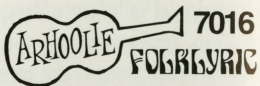


# NORTEÑO & TEJANO ACCORDION PIONEERS



7016

1. LA CHICHARONERA (*Polka*) - Narciso Martínez  
(10/21/36 - Bb2910)

2. LA ADELITA (*Canción*) - Roberto Rodríguez &  
Clemente Mendoza (6/11/30) (W404167 - Ok16739)

3. A PALERNO (*Vals*) - R. de Leon & L. Villalobos  
(1929) (Vo 8364)

4. LOS AMORES DE CHEPA (*Polka*) - Estanislado  
Salazar & Hnos. Mier (6/20/30) (W404345 - Ok16791)

5. CIELITO LINDO (*Canción-vals*) - Rodríguez &  
Mendoza (6/11/30) (W404162 - Ok16739)

6. LA LIEBRE LIGERIA - Estanislado Salazar & Hnos.  
Mier (6/20/30) (W404346 - Ok16722)

7. LA CUCARACHA (*Canción-Vals*) - Paz Flores &  
Francisco Montalvo (4/2/34) (Bb2222A)

8. LA BELLA ITALIA (*Polka*) - Bruno Villareal  
(1/31/35) (Bb 2322)

9. BRINCANDO CERCAS (*Mazurka*) - Bruno  
Villareal (1/31/35) (Mw 4912)

10. ADIOS MARIA (*Polka*) - Bruno Villareal  
(8/16/35) (Bb 6446)

11. INGRATA NENA (*One-Step*) - Bruno Villareal  
(8/16/35) (Bb2403)

12. EL CAPOREAL (*Vals*) - Jesús Casiano (8/22/35)  
(Sa 2295 - Vo 8744)

13. LA BIEN POLVIADA (*Polka*) - Jesús Casiano  
(8/22/35) (Sa 2296 - Vo 8729)

14. CONTRADANZA (*Mazurka*) - Jesús Casiano  
(2/26/36) (Vi 75333)

15. CAMPANITAS DE PLATA (*Two-Step*) - Jesús  
Casiano (2/26/36) (Vi 75333)

16. VIVA MOJARRA (*Polka*) - Narciso Martínez  
(10/21/36) (Bb 2920)

17. LUZITA (*Mazurka*) - Narciso Martínez (10/21/36)  
(Bb 2920)

18. EL QUININICHE (*Polka/Huapango*) - Narciso  
Martínez (10/21/36) (Bb 2955)

19. EL AMOR DE PANCHITA (*Mazurka*) - Narciso  
Martínez (10/21/36) (Bb 3008)

20. PIEDRAS NEGRAS (*Polka*) - Narciso Martínez  
(10/31/36) (Bb 2972)

21. FLOR MARCHITA (*Schottish*) - Narciso Martínez  
(9/13/37) (Bb3054)

22. DISPENSA EL ARREMPUJÓN (*Polka*) - Santiago  
Jiménez (2/9/37) (61728-De10193)

23. LA NAPOLERA (*Polka*) - Santiago Jiménez  
(9/21/38) (64556-De 10427)

24. EL ZACATAL (*Schottish*) - José Rodríguez  
(10/27/37) (Sa 2794-Vo 9106)

25. LA PETACONA (*Polka*) - José Rodríguez  
(10/28/37) (Sa 2798-Vo 9079)

26. EL GOLFO (*Vals Bajito*) - Lolo Cavazos  
(6/14/39) (Dal 817-1-Vo 9265)

27. LA GARDENIA (*Polka*) - Lolo Cavazos  
(6/14/39) (Dal 973-1-Vo 9243)

All recordings made in San Antonio, Texas except  
#26 & 27, recorded in Dallas, Texas.

# Norteño & Tejano Accordion Pioneers 1929-1939

Narciso Martínez  
Bruno Villareal  
Jesús Casiano  
Santiago Jiménez  
Lolo Cavazos  
and others



7016



## NORTEÑO & TEJANO ACCORDION PIONEERS

Until the recent rise in the popularity of **Tejano** music, which on occasion still makes use of an accordion, and the growing following for artists such as Flaco Jiménez on an international level, the accordion music from south Texas and the border region was considered "low class" and not very respectable. It was the music of country folk, ranch hands, cantina patrons, truck drivers, blue collar workers, etc. It was country dance music where a lone accordion with perhaps a drum or a *bajo sexto* to help out, would supply the music to keep the dancers happy. The rise of **Norteño** and **Tejano Conjunto** music to wide spread popularity with the addition of vocal duets, is similar to the acceptance of American Country music where the fiddle, however, retained its dominance.

These 27 selections, reissued from the original 78 rpm discs, were made between

1929 and 1939 by the first recording artists of **Norteño** and **Tejano Conjunto Music**. Almost all are instrumentals except for three selections which feature the evolving popular vocal duet sound in combination for the first time with the accordion. These first artifacts of a vibrant, today ever more popular, and now over a hundred year old regional music, are presented in near chronological order. The first selection however, the polka "La Chicharonera" from 1936, is Narciso Martínez' historic first recording. "El Huracán del Valle," as Narciso became known, with his unique style, his amazing technique, and the wide distribution of his records, influenced every accordionist to follow and he is today recognized as the Godfather of the Norteño/Conjunto tradition. However, he was not the first accordionist from south Texas and the border area to make a recording. That honor probably

goes to R. de Leon for his 1929 San Antonio recording of the waltz "A Palermo" (#3). This piano accordionist, about whom nothing is known, not even his first name, could well be of Italian, French, or Austrian background and the sound of the performance is very much in the continental salon or restaurant tradition. His sound, however, was not to be the future sound of Norteño accordion music. Norteño and Conjunto music was almost entirely created, first on a one, then a two, and finally on a three row, button, diatonic accordion. Almost all the selections heard here are played on the one or two row instrument. The triple row accordion did not come into wide use in this area until the 1940s.

Following Narciso Martínez's first instrumental, is the very first recording of Norteño music. The song, "La Adelita," was widely loved and dates from the time of the Mexican Revolution. The record features the then already popular and well established sound of a vocal duet, accom-

panied here for the first time on record by an accordion. Selections #5 and 7 are further early examples of the sound which by the late 1940s developed into one of the most popular forms of Mexican-American music and soon spread throughout the Spanish-speaking USA, Mexico, as well as central and south America. Both "Cielito Lindo" and "La Cucaracha" were also well known songs and the records became good sellers in this style. "La Cucaracha," associated with the Mexican Revolution, was probably the first "hit" record in this genre. Recorded in 1934, it was also recorded that same year by an orchestra (also with vocal duet) for middle class audiences. (Heard on ARH/FL CD 7001 "An Introduction to Mexican-American Border Music.")

For the rest of the decade of the 1930s, most recordings of this regional south Texas accordion music were strictly instrumentals. That was how the tradition had developed, out in the rural hamlets and *ranchos* where accordion music had become the popular dance music. On week ends or at festive



occasions, a local or traveling accordionist was hired usually accompanied by a *tambora*, or bass drum, sometimes a fiddle, and by the 1930s usually a *bajo sexto*. The record companies soon discovered that people enjoyed accordion records at house dances and other occasions when they might not be able to find or afford a live musician! They also discovered that Norteño accordion music was saleable to other ethnic groups, since the music shared many European elements. Several of Bruno Villareal's and Narciso Martínez' recordings, among others, were released under pseudonyms and under other titles in the companies' Polish and Cajun series, and were soon popular with folk dancers around the country for decades to follow.

Bruno Villareal, Jesús Casiano, Narciso Martínez, Santiago Jiménez, Jose Rodríguez, and Lolo Cavazos, for one reason or another, came to the attention of recording directors and made a good number of instrumental recordings. I have selected their most interesting examples and have

tried to present a variety of dances popular at the time. By the mid-1930s, the polka was apparently by far the most popular dance although polkas in minor keys were already becoming rare and have today almost vanished. Musicians have told me that the dancers prefer the simpler polkas in major keys and that they have a hard time finding trained musicians who know the changes of the older, more complicated tunes. Waltzes were also very popular in the 1930s, along with regional specialties such as mazurkas, schottishes, redovas, huapangos and the universally popular one-steps and two-steps.

In the late 1940s, Norteño and Tejano Conjunto music developed such widespread popularity that most popular singing duets began using an accordion, a *bajo sexto*, and a string bass to back up their vocals. A wonderful, easy to record, juke box sound had arrived which was soon heard all over the Spanish-speaking hemisphere.

(Chris Strachwitz – 1995)

## The Button Accordion

The diatonic accordion has been popular with Border musicians for about 100 years, and most of the instruments used in the Border area (until very recently) were made by the German Hohner company. Hohner built their diatonic button accordions simply and inexpensively to popularize the instrument in America. The instrument heard on most of these selections has two rows of treble buttons tuned in two major scales, such as G/C or C/F, and eight bass buttons, four for each key. The button accordion works like a harmonica in that each button has a two note value, one pushing and one pulling. Unlike the piano accordion which plays any group of notes in one direction, a scale run on the button accordion is played by working the bellows in and out. "Diatonic" indicates that the instrument does not have regular sharps and flats, as does the piano accordion, but it does have one flat key per row at the low end of the treble side.

These accordions are double-reed, that is with each note one reed vibrates at standard pitch and the other about one fourth tone sharp. The dissonance produces a vibrato effect that gives the button accordion its unique sweetness and delicacy. Two adjacent buttons played together almost always produce a pleasant third interval, which is the basic harmony of all Mexican singing. No wonder this instrument became popular with the people of the Border!

The piano accordion never equaled the button style in popularity with Norteño musicians, probably because in addition to being four times as expensive, it doesn't have the right kind of vibrato sound and staccato action that characterizes the fast, choppy polka and the more expressive *corrido* and *canción* style playing. The simple, direct action makes the button accordion very responsive to the technique of the player, and this flexibility lead to the





*Lolo Cavazos*



*Santiago Jiménez y sus Valedores. L. to r.: Ismael Gonzáles, Santiago Jiménez, Manuel Gonzáles.  
San Antonio, Texas, circa late 1940s.*

*Photo courtesy Santiago Jiménez & Institute for Texan Culture at San Antonio.*



development of individual styles and eventually stylistic trends in Tex-Mex accordion playing. According to several accordionists.

people at dances have even expressed their open dislike towards the piano accordion. (Ry Cooder – 1975)

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## A Little More About the Accordion

The first accordion was built by the German Friedrich Buschmann in 1822 who called it a *Ziebbharmonika* (*zieh* in German means *pull*). However it was Cyrill Damian who in 1829 in Vienna, Austria, began to mass produce and adopt the name *accordion* for these instruments. In Spanish the name of the instrument is usually spelled *acordeon* while in English it is generally spelled *accordion*.

I found one of the first written reports of the accordion being used along the Border area in John Peavey's "Echoes from the Rio Grande Valley" (Springman-King, 1963, page 27) where the author describes an open air dance about 1905 where a

band consisting of fiddle, accordion, and drum supplied the music. Many people told me that the instrument was brought into the area by German and Bohemian settlers. Germans were also active in the construction of factories, mines and the railroads in Northern Mexico. Narciso Martínez told me that as a young man when he was learning to play the accordion, "I had a *compadre* who had a good ear and we would go hear those German bands play in the plaza and when we got home, my *compadre* would whistle the tunes we liked and I would try to play them on the accordion!" Many tunes are no doubt of Mexican origin, and may be adapted or derived from

orchestral arrangements. The more exact evolution and origins of this music I shall

leave for future researchers!

(Chris Strachwitz – 1995)

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## The Musicians

Among the first accordionists to become popular in South Texas were Bruno Villareal and José Rodríguez. **Bruno Villareal**, almost blind, was born May 21, 1912 in La Grulla in the Rio Grande Valley. By the time he made his first records he was labeled "El Azote del Valle" (the whip of the valley) and a few years ago was still remembered by people as far north as Amarillo, Texas, for playing in the streets with a tin cup attached to his piano accordion, the instrument he seemed to favor from the late 1930s onward. Bruno Villareal was inducted into the Conjunto Music Hall of Fame in 1987. He died a few years later, on May 15, 1990. While Bruno was an itinerant street musician, **José Rodríguez** played primarily for dancing. Narciso Martínez recalled at-

tending a dance where José Rodríguez, known as "El Tigre del Valle" and "La Bamba," was playing. Upon spotting Narciso, José supposedly stopped the dance and told Narciso that he did not want him around because he wanted to guard his tunes for his own recording sessions and accused Narciso of "stealing" his material.

**Jesús Casiano**, known as "El Gallito" (the little rooster), apparently spent most of his life in San Antonio where he continued to record into the 1950s for RIO Records, making polkas his specialty.

**Lolo Cavazos**, born January 5, 1906 in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, was living in Alice, Texas, when I corresponded with him in 1975. I heard that he died sometime in the 1980s. Lolo recalled that accordion music

had been popular since he was a little boy and he believed Norteño music got started in the Rio Grande Valley. He was a self-taught musician and began playing in the 1930s on a two-row instrument, which he was still playing in the mid 1970s. During the 1950s Lolo Cavazos recorded a few sides for the IDEAL label.

The most important and influential accordionist in the San Antonio area during this period of the pioneer recordings was **Santiago Jimenéz**. Born April 25, 1913, in San Antonio, Santiago was labeled "El Flaco" (the skinny one) on his first records. He started to play accordion about 1923 and learned most of his early tunes from his father, Patricio Jimenéz. About 1935 Santiago bought his first two-row accordion at a pawnshop and within a year was broadcasting daily over the radio. Thomas Acuña, music store owner and talent scout, heard these programs and asked Santiago to record. The pay was only \$7 per record and no royalties but via his records and radio programs Santiago became locally

popular. During World War II the major record companies stopped recording regional music, giving rise to many small firms in the late '40s to fill the ever-growing demand. Santiago recorded extensively in the late 1940s and early '50s and was especially successful with "Viva Seguíne" and "La Piedrera" which have become polka standards in south Texas. Santiago Jiménez was one of the few accordionists who could sing, and on his last recordings he sang duet with his son, Flaco. Don Santiago Jiménez died in San Antonio, Texas, on December 18, 1984. His tradition however lives on in the hands of his sons, Leonardo, better known as Flaco Jiménez, and Santiago Jr. (Don Santiago Jiménez's first and last recordings are available on Arhoolie CD/C 414).

Finally the Godfather of Norteño music: **Narciso Martínez**, who was no doubt the most popular accordionist from the mid-1930s to the mid '50s. Born October 29, 1911, in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Narciso grew up in the Valley and became known as "El

Huracán del Valle" once he started to record in 1936. Besides being a superb musician, Narciso emphasized the treble end of the accordion, leaving the bass part to his *bajo sexto* player. In the late 1940s when IDEAL Records started, Narciso became their primary artist or "house accordionist" who not only recorded prolifically on his own but also helped create the Norteño style by accompanying most of the popular vocal duets on that label. He also recorded with the popular orchestra leader, Beto Villa, and soon went on tour across the southwest, thereby increasing his audience enormously. Narciso continued to play occasional dances to the end of his life, but during the '60s, as he found his popularity sagging, he took a job driving trucks and later worked as an animal keeper at the

Brownsville zoo. In 1983 Narciso received the National Heritage Fellowship Award from the NEA and he has been inducted into the Conjunto Music Hall of Fame. In 1989 Narciso's album of his best recordings for the IDEAL label was up for a GRAMMY nomination (Arhoolie CD/C 361 – Father of the Texas-Mexican Conjunto). Narciso Martínez died on June 5, 1992 at his home near San Benito, Texas.

Narciso Martínez and Santiago Jiménez along with Flaco Jiménez, Eugenio Abrego, and many other fine accordionists can be seen in the documentary films: **CHULAS FRONTERAS** and **DEL MERO CORAZÓN** made by Les Blank and Chris Strachwitz. (Both films are available on one video cassette from Arhoolie Records for only \$30 plus shipping.)

(Chris Strachwitz - 1995)

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Cover photo: Narciso Martínez & Santiago Almeida

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6. LA LIEBRE LIGERIA (*Redova*) -  
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Paz Flores & Francisco Montalvo
8. LA BELLA ITALIA (*Polka*) - Bruno Villareal
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10. ADIOS MARIA (*Polka*) - Bruno Villareal
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26. EL GOLFO (*Vals Bajito*) - Lolo Cavazos
27. LA GARDENIA (*Polka*) - Lolo Cavazos

*All recordings made in San Antonio & Dallas, Texas, between June 1930 and June 1939.*

Cover photo: Narciso Martínez and Santiago Almeida.

Edited & produced by Chris Strachwitz.

Cover design by Wayne Pope.

All recordings from the collection of Chris Strachwitz.

Sound restoration by George Morrow using the No Noise system.

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