

esting at its most incongruous, where the lines between art and kitsch, between naivete and sophistication, and between various styles, are crossed and recrossed. Such is the case in Madame Riviere's Hawaiians' reinvention of Sousa and ragtime, and in Hoot Gibson's glorious slide polyphony. Such is also the case with Raymond Kane's "Palolo" which alternates between a stately, dignified presentation of its lyrics with guitar improvisations that can only be described as deranged. And one doesn't know whether to grimace or marvel at Frank Ferrara's shimmering harmonic rendition of "Taps" (on "Melodias Populares Mexicana"!!!). It's wonderful to listen to a music that makes both responses possible at the same time. *Reviewed by Evan Ziporyn.*

Flaco Jimenez, *Un Mojado Sin Licencia*, Arhoolie 396

One of the happy by-products of today's global market and multicultural orientation is that it is possible for purveyors of various local styles to reach a wide audience without having to homogenize or compromise. Flaco Jimenez is a case in point. A button accordionist who has performed traditional Tex-Mex dance music in the border-region Norteno community for over thirty years, he would seem by this description to be an unlikely candidate for national renown. Yet Flaco has managed to reach the 'anglo' audience. His group, the Texas Tornados, is a top-draw among both rock and country audiences, and his appearances on Saturday Night Live have marked him as a true "crossover" artist. He won a Grammy in 1987 for an Arhoolie recording of new material, *Ay Te Dejo En San Antonio*.

This collection, a reissue of older material, provides the background to his current music. It is comprised of songs issued on 45-rpm recordings originally released on the regional Norteno/Sombrero labels in the mid -60s. The first 14 tracks were originally released by Arhoolie in 1977; the remaining ten selections were added for this rerelease. The enthusiastic liner notes by Michael Goodwin – apparently the same as those used on the '77 LP – make it clear that *that* release also was precipitated by Flaco's then new-found fame. He had recently been featured on Ry Cooder's *Chicken Skin Music*, providing a plaintive counterpoint to Mr. Cooder's moody guitar playing. These recordings make it clear that Flaco's personal style has not been altered by success. His playing remains distinctive and consistent whether accompanying English lyrics or Spanish, and whether he is playing elaborate arrangements with LA studio musicians or bare-boned *rancheras* with bass and drums, as on these recordings.

The style itself is a family legacy, for although Flaco is known as "El Rey de Texas" (The King of Texas), he is in reality the heir to that particular throne. His father, the late Santiago Jimenez (who was nicknamed "Flaco") was in his day the leading button accordionist in San Antonio, and his younger brother, Santiago Jr., now rivals Flaco in fame and virtuosity. Between the three of them, the Jimenez name has been synonymous with Tex-Mex music for most of the century.

Tex-Mex repertoire consists of various hybrid dance forms – polkas, boleros, *rancheras* and *corridos* – appealing to the ethnic communities that populated Texas: not just Spanish-speakers but Czech and German immigrants as well. The music thus finds the common ground between the boisterous open-handedness of the Bohemian beer hall and the pathos and romanticism of the Iberian peninsula. Inevitably, other influences from the New World melting pot crept in, and one can occasionally hear musical nods to the blues and other African-American traditions. In its traditional context, as on these recordings, the ensemble consists simply of the accordion, two vocalists singing in stoic close harmony, and a skeletal rhythm section of bass and

drums. The advantage of these selections, aside from their value in establishing Flaco's roots, is that his flamboyant and mercurial playing style is thrown into sharp relief by the starkness of these musical surroundings. The arrangements are deliberately spare and minimal, a functional beat and bass line, over which Flaco darts and weaves like the cartoon Roadrunner over a desert terrain, punctuating the romantic lyrics with a wide variety of arpeggios, jazz chords, unexpected swells, and soaring lyrical melodies.

The bulk of the material on this CD is comprised of *rancheras* and *corridos*, both with square, "oompah" -like feels. The one *bolero* on the album, "Sin Fe," provides a welcome contrast. The peppy, workmanlike style serves as a deadpan layer for an astonishing variety of lyrics. The same basic tempo and chord progression can be used for songs of political commentary ("El Padre de Un Soldado," a Vietnam-era protest song), rakish humor ("El Troquero"), romantic yearning ("No Me Digas Que Te Vas"), and, occasionally, astonishing anger and vindictiveness ("Hasta la Tuma," in which an unfaithful lover is threatened with eternal misfortune for her infidelity). The lyric, sung in fine close harmony by Jimenez and Toby Torres – with occasional cameos by the label-owner, Jose Morante – are rendered earnestly and with restraint; the effect can be powerful and occasionally disconcerting. They also serve to demonstrate the musical power of the Spanish language, in which almost any sentiment can be made to sound poetic. Before now, this reviewer would never have suspected that a line which literally translates as "I am an experienced carpenter and musician" could be fit into a dance tune. Now I know better.

As a package, this collection has problems. As mentioned, the liner notes have not been updated since the original release 17 years ago – thus no information is given on the additional ten tracks. Even taken as they are, the notes are more about gush and hype than about actual information ("he looks like Clark Gable, and he can play the buttons off a diatonic accordion."). More importantly, no chronology to the recordings is given, although original serial numbers are provided, therefore making it difficult to get any sense of Flaco's progression as an artist. In a style as homogeneous as this one, all new musical elements stand out: his wonderful negotiation of chromatic terrain in the introduction to "De Rodillas Quisiera Mirarte," for example, or his sudden use of high, quasiblue notes in "La Primer Noche de Mayo" and "Cuando Mas Tranquila." One would like to know whether these represent innovations or are simply things Flaco happened to do that particular day. The other musicians – drums and bass – are not listed, although in some cases this is probably for the best. Despite these shortfalls, this is a fine collection, not just for the purpose of hearing what "Flaco sounded like playing for *Tejanos*," as Mr. Goodwin puts it, but in its own right.
Reviewed by Evan Ziporyn.

***Vintage Music from India – Early Twentieth-Century Classical & Light-Classical Music*, Rounder CD 1083.**

Light-classical artists from North India in recordings from 1905-1930: Gauhar Jan, Janki Bai, Malka Jan, Master Labhu, Mohammad Hussein, and others; North Indian Khyaliyas Narayanrao Vyas and Vishnupant Pagnis; South Indian Artists: Venu (playing vina) V. Kandaswamy (nagaswaram), Nagaraja Rao (flute), and Miss Rosa (light-classical vocal).

From the early days of the phonograph, the British Gramophone Company of India (later a part of EMI) was active, marketing some 4000 titles by 1910. These 78-rpm