



*Music in Mexico*



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EXPERIENCING MUSIC,  
EXPRESSING CULTURE

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## Preface



When I was invited to write this brief volume about music in Mexico I was hesitant about accepting for two reasons. One, most of my scholarship deals with transnational flows and postnational interpretative frameworks; thus writing a book about music in a very localized geographic location seemed a contradiction. Second, I have also been very critical of musical canons and was not particularly excited about writing a book that dealt with Mexican canonic musical practices or with the prospect of creating a new canon of Mexican music. Regardless of these reservations, I accepted the invitation as I saw it as an opportunity to further my belief that we need to move away from the nation-state as a unit of interpretation as well as a chance to question stereotypes of Mexican music. Thus, I set out to write a book about the musics that Mexicans grow up listening to in their everyday life and how these practices are informed by continual histories of migration and transnational flows. Since it is impossible to cover all of Mexico's diverse musical traditions in this textbook I focus on a selection of contemporary music practices that have remained neglected in the sonic representation of Mexican culture both in Mexico and abroad.

I have excluded some musical forms that have become stereotypes of Mexicanness in the country and abroad. My intention is not to say they are meaningless musical practices, since clearly they are not. Instead, I challenge the representations about Mexican culture that these genres have helped reproduce, focusing on contemporary musical practices that Mexicans grow up listening to such as *norteña*, *banda*, *bolero*, *balada*, and forms of alternative music like rock and *canto nuevo*. While mariachi and other *sones* and folk musics are heard by Mexicans on special occasions and celebrations, they do not really form part of their everyday musical experience. This means I do not focus on folk musics because with rare exceptions, they are not what most Mexicans favor as part of their daily social interactions or what surrounds them growing up. Moreover, many of the folk musics that have become symbols of Mexico through government-sponsored institutions such as the Ballet Folklórico de México (Mexico's Folk Ballet Company) are stylized,

re-choreographed, and re-contextualized exhibition practices that do not really exist as such among regular folks in urban areas or the countryside. There, one is more likely to hear local variants of *norteña*, *banda*, *cumbia*, *balada*, rock, as well as local folk traditions that have continued independent of those government-sponsored practices—but being local, these traditions do not represent the larger musical experience of most Mexicans. *Banda*, *norteña*, *bolero*, *balada*, and rock are the genres and styles that sell millions of records in the Americas and receive Grammy Awards every year. These are the musics Americans are more likely to hear in Mexico or in the houses of their Mexican or Mexican American friends in the United States; they truly reflect the contemporary experience of Mexicans and speak to the many social issues affecting Mexico. Finally, although I briefly mention mariachi in relation to *son* traditions like *son jarocho* and *bolero ranchero*, I have not included a larger discussion of this practice mainly because Daniel Sheehy's book in this series provides a lengthy, in-depth discussion of this music tradition.

Mainstream representations of Mexican culture in the United States developed in terms of Otherness as necessary for the construction of a U.S. identity. Central to any construction of identity is the notion of difference. Identity is defined by what one is not as much as by what one is or aspires to be; thus, claims to individual and collective identity always need to recognize those who are different from us in order to develop a sense of our community and ourselves. Constructions of national identity are not different; in order to define the nation and its residents it is fundamental to define those who do not belong in it. For historical and cultural reasons, Mexico and Mexicans have figured prominently as that Other when shaping the discourse of U.S. differentiation. The United States, in order to be defined as a prosperous, civilized, law-abiding, largely white, Protestant, hard-working, English speaking nation, had to be contrasted with a representative of the opposite of those ideals; thus, Mexico and Mexicans came to embody poorness, barbarism, criminality, non-whiteness (or indigeneity), Catholicism, indolence, and unsophisticatedness. In the U.S. imagination Mexico became the quintessential Other; a representation continuously reinforced by a history of military, political, and economic conflict between the two nations. Such discourse also validated the 19th-century U.S. expansionist project, and was used as a symbolic excuse to conquer the Mexican territory that became the American Southwest. That a large majority of contemporary Mexican working migrants come from poor indigenous and mestizo communities forced to cross the border without documents by economic and political systems that marginalize and discriminate against

them in both countries has helped reinforce these misguided representations. However, the musics Mexicans grow up listening to, which are the result of lengthy processes of globalization, indicate that their dreams and aspirations are no different from those of Americans. One goal of this book is to show United States students that regardless of obvious cultural and ethnic differences, there are many points of contact and similarities between U.S. and Mexican peoples.

*Music in Mexico* is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the three overarching themes of the book: (1) "Mexico's troubled legacy with its indigenous past has shaped the representation of the country and its culture"; (2) "Most musical genres in contemporary Mexico are the result of migration"; and (3) "The TV, radio, and film industries of Mexico have played a powerful role in the development of a sense of Mexican music within Mexico and abroad." The themes are presented in such a way as to provide the student with a basic knowledge of Mexico's history in order to inform contemporary musical practices. Chapter 2 examines the renaissance of *son jarocho* in contemporary Mexico and its embrace by Mexican American communities. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the Mexican romantic song complex, especially its two most popular genres, the *bolero* and the *balada*. In Chapter 3, the *bolero* is taken in order to show cultural connections between Mexico and the Caribbean and to study the construction of traditional gender roles in Mexico. Chapter 4 takes the *balada* as a case study to explore the powerful role of Mexican media in shaping musical tastes throughout Latin America as well as ways in which mainstream musicians may challenge traditional gender constructions. Chapters 5 and 6 deconstruct the idea of "Regional Mexican Music," an umbrella label used to market a wide variety of heterogenous Mexican musical traditions, especially *norteña* and *banda* musics. By examining *norteña* and *banda* musics in relation to the Mexican diaspora, these chapters show the importance of Mexican migrant communities in shaping contemporary Mexican musical culture. Chapter 7 discusses underground musical practices like rock and *canto nuevo* in order to show different ways in which the development of Mexican music has responded to a variety of social concerns and cultural practices that transcend the boundaries of the country.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book would not have been possible without the enthusiasm, commitment, guidance, and passion of many people. I would like to thank

## Introduction



On April 30, 2010, Chicago's House of Blues became a niche of Mexican musical culture as a great crowd, primarily Mexicans and Mexican Americans, gathered to fervently applaud and sing along with Lila Downs. Lila appeared, wearing high-heeled tall boots, a waistband over-knee skirt, a tube top beautifully decorated with Oaxaca-style embroidery, and a white shawl resembling the wings of a sparrow, to passionately sing Tomás Méndez's classic *ranchera* song "Cucurrucucú paloma" (Coo Coo Dove); it was clear then that this was going to be an extraordinary evening. The crowd, mesmerized, almost hypnotized by Lila's beautiful, expressive voice, enjoyed her rendition of *rancheras*, *huapangos*, *boleros*, *corridos*, and *sones*, including "Arenita azul" (Blue Little Sand), with a powerful percussive beat that invited everyone to dance. Her soulful versions, in Spanish, Zapotec, Mixtec, and Nahuatl languages, of classic Oaxacan songs like "La llorona" (The Weeping Woman), "La zandunga," and "Simuna" (Simona) brought nostalgic tears to the many Oaxaqueños (from Oaxaca state in Southern Mexico) in the audience. However, her wonderful medley of Woody Guthrie's classics "Pastures of Plenty" and "This Land Is Your Land," reinvented with *cumbia* and hip-hop touches, brought down the house, the crowd screaming and singing, accompanying Lila's performance.

Lila Downs's concert at the House of Blues was no ordinary performance. Occurring in Chicago, with its large Mexican and Mexican American communities, during the heated national debate about immigration and Arizona's SB 1070 law; Lila's "Mexicanized" renditions of Guthrie's classic odes to the working classes strongly resonated with this audience. Guthrie's "Pastures of Plenty" (1941) chronicles the experience of migrant workers going to California and Arizona to harvest crops while living "on the cities' edges." In the present anti-immigration context, Downs's appropriation of the song was a statement of how Mexican migrants and Mexican American workers embody the powerful tale that connects U.S. identity to immigration, hard work, and determination.

I also think that Downs' concert reflects the ways in which the wonderful kaleidoscope of contemporary Mexican culture is developed in complex dialogues that transcend Mexico's political borders. Lila's singing in multiple languages spoke to the multi-ethnic character of Mexico, for it is home to more than 60 indigenous ethnic groups with their own languages. And her engaging interpretation of "Arenita azul," a traditional *chilena* from the Costa Chica region in Oaxaca and Guerrero, reminds us of Mexico's forgotten Afro-Mexican population. The African presence, dating to the 16th century when it numbered roughly a half-million, was neglected during the re-imaginings of the Mexican nation even though smaller groups of Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, and African Americans kept migrating to Mexico until the end of the 19th and sometimes through the 20th century. Mexico's European heritage is also diverse, and although most Europeans arrived from Spain during colonial times, many ethnicities and cultures have immigrated through Mexico's history, including Germans, Italians, French, as well as Chinese, Japanese, Jews, and Arabs. Figure 1.1 offers a map of Mexico that shows the location of the main cities and cultural areas discussed in the book.

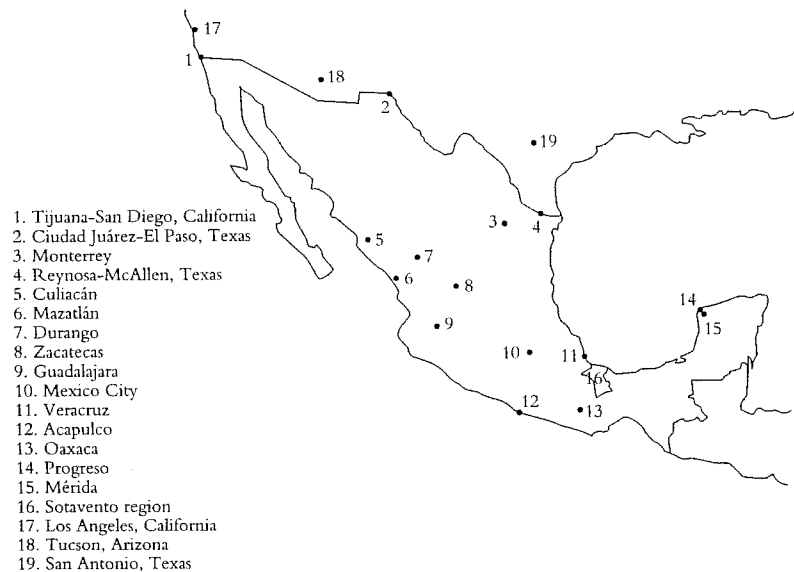


FIGURE 1.1. Map of Mexico.

Lila's repertory—traditional genres, jazz, and hip-hop—speaks to the wide variety of experiences and aspirations of Mexico's people. The history of some of these songs shows how powerful media shaped symbols of Mexican music and popular culture and its representation throughout the world. In the 1965 film *Cucurrucucú paloma*, singer Lola Beltrán introduced the song "Cucurrucucú paloma," and with the help of Latin America's influential radio and TV networks, XEW and Televisa, made it and herself into icons of Mexican *ranchera* and mariachi music.

The three issues I have mentioned in relation to Lila Downs' concert in Chicago—ethnicity and the place of indigeneity among symbols of Mexican identity, the role of migration and diaspora in determining Mexican culture, and the power of the media in shaping its national and international representations—are the central themes for discussion of Mexican music in this book. Figure 1.2 shows Lila Downs performing at Chicago's Congress Theater.



FIGURE 1.2. Lila Downs performing at Chicago's Congress Theater. (© Oliver Gillinson. Used by permission of Oliver Gillinson, 2012)

Chicago. Son Chiquitos and Jarochicanos are an indicator of the growing interest in *son jarocho* among Chicago Latino youngsters. In the last 30 years the genre has given young Mexican Americans in Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle, San Antonio, Madison, and New York a way to identify with and to celebrate the cultural heritage of their parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents. Its success here is connected to the rebirth that *son jarocho* has experienced in Mexico since the late 1970s when Mono Blanco and Siquisirí, and later Chuchumbé, Los Parientes, Los Cojolites, and Son de Madera, reclaimed *son jarocho* from the fossilized, postcard version it had become in the "official" stiff, theatrical performances favored by cultural brokers, media producers, and ballet *folklórico* proponents. The revitalized movement emphasized the tradition's social aspects and openness to collective participation. In this chapter I explore the history of *son jarocho*, show the relationship between its Mexican renaissance and its increasing presence among Mexican American communities across the United States, and analyze the music's performative power in its present diverse social and cultural settings.

### THE MEXICAN SON COMPLEX

*Son jarocho* belongs to a larger Mexican musical complex of regional styles of *sones* such as *son abajeño*, *son arribeño*, *son calentano*, *son de artesa*, *son jarocho*, *son huasteco*, *son istmeño*, and numerous musical practices of the colonial period (1521–1821) known as *sonecitos del país* (little *sones* from the countryside). *Sones*, basically meaning "sounds," "tunes," or songs, are mestizo dance musics developed in 18th-century Mexico mixing Spanish, African, and indigenous music traditions. They represent the oldest repertory of traditional Mexican music. Regional *sones* are stylistically distinct but share common elements: they all combine a type of plucked string-based instrumental ensemble with *zapateado* dance style, an improvisatory singing structure called *copla*, and predominant ternary rhythmic patterns with frequent *sesquiáltera* or *hemíola* (a rhythmic practice common to many Spanish and Spanish American musics characterized by a continuous shift from compound duple to simple triple meters, typically back and forth from 6/8 to 3/4). Most *son* traditions are participatory in nature; community members join in dancing and singing at celebrations called *fandangos* which often include musicians from different bands jamming together.

**ACTIVITY 2.1.** *As you read about these varieties of son, create a chart for yourself that includes for each these elements: the name(s) of the variety, the region(s) in which it flourishes, the instrumentation for the music, and other information. In this way, you can begin to understand what distinguishes the varieties from each other and also glimpse the richness of the varieties of music in Mexico.*

*Sonecitos del país's* repertory of popular songs and *jarabes* (multisectioned dances) entered city theaters as part of *entremeses* (one-act comic theatrical performances). Propaganda vehicles of patriotic ideas during the Mexican War of Independence (1810–21), the Mexican-American War (1846–48), and the Franco-Mexican War (1861–67), they remained popular through the end of the 19th century transcending regional boundaries to become Mexico's first nationally popular music. Unlike *sonecitos del país*, other *son* traditions remained localized, acquiring significance as regional cultural manifestations through the 20th century. *Son abajeño*, from the western Mexican states of Colima, Jalisco, Michoacán, and Nayarit, features an ensemble that usually includes two violins, *vihuela*, *guitarra de golpe*, and harp or *guitarrón* (bass guitar) which, with its repertory is the basic source of modern mariachi. The *son arribeño* style from the north central states of Guanajuato, Queretaro, and San Luis Potosí is characterized by two violins, which provide the main melodic and rhythmic elements, *guitarra quinta*, *jarana* and *vihuela*. The Tierra Caliente (Hot Land) region in the western states of Michoacán and Guerrero is home to the *son calentano*. The type of *son calentano* from the Balsas River area features an ensemble of one or two violins, one or several guitars, and a small drum. The one from the Tepalcatepec river region is a larger ensemble called *conjunto de arpa grande* (large harp ensemble) composed of one or two violins, *guitarra de golpe*, *vihuela*, and a large harp that gives the group its name and is also used as a percussion instrument.

Originating in the southern states of Guerrero and Oaxaca's Costa Chica (Small Coast), an area with a strong Afro-Mexican presence, the *son de artesa* is also known as *son de tarima* since it features a wooden platform (*tarima*) where dancers perform rhythmic patterns in *zapateado* style, a percussive component considered an intrinsic stylistic element rather than a simple ornament. Besides the *tarima*, the ensemble includes violin, *cajón* (wooden box), and *charasca* or *guacharasca* (a type

of rain stick) or violin, guitar, and drum. The repertoire *artesa* musicians play includes *sones* and *chilenas*. The *son istmeño*, from Oaxaca's Tehuantepec isthmus, is an ensemble of one or several guitars, *requinto*, and occasionally marimba. Due to the area's large Zapotec population, many *sones istmeños* are either in Zapotec language or bilingual. *La huasteca* is a region that intersects the northeastern states of San Luis Potosí, Tamaulipas, Hidalgo, and Veracruz in northeastern Mexico; it gives its name to the *son huasteco* style, played by both its mestizo and indigenous communities, and characterized by an instrumental lineup that includes violin, *jarana*, and *guitarra quinta* or *huapanguera* (after the *huapango*, a common genre in the *son huasteco* repertory). Its most salient features are the virtuoso violin parts and the improvisation among all instruments and singers.

**ACTIVITY 2.2.** Do some research about the *chilena* (earlier in the chapter) as a music genre and try to think about it in relation to the story of migratory flows. Where did it come from? Why is it called *chilena*? What other South American dance styles is it related to? What countries claim these dances as "national" symbols?

### STYLE AND PRACTICE IN SON JAROCHO

Although sharing many general features with other *son* styles the *son jarocho* features a unique musical structure, improvisatory style, performance practice, and singing tradition. Its origins are in many cities and towns on the Papaloapan River and the Los Tuxtlas area of central and southeastern Veracruz state. This is the state's largest subregion and is called El Sotavento (Where the Winds Blow). Within this cultural complex is the World Heritage town of Tlacotalpan whose historical importance as a commercial port during the 19th century is still celebrated in the *décimas* (a 10-line poetic form) in some older *sones jarocho*s. Since 1978, Tlacotalpan has annually hosted a *fandango*, the Encuentro de Jaraneros y Decimistas (Meeting of *Jarana* Players and *Décima* Singers), as part of the celebrations for its patron, the Candelaria Virgin. Figure 2.1 shows the town's main road entrance. Lasting for several days and culminating on February 2 (day of the Candelaria Virgin), it is the most important encounter of *son jarocho* musicians, singers, and dancers, and



FIGURE 2.1. Monument to Son Jarocho at the entrance of Tlacotalpan, Veracruz. (© Ekaterina Pirozhenko. Used by permission of Ekaterina Pirozhenko, 2012.)

is a pilgrimage destination for professional and aficionado *son jarocho* practitioners from Mexico and the United States. Although this *encuentro*'s original intention was to maintain traditional forms of *son jarocho*, it has become a kaleidoscope of contemporary practices, causing tensions between conservatives wishing to keep *son jarocho* with a fixed repertory and performance practice and those wanting to inject musical elements from other traditions, making it more meaningful to everyday realities and lifestyles.

Despite historical and regional variations, *son jarocho*'s basic ensemble includes *arpa jarocho* (harp), *requinto jarocho*, and *jarana* but rarely the violin, which was included in early 20th-century ensembles. Different local performance traditions may include an assortment of percussion instruments, among them the *quijada de burro* (donkey jaw), *pandero* (tambourine), *tarima*, *cajón*, and *marimbol* or *marimbula* (bass thumb piano). The harp's main role is to provide a strong bass line but it also introduces melodic material based on the song's harmonic progression.

The *requinto jarocho*, *guitarra de son*, or *guitarra jabalina* is a four-string, guitar-like instrument; its body, neck, and tuning head are carved from

a single piece of wood, with the top made out of a thin piece of wood. The slightly raised finger board features guitar-like metallic frets, usually up to the joint of the neck and the body but sometimes also running all the way down to the sound hole. The traditional tuning of both the *requinto jarocho* and the *jarana* was based on a series of intervals between the instruments' open strings. Tuning was not understood as a series of specific pitches, like the contemporary notion of "tuning," and the instruments in the ensemble were tuned to each other as opposed to an external reference. Today, however, many musicians often tune their instruments in relation to specific pitches. The *requinto jarocho* uses nylon strings that could be tuned differently according to the instrument's size, the most common tunings being (from the lower string up) B C F B' or F G C' F', with another possible tuning (E) A D' G' C', with the lower E string optional for the occasional five-string *requinto*. Since the actual pitches may change, the most important aspect of the tuning is the intervallic relation between strings. According to their sizes, the different *requintos* are called *primo* (the smallest one), *punteador*, *medio requinto*, *requinto* (the most common), *cuarta*, *leona*, and *león* (the largest one). The *requinto* is played with a variety of *punteado* (plucking) techniques that involve a type of plectrum called *espiga* (spike) or *pluma* (feather), traditionally made from horn or bone but plastic ones are now quite common. The *requinto's* sound is deep and percussive, usually carrying the melody or providing a continuous melodic accompaniment to the singer; occasionally, it could also be used to strum chords. In southern Veracruz, it is common that an ensemble of *requintos* playing the bass line and melodies would replace the *arpa jarocho*. Figure 2.2 shows Raul Fernandez playing his *requinto*.

The *jarana* is a five-course, guitar-shaped instrument, a course being usually a pair or more of adjacent strings. Like the *requinto jarocho*, it is carved from a single piece of wood (although contemporary instruments may be made from separate pieces, like guitars). The slightly raised fingerboard features 12 metallic frets that very rarely go beyond the body and neck joint. The lowest and highest *órdenes* (courses) are single and the three middle ones are double (a common feature among baroque plucked instruments, the direct ancestors of the *jarana*) which gives the instrument its unique timbral quality. Habitually the unison and octave stringed courses are slightly "out of tune," which creates beating among all the overtones. Practitioners perceive this acoustic phenomenon as the instrument's timbric richness; some of the smaller *jaranas* may have six, five, or four courses. There are three typical tunings; one (ADDG'BBE), similar to the higher five strings of a standard guitar but with the fourth,



FIGURE 2.2. Raul Fernandez playing the *requinto jarocho*. (Courtesy of Alejandro L. Madrid)

third, and second strings as double courses; a second one based on a cycle of fourths (D G'G B'B' EE C); or a third one based on a C major or a minor chord (G AA E'E CC G). They are all re-entrant tunings (a tuning in which the strings are not ordered from lowest to highest pitch), with an octave stringing in the third.

There are several types of *jaranas*; according to size, they are called *chaquiste*, the smallest one; *mosquito* or *chillador* (squeaker); *primera*; *segunda*; *tres cuartos*; *tercera* (the most common); and *tercerola* (the largest one). The *jarana* produces a very percussive sound and provides the rhythmic and harmonic framework of *son jarocho* as the player produces energetically strummed chords in a variety of rhythmic patterns. These strumming patterns are called *maniqueos* (strokes); the combination of two basic playing techniques—strumming (all strings simultaneously) and *rasgueo* (a roll created by the fingers slowly sweeping across the strings)—and effects such as striking the fingers against the strings or



FIGURE 2.3. Anabel Tapia playing the jarana. (Courtesy of Alejandro L. Madrid)

slapping the strings against the fret board offer *jaraneros* (*jarana* players) a large rhythmic and textural palette. The *jarana* sound is so central to the *son jarocho* tradition that the word *jaranero* is actually used as a synonym of *son jarocho* musician. Figure 2.3 shows Anabel Tapia, *jarana* player of the Chicago-based group Tarima Son.

The percussion instruments used in the southern region of Veracruz include *tarima*, *pandero*, *quijada de burro*, and *marímbula*. The *tarima* is a wooden platform where couples take turns dancing, joining the musical performance by producing rhythmic patterns via their *zapateado*. This dancing is a social practice fundamental to *son jarocho* as it allows community members to participate, their percussive footwork emphasizing the polyrhythmic character of the music. Figure 2.4 shows *zapateado* on a *tarima*.

The *pandero* is an octagonal hand drum of Spanish origin; the player strikes its leather drumhead or its wooden frame, which includes eight pairs of jingles fixed in slots on each side of the frame. The player combines striking the drumhead and the frame with the right hand with

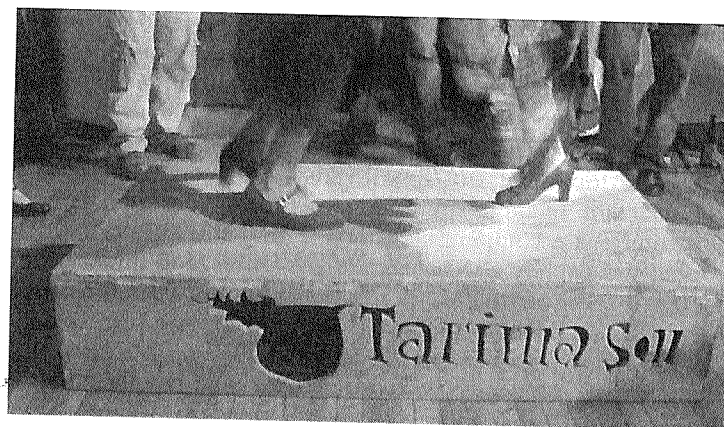


FIGURE 2.4. The tarima of Chicago-based group Tarima Son. (Courtesy of Alejandro L. Madrid)

shaking the instrument with the left hand to make the jingles rattle. The *quijada de burro*, a percussion instrument of African origin made with the lower jaw of a donkey or horse, is played by hitting the side of the jaw, making the teeth vibrate. An Afro-mestizo large wooden box used in *son de artesa* and other African-influenced musics in Latin America (particularly in Afro-Peruvian music) is the *cajón*, on which the musician usually sits and plays rhythmic patterns on one side of the box. The *marímbol* or *marímbula* is a thumb piano common in sub-Saharan Africa and the Afro-Caribbean diaspora; in *son jarocho* it plays or reinforces bass lines. The instrument is particularly featured by contemporary Tlacotalpan ensembles. *Marímbulas* often are large wooden boxes with a sound hole on one side and metallic tongues of different sizes attached to a piece of wood above the sound hole. There is no standard *marímbula* in *son jarocho*, for the instrument varies in size and number of tongues, which rarely have a range beyond one octave.

**ACTIVITY 2.3.** Investigate what other Afro-Mexican, Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin American traditions use the *tarima*, the *cajón*, the *quijada de burro*, and the *marímbula*. Discuss with your teacher and classmates the possible relations between these traditions and *son jarocho*.

Harmonically, traditional *sones* are rather simple, often following I-IV-V-I or even I-V-I chord progressions. The complexity of *son jarocho* is in its rhythmic structure and the improvisational character of *requinto* solos and lyrics. With few exceptions (like the famous *sones* “La bamba,” “El colás,” or “El tilingo lingo”) *son jarocho* tends to be in ternary rhythm, in composed duple meter (6/8) with frequent instances of *sesquiáltera* or *hemíola* in the melodic rhythmic structure or the often polyrhythmic instrumental accompaniment. The formal structure of *son jarocho* is strophic and usually alternates calls, responses, and improvisational instrumental sections; “La María Chuchena” offers a good example of this. The sung sections are organized strophically by a principle of call and response in which a soloist (usually the lead *requinto* player) sings a melody (a) that is repeated with different lyrics (a’) by the other musicians. After the response, there is a new call based on a slightly different melody (b), and a new response (which in this case is a refrain that is repeated exactly the same at each section’s end). The version recorded in the accompanying CD (track 1) is one of the song’s many possible versions; most variants keep one or two stanzas and the refrain but add new verses.



**ACTIVITY 2.4.** Listen to CD track 1, a recording of “La María Chuchena,” and follow its structure (Figure 2.5). The song is divided into three large similarly organized sections. Instrumental solos begin each section, first with the introduction, then an instrumental interlude at 0:48, and another at 1:30. You will notice that all *requinto* solos are improvisations on the same harmonic sequence and their endings elaborations of the same hemiola-based cadence (look at it at the end of measure 16 in Figure 2.6). The companion website has a more detailed analysis of the use of hemiolas in “La María Chuchena.” To see how different musicians might expand the song, look on the Internet for other versions, such as the recording by the renowned East Los Angeles-based band *Los Lobos*.

During a *fandango* performance, musicians would likely extend the *son* in two ways, one by expanding the instrumental interludes

continues  
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FIGURE 2.6. Instrumental introduction to "La María Chuchena." (Courtesy of Alejandro L. Madrid)

to allow for more instrumental improvisation as well as *zapateado* by *tarima* performers, another by allowing singers to improvise *coplas* (verses) during the sung sections. On occasion, the call and response style between soloist and choir might be replaced by two singers improvising against each other in a type of *copleros'* (verse improvisers) duel of sorts. These improvisations last from a few minutes to hours depending on the energy developed between *jaraneros*, *tarimeros*, and *copleros*.

*Coplas* follow a traditional poetic form of octosyllabic lines usually organized in quatrains (four lines), although also in sestets (six lines) and occasionally quintains (five lines) and *décimas* (10 lines). Some older *sones* are organized according to *décimas*, a 17th-century Spanish poetic form common to other types of Latin American musics from Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Colombia, Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina, but the bulk of the repertory, especially newer songs or older ones with new lyrics, is organized in quatrains.

**ACTIVITY 2.5.** The companion website to this book contains more detailed analysis of quatrain strophes in "La María Chuchena." Use that analysis as a model to do some poetic analysis of your own. Find a *décima* by a contemporary poet such as Guillermo Cházaro Lagos and a 17th-century Spanish *décima*-based poem by a writer such as Pedro Calderón de la Barca, and compare them.

Improvising *coplas* is one of the most salient and difficult features of *son jarocho*, separating good from extraordinary performers. The *décima* is no longer the most common poetic form used in *son jarocho*, but because it is the oldest and most traditional, *copleros* are often called *decimistas*. The improvisation of *décimas* is still the ultimate test for a superior *coplero*; so, when they are improvising, seasoned *copleros* humorously mention current events and facts about musicians or people present. These improvised vocal performances are the backbone of a *fandango* event and also the norm when street musicians sing in restaurants or public plazas. Street musicians use numerous formulas by which they might insert customers' names to personalize the *copla*, a practice less appreciated among connoisseurs at a *fandango*, who expect more creative forms of improvisation. Also, among street musicians, rhymes tend to follow simple "abab" patterns, while *fandango* musicians perform more complex *décima* rhyme patterns (e.g., "abbaacddc" or "abbaacddcd" or "abbaaccaac"). The *copleros* are central to the *fandango* as their creativity, invention, and wittiness energize other participants (*jaraneros*, *copleros*, and *tarimeros*) and galvanize the crowd, thus shaping the tone and character of the collective performance.

**ACTIVITY 2.6.** Search the Internet for videos of *fandangos* and analyze the dynamics of these collective performances. How do the *tarima zapateado* rhythms relate to the string instruments? How do *tarima* dancers and *copleros* interact?

### SON JAROCHO IN VERACRUZ: A HISTORY OF MIGRATION AND TRANSCULTURATION

Founded in 1519 as Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz (Rich Village of the True Cross), Veracruz is Mexico's first European city, its oldest and largest

call *los marisqueros*; stereotypes whose national and international success accompanied neglect for actual countryside *fandango* practices that did not follow this typecasting and thus were considered lacking sophistication and refusing modernization. Nevertheless, the symbolic power and cultural capital of ballet *folklórico* practices have played a decisive role in the contemporary renaissance of *son jarocho* among Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

### THE TRANSNATIONAL RESURGENCE OF SON JAROCHO

The Mexican economic crisis of the mid- to late 1970s was harsh on peasants and rural communities. Veracruz state suffered dramatically, leading to massive migration, especially from the Sotavento region into urban areas. Many musicians who migrated to Veracruz and other cities worked as street musicians, although a few were able to get part-time teaching positions in music or dance at Casas de Cultura (Cultural Centers) and other government-sponsored community workshops. In 1977, a group of musicians founded Mono Blanco, a band intended to preserve traditional *son jarocho* as a communitarian practice. Mono Blanco combined the experience of seasoned, older musicians, and their younger apprentices who were also savvy cultural promoters. These younger musicians gained the sponsorship of important cultural institutions of Veracruz state, which allowed them to make performance tours in the state and beyond, and let them organize local music and dance workshops and *fandangos*.

The Mono Blanco activities coincided with a movement in Mexico City to reaffirm traditional Latin American music (see Chapter 7), a result of the populist politics of President Luis Echeverría in the early 1970s; the increasing presence and cultural influence of exiles from dictatorships in Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay; and the fervor for Latin American unity stoked by the Cuban revolution. To position Mexico within this cosmopolitan Latin Americanist movement, urban Mexican musicians and cultural brokers turned to the country's traditional musics beyond the official ballet-*folklórico* representations. Their initiatives were also sponsored both privately and by government institutions in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Meetings of traditional musicians were organized around the country; new groups (like El Chuchumbé, Los Parientes, or Son de Madera) appeared, making Mono Blanco's mission their own. One of the events founded at the time, Tlacotalpan's Encuentro de Jaraneros y Decimistas, has survived

and thrived to this day, becoming, as previously noted, a kind of *son jarocho* mecca.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, interest in *son jarocho* shifted from preservation toward experimentation. Musicians rediscovered Afro-mestizo instruments such as the *marimbula* and incorporated new elements such as the blues scale in *requinto* improvisations and instruments like the *quijada de burro*, the congas, and the *cajón* from African American, Afro-Caribbean, and Afro-Peruvian musics. These practices reestablished and reinforced the connection of *son jarocho* to the larger historical complex of African diasporic culture and, after decades of an official racial discourse (*mestizaje*) that effectively rendered blackness invisible among Mexicans, reinstated Mexico as an essential historical pathway to the dissemination and transculturation of African culture in the Americas.

In 1987, the box office hit film *La Bamba*, by Mexican American director Luis Valdéz, told the story of 17-year-old Mexican American rock 'n' roll star Ritchie Valens. A defining scene shows Ritchie and his brother traveling south of the Mexican border to a brothel in Tijuana. While his brother is interested in Ritchie getting intimate with the local ladies, Ritchie appears more absorbed with the brothel's band playing "La bamba." Fascinated by the song, he stands by the stage and starts following the musicians' harmonic sequences on his own guitar. When Ritchie returns to Los Angeles, he and his producer decide to include a rock 'n' roll version of "La bamba" as the B-side of his second single, "Donna." Valdez's film suggests that Valens's decision to record "La bamba" resulted from a sense of regained Mexican pride after his trip to Tijuana, but in real life Valens already knew the song as it was frequently played by his relatives at family gatherings in Los Angeles. Nevertheless, the film helps us better understand two important moments in Mexican Americans' historical relationship with *son jarocho*. One, the release of Valens's "La bamba" in 1958, which introduced the song to a large audience in the United States, coincided with the popularization of the song in Mexico as an almost "unofficial" Mexican anthem. Second, when the film was released in 1987 it helped solidify the *son jarocho* movement among Mexican Americans in Los Angeles, and ignite interest in it among other Mexican American communities in the United States.

**ACTIVITY 2.10.** Search the Internet for videos of traditional or ballet *folklórico* renditions of "La bamba" and compare them to Ritchie Valens's rock 'n' roll version. What did Valens change and what did he retain in his version?

Ritchie Valens introduced "La bamba" to United States audiences in the late 1950s by "dressing it up" as rock 'n' roll, the music style that was becoming popular; this illustrates how Mexican Americans struggled to conform to mainstream United States culture so as to be considered Americans. Only in the 1970s, at the height of the Chicana/o civil rights movement, with its re-signification and celebration of Mexican expressive culture as a marker of identity, did *son jarocho* gain followers among Mexican Americans as a symbol of resistance against an American mainstream that refused to accept them as equals. *Son jarocho* entered the Mexican American imagination through ballet *folklórico* lessons, which became increasingly prominent among Mexican Americans during the 1970s and 1980s, developing into spaces for the performance and celebration of a unique Mexican American identity. Ballet *folklórico*'s fossilized nationalist rhetoric in Mexico was transformed by Mexican Americans to fit their own political agendas.

An early example of this politically nuanced appropriation of *son jarocho* is the work of the East Los Angeles-based band Los Lobos, who play the Mexican musicians at the Tijuana brothel in Valdez's film *La Bamba*. The movie's title, originally *Come On, Let's Go*, after Valens's first single, was changed because the presence of Los Lobos in the movie indicated that a focus on "La bamba" would resonate with the interest on *son jarocho* among Mexican Americans at the time. The success of the movie and the Los Lobos soundtrack recording of "La bamba," number one in the pop music charts for three weeks, galvanized this interest and provided for further commercial success of *son jarocho*-related endeavors such as Los Lobos' Grammy-Award winning album, *La Pistola y El Corazón* (1989), which features two *sones jarocho*s among other types of traditional Mexican music. Steve Loza suggests that this recording and their subsequent national concert tour exposed audiences to Los Lobos' modernized and eclectic version of *son jarocho*, by replacing traditional instruments according to the band's needs (1992: 192) and even including English lyrics at times, such as in their guest performance on *Sesame Street*.

Many Mexican Americans who grew up on rock and other U.S. popular music became interested in *son jarocho* precisely because bands like Los Lobos presented it as a modernized musical form that spoke to their own lives in the United States. Raul Fernandez, from Chicago's *son jarocho* band Son del Viento, recalls that he became interested in *son jarocho* after listening to Zazhil (a Mexican band led by Víctor Pichardo) play modernized versions of Mexican *sones* with electric instruments, congas, keyboards, saxophones, and drum set (they branded their style "progressive *son*"). In the early 1980s Zazhil played for Amparo Ochoa, one

of the leading figures of the Latin American music movement in Mexico, and first performed in Chicago in 1990, a few years after the Old Town School of Music first invited Mono Blanco to concertize and to teach *son jarocho* workshops in the city. The modern sound of Zazhil and the initial work by Mono Blanco established the foundations of a vigorous *son jarocho* movement in Chicago.

Musicians like Raul Fernandez, first attracted to *son jarocho* by the modern sound of Los Lobos and Zazhil, soon began exploring its traditional aspects. In 1993 Víctor Pichardo and Juan Dies started the Chicago-based band Sones de México, that plays all types of Mexican *sones* but was primarily interested in recovering the collective and communitarian aspect of the *fandango* experience. The emphasis on the *fandango* by Sones de México and other late 1990s and early 2000s *son jarocho* bands such as Tarima Son, Son del Viento, or A Flor de Piel; the influence of Mexican bands such as Mono Blanco, Los Cojolites, Chuchumbé, and Son de Madera performing in Chicago; and the work in K-12 schools and community centers by many band musicians generated interest among Chicago's Mexican American youth in *son jarocho* as something relevant to their lives.

This awakening also took place in cities like Los Angeles, Madison, San Antonio, and Seattle where local bands have emerged—Quetzal from Los Angeles is possibly the most prominent one—and local musicians have developed links with Mexican traditional groups, even traveling to Tlacotalpan to participate in the Encuentro Nacional de Jaraneros y Decimistas. But there is a difference in the Mexican American *son jarocho* movement: while its players acknowledge that the tradition comes from Veracruz, they understand that it is re-signified in the United States according to the realities of the different Mexican American communities, and often the ethnic Latinos, who play it. This is a process of transculturation by which *son jarocho* has become something uniquely representative of the Mexican American and even Latino experience. Such is the case of the many youth groups that take this music and make it their own, one of which is Chicago's Jarochicanos.

According to Gina Gamboa, projects like Jarochicanos and Son Chiquitos have been embraced by the Mexican American and Latino communities because they preserve and celebrate Mexican culture—not only music but also the Spanish language—and provide a space for the continuous development of unique multicultural and political alliances among different Mexican American and Latino groups. Maya Fernandez, *jarana* player, singer, and *tarimera* for Son del Viento, points out that Jarochicanos is strongly influenced by the political needs and everyday lives of their young Latino members. The musical

experimentation among Jarochicano members who introduce elements from African American hip-hop and Puerto Rican *bomba* to traditional *son jarocho* should be seen as a response to their multicultural reality as American youth and their recognition that many of the problems faced by Mexican Americans in Chicago are shared by the Puerto Rican and African American communities. The intersection of these ethnic groups occurs in neighborhoods like Little Village, Pilsen, or Humboldt Park and on the stages often shared by the young musicians from these communities. That Mexican American and Latino communities across the United States return to the same traditional forms of *son jarocho* has allowed a common repertory and performance style among musicians in California, Illinois, Texas, Florida, and Wisconsin. Son Solidario (Solidarian Son) is the name taken by young *son jarocho* musicians from these states when they gather at politically progressive events such as the United States Social Forum, at protests against the School of the Americas, or in support of the Farm workers Freedom March. Sharing a common *son jarocho* background has allowed them all to perform together in support of common causes, singing *coplas* (improvised or prepared in advance) that reflect upon the political causes at stake.

**ACTIVITY 2.11.** Search the Internet for videos of *Son Solidario* at the events mentioned earlier. Analyze the particularities of these fandangos. How do they differ from fandangos in Mexico? How do their lyrics reflect the political causes they support?

The hybrid musical forms being forged at these points of cultural and political intersection bear witness to the transnational and transcultural crossings that have characterized the Latin American experience in general and Mexican culture in particular throughout their histories. They also challenge the shortcomings of Mexican *mestizaje* discourses by reestablishing the cultural connection between *son jarocho* and the African diaspora in both historical and contemporary contexts. As such, contemporary *son jarocho* and the experience of contemporary Mexican people are understood in the transnational dialogues this music helps to establish between local Mexican communities, national Mexican discourses, and Mexican American life beyond the boundaries of the Mexican nation-state.

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It is June 26, 2004, and the stage is filled to capacity for the opening of Luis Miguel's concert as the band starts to play. The musicians wear traditional *son jarocho* tributed over a variety of instruments—bass on the left, guitar on the right level—two trumpets, a drummer to the right wearing reversible shoes on each side of the stage, situated by the center. The guitar and bass play a few seconds of the song. Luis Miguel stands at the center of the stage, and the band members are arranged around him. The staff members are also visible. "Solidario" (Solidarian Son) is part of the concert. The second part of the concert made Luis Miguel's name. The second part of the Latin pop concert is an arrangement of the song.

and distasteful by upper-class Latinos). The trajectory of *Onda Grupera* in Mexico and Regional Mexican music in the United States should be understood not as parallel phenomena but as aspects of the same transnational complex inclusive of the same musicians and followers, interconnected networks of distribution, and interrelated practices of consumption.

Nevertheless, it is vital to untangle the marketing clutter known as *Onda Grupera* in order to understand how some of the musics marketed under the same label have become meaningful to diverse audiences at different moments in Mexican and Mexican American history. This will enable a better understanding of how their growing interpenetration in a transnational context has generated new, strikingly original hybrid music genres.

### ACCORDION MUSIC FROM THE MEXICAN NORTHEAST TO THE WORLD

*Un, dos, tres, cuatro* (one, two, three, four), the lead singer establishes the beat and the button accordion enters with a syncopated solo in parallel thirds over a typical oom-pah, oom-pah rhythmic base provided by an electric bass that plays on the down beat, and a bajo sexto strumming chords on the upbeat with support from the drum set. The five musicians on stage, wearing stylish white outfits, are showered by green, white, and red lights resembling the hologram of a Mexican flag; flashing light panels in the background and wisps of fog in the foreground provide an almost modernist atmosphere that gives new meaning to the rural musical gestures recognizable in the song's style. This is the concert's climax and the crowd, absorbed by the performance, clap, whistle, and sing along through the first couple of verses before the lead singer utters the end of the second verse, "soy extranjero en mi tierra y no vengo a darles guerra, soy hombre trabajador" (I am a foreigner in my own land, and I did not come to make any troubles, I am a working man), and a loud approving roar from the audience overcomes the theater. The moment is typical of the deep connection between Los Tigres del Norte and their audience created by powerful emotional reactions to the band's music and solidarity with its denunciation of the abuses and discrimination Mexican immigrants suffer in the United States. Los Tigres del Norte's music is an audible space for its fans to proudly reclaim and celebrate their rural origins as well as their rights in their new country. Figure 5.1 shows Los Tigres del Norte during a TV performance.

The song, "Somos más americanos" (We Are More Americans), is a *corrido* in *norteño* style and shows why this music has been meaningful

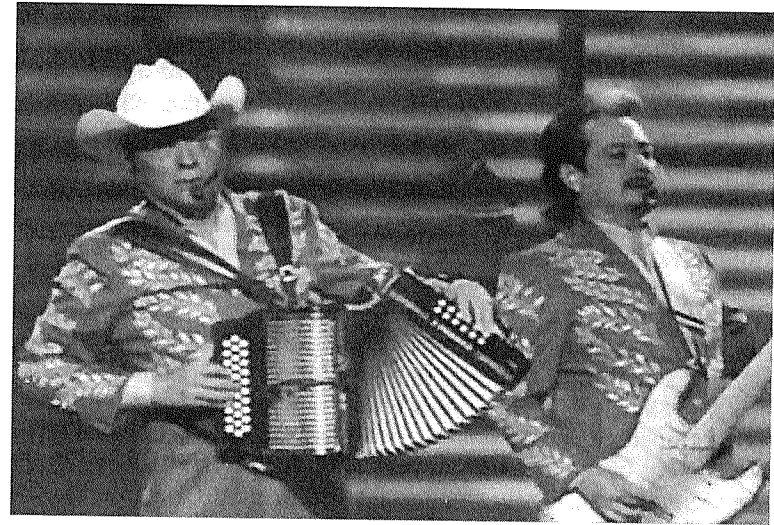


FIGURE 5.1. *Los Tigres del Norte* performing live at the 2008 Latin Grammy Awards. (Courtesy of Alejandro L. Madrid)

for Mexicans and Mexican Americans for more than a hundred years. The song speaks of the alienation felt by many Mexican immigrants in the United States with xenophobic and racist propaganda accusing them of abusing the immigration and social security systems. Los Tigres del Norte replies to this rhetoric stating that Mexicans immigrated not to create problems but to work hard ("no vengo a darles guerra, soy hombre trabajador"). They also remind the audience that the Southwest has been Mexican territory ("soy extranjero en mi tierra") thus making Mexicans part of the "American" dream, arguably even "more American" than "anglos" as they have been here longer. The song reflects on the notion of transnational belonging that characterizes the experience of the audiences who have embraced this music throughout northern Mexico and the Southwest. It also suggests that *norteña* music has come to represent this migrant culture, articulating the deep feelings of identification that have helped it gain popularity throughout the Mexican diaspora.

In the 2009 PBS documentary *Latino Music USA*, Los Tigres del Norte was called "the most famous band mainstream America never heard of"; indeed they are the most commercially successful band among Latinos in the United States. However, Regional Mexican has marginal status music in the mainstream United States entertainment industry due to its

stigma as unsophisticated music and the fact that it is sung in Spanish. How was this music born and how did it become immensely popular throughout the Mexican diaspora and beyond?

*Norteña* music came to northern Mexico and southern Texas in the late 19th century with the Germans, Czechs, and Poles who settled there after building railroads between Monterrey and Texas in 1882. They introduced the accordion and musical genres like the polka, redowa, and schottische (called *polca*, *redova*, and *chotis* in northern Mexico) and brought crafts and businesses, like breweries and steel-making, that still define the industrial identity of the Mexican northeast and its long-standing cultural ties with southern Texas. These businesses flourished in Monterrey, just 150 miles south of the Texas border making Monterrey an axis of a commercial and economic network that included Laredo in Texas' Rio Grande Valley, and San Antonio.

This transnational economic circuit was also fundamental in the development of the *norteña* and conjunto musics that came to identify these regions musically during the 20th century. Both musical traditions share a standard instrumentation that includes the button accordion, the *bajo sexto* (a double-stringed bass guitar), the *tololoche* (bass), and the *redova* (a home-made drum now largely replaced by the *tarola* (snare drum) or drum set. Both developed from a core repertory of *polcas*, *redovas*, *vales*, and *chotis*es to which local genres such as the *corrido* (a type of descriptive ballad) and *huapango* were added. *Norteño* and conjunto are nearly identical styles, with minor singing and instrumental differences, and named for the regions where they were adopted; *norteña* for the tradition of those living south of the Rio Grande, while conjunto is the term preferred by Mexican Americans and Tejanos. Their history is one of continual dialogue in which performance styles and repertoires fluidly move back and forth over the border.

The arrival of polka, redowa, waltz, and schottische to Monterrey and south Texas was part of a larger dance craze for fashionable dances that brought a sense of cosmopolitanism to the urban centers that adopted them in Mexico and the United States during the second part of the 19th century. This was especially important in Mexico as pressures to Europeanize increased among the country's elite; eventually, the same sense of cosmopolitanism caused adoption of those dances in the countryside as symbols of sophisticated European culture. By the 1890s and 1900s the new musical genres were already part of the repertory of more traditionally local music ensembles such as military bands, *orquestas típicas* (string ensembles), and *tamborileros* typical of the Tamaulipas region—also known as *la picota* and formed by clarinets

and a homemade drum called *tambora de rancho* (ranch's drum). Local musicians slowly incorporated one- and two-row button accordions, the *bajo sexto*, and the *tambora de rancho* into their ensembles as it was more economical to hire one accordionist than larger orchestral ensembles. By the 1920s, the accordion and *bajo sexto* became the preferred basic instrumental ensemble with occasional additions of *tololoche* and *redova* or *tambora de rancho*. These dance and music traditions traveled with the farming workers throughout Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and south Texas frequently coming into contact with German and Czech communities from whom repertory was borrowed. Many of today's classic *polcas* from the *norteña* and conjunto repertory are in fact German or Czech polkas, such as "El barrilito" (the German "Beer Barrel Polka"). Mexican and Mexican American musicians acknowledge the origins but note that, regardless of their origin, the dances acquire new life and meaning when played by *norteño* and conjunto ensembles.

**ACTIVITY 5.1.** Search the Internet for videos of "Beer Barrel Polka" played by Norwegian American accordionist Myron Floren and "El barrilito" played by Mexican American accordionist Tony de la Rosa. Identify the stylistic differences. How are the European or Anglo and Mexican performances different? Pay attention to the musicians' delivery of the melody, vibrato, use of tempi, rhythmic liberties, syncopation, and improvisation, as well as the different instrumentation and the possibilities they offer. How do these musical elements vary from performance to performance, and how are the musicians able to instill a different feel to their versions? You can find additional material about the differences between the two styles in the following NPR website [www.honkytonks.org/showpages/accordion.htm](http://www.honkytonks.org/showpages/accordion.htm).

The standard *norteña* ensemble uses a button accordion, *bajo sexto*, and *tololoche* as its basic instrumental lineup; larger ensembles might use these instruments as the foundation upon which to add clarinets, saxophones, and percussion. The accordion gives the style its characteristic timbre and while most accordion players today play chromatic accordions, some of the earliest great accordionists in the tradition, such as Narciso Martínez, used the diatonic button accordion early in their

career. Depending on its type, the instrument would have two to five rows of buttons to play melodic lines with the right hand; the left hand plays harmonies on a buttonboard that has columns of buttons organized by circle of fifths, each button sounding a complete triad. This is the standard left-hand button system called *Stardella*; more modern button accordions offer more flexibility and freedom to play bass lines and choose the pitches in the harmony. In purely instrumental pieces, the accordion carries the melody; in other songs it would play solos at the beginning and in the middle of the piece; during the rest of the song it provides a fast, arpeggiated harmonic background to the singer. The accordion also plays the embellished cadences that characterize the sectional endings in this style.

The *bajo sexto* is a guitar-like instrument with six double courses; it is tuned by fourths, E-A-D-G-F-C (one octave below the register of the standard guitar), it reinforces the accordion's harmonies, and also plays melodic counterpoints to the vocal part or solo accordion during the improvisatory passages. The *tololoche* is a double bass-like instrument although slightly smaller in size. It may have four strings—although three-string instruments are not unusual—tuned also in fourths, ADGC, one whole step higher than the standard double bass. The *tololoche*, played always in pizzicato style, became part of the standard *norteño* outline in the 1940s and it is still heard in street musician ensembles, although the electric bass has replaced it in more commercial bands. Early *norteño* groups used a percussion instrument called *redova*, a small wooden tablet played with wooden mallets, later replaced by the *tarola* or snare drum, which was replaced by the drum set in contemporary commercial ensembles. Nevertheless, the *redova* can still be heard in traditional, *folklórico* events, and the *tarola* among street and restaurant musicians.

Genres in the core *norteña* repertory include the *polca*, *redova*, *vals*, and *chotis*, all instrumental dances of European origin transformed by their contact with more traditional Mexican genres. The *polca* is a fast dance in simple duple meter (2/4), its rhythmic accompaniment often identified as *oom-pah oom-pah*, an onomatopoeia referring to the bass-chord sequence that characterizes the music (Figure 5.2).

While the phrasing in European polkas tends to emphasize the downbeat, the Mexican *polca* tends to privilege more syncopation, often anticipating the downbeat. Emphasis on the upbeat in Mexican *polca* is also evident in the style of the *bajo sexto*, which regularly plays chords only on the upbeat.

The *redova* and the *vals* are dances in simple triple meter (3/4). Musically they are almost undistinguishable; the dance steps make



While groups like Luis y Julián and Carlos y José continued the duetto tradition into the late 20th century, the continuous lineup changes of Los Cadetes de Linares, with its expansion of the *norteña* music ensemble, foreshadowed the advent of larger *norteña* bands that redefined *norteña* in the 1970s, especially groups like Los Tigres del Norte. Having won five Latin Grammy Awards and achieved sales of over 32 million records, Los Tigres del Norte are the most popular and successful *norteña* band ever. Their music and recording output spans the smaller and more localized *norteña* market of the 1960s and the transnational *norteña* boom that took over the Mexican music industry and expanded the genre's influence to South America from the 1990s.

Los Tigres del Norte was founded by the Hernández brothers and cousins (Jorge, Hernán, Freddy, and Raúl) from the northwestern state of Sinaloa in 1968. Their huge commercial success and continual work across borders exemplifies the type of transnational practice that eventually resulted in the style's acceptance by the mainstream Mexican entertainment industry. In 1974, after moving to the United States, the band recorded "Contrabando y traición" (Contraband and Treason). This *corrido* ignited the band's career, inspired a series of movies based on the song's main characters (Emilio Varela and Camelia "La Texana"), and triggered the boom of the *corrido* sub-genre known as *narcocorrido* (ballads about drug dealings).

Los Tigres del Norte reinvigorated the *norteña* style by introducing electric bass, drum set, and saxophone into the ensemble's lineup; by incorporating musical elements from other styles and traditions, especially *cumbia*, *bolero*, *balada*, *merengue*, and rock; and using special sound effects to support the narrative plot of their *corridos*. They have also collaborated with pop, rock, and *reggaetón* stars such as Juanes, Julieta Venegas, Zach de la Rocha from Rage against the Machine, and Residente from Calle 13. Having experienced discrimination as immigrants themselves, the band members have made part of their mission to support the political cause of undocumented migrant workers in the United States. Songs like "Vivan los mojados" (Long Live the Wetbacks), "Jaula de oro" (Golden Cage), "Tres veces mojado" (Three Times Wetback), and "Somos más americanos" are very critical of the hypocritical dynamics of U.S. immigration laws. They argue that while the United States economy generates a demand for cheap Mexican labor its immigration policies make it impossible for them to enter the country with the necessary documents and authorization that would prevent their exploitation, a situation compounded by xenophobic politicians who make them into scapegoats. The *corridos* and songs by Los Tigres del Norte promote a

sense of pride in the immigrants' cultural background and emphasize that they are in fact central to the U.S. economic and cultural fabric. Part of the band's success comes from their unconditional solidarity with the people they sing for and about.

The influence of Los Tigres del Norte was strong not only in the music market but also in the performing style shift from the austere stage presence of early acts like Los Alegres de Terán to the grand shows of Los Tucanes de Tijuana and Bronco. As mentioned, Los Tigres del Norte were also fundamental in the popularization of the *narcocorrido*, a sub-genre shared with banda music, one of the other musical traditions from northern Mexico that became big in the 1990s under the rubric Mexican Regional Music or *Onda Grupera*. Before discussing *narcocorridos* and their unquestionable importance in contemporary Mexico, I will examine the trajectory of banda as a music style that came to represent a northwestern Mexican identity.

**ACTIVITY 5.5.** *In order to learn more about how norteña music performance styles have influenced recent migrant groups from Southern Mexico in the United States, listen to the fourth installment of Squeezebox Stories produced by Julie Caine and Marié Abe (<http://squeezeboxstories.com/stories/story-four-migration/>). Discuss it in class.*