

Land of a Thousand Dances



Land of a Thousand Dances

Chicano Rock n Roll from Southern California

David Reyes

and Tom Waldman

To our wives, Gloria Reyes and Rebecca Campbell,
and our children, David and Sarah (Reyes) and Zachary (Waldman).
This book would not have been completed without their support
and understanding.

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First Edition

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Introduction

In 1964 the Premiers, a group consisting of five Chicano teenagers from San Gabriel, California, joined Dick Clark's "Rock 'n' Roll Caravan" on a tour of the Midwest and Deep South. The invitation had been *extended* because of the recent release of their cover version of "Farmer John," a modest success on the charts. To nineteen- and twenty-year-olds whose concert experience was limited to playing local dance halls and backyard weddings, the tour was a series of imposing firsts: large arenas, media coverage, long bus rides, air travel. But nothing was as strange to them as Alabama, where the culture, weather, speech, and landscape seemed like another country compared to the barrios of Los Angeles County.

During their brief time in the South, the Premiers occupied the middle rung in the racial hierarchy, the not-black-but-not-white-either category. The guardians of segregation, mystified by the Premiers, could not reach a conclusion, Mexican-Americans being about as common in the Deep South in 1964 as Klansmen in Harlem. "They didn't know what we were," said Billy Cardenas, the group's producer and co-

manager. At a hotel in Birmingham, the Premiers were judged white, which permitted them to check in to better rooms for the evening. But the next day, at a gas station outside the city, they were directed to the "colored" restroom. Black one minute, white the next, the Premiers criss-crossed the racial divide with regularity. "We just had to play it by ear," said Cardenas.

In other parts of America as well, the locals were confused by Chicano rock 'n' roll groups who performed in their cities and towns. Touring the Midwest in 1965–66, Cannibal and the Headhunters were mistaken for Hawaiians; the same happened in the mid-1970s to a band called Poverty Train in, of all places, Hawaii. Another decade later and thousands of miles away, European journalists peppered a promising band called Los Lobos with questions about the music scene in Mexico. The band members protested that they were Chicanos from East Los Angeles, not Mexicans, but their interviewers didn't understand the difference.

Those unaware of the role Chicanos have played in rock 'n' roll (music primarily written and performed by Anglos) and R&B (music

primarily written and performed by blacks) include rock historians and journalists in the United States. The continued success of Los Lobos has partially lifted the veil of ignorance, but there is thirty years of rich history, from Ritchie Valens through Thee Midnites, Cannibal and the Headhunters, Tierra, El Chicano, and Los Illegals, that predates Los Lobos. Yet most critics, observers, and participants continue to insist that rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues were made by blacks and whites for blacks and whites. Only the late Frank Zappa, Bill Medley, and a few others who grew up with Chicano teenagers and heard Chicano bands in Southern California in the 1950s tell the whole story. "The first band that I ever saw perform live was a [Chicano] group called the Velvetones from San Diego," said Frank Zappa. "They were great because they all had matching suits, big sport coats and peg pants, and had a whole line of saxophones doing big steps."

The irony is that Chicano musicians and many Chicano fans have been all-encompassing in their tastes, from the Penguins to the Beatles, James Brown to Led Zeppelin. They have been far more aware of rock than rock has been aware of them. The Chicano rock 'n' roll and R&B audiences are indifferent to the race of a group, or the specific style of the music; they care only if a song is good. Acceptance of new and different sounds is not all that common in pop music. The peer pressure and sense of cultural superiority that keeps many listeners confined to their own musical "ghettos" is all but missing with Chicanos. On the whole they have been more than willing to appreciate and

support a wide range of pop music forms. Being on the margin of American pop culture creates its own kind of freedom. Chicanos listen to what they want, without having to satisfy their own or others' race-based expectations.

The point is beautifully illustrated by Chicano rock 'n' roll groups, especially since 1964. It was not unusual for East LA musicians in the mid-1960s to be influenced by James Brown and the Beatles, although the vast majority of Brown's fans were black and the Beatles' audience was almost entirely white. Even as the gap widened between African-American and Anglo listeners in the late sixties, a consequence of the rise of British art rock and classical rock bands on the one hand and the separatist agenda of black power/black nationalist movements on the other, Chicano listeners refused to play the game. An example is Cesar Rosas of Los Lobos, whose first band played hard rock, and whose second band played funk, and funk only.

Not surprisingly, Chicano bands had to be versatile to satisfy the demands of the Chicano audience. "They wanted it all," said Jimmy Seville, a keyboard player for several Chicano groups from the 1960s into the 1990s. "They didn't just hire an R&B band, they didn't just hire a rock band, they hired a radio. We learned to become a radio." One of the most successful of these "radios" was a legendary East LA band called The Emeralds, which could switch in an instant from James Brown's "I Got the Feeling" to a song by Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. "We would do anything with harmony," said Aaron Ballesteros, who played drums for the Emeralds, "but we were little soul demons too.

Anything that was good, we'd do it." To this day older Chicano rock fans are disappointed that the Emeralds never cut a record.

But versatility is not always a virtue in the music business, which for marketing purposes prefers easily defined categories. A funk/soul/blues/pop ballad band would tend to give the promotion department problems. This is certainly not the sole reason Chicano musicians have had few hit records through the years, but it has contributed. Los Lobos has managed to overcome this by being a rock band on one album, a more traditional Mexican band on another, and a funk/blues group on a third. However, there are few rock musicians of any race, color, or creed that are as capable as Los Lobos.

For Chicano groups, the question of "What are we?" has meant different things in different eras. Groups from the 1950s to the mid-1960s did not consider themselves "Chicano"—indeed, the term had not yet been adapted for widespread use—nor did they dwell on their Mexican heritage, at least as far as making music was concerned. They were rock 'n' roll bands that happened to come from the barrio. Only when they played weddings, where the older crowd insisted on Mexican music, did these groups add boleros and rancheras to their set. They were aware of those styles of music from having listened to their parents' records.

After 1967, Chicano rock 'n' roll added a recognizable ethnic component, as did Chicano politics, Chicano theater, and Chicano art. Bands that from 1964 to 1966 dressed in imitation of the early Beatles, or in 1967 like scruffy hippies,

started wearing sombreros or serapes. Indeed, the history of Chicano rock 'n' roll since the 1950s can be defined as a classic immigrant's tale: assimilation, followed by a return to old country roots, followed again by a synthesis of the two. Many Chicano musicians who formed groups between 1968 and 1970 were inspired by their parents' 78s of Mexican music, in addition to their own R&B 45s and rock LPs. The fans responded in kind. While much of the audience still clamored for oldies, R&B ballads, and rock, this was now augmented in many quarters by an interest in Mexican and Latin musical styles, which were evident in the sound of groups such as El Chicano, Tierra, and Redbone. This international mix led to an internal reassessment of Chicano-style rock and R&B. From the late 1960s to the 1990s, many Chicano band members have in some sense asked themselves: What does it mean to be a Mexican-American performer? Is the artistic soul of Mexican-Americans made in the United States, in Mexico, or does it reside somewhere in between? How Chicano rock musicians of the later era addressed these questions is one of the central themes that will be explored in the book.

Despite the addition of new and different influences after 1967, the basic ingredients of Chicano rock 'n' roll apparent in the 1950s are still around in the 1990s. For example, it is the case with most, if not all Chicano groups that honesty has always triumphed over pretentiousness. Chicano musicians rejected—indeed, recoiled from—the bloated and blatantly commercial aspects of the rock 'n' roll industry. They played what they wanted when they wanted. The "rock

star trip" was considered a joke. We didn't meet one Chicano musician, for example, who desperately wanted to be Elton John, Freddie Mercury, or, God forbid, Rod Stewart, performers who after a few years on top became self-indulgent and musically irrelevant. To Chicano bands, rock 'n' roll meant dancing, harmonies, fun, and good times. Even those Chicano performers who have become national stars—Ritchie Valens, Los Lobos, and for short periods, Tierra, and Cannibal and the Headhunters—always returned to live and work in the neighborhood.

That much overused word innocence applies here. The bands of the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s were performing and recording without much knowledge of contracts, percentages, or royalties. Years later, when they were older, wiser, and had more mouths to feed, many of the groups regretted not having been more aggressive on the business side. But in the beginning nothing mattered to them as much as the chance to perform at dances in the neighborhood. The enduring images from the first decade include Valens alone with his guitar, playing for kids in Pacoima, and the Premiers banging on their instruments in the backyard of the home of two of the band members' parents.

Ironically, the fact that a majority of Chicano bands have not courted, or been courted by, the upper echelon of the record business has allowed them greater musical freedom. They have not had to follow rules; indeed, sometimes they have made their own rules. One of the most famous songs ever recorded by a Chicano rock 'n' roll band, Cannibal and the Headhunt-

ers' "Land of 1000 Dances," has a famous vocal hook, which occurred only because the lead singer forgot the lyrics and improvised on the spot. The Premiers, the Blendells, the Romancers, even at times the brilliant Midneters hit sour notes or missed a beat now and then. But this is part of the charm of Chicano rock 'n' roll/R&B. Rock 'n' roll is at heart a who-gives-a-damn medium. When performed from sheer joy, anger, or frustration, the music is at its peak. This is true of Doo Wop and R&B groups of the 1950s and 1960s, surf bands of the early 1960s, the British Invasion groups of the mid-1960s, and punk rock in the late 1970s.

From the sixties onward, Chicano groups have used an original song the way directors might use the text of a play—something from which to build, not something to copy note for note. "To this day I have not heard the original version," said the singer and songwriter Max Uballez, speaking of the ballad "My Heart Cries," which his band the Romancers recorded in 1965. "Manuel Rodriguez [the bass player] suggested we do the song at dances. He showed us the basic chord changes and words." The Romancers' version, with four-part harmonies, is reminiscent of the British Invasion bands, while the original, by Etta James and Harvey Fuqua, has the typical R&B rhythms and harmonies of the early sixties. Another example, The Epics' cover of the Shirelles' hit "Mama Said," differs from the original in its use of a horn intro and super-quick beat. And Thee Midneters' version of Jerry Butler's "Giving Up on Love" has its own powerful horn opening that substitutes for the vocal introduction on the original. Chicano groups

then and now would manipulate entire songs, turning them inside out, in order to express all the sounds they heard on the radio.

The desire to do it “our way” is evident in the early Chicano R&B singles (1956–63), which are distinctive in large part because they are not obviously derived from the black groups who inspired them. Chicano singers did not try to “sound black” when singing ballads. In fact, the harmonies in boleros, a traditional form of Mexican music, were as essential to the sound of Chicano R&B as Robert and Johnny, Don and Dewey, or other contemporary R&B vocal duos.

The Carlos Brothers, Velvetones, and the Perez Brothers were three of the most popular Chicano groups in the late 1950s and early 1960s. “Queen of My Heart,” written and recorded by Rene and Ray in 1962, who at one time sang with the Velvetones, is a fine example of the Chicano ballad style. The song includes a guitar lead taken right from the R&B archives, casual, almost laid-back vocal harmonies, and vibes, an instrument typical of Latin jazz but rare in R&B. The title is as romantic as anything on the radio at that time, while the lyrics drive the point home:

Here is my Heart
 To do with as you Please
 Here is the Key
 Open and You'll See
 You'll find a love, a love all your own
 Here lies your treasure
 Here is Your throne

It is impossible to consider Chicano rock ‘n’ roll apart from the Chicano audience. Indeed, the audience provides important clues to the development of the Chicano sound and was responsible for the establishment of an East LA scene, especially between 1964 and 68. Inspired by the Beatles’ arrival in America, seemingly every high school kid and many junior high school kids in that part of the city wanted to form a band, if only for the camaraderie and the sheer joy of playing. The groups all dressed in suits, à la the Beatles, and they invented wonderful band names such as the Epics, the Ambertones, the Heartbreakers, Thee Righteous Rhythms, the Apollos. As much as the music, the names and the audience constituted the swagger of Chicano rock ‘n’ roll in the mid-sixties. Teenagers, dressed in Carnaby Street fashions (print blouses and miniskirts for the girls, bell-bottom pants and Beatle boots for the guys), flocked to dances at local dance halls such as Big Union, Little Union, and Paramount Ballroom.

Among the architects of the scene were Irma Rangel and her junior high school girlfriends, who went to rock ‘n’ roll dances every weekend in the mid-sixties to see Thee Midnitters, the Impalas, the Apollos, and other favorite groups. Like thousands of other young women in East LA, Rangel and friends were as important to the local rock ‘n’ roll world as were the (almost exclusively male) bands themselves. During the week the girls would get together after school to practice the latest steps, which had to be learned by Friday and Saturday night. Status was the reward; popularity was based on how well you danced, according to Rangel.

Knowing what to wear and how to look mattered just as much. Rangel remembers that she and her friends patterned themselves after the look of Cher (then happily married to Sonny) and Twiggy. With those two in mind, the girls wore dresses or wide bell bottoms, and created a “wide-eye” effect with makeup. The hair was cut short and featured a duck-tail in back. Clothes were traded back and forth, with new styles added to the mix every week. Just as the bands put a lot of time and effort into their appearance, so did the teenage girls who came to see them.

Two East LA record stores, the Record Rack and the Record Inn, also played a major part in sustaining the momentum. Tony Valdez, who worked at the Record Rack, and was an MC, and now works as a reporter for the Fox Television affiliate in Los Angeles, first noticed this after Rene and Ray released “Queen of My Heart” in June 1962. The song was predictably popular in East LA and representatives from Donna Records, the musical home of Rene and Ray, regularly visited the store to inquire about sales. Never before had the Record Rack been so valuable to the industry. Several months later Billy Cardenas, a seminal East LA producer who at that time was starting to recruit and record area bands, came by to put up posters advertising his dances. “All of a sudden kids were saying ‘Hey man, those are the ones I saw at El Monte, those are the ones I saw at the Little Union,’” said Valdez. “I guess it became more important for them to buy records, because we were selling a lot more.” The ritual of purchasing the latest 45 changed when the group lived down the street. “Here

were people you could go and see on a Friday night, here were people you could touch and talk to,” said Valdez, describing the attitude of young customers in the early- and mid-sixties. “Buying that record was some tangible piece of your relationship to them. It added a new dimension that we [the Record Rack] had never had before.”

For the bands themselves, the Record Rack served two essential purposes: A place, perhaps the only place, where their records were heavily promoted, including copies displayed up and down the front window; and a source for the obscure, hard-to-find R&B singles that they might want to record for themselves at some future date. This was the era of listening booths—the Record Rack had four—and

Part One

Corridos,
Boleros,
and R&B:
Early Rockin'
Days in East LA



Dancin' in the Streets

*Cannibal and the Headhunters,
the Premiers, and lil' Ray*

Chico Sesma and Lalo Guerrero were too old for rock 'n' roll. Guerrero was born in 1917, Sesma in 1924. By the time rock 'n' roll broke out in 1954–55, both of them had spent some twenty years in the music business. Sesma, a trombonist from East LA, played with numerous big bands during the 1940s. A guitarist born in Tucson, Guerrero was a prolific songwriter who performed with a quartet or an orchestra. Guerrero—who in 1960 opened a popular nightclub in East LA called Lalo's—had a considerable following among Mexican-Americans in Southern California during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Sesma became best known when he cut back on playing music to work as a promoter and disc jockey.

Despite the fact that these two men began performing long before anyone had heard of Elvis Presley or Chuck Berry, their stories are important for this book. They represent both the non-Mexican and Mexican musical environment that predated rock 'n' roll in the barrio, especially the interest in big band, jazz, and pop vocalists (Chicano love for black music did not start with rhythm and blues). In addition, the ebb and flow of their careers and their feel-

ings about American and Mexican music offer valuable lessons that can be applied to Chicano rock 'n' roll bands from the 1950s to the present. Finally, Sesma and Guerrero were major influences on the rock 'n' roll performers who came from the Chicano community of Southern California. They are men of intelligence, well-versed in music of all kinds, who served as examples and mentors to those musicians who came after. The best Chicano groups, including Thee Midneters and Los Lobos, have cited the influence of Sesma and Guerrero in helping them develop as Mexican-American artists. (Los Lobos made an album of children's music with Guerrero in 1994 that was nominated for a Grammy.) Indeed, Guerrero's name, if not music, is now widely known; in 1997 he was awarded a National Medal of the Arts by President Clinton at a White House ceremony.

When Chico Sesma attended Roosevelt High School, East Los Angeles was a multiculturalist's dream. His classmates included Japanese, Jews, Latinos, Russians, went back to his previous career as a "Mexican" singer. There is, however, a coda to the story. A publishing company, Com-

modore Music, took a gamble in putting out sheet music of the song; the accompanying photo was of a brown-skinned singer with the unlikely name of Don Edwards.

Guerrero continued to play Mexican-based music for Chicano audiences through the mid-1950s. He also switched labels, moving from Imperial to RCA, another American record company eager to capture the Latin market. At this point Guerrero was in his late thirties, father of two young sons, and seemingly destined to have a comfortable career as a Chicano singer liked, even loved by his Chicano fans. It paid the bills, with money to spare. But the Don Edwards' disappointment notwithstanding, Guerrero still believed that under the right circumstances he could be a success with Anglo audiences. After all, he loved "their" music, and spoke "their" language. How could he get their attention?

In 1955, he found a way. This time Guerrero neither changed his name nor wrote about subjects that were remote from his own experience. Instead, he relied on his sense of humor. Nineteen fifty-five was the year that America became obsessed with Davy Crockett; coonskin caps were wildly popular and two versions of "The Ballad of Davy Crockett," one by Bill Hayes, which topped the national charts for five weeks, the other by Fess Parker, who starred in the movie version of Davy Crockett's life, were in record stores and on the radio. This was the year that Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Bo Diddley cut their first records, but American teenagers had not made the transition en masse from pop to rock 'n' roll. Instead they bought "Davy Crockett."

Although we don't know how many Chicano teens took home the record, it's safe to assume that those who did were not as enamored of the Davy Crockett legend as were Anglos. Davy Crockett became an American hero because he and everyone on the inside died in 1835 defending the Alamo, a fort in San Antonio, from Mexican troops led by Santa Anna. This set in motion the chain of events by which the United States wrested control of the Texas Republic from Mexico, for obvious reasons an ambiguous historical event to many Chicanos, including Lalo Guerrero, who decided to have fun with the Davy Crockett craze. He wrote a parody of "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" called "The Ballad of Pancho Lopez." Same familiar guitar opening as the hit, but much different lyrics. And though the title character had a Spanish name, the entire song was sung in English.

Chicano Power

Now Anglo record-buyers were receptive. According to Guerrero, "Pancho Lopez" eventually sold more than five hundred thousand copies throughout America. "I was pretty popular on the tube for six months," said Guerrero, who performed the song on the Tonight Show, then hosted by Steve Allen, and the Art Linkletter Show. Whether Anglos bought the record because they thought it was funny or because it sounded like "Davy Crockett" is unclear. Ironically, Guerrero could have been under fire for releasing "Pancho Lopez" twenty years later, not because of legal action by record companies, but because of resistance from Chicano groups who didn't find it funny. This spoof on Ameri-

cana also contains some unflattering references to Mexican-Americans, though these references are part of the joke. Among the stanzas: "Pancho, Pancho Lopez, you lazy son of a gun," and "Pancho, Pancho Lopez, he lie in the sun and snore." With the heightened sensitivity of all groups since the late 1960s to lyrics/remarks/articles/books deemed ethnically offensive, content often takes precedent over context. That Guerrero was satirizing an American icon, one with less than heroic status to Mexican-Americans, might well have been lost in the inevitable criticism of his lyrics. Ethnic heritage would not necessarily have been an ironclad defense; Jewish groups have in the past lambasted Philip Roth and Woody Allen for their allegedly insulting stereotypes of Jewish characters, for example.

Following the success of "Pancho Lopez," Guerrero released other parodies, such as "Tacos for Two" and "I Left My Car in San Francisco." In 1960 he opened his own club in East Los Angeles, Lalo's Place, which he sold twelve years later. When Guerrero gave up the club he was fifty-five; too young to retire, but too old to resurrect his glory days. Or so he assumed. What he did not realize was that the growing Chicano movement on college campuses, which led to the introduction of Chicano Studies programs, had sparked great interest in his life and work. He was regarded, correctly, as a trailblazer, a Chicano musician who had persevered in the decades when Chicanos were all but invisible in American culture and society. Chicano student organizations at UCLA, the University of Texas, Harvard, and Yale invited him to speak and per-

form. Ethnomusicology departments obtained with considerable effort a number of Guerrero's records. The Guerrero revival, which began in earnest in 1975, continues into the 1990s. In recent years, Guerrero has performed several concerts with his son, Mark, a talented musician and songwriter in his own right.

On his own terms, he also wooed Anglo audiences. Every week from the early 1970s to the early 1990s Guerrero sang at a Mexican restaurant in swank Palm Springs. The crowds did not come to hear Don Edwards. Guerrero sang traditional Mexican music, parodies, and his original compositions—bona fide Chicano music—from the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. "I can work both cultures [Anglo and Latino] very well," he said. Now eighty years old, he still performs several concerts every year.

Although he played a different kind of music, Guerrero's career in important ways resembles those of Chicano rock 'n' roll and R&B performers who came later. Like Guerrero, many of these musicians tried, with varying measures of success, to balance their American pop roots with Mexican cultural traditions. And, as was clearly the case with Guerrero, American record companies were reluctant to sign Chicano groups, and unsure how to market them. Was their music Mexican, American, or Mexican-American? Perhaps the labels would not have been as confused if their promotion people and producers had asked the musicians for guidance. "I'm not from Mexico," said Guerrero. "I sing about our people over here. I sing about their lives, their problems, their trials, their tribulations, their customs."

The issues of identity and heritage that many Chicano rock musicians faced, especially after 1967, were also faced much earlier by Lalo Guerrero and Chico Sesma. They, too, grappled with the question of how to balance a Mexican musical tradition—inherited from mom and dad—with the sounds of American pop. The answer was to try it all.

At the same time, Sesma's love for jazz is an early example of the strong feelings many Chicano musicians and the Chicano audience have always had for so-called black music. When R&B took hold in the 1950s, the pattern was established beyond any doubt.

Chicano Power

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When Chico Sesma attended Roosevelt High School, East Los Angeles was a multiculturalist's dream. His classmates included Japanese, Jews, Latinos, Russians, WASPs, and blacks. This was at least twenty years before Mexican-Americans became the dominant population of East LA. Roosevelt students in the 1940s found common cause in jazz and big band sounds, the American popular music of the day. Sesma and his friends listened to Lionel Hampton, Tommy Dorsey, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, the Mills Brothers, the Ink Spots, and Fats Waller. Together they went to hear these musicians perform at the Orpheum Theater on Broadway, in downtown Los Angeles, only a couple of miles from the neighborhoods around Roosevelt High School.

Sesma's high school years were one long concert. He was a member of the dance orchestra (which played stock arrangements of current big band numbers at all the school dances), the concert band, and the band featured at each Roosevelt High football game. Sesma's parents encouraged his musical interests and provided private lessons for him, although they did not share his passion for the American hit parade. "Their preferences were considerably different from what we youngsters enjoyed," said Sesma. "They liked mariachis, boleros, things like that. I didn't care for it at all." After high school he played trombone with the Johnny Richards Orchestra and the Russ Morgan Orchestra in ballrooms, hotels, and on motion picture sound tracks. He also toured the country, including stops in New York, Chicago, and Virginia. In his early twenties Sesma was already earning between \$350 and \$375 per week, a large sum in

the mid-1940s. Sesma recalls that he was one of the few Mexican-Americans in Los Angeles performing big band music, although in other parts of the country Latin performers were quite popular. On the East Coast, the rumba, Afro-Cuban stylists, and the conga were the well-known products of a Latin wave that had transformed jazz in the 1930s and 1940s.

year a childhood friend got a job as salesman at a local radio station. The station, KOWL, featured a black disc jockey named Joe Adams. "They wanted a counterpart to Joe who could relate to

Lalo, Chico, and the Pre-Rock Era

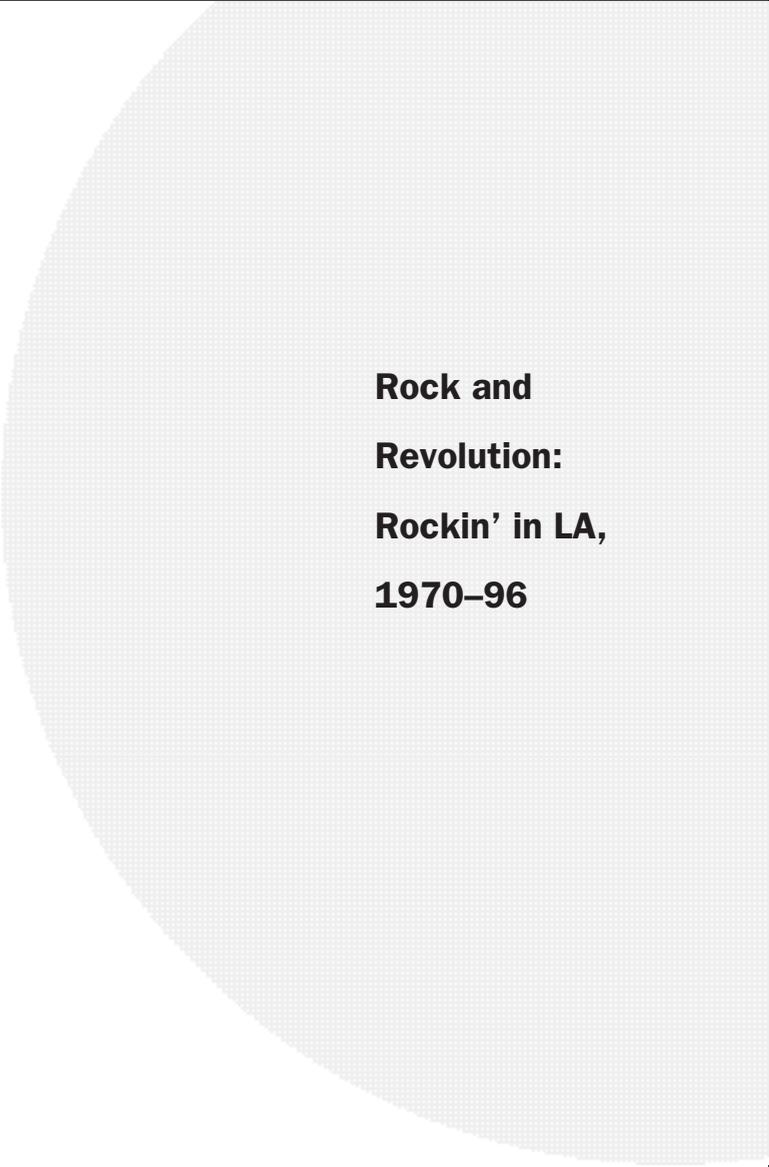
Chico Sesma and Lalo Guerrero were too old for rock 'n' roll. Guerrero was born in 1917, Sesma in 1924. By the time rock 'n' roll broke out in 1954–55, both of them had spent some twenty years in the music business. Sesma, a trombonist from East LA, played with numerous big bands during the 1940s. A guitarist born in Tucson, Guerrero was a prolific songwriter who performed with a quartet or an orchestra. Guerrero—who in 1960 opened a popular nightclub in East LA called Lalo's—had a considerable following among Mexican-Americans in Southern California during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Sesma became best known when he cut back on playing music to work as a promoter and disc jockey.

Despite the fact that these two men began performing long before anyone had heard of Elvis Presley or Chuck Berry, their stories are important for this book. They represent both the non-Mexican and Mexican musical environment that predated rock 'n' roll in the barrio, especially the interest in big band, jazz, and pop vocalists (Chicano love for black music did not start with rhythm and blues). In addition, the ebb and flow of their careers and their feel-

ings about American and Mexican music offer valuable lessons that can be applied to Chicano rock 'n' roll bands from the 1950s to the present. Finally, Sesma and Guerrero were major influences on the rock 'n' roll performers who came from the Chicano community of Southern California. They are men of intelligence, well-versed in music of all kinds, who served as examples and mentors to those musicians who came after. The best Chicano groups, including Thee Midneters and Los Lobos, have cited the influence of Sesma and Guerrero in helping them develop as Mexican-American artists. (Los Lobos made an album of children's music with Guerrero in 1994 that was nominated for a Grammy.) Indeed, Guerrero's name, if not music, is now widely known; in 1997 he was awarded a National Medal of the Arts by President Clinton at a White House ceremony.

By 1949, Sesma's musical career had slowed. He found himself with more time between assignments, which made him seriously consider another line of work. That same

the Mexican-American community with a bilingual, Latin music format," said Sesma. "My friend at the station remembered me from my youth. He spent about two weeks bringing home commercials from the studio and various formats for me to study. And then came my audition day. I did a fifteen-minute bit at the studio, and I was hired that day to do a half-hour broadcast." With his deep, rich, and warm voice, it's hard to believe that Sesma ever had a career other than radio, unless it was performing Shakespeare on Broadway. Hired in 1949, he continued as host of the show for twenty years.



**Rock and
Revolution:
Rockin' in LA,
1970–96**

Part Two

Selected Discography

Blendells LPs

Baby Don't Go (Sonny and Cher and Friends).
Reprise 6177. 1964.

Blendells 45s

"La La La La La." Reprise 0291. 1964.
"Dance With Me." Reprise 6177. 1965.

The Brat LPs

Los Angelinos. Zanya. 1983.

The Brat EPs

Attitudes. Fatima 77. 1980.

Cannibal and the Headhunters LPs

Land of 1000 Dances. Rampart 3302. 1965.
Land of 1000 Dances. Date 3001. 1967.

Cannibal and the Headhunters CDs

Land of 1000 Dances. Collectables. 1996.

Cannibal and the Headhunters 45s

"Land of 1000 Dances." Rampart 602. 1965.
"Land of 1000 Dances." (Radio edit). Rampart
602. 1965.

"Nau Ninny Nau." Rampart 644. 1965.

"Follow the Music." Rampart 646. 1965.

"Please Baby Please." Rampart 654. 1966.

"La Bamba." Date 1516. 1966.

"Means So Much." Aires 1002. 1967.

"Means So Much." Capitol 2393. 1967.

Carlos Brothers 45s

"Tonight." Del-Fi 4112. 1958.

"It's Time To Go." Del-Fi 4118. 1959.

"La Bamba." Del-Fi 4145. 1960.

Eastside Connection LPs

Brand Spanking New. Rampart 3306. 1979.

El Chicano LPs

Viva Tirado. Kapp 3632. 1970.

Revolucion. Kapp 3640. 1971.

Celebration. Kapp 3663. 1972.

El Chicano. MCA 312. 1973.

Cinco. MCA 401. 1974.

The Best of Everything. MCA 437. 1975.

Pyramid (Of Love and Friends). MCA 452. 1976.

This Is... . Shady Brook 005. 1977.

Viva! El Chicano. MCA 25197. 1989.

El Chicano CDs

Viva! El Chicano. MCA 25197. 1989.

El Chicano 45s

"Viva Tirado." Gordo 703. 1970.

"Viva Tirado." Kapp 2085. 1970.

"Viva La Raza." Kapp 2129. 1970.

"Satisfy Me Woman." Kapp 2182. 1972.

"Tell Her She's Lovely." MCA 40104. 1973.

"Brown Eyed Girl." MCA 40136. 1973.
 "Gringo in Mexico." MCA 40199. 1974.
 "Barretta's Theme." MCA 40422. 1975.
 "Dancin' Mama." Shady Brook 032. 1976.
 "Groovin'." RFR 1001. 1983.
 "Do You Want Me." RFR 1002. 1983.
 "Do You Want Me." Columbia 04055. 1983.
 "I'm in Love With." Columbia 04551. 1984.
 "Let Me Dance With You." 12" Single.
 Columbia 04997. 1984.

Lalo Guerrero LPs

Torero. Songs include "Elvis Perez."
 Discos Columbia. Xlp 45255. 1957.
 La Mini Falda de Reynalda. Discos Torre
 N-19066. 1967.
 La Celosa y El Celoso (plus several 45s).
 Cap Latino 19019. 1970
 Oigo Una Banda. EMI Capitol 383. 1976.
 Parodies of Lalo Guerrero. Ambiente Records.
 1981.
 Music for Little People (Recorded with Los
 Lobos). Warner Brothers. 1995.

Lalo Guerrero 45s and 78s

(Records listed by label. Some release dates
 are best estimates.)
 Vocalian Records. Las Carlistas/Lalo Guerrero.
 Two 78 rpms. 1938.
 Imperial Records. Trio Imperial/Lalo Guerrero.
 Two hundred 78 rpms, including "Los
 Chucos Suaves," "Vamos a Bailar," "Marijuana
 Boogie," and "Chicas Patas Boogie." 1946–
 53.
 RCA Victor Records. Four 78 rpms. 1954.
 Real Records. Several 45s, including "Mickey's
 Mambo" (featuring Chico Sesma's band)
 and "Pancho Lopez." #1301. 1955.
 L&M Records. Several 45s, including "Pancho

Claus." #1000. 1956.

Colonial Records. More than one hundred 45s,
 from 1958 to 1972, including "Los Angeles"
 (featuring Mariachis Los Reyes). #287. 1961.

Mark Guerrero LPs

Tango. A&M 3612. 1973.
 On the Boulevard. (EP) Eastside Landmark 002.
 1989.
 Radio Aztlan. Radio Aztlan Records. 1993.
 Jukebox Man. Radio Aztlan Records. 1994.
 Face and Heart. Radio Aztlan Records. 1997.

Mark Guerrero 45s

"Get Your Baby." (Mark and the Escorts) GNP
 Crescendo 350. 1965.
 "Dance With Me." (Mark and the Escorts) GNP
 Crescendo 358. 1965.
 "Three's a Crowd." (Nineteen Eighty Four) Kapp
 2003. 1969.
 "Lila, Love Me Tonight." Ode 66014. 1971.
 "Rock and Roll Queen." Capitol 3373. 1972.
 "I'm Brown." Capitol 3486. 1972.
 "Holy Moses." (Tango). A&M 1622. 1974.

Kid Frost CDs

Hispanic Causing Panic. Virgin 91377. 1990.
 Eastside Story. Virgin 86275. 1992.
 Smile Now Die Later. Ruthless 1504. 1996.

Lighter Shade of Brown CDs

Brown & Proud. Pump 15154. 1990.
 Hip Hop Locos. Pump 19114. 1992.
 Lil' Ray 45s
 "There is Something On Your Mind."
 Dore. 1961.
 "Karen." Faro 617. 1964.
 "I (Who Have Nothing)." Donna 1404. 1965.
 "I (Who Have Nothing)." Atco 6355. 1965.
 "It's Good Enough For Me." Mustang (5). 1965.
 "Leave Her Alone." Columbia 44287. 1971.

Los Illegals LPs and Videos

Internal Exile. A&M 4925. 1983.

Bed of Roses. Self-Produced Video. 1985.

Los Illegals 45s

"El Lay." A&M 2401. 1982.

Los Lobos CDs and Cassettes

... And a Time to Dance. Seven-song LP and cassette. Slash 23963. 1983.

How Will the Wolf Survive? Slash 25177. 1984

By the Light of the Moon. Slash 25523. 1987.

La Bamba (Soundtrack). Warner Brothers. 1987.

La Pistola Y El Corazón. Slash 25790. 1989.

Neighborhood. Slash 26131. 1990.

Kiko. Warner Brothers 26786. 1992.

Just Another Band From East LA. Warner Brothers 45367. 1993.

Papa's Dream (With Lalo Guerrero). Warner Brothers 42562. 1995.

Colossal Head. Warner Brothers 46172. 1996.

Thee Midniters LPs and Cassettes

Thee Midniters. Chattahoochee 1001. 1965.

Love Special Delivery. Whittier 5000. 1966.

Thee Midniters Unlimited. Whittier 5001. 1967.

Giants. Whittier 5002. 1968.

Best of. Cassette only. Rhino 40053. 1983.

Thee Midniters 45s

"Land of a Thousand Dances." Chattahoochee 666-1. 1965.

"Whittier Boulevard." Chattahoochee 684. 1965.

"Sad Girl." Chattahoochee 690. 1965.

"That's All." Chattahoochee 694. 1965.

"Brother, Where Are You." Chattahoochee 695. 1965.

"Land of a Thousand Dances/Ball of Twine." CH 666. 1966.

"Love Special Delivery." Whittier 500. 1966.

"It'll Never Be Over For Me." Whittier 501. 1966.

"The Big Ranch." Whittier 503. 1966.

"The Walking Song." Whittier 504. 1967.

"Everybody Needs Somebody." Whittier 504XXX. 1967.

"Looking Out A Window." Whittier 507. 1967.

"Chile Con Soul." Whittier 508. 1967.

"Breakfast On The Grass." Whittier 509. 1967.

"You're Gonna Make Me Cry." Whittier 511. 1968.

"The Ballad of Cesar Chavez." Whittier 512. 1968.

"Chicano Power" (Limited Edition on La Raza "Come on Let's Go." Del-Fi 4106. 1958.

"La Bamba/Donna." Del-Fi 4110. 1958.

"In a Turkish Town." Del-Fi 4114. 1959.

"We Belong Together." Del-Fi 4117. 1959.

"Stay Beside Me." Del-Fi 4128. 1959.

"Cry Cry Cry." Del-Fi 4133. 1960.

Anthology CD

The East Side Sound. Dionysus 08. 1996.

Includes songs by the Romancers, Cannibal and the Headhunters, the Mixtures, and others.