

Yma Sumac - Inca Taqui (1953)

Written by bluelover

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A1 *K'arawi (Planting Song)* A2 *Cumbe-Maita (Calls Of The Andes)* A3 *Wak'al (Cry)*
A4 *Incacho (Royal Anthem)* B1 *Chuncho (The Forest Creatures)* B2 *Lulla Mak'ta (Andean Don Juan)*
B3 *Malaya! (My Destiny)* B4 *Ripui (Farewell)* Yma Sumac - vocals Moises Vivanco And His Peruvians - orchestra Moises Vivanco - composer and conductor

Inca Taqui is the third album of the so-called Queen of the Andes, Peruvian singer Yma Sumac (1922–2008). It is released in 1953 on Capitol Records. The eight tracks of Inca Taqui are solely envisioned and concocted by one writer, Yma Sumac's husband Moisés Vivanco (1918–1998). This fact is curiously embossed at the cover, for his face is featured next to Sumac's on the original artwork of the 10" release.

The front cover of later re-issues differ and strike off Vivanco completely; marital crises led to the divorce of the couple and Vivanco's artwork-related disappearance. Be that as it may, his role as a producer and bandleader becomes much clearer as the back cover also mentions Moisés Vivanco And His Peruvians. This mixed backing choir thankfully does not only accentuate Sumac's otherworldly vocal range, but leads a life of its own, a dynamic particularity that elevates this release and could already be observed on the first album in lesser fashion.

Two stylistic focal points make Inca Taqui very special and potentially exciting. Firstly, Vivanco uses a – back then shiny new – trick to ennoble the featured material, namely the treatment of authentication: the liner notes state that Vivanco was inspired by Incan folklore and used its characteristic traits in each of the compositions. This fake approach concerning Pagan rituals and occultations became en vogue a few years later when Martin Denny's Exotica successfully kicked off the faux-Polynesian setting in 1957. Secondly, as a result, it so happens that Vivanco's songs are much more reduced. There are orchestra strings, horns, flutes and exotic percussion on Inca Taqui as well, but one stylistic coup de main consists of the reliance on

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Latinized acoustic guitars. Three tracks out of eight exclusively feature Yma Sumac's vocals and a few guitar riffs, with the occasional use of the backing choir and a few shakers or drums. The results are as intimate as they show the real power of Sumac's vocal range. Depending on the listener's viewpoint, this deliberate lack of additional instruments may be Inca Taqui's biggest weakness or its unique selling point. Luckily, there are carved out orchestral pieces on here as well, both of the mysterious and the sun-dried kind. Read more about them in the following paragraphs.

The album starts off with K'Arawi (Planting Song), and right from the get-go does the particular arrangement-related particularity of Moisés Vivanco come into play. The dusky warmth of the guitar and Yma Sumac's ethereal voice in wraithlike realms is all there is at the beginning. This reduced setting works marvelously well, for even if Sumac's voice is most impressive when she fights the large orchestra, the minimal approach provides a great change of pace. Of particular success are the sudden vocal bursts of the female backing choir and a lead violin. The ensuing sound flashes in glaring colors, bedazzles the listener who remains beguiled. I am awestruck for sure. This alienating blast is one of the earliest examples of Space-Age with anything else but vocals and a violin. And that is it. This enthralling, totally enigmatic power ballad has not lost anything of its magic. Vivanco is capable of much complexer arrangements, but he decides to start things slowly in order to trick the listener into thinking of K'Arawi as a truthful song of Incan heritage. Naturally, it is not.

The following Cumbe-Maita (Calls Of The Andes) is entirely different and proves its densely layered nature immediately, for a glissando brass flourish meshes with a rhythm guitar, shawm-like trumpets, gossamer strings and Yma Sumac's striking vocal range. Alto flutes, timpani and bongos as well as interspersed guitars round off this mercurial song in 6/8 time, its mood being cautiously solemn and pompous. While Wak'Al (Cry) repeats the formula of the opener but features both the backing choir prominently in adjacency to Sumac as well as sudden bone-crushing, thumping drums next to the guitar strings, Incacho (Royal Anthem) opens the instrumental pool once again by injecting Chinese gongs and Far Eastern tone sequences on both the bass flute and the strings. Sumac almost chirps along to the amicable majesty of the panorama whose wideness is astonishing and makes it my top pick of the album. The composition later morphs into a celebratory Balkan-style Folk interlude with male hey! chants and the inclusion of bongos and tambourins. Incacho ends with polyphonous flutes and the feeling of having listened to a truly exotic song that is less about acidity and shock-and-awe operations than a contemplative look over the Andes. In short: my favorite!

Side B opens with Chuncho (The Forest Creatures), and it succeeds big time thanks to Vivanco's onomatopoeic mimicry arrangement with warbled bird-resembling paradisiac flutes and plucked violins in high tone regions, a deliberately murky guitar aorta whose seemingly genteel trait changes its impetus at higher volume levels, and Yma Sumac's similarly

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opaque-arcane vocals next to rattling snake-like maracas. This is yet another fantastic piece, for it is enormously mystifying and acroamatic. The feeling of being in an enchanted forest is maintained throughout its runtime. A mellow piece of hatched colors. Llulla Mak'Ta (Andean Don Juan) is the festive dance take of the album, comprising of fast bongo-fueled rhythms, cheerful chants, mellifluous alto flute melodies with additional effervescent bubbles and the Sun Virgin's vocals which reside in a stable-streamlined range this time, with the Asian reed fanfares turning out to be another exotic element that does not seem to fit in this setting on paper (let alone in the Andes themselves), but works really well during the transformation of this perceived hodgepodge into music.

It is Malaya (My Destiny) that opens with an overly bold Balearic Flamenco guitar which I simply cannot link to the Andes and the overarching sound of the album, no matter how hard I try. The ensuing heated atmosphere with handclaps, Sumac's chants and the threnodic backing choir make it a fitting inclusion in terms of the way the instruments are set up, but the given tonal range and hot-blooded timbre are literally too far off, namely rooted in Mediterranean climes and hence all too commonplace. A rare misstep. The outro Ripui (Farewell) is a saccharine ditty with sweet flute and string couples and the deepest chants Yma Sumac has to offer. The mood is tongue-in-cheek and very bright, almost comically so. Again, I am not particularly fond of this tune, but dig the fact that it is no lamenting farewell, but a blithesome one.

Inca Taqui is Yma Sumac's often overlooked sophomore album, and I think I can pinpoint the reason. It has to be about Moisés Vivanco's exclusive input. This is not a good or even logical reason per se, for he also orchestrated the following 10" bestseller Legend Of The Sun Virgin. But whereas the debut featured three composers, one of them the soon-to-be mighty Les Baxter, the arrangements on Inca Taqui are purposely thinned out in order to strengthen their faux-Incan heritage and humbleness. Maybe you disagree with me, but Yma Sumac's albums are not solely about her voice, although her achievements in this regard make up the vast majority of each album's magic. I for one also dig the foreign instruments and mystery-laden tone sequences next to the well-known inclusion of strings and horns. In this regard, Inca Taqui underwhelms, but its lack turns into strength, for Mrs. Sumac never sounded more intimate throughout the 50's than on this album.

The focus on the guitar itself is not questionable, but some Spanish tonalities and riffs sure are, probably the rem(a)inders of the Spanish Conquest? Regardless of these minor flaws, each and every of the compositions is again brand-new and shiny, carving out the legendary status of the self-proclaimed Queen of the Andes further. My favorites remain Incacho with its orchestral setting that is surprisingly balmy and unbelievably lofty and wide, as if one looked over a gorgeous mountain range, and the forest-depicting Chuncho which caters to a different kind of listeners, namely those who want their Exotica music to be somewhat jinxed, bewitched and mysterious. The mimicry and the instrumental chirps make it a gorgeous green-tinted tune. Inca

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Taqui is definitely worth your while, especially so since its CD re-issue is coupled with Sumac's debut and hallmark Voice Of The Xtabay. Both albums present pre-Exotica works with soft Space-Age slivers. Definitely recommended, even to those people who aren't too fond of Sumac's jumpy and ever-shifting chants. ---ambientexotica.com

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