



LEFT TO RIGHT: ANNETTE TORRES, LEAH ROSE GALLEGOS, HECTOR FLORES, DENISE CARLOS, JOSE CANO, DANIEL FRENCH AND DAVID FLORES

THE STORYTELLERS

Las Cafeteras puts a modern spin on Son Jarocho folk music to tell it like it is

For many Americans, the first introduction to the infectiously happy ditty “La Bamba” was either circa 1958 from the crooning Chicano rocker Ritchie Valens or circa 1987 from a pompadoured Lou Diamond Phillips playing the crooning Chicano rocker in the biopic *La Bamba*.

This Top 40 hit, however, is hundreds of years old.

“‘La Bamba’ is a traditional Son Jarocho song,” Leah Rose Gallegos explains. “It’s been remade by Ritchie Valens, Los Lobos and also us.”

Gallegos is a member of seven-piece L.A. band Las Cafeteras, playing WOW Hall Feb. 4.

The Las Cafeteras version, “La Bamba Rebelde,” from the 2012 album *It’s Time*, adds lyrics with a contemporary punch — about Arizona’s immigration laws (“contra leyes racistas en Arizona”) and not letting borders divide

people — but it is still very much rooted in Son Jarocho, a folk music tradition that originated in the Mexican state of Veracruz.

Gallegos’ bandmate Hector Flores described the music best when the band visited Seattle’s KEXP last year: “It’s basically slave music — a mix of African, indigenous, Spanish, Arabic beats, rhythms and rhymes that kind of coalesced during a time of degradation known as slavery, but out of this time came this very beautiful music that people used to communicate and talk about their surroundings.” He adds, “We’re using this traditional music to tell our stories about kids growing up in L.A.”

Gallegos points to the song “La Guacamaya” as an example. “We would sing this song over and over and over and sing these verses about this bird and one day we

were kind of discussing it and said, ‘What is a guacamaya?’ Some of us had never seen one in our life.”

The band decided that, for them, “La Guacamaya” was a symbol for “ghetto birds,” or the helicopters that buzz above the poor neighborhoods of East L.A. “We were rewriting to our own experiences,” Gallegos says.

The goal of Las Cafeteras, Gallegos adds, is to use “storytelling as a tool of empowerment” and encourage others to tell their own stories. Las Cafeteras has been incredibly effective in their mission — NPR has called the music “creative, socially conscious, it’s perfect.”

Perhaps this is because the band’s brand of Son Jarocho is, like “La Bamba,” so infectiously happy and emotive. Gallegos’ voice is a high, richly celebratory siren — it’s uncanny. Part-Apache and part-Yaqui, she learned to sing from Mexican traditional healers, or curanderos. “It was such a blessed introduction to the voice, she says. “I wasn’t so much learning technique or the musicality of it, or the science behind the voice, but I was learning to share the voice as a tool and almost as an offering.”

As she sings, she plays the quijada, a donkey jawbone used for percussion.

“The teeth of the jaw are a little loose so when you hit the side of it, it has a really nice jingling noise,” she says.

Gallegos, like many in the band, also performs a percussive dance — zapateado — on a wooden board. The other six members — Annette Torres, Daniel French, Hector Flores, David Flores, Denise Carlos and Jose Cano — sing and round out the Son Jarocho sound with a marimbol (a percussive instrument), a jarana segunda (an 8-string guitar from Veracruz), a requinto (a small-body guitar) and a cajón (a six-sided percussion box).

Las Cafeteras is gaining a reputation for high-energy live performances. When I bring this up to Gallegos, she laughs.

“I almost feel like the seven of us get somewhat possessed but in a really good way,” she says. “It has a lot to do with our experience of this creative expression through music. I think that itself makes the body and the mind feel really good. I think we get entrapped in the moment of being free.” ■

Las Cafeteras plays 8 pm Wednesday, Feb. 4, at WOW Hall; \$10 adv., \$12 door.

YOUNG GUNS

Young musicians lead the charge, from Music Today Festival to a Broadway House concert

For all the talk about classical music being your grandparents’ music, there sure seem to be plenty of young musicians heading in that direction.

At 8 pm Thursday, Jan. 29, at the UO’s Beall Hall, the school’s **sonos domum Ensemble** plays new music by emerging student composers in a free, fascinating concert that includes improvisations with help from the audience. In another event in the UO’s **Music Today Festival, Oregon Composers Forum Chamber Orchestra** plays more new music by UO composers 8 pm Saturday, Jan. 31, at Aasen-Hull Hall. On the afternoon of Friday, Jan. 30, at Beall, pianist **Naomi Kudo**, the 23-year-old winner of the prestigious 2008 Gilmore Young Artist Award, plays a free recital of music by Beethoven, Chopin and American composer Samuel Barber. Following on Sunday afternoon, Beall hosts the **Oregon Wind Ensemble’s** performance of music by 20th- and 21st-century composers like Morton Gould and Don Grantham.

Piano prodigy Franz Liszt was only 11 when he played his Vienna debut recital in 1822, and at 7:30 pm Tuesday, Feb. 3, at Beall, renowned pianist **Paul Barnes** will play the mighty “Sonata in B Minor” of this great

composer. Violist **Patricia McCarty** was also a prodigy, capturing major international awards while still in her teens. Since then she’s become an accomplished orchestral, chamber and solo player and teacher in New England; at 7:30 pm Monday, Feb. 2, McCarty joins the busy Portland pianist **Cary Lewis** at Beall in music by Bach, Beethoven, Brahms and David Avshalomov.

More musical youth brightens the Beall stage 7:30 pm Saturday, Jan. 31, at the **Oregon Mozart Players** concert featuring the winners (violinists **John Fawcett** of Bend and **Claire Wells** of Springfield) of OMP’s first annual Young Soloist Competition in, respectively, Dvořák’s “Violin Concerto” and a dazzling, folk music-inspired, neb-romantic contemporary concerto by Armenian composer Alexander Arutiunian. The band also plays Mozart’s sparkling *Paris Symphony* and the lovely pastoral “Ballade for Clarinet, Harp and String Orchestra” by contemporary composer Eric Ewazen.

At 7:30 pm Thursday, Feb. 5, at Beall, the **University Symphony’s** young orchestra players deliver a pair of popular Russian gems — “The Polovtsian Dances” from Borodin’s opera *Prince Igor* and Rimsky-Korsakov’s glorious *Scheherazade*.

At 7:30 pm Saturday, Feb. 7, at Central Lutheran Church, medieval flute specialist and musico-historical detective **Norbert Rodenkirchen** plays a free concert featuring his reconstruction of some of the mesmerizing music of the Pied Piper from the late 13th century. In another concert featuring historical instruments, **James Edwards** and **David Rogers** play 19th-century guitar duets by Mozart, Carulli, Sor and more on 3 pm Sunday, Feb. 8, at United Lutheran Church.

Speaking of guitarists, Nuevo Flamenco master **Jesse Cook**, whose music mixes flamenco, rumba and jazz elements, plays 8 pm Wednesday, Feb. 3, at McDonald Theatre.

There’s plenty more jazz this week and next, starting with “Save Your Love For Me” — the performance at 8 pm Thursday, Jan. 29, at The Shedd by superb saxophonist **Joe Manis** and singer **Siri Vik**, with music from the classic 1961 album *Nancy Wilson/Cannonball Adderley*. From 7:30 to 9:30 pm Friday, Feb. 6, The Shedd hosts the great Austin-based pianist and singer **Marcia Ball**, whose jazzy R&B shows are always upbeat. Finally, at 7:30 pm Saturday, Feb. 7, UO prof **Brian McWhorter** leads some of the UO’s top young jazzers and his Beta Collide partner, contemporary classical flutist **Molly Barth**, in a concert featuring original interpretations of 2015 Grammy-nominated songs at the intimate Broadway House, 911 W. Broadway (686-9270). — *Brett Campbell*