

1. **Southern Select** (Polka) (ID#579) (Barnabe Alvorado)
2. **Salvador** (Vals) (ID#269) (Francisco Moure – Peg International, Inc.)
3. **Tequila Es Mala Yerba** (Polka) (ID#374) (DAR)
4. **Rosita** (Vals) (ID#149) (Manuel E. Gonzalez – San Antonio Music Publishers, Inc.)
5. **Rio Grande** (Polka) (ID#800) (Beto Villa - San Antonio Music Publishers, Inc.)
6. **Morir Soñando** (Vals) (ID#151) (Manuel D. Pelayo – Universal Musica, Inc. OBO Emlasa)
7. **La Picon** (Polka) (ID#355) (Beto Villa - San Antonio Music Publishers, Inc.)
8. **Angelina** (Vals) (ID#824) (Merced Martinez)
9. **El Sapo** (Porro) (ID # 722) (Chuy Compean)
10. **Rosalia** (Vals) (ID#385) (Quirino Mendoza – Peer International Corporation)
11. **Rancho Grande** (Polka) (ID#655) (DAR)
12. **Nereidas** (Danzon) (ID#730) (Amador Perez – Mexican Music Copyright, Inc.)
13. **Maria Elena** (Vals) (ID#800) (Lorenzo Barcelata – Peer International Corporation)
14. **San Buena Ventura** (Huapango) (ID#974) (DAR)
15. **El Suby** (Suby) (ID#888) (DAR)

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10341 San Pablo Ave, El Cerrito, CA 94530

# Beto Villa

## Father of Orquesta Tejana VOL. I

**Beto Villa** - alto sax and his Orchestra; including Narciso Martinez (accordion) or Raymundo Trevino (piano accordion).

Original recordings produced by Armando Marroquin in Alice, Texas for IDEAL Records of San Benito, Texas. All selections were recorded between 1948 and 1954. The number in parenthesis indicates original IDEAL catalog number of 78 rpm release. Some selections were also issued in the 1960s on IDEAL LPs and EPs.

Re-issue edited and produced by Chris Strachwitz  
Notes by Manuel Peña and Chris Strachwitz



# Beto Villa

## Father of Orquesta Tejana VOL. I





# BETO VILLA

Father of  
Orquesta  
Tejana

ONE NIGHT in 1952 at a ballroom, nearly 10,000 Chicago Latinos paid \$7 a head – an enormous sum at that time – to dance to the music of **Beto Villa** and his orchestra. At the time, Villa's orchestra was the only nationally successful Latino band mixing the American big-band-era sound with Mexican rather than Cuban music and adding a Chicano-Norteño flare to it. Villa represented the Latino who had transcended the ethnic barriers and made it in the Anglo world playing American music with a Latin tinge. "To Chicano musicians he was an innovator and a door opener." So wrote Ignacio Garcia in **Nuestro** magazine (June 1980) in an article detailing the

career of Beto Villa, the legendary pioneer of Tejano music.

This record contains Beto Villa's original recordings made between 1948 and 1954, reflecting the band's diverse repertoire ranging from old-fashioned Mexican waltzes like *Rosita Vals*, (which was Beto's first hit record), to polkas, *danzones*, *huapangos*, *subys*, *porros* and other popular Latin dance rhythms.

Falfurrias, Texas, is a small country town in the middle of south Texas between San Antonio and the Rio Grande Valley. (On the northside, at the city limits, is a small shrine dedicated to the late legendary Mexican *curandero* Don Pedro Jaramillo.) During the time of the Mexican Revolution Alberto Villa, a musician

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# BETO VILLA

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and leader of a small *orquesta tipica* consisting of flute, bass and guitar, left Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, along with at least two of his brothers, Arturo and Oscar, and headed north. After a stop in Rio Grande City, the Villa family eventually settled in Falfurrias and on October 26, 1915, a son, Alberto Villa, was born. Twenty-five years later, by then known as Beto Villa, he took the southwest by storm and filled dance halls from the Rio Grande to Chicago and from Texas to California. Even today, Beto Villa is still remembered not only by the legions of fans who danced to his music and listened to his records, but by orchestra musicians who refer to him as the founding father of the **ORQUESTA TEJANA**.

Beto Villa opened the doors for future Chicano orchestras such as **Little Joe & La Familia, Isidro Lopez, Latin Breed, Augustine**

**Ramirez**, and all the others who followed in his footsteps. Beto Villa mixed the sound of the traditional Mexican *orquesta tipica* of his father's generation with the regionally evolving popular rural *norteño* accordion music. He injected his own passion for the sound of the American big band and included contemporary orchestra music from Mexico, Cuba, and other parts of Latin America.

By 1932, Beto Villa had joined his first band, the "Sonny Boys," under the leadership of Apolinar Gonzales, which included his uncle Arturo Villa on drums. All the band members loved the sound of the popular American dance bands, but they also knew their Mexican music and performed at school dances, local fiestas, Mother's Day ceremonies, and other social functions. Beto's father was a fine guitarist and bass player who only played by ear. He wanted his son to learn to read music and

persuaded young Beto to take lessons from a Mr. Valenzuela, who was a trained Monterrey musician. Learning how to read music, especially Mexican, almost backfired because Beto lost interest when he got to junior high school and joined the school band which played only American and no Mexican music. By this time, however, Beto had decided that music was going to be his career and other professional orchestras, including the Willie Lopez Orchestra from San Antonio, the Valdez Orchestra from Corpus Christi, and the Estrada Band from Kingsville, hired young Beto to play sax with them, and he was soon making a name for himself. After traveling with the Lopez Orchestra for almost two years, Villa dropped out of school to devote his energy full time to music.

Beto Villa had known his future bride, Rafaela Treviño, a neighbor

who lived just two blocks from his house, for some time. On February 8, 1936, they were married, shortly after Beto had gotten his first full-time contract to play at the "Barn," a dance hall in Freer, Texas, that catered to oil company workers. Even though this was during the Great Depression, Freer was experiencing considerable prosperity due to the oil boom and every night the patrons would fill the "kitty" with money for requests – more money, in fact, than the band was paid under their contract.

In 1940, after four years of playing six nights a week without a break, Beto Villa decided to drop out of music and go into business with his father-in-law using the money he had saved. They opened a meat market and for a while music took a back seat in Beto's life.

During World War II, Beto served in the US Navy, where he promptly





joined a band which played dances for enlisted personnel, and he soon received a promotion. Beto's soulful playing made him very popular, and it was soon obvious that music was to be his life after all. Upon discharge from the Navy, the Villas opened their own dance halls. One was called the Pan American, named after the famous dance hall in Houston; the other was La Plaza, an out-door platform where people could gather around and listen to music. As Beto became more widely known and popular around Falfurrias, he soon discovered that he could earn more money playing dances on weekends than he could make all week as a butcher in those lean post-war years.

By 1947 Beto's friend, Armando Marroquin from Alice, Texas, had begun to produce recordings for IDEAL Records, a new company specializing in local Tejano music. The major national record firms had



stopped the production of regional musics with the advent of World War II and when the war was over, the public was eager to buy almost any available recordings of their own home-grown music. Sales for IDEAL's recordings were growing steadily but mainly for their *cantina*-oriented *duetos* and accordion *conjuntos* with Narciso Martinez, already a well-known recording artist in the 1930s, as their star attraction.

One day Beto Villa suggested that Armando let him try to make some recordings with his orchestra. At first there was considerable reluctance on the part of Armando's business partner, Paco Betancourt, who was in charge of sales and distribution. Finally they agreed, however, to give one record a try and in November, 1947, Beto Villa and his orchestra recorded two sides: *Las Delicias*, a polka, (heard on Arhoolie CD # 368 - Orquestas Tejanas) and *Porque Te*

*Ries*, a waltz. Shortly after the record was released, Armando got a call from Paco telling him to record more by that orchestra because orders were coming in pretty good for that first release. Armando felt that Beto's music would sell even better if they would combine the folksy, popular accordion sound of Narciso Martinez with Beto's orchestra. In February, 1948, a trimmed-down Beto Villa orchestra with Narciso on accordion, recorded two polkas directly onto acetate discs: *Madre Mia* and *Monterrey* as well as two waltzes: *Rosita* and *Morir Soñando*. All four sides proved to be very popular, but *Rosita* became Beto's first real hit.

In an interview with Beto's widow, Mrs. Rafaela Villa, she told me that many musicians and friends felt that the sound of those early records was "corny," "silly," or just plain "bad," and did not represent the sound of the band at dances. The public, how-

ever, did not share that criticism. To the contrary, they loved that corny mix of regional ingredients, a blend of rural and urban, lower and middle class tastes. Beto Villa's records were in great demand all over the Southwest and soon Armando Marroquin, his wife Carmen, sister-in-law Laura Cantu (two sisters who sang as Carmen y Laura), Narciso Martinez, and the whole Villa band went on tour throughout the vast Southwest, from Texas to Michigan, from Oklahoma to California and wherever Texas-Mexicans were living or working.

Mrs. Villa took on the job of booking the band because Beto wanted to concentrate on his music and Armando was very busy with his recording activities. A page out of her schedule book for the year 1951 shows the band playing every weekend between January and May, all over Texas. In May they started on a

tour through Arizona and one weekend played Duncan, Tucson, and Phoenix. Two days later they were in Pomona, California, and toured throughout California with hardly a night off: Bakersfield, Selma, Richmond, Fresno, Salinas, Hanford, Santa Barbara, Oxnard, Fresno, Oakland, San Jose, Tulare, Merced, Sacramento, Marysville, and Stockton. From there it was east to Salt Lake City, Utah; Greeley, Colorado; Scotts Bluff, Nebraska; Denver, Colorado; La Junta, Dodge City, La Junta again, Newton, Kansas City, Wichita, and Topeka, Kansas; Saginaw, and Detroit, Michigan; and Chicago, Illinois, for two nights and finally home on July 15th. Two weeks later they were off again to Dallas, San Angelo, San Antonio, Laredo, Del Rio, Pecos, Lubbock, and El Paso, Texas; Carlsbad, Albuquerque, and Pueblo, New Mexico; Scottsbluff, Nebraska; Holcomb, Kansas; Rocky

Ford, Colorado; Santa Fe, New Mexico; Flagstaff, Gallup, Duncan, Tucson, Phoenix, Safford, and Ajo, Arizona; and over to California: El Centro, San Bernardino, Selma, Hanford, Modesto, Fresno, Merced, El Centro, Ventura, Bakersfield, Fresno again, Selma again and on Sept. 16, 1951, Fresno for a third time!

Narciso Martinez only went on a few of the tours since he was busy playing with his own *conjunto* and the regular piano accordionist, Raymundo Treviño rejoined, who was already familiar with the band. The ladies made a nice vacation out of these tours and the group traveled in two Chrysler station wagons and a panel truck. Beto wanted a bus, but the women thought the station wagons were much more comfortable. Armando and Beto were not big on sightseeing, but the women insisted on visiting Carlsbad Caverns in New

Mexico and Pike's Peak in Colorado.

Mrs. Villa learned her booking business by "jumping into the fire" as she put it. At first she would ask a certain amount per night, which was the tradition, but when on their first trip to Arizona, the owner of the Riverside Ballroom did not want to pay what they asked for (claiming the band was not known in the area), she suggested that they split the door: 70% to Villa and 30% to the ballroom but without a guarantee. The man gladly accepted. They took in almost \$5000 that night as their share, and from then on they were delighted to work on a percentage basis.

For almost 12 years, Beto Villa and his Orchestra remained a major attraction on the Tejano music circuit. In 1960 Beto's health began to give him problems and he stopped touring. Beto Villa's orchestra continued to record occasionally and they

performed at many local celebrations.

On November 1, 1986, Beto Villa died in Corpus Christi, Texas, at age 71. Beto Villa will always be remembered as a pioneer in Tejano music. I

hope this collection will serve to keep his work and legacy in front of the public.

*Manuel Pena & Chris Strachwitz*

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#### EDITOR'S NOTE ON THIS NEW EDITION:

This CD includes several selections previously available on Arhoolie CD 364 (#4,5,6,10,&14) which is now out of print.

In choosing the selections I have tried to emphasize Mr. Villa's beautiful alto sax work on waltzes and polkas but also included other regional and Latin dances which were gaining popularity in the 1950s. The one huapango is performed in the old Tamaulipas tradition with two clarinets taking the lead.

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# Beto Villa

Father of Orquesta  
Tejana – VOL. I

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2. **SALVADOR** (Vals) (ID#269)
3. **TEQUILA ES MALA YERBA** (Polka) (ID#374)
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12. **NEREIDAS** (Danzon) (ID#730)
13. **MARIA ELENA** (Vals) (ID#800)
14. **SAN BUENA VENTURA** (Huapango) (ID#974)
15. **EL SUBY** (Suby) (ID#888)

This collection brings you some of the first recordings by **Beto Villa's Orchestra** produced for the south Texas **IDEAL** label between 1948 and 1954 by **Armando Marroquin**. All selections are instrumentals featuring **Beto Villa's** alto saxophone and represent the wide variety of then popular dances.

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FILE UNDER: TEJANO

