

“TALK TO ME”: THE STORY OF SAN ANTONIO’S WEST SIDE SOUND

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“TALK TO ME”: THE STORY OF SAN ANTONIO’S WEST SIDE SOUND

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## **DEDICATION**

To Gaga & Pacho

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  | <b>Page</b> |
|--|-------------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....  | vi          |
| CHAPTER  |             |
| I. INTRODUCTION.....   | 1           |
| II. THE EARLY YEARS OF THE WEST SIDE SOUND, 1944-1954.....   | 11          |
| III. THE GOLDEN YEARS OF THE WEST SIDE SOUND, 1955-1969..... | 35          |
| IV. “THE WEST SIDE SOUND ROLLS AGAIN”: 1970-1999.....        | 62          |
| V. CONCLUSION.....   | 87          |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY.....  | 92          |

## CHAPTER I:

### INTRODUCTION

Contrary to its name, the “West Side Sound” did not actually originate on the West Side of San Antonio. Nor, for that matter, is it a singular “sound” that can be easily defined or categorized. In fact, the term “West Side Sound” was not widely used until San Antonio musician Doug Sahm applied it to his band, the West Side Horns, on his 1983 album, *The West Side Sound Rolls Again*. Since then, journalists, music fans, and even Sahm himself have retrofitted the term to describe a particular style that emerged from San Antonio and the greater South Texas region beginning in the 1950s and continuing into the early twenty-first century.

So what, then, *is* the West Side Sound? To quote historian Allen Olsen, the West Side Sound is “a remarkable amalgamation of different ethnic musical influences found in and around San Antonio and South-Central Texas. It includes blues, *conjunto*, country, rhythm and blues, polka, swamp pop, rock and roll, and other seemingly disparate styles.”<sup>1</sup> To others, the West Side Sound is more of a feeling than a specific musical genre. In the words of Texas Tornados drummer Ernie Durawa, “it’s just that San Antonio *thing*...nowhere else in the world has it.”<sup>2</sup> Both descriptions of the West Side

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<sup>1</sup> Allen Olsen, “San Antonio’s West Side Sound,” *Journal of Texas Music History* 5, no. 1, Spring 2005, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Ernie Durawa, interview by the author, Austin, TX, February 3, 2013.

Sound are accurate, but they really only tell part of the story of this remarkable musical hybrid.

In order to fully understand the origins, evolution, and long-term impact of the West Side Sound, it is necessary to examine the social, cultural, and historical roots of this phenomenon, as well as the ways in which it helped redefine the larger musical landscape of the American Southwest and the entire nation. In an effort to provide a more complete understanding of this uniquely Texan musical idiom, this thesis examines the history of the West Side Sound throughout three distinct periods: its origins, its “golden years,” and its long-term impact on mainstream popular music. In addition to analyzing the origins and evolution of the West Side Sound, this study examines other related genres, such as Chicano Soul of the 1960s and Texas-Mexican music (or *música tejana*) of the 1970s, and how they influenced the West Side Sound.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis also looks at the impact of the so-called “Chitlin’ Circuit” on the development of the West Side Sound. The Chitlin’ Circuit was a loosely-knit network of black-friendly, and often black-owned, music venues that stretched across the racially-segregated South and Southwest during the Jim Crow era. The Chitlin’ Circuit was vital to the emergence of the West Side Sound, because it provided an arena in which African-American musicians, club owners, and audiences could share in a constantly evolving exchange of musical innovations and experiences with Anglo and Hispanic artists and music fans in San Antonio.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the best source for additional information on Chicano Soul is Ruben Molina’s *Chicano Soul: Recordings and History of an American Culture* (Los Angeles: Mictlan Publishing, 2007); The most comprehensive examination of Texas-Mexican music, or *Música Tejana*, is Manuel Peña’s *Música Tejana: The Cultural Economy of Artistic Transformation* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> For more on the Chitlin’ Circuit, see Alan Govenar, *Texas Blues: The Rise of a Contemporary Sound*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008).

As important as the “Chitlin’ Circuit” was throughout the entire South, it took on a whole new significance in terms of mixed-race live music performance in and around San Antonio.<sup>5</sup> Because San Antonio had long been a very ethnically diverse city, with large numbers of Hispanics, African Americans, Germans, Czechs, and others, it was not as rigidly segregated as most major southern cities of the early twentieth century. In fact, San Antonio was the first large city in the South to desegregate its public school system following the Supreme Court’s 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling that outlawed segregation in public schools.<sup>6</sup> In 1960, it also became the first major southern city to integrate public lunch counters.<sup>7</sup>

The proliferation of military bases in and around the Alamo City during World War II, and the desegregation of the U.S. military in 1948, also contributed to the increased social intermingling among those of different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. As Allen Olsen points out, this allowed for an atmosphere of “intercultural congeniality” in San Antonio not found in most other cities throughout the South.<sup>8</sup> This intercultural congeniality was especially apparent in certain local nightclubs, where musicians and audiences from different racial and ethnic backgrounds mingled rather freely. This helped create a unique environment in which artists could blend an eclectic array of styles into something exciting and unique. The saxophone-driven soul and

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<sup>5</sup> Preston Lauterbach, *The Chitlin’ Circuit and the Road to Rock ‘n Roll* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2011), 18.

<sup>6</sup> “San Antonio: A City Already Desegregated,” *St. Petersburg Times* (St. Petersburg, FL), October 6, 1963, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Goldberg, “Racial Change on the Southern Periphery: The Case of San Antonio, Texas, 1960-1965,” *The Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 3 (August 1983): 287.

<sup>8</sup> Allen O. Olsen, “The Post-World War II ‘Chitlin’ Circuit’ in San Antonio and the Long-Term Effects of Intercultural Congeniality,” *Journal of Texas Music History* (7), 2007, 22-33.

rhythm and blues (R&B) of Clifford Scott and Vernon “Spot” Barnett and the Tex-Mex/rock and roll/country sound of Doug Sahm, Randy Garibay, and others, all represent the complexity of the West Side Sound resulting from the cross-pollination of diverse musical influences found in and around San Antonio over several decades following the Second World War.

Of course, as with any form of cultural expression, music is highly subjective and open to interpretation and evaluation by a broad audience. The West Side Sound, which is a continuously-evolving blend of ethnic, cultural, and social influences occurring over several decades is subject to what historian Benjamin Filene calls the “cult of authenticity.”<sup>9</sup> This involves an ongoing debate among musicologists and others over what is “authentic” versus “inauthentic” music. Ethnomusicologist Manuel Peña also addresses this issue by using the terms “organic” versus “super-organic” music. According to Peña, organic music is that which arises organically from within a community and is used mainly for non-commercial purposes. Super-organic music, by contrast, is music which is produced primarily for financial profit.<sup>10</sup>

Although the discussion of “authentic” versus “inauthentic” music and “organic” versus “super-organic” music provides useful insight into the complex development of musical culture, as well as the manipulation and mediation of music, there are limits to this analytical paradigm. First of all, there is almost no music that can be clearly categorized as either totally organic or totally super-organic. Most music contains

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<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 10.

<sup>10</sup> Peña, *Música Tejana*, 11. For more on the topic of “authenticity” in music, see Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

elements of both, and often music that originated as organic ultimately can be used for commercial purposes. Likewise, it is possible that music which began as super-organic can resonate in a way with its audience so that it becomes a truly meaningful part of the community's culture in an organic way. In a similar vein, the notion of "authentic" versus "inauthentic" music is highly subjective and is often interpreted in dramatically different ways by different people.<sup>11</sup>

When talking to veteran West Side Sound musicians, each offers a somewhat different explanation of what the West Side Sound means to him. For example, singer Joe Jama states that his popular 1969 soul ballad, "Phases of Time," is a signature song of the West Side Sound. "Phases of Time" indeed features many of the universally-recognized characteristics of the West Side Sound, including a big brass horn section, a Hammond organ, and group harmonies, in this case provided by the R&B group, the Royal Jesters.<sup>12</sup>

However, the Sir Douglas Quintet's 1965 Tex-Mex classic, "She's About a Mover," also represents the unique style of the West Side Sound. Likewise, the West Side Sound can be heard in the Texas Tornados' 1990 hit, "(Hey Baby) Que Paso?" written and performed more than two decades after Jama's "Phases of Time." As different as these songs are from each other, they all share a common thread as byproducts of the unique musical environment found in San Antonio over the past half century. An important part of this study is to explore the connections among these seemingly disparate styles stretching over multiple decades and to better understand how

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<sup>11</sup> For more on this, see Gary Hartman, *The History of Texas Music*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 13-14.

<sup>12</sup> Joe Jama, interview by the author, San Antonio, TX, January 23, 2013.

they are part of a larger constellation of musical influences found in the unique historical and cultural environs of South Texas.

Emerging over several decades and from different cultural influences and generations of musicians, the West Side Sound is a continually-evolving style, imbued with a sense of folkloric roots tradition. Yet, to many music veterans and aficionados, the heyday of the West Side Sound is long since over—a warm, yet distant musical memory from a by-gone era, much the same as psychedelia, disco, or new wave. However, unlike other genres, the West Side Sound is still defined by its intrinsic relationship to the city of San Antonio. Even today, it continues to thrive as an “oldies” format on San Antonio radio stations.

This paper examines the birth, maturation, and subsequent decline in popularity of the West Side Sound in San Antonio over a half century—from 1944 to 1999. In order to trace the roots and long-term development of the West Side Sound, this thesis is divided into three chapters: Chapter Two, “The Early Years of the West Side Sound, 1944-1954,” explores the historical background and emergence of the West Side Sound, including what impact blues, jazz, conjunto, R&B, and other popular genres had on the rise of the West Side Sound. This chapter also analyzes the social, cultural, and political dynamics of South Texas with an emphasis on the Texas-Mexican, or “Tejano,” community and its influence on the local music scene.

Chapter Two also evaluates the importance of a massive and newly-desegregated military presence in San Antonio after World War II, particularly the impact that a large number of racially diverse servicemen and women had on the local entertainment scene. Finally, this chapter discusses the rising popularity of doo-wop, R&B, rock and roll, and

soul music by the end of the 1950s, along with the emergence of the West Side Sound, led by such artists as Doug Sahm, Spot Barnett, and Idelfonso “Sunny” Ozuna.<sup>13</sup>

Chapter Three, “The Golden Years, 1955-1969,” focuses on the maturation of the West Side Sound with a new generation of Mexican-American teenagers who were influenced by older African-American musicians, such as Clifford Scott, James Brown, and B.B. King. During this time, local high school doo-wop groups, such as The Revells, The Sunglows, Charlie and The Jives, The Dell-Kings, Gilbert and the Blue Notes, and others, began blending these diverse influences to help reshape popular music in the Alamo City.

This chapter also explores the little-known history of local independent record producers in and around San Antonio, who successfully preserved and promoted this music, despite being far away from the nation’s major centers of the music industry, New York and Los Angeles. Although many cities during the 1950s and 1960s saw an emergence of “indie” labels, few regional scenes rivaled San Antonio in terms of the sheer amount of recordings and diversity of styles found throughout the city.

Finally, Chapter Three focuses on one of the most enduring legacies of the West Side Sound—its role in helping create and define Chicano Soul music. Chicano Soul is primarily a result of Mexican-American musicians, from Texas to California, borrowing elements of African-American soul music in the 1960s and 1970s and combining those with Hispanic and other musical traditions. By the mid-1970s, Chicano Soul and R&B faded in popularity in San Antonio, as newer, electronic-driven forms of music, such as Tejano, funk, disco, and hard rock, emerged. Nevertheless, Chicano Soul and the West

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<sup>13</sup> For additional information on these and other artists, see Laurie Jasinski, ed., *The Handbook of Texas Music*, Second Edition, (Denton: Texas State Historical Association, 2012).

Side Sound shared many common influences, and each played an important role in the evolution of the other.

Chapter Four, “The West Side Sound Rolls Again, 1970-1999,” focuses on the crossover of Chicano Soul and Tejano music of the 1970s into a rock/pop-oriented “Tex-Mex” genre, pioneered by Doug Sahm, both as a solo artist and as one of the founding members of the super-group, the Texas Tornados. As mentioned earlier, Sahm coined the term, “West Side Sound,” to describe the horn-laden soul music produced by his brass section, the West Side Horns. Though only some of his band members lived on San Antonio’s West Side, Sahm invented this label partly in tribute to the unique blending of musical elements found in that part of San Antonio and partly as a way to “brand” this eclectic style for public consumption. Sahm became successful in the 1970s as a solo musician, drawing from his country, blues, and R&B roots to create a unique pop/rock sound. One of the key figures behind Austin’s then-burgeoning progressive country scene, Sahm was the first San Antonio-born musician to introduce the West Side Sound to a larger national audience. His recordings from the 1970s and 1980s feature such South Texas artists as Flaco Jiménez, but also include such international icons as Bob Dylan.

Chapter Four also discusses the decline of Chicano Soul—in terms of the harmony and small-combo R&B groups of the 1960s—and the dawn of the big-band Tejano format of the latter 1970s, which was infused with the ideology and identity politics of the Chicano Movement. New developments in recording technology by the late 1970s replaced the traditional brass section of three, four, or even five horn players with one synthesizer, which could emulate horn tones. This allowed large orchestras to

“down size” into smaller, more portable combos, which were cheaper to maintain and take on tour. Though Sahm reached the pinnacle of his career during the 1990s with his group, the Texas Tornados, the West Side Sound had already begun to decline in popularity by the late 1980s. Chapter Four discusses how and why this transformation took place, as well as the long-term implications of these changes.

Why is it important to examine the West Side Sound? There are several reasons that this unique musical phenomenon is worthy of further historical study. First of all, the West Side Sound exemplifies perhaps better than any other genre besides Western swing the remarkable cross-pollination of musical cultures that has taken place in Texas over the past two centuries.<sup>14</sup> Examining how the diverse musical influences present in the West Side Sound blended together helps further our understanding of the ways in which various ethnic communities have interacted culturally throughout the state’s history. A more thorough analysis of the evolution and long-term significance of the West Side Sound also provides insight into the genre’s role in helping shape the larger canon of American popular music.

Currently, very little scholarship exists on the West Side Sound. There is no book devoted to the topic, and only a handful of articles have been written on this unique musical hybrid.<sup>15</sup> Much like Detroit’s “Motown Sound” or Philadelphia’s “Philly Sound”

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<sup>14</sup> For more on the eclectic musical genre known as Western swing, see Hartman, *History of Texas Music*, 143-147. Other helpful sources include Charles Townsend, *San Antonio Rose: The Life and Music of Bob Wills* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1986), Cary Ginell and Kevin Coffey, *Discography of Western Swing and Hot String Bands, 1928-1942* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), Jean Boyd, *Dance All Night: Those Other Southwestern Swing Bands, Past and Present* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2012), Jean Boyd, *We’re the Light Crust Doughboys from Burrus Mill* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), Jean Boyd, *The Jazz of the Southwest: An Oral History of Western Swing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), and Deirdre Lannon, “Swingin’ West: How Hollywood Put the ‘Western’ in Texas Swing,” M.A. Thesis, Texas State University-San Marcos, 2007.

of the 1970s—the string-heavy, smooth soul style which emanated (mainly) from famed production duo, Gamble and Huff—the West Side Sound has had a significant impact on both local and national music. This thesis aims to expand the scholarship on the West Side Sound by bringing greater recognition to the music itself, as well as the musicians, and to better understand how the cultural and historical elements that gave rise to the West Side Sound are connected to larger social, political, economic, and demographic changes taking place throughout the Southwest.

This thesis also highlights the role of time, place, identity, racial politics, and social mores within the grand narrative of the West Side Sound. Above all, this is a story about racial interaction and popular music in San Antonio, Texas. While some articles have been written on this music, little is known about the behind-the-scenes producers, studio owners, and record distributors, who helped preserve and popularize this music. This thesis is intended to shed more light on this unique musical phenomenon, as well as on those who helped “make it roll.”

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<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the most comprehensive examination to date of the West Side Sound is Allen Olsen’s unpublished manuscript, “Overlooked Americana: San Antonio’s West Side Sound” (June 8, 2009). Although never published, this study provides valuable insight into the origins and evolution of the West Side Sound. I am very grateful to Allen Olsen for generously sharing with me his manuscript and his knowledge about the history of the West Side Sound.

## CHAPTER II:

### THE EARLY YEARS OF THE WEST SIDE SOUND, 1944-1954

This chapter examines the unique musical and socio-economic environment that existed in San Antonio from 1944 to 1954, which contributed to the early development of the West Side Sound. In particular, it focuses on what Allen Olsen terms “intercultural congeniality” among Mexican Americans, African Americans, and Anglo Americans and the role that played in the emergence of this distinct and ethnically complex musical subgenre.<sup>16</sup>

By the mid-1940s, the proliferation of military bases and other defense-related facilities throughout San Antonio had brought a substantial influx of black, Hispanic, and Anglo servicemen and women into the area, along with a large and diverse civilian population, which served in support roles either on the bases or in nearby private businesses. Thousands of these people, whether military or civilian, were part of a larger national migration of Americans from the countryside into the cities during the World War II era. Most were earning a substantial amount of disposable income for the first

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<sup>16</sup> Allen Olsen’s term “Intercultural Congeniality” refers to the open social intermingling that occurred among blacks, Anglos, and Hispanics in post-World War II San Antonio at a time when most other southern cities remained strictly segregated. As Olsen points out, “a remarkable degree of musical cross-pollination took place among people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds,” thereby helping create a cultural environment in which the West Side Sound could grow and flourish. Olsen, “The Post-World War II ‘Chitlin’ Circuit,” 3.

time in their lives and were eager to spend their wages on housing, automobiles, appliances, and entertainment.

The repeal of Prohibition in 1933 already had helped unleash a pent-up demand for alcohol consumption and sparked a proliferation of live entertainment venues by the 1940s, which provided alcoholic beverages, live music, and dancing. In San Antonio, such venues as the Keyhole Club, the Eastwood Country Club, the Ebony Lounge, the Tiffany Lounge, and others, fostered a spirit of integration among patrons and performers—a unique, mixed-race social experience practically unseen in the rest of the American South. However, despite this tendency by many club owners, patrons, and performers to defy contemporary social mores and mingle openly, certain local individuals and institutions, particularly the San Antonio Police Department, remained vigilant in enforcing segregationist Jim Crow laws in an attempt to prevent public socializing among people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds.

In many ways, post-World War II San Antonio was a community struggling to reconcile its long history of ethnic and cultural diversity with its position as a major urban center on the fringes of a stubbornly-segregated American South. While the growing military presence in the area brought a large influx of servicemen and women from different racial backgrounds, and the 1948 desegregation of the Armed Forces provided unprecedented opportunities for interracial mingling, San Antonio, and the rest of Texas, still generally adhered to the segregationist policies found elsewhere throughout the South.

What existed in the Alamo City during this time period was a paradoxical situation in which the official institutions of power, including the city government and the

San Antonio Police Department, resisted integration, while at the same time, several of San Antonio's nightclubs were taking the lead in providing opportunities for citizens of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to socialize freely. By their own admission, some club owners and musicians cultivated mixed-race audiences as a way to attract more patrons. It is not entirely clear whether the audiences themselves patronized these clubs as part of a conscious effort to break down segregationist barriers, or whether they were simply frequenting venues in which they felt most comfortable and could hear the types of music they enjoyed. What is certain is that the Alamo City's live music scene during the 1940s and 1950s helped create an environment of multi-ethnic cultural exchange from which the eclectic musical genre now known as the West Side Sound would emerge.

### **The "Chitlin' Circuit" and Its Impact on San Antonio's Live Music Scene**

On November 3, 1944, venerated New Orleans jazz musician, Don Albert, opened the Keyhole Club at the intersection of Iowa and Pine streets, in the heart of San Antonio's predominantly African-American east side.<sup>17</sup> Though the venue was relatively short-lived (closing in 1948 and reopening at a different location in 1950), the Keyhole Club was an important stop on the Chitlin' Circuit, and it played a crucial role in the early development of the West Side Sound. The venue's immense popularity also made Don Albert one of the first major African-American club owners in the segregated South.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "Don's Keyhole Club to Open Friday, Nov. 3rd," *San Antonio Register* (San Antonio, TX), October 27, 1944. Don Albert's full name was Don Albert Dominique, but he was commonly known as Don Albert. For more on Albert's life and career, see Sterlin Holmesly, "Texas Jazz Veterans: A Collection of Oral Histories," *Journal of Texas Music History*, Volume 6 (2006), 30-34.

<sup>18</sup> Olsen, "The Post-World War II 'Chitlin' Circuit,'" 6.

One thing that set the Keyhole Club apart from so many other black-owned clubs across the South was its efforts to integrate Anglo, Mexican-American, and African-American clientele and musical acts. In a region of the country marred by institutionalized apartheid and racial violence, the Keyhole Club was an integrated live music oasis in an era of Jim Crow segregation.<sup>19</sup> This was particularly important for black touring artists during the 1940s and 1950s who relied on such black-friendly and/or black-owned music venues to make a living on the larger Chitlin' Circuit.<sup>20</sup>

The early success of the racially-integrated Keyhole Club angered many local segregationists. Don Albert often upset his detractors by openly advertising the fact that both his bands and his audiences were integrated. It was not uncommon at that time across much of the country for black entertainers to perform for white audiences, but having Anglos, blacks, and Hispanics mixing freely as audience members was still taboo throughout the South. Albert not only allowed this in his venue, but he publically boasted about it through advertisements in the *San Antonio Register*, one of two African-American owned newspapers in the city.<sup>21</sup> Albert closed the Keyhole in 1948 to pursue a

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<sup>19</sup> There were a few other multi-racial clubs in San Antonio and elsewhere by the mid-1950s. However, the Keyhole was one of the first to exist in the South as early as the mid-1940s. This distinction is especially important, since it predates President Harry Truman's 1948 desegregation of the military, one of the first national policy changes paving the way for further civil rights legislation. Don Albert biographer Christopher Wilkinson argues that Albert's decision to encourage integration in his club, though very risky, was mainly an attempt to increase his customer base among San Antonio's diverse military community. The fact that Albert openly advertised his club as "integrated" suggests that he was willing to risk retribution from segregationist forces in order to cultivate an atmosphere of racial mingling in his establishment. For more on this, see Christopher Wilkinson, *Jazz on the Road: Don Albert's Musical Life* (Berkeley: University of California, 2001), 215-229.

<sup>20</sup> Lauterbach, *The Chitlin' Circuit*, 136.

<sup>21</sup> Don Albert, "The Keyhole Club," advertisement, *San Antonio Register* (San Antonio, TX), February 7, 1947, 7.

business venture in New Orleans, but he reopened the venue in 1950 in a new location on the west side of San Antonio with business partner Willie “Red” Winner.<sup>22</sup>

Before long, San Antonio Police Commissioner George Roper and the S.A.P.D.’s vice squad began harassing Albert, Winner, and their customers as part of an effort to permanently close the club at its new location. Among other charges, officials made questionable claims that the building itself was a safety hazard.<sup>23</sup> Albert fought against such charges, although the resulting legal battles drained a substantial amount of his financial resources, and ongoing harassment by city officials drove away some of his clientele. Despite these challenges, Albert and Winner won the lawsuit. Their case is a civil rights success story that presaged future legal battles by the N.A.A.C.P. and others to dismantle the segregationist Jim Crow system throughout the rest of the South.

Don Albert’s ability to keep the Keyhole Club operating was both a practical and a symbolic victory. It signaled to other African-American business owners that segregationist policies could be successfully challenged, at least in some instances. In addition to that, the fact that he could continue to allow mixed-race bands and audiences to gather openly in his venue helped create an arena in which ethnically-diverse musical influences combined freely and cross-pollinated into the types of hybrid genres that eventually gave rise to the West Side Sound. Because of the city’s long-held reputation as

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<sup>22</sup> Wilkinson, *Jazz on the Road*, 233.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 235-237. In the 1951 civil suit against S.A.P.D. Commissioner George Roper (Winner vs. Roper), Roper and S.A.P.D. defendants cited municipal building code violations as the cause of the forced closure. During the trial, Roper stated “the Keyhole’s roof was inadequately braced, that there were too many people in the building for safety, that there was an inadequate number of aisles between the tables, and that Winner and Albert had failed to obtain the required certificate of occupancy.” However, when Albert responded to the allegations, asking the city building inspector to demonstrate what the specific problem was, he responded to Albert by saying, “Frankly, I don’t know.” Albert also hired an independent contractor to determine whether there was a problem, but the independent contractor could not find anything wrong. After Albert and Winner eventually won the suit, the city twice appealed the court’s decision but lost both times.

an ethnically-diverse community “local NAACP leader Harry Burns once famously characterized San Antonio as ‘Heaven on Earth,’ when compared to other southern cities.”<sup>24</sup> However, Don Albert’s clashes with local officials and others is a reminder that racism and segregationist ideology were still deeply ingrained within local society and would continue for years to cause problems for the Keyhole Club and other racially-integrated venues in the area.

In addition to the Keyhole Club, Johnny Phillips’s Eastwood Country Club was another important black-owned San Antonio music venue and a popular stop along the Chitlin’ Circuit. Established in 1954 on St. Hedwig Road in deep east San Antonio, the Eastwood Country Club was one of the city’s premiere destinations for blues, jazz, and R&B groups throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The Eastwood hosted some of the most popular black recording stars of the day, including James Brown, Ella Fitzgerald, Junior Parker, Bobby “Blue” Bland, and many more. Like Don Albert, Johnny Phillips had a reputation for being an honest businessman who paid his artists well and treated them with respect. In addition, Albert and Phillips frequently offered musicians hospitality in the form of lodging and home-cooked meals, which were often eaten communally with club employees and customers. This helped reinforce a sense of “family” among the artists, fans, and proprietors and contributed to the growing atmosphere of intercultural congeniality. On a more pragmatic level, providing good pay and comfortable conditions allowed Don Albert and Johnny Phillips to attract some of the most prominent national artists to perform in the Alamo City.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Olsen, “San Antonio’s West Side Sound,” 30.

<sup>25</sup> Lauterbach, *The Chitlin’ Circuit*, 99.

Although perhaps less influential than the Keyhole Club and the Eastwood Country Club, there were several other popular clubs throughout San Antonio at the time, which also welcomed mixed-race audiences and bands. These included the Blue Note, the Tiffany Lounge, the Celebrity, the Cadillac Club, the Fiesta, and the Ebony Club. In addition to these private establishments, San Antonio was home to several public venues, such as the Municipal Auditorium, the Sunken Gardens, and Hemisfair Park, which hosted performers from a variety of racial and ethnic musical genres beginning in the 1960s.

While these venues are important in terms of their regional historical significance, they are also notable because they are where local musicians mingled with and were influenced by nationally touring R&B, jazz, blues, and gospel groups. Whether it was R&B legend Louis Jordan, pop vocal virtuosos the Ink Spots, or jazz icon Lester Young, these established artists made a lasting impression on many young San Antonio musicians, including those who would go on to shape the West Side Sound.<sup>26</sup> These live music venues, whether public or privately-owned, served as informal “classrooms” in which aspiring musicians could watch, listen, and learn to emulate their favorite professional artists. According to Vernon “Spot” Barnett, African-American saxophonist and bandleader at both the Eastwood Country Club and the Ebony Club during the 1950s, these were places where “anybody who was anybody...went to play live music.”<sup>27</sup>

As importantly as being locales in which novice musicians could listen to and learn from veteran artists, most of the clubs provided opportunities for younger players to

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<sup>26</sup> R&B icon Louis Jordan is highly regarded by most early West Side Sound musicians. Jordan played often in San Antonio throughout the 1940s and 1950s, at a time when the West Side Sound’s first generation of musicians was beginning to frequent the Eastwood Country Club and other venues.

<sup>27</sup> Vernon “Spot” Barnett, interview by the author, San Antonio, TX, September 9, 2012.

perform publicly. Several local bands gained some of their first high-profile exposure opening for national acts at San Antonio's Municipal Auditorium. Likewise, local club owners often hired young, unknown artists to either open for established groups or to substitute for individual touring band members who might be absent due to illness or schedule conflicts. In many cases, house bands, which typically included at least some younger, local musicians, served as back-up groups for nationally prominent artists. The end result was a network of nightclubs throughout San Antonio that provided an open, welcoming, and dynamic environment in which aspiring musicians could perform alongside veteran musicians, blending, borrowing from, and reshaping an eclectic and seemingly endless range of ethnic musical styles and influences.

Of course, the success of these San Antonio nightclubs was not based solely on their unique role as incubators for musical experimentation and innovation. Entertainment venues of any kind depend on the revenue generated by audiences. These clubs thrived, in large part, because of the sizeable and racially-diverse military community based in and around San Antonio. Most of these soldiers were young, single males, and many were eager to spend a significant portion of their earnings socializing in local nightclubs. In some cases, servicemen stationed at the city's military installations also created their own multiracial bands.<sup>28</sup>

There were specific racial, cultural, social, and historical factors that helped create a unique musical environment in San Antonio and contributed to the emergence of the West Side Sound. However, it is also important to recognize those musical influences from outside of Texas that helped shape the local music scene. The most influential of

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<sup>28</sup> Wilkinson, *Jazz on the Road*, 289.

these during the 1940s and 1950s was the massive influx of military personnel and civilians of various ethnic backgrounds who came from throughout North America. These new arrivals brought with them the orchestral swing of Harlem, the country blues of the Mississippi Delta, the big-band jazz and swamp pop from neighboring Louisiana, and R&B from Memphis and Detroit, all of which blended with the rich traditions of *conjunto*, *mariachi*, western swing, honky tonk, blues, gospel, and other genres that already had existed in San Antonio for decades. This eclectic cross-pollination of musical influences, along with a dynamic live music scene and a somewhat less rigidly-institutionalized system of racial segregation than that which existed throughout the rest of the South, helped create a cultural environment in which the West Side Sound could take root and flourish.<sup>29</sup>

By the end of the 1950s, it was not uncommon to see racially-integrated bands in San Antonio. According to historian Andrew Brown, “the first fully integrated (white, black, Hispanic) band in town anyone can remember was Little Sammy Jay and The Tiffanaires, one of the regular groups at the Tiffany Lounge.”<sup>30</sup> Reflecting on San Antonio’s race relations during the 1950s, West Side Sound pioneer Spot Barnett said, “Oh, we didn’t give a shit about all that! We just wanted to *play*. See, San Antonio was different.”<sup>31</sup> As a black musician who toured extensively on the Chitlin’ Circuit during that time, Barnett had performed in many clubs throughout the South that were still racially segregated. In 1950s San Antonio, he established a reputation not only as one of

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<sup>29</sup> Hartman, *History of Texas Music*, x.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Brown, liner notes to *Doug Sahm: San Antonio Rock*, Norton Records CED-274, 2000.

<sup>31</sup> Vernon “Spot” Barnett, interview by the author, San Antonio, TX, September 9, 2012.

the city's greatest R&B bandleaders but also one who employed a multiracial, integrated backing band, which included fourteen-year old white musical prodigy, Doug Sahn.

Sahn, who would become a Texas music icon and international ambassador for the West Side Sound, was a frequent visitor to these mixed-race music venues during the 1950s, particularly the Eastwood Country Club. Born in San Antonio on November 6, 1941, Doug Sahn grew up just a stone's throw from the storied venue, making it relatively easy for him to sneak out after hours to enjoy the club's eclectic mix of live music.<sup>32</sup> As a teen, Sahn talked his way into these adults-only venues, mixed and mingled with musicians and club patrons, and eventually convinced Keyhole house bandleader Spot Barnett to let him sit in with his renowned Twentieth Century Orchestra. "On any given night," Sahn later recalled, "you had T-Bone Walker, Junior Parker, The Bobby "Blue" Bland Review, Hank Ballard and James Brown. You just dug in. In the San Antonio clubs there was nothing but hustlers, pimps, strippers, and a few straggly flat-topped cats from Lackland (Air Force Base)."<sup>33</sup>

Doug Sahn was born and raised on the city's predominantly black east side and developed an early interest in blues and R&B. However, he first gained a local following as a young country singer and musician, performing on the radio when he was only five. By the age of eight, "Little Doug Sahn," as he had come to be known, was performing in area nightclubs and on the nationally-popular *Louisiana Hayride*. Sahn seemed to absorb the myriad musical genres present throughout his hometown, including German and

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<sup>32</sup> Jan Reid and Shawn Sahn, *Texas Tornado: The Times and Music of Doug Sahn* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 25.

<sup>33</sup> Travis Stimeling, "The Creation of 'Texas Music': Doug Sahn's Atlantic Sessions and the Progressive Country Era," *Journal of Texas Music History*, Volume 12 (2012), 8-15; Reid and Sahn, *Texas Tornado*, 25.

Czech polkas, waltzes, and schottisches, Texas-Mexican *conjunto* and *mariachi*, African-American blues, jazz, and R&B, and Anglo-American western swing and honky tonk. He freely blended all of these influences to create an eclectic, roots-based style that eventually made him an international star, especially after co-founding the Grammy Award-winning super-group, the Texas Tornados, in 1989.<sup>34</sup>

Spot Barnett served as a bandleader and mentor for many other young San Antonio musicians, including two young Mexican-American musicians named Randy Garibay (born Ramiro Beltrán) and Arturo “Sauce” Gonzalez, who would use their experience in Barnett’s band to help create a distinct Chicano Soul sound during the 1960s.<sup>35</sup> According to West Side Sound veteran Jack Burns, it was common to see Hispanics, blacks, and Anglos playing together in Barnett’s orchestras.<sup>36</sup> Randy Garibay went as far as to claim that ““San Antonio was the first city in Texas to have integrated bands.””<sup>37</sup> Although Garibay’s assertion is difficult, if not impossible, to verify, it does seem that San Antonio had a disproportionately high number of mixed-race bands during the 1940s and 1950s. Without a doubt, the Alamo City’s live music venues provided an environment in which musicians of all ages, races, and ethnic backgrounds were not only allowed, but actually encouraged, to work together openly in creating a unique and dynamic amalgamation of musical styles.

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<sup>34</sup> James Head and Laurie E. Jasinski, “Douglas Wayne Sahn,” *The Handbook of Texas Music*, Second Edition, Laurie E. Jasinski, ed., (Texas State Historical Association, 2012), 536-538.

<sup>35</sup> Jackie Potts, “Randy Garibay,” *Handbook of Texas Music*, Second Edition, Laurie Jasinski, ed., (Denton: Texas State Historical Association, 2012), 231.

<sup>36</sup> Jack Barber, interview by Allen Olsen, San Antonio, TX, August 5, 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Brown, liner notes to *Doug Sahn: San Antonio Rock*.

### **Institutional Racism and Military Diversity in San Antonio**

Although several of San Antonio's nightclubs promoted a sense of intercultural congeniality in the 1940s and 1950s, the police department and many private citizens continued to support policies and behavior that reflected the widespread racial biases present across the South and other parts of the country at that time. Institutionalized racism could be seen throughout the Alamo City in the form of police intimidation, lack of equal access to public facilities, and a variety of segregationist laws existing at the municipal level. Despite such lingering challenges, San Antonio did not experience the same level of public lynchings and anti-black violence seen in other southern cities of comparable size.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, San Antonio did face some notable occurrences of racial violence in the early twentieth century, the first in 1900 and the second in 1913.<sup>39</sup> However, these two incidents were relatively minor in comparison to the brutal race riots that occurred in other Texas cities, such as Brownsville (1906) and Houston (1917), which resulted in dozens of killings, beatings, and incarcerations.<sup>40</sup> By contrast, San Antonio's most serious incident of racial violence during this time period resulted in only three shootings.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Joe Scott, interview by Sterlin Holmesly, San Antonio, TX, July 27, 1984.

<sup>39</sup> Marilyn Von Kohl, "Riots," *The Handbook of Texas Online*, (Texas State Historical Association), accessed December 1, 2012, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/jcr02>.

<sup>40</sup> Brian D. Behnken, "Houston (Texas) Mutiny of 1917," in *Encyclopedia of American Race Riots*, Walter C. Rucker and James Upton, eds., (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 1: 280-289.

<sup>41</sup> "Rioting in San Antonio; Negro Soldiers Attack Police, and Two Men and a Horse Are Shot," *New York Times* (New York, NY), July 12, 1900, 2.

One of the reasons that San Antonio did not suffer the same degree of interracial violence seen in so many other southern cities at the time is that its black community had in place a fairly well-organized and effective political machine. This helped shield the black population from harassment and provided such amenities as running water, a sewer system, street lights, and a library, all of which enhanced public safety and helped ameliorate racial tensions in the city. Charles Bellinger, a black businessman who rose to power through his various enterprises, including a theater, pool hall, and construction company, was the leading figure in San Antonio's African-American politics during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Much like white urban bosses elsewhere across the country, Bellinger provided services and employment in exchange for votes from his black constituents, thereby building one of the most powerful black political machines in the South at that time.<sup>42</sup>

During the early twentieth century, local law enforcement, including the San Antonio Police Department and the Bexar County Sheriff's Office, vigorously enforced state and local segregation laws related to the use of schools, streetcars, buses, libraries, pools, parks, and other public spaces. However, unlike other major cities in Texas, San Antonio did not have large, well-organized chapters of such white supremacist organizations as the Ku Klux Klan or the White Citizens' Council during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>43</sup>

In general, African Americans in San Antonio also had somewhat better employment prospects than blacks in other southern cities throughout the first half of the

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<sup>42</sup> Alwynn Barr, "Charles Bellinger," *The Handbook of Texas Online* (Texas State Historical Association), accessed December 1, 2012, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fbe74>.

<sup>43</sup> Goldberg, "Racial Change on the Southern Periphery," 382.

twentieth century. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, most public and private employers across the country gave preference to white men when doling out what few jobs were available. Employers typically considered women and minorities to be low-priority, in terms of hiring. However, San Antonio had a better record than most cities in the South when it came to employment for African Americans during the 1930s. As Christopher Wilkinson points out, “in many southern cities just before the start of World War II, such (mechanical) work would not have been easily found by an African American, particularly after the economy turned down again in 1940.”<sup>44</sup>

By the 1940s, construction workers, mechanics, and manual laborers were increasingly in demand throughout San Antonio’s bustling military installations. Since most of these jobs were federally-funded, they typically were more accessible to minorities. However, minorities also enjoyed greater access to private-sector jobs, mainly because the rapid growth in military facilities throughout the area created a strong demand for blue-collar workers in a variety of businesses connected to the defense industry. Although racism was still very much present in many forms throughout San Antonio, the influx of federal dollars, along with the growing demand for unskilled or semi-skilled labor, helped bring an unprecedented degree of economic opportunity for minorities in the area.

By 1950, San Antonio’s population was 7% African-American, as compared to 27% in Houston. However, San Antonio experienced fewer instances of white-on-black

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<sup>44</sup> Wilkinson, *Jazz on the Road*, 211.

racial violence from Reconstruction into the twentieth century.<sup>45</sup> The reasons for this are complex, but much of it has to do with the more equitable ethnic balance of Hispanics, Anglos, African Americans, Germans, Czechs, and others in the Alamo City. Historian Robert Goldberg describes San Antonio as having a “moderate racial atmosphere” when compared to other southern cities during the first half of the twentieth century. Goldberg calls San Antonio a “progressive” city in a region ruled by mob violence and widespread police intimidation and says that, “segregation was woven into the fabric of San Antonio life, but it did not elicit violence or impassioned defenses.”<sup>46</sup>

### **The Stylistic Foundations of the West Side Sound**

There are several stylistic components that contributed to the development of the West Side Sound and Chicano Soul music of the late 1950s and early 1960s, including the so-called “doo-wop” style. Doo-wop, defined by tight vocal harmonies and themes of teenage romance, originated among small groups of teenagers gathering on street corners in New York City and other urban areas to entertain passersby in hopes of earning money in an otherwise limited economic environment. In some cases, these doo-wop groups included members of street gangs, who also performed as a way to demonstrate their musical prowess and to gain greater notoriety within their communities. Eventually, some of these groups, including the Ink Spots and the Mills Brothers, landed recording contracts and went on to achieve national acclaim as performing artists. By the late

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<sup>45</sup> “United States Censuses of Population and Housing, 1950,” in *United States Census Bureau* (U.S. Department of Commerce), 45, accessed October 15, 2012, [http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41557421v3p2\\_TOC.pdf](http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41557421v3p2_TOC.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> Goldberg, “Racial Change on the Southern Periphery,” 351.

1950s, doo-wop had become very popular across the country and aired regularly on such South Texas radio stations as KMAC and KONO.<sup>47</sup> Prominent San Antonio high school doo-wop groups, such as the Royal Jesters and Henry and His Kasuals, played an important role in shaping the early West Side Sound by popularizing multi-part harmonies, romantic themes, and pop, blues, and R&B to a racially-diverse teenaged audience in the Alamo City.<sup>48</sup>

Another important early influence on the West Side Sound was a big band-styled brass section, typically led by a tenor saxophone. This is perhaps best represented by such groups as Dino and the Dell-Tones and Rudy and the Reno Bops. The 1960s West Side Sound also often included a piano or organ. The Vox Continental organ, as used by Augie Meyers, who performed with Doug Sahm in the Sir Douglas Quintet and later in the Texas Tornados, was especially popular. New Orleans-styled piano triplets also appeared frequently in West Side Sound songs from this period. For example, such tunes as Doug Sahm's "Why, Why, Why," Sunny and the Sunglows' "Just a Moment," and The Royal Jesters' "My Angel of Love," all contain these core elements. By the mid-1960s, an increasing number of West Side Sound bands began incorporating more Tex-Mex *conjunto*, Louisiana swamp pop, and other disparate styles, helping further broaden this already eclectic genre.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Andrew Brown, "'No Color in Poor': San Antonio's Harlem Label," *Wired For Sound* (blog), entry posted September 25, 2011, <http://wired-for-sound.blogspot.com/2011/09/no-color-in-poor-san-antonios-harlem.html>.

<sup>48</sup> For more on doo-wop, see Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>49</sup> "Why, Why, Why?" 45-rpm recording by Doug Sahm, Harlem HM-107-A, 1961.

*Conjunto* is a popular genre of *música tejana* (or Texas-Mexican music), which is most often associated with working-class Texas Mexicans from the rural Rio Grande Valley. Traditionally consisting of an accordion and *bajo sexto*—a twelve-string Mexican guitar—*conjunto* is rooted in European, Mexican, and Spanish musical traditions. In fact, *conjunto* is a remarkable example of the cross-pollination of ethnic musical cultures that has taken place in the Southwest over the past several centuries. *Conjunto* borrows extensively from the folk music of northern Mexico, especially the popular style known as *norteño*. However, *conjunto* also incorporates polka, waltz, and schottische dance steps, as well as the accordion, all of which were brought to Texas and northern Mexico by German and Czech immigrants.<sup>50</sup>

Although rooted in musical traditions from both northern Mexico and the American Southwest, *conjunto* evolved into its own unique style by the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>51</sup> For many working-class Tejanos, or Texans of Mexican descent, *conjunto* came to represent both pride in one's ancestral heritage but also a willingness to embrace other musical influences. As *conjunto* grew in popularity throughout South Texas in the first half of the twentieth century, it increasingly took on symbolic importance in helping forge a sense of "collective identity" among Tejanos, especially those of the working class. *Conjunto* represented a more "organic" or "authentic" expression of Hispanic culture, which spoke to "a whole array of social, political, economic, and cultural factors

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<sup>50</sup> José Angel Gutiérrez, "Chicano Music: Evolution and Politics to 1950," in *The Roots of Texas Music*, ed. Lawrence Clayton and Joe W. Specht (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 161. The Texas Conjunto Festival has been held at San Antonio's Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center annually since 1982; For a more complete discussion on the subtle differences between *conjunto* and *norteño*, see Manuel Peña's *Música Tejana* and Kathy Ragland's *Música Norteña: Mexican Migrants Creating a Nation Between Nations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> Hartman, *History of Texas Music*, 24-26.

that form the basis for a collective identity” among working-class Tejanos.<sup>52</sup> *Conjunto* music certainly came to be a cornerstone for the development of the West Side Sound by the mid-twentieth century.

There are other regional styles that influenced early West Side Sound musicians, as well. For example, the “Texas R&B sound” is a guitar-and-horn laced interplay, popularized by T-Bone Walker in the late 1940s. Aaron Thibeaux “T-Bone” Walker was born in Linden, Texas, on May 28, 1910. Walker’s family moved to Dallas when he was two years old. As a youngster, he spent time in Dallas’s predominantly African-American neighborhood of Deep Ellum, learning to play from such pioneering Texas bluesmen as Blind Lemon Jefferson. By the 1940s, T-Bone Walker had developed an upbeat blues guitar style, along with a famously energetic stage presence, which contributed to a newly emerging genre known first as “jump blues,” then Rhythm and Blues, and eventually R&B. Walker’s best-known composition, “(They Call It) Stormy Monday,” made him a national sensation, and he went on to become a major influence on numerous other blues and R&B artists, including B.B. King, Johnny Winter, Freddie “The Texas Cannonball” King, and Stevie Ray Vaughan.<sup>53</sup>

T-Bone Walker had a tremendous influence on the development of R&B nationally, with his electric blues shuffle style, his jazz-oriented guitar solos, and his role in defining the modern R&B ensemble, often composed of electric guitars and bass, drums, and horns. Walker had a particularly strong impact on blues and R&B musicians

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<sup>52</sup> Manuel Peña, “Hispanic and Afro-Hispanic Music in the United States,” in *Handbook of Hispanic Cultures in the United States: Literature and Art*, ed. Francisco Lameli (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1993), 291.

<sup>53</sup> Bill Wyman with Richard Havers, *Bill Wyman’s Blues Odyssey: A Journey to Music’s Heart and Soul* (New York: DK Publishing, 2001), 236-237; See also Helen Oakley Dance, “T-Bone Walker,” Jasinski, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, Second Edition, 661-662.

in his home state of Texas, including those in San Antonio. Several West Side Sound artists, including Doug Sahm's former backing band, The West Side Horns, have long made Walker's R&B classic, "The T-Bone Shuffle," a standard part of their repertoire.<sup>54</sup> Other San Antonio blues bands, such as Big Walter Price and the Thunderbirds and Jitterbug Webb and the Five Stars, also incorporated the T-Bone Walker sound into their R&B of the 1950s.<sup>55</sup>

Texas blues historian Alan Govenar states that within "the rhythm and blues of T-Bone Walker, the electric guitar assumed a role that superseded the saxophone, which until then had been the prominent solo instrument in jazz. The R&B band sound became tighter and depended more on the interplay of the electric guitar with the horn section, piano, and drums."<sup>56</sup>

However, while T-Bone Walker helped make the guitar and rhythm section "interplay" integral to the West Side Sound, as an outgrowth of his Texas-style R&B, it was the prominence of the saxophone, leading a full, rich horn section that gave the Alamo City its own distinctive style. As bandleader Rudy "Tee" Gonzales points out, "It's the double horns, two-part harmony—the West Side Sound. It's classic, and the sound went all over. People recognize it."<sup>57</sup> Drummer and producer Manuel "Manny" Guerra used this same double-tenor arrangement for his group, The Sunglows. This

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<sup>54</sup> Mark Busby, ed., *The Southwest: The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Regional Cultures* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 340.

<sup>55</sup> Vernon "Spot" Barnett, interview by the author, San Antonio, TX, September 9, 2012.

<sup>56</sup> Alan Govenar, "Blues," *Handbook of Texas Music*, 65.

<sup>57</sup> Hector Saldaña, "One Last Blast from the Past," *San Antonio Express-News*, October 18, 2012.

technique was later adopted by the more well-known offshoot of that band, Sunny and the Sunliners.<sup>58</sup>

While T-Bone Walker is largely responsible for popularizing the R&B combo arrangement in Texas, the two-part horn section, with tenor sax on lead, was one of the most important identifying characteristics that made San Antonio R&B sound different from that commonly heard in Houston, Dallas, or many other cities across the country. This two-part horn section derived mainly from earlier *orquestas tejanas*, or Texas-Mexican orchestras, which were very popular throughout South Texas during the 1930s and 1940s. According to Spot Barnett and Rudy “Tee” Gonzales, this “Latin” influence helped make the West Side Sound distinct from the R&B scenes of Detroit, Los Angeles, Chicago, and elsewhere. West Side groups such as Henry and His Kasuals, the Royal Jesters, the Eptones, Spot Barnett Orchestra, Sunny and the Sunliners, and many others often incorporated this into their sound. For example, the Eptones’ song, “Sweet Tater Pie,” contains a T-Bone Walker-style arrangement along with a two-part horn section. This soulful, big band-styled tune, which includes jazz and funk elements, also features a tenor saxophone leading the two-part horn section, typical of earlier Texas-Mexican orchestras.<sup>59</sup>

Another very influential figure in the development of the West Side Sound during the 1950s and 1960s was African-American saxophonist, composer, and arranger, Clifford Scott. Scott was born in San Antonio on June 21, 1928. Born and raised on the city’s east side, Scott was a child prodigy who was proficient on a number of instruments. As a teenager, Scott played saxophone with the popular Amos Milburn. While appearing

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<sup>58</sup> Molina, *Chicano Soul*, 25.

<sup>59</sup> “Sweet Tater Pie,” 45-rpm recording by the Eptones, Jox Records JO-063-B, 1967.

with Milburn at the Eastwood Country Club and in other local mixed-race clubs, the young Scott also met and performed with John Coltrane and other legendary artists who toured through the area. When Scott was only fourteen, famed bandleader Lionel Hampton hired him to play saxophone with his group at the city's Municipal Auditorium. Clifford Scott went on to perform and record with Charlie Parker, Ray Charles, Count Basie, and many other prominent artists. Scott also made some of his own recordings for King and Pacific Jazz Records.<sup>60</sup>

However, it was Clifford Scott's chart-topping single, "Honky Tonk," which he co-wrote with popular R&B recording artist Bill Doggett, that helped revolutionize the role of saxophone in early rock and roll music. Many West Side musicians consider "Honky Tonk" to be the "unofficial anthem" of the West Side Sound, since it is a standard tune performed by most San Antonio R&B groups.<sup>61</sup> Recorded in 1956 for Cincinnati's King Records, "Honky Tonk" is a sax-driven, early rock and roll instrumental shuffle, featuring Clifford Scott's four-part tenor sax on lead.<sup>62</sup> What was first conceived as a warm-up rehearsal shuffle for Bill Doggett's band while on tour, "Honky Tonk" places the tenor saxophone in the foreground, giving it a whole new prominence as a lead instrument. The tune became a jukebox staple nationwide and inspired a new generation of horn players across the country, particularly in San Antonio, where Scott was

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<sup>60</sup> Karla Peterson, "Clifford Doneley Scott," Jasinski, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, Second Edition, 543-544; Olsen, "Overlooked Americana," 79; R&B and pop music icon, Ray Charles, toured regularly throughout Texas during the 1960s and 1970s. Charles was fond of the distinct style of players he found in the Lone Star State and often hired local artists for his band as he passed through the Southwest. Ray Charles sometimes recruited local players when he appeared at Austin's Victory Grill or San Antonio's Eastwood Country Club, including David "Fathead" Newman, Martin Banks, James Earl Clay, James Polk, Spot Barnett, Henry Coker, and Leroy Cooper.

<sup>61</sup> Charlie Alvarado, interview by Allen Olsen, San Antonio, TX, May 10, 2004.

<sup>62</sup> "Honky Tonk," 78-rpm recording by Bill Doggett, King Records K8767, 1956.

celebrated as a hometown hero. Clifford Scott's lifelong association with this hit, which peaked at Number Two on the Hot R&B Singles of 1956, earned him the nickname, "Mr. Honky Tonk."<sup>63</sup>

One of the countless younger San Antonio musicians whom Clifford Scott inspired was Spot Barnett. "He didn't just influence *my* style; he influenced *all of us* (Texas saxophone players). He was mostly responsible for the Texas style...that Texas Tenor sound," says Barnett. "So, just like they had state high school football championships, they had state school band competitions back then, too, and the competitions were just as fierce. The Texas Tenor sound kind of developed from there, because you could hear a cat playing, and *you knew* he was from Texas."<sup>64</sup>

Because the tenor saxophone is so prominent in the R&B music of San Antonio, it is important to understand the nature of the "Texas Tenor" style. African-American jazz sax legends Illinois Jacquet, Arnett Cobb, King Curtis, and Conrad Johnson are all closely associated with this sound, but what distinguishes it from other regional music styles? "When jazz fans talk about the Texas Tenor saxophone sound," explains music writer Nick Morrison, "they're talking about a sound which is very robust, sometimes raw, and which mixes the musical vocabularies of swing, bebop, blues and R&B. It's that honking, bar-walking saxophone sound that used to blast from jukeboxes coast-to-coast." Others suggest that the Texas Tenor saxophone style is perhaps best understood as a "feeling," rather than specific tonality or conscious approach to instrumental

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<sup>63</sup> "Hot R&B singles of 1956," *Billboard Magazine*, 1956.

<sup>64</sup> Vernon "Spot" Barnett, interview by the author, San Antonio, TX, September 9, 2012.

arrangements.<sup>65</sup> While finding a clear definition for the Texas Tenor sound may be difficult, this phenomenon certainly appears to be a byproduct of the unique confluence of styles found in San Antonio and elsewhere throughout the Lone Star State.<sup>66</sup>

Clifford Scott and Bill Doggett's hit single, "Honky Tonk," became one of the most frequently-covered tunes for young West Side Sound saxophonists and horn players in the 1950s and 1960s. Still today, many San Antonio bands, including the West Side Horns, regularly play the classic tune, since they consider it to epitomize the style and spirit of the West Side Sound. Frank Rodarte, Rocky Morales, Charlie Alvarado, Rudy Guerra, Louis Bustos, and Charlie McBurney, some of the most well-established and best-recognized saxophonists and horn players in San Antonio, are just a few to have been influenced by Clifford Scott's sax-laden shuffle. Several of the younger West Side Sound musicians interviewed by Allen Olsen agreed that being able to perform "Honky Tonk" proficiently was "an understood requirement for playing in these (San Antonio) clubs."<sup>67</sup> In that sense, "Honky Tonk" became a litmus test of sorts for proving one's skills as a San Antonio R&B musician.

With its booming multiethnic population and its vibrant and diverse live music scene, post-World War II San Antonio's "intercultural congeniality" contributed to the foundation of the West Side Sound. From live music venues such as the Keyhole Club and the Eastwood Country Club, integral to the Chitlin' Circuit throughout the 1940s and 1950s, San Antonio's dynamic and eclectic musical environment greatly influenced the

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<sup>65</sup> Nick Morrison, "Five Titans Of Texas Tenor Sax," NPR Music, last modified October 6, 2011, accessed October 20, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/ablogsupreme/2011/10/05/141088887/five-titans-of-texas-tenor-sax>.

<sup>66</sup> The most complete study of the "Texas Tenor" sound and all other matters related to the development of jazz in Texas is Dave Oliphant's *Texan Jazz* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1996).

<sup>67</sup> Olsen, "Overlooked Americana," 51.

West Side Sound's first generation of musicians. Artists such as Doug Sahm and Spot Barnett performed in these venues and had the opportunity to play alongside other major artists of the day. The military installations of San Antonio employed many African Americans and other working-class minorities, becoming a major source of employment in the region. Furthermore, the influx of young servicemen into the city during and after World War II increased demand for nightlife and entertainment, which allowed these venues to flourish.

The dynamic confluence of the Texas Tenor sound, the Texas R&B sound, and doo-wop music in San Antonio by the late 1950s was integral in helping to create the West Side Sound. Artists such as Clifford Scott and T-Bone Walker were immensely popular in postwar San Antonio. While the Texas-Mexican *conjunto* was the force which truly gave the West Side Sound its own distinct style by the 1960s, groups such as Mando and the Chili Peppers were experimenting with crossover Tex-Mex *conjunto* music and rock and roll as early as the mid-1950s. This cross-pollination of sounds, including R&B, tenor sax, doo-wop, and *conjunto*, with its centerpiece instrument, the accordion, would give rise to the "golden years" of the West Side Sound during the 1960s.

## CHAPTER III:

### THE GOLDEN YEARS OF THE WEST SIDE SOUND, 1955-1969

This chapter explores the “golden years” of San Antonio’s West Side Sound, from 1955 to 1969. By examining the convergence of doo-wop, *conjunto*, rhythm and blues (R&B), and rock and roll, this chapter delves into the development of early West Side Sound “combo” groups, such as Sunny and the Sunliners and Mando and the Chili Peppers. In the context of such groups, this chapter also discusses the notion of cross-pollination, or “hybridity” in *música tejana*—first in the *orquestas tejanas* (Texas-Mexican orchestras) of the 1940s and 1950s and afterward in the West Side Sound of the 1950s and 1960s. Lastly, this chapter examines the local music industry, including record producers, record labels, radio deejays, distributors, and others, who contributed to the development of the West Side Sound during this period.

By the early twentieth century, there were two main types of musical ensembles popular among Texas Mexicans—*conjuntos* and *orquestas tejanas*. The *conjunto* was typically a smaller group of non-professional musicians whose instruments often included the accordion (borrowed from German and Czech immigrants), the *bajo sexto* (a 12-string rhythm guitar), and sometimes a fiddle or a single drum. Because *conjuntos* were small, more affordable, and tended to perform traditional Texas-Mexican folk music, they

were more popular among working-class Tejanos. During the 1940s and 1950s, such groups as Conjunto San Antonio Alegre and Conjunto de la Rosa performed for lunch and dinner crowds along the San Antonio River, helping make live music a staple of downtown San Antonio life during the early postwar period.<sup>68</sup>

The other prominent type of musical ensemble, the *orquesta tejana*, was usually a larger group whose instrumentation featured guitars, violins, horns, and a full percussion section. *Orquestas* typically included formally-trained musicians who blended traditional Mexican folk music with more modern styles, such as jazz, swing, and pop. Because they were bigger, more expensive, and more inclined to incorporate popular music into their repertoire, *orquestas tejanas* tended to attract middle and upper-class Tejanos, who not only had the money to hire such large bands but also were eager to demonstrate their increasing upward mobility and assimilation into mainstream American society by embracing a broader range of popular music styles.

This blending of traditional Texas-Mexican genres with more popular music is an example of the process of “selective assimilation” that Mexican Americans, and virtually all other ethnic groups, underwent as they strove to preserve certain aspects of their cultural heritage while also working to achieve greater acceptance and upward mobility within American society.

In order to better understand how Texas-Mexican music reflects this process of selective assimilation within Mexican-American society, it is important to consider two different schools of thought—“autonomy” versus “hybridity.” In some of his earlier works, ethnomusicologist Manuel Peña argues that Mexican culture has been largely

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<sup>68</sup> Chris Strachwitz, liner notes to *San Antonio Conjuntos in the 1950s*, Arhoolie AR-376, 1994.

autonomous in South Texas. For example, Peña argues that most working-class Tejanos embraced *conjunto* music as means to “defend” against increasing Anglo cultural hegemony throughout the state. By celebrating “authentic” cultural traditions, such as *conjunto*, working-class Tejanos were preserving their ethnic heritage in the face of encroaching cultural influences from Anglos and others.<sup>69</sup>

Historian Jason Mellard challenges Peña’s assertion and, instead, emphasizes the hybrid nature of Texas-Mexican cultural identity.<sup>70</sup> *Orquesta tejana* is a particularly potent representation of this “hybridity,” since it is a product of the cross-pollination of a variety of musical elements from both inside and outside of the Texas-Mexican community. Although it remained more traditional than *orquesta tejana* and did not absorb such a broad range of jazz, pop, swing, and other styles, *conjunto* also incorporated a variety of “outside” influences, including German and Czech accordion, polkas, and waltzes and, more recently, blues and country music. Likewise, the amalgamation of musical influences that helped create the West Side Sound reflects the ongoing process of hybridity in *música tejana*.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Manuel Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-Class Music* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 151.

<sup>70</sup> Jason Mellard, “Regional Hybridity in Texas Music: The Case of the Texas Tornados,” *Text Practice Performance* 5 (November 2003): 109.

<sup>71</sup> Mellard acknowledges that Peña’s emphasis on Texas-Mexican “autonomy” was more pronounced in his first book, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto* (1985), than in his latter two books on *música tejana*, *The Mexican American Orquesta* (1999) and *Música Tejana* (1999). Mellard states that Peña’s more recent books demonstrate an “evolution” in scholarship regarding *música tejana*. This shifting paradigm can also be seen in José Limón’s *American Encounters* (1998), regarding Texas-Mexican hybridity (models of convergence) and the loosening of the dominant Anglo-Mexican binary of conflict in South Texas. Mellard, “Regional Hybridity in Texas Music,” 109. José Limón, *American Encounters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998). Manuel Peña, *The Mexican American Orquesta: Music, Culture, and the Dialectic of Conflict* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

By the 1950s, as the early West Side Sound began to emerge, Texas-Mexican music, whether *conjunto*, *orquesta tejana*, or some other sub-genre, already had a long history of absorbing and adapting diverse musical influences, including blues, jazz, R&B, country, and polka. As rock and roll appeared in the mid-1950s, *música tejana* would once again demonstrate its ability to hybridize with other musical forms. Although rock and roll is often thought of as the result of combining African-American and Anglo-American cultural influences, Latin music has played a significant, although largely under-recognized, role in the evolution of this popular genre.

### **Binarism vs. Hybridity: Latin Music's Influence on Early Rock and Roll**

Although its roots extend back decades earlier, rock and roll began to emerge as an identifiable musical genre in the United States during the mid-1950s. The so-called “Sun Sound,” spearheaded by Memphis-based Sun Records proprietor Sam Phillips, forever changed the face of American popular music. According to the “Sun Story” narrative, such young white musicians as Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Carl Perkins, mixed southern music that crossed both racial and gospel/secular divides to form the foundation of rock and roll in the mid-1950s. The “Sun Story,” also sometimes referred to as the “Big Bang Theory” of rock and roll, suggests that rock and roll “exploded” into existence when Presley, Lewis, Perkins, and others gathered at Sun Studios and began blending together black and white musical influences to create a dynamic, new style that came to be called rock and roll.<sup>72</sup> The Sun Story is an example of

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the dominant black-white binary paradigm found in pop music scholarship, which is the “conception that race in America exists, either exclusively or primarily, of only two constituent racial groups: the Black and the White.”<sup>73</sup>

In many ways, the Sun Story is a popular narrative about the merging of race-based musical genres in the Jim Crow South (specifically the “race” and “hillbilly” genres), which resulted in a “colorblind” hybrid genre known as rock and roll.<sup>74</sup> The Sun Story/Big Bang Theory contains elements of historical fact and is useful in helping understand the racial dynamics and cultural cross-pollination involved in the emergence of rock and roll. Unfortunately, however, this paradigm is a gross oversimplification of when and how rock and roll actually came into being. One only need look at western swing of the 1930s to see how white country artists already were embracing black blues, jazz, ragtime, swing, Mexican *mariachi*, German-Czech polka, and other styles and mixing those with traditional Anglo fiddle music.

Likewise, throughout the 1940s, white bandleaders, such as Benny Goodman and Glenn Miller, borrowed heavily from African-American music. At the same time, black R&B artists of the 1940s also incorporated elements of pop and country music and regularly used such terms as “rocking and rolling” in their song lyrics. Furthermore,

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<sup>72</sup> Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 248-249. Malone was not the first to acknowledge the “convergence” of black and white musical influences in helping to create rock and roll in the mid-1950s, particularly as it pertains to Sun Records. This convergence builds on a body of scholarship which uses a black/white binary model of racial identity and the deconstruction of race-based genres, i.e., black and white music.

<sup>73</sup> Juan Perea, “The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race: The ‘Normal Science’ of American Racial Thought,” *California Law Review* 85, no. 5 (October 1997): 346.

<sup>74</sup> “Colorblind” is used here to indicate rock and roll’s resistance to racialization, as well as class and gender constructs, as a teen-oriented format which often blurred these distinctions. In 1949, the same year RCA Records introduced its 45-rpm disc to wide acclaim, *Billboard Magazine*’s Jerry Wexler (later of Atlantic Records fame) replaced the term “race record” with the more neutral term, rhythm and blues, or R&B. Peter Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Southern Dream of Freedom* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1999), 22.

Chuck Berry (a black musician) and Bill Haley (a white musician) were performing early rock and roll prior to the heyday of Sun Studios. So, rather than rock and roll resulting from a “Big Bang” convergence of a handful of artists in one particular studio (the Sun Studio in Memphis), the elements of rock and roll had been mixing and mingling for years before Presley and his peers popularized this new style.<sup>75</sup>

However, what is most obviously lacking in the Sun Story, as a result of its reliance on the over-simplified black-white binary paradigm, is any acknowledgement of Latinos and Latin music in the formation of rock, soul, and R&B music. To be sure, Latinos had no direct role in the recordings produced at Sun Studios. However, the notion of a black-white binary relies on a subjective construct of “whiteness” and “blackness,” which does not accurately represent the racial and ethnic complexity of American society.<sup>76</sup>

Since the 1980s, a number of race theorists and social scientists have challenged the black-white binary, because it largely ignores ethnic groups other than African Americans and Caucasians.<sup>77</sup> In his effort to deconstruct this black-white binary model, Juan Perea asserts that “the Black/White Paradigm operates to exclude Latinos/as from

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<sup>75</sup> Hartman, *History of Texas Music*, 196-198; See also Kevin Romig, “Not Fade Away: The Geographic Dimensions of Buddy Holly’s Career,” *Journal of Texas Music History*, (11) 2011, 20.

<sup>76</sup> There are numerous Hollywood and TV “bio-pics” about Motown and Motown artists—from the story of The Temptations and Diana Ross to films on Motown president, Berry Gordy—that reinforce the concepts of race and pop in a two-dimensional, black-white context. Likewise, the award-winning Broadway musical, *Motown: The Musical*, as well as countless books, articles, and CD liner notes about Motown and related musical genres virtually ignore the influence of Latino music on R&B, soul, and rock and roll.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Chang and Adrienne Davis, “Making Up is Hard to Do: Race/Gender/Sexual Orientation in the Law School Classroom,” *Harvard Journal of Law and Gender* 33, no. 1 (November 2010). Robert Chang, “Toward an Asian American Legal Scholarship: Critical Race Theory, Post-Structuralism, and Narrative Space.” *California Law Review* 85, no. 5 (October 5, 1985).

full membership and participation in racial discourse, and...that exclusion serves to perpetuate...negative stereotypes of Latinos/as.”<sup>78</sup>

The idea of black-white binarism has long dominated popular discourse on the origins and evolution of rock and roll, but it is outdated and inaccurate. Such major southwestern cities as San Antonio, Houston, and Los Angeles, all of which include large Hispanic populations, are largely neglected in most case studies involving the black-white binary. Consequently, black-white binarism marginalizes America’s Latino population and minimizes its influence on the development of rock and roll music. In particular, San Antonio’s West Side Sound, a confluence of “black, white, and brown” music (as well as other regional ethnic cultures, including Czech, Polish, and German), highlights the weaknesses inherent in the black-white binary model.

By the 1950s, Texas-Mexican rockers, such as Freddy Fender and Armando Almendarez, along with California-Mexican rocker, Richie Valens (born Richard Valenzuela), were mixing “Latino” music with R&B and rock and roll. The most well-known example is Valens’s rock and roll rendition of the old Mexican folk song, “La Bamba” (1958). Also known as *Rock en español*, this mixture of American rock with Latin music styles, which sometimes includes both Spanish and English lyrics as part of a linguistic “code-switching,” is still used today by Latin musicians ranging from veteran rocker Carlos Santana to younger rap artists.

Los Angeles’s early R&B scene featured an active mix of black music with Latin rhythms, giving rise to the “Pachuco” craze, which spread throughout southern California

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<sup>78</sup> Juan Perea, “The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race: The ‘Normal Science’ of American Racial Thought,” *California Law Review* 85, no. 5 (October 1997): 1215.

and El Paso during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>79</sup> Pachuco music was a mixture of *mambo*, *caló*, R&B, big band, and swing. Its vibrant “zoot-suit” culture was the ideological and musical predecessor to *Chicanismo*.<sup>80</sup>

For example, West Coast *pachuquero* Lalo Guerrero’s “Marijuana Boogie” (1949) and “Los Chucos Suaves” (1949) combined big band and swing with black R&B to make these songs immensely popular among California’s Mexican-American community during the late 1940s.<sup>81</sup> Such R&B singles as “Pachuco Hop” (1952)—East Los Angelino Chuck Higgins’s homage to his Mexican-American fan base—and Ruth Brown’s “Mambo Baby” (1954), demonstrate a strong Latin influence in R&B and rock and roll. Los Angeles and San Antonio are perhaps the best examples of this interracial cross-pollination. The music scenes in both of these urban centers throughout the 1940s and 1950s represent a remarkable process of hybridization which included a distinct “tri-ethnic” cultural blend and directly challenge the notion of black-white binarism in the emergence and maturation of rock and roll.

### **The West Side Sound Takes Off**

In the fall of 1955, Armando “Mando” Almendarez made what is perhaps the first “Chicano rock” record in history. Almendarez recorded a polka-rock rendition of Clifton

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<sup>79</sup> Anthony Macías, *Mexican American Mojo: Popular Music, Dance, and Urban Culture in Los Angeles, 1935–1968* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2008), 118-119.

<sup>80</sup> Avant-Mier, “Latinos in the Garage,” 559. *Caló* is early twentieth-century Mexican-American slang closely associated with pachuco culture. *Chicanismo* refers to the late 1960s Chicano Movement, which will be further explored in Chapter Three.

<sup>81</sup> Molina, *Chicano Soul*, 8-9.

Chenier's "Boppin' the Rock," with Chuck Berry's "Maybelline" as the B-side.<sup>82</sup> Under the group name Armando Almendarez y su Conjunto Mexico, Almendarez released the 78-rpm on Rio Records, owned by Hymie Wolf. In 1948, Wolf had opened a liquor store at the intersection of Commerce and Leona streets in downtown San Antonio. Wolf eventually expanded his operations to include a record shop and a recording label. Known for its locally produced *conjunto* and *cantina* records during the 1950s, as well as its popular stock of Latin and Mexican records from major recording artists, Rio Records became one of the first independent labels in the city.<sup>83</sup>

Rio Records, though modest and relatively short-lived, paved the way for a number of other entrepreneurs who would launch their own record companies. Such independent-minded producers as Emil "E.J." Henke, Abraham "Abe" Epstein, Joe Anthony, Manuel Rangel, and Jesse Schneider, are just some of the businessmen who started their own record companies in San Antonio and throughout South Texas during the 1950s and 1960s. Because of the proliferation of these independent labels, local artists no longer had to rely on negotiating contracts with major record companies in New York or Los Angeles.<sup>84</sup>

With its large Hispanic population, San Antonio became the hub of the burgeoning Texas-Mexican recording industry. However, Alice, Texas, a small oil and ranching community some 120 miles south of San Antonio and 40 miles west of Corpus Christi, also played a crucial role in the evolution of *música tejana* during the mid-

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<sup>82</sup> "Boppin' the Rock" b/w "Maybelline," 78-rpm performed by Armando Almendarez, Rio Records R-345, 1955.

<sup>83</sup> Chris Strachwitz, interview by the author, Austin, TX, March 3, 2011.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

twentieth century.<sup>85</sup> Alice became an important player in the nascent Texas-Mexican recording industry during the early postwar era largely due to the efforts of Armando Marroquín and Paco Betancourt and their home-grown label, Ideal Records. Beginning in the late 1940s, Marroquín and Betancourt recorded and promoted such musical pioneers as Beto Villa and Isidro Lopez. Because Marroquín and Betancourt owned their own record label, they could allow Villa, Lopez, and other highly innovative bandleaders to experiment with combining elements of working-class *conjunto* and *ranchera* music with the jazz, swing, and pop-inflected sound of *orquesta tejana*. This mixing of styles during the 1940s and 1950s helped lay the foundation for the emergence of the even more eclectic West Side Sound of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>86</sup>

During the 1950s and 1960s, Clifton Chenier, a black, French-speaking Creole accordionist whose music incorporated both Texas and Louisiana musical traditions, also had an important influence on Hispanic music in South Texas. Recording in his early career for the Los Angeles-based Specialty Records, an early R&B/gospel music label, Chenier's records were very popular on jukeboxes throughout the state, especially in South and Southeast Texas, where many Louisiana-born Creoles and Cajuns lived.<sup>87</sup>

More importantly, however, Chenier's music shared a distinct similarity with *música tejana* that many other R&B musicians did not, since he was a proficient

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<sup>85</sup> The Tejano R.O.O.T.S. Hall of Fame and Museum is located in Alice, Texas, and was officially sanctioned by the Texas Legislature in 2001 with approval of H.R. Bill 1019. For more on this, see [www.facebook.com/tejanoroots](http://www.facebook.com/tejanoroots).

<sup>86</sup> Peña, *Música Tejana*, 132-133. Beto Villa was particularly adept at mixing traditional Texas-Mexican musical styles with international Latin music forms, such as *danzón*, *mambo*, and *bolero*, as well as American jazz and foxtrot.

<sup>87</sup> Shane Bernard, *Swamp Pop: Cajun and Creole Rhythm and Blues* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), 44.

accordionist. Chenier played accordion-driven R&B music that was very popular in the region during the early postwar era, mixing in elements of blues, jazz, bebop, and French-Creole music, which helped lead to the emergence of “zydeco” in the 1950s.<sup>88</sup>

Clifton Chenier, often referred to as “The King of Zydeco,” also had an important impact on the West Side Sound, especially because of his influence on such prominent Tejano accordionists as Armando Almendarez. As musicologist Chris Strachwitz points out in his liner notes for the CD reissue of the Rio Records catalog, Almendarez had “obviously listened to the jukebox records of...Clifton Chenier” as he developed his unique accordion style.<sup>89</sup>

Chenier also influenced San Antonio accordionist Leonardo “Flaco” Jiménez, one of the state’s most prominent *conjunto* artists from the 1950s to the present. Jiménez, who co-founded the super-group, The Texas Tornados, recalled, “The way I learned to play the accordion was on the wild and happy side, much like Cajun and zydeco music. One of my early idols was Clifton Chenier. The way he played, it was like the accordion was yelling at you: ‘hey, take this. I like to make my accordion yell and scream and make it happy.’”<sup>90</sup> Musicologist Ramiro Burr further emphasizes Chenier’s importance in popularizing the accordion by stating that Chenier “did as much to expose the accordion in the past forty years as did conjunto legend Santiago Jiménez, Sr.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Chenier did not invent zydeco, but he was certainly an important contributor to its emergence and development during the early postwar period. For more on the origins of zydeco, see Roger Wood, *Texas Zydeco* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 96-97. Among other important points, Wood notes that the first known recordings of zydeco were made in Houston, not in Louisiana.

<sup>89</sup> Strachwitz, *San Antonio Conjuntos in the 1950s*.

<sup>90</sup> Leonardo “Flaco” Jiménez, interview by Aaron Howard, New Haven, CT, 2000.

<sup>91</sup> Ramiro Burr, “The Accordion: Passion, Emotion, Musicianship,” in *Puro Conjunto!: An Album in Words and Pictures*, ed. Juan Tejada and Avelardo Valdez (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 122.

Almendarez's recordings demonstrate the dynamic musical cross-pollination taking place throughout San Antonio during the post-war era. Like Freddy Fender in South Texas and Lalo Guerrero in southern California, Almendarez was rapidly redefining the parameters of Mexican popular music during the 1950s. In an attempt to stay relevant and increase record sales, Hymie Wolf started dabbling in American rock and pop music in the mid-1950s, primarily with Almendarez and his various groups, such as Conjunto Mexico and Conjunto San Antonio Alegre.<sup>92</sup>

Within three years, Almendarez had recorded some 50 sides for Rio Records. These recordings represented a remarkably diverse range of styles, including *conjunto*, polka, rock and roll, R&B, and even a western swing-flavored number sung in Spanish. Almendarez's work with Rio Records not only reflects his tremendous versatility as a musician but also the eclectic tastes of his San Antonio and South Texas audience.<sup>93</sup> His ability to successfully meld regional music styles helped forge a distinct "Tex-Mex" sound during the 1950s, which would influence an entire generation of younger West Side Sound artists.

Almendarez's recordings and performances from the late 1950s garnered widespread regional attention, and inspired Mexican-American teenagers across the Southwest, including future West Side Sound icon, Randy Garibay. As Garibay later recalled, "I'd go to these house parties with my brother and this guy Armando Almendarez and San Antonio Alegre would be playing. They'd do the standard polkas and boleros and then, all of a sudden, with Mando [Armando] playing accordion, they'd

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<sup>92</sup> Strachwitz, *San Antonio Conjuntos in the 1950s*.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

break into ‘Lucille’ or ‘Just Because’ by Lloyd Price. It was amazing. That’s when I first heard rock ‘n roll.”<sup>94</sup> Garibay went on to lead some of the most influential bands involved in the West Side Sound, including The Pharaohs, The Dell-Kings, Los Blues, and Cats Don’t Sleep. He also wrote “Barbacoa Blues” (1997), which became one of the most popular songs associated with the West Side Sound.<sup>95</sup>

Rodolpho “Rudy T” Gonzales was another influential musician in the early years of the West Side Sound. Gonzales was born July 4, 1939, in San Antonio.<sup>96</sup> He started playing with his brother, Manuel “Red” Gonzales, in 1952 as part of a traditional *conjunto* group. First performing as Red y su Conjunto, then Conjunto Los Panchitos, Rodolpho Gonzales permanently changed the band’s name to Rudy T and His Reno Bops in 1955.<sup>97</sup> In 1957, Rudy T and His Reno Bops recorded another one of the earliest Chicano rock records, “Cry, Cry.”<sup>98</sup>

Released a year before Chicano rock pioneer Ritchie Valens’s 1958 debut hit single “Come On, Let’s Go,” “Cry, Cry” was the first and only 45-RPM rock record to be released on Wolf’s short-lived Rio Records label. Featuring a guitar-driven combo and a two-part tenor saxophone section, Rudy T and His Reno Bops are one of the earliest

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<sup>94</sup> Michael Hurtt, “The Other Chili Peppers,” *OffBeat Magazine*, modified May 1, 2005, accessed March 4, 2013, <http://www.offbeat.com/2005/05/01/the-other-chili-peppers/>.

<sup>95</sup> Potts, “Garibay, Randy,” *Handbook of Texas Music*, 231.

<sup>96</sup> Gary Hartman, “This Week in Texas Music History: Rudy T. Gonzales,” Art and Seek, last modified July 1, 2001, accessed May 11, 2013, <http://artandseek.net/2011/07/01/this-week-in-texas-music-history-rudy-t-gonzales/>.

<sup>97</sup> “Biography: Rudy & The Reno Bops,” American Sabor: Latinos in U.S. Popular Music, accessed April 3, 2013, <http://americansabor.org/musicians/rudy-reno-bops>.

<sup>98</sup> Andrew Brown, “Rudy and his Reno Bops on Rio 101,” *Wired for Sound* (blog), entry posted March 10, 2012, accessed April 26, 2013, <http://wired-for-sound.blogspot.com/2012/04/rudy-and-reno-bops-on-blaze-104.html>.

examples of the West Side Sound group ensemble. They also became one of the first and most popular Chicano Soul groups associated with the West Side Sound.

“Cry, Cry” and “Boppin’ the Rock” are prime examples of the eclectic blending of musical styles that took place throughout San Antonio during the mid to late-1950s. Although these particular songs were not big hits, Rudy and His Reno Bops and Armando Almenderez y su Conjunto Mexico (later Mando and the Chili Peppers) did make an impact in the local music community at the time by inspiring Tejano youth to combine rock, soul, and R&B music with the Latin influences of their parents’ generation. Finally, these early records also were important in helping bring about a proliferation in independent Texas-Mexican record labels during the 1960s.<sup>99</sup>

### **The Highway 90 Effect**

Almenderez’s appropriation of Clifton Chenier’s Creole-influenced R&B and Chuck Berry’s seminal rock and roll are examples of the dynamic cultural cross-pollination that permeated San Antonio’s postwar music scene. In a single two-sided record, “Boppin’ the Rock” and “Maybelline,” Almenderez covered a broad range of styles, including zydeco, R&B, and rock and roll. While his version of “Boppin’ the Rock” remains relatively obscure today, due in part to its limited distribution, it is an important example of the musical influences from Louisiana that impacted Texas artists.

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<sup>99</sup> Gary Hickinbotham, “A History of the Texas Recording Industry,” *Journal of Texas Music History* 4, no. 1 (March 2004): 7.

This would be especially evident in the early works of West Side Sound pioneer, Doug Sahm.

Chicano Soul also borrows from the Texas-Louisiana border style known as “swamp pop.” According to historian Shane Bernard, swamp pop is a blend of pop, R&B, and rock and roll characterized “by highly emotional vocals, simple, unaffected (and occasionally) bilingual lyrics, tripling honky-tonk pianos, bellowing sax sections and blues backbeat. Upbeat compositions often possess the bouncy rhythms of Cajun and black Creole two-steps.”<sup>100</sup> Lloyd Price, Fats Domino, and Allen Toussaint are just some of the more prominent New Orleans artists who helped popularize swamp pop and other Texas-Louisiana musical hybrids among young Tejanos in and around San Antonio during the 1950s and 1960s.

*Austin Chronicle* writer and San Antonio native Margaret Moser refers to the “Highway 90 Effect” in describing Louisiana’s dramatic musical influence on San Antonio and the West Side Sound.<sup>101</sup> Even before World War II, U.S. Highway 90 had been a major thoroughfare for Chitlin’ Circuit performers traveling from the Deep South into Texas. Because it was such an important transportation route connecting Texas with other southern states, Highway 90 played a crucial role in facilitating the movement of people, culture, foods, commerce, and music back and forth between Louisiana and South

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<sup>100</sup> Bernard, *Swamp Pop*, 5-6.

<sup>101</sup> Margaret Moser, email message to author, April 22, 2013. Moser credits Austin musician Larry Lange for raising public awareness of the cultural and historical significance of Highway 90 during his performances. Moser explains, “When he started Larry Lange & the Lonely Knights about 12 or so years ago, Larry was specializing in music that ran from Lafayette to San Antonio to Corpus and made a point of talking about Highway 90. He became so into the Latino musicians, the band morphed into the Chicano Soul Revue. He deserves credit for emphasizing that regional aspect.”

Texas.<sup>102</sup> Swamp pop, zydeco, Cajun, R&B, and other styles traveled back and forth along Highway 90, helping to reshape the musical landscape of the entire region.<sup>103</sup>

Doug Sahm's music from the 1950s and 1960s illustrates the so-called Highway 90 Effect. Sahm's mod-rock group, the Sir Douglas Quintet, remained steeped in Tex-Mex and swamp pop tradition.<sup>104</sup> Sahm was completely comfortable moving freely among ethno-cultural identities and musical genres. At the same time that he embraced Chicano music and political ideology, he also was a pioneer in the progressive country music scene.<sup>105</sup>

In a review of Doug Sahm's *Harlem Recordings*, journalist Barry Mazor applauds the CD as a testament to that South Texas-New Orleans tradition—the Highway 90 Effect. “Doug Sahm is a clear creature of the Third Coast; the biggest influence is the New Orleans roll of Allen Toussaint, and of the great Dave Bartholomew/Huey Piano Smith bands that backed the hard Specialty Records acts such as Little Richard,” Mazor

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<sup>102</sup> Bernard, *Swamp Pop*, 52. Bernard refers to this same concept in terms of east-west corridor Highway 190, which is an auxiliary route of Highway 90. Throughout *Swamp Pop*, Bernard emphasizes the importance of Highway 190 during the early postwar period in the formation of the West Side Sound.

<sup>103</sup> Margaret Moser, email message to author, April 22, 2013.

<sup>104</sup> Sahm's music changed to reflect the so-called “British Invasion” of the mid-1960s, in which the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and other English groups came to dominate the American pop charts. Sahm's music evolved again during the late 1960s, as he became part of the San Francisco-based psychedelic rock scene. However, his late-1960s discography, including his biggest hit, “Mendocino” (1968) still reflected the various Texas musical influences of his youth.

<sup>105</sup> In his song, “Chicano” (1973), Sahm proclaims his adopted Mexican identity. Historian Travis Stimeling acknowledges that some critics might regard Sahm's appropriation of a dual Anglo-Chicano identity as metaphorical “brownface,” thereby demonstrating Sahm's “colonial impulse” as an Anglo Texan. However, Stimeling also recognizes that Sahm may have simply been demonstrating genuine solidarity with the Chicano Movement and a sincere appreciation for Mexican folk culture. Sahm claimed he was given the surname “Saldaña” by his Hispanic fan base in San Antonio. He used this name on the 1971 Sir Douglas Quintet LP, *The Return of Doug Saldaña*. Travis Stimeling, “The Creation of ‘Texas Music’: Doug Sahm's Atlantic Sessions and the Progressive-Country Era,” *Journal of Texas Music History* 12 (2012): 12.

contends. “Doug’s voice is...utterly adept at handling tough R&B demands, over blowing saxes, popcorn-popper walking piano riffs—and here, unusually, lead guitar over New Orleans-style rockers and ballads.”<sup>106</sup>

As discussed in Chapter One, Chitlin’ Circuit musicians, such as Lloyd Price and Ray Charles, performed in San Antonio during the 1940s and 1950s at such venues as the Eastwood Club, the Keyhole Club, Ebony Lounge, and the Fiesta. Years later, Doug Sahm often recalled the live music clubs he frequented as a teenager. It was at these venues that Sahm and other young San Antonio musicians were first exposed to New Orleans-style piano triplets, which are “a group of three notes played inside the length of two of its note-type,” that typified piano-driven rock and roll music during the 1950s.<sup>107</sup> Examples of triplets can be found in many of Fats Domino’s recordings, including his 1956 hit “Blueberry Hill.” Ray Charles’s 1959 R&B hit, “What’d I Say,” also incorporates piano triplets. Likewise, Augie Meyers, organist for Sahm’s Sir Douglas Quintet often used triplets in his keyboard work.<sup>108</sup> In his later years, Sahm often spoke of his love for the triplet-driven R&B of the past, going so far as to use the working title, *Triplets for a Dying World* for his 1989 record, *Juke Box Music*.<sup>109</sup>

Chicano rocker Freddy Fender was also influenced by the myriad musical styles found in Louisiana, having performed there throughout his early career. His triplet-filled ballad, “Wasted Days and Wasted Nights” (1959, 1975), exemplifies this Texas-

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<sup>106</sup> Barry Mazor, “The Sahm Remains The Same,” *No Depression*, July/August 2000.

<sup>107</sup> Brandy Kraemer, “How to Count and Play Musical Triplets,” About.com, accessed April 25, 2013, <http://piano.about.com/od/lessons/ss/Counting-Musical-Triplets.htm>.

<sup>108</sup> Reid and Sahm, *Texas Tornado*, 29.

<sup>109</sup> Jody Denberg, “Beyond the Blues,” *Texas Monthly*, April 1989.

Louisiana cross-pollination.<sup>110</sup> Although musicologist John Broven may somewhat overstate the case, he legitimately points out the important influence of swamp pop and other Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast styles on the development of Chicano Soul and such prominent Texas artists as Freddy Fender. As Broven says, “Although Freddy was a Chicano from Texas marketed as a country artist, much of his formative career was spent in South Louisiana; spiritually Fender’s music was from the Louisiana swamps.”<sup>111</sup>

### “Talk to Me”: On the Air and in the Groove

In 1945, six-year-old Manuel “Manny” Guerra’s first foray into making music started with a simple experiment in his father’s two-car garage. Using thumbtacks set atop empty tin cans, the young Guerra attempted to recreate the sharp *ping* sound of the snare drum, as he had heard in a music-filled outing one evening with his father. Two years later, Guerra began playing drums in his father’s band and continued to be fascinated by the process of making music.<sup>112</sup> Today, after spending over half a century in the music business and having received multiple awards and accolades, Guerra remains an important figure in the Tejano music industry. Guerra’s 1965 *polka-ranchera* hit, “Peanuts,” on his Sun Glow Records label, helped to form the foundation of the modern Tejano sound.

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<sup>110</sup> Under Huey Meaux’s direction, Fender re-recorded “Wasted Days and Wasted Nights” in 1975 to wide acclaim. It peaked at Number One on the U.S. *Billboard* Hot Country Singles. Much as he had done in creating a “British” image for Doug Sahm and the Sir Douglas Quintet during the 1960s, Meaux rebranded Freddy Fender as a country singer in the mid-1970s.

<sup>111</sup> John Broven, *South To Louisiana: The Music of the Cajun Bayous* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 1983), 281-282.

<sup>112</sup> Manuel Guerra, interview by Ramón Hernández, San Antonio, TX, 2004.

As drummer and producer for the pioneering 1960s West Side Sound group, Sunny and the Sunglows, Manny Guerra is a vital part of the movement. The story of the Sunglows begins with Guerra's brother, Rudy, and his friend and schoolmate, Ildefonso "Sunny" Ozuna. While they were friends at San Antonio's Brackenridge High School in 1957, Rudy Guerra and Sunny Ozuna started an *a cappella* pop group, The Galaxies.<sup>113</sup> Though short-lived, The Galaxies were a stepping-stone to the pair's next band, The Sunglows, which was patterned after doo-wop and R&B groups popular at the time.

Sunny Ozuna and Manny Guerra formed The Sunglows in 1958—a six-piece R&B combo composed of Mexican-American teenagers, most of whom attended Brackenridge High School.<sup>114</sup> These types of groups began forming throughout high schools all over San Antonio, performing at record hops and other teen venues.<sup>115</sup> Shortly after forming The Sunglows, Manny Guerra started drumming for Isidro Lopez, a pioneer of *orquesta tejana*. Lopez's big-band style had a strong influence on Ozuna and Guerra and convinced them to incorporate a horn section into Sunny and the Sunglows.<sup>116</sup> Consequently, Manny Guerra is an important link between the *orquestas tejanas* and *conjunto* of the early postwar period to the Chicano Soul of the 1950s and 1960s.

Former Sunliner band member, Henry Parrilla, who later enjoyed a successful career with his own soul group, "Little Henry and the Laveers," remembered Manny Guerra's key development of the West Side Sound. "I think Manuel Guerra was the one

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Molina, *Chicano Soul*, 27.

<sup>115</sup> Peña, *The Mexican American Orquesta*, 260.

<sup>116</sup> Greg Beets, "La Onda Chicana: Sunny Ozuna, Still Talking – to You, Me, and Texicans Everywhere," *Austin Chronicle* (Austin, TX), July 21, 2006.

who brainstormed that whole thing [using the Hammond organ],” recalled Parrilla. “You see, he wanted to do music without the accordion, and he didn’t want to just have a horn band like an orchestra and they couldn’t carry around a piano. Once Sunny and the Sunliners started to use the organ, that was it—everyone wanted to use that sound.”<sup>117</sup> That “sound” was a result of the core ensemble most often associated with the golden era West Side Sound—keyboard, drums, electric guitar and bass, and horns. In many cases, the lead singer also served as front man and namesake for the group, as with Sunny and the Sunglows, Henry and the Laveers, and Charlie and the Jives.

In 1960, the Houston-based Kool label released the first Sunny and the Sunglows 45-rpm, “Just a Moment,” a love ballad whose flipside was an upbeat song entitled “Uptown.”<sup>118</sup> Shortly afterwards, Manny Guerra made his debut as record producer with Sunny and the Sunglows performing “From Now On” b/w “When I Think of You” on the Sun glow label.<sup>119</sup>

However, it was Sunny and the Sunglows’ ninth single, “Talk To Me,” recorded in 1962 for Manny Guerra’s Sun glow Records, that caught the attention of prominent Houston deejay and producer Huey Purvis Meaux, a.k.a. “The Crazy Cajun.”<sup>120</sup> The following year, Meaux released “Talk To Me” on his own Tear Drop Records label. Huey Meaux knew the Spanish-language market, as well as R&B, blues, country, polka, rock,

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<sup>117</sup> Molina, *Chicano Soul*, 25.

<sup>118</sup> Andrew Brown, e-mail message to author, April 30, 2013. Some sources cite the release date of “Just a Moment” as 1959. However, music historian Andrew Brown found evidence in Houston’s ACA studio archives verifying that the single “definitely dates from 1960—it was mastered at ACA in Houston on or around June 30, 1960.”

<sup>119</sup> Brown, ““No Color In Poor,”” *Wired For Sound* (blog).

<sup>120</sup> “Talk To Me” b/w “Pony Time,” 45-rpm produced by Manny Guerra, performed by Sunny Ozuna, Sun glow Records SG-110, 1962.

funk, swamp pop, rockabilly, and nearly all other styles of music found in Texas and Louisiana.<sup>121</sup> By October of 1963—under Meaux’s newly rebranded group, “Sunny and the Sunliners,”—“Talk to Me” reached Number Eleven on the *Billboard* Hot One Hundred list.<sup>122</sup> Following the success of the single, Sunny and the Sunliners became the first Chicano group to perform on Dick Clark’s popular television show, *American Bandstand*.<sup>123</sup>

“Talk to Me” remains a very important song in the canon of Mexican-American music, partly because it was the first Chicano record to break nationwide. It also is a prime example of early Chicano Soul, with its slow, string-filled rendition of R&B recording artist Little Willie John’s original from 1958.<sup>124</sup> “Talk to Me” also secured Sunny and the Sunliners’ position as “the premier Chicano group in the country,”<sup>125</sup> especially after helping make national television exposure more accessible to young Mexican-American artists. What is not often remembered about that particular tune, however, is that Manny Guerra arranged, recorded, and produced it, but never received full credit. Thirty years later, Manny Guerra recalled the experience:

I produced that [“Talk To Me”], that was my arrangement, that was on my label. Just recently, I was telling my wife, “I can’t understand. I chose that song, gave it to Sunny, I arranged it, I recorded it, it went on my label, and yet when people here talk about ‘Talk To Me,’ it’s Sunny and the Sunliners.” Sunny just split our group when the thing was hitting. That’s when they [Huey Meaux and Chester

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<sup>121</sup> Jasinski and Cobb, “Meaux, Huey P.,” in *Handbook of Texas Music*, 2: 398-399.

<sup>122</sup> Huey Meaux, “Sunny and the Sunglows,” advertisement, *Billboard*, October 19, 1963, 16.

<sup>123</sup> Molina, *Chicano Soul*, 30.

<sup>124</sup> Manuel Guerra, interview by Ramón Hernández, San Antonio, TX, 2004.

<sup>125</sup> Molina, *Chicano Soul*, 30.

Foy Lee/Tear Drop Records] coaxed him “come out from there, you don’t need to carry that group. We’ll get you to form your own group.”...So he took off on his own, and he took advantage of the hit.<sup>126</sup>

Two years following Sunny and the Sunliners’ nine-week stint on the *Billboard* Hot One Hundred with “Talk to Me,” Huey Meaux produced the Sir Douglas Quintet’s breakout single, “She’s About a Mover,” which eventually hit the Number Thirteen spot on the U.S. *Billboard* Pop list.<sup>127</sup> These songs, which were two of the biggest hits in West Side Sound history, exemplify the local music phenomenon’s most distinctive styles—Chicano Soul and Tex-Mex rock. These songs also highlight the often under-recognized importance of the late producer, Huey Meaux. By bringing Sunny and the Sunliners and the Sir Douglas Quintet, along with dozens of other artists, into the national spotlight, Meaux and his Tear Drop and Latin Soul record labels had a profound impact on shaping and popularizing Chicano Soul and the West Side Sound.<sup>128</sup>

### **Harlem Records**

During the 1940s, Howard Davis’s KMAC radio station in San Antonio catered primarily to black audiences by playing “race” music and later, R&B. By the mid-1950s, KMAC expanded its programming to include more rock and roll, thereby attracting more

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<sup>126</sup> Peña, *The Mexican American Orquesta*, 261.

<sup>127</sup> Reid and Sahm, *Texas Tornado*, 31.

<sup>128</sup> For more on Huey Meaux’s life and career, see Andy Bradley and Roger Wood, *House of Hits: The Story of Houston’s Gold Star/Sugar Hill Recording Studios* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

white, Hispanic, and black teenagers.<sup>129</sup> Many West Side Sound veterans have remarked that their initial exposure to blues, pop, and R&B music came from KMAC and other local radio stations.<sup>130</sup> Started in 1948, KMAC's "Harlem Serenade" was the first radio program in San Antonio devoted to "race" music, and later, to R&B and rock and roll.<sup>131</sup>

Flip Forrest, an African-American deejay, took over the show in the early 1950s. Airing from ten to midnight, his "Harlem Serenade" gained a devoted following among San Antonio's youth, resulting in the formation of a Flip Forrest fan club and Forrest's frequent appearances at record shops and high school record hops.<sup>132</sup>

In 1956, Joseph Anthony Yannuzzi (nicknamed "Joe Anthony") took over "Harlem Serenade," following Flip Forrest's retirement from radio. As a 22 year-old deejay playing R&B and early rock and roll, Anthony enjoyed widespread popularity among the city's youth. In an interview with Andrew Brown, bandleader Charlie Alvarado expressed his adoration for Anthony, with whom he made his first hit record—1961's "For the Rest of My Life," by Charlie and the Jives. "[Anthony's] mother was Mexican; his father was an Italian immigrant," recalled Alvarado. "He was like Wolfman Jack, but could break out in Spanish at the proper time, and say it in slang. So right there, all the West Side loved him. Joe was one of the most popular DJs in town, especially with the Chicanos."<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Charlie Alvarado, interview by Allen Olsen, San Antonio, TX, May 10, 2004.

<sup>130</sup> In multiple interviews, West Side Sound veterans identified local R&B radio programming, particularly Flip Forrest's and Joe Anthony's "Harlem Serenade," as a significant influence on their early musical development.

<sup>131</sup> Disc Jockey Show Hooperatings," *Billboard*, October 2, 1948.

<sup>132</sup> Olsen, "Overlooked Americana," 28.

<sup>133</sup> Brown, "'No Color In Poor,'" *Wired For Sound* (blog).

The summer of 1959 was an important time for the West Side Sound. It was then that Joe Anthony, along with business partner Emil “E.J” Henke, launched their record label, Harlem Records. Anthony and Henke released their first single from a local mixed-race doo-wop group, The Lyrics, in August of that year.<sup>134</sup> Harlem became one of the first local labels to release doo-wop and R&B records in San Antonio.<sup>135</sup>

As popular as it had been during the 1950s, doo-wop had almost completely disappeared from the national charts by the time of the so-called British Invasion in the mid-1960s.<sup>136</sup> However, doo-wop continued to thrive in San Antonio among black and Chicano youth well into the late-1960s.<sup>137</sup> In an interview with the *San Antonio Express-News*, Manny Guerra stated that doo-wop’s popularity with Chicanos was due to the genre’s simplicity and romantic themes. “To me, it’s just very simple people expressing themselves. The Royal Jesters were very simple people, simple harmonies, and the people loved them because it’s down to earth.”<sup>138</sup>

Harlem Records’ catalog of twenty singles contains some of the most prominent names in San Antonio music history. Doug Sahm, Spot Barnett, Charlie and the Jives, The Lyrics, and The Royal Jesters all recorded for the short-lived imprint. The diversity

<sup>134</sup> “Oh, Please Love Me” b/w “The Girl I Love,” 45-rpm performed by The Lyrics, Harlem Records HM-101, 1959.

<sup>135</sup> Molina, *Chicano Soul*, 16.

<sup>136</sup> Richie Unterberger, “Doo-Wop,” *All Music Guide to Rock: The Definitive Guide to Rock, Pop, and Soul*, Third Edition, Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, and Stephen Erlewine, eds. (San Francisco: Backbeat Publishing, 2002), 1307.

<sup>137</sup> Hector Saldaña, “One Last Blast from the Past,” *San Antonio Express-News*, October 18, 2012.

<sup>138</sup> Hector Saldaña, “The Music Beat: West Side Sound Revisited,” *San Antonio Express-News* (San Antonio, TX), January 19, 2011.

of artists and musical styles represented on these records reflects the type of intercultural congeniality that could be found throughout San Antonio's music scene by the 1960s. Saxophonist Charlie Alvarado, who had a few regionally successful singles with his group, Charlie and the Jives, recalls that unique sense of interracial cross-pollination in San Antonio during those years. "The people that frequented the Fiesta [night club] were mostly Chicanos, but everybody went in there...black, white. It was during the time when there was a lot of racial unrest all over the country, especially here in the South, but we didn't have any problems here, especially the musicians, no problems. Everybody together."<sup>139</sup>

Although Harlem Records lasted only into the early 1960s, it left behind a remarkable legacy. Norton Records' reissue of the pioneering label's catalog, *San Antonio Rock: The Harlem Recordings*, reveals the diversity of styles and the versatility in musicianship that prevailed during the "golden years" of the West Side Sound. Despite Harlem Records' demise in 1961, a number of other independent labels soon emerged to help continue the ongoing evolution of the West Side Sound in and around San Antonio.

### **Epstein Enterprises and Other San Antonio Record Labels of the 1960s**

As Harlem Records began to decline by mid-1961, a young realtor on the west side of San Antonio, Abraham "Abe" Epstein, founded a new label, Cobra Records. He went on to launch eight other labels, including Jox, Dynamic, Soulsville USA, Suzuki, Vallado, Groovy, Beckingham, and Metro-Dome, which, together, would be responsible

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<sup>139</sup> "The Late-1950s R&B Scene," American Sabor: Latinos in U.S. Popular Music, video file, accessed April 26, 2013, <http://americansabor.org/video/late-1950s-rb-scene>.

for one of the most diverse collections of music yet produced in South Texas. Over a twelve-year period, from 1961 to 1973, Abe Epstein released hundreds of local recordings of *conjunto*, *ranchera*, Tex-Mex, polka, garage rock, country, soul, funk, and R&B. Reminiscing about his popular doo-wop/soul group, The Royal Jesters, Henry Hernandez recalled Epstein's pioneering role in the local music industry. "In our case, we started out on Harlem Records, but we were aiming higher, so we went to Abe. As a teenager in San Antonio, every high school had a garage band, but it wasn't a 'band' unless you recorded at Abie's recording studio. We just wanted to be on vinyl and hear it on the radio. The teenagers in high school would buy the music to keep it going."<sup>140</sup>

Texas music writer, Joe Nick Patoski, credits Epstein with helping promote the multi-racial ethos of the West Side Sound. "It was black, brown and white like no one else mixed up at the time. That's his legacy," says Patoski. "That was one of the richest periods in Texas music. Period. Those records define what San Antonio music is and was. It's one of the coolest sounds going, as great as any on Earth. He knew good music, he had a good ear and he made great records that continue to resonate."<sup>141</sup>

Abe Epstein's eclectic stable of record labels represents the tremendous breadth and depth of the West Side Sound during the 1960s, since each label had its own niche market, whether soul, *conjunto*, rock, or some other genre. Jox, Cobra, and Dynamic were by far Epstein's most successful labels. These three alone featured some of the most popular groups in South Texas, including The Commands, Little Jr. Jesse and the Tear

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<sup>140</sup> Ramón Hernández, "Abie Epstein's Legacy Was Music," River City Attractions, last modified May 12, 2012, accessed April 24, 2013, <http://www.rivercityattractions.com/abie-epsteins-legacy-was-music/>.

<sup>141</sup> Hector Saldaña, "Producer of Iconic 'West Side Sound' Dies," *San Antonio Express-News* (San Antonio, TX), April 13, 2012.

Drops, Doc & Sal, George Jay and the Rockin' Ravens, Al and the Pharaohs, Henry and His Kasuals, Don and the Doves, The Royal Jesters, Zapata, and Rene & Rene.

Other entrepreneurs also launched their own independent labels around this time. Producer Emil "E.J." Henke, who had partnered with Joe Anthony on Harlem Records, was known for his output of country, rockabilly, and rock records, including some of Doug Sahn's earliest recordings.<sup>142</sup> Henke also dabbled in soul and R&B with his Satin and Wildcat record labels during the late 1950s and 1960s, although he failed to chart any major hit singles.<sup>143</sup> Local producers Jesse Schneider of Renner Records and Manuel Rangel of Rival Records also produced scores of local Chicano Soul records associated with the golden years of the West Side Sound.<sup>144</sup> Despite playing a significant role in the larger South Texas music scene, most of these independent producers folded after a few years, unable to keep up with the rapidly changing music scene of the late 1960s—an era which ushered in *La Onda Chicana* (The Chicano Wave) of the 1970s and signaled the beginnings of a third and final phase in the ongoing development of the West Side Sound.

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<sup>142</sup> Brown, liner notes to *Doug Sahn: San Antonio Rock*.

<sup>143</sup> Hickinbotham, "History of the Texas Recording Industry," 11.

<sup>144</sup> Molina, *Chicano Soul*, 22.

## CHAPTER IV:

### “THE WEST SIDE SOUND ROLLS AGAIN”: 1970-1999

This chapter examines the third major phase in the long-term evolution of the West Side Sound. It was during this period, from approximately 1970 to 1999, that the West Side Sound expanded well beyond Texas to gain a substantial international following. It was also at this time that elements of the West Side Sound combined with a resurgence in the popularity of *orquestas tejanas*, along with the rise of *La Onda Chicana*, to help forge a new musical genre known as *Tejano*. By the early 1980s, *Tejano* would become the most popular and commercially-successful Texas-Mexican musical idiom ever, both in Texas and throughout the Spanish-speaking world. *Tejano* also would pave the way for the further cross-pollination of *música tejana* with pop, hip hop, and other emerging genres.

This chapter also discusses the important role certain West Side Sound musicians, especially Doug Sahm, played in pioneering Austin’s so-called progressive country music of the 1970s. In fact, Sahm and other influential West Side Sound artists would leave San Antonio during this period and permanently relocate to the Austin area, helping significantly alter the city’s live music scene and paving the way for the branding of Austin as “The Live Music Capital of the World.”

Lastly, this chapter examines the final years of this nearly half-century period of the West Side Sound. In many ways, it was during the 1980s and 1990s that the West Side Sound reached its greatest level of popularity and influence, particularly with the remarkable success of the super-group, the Texas Tornados, formed in 1989 by Doug Sahm, Freddy Fender, Augie Meyers, and Flaco Jiménez. The Grammy Award-winning Texas Tornados were critically and commercially successful, performing for devoted fans world-wide and helping spread their eclectic blend of Texas-based musical influences around the globe.

This chapter ends with Doug Sahm's death in 1999, which would be followed by Freddy Fender's death in 2006. Today, the Texas Tornados continue to perform with Sahm's son, Shawn Sahm, serving as lead vocalist, but the band does not enjoy the level of commercial success or critical acclaim that it once did. Consequently, the deaths of Doug Sahm and Freddy Fender mark an important milestone in the long-term development of the West Side Sound and signal an end to the nearly fifty-year period that is the focus of this study.

### **The West Side Sound and Chicano Soul in the 1970s**

By the late 1960s, Chicano Soul had extended its influence throughout the Southwest. Mexican-American rock groups, such as Thee Midneters, the Premiers, and the Sir Douglas Quintet, all reflected the eclectic Tex-Mex, R&B, and pop influences they had absorbed through their association with Latin rock, the West Side Sound, and Chicano Soul. However, these same groups also had begun to adopt a new look and

sound brought to American shores by the so-called British Invasion. The British Invasion, which lasted roughly from 1964 to 1969, was a period in which dozens of English rock and roll bands, including the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Kinks, and the Animals, dominated U.S. pop charts and reshaped rock and roll lyrically and musically.<sup>145</sup>

Doug Sahm, who had always embraced new musical influences, began to incorporate this British pop and rock and roll that was sweeping North America. As a result, Sahm's music took on an even more eclectic sound during the late 1960s, as he added British rock flavorings to the country, blues, R&B, and Tex-Mex repertoire he had been building for years. Sahm also moved to San Francisco around this time to be in the epicenter of the late 1960s hippie counter-culture scene. With his band, The Sir Douglas Quintet, Sahm soon built a national following based on such hit songs as his 1968 "Mendocino."<sup>146</sup> Because of his success, Sahm rose from being a Texas-based pioneer of the West Side Sound to becoming a nationally-known recording artist. This new-found fame, coupled with the fact that his musical style was so unique, twice landed Sahm on the cover of the *Rolling Stone* magazine, the most prominent rock music publication at the time.<sup>147</sup>

Doug Sahm's move to California during the late 1960s was part of a larger westward migration of young Texas musicians, including Janis Joplin, Don Henley,

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<sup>145</sup> Hartman, *History of Texas Music*, 205; Of all the English groups arriving in the United States during the British Invasion, the Beatles were the most popular and, arguably, the most influential. Perhaps ironically, two of the Beatles' biggest musical idols and role models were Texas artists—Buddy Holly and Roy Orbison. For more on the Beatles, Buddy Holly, Roy Orbison, and the impact they all had on each other's careers, see Philip Norman, *Shout! The Beatles in Their Generation*, Revised Third Edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), Philip Norman, *Rave On: The Biography of Buddy Holly* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), and Alan Clayson, *Only the Lonely: Roy Orbison's Life and Legacy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

<sup>146</sup> Reid and Sahm, *Texas Tornado*, 28, 56.

<sup>147</sup> Barry Mazor, "The Sahm Remains The Same," *No Depression*, July/August 2000.

Kenny Rogers, and others, who sought to escape the conservative political and ideological environment of the South. The hippie counter-culture movement, which championed civil rights and greater freedom and openness regarding sex and drugs, resulted from a growing tide of social upheaval which today defines the legacy of the “long 1960s.”<sup>148</sup> Meanwhile, the highly controversial Vietnam War, which saw many Mexican-American and African-American soldiers serving on the frontlines, further splintered the country. In many ways, popular music served as a collective “voice” for American youth, who found inspiration in the songs of such artists as Bob Dylan, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, James Brown, and Aretha Franklin.

Many Texas youth, including Texas musicians, were caught up in the same counter-cultural fervor as other American teenagers at the time. San Antonio’s pop music output started to decline by the end of the decade, as more and more musicians began switching to rock and roll, while others left the state entirely. The sudden proliferation of drug use also impacted the Texas music scene. Not only were artists from the Lone Star State beginning to incorporate “psychedelic rock,” with its frequent drug-related themes, into their music, but several prominent musicians, including Freddy Fender and Austin psychedelic rock pioneer, Roky Erickson, were arrested on drug charges.<sup>149</sup> In fact, Doug Sahm’s departure to California was prompted, in part, by his 1966 arrest for marijuana

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<sup>148</sup> Historian Arthur Marwick uses the term “long sixties” to refer to the widespread cultural and social “revolutions” (including sexual, civil rights, drug culture, musical, and political) involving youth in the United States, Britain, France, and Italy, from 1958 to 1974. Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 1998).

<sup>149</sup> Hartman, *History of Texas Music*, 208-212.

possession in Corpus Christi. Sir Douglas Quintet keyboardist, Augie Meyers, and the other band members eventually followed Sahm to the West Coast.<sup>150</sup>

By the late 1960s, psychedelic rock, *orquesta tejana*, and a new African-American sub-genre known as “funk” were starting to eclipse the previously popular soul and R&B traditions of the West Side Sound. New local bands, such as Mickey and the Soul Generation and Latin Breed, reflected a shift away from the earlier foundational elements of the West Side Sound toward newly-emerging styles.<sup>151</sup>

This stylistic shift was connected to larger societal changes, including a surge in “cultural nationalism” among African Americans, Mexican Americans, American Indians, and other traditionally-marginalized groups. Cultural nationalism, or the desire for political self-determination and a renewed sense of pride in one’s ethnic heritage, manifested itself within the Mexican-American community in the form of the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Such terms as Chicano and *Chicanismo* came to symbolize ethnic pride and self-affirmation among Mexican Americans during this period.<sup>152</sup> These larger social changes affecting Texas Mexicans also would be reflected in certain developments taking place in *música tejana* at the time.

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<sup>150</sup> Reid and Sahm, *Texas Tornado*, 37-39.

<sup>151</sup> Molina, *Chicano Soul*, 115-116.

<sup>152</sup> Peña, *The Mexican American Orquesta*, 207.

### “Young, Gifted, and Brown”: *La Onda Chicana* and Cultural Nationalism

*La Onda Chicana*, (literally translated as The Chicano Wave, which symbolized a resurgence in ethnic pride among Mexicans and Mexican Americans) culminated in the Chicano Movement, which swept through Mexico and Mexican-American society beginning in the late 1960s.<sup>153</sup> Much like the ideological tenets of the Black Power Movement and its quest for greater civil rights and increased political, economic, and social opportunities for African Americans, *La Onda Chicana* had at its core the concept of cultural nationalism combined with the pragmatic goal of improving civil rights, political liberties, social justice, and economic opportunities for traditionally-marginalized Mexican Americans.<sup>154</sup>

At the height of the Chicano Movement during the 1960s and 1970s, Mexican-American labor activist Cesar Chávez and his National Farm Workers Association (later The United Farm Workers) championed *La Onda Chicana*'s political ideology, which included demands for such basic workers' rights as collective bargaining and minimum wages. Politically left-leaning student organizations, such as M.A.Y.O. (Mexican American Youth Organization) and MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán), as well as grassroots political organizations, including L.U.L.A.C. (The League

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<sup>153</sup> Eric Zolov makes a compelling case for *La Onda Chicana*'s emerging from Mexico City's countercultural rock scene of the late 1960s and 1970s. However, historians Manuel Peña and Joe Nick Patoski credit Little Joe Hernández, Sunny Ozuna, and Johnny Gonzales for pioneering the *Onda Chicana* movement north of the border in the early 1970s. The term, *La Onda Chicana*, or “Chicano Wave,” is sometimes used interchangeably with the larger socio-political “Chicano Movement” of the same era. Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 15; Joe Nick Patoski, *Selena: Como La Flor* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 1996), 29; Peña, *Música Tejana*. 159-160.

<sup>154</sup> Peña, *Música Tejana*, 160.

of United Latin American Citizens) and La Raza Unida, were the guiding force behind *La Onda Chicana*'s political activism.<sup>155</sup>

*La Onda Chicana* also found expression through new developments in *música tejana* during this period. More specifically, *La Onda Chicana* signaled a renewed interest in the hybridization of different musical genres, which already had been going on in South Texas to varying degrees for decades. *Orquestas tejanas*, which had long absorbed such “outside” musical influences as pop, jazz, swing, and R&B, took a leading role in incorporating rock and roll into an already eclectic blend of styles. In some cases, *orquestas tejanas* of the 1960s and 1970s also included political messages in their music that reflected the progressive ideology of the Chicano Movement. This fusion of traditional Texas-Mexican music, with blues, country, R&B, and rock and roll, along with a more youth-oriented cultural and political ideology, helped lay the foundation for the emergence of a new sub-genre, known as *Tejano*, by the late 1970s.

These dramatic developments in *música tejana* led to a proliferation of new bands, as well as a number of new Texas-based record labels, including El Zarape, Key-Loc, Discos Grande, Lira, GCP, Mr. G, Buena Suerte, Zaz, and others. In the summer of 1972, Dallas, Texas, producer Johnny Gonzales released an ad in the premier music trade publication, *Billboard* magazine, which stated, “We’re Coming Through in ‘72. *El Zarape Records es la Onda Chicana.*” Gonzales’s announcement, which was the first in a series that appeared throughout the early to mid-1970s, is among the earliest examples of the term *La Onda Chicana* being used in commercial advertising.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 160-161.

<sup>156</sup> Bill Williams, “Chicano Music Offers Hot Spice: Industry Built on ‘Tex-Mex’ Sounds,” *Billboard*, August 19, 1972, 7.

Johnny Gonzales and his El Zarape Records quickly became a major player in the national Chicano music scene of the 1970s, in large part because of a *Billboard* “spotlight” issue on the burgeoning *música tejana* industry. The article, entitled “Chicano Music Offers Hot Spice: Industry Built on ‘Tex-Mex’ Sounds,” included a profile of the young producer.<sup>157</sup> Gonzales recalled his experience with the major label, CBS International, in the early 1970s:

In the early ‘70s, I went to Mexico City since I was associated with CBS International. They advertised my name and my label on all the newspapers in Mexico City. And the ads’ said: “The *Onda Chicana* has come to Mexico – Johnny Gonzales and El Zarape Records.” And they [CBS International] distributed my records in Central and South America, Spain...I would get royalties from a lot of countries. I was with them for five years, and it was okay, because I got some royalties and eventual recognition for [pioneering] *Tejano* music.<sup>158</sup>

Johnny Gonzales’s experience demonstrates how the international distribution capabilities of major labels, such as CBS International, helped promote *música tejana* world-wide during the 1970s. This was important to the long-term development of the West Side Sound, since it brought Texas-Mexican music greater national and international attention. Prior to this time, *música tejana* had remained mostly regional, subject to the limited reach of small-time South Texas record distributors. Most West Side Sound records associated with the golden era rarely sold outside of Texas.<sup>159</sup> In order to place a song on the national charts, these home-grown labels usually had to

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 6-11.

<sup>158</sup> Johnny Gonzales, interview by the author, San Antonio, TX, November 30, 2011.

<sup>159</sup> Huey Meaux had an unusually extensive distributorship for a Texas producer. For more on Meaux, see Bradley and Wood, *House of Hits*.

license a regional hit to a major label. This is what Huey Meaux did with the Sir Douglas Quintet's 1965 hit, "She's About a Mover," which Meaux had convinced London Records to release nationally. However, for the most part, until CBS International and other major labels started to promote *música tejana* in the mid-1970s, local distribution was generally confined to the greater South Texas region, including San Antonio, Laredo, Corpus Christi, and elsewhere throughout the Rio Grande Valley.<sup>160</sup>

By the 1970s, large-scale *orquestas* had all but replaced the *conjunto* groups and small doo-wop and R&B combos that had characterized the West Side Sound of the 1960s.<sup>161</sup> Such prominent Texas-Mexican pop stars as Sunny Ozuna (of Sunny and the Sunliners) and Jose "Little Joe" Hernandez (of the Latinaires) started phasing out doo-wop and R&B from their repertoires and replacing those with more broad-based *orquesta* music, which increasingly included rock and roll. In some cases, these artists also infused their songs with political messages, reflecting the growing influence of the Chicano movement on themselves and on the entire Mexican-American community.

As perhaps the two most popular bandleaders among young Tejanos of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Little Joe Hernandez and Sunny Ozuna were increasingly distancing themselves from mainstream pop music. Instead, they were embracing *Chicanismo* and Chicano political ideology while blending traditional Mexican music with rock and roll.<sup>162</sup> Ozuna explained this transition. "You have friends and money only while you're there. The minute the song dies—[it's] 'Sunny who'? And in *la Onda*

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<sup>160</sup> Johnny Gonzales, interview by the author, San Antonio, TX, November 30, 2011.

<sup>161</sup> Peña, *The Mexican American Orquesta*, 238.

<sup>162</sup> Olsen, "Overlooked Americana," 79.

*Chicana*, what is nice is if you're cold for a while, they still come to see you. The white market is not that way. Chicanos hold on more to their roots, and hold on more to their stars. They back them better.”<sup>163</sup>

While Ozuna, Hernandez, and other young Chicano musicians may have been turning away from mainstream pop and increasingly toward traditional Mexican music, that does not mean they stopped drawing inspiration from the music of other ethnic or racial groups. In fact, Sunny and the Sunliners' 1971 album, *Young, Gifted, and Brown*, borrowed from black Civil Rights singer and activist Nina Simone's 1970 protest song, “Young, Gifted, and Black.”<sup>164</sup>

Instrumentation and recording technology also changed during this time period. The Hammond B-3, Farfisa, and Vox Continental organs, which were key instruments during the West Side Sound's golden years, often were replaced with the cheaper, more portable, and generally road-friendlier Korg and Yamaha-brand synthesizers during the 1970s.<sup>165</sup> Synthesizers provided a more “electronic” sound than the piano organs of the prior decade. In many ways, this was better suited to the rock and roll that so many Chicano musicians now made a core part of their repertoire. By the mid-1970s, electronic instruments and affordable recording gear, such as mail-order soundboards, also made independent recording much easier than it had previously been. As a result, musicians had greater flexibility than ever in experimenting with mixing new styles and producing and distributing their own recordings.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Peña, *The Mexican American Orquesta*, 262.

<sup>164</sup> Ramón Hernández, email message to author, May 20, 2013.

<sup>165</sup> Reid and Sahm, *Texas Tornado*, 45.

<sup>166</sup> Hickinbotham, “History of the Texas Recording Industry,” 8.

As one of the most popular and influential Texas-Mexican bandleaders of the 1960s and 1970s, Little Joe Hernandez played a leading role not only in blending together new musical influences, but also in reconciling the often conflicting “dual identity” experienced by so many young Chicanos. In fact, Hernandez was typical of most such younger Tejanos, who had been born and raised in the United States but, because of the Chicano movement, were “rediscovering” their ethnic Mexican heritage. His own ideological evolution, as well as the changes taking place in his music during this period, reflect the struggle many Chicano youth were experiencing in trying to balance the inherent conflicts present within their bi-cultural world.

Born on October 17, 1940, in Nixon, Texas, Hernandez later moved to Temple, just north of Austin, where he formed the popular group, Little Joe and the Latinaires. The Latinaires recorded for Johnny Gonzales’s El Zarape Records in Dallas and Benjamin Moncivais’s Valmon Records in East Austin throughout the 1960s, producing the type of *ranchera*-polka and Chicano Soul music often associated with the West Side Sound combos. Like Sunny Ozuna and his Key-Loc Records, Hernandez started his own record labels—Buena Suerte and Good Luck Records.<sup>167</sup>

After the release of Little Joe and the Latinaires’ 1968 debut album, *Follow the Leader*, Buena Suerte Records produced dozens of LPs and 45s, until the label folded in the mid-1970s.<sup>168</sup> Although Little Joe and the Latinaires had enjoyed widespread success as a pop group, by the late 1960s, Hernandez was becoming increasingly influenced by

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<sup>167</sup> The label Buena Suerte was used for Spanish-language releases, while the Good Luck label was used for English-language releases, including country and funk. Ramón Hernández email to author, May 2, 2013.

<sup>168</sup> Ramón Hernández email to author, May 2, 2013.

such politically-oriented Latino artists as California-based rock guitarist Carlos Santana.<sup>169</sup> By 1970, Little Joe Hernandez had changed his band's name from The Latinaires to La Familia as a reflection of his conscious effort to return to his ethnic Mexican roots. La Familia trumpet player, Tony "Ham" Guerrero, recalls the transition:

This was in 1969 [officially adopted in 1970], when we made the drastic [name] change. "You know," Hernandez said, "we're still called Little Joe and the Latinaires, and that sounds dated, and I don't like it anymore. And we're still wearing \$250 suits, and we look like goddamned James Brown! That bullshit is out. Look at all those goddamn freaks going around. And they're doing the thing; we're not doin' nothin' [sic]". Then he said, "I've decided we're gonna drop the 'Latinaire' bullshit, and we're gonna go with *La Familia*, and we're gonna become hippies with long hair." So we did, we changed. He became the first freak of the *La Onda Chicana*, with real long hair down to his ass, and chains and all that.<sup>170</sup>

Little Joe Hernandez's rapidly-shifting attitude and his determination to "re-brand" himself, his band, and his music as more "Chicano," reflected a larger change taking place in Mexican-American music and culture by the early 1970s. Manuel Peña argues that Hernandez's adoption of the new name "represents an arresting metaphor for the transformation occurring at this precise moment on the sociopolitical level: from Mexican American to Chicano."<sup>171</sup>

Little Joe y La Familia's 1972 *Para La Gente* album, which incorporates elements of rock and jazz, is another example of *La Onda Chicana*'s propensity toward hybridization. *Para La Gente* features the song, "Las Nubes (The Clouds)," which

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<sup>169</sup> Peña, *Música Tejana*, 163.

<sup>170</sup> Peña, *The Mexican American Orquesta*, 239.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

became an anthem of sorts for the Chicano movement. Based on an older Mexican folk song, La Familia's updated version of "Las Nubes" acknowledges the many struggles facing Mexican Americans, but it also celebrates the progress already made and expresses cautious optimism about the future.<sup>172</sup> Hernandez, who had worked as a cotton picker before becoming a professional musician, continued to promote this sense of *Chicanismo* in his song lyrics and political activities throughout his career.<sup>173</sup>

By the early 1970s, Manuel Rangel, Jr., and his record distribution company, Rangel Distributors, helped to further expand the distribution network of *música tejana* in San Antonio.<sup>174</sup> Rangel was among the earliest local distributors to sell records outside of Texas in such places as New Mexico, Arizona, and California, at about the same time CBS International signed its distribution deal with Johnny Gonzales.<sup>175</sup> The launching of Manuel Rangel and Johnny Gonzales's distribution networks signaled an important moment in which regional Mexican-American music would begin reaching a broader national and international market.<sup>176</sup>

San Antonio-based *conjunto* accordionists Leonardo "Flaco" Jiménez and Esteban "Steve" Jordan, who were gaining mainstream crossover appeal in the 1970s, were also

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<sup>172</sup> Peña, *Música Tejana*, 167.

<sup>173</sup> Hartman, *History of Texas Music*, 47.

<sup>174</sup> Charlie Brite, "Tex-Mex Sounds Undergo Change," *Billboard*, August 19, 1972, T-4. Rangel was heir to San Antonio's early postwar *música tejana* label, Corona Records.

<sup>175</sup> Charlie Brite, "Latin Distribution Adds PX's Worldwide," *Billboard*, September 7, 1974, T-10; Charlie Brite, "Tex-Mex Sounds Undergo Change," *Billboard*, August 19, 1972, T-4. Rangel was certainly not the only distributor to start selling records out-of-state, but he was one of the first.

<sup>176</sup> Peña, *Texas-Mexican Conjunto*, 70. Peña states that the major labels stopped making *música Tejana* recordings during the World War II era largely due to the rationing of war material (especially shellac) within the United States and the emergence of a more active Spanish-language record production infrastructure in Mexico City.

garnering new international audiences as far away as Europe and Japan.<sup>177</sup> From the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, *música tejana* record sales skyrocketed from hundreds to thousands and, eventually, to millions.<sup>178</sup> This twenty-year period also saw the advent of commercial music production in Texas, with a proliferation of studios and concert venues across the state.<sup>179</sup>

Although Johnny Gonzales may not be as well-known to the general public as some others involved in the West Side Sound, his pioneering studio work and his efforts to internationalize *música tejana* make him a seminal figure in the rapid rise in popularity of the West Side Sound during the 1970s through 1990s. In addition to Gonzales, there were other “behind-the-scenes” producers, promoters, and label owners who were helping promote *música tejana* globally by the 1970s. Such independent producer-musicians as Alberto “Al Hurricane” Sanchez and Roberto Martínez, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, also were helping expand the Texas-Mexican music market well beyond South Texas and Northern Mexico.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Carlos Guerra, “Accordion Menace...Just Say Mo’!,” in *Puro Conjunto! An Album in Words and Pictures*, ed. Juan Tejeda and Avelardo Valdez (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 115.

<sup>178</sup> Williams, “Chicano Music Offers Hot Spice,” T-6.

<sup>179</sup> Hickinbotham, “History of the Texas Recording Industry,” 7-8.

<sup>180</sup> Al Hurricane Sanchez owned Hurricane Records, which produced *conjunto*, New Mexican pop, and Chicano Soul that was quite similar to that found in the West Side Sound. Roberto Martínez and his M.O.R.E. Records released comparable types of Mexican and Mexican-American music. Louis Holscher, “Recording Industry and Studios in the Southwest Borderlands,” in *Encyclopedia of Latino Popular Culture in The United States*, Cordelia Candelaria, Arturo Aldama, and Peter Garcia, eds., (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 2: 672.

### The West Side Sound Relocates to Austin

After a few years of living in San Francisco during the late 1960s, Doug Sahm and the other members of the Sir Douglas Quintet returned to Texas in the early 1970s.<sup>181</sup> Soon after the 1968 release of “Mendocino,” Sahm had expressed his desire to return to Texas, even articulating it in his song, “Texas Me.” Part of Sahm’s desire to return to his home state had to do with the fact that, in certain ways, the earlier San Francisco counter-cultural ethos of “peace and love” had given way to a growing environment of crime, violence, and the use of harder drugs by the early 1970s. In an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine, Sahm said that San Francisco had ““gotten to where it’s just who has the most dope, you know—who can score the most coke and who had the most Rolls Royces.””<sup>182</sup>

The Bay City, and its changing music scene, also became less attractive to other musicians who had migrated from Texas to the West Coast at the height of the hippie counter-culture era. Austin psychedelic rock band, the Conqueroo, moved to San Francisco in 1968. Upon arrival, however, Conqueroo guitarist and lead singer Bob Brown found a rapidly deteriorating scene. ““Haight Street smelled like piss, and a lot of the little stores were closing down. All the people we thought were running around with flowers in their hair were now running around with needles stuck in their neck.””<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Reid and Sahm, *Texas Tornado*, 64.

<sup>182</sup> Chet Flippo, “Sir Douglas Goes Home,” *Rolling Stone*, July 7, 1971, 27.

<sup>183</sup> Reid and Sahm, *Texas Tornado*, 73.

Meanwhile, ninety miles north of San Antonio, Austin was quickly developing a reputation as a desirable destination for Texas artists who had migrated earlier to San Francisco, Los Angeles, Nashville, or elsewhere. In fact, by the early 1970s, the Capital of Texas had become the epicenter for a dynamic and eclectic new musical sub-genre that would come to be called “progressive country.” Austin’s progressive country scene involved a diverse mix of regional musical influences, including “honky tonk, folk, rock and roll, swing, boogie-woogie, blues, and other styles.”<sup>184</sup>

There were a number of factors that helped make Austin an ideal location for the development of a vibrant and dynamic live music scene. With several universities in the area, Austin had a large population of college students who had disposable income and were eager to spend part of it on entertainment. There was also a handful of innovative entrepreneurs who were willing to sacrifice much of their own time and personal income operating live music venues that hosted a remarkably eclectic blend of musicians who performed for youthful audiences eagerly seeking out such diverse entertainment. Among the most notable of these venue owners were Clifford Antone, who co-founded Antone’s, George and Carlyne Majewski, owners of Soap Creek Saloon, and Eddie Wilson, co-founder of the Armadillo World Headquarters, who once remarked that Austin’s abundance of “cheap pot and cold beer,” also was a major factor in attracting musicians and fans to the city.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Hartman, *History of Texas Music*, 165.

<sup>185</sup> Gary Cartwright, “Self-Promotion • Eddie Wilson,” *Texas Monthly*, September 1997, 114. Eddie Wilson—co-founder of the Armadillo World Headquarters (in operation from 1970 to 1980) and current owner of Austin’s celebrated Threadgill’s restaurants—gained national media attention in the early 1970s with this candid explanation of Austin’s strong appeal to musicians and fans alike.

Austin's burgeoning progressive country scene of the early 1970s also caught the attention of West Side Sound veterans, in part because of its proximity to San Antonio. In addition, the cross-pollination of diverse musical styles that lay at the heart of progressive country music was very similar to the type of musical hybridization that West Side Sound musicians had thrived on for decades. Doug Sahm was one of the first West Side Sound pioneers to relocate to Austin shortly after moving back to San Antonio from the West Coast in 1971.<sup>186</sup>

Before making his move to Austin, however, Sahm returned to his previous San Antonio music haunts, meeting and "jamming" with old friends. On a tour of the west side, Sahm told friend and *Rolling Stone* journalist Chet Flippo, "Man, the West Side is so beautiful, so soulful. There's [sic] 400,000 people on the West Side, man, the original soul Mexican thing of the world. See, the West Side is pure Chicano."<sup>187</sup> Despite Sahm's continued affection for his home town, the musical environment in San Antonio had changed significantly since he and others migrated to California in the late 1960s. By the mid-1970s, the city's music scene featured much more traditional *conjunto* and Mexican folk than it did the eclectic music associated with the West Side Sound of the previous decades.

Once Doug Sahm did permanently relocate to Austin, he seemed perfectly at home with the diverse music scene, since it reminded him in many ways of his formative years in San Antonio. Though Austin was only half the size of San Antonio and perhaps

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<sup>186</sup> Reid and Sahm, *Texas Tornado*, 64.

<sup>187</sup> ...to the Sublime, last modified November 17, 2009, accessed May 3, 2013, [http://tothesublime.typepad.com/to\\_the\\_sublime/2009/11/incredibly-its-been-10-years-since-doug-sahm-died-this-is-a-piece-i-wrote-for-the-2008-pop-music-conference-held-annually.html](http://tothesublime.typepad.com/to_the_sublime/2009/11/incredibly-its-been-10-years-since-doug-sahm-died-this-is-a-piece-i-wrote-for-the-2008-pop-music-conference-held-annually.html).

less culturally diverse than his hometown, it provided a nurturing atmosphere for the resurgence of the West Side Sound. Just as Austin would have a significant impact on Sahm's ever-evolving musical sensibilities, he also soon became one of the most admired and influential artists in the Austin music scene. Sahm's seemingly effortless ability to blend country, blues, R&B, *conjunto*, rock and roll, and other styles, allowed him to quickly build a large following in Austin and establish himself as a key player among other such notable progressive country artists as Willie Nelson, Marcia Ball, Gary P. Nunn, Jerry Jeff Walker, Michael Martin Murphey, and others.<sup>188</sup>

Sir Douglas Quintet bassist Jack Barber, who later played with Sahm's various groups in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, remembered the West Side Sound's move to Austin during the 1970s. "Everything started taking off in the middle seventies," Barber recalled. "Doug could do it so well. Nobody else could do that. They either did country or the blues, but Doug could do it so well that when you book him, you know what kind of artist you get."<sup>189</sup> Sahm's newly formed group, "Doug Sahm and his Band," played regularly at Austin's Soap Creek Saloon during this time.<sup>190</sup>

As Doug Sahm became increasingly comfortable in the Austin music scene, he began recruiting former San Antonio band mates to join him, including Spot Barnett and Rocky Morales, who would perform on many of Sahm's records throughout the remainder of his career. Another important musician Sahm drew into the Austin scene was accordionist Leonardo "Flaco" Jiménez, who was playing mostly traditional

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<sup>188</sup> Hartman, *History of Texas Music*, 170.

<sup>189</sup> Jack Barber, interview by Allen Olsen, San Antonio, TX, August 5, 2004.

<sup>190</sup> Reid and Sahm, *Texas Tornado*, 113.

accordion-polka and *conjunto* music in San Antonio's *barrios* and nightclubs during the early 1970s.<sup>191</sup>

Flaco Jiménez also caught the attention of Ry Cooder, a popular roots-rock musician from California. Beginning in the 1970s, Jiménez recorded with Sahm, Cooder, the Rolling Stones, Dwight Yoakam, and many other prominent artists, thereby helping introduce South Texas accordion-based *conjunto* into mainstream popular music. At the same time that Doug Sahm, Ry Cooder, and Flaco Jiménez were expanding the national audience for *conjunto*, some major labels were looking to further capitalize on Texas-Mexican music. “The conjunto record companies were all local, independent operations,” Jiménez recalled. “San Antonio may have been the base of conjunto music but the major labels weren't interested in this scroungy music. It was just among Mexicanos. I would consider myself one of the first ones who started sharing cultures.”<sup>192</sup>

Famed Atlantic Records' producer Jerry Wexler visited Austin in 1972 and soon took an interest in Doug Sahm, Willie Nelson, Marcia Ball (then performing under the stage name Freda and the Firedogs), and other progressive country artists. Wexler already was well-known for helping promote the careers of some of the biggest names in pop, blues, R&B, and soul during the 1960s, including Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding, and Wilson Pickett. By the time he recorded Willie Nelson, Doug Sahm, and Marcia Ball in the 1970s, Wexler also was working with such rock artists as the Allman Brothers and Carlos Santana.

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<sup>191</sup> Leonardo “Flaco” Jiménez, interview by Aaron Howard, New Haven, CT, 2000.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

In 1972, Jerry Wexler signed a deal with Doug Sahm to produce his first Atlantic record, *Doug Sahm and Band*, which was released the following year. Sahm brought with him to the Atlantic Studios in New York some of his old San Antonio band mates, including members of the Sir Douglas Quintet, but he also included some other notable musicians, whom Sahm had been working with more recently, including Dr. John, Bob Dylan, and Flaco Jiménez.<sup>193</sup>

Jiménez recalled how Sahm encouraged him to broaden his repertoire to include more pop, rock and roll, and other styles. “‘Doug told me: ‘you’re not supposed to play just that simple, traditional conjunto music.’ There are so many players who stayed in the same crater like my papa did. Doug showed me there were other worlds out there.’”<sup>194</sup>

Sahm released two more albums with Wexler on Atlantic Records—*Doug Sahm and Friends* and *Texas Tornado*.<sup>195</sup>

Through these and other major recording projects during the 1970s, Doug Sahm, Flaco Jiménez, Augie Meyers, and other South Texas artists continued to spread their *conjunto*, rock, blues, R&B, country, and pop-inflected West Side Sound throughout the Austin progressive country scene and well beyond.

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<sup>193</sup> Stimeling, “The Creation of ‘Texas Music,’” 11.

<sup>194</sup> Leonardo “Flaco” Jiménez, interview by Aaron Howard, New Haven, CT, 2000.

<sup>195</sup> Stimeling, “The Creation of ‘Texas Music,’” 11.

## The End of an Era

By the end of the 1970s, a San Antonio *Tejano* group, the Latin Breed, was emerging as the city's most popular *orquesta*. Along with other such bands as Grupo Mazz, David Lee Garza, La Tropa F, and Ruben Ramos, *Tejano* had become the most popular Mexican-American musical genre in the Southwest by the early 1980s.<sup>196</sup> Because of this growing interest in *Tejano* music, local industry leaders and fans established the Tejano Music Awards in 1980 and the Texas Conjunto Festival in 1982 to celebrate the rich traditions behind this music, as well as this new genre's rapid rise to the international stage.<sup>197</sup>

Starting in the 1980s and 1990s, Hispanic-owned radio stations across the Southwest were playing *Tejano* music, and record labels, both local and national, began showing renewed interest in *música tejana*.<sup>198</sup> *Tejano* music received a major boost in popularity in the early 1990s with the phenomenal success of a young singer named Selena Quintanilla. Quintanilla was born April 16, 1971, in Lake Jackson, Texas. Her father, Abraham, was leader of a 1960s Chicano Soul group from Corpus Christi called the Dinos. (He later used this name for Selena's early 1980s family band, Selena y los Dinos.) After building a regional following in South Texas during the mid-1980s, Selena

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<sup>196</sup> Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., *Tejano Proud: Tex-Mex Music in the Twentieth Century* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2002), 85.

<sup>197</sup> Peña, *Música Tejana*, 199. Disc Jockey Rudy Treviño and Latin Breed's Gilbert Escobedo started the Tejano Music Awards in 1981.

<sup>198</sup> Guadalupe San Miguel, "When Tejano Ruled the Airwaves: The Rise and Fall of KQQK in Houston, Texas," in *Chican@ Critical Perspectives and Praxis at the Turn of the 21st Century: Selected Papers from the 2002, 2003 and 2004 NACCS Conference Proceedings*, ed. Ed A. Muñoz (San Jose, CA: San Jose State University SJSU ScholarWorks, 2006), 202.

won Female Vocalist of the Year at the 1987 Tejano Music Awards.<sup>199</sup> Shortly afterwards, Selena, as she came to be known by her fans, signed a contract in 1989 with Capitol/EMI and soon became the biggest star in *Tejano* music. Selena's remarkable success helped usher in what music historian Guadalupe San Miguel calls "the era of corporate involvement," during which a number of Tejano bands signed recording contracts with major labels throughout the 1990s.<sup>200</sup>

In an effort to reach a larger mainstream audience, Selena started recording in English during the early 1990s, with her brother, A.B. Quintanilla, as producer. Mixing in elements of pop, R&B, rock, hip-hop, and *cumbia*, and incorporating choreographed dance moves and colorful costumes into her stage performances, Selena became an international ambassador for *Tejano* music. With fourteen of her songs on the *Billboard* Top 10 Latin Songs list, including her number-one hit, "Como La Flor," *Billboard* deemed her the "best selling Latin artist of the decade."<sup>201</sup> Selena's 1994 multi-platinum CD, *Amor Prohibido*, which remains the best-selling Latin record of all time, includes some of her most celebrated songs, such as "Bidi Bidi Bom Bom," "Si Una Vez," and "Amor Prohibido." Selena's unparalleled role in popularizing Tejano music worldwide earned her the nickname the "Queen of Tejano."<sup>202</sup> Selena Quintanilla was murdered in 1995 by the former president of her fan club, but the singer left a lasting legacy in *música tejana* by helping popularize *Tejano* music around the world.

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<sup>199</sup> Joe Nick Patoski, *Selena: Como La Flor* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1996), 34, 76.

<sup>200</sup> San Miguel, Jr., *Tejano Proud*, 92.

<sup>201</sup> "Selena: Best Selling Latin Artist of the Decade," advertisement, *Billboard*, December 25, 1999, HY-17.

<sup>202</sup> San Miguel, Jr., *Tejano Proud*, 89-92.

Tejano's rise in popularity during the 1980s and 1990s did not mean that the West Side Sound had gone dormant. One of the West Side Sound's most innovative and soulful singer-guitarists, Randy Garibay, released his local hit, "Barbacoa Blues," in 1996. The song highlights the unique culture of San Antonio's west side and celebrates such local pastimes as hanging out with friends and family and dining on *barbacoa*, or Mexican-style barbecue. "Barbacoa Blues" follows a typical 12-bar blues progression. "I went down Nogalitos/ Lookin' for some *barbacoa* and Big Red/ I went down Nogalitos/ Lookin' for some *barbacoa* and Big Red/ I coulda had *menudo*/ But I got some *cabeza* instead!"<sup>203</sup> Garibay's song remains popular in San Antonio, since it resonates so strongly with locals, and because it was one of the last hits for Randy Garibay, the self-proclaimed "Chicano Bluesman," before he died in 2002.<sup>204</sup>

As *Tejano* grew in popularity in San Antonio and throughout the Spanish-speaking world, Doug Sahm was busy charting his own musical course. His contract with Atlantic Records only lasted a few years, and after some singles on other labels, Sahm released his 1983 album, *The West Side Sound Rolls Again*, on Huey Meaux's Crazy Cajun Records. The album featured the Sir Douglas Quintet and his newly formed "West Side Horns," including Rocky Morales, Louis Bustos, Al Gomez, Spot Barnett, and Arturo "Sauce" Gonzales. This album marked the first published use of the term *West Side Sound*.

Throughout the 1980s, Doug Sahm and his West Side Horns played in Austin and San Antonio regularly. Meanwhile, Sahm and Augie Meyers toured extensively

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<sup>203</sup> Olsen, "San Antonio's West Side Sound," 12.

<sup>204</sup> Potts, "Garibay, Randy," 231.

throughout Europe in the 1980s, where they had developed a large following, particularly in Scandinavia.<sup>205</sup> In 1989, Sahm launched his latest West Side Sound incarnation, the Texas Tornados, a “super-group” which included veteran Texas musicians, Augie Meyers, Freddy Fender, Flaco Jiménez, Ernie Durawa, Louie Ortega, and Speedy Sparks. The band released its self-titled debut album, *Texas Tornados*, for New York-based Reprise Records in 1990. The LP, recorded at the Fire Station studio in San Marcos, Texas, approximately half-way between Austin and San Antonio, showcased the West Side Sound’s long-standing blend of *conjunto*, country, pop, R&B, and rock and roll. The album included such hits as “Hey, Baby (*Que Paso*)?” and “Soy de San Luis,” the latter of which won a 1991 Grammy Award for Best Mexican-American Performance.<sup>206</sup>

The group vaulted to international stardom and developed a loyal following around the world. The remarkable success of the Texas Tornados helped rejuvenate the careers of Sahm, Fender, Meyers, and Jiménez. However, the band’s meteoric rise ended when Doug Sahm died of a heart attack in 1999. Seven years later, in 2006, Freddy Fender also died. This marked the passing of two of the Texas Tornados’ founding members and leading architects of the West Side Sound.

The Texas Tornados represent the apex of the West Side Sound, due in part to their far-reaching popularity. In tandem with the mainstreaming of *música tejana* during the 1990s, the Texas Tornados’ brand of Tex-Mex rock has been featured in mainstream American entertainment, ranging from movies and commercials to light night television, most notably CBS’s *The Late Show with David Letterman*.

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<sup>205</sup> Reid and Sahm, *Texas Tornado*, 155.

<sup>206</sup> Gary Hickinbothom, “Texas Tornados,” in *The Handbook of Texas Music*, Second Edition, Laurie Jasinski, ed., (Denton: Texas State Historical Association, 2012), 615.

Despite the deaths of Doug Sahm and Freddy Fender, the West Side Sound still remains popular. Such bands as Cats Don't Sleep, Sexto Sol, and The West Side Horns (under the leadership of Sauce Gonzales), continue the long-standing West Side Sound tradition of blending often disparate musical elements that reflect the diverse and ever-evolving cultural environment of San Antonio and South Texas. In the process, these musicians, and their fans, continue helping redefine not only *música tejana* and Texas music in general, but also mainstream American music.

## CHAPTER V:

### CONCLUSION

2013 marks the fiftieth anniversary of Sunny and the Sunliners' hit, "Talk To Me." Its rise to the top of the *Billboard* Hot 100 list made it one of the earliest Chicano recordings to achieve national popularity. From September to November 1963, the "Talk To Me" single sold hundreds of thousands of copies, signaling the undeniable emergence of the West Side Sound into mainstream popular music.<sup>207</sup> Although most Americans may not have even noticed this cultural milestone, it had significant implications for the history of Texas-Mexican music.

The hybrid nature of the West Side Sound can be heard in many forms, including the Tex-Mex rock of the Sir Douglas Quintet, the *conjunto*-country ballads of Freddy Fender, the jazz and soul-inflected polkas of Esteban Jordan, and Flaco Jiménez's lively accordion licks accompanying the Rolling Stones.<sup>208</sup> Such Texas rockers as Girl in a Coma and Los Lonely Boys carry on the hybrid spirit pioneered by Rudy and His Reno Bops and Mando and the Chili Peppers generations earlier. Girl in a Coma's 2010 punk-

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<sup>207</sup> Huey Meaux, "Sunny and the Sunglows," advertisement, *Billboard*, October 19, 1963.

<sup>208</sup> "Sweethearts Together," written by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, performed by the Rolling Stones, Virgin CDV2750, 1994.

rock version of Selena's "Si Una Vez" exemplifies this tradition of borrowing from the past and modernizing for the present.<sup>209</sup>

A half-century after it first appeared, the West Side Sound continues to receive widespread attention, as archival record labels, such as Chicago's Numero Group and Austin's Heavy Light Records, re-release Chicano Soul music. Currently, Numero Group is working on a comprehensive reissue of the expansive Abe Epstein record catalog for the forthcoming compilation, *Epstein Enterprises: San Antonio, Texas*.<sup>210</sup> Although it may not have the same level of world-wide popularity that it once had, the West Side Sound still remains vital, culturally, economically, and historically.

Today, such San Antonio bands as Sexto Sol and Suzy Bravo and the Soul Revue, carry the West Side Sound tradition to younger audiences, mixing in hard rock, funk, and electric blues, giving the "oldies" tradition a contemporary twist. All-vinyl deejays, such as Eddie Hernandez (a.k.a. DJ Plata and guitarist for both aforementioned groups) and JJ Lopez (of KRTU's "The Diggin' Deep Soul Shakedown" radio program), continue to spin San Antonio soul music and educate young audiences about the city's unique musical heritage. Meanwhile, local cultural institutions, including the South Texas Popular Culture Center, the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, and the Carver Community Cultural Center, are dedicated to the preservation and celebration of San Antonio's rich and diverse musical traditions.

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<sup>209</sup> Deborah Vargas, *Dissonant Divas in Chicana Music: The Limits of La Onda* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2012), 225.

<sup>210</sup> Ken Shipley and Rob Sevier, liner notes to *Eccentric Soul: The Dynamic Label*, Numero Group 043, 2013.

A number of factors have made San Antonio a hotbed for the type of musical hybridization that helped produce the West Side Sound. Not quite “southern” and not quite “southwestern,” San Antonio is located at the cultural crossroads of the Deep South, the American West, and Latin America.<sup>211</sup> Established as a Spanish settlement in the early 1700s, San Antonio became a magnet for Anglo, German, Czech, French, and other immigrant groups by the early 1800s. Likewise, African Americans, both slave and free, came into the San Antonio area beginning in the 1820s and continued arriving in large numbers throughout the twentieth century.<sup>212</sup>

Because it attracted such a large and ethnically-diverse population, San Antonio became home to a dynamic and eclectic musical environment, which included *bolero*, *corrido*, *mariachi*, *conjunto*, blues, jazz, gospel, polka, Cajun, Creole, R&B, rock and roll, and many other styles.<sup>213</sup> The continual influx of diverse populations and cultures helped create a situation in which musicians and fans from a variety of backgrounds could mingle freely in an atmosphere of “intercultural congeniality” that was quite unique, especially at the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>214</sup> Many African Americans who lived in San Antonio during the pre-civil rights era remember the city’s progressive racial attitudes.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Olsen, “San Antonio’s West Side Sound,” 27.

<sup>212</sup> Hartman, *History of Texas Music*, 207.

<sup>213</sup> Peña, *Texas-Mexican Conjunto*, 20.

<sup>214</sup> Olsen, “Overlooked Americana” 155.

<sup>215</sup> Vernon “Spot” Barnett, interview by the author, San Antonio, TX, September 9, 2012; Joe Scott, interview by Sterlin Holmesly, San Antonio, TX, July 27, 1984; Robert Goldberg, “Racial Change on the Southern Periphery.”

The proliferation of military bases in and around the Alamo City during World War II ushered in a vibrant mix of servicemen and women from around the country who brought with them a variety of ideas, cultures, and musical tastes. The fact that many of these military personnel had disposable income and were eager for live entertainment made it possible for several of the city's nightclubs to provide a public arena in which musicians and music lovers of all races and ethnic backgrounds could share in a unique cultural communion that would help give rise to the West Side Sound.

San Antonio's nightclubs, especially the Eastwood Country Club, the Ebony Lounge, and Don Albert's Keyhole Club, played a vital role in providing a public space in which local artists could socialize and exchange musical ideas and innovations with their peers and with younger musicians. In addition, such national R&B and blues performers as Bobby "Blue" Bland, Louis Jordan, and James Brown, played these venues frequently, helping to influence multiple generations of San Antonio musicians. West Side Sound veterans Charlie Alvarado, Rocky Morales, and Doug Sahm all have remarked on the importance of these local nightclubs in their early musical development.

It is important to note that, while this study examines the West Side Sound's evolution over the years, in some ways, this unique musical phenomenon is difficult to define or categorize. For example, when asked how to describe the West Side Sound, West Side Horns bassist Jack Barber bluntly stated, "There is no West Side Sound. The West Side Sound...is just 'ice house' music. You know, all the 'Baby, I Love You' kind of songs...the 'oldies' kind of thing. That's kind of what the West Side Sound is in a

sense. Doug [Sahm] just named the band the West Side Sound because they were all mostly from the west side.”<sup>216</sup>

Joe Jama, popular Chicano Soul singer and former member of the Royal Jesters, also had trouble describing the West Side Sound. Jama considered it more of a “feeling” than a specific tone or instrumentation. “We absorbed that black sound, and we’re Hispanics from San Antonio, so it just kinda came together into this *sound*, ya know? We’d cover a Bobby “Blue” Bland song, but we didn’t do it like him—we’d do it like *Chicano* style. It was the way we [Chicanos] expressed soul music. It’s hard to say, man. It can’t be duplicated—you gotta be from here.”<sup>217</sup>

Despite the difficulty some may have in describing or defining it, the West Side Sound is a remarkable example of the type of cultural hybridization that can take place when a variety of elements come into play in a certain place at a certain time and under certain conditions. In the case of San Antonio, the West Side Sound reflects a unique, and often progressive, blending of cultures, ideologies, and attitudes that reflect the distinct conditions present in that region of Texas. The continuing popularity and social relevance of the West Side Sound is a testament to the unique history, culture, and people of San Antonio.

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<sup>216</sup> Jack Barber, interview by Allen Olsen, San Antonio, TX, August 5, 2004.

<sup>217</sup> Joe Jama, interview by the author, San Antonio, TX, January 23, 2013.

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## **VITA**

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