

The Day The Music Died

by Julio Guerrero,
*Democracy
Chronicles*

A number of years back my good friend, Mario Z. Álvarez and I were aimlessly driving around in North Hollywood, Los Angeles on New Year's Eve, no less. Mario and I had met in the Pacific Northwest years before while we were working on Chicano radio news, him in Portland, and I, in Seattle and we were reunited this time around to format the news system for KUFW, an FM station to

serve the farm worker communities in the San Joaquin Valley at the request of Cesar Chavez. But this symbolic night we had no plans, no place to stay, no friends in the area and it was already past ten. After we ran out of ideas of how to end the year we decided to stop in a bar and share a drink instead of driving around in the drizzling night so we picked a random bar and went inside shaking off the rain from our hair.

It was a nice bar-dive with a good crowd in seasonal festive mood embellished in chorus songs aided by a piano man. Since we didn't know anybody we went straight to the bar and took the two available stools towards the end. Walking into a neighborhood bar out of the blue is always a gamble so we didn't really know what to expect but soon enough it felt like a nice comfortable place. The bartender was very prompt to take our order with a friendly smile so as we asked for a couple of beers they were promptly served along with a couple of Christmas hats everybody in the bar was wearing. Noticing we were not local or part of the regular crowd, the friendly man behind the bar made small conversation with us and asked what we did so we told him and, as the night rolled on, we found out later the crowd at the end of the bar were saying Mario and I were Cesar Chavez's bodyguards. All of this made Mario and I feel right at home; out of the rain, in a warm place, being part of the chisme, with Raza singing *rancheras* accompanied by piano so we said *Salud* to one another wearing the silly pointy hats.

The piano man was an older Mexican fellow wearing a nice suit, a stylish haircut, a pencil thin mustache and was doing a great job keeping everybody engaged and motivated. He was actually



a professional performer that went by the name of Don Juan although they kept calling him "Don", as in a gringo name. At one point Don Juan asked if there were any requests so I shot back "how about

American Pie".

It could have been the *cerveza*, the holiday mood or the fact that I felt at home what made me think I had the license to change the *ambiente* from José Alfredo Jiménez, Cuco Sánchez and Los Panchos to Don McLean but it definitely didn't sit well in this Chicano L.A. bar. There was an immediate reaction of protest especially from the most animated members of the crowd but I only thought *American Pie* would be a nice group tune to sing along to. Luckily Don Juan, an expert at dealing with loud crowds mediated the situation and proceeded to play the well-known epic song and after the first chords the entire bar was singing along "*Bye, bye Miss American Pie...*"

Today, this particular song has a personal ring to me because on October 21st I lost a dear friend and mentor whom I credit for introducing me to the appreciation of media. I met **Hipolito "Polo" Alvarez** in the early sixties in Monterrey when we both followed the US Top 40 charts. Those were the years of preparatory school when we immersed ourselves in the rhythm and sounds of the great pioneers of rock such as Bill Haley, Chuck Berry and Little Richard while at the same time joined students marching to the U.S. Consulate chanting ¡Yankis, no!, ¡Gringas, Si!!!

Personally, Polo was a charismatic human being, with a charming personality and a great sense of humor. As a friend he graced me with his understanding of pop art and culture and basically cultured me on human behavior and relations. Although he was only a year older than me he had a vast vision and understanding of the ever evolving media industry which

Muere el locutor Polo Álvarez, 'la biblia del rock'

El locutor que formó parte de Radio Alegría y es principalmente recordado por su conocimiento en la música rock, falleció este viernes a los 80 años de edad.

El locutor Polo Álvarez murió este viernes a los 80 años de edad. Créditos: Cortesía

Por Redacción ABC Noticias

Monterrey.- El mundo de la radio y los amantes de la música rock en Nuevo León están de luto, por el fallecimiento del locutor Hipólito Álvarez Guajardo, conocido como Polo Álvarez, a los 80 años de edad.

El comunicador, también apodado 'la biblia del rock', falleció la tarde de este Viernes (21 de octubre, 2022) por un infarto, luego de haber sido operado de la vesícula, informó su familia.

Se mantuvo por más de 50 años en los micrófonos, deleitando a su audiencia, especialmente cuando se hablaba de Rock, su rama de especialidad



y por la que es principalmente recordado.

A lo largo de su carrera prestó sus servicios en estaciones como Radio Alegría, Premier 91.7, Stereo 99, Stereo Classic y Frecuencia Tec, además de ser reconocido por su participación en programas como Sincronías y Rock and Roll Fantasy.

Álvarez se convirtió en una voz icónica en la comunidad regiomontana, no solo entre el público general, sino también entre personalidades del mundo de la comunicación, que dedicaron palabras de despedida a su memoria en las redes sociales.

“El considerado como “La Biblia del rock” fue catalogado por varias generaciones de locutores como uno de los pilares de la radio”, se puede leer en una de las publicaciones en redes sociales.

in time would earn him a special place in Monterrey and across Mexico. Throughout his long career, Polo became an iconic radio voice and personality in Monterrey not only among the general public, but also well respected among personalities from the world of communication and the entertainment industry. Like many, Polo started as a humble studio engineer where he learned the basic tools of the broadcasting trade which eventually launched his 50-plus years career. Since he filled the late night hours before the station signing off, he would ask me to join him to keep him company so we would spend many hours together talking about plans, dreams and visions sometimes past 3am. Thanks to these late night sessions I acquired the basic understanding of radio broadcasting operations which I would use later on as I got involved in media activism as part of the Chicano movement.

Ten years after we met, I became in charge of coordinating the Radio production component of *Sol de Aztlan*, a Chicano organization producing programs aired on WKAR licensed to Michigan State University, produced the first bilingual children's program for public radio at a national level, offered broadcasting training programs for many Spanish language radio aficionados around Michigan and the Great Lakes area that would serve hundreds of thousands of Chicax and Latinx listeners around the Midwest offering a series of workshops in which people from Michigan, Indiana, Ohio and Illinois were trained and later went back to their community where participants eventually developed their radio shows in commercial and public radio stations, I eventually coproduced the first national *Chicano News Service* and co-founded KDNA, one of the first community owned Spanish language stations in the country and 20 years later I was invited by Cesar Chavez to help him develop KUFW, *Radio Campesina*.

When I heard of Polo's passing memories of our friendship flashed through my mind and the prose;

*I was a lonely teenage broncin' buck
With a pink carnation and a pickup truck
But I knew I was out of luck
The day the music died*

As an epilogue I would submit that Polo was credited for promoting rock music in Monterrey to the degree of putting the city on the map for international concert promoters giving Monterrey the title of the *Capital of Rock and Roll*. Polo also opened opportunities for many a young talent that continues his rich legacy. Furthermore, that legacy transcends beyond borders by leading me in the direction of media practice and activism. Thanks to his friendship and mentorship I became part of the *Chicano Radio Movement* and the rest is history.

RADIO ESPERANZA



96.5 KEPJ-LPFM-SAN ANTONIO