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El Monte's American Legion Stadium

El Monte's American Legion Stadium, on the other hand, reflected the aesthetics of an emerging rock 'n' roll culture. Built prior to the 1932 Olympics, the developers constructed this multipurpose structure with the idea of hosting major sporting events and conventions to accommodate the mostly working-class communities of the San Gabriel Valley. In its early days, Legion Stadium hosted the wrestling matches for the 1932 Olympics held in Los Angeles, and later became the sight of roller derby matches for the Los Angeles team, the Thunderbirds. In addition, as an American Legion hall, the armed services used the facility for benefits, reunions, and meetings for local veterans and service people. Moreover, the auditorium maintained an open invitation to organizations interested in using the stadium. Regardless of the event, the functions held there inevitably reflected the blue-collar image of the people who lived nearby and used the hall.

An assortment of economic, geographic, social, cultural, and political preconditions contributed to El Monte's development as a venue for rock 'n' roll music. The formation of rock 'n' roll bands and the creation of new music represented youthful attempts at imitating the popular images presented on television and in magazines (for example, Ricky Nelson and Elvis), mimicking African American rhythm and blues sounds emanating from the radio, and achieving a degree of local celebrity and respect. For many promoters, record company representatives, and disk jockeys, economic reasons propelled their involvement. Radio personalities gained popularity as interest in the music increased, while a nascent recording industry began to realize the profitability of the emerging youth market in terms of record and concert ticket sales. At times they exploited young artists, causing distrust among performers and promoters of rock 'n' roll music. Initially, however, competition between bands, recording companies, and disc jockeys helped nurture the rock 'n' roll music scene.

Regardless of their motivations, all involved agreed that live performances contributed to the promotion of rock 'n' roll. Many of the potential consumers of this music, however, represented "underage" teens who could not attend many concerts because of a Los Angeles city ordinance that restricted gatherings of people under the age of eighteen. Therefore, although many promoters and local disc jockeys wanted to host local concerts in the City of Los Angeles, this law often prohibited even the performers of this music from participating due to their underage status.

The spatial dimensions of Greater Los Angeles and the less restrictive laws of Los Angeles County created the potential for the development of a dance hall culture in the

Southland. Art Laboe, a noted local radio disc jockey, record producer, and concert promoter, stated simply, “Concerts started at El Monte because the laws were different in the county than they were in the City [of Los Angeles].” In particular, rules restricting underage gatherings did not exist in the county, which permitted Laboe and other disc jockeys and promoters to host rock ’n’ roll shows for teenagers. Similarly, relaxed county legislation also benefited other venues situated in Los Angeles’s hinterlands, including Rainbow Gardens and the Long Beach Municipal Auditorium; the latter competed with the Legion Stadium in size and reputation.

Angelenos’ experience of life in Greater Los Angeles – a network of suburbs connected by parkways and freeways – encouraged young people to drive from their homes to county dance hall sites. Although young people may have lived in a particular neighborhood segregated by race and class, the common experience of listening to music broadcast across the Southland on KRLA and other radio stations prefigured the interethnic popularity of the halls. Located approximately fifteen miles east of downtown Los Angeles and accessible by the main traffic arteries in the region, El Monte drew a diverse clientele from all ends of the Southland. Recalling the racial and class composition of audiences, Art Laboe commented: “White kids from Beverly Hills, black kids from Compton, and local Chicano kids used to come out to our shows every weekend.”

The commute gave rise to an emergent car culture. Inheriting or borrowing the cars of their parents, young people altered or “customized” their vehicles and formed car clubs. According to one faithful El Monte Patron, Richard Rodriguez, “lowriders were early fifties, and everybody was lowriding.” To lower their cars, teens would heath the suspension springs underneath their wheel base or load their trunks with sand or cement bags. For those who owned their own vehicles, elaborate modifications were possible. Many invested in expensive chrome “spinners” or hubs and whitewall tires that they illuminated by affixing semi-truck lights to the fenders and skirts of their cars. These truck “reflectors” came in amber, blue, orange and red, allowing individuals to vary colors, which gave each car its unique look. Often, lowriders played music from *within* their cars as a way to prepare for the night’s entertainment. As Rodriguez remembered, “you had your record player that was made by Craig. The actual 45rpm record inside the car! If you hit a bump in the street, there went the record”.

In addition to the cars, clothes shaped the world of the teen dance halls. Unlike Rainbow Gardens, which maintained a dress code, El Monte American Legion Stadium allowed young patrons to wear whatever they desired. This condition led to an eclectic, nonconformist fashion at El Monte, indicative of the cultural diversity extant in rock ’n’ roll audiences. Khaki pants and a “Sir Guy” brand, Pendelton-style, plaid shirt were particularly common among many local Chicanos, while Chicanas frequently wore a short-sleeved blouse with a tight-fitting, short, pegged skirt, usually cut about six inches above the knee. According to El Monte patron Marta Maestas, women also wore white, flat shoes known as “bunnies.” Maestas remembered, “you wor them with socks.” She added, “If you were ‘bad,’ you pulled them up, if you weren’t you kept them down.” These fashion statements expressed subtle acts of rebellion on the part of Mexican

American youths who consciously broke with the “classy” suit and gown look of their parents.

The multiethnic composition of El Monte’s audiences affected teen fashion as many white, Mexican American, black, and Asian/Pacific Islander youths shared styles and influenced one another. Often, the varying styles led to the development of “fads.” For example, Jerry Castellano recalled adopting the “collegiate” look of a cardigan-style, lettermen’s sweater worn by many white teens as a way of distinguishing himself from other Chicanos. Richard Rodriguez remembered, “the black guys – those guys would dress all the time! Those guys wore suits or sports coats.” Many African American men dressed in suits that imitated the look of popular black performers such as Don Julian, Brenton Woods, and Richard Berry. Wearing tailored suits trimmed with velvet or sati along the sleeves and lapels, audiences adapted these fashions to their material means and aesthetical tastes to create the “continental” look: “that would be narrow lapels, narrow pant legs, [and] Continental pocket meaning...kind of your western cut. But, it was a tapered pant or slack.” These fashions would make their way back to the stage as performers tried to adapt to the changing tastes of their audiences. White performers such as Fabian and Jerry Lee Lewis simultaneously influenced and incorporated changes in fashion by contributing their own regional tastes in clothing and appropriating styles worn by audiences. Occasionally, clothing fads informed the themes of songs, as represented in Hank Ballard’s tune “Continental Walk.” Similarly, the car culture inspired many songs such as Three Midnites’ “Whittier Blvd,” or for a later generation WAR’S classic 1975 hit “Lowrider.”

The performing groups and their music best represented the degree of inter-cultural exchange and ethnic/racial diversity present at rock ‘n’ roll shows. Several bands consisted of musicians from a variety of cultural backgrounds including African American, Mexican, white, and Asian/Pacific Islander. The intermixing facilitated a blending of cultural influences within a musical genre already distinguished by its hybridized origins of African American rhythm and blues, jazz, gospel, and white country and rockabilly. Created within the context of the ethnically diverse environment of Southern California dance halls, music emerging from this scene possessed a broad-based, cross-cultural appeal, which facilitated understanding among the racially diverse audience. Recalling how music affected his life, and the lives of people of his generation, Jerry Castellano remembered: “The music of the fifties kind of helped because everybody got into it...the blacks were popular entertainers, the whites were popular entertainers...It helped bring generations – not generations – but cultures together and understand. We took that same road, and we tried to do the same thing as far as bringing people together. That’s all we did in our music.” Following these tenets, Castellano recalled adding a Jewish pianist with a “classical” background into his group, The Royals, as much for his musical contributions as for the message it delivered to audiences. “We did not want to keep it just a Chicano band.”

Such was the case with Rainbow Gardens’ house band, The Mixtures. The self-conscious, iconographic title of the group epitomized the intentions of many bands and artists who sought to reflect the multicultural world of Southern California’s dance halls.

Led by Mexican American pianist Steve Mendoza and African American saxophonist Delbert Franklin, the group also included a Chicano drummer (Eddie de Robles), a Puerto Rican bass player (Zag Soto), a black horn player (Autry Johnson), a white guitarist (Dan Pollock), and an American Indian/West Indian percussionist (Johnny Wells). The band saw their diversity as an asset and tried to highlight the uniqueness of their multiracial composition, as Delbert Franklin explained: “We started as The Playboys, and then I would say about sixty or sixty-one we became The Mixtures. We changed the name because we looked around and we were all mixed so [we thought], ‘why not be called The Mixtures?’”

Playing on a local radio station in Oxnard, California, The Mixtures caught the ear of Hollywood restaurant owner Eddie Davis who had begun to dabble in producing and managing teen rock ‘n’ roll bands. Drawn to the group initially by their talent, Davis believed their diversity would contribute to their success. Davis recalled, “I remember [Steve] Mendoza asking me if there was a chance that they could do anything in the future because they were racially mixed. In those days you remember, blacks and whites did not mix, period.” According to Dan Pollock, Davis was particularly intrigued by the ability of white teens like himself who could play R&B: “Eddie booked us because he thought it was unique that we were playing his sound...and that there *were* white people in [the band]!” Pollock added, “[Davis] thought – two birds with one stone, he could break this thing out – you know, have this mixed band, this mixed act get over where others had feared to tread.”

Connected to some of the most popular disc jockeys in Southern California such as Dick Moreland, Wink Martindale, and Bob Eubanks, Davis quickly found work for the band on radio and television stations, as well as in local dance halls and concert auditoriums. Southern California’s most popular rock ‘n’ roll station, KRLA, featured the group regularly during their all-night shows, while Cande Mendoza contracted The Mixtures for Friday night dances. According to Franklin, the band appealed to the racially diverse audience at the club: “Rainbow Gardens is a good way to put it because that’s what it became, a rainbow garden.” Later, Davis arranged for the group to appear on a Saturday afternoon dance show, “Parade of Hits,” hosted by African American announcer Larry McCormick on the local television station, KCOP, Channel 13. On Saturday nights, the band traveled throughout the Southland, playing at a few of the many dance halls in Southern California, including El Monte American Legion Stadium.

Eddie Davis took pride in being “the first guy to put out a record with a racially mixed group” and fondly remembered the local popularity of The Mixtures. Yet, for all their success, the group never achieved national fame, a fact that disappointed “The Godfather of the East L.A. Sound.”

“I tried and tried to promote them nationally,” Davis lamented, “[but] I could never get The Mixtures out of Southern California.” Franklin shared these feelings, stating: “I wouldn’t say we were the first Southern California band, [but] we opened the doors, not just for mixed bands, you know, but for [all] bands.” Famously known as the “good luck band” within the dance hall circuit, many successful performers such as Lou Rawls,

Barry White, Bobby Riddell, The Rivingtons, the Beach Boys began their careers either singing in front of The Mixtures, or opening for them on Friday nights. Although their diversity helped them gain work, Franklin believed it also prevented them from gaining access to lucrative recording deals. “We didn’t get recording deals,” Franklin remembered, “[party]’ cause the record companies were afraid even though they saw what we were doing.” For Pollock, racism was the crucial factor in restricting the growth of the band’s popularity:

[Our diversity] held us back. [It] held us back because you gotta remember that...the greater LA area was still a rather prejudiced area. Albeit...it was more progressive than say, Mississippi, but it was still...less than ten years from the time where black people couldn’t even stay in hotels in Los Angeles. They had to go to the Dunbar [a hotel for African Americans] or find people’s homes to stay...I mean, excellent performers...all the greatest guys in the world would come through. They couldn’t...get a room, until Nat King Cole finally bought a house in the Hollywood Hills and broke the color barrier. It was headlines! It takes a while for that assimilation see, and these were still very prejudiced times here in Southern California.

For record executives who invested in the “exotic” appeal of all-African American bands or the “novelty” of all-white bands playing “black music,” The Mixtures did not fit their narrow definitions of a marketable group. Commenting on the effectiveness of their intercultural message, Pollock explained that although “the guys were all together on this thing,” he also believed that Davis “bit of more than he could chew.” Davis’s own assessment of his strategy to highlight the multiethnic composition of the band confirmed Pollock’s impressions, admitting that “I was very naïve and I never knew anything about prejudice.”

Despite never achieving national fame, The Mixtures possessed an “aural and visual” appeal that garnered favor from Southern California’s diverse audiences and radio personalities. That The Mixtures gained popularity as a live band but never as recording artists also suggests the importance of place in the formation of Los Angeles’s interethnic music culture. Although many teens respected the “commercial” success of Ritchie Valens or Ricky Nelson, Southern California bands could also achieve a degree of fame from their live performances. Noting the unique qualities possessed by The Mixtures on their only record album (no surprisingly, a live album recorded at Rainbow Gardens), Dick Moreland wrote, “California has discovered them [The Mixtures] to be the most exciting act which has ever provided in-person entertainment in their area.” Although disc jockeys and promoters often used such hyperbole to sell records and tickets and increase their own popularity, the emphasis on the live or “in-person” quality of the band accurately states the significant connection between audience and performer and music and dance, that made the dance halls the center of an emerging youth culture. Moreover, it demonstrates the relatively egalitarian or democratic nature of musical production during this period. Although recording deals only came to precious few bands, aspiring

musicians could seek affirmation and acceptance outside the recording industry in the dance halls.

For women performers who appeared on stage less frequently and in fewer numbers than men, the dance hall held more remote promise for recognition and respect. The career of Rosalie Mendez Hamlin, or “Rosie” of the group Rosie and the Originals, provides insight into the unique experiences of women in this male-dominated industry. Early in her career, Hamlin’s participation in an emerging music and dance hall culture proved to be her salvation. Born in Alaska to an Anglo father and a Mexican mother, Hamlin moved to San Diego as a teenager, where her parents began to have marital problems. After a period of great upheaval that, in her words became “physical,” Hamlin ran away to live with her Aunt Socorro and Uncle Frank. There, she cultivated her talents as a piano player and singer. According to Hamlin, “music was a way to not lose it, you know, because you don’t understand why grown-ups are doing all this fighting and breaking up.” When her single “Angel Baby” hit big in 1962, Hamlin moved to Los Angeles to join the dance hall circuit. Once she arrived, she found a diverse group of veteran male performers who supported her professional development. Hamlin recalled, “I was put on stage with a lot of well seasoned entertainers that I respected a whole lot and they kind of raised me and taught me a lot about music.” She added, “it became like a family and it was really good because I no longer really had a family, I was sort of just traveling around a lot and it was wonderful to have that support and influence.” Relying on a surrogate family that included popular performers such as Richard Berry, Johnny Otis, and Don Julian, Hamlin became one of the few women to gain popularity in the Los Angeles music scene.

The nurture and guidance of veteran musicians, however, did not make Hamlin immune to the discrimination experienced by women in this industry. According to Hamlin, women in rock ‘n’ roll bands performed as either background singers with little visibility, or as lead singers restricted to singing only. Although her hit single “Angel Baby” earned her an elite place among women performers, she resented some of the restrictions placed on her as a woman musician. Hamlin explained:

Usually, in those days, if you were a female singer, you were the front person...and you didn’t get back there and play. It was not kosher – it wasn’t cool [for women to play instruments]. It was like you should stand up there and look cute, you know. That’s what it was. There’s a lot of women that played instruments, but usually you saw them up front...[or] A lot of times women would not do any front work, they’d just be up there and sing and then disappear discretely, and the band leader, like Ike of Ike and Tina Turner, would be the one that was the important person.

Even during the mid-1960s, when Hamlin had established herself as one of the few successful women performers in Southern California, she experienced discrimination from concert promoters who denied her equal rehearsal time before shows and rescheduled her appearances to accommodate the whims of younger, male performers. Hamlin explained, “I would just tolerate it, you know, because it was really a man’s

business.”

For women who attended the shows, the dance hall was a place that could evoke both curiosity and fear. Marta Maestas, for example, remembered being “more scared than curious” when she attended concerts at El Monte as a fourteen-year-old in 1954, but also called the experience “the time of [her] life.” Although many things contributed to her feelings of “edginess,” including sneaking out with her girlfriends, the vastness of the stadium, and the occasional drinking and fighting in the parking lot, the “raw, sexual energy” present in the music and the dance hall figured prominently in her reminiscence of El Monte. “It scared me,” she remembered, “because I did not know how to react even though it was all around me there.” She added, “the music was much more sexual and I was not attracted to the softer, pop stuff. I was obviously attracted to the sexual energy.” Maestas dealt with these tensions by confining this energy to the dance floor, where she maintained more liberal rules about touching. Maestas explained: “There was an invisible line that you didn’t cross with me. It was o.k. when you were dancing. It wasn’t, but I made it that way so I could deal with it [the sexual energy].”

Frequently, passions kindled on the dance floor spilled over into the parking lot where distinctions between “good” and “bad” touching became more difficult to maintain. An encounter with a sexually active girlfriend and an overzealous boyfriend ultimately persuaded Maestas to stop going to El Monte American Legion Stadium. She explained: “A lot of stuff happened outside. We [Maestas and her boyfriend, Henry] went back to her car. My friend Joanne and Henry’s friend weren’t just necking – they were actually getting ready to have sex. And I’d never seen anything like that, and it scared the hell out of me. [Henry] wanted to do the same thing and I told him, ‘No way! You’re out of your mind!’ I made him take me home and I wouldn’t go with him anymore.”

Although other youths chose freely to engage in sexual relations outside of the stadium, women often received unwanted advances from male peers influenced by the environment of the dance hall. Remembering the pressures that many women felt, Maestas asserted, “a lot of that was brought on by the music.” While popular songs such as Hank Ballard’s “Sexy Ways” and “Let’s Go Again (Where We Went Last Night)” conveyed the sexual freedom of the times, it also encouraged men to expect such sexual favors from all women they encountered at the shows.

Other musicians, however, wrote song lyrics that emphasized romantic encounters and sincere feelings of love. Reflecting on the music of the period and the primary inspiration behind her songs, Hamlin commented, “It was all based around a love theme.” [It was] probably because of our age,” she added, “experiencing what’s new, like puppy love that turned into romance that, you know, later became marriage.”

Romance within multiethnic dance halls often led to interethnic/interracial dating and provided youths the unique opportunity to challenge racial prejudices in Southern California. A tradition of cooperation in multicultural communities and multiethnic organizations such as the Community Service Organization competed with

discriminatory attitudes to shape the larger society's response in intercultural mixing and rock 'n' roll shows. Prejudices against intercultural courtship and dating, particularly between non-blacks and African Americans, persisted in the minds of many parents of the 1950s. Richard Rodriguez remembered his experience living in Duarte during the early fifties: "You see, back in the fifties, if you dated a black girl, your parents would probably move out of the area. If you were even seek walking with a black girl, [and you were] Mexican, your old man would probably take a switch to you." Living next to African American families in a community segregated because of racial restrictions in housing, Rodriguez recalled: "[my parents] rented a house to black people, [but] I was not allowed to date a black girl. My mother didn't want it, my uncles and aunts didn't want it...And it was like I better not do this."

The experience of growing up in a racially mixed community, however, provided a basis of familiarity that presented the potential for breaking down color and cultural barriers. Through exposure to multiethnic and music and contact with a racially diverse audience in the dance halls, a new generation realized some of this potential. As Rodriguez recalled: "When I went to El Monte, I felt that I could date anybody I wanted to; I could dance with anybody I wanted to. But, I was a little shy yet at El Monte because I was trying to understand the crowd, and why the girls would dance with black guys, and nobody's fighting over it." Eventually, such interethnic mixing on the dance floors and in the parking lots broke down youths' ambivalence toward intercultural romance. According to Marta Maestas, "that was a time when, in the outside world, [interracial dating] was unacceptable." Reflecting on her experience during the mid-fifties in El Monte, Maestas recalled: "It was Latina women with a black man. It was black girls with Latino boys. But, it was kind of an easy mix. I didn't feel the same kind of barriers then as I did in the late sixties." Similarly, during the late 1950s, Rodriguez remembered seeing "more blacks dating white girls and Chicana girls." He added, "Every now and then you might see a white man with a black girl or a white man with a Mexican girl, or vice versa...El Monte was melting pot!"

Political decisions and demographics realities in Southern California suburbs facilitated the blossoming of intercultural cooperation among youths in the 1950s. The combination of a growing youth population and the failure of the educational infrastructure to address such growth led to a high degree of race and class mixing in local schools. For example, in the heart of the San Gabriel Valley, the cities of Monrovia, Arcadia, and Duarte maintained just one high school for the three townships. Arcadia contained a white affluent and middle-class population, while Monrovia and Duarte had a cross-section of black, white, and Mexican working-class families. Although this clash of cultures initially resulted in conflict, administrators, out of necessity, actively sought ways of facilitating understanding and tolerance by holding "get-acquainted dances" and naming the school mascot the "M.A.D. Wildcats" [Monrovia, Arcadia, and Duarte].

Music and dance served as a bridge between cultures and helped to ameliorate racial tensions on Southland campuses. Playing at a high school function in Pasadena, Jerry Castellano recalled how music forged a link between him and a mostly white

audience: “We went thinking we were going to be playing to a lot of Latinos. Wrong! They were all white. So we thought, “what are we going to do, what are going to play?” So we decided we’ll mix it up. We’ll play their music, and we’ll throw in ours once in a while. And, as it turned out, we played our own stuff and they loved it!”

Although Castellano and other Mexican Americans played a hybridized music composed of a variety of cultural influences, many still acknowledged distinctions between mainstream rock ’n’ roll and “their” music. Much of this can be attributed to the regional development of a unique “Eastside Sound” characterized by the presence of Mexican/Latin American influences. Although African American rhythm and blues formed the basis of this music, Chicanos had their own variation of R&B. Mexican teens emphasized a more “intense” rhythmic patter. According to Castellano, “we didn’t use a bass player; we used rhythm guitar.” In addition, many Southern California groups incorporated a brass section, particularly a saxophone, into their bands. “We always had a saxophone, a rhythm section, and a brass section. It was part of the make up of our music,” commented Castellano. Moreover, these bands maintained contact with their audiences throughout a show so that patrons could often call out to the performers, “play that song, or we want to do this dance.” This made for a particularly “raw” or “primitive” quality, in which audiences’ hoots and hollers figured prominently in the Southern California musical aesthetic. Audiences “contributions” were recorded on many albums such as The Mixtures’ “Stompin’ At the Rainbow,” or the more popular hits of the period such as Thee Midneters’ “Whittier Blvd.” and Handsome Jim Balcolm’s “Corrido Rock.”

The popularity of the latter song (which also served as El Monte’s theme song) demonstrates the important influence of Mexican/Latin American rhythm on Southern California bands and the acceptance of this music by a multiethnic community. Although the traditional corridor typically contains words and a distinguishable rhyme scheme, rock musicians probably used the title “corridor” not as a literal description of the song, but rather as a reference to the Latin American origins of its musical arrangement. “Corrido Rock” contains all of the above-mentioned influences, such as a strong rhythmic guitar beat with a saxophone lead that harkens back to a previous generation. This dance hall “standard” represents an adaptation of the instrumental music enjoyed by a mostly Mexican American audiences at places like Rainbow Gardens on a Saturday night. Moreover, the recording of this song by a white artist exemplifies the cross-cultural appeal of this music.

Music from a previous generation, however, was not as remote as the separation of these two worlds might suggest. For example, Latin American big band venues continued serving adult audiences through the 1960s. At Rainbow Gardens, where rock ’n’ roll and Latin American big band “shared” the stage, though on different nights, teens could keep up with the popular trends in Latin American music. In addition, youths commonly began their musical education at home. Jerry Castellano recalled: “I learned [music] from [home]...My dad taught me or my uncle had taught me. They were all Mexican chords. Then I used them in rock ’n’ roll and then as the years went by, I learned the seventh chord...the jazz chords...But, they all came from the Mexican chords

that my dad used.”

The experience of performing in church, and at family and community functions also shaped the tastes and attitudes of many young musical artists. Maria Elena Adams-Gonzalez, for example, recalls how she got her start in music by singing at the Fiesta held every year in the Arbol Verde *colonia* in Claremont: “It was right next to grandma’s [house] at the hall of the Sacred Heart Church in the community. Cecilia [her younger sister] and I would sing every year there.” “Discovered” by Frank Zappa who lived in the Pomona Valley during the late 1950s and early 1960s, Adams-Gonzalez went on to perform with the popular local band Ronnie and the Casulas, and later recorded and performed as a solo artist under the name “Gina Terry.”

Frequently, the origins of artists’ music and the inspiration for their participation conflicted with the emerging “commercial” mentality of the industry. Ultimately, record producers and promoters came to dominate the rock ’n’ roll scene and soured many musicians’ interest in pursuing a professional career in popular music. For example, Adams-Gonzalez remembers singing for pleasure and to express her culture and feelings through song; however, “when Frank [Zappa] heard me for the first time at the Ontario Music Center, all I remember is him telling me he saw dollar signs.” Although Adams-Gonzalez mentioned, “Frank was a very nice man,” she did not view her talents as a vehicle to fame and fortune. After a short teen career, recording and performing at local venues, Adams-Gonzalez chose to leave the profession and pursue music in less commercial venues.

Similarly, Jerry Castellano remembered: “we didn’t do it for money. It was something else to do, to stay out of drugs, to stay out of trouble.” For Castellano and his partners, forming a band represented another option for gathering with friends. Their popularity, however, attracted an agent, who imposed a new mode of relating to their music and to one another: “When the agent came in, he did get us a lot more interest, and bookings, and stuff like that. But, what we later found out was that he was doing it for his own purposes. Things were beginning to happen, like little small arguments between us because of him. ...To make a long story short, he took over the whole thing and we had no say so in it anymore.” Despite achieving some local success, Castellano and two original members eventually broke off from their first band The Velveteens and formed new groups.

Many young performers who pursued a career in music found the industry dominated by self-interested recording executives and predatory music promoters who often bilked artists out of profits generated by their songs. Frequently artists would records original material and send it to a recording company for consideration. Often, the band or artist would never receive a replay; however, the music, or some portion of it would manifest itself in the sounds of groups already signed by the label. Even those artists who secured contracts with recording companies did not always profit from their creative endeavors. For example, Rosie Hamlin signed an illegal contract with Highland Records in 1960 that paid her only a penny per record for her hit “Angel Baby.” Although the song became a mega-hit and propelled her career, Hamlin earned few

royalties on the song until she had the original contract invalidated and won a copyright infringement lawsuit in 1988.

By the early 1970s, a small number of large recording companies bought out many of the over 400 local recording labels of the 1950s and significantly consolidated the industry. This consolidation resulted in a concomitant concentration of varied musical expressions into the music of select groups and artists. Although musicians such as Jerry Castellano and Rosie Hamlin continued to perform and create music, access to radio airwaves and dance hall stages became increasingly difficult. Radio stations and recording companies interested primarily in increasing their market share attempted to ensure their profits by channeling their resources into the promotion of particular artists or supergroups. These decisions transformed the complexion of rock 'n' roll as the number of bands and the interest in live performances at small, intimate venues waned toward the end of the 60s and the early 70s.

The world of the dance halls and the message of the music also changed as a result of the social, political, and economic turmoil of the period. In addition to the Vietnam War and its dramatic effects on teenaged populations, material inequalities and persistent social injustice contributed to a fracturing of Southern California society. As the 1950s boom economy slowed and industries began to relocate in right-to-work states, black and Latino communities were the first to be hurt by growing unemployment. Although the intercultural mingling at places like El Monte's American Legion Stadium and Rainbow Gardens familiarized blacks, Latinos, Asians, and whites with one another, it also tended to accent the growing material inequalities among Southern California's residents. Moreover, as rebellions developed in Latino and black communities in response to the deepening economic and social crises, whites tended to recoil from the intercultural understanding of another age, back to their secure white, middle-class neighborhoods. The construction of new schools and the further development of homeowners' associations, which supported de facto segregation along racial and class lines, facilitated such retrenchment. With the "refinement" of commercial radio and the promotion of particular popular music stars and supergroups, the local music scene lost its appeal for many teens, including blacks and Latinos.

By the early 1960s, the mambo craze that swept the United States in the 1950s had subsided, thus reducing Saturday night audiences at Rainbow Gardens. Although the Pomona dance hall remained a viable and profitable business, both the Thomases and Cande Mendoza chose to leave the music business. Gertie and Ray Thomas retired, while Mendoza, inspired by his early activities in community organizing and journalism, pursued a successful career in education and politics. In 1963 the Thomases sold Rainbow to the owners of Virginia's, another Latin American venue operating in downtown Los Angeles. Somewhat mysteriously, the facility burned the following year, never to be rebuilt.

El Monte's American Legion Stadium continued to host dances through the 1960s on the strength of rock 'n' roll popularity. Initially, as the industry grew, so did El Monte's stature among fans. Toward the end of the 1960s, however, changes in both the

music business and society made El Monte a less suitable place for live shows. Even Richard Rodriguez acknowledged that something had changed midway through the 1960s. In a recent retrospective article he commented: “The shows inside the place reflected the changes going on outside. Stabbings, beatings, and riots were commonplace. Rival gangs fought each other as the music provided them with a soundtrack.” Ultimately, promoters moved performances elsewhere as laws changed and demographic, geographic, and economic circumstances reshaped the location of entertainment. El Monte’s American Legion Stadium was destroyed in 1974.

Compilation albums of that period, retrospective collections recently assembled, reunions such as the annual “Memories of El Monte” show, and the many “oldies” radio stations throughout the Southland preserve some of the memories of the musical culture extant in Greater Los Angeles between the end of World War II and the tumult of the 1960s. The evolution from exclusively white big band ballrooms of the 1940s, to predominantly Latino clubs in the 1950s, to multiethnic teen music dance halls in the 1950s and 1960s demonstrated the degree to which public space opened for a greater number of Southern California residents and cultural influences after World War II. Although material inequalities and persistent racial/ethnic prejudice continued to shape social relations throughout this period, people of diverse cultural backgrounds were able to discover some common ground in the music culture and dance halls.

The creation of such places required a respect for, or at least tacit acceptance of, predominantly non-Euroamerican based music by a larger, white dominated society. The market for Latin American music concerts and recordings provided Mexican Americans a cultural foothold and a sense of belonging in U.S. society. Equally important, it presented the potential for Latin American culture to influence and transform dominant culture and public space by making both more receptive to non-Euroamerican influences.

Eventually, mambo and other forms of Latin American music garnered favor from a predominantly white listening audience in the United States. This popularity, however, did not dramatically alter white perceptions of Latinos within their immediate surroundings, nor did it inspire them to reconceptualize and reorganize public space. As the above history suggests, whites may have listened to the music, but places like Rainbow Gardens on a Saturday night remained mostly Latino.

The creation of shared, multiethnic public spaces, and cross-fertilization among various cultures in music depended on a new generation of Angelenos. Although de facto segregation and material inequalities persisted, young people of various cultural backgrounds voluntarily chose to enter the multicultural environment of the dance halls, and enjoyed the culturally hybridized sounds of Southern California rock ’n’ roll. Shaped by radio, television, and freeways, the “postmodern” social geography of Greater Los Angeles facilitated the convergence of Southland youths in places like El Monte’s Legion Stadium.

Finally, the intentional mixing of cultural forms, the use of symbolic iconography, and the incorporation of environmental influences in the music and dance hall culture of

the 1950s and 1960s suggested that many youths had more on their minds than just “good time” rock ’n’ roll. The music and experiences of these teens represent what Paul Gilroy calls a “politics of transfiguration.” Communicating through nontraditional means, using nonlinguistic mediums such as rhythms, body motion, and fashion, these youths projected “an alternative body of cultural and political expression that considers the world critically from the point of view of its emancipator transformation.” Although their exchanges were often restricted to the dance halls, youths, nevertheless, quieted the dissenting voices implanted in their heads by a larger society to forge relationships across racial, ethnic, and class lines. Moreover, performers successfully transcended divisions in society to create a hybridized music influenced by the many cultures present throughout Greater Los Angeles. The intentional blending of musical forms; the purposeful cultural diversity in bands such as The Mixtures; the cross-cultural exchanges that took place on the dance floors among African Americans, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, whites, and Latinos; and the sharing of fads and fashions across the ethnic/racial lines all provided evidence of this alternative vision of human relations considered by these young Angelenos.

The blossoming of institutions like Rainbow Gardens, El Monte American Legion Stadium, and Padua Hills Theatre in the “hinterlands” of the metropolis forces a reassessment of the center-periphery analyses of cultural development that cast cities as beacons of enlightenment and creativity. In greater Los Angeles, progressive and creative cultural forces did not always emanate from the city; rather, the incorporation of suburban settlements into the metropolitan orbit allowed entertainment centers to shape Southern California culture. Indeed, in the case of Legion Stadium, cross-cultural exchange and hybridization in popular music occurred on the “Eastside” because the city maintained ancient laws restricting the congregation of youth and the LAPD aggressively policed “race mixing” at rock ’n’ roll concerts within their jurisdiction.

The post-World War II citrus belt also served as an important location for experiments in nonwhite-white coalition politics. During the 1940s and 1950s, a group of young Mexican Americans, led by newspaper owner and editor Ignacio Lopez, drew on the support of African Americans and white, working-class activists and scholars to achieve civil rights for minorities living on the fringes of this expanding metropolis. These second- and third-generation Mexican Americans organized political groups known as “Unity Leagues” that predated the important Community Service Organization of East Los Angeles, and used López’s *El Espectador* to aggressively fight racial discrimination throughout the valley. Their efforts placed pressure on many white, middle-class and elite community leaders to address the problem of residential segregation, and led to the formation of “intercultural” communities during the 1960s and 1970s. In the following chapter, I explore the successes and failures of intercultural political organizing as suburbanization redefined the place and space of minorities in Southern California after World War II.

Art Laboe interview

Ibid. Two other concert promoters, Johnny Otis and Eddie Davis, confirmed that laws were more lax in the county than in the city when it came to shows for youth. On a compact disc insert *The East Side Sound, 1959-1968*, Davis recounted his troubles with the law: “I gave a dance at the Shrine Exposition Hall [in Los Angeles]. 80% of the attendance was under 18. The police stopped the dance. I paid a fine and nothing

ever happened.” As a result, Davis moved his concerts to Rainbow Gardens in 1962 to avoid the harassment. Similarly, Johnny Otis moved his R&B shows to El Monte’s American Legion Stadium to avoid “ancient blue laws” enforced by Los Angeles police officers designed to breakup inter-racial, youth-oriented concerts. Otis claims he eventually had to pay off “El Monte city fathers” to allow him to continue his shows. See Eddie Davis, liner notes to *The East Side Sound*, 1959-1968; and Otis, *Upside Your Head! Rhythm and Blues on Central Avenue*, 61.

Art Laboe interview.

Richard Rodriguez interview. Mr. Rodriguez attended shows regularly at El Monte’s American Legion Stadium throughout its existence, and helped Art Laboe with the production of El Monte’s reissued compilation album entitled *Art Laboe’s Memories of El Monte: The Roots of L.A.’s Rock and Roll*. Today, Mr. Rodriguez serves on the board of directors for the Doo Wop Society, and is a part time organizer of concerts and music events.

Rodriguez interview; Marta Maestas interview. Maestas explained that her peers called the shoes “bunnies” because “they had bunny tails in the back and in the front that looked like bunny ears.”

Rodriguez interview.

Jerry Castellano interview.

Rodriguez interview

Ibid.

George Lipsitz identifies the process of fashion and youth culture influencing the themes of rock ’n’ roll music coming out of Southern California. The “pachuco” style and subculture in particular had an early effect on Southland music, manifested in Don Tosti’s 1948 hit “Pachuco Boogie.” Chuck Higgins’s 1952 hit “Pachuko Hop” (popular with El Monte’s audiences) demonstrated a continuing influence of the pachuco in the fifties. According to Rodriguez, Castellano, Mendoza, and Lipsitz, however, the pachuco subculture gave way to what Lipsitz called a “cholo” style in the 1950s. See Lipsitz, “land of a Thousand Dances,” 271-72. Also Rodriguez, Mendoza, and Jerry Castellano interviews.

Lipsitz, “Land of a Thousand Dances.”

Jerry Castellano interview.

Ibid.

Delbert Franklin interview.

Dan Pollock interview.

Eddie Davis interview in the compact disc insert, *The East Side Sound*; Candelario Mendoza interview. Davis never mentions the role of Candelario Mendoza in singing The Mixtures as Rainbow Gardens’ house band. Instead, Davis claims that he found Rainbow Gardens through his relationship with disk jockeys Bob Eubanks and Wink Martindale. It is possible that as the booking manager, Mendoza worked through Eubanks and/or Martindale who occasionally hosted Friday Night Dances at Rainbow Gardens.

Franklin interview.

Pollock interview.

Eddie Davis interview.

Dick Moreland, liner notes to The Mixtures’ album, *Stompin’ at the Rainbow*.

Ibid.

Rosalie Mendez Hamlin interview, June 26, 1997

Maestas interview.

Ibid.

Hamlin interview.

Lipsitz, “Land of a Thousand Dances,” 270. The experience of such labor and community organizers as Bert Corona and Hope Mendoza Schechter, who married non-Mexicans, demonstrates the effect activism had on breaking down cultural barriers in courtship and dating of this period. See Bert Corona interviewed by Mario T. Garcia in *Memories of Chicano History*; Rose, “Gender and Civic Activism in Mexican American Barrios,” 188. For issues surrounding interracial marriage, see Pascoe, “Race, Gender, and Intercultural Relations.”

Rodriguez interview. A switch was the popular term commonly used during the 1950s and 1960s for a tree branch.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid. Maestas interview.

Castellano interview.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ruben Guevara, as quoted in Lipsitz, "Land of a Thousand Dances," 280

For a description of the *corridor* and its importance in Mexican/Mexican immigrant culture see, Herrera-Sobke, *Northward Bound*, xxii-xxv, and *The Mexican Corrido*.

Jerry Castellano interview.

Maria Elena Adams-Gonzalez interview.

Ibid.

Ibid. Adams-Gonzalez chose to sing for her local Catholic church parish. She still participates in her church choir.

Jerry Castellano interview.

Ibid.

Ibid. Also Mendoza interview, February 17, 1995. Castellano mentioned that the appropriation of artists' material by record executives was a common occurrence in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, he composed a song entitled "Jerry's Jump" with his first group The Velvetens. After Castellano left the band, however, the agent had the bandleader record the song under a new title "Johnny's Jump.

Hamlin interview.

For a thorough analysis of how commercial motives transformed the rock "business" during the late 1960s and early 1970s, see Wicke, "We're Only in It for the Money": the rock business," chapter 6 in *Rock Music*, 113-34; and Guevara, "The View from the Sixty Street Bridge."

Mike Davis explains how many corporations in the 1970s adopted General Electric's 1950s strategy of moving production to the "Sunbelt" (for example, Arizona) where labor organizing was discouraged and legislated against. Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, 127-38. In his book, *City of Quartz*, Davis examines how the white Los Angeles power structure directed redevelopment money into ventures that benefited white Angelenos while abandoning black and Latino communities. The 1965 Watts Rebellion and the 1970 Chicano Moratorium in East Los Angeles represented just two climatic events in an ongoing struggle to act out against such civic neglect. See Davis, "Power Lines," chapter 2 in *City of Quartz*, 101-49.

For a history of how homeowners' associations helped sculpt the segregated landscape of Greater Los Angeles see Davis, "Homegrown Revolution," chapter 3 in *City of Quartz*, 152-219.

Mendoza served as the president of the Pomona Unified School District twice, and started his own bilingual (Spanish/English) newspaper, *La Voz*, in the 1980s. Mendoza Interview, February 17, 1995.

Richard Rodriguez, "El Monte Legion Stadium," *The Doo Wop Society Newsletter* (1996). I want to thank Rosie Hamlin for providing me with this article.

Roberts, "The 1940s: The Watershed," in *The Latin Tinge*, 100-126

Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 39.

Both Edward Said and Cameron McCarthy make this same argument with regard to culture and art on a global scale. See said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 48-49; McCarthy, *The Uses of Culture*, 5-6