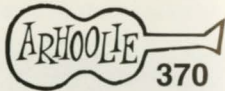


# FLACO JIMÉNEZ

## "Flaco's First"



1. RECUERDOS DE SAGINAW (polka) (2:11)
2. CONTIGO NO MAS (ranchera) (2:24)
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Total time: 76:55

### LOS CAMINANTES:

Leonardo "Flaco" Jiménez - accordion & vocals; Henry Zimmerle - bajo sexto & vocals; Roberto Cadena - vocals; Roger Herrera - drums; Mike Garza - bass

Re-issue edited and produced by Chris Strachwitz

Cover by Wayne Pope

Photos courtesy Roger Herrera or Toby Torres

Re-issue produced by contractual agreement with Leonardo Jiménez

Transfer of original discs to digital tape by Chris Strachwitz

Re-mastered by George Morrow of Echo Productions and Mike Cogan of Bay Records

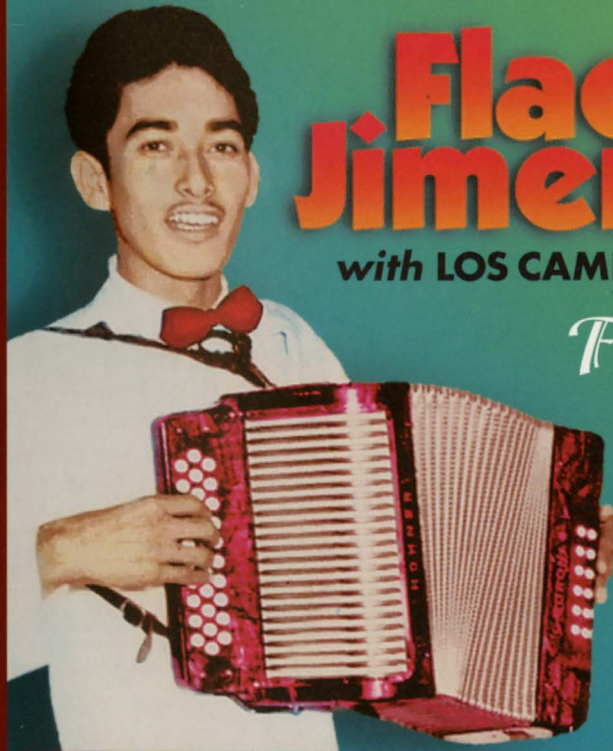
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TEJANO ROOTS

# Flaco Jimenez

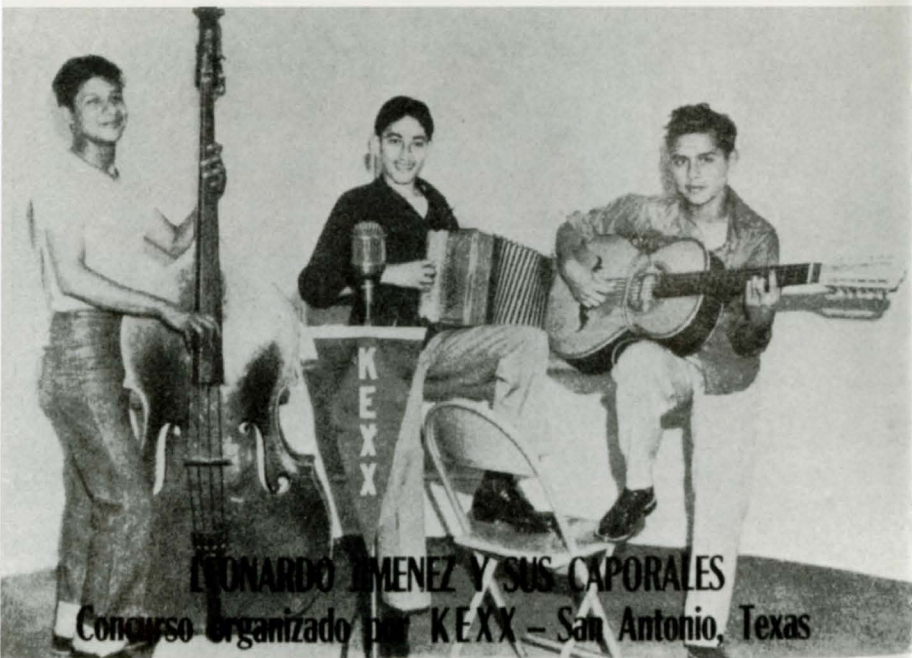
with LOS CAMINANTES

Flaco's First!



A  
**Rio**  
RECORDING





Leonardo "Flaco" Jiménez y sus Caporales with Henry Zimmerle on bajo sexto,  
at radio station KEXX, ca. early 1955.

## A NOTE ABOUT THE RECORDINGS:

**T**he selections on this CD or Cassette represent the best of Flaco Jiménez's very first recordings made when he was only sixteen years old and are of both musical and historical interest to those of us who admire this great regional GRAMMY winning artist. These old recordings are not of the best audio quality and considerable distortion is evident. The original acetates and tapes were lost by the processing company. Only 45 rpm stampers survived and the items heard here were dubbed from 78 and 45 rpm pressings.

All selections were originally recorded and produced by Hymie Wolf for his RIO label in San Antonio, Tx., between mid-1956 and May 1958. The rights to all RIO masters were purchased by Arboolie Records in 1991 from Mr. Wolf's widow, Jenie Wolf Mieri.

Flaco Jiménez had alerted me to the fact that most of the 78 rpm releases of his RIO recordings, sounded "speeded up" to him and were not in the right keys. So I asked Dix Bruce to join me with his guitar at my variable speed turntable as we checked each disc from which these masters had to be dubbed. Flaco told me that the first cut was in the key of G and the second in the key of C and he gave us the correct keys for several other selections. With those facts as a guide we quickly found that his claim was correct and that many selections were about one half step too fast. At first I had been skeptical of Flaco's claim but as I mentioned this possibility to several people familiar with mastering techniques in the 1950s, I was told that the masters of several Fats Domino records were apparently slowed down while cutting the acetate in order to make the resulting records play faster when heard on a standard 78 rpm turntable. All selections slowed down in the initial mastering process have been readjusted in the remastering process by George Morrow to achieve almost perfect pitch. Most of the 45 rpm releases (or test pressings) from which I dubbed several selections, turned out to be at the correct speed.

(Chris Strachwitz)



# FLACO JIMÉNEZ

## "Flaco's First"

During the mid-1950s San Antonio's Mexican American community was in transition. It was a cultural and economic boom period with servicemen from all over the country stationed at Lackland and other Air Force bases. The service industry connected with the military had become a major employer. Job opportunities were abundant and there was plenty of work for musicians to play at dances and private parties for almost every level of society.

During the busy Christmas season of 1955 bass player Mike Garza and drummer Richard Herrera had a number of engagements and dances lined up for their band which went under the name of **Melodias Alegres**. As popular as the group was, they had just once again lost both their accordionist and guitar player,

rather essential members of any San Antonio dance band of the 1950s. Accordionist Emilio Martínez, who used to be the group's leader, suddenly decided to leave town. Mike and Richard, who had contracted most of the jobs, soon found Raúl Moreno to take Emilio's place. Raúl, however, soon left for greener pastures with **Los Tres Reyes**, a very popular group under the leadership of composer, singer, and guitarist Daniel Garces. Accordionist Luis Calderón was then recruited by the luckless Mike and Richard. However he soon got married and at his wife's insistence, refused to work on the all-important weekends! For the next six months a man named Joe Martínez filled the accordion chair joined by Willie Consecro on guitar and they played the dances as well as the weekly radio program over KCOR, San Antonio's biggest

Spanish language radio station. Just before Christmas, Joe Martínez as well as the guitarist suddenly vanished! In December of 1955, once again, eagerly looking for replacements, Mike and Richard went to El Centro Mercantil, an upstairs establishment, better known as the Radio Club, on Delarosa Street and also known as a hang out for musicians. There they met two young boys who according to one of them "were just hangin' out." Mike and Richard had heard that these two were good on the accordion and the *bajo sexto* although they had neither heard them in person nor broadcasting over KEXX where the boys were beginning to make a name for themselves as "Leonardo Jiménez y su Caporales." Leonardo and his buddy, Henry Zimmerle were shy young boys who not only played sitting down but also in an older "pure *conjunto*" style with a repertoire of mainly polkas, *rancheras* and waltzes. They were however hired on the spot and on that day 16

year old Leonardo "Flaco" Jiménez and 15 year old Henry Zimmerle became professional musicians.

One of the jobs during that first weekend with the band now known as **Los Caminantes**, was at the Las Vegas Nightclub in San Antonio where the group had been playing regularly on Sunday afternoons, following their 12:30 to 1 PM radio program over KCOR. The club attracted a well-dressed crowd and featured a full orchestra in the evenings. The manager of the club did not approve of the way two of the members of Los Caminantes presented themselves. As Leonardo and Richard remember it: "the whole band got fired because we looked and dressed like Pachucos with baggy pants, big 'straight legs' shoes, T-shirts and wild hairdos. Mike and Richard refused to fire the new young members as the manager had requested and told him that the whole band would rather quit."

Mike Garza and Richard Herrera had been professional musicians for some

time who noticed the remarkable energy and talent developing in the two youngsters whom they had just hired. They took the boys under their wing and taught them how to dress nice and even showed them how to tie the knot in their ties. They also told the two boys to stand up when playing, in contrast to their previous jobs where they would sit down in the older, rural manner.

Roberto Cadena hailed from Alton, Texas, and was stationed in the Air Force not far from Laredo. He would often sit in and sing with Los Caminantes at the Mexican restaurant in Breckenridge Park where they played every Sunday afternoon. Roberto had a good voice and was very popular with the crowds and was soon asked to join Los Caminantes as their regular vocalist. Flaco remembers him as a sharp dresser and especially good with the increasingly popular boleros. Flaco and Henry had never played boleros before but quickly learned as their musical education went into high

gear.

On May 2, 1956, Los Caminantes, with 17-year old Leonardo Jiménez and Henry Zimmerle as permanent members, made their first recordings for Hymie Wolf's RIO label which he operated out of the back room of his record shop on West Commerce Street. About the same time Los Caminantes were asked to appear every Thursday on Channel 41, KCOR-TV, from 8:30 to 9:30 PM. During the next two years Los Caminantes became the #1 group in San Antonio and their popularity encouraged Mr. Wolf to sometimes keep them in his little studio for days. Flaco recalls: "Wolf wanted a new record out almost every day. We each were paid \$8 per song, for a total of \$50 per side. The first ones were cut directly to disc/acetate and were only 78s." Soon, in the mid-1950s, the 45 rpm record replaced the 78 and someplace along this time Mr. Wolf purchased a tape recorder. Unfortunately very few tapes of his re-

cordings have survived since they were apparently never returned by the pressing plant who cut the master and processed and pressed the records.

Every Tuesday Los Caminantes would record for RIO—usually just two songs. Sometimes Mr. Wolf would pick the songs but usually the guys in the *conjunto* would select and rehearse them on Mondays. Slowly Henry began to write songs on his own and harmonize with Flaco but they were shy about it. It seemed Roberto was the popular singer with his strong solo voice, especially with the more upscale audiences. Both Henry and Flaco's fathers encouraged the boys to stay with Mike and Richard and learn to become professionals.

Flaco could never remember what tie to wear each night and would therefore hang all his ties from the mirror of his '49 Mercury Ford. It wasn't easy to become a pro and often even embarrassing. One 16th of September, when they were booked to play a fiesta at Salon Torres,

just south of San Antonio, they were required to wear dark pants, bow tie and a white coat. Flaco had sent his white coat to a cleaner and picked it up on the way to the gig only to discover that it had shrunk when he tried to put it on! A friend named Joe who happened to be wearing a white coat, came to Flaco's rescue!

These, Flaco's first recordings, show what a remarkably fluid and accomplished accordionist he already was as a teenager. Out of sixty sides recorded for RIO between May of 1956 and May of 1958, when Flaco left Los Caminantes, six were polka instrumentals by Flaco, thirty six songs featured Roberto Cadena, sixteen were sung by Flaco and Henry Zimmerle, and two songs were solo vocals by Henry.

Roberto Cadena was the group's prime vocalist. He also made several records under his own name with other *conjuntos* accompanying. He was a handsome urban singer with a good solo voice



and he overshadowed the two shy young boys who began to harmonize in a more rural tradition. In August of 1956 Flaco and Henry recorded their first vocal duet ("Mis Penas") but had to wait until mid-November to record another one ("Me Siento Abandonado"). Henry Zimmerle composed the songs and he soon became recognized not only as a fine *bajo sexto* player, but singer and song writer as well.

By May of 1958 Flaco Jiménez had left Los Caminantes because, as he put it, "the other companies were paying better and had better distribution." Flaco had obviously realized that he could make it on his own. He started to record for Manuel Rangel's **Corona** label who were also marketing his father's (Santiago Jiménez Sr.) music. No one had exclusive contracts however, and Flaco also was soon recording for José Morante's **Sombrero** and **Lyra** labels (the best of which can be heard on Arhoolie CD/C 396: "Un Mojado Sin Licencia").

From then on Flaco Jiménez's recorded legacy became remarkably prolific. He had become a star in San Antonio. Lack of distribution, however, for most of the labels for which he recorded, contributed to Flaco's relatively unknown status outside the Alamo City. Another factor may have been lack of that magic second voice which was and still is essential to becoming a star on the Norteño or Conjunto scene.

Henry Zimmerle was a natural duet for Flaco but he went solo soon after they both left Los Caminantes. Toby Torres was at times a good second voice—and even better was Fred Ojeda much later. But that magic, perfect, complimentary voice never came around.

Flaco eventually made his mark by sheer perseverance and instrumental virtuosity and his incredible talent to fit in with other types of music and reach out to other audiences who may be surprised by these, his first raw, but 100% pure Tejano roots recordings!

(Chris Strachwitz - 1995)



*Los Caminantes: left to right: Flaco, Mike Garza, Roberto Cadena, Henry Zimmerle, & Richard Herrera.*

### Discography:

1. **RECUERDOS DE SAGINAW** (Leonardo Jiménez - Tradition/Bug Music Co.) Rio 364 (1176); May/June 1956.
2. **CONTIGO NO MAS** (Nico Jiménez) vocal: Roberto Cadena; Rio 364 (1175); May/June 1956.
3. **NOCHECITA** (DAR) vocal: Roberto Cadena; Rio 370 (1186); 7/3/1956.
4. **MIS PENAS** (Henry Zimmerle - Tradition/Bug Music Co.) vocal: Roberto & Henry; Rio 374 (1194); 8/9/1956.
5. **ALMA ENAMORADA** (Rafael Elizondo) vocal: Roberto & Henry; Rio 376 (1198); 8/16/1956.
6. **ME SIENTO ABANDONADO** (Henry Zimmerle - Tradition/Bug Music Co.) vocal: Henry & Leonardo; Rio 382 (1209); 11/1956.
7. **TRATANDO CON OTRO** (Leonardo Jiménez - Tradition/Bug Music Co.) vocal: Henry & Leonardo; Rio 384 (1213); 12/1956.
8. **LA COMPLICADA** (Leonardo Jiménez - Tradition/Bug Music Co.) Rio 384 (1214); 12/1956.
9. **CORAZÓN HUMANO** (Henry Zimmerle - Tradition/Bug Music Co.) vocal: Leonardo & Henry; Rio 391 (1228); released: 2/27/1956.
10. **ESTA NOCHE ME LA PASO VACILANDO** (Leonardo Jiménez - Tradition/Bug Music Co.) vocal: Leonardo & Henry; Rio 400 (1246); rel. 5/31/1957.
11. **YA NO LE HAGAS CORAZÓN** (Gilberto E. Elizondo) vocal: Roberto Cadena; Rio 401 (1248); rel. 6/1957.
12. **FALSA PROMESA** (Henry Zimmerle - Tradition/Bug Music Co.) vocal: Leonardo & Henry; Rio 402 (1250); rel. 7/1957.
13. **ESTANDO YO CONTIGO** (José Morante) vocal: Roberto & dueto; Rio 404 (1253); rel. 8/6/1957.
14. **EL CIRCO** (P.D.) Rio 404 (1254); rel. 8/6/1957.
15. **PALOMA SIN NIDO** (P.D.) Rio 404 (1254); rel. 8/6/1957.

16. **NEGRA TRAICIÓN** (P.D.) Rio 404 (1254); rel. 8/6/1957.
17. **NUNCA PENSE** (Tony Rodríguez) vocal: Roberto Cadena; Rio 408 (1262); rel. 10/4/1957.
18. **SE ACABO MI AMOR** (Henry Zimmerle - Tradition/Bug Music Co.) vocal: Henry & Leonardo; Rio 410 (1266); rel. 10/18/1957.
19. **SOLITO LORO** (Henry Zimmerle - Tradition/Bug Music Co.) vocal: Henry & Leonardo; Rio 411 (1267); rel. 11/6/1957.
20. **CARTAS MARCADAS** (DAR) vocal: Henry & Leonardo; Rio 411 (1268); rel. 11/6/1957.
21. **TIENES QUE SER MIA** (Henry Zimmerle - Tradition/Bug Music Co.) vocal: Leonardo & Henry; Rio 412 (1270); rel. 11/18/1957.
22. **CORAZÓN DE HIERRO** (Henry Zimmerle - Tradition/Bug Music Co.) vocal: Leonardo & Henry; Rio 412 (1270); rel. 11/18/1957.
23. **YA NUNCA VUELVAS** (Henry Zimmerle - Tradition/Bug Music Co.) vocal: Leonardo & Henry; Rio 414 (1273); rel. 12/13/1957.
24. **SIEMPRE HACE FRIO** (Cuco Sánchez) vocal: Leonardo & Henry; Rio 416 (1277); rel. 1/25/1958.
25. **NADA PERDI** (Tony Rodríguez) vocal: Roberto & Henry; Rio 417 (1279); rel. 3/4/1958.
26. **NUESTROS AMIGOS** (Ramiro Hernández) vocal: Leonardo & Henry; Rio 417 (1280); rel. 3/4/1958.
27. **RAQUEL POLKA (2-24)** (Leonardo Jiménez - Tradition/Bug Music Co.) Rio 418 (1282); rel. 3/26/1958.
28. **TE PIDO QUE ME QUIERAS (2-14)** (Henry Zimmerle - Tradition/Bug Music Co.) vocal: Henry & Leonardo; Rio 419 (1284); rel. 4/22/1958.
29. **ZANCUDO ELECTRICO (2-16)** (Leonardo Jiménez - Tradition/Bug Music Co.) Rio 420 (1258); rel. 5/5/1958.
30. **QUISIERA VERTE (2-34)** (Henry Zimmerle - Tradition/Bug Music Co.) vocal: Henry & Leonardo; Rio 420 (1286); rel. 5/5/1958.



*Los Caminantes playing for drummer Richard Herrera's wedding  
(with Roberto Cadena taking the drummer's role)*

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# FLACO JIMÉNEZ

## "Flaco's First"



### Up to 78 Minutes of Historic TEX-MEX MUSIC

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Total time: 76:55

#### LOS CAMINANTES:

Leonardo "Flaco" Jiménez - accordion & vocals; Henry Zimmerle - bajo sexto & vocals; Roberto Cadena - vocals; Roger Herrera - drums; Mike Garza - bass

These 30 selections represent the best half of FLACO JIMÉNEZ's first recordings as a teenager in chronological order, made in San Antonio between mid-1956 and May 1958. Unfortunately, considerable distortion is evident on many of these selections. The performances however, are delightful examples of this once regional, but now world famous Grammy winning artist and they show off Flaco's already fluid and distinctive accordion style as well as his soulful vocal duets with the even younger song writer and *bajo sexto* player, Henry Zimmerle.

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