

Los Texmaniacs

conjunto tejano

San Antonio, Texas

The power quartet Los Texmaniacs emerged from the vibrant Tex-Mex *tejano* music scene of San Antonio where it is not uncommon to see a man walking down the street with an accordion or *bajo sexto* in his hand and a cowboy hat on his head. Dan Sheehy, Director of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, hit on the core of the group's rooted rocking sound when he said, "They go way beyond *conjunto*, but their mastery of the traditional forms is perfect." Often compared to the legendary Texas Tornados, Los Texmaniacs have built a large following in their home state and around the country with their melding of traditional *corridos*, *tejano* polka sound, and a more modern rock & roll.

A unique American regional music born in the valley of the Rio Grande along the Texas-Mexican border, *conjunto* (literally "group" in Spanish) is a lively dance music that began to develop in the late 19th century when German, Czech, and Polish immigrants introduced the button accordion into Mexican working class communities in southern Texas. By the early 1930s, the modern *conjunto* style emerged as a boisterous and distinctive Tex-Mex fusion that revolved around the sounds of the accordion and the *bajo sexto*, a 12-string guitar-like instrument that added a bass rhythm. Bass and drums were added later.

Los Texmaniacs founder, Max Baca is one of the most dynamic *bajo sexto* players in the world. He grew up in a musical family in Albuquerque, New Mexico and began playing the accordion as a young child, "I was five years old, and I learned the polka 'Monterrey.' The second song I learned was 'In the Mood.'" His openness to varied musical sounds led him to be one of the most highly sought-after sidemen in Texas music, having performed with everyone from Los Lobos to the Rolling Stones to Flaco Jimenez. The *bajo sexto* is often a rhythm instrument used to accompany the accordion and human voice, but in Baca's hands, it becomes a powerful lead instrument. Baca is capable of jaw dropping lead runs as well as a rock-steady rhythmic punch that is the signature sound of the instrument.

David Farias began playing accordion at the age of eight. By the time he was 13 he was fronting his own band. Over the course of the next three decades that original kid group morphed into the very popular family band La Tropa F, which is still together, and David still leads them on accordion and vocals. Searching for a new sound, he and Max joined forces in 1997 and began to incorporate elements of rock & roll, while staying firmly planted in tradition.

Rounding out Los Texmaniacs are Lorenzo Martinez on drums and Oscar Garcia on bass guitar and harmony vocals. Like the fiery cuisine of the Texas-Mexican border, *conjunto tejano* is music created from many ingredients. Los Texmaniacs look deep into the musical cupboard and draw new spices into the mix, creating a new, lively and highly danceable sound.