



World Mandolin: A la Orilla de un Palomar by Paul Oortz

With my last posting of Carlo(s) Curti(s)' "Tipica" I illustrated a bit of a Mexican mandolin tradition. If you'd like to hear more historical recordings of that sort I suggest you listen to "Orquestas Tipicas: Pioneer Mexican-American Dance Orchestras; Arhooly Records 7017. This fascinating small label, founded in 1960 by a man named Chris Strachwitz, specializes in all kinds of music that the major (read "commercial") companies aren't interested in. If ever you were ever hoping to encounter an

example of Tejano mandolin, that's a place to go looking for it!

In this posting I'm offering my transcription of a tune from Arhoolie 7018, with the long title "Mexican-American Border Music - Volume 5. Orquestas de Cuerdas: The String Bands. The End of a Tradition. Original Historic Recordings: 1926-1938." The tune itself is called "A la Orilla de un Palomar (danzón)" and was recorded in 1930 in San Antonio, Texas, by the Trio Alegre on mandolin and two guitars. You can order that track from places like Amazon. Below you'll find a button that allows you to hear me play the tune on two mandolins and guitar.

We had already observed that spelling does not survive cross-cultural transitions very well. In the case of Mr. Curti that seems to have been intentional, in this case probably not. There's a very old Mexican folk song, entitled "a la orilla de un palmar." A man walks by the edge (orilla) of a palm grove (palmar), and finds a beautiful orphan girl who tells him of her desolate life all alone:

*Solita paso la vida
a la orilla del palmar,
solita voy y vengo
como las olas del mar.

*

*"Alone I spend my life at the edge of a palm grove; I come and go alone, like the waves of the sea..."

*

Check it out on Youtube; you'll find many different versions, by street-musicians, by mariachi bands, even a classical arrangement for string

quintet. Actually, the famous Mexican composer Manuel Ponce wrote such a beautiful arrangement, that was so often played that many actually believe he wrote the song.

How did the lovely girl with stars in her eyes end up by a pigeon loft (palomar) rather than by a palm grove (palmar)?

I surmise that someone somewhere in the Arhoolie offices in Berkeley CA was thinking about Mount Palomar, the famous mountain in San Diego County where the world famous observatory is located. Or maybe they were thinking about the Palomar Ballroom (where Mr. Trachwitz occasionally gigged – according to the Arhoolie Website).

Although obviously still based on the Mexican folksong, the tune the Trio Alegre recorded is a lot happier and more up-tempo. It's a creative reinterpretation. They call it a "danzón," a type of dance which originated in Cuba in the second half of the 19th century, and then gained popularity in the Coastal states of Mexico (Veracruz) - and obviously as far as San Antonio.

At any rate, its a delightful tune to play, and a rare specimen of Tejano mandolin playing the lead in the days before the two or three row accordion conquered the throne in that realm.

A la Orilla de Un Palomar

Trad.

Score

A7 D A7 D

5 A D E 1.A 2.A

10 A D A

15 1.D A D2

A la Orilla de Un Palomar

20

D A

Musical staff for measures 20-25. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The staff contains a melody with a repeat sign at the beginning. Chords D and A are indicated above the staff. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with a long note in measure 24.

20

Guitar fretboard diagram for measures 20-25. The diagram shows fingerings for the right hand: 2, 0, 5-5, 0-2-3, 2, 0, 0, 0-2-3-2-0-3, 5, 5, 7-7, 5-3.

26

D A D D7 G

Musical staff for measures 26-31. The key signature has two sharps. Chords D, A, D, D7, and G are indicated above the staff. The melody includes a 7th fret barre in measure 29.

26

Guitar fretboard diagram for measures 26-31. The diagram shows fingerings for the right hand: 2, 5, 5-0-5, 2-2-2-1, 2, 2, 5, 5-5-3-2, 5, 3, 3. Measure 31 has a 7th fret barre indicated by 'x x x'.

32

D A

1. D A 2. D

Musical staff for measures 32-35. The key signature has two sharps. Chords D, A, 1. D, A, and 2. D are indicated above the staff. The staff includes a first and second ending bracket and accents (>) in measure 35.

32

Guitar fretboard diagram for measures 32-35. The diagram shows fingerings for the right hand: x, 0-2-3-3-2-0, 2, 5, 3-2, 2-0-3-0, 5, 5-0-5, 2-2-2-0, 5, 5-5-5, 5. Measure 35 has accents (>) under the notes.