

10

Twenty-First Century Latin American and Latino Popular Music

DANIEL PARTY

Introduction

This chapter discusses recent trends in both Latin American popular music and Latino popular music (Latinos are people of Latin American heritage who live in the United States). In the new millennium, Latin American and Latino popular music are so deeply intertwined that it has become increasingly difficult to draw a clear line between them, as the songs considered here illustrate. Strikingly, the United States is today the second-largest consumer market for Latin American music after Brazil. The market for regional Mexican music (an umbrella term that includes styles like norteña, banda, and ranchera) is larger in the United States than in Mexico itself! Accordingly, the production center for regional Mexican music is now in Southern California, not Northern Mexico. And the largest market for Dominican bachata is not on the island of Hispaniola but on the East Coast, largely due to the increase in Dominican immigration and the popularity of Aventura, a *Dominican* band from the South Bronx.

Not only is the United States an important consumer of "Latin/o American" music (this term will be used when it is appropriate to encompass both Latin Americans and U.S. Latinos), but it is also the most prolific production center for Spanish-language popular music, the vast majority of which is produced by the four major international recording labels (Warner, EMI, Sony, and Universal). Each of these labels has a subsidiary that oversees music for the Latin American and Latino market. Notably, these Latin music subsidiaries are not located in Latin America but in the United States (three in Miami and one in Los Angeles). Some artists based in Latin America travel to the United States to collaborate with producers and take advantage of cutting-edge studio technology. Some relocate permanently to the United States in

LISTENING guides

Shakira, "La tortura"
Juanes, "Me enamora"
Los Tigres del Norte, "De paisano a paisano"
Venegas, "El presente"
Calle 13, "La Perla"
Kumbia Kings featuring Ozomatli, "Mi gente"
La India, "Sedúceme"
Aventura, "Su veneno"

order to internationalize their careers (Miami remains the preferred hub for artists with hemispheric appeal). And some Spanish-language pop stars are U.S.-born Latinos who are bicultural, equally comfortable in U.S. and Latin American cultures.

One of the most salient features of twenty-first-century Latin/o American popular music is its **hybridity**. Hybridity, the mixing of various elements, is certainly not unique to Latin American music. All popular music from around the world is the result of combinations of features from multiple sources from the distant and recent past. What is noteworthy about recent Latin/o American popular music is that it embraces hybridity as an aesthetic. More often than in Anglo pop music, Latin/o American artists are likely to combine the local with the global in their hit songs. Colombian Juanes may play a Jimi Hendrix-inspired guitar solo over a Colombian cumbia rhythm, Puerto Rican MC Residente may rap over Balkan brass band music, and Los Angeles band Ozomatli may mix a shout-out in Jamaican dancehall style with tejano accordion and Indian *tabla*. The songs discussed in this chapter illustrate that Latin/o Americans are in dialogue not only with other nations from the Americas but also with the rest of the world.

An important inspiration for the foregrounding of musical hybridity is the recent increase in interaction among different Latino communities in the United States (the adjective **inter-Latino** is used to describe this type of interaction). Latin American immigrants to the United States not only encounter dominant Anglo culture, but also other Latin American cultures, often for the first time. The marked diversification of the Latino population since the 1990s has resulted in a noticeable growth in the number of inter-Latino marriages and other cross-cultural affiliations. An increasing number of young Latinos today thus experience an added layer of hybridity, since they may embody two or more national groups (e.g., Mexican, Cuban, Bolivian). Inter-Latino diversity is challenging the long-standing approach to thinking about Latinos in terms of a single external national affiliation (such as “Cuban-American”). Inter-Latino interaction in the United States has become an important trend in popular music, as exemplified by the international hits of Shakira and Wyclef Jean’s “Hips Don’t Lie” (Colombian and Haitian), and Café Tacuba and producer Gustavo Santaolalla’s “Eres” (Mexican and Argentinean, discussed in Chapter 3).

There is much to laud in such music. A hybrid aesthetic rejects notions of racial and cultural purity and instead celebrates the multiple associations and influences in our lives, regardless of our ethnicity. For Latinos in particular, hybridity is a feature of **Latinidad**, the shared culture and experience of Latin American immigrants and their descendants in the United States. Thus, hybrid music (“neither here nor there” or “both here and there”) can speak powerfully to the life experiences of Latinos and other immigrant communities.

Although the notion of hybridity may suggest egalitarian cultural exchanges, one needs to be aware of the power dynamics that often surround them. In hybrid expressions, one culture almost always dominates. For example, in *Nor-tec* music (the hybrid style of techno and Mexican *banda* discussed in the book's introduction), DJs sample *banda* music to create electronic music pieces, not the other way around. (Although the idea of a brass band emulating the blips and beats of techno is intriguing, most likely the resulting music would not be considered *banda* by *banda* fans, and might not be appealing to them.) Moreover, hybridity can easily contribute to ethnic ambiguity, functioning to create a common-denominator product to maximize potential consumer audiences. From a marketing perspective, the more styles included in an album, or even within a single song, the larger number of communities that may purchase it. But in creating ethnic ambiguity, hybridity can function as a homogenizing force that conceals or downplays socio-cultural differences.

This chapter provides a sample of important trends in popular Latin/o American music of the twenty-first century's first decade. It emphasizes artists who have one foot in Latin America and one in the United States, who have a sizeable following across the Americas, who win Grammy and Latin Grammy awards, and whose music is widely available for purchase. Although contemporary popular musics created by Latin Americans and U.S. Latinos have many things in common (and often sound very similar), it is important to recognize that U.S. Latinos are a distinct group from Latin Americans. U.S. Latinos constitute an ethnic minority with a long history of struggle for civil rights and social recognition. As such, the music of U.S. Latinos holds a different set of meanings as the expression of a historically disenfranchised minority. For that reason, this chapter is divided into two sections. The first section covers contemporary Latin American popular music (with examples by Colombian, Mexican, and Puerto Rican artists), and the second examines recent trends in popular music by U.S.-born Latinos.

Contemporary Latin American Popular Music

Colombian Hit-Makers

Shakira and Juanes, the most commercially successful Latin American artists of the new millennium, have a lot in common. Both are Colombian singer-songwriters who grew up in cosmopolitan environments that exposed them to a wide range of music, with British and U.S. rock at the core. Both relocated to the United States in the late 1990s to reinvent and internationalize

their careers. Both use a hybrid approach to commercial pop rock; that is, they borrow from a wide range of local and international styles to “spice up” their radio-friendly hits. Both are popular beyond the Spanish-speaking Americas, and have become de facto cultural ambassadors for Colombia and Latin America.

In the United States, where they still reside, Shakira and Juanes are the most visible faces of “new Latinos.” The marked increase in migrant populations from South and Central America since the 1990s has challenged the perception of U.S. Latinos as primarily Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban—the three historically dominant Latino communities—and has shifted attention away from stateside Latino culture to Latin American culture. The two songs discussed in this section are among the most popular Latin/o American hits of the twenty-first century. Shakira’s 2005 “La tortura” (Torture) holds the record for longest run (25 weeks) at the number one spot on the U.S. Billboard *Latin Pop* chart. Juanes’s 2007 “Me enamora” (She Seduces Me) follows right behind it, having stayed at number one for 20 weeks. Shakira’s piece won Latin Grammy awards for best song and record of the year, and so did Juanes’s two years later.

Shakira: Resisting Categorization

Shakira (Shakira Isabel Mebarak Ripoll, b. 1977) is the most successful Latin American singer worldwide of recent years. She is a global phenomenon and has recorded songs in Spanish, English, and Portuguese. Shakira has been described as “pop’s twenty-first-century Latina bombshell,” a moniker that echoes the way Brazilian Carmen Miranda was characterized in the late 1930s (see Chapter 6). Yet she is also known for her intelligence; in an interview she once explained the choice of covers for her albums with references to Freud’s psychoanalysis and Jungian archetypes.

Shakira is a fascinating example of a global Latin American who resists easy categorization. Born in Barranquilla, an important port town on Colombia’s northern Caribbean coast, she is of Lebanese and Spanish ancestry, and describes herself as a mix of “raw kibbeh and fried plantain.” She grew up in a cosmopolitan environment, and her early musical preferences were divided between Anglo bands like Nirvana, Led Zeppelin, and The Cure and songs derived from her Arabic heritage.

Shakira’s international popularity began with her third album, *Pies descalzos* (Bare Feet, 1996), which she cowrote and coproduced with Luis Fernando Ochoa. Already in this early album one can hear Shakira’s eclectic approach to popular music. The song “Un poco de amor” (A Little Bit of Love) featured a Jamaican dancehall beat and guest vocals by reggae singer Howard Glasford. Two years later she released what many critics and fans consider her best album, *Dónde están los ladrones?* (Where Are the Thieves?),

The Latin Music Explosion and Crossover

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Latin American and U.S. Latino popular music seemed unstoppable. Ricky Martin's electrifying performance in the 1999 Grammy Awards ceremony landed him a *Time* magazine cover and countless media appearances. Martin's achievement paved the way for a cadre of Latin/o American artists who found commercial success in the United States and beyond with English-language pop albums.

The artists of the so-called "Latin explosion," who besides Martin included Marc Anthony, Jennifer Lopez, Enrique Iglesias, and Shakira, followed the model of 1980s crossover stars Gloria Estefan and the Miami Sound Machine. This is not coincidental; Miami Sound Machine founder and Gloria's husband Emilio Estefan Jr. produced several of the "Latin explosion" albums. The tenants of Estefan's crossover model include the use of standard American verse-chorus song format; the incorporation of subdued Latin American music influences, such as the syncopated keyboard style of salsa (derived from the salsa montuno; see Chapter 5), nylon-string guitar runs, and—most importantly—lyrics in English, peppered with a few easy-to-pronounce Spanish words.

The financial appeal for Latin/o Americans of reaching the U.S. Anglo music market is undeniable. The United States is the largest market for recorded music in the world, accounting for 27 percent of global revenues in 2008. By comparison, the largest Latin American market for music is Brazil (which represents 1.2 percent of global revenues), followed by Mexico (0.8 percent), and Argentina (0.3 percent). The urge to record in English is especially strong because the English-speaking United States has a long history of resistance to popular music in other languages. In 2007, for example, the market

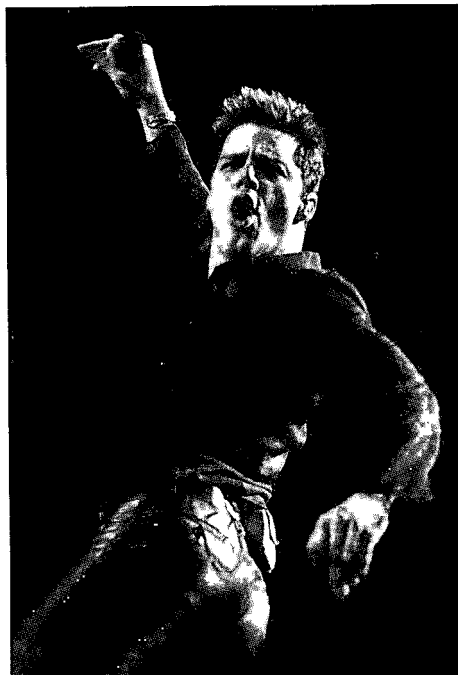


FIGURE 10.1 Ricky Martin on stage in Miami in 1999

for Spanish-language albums represented only a modest 5 percent of total sales.

At first, Latin/o Americans were thrilled to see crossover stars achieve what seemed to be a realization of the American dream. But as the media craze subsided, fans grew disenchanted with what began to sound like a predictable musical formula that actually included relatively few influences from Latin America. Since then, several of the "explosion" artists have returned to recording in Spanish in order to reconnect with their original audiences. From today's vantage point, the "Latin Explosion" illustrates the limitations of a one-size-fits-all formula in Latin/o American music, and the dangers of catering too slavishly to the English-speaking mainstream.

a considerably more ambitious CD featuring mariachi trumpets (“Ciega, sordomuda,” Blind, Deaf and Dumb), bolero-style percussion on the bongos (“Moscas en la casa,” Flies in the Home), and the Middle-Eastern *oud*, a fretless pear-shaped precursor of the guitar (“Ojos así,” Eyes Like That).

Interested in expanding her popularity to include the U.S. market, Shakira did what many Latin American artists have done since the early 1980s: move to Miami. Riding the wave of the late 1990s “Latin Explosion” (In Depth 10.1), she released her first English-language album, *Laundry Service*, in 2001. The album topped charts around the world, yet many Latin American critics felt that Shakira had sold out and overly “Americanized” her sound. They pointed out the changes in lyrical themes on the release (mostly about love, whereas she had sung about political or socially engaged issues previously) and in her image. Shakira had dyed her signature dark hair blonde, and she appeared to be skinnier and wearing considerably skimpier clothes. All of this elicited rather unfavorable comparisons to Britney Spears.

On her follow-up album, Shakira took a different strategy. Instead of producing a one-size-fits-all crossover release, she divided her audience and provided two distinct products, one in Spanish (*Fijación oral, Vol. 1*, 2005) and months later one in English (*Oral Fixation, Vol. 2*, 2005). Although the album titles suggest that one release is a translation of the other, there are only two songs that appear on both albums. Shakira has explained that the musical elements used in a song lead her naturally to the language she should use to record it. You can hear this: the album intended for an Anglo audience is more homogenous, incorporating mostly rock influences. The Spanish-language one, by contrast, is strikingly eclectic. A *New York Times* review labeled it “blissfully pan-American”; an even better descriptor might be “worldly,” given that many of its influences come from beyond the Americas. Tracks include nods to Brazilian bossa nova, 1960s French pop, 1980s British synth pop, reggaeton, and Argentine *rock nacional*. In *Fijación oral, Vol. 1*, she comes across as an informed listener with a profound knowledge of popular music from many countries, and the album proved an important point to her Latin American critics: that she had not replaced her Colombian/Latin American identity with a U.S. one. Instead, she absorbed what the United States and Europe had to offer and used it creatively, in conjunction with her Latin American heritage.

The first single of *Fijación oral, Vol. 1*, “La tortura” (Torture, Listening Guide 10.1), is a duet with Spanish balladeer Alejandro Sanz, a major pop star in Spain and in Latin America. Structured as a conversation, the song tells us that Sanz cheated on Shakira and is now apologizing, but only half-heartedly. The true feelings of each singer are ambiguous until the second half of the song, in which Sanz acknowledges he wants forgiveness but plans to continue misbehaving (on Saturdays!). The story’s twist comes at the

Shakira: "La tortura" (Torture)

Composers: Shakira, Luis F. Ochoa

Lyricists: Shakira, Alejandro Sanz

Date of recording: 2005

Performers/instruments: Shakira with Alejandro Sanz; accordion, electric and acoustic guitars, electric bass, Cuban tres, keyboards, drums, and percussion

Form: strophic verse-chorus with bridge

Tempo/meter: moderate duple

What to Listen for:

- Prominent reggaeton beat, often accompanied by a tresillo-style bass line
- Eclectic studio production: many electronic sound effects, instruments such as Colombian vallenato accordion and Cuban tres featured, as well as Sanz's Spanish flamenco-inspired singing
- Backbeats strummed on electric guitar, a style taken from Jamaican ska and reggae

Time	Text	Translation	Description
0:00	Ay payita mía . . .	Hey girl . . .	Entrance of reggaeton beat, together with an electronically echoed acoustic guitar and an electric guitar playing chords on beat 2 (the backbeat) during the introduction. Later, bass and accordion play over the same beat, imitating cumbia vallenato (see Chapter 4)
0:19	No pido que todos los días sean de sol . . .	I don't ask for sunshine every day . . .	Stripped-down verse section features female voice prominently as well as accordion chords and sparse percussion hits; other instruments silent
0:39	Ay amor me duele tanto . . .	Oh, love, it hurts so bad . . .	Pre-chorus , with vocal harmonies; entrance of bass with tresillo pattern over reggaeton beat; guitar plays sparse, occasional chords
0:54	Yo sé que no he sido un santo . . .	I know I haven't been a saint . . .	Chorus ; full ensemble sound featured with ska-inspired backbeats on the electric guitar, along with reggaeton rhythm and heavier bass pulse on strong beats
1:22	No puedo pedir que el invierno . . .	I can't expect winter. . .	Verse ; music becomes sparser again, with reggaeton pulse and bass prominent, but less drum set and guitar
1:42	Ay amor me duele tanto . . .	Oh, love, it hurts so bad . . .	Pre-chorus ; Cuban tres plays prominent fills
1:56	Yo sé que no he sido un santo . . .	I know I haven't been a saint . . .	Chorus ; full ensemble sound featured again; accordion solo at 2:16
2:25	No te bajas, no te bajas . . .	Don't let go, don't let go . . .	Bridge ; most instruments fall silent for a time, except male voice and bass; slow buildup of pulse and percussion again

(continued)

Time	Text	Translation	Description
2:45	Yo sé que no he sido un santo . . .	I know I haven't been a saint . . .	Chorus
3:00	Todo lo que he hecho por ti . . .	Everything I've done for you . . .	Outro; section features electronically generated melodies and electric guitar on backbeats; texture slowly thins; acoustic guitar strums in the final seconds



FIGURE 10.2 Cover of Shakira's *Fijación oral*, Vol. 1, 2005

end when Shakira recognizes that he will not change and then breaks off their relationship. Musically, the song is a catchy mix of reggaeton, Colombian vallenato accordion playing, and Jamaican dancehall, together with the flamenco-stylized vocals of Sanz.

The music video for “La tortura,” directed by the renowned Michael Hausman, broke MTV’s unspoken language barrier when it aired on the station without translation or subtitles. The video is largely about the male singer’s voyeuristic gaze, as he peeks at Shakira from an adjacent apartment window. Through the use of fragmented narrative, Hausman undermines the possibility of understanding the song in a monolithic way. There are times in the

video when we are likely to empathize with Sanz, a few second later to despise him. Most interestingly, as Sanz watches Shakira lasciviously, we—the viewers—become voyeurs as well, complicit in his transgression.

Shakira’s savvy use of images brings to mind an artist like Madonna, an early star of the music-video era. Like Madonna in the 1980s, Shakira plays with various female stereotypes, for instance, the naïve virgin when she sings in a childish voice (“Día de enero,” January Day), the sexually charged bombshell (“Las de la intuición,” Women with Intuition), or the nurturing mother (on the CD’s cover art; Figure 10.2). Also like Madonna, Shakira uses her body and dancing to garner attention, and once we are looking at her, she manages to make us aware of the very act of looking.

Juanes: A Triple Threat

Singer-songwriter and guitarist Juanes (Juan Esteban Aristizábal Vásquez, b. 1972) started his career in his home country of Colombia as lead singer for

a heavy metal band. In 1998 he moved to Los Angeles to start a solo career, and the half-dozen albums he has released since have topped the charts throughout Latin America, the United States, and Europe. To date, he has more Grammy awards than any other Latin American or U.S. Latino artist. Perhaps the most striking feature of Juanes's international success is the fact that he has achieved it singing in Spanish. When prodded as to why he does not sing in English he responds: "I prefer to play guitar in English and sing in Spanish."

In his music and appearance, Juanes combines three important types of Latin American musician. He is part urban, scroungy rocker who can solo on the electric guitar; part romantic crooner with a smooth voice; and part socially conscious singer-songwriter. Although he borrows from all these styles, his sound is considerably more homogenous than Shakira's. His songs are arranged for a traditional rock combo of electric guitar, electric bass, keyboards, and drum set—and he regularly performs his songs live with a small band. Gustavo Santaolalla, an Argentine composer and producer who lives in Los Angeles, has been behind Juanes's entire solo career. Not only has Santaolalla produced or coproduced all of Juanes's records, but he is responsible for encouraging Juanes to incorporate elements of Colombian traditional music into his pop-rock mix, adding yet another layer to his hybrid style.

Juanes manages to be a pop star and still sing about social issues. A recurring theme in several of his songs is the problem of landmines in Colombia, an ever-present threat. Since 1990, landmines have led to more than eight thousand amputees there, and some estimates suggest that they claim three victims a day. Juanes has also taken an active role in organizing concerts with a sociopolitical agenda. He organized a Peace Without Borders concert in response to the diplomatic crisis that affected Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela in 2008. A year later he organized a controversial second Peace Without Borders concert in Havana, Cuba (Figure 1.3). Given Juanes's massive following, these activities have resulted in public acknowledgments by the presidents of Venezuela, Colombia, Cuba, and the United States.

Juanes's international hit "Me enamora" (2007, Listening Guide 10.2) is one of his best-known songs. An upbeat love song with a lilting guitar intro, a strong downbeat, and a memorable chorus, "Me enamora" topped the charts in over a dozen countries and won two Latin Grammy awards. The electric guitar solo borrows from classic Anglo blues rock, illustrating well what Juanes means by an "English-speaking" guitar.

Although there are many important similarities between the music of Shakira and Juanes, some key differences should be

FIGURE 10.3 Juanes in concert in the Dominican Republic, 2010



© Juanes: “Me enamora” (She Seduces Me)

Composer/lyricist: Juan Esteban Aristizábal Vázquez
(Juanes)

Date of recording: 2007

Performers/instruments: Juanes; electric guitar,
keyboards, electric bass, drums, and percussion

Form: strophic verse–chorus

Tempo: moderate duple

What to Listen for:

- Strong rhythm-and-blues/rock influences, less overtly associated with Latin America
- Elements of Jamaican ska and reggae, and of international pop
- Sudden shifts of texture from full to sparse, corresponding to lyrical sections

Time	Text	Translation	Description
0:00			Instrumental introduction in electrified blues style; electric guitar and full ensemble sound with electric bass and drum set prominent in this section
0:19	Cada blanco de mi mente . . .	Each blank in my mind . . .	Verse; texture becomes thinner initially, with bass on strong beats and high hat on backbeats behind vocals
0:39	Hay tantas cosas . . .	There are so many things . . .	Pre-chorus; texture builds slowly, adding electric guitar strumming on the backbeat, more percussion, and electric organ
0:49	Me enamora . . .	I love how . . .	Chorus; section features vocal harmonies and a strong backbeat feel, reminiscent of Jamaican ska and reggae, as in “La tortura” (Listening Guide 10.1)
1:15			Return of introductory melody, followed by a solo on the electric guitar; loud section with full ensemble sound
1:44	Yo no sé si te merezco . . .	I’m not sure I deserve you . . .	Verse; texture becomes sparser again, as in the first verse
2:04	Hay tantas cosas . . .	There are so many things . . .	Pre-chorus
2:14	Me enamora . . .	I love how . . .	Chorus

noted. Perhaps the most controversial is their choice of language. As part of her crossover effort, Shakira learned English and began to write and record in English alongside Spanish. Juanes, on the other hand, has continued to sing in Spanish. Language is just one of many aspects in which Shakira is open to experimentation. Her singing is notably versatile. She can sound soothing and

comforting at one point, intense and angry on the following track, only to be close to sobbing on the next. And in her music she has embraced a plethora of international styles. Comparatively, Juanes's style has changed considerably less during the past decade. His lyrics have evolved with each album, but musically he has remained close to the sound he and Gustavo Santaolalla developed for his first solo album in 2000, a compelling mix of classic rock with Colombian traditional music elements.

Shakira and Juanes demonstrate that Latin American artists can achieve worldwide success in the commercial music market, and in different ways. Their urbane and cosmopolitan music represents their status as global citizens. It is of utmost importance to recognize that for cosmopolitan musicians like Juanes and Shakira, hybridity is a choice, the result of individual aesthetic decisions as well as of education and privileged social position. For many others, like the poor Mexican migrant workers discussed in the next section, hybridity is an imposed reality, the result of fragmented lives and the need to fit in a host society.

At the Boundary: Two Case Studies from the Mexico–U.S. Border

The Mexico–U.S. border is a musically rich region that spans almost two thousand miles and represents home for more than ten million people. The border region can be described as a contact zone, a place where cultures meet and identities are challenged by the encounter. Unlike the experience in the heartland, border inhabitants are constantly reminded of their national identity through contrasts with others. Yet for many who live by the border, *patria* or homeland is truly the border itself, not Mexico or the United States. Chicana author Gloria Anzaldúa has famously described the U.S.–Mexico border as “two worlds merging to form a third country.”

Northern Mexico has a distinct identity, historically estranged from that of the capital, Mexico City, and comparable to the relationship between those in Texas or the southwest United States and Washington, D.C. Mexican northerners have a self-sufficient mindset, developed from decades building communities in harsh terrains without aid from the central government. Understandably, given the region's proximity to the United States, the far North is Mexico's most “Americanized” region—a sore point for the Mexican government. From Mexico City, the northern frontier appears as a porous zone where Mexicanness is diluted and U.S. culture is all too prevalent. Government officials do not always recognize the rich culture that exists at the border, reflected in the various music traditions that have blossomed there. Border culture is particularly diverse in terms

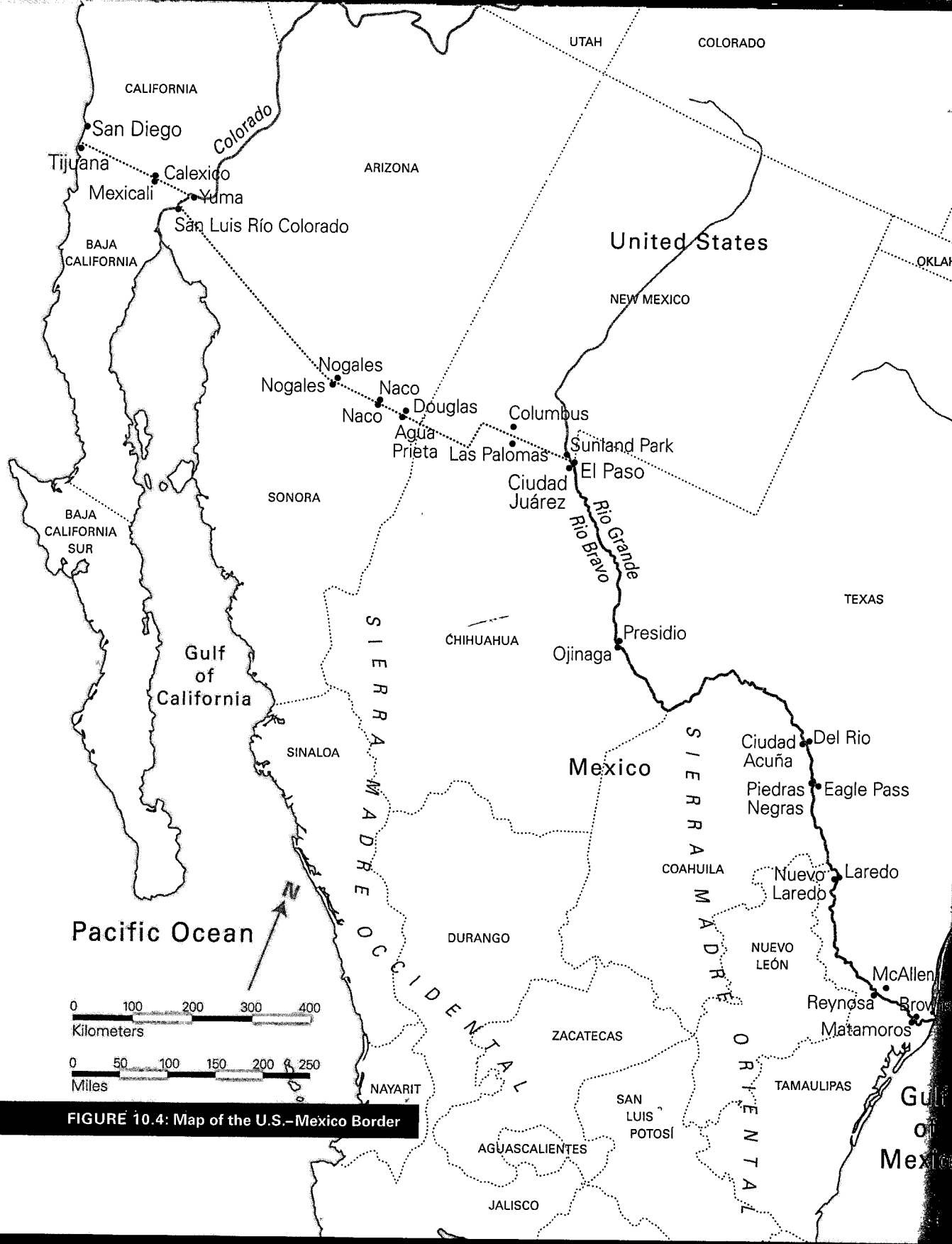


FIGURE 10.4: Map of the U.S.-Mexico Border

of well-established popular music traditions, everything from working-class, largely unrecorded rural styles like huapango (see Chapter 3, p. 96) to the mass-mediated *tejano* style of the late Selena Quintanilla.

Throughout the twentieth century, a common theme in border music was the border experience itself. Songs celebrated self-reliance and discussed legal and illegal border crossing, the difficulties of working far from home and of staying true to oneself in the midst of the constant push and pull from north and south. As a result of changes in migration patterns, in recent decades the themes of border music have undergone important transformations. This section's examples represent two cases of twenty-first-century border music: music of working-class northern Mexicans and undocumented migrants, and alternative pop by cosmopolitan performers.

Música norteña: Neither Here nor There

Mexican laborers have been crossing over to work in U.S. territory since the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848. In the mid-twentieth century, the Immigration and Naturalization Service's Bracero Program streamlined the process by which Mexicans could enter the United States to work temporarily in agriculture and railroad building. Bracero is a Mexican Spanish term for temporary laborer (from the Spanish word for arm). By the time the controversial Bracero Program was terminated in 1964, the use of Mexican labor had been institutionalized. Farms and factories still relied on cheap Mexican labor, and the vast numbers of Mexican nationals in need of work resulted in an exponential growth in illegal immigration. In 2010, there were about twelve million Mexican immigrants (foreign born) in the United States, of which about half were undocumented.

Changes in immigration laws and border control during the last twenty years have resulted in new migration patterns that have transformed the lives of undocumented migrant workers. Border control has tightened, thus migrants are crossing less often, opting instead for longer stays in the United States. While historically the vast majority of migrants had been working-age men, in the last two decades an increasing number of women and children have joined them. In the past, Mexican migrants had remained close to the border, primarily in California and the Southwest. Today, they find work all across the United States; thus, some of the fastest-growing Mexican communities are now in the Pacific Northwest and in the Northeast, as well as in the Carolinas and the Southeast.

Another important shift is that recent migrant workers are considerably less invested in **assimilation** into the United States, as demonstrated, for example, through a lack of interest in learning English or in becoming a U.S. citizen. This can be partly explained by the hostility they encounter: in the new millennium the United States has become a considerably less

welcoming place for immigrants than it used to be. Also, recent developments in technology and travel have allowed immigrants to maintain long-distance communication with their families and places of origin. In a sense, these newly arrived peoples remain closer to their hometowns than ever before.

The most concrete way in which migrants remain connected to their hometowns is by sending back part of their earnings to family. These monies, called **remittances**, have grown so much in recent years that they have become a key component of several Latin American countries' economies. For example, in 2007, remittances sent from the United States to Mexico reached almost \$24 billion dollars. The Mexican government, aware that migrants who remain connected with their hometowns are more likely to contribute to their local economies, has developed policies that aim to maintain such links. For example, since 2005, Mexicans abroad have been able to vote in local elections in their former places of residence.

Migrant workers have been quick to adopt new technologies for music consumption. Their inherent mobility and the need to maintain regular communication with people back home have made the cell phone an essential part of migrant workers' lives. Not only is the cell phone their primary means of communication, but also their main means of acquiring music. In 2008, Latinos were twice as likely to buy ringtones as were non-Latinos. And when it comes to digital purchasing of regional Mexican songs, 85 percent of the time fans download them to their cell. Regional Mexican, an umbrella category that includes **música norteña**, **ranchera**, and **banda**, is by far the dominant style of Spanish-language music in the United States (in 2008, it accounted for 62 percent of all U.S. Latin music sales). Given the strong ties between regional Mexican and cell-phone use, phone carriers have built more partnerships with regional Mexican artists than with any other genre, Latin or not.

The most popular music among Mexican migrant workers, particularly undocumented ones, is **música norteña** (p. 107). The standard instrumentation of a **norteña** ensemble features a three-row button accordion, **bajo sexto**, electric bass, and drums. Set to dance-oriented styles like polka and waltz, **música norteña** repertoire incorporates many pieces with socially conscious lyrics that might be described as contemporary corridos, traditional Mexican narrative ballads (for more on corridos, see Chapter 3). In **norteña**, the emphasis is on lyrics rather than instrumental virtuosity; in fact, only minimal accordion soloing is used. (If you enjoy virtuosic accordion playing, check out **Texas-Mexican conjunto**, the north-of-the-border version of **norteña** that focuses on instrumental dancehall numbers and features striking accordion solos.) **Norteña's** lyrics deal with the experience of migration and celebrate Mexican traditions as well as resistance to assimilation.



FIGURE 10.5 Los Tigres del Norte performing at the Latin Grammy awards in Houston, 2006

Norteña songs contribute to the development of a sense of community at a time and place when identities are most frail and in flux. As Cathy Ragland puts it, norteña creates “a nation between nations.”

The main audience for *música norteña* is in Northern Mexico (Tamaulipas and Nuevo León) and among Mexican immigrant laborers in the United States. But in recent years, norteña’s popularity has extended as far south as Mexico City. With one out of ten Mexicans living in the United States, norteña’s stories of displacement are striking a chord—even with the ones who stay behind. The most famous norteña acts are Ramón Ayala y Los Bravos del Norte, Los Tucanes del Norte, and Los Tigres del Norte.

Los Tigres del Norte have made a four-decade career of singing about border crossing and immigrant life. In 1968, while still teenagers, the four brothers Hernández from Sinaloa entered the United States hoping to make money playing music. They eventually settled in San José, California, began recording with Fama records, and went on to sell more than thirty million albums. Los Tigres specialize in the performance of corridos that deal with contemporary social issues. They are largely responsible for modernizing the corrido by replacing the genre’s traditional poetic speech with a plain, working-class language.

In the early 1970s Los Tigres del Norte found fame recording *narcocorridos*, a subgenre of corrido that chronicles the lifestyle and tragic adventures of border-crossing drug smugglers (p. 93). Though still known for their popular *narcocorridos*, in the new millennium Los Tigres del Norte have moved beyond the style to sing more broadly about the life of the *mojado* or wetback, the poor immigrant that crosses the border illegally. They have also added songs that address sociopolitical issues in Mexico itself (listen to “La granja,” The Farm, from 2009, an allegory of political corruption which was censored by concert promoters in Mexico). The recent immigration

EXAMPLE 10.1: Basic música norteña pattern

The musical score for Example 10.1 is in 2/4 time and consists of three staves: Bajo Sexto (treble clef), Bass Guitar (bass clef), and Snare Drum (percussion clef). The Bajo Sexto staff has a melody of quarter notes with rests, and the Bass Guitar staff has a bass line of quarter notes with rests. The Snare Drum staff has a simple drum pattern of quarter notes with rests. Chords are indicated above the Bajo Sexto staff: C, C, C, C, C, F, G7, G7.

trends outlined above are reflected in Los Tigres's recent de-emphasizing of border crossing itself and newfound interest in the struggles of migrants within the United States, particularly assimilation.

One representative example of Los Tigres's recent work is "De paisano a paisano" (From Countryman to Countryman, 2000, Listening Guide 10.3). Like most Tigres songs, "De paisano a paisano" is in duple meter, and the arrangement and production are straightforward. At its core lies a regular pattern of a bass guitar note on the downbeat followed by a chord on the bajo sexto played together with the snare drum (Example 10.1). This is the typical manner of interpreting polka music in norteña repertoire. The accordion plays the introductory melody and the fills between verses; accordion lines are simple and memorable, rather than showy and virtuosic. Vocal harmonies are used only during the chorus.

Although Los Tigres's concerts attract both men and women, their songs bear traces of a tradition of performance that occurred in male-only spaces, such as local cantinas. Thus, song lyrics often describe conversations among men. Even in songs about love or heartbreak, the lyrics do not address a woman directly, but rather a buddy or a relative. As the title suggests, "De paisano a paisano" (From Countryman to Countryman) recounts a story told man to man. It celebrates the untamable character of the *mojado*, who could be from anywhere in Latin America, bravely crossing borders to provide for his children, and his anti-assimilationist attitude. The song presents the *mojado* as a heroic outlaw.

"De paisano" illustrates Los Tigres del Norte's uncanny ability to embrace commercialism while maintaining a populist, even oppositional stance vis-à-vis the mainstream. On the one hand, the song appeared in TV ads in which the band promoted a money-transferring company. On the other, Los Tigres used the same song to record a different ad promoting a campaign of Mexico's Secretaría de Gobierno; the campaign aimed to inform Mexican workers abroad of their rights and privileges and was appropriately

☉ Los Tigres del Norte: "De paisano a paisano" (From Countryman to Countryman)

Composer/lyricist: Enrique Valencia

Date of recording: 2000

Performers/instruments: Los Tigres del Norte; accórdion, bajo sexto, electric bass, drums

Form: strophic verse-chorus

Tempo: moderate duple

What to Listen for:

- Accordion fills
- Polka rhythm, created through alternation between a bass note and the bass drum playing on the downbeat and a bajo sexto chord and a snare drum on offbeats
- The simple, clean arrangement and production

Time	Text	Translation	Description
0:00			Introduction; accordion begins alone, accompanied only by occasional percussion taps on strong beats; polka rhythmic pattern begins at 0:07
0:20	Como el águila en vuelo . . .	Like a flying eagle . . .	Verse; instruments mostly maintain constant patterns, deferring to the vocals, but bass fills follow the first half of the text at 0:29; accordion fills between verses, at 0:42
0:47	Si la muerte me alcanza . . .	Should death take me . . .	Verse; similar instrumental fills at the end of vocal phrases
1:13	De paisano a paisano . . .	From countryman to countryman . . .	Chorus; second voice enters a third higher than the original and harmonizes with the lead singer; accordion fills at 1:21 and 1:32, and 1:42
1:54	De paisano a paisano . . .	From countryman to countryman . . .	Section spoken while accordion plays the introductory melody
2:33	De paisano a paisano . . .	From countryman to countryman . . .	Chorus

named the "*Paisano* program." Los Tigres's popularity has extended the appeal of corrido beyond its original border audience to include people in Mexico City and in places as far off as Chile and Spain. The group has even shared the stage with mainstream Latin pop artists like Ricky Martin and the Mexican ska/pop/rock group Maná. For millions of undocumented workers (throughout Latin America), Los Tigres del Norte tell an inspiring story of a *mojado's* triumph against all odds.

Cosmopolitan Tijuana: Both Here and There

Nothing represents border culture better than the Mexican city of Tijuana. Tijuana is the busiest port of entry in the U.S.–Mexico border, stamping over forty million crossings a year. For most of the twentieth century, Tijuana had a bad reputation in both countries. In the United States it was conceived as a city of sin and debauchery; and in Mexico, Alejandro L. Madrid writes, as “the barbaric land where U.S. cultural imperialism threatens Mexican, Latin American, and Hispanic culture in every bar where you order your beer in Spanglish and pay with a mix of dollars and pesos.” Tijuana appears from both these perspectives as a place where a large transient population prevents the emergence of a lasting social or cultural identity, a town neither here nor there.

In the new millennium, however, Tijuana-based artists have been challenging stereotypes of the border region. Authors, visual artists, musicians, and dancers argue that their culture has been misunderstood and that foreign critics miss the point by expecting a static Mexican identity from Tijuana. Instead, they posit, Tijuana needs to be understood as a multicultural place, and scholars agree. Researchers argue that *tijuanenses* have a strong national identity, fueled in no small measure by the experience of constant contact/friction with the United States. What is unique about *tijuanenses*, Jennifer Insley suggests, is that they “incorporate signs and symbols from elsewhere without perceiving a contradiction between these and a fluid but strong sense of national, ethnic, and linguistic selfhood.”

The Tijuana multimedia art form known as Nor-tec, discussed briefly in the Introduction, is a perfect aural representation of contemporary Tijuana culture. Nor-tec stands for a hybrid of norteña and techno, the local and the global. Musically, this means that Nor-tec DJs take samples from classic norteña and banda sinaloense (see Chapter 3) tracks and fuse them with the beats and loops of electronic popular music. Rather than an amorphous “neither here nor there” style, Nor-tec is better thought of as both here and there.

Singer-songwriter Julieta Venegas (b. 1970) represents yet another kind of border pop musician, similar in some respects to Shakira and Juanes (Figure 10.6). Born in Long Beach, California, to Mexican parents, she spent her formative years in Tijuana. Like many young *tijuanenses*, Venegas had more contact with

FIGURE 10.6 Julieta Venegas performing her MTV Unplugged concert in Mexico City, 2008



San Diego, California, than with the far-away Mexican capital. Venegas and her music can be best described as cosmopolitan. On the one hand, she is strongly rooted in Mexican culture: despite being fluent in English she has shown no interest in writing songs in that language, nor in moving to the United States. On the other hand, she grew up listening to Anglo rock and borrows freely from it. The international quality of her music makes it equally appealing and meaningful to Argentines as to Spaniards and North American critics, who have celebrated her music since the release of her first album, *Aquí* (Here) in 1997.

While Venegas's first instrument is the piano, she is most widely recognized for playing the keyboard accordion. Interestingly, Venegas picked up the accordion after being inspired not by *música nortea* repertoire but by alternative rock musicians Tom Waits's and Joe Jackson's use of the instrument. Her 2008 *Unplugged* album for MTV illustrates Venegas's keen musicality. The most common pitfall of acoustic pop-rock albums is their aural monotony; stripped of guitar pedals and other sound effects, there is often little except the melody to distinguish one song from the next. Aware of this, Venegas worked with Brazilian Jaques Morelenbaum, long-time collaborator of bossa nova founder Antônio Carlos Jobim, to re-create her songs for live concert settings. Relying on several multi-instrumentalists, the elegant yet lively arrangements present an eclectic kaleidoscope of sounds, from a classical string quartet to tuba, from cavaquinho (see Chapter 6) to a saw blade played with a bow.

"El presente" (The Present, Listening Guide 10.4), the first single off the album, showcases Venegas's cosmopolitan aesthetics. The song opens with

LISTENING
guide 10.4

 **Venegas: "El presente" (The Present)**

Composer/lyricist: Julieta Venegas

Performer/instruments: Julieta Venegas; accordion, acoustic guitar, string quartet, keyboards, bass, drums and percussion

Date of recording: 2008

Form: strophic verse-chorus

Tempo/meter: brisk duple

What to Listen for:

- Polka rhythmic pattern heard in the introduction (and at later moments) drawing from *nortea* but speeding up the pulse and mixing the traditional sound with backbeat guitar strumming
- Elements from pop and European classical music (synthesizer, cello, etc.) contrasting markedly with references to traditional border repertoire

Time	Text	Translation	Description
0:00			Introduction; accordion takes the lead melody, accompanied by bass, drum set, and backbeat guitar strumming; one of the more "traditional" segments of the music

(continued)

Time	Text	Translation	Description
0:13	Ya sé lo que te diga . . .	I know that nothing . . .	Verse ; thinning of texture as the accordion largely drops out to feature Venegas's vocal; another female voice enters in harmony during second half
0:26	Quién nos dice que la herida . . .	Who says that the wound . . .	Pre-chorus ; louder and with more of a pop feel with syncopated acoustic guitar strumming and keyboard, held chords in accordion
0:40	El presente es lo único que tengo . . .	The present's the only thing I've got . . .	Chorus ; section seemingly out of time; percussion thins; lyrical cello counter melody plays prominently under the lead vocal and backs vocal harmonies; guitar (plays more softly) and tambourine heard
1:03			Repetition of instrumental introduction, with addition of trumpets
1:20	Con el mundo como va . . .	The way the world turns . . .	Verse
1:32	Quién nos dice que la herida . . .	Who says that the wound . . .	Pre-chorus

Venegas playing a *lilting* line on the accordion over a lively polka rhythm and bass pattern. In the chorus, the percussion drops off and is replaced by sustained string notes and Beatlesque vocal harmonies, producing an out-of-time feel.

Hip-hop en Español

As we saw in the previous section, remittances by Latin Americans working in the United States are so large that Latin American economies have begun to depend on them. Latino-studies scholar Juan Flores suggests that migrants' influence in their home countries extends far beyond monetary contributions. Flores proposes that migrants also transmit what he calls "cultural remittances," by which he means ideas and expressive forms, like music, that arrive in Latin America when migrants return home to visit or to relocate. In addition to physical visits, recent technological developments in communications have made the transmission of expressive forms from the diaspora to the homeland considerably easier than in previous decades.

One of the musical styles that arrived in Latin America as a cultural remittance is hip-hop. Spanish-language rap first found international popularity in the 1990s. It did not take root in a single location; instead, all across the Americas, MCs and DJs tried their hand at this exciting style that originated

in New York City. Some of the most important 1990s Latin American rappers include Panamanian El General, Puerto Rican Vico C., and bands Illya Kuryaki and the Valderramas from Argentina, and Control Machete and Molotov from Mexico. The most important international break for rap *en Español* came in the new millennium with the worldwide success of reggaeton (see Chapter 5).

In the United States, Latinos have been involved in hip-hop culture—DJing, graffiti, breakdancing—since its early days in the South Bronx in the late 1970s. By the late 1980s, a few Latino artists had crossover success rapping in English, sometimes peppering the lyrics with Spanish phrases and slang. Examples include Cuban-American Mellow Man Ace (“Mentiroso,” 1989), Chicano Kid Frost (“La Raza,” 1990), and Ecuadorian-American Gerardo (“Rico Suave,” 1991). More recently, Nuyorican Fat Joe and Cuban-American Pitbull have released chart-topping albums in the United States.

Throughout Latin America there also is an important, albeit less commercially successful, form of hip-hop that raps about sociopolitical issues. Political rap, known as “hip-hop *social*” in Colombia and as “rap *consciente*” in Cuba, has been particularly important among Afro-Latin American youth. Inspired by African American rappers who use hip-hop to celebrate a shared African diasporic experience, Latin American rappers adopt the style to decry social and racial inequality and challenge the status quo. This grassroots rap can be considered the torchbearer of 1970s political song (see Chapters 4, 5, and 7).

Since 2000, one hip-hop group that has managed to create catchy party tracks *and* politically engaged rhymes *en español* is the Puerto Rican duo Calle 13 (Figure 10.7). Calle 13 consists of rapper and frontman René Pérez

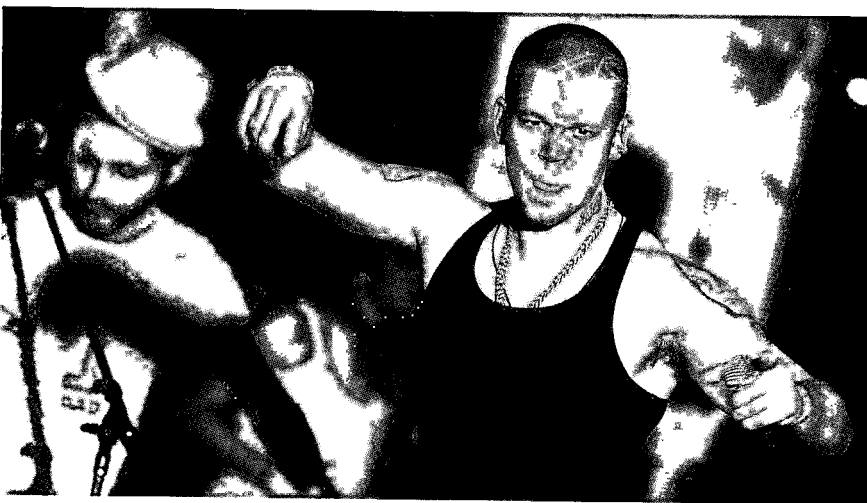


FIGURE 10.7 Eduardo Cabra (left) and René Pérez (right) of Calle 13 performing in Los Angeles, 2008

(aka Residente) and multi-instrumentalist and producer Eduardo Cabra (aka Visitante). They first achieved international popularity in 2006 as reggaeton artists with the song “Atrévete-te-te.”

Calle 13’s third album, *Los de atrás vienen conmigo* (Those in the Back Are Coming with Me, 2008), is to date their most ambitious both musically and lyrically. Its eclectic musical mix (the *New York Times* described it as “omnivorous”) includes influences from polka, Balkan brass bands, 1980s synth pop, and Nigerian Afro-beat. Lyrically, *Los de atrás* is an aggressive, albeit humorous, album: rapper Residente takes on, among other things, reggaeton’s frequent glorification of consumption and excess, and its misogyny; dancehall singer Sean Paul’s accented English; and Latin American social climbers who pretend to be American and reject their heritage wholesale (“gringa wannabe”). But there is an important exception to such biting commentary: the third single, “La Perla” (Listening Guide 10.5) is a heartfelt, nostalgic ode to the San Juan working-class neighborhood of the same name.

Like many Calle 13 songs, “La Perla” disparages the *bling* lifestyle, celebrating instead the simple pleasures of family life in the *barrio*: brightly-painted houses, boys jumping across rooftops, an adolescent’s first kiss, grilled food, cold beer, and shooting hoops with friends. In evocative and highly visual vignettes, Residente raps that he’s not interested in modernization, but in staying true to his heritage, represented by the image of his mom’s food and his grandmother in a rocking chair. The chorus boasts of barrio pride: “I have everything/I don’t lack anything/I have the night, which is my blanket/I have the best skylines/I have a cooler stacked with iced beer.” The musical arrangement, by Visitante, is sparse, to keep the listener’s attention on the lyrical flow. It features an Afro-Uruguayan style called *candombe* (see Chapter 7), played by Argentine percussion group La Chilinga (notice how *candombe* shares the 3-2 *clave* pattern of Afro-Caribbean music).

The second half of “La Perla” includes a rap and a *soneo* (an improvised vocal in call-and-response form) by renowned Panamanian salsa singer-songwriter Rubén Blades, known for his socially conscious songs. Blades continues Residente’s celebration of barrio life and its matrilineal culture, but suggests that La Perla is a “barrio universal” in that it represents working-class life across the Americas. His collaboration with the hipsters in Calle 13 introduced Blades to a younger generation, while his socially conscious rap lent credibility to Calle 13’s political leanings. The music video, a beautiful realization of the song’s narrative, won a Latin Grammy for best video.

☉ Calle 13: "La Perla" (The Pearl)

Composers/lyricists: Eduardo Cabra, René Pérez, and Rubén Blades

Performers/instruments: Calle 13 featuring Rubén Blades and La Chilinga; horns, electric bass, keyboards, and percussion

Date of recording: 2008

Form: strophic verse-chorus

Tempo/meter: moderate duple

What to Listen for:

- Uruguayan candombe percussion
- Rubén Blades's rap and *sonero* sections

Time	Text	Translation	Description
0:00	Oye, esto va dedicado . . .	Hey, this is dedicated to . . .	Introduction/Dedication; begins with 3-2 clave pattern
0:21	Yo tengo actitud desde los cinco años . . .	I've had attitude since I was five . . .	Verse; entrance of keyboard, then bass
0:53	Allá abajo en el hueco, en el boquete . . . [2x]	Down there in the hole, in the gap . . .	Chorus; Blades sings lead (half sung/half spoken), full ensemble: backing vocals, piano, organ, trombone notes held
1:16	Un arcoíris con sabor a piragua . . .	A rainbow that tastes like a canoe . . .	Verse; return to sparse percussion in 3-2 clave; keyboard and synth riff starts at 1:26, then horns added
1:58	¡Oye! Esto se lo dedico . . .	Hey! I dedicate this . . .	Verse; bass drops, horns join riff, then bass returns with a thicker percussion arrangement
2:31	Allá abajo en el hueco, en el boquete . . . [2x]	Down there in the hole, in the gap . . .	Chorus; Blades sings lead (half sung/half spoken), full ensemble: backing vocals, piano, organ, trombone notes held
3:15	¡Oye!, Esto fue por la inocencia de Jonatán Román . . .	Hey! This goes for Jonatán Román's innocence . . .	Spoken dedication uttered by Residente
3:24	Esa risa en La Perla la escuché en el chorrillo . . .	That laughter in la Perla, I've heard in the stream . . .	Blades raps over candombe percussion and repeated three-note bass line
3:47	¡La noche me sirve de sábana! . . .	The night serves me as a blanket! . . .	Chorus; call-and-response <i>sonero</i> between Blades and group; only percussion and isolated bass hits; at 4:08 entrance of large ensemble with a salsa groove: bass, keyboard, new voices
4:30	Allá abajo . . .	Down there . . .	Chorus

Recent Trends in U.S. Latino Popular Music

Latinos or Hispanics, the two terms used in the United States to refer to people of Latin American ancestry living in the country, totaled an estimated 50.5 million people as of 2010. At 16 percent of the total U.S. population, they are the country's largest ethnic minority. If the U.S. Latino communities lived in a separate country, it would be the third-most-populous nation in Latin America. People of Mexican and Puerto Rican ancestry still predominate among Latinos, in 2010 accounting for 63 percent and 9 percent of the total demographic, respectively. But shifts in immigration beginning in the 1990s led to a marked increase in new migrants from Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, and El Salvador—a group collectively referred to as “new Latinos.”

A common misconception about U.S. Latinos, partly fueled by the growth of “new Latino” immigration, is that most Latinos are foreigners. In fact, people of Latin American heritage have been living and making music in what is now U.S. territory since the sixteenth century, and more than 60 percent of Latinos in the United States today were born there. Some artists make music primarily for Latino audiences, while others aim at crossing over to the mainstream Anglo market. Some emphasize their Latin American heritage, while others downplay it. Latinos have been instrumental in the development not only of Latino popular-music styles, such as New York City salsa, Texas conjunto, and Los Angeles Chicano rock, but also of styles traditionally considered Anglo, like rock and roll, country, and hip-hop.

This section focuses on twenty-first-century popular music created by U.S.-born Latinos for Latino audiences. The Listening Guides represent three of the largest Latino groups: Mexican Americans, stateside Puerto Ricans, and Dominican Americans. Each of the next three guides—illustrating *cumbia tejana*, *salsa romántica*, and *urban bachata*, respectively—presents a modernized version of a Latin American style studied in previous chapters. The artists behind these innovations are bilingual and bicultural second- and third-generation Latinos. They have hybridized Latin American genres, fusing them with contemporary rhythm-and-blues and hip-hop elements to make them more appealing for urban U.S. Latino audiences.

Twenty-First-Century Cumbia Tejana

U.S.-born Mexican Americans—that is, the descendents of Mexican immigrants—have a considerably different experience from that of the undocumented migrants just discussed. Second-generation Mexican Americans have historically assimilated well into U.S. Anglo culture. Research has

shown that second-generation Mexican Americans speak English better than they do Spanish and regularly move out of immigrant neighborhoods into multiethnic ones. This process plays an important role when it comes to musical preferences. For many second-generation Mexican Americans, their first music interests are styles in English, such as rock and hip-hop, not Mexican music in Spanish.

Many U.S.-born Mexican American musicians first performed Anglo styles like rock and roll and country, and only later embraced their Latin American heritage. Examples include Ritchie Valens, Freddy Fender, Los Lobos, Selena Quintanilla, and Los Lonely Boys. Their stories speak loudly of their complex bicultural worlds. For example, the great tejano singer Selena Quintanilla, born in Lake Jackson, Texas in 1971, started singing in English and only reluctantly switched to Spanish at the request of her father, who thought that she had a better chance of success by targeting Spanish-speaking Americans than by aiming for crossover to Anglo audiences. In her early Spanish-language recordings, Selena didn't understand what she was singing, so her father had to coach her. Only after she had secured a massive fan base among Mexican Americans did Selena begin to fulfill her long-time dream of recording an album in English. Sadly, she never saw the project to fruition because a fan shot and killed her in March 1995, while she was still working on the album.

After Selena's passing, the torch of hip tejano music passed to her older brother, A.B. Quintanilla III (b. 1963), who played in Selena's backup band and also composed several of her hits. Quintanilla has enjoyed widespread popularity in the new millennium with his band Kumbia Kings. The Kumbia Kings updated the tejano sound by replacing the traditional sparse production, used for example in Selena's early 1990s albums, with elaborate techniques and studio effects typical of contemporary rhythm-and-blues, hip-hop, and boy band music. Kumbia Kings vocals also borrow extensively from smooth rhythm-and-blues crooners, like Usher or Ne-Yo.

True to their name, Kumbia Kings often feature the cumbia rhythm in their dance-oriented songs. Cumbia is a style originally from Colombia's northern coast that in the mid-twentieth century became popular throughout Latin America. In previous chapters you have encountered various local variants, such as Argentinean *cumbia villera* (Chapter 7), Peruvian *cumbia andina* and technocumbia (Chapter 8), and Mexican cumbia (Chapter 3). The Mexican variant is markedly simpler than Colombian cumbia. The original polyrhythms are replaced by a straightforward rhythmic pattern and small combos (*grupos*) consisting of electric guitar, electric bass, organ/synthesizer, *güiro* and drum set that take the place of traditional big bands. Example 10.2 shows

EXAMPLE 10.2: Mexican cumbia rhythmic pattern

The image displays the core rhythmic pattern of Mexican cumbia through four rhythmic diagrams and a musical score. The rhythmic diagrams are as follows:

- Diagram 1: A sequence of 16 boxes, alternating between black and white. The pattern is: Black, White, Black, Black, Black, White, Black, Black, Black, White, Black, Black, Black, White, Black, Black.
- Diagram 2: A sequence of 16 boxes. The pattern is: Black, White, White, White, Black, White, White, White, Black, White, White, White, Black, White, White, White.
- Diagram 3: A sequence of 16 boxes. The pattern is: White, White, Black, White, White, White, Black, White, White, White, Black, White, White, White, Black, White.
- Diagram 4: A sequence of 16 boxes. The pattern is: Black, White, White, Black, Black, Black, White, White, White, Black, Black, Black, White, White, White, Black.

The musical score below shows the rhythmic pattern for four instruments: Güiro, Cowbell, Congas, and Bass. The Güiro part is a single melodic line with eighth notes. The Cowbell part is a single melodic line with eighth notes and rests. The Congas part is a single melodic line with eighth notes and rests, using two different pitches represented by black and white heads. The Bass part is a single melodic line with eighth notes and rests, using two different pitches represented by black and white heads.

Mexican cumbia's core rhythmic pattern. Note that in the conga line, the two different pitches in black heads represent open tones on two different conga drums, one tuned higher than the other. The golden age of Mexican cumbia spans the 1970s and 1980s, with groups such as Los Bukis and Bronco. Kumbia Kings can be considered a modernized version of such groups.

In 2003, Kumbia Kings released the album *4* in which they mix cumbia, reggae, vallenato, rhythm and blues, and hip-hop. The album's first half features songs in Spanish while the second half is in English. The third single released off the album is an exciting collaboration, cowritten and coperformed by Kumbia Kings and critically acclaimed alternative rockers Ozomatli, a Los Angeles, California, band that formed in the mid-1990s, and is known for its musical hybridity. In Nahuatl, an indigenous Mexican language, Ozomatli refers to a figure in the Aztec sun calendar and to the god of dance. While borrowing most consistently from Latin American dance rhythms, the multiracial band incorporates elements from a wide range of world music sources. In the following quote, Ozomatli's Mexican American trumpet player Asdrubal Sierra jokingly describes what an ad for the band would look like:



FIGURE 10.8 Kumbia Kings at the Premios Juventud Awards in Miami, 2004

Looking for a classical Indian music/tabla player of Japanese decent; a Jewish American bassist influenced by Sly and Robbie; a Mexican guitarist that can play Cuban tres, a strat, a Veracruzian jarana; a half Spanish/Mexican tenor sax player that doubles on requinto jarocho and piano; and a Mexican American singer who can sound Middle Eastern, *gitano* [Gypsy], salsa, or rock in English or Spanish—play trumpet is a must.

Before collaborating with Kumbia Kings on “Mi gente” (My People), Ozomatli’s 2001 album *Embrace the Chaos* won the Grammy for Best Latin Rock/Alternative Performance. “Mi gente” (Listening Guide 10.6) thus represents a collaboration between the hit-making, chart-topping Kumbia Kings and the less commercially successful but critically acclaimed Ozomatli (Figure 10.9). The song also bridges the gap between the Latino cultures of Texas and Southern California.

“Mi gente” takes inspiration from first-generation immigrants. It tells the story of a migrant worker who comes to the United States following a promise of opportunity. He wonders “if I’m honest and I work from dawn until dusk, why am I treated like I don’t belong here?” The infectious chorus expresses a string of contradictory emotions: “I suffer, feel, laugh, cry, don’t speak up, scream, with my people . . . because they don’t understand me.” The song opens with a striking mix of hip-hop scratching, Brazilian cuica friction percussion, Caribbean timbales, and Mexican accordion. The bridge section borrows from Jamaican dancehall, and is followed by a bluesy electric guitar

🎧 Kumbia Kings featuring Ozomatli:
"Mi gente" (My People)

Composers/lyricists: Luigi Giraldo, Raúl Pacheco, Justin "Niño" Porée, Abraham Quintanilla III, Nir Seroussi, Asdrubal Sierra, and Jiro Yamaguchi

Performers/instruments: Kumbia Kings featuring Ozomatli; accordion, electric guitar, electric bass, horns, keyboards, drums, and percussion

Date of recording: 2003

Form: Strophic verse-chorus with bridges and montuno

Tempo/meter: Moderate duple

What to Listen for:

- Eclectic introduction opening with hip-hop scratching, Brazilian cuica, timbales, and accordion
- Anthem-like, politicized quality conveyed by using several singers, and a chanting chorus
- Cumbia rhythmic pattern

Time	Text	Translation	Description
0:00	Ozomatli, Kumbia Kings, Exclusivo, Cumbial		Introduction; whispered voice, hip-hop scratches, keyboard and horn hits in crescendo, cumbia beat starts at 0:11, bird calls at 0:14, horn riffs, timbales fills
0:22	Sufro, siento, río, . . .	I suffer, feel, laugh, . . .	Chorus; group vocal
0:33	Si yo trabajo de sol a sol . . .	If I work from dawn 'til dusk . . .	Verse; pair of voices
0:44	Si yo vine de lejos a esta tierra . . .	If I came to this land from far away . . .	Verse; single voice
0:53	Sufro, siento, . . . [2x]	I suffer, feel, . . .	Chorus; timbales fills, bird calls
1:15	Yo quiero que entiendan . . .	I want you to understand . . .	Bridge; musical shift to a quieter sound, almost out of time, less percussive; vibraslap; freer bass and sax lines, then at 1:24 locks in again, leading up to chorus
1:35	Sufro, siento, . . . [2x]	I suffer, feel, . . .	Chorus; horn melodies and percussion hits accompany the voices during the chorus, and in introduction
1:57	Sufro por ti para que no sigas así . . .	I suffer for you to not continue like this . . .	Bridge 2; dancehall style; voice quasi-spoken or chanted, sparse percussion rhythm (hits on the first two beats of a tresillo)
2:07			Solos; electric guitars (2:07), then trumpet (2:28), timbales fills
2:49	Sufro, siento, . . . [2x]	I suffer, feel, . . .	Chorus
3:10	Por mi gente es que grito yo . . .	For my people I shout today . . .	Montuno; lead voice alternates with chorus; horns drop out, Brazilian cuica, accordion, and timbales play fills



FIGURE 10.9 Ozomatli performing at the WOMAD festival in Malmesbury, England, 2010

solo and a jazzy trumpet line. The music video combines scenes of Kumbia Kings and Ozomatli performing (separately) with footage from the Chicano rights movement of the 1960s. The video brings home the song's message of unity, ending with the image of a wall graffiti that reads "Brown is together."

Salsa for the Hip-Hop Generation

A lot has happened since the golden age of the raw and edgy sound of 1970s New York City salsa discussed in Chapter 5. After a rough patch in the 1980s when Dominican merengue dominated the East Coast Latino club scene, salsa came back in full force with an updated, smoother sound and an aesthetic that made it more commercially successful than ever before. In the twenty-first century, salsa artists like Marc Anthony and La India have begun to close the gap between the hard-driving *barrio* salsa of the 1970s and the romantic spirit of the 1990s.

The 1980s was a trying decade for salsa. It started with the closing of Fania Records, the epicenter of salsa production in the 1970s and, to many, the label that created the best salsa records ever produced. As Latino youth turned to Dominican merengue and the new Bronx style later known as hip-hop, salsa became "old-folks' music." The most successful effort to modernize salsa came from the collaboration of arranger Louie Ramírez and producer Isidro Infante. They came up with the idea of recording cover versions of already-popular *baladas* (romantic pop ballads, a style wildly popular across Latin America that is associated with soap opera sound tracks) using salsa arrangements.

This new style, first known in Puerto Rico as *salsa sensual* and in New York City as *salsa romántica*, differed from the Fania model in a number of important ways. First, it avoided the Spanish Harlem-centered and politically charged lyrics of 1970s salsa. Even as the style moved beyond cover songs and new ones were composed, lyrics dealt mostly with romantic

themes. Second, a smooth-sounding crooning style of singing replaced the nasal quality of 1970s salsa vocals. Third, the brash, rough-around-the-edges sound of the salsa bands, particularly of the brass and percussion, was replaced with a polished and refined sound, molded in the studio. Finally, salsa romántica shifted the attention from the bandleader to the singer, and from improvised lead vocals in the montuno to entirely precomposed songs. Instead of experienced *soneros*, most salsa romántica featured youthful and attractive singers that appealed to younger audiences.

In 1987, concert promoter Ralph Mercado founded the label RMM Records with the purpose of recording and marketing this new style of salsa. RMM's music directors Isidro Infante and Sergio George are largely responsible for shaping the salsa sound of the 1990s and are behind the success of a cadre of singers including Tito Nieves, La India, Marc Anthony, and Johnny Rivera. Infante and George aimed at crossover, but not in the traditional sense of pushing a Latin/o American style into the mainstream United States. Their goal was primarily crossover within Spanish-speaking Latin/o American communities. As previous chapters in this book demonstrate, musical preferences vary widely across Latin America, making hemispheric crossover a challenging enterprise few artists have achieved. While purists continue to mourn the death of the classic Fania salsa of Willie Colón and Héctor Lavoe, RMM's formula produced the best-selling salsa artists of all time, and, notably, brought to fruition Fania's dream of a pan-Latin American embrace of salsa.

One of the most compelling singers in the RMM roster was *Nuyorican* La India (b. Linda Viera Caballero in 1969) (Figure 10.10). Like many young second-generation Nuyoricans in the 1980s, La India initially rejected salsa because she considered it old-fashioned and corny. She started her music career singing in English in the house-music scene, and only turned to salsa after encouragement from salsa singer Héctor Lavoe. Her breakthrough album, *Dicen que soy* (1994), is a perfect example of producer Sergio George's new approach to salsa. George combined La India's soulful rhythm-and-blues vocals (including melismas and blue notes), covers of famous baladas arranged as salsa, and elements of hip-hop and house music. The winning result was somewhere between 1970s "hard salsa" and 1980s salsa romántica; the lyrics were too romantic and melodramatic to be "hard salsa," the singing too fiery and intense to be salsa romántica. (*Dicen que soy* closes with an exciting duet with then up-and-coming Marc Anthony, called "Vivir lo nuestro," roughly "Live Our Lives").

FIGURE 10.10 La India performing in Hollywood, Florida, 2008



A comparison of La India's 2002 song "Sedúceme" (Seduce Me) with the salsa song included in Chapter 5, Celia Cruz and Ray Barretto's "Ritmo en el Corazón," will help us elucidate the new features of twenty-first century salsa. While "Ritmo en el Corazón" is not a classic salsa from the 1970s golden age, it serves our purpose here because in 1988, when it was recorded, the song looked back nostalgically to earlier decades, as represented by two older and well-established artists. "Ritmo" celebrates tradition both lyrically and musically. Celia Cruz sings about her undying passion for music while outlining the history of salsa, from Africa to Cuban son and rumba. Musically, the song acknowledges the two main sources for salsa, Cuban son and Puerto Rican bomba.

Like many salsa romántica songs, "Sedúceme" contrasts stylistically with older repertoire, represented by songs such as "Ritmo en el corazón." It opens with an airy keyboard and synthesizer introduction reminiscent of late 1990s boy-band production; only twenty seconds into the song, with the entry of the percussion, do we realize that this is actually going to be a salsa number. Also characteristic is the fact that the song is about heartbreak and seduction rather than tradition or politics. In "Sedúceme," the singer pleads for a final night of passion with her lover before parting ways. There are no references to salsa's history except for a clever allusion to the title of La India's own duet with Marc Anthony, "Vivir lo nuestro." The target audience for "Sedúceme" is a younger crowd that is open to salsa, yet may not be interested in thinking about it as a style with a long history, or a political one.

The crisp, clear pop sound of songs like "Sedúceme" is the result of **overdubbing**, a recording technique in which each part is recorded individually and the final song is produced by layering the tracks. The downside of overdubbing is that it limits opportunities for improvisation and interaction among musicians that can occur in live performance. Ray Barretto's own opinion was that most of the young salsa singers who emerged in the early 1990s were unable to *sonear*, to improvise in rhyme like classic salsa singers could. While India has developed into a great vocalist in terms of her overall abilities, improvisation plays a less central role in her music than it did with earlier performers. When I saw La India performing live in Philadelphia in 2003, "Sedúceme" was the climax of the show. She belted the song out with aplomb and passion, making everybody in the audience move. Yet her *sones* in the montuno section were identical to the recording, and so were the brass section's *moñas*. Old-timers may resent the declining role of improvisation in salsa, yet nobody in the audience at that show, including me, seemed to mind.

The "pop" quality of this new salsa is only part of the reason why it resonates with younger-generation Latinos. Most importantly, for many second-generation Latinos, this new salsa resonates with their bilingual and

© La India: "Sedúceme" (Seduce Me)

Composers/lyricists: India, S. Marte, R. Contreras, and J. Greco

Performers/instruments: India; trumpets, trombones, keyboards, electric bass, and percussion

Date of recording: 2002

Form: strophic verse-chorus with bridge and montuno

Tempo/meter: moderate duple

What to Listen for:

- Rhythm-and-blues inflected vocals and overall sound influenced by U.S. pop
- Other salsa romántica qualities: synthesizers, strings, overdubbed vocals, strings, smooth, sweet-sounding horn arrangement, extremely polished studio production
- Horn lines change in each verse, each time growing more complex
- Shorter vocal call-and-response section (the montuno) in contrast with the multiple montunos in Celia Cruz's "Ritmo en el corazón"

Time	Text	Translation	Description
0:00			Synthesized keyboard, warm bass notes, and a lack of Latin percussion make the introduction sound like a pop ballad
0:29	Bésame, pronto va a amanecer . . .	Kiss me, it's almost dawn . . .	Verse; entrance of congas and bongo accompanying the voice along with sparse synthesizer lines and bass notes
0:50	Mírame, quiero ver en tu mirada la pasión . . .	Look at me, I wanna see passion in your eyes . . .	Section features slap bass, fills by the trombones, and later trumpets that enter for the first time
1:10	Sé que mañana no estarás . . .	I know tomorrow you'll be gone . . .	Chorus; percussion switches to bells, lead vocal moves to a higher register; synthesized strings accompany syncopated keyboard patterns; trumpets and trombones alternate hits
1:42	Porque tú eres parte de mi vida . . .	Because you're part of my life . . .	Verse; texture becomes thinner again, percussion switching off bells; more horn arrangement accompanies the verse vocal
2:04	Sé que mañana . . .	I know tomorrow . . .	Chorus; same as above; African American-style melisma in India's voice toward the end of this section
2:37	Solamente tenemos unas horas . . .	We only have a few hours . . .	Bridge; percussion becomes softer at first; timbales continue to play bell. For most of the bridge, the bongo plays on the head, while the piano and bass stop the driving montuno style, which resumes at 2:57 as excitement builds
3:24	Sé que mañana . . .	I know tomorrow . . .	Chorus
3:58	Bésame, abrázame, sedúceme . . .	Kiss me, hold me, seduce me . . .	Montuno; emotional climax of the song, involving call-and-response singing between India and a male chorus; short montuno section broken into two halves, with an instrumental break in between; romantic and soft finale, like the introduction

bicultural experience. It allows them to reconnect with their heritage without giving up the hard-earned right to assimilate into U.S. society.

Urban bachata: To the White House and Back

Dominican Americans are the fifth-largest Latino population in the United States. Unlike the Latino groups just studied, most Dominican Americans are first-generation immigrants. In fact, over half of the Dominican American population arrived in the United States after 1990. The economic, political, and cultural importance of the Dominican Republic's U.S. diaspora is undeniable. As George Lipsitz notes, Dominican political candidates campaign in New York City, Dominican political parties have offices in the United States, and the remittances of Dominicans abroad shape the country's economy.

A music style that beautifully illustrates the transnational nature of contemporary Dominican identity is bachata. As outlined in a Chapter 5, bachata is traditionally a Dominican acoustic love ballad characterized by its lyrics about heartbreak and quick, high-pitched, lilting countermelodies on the lead guitar. It originated in the 1960s as a local variant of the Cuban and Mexican bolero and Puerto Rican *jibaro* music. As Dominican immigration to the United States skyrocketed in the 1990s, the musical preferences of migrants, with their higher incomes, began to shape the Dominican music industry from abroad. In the new millennium, as Deborah Pacini Hernandez explains, it is *Dominicananyork* bachata that dominates the scene in both countries, rather than the other way around.

By far the most influential and commercially successful *Dominicananyork* bachata group is Aventura, a quartet formed in the mid-1990s in the South Bronx. Aventura's breakthrough came in 2002 with the hit "Obsesión," which topped the charts in places like Italy and Germany and helped define their bicultural style. The "Kings of Bachata," as they call themselves, modernized bachata by adding melismatic rhythm-and-blues singing, rapping in English and Spanglish, collaborating with reggaeton artists, and adopting a hip urban fashion sense and a big-city attitude. In the words of frontman Anthony "Romeo" Santos, Aventura "put the cool in bachata."

Musically, the most recognizable features of Aventura are Romeo's suave and expressive *false* *setto* and Lenny Santos's rapid-fire guitar countermelodies. Aventura follows a trend that started in the 1990s of composing bachata with clean, family-friendly lyrics and marketing it to young women. Lead singer Romeo unmistakably addresses his song lyrics and frequent ad-libs to women. The band presents a striking combination of old and new, rural and urban sensibilities. All their major hits are essentially acoustic bachatas accompanied with guitar and light percussion on bongos, congas, and güira (a metal version of the gourd güiro preferred

FIGURE 10.11 Aventura performing in Hollywood, Florida, 2010



by Cuban and Puerto Rican performers). Their gallantry is definitively old-fashioned, tame in comparison to hypersexualized rap and reggaeton. Yet their looks are unquestionably urbane: designer jeans and tight shirts, shiny bling and light-colored suede.

So far, Aventura has not crossed over to the mainstream U.S. market. Arguably, however, the massive audience that follows the group challenges the very concept of mainstream. In early 2010, Aventura played four sold-out concerts at New York City's Madison Square Garden, a feat unheard of since Madonna's peak in the 1990s. By comparison, that same month Lady Gaga sold out for four nights too, but in Radio City Music Hall, a much smaller venue. If bachata is a niche market, then the niche may soon grow larger than the mainstream.

The flow between homeland and diaspora is circular. The same advances in technology that allow immigrants to stay connected to their homeland permit the reverse flow of music back to the sending country. First-generation Dominicans brought bachata with them. Second-generation *Dominican Yorkers*, like the members of Aventura, are sending it back, transformed, as a cultural remittance. In 2010 Aventura presented the same show they developed for the U.S. market to a sold-out Santo Domingo arena; fans fainted and critics raved.

In 2009 Aventura dominated the Billboard Latin charts with their album *The Last*. Its massive popularity landed them an invitation to perform at the White House for a televised concert hosted by President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month.

Ⓢ Aventura: “Su veneno” (Her Venom)

Composer/lyricist: Anthony “Romeo” Santos

Performers/instruments: Aventura; acoustic and electric guitars, electric bass, percussion

Date of recording: 2009

Form: strophic verse–chorus

Tempo/meter: moderate duple

What to Listen for:

- Intricate nylon-string guitar countermelodies, harkening back to the acoustic origins of bachata and contrasting at times with flanged electric guitar
- Smooth crooning tenor voice
- Sung in Spanish, but partly spoken in English

Time	Text	Translation	Description
0:00			Solo acoustic guitar in the introduction, along with synth effects
0:12	En el proceso de dejarla . . .	In the process of leaving her . . .	Verse; bongos, guitar countermelody, electric bass; guitar fill style derived from the bolero tradition
0:29	(Tal vez) mi futuro está en sus manos . . .	(Perhaps) my future is in her hands . . .	Flanged electric guitar in the background, referencing more-recent bachata sounds
0:52	Su maldito veneno . . .	Her damned venom . . .	Chorus; all instruments continue as before, but the güira more prominent in this section, switching from straight hits to more-syncopated variations
1:25	[Spoken] <i>Romeo's not gonna die like that . . .</i>		Introduction with acoustic guitar and effects as before, then electric guitar solo
2:10	(Tal vez) mi futuro está en sus manos . . .	(Perhaps) my future is in her hands . . .	Verse; strummed guitar

Aventura’s members were the only performers who were not from the three historically dominant U.S. Latino communities: Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cuban Americans. At the White House they performed their bachata “Su veneno” (Her Venom), the third single off *The Last*.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored contemporary Latin/o American popular music, emphasizing the concept of hybridity and the interconnections that exist across the Americas. All the artists in this chapter can be described as having one foot in Latin America and one in the United States. For contemporary

Latin American artists, the U.S. serves as an attractive center of music production and, given the size and economic power of the Latino community in the United States, a highly profitable market as well. For U.S.-born Latinos, on the other hand, Latin America remains an important source of musical inspiration and a powerful referent for the construction of Latino identities.

This chapter has also addressed the impact of migratory trends on popular music. In the future, migration is expected to continue to be a transforming force in both Latin America and the United States (some estimate that by 2050, U.S. Latinos will account for 30 percent of the country's population). Through economic and cultural remittances, the influence that diasporic communities have in their originating countries is likely to persist, if not grow. In the United States, it is conceivable that the growth of the Latino population will lead to an increase in inter-Latino interaction. Stronger bonds across U.S. Latino communities may contribute to a weakening of national identification with countries of origin. In its place we may find a bolstered sense of *Latinidad*. The music that will speak to these new identities remains to be heard.

KEY TERMS

assimilation	inter-Latino	regional Mexican music
balada	<i>Latinidad</i>	remittances
cosmopolitan	música nortea	salsa romántica
cumbia tejana	narcocorrido	tejano
dancehall	new Latinos	Texas-Mexican conjunto
falsetto	Nor-tec	urban bachata
hybridity	overdubbing	

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