

LATIN RECORD RACK

Folk tradition, modern rendition

By AGUSTIN GURZA
Times Staff Writer

Son de Madera

"Las Orquestas del Día" (Son de Madera)

★★★½

THIS accomplished group has been at the forefront of the movement to revive the rousing music of Veracruz. Known as the *son jarocho*, this rhythmic style arose centuries ago from the dramatic convergence of Spanish, Indian and African elements. It's characterized by the bright flutter of the *jarana*, a small guitar; the sharp dance steps of the *zapateado*; the improvisations of the lead singer and a high-pitched call-and-response chorus.

But this is not just another traditional album of *música jarocho*, too many of which become anthropological documents. "Las Orquestas del Día" marks a creative step forward for the band, which takes the folk music it has cherished and brings it into the present, making it sound fresh, modern and fully its own.

Recorded in Mexico City and produced by members of Quetzal, East L.A.'s Afro-jarocho fusion band, this work is authentic but full of surprises. Standards such as "La Bamba" and "El Casabel" are barely recognizable, with unfamiliar verses and revelatory reworkings.

The arrangements are occasionally breathtaking, intensified by the smart song sequencing. In a one-minute track, the haunting a cappella vocal of Laura Reboloso Cuellar affirms love and loyalty in contrast with images of desolation. That's followed by the 6½-minute "La Marea" ("The Tide"), with its soulful tapestry of strings, including the *clavecin* (sounds like a harpsichord) of Miguel Ciceros and the always evocative violin of L.A.'s Rocío Marrón. Then comes the joyful "La Fantasía de Santiago," with verses and interludes that float softly to a soothing, lullaby-like ending.

This is a beautiful work that shows how fruitful it can be when Chicanos and *Mexicanos*, sometimes distant cousins, collaborate creatively across the border.



Courtesy of Son de Madera

ACCOMPLISHED: Son de Madera's "Las Orquestas del Día" marks a creative step forward for the band, which takes the folk music it has cherished and brings it into the present.