

# Los Pingüinos Del Norte



**Trovadores De La Frontera - Border Troubadors**  
Celebrating 50 years of Rubén "The Penguin"  
Castillo & Los Pingüinos Del Norte



9024

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**Trovadores De La Frontera**  
featuring "El Corrido de Juan García"



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## *Trovadores de la frontera/Border Troubadors*

1. **EL CORRIDO DE JUAN GARCIA** (Corrido) (DAR) (The Ballad of Juan García)
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### Los Pingüinos Del Norte:

**Rubén Castillo Juárez** - accordion y voz  
**Antonio Perez Rodriguez** - bajo sexto y voz  
**Jose Rodriguez De La Cruz** - tolaloche

\* All tracks written by Rubén Castillo Juárez, and all arrangements of traditional material are © by Tradition Music Co. (BMI) admin. by BUG Music Co. - Hollywood, CA., USA.

**Grabado en** Piedras Negras, Coah. Mexico por Chris Strachwitz

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Congratulations to  
**Rubén Castillo Juárez,**  
celebrating 50 years in Musica Norteña!

The celebrations of the patriotic holiday of September 16, 2000, in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, included one very special event indeed. The public performance of regional music by the conjunto Los Pingüinos del Norte marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a professional musician and walking repository of border lore of the group's leader — Rubén Castillo Juárez — known to one and all as “el Pingüino mayor” (the top/senior penguin). Short of stature and somewhat pigeon-chested, Sr. Castillo had acquired this moniker at the age of eight while still working with his family on the isolated rural *ranchería* in the hinterlands of Nuevo Laredo,

Tamaulipas, where he was born and raised. When Rubén was about ten or eleven years old, his father's legs were crushed by a mishandled load of firewood, and he was no longer able to support his extensive family. As a consequence, young Rubén was obliged to migrate to the city of Nuevo Laredo and seek some means of support there. Like so many other Mexican children in similar circumstances, the boy was encouraged to learn to play an instrument — in this case the guitar, at least initially — and to sing popular songs in public for tips. His debut performance came during a contest organized by the municipal

authorities in honor of the Independence holiday, September 16, 1950. The Penguin recalls that he was loaned a fancy *charro* suit complete with boots and a broad-brimmed *sombrero* (much like mariachi musicians still wear), and that he sang the *cristero* corrido "Valentín de la sierra." His choice was a resounding success and to this day Los Pingüinos are particularly noted for their vast repertoire of corridos, although they do play all kinds of popular music of the region as well. As a prize, the *presidente municipal* (mayor) personally handed the Penguin a gleaming five peso coin. The crowd followed suit by throwing him five and ten centavo coins in such abundance, that by the end of the day, the young Rubén walked away from the plaza with no less than fifty-five pesos and fifty-five centavos — a princely sum for a boy at that time and place. The Penguin himself was

particularly impressed by the symmetry of four "fives," and has never forgotten the moment.

For a time, the novice street musician hooked up with another lad who played accordion, and they worked the streets, parks, markets, and bars playing *música norteña* in the style of the currently popular recording groups such as the Hermanos Maya, and of course, the incomparable Alegres de Terán. Sensing that the accordion was the key to success, the Penguin bought a cheap, used two-row button model, and began learning to play it in his spare time — in secret as he puts it. When he finally felt confident in his accordion skills, he soon found another boy who could accompany him on guitar, and later, *bajo sexto*. This dueto played the streets and bars of Nuevo Laredo for several years under the name Los Dos Morenos (The Two Dark-skinned Men). The

photograph seen here from 1952 suggests that Rubén also played in a trio with two of his older brothers for a time. The competition in Nuevo Laredo was fierce, however, and by the late 1950s Rubén was beginning to feel the need for more stability in his life. These factors impelled him to take leave of his beloved Nuevo Laredo, never to return on a permanent basis. Nonetheless, he did take with him a unique repertoire of songs and corridos that were current in the Two Laredos (as they are called) during the 1950s. One great example of this type of material is the song "The Dime for the Bridge" (#10), composed by the notoriously "Bohemian" songster Manuel C. Valdez, himself a native of the "Two Laredos," which describes a drunkard's "pilgrimage," first through the bars nearest the International bridge, and eventually on to the notorious basement jail where a large

number of prisoners drowned during the floods of 1954, and finally back to the International bridge with only a borrowed dime in his hand to pay the toll. The Penguin assures us that this song was wildly popular in the Two Laredos, and that as he puts it, "all of the groups made lots of money playing it."

Feeling the need of a grubstake, the Penguin temporarily set aside music as his primary source of income, and worked the cotton fields near Lamesa, Texas for a season or two. Thus his songs of migrant labor (such as "El Desesperado" heard on Arhoolie CD 311) are based on personal experience. Having saved several thousand dollars, the Penguin decided to establish himself in Piedras Negras. He began by frequenting the old market district on Zaragoza street in the downtown area. He says that he introduced himself by organizing a big fiesta, and



**Los Hermanos Castillo Juárez:**

(l to r): Carlos, Rubén, y  
Daniel Castillo Juárez.

(Photo taken April 29, 1952,  
in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas)



Photo courtesy Rubén Castillo Juárez.

buying all of the food and drink. It was also in the market that he met his wife, who at that time made her living selling tortillas there. Not all went smoothly at first in Piedras Negras, however. After only three days of playing in the marketplace, the local Musicians' Union informed him that he would have to desist unless he joined up, for a considerable fee. The Penguin points out that the "dues" would have put him out of business, and that furthermore, all of the officers of the union were orchestra musicians who had no sympathy for either the street musicians or their music. Undeterred, the Penguin visited the Presidente Municipal, who, it turns out, was a fellow Nuevo Laredan. After explaining his predicament to a friendly ear, the Penguin says that he walked out of the *Presidencia* with a permit good for three years that had cost him nothing at all!

The years since then have been good to the Penguin. During the 1970s he sang with bajo sexto player Hilario Gaytán, creating the distinctive Pingüinos del Norte sound. Chris Strachwitz of Arhoolie was first taken to hear and record the group by the late Rumel Fuentes and Jerry Abrams, then a graduate student at the University of Texas studying border culture under the tutelage of the late don Américo Paredes. Recording under "field" conditions in a bucket-of-blood on Zaragoza street, near the market, called La Cantina El Patio, Strachwitz cut some really classic sides, most of which were issued on Arhoolie LP 3002, some of which have been reissued on Arhoolie CD 311. The Pingüinos relationship with Strachwitz continued in 1975 during the filming of the award-winning Brazos Films documentary *Chulas Fronteras*, in which the Penguin was able to interpret some of Rumel Fuentes' more





© by C. Strachwitz.

Los Pingüinos Del Norte in 1970 (Piedras Negras, Coah.)

poignant corridos including “Mexico Americano,” the singing of which earned him a lot of money in the cantinas. The Penguin’s proudest moment however was when he was able to appear on television with the late, great Texas *Bolero* queen, Chelo Silva. The Pingüinos have long hosted a weekly radio program in Piedras Negras over XEMU, “La Rancherita Del Aire,” and are still to be found strolling through the marketplace or playing for private parties all over northern Coahuila. Their repertoire is truly immense, including much regional material virtually unknown beyond the confines of the area, as well as all of the standards and latest hits of the national repertoire. For the last few years Rubén has had the good fortune to have teamed up with *bajo sexto* player and second voice Antonio Pérez Rodríguez, and as a consequence, Los Pingüinos sound as good as they ever did back in the 1970s.

This particular collection focuses mainly on material that is specific to either Nuevo Laredo or Piedras Negras, Eagle Pass, and the vast cultural zone that stretches from small towns in Texas such as Crystal City and Carrizo Springs all the way down to the Don Martín dam area and Rosita and Monclova, Coahuila. We have decided to feature the corrido “Juan García” because it is an as yet little-known, but very striking, ballad of intercultural conflict along the border from the early 1930s. García, a native of the *ejido* of San Vicente, some twenty miles downriver from Piedras Negras, had been convicted of stealing sheep from the vast, Anglo-owned El Indio ranch (roughly parallel to San Vicente) in 1928. After a period of incarceration of only two months at the Blue Ridge prison farm, however, García managed to escape, and return to the Piedras Negras area. As can be seen in the



corrido “Pablo Varela” (selection #9), pulling off a successful escape from an Anglo jail was often a first step in acquiring legendary, folkloric status as a hero of intercultural conflict among the Mexican populations on both sides of the river. In any case, the Anglo-Texan authorities and the owners of El Indio ranch accused García of reverting to sheep, cattle, and horse rustling as an occupation, as well as having some vaguely defined involvement in trans-river liquor smuggling. It would appear that by late December of 1931 these parties had become so frustrated by García’s continued freedom and alleged criminal activities that they decided to set up an ambush, and “liquidate” this nemesis once and for all. The Eagle Pass *Daily Guide* published a series of articles, weaving what seems to be an elaborate fiction of heroic confrontation on the part of a lone Border Patrol officer — strangely, by

*Daily Guide* standards — unnamed in all of the prolix accounts of the affair, with the “desperate Mexican bandit García and his bloodthirsty gang.” The truth would seem to be that quite a large posse of lawmen as well as gunmen from El Indio ranch set up the ambush at the river’s edge and mowed García down from cover as he rode unaware across the shallows known as Paso Largo heading for the U.S. side on the evening of December 21, 1931. However it may have occurred, García’s body was lashed to the running board of a car and paraded through the streets of Eagle Pass like a trophy buck during hunting season. The body was then put on display at the morgue, and the Anglo community engaged in a great deal of self-congratulation at this supposedly “chance” triumph which had taken place under such “heroic” circumstances. The people of Piedras Negras, however, did not believe a

word of it, and were particularly enraged when the then Mexican Consul in Eagle Pass approved the Border Patrol’s actions without having taken the trouble to investigate the circumstances. All of the prominent business people of Piedras Negras, orchestrated by the local paper, *El Bravo*, signed a petition that was sent to Mexico City demanding that the consul be removed from office. The Mexicans found it particularly galling that García had not in fact either committed, nor attempted to commit any crime on the evening of his death, and that the display of his body and the characterization of him as a “Mexican bandit” — a standard stereotype of intercultural conflict in Texas — without any proof constituted a grave injustice. This is the attitude towards the affair that is reflected in the corrido, which was apparently composed by a member of García’s family shortly after the event. The text

remained part of the García family’s private folklore for many decades, however, and it was only some ten years ago that a family member communicated the text to the Penguin. Through the Pingüinos’ performances, both in the streets and on the radio, the corrido has re-entered the active repertoire, and has found its first commercial recording on the present CD. This is but one small indicator of the importance and quality of the cultural production and transmission that makes the Penguin and his Pingüinos so unique, and so worthy of commemoration with this CD.

Prof. James Nicolopoulos  
Berkeley, Calif. - August 2001



## 1. El Corrido de Juan García.

Año de mil novecientos  
treinta y uno al recordar,  
corrido de Juan García  
es el que voy a cantar.

Era ladrón de ganado,  
contrabandeaba licor,  
ya lo traían en la lista  
agentes de Migración.

Para poder liquidarlo  
pues así convendrían,  
a traición le dieron muerte  
los rinches de infantería.

Melchor también disparando  
alcanzó a cruzar el río,  
dejando a Juan y a un amigo  
y al caballo mal herido.

Por las calles de Eagle Pass  
los gabachos lo exhibían,  
en la polvera de un carro  
el cuerpo de Juan García.

En San Vicente\* quedó  
recuerdo de aquel panteón,  
acompañado de un rinche  
que Juan García mató.

## Ballad of Juan García

The year of 1931,  
as it is remembered,  
the ballad of Juan García  
is the one I'm going to sing.

He was a livestock rustler  
and he smuggled liquor,  
Immigration agents  
had him on their "list."

In order to "liquidate" him,  
because it was the most convenient way,  
the "rinches"\* of the Border Patrol  
murdered him in an ambush.

Melchor, who was also firing,  
managed to cross the river,  
leaving behind Juan and another friend  
and a badly wounded horse.

Through the streets of Eagle Pass  
the Anglos paraded  
the body of Juan García  
lashed to the running board of a car.

In San Vicente\*\* he remains,  
a reminder to us from that cemetery,  
accompanied by a "rinche"  
that Juan García had killed.

\* Ejido de donde era, en lado mexicano más o menos  
parejo con El Indio.

\* "rinche" = originally a derogatory term applied to  
the Texas Rangers, later expanded to apply to all  
Anglo law enforcement officers.

\*\* San Vicente = Name of the ejido where Juan García  
was born and lived, roughly opposite El Indio  
ranch on the Mexican side of the river.

## 2. Errante Pasajero

(The Penguin says he learned this song 48 years ago in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas)

Para mí no hay fronteras  
ni barreras ni cerros,  
igual que un millonario  
ando por dondequiera.  
Y nunca ando llorando  
pensando en el dinero,  
los pobres no lloramos,  
parecemos de acero.

Amores he tenido  
por todo el mundo entero  
y nunca me han engreído,  
soy pájaro jilguero.

Las conquisto cantando  
y las dejo llorando,  
qué linda es la vagancia,  
qué lindo es el soltero.

Soy errante pasajero  
en avión o en tren carguero,  
anoche fui a Nueva York,  
amanezco donde puedo.

Yo nunca tuve escuela  
colegio o internado,  
yo solo tengo vida,  
a golpe me ha formado.

Algunos me presumen  
porque son muy letrados,  
pero en la vida real  
me sirven de bocado.

Soy errante pasajero  
en avión o en tren carguero,  
anoche fui a Nueva York,  
amanezco en mi Laredo.

## Wandering Traveler

For me there are no borders,  
nor barriers nor fences,  
just like a millionaire  
I go wherever I please.  
And I never go about crying,  
thinking about money,  
we poor folks don't cry,  
we're as hard as steel.  
I have had love affairs  
all around the world  
and they've never tied me down,  
I'm as free as the mockingbird.  
I seduce the girls singing  
and I leave them crying,  
how beautiful is the life of a vagabond!  
how beautiful is the life of a single man!  
I'm a wandering traveler  
on an airplane or freight train,  
last night I went to New York,  
I wake up wherever I happen to be.  
I never went to elementary school  
or high school or had any other formal training,  
I've only had the school of life,  
I've been trained in the "school of hard knocks."  
Some folks look down on me  
because they've got lots of "book-learning,"  
but in real life  
they're "push-overs" for me.  
I'm a wandering traveler  
on an airplane or freight train,  
last night I went to New York,  
and I woke up in my beloved Laredo.



4. This is the first of two corridos about a famous race horse named Chocolate that was owned by a wealthy rancher by the name of Antonio Espinoza. According to the Penguin, Espinoza was born into a prominent family in the vicinity of Guerrero, Coahuila. His ranch, known as La Cortina (The Curtain), was the showplace of the district, covering an area of approximately 200 square kilometers. Espinoza was widely respected for providing most of the animals, equipment, and entertainment for the Mexican-style rodeos known as *jaripeos* which are such an important part of the rural culture in northern Mexico. He was also generous to musicians, and both Aurelio de la Cruz (composer of this first corrido, and in the early 1990s a member of Los Pingüinos himself) and the Penguin (composer of the second) knew him well. The Penguin recounts an incident that illustrates

this relationship. When Rubén was preparing for his daughter's quinceañera (the elaborate celebration of a girl's fifteenth birthday that serves as a sort of social "coming out" ceremony), the Penguin was looking around the ranches of El Moral, a place belonging to the municipality of Guerrero, for a suitable calf to serve as the main course at the quinceañera feast. The people of El Moral suggested that Rubén approach Mr. Espinoza. Espinoza not only made the Penguin the gift of a fat, beautiful calf, he also gave him a present of 2,000 pesos to help with the other expenses. The second corrido, "The Theft of El Chocolate," concerns an incident that seems to have marked the beginning of a decline in Espinoza's fortunes. Envious rivals, apparently, stole his most famous race horse, and as a consequence the Federal Police had a pretext for ransacking La Cortina, and finally, imprisoning and torturing

Espinoza in the relatively modern jail complex known as El Cerezo located in the southern part of Piedras Negras. When Espinoza was able to free himself from the charges (false, according to the Penguin) that had put him in El Cerezo, his enemies determined to kill him. It would appear that they finally succeeded in the year 2000. Espinoza was crossing the Río Grande with five

undocumented immigrants from southern Mexico in a small boat. The boat was deliberately capsized in mid-stream, and one of the immigrants took advantage of the confusion to stick an ice-pick in his throat, a mortal wound. The general opinion around the region holds, however, that the immigrants were merely acting on the orders of Espinoza's powerful local enemies.

#### 4. El Chocolate

Voy a cantar este corrido,  
señores, les voy a recordar  
una historia conocida  
yo les voy a relatar,  
allá en Guerrero, Coahuila  
nadien lo puede olvidar.

Allá ha nacido un caballo  
su fama allá es popular,  
por nombre es El Chocolate,  
que ha nacido pa' ganar,  
su dueño Antonio Espinoza  
sabe perder y ganar.

#### The Horse, Chocolate

I'm going to sing this ballad,  
gentlemen, I'm going to remind you  
of a well-known true story,  
I'm going to tell you about something  
that happened over there in Guerrero, Coahuila,  
something no one can forget.

Over there a horse was born,  
over there his fame is well-known,  
his name is El Chocolate,  
and he was born to win;  
his owner is Antonio Espinoza,  
a man who knows how to win and to lose.

(continued)



Año del ochenta y nueve  
esto ha quedado en la historia,  
de Durango hasta Torreón  
en la región lagunera  
corrió con varios caballos  
y no perdió una carrera.

El día veintiuno de enero,  
mil novecientos noventa  
cuando corrió en Villa Unión  
con una yegua ligera,  
tiene por nombre La Bruja  
con quien perdió la carrera.

La revancha se la vio  
en Zaragoza, Coahuila,  
doscientas cincuenta yardas,  
distancia comprometida,  
ganándole El Chocolate  
con cuerpo quedó perdida.

Vuela, vuela palomita,  
de Guerrero hasta Sabinas,  
de Zaragoza a Morelos,  
sin olvidar a Rosita,  
pueblito de Villa Unión  
repártele la noticia.

Adiós rancho La Cortina,  
municipio de Guerrero,  
adiós Antonio Espinoza,  
hombre legal y sincero,  
amigo de los amigos,  
no lo delumbre el dinero.

In the year of 1989,  
this has gone down in history,  
from Durango all the way to Torreón,  
throughout the region known as "La Laguna,"  
El Chocolate ran against many horses  
and didn't lose a single race.

It was only on January 21,  
1990 when El Chocolate  
ran a race in Villa Unión  
against a light-footed mare,  
known as La Bruja ("the Witch"),  
that El Chocolate first lost a race.

The rematch took place  
in Zaragoza, Coahuila;  
two hundred and fifty yards,  
the distance was measured and proven;  
El Chocolate winning the race;  
the mare lost by a length.

Fly, fly away little dove,  
from Guerrero to Sabinas,  
from Zaragoza to Morelos,  
without forgetting about Rosita, Coahuila,  
fly to the little town of Villa Unión  
and spread the news!

Farewell La Cortina ranch  
in the township of Guerrero,  
farewell Antonio Espinoza,  
an honest and sincere man,  
a true friend to his friends,  
may money never cloud his judgment.

## 5. El Robo de El Chocolate

El día quince de octubre  
del año noventa y tres  
se han robado a El Chocolate,  
pues no se ha sabido quién.  
Ya no miro a mi caballo,  
ya no lo oigo relinchar,  
miro sólo su montura,  
me dan ganas de llorar.  
Diez vaqueros lo han buscado  
aquí en Guerrero, Coahuila,  
no lo han podido encontrar  
en su rancho La Cortina.  
A las patas de mi cuaco  
yo apostaba mi fortuna,  
treinta carreras que tuvo,  
solamente perdió una.  
Ofrezco una recompensa,  
el que la quiera ganar  
si devuelve mi caballo,  
nada voy a preguntar.  
Los dedos son ambiciosos  
y toditas las madrinas  
han ultrajado mi rancho,  
quieren mirarme en la ruina.  
Desde que estuvo en la cárcel  
ya lo han querido matar,  
esto pasó en El Cerezo,  
esto acaba de pasar.  
Ya me despido señores  
de mi Guerrero, Coahuila,  
su amigo Antonio Espinoza,  
y su rancho La Cortina.

## The Theft of El Chocolate

On the day of October 15  
in the year of 1993,  
El Chocolate has been stolen;  
nobody knows who did it.  
— I no longer see my horse,  
I no longer hear him whinny,  
I can only look at his saddle;  
it makes me want to cry. —  
Ten cowboys have searched for him  
here in Guerrero, Coahuila;  
they haven't been able to find El Chocolate  
on his ranch La Cortina.  
— I used to wager my fortune  
on the feet of my beloved horse;  
out of thirty races that he ran,  
he only lost one.  
I offer a reward  
to whomever wishes to win it;  
if he returns my horse,  
I will ask no questions. —  
The snitches are greedy  
and every last Federal police stooge  
has violated my ranch:  
they want to see me reduced to ruin.  
Ever since Antonio Espinoza was in jail,  
they have been trying to kill him;  
this happened in El Cerezo prison,  
this just happened recently.  
Now I bid farewell, gentlemen,  
to my beloved Guerrero, Coahuila,  
to your friend Antonio Espinoza  
and his ranch La Cortina.



6. Raimundo Cázares, the protagonist of this corrido was also a close personal friend of the Penguin. He was an independent trucker based in Eagle Pass, making a good living and not involved in any type of criminal activity. On the afternoon of June 24, 1979, however, he suffered a stroke of bad luck. He was picnicking with his wife and children in the historic Ft. Duncan park, at a bar-b-que site right by the banks of the river. While he was preparing the *carne asada*, five “wet-backs” approached him. Rubén laughs as he tells the story, insisting that they were “really wet” because they had just swum the river and were emerging dripping with water from head to toe! They begged him to help them get to San Antonio. As the song says, Cázares felt impelled by his sense of obligation to his fellow countrymen, and loaded them on to his truck. Twelve miles out of Eagle Pass on the road towards Carrizo Springs, the Border Patrol pulled him over, and that was the end of Cázares’s one and only adventure as a smuggler of undocumented workers. It was Cázares himself who suggested that the Penguin compose the corrido, and he even drove Los Pingüinos down to Monterrey, Nuevo León, in order to have it recorded at his own expense – which included the hotel and meals for the musicians and their families (note Dina Record #45-215).

## 6. El Patero del Año

El veinticuatro de junio  
del año setenta y nueve  
me agarraron prisionero,  
a mi familia conmueve.

## The Smuggler of the Year

The 24th of June  
of the year 1979  
they took me prisoner,  
it really shook up my family.

Otro día por la mañana  
me sacaron a juzgar,  
me pusieron abogado  
sin haber necesidad.

Eran cinco mojaditos  
del estado de Durango,  
a la pinta fui a parar  
nomás por darles la mano.

Cruzaron el Río Bravo  
que parecía un demonio,  
exponiendo hasta sus vidas  
por llegar a San Antonio.

Al fin ya quedé fichado  
como “el patero del año”,  
no me les pude rajar,  
yo también soy mexicano.

Cázares es mi apellido,  
hay que darle vuelta al mundo,  
si quieren saber quién soy  
llevo por nombre Raimundo.

Ya me despido señores  
de estas dos lindas fronteras,  
esto pasó en Eagle Pass,  
vecino de Piedras Negras.

The next day in the morning  
they hauled me into court,  
they gave me a lawyer  
when it wasn't really necessary.

They were five “wetbacks”  
from the state of Durango,  
I ended up in prison  
just for giving them a helping hand.

They crossed the Rio Grande,  
that seemed as wild as the Devil,  
risking their lives  
to get to San Antonio.

Because of this I was labelled  
as the “smuggler of the year,”  
but I couldn't let them down,  
I, too, am a Mexican.

Cázares is my family name,  
let the whole world know it;  
if they want to know who I am,  
my first name is Raimundo.

Now I bid farewell, gentlemen,  
from these two beautiful border towns,  
all this took place in Eagle Pass,  
just across from Piedras Negras.



## 7. Juan el Valiente

Salieron los judiciales  
con Juan Antonio esposado,  
iban con rumbo a Guerrero  
a comprobarle los cargos.

Lo acusaban de dos muertes  
y señora atropellada,  
el robo de dos monturas  
allá por la madrugada.

¡Cómo lloraba su madre  
de ver tan cruel felonía,  
de ver a su hijo querido  
en la penitenciaría!

Gritaba Jesús Morales  
componiéndose el sombrero:  
— Con esta cuarenta y cinco  
con cualquiera yo me muero. —

Después de tanto martirio  
de cargos que le achacaban,  
a Juan le dieron pa' afuera,  
no se le comprobó nada.

De Guerrero a San Vicente,  
me despido en mi fortingo,  
Hacienda de los Laureles\*  
y también Santo Domingo.\*\*

## Juan the Tough-guy

The Judicial Police went forth  
with Juan Antonio in handcuffs,  
they were going towards Guerrero  
to prove the charges against him.

They were accusing him of two murders  
and running over an old woman,  
as well the theft of two saddles  
there during the early hours of the dawn.

Oh, how his mother wept  
upon seeing such a cruel injustice!  
Oh, to see her beloved son  
in the penitentiary!

Jesús Morales was shouting,  
while adjusting his hat:  
"With this forty-five,  
I'll shoot it out with anybody!"

After so much martyrdom  
of charges that had been laid against him,  
they had to let Juan go free,  
they couldn't prove anything against him.

From Guerrero to San Vicente  
I bid farewell in my little Model T Ford,  
to the Hacienda Los Laureles\*  
and also to Santo Domingo.\*\*

\*La hacienda de Los Laureles se encuentra en frente de San Vicente;

\*\* Santo Domingo es un ejido colindante.

8. El Pingüino observes that this corrido once had as many as 36 stanzas; today none but these eight are remembered. He also comments that at the time, in the early 1930s, it was still the custom to have cattle rustlers summarily shot.

## 8. Florencio Garza

## The Ballad of Florencio Garza

Hoy vengo a cantarles la triste tragedia  
que en el treinta y dos pasó,  
el treinta y uno de julio  
Florencio Garza murió.

Allá de la pasta, allá de El Mesquite,  
unas vacas se perdieron,  
según las informaciones  
por este rumbo salieron.

En San José de Aura estaba una boda  
que se estaba principiando  
cuando llegó la acordada  
por Florencio preguntando.

En aquel momento aquellos soldados  
a Florencio desarmaron,  
le echaron en una troca,  
a Sabinas lo llevaron.

Dice el general cuando vio a Florencio:  
— ¡Qué trabajos nos has dado!  
¿A ver si vas entregando  
las vacas que te has robado? —

I come today to sing you of the sad tragedy  
that happened in 1932,  
on July 31,  
Florencio Garza died.

Over there by the pasture, over there by El Mesquite,  
some cows went missing,  
according to certain information,  
it was by this route that they went off.

In San José de Aura there was a wedding  
that was just getting started  
when the posse arrived  
asking for Florencio.

At that moment those soldiers  
disarmed Florencio,  
they threw him in a truck,  
they took him to Sabinas.

When he saw Florencio, the General said:  
"What a rough time you have given us!  
Let's see if you've come to return  
the cows that you have stolen?"

\*The Hacienda de Los Laureles is right across from San Vicente.

\*\*Santo Domingo is a nearby ejido (communal farm).



Contesta Florencio, muy disimulado:  
— No sé nada General,  
si por eso me fusilan  
por hecho lo voy a dar. —

— Pobres de mis padres, cómo llorarán  
cuando sepan de mi muerte,  
pero no culpen a nadie  
nomás que a mi mala suerte. —

Ya canté los versos de Florencio Garza,  
pues 'ora sí me despido,  
como un recuerdo a sus padres  
se los compuso un amigo.

Florencio answered, in a very low-key manner:  
“General, I know nothing,  
and if you're going to have me shot for that,  
I'll accept it as done and over with.”

“My poor parents, how they will weep  
when they find out about my death!  
But don't put the blame on anyone,  
just on my bad luck.”

Now I've sung the verses about Florencio Garza,  
so now I will bid farewell;  
as a keepsake for his parents,  
a friend composed these verses.

9. Again, in this case the Penguin knew at least one of the protagonists fairly well – the killer Ernesto García. In contrast to García, Varela was intelligent and a hard worker. His exploit of escaping from the jail in Crystal City, Texas, lent him a certain heroic status. The Penguin opines that he was probably murdered out of envy by some of the men he had displaced as foreman on a ranch near the Don Martín dam. About Ernesto García, it is remembered that he was blind in one eye, often employed Los Pingüinos to play music for him, and was never known to work at any visible job. He lived in Piedras Negras – unmolested, it would seem – for many years after having killed Varela down at Don Martín dam.

## 9. El Corrido de Pablo Varela

El año del treinta y cuatro  
debemos de recordar,  
el corrido de Varela  
es el que voy a cantar.

## The Ballad of Pablo Varela

The year of 1934,  
we should all remember;  
the ballad of Varela  
is the one I'm going to sing.

Residió en Estados Unidos,  
demostró su valentía,  
a las leyes les dio prueba  
que miedo no les tenía.

Calaboz de Crystal City  
gratos recuerdos dejó,  
les venció cuatro varillas  
y a Piedras Negras llegó.

Se fue para Don Martín,  
hombre muy inteligente,  
y llegó a ser mayordomo  
manejando mucha gente.

Quince pesos le pagaban,  
era su sueldo por día,  
paseaba con sus amigos,  
era mucha su alegría.

El día siete de enero  
le invitaron a tomar,  
trataron de emborracharlo  
para poderlo matar.

Ernesto García lo hirió  
al momento tiró a huir,  
los empleados de su parte  
no lo quisieron seguir.

A Rosita lo llevaron  
de la Presa Don Martín,  
lo atendieron los doctores  
pero él no pudo vivir.

Ya con ésta me despido  
dispensen los trovadores,  
su nombre es José Barrientos  
también Eliseo Torres.

He lived in the United States,  
he demonstrated his bravery;  
he proved to the lawmen  
that he wasn't afraid of them.

He left behind fond memories  
at the jail of Crystal City;  
he pried open four of the cell bars  
and escaped to Piedras Negras.

He went down to the Don Martín dam,  
and being a very intelligent man,  
he became a foreman there,  
in charge of many people.

They used to pay him fifteen pesos,  
that was his daily wage;  
he used to go out partying with his friends,  
he was enjoying life to the full.

On January 7, 1934  
some friends invited him to go drinking;  
they tried to get him drunk  
so it would be easier to kill him.

Ernesto García wounded him,  
and immediately fled the scene;  
the police, for their part,  
didn't dare to pursue him.

They took Varela to Rosita, Coahuila  
from the Don Martín dam;  
the doctors tried to treat him  
but Varela was unable to survive.

Now with this I bid farewell,  
please forgive the composers,  
one's name is José Barrientos,  
the other is Eliseo Torres.



## 10. El Diez pa' el Puente

Cuando paso el puente  
llego al Noventa y Cinco,  
me tomo una cerveza,  
me voy pa' el Tampico.

Allí en el Tampico  
me tomo otras y luego,  
me voy pa' enfrente  
a Los Dos Laredos.

En Los Dos Laredos  
me tomo otras tres,  
y allí me voy medio mareado  
al Sesenta y Seis.

En el Sesenta y Seis  
el vino me trastorna  
me da por bailar  
me voy al California.

En el California  
pido un carro de sitio  
que me va a dejar  
al Salón Perico.

Salgo del Perico,  
me voy al Gato Negro  
y a poco borracho  
me voy a Casé Cabello.

A Casé Cabello  
me pongoocolino  
y todos mis amigos  
me invitan al Marino.

## The Dime for the Bridge

When I cross the bridge  
I go first to the Ninety-Five bar  
and drink a beer,  
then I move on to the Tampico bar.

There in the Tampico  
I drink a few more and then  
I go across the street  
to the Two Laredos saloon.

In the Two Laredos  
I drink three more,  
and from there I go stumbling and weaving  
to the Sixty-Six bar.

In the Sixty-Six  
the liquor really messes me up  
and I try to dance;  
from there I go on to the California bar.

From the California  
I call a taxi  
that leaves me off  
at the Parrot Saloon.

I leave the Parrot  
and go to the Black Cat,  
and now just a little drunk,  
I head for the Casé Cabello Club (and Bordello).

At the Casé Cabello  
I get really plastered  
and all of my friends  
invite me to go the Marino.

De allí me voy al Kloster  
a donde todos van,  
se me pone al brinco  
el amigo Juan.

Para no hacer bronca  
y al bote ir a dar  
a la Estrella Roja  
me voy a tomar.

Pero el cantinero  
que me estaba viendo  
pa' pronto me dice:  
— A tí no te vendo. —

— ¿Por qué no me vendes  
si yo traigo dinero?  
Si tú no me vendes  
me voy a Casé Borrego. —

Pido una cerveza  
y me la sirvió,  
pero al ir a cobrarme  
fue donde se clavó.

Yo muy disgustado  
me salgo de ahí,  
paso el Salón Américas,  
llego al One-Two-Three.

Pido una cerveza  
me siento a tomar,  
le echo un nicle al piano  
y me pongo a bailar.

From there I go to the Kloster,  
a place where everybody goes;  
my friend Juan the bartender  
refuses to serve me.

In order not to raise a fuss  
and end up in jail,  
I head off to the Red Star bar  
to have a drink there.

But the bartender,  
who was checking me out carefully,  
right away tells me:  
"I'm not going to serve you."

"Why won't you serve me,  
if I've got the money?  
If you won't serve me here,  
I'm going over to the Casé Borrego."

I asked for a beer  
and the bartender served it to me,  
but when he took the money  
he stole the change.

Very displeased,  
I get out of there,  
I pass by the Americas Saloon,  
and arrive at the One-Two-Three club.

I order a beer,  
I sit down to drink,  
I throw a nickle to the piano player  
and I start to dance.

(continued)



Pero no sabía  
lo que iba a pasar  
cuando un policía  
de ahí me fue a sacar.

Me echaron a la "julia"  
derecho a la inspección,  
me bajaron al sótano  
sin declaración.

Pero un amigo mío  
de ahí me fue a sacar,  
pagó cincuenta pesos  
el dueño del Cristal.

Yo llegué al Cristal  
bastante agüitado,  
pidiendo un diez pa'  
el puente  
me fui pa' el otro lado.

But I didn't know  
what was going to happen next  
when a policeman  
came to pull me out of there.

They threw me in the "paddy wagon,"  
and took me straight down to the station,  
they locked me up in the basement cells  
without taking a statement or presenting charges.

But a friend of mine  
came down to bail me out,  
the owner of the Crystal Club  
paid fifty pesos bail.

I got back to the Crystal  
very upset and frightened,  
begging for the loan of a dime to pay the  
bridge toll,  
I crossed back over to the US side.

**11.** In contrast to many of the corridos in this collection, "Alejos Sierra" is very well known along the Border, and because it has been recorded commercially so often, has truly become part of the Greater Mexican national repertoire. Don Américo Paredes expressed some doubts about "Alejos Sierra," speculating that it could be an example of what he disparagingly calls the "saloon-brawl type" of corrido. Dr. Paredes was always very insistent on distinguishing between what he considered the true, heroic corrido where a man defends his rights or avenges a serious grievance, and ballads similar to the "saloon-brawl" type which some social scientist would use as examples in a

judgmental critique of the Mexicans' so-called obsession with machismo. What my own archival research has revealed is that on the afternoon of Sunday February 14, 1932, a young cowboy by the name of Alejos Sierra did, indeed, ride into the Gato Negro saloon in Piedras Negras firing his pistols indiscriminately. The place emptied out immediately, and Sierra dismounted, sat himself down with a bottle, a glass, and both his pistols on the table facing the door in front of him. Two policemen, attracted by the sound of the shots and the panic in the streets, rushed to the scene. As they entered the saloon, they were met with a furious fusillade, and both were wounded, one mortally. The other, however, as he was diving to the floor, was able to kill Sierra. *The Eagle Pass Daily Guide* could produce no motive other than a drinking spree, and noted that Sierra had had brushes with the law before for drunk and disorderly, assault, etc. Up to this point, then, the available information would tend to support Dr. Paredes's fears about this popular border corrido. For the Spanish language press at the time, the incident reminded the writers of the wild and wooly days of the recent revolution, and at least one could not resist using the most florid, heroic prose to describe how Sierra pranced his "charger" into the saloon. The English language press also saw the incident through a nostalgic lense, recalling the already legendary — not to say largely mythical — days of the "wild west" where the cowboys were wont to "shoot up the town" on a Saturday night. The truly puzzling fact, however, is that whereas the slain policeman Hilario Conde's funeral was held at four o'clock in the afternoon with no particular fanfare, the mass and burial for Alejo Sierra was on the order of an unprecedented event. *The Eagle Pass Daily Guide* reported the following: "An unusual funeral procession was held yesterday afternoon at 6 o'clock for

Alejo Sierra, the young gunman who caused such a stir and commotion by his activity in a North side saloon Sunday. The coffin holding the body of the slain man was carried on the shoulders of six stalwart men who headed a procession of nearly a thousand people on the way to the cemetery a mile out of town. The funeral was on the order of a demonstration by friends of the youth.” Although we can only speculate about why Sierra’s demise brought forth such an outpouring of sentiment, it is perhaps relevant to note that in the aftermath of the event, then Secretary of War Plutarco Elías Calles sent special military units to Piedras Negras in order to impose a strict campaign of “depistolization.” Calles, who was at the head of the political group forging what was to become the PRI at the time, was attempting to impose a dictatorial order on Mexico that was in part modeled on Mussolini’s Italy. The hundreds of youths who found inspiration in Alejos Sierra’s exploits might just have been demonstrating their dissatisfaction with the “new order.” Thus, too, Alejos Sierra’s apparently random demonstration of machismo and vain *valentía* might well have had an ideological basis far more profound than mere drunken violence. In any case, “Alejos Sierra” is perhaps the most well-known corrido associated with Piedras Negras, and no collection like the present would be complete without it.

## 11. Alejos Sierra      The Ballad of Alejos Sierra

En Piedras Negras, Coahuila  
esto pasó el treinta y dos,  
cantina del Gato Negro  
pasó una tragedia atroz.

This happened in Piedras Negras, Coahuila  
in the year of 1932;  
in the Black Cat saloon  
an atrocious tragedy took place.

A las cinco de la tarde  
andaba aquél mundo a tierra,  
con su pistola en la mano  
a caballo Alejos Sierra.

Llegaron a la cantina  
y la quisieron sitiar,  
al primero que divisa  
le comienza a disparar.

Como a unos cuantos minutos  
de seguirse disparando,  
dos empleados mal heridos  
y Alejos agonizando.

Alejos murió al momento  
Hilario otro día murió,  
un grande acompañamiento  
a los dos los despidió.

Se lo llevaron en hombros  
de la iglesia al camposanto,  
lo bajaron a su tumba  
entre sollozos y llantos.

Ya con ésta me despido,  
con el cantar de mi tierra,  
aquí termina el corrido  
del señor Alejos Sierra.

At five o'clock in the afternoon,  
that guy was acting really crazy;  
with his pistol in his hand,  
Alejos Sierra rode into the saloon on horseback.

The policemen arrived at the saloon  
and they tried to surround it;  
Alejos began shooting  
at the first policeman he could see.

After a few minutes  
of everybody shooting,  
two policemen were badly wounded  
and Alejos was in his death throes.

Alejos died on the spot  
and the policeman Hilario died the next day;  
a great crowd of people  
bid farewell to the two of them.

They carried Alejos's coffin on their shoulders  
from the church to the graveyard,  
they lowered him into his tomb  
accompanied by sighs and weeping.

Now with this I bid farewell  
with a song from my native land,  
here ends the ballad  
of Señor Alejos Sierra.



**13.** This is yet another ballad from northern Coahuila that has passed on into the national repertoire, principally through many recordings. Américo Paredes collected it along the Lower Border, and includes a version in his Texas-Mexican Cancionero. The incident occurred on the evening of July 30, 1925, in the small town of Allende, some thirty miles south-west of Piedras Negras. According to some newspaper accounts, the young Arnulfo encountered Lieutenant García of the Rural Mounted Police paying court to the former's girl friend, Rosario Arrellano, and it was this that provoked the intense stare that so offended the policeman. If this is so, it is just as well that the corridistas have had the good sense to leave it out; as Dr. Paredes explains so cogently, as it stands, the ballad is an eloquent paeon to the citizen's right to defend himself from the arbitrary abuse of authority.

### 13. Arnulfo González      The Ballad of Arnulfo González

De Allende se despidió  
con veintún años cabales,  
gratos recuerdos dejó  
al pueblo y a los rurales.

Estaba Arnulfo sentado,  
en eso pasó un rural,  
le dice: — ¿Oye, qué me ves? —  
— La vista es muy natural. —

El rural muy enojado  
en la cara le pegó,  
con su pistola en la mano  
con la muerte lo amagó.

He said farewell to Allende  
at the age of exactly twenty years old;  
he left behind pleasant memories  
with the townspeople and the Rural Mounted Police.

Arnulfo was sitting down  
when a Rural Mounted policeman passed by;  
he says to him: "Listen, why are you staring at me?"  
"Looking at people is very normal."

The policeman became very angry,  
and he struck Arnulfo in the face;  
with his pistol in his hand,  
he threatened to kill him.

Se agarraron a balazos,  
se agarraron frente a frente,  
Arnulfo con su pistola  
tres tiros le dio al teniente..

Pero ahí le dijo el teniente  
casi pa' agonizar:  
— Oiga, amigo, no se vaya,  
acábame de matar. —

Arnulfo se devolvió  
a darle un tiro en la frente,  
pero en la vuelta que dio  
ahí le pegó el teniente.

¡Qué bonitos son los hombres  
que se matan pecho a pecho,  
cada uno con su pistola  
defendiendo su derecho!

En Allende hay buenos pollos,  
el que no lo quiera creer  
nomás no revuelva l'agua  
que así se la han de beber.

Ya con ésta me despido  
pácíficos y fiscales,  
aquí termina el corrido  
de un teniente y de González.

They started firing at each other,  
they were shooting face to face,  
Arnulfo with his pistol  
put three bullets in the lieutenant.

But then the lieutenant said,  
almost in his final death agony:  
"Listen, friend, don't go away yet,  
finish me off first."

Arnulfo turned around  
in order to put a bullet in his forehead,  
but as he was turning  
the lieutenant plugged Arnulfo with a mortal round.

How admirable are the men  
who kill each other face to face!  
Each one with his pistol,  
defending his rights!

In Allende there are good fighting cocks,  
he who doesn't want to believe it,  
just let him stir up the waters,  
and he will have to drink the mud.

Now with this I bid farewell  
to peaceful folk and to policemen,  
here ends the ballad  
about a lieutenant and González.

**14.** Los Pingüinos know another corrido, known simply as “Genaro Balboa,” that tells the story of this murder - without, however, mentioning anything about the horse or the horse race that provoked the incident.

**14. El Corrido de la Yegua Colorada      The Ballad of the Red Mare**

El diecinueve de octubre  
del año cincuenta y tres  
don Ambrosio con Genaro  
los dos la vida perdieron  
por una apuesta que hicieron  
a dos yeguas que corrieron.

Pues la yegua que ganó  
era grande y colorada,  
por cierto que el dueño es  
José Antonio Villarreal,  
testigo de esta desgracia,  
que ha pasado tan fatal.

Comenzaron las discordias  
tomando en una cantina  
y don Ambrosio enojado  
a Genaro lo insultó  
nomás por cincuenta pesos  
que Genaro le ganó.

Al fin de tantos insultos  
Genaro no se aguantó,  
y sacando su pistola  
pa' pronto le disparó,  
y don Ambrosio muriendo  
pues a Genaro mató.

The 19th of October  
of the year of 1953,  
Ambrosio along with Genaro,  
both of them lost their lives  
because of a bet that they had made  
on a race between two mares.

Well, the mare that won  
was large and red,  
for sure her owner  
is José Antonio Villarreal,  
a witness to this tragedy  
that has had such a fatal outcome.

The disagreement started  
while they were drinking in a bar,  
and Ambrosio got so mad  
that he insulted Genaro,  
it was only over fifty pesos  
that Genaro had won from him.

After so many insults,  
Genaro could no longer control himself,  
and pulling out his pistol,  
he quickly fired a shot,  
and as Ambrosio was dying,  
well, he shot Genaro dead, too.

Por fin los dos se mataron  
sin angustia ni dolor,  
que en El Moral y en Jiménez  
allá hay hombres, ¡sí señor!  
que se matan pecho a pecho  
demostrando su valor.

Finally, the two killed each other  
without anguish nor pain;  
it goes to show that in El Moral\* and in Jiménez,  
there are some real men over there, yes sir!  
They kill each other face to face,  
giving proof of their bravery!

\*Both El Moral and Jiménez are towns along the  
highway that runs parallel to the river between  
Piedras Negras and the Villa Acuña, Coahuila/Del  
Rio, Texas, urban area.

**16.** José María “Chema” Castro’s demise occurred around 1962. Castro was something of a Robin Hood figure, concentrating on robbing the rich and helping the poor. His specialty was kidnapping the sons of the rich for ransom. According to the Penguin, who played for him and his father, don Juan Castro, many times, Chema was a short man, even shorter than the Penguin, with pronouncedly Indian features. The Penguin insists that Castro did not like killing or violence for its own sake, and was highly respected by the poor in Piedras Negras. The police were afraid of him, however, and so they relied on a trap that they had prepared at a dance. Chema escaped, however, and eluded capture by hiding in the well shaft of an abandoned mine. When he felt that things had cooled down some, he took refuge at the house of his aunt in a little village on the road to Ciudad Acuña. Medrano Marquina was a particularly notorious police commander in Piedras Negras, infamous for his gratuitous use of violence. The woman mentioned in the corrido — Castro’s aunt — sold out her nephew and revealed his presence in her house. Marquina’s posse found Castro sick and asleep as they assaulted the house. The Penguin noted that the



composer mentioned in the final verse, Carlos González, is a well-known composer of commercially successful música norteña and ranchera. His “nom de plume” is Carlos Corral, and he can count the super hit of a few years ago, “Un puño de tierra” among his compositions.

## 16. El Corrido de Chema Castro      The Ballad of “Chema” Castro.

Con el permiso del pueblo  
y de las autoridades,  
en los versos que les canto  
voy a decirles verdades.

Con rumbo a Ciudad Acuña,  
equipado de armas finas,  
con sus mejores agentes  
salió Medrano Marquina.

Llegaron hasta una casa  
donde Chema se encontraba,  
les contestó una señora:  
— Señores, yo no sé nada. —

— Aquí no se encuentra nadie,  
pero abrirle yo no puedo. —  
Con la M-1 en la mano,  
entró Ramón Escobedo.

Adentro estaba Escobedo  
y le empezó a disparar,  
fueron malos los disparos,  
nunca le pudo pegar.

With the permission of the people  
and of the authorities,  
in the verses that I sing to you,  
I'm going to be telling you true things.

In the direction of Ciudad Acuña,  
armed with the most powerful weapons  
and accompanied by his finest agents,  
Medrano Marquina set forth.

They arrived at the house  
where Chema was hiding;  
a woman answered them at the door:  
“Gentlemen, I know nothing.”

“There’s nobody here,  
but I can’t let you in.”  
With his M-1 carbine in his hand,  
Ramón Escobedo forced his way in.

Escobedo was inside  
and he began firing,  
but his aim was bad,  
and he never hit him.

De pronto se oyó una voz:  
— Hágase a un lado, compadre. —  
Ramón Núñez con pistola  
dos veces logró pegarle.

Chema salió por el patio  
queriendo emprender la huida,  
y fue la arma de Marquina  
la que acabó con su vida.

Ya con ésta me despido  
ya terminé de cantarles,  
el que compuso el corrido  
se llama Carlos González.

Suddenly, another voice was heard:  
“Get out of the way, friend!”  
Ramón Núñez with his pistol  
managed to hit him twice.

Chema ran out through the backyard,  
trying to make his escape;  
it was Marquina’s weapon  
that put an end to his life.

Now with this I bid farewell,  
now I’ve finished singing to you,  
the person who composed this ballad  
goes by the name of Carlos González.

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