

Transcript of Lucho Clip from Don Randel's Oral History Interview

Well, the other thing I learned principally, which will be interesting to a number of the people who are interested in the community you're making a history of, I learned to play the Hammond Organ from a guy named Lucho Azcarraga...Lucho was the single most popular musician in Panama and the Canal Zone. If you wanted to give a party guaranteed to be a success, you hired Lucho. And he played for Panamanian parties, and he played at the Panama Hilton, but he also played at the Officers Club in the Canal Zone...When U.S. Army and Air Force personnel left Panama, sometimes got assigned to Fort Bragg in particular, and so Lucho would get hired to go to Fort Bragg and play once in a while. Anyway, my father—and Lucho didn't take any students. He never taught anybody. And my father cornered him somehow and persuaded him to give me lessons. But Lucho also play the accordion and my father's idea was that I should learn to play the accordion. So, on one of our trips to the States, where we would fly to Miami, because that was the closest point to Panama, stayed at the Towers Hotel right near the main drag of Miami, went to a music store, and bought an accordion. Well, I was already playing the piano by then and I knew a certain amount of music theory which facilitated playing the organ. So, I had a couple of accordion lessons in Miami in a hotel while we stayed there for a couple of weeks, and I learned to play "Peg O'My Heart" and "Moon Over Miami" and stuff like that. So, we go back to the Panama with this accordion, and my father wants Lucho to teach me the accordion, because Lucho could play all kinds of stuff. So, Lucho comes to the house. My father, in the meantime, had bought a Spinet Hammond Organ, a little one, had only one octave of pedals in the base, had two keyboards, however, but not full size. And so, I had fooled around a bit. And then, of course, had the piano there, which I play. So, Lucho comes to the house, and he says, okay, play me something on the accordion. And so, I played "Peg O'My Heart" probably, which I thought I could play reasonably well. And he says, okay, now play me something on the piano. I don't remember what I played on the piano, if it was classic or not. He said, okay, play me something on the organ. Well, I had only fooled around on the organ by myself, but so I played something on the organ, he said, okay, I'm gonna teach you the organ. And that's how it all began, and I would have my lessons with him, after the first couple at the house, in the bar of the Panama Hilton Hotel because there was a full-size organ there, and he had a radio broadcast every noon from that bar. So, my lessons, for the most part, especially in summer, when I wasn't in school, would be at 8 o'clock in the morning, in the Panama Hilton bar. My father would drop me off on his way to his office and leave me there. Lucho would show up, teach me something. It was—a lot of it by ear, but a lot of it I'd have the melody written out and the chords, but nothing more than that. And so, he's play something for me. We would, if we had the music, look at that, he'd say, okay, you got it, and I'd say, yeah, I think I got it. He'd say, okay, I'll be back later. And I would sit there and practice these things all morning while the bartenders took stock. I used to know the language of how they measure how much was left in this bottle of model of whatever. And then, by late morning, some of the bar customers would start to show up to take part. And then he would come back just before his, radio broadcast to see how I was doing, and so I'd play for him. And he had an extraordinary ear. I'd play something, and in the middle of it he'd say, no, B flat in the base. And so, by that method anyway, I learned to play the organ...I had a little combo with Lucho's son, Chipi, Chipi Azcarraga, played the maracas and miscellaneous other things, percussion instruments, and a classmate, Chipi was just a year or two younger, a classmate of mine Edgar Ameglio played the drums, the tumba, Conga drum, sort of thing. So, the three of us constituted a little combo. Sometimes we added another one of Chipi's relatives. In

carnival season we played a lot. In one year, at least one year, I don't know we probably did it more than once, the Canal Zone organized a big float in the carnival parade. You might have seen a picture of that, and so my combo and I were on that float. We had a generator hooked up by the Canal Zone Electrical Division which could do all kinds of stuff. So, they put a little generator on there to run the organ and girls in polleras, this Panamanian dress, and guys in montunos were on this float in the main carnival day parade, and us playing music.