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Steven Loza. *Barrio Rhythm: Mexican American Music in Los Angeles*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993. xvii + 285 pages. Pictures, notes, sources, discography, and index.

Scholars of immigration and ethnic studies have grappled with controversies surrounding the processes of acculturation and assimilation. These themes are especially pertinent in Chicano cultural history, in part because of issues associated with the proximity of the Mexican border, cyclical patterns of immigration, and the culture of the borderlands. These experiences tend to continually redefine what is "traditional" in both Mexican and Mexican-American cultures. Indeed, in *Barrio Rhythm*, ethnomusicologist Steven Loza posits that one of the challenges in exploring the extent to which the Chicano subculture will assimilate into the dominant society is tempered by the reality that "Mexico is simply too close—geographically, historically, economically, and in the final analysis, culturally." (page 53)

Loza examines the evolution of Mexican-American music as a process of change, maintenance, and adaptation in Los Angeles, one of the major centers of Chicano group life in the United States. He focuses on the post-World War II years, arguing that "the period marks the emergence of the Mexican American, or Chicano, as a dynamic actor on the American state—north and south of the U.S.-Mexican border." (page xviii) This development in the musical life of L.A.'s Chicano communities resulted from the acceptance, viability, and increase of Mexican Americans and other Latinos in the entertainment industry, including the night club circuits, broadcasting, and movies. In addition, focusing on a contemporary period allowed Loza, himself a musician, to play the role of the "native ethnographer," studying and evaluating other Chicano artists and their shared cultural heritage. He notes how at different times and in varying ways, musicians like Lalo Guerrero, Los Lobos, and Teresa Covarrubias countered the hegemony of the dominant culture

by presenting alternative life experiences which are rooted in a Mexican past.

The flourishing of Mexican American music in Los Angeles reflects the extent to which Chicano musicians have, on the one hand, maintained "traditional" Mexican cultural genres while on the other hand, also transforming and adapting them to contemporary styles for a myriad of audiences. This paradox is represented by, for example, the Masked Phantom Band, featuring the Chicano saxophonist Li'l Bobby Rey. In the 1950s, the band mixed the traditional Mexican ballad style of the corrido with the sounds of rock-and-roll in "Corrido Rock," which consisted "of two saxophones playing a norteño-styled riff in harmony, superimposed on a supporting fast rock beat." (page 82) Loza shows how this technique of freely mixing musical styles contributed to a varied assortment of Mexican-American music, as artists incorporated Puerto Rican, Afro-Caribbean, and Latin jazz sounds into their repertoires. Further, this blending of musical genres continues with more recent Chicano groups, including The Alienz, Los Rock Angels, and rappers Kid Frost.

Loza argues that this fluid exchange of cultural artifacts between musicians from a range of ethnic backgrounds and the diversity of Los Angeles itself are major factors in the evolution of the "Eastside sound" beginning in the late 1960s. This emergence coincided with the political activism of the Chicano movement, giving rise to local groups like El Chicano, whose 1971 recording, "Sabor a mi" became known in some eastside quarters as the 'eastside anthem,' and to this day it is still remembered as one of the most important musical legacies of its period in East Los Angeles." (page 103) Loza posits, however, that among contemporary Chicano musicians from this decade, Los Lobos best depicts the complex cultural processes of maintenance and transformation. The band is well known for its bilingual and rock-and-roll format, receiving a Grammy Award for the best Mexican-American ensemble in 1983 and again in 1989. This critical acclaim came after the band went to Mexico "absorbing ideas, learning music, purchasing instruments, and generally enjoying the journey. They went to learn about their

culture, the source of much of the music that they were re-creating and reinterpreting." (page 237) Thus, the evolution of Chicano popular music in Los Angeles embodies the dynamic processes of borrowing from other genres, preserving selected traditional Mexican styles, and interpreting the diversity of experiences among Chicano people.

Musicians, however, have taken disparate and oftentimes painful journeys in creating this fusion of rhythms and creating identities as Mexican Americans. For example, Loza relates how the difficulties with getting Anglo audiences to accept Guerrero as a mainstream singer compelled him to continue to perform Mexican songs for largely Mexican audiences. Guerrero remembers how in the 1930s, Anglos "couldn't conceive of a Mexican, especially one who looks as Indian as I do, sitting up there and singing Bing Crosby songs." (page 159) But when Guerrero ventured to Mexico, and despite widely-popular Mexican records, Mexicans regarded him as a *pocho*, a derogatory term for an assimilated Mexican American. Loza delineates how these dilemmas related to forging Mexican American culture and identity continue. These tensions are further complicated by expectations about "traditional" gender roles for women and intergenerational conflicts between Mexican immigrant parents and their children born north of the Rio Grande. For example, Sandra Hahn, a member of Los Illegals, consented to an interview (in October 1984) about her work although her parents did not know that she belonged to a Chicano punk rock band. Hahn told Loza that her parents "wouldn't accept it.... To them, it's just something that you [Chicanas] just don't do." (page 215)

Loza divides his study of Mexican-American music in Los Angeles into three parts: History, Ethnography, and Reflections. The first part examines the complex cultural, political, and socio-economic struggles in the history of the *pueblo*, from its Native American roots, Spanish/Mexican settlement, Anglo conquest and eventual growth as a U.S. metropolis, to the relatively more recent Chicano Movement and Eastside Riots in the post-World War II era. Relying primarily on studies of Los Angeles by Chicano scholars, notably Richard Griswold del Castillo's *The Los Angeles Barrio* (1978)

and Rodolfo Acuña's *A Community Under Siege* (1985), this narrative serves as a succinct background to Loza's forte, the role of Mexican-American music in the lives of Chicanos in and out of the barrio and the fluidity of dialogue across borders. Loza also uses newspaper sections, especially "Mundo Artístico y Social" from *La Opinión*, to trace the growth of, and transformations in, Los Angeles' musical scene. Although a bit thin on analysis, he does provide a good description and chronology of the tremendous expansion of Mexican-American and Latin-based entertainment beginning in the 1950s.

The latter two sections of the book are arguably the most significant, and Loza is clearly in his element talking about music and musical production with fellow musicians. The interviews, conducted in October 1984, contain rich materials not only for examining the development of Chicano music but also for illustrating the diverse experiences, including struggles, failures, and successes, of the fifteen artists who had been instrumental in music originating from Los Angeles since the war years. Their reminiscences, oftentimes reflective, convey the humor, determination, and resiliency with which they approach their lives, their legacies, and their music. *Afficionados* will no doubt take notice of Loza's analyses of the musical styles of selected artists ranging from Lalo Guerrero's 1943 *guaracha* "Chucos suaves" to the more contemporary "El Lay (L.A.)" by Los Illegals.

The ethnography section is further divided into two sections, "The War Veterans," which include interviews with Guerrero, Eddie Cano, and Andy Russell; and "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag," which focuses on newer artists like The Brat, Los Illegals, Califas, and Los Lobos. These musicians, however, share some similar problems, for example, marketability in the mainstream recording business remains a tremendous hurdle. For some groups, formal and informal networks in the Chicano community continue to be vital outlets for exposure.

Barrio Rhythm makes a significant contribution to Chicano history by showing that continuous, cyclical immigration to and from Mexico influences the cultural developments in Mexico,

Mexican American communities, and the borderlands. Unlike earlier Chicano scholars who had argued that patterns of nineteenth century U.S.-Mexican relations established the boundaries of current and future proceedings, Loza shows that migrations continue to play a crucial role in the creation or rejection of Mexican American identities. This work also makes a contribution to several fields of inquiry, including musicology, urban studies, and the history of Los Angeles.

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