

Some notes on “La Bamba” by Maegan Moriarty ‘20

Their album *It's Time* conveys the group member's experiences of being born in LA of immigrant parents, while simultaneously creating Chicano protest music. They are cognizant of the culture and history of son jarocho, and maintain the music's political edge. The album's title purposefully does not say what it's time for because the artists said, “you know what it's time for — you know and I know. You know what you're supposed to do, and we want you to do what you're supposed to do,” (Johnson 2012). Since the artists leave the interpretation of the album in the hands of the listener, the group is forcing its audience to take control of their thoughts and actions before even listening to their work.

A song that particularly shows Las Cafeteras commitment to political activism and their appreciation of son jarocho is “La Bamba Rebelde,” and demonstrates how a widely-listened to song can be utilized to mobilize a group of people. This song is a new version of the Mexican folk song which was made popular by Ritchie Valens in his 1958 rendition and Los Lobos remake in 1987 (Johnson 2012). The song “La Bamba Rebelde,” echoes traditional son jarocho through its instrumentation. At 0:00-0:35, the percussion instruments cajón, marimbula and quijada de burro are audible. The cajón appears to set the beat of the song and the quijada de burro adds a constant additional layer, emphasizing the first note of every four beats. The marimbula appears in the background during this song, but does not emphasize the same notes as the cajón and quijada de burro and appears to be shifting between duple and triple meter-- or following a pattern of hemiola, which is typical of son jarocho music. At the 0:35 mark, there is an addition of string instruments, the jarana and requinto which makes the space seem more rich and full. The rhythm shift between the duple and triple meter creates tension and release, which encourages movement. The established rhythm is broken up at 1:02 and 1:24 at the end of the verse, appearing to have the purpose of emphasizing the lyrics and livening the celebration. The string instruments cease for two seconds and the singer's voice appears to draw upwards, making the listener anticipate the reincorporation of the strings and the full liveliness they bring to the song. It is hard to differentiate the tarimbas from the complexity of noise that the rest of the instruments create, but at moments within the song like at 2:42, the percussive sound of a high-heeled zapateado is audible. The rhythm of the zapateado does not follow the rest of the instruments but hits the same beat as the cajón on the first note in a four count, creating further tension and movement in the song.

Additionally, the lyrics of “La Bamba Rebelde” simultaneously link to son jarocho history and promote political activism. The word “Rebelde,” or “rebel” in the title of the song is an immediate indicator that the song will take political form. The word “La bamba” in Spanish comes from the Spanish verb “bambolear” which means “to shake.” Thus, the lyrics allude to the idea of a rebellious or insurgent movement before the song even begins. The overall message is to narrate the plight of immigrants and to empower and celebrate their existence. For example, the lyrics, “Ay, arriba y arriba ay arriba y arriba y arriba iré. Yo no creo en fronteras, yo no creo en fronteras yo cruzaré yo cruzaré yo cruzaré,” translate to the idea that the singer will persist, as she does not believe in borders that hold her back. The first tense “yo” is not meant to be exclusive to the recorded singer; the song is supposed to empower the intended audience--all immigrants, not just Chicanos-- to sing this for themselves, thus claiming that they have the abilities to persevere too.

Another line, “Yo no soy marinero, yo no soy marinero, Soy capitán soy capitán soy capitán,” displays the idea of command or authority, along with autonomy. It narrates the message that men and women within the United States can direct where the course of their lives go-- they do not need to feel aimless or helpless, repeating this idea of power. Particularly when listening to the song at 1:23, one is able to hear that the female singer, not the chorus, emphasizes that she is in fact, “capitán,” or that she is captain and in control. It is important to note that the lyrics to this song are in Spanish, which restricts the audience who could understand this song’s message. Even if “La Bamba Rebelde,” is not comprehensible by all immigrants, it at least resonates with those who come from Spanish-speaking countries. Latinx people are a marginalized group of society, and it is important that encouragement exists within music, literature, and art, that acknowledges and promotes their identity. The songs of *It’s Time*, particularly “La Bamba Rebelde,” do just that.

About Son Jarocho:

Olsen, Dale A., and Daniel E. Sheehy, eds. *The Garland Handbook of Latin American Music*, 188-192. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Routledge, 2015.

https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Garland_Handbook_of_Latin_American_M.html?id=RK6TA_gAAQBAJ

Madrid-González Alejandro L. “The Transnational Resurgence of Son Jarocho.” In *Music in Mexico: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*, 11–14. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Importance of Son Jarocho today to Especially Mexican-Americans

<https://www.npr.org/2011/10/29/141723031/a-musical-style-that-unites-mexican-americans>

Instruments Used in Son Jarocho: <https://www.loscenzontles.com/learn/instruments>

Son Jarocho Lesson Plan:

<https://folkways.si.edu/son-jarocho-veracruz-exploration-dance-forms/music/tools-for-teaching/smithsonian>

Information on Fandangoes and Improvisation in Son Jarocho Music (Lesson Plan):

<https://folkways.si.edu/fandango-son-jarocho-community-tradition-improvisation/music/tools-for-teaching/smithsonian>

Good Information on the Genre:

<https://www.carnegiehall.org/-/media/CarnegieHall/Files/PDFs/Education/Educators/Toolbox/Grade-5/Global-Encounters-Music-of-Mexico/Celso-Duarte-son-jarocho-music-and-Mexico.pdf?la=en&hash=E05F47FAC9D3733F34E885ADA2AC14DC>

Basic Information at Fandango at the Wall:

<http://fandangowall.com/>