Son Jarocho: A Transnational Cultural Exchange and the Revitalization of a Traditional Music Form

Jeronimo J. Sexton

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Science

Department of Southwest Studies
Colorado College
April 2016

Introduction

Son Jarocho[1] is a centuries-old musical tradition originating in the southeastern, gulf state of Veracruz, Mexico. In recent years, it has evolved into a transnational practice; Chicano and Mexican immigrant communities in various population centers of the U.S. have adopted Son Jarocho as protest music within the immigration rights movement, and as an affirmation of their own rich cultural identity (Hernandez, 2). Chicanos are part of a radical revitalization of the tradition, repositioning the music within a modern context, a process is contingent on a transnational cultural exchange between communities in Veracruz and the U.S. This thesis is structured as follows: first, I will provide a historical context, leading to a brief review of the literature examining the modern context, and a description of the *fandango*. The subsequent section seeks to establish a familiarity with Son Jarocho's instrumentation, and the distinct manner of instrument construction. The penultimate portion of the paper contains a two-part description of my field research, and the final section of the paper will discuss conclusions on the nature of Son Jarocho's transnational presence and adaptation in the Chicano context.

To gain qualitative data for my own inquiry into Son Jarocho in a transnational setting, I relied primarily on the ethnographic method of participant observation. In the area of music and expressed culture, particularly Son Jarocho, interviews were not a central component of my field research; rather, I interacted with and spoke with musicians and community members simply by attending are participating in various Son

---

[1] Italics will be used for words in Spanish, though it will cease to be italicized if it appears frequently throughout the document

Jarocho related events. In both the U.S. and Mexican context, I attended Son Jarocho group classes and fandagos, experiencing both the informal group class setting and the community space of the fandango, an event and key component of Son Jarocho I will elaborate upon. In addition to employing participant observation and interacting with community members, I acquired basic proficiency playing two of the primary Son Jarocho instruments as part of my research as a musician.

Contextualizing Son Jarocho

Son Jarocho originates in a tropical region referred to as the *Sotavento* located what is now modern day southern Veracruz, characterized by its diverse ethnic and racial composition. It's resistance-rooted origins can be traced back to as early as 1776, evidenced in a colonial edict banning *El Chuchumbe*, which wittingly mocked the colonial hegemony, specifically the supposed chastity of catholic and colonial figures of authority (Hernández, Sánchez, 187). As the primary point of entry into New Spain during the colonial rule of the Spanish, Veracruz also functioned as the colony's slave port (Madrid 26). When the Spanish sought to ameliorate a labor shortage brought on by the rapid extermination of the majority of the indigenous population through exposure to old world diseases, they initiated a massive importation of slaves from West Africa (Díaz-Sanchez, Hernandez 188). The magnitude of this importation was such that they outnumbered the Spanish population three to one by the end of the 16th century, becoming the largest slave population in all of New Spain (Madrid 26). While this influx eventually balanced out by the middle of the 17th century, the significant presence of West Africans in Veracruz challenges a both a common historical perception that black Mexican populations are nonexistent. It also refutes the pervasive Mexican nationalist belief of the *mestizaje* of the Spanish and Indigenous populations, which while true in the vast majority of Mexico, denies the existence of *Afromestizos* in areas such as Veracruz. The presence of West Africans was an essential part of the radically uneven social climate in which the Indigenous, Europeans and West Africans cultures interacted. While it is difficult to ascertain the extent of influence of these various cultures, especially in the case of West African slaves, it is of important historical context to note the uneven social dynamics and conditions of transculturation that characterize the origins of the tradition.

The literature describing the contemporary state of the Son Jarocho movement, or as it is often referred to in Spanish language literature *el movimiento jaranero,* is not in abundance. Mexican scholars are responsible for majority of the body of work on this topic, with the more recent literature primarily taking the form of graduate theses. While this literature acknowledges the adoption of Son Jarocho in various cities in the Unites States, a focus on this particular aspect of transnational scope is in large part the product of recent wave of post-grad literature written by various Chicano identifying scholars, in English. This literature focuses on the adoption of Son Jarocho as a reclamation of Mexican heritage and identity, along with a reorienting of the tradition within a distinct urban context. In a 2004 article that delves into the cultural politics of the Chicano music scene in Los Angeles, Victor Viesca discusses Son Jarocho's impact and importance, owed in large part to the vastly influential groups *Quetzal* and the earlier group Los Lobos. Although this article focuses on the appropriation of Son Jarocho in a band setting as opposed to a communal one, it presents some insights that are valid in both contexts. Viesca, along with another scholar, Hernandez, express that by adopting a form of traditional, rural Mexican music, Chicanos are not only affirming their Mexican roots, but are conveying their solidarity with the Mexican people and particularly the cause of immigrant rights (Hernandez, 2012). In this sense, Son Jarocho has been repurposed for political resistance in a new urban context, rejecting the dominant anti-immigrant culture and pro-white political hegemony, while asserting a distinct cultural identity. Addressing the issue of reinterpretation and adoption, Hernandez raises the point that authenticity is virtually irrelevant in this case, as urban practitioners are not concerned with preserving an 'authentic' practice. We will see later how this repurposing does not necessarily mean an alteration of the fundamental aspects of Son Jarocho, and may actually fortify of these aspects, regardless of an added political inclination (Hernandez, 2012).

The final and most important component in establishing a context for Son Jarocho, is a description of the fandango, the communal nucleus of the tradition. I have assembled the following defining traits from my various field experiences of the fandango in the U.S. and Vercruz. A fandango can occur anywhere, outside in a plaza or by a river, in a living room, at a rally, or a wedding. It is an open, non-exclusive space where a community gathers to enjoy each other's company and both participate and observe. As opposed to a conventional performance with a predetermined length and program, the fandango has a non-specified duration and the *sones* preformed are decided on the spot. Following this informal nature, the fandango does not adhere to the performer audience binary present in typical music concerts or performances. Participation does not depend on experience level, experts and beginners can play together without any issues. Due to the nature of Son Jarocho's simple harmonic structure and somewhat standardized repertoire, people can simply join in as they please. Although there are often chairs placed in for community members to spectate, the *fandango* is not being preformed specifically *for* them, rather, the musicians and dancers are doing it for their own enjoyment while including those who are not playing at the time. This dynamic is evident in the layout of the musicians in relation to each other and their dancing counterparts: they play towards each other, creating the energetic core of the music. This ‘core’ is organized around the *tarima*, a wooden percussive instrument in the form of a rectangular box on which the dancers stand on, and are responsible for producing the rhythmic heartbeat of the music, with hard-soled shoes. The musicians pack themselves tightly around it, usually on three sides, so leaving one side open for on-looking members of the community who are present at the fandango but not currently partaking in the music or dance. If a family hosts the fandango at their home, a common setting, they will often provide food, with other members of the community contributing drinks or other food items, akin to a potluck. Finally, a fandango is organized and run solely by the community, with no commercial intention, and without the involvement of state bodies or exterior entities.

Instrumentation and Repertoire

As opposed to the more popular styles of regional Mexican music’s such as *Norteño* or *Mariachi*, Son Jarocho’s repertoire is made up of hundreds of different *sones.* A *son* is not simply a different word for a song. Although it is analogous in the sense of referring to a standard ‘tune’ in a repertoire, it does not function as song does. Songs have a generally fixed length and predetermined duration and sequence of verses and choruses. On the contrary, a son does not have a specified duration. While there are perhaps twenty or so sones heard most often at the fandango, each time they are played will turn out differently, based on stamina, liveliness, available dancers, and any number of other human factors and limitations. *La Bamba,* a son that many have only heard the commercialized rock song adaptation of, may last ten minutes on the short side, fifteen in a middle range, or on some occasions may carry on beyond forty minutes. The unspecified length of a *son* is made possible by several parameters. Each son has three basic sections: the instrumental section, the verse, and the chorus, and a corresponding cache of verses from which any can be sung. These sections are of varying lengths and structures in each son. Each son begins with the instrumental section; the chords played during this section are not altered for the verse, this allows anyone with the desire to do so to begin singing a verse without any indication. There is no designated singer, the verse section simply begins when someone decides to start singing a verse; anyone who feels the confidence and desire to sing can do so. In the majority of sones, the chords remain unchanged during the chorus as well, which will sometimes include a call and response. When the verse and chorus are completed, the instrumental section returns, and continues until someone feels the urge to sing another verse and chorus.

Son Jarocho is performed with a unique ensemble of percussive and stringed instruments, further distancing itself from Mariachi, a derivative of *Son Jaliscense*, which predominantly features brass instruments such as the trumpet and tuba and violin, and the accordion in *Norteño*. None of the Son Jarocho instruments are found elsewhere, even in the case of *violin tuxteco,* or *arapa jarocho*, which are variations of the violin and harp. While there is a degree of regional diversity, the *jarana* and *requinto,* two guitar-like instruments, and the percussive tarima, are the most commonly encountered instruments. Each provide a distinctly fundamental element of the music: the jarana defines the harmony, the requinto and voice produce the melodic content, and the tarima is responsible for the rhythmic base.

The jarana serves the vital role of providing the harmonic structure as well as a degree of the rhythmic content. Its harmonic role is apparent in its configuration: the strings are organized in five courses, three of which are paired strings played as single string, and two outer individual strings. The jarana is found commonly in four different sizes, from smallest to largest: *mosquito, primera, segunda,* and *tercera.* They are all are tuned the same way, yet each is in a different register. When played in unison, they construct a vast harmonic canvas comprised of the several registers being heard simultaneously. Jaranas are exclusively strummed; the distinct strumming patterns and techniques allow for the jarana to take on rhythmic responsibility in addition to harmonic structure. As the harmony nearly always remains entirely fixed, improvisation takes place in the area of varying and experimenting with the strumming pattern. While jaranas are found in other regional Mexicans music's, such as *Son Huasteco*, the *jarana huasteca* is an entirely different instrument, with a distinct tuning, string configuration, construction and of course, playing technique.

The requinto, or simply, the *guitarra de son*, is the primary melodic instrument, used almost exclusively for the production of melodic lines. Its configuration is far more familiar: four single strings, arranged in sequence from lowest to highest pitch. The requinto player is given the task of "declaring" the *son*, by playing a kind of melodic announcement before all other instruments enter, that indicates the son that will be played. For the remainder of the son, the requinto plays a mixture of set figures while experienced players will conceive of improvised variations. Unlike the jarana, the requinto does not come in five distinct size variations, but rather is found most in the two sizes of primero and segundo, while the latter is far more common (Castro 12). The requinto is played with a long plectrum that is held similarly as a pencil, except that the non-playing side is threaded between the middle and pointer finger. The string is struck in a percussive motion, and unless the player is producing a rapid burst of notes, only down-strokes are used.

The *leona*, or simply, the *guitarra grande* contains the lowest tonal register and is the largest of the stringed, guitar-like instruments in the ensemble. It is akin to the cello in its range, and somewhat in its timbre. It is technically considered the larger brother to the requinto, and although it is played using the same plectrum based down-stroke technique, it serves a distinct function from the central melodic role of the requinto. Although the leona has a bass-like range the playing style is more akin to the requinto; in a sense the leona player creates a counter melodic texture to the requinto melody. The notes are often very syncopated in their execution, and ornamental in both execution and pitch, further distancing the *leona* from a traditional bass role in the ensemble.

The influence of Spanish music can be discerned in the close relation of the jarana to the Spanish baroque guitar. In both it's appearance and tuning, and string arrangement, it is clear the baroque guitar is the predecessor to the jarana, and this also explains similarities to contemporary North African and Middle Eastern instruments that also share this common ancestor (Castro, 8). The baroque guitar also features five courses, or four courses with the string highest in pitch being individual; this is near identical to the farana's arrangement of three inner courses with a two individual strings on either side. In effect, both instruments are played as five string instruments.

There are several percussive instruments found in Son Jarocho. The most characteristic is the *quijada*, a completely dried out donkey or horse jawbone found in various Latin American traditional music's. The jawbone is left out to dry in the sun and sometimes is boiled to remove excess muscle and skin. It is played using a mixed technique of scraping the teeth with a long wooden or ivory pick in tandem with striking the base of the jawbone with the palm of the hand. Each of these actions produce a completely distinct sound: the teeth scraping produces a kind of shaker like noise as the pick is run rapidly across an entire row of teeth, while the palm strike results in a sustained rattling of all the loose teeth in jawbone, which lasts about a half of a second depending on the resonance of the jawbone. Teeth often fall out of the quijada when it is not held in the upright position; if this were not so and the teeth are modified in anyway so as to not fall out, the looseness required for the essential rattling properties of the quijada are lost. Other common percussive instruments include the cajón, and the tambourine.

The most important percussive instrument in the ensemble is the tarima. Its function is to outline and provide the core rhythm upon which the other instruments ground themselves and elaborate. The tarima takes the form of a large wooden rectangular box with a height of around six inches, and in many different widths but usually wide enough for two people to comfortably move around on. The rhythmic patterns played on the tarima are produced by wearing hard soled shoes and stomping directly onto the wooden top of the box, which contains a large hole in it's side in order to allow the sound to emanate. The playing of the tarima comprises the fundamental dancing portion of Son Jarocho, which is why referring to Son Jarocho purely as a musical form does not provide a complete picture.

Son Jarocho's distinction from other regional music's of Mexico is also evidenced in the particular manner of construction of the instruments, which is also exclusive to the Son Jarocho luthier tradition. The most idiosyncratic aspect of the construction method is the excavation of essentially the entire body of the instrument from a single piece of wood, without the use of lamination methods common the vast majority of luthier traditions. This is to say that the neck, body and back pieces, with the exception of the top and fingerboard, are a single piece of wood. This means that the wood must be selected carefully as to accommodate all those parts that normally do not have to be sourced from a single piece of wood, or even the same tree. However, the result is an instrument with incredible resonance due to less seams and partitions. One piece of wood vibrates more than several glued together pieces. This construction method also provides a degree of added resiliency and durability, as the instruments are less prone to incidents of warping due to the tropical climate, which is a difficult environment for wooden string instruments that are highly sensitive to changes in humidity.

Field Research: A Personal Introduction to Son Jarocho

In the first leg of my research, I attended several workshops in the greater Los Angeles area. My very first encounter with Son Jarocho took place at the Eastside Café in East L.A., an autonomous, donation-based community space which offers Son Jarocho workshops, at beginner and intermediate levels. The class was scheduled for 10am, and I arrived about 45 minutes late, to find a completely locked up façade. About fifteen minutes later, I was about to drive home when I noticed some people crossing the street, totting black instrument cases of various sizes—class was still on, just slightly delayed. I had no instrument, no prior experience, and had no personal ties to anyone in the class. Regardless, I was invited to watch, and participate in two instances. During the portion of the class that focused on *zapateado*, I was encouraged to join in; I learned some of the fundamentals, specifically the fundamental "café con pan" pattern. Towards the end of the class, a woman lent me her jarana. After a few moments of examining the finger placement of the other jarana players, I determined the chords and participated a son for the first time. By the end of this single session I had gained a basic understanding of the musical elements of Son Jarocho, and experienced a kind of inclusiveness and openness to me as a stranger, that I hadn't ever been exposed to.

Two months later, I returned to Los Angeles and continued where I had left off previously. This second leg of my initial research began with attending a fandango for the first time. In order to diversify my experience of Son Jarocho in Los Angeles, I reached out to another community space, El Centro Cultural De Mexico, in Santa Ana. I spoke to the coordinator of the Son Jarocho classes there, who informed me that with the Christmas season in full swing, classes were on standby, but invited me to attend a fandango instead. All of the *jaraneros* from various parts greater Los Angeles area were invited, uniting a larger community usually separated by the vast urban sprawl Los Angeles and the surrounding metropolitan areas. I arrived at the Fandango with three friends, all of whom spoke Spanish in some capacity. As we approached the house we were somewhat hesitant to go inside, feeling a bit like strangers entering a party uninvited: the woman who had invited me was still on her way up from Santa Ana. This minor anxiety was relieved after were greeted and welcomed upon entering, and were immediately engulfed in sound of the music. As we sat and watched, we marveled to each other about the incredible volume being produced. The musicians and dancers were playing without the use of any kind of amplification, yet we could not hear each other's remarks without raising our voices significantly. The surges of z*apateado* were almost deafening, demanding the attention all nearby ears.

On one side of the elongated living room, which was the central musical space, there were several tables accompanied by chairs. These accommodations allowed for people to observe while eating. On the other side of the room, the musicians congregated on three sides of the tarima, while the side facing the tables was left open to allow dancers ample space to step on and off. Although the positioning of the musicians and tarima allowed for easy viewing by those observing, the musicians played towards the dancers, focusing on each other. Musicians and dancers came and went, moving in and out of the musical space as they pleased. Children and babies were brought up on the tarima to learn through direct immersion. A man lent me his jarana and showed me the chords, and a percussionist friend of mine was given a chance to play the cajón. When we decided to make our exit at around 1am, the music was showing no signs of stopping. I asked the women from Santa Ana, who had invited me, when things would wind down. She said probably not for a few hours, because people wanted to enjoy themselves in light of the amount of distance some had covered to be present.

Over the next two weeks, I attended two Son Jarocho classes taught in Santa Clara, at the Centro Cultural De México. The individuals organizing these classes, much like those I had meet at the Eastside Café in East L.A., were completely open to my participation, and receptive to my interest even as a stranger. To accommodate newcomers, or those who simply did not have instruments, the center possessed several extra jaranas to lend out. Roxana, the leader of the class, would begin by suggesting various *sones* to work on. The class members would then deliberate and decide which they felt needed the most work. Once selected, Roxana begin with the *Rasgueo,* the fundamental strumming patter. The class practiced this with muted strings, in order to isolate it as a rhythmic pattern. This was an interesting exercise in separating rhythm of the strumming from the actual harmony produced by the chords. In many years playing guitar, and focusing primarily on chord progressions, I had never encountered this subtle distinction, which I have discovered, can bring a lot more richness in detail even when only two or three chords are being used. In many cases of music, the strumming of chords is not often paid much attention to beyond its basic function of providing a harmonic underpinning. Son Jarocho places equal importance in the dynamics and rhythmic subtleties of strumming as in the melodic content, enriching the musical texture.

Next, Roxana shifted the class' focus to the vocal component of Son Jarocho, an entirely new territory in my thus far brief education. Using a large whiteboard, we worked on one verse, which in this case was a call and response. Roxana stressed the importance of projecting as much as possible, in order to be heard, and responded to. When it came my turn to *Pergonar,* to lead a verse, I surprised myself in the sheer volume that I produced, a vocal capacity I had not experienced in any other context, especially not when attempting to sing something for the first time. I was able to intuitively produce a melody, and this gave me a newfound freedom of musical expression I had never before encountered.

A few days later, having attended a few classes and a fandango, I set out for Veracruz, to attempt to immerse myself in the context in which Son Jarocho comes from, and procure an instrument. I had acquired some contacts and locations from members of the Santa Ana community, but had virtually no idea how the events of my trip would play out. I flew to Mexico and then traveled by bus to Xalapa, Veracruz, where several of the contacts I had been given were based, and I had been told would be a good place to get an idea of Son Jarocho in it's place of origin. After a few days of asking around and following up on various leads, I had been to a monthly fandango held by a Son Jarocho class, and had a long conversation with another teacher and luthier. But a contact that my mother helped connect me with through a friend, suggested that I leave Xalapa immediately, and join her friend and mentor Joel Cruz Castellanos in the countryside, rather than remain in Xalapa. I took her advice, and after another four-hour bus ride, I arrived in Santiago Tuxtla, one of four small towns in the rural, agriculturally based region of Los Tuxtlas, in southern Veracruz.

To my incredible fortune, Joel Cruz Castellanos, who I later learned is a member of the internationally renowned Son Jarocho group, Los Cojolites, took me into to his home and community for the next six days. My stay coincided with a forty-day festival called the "Fandango de la Rama" in which a fandango occurs every night from December 25th through February 2nd. This intense immersion played a large role in shaping my understanding the social and cultural context that Son Jarocho is rooted in. When I arrived at Joel's house on Sunday at around 6:30pm, no one seemed to be home. I soon learned that I had awoken everyone in the house; they were sleeping in recovery from the Saturday night fandango, which had lasted until 8am that morning. Two hours later, a group of us headed out of Joel's house with instruments slung over our shoulders. We crossed through the plaza, and continued down a gentle slope until we crossed a river by bridge, and then headed up a steep embankment on the other side. On a sleepy Sunday evening, the town was quiet, yet a far-off rhythmic din could be heard. As we crested the hill, the clamor grew just as a large crowd gathered around a white canopy came into view.

The fandango was in full swing. Tamales and fruit laced liquors circulated as thirty or more *jaraneros* as well as several *zapateadores* on the tarima created an impenetrable wall of sound. Similar to the arrangement I had observed in Los Angeles, the musicians were tightly packed on one side of the tarima facing the dancers, opposite several rows of plastic white chairs, in which community members could relax and enjoy the fandango. Standing within the tightly packed cluster of musicians, which included children, adolescents, young adults, and elderly folk, my own strumming became almost inaudible, joining the chorus of other jaranas of various shapes and sizes. The energy created by so many individual moving parts contributing to a whole is difficult to describe. It is both exhilarating and invigorating. After several hours of continuous music the crowd began to diminish significantly. It was between midnight and one in the morning, around the time when fandangos usually end on weeknights, as I would learn over the course of the next few days.

For the next six days, I joined Joel at the fandango each night, for anywhere from three to five hours. During the day, as we walked around the village, spotting Iguanas in their lofty tree-top perches, it seemed that half the people we passed ask where the fandango would be held that night. He would promptly respond that it would be at so and so's house, often giving them some general directions if they were unsure of its location. While Joel is by no means required to be at each fandango, he is there every night, for the bulk of its duration. He explains that an experienced player needs to take a leadership role in assuring that fandango is properly set up, and bring the energy and guidance to the music. This commitment to the fandango comprises one aspect of the social responsibilities he takes on, voluntarily. When he is not touring in the U.S. or in Mexico making a living through performing with group Los Cojolites and leading workshops, he provides various weekly workshops entirely free of cost for members his community. His students, who in large part are made up of a young demographic, gather outside his house to take classes in various instruments, many of which Joel lends out to them at no cost. The classes are entirely optional, and it is by their own will and interest that his students partake in the classes. During my stay in Santiago I witnessed their involvement. There active challenged my notion of Son Jarocho as a traditional music, with no modern cultural relevance—their participation suggests this is an evolving cultural tradition with the capacity to be adapted and reiterated.

Field Research: Performing Transnationally

The following chapter of my research took the form of a somewhat spontaneous opportunity—my professor had arranged for our class to eat dinner at a restaurant in Austin at which some old bandmates of his were going to play some Son Jarocho. In hopes of joining them at some point, I brought along the jarana I had procured in Santiago Tuxtla. As our class ate dinner, a group of four musicians, three Chicanos and one White man began to play for us. They sat facing each other, around a small square tarima. Although no one danced on it, they positioned it as the focal point. I learned later that the women who regularly dances *zapateado* with them had lost her mother that same day, in her absence they had chosen to set up the unused tarima in her honor. About forty minutes into it, one of the members of the group broke a string, and as they stopped to retune, he noticed my jarana, and invited me to join them. A thousand miles away from where I had begun to learn Son Jarocho, I jumped into playing with several people I had never met. Most of the *sones* they were playing, I had become somewhat familiar with in Santiago Tuxtla, and had no problem playing along with. While I still didn't know any verse, I was more than occupied with listening for the groups' dynamic shifts. In La Bamba, one member of the group sang a modified version of the chorus, reflecting their own adaptation of the music to a U.S. context. He replaced the typical choral line, *'yo no soy marinero'* with *'yo no soy de la migra,'* which translates to, I am not from, nor do I support the Border Patrol. This declaration of his solidarity with the immigrant rights cause is an example of the capacity for communities living in different social contexts to adapt Son Jarocho to their own reality, while preserving the communal enterprise inherent in its practice. Even the performance, show-like setting of this instance of Son Jarocho in Austin did not impede the inclusive communal aspect of the tradition, in that I was invited to join them as a fellow Jaranero.

My following research experience brought me to Seattle Washington, where I joined Joel, who had become a great friend of mine in only the short period I had spent with him in his hometown Santiago Tuxtla. As part of the lifelong effort that he has chosen to dedicate himself to, he embarks on lengthy travel sessions to the U.S. Performing with his group and leading workshops in numerous cities where Son Jarocho practicing communities are both a means of supporting himself as a musician and continuing to actively participate and reinforce the transnational cultural exchange which enables the music to continue to thrive internationally. On this particular tour, he visited The Bronx, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Santa Ana, San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle. I met up with him on the final leg of two-month extravaganza, where he was staying with the two lead members of the Fandango Project in Seattle. This group holds weekly workshops for active members of the Son Jarocho community, organizes fandangos, and performs regular outreach to educated the general population, and generate visibility that may attract new members into the community. I joined James, Miguel and Joel in giving presentations at several bilingual schools in the Seattle area, at preschools, elementary schools, and high schools. On one occasion, we visited the Casa Latina, a non-profit that provides educational and various other forms of aid to Latino seasonal workers, and accompanied their morning proceedings, in which workers are provided with various job assignments negotiated and mediated by the organization. We brought a several extra jaranas with us, to encourage those interested to play along. A number of people gathered around to hear the music, and while most preferred to listen a few picked up jaranas to which James provided some basic instruction. Although the nature of the visit was not to give a workshop that would not have been possible what is primarily a work environment, there was still some basis for inclusion and exchange rather than a closed, rigid performance. To culminate Joel's week in Seattle, a fandango was held at one of the community member's houses. This fandango, and the Seattle community, was distinct from what I had experienced in Los Angeles. In terms of demographics, the community was a diverse mix of Latinos of different origins, as well as Caucasians with ties to these communities, and spoke Spanish. Additionally, while some were Seattle born Chicanos, others Mexicans nationals who are working or studying. In Seattle, the Son Jarocho movement has built a community across racial and nationalistic lines, expanding the notions Son Jarocho's community building capacity in the United States.

In my final research endeavor, I returned to Veracruz, to attend the fifteenth edition of the annually held *Seminario de Son Jarocho* in near the city of Jaltipan Veracruz. The *seminario* is a weeklong intensive on a very Rustic ranch. There is no electricity save for a generator to run a water pump for the bathroom at certain hours of the day, and everyone attending must bring tents to sleep in. Each person selects an instrument from the Son Jarocho ensemble; for the remainder of the week they are paired with an instructor specializing in that instrument, in the form of group classes. Workshops offered included beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels for jarana and requinto, the most common instruments, Jarocho harp, *zapateado*, Jarocho fiddle, and leona. I elected to learn the leona, which is the instrument that Joel instructs. Around forty people attended the *seminario,* hailing from various distinct backgrounds and places. Many of those attending were from Mexico City, Cuernavaca and the neighboring state of Oaxaca, others from the farther reaches of states such as Sinaloa, and many were from the large cities in Veracruz such as the Port of the same name, and the capital, Xalapa. But part of the demographic also reflected Son Jarocho's transnational scope—several people were from cities such as Chicago, San Francisco, Seattle, and myself, from Los Angeles. Geographically, there were even further away connections; there was a couple from France, and another from Germany. The isolated ranch to which this multinational crown arrived, is by no means easy to reach. From Mexico City, I took a four-hour bus to the port of Veracruz, followed by another five-hour bus to Acayúcan, and another hour-long car ride out to the ranch. By the end of the week, although short lived, many friendships had been formed, several communal inside jokes had been born, and many hoped to return the following year.

The Recovery of Son Jarocho, and the Fandango

To understand how the vital the fandango is to the propagation and existence of Son Jarocho, it is important to review the recent 20th historical context from which the current state of Son Jarocho is far removed. During the first half of the century, the Mexican nation state undertook several projects with the aim of homogenizing the disparate regional expressions of culture into a recognizable definitively nationalist, Mexican identity. In the early 20th century, the Mexican government turned to Mexico's variety of regional music's, in order to build, in Ishtar Cordona's words, a "national cultural inheritance" with which to bolster a national identity (Cordona, 134). Rather than preserving existing traditions, these efforts extracted these regional expressions from their original context, stripping them of their locally based cultural meaning. This elimination of original context was facilitated through the geographical relocation of rurally based music traditions and culture to centralized urban centers such as Mexico City, and the standardization and synthesis of regionally based music into a homogeneous, easily accessible repertoire. A twenty-five minute son is not an easily packaged, radio friendly item, nor does it function as a tune to be played along with a score of other Mexican songs in a performance setting. For these reasons, the social context of the fandango was forfeited in exchange for what Cordona terms Son Jarocho *"Folclorizada"* (Cardona, 133), in essence an easily assessable, easily reproduced, approximation.

It is important to note that this was not a finite or definitive process, but rather a gradual dilution of Son Jarocho into a kind of feature of a standardized national repertoire, just a different genre of song that might be preformed or in danced by an academically trained dancer or musician. This is to say that in large part, Son Jarocho simply lost it's meaning and intended purpose through the separation from the original rural setting and communal context. While the fandango, community based Son Jarocho persisted in some isolated communities, it nearly perished in favor of the synthesist commercial approach being carried out in the urban centers (García de León, 58).

Fortunately, during the late seventies, several kinds recovery efforts sought to combat this declensional trend of commercialization and standardization. *Mono Blanco*, an early Son Jarocho group comprised of several musicians and anthropologists, is often credited for their concerted effort to seek out and learn form the surviving practitioners of the music and essentially re-incubate this cultural practice back into the hands of the communities from which it emerged (Figueroa-Hernández, 312). Along with other groups and collectives of their nature, Mono Blanco accomplished this through traveling to numerous localities over the course of several years, organizing and establishing open workshops targeted particularly at the younger members of the communities, namely, the children. This particular effort represents a particular component in a larger recovery endeavor, the eventual success of which led to the modern reincarnation of Son Jarocho. Another equally crucial component of this endeavor was the establishment of *El*

Encuentro de Jaraneros de Tlacotalpan. This event, which continues today, initiated the gathering of *jaraneros* from all around Veracruz, exposing the regional variations that can still be found, and vastly increasingly the visibility of music to the younger generations (Figueroa-Hernández, 313). This annual event coupled with other efforts sparked a massive revival and reinvigoration of Son Jarocho in Veracruz, which has ultimately reached far beyond the borders of the Veracruz, and even of Mexico, finding it way into Chicano communities all across the United States. They paved the way for the modern trajectory of *el movimiento jaranero*, of the fandango.

Conclusions

In the world of contemporary revitalizations of folk traditional folk music, Son Jarocho is unique in both its transnational scope and continued growth and evolution. Why don't Mariachi, or even Norteña, the two most popular Mexican music genres in the U.S., fulfill the role of Son Jarocho? Why do communities as far removed from Mexico as Seattle, Portland and Philadelphia, learn, practice and organize around a particular regional music found in one of the southernmost Mexican states, in place of the various other far more familiar and popular possibilities?

In his lengthy treatment on Son Jarocho from the early 2000s, Antonio Garcia de Léon expresses concern over the fundamental root of the music, the fandango, being forgone by the rise of Son Jarocho groups (Léon, 58). While his concern may have been more justified in the mid-2000s before the fandango had gained it current status, my research suggests that the two seemingly counter worlds of individualistic art, and the more traditional fandango based Son Jarocho do not impede each other. Although

Chicano's have reoriented Son Jarocho to address and embody a political stance, the social element of the fandango, along with the musical instrumentation and tradition have not been altered (Cardona, 145). At Son Jarocho's core, is the fandango, a celebration rooted in rural origins, which before its most recent revival, had been relegated to the position of irrelevant, and counter-progress. The rurally based notions of communion, of fellowship, of gathering as a community, inherent to the fandango are rendered all the more relevant in an urban setting that often stifles those processes.

The growing value the Chicano community place in the fandango is paramount in facilitating the ongoing transnational cultural exchange. I witnessed this firsthand in Seattle, where Joel imparted his knowledge, expertise and support in distinct venues. He gave personal instruction in numerous more advanced instruments such as requinto and violin, as well as leading group workshops and taking a central role in leading the fandango. In this manner, the relationship with Veracruz natives like Joel form part of the conduit through which this link remains intact. Although Chicano's exercise their own agency in repurposing Son Jarocho as a tool for active political protest, and there are recording artists who intentionally diverge from the traditional form, the connection to Veracruz as the source of inspiration and knowledge, and the importance of the fandango continues. For instance, when the Jaraneros in Austin altered the chorus in La Bamba to include a denunciation of the Border Patrol, they declared their political solidarity, entirely within the inclusive environment of the fandango, allowing me, a stranger, to join in with them.

Another instance of this ongoing exchange occurs every year at the border between San Diego and Tijuana. During this unprecedented event, musicians from either side of the border meet at an area of the border to participate in a Fandango that is effectively taking place in both the U.S. and Mexico. This inherently political gathering resists the U.S. government's imposition of a highly militarized effort to prevent this very transnational relationship and exchange from occurring. In this sense, the fandango and its multinational participants transcend the exclusionary politics of U.S., revalidating a centuries old cultural expression from the distant past, as a radical form of resistance within the modern circumstances.

Epilogue

Recently, a friend asked if I felt that learning Son Jarocho had in some ways “decolonized” my approach to music. I wasn’t sure what to make of the question, but there seemed to be some validity to it after some thought. Although the literal meaning of the word decolonization has little pertinence in this case, a more metaphorical reading gave room for some insight into the aspects of Son Jarocho that have challenged my conceptions of musical expression and performance. My introduction to playing music came in the form of cello performance. I felt an immense pressure to succeed within a binary failure or success dichotomy in which performances often seemed more like exams than an act of artistic expression. Son Jarocho, on the contrary, is not dictated by the hierarchical structure that dictates classical music: musicians of all experience levels coexist at the fandango, and the emphasis is lies in enjoyment and sheer catharsis, rather than an intense pressure to succeed. In it’s reversal of those conventions, Son Jarocho has introduced a platform for expressivity unparalleled in all my years as a classical musician. In only a few months of participation, I have gained a capacity to improvise melodically with my voice, a kind of freedom and musical expression I never had access to before.

Bibliography

Cardona, Ishtar.
2011. Fandangos de Cruce: La Reapropiación del Son Jarocho como Patrimonio Cultural. Revista De Literaturas Populares 6(1):131-146.

Castro, Pablo.
2004. La Jarana y el Requinto Jarochos. Encuentro Nacional de Guitarra. Querétaro: Escuela Laudería del INBA.

Chávez, Alex E.
2015 So ¿te fuiste a Dallas? (So you went to Dallas?/So you got screwed?): Language, Migration, and the Poetics of Transgression. Journal of Linguistic Anthropology 25(2):150–172.

Díaz-Sánchez, Micaela and Alexandro Hernández.
2013 The Son Jarocho as Afro-Mexican Resistance Music. The Journal of Pan African Studies 6(1):187-209.

Figueroa-Hernández, Rafael.
2015. Yo No Soy Marinero, Soy Capitan: Usos Sociopolíticos Contemporáneos del Fandango y el Son Jarocho. Revista Internacional 12(1):305-321.

Garcia de León, Antonio, and Liza Rumazo.
2006. Fandango: El Ritual del Mundo Jarocho a travez de los Siglos. Veracruz: Instituto Veracruzano de la Cultura.

Hernandez, Alexander.
2012 Creative Renewal of the Son Jarocho Fandango in Los Angeles. National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Annual Conference.

Loza, Steven.
1992 From Veracruz to Los Angeles: The Reinterpretation of the Son Jarocho. Latin American Music Review 13(2):179-194.

Madrid, Alejandro L.
2012 Music in Mexico. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Viesca, Victor.
2004 The Battle of Los Angeles: The Cultural Politics of Chicana/o Music in the Greater Eastside. American Quarterly 56(3):719-739.