

# Conjunto Los Pochos

## At the Grand Annex

by: Terelle Jerricks, Managing Editor

Catching up with Conjunto Los Pochos is about as difficult as capturing lightning in a bottle considering how busy the traveling norteño band has been this past year. Random Lengths previously spoke with the band members in the summer of 2009 in Santa Monica, when they performed at the Ash Grove's Beyond November event, which combined the arts and activism for social justice to carry on the momentum that President Barack Obama's election represented.

On Oct. 16, Conjunto Los Pochos will be gracing the stage of the Grand Annex in San Pedro, working their magic to get folks dancing out of their seats.

Though the word "conjunto" translates to "group" in Spanish, not every band with the word "conjunto" in their name actually performs in the specific musical style also known as *conjunto*. Genuine *conjunto* is a small-group-dance music, driven by the accordion and the *bajo sexto* (a baritone-range twelve-string guitar). This music actually is native to Texas and northern Mexico. Outside of Texas, *conjunto* music is generally referred to as *música norteña*, or simply *norteña*, with certain differences such as location, instruments used and the preference of *conjunto* for the *ranchera* form over the *corrido*.

*Conjunto* also is very similar to Tejano music, except that its sensibility is more rural and traditional than modern or urban. In addition to being primarily dance-oriented, *conjunto* also has had a historical role as the music of the working classes, its celebratory exuberance and often tough, rowdy lyrical themes setting it apart.

The standard *conjunto* ensemble features an accordion (usually a simple diatonic model), *bajo sexto*, bass, and drums, along with one or two expressive vocalists. This format solidified around the 1950s, but its roots date back to the late 1800s, when the Mexican population in the area was introduced to the accordion and to various European folk dances - polkas, waltzes, redovas, mazurkas, schottisches - by German and Czech immigrants living in southern Texas.

With Otoño Luján on button-accordion, Elliott Baribeault on the *bajo sexto* as well Ernesto Molina on bass and Lorenzo Martinez on drums, we learned that most in the band were classically trained (Otoño learned from other working artists). Los Pochos began with Otoño

and Elliott Baribeault in 1996 at the California Institute of the Arts. Otoño was studying to become a

visual artist, but he always had an overriding interest in learning more about social movements that shaped his heritage as a Mexican American.

For Otoño, the defining moment that sparked his interest in norteño music was a documentary film made in the early '70s called *Chula Fronteras*, directed by Les Blank and produced by Chris Strachwitz.

"That film touched on a lot of things I was personally connected to as far as Texan and North Mexican culture and music," Otoño explained. "I was able to hear the music in the context of people's lives in that movie."

Otoño explained further, saying, "There was this rural connection and they talked about the Farm Workers movement. At that time I was very much interested in social issues and identity issues. So, for me, it resonated on a very personal level; particularly, the performances of Flaco Jiménez and Los Alegres De Teran. So hearing that music in the context of these visuals together was a very powerful experience for me."

If the spark that piqued Otoño's interest was *Chula Fronteras*, then the fuel that sustained his passion was the popularity of *norteña* music in the early 1990s at the height of singer Chalino Sánchez's popularity before he was executed in Mexico.

Otoño took up the accordion as a result, but only got so far before realizing he needed professional player to teach him. He searched for six months before running into a musician coming out of a club in East Los Angeles with a button-accordion strapped to his chest. Otoño asked the man if he knew someone who could teach him. The musician replied that he could do it, and wrote his name and number on a napkin.

"Neither the accordion nor the *bajo sexto* is taught at the University level with the exception of University of Texas, Austin," Otoño explained. "Essentially, this music continues to be passed on by traditional means, by artists teaching on a one-to-one basis."

Otoño doesn't like the term "self-taught."

"I don't think anyone is self-taught unless you live in a cave," he said.

Conjunto Los Pochos / to page 15

## RANDOM Notes

### Laurie Morvan Band Plays Cafe Boogaloo Oct.23

by: B. Noel Barr, The Music Writer Dude

*Random Lengths News* caught the Laurie Morvan Band at the 2010 Bayou Festival this summer. Akin to a hound catching a scent, her incendiary playing cut through the zydeco from the main stage and took us across the grounds to the blues stage.

We stood there watching in awe as Laurie tore into blues originals like, "Come Over to My BBQ" and "Living in A Man's World." Both songs come from her *Fire It Up* compact disc, which won the 2010 Blues Foundation, Blues challenge award for best self-produced CD. She was the Blues Breaker of the week on the House of Blues hour hosted by Dan (Elwood Blues) Aykroyd for the shows that aired April 24 and 30. Aykroyd interviewed Laurie for the Blues Hour in June of this year as well.

Stevie Ray Vaughn inspired her. This Illinois native sounds similar to another Texas blues man Johnny Winter. Laurie has dedicated her life to playing guitar though there were times when

Random Notes / to page 14



Otoño Luján (button-accordion), Lorenzo Martínez, Ernesto Molina, Elliott Baribeault (bajo sexto)



>> arts cuisine entertainment