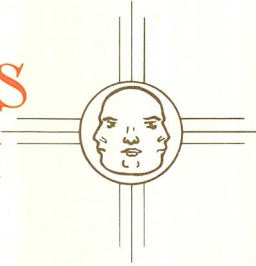


Los Comanches de la Serna



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Los Comanches de la Serna, a group of singers and dancers from Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico, are unusual even in a state where unique and colorful racial and ethnic groups are abundant.

The group is made up of *genízaro* people, descendants of Indian captives of the Comanches, who were traded to the Spanish ranchers who founded Ranchos de Taos in exchange for staples and other items the nomadic Comanches needed. The captives, many of them children, came from a variety of Indian tribes, and were brought up with Spanish surnames, often as part of the Spanish family that took them as barter in the great Indian trade fairs at Taos, three miles north of the Ranchos de Taos community.

The captives, from a variety of tribes, learned Spanish, became Catholics, and in general adopted Spanish ways. But they retained the Comanche language learned from their captors, and prior to 1846, when New Mexico ceased to be part of Mexico and became a territory of the United States, they considered themselves Indians rather than Mexican citizens.

As time went on, the United States government decreed that Indians should be assigned to reservations. Oral history in the cluster of villages at Ranchos de Taos -- nearby Talpa and Llano Quemado are where most of the *genízaro* descendants live today -- says that some of the *genízaros* returned

to their tribes to reunite with loved ones. Among the tribes, their oral tradition says, were Navajos, Utes, and Apaches.

The *genízaros* who remained in the villages remembered the Comanche dances and songs and handed them down from father to son. In their homes, the traditional festive days included Comanche music and dance in their celebration.

Today, Los Comanches de la Serna perform on New Year's Day, commemorated as Emanuel's Day, and on St. Paul's Day, January 25. On those two days, from sunup to sundown, between 30 and 40 drummers, singers, and dancers go from house to house in Talpa and Llano Quemado, singing and dancing. They remember about 36 songs and 12 dances from the old days, and the young people of the community are eager to become part of the group.

The last part of the name, De la Serna, derives from the Cristóbal de la Serna Land Grant, purchased in 1724 from the original owners by Diego Romero, the man who established the community of Ranchos de Taos.

The present leader of Los Comanches de la Serna is Francisco Gonzales, who is a descendant of both the *genízaro* people and Diego Romero. He is deeply concerned that the unique Comanche tradition of the *genízaro* people in northern New Mexico be perpetuated. He has taken the group to perform at several universities, Spanish village fiestas in New Mexico, a Taos Indian Pueblo feast day, and a number of other functions, including weddings.

The *genízaros* live in the ruggedly beautiful Sangre de Cristo Mountains, part of the Southern Rockies. The adobe houses of their community have mellowed with the years until they seem to have been there forever, as timeless as the earth itself, as enduring as these remarkable people.