Musical performance is an act of reciprocity between the earthly musician and a sky spirit who may be identified as the supreme deity Tezcatlipoca, the sun, or the Christian dios ‘God’. As repeatedly stated in the songs themselves, the music “entertains” the earthly lords and princes who hear it, just as it “entertains” the supreme spirit. Occasionally there may be a suggestion that the supernatural source initiates the song, which the human musician “answers,” as in Romances 37v:2–6: “The swan goes first, and all the rattles and drums answer him.” But the usual idea is that the singer ‘begins’ or ‘strikes up’ (pehua), and the supernatural source ‘answers’ (nanquilia), as in Cantares 3:19: teoquecholme nechnananquilia in nicuicani ‘the spirit swans are answering me the singer’. (“Swans” are companions of the sun; see TRAN 2.1, 5.5, 16.1.) Or Cantares 35v:14: noncuicapehua nicanaya ye’coya moxochiuh ipalnemoani ‘here I strike up a song, and your flowers arrive, O Life Giver’. Thus the act of “beginning,” or “striking up,” initiates the musical process (see Romances songs VIII, XV, XX, XXV, and XXXIII), as set forth in a sixteenth-century myth of origin, the two surviving versions of which are as follows.

Now, it’s time to be apprised of who this Tezcatlipuca is—whom the Indians consider of great importance, being the reason we’ve spoken of him so frequently. The name is composed of three [terms:] tezcatl, which means ‘mirror’; tlepuca, which in turn is made up of tletl, meaning ‘light’, and puctli, ‘smoke’; and together they form this name Tezcatlipuca, because it is said he always carries a very bright mirror with him and gives off smoke on account of the incense and other aromatic things he carries. It is also said that this
same god created the wind, who appeared as a black figure with a great spine all bloody, a sign of sacrifice, to whom the god Tezcatlipuca said: “Come here, go beyond the ocean to the house of the sun, who has many musicians and trumpeters with him that serve him and sing; among whom are some with three feet, others with ears so large they cover their whole body; and, when you get to the edge of the water, call to my nieces Esacapachtli, which is a turtle, and to Acilmatl, which is half woman, half fish, and to Altcipatli, which is the whale, and tell them to form a bridge for you to cross over; and bring me back from the sun’s house those musicians with their instruments so you can honor me,” and having said this much he took off and was seen no more. Then the wind god went to the edge of the water and called to the ones who have been mentioned, and they came right away and made a bridge, over which he crossed. Seeing him approach, the sun said to his musicians: “Here comes the trickster [le meschant]; nobody answer him, for whoever answers him will go with him.” These aforesaid musicians were dressed in four colors: white, red, yellow, and green. As soon as he arrived, the wind god called out to them, singing; and one of them answered immediately and went off with him and brought the music that they use at the present time in their dances in honor of their gods, the way we do on the pipe organ.

—translated from the French of André Thévet
(Jonghe 1905:32–33), a mid-sixteenth-century version of a lost Spanish original (of 1543 per ibid.: 6)
come out, they put down quail, locusts, butterflies, and snakes, some of them here, some of them there, as they could not determine which way he would come forth; and finally, unable to guess, they consigned all of these to be sacrificed, which in later times was to become a very prevalent custom in front of their idols; and finally the sun did come forth where it was supposed to; but it stopped and wouldn’t go farther. And when the aforesaid gods saw that it wouldn’t travel its course, they decided to send Tlotli [‘falcon’] as their messenger, to tell him, or order him, to travel the course; and he answered that he would not move from the place where he was until they themselves had been put to death and destroyed; and at that reply, which frightened some and made others angry, one of them, named Citli [‘hare’], took a bow and three arrows and shot at the sun, aiming to split his face: the sun ducked and was not hit: he shot another arrow, and the sun dodged, and the same thing happened the third time: and the sun, annoyed, took one of the arrows and shot it back at Citli and split his face [hence the origin of the hare’s split lip?], causing his death. Seeing this, the other gods became discouraged, as it was apparent they could not prevail against the sun: and in despair they resigned themselves to being killed, and they all sacrificed each other by [opening] the breast; and the priest of this sacrifice was Xolotl, who opened their breasts with a large knife, killing them, and then killed himself, and each one bequeathed the clothes that they wore, which were mantles, to their devotees in memory of their devotion and friendship. And thus appeased, the sun ran its course. And these devotees, or servants, of the dead gods encased these mantles in certain pieces of wood, and making a slot or perforation in the wood, they inserted, for a heart, some little green stones and snakeskin and jaguar pelt, and this bundle they called tlaquimilolli, and each one labeled it with the name of the devil who had given him the mantle, and this was the principal idol that they held in great reverence, and they did not esteem the brutish statues of stone or wood that they made as much as they did these. I make mention here of the aforesaid padre, Fray Andrés de Olmos [the compiler of a (now lost) work on mythology used as the author’s source], who found in Tlalmanalco one of these idols wrapped in many mantles to keep it hidden, though these were already half rotted away.

[Book II,] Chapter III. Of how Tezcatlipuca appeared to a man who was his devotee and sent him to the house of the sun. It is said that the men who were devotees of these dead gods, who had left them their mantles as memori-
als, went about with the mantles wrapped around their shoulders, sadly and pensively, looking to see if they could find their gods or if they would appear to them. It is said that the devotee of Tezcatlipuca, who was the principal idol of Mexico, persevering in his devotion, reached the sea coast, where he did appear to him, in three shapes, or forms, and called to him and said, “Come here, you! Since you are such a friend of mine, I want you to go to the house of the sun and bring back singers and instruments so you can make festivities for me, and for this purpose you must call out to the whale, the mermaid, and the turtle, so they can form a bridge that you can walk across.” And so, as the bridge was made, and the sun heard him giving out with a song he happened to be singing, the sun warned the people around him and his servants not to answer the song, because whoever answered would have to go with him. And so it occurred that some of them, finding the song mellifluous, did answer him, and he took them away, together with the [skin] drum they call vevetl and [the log drum known as] the tepunatzli; and this, they say, was the beginning of the festivities and dances that they make for their gods: and the songs they sing in those areitos [sacred dances] they consider to be prayers, performing them in concert with a particular melody [tono] and choreography [meneos], with much concentration and gravity, without any disagreement in the voices or in the dance steps. And they preserve this same synchronization nowadays. But it is much to be advised that they not be allowed to perform the ancient songs, because all of these are filled with memories of idolatry, or be allowed to perform them with diabolical or suspicious insignias which represent the same. And it should be noted, with regard to what has been said above, that the gods killed each other by [opening] the breast, and from this, so they say, came the custom that was later practiced, of killing people as sacrifices, opening the breast with a flint knife and taking out the heart as an offering to their gods.

—translated from the Spanish in Fray Gerónimo de Mendieta's Historia eclesiástica indiana (Mendieta 1971:79–81), a work completed in 1596 (ibid.: xxiii)