



EAGLE FEATHER RESEARCH NEWSLETTER

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Welcome, Willkommen, Bienvenue, Bienvenidos, Benvenuto. Welcome to our November newsletter. In this issue, we will dedicate space to Chicano music. While information regarding its origins and development in the Southwest is featured in our *Mestizo*..book, we would like to provide more detail and bring it up to date focusing on Tony “Ham” Guerrero and Tortilla Factory. Tony is old school as a 64 year old leader of the band Tortilla Factory. He believes in “la onda Chicana”, the Texas version of 1960’s Chicano consciousness that his music represents. His revitalized Tortilla Factory has recently been nominated to receive a Grammy award for Best Tejano Album. His current sound is not the Tejano sound of Conjunto, the peppy and folksy music or the slick, post Selena radio pop in Spanish. In it there is what Joe Gross describes as “a juggernaut of heavy, almost psychedelic Latin funk that Guerrero thinks defined the band.” It wasn’t a two, three minute radio friendly song, states Guerrero. While the album starts with a traditional folkloric song, it adds complex rhythms, “jazz funk” in the middle, a mambo...The fusion of jazz, Latin music, funk and rock with African American lead singer Bobby Butler brought about Little Joe Hernández’s band *La Familia* came to embody “la onda Chicana.” According to retired professor of Anthropology and Ethnomusicology Manuel Peña, what distinguishes Tortilla Factory from Santana was the way they blended the polka ranchera (of Tejano-Texas German roots) with funk bands like Tower of Power. “That, says Peña, was a brilliant stroke that was uniquely Tejano.” Prof. Peña has documented Mexican American music in award winning books e.g. *The Texas Mexican Conjunto* and *The Mexican American Orquesta*. He further enumerates—“La Familia, Tortilla Factory, Latin Breed and Jimmy Edwards (band) were the epitome of being Chicano in the 1970’s. It was one of the most exciting, progressive regional music styles anywhere.”

According to Guerrero, the roots of this Tejano style began with Beto Villa who is the founder of the Orquesta Tejana, a Latin-tinged big band music in 1947. “Villa studied the Mariachis, the sound of the trumpets, the violins. They blended that with the German polkas which the Mexican people in south Texas embraced and loved.” There is no one “Tejano” music any more any more than there is one kind of Mexican American who lives in Texas. Guerrero who was born in 1944 in

San Angelo, Texas, was raised by his grandparents who started him with trumpet lessons when he was 8 years old. After High School, he went to the well-regarded Berklee School of Jazz in Boston. By 1968, he had joined Little Joe Hernández and the Latinaires where he became the de facto musical director. Bobby Butler an Arkansas native, known latter as “el Charro Negro”, fell in love with Mexican music while working alongside migrant workers. He was to later join the Latinaires where his rendition of “La Enorme Distancia” was floored everyone. Guerrero saw him as the Chicano Nat King Cole. After the band was changed to Little Joe y La Familia and after its breakup years later, Guerrero sought to start his own group that could incorporate big band chops with then electric funk, one that could blend soul and Chicano music. He brought in Butler, cut some demos and the rest is history. The band hit the road playing in “the taco circuit,’ from Brownsville to San Jose and recorded about 20 albums. Royalties were scarce and the band never registered its songs with a publisher. After Tortilla Factory reached its natural end in 1986, Guerrero moved his family to Austin, Texas where he played jazz and salsa at Club Islas. Burned out, he had little good to say about major label interest in Tejano in the late 1980’s. “They took anyone that was available.”

With his health declining, a diabetic and failing kidney, Guerrero no longer plays the trumpet, limiting his creative activities to singing. When Tortilla Factory pianist Tony “Toke” Gutiérrez was terminally ill with a brain tumor, Guerrero contacted Butler for a reunion gig in 2006 to raise money for Gutiérrez. That gig planted the seed for “All That Jazz” which was subsequently nominated for a Grammy. Tortilla Factory is back with Guerrero’s version of a musically sophisticated Tejano. And the diversity among Chicanos and their music continues in their evolutionary path.

Happy and Insightful Reading,
Arnoldo Carlos Vento, PhD



‘El Charro Negro’ Bobby Butler, left, reunited with Tortilla Factory founder Tony ‘Ham’ Guerrero 2006 to raise money for an ill ex-bandmate. They were joined by Alfredo Antonio Guerrero, right.