

Ruben “El Gato Negro” Ramos and Alberto “Skeeter” Amesquita sat down in the little chairs over to the side of the room, ignoring the three sofas in the office. “El Gato Negro” kept his sunglasses on, presumably to avoid the glare of the fluorescent lights.

When they entered the room, I could see how he might have gotten the name “El Gato Negro” – my heart began to flutter a bit in the presence of these two tall *Mexicanos* who were obviously used to commanding attention. *El Gato Negro* was actually the name of one of his more successful songs, and the nickname stuck.

Although he mentioned once or twice that he never had any musical talent, Ruben Ramos must be pretty good to have been asked to join with David Hildago and Cesar Rosas (of Los Lobos), rocker Joe Ely, Freddy Fender, Flaco Jimenez, and Rick Trevino, as they produced their Grammy-award winning album *Los Super Seven*. Mr. Ramos was born into a musical family. His uncles were all musicians in the early 1900’s, their *orquesta* playing big band music all around Texas.

When his sister Inez took off for Austin, tired of working in the fields picking cotton with the rest of the family, she joined up as a singer for their band. She encouraged her five brothers to become involved in the family music business, and eventually her brother Alfonso formed his own Orchestra. Mr. Ramos first played maracas with them, then drums from time to time until Alfonso fired his regular drummer.

Mr. Ramos’s step into the musical career of a drummer happened at that point – he was 17 years old with a job as a lens grinder when his brother asked him to officially join the band. They were on the bill with *El Indio* Isidoro Lopez, playing in Lockhart, Texas.

Even though the Alfonso Ramos Orchestra was wildly popular on a national basis, Alfonso eventually decided to commit more time to family than to touring. Their brother Rogelio (Roy) formed The Mexican Revolution in 1970, playing Tejano music to a national and international audience.

Mr. Ramos joined up with The Mexican Revolution as vocalist. He had come a long way from that initial gig as the band’s drummer. Eventually he found himself “trying to sing and keep the beat...eventually I got it”. That was when he took over the “rock” sound for Alfonso, which prepared him for becoming the lead man of the Revolution.

Mr. Ramos says they play Tejano music, but it is not the same Tejano that has been popularized on the radio. The band incorporates all kinds of music: *polka*, *bolero*, *danzón*, calypso, Earth Wind & Fire...

Trumpet player “Skeeter” Amesquita looks forward to singing the popular ‘70s tune “Brick House” at their shows. He remembers being in high school at Johnston High in East Austin in the ‘70s, listening to all that “great music”.

In other words, they have more to offer than many of the other Tejano groups out there, but then they’ve been around a bit longer, and been exposed to a bit more. Skeeter says

that since they were bi-lingual they were doing everything that the other popular bands were doing those days, and more.

Now they are more focused on the music than ever before. That, and being a positive role model. “I really praise God – I mean I’m not a saint. I’m a little devil sometimes.” But Mr. Ramos stresses to his fans that it is important to be a positive role model, especially for your own children. Parents have to get involved, go to PTA meetings and school plays. Keep their kids in school. They have to vote, they have to make the voice of Latinos heard in the government.

Maybe that is one of the reasons they were happy to meet us at the office of Cine Las Americas in Johnston High School – The Revolution is working towards scheduling a mini-concert there and possibly at other area high schools, organized by Cine Las Americas and the Austin Latino Music Association. The missions for both organizations deal with finding new ways to keep kids interested in school and to consider going to college: Cine Las Americas through media and film, Austin Latino Music Association through music.

Ruben Ramos and the Revolution with Special Guest Alfonso Ramos will play for a general Austin audience on Tuesday December 11, 2001, as the third guest in Austin Latino Music Association’s *Sonidos Del Barrio* series. *Sonidos Del Barrio* will be taped for television and viewed at a later date on Austin Music Network and nationwide. The event begins right at 8pm at Miguel’s La Bodega, 415 Colorado Street. Admission is \$10 at the door.

Samantha is a freelance writer and supporter of the arts, especially through her work with Cine Las Americas.