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- Los Destellos
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- Chacalón y la Nueva Crema
- Los Destellos
- Ranil y su Conjunto
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- Los Walkers
- Los Wembler's de Iquitos

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THE ROOTS OF CHICHA 2

PSYCHEDELIC CUMBIAS FROM PERU





CHICHA



Chicha is a good word. It's short, snappy and easy to remember. Context being everything though, it's not surprising that it has gone on to become a totemic word conjuring both pride and shame, representing thousands of years of pre-Colombian tradition on one hand, and five hundred years of servitude and neglect culminating in the harsh slums of Lima on the other.

Chicha is originally the name of an alcoholic drink, made of fermented *maize*, which the Incas were especially fond of. In the past thirty years, however, the word has taken on a pejorative connotation. Peruvian *cumbia* started being called *chicha* in the late 70s, around the same time that the music came to be viewed as the expression of the slums – the *pueblos jóvenes*. Little by little, the word became an adjective, and people now talk of *chicha* culture, *chicha* press, *chicha* architecture, even of a *chicha* president, and none if it – you guessed right – is meant as a compliment. *Chicha* suggests corruption, shady deals, and *cholos* – a derogatory term for a person of Andean heritage that, of late, is being reclaimed and worn as a badge of honor by the very *cholos* it was supposed to demean in the first place.

Few people would call themselves *cholo*, or listen to *chicha*, in San Isidro or Miraflores, the middle class neighborhoods of Lima. While the word *chicha* itself is still synonymous with lower-classes and tastelessness, *cumbia* has become acceptable – as it first was in the late 60s when, in all parts of the city, people partied to the new tropical rhythm.

In 1968, Enrique Delgado released his first record on Odeon with his new group, Los Destellos, single-handedly creating Peruvian *cumbia*. He codified the genre early on by



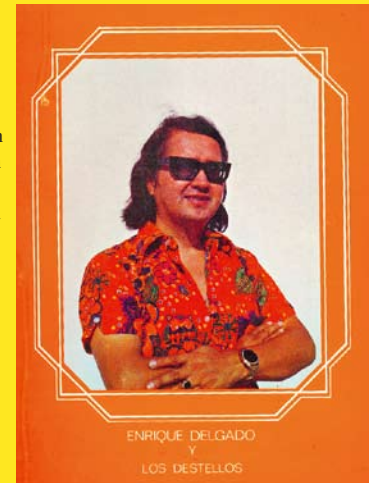
using the electric guitar as the primary melodic instrument, and mixing *cumbia* rhythms with folkloric *huaynos*, *criollo* voicings, Cuban *guarachas* and *guajiras*, rock, boogaloo, surf, psychedelia, oriental music, classical music, and bits and pieces from Brazil, France, Chile – all without ever using the words *post-modern*, *pastiche* or *mélange*. All Peruvian *cumbia* and *chicha* bands for the next thirty years would end up drawing from the exact same sources.

Most Peruvians to this day recognize three main national types of popular Peruvian music. There's *criollo* music, which is played on Spanish guitar, accompanied by spoons or castanets, sometimes *cajon*, and one or two singers. The repertoire consists mostly of waltzes and *marineras*, with an occasional *polka* and the relatively recent addition of Afro-Peruvian *festejos*. *Criollo* is often considered the “national” music of Peru. *Folelor*,

or music from the Andes, is another genre. The *huayno* is its most common expression, and can be played by brass bands, harps, *charangos*, or just guitar. The panpipes bands, popular on the streets of most European and North American cities, are actually less common. And then there's Afro-Peruvian music, the music passed on by generations of former slaves, popularized and codified in the 60s and 70s. In the past thirty years, a lot of Afro-Peruvian music has found its way into *criollo* music, the way the *criollo* guitar had found its way into *folelor*. Musicians, while usually specialized, often hopscotch from one genre to the other, and most *chicha* musicians, particularly singers and guitarists, are schooled in *criollo* music, which has had at least as strong an influence on *chicha* as traditional Andean music.

There were *cumbia* bands in Peru before Los Destellos. Los Demonios de Mantaro, from the highlands of Junín, were an example. They modeled their sound on the Colombian bands of that era and scored the first Peruvian *cumbia* hit, “La Chichera”, back in 1965 –which is one of the reasons the music would later be called *chicha*. Los Compadres del Ande, around the same time, used a similar format, but with the added bite of an electric organ, foreshadowing the sounds of Juaneco y su Combo and Manzanita, who appeared a few years later.

Meanwhile, in Lima, the electric guitar was the new thing. The *guitarra criolla*, the classical Spanish guitar, was pretty much the





Compay Quinto

national instrument. It was used in *criollo* waltzes and *marineras*, and by a great many folkloric bands. The electric guitar was first embraced by *Nueva Ola* bands (New Wave, as rock was called in the early 60s), but soon *criollo* guitar players started switching as well and used it in all kinds of “tropical” bands (*música tropical* being anything that used an Afro-Cuban or Afro-Caribbean rhythm section – bass, bongos, bells, timbales and congas). To this day, most *chicha* guitarists are often conservatory-trained players who can switch from Bach to *huayno* and *criollo* music but yet are still scorned by critics who view them as uncouth.

Before 1977, Peruvian *cumbia* was rarely called *chicha*. However, in retrospect, it is hard to call some of the proto-*chicha* bands *cumbia* bands, as *cumbia* rhythms barely figured into their music.

Pioneer Compay Quinto was one of the first electric guitarists to specialize in an all-Cuban repertoire, mixing up a surf-like esthetic with *criollo* technique and syncopated Cuban *montunos*. Jhon Beny, leader of the band Los Ribereños, was another. Already slightly more syncretic in nature, Los Ribereños still played mostly Cuban music, with an occasional nod to Andean music. However, even their most Cuban covers had a distinct, yet hard to define, Peruvian flavor. To paraphrase Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart’s comment on pornography, all I can say is that “I recognize it when I hear it.”

Both Compay Quinto and Los Ribereños are considered part of the Peruvian *cumbia* canon, even though neither ever really played *cumbia*. In a way, this is part of the *cumbia credo* around the world – most of it has little to do with the original music from coastal Colombia. Much like Rock and Roll, non-Colombian *cumbia* is defined mostly by its instrumentation and is essentially idiosyncratic in nature. To start playing *cumbia*, just refer to what you’re playing as *cumbia*. Using a *guiro* could help.

Paradoxically, the Velasco years (1968-1975) were to be the golden age of Peruvian *cumbia*, despite the dictator’s dislike of the genre. Los Destellos proved so irresistible that every Peruvian label rushed to launch their own tropical bands, starting with Odeon/IEMPSA, El Virrey and Dinsa and later Infopesa, Sonoradio, FTA and more. By 1970 it had already become an incredibly crowded field. Bands were roughly divided between *cumbia costeña*, which, like Los Destellos, was primarily from Lima, and *cumbia amazónica*, which started almost around the same time with bands such as Juaneco y su Combo and a little later with Los Wemblers and Los Mirlos. *Chicha*, also called *cumbia andina*, was not officially born until the late 70s.



Los Ribereños



In a way, until 1975, the music was defined by a crazy form of cosmopolitan eclecticism. Manzanita and Los Destellos had no problem switching styles, and neither did their constituency. They went from pathos to comedy, from California surf to Andean melodies. They covered classic *huaynos*, sang about beer (yes) and marijuana (no). Enrique Delgado used a drum kit and a Moog on some of his recordings, Los Quantos covered Simon and Garfunkel's *The Sounds of Silence*. Los Yungas used a banjo.

There were no rules, yet the music had an incredibly strong identity. Little by little, it all got more codified. People in the *pueblos jóvenes* started identifying with the music and with identification came expectations. Bands who were able to meet those expectations did very well and established a lasting style that relied on a more social message. People needed the songs and their references to mirror their own lives.

Most ethnomusicologists insist that *chicha* is defined by its Andean flavor – which is debatable. Most, if not all, *chicha* musicians are from Lima and most use *huaynos* and pentatonic scales in about the same proportions as bands like Manzanita or Los Hijos del Sol. The great exponents of 1980s *chicha* (such as La Mermelada, Chacalón or Centeno) use exactly the same musical elements as the ones pioneered by Los Destellos.

Chicha is sometimes easier to define in non-musical terms. The definite Andean aspect of the music is the direct connection all the players felt to their heritage. Most had roots in the highlands – either by birth or from their parents. Most lived in poor neighborhoods such as Comas, El Agustino, or la Victoria, which had a majority of *provincianos* – migrants from the Andes. Their audience related as much to the lyrics as it did to the music. 1980s *chicha* had a lot more singing than 70s *cumbia*, which tended to have more instrumentals. *Chicha* lyrics usually address the harsh lives of *provincianos*: looking for work, being betrayed, driving a bus, craving a better life, suffering.



Jose Carballo and Chacalón

Los Shapis could be the exception. Their first album, *Los Autenticos Shapis*, made them overnight superstars. Their first big hit, “El Aguajal”, was a *huayno*, which was not in itself novel, but singer Chapulín’s style was definitely rooted in the highlands with no hints of *tropical* influence. While Los Shapis use the same musical vocabulary – *montunos*, *tumbaos* – their sound remains more *serrano*, even when their songs veered more towards rock or ballads.



Other factors made 80s *chicha* distinct from the early 70s *cumbia*. Choice of instruments and production values counted for a lot. Keyboards were no longer Farfisas but Korgs. A number of guitarists stopped using amps altogether in favor of effects racks plugged directly into a PA. Singers such as Chacalón started using a lot of reverb, and the percussion section saw the addition of electronic percussion pads. In general, the music became more processed, as if trying to claim its urban status. It was a new aesthetic, which newcomer Juan Campos would know how to exploit with his label Horoscopo.

However, the most significant element of *chicha* in the 1980s, which in retrospect would come to define all of *cumbia* in Peru, was a social one. After gaining a stronghold in the province of Ayacucho, the Shining Path (the ultra-violent Maoist group) moved on to Lima in the early 80s and started infiltrating the *pueblos jóvenes*, using them as a base from which to wage war against government institutions. The war in the highlands had precipitated a massive increase in migration to Lima, where conditions had already become more than precarious. With the arrival of the Shining Path, things got even worse. Gradually, *pueblos jóvenes* were essentially taken hostage. The economy suffered horribly, especially under current president Alan García's first term (1985-1990). The government repression proved as bloody and arbitrary in its targets as the insurgency. The middle-class got even more terrified of *cholos*, who were seen as potential aggressors.



Back in Comas, where it all started.



A squatter settlement at KM 22 of Panamericana Sur—south of Lima.

The social divide became even clearer: a failing first-world environment in the “good neighborhoods,” where people lived in fear of bombs and listened to foreign rock on FM stations, and a failed third-world state where people lived in constant fear of violence and listened to *chicha* on the AM stations. Fear and violence on all sides defined the period, but people in the *barrios* clearly suffered the most. Suspected of being terrorists, subject to curfews and random searches, closely watched by Shining Path militants, they had very little refuge. An estimated 70,000 people died. By comparison, about 15,000 people died in Argentina’s dirty war, and between 3,000 and 4,000 in Pinochet’s Chile.

Interestingly enough, while *chicha* lyrics in the 1980s started tackling social issues (which were usually ignored in the 1970s), they tended to stick to apolitical subjects: poverty, hardship, nostalgia for the highlands, pride of being a *provinciano*, hard work, family, drinking. A certain Andean ethic was present, but with no reference to the violence, no hint of political demands, no appeal to peace. It’s as if nothing was happening.

And this may actually sum up *chicha*: a sense of defiance marked not by a culture of protest, but defined by silent endurance. As if by ignoring the harsh topical realities of fear and violence, they were negating them and focusing on the universal values of their everyday lives. Love, suffering, work, music.

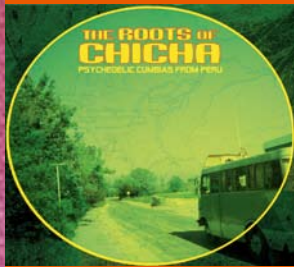


Enrique Delgado

Volume one. Volume two.

When I released the first volume of “Roots of Chicha” in September of 2007, I couldn’t have foreseen the kind of impact it would have. Had I known, I would have been a little more careful in my research, talked to a few more people, and asked a lot more questions. I got lucky. The songs I picked, mostly by instinct, turn out to be some of the most emblematic of the 60s and 70s.

Releasing a second volume proved a lot more difficult. I have since gone back to Peru, listened to hundreds more songs, talked to a lot of people, met some of the players, and gained a much broader understanding of the music and its history. All of which made the task of compiling a second volume much harder.



The impact the first volume had in Peru came as a big surprise. For decades, *chicha* had been scorned as the trashiest expression of Lima's slums. While the music certainly lived on with the working class, many journalists, students, and musicians had also become interested in the music and used the release of the album as an excuse to explore what had become an obscure chapter of their popular culture. News that a gringo was interested in *chicha* found its way Peru's mainstream press. That this gringo was also playing in a band (Chicha Libre) that paid tribute to the music, gave it an additional air of exoticism.

The timing was perfect. After the Fujimori years (1990 to 2000), many Peruvians were eager to reconnect with the pop culture of the 1960s. It started with Lima's very vibrant rock scene. Bands such as Los Saicos, Los Shains, Los Holys or El Opio were some of the most original Latin America had ever produced, but were near forgotten. This was in part because dictator Velasco (1968 to 1975) abhorred rock (and *cumbia*) and officially favored *folclor* and *criollo* music. *Cumbia*, which had been even more popular than rock, had to be next.

A few months before the release of Roots of Chicha, most members of the very popular *chicha* band *Grupo Néctar* died in a car crash. It became major news and was reported not just in the *chicha* press (as the popular press is called) but in the "serious" (and seriously middle-class) press including *El Comercio*. This proved to be a bit of a Trojan horse. If it was ok to talk about dead *chicheros*, it was probably ok to talk about *chicha*, especially if it meant talking about an album with an English title. Two years later, a *cumbia* revival seemed to be in full swing. Not only were old bands, such as Juaneco y su Combo or Los Mirlos, given sudden attention, but popular Peruvian rock bands started paying homage to the music. Jam rock band Bareto released an album of classic Peruvian *cumbias* which, all of a sudden, took the music to the hip clubs of Barranco.

Still, the music that was being revived was being called *cumbia* – *chicha* still belonged to the *cholos*, and middle class hipsters were not quite ready to embrace it. Furthermore, the style that was being favored was mostly the Amazonian one. In part because of the exotic appeal of the Amazon, which is almost as far from Lima as it is from New York, but also because it was safer. There was very little association between the Amazon and the slums of Lima, or with the violence that shook the country in the 80s and 90s. The music of Juaneco y su Combo seemed classless and modern. It belonged to a fantasy land and an imaginary time. *Chicha* you could still hear daily, blasting out the *combis* – the private minibuses that are Lima's main mean of transportation.



The chicha family: Chacalón, Victor Casahuaman and Walter Leon

This second volume is not a sequel. It's an attempt to rectify some of the biases and inaccuracies of the first volume. Volume two focuses more on the urban aspect of the music and less on the Amazonian side. It highlights some lesser-known bands, and it also broadens its scope to include some of the early Cuban-influenced groups who would play such a crucial role in the elaboration of the *chicha* sound, as well as some of the later bands who play in the more Andean style that came to be referred to as *chicha*. More roots. More *chicha*.

THE BANDS



LOS DESTELLOS

Enrique Delgado is widely seen as the creator of Peruvian *cumbia*. When he formed Los Destellos in 1966, he was thirty and already a successful sideman who had been working with both *criollo* and folkloric musicians (including the great and greatly popular El Trovador

Andino). A conservatory-trained musician with perfect pitch, Delgado set the standard pretty high for all *chicha* guitarists. With Los Destellos, he made use of all his musical background: he played *guaracha*, *huayno*, and surf, drawing inspiration from film music, classical music, rock, and psychedelia. Los Destellos definitely set the tone for the all inclusive-sound that would come to define *chicha*. Second guitarist Fernando Quiroz, who had played in the rock band *Los Zanys*, provided a particular rich interplay with Delgado's guitar – switching from playing chords to *montunos*, tight harmonies and counterpoint. Both guitarists were fond of *wah* pedals and suddenly switching to distortion. Delgado passed away in 1996.

MANZANITA Y SU CONJUNTO

In the sometimes polarized world of Peruvian *cumbia* aficionados, a sizeable faction claims Trujillo native Manzanita as the true father of the genre. In truth, Berardo Hernandez (his birth name) is indeed the other great *chicha* pioneer. Very much like Enrique Delgado, who always overshadowed him, he was a classically trained guitarist who started out playing *criollo* music and first earned his living working with folkloric bands such as Los Pacharacos. He formed Manzanita y su Conjunto in 1969 and made his mark right away. His sound was like no other – never derivative, always personal. He liked to improvise more than was the norm in *musica tropical* and, unlike Delgado, wrote most of his own tunes. He is remembered for his superior technique but was not an overwhelmingly flamboyant player – he favored parts and arrangements. His band used a Farfisa organ to play the kind of harmonies and counter-melodies usually played by a second guitar. Despite the historical competition, Delgado and Manzanita seemed to have been friends and very much admired each other's playing. Berardo Hernandez passed away in 2007.



RANIL Y SU CONJUNTO TROPICAL

Raul Llerena is one of the most fascinating characters of the Peruvian *cumbia* movement. He was born in Belen, a mostly poor and indigenous neighborhood of Iquitos, the largest of the Amazonian cities. Like many of his contemporaries, his background was in *criollo* music. He got his start as a professional musician in a *criollo* band but gradually got more interested in tropical music. He started his own *tropical* band in the mid 70s, calling it Ranil after the first syllables of his own and his wife Nilsa's names. Unlike his peers in local bands Los Silvers or Los Wemblers, he refused to sign on with a label and decided to start his own, which he

called *Llerena*. He put out a number of LPs that proved very popular in and around Iquitos, but due to the independent nature of the venture, never crossed over in the rest of the country. Ranil had studied in Lima to be a teacher, and not content to simply be a musician, he started his own radio station in Belen – and then ran his own TV station. Many of his songs were already concerned with social issues and he became quite the gadfly as a radio personality. He seems to now have achieved folk hero status and he has also decided to run for mayor of Belen. In the past few years, there has been a regain of interest for his music.



WALTER LEON Y LOS ILUSIONISTAS

When Walter Leon started Los Ilusionistas, he very consciously modeled his band on Los Destellos. He even admitted that he wrote *Colegiala* thinking of Los Destellos' early hit *Elsa*. Ironically, *Colegiala* would go on to become one of the best-known *cumbias* in the world, although few people know the original version or are even aware that the song is Peruvian. In the 1980s, Nescafé made it its theme

song but used a version recorded by a Colombian band. Most Europeans were introduced to cumbia by hearing the Nescafé version on television. Walter Leon wrote a number of very well known songs but doesn't play much anymore. Los Ilusionistas' singer, Carlos Ramirez, is still very active. He went on to lead Centeno, one of the classic *chicha* bands of the 1980s, and he still plays regularly.



GRUPO CELESTE

Guitarist Victor Casahuaman started Grupo Celeste in 1974. He is one of the founders of the modern *chicha* sound. His own songs relied on lyrics as much as they did on the music. Earlier *cumbia* bands were more concerned with making people dance and a majority of the songs were instrumentals. Grupo Celeste made people care about what they sang about. The sound was also harder, more rock – with busier bass lines, less *tumbaos*, funkier grooves.

Lener Muñoz's lead guitar was louder and less syncopated. But mostly, Grupo Celeste introduced Chacalón to the world. Chacalón sang Celeste's first major hit, *Viento*, which is said to have sold close to a million copies and made him the voice of the *provincianos* practically overnight. Chacalón sang with Celeste on and off for a few years but went on to form one of the two most influential *chicha* bands of the 1980s. Grupo Celeste went through a great many personnel changes but remains active to this day. The group is particularly popular in Mexico where its style has had a direct impact on the development of Mexican domestic cumbia.



COMPAY QUINTO

Pancho Acosta was one of the first Peruvian guitarists to specialize in an all-Cuban repertoire, mixing up a surf-like esthetic with *criollo* technique and syncopated Cuban *montunos*. He started his band, Compay Quinto, in 1967, and *El Diablo* remains their most famous tune. Pancho Acosta went on to play with the very popular Los Continentales in the 1980's. To this day Compay Quinto still performs in Lima.



LOS RIBERENOS

Los Ribereños, led by Jhon Beny, is another 60s band which specialized in a mostly Cuban repertoire but gave it what we can, in retrospect, call a *chicha* twist. The music was getting a little more syncretic, with an occasional Andean flavor, but *guaracha* remained its strongest element.



LOS WALKERS

From Huanuco, this band specialized in an instrumental repertoire of well-known songs from Cuba and Peru. Their version of *Siboney* – Cuban composer Ernesto Lecuona's classic – epitomizes the mixture of surf, Cuban influence, and rock, which was to play such a big part on the further development of chicha.



CHACALÓN Y LA NUEVA CREMA

A product of *La Victoria*, one of Lima's poor neighborhoods, Chacalón was born Lorenzo Palacios. One of fifteen children, his parents were migrants from the provinces. For years, he earned a meager living fixing shoes and playing a few gigs here and there – mostly with the help of his brother Chacal, who had already made a name for himself. After scoring a big hit singing with Grupo Celeste, his old friend Jose Luis Carballo, who was then touring with Los Hijos del Sol, convinced him to record with his new group, La Nueva Crema (named after the British group Cream). Producer Juan Campos offered them a deal on his new label Horoscopo. Almost immediately, Chacalón became the voice of the *pueblos jóvenes*. His songs emphasized the urban travails of Andean migrants – the hard work, pride, suffering, and drinking of his fellow *provincianos*. The *Pharaoh of Chicha*, as his fans called him, died in 1994. His funeral was attended by 60,000

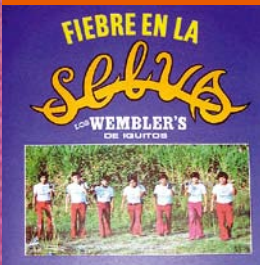
people. Jose Luis Carballo, who wrote a great number of his songs and was responsible for La Nueva Crema's sound, now lives and works in L.A where his own band, La Mermelada, still performs occasionally.

LOS SHAPIS

Los Shapis gave Peruvian *cumbia* a stronger Andean flavor than most of their predecessors. While the musical mix was essentially the same as Manzanita or Los Hijos del Sol, Los Shapis wore their Andean roots as a badge of honor. It defined who they were and where they came from. If Chacalón was a tragedian whose longing for the Andean past had all the *provincianos* in tears, Los Shapis celebrated the Andean heritage with a more joyful enthusiasm - and they were the first to insist on calling the music *chicha*. Band-leader and guitarist Jaime Moreyra drew from rock, tropical music, bolero, and even disco, but always favored Andean sounding pentatonic melodies. Singer Julio Simeón Salguerán, better known as *Chapulín el Dulce*, sang in the *ahuaynado* style of the classic huayno singers, with no trace of the Afro-Cuban *sonero* influence that informed Felix Martinez (of los Destellos and Los Girasoles), Carlos Ramirez (of Los Ilusionistas) or even Chacalón. Los Shapis'



first LP came out in 1981 on Horoscopo and was a huge success. Their first single, El Aguajal, was a traditional *huayno* and instantly set the tone. They became something like the Beatles of *chicha* – complete with a musical film, *Los Shapis en el Mundo de Los Pobres (In the World of the Poor)*, a rags to riches musical fable in which *chicha* (the drink) can give super human powers, cure a hangover, or even fill up your tank. Los Shapis are still popular, playing regularly in Peru and for Peruvian communities around the world. Chapulin's life was just the subject of TV series.



LOS WEMBLERS DE IQUITOS

The Sanchez brothers, who lead Los Wemblers, may not have had the fame of fellow amazonians Juaneco y su Combo or Los Mirlos, but their music symbolizes 1970s Iquitos: a frontier town with one foot in the jungle and the other in an oil well. Iquitos still doesn't have road access, but the 70s oil boom supplied sudden wealth as well as many outlets to dispose of it. *Petroleros* apparently liked to party, and Iquitos provided plenty of places to do just that. La Danza del Petrolero was made famous by Los Mirlos, who used it as one of their signature songs, but Los Wemblers wrote it – and must have encouraged actual oilmen to dance to it every weekend.

Mastered by Scott Hull at Masterdisk

Compilation produced by Olivier Conan

Liner notes by Olivier Conan

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Photos courtesy of Los Shapis, Jose Carballo, Erika Rossi and IEMPSA.

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Original recordings released between 1968 and 1981 on IEMPSA, El Virrey, Sonoradio, Doremi, Discopé, Llerena, Horoscopo and Caracol

