

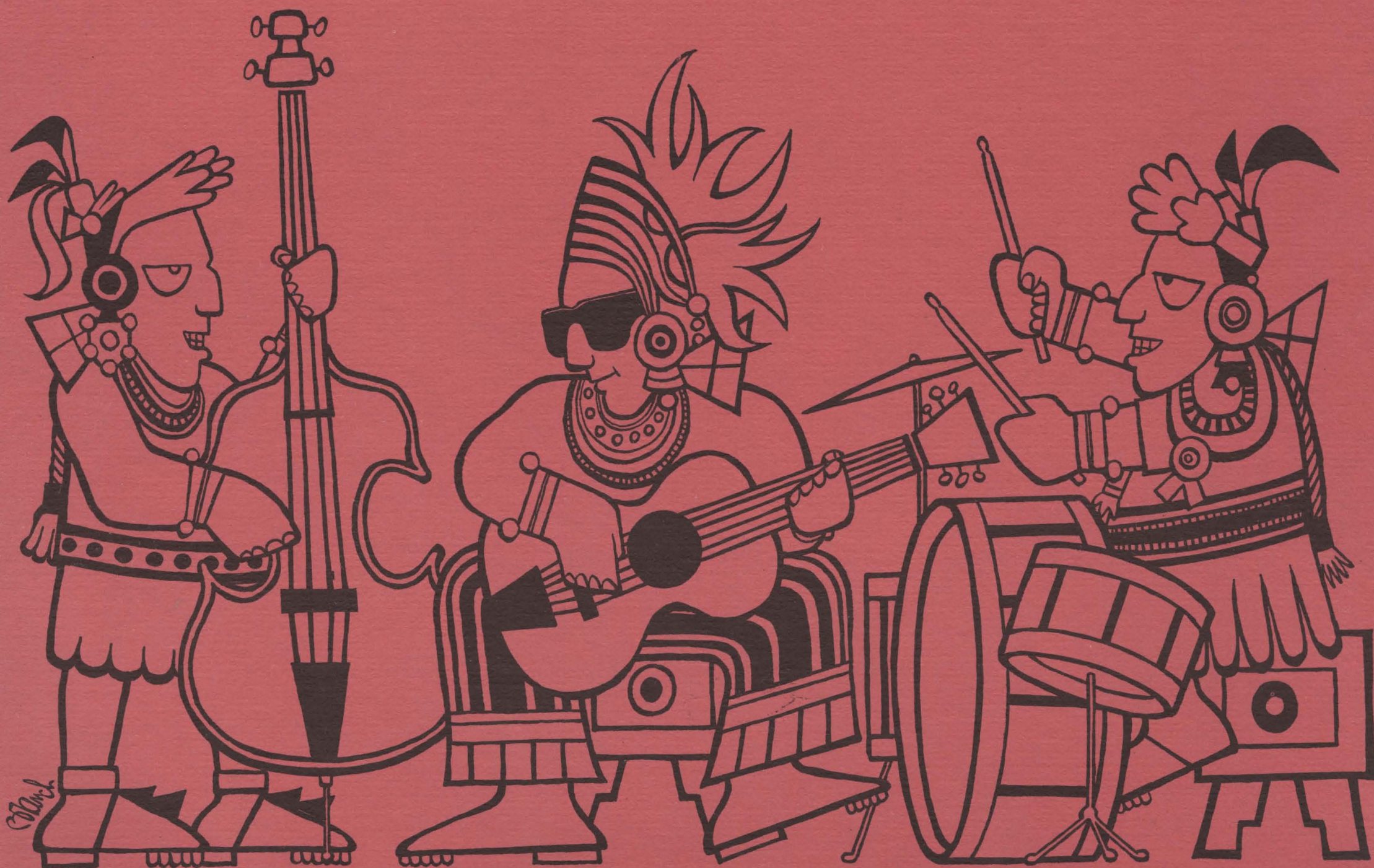
PRODUCED BY BEN TAVERA KING

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FTS 37458

New Directions in Tex-Mex Music

'BORDER CROSSINGS'

Ben Tavera King Y Los Jazztecs



DRAWING BY JOHN BRANCH

DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FTS 37458

New Directions in Tex-Mex Music '**BORDER CROSSINGS**' Ben Tavera King Y Los Jazztecs

SIDE I

1. En La Manana
2. La Fiesta
3. El Viaje
4. El Mercado
5. Algo Romantico
6. Cruzando

3:49

2:56

3:30

2:52

2:25

3:18

SIDE II

1. El Sueno
2. En La Ciudad
3. Sombras
4. La Adventura
5. Media Noche
6. Reprise

3:25

2:56

2:30

2:23

2:23

:25

(All songs either arranged or composed
by Ben Tavera King)

Credits:

Produced: Ben Tavera King

All arrangements and compositions by Ben Tavera King (ASCAP)

Recording Engineer and co-producer: Dubby Hankins

Recorded at the DHS Studio, San Antonio, Texas, January 1984

Cover Illustration: John Branch

Special Thanks: Vickie Davidson

Ben Tavera King plays: guitar, Indian flute, button accordion,
Indian harp and mouth bow

Mike Allison: string bass and percussion

Alex Medina: percussion

"Border Crossings" is essentially a modern version of the centuries-old Hispanic corrido, which is a series of verses that tell a topical story.

While a variety of traditional and even primitive instruments are used on this LP, the music's topic is as current as today's headlines.

The album's cuts trace an everyman leaving his home to cross a border into another land. Is he going from Mexico to the United States to better himself economically? Or is he going from one Central American country to another to escape war?

It's up to the listener to paint the scenes mentally as the music charts an eventful day centered around a border crossing.

The way the traditional instruments on this album are played is also about border crossings—musical ones. Ancient instruments, such as the mouth bow and bamboo flute, are allied with contemporary acoustic instruments to reflect the cultural interminglings.

Most of the album's cuts are based on traditional Mexican melodies that are improvised on with a jazzlike feel.

Examples of this juxtaposition of musical traditions range from a playful be-bop style melody played on an Aztec flute in "En La Ciudad" to the improvised guitar passages that follow the haunting strains of a bamboo flute on "La Manana."

The album's moods go from the impressionistic "EL Viaje" to the rollicking rhythms in "El Mercado."

The instruments on the LP include the nylon-string guitar, button accordion, Mexican folk harp and mouth bow, as well as the string bass and various percussion instruments.

"Border Crossings" was composed and arranged by Ben Tavera King, who has won a national reputation for his previous albums of Tex-Mex music on Folkways, "Border Bash" (FD6528) and "Saturday Night San Antonio" (FD6527).

He learned the Tex-Mex button accordion from the legendary Jimenez family, which includes the well-known Flaco Jimenez, as well as his father Santiago Jimenez and another son, Santiago Jr.

King studied guitar in Spain as well as Texas. The San Antonio-based musician has performed in such diverse places as New York, Mexico City and Costa Rica.

Joining him are string bass player Mike Allison and percussionist Alex Medina, both of whom have played with a variety of groups ranging from jazz and Tex-Mex to new music.

The trio, performing as Los Jazztecs, has been performing at festivals and clubs throughout the Southwest.

—Rafael Castillo

(P)©1984 FOLKWAYS RECORDS & SERVICE CORP.
632 BROADWAY, N.Y.C., 10012 N.Y., U.S.A.

New Directions in Tex-Mex Music '**BORDER CROSSINGS**' Ben Tavera King Y Los Jazztecs

PRODUCED BY BEN TAVERA KING

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FTS 37458

RETURN TO ARCHIVE
CENTER FOR FOLKLIFE PROGRAMS
AND CULTURAL STUDIES

New Directions in Tex-Mex Music 'BORDER CROSSINGS'

Ben Tavera King Y Los Jazztecs

Like a musical sponge, the American Southwest has always absorbed dissimilar types of music and turned them into a hybrid sound.

The pre-Columbian Indians, for example, had a distinct music when the Spaniards came to the New World. The Indian music bore no resemblance to the music of the Spanish, but in time there was change.

Indians began using Spanish stringed instruments, like the guitar, but searched for sounds on the instruments that pleased their ears -- thereby creating music that reflected their Mestizo culture.

In time, Mestizo music received a rhythmic shot in the arm from the African slaves on Mexico's east coast.

By the beginning of the 20th century yet another influence came from Eastern European settlers moving into the Southwest with their accordion and polka rhythms. They helped formed the basis for modern Tex-Mex music.

The music on "Border Crossings" mixes the Indian, Mestizo and European influences to come up with a polygot sound, that tosses in the improvisational feel of jazz.

The evolution of the music on this LP came about through two projects I worked on concerning Mexican-American culture.

One was a documentary produced by the Institute of Texan Cultures, "The Painted Walls of the Barrio," which traced the development of mural paintings from the ancient Aztecs and Toltecs to the artwork that currently appears on walls throughout the Hispanic Southwest.

The music that accompanied the documentary had to reflect modern Hispanic culture in the United States, as well as traditional Mexican and Indian cultures.

To get the right sound, different aspects of various types of music were mixed together. A variety of instruments were used which ranged from the ancient mouth bow to the modern drum trap set and Tex-Mex accordion.

Some of the cuts on this LP had their beginnings while I was working as a musician in residence in the San Antonio Independent School District on a grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts.

During my residency I found students had a positive reaction to ethnic music if the music was descriptive in nature and gave them a chance to use their imaginations to elaborate on what they heard in the music.

Eventually a series of pieces evolved that told the story of "Border Crossings." Like a traditional corrido, which is a topical ballad, the instrumental pieces lead one into another to tell the story of a border crossing.

Here is the background and description of the pieces that comprise "Border Crossings":

-- Ben Tavera King

"Border Crossings"

1. "En La Manana" (3:49) -- A simple melody played on the cane flute opens the LP. The melody is based on a tune from the Yaqui Indians of Northwestern Mexico and Arizona. The tune is repeated by the guitar's bell-like harmonics which are reminiscent of bells pealing from a small village church. The bells' melody is twice interrupted by lively passages based loosely on the improvised portions of the "sones jarocho," which

come from the state of Veracruz. The alternation between the frenzied and placid music reflect the soon-to-be traveler's apprehension about leaving his home.

2. "La Fiesta" (2:56) -- Before leaving the traveler attends a fiesta, or party, held before his departure. The last part of the piece is punctuated by a passage from a "son huasteco," which comes from the Mexican state of Tampico.

3. "El Viaje" (3:30) -- The main theme in this piece is based on the traditional ranchera known as "El Triste Adios," or "The Sad Goodbye." This piece has a true mestizo flavor because of the way the Mexican guitar melodies alternate with the Indian percussion instruments.

4. "En El Mercado" (2:52) -- The lively interplay between the bass, guitar and drum paints a vivid picture of the organized confusion of a border village marketplace where vendors shout about their wares in between bargaining with clients. Toward the end of the song an Indian flute takes over the melody to give a taste of what the song would sound like when actually played by street musicians.

5. "Algo Romantico" (2:25) -- What Hispanic ballad or corrido would be complete without a reference to romance? This piece can be taken as a romantic daydream about someone left behind by the traveler. It is based on the bolero rhythms and melodies found in several romantic Mexican songs.

6. "Cruzando" (3:18) -- All thoughts of romance are put aside as the traveler attempts a perilous crossing. The cross-rhythms between the guitar and Indian drums can represent anything from treacherous river currents to army patrols.

SIDE II

7. "Suenos" (3:25) -- After reaching the other side of the border, the traveler rests. Lying on his back, he watches the

blowing clouds and dreams of his new life. The song begins with a simple melodic figure played on the Indian mouth bow that's picked up and developed by the ensemble, into a more contemporary tune.

8. "En La Ciudad" (2:56) -- The excitement of the big city is shown with a jazzed up cumbia, which has its origins in Colombia. To show the mixing of old and new values an Indian flute plays a bebop-like melody in the middle of the song. The piece also features the button accordion, an instrument popular throughout Latin America, but particularly along the Texas/Mexico border.

9. "Sombras" (2:30) -- As the sun begins to go down, the initial excitement of the city wears off and the traveler begins to deal with the strange environment. The melodies and rhythm in this piece are taken from the music of the wandering musicians, who make their living serenading diners along downtown streets in the early evening.

10. "La Adventura" (3:19) -- The cross rhythms and melodies of the guitars trace a chase between the traveler and the "authorities" through the city streets.

11. "Media Noche" (2:23) -- As his first day in the new country ends the traveler realizes there will be many more adventures in the new country. The piece is based on the traditional "soleares" from Spain, which fits the traveler's mood because it literally means "loneliness."

12. "Reprise" (:25) -- The Indian harp from Oaxaca restates the initial theme played at the beginning of the album. Unlike the traditional corrido, "Border Crossings," has no definite conclusion. The story is still being written everyday as borders, of all types, continue to be crossed. Stay tuned.