

Tex-Mex Dance Music Vol. 2

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FD 6528

BORDER BASH

Los Polkeros de Ben Tavera King



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MUSIC LP

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

- SIDE I**
1. Chicitos Pero Picos (Cumbia) 2:00
 2. Margarita (Ranchera) 4:30
 3. El Relampago (Huapango) 1:28
 4. Arrancate (Redova) 1:55
 5. Mi Carrochita (Polka) 2:11
 6. Nada Enchilada (Polka) 3:00

- SIDE II**
1. Paloma Sin Nido (Ranchera) 2:51
 2. Cumbia Atlantico (Cumbia) 2:08
 3. La Cacahuata (Polka) 3:00
 4. Pantalón Blue Jeans (Ranchera)
by Santiago Jimenez 2:27
 5. Fantasia de Zarzamora Street (Cumbia)
by Ben Tavera King 2:46
 6. Zapatas Alegres (Polka) 2:43

(All songs traditional unless otherwise noted)

Produced by: Ben Tavera King
 All arrangements by: Ben Tavera King (ASCAP)
 Recording Engineer: Dubby Hankins
 Recorded at the Dubby Hankins Studio, San Antonio, Jan. 1983
 Cover Photography: Robert "Mac" McLeroy
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 Special thanks: Vickie Davidson
 Los Polkeros: Ben Tavera King, button accordion; Luis Gonzales, bajo sexto and vocals; Jim Beal, bass, and Alex Medina, drums

On Saturday afternoons the mouth-watering aroma of barbecue hangs heavy in the air as preparations for weekend pachangas, or bashes, are made throughout South Texas.

The bashes are held by Mexican Americans in their backyards or neighborhood bars. Regardless of the location, the bashes have three important ingredients: beer, barbecue and non-stop Tex-Mex music.

The music is a spicy combination ranging from polkas and soulful rancheras to cumbias, with their unmistakable Afro-Hispanic rhythms.

Los Polkeros is a group of San Antonio musicians who specialize in the Tex-Mex music played at the bashes on both sides of the Texas/Mexico border.

The group is led by button-accordionist Ben Tavera King. He learned his repertoire of polkas, cumbias and huapangos from such legendary accordionists as Santiago Jimenez and Valerio Longoria.

His first album on Folkways, "Saturday Night San Antonio" FWD 6527, traced the early roots of Tex-Mex music with pieces spanning 1890 to 1940. "Border Bash" concentrates on modern Tex-Mex music.

On this album Ben is joined by bajo-sexto player and vocalist Luis Gonzales. The bajo-sexto is a variation of the 12-string guitar, brought to Mexico by the Spaniards. Usually the bajo-sexto is only used to play chords to back up the accordion, but Gonzales has developed a unique style combining melody riffs with the traditional chords progressions. Gonzales has played and recorded with several well-known Tex-Mex groups in San Antonio and Chicago.

Los Polkeros' rhythm section is composed of Jim Beal on bass and Alex Medina on drums and percussion. Beal learned the roots of polka music by listening to his Hungarian grandfather play the accordion. Medina's drumming style reflects a variety of musical influences ranging from African and Caribbean to traditional Tex-Mex.

Los Polkeros has been playing at folk festivals and colleges as well as the traditional border bashes held throughout the South Texas/Northern Mexico region.

—Rafael Castillo

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BORDER BASH **Los Polkeros de** **Ben Tavera King**

Tex-Mex Dance Music Vol. 2

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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The History of Tex-Mex Music and song translations

As boundaries go, the Rio Grande River which separates Texas and Mexico has never been much of a barrier between the two cultures.

Daily, thousands of people cross the Rio Grande both legally and illegally. The result is a constant intermingling of cultures.

Nowhere is this mixture of cultures as evident as in Tex-Mex music.

As the name indicates, Tex-Mex music is the musical fruit of the marriage of two cultures. It is neither distinctly Mexican or American, but is instead a combination of several influences and has roots in such diverse locales as Germany and Africa.

The musical cross pollination began during the turn of the century when German and Polish immigrants started several settlements in South Texas. With them they brought their accordions and a repertoire of polkas and waltzes. The European immigrants' Mexican American neighbors incorporated several aspects of European polka music into traditional Mexican music. The resulting blend became the most popular folk music in South Texas and Northern Mexico. In San Antonio, for instance, Tex-Mex music has become an important fiber in the fabric of Mexican American life since it is performed at a variety of social functions including weddings and informal family get togethers.

Tex-Mex music originated as solely instrumental music played on the button accordion and bajo-sexto guitar.

But by the late 1940s the music was in demand in the large dance halls on both sides of the border. Consequently, to meet the demands of the larger halls, the traditional Tex-Mex conjunto, or group, grew to include the electric bass and trap drums as well as the button accordion and bajo sexto.

In addition to the traditional instrumental polkas and redovas that formed the base of the Tex-Mex repertoire, songs known as rancheras, became very popular. Based on the traditional Mexican songs popular during the 1800s, the lyrics of the Tex-Mex rancheras often reflect the mixing of cultures as English words crept into the Spanish-language songs.

The Tex-Mex stew received an extra ingredient in the late 1940s as tropical rhythms such as the cumbia, which originated in Colombia with the descendants of African slaves, became popular. The African-influenced rhythms and melodies added more variety to the straight 4/4 and 3/4 rhythms that had dominated the Tex-Mex repertoire.

The result of the different musical influences and languages make for a style of music that fuels border bashes all night on both sides of the Rio Grande.

SIDE I

1. Chicitos Pero Picos (Cumbia) 2:00: The short drum introduction announces a cumbia, a rhythm that has its roots in Colombia. The accordion and bajo-sexto trade the catchy melody back and forth and at one point join in unison. This melody, originally recorded by the Conjunto Alamo, in the late 1940s was one of the first cumbias to become popular in South Texas via Spanish-language radio.

2. Margarita (Ranchera) 4:30: This is a classic example of the Tex-Mex ranchera, which combines the classic 4/4 polka rhythm with lyrics. This song was first popularized during the early 1950s by

Santiago Jimenez, and it remains an often-requested tune.
(Margarita-Spanish text)

Margarita, Margarita no te subas te arriba

que las flores en el arbol no dura toda la vida.

Desde aqui te estoy mirando cara, cara frente, frente

Pero no eres pa decirme chiquitito "vente, vente."

chorus:

Ay que lastima, que lastima que lastima me da,

de ver a Margarita que llorando esta.
(3rd verse)

Te voy a comprar chinelas y un vestido muy bonito,
pa que varas a bailar al stilo tachachito.
Desde aqui te estoy mirando sentadita en tu ventana,
que bonitos ojos tienes lucero de la manana.

Margarita (English Text)

Margarita, Margarita don't act so high,
because the flowers in the tree don't last forever
From here I'm looking at your face, but you don't last forever
courage to come tell me, "Hey boy, come over here."

(chorus after every verse)

How sad, how sad it makes me
to see Margarita crying.

(3rd verse)

I'm going to buy you dancing slippers and very pretty dress
to go dancing in the tachauchito style.

From here I'm watching you in your window,
What beautiful eyes you have - like the rising sun.

3. El Relampago (Huapango) 1:28: The translated title of this piece
means the lightning bolt and that describes the quick, driving rhythm that
propels this piece. The huapango rhythm has its roots in the harp music
of Veracruz and worked its way north up through the state of Tamaulipas
where it seeped across to Texas where it was adopted to the accordion.
This dance is accompanied by a lot of heel stamping in South Texas
dance halls.

4. Arrancate (Redova 1:55: This is a turn of the century piece, which
has its roots firmly in the Eastern European music that mixed with Mexican
music during Tex-Mex music's early days. The rhythm of the redova is
essentially a waltz, but it has a livelier rhythm.

5. Mi Carrochita (Polka) 2:11: This is a novelty polka that was
first recorded during the late 1940s. The polka's subject matter, a
jalopy, reflects the changes that came about in Mexican-American society
after World War II. The spoken introduction mixes English with Spanish
as a young man offers a woman a ride in his jalopy or carrochita.

Spanish text

Honey, va pa ca. Quieres un ride en mi carrochita?

English text

Honey, come over here. Do you want a ride in my jalopy.

6. Nada Enchilada (Polka) 3:00: This is an original polka based on a popular melody in Northern Mexico, especially in the industrial city of Monterrey. The polka danced to this tune is called the estilo tachuachito or possum style because the couples stick their backsides out more than usual and move around the dance floor looking slightly like possums.

SIDE II

1. Paloma Sin Nido (Ranchera) 2:51: This ranchera is one of thousands of Tex-Mex rancheras dealing on the age-old theme of unrequited love. It's title means "Dove Without A Home"

Spanish text

No me importa tu vida pasada, no me importa tu vida presente

Me jugaba asta el alma desafiando, La vida y la muerte

Ya de plano no puedo quererte mejor te conviene olvidarte de mi

(chorus repeated after first and second verse)

Terminastes mi amore en pedasos como si fuera juguete de nino

Hoy que quiers tenerme en tus brazos no te cobro tan solo te olvido

Si otra vez al corer de los anos cara a cara nos pone el destino

crusaremos sin darnos la mano como dos que nesean conosido

(2nd verse)

Cuando tanto y tanto te amaba

Ni un saludo crusastes conmito hoy que vas por el mundo sin nada

y te llaman paloma sin nido de limosna me pides carino

pero ese carino pa ti se acabo

(English translation)

Your past life isn't important,

neither is your present

Your playing with my heart and challenging my life and death

I don't care for you, so it's better to forget about me.

(chrous after each verse)

You ended my love in pieces like it was a child's toy

Today you want me in your arms, but I don't change and simply forget you

In the years to come we may come face to face as destiny brings us
together.

But we will pass without shaking hands, like we don't know each other.

(second verse)

When I used to love you so much, you didn't even say hell

Now you're going through the world and they call you dove without a home

For a donation you ask for love, but the love I had has fallen.

2. Cumbia Atlantico (Cumbia) 2:08: This cumbia is done in a special arrangement that exposes its African roots. The middle of the piece is highlighted by a log drum solo by Alex Medina that borrows strongly from the African tradition. In the first part of the piece his snare drum work is reminiscent of the Brazilian samba style.

3. La Cacahuata (Polka) 3:00: This polka, known as the "Peanut Polka" in English, has crossed a variety of ethnic boundaries. It started as a popular Mexican polka in the Northern state of Nuevo Leon and traveled across to Texas, where it was popularized by several of the area's leading accordionists. In turn, it has been picked up by Polish and German polka bands in the Midwest and become a staple of their repertoire also.

4. Pantalon Blue Jeans (Ranchera) by Santiago Jimenez 2:27: This ranchera written by one of Tex-Mex music's founding fathers shows how the music is still evolving and reflecting Mexican American society. During the 1920's Jimenez wrote and recorded such famous Tex-Mex polkas as "Viva Seguin," but this ranchera composed in 1980 retains his old style of playing with lyrics about the current rage for blue jeans.

(Spanish Text)

Todas las muchachas usan pantalon

Es la nueva moda y tiene razon

No se ponen medias usan calsetin

Anda muy de moda el pantalon blue jean.

Salen de la escuela suben a el camion
 todos muy bonitas con su pantalon
 luego por la noche se van a un drive in muy entalladito, el pantalon blue jean.
 Ayer por la manana una boda vi vestidos a la moda como se usa aqui
 Padrinos y madrinas era un gran festin asta el padrecito andaba en blue jean.
 Es la nueva ola para que negar en Estados Unidos o en cual quiere lugar.
 Todoitos con la moda que no tiene fin, andamos luciendo el pantalon blue jean..

(Englsih translation)

All the girls wear pants in the new and for good reason.
 They don't wear stocking, they wear the socks that go with the blue jean style.
 They leave for school on the bus, all very pretty in their pants.
 Later in the evening they go to the drive in their tight blue jeans.
 Yesterday morning I saw a wedding where everyone was dressed in style --
 godfathers, bridesmaids and all - it was a big fiesta
 Even the grandfather was in blue jeans.
 It's the new wave for the United States and everywhere else.

Everybody instyle, we're all showing up in blue jeans.
 5. Fantasia de Zarzamora St. (Cumbia) 2:46: This is an original
 cumbia named after one of the busy streets on San Antonio's West
 Side. In the middle of it is a bajo-sexto break that borrows
 from Cuban tres for its inspiration, before returning to the
 traditional cumbia melody.

6. Zapatas Alegres (Polka) 2:43: This closing polka is called
 "Happy Shoes" in English. Near the end of any border bash when
 the dancers are feeling their most uninhibited, there is more
 emphasis on heel stomping. You can hear this sound, plus shouts
 of encouragment by the musicians to the dancers.

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