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UNT musicians bring new Latin sound to Dallas

By Reporter on September 2, 2014

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Matt Wood / Senior Staff Writer

With an army of percussive instruments, powerful vocalists and guitarists, Los Patos Poderosos play with a celebratory vigor as they bridge Latin and American music.

Los Patos Poderosos, Spanish for “The Mighty Ducks,” is a Latin music group made up of UNT students, alumni and faculty. The group has performed in Dallas and Fort Worth, but largely plays in Denton.

The band’s roster consists of three vocalists, two guitarists, an electric bassist, two percussionists and a keyboardist. Typically, however, the band only plays with one or two members from each section at a time, depending on which members are available to play a show.



Currently, the band is comprised of teaching fellow Laura Otero, Mafe Naranjo, and Monica Gastelumendi on vocals; Chris Hokamp and Ronin Delisle on guitar; Jesse Coulter on bass; and Joe Cripps and Andrew Scott on percussion.

Blending Cultures through Music

The style the band plays is rooted in the Latin cumbia style, which prominently features a specific rhythmic pattern of two short notes followed by a long one, bassist Coulter said. More specifically, the band plays what is called Peruvian cumbia, or chicha music.

Chicha, a subgenre of the cumbia style, combines elements of Latin music with the influences of 1960s psychedelic rock. The genre was born in Peru in the ‘60s, and Coulter said the fusing of the two musical styles makes for a more approachable style of Latin music.

“It’s distinctive because it uses more garage-rock type instruments, instead of traditional instruments like an accordion,” he said. “It’s a little more like pop music and more American-influenced.”

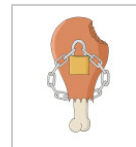
Making the Band

Coulter said he and another founding member, Chris Hokamp, were attending UNT when they discovered chicha music.

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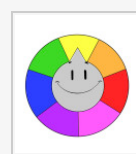
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“It kind of fell in our laps, and we just ran with the idea of making a band,” he said. “People just kind of appeared to do it with us.”

In his experience with the band since its forming in fall 2012, Coulter said playing with the group has been fulfilling because of the people he’s played with and the opportunity to work with the university.

“It’s been awesome,” he said. “We’ve been lucky to have a connection with UNT and to present the music to people.”

In the different environments they’ve played, Coulter said audiences have been very receptive to what they present.

“It’s party music,” he said. “It’s a very adaptable form of music. You can turn almost any song into a cumbia and people respond to that.”

Gathering Fans

About two weeks ago, the band played in Dallas at The Wild Detectives, a bookstore and coffee shop, for the store’s “Chicha Night,” which celebrated Latin culture with music and food. One of the owners, Javier Garcia del Moral, said the band was a perfect fit for capturing the spirit of the event.

“They just created the vibe we were looking for,” he said. “The band and specifically their singer made a huge effort to bring the people into the music and create an inviting environment.”

Moral said the band made sure that regardless of whether or not people were familiar with the chicha genre, they would become fans by the end of the night. It proved effective. Moral said the band played three encores per the request of the audience.

The band was set up with Moral through the Chasquis group, a Dallas-based multicultural production company headed by Victor Rimach. Rimach discovered the group while he was in Peru after a musician told him about a chicha band from Denton.

“The experience with them has been phenomenal,” he said. “Los Patos Poderosos has a solid line of musicians. Most of them graduated from UNT.”

Particularly, Rimach said the main vocalist, Laura Otero, was classically trained and has a commanding stage presence. He said the band does an incredible job presenting a genre that is relatively unknown in America.

“Chicha music has been a very strong force in the reinvention of contemporary popular music in Peru,” he said.

Rimach said the genre is flourishing in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, citing diversity and the Hispanic population as key factors in its success.

“I’m really proud to see the Dallas scene accepting this movement with open arms,” he said. “You will never contain yourself from the contagious rhythm of chicha music.”

In recognizing their work and enthusiasm, Moral said the band’s celebration of culture and exceptional talent was reflected in their performance, and that he has a huge amount of respect for what the group is doing.

“Bands like this are helping to promote styles that most people aren’t aware of,” he said. “That’s what we’re all trying to do, take these things we enjoy and share them with others.”

Featured Image: Los Patos Paoderosos, a UNT band comprise of faculty members, plays for a packed house at The Wild Detectives, a bookstore and bar, on Aug 24 in Oak Cliff. Photo courtesy of The Wild Detectives’ Facebook



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