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P.O. Box 9195
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Presents: "CHULAS FRONTERAS"

"..."Chulas Fronteras" is absolutely the best Chicano documentary film that I have seen to this date...its our history, rescued without excuses and without romanticism but with vitality." Prof. Juan Rodriguez -

Univ. of Calif. at La Jolla

A 58 minute documentary in color about Musica Nortena of the Texas - Mexican border region, its people, their work, and celebrations. Featured are Narciso Martinez, Lydia Mendoza, Flaco Jimenez, Los Alegres de Teran and other musicians important in the development of this uniquely Mexican-American regional music.

CHULAS FRONTERAS, the newest work by Berkeley based film maker Les Blank, will have its world premier Friday, July 23, at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (Van Ness and McAllister) at 7:30 PM and at the Pacific Film Archives at 2621 Durant Ave. in Berkeley on Tuesday, July 27, 1976 at 7:30 and 9:30 PM.

Musica Nortena, although not the only Chicano music heard in the South West, has evolved since the turn of the century into the last Mexican regional style and the only uniquely Mexican-American style. Immediately recognizable by the two voice harmony and the accordion as a lead instrument, Musica Nortena has developed from several traditions including the German-Bohemian melodies, the accordion dance music, the traditional Mexican two voice harmony, and songs which have been passed on from generation to generation but with also many contributed by local song writers and corridistas (balladeers). Over the past 30 years this style of music has become very popular not only in the Northern parts of Mexico and the Southwest, but throughout Mexico and even Central and South America. Musica Nortena has also spread north to Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Oregon, Washingt



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California, and wherever the people from the border have moved in their search for better job opportunities. The songs these conjuntos (groups) sing are the poetry of the people and the corridos (ballads) are their newspapers. What is perhaps common and ordinary music to most people in South Texas is really of extraordinary beauty and vitality as well as of literary and historical importance.

The film contains several finely detailed individual profiles and a visually effective study of the plight of migrant farm workers. Some of the speech in the film is in Spanish, and most of the songs, hence the film has English subtitles.

Narciso Martinez, who today works as a caretaker in the Brownsville zoo, but still plays occasional dances, is perhaps one of the most important and influential musicians seen in the film. He took the simple two-row button accordion and leaving the bass runs to his bajo sexto (12 string guitar) player, concentrated on fancy lead work which was to be the foundation for all Norteno accordion players to follow.

Lydia Mendoza, from a long line of traditional musicians, never conformed to local popular styles. After her start singing with her family, she sang solo and instead of rancheras she preferred boleros and even tangos as well as songs from many Spanish speaking countries. She became widely loved by Chicanos from all walks of life and even today she still learns several new songs every day!

Los Pinguinos del Norte are perhaps the least known conjunto in the film but are the most typical of the many roving street musicians who go from



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cantina to cantina singing the songs customers are willing to put their hard earned money down for. Two of the songs they sing, "Corrido de Cesar Chavez" and the last song "Mexico-Americano" were written by Rumel Fuentes of Eagle Pass, Texas who performs the remarkable version of Doug Sahm's "Chicano" in his family's back yard where several interesting scenes were filmed, including the conversation with his brother Dee Dee Fuentes, a tractor driver for the county.

Flaco Jimenez, and his son David perhaps, will carry on a long tradition handed down from his father Santiago Jimenez who in turn learned to play from his father Patricio Jimenez. The Jimenezes have been the pace setters for Norteno music in the San Antonio area ever since the 30s when Santiago made his first recordings. Flaco appeared recently on the PBS TV series "Austin City Limits" and is perhaps the first Norteno musician to reach out to a new Anglo audience.

Los Alegres de Teran are no doubt the most famous group to appear in this film and one of the most important ones in the development of Musica Norteno. There had been several other groups who combined the sound of the accordion with the two voice singing but it was Los Alegres who made the style so popular that it can be said their sound personifies the Norteno sound.

Eugenio Abrego's accordion playing is superb and his lead voice combines with the sad sounding second of Thomas Ortiz who plays the bajo sexto. They have been together now for over 26 years and have sold millions of records throughout the South-West, Mexico, and other areas.



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A Film by Les Blank

Conceived and produced by Chris Strachwitz

Assistant editing: Maureen Gosling

Consultant: Guillermo Hernandez

Interpreter: Pacho Lane

Sound: Chris Strachwitz

Camera and editing: Les Blank

Les Blank, one of the most exciting independent film makers around, has put his devotion to the art of cinema in the service of his love for American folk music. His previous films have been "The Blues Accordin' to Lightnin' Hopkins"; "A Well Spent Life" (on Blues man Mance Lipscomb); "Spend It All" (on contemporary Cajun life in Louisiana); "Dry Wood" (on black or Creole Cajuns); and "Hot Pepper" (on Creole Bluesman Clifton Chenier).

Chris Strachwitz, for the past 16 years producer of Arhoolie, Folklyric, Old Timey, and Blues Classics LPs and now proprietor of the Down Home Music Company in El Cerrito, a store specializing in many types of American folk and ethnic music, pooled his resources with Les Blank to make this film a reality.

Arhoolie Records plans to release a sound track LP from "Chulas Fronteras" which should be released in September 1976 accompanied by a booklet which will include the entire transcript of the film in both English and Spanish, for use in class rooms and for the general enjoyment of the listeners.