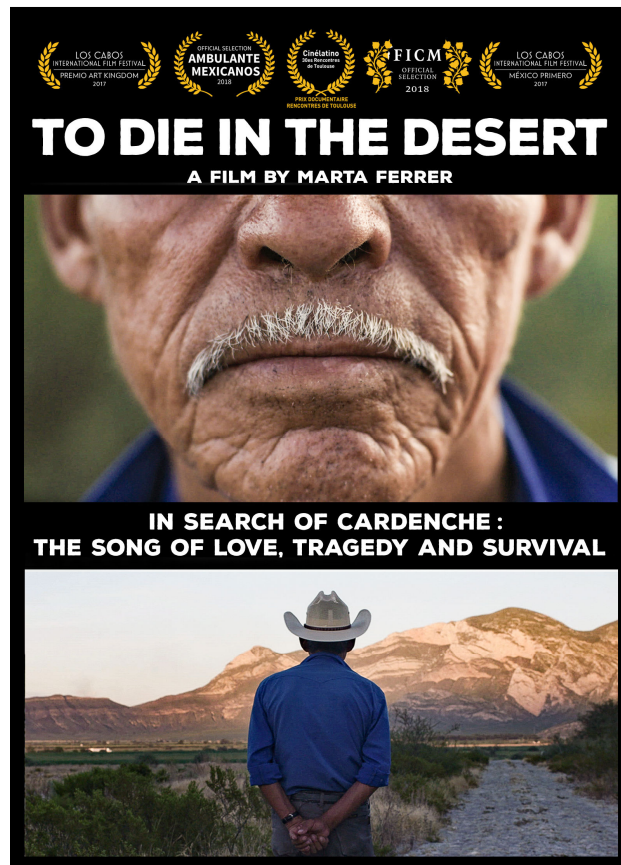




TO DIE IN THE DESERT (A MORIR A LOS DESIERTOS)



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Sapioriz

Sapioriz is a small town in the state of Durango, in northwest Mexico. Durango is one of Mexico's largest states. It borders Chihuahua, Coahuila, Zacatecas, Jalisco, Nayarit, and Sinaloa. The state of Durango is one of the coldest states in Mexico, and it has a low average rainfall. Sapioriz is a semi-desert area.

About Cardenche Music

Cardenche music is a traditional form of music that is sung without the accompaniment of musical instruments. Singing without instrumental accompaniment is a musical style known as a cappella, and can be done in a number of different ways. For example, some a cappella groups use their voices to mimic the sound of instruments. In a Cardenche music group, there are traditionally three singers, with each one singing a different melody, all at the same time, and in harmony. Music where there are multiple voices singing at the same time is known as polyphonic. Another distinctive feature of Cardenche music is that it often features drawn-out melodies and has long pauses within the music. In traditional Cardenche music, singers often drink a distilled alcohol called sotol while they sing.

Many cardenche songs are full of themes of sadness and suffering. Even the name of this musical tradition is related to pain. Cardenche comes from the name of a type of cactus. This cactus has thorns that slide into the skin easily, but hurt a lot when you try to take them out. Cardenche singers say that their music is the same as the thorns of the cactus. They explain that because they are singing about painful topics, sometimes the music hurts when it comes out. But like the cactus thorn, they insist that this painful music does have to come out of them because only then will they feel relief.



The Origins of Cardenche Music

According to director Marta Ferrer, the pain and suffering in Cardenche music comes from real-life experiences. Many of the parents and grandparents of today's generation of Cardenche singers worked in the cotton fields near their village. They were forced to work long, hard hours just so that their families could survive. They talked about their experiences in the Cardenche songs that they sang. Ferrer says, "This singing was a reflection of the state of their souls, of an entire community." As a result of the sadness and suffering that these people went through, many Cardenche songs are also full of sadness and suffering.

However, singing about their pain was a cathartic act for the Cardenche singers. Ferrer calls it, "A relief as it were. A sigh. A venting off." NPR writer Jasmine Garsd stresses that Cardenche singers don't care about the opinions of the audience because singing is a personal experience. She explains that they sang because they felt compelled to do so. She says, "Cardenche is simply a physiological necessity; the need to expel pain through song."

Cardenche Today

In recent years, Cardenche music and the singers of Sapioriz have received some attention in other parts of Mexico and even internationally. On February 9, 2008, the Cardenche group called Los Cardencheros de Sapioriz was awarded the Mexican National Prize for Arts and Sciences in the category of Popular Arts and Traditions. This is a monetary prize awarded by the Mexican government. As a result of interest in their music, the singers were able to perform throughout Mexico. Antonio Valles, one of the singers in the group comments, "They used to mock us (in the village) because we were singing our songs. But we've been to places you can't imagine, we've crossed almost the entire Mexico touring, eating well and sleeping in beds we'd never slept in before."



Culture Trip contributor Stephen Woodman notes that Cardenche music has even been incorporated into the music of a few well-known musicians such as folk musician Juan Pablo Villa, Helado Negro (a musician born in Florida), and Grammy award winner Lila Downs.

A Vanishing Tradition

Many Cardenche songs have been passed on from generation to generation, however despite some recent interest in this tradition, as time passes more and more Cardenche songs are being lost. Medium contributor José Juan Zapata Pacheco, notes that some of this loss has happened gradually over time, as life has changed and the community members live differently. He says, “The previous generation of cardenche singers . . . used to know and sing about eighty songs.” Now, he reports, “The current and last generation, only know and perform a half of this repertoire.”

Another reason for the loss is that many young people in the current generation are simply not very interested in Cardenche music. Pacheco explains that Cardenche survives by being passed along from generation to generation, however he says, the next link in the chain is broken. Garsd also worries about the future of this musical tradition. She warns, “It’s . . . in danger of extinction.”



Additional Resources

- Manuel Betancourt, "This Moving Documentary Is an Homage to Mexico's A Cappella Singers Who Keep Cardenche Alive," Remezcla, November 21, 2017. <http://remezcla.com/features/film/a-morir-a-los-desiertos-los-cabos-film-festival>
- Jasmine Garsd, "Latin Roots: Canto Cardenche, The Sound of Sorrow," NPR, May 30, 2013. <https://www.npr.org/2013/05/30/187046934/latin-roots-canto-cardenche-the-sound-of-sorrow>
- José Juan Zapata Pacheco, "Cardenche Resonances," Medium, April 30, 2016. <https://medium.com/@jojuzapa/cardenche-resonances-c3c19db06fc4>
- Stephen Woodman, "Canto Cardenche: What to Know About Mexico's Most Sorrowful Singing Tradition," Culture Trip, January 19, 2018. <https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/mexico/articles/canto-cardenche-what-to-know-about-mexicos-most-sorrowful-singing-tradition/>



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