

**World Pop in the DF:
The Impact of CD Pirating on Mexican Musical Culture**

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“The musics of the city undergirded its position as the center of the musical landscape.”
Philip Bohlman

The popular music scene in Mexico City saw a resurgence of nationalism and cultural centrism in the 1980's, with groups such as Café Tacuba adopting styles from around the world, but redefining them in Mexican contexts (Dillon 1997). However, this trend seems to be changing, as newer indie groups seek to appeal not to local culture but to a global audience, often singing in English, promoting themselves via MySpace, and citing European and American musical influences (Kun 2007). Some of these changes can be attributed to the economic opening of Mexico in the late 80's and early 90's, particularly the signing of NAFTA in 1992 (Hamnett 2006). Only once free markets were created did external technological and musical influences begin to play such a major role in Mexican life (Pedelty 2004). While abroad, I would like to look at the ways in which the dynamics of globalization have affected the music industry in Mexico City, specifically focusing on CD pirating and its effects on local culture.

From the conception of the cassette tape through the birth of present strategies of internet sharing, music consumers have continually sought to bypass traditional modes of distribution, much to the chagrin of the recording industry (Franklin 2005, Manuel 1993). Nowhere is the trend of material pirating more prevalent than in the developing world. In Mexico City, new CDs are available on the street within hours of their release, at a fraction of the price. Many of those involved in the process of pirating claim that they are doing the underprivileged a service and that prices determined in Western markets are prohibitive to consumption in the second and third worlds (Gori 2002). Yet the music industry, along with international and government officials, insists on improved enforcement of the intellectual property rights outlined in Mexican federal law as well as in treaties like NAFTA and TRIPS (Zamora et al 2004). Although pirating is in many ways a result of the open market, it is the

influence of second market industries, like pirating, that is preventing Mexico from becoming a major economic player.

Although Stokes's claim that, "one can no longer talk in simple terms about "the West' imposing itself culturally on the 'third world'" is certainly true, it is undeniable that the past several decades have seen an unprecedented spread of musical forms across the globe (2004). With the development of the "World Music" industry, this exchange has come to be much more reciprocal, with voices from the developing world finding a globalized following at the same time as American pop groups (Clayton et al 2003). The universe of music has never been more diverse.

However, not every CD is copied and sold by pirates. In my research, I would like to examine the kinds of music copied by pirating agents and how the cheap availability of certain artists and genres affects musical tastes in the city, specifically amongst the student population. I suspect that such processes will serve as engines in the spread of American and global pop genres. I would also like to look at the ways that this secondary market influences the way that music native to Mexico is produced and perceived.

I feel that such investigations are necessary barometers for understanding the ways that integration and globalization affect local cultures. Although theories of "cultural imperialism" and "Americanization" may be overstated, local cultures have undeniably been impacted by increased global connectivity. As Mark Slobin argues, "music is at once an everyday activity, an industrial commodity, a flag of resistance, a personal world, and a deeply symbolic, emotional grounding for people in every class and cranny the superculture offers" (Slobin 1993). It is therefore impossible to deny the importance of music as both an engine and an index of larger social, economic and political patterns.

I feel that music pirating is directly linked to the importance of listening as part of musical experience, a point stressed by scholars such as Middleton. If, as he asserts, “listening...must be considered a productive force” along with recording and performance, the act of pirating takes on some of these same productive qualities, influencing what is listened to and thereby affecting what is later produced (Middleton 1990). Stokes also stresses the importance of listening, claiming that, “the act of putting a cassette or CD into a machine evokes and organizes collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity” (1994). Any form of musical experience, including the passive intake constituted by listening, informs the creation of identities, as individuals, but also as cities, nations and societies.

In order to execute my research, I will employ a combination of interviews and surveys amongst both CD vendors and the student population of Mexico City. Before arriving in Mexico, I will continue to do extensive reading on my topic, educate myself about local culture and music, and construct my interview set. I will also practice my surveys and interviews on others in order to anticipate any problems and make adjustments prior to arrival. Once in Mexico City, I will take two weeks to acclimate to new surroundings, get to know fellow students and begin to explore the perceptions and practices of the pirating industry. This will also leave me time to make any changes to my methodology that may seem necessary once on site. Surveys and interviews will be conducted with subjects from the Universidad Panamericana, some of whom I will meet prior to arrival, and CD vendors from various parts of the city. At least forty surveys will be administered amongst the student population. Surveys and interviews will be conducted during my third through fifth weeks. Once surveys are completed, I will select a set of respondents for more in-depth interviews, which will focus on the personal choices and perceptions involved in the

production and consumption of pirated music. During my remaining weeks in Mexico City, I will compile my survey data, transcribe interviews and conduct any follow up inquiries I may find necessary.

In order to facilitate interviews in the face of possible legal concerns, I will carry proper university identification, travel with locals and possibly offer payment to subjects. If interviews with vendors prove too hard to obtain, my project will still be viable with student interviews, more causal conversations with vendors and inventories of what CDs can be found on the market. Quantitative questions will focus on the number of pirated CDs bought or sold, the amount consumers are willing to spend on music and the variety of artists sold by pirates. Qualitative questions will seek to determine respondents' opinions about the morality and cultural impact of pirating, along with discussions on local musical tastes.

Coursework at Northwestern has prepared me theoretically and practically to conduct this research. I am a music major and have taken two-years of Voice Lessons, Music Theory, Music History and Aural Skills, along with a quarter of World Music Cultures. My second major, International Studies (including classes such as International Law, World Systems and Globalization), has equipped me with economic, political and sociological understanding, all of which will be useful in my analysis. Coursework in Spanish this summer at the Instituto Cervantes and at Northwestern in the fall, along with previous knowledge of Romance languages, will prepare me to conduct my research before arriving in Mexico.

Ultimately, this research will become an Honors Thesis in International Studies or a paper for a major in Musicology. However, I will also value the process as an introduction to the world of research, as well as a chance to obtain an intimate understanding of a non-American culture.

Works Cited

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Budget

Travel		
	Metro Fare	\$25.00
Materials		
	Digital Tape Recorder	\$50.00
	Microphone	\$10.00
	Copies (Surveys, etc.)	\$10.00
Miscellaneous		
	Stipend for Interviews (meals with subjects, etc.)	\$70.00
	Translator/Guide	\$160.00
TOTAL		\$325.00

Addendum

In the past weeks, I have continued to make progress in planning my research. I have met with Liliana Alvarez, the director of Global Cities at Universidad Panamericana. With her help and contacts from my advisor, Drew Davies, I am well on my way to finding an advisor in Mexico City. This summer and during the fall quarter, I will take Spanish classes and continue reading up on my topic. The research I have presented here may become part of a more expansive project for the Global Cities program, an honors thesis in International Studies or may be something which I execute on my own. Either way, I am dedicated to carrying out this inquiry.

The Study Abroad Office has permission to post my proposal on their Web site and to use it in future SARP programs or other programs or courses related to study abroad.