

Topic: Finding identity through music

Abstract: Being a first generation *Chicana* was confusing for me trying to find a fine line between being American and not losing my Mexican heritage and music helped me find this fine line. I found my identity as a first generation Mexican-American through the music of my culture.

Keywords: Music, culture, Identity, Mexican-American/ Chicanos, music genres.

Music as Our Voice

Music connects, unites, and divides people all across this sphere. Doesn't matter what side of the spectrum of life you are on or what hemisphere you reside in music will both give you individuality and help you feel united as a part of a group. Music can help you trace where your people have been, how they got where they are from where they were. For me music was the key to all these things.

Being a *chicana* was confusing to me; was I Mexican or American and how could you be both. There had to be more to it than just where you were born. And when filling out papers, what was my ethnicity? Mexican, Hispanic, or Latino they couldn't all refer to the same group of people. Just because we weren't originally born on this soil and we all speak the same language in different dialects that didn't make us one people.

I wanted to find the things that made us, us and what separated my generation from the previous. Of course there are the dishes that are passed down through generations connecting us to the ones before us, and then another distinct attribute separating us from generations before us is the clothing worn by the Chicanos today. Even though it is a stereotypical form of attire non the less it is one of our trade marks. But for me finding our identity, my identity didn't come from dishes native to the

regions my parents came from, nor was it from the way my cousins dressed, walked, and talked. It came from the music they listened to.

It came from my mother's mariachi music, *corridos*, *y musica tejana*, from the Motown songs my dad use to listen to when he lived in San Luis, Sonora and continued to listen to when he came into the United States, from my cousins' gangster and Chicano rap. I had found our identity, my identity in every lyric, melody, stanza, measure, and beat. It didn't matter what genre I was being exposed to, depending who I was staying with at the time. Once the tune began I felt like I fit. As the music played I found my map and I didn't feel lost anymore. Music wasn't simply different frequencies coming from the speakers of the stereo. It was what connected us to the previous generations and gave us our own identity our own voice, and I loved every genre. From the heavy brass bass of mariachi music to the sing song voice of Chicano rap. To me it didn't matter how different the music was because it was all our voice. The oldies but goodies the older *cholos* listen to while cruising in there low riders. The mariachis that play at our weddings and *quincenreas*, the *corridos* me and my family listen to while driving through my mother's beloved Tamaulipas, MX; the *tejano* music my *tias* listen to while cleaning on the weekends, and the gangster and *chicano* rap my generation listens to today; all of these are our voices. It doesn't matter what outsiders wanted to say about the music or "noise", I was proud because it is our sound.

After finding my identity through the music of my culture it intrigued me to think that this was true for cultures all over the world. That music all over the world held the past and present of every culture it came from and I became eager to taste every rhythm, harmony, melody, chord, and scale that histories all over our sphere had created. Simply

to hear it wasn't enough I wanted to know all the ingredients that went into making it

Where the instruments indigenous to the region or were they brought by settlers? Are the scales and chords native to that part of the world? How does the role of music differ in all the cultures and societies around the world? And so many other questions that just flooded my mind. Music creates the souls all over this world that give our planet life, a heart beat, a rhythm.

To me music unites and divides people all across our four hemispheres. No matter whom you are or where you are from the minute that rhythm hits your body and moves through you like a shock wave, whether you do it or not, your body gets the urge to move every inch of it until its movements are the melody. To me music isn't just a song playing on the radio or something to dance to at parties it is a critical aspect of life it is a necessity to me. By using music to identify myself with my Mexican heritage it opened so many doors for me. When I found out that I could go into a field where I could study music all over the world from different culture I had no doubt in my mind what it was I was going to major in when I graduated from high school. Going from a forensic science major to music major might seem like an odd jump for many people but to me it was as natural as changing shoes.

My parents didn't approve of this change they thought I wouldn't be able to do anything with a degree in music. That music should be left as a hobby and I should just go back into forensics. True forensics fascinates me along with any science and it would be a fascinating career but studying music is the one thing I would do for free. After seeing how determined I was in sticking with my music major and how committed I was to all my work they eventually gave in and accepted my choice. I can't wait for the day I

can graduate and start working in the field visiting different cultures and observing how music plays a role in their day to day life, how they're instruments are made, how they connect to their world through their music, and so many other things I want to understand about all the various cultures we have to privilege to coexist with on our planet.

Probably the best thing that came out of my love for music, despite the connection I acquired to my Mexican heritage and culture as a first generation Mexican-American, was the impact it has had on my younger sisters. My middle sister told me that seeing me so determined to do something I love with my life makes her want to try harder in school so that she can have a career and not end up like the majority of the women our family have and to me that is the best thing my love for music could have done. Not only affect my life in such a positive manner but also someone else's. I would love to help more people with my love for music I want to be able to give back to my people. To help other Mexican-American generations to not forget where their hearts come from, I want them to know the rich culture their parents, grandparents, families left behind to be able to give them something better than what they had. And maybe since the music of my family helped me want to know more about where it all came from and helped find a connection to a culture that had been left behind in Mexico with only scraps of it slipping through the border then maybe I can do that for other generations born here in America.

Music gave me eyes to see what was hidden behind the eyes of my *familia* in their memories. It helped connect part of me that didn't seem to coexist with my Mexican half and showed me to be proud of where my parents came from and to never deny what I am. Music is not simply pitches at different frequencies, a sound, or even just a song it is the voice of all the various cultures on our beloved shore.