



# *The Costeño*

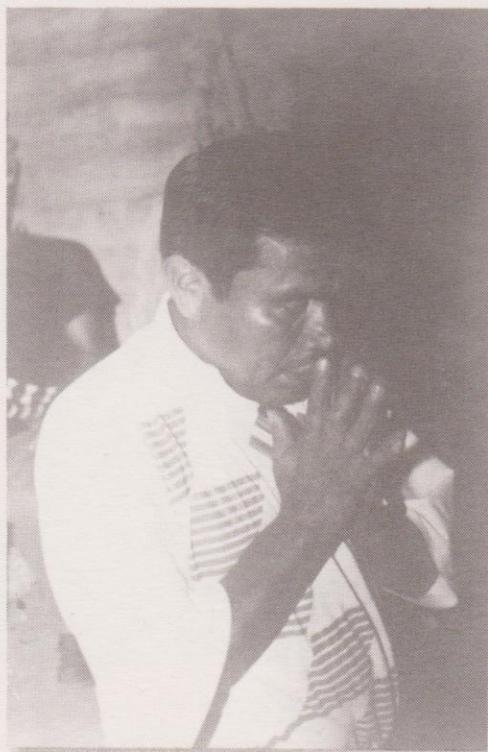
*Livestock as a dance symbol in  
Guatemala*



*Carlos René García Escobar*

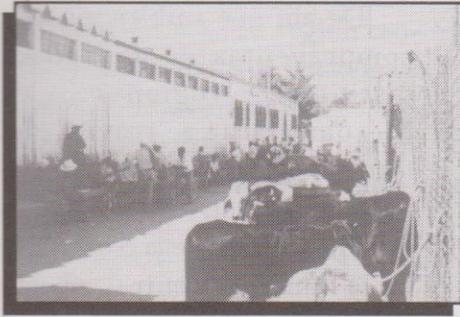


Scene of the *Costeño* dance in *Rabinal, Baja Verapaz*  
Residence of Julio Sánchez. At the back, seated, Juan  
Alvarado presided over it saintly  
Photography: Guillermo Alfredo Vásquez Gonzáles.



Mr. Julio Sánchez Cuxun,  
Owner and representative of the *Costeño* Dance of  
*Rabinal, Baja Verapaz.*  
Photography: Guillermo Alfredo Vásquez Gonzáles.





# The Costeño

## Livestock as a dance symbol In Guatemala

**A**s one of the most popular dances in *Rabinal B.V.* we have

listed this “traditional dance”, which has been practiced for many decades in the valley of *Urram* or *Samaneb*, which culturally includes the municipalities of *Cubulco* and *San Miguel Chicaj*, places where occasionally and for their leading livestock fairs, of which *Rabinal* is the most famous and crowded one, cattlemen arrive from distant regions (*Zacapa* and *Cobán*, for example) to show their livestock for comparison with the livestock of the locals. This is an economic and cultural fact that has existed since colonial period, such as the oral tradition and the chronicles reveal for the entire region.

So, there is no doubt, then, that one of the most important factors in the economy of Mesoamerica during the colonial period and up to the present day, in addition to agriculture, is cattle raising, which remains as one of the most important sectors of the

economic system of the internal subsistence and the export of its products, meat, and handicrafts, in the territories that today make up the Republic of Guatemala. In this regard, the historian Ernesto Chinchilla Aguilar tells us:

*“During the colonial period, the vital branch of cattle breeding production had relatively little development, as were leather, fur, and yarn, due to the difficulty that existed for its exportation.*

*Nevertheless, it is necessary to recognize that the livestock reached a certain interdevelopment, since Hernán Cortes in 1525 sent his service money and jewels in a ship, with other people to be returned to him, from Cuba to the Trujillo port: supplies, livestock of all kinds, and diverse plants, to accommodate ground and ennoble it with them.”<sup>1</sup>*

During the colony period, as stated above, the livestock began to be imported from the Caribbean Sea, via Puerto Caballos in Honduras, and very soon into the American lands that were

taken advantage of by livestock of all kinds brought from Europe which, since this moment had turned into an essential element for the everyday life of its residents. This is what Bernal Díaz Del Castillo is referring to when he tells:<sup>2</sup>

*“...and now raise livestock of all kinds and dominate oxen ..... In addition to this, every powerful chief owns horses and is rich, they bring cages with good saddles and walk through the cities and villas, ... and even though in some towns they play cañas, run bullfights, and play sortija”*

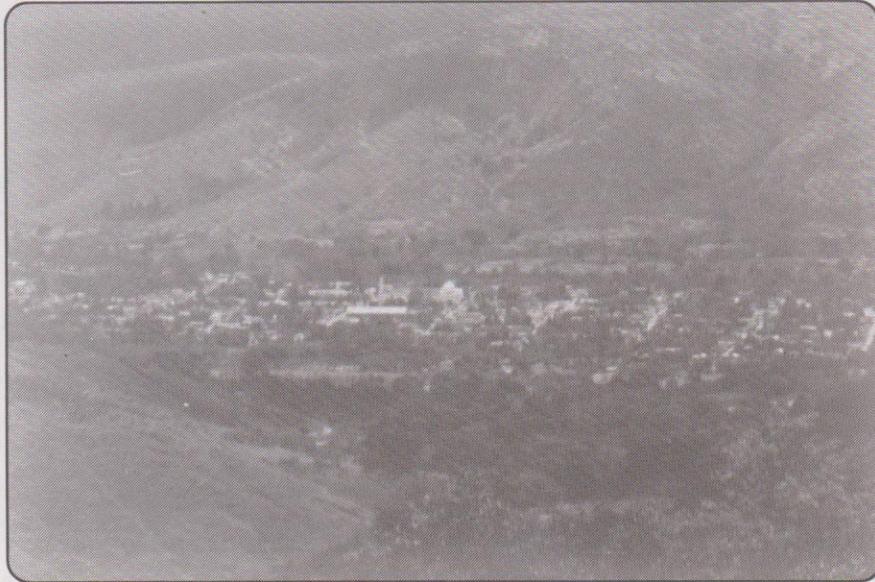
Chinchilla states that cattle breeding increased in a supernatural way that:

*“Even the Indigenous people were owners of some herds, and they asked for “irons and marks” to forge them, as was customary among landowners”<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Chinchilla Aguilar, Ernesto. **Blasones y Heredades.** S.I.S.G. Tipografía Nacional, Guatemala. 1984. Pág. 460-461.

<sup>2</sup> Díaz Castillo, Bernal. **Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España.** Cap. CCIX. Edit. Porrúa, S.A. Núm. 5 México, 1983. Pág. 582.

<sup>3</sup> Op. Cit. p. 462.



*Panoramic view of the Municipal city of Rabinal, Baja Verapaz,  
from the highway to the Municipal city of el Chol, Baja Verapaz  
April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021*

*Photography Guillermo Vásquez*

The *Estancias* were the first economic units of production in the XVI century, dedicated to the raising and exploitation of large and small livestock. Taking in account the point of view we are researching in this document, it is known that just in the valley of San Jerónimo, B.V. for example, close to the *Rabinal*, in colonial period existed seven different stays for the purpose.

*The importance of these results are relevant, since they oversaw the breeding and necessary maintenance of animals, both for the food diet of the population, as well to be used as driving force at work, transportation, move mills, etc., at the same time that its derivatives were used as: tallow for the production of candles and soaps, skin for pouches, saddlery, shoemaking, etc., which of course, gave the possibility that its marketing, both internally and externally.*<sup>4</sup>

Chinchilla Aguilar also informs us that, although the increase in the cattle breeding took place at the surroundings of Santiago of Guatemala, the zones where cattle breeding was developed were mainly at the south and east of Guatemala, El Salvador, in Honduras, and in Nicaragua, that amply provided solutions for the emerging needs of the population, for example, the permanent consumption of beef, milk, cheese, tallow, etc. and whose tanneries satisfied the garment manufacturing, furniture, and leather goods, as was mentioned above. For other, the indigenous, mulattos, and brown developed their abilities in the rodeos “*beating the beefs clean-handed, to shoe them, castrate theme or simply tame them*”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Castillo Galindo, Justo Adalberto **Una aproximación histórica de la Hacienda San Jerónimo: de la colonia a fines del siglo XIX.** Tesis para obtener el grado de Licenciatura de Historia. Escuela de Historia, USAC. Guatemala, 1989. Págs. 16-19 y ss.

Thus, the sales and purchases of livestock were carried out in various regions of Mesoamerica through the social phenomenon known as the cattle or cattle-raising fares. The cattle came from the north coast of Central America, specially from Puerto Caballos, and were later distributed throughout Center America from the places mentioned above. Is the case that the root cause of the introduction and proliferation of livestock in a new life order with new cultural training customs was incremented in these regions. Along with the livestock fairs, proliferated the *bull riding events, Palenque or cockfights, chicken or duck pulling contest, ribbon races, bullfights*<sup>6</sup> and was developed the general domestication and exploitation of livestock, as well as the worship to the images of their Christian patrons was constituted as an indispensable element in the process of their religious symbolization for their sacred rites and for popular amusement. In this sense is that the dances that recall the Spanish bullfights and other similar ones aimed at social coexistence through the praise of the animal, the bull, assimilating as a new nahual in regional cosmogony. (Horse was in a similar circumstance, it was introduced by the invading Spanish at the

<sup>5</sup> Op. Cit. pp. 466.

<sup>6</sup> Dary Fuentes, Claudia. **Fiestas Tradicionales del Oriente de Guatemala.** Bol. La Tradición Popular, No. 98. CEFOL-USAC. Guatemala. 1994. 20 pp.



battle of 1524). The central region of the Republic of Guatemala which includes the departments of Chimaltenango, Sacatepéquez, Guatemala, Baja Verapaz and El Progreso, as well as the southern department, especially in Escuintla, and in

general the entire territory that today is known as Guatemala contributed, during the colonial time, to the increase of bull, bovine, cattle, equine, and mule livestock in all its splendor. In the case of the *Rabinal*, the cattle ranches of the families Perdomo and Grijalva placed between the regions of *Cubulco* and *Pantzuj* were famous.<sup>7</sup>

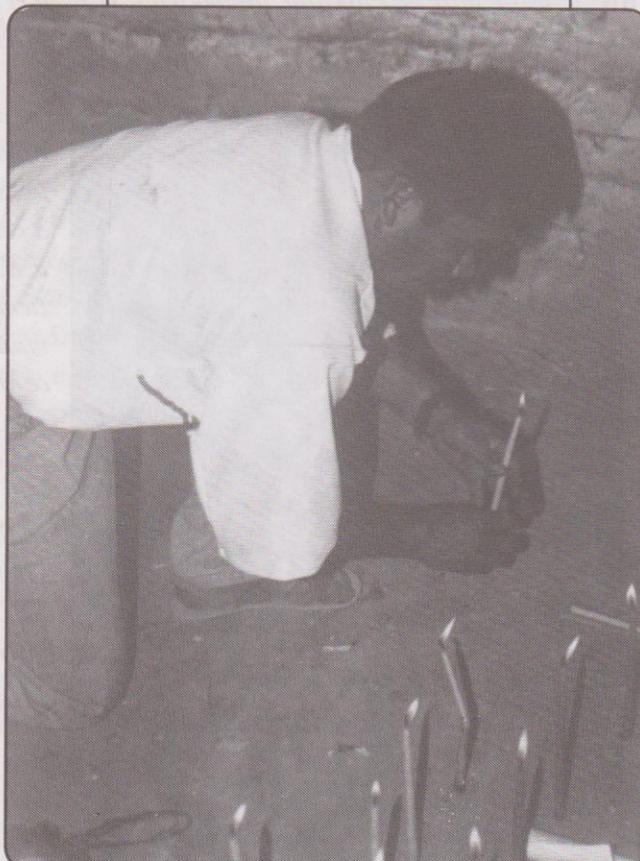
From there the arose of the symbolic representation in a theatrical and dance performances, dances like *Toritos*, (central valley), *La Vaca Mora* (Southwest coast), **The Costeño** (Baja Verapaz), *Los Cuatro*

*Toros* (Escuintla), *Los Negritos* (Sololá), *El Torito Pinto y La Caballera* (Oriente), *La Catarina* (Alta Verapaz), *El Toro Ruch* (Joyabaj, Quiché), *La Vaca* (Petén), and *De Mexicanos y de Vaqueros* (Occidente).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Personal information of Mr. **Francisco Mendoza**, from the Rabinal, rural technician in health.

<sup>8</sup> García Escobar, Carlos René. **Atlas Danzario de Guatemala**. CEFOL-DIGI-USAC-EDIT. CULTURA. Guatemala, 1996. Págs. 92-96.

Bullfighting, -bullfighting spectacle- were introduced by the Spanish, and had a glorious period in Guatemala during the colonial and XIX centuries. Even recently, in the fifties of the XX century,



Initiation blessing ritual for masks uses in the Costeño dance, by Mr. Julio Sánchez  
April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2001  
Photography: Guillermo Vásquez

Bullfights were practiced in the style of Spanish paraphernalia in the city of Guatemala.

But was from those ancient times where the practice of a special dance arose, thanks to this exhibition, **The Costeño**, the one we will learn later on, reflects ancient customs and environment livestock fairs from ancient days, celebrated in what today is known as

the old towns of *Baja Verapaz*, especially in the *Rabinal*.

As the *Costeño* may constitute the most popular traditional dance in this region,

here we present the approximate research to the anthropological and historical interiorities that set the scene of the customs of deeper roots in the interior of the country for us, *livestock fairs* that means, the exhibition and purchase and sale of the same.

The information was kindly provided by his owner and representative, principal of the brotherhood of St. Peter, and the ceramic artisan, Mr. **Julio Sánchez Cuxun**, who would give us the opportunity to document together with a team of researchers from de Center of Folkloric Studies, in the sound recording (Lic. **Fernando López**), in photography

photography (Assistant **Guillermo Vázquez González**), and in the videotaping (Assistant **Jairo Cholotío**) in his residence the dance representation of the *Costeño*.

The description continues at the transcription elaborated by the author of Mr. Julio voice, as the producer of the interviews sustained with him, at the



process of such field research that were made in June 2000 (for the celebration of the Corpus Christi), January 2001 (for the main celebration of Saint Pul), and on April 28-29 and 30<sup>th</sup> 2001 (for the celebration of the Holy Cross). A biographic summary of his relationship with the dance that he organizes, administrates, and represents

represents, as a brief life history was also included.

### Organization

*"When I present the dance, I must feed the dancer for five days, from the first tamales, the cosonik [traditional Guatemalan food], it could also be the first presentation, after on the holy day of guaim, later at the holy day of velación, on the eve, and on the very day. At the case that the dance is presented for five each character must have two people, that means in total are 24 dancers, plus three marimba's players, and the cahauxel who adds devotion, that means that he places the dancer's tealights, so nothing bad occurs during those days.*

*Before the dance begin, about 4 or 5 rehearsals are made during one month before the party or the mere dance. Anyway, during this month only the marimba's player receives food, and the rest only when the presentation of the dance begins. About the marimba's players, during the rehearsals everyone pay a fee to pay them, the fee is paid by the dancers and*

*the representative. The fee is around 40 or 35 quetzals each, but sometimes boys do not fulfill one, and in those cases I need to be dealing with them, so they pay their feed. No one wants the role of Panchita<sup>9</sup>, is weird when someone wants to interpret the role of Panchita, she also does not pay its share, the thing is that her part is divided into*



*Initiation blessing ritual for the masks uses in the Costeño dance, by Mr. Julio Sánchez.  
April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2001  
Photography: Guillermo Vásquez*

*eight characters to pay her share to pay the marimba. When the feed is not met, the representant must pay it from his pocket. The Chuch Ajau does not receive payment, just the players do.*

<sup>9</sup> In the representation of April 2001, we saw Mr. Julio put on a custom of La Panchita and represent it with the dance, due to the lack of a person who may want to do it.

### Ritual's Dates

*I used to present the dance for the day of La Cruz (May 3<sup>rd</sup>), Corpus Christi (It could vary), and Saint Paul (June 29<sup>th</sup>). But the day that I like the most to present my dance is on the first day of my neighborhood's saint patron, Saint Sebastian (January 20<sup>th</sup>). Even though the exact days to present it*

*are on the Holy Cross and Corpus Day. Every time I had to present my dance; the culmination is here on zone 3 with "el chipe" as we say on San Sebastian, and is depends on the schedule, because we can stay dancing till 4 or 5 in the morning. As we begin that day at the Calvaria dancing; at the holy church, 2; on Saint Peter Apostle, 3; on Saint Peter Martir, 4; on Santo Domingo, 5, and two dances with El Divin (Sacramento) in total are seven dances, and one with Saint Sebastian, so they are 8. Well nine, because to start I also present a dance on my house.*

### Mask and Character's wake

*This is with the first cosonik, which is make at El Calvario, when we thank the animas that had participated in the dance,*

*death now, and we light a tealight to pray, so they take spiritual care of dancers and marimba's players. When night is about to finish, someone from the holy church comes to thank God.*

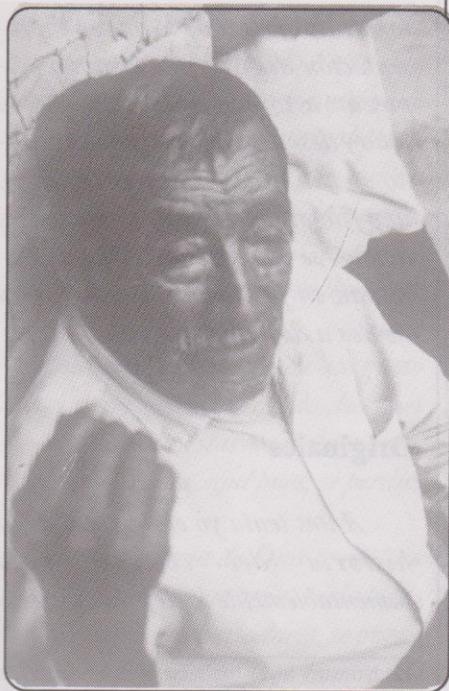
*at the prayers made in the first cosonik, the first wake of masks,*



Which is at El Calvario, what we ask for is protection. After the parochial church leaves, and then we come to my house. We pray once again, and when we finish each mask receives its firewater. (If a mask breaks or deteriorates, the mask artisan Luciano Toj who is a specialist on mask of the Costeño can fix them).

At the general rehearsal is when we light candles to the twelve masks, at the twelve dancers, and to the three marimba's dancers. We make that in the altar of my house. Our K'ahau xel is Mr. Felipe Sis Rojas. (Nevertheless, on the present year was Mr. Juan Alvarado.

(We saw the ritual of the mask wake for the general rehearsal on April 28<sup>th</sup>, it is done in the following manner:



Mr. Juan Alvarado, with 90 years old, old K'ahau xel of Rabinal, highly demand for these rituals in the region.

April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

Photography: Guillermo Vásquez.

it is done by Mr. Julio Sánchez. He places all the masks in front of his brotherhood altar, at the living room of his house. He prays in Achí, mixing it with prayers from the catholic devotional. At the same time, he lights two candles for each mask. Those are the two people who represent the same role. When every candle is lit, he smudges them with pom and incense. After that he pours a small splash of liquor on mask's mouths. Then he praises the altar, which has flowers, masks, lit candles, pom, and incense, bowing, and putting his forehead at the ground. Afterwards, he takes the candles to the hallway to place them at the floor and light them in front of the marimba. From there he takes lit candles, and goes to the house's backyard, where the general rehearsal is done, and in front of the marimba he places them on each Mayan cardinal

point, that means the five points: North, South, East, West, and in the Center. And he also pours a splash of liquor on them. He goes back to the altar, and then he finishes with the prayers. Without turning off the candles on the backyard, the rehearsal begins).

### Costumes and Masks

*Costumes represents the characters from many decades ago: the cacao chargers are agricultural peasants who walk around with a monkey, and bring cacao to the South coast of Guatemala, to sell it at the fairs.<sup>10</sup> The cowboys, has their ladino suits, which consist in a hat, jacket, tie,*

*pants, gaiter, and a bull, they come from the east of the country. To create our customs, we buy the fabric and then we send it to be sewn with a lady from zone 1 of the Rabinal. He owns a Candlemas named San Judas. As a seamstress she es the one who sew the customs with the fabrics that I recollect, little by little, when I need them. In that way, in a year I almost have the complete set.*

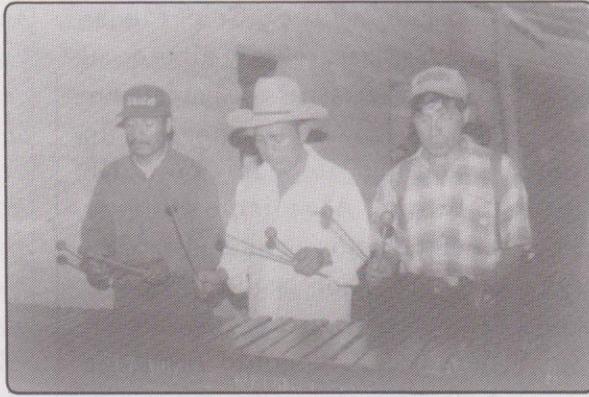
*I have like twelve years with the masks and customs. We used to lend them, but thanks to the emotion and enthusiasm that we show when we present the dance of the Costeño, the parish received help from Spain, and they took me in account, and they gave us enough to make the customs. They bought the fabric and then we send it with a lady in the zone 1. At the parch told us that they would give us the masks, but that wasn't possible, it seems like the money was over. That was like ten years ago. I also receive money for the marimba which is named La Voz del Rabinal Achí. [The voice of the Rabinal Achí].*

<sup>10</sup> According to the Dutch anthropologist **Ruud Van Akkeren** since pre-Hispanic times, cacao has been transported by the rout that follows the Nahualate river, from the South coast to the highlands. They got to Chichicastenango and continued their way to the lands of Baja Verapaz. At colonial times, Mr. **Francisco Mendoza** states, native from Rabinal, and a health technician, who to come at Chichicastenango is that cacao chargers are named "maxenos". However, at the moment of observing the customs of the chargers, was obvious that that they weren't from the region, but from the south land of tzutuhiles. (See the illustration):



## History and Content

By the moment I born, the Costeño already existed, I mean the dance has around a hundred years. Elders says that it exists from a long time ago. That why, it is one of the most ancient dances, same as the Rabinal Achí, and Los Huehuechos.<sup>11</sup>



Marimba's players "La Voz del Rabinal Achí"  
Enlivening the Costeño dance.  
April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2001.  
Photography: Guillermo Vásquez.

The cattlemen who arose at the Rabinal for the livestock party, and the purchase and sale of livestock on January 20<sup>th</sup> at "La Estación" as is known locally, place at the Calvario Street, comes from Zacapa, and bring the livestock from the coast in trucks. They come for the Saint Paul celebration. However, just around a month ago the purchase and selling of livestock on Sundays here in the Rabinal was authorized. It used to be only when there was the Saint Paul fair, and on September 14/15. People buy the animals properly for work here, little bulls, horses, heifers, and goats. At the old days, you could sow your cornfield, and a "hard day of work with oxen" was cheap, but nowadays that has changed, now is count by "pack mules" or a block, and that is expensive. If you go to talk to the owner, so he breaks the ground or furrowed for you, that will cost you a 100 quetzales, a hard day of work with oxen. What is done in a day depends on the animal, it can go from a dull day's labor or medium day's labor where cowboys

Allegedly the history of the costeño is that exist a group where cowboys

<sup>11</sup> We assume that the collective memory of people who live on Rabinal, regarding to oral tradition, doesn't go beyond a hundred years, that's why some elders still remember watching in their childhood shows of the Rabinal Achí, from Patzún or the Huehuechos, San Jorge or La Sierpe, El Venado, and Elchico Mudo, agreeing that all of them are the oldest ones.

their chief, who is the Pascual. They are buyers and sellers of livestock and make trades with the maxeños. When they arrive in a town, they begin with a barter, that means an exchange, with money that is cacao, and buys livestock. Their history begins when they met a woman, "La Panchita", as is known at the town, and the maxeños fall in love with her; so, they begin to annoy her husband Luca, an old man, and start to disturb the woman. The Costeño dance is composed by twelve characters, the cowboy's chief name Pascual, then the cowboys Tomás, Gaspar, Juan, Lucas, and the little bull. They are cattle dealer. They arrive at a town with a fair to sell their livestock, and met with the chief of the other characters, who are livestock purchasers, where Cristobal is the chief of chargers, they make livestock trade with their cacao. That the reason why Pablo is the name the first charger, the one with the red mask, because they brought cacao to buy livestock, and at the exchange they gave cacao. The one with the black mask is named Ratón (mouse), he is also the second charger, and then the third charger, Mundo.

Between them they bring a beautiful woman name Panchita. Afterwards, both groups start to play like in a bullfight, one brings a little bull, and the other has a monkey, and the party is done at the place they met. When they met, let's say, they create a great friendship, and for the lack of someone who cooks tortillas for them, a woman appears among them, she prepares food for both gourps

The old man group Lucas falls in love with the lady, and the three young chargers starts to disturb her, and that's why the chief hits them with a stick. The lady prefers at the third charger, who is the one in charge of the group's money, his name is Mundo. They end up buying livestock, that means a little bull. After buying it, they burn it with an iron stick, and then both groups ride the bull during the entire Costeño's presentation. When they begin to ride the bull is when the story is report, and after the bullfight is when they go to say goodbye, and make a line in front of the marimba, afterwards they go, turn around, and finish their presentation. The entire show lasts from two-to-two hours and a half.

## Originals<sup>12</sup>

I used to have de original Costeño's history, but sadly I borrowed It to some high school students from here, and

<sup>12</sup> Our purpose is to always provide an original copy of the dance to our readers. Nevertheless, it was impossible to achieve, since it's nonexistent, and the natural distrust of Mr. Julio to provide us the copy that him and his son elaborated thanks to the reasons detail later.



till this day they hadn't turned it back. Therefore, the original of the history is lost, that was like five or six years ago. It was written in a paper made by an elder who donated it to me on a typewriter, that person was mi uncle Agapito Sis. When I participated with him, he told me, appear, come with us. And that was how I appeared as a monkey. The next year, once again for the saint patron San Pedro, I asked my uncle if was going to help me, because I liked the dance and I wanted to repeat it, I told him to give me the sings, and he helped me out. The I presented the Costeño, and he told me "Uh, that was beautiful, you really know how to guide people. I'll give you the original of the history to keep it as a memory". But unfortunately, I borrowed it, and they never turned it back to me. The guy who I borrowed it is now a college teacher, he was a little ked when he was studying, he's the son of Mr.... that man with le last name Pantán. I went several times with him to claim for the original, until one day he scolded me, saying that since I gave it to him with my will, I had no right to be claiming it. He told me "Does the guy lose it? He did, and you know it. Little boys have no responsibility and, if you with you will and hands gave it to him, well you have nothing to claim now". And, till today it's lost.

By the grace of God I have kept in my memory everything related to the dancers; I can tell you how many verses has every character. For example, Pascual, our boss, has 14 verses. Cristobal has 13, Lucas 11, and Panchita those are the characters with

who speak the most. Of others, let's say, Tomás, Gaper and Juan only speak 3 times. The little bull has a long verse of around 15 lines. The role of the monkey has two verses, and on his last verse is when it makes the dance's farewell, and talks about people who critique the dance, cause there's always someone who does it, so he says:

"Uh gentlemen, I also came here to finish our story. Between leaps and bounds, with all my heart I had went through victories, and through the riverside of the sea, but if any innocent comes to worship, I will tell today to the Saint Patron, long live to the divine sacrament who is celebrated today on the Rabinal".

As I repeat, by the grace of God, I don't know if is thanks to his blessing or my interest, because at least I have kept in my memory the story of the Costeño dance. There are moments that I may forget some verses, but most of it is in my memory. I have a copy that I made with my son, because I tell him, God forbid something could happen to me, so at least there's a recollection of it. My son already knows all of it, and hast the entire Costeño's story on his memory.

For example, coastal people bring livestock to exchange it for cacao.

When Pascual arrives with Cristóbal he says:

"Welcome fellow countryman, we have reunited here once again"

So Cristóbal answers:

"Here I bring my cacao, what can we exchange it for?"

And once again Pascual speaks:

"You say it very well, for me we already have a trait"

## Choreography

The role of the little bull begins wrapping everything; he begins collecting; He first takes out Pascual, then he goes for Cristóbal, then for Tomás, and after that he goes for the first charger, takes out Gaspar, the mouse, and in that way he ends up with a line (That means that he goes dancing with each character from one side to other each time). Afterwards, he the dance finish, everyone moves in a line, finishing and breaking it, finishing the dance. The little bull says:

"Even though I'm an animal, I have come to catch parties celebrated on this place. We also warn that



Monkey in the Costeño's dance  
April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2001.  
Photography: Guillermo Vásquez.



*all are invited to this land, where cacao is sold. I would like to know how Christians have come to... in this place".*

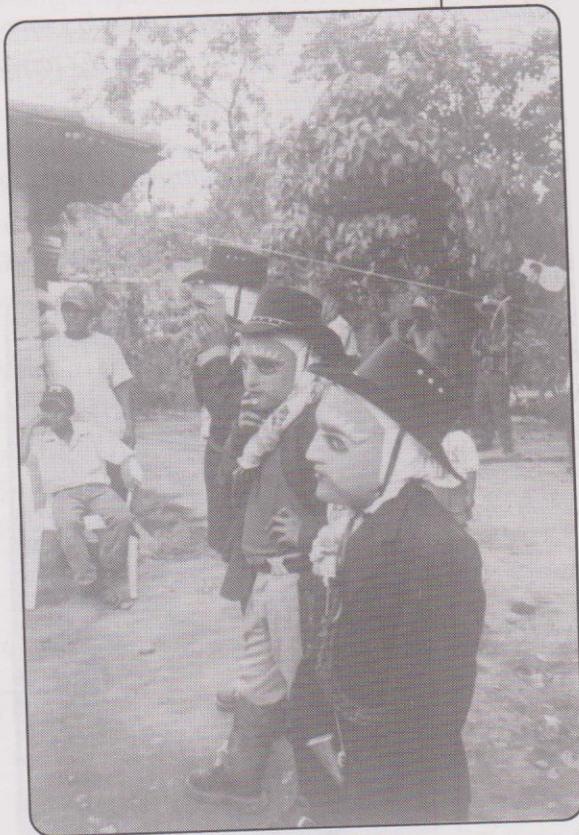
*When the little bull is finally sold, it is burned with iron. But now, kids at schools who present it doesn't do it anymore. If you pay attention, as I repeat, those who are dancing nowadays, doesn't do it in the right way, and some spins, because they don't do the exact quantity. When I present my dance, I tell my boys "Okey people, I want to perform this dance, but it has to show that is a dance from here, from the center." Because that what I have here at the Rabinal, everyone knows who presents the best Costeño's dance*

*at the Rabinal. As I say: "Look guys, we will present a dance, but we will do it right, well represented so people say, it's from the urban zone". That's why I tell you that when I teach the spins to guys, I teach them all of them, when they arrive, when they must sell the little bull, how to burn it, how to do it, because I don't know it, they still do it. Today I couldn't be at the rehearsal because I had a commitment with my brotherhood, but tomorrow after the procession I'll go to check why they aren't doing it anymore. When I present it, I like to participate with the guys, so I appear as the first charger or as the world who charge the iron. When the moment to wrap the little bull with spins comes, he is already award of it, he takes the iron and pass it to the red mask's guy*

*because the world is the one with the money, and iron, so he gives it to the first charger, and the mouse (the one with the black mask), they take the iron, and they begin to play there. Then, they pile up trash, then they blow with a hat, making signs that they're heating the iron, later they go subtly to burn the little bull, but as it's intelligent, when he notices them, he begins goring them, and doesn't allow them to burn them, so that they mark it.*

*(The choreography that we were able to watch on the general rehearsal is the following one:*

1. They enter in two lines facing the marimba, which is facing the altar.
2. They interlace in a single file in front the marimba, and in its opposite side (where they entered). This interlaces repeats two times.
3. Then they interlace the two files at the same time, but facing each other, spinning in circles in pairs, holding hands, and then they repeat it.
4. Always in a single file, cowboys pass in front the chargers, and then the charges pass in front the cowboys.
5. Spinning in the center, pair by pair create a chain.
6. The bull and the monkey create chain, and then the bull goes to move each character from one place to another, creating a chain with them.
7. When the bull finish, cowboys dance in a single file, and they pass in front the chargers. When they finish with the spins, they recite their verses.
8. They dance in another single file and recite at the front with Panchita.
9. They turned back to their places dancing in a single file.
10. Now charges begin dancing in a single file in front cowboys.



*Cowboys in the Costeño Dance  
At Mr. Julio Sánchez house  
April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2001.  
Photography: Guillermo Vásquez.*



They repeat the dance, and then they go to recite their verses, and then goes back to their places in a single file.

11. Cowboys pass in front chargers in a single file.

12. Bosses recite their verses.

13. Everyone recite their verses. Which are praises to Virgin Mary.

14. They do interlace in a single file once again on both ends.

15. Bull comes out to chain with the rest, one by one, side by side. Once he finishes, he moves to the center and recite his verses.

16. Then he repeats his chains.

17. He spins several times at the center, he stands in front the marimba and stays there.

18. The rest create a chain.

19. Both groups are placed at the opposite end of the marimba, they make a interlace, and then they get close to the marimba dancing. Make a final salute and there's where the dace finish).

The choreographic position (a contradance) of the dancer is:

**ALTAR**

**MUSIC**

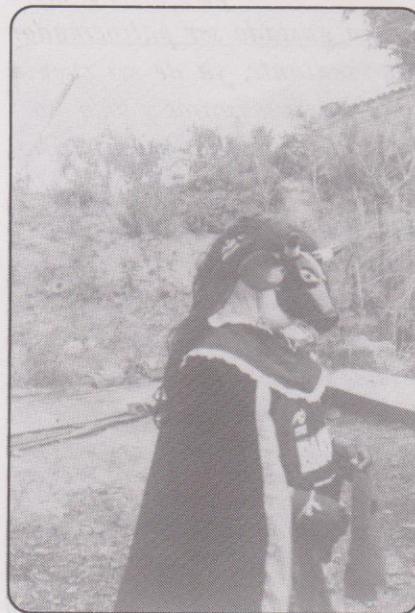
(Marimba in a single key)

**Chargers:                      Cowboys:**

Cristóbal	Pascual
Pablo (1st. Charger)	Tomás
Mouse (2nd. Charger)	Gaspar
World (3rd. Charger)	Juan
Panchita	Lucas
Monkey	Little bull

**Music**

*There are a lot of marimba's players who knows the sones of the Costeño, especially in the villages, but here in the town many of them doesn't like them because they know how scarified those sones are. In a single presentation of the Costeño dance, if they play the entire dance those are like two hours plus half hour playing with little interruptions. So, that's why many players dislike it. It is not the same*



*Bull in the Costeño Dance at Mr. Julio Sánchez house. April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Photography: Guillermo Vásquez.*

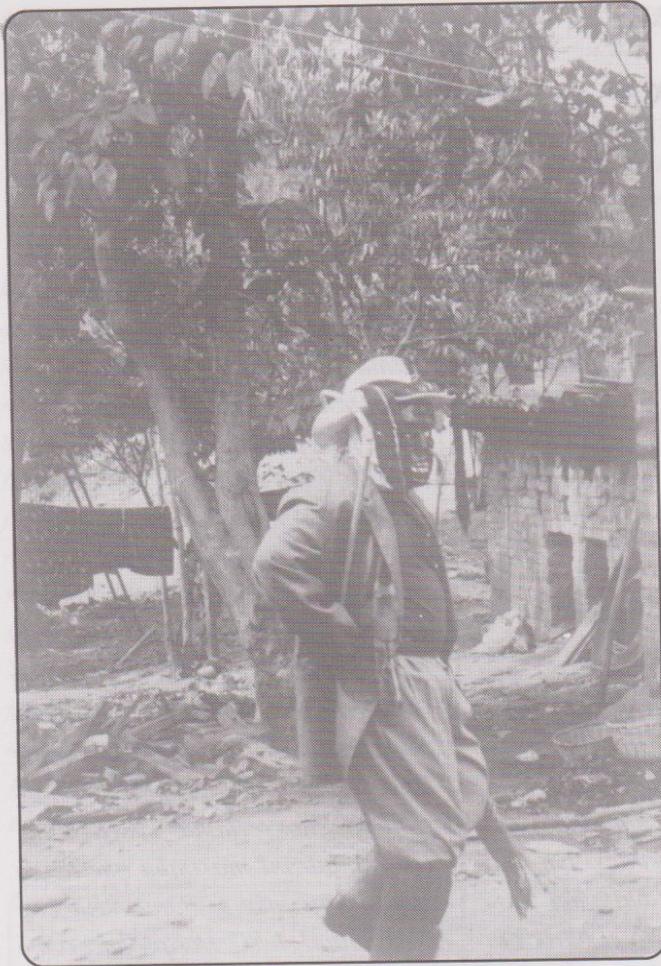
*playing in a brotherhood, because there they play two or three sones and then rest.*

*Here in the neighborhood, we have a group who are the brother's Cajbones, they know the best how to play the sones of the Costeño. The elder's name is Bernabé Cajbón, the second one's is Celestino Cajbón, and the other's is Miguel Angel Cajbón, there are like eight guys, and all of them know every Costeño's round and sones. I began with them, they were my first players, and they play the costeño's music beautifully. But sadly, as everyone knows when you overpass your limit of alcohol, you are not able to complete all your tasks, there was couple of times when they failed me, ant didn't complete with our agreement, because they were drunk. Their marimba is name "La Reinita". In turn, the one in my house is name "La Voz del Rabinal Achí". Because it was like eight or nine years ago that the brothers Cajbón are participating and playing beautifully the costeño's sones. There are like 29 sones, each character has its own son, and Pascual and Cristobal play theirs like 5 times. Yeah, in total are like 30 sones.*

**Brief life history of the owner and representative of the Costeño in Rabinal B.V., Mr. Julio Sánchez Cuxun**

*I am 43 years old, born on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1957. I am married, with five children: four men and one lady. My father was Mr. Feliciano Sánchez, now deceased, and my mother was Mrs. Estefanía Cuxún Mensoza, recently deceased, only twenty days ago.*





Oldman in the Costeño Dance  
at Mr. Julio Sánchez house.  
April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2001.  
Photography: Guillermo Vásquez

*I am in mourning, but I still complete all my commitments at the brotherhood, because we must be responsible with our commitments. I am the fourth butler of the brotherhood of Saint Apostol Peter, and next year I will be upgrade to third butler.*

*I began sponsoring the Costeño dance, that is the oldest and more original from our town, at the age of twenty-three, after getting married, because my mother didn't allow me to participate, despite I was single, once I got married, I disposed everything to It. So, I began to appear in the dance and then started liking it. I already have fifteen years*

*sponsoring and the representant of the costeño dance, here at zone 3. Sadly, we have no support here in our town, that means that our authorities forget everything. They say that the Rabinal is the alleged cradle of folklore, but that's just a saying, because we don't receive any support. Thanks to God, like ten years ago we receive help from Spain, and they donated us the marimba and some clothes, because they were supposed to donate us everything, but as always, I like to*

*be the representative sponsor, I bought everything I need including my masks, and till today, thanks to the grace of God, I have all I need. I like to present the dance every year, but lately for my commitments in the brotherhood of Saint Peter, I hadn't been able to present it. Thanks to God a group of teachers have been moving to preserve the tradition of our town. They have encouraged people at schools, and that the reason why guys are participating<sup>13</sup>. They always ask me for help, that's why this year (2000) I rent them the masks and customs. I tend to rent my stuffs to*

*avoid losing them, cause the money that enters I invest it in new clothes, because clothes are ruined by wear and tear. When one custom breaks down there is already a new one. And that's how we do it, because I don't want this tradition disappears.*

*My first appearance in the dance was as "the monkey". Later, I was "the little bull", and the dance that I like the most is the first maxeño, the one with the red mask. In other words, my favorite role.*

*In total are twelve characters: in group one, the group of cowboys, is Pascual, the one who carries a dumbbell, then is the first cowboy Tomás, second cowboy Gaspar, third cowboy Juan, aka "Juan Temptation", then goes Lucas, the old man with a whip, and then "the little bull". In the other hand is the one who carries a broom, Cristobál, then the first maxeño, first zunil<sup>14</sup>, second zunil is the mouse, that is the one with a "black mask". The third is "world", third charger, then is "The Panchita", and the last one is "Monkey".*

*As I've been the dance's representative for around fifteen years, I know*

<sup>13</sup> Since 1993, for Corpus Christi celebration, Magisterium from Rabinal has organized to represent rabinal's dance with kids at schools from the Municipal seat and its villages, on display that adults had stop practicing it for different reasons. For this reason, they have had to go to traditional dancers, for the purpose of lending or renting out masks and customs and teach the students the movements of the dances. It would be convenient at this stage (2001), to carry out an evaluation that means the adequate development of this ingrained cultural fact on kids during these years. This Rabinal's Magisterium labor has not yet been recognized by the corresponding authorities.



what we need to look out for and, even if I have come across with irresponsible people, to date, we have been able to present in Cobán, and lately in the capital city. Major took us there last year (1999) on November 17<sup>th</sup> when the handicrafts market was inaugurated in zone 13. Due to some commitments in the brotherhood, I couldn't assist, but I did organize everything, they pay a round-trip transportation and even paid the day to the guys.

The dance that I like the most is The Costeño, even though I like to participate in other dances like Moro Español, but not that much... the thing is that this dance is new, is not as traditional as The Costeño. People at the Rabinal think that El Costeño is the most beautiful one for its sones, they give it joy. Is also true that dances from Costeño de Cubulco and San Miguel are different from the Rabinal's one. Masks and spins are different, although histories are the same because they had come to brought me here at the Rabinal.

## Conclusion

As we have observed, the Costeño dance present to us traditional aspects from colonial and subsequent periods of economic and livestock lifestyles. Aspects that are most likely to be referred to today

14 The fact that they're also name as **zuniles** corroborates the migratory origin of this cacao chargers, Zunil is a municipality south of the city of Quetzaltenango, which also facilitates language comprehension in cacao marketing, since it's a K'iche-speaking municipality, a place of passage in this commercial migration.

since cattle sales continue to be carried out at Rabinal, for the days of its annual titular celebration, when the celebration is done in a big way, and weekly, because as we know the current major allowed for this year (2001) the purchase and selling of livestock.

Although the romantic content in the interior of text and dan (myth of origin) is not performed in today's reality, it is well known that at a certain point in the past it gave rise to the symbolic representation of economic, social and cultural purchase and selling of livestock lifestyle, which today we know as **The Costeño Dance**. We observe that is well known the notorious economic relation at old times when merchants from the couth coast raise to the alti plane to trade their cacao, such a common beverage in the entire region, that it was used as a trade coin, and got even more famous with the introduction of sugar,

the famous *chocolate*. It's important to take in account that the religious rituals that accompany this dance represents the principal fundament for its survival in time, the music and the joy that produce in the audience, since everything is involved and framed by the religious cult to the ancestors.



Costeño Dance at Mr. Julio Sánchez house.  
April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2001.  
Photography: Guillermo Vásquez.



“Contra dance”, first son in the Costeño dance. This is composed by 32 sones that enliven different shots. Transcription of Enrique Anleu Díaz.

Moderato *Contradanza* Transcrip. Enrique Anleu Díaz

1a  
2a  
3a  
4a

2o toma

3o Tercio

The shots of this contra dance are famous in the Rabinal, we offer this transcription from Enrique Anleu Díaz as a model to be applied in education.





Scene of the Costeño dance in Rabinal  
Baja Verapaz  
Photography: Guillermo Alfredo Vásquez  
Gonzáles.



Mask of the Costeño dance in a funeral,  
In the house of Mr. Julio Sánchez  
In Rabinal Baja Verapaz  
Photography: Guillermo Alfredo Vásquez

**Director:**

Celso A. Lara Figueroa

**Senior Researchers:**

Celso A. Lara Figueroa  
Carlos René García Escobar  
Aracely Esquivel Vásquez

**Internal Researchers:**

Juan Fernando López Rivera  
Julio Roberto Taracena Enríquez  
Mirna Annabella Barrios Figueroa

**Research Assistant:**

Deyvid Molina  
Xóchitl Anaité Castro Ramos  
Magda Cifuentes de Ureta  
Lisa María Chaulón Vélez

**Documentation center:**

Miguel Girón

**Proofreading and editing:**

Guillermo Alfredo Vásquez Gonzáles

**Audiovisual area:**

Jairo Gamaliel Cholutío Corea

**Cover design:**

Jaime Homero Solares Rodríguez

**Interior design:**

Amilcar Enrique Rodas Reyes

# La Tradición Popular

