the Western Hemisphere.¹⁵ Still the Creed was translated into Quechua and set to the tune of *Sacris Solemnis*,¹⁶ and sung in procession, a practice common in the Old World as well.¹⁷

Through the years, various travelers have provided excellent accounts of native music. Peru's Jaime Martínez Compañón (1737-1797) is an excellent example. During the period 1782-1787, he gathered a collection of both Creole and Indian tunes during his episcopal tours of Trujillo. Today, this gold mine survives in the *Biblioteca de Palacio* in Madrid and bears the call number 90/344.¹⁸ Still another great pioneer in the notation of Indian music was Fray Felipe Arroyo de la Cuesta (1780-1840), who worked in Alta California.¹⁹ Still other travelers, such as Jean de Lery,²⁰ John Gabriel Stedman,²¹ Paul

¹⁴ Humberto Vázquez Machicado and Hugo Patiño Torres, "Un código cultural del siglo XVIII", *Historia*, (Buenos Aires), XIV, (1958), 65-107.

¹⁵ Robert Stevenson, *Music in Aztec and Inca Territory*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 281-284. A reprint of this work was issued in 1976. It is, perhaps, the single most valuable work written for pre-nineteenth-century music. It contains appropriate chapters, with revisions, from the earlier mentioned *Music in Mexico* and *The Music of Peru*. Two recordings have been issued of *Hanacpachap cussicuini* on Angel records (S-36008) and Qualiton.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 279.

¹⁷ *Companions of Jesus*, Paul Molinari, et al., (London: English Province of the Society of Jesus, 1974), 80.

¹⁸ Stevenson, *Music in Aztec and Inca Territory*, 313-321 and 324-334. Also, Stevenson, "Written Sources", 13.

¹⁹ Stevenson, "Written Sources," 7-13.

²⁰ Correa de Azevedo, Luis Heitor, "Tupynamba melodies in Jean de Lery's *Histoire d'un Voyage fait en la Terre du Brésil*", Papers of the American Musicological Society Annual Meeting, 1941. Cited by Stevenson in "Written Sources", 13-15.

²¹ *Narrative of a five years' expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam in Guiana, on the wild coast of South America; from the year 1772, to 1777.* (London: J. Johnson, 1796). For a detailed description of this work see: Robert Stevenson, *A Guide to Caribbean Music History*, (Lima: Ediciones "CULTURA", 1975), 59.

Marcos,²² and M. E. Descourtiz,²³ left behind valuable accounts of musical activity with highly treasured musical examples. Yet, the historical musicologist continues to be plagued by the survival of more descriptions of the music than of the actual survival of the music and text.²⁴

However, the text and music have survived for two sixteenth-century Nahuatl hymns. In his monumental *Historia de la música en México*, Gabriel Saldívar published in facsimile these Nahuatl chansons.²⁵ The text of the first reads:²⁶

**Sancta maria yn ilhuicac cihuapille tinatzin dios yn
titotenpantlatocantzin.
Ma huel tehuatzin topan ximotlatolti yn
titlatlaconhuanimen.**

Holy Mary, Queen of Heaven, Mother of God, thou art our mediator.

Intercede ("speak thou well") for us who are sinners.

The text of the second is:

**Dios itlaçonantzine cemicac ichpochtle cenca
timitztotlatlauhtiliya ma topan ximotlatolti yn**

²² *Travels in South America: From the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean*, (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Co., 1875), 250-253.

²³ *Voyages d'un Naturaliste, et ses observations*, (Paris: Dufart, père, Libraire-éditeur, 1809), III, 132-136.

²⁴ A prime example of such a case is found in the *Carta del Padre Pedro Morales*, (México: Antonio Ricardo, 1579), 26r-27. Provided are the Nahuatl text (with a Spanish translation) and a description of the performance. In Lemmon, "Jesuits and Music in Mexico", (192-194); the Nahuatl text with its Spanish translation is reproduced along with an English translation by Fernando Horcasitas.

²⁵ México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1934, 102-105.

²⁶ Saldívar, *Historia*, (107) provides a Spanish translation by Mariano Rojas. Stevenson, *Music in Aztec and Inca Territory* (206) presents the English translation used here by Charles E. Dibble. As Rojas' translation is not literal, the following Spanish translation by Fernando Horcasitas is provided.

Text 1. Oh tú, mujer noble celestial, Madre de Dios, abogada nuestra (tú que hablas a favor de nosotros).

Text 2. Oh amada Madre de Dios, siempre virgen, mucho te rogamos que hables por nosotros ante tu amado hijo Jesucristo, pues allá estás junto a él.

ilhuicac ixpantzinco in motlaçoconetzin Jesu Christo.

Ca onpa timoyetzica yn inahuactzinco yn motlaçoconetzin Jesu Christo.

Oh precious Mother of God, oh eternal Virgin, we earnestly implore of thee: intercede for us. In heaven thou art in the presence of thy dearest Son, Jesus Christ.

For thou art there beside Him. In heaven thou art in the presence of thy dearest Son, Jesus Christ.

Saldívar provided a modern transcription of the first hymn.²⁷ Stevenson provided a further study in 1952,²⁸ and a transcription of both in 1968.²⁹ Steven Barwick, whose Harvard doctoral dissertation remains a pioneering study in Mexican colonial music,³⁰ also published a transcription of these two hymns. Barwick did not use the Nahuatl text, but rather a Spanish translation.³¹ Finally, these hymns are attributed to "Don" Hernando Franco, an Indian student of Hernando Franco (1532-1585), chapelmaster of the Mexico City cathedral.³²

Now, a later setting of the first text has surfaced. Hurriedly jotted down on a blank page toward of the Library of Congress' copy of Bartolomé de Alva's *Confessionario mayor, y menor en lengua mexicana, y pláticas contra las supersticiones de idolatría que el día de oy an quedado a los Naturales desta Nueva España, e instrucción de los Santos Sacramentos, etc.* (México: Francisco Salbago, 1634) is a setting for two voices of *Santa Maria yn ilhuicac*. A precise date of composition can not be affixed, nor can a definite composer be ascribed. The only possible clue for a composer is the notation that this particular

²⁷ Saldívar, *Historia*, 106.

²⁸ *Music in Mexico*, 119-121.

²⁹ *Music in Aztec and Inca Territory*, 208-213.

³⁰ "Sacred Vocal Polyphony in Early Colonial Mexico", (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1949).

³¹ The first text appeared as "Plegaria a la Virgen" (New York: Peer International, 1952; Order Number M126), the second appeared under the title "Oh Señora", (New York: Peer International, 1952; Order number 124).

³² Stevenson, *Music in Aztec and Inca Territory*, 204-206.

copy of the *Confessionario* was *del uso del Br. Dn. José Jacobo Arellano*.³³ The composition does not reflect the highest level of musical sophistication; indeed, it is rather primitive. Furthermore, it is, like the Haverstadt publication, the cantata of the three Moxo Indians, and a mass written by a Zapotec Indian,³⁴ replete with inaccurate musical notation. It stands as an example of what was probably the musical climate of the missionary fields as opposed to the cathedral music of the period, in which both Spaniard and Indian reached heights of musical glory.³⁵

The following is a transcription of the hymn found in the *Alva Confessionario*. It should be noted that the original orthography is preserved.

³³ A photographic copy of portions of this particular *Confessionario* is in the Latin American Library of Tulane University (Classification: Pam. 497.2011). The original is in the Library of Congress. The Library of Congress copy does not contain any additional information which would shed light on the hymn. Benjamin Lee Whorf made a translation of the hymn and a small linguistic note. These are also in the Tulane Latin American Library under the same classification as the *Confessionario*. His translation is:

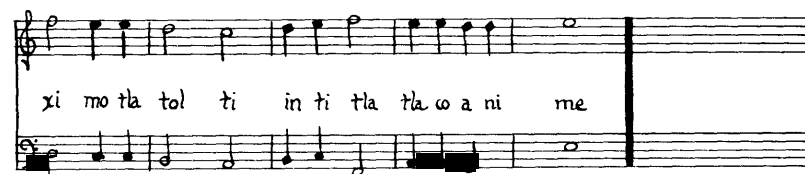
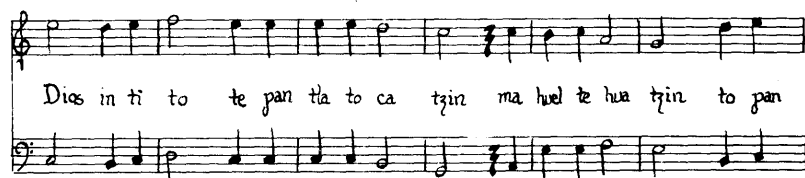
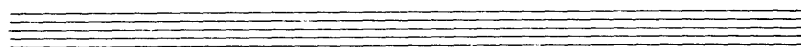
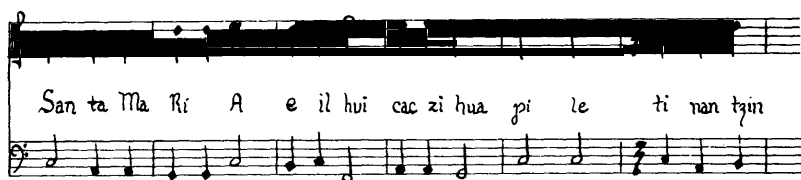
O Holy Mary, Queen of Heaven,
Thou Mother of God, Thou who art over
us, Supreme One, may thou
be over us and take the
testimony of us sinners.

His linguistic note is:

**Santa Maria-é ilwíkak ziwapill-é
tii'-nántzin Dios in ti to'-tépan
tla'tocáztin, ma wel teuátzin to'-pan
xi'-mo-tlatólti in ti tla'tlakoaníme.**

³⁴ A polyphonic Latin mass ascribed to Andrés Martínez, dated 1636. Dr. Peter E. Peacock, after a thorough investigation of this work, reported in a correspondence dated July 7, 1979 that the work contained so many errors of a copyist, that it is beyond a faithful reconstruction. For more information on this work and other musical holdings of the Tulane Latin American Library, see: Alfred E. Lemmon, "Un fondo musical en el extranjero", *Heterofonía*, xi, (May-June, 1978), 24-26 and 43-45.

³⁵ For a study of Juan Matías, an Indian from Oaxaca, who achieved considerable fame for his prowess as a composer see Robert Stevenson, "El más memorable de los maestros indígenas", *Heterofonía*, xi, (July-August, 1978), 3-9. The same issue presents Stevenson's transcription of Matías' villancico: "Quién sale este día disfrazado" on pages 23-27. One should observe that pages 25 and 26 are out of order and should be reversed. Stevenson later considerably enlarged this study and presented it (with the villancico) in the *Inter-American Music Review*, i, (July, 1979), 179-203 under the title "Baroque Music in the Oaxaca Cathedral: Mexico's most memorable Indian Maestro."



Musical notation written in the *Confessionario* of Bartolomé de Alva.

Resumen

El investigador Gabriel Saldívar en su *Historia de la música en México*, publicada en 1934, incluyó en facsímile el texto y la música de dos himnos en náhuatl del siglo xvi, en honor de la Virgen María. Aunque de ambos se han publicado algunas traducciones al castellano, el descubrimiento llevado a cabo por el autor de este artículo, Alfredo E. Lemmon, ha permitido enriquecer la información particularmente acerca del segundo de esos himnos. En el ejemplar que preserva la Biblioteca del Congreso de Washington del libro de Bartolomé de Alva *Confessionario mayor y menor en lengua mexicana...* se incluye una transcripción para dos voces del segundo himno intitulado *Santa María yn ilhuicac*. Dicha partitura se ofrece en el presente trabajo.