

INTERSECTIONS RADIO

INTERVIEW WITH LAS CAFETERAS

MAY 16, 2018

TRANSCRIPT

[MUSIC: "LA MORENA"]

Morenita
Rezando estoy
Rezando a usted

Morenita
Rezando estoy
Rezando a usted

SARIKA MEHTA: You're listening to Intersections Radio, the podcast where we geek out on all things intersectionality. I'm your host, Sarika Mehta. Welcome, and thanks for tuning in.

Now, today is a very special day, and a special episode. In studio we have Las Cafeteras. Las Cafeteras is a Chicano band from Los Angeles, whose music is rooted in the traditional Veracruz sounds of son jarocho, with lyrics talking about contemporary issues and social justice.

But that's not all they do. They're organizers, they're educators, and you can hear it in their music. Their latest album is Tastes Like LA, and it steps beyond son jarocho and brings more influences and more flavors to the music. This album includes a single that went viral last year, If I Were President, as well as a new take on Woody Guthrie's classic This Land Is My Land. Las Cafeteras, welcome to Intersections Radio.

We have a lot of people in the studio today, so let's take a minute to introduce everyone. Tell us your name and what you play.

HECTOR FLORES: My name is Hector Flores, I'm playing the jarana tercera. We'll go to my left.

CHRISOL LOMELI: My name is Chrisol Lomeli, I'm actually -- I'm singing vocals, filling in for Leah.

XOCOYOTZIN MORAZA: My name is Xocoyotzin Moraza, and I'm performing on the requinto jarocho.

DANIEL FRENCH: Hey, I'm Daniel French, I'm playing the jarana segunda.

DENISE CARLOS: Hola, I'm Denise Carlos, I play the jarana primera, zapateado, and I do vocals.

JOSE CANO: And hello, last but not least, I'm Jose Cano, and I'm tonight's mero mero cajonero, playing the cajon.

DENISE CARLOS: Tonight and every night.

SARIKA MEHTA: Well, it's nice to meet everybody. Let's start by talking about the roots of your music, which is son jarocho, and the Eastside Cafe in Los Angeles. Who wants -- Hector, why don't you tell us a little bit about how you all got together.

HECTOR FLORES: A lot of us were friends -- we actually, a lot of us were friends of Denise and Jose. Actually met at a casa in LA, when they were studying and they were student activists. Myself and Frenchie, we met when we were trying to save the largest urban farm in the country, it was called the South Central Farm, I don't know if people know about that, there's a documentary called The Garden.

And we met because people -- there was a lot of movement going on, there's always music, dance, poetry, and son jarocho was this music that was starting to be played by a group in Santa Ana, and a bunch of us learned at a space called the Eastside Cafe, it's a Zapatista inspired space, as students for many, many years, just fell in love with the poetry.

It's all -- it's love for Afro Mexican culture, songs, and it's like roots. It's wooden instruments, and it's a music that comes from colonialism, from slavery, it's a mix, an amalgamation of African, indigenous, Spanish, Arabic, beats rhythms and rhymes, and it's kind of like us. Like, we come from a lot of different places, all of us are Chicanos, Chicanas, Mestizos, we have native blood, we have European blood, we have African blood, and, you know, through that pain came this beautiful music, and formed this band, you know?

And so, that's who we are, in a nutshell. I don't know if anybody else wants to add on that stuff, but, you know.

SARIKA MEHTA: Pretty -- pretty good description. It comes out in your music, you can hear it in the lyrics, the issues you talk about. I just want to take one moment to ask you about your name, Las Cafeteras. I know it came from learning the music and being a part of the Eastside Cafe, but you were Los Cafeteros, and I know that you were challenging the patriarchy of the Spanish language.

DANIEL FRENCH: Hey, what's up, it's Daniel. So, yeah, I mean, like, if you, you know, if you -- if somebody came into this room and said hey guys, how are you doing? The -- everybody in the room might say, oh, I'm good, but if somebody walked in this room and said, hey ladies,

how are you doing? Probably --

DENISE CARLOS: We'd be, like, hey.

DANIEL FRENCH: Probably the men in the room might be like, oh, they're not talking to me. So, in Spanish, it's the same thing, and so, they, people will call it the Cafeteros, because we were from a community center where we started learning some traditional songs, called the Eastside Cafe, so they would call us the Cafeteros, because we came out of this community center.

Long story short, we decided cool, we have to decide on, is it Cafeteros, or is it Las Cafeteras, and we decided we would change the norm, and say Las Cafeteras, the feminine, and say, cool, like, it's okeh, you can call us the feminine, Cafe -- like, coffeepots, or coffee pickers, and say that, like, that's cool, we can accept that identity, like, women have had to accept being called dudes for, like, hey guys, you know, for a long time.

And, in the end, it's beautiful, because it's -- it's acknowledging what's feminine about this group, but it's also acknowledging the feminine in all of us, and that we all come from women, and so, you know, why not? I mean, it's, duh.

HECTOR FLORES: We want to make that the norm.

DANIEL FRENCH: Yeah.

SARIKA MEHTA: I like that you're making that the norm, and thank you for humoring me on the language nerd part of my [inaudible]. So, let's talk about the album, your first album, It's Time, seemed more rooted in the son jarocho, you know, this music and culture that brought you all together. Tell us about the second album, Tastes Like LA.

JOSE CANO: Yeah, sure. I mean, Tastes Like LA came out last year. A bunch of our original songs, some remakes of traditional songs. We had a great time doing it. It has a couple of songs that we're going to play today.

SARIKA MEHTA: Well, let's get right to it. One of the very popular songs on this album is If I Were President, which, the -- when this was released last year, at least when the video was released, it went viral, so, tell us about If I Were [sic] President.

DENISE CARLOS: So, the album is called Tastes Like LA. A lot of times when we travel, people are asking us what genre do you play? And we used to say son jarocho, but things have changed, right, there's -- it's a plethora of genres, and so, If I Was President is actually a retake of the son jarocho song, called El Presidente, which is a song, a traditional song, hundreds of years old, where folks were basically

making demands of the president in Mexico, and so when we talked about how this music and how this song fit into our daily lives, we talked about, well, what does it mean to be a leader, what are things that we want to change in our communities, how do we not only protest but also build?

And so, President is a song talking about what we want to see in our communities. Here we go.

[MUSIC: "IF I WAS PRESIDENT"]
SeÑor Presidente le vengo avisar
No tengo papeles para trabajar
SeÑor Presidente le pido porque
Matan al Moreno con piel de cafÈ

Si fuera presidente
Honestamente
Si fuera Presidente
Para mi gente
Si fuera Presidente
Honestamente
Presidente
Para mi gente

Check, check, one, two
You see, if I was president
Iíd roll up my sleeves
As I face the congregation
First thing Iíd do
Is free education
And every third period
Weíd practice meditation
Every third period
Weíd practice meditation
You see like a brown Robin Hood
Iíd take from the rich
And Iíd give to the poor
So my little sister
Ainít got to be hungry no more
And my first lady
Would be my mom
Cause sheíd smack me in the head
At the first thought of drone strikes
And dropping bombs
And Iíd free all my poor black and brown kids
That got caught up in three strikes
And when they get out
Theyíre gettiní free bikes
So they can ride to their future
Not their past

Go to the store, get some chips
With no GMO ícause my folks
We gotta right to know
And if you donít know
Now you know
Now you know
So everybody, man,
You know the words
Here we go

Me gusta la lima, me gusta limon
Pero no me gusta tanta corrupcion
Me gusta la lima, me gusta limon
Pero no me gusta tanta corrupcion

Si fuera presidente
Honestamente
Si fuera presidente
Para mi gente
Si fuera presidente
Honestamente
Presidente
Para mi gente

At my inauguration
Ííd burn tobacco at the opening
Send thanks and prayers
To creator and all living beings
Then Ííd sit you down with your abuelita
Rewrite history so our kids can see
Where we came from and a new destiny
From Flint to Cali water flowing pure and free
My department of peace
Would melt guns into bike racks
Budget cuts to corporate kickbacks
If I was president, well, thereíd still be drama
Takes a village to heal our generational trauma
So, shake your spine,
Put your hands up high
We got a different kinda party in the White House tonight

If I was president
Hey, what would I do?
If I was president
Hey, Ííd ask you
If you were president
Hey, what would you do?
If it was you, you or you

Me gusta la lima, me gusta limon

Pero no me gusta tanta corrupcion
Me gusta la lima, me gusta limon
Pero no me gusta tanta corrupcion

Tell 'em, French

To all the dreamers,
To everyone out there
Wishing for a better world
Build it, don't wait
We can't wait on these presidents
Here we go
It's on the people
It's on us to start right now
Wherever you're at
Take that next step
Vamos, mi gente

Si fuera presidente
Paí toda la gente
Si fuera presidente
Paí toda la gente
Si fuera presidente
Paí toda la gente

Me gusta la lima, me gusta limon
Pero no me gusta tanta corrupcion
Me gusta la lima, me gusta limon
Pero no me gusta tanta corrupcion
Me gusta la lima, me gusta limon
Pero no me gusta tanta corrupcion
Me gusta la lima, me gusta limon
Pero no me gusta tanta corrupcion
Me gusta la lima, me gusta limon
Pero no me gusta tanta corrupcion
Me gusta la lima, me gusta limon
Pero no me gusta tanta corrupcion

SARIKA MEHTA: Thank you! Thank you for performing that.

DANIEL FRENCH: To all those presidents listening, y'all better recognize.

SARIKA MEHTA: Talk about the response when you guys released the video for that song.

HECTOR FLORES: We got a -- you know, we released it on Inauguration Day, so the day that 45 got inaugurated last year, that's when we dropped the video, and, you know, we got a lot of love for it, not because it was our video, it's because it was, like, as a country, the

sentiment. I think even like all over the world, people were just, it was as sentiment, like, this ain't our president, and more than anything I think it was a call for people to think about what they would do.

Because everybody in their home, like, everybody's the president of something. You might be the president in your, you know, in your house. You might be the president of your school crew, you might be the president in your family, you know, you might be an older brother, you know, everybody's got to make decisions in their lives that impact people, and so are you taking account into what's best for you and your family in a healthy way?

And I think we've all got to be the best presidents we can be in our family, in our community, you know, on our block, and I think at the end of the day that's what it was about. Like, we don't want to be anti anymore, we want to be pro something, more than anything.

SARIKA MEHTA: That's a good way to put that. The president is kind of at a macro level. At the micro level, I thought about, you know, how, el zapateado, from what I understand, it has roots in Afro Mexican history. But, it's so related to contemporary issues of how our country is treating black people.

DANIEL FRENCH: Yeah, I mean, one of the things that Hector talks about in one of the parts of the song is naming black -- black people who've been killed at the hands of, like, our law enforcement system, and people who -- who are beautiful, who are human beings, and have families, and come from particular neighborhoods and communities, and who have futures, and had futures who were cut short.

And so, you know, it's an Afro Mexican song, son jarocho is Afro Mexican music. It comes from that mix of people, and, you know, we're none of us in this room is black, you know what I'm saying? So, it, what's beautiful is that we can name, that we see, we see that happening, we see our brothers and sisters and we see what's happening in this country, and as, you know, as people who are Latino and native and otherwise, we can say, look, like, those are our family, too.

I didn't even know any of the people you'll hear named in this song, personally. But at the same time they represent people, friends, family, neighbors, and people who are close to me, and so, I think for us it's, this music has been a way for us to speak our -- speak bridges, and to sing bridges, and to say, cool, you know what, like we're in solidarity with you. We don't -- like Hector says, you know, I don't have to know you to love you, to have love for you, and to say that, you know, your pain is mine.

And, like MLK said, like, none of us is free until we're all free, you know, our freedom is bound together with each other, and so, and

that's something you'll hear in the rhythm, like, the, ta-ra-ta ca-ta-ca-ta, takata ta-ta-ta-ka, that's a -- that's a straight west African rhythm, and so, it's -- it's these heirlooms that exist in this traditional music, and it comes up in different ways, and it's funny because we're Chicanos and group, you know, mostly, and all of us in southern California, and so, this isn't even necessarily where we grew up, but this is us saying this is the music that called to us, and us trying to make the music speak to the time.

SARIKA MEHTA: What is el zapateado, like, what, dance, is it a rhythm, or what is it?

HECTOR FLORES: We've got an ethno-musicologist in the house, we are -- our friend Xocoyotzin, maybe, could you say, maybe shed a little bit, zapateado? Shed a little bit of the history, or --

XOCOYOTZIN MORAZA: The word zapateado is actually a word that derives from the word "zapato," which in Spanish means shoe. It has a reference to the footwork that is used in these particular types of sones from Veracruz. Zapateado is the name of a son jarocho, but also refers to the style of dancing that accompanies the music.

So, the dancing itself, the zapateado itself, is actually considered another element to the music, so it's an actual instrument. So, not only is it -- serve as a percussion, but it also serves as the livelihood of a fandango, or the livelihood of -- like, it's almost like a heartbeat, just like the jarana, just like the harp, which is also used in different regions, the requinto, and the sound of singing, which is called atpregûn.

So, they all tie in together and create the son jarocho. So the zapateado is a very integral part of this style of music.

DANIEL FRENCH: Here we go, with Zapateado.

[MUSIC: "EL ZAPATEADO"]
Te pareces a la flor
Que tumba la berenjena
Si probaras de mi amor
Veras que cosa tan buena
Tiene sabor coyol
Y olor de yerba buena

Lero Le
Quisiera ser mariposa
Quisiera ser mariposa
Para poder yo volar
Pero paí que quiero alas
Digo paí que quiero alas
Si vuelo al zapatear

Si vuelo al zapatear

I come from the sun and the moon
The sky's my father
Like the flowers
I bloom

I look like my mother
Her skin is dark brown
Yo, I look like my mother
'Cause I came from the ground

My heart beats in rhythms
'Cause it's made like a drum
And when I spit rhymes
All my ancestors come
We sing songs about the past
About the present, about our pain
And when we get together
We say "not in our name"

From Gaza, Honduras, Guatemala, Vietnam,
Yo I'm banging this drum
For all they who're dropping bombs
Those creating borders
And taking away my mom
All the tune will be rising
And we're rising in song

My name is Emmett Till
And I ain't doin' nothin' wrong
I didn't whistle at a white woman
I wasn't causin' no harm
I need you to remember my name
'Cause it's seven generations long

My name is Trayvon Martin
I ain't doin' nothin' wrong
I was just walking home
I wasn't causin' no harm
I need you to remember my name
'Cause it's seven generations long

My name is Stephon Clark
I ain't doin' nothing' wrong
I was in my back yard
I ain't causin' no harm
I need you to remember my name
'Cause it's seven generations long

My name is Sandra Bland
And I ain't doin' nothin' wrong
I was just driving home
I wasn't causin' no harm
I need you to remember my name
'Cause it's seven generations long

Con la voz de un mestizo
Y jarana de madera
Soy versador fronterizo
Cantando a la frontera
Por mi pueblo que no quizo
Abandonar su bandera

SARIKA MEHTA: Wow. Thank you. Thank you for sharing that.

HECTOR FLORES: Yeah. This music is so old, it's old music, and the only reason we know about it, is because people pass down these stories. They would say it in their pueblos, they would say it at campfires. That's how we know these songs exist, the music, and so, part of what today, #BlackLivesMatter, and the movement they created, is they say their name. The only reason we're going to remember each other is if we keep on saying their names.

And so part of it's connecting, like, the only reason we know the past is because they were passed down. And so we have to continue to do that, do the same thing, too, you know, and so this is -- now is the time for us to say our -- our herstory, history, their story, you know, and so, that's part of what I think son jarocho taught us, is to tell our story, you know?

SARIKA MEHTA: To recognize this history, and bring it forward. Well, thank you for sharing that. On a completely separate and different note --

HECTOR FLORES: Let's talk boba.

DENISE CARLOS: Contouring and boba.

SARIKA MEHTA: I would love to hear the last song, Tiempos de Amor, but just, before we get there, before we get there, actually I wanted to talk personally about your family for a moment. Your mom, who, you know, serves as an inspiration for a lot of what you do, she's the eldest of 14 siblings, and half of her siblings, six or seven of them, are deaf.

So you grew up with immigrant parents, with immigrant relatives, and also with the deaf community.

HECTOR FLORES: Yeah. Yeah. I think, you know, I learned at a very

early age that this world has been created not for everybody. You know, we live in a -- most of us, if you listen to this, it's because you can hear. And so, like, the deaf community, this world is not being created and cultivated for deaf people. And for a lot of different folks.

But I learned at an early age how deaf folks had to really like survive, and find humor and craft their dignity, in a world that was not made for them. And even made to feel like they were handicapped.

So my family does not identify as folks who are handicapped. They feel they have a gift from god, and they can actually hear things that other people cannot, and to communicate, and so I learned very early, at an early age, about deaf power, and what that meant, and the beauty in what other people find as a default, you know.

And so as a Chicano kid, a child of immigrants, like, be an immigrant, you know, be the kid who didn't grow up with a lot of money, having deaf family members, and you -- there's a lot of different injustices you see, but then how to then celebrate, not what -- you celebrate the fact that we're still here, man, and we're doing more with less. You know?

And so I've got mad love for my deaf folks, my deaf community. I believe in deaf power, and I feel like there's a lot of different communities that have been marginalized, and they're creating more with less, and I feel like, that's allowed me to see the world and hear the world in a different way, you know?

SARIKA MEHTA: How do you make your music reach the deaf community? Particularly, it's all -- it's a grassroots movement.

HECTOR FLORES: Yeah, I mean, deaf folks will -- deaf folks will receive music in the way that's best for them. When we were kids, my family, my uncles were break dancers, so they would go to yard sales, and they would buy all the bass, they would buy the huge sound system, but just bass.

And so like when my families come, or when they -- like, they're very visual, so, but they would break dance just to the beat. They couldn't hear it, but -- and so my family now --

SARIKA MEHTA: They'd feel the vibrations.

HECTOR FLORES: They feel the vibrations, man. And it's also, too, like, can you -- they can also sense if people are actually giving off vibrations, so when they watch things, things are very visual. So at our shows, we're like dancing, we're moving, we're hopping around. One of our songs, Luna Lovers, we'll sign in the middle of the song, and so we'll sign a piece of the verse there, but more than anything I

think we're a visually stimulating band, more, as much as we are a sonically stimulating band, you know?

And so, whether you can hear or see us, you're going to have a banging time.

SARIKA MEHTA: Actually, I felt that with the zapateado component of -- with the footwork, I felt that that was such a visually appealing aspect in addition to everything else that you guys bring to the show.

HECTOR FLORES: Yeah, yeah, big time.

XOCOYOTZIN MORAZA: I think the zapateado's definitely something you can feel.

HECTOR FLORES: Yeah.

XOCOYOTZIN MORAZA: Because the instruments, for someone that comes from the deaf community, they may not be able to hear the music, but they can definitely feel the vibration of the zapateado, and the zapateado has the same beat as the song, the son. So therefore, that's one method of translation into being able to receive it, and enjoy it.

SARIKA MEHTA: Awesome. Well, how about it, can we hear Tiempos de Amor?

HECTOR FLORES: Yeah.

[MUSIC: "TIEMPOS DE AMOR"]
La
Cruzaría cualquier río
Para estar cerca de ti
Porque siento un vacío
Palpitar dentro de mi
Dentro de me

No puedo seguir así
Sueño estar junto a ti

En tiempo de dolor
Con frío o con calor
Yo cruzaría montañas
Para alcanzar tu amor
Ooooh la la la laa
Ooooh la la la laa
Ooooh la la la laa

Moriría hasta de sed
En los campos y el desierto
No me puede detener

El sufrir ni el pensamiento

No puedo seguir asi
Sueno estar junto a ti

En tiempo de dolor
Con frio o con calor
Yo cruzaria montanas
Para alcanzar tu amor
Ooooh la la la laaa
Ooooh la la la laaa
Hey, hey, hey, come on

Yo naci de mi madre
Yo naci de la flor
Yo naci de la tierra
Tengo el mismo color
Yo naci
Yo naci

Yo naci de mi madre
Yo naci de la flor
Yo naci de la tierra
Tengo el mismo color
Tengo el mismo color
Oh, oh, la la la laaa
Oh, oh, la la la laaa
Oh, oh, la la la laaa
Oh, oh, la la la laaa

SARIKA MEHTA: Those were my guests, Las Cafeteras, a Chicano band from LA, playing their latest album, Tastes Like LA. Check out LasCafeteras.com. Las Cafeteras, thank you so much for joining me on Intersections Radio, for performing in studio during a very busy day with many performances. Thank you so much.

HECTOR FLORES: Keep in intersectional, y'all.

DANIEL FRENCH: Thank y'all so much, KBOO, we'll see y'all next time.

SARIKA MEHTA: To listen to the podcast of this interview, check out IntersectionsRadio.wordpress.com. Visit the same website for previous episodes of this podcast. And join the Facebook community at facebook.com/IntersectionsRadio. You're listening to Intersections Radio, this program airs locally on KBOO community radio. I'm Sarika Mehta. Thanks for listening.

[MUSIC: "THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND"]
This land was made for you and me
La tierra es tuya

