

# RAUL "El Ruco" MARTINEZ DUETO ALEGRE

DUETO ALEGRE: Raul Martínez - accordion & vocal • Juan Gonzalez - bajo sexto & vocal

1. LA CHAMAGOSA (Cancion) (vocal by Raul & José Vela)
2. MUCHACHA ENAMORADA (Polka instrumental)
3. DE QUE TE SIRVIO (Cancion) (vocal by Raul & José Vela)
4. ABRAN BRECHA (Polka instrumental)
5. VUELVE LA PALOMA (Cancion) (vocal by Raul & Juan Gonzalez)
6. LEANDRO Y GARCIA (Corrido) (vocal by Raul & Juan Gonzalez)
7. ME QUEDA TU RECUERDO (Vals instrumental)
8. ADIOS PALOMITA (Cancion) (vocal by Raul & Juan Gonzalez)
9. ASI SE BAILA EN SAN ANTONIO (Polka instrumental)
10. INFAME MUJER (Ranchera) (vocal by Raul & Juan Gonzalez)
11. ARRIBA LA PALOMA! (Polka instrumental) (accordion duet: Raul & Pancho Martínez)
12. LA TRAGEDIA DE TIMOTEO (Tragedia) (vocal by Raul & Juan Gonzalez)
13. SALUDAME AL PASAR (Schottis instrumental)
14. TE CREIAS MUJER (Cancion) (vocal by Raul & Juan Gonzalez)
15. BAJO EL AGUILA DOBLE (Polka instrumental)
16. YA VES QUE SI (Danzon)
17. ABANDONADO Y DESPRECIADO (Cancion) (vocal by Raul & Jesús Maya)
18. DOMINGA (Vals instrumental)
19. TENDRIAS RAZON (Cancion)
20. PALOMITA INGRATA (Cancion)
21. TEN CUIDADO (Polka instrumental)

All selections (except #21) were remastered from original 78rpm discs & test pressings. For that reason some surface noise is present. #21 is remastered from the original tape.

Edited by Chris Strachwitz from FALCON, IDEAL & AERO 78rpm recordings

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# RAUL "El Ruco" MARTINEZ

## DUETO ALEGRE

Historic  
First Recordings  
1948-1956





Raul Martínez & Juan Gonzalez

### Raul “El Ruco” Martínez

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Along the Rio Grande on both sides of the Texas-Mexican border, the accordion became slowly more and more popular, among Mexicans as well as Tejanos, during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Until the end of World War II in 1945, diatonic one and two row button accordions had been used mainly at country dances and by some street musicians. By the late 1940s, however, with the advent of simple amplification in dance halls and cantinas, singers could now be heard even over the louder, more versatile and recently introduced triple row accordions. By the 1950s most singing duets couldn't attract a crowd unless they featured an accordion! The perfect compliment to the accordion was the *bajo sexto*, a heavy 12 string guitar tuned in pairs: F,C,G,D,A,& E. With the addition of a string bass player and later a drummer, you had the basis for the modern *Conjunto Norteño*. This delightful, lilting, regional music soon became known as *Musica Norteña* (music from the north) south of the border and simply as *conjunto* (group) in Texas.

Accordionist Narciso Martínez (1911 – 1992) became the first star of *Norteño* and *Conjunto* music, but he was not a singer! Raul Martínez and his “Dueto Alegre” (along with Maya y Cantu – Arhoolie CD 9013) were among the

pioneering *duetos* in the *Norteño* music field and are still fondly remembered today. The roots of all super stars since then, such as Los Alegres de Terán, Los Donneños, Los Relampagos, Los Tigres Del Norte, Ramon Ayala, Flaco Jiménez, etc. all go back to the 1940s and early 50s when Mexican accordion music was in its infancy.

Raul Martínez (12/16/1925 – 12/27/1978), was the son of Narciso Martínez's older brother Santos, who had been playing and teaching accordion to his siblings for years before Narciso even started. When he was about five years old, Raul was also taught how to play the accordion by Santos. This was just two years after Santos Martínez had gotten his brother Narciso started. Somewhere down the line Raul acquired the nickname "El Ruco" (the Old or Worthless One). Narciso Martínez had become famous as "El Huracan Del Valle" (the Hurricane of the Valley) and Bruno Villareal was billed as "El Azote Del Valle" (which can be taken as either The Whip or the Scourge of the Valley!). Those of you who have never been to south Texas, should keep in mind that when folks down there talk about the Valley – they mean the lower Rio Grande Valley from Laredo to the Gulf, especially the fertile part from Mission, Texas, eastward.

Although born in Oswald, Texas (near Victoria), into a family of farm workers, Raul lived in La Paloma for most of his life – the same small community west of San Benito which the entire extended Martínez family called home. As Raul grew older he became a superb accordionist, a fine singer and a prolific composer. All the songs and instrumentals on this CD are composed by Raul Martínez. Another close relative, Narciso's younger brother,

Francisco "Pancho" Martínez, also played accordion, sang, and was a good *bajo sexto* player. He is heard playing an accordion duet with Raul on selection # 11 – a salute to their home village! The Martínez family was obviously musically gifted but the hard times and the limited regional popularity of their music made it impossible to rely on music for their full time sustenance. They all worked in the fields at various times to eke out a living.

Although Raul Martínez began his musical training at an early age, he did not get a chance to record until the 1940s when small record companies sprang up all over the country recording locally popular musicians. Sometime in 1947 Raul met *bajo sexto* player and singer, Juan Gonzalez in Harlingen and they decided to form Duetto Alegre. Juan Gonzalez, born in Brownsville, Texas, August 7, 1926, became widely known in the Valley as La Uña (the Guitar Pick) and was in great demand as one of the best *bajo sexto* players. Their voices seem to have blended well and Duetto Alegre became very well liked and in great demand at various social functions. Juan Gonzalez had recently been discharged from the US Army and by early 1949 Duetto Alegre went to McAllen, Texas, where they recorded for the recently established FALCON label (note # 4 & 6). They must have been very popular by then because according to the FALCON recording ledgers, the duet was paid \$ 130.00 for 8 selections at their second recording session on August 24, 1949 (# 2, & 10). The amount was a generous sum when compared to what other *norteño conjuntos* were getting at the time. This was still years before the label recorded Los Alegres De Terán. At this time *Norteño* and *Conjunto* music was in its infancy but obviously rapidly growing in popularity.

By February of 1950 Dueto Alegre went over to Alice, Texas, and recorded for the well established IDEAL label which focused exclusively on the “regional” music of south Texas. Among the first recordings for IDEAL in 1950, Dueto Alegre re-recorded one of Raul’s compositions which he had cut for FALCON the previous year, the corrido “Leandro y Garcia.” This time however the *corrido* was sung by Carmen y Laura, the singing sister “stars” of IDEAL Records, with Dueto Alegre backing the girls. I guess the FALCON release of this corrido (note # 6) had become quite popular and Raul may have wanted to have other artists cover it as long as he received the additional composer’s royalties. During 1950 Dueto Alegre recorded more sides for IDEAL (note: # 7, 13, 14, 15, 16, & 17). Sometime in the early 1950s Raul recorded several regional instrumentals for the very small AERO label located in Corpus Christi, Texas. On these sides (note # 18) he was billed as Raul “El Ruco” Martínez. On September 23, 1952, however, the duet of Raul & Juan Gonzalez was back at the FALCON studios with Merced Martínez on string bass (note # 5 & 12) and on January 22, 1953, they recorded more sides for FALCON, this time with José Vela singing duet with Raul (note # 1 & 3). On October 4, 1953, more records were made at FALCON this time with Mario Saenz playing the bass (# 10).

By 1954 the partnership with Juan Gonzalez as Dueto Alegre had come to an end because, according to Juan’s widow, Tomasa Gonzalez, Raul had lost his wife and in order to bury his sorrows he began to drink heavily, becoming difficult to deal with. Juan Gonzalez, as a good singer and excellent *bajo sexto* player, joined other groups and recorded with Flaco Jiménez and the

Mendoza sisters among others. Juan Gonzalez moved to Ohio in 1959 and in 1960 settled in Detroit, Michigan, where he continued to work as a musician until the late 1970s and where he died on February 28, 1997.

Raul Martínez next appeared on records later in 1954, back at IDEAL, but now billed as simply Raul Martínez *y su conjunto* (note # 19 & 20). The last item on this CD (# 21) is from 1956, again recorded for IDEAL and reflects the recent demand for a drummer to be added to the *conjunto*. In the 1960s Raul recorded an album for the RELOJ label but his original, historic, first, and best recordings are heard on this CD – I hope you enjoy it!

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Notes by Chris Strachwitz with help from Juan Antonio Tapia – July 2003  
Special thanks go to Raul’s sister, Martha Cardenas and her siblings as well as to Juan Gonzalez’s widow, Tomasa Gonzalez and her daughter, Emilia – for giving me additional information.

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