

QUETZALCÓATL

Art Form: Music

Style: Traditional

Culture: Mexico & Latin America

MEET THE ARTIST:

Dedicated to presenting the richness and variety of traditional Latin American music from its indigenous roots to depictions of contemporary life, **Quetzalcóatl** (pronounced ketz-al-KO-watt) celebrates the depth and history of Mexican and Latin American culture that is still very much alive and evolving. Group members include director Alfredo López Mondragón, Luis Hiraes, Hugo Macario; Luis Felipe González, Ignacio "Nacho" Marquez, and Delfino Vicente Guerrero. *Quetzalcóatl's* musicians have the impressive ability to change instruments just as they change among different Latin styles. This extraordinary ensemble of Latin Americans has delighted audiences in major concert venues throughout Mexico, the U.S., Canada and Europe. Based in the United States and Mexico, the group has also performed their music for television and films. *Quetzalcóatl* takes its name from the Aztec and Toltec God of wind. This plumed serpent, whose symbol embodies the basic energies of the universe, is considered to be the master of life, a compassionate teacher and unifier of different peoples.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

Quetzalcóatl's repertoire covers a range of musical genres from a wide geographical area. This encompasses Mexico, South America and the Caribbean, including all the regions of Mexico (Veracruz, La Huasteca, Jalisco/Michoacán, Guerrero, Oaxaca), as well as music from Venezuela, Cuba, Argentina, Peru and Colombia. Part of the authentic performance of Latin American traditional styles involves the use of instruments indigenous to each musical type. *Quetzalcóatl* treats its audiences to a wide range of authentic Latin musical styles. As a result of this diversity, their instrumentation is complex. Each member sings and plays many different acoustic and stringed instruments, often switching instruments within one piece. These include numerous folkloric/traditional guitar types including *guitarra quinta huapangera*, *jarana* and the tiny *mosquito*. Also included are a variety of regional harps, a multitude of folkloric percussion instruments and modern acoustic/electric bass. As they share their craft, they stress the powerful relationship between the African, Spanish and Latin American cultures that came together to create this music.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Today's Latin American music is based on three fundamental cultural roots: African, Spanish and Indian. In this music, they are so intertwined as to be inseparable. Before arriving in the New World, Spanish music had already contained elements of African rhythms as a result of earlier North African cultural dominance. Complex rhythm combinations of 2, 3 and 6-beat patterns, known as *sesquiáltera*, typify many of the selections in *Quetzalcóatl's* repertoire. This characteristic demonstrates the African influence in Spanish music. These traits were further elaborated by African musicians and their descendants living in Latin America. Cuba, Venezuela, Peru and the coastal areas of Mexico were most influenced by African styles.

Before the Spanish Conquest of the Americas, indigenous Indian music was complex and varied in its own right. After the Spaniards arrived, they began teaching Spanish musical styles to the indigenous and later the *mestizo* people, adding more elements to that complexity. Much of contemporary music identified as indigenous is actually part of the legacy of Spanish and African styles performed by Indians. In *Quetzalcóatl's* performance, the indigenous influence in *mestizo* music is identified by the vocal styles, the extensive use of animal themes as well as certain dance steps in the songs.

However *Quetzalcóatl's* music is not limited to traditional music. They also play new works incorporating the traditional styles. In this way, the musical legacy of this region continues to grow. The historical heritage of Latin American culture is still only partially known. As recently as 2006 ruins of an ancient pyramid built by the *Teotihuacan* culture (which flourished 1700 years ago) was unearthed providing additional evidence that establishes more about these cultures. Just as scientists continue to search for new information, so do the musicians of *Quetzalcóatl* strive to uncover and share musical riches from Mexico and other Latin American countries.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What words come to mind that describe the music of *Quetzalcóatl*?
- *Quetzalcóatl* plays many different musical instruments. Which was your favorite and why? Least favorite? Why?
- What instrument did you find to be different from others that you have seen or heard?
- What one fact about Latin American music made an impression on you?
- What feelings or moods did the music inspire in you?

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - HISTORY/SOC. STUDIES:

Quetzalcóatl plays music and instruments from all over Latin America and the Caribbean. Many of these instruments, as well as much of the music that is played on them, have roots in Africa. Brought over in the slave trade, the music found its way into the indigenous cultures of the Americas. African music had a similar impact on the birth of jazz, rock and hip-hop in the United States. Those influences include strong rhythmic patterns, improvisation and call-and-response.

On a large map of the world, locate the various Mexican states (especially the northern states where Norteño and Banda music comes from) as well as Cuba, Venezuela, Argentina, Peru and Columbia. Next find the countries in West Africa, where many of the slaves came from. Then, locate North Africa and Spain in southern Europe. Trace the various paths that the music had to take to get from North Africa to Spain and then to the New World (Americas) and then from West Africa to the Americas. Discuss your thoughts on how these cultures came together to create what we call Mexican and Latin American Music. Discuss how this influences music written today.



Legend:

- Artistic perception
- Creative expression
- Historical & cultural context
- Aesthetic valuing
- Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- Have students bring in an assortment of plastic containers with lids to use as shakers. Then fill boxes or jars with a variety of materials such as rice, small stones, sand, gravel, dried beans, marbles, paper clips, etc. Ask students to place small amounts of one type of material in each shaker. Encourage them to experiment with shaking them to perceive the sound made by the different types of material. This project can be connected to a graph where they scientifically listen to each and fill out such categories as loud to soft sounds (dynamics), crisp to dull sounds (texture), shortest-lasting to longest-lasting sounds (duration), highest to lowest sounds (pitch), etc. Have them compare their graphs and discuss the results, as well as the way different people perceived the sounds.
- Teach the students a Mexican or Latin folk song, or bring in a recording. Help them clap simple rhythmic patterns to accompany the song. If you made the shakers described above, use them as rhythmic instruments for this activity.
- Many of the instruments played by *Quetzalcóatl* were fashioned from material found in the environment. Ask the students to look at home and at school for both natural and man-made objects that can make sound. Have them bring their objects to the classroom. Let each student demonstrate and explain how the sound is produced. Then, challenge them to place each instrument in one of the following categories: wind, string or percussion instruments. Have them justify their choices.
- Read a Latin American folk tale. Afterwards, ask students to name aspects of the tale that refer to customs, beliefs, costumes, food, symbols, wisdom, music, instruments and language that relate to traditional culture. Discuss how folk stories serve as vehicles for preserving traditional customs, wisdom and values.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Olsen, Dale A. & Daniel Edward Sheehy, eds. *The Garland Handbook of Latin American Music*. Garland Publishing, New York, NY: 2000.

Quetzalcóatl album:

<http://www.lunablanca.com/mercado/music/quetz/album.html>

INSTRUMENTS AND VOCABULARY: QUETZALCÓATL

<i>bongo drum:</i>	A pair of small, connected drums in two sizes that are struck with the fingers. Afro-Cuban origin.
<i>cajn:</i>	Percussion instrument of Peruvian origin. Wooden box.
<i>claves:</i>	Two short wooden cylinders which are struck together. Afro-Cuban origin.
<i>cuatro Venezolano:</i>	A small four-string guitar from Venezuela.
<i>course:</i>	A course is a pair of adjacent strings tuned to unison or an octave and usually plucked together as if a single string, in musical instruments such as the lute and <i>vihuela</i> .
<i>electric bass:</i>	A contemporary electronically amplified string bass.
<i>guitarra quinta huapangera:</i>	Larger than a Spanish guitar, this instrument produces a deep bass sound. It has eight strings in five courses. Its name is derived from the rhythm called “huapango.”
<i>guitarra sexta:</i>	A traditional classical guitar.
<i>guitarron:</i>	A very large bass guitar used in Michoacan, Jalisco and Colima, Mexico. It has a large convex back.
<i>harp:</i>	The harps used are variations of harps whose precursors were found in ancient Mediterranean, Egyptian and Irish civilizations. The 16th century form was brought to Latin America from Spain during the Colonial period.
<i>jarana Huasteca:</i>	A small five-string guitar from the Huasteca region of Northeastern Mexico. Similar to ukelele.
<i>jarana jarocho:</i>	A small eight- or ten-string guitar from Veracruz, Mexico. The instrument is produced in three sizes: <i>jarana mosquito</i> (first), <i>jarana segunda</i> (second) and <i>jarana tercera</i> (third). All three types are used by the group at various times. Similar to the size of a ukelele.
<i>Los Llanos:</i>	The tropical savanna plains of Venezuela, a source of the joropo.
<i>maracas:</i>	Usually played in pairs, this instrument is fashioned from seed-filled gourds (or gourd shapes) which produce a rattling sound. Originally used by indigenous people in the Caribbean basin, it is closely related to a type of African rattle.
<i>mestizo:</i>	A person of mixed racial ancestry, especially of mixed European and Native American ancestry
<i>mosquito:</i>	A very small ten-string guitar, smallest of the <i>jarana jarocho</i> family. Similar to the size of a ukelele.
<i>pandero:</i>	A hexagonal tambourine from Veracruz, Mexico, decorated with brightly colored ribbon.
<i>requinto Jarocho:</i>	A small four-string guitar from southern Veracruz. It is plucked with a cowhorn pick and is used to play <i>contrapunto</i> , counter melody to the harp.
<i>sesquiáltera</i>	A rhythmic ratio of 3:2 (also called hemiola)
<i>Spanish guitar:</i>	A standard six-string guitar. It is the same as the <i>guitarra sexta</i> .
<i>tambor Huacana:</i>	A large drum from northern Mexico.
<i>tamborita:</i>	A small military-style drum from Guerrero, Mexico.
<i>trés Cubano:</i>	A standard size guitar with three courses of two steel strings. It is a lead melody instrument and national instrument of Cuba and is also played on the Gulf Coast of Mexico.
<i>vihuela:</i>	A medium sized, five-string guitar-like instrument with a short neck and a convex back that is reminiscent of the lute. It is most often played in mariachi groups.
<i>violin:</i>	Of European origin, the standard instrument has four strings and is played by bowing or plucking.