
Tijen Tunali, Ph.D. Student

This invaluable volume focuses on the history of Rock music in the Americas and presents a multi-vocal account consisting of 15 articles: four of them focusing on Mexico, two on Brazil, and one each on Cuba, Uruguay, Colombia, Guatemala, Argentina, Puerto Rico, and Chile. The contributors come from different disciplines, such as Anthropology, History, Literary Studies, Sociology, Ethnic Studies, and Ethnomusicology. Two essays are written by non-academics: the essay about the Guatemalan Rock group, *Alux Nahual* by Paolo Alvarado, who was the founding member of the group, and Tere Estrada, who is the co-writer of the article on women rockers in Mexico. The book also includes an appendix of Rock music in Latin America from 1940 to 2000.

In this comprehensive anthology, the authors argue that while early Rock’ n’ Roll posed some degree of threat to the social order in the U.S., in Latin America, the political and social implications surrounding this foreign phenomenon was quite different. Rock music was seen by many as the representation of the “cultural, military and economic imperialism” of the United States during a time when the U.S. was engaged in forceful political, as well as military intervention in Latin America. The main stand of this volume is that with its anti-establishment message, Rock eventually threatened the stronghold of the authoritarian regimes that held sway in the Americas. Hence, for many leftist Latin American intelligentsias, it was a threat to the integrity and survival of local musical forms.
The main contribution of this volume is that it presents its readers with a thorough overview of local Rock music production and reception in various Latin American states, while addressing, simultaneously, overarching questions of musical difference, which are embedded in the cultural—often racial and social—differences of the global music market. The authors are careful in placing Rock music in the context of local social and political phenomena, such as the Cuban revolution, student protests in Mexico, and the authoritarian regimes of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Guatemala. The contributors are very successful in balancing the contradictions inherent in any discussion of global dynamics and national contexts.

The general approach of the book is to trace the development of the perception of Rock music from a hegemonic cultural expression to one that becomes counter-hegemonic. We learn that, like the rest of the “developing” world, the Rock’ n’ Roll phenomenon was first embraced by middle and upper class Latin American youths, for whom it was a symbol of modernity. Given their privileged economic positions, they had access to records, instruments, radios, and record players and were thus able to become familiar with this musical idiom. In contrast, local Rock bands were preferred by Latin American governments, as a statement against “imperialistic” Anglo Rock music; thus, local musical groups received state subsidies in most Latin American countries. With the cultural and social changes that affected the globe in the late 1960s, this was an era of counter-culture and the uprising against authority in Latin America, as well. Middle class youth embraced these developments and a Rock movement started developing throughout Latin America in opposition to apolitical and government-supported local music. The fans of Rock soon gained the potential to influence millions and gather hundreds of
thousands of people at music festivals; however, except for Cuba, from the 1980s and on, the power of music culture shifted entirely to the hands of commercial music industries.

In their introduction, Hernández, Zolov, and L’Hoeste compile an anthology of Rock music across the Americas, from the beginning of the sixties to the end of the nineties. They reframe the relationship of Rock’ n’ Roll to the ideologies of capitalist consumerism and state intervention in music through Latin America during this time. Moreover, they compare these developments to those in the U.S but they also compare the historiography of Rock in authoritarian contexts, such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Guatemala with that of Mexico and the Cuba. In the article, “Between Rock and a Hard Place,” Hernández, and Garófalo interview academic authorities of Rock music in Cuba, such as Humberto Manduley López, author of Rock in Cuba, and González Moreno, who wrote the book Rock en Cuba. They build on the turbulent experience of Rock music during the first 20 years of the Cuban Revolution. The authors evaluate the contradictory position of Cuba’s Revolutionary government of banning music in English to government-supported Rock bands. With a smoothly written narrative, López describes the measures people took to listen to Rock music, which was broadcast from the U.S, and how the Cuban Rock bands survived underground.

In “La Onda Chicana,” historian, Eric Zolov demonstrates, with the example of a Rock band called La Revolución de Emiliano Zapata, that bands, such as this one, were able to manipulate the PRI’s official rhetoric of revolution and articulate their own understanding of cultural revolution. Another invaluable article, “A contra corriente: A History of Women Rockers in Mexico,” offers a survey of women rockers in Mexico from Gloria Ríos to Julieta Venegas. The authors, for the first time, incorporate women
into the histories of Latin American Rock. Building upon interviews with women rock
singers, such as Laura Abitia and Norma Valdez, Baby Batiz, Kenny Avilés, and Zappa
Punk, the authors re-write the 40 year history of Mexican rock from the perspective of
rockeras. They also situate their argument in relation to the changing attitudes of women
musicians within the broader social phenomenon of La Onda movement.

The collection of articles in this volume tells the tragic stories of a musical idiom
that, although suppressed and manipulated, found a way to survive in the most ominous
of conditions. As George Yúdice points out in the “afterword,” the reason those musical
expressions were repressed was because they were transgressive. This meticulous study
demonstrates that Rock music in the Americas, with its flouting aesthetics and power to
mobilize, still presents a possibility for negation, no matter how much and for how long it
has been repressed and/or comodified.