
COWBOYS - VAQUEROS

Origins Of The First American Cowboys

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Chapter 7

Cowboy Music

Today's Mexican music and Country Western music both have their roots in the same first cowboy-vaquero sitting in front of the campfire strumming his guitar on a moonlit night lamenting a love story about a beautiful young girl. When Gene Autry died in October 1998, the media touted him as the first singing cowboy. Not so! When he was born in 1907, there had already been at least a dozen generations of singing vaqueros live and die before him. The guitar was imported from Mexico, and what eventually came to be known as Country Western music originally started out as English language versions of Mexican songs. Anyone with an ear for music appreciation and particularly those who are Spanish/English bilingual need not read the history books to notice the many similarities between American Country Western music, American Vaquero-Spanish Country Western music, and the country western music of all the Americas from Mexico south.

The first instrument that comes into mind when we think of cowboy music is the guitar. On the Spanish guitar are played the western ballads and upon examination it becomes clear that notwithstanding the universal themes of humanity, western ballads are strikingly similar to the Mexican corridos, songs of the Vaquero. Gene Hill, in his book *Americans All, Americanos Todos*, examines two popular examples: Anoranza Press, Albuquerque, NM, 1997. The nonsensical verses of English country western songs at the end of each refrain recover their original messages with little correction in the original Spanish version.

The Old Chisholm Trail

Come along boys and listen to my tale,
I'll tell you of my troubles on the old Chisholm Trail,
Com-a-ti-yi yippi, yippi-yea, yippi-yea,
Com-a-ti-yi yippi, yippi yea.

With a twenty-dollar horse and forty-dollar saddle,
I'm a-goin'down South with longhorn cattle,
Com-a-ti-yi yippi yea, yippi yea,
Com-a-ti-yi yippi, yippi yea.

With my foot in the stirrup and my seat in the saddle,
I'm the best wild cowboy that ever rode astraddle,
Com-a-ti-yi yippi, yippi yea, yippi yea,
Com-a-ti-yi yippi, yippi yea.

Translation From Spanish Language

Com-a-ti-yi yippi, yippi yea, yippi yea,

Spanish - Como esta alla epa, epa eh, epa eh?

English - How are things over there? Hey, eh?

Yippi-yi yea, yippi-yi-yo,

Spanish - Epa eh alli, epa eh yo,

English - Hey, over there, Hey, it's me!

Yippi-yi-yo ca-yea,

Spanish - Epah eh alli, epa eh i yo,

English - Hey over there you're gonna' fall.

Yippi-yi yea, yippi-yi yo,

Spanish - Epa eh alli, epa eh i yo,

English - Hey over there, Hey, it's me,

Yippi-yi yo ca-yo

Spanish - Epa eh alli, epa eh callo'

English - Hey over there! Oh! He's fallen!

Another very common nonsensical cowboy verse makes sense in it's original Spanish verse: "Tumbling Tumbleweeds" - Same Translation;

Yipp-yi yea, yippi-yi yo,

Yippi-yi yo ca-yea,

Yippi-yi yea, yippi-yi yo,

Yippi-yi yo ca-yo.

A study of many of the ancient dance steps of Mexico's various regional variations of Ballet Folklorico reveals bits and pieces which were eventually to show up in American country western dance styles. Even the Western Square dance finds its origins in the northern Mexico dance style of the cuadrilla or cuadrille dance. The French term for back-to-back, dos-a-dos, and Spanish term for two-by-twos, dos y dos should be familiar to the square dancer who knows the meaning of the do-si-do. The holler, yips, and "ahooahs" characteristic of the old west cowboys are not as common in recent modern Country Western songs but have not diminished even slightly from its original place in Mexican music to this day.

Historic struggles of the people from whom America borrowed the cowboy culture are reflected in many ballads and songs of the vaquero, as illustrated by Enrique R. Lamadrid in his book *Pastores Y Vaqueros*. In one of his examples, he notes that, "the romantic notions of the cowboy and the "winning of the West" have obscured both the Hispanic origins of ranching traditions and the reality of the inter-cultural conflict as "El Norte," or northern Mexico, was politically and socially transformed into the "Great Southwest." The Mexican American war made the dreams of Manifest Destiny into reality. Although the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo provided protections for land ownership, most Mexican Americans were dispossessed of their land. This defiant struggle for land and ultimately cultural identity is also expressed in ballads and songs." One example La Madrid provides is the following, which ironically rings like so many American cries to fight against oppression and for liberty, in this case the Americans find themselves as the oppressors of liberty and ownership of land.

INDITA DE MANUEL B. OTERO

Ay indita de don Manuel B.,
residente del la Costancia,
por defender tus derechos

chorus

tu sufriste muerte sin causa!
Ay, indita de don Manuel B.,
residente de la costancia,
por librar a tu nacion
tu sufriste muerte sin causa!

1

chorus

Dice Maelito Otero
con su palabra de honor;
-Whittier, ensename el derecho
para entrar a mi posesion;
que si yo tengo derecho,
no quiero tener cuestion.-

2

chorus

Ahi Whittier le respondo
de colera persuadido,
-Derecho no tengo yo,
ni nuca lo he conocido;
tu solo sales de aqui
o a esta arma estas rendido.-

3

chorus

-Ante Dios pongo mi queja
y al Supremo Tribunal
que se ha de andar mi querella
ante una corte marcial,
que mi muerte fue sin causa
y me derecho legal.

4

chorus

Don Carlos por su fortuna
sin sus armas se encontro
y al mismo punto que yo
sin esperanza ninguna.

5

chorus

Don Anriques por la vida
y en defensa se metio;
!ay, que doctor tan valiente,
ni per eso se rindio!

6

INDITA BALLAD OF MANUEL B. OTERO

Oh, indita of don Manuel B.,
resident of Costancia,
for defending your rights

Suffered death without cause!
Oh, indita of don Manuel B.,
resident of Costancia,
for liberating your nation
Suffered death without cause!

Manuelito Otero says
with his word of honor;
-Whittier, show me the warrant
by which you enter my possessions;
for if the law is on my side,
I don't want to have a question.-

There Whittier relied to him,
persuaded by his anger
-I have no right
nor have I known of it;
only you leave here
or by this gun you will be subdued.-

-Before God I place my complaint
and before the Supreme Tribunal
that my quarrel should have come
before this court martial,
that my death was without cause
and my rights legal.

Don Carlos by his luck
without his arms he found himself
and in the same situation as myself
Without a hope.

Don Anriques put his life on the line
and came to the defense;
oh, what a brave doctor,
nor for that would he yield!

	chorus	
-Dona Isabelita Baca, y adios, madre de afliccion, adios, Eloisa Lucinda, tu dermano don Salomon; tu seras la protegida, siendo el tu administrador.	7	-Dona Isabelita Baca, farewell, mother of affliction, farewell, Eloisa Lucinda, your brother Don Salomon; you will be protected, with him as you administrator
	chorus	
De Los Lunas y Tome del Torreon y del Manzano, tambien los de Punta de Agua acuden a mi llamado, a defender esta estancia, !que lugar tan desgraciaado!	8	From Los Lunas and Tome from Torreon and Manzano, also those from Punta de Agua come my call, answer to defend this estate, What an unhappy place!
	chorus	
Adios Eloisa Lucinda, se acabo todo tu haber, con una grande fatiga lo llegaron a saber.	9	Farewell, Eloisa Lucinda, all that you had is finished, with great anguish They came to realize it.
	chorus	

-Edwin Chavez Berry, of Tome, New Mexico & Andres Lujan, of Torreon, New Mexico, 1956

The first cattle drives in this country began with the Juan de Onate journey from Zacatecas, New Spain/Old Mexico to the kingdom of New Mexico in 1598 when the Spanish colonizers brought 5,400 head of sheep and 1,200 head of cattle. The sale of livestock made many a rancher fabulously wealthy. Corridos, sheep and cattle drive traffic went back and forth between Mexico and New Mexico. After the Mexican-American war when the Indians were confined to reservations, and the Buffalo were gone, the demand for meat on the East Coast and large government contracts to feed the military shifted the direction of cattle drives for the vaquero of the Southwest from New Mexico and Texas northeast toward Missouri and west toward California. This corrido was sung in two versions. The New Mexican version of this ballad has a tragic theme touting the dangers of the work; a mother laments the death of her son. The Texan version highlights the rivalry of the Anglo-American cowboys versus the Mexican Vaqueros, singing the praises of the superior skills and daring of the Mexican Vaqueros.

EL CORRIDO DE KANSAS Cuando salimos para Kansas Con aquella novillada, !ay, que trabajos pasamos por aquella llanda!	1	THE BALLAD OF KANSAS When we went to Kansas with that herd of cattle, oh, what work we had On that endless plain!
Como las nubes eran tan prietas y sin alcanzar el corral, los truenos eran tan recios que nos haican llorar.	2	The clouds were so black and we couldn't reach the corral, the thunderbolts were so loud That they made us cry.

Cinco mil eran los novillos los que ibamos a llevar; entre quince mexicanos no los pudimos dominar.	3	The cattle numbered five thousand which we had to take; among fifteen Mexicans we could not control them.
Bajamos al Rio Grande, no habia barco en que pasar El caporal nos decia, -Muchachos, se van a ahogar.	4	We went down to the Rio Grande, there was no boat in which to cross. The foreman said to us, Boys, you're going to drown.
Los vaqueros le responden todos en general, -Si somos del Rio Grande, de los buenos para nadar.	5	The cowboys replied all together, -But we are from the Rio Grande, of the ones that know how to swim.
En el valle de palomas salio un novillo huyendo El caporal lo lazaba en su caballo berrendo.	6	In the valley of doves a steer went astray The foreman lassoed him on his spotted horse.
La madre de un vaquero le prequnta al caporal, -¿Que razon me das de mi hijo? que no lo he visto llegar.	7	The mother of a cowboy asked the foreman, -What news have you of my son? For I haven't seen him arrive.
Senora, yo le dijera pero ha de querer llorar, su hijo lo mato un novillo en las trancas de un corral.	8	Lady, I will tell you but it will make you weep, a steer killed your son against the logs of a corral.
Si seguimos como vamos y como vamos seguimos, aqui se acabo cantando los versitos de un vaquero.	9	If we keep on as we go and go as we keep on, here is ended the singing of the verses of a cowboy.

-Adolfo Maes, Canjilon, New Mexico, 1949

EL CORRIDO DE KANSAS

Quando salimos pa' Kansas
 con una grande corrida.
 frittata mi caporal:
 -Les encargo a mi querida.-

1

Contesta otro caporal:

-No tengas cuidado, es sola;
 que la mujer que es honrada
 aunque viva entre la bola.-

2

Quinientos novillos eran,
 todos grandes y livianos,
 y entre treinta americanos
 no los podian embalar.

3

Llegan cinco mexicanos,
 todos bien enchivarrados,
 y en menos de un cuarto de hora
 los tenian encerrados.

4

Esos cinco mexicanos
 al momento los echaron,
 y los treinta americanos
 se quedaron azorados

5

Los novillos eran bravos,
 no se podian soportar,
 gritaba un americano:
 -Que se baje el caporal.-

6

Pero el caporal no quiso
 y un vaquero se arrojó;
 a que lo matara el toro
 nomas a eso se bajo.

7

THE BALLAD OF KANSAS

When we left for Kansas
 with a big cattle drive,
 my supervisor shouted;
 -Take good care of my beloved.-

Another foreman shouts:

-Fear not, she has no other loves;
 for if a woman is virtuous
 no matter if she lives among men.-

There were five hundred steers,
 all large and swift,
 and between thirty American cowboys
 They couldn't bunch them up.

Five Mexicans arrive,
 all wearing good chaps,
 and in less than a quarter hour
 They had them penned up.

Those five Mexicans
 in a moment put in the steers,
 and the thirty Americans
 were left astonished.

The steers were vicious,
 it was very hard to hold them,
 an American shouted:
 -Let the foreman go into the corral.-

But the foreman didn't want to
 and a vaquero took the dare;
 for the bull to kill him
 That's all he managed to do

**La mujer de Alberto Flores
le pregunta al caporal;
-Deme usted razon de mi hijo
que no lo he visto llegar.-**

8

**The woman of Alberto Flores
asks the foreman;
-Give me work of my son
for I haven't seen him return.-**

**-Senora, yo le diria
pero se pone a llorar;
lo mato un toro frontino
en las trancas de un corral.-**

9

**-Lady, I would tell you,
but I know that you will cry;
he was killed by a blaze faced bull
against the rails of a corral.-**

**Ya con esta me despido
por el amor de mi querida,
ya les cante a mis amigos
los versos de la corrida.**

10

**Now with this I take my leave
by my sweetheart's love,
I have now sung for my friends
The verses of the cattle drive.**

-Americo Paredes, Brownsville, Texas, 1930's