TEXAS-MEXICAN BORDER MUSIC - VOL. IV ORQUESTAS TÍPICAS "The First Recordings: 1926-1938"



FOLBLURIC

- 1. OFELIA (J. García) (polca) José Perches Enriquíz Orq. San Francisco, Ca. 3/31/1928 (W400543B-Ok 16291)
- 2. COQUETONA Y JUGUETONA (Rafael Galindo) (danzas) • Quinteto TipicoíMexicana • New York 12/1926 (W95418,Co2716x)
- 3. POR VIDA DE DIOS (Ed. Tavo) (polka) Orq. Acosta-Rosette - Los Angeles, Ca. 1927 (W95903,Co 2857x)
- ALICIA (J. P. Enriíuez) (vals) José Perches Enríquez Orq. - San Francisco, CA. 3/30/1928 (W400536B,OK16291)
- 5. ALMA MÍA DE MI GRANDOTA (polca) Orq. Del Norte - El Paso, Tx. 4/20/1928 (BVE42185,Vi81236)
- 6. MONTERREY ALEGRE (A.M. Garza) (pasadoble flamenco) - Orq. Mexicana Calvillo San Antonio, Tx. 3/1928 (Vo8219)
- 7. SONADOR (vals) Los Desvalados El Paso, Tx. 4/28/1928 (BVE 42246-2)
- MONDRAGÓN (Pacheco) (marcha) Orq. De La Familia Ramos - Chicago, Ill. 8/25/1928 (C-2351, Vo8196)
- 9. ABORRECIDO (polca) Típica Martínez San Antonio, Tx. 12/1928 (W110085, Co3550X)
- **10. EL MAÑOSO** (pasodoble) **Orquesta Típica Fronteriza** (A. Reyes-director) El Paso, Tx. 4/15/1928 (BVE42141-2, Vi80756)
- PENSANDO EN TI (vals) Orq. de Alfredo M. Garza San Antonio, Tx. 6/17/1929 (W402660A, Ok16617)
- 12. LA NEGRA (one-step) Banda Chihuahua Los Angeles, Ca. 5/24/1929 (W403461B, Ok16651)
- **13. LA PRIETA, LA GÜERA Y LA CHATA** (1.C. Pérez) (danzas) - **Los Desvelados** El Paso, Tx. 7/15/1929 (BVE55246-2, Vi46435A)

- 14. LOS CANEDISTAS (polca) Orq. de Guadalupe Acosta San Antonio, Tx. 6/20/30 (W480024c,Ok16783)
- ADIOS MI CHAPARRITA (Tata Nacho) (tango-fox trot) Emilio Cáceres y su orq. del Club Aguila (vocal: Herrera y Quiroga) - San Antonio, Tx. 4/4/1934 (BVE82804-1)
- 16. EL SUEÑO DE CALIFAS (one-step) Orq. Fronteriza El Paso, Tx. 10/23/1934 (EP5049A, Ok16837)
- LA REINA DE LAS FLORES (mazurka) Orq. Fronteriza El Paso, Tx. 10/23/1934 (EP5052A,Ok16828)
- 18. ADIOS AMOR MÍO (polca) Orq. Fronteriza El Paso, Tx. 10/23/1934 (EP5042B,Ok16825)
- 19. SIEMPRE ALEGRE (schottish) Orq. Fronteriza El Paso, Tx. 10/23/1934 (EP5053A,Ok16828)
- 20. ES IMPOSIBLE (one-step) Orq. Tomás Núñez El Paso, Tx. 10/24/1934 (EP5083A,Vo8566)
- 21. LAS GAVIOTAS (one-step) Orq. Tomás Núñez El Paso, Tx. 10/24/1934 (EP5082A,Vo8566)
- 22. PENUMBRA (vals bajito) José María Arredondo Trio ("El Venado") - San Antonio, Tx. 11/12/1936 (8A2460-1,Vo8958)
- 23. BESOS Y CEREZAS (foxtrot) Los Cuatezones (Quinteto de Cuerdas) - San Antonio, Tx. 11/19/1936 (8A2529-1,Vo8922)
- 24. CELOSA (vals-canción) Eva Garza con Orq. Dallas, Tx. 12/6/1937 (62944, De10278)
- 25. JIG IN G (E. Cáceres) (foxtrot) Emilio Caceres y su orq. del Club Aguila - San Antonio, Tx. 4/4/1934 (BVE82807-2)
- 26. ALMA ANGELINA (Vals canción) Las Hermanas Padilla & Orq. de Manuel S. Acuña - Los Angeles, Ca. 2/18/1938 (MLA 274-A, Vo9072)
- Total time: 78:30 © & © 1996 by Arhoolie Productions, Inc.

MEXICAN-AMERICAN BORDER MUSIC-VOL. 4

Orquestas Típicas

The First Recordings: 1926 - 1938

Pioneer Mexican-American Dance Orchestras

Orchestas Típicas *"The First Recordings: 1926-1938"*

The charming dance tunes by these Mexican and Mexican-American orchestras ranging in size from clarinet-led trios to 10 or 15 piece bands constitute the first and last documents of a genre which was very popular during the half century between 1885 and 1935. The recordings were made between 1926 and 1938, north of the border, in the United States with the then-recently perfected electrical equipment. Many of the musicians were no doubt recent immigrants who had left Mexico because of the endless turmoil caused by the revolution. Others, however, were Tejanos or Mexican-Americans who had been supplying their communities with popular music for generations, while also keeping traditions from the homeland alive. For the most part they were well-trained players who were familiar with or could read the often difficult and complex compositions and arrangements. These orquestas típicas could be heard at every sort of occasion, from private dances, quinceañeras, fiestas to Sunday concerts in

the park. They also performed a remarkable variety of music to please every strata of border society and had to be prepared for every kind of request, which might well be for a *paso doble*, *danza*, one-step, waltz, mazurka, *buapango*, polka, fox trot, march, schottishe, tango, or *danzón*.

Today orquestas típicas have just about disappeared, or more precisely, they have been replaced by conjuntos, mariachis, orquestas tejanas, grupos, or bandas, which today bring the latest and most popular songs and dances to the various levels of Mexican and Mexican-American society. While the demand among today's young, affluent middle class may be for cumbias, boleros, latin or salsa, it is the polka and the waltz which have continued to be the mainstays of the thousands of conjuntos who nightly pour out their repertoire of rancheras and corridos, no matter if they are performing in a cantina or a huge stadium. Violins are today pretty well limited to mariachis or regional folk ensembles from the Huasteca and

Michoacán. Brass and reeds on the other hand have made a remarkable comeback during the past ten years with the popularity of *banda* music, which had it origins mainly in the states of Sinaloa and Zacatecas. In Mexican urbanpop music violins have been replaced by the synthesizer while in Mexican rural music

A LITTLE HISTORY:

By the middle of the 17th century in colonial Mexico, the Spaniards had established "Coliseos de Comedios" which became the birth places for the first secular musical ensembles. In these popular theaters, small companies would put on performances which included singers, dancers, comics and musicians who would interpret traditional Spanish songs and dances such as coplas, décimas, romances, and jotas alongside local and regional specialties. The small orchestras to accompany the shows would usually include violins, harps, guitars, flutes, oboes, and perhaps a cornet. These "Coliseos" in the major urban centers were open to the general public and Spaniards, criollos, mestizos, indigenous people, as well as mulattos would mingle and together enjoy the presentations.

since the 1940s they have been replaced mostly by the accordion. What rock and roll guitarists and soul music have done to American dance bands popular during the first half of the 20th century, accordionists, keyboard players, and *bandas* have done to Mexican *orquestas típicas* over the last 60 years.

By the mid-17th century, imported Africans were outnumbering the Spaniards. Unfortunately little is known about the exact influence of Africans on the development of Mexican popular music, but their presence was definitely felt, if primarily in the urban centers of Mexico City, Puebla, Guanajuato, Morelia, Guadalajara, Pachuca, and of course Veracruz, the main port of entry. Some scholars have suggested that Africans sang verses, much like *sones*, often critical of the colonial rulers and that African dances were considered "excessive" but obviously left their mark, especially via the Cuban imports of the past century like the *babanera*, *danzón*, and bolero.

Very little is known about the nature of Spanish folk music at the time of the conquest except that many of the early Spaniards were from the province of Andalucía — the center of Gypsy culture. Many dances and vocal traditions at first ascribed to Spain, may have actually had their origins in other Latin American or Caribbean countries.

By 1821 Mexico had gained her independence from Spain but a long struggle ensued between the conservatives, who were for the continued dominance by the Church, and the Liberals who were for the integration of the indigenous populations. Soon many professional musicians and composers, who were trained in a religious environment, departed from strictly liturgical music and broadened their activities to include theater work. The Spanish zarzuela (musical theater) had a tremendous following as did Italian oper,a and the demand for professional musicians grew rapidly. Conscious efforts towards cultural and social integration were especially noticeable after 1850 under the Zapotecan Indian president, Benito Júarez, who gave official recognition to the cultures of mestizos and Indians. The rich and the aristocracy were soon in control of music and culture and the era of conservatories and musical academies as well as concerts and music in the home was soon in evidence among the elite.

Since the latter part of the 18th century,

France replaced Spain as the cultural trend setter. The minuet, waltz, polka, mazurka, schottische, among others, were all imported from Paris. Regionally, sones (also known as buapangos in the northeast) of Spanish, African, and mestizo origins, continued to be popular in part no doubt due to their improvised, topical lyrics. Since many of the early Spanish settlers came from the region of Andalucía, it is said that the Mexican son has strong ties to improvised Gypsy singing. Today these ties are still in evidence, especially in Veracruz where sones jarochos are, at their best, largely improvised, and also in the state of Michoacán where valones are an older improvised verse tradition. During the period of French influence Mexico also experienced tremendous popularity for military brass bands which perhaps reached its peak in the late 1800s when, for example, the Eighth Cavalry Mexican Band, consisting of over 60 musicians under the direction of Encarnación Payén, played at the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition which opened in New Orleans, Louisiana, on December 16, 1884. This, and similar Mexican bands, as well as the early Cuban danzón orchestras (note Arhoolie CD 7032) are said to have left considerable impact upon

many of the just-developing jazz musicians in that city. The popularity of brass bands was universal at the turn of the century. In the United States John Philip Sousa, with his polished brass band, was a pop star. Every city and town in Mexico had its *banda de policía* and marches were especially popular with the public.

To counteract the often rebellious regional authentic mestizo folk music, the national government from the mid-1800s on, supported what became known as "nationalist" popular music. This included the military brass bands along with what were soon-to-be known as *orquestas típicas*, which were actually to some degree copies of the folk *típicas* which were already regionally popular by the mid-1850s. Folk *típicas* had evolved from the theater orchestras, mixed with indigenous traditions, and then took many directions in the various parts of Mexico.

In 1884 the first pseudo *orquesta típica* was organized by students and teachers from the National Conservatory in Mexico City under the direction of Carlos Curti. Their repertoire consisted of arrangements of a great variety of popular dance music. To appeal to the masses and perhaps to give them some stamp of authenticity, the musicians even wore *charro*

costumes, similar to those still favored by today's *mariachis*, which themselves evolved from folk típicas. The orquestas típicas were given government support to take Mexican culture and music all over the world and many of them traveled to the United States and to Europe. These orquestas típicas often used regional and folk instruments including bandolons, mandolins, harps, flutes, marimbas, psalteries, violins, guitars, and guitarrones but they also included classical instruments such as violincellos, contra-bass, clarinets, trumpets, and other brass.

These orchestras were mostly an urban attraction but were sometimes invited to wealthy landowners' haciendas or to village fiestas. Some of these orchestras would take on singers and dancers in order to present a broad spectrum of Mexican music. The most famous of the early national *orquestas típicas*, formed in 1901, was under the direction of Miguel Lerdo de Tejada. Although headquartered in Mexico City, the orchestra toured widely and in 1902 went to the Pan American Exhibition in Buffalo, N.Y. In 1928 and 1929, when Tejada led several orques*tas típicas*, he again toured the United States, always with continued government support. I have omitted recordings by Tejada's

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orchestra because they were made late in the orchestra's career and feature dreadful vocals by semi-operatic singers performing "national" airs with brief instrumental interludes. The recordings by Tejada also do not appear to be representative of what the real *orquestas típicas* (who did make the recordings heard on this CD) sounded like. (An LP of re-issues of Tejada's music used to be available in Mexico.)

The use of the term orquesta típica coincides with the beginning of the regime of Porfirio Díaz in the early 1880s. With his departure however, and the start of the decades-long Mexican Revolution in 1910, authentic and regional folk musics began to make more of an impact on the popular music scene in Mexico. The rise of the mariachi from regional string ensemble specializing in improvised sones to almost becoming Mexico's national music (although highly stylized with almost no elements of improvisation left) can be largely attributed to the populist Mexican Revolution. The period from the start of the revolution in 1910 until the mid-1920s, when the first recordings heard on this collection were made, was a time when many professional as well as folk musicians left Mexico in search of more peaceful and rewarding work in El Norte. Although most

recordings then, as now, were made by vocalists, these gems of mostly instrumental music represent a few audio snapshots of what the *orquestas tipicas* mixed with regional and folk elements had evolved into during the last decades of the genre's existence.

Dancing has always been a popular pastime for all social classes, but it has been especially prevalent since the early 1920s. On April 20, 1920, Salón México, a large dance hall, opened in Mexico City. Salón México was open to everyone and it was open all night long! The clientele included not only the urban elite, but the working classes, prostitutes and other elements of the "partying" crowd! The dances varied from currently popular and sexy danzones played mostly by Cuban bands, to tangos, fox trots, waltzes, pasodobles, polkas, and more. Salones de baile soon sprang up all over the country and good, versatile dance musicians were in great demand. You see the word "salón" to this day in many parts of Mexico, designating a dance hall for everyone in contrast to the "men only" policy of the lowly cantina!

Regional Mexican folk musics and dances continued their evolution and development out in the provinces. According to Juan S. Garrido, a major Mexican orchestra leader and composer from the 1920s to the 40s, the complicated rhythms of the *son* or huapango prevented such regional folk traditions from becoming nationally successful. However, beginning with the Mexican Revolution, many of the regional musics and dances have entered the mainstream of Mexican popular culture, although often to the disdain of the upper classes.

THE DANCES:

The dances heard on these recordings are those which were the most popular at the time and the **polka** appears to be right at the top! This dance was possibly introduced from the US during the Mexican War of 1847 but it is more likely that it came to Mexico from France during the time of Emperor Maximilian (1864-67) when French influence dominated (as it continued to do under Porfirio Díaz). Like so many imported dances, the polka has filtered down to the masses from the society folks who were first enamored of it. The waltz also came from France and was already widely popular by 1815. Church officials called the waltz "obscene" with the words: "man's depravity could not invent anything more pernicious" but the dance became perhaps the most important

element in Mexican music because almost every canción is in waltz time! During the Díaz regime the Viennese waltz became very fashionable and "Sobre Las Olas" (Over The Waves) by the Mexican composer, Juventino Rosas, became an international hit (note ARH/FL CD 7018 - Orquestas de Cuerdas - cut # 2).

Danzas, contradanzas, and related dances also came from Europe, some with a Cuban twist. The fox trot was of course the most popular American dance step in the 1920s and also gained enormous popularity in Mexico. The **bolero** in 2/4 time came from Cuba and is still popular today with bands and especially with trios. The first queen of Tejano music, Lydia Mendoza, recorded many boleros during her long recording career and fellow Tejana, Chelo Silva built her entire very successful career on singing only boleros. Text-wise the tango has a lot in common with the bolero and the Argentine singer Rosita Quiroga's recording of "Tango Negro" supposedly helped popularize this genre internationally in the 1920s. The tango started in the red light district of Buenos Aires and soon spread all over the world as a sensual and sexy dance. The pasodoble, although it means two step in Spanish, is actually a type of one-step and became very popular in the late 1920s and had long been identified with bull fights. **Onesteps** were popular on both sides of the border and the tune "La Negra" (# 12 by Banda Chihuahua) to my ears has a good bit of ragtime in it: it seems to contain elements of the "Black And White Rag." The "La Negra" heard here has no relationship to the *mariachi* anthem by the same title.

THE ORCHESTRAS:

Unfortunately very little is known about the various orchestras or their leaders which are heard on this CD. However, it seems that El Paso, Texas, was home to a large number of excellent bands in the late 1920s. El Paso, with Júarez, Chihuahua, across the river, was at that time the main gateway between the United States and Mexico. The city was an urban oasis for the many cattle ranchers and the just developing oil-related businesses in a vast region within hundreds or even thousands of miles. With elegant hotels, a cosmopolitan society scene, military posts on the outskirts, and a developing center for aviation, El Paso was obviously a remarkable and rapidly growing city. Here two cultures, both fond of music, parties and dancing, probably offered many

opportunities for good orchestras and all sorts of musicians and singers, who could supply the latest hits as well as old favorites.

El Paso, along with the rest of the United States, was also experiencing considerable problems related to the passage of the Volstead Act in 1919 and subsequently the Eighteenth Amendment, which was ratified on January 16. 1920. It signaled the beginning of Prohibition! Historian C.L. Sonnichsen in his book "Pass Of The North Vol. 2 (1918-1980)" states: "The town was not wide open at the outbreak of the war (World War I), but it was only half closed. The tradition of the border was against forcing morality on anybody. Liquor flowed less freely, perhaps, in 1920 than it did in 1890, but it still flowed, and prostitution and gambling were still present. Liquor traffic was impossible to stop...bottle bearing Mexicans could wade the river almost anywhere ... " The Border Patrol Service, which was only established in 1924. simply increased the violence connected with it in their attempt to stop the smuggling and in 1928 El Paso reached its peak as a "hot" town according to Sonnichsen. The still widely sung corrido "El Contrabando del Paso" was first recorded at that time (note: ARH/FL CD - 7019/ 20 : Corridos y Tragedias de la Frontera).

Sonnichsen goes on to say: "Since bonafide whiskey and gin could be obtained easily and more or less cheaply, the poisonous concoctions evolved in cellars and bathrooms throughout the rest of the nation were almost unheard of in El Paso. As a result, the incidence of paralysis, blindness, and death from drinking weird potions was low indeed. Prohibition, of course, was a boon to Júarez and became even more of a bonanza when two Kentucky distilleries moved to Mexico and began to produce Straight American and Waterfill & Frazier whiskies. There was really little point to smuggling liquor into Texas when the Mexican fountain was so close at hand. ... Júarez was always a thorn in the flesh to the reformers ... who were constantly looking for ways to separate the imbiber from his bottle.

"Júarez became dependent on El Paso for trade, employment, and patronage, and its chief function became, increasingly, the providing of entertainment for fun seeking Americans — frequently on a very low level. . . . El Paso was by no means the worst place in Texas for a Mexican to live, however. The upper levels of American and Mexican society continued to mesh pretty well. . . Mexicans with money and education and talent of any kind could make

their way in gringo society and were accepted as equals." Mr. Sonnichsen continues: "but discrimination existed in El Paso as well as in other Texas cities. The good jobs went to Anglos...but immigrants had hope and Abraham Chávez, who spent his childhood in Júarez, used to carry his violin back and forth across the river when he went for lessons. He was too proud to accept the coins the tourists tossed him when they asked him to play, but he went on to become a concert violinist, a professor of music at the University of Colorado, and the conductor of the El Paso Symphony Orchestra. The ladder was there, and it could be climbed, but some Mexicans born in the United States were unwilling to endure the discrimination...and went back to their homeland...to seek a more hospitable environment. ... By the end of the 'roaring twenties'... business was booming on both sides of the border, people were making a lot of money, legitimately and illegitimately, and the pace of life was fast." There were speakeasies everywhere and night life galore on both sides of the border.

In April of 1928, one of the first traveling recording teams from the Victor company came from New York to El Paso and recorded a

number of excellent Mexican singers and orchestras including the fine corridistas Luís Hernández and Leonardo Sifuentes (note: Arhoolie CDs 7019/20 and box set CD 7041/44 -The Mexican Revolution) as well as the Orguesta del Norte, Los Desvalados, and the Orquesta Típica Fronteriza, all heard on this collection. Mexicans have always had the reputation for being fine singers and musicians and El Paso during the boom years of the 20s had apparently attracted some of the most talented ones. As the old saying goes: musicians and prostitutes go where the money is! San Antonio was another regular stop-over for the recording teams and here they found not only plenty of Mexican talent but also American rural string bands, blues singers, territory bands, and Czech-Bohemian orchestras.

In 1977 I met Guadalupe Acosta who had recorded with his orchestra in 1930 and whose family is responsible for the photo on the cover of this disc. He also sold, built, and repaired instruments, and told us about how, as a talent scout for the Okeh label, he felt obliged to teach some of the singers proper Spanish in order to qualify for a recording session! Emilio Cáceres, also from San Antonio, is probably the only name familiar to many jazz fans, because he was not only leading one of the best Mexican dance bands in San Antonio from the 1930s into the 50s, but cut some wonderful hot jazz sides at the same time (note #25) and continued to develop as a jazz violinist who made superb jazz albums in the 1960s. The only orchestra, however, which (via its recordings heard here) clearly hints at what was soon to be the Tejano *orquesta* sound, was led by Tomás Núñez, and working in El Paso in the mid-1930s!

Among Mexican orchestra scholars, however, the name of Manuel S. Acuña is probably the most prominent name in this collection. Mr. Acuña was a well-trained and educated musician from Mexico, but never really made a name for himself as a successful orchestra leader. Rather his fame will ultimately rest in having been one of the first professional arrangers and record producers for Mexican music in Los Angeles. He put together the rather dreadful sounding but very successful small studio recording group, Los Costeños, who backed the enormously popular Padilla sisters on almost all of their recordings. In that group he combined what in his opinion were probably the best elements of the evolving mariachi sound and the small orguestas tipicas with their today almost hokey sounding interpretations of *ranchera* music. Mr. Acuña did record with his full orchestra a series of folk dance discs for Decca in the 1930s and later in the 40s again for the Imperial label and in the 1950s had his own recording company. This collection ends with one of the very few selections recorded by

Mr. Acuña's full and well-arranged orchestra, backing the Padilla sisters in 1938. This was however the sound of the genteel Mexican past and not of the swing and *ranchera* driven Tejano/Chicano orquestas which in the 1950s revitalized Mexican-American orchestras.

(Chris Strachwitz - 1996)

I wish to acknowledge the following sources for my essay: 1) C.L. Sonnichsen: "Pass of the North Vol. 2" - Texas Western Press. 2) Claes af Geijerstam: "Popular Music in Mexico" - University of New Mexico Press. and 3) two general articles sent to me by Sr. Ernesto Cano Lomeli of Guadalajara, Jalisco. Also thanks to Manuel Peña for reading my essays for factual details.

For further examples of the Tejano/Chicano orquesta sound as it evolved from the late 1940s into the 1950s, may we suggest: Arhoolic CD/C 364: BETO VILLA, his sax and orq. - "Father of Orquesta Tejana." Arhoolic CD/C 368 ORQUESTAS The Formative Years (1947-1960). Arhoolic CD/C 363 ISIDRO LOPEZ, his sax and orq. - "El Indio." Also note the forthcoming book by Manuel Peña: "The Mexican-American Orquesta" - Univ. of Texas Press - late 1996

Edited and produced by Chris Strachwitz

Cover photo: the Guadalupe Acosta Orquesta - courtesy the Guadalupe Acosta Family; copy from the Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio

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All original recordings from the collection of Chris Strachwitz

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