The Rock Music Scene on the US/ Mexico Border: Cultural Translation and Adaptation

La escena de la música rock en la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México: traducción y adaptación cultural

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses how rock music integrated into the local culture of a region where the dominant music genres were Tejano and other Mexican-influenced forms. Using a series of in-depth, qualitative interviews with long-practicing musicians, we discuss how rock was shaped and melded into local customs and practices. Musicians discussed being flexible in their live performances, playing British invasion songs right after a

corrido, being pushed to the margins, and performing at ranches outside the city limits when clubs would not feature them. Nevertheless, the local rock music scene developed in South Texas and became a unique cultural hybrid. We use this example to discuss what cultural hybridity looks like in the context of music performance, the role of new media in advancing it, and what it means for border identity.

Keywords: Rock music, music scene, U.S./Mexico border, Hispanic/Latino

RESUMEN

Este estudio aborda cómo la música rock se integró en la cultura local de una región donde los géneros musicales dominantes eran el tejano y otras formas de influencia mexicana. Usando una serie de entrevistas cualitativas y profundas con músicos de larga práctica, discutimos cómo se formó el rock y cómo se mezcló con las costumbres y prácticas locales. Los músicos hablaron sobre ser flexibles en sus presentaciones en vivo, tocar canciones de la invasión británica justo después de un corrido, ser marginados y actuar en ranchos fuera de los límites de la ciudad cuando los clubes no los presentaban. Sin embargo, la escena de la música rock local se desarrolló en el sur de Texas y se convirtió en un híbrido cultural único. Usamos este ejemplo para discutir cómo se ve la hibridez cultural en el contexto de la interpretación musical, el papel de los nuevos medios en su avance y lo que significa para la identidad fronteriza.

Palabras-clave: *Videojuegos, producción, Cuba, industria de videojuegos, mercado de videojuegos*

South Texas culture has a rich tradition of music genres, such as Tejano, cumbia, *norteño*, *corridos*, *música ranchera* (mariachi music), and *baladas*, as well as Spanish and Latin American pop music that is prevalent in Mexico (Díaz-Santana Garza, 2021). Rock music in the region has been less popular, going through cycles of stigmatization and being forced underground, but has recently seen a resurgence as the region has diversified and the internet has challenged traditional media (Sanchez, 2022). The South Texas border region is predominantly Hispanic/Latino, serving as a liminal space between U.S. American and Mexican culture, where English and Spanish are frequently used interchangeably (Lozano, 2017). While Spanish-language music (except for reggaeton) has failed to reach mainstream status across the United States, in South Texas, *it was the mainstream music scene*—with genres like rock at the margins.

This paper specifically focuses on a marginal music scene in a liminal, transnational setting since distinctive and geographically bounded clusters of musicians help define the local culture of cities and regions. To study South Texas, we focus on the border city of Laredo. As Heine (2012) writes, common genre music scenes are a means by which local culture is expressed and defined and are very much a "powerful form of communication" in an era of unbounded global commerce and destabilized identities (p. 200). While alternative music

scenes have been studied as they relate to dominant music scenes, less scholarly attention has been paid when scenes differ in language and could even be seen as "outsider" genres, especially in non-white settings. This study addresses this gap, focusing on the intermixing, clash, translation, and adaptation of the rock music scene in South Texas, a region where the dominant music scene comprises northern Mexican–influenced and Spanish-language genres.

Using a series of in-depth interviews with primarily Hispanic/Latino musicians who have participated in the South Texas rock music scene since the 1980s, we investigate how the scene has developed in relation to the dominant culture in the area. The ultimate objective is to explore U.S./Mexico border culture in relation to living music and how a rock music scene developed in a small but rapidly expanding transcultural community while also learning how local musicians have utilized technology and digital media to propagate a budding music scene in an understudied region.

We begin by reviewing existing studies into music scenes and the role of media and digital technology in music scenes in general. Next, we describe our methodology and give a brief background of the musicians who participated in this study and the methods used to analyze their narratives. Finally, we describe how the local rock music scene started in the late 1960s and early 1970s, its decline in the 1980s, its resurgence in the 1990s, and how it has interacted with and adapted to local cultural customs. We also discuss the role of digital technology and social media in its propagation and growth as described by musicians currently active in Laredo's rock music community. We finish with a discussion of the resulting identity formations in the border region. Specifically, we engage with the identity positions articulated by the musicians in the findings, teasing out their relation to the broader border culture and how they often used rock music to distinguish themselves from it.

FLUID MUSIC SCENES

A music scene is a community of musicians, fans, and promoters interacting within a geographically bounded area. Bennett and Peterson (2004) describe music scenes as "those largely inconspicuous sites where clusters of musicians, producers, and fans explore their common musical tastes and distinctive lifestyle choices." They are generally thought of as based in a certain location (i.e., a municipality) but can also branch out as musicians and promoters network with others and venues where they can perform. This is what Bennett and Peterson (2004) refer to as translocal scenes, which will often be specific to a genre of music. The Tejano music scene, which encompasses South Texas, is a clear example of this (Tejeda, 2014). The Tejano music scene refers to all the bands that play this genre, the record labels that distribute their music, the radio stations that play their songs, and the venues that hire them to perform. These are not isolated to any specific city but encompass all of South Texas and even reach across the state to cities like Dallas and Houston. Music scenes can also be virtual, as musicians, producers, and record labels use the internet to promote and distribute their music (Brae, 2018).

In Hispanic/Latino communities in the United States, rock music was often used to approach mainstream culture while also resisting the more conservative elements in traditional upbringings (Avant-Mier, 2010). On the other hand, it was also used in Latin America to resist U.S. imperialism and hegemonic national regimes. The particularness of Laredo and the U.S./Mexico border region deserves some attention here too. In Laredo, over 95% of residents identify as Hispanic/Latino, and over 85% speak a language other than English (U.S Census Bureau, 2021). The culture of the borderlands, in general has been described as hydridic, melding Mexican and U.S. culture into a third space (Anzaldúa, 1987). Ragland (2009) orients her study of *musica norteña* as immigrants creating *a nation between nations*. In other words, the borderlands are often conceptualized as a third space between cultures.

For some, the characterization of the borderlands as a hybrid space does not tell the full picture (Villa, 2003). People on both sides can also *use the border*, whether to cross for less expensive goods, hire less expensive labor, or assert dominant identities. In this sense, hybrid culture takes on a deeper meaning since

there are multiple positions that can be adopted and discarded in the borderlands as needed. Music scene(s) can reflect hybrid cultures, as in a student listening to U.S. pop music on their own and *norteño* with their parents, and also reflect tensions within the system of articulation, such as mockery of music choices or designating social status.

William Straw (1991) describes the significance of local music scenes as "systems of articulation" of culture, referring to Edward Said's (1990) observation that mass media articulates global culture. Straw asserts that "this same system of articulation is produced by migrations of populations and the formation of cultural diaspora which have transformed the global circulation of cultural forms," resulting in "distinctive logics of change and forms of valorization characteristic of different musical practices, as these are disseminated through their respective cultural communities and institutional sites" (p. 369). One of the examples Straw uses to illustrate this is the rise of alternative rock. The local underground alternative rock scenes of the 1990s gave audiences an alternative to generic popular music. The emergence of these bands from cities well outside the music entertainment hubs of Los Angeles, Nashville, and New York began to underscore the importance of local music scenes in American culture.

Heine (2012) argues that "in a world that feels increasingly impersonal, anonymous, and intangible, the music scene is an enduring palpable expression of the character of a place and its people" (p. 201). Heine further argues that "vibrant" music scenes often have other types of scenes, "such as a restaurant scene" or a nightclub scene, which feed the music scene and vice versa. As such, she lists a set of conditions that are necessary for a "vibrant music scene": "a connected community of musicians and promoters, a record label, a recording studio, a prominent festival, a great local radio station, a local music blog, a forward-thinking municipal government, and access to capital for emerging music businesses" (p. 203). While all of these, minus the blogs perhaps, are in place for other genres in South Texas, particularly Tejano and Mexican music genres, the rock music scene has subsisted with only the community of rock musicians and promoters and an audience of people who enjoy the music.

LOCAL MUSIC AND NEW MEDIA

The advancement of recording software resulted in "the rise of more affordable digital recording rigs and easier programming protocols," creating "a democratization of technology, making available a process that was once accessible only through the facilities and skills provided by a recording studio." (Leyshon, 2009, p. 1309) Thus, technology has made professional-quality recording and music production possible for the average musician. What was once attainable only at big professional recording studios is now accessible to anyone with a computer and the software.

Digital technology provides new means for local artists to create music and distribute and promote it themselves. Since the introduction of the internet, "music can now be disseminated online, and people can connect easily across localities, regions, countries, and continents" (Kruse, 2010, p. 625). The internet shapes music distribution via easy access to streaming services such as Spotify and iTunes and inexpensive professional digital distribution services such as DistroKid and CD Baby (Brae, 2018). Additionally, the internet has proven "useful for creating and maintaining contacts in music scenes that are also face-to-face connections" (Kruse, 2010, p. 636). The introduction of social media has only increased interaction and reach for musicians, promoters, and fans alike.

While many feared that the internet and online music distribution would cause some local music scenes to dwindle and fade away, digital technology has turned out to be the driving force that empowers them. Kruse (2010) argues that although music production and distribution are no longer centralized and have become global, local scenes still maintain their distinctiveness based on location, history, and culture. Because music is often "identified with specific geographical and physical spaces," the way it is understood "in relation to local identity is important" (Kruse, 2010, p. 628). She further explains that, in music scenes, "subjectivities and identities were formed, changed, and maintained within localities that were constituted by geographical boundaries, by networks of social relationships, by a sense of local history, and in opposition to other local-

ities" (Kruse, 2010, p. 628). Music artists are produced locally, they distinguish themselves and their music via the influence of their local histories and cultures, and the internet and digital media are the vehicles by which they reach global audiences.

Facebook is filled with pages and profiles of local bands, venues, and promoters who advertise their shows every week and even provide photos and videos of their performances and interactions with fans. Band members regularly share their post-performance insights on their profiles and discuss the evening's highlights with those who attended via comments. Through these online media, bands and venues reach more audiences and create new connections with other musicians and venues, thus increasing interest and growth (Verboord & van Noord, 2016). Traditional media outlets have felt the effects of online media and the ease with which any artist can gain exposure via social networks like Facebook and user/creator-driven media platforms like YouTube and SoundCloud. There has certainly been enough interest in rock music among people in South Texas for musicians to want to play it and audiences to want to listen, but venues for live rock music were limited between the 1980s and 2000s. This study focuses on how local musicians navigated this period and adapted to the internet era while translating rock music to the local scene.

METHODOLOGY

We used in-depth, qualitative interviews with local musicians participating in the South Texas rock music scene to generate data for analysis. One of the critical responsibilities of qualitative research is "to study human symbolic action in the various contexts of its performance" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, p. 4). We aimed to understand how local musicians understand and contextualize their memories of the development of the local scene. Previous studies into music scenes, such as Kruse (2010) and Heine (2012), have drawn data from interviews with musicians who are participants in their local scenes. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and because it was preferable for some subjects, the first author conducted all interviews via telephone. Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) have compared face-to-face and telephone interviews and found "that telephone interviews can be used productively in qualitative research." While some researchers prefer face-to-face interviews, even via Zoom, telephone interviews are "just as good for eliciting stories and information" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, p. 240).

The first author has been an active musician in Laredo, Texas, since moving there almost 40 years ago. This closeness to the scene is both a positive and a negative, as the author's observations, memories, and analysis were undoubtedly influenced by personal experience. However, the author also found that his descriptions of the evolution of the rock music scene sometimes differed from what the participants shared. Their memories came from the perspective of having lived in the community from a young age, unlike an outsider. In addition, as Lozano (2017) argues, memory is an imperfect form of data since people tend to leave out details that might not put them in the best light and rearrange other details to fill a narrative. Nevertheless, in the absence of other forms of data, such as a well-maintained database, oral history–type interviews were the best methodological tool at our disposal.

We interviewed nine local musicians who became active in the local scene at different times over six decades, from the 1960s to the present and have been highly active in the local scene for many years. Given the size of the city and the scene, the potential pool of professional musicians was limited. As such, the authors utilized a convenience sample, drawing upon the personal network of the first author to secure participants. The background of the musicians is diverse: one participant is a drummer who has played in country, Tejano, and rock bands locally since the 1960s, and another owned a local live music venue until it closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. One participant is a highly respected local guitar virtuoso and music teacher who has graced the scene on both sides of the border since the 1990s. We also interviewed a vocalist who started performing classic rock covers while still in high school in the early 1990s and became one of Laredo's most prominent band leaders. His group covers everything from Tex-Mex music and cumbias to 1950s oldies, country, classic rock, and Spanish-language pop/

rock. The diversity of professional experience among the participants helps inform our study more holistically; however, it must be acknowledged that the sample is demographically very homogenous—Hispanic/Latino middle-aged men. Pseudonyms have been applied to them.

The interviews utilized a guide to direct but not overly control the conversation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). The interviews began with a set of questions focused on the participants' interest in rock music despite its marginal status in the region. For example, we asked, "How did you become interested in playing rock music as opposed to genres that were more popular and socially accepted locally?" and "What motivated you to keep playing rock music in Laredo despite the lack of venues in which to perform?" We then moved to understand the development of the local scene from their perspective, asking, "What was the scene like when you started playing?" and "What do you feel has changed in Laredo for there to be so much more interest in local rock and, subsequently, more venues?" These questions directly addressed the focus of the study. The final set of questions covered how they use the internet to promote and propagate their music, including platform choice, effectiveness, and how audience feedback is interpreted. Following the process of thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), we generated transcripts of the interviews using online audio transcription tools. Next, a multiple-reading process was conducted to uncover patterns and reoccurring narratives using a grounded approach. One challenge was noting common themes among respondents while not leaving out those more particular to an individual interviewee. After several readings, the authors conferred to discuss initial findings and sought out areas of conceptual common ground.

ADAPTATION AND GROWTH: THE ROCK MUSIC SCENE IN SOUTH TEXAS

The scene developed in the 1960s when local musicians began performing rock music at local venues, even though the owners were reluctant to hire rock bands. Rock music, often infused with Latin elements, became a part of the local culture—a trend seen in several border cities (Avant-Mier, 2010). However, in the 1980s, there was a shift even as rock became more popular in mainstream U.S. culture. During that period, the most popular music genre in Laredo was Tejano music, a hybrid style with a Mexican *norteño* music foundation and elements of North American genres like country. Tejano quickly outperformed rock for business establishments that hired live musicians. As rock was pushed to the margins, violence, drunkenness, and illegal activity increased at private events where local rock bands played. The few places that still hired rock bands during that period favored professional groups from out of town, leaving local musicians to host their events independently at backyards and ranches in the surrounding rural area.

There was a resurgence of venues hiring local rock bands in the 1990s, this time exclusively. New educational institutions devoted to the arts led to more musicians who benefitted from the tutelage of their predecessors. As more people moved to Laredo in the early 2000s and the population increased, audiences with a taste for rock music grew, adding a more enthusiastic reception of local rock bands and making the nightlife more vibrant. The advent of digital technology further fueled the scene, as it provided newer and better tools for creativity, distribution of original music, and promotion of shows for bands and venues alike.

We understand this process as a way in which the local culture of the South Texas borderlands came to reconcile the dual influences of U.S. American and Mexican post-war mass culture. Mexican Americans living on the border felt immense pressure to assimilate while preserving their culture. As Avant-Mier (2010) argues, rock music offered a way to get closer to mainstream culture and stay grounded by integrating Latin musical elements. In the case of Laredo, local musicians also played rock. They developed a local scene to form a hybrid global, national, and local articulation of culture, such as playing Beatles songs to majority Spanish-speaking audiences and finding their own spaces in local hegemonic culture.

THE EARLY SCENE

Tacho started performing with his first band in 1967 when he was a teenager. "There was a club across from Lamar Middle School where we would play all rock music. We would play Jimi Hendrix, Steppenwolf, Janis Joplin, the Doors, all that stuff." Moreover, although the city was much smaller than today, rock bands were not limited to places that only hired rock bands; they could play anywhere they wanted. This is notable because music genres are commonly segregated by venue in other cities, with some hosting primarily rock, country, jazz, etc. Venues in Laredo vastly preferred to offer a variety of music to their patrons and conformed to the perspective that, as Duke Ellington said, "There are simply two kinds of music, good music, and the other kind.... The only yardstick by which it should be judged is simply that of how it sounds."

Nevertheless, it was always wise to play the more popular rock and pop tunes and to be familiar with the Mexican and Spanish music that had always dominated this part of the U.S./Mexico border. "We are in a border city," said Tacho. "That's why you have to play the other stuff [Mexican music]. If you go to San Antonio, there's rock, there's country and even jazz, but here you have to play everything. You have to go where the money's at." Despite the fluidity of musical tastes in the early scene, it was a requirement that rock bands also be able to play Mexican and Mexican American music.

Thus, a music scene as defined by Bennett and Peterson (2004), Straw (1991), and Heine (2012) very much existed in Laredo, Texas, between 1970 and 1980, when it had a smaller population of 69,000–91,000 (Texas State Historical Association, n.d.). The introduction of rock music in these venues signaled a cultural shift characterized by the "valorization" of "different musical practices" being "disseminated through their respective cultural communities" (Straw, 1991, p. 369). Rock music was welcomed along with all other music genres, whether or not they were indicative of the predominantly Mexican ethnicity of the area or the southwestern American culture of Texas. When this U.S. American genre of music was introduced to this culturally Mexican and Mexican American community, it changed the local culture by broadening its musical palette and tastes, and musicians even played it to push back against their own local culture. However, this music scene differed somewhat from Heine's definition in that it was not yet based on genres like it is today. Music groups of all styles existed in one scene and performed in all local venues, as opposed to a rock music scene, a Mexican *conjunto* music scene, a country music scene, etc. The scene simply comprised musicians who played what they and their audiences liked without thinking about what style they were playing or where it came from. Whether it was a Mexican *corrido* or the latest American Top 40 hit, it was enjoyed by local performers and audiences alike.

This denoted a merging of cultures that further added color to an already hybrid Mexican American culture instead of a cultural clash or conflict. Rather than assimilating themselves to U.S American culture, Laredoans were assimilating it to their way of life; they took what music they liked and made it their own. This is evident in the Tejano music that began in the late 1970s and rose to prominence in Laredo and South Texas in the 1980s, which combined northern Mexican music genres with rock music and other non-Latin American genres of music. As a longtime rock and Tejano drummer asserted, "Even in the Tejano *polkas* and *cumbias*, you can hear rock music." Ricky, another musician, cited an example from a city not far north of the border: "One of the good examples are the Navaira brothers (sons of late Tejano music legend Emilio Navaira) who have a beautiful band called 'The Bandoleros' in San Antonio.... They put [Mexican-style] accordion music to their rock songs, but the rock songs they write are exactly like Beatle-esque or Badfinger type of music, which I love."

As the 1970s progressed, new music genres developed, and musicians had to adapt. The disco music craze of the late 1970s significantly affected popular music worldwide. "In the 70s, we ended up playing disco to survive," exclaimed Tacho. However, in the early 1980s, South Texas was the breeding ground for the new wave of Latin music known as Tejano, based upon the *cumbia* and *polka* styles prevalent in Mexican *norteño* music but influenced by American genres such

as rock, jazz, and country (Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2021).

The emergence of a hybrid music genre in South Texas is not surprising, as venues that had traditionally had Mexican music as their primary entertainment had been hiring rock bands to perform as well. Thus, musicians who were accustomed to hearing and sometimes playing all those genres combined them into something original and indigenous to the South Texas border communities. As Tejano music gained popularity in South Texas, more and more musicians and bands turned from rock and English-language popular music to Tejano to follow the trend and seek more remarkable success.

COMPETING WITH TEJANO MUSIC FROM THE MARGINS

Roque remembers that crossing over to Tejano music paid a lot more than staying in rock bands: "At that time you had the beginnings of the Tejano scene so, you know, rock itself was kind of getting drained away of some of the musicians that were in these bands. They were going off to form or join Tejano bands because of the lucrative aspect." According to Ricky, the popularity of Tejano music overtaking rock music in Laredo made sense. He noted, "Well, it's basically that Laredo has grown with that particular type of music, like Ranchero, Tejano, accordion music [Mexican *norteño* music], mariachi music, romantic trios. It was the culture here in Laredo." Tacho concurred: "We're in a border town. We had to play all that stuff: a lot of *polkas* and *cumbias*."

During this time, the rock music scene was pushed to the margins, with few venues hiring local rock bands. As one musician recalled, shows were self-organized at ranches or in backyards: "We would charge an admission fee" and "offer [aside from the music] was they called 'trash can punch.'" The musician reminded that the "trash can punch was a mix of "gallon jugs of Everclear" bought in Mexico, "brand-spanking-new fresh plastic trash cans," and "Kool-Aid in there with the Everclear and then fill the rest up with water from the *mangera* [garden hose]." However, one musician noted that this practice began stigmatizing the rock music scene: "It started kind of being connected with trouble. You know, 'whenever there's a party with the rock bands, there's a fight." Backyard rock parties, and those held at ranches in the outlying rural area, were notorious for being the sites of brawls and illicit activity. With little to no security at these events, fights would often break out. The "moral panics" (Williams, 2017a, 2017b) already associated with rock music in the 1980s due to connections with Satanism and obsentity (Kelly, 2015) certainly did not help matters. Rock music was considered an outsider genre with a reputation for rowdy ranch parties and struggled to gain broader acceptance in Laredo and South Texas.

CHANGING AUDIENCES AND TASTES

In the 1990s, one venue opened its doors to original rock groups of every subgenre, no matter how extreme or heavy. Somewhat outside of the norm for a live rock music venue, Sal's Pizza began letting original bands perform their music on weekends. As the restaurant was strictly a pizzeria and did not have a bar, there was no age limit for audiences or performers. As is usually the case, there was no pay, and the groups were expected to do their own advertising and promotion. Miguel was one of the musicians who frequently performed at Sal's with his band. "Sal's was the place that would welcome you. It didn't matter if you played rock, punk, or metal. It was open to all kinds of music as long as you were willing to put in the time to make flyers and bring people."

Thus, the 1990s marked a turning point for Laredo's rock music scene. The city, which now had a larger population of almost 123,000 people (Texas State Historical Association, n.d.), had four venues that featured live rock music every weekend, one of which welcomed bands who played their original music. Gus, another musician who became active at this time, recalled, "It was a handful of places that had rock music, but they had it all the time. Those places were good about rotating the bands and changing it up." More live rock venues opened through that decade, and, unlike bars such as The Whistle Stop that hired only bands from out of town, they preferred local talent. The local

restaurants and bars that hired bands did so to attract customers and keep them there, while the bands acquired more fans and got more gigs. As the 1990s and the 20th century ended, this "cross-pollinating" (Heine, 2012, p. 203) between local rock bands and venues led to growth for both scenes, as more bars and restaurants would hire live music opened, and more rock bands formed to perform in them.

As the city grew, the arts scene in general also grew. The Laredo Center for the Arts opened in 1993 and featured work from local artists. In the same year, the Laredo Independent School District started its first magnet school program, the Vidal M. Treviño School of Fine Arts and Communication, known locally as VMT. Aside from journalism and television and radio broadcasting classes, the school offered formal instruction in art, theater, dance, and music for local high school students. Plus, the school also offered classes in professional studio recording for a long time. In fact, local musicians of all genres worked at the school teaching guitar and electric bass and those with recording experience taught music production in the school's recording studio. New amateur theater groups sprang up, presenting musical plays and dramas on a seasonal basis. The local four-year college, Texas A&M International University, began offering undergraduate degrees in music and art, which were previously unavailable near Laredo.

As the city grew, so did the population's musical taste and openness to new and different styles of music. Tejano bands were still plentiful, but the rock scene was on the rise and bigger than before. New clubs opened and regularly hired rock bands who played original songs. The population of Laredo has grown steadily every decade since 1880, but the first ten years of the 21st century saw the city's largest gain per decade, increasing by over 60,000 people (World Population Review, 2021). Most came from Mexico, with Texas seeing the second-largest increase in immigrant population per state between 2000 and 2010 (Camarota, 2011). Musicians generally felt that Laredo audiences were more reserved in their behavior at live music venues. However, the influx of people from Mexico and places north of the border city in the early 2000s brought with it a different kind of audience that was more extroverted. One musician recalled, "You started getting a lot more audiences that were Spanish first, and they would approach the band to ask for requests." He continued, "Those are folks that go out, and they relish their moment to be entertained. So, you're starting to get a lot of audiences that would clap along and sing along, and they'd actually get up and dance." Counterintuitively, audiences from Mexico helped rock bands playing songs from U.S.-based bands finally compete against the locally grown genre of Tejano. This trend, mixed with the formalization of music education in the region, helped diversify the audiences and tastes of the city.

THE ROLE OF NEW MEDIA

The advent of the internet and the rise of computers put new tools in the hands of musicians for creativity, self-promotion, and production and distribution of original recordings. While Heine (2012) argues that a "vibrant music scene" includes a recording studio and a record label (p. 203), now everyone could have a studio (Leyshon, 2009) and, with online distribution services available for a nominal fee, anyone could act as a record label (Brae, 2018). In larger cities, local rock stations will dedicate weekly slots to the latest original music of up-and-coming local bands. They also sponsor events such as Battle-of-the-Bands contests, where local groups will perform in front of an audience, and a panel of judges made up of notable local DJs and successful local musicians. While these types of opportunities were sorely lacking in Laredo, the emergence of new technologies filled the gap.

In the 1980s and 1990s, rock bands in Laredo would create and print flyers to promote an upcoming show, as is common in other cities with active music scenes. Clubs and bars often had weekly newspaper and radio ads to promote food and drink specials, while also announcing which band would be performing on their stages that weekend. According to Ricky, these media could be costly. "It was very hard back then," he said. "The little money that you had was spent on advertising. Social media has made it easier for bands and venues to advertise and promote shows, and perhaps even reach more people. Another band member added, "You

don't have to advertise anymore because everything's on Facebook."

While there is no guarantee that everyone in a specific location will see everything posted by fellow locals on social media, it still affords musicians, promoters, and venues an advertising option that is free of charge and will easily reach users who follow them. "There's a sea of information. It's hard for people to see your ad worldwide, but locally you can be very successful with it if you know how to promote it," said a performer who also worked in radio for a time. This includes ensuring posts are tailored to specific audiences using groups and pages with local niche audiences.

According to Beto, a younger musician, social media has given bands playing shows locally an advertising advantage that they would not have otherwise. "If 50 people actually show up because of an ad you did, you're already in good standing with a lot of clubs here in town. You've already filled up a third of that place, and the rest of their regulars come in, you know, you're going to have a pretty decent night." The internet not only assists musicians with distributing their music and promoting their shows, but it also serves as a learning tool. There is a veritable sea of websites and YouTube videos providing instruction for beginners up to the most advanced players. "There are more good musicians now because of education," said Tacho. "There are videos on YouTube, and people can learn how to play. All we had was the record player, and we had to figure it out ourselves, but now people learn off of YouTube."

Many musicians and bands utilized social media during the COVID-19 pandemic to continue reaching their audiences via live-streamed performances on Facebook and other social media sites. Victor said, "We've seen a lot of cover bands, or local bands, that you catch here at bars and stuff, but now they can't, so they'll go live. They'll do a little show from wherever they're doing it and people tune in and then watch them, which I think is great." Gus and his wife have a band called Little Sister, which has been a main staple on the Laredo rock scene since the late 1990s. "With Little Sister's Facebook, when the pandemic started, we were able to do live shows for people to watch in the comfort of their homes. They were just basically concerts with me and her, and an acoustic guitar here in our study, and she really pushed to make that happen so that people can feel a little bit of normalcy in their life." This illustrates David Beer's assertion that social media networks "have caused a rapid and radical reconfiguration of the relations between well-known and little-known performers and their respective audiences" (Beer, 2006).

DISCUSSION: HYBRID IDENTITIES AND CULTURE IN THE BORDERLANDS

Kruse (2010) wrote that music is understood "in relation to local identity" (p. 628). The local identity in Laredo, Texas, is defined by the multilayered nature of its culture. Located on the U.S.-Mexico border, with most of its citizens having roots in Mexico either through heritage or origins, Mexican culture is prevalent in daily life in Laredo, Texas. With a largely bilingual populace, who often speak Spanish and English interchangeably, an abundance of Spanish-language media, a profusion of Mexican restaurants, and commonplace Mexican cultural traditions, Laredo's line between what is inherently Mexican or U.S. American is blurred (Lozano, 2017). At the same time, being in the United States and Texas, there is a strong influence of national U.S. culture through its educational institutions and English-language mass media. The ensuing culture in this transnational space is hybrid and fluid. For example, a shared experience in the city is a Sunday *carne asada* with family and friends during football season to watch the Dallas Cowboys or Houston Texans play.

The multicultural layers are sometimes contradictory, sometimes complementary, and sometimes in conflict. To be very clear, the musicians interviewed in this study are all based on the U.S. side of the border, and most were educated in the United States. Their statements often position their preference for rock music as something that had to compete with Tejano, *norteño*, and other forms of popular Spanish language music for venues and audiences from the margins. This is even the case despite Tejano and norteño being hybrid music genres developed in the Northern Mexico/South Texas region (Díaz-Santana Garza, 2021). As such,

it might be, as Villa writes, that the "border is not really one, but multiple, in the sense that not only different people construct distinct borders and disparate identities around those borders, but those different borders acquire a distinct weight in relation to the different subject positions" (2003, p. 616). For the musicians interviewed here, the local culture (broadly defined) always had to be contended with and even accommodated. This meant intermixing musical genres in live performances (playing Britpop one song, then a Spanish language song the next) or finding alternative means for distribution (ranch parties, the Internet).

One can glean from the interviews that sometimes, the choice to listen to and play rock music was also a way to be different from others. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean the musicians wanted to adopt a different national or ethnic identity (i.e., not Mexican or Latino), but perhaps more quotidian differences of idiosyncratic tastes and personality dispositions. Thus, the music they choose to play and listen to expresses who they are rather than something they are trying to assimilate. As Nico summed up in his interview, "I'm Hispanic, man. I'm Latino, bro, but I identified more with the rock music. The Beatles spoke to me more than the other music did."

Perhaps as Villa (2003) writes, scholars of the U.S./Mexico border should avoid "a tendency to confuse the sharing of a culture with the sharing of an identity" (p. 611). Nico's comment speaks to rock music being a way to differentiate amidst a dominant local culture. This reiterates the function rock music has long had, as it informs and blends into new hybrid music forms in Latino and Latin American cultures while also being a way to approach mainstream culture (Avant-Mier, 2010).

CONCLUSION

The resurgence of the South Texas rock scene from the 1990s onward, when the Tejano music craze was still at its height, denotes resiliency and adaptability among the rock musicians of Laredo. While the city's night spots leaned toward music genres of Hispanic/Latino identity in the 1980s, the people did not abandon rock music. It is interesting to note that after venues in the 1960s through the early 1970s hired bands of all genres, Tejano music, which is known for blending Mexican music with American genres like rock, jazz, and country, and even adding elements of other Latin American genres like salsa and merengue, gained prominence not only in south Texas but also across the state. This reflects the cultural fluidity and hybridity of South Texas and how musicians on the border have assimilated rock and other music genres into their culture. In this example, the local music scene could also generate a new musical form by lowering the barriers between musical genres.

Further study into the histories of music scenes in South Texas and the different genres they contain may uncover how this sort of cultural fluidity and hybridity may have led to the rise of the Tejano music scene in Texas in the 1980s and 1990s. Furthermore, other Latin music genres infused with elements of hip-hop music, such as reggaeton, have risen to prominence. These music styles, like Tejano, blend Hispanic and American genres to create hybrid genres that audiences enjoy in both the United States and Latin America. Additional studies may trace how these mixed genres originated and became popular across many countries and what they mean for their local music scenes.

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