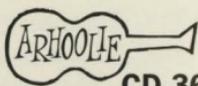


**TEJANO ROOTS:
ORQUESTAS TEJANAS**
THE FORMATIVE YEARS (1947 - 1960)



CD 368

BETO VILLA:

1. Las Delicias (117a) (11/47) - Polka
2. Rosita Vals (148b) (4/49)
3. Mambo #7 (475a) (5/50)
4. Monterrey (151a) (4/49) - Polka
5. Victoria (777b) (5/52) - Polka

ISIDRO LOPEZ:

6. Mala Cara (Oscar Martinez) (1595a) (9/58) - Rock-Ranchera
7. Díganle (1226b) (8/55) - Ranchera
8. Sufriendo y Penando (1775a) (3/18/60) - Ranchera
9. Emoción Pasajera (1832a) (2/60) - Ranchera
10. Miénteme Más (1835b) (2/60) - Bolero
11. La Hiedra (1810b) (2/60) - Danzón

PEDRO BUGARÍN:

12. Los Comentaristas (856b) (1/53) - Polka
13. Chivirico (929a) (6/53) - Mambo
14. Doña Chona (929b) (6/53) - Mambo

BALDE GONZALEZ:

15. No Te Preocupes Por Mí (José V. Franco) (695-b) (1/52) - Bolero
16. Si No Te Amara Tanto (Juan M. Garcia) (695a) (1/52) - Bolero
17. No Esperar Mas De Mí (Balde Gonzalez) (1299) (1/56) - Canción-Blues

MIKE ORNELAS:

18. Blanca Estrella (627b) (6/51) - Danzón

EUGENIO GUTIÉRREZ:

19. Mi Marianita (E. Gutiérrez) (945a) (6/53) - Porro
20. Julia! Julia! (José Verduzco) (697b) (1/52) - Ranchera (Vocal by Delia Gutierrez and Laura Hernandez)

CHRIS SANDOVAL:

21. Porque Eres Tan Mala (1362b) (6/56) - Ranchera (Vocal with John Colorado's Orchestra)

DARIO PÉREZ:

22. Azalea (1517b) (11/57) - Vals

BALDE GONZALEZ:

23. Mi Morena (arr.: Pine Caceres) - Polka

ISIDRO LOPEZ:

24. Nuevo Contrato (Isidro Lopez) (1832a) (2/60) - Ranchera

Numbers in parenthesis refer to original IDEAL catalog numbers on 45, 78 or LP releases. Date in parenthesis refers to approximate date of the original IDEAL recording session.

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Tejano Roots: ORQUESTAS TEJANAS
OVER 60 MINUTES OF CLASSIC TEJANO MUSIC



THE FORMATIVE YEARS WITH

Beto Villa ■ Isidro Lopez ■ Pedro Bugarín ■ Eugenio Gutiérrez
Balde Gonzalez ■ Mike Ornelas ■ Dario Pérez ■ Chris Sandoval

Orquesta Tejana: Its Formative Years

Music is a form of cultural communication, and the most powerful forms of music are those which are intimately connected to a people's fundamental attitudes toward art and life. Such musical forms are said to be "organically" linked to a people's everyday thoughts and actions; they correspond in some way to the most profound cultural rhythms of social life. Moreover, culturally powerful musics are "homegrown," in the sense that performers involved in musical creation are a part of the immediate community. Thus, the community does not passively receive its music from some outside source, but is actively involved in the creation and evaluation of that music.

Among Texas-Mexicans, two homegrown, culturally powerful musics emerged simultaneously in the 1930s, in the form of rival ensembles and their styles. One of them, a folk accordion style strongly associated with the poorer, working-class Texas-Mexicans, or *tejanos*, came to be known as *conjunto* (known outside Texas as *música norteña*). The other, which forms the content of this CD/C, has been known by various names—*orquesta tejana*, (or simply *orquesta*), Tex-Mex, and,

ultimately, *La Onda Chicana* (The Chicano Wave).

Forged in the midst of a society undergoing rapid economic and ideological transformation, *orquesta* played a prominent role in shaping the musical and cultural taste of a group of upwardly-mobile Texas-Mexicans who made their first impact on *tejano* life in the 1930s. This group desired to become more rapidly Americanized and to be accepted by the Anglos, while it tended to look down on the culture of their less assimilated working-class peers. During its formative years—the '40s and '50s—*orquesta* played a particularly strong role in communicating a middle-class alternative to the *conjunto* and working-class culture generally. It was at this historical moment that the performers featured on this CD burst upon the scene.

Orquestas existed among Texas-Mexicans prior to the 1930s, but with few exceptions, these were rudimentary ensembles, the most common consisting of a violin or two, along with guitar accompaniment. Exceptions to this norm were the few genteel orchestras and string bands which existed in larger cities like Laredo and El Paso, but for the most part



Publicity photo of Beto Villa's small band – late 1940s.

the makeup of early Texas-Mexican *orquestas*, such as they were, depended on the availability of often-scarce instruments and musicians (note: *The Tejano Orquesta Tipica: 1920s and 1930s AR/Folklyric CD/C 7014*). In short, early *orquestas* were improvised ensembles that reflected the basic poverty of most Texas-Mexicans. This poverty was at least partly attributable

to the subordinate position that Texas-Mexicans occupied in the system imposed by the Anglo-Americans after 1848, when a defeated Mexico finally acknowledged that Texas and the rest of the American Southwest were no longer part of its territory.

After almost a hundred years of oppression, the Texas-Mexicans finally the

began to acquire some economic and political power in the 1930s, as a small but influential group of upwardly-mobile Texas-Mexicans—lawyers, teachers, small business people, craftsmen, white-collar workers—began to project a spirit of equality with Anglos, while espousing an assimilationist ideology. Historian Mario Garcia has aptly called this group the “Mexican American Generation.” The members of the Generation wanted to be known as Americans, even if hyphenated, as in “Mexican-American.” At the same time, they began to aspire toward American cultural forms, while loosening their ties with more traditional Mexican culture. However, due to the unyielding prejudice of the Anglos, the new Mexican-Americans ultimately settled for partial assimilation and the adoption of an ideology of biculturalism.

It was at this historical juncture, when the upwardly-mobile, bicultural Mexican American Generation first emerged, that the Texas-Mexican *orquesta* made its appearance. Its organization, however, was largely influenced by musical developments in both Mexico and the United States, where the modern dance orchestra had recently come into its own. The Texas-Mexican version was merely following the trend.

But being situated at the border

between two distinct cultures, the Texas-Mexican *orquesta*, like its bicultural creators, inevitably took on a dual (bi-musical) character. By performing music associated with Mexico and Latin America (including that of the *conjunto*) *orquestas* kept alive the *tejanos'* ethnic roots; by performing music associated with American dance bands, they satisfied the middle class desire to assimilate American culture. Thus, from Mexico and Latin America came the *bolero*, *guaracha*, *rumba*, and other genres; from the United States came the boogie, swing, and foxtrot.

The first person to exploit the bi-musical inclinations of the new class of bi-cultural *tejanos* was the “father” of *orquesta tejana* itself, **Beto Villa**, from Falfurrias, Texas. The son of a prosperous tailor, and a man with an assimilationist outlook, Villa organized his first band in 1932, a group which specialized in American big band music and whose name symbolized his generation’s desire for inclusion in Anglo-American life—“The Sonny Boys.” But Villa was only a high school student at the time, and he had to wait until World War II was over before he got his commercial break.

In 1946, Villa approached **Armando Marroquín**, from Alice, Texas, who had just formed **Ideal** Records with partner **Paco Betancourt**. By this time, however,

Villa had adopted a different musical strategy. He had abandoned his pursuit of American big band music—at least temporarily—and was concentrating on what was (and is) known as *música ranchera* (“country” music)—historically a type of music associated with the *mariachi* in Mexico and the *conjunto* in the Hispanic Southwest. Of simple melody, harmony and rhythm, and with deep agrarian (*ranchero*) roots, this music has, since the 1930s, been juxtaposed in the minds of Texas-Mexicans against urban, sophisticated musics such as that of the big bands.

In the 1940s and '50s, musical sophistication was sometimes equated with “high-class” snobbery, an attribute working-class people usually ascribed to the upwardly-mobile. A derivative cultural label, *jaitón* (from “hightone”), came into use to distinguish the latter from the simple, rustic lifestyle of the common people. It was out of this cultural distinction that two socioeconomically opposed musical symbols were born: *ranchero* vs. *jaitón*. The former was the music most Texas-Mexicans subscribed to, mainly in the form of the *conjunto*. By contrast, *jaitón* music, in the form of *orquesta*, became associated with the high-powered, assimilation-minded urbanites, who wished to downplay their own

cultural heritage and join the American mainstream.

Mindful that there was not enough of a purely *jaitón* audience to support the sophisticated, big band music he preferred, and having an astute sense for what would sell, Villa decided to invent a *ranchero* style for the new *orquesta*. Most likely, Villa knew that even *jaitones* still enjoyed *ranchero* music, as long as it was properly packaged (i.e., played by an *orquesta*). He thus begged Marroquín of **Ideal** Records to let him record a couple of polkas (the most traditional *ranchero* genre), convinced that he had a winning combination—*orquesta* and *ranchero*. He even volunteered to bear the costs of production.

But partner Betancourt was skeptical: he didn’t think Villa’s *orquesta* was professional enough. In the end Betancourt finally agreed, and, [in October of 1947], Villa recorded his first two sides for **Ideal**. Side A was a polka, *Las Delicias*, (the first selection on this recording), which showcased Villa’s new *ranchero* style. The flip side featured a simple, also *ranchero*, waltz, *Porque te Ries*.

Marroquín then sent the first batch of records to Betancourt, who worked on the distributing end from San Benito, about 100 miles from Alice. Marroquín recalled in a personal interview that no sooner had he sent Villa’s record to Betancourt, then

the latter called him back, saying, "Say, tell him to record some more." "Villa's record was selling in bunches," recalled Marroquín.

With the release of that first recording, Villa's position in Texas-Mexican music was assured, as a spate of hits followed, including such all-time favorites as *Rosita Vals* (with accordionist **Narciso Martínez**), *Monterrey*, *Las Gaviotas*, *La Piconá*, and *Tamaulipas*. Villa's folksy, *ranchero* style of polka had taken *tejanos* (*jaitones* and otherwise) and Mexican-Americans everywhere by storm, and his name and music quickly became legendary. In the late '40s and throughout the '50s, he drew packed houses wherever he performed, particularly in the public dance halls that became so popular throughout the Hispanic Southwest after 1948.

But Villa was not content with exploiting the *ranchero* sound that kept him locked in the traditional culture of working-class *tejanos*. As a member of the assimilationist, upwardly-mobile Mexican American Generation, he still yearned for a "high class" big band, of the type then in vogue among sophisticated urbanites both in Mexico and the United States. In 1949, he finally decided to take the inevitable step, according to **Reymundo Treviño**, a piano-accordionist who had been with Villa for years.

"Beto made the *orquesta* real big," reminisced Treviño, "and those of us who couldn't read music, we were fired." Now leading a big-time touring *orquesta* that at times numbered as many as 12 musicians, Villa began to venture into more sophisticated musical realms, as he added an increasing number of *boleros*, *mambos*, *guarachas* and other non-*ranchero* Latin American genres to his repertoire—not to mention a few American foxtrots and swings. All in all, by 1950 Villa had become much more bi-musically eclectic, mixing with great success what Marroquín described as the "*ranchero* and 'high class.'"

A good example of Villa's more sophisticated Latin American approach is *Mambo #7*. Villa realized, of course, that the *polca ranchera* was still his bread and butter, and he kept coming back to this tried-and-true genre, right up until his last recordings with **Ideal**. Even with the dependable polka, however, Villa at times deviated from his by-now folksy trademark, as is evidenced by the smoothly arranged polka *Victoria*.

Thanks to his prolific and eclectic recording career—**Ideal** released over 100 78s and a score of LPs—Villa maintained his grip on Tex-Mex music until the late 1950s. At this time, however, a younger group of dynamic *orquestas* began to overtake him. Among the latter, one man

towers over all others—**Isidro López**. While acknowledging his debt to Beto Villa, Isidro López nevertheless began immediately to break new ground in the *orquesta tejana* tradition (increasingly known as Tex-Mex after 1960). The moment he began to record commercially for the powerful **Ideal** label, in 1954, he struck out in new directions.

Like Villa and most *orquesta* musicians, Isidro López attended high school, where he learned to play saxophone and clarinet. In fact, López even attended college for a year. Thus, although he always professed a strong bond with the lesser educated working-class *tejanos*, and often proclaimed special preference for their *conjunto* brand of music, López was nonetheless strongly influenced by the middle-class, bi-cultural ideology of his *orquesta* peers. These twin influences are reflected in his music.

Thus, from his working-class roots he inherited the *canción ranchera*, popularized in Mexico by the *mariachi*, in Texas by the *conjunto*. A type of song that often dwells on abandoned lovers and treacherous women, the *canción ranchera* has always been the special possession of the Mexican working-class. In López's case, he recognized the great potential the *ranchera* held for the *orquesta*, and he exploited it to maximum effect. Adapting the *mariachi*

style to Tex-Mex, López created what he has dubbed *Texachi*, a unique *ranchero* style that brought him tremendous success, in Texas and beyond.

But true to his bi-cultural nature—and a great innovation for its time—López also mixed in on occasion a few rock-and-roll licks for special effect (as in the tune *Mala Cara*). And, like Villa and most *orquesta* musicians, López was capable of stepping out of the *ranchera* mold altogether and moving into the sophisticated or *jaitón* style, as in *La Hiedra*. But the *ranchera* remained always López's bread and butter, and he recorded hit after hit in this genre: *Desilución*, *Díganle*, *Sufriendo y Penando*, *Emoción Pasajera*, and many others. Altogether, **Ideal** released over 60 singles and 8 LPs.

Beto Villa and Isidro López were the indisputable kings during the formative stage of the *orquesta tejana*, or Tex-Mex, tradition that Villa launched, and as leaders, they naturally encouraged their share of imitators, in and out of Texas. But other figures made significant contributions of their own to this culturally important music during the pioneering years of the '40s and '50s.

In Texas, a major contributor to the *jaitón* side of *orquesta* is **Balde González**, the blind pianist-singer from Victoria, Texas. From the beginning, González charted his

own independent course, refusing to follow Villa's and López' lead into the working-class, *ranchero* style that those two contemporaries had popularized. Instead, from his initial entry into the *orquesta* field, he came to represent the most *jaitón* elements of Texas-Mexican music and society. As such, González quickly became known for the smooth, crooner style that he used with considerable commercial success in the performance of his specialties, the romantic *bolero* and the foxtrot (which he usually sang in Spanish). Among González' most popular tunes are his *boleros*, some of which he composed.

Many lesser figures dotted the musical landscape of the rapidly developing *orquesta tejana* during its formative years of the '40s and '50s. Most of these recorded for the dominant **Ideal** label at one time or another. Among the better known were Chris Sandoval, Mike Ornelas, Darío Pérez, **Eugenio Gutierrez** and an Arizonan, **Pedro Bugarín**. Bugarín is an interesting figure, because in certain aspects, he represents the Mexican American *orquesta* as it developed beyond the pale of Tex-Mex influence. Thus, some of his arrangements and style of delivery are more aligned with the *orquestas* from Mexico and Los Angeles, while in other respects he took his cue from Beto Villa's example (compare the Tex-Mex polka, *Los*

Comentaristas with the mambo, *Doña Chona*). In fact, it was through his imitations of the latter's *ranchera* style that he gained popularity among Texas-Mexicans in the 1950s.

Eugenio Gutierrez is an interesting historical figure because, along with Beto Villa, he recognized the importance of the *conjunto* in the musical activities of the Texas-Mexicans, and the opportunities that existed in grafting the two rival styles together. Thus, he and Villa both took steps early on to combine the two ensembles, Villa recording several tunes with the "father" of the modern *conjunto*, Narciso Martinez (e.g., *Rosita Vals*), and Gutierrez teaming up with Pedro Ayala, another notable figure in the *conjunto* tradition.

The attempts by Villa and Eugenio Gutierrez to combine *orquesta* and *conjunto* were commercially motivated, of course. But they also signaled a recognition, however unspoken, that *orquesta* and *conjunto* represented two sides of the same cultural coin. Thus, while at one level they may have symbolized two distinct (and opposed) class lifestyles, at another level they signified a common ethnic heritage. And the link that tied them together was the *ranchero* style that both shared.

In summary, during its formative years *orquesta* essentially reflected the

ambivalence of the Mexican American Generation. This ambivalence was perfectly mirrored in the many stylistic faces of *orquesta*. In its *ranchero* aspects, for example, it reconnected the upwardly mobile *tejanos* with their ethnic, working-class roots, which they found difficult to cast aside. In its efforts at sophistication, *orquesta* satisfied *tejanos'* desire to assimilate middle-class culture. At yet another level, Latin American music, generally, reinforced their Hispanic identity, while American music strengthened their push toward Americanization. Finally, all of these disparate styles, amalgamated within one single *orquesta tejana* tradition, symbolized the conflicting currents that swirled around the Mexican American Generation.

Events during the 1960s changed the political and cultural equation, and, again, *orquesta* responded accordingly. In the process, it entered into a second stage of development, as a new generation of performers charted a new musical course. This second stage of *orquesta tejana* saw the consolidation of the *ranchero* and sophisticated, as well as Latin and American, into one seamless bi-musical sound that came to be known as *La Onda Chicana*.

In many ways, the successful consolidation of so many distinct styles

reflected the nationalistic spirit of the Chicano Power Movement that swept through the Southwest in the late '60s. Imbued with this spirit, Chicanos tried to sweep aside internal class and regional differences and to present a unified Chicano cultural front. This powerfully unifying impulse affected musical culture, and *orquesta* responded with vigor. It moved rapidly toward a synthesis of all the disparate elements that had been wanting to coalesce during the formative years—*ranchero* vs. *jaitón*, Mexican/Latin vs. American, *conjunto* vs. *orquesta* and simple vs. sophisticated. In the new *orquestas* all of these were apt to be combined—within the same piece!

Leading figures in the second stage of development include Sunny and the Sunliners, Freddie Martinez, Agustín Ramirez, Latin Breed, Jimmy Edward, Tortilla Factory, and the most important of the new generation *orquestas*—Little Joe and the Latinaires, known as Little Joe *y la Familia* after 1970. The latter group was particularly successful in simultaneously synthesizing the *ranchero/jaitón* and Latin/American horizons, and it earned the enthusiastic support of Chicanos from Texas to California.

The dramatic developments that took place during *orquesta's* *Onda Chicana* phase deserve their own in-depth presentation.

however, is beyond our present intent, and we must leave such a labor for another occasion.

Meanwhile, this CD/C introduces to a general audience outstanding performances from the formative years of this influential Texas-Mexican tradition. The listener will note the wild variety of genres and styles, which range from *orquesta-conjunto* combinations (Beto Villa-Narciso Martinez in *Rosita Vals*) to the suave sounds of Balde González' *No Te Preocupes por Mí* and Pedro Bugarín's forward-looking, jazzy mambo, *Doña Chona*. *Orquesta tejana* has received little notice from students of American ethnic cultures. Hopefully, this introduction can

bridge the gap by bringing one of America's most dynamic ethnic-music traditions to the attention of a wider public.

(Manuel Peña, California State University, Fresno, California - January, 1992)

Original recordings produced by Armando Marroquin between 1947 and 1960 for IDEAL Records.

Re-issue produced by Chris Strachwitz. Edited by Manuel Peña and Chris Strachwitz.

Notes by Manuel Peña

Cover painting by Jesse Almazán

Cover design by Wayne Pope



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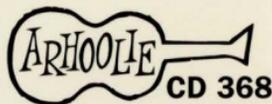
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