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Elevating My Chicana Feminist Consciousness through the United States' First Female Show Mariachi

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ELEVATING MY CHICANA FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH THE
UNITED STATES' FIRST FEMALE SHOW MARIACHI

A Thesis

by

MONICA A. FOGELQUIST

Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF MUSIC

August 2017

Major Subject: Ethnomusicology

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August 2017

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ABSTRACT

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Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles is widely recognized as the premier all-female mariachi in the world. In my thesis, I examine the gendered implications of a female group directed by a man and their relation to Mexican and Mexican-American gender ideologies. Many of the ideas on gender roles traditionally inculcated in previous generations of Mexican and Mexican-Americans are still manifest in the ways in which the group functions. Through my personal testimony as a former member, and accounts by other past and present members of Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles, I argue that Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles has given women a voice in the mariachi world, but the voice is that of one man's interpretation of the ideal female mariachi musician.

DEDICATION

The completion of my Master's Degree would not be possible without the love and support of my family and compañeras. To my parents, Mark and Ina, thank you for always believing in me and for instilling a love of music in me. To my spiritual brother, Ricardo, thank you for the countless words of encouragement along the way. To my sisters in music, Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles, thank you for your everlasting friendship; my life would not be the same without you.

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This thesis would not have been realized without the relentless support and encouragement from my thesis committee chair, Dr. Andrés Amado. His vast body of knowledge paired with guidance, kindness, and an immense amount of patience are what have allowed me to complete my studies at this level. I would also like to thank Dr. Stephanie Álvarez for igniting an excitement for Mexican-American Studies in me, and for always making the impossible possible, for me as well as her other students through compassion and creativity. I thank Dr. Susan Hurley-Glowa for giving me a variety of outlets in which to share my love of mariachi music, for her generosity in and outside of the classroom, and for valuing my contributions as a scholar.

To all the members of my thesis committee: thank you for directing me to countless sources of information that have allowed me to better support my ongoing research. Thank you for your feedback and for not giving up on me.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I was 18 years old when I joined Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles. Since I had first seen the group at the Mariachi Spectacular Festival in Albuquerque, New Mexico four years before, I knew I wanted to be a part of this group. The group's founder, José Hernández, promoted the women in the group as the best female mariachi musicians in the business. Hernández, considered as a musical giant in the mariachi world, gave women an empowering space, making possible, the same musical opportunities and experiences he gave the members of his male group, Mariachi Sol de México. I knew I wanted to be a part of this exclusive group of women, not only for the musical satisfaction that it would bring, but also because of the level of prestige it carried, with Hernández's stamp of approval as an individual musician.

When Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles performed, they took charge of the stage. They played songs like "La reina es el rey" and "Esta situación," both songs with themes of how a woman has control over the man and/or how she is no longer willing to put up with the man's wild ways. They performed classic songs made popular by the great *ranchera* singers of the past, including Amalia Mendoza, Lucha Villa, and Lola Beltrán. They connected with the audience in a playful, campy manner, and were wildly popular with the large crowds they entertained. They represented the modern Mexican-American mariachi musician, adhering to musical and cultural values that were part of mariachi territory. There was no element about that

group that was unappealing to me, and I made it a personal goal to become a part of the group I admired so much.

When I first joined the group, I was completely infatuated. I spent as much time as I could, practicing the music. When I received my pink *traje*, I was so excited about it that I took it to one of my history classes as part of a presentation.¹ I had the honor of wearing that traje symbolizing that I was part of a small group of women who had earned the distinct privilege of being a member of Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles.

During my seven-year tenure, I got a taste of many things: musical growth, a deeper understanding of mariachi music and my role as an individual and group member, and learned about the social implications that went along with being a member of “America’s First All-Female Show Mariachi.” Much of what I experienced was tangled in a web of misogyny and androcentric ideologies that come with Mexican culture. Even though this group was primarily comprised of Chicanas who had grown up in the greater Los Angeles area, the group was spearheaded by a man entrenched in customs and traditions of the old mariachi ways of Mexico. I was young, naïve, and impressionable when I joined Mariachi Reyna. When I left the group, I felt completely voided and believed that if I didn’t play with them, that I wouldn’t want to play anywhere else. What had this group done to me? Why did I find myself desperate to escape the group’s leadership, yet feel so empty in its absence?

¹ The traje de charro is the standard uniform worn by modern-day mariachi musicians. Prior to the 1930s, mariachi musicians wore the most common peasant attire of woven cotton pants and shirts with *huaraches*, leather sandals. As the mariachi became more urbanized and part of more prestigious social functions, the uniform changed. Mariachis borrowed the traditional Mexican horseman’s outfit, the traje de charro, consisting of riding pants, and jacket, along with a wide-brimmed sombrero.

It took me several years to find a new place in the mariachi world, one that brought musical and social satisfaction that I once thought only Mariachi Reyna could bring. I began teaching mariachi music at various schools in San Diego, California before going back to school to pursue a teaching credential in Spanish. When I completed my degree, I began working with my dad's mariachi, also based in San Diego, where I slowly began to regain a love for playing without feeling like I was in the wrong group. In 2013, Dr. Dahlia Guerra and Francisco Loera, co-directors of the University of Texas-Río Grande Valley's Mariachi Aztlán, recruited me to join the group while pursuing a Master's Degree. I jumped at the chance and moved to Texas, literally from one day to the next. It wasn't until I started analyzing music through a socio-cultural perspective in my classes that I began to reflect on what my experience in Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles meant to me as a person, and as a scholar. Were my experiences common among my *compañeras*, or were they isolated? What role did Mariachi Reyna play to empower female mariachis?

As I studied in a variety of disciplines, I felt that the best way to tell my story was to approach gender studies in music through *testimonio* and Chicana Feminist Epistemology. Both *testimonio* and Chicana Feminist Epistemology lie in the direct experience of the individual telling the story. Through my personal experiences, along with those of my colleagues, the personal tale of what the experience of being in a professional all-female mariachi was like could be brought to light.

Method: Testimonio

I have chosen to use *testimonio* as the research method for this thesis because it is based in the documentation of the experiences of oppressed groups of people. As a member of an all-

female ensemble led by a man steeped in traditional androcentric Mexican culture, the environment naturally lends itself to oppression, regardless of whether the oppression is acknowledged. Testimonio provides the opportunity to document and analyze these experiences, and to realize how they affect the lives of the women narrators. Testimonio is a narrative method developed within Latin American Studies. Due to its ability to empower oppressed communities by giving them a voice, the testimonio has found its way into several other academic disciplines, seeking to include a plurality of voices, including those of women of color. Lindsay Perez Huber summarizes various definitions of testimonio:

While there is no universal definition of testimonio...scholars have identified several important elements of testimonio to consider. For example, Yúdice describes testimonio as, 'authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation' (1991, 17). Brabeck describes testimonio as a 'verbal journey...of one's life experiences with attention to injustices one has suffered and the effect these injustices have had on one's life' (2001, 3). Cienfuegos and Monelli describe the process of testimonio, which allows the individual to transform past experience and personal identity, creating a new present and enhancing the future' (1983, 46). The Latina Feminist Group (2001) describes the method of testimonio as a way to create knowledge and theory through personal experiences, highlighting the significance of the process of testimonio in theorizing our own realities as Women of Color (2009, 643-644).

For this thesis, I find the method of testimonio appropriate to describe a very personal Chicana experience. Following the definitions outlined above I create my own narrative.

Another important component within my research to form my narrative has been the use of *pláticas*. *Pláticas*, or conversations between my *compañeras*, group colleagues, are defined by Dr. Francisco Guajardo (The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley) and Dr. Miguel Guajardo (Texas State University San Marcos) as "...an expressive cultural form shaped by listening, inquiry, storytelling, and story making that is akin to a nuanced, multi-dimensional conversation...when engaged in *plática*, we learned you have to pay attention to the story, to the form of the story, to the environment surrounding the story; you have to pay attention to the

question, to the form of the question, and to context” (Guajardo & Guajardo 2013, 160). I believe the inclusion of many casual pláticas I have engaged in with my compañeras over the past 16 years and have documented in different journals, allows me to further analyze my own thoughts, and that these exchanges between us serve only to enhance or solidify a point I am trying to make.

I write about my experiences as a member of Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles to shed light on the issues facing young Mexican-American women in Los Angeles working in a male-dominated industry. I discuss how such experiences have not only shaped me as a musician, but also how they have increased my awareness of the progress that my compañeras and I are making within the mariachi world, and to show that the responsibility for further progress lies in our own hands. This is my “verbal journey” of how I navigated my way through Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles. While much of the time spent there brought forth positive outcomes such as musical growth and friendships with the other women based in a deep appreciation for Mexican music, I cannot ignore the oppressive undertones of the environment in which the group thrived. My past experience along with the experiences that I have had since leaving Mariachi Reyna in 2008 have not only shaped my perception of being a member of that group, but also where I fit in as a female mariachi musician in general. My testimonio is directly tied to the theoretical framework of Chicana Feminist Epistemology.

Theoretical Framework: Chicana Feminist Epistemology

The Chicano and Second Wave feminist movements were incredibly important in making way for women to break the traditional confinements of the genre (Sheehy 2006, 87-89). The

Chicano Movement of the 1960s created an intense desire for Mexican-Americans to seek their heritage of origin and to create a new identity based on the culture of the motherland. The Second Wave Feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s sought to further the equal treatment and opportunities available to women in the United States. Women fought for equal educational opportunities, equal pay in the workforce, and other social and cultural inequalities (tavaana.org, 2017). Stemming from both the Chicano and Feminist Movements was the Chicana Feminist Movement. The Movement was driven by an awareness that not only were Chicanas standing up to white hegemony as Mexican-Americans, but also as women standing up to white and Mexican male hegemony:

With their growing involvement in the struggle for Chicano liberation and the emergence of the feminist movement, Chicanas are beginning to challenge every social institution, which contributes to and is responsible for their oppression, from inequality on the job to their role in the home. They are questioning “machismo,” discrimination in education, the double standard, the role of the Catholic Church, and all the backward ideology designed to keep women subjugated (Vidal 1971, 3).

The act of simply stating that Chicanas were aware of the inequalities of their reality, is a great contrast to the institutionalized attitudes pioneering Chicana feminist, Gloria Anzaldúa refers to. To no longer be willing to accept the unacceptable and join together in solidarity is what powered this change. The increased awareness and rejection of that oppression of Chicanas in the United States has indirectly influenced and changed the face of the modern-day mariachi.

As scholars continue to write about pioneering works of Chicana feminists, we see that there is a continued need to revisit these works in order to frame new works of the Chicana experience. Dolores Calderón has revisited Dolores Delgado Bernal’s *Using a Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research* to highlight important points when discussing the Chicana experience. The intersectionality of race, gender, ethnicity, and nationality create a space for “Chicana feminist perspectives that contribute to a decolonization of the research

process and inform our practice as activist scholars” (Calderón 2012, 514). Gloria Anzaldúa, suggests that new narratives embody alternative paradigms in research (Calderón 2012, 515). Chicana feminists go against traditional forms of research and synthesis that often exclude people and the intersectionalities of race, class, gender, and sexuality that are experienced outside of the “traditional Western” perspective. Delgado Bernal, drawing on the work of Anzaldúa as well as other United States Third World Feminists, proposes that Chicana feminist epistemology “privileges the life experiences and knowledge of Chicanas...paving the way for education scholars to employ Chicana feminist systems of knowing into their scholarship” (Calderón 2012, 515).

As a musician and scholar, I have been able to further contextualize my experiences into ones that give unique meaning as a Mexican or Chicana woman centered in a misogynistic musical space. As Delgado Bernal states:

...Chicana scholars [who] have challenged the historical and ideological representation of Chicanas, relocated them to a central position in the research, and asked distinctively Chicana feminist research questions, all important characteristics of a Chicana feminist epistemology. By shifting the analysis onto Chicanas and their race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality, scholars are able to address the shortcomings of traditional patriarchal and liberal feminist scholarship, thereby giving voice to Chicana experiences and bringing change to their lives (1998, 559).

My various perspectives can highlight issues that continue to plague women and their progress in the world of mariachi. Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles has created a space for women, primarily Chicanas, allowing them to perform Mexican folkloric music while maintaining musical integrity. In spite of this, antiquated Mexican patriarchal practices and philosophies stifle the musical and social progress of women in the broader mariachi genre.

By sharing my testimonio from a Chicana Feminist perspective, I hope to encourage the growth of a body of literature by Chicana musicians, which I believe can become a source of

collective empowerment. Such perspectives can bring forth different issues that individuals may continue to perceive as taboo, and thus not feel comfortable to explore them openly in other settings. By bringing about melding our experiences together as women mariachi musicians, we can put forth a more comprehensive understanding of what it is to work as a Chicana mariachi musician in a variety of contexts. If we leave the analysis solely in the framework of a different time, perspective, and purpose, we limit the information that can be extracted, and ultimately deemed of value.

In this thesis I explore my experiences along with the experiences of my compañeras as members of Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles, an all-female mariachi group under the direction of a man, to investigate questions that relate to the female mariachi experience: What are the implications of having a male director? How does this affect the musical and social output of the group? To what extent are women empowered under this model, and how can women find ways to empower each other in this context? Through my own testimonio and analytical reflections based on ethnomusicological and gender studies scholarship, I show that Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles has given women a voice in the mariachi world, but the voice is that of one man's interpretation of the ideal female mariachi musician.

I will argue this point in the thesis in several parts. In chapter two, I chronicle women's entrance into the mariachi profession. In this chapter, I explain how the social changes that were in motion during the 1960s and 1970s allowed for the inclusion of more people in the production of mariachi music than ever before. I explain the development of female mariachi ensembles in Mexico, which were the precursors to the rise in female groups in the United States. It is also important to mention Rebecca Gonzales, who was the first woman to be fully integrated in a professional mariachi ensemble as a case study of these developments. Whereas mariachi music

was a primarily oral tradition passed generationally throughout Mexico, the influx of mariachi musicians in the United States along with the incorporation of mariachi music in public school systems among other developments, made it possible for the participant pool to include people who may not have fit the “traditional” mariachi mold.

In chapter three, I present my testimonio or my experience as a member of Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles. As I narrate my story, I explore various facets of the female mariachi experience, and reflect on how the nature of the mariachi tradition may limit musical and social opportunities for women in this line of work.

Finally, in chapter four, I discuss how this research can be further developed. Since the founding of Mariachi Reyna in 1994, there have been many offshoots, creating more performance spaces for women in mariachi music. Have these groups followed the Mariachi Reyna model based on the mandates of a male director? If so, what is the impact over the musical and social outputs? If women run the group, is there a different outcome? Where does the future lie for these groups along with Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles? As we become increasingly aware of the challenges we face as female mariachi musicians, we can look forward to solutions or alternatives that will lead to a position of collective empowerment and forward thrust changes in stagnant models of conduct within the female mariachi experience.

CHAPTER II

MAKE WAY FOR WOMEN, MARIACHI!

As mentioned in chapter one, I maintain that although women have made considerable progress as performers of mariachi music, androcentric ideas embedded in Mexican culture perpetually influence the musical tradition. Performance opportunities for female mariachis are frequently controlled or constrained by the dominating male perspective on the genre. Identification with mariachi by its performers has tended to follow rather rigid gender lines. Within the history of mariachi as a genre, female performers have been marginalized and/or often viewed as an interesting novelty within a male-dominated arena. Before I go into my personal experiences as a performer in chapter three, I will provide a brief overview of the development of mariachi in Mexico and the US, and then focus in more detail on contributions to this style by female musicians. Based on my research and experiences as a performer, I suggest that full integration into the world of mariachi will only be achieved by female groups who perform at the very highest possible standards in musicianship, as mentors, and through professional business practices.

In the early days of what is considered to be the modern mariachi (1930s and beyond), women participants were virtually non-existent. The few women who represented *ranchera* music, including Lucha Reyes and Matilde Sánchez were solo singers. Women were a rarity in the working mariachi groups of the day, and all-female mariachi groups were unheard of. Mariachi music was a generational and oral tradition, with the music typically being passed

down to the sons and nephews of existing male musicians. In the event that the younger generations of a family were girls, the musical heritage would be passed down to them (Pérez, 2014). Although there were women musicians in Mexico, they were not highly visible in the community.

However, in 1948 Victor Angulo and his wife, Adela founded the first known all-female mariachi group in Mexico, *Adela y su mariachi de muchachas* (Pérez, 2014). The members of the group were nieces of Angulo, and daughters or other relatives of active mariachi musicians. This group and others such as *Las Coronelas* and *Estrellas de México* began appearing in Mexico and touring with prominent male mariachi groups throughout the country. Groups such as Mariachi Estrellitas from Mexico City toured in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Chicago, Illinois (Muñoz, 2007). They were also featured on a local Christmas television show recorded in Weslaco, Texas. However, these early groups were not particularly well known for their musical skills, and were considered a novelty act among the established male ensembles (Pérez, 2014).

Although these groups enjoyed success with their audiences, they eventually faded into obscurity, as many of the members left music to fulfill their expected social roles as wives, mothers, and caretakers. The unconscious oppression of the early women mariachis of Mexico contributed to their demise. The increased awareness and rejection of that oppression of Chicanas in the United States indirectly influenced and changed the face of the modern-day mariachi.

By the 1960s and 1970s intense social revolutions were in motion, which opened doors for the inclusion of women in mariachi music. Shortly after mariachi music made its way to the United States, civil rights were at the forefront of societal issues. The second-wave feminist movement and the Chicano movement both developed as part of demand for equality and civil

rights for women and Latinos. Stemming from both the Chicano and feminist movements was the Chicana feminist movement. This movement was driven by an awareness that Chicanas were facing a double set of challenges: standing up to white hegemony as Mexican Americans, and holding their own in the face of white and Mexican male hegemony:

With their growing involvement in the struggle for Chicano liberation and the emergence of the feminist movement, Chicanas are beginning to challenge every social institution, which contributes to and is responsible for their oppression, from inequality on the job to their role in the home. They are questioning “machismo,” discrimination in education, the double standard, the role of the Catholic Church, and all the backward ideology designed to keep women subjugated (Vidal 1971, 3).

The act of simply stating that Chicanas were aware of the inequalities of their reality is a great contrast to the institutionalized attitudes Gloria Anzaldúa refers to. To no longer be willing to accept the unacceptable and join together in solidarity is what powered this change.

The second-wave feminist movement sought to further the equal treatment and opportunities available to women in the United States. Women fought for equal educational opportunities, for equal pay in the workforce, and for balance in other social realms, including music making. However there were tensions within this movement between the different needs and challenges facing white, cis-gender, middle class women, and women of color, who felt often torn between supporting civil rights for their own minority groups whose patriarchy oppressed them, and feminism where they were second class to white heterosexual middle class women. Yet, the Chicano and second-wave feminist movements proved to be important catalysts for women who wanted to break through the traditionally gendered confinements of mariachi music in particular, creating opportunities and the means for women to begin to participate in performances (Sheehy 2006, 87-89). The Chicano movement of the 1960s created an intense desire for Mexican-Americans to embrace their heritages, and to create a new identity

that includes the culture of the motherland, and mariachi music was an important community symbol.

Another result of the Chicano movement was public school system reforms that promoted equal educational rights for all students, as well as bilingual and multicultural education programs that often times resulted in culturally enriching educational opportunities. This included the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 and the Title IX Education Amendment of 1972, which prohibited gender discrimination of students in any educational program funded by the federal government (US Dept. of Labor).

These legislated socio-cultural changes impacted both how mariachi music was taught, and who received musical training in the United States. Unlike in Mexico, where the music was primarily passed down orally through family tradition, mariachi music soon became incorporated in the United States public education system in some states including California, Texas, and Arizona, allowing for girls to be included in this musical tradition (Sheehy 2006, 87-89). The ethnomusicology department at UCLA was the first educational institution to offer a mariachi program to its students. Graduate student Donn Borchardt founded the program in 1961 (UCLA, 2009). The ensemble continued its development under the tutelage of Jesús Sánchez, a retired mariachi musician from Mexico. The study of mariachi music was open to all students, and both men and women participated in the performing ensemble. Eventually, the group left UCLA and became a professional group, Mariachi Uclatlán, directed by Mark Fogelquist from 1973 to 1993. Fogelquist played an important role in creating opportunities for female mariachis in the 1970s. He was an ethnomusicology student at UCLA, and later became the director of the campus Mariachi Uclatlán early in that decade. While taking a hiatus from his graduate studies, he taught mariachi music at San Jose City College. He met Rebecca Gonzales in that context, a

young Chicana raised in Northern California who had studied the violin and had played in local orchestras. Impressed with her musical ability, Fogelquist recruited her for his mariachi class and eventually invited her to play with Uclatlán.

Before Gonzales joined the ensemble, the presence of women in the Los Angeles mariachi scene was unprecedented due to long-standing ideas ingrained in Mexican culture that confined women to the home as wives, mothers, and caretakers. As Gloria Anzaldúa states:

Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them...the culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. The culture and the Church insist that women are subservient to males...the onus is still on woman to be a wife/mother...women are made to feel total failures if they don't marry and have children (1987, 38-39).

Culturally, Mexican women, even more so than Anglo women are expected to remain in the home, rear children, clean the house, and take care of their husbands (Anzaldúa 1987, 38-40). Not embracing the prescribed lifestyle may be considered as selfish or to be a social failure (Anzaldúa 1987, 38-40). These internalized ideas are transmitted to all parts of society and culture, including music. This long-held conservative mindset upholding patriarchal standards works very much against the creation and success of an all-female mariachi group.

Times and attitudes are slowly beginning to change. As a consequence of intense activism relating to feminism, civil rights, and the Chicano movement in the 1970s, the social contexts in which Mexican and Mexican-American women operate now differ from those considered traditional, allowing new freedom in women's behavior and choices. Interactions between Mexican-Americans and other groups in the U.S. have also facilitated changes in accepted gender norms. For example, my father's non-Mexican background allowed him to approach mariachi ensembles (and female participation in them) more openly than other musical directors with more traditional backgrounds. He grew up in the United States with parents who

worked as professors and who believed in gender equality. My grandparents raised my father and his brothers to view education, employment, and daily chores without gender privilege or discrimination.

When Fogelquist recruited Gonzales to join Mariachi Uclatlán in 1975, he stated that gender was not a determinant of whether she would be in the group:

I wasn't really thinking about gender because...my experience in the mariachi world started off at UCLA. Rebecca's first exposure to mariachi music was in the class that I was teaching at San Jose City College, and there were a lot of girls involved in that class. And when I brought her to Mariachi Uclatlán, I was just looking for a good violinist...who could sing, and she was a good violinist who could sing. And, I didn't have the prejudices that say, a Mexican mariachi musician who grew up in this all-male tradition would have had. I didn't carry those concepts with me. Rebecca was a fantastic person for breaking that gender barrier because she was so good...It was like Jackie Robinson...in baseball. Who could say he didn't belong there? ...Who could say he was thrown in just as a gimmick or something? He was good...and so was Rebecca (Sheehy 2006, 88).

Although my father did not see gender limitations, traditional mariachis were more reluctant to accept women in their group. Nevertheless, after playing with Mariachi Uclatlán for a year, Gonzales was recruited by Nati Cano to join his Mariachi Los Camperos, the exemplary mariachi group of Los Angeles. Cano stated in an interview that even after he hired Gonzales, other members of his group were resistant to the idea of a woman playing next to them:

Oh, people got mad at me. "But why? Why a woman? ...And it was during the women's liberation movement and all that, right? The television stations came, all the major television stations. "Now at La Fonda [Restaurant], a surprise..." And look what has occurred. That is, all of a sudden, the girls in the schools said, "Hey, it is possible. Why not?" (Sheehy 2006, p. 88-89)

In a pioneering new mindset in the 1970s, Cano did encourage the participation of women in mariachi music, unlike other directors who clearly saw their inclusion as a problem. "Some of the established mariachi players declared that they were ruining the music. Pedro Rey of Los Galleros de Pedro Rey said that they were disgracing mariachi music. Others complained

that they were taking all the jobs. Some thought they looked ridiculous. Some thought they had no right to be there” (Reifler 2015, 15-16).

For many Mexican men living in Mexico and in the United States, the idea of having women enter their professional and social spheres was unacceptable, and some continue to feel this way many decades later. During the 1970s there were many radical social changes in the United States. Women were taking a stance and declaring their independence, demanding equality in the home and workplace, and taking on various educational and professional endeavors. The radical social changes in the US certainly did affect the lives of many white, middle-class women at the center of the Women’s Liberation movement, but the situation for Chicanas in the United States was different because of conservative defense for traditional gender roles. Vidal states, “Chicano philosophy...believes that the Chicana women’s place is in the home and that her role is that of a mother with a large family. Women who do not accept this philosophy are charged with betrayal of ‘our culture and heritage’” (1971, 8). Staying away from anything associated with the women’s liberation movement, including opening musical opportunities to all people is encouraged as an “Anglo thing” (1971, 6). This is only another tool of the oppressor to keep progressive ideas out of the heads of the group they wish to continue oppressing. It is important to point out that Gonzales was a Chicana who grew up in Northern California. She was one of the individuals benefitting from school music programs, and someone whose parents clearly valued the cultural contribution that the mariachi made on their daughter’s life. For the men that dominated the mariachi scene, educational, cultural, and musical opportunities open to both men and women were conceptually a far stretch.

Rebecca Gonzales’ groundbreaking entrance into the professional mariachi world was highly influential. Ironically, Pedro Rey, who had expressed great disdain for women mariachi

musicians in the late 1970s, eventually integrated violinist Laura Sobrino, a woman who got her start in mariachi music at the University of California, Santa Cruz, into his group in the late 1980s. Mónica Treviño of Tucson, Arizona, who started her musical training in a city youth program, became Gonzales' successor in Mariachi Los Camperos, also in the late 1980s.

Simultaneously, there was a resurgence of the all-female mariachi group in Mexico with the formation of Mariachi Las Perlitas Tapatías, based in Guadalajara, Jalisco. This group began performing at various mariachi festivals throughout the southwestern United States, and was extremely popular (lasperlitas.com.mx, 2017). However, as with their predecessors, they were seen as more of a novelty act than a serious ensemble, and they were not necessarily regarded for their high-quality music. They wore pretty dresses, danced on stage, and even removed their skirts at times to reveal shorter, tighter fitting skirts (Pérez 2002, 158). These gimmicks were crowd pleasers, but the group was not taken seriously among the male mariachi musicians. Former member, Maricela Martínez recalls the musical director of the group during her tenure (Crecencio Hernández, older brother of José Hernández): "...Pero él siempre nos miraba como una mina de oro...En general, éramos... como un coro de la iglesia...algo bonito, algo 'cute' para los demás músicos, era "hobby"... 'Mira estás haciéndolo bien pero nunca vas a llegar a tocar bien'" (personal communication, 2015)².

Although it was clearly going to be a challenge for an all-female mariachi ensemble to be taken seriously in Mexico, José Hernández saw Mariachi Las Perlitas Tapatías as inspiration to form his own all-female group, Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles (personal communication, 2001). It is important to highlight the role of public school programs in the United States in correlation to the development of the all-female group. With the establishment of public school mariachi programs, and the large numbers of female students, the talent pool increased in size,

² "He always saw us as a goldmine...Generally speaking, we were...like a church choir...something nice, something 'cute' for the other musicians, it was a 'hobby'... 'Look, you're doing okay, but you will never play well.'"

allowing for Hernández to recruit members for his new group. However, Hernández was not looking to create a group that was a gimmick. His mission was to create a mariachi group of women who would be on musical par with male mariachi groups.

CHAPTER III

MY TESTIMONIO: MARIACHI REYNA AND ME

When examining Mariachi Reyna under an analytical lens, I have to ask myself why I wanted join in the group so badly. I remember very clearly just turning 14 and seeing Mariachi Reyna in concert for the first time at the Mariachi Spectacular Festival in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The female musicians were flawlessly beautiful: they wore the most elegant trajes I had ever seen, and played the music very well. There was nothing I did not instantly admire about them as a group. In addition to the musical and physical aesthetic that made this group so appealing, they performed on a regular basis all over the country, something I had wanted to do since deciding I wanted to become a professional musician in middle school.

In about 1997, José Hernández, the group's founder and director, extended an invitation to me to eventually become part of the ensemble if I decided to attend college in Los Angeles, based on my potential as a young performer. Although only a freshman in high school at the time, I made it my goal to accept this invitation upon graduation. A few months after Hernández had invited me to the group, he sent me a copy of the group's first studio album. I was inspired by it, and I listened to the album countless times, dreaming that I would one day record with these remarkable musicians.

According to plan, I moved to Los Angeles in 2001 to attend Whittier College the very summer I graduated from high school, and soon joined the Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles. During my very first rehearsal, I took part in a recording of about 45 minutes worth of music that

I had to learn in just a week. Since school had not started, I had time to practice the music for several hours a day. Much to my dismay, none of the music I had spent rehearsing that week was rehearsed during the second rehearsal. Instead, we learned a new song, “La borrachita,” by ear. This proved to be quite a challenge for me, as my musical training up to that point had been largely based on reading music notation. I remember leaving the rehearsal feeling defeated and disappointed that I did not get to show what I had spent the week learning. Furthermore, learning the new music by ear was unfamiliar to me, and I was clearly less skilled at it than the other women. This second rehearsal was a small setback, but I remained committed and determined to assimilate into the ensemble.

The group dynamics within the ensemble also challenged my expectations. I soon found that the women whom I had admired from afar seemed territorial and not necessarily welcoming of new members like me in person. In addition, the charm that Hernández used on me as a recruiter quickly faded when I joined the group. He proved to be a stern taskmaster, setting a serious tone and establishing high expectations from the beginning of our professional relationship. In retrospect, I see that my socialization in the group was predicated upon how well I learned the “Reyna way.” For example, in my first year, the interactions I had with the members of the group were limited to conversations pertaining to group responsibilities. I remember that orders were barked at me if I didn’t play something up to standard, or if I didn’t follow a point of protocol that no one had bothered to explain beforehand. Reflecting on those rehearsals, I see now that I mostly learned the ropes through observation, trial and error. Because I had such admiration and respect for the women, I tried my hardest to do exactly as I was told in order to earn the respect of my new compañeras.

My First Concert

My first performance with Mariachi Reyna was on November 10, 2001. We left the group's home base, Cielito Lindo Restaurant in South El Monte, California early that morning. I was very excited to be finally traveling with the group, after three months of rehearsing without being included in a single performance. A few days before this first concert, I picked up my bright pink traje de charro from the *sastre*, as well as my pink boots, neck and hair *moños*, and earrings. I had all of my Reyna attire ready to go, and couldn't wait to put it all on.³ The moment I had dreamed of for years had finally arrived.

We traveled to San Diego to the concert venue, and I remember that even as excited as I was, there was a bit of an awkward feeling being among the women I had idolized for so many years. I was technically a member of the group, and yet I still didn't feel like I belonged. With the exception of one girl, no one went out of the way to make me feel welcome or socially accepted. As I reflect on that day more than sixteen years later, I realize that there could be a variety of factors why my compañeras did not immediately warm up to me as an ensemble member and fellow female musician. Perhaps I learned the music too slowly, or evoked envy or resentment by displacing another musician in the group's lineup. I remember during the last rehearsal before my first concert in San Diego, Hernández assigned me a song that was normally sung by the group's star singer. I so happened to give this girl a ride home after that rehearsal, and in a rather upset tone, she let me know that Hernández had "given" me her song, clearly expressing some anger and resentment about this decision. In my naïveté, I viewed José's action solely as an effort to give me a small role in the group as a new member. I would later realize that José used this replacement tactic within the ensemble on a regular basis to remind soloists

³ *Sastre*: tailor

Moños: the name used for the hair and neckties mariachis wear

that they were not indispensable, and that anyone could come in the group at any time and take their place.

Although I didn't find much support from my compañeras on that first San Diego performance occasion, I made the best musical contribution that I could during that concert and throughout my work with the ensemble, and my relationships with other group members gradually improved as I established my musical worth and their trust and affection. Mariachi Reyna was the only female group on the San Diego show's lineup. The other groups were Mariachi Sol de México, Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano, and Mariachi Los Reyes de México. I not only felt pressure to prove my worth to my compañeras, but also to help make the group sound as good as possible around the other groups, which we collectively admired so much.

And who were the players we admired? Men.

We were the only female group on the concert lineup, and with the exception of two women in Mariachi Los Reyes de México, the only women period. Because most professional mariachi groups are comprised of men, they are our role models. As more female groups have formed over the years, there are consequently more women to admire; yet the field is still dominated by men. Respect and admiration are earned through musical competency, so musicians with the highest level of musicianship and musical integrity become the greatest role models. However, because the format for the most recognized professional mariachi groups remains all male, the people whom both men and women look up to the most remain men.

A comparative look at a promotional article that described the four ensembles participating in that San Diego concert illuminates the importance of gender. The writing on

male ensembles focuses on personnel and style while the author's description of the all female group is quite different:

“2001 Latin Grammy Award Nominee Mariachi Sol de México de José Hernández, a 14-member orchestrated group offering traditional sounds embellished with fresh, contemporary passion and powerful new rhythms.” (laprensa-sandiego.org, 2001)

“Nati Cano y Los Camperos, a pioneer in the mariachi renaissance in the United States and Mexico known for its amazing number of singer/instrumentalists.” (laprensa-sandiego.org, 2001)

“Mariachi Los Reyes de Mexico de Francisco González, known for introducing and featuring the accordion while paying tribute to Mexican artists and composers from past, present and future. Founder Francisco Javier González Bautista is the former first violinist and lead singer of the world-renowned Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán.” (laprensa-sandiego.org, 2001)

“Reyna de Los Angeles - America's first female mariachi group, a tradition-breaking ensemble whose music champions a return to romance, manners and solid values.” (laprensa-sandiego.org, 2001)

The descriptions of the male groups centered on their musical contributions and style, but comments on Mariachi Reyna played up the socially respectable and acceptable behavior of women on stage. There was no mention about the musicality of the group. Rather, the author focused on “a return to romance.” What does this include? 1) the projection of beautiful and seductive images; 2) proper manners—nothing vulgar or socially questionable, acting like a lady, and singing like a proper lady about proper topics; and 3) solid values—those that follow a societal norm, limiting the way a woman should speak, behave, and express herself even through music. The problem with this description is that it fails to tell what kind of musical group it is. The other descriptions of the male groups made no mention of social or cultural values that the men maintained as performers but the women were held to a different standard that wasn't exclusively based on musical abilities.

This begs that question why the description of Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles didn't focus on the musical contribution it has made to the mariachi world. Couldn't the description have read:

“America's first all-female show mariachi, known for its diverse repertoire, instrumental and vocal excellence, and entertaining and engaging showmanship”? Why was the focus on appearance and moral values? If this group is supposed to be known for its musical quality and competence, why is the focus shifted only to how these women are to be perceived by the audience? It seems that the answers to these questions have deep roots in Mexican and Mexican-American cultural values and expectations that are very slow to change when it comes to women's behavior.

“Do Not Play Like a Girl”

Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles was founded in 1994 by José Hernández, a fifth-generation mariachi musician born in Mexicali, Baja California and raised in Pico Rivera, California. The youngest of eight children, Hernández followed in the footsteps of his father and brothers, all of whom were active in the Los Angeles mariachi scene. His oldest brother, Pedro Rey, was the founder and director of Mariachi Los Galleros, one of the most influential groups in Los Angeles. Hernández performed with the group and produced musical arrangements until the founding of his own group, Mariachi Sol de México in 1981 (sroartists.com, 2012). Hernández has always maintained a high level of musical integrity that has attracted many of the most well respected mariachi musicians in the world. His adherence to traditional mariachi music while incorporating contemporary musical sounds and styles has made his groups attractive to musicians and audiences alike.

When Hernández founded Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles, it was his mission to create a group that would earn the respect of other mariachi groups. At this time, the only other female show group that existed was Mariachi Las Perlitas Tapatías of Guadalajara, Jalisco (Los Angeles Times, 1995). While this group was visually entertaining, the musical component was less than stellar. Although it was Hernández’s intention to create a space for many women to come together and play mariachi music (as opposed to having a token woman in a traditionally male ensemble), engrained misogynistic ideologies that accompanied Mexican and Mexican-American culture are unconsciously revealed between Hernández and his female group members. In an interview during the early years of Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles’ existence, Hernández was quoted as saying that it was important for the female musicians to earn the respect of their male peers, but said in a way that exposed a few unpleasant caveats. He stated, “I didn’t want guys to say, ‘They play like girls.’ Now the guys from other groups come up to me and say they can’t get over how these girls sound. They go, ‘If you close your eyes they sound just like guys’” (Los Angeles Times, 1995). The interview went on to say how this type of talk was pleasing to Laura Sobrino, Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles’ group coordinator at the time. Although many would agree that it is complimentary to have the approval of those we admire and respect, the attitude expressed by Hernández highly emphasizes that the woman remains the ‘other’ and that for women, the group sounds good, but only if they are capable of sounding like those “in charge.”

The pressure to measure up to the musical standards of the dominant force in the mariachi world is strong. One of my compañeras Sylvia Hinojosa, a founding and current member of the group, expresses how the music was always a priority for the success of the group:

When I first started, I was 13 years old and the youngest member, and less experienced in the group. We had members like Laura Sobrino, Cindy Reifler, and Cathy Baeza who had played for years with experienced male mariachis like *Sol de México* and *Los Galleros* de Pedro Rey. These women set the example of great mariachi style and precision. Our director, José Hernández, had only worked with an all male mariachi, which brought forth a certain discipline to the group. We were very uniformed not only in appearance but in image as well” (personal communication, 2014).

The internalized sexist ideas in Hinojosa’s testimony are strong. Mariachi scholar Leonor Pérez cites musicologist Susan McClary stating that the members of a social group will internalize the norms of their chosen music culture and respond accordingly (2002, 159). For example, the men who dominate a musical form or genre typically establish certain musical expectations, and the women involved typically follow in the same mold without question. It becomes a part of what they recognize as the norm. In mariachi, male (or even macho) expectations for learning music at a certain rate, keeping up with more demanding musical arrangements, and pushing oneself beyond his or her limits in order to keep a spot in the group is common in female groups, as well. Another compañera, Karla Tovar, who has been with the group for 18 years, has stated that she continues to work hard to keep up with the group’s musical demands:

Looking back, I think the musicality of our group has evolved and has become more challenging. The difference can even be heard when listening to Reyna’s first album compared to the latest one. I think the overall musicianship has continued to improve and our sound has reached an elite level which proves that we belong and we hold our own against other elite all male groups...I continue to push myself musically in order to keep Reyna” (personal communication, 2014).

Although musical quality is necessary for the success of a group, throughout conversations over the years with past and present members of Mariachi Reyna, many of the women placed such a great deal of emphasis on the subject. Knowing one’s instrument and being able to defend oneself in a man’s world was a constant theme. Jeanette Martínez, who is a

relatively new member of the group, testifies that she feels she must prove herself worthy of her place in the group, but also as a teacher of younger male generations:

One of the greatest challenges I have faced would be to be taken seriously. There have been quite a few [mariachi] workshops that I have been the instructor for, and at times it seems like even the younger boys don't want to take you seriously. It is as if they don't believe that you are capable of being *their* instructor. It is a challenge because I feel a need to prove myself to these students and even teachers. I take this challenge very seriously. It keeps me on my toes and it makes me want to strive and be one step ahead in order to become a better musician. I believe that when José Hernández writes for our female group, he demands constant growth and progress, which will help maximize my potential (personal communication, 2014).

Anzaldúa tells, "The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system" (1987, 39). This means that women constantly have to work harder than the men to prove themselves and earn a certain level of respect. Of course this is not limited to Mexican or Mexican-American gender ideology, holding true for anyone who does not identify as a white, heterosexual male in our society.

This notion of earning respect is absolutely integral to my identity as a female mariachi. I remember going into the group feeling that I was an adequately prepared musician, but it was not long before I realized that I had a lot of catching up to do to compete with the other young women in the group. This manifested itself in some new realities. For example, I was used to playing the 1st violin part in my previous group. When I joined Mariachi Reyna, I was assigned to play 2nd violin, a part that often sounded foreign and distorted to my untrained ears. Secondly, Mariachi Reyna learned about 90% of the music by ear, another concept that was foreign to me. I remember struggling for the first few weeks to catch on to what the group was playing. I felt that both Hernández and the other girls would grow impatient with me if I learned too slowly.

In retrospect, my self-inflicted feelings of inadequacy created a powerful learning experience about will and desire. These women were applying the same type of pressure on me

that they had come to expect from Hernández. There was an expectation that if you were in that group, that you would come up to the level of the group in a short amount of time, or you would be replaced. My previous background had perhaps not prepared me for this, but I was determined to earn the respect of my leader and of the other girls, whom I looked up to and admired so much. In the end, I believe that the culture of the group has developed because there is a constant pressure to impress and earn the respect of the group's male director and the male musicians in his group, who often times share the stage with Mariachi Reyna. The desire to impress each other as members of the same group is also present. Within the group lie leaders, those who have had more professional experience on the outside or perhaps more formal training that allows them to become mentors to fellow members. The fact that the arrangements for the group have evolved and become much more complex goes to show that the women in the group have risen to the highest possible standard, which directly correlates to earning and keeping not only the male counterparts' respect, but a respect and admiration amongst each other.

Perpetuating Asymmetrical Gender dichotomies in Search of Legitimacy

The challenges women face in the mariachi world are not unique. Ethnomusicologists have long studied the role of women in music, and sometime identified similar patterns (Koskoff 1989, 10). Alan Merriam has stated, "music reflects, and in a sense symbolizes, male-female roles" (p. 248). Ellen Koskoff states, "In all known societies, men's actions receive higher value and prestige, and loss of male status is equated with female-behavior" (1989, 10). Returning to Hernández's quote about Mariachi Reyna sounding "like guys," the idea quite clearly implies that sounding like women is a negative thing. If sentiments of inferiority and powerlessness are associated with the female gender, strength in our culture comes in having a man spearhead the

operation in order to legitimize it. Although much of the success of Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles is deservedly attributed to director José Hernández, the women in the group are the ones to have bred its success. The women are the people bringing the music to life, setting their own standards within the group to make good music, and to represent Mexican and Chicana women nationally and internationally. Perhaps the initial motivation has been to earn the respect of Hernández and other renowned musicians, but throughout the group's trajectory, the desire to impress and support each other in our musical and professional endeavors has developed for the sake of becoming the strongest unit possible.

However, social asymmetry remains the "norm" in many contemporary societies, and the members may not be aware of or care about these asymmetries. Music can be a very powerful vehicle to bring awareness about these social asymmetries, ultimately enacting change. Ellen Koskoff states:

Music serves as one of the best contexts for observing and understanding gender structure of a society because musical and social dynamics share notions of power and control...Music performance plays an important role in inter-gender relations, because inequalities perceived may be protested, mediated, reversed, transformed, or confirmed through social or musical strategies (1989, 10).

Hernández almost exclusively controls the repertoire that Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles plays. However, within that repertoire are small samples of songs of empowerment, standing up to men and saying "no more." One such song, "Esta situación," allows for the singer to stand up to her lazy, drunk, womanizing husband, which is something that Mexican and Chicana women may secretly support but generally keep to themselves. The way that the singer chooses a man from the audience to be the one called out on his indiscretions, leading to cheering and laughing from the crowd, lends a level of facetiousness that is light-hearted, but nonetheless bringing to light real issues that so many Mexican and Chicana women face on a

daily basis. As Vidal states in her *Marriage-Chicana Style*, “Chicanas should understand that Chicanos face oppression...but this does not mean that the Chicana should be a scapegoat for the man” (1971, 2). Deborah Vargas also gives insight to how music can be a powerful tool in reconfiguring cultural “norms”: “Throughout the twentieth century, scholars of Chicano music have theorized the ways in which music is a way of articulating resistant subjectivities, as well as claims to visibility and public space by Chicanas/os. In creating a canon of Chicano music, scholarly work has prioritized specific forms of ‘cultural resistance’” (2012, 174).

With artists in other musical genres such as Chelo Silva, *La reina tejana del bolero*, who was famous for her performances of no-nonsense, “I wear the pants” songs, a new identity for women is created, albeit in a fashion that is satirical and light-hearted. The interpretations of these songs in or outside of the mariachi world do serve as a way to generate alternative knowledge and subjectivities. Many of the scenarios that Chicana women face in their home lives cannot be openly expressed due to the asymmetrical gender dichotomy that exists within a family. A woman may not feel comfortable openly expressing disdain for her drunk, womanizing husband, yet through song, any subject is fair game, as long as it’s masked by a performer’s “alter ego,” so to speak. The themes of heartache, betrayal, truth about character, all topics that may be hard to speak about, come to life through song. As performers, we become empowered to spill sentiments that we may not be brave enough to express in a conversation. Through this expression, new knowledge is developed between people: what you couldn’t bring yourself to say at the kitchen table to your parents, partner, or loved ones has all been left on the stage. A consciousness is not only raised for the listener, but especially for the performer who may not have been so in touch with their thoughts and feelings until putting it into the context of

song. At this point, there is a shift in the traditional dichotomy where a woman feels empowered enough to openly express what is on her mind and in her heart.

“Appearance is Important, Ladies!”

Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles is known for its bright pink traje de charro. Throughout the group’s existence, many other female mariachi groups have imitated Mariachi Reyna’s style with pink trajes de charro of their own. This is certainly a stark contrast from the colors traditionally worn by male mariachi groups. Other colors that Mariachi Reyna includes in its wardrobe are purple and bright blue. Ironically (or not), the women of the group have never chosen the design of their outfits. Since the group’s inception, José Hernández has highly controlled the visual image of the group. Hair and makeup should be uniform and the only colors allowed are those conventionally associated with femininity.

While I never gave the colors much thought while wearing the different trajes, in retrospect, this was another way of perpetuating a socially imposed ideology of what it meant to look like a woman. As Pérez points out, the “traditional male-female dichotomy is accomplished through the heightening of female sexuality: by identifiable “female” characteristics in dress... traditional mariachi directors protect the image of the mariachi genre” (2002, 156). By controlling the visual output of the group, the supposed liberator remains an oppressor.

As I think back to my first concert and how I wore my pink traje with so much pride, a symbol of having truly “made it” in the mariachi world, I never realized what was to come with putting on that suit. There was great musical responsibility, but the pressure to look and act a certain way, to embody what the concert promoters emphasized when describing the group— “...America's first female mariachi group, a tradition-breaking ensemble whose music

champions a return to romance, manners and solid values,” almost overshadowed the musical responsibility.

Being overlooked for parts in the group because one doesn't “look the part” is a familiar tale to which several of my compañeras and I can attest. I remember being told countless times to “take care of myself,”—code for “lose weight or else.” Or else what? I would be overlooked for future job opportunities and roles within the group. This was and is currently not an uncommon practice. The pressure to look a certain way in the group could become a source of constant anxiety for any member, and I know it did for me. I was no longer preoccupied with learning my music. I was constantly worried about how I looked and if I was going to be invited to the group's next job. It didn't matter that I made a positive musical contribution to the group. I no longer fit within the ideal image of what a “reyna” should look like, and therefore, was not going to be allowed to participate any longer.

In the moment, I just felt disappointed that my musical merits were overlooked because of my physical appearance. I did not necessarily associate it with an oppressive and unjust model for running a group. Since we were all together and I had not been the first (nor the last, I'm sure) person to feel the pressure to conform to a certain look—it is no surprise that none of us thought to come together to stand up for what we felt was just or unjust treatment of a compañera. We accepted what the circumstances were, and remained silent, as we had for so many other scenarios within the group. It was not until I left the group and had been gone and part of other groups that I realized how distorted the reality of empowerment within the group was. When playing with groups that appreciated me for my musicality and placed no visible emphasis on my image, then I could genuinely say that I had made it as a female mariachi musician.

Adhering to the musical demands imposed by Hernández was vital to the group's long-running success. The initial desire to be respected by "the guys" served as an extrinsic motivator, which got the group off the ground. In the early days of Mariachi Reyna, there were no other groups of women to look up to that were on the same musical level or that shared the same level of prestige. Playing "like a guy" was the end goal. Playing "like a girl" was inferior, but you better look like a girl, a girl that all the guys would lust after. No one was interested in a girl who played like a guy, but didn't look like a model. As I stated before, while I was in the group, I was not conscious of the oppressive nature of my environment, as I suspect many of my compañeras who are no longer members were either. As for my compañeras who remain members of Mariachi Reyna, through their testimonio, it is apparent that they are conscious of the challenges they face within the group. As cliché as it may sound, realization is the first step towards change. Once we as a group of women realize that we are being limited musically and socially, then we can break past those limitations, look at and appreciate each other's contributions for what they are, and begin to empower each other. Once this occurs, we begin to own our social and musical environments.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles, because of their high level of musicality has been presented with many opportunities not given to previous female mariachi musicians. Their national and international tours, and their nominations for the American and Latin Grammys recognize the ensemble's contributions to Mexican music within mainstream American and Latin music industries. The early and continued success of Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles has inspired the formation of other groups and has opened opportunities for more women mariachi musicians to participate and showcase their talents.

In 1999 two female mariachis followed in the footsteps of Reyna de Los Ángeles and subsequently developed wide acclaim: Mariachi Mujer 2000, founded by Marisa Orduño, the original guitarrón player of Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles, and Mariachi Divas, a popular group in the Los Angeles area founded by Cindy Shea, a jazz trumpet player known for fusing Latin jazz with pop and mariachi music. Later, Las Colibrí founded by former Mariachi Divas member Susie García, has billed itself as an all-stringed ensemble. Although Mariachi Divas and Las Colibrí incorporate other musical elements not traditionally associated with mariachi music, they have successfully created new outlets for more women to participate in professional female mariachi ensembles. By incorporating other genres of music and borrowing elements from for example, Latin jazz, American jazz, and American pop, these groups not only make themselves marketable to varied audiences, but in turn create a transcultural musical process.

However, women still face many challenges within the larger mariachi community. It remains a rarity to see a woman in anything but the all-female ensembles. The majority of working mariachis are all male. When they participate in all-female groups, women are paid less, and are oftentimes overlooked as possible headliners at big mariachi concerts around the country. As my compañera, Karla once stated:

I would love to say that everything is equal and we're looked at as having the same talent but that wouldn't be true. There have been great strides within the past few years but we still have a way to go. I also think this is part of a larger social issue. If women aren't seen as equals in other fields of work, it's highly unlikely that they'll be seen as equals in the mariachi world, which has been a historically male-dominated culture (personal communication, 2014).

The fact that other groups are enjoying success proves that Mariachi Reyna has helped shape views on women mariachis for the better. However, the fact that women still are not able to make a full-time living as mariachi musicians unlike men is still a challenge. Plenty of female mariachi musicians, myself included, have stated that they would enjoy working full-time, but the opportunities do not yet exist. Most female mariachi musicians stay in school and pursue other careers; playing with the mariachi remains as a part-time "hobby."

Another compañera who recently graduated from UCLA was a member of Mariachi Reyna from 2012 to 2015 before leaving the group to pursue a career in teaching once stated:

In my eyes, playing with an all-female mariachi today is not a practical venture for someone who seeks a financially stable living. Female mariachis find themselves having to sacrifice the amount of time that they dedicate to mariachi because a career in mariachi is not as promising as a career in mariachi for men. I believe there will be a drastic influx of women prepared to take on a career in mariachi once female groups begin to play full-time. The numbers of women involved in mariachi are already there (personal communication, 2014).

Such statements reveal that the absence of all-female groups working full-time is not due to a lack of enthusiasm. Many women would like to work as career mariachi musicians. Either

enough work needs to be generated for these all-female groups to sustain its members without supplemental incomes, or more women need to be incorporated into full-time male groups.

Looking to a Future of Empowerment

Ironically the positive space created for women within the mariachi world has also increased gender segregation and has impeded musical collaborations among genders. Until men and women mariachi musicians come together and truly view each other as equals will the underlying power asymmetry be abolished.

Even so, given the levels of misogyny in the mariachi culture at large, Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles has helped change the face of mariachi. It was the first group recognized and respected by other mariachi musicians who were primarily men, not accustomed to seeing women interpret the music. As founding member Sylvia Hinojosa has said:

Mariachi Reyna has greatly impacted the mariachi industry in general. Before Mariachi Reyna, you didn't hear of an all-female group performing alongside prestigious mariachis like Mariachi Vargas and Mariachi Sol de México. Mariachi Reyna has set an inspirational example for all-female mariachi groups that have come after them and we are very proud of what all women mariachis have accomplished. Women have set a standard and a norm, and now a part of this genre can't be ignored (personal communication, 2014).

There is no denying that as women mariachi musicians, we must come together to educate and bring about awareness of our musical and intellectual contributions to further enact change and empower current and future generations of women mariachi musicians. In spite of the constricting working conditions within Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles, as the women continue to work and become more self-aware, I believe that they will empower themselves and other women who will follow. A sisterhood has grown from this common experience. As our pláticas of experiences inside and outside the group continue, we will further solidify our place,

which allows us to play and interpret our music in our own way, and thus perform our personal cultural identities, unique from others in the mariachi world.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Monica A. Fogelquist is a teacher, student, and professional mariachi musician. She began studying the violin in Whittier, California under the Suzuki Method when she was seven years old. Her father, a professional mariachi musician, moved the family to Wenatchee, Washington in 1993 where he pursued a career in bilingual education, and started the first student mariachi program in the Pacific Northwest. It was here that Monica began her study of mariachi music. She graduated from Wenatchee High School in 2001, and went on to major in Spanish and minor in history at Whittier College in Whittier, California. While she was a student at Whittier, she became a member of Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles, where she played from 2001 to 2008. In 2008, she enrolled at San Diego State University, where she obtained a BCLAD teaching credential with an emphasis in Spanish. She taught mariachi classes at various schools in the Sweetwater School District before teaching courses in Spanish, social studies, and general education at different schools in the Chula Vista Elementary School District.

In 2013, she was recruited by Dr. Dahlia Guerra and Francisco Loera, co-directors of UTRGV's Mariachi Aztlán, to play in the group while pursuing a Master's Degree, completing her degree in music with an emphasis in ethnomusicology, as well as a Graduate Certificate in Mexican-American Studies from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in August of 2017. She currently teaches mariachi music at Chaparral High School in Las Vegas, Nevada. She hopes to one day obtain a Ph.D. and teach mariachi music at the university level. Miss Fogelquist may be contacted through email at monica.fogelquist@gmail.com.