Conjunto & Orquesta

Music and Tejano Identity: “What Are We?”
1914: Mexican anarchists draft the 'Plan de San Diego' to re-take Mexican territory in US
- Plan never executed but leader captured with written copy
- Inspires panic in south Texas
- Innocent Tejanos killed in preemptive paranoia.

Los Sediciosos
"Now the fuse is lit by the true-born Mexicano, and those that pay the price will be the Texas-Mexicano.
400,000 Mexican-Americans enlist during WWII
A Mexican-American middle-class emerges post-war
Tejanos Organize

- 1911 First Mexican Congress in Laredo Texas.
  ○ Discuss future of Mexican-American economy, Spanish language, Mexican culture, social discrimination, education, abuses of law.
- 1929 **League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)** founded in Corpus Christi, TX
- By Great Depression, American-born Tejanos outnumber Mexican immigrants for first time
Conjunto  ‘Ranchero’ or Ranch-style music.

- Accordion-centric
  - instrument iconic of **working class**
- Emerging from from influx of **German** -**Czech immigrants** to Texas in mid-19th century.
- Instrumental dance styles
  - Polka / Polca - fast 2/4
  - Mazurka/ Masurca
  - Schottische / Chotis
  - Waltz / Vals - slower 3/4
- Enters Mexican-Texas oral tradition
Narciso Martinez: el primero

- **Narciso Martinez**, accordionist regarded as the father of modern conjunto style
- Began recording 1935
- Abandoned left hand bass to emphasize melodic playing.
- Accompanied on **bajo sexto** by Santiago Almeida
- Martinez abandons bass/chord playing to emphasize more ornate melodic playing with **staccato** style
Bajo Sexto

- Essential accompaniment to accordion in Conjunto

- Guitar-like but lower notes
- 12 strings tuned in 6 pairs
- plays bass notes and chords
Narciso Martinez Listening

**La Tipica:** Listen for **distinct roles** of bajo sexto and accordion and for **staccato** playing in accordion

**La Chicharonera:** early hit for Martinez and representative of growing dominance of Polka
Narciso Martinez  continued

- b.1911 in Mexico
- Family soon immigrated to TX
- Working class upbringing included poverty, transience, and illiteracy
- Conditions continued throughout recording career
Developments to Conjunto

- Martinez’s influence
  - Popularity of Polka
  - Virtuosic accordion
  - Bajo Sexto as essential

- Late 1940s **Valerio Longoria** adds vocals and drums

- *En Donde Estas*
  - Polka feel

- **Twin Melody in vocals**
  - Quintessential ‘ranchero’ sound
  - Described as ‘parallel 3rds’ in assigned reading
Working Class Music

- Most commonly heard in cantinas or parties amongst working class
- Cantina status stigmatizes music
Orquesta Tejana: middle class, ‘jaiton’ music

- Began as ad-hoc ensembles of strings and winds. Stabilized through urban patronage in 1930s and 1940s
- Modeled after American Big Bands
- Moved away from traditional dance forms like Polka
- Accordion replaced by trumpet & saxophone
- Later incorporating pan-latin sounds: Afro-Hispanic Caribbean (i.e. salsa)
Beto Villa

- Holding stature in Orquesta tradition equal to Narciso Martinez’ Conjunto.
- Middle class
- Relatively well-educated
- Began recording with his Orquesta but featuring more ranchero-sounds
- In 1949 fires illiterate musicians, replaces with literate musicians
- Fuses Mexican ranchero sounds with American big band, Pan-latin styles like salsa to create more Jaiton-sounding Orquesta Tejana
Beto Villa continued

- Las Delicias, 1946
  - Ranchero Elements
    - Polka style (fast 2/4)
    - Accordion + Bajo Sexto
    - Twin Melody
  - Jaiton Elements
    - Trumpet and Saxophone have lead role
    - Accordion moves to background
Beto Villa continued

- Angelina, post 1949
  - “Jaiton” or “High-Toned” sound
  - Prominent winds: sax, trumpet
  - No more accordion
  - No twin melody

- Glenn Miller - Moonlight Serenade, 1939
The Americanizing Middle Class

- By 1930s Mexican-American economy diversifies in urban areas with merchants, professional skills, white-collar jobs.
- Socio-culturally caught in middle of “inter-ethnic conflict”
- **LULAC** leadership and membership skewed towards middle-class
LULAC’s Assimilationist Ideology

“We [Mexican Americans] have American ways and think like Americans. [But] we have not been able to convince some [American] people that there is a difference between us [and the old Mexicans]” - LULAC member in 1929

- only US Citizens permitted membership
- advocated strict immigration policies
- endorsed assimilation as means of combating discrimination
- sued for integration of school districts
Middle Class Biculturalism

**LULAC Objectives**

- “Respect your citizenship, conserve it; honor your country [the United States], maintain its traditions in the minds of your children, incorporate yourself in the culture and civilization;”

- “Love the men of your race, take pride in your origins and keep it immaculate; respect your glorious past and help to vindicate your people.”
## Balancing Mexican and American in Music

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<th>Positive Connotations</th>
<th>Negative Connotations</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Conjunto</strong></td>
<td>Ethnic pride</td>
<td>Backwardness</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>music / Ranchero</strong></td>
<td>Evocative of ‘glorious past’ in Mexico</td>
<td>Unsophisticated</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lazy</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Orquesta</strong></td>
<td>Aspiring to greater economic opportunity &amp; stability</td>
<td>Snobbery</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tejana / Jaijon</strong></td>
<td>Aspiring to greater political/economic enfranchisement</td>
<td>Abandoning tradition</td>
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<td>Failing to ‘take pride in your origins’</td>
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<td>Sophistication, Cosmopolitanism</td>
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*Conjunto* music is also known as Ranchero style.

*Orquesta Tejana* is also known as Jaijon style.
Conjunto & Orquesta in Dialogue

- Rancho Grande, post 1949
  - Conjunto/Ranchero/Mexican
    - ‘Big Ranch’ - remembering rural past
    - Polka feel
    - Twin Melodies
    - Clarinet solo evocative of Narciso Martinez staccato
  - Orquesta/Jaiton/American
    - Big Band harmonies
    - Guitar solo quotes popular Texas, Anglo musician Bob Wills’ ‘Steel Guitar Rag’,
Conjunto & Orquesta in Dialogue

Isidro Lopez’ Un Fracaso de Amor
- Accordion & bajo sexto of Conjunto,
- Latin-Caribbean percussion made popular in more extreme orquesta
- Slower, smoother tempo/feel of orquesta
Listening Assignment #1

- Posted immediately after class
- Due in lecture 1/22 (one week from today)
- Listening to 5 recordings by Beto Villa
- Organize by most Ranchero/Jaiton sounding
- Listen for
  - Instrumentation: what instruments are present/absent
  - Genre/Feel: Is it a Polka, Waltz, or something less-defined?