

Promoting Mariachi Music and La Cancion Ranchera: One Librarian's Efforts

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INTRODUCTION:

MY GRANDPARENTS:

My paternal grandfather's family hails from Asturias, Spain. Don Antonio, as he was called, was born on the outskirts of Oviedo in the 1880s. He immigrated to North America in the early 1900's and first landed in Cuba. From there, he moved to Mexico, where he met my grandmother, who was also of Spanish descent, although born in Sombrerete, Zacatecas, Mexico. They came to the US during the Mexican Revolution, in approximately 1917.

My maternal grandfather was born in Tarachi, Sonora Mexico and was Mexican of Spanish descent, but also part Mayo Indian. He came to the US in the early 1920s to work in the mines. He met my grandmother, Josefa Ortega, in Arivaca, Arizona, her home town. They married and moved to Superior where my mom and her four siblings were born. All my grandparents spoke Spanish, of course. I don't know if any of them ever learned English.

MY PARENTS:

My parents were born in the US and grew up speaking both Spanish and English. My dad went to school through the 4th grade and my mom made it through the 8th grade. They were comfortable with both languages. Since they were first generation, for the most part, their parents cultures played a very strong role in their upbringing. The influence of Catholicism was very strong and both families were very close-knit. Spanish was the dominant language. Both families were working class and what one would call economically disadvantaged. However, my grandparents were literate and could read and write in Spanish. The work ethic was extremely strong in both families.

My parents spent their childhoods in rural Arizona. My mom grew up in a small mining town called Superior, and my dad grew up in Camp Verde, Arizona. My mom's father died young leaving my grandmother to raise five children on her own. She moved her young family to Tucson when my mom was twelve years old. My dad's family moved to Superior when he was 16. They met when she was 18 and he was 21. After they married, they settled in Tucson in the mid- 40s where they began to raise their growing family.

I don't recall my parents ever saying much about the role of music in their families, but my dad has made reference to my grandfather getting up on a table and dancing flamenco a few times. My mom's mother sang and played the guitar and was in love with a musician in her youth, but she married my grandfather instead, at her mother's insistence.

My parents were children in the twenties. In the thirties and forties as teenagers and young adults, they listened to Spanish language radio and to Mexican music on the jukeboxes that

populated the restaurants of their small communities. They like going to dance and they also went to the movies. Once they were married with children they continued doing so, taking my eldest brothers and sisters along to the Cine Plaza downtown and to other venues where Mexican films were shown. They even got to see Pedro Infante live downtown at the Cine Plaza back in the 50's. They were part of two very large extended families and up until the mid-fifties a lot of their time was spent on "el rancho" with my father's father and his family.

MY PART OF THE WORLD: TUCSON ARIZONA

Tucson was first settled by the Hohokam, a Native American group, and is considered one of the oldest continuously inhabited locations in North America. When the Spanish arrived in the 1600's, they founded the presidio of Tucson, and the Spanish flag was flown over it until 1820, when Mexico gained its independence from Spain. From 1820 through the mid 1800's, the Mexican flag flew over the small town. Since the US took over southern Arizona in 1856, and with the arrival of the railroad in the 1870's, it became a multi-cultural, multi-lingual city and has been so for over 150 years.

Mariachi music in Mexico was a more rural phenomena up until after the Mexican Revolution. It became much more popular and a more polished, urbanized phenomena with the arrival of radio and film. Mexican music was popular in Tucson, and one of our country's finest singers and composers, Lalo Guerrero, born in Tucson, would play in various places around town. By the mid-40s, Mexican popular music, including mariachi and ranchera music, filled the airwaves and the movie theaters throughout Mexico and the Southwestern US. Singing movie stars like Pedro Infante and Jorge Negrete were all the rage. Movie theaters like El Cine Plaza and the Lyric featured these stars and their movies.

Los Changuitos Feos were formed in Tucson and performed all over the place. I had friends who were members, but I don't recall ever hearing them live, however.

Los Changuitos Feos later became Mariachi Cobre. Steve Carrillo attended the same high school I went to and we would both get rides from our teachers the Cruz's sometimes. I remember that the radio was on once while we were waiting for Mr. Cruz in the car, and hearing Steve complain about the norteno music that was playing. He clearly had his preferred style of music, obviously mariachi. I didn't know that Steve was such a gifted musician at the time. I had no idea about his singing. All I knew was that he played the trumpet and I always wondered why he wasn't in the marching band.

The first Tucson International Mariachi conference was held in 1982 and the featured singer was Lola Beltran. The Tucson conference is probably the oldest continuous festival in the country. However, the state of Texas held its first conference in 1979 and has the honor of being home to the first conference.

My Childhood through the beginning of high school:

I was born in Tucson, Az in 1959, the last of six children born to Alfred and Josephine Diaz. By the time I came around, all but one of my grandparents were gone. My four eldest sisters and brothers spoke Spanish growing up, but my brother Fred and I didn't.

We both grew up speaking English primarily, but of course we were exposed to the Spanish language from a very early age, as both my parents and my one living grandparent spoke it regularly, as did many of my older relatives. However, I didn't begin to seriously learn Spanish until the 7th grade when I started taking it in school. Because I was exposed to it at home, I was able to learn it quickly and did quite well.

My parents had a few Mexican records including Jose Alfredo Jimenez's album "La Enorme Distancia, which he recorded with in the early sixties with Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlan. My mom also had some 45's including ones by Lucha Villa/Flor Silvestre/Irma Serrano. At some point I also ended up with my grandmothers and uncle's 45s which included Bala Perdida by Lucha Moreno, Dona Elena y el Frances by Ignacio Lopez Tarso. I think there were also some by Conjunto Bernal and Las Hermanas Nunez. When Javier Solis died in 1966, I remember my parents going out and buying one of his albums. He was my dad's favorite singer.

The radio at home was always on and of course, my mom had it on the Spanish station, and sometimes Lola Beltran would appear on television on the Mexican Theatre program on Sunday mornings. My mom adored la musica ranchera and would get very excited when someone like Lola Beltran would sing rancheras. I would eagerly watch the program each week waiting for Lola to make another appearance, but these occasions were all too few and far between. This was back in the sixties, way before cable tv. "Mexican Theatre" was for the longest time the only Spanish-language program on television, and it was on for only an hour every Sunday.

At family gatherings, community fiestas (Fiesta de la Placita, El Cinco De Mayo, 16 de Septiembre) and parties, there would typically be musicians who sang rancheras. My mother would love to sing along. She sang harmony and had a lovely voice. I clearly remember her being chastized by my father for not wanting to go home one night at a neighborhood party. She insisted on staying and singing with the guys, and she did.

My mom was a very emotional person, and sometimes she let the melodrama take over. There were times when she and my dad didn't get along too well, and she'd play her records. The two that I remember the most clearly were Cancion de Un Preso, about a prisoner who is about to die and longs to see her loved one just one last time before she goes...Another was "Mi Destino Fue Quererte by Flor Silvestre. Talk about crying in your beer! This song is as sad and gloomy as they get!

Sometimes our parents would take us to Nogales, and we would usually end up at La Caverna, a restaurant where there were mariachis and trios who strolled around playing for people upon request. My mom would just loved hearing them and would always get my dad to pay for at least a few songs.

In the fourth grade, I wanted to play the violin, but was given a cello instead. I played it for four years. This helped expose me to orchestral music and I learned how to read music. Who knows if I would have become a mariachi if I had been given that violin to play? I might have!

I don't recall hearing live mariachis all that often in my childhood.

Raising my consciousness:

Growing up, my siblings and I didn't really get into Mexican music. Neither did our friends or cousins, really. My four older brothers and sisters listened mostly to top 40 American pop music. In the early to mid- sixties, oldies, Motown and top 40 were all the rage, but by the latter half of the sixties, youth culture and its attendant music dominated our lives. The Beatles were a big hit, as were the Rolling Stones. The last thing any of us kids wanted to do was to hear Mexican music. It belonged to our parents and we didn't want to anything to do with that! It was all too old school!

In my freshman year of high school, I took a class called "Cultural Awareness" (really Chicano Studies). We learned about the Chicano movement, about the history of the Southwest and Mexico, and about our own cultural practices as members of the Mexican American community. As part of this, our teacher played Mexican music for us. He had an anthology of Mexican corridos, and I became smitten with the music, especially songs like La Adelita and La Rielera. They seemed so very familiar. I remember that I went in search of sheet music of Mexican songs and that I could not find a whole lot at all, although when in Nogales, I did find some of the "guitarra facil" songbooks that were available. I still have my very first one of songs by Jose Alfredo Jimenez.

I bought my first ranchera album when I was fourteen or fifteen: Corridos con Antonio Aguilar. I still have a copy of it.

Mariachis started playing in church at around this time.

I became a big fan of Joan Baez. Her album "Gracias A La Vida" became one of my favorites. On it, she is accompanied by mariachis on tunes like Cucurrucucu Paloma and El Preso Numero Nueve.

At this time I also became a big fan of American folk music and also listened to Judy Collins, Joni Mitchell, and Bob Dylan. I loved protest music and hated the current popular music of the day, which was disco and top 40.

I was a member of the marching band in high school and played the saxophone. I also learned the flute and the guitar on my own.

EARLY ADULTHOOD/COLLEGE:

I began to collect albums, including Mexican ranchera and mariachi records. I had a good job and played the guitar. I didn't know a lot about mariachi music at the time. I think my knowledge

of it was limited to knowing about Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlan and a few of the most famous ranchera singers like Antonio Aguilar, Lola Beltran, and Jose Alfredo Jimenez.

I began to write my own songs and sing.

Mariachi Cobre would perform at Los Yentes. I went to see them once or twice.

Tucson International Mariachi Conference started in 1983. I didn't go to any of the concerts until later, like in 1987. I missed Lucha Villa and Lola Beltran! I can't believe it!

Radio Show:

I was a volunteer disc jockey at KXCI starting in 1983.

This is when I started to take much more of an interest in Mexican music. I hosted two radio shows, one of which was called the Chicano Connection, which is where I began to play what little mariachi music I had acquired by this time, not a lot by any means. I believe I started out with some Jose Alfredo Jimenez and Javier Solis albums, but not much else. However, it was at this time that I became very serious about building my record collection and I began to start looking for more material. I became the proud owner of a few Lola Beltran and Lucha Villa records, but they were hard to find in Tucson. I later learned that there were other record collectors in the community who were amassing sizeable collections of Latin music. One was a fellow disc jockey named Pepe Galvez. He later opened a record shop and had a huge inventory of Mexican mariachi and ranchera music on hand, much of which ended up in my hands, as I eagerly bought as much of it as I could afford.

Teatro Libertad.

I also joined a theater company called Teatro Libertad. It was here that I learned about "la nueva cancion" or Latin American protest music. I played the guitar in this group and sang too. We played a few corridos along the way, but were not by any means playing any mariachi music. At around this time, one of our members' children was in Los Changuitos Feos, a youth mariachi group with a long history in Tucson.

Late 80's:

In December 1986, I received my master's degree in Library Science. I started my first job as a librarian the following month at the Nogales Public Library, right on the US Mexico border. I loved going shopping and eating lunch on the Mexican side, and would enjoy listening to the musicians in the bars and restaurants. I also continued looking for and buying music.

By the time summer rolled around, I had found another position at the University of Michigan and moved to Ann Arbor, where I lived for over five years. I longed for home, and Mexican music became for me a strong link to my people and my culture.

My mom died in 1988. The day before her funeral, I went to the swap meet and found a Lucha Villa cassette. As luck would have it, it included all of her best songs and I feel in love with it. I played it for my dad, and he told me that my mom had something to do with me finding it. All the songs were about love and loss (Cuando Canta La Paloma, Una Pura y Dos Con Sal, Declarate Inocente, La Huella de Mis Besos, No Sigas Llorando, A Medias de la Noche Mi Ranchito etc), and they touched my dad deeply. The following day at her funeral, three musicians sang the following songs: Las Laureles, Por Un Amor and Volver, Volver. I cried uncontrollably, as did all of my family. These songs personified my mom. They were her gift to her children.

From this point on, Lucha Villa was my queen and I searched everywhere for her music. I could not find a whole lot at first. This was a turning point in my life for me, as the music hit home and touched something deep inside me. It connected me to my Mom in a way that nothing else could. Throughout her life, she was very passionate and overly dramatic. Her favorite songs when I was a kid were Cancion de Un Preso by Irma Serrano and Mi Destino Fue Quererte by Flor Silvestre, two gut wrenching rancheras sung with so much sentimiento, you could swear the singers were crying as they sang them. I knew at this point that this "sentimiento" was what made us human. In this day and age of coldness and icy calm, it's sometimes very refreshing to let out a grito full of emotion and pain.

In my work as a librarian, I learned how to seek out information. Reference service was my specialty, so I learned all about indexes and library catalogs and finding information. I quickly realized that there wasn't a lot available about Mexican music, neither in books or journals.

Part of my job as a librarian is involvement at the national level in organizations like the American Library Association. I started attending library conferences around the country in the late 80s in cities like San Francisco, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Denver, New Orleans, San Antonio, Austin, Dallas Seattle, and San Diego. My record collecting habit only grew stronger during this time period as I had a good job and lots of credit. I spent my free time visiting record stores and bookstores, looking for as much Mexican music albums and books on Mexican music as possible. Over the years, I have acquired quite a collection of record albums. I have focused on collecting female ranchera singers like Lucha Villa and Lola Beltran, but I also collected trios, music by mariachis and other types of Latin music.

In 1992, I left Michigan and took a job back home at the University of Arizona Library. Part of my job was to promote diversity within the organization. One year, the group I worked with on this sponsored a Cinco de Mayo program, and we invited the UofA's mariachi ensemble to perform. I remember asking the group to sing Volver, Volver, and the leader told me, why don't you sing it? To my own shock, I said, okay! I was very nervous, but I did sing the whole song, and when I was finished, the whole room erupted in applause. I was elated. I had sang Volver, Volver with a mariachi group! It was one of my life's high points!

In 1997, one of my friends from an organization called REFORMA, the National Association for the Promotion of Library and Information Services to the Spanish Speaking, took notice of my interest in Mexican music, as I was always showing up at conference meetings with a pile of records in my backpack that I had found in whatever city we were in at the moment. He invited

me to consider giving a presentation with him on Latin music at conference of librarians in Utah. Thus began my career in music librarianship. I gave my first presentation on Latin music in 1998 at the Utah Library Association Conference with Mr. Ben Ocon. We divided up the program into various “genres”, and I agreed to cover mariachi music and rancheras, as well as nueva cancion and other areas. I remember clearly stating that the term mariachi came from the French word for marriage, and Ben jumping in correcting me, stating that it was from the Coca language. That embarrassing episode left me determined to learn more. If I was going to be presenting information about this music, I’d better darn well know what I was talking about.

Our goal was to introduce Latin popular music to other librarians in the hopes that they would learn about it and begin to build collections of such music in their own libraries. Ben and I understood that Latin popular music was not something most librarians, who happen to be white middle-aged women (although this has begun to change some), would know much about. Given that the Latino population in the US was growing and spreading throughout the country, we knew that there would be a strong interest and demand for this type of material in libraries. Our session turned out to be quite popular. We provided packets of handouts for the program participants and agreed to serve as consultants for librarians with more questions.

It’s important to remember that at this time, –the late 90’s– that the internet and the worldwide web had not yet become so ubiquitous in our daily lives, and that websites like Amazon and Ebay hadn’t yet been created. Librarians needed to rely on national and regional suppliers and on local resources to build these specialized kinds of collections. In some cases, they needed to travel to big cities to acquire this material, as it was not as readily available as it is now. Very few librarians even bothered collecting anything on mariachi music, since it wasn’t something most of them were familiar with.

After the first program that I did with Ben Ocon, I felt like I had hit on something important and meaningful and that I was passionate about. Within a year or so, Ben and I did another presentation at yet another library conference, this time in Arizona. Again, it was a big hit with the attendees, and we received a great deal of praise for our efforts. The programs we did included audio samples and video samples, as well as a lot of information for librarians about the various genres that we were covering. Our hope, as I noted earlier was that librarians would go back to their libraries and order Latin music for their library collections. For video samples, I would seek out old Mexican movies and find spots in them where an artist like Lucha Villa would sing a song, or I would find concert videos and play snippets from those. We switched back and forth, and kept the pace very fast. Each audience seemed to really enjoy the program and found the materials we’d distribute to be very worthwhile. I have to admit that from the beginning I emphasized mariachi music and musica ranchera, but I acknowledged my bias up front, which seemed fine with the audiences. I was always willing to admit that I was continuously learning about Latin music, and that I didn’t know everything there was to know. To this day, I continue to learn about it. It’s a lifelong venture as far as I’m concerned.

Unfortunately, there were a few points along the way when I received some negative feedback. I tended to include on my resource lists artists and titles that were not easy to find, especially in places around the country where there wasn’t good distribution of some of the more “Mexican” oriented record labels. This is still the case to this day. If one goes to any major bookstores like

Borders or Barnes and Noble, one is more likely to find Celia Cruz and Willie Colon, or even Alejandro Sanz, than say music by Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlan or Lola Beltran. This is because of problems with distribution of Mexican music. One only finds this material in record stores that cater to the Latino community. Nowadays, with the availability of music through Amazon.com and Ebay, this problem seems to have been rectified. However, it is still difficult discovering new artists and works, because you cannot really browse these online sources like you could the goods in a well stocked record store.

Things I have done to promote mariachi music:

Introduction to Musica Latina sessions. The goal of these sessions was to provide an introduction to Latin Music either to librarians or the general public. When presenting to other librarians, my co-presenter and I provided numerous handouts that could be used for building collections of Latin music. While mariachi and ranchera played a very prominent role, they weren't the only focus. However, I admitted to each audience that my preference was for this music.

- Utah Library Assn. Conference with Ben 1997?
- AzLA solo 1998?
REFORMA National Conference with Ben Ocon
- Chandler Public Library solo
- Tucson Public Library Sam Lena Branch solo
- Tucson Public Library Main Branch solo
- Americanos exhibit and programs solo

In 1999, I started as the temporary music librarian at the University of Arizona. The School of Music has a mariachi education program in place, but its importance and emphasis have not been huge. This was reflected in the lack of materials that were available in the Music Library. Almost nothing existed, except for some Arhoolie recordings like the anthology of corridos from the Revolution and some lps in the series, Mexican American Border music. Within a year, I was assigned to this position permanently. Included in the work was building the Library's collection of holdings of music. I took advantage of the opportunity to add holdings of Mexican popular music to the collection. It is now one of the best stocked libraries in the nation . The collection includes books, scores, songbooks, recordings, and films related to latin music, especially mariachi and ranchera music.

In searching other library catalogs, I have noticed that while some libraries like UT Austin and New Mexico State University have extensive holdings of mariachi recordings, if you look deeper there are very few recordings by Mexican ranchera singers who used mariachis to accompany them. The recordings of singers like Lola Beltran, Lucha Villa and others are not widely available in such catalogs. I think this is a real shame, as these singers almost always had mariachi accompaniment, and it is their music that has greatly helped to popularize the mariachi sound.

The Tucson International mariachi Festival has been occurring annually since 1982. Each year, what people look forward to the most is the "headliner", usually a prominent ranchera singer. The first few years, Lola Beltran and Lucha Villa were brought in. In subsequent years, Aida

Cuevas, Guadalupe Pineda, Beatriz Adriana, Linda Ronstadt, Pedro Fernandez and Angeles Ochoa were brought in. This for me is evidence that mariachi conferences and fetivals thrive mainly when a major ranchera singer is brought in.

As someone who has an avid interest in “collecting” music and films, I have tried to emphasize that one has to be very proactive in finding material. I have found that I keep learning more and more the deeper I delve into researching and searching. I have found Ebay especially helpful for finding material produced in other countries, especially those in South America. Over time, I have come to realize that ranchera music and mariachi groups are famous throughout the world, and many artists like Miguel Aceves Mejia sold millions of records in countries outside of Mexico and the United States. One popular singer, Maria De Lourdes, was in fact more popular in Holland than she was in Mexico. She was a true ambassador of Mexican music, and was very well loved in Europe.

In the first five years of the new millienium, I spent a great deal of time giving presentations on Latin Music at conferences and other public programs. My efforts were recognized locally when I was featured in a full page article on the front page of the Arizona Daily Star’s entertainment section in 2003. A writer for the Star attended one of my programs, and followed up by requesting an interview with me. He asked about the work I did at the Library and interviewed the Dean of the Library as well as faculty in the School of Music. I did receive support from the Dean and the faculty member interviewed was also supportive, to a point. Her emphasis is on ethnomusicology, and these academic types tend to downplay commercial or popular music, as they do not feel it is genuine, or “folky enough” for real academic study. Other faculty in the School of Music did not support my efforts. They wanted that tenth recorded version of La Traviata in the collection and were bothered that I was “diversifying” or tainting their lilly white classical library with world music, jazz, Latin music and popular music. How dare I!!

Within the last five to six years, while I have slowed down on giving introductory presentations on “Latin Music”, I have focused more effort on other kinds of activities and programming. For example, in 2005 I joined the Board of Directors of the Tucson International Mariachi conference. One of the requirements of being a board member is that you help raise money for the organization. I did this by producing a film festival which I dubbed, Cine Mariachi. I worked with the Mexican Consulate in Tucson and was able to bring the film Dos Tipos de Cuidado, starring Pedro Infante and Jorge Negrete, to town. Also included were the films “El Mariachi Canta” with Luis Aguilar and Lucha Villa, and Rogaciano El Huapanguero with Lola Beltran and Miguel Aceves Mejia. The festival also included mariachi performers and baile folclorico. It took a lot of work to get this event off the ground, but in the end, it was the only one of a series that made any money for the organization.

From 2004 to 2008 , I also resumed my involvement with KXCI radio, co-hosting the 10 to midnight Wednesday night Latin program. While the program has changed names a few times, (from Barrio Sounds to The Chicano Connection to La Serenata), my emphasis didn’t. I featured mariachi and ranchera music as the core foundation of my programs, but I also mixed things up with American soul and oldies, as well as other genres of Latin music. In April of each year, I would emphasize mariachi music, as the Tucson International Mariachi Conference takes place then. In November, I celebrate Mexican Independence and the birthdays of Lucha Villa and

Pedro Infante. In January I focus on Juan Gabriel and Jose Alfredo Jimenez, who both happen to have birthdays that month, and on and on. It is very gratifying to have regular, loyal listeners and always a big surprise when a non-Latino calls and requests something by a singer like Irma Serrano or Lucha Villa.

In 2009, I wrote an article for the REFORMA Newsletter, called Confessions of a Ranchera Junkie. I do whatever I can to remind my colleagues in the library profession that Mexican music more important to the Mexican american community than salsa or Latin jazz. There seems to be a bias among educated Latinos for non-Mexican music, and I don't understand why that is exactly, but I know its there.

Also in 2009, I developed several web pages on Latin music, including two on Lucha Villa, one on Ranchera Singers and one on Mariachi and Ranchera music, among others. I have tried to gather and organize all the websites that exist in the Internet related to Mariachi music. These sites have proven to be well worth the effort. The one thing that is frustrating is that they need continous revision, as links often die or entire websites disappear.

At the end of 2009, I resumed hosting my radio program, and I am now on twice a month. My co-host, who I recruited to replace me is a young musician by the name of Justin Enriquez. He changed the program's name from the Chicano Connection to La Serenata and he plays solely mariachi and ranchera music. I again, mix it up.

In 2010, I was honored serve as a judge for choosing female musicians to be in Tucson's first All female mariachi group. I was also asked to judge a mariachi competition.

As I write this paper, and go through all of my articles, newspaper clippings, photos and records, I realize that I need to continue to document this very important musical genre. There is so much available now that its amazing. I have become especially fascinated with Ebay and Amazon.com. I love looking at old record albums and photos of singers and movie stars, and I continue to discover ones that I'd never heard of before.

Challenges:

As a fan, a collector and a librarian, I am concerned that our institutions such as libraries, schools and museums are ignoring this huge part of our culture.

Yet, to blame these institutions is not really fair. Part of the problem with gathering information on mariachi history, of course, is the fact that there simply isn't a great deal written about it. In 2002, Dr Celestino Fernandez pointed this out in a presentation he gave in Tucson that was re-published in the Tucson Citizen. He stated the following:

“When Jonathan Clark combed the great libraries of Mexico for details on the origins of the mariachi, he was surprised to come up nearly empty-handed. “I was really disappointed,” the mariachi authority admits. “Most of the books on Mexican music didn't even contain the word ‘mariachi’ in the index.” Even if the book were on folk music, Clark said the mariachi was pretty much treated in passing.

“After going to all the major libraries I realized the answers to my questions weren’t going to be in any books.” Clark spent the next 12 years in Mexico, becoming the first “gringo” to play regularly at Mexico City’s famed hub of mariachi activity, Plaza Garibaldi, and interviewing hundreds of old mariachi masters”.

While there now exist a handful of book titles, like Daniel Sheehy’s *Mariachi Music in America*, Patricia Greathouses’s *Mariachi* and Jesus Jaurergui’s *El Mariachi* (in Spanish), there are very few reference works that one can use to look up biographical information (Ramiro Burr’s *The Billboard Guide to Tejano and Regional Mexican Music* is the one exception and it’s already at least 10 years old) or information about the recording history of various groups and singers. In contrast, English language reference books about groups like the Beatles and performers like Frank Sinatra are plentiful.

This problem is not confined to popular music. It seems to be one that touches all forms of Latin American music. In a 1984 article titled, “Current State of Bibliographic Research in Latin American Music” (*Fontes Artes Musicae* vol 31/4, p207), Malena Kuss wrote about what she saw were major issues affecting research and study of music from this region of the world. Among them was: “the need for composite tools of bibliographic control that would consolidate and centralize all available materials in single volumes to facilitate coverage of Latin America in reference sources of international scope and eventually overcome the serendipity that has besieged research in Latin American music”. Another issue in need of attention is, “The fact that the most comprehensive lists of materials on music appear in inter-disciplinary bibliographies or in special publications which are often now well known outside the field of Latin American studies”.

Public libraries sometimes carry mariachi and ranchera music, but public library collections are notorious for high theft rates and damage to materials happens frequently.

Academic libraries with music libraries have not emphasized building collections of mariachi or ranchera music.

Reliance on vendors like Baker and Taylor and other companies that provide books and a-v materials to libraries makes acquiring materials outside the mainstream a problem. This is especially true for some of the major record labels from Mexico like Peerless and Musart, not to mention the smaller ones. Reliance on the giant labels like EMI, Sony and Columbia, often meant that Mexican mariachi and ranchera music is bypassed. This is still the case if one visits stores like Border Books. It rarely stocks and Mexican or ranchera artists.

I have a hunch that there are private collectors out there that have substantial collections and archives, but who are not willing to donate them to libraries or museums. One potential problem is that there is a cultural gap between collectors who are of Latino descent and the representatives of Libraries who wheel and deal to acquire archival collections. Funding is a major issue for archives, and in recent years, academic libraries with special collections have begun to require that the donors of materials also provide funding for processing and preservation of the materials. Many archives have huge backlogs of unprocessed and inaccessible treasures as a result.

We need more academics to write about Mexican music. While there now exist books that provide good introductions to mariachi and ranchera music, there is so much more that needs to be done. We need discographies, bibliographies, histories, handbooks, studies and biographies of those great musicians that have performed in these genres we call mariachi and la musica ranchera.

We need more people to step forward and advocate for community involvement and support from local and state, even our national government in creating archives, collections, museums and libraries of Mexican music. For a poor young child wanting to learn mariachi music, there is still the issue of access. Not everyone can afford to buy from Amazon or Ebay, nor should they have to. The problem as I see it is that our community has not had the means to support libraries and museums and archives and collections. However, we need to start. The collections developed by Chris Strachwitz at UCLA and the Diaz Ayala Collection in Florida are two examples of what should be happening throughout the Southwest.

Times have certainly changed. The availability of mp3 files, EBAY and Amazon have opened up the world of mariachi and ranchera music recordings to today's listener and fan. No longer does one have to scour the record racks at local record shops (which are practically non-existent these days anyhow). There are now some good introductory works on mariachi music available, and classic movies are now a dime a dozen on the internet.

It would be easy to dismiss all of this, since one could argue that this music belongs to Mexico, and the Mexican people should be responsible for writing their own history. However, I believe this view is short-sighted because on this side of the border this music has played probably an even more important role in our culture. It has connected us to who we are and has touched our souls and our spirits. There is so much to lose if we don't start advocating that libraries collect Mexican music, that our museums and historical societies start paying more attention to our culture. We have to be our own advocates and we have to raise our voices and be heard. It is not enough to have festivals or mariachi education in the schools. We have to preserve our history for future generations.