

Focus on Folklife Traditions of Farmworkers

Rancheras & Románticas of Humberto Zapata Alvizo

Documentary Project by Joe Bagby

Humberto Zapata Alvizo has been a faithful carrier of Mexican folklife tradition for as long as he can remember. He has been singing *rancheras* and *románticas* since childhood. The 22-year-old Potosino (native of the eastern Mexican state of San Luis Potosí) was more than willing to share the lolling love ballads and longing recollections of home.

Originally from the tiny town of Norias del Refugio, Zapata is a farmworker in Nash County, North Carolina. Far from home, the dynamic young man is accustomed to singing for his friends and comrades at the camp where he lives. He eases their longing for the familiar--for home, family, and loved ones.

The six songs Zapata sang were all soothing and simple, consisting of his lyrics and guitar. The round, steady strumming of his guitar and peaking voice combined for a nostalgic effect, and he carefully explained the songs one by one.

Zapata explained that these are not modern or popular songs, but traditional, obscure *ranchera* and *romántica* ballads. Zapata, and others like him, serve the dual purpose of providing soothing entertainment and relaying words of earlier Mexican musicians.

"*Rifaré mi Suerte*" is a telling and introspective song about the difficulty of migrant life. It illuminates three important aspects of Mexican and migrant culture: the promise of leaving one's life in order to earn money for family, the value placed on familial well-being, and strong faith.

Zapata said, "One knows that God guides us on earth and blesses our parents, our

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Introduction to Folklife

During the summer of 1999, SAF Into the Fields interns surveyed the folklife traditions of migrant farmworkers throughout North and South Carolina. The interns received training from Folklore and Documentary Consultants Jill Hemming, Paul Ortiz, Abigail Blosser, and Julie Stovall. By using oral histories, drawings, recipes, poetry, and photography, the interns learned about verbal, material, and social traditions of farmworkers.

The interns observed farmworkers' lifestyles, cultural heritage, art, music, food, and religious traditions. Some folklore traditions that interns documented were *quinceañera* celebrations, baptisms, cooking traditions, rituals, faith, songs, and personal narratives. By immersing themselves in farmworkers' everyday lives, interns were able to observe how culture changes and adapts as it crosses borders and how farmworkers are creating new communities in North and South Carolina.

The Latino farmworker population is a significant community in the Carolinas whose culture is being intertwined with that of native North and South Carolinians. Recognizing the importance of migrant farmworkers' cultural traditions, witnessing how they are preserved over time and distance, and sharing their heritage with others are integral parts of this project.

Support for this project was provided by the North Carolina Arts Council. Interns' work will be archived in the Southern Folklife Collection of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



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Rancheras and Románticas *continued from page 1*

brothers and sisters, and blesses us. One is never alone, you know? And this song shows a lot...about our feelings, about our families more than anything...about our struggles to come out okay."

*Ahora que me encuentro lejos
 De la tierra en que nací
 Ay, de mis padres queridos
 Cuanto han sufrido por mí*

*Now that I'm so far
 From the land where I was born
 Oh, my beloved parents
 How much they have suffered for me*

*Pobrecita de mi madre
 Cuantos consejos me dió
 Con lagrimas en sus ojos
 Sus bendiciones me dió*

*My poor mother
 Who gave me so much advice
 With tears in her eyes
 She gave me her blessing*

*Ya no llores madrecita,
 Esté bien, que ya no sufriré
 Déjame rifar me suerte
 Por buscando el porvenir*

*Don't cry anymore, mother
 be well, don't suffer
 Let me raffle my luck
 By seeking my fortune*

*También dejé mi amorcito
 Que le prometí volver
 Yo sé bien que ella me espera
 Díos me lo ha de conceder*

*I also left my love
 Whom I promised I'd return
 I know well she waits for me
 Surely God has to grant me this*

*Quisiera ser cuales aves
 Y volar donde tú estás
 Cruzar valles y montañas
 Y a míos querencias llegar*

*I would like to be those birds
 And fly to where you are
 Crossing valleys and mountains
 And get to my loved ones*

*Virgencita Milagrosa
 Sabes bien mi padecer
 De rodillas iré a verte
 Si me concedes volver*

*Miraculous Virgin Mary
 You know my suffering well
 On my knees I'll go to see you
 If you let me return home*

Piñata Summer

Documentary Project by Ellen Szedon

Through her work with Project Avery Literacy, SAF intern Ellen Szedon coordinated a summer enrichment program for Spanish-speaking children in Avery County. Ellen helped the children construct their own piñatas, as a way to teach them about art and color.

Piñatas originated in Italy, spread to Spain as part of Lenten celebrations, and then to Mexico where they already had a similar tradition. Piñatas continue to add excitement to parties in Mexico and the United States.

The tradition of making piñatas begins with pasting newspaper strips onto inflated balloons and then hanging them to dry. After the piñatas have dried, they are decorated, painted, and filled with candy. At parties, children take turns trying to break piñatas to get the candy.



Luis and Lupe proudly display their finished rainbow piñatas. They worked hard to paint them, while learning the various colors. The piñatas gave the children a feeling of accomplishment and creativity.

