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Musical instruments
of the Chiquitano people

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The Chiquitano people

The Chiquitano are an indigenous people native to the eastern Bolivian lowlands, with a population ranging between 40,000 and 60,000 persons (making them the third largest demographic group in the country). They are settled in the provinces of Ñuflo de Chaves, Velasco, Sandoval, Germán Busch, Ichilo and Chiquitos (Santa Cruz department) and Iténez (Beni department), as well as in three municipalities in the bordering state of Mato Grosso (Brazil), where they work in agriculture and local *haciendas*. They speak the Bésiro language (the fourth most spoken language in Bolivia) and keep alive an important part of their identity as a native group.

The Chiquitano come from the concentration of different indigenous groups gathered together in the Jesuit

missions (*reducciones*) established in the region in the 1600s.

The Bolivian lowlands were first mapped by the expeditions of Spanish conquerors Ñuflo de Chaves and Domingo Martínez de Irala in 1546. Accompanied by Guarani porters and warriors, they left Asuncion (Paraguay) and headed for present-day Peru in search of the legendary "Sierra de la Plata" (Silver Mountains) following different routes (Paraguay River, Pilcomayo River...). It is believed that some of the native groups described in the chronicles that relate those journeys were the antecessors of current Chiquitano, particularly those who used to poison their arrows.

The Guarani who accompanied the conquistadors used the derogatory name *tapii-mirí*, "little slaves", to refer to the peoples they found in their way. Europeans simplified the term by calling them *chiquitos* ("little ones"); the area they inhabited was since then known as "Llanos de Chiquitos" ("The little ones' plains") or "Chiquitanía" ("The little ones' land").

The region was effectively conquered between 1557 and 1560 by Ñuflo de Chaves, who founded the village of Nueva Asunción (also called "La Barranca") on the banks of the Guapay River in 1559. In 1561 he founded the first city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra (known today as "La Vieja", "The Old [city]") in Sierra de San José, after defeating several Chiquitano tribes, including the Tamacoci and the Gorgotoqui. In 1590 Santa Cruz moved to what is now the town of Cotoca, and five years later, to its definitive location.

After the abandonment of Santa Cruz "La Vieja", the Chiquitano, who had suffered four decades of foreign domination, regained their freedom and launched numerous attacks against Spanish settlements. In 1690 some factions, defeated by punitive expeditions, agreed to allow Jesuit missions to be established in their territory. The first one (San Francisco Xavier, 1691) was founded among the Pinoco; by the same time, the fierce and repeated attacks of the *bandeirantes* were wiping the Chiquitano villages off the map. Spanish forces put an end to the Brazilian slaveholders and between 1691 and

1767 backed the creation of ten others Jesuit missions or pueblos de indios ("Indian villages") in the Chiquitanía: San Rafael (1696), San José de Chiquitos (1698), San Juan Bautista (1699), Concepción (1708), San Miguel (1721), San Ignacio de los Zamucos (1724), San Ignacio de Loyola (1748), Santiago (1754), Santa Ana (1755) and Santo Corazón (1760).

By 1745 the priests had collected and reported a sample of the huge cultural diversity in the area, represented by the native groups living in the missions: Piñoca, Purasi, Paicón, Quiviqica, Baure, Guapa, Boococa, Tubasi, Puizoca, Zibaca, Quimomeca, Quitema, Napeca, Paunaca, Cusica, Tapacura, Tau, Tanipica, etc. — from whose fusion the "Chiquitano" people would later emerge. After the Jesuits' expulsion from Spanish territory in 1767, the region was almost forgotten (except by the new slave raiders). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the area was plunged into poverty and the old towns were reduced to ruins. To add to the desolation, the entire territory was one of the scenes of the Chaco War (1932-1935) between Bolivia and Paraguay. The

slow socioeconomic recovery, which is still underway, began during the second half of the last century.

The music

Information about the music of the Chiquitano groups before the arrival of the Jesuits is scarce. The priests themselves did not pick up their songs or any other trait of their musical life, although they could have done it. However, by reading through the general descriptions of indigenous peoples and their customs provided in their accounts, it seems that music played a very important role in these societies. According to Father Charlevoix:

The day started with music until the sun had dried the dew (...)

At sunset, most people went to rest, but young people spent much of the night dancing to the sound of the instruments.



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Father Fernandez (quoted by Strack) wrote that aboriginal marriage ceremonies included many activities, wedding receptions lasting two or three days, and lots of music. Music was also present in the game of archery, the *huitoró* ball game and the game of war *butucú*; the latter, according to Bayo, would have been played in the main squares of the Jesuit missions.

Two centuries later, in 1948, Métraux listed the instruments he found among the Chiquitano:

Flutes (with one or two fingering holes), panpipes and anklets made of fruit husks, gourd rattles, and whistles are the only musical instruments mentioned by our sources.

The Chiquitano traditional instruments broadly fall into two categories: the *buxikia busúkiro* (wind instruments)

Image 01 [prev. page].

Wind instruments of the Chiquitano.

[Photo: grandespiedrasynandu.blogspot.com].

and the *buxikia musimúnunu* (percussion instruments). They have also adopted a number of Western elements, e.g. the Baroque instruments introduced by the Jesuits (especially the violin) as well as the guitar and the accordion played by Bolivian mestizo folk groups.

Chiquitano musical ensembles are divided into two major groups: the church's *capilla musical* ("musical chapel"), derived from the Jesuit musical ensembles, which play liturgical music, and the traditional ensembles featuring flutes and drums. In a single village there can be several of the latter: they play orally transmitted instrumental music, and do so in community festivals, in front of particular audiences and at the *cabildos* (sort of village councils).

The following pages will focus on the instruments used in traditional ensembles.

Wind instruments

The *buxikia busúkiro* include the transverse flutes *buxíkh* and *tyopìx*, the vertical flute *natíraixh*, the panpipes *yoresóx* and *yoresoka*, and the horn *sananáx*.

Buxíkh

Also written *buxixh* or *burrirr*, it is a transverse flute, about 2.5 cm in diameter and 45 cm in length. It has 6 frontal fingering holes, 2.5 cm apart: the first one is usually 20-25 cm away from the embouchure hole, while the latter is located 5-10 cm from the distal end.

The flute is made with a straight piece of *tacuara* cane (called *bokíkh* or *bokimia*, depending on its thickness). The pipe is open at the distal end and closed by a natural





node (*cañoto* or *nuschakix*) or a stopper of beeswax (*yopox*) at the proximal end. In recent times, PVC pipes have also been used to make these instruments.

The tuning is not tempered and the tonic note can vary from instrument to instrument (usually around E). In the unlikely event that the flute is tuned according to a diatonic scale, semitones can be obtained by partially closing the fingering holes.

Image 02 [prev. page].

Buxíxh.

[Photo: conar.senip.gob.ar/].

Image 03.

Buxíxh.

[Photo: conar.senip.gob.ar/].

The *buxíxh* is probably a reproduction of the European military flute (*fife*), since this kind of aerophone is not usually found among the traditional instruments of the Bolivian lowlands. Nowadays it is the main, leading instrument within the Chiquitano musical panorama. According to some informants, in the old times it could only be used between May and August. Today it can be played all year round, without restrictions, and performing all kind of music: from Christian religious compositions to indigenous traditional songs.

The *buxíxh* player is called *ñaponux buxíxh*, and he is expected to be able to play all the other native wind instruments besides this transverse flute.

Among the Chiquitano of Brazil, the *buxíxh* is considered to be a female instrument and, as in Bolivia, it can be used at any time during the year.

Natiraixh

Also written *natiraix* or *nateraish*, and known as *fifano* or *purísima*, the *natiraixh* is a vertical duct flute. It consists of a straight segment of *tacuara* cane, 2.5 cm in diameter and about 50-55 cm in length, open at both ends; the proximal one has a beeswax stopper that forms the duct. It has 6 fingering holes on the front, and one thumb hole on the back. The first hole is located 25-27 cm away from

Image 04.
Natiraixh.
[Photo: conar.senip.gob.ar/].





the proximal end, and the distance between holes is about 2.5 cm.

As in the case of the *buxíxh*, the tuning and the scale of the *natiraix* is a variable feature from instrument to instrument; the most common tonic note is F. Its name appears to derive from the European fife (in Spanish, *pífano*), and it was probably introduced in the area by the Jesuits.

This flute can only be used for a limited period of the year: namely, from the festivity of the Purísima Concepción (December 8, hence the name *purísima*) until Ash Wednesday, including Carnival time.

Brazilian Chiquitanos consider the *natiraixh* to be a masculine instrument and play it at Carnival, as a sort of "in-

Image 05 [prev. page].

Natiraixh.

[Photo: conar.senip.gob.ar/].

termediary" between the living human beings and other entities (animals, the dead...) who, according to the traditional beliefs, take part in the celebration.

Yoresóx

Also written *ioresox* or *ioresorr*, this instrument is commonly known as *seku-seku* or *secusecu* — a term deriving from the word *siku*, the popular double-row panpipe of the Andean highlands, with which the *yoresóx* has some similarities.

It consists of 6 pipes of different length arranged in two rows of 3, each row tied up with *purubixh* cotton thread; the instrument produces six pitches, distributed alternately between both sets of tubes. Known as "mother" and "daughter" or "male" and "female", each row is played by a different musician. The smallest tube of the "daughter" or "female" row is about 10 cm long, while the largest of the "mother" or "male" row can be 20 cm in length. All the pipes are made from thin-walled cane segments, and are usually 1-1.5 cm in diameter.



The *yoresóx* can only be played from Ash Wednesday to St. Peter's Day (June 29). It appears mainly during the processions of Easter Sunday, being played between *compadres*.

Some sources quote it as *navotich*; Snethlage recorded its name as *abō ísch*. Among the Chiquitano of Brazil is also called *yoresóXH*.

Yoresoma

Also written *ioresoma*. Other possible names are *yoresoka* or *ioresoka*, and *yoresomanka* or *ioresomanka*. It is a single-row panpipe with 6 thin-walled cane pipes

Image 06 [prev. page].

Yoresóx.

[Photo: conar.senip.gob.ar/].

Images 07 and 08.

Yoresóx.

[Photos: conar.senip.gob.ar/].



held together by cotton thread, whose length ranges from 10 to 30 cm.

The *yoresoma* is performed on very few occasions, and usually solo. It can be played from All Saints' Day (November 1) to the Feast of the Immaculate Concepcion (December 8), and sometimes to the end of the year. In places like the town of San Lorenzo (municipality of San José de Chiquitos), musicians combine a *yoresoma*, which play the part of the "mother" row (*nipiapax yoresomanka*), with a "daughter"-like row half the length of the "mother" that sounds about an octave above.

Tyopix

Also written *tyoopix*, or even *topüs* or *topurr*. In some sources it appears as *requinto* or *requintada*. It is a trans-



Images 09 and 10.
Yoresóx and *yoresoma*.
[Photos: Sugiyama T.].



verse flute so hardly used that in some sources has been listed as no longer in existence.

It is made of two consecutive segments of thick *tacuara* cane (*bokimia*), sometimes slightly bent, about 2.5-3 cm in diameter and 90-100 cm in length (as long as the musician's arm). The proximal end is kept closed by a natural node of the cane, while the distal is open. It has a mouth hole, and two square or, more rarely, circular fingering holes, towards the distal end, about 80 and 85 cm away from the proximal.

Much of the information about the *tyoopix*'s construction, use and repertoire has been lost. One strand of oral tradition states that it was played between July and October, during the corn harvest. Others point out that its name would mean "*chaqueo* time", i.e., when trees are cut down in a forest; it would have been used to warn

Image 11 [prev. page].

Yoresoma.

[Photo: conar.senip.gob.ar/].

workers as the tree is falling, or even to say farewell to the trees that had just been cut. In the first half of the nineteenth century, D'Orbigny found that the instrument was played during the *guatoroch* or *huitoró* ball game, staged at Carnival:

At three, a wild music announced the arrival of the players. Several musicians accompanied those Indians: some beating small drums; others shaking a gourd full of pebbles; others playing whistles or long flute-like bamboos, with two holes bored at the end, which made the musician stretch his arm in order to extract sounds.

The flutes that have survived to this day can produce up to three notes within an interval of a second (e.g. F-F#-G).

Sananáx

Also written *sanana*, and sometimes called *sibibix*, it is a short horn made with a segment of *tacuara* cane 30 cm



long and 0.5-3 cm in diameter, open at the proximal end and closed at the distal one. About half way through the pipe, it is perforated with a hole. On its upper side, a dry *tatu's* tail (armadillo) is inserted, glued and secured to the cane with "black wax" (beeswax mixed with charcoal). This tail acts as a resonance bell.

The *sananáx* produces a single sound, with a timbre similar to that of some natural trumpets from the Bolivian lowlands (e.g. the *caña chapaca* of Tarija) or certain horns from the Andean highlands (e.g. the *pututu*).

It accompanies the *natiraixh*, and is used only during the Carnival. Apparently, it is part of the cultural heritage of a particular Chiquitano subgroup, the *paunax*, being unknown among the other subgroups, e.g. the *monkox*.

Image 12 [prev. page].

Tyopix.

[Photo: conar.senip.gob.ar/].



Image 13.

Performer of *sananáx*.

[Photo: Da Silva (2015)].



Percussion instruments

The *buxikia musimúnunu* include two membranophones: the *taboxiox* and the *tampora*.

Taboxiox

Also written *taborriorr*, and commonly known as *tamborita*. It is a drum with a body 100 cm in diameter and about 15 cm high, made from a hollowed out piece of oak, and equipped with a decompression hole. This last feature suggests that the instrument has a European origin: probably an adaptation of the old marching snare drums.

It has two heads, each one sewn over a reed hoop. The upper (batter) head is made of *urina* (*Mazama*

Image 14 [prev. page].

Sananáx.

[Photo: Sugiyama T.].

gouazoubira) or goat skin; sometimes two or three skins are put together so that the head becomes thicker and more resistant. The lower (resonant) head (called *tarisix*, literally "buttocks") is made of *marimono* (*Ateles paniscus*) or *gato de monte* (*Felis colocolo*) skin, and must be very thin. Finally, a cowhide snare (*prima* or *niprimax*) is stretched across the outer surface of the lower head.

It is said that *gato de monte* skin does not lose its sound, and that it resonates on sunny and rainy days alike; at present, however, commercial plastic heads are often used to produce a larger volume of sound.

The skins are stretched and secured over the body by two rims of about 3 cm wide, made of very flexible *bi* or *nóbish* (*Genipa americana*) wood, tied together by *tesadores* (strong cords made of *urina* skin) that zigzag from one to the other.

The instrument is played hanging to one side from the drummer's shoulder, as in (military) parades, using a pair

of sticks, between 25 and 45 cm in length, called *palitoques* or *masimunutux*.

To learn how to play the *taboxiox*, a mock instrument is used, called *jipurí*. It is made with a palm leaf by lifting off a strip of fiber from its central rib, and holding this strip above the leaf surface with the help of two small wooden pieces for it can be hit with drumsticks.

Tampora

Also written *tampóora*, it is a swallow drum with a wooden body of 150 cm in diameter and 20-30 cm high, equipped with a decompression hole. Like the *taboxiox*, it might be a membranophone of European origin, probably derived from the military band bass drum.

It has two heads made of thick *huaso* (*Mazama americana*) skin, secured by rims (*sobrearos*) 4 cm wide joined together by *tesadores* of cowhide. It is struck with a wooden stick, 32 cm long and with a head of about 10 cm in diameter.

During the performance, the musician usually remains standing with the bass drum hanging to one side from his shoulder, but he can also be seated and place it on his knees, a position that allows him to vary the sound pressing the skin with his elbow.

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Pictures

Picture 01.

<http://grandespiedrasynandu.blogspot.com.es/2010/05/vitrina-con-instrumentos-musicales-pre.html>

Picture 02.

http://conar.senip.gob.ar/pawtucket/media/SUR/images/5/6/0/46267_ca_object_representations_media_56034_large.jpg

Picture 03.

http://conar.senip.gob.ar/pawtucket/media/SUR/images/5/4/9/22913_ca_object_representations_media_54941_large.jpg

Picture 04.

http://conar.senip.gob.ar/pawtucket/media/SUR/images/5/4/9/46172_ca_object_representations_media_54940_large.jpg

Picture 05.

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Picture 06.

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Picture 07.

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Picture 08.

http://conar.senip.gob.ar/pawtucket/media/SUR/images/5/4/9/37615_ca_object_representations_media_54939_large.jpg

Picture 11.

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