

Interviewee: Isaac Rodriguez

Interviewer: Mary Manning

Date: 9/23/2017

Transcription Conventions:

“ . . . ” after a phrase that is not completed.

Repeated words/short phrases and fillers such as “uh”, “um,” and “ah” are usually not transcribed.

Pauses, laughter are not noted or transcribed.

Mary: [00:00:01] Alright, we're rollin. Today is September 23rd, 2017. I'm Mary Manning and I'm with the the University of Houston, and I'm working on a research project called Community Practice, Identity Building, and the Gulf Coast Sound. I am at the home of Isaac Rodriguez, who is a DJ who has kindly agreed to share his knowledge and expertise about D.J.ing and Tejas Got Soul.

Mary: [00:00:34] So tell me about Tejas Got Soul.

Isaac: [00:00:43] OK. Tejas Got Soul. I'm going go to the beginning. Tejas Got Soul started . . . well, the seed was planted when . . . it was probably about five years ago. My grandma was in town, and she was staying at my aunt's house. She had just retired, and she was moving up north with one of her grandsons. So she was having an estate sale. So when I was going to pick up my grandma who lives in L.A, she was at my aunt's house who was having an estate sale. So when I drive up, and I don't really see this side of the family, like I don't see them. I probably see them once every three years. Basically when my grandma is in town, I'll go see her sisters and I've never been close to that side of the family just because you know my grandma was never around. She was always in LA, but anyway back to the story.

Isaac: [00:01:34] So I went to go pick up my grandma, and my aunt was having an estate sale. And when I walk in, I notice that they're pricing everything and everything's boxed up, and my grandma, we said our hellos and we hugged each other. And she said, "Oh, your Tia's having an estate sale. If you see anything you want, just take it." And the first thing I said was, "does she have any records," just thinking that she might have some kind of records. And my aunt was like "yeah, I do. I have a shoe box full of 45s in the back somewhere. I'll go get them for you." So when she went and got the 45s. She gave me the box and I start looking through the box and I pulled out Sunny and the Sunliners 45. I pulled out a little Jessie and the Tear Drops 45. I pulled out a Joe Bravo and all these were old Tejano bands.

Isaac: [00:02:32] But this was before they even played Tejano. This was when they were playing R&B and soul. So it was all their English stuff. Which kind of. I had the box and I was like "Whoa what is this?" You know Tear Drop Records. I knew that was a Houston label. And so I was definitely . . . it caught my attention to go home and check them out. But you know I spent the day with my grandma, and as soon as I got home . . . I came home, opened the box, I cleaned up all the records, and I started playing them on a record player, and immediately I was like . . . I felt the connection. I felt like I had been missing out all these years.

Isaac: [00:03:06] I had been into punk and ska and reggae, and I was collecting those records already, and I almost felt guilty for not knowing much about this, being that this was going on in my own backyard. This is what my family listened to. And it was great great music. So, from then

on, I just kind of became obsessed with it. Like everything I had before, I put on the backburner. Like I was . . . I would DJ mostly Jamaican records and stuff and reggae and ska and I just slowly slowly started going toward the Tex-Mex stuff, the R&B, and the soul. And I don't speak much Spanish, so I was immediately interested that these guys were like me--they're Chicanos but they're doing English. And then, after I start getting into the English stuff, I started getting more into the Spanish stuff.

Isaac: [00:03:59] And I didn't know anybody else was doing this at the time. But as soon as I started researching, like I found there was other guys mostly in San Antonio that are pretty much doing the same as Tejas Got Soul stuff. There's a guy named Jason Saldana. He does a West Side Sound System. There's Hector Gallegos and Rambo [Salinas]. They do Alamo City Soul Club. There's Jerry and Chuco. They do Tejanos of Soul, and all these guys are from San Antonio because the majority of Chicano soul from Texas comes from the West Side and South Side of San Antonio.

Isaac: [00:04:35] So I mean as soon as I seen that they were already doing it I thought I was behind. Like I felt like I was behind. I had got kind of a push because I guess I got into it at the right time because all these records, and you know these Chicano records that she gave me, that Little Jessie in the Teardrops, these go for like now five hundred to a thousand dollars. I could . . . I would never pay that for a record. Like I'll go out and dig, and if I find the record, I find it, and I do find them, or I'll trade from another record collector.

Isaac: [00:05:07] But you know I guess the Texas thing is real hot right now with collectors and with DJs. So I think I got into it just right before it blew up but not soon enough to where I could get these records for like five or ten bucks. Because I hear a lot old stories, where Jason from San Antone, he's always telling me, "Man, I used to buy these records for \$5. Nobody wanted them, and now there's records priced on eBay for fifteen hundred dollars." You know a Chicano record from you know Texas. So that was the beginning of Tejas Got Soul. That's how I got into it. That's how the seed got planted. So I started collecting.

Isaac: [00:05:44] More and more records I would go out digging. I would go to San Antonio to dig out go all all over Texas to dig to find these records. Forty fives and LPs. And once I got my collection good enough, it was probably like a year after my aunt gave me that first box of 45s, is when I threw the first Tejas Got Soul event, which wasn't even called Tejas Got Soul. I hadn't found a name for it yet.

Isaac: [00:06:10] What I was doing is, I was building my collection, and at the same time, I was looking for the right place to do it at. Because you can't go to any Tejano bar in Houston and play old Tex-Mex. They're not going to have it. They want to hear Selena, Emilio, La Mafia, all the the popular stuff from the 90s you know, just the popular Tejano. So you can't do that. And not only can't you do that, you know, the owners of these bars they don't want you to come and play this old music that's going to . . . not everyone is into it you know, not everyone gets it. Even Tejano people don't get it you know. So I had to go and find the right bar, the right spot to do this at, where I knew that it would work.

Isaac: [00:06:52] So I was looking all around going to different places, and I went to . . . I had a gig somewhere, and after that gig . . . We had just moved to the area, it was probably three years ago . . . I stopped at the D&W, which is right down the street, and then, I stopped in there, like automatically felt the vibe. It was a good vibe. I think there was a rockabilly show that day. And right when I walked in, I see Nick at the bar. I was just talking to him, and I was like, "Who does the

booking" you know, and he was like "I do." And I say, "Oh really." And I felt the connection because . . . Even when I was into punk or I'd go ska shows, I would go to these Tejano events, and the only other person from that scene I would see there is Nick.

Isaac: [00:07:30] So I knew that he was into the same thing as I was you know. I knew that he was you know . . . his family probably raised him just like mind did. He grew up around this music. I've known him when the bands he played in and I knew that he was into music. So I was like "Hey Nick, I got this idea man I want to do like a night of oldies and Tejano oldies and English oldies just like you know an oldies night basically but we're going to do Tejano oldies. And he was like "Yeah man, I dig that. I dig that. That sounds cool." He's like "I'll hit you up about it."

Isaac: [00:08:02] I had left that night and a few months passed probably even a year, or close to a year, and he didn't hit me up. I was thinking it was just like bar talk. You know he just agreed to it or whatever, and I kind of just wrote it off. But I was still collecting my records, and then finally one day he just messaged me out of the blue and said, "Hey, Isaac, do you still want to do that DJ night." And I was like, "yeah yeah heck yeah I've been waiting for it." So he hit me up. We set a date. The first one was it was on the Valentine's Day weekend, so we kind of had a spin off of the Valentine's thing. It was on a Sunday and we couldn't think of a name for it.

Isaac: [00:08:38] So Nick just called the event Noches en el Barrio, like nights in the neighborhood. And it was a dance where people could come out and hear the old Tejano music and oldies. So me and Nick did that. That went good. A lot of people came out, so we talked. We had a meeting about it and he was like "Look, we'll do it again. And again, you know once a month or something." I was like "Cool." It still wasn't Tejas Got Soul at the time but we did Noches en El Barrio for like I'd say the next three months and we couldn't . . . We were thinking of a name to name the crew.

Isaac: [00:09:14] All right. So three months went by, and we were doing the events. We were calling it Noches en el Barrio, and we wanted to like make a name, like come up with a name for ourselves that would describe us to let people know what we're about. And we did the first three think like once a month, and then I think Nick got real . . . he was he was still with Billy Joel Shaver at the time, and he went on the tour, and when he went on tour, it kind of . . . the DJ nights kind of were put on pause because you know Nick wasn't here to book them and stuff like that so. I think we probably didn't do one in like four or five months, and in that four or five months, I was doing my other events at other bars and stuff like that.

Isaac: [00:09:55] And one day I was just sitting down at work and I was just thinking like "man . . . how could . . . what would be the best way to describe what I want people to know that we're about?" And I was like definitely . . . I definitely want to put Texas in there because that's what I represent the most. You know I'm a Texan. And I wanted to represent . . . I want people to hear the name and know that I'm a . . . I'm Mexican, I'm Chicano, you know what I mean. And I want people to hear the name and know that.

Isaac: [00:10:24] Basically when they hear the name I just wanted them to know everything that we're about, so I . . . And the soul, when I said soul, I didn't mean you know just your soul music, I meant just like heart and soul. You know Like Tejas Got Soul. So I was like "Wow, Tejas Got Soul." That sounds really cool. So, because like . . . I was thinking like you know the conjunto artists they put their heart and soul in the music. The guys who did the Spanish Tejano, they put their heart and soul . . . the soul, and R&B, so like that, it's going to be "Tejas Got Soul."

Isaac: [00:10:59] And then, I was, like I said, I was into the Jamaican stuff at the time, and the Jamaican DJs they were known for their sound systems, like they'd go set up their sound systems all around Jamaica. And people would come out and dance. So I still wanted people to know that I would be able to get down on some ska and reggae if I had to. So I threw the "Sound System" behind the "Tejas Got Soul." Most people just call it Tejas Got Soul now, but it's Tejas Got Soul Sound System.

Isaac: [00:11:25] And so Nick was on tour. And he . . . and I had made a flyer for an event I was having, and it was the first time I had put the name out there. I put you know "Tejas Got Soul presents," "Tejas Got Soul Sound System presents." And as soon as Nick saw the flyer, he messaged me and was like, "hey, who is that?" And I was like "That's me." He was like "Wow dude, you came up with a good name. That sounds awesome." He's like "Who else is in it?" And I was like, "Just me, dude." And he was like, "Cool." I was like "I mean you're down, right, like you're . . . I mean this is what we were working on. If you like the name then, I mean let's call ourselves this you know."

Isaac: [00:12:04] Because one thing you know during those months me and Nick weren't . . . he would come up with a name, and I would come up with a name, and we weren't agreeing on it. So I kind of just stopped asking him what he thought of a name because I felt so passionate about this name that I was like, "I'm going to call it this. You know, this is what's going to be." You know what I mean? Hoping that he was going to like it, and if he didn't, I was still going to stick with it." So he liked it. And I mean he loved the name and ever since then it was me and Nick.

Isaac: [00:12:35] So the Tejas Got Soul. We start putting it out there and started DJing and we specialize in like I said the the old Tex-Mex, the early days of . . . it's called La Onda Chicana, which was what they called Tejano music before it was called Tejano music. If you talk to any like old schooler they'll say La Onda. It was called La Onda Tejana or la Onda Chicana. They called it both, but they didn't call it Tejano music. So basically that's what we specialize in Tex-Mex, early Tex-Mex, and the R&B and the soul that those guys were doing before they were doing Spanish.

Isaac: [00:13:14] The record labels Keylock, Tear Drop, all the record labels out of San Antonio, Covert Records, and just all these different record labels. Like honestly I'm to the point to where when I'm digging, I'm not looking for anything else but Texas music, specifically that. There was a big scene in L.A., and I do spin some of that East LA stuff, but for the most part Tejas Got Soul specializes in . . . we spin early Tex-Mex, English and Spanish. And that's about it.

Isaac: [00:13:47] We've been working on shows and events, but that's the message we're trying to give the people out there. Don't forget about these original guys who paved the way for all these bigger Tejano artists like Selena. Selena's dad was in Los Dinos, which were a Chicano soul band from the 60s. Like they you know . . . you see them on the movie, but they were real band. On the Selena movie they came out, and they were a real band Los Dinos. They did English R&B and soul.

Isaac: [00:14:13] And you know there's albums and records out there, so you know all these later Tejano artists, they kind of reap the benefits of these guy. And a lot of these guys are still performing today and probably didn't make half as much money as Emilio and La Mafia, but they're still doing and they still love it. So that's basically what we're about.

Mary: [00:14:36] Describe how audience interaction influences what you play and how?

Isaac: [00:14:41] OK. So just last night we had an event, and there was a lot older people there. They were like in their 60s and late 50s maybe even early 70s. They were in love with the music, but some of them were coming up to me saying, "Man you're taking us back to the Pan-American ballroom." And I was like loving it you know, spinning record after record that I knew that they would like you know.

Isaac: [00:15:05] And then some girl comes up to me. She looks like she's in her late 30s. And she she's like, "Don't you have anything newer than this? Like this is like old stuff like this is like from the 50s and 60s. She's like you're putting me to sleep over there." Now I'm like, "Well yeah, tonight is actually like a branded night like we do oldies, Tejano oldies." She's like, "Oh," and she's like, "Can you play stuff newer?" Newer being, the newest stuff these people want to hear is like from the 80s and 90s, so I guess it's new. But it's really old, right? So I guess we started playing stuff that you know she wanted to hear. We you know we try to make everybody happy.

Isaac: [00:15:42] But as far as like the connection with the crowd. When the crowd's feeling it, I'm feeling it. I can get . . . I can start digging deeper and deeper in my box and pulling out some rare Chicano Tejano stuff that these people probably hadn't heard in years, or somebody can come up to me and make requests like to hear some of the later stuff that kinda throws . . . throws a little damper in my vibe, but I'll make them happy and I'll play the stuff. I don't mind the stuff. I like that stuff too. But like I said. But when the crowd's feeling it, I'm feeling you know what I mean. When I'm feeling it, the crowd feels it.

Isaac: [00:16:18] You know if I get in the zone and I know I'm . . . you know I'll go to . . . wherever I DJ. I like to go there like the day before . . . or get there . . . if it's my first time, I'll go there the day before, or the early in the day, to see, to peep the venue, peep where I want to be, where I can tell the crowd would be dancing at. You know I'd like to get there and peep out the crowd, the vibe itself, so I can know what to bring because like I said we're only limited to what we can do with Tejas Got Soul. So you know you can't go play early Tex-Mex music at like a yuppie club in the Heights. Do you know what I mean? They'll kick me out. You know what I mean? Like I'm limited to where I can DJ.

Isaac: [00:16:57] So that's why I only DJ in certain spots, mostly spots that are in old Chicano neighborhoods. I can do other stuff, but when we're talking about Tejas Got Soul here, it has to be at certain bars you know North Side or Magnolia or in Second Ward and you know here in Eastwood. And you know those are the places that I'm after. Those are the places where it's not uncommon for me to be playing the music of someone who was actually on the record. That's how we met Manuel Mendiola.

Isaac: [00:17:36] So these are the places I know . . . you know this is where like the family of these people go. And I like to keep the music in these kind of places. I don't really like to . . . to take it out anywhere else because, I don't know, it just feels weird when I do that. But the crowd, and as far as me getting along with the crowd, like I said, it has to be in the right place, and we both . . . the crowd has to be feeling what I'm doing, and I have to be feeling the crowd. And sooner or later we get them up there. You know we start . . . because there's a lot of hits that these guys did that you wouldn't you wouldn't even know they were . . . Chicano artists made them.

Isaac: [00:18:18] Like Wooly Bully from Sam the Sham, and that one always gets them going. And everyone loves that song. That's probably one of the most popular songs. And Sam the Sham is from Dallas. He's a Chicano from Dallas. "96 Teardrops" from Question Mark and the Mysterians—

that's Chicano. Those guys did that. Red Bone "Come and get your love." All these songs, like they always get the crowd going no matter if the crowd hates what I'm playing or if they love it. Like this just throws more flame on the fire if they love it. Everybody comes out and starts dancing to those songs, and with those songs that get them going.

Isaac: [00:18:51] And then I'll just slide in some more stuff with the same vibe. So definitely, I have to be feeling the crowd for me to get in the vibe. I just can't . . . that's just how I am. That's how I am with everything. And if I'm with someone, and then, they feel a certain way I kind of vibe off them. So I definitely vibe off the crowd. I mean if that answers your question. I'm not sure.

Mary: [00:19:12] It does answer my question. My next question is going to be a little related to that I'm gonna ask you to maybe to tell me more about what you mean when you say it gets them going and gets them up there. I'm pretty sure I know what you mean, but tell me how the audience responds to the music.

Isaac: [00:19:26] Ok.

Mary: [00:19:26] That you play.

Isaac: [00:19:28] OK.

Mary: [00:19:28] So more about that.

Isaac: [00:19:29] So say I'm playing a set of rancheras. Nobody's up there dancing it. And . . . and this is . . . like one DJs, we always you know. . . we always say like there's a certain song that's going to get them going. And if this is not working . . . like honestly like early in the day when I get to a gig, I don't start playing all my . . . the best stuff right off the bat. You know you want people to come in. You want them to start drinking. You want the drinks to start flowing because people don't like dancing when they're sober. That's just, you know, that's just how it is. They don't like dancing when they're sober. There's a few people that will, but for the most part, people want to be drinking with their friends.

Isaac: [00:20:08] You know, the music's playing in the background. Then later on through the night they start catching a buzz, and then, they start you know wanting to dance. So I'll save my . . . the good stuff for around that time. So what I'll do is, I'll play . . . like I'll play whatever early in the day, early in the night, and then, a song like Wooly Bully from Sam the Sham. I'll put that on like in prime time. And when I say "gets them going," that gets them to the dance floor it and it starts . . . it just happened last night like that song right there. The dance floor was empty. I played that song like at the right time, and before you know, there was 15 people on the dance floor, 20 people, which is big for the D&W, cause let me note that it's a small place and only fit's like 50 or 60 people.

Isaac: [00:20:50] So yeah, "it gets them going" means that we get the dancefloor flowing. I mean that's . . . a DJ's main job is to keep the dancefloor going and to keep the people entertained. So once you once you break the ice with a good song, then all throughout the night people will start slowly slowly coming . . . off and on dancing and dancing. So that's basically what we mean by "get them going," get their blood flowing you know. You play that one song that's going to . . . that's going to hit, and they're going to get to the dancefloor.

Isaac: [00:21:17] Because I mean. . . you know there are some nights when you know . . . On a Sunday people don't don't dance at all you know. And it does kind of, you know, a DJ would notice you know. But yeah Saturday night, Friday night, I mean you definitely have the densely packed, and there's songs that will do that. Genres that will do that. Cumbia will always get the dance going you know. So that those are the stuff that like I keep on the side for the right time of night where I'm gonna play all this stuff to get them going. And basically once you get the dancefloor going. I mean that's what it's all about. Everyone's having fun. I'm having fun. They're having fun, and I'm vibing off of them. That's basically it.

Mary: [00:22:02] Can you tell me about some of the conversations you may have had with people, like the audience, about the music.

Isaac: [00:22:07] OK. A lot of the times when I'm DJing like . . . Like I said earlier, the music that I'm playing, these records I'm playing, these bands that I'm playing, a lot of them are from Houston. So it's not a surprise if one of their family members is at the bar . . . or that I'm DJing at. Because you know these musicians were from these neighborhoods from Second Ward and Northside and Southeast and Magnolia. So just the other day I was DJing and I was playing Sunny and the Sun Liners, and the saxophone player. His name is . . . the saxophone player from the Teardrop era of Sunny and the Sunliners, because he was on Sun Glow, Tear Drop, and Key Lock.

Isaac: [00:22:51] So the Teardrop era of Sunny and the Sunliners was basically the Houston Sunliners. Everybody in that band was from Houston except Sunny. But while he was here recording, he was he was living in Houston while he was on that label. So the Sunliners at that time were basically a Houston band. So anyway all these guys, they have brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews, and the saxophone player that played on that line up, his older brother was there. His name . . . the sax player was named Woody and his older brother came up to me. This guy is probably 80 years old. I mean he didn't look it. He was dancing all night.

Isaac: [00:23:27] He comes up to me at the end the night, and he's like, "Hey man, you were playing Sunny earlier," and I was like "Yeah," and he was like, "You know that's my brother. My brother played in that band." And I was like, "Wow really like really," and he was like "yeah." And he picks up his phone, and he calls his brother on on the phone, and I guess Woody, he's now, Woody, he's now a truck driver and he was out driving his truck. And his brother was like, "Hey man, I'm here with a DJ." And he . . . well first, well first he got on the phone and he was like, "Hey brother, I want you to know I love you, and I respect you." I guess he was a little buzzed.

Isaac: [00:23:58] He's like "Man the contribution you made to music is still going strong today." He's like "Man, you know you're the pride of the family." He's like "Well anyway I'm sitting here with the DJ. He just played. He was playing your music all night." And he's like, "He wants to talk to you." And I was like "Hello." And he was like "Hey, What's up? It's Woody man." I say "Hey man. I just wanted to say thanks for the music you left behind. It's great. I love it you know." You know, he's like "Yeah man, no problem man. When I'm not on the road, I'm in town. When I'm in town, you know, here's my number. Well, we'll hang out, and I'll tell you some stories."

Isaac: [00:24:33] And I had met Oscar Villanueva, so I told him of . . . him and Oscar, that was their band, that was the same band, the same Sunliners. So I was like "Yeah man I know Oscar. I met him too." And he was "Oh yeah, I haven't seen Oscar in years, man." And when I see him . . . and when I want to talked to Oscar I was, "Hey, I talked to Woody." And he was, "Hey, what's that fool up to?" But yeah, so the conversations I have with the people that are there, that are interested in

the music, they're always real special to me.

Isaac: [00:25:02] You know like I love the fact when someone comes up to me and tells me, "Man, this song reminds me of my grandpa" or "Oh man, I haven't heard the song in years." It's always something real sentimental. Like it's always something like that they hold close to them, like that has sentimental value. One of these, you know the songs, you know they're favorites of them and they grew up on them.

Isaac: [00:25:24] So it's not just like, "Oh, that's my song, I love that song." This is . . . it's like, "Oh my, I remember my mom used to clean the house and put that record on you know." And that means a lot to me you know because that's exactly what I'm trying to do. Because especially here in Houston, it's not like in the valley or San Antonio where they . . . like it's like Tejano Pride over there. Houston it's really not a Tejano city. So when you find those people, when you find that crowd that they're kind of the people that you're looking for, and when you find them, and they're sitting there telling you, "Oh man, I hear you on Saturday nights with Gus, man. I came to check you out, and you know you and Gus get down, man" and like, "You know y'all are keeping La Onda alive," and it means a lot you know.

Isaac: [00:26:06] So the conversations are always really really special, and they mean a lot to me. I mean someone can make my day when they come up to me and tell me like, "Man, I love this, man. My parents got married at the Pan American Ballroom." Just last night, there was a crowd of people, a table of people, like eight people. And as soon as I was playing the songs they were like, "Ooooo, DJ's taking us back to the Pan American Ballroom tonight," and just like I was like "Exactly." You know that's . . . my mission was completed you know.

Isaac: [00:26:39] But yeah, so that's where the conversations are special and you know especially when they have a . . . they tell me a personal story about a family member or something like that and that's pretty much what this music . . . what it always is. You know someone doesn't just come up to me and say, "Ah, good stuff, man." They come up to me and tell me a story about why they like it and what they remember about it, you know. So that's what I really enjoy.

Mary: [00:27:07] You mentioned playing at the D&W Ballroom [It's "Bar" not "Ballroom"], can you mention some other places that?

Isaac: [00:27:14] OK. The D&W. I play down the street on Canal; it's a coffee slash motorcycle shop it's called R&R H.R. Rock and Roll Hot Rods. I've played at Eastdown Warehouse. I used to do my Tejas Got Soul Sundays over there. I've DJed everywhere in Houston. Fitzgerald's, House of Blues, but we're talking Tejas Got Soul Sound System. I've only DJ . . . I only do that at a few places. I've done it at Fitzgerald's, a few times at Fitzgerald's, for . . . opening up for different bands. At the Continental Club. We do it at the Big Top which is right next door to the Continental Club.

Isaac: [00:28:01] So basically D&W, R&R H.R., the Continental Club, the Big Top, Fitzgerald's, East Down. These are places where I've done Tejas Got Soul, but me as a DJ, I've DJed anywhere and everywhere you can think of in Houston. Oh, Tejas Got Soul, we DJed at Rockefeller's. So if there is like a music hall like Rockefeller's or Fitz, it's usually for maybe Los Skarnales playing or some other kind of Mexican-influenced band might be playing and then, they'll come ask us to DJ. Yeah, so that's about it. I mean there's other places I've DJed like in these little neighborhoods, bars, but I can't think of the name right now.

Mary: [00:28:42] Tell us about some of the other DJing you have done, and do you still do that, or is that more . . .

Isaac: [00:28:51] What influenced me to DJ in the first place was, like I said, I was into ska for as long as I can remember. You know, when I was a kid, I mean a baby like 9 or 10 years old, I had older brothers and sisters they were into punk, which got me into punk. And then, when you're in a punk for so long, you start to . . . you know some punks, they throw a rockabilly influence and a lot of punks do ska punk. I felt a connection with the ska punk right off the bat. It was just fun music. You could dance to it real easy. It lifted your spirits up.

Isaac: [00:29:30] So once you get into ska punk, then you start researching more and digging more, and you find out--you know the two tone stuff from London--and then, before that the real stuff from Jamaica. So once I got into the Jamaican stuff, you start you know researching the culture and you find out you know these guys were . . . it was a big DJ culture in Jamaica like back in the 60s like Coxsone and Studio 1. They would come out and they would bring their whole sound system out and just basically throw a party in the middle of you know a neighborhood somewhere in Kingston.

Isaac: [00:30:07] So that really caught my interest, so I started buying records and turn . . . I would . . . I was buying records first I didn't have like a DJ set, but I'd be playing records at my house. And I just one day just like, "Man I need to get some turntables." I had turntables years before like in '98. I had a pair of turntables and I was also, being from Houston, I was in the DJ Screw, and that's what inspired me to buy my first set of turntables back in '98, and I didn't . . . I never dejected, I wasn't going to be a DJ. I just had them at my house just to mess with them and just learn how to screw and chop the music.

Isaac: [00:30:46] So fast forward 10 years later. That's when I bought turntables again to DJ but to DJ ska music. Because I felt like that was the right way to do it. If you're going to DJ this music you should be playing it on record. I mean just like the originals did it. So I was . . . again I had to build up my collection and once I had enough records to where I felt like I could go out and spin the set, I started spinning all around town.

Isaac: [00:31:19] I was in a ska band at the time, so what I would do is, I would just put myself on the event because I . . . when I was in a band I was you know pretty much the organizer and the promoter, so I just throw myself because . . . I would notice like . . . first I would bring like a mix CD out, and I'd just burn a bunch of songs on the CD and play them, and during intermission, just to keep the vibe going, the ska vibe going, and just to turn kids on to the older stuff.

Isaac: [00:31:51] I've always been about roots you know roots music. If you're going to be in the ska you know, don't just listen to like the Mighty Bosstones or The Specials, which are great bands, but learn the roots of it you know. So I know some . . . there's punk kids out there, you know they're into the Operation Ivy, and so they'll come to my ska show, but they've never heard of like **King Stitt(?)**, Delroy Wilson, or the Skatalites.

Isaac: [00:32:19] So what I would do is, I would make CDs of all this older stuff, so at the same time, the people who do know who they are could enjoy it and know that we know our roots. Like there's ska bands out there, and you know when you're in a band, people are like, "Yeah, these guys they're playing ska, but they don't know nothing about it you know."

Isaac: [00:32:37] But you know I wanted people to know that "Hey, we're playing you know ska, modern ska, but we do know and respect our roots," so I'd make CDs of a bunch . . . of all the old stuff. And then I noticed people were digging the songs and people were dancing. Sometimes a really good song would come on early, and no one was there to hear it, so because it was on CD that I made you know, so I told myself "Man, I'm just going to start bringing my turntables and DJ during intermission myself." So I would do that.

Isaac: [00:33:08] And then once I started doing that, I had friends who were having birthday parties or events and then they'd hit me up like, "Hey Isaac, you want to DJ my birthday party" you know. I was like "Woah, like I never thought about that, but yeah sure I'll do it." And then soon after that I start having another DJs asking me, "Hey, I'm doing a Jamaican night. You know you want to come spin with me?" And then, yeah then, as soon as all that went off, I started figuring out that people do want to see DJs too.

Isaac: [00:33:39] A DJ can entertain a crowd just as well as a band you know. So I started promoting myself as a DJ and just doing DJ events with no band in it at all because my first events were . . . I was just a little extra on the side. You know I was just the intermission guy, the DJ. But once you know people started coming around and hearing more and more and more of me DJing they kind of, especially with the ska thing.

Isaac: [00:34:03] I'm mad because once I started Tejas Got Soul I kind of had to reinvent myself and rebuild my crowd because just because I'm into this music my friends can come out and support every once in a while but they're not really into it. You know my friends that I had for years, they're in the ska and reggae and punk you know. So there's some of them that do actually like it. But for the most part I feel like once I got . . . when I got Tejas Got Soul, when I started that up, I had to re build the crowd. Because when I was doing the Jamaican stuff and the ska and reggae, I'd throw a little punk in there too. The place was always packed like no matter what.

Isaac: [00:34:38] But at the same time I was . . . I didn't have my son and I was hanging out more, so it could be because I had more friends back then. But yeah, that's the other stories of me DJing like with the other side. And I . . . once like I said, once I got into Tejas Got Soul and started doing that, I kind of just shied away from from the Jamaican stuff I don't really mess with anymore. I will. You know I was supposed to DJ the Skatalites next week, but I didn't. I don't have a babysitter, so I'm not going to be able to do that. I was looking forward to that, but anyway.

Mary: [00:35:17] Tell me what roots and roots music mean to you. That may be two questions.

Isaac: [00:35:24] Ok. Roots music is basically self-explanatory. It's roots. It's the music that is from you know started from the ground up, like Conjunto is a form of roots music. It was . . . it was started here in Texas. And basically, it's just the beginning of a genre maybe like you know you have Jamaican roots music. Ska a form of roots music. It's basically the root of the genre of that group you know. So much grew from from conjunto. Tejano grew from conjunto.

Isaac: [00:36:04] You know roots music is a music, and it's usually from a certain location you know. You hear like . . . Texas roots music is conjunto. It's a Texas music. It's south Texas roots music. Reggae is you know, it's a roots music, it's from Kingston. You know, you have stuff like that like. Basically the beginning of of a genre I'd say, like if that makes any sense. Like the roots of it, you know. The forefathers of a certain genre of music, any genre of music. You know you go back to the roots, to the root of it. You know who was there first. You know Flaco Jimenez, Narciso

Martinez. These are like Texas roots, legends. You know that . . . that they were started. So I'd say that's what's roots, to me, is.

Mary: [00:37:05] How do you . . . how does your act get gigs?

Isaac: [00:37:09] We basically . . . we honestly . . . we don't . . . I don't really go fishing for gigs anymore. People just . . . people hit me up. They hit us up and ask us if we want to spin at their establishment. And before I do I make sure it's clear to them that they know what I do, and that you know this is what I'm going to do, "Are you OK with that?" And they either say yes or no—unless it's an event that we put together like the Tejas Roots event. We put that together and that's something we work on.

Isaac: [00:37:44] But if it's like Rock Baby, like Big E asked me to DJ that last year, this past year. Yeah, we just get hit up. Then when the D&W wants us there, they pretty much let us know. They're like, "Hey guys, you guys ready to come in this weekend?" Like "Yeah, sure." Basically that's it. Just ask us, and we'll do it basically. If we're what they're looking for.

Mary: [00:38:09] Let's kind of go back to the last time we interviewed. You said, "next time ask me about punk." And I'm also going to mention that a lot of people who are kinda DJing roots music now, kinda came out of that punk scene, and you kinda hear like about the Clash a little bit.

Isaac: [00:38:28] Yeah.

Mary: [00:38:28] What do you think?

Isaac: [00:38:30] Yeah, I think punk . . . me being into punk so young and most punks . . . punk teaches you . . . one of the things that it teaches you is the DIY attitude, to do it yourself. And another thing it teaches you is not to be close minded when it comes to music because first of all you have to be open.

Isaac: [00:38:52] Well, I guess at that time—because now it seems like punk is more accepted or whatever—but at that time, growing up, you had to be open minded to be into punk. So with bands like The Clash, when you know you get into punk, and then you see a band like The Clash, that not only were they playing punk but they were playing reggae. They were playing you know like rock n roll. Like they did it all but they did it with the punk rock attitude, which is like the DIY attitude. like "do it yourself." They appreciated roots music from other cultures and genres. You know they were into hip hop too. You know they appreciated the whole hip hop thing.

Isaac: [00:39:39] So basically, the fact that I was so young into punk or anybody . . . punk teaches you not to be like those . . . not to judge anyone, like those people are judging you. You know like I remember living in the Heights and walking to Fitzgerald's, and this is back when the Heights wasn't as nice as it was. I knew that walk was going to be a heck of a walk just to get there because there was a lot of you know Mexican gangs in that neighborhood at the time, and we had to walk through the streets.

Isaac: [00:40:07] You know my brother was a skinhead at the time. His friends had dreadlocks. His girlfriend had purple hair. You know and this is in the early 90s it wasn't . . . purple hair wasn't a normal thing like it is now you know. And just like we would get so like harassed at that time. So one thing you learn is like don't ever like judge anyone. Because I was just like those guys. I just

liked different music. That was it you know? So when you go to roots music . . . I think why punks are so open to roots music is just because we're not judgmental.

Isaac: [00:40:54] Punks are real passionate about them . . . about music period. So punk honestly is like a gateway to roots music. You know. Even if it . . . even if punk says nothing to sound like. "Son, there's nothing in punk that sounds like an old Jamaican record." It's still. That was my gateway. Like the the lessons in life it taught me, to be open minded and don't judge anybody you know by what they're into you know. If anything, learn to check it out and learn what it's about. You know what I mean, if that makes sense.

Mary: [00:41:41] Tell me about some the acts that you DJ with, or the bands that you play with.

Isaac: [00:41:56] A lot of the bands that I played with from Houston . . . I just played with Rudy T. Gonzalez from Rudy and the Reno BOP's. I DJed for his event over at the Continental. He's an old Chicano, R&B, soul, Tejano guy. He's in his mid 70s. He still performs. Los Skarnales, I always always play with those guys. They're Houston legends.

Isaac: [00:42:19] Nick Gaitan, I DJ with him. Manuel Mendiola. I DJed for that event. Basically, I just DJ for artists that I have a connection with, that the music has a connection with.

Isaac: [00:42:38] Los Nahuatlantos from San Antonio. Piñata Protest. I DJed for that event. I mean besides a lot of the . . . I mean I've DJed for so many other bands but not Tejas Got Soul you know. I did the ska and punk stuff, but just to name a few of those . . . Oh, I DJed for Lee Scratch Perry and the Skatalites. I DJed for Voodoo Glow Skulls.

Isaac: [00:43:09] I opened up for these guys, DI from L.A. They're like an L.A. punk band. Who else? I mean there's just so many I can't think of it . . . Who else? The Lee Scratch Perry show and the Skatalites was a lot of fun. These really aren't Tejas Got Soul events, but that's just like I done those with the ska and reggae thing, and I will DJ a ska and reggae event under Tejas Got Soul too, just to add that in there. But yeah, the Vibrators. I DJed opening up for them.

Isaac: [00:43:59] So many other people I just can't think of. And a lot of the local bands. But it's always good . . . it's always fun when it's Los Skarnales or Nick or someone like that. Local guys around here.

Mary: [00:44:12] Bring it backing it back to Tejas Got Soul. Would your set maybe a little different at the D&W than it would be for opening up for an act at the Continental Club?

Isaac: [00:44:30] Yes. I would probably . . . if I was at the Continental Club, I'd probably play more of the English stuff because I mean it's such a diverse crowd over there. And chances are if you're at the Continental Club, you're at an R&B, rock n roll, rockabilly event. So I would do the Tejas Got Soul and I would play . . . and there's tons of Chicano R&B that fits right in at the Continental, that gets the crowd going over there. And at the D&W I always feel more free to play the rancheras and the conjunto and the . . . and the you know the Spanish stuff. So, yes, there's definitely a change. I do the . . . I do more R&B and soul at the Continental. And I . . . and I throw in a couple of Spanish tunes here and there, but at the D&W my set is probably 60 percent Spanish. So.

Mary: [00:45:23] What would you say about DJing and the community of people who come to your shows and the people that you DJ with that I haven't already brought up? What questions

should I have asked that I didn't?

Isaac: [00:45:43] Can you repeat that one more time? I'm sorry.

Mary: [00:45:44] What should I have asked you that I didn't or what would you like to say about DJing Tejas Got Soul?

Isaac: [00:45:55] I just like to say about Tejas Got Soul is that . . . My whole reason for starting and being and doing it and feeling passion about it is to shine a spotlight on the musicians from the past, the guys that started it, and to, you know, to let people know that they're still alive. I mean some of them are still alive. That some are still performing. That this awesome music has been kind of swept under a rug and doesn't get the notoriety that it should. So basically the whole reason for me doing Tejas Got Soul is to represent Houston and Texas, but to let people know that you know it wasn't just happening in San Antonio and East L.A. It's happening in Houston too. And basically, to preserve the culture. I think that's just what. . .

Mary: [00:47:04] I can think of one more question that I want to ask you, and this is maybe related to something that you have mentioned to me before, but . . . Does your feelings about the roots, your roots, and roots music. Has that changed since you've had a child?

Isaac: [00:47:23] Yes, definitely. That's one of the main reasons that pushes me to do this because I want him to be proud of who he is. He's a fifth generation Houstonian, a Texan. And I want him to grow up knowing that he's got . . . he's from an amazing culture you know. I want him to grow up knowing that . . . How can I say it? That his dad was preserving it, so that he can be proud of himself. Yeah, I think that's pretty much it.

Mary: [00:48:10] Is there anything else you want to add?

Isaac: [00:48:10] Aw, no, that's it.

Mary: [00:48:10] This concludes the interview with Isaac Rodriguez.

Isaac: [00:48:13] Alright.