Conjunto Alma de Apatzingán “Arriba! Tierra Caliente”

1. LA CHILECA (see inside page 15)
(What Beautiful Eyes You Have)
2. QUE BONITO PAR DE OJITOS
(The Day You Leave)
3. ES UN CAPRICHÓ (It’s a Yearning)
4. YA CASI ESTÁ AMANECIENDO
(Daybreak is Near)
5. DANZA DE LOS ANGELITOS
(Dance of the Angels)
6. EL DÍA QUE TE VAYAS
(The Day You Leave)
7. YO VI NACER UNA NUBE
(I Saw the Birth of a Cloud)
8. MIRA LUISA (Look, Luisa)
9. EL APASIONADO
(The Empassioned One)
10. CLAVEL DE PRIMAVERA
(Carnation of the Spring)
11. LA BRUJERÍA (The Witchcraft)
12. EL AGUITADO (The Coward)
13. OJOS NEGROS QUE NUNCA ENGANAN
(Black Eyes That Never Deceive)
14. MINUETE AL SEÑOR SAN ANTONIO
(Minuet to Señor San Antonio)

15. MINUETE AL CRISTO MILAGROSO
(Minuet to Miraculous Christ)
16. DANZA DE LOS LIRIOS
(Dance of the Irises)
17. DANZA A LA VIRGEN DE ACAHUATO
(Dance in Honor of the Virgin of Acahuat o)
18. DANZA DE LA MANDA
(Dance of the Promise)
19. LA PIPA DINÁ (Corrido)
(The Marijuana Truck)
20. SEMBRADORES DEL CERRO
(Corrido) (The Growers From the Hill)
21. LA MUERTE DE JUAN ORTÍZ
(Corrido) (The Death of Juan Ortiz)
22. EL PADRE CONTRABANDISTA
(Corrido) (The Trafficking Priest)

Produced by Ignacio Montes De Oca H. for Alborada Records. Arhoolie release produced by Chris Strachwitz under license from Alborada Records. Re-mastered for CD by Mike Cogan, Bay Records, Berkeley, CA.

One night several years ago I walked into a bar called "La Tortilla" in Redwood City, California, with a friend visiting from England. Several mariachis in San Francisco had told us that there were no regular mariachis using a harp in this area, but that we might find conjuntos (groups) using a harp in a place called "La Tortilla." Well, they were right. Not only was there one such conjunto with harp, two violins, vihuela, and jarana ferociously serenading a customer at one end of the long bar, but as soon as they finished their song, a second such conjunto segued into a song for a paying customer at the opposite end of the bar without missing a beat. They were mariachis, but without the trumpets.

Although I thought I was in heaven, I was really in a little part of Michoacán, transplanted to California from that southwestern Mexican state. Over the years, Michoacán has probably supplied more field workers, whose hard work has put fruits and vegetables on your table, than any other region of Mexico. They have come especially from that part of Michoacán which has Apatzingán as its center. It's relatively good farm country in the heart of Tierra Caliente—the Hot Lands. It's hot all right—temperature-wise it was in the 90s every day when I visited last February, and in recent years the region has also achieved considerable fame, or infamy if you prefer, as a center for traficantes, smugglers of controlled substances, mostly organic plants which many governments have however declared to be illegal. Trafficking has become much more lucrative than farming, especially since most farms are now big and mechanized and need fewer and fewer workers. The folklore and popular literature which has developed around this unofficial "business" is quite extensive and is reflected in the repertoire of the many regional popular conjuntos who make their living providing customers with the songs and corridos they want to hear, and hear over and over again.

During the era of the Bracero Program, the US welcomed thousands of workers from Michoacán every year because they were famous as the best farm hands. They were also welcomed as cheap seasonal laborers who could be sent back home as soon as the US farmers no longer needed them. Today California's present governor and his allies, want no more immigrants and instead of hitting on employers of illegal workers which may involve the biggest agri-business corporations, they try to devise methods of turning our mutual border into an iron curtain where no human traffic is allowed. The only cargo they want to allow to come north is cheap produce during our off-season. That will benefit the big ranchers in Mexico which are often also controlled by international and US corporations, and of course it benefits our consumers at the expense of our own farm workers who have a hard time getting a decent wage.

Conjunto Alma de Apatzingán is a magnificent example of the regional groups from Tierra Caliente,
in their most authentic, vital, and purest form. The repertoire of this conjunto de arpa is all encompassing and ranges from old traditional religious minuets, to old-time danzas, and includes lots of popular rancheras and canciones as well as old and new corridos, sones, and the very regional balonas. The latter are not heard on this CD but perhaps we can include several on a future release.

The harmonizing voices of the two brothers, Juan Pérez and Manuel Pérez Morfin, are to my ears the perfect match for pure rural duet singing. Juan Pérez’s powerful harp playing not only keeps a strong bass line going but also uses the treble strings of the harp beautifully. The violin is in perfect hands both when played by Manuel Pérez Morfin or by Bertoldo “Beto” Pineda. That last name will probably ring a bell with anyone familiar with the music of Conjuntos De Arpa Grande from Michoacán. For years “Beto” Piñeda García has been leading a famous conjunto which recorded prolifically in the 1980s under the name Nuevo Alma de Apatzingán for Mexican Ariola and JCOR Records. Today he still leads his own conjunto but comes along to help out when his friends need him.

This music from a relatively isolated part of Michoacán, is the popular Mestizo folk music of the region and is heard everywhere: in the streets, in the cantinas, at festivals, at celebrations and at parties. This music also harks back to the days when mariachi music was in its infancy, coming out of the hills of Jalisco and Michoacán to eventually become Mexico’s national music as stylized in Mexico City. Conjuntos De Arpa from Michoacán use the same instruments as the early mariachis before the trumpet became an integral part of those ensembles in the 1930s. The many thriving Mariachi Festivals taking place across the southwest and in Mexico, might consider including Conjuntos De Arpa Grande in their programs to illustrate the dynamic and very much alive roots of the music. Conjuntos Michoacanos are to Mariachi music what the Blues are to Jazz, they are an essential foundation and they are alive and thriving.

In the town of Tumbiscatio, in the state of Michoacán, on the eighth day of March of the year 1945, Juan Pérez Morfin, arrived in this world. At a very early age a musical interest and curiosity awakened in him, as he learned to play the guitar with his father Don Jeronimo Pérez Gallardo, whom he accompanied during celebrations of las Fiestas Patronales (celebrations to honor the patron saints) in different towns within the region of Tierra Caliente. Together they played minuets. The minuete is a religious song of praise usually performed in church. Accompanied by minuets the faithful worshipers thank God or various saints for favors they have received. Minuets are also played by the Huichol and Coras Indians in the Sierra mountains of Nayarit. They are played in the churches in the Coca region of the state of Jalisco and also in the outlying region of Apatzingán. The instruments usually used to play minuets are the violin, guitarra de golpe, guitarrón, vihuela, and occasionally include the accompaniment of a harp.

At a young age, Juan Pérez Morfin commenced his study of playing the harp. For a time he had temporarily set the harp aside, to earn a living by playing the guitarrón with other conjuntos and mariachis
in the region of Planeca. It was a time when Conjuntos De Arpa were seeing a temporary decline in popularity. Like his father, Don Jerónimo, who also earned his living as a musician, Juan Pérez never received formal musical training. That did not, however, prevent him from mastering the harp, nor from using his God-given talent as a singer, as demonstrated in his performances.

Conjunto Alma de Apatzingán, was first formed in 1975. Initially the group was composed of Bertoldo “Beto” Piñeda García, Juan Pérez Morfin, Salvador Chavez, and Leopoldo Barajas. Soon his brother Manuel Pérez Morfin joined. The group initially experienced its greatest success performing balonas, which are humorous songs based on characters or events that are intended to make the audience laugh. However, these have fallen out of favor with the wider public which the group has reached via their records and out-of-state appearances. In recent years Conjunto Alma de Apatzingán has consistently won the first place award at the concurso (contest) which is held annually on October 22nd in Apatzingán, Michoacán. This annual concurso features contests only between conjuntos de arpa from that region but also includes the best local tamboreros who kneel next to the bass board of the harpist, using the harp as a drum.

To date Conjunto Alma de Apatzingán have recorded ten albums with great regional and national success. They have also appeared in ten films of Mexico’s Cine Nacional, as well as having been featured in Mexico City, at the prestigious Auditorio Nacional, the Palacio de Bellas Artes and in the Teatro De La Danza. They have also given performances in Morelia, Michoacán, at the Teatro Morelos, Teatro del Pueblo, and at the Casa de las Artesanías. The Conjunto has regularly played for the Governor’s banquets in the state of Michoacán. They have also had the opportunity to play for a former president of the Republic, Miguel De La Madrid Hurtado at Patzcuaro, Michoacán, and on another occasion performed at the Presa de Chilatán. They were also invited to play at the inauguration of the coastal highway, Lázaro-Colima, at the request of Lic. Carlos Salinas de Gortari, Mexico’s current president.

(Notes by Chris Strachwitz and Ignacio Orozco Camarena–1994)

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Credits continued from back page:

# 1 - 4, 6 – 8: Juan Pérez Morfin-arpa and lead vocals; Bertoldo “Beto” Piñeda García-violin; Maclovio “Paco” Alvarez Huerta-guitarra de golpe and second voice; Andrés Avalos-vihuela and vocals; Manuel Pérez Morfin-violin (on a few selections); engineer: Hector Mora Márquez.; ca. 1993.

# 5, 9 – 22: Juan Pérez Morfin-arpa & lead vocal; Manuel Pérez Morfin-violin & vocal; Manuel Pérez Jr.-violín (on a few selections); Andrés Avalos-vihuela; Paco Alvarez-jarana; unknown accordion; Engineer: Gil Madrigal C.; ca. 1992.

Recorded at PGM Studios, Uruapan, Michoacán, Mexico, (1992 and 1994).

Transcriptions & translations of songs by Zack & Juanita Salem.

Translation of Ignacio Orozco Camarena’s contribution to the notes by Leticia Del Toro.
11. La Brujería
Dican que van a embrujarme,
con eso a mi no me asustan,
sirva toloche mesero,
que es el highball que me gusta,
tengo como dos hechiceros
y de votar a una bruja.
Para matar gatos negros
no necesito pistola.
Los emborracho primero,
jondeandoles de la cola.
Las brujas me las almuerzo,
 hasta con toda y escoba.
Que van a embrujarme
con la brujería.
Que van a matarme,
déjen que me río.
Que por allá anda un muñeco
y que a mi se les parece,
y de alfíller es repleto
para que cambie mi suerte.
La calavera del muerto
a mi me pela los dientes.
Allí va la bruja volando
en su escoba encarnada,
los polvos que va regando
son de la madre Matianza.
¿Que dices bruja, nos vamos?
Me cuadra la vacilada.

Witchcraft
They say they’re going to cast a spell on me
but they don’t scare me with that,
serve me their strongest potion, bartender,
that’s my kind of highball
I’ve got two sorcerers
and one witch to spare.

In order to kill black cats
you don’t need a pistol,
first I get them drunk
holding them up by the tail
and I eat witches for breakfast,
broom and all.

So they’re going to cast a spell on me
with their witchcraft!
So they’re going to kill me!
Don’t make me laugh!
They say there is a doll
and they say it looks like me,
and that it’s complete with a pin
so that my luck will change.
The dead man’s skull
shows his smile to me.

There goes the witch flying by
on her broomstick.
The magic powders she’s spreading
are of “Mother Matianza.”
What do you say , witch,
let’s go have us some fun.

12. El Aguitado
Se que me dices “el aguitado”
y que te importa un comino mi querer,
solo te digo que estoy asqueado
y que me sobran aromas para oler.

Tu me tenías muy aguitado
me maltratabas haciendome a tu ley,
pero mi suerte ahora ha cambiado,
ahora me gusta el aguita del maguey.

Ahora me aviento mi mezcalazo
de parrandero y me voy de vacilón,
y si te encuentro no te hago caso
porque me cargo prietitas de a montón.

Yo ya soy libre, soy parrandero,
bendita la hora en que te pude olvidar,
por eso dices que soy grosero
porque pensabas que me ibas a ensillar.

Que triste suerte la de los buenos,
quedicksionan con un maldito amor.
Aunque ellos vivan en los infiernos
sufren contentos su pena y su dolor.

Yo se los digo muy a lo macho
porque en un tiempo también ya me pasó,
bonita vida la del borracho,
que no respeta ni a cargo ni a vargor.

The Coward
I know you call me “the coward”
and that you don’t give a damn for my affection,
I just tell you that I’m disgusted
and that I’ve plenty of other scents to smell.

You had me pretty well tamed,
you mistreated me and had me under your thumb,
but my luck now has changed,
now I enjoy drinking the juice of the maguey.

Now I drink my mezcal,
go out on a binge and enjoy myself,
and if I run into you I pay no attention,
because I’ve got plenty of other women hanging around.

Now I’m free to enjoy myself,
bless the hour I was able to forget you.
That’s why you say I’m a bum,
because you thought you had a hold on me.

What a sad fate the good ones have,
they are entranced by this damned love,
and even though they’re in a living hell
they suffer contentedly their pain and anguish.

I’m telling you, in this macho way,
because there was a time all this happened to me.
It’s a beautiful life the drunkard has,
he need not respect anyone or anything.
19. La Pipa Dina
Esta era la Pipa Dina
a las dos de la mañana,
rugía el motor de la Pipa,
que olía a pintura fresca
que habían cambiado el color,
bién llena de marihuana.

En la población de Arteaga
decía Laureano Del Rio
con otros dos compañeros:
-Mucho cuidado chofer,
esta mata es de la buena,
es la de Tumbiscatio.

Así agarró su destino
por toda la carretera,
aves en Sinaloa
o a veces hasta Sonora,
Carmelita se encargaba
de pasarlo a la frontera.

Estado de Michoacán,
carretera treinta y siete
la tiene muy vigilada
la Federal de Caminos,
compradores transitaban,
se pelaron como un cohete.

Hay guerra contra la mafia,
ya los están acabando,
yo no caben en la cárcel
pero siguen traficando
porque en Estados Unidos
mejor la siguen pagando.

10

The Marijuana Truck
This is the story of the Pipa Dina.
At two in the morning
it was revving up its engine,
and it smelled of fresh paint
because they had changed it's color,
and it was loaded up with marijuana.

In the town of Arteaga
Don Laureano and two other
companions said:
"Be very careful driver,
this pot is the very best
from the town of Tumbiscatio."

That's how it followed it's destiny,
all the way down the highway,
sometimes in Sinaloa
or sometimes in Sonora,
Carmelita was responsible
for getting it across the border.

State of Michoacán,
highway thirty-seven,
the highway patrol
are watching her closely,
buyers come and go
and they took off like a rocket.

There is a war against the mafia,
these days they are being finished-off,
no more can fit in the jail
but they continue to traffic drugs
because in the United States
they keep paying more for it.

11

La Pipa muy bien cargada
a Uruapan iba llegando.
La señala la Federal
pero se aventó a un barranco.
Carmelita y Don Laureano
se quedaron esperando.

20. Sembradores del Cerro
En las barrancas y cerros vivían puros animales
Ahora hay hombres y mujeres,
cuevas llenas de costales.

Antes allí en los ranchitos
había maíz para la marrana
Ahora si ni maíz siembran,
puritita marihuana.

La amapola es gran riqueza
dicen rancheros del cerro,
no la produce la tierra,
federal no la dejan,
quieren vivamos de perros.

En lo más alto de un cerro
hay tres mil matas floreciendo,
hay varios cuernos de chivo
y otras de gruea oca libre
día y noche la están cuidando.

Dicen vale más que el oro
la compran en el extranjero,
nos dan parque y buenas armas
y también mucho dinero.

On the highest part of a hill
there are three thousand flowering plants,
and several machine guns
and other high calibre weapons
protecting the crop day and night.

They say it's worth more than gold,
that they buy it outside the country,
they give us ammunition and good arms
and also a lot of money.
Las mujeres platicando:
"Este año damos más caro,
y que no venga el avión,
los sacaban el ecuaro".

Ahora hay órden de apención
trafican como la han sembrado,
los dueños de ese dinero
son gobierno y licenciado.

Ahora los carros del año,
esos si los traen pavo, cerca
y en vez de estar armados
un machete o la taquera.

Si nos agarra el gobierno
muy dura está la condena,
los sembradores del cerro
dicen sí vale la pena.

21. La Muerte de Juan Ortiz
Mil novecientos noventa
no se les vaya a olvidar
que no traigan más bravos,
hombres a carta cabal
a las dos de la mañana
les cayó La Judicial.

Juan Ortiz tenía delitos
no se iba de Los Olivos,
andaba muy bien armado
también sus hijos queridos

The women are saying:
"This year we'll sell at a higher price,
but we won't have the plane come
because it tears up the corn fields."

Now there are laws against trafficking
just as there are against planting,
some are locked up
and the government and the lawyers
now have all their money.

If the government should catch us
the penalty is very stiff.
The growers from the hill
will say if it's worth the trouble.

The Death of Juan Ortiz
In the year of 1990
don't anyone forget
that four brave friends,
men tried and true,
at two o'clock in the morning
were accosted by the Federal Police.

Juan Ortiz had committed crimes
and never left Rancho Los Olivos
He and his beloved children
were always well armed,

usaban reglamentaria
sus rifles cuerno de chivo.

La gente los denunciaba,
los tomaron prisioneros
cerca tenían sus rivales
le lanzaban al gobierno
como eran gallos jugadores
querían quitarlos de enmedio.

Judiciales y Federales
les cayeron al poblado
la casa donde dormían
ya los tenían rodeados
al señor Nicosolorio
allí con un pie quebrado.

Se estremecía la gente
oyendo la balacera
estaban bloqueadas las calles
el gobierno por dondequiera
y le gritaban a Juan
era mejor se rindiera.

Alfonso, también José
no se podían rajar
pues ya tenían moribundo
a un jefe de judicial
y ellos estaban adentro
no los podían sacar.

Y hablaban por el radio
les mandaban mas gobierno
porque a varios judiciales
había mandado al infierno

they were well outfitted
with machine guns.

People denounced them
and took them prisoner,
and the government after them.
Since they were such brave men
they wanted them out of the way.

The Federal Police
came down on the town,
the house where they lived
was now surrounded
and Mr. Nicosolorio
was there with a broken leg.

The townsfolk all trembled
when they heard all the shooting,
the streets were blocked,
and the government was everywhere,
and they shouted to Juan
that it would be better if he gave up.

Alfonso and José
were not going to give up
because they had already wounded
a police chief,
and they were inside
where they couldn't get them.

The government called on the radio
for more reinforcements
because several Federal Police
had already been sent to hell,
Las mujeres platicando:
“Este año damos más caro, y que no venga el avión, nos sacaban el ecuaro”.

Que ahora hay órdenes de apención trafican como la han sembrado, algunos están encerrados los dueños de ese dinero son gobierno y licenciado.

Ahora los carros del año, esos sí los trae cualquiera, antes era en un burrito y en vez de esas armas finas un machete o la taquera.

Si nos agarra el gobierno muy dura está la condena, los sembradores del cerro dicen sí vale la pena.

21. La Muerte de Juan Ortiz
Mil novecientos noventa no se les vaya a olvidar cuatro amigos muy valientes hombres a carta cabal a las dos de la mañana Jes cayó La Judicial.

Juan Ortiz tenía delitos no se iba de Los Olivos, andaba muy bien armado también sus hijos queridos

The Death of Juan Ortiz
In the year of 1990 don’t anyone forget that four brave friends, men tried and true, at two o’clock in the morning were accosted by the Federal Police.

Juan Ortiz had committed crimes and never left Rancho Los Olivos He and his beloved children were always well armed,

usaban reglamentaria sus rifles cuerno de chivo.

La gente los denunciaba, los tomaron prisioneros cerca tenían sus rivales le lanzaban al gobierno como eran gallos jugados querían quitarlos de enmedio.

Judiciales y Federales les cayeron al poblado la casa donde dormían ya los tenían rodeados al señor Nicosolorio allí con un pie quebrado.

Se estremecía la gente oyendo la balacera estaban bloqueadas las calles gobierno por dondequiera y le gritaban a Juan era mejor se rindiera.

Alfonso, también José no se podían rajar pues ya tenían moribundo a un jefe de judicial y ellos estaban adentro no los podían sacar.

Y hablaban por el radio les mandaban mas gobierno porque a varios judiciales había mandado al infierno

they were well outfitted with machine guns.

People denounced them and took them prisoner, nearby they had rivals who sent the government after them. Since they were such brave men they wanted them out of the way.

The Federal Police came down on the town, the house where they lived was now surrounded and Mr. Nicosolorio was there with a broken leg.

The townsfolk all trembled when they heard all the shooting, the streets were blocked, and the government was everywhere, and they shouted to Juan that it would be better if he gave up.

Alfonso and José were not going to give up because they had already wounded a police chief, and they were inside where they couldn’t get them.

The government called on the radio for more reinforcements because several Federal Police had already been sent to hell,
y que les mandaran parque
porque el asunto era serio.

Y les arrojaron gases
pa' poderlos dominar
y los Ortiz les gritaban:
“Pues venganos a sacar”
pero cuando estan ciegos
allí los fueron a matar.

Nos acordamos de Juan
y de sus hijos sagrados
ellos ya estan en Ia gloria
De Dios serán perdonados.

Adios rancho del Olivo
mi corrido ha terminado.

22. El Padre Contrabandista
Repiqueteaban las campanas de aquel
 templo
y en mi mente el recuerdo se quedó.

Maldito sea el contrabando y el dinero
que a un sacerdote a la tragedia le
inducio.

En el curato tenia sus laboratorios,
droga de todas y armas de lo mejor.
Mandaba fieles a llevar el cargamento
dañando al mundo y atentando contra
Dios.

and they called for more ammunition
because the thing was getting serious.

They threw in tear gas
in order to flush them out
and the Ortiz family shouted
“Come in and get us”
but when they had been blinded,
they came in and finished them.

We remember Juan
and his sacred sons
they are now in heaven
and will be pardoned by God.
Goodbye Rancho del Olivo,
here my corrido has ended.

The Drug Trafficking Priest
The bells were ringing over in the
temple
and in my mind the memory has
remained.
Contraband and money be damned,
they brought tragedy to a priest.

In the parish he had his laboratories,
every kind of drugs and the best of
weapons.
He sent the faithful to carry his shipments,
damaging the world and sinning against
God.

Un día la iglesia rodeado de Federales
aquel curita mas de diez ametralló,
dejando muertos parroqueanos y
gobierno
y pa' escapar ni la solanita le estorbó.
Regocijan de aquel pueblito los
domingos
iban a misa a las seis de la mañana,
y unos rancheros con sus burros bien
cargados
venían bajando costales de marijuana.

Me duele el alma explicar este relato
y a mi me consta, no me juzgas
hablador.

También me cuentan que por viento,
mar y tierra
pasaba coca ese apóstol del Señor.

One day the church was surrounded by
Federales,
and that priest machine-gunned more than
ten,
leaving parishioners and government
agents dead,
and made his escape still wearing his robe.

They always rejoiced in that town on
Sundays,
they went to mass at six in the morning,
while some ranchers, with their burros
loaded down,
were busy taking down sacks full of
marijuana.

It hurts my soul to explain this story,
but I swear it’s the truth, so don’t judge me
a liar.

They also tell me that by land, air, and sea
this apostle of God smuggled cocaine.

Note:
#1. La Chileca – Over a hundred years old, this song was supposedly named
and composed for Cecilia, or “Chila,” the wife of the owner of a hacienda
in the town of Chila, Michoacán. According to Guadalupe Madrigal, leader
of Los Gavilanes de Oakland, all mariachis know the song by this name.
Conjunto Alma de Apatzingán

“Arriba! Tierra Caliente”

Over 78 Minutes by the premier Conjunto de Arpa Grande

1. LA CHILECA (4:06)
2. QUE BONITO PAR DE OJITOS
   (What Beautiful Eyes You Have) (3:09)
3. ES UN CAPRICHO (It’s a Yearning) (2:53)
4. YA CASI ESTÁ AMANECIENDO
   (Daybreak Is Near) (3:14)
5. DANZA DE LOS ANGELITOS
   (Dance of the Angels) (2:44)
6. EL DÍA QUE TE VAYAS
   (The Day You Leave) (3:36)
7. YO VI NACER UNA NUBE
   (I Saw the Birth of a Cloud) (4:02)
8. MIRA LUISA (Look, Luisa) (2:56)
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    (Carnation of the Spring) (3:27)
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    (Minuet to Señor San Antonio) (2:25)
15. MINUETE AL CRISTO MILAGROSO
    (Minuet to Miraculous Christ) (3:49)
16. DANZA DE LOS LIRIOS
    (Dance of the Irises) (3:12)
17. DANZA A LA VIRGEN DE ACAHUATO
    (Dance in Honor of the Virgin of Acahuato) (2:39)
18. DANZA DE LA MANDA
    (Dance of the Promise) (2:43)
19. LA PIPA DINA (Corrido)
    (The Marijuana Truck) (3:22)
20. SEMBRADORES DEL CERRO
    (Corrido) (The Growers From the Hill) (4:09)
21. LA MUERTE DE JUAN ORTÍZ
    (Corrido) (The Death of Juan Ortiz) (4:33)
22. EL PADRE CONTRABANDISTA
    (Corrido) (The Trafficking Priest) (4:28)

Total time: 78:16

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