George Lipsitz

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Three Moments of Mexican Music Making in Los Angeles

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LIVED PLACES PUBLISHING

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First published in 2026 by Lived Places Publishing

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 9781918026306 (pbk)
ISBN: 9781918026320 (ePDF)
ISBN: 9781918026313 (ePUB)

Cover design by Fiachra McCarthy
Book design by Rachel Trolove of Twin Trail Design
Typeset by Newgen Publishing, UK

Lived Places Publishing
P.O. Box 1845
47 Echo Avenue
Miller Place, NY 11764

www.livedplacespublishing.com

Abstract

This book explores how music functions as a social force by exploring the ways in which Chicano Rock, Banda, and FandangObon musics registered, resisted, and re-storied the social, political, and economic conditions facing people of Mexican origin in Los Angeles. These musics reflected and shaped the Chicano movement of the 1960s, migrant self-defense and self-definition in the 1990s, and a collective response to the commercialization and co-optation of ethnic cultural difference in the 2010s and 2020s. The book shows how musicians have been organic intellectuals using performance to mobilize their communities to resist unlivable destinies and create new forms of convivial co-creation.

Key words

Chicano, Banda, FandangObon, Postmodernism, Assimilation, Organic Intellectuals, Families of Resemblance, Labor Exploitation, Amplification, Fugitive Spaces of Belonging, Counter Publics

Contents

Learning objectives

1. To describe how music can function as a social force.
2. To recognize music as a register of historical and social conditions and as a means to resist and re-story them.
3. To discern and appreciate the tensions between assimilation and separation among people of Mexican descent in Los Angeles over time.
4. To see how perceiving families of resemblance in groups with similar but not identical characteristics enable members of aggrieved communities to make connections despite differences.
5. To discover the ways in which expressive culture reflects and shapes relations between races and places.

Introduction

This book explores three moments of Mexican music making in Los Angeles. It argues that in moments of danger, Chicano Rock, Banda, and FandangObon registered, resisted, and re-storied the social, political, and cultural conditions facing people of Mexican origin in the city. Its chapters were written separately over a 40-year period. They were not composed with the intention of introducing and developing a single theme. They were published in 1986, 2007, and 2024 in response to specific moments of crises and conjunctures in society and scholarship at those times. Looking at them now, however, I see that they hang together. Each of the three moments of music making described and analyzed in this book involve creative musicians from an aggrieved, exploited, and racialized community making sounds that served as bridges between cultures, countries, communities, and categories. In their own ways and in their own times they brought forth music that created bridges that enabled overcoming divisions, negotiating difficulties, and creating new and unexpected connections and creations. Their music and the practices attendant to it envisioned and enacted a more decent and democratic shared social life.

I take the title of this book from the album *Puentes Sonoros* (Sonic Bridges) released in 2021 by the Chicano band Quetzal. I love all

of Quetzal's recordings. I have been transformed repeatedly by hearing them play live, and my life has been enriched tremendously by participating with them in public panel discussions, participating in song writing workshops that they have conducted, working with them to write a short book on arts practice in East Los Angeles, and writing liner notes for an album some of them made with David Hidalgo of the band Los Lobos. All of my experiences with Quetzal and their community have deepened my understanding of the promises and perils of crossing physical, stylistic, and social borders.

The songs that appear on Quetzal's *Puentes Sonoros* build bridges between the band's location in Los Angeles and liberation struggles and music made by people they have worked with in Chiapas and Veracruz in Mexico and those to whom they feel connected elsewhere. One song honors the Fandango Fronterizo celebration held every year where singers and dancers accompany each other on both sides of the border fence that divides Tijuana from San Diego. The song "La Vuelta" (The Return) that concludes the album features a mesmerizing mother–son duet by Martha González and Sandino González Flores singing lyrics that honor three departed Indigenous and Black women freedom fighters: Zapatista Commandante Ramona from Mexico who died of kidney failure at the age of 47; Brazilian LGBTQ and human rights activist Marielle Franco who was assassinated at the age of 38 in 2018 by former police officers allied with that nation's right wing government; and Honduran environmental activist and Indigenous (Lenca) leader Berta Isabel Caceres assassinated at the age of 44 in 2016 in a killing orchestrated by leaders of that nation's resource extraction companies and

government supported by the US. Like the other songs on the album, "La Vuelta" constructs bridges between the living and the dead, genders and generations, and the global north and the global south. It links struggles for liberation, human rights, and environmental justice led by Indigenous and Black women from Mexico, Brazil, and Honduras to the concerns of listeners in the US and around the world. Honoring the memories of these women encourages listeners to take up their causes and build bridges to a better world.

The bridges created in the words and music on *Puentes Sonoros* make ongoing but never completed connections. As Alex Chávez writes in the liner notes of the album, *Puentes* Sonoros creates "an always resonant bridge—not arrival, but an *eternal* and *imagined* sonorous present full of intensity, full of memories of where you've been and desires of where you might go. Back and forth, and back again."[1] This bridge does not offer unobstructed paths to other places. It is a place for taking on the hard work of connecting with differentially situated places and people, learning from them and with them, and accompanying them by sharing journeys that require coping with obstacles, chasms, and divides. The purpose of the bridge is to prepare people to recognize divisions, live with contradictions, and use difference creatively and humanely. If we do not build bridges, we run the risk of being stranded on our own little islands.

Members of Quetzal appear briefly in this book in Chapter 1 and at greater length in Chapter 3, but their concept of sonic bridges is the glue that holds the entire volume together. Music has distinct places of origin, but it also moves across physical, social, and aesthetic borders. The music made in Los Angeles by the

Chicano Rock, Banda, and FandangObon musicians in this book contains figures, forms, sounds, and devices from diverse regions in Mexico, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. These take on new meanings when played in Los Angeles where they interact with, shape, and reflect music from other places and cultures. Chicano Rock, Banda, and FandangObon bridged the past and the present, the living and the dead, tradition and innovation, expressive culture and class struggle, commodity consumption and convivial co-creation, assimilation and separation. This book is not just about the existence of past bridges; it is a plea for readers to find bridges in the present, recognize what we can learn from them, and honor and augment their enduing and continuing presence.

Chapter 1 argues that Los Angeles Chicano Rock music demonstrates the importance of knowledge and art crafted by organic intellectuals located in what the dominant culture considers marginal places and spaces. I contend that this music advanced profound interpretations and arguments about tensions between assimilation and separation, and about the unfixed, fluid, and flexible nature of ethnic and racial identities. The chapter proposes that the fragmentations and alienations of postmodern society that deeply vex traditional intellectuals can be comprehended and countered by the ways of knowing developed and disseminated by Chicano Rock musicians acting as organic intellectuals.

Chapter 2 interprets the sudden and unexpected 1990s popularity and profitability of Banda music in Los Angeles as a register of dramatic demographic, economic, and political changes. Banda music and the subcultures that coalesced around it turned the Mexican identity and use of the Spanish language that the dominant culture despised into emblems of pride. Banda served as a

bridge where people from different regions in Mexico living in different parts of the Los Angeles area could make connections across genders and generations. The chapter makes a bridge between its descriptions and analyses of expressive culture and the early 1990s Southern California drywall workers strike to demonstrate how a seemingly apolitical form of expressive culture drew its determinate meanings from class consciousness and class struggle.

Chapter 3 examines the contemporary FandangObon that fuses the Mexican son jarocho fandango with Japanese bon odori, West African ballet, and Sufi circle dancing. Forged through recognition of families of resemblance among cultures with origins in different countries and continents, FandangObon responds to the minimization and marginalization of migrant cultures in Los Angeles by staging a spectacle and offering engagements that build active counter publics in fugitive spaces of belonging. The FandangObon amplifies the lives and cultures of people encouraged to feel small by the dominant culture. It creates fragile spaces of belonging for communities treated always as disposable, displaceable, and deportable. Bringing different cultures together in a common conversation built on families of resemblance while still honoring the autonomy and integrity of all participants, it minimizes direct one-to-one relations between each group and the putatively Anglo center while maximizing the potential of polylateral relations among similarly, although not identically, aggrieved and racialized groups. Unlike Chapters 1 and 2, Chapter 3 emerged from many conversations and collaborations with the musicians and writers featured in it. I co-wrote an introduction and helped edit Rubén Guevara's *Confessions of*

a Radical Chicano Doo-Wop Singer, offered comments and suggested editorial changes to Nobuko Miyamoto as she was writing *Not Yo' Butterfly*, and had many occasions to participate in discussions, song writing workshops, and musical events with Martha González and Quetzal Flores.

Who writes?

I never present myself anywhere in the world as a Chicanx Studies expert. Everywhere I go in the world, however, I try to testify to having been profoundly influenced, educated, and inspired by the intellectual, moral, spiritual, and aesthetic greatness of Mexican culture and Mexican people in the US. Hindered by my early life experiences with parochial and monolingual educational institutions and media outlets, I remained oblivious to the Mexican presence in the US for many years. From elementary through graduate school, I never had assigned to me a single article or book written by an author of Mexican descent. The profound political wisdom, aesthetic brilliance, and life and death struggles of Chicanx communities rarely made an impact on the books and articles that I read as a student. I heard popular songs by Ritchie Valens, Rosie Hamlin, Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs, and Chris Montez but did not notice they were made by people of Mexican origin. Until my thirties I lived in cities with minimal evident Mexican presence. My knowledge about music was limited to what I had picked up struggling to play clarinet, saxophone, and oboe in high school bands and orchestras. As a monolingual Anglophone speaker and reader, I needed to have a bilingual dictionary among my books to understand communications in Spanish. I had visited Los Angeles briefly several times,

but had never lived there. My embodied and social identities as a middle class cisgendered white heterosexual male with no diagnosed disabilities made me relatively empowered socially but grievously enfeebled intellectually. The research skills and opportunities to write, to speak, to be read, and to be heard that advantaged me professionally hampered my perspective politically. I have never been forced to face the consequences of the social injustices I describe in these chapters in the same ways that confront people of Mexican descent. These deficiencies guaranteed that there would likely be be shortcomings in my descriptions and analyses. Yet the aesthetic, political, moral, and intellectual achievements by musicians of Mexican origin using culture to refuse unlivable destinies struck me as so important that I needed to describe and air them widely so people could learn from them as I had, even though I might make mistakes.

Some of the things that made me prepared to write about Mexican music in Los Angeles in scholarly publications left me unprepared to do it well. My training as a historian and cultural critic equipped me with some useful tools that enabled me to see how popular culture could be an important register of social conditions and a significant source of resistance against injustice. In my book *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s,* I argued that popular music, movies, car customizing, clothing styles, slang, and sports served as crucibles for the insurgent consciousness that fueled a massive strike wave by US workers immediately after the Second World War.[2] My experiences as an activist in the civil rights and anti-war movements and especially my association with an insurgent rank and file caucus in the Teamsters Union in St. Louis taught me that social movement

mobilizations emerged from and relied on whole cultures of opposition that touched every part of people's lives. Things I learned as a scholar and activist positioned me to be open to recognizing the importance of Mexican music in Los Angeles and to write about it. But that same training that enabled the project also inhibited realization of its full potential.

The scholarly tools I possessed when I started writing about Mexican music in Los Angeles emphasized observation rather than participation. They privileged seeing things from far away rather than from close up. The audit cultures of academia reward displays of subject matter mastery and demonstrations of writing competence and complexity. This trains researchers like me to write *on* or *about* people in struggle, but not to write *with*, *by*, and *for* them. The chapters in this book that chronicle three moments of my learning also demonstrate the necessity for unlearning, for perceiving shortcomings and mistakes in order to respond honestly and honorably to urgent matters of social justice. Chapter 3 on FandangObon published in 2024 is closer to where I now want to be than Chapter 1 on Chicano Rock published in 1986 and Chapter 2 on Banda published in 2007. But it is very possible that in the future I will look back at it and see the kinds of shortcomings in Chapter 3 that I now discern in Chapters 1 and 2. But I don't regret writing the earlier chapters. They intervened in public life and built bridges that were greatly needed in times of crisis. Any such intervention runs the risk of errors that might later embarrass the author, but silence helps no one. Errors and shortcomings can help move the collective conversation along. Critiques by readers highlight questions unasked that need to be answered. We always know more

together than we know individually. The great Nishnaabeg artist, activist, and intellectual Leanne Betasamosake Simpson points to the always-unfinished nature of scholarship and the superiority of collective dialogue over isolated monologue toward the end of her book *As We Have Always Done*. She says, "I look forward to the coming years when I'll look back on this book and see the weaknesses of my arguments and how much my thinking has changed, and this will be a very good thing. I hope that this next generation will read this book and see how little I actually know about how to live Nishnaabewin (Indigenous grounded normativity) compared to them."[3] Today is not yesterday. Tomorrow is not today. Nothing from the past ever disappears completely or loses all relevance, but by itself nothing from the past suffices to address the problems of today and tomorrow except the will to keep thinking.

A lot has changed over the past four decades. The modest desegregation of university faculties and excellent new research by generations of scholars in Chicanx Studies, Cultural Studies, and Ethnomusicology now make it possible for students from diverse backgrounds to engage in sustained study of Chicanx popular music and its connections to social structures and identities. Cultural workers doing art-based community making are no longer written about exclusively by outsiders because academic presses publish books that the cultural workers write themselves. Students today will not have to follow the circuitous paths I walked down to learn how music builds bridges. It may be worthwhile, however, to remember that the small number of writers, teachers, and lecturers credentialed as intellectuals by educational and cultural institutions make up only an

infinitesimal proportion of people who think, know, and create. Finding bridges and crossing them can help bring together what segregation, subordination, and exploitation keep separate. Looking for value in undervalued people living in undervalued places can be an important means of transcending the limits of the increasingly corporate controlled classrooms and cultures that dominate this society. Attempting to learn about music made by people of Mexican origin in Los Angeles forced me to step outside comfort zones, to speak with whoever would listen and to listen to whoever who would talk. I reprise a little of that history below, not as an exact roadmap for others to follow, but as an affirmation of learning as a collective social process that needs to take place within and beyond schooling.

My journey from observation to participation entailed crossing many bridges. I found little to no information about Mexican music made in Los Angeles on classroom reading lists, in graduate school training, through research in established archives, or perusing bookstore and library volumes with titles promising knowledge about race, migration, labor history, and urban studies. But at the margins of the academy, and in the broader world beyond it, eyewitnesses and ear witnesses to Los Angeles Mexican music and culture abounded. I had the good fortune of encountering a host of teachers, most of whom had no official positions as instructors. They piqued my curiosity and opened my ears and eyes to a wide range of diasporic Mexican music. First among my college classmates, professional colleagues, and students, then later among musicians, poets, and political activists, generous and knowledgeable people gradually made me aware of the beauty, power, and complexity of the Mexican music

made in Los Angeles. Conversations with college friends from Los Angeles alerted me to the existence and importance of zoot suits, pachucos, and the Chicano Rock music played in concerts at El Monte Legion Stadium. They helped me see that the 1968 walkouts by students in Los Angeles high schools and the 1970 Chicano Moratorium anti-war mobilization had musical sound tracks. A decade later in the humanities division classes that I taught at the University of Houston at Clear Lake City I assigned the kinds of books never assigned to me as a student: fiction writing by Rudolfo Anaya, an ethnographic study of gang life by Joan Moore, and the forays into folklore by Américo Paredes. In Houston I encountered anthropologist Brenda Bright's research on low riders in Houston, Espanola in New Mexico, and Los Angeles which led me regularly to read *Low Rider* magazine and absorb its particular versions of Chicanx histories. A phone call to Johnny Otis who produced the recording by L'il Julian Herrera discussed in Chapter 1 of this book led to continued conversations and collaboration on a book by Otis that alerted me to the deep respect and affection for Chicanx musicians and audiences that Otis developed during the early years of Los Angeles rhythm and blues. Hearing songs by Lalo Guerrero led to an exchange of letters between us. Reading book chapters written by Rubén Guevara set the stage for an eventual face to face conversation at a conference in Los Angeles, and that encounter led me to invite Guevara to make presentations to college classes I was teaching and at community meetings I was hosting. Those events paved the way for our work together as I helped edit and co-authored an introduciton to Guevara's compelling memoir *Confessions of a Radical Chicano Doo Wop Singer*.[4] Many talks and travels across the

Sixth Street Bridge in East Los Angeles with Chicana feminist "bus poet" Marisela Norte positioned me to write the introduction to Norte's published poetry collection *Peeping Tom Tom Girl*.[5] A 1993 interview at the Troy Café in Los Angeles with Alicia Armendariz (Alice Bag) and Teresa Covarrubias educated me about Chicanx punk and the importance of the women who created and performed it.[6]

Participation in an interdisciplinary intercampus exhibition about Chicanx poster art gave me an opportunity to write the chapter "Not Just Another Social Movement: Poster Art and the Movimiento Chicano" in the 2001 book *Just Another Poster? Chicano Graphic Arts in California* edited by Chon Noriega.[7] A chance encounter with visual artist Jay Lynn Gomez after participation in a museum panel discussion in 2011 led to many conversations and shared presentations about Gomez's innovative installations of spray-painted images on cardboard of low-wage workers posted on hedges, trees, and bus stops in wealthy Los Angeles neighborhoods made beautiful by migrant labor. Barbara Tomlinson and I highlighted the importance of Gomez's installations in our 2019 book *Insubordinate Spaces: Improvisation and Accompaniment for Social Justice*.[8] Russell Rodriguez introduced me to mariachi as a social force and to the members of the band Quetzal, creating connections that led to a jointly authored 2012 article with Rodriguez on the insurgent knowledge of folklorist Américo Paredes.[9] Through my contacts with Rodriguez, Martha González, and Quetzal Flores, I became acquainted with the Building Healthy Communities in Boyle Heights project in East Los Angeles conducted by the Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA). We brought together the experiences, knowledge,

and practices for social change created by musicians, singers, dancers, altar makers, actors, quilters, and embroiders in the 2020 handbook (published in both English and Spanish versions) *Saludarte: Building Health Equity on the Bedrock of Traditional Arts and Culture*.[10]

A line in an essay by Toni Cade Bambara resonates for me as it identifies a "host of teachers who have crossed my path and always right on time…."[11] Because of teachers like those Bambara describes, I did not so much discover Los Angeles Mexican music and culture. It discovered and captured me. This book is an account and evaluation of the sonic bridges created through Chicano Rock, Banda, and FandangObon. I hope it offers readers a bridge to those three musics and the political and artistic work that they enabled. But I also hope it provokes readers to take and make bridges of their own in the future.

1
Cruising around the historical bloc: Postmodernism and popular music in East Los Angeles

During his first visit to Los Angeles, Octavio Paz searched in vain for visible evidence of Mexican influences on that city's life and culture. The revered Mexican writer and diplomat found streets with Spanish names and subdivisions filled with Spanish revival dwellings, but to his surprise and regret he perceived only a superficial Hispanic gloss on an essentially Anglo-American metropolis. Mexican culture seemed to have been reduced to little more than local color, even in a municipality that had belonged to Spain and Mexico long before it became part of the United States, a metropolis where one-third of the population traced its lineage to Mayan, Toltec, Aztec, Spanish, and Mexican

The core of Chapter 1 originally appeared in "Cruising Around the Historical Bloc: Postmodernism and Popular Music in East Los Angeles." in *Cultural Critique* n5 (1986) pp. 151–177 and is reprinted with permission.

ancestors, a city that hosted more residents of Mexican ancestry than all but two of Mexico's own cities. Paz acknowledged what he perceived condescendingly to be a "vague atmosphere" of Mexicanism in Los Angeles manifested in "delight in decorations, carelessness and pomp, negligence, passion and reserve." He contended, however, that this "ragged but beautiful" ghost of Mexican identity rarely interacted with "the North American world based on precision and efficiency." To his dismay, Paz perceived only an ephemeral Mexican identity floating above the city, "never quite existing, never quite vanishing."[12]

As both the oldest and newest migrants to Los Angeles, people of Mexican origin have faced unique problems about cultural identity and assimilation, but these issues are not confined to them. The anguish of invisibility that Paz discerned in Mexican Los Angeles is all too familiar to minority ethnic communities around the world. Cultural domination by metropolitan elites everywhere eviscerates and obliterates traditional cultures rooted in centuries of shared experience. For ethnic minorities, impediments to becoming assimilated into dominant cultures can bring exclusion from vital economic and political resources. Successful integration into the dominant culture, however, can be equally perilous. It can annihilate prized traditions and customs that are vital for individual and collective identity. Dominant cultural institutions, mass media, and political leaders depict dominant cultures as "natural" and "normal," never representing the world from the vantage points of those they dominate whom they deem different and deviant. Pervasive prejudice and intentional discrimination reinforce the marginality of ethnic minority communities. Mass media images never grant full legitimacy to perspectives

perceived to be on the margins of society. Surrounded by images that exclude them and included in images that demean them, ethnic minorities can come to feel as Paz described them: that they never quite exist and never quite vanish. Traditional forms of cultural expression within minority communities lose their power to interpret and order experience. Yet their erasure is never fully achieved. They are never as absent as Octavio Paz perceived them to be. They persist as important icons and engines of identity in works of expressive culture that acknowledge alienation yet find affirmation in the face of negative ascription.

The Mexican American community of Los Angeles that so disappointed Octavio Paz provides an instructive example of the capacity for minority ethnic groups to fashion forms of cultural expression that are appropriate for facing the lived complexities and contradictions of what scholars call the postmodern world. Paz's static and one-dimensional view of Mexican identity prevented him from seeing the rich culture of opposition embedded within the Los Angeles Chicano community. What seemed to him like an ephemeral cloud "hovering and floating" above the city, in actuality represented a complicated cultural strategy designed to preserve the resources of the past by adapting them to the needs of the present. In many areas of cultural production, but especially in popular music, organic intellectuals within the Los Angeles Chicano community pursued a strategy of self-presentation that brought their unique and distinctive cultural traditions into the mainstream of mass popular culture. Neither assimilationist nor separatist, they played on "families of resemblance" (similarities to the experiences of other groups) to fashion "a unity of disunity."[13] In that way they sought to make

alliances with other groups by cultivating the ways in which their particular experiences enabled them to speak with special authority about the ideas and alienations of others. They used the techniques and sensibilities of postmodern culture to build a "historical bloc" of oppositional groups united by similar ideas and intentions but not identical experiences.[14]

Chicano rock music: Sonic Bridges

The music created by musicians of Mexican origin in Los Angeles bears particular relevance to the concerns about ethnicity, identity, and culture raised by Paz. From the Don Tosti Band in the 1940s through Los Lobos in the 1980s, Chicano musicians in Los Angeles made commercially successful recordings by blending elements of the folk music of Mexico with the cultural fusions of the modern day *barrio*.[15] Musical forms and social attitudes emanating from the isolation, exploitation, and marginality but also the convivial co-creations of *barrio* life took on new meaning when embraced as "youth" music by consumers, many of whom had little knowledge of or concern about the ethnicity of the musicians.[16]

Caught between the realities of life in their community and domination by Anglo-capitalist commerce and culture, Chicano artists fashioned a music that was accessible from both inside and outside their community. They juxtaposed multiple realities, blending Mexican folk music with Afro-American rhythm and blues, playing English language songs in a Mexican style for Spanish speaking audiences, and answering requests for Mexican music and rock and roll with the same song, "La Bamba."[17] The musicians practiced particularly intricate forms of intertextuality by connecting their music to community subcultures and institutions oriented around distinct forms of dress, speech, car customizing,

visual art, theater, and politics. References to shared historical and cultural experiences permeated their songs, but these references extended beyond the immediate Chicano community to include cultural forms from outside it like rockabilly and soul music nurtured in white and Black working-class communities. Those forms of inter-referentiality complemented an equally adept facility for comparisons through families of resemblance. Chicano culture creators could incorporate rockabilly or rhythm and blues into their songs because they recognized similarities in form and content to their own music that bridged surface differences. Yet even while drawing on families of resemblance they never lost sight of the unique and singular historical and social realities shaping them and their community.

The emergence of Los Lobos as a significant commercial rock band in the 1980s provided an example of the persistence of the qualities that scholars identify as key elements of postmodern culture: bifocality, juxtaposition of multiple realities, intertextuality, inter-referentiality, and comparisons through families of resemblance. Los Lobos mixed Mexican *Norteño* accordions and guitarrons with Afro-American and Anglo rockabilly drums and electric guitars. They bridged Chicano and mass culture, playing to audiences in both camps. The five members of the group first picked up instruments in response to the popularity of the Beatles, but they did their initial work as professional musicians playing Mexican folk music for neighborhood gatherings. In response to critics who charge that the band's forays into rock music betray their roots in Mexican folk music, drummer Louis Pérez responds, "We always aspired to play to everybody, but there was no place to expose it. We haven't gone back on the basic philosophy of this band, which was to play cultural music.

It's a music that's as much Mexican culture as it is American, and that's what we are."[18]

Rock audiences first discovered Los Lobos when the band played as the opening act for a US tour by the British punk/new wave group The Clash. A band of white men from Europe playing new wave music strongly influenced by reggae and rhythm and blues, The Clash recognized families of resemblance that tied their music to Los Lobos. They gave the Chicano band augmented commercial exposure. Subsequently, an Anglo band from Los Angeles, The Blasters, arranged to have Los Lobos open shows for them. Conrad Lozano of Los Lobos acknowledged his group's debt to the Blasters in a 1984 interview, telling a reporter "Musically it gave us someone to look at and reinforced our commitment to our style. We met them and had a lot in common. We became friends and they liked our music so much that they had us open some gigs for them. That really allowed many more people to see and hear us."[19] Years later, when they had become a fully established commercially and aesthetically successful band, Los Lobos opened doors for others, choosing Quetzal to serve as their opening act and giving that band its first major exposures to mainstream audiences.

Anglo saxophone player Steve Berlin left The Blasters to join Los Lobos, a transition that seemed logical to him because of his own histories of crossing bridges and juxtaposing multiple musical forms. Born in Philadelphia and nurtured in that city's rhythm and blues music, Berlin introduced Los Lobos to some old rhythm and blues songs while they taught him to play their traditional polkas, boleros, *rancheras* and *corridos*. Describing the families of resemblance connecting him to the other members