Las Mananitas

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Las Mananitas
Folksong

Informant:
Cassie Thompson is 21 years old and is currently working on her undergraduate degree at Utah State University. She is working towards a major in graphic design with a minor in psychology. Cassie and I have lived together for 3 years after we were randomly placed together as roommates. Cassie was born in Sandpoint, Idaho and moved to Portland, Texas when she was 12 years old. Cassie Thompson is an active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Both of her parents and all of her siblings are practicing members. Cassie’s hobbies include running, working out, reading, photography, and experimenting with photoshop. Cassie is engaged and plans to get married in December to her fiancé, who is also an active member of the LDS church.

Context:
I interviewed Cassie in our living room after having heard her sing Las Mananitas over FaceTime with her family several times. I had first heard her family sing this song together my first semester of college. She was singing to her brother for his birthday. I have since heard her sing the song for every immediate family member’s birthday, including her now fiancé. The living room provided a comfortable, relaxed setting where Cassie was able to sing without restrictions. Her fiancé was present, and was learning the words of the song at the same time as I was.

Las Mananitas is a traditional Mexican song that is sung for the day of your saint. The day of your saint is an important part of the Catholic religion. From Catholic friends the informant knows each person chooses their own saint to watch over them throughout their lives. You celebrate your saint on their assigned day typically with a dinner. Las Mananitas is also sung on Mother’s Day and birthdays in Mexican Homes. It is now more common to hear Feliz Cumpleanos (traditional happy birthday) but many families still sing Las Mananitas as well.

The informant’s family started singing Las Mananitas after the informant and her sister began taking Spanish classes in High School. The informants father had sung the song to them as children, but none of them learned the words. He had first learned the song while serving an LDS Mission in Guadalajara, Mexico. In order to practice their Spanish skills, the Informant’s father taught them Las Mananitas. Over time it became a tradition to sing the song for everyone’s birthday, the same way it would in Traditional Mexican Culture. Living in Portland, Texas, near the Mexico border there is a greater incentive to learn Spanish and adopt cultural practices into family traditions.

Text:
If you google “Las Mananitas” the first version that pops up is the one we use. We use the first three verses until [pauses to sing to herself] felicitarte. Then we skip one and sing the fourth verse that begins with Ya viene.
Estas son las mañanitas
Que cantaba el rey David
Hoy por ser día de tu santo
Te las cantamos a ti

Despierta, mi bien, despierta
Mira que ya amaneció
Ya los pajaritos cantan
La luna ya se metió

Que linda esta la mañana
En que vengo a saludarte
Venimos todos con gusto
Y placer a felicitarte

Ya viene amaneciendo
Ya la luz del día nos día
Levántate de mañana
Mira que ya amaneció

I can try and translate it for you, but I haven’t spoken Spanish in a long time and I don’t remember the English words my ad taught me.

This is the morning
That we sing of King David -as in King David of the bible-
This is the Day of your saints
And we sing of you- or with you- or something like that

Wake up, my love, wake up
Come look at the sunrise
And the birds that sing
And the moon already went down -Chet will you help me-
[informant’s fiancé who served a Spanish speaking LDS mission takes over the translation]
How beautiful is the morning
That I come to see you
We come with happiness
And congratulate you

Now comes the sunrise
And the light of the day you give to us
Wakeup from the morning
Look that the sun rose.

Texture:
Cassie sang the song with joy in her voice, performing it the same way I have heard her perform it with her family. Some notes were sung with loud refrain and others more mildly. As she spoke of the backstory it was apparent that Cassie has pride in her family tradition. She reflected on how her family encourages each other to sing with very little seriousness and sustain on certain words to draw it out. In the past I have seen it performed with grand arm gestures, almost to the point of interpretive dancing.

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