



The Inevitable Bandstand: The State Band of Oaxaca and the Politics of Sound (The Mexican Experience)

Charles V. Heath

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In the hands of the state, music is a political tool. The Banda de Música del Estado de Oaxaca (State Band of Oaxaca, BME), a civil organization nearly as old as the modern state of Oaxaca itself, offers unique insights into the history of a modern political state.

In *The Inevitable Bandstand*, Charles V. Heath examines the BME's role as a part of popular political culture that the state of Oaxaca has deployed in an attempt to bring unity and order to its domain. The BME has always served multiple functions: it arose from musical groups that accompanied military forces as they trained and fought; today it performs at village patron saint days and at Mexico's patriotic celebrations, propagating religions both sacred and civic; it offers education in the ways of liberal democracy to its population, once largely illiterate; and finally, it provides respite from the burdens of life by performing at strictly diversionary functions such as serenades and Sunday matinees.

In each of these government-sanctioned roles, the BME serves to unify, educate, and entertain the diverse and fragmented elements within the state of Oaxaca, thereby mirroring the historical trajectory of the state of Oaxaca and the nation of Mexico from the pre-Hispanic and Spanish colonial eras to the nascent Mexican republic, from a militarized and fractured young nation to a consolidated postrevolutionary socialist state, and from a predominantly Catholic entity to an ostensibly secular one.

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