Corridos
# Mexican Corridos

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Corridos

INTRODUCTION

by Henry Cowell

Mexican Corridos are stories told in song. The word comes from correr, the Spanish verb meaning to run, and this indicates that there is to be a running narrative. The use is limited - not all tales are called corridos - usually love stories are not included. News stories with embellishments are the most customary; but these range from classical news items which become virtual sagas through retelling, and may deal with events of the neighborhood, the country, or news of the world. The religious corridos deal with anything from a story of the life of Christ to a recent miracle, or even a kindly act by a priest. Stories of traditionally-known bandits may be mixed in with reports on recent elections. Discoveries of oil wells, volcanos and ancient Aztec ruins may be found preserved in corrido words, sung to the old tunes. Current robberies, murders and visits of foreign dignitaries are told of in song, but usually die in favor of other similar news, since these subjects are apt to be topical rather than historically important.

Love stories which tell of hypothetical lovers, or even local real ones are not usually thought of as corridos, even though they are sung by the same singers. A classical or enduring love story, however, may become a corrido, if it contains a narrative plot, and concerns a historical event. Thus the story of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor has become a corrido (although we have never been able to find anyone who sings it).

The music of the Mexican corrido shares its style with many other sorts of folk songs, particularly love songs. It is most commonly sung by two men together, who accompany themselves on a guitar. While the music is often dubbed "Spanish", the style is only in part related to the music of Spain today. It preserves a music which has largely died out in Spain, but which is related to the practice of fauxbourdon, a cultivated musical scheme of the 15th century, that was picked up by ear by folk singers. This consists of having the entire melody followed by the musical interval of the third (three notes along the scale from the melody) and the sixth (six notes along the scale from the melody). In Spain this has become for the most part absorbed in more varied practices; in Mexico, the two men sing together, not both in thirds and sixths, but either in one or the other. This is fitted into a very simple harmonic scheme, in which the guitar plays either the tonic chord (on the first tone of the scale) or the dominant chord (on the fifth note of the scale). Seldom are any other chords added to complicate matters, and when this does occur, it is a sign of outside influence. The rhythm is always in a moderately-flowing three, like a waltz, and in many corrido melodies the final tone is held over the barline, so that there is a mild syncopation. There are certain well-known spots in the melodies where the voices always slide from one tone to another (for the benefit of musicians, this is when the leading tone slides down to the subdominant, and, as an answer, the submedient slides down to the medient).

The corrido style may be found outside of Mexico - we have heard it from Central America and Cuba, and to a limited degree from South America, but it seems to flourish particularly in Mexico.
SIDE I, Band 1: CANANEÀ

Voy a dar un pormenor
de lo que a mí me ha pasado,
que me han agarrado preso,
siendo un gallo tan jugado.

Me fui para el Agua Prieta
a ver quien me conocía,
y a las once de la noche
me aprehendío la Policía.

Me aprehendieron los gendarmes
al estilo americano,
cómo era hombre de delito,
todos con pistola en mano.

La cárcel de Cananeà
se edificó en una mesa
y en ella fui procesado
por causa de mi tropeza.

Ya con esta me despido
por las hojas de un granado,
aquí se acaba el corrido
de este gallo bien jugado.

Singing Translation (with a few liberties for rhyming, etc.)

Gather round, I'll tell you my story
By the leaves of an avocado
And it's all about the capture
Of this reckless desperado.

I went off to Agua Prieta
Just to see if they would spot me,
And the bells were tolling midnight
When the four policemen got me.

Yes they quickly took me captive
In the famous Yankee fashion
For their guns were cocked and ready
And their eyes were filled with passion.

The Cananeà prison,
Stands upon a lonely prairie,
And they tried me there that morning
Just because I was unwary.

Now it's time for me to leave you
By the leaves of the avocado,
And I'll close my sad corrido
Of this reckless desperado.

---

SIDE I, Band 2: FANDANGUITO
(LITTLE FANDANGO)

A languid, southern rhythm characterizes the "Cupido corrido". The slow movement of the jarana dance on moonlit nights beside the mango grove. It is easy to place the origin of this because of the clever use of place names in the song: Tierra Blanca, Misantla, Papantla.

In the middle of the song there is a sudden shift from the romantic to the very practical -- love is after all secondary, there are many other satisfactions in life: a flourishing cornfield or a fine horse... or even other loves, if this one fails.

Ay cupido chiquito tirano,
Ay cupido dame la mano

Fandanguito de tierra caliente
que bailan todos los del manglar.

Fandanguito que en noches de luna
por sus ventanas iba yo a cantar.

Que me importa que ya no me quieras,
que al cabo la milpa ya va a jilotear.

1) Avocado: in the original it's a pomegranate
2) In original: cops arrested me
3) In the American style

TRANSLATION

Ay, little tyrant Cupid,
ay, Cupid, give me your hand.

Fandanguito of the tropics,
that all danced beside the mango grove.

Fandanguito, that on moonlit nights
by her window I would sing.

I care not if she no longer loves me
after all, my corn patch is coming up fine.
Tengo mi cuaco tordillo radado,
y mis chaparreras de buen material.

Ay chonita, chinita, chiquita, chula y charrita
... (section unintelligible) ...

Fandanguito del Río Papaloapam
que en cada verso canta un amor.

No me importa que me andes tanteando
a ver si me encuentras con otra mujer.

.... amores.... cambiar
................ tu querer...

Tierra Blanca, Misantla, Papantla
Zacahuistla, Toteco y Jalapa,
Fandanguito
Al compas de las armas lloronas
y la jarana de Tiltepec.

Y ahora que ando corriendo la vida,
y se lo que cuesta y duele el amor.

I've got a nice grey horse
and riding britches of good material.

Ay, little curly-haired, lovely chonito (2)

Fandanguito of the Papaloapam River
that sings a song of love with each verse.

I don't care if you're spying on me
to see if I'm out with another woman,
(There are many more loves to exchange for yours.)

Tierra Blanca, Misantla, Papantla
Zacahuistla, Toteco y Jalapa.

Fandanguito, that in my little town I danced,
marking rhythm with the weepy harps
and the jarana of Tiltepec.

Now I'm out in the world and know the worth and pain
of true love.

It doesn't much matter what happens to me,
After all, I'm a man and can take it.

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SIDE 1, Band 3: CORRIDO DE LA PERSECUCION RELIGIOSA

TRANSLATION

Esta es la historia, senores,
del problema religiosa,
((and how before things improved
many sad days went by...)))
tras muchos dias amargos,
en que no hubo religion,
ya nadie por las iglesias
y despues la rebellion.

Ya no hay tiros ni trancazos,
Toditito esta arreglado,
Ora si puedo casarme,
Por la iglesia y el estado.

Las leyes de la Reforma,
que habian sido letra muerta,
tomaron vigor y forma
al terminar De la Huerta.

Vino como consecuencia
una cruel persecucion
no hubo libre conciencia,
yah ni en la constitucion.

Ya no hay tiros ni trancazos,
Toditito esta arreglado,
Ora si puedo casarme,
Por la iglesia y el estado.

This is the story, gentlemen,
of the religious troubles.
(unintelligible section)
And how before things improved
many sad days went by.

Those were difficult times
in which religion was banned.

No one was seen at the churches --
and then the rebellion began.

There are no more shots or blows now,
Everything has been arranged,
Now I can get married
by the church and by the state.

The Reform Laws for long
had not been enforced,
but when De la Huerta left
they took on vigor and form
and cruel persecution
consequently came,
there was no liberty of conscience
nor support from the Constitution.

There are no more shots or blows now,
Everything has been arranged,
Now I can get married
by the church and by the state.

It was in '22
that all the trouble began.
When the Papal delegate
was expelled from town.
In the year '26
intolerance was in flower,
when war was declared
against faith and conscience.

Ya no hay tiros ni trancazos,
Toditito esta arreglado,
Ora si puedo casarme,
Por la iglesia y el estado.

There are no more shots or blows now,
Everything has been arranged,
Now I can get married
by the church and by the state.
Y en la lucha fratricida
Por valles, montes y llanos,
Nunca pude ser vencida
La fe de los mexicanos.

Y es que nuestra religion
Por la que damos la vida,
El alma y el corazón,
Nunca puede ser vencida.

Ya no hay tiros ni trancazos,
Toditito, esta arreglado;
Ahora sí puede cantarles
Por la iglesia y el Estado.

Don Emilio Portes Gil,
Presidente, mexicano,
Ya arregló las diferencias
Que había con el Vaticano.

Hoy por eso las campanas
Repican con tanta prisa,
Llamando a los mexicanos
A la iglesia y la misa.

Ya no hay tiros ni trancazos, etc....

Paso ya la intransigencia,
Volvió la paz a reinar;
De libertad de conciencia
Podemos ya disfrutar.

Mexico ha reconquistado
Su gloriosa religion,
La fe del gran cura Hidalgo
Y Morelos y Pavon.

Ya no hay tiros, etc....

SIDE II, Band 1: CORRE, CORRE, MAQUINITA!
(RUN, MY LITTLE LOCOMOTIVE!)

El día primero de abril,
Jueves Santo en la manana.
Salio Villa de Parral
A expedir una campana.

Ya se va Francisco Villa,
Se llevo todos los trenes
Hasta llegar a Celaya;
Allí formaron cuarteles.

Corre, corre, maquinita,
Sin dejarle ni un wagon
Hasta llegar a Celaya
A combatir a Obregon.

Entre las tres y las cuatro
Se comenzó el tiroteo;
A las siete de la noche
Ya se oía el bombardeo.

TRANSLATION

Even in the fratricidal war
Through valleys, mountains and plains,
Never could there be victory
Over the faith of the Mexicans.

The truth is that our religion
For which we give our lives,
Our souls and our hearts,
Can never be conquered.

Now there are no shots nor blows,
Every little thing is all arranged,
For the Church and the State
The song can now be sung.

His Honor Emilio Portes Gil,
President of Mexico,
By now has arranged the differences
That existed with the Vatican.

That is why today the bells
Are ringing on in such a hurry,
Calling to all the Mexicans
To come to church and hear the mass.

Now there are no shots nor blow, etc..

A thing of the past is all intransigence
Peace once more has come to reign.
Liberty of Conscience once more
We are permitted to enjoy.

Mexico again has regained by war
Its religion so glorious;
The faith of the great curate Hidalgo,
And of Morelos y Pavon.

Now there are no shots, etc.....
Gritaba Francisco Villa,
Pues de perder, yo me vaya.
El combate lo he perdido
en este Plan de Celaya.

Gritaba Francisco Villa:
Ah! Que malas estan las cosas
Ya están cayendo soldados
Del batallan de Zaragoza.

Por este lado del Sur
Brillaban los horizontes:
Pelea con mucho valor
La brigada de Agramonte.

El 16 de septiembre,
Formaron un simulacro,
Mataron tres cabecillas
Del estado guanajuato.

El dia primero de abril,
Jueves Santo en la manana
Salio Villa de Parral
A expedir una campana.

As the shrapnel kept on roaring,
As the cannon roared its blasts,
Even louder there resounded
A mighty beating of a drum.

This rolling drum that then resounded
Came from ranks of Carranzistas,
Who valorously fought the fight
Against the treacherous Villistas.

SIDE II, Band 2: SIMON

Andaba cuete Simon
cuando callo muy rendido,
vino a encontrar a su Elena
con un traidor bien dormida.

.....y luego que es mi amistad.

Me fui para Piedras Negras
para poderla olvidar,

Me fui para San Antonio
me devolvió el extranjero.

Como echar al olvido
el amor primero?

Tenia los ojos negros
y el cabello encarrujado

((consuelo a su amante
ye le sale lo apasionado)))

Que tienen esos ojitos?
Porque me miran asi?

Contentos para otras partes
y enojados para mi.

Soy como agua del rio
todo se me va en correr.

Como con nadie me engrio
a nadie siento el perder.

Mi novia mando una carta
donde me manda decir,
que si no la sigo amando,
ella prefiare morir.

Yo no canto porque se
ni por que mi voz es buena.....

Canto por que tengo gusto
en mi tierra y en la ajena

TRANSLATION (also found in "El quelite" - well-known Mexican folk song, sung here in N. M.)

Simon was just a bit tight
when he fell into a faint,
for he found his Elena
with a betrayer fast asleep.

.....and then he says he's my friend.

I went off to Piedras Negras,
to see if I could forget her.

I went off to San Antonio
but homesickness sent me back.

How could I forget my first love?

Her eyes were black
and her hair curly.

What's the matter with those eyes?
Why do they look at me so?

They're happy if they glance elsewhere
but angry if they light on me.

I'm like the flowing river water
all I do is swiftly glide;

and as I'm never attached to anyone
I don't mind if I lose them all.

My girl sent me a letter
and in it she said to me,

that if I no longer loved her
she'd much rather not live.

I don't sing because I know how,
or because my voice is good......

I sing because I like to,
in my land and in other lands.
La vaquita con el toro se metió ya a la ladera.
Ya le dirá Pancho Villa, que se mete donde quiera.
Ey, ey, ey...
Por el filo de la Sierra, viene un gavilan volando.
Gallina que no me llevo la dejó cacaraqueando.
Ey, ey, ey...
La vaca era colorada y el becerrito era moro.
Ey, ey, ey...
Me puse a considerar de qué color sería el toro.

Yo vi pelear un toro con una vaca morena.
No hay bocado más sabroso que el de la mujer agena,
No hay bocado más sabroso y aunque la propia este buena.

I began to wonder what color the bull might be.
There's no tastier dish than another man's wife.
There's no finer tidbit even if one's own is nice.
Ey, ey, ey, bacalay, bacalay.

The above is a "corrido" with humorous picaresque notes based on the farmyard. There is in it an allusion to Pancho Villa, whose ability to hide himself in the hills after effecting his daring raids is proverbial.

The bandit chief is still popularly remembered in the North of Mexico with a certain amount of admiration, even of affection.
SIDE II, Band 5: CORRIDO DEL MINERO
(THE MINER’S CORRIDO)

Tocan las seis y al tiro me presento
con paso lento y agitadamente,
Me conduzco a las selas de la muerte,
donde me dicen que es un puro afanar.

Solo un recuerdo te pido para mi alma,
y adonde este te mandare mi queja.
Me voy querida, para la Mina Vieja,
solo Dios sabe si ya no volvere.

Tocan los pitos del segundo.....
para bajar aquel escalera yado,
para bajar muchísimo cuidado
donde el minero no lo designara.

Tomo la voz de su vida sombría,
donde s’encuentra el hombre que te adora,
allí s’encuentra el que suspira y llora,
como un recuerdo a ti te lo enviara.

Solo un recuerdo te pido para mi alma,
y adonde este te mandare mi queja.
Me voy, querida, para la Mina Vieja,
solo Dios sabe si ya no volvere.

TRANSLATION

At the stroke of six I come,
slow of step and very much upset,
I’m heading for the halls of death
where they tell me all is a struggle.

I only ask a remembrance for my soul,
and wherever I be I’ll send you my lament.
I’m off, my love, to work in the Old Mine:
God only knows if ever I’ll return.

The whistles blow to call the second shift,
to send us down along the lengthy stairs,
If you go down, be very very careful,
or else the miner will not live to return.

I raise my voice to tell the sad life,
for there’s a man who so adores you,
there’s one who sighs and weeps,
and sends you this as a sad souvenir.

I only ask a remembrance for my soul,
and wherever I be I’ll send you my lament.
I’m off, my love, to work in the Old Mine:
God only knows if ever I’ll return.

Recorded in Mexico, 1920-1930
Posada illustrations, gift to
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Translations by Arthur Kevess
Production Director, Moses Asch

Calavera of Monopolists by Mendez
from M. Asch collection