

task was to hunt down Murrieta. Supposedly the rangers killed him, severed his head, and displayed it in various cities throughout California. However, the legend says that the Rangers murdered an innocent Mexican and that Murrieta escaped.

### Unrecorded Songs

*The following three songs were written by Rumel Fuentes after 1972 but were never recorded: "En Vietnam," "Corrido de los Hombres," & "Corrido de la Migra." They are powerful songs and largely speak for themselves. The lyrics to these songs, transcribed and translated, can be found embedded in the disc.*

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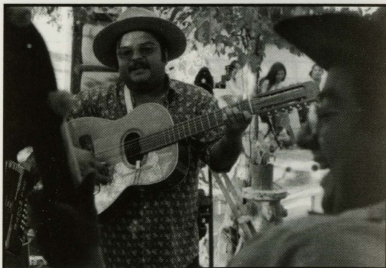


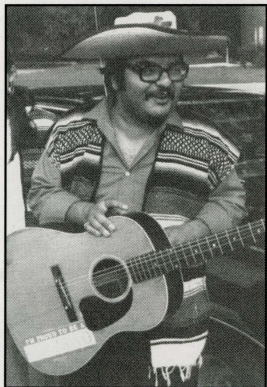
Photo: Pachó Lane

**Full transcriptions  
and translations of  
all the songs are  
found embedded in  
the disc and can be  
accessed on your  
computer.**

# Rumel Fuentes CORRIDOS of the CHICANO MOVEMENT







1. **YO SOY TU HERMANO**
2. **CORRIDO DE CÉSAR CHÁVEZ**
3. **WALK-OUT EN CRYSTAL CITY**
4. **AZTLÁN**
5. **EI CORRIDO DE REIES LOPEZ TIJERINA**
6. **MÉXICO-AMERICANO**
7. **PARTIDA LA RAZA UNIDA**
8. **HUAPANGO LOS TRABAJOS**
9. **CORRIDO DE PHARR, TEXAS**
10. **POLÍTICA EN LOS BARRIOS**
11. **CORRIDO DE JORGE I. SANCHEZ**
12. **JOAQUÍN MURRIETA**
13. **MÉXICO-AMERICANO**

Rumel accompanied by Los Pingüinos del Norte

## **Rumel Fuentes - vocals and guitar Jo Zettler - second voice**

All songs composed by Rumel Lopez Fuentes and © by Tradition Music Co./BUG Music (BMI).

Recorded by Chris Strachwitz:

# 1, 2, 3, & 5: in Austin, TX April 1972 with Luis Ortiz added on requinto guitar.

# 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, & 12: in Austin, TX May 1972 as last but add Chano Castillo on 12 string guitar.

# 13: recorded in Eagle Pass, TX in 1975. Sung by Rumel, accompanied by Los Pingüinos del Norte during the filming of "Chulas Fronteras" (Brazos Films - DVD #104, available for \$25.00 from [www.arhoolie.com](http://www.arhoolie.com). DVD also includes "Del Mero Corazon" plus 30 minutes of bonus footage).

Photos by Chris Strachwitz except as noted.

Transcriptions and translations of the songs, bios, and comments on the songs by Jo Zettler.

Edited by Haley Ausserer.

Design by Wayne Pope.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Rumel Fuentes was a devoted activist, composer, and singer for the Chicano Movement during the late 1960s and early 1970s. His home was in Eagle Pass on the Texas – Mexico border, and unfortunately his voice and songs were not heard as widely as those of many others. Many of Rumel's corridos (narrative ballads) speak of local injustices, discrimination, and interracial problems in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, while others focus on the broader aims and themes of the Chicano Movement.

Rumel's song, "México-Americano", a very moving tribute to brown pride, bilingualism and ethnic identity, was first heard in 1976 with the release of the Brazos Films production "Chulas Fronteras" (DVD and soundtrack available from [Arhoolie.com](http://Arhoolie.com)) sung by Rumel, accompanied by Los Pingüinos del Norte. The song has since become part of the repertoire of the delightful female duet, Los Cenzontles. "Yo soy tu hermano" was performed by Los

Lobos and appears on their video "Live at the Fillmore," and was also recorded by Conjunto Aztlán (Smithsonian Folkways CD 40516 "Rolas de Aztlán – Songs of the Chicano Movement").

I apologize for not releasing this material during Rumel's lifetime, but hope that this CD will belatedly celebrate his life and work, and perhaps rekindle the spirit and political involvement of the 1970s. (Chris Strachwitz – 2009)

## **RUMEL FUENTES**

Rumel Lopez Fuentes was born on June 25, 1943, in Eagle Pass, Texas. The ninth of eleven children, he was named after German General Erwin Rommel at the suggestion of his older brother, who at the time was serving in the US Armed Forces in northern Africa. Rumel grew up on the Texas-Mexico border but each year his family spent spring and summer going to Michigan and Indiana as migrant farm workers. It was a hard life, and Rumel was the only one of



his siblings to graduate from high school and go on to college.

Though he also loved Johnny Cash and Bob Dylan, Rumel was most interested in traditional Mexican folk music, especially the corridos that he had heard his father sing. "Corridos," or ballads, were often written about ordinary men who were seen as brave, strong, and willing to stand up to oppressors. Rumel saw the corrido as "a means of exposing evils and injustices, and relating the truth about things as they actually happen." The corrido has a definitive style, usually written in 3/4 time. Many of Rumel's songs, such as "César Chávez," "Corrido de Pharr, Texas," and "Walkout en Crystal City" replicate this style.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s Rumel became very involved in the Chicano movement and the Raza Unida political party in Texas. He began to write his own corridos describing events of that time, people who were considered "heroes" of the Chicano movement, and experiences of everyday life for the Mexican-

American in the United States. He and his wife Jo, as members of the Teatro Chicano at the University of Texas, sang these songs at various political rallies and voter registration activities around the state, as well as at the National Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C. Rumel wrote of his songs: "Rather than hearing them around campfires, on 'troop trains,' and in cantinas, you hear them around conferences, political rallies, and wherever Chicanos gather to talk and drink beer."

Rumel received a Masters in Education from the University of Texas in 1974 and taught elementary school in Eagle Pass, Texas, for many years. In 1975 he assisted Chris Strachwitz and Les Blank in the making of the documentary film, "Chulas Fronteras." He died of liver disease in 1986 at the age of 43.

### JO ZETTLER

Rumel and I met in 1967 when I was sent to Eagle Pass, Texas as a VISTA Volunteer. I learned to speak



Photo: Pachó Lane

Rumel Fuentes (right) with Rubén Castillo Juárez of Los Pingüinos del Norte during the filming of "Chulas Fronteras."

Spanish and was very involved in community organizing there. Even though I was not Mexican-American, I loved the people I worked with and deeply admired their culture, particularly the way music was a part of their lives. I had been singing harmony all my life, and singing traditional Mexican music (and dancing to it!) brought Rumel and me together.

We married in 1968, and I ran a Planned Parenthood clinic while he

bussed to a junior college 60 miles away. During the summers he began to write his music. In 1970, Chris Strachwitz came to Eagle Pass and with Rumel's guidance recorded Los Pingüinos del Norte at a cantina in Piedras Negras. He had been introduced to Rumel through Jerry Abrams, freshly out of law school in Austin and working for the United Farm Workers in the Rio Grande Valley. After Rumel received his A.A.



degree, we moved to Austin to finish our B.A. degrees at the University of Texas. There we joined the Teatro Chicano, an impromptu theater group that produced skits about the need for Mexican-Americans to become politically involved. The Teatro became a regular venue for performing Rumel's songs, and the lyrics did their part to encourage people to become politically active.

Chris Strachwitz of Arhoolie Records had kept in touch with Rumel, and stopped in Austin hoping to record Rumel's songs. Chris, a student photographer, two musicians, and Rumel and I all crowded into our tiny living room in married student housing and made these recordings.

Rumel and I divorced in 1975, and I moved to the West Coast to go to graduate school. I ended up in Portland, Oregon, and have lived here for 25 years. Until a few years ago, I had lost track of my passion for singing, but as I age I realize that singing is in my heart, as it was in Rumel's. His early death was a loss to us all.

## Comments on the Songs

### 1. Yo Soy Tu Hermano

This song was written in the early 1970s as the Chicano movement became more assertive. The lyrics represent the shouts of an angry young man as he tries to rouse his "brothers" to action: "Dame tu mano, vamos a volar/Give me your hand, let's fly!" The song decries some of the injustices against the Mexican-American at that time, including enforced poverty, biased courts of law, disproportionate casualties in Vietnam, police brutality, and bigoted law enforcement agencies.

### 2. Corrido De César Chávez

This corrido describes the work of César Chávez to improve the life of the migrant farm worker. César Chávez and the United Farm Workers (UFW) began to unionize farm workers in the early 1960s through non-violent protests and nationwide boycotts of certain products. Chávez had

grown up working in the fields and had only eight years of schooling, but he began to organize workers and bargain with growers for better wages and working conditions. In the late 1960s when the song was written, migrant farm workers earned 65 to 85 cents an hour when and only when they worked. There was no good year-round work, and when there was work it was usually in the fields from sunup to sundown. There were rarely amenities such as toilets or drinkable water, much less health or disability insurance. As a result of his leadership (and with the help of the AFL-CIO and consumer boycotts), Chávez changed the nature of employment in American agriculture.

### 3. Walk-out en Crystal City

Crystal City, Texas, 15% "Anglo" and 85% Mexican-American, was a place where Anglos historically were in control, from the highest local political positions down to the high school cheerleaders. For many years Mexican-Americans were discouraged even from completing high

school. In the late 1940s, a Crystal City High School graduating class included only one or two Mexican-Americans; but by the late 1960s, the percentage of Mexican-Americans in high school matched their percentage of the town's population. But the teachers continued their long-standing policy of selecting three Anglos and only one Mexican-American as cheerleaders. Other matters in the school were handled in a similar manner. In 1968 and 1969, students began to protest, and eventually staged a walk out led by a student named Severita. Eventually their actions resulted in a school system with a Mexican-American majority in the school administration, faculty, and school board.

The walk-out and subsequent political actions in Crystal City, including the formation of the Raza Unida Party, were organized by José Angel Gutierrez. Gutierrez had returned to his hometown after completing college and became a leader of Chicano political efforts throughout Texas. He eventually received a doctorate and



became a college professor at the University of Texas at Arlington.

#### **4. Aztlán**

The word Aztlán means "the northern lands" as used by the Náhuatl-speaking Indians of Mexico, and included the states of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and California. The name and its concept achieved mythic status during the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In Chicano theatre groups, the U.S. acquisition of this territory was often depicted as "gringo" ranchers stealing five daughters of Mexico.

To the Chicano of that time, Aztlán represented the ideal of taking back from the Anglos the land that Mexicans once owned. Historically, Mexicans, Spaniards, and Native Americans owned most of these lands. Most land ended up in the hands of white men through either fraud or violence. One common practice was for an Anglo to dispute a Mexican's land. Then the Mexican would have to hire an Anglo lawyer who would demand to be paid with

land. In addition, tax rates on land would be levied so that Mexican ranchers would have to sell their land at a very low price. And often, Anglos would just come to the ranch and give the Mexican ranch owner until sundown to leave. Most of the time the "law" and law enforcers condoned these activities.

#### **5. El Corrido de Reies Lopez Tijerina**

In the early 1970s, Reies Lopez Tijerina formed a movement to restore lands in New Mexico to their original owners - families who held titles to the land under the original Royal Spanish Land Grants. These titles were guaranteed by the government of the United States under the Treaty of Guadalupe, signed after the Mexican-American War of 1846. These lands ended up in the hands of wealthy ranchers who in many cases had forced the original owners off the land. Local, state and federal police constantly harassed Tijerina and his family during his legal actions to restore the lands. His efforts failed,

but he was lauded as a hero of the Chicano movement for his work and for his eloquent speeches.

#### **6. (& 13.) México-Americano**

"México-Americano" is a song of identification written in the late 1960s before the term "Chicano" became common. At that time children were still being punished for speaking Spanish in school. Policies of public institutions and private employers subtly and not-so-subtly encouraged Mexican Americans to see themselves as lower-status citizens and to reject their Mexican heritage. The song "México-Americano" urges Mexican-Americans to see the strengths of being bilingual and bicultural, and to appreciate their rich heritage.

#### **7. Partida La Raza Unida**

La Raza Unida political party was organized in 1970 by José Angel Gutierrez and Mario Compean to support Chicano candidates for public office. It was the first minority third

party in the country. The party helped to unite the Mexican-American vote so that the Mexican-American might have more bargaining power and organized participation in local, state, and national elections. The party initially was most successful in small towns such as Crystal City, Texas, where a majority of voters were Chicanos. Attempts to elect officials at the state level failed, and the party's political activities waned toward the end of the 1970s, but it had lasting impact on increasing the support for Mexican-American candidates in the Democratic Party. The party still exists in parts of Texas, New Mexico, and California, but focuses its efforts on community issues such as substance abuse and public schools' accountability.

#### **8. Huapango Los Trabajos**

Many Mexican-Americans living in Texas at this time "migrated" north each spring to work in agriculture in the Midwest or in Idaho and Oregon. The song has a humorous tone, but the actual work was often brutal.



Whole families rose at dawn, drove to the fields, and worked in backbreaking labor until dusk. In spring there would still be frost on the ground, and in summer temperatures could reach 100 degrees. The families usually had to leave before school was out in the spring, and return after school had started in the fall, making it hard for children to keep up with their peers. Now newly-arrived immigrants from Mexico do much of this work, with many of the same hardships.

## **9. Corrido de Pharr, Texas**

In 1970 and early 1971 there were complaints about unnecessary brutality by the Pharr, Texas, police force. These complaints focused on Chief Alfredo Ramirez, himself the possessor of an impressive criminal record, and Sergeant Mateo Sandoval, an immigrant from Mexico who had a reputation for a short temper and a penchant for violence. On February 6, 1971, a picket line to protest the brutality was set up at City Hall and at the jail. As more people started gathering to support the

picket, Chief Ramirez gave a quick "order to disperse" and turned a high-pressure fire hose on the crowd. Bystander Alfonso Loreda Flores, a construction worker home for the weekend from his job in Corpus Christi, was observing the protest when he was shot in the head by Robert Johnson, a deputy sheriff. When he fell to the ground, he still had his hands in his pockets. The grand jury returned an indictment of a misdemeanor "negligent homicide."

## **10. Política en los Barrios**

Political campaigns in south Texas consisted mostly of Anglo-American males throwing parties in the Mexican-American neighborhoods right before the election. Candidates competed to throw the biggest barbeque, and free beer was often included. Once elected, however, most candidates ignored requests for the services they had promised. This began to change in the late 1960s with voter registration drives and the Raza Unida party's efforts to promote Mexican-American candidates. Many

of these candidates followed through on their promises to work on issues relevant to Mexican-Americans.

## **11. Corrido de Jorge I. Sanchez**

George I. Sanchez was a renowned reformer and activist for the education of Mexican-American children. Beginning in the 1930s, Sanchez fought for equality of state funding for schools attended by Mexican-American and Native American children. He became a tenured professor at the University of Texas in 1940, and spearheaded and won many court cases challenging school financing for and segregation of Mexican-Americans. Besides his expert testimony, Sanchez was famous for such legal strategies as suing the individual members of state boards of education so that they would settle on the major issue quickly in exchange for removing their names from the suit. None of the suits in which he participated were ever appealed.

By the time of his death in 1972,

Sanchez's contributions to education for Mexican-Americans had made him a role model for Chicano activists of that time. Sanchez's accomplishments were all the more remarkable because he obtained advanced degrees and worked successfully for reform at a time when Mexican-Americans were severely discriminated against in education and elsewhere.

## **12. Joaquín Murrieta**

Joaquín Murrieta was a legendary figure in California during the Gold Rush of the 1850s. His name, for some political activists, symbolized resistance to Anglo-American economic and cultural domination over Mexican-Americans and Native Americans. His true history is sketchy, but the "folk hero" story is that the Anglo power structure of that time murdered his family, and he became an outlaw in order to seek justice. He consistently eluded the law until the Governor of California signed an order to create the "California Rangers," whose specific

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**CD 507**

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