

By Sam Kindrick

Joe Teutsch remembers the date and location well.

It was August 16, 1976, exactly one year to the day before Elvis Presley's August 16, 1977 death.

The location was the old ZAZ Studios, squarely in the middle of San Antonio's West Side.

Occasion for the ZAZ gathering was the recording of Joe Teutsch's very first single, *Tell Me* on the A-side, with *Mescal Road* on the flip.

This was before Dumas, Texas native Joe Teutsch was to morph into Joe King Carrasco, a Tex-Mex icon and Texas Music Hall of Fame member who brought his own brand of *Nuevo Wavo* rock-and-roll to Austin stages during the cosmic cowboy era of the 1970s and 1980s.

Influenced heavily by such Tex-Mex pioneers as Augie Meyers and the late Doug Sahm, accordion whiz Steve Jordan, and Sonny Ozuna, the talented singer, songwriter, and hot-handed guitarist who was to later assume the mantle of Joe King Carrasco remembers that night at ZAZ Studios well.

"I went over there with Speedy Sparks," Joe King recalls. "Man, we had a horn section for that session. Rocky Morales was there. Louie Bustos. Frank Rodarte. Speedy Sparks and Charlie McBirnie. I know we must have consumed at least 15 cases of Schlitz before the recording was done. It was just one of those magical times that come only a few times during a lifetime. My ties to San Antonio have always been strong."

Here last month for a rousing performance at Casbeers, Joe King Carrasco Teutsch was interviewed at

length about his life with three Jack Russell terriers on the beautiful beaches of Puerto Vallarta, Mexico where he now lives most of the time.

A true character who says he works for pesos and shrimp tacos in the beach bars along the 70-mile long Puerto Vallarta bay area, Joe King is no peon in a vast entertainment world which has carried the acclaimed king of Tex-Mex all over Europe, Central and South America, and Canada.

He is a movie actor, movie producer, member of the Texas Music Hall of Fame, and a former MTV host who has recorded with Michael Jackson and the Texas Tornadoes. Joe King has appeared on Saturday Night Live, been interviewed extensively by Rolling Stone Magazine, and he has recorded some 14 CDs, all available at Joeking.com.

As for his fanciful stage name, Joe King Carrasco Teutsch admits that the fatal and headline-grabbing prison break attempt in the 1970s by drug kingpin Fred Carrasco might have figured into his eventual "crowning."

Joe King said, "I started hanging out in Mexico when I was 17, and I was playing around with a bunch of conjunto bands when Carrasco tried to bust out of prison. The name Carrasco was everywhere, and some musicians started jokingly calling me Carrasco. I was sorta looking for a special name, a royalty thing like Sir Doug and Lord August (Augie Meyers' first stage handle), and I was thinking about Count Carrasco when my friend Joe Nick Patoski started insisting I call myself King Carrasco. I wanted Count, Joe Nick wanted King, and he fi-

nally won out. I became Joe King Carrasco."

Patoski is a noted freelance Austin writer who has penned articles for Texas Monthly and sundry other publications in the Lone Star State. And the Patoski touch may be evident in some of Joe King's press hype which includes this interesting passage:

Several years ago, "His Majesty" took a few left turns at Nogales and wound up playing with his band at a bar called Pancho y Lefty's in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. There the Tex-Mex fell into a slow cool cumbia/reggae groove. This style seemed to be the musical answer to what Joe had been searching for from the Mayan pyramids to the shores of Lake Titicaca. This mystical combination of Latino and Caribbean, with a little bit of Sam The Sham thrown in for a spicy flavor, has evolved into a style Joe has termed "Tequila Reggae."

As usual, Joe was wound tight for his local show last month, jumping through the crowd and across the dance floor with guitar in hand, and while the driving rhythm definitely had a south seas quality to it, I detected a sound in Carrasco's nimble guitar picking which had a distinctive Willie Nelson resemblance.

Then it hit me. Carrasco picks a guitar with gut strings as Nelson has been known to do on many occasions. It's a different and distinctive sound.

The next Carrasco show at Casbeers will be in December, the exact date to be announced.

With a platter of Casbeers enchiladas under his nose, and his Jack Russell female

Anna helping him clean the plate, Joe King mused about music labels, his love for dogs, the melding of West Texas country with Mexican and South American political songs, and what he calls an enduring love for Mexican slang.

"Call it what you like," Joe King says. "It's Tequila Reggae and it's Nuevo Wavo and plain old Mexican rock-and-roll. And there's country in it, too, although I'm not exactly known for country music. I was born in Dumas in North Texas, and I grew up there and in California where I spent some early years before coming back to Austin to play music. You can't ride the roads of Texas as long as I have without having some country in your soul. And I guess some of mine comes out in the sound track of my new movie which is being released this fall."

Titled *Rancho No Tengo* (a ranch I do not have), the film is about love in a trailer park between a long-haired and middle-aged cat in a cowboy hat and a damsel half his age.

Although Joe King Carrasco has acted in countless independent films over the years, many of them shot in the Austin area, this represents his first directed feature, and the soundtrack for *Rancho No Tengo* is being released with the movie this fall.

"There is country music in the soundtrack," Carrasco smiles. "This is a sort of western in a trailer park. And I think I will have a part in an upcoming movie titled *No Mexicans or Dogs Allowed*, but I don't have all the details on this one yet."

In 1978, and after that initial recording experience with San Antonio's West Side

Horns and others, Joe released an LP titled *Tex-Mex Rock & Roll* with his first band El Molino. This record made it to England where it was re-released by Big Beat Records.

By 1980, Joe Teutsch was Joe King Carrasco, and with his new band, The Crowns, he released that group's first single titled *Party Weekend* and things really began to pop.

The band became one of the first American groups signed by England's legendary Stiff Records, and there followed Rolling Stone acclaim, Saturday Night Live, a tour with a British-born Jamaican band called The Equators (where Joe picked up a lot of his reggae influence) and an eventual contract with MCA where he had Michael Jackson, the king of pop, singing background harmonies on his album *Synapse Gap*.

After living and studying in Nicaragua in the mid 1980s, Joe's music took on an even greater Latin influence. Activist albums dealing with unjust politics of the times in Central America included *Bordertown*, *Bandido Rock*, *Dia De Los Muertos*, and *Royal Loyal & Live*.

With a blistering guitar style and a penchant for the wild and sometimes bizarre, Joe King thrilled Austin crowds during the 1980s with what became known as the "Carrasco Leap of Faith."

With drums rolling and cymbals crashing, Joe King's signature finale to most shows included him running and hurling his body head-first off of some elevated stage and into the arms of his faithful fans.

Without fail, they always managed to catch him before his neck was broken or his brains splashed out on some concrete floor like the one at

Armadillo World Headquarters, although Joe concedes that he might have suffered some minor head trauma which is only now making itself manifest.

"I'm 53 years of age now," Joe King laughs. "But I stopped diving off stages when my business contractor told me to stop it."

Joe King has a hearing problem. A doctor asked if he had shot skeet or fired shotguns for other reasons over the years.

"It wasn't guns that hurt my hearing," Joe said. "It was drums and cymbals."

When living in the United States, Joe King and his three Jack Russell terriers--Anna, Peanut, and Peewee--can be found in an adobe cabin on eight acres of Hill Country turf just outside of Llano.

This represents about two months out of every year, for Joe King lives the rest of the time in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico where he has returned to his roots and some faithful musician friends in a popular beach band known as The PV Allstars.

Fronted by Corpus Christi native Roy Hollingshead on vocals and drums, and including former San Antonio saxman Gil Herman and Puerto Vallarta native Mike Cervantes on bass, the PV Allstars just needed Joe King Carrasco to become the hottest band on the coast of Mexico.

Carrasco said Hollingshead, who was with him at the Casbeers gig, first urged him to join the PV Allstars.

"It's a good life and I love it," says Carrasco. "We work about five nights a week in some 10 clubs that line a couple of bays in the Puerto Vallarta area. I guess you might say that I work for pesos and shrimp tacos, but that's what attracted me to

Mexico in the first place. I was hanging out in Mexico when I was 17 years of age, learning the language and playing with musicians who were a lot like some of the old players you once found on the San Antonio Riverwalk. And not just mariachis, but musicians who played standards as well. They were in it more for the music than for the money, and I guess I'm still that way today.

"In Puerto Vallarta I have everything I need. I have an apartment with a manager who allows me to keep the dogs in my sleeping quarters, and I can get my car fixed, my computer overhauled, and all the shrimp tacos I can eat within five minutes from my apartment."

Joe King says nothing that happens in Puerto Vallarta "goes on your permanent record." But on a more serious note, he says that at 3 or 4 in the morning it's just you and the cops out there on the streets.

"I keep everything really straight, and because of my dogs, I go out of my way not to make waves or cause any friction," Carrasco said. "I carry plastic bags and clean up the poop where ever I go. I'm really fastidious about the dog scene."

Although Joe King Carrasco's relationship with three Jack Russell terriers might seem a mite extreme to some, the bond between man and dogs strikes a note deep within my soul. As a Jack Russell owner myself (I now have 6-month-old pups Henry and Annie), I am still enduring the pain and grief from the loss of Petey the Wonder Dog, my 17-year-old Jack Russell who passed from this earth in May.

A musician who smuggles his Jacks into hotel rooms, restaurants, and supermar-

kets in ventilated sacks hanging around his neck and across his back makes perfectly good sense to me. What is there not to love about Joe King Carrasco?

As Petey's kidneys began to fail during his final days on this earth, I simply spread a rain slicker across the bed and kept my sleeping partner in his customary spot until his last day and the final goodbye.

"A lot of people just can't understand," Joe King said. "I have a son by a former marriage, and there have been numerous girlfriends through the years. But I guess none of them were really keen on sharing the bed with me, Peewee, Anna and Peanut all at the same time. So for now, it's just me and the Jack Russells. The dogs need me and I guess I need them as well."

At the annual Puerto Vallarta all-breeds dog show this past year, Joe King's Jacks swept the costume division.

"I had them all dressed in sombreros and serapes," he laughed. "They were the hits of the show."

Carrasco also hauls his dogs to the Jack Russell terrier field trials in Brenham and other Jack Russell outings in Texas.

"I was here last winter playing a fundraiser for Kinky Friedman," Joe King said. "I hope Kinky runs for governor again. If he does, I'll damn sure be back to help support him."

"A lot of people don't know the real Kinky. They see a comic and musician puffing on a big cigar, but what they fail to recognize is a man who has literally saved the lives of hundreds of dogs.

"Kinky's campaign people missed a bet in not playing heavier on his wonderful love for animals and the animal rescue ranch he runs near

Utopia. I carried seven stray dogs to him and he took them all in without a question. He saves dogs and he loves every single one of them with all his heart. Hell yes, Kinky Friedman would make a great governor.”

Come to think of it, Joe King Carrasco would get my vote if he never decided to throw his sombrero in the ring, and I’ll back Kinky if he decides to make another gubernatorial run.

Great musicians and comics the likes of Kinky Friedman and Joe King Carrasco are few and far between, but world-class showmen who display real love of a faithful dog are true rarities in this nasty old world.

Joe King will probably be playing Casbeers again sometime in December.

“It’s the only San Antonio place I play,” says Joe King Carrasco Teutsch. “And the only place to get real Tex-Mex enchiladas. They ain’t got nothing like Casbeers enchiladas down in Puerto Vallarta.”