

<sup>70</sup>Rodolfo J. Cortina, "Research on the Corrido: The Questions of Origin, Toponymy and Persistence—A Review Essay," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, 3 (1984): 205.

## Critique

The role of song texts in evaluating human behavior has received relatively little attention by either anthropologists or ethnomusicologists and their value as social documents, consequently, has been sadly overlooked. As Macias observes, the texts of *corridos* popular in San Felipe function simultaneously on several levels. As historical chronicle, social commentary (and criticism), and as vehicles for teaching and proselytizing, these texts reinforce a sense of community and cultural identity, and serve, also, as reminders of economic reality, articulating their subjects' aspirations and incumbent moral obligations.

The *corridos* referred to in Macias's paper are narrative ballads, sung to instrumental accompaniment—guitars, or *mariachi* ensemble. The origins of the *corrido* can be traced back to the Spanish *romance* of the Conquest era. Texts commonly chronicle notable or unusual historic or current events, sometimes humorously or satirically, often with sharp social criticism expressed openly or implied. The prototype is a narrative text, set in quatrains of octosyllabic lines, with assonance or end-rhymes on alternate lines. As Macias's examples indicate however, there are many variations to the traditional form. The *corrido* took on new significance during the Mexican Revolution as musical outlets for expressions of popular sentiment and as anthems of nationalistic fervor.

In our own time, apparently, the *corrido* serves to chronicle and immortalize the events and heroes of Mexican emigration. In this role, the heroes, glorified, romanticized, and vindicated by the song texts, are those who have dared the border guards, risking prison and death to reach the promised land. Their heroic status is reinforced by the accounts and evidence of new economic prosperity and is validated further by poignant expressions of longing for home and family. The hardships suffered by the emigrants, their economic privation, discrimination and oppression, related by the *corridos* and by returning emigrants, serve only as a "cross" which must be borne as the price of economic progress.

The *corridos* cited by Macias imply emigration to the United States is regarded by San Felipeños as their inevitable and inexorable destiny. Is this implied attitude simply coincidental, the result of the particular song texts cited, or do the San Felipeños consider themselves "immigrants" even before they have emigrated? Is this attitude characteristic of other communities as well? Is the incidence of emigration in San Felipe abnormally high, in comparison to other towns in the region, or elsewhere in Mexico? How do the emigrants/immigrants themselves regard the *corridos*? Do they consider these

texts documents of personal experiences? Are the *corrido* texts taken seriously by those who hear and play them? While quantitative data does not reveal the qualitative aspects of the San Felipeños' behavior, it can help define their context.

Similarly, do the exploits and experiences of its emigrants monopolize the subject matter of *corridos* heard in San Felipe? Is emigration now the dominant topic of these *corridos*? Throughout Mexico? Or only in San Felipe and in towns like it? Again, quantitative data is called for to place these song texts in context.

Macias's paper reflects insight, sensitivity and careful observation. He is to be commended for recognizing the significance of *corrido* texts as documents, litmus paper, as it were, of the society that creates these songs. His conclusions are indicative of the wealth of material that song texts offer us as measures of social behavior. Macias's future investigations, I hope, will focus on the larger context of the topical *corrido* and, perhaps in collaboration with an ethnomusicologist, will also focus on the music which gives life to the *corrido* text, and without which, the *corrido* cannot be appreciated fully.

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