

plus thumbnail biographies of the singers are provided as well. No vocal texts are included. Given the care with which discographic information is provided, it seems odd that the CDs themselves have no numbering beyond CD1 and CD2. Is this release intended as a one-time event? We should hope that Yale will continue to make their rare materials available on further releases.

Undoubtedly, the supreme treasure is Lilli Lehmann's recording of the "Liebestod". To hear one of the first great Wagner sopranos in one of her greatest roles is a real privilege. Unreleased because it was too long to fit on a 78 side and for reported distortion at the end (conveniently modified by Mr. Burns, we presume), this is its first public release. Yale's opinion that it is one of the great lyric outpourings seems fully justified.

The remaining forty-seven singers are consistently fascinating. Lehmann alone gets two tracks, "Du bist der Lenz" and the "Liebestod", although Pelagie Greeg-Andriessen has two tries at "Ho-jo-to-ho" on one track. Muratore, Clement, Destinn (electrifying in Leoncavallo's "Roland von Berlin"), Litvinne, Caruso, and Tamagno are represented. The remaining tracks are from those names one sees but rarely encounters in sound. This reviewer was initially daunted by the variable quality of the recordings. Repeated hearings increased interest and appreciation for the invaluable materials provided so generously.

Do not apply to Yale for purchase. *Reviewed by Howard Kennett.*

Endnote

This recording is available only from: Nipper, PO
Box 4, Woodstock, NY 12498-0004. Telephone:
(914) 679-6982 Fax: (914) 679-6904, Price:
\$39.50 + \$3.50 shipping

Hawaiian Steel Guitar Classics 1927-1938, Arhoolie 7027

The Hawaiian steel guitar, like the Pidgin language spoken by its most accomplished practitioners, is a prime example of twentieth century cross-cultural hybridization. Brought to Hawaii by Hispanic immigrants in the late nineteenth century (and still used within those communities, as is well-documented on the Smithsonian collection "Puerto Rican Music in Hawaii"), it quickly found its way into the rapidly burgeoning, cosmopolitan Hawaiian mainstream. Retuned to major or minor triads (the so-called "slack-key" tuning), positioned on the lap and played with a slide, it soon became the representative sound of the islands, along with its similarly imported cousin, the ukulele. In addition to considerable state-side popularity of the genre in the 1920s and 30s, the innovative slide style had a profound impact on a number of different genres, from bottleneck blues playing in the Mississippi delta to Nashville pedal-steel practice. Most miraculously, Nigerian juju musicians in the 1960s became enamored of the sound, and incorporated it into their ensembles; it is now an inextricable element in the music of King Sunny Ade, for example.

Despite this impact, which was largely a hidden one, and again like Pidgin, it is a rhetoric that until recently got little to no respect. The style has been the subject of more ridicule than anything else, conjuring images of "Tiny Bubbles" and umbrella-laden drinks. Despite its distinctive place as a uniquely American genre, the style has been too closely associated with sultry tropical caricatures, nonsense lyrics, and Don Ho in order to take its rightful place alongside other regional styles.

This collection goes a long way toward rectifying that situation. It has been curated with obvious care and passion by Bob Brozman, himself an excellent player, and his well-written liner notes provide considerable background, pointing toward distinctive characteristics and relating colourful anecdotes. He is not afraid of editorial comment, referring to one unfortunate performer as playing “like a man whose taste had been surgically removed,” and another as “Mr. Eccentric.” These comments are not necessarily meant as insults, for even taken seriously the style is redolent with goofy incongruities from a prototypically multicultural grabbag: novelty numbers, cowboy tunes, references to Sousa marches and Gypsy tunes, traditional hulas accompanied by jazz improvisations, etc. Even the true masters of the style – Sol Hoopii, Sid Bright, and Raymond Kane, for example – are never averse to sound effects, crazed glissandi, or outrageous vibrato. A pleasant sense of crowd-pleasing is always present in the music, but through it all, a sense of ongoing practice emerges, one worthy of respect. The masters of the form – Hoopii, Bright, etc. – all have goofy effects in their bags.

The collection by no means consists exclusively of Hawaiian music, but rather of “Hawaiian steel guitar” music, that is, music played on the Hawaiian steel guitar, whether by actual Hawaiians or otherwise. Thus it includes quintessentially Hawaiian material such as Hoopii’s “Palolo” right along side the Weimar-decadent Hawaiian Orchestra’s “White Birds,” a German recording from 1931 in which a thankfully anonymous guitarist tries haplessly to imitate a cheesy violin vibrato (Mr. Brozman comments: “For some reason even Germany had several recording steel players.”). C-grade cowboy actor Hoot Gibson, who may or may not have actually played his guitar, is juxtaposed against Indonesian master Rudy Wairata, who recorded “Ticklin’ the Strings” in Holland in the mid ’50s (why this track is included in a collection of music from 1927 to 1938 is never made clear). And one run-of-the-mill performer, Frank Ferrara, appears Zelig-like under a variety of more suitable pseudonyms – Palakiko and Paaluhi, and the “Trio de Hawaii” – though one often wonders why he bothered.

The central issue in any hybrid form is not simply the common denominators that allow hybridization to occur, but the irreconcilable differences that provided the dynamic necessary for it to continue to develop. Both these elements are apparent from the first track, Hoopii’s “Palolo.” Hoopii, the most revered figure among cognoscenti, played in a “hot jazz” style very reminiscent of the contemporaneous Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings: single-line melodies in a sharply syncopated manner. Against this, Hawaiian lyrics are sung in a distinctively evenly-aspirated manner (clearly derived from chanting traditions that precede the European “discovery” of the Sandwich Islands in 1778). The juxtaposition of these two rhythmic conceptions – the jazz syncopations of the ukulele and guitar on the one hand, the almost-clichéd even notes of the vocal line on the other – is a constant issue. Its full flower occurs with “Hawaiian Cowboy” (as performed by Bright’s Hollywaiians) in which these linguistic and musical conceptions finally overlap and influence one another.

The collection as a whole is incredibly entertaining and stimulating. As befits a form in the early stages of hybridization, it’s easy and fun to listen to the influences flying by on the surface. The beauty of such a kitsch-ridden music is that it really can’t go wrong. The style is so thoroughly discredited in the popular imagination that even at its worst it has tremendous value, as is the case with the aforementioned “White Birds.” At its best, as in the work of Hoopii, Bright, and Wairata, the collection is revelatory: Hoopii’s phrasing, Bright’s elegant microtonal bends, and Wairata’s virtuosity are exquisite and worth getting to know. For me, though, the collection is most inter-

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