

FROM PAGE 20

ted recording in January 1986 and continued right through the year, with short breaks for some one-off dates like Farm Aid and some festivals," says Perez. These sessions took place under some heavy pressure.

"It is a weird situation when the press are very high on the band, the live shows are selling out everywhere, and someone comes and tells you the last record didn't sell nearly enough. It's like, where did we go wrong in doing right!"

"Speaking broadly, it was a question of how much of an exotic flavour were we going to let in. We had some traditional tunes and we had some that were written very open-ended. We could have stuck Mexican passages on just about all of them, but that would have been pandering to a certain part of our audience that sees us as exotic, as outside the mainstream.

"Along about this time, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Robert Cray [both good friends of Los Lobos] were happening, and there were strong, company-affiliated suggestions that we move the blues more to the fore. At the same time, myself and David Hidalgo had written some stuff that leaned towards R&B, so we had plenty of directions to choose from."

Again critically acclaimed (except by those British poseurs), *By the Light of the Moon* didn't sell as well as anticipated, and it is to be hoped that the phenomenal success of 'La Bamba' will focus new attention on that strong, original album.

Undervalued

So here we be. Late '87 and Los Lobos' own material is sadly undervalued, yet they're now chart-topping popstars — an 18

year long overnight success!

When long-held plans for a film bio of Richie Valens finally came to fruition, Los Lobos were the logical choice for the crucial soundtrack. David Hidalgo's sweet, melodic voice proved a more than able substitute for Valens' on new versions of his old hits (the originals were sonically sub-par), so they're his vocals you hear coming from the mouth of lead actor Lou Diamond Phillips.

Turns out Los Lobos have long been fervent fans of Valens' music. "It was always around," recalls Hidalgo. "His songs were staples as we were playing weddings. You'd never get through a gig without doing 'La Bamba' at least once, y'know. But it wasn't until the mid-70s that we started to look into his career and see who he really was, how important he was. I think it is a great thing someone has finally done this movie."

"When I started to dig up his records, I found out he was only 17 when he died, that his whole career was only eight months long, and that he wrote most of the stuff he performed. Amazing!"

Irony

It's a fascinating irony that Valens himself couldn't speak Spanish fluently. His racial background was down-played in his career; his manager, for instance, insisted he change his name from Richard Valenzuela to the whiter-sounding Valens. His ascent to role model for Chicano youth has come posthumously.

As Hidalgo acknowledges, "Richie inspired a whole lot of people. I guess it is like he is passing the baton to us. I'd like to think or hope we have a positive influence on people; that we inspire them to go out and do things."

Interestingly, Valens didn't write 'La Bamba,' arranging and adapting it from a traditional Mexican song, but such a move in the 50s was radical and courageous. As well as the Valens songs Los Lobos performed for the soundtrack album, the band worked on instrumental tunes for the score. "They were done in the traditional Mexican style," says Hidalgo. "We worked with Carlos Santana on certain scenes, and he contributed some ideas. We brought out all the old acoustic instruments and pieced together a few songs. It was great working with Carlos."

As for the Valens hits, Hidalgo found it "hard to do the most familiar songs like 'Donna,' especially to get the inflections right. I'm real proud of how it turned out." The fact that the soundtrack LP, not just the infectious 'La Bamba' single, is rocketing up the charts testifies to the authentic feel Los Lobos imparted.

Along with ex-Stray Cat Brian Setzer and Marshall Crenshaw, Los Lobos were given a cameo in *La Bamba*, playing the house band in a plushly decadent house of ill-repute in the wild city of Tijuana.

Inheritors

The success of *La Bamba*, the song and the movie, confirms the claim made to me by writer/director Luis Valdez, North America's top Chicano playwright. "There's a new attitude through the country generally in re-

gards to Hispanic artists. It is more than a coincidence that Los Lobos ended up doing the soundtrack.

"They're the spiritual ancestors of Richie Valens' legacy, as are the other Latin rock and pop artists since the 50s. These artists, looking back, have created the image of Richie as a Hispanic."

Since the 50s, the whole concept of "ethnic consciousness" has taken root in the US. Nobody dares tell the guys in Los Lobos to change their names to sound more Anglo, less Mexican-American!

Which is not to suggest that there are not battles still to be fought. Los Lobos have long resisted attempts to tag them a political band, but they are eloquently addressing the problems faced by their people.

The "land of the free, home of the brave" has all too often been both cowardly and repressive in dealing with Latin-American migrants, legal and illegal, and Los Lobos haven't hesitated to address this:

"All searching for the promised land

Tired souls with empty hands

Asking to themselves, is this all there is?"

— 'Is This All There Is?'

A band that can make you smile, sing and dance one minute, think and cry the next, is all too rare a commodity in contemporary rock 'n' roll.

This Wolf will survive. This Wolf will prosper!

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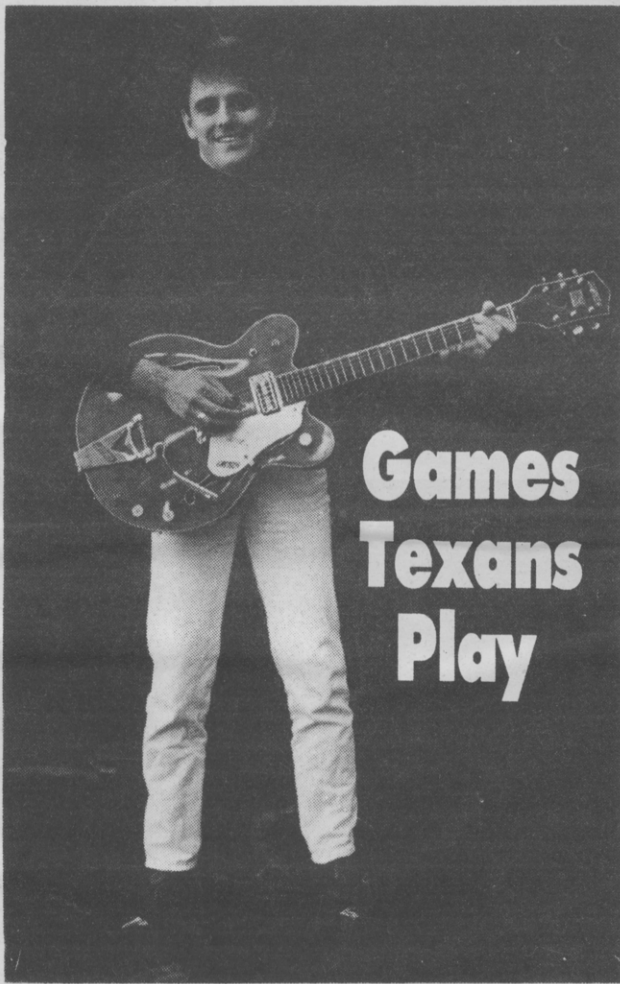
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Tex Pistol plays 'The Game of Love.'

A pistol shot rang out in the middle of the night. That could only mean one thing: Tex was back.

But things were different. Opening the door I sleepily noticed he'd put his faithful palomino out to pasture: Tex was leaning against a shining Falcon ("anything less than a V8 is a compromise") with a broad grin on his face.

"I've got a new record to play you," he said, forcing his way inside and commandeering my windup. Oh dear. Would this be another 'Ballad of Buckskin Bob,' universally acclaimed but widely ignored? Radio listeners never got a chance to decide for themselves whether 'Bob' was too country for the pop fans, or too country for the pop fans.

I'd thought that'd be the end of Tex, but last year's Music Awards only encouraged him with the award for most promising vocalist.

Instantly, the simple riff of the new song was familiar: "The purpose of a man is to love his woman..." "That's 'The Game of Love,' by Wayne Fontana and the Mindbenders!" I said. "But it's not country!"

"Nope," said Tex, "but it's set every hoedown and barn dance I've played at alight! All these turkeys out there doing dodgy covers, I thought I'd show 'em how. The Angels and the Animals! The Pet Shop Boys and Dusty Spittle! My God!"

I could see Tex's trigger finger

was beginning to shake, so I flipped the disc over. The soothing sounds of pedal steel and western swing relaxed him. "Ah, Bob Wills," he rhapsodised. "That's Warratah Wayne on the 88s, the finest honky tonker in the country."

But suddenly the house started to shake. "This is 'W11 to Whangaroa Bay!'" Tex shouted over the litany of local colour. It sounded like Route 66 to Glendowie to me, Dave Edmunds rips this joint, with Dr John's famous lick tinkling away.

"We've made a video of 'The Game of Love,'" said Tex, "it's made by a young buck from Wellington: Paul Middleditch, just 19 and a swag of *Spot On* film awards under his belt. I must say I was mighty perturbed by his manner, he's an upfront young dude, and I've dealt with a lot of film turkeys making spaghetti westerns. But on the day he was tireless, with great ideas: not a venetian blind in sight."

"I'm playing hired gun for the Warratahs — Trevor de Clean's picked them up for his Pagan breed too."

In a flash, Tex was gone, and I was left playing 'The Game of Love.' Who was that masked man?

Chris Bourke