

# **AYER Y HOY en Taos**

**Yesterday and Today in Taos County and  
Northern New Mexico**



## **Los Comanches**

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## HISPANIC TRADITION FOLKLORIC MUSIC AND DANCE

By Dr. Lorenzo A. Trujillo

The Hispanic folkloric tradition of Colorado and New Mexico had its beginnings in the 1500s and 1600s when this area was colonized by the Spaniards. The survival of the *manito* culture of Colorado and New Mexico has occurred because of special circumstances. (The term *manito* is used by Hispanics of the Southwest to refer to the descendants of the Spanish Colonials of New Mexico and Colorado. The term is a shortened form of the word *hermanito*, which means little brother. The diminutive form implies a caring and warm sense of brotherhood.)

This cultural group has maintained a strong sense of ethnic identity because of geographic isolation in rural, as well as urban areas, close family ties, a close relationship to the land, and definite patterns that emphasize culture and language maintenance. The continued existence of this culture as a vivid and real element of society today is a phenomenon of true interest for the ethnologist.

While most ethnic groups in America today have melted and lost the true sense of ethnicity, the *manito* continues to flourish and pass on the values and language of his ancestors of the 1500s. Southwest Spanish is a vivid example of cultural maintenance. In this article, a sketch of two of the key figures of this past century will be

presented, as well as their music and dance. Through the efforts of people like these, the *manito* tradition lives on with the complete integrity of the past and the present.

Victor Cárdenas was born December 23, 1901, in Folsom, New Mexico. During the next 76 years of his life Mr. Cárdenas performed with his famous violin collection for 17 years with the Denver Dancing Academy and with the Rocchio Dance Academy for 10 years. He had his own band, Los Viejitos, for three years and he played for a year in California with the Hank Thompson Band. In his later years he was a founding member of the Mariachi de Colores and the founder of the Mariachi Guadalupana.

During this period it was my fortune to have studied and performed with Mr. Cárdenas. In December, 1991 I had the good fortune of performing a Christmas pageant in the Taos Civic Auditorium with Victor's *primo hermano*, violinist Alfonso Cárdenas, now 63 years old. In his many performances requests were made for the music of the past. Mr. Cárdenas always knew the music and how to do the dance. One of the dances requested was the "Valse de los Paños."

The "Valse de los Paños" is a unique example of how the Hispanic tradition still survives today. This

dance and music originated in the court dance of Spain. Although the dance is of the 16th Century, it is popular today among the people of the villages of New Mexico and Colorado.

"Valse de los Paños" means the waltz of the scarves. During the dark ages and early renaissance in Spain it was forbidden for physical contact to occur between a man and a woman. Therefore an acceptable way for a man to dance with a woman without touching her was to have a material scarf bond the dancers together.

Further, if you have read Don Quixote de la Mancha by Cervantes, you will recall the significance of the scarf and its colors. The scarf of a woman was symbolic of her honor. Honor has traditionally been and remains the highest of values for the Hispanic *caballero*. A *caballero's* woman is the vestige of his and his family's honor. Therefore the historical and cultural value of this dance assumes a greater significance when one considers the psychological and cultural values that have given rise to this kinesthetic statement.

The dance was traditionally and is still performed at the initiation of a ball. You may agree that it would provide a proper medium for a virtuous woman to meet her knight in shining armor.

The following is a description of the dance and the music to

accompany the dance is transcribed from a tape of Mr. Cárdenas' music titled "La Música de los Tiempos de Antes".

### VALSE DE LOS PAÑOS

Dance step: Waltz  
Right, left, right  
Formation: Square  
Part One: Music Part A

Beginning with right foot, two sets facing take four waltz steps toward each other and toward the center. On the fourth step, ladies curtsy and men bow. Take four waltz steps back to starting place.

Next two sets will take four waltz steps toward each other and toward the center. On the fourth step, the ladies curtsy and the men bow. Take four waltz steps back to starting place. Other two sets will step in place.

#### Part two: Music Part B

All sets start with the lady on the left, moving clockwise, traveling across in front of the center person, under his left arm and back to place to a count of eight. The center person follows the lady by making a left-face, turning slowly under his own left to a count of eight, bringing the group back to original formation.

Next the ladies at the right move counter-clockwise and travel across in front of the center person, under his right arm and follow the lady by making a right-face, turning slowly under his own right arm to a count of eight, bringing the group back to the original formation.

Repeat:

Part One (Music Part A)  
Part Two (Music Part B)  
Repeat until end of music.

The music is written so the dance can be repeated as many times as desired. (Note: on various occasions the author has noted that exhibition groups who lack live accompaniment have performed this dance with the following recording: "Redondo del Paño" on *El Redondo Largo*, MORE RECORDS 8027. Because this is a recording of another piece of music, it requires adaptations

of the choreography sequencing to fit the music.)

### VALSE DE LA COMANCHA

The *Valse de la Comancha* was taught to my mom by Mela Sedillos. She was a resident of Albuquerque, NM until she died. I mastered the music when I was at a family reunion in Arroyo Seco, NM and played all afternoon with my *primo*, Damian Archuleta, who lived in Taos. He began playing violin when he was eight years old, when his father bought him a violin. During the 77 years of his life, he contributed to the preservation and continuation of the music and dances by playing for numerous special occasions in the Taos area. He reached a pinnacle in his career when he played with Los Alegres de Taos at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. and in the film, "The Milagro Beanfield War."

Legend has it that a *caballero* fell in love with La Comancha at one of the fiestas in the early days of New Mexico. In the early days a special event was recorded by the musicians and song writers, who created a composition that they would present as they traveled from village to village. This must have been such an occasion for the dance and music still survive to let us know of the event. The music and the dance description are provided.

### VALSE DE LA COMANCHA

Step: Waltz  
Left, right, left; right, left, right  
The waltz is a combination of three smooth walking steps done to 3/4 time, with a complete transfer of weight on each step. The first two steps cover ground, and the third is a closing step. It is the smooth, continuing turning step that gives the waltz its graceful appearance.

Part One (Music Part A):

Formation: Dancers will form squares of two couples each.

Man with his free hand behind his back and lady with her free hand holding her skirt.

Join right hands in a star

position. Each lady holds a scarf at star position center.

Travelling clockwise, do eight waltz steps. At change of music, change to a left-hand star and travelling counter-clockwise, do eight more waltz steps.

Part two (Music Part B)  
Formation: closed position

At change of music, move into a closed position with your partner. Waltz step to a count of 16. Dance in close enough proximity to the other couple so that when the music changes you will be ready to repeat Part One (Music Part A).

Repeat:

Part One (Music Part A)  
Part Two (Music Part B)  
Repeat until end of music.

(Description prepared in cooperation with Marie Oralia Trujillo.)

### Music score

During the past decade much interest has been shown in the folklore of New Mexico and Colorado. Because of this interest, dances of Colorado and New Mexico were taught by Ms. Mela Sedillo at the National Convention of the *Asociacion Nacional de Grupos Folkloricos* in 1976 in Pueblo, Colorado. These dances, through the assistance of Mr. Cárdenas, was prepared for exhibition by Ms. Marie Oralia Trujillo. Since her group began in Colorado, many other groups were formed and now present these dances in exhibition form. One of the more popular groups is the "*Ancianos Alegres*" of Brighton, Colorado. This is a senior citizen group who meet weekly to give tradition life. This dance was also taught by the author in 1979 at the California Folk Dance Federation Teacher Training Workshop in Sacramento, California.

This culture is alive and continues to flourish because of the strong sense of ethnic identity, pride and maintenance of the value system that is the tradition of the Hispanic of the Southwest.

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VALSE DE LOS PAÑOS  
(New Mexico)  
Traditional Colorado and New Mexico arrangement by  
Lorenzo Trujillo and Jenny Knantz

Violin

1 2 3 4 5 6  
7 8 9 10 11  
12 13 14 15  
16 17 18 19 20 21  
22 23 24 25 26  
27 28 29 30 31  
32 33 34 35 36

