

El Ciego Melquiades

(the blind fiddler)

San Antonio House Party

Arhoolie 7045

1. EL GATO NEGRO (POLKA) (4/1938)
2. LAS TRES ELVIRAS (MAZURKA) (9/37)
3. LA GRIPA (POLKA) (9/37)
4. ALMA DEL ALMA (VALS) (10/38)
5. DIAS FELICES (POLKA) (9/37)
6. BEATRIZ (VALS) (10/38)
7. TODOS ELLOS (TWO STEP) (2/37)
8. PANCHO VILLA (POLKA) (10/36)
9. QUE TOMAS (TWO STEP) (10/38)
10. FELICITAS (POLKA) (10/38)
11. LA BORADITA (POLKA) (10/38)
12. TUYO O DE NADIE (VALS) (2/35)
13. CONCHA (POLKA) (9/37)
14. ISABEL (VALS) (9/37)
15. MARY (POLKA) (4/38)
16. PARA MI Y PARA MI NOVIA (VALS FOX TROT) (4/38)
17. LUZ (POLKA) (10/38)
18. MUCHACHAS MODERNAS (VALS FOX TROT) (10/36)
19. VIRGINIA (POLKA) (CA. 1949)
20. MANUELITA (POLKA) (CA. 1949)

"El Ciego" Melquiades Rodriguez - fiddle with unknown guitar, violoncello, string bass (& clarinet on # 7)

Recorded in San Antonio, Texas between 1935 and 1949

Re-issue edited & produced by Chris Strachwitz

Sound restoration by George Morrow/
The Old Masters

Graphic Design by Morgan Dodge
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10341 San Pablo Ave, El Cerrito, CA 94530
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El Ciego Melquiades (The Blind Fiddler) "San Antonio House Party"

Melquiades Rodríguez began his recording career in the early 1930s when he made several records as a singer and guitarist with various partners. By this time however, the music he was best at, playing a fiddle at country dances or house parties, was fading from the scene of popular Mexican-American music in south Texas. Vocal duets with guitars were the popular sound on records, radio and juke boxes. The era of the string bands and small "orquestas típicas" was fading rapidly. The accordion was replacing the violin at dances – especially in the country where full orchestras were an extravagance no one could afford. Somehow Melquiades' real talents were brought to the attention of the recording director and during the second half of his second recording session in 1935, Melquiades was listed

as "El Ciego (the Blind) Melquiades" and recorded two polkas and two waltzes on the fiddle. The same pattern of recording some vocal selections along with several fiddle tunes, persisted through early 1937. By September of 1937 Melquiades was asked to record only fiddle tunes and was billed solidly as "El Ciego Melquiades" and a violoncello player was added to give him some nice back up and seconding. Apparently the fiddle solos were successful enough to warrant El Ciego to be asked back into the studio several more times before the firm ceased their regional recording activities in San Antonio late in 1938. During World War II most recordings of regional and vernacular music ceased and it was not until the late 1940s when a host of small local labels sprang up all over the country trying to fill the

demand from juke box operators. The last two selections on this CD are taken from 78s on the Corpus Christi located AERO label from the late 1940s, which are apparently the last sides El Ciego made on fiddle. He did record once more for IDEAL but again as a singer and guitarist.

The music which Melquiades Rodríguez played on the fiddle was from a fading tradition. The sound of the violin, once so common on both sides of the border, was by the 1940s and 50s rapidly replaced by the much louder and sturdier accordion. There were a few other violinists during the 1930s who made similar recordings but none were as popular as El Ciego Melquiades. I think he played in a more fluent and rural style while the

others were perhaps better trained musicians. He was also apparently a very well liked man who appeared at many house parties, restaurants, bars, and on the streets of San Antonio. A woman raised in San Antonio, but living in the Bay Area, phoned me and recalled the parties her father used to give where El Ciego would play all night long, and she had fond memories of him even though she was only a little girl at the time. Other people remembered the blind fiddler in San Antonio, including Fred Zimmerle of Trio San Antonio, whose brother Henry used to play guitar with El Ciego during the 1940s. They all had fond memories of the man and his music, but knew nothing about him.

(Chris Strachwitz – 2002)

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– fiddle

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