

Oye mi canto: Valuable Journalism as a Tool to Tell the Stories of a Diaspora

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Abstract

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Valuable journalism—a concept that aims to enhance civic engagement and news consumption by making journalism a more enjoyable and meaningful experience—offers a potential response to the contemporary challenges faced by journalism as an institution. This research-creation project explores how this approach can be applied through the production of a podcast that tells stories from the Latin American music scene in Montréal.

Rooted in the personal experiences of Hispanic musicians, the podcast navigates themes of immigration, identity, cultural clashes, and adaptation, while highlighting these artists' contributions to Montréal's cultural life. This project highlights lifestyle journalism's political significance and relevance. It responds to the lack of media coverage of Hispanic musicians in the city and examines how music journalism can amplify the voices and traditions of the diaspora in a way that is both informative and entertaining. It also explores how, through the use of engaging storytelling, music journalism can educate a non-Hispanic audience about Latin American music, its instruments, its cultural significance, and the lived experiences of the people who create it. This project demonstrates how entertainment and information can coexist to create journalistic pieces with social and political impact—promoting empathy and appreciation for the Hispanic community in a context where anti-immigration discourse, particularly against Latin American people, is spreading rapidly.

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Introduction

My mom always carried a tiny radio in her bag. On family trips, especially when we went to a place we hadn't visited in Colombia, we would tune in to the local radio stations of the region. We would listen to songs we had never heard and sometimes to radio shows in Indigenous languages we didn't understand. It was our way to learn about the different cultures of our country.

Months before arriving in Montréal, I listened to many podcasts about the cultures and history of Canada and Québec. I even studied French for six months before my trip. Even though I learned so much, nothing could have prepared me for how small and out of place I felt when I arrived.

Immigrating means having a constant sense of loss, wondering about your identity, and figuring out how to rebuild yourself in a context that has more differences than similarities to your culture. Immigrating is also feeling joy and gratitude for finding new places and people you can call home.

My research-creation project started in 2023, when I emigrated from Bogotá, Colombia, to Montréal. Experiencing winter, the grief of leaving my family and friends behind, interacting in three languages and feeling nostalgic in December during the holidays evolved into journalistic questions about the identity of the Latin American diaspora in Montréal.

Months after arriving, I started to listen to the radio, but this time, I wasn't looking to learn something about the culture of this place. I was hoping to find anything similar to my culture, maybe a radio station in Spanish or even a song that could help me understand what the Latin American community is like here, where its members go to dance, and how people deal with this journey of rebuilding their identities.

Even though I found some radio shows in Spanish about Latin American popular culture, they didn't talk about the Hispanic diaspora in Montréal. The lack of coverage of Latin American culture in the metropolis and the need for connection with my territory inspired me to seek out Hispanic artists or bands in the city.

I found many vibrant musical projects led by Hispanic immigrants or their descendants, such as Raíz Viva, a group with Colombian and Brazilian artists who use traditional Colombian drums to play cumbia, a genre widely known in Latin America. Less Toches, another cumbia group based in Montréal, distinguishes itself by its use of the accordion and mix of cumbia and vallenato—a Colombian and Venezuelan music genre. I also found many other Montréal-based artists like Roberto López, Stephany Osorio, Bianca Rocha and Andy Rubalbelo who have developed their musical styles based on Latin American sounds like salsa, Latin jazz or bossa nova.

My research-creation project started as a question about my identity, which, after finding this musical scene, evolved into a journalistic study about how to amplify the art of Montréal-based Hispanic musicians, how to talk about a diaspora and their traditions while reflecting on what it means to immigrate. This project also seeks to educate Montréalers, who might dance to this music at bars or festivals but don't know its history, where it comes from or who creates it.

Objective

The objective of this research-creation thesis was to create a podcast to tell the story of the Latin American music scene in Montréal, highlighting the artists who are part of it and their life stories. I explored this within the context of immigration, the nostalgia of being away from home, and how these artists have adapted their music to Montréal's audiences.

Through this podcast, I wanted to explore how music journalism can amplify musical projects while talking about a diaspora and its traditions in an entertaining way, using engaging storytelling. The combination of information and entertainment aims to educate the audience about the music genres, the instruments used to play them, and how these artists' work has been influenced by their new environment after immigrating.

Research questions

RQ1: Using an original podcasting project about Latin American music in Montréal as an example, how can music journalism be used to amplify personal stories of the culture and traditions of a diaspora?

RQ2: How can Costera Meijer's (2022) concept of "valuable journalism" be applied to create a podcast about Latin American music in Montréal that seeks to inform and entertain the audience?

RQ3: What best practices and guidelines can producing an original podcasting project about Latin American music in Montréal reveal for the production of future content that seeks to both inform and entertain audiences about the cultures and traditions of a diaspora?

Literature Review

In the following section, I explore how existing scholarship has depicted the limits and shared aspects of hard and soft news to approach how music journalism, as a subfield of lifestyle journalism, can incorporate aspects of both types of journalism when telling stories about a diaspora. This will also contribute to reflecting on the civic contributions that this type of journalism can make.

The subsequent section focuses on scholarship that has proposed an understanding of lifestyle journalism and its subgenres as a distinct field. In this part, I will address its practices, functions,

and how it can challenge Western discourses that exoticise non-white communities and cultures, which I will contrast with theories that propose better practices in journalism.

The last part of the literature review addresses the roles and news production processes of lifestyle journalism, showing how journalistic roles present a dynamic spectrum of possibilities. Here, I will explore how lifestyle journalism and its subfields can enact different roles to inform and educate audiences, using better practices to create a bidirectional relationship with the public, contributing to their everyday lives.

Hard news and soft news

Sandra Banjac and Folker Hanusch (2023) reflect on the boundaries between ‘political’ and lifestyle and journalism, in other words, ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news. They note ‘hard’ news has generally been viewed in professional and academic circles as crucial in ensuring democracy, while ‘soft’ news has been treated as frivolous, individualistic, and the opposite of ‘real journalism’ (Banjac & Hanusch, 2023). As these authors state in their research, at the base of such assumptions about ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news are gender archetypes; political-rational ‘hard’ news is connected to the masculine. It is urgent, factual, belongs to the public sphere and is linked “with democracy and citizenship” (Banjac & Hanusch, 2023, p.2160). On the other hand, ‘soft’ news is linked to the private sphere; it is supposedly characterised by opinion, and it is about female matters like reproduction, family life and emotion, aspects that are “inappropriate for democratic discourse which requires rationality” (Banjac & Hanusch, 2023, p.2160).

This “gender hierarchy” (Banjac & Hanusch, 2023, p.2159) of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news proposed by these authors is a conceptual frame used to analyse both types of journalism and the boundaries that have emerged. These distinctions have created a power dynamic that privileges journalism that is “timely, factual and text-oriented, with societal consequences” (Banjac &

Hanusch, 2023, p.2157) over lifestyle journalism, which is considered uncritical and tied to commercial influences. In their study, the researchers show through interviews with journalists how lifestyle journalists have internalized this delegitimization of their work and, in the words of Banjac and Hanusch, were self-expelled and self-othered from what was considered ‘serious’ journalism (2023).

For these authors, this dichotomy of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news is being challenged by the politicisation of lifestyle journalism—and everyday life more generally—and its engagement in “acts of politics” (Banjac & Hanusch, 2023, p.2169), which includes using entertaining storytelling around ‘hard topics’ to engage audiences that tend to avoid the news, and offering a counter-narrative to negative political news (Banjac & Hanusch, 2023). The challenge to these paradigms and boundaries is also a result of lifestyle journalists reclaiming their agency and infusing their work with value by being advocates, educators, mediators and a “mirror to society” (Banjac & Hanusch, 2023, p.2166).

In addition, commercialism and entertainment, which have been described as “journalism’s response to greater economic pressures and competition to retain audiences” (Banjac & Hanusch, 2023, p.2166), have often been attributed to lifestyle journalism. Nevertheless, ‘political’ journalism now relies on commercial strategies like sponsored content to stay afloat (Banjac & Hanusch, 2023).

These authors conclude that even though the boundaries between ‘hard’ and ‘soft news’ are being challenged, they aren’t completely blurred since journalism is “embedded within larger societal hierarchies and inequalities” (Banjac & Hanusch, 2023, p.2163). The authors state that to fully blur the limits between hard and soft news, journalism would need to exist within a

society where those hierarchies and inequalities don't define social life anymore (Banjac & Hanusch, 2023).

Reijo Savolainen (2022) also thinks the boundaries between political and lifestyle journalism aren't as clear and sees the dichotomy as a hybrid of information and entertainment. In his research, news and entertainment fuse into infotainment, a concept that “problematizes common assumptions that news is necessarily objective and factual information, while the informational value of entertainment is insignificant” (Savolainen, 2022, p. 956). In his conceptual analysis of infotainment, the author focuses on the audience and its members' goal-directed motivations for media consumption. This is an interesting approach in that it evaluates the 'hard' and 'soft' news dichotomy from the consumption perspective rather than from the production of information.

In his research, Savolainen doesn't question the archetypes attributed to both sides of the dichotomy, but rather describes the information and entertainment sides with the traditional denotations, such as a superficial and effortless mode of processing information. As a result, the author states that people who tend to use media driven by an eudaimonic motivation, which means a truth-seeking interest, will consume “more elaborated forms of information processing” (Savolainen, 2022, p.963), meaning contents “that address serious topics, focus on topical issues rather than persons and avoid presentation style characteristic of entertainment programmes” (Savolainen, 2022, p. 966). In contrast, people driven by a hedonic motivation—those who are searching for an escape or relaxation through their media consumption—tend to be associated “with a superficial mode of information processing” (Savolainen, 2022, p.963), like “programmes that discuss light topics, focus on an individual's experiences and make use of dramatic presentation style” (Savolainen, 2022, 966).

Even though there isn't a consensus among researchers about the definition of infotainment, the author explains how this concept has evolved in academic research. Early studies focused on the rational versus emotional divide. Infotainment had a pejorative meaning that lamented "the growth of entertaining elements in news programmes" (Savolainen, 2022, 960). Then, the analysis shifted toward how the rational and emotional elements were used in every news text, which meant a change of perspective from a dichotomy to a continuum (Savolainen, 2022).

While Savolainen focuses on news consumption, Tony Harcup and Deirdre O'Neill (2001) study news production and the choices made in story selection, and the news values that influence the process. Their work seeks to understand how some events become news and why others are excluded. In their research, they updated the news values originally formulated by Galtung and Ruge (1965)¹, which mostly focused on the 'hard' news dimension. Instead, Harcup and O'Neill analysed articles from tabloid newspapers in the United Kingdom and concluded that many stories were included exclusively to entertain the reader, reference something positive or promote the newspaper's agenda (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001), which are factors that weren't considered in Galtung and Ruge's values.

Harcup and O'Neill (2001) thus state that "no contemporary set of news values is complete without an 'entertainment' factor" (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001, p.277) since journalists need to entertain and inform at the same time (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). For this reason, they propose a set of nine news values where the entertainment component is present: (1) News stories should cover the power elite, which means powerful individuals and organisations (Harcup & O'Neill,

¹ Johan Galtung and Mary Ruge's study (1965) focused on how international events did or didn't become news in the Norwegian press. To explore this, they presented a series of factors that seemed to be important in the selection of news, and subsequently, evaluated the coverage of three international crises in four Norwegian papers through the framework they created. Eventually, this paper became "a landmark study on news values and news selection" (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). However, years later, Galtung expressed that this work was intended as a warning rather than a guideline (Haagerup, 2019) since his paper emphasized that "if news continued to reflect the world in this antagonistic way, it would generate extreme negativity" (Haagerup, 2019).

2001); (2) stories concerning celebrities; (3) entertainment, which are stories “concerning sex, showbusiness, human interest, animals, an unfolding drama, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, entertaining photographs or witty headlines” (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001, p.279); (4) surprise (5) bad news, which are stories related to conflict or tragedies; (5) Good news; (6) magnitude, related to “stories that are perceived as sufficiently significant either in the numbers of people involved or in potential impact” (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001, p.279); (7) relevance, related to groups and nations relevant to the public; (8) newspaper agenda (9) Stories of follow-up, which is about subjects already in the news, is a value to consider according to these authors.

The inclusion of contemporary news values contributes to the debate regarding how other forms of journalism that have been excluded from the definition of “real journalism” can be considered as relevant and important as “hard” news. It also helps to question whether the limits between “political” and lifestyle journalism are still valid and how both fields can be defined in the present, taking into account current practices, roles, and functions in society.

For Unni From and Nete Nørgaard Kristensen (2018), this debate of ‘hard’ versus ‘soft’ is related to the Western ideology that many scholars and practitioners share of what journalism is and what values it should have (From & Kristensen, 2018). They identify distinctive news values between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ journalism: topicality, whether a story is of public or individual relevance; timeliness, if an article is urgent or can be published anytime; style, if a story is subjective or objective; and addressing the audience, if the public is treated as a collective or as individuals (From & Kristensen, 2018). For these authors, these distinctions help to highlight how constructive journalism contributes to blurring the limits between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news (From & Kristensen, 2018).

The researchers promote constructive journalism to overcome the division of ‘hard’ versus ‘soft’, a type of journalism that has a solutions-oriented approach and replaces the journalist's role of reporting about conflicts with a positive-guiding role providing solutions to issues related to the political public sphere (From & Kristensen, 2018). They adapted this solutions-oriented approach to service journalism², which is characterised by human interest and “addressing audiences in their capacity as partly citizens, partly consumers and partly clients” (From & Kristensen, 2018, p. 715), and provides expertise and advice on issues of everyday life. For this reason, these authors see culture, lifestyle and consumer journalism as subfields of service journalism (From & Kristensen, 2018). Constructive journalism breaks the rules of Western journalism and blends the limits between ‘harder’ and ‘softer’ ways since it covers political and social issues while presenting the stories through different genres or styles, and addresses the audience as lifestyle journalism would do (From & Kristensen, 2018).

An interesting point these authors make about constructive and service journalism is that the way they address the audiences as consumers also blends the limits between the private and the public sphere since “individual consumption and life choices may indeed be political” (From & Kristensen, 2018, p.724). Focusing on the needs and preferences of the public has mirrored societal and cultural changes, which makes this type of journalism valuable because it is a mediator between cultural institutions (public sphere), industries and consumers (private sphere), and is a gatekeeper since it brings audiences attention to selected cultural topics while making a “societal reflection on modern life to cultural citizens” (From & Kristensen, 2018, p. 723).

² Service journalism guides the audience as individuals on matters of consumption and choices on various aspects of life “in an increasingly complex society and everyday life” (From & Kristensen, 2012, p. 28). Both lifestyle and service journalism provide the audience with news and information they can apply in their own lives (Hanusch (2012).

Elfriede Fürsich (2012) shares this idea regarding the political attitudes in lifestyle decisions as a marker of the blurring boundaries between the private sphere (consumption) and the public sphere (citizenship) (Fürsich, 2012). She sees the duality of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news as “(an) approach that privileges a problematic traditional “‘rational’ model of citizenship” (Fürsich, 2012, p.17), which is based in gendered and ethnicized concepts of who is a citizen and excludes non-white and female audiences (Fürsich, 2012).

Such scholarly contributions indicate lifestyle journalism indeed contributes to the political dimension since the individual experiences of the audience, the matters regarding identity, their consumption habits and interests are also part of the political dimension. “Personal problems”, as stated by Carol Hanisch in 1970, are “political problems” (p. 77). According to Mark Deuze and Tamara Witschge (2018), journalism and what journalists do can’t be “separated from their material context” (p. 167). They state that “journalism is transitioning from a more or less coherent industry to a highly varied and diverse range of practices” (Deuze & Witschge, 2018, p.166).

These authors see the ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news dichotomy as core-periphery and argue that it is a mistake to assume that the types of journalism that exist “outside and alongside legacy news organizations are necessarily different or oppositional to the core values” (Deuze & Witschge, 2018, p.168). They even expand the debate towards the progressive disappearance of “the newsroom,” the place or an institution that has long been considered *the* site where journalists work, that provides guidelines for their work, and at the same time, is built by the same workers (Deuze & Witschge, 2018).

The lack of stable jobs, the new places where journalism takes place apart from newsrooms—such as free WiFi coffee shops or home offices— and the collaboration of the

public in news work are other aspects Deuze and Witschge analyse to propose a contemporary definition of what journalism is and what journalists do (Deuze & Witschge, 2018). In their eyes, “understanding journalism means to appreciate journalists’ personal drive beyond the institutional protections and privileges of the profession” (Deuze & Witschge, 2018, p. 176). This definition needs to contemplate the affective and social dimensions of journalism to see it “as a moving object and as a dynamic set of practices and expectations – a profession in a permanent process of becoming” (Deuze & Witschge, 2018, p. 177).

To finally move beyond discussions about what is journalism and what isn’t, Deuze argues that this craft should be defined by “the affective and cognitive ties that professionals bind to it” (Deuze, 2019, p.3). The author says that journalists are the ones who define their profession since they love it and have their own perspective of what they do, despite their precarious working conditions (Deuze, 2019).

To summarize, literature shows that the traditional binary of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news or political and lifestyle journalism has been evolving. The boundaries between both types of journalism aren’t clear anymore, and likely never were. Scholars have pointed out the ethnocentric, sexist and Western perspectives that hold political journalism as the only serious and valid form of the profession. Due to societal changes and shifts in the journalistic institution itself, such as the evolution of the newsroom, the digitalization of the craft, the dichotomy has evolved to a continuum where lifestyle journalism has political significance and relevance while providing information through entertainment with contemporary news values to an audience that is seen as consumers, citizens and individuals.

Lifestyle journalism and its subgenres as a distinct field

Fürsich (2012) proposes that the conditions of different fields of journalism, such as underlying ideologies and cultural assumptions, should be used to define them. She states, for example, that lifestyle journalism should be studied and acknowledged “as a specific profession and a unique discourse at a particular time” (2012, p.19) with an intrinsic value. Folker Hanusch (2012) shares this vision and proposes a definition of it as a field “that primarily addresses its audiences as consumers, providing them with factual information and advice, often in entertaining ways, about goods and services they can use in their daily lives” (Hanusch, 2012, p.5).

The decline of social institutions such as family, church and school, the need for people to forge and express their identities, the emphasis of contemporary society on well-being and having a quality of life, and the new role of media industries on providing guidance for individuals have influenced the growth for the demand in lifestyle journalism as Hanitzsch and Vos (2018) state. Kristensen and From (2012) consider other aspects of the consolidation of lifestyle journalism as a distinct field, such as the segregation of topics, the developing consumer society and the interdependence between the press and advertisers.

Kristensen and From mention that journalism is “a cultural institution providing public service for private money” (Kristensen & From, 2012, p.39) that has shifted due to cultural and industrial transformations. These changes have blurred the limits between lifestyle, cultural and consumer journalism (Kristensen & From, 2012). According to the researchers, the fusion of these types of journalism was influenced by the introduction of service journalism in the second part of the 20th century (Kristensen & From, 2012), which aims to guide the readers “on matters of consumption and choices of softer aspects of life in an increasingly complex society and everyday life” (Kristensen & From, 2012, p.28). Service journalism sees the members of the

audience as individuals (consumers) rather than as citizens, an aspect that lifestyle journalism also has.

The societal and industrial transformations allowed the expansion of cultural journalism, which crosses boundaries “of such domains as politics, celebrity culture, lifestyle and consumption” (Kristensen & From, 2012, p.28). Therefore, the authors highlight in their research how lifestyle articles refer to audiences as individuals and citizens at the same time due to the mixture of lifestyle, cultural and consumer journalism (Kristensen & From, 2012). They point out some articles as examples of this fusion, like a text that approaches a garden as an aesthetic expression and a public good (Kristensen & From, 2012), or fashion as a “representation of ways of life and a symbolic marker of taste and lifestyle” (Kristensen & From, 2012, p. 33).

As a conclusion of their study, the authors state that lifestyle journalism and cultural journalism exist in a “continuum between art, popular culture, lifestyle and consumption” (Kristensen & From, 2012, p.28), where guiding the reader on immaterial topics and providing advice on having a good life is a priority (Kristensen & From, 2012). The fusion of contemporary lifestyle and cultural journalism has articulated these types of journalism as a “cultural phenomenon in society” (Kristensen & From, 2012, p.40) where actors and cultural industries tend to accommodate each other. This phenomenon has allowed journalists to negotiate whether a subject is covered in consumer, culture or lifestyle journalism, depending on the angle of the story, the mode of address, and the editorial line of the newspaper (Kristensen & From, 2012).

In *Rethinking Constructive Journalism by Means of Service Journalism*, Kristensen and From (2018) state that cultural, lifestyle and consumer journalism are subfields of service journalism, which guide the modern human being, an engaged reader, regarding their consumption, leisure

time, and personal developments while living in a society that changes fast and frequently (Kristensen & From, 2018).

Service journalism often covers “consumer-related subjects and objects—cars, fashion, food, cultural events—but also more abstract cultural phenomena and politically infused issues, such as wellness, subcultures, psychology, gender, sexuality and human relations” (Kristensen & From, 2018, p.724). It addresses social and personal problems while connecting the subjects to a broader context, discussing political and economic issues (Kristensen & From, 2018).

According to Fürsich, this contextualization of individual issues in a larger landscape is related to the role of lifestyle journalists as cultural intermediates that negotiate the “establishment of status positions” (2012, p.9) and provide “judgments of taste” (Fürsich, 2012, p.13), which are affected by wider issues like identity, class and social mobility. Therefore, a lifestyle journalist is an “arbiter of taste cultures” (Fürsich, 2012, p.9) and is “part of the social negotiation of the social negotiation of status and power” (Fürsich, 2012, p.9). Their role is to be mediators by managing “public discourse on contemporary social issues” (Fürsich, 2012, p.14).

This negotiation role is a counterpoint to the Western, sexist and ethnocentric concept of journalism discussed in the previous section. Lifestyle journalists can mediate in the discourse of globalization where Western reporting from nations in development are focused or triggered “by crises, catastrophes and natural disasters thereby re-emphasizing an image of the developing world as a chaotic place beyond relief and in constant need of support by the West while probably prompting audience apathy” (Fürsich, 2012, p.19). This mediation role is crucial since it provides different representations of the Other, which is important in “dimensions of cultural exchange, authenticity and hybridity during times of change” (Fürsich, 2012, p.21).

An example of the mediation on the representation of ‘the Other’ in lifestyle journalism is Fürsich’s analysis of music journalism review articles. She found that the majority of the coverage had a discourse of the “West versus the rest” (Fürsich, 2012, p.21). However, she mentions that “in the struggle over defining the role and place of world music, reviewers continually, if slowly, worked towards an acknowledgement of a new cultural sensibility” (Fürsich, 2012, p.21). This research supports her affirmation of lifestyle journalists as cultural negotiators since, specifically in the music journalism field, it allowed a progressive acceptance of other sounds and cultures. This type of journalism “negotiated an emerging attitude not just toward artistic production, but also toward audiences and geopolitical norms, such as the position of the nation-state and the understanding of the Other” (Fürsich, 2012, p.22).

The examination of music review articles also sheds light on how lifestyle journalism can invite audiences to consider the inequalities in the globalized world, such as “unequal access to cultural production, the commercialization of the public sphere, geopolitical transformations, economic inequalities, racism, migration, and diaspora” (Fürsich, 2012, p.12). For the author, lifestyle journalism is an arena of “active cultural negotiation” (Fürsich, 2012, p.23) that follows “specific professional routines and economic conditions” (Fürsich, 2012, p.23). Nevertheless, it can also perpetuate stereotypes and crude depictions of Others when journalists don’t have an awareness of the impact of representation and cultural differences (Fürsich, 2012).

The journalistic attempts to define the World Music genre in music reviews are an example of this misrepresentation. Fürsich and Roberto Avant-Mier (2013) state in their paper that the World Music reviews they analysed were based on “race, ethnicity, colonialism and cultural imperialism but moved slowly to an appreciation of hybridity and global cultural exchange” (p. 102). They affirm that this change of perspective is relevant since it shows the symbolic value of

music journalism: the potential of the popular to recalibrate hegemonic positions, to change the narrative from “a de-humanizing and objectifying attitude towards non-white musicians” (Fürsich & Avant-Mier, 2013, p.114) to the integration of local and global musicians’ expertise, and the inclusion of their creative opinions and stories (Fürsich & Avant-Mier, 2013). In their analysis, the authors found that this change of attitude was also influenced by the use of non-intimidating language regarding music expertise, which invited the readers to listen to music that challenged their Western expectations (Fürsich & Avant-Mier, 2013).

For scholar Paula Hearsum (2013), the music journalist’s role is being a cultural gatekeeper since there is still a need in the audience for a trusted guide, and it remains a relationship between wordsmiths and music fans. However, there is an erosion in this role because “music promos turn up online without the ‘gatekeeper’” (Hearsum, 2013, p.114), which has also changed the power dynamic between the cultural institution of journalism and its public because news outlets have now “user-pitched content” (Hearsum, 2013, p.121), where it’s the audience who inform the writers of music journalism about what to write.

Hearsum affirms that for music journalism to continue to be meaningful, it needs to create “a shared musical discourse with a purpose” (Hearsum, 2013, p. 109). To accomplish this the author identifies three aspects of music journalism's communicative functions: the way people experience music journalism through various platforms and discourses, how audiences engage with the content individually or collectively through words and music itself, and how the union of experiencing and engaging creates “meaning(s)” (Hearsum, 2013, p. 109).

To summarize, scholars see lifestyle journalism as a distinct field that has its own practices and entertains its audience while providing information and guidance on issues of the contemporary world. This type of journalism not only contributes to the consumer or individual

dimensions of the audience but also challenges Western discourses that exoticize and “*other*” non-white communities and cultures. Contextualizing social and personal problems in a larger context has made lifestyle journalists mediators between cultures and power hierarchies. A role that helps to bridge the representation gap of marginalized communities and invites audiences to consider unequal realities while providing them with enjoyment and news they can use in their everyday lives.

Roles and news production practices of lifestyle journalism

As Thomas Hanitzsch and Tim Vos (2018) state, journalistic roles are the culture and identity of the profession and are created and enacted by journalists. These authors mention that even though some roles related to ‘hard’ news have more discursive power than others and the ones related to lifestyle journalism are underrated, the field is charged with political value since “everyday life is not devoid of political significance” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p.157).

To begin understanding the current roles of contemporary lifestyle journalists, they identify three interrelated spaces of “everyday needs” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p.157). The first is consumption, where the members of the audience are recognized in their role as consumers; therefore, journalism provides various kinds of products and activities to help them construct their consumer lifestyles (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). The second space is identity, where journalists contribute with orientation to help the public with “the management of self and everyday life, and for developing a sense of identification and belonging” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p.158). The third interrelated space is emotion, where journalists help individuals regulate their mood with social and cognitive experiences that contribute to their emotional well-being (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018).

Every need is paired with a role (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). Consumption is linked to the marketer role, who “promotes lifestyles and purchasable products of various kinds, thereby potentially serving their advertising clients” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p.159). Emotion is paired with the mood manager role, who “contributes to the management and regulation of emotional well-being” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p. 159) by acting as an entertainer or by providing a positive experience. Identity is related to the friend role, who acts as a companion, a therapist or someone who “helps the audience members navigate the difficult task of identity work and the complex world of social relationships” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p. 159).

When those spaces interrelate, other roles appear, such as the inspirator role, who addresses emotion and consumption by providing “inspiration for new lifestyles and products” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p. 159) while tying them “to a positive attitude toward life” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p. 159). The service provider role supports consumption and identity spaces by seeing the audience as consumers, citizens and clients while offering them “information and advice on services and products (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p. 159). The connector role addresses both identity and emotion by connecting “the members of the audience to their communities, and to society in the broadest sense, by providing a sense of belonging, and by contributing to shared consciousness and identity” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p. 159). Finally, the guide is the role that intersects the three spaces. It is a generic role where journalists provide “orientation in an increasingly multi-optional world in daily life, for example, by presenting exemplars of (more or less) desired lifestyles through celebrity news” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p. 159).

Other roles mentioned by the authors are part of the political news arena. However, they should also be considered as part of the lifestyle journalism roles since the blurring boundaries between political and lifestyle journalism, and the fusion of the public and private spheres have

highlighted the political significance of everyday life journalism. In the first place, the “informational-instructive” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p. 152) function of journalism should be considered as part of the lifestyle field since journalists are curators who find, organize, contextualize and share the most relevant content on a specific topic (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). They also have the storyteller role, since lifestyle journalists provide “explanation, background, and context” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p. 153) of events and issues.

Secondly, in the “advocative-radical” function (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p. 155), lifestyle journalists are also advocates who see themselves as “a spokesperson for specific groups of people or their causes or —more generally— for the socially disadvantaged” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p. 155). Lifestyle journalists also have the role of missionaries because they promote “certain political ideology or cultural, spiritual, and moral values” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p. 155).

Lifestyle journalists should also be considered in the “developmental-educative” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p. 155) function because in their role as educators they “raise awareness and knowledge about a perceived problem” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p. 155), a concept connected to Kristensen and From’s (2018) service journalism utility. In addition, as stated by Fürsich (2012), From and Kristensen (2018), and Banjac and Hanusch (2023), lifestyle journalists have the role of mediators. In this dimension, they serve “as a bridge especially in heterogeneous societies by reinforcing social harmony and attachment to society, by forging commonality of values, and by contributing to conflict resolution” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p. 156).

Hanusch (2019) bases his research on these roles and explores through surveys he conducted what lifestyle journalists think their roles are. One of the findings of his research is that “lifestyle journalists predominantly see their role as providing content that is fun, and which inspires and

entertains audiences” (Hanusch, 2019, p. 200). The most popular role among journalists is the “inspiring entertainer” (Hanusch, 2019, p. 202), who provides content “that is fun to consume, lets audiences relax and which provides ideas on how audiences can spend their leisure time” (Hanusch, 2019, p. 201). The author links this function to the mood manager and the inspirator roles mentioned by Hanitzsch and Vos (2018).

According to Hanusch’s research, journalists also see themselves as service providers, a role that aims to “provide information, advice and reviews of new products, services and trends” (Hanusch, 2019, p. 205) and even though they aren’t critical of lifestyle industries, acts on behalf of the audience. Other journalists think their role is to be a community advocate. Here, lifestyle journalists act on behalf of the interests of the audience and have a watchdog role where they scrutinize lifestyle businesses and investigate the moral and ethical aspects of lifestyles (Hanusch, 2019, p. 205). The author relates this function to Hanitzsch and Vos’s (2016) connector role.

The life coach role, which is related to helping people “navigate through their lives by providing motivational and practical advice and examples” (Hanusch, 2019, p. 206), is also present in journalists’ craft. This role covers the functions that traditional institutions, such as family, church or school, had in guiding people in their everyday lives (Hanusch, 2019). Finally, the author states that lifestyle journalists can also contribute to public quality (a concept that will be explained later in the text) by being service providers and community advocates (Hanusch, 2019), which Hanusch relates to the disseminator role mentioned by Hanitzsch and Vos (2018).

Isabella Glogger (2019) analyses in her paper the relation of journalistic roles to the news production process. She mentions that individual journalistic attitudes and personal beliefs impact the production of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news, meaning that the roles conceptions —the most

important purpose of the journalistic profession— influence the secondary decisions that journalists make when covering a subject, such as “the degree of emotionality of a news item” (Glogger, 2019, p. 2297), among others. The author states that these decisions are “influenced more by individual journalistic characteristics than by macro-developments” (Glogger, 2019, 2297), like commercialism.

The findings of this paper propose an interesting analysis since it suggests that the production process is different for ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news due to the influence of journalistic roles in the production of news. For example, the entertainer will resort to “a softer way of reporting” (Glogger, 2019, 2305), and will provide more entertaining news; the adversary role—the one who criticises the power holders—focuses on the societal relevance of the topic; and populist mobilizers, whose role is to advocate for the socially disadvantaged, emphasize on the individual relevance while reporting for a story (Glogger, 2019).

The literature examined thus far shows that even though some of the ‘political’ journalism roles mentioned by Hanitzsch and Vos (2018) aren’t considered part of lifestyle journalism, other authors like Hanusch and Glogger show how the blurring boundaries between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news and cultural and industrial changes have influenced journalistic roles and the news production process, making it a field with dynamic practices and expectations (From & Kristensen, 2018; Deuze & Witschge, 2018).

The intersection of roles shows that seeing lifestyle journalism exclusively by its entertaining function or identifying it solely by its market-oriented role is misleading. Journalism for everyday life contributes to *public quality*, a concept coined by Irene Costera Meijer (2001), which reconnects cultural journalism to “a public or democratic idea of the public sphere” (Fürsich, 2012, p.18). For Costera Meijer, “people’s immediate world: their family, friendships,

neighbourhood, town, or country” (Costera Meijer, 2001, p. 198) composes that public sphere, and states that traditional journalism doesn’t acknowledge the importance of integrating these dimensions on the coverage, underestimating the audience as an active consumer who uses information “in both their personal and social life” (Costera Meijer, 2001, p. 194).

The author mentions that, even though paying attention to the interests of the audience has often been considered by journalists as problematic for journalism’s perceived “objective” role in democracy, now it is fundamental to keep this institution “alive as a constructive force in democracy” (Costera Meijer, 2020, p. 2330). Audiences are now part of the news production practices, and their feedback is part of the journalist’s professional status (Costera Meijer, 2020). For that reason, Costera Meijer explores in her research what kind of journalism audiences would find valuable enough that they will pay for in money or attention (Costera Meijer, 2022). She calls this *valuable journalism*, which is defined as a “meaningful, enlightening, surprising, empowering, comforting or reassuring experience which optimizes news enjoyment and civic empowerment” (Costera Meijer, 2022, p.241). It is a concept I find fascinating since it gathers functions and roles of both political and lifestyle journalism while highlighting its contribution to the public and the private sphere.

Valuable journalism’s role is to evoke in users “a range of appreciated subjective perceptions, reactions, sensations, emotions and feelings” (Costera Meijer, 2022, p.233). The audience experiences this by getting recognition. The author describes it as “the kind of pleasure ‘being heard’ refers to, involves a sense of citizenship (agency, efficacy), in combination with the relief of being able to recognize other people’s experiences as similar to one’s own” (Costera Meijer, 2022, p.237). This is an important aspect, since it is often neglected how news can harm by denying people’s experiences (Costera Meijer, 2022).

Secondly, valuable journalism provides users the satisfaction or pleasure of learning something new and seeing other perspectives (Costera Meijer, 2022). As the author explains, “being 'moved to think' is seen as journalism’s core business” (Costera Meijer, 2022, p.238), which can be related to the educator role mentioned by Hanitzsch and Vos (2018). For Costera Meijer, the educational function of valuable journalism could also be related to the promotion of empathy (Costera Meijer, 2022).

The third role of valuable journalism is “increasing mutual understanding” (Costera Meijer, 2022, p.239). Here, news media “deepens people’s comprehension of the world, their country, region, city or neighbourhood” (Costera Meijer, 2022, p. 239), and promotes people’s problem-solving abilities to interpret each other's behaviour in a multicultural context (Costera Meijer, 2022).

These roles are evidence of how valuable journalism sees the connection with the audience as a vital component of the news production process. To accomplish these functions, according to Costera Meijer, journalists must develop six virtues: Accuracy, sincerity and hospitality, which the author describes as taking the necessary care to report the truth as fair as possible while ensuring that the stories and voices of marginalized members of the community will be narrated on their own terms (Costera Meijer, 2022). This role could be linked to Hanitzsch and Vos’ (2018) change agent, who advocates for social equity, the advocate, and the connector.

The fourth virtue is listening to strengthen the voice of the people who are less heard and to explain an issue in greater detail, even if it challenges the journalist’s beliefs (Costera Meijer, 2022), which are similar to the mobilizer, the educator, and the access provider roles mentioned by Hanitzsch and Vos (2018).

The fifth virtue, being a good friend, is related to paying attention to the audience. This means, to give them what they want occasionally, but also to provide them with what they need (Costera Meijer, 2022), which is tied to the friend role, the service provider, the marketer and the guide roles described by Hanitzsch and Vos (2018).

The last virtue that Costera Meijer (2022) mentions is keeping a proper distance to avoid othering social groups or intruding into the private lives of public figures, functions related to the mediator role illustrated by Hanitzsch and Vos (2018).

In conclusion, the literature examined shows that lifestyle journalism's roles and news production processes aren't guided exclusively by the market's behaviour. Many roles conceived for 'political' journalism are now part of the lifestyle field, which demonstrates once more the contributions this type of journalism has to the political sphere. This also shows that journalistic roles are a dynamic spectrum of possibilities that evolve with the profession and social transformations. For this reason, paying attention to the audience shouldn't be considered a threat to journalists' independence but a crucial practice to keep the industry afloat. It is a bidirectional relationship where journalists provide valuable information to the public and receive feedback to continue creating quality content.

Theoretical framework

In my research-creation project, lifestyle journalism wasn't considered as the opposition of 'political' journalism. Pablo Boczkowski (2009) said that "the difference between hard and soft news rests against a background of commonalities" (p. 101) and the process of working on a 'hard' or 'soft' news story is the same. In consequence, my project focused on being a hybrid of information and entertainment: an infotainment approach where the dichotomy evolves to be a

continuum (Savolainen, 2022). After all, “...being a music journalist is not fundamentally different from any other branch of journalism” (Inglis, 2010, quoted in Hearsom, 2013, p. 116).

To build the basis of my project, I applied Costera Meijer’s (2022) valuable journalism framework. One of the relevant ideas for my project was how journalism can be used and articulated “as a sensory experience” (Costera Meijer, 2022, p. 231) that enriches people’s everyday lives. In her eyes, the valuable experience is related to appreciation, “a more serious and lasting entertainment experience, involving less immediate and more reflexive gratification than media responses such as fun, relaxation, suspense or diversion” (Costera Meijer, 2022, p. 233).

In my project, this appreciation influenced the creation of my podcast since I intended to talk about immigration and educate people about some of the rhythms from Latin America through the stories of musicians. This approach allowed me to create a piece of audio journalism that is engaging and educational while reflecting on cultural and societal struggles.

As Costera Meijer (2022) mentioned, the educational function of valuable journalism is the promotion of empathy, and I imagine that a possible outcome after the publication of the product could be a sentiment of empathy and appreciation for immigrants and our music.

Methodology

My project affected me. Jesús Martín Barbero, semiologist, anthropologist and philosopher, said at a conference at the University of Cartagena, in Colombia, that “we only research what truly affects us because ‘affect’ comes from ‘affection’” (Barbero, 1999). My research project affected me since it had a lot of me in it: I am a Latin American woman, and a cultural journalist who enjoys discovering new sounds and likes to learn about the stories behind the art.

I positioned myself to be transparent, to make evident my interests and beliefs, since journalists, as mediators in the Canadian multicultural context, must be transparent about their biases and positionality to put them in dialogue with other worldviews. Interculturality is about interacting, learning and understanding other ways of thinking in a bidirectional communication. For the Indigenous National Organisation of Colombia (ONIC), interculturality “represents an ideal complementary link between different cultures based on balanced conditions of interaction, where there is no dominant culture and others are subordinate, and where all have the same opportunities for influence as well as affirmation” (2014, p.17).

Acknowledging this interculturality and my position was also important for this project because my research had a reflexivity component. Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2022) define this approach as a journey, not a destination, where the researcher recognizes and takes responsibility for their positionality and the effects it may have on the questions formulated for the research, the recollection of the data and its interpretation.

For Sue Wilkinson (1988), reflexivity proposes to acknowledge not only how the life experiences of the researcher influence the projects, but also how the research feeds back into life experience. It is a bidirectional relationship. It requires a disciplined practice of critical reflection of the researcher’s role, the research practice and the process. It means being aware of one’s positionings, such as culture, religion, social class, among others, to reveal their assumptions, values and biases (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2022; Wilkinson, 1988).

My personal experiences, emotions and thoughts were part of this reflexivity component to critique cultural beliefs with rigour and creativity, which then were expressed through storytelling. I chose this as a part of my methodology to connect my identity journey to the

experiences of others, the musicians, who express through their music the need to connect with the roots of the place they came from, just like me.

Furthermore, to explore the culture and traditions of a diaspora, I conducted in-depth journalistic interviews with the musicians about their immigration experiences, their identity, the production process of their music, and the meaning of their songs. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to have “some comparability and flexibility to discover unanticipated knowledge” (Banjac & Hanusch, 2023, 2161).

This was a research-creation project, a concept which is a conglomerate of “approaches and activities that incorporate creative processes and involve the production of artistic works in the context of academic programs” (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012, p.13). This methodology is used with topics that can’t be addressed without engaging in creative practice (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012). I chose this methodology because I believe it is better to talk about music by showing people how it sounds through an audio production, rather than describing it. As Hearsom (2013) cites in her article, “writing about music is like dancing about architecture” (p.108).

I decided to create a podcast, which, in my opinion, is the perfect medium to talk about music. In a research-creation project, the production of a podcast “require(s) that producers follow protocols and apply skills and methodologies very similar to those used by academic researchers in the social sciences and humanities” (Lindgren, 2014, p.173). The creation of the podcast is a “research *on* practice” (Lindgren, 2014, p.175) method, and it is used when the understanding of the research “can only be achieved by direct reference to the journalistic outcomes” (Niblock, 2012, p.506).

This research on practice was guided by Costera Meijer’s (2022) valuable journalism approach, where she proposes a set of six interrelated journalistic virtues, which are accuracy,

sincerity, hospitality, listening, being a good friend, and keeping a proper distance. I used the definitions of each virtue as guidelines to create the questions for my interviews, to do research for each episode, create the script, and finally to edit the podcast.

By using this approach for my project, I intended to enact the mediator and educator roles (Banjac & Hanusch, 2023) by serving as a bridge between Latin American cultures and the heterogeneous Canadian society, arbitrating between cultures and tastes by providing accurate information, raising awareness, and contextualizing personal stories in a larger context.

I believe that creating a podcast could contribute to answering my research questions since the research on practice method helped me explore how music journalism can be used to amplify stories of a diaspora, reflecting on the way about the best practices to do it and the limits or shared aspects that might exist between lifestyle and political journalism.

Podcasts are “intimately whispered into our ears” (Lindgren, 2016, p.23). It is a “personalized listening space created by headphones that further accommodates the bond created between voices in the story and the listener (Lindgren, 2016, p.23). This medium is in sync with the valuable journalism approach, since the intimate nature of podcasting helps journalists to take a “narrative approach to the development of their journalism, emphasizing the personal experiences of subjects of the story” (Lindgren, 2016, p.2), promotes empathy and appreciation since listeners engage in a conversation with the journalist and the interviewees while learning “about themselves by hearing others grapple with emotional challenge” (Lindgren, 2016, p.5).

I chose to create a podcast since it is a medium where I feel like a fish in water. I have been a radio producer for more than seven years; therefore, I was qualified with the necessary technical skills to carry this project out, from beginning to end.

This short series was narrated by me. I recounted part of my immigration experience and the reflections I have had during this time to provide a context for the audience about what it is like to immigrate. As Lindgren (2016) describes, personal and intimate experiences in podcasting have the potential to create a unique relationship between the audience and the story. Personal storytelling fosters empathy among the audience because they learn more about each other while relating the story “to his or her own experience and develop insight and understanding as they listen” (Lindgren, 2016, p.27).

Apart from sharing my immigration experience, my voice also guided the listeners through the stories told by musicians about the beginning and evolution of the Latin American music scene of Montréal. I also briefly contributed information about the history of the genres played by the musicians and the instruments they use. This educational part is tied to what Lindgren (2016) points out as the base of podcasting: oral tradition.

To create the podcast episodes, I interviewed members of three musical or cultural projects: Less Toches, Sonido Pesao and Roberto López. The interviewees come from different Latin American backgrounds and play different music genres, such as cumbia, jazz, bullerengue and rap. The interviews focused on their musical projects and their experiences of being Latin American musicians in Montréal.

The podcast has three episodes of 20 minutes each. The first is about the beginnings of the scene, the pioneer musicians that brought their home countries’ music to Montréal, such as Roberto López and José Armando, the bars and venues, like Café Saint-Jacques, that helped consolidate the scene and how Montréal has embraced Latin American cultures by creating festivals to display this type of music, making Montréalers enjoy sounds like cumbia, salsa, and

latin jazz, among other genres. In this episode, I talked about the adaptation process after migrating and the cultural clashes, such as language barriers.

The second episode covers the present Latin American music scene in Montréal, some groups that are part of it, the genres they play, a brief story of these musical rhythms, and how the artists have adapted their art to a non-Spanish-speaking public. In this episode, musicians talk about the meaning of some songs and how they transmute to music the nostalgia of being away from home. Here, I include some of my anecdotes around this type of music, how listening to it makes me feel at home and why Latin American music is a political act in a world where anti-immigrant sentiment grows exponentially.

The third episode covers the life story of Sonido Pesao's members. Through their stories, they unveil the racism and constant profiling that Latin Americans endure in the city, which is tied to a reflection about the constant need for immigrants to prove we are worthy of existing in the place we immigrated to, and the possibility of a future where we won't be considered a burden for society just because we are searching for a better life.

The three episodes have original music from some of the artists, including songs recorded during the interviews, which were part of the sound design of the podcast. I also included recordings of concerts and live presentations from the groups and swipers and transitions from royalty-free libraries.

One of my references was the podcast *LOUD: THE HISTORY OF REGGAETON* (Queen, 2021), where Ivy Queen, a successful reggaeton artist, narrates the origins of this musical genre in Panamá and the sociopolitical struggles that came with it. Each episode has sound ambience from bars, Panamá City, interviews with characters that contributed to the creation and evolution of the genre, and Queen's personal anecdotes and reflections about reggaeton and her career.

Another style reference was Radio Ambulante (Alarcón, 2012), a narrative podcast that tells stories in Spanish from all around Latin America about love, youth, immigration, environment and people in extraordinary circumstances. They usually explain the political, cultural and social background where the stories take place, which enriches the narrative and helps people from other countries in Latin America to understand the story better.

I chose these podcasts because they have features I wanted to emulate in my project. For example, I wanted to combine the narration in first-person in some parts of the story with an omniscient narrator that guides the course of the episode.

Even though my references were in Spanish, my podcast was created in English because my target audience was young Montréalers and adults who live in the metropolis since they are the ones who might have listened to the rhythms played by Latin American musicians, even danced to them in one of the city's many summer festivals, but don't know their histories or who created them.

Finally, this research on practice aimed to contribute to the essay component of this thesis since I used my experience working on this podcast to reflect on the shortcomings a product like this can have, how my approach could—or couldn't—contribute to cover matters of a diaspora with better practices and it also allowed me to analyse what music journalism can reveal about the boundaries or shared aspects of the hard and soft news dichotomy. My essay contributed to helping me observe my process of creating the podcast critically by contrasting the production process with the theory, in order to provide a fresh perspective on the contemporary functions, roles and production practices of lifestyle journalism and its subfields.

Discussion

Scholar Paula Hearsum (2013) mentions that for music journalism to continue to be meaningful, it must create a “musical discourse with a purpose” (Hearsum, 2013, p. 109). In the case of my research-creation project, the purpose went beyond talking about the culture of a diaspora. It aimed to resist anti-immigration discourse—particularly against Latin American people—through education and the promotion of empathy within Montréal’s multi-ethnic landscape by amplifying the personal stories of Hispanic musicians living in the city.

To do this, I used Irene Costera Meijer’s (2022) concept of *valuable journalism* as a guiding framework. Since there is no instruction manual for how to apply this concept, I imagined what valuable journalism would look like in practice and created my own set of steps. As a result, the podcast production process developed in three stages.

First, as the limits between lifestyle, cultural and consumer journalism are blurred (Kristensen & From, 2012), there is a “continuum between art, popular culture, lifestyle and consumption” (Kristensen & From, 2012, p.28); therefore, I began working on the podcast much like I would any other journalistic story: identifying sources (the artists), contacting them, and scheduling interviews. After all, “...being a music journalist is not fundamentally different from any other branch of journalism” (Inglis, 2010, quoted in Hearsum, 2013, p. 116).

When I started on this project, I wanted to include every Latin American artist or group living in Montréal in the podcast. I quickly realized how naive that was. I went into researching this project assuming there weren’t many Latin American bands active in the city; but to this day, I continue to discover new ones with impressive musical projects. Therefore, since my timeline was very limited, I chose three artists with different backgrounds and musical interests to reflect, on a small scale, Latin America’s diversity. Despite the lack of female representation in

Montréal's Hispanic music scene, I invited two female artists to be part of the podcast; however, they were not in town during the available interview period.

In the second phase, I used Costera Meijer's (2022) key experience of *learning something new* to prepare the questions for the in-depth journalistic interviews with the musicians. Costera Meijer explains that users get this *learning something new* experience with pieces that "surprise them, provide them with counterarguments and offer them perspectives they were unaware of, broaden their horizon and enlighten them" (Costera Meijer, 2022, p.238). It is important to note that, as the author explains in her text, it is impossible to meet all the key experiences (getting recognition, learning something new and increasing mutual understanding) in one approach (Costera Meijer, 2022). As a consequence of this, I focused on implementing just two (getting recognition and learning something new) of the three experiences.

In this stage, I imagined myself as a member of the audience—someone who doesn't speak Spanish as a first language and wasn't born in Latin America—and reflected on what things I would like to learn and understand about an artist and a type of music I don't know. Therefore, I created a set of questions that would work for every interview, such as *Could you tell us the story of the band? When did your musical career start? What inspires you to create your music? What kind of challenges have you faced developing your career in Montréal? How do you think the Montréal audience perceives your music? When did you arrive in Montréal? What kind of music did you grow up listening to? Where did you grow up?*

Then, during the interviews, I encouraged the artists to elaborate on their adaptation process after immigrating (if they felt comfortable) and on how their upbringing influenced their music. I also asked them to explain, for a non-Latin American audience, their musical genres, instruments, and any culturally specific language they used.

The third—and most difficult—phase was writing the podcast episode scripts. Initially, I thought the podcast was going to be exclusively about feeling homesick and how nostalgia was a driving force behind the artists' preservation of tradition in Montréal. Subconsciously, I assumed every Latin American who emigrated to Montréal felt as homesick as I did when I started working on my research-creation thesis. But, as the project evolved, I realized that I didn't want to talk about nostalgia anymore. First, even though some artists mentioned the links between nostalgia and the music they make, others reflected on embracing the complexity of living in a multicultural city. Secondly, my feelings towards Montréal changed. I feel more adapted to living in this city, and although I still miss my family, I no longer feel the sadness pressing on my chest anymore. I even have favourite places in the city and a favourite season — summer.

Finally, a video podcast I watched from Carolina Sanín (2025), a Colombian writer, made me see my script through other lenses. In her monologue, she mentioned how, as Latin Americans living in North America, we can be excluded by not enacting the colonial stereotypes created about us (Sanín, 2025), such as being like Speedy Gonzales. Because of this, the way we narrate our experiences is influenced by falling into the trap of believing that being an immigrant is an identity (Sanín, 2025), which could lead us to lose sight of the nuances of each particular experience of immigration. For example, the challenges a Latin American refugee in Canada faces aren't the same as those of people like me, who came to pursue a Master's degree.

Therefore, in my podcast, to amplify personal stories of the culture and traditions of a diaspora through music journalism, I talked about immigration as an experience we go through, not as an identity. As a result of this, I explored the wide spectrum of emotions, intersections and experiences that immigration could carry. Beyond being critical of the so-called immigrant identity, I wanted to honour the complexity of Latin American musicians' stories based in

Montréal, especially to show the listeners the nuances of this *Latino* identity. This approach aligned with putting into practice Costera Meijer's (2022) key experience of *learning something new*, intertwined with qualities mentioned by the author, such as honouring complexity, multi-perspectival, and opening one's horizon (Costera Meijer, 2022).

Presenting the multiplicity of experiences and creating storytelling that made sense and connected with the audience was the biggest challenge in writing the scripts. I took professor Kristy Snell's advice to start the story with myself, so I could create a bond with listeners and begin building the intimate atmosphere (Lindgren, 2016) that a podcast can provide. I wanted the podcast to have a conversational tone to foster that intimacy, so listeners would feel I'm speaking directly to them, not reporting to an audience.

Constructing this relationship between the audience and me is also part of putting into practice Costera Meijer's (2022) valuable journalism approach. Sharing my personal stories and thoughts is part of *getting recognition* and *increasing mutual understanding* experiences (2022) because it can foster feelings of representation, belonging, comfort and affirmation. While writing the scripts, I also positioned myself transparently to highlight the contrasts the immigration experience can have, to acknowledge my biases, and to put these in dialogue with other worldviews present in a multicultural city like Montréal. I used anecdotes, such as the one I mentioned of feeling exhausted by interacting in three languages at the same time, and included reflections I have had on my immigration experience, such as the feeling of having to constantly show that I am worthy of being here.

Including myself in the narrative was very challenging. In my reflexive notes, I wrote on May 16: "As a journalist, I was taught to keep myself out of stories; to keep my feelings out and be impartial. However, in this podcast, I share all these thoughts and feelings my friends and I have

talked about regarding what it means to immigrate and adapt. Putting my thoughts and experiences into the story is sometimes uncomfortable but also revealing, because it allowed me to see my immigration experience from another perspective. That is how this research has affected me. Despite this, I keep wondering how many of my anecdotes and thoughts I should include. I have a repetitive thought reminding me that a journalist shouldn't be the news, so how much of my story is too much?"

I followed my intuition as a storyteller to know where in the narrative I could include an anecdote or a reflection; however, looking back, I can see how these doubts influenced my writing in the first chapter. It's evident how I'm present with my anecdotes and reflections at the beginning of the story, and slowly fade away to the end of the episode.

My advice to fellow journalists who embark on a similar project is to be clear about why they want to include personal stories in their journalistic products. As Sanín (2025) said, the point isn't to compulsively talk about every minor detail of one's life or to make something autobiographical, but to share how we perceive the world and those around us, enriching the storytelling and creating something that generates meaning (Costera Meijer, 2022).

Moreover, to continue applying Costera Meijer's valuable journalism (2022) concept and make a product that was educational and entertaining, I put into practice some of the six interrelated virtues mentioned by Costera Meijer (2022). The virtue of *listening* is most present in the podcast for two reasons. First, Costera Meijer says that to enact this virtue, journalists must be ready to listen to things they don't want to hear and challenge their beliefs (Costera Meijer, 2022). As I explained earlier, my perspective on the link between immigration and nostalgia changed after hearing the musicians' stories, and I was transparent with the audience about this change of heart. Second, listening also means "to explain an issue in greater detail to

‘the other side’” (Costera Meijer, 2022, p.244), which I embodied by imagining myself as a member of the audience to ask the necessary questions and describe the music genre and its context in as much detail as possible.

In addition, I oriented the podcast’s creation around the virtues of *accuracy* and *sincerity*. I took care to ensure the musicians were seen and heard on their own terms, verified that the information they shared was accurate, and made sure the storytelling was coherent with what I said and believed, to use Costera Meijer’s (2022) terms. Then, the final virtue I incorporated was *keeping a proper distance*. For Costera Meijer (2022), this means avoiding *othering* social groups. Thus, I aimed to create a narrative beyond the binary *Us*—Latin Americans who immigrated to Montréal—versus *Them*—non-Hispanic people—toward something inclusive that contains both worlds.

As part of the lifestyle journalism field, my role as a music journalist was to act as a bridge between cultures (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018), to enact the mediator role between the multiplicity of cultures, and to negotiate the “establishment of status positions” (Fürsich, 2012, p.9) and the “judgments of taste” (Fürsich, 2012, p.13) regarding the Latin American diaspora and its cultural expressions. To achieve this, by applying Costera Meijer’s (2022) valuable journalism concept and creating a product that was both educational and entertaining, my strategy was to weave together the musical context with parts of Montréal’s history and the development of the Latin American music scene in the city and abroad. I included audio clips of anecdotes, sound effects to explain specific sounds, such as timbales or birds, and, of course, music from the artists. I intended to show how intertwined the stories of musicians who came to the city are with the everyday lives of Montréalers to strengthen the *recognition* experience (Costera Meijer, 2022).

This way, not only can people who immigrated to Montréal see themselves in the narrative, but also those who grew up in the city.

In addition to this, to talk about the music genres in detail, I followed Hearsum's guidelines to write a music review, which are: "distinguish musical form, give an explanation of production style, explore emotion, and contextualize" (Hearsum, 2013, p.112). I tried to be as detailed as possible in explaining how a specific rhythm sounds, the context in which it developed, and how this information might be relevant for the listeners, since the power of contextualization is in generating meaning (Hearsum, 2013). As the author says, what is important "is not the music in itself but how we use it to relate to others, how we communicate through it or interpret it" (2013, p.112). This generation of meaning is tied to Fürsich and Avant-Mier's (2023) vision of the symbolic value of music journalism: the potential of the popular to recalibrate hegemonic positions, to change the narrative from "a de-humanizing and objectifying attitude towards non-white musicians" (Fürsich & Avant-Mier, 2013, p.114) to the integration of local and global musicians' expertise, and the inclusion of their creative opinions and stories to educate an audience. After all, as Costera Meijer (2022) says, "being 'moved to think' is seen as journalism's core business" (p.238).

The integration of Costera Meijer's valuable journalism (2022) in music journalism shows how the boundaries between hard and soft news exist as a continuum. This intersection of values and virtues with lifestyle journalism can create products that entertain and inform the audience, involving less immediate and more reflexive gratification (Costera Meijer, 2022, p.233).

Conclusions

This research-creation thesis set out to explore how valuable journalism (Costera Meijer, 2022) can be applied through the production of a podcast that tells the stories of the Latin American music scene in Montréal. It aimed to answer three main research questions:

RQ1: Using an original podcasting project about Latin American music in Montréal as an example, how can music journalism be used to amplify personal stories of the culture and traditions of a diaspora?

RQ2: How can Costera Meijer's (2022) concept of "valuable journalism" be applied to create a podcast about Latin American music in Montréal that seeks to inform and entertain the audience?

RQ3: What best practices and guidelines can producing an original podcasting project about Latin American music in Montréal reveal for the production of future content that seeks to both inform and entertain audiences about the cultures and traditions of a diaspora?

The goal was to create a podcast that amplifies musical projects while talking about a diaspora and its traditions in an entertaining way through the use of engaging storytelling. The combination of information and entertainment aimed to educate a non-Hispanic audience about various music genres, the instruments used to play them, and how these artists' work has been influenced by their new environment after immigrating.

This research essay has outlined the literature that informed this study, its theoretical approach, and methods used, and has discussed how these elements shaped both the research and the production processes of the podcast.

In this concluding section, I review how this project has responded to the three research questions and underscore the strengths and limitations of this research, as well as future research directions.

Music journalism that amplifies personal stories of the culture and traditions of a diaspora

To be meaningful, music journalism must create a musical discourse with a purpose (Hearsum, 2013). Therefore, in order to amplify personal stories of the culture and traditions of a diaspora through music journalism, immigration should be seen as an experience people go through rather than an identity. This approach will allow us, journalists, to explore the wide spectrum of emotions, intersections and experiences that immigration could carry. It also encourages us to observe each story and musical piece through an intersectional lens, enabling us to honour the complexities and nuances of a diaspora and its cultural expressions.

Valuable journalism to inform and entertain the audience

Applying the valuable journalism framework can help us create more comprehensive, nuanced, and accurate journalistic pieces about a diaspora that can resonate with the audience. To create a meaningful piece using this framework as a guide, as journalists, we must we must place ourselves in the audience's position. This allows us to include the elements they may want to know, while also providing the necessary context and information they need to learn. Furthermore, the six interrelated virtues mentioned by Costera Meijer (2022) can be considered as the journalistic principles that illuminate the pathway we must cross to develop a valuable piece that is both informative and emotionally engaging.

Best practices and guidelines

When creating a journalistic piece in music journalism that seeks to amplify personal stories of diasporic culture and traditions, several best practices should be followed:

1. Represent the diversity of experiences: It is crucial to present the multiplicity of experiences within a diaspora to avoid homogenizing it and falling into the trap of believing that being an immigrant is an identity.
2. Adopt a critical, mediating role: With this critical mindset, music journalists can enact as mediators between the multiplicity of cultures and negotiate the “establishment of status positions” (Fürsich, 2012, p.9) and the “judgments of taste” (Fürsich, 2012, p.13).
3. Follow the steps of writing a musical review: To talk about the music genres in detail, it’s important to follow Barney Hoskyns' structure to talk about music: “distinguish musical form, give an explanation of production style, explore emotion, and contextualize” (Hoskyns, 1984, quoted in Hearsun, 2013, p.112).
4. Emphasize relevance: It’s essential to explain why the information shared is meaningful to the audience, as the power of this type of storytelling lies in generating meaning (Hearsun, 2013).

Strengths, limitations and future research directions

As Costera Meijer (2022) affirms, valuable journalism can provide a service that people actually need, and as a consequence, they will spend their time and money on it (Costera Meijer, 2022), making it a potentially sustainable enterprise. However, to fully measure the impact of the journalistic products, it is fundamental to listen to the audience.

For future research-creation projects on valuable journalism, to confirm whether the objective of creating a piece that enriches people’s everyday lives (Costera Meijer, 2022) was accomplished, it is crucial to present the product to an audience. A major limitation of my project is that I couldn’t know if my approach to putting valuable journalism into practice produced a

piece where listeners would feel seen, represented, enlightened, or connected. This highlights the audiences' key role in valuable journalism. In this profession, we have a social contract with the public (Bugeja, 2009), and to understand what the listeners want or need to learn, it is key to have their feedback.

Another limitation, as I previously mentioned, was that due to the timeframe I had to complete my project, I could only include three musicians, despite the incredible richness and diversity of the Latin American music scene in Montréal. However, I plan to continue with this project after I graduate, since I want the podcast to be a medium where Latin American musicians in the city can share their music and experiences. It will serve as an educational tool to foster appreciation for Hispanic immigrants and their music, a relevant aspect in a world where anti-immigrant sentiment is rapidly growing.

Furthermore, this project succeeded in providing a guide on how to tell the stories of a diaspora with care and accuracy by ensuring the artists were narrated in their own terms, and questioning the idea of being an immigrant as an identity. My recommendation for future research and for current journalists is to critically evaluate how the narratives we create could contribute to *Othering* social groups. An example of this is how using the term 'immigrants' as an identity or a category could erase the nuances and complexities of the human experience when talking about a diaspora.

Additionally, it is important to explain the context in which a diaspora exists. For example, by layering locations, such as Colombia and Montréal, through music, language, and shared cultural moments. I also talked about Jardin Gamelin and Concordia as casually as I mentioned Bogotá or family trips, with the intention to anchor the listeners in both places at once. Through this, I

intended to help the listeners take a peek into the life of a Latin American woman experiencing Montréal as a way to foster empathy toward the Latin American community.

Finally, this podcast succeeded in incorporating information and entertainment in a journalistic product. The personal storytelling and the sensory details in the narrative —such as the description of the places or the instructions to dance cumbia—could wrap the listener in the environment with scenarios they could imagine and even interact with. Moreover, referencing actual traditions, such as the Independence Day dances or cumbia on the radio, and including historical context of the music genres, the instruments, and the communities behind them, clearly shows how music journalism, as part of the lifestyle journalism umbrella, can educate audiences about social groups often underrepresented in the media or portrayed through stereotypes. This project portrayed a comprehensive vision of how lifestyle journalism has value by itself; it is politically relevant since it sees the audience as citizens and consumers, and provides them with information in entertaining ways for their everyday lives, showing how entertainment and information can co-exist to create products with social and political impact.

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Appendix I

Roberto Lopez interview

Natalia: So I would like to start with, can you please introduce yourself? What do you do?

Where you were born?

Roberto: Well, hi, I'm Roberto Lopez. I was born in Bogota, Colombia. I grew up there. Since I was very young, I was interested in music, though my family was not interested that I become a musician.

So I played in several bands. I taught myself. I studied with a couple of musicians and just performing gave me the tools to learn and to develop my skill on the guitar, which is my instrument.

When I was young, I was very, well, I've always been countercurrent to whatever is going on. So when I was young, I was very much into rock and into albums that were difficult to get in Colombia at the time. So I had to go downtown to people who imported the albums and you can get them on tape if you didn't have money. And my interests were those. I was attracted to the electric guitar and all the sounds that you can produce with the electric guitar.

In my evolution, I was interested in jazz and at some point I said, "I want to study jazz." So I ended up coming to Montreal to pursue, to do my studies in music because I never had formal education. I had to teach myself how to read, how a little bit of theory just to be able to pass the exam at the university to be accepted in a music program. And when I arrived in Montreal, that was in 1994,

There was a Latin scene happening already here in the city. So I met Joey Armando, who was a timbal player. He used to play in, he played in the first rock record ever recorded in Colombia at the end of the sixties. And he was featuring in an interview at the Radio Nacional not long ago. He unfortunately passed away during the pandemic.

But he also played cumbia and his band used to open for Lucho Bermudez band in Bogota.

in a downtown bar where Lucho Bermudez band played.

N: Sorry for interrupting you. Which band was that?

R: I don't remember the name of his band, but it was the band that opened every night before the Lucho Bermudez Orchestra. So they would perform before and then the Lucho Bermudez Orchestra will come in and play later.

Could you explain to the audience who was Lucho Bermudez and why he's so important in the Colombian musical scene? Yeah, certainly. Lucho Bermudez is probably one of the most important composers in Colombia. Lucho Bermudez was born in the Caribbean coast and most of Afro-Colombian rhythms that people know about

come from the Caribbean coast, meaning cumbia, porro, and many other styles that have developed in the coast. And you have to remember that this is music that comes from rural towns. So usually a rhythm, it has one name in one town and you travel a few kilometers in another town, it has a different name. Or usually a rhythm,

changes. They share the same name, but it's played differently from town to town. Lucho Bermudez was the first one who brought this to the capital, to Bogota, where people were not used to listen to this kind of music. And I'm talking about around the 40s, the 50s.

And Lucho Bermudez was recorded by RCA Records at the time, and his albums were internationalized. They were sold all over Latin America. So people grew up listening to Lucho Bermudez in Argentina, in Mexico, in Peru, in other countries. And sometimes they believe cumbia comes from there because they listened to their parents. They heard their parents listening to Lucho Bermudez music.

So nowadays, you know, cumbia has become very popular and you hear that there's Mexican cumbia and Argentinian cumbia and all these can be traced back to those years. Lucho Bermudez explored and he was very much influenced by Benny Goodman and the jazz orchestras of the time. So he kind of orchestrated cumbia into a jazz big band and it was the time where the big band jazz orchestras became popular in Colombia. And there's a great compilation from Soundways Records that's called Cartagena, and it's a collection of porros and cumbias and descargas from that era. It features Lucho Bermudez, but it features many other Colombian artists. So that link between jazz, and cumbia.

N: And Lucho Bermudez played the clarinet. Why the clarinet?

R: Because there's a popular instrument that's called flauta de millo, which is made from a little piece of bamboo. And the sound that this instrument produces, it's the only Western instrument

that gets close to that is the clarinet because of the mouthpiece and the kind of sound that it produces. So

the clarinet became the instrument that would bring us close to that sound from the flauta de millo. That's why it became an important instrument in cumbia music. So Lucho Bermúdez kind of bridged the popular music, the rural music, the folkloric music, with a more urban educated, if you can say, and developed style of music. And Lucho Ramírez was pivotal and was very important in doing this transition. And also exposing people from the interior of the country that were not or used to believe that that kind of music was for low-class people, that you wouldn't listen to that kind of music. So he kind of popularized cumbia and porro and other rhythms for people in the interior of the country, the high society in Bogotá, who suddenly were listening to cumbia.

And that became the first expansion or the first step for Cumbia to come out from little towns in the Colombian coast to the Colombian capital to being recorded and to being exported all across Latin America.

N: And why do you say that he helped to bring that music to the interior of the country.

How was it before? Who played cumbia before? Who was listening to cumbia? Why was it a rural genre?

R: Well, it's a style of music that cumbia mixes three elements, which is the indigenous element, the Spanish and European element and the African element, which is the merge of the three cultures. In other places in the Caribbean, the native cultures were exterminated and practically

they're non-existent. So usually if you go to Cuba or to Dominican Republic or to Puerto Rico, you have the Spanish and the African influence. But in Colombia, we have the three of them.

So the flutes become very important in the sound of cumbia. Cumbia was developed in the coast just because, well, we had the incoming slaves who brought the percussions and the chants and their traditions.

Contrary to the United States or North America where they were not allowed to do drumming, they were only allowed to sing. That's why we have blues and soul and all this music that is developed from African influences, but only through vocal practices, there's no percussion. In Latin America and in the Caribbean, the Spanish allowed the percussions. The rhythms stayed there when they were not allowed to practice the religion, they would use syncretism and they would name festivities for their gods and goddess with saints from Catholic religions. So they were allowed to keep drumming and singing and doing their traditions. And this developed just because of demographics in the Caribbean coast, also in the Pacific coast.

In the interior of the country, many places in the interior were colonized, meaning some places there was no indigenous presence and many Spanish came and settled.

So in these regions, there was less of an African influence. So we had more of a traditional Spanish influence. So string instruments developed. So we have a lot of variations of the guitar in Colombia, like the tiple, the bandola, like many instruments that developed from the Spanish guitar, which are unique to Colombia and are variations of that guitar.

So people in the interior of the country were not necessarily exposed culturally because it was not part of the music that they were doing or listening. So when Lucho Bermudez came, it was

also, I mean, people probably listened to cumbia and there was migration from people from the coast to the interior.

But it was always considered low class music. See, people in high society wouldn't listen to this music, wouldn't go to watch a show. So the fact that Lucho Bermudez came to the interior and began performing in places that had a reputation and exposing people from higher classes to this kind of music kind of open the way for a much broader acceptance of that style of music.

So we talk so much about Columbia and see, I've done a lot of research and I've gone and learned the rhythms with percussionists that used to play with Totola Momposina and other people. But It's more a research in terms of learning and knowing where things come from than an academic research. So I have some answers, but I don't have all the answers.

N: No, but it's been great. It's been great because I think you've explained very in simple words and I think it's understandable. So I want to start talking about Joe Armando. So what can you tell me about him?

Well, Joe Armando was a drummer and a percussionist. As I said, he performed in the first rock album ever recorded in Colombia and printed in vinyl. I think it was called Los Pelucas or something like that, the name of the band. I'm not sure. I don't remember exactly.

But he was also into Latin jazz at the time. And, you know, it was a moment where musicians who had immigrated in the United States, particularly in New York, were creating a wave of music explorations. You know, Boogaloo was born in 67, 66, which is...

Soul musicians meeting with Latin musicians in New York. So the same kind of experimentations were happening in Colombia, where people were doing this cumbia, mainly influenced by Cuban music, exploring Colombian rhythms.

And he used to perform, I think it was Candilejas, the place, the bar. And they were the opening act before Lucho Bermudez band. In Bogota, right? In Bogota, yeah. He moved, he came to perform at the Expo 67 in Montreal with a band performing here.

And he met a bunch of musicians here. And at the time, you know, sometimes people arrive and the Canadian border guy said, you want to stay? And Joey was asked, do you want to stay in Canada? He said, oh, sure. And he stayed. It seemed so simple and so crazy at that time. So he stayed here and he became one of the main figures here.

doing Latin jazz in Montreal. At that time there were less Latin musicians in town. So he became the tibal player, the one who knew about cumbia, the one who knew about salsa, alongside I think it was Michel Seguin, a Quebecois percussionists, they both used to go to Mont-Royal to play drums there outdoors. That kind of started the tam-tams that we know today in Mont-Royal.

N: Really?

R: Yeah, it comes from there. It was a long time ago. So they were used to going to this jam on the weekends, on the tam-tam. And then people slowly began to come and then it turned into these crazy unjammable... People playing precautions, just like, just a big trip. So it became a tradition eventually. And I remember when I came in 94, that tradition was already established. So if you wanted to just go and jam precautions, you would go on Sunday to Mont-Royal and just play with all the crazy characters on the mountain. So it comes from a long time ago.

So Joy was one of these, responsible for promoting and developing Latin jazz in Montreal. When I came in '94, I met a Chilean musician who was studying at the university at the time and I met him probably like the first week or second week I was here and the first thing he asked me oh you come from Colombia you must know Joe Armando I said I just arrived he said come I'll meet I'll take you to meet Joe he's playing at this place downtown so I remember going to the bar and watching him play and you know I went to talk with him and eventually we became very good friends so I heard all these stories about him playing with Tito Puente came to town and went to his house to jam in his basement. The last concert Tito Puente played in town, Joe Armando opened the concert and towards the end of the concert, he joined Tito Puente on stage to do a timbal solo together.

N: Who is Tito Puente for the audience that is not familiar with that?

R: Tito Puente is a percussionist, a Puerto Rican percussionist who lived in New York. And he's probably one of the main figures in Latin jazz. So he performed with many people and he was, you know, the godfather of Latin jazz, if we can say that. He was a ball player,

He was a composer, a producer, he released, I don't know, how many, many, many, many albums. So if anybody wants to learn about Latin jazz, they should start with Tito Puente. Just to say, many people know Oye Como Va.

Usually the Carlos Santana, the Santana version, which is very popular. Well, that song is not written by Carlos Santana. It's written by Tito Puente. The original song, you can find it in Tito Puente's album.

N: How does that sound? How does the song go?

R: It goes... Oye como va mi ritmo bueno pa goza mulata. Yeah, yeah. It's just, it's very simple. It's just a cha-cha-cha and the rhythm of cha-cha-cha. And it was kind of a descarga. So, you know, there's no lyrics. The lyric is just that phrase. And the whole concept of the song is that you just sing that.

You play a melody, you sing that again, and then everybody solos. So there's a timbal solo, there's a trumpet solo, a piano solo, and then you come back to the chorus and there's an outro.

N: You have mentioned multiple times "la descarga", but I think we haven't defined that. Can you please explain it?

R: "Descarga" is the Latin version of a jam. A jam in jazz is when musicians get together and you just play. Usually you play a head or you play a groove and then it's a time for everybody to improvise. So you take turns improvising, but the structure of the song is, it's open or, you know, you can take, for example, a 12-bar blues. It's just 12 bars that repeat and repeat and repeat to eternity, and you just take turns doing solos over the structure. So a jam session, when you say a jam session, is that you play a tune that everybody knows, and then after that, It's just solos and so the scar guys like you let everything go out. See you let when you do a solo, you let what you feel go out. So it's not prepared. It's improvised.

N: Okay. So you mentioned that, well, you met Joey Armando. Did you start playing with him?

R: I jammed with him many times. We performed several times together. He would come and perform as a guest or do... I had a show and I invited him to come and do percussions.

But interesting music were a little bit different. See, I learned a lot from Joey. Joey taught me because he knew so much. He was just like a walking encyclopedia. So I would go to his house and we would jam together.

He would teach me, oh, this rhythm goes like this and you do this and you play it like this. So I learned a lot of how the percussion works in Latin music in the different styles because in Latin music, usually you just give the name of a rhythm or a style and you're supposed to know what each instrument does and you're supposed to understand how it works to be able to play on top of it.

So, so I learned a lot. So it was kind of a, you know, a mentor who would teach me things and who tell me all these incredible stories about him and other musicians and Tito Puente and, you know,

He played with Miroslav Vitus, which is a jazz bass player, opening at the Olympic Stadium for Emerson Lake and Palmer. So he had these crazy, crazy stories of performances. And, you know, musicians usually, we all have many stories like that. So it was just fascinating listening to him.

N: And how was the Latin American music scene when you arrived in Montreal?

R: It was a little bit ghettoized. How do you say? It was very much in ghettos, meaning musicians would perform at 649, which was a salsa dancing place, would perform in Dominican discotheques or, you know, in places that were specifically for people who wanted to go and dance salsa, mostly for the community. They would also perform mostly in the national festivities. So if it was the Peruvian National Day, they would do a party in the park and then, you know, they would invite the Peruvian musicians and other Latin musicians to perform on

stage. Same thing for the Colombian festival, the National Day and all the Latin national festivities. Now they all happen in park for the La Rondiz in Il Sant'Helen, but before that they were just organized by the community in parks around the city in Montreal. So, you know, there was the Cuban community which has always been present, so the Cuban musicians would gather and play Cuban music and Cuban salsa. Then we had the Dominican community. There was Orquesta Pambiche who played merengue and had several of my friends from school who would come and do the saxes and the trumpets and the trombones... You had, but the Colombian community was not, it was not much developed. I mean, if I remember well, there was a Colombian trumpet player. I can remember his name right now who performed with some of these bands from time to time. And there was Joey Armando and that's it. There were no other Colombian musicians until I came here in 94. And yeah, You know, Joy would play sometimes cumbias more in a Latin jazz context. He would play in bars, play jazz. He would play at the jazz festival. But he was mostly...

I mean, if you're somebody living in Montreal who didn't speak Spanish or who was not involved in the community activities, unless you went to dance salsa downtown and there was a band playing or you went to one of these national day festivities in the parks, you wouldn't hear much of the music being done in Montreal at the time.

N: Okay. And Joe Armando was from which part?

R: Bogota. Okay. He was from Bogota and he lived here.

There were other Colombian musicians, particularly in Toronto, because before the big wave of Colombian immigration, there was a bigger Colombian community in Toronto than in Montreal. Okay.

N: And why did you decide to come to Montreal?

R: I wanted to study jazz and going to the States to study jazz was very, very expensive.

And somebody said, well, why don't you go to Canada? And the only thing I could think of was, oh, Montreal, the jazz festival. And in my head, I thought, oh, it's French, it's English, the jazz festival. I should be a fan place. It should be really rich culturally. So I'm going to Montreal, but I don't.

I didn't know much. It was just like a crazy decision at the time. And so I went to the consulate and I said, I want to study. And they passed me books and I looked at the universities. I took notes and then I wrote to the universities and started the procedure to apply to the university for the music program. And at that time, when I came to study, most of the people who came to study came to study engineering or finances or other kind of careers, but not music. I was the only Colombian studying music during a long time here at the university. And so it was like a crazy decision. And I just took the plane and it was long. And when I arrived here, I said, oh, what am I doing here? What was I thinking? So, you know, like anybody who emigrates, it's the cultural shock at the beginning, you know, everything is new, you want to discover, but, you know, it's like, I knew English, but my English was not that... I mean, I thought it was good, but when you have to speak English every day, when you go to a classroom and you have to take notes and to participate in a classroom in English, it's very difficult. So the first semester was really hard. Like, I got in the metro or the bus and I saw people that I knew and I was like, oh,

please don't come and speak to me. Not before 9 a.m., please. Yeah. My brain is not ready. But just being immersed in that. And I always say when people say, I want to study a language, I say, well, you have to study something else and then use the language. That's when you learn because you're obliged to use the language.

And at the end of the first semester, I was already Speaking better and being able to take notes and participate in class and just my English just grew exponentially fast.

N: And how was the process of adaptation? Did you feel nostalgic of being away from home or how was that process?

R: I mean, certainly, but...

You know, I had this dream of studying music. It was my dream. So being here and being able to do that, it was just fascinating. And I realized in school that I was sitting with people who had gone through college, who had, you know, when the teacher came and said, for example, this standard. So he was talking about a tune in jazz that everybody knew. But I didn't know that. I didn't grow up listening to jazz. I was not...

So for me, it was like absorbing an enormous amount of information, of material, musical language, a language to express myself and being able to participate in class. So it was very difficult. So yeah, I was very nostalgic, but at the same time, I was living a great adventure. So it was all those feelings.

N: And when did you start researching and playing Latin American music?

R: It was during my years at the university because my friends and my colleagues would come and say, oh, Roberto, you come from Colombia.

N: So what kind of music do you play in Colombia?

R: So I would tell them and they say, how do you play that? And I was like, oh, my God, I know this music. But because I was so rebel and I just wanted to play rock and other stuff, I said, "I don't know how to play this music." So the whole process of searching for my roots and learning my own roots began there. I would say the culmination of that was in 2011, I launched a project that I called Afro-Colombian Jazz Orchestra.

And I invited all the jazz musicians that I knew. It was almost like an all-star band. And I said, I'm going to make you play Colombian music. I was the only Colombian in the band. So I had to write all the parts and explain all the parts. And I said, when I was in school, people knew about Brazilian music because the golden age of Brazilian music and Brazilian jazz was in the 70s.

People knew about Cuban music, but I realized that people didn't know about Colombian music, didn't know who the composers were, didn't know what the styles were, didn't know how to play Colombian music. So I did this project to make my jazz musicians play Colombian music and it was very fun. So I did music from Lucho Bermudez and Jose Barros and some of the greatest composers, but I also did half of the album were my original compositions. So it was very, very, very fun.

N: Okay. And how was that mix? Were you trying to incorporate traditional instruments or kind of like Lucha Bermudez style to imitate the sounds with other instruments? How was that?

R: Well, because, you know, that had to be done already by Lucho Bermudez a long time ago. You know, if we look back at that, it's already, you know, classical art, classical Colombian music. So my approach was more jazz. So I said, I'm going to just choose the orchestration, the instruments I want to have in the band. And then maybe the only folkloric instrument that we had was the alegre, which is the drum, which is kind of similar to a conga. It's between a conga and a djembe. And it's the drum that we use to play folkloric, folkloric cumbia and folkloric rhythms from the Caribbean coast. So that was the only instrument. The rest was electric guitar, upright bass, drums, and we had clarinet, we had trumpet, tenor sax, and bombardino, which is the euphonium, which the trombone player usually plays one or the other. What instrument is that?

The bombardino is the euphonium, which is a smaller tuba. It's a higher pitch tuba. It's not the bass tuba. It's the tenor tuba, kind of a tenor tuba. We can say it's that, but it's called euphonium. And in Latin America, it's also called bombardino.

N: Okay, so we talked about the mix between jazz and cumbia. Can you tell me more about it? When you created the orchestra, you mentioned that at that time, the audience was mostly from the Latin American community. When you started your project, did you feel that the audience was the same or something was changing?

R: No, well, I have to come back a little bit because when I talked about the Afro-Colombian Jazz Orchestra, that was my third album.

My first album came out in 2005. And before that, I had like a cover band, if I can say. And we used to play in the plateau. There was the Balatou, which was home for the Brazilian community who played Brazilian music on Sundays. And it was kind of the world music place. So when...

I finished school in 1998. I had kind of lost my direction as an artist. You know, at the end of school, you end up sounding like everybody at school because we're all influencing each other and you want to play jazz and you want to sound like this. And I finished and I said, wow, I have this amount of information in my head now but I don't know what I want to do with it. I don't know what my voice as an artist is. So at that time I said, I want to write music for film and documentaries. So I started doing that. So I wrote music for documentaries for at least 30, 35 documentaries. I wrote music for eventually for video games. I wrote music for short films. So I became the composer, the studio composer who can do a lot of styles of different music and approach from orchestral to electronic to jazz to rock to world that could approach whatever a producer wanted to have in their film. But at some point I, you know, I kept exploring the Latin grooves and what I wanted to do and how to bring, you know, all those years of listening and playing rock and jazz and cumbia and salsa and how to put all that together. So at some point around the year 2001, I put together a band that was called Grupo Azucar in tribute to Celia Cruz. And I said, well, let's go and play in bars. So I played at the Balatou, but I also played at L'Escogriff. L'Escogriff was, or it is still today, an underground punk bar on Saint-Denis, close to Mont-Royal. So many of the rock punk underground bands in the francophone scene of Montreal came out of there and I was the only playing Latin music in that bar but every time we played it ended up in a big party and the bar now it's bigger because they took the local the space next to it and they enlarged the space but before it was really small and people would just jump and dance and I could see the bar the table of the bar just bending because the floor was bending of people jumping.

So it was very fun., and I played from, you know, music from Almodovar films. We used to play some boleros and we played Latin descargas and we played cumbia and we played Grupo Nietzsche. We played like all kinds of, it was a mix of music.

We played Brazilian music. It was just a mix of all the music I was listening to at the time that I wanted to do live. And slowly I started creating music and writing songs. I wrote a song, let's try this song, let's play this song. And at some point I had a grant to record a demo. So we went in the studio and recorded one of my songs. And the idea to that was to eventually do an album.

But, you know, sometimes bands, there's fatigue and I got tired of just pushing and pushing. And it was me doing all the transcriptions and creating all the charts and organizing all the gigs. And I said, oh, I think I need a break. So at some point I stopped, you know, kept working on doing documentary and music for other things. But this idea of writing music and songs, my songs, works.

was still in my head. And I started to become tired of being confined because we have the impression that when you do music for film, you have the liberty to do whatever you want, but you don't. You're writing music according to the vision and the needs of the producer or the director and what they have in mind, what they imagine they listen to. So it's an art of Knowing what they need, what they want and delivering that, which is it's great. It's it's it's very, very interesting and demanding to do. But I needed the freedom to do what I wanted to do. So in 2004, I started a project.

It became the Roberto Lopez project. And my idea was not to perform, but to do a series of compositions as a composer, write it, and then invite a bunch of musicians to come and play

them with me and record that and do an album. So I ended up using almost like 11 or 12, 13, we were 13 musicians on that first album.

And, you know, it had a little bit of English, it had a little bit of French, but it was mostly in Spanish. There were songs, there were three singers. And, you know, I did this album and then suddenly I won an award from the Fondation du Mer de Montréal, the foundation of Montreal's major, which had an agreement with the Franco-Foliesse.

So that award with the Franco-Folies, the Franco-Folies gave me the award and part of the award was to perform on a scene on the Franco-Folies. So suddenly the project that I did that it was more, you know, a composer vision and writing my songs became a project to be transposed on a stage.

So six months after I'm performing live on stage at the Franco Police and then Radio Canada, Spaz Music at the time, they start playing my music. And then a friend called me and they say, you know, Chantal Jolie at Radio Canada is asking, who is Roberto Lopez? Anybody know this guy? And she was playing my music all the time. And then suddenly, you know,

I became known and people were interested and people were calling me, inviting me to concerts. The following year in 2007, I ended up with a group of very well-known artists doing the opening show for the Franco Police. And it was filmed for TV. And I had people call me, Roberto, I'm watching you on TV. This is insane. So suddenly, you know, Latin music became popular.

I felt somehow I broke a barrier from people performing only to the community and in restricted spaces to suddenly producing an album, launching an album that had a certain level of production that played on radio.

Because before me, people did albums. I'm not the first in the Latin community to do an album, but to do a production that was deemed big enough to be played at Radio Canadá and being presented at the Franco Police and just being put in advance and put the spotlight to that production in a space where the Latin community was not necessarily present, was a breakthrough.

N: You were saying that the Latin community was present but wasn't very visible. And I remember you talked before about the big wave of immigration that helped the Latin American community to grow. Can you talk about that big immigration wave? Because that also brought new sounds, right?

R: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. So just to make clear, there were certain artists like...

who were invited to perform at the jazz festival and other festivals. But the music remained very folkloric or very Latin mainstream. What I did was my vision as somebody living in Montreal who took many different influences and mixed them with the roots, with the Latin music. So the music that I did was far from being folkloric, far from being...

the kind of music that talked to somebody who's nostalgic about their country. See, they want to listen to cumbias and porros, the traditional ones, not what I was doing. But what I was doing talked to anybody who lived in Montreal, you know, who felt identified, oh, yeah, well, this music is great.

is representative of the cultural richness of Montreal and it's modern and it's up to date. It has folkloric elements, but it's not folkloric. So I launched later in 2009 a second album and I think around 2009, 2010, we start to feel a new wave of immigration because immigration always comes in waves. See, the Latin community who was here, many immigrated, you know, before I came many years ago. Many were born from parents who immigrated many years ago. Some immigrated at that time, but it was not a big wave of immigration. Around 2009, 2010, I think there were many immigrants...problems in Colombia with security. So many people started coming to Canada searching asylum, but also the Canadian government became very active in going and searching for professionals and people who wanted to immigrate to Canada. So there was a big wave of people coming from Brazil, from Colombia, from other places in Latin America. But it was a big wave and a new wave. So these new people came and slowly started to, you know, become part of that cultural effervescence. I don't know if we have that word in English, but what's boiling in the communities and in the cultural interactions that artists have.

Suddenly, we have people who came who played the traditional drums and other instruments that when I was doing my first album, it was very difficult. I wanted to recreate a sound and I did not have access to people here who had that knowledge or the instrument or the level of professionalism to perform in a recording at that point while right now,

There's many projects and people and the richness of different traditions. There's different people who are able to bring that here into the cultural landscape and contribute to it, growing the Latin community. And Latin music also had a boom. It was not only the immigration, but globally. I used to go to Womex from time to time. Womex is the world music market that happens in Europe every year. And for the past 10 years, Colombian music has been in the spotlight. The golden age of Brazilian music happened at some point. Colombian music during many years

became restrained to Latin America and to Colombia. And then suddenly we have this big explosion of interest in Colombian music and people traveling to Colombia to explore, to learn, to do documentaries, you know it slowly started when when richard blair uh who produced and recorded who recorded for peter gabriel in london came to colombia after recording totola momposi momposina at real world studios, and came to Colombia and started exploring and internationalizing the new wave of Colombian music. And we have Carlos Vives, who suddenly became a big star in Latin America. And then this interest, not only from other countries in Latin America, but worldwide about cumbia and the Colombian sounds and how come there's all this richness and this variety and this...

rhythms that sound very different from Brazilian or from Dominican or from Cuban. So I feel that the Colombian golden age of music worldwide happened in the past 10, 15 years.

N: You mentioned in an interview that if you were in Colombia, you will do the music you do, but it wouldn't sound the same.

R: No, no, I'm a believer that, see, as an artist, you absorb your surroundings and you're influenced by the style of life that you have, by the people who surround you, by the community. And if I had stayed in Colombia, I would probably have researched and explored and I have probably done many of those things, but my sounds would be probably in line with what my friends and colleagues in Colombia have done in the past 15 or 20 years. But being in Montreal and being so close to jazz and to other styles of music and to the vision that you have as an immigrant in a society in Canada, where, you know, you always have this dual, dual, I wouldn't say citizenship, but dual identity. Yeah, a dual identity because, you know, I'm Colombian, but when I go to Colombia, I'm not that Colombian anymore, you know, but I'm still Colombian. So

at some point and when I'm here, I'm not Quebecois, I'm not Canadian completely. So you live in this limbo where you're everything, you're both identities, but you're none of them. So you're in a position which I find is very unique and very interesting in which you can take the best of both, to construct something better, you know, and richer. So with that in mind, when I do music, that transcribes in my music. So all those elements come together. So I can do a traditional cumbia if I would want to, but I don't want to. I want to express what I feel. And what I feel is this mixture of things. And I try to do that in my music. And I usually...

I try not to repeat myself also. See, some musicians find a sound and find something and they, oh, this is our identity. But as an artist, my identity is not to be locked in an identity. See, I don't want to be fixed into something. I want to continue to evolve. I want to do something that pushes my limits, but that also pushes my interest, that keeps me going ahead with it.

So I need that. I need the newness of things so I can keep going with what I do. In another interview, it was a very old interview, you mentioned that Latin American music is communal because everybody has the same importance, like the same...

Yeah, so everybody is vital to create that music, to play that music. Meanwhile, in North America, music sometimes is focused on just one person, like one main star.

N: How would you explain that part of the community making the music in Latin America?

R: Well, see, you have to think that in Western music, and especially lately, it has evolved to the point that the interest is the artist. The rest doesn't matter. You open Spotify today, you cannot know who played on the album, who produced the album, who recorded the album, who are the

musicians. You just know who the artist is. You don't even know who wrote the music that you're listening to. This used to be on the CDs or on vinyl. You could open and read and learn.

And there's always a division when you're on a stage and the public is sitting. There's always a division between the artist and the public. If you go to the origins of the rhythms and the music, you understand that most of this music comes from a community, from people sitting, not on a stage, but sitting in a circle, everybody together performing. So there's not a division between the musician and the public, and the public participates in the music. They can come, they can clap, they can sing, they become an integral part of the music. And in that sense, music has always been communal.

And when you're a performer and you're playing an instrument, you understand that everybody has a role to play, but that one's role is not more important than the other. Because if you take somebody away, you just lost something that is part of the music. So that idea of community around the music and...

not having a hierarchy. Hierarchy. Yeah. It's magical. It's what makes music magical.

So I kind of like that. Unfortunately, in modern day, you have to put your name and, you know, I never intended to be the band leader. I never intended to be the person in front leading or talking to the public. I only wanted to play guitar and write my music and make my music be played by other musicians.

But, you know, how it works. Everybody was like, oh, Roberto, it's your project. You have to go in front, go talk, go present, go. So I ended up being in front. But, you know, it's not something

that I wanted or it was my plan to be there. I just wanted to be playing guitar and playing music. So in that sense, the communal part of the music is what I like the most.

N: Okay, I want to link that to... We've done some interviews with some bands and they have mentioned that you were a very important person for them to grow up and to start being known in the music scene because you've helped them. I don't know, you've taught them or you helped them to connect with other musicians as well. Can you tell me about that role of you being a mentor of other Latin American groups?

R: Well, I'm honored that they say that about me. I don't know. I always want to see everybody succeed. So...

When I have people that I see that have talent and, you know, either I invite them to play with me and maybe they learn and they develop themselves just from the experience, because that's how I learn. I learn from playing with other people and playing with people who had more experience than me.

So you always learn from that. And sometimes just they say one or two things to you or just being there sitting and learning from observation. It's a big influence on an artist's career. And of course, I'm always very open to say to people, maybe you should do that and push them to, you know,

find their way to open doors, to maybe connect with other people and find their way and their voice and realize what they want to do. Okay. Okay. We've talked with Les Toches. Yeah. And they mentioned that you helped them. I don't know how was your role in that, but they

mentioned that you've helped them, to build their group, their sound, their... Yeah, to start playing in Montreal as well. Yeah, I mean, people...

People call me and they ask me questions. What do you think of this? What should I do? So, you know, I tend to give advice all the time. And of course, you know, Danielle, it's been a long time. I, you know, I've known Danielle and we've talked and I've

When I've had an opportunity to work with him, I always tell him, try to teach him or give him advice on how to deal with things or understand things or develop things. We worked together when we did El Grito, which was... during all the pandemic, at some point in the pandemic, there were problems in Colombia and we wanted to support artists in Colombia. So we did a video which presented dancers and performers and musicians and we played a tune with several Colombian musicians and I produced the tune.

Danielle was part of that. And during the recordings and the productions, you know, I gave him advice probably. So it's always, I don't keep a backlog of those things. It just happens naturally. So I'm always, you know, or if I have an idea, I tell somebody, oh, maybe you should look into that or do that. And maybe I plan to see that hopefully, yeah. grows into something for that person.

N: Yeah, we were talking, we did an interview this Monday with a group called Raiz Viva. I don't know if you've heard of them. Yes, I know them. Yeah, and they mentioned something that I really liked and it is this part of the community, like grow in a community, like grow as an artist, but in a community of artists where everybody supports each other. And they mentioned that that's what they aim to do. They want to continue growing, helping each other, like other bands, other groups. And I think that's beautiful. I really like that idea.

R: Yeah, I mean, it doesn't happen always, but most of the time. And I learned that when I was in Colombia, but mostly here in school.

And it's the community. I know so many musicians and everybody is willing to help everybody and support everybody. So that idea of community, it's vital because we're all in the same boat. And if you get a gig in a show this year, you're probably not getting the same gig next year. So somebody else can come in and do it.

So, you know, in the community of artists that I have, we share many, many insights and information and support, you know, because it's not an easy job and it's not an easy career to have.

N: And what do you think it's the glue for that community or what does what connects connects the the community?

R: the love for music okay because as as one of my teachers I remember in in improvisation class at University he said: We don't do what we do just because we love to do it. It's because we need to do it. We need to do music to be well and to feel happy. And it's that. When you think that music is more important than you, then that's what keeps a community and...

It's not the ego, it's not the person who's important. It's music and learning about music and developing music and developing a language and developing an identity in music. It's more important. Okay. And what do you think about the Latin American music scene right now? I'm happy that it's more diverse.

It's more rich just because there are more artists. And when I talked about before about, you know, breaking that barrier of out of the community or communal events to major events,

performing at the Jazz Festival, at the Franco-Folies, at many festivals, on TV. You know, I think that Paris has been broken and many of the artists these days are able to be invited on TV or be invited to the major festivals. Yes.

N: And do you think people know about the artist?

R: I don't know, because they're more often on social media or is it word of mouth? It's a little bit of everything. I mean, I have to understand that when I was starting and when I was doing this in 2005 and If I had an article on La Presse and Radio-Canada, Espace Musique played my music, suddenly a lot of people knew that I had an album and knew who I was. Today we're bombarded by so much information, by so many things.

that is difficult to receive the information. It's difficult for an artist to share that information. So it's a little bit of many things. It's a little bit of word of mouth. That has always been the case. But social media could help or not because, you know, when you're not in the top 10%, the impact that you can have on social media, you need to spend time, a lot of money to become visible. So I would say it's more, you know, like the old school. At the beginning, when I started playing at the Bobad, nobody knew who I was, so I had to do posters and then put posters all across the city and put a poster, not across the city, but close to the bar and, you know, try to get my show posted in the upcoming activities, in the newspaper. And, you know, the things that you did at the time. I think these days the medium has changed, but you need to do the same thing. You tell your friends who tell other friends, hey, we're performing, come. You post it in social media. You create a Facebook event. See,

That's the equivalent of doing posters at the time and then hope that slowly that community will grow. Obviously, there's a limit. See, performing bars at some point is very difficult for it to grow more than that.

So that's when maybe doing an album, maybe going to the next steps. And even doing an album, there's no guarantee that your music is going to be played on radio stations or even if it's played in radio stations, that's going to lead to something else. But I think that's the way to go. That's what you need to do. And I always say, I do a song, I do an album. After it's done, it lives its own life. See, you create a piece of art and then it's how people receive it, what people decide to do with it, that piece of art has its own life.

N: I think we forgot to explain the name Azuca. I think it's kind of obvious for me, but maybe for the audience it may not be obvious or understandable. So can you please explain it?

R: Grupo Azuka came from the famous word that Celia Cruz used and every time she was performing or singing, she would just yell "azúcar" to say azúcar, which is sugar. And it was her way of saying, you know, it's sweet, it gives you energy. So it was her trademark.

when Kate created Grupo Azucar, I borrowed that from her just because of the style of music that we were doing with Grupo Azucar, which was a little bit more of salsa with beats of cumbia and Latin jazz and other styles, but it comes from there.

Appendix II

Less Toches interview

Natalia: So, can you please introduce yourselves with your name and the role you have in the band, please?

Jacob: My name is Jacob, I am the lead singer and I also play the guiro, also called the guacharaca.

Daniel: I'm Dani Rodríguez, I'm in the percussion and tambora and some flute as well, gaita.

John: Hello everyone, my name is John González, I play the accordion in the band, I dance.

N: Okay, thank you. So, how will you define Les Toches?

Jo: Party, la fiesta y la cumbia. The expression of us. It's a group that is open to the expression of what we feel.

N: What about you?

D: Yeah, well, there are many layers. There is the party side, but it's very linked to identity or this kind of music from Accordion and all we can bring into it.

Ja: Yeah, I think the spirit of the band is definitely what the word "fiesta" represents in English, in Spanish, sorry. I think that, you know, there's, it's funny how, you know, there's this writer that says that there's a difference between a party and a fiesta. Everybody's welcome in a fiesta. Not everybody's welcome in a party, right? And why do we say that? It's because I think that, you know, the people who listen to us and the people who like to dance our music and who come to

see us, they come from different places, different countries, different orientations, different ways of thinking. And since we're also from different countries, all of us, I think it adds up pretty well to that concept of diversity, but also union.

N: And what's the story of Les Toches? We all have a different version.

D: My version of the Stoiches begins when I bought an accordion without knowing how to play. And two years later, I met this guy who arrived to Montreal and brought all the power of accordion music, which means cumbia and also vallenato and all the rhythms that come from there. So I wanted to learn from him and that's for me how it started.

The rest of the story, well, how he met the other members, I think there is some power on the accordion itself and the player obviously, but then another powerful thing that happened that I realized recently is that Jacob was living with a this amazing woman from the coast of Colombia, he was getting tough or he was discovering these rhythms without ever going to Colombia. So he was kind of getting into it, loving to sing and learning guacharaca, you can tell about that. But I think that those two poles were really the force where all of this came from.

Ja: I mean, yeah, I agree with you. I think that, at least for me, I've always, you know, it would be a lie if I say that I always loved cumbia. I didn't always love it. But I think that when I came to Canada, cumbia for me was some sort of you know, like a nostalgic sound, a nostalgic beat that reminded me home because in Mexico of course we listen to a lot of cumbia, not only Sonata Santanera but also our own cumbia, you know, Chicano cumbia, Mexican cumbia, Peruvian cumbia, cumbia from everywhere and I lived with a woman from Barranquilla, she was my roommate and she became my friend. She was very loud and she's still a very good friend of mine and she would play like, I don't know, like Nelson Pinedo, Totolamo in Pocina, Joe Arroyo.

So I kind of started listening to a lot of that music and I started to like it. And then slowly but shortly I started going to a lot of cumbia jams

I got a guiro and then I started practicing and then I was like, "I love this, you know, this is really nice." And then I stopped, I started to lose that fear of singing because I'm not a professional musician. I've been playing music for maybe four years and they've been very, very patient with me with the beat, you know, with the harmonies, with the, you know, having the voice to sing.

So anyway, how the Stoches started, the story of the Stoches, I think that when I met John Gonzalez who is an accordion player, we bonded quite well and then a friend of mine called me and he said "I want a cumbia band, like a salsa band or something that would make my friends dance for an event" and I called John and I said "Hey, maybe we can get one percussionist" and that was Danny, "and one bassist" who is Lucas who unfortunately could not be here

And then we just do it. And he said: "Okay, let me find the people." So he found everybody he needed to find. And then we did that event. We played for like maybe 50 people. And we felt like there was something going on and we wanted to continue. And the rest is history, really.

N: And how did you guys meet?

Jo: I don't really remember, oh in the park. We met at a park, we met at a park. You brought your accordion and you had another friend who had a huacharaca and then I heard you play, you two, and I was like amazed. And then we started hanging out and you know, the vibe, the energy and we become old friends and everything started to flow. I went to a jamming, the one that you used to do on Mondays, you remember? With Juan Pablo Carmona and... La Casona.

D: I think so. No, the one at La Casona. The first one. Yeah, we had many. I was trying to open the spaces to play because before that it was very like jams in the park or yeah, like private events but I wanted to show it to more people.

And also I remember at that time we wanted to play with other instruments. We were experimenting, like playing with a guitar and a keyboard. So we had many, many musicians playing with us and not defining really what the format was and in one of those rehearsals we had a friend called Ivan who is also from Bucaramanga, from San Gil but this region Santander where the accordion music is very popular, John is from there, my family is from there, so at some point I said "ah we are a lot of touches" and we started playing with that word which is a bird and now what we say is It's a bird that shows that there are no frontiers or something like that, that represents some kind of freedom and joie de vivre and happiness. Fiesta!

N: And how did everyone arrive in Montreal?

Ja: Well, my story is a little different, I was born in New Brunswick. My dad is from, he's from Caracat, New Brunswick, and my mother is Mexican, so I was just born there, and two months after we all moved to Mexico, and then I just decided to come back when I was 19 because I wanted to study here. And I had the chance of having my father here, so I said, why not?

D: I was also born in Canada. My parents from Santander, from Bucaramanga, both of them, they used to live here. Where is that?

My parents are from Bucaramanga, Santander, Bucaramanga, like John. Yeah, but where is that? In which country? In Colombia. I don't think everybody knows Bucaramanga. Thank you. Thank

you for being there, as always. That's how it works. Like, imagine we are on the stage and we are, like, playing and if we miss a spot, the other one will be there. So...

They came back to Colombia when I was one. So I grew up in Cali, Colombia as a Caleno and then I lived in Bogota and I remember I wanted to be more in Colombia because well, I was born here, I could come back here, but I wanted to discover really deeply the country and different stuff. I discovered music, Andean music, music from the coast, Pacific coast and the North coast. So yeah, I came back to Montreal many times since I was 14 and the last one was 15 years ago when I decided to live here because my niece was born and I wanted to show her cumbia.

Jo: I arrived in Canada 10 years ago and I lived 7 years in Vancouver with my mom, two brothers. And then I came for the first time to Toronto and Montreal just to play, in Toronto, to play live for a week. And then I just wanted to discover Montreal. I like it and I decide to stay a little more and I have been here for three years. Yeah, it happened like that really natural.

N: So, I want us to talk about cumbia. So, we have different versions of cumbia, like Colombian cumbia in the group, of course, Mexican cumbia, and the bass player is from Argentina as well. So, how would you explain to someone that is not as... that doesn't know many things about cumbia, how would you explain What is cumbia and the differences between countries and rhythms?

D: There are many ways to see that. If we see it today, like in the whole portrait and the way music has evolved, like anything is possible and you have a lot of mixes and when you go to the roots and what the experts say that when you go deeply to the roots Cumbia comes from the the river of the region of the river of Magdalena which is the biggest river in Colombia and goes all through the territory of Colombia so from from the mountains to the coast to the ocean these

boats that are still today going up and down they used to spread music all across the country so we had the original indigenous music which were more like flutes and semillas and yeah basic percussion but then during the colonialism the African came in well, we were brought by the Spanish colonialists or... Colonizers. Colonizers. And so we had this mix, mestizaje they call it, of the indigenous, the black and the Spanish. So there was this mix of the rhythms, a lot of rhythms, different rhythms.

And cumbia is maybe the queen of it or the major pattern and after that it got spread like it got its own evolution one of them is the arrival of guitars and then clarinets and then the accordion is a very specific one coming from Valle del Par and I believe there is a story about how the accordion got into Colombia maybe because of the arrival of German workers for the train or there is a legend about a boat that was sank it sunk a break well something like that so i don't know exactly what the story is but the accordion became a a big element on the local culture and all the mixes so we have cumbia but we have like many other rhythms we don't play only cumbia but actually we have represented in the group the countries where cumbia grew up the most. That's just a saying. It also happened in Peru, in different ways. So we can say Latin America is a complete degrade of rhythms. Only in Colombia you have a thousand of different rhythms. And you have hops, and cumbia is one of them maybe pacific music would be another one music from the Llanos Orientales which we share with with Venezuela. So the amazing thing is when you realize all these rhythms go through the frontier and erase it, like you cannot see exactly which country... There is accordion music also in Panama, there is African drums also in the Pacific with Ecuador. So all this is like you cannot say exactly what what the rhythm is or what is specifically how to play, there is no one cumbia so we have a kind of merging, like you know the feeling of the bass is from Argentina which is very party we have the accordion, originally the

accordion players were people that trovadores that would bring stories from one place to another, the way to share news and also the deep feeling of the roots of the flutes and the indigenous aspect on the lyrics, it's very poetical so these elements... sometimes I say jokingly that Jacob is a nerd of cumbia and of vallenato because he was this guy who writes, translates, studies, discovers with a lot of passion and gives us another point of view because we grew up with that but maybe we don't put it as a real value.

Ja: You know when you go to Mexico and you see the relationship that people have with with this kind of music with cumbia and then you compare it to What in my experience I've seen Colombians feeling cumbia. It's two very different things even though cumbia is Colombian I think Colombians see cumbia as a very folkloric and traditional thing that does not necessarily appeal the youth or does not necessarily have that important space that those who love cumbia think it should have.

When you go to Mexico or when you go to some parts of Peru, people don't dance salsa. I mean, they do, but they are going to dance a cumbia if you play cumbia. And it's a kind of dance or a kind of music genre that we could consider, at least in Mexico, an urban genre, as much as hip hop, as much as maybe R&B, as much as many of the other urban genres that you may hear.

In Mexico there is a big crowd, I would say like a lot of people who really listen to cumbia, like the majority. And they don't listen to cumbia in December like Colombians do, they listen to cumbia every single month of the year.

And of course there are things that change, you know, when you have Mexican cumbia, when you have cumbia that's not from Colombia. A lot of Colombians say, "Well, that's not really cumbia." I mean, you're right. It's not the cumbia from Colombia. It's a different cumbia with

different instruments and different lyrics, different stories. So what is cumbia? It's just this. That's for me, that's what is cumbia. And you can go and do many different things with it, you know.

N: And would you like to add something about the accordion? About the accordion?

Jo: As Dani was saying, the cumbia started with the midst of the native people, that they were playing flutes, especially a small flute that is called flauta de millo, that's like the one that is used for cumbia. After the gaita, the gaita is used for gaita music, but after the gaita start to get into the cumbia rhythms. And after that first period, then the accordion and the clarinet take space on the cumbia rhythms. That is like around maybe a hundred years ago that the accordion started to take place on the cumbia but the essence of the music is with native instruments and then yes they have been a really great artist that get really popular in Mexico and I think that's something that started to give more value to Lucho Bermudez with the clarinet like he make it more international so yeah it becomes one of the elements for cumbia and vallenato, the accordion

N: Do you remember when you started playing accordion? Do you remember the feeling was difficult or you wanted to...

Jo: For me it was natural because I grew up in Barranca Bermeja and six hours away from that city were the cumbia stars. So, you know, that music was all around for me. I liked it, my family enjoyed it. So, the language was there since my like that's the music that my money used to listen when i was on her belly so it has been there but i get more focus on vallenato and then maybe like six seven years ago i started to focus more on cumbia but the cumbia was always there because when you play vallenato you learn some cumbias but it's different to focus on that style it's a it's another another planet okay so it becomes a i don't know i feel it i don't know, It's natural. The Cubanato, the one you put on the back. What is that? What is the Cubanato?

No, a mixing cumbia with vallenato. Because in a way when you play with the accordion you use a rhythm that makes it different, you know? Make the composition different. So that's why I call it like that sometimes. And what we do is really particular because we use the elements of the folkloric music, like the roots, you know, the alegre, the tambora, maracas sometimes, but we use more the guacharaca. So we create, it's like a new concept of instruments, because usually when people play cumbia with accordion, they have another kind of instrument, timbales, congas, the little caja that sounds like a darbuca. So yes, just to add that, we add something new because of the instrumentation that we use and the power of the different cultures.

N: I was thinking that somebody who would listen to the podcast and it's not from South America and it's not aware or doesn't know anything about cumbia, how would you explain the sound of every instrument because I know how a guacharaca sounds but how would you explain that to someone that doesn't know anything about cumbia?

D: The funny thing is that guacharaca is also the name of a bird and that's the sound that Jacob described I wonder and guess the bird makes that sound but that's a very very high pitch and that leads everything.

In this case, what is amazing is that Jacob being from Mexico, he has a natural color in his voice that really really completes in a fantastic way the sound. Like it makes us really think about the old players or he's like an alive vintage version of Cumbia power. And so he plays the guacharachas, he really like I say very nerdlly like studying like the rhythms and stuff but the natural stuff of his, the color of his voice maybe linked with some kind of also where he grew up or... That's how I see it, right? And the heritage that John brings because at the beginning we started playing and we were able to play for hours and I had never took a, or maybe sometimes

got a caja myself being a percussionist and when I sat down, that's my belief, for the first time and he played like this introduction Supernatural comes to me which wouldn't be maybe the case for Hanser, it's different for each one of us so that's again like the traces, the rhythms left on us and how it became something different when we started playing together because we don't feel we are in Montreal or we don't feel we are in Colombia we just feel we are in this abstract place called Parranda when we start playing and that's why I feel we can share with people when we are in a big party between us we are communicating and I think the people in the dancefloor feel connected so a super important thing for this kind of band is that the public connects with the music and completes it when they dance, they make us play better. When they sing, they make us more energetic and we want to go as high as we can. To also surprise them every time. Even if we play similar stuff all the time and it's very trans, repetitive and similar.

All the time people tell us like it was the best show or it was completely, it felt completely new and we adapted it because we also work on Evolve.

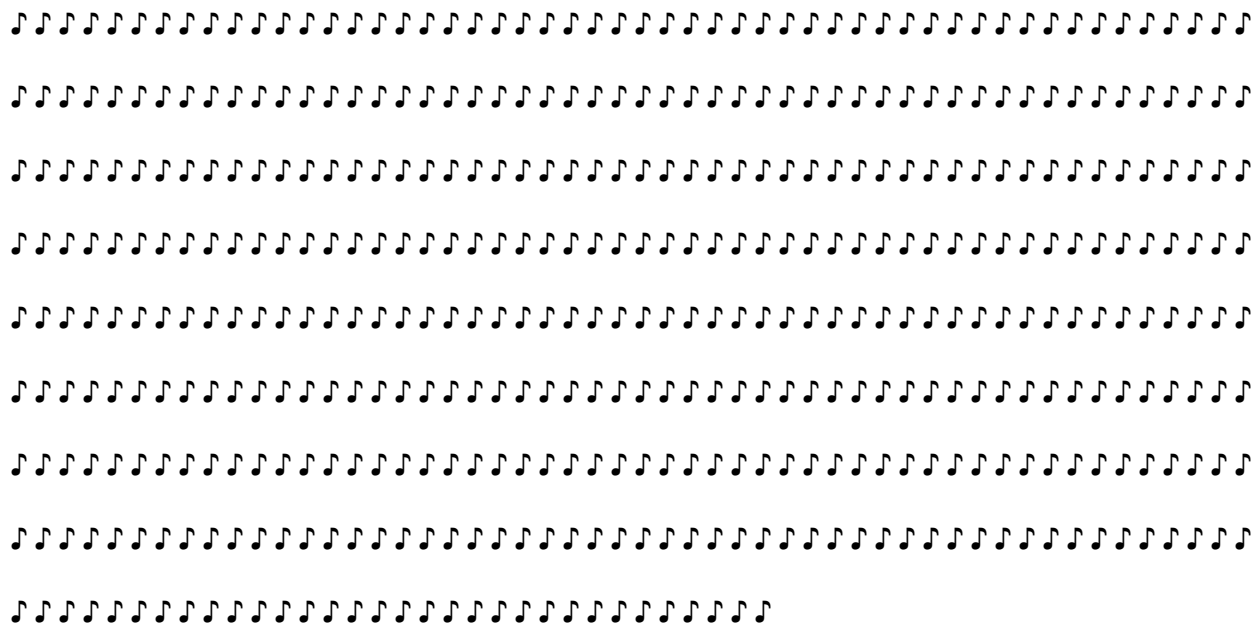
Jo: Yeah, we are using new instruments but the way we interpret the songs is really spontaneous. So every song has a moment where something new could happen.

It's not that we are setting up everything. So we set up some things, of course the voice, the intro. But there is always a free expression of how you feel. And that's what happens in the traditional music. You listen to the melody but everything is different, the percussionist is doing different things. If he feels really excited or not, it depends. So I think that's an element and that's something that I do. When someone is crazy I get different ideas, I communicate differently. That's probably why we always create that trance.

Ja: It is difficult to explain cumbia to somebody who's never heard it. I know. But I mean, at least where we are, you know, here, our group has an accordion, which everybody knows. The tambora, which Danny plays, and it's like more of a, like a bass drum. And then I play the guacharaca.

Hanser plays the alegre and the congas that is dancing and decorating the melody and the bass is always like something like that yeah I was for next time we promised we will rehearse an acapella version of cumbia but you made me think of something like when we started

One of the ideas... Let's play it. Okay. Let's do it. Let's do it.



N: That was amazing! So I was thinking, you said that you didn't always love cumbia. Why is that?

Ja: It's a very interesting question. Unfortunately, I think that I think that, well, let's say it this way. In a lot of Latin American countries, I would say in the majority of them, there is classism,

right? And I think that a lot of the times the kind of music that people listen to sort of tells you from which social class you may come from and if you like this kind of music then that means that you must come from this kind of social class or whatever. And I think that when I was younger I would listen to The Doors, I would listen to Queen, Pink Floyd, I was more of a rock guy, I didn't like cumbia at all.

And I think it's because it was also something that for me, it was foreign. So that's why I liked it, you know? And everybody was listening to it, you know? Everybody who liked rock and roll, everybody who liked psychedelic rock would listen to those bands. And I wanted to be like that, you know?

And I think that unfortunately I was part of those people who saw cumbia as kind of like, it's not so good, you know? But in reality, like when we would go to weddings or to first communions or baptism or any kind of important social gathering, everybody would dance cumbia. It doesn't matter where you're from, it doesn't matter which social class you come from. But I think it was not the music that I would listen to in the first place. I would listen to other things. But then, of course, you grow up and you know, feeling nostalgic is one side of not wanting to lose that. And I think the other one is that when you start listening to more music and not only the kind of music that you used to listen to when you were a kid, but you start listening to jazz, you start to listen to hip-hop, you start listening to, I don't know, folk, for example. You start like opening your horizons and then you realize, wow, there's a lot of like

like rich material, rich like flavor in all of this music that I was not understanding and I was not wanting to understand at all. I was just like very very like, like no, this is not who I am. I don't

want to be part of this culture. This is the way I used to think. Now I don't think the same way, thank God. But yeah, I think that's why there's a lot of like, you know,

You know, like, oh you listen to that kind of music, you know, when you grow up, I don't know if in Colombia it's the same way, but like those kind of music is for old people or for like not cun people, you know. That's how I used to think before, you know.

N: Do you think in Colombia is the same? Like cumbia is something for a different social class, like working class people, or is it something regional maybe?

D: Well, I can identify when you say when we were young we all wanted to be like be American and be cool and be on the trend and that was not the music of our parents. That music we use, as you mentioned, to listen only during the Christmas time. But also when you leave the country and you see it from another perspective and when, well, also there is this thing about loving music and wanted to play it. Maybe in my case a lot the big reason or a lot of it is being away from the country and the feeling of nostalgia and all the poetics that it brings that a rhythm, hybrid rhythm like mestizo rhythms are really linked to the migration and it's a poetic image of it. So in a short way like when this artistic pulsion burns in you maybe because you need it to heal something well you rediscover stuff from your own country so I know in Colombia we could for example isolate a lot of the music of the Pacifico or I know for example that champeta which is super popular now at the beginning it was like isolated but what is champeta? champeta is a north African rhythm that is very popular in the north of Colombia really linked to Congolese sukus and that is more played with guitars and stuff but we could have in the group similar rhythms to that...It's like you're doing that. And actually that was super popular before reggaeton and it's linked with dancehall. All of this is linked somehow. So labels and cumbia

might be one of those. Like in the 70s, the tropical trend in Colombia was to make it like they labeled it as a tropical.

But it was cumbia and they mixed it with salsa and now it came back to Africa and now maybe you're saying in Cuba there is no cumbia but now there are a lot of exchanges or there is exploration all the time. Musicians are mad about it. About counting and remixing and blah blah blah and then pop! A label comes up and transcends through the history. Cumbia is one of them, salsa is another one of them, vallenato. In Cali for example recently there is this thing like salsa choque. I believe now in Colombia, Alvaro told me this yesterday, there is something called like chalupa, which is one rhythm but they are doing like this traditional cumbia sabanera, which is the genre we are very close to.

So, I got a little lost in the whole idea, but in Colombia, yeah, we can be identified, but it's more and more crossed. And I think also after the social explosion we had like two or three years ago, young people started to feel more close to folklore, to identity. - The riots. - Yeah. So I feel that for some logic reason, because it's linked with resistance and the Africans have taught us how to resist in the palenques and so there is a strong learning from the black communities in Colombia about resistance and being against it. So it's super political. Afro-Colombian music in Colombia is actually a statement.

And I deeply believe it is for us also as migrants to sing in Spanish, to translate, to show that we can be together, we represent Latin America. So, as I said, there is a lot of, let's say, literature, poetic potential in doing that. The beautiful thing is it takes a little of magic of someone who has studied it for years and is in the island of Montreal or someone who has a magical color in his voice like Jacob or the spice of the Cuban who says there is no cumbia in Cuba but he plays

more cumbia than any of us I mean with the afro power of the beat in the drum and me like trying to, I sometimes in the Tambora feel like driving a boat, like okay, or a cow, or a... Yeah, boom, boom, we're going this way, we're going that way, stop! You know? So that's the trip. That's nice. What a nice trip.

N: And how do you think these musical exchanges in Montreal have influenced your sounds as Les Toches? Or if they have or if they haven't?

Ja: Well, just to put it in some way, we play cumbia in Spanish and we also play cumbia in French. Why? Because...

Because we like it. But like we have a Francophone public as well and we don't do it for them even though I think they appreciate it but we do it because we believe in cumbia, cumbia can reach different cultures and different languages and definitely like some musicians who have been present in some jams have influenced a lot the music we make. For example, we have a very good friend, Yaya Sherif, who used to be our roommate and who helped us to compose our first song. And it was a riff that he made with the guitar and that became like our very first song and he's actually like a co-author or co-composer of that song. He's from Niger, by the way.

So yes, sometimes we jam with friends who are not even from Latin America and we find something interesting and then we incorporate it to our music. Sometimes it happens. That's Montreal. That's Montreal, yeah.

D: And if I may add, recently we participated in a Cilidor which is mainly organized by Nuit d'Afrique. even if it's music of the world, the focus and the community is a lot of African rooted music. So I believe going through that network and feeling or being recognized in that ecosystem

makes us realize the connections and improve them and want to go some places we didn't imagine before.

So maybe for now, Les Stoches is more than an accomplished thing that is like this is our way of cumbia or this is what we accomplished. I think it's something that started like we are still discovering we don't have like official records yet. We have some homemade or not like well yeah they're professional but it's they we did it at the start of the project so I believe we are still discovering where we can go.

By now we are playing a lot, in all the places that we could, in the street, in the birthdays, in the restaurants, in the festivals, wherever, between us. But it's especially fun to imagine where we can go. That's a nice feeling because we feel like babies somehow in the music, learning that thing you're describing, that happens or not, like the bridge, we're looking forward to that.

N: When did the band start?

Ja: It started in Well, it's a little blurry, but I would say it started between February and April 2022. It's pretty recent. Yeah. Okay. Okay.

N: And before I forget, can you please tell us the story of the name? You already mentioned something about the bird.

Ja: the Toche, as John and Danny mentioned earlier, is a bird that lives in different parts of South America. and there's like a certain sense of you know, diversity and freedom, just like they mentioned earlier. And it's very funny because less, it can be translated to two different things. On one side, it's in English less, which means the opposite of more, right? So less clumsy, less idiots, less this, because Doce not only is a bird, but it's also like, it can be kind of, I don't I don't

know if it's an insult, but it's kind of like a, you know, if someone calls you "toche" in Colombia, it's not necessarily the best noun to receive, right? So, less "toches". But also, I don't know if this is important to mention, we live in Montreal and in Montreal people speak a lot of French, and when I started learning French, I would, just like many other people who speak Spanish as a first language, pronounce every single word that I would see, right? So when you say for example "los" "the" like the article "the" in French is "les" right? But we how do we pronounce it? "les" so it's kind of a way to oblige the reader to make the same phonetic mistake that we make.

D: We started making the joke because the word is very used in Santander and many of us at that moment came from there and it sounds like it's also like with the genre, like "toche" is like... you mentioned clumsy but maybe macho also, like when you... you know when you cut the borders with scissors when you're in kinder and you go like very like away from the border you want to cut so you're not very clean, you're not like you're not a perfectionist, okay? The "toche" is the opposite of perfectionist.

So the word just worked well. All these explanations came afterwards with us. At the beginning, maybe we were calling it "Los Toches" but someone from Colombia said "Oh, that's negative. Okay, "Los Toches." And we also maybe wanted to make it more inclusive, to sound not like a loss because we are five guys and we want to take into account the feminine element of the music and of all of us and to embrace that we can be completely open about the expression of feeling. So showing ourselves as weak or the opposite thing that the big macho with the machete would do. So we wanted to break a little that spirit independently of the name. We wanted to get away a little of this idea of masculine player from their country and more like Les Stoches Cumbia.

N: You mentioned earlier that you met in a Cumbia Jam and I would like to know if you think many Latin American groups or Latin American music started in these small venues or just playing at parks or and then it started to grow the Latin American music scene started to grow or How do you see it?

Ja: Well, I mean I think there's a little bit of that, what you just said. There's a lot of musicians who are just chilling together and then they make a band and it's our case. But I think that there's, right now there's more of a big interest in general in Latin American music because it makes people dance.

I am not too sure how it happens with other bands but like at least John and I met in a jam that was not a cumbia jam it was a very white jam it was more like a rock and roll you know and we were like the misfits of that place because we were playing accordion and and Guacharaca and everybody was like "What is this beat? What are you guys doing? This is so chaotic" and we just didn't care. It was pretty annoying for them probably. But that's when we reconnected and were like "Hey man, we can do something together. Let's try something." That's my version of how Let's Touch is started. The first particle of it.

N: And do you think there's a Latin American music scene right now in Montreal?

Ja: I think the mix of permissiveness that we have in Montreal, which really contrasts with other Canadian cities where like things seem to be everything seems to be in order. But in Montreal there's a certain permissiveness where people can just not do whatever they want but you know they there's a little bit of chaos that's permitted in the city. That's one thing and I think the other thing is that well it's not...It's not the case anymore, but a couple of years ago, Montreal was really, really cheap in terms of rent, housing. I mean, many other people, like people from

Vancouver would say, "No, it's still very cheap." But it has changed. It used to be even cheaper before. And I think that allows for a lot of artists to express themselves and to dedicate some time into their hobbies and into their passions, which is something that maybe in other North American cities you wouldn't be able to do because they're always working. You have to pay your rent, you have to pay your car, you have to pay this, you have to pay that.

So in Montreal you have like you can breathe, you can chill, you can work and I think because of that Montreal is the perfect place for I would say Latin American and maybe world music in general because people come here to chill and they come here to have a good life and they come here to eat well and they come here to meet people from other countries so everybody's escaping from something

D: also you can feel recently Latin music for Quebecois culture was only "Suavemente" or the big revolution was "Despacito". which is actually very influenced by cumbia I think Despacito is 80% a cumbia What? It's a lot of influence of that beat but I'm saying that working on a project like this and listening to old music and all we have mentioned brings some diversity of richness of what we understand locally as Latino because that word like it's the way they label us like to understand us but at the same time we are like a universe and this one is specific very like very specific and there are other bands of cumbia of course like and also other artists like something that is very amazing is like you have Latin artists that are away from the label. You have for example, Matteo who does his own kind of thing, Ramon, like very authors, like they build and they compose their music, Stephan Osorio, Mansell Ruiz, Acawi, all of those are inspiring Latinos that have built their projects from a very personal point of view. Our project is more like collective and is and it's still like very very personal but i think it brings some some idea or yeah

very personal idea or unique point of view of what uh Latin community can be locally in a musical way

N: would you like to add something?

Jo: Everything the guys say is true. There is a lot of culture here. Me that I used to live in Vancouver, I noticed how there is more tradition here. Me, I was playing there too and when they want another like cumbia band or an accordion player, they used to hire like musicians from Seattle. And here I discovered there are so many people that play, not so many but there are a lot of people that play the accordion, so many people that are teaching the dance of cumbia, like academies. I met this guy doing a project, no? It was a... What it was? Bumaranga? With some dancers from Africa. Ah, yeah. We were walking on the street. All traditions, the culture is really alive. Being close to Toronto, probably being close to New York. I think that is the main thing for the arts in Canada. So if you want to get into the arts and discover and meet people, there is always something happening. Right? Every day, you can go out and discover. So yeah, that was your question, no? Yeah. So the Latin community is big too. What the guy was explaining. So many people doing art since long time ago.

N: So, would you say that there's a cumbia scene as well? Like a cumbia scene, not only a Latin American music scene?

Jo: Yes, there is a cumbia scene too. Stephanie Osorio does that, Ramón Chicharrón puts on rhythms too. Bumaranga, Raiz Viva, Roberto, Cumbia Control, there is many more that I don't know. Not only Colombia Cumbia, Chilean Cumbia, we have Confusión, we have El Chelo, Peruvians, too. Sonido Pesado, they have a lot of cumbia in there. It's in Cuba, they influence cumbia, influence some of the music with cumbia, too.

D: Actually, our big maestro is Roberto Lopez, who has Afro-Colombian jazz. He opened a lot of paths for younger people artist so is there a scene like a gypsy cumbia is very big like a project and inspiring, so is there a scene like an organized scene or that we recognize each other? Maybe sometimes I see these big festivals of reggaeton and I think: "Wow, that grows fast!" So what we do is maybe closer to a resistance or to... I don't know, it can be very commercial but it's like trying to highlight like very... like traditional stuff that could be erased but the homogenization of globalization... Well, it's how I see it, no? Like reggaeton is very similar and goes to some places very in entertainment way but there is also this poetical side of slowness and seduction, Cumbia is a dance of seduction before everything but in a very smooth way so what I'm saying is that Cumbia could be some scene but we like in a very spontaneous way and we hope it grows it's not just paradise Montreal has always has also some struggles like yesterday we saw La Tulipe the place where we play for Silly Dog and we actually had our historic moment for us is closing because of noise control so it's not like paradise all the time and also founding and the way the artists are paid and all of that we're discovering that is a very complicated industry and we still take it as a very personal artist expression we don't know yet where it can go.

Appendix III

Sonido Pesao Interview

Luny: Yo, I'm Luni, L-U-N-Y 514. I'm a co-founder of Sonido Pesao. I'm a songwriter, performer and one of the main MCs straight from Montreal, Saint-Michel, you know?

Elo: Elo Sono, a new addition of the group, I don't know. South Shore represent.

L: Singer, songwriter, powerful voice. First time I introduce myself like this. Talented musician. Let's go Luny! He did the best for him and the best for me. That's it.

Chellz: So my name is Chellz, I'm from El Salvador. I'm co-founder of Somnivo Pesado too. MC, songwriter. Yeah, I like to have fun with music.

N: How would you guys define Sonido Pesao?

L: We're like a blend of today's music mixed with our roots, our ancestral culture music from our countries. We create, because I hate saying blending, but we create a sound that reunites like the old folk sounds from our countries with what we do as how we started like we rap on a regular basis like it's rapping is part of our culture hip-hop is part of our culture so we put all this together it's like doing like the perfect salad.

C: I think it has a really hip-hop soul because like you said we grew up with the hip-hop scene and hip-hop is all about sampling some old music, you know what I'm saying? It's not a new music, it's like they reinvent something that was already there, you know? So that's what we do but with Latin music. I remember when I was a kid and my mother used to listen to old cumbias and old salsas. And also I remember that almost all the songs were about love or desamor. I wish

I could hear something different, some other words. And I remember that song from a group from El Salvador, Jhosse Lora. It was a song about a little boy that lost his father and his mother because of the war. And everybody called him "El Peche", "Ay bien, El Peche". And it was a story of him, like he was finding something to do to make some money and to eat, you know? And it was so profound, the lyrics were so sad, you know? And it was a real story because when I was in El Salvador I saw that kind of stuff, you know? So I was like, man, that like, how do you say, took my attention, you know? I like that. So when we started the band, the lyrics were always important. We always have to have a message, important things to say.

N: Can you tell us the story of Sonido Pasado? How did it started?

L: Well, it started like the whole concept, especially me and Celle together, we started around 2006 But it was Heavy Sounds And it was Heavy Sounds back then It was Heavy Sounds We started that Me, Chels and Arrila Who was from Peru too And he was like Our main producer back then And he used to rap too We used to work together a lot We started evolving into We went from having like 3 MCs We had a DJ And it was all like Like A normal hip hop group, right? But then we started adding the instrumentals, like the musicians.

C: But the thing about that is like Rila, he used to work in that restaurant called... L'anecdote. L'anecdote. And at L'anecdote, all the musicians from Montreal were working there, man. If you want like a key player... Go to L'anecdote, you go to... It's a small restaurant on Rachel. Yeah, on Rachel in St-Germain. And yeah, even me, I worked there, so... So we started to replace all the samples by real instruments in the live shows.

L: And at some point we kept growing because we had trombones, we had drums.

electric guitar, bass, percussions, then we had two more MCs. At some point we were almost like 10 to 12 members in Heavy Sounds. That led us to a bunch of cool stuff. We did like City Dog with Nidafrique in 2012 and we won it. We ended up winning it and out of that big win we were able to do that vinyl which is called Cuatro Vientos.

It's available on all platforms by the way. And it has some very cool songs that we... I think we recorded them all in one day, right?

C: No, we had two or three days in a studio in Verdun. It's all live. On that record, Quatre Vientos, it's all live. There's no samples. Real drums, real bass, git, brass, percussion. So yeah, yeah.

L: And that heavy sounds, we did a lot of stuff which was very cool but we used to mix a lot of the English and French and Spanish all in the group. We went to Peru, we did the whole Canada tour and then there was like, we lost our percussionist, he got deported, sent back to Mexico with his family, they didn't accept his case here which was a heavy hit for us. Like the other people in the band had other venues they wanted to explore. So we reduced our formation and then we said like let's just go with the full Spanish only like let's re- started without fully changing the name, we just translated the name to Sonido Pesado.

Ch: And then we went full... So in 2016 we dropped our first album, Sonido Pesado, called Reír Para No Llorar. Because you see, we lost some people in the way, so we changed the name to Spanish, Sonido Pesado.

and then after we dropped another a second album and that's where after just after the album

L: After the album release party Elo joined the group.

N: And why did you decide to start everything in Spanish?

L: Because when people used to hear heavy sounds, they were always like "Is it a metal band? Is it this? Is it that?" Everybody was always confused into what was the group, right? But when we switched to "Sonido Pesado", we didn't even say "Sonido Pesado", we went "Pesado" because of that urban flow that we bring with us all the time.

C: And now there's people that think we are Portuguese or something.

L: But I mean... I mean, Dominicans or Puerto Ricans or everybody from the Caribbean they will understand what "pesao" is "pesao" But yeah, we did the whole switch we started rapping fully in Spanish Like that first album "Reír Para No Llorar" it was only that, full song all in Spanish and it was well perceived by our surroundings. We won Prix de la Diversité in 2016. The song of the album Reír Para No Llorar was also in a TV show for Apple TV called Mosquito Coast. And that was like... We did a lot of cool stuff with Reír Para No Llorar before we went to the phase of building Todo Revuelto, which is the last album we did, and now we're creating new stuff with Elo. We're exploring French. Yeah, we're doing "Frañol" now.

N: What can you tell me about the albums "Reír para no llorar" and "Todo Revuelto"?

C: Todo Revuelto, we work with Bugat. He co-produced the album with us. I don't know if you guys know Bugat, but he's one of the main artists of the Latin scene in Quebec.

He did a lot of good work, put out some really good songs. He also started with French actually. And then... With Mauvaise Herbe. With Mauvaise Herbe. One of the best hip-hop group of Quebec. And yeah, so...works a lot with some other artists and won a lot of prizes and all that so it is a good friend of mine actually when just before we started to like get known by the scene

because in the beginning Heavy Sounds was only with the Latin producers and all that and Bugatt saw our potential and he goes like "I'm gonna talk to you remember Raba from the Boba? I'm gonna talk to Raba, maybe we can book a show with you and all that"

So we booked a show at Les Beaubards. Rest in peace. Rest in peace, Les Beaubards. It was Thursday, Thursday. Thursday, Thursday. Thursday. It was like the second week or the first week after...after christmas after new year's after new year's okay and so like uh like uh there's not gonna be a lot of people a lot of people we full of the place man he was full of people it was crazy so so after that he started to give us more more days all that because of god yeah

L: Thanks to Bugatt we did our first jazz festival too. Exactly. We performed in our first. We were special guests. And so we decided to work a whole album with Bugatt. So that's why this book, I think...This album is a little bit different from the rest, like the sounds of the snares, the kicks, all that. It's another... How do you say texture? Different texture. Different textures. So yeah, I think that's the special thing about the Dord-Riwe

N: You mentioned previously the restaurant where all the musicians met. What was the name again?

C: L'anecdote.

N: What can you tell us about the L'anecdote?

C: They say that that was one of the favorite places of Dédé Fortin, the guy from Les Colocs, a huge band from Montreal.

The anecdote was like a cooperative. All these young people were working there, all of them musicians. I used to work there for the breakfast and it was crazy. It was so busy. But so busy, you couldn't go there to work, like hangover. It's impossible to work there on a hangover. No, man. They did like La Fille. Yeah, the line-up. The line-up goes outside. And then he turned the corner like that. And I was working with Rila. And I said to Rila, man, we're never going to make it, bro. Too many fucking orders, man. And then he held me by the shoulders and he was like: "We're gonna make it, bro!" "We're gonna make it!" And then we worked so hard, man, it was crazy. Etienne Lebel was working there, Arnaud Soli was working there, his brother too. All those musicians, we worked with them either in shows or in studios. So yeah, that was a nice spot.

N: And how did you guys meet?

L: In the hood. We grew up in a place called Saint-Michel. It's on the east side. We went to high school together. We did high school, we grew up with the street people and all that. "Desmadres" as we say in Spanish. And then we ended up being roommates too. We lived together for a while. Also in Saint-Michel too, in Leonardo da Vinci.

C: That's where we met Rila too. Yeah. In Saint-Michel. The thing about Saint-Michel is, like he said, we grew up in the neighborhood and in that time it was hard. Yeah, it was run by street gangs. Yeah, there were a lot of gang shit, drugs, prostitution and all that. And also police brutality. If you're Latino or if you're black, they were gonna stop you for no reason. - Just for walking.

L: Just for walking, walking with your backpack, have baggy pants, boom, put you on the corner.

C: And I remember I was waiting in the metro and the police came, they were looking for some Latinos. It wasn't us. But we all look alike for them. I remember the cop, he goes like, can I see your ID? And I said, why? And I didn't have the time to finish why. I was already on the floor with my arm, you know, reaching my ear from the back. And then they checked the IDs. Okay, it's not them. And they left. That's it. Oh my God.

L: So, yeah. That was a regular Friday. At least we didn't have a ticket, you know. But anyway, so...

C: So yeah, we had a street life, right? And then I remember Jose Rosales, a good friend of mine, he was working with Pacte de Rue.

L: It's an organism that helps the youth to stay out of drugs and stay out of the streets. Focusing the energy they put on the negative stuff of the streets to put it on some positive stuff like it will help you find your passions and put that energy through. They're gonna give you other propositions.

C: And so someone told José Rosales that I rap, alright? So he came to me like "Hey bro, they told me you rap, no, no, no..." "I can get you a studio if you want." So he was the first one who brought me a studio to record a song.

But still, you know, at the time I was young and stupid so I had a fucking attitude. We used to love to fight too. But this guy, he never let us down, man. He was always there to find some new projects. He even took us to do a delta plan. I don't know how to say it. Paragliding.

Okay. Yeah. And he... But the thing that changed my life, like for real, and I was talking about this earlier with a new friend.

Because I don't talk about that that much. But the thing that I think that changed my life is that Jose one day he came to me and said: "Bro, I heard about a project. The Cirque du Soleil wants to bring five artists from Montreal to Australia, Sydney, to represent Montreal. This is for the IYP, International Youth Parliament, big thing, na na na." And like most of the time I was either alcohol or drugs when I was a kid.

I was like, bro, they're never gonna take us to Australia, bro. We're a bunch of kids from the hood, it's not gonna happen. Bro, man, I don't know. So, okay, we prepare like a 10-minute set. The guy from the Cirque du Soleil, he came drop in. He saw the thing and I was like, oh yeah, I like it. Prepare 20 minutes of that and let's go to Sydney.

And I was like, for real, like for real, for real. But then, okay, we had to prepare all that. And Jose took that really seriously. Like he really wants to do like meetings every week. And I was so, I was late. I was drunk. I was drunk. And so...

Just like a couple of days before the travel, he brought me to, he took me to a bar. He said, bro, you're like this close to not going to sit there. You need to change your attitude, bro. You cannot, I cannot bring you over there. And with this kind of attitude that you have, you know, like you cannot fuck up this, you know, like, like, bro, it's going to be okay. Anyways, when I got there, bro, and I saw the whole thing, I was like, "Oh, this shit is big!" We were working in a huge theater. There were like five young people from Brazil, from France, from Brazil there were percussionists, from France, b-boys and b-girls, South Africa, danse contemporaine, musicians from Australia, Chile, they were artists from circus, circus artists, and they were all like professionals and they were all good and they were all my age, you know? And I was like, okay, I need to, I need to be on point.

Man, I was always the first arriving at the practices the last living the practices i opened the show with the brazilian in the percussion man i never did percussion in my life we spent a month preparing the whole show and that that changed when i came back to saint michel and i saw my my friends i was like man we we're losing time guys we're wasting time and they didn't understand and that changed my life that After, one year after we went to Peru, no, we went to Cuba. I went to Cuba and then after we went to Peru. And after Akita it's done. Like I don't wanna... And Jose had a lot to do with us going to Peru too. Of course, of course. I told you man, Jose. Jose did a lot of things for us. Jose is a big piece in this rompecabezas.

N: So is he like a musical producer?

L: Not even. He just... Helping the kids. I think he's a community person. He just like...to help it's in its nature like today he's a he's a bus driver so he's always connected with people

C: yeah but when he was younger like he went to travel in the world yeah yeah peru he did yeah yeah yeah and all that he even did the security for uh manu chow yeah yeah yeah he did a lot of stuff he he had a cool cool life story which he should talk about one day. Yeah, man. That's why it's important when we have the chance to talk about it. He's a good person to talk about.

N: And how did you meet him?

L: In the streets. He approached us. Like, you know...He used to solve the police problems we used to have because like, let's say we would get together next to the metro Saint-Michel and let's say we would play ball, we were always having beers or smoking a joint but we were like playing soccer and in between the whole group police just came crashing down. Okay, this is an argument they would call it like.

You guys are way too much. You're like a street gang. You're gangsters right away. And they would put us all on the floor just to get our IDs. And he started coming to kind of protecting us. There's resources that we can use to fight back against the police. They even used to give us those little... You remember those little books? Little books of how to entail a conversation with a police officer. How to answer back questions without sounding cocky and just by knowing your rights. That brought us shows too. We did a bunch of shows with this organism called COBP. It's a... Cooperative Contre la Brutalité Policière. Against police brutality. They would do these big... shows. These big manifestations outside in the streets. Like, no justice, no peace for the police.

N: What year was that?

C: That was around 2008, 2009, more 2010.

N: Do you think it's different for Latin American people now?

L: No, it's still bad. I got arrested like Thursday, got stopped in an Uber just because they saw me go out. I work as a DJ. They saw me going out of the club, jumping to the Uber right away. And I'm like, why? I'm going home. "Oh, what were you doing here? I just came from work. What's your problem?"

E: Yeah, and my brother gets always arrested, like long hair, like Latino. And he's always driving his girlfriend's car, so it's not his name. And they're like, "Whose car is this? Why are you driving?" It's like everything. It's like blood for sure.

C: And it's like almost 20 years from that event and nothing has changed. At least now we have our cell phones, we can record them.

N: Chellz, when did you arrive in Montreal?

C: I was 10 years old. I came with my whole family, my parents, my brother and my sister. We came because of the war, the civil war. My father was working for a syndicate. Syndicate is a good word? Union. Union, thank you. And after the war they started to kill the people from that union. They killed like two friends of my father. So he applied because at the time in here they needed to... Populate. Populate Quebec, you know. So...So that's how we got here.

L: A bunch of Latinos got here because they needed to populate Quebec. Like the Chileans, the Peruvians, Guatemalans, people from Guatemala, Salvadorians. They all had wars, like civil wars.

C: But it's crazy because they all put like, almost all the American Central people, they all put them in the Saint Michel. But Saint Michel is now Petit Maghreb.

N: And what about you guys? How's your story growing up in Montreal?

L: Well, my parents come from Guatemala. They came here 40 years ago. My dad came here almost 45 years ago. He got deported and then he came back. And when the officers stabbed him, didn't I kick you out of this country? But it was too late. He was already accepted back. So then I was brought into the world. And yeah, I grew up... When I was born we were living in Park X. When I turned like 8 years old we went to Saint Michel and stayed there the whole time. Was like... He's still there, your father. Yeah, my father, yeah. And like we grew up like... If we would have grown up in Guatemala we grew up that way in the household. Because like Spanish was the first language I learned. Even before French. Like French was difficult for me at the beginning.

because at house my dad used to tell me you only speak Spanish here if I hear your word from French you're gonna get a clap in the back of your head but yeah it was always Spanish I learned how to read write and speak Spanish at home without even be going to school for that.

N: What about you Elo?

E: Me, it was really countryside, little village. And I don't know, my dad came here with all his promotion, like all the high school boys. So they had like their little soccer team and it was always like, it was like a little Peru in my home and like, I don't know. It was nice a lot of music i come from a musician that's how he came to uh to quebec with a high school and they stayed they never left yeah they came from Peru to play here no no no they just came like all the crew like they've been calling like yo quebec is crazy you need to go and then they all stayed they're all like my uncles and and a lot of music always like playing, cooking, Peruvian we love to eat.

N: You were saying that you grew up in a family of musicians?

E: Yeah, I still play with my family as today. I have a band with my brother, uncle and father. El son sono.

N: And what music did you guys grew up listening to?

L: I listened... My dad was a music connoisseur so we had tons of cassettes and vinyls I grew up with a lot of cumbia, marimba, salsa and merengue from the 80s like Wilfredo Vargas and... Wilfredo Vargas was a very part of the family household. From 14 to 16 I think. And the ballads like Los Angeles Negros, all that music from that area, at that time, it was like... So hip-hop. So hip-hop. But yeah, and that's even through that, that's where I heard my... I had my first hip-hop cassette because my dad bought this Vico C tape where there was the Tony Presidio track, the

original one which was so cool and I fell in love with that Again the lyrics! Yeah, the lyrics.

Lyrics was always a thing that captivated my attention Do you remember the lyrics of the track?

Yeah.

C: Antonio Perez says: Antonio has turned it into a demon. A 357 is enough to charge you a ticket. You don't understand. And that depends on his life, his food, at any time.

N: So for the people who don't know the track, what is the story about?

L: It's the story about a guy who grew up in the neighborhood and he became a hitman. He was killing people for money, a hitman. And then he ended up in prison and he served his time. He was able to escape prison. But he became a snitch. Yeah, he became a snitch, but then he was able to escape from jail. He planted a fuga. He planted to escape from jail. He was able to do that.

And then when he ended up to New York, life was too expensive because now he couldn't be anymore related with the same people. So his life was shitty. So he went back to his country. And while the plane was arriving to his country and he was getting off, he got shot by somebody who he had killed a family member. So it was like the whole circle of life came up to him like, he started as a killer and ended up being the one killed at the end because karma came up, caught up to him.

N: why is that song so important to you?

L: I think I love the storytelling of that story and it was new like

C: At that time it was new for us and I mean for me because I didn't speak English at that time, so all the rap that I used to listen to, I couldn't understand what they were saying. And to understand the whole thing and the history and the storytelling, it was so nice, so well told. So, I don't know.

L: And as growing up after that, then you compare it to those hip-hop from the 80s, like KRS-One, Big Daddy Kane, they all go with stories like that too. So it's like...It's part of their reality that we kind of grew up with. Us growing up also was like... Okay, we went from elementary school, we go to high school. And in high school, it was like jail, right? So every community goes with their people. So Latinos are with Latinos. The white people are with the white people. Asians with Asians. The Afro-descendants are all together. So everybody is in their own corner. And...it's like those songs most of the songs and the movies we grew up watching like we grew up watching the movies like Colors, Blood In Blood Out, Menace to Society those were and it's the same concept now it's very different though because I think the whole thing of curiosity the internet has brought a lot of people into blending together and know about each other cultures.

C: I think we realized that we are not so different. We are all the same, but different. What about you? What kind of music did you grow up listening to? When I was in El Salvador it was hard to listen to music. It was wild war, you know, we didn't have a lot of...resources like radio the TV was always broken and it was really here when I got here that I really knew all this kind of music from all America Latina and the same I grew up with the listen to merengue listen to rap I remember one of my friends one he had family from the United States and they brought him a cassette he borrowed me the cassette, it was "Playeros" and then I was like "Damn, this shit is good man!" It's a DJ/beatmaker from Puerto Rico with a lot of MCs from Puerto Rico. And all

the MCs were violent so we were like "Oh my God!" And then also he gave me a cassette from Panama, "El Chombo" So yeah, all this kind of stuff, reggaeton from that time.

L: Another thing that was very part of our life, I'm sure them too, is the Mexican music. We grew up with Vicente Fernandez, Juan Gabriel, Pepe Aguilar, Los Tigres del Norte. Those were bands that we used to listen a lot at home. Because we are so close from Mexico. Mexico is like the Hollywood of Latin America.

N: What about you, Elo?

E: More like waltz, stuff like that. Fado. My mom loves music from around the world. So a lot of Manouche. Music from Angola. I don't know, my first show was Bonga. I really love that artist. It was crazy. French music too. Juliette Cricot, I don't know. Everywhere and then yeah, in high school like 14 from 16, a lot of merengue, bachata. I think I was stuck to this. And after a lot of rock when I discovered rock. I really love it, hard rock, punk, every soft rock too, like folk. I don't know, I really love everything. Yeah. A lot of traditional music, everything that's from a country.

C: When we do road trips together, when we go play in other towns, I love to travel alone in the same car because... We're all Shazams! No, because I think we have the same kind of taste of music. Yeah, I love good music from anywhere. Sometimes you make me discover something, sometimes...I make her discover something.

E: I personally am an album listener. I love to discover an album. A whole album.

C: I have a daughter she's 15 years old her name is Alicia and she she listened to the for the first time the whole album of Lauren Hill Miss Education and she came to me hey Papa I heard I

listened to the album the whole album from the first strike to the end and it's like a whole story you know with the schools and all these kids like yeah you know it's important. This is how we used to listen to music before Spotify came.

E: And it's funny because I always had this hip-hop side because my older brother is a breakdancer. You too, you're a breakdancer. I'm retired now. I'm retired. But yeah, so it's always been a mixed up of my other brothers. It was really like blues and...

I think there's a nice mix between everything, like traditional rock, hip-hop. And I'm happy to have those three bands with me in my life. It's nice.

N: And how did you meet with Tails and Loony?

E: I mean there were famous rock stars I saw their shows like wow that's crazy and so when they approached me I was like sure no doubt.

L: Actually the first time I met Elo was oh yeah actually I had this web radio show called the mundo urbano and they were doing a street cake with her. I think we just won the Citi Dolls. Yeah. And I received them at the radio show and that was the first time we interacted.

E: it was my first interview ever i was so shy and i don't know and then there was this guy this guy was uh yeah the spot they had cumbia parties over there that was your home yeah yeah that was my home like yeah so you were playing there every sunday for two years and it's funny because at some point, I have a friend who played on a Sunday last year and I was like, "Who goes to see a show on a Sunday?" I was tired and I was like, "I don't want to go, but I'll go anyway." And going, I was there. I was like, "Oh damn, I did play for two years every Sunday and it was full every time." I used to say, "These are the warriors of the weekend." People party

Friday, they party Saturday. If they're here on Sundays, it's because they really wanted to be here. It was always so crazy. Like we had shows with the trumpeter over the saxophonist doing solos both of them and like crazy parties We used to play from 11 to 2 am.

L: They had those underground latino parties there Big cumbria night You're the rap star.

E: It was fun. I remember I saw you guys in the...Le Petit Campus. Oh yeah. That was a fucking amazing show. And I remember I was... Petit Campus is a nice venue. I think that's my favorite.

L: When Yann Lettre was with us before, we were looking for a new singer, and we had like a couple of choices you know and then we were scouting that's what we were doing technically we were scouting like okay let's go see them in show oh nice okay okay you came for that that's funny and then we saw you on that set and I was like okay there's no question like this is it nice now it really ended up well I'm really happy because it turned out to be family. It was just like natural, perfect. You're a songwriter too. In this new album she did a lot of compositions.

N: What's the name of the album?

L: For now it's "Atemporal" and I think it's gonna stay that way. Or maybe it's "Atemporal". We might end up arguing at some point for the name of the... But it's all good. It's nice. Yeah. No, but yeah, it's a different approach of writing. I'm used to like play music and then create a song from, I don't know, and like more like with instruments and then like really like...really well written and then okay verse chorus and then but then it's like we got the mic we got the beat let's try like anything and it's really nice because it's really out of my comfort zone but I really like it uh create something in me. Let's go, let's go! I'm super hyped. It's funny because every time we're in the studio and then I have this demo beat, whatever, okay cool man, we start to write and like

Loony and me, we're from the hip-hop scene, you know, like we used to that, like we go to the studio, we write a verse, 16 bars, then we record it, okay let's go, perfect.

C: And then, so I was like, "So Elo, do you have something?" First time it was funny.

E: Like they're listening to the beat and I'm like, "Okay, okay." And they're like super in the zone, I'm like, "Okay." They're like, "Okay, I'm ready, I got something." And the other's like, "Yeah, me too, I got something." I'm like, "Oh, what the fuck?" I'm like, "I got nothing, I'm gonna listen to that track like a long time before I came with something." You know, and they were like, "No, just try something, anything. do it and i don't know it actually stayed because this chorus is there it's safe because i remember when when the when when you say well i think i have something i'm like okay let's go yeah and then and then she she she sing and i'm like oh she's go okay let's record it let's record it it's like no it's good. That's another vibe too, because I don't know, I used to play with my brother a lot and we're really like, we're not hyping ourselves enough. We're always like, "Oh, do you think that's good?" And we're really hard with ourselves and arriving with that vibe that it's like... Just the chorus and you're like... It's like, I love it, it's perfect. But I mean, but it's real. It is. It's real. I'm not faking it. No, of course. No, no, no, when you sing that part, that line, like oh shit, like he got me, let's record it right now. It's really nice, it's a nice vibe.

N: And how do you feel the public has received that mix between English, French, Spanish and all like the your music proposal or your music?

E: I think they've been waiting for it. Yeah, it's common sense. It's Montreal. It's Montreal

C: And also we're Latinos, you know, so we are in between of the, let's call it war, of French and English, you know. So we're in between. We're like the peacemakers. So if you want to speak some things in French and Spanish, that's cool. Well, let's put it in English. Like, it's okay. It goes. It's okay. So yeah, like she said, they're waiting for that. We need to do it more. And all that thing... There's a map that came out where you can see all the languages that are more spoken in the city, a part of French and English. And it's Spanish and Arabic everywhere. It's like full, full, full.

L: We're also part of the most consumed music in the whole world, like Latino music. People love it.

E: There's a lot of people who speak Spanish. Yeah, like Quebecers, they go to Mexico, to Cuba two times, they come back, they speak Spanish, they're super hyped for the music. It's right, like the hype is there. They're like listening to Los Van Van and Buena Vista Social Club and... Okay, you went to Cuba.

E: Coming from the countryside, I can see it. They really love Latin music and Latin vibes. Even my dad was the first Latino of the village. They never saw him, but he knows everyone. He's a jogger. Yeah, a jogger. He's always on the street running, and he's really social. So it's like everybody in the village knew him, and they were like, "Oh yeah, like music, and they really liked it." I don't know. It's there.

N: **And the majority of the audience is from Montreal or Latin American or is it a mix of everything?**

L: Our majority is very Montrealish, but we have like... Because the way it's Montreal, Latinos in Montreal are special, right? So we get like the underground Latinos.

I would say the outcasts. They don't go to nightclubs or like your regular typical nightclub where they put top 40 Latino music. They want to listen to more raw stuff, like more hardcore. They want to get loose. Even if they don't know how to dance, people over there, we don't care. Like you come to our show, as long as you're having a blast and you're getting drunk at the end, it's perfect. And that's the mix we have. We have like a mix of...a lot of people from Montreal from different backgrounds and we have like our special breed of Latinos who come to party with us and they're from all kinds of different backgrounds they're either Colombian, Peruvian, Central Americans, Mexicans...They'll come to have a blast for the time, but they all like more punk. You know, they're more fun. The Latinos that like to go to the club Yeah, so yeah, we got the old cast Latino gang the Warriors from the region, which is cool because to them it gives them a space where they identify when they come to our shows. They feel: "This is my spot, this is my people".

N: There are lots of rhythms that we share from Central America to South America like musical rhythms and one of them is cumbia and how do you think cumbia has influenced your sounds in Sonido Pesado?

L: One of our first songs not only as Sonido Pesado but as Heavy Sounds was Que Voy A Hacer which was a mix of salsa and cumbia that was like one of our big hits back then like we worked a lot with Bugat who was also into cumbia so we always worked a lot through that sound because that sound is like... It's from everywhere. It's very big in Latin America from Mexico all the way down to Argentina. And there's different styles of... I don't know, that rhythm... There's

this Japanese band who does cumbia too. And there's cumbia from everywhere, you know, there's cumbia from all the countries. Thanks to Colombia. That's true, that's true. But like it's the same and at some point it can be really representative of your country and at the same time it's like we all have it. We all can relate to it.

C: And you know what? Cumbia it's a riddle that easily can be mixed with whatever other rhythm. Like you know like you put a boom bap beat over a... You have a fucking boom bap cumbia right there. It's incredible.

E: With my rock band, my friends take the harmonica out, I just take the guido and it works. Yeah, it's perfect. It comes with everything. It's magic. Yeah, cumbia is... Like those of Son Rompe Pera.

L: Cumbia is the new punk. Yeah, cumbia is the new punk. It is right now Cumbia is a big movement in the whole Latin America. They have this with the Cholo community also. And it's always been too. And I think it's still. Cumbia is forever. It's atemporal.

N: Have you seen the influence of Cumbia in other groups in Montreal?

C: El Sonsono There's a Bugat Agua Negra Right now there's our boy Les Toches Eli with his project MTL Sospicante Has a lot of cumbia influence too Les Toches, they won Cilidol They won Cilidol, yeah Les Toches this year And they do traditional cumbia Who else? Ramon also, Ramon Charon. So yeah, I think we have a pretty good scene of Cumbieros in Montreal. Like root cumbia and also more fusion.

N: And my last question: what do you think about the Latin American music scene in Montreal?

L: It's big, it's growing, it's a lot more professional, it's alive also. I think you cannot pass through the Latin scene. Right now we need a Latino scene in Montreal, we need it to expand bigger. We need more spaces.

E: Yeah, because it's always been there but the space is not... Yeah, like... We need representation.

L: It's always been very restricted. Like, I have a radio show on CIBL called "Rumba Mundial" that I started because of the lack of representation for us to put our music through. Because they're always like: "Okay, well, it's too hardcore for us to play. It's not too tropical or it's not this, it's not that." So I wanted a space where it's uncensored and I just, oh you have a song? It's good. Oh your song is five minutes? I don't care, I'll play it. And thank you for your podcast too because like, it would have been normal to have one like 10 years ago, you know, and you would have material because it's always been here.

E: But we need more visibility, clearly.

C: I think the Latin scene is growing and I hope that pretty soon we will be able to have like a category not world music no, not world music at least Latin music

E: Already the music scene in Montreal it's so big like Montreal it's a really small city but the amount of musicians and good musicians it's wild in Montreal and most of them are Latinos but we don't have the...

L: Shout out to all the communities, like the radio communities, podcasts, who actually put the effort to get to know us.

E: And not just like money, like making music, you know, because there's a lot of Latinos that they're like, oh yeah, we're here for the Latinos, but they put like like Daddy Yankee and stuff like that and it's like yo it's happening like here there's a lot of good music from here from Latinos for Latinos and for the rest of the city too. And Quebec. It's almost like football for us but...

C: I think the Latin scene is great. Like you said, it sounds professional. Maybe that's my opinion and maybe I get a couple of haters, but I'm one, so it's okay. We have maybe a little problem of... Problem d'identité? Identity problem. I think the product sounds good, but still a lot of artists trying to do the same thing that is already happening outside. That's what I think. It sounds good, but it sounds like if you give me a song from here and from over there, I can't really know which one is what. And I think we have a nice place here. We can do our own thing without copying the rest of the scene. And it's already sounding good, so...What are you waiting for guys? The talent is there. So, book us! Yeah, and if you ever come to a Sonido Pesado show, you're gonna sweat, you're gonna sweat, you're gonna lose some weight, like it's gonna be crazy. Your life will be the same. Yeah.