

The Family Business: Bringing Latino Beats to Leon Springs

by Alexis Schooley

I had heard the rumors. I had heard about the crowds. I had heard about the music, which caught me off guard as normally that is not part of the reason to try a new bar in town. Nothing could prepare me though for what I saw that Wednesday night.



I was running late, as usual. I thought the crowd would thin out by the time I got there, so it was much to my surprise that I had to park around the back in order to find a good spot! I saw women and men dressed in their best dance clothes, sequins and slacks intact. I saw a distinguished crowd pumped with an excitement that immediately drew me in.

As I opened the doors, I could hear the heartbeat of this excitement from behind the foyer wall. From the sound, I was expecting more people with instruments, but there behind the crowd of dancing people were three musicians looking like they may be having more fun than the crowd. The lead singer picked up one sax after another, then a

flute and then belted out Santana like it was old hat. I thought I was beginning to understand why these guys were special; little did I know it was just the tip of the iceberg.

"Every time I set up I get excited because I know it's on," said J Posada as he walked by with a bag filled with drums that measured half his size. His eyes were filled with the knowing animation that accompanies someone that truly does what they love to do. I sat at the table outside awaiting Joe Posada, and his son J to join me after they set up their instruments. Behind me, a stranger leaned in and asked if I knew them.

"I love these guys," the stranger said with eagerness. Surely he didn't know I was there to do an interview. "They are great guys, and so talented," he continued. I wondered what about them drew this sort of

loyalty from their fans, as this was the "vibe" that I was hearing that drew me in to begin with.

Joe Posada joined us at the table after warming up his saxophones on the stage. I couldn't help but get this nonchalant, "Lou Diamond Phillips" sort of coolness about him. He began playing at the age of 12 while growing up on the West side of San Antonio. His family owned a bakery, which directly conflicted with the late night gig schedule of a budding musician, but his mother knew it was a way to keep her boy out of trouble. When he was young his parents couldn't afford anything but a silver-plated saxophone which was not as "cool" as the gold ones the other kids had. So they took it to Alamo Music and had them "dip" it in the brass to make it just like the other kids. The ironic thing is that now Joe's favorite instrument is his 90-year-old silver saxophone (that he found on E-bay, like many of his instruments).

He worked his way up by playing with the bands that are now considered the "golden age of Tejano." He found a style in the wind instruments (flute and sax) that took his style to a level not found previously, a sort of jazz influence that could not be denied.

He has always pursued his dream of music. "I did have one normal job. I worked at the Pace factory, but it was very part time in the afternoon so that I could recover from the gigs the night before. I think it is really important to immerse yourself in what you do," Joe said nodding to his son next him.

J Posada (actually Joe Posada, Jr.), the middle child of three, picked up sticks in quite a similar way as his father, only much younger. "I was always around music. I remember being curled up next to the stage when I was very young," recollected J now

in his early thirties. In his early teen years J started playing gigs with other bands, "mostly rock, several Christian rock bands," he recalls. As he was trying to push the aforementioned drum bag back in the window, Joe caught his son sneaking in from a late night gig on a school night. As J remembered this, Joe leaned back with a mischievous but proud look on his face. "When he found out what I was doing, he asked 'Well, did you make any money?' and I held out my hand with the little that I did make," he laughed. "He told me to get to bed before my mother found out."

Just because J inherited his father's musical gift did not mean that Joe would pave the way for him. J occasionally worked as a "roadie" for his father while exploring his talents in other bands, always hoping he would be next in line. Joe continued playing all over the country with some of the legends in the business, honing his craft as only time will do. J grew up in the same neighborhood as his father and he too went to Lanier High School, "although it wasn't as rough as when I was there," laughed Joe. "Kids that don't have a purpose are always going to find their way into trouble, it is no different in that neighborhood or any other."

"He gave me this book, 'The Rhythm of Life: Living Every Day with Passion and Purpose,' and it really opened my eyes as a musician," says J. He went on to tell me with evident passion that everything has a rhythm and he listens for it now. "A motorcycle, a train, even the trees. Yes, I pull a lot of inspiration from the trees," J explained as he pointed to the trees blowing on the hill across the parking lot. Just then a motorcycle pulled up and I watched as J's distraction grew while listening to the rhythm of the engine.

"I have a lot of influences," Joe added. "John Coltrane, Jeff Lorber and Alfonso Ramos are definitely influences."





which explains the unique jazz influence to the Tejano rhythms. J's obvious influence of 'Sting' is evident in the CD entitled *The Family Business*. The result is a delicate mix of two generations of music intertwined.

This combination is what has brought them number one hits in the Tejano music scene and a Grammy nomination for their CD entitled *Then & Now*. "First thing I thought was, 'Hey, we're going to LA!'" said J with a smile. Always protective of his original work, Joe produces his own label now under the name of Baby Dude Records, after his many grandsons. "My new baby daughter threw that off!" laughed J.

So, what are a couple of Grammy-nominated musicians doing playing at a new bar in Leon Springs? They explain that there are certain places that a musician can play that they know they are being heard, and that is good for their soul. Jimi Ellis, owner of Chango's Havana Club in Leon Springs say he heard them play over a year before the

club opened, "I knew they would be perfect," he tells us with a spark in his eye.

Out here, on the edge of hill country, where the Latino rhythms of San Antonio meet the swing of Hill Country blues, it is no wonder that a night filled with generational mix of salsa and spoils would go so well.

Joe, armed with his silver sax, and J setting the rhythm to the trees, light up the room brighter than the moon shining in the large window behind them. The crowd gathers on the floor, with the second wind after a long day at work, and releases steam to songs ranging from classic salsa to disco responding to every tempo thrown at them.

J's eyes closed and following the melody beat out before him.

Joe leaning into a sax solo that crosses the musical genres into just pure feeling.

If you look closely, through the bodies twisting and turning across the dance floor, you see the subtle glances of a father to a son. For a father that has done all he could for his family, and for a son that has learned to "never look back" and follow his dreams, the combination is powerful when standing still in the whirl of it all.

Now I know why the stranger loved "these guys".

