

# Friends draw on diverse backgrounds

The Tejas Brothers combine Texas blues and rock, heavily influenced by Tex-Mex and country

By Tom Geddie

SIX WEEKS AFTER HE FIRST PICKED UP an accordion, Dave Perez got his first gig. It turned into an eight-year engagement with the Los Lupes Tex-Mex restaurant chain — most but not all of that time in the Duncanville location — before a chance encounter led to the founding of the popular Tejas Brothers band.

One night at an open mic at the Stockyards Saloon, Perez hooked up with bass player-vocalist John Garza and the Cochran brothers, Lex on guitar, percussion, and vocals and Danny on drums.

That was five years ago.

The Tejas Brothers released their second CD, *Rich Man*, this year and the first single, “Say It Again,” climbed to #8 on the Texas Music Chart. The second, “This Little Feeling,” jumped from 26 to 17 in September. The band’s also picked up multiple nominations for best live act in Texas in several genres.

The 13 tracks, in their Texas diversity, remind a bit of Doug Sahm without copying the too-gone Texas master.

The consistently solid songs are mostly about love and desire, except for the somewhat haunting and critical “La Madrina,” which translates as “the godmother,” as in godfather; it’s a term used for any of several notorious female drug traffickers, apparently including one who used the name herself, described metaphorically (or not) as a wild-eyed woman with a snake in her hands.

Most of the CD, though, even the lost-love songs, is lighter and pure fun, driven by Perez lively accordion, and even “La Madrina” sounds upbeat.

Even after five years, Perez has a hard time describing the music.

“It’s just inspired by so many different things. I would say it’s just good Texas music, I hope,” he said. “Some of the elements would include Texas blues and Texas rock ‘n’ roll heavily influenced by Tex-Mex and country. I love some of the greatest — Merle Haggard and George Jones and Johnny Cash — and some of the great blues like the Kings — Freddie and Albert. On the conjunto side, Mingo Saldivar from San Antonio was a big influence on the accordion.

## Friends

“TEJAS” TRANSLATES TO “friend,” said to refer back to the days when Spanish explorers en-

influences are the members own backgrounds.

“It’s so hard to list all the biggest influences because there so many,” Perez said. “All four members in the band come from diverse backgrounds and it works because we all are a bunch of good guys. I would trust every single guy in the band with my life.

“We like to work together and get in the van and go wherever we need to go. Sometimes we watch movies, and laugh, and tell stories,” he said. “That’s why the music works so well. The foundation of friendship allows for the musical harmony and chemistry to be built as high as we can take it. The foundation is strong.

## Cochran brothers

DANNY COCHRAN HAS BEEN drumming since the 1970s. He played in bands with Delbert McClinton and Anson Funderburgh and has performed with John Mayall and Dave Mason. He’s also been in a couple of movies, including the odd, semi-classic “Idiocracy.”

Lex Cochran got his first Fender Telecaster under the Christmas tree when he was 12, and has played with a bunch of blues, country, rock, and western swing outfits including the

country Tex-Mex outfit The Lonesome Losers.

## John Garza

GARZA BEGAN PLAYING BASS in the late 1980s and has worked with Pat Boyack and the Prowlers, Holland K. Smith, and The Kenny Traylor Band.

“There’s always going to be so much in common in the different styles, and people want to hear something presented in a different way because a good song is a good song. It’s bigger than us just going out and putting on a good show,” Perez said. “In the audience we might have cowboys and might have somebody coming expecting to see a Tejano band and then learning to appreciate the blues. We seem to bring the audiences together, and it’s cool to see everybody leaving like a big family.”

## Dave Perez

PEREZ GREW UP LISTENING to Tex-Mex and country music.

“Until we formed the Tejas Brothers, you could have asked me who Lightnin’ Hopkins was and I might have guessed he was a meteorologist. When I met Danny and John, some of the stuff they were showing me, wow — I could start hearing the influence from that music in the way they played. It brought us all

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closer,” he said. “The blues is not heavy on an accordion player’s mind, especially somebody raised in traditional Spanish music, but when I got with these guys I knew I’d been missing out.”

The band’s live shows are designed for good times.

“We pour out as much as we physically can,” Perez said. “Whether it’s 10,000 people or a hundred people in a small venue, they are going to get the same show. It puts everybody on the same page — smiling, laughing.

Very rarely do I look out in the audience and see somebody texting; we’ve got their attention. Whatever mood they come in, they are going to be happier when they leave.”

Perez picked up that accordion in 1998 when he was 22 years old, and learned a lot with the Los Lupes gigs most often in Duncanville but also in Irving, Carrollton, and Grand Prairie

“When I played at the restaurants it was such an intimate venue — some of them would hold 200-300 people in one dining room, but the one in Duncanville sat maybe 60 packed — because there was no big PA. It was almost like a living room,” he said.

“The smaller the audience, the more intimate the show, and that helped me fine tune and hone my craft, which is entertaining.”

Perez was an award-winning actor in high school.

“It’s almost like I feel more like myself on the stage than when I’m off the stage and have to adapt to the world,” he said. “On stage, that’s where I feel my most comfortable.”

After that chance encounter with his soon-to-be bandmates at the Stockyards Saloon, Perez spent three more years with the Los Lupes gigs before the band’s schedule “just got too busy” and finally forced him to give it up. He misses it sometimes, but enjoys the bigger stage, too. ■

The Tejas Brothers will perform at Lee Harvey’s on November 12 and December 18 at Love and War in Texas Plano, and the Rodeo Exchange in Fort Worth on December 23.



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