



King Carrasco serves up royal Tex-Mex punch at Club West

King Joe's ready for a jolt of Tex-Mex surf music

By STEPHEN POWELL

Joe "King" Carrasco is a wild and crazy guy. For many in the entertainment business, these features are Hollywood glitz to sell a show. But for Carrasco, the self-appointed monarch of classic Tex-Mex, wild and crazy are inherent personality traits.

Riding the wave of over 250 shows a year, Carrasco and his band The Crowns will be hitting the Santa Fe beach at Club West on Saturday with his special powerhouse brand of Mexican surf music.

Carrasco's most spectacular move is a nose dive into the outstretched hands of an eager audience, a clear indicator of the implicit trust and camaraderie that swiftly builds in a 90-minute set.

Oh, and don't worry folks, if the crowd is willing, encores last as long as the main act.

Carrasco plays a smorgasbord of Latin verve — polkas, cumbias, calypso, salsa, Chicano rock — with a nearly always all-Latin band. And yet the man is a gringo.

Born Joe Teutsch to parents of German descent in Dumas, Texas, Carrasco earned his stage name while playing the *frijole* circuit back in the late '70s.

Named after an infamous Chicano outlaw as the result of a fellow musician's inability to effect a German twang, Carrasco was clear from the start where he wanted to take his music.

"One of my goals in life, and this is a really weird goal, is that through my songs like *Don't Push Your Suerte* and *Vamos a Get Down* I get people to understand the cross-cultural experience of

CLOSE-UP

Who: Joe "King" Carrasco
What: Tex-Mex
When: 9:30 p.m. Saturday
Where: Club West
Tickets: \$7

English and Latin cultures," Carrasco said. "That's where these songs come from, trying to integrate these two cultures."

Latin music broke into the American pop mainstream in 1958 with the Ritchie Valens release of *La Bamba*. Valens, born Ritchie Valenzuela, died tragically a year later in an airplane crash with Texas rockers Buddy Holly and J.R. Richardson, alias The Big Bopper.

But along came a country and blues singer from south Texas named Baldemar Huerta, introduced to the public as Freddy Fender, to pull up the slack.

By the mid-'60s Chicano rock was a full-fledged genre with such Texas bands as Sam "The Sham" Domingo and the Mysterians, and perhaps most famous, Doug Sahm and his Sir Douglas Quintet taking the lead.

An heir to this tradition, Carrasco, like his mentor Sahm, found himself to be an Anglo with a profound love of all things Latin, and in particular, Mexican. Carrasco explains, "There's so much mystery in Latin America that I've become addicted to their culture. When I listen to Latin American music there's a certain spirit to it — the history of the Mayans and Aztecs is all in there. One of the things I like about being down there is the sense of adventure — it's Third World, it's raw, and yet

it's right across the border."

Carrasco further explains how the 1800s influx of German and other European settlers to mine for riches in Mexico and parts of Central and South America affected the culture.

"The *campesinos* heard that music, listened to the polkas and all that and adapted it to their own folk music — that's how the accordion got into their music," Carrasco said.

"Then during the Mexican Revolution, there was a lot of immigration to escape and a lot of those people ended up in San Antonio. Basically, Tex-Mex came out of that," he said.

In the last several years, Carrasco's high octane fun 'n' games have also taken on a more serious side, the result of attending a language school in Managua, Nicaragua in 1985.

With the 1987 Rounder Records release of *Bandido Rock*, Carrasco's outspoken politics are accompanied by his characteristic wit with such song titles as *Fuera Gringo* and *Who Buy the Guns that Kill the Nuns*.

Again, Carrasco cites history to back his act.

"Not many people know it, but *La Cucaracha* was originally a pretty political song about the Mexican Revolution. Protest and politics have always been a force within Latin-American culture and music."

Carrasco has eight albums to his credit and a popularity as strong in France and Switzerland as in his home state.

His last release, *Royal, Loyal and Live* (Rio's Royal Texacali Records, 1990), captures the live side, including a jammed out version of the classic *96 Tears*.