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The Best in World Music

Los de Abajo
Interview – 2003 BBC World Music Award

Lider Terán of Los de Abajo: Interview

by Jon Lusk (January 2002)

Lider Terán is the lead singer with Mexican roots pop group Los de Abajo. As one of the four original members of what has now become a nine-piece group, he often acts as one of their spokespeople. Even though his name closely resembles the Spanish for 'leader' (Líder), he insists the group has no leader they work collectively, all receiving equal pay.

Q: You're just about to release your second album. Briefly, how has your music changed since the first?

A: It's altered radically, sound-wise. Our music is now much more contemporary, and we are exploring new territory through the use of samplers and loops. We're also playing more traditional Mexican music as well as creating new fusions with rai, dub, rumba, etc...

Q: Your lyrics often express your politics, but most foreign audiences you play to don't understand Spanish. How do you feel about this? Would you sing in English in order to overcome this, or is the music the most important thing?

A: Clearly, lyrics are a fundamental part of our music and we would certainly like to experiment and incorporate other languages into our songs.

Q: Times were tough for Los de Abajo before you were signed to the Luaka Bop label. Do you find it more difficult to adhere to your early ideology as you become more successful?

A: No, just the opposite: music always dictates honesty and freshness in what we express and say. When music stops dictating that congruence with what we are, we will cease to exist.

Q: How important to you is it that foreign audiences should learn something about Mexican culture from your music?

A: It's a fundamental role for music to disseminate social and cultural information. We don't intend to carry a flag, but it's important to become a part of that bridge called interchange and cross breeding.

Q: What do you think of the term 'world music?' Is there an equivalent expression in Spanish, and how do you feel about being categorised in this way?

A: In Spanish it translates as 'música del mundo' (music of the world), a bit vague and ambiguous. However, since we understand that it's a term which aspires to embrace the diverse musical expressions of the world while taking into account identities belonging to each culture, it has great value. To us, being categorised in this manner is an opportunity to play with musical labels and break through the frontiers of

racism, to generate a multicultural melting pot.

Q: Some people believe that the fusion of local roots musics with popular and foreign styles is 'killing' world music. What are your thoughts on this? Is fusion killing world music?

A: On the contrary, it rejuvenates the language of popular music. And musical hybrids always travel from the avant-garde or cutting edge to become roots music in the future; it's a cycle that gives birth to new genres. World Music would die in a state of puritan stagnation without the benefit of such fusions.

Q: What is the biggest problem confronting groups like Los de Abajo in Mexico at the moment?

A: Obtaining performance spaces, like alternative clubs, in the different states of the country and the capital. Also it's hard to find festivals where a strong musical diversity can be heard.

Q: What is the most serious contemporary issue facing the Mexican people in general?

A: The political and economic crisis throughout Latin America, especially Argentina and Colombia. In Mexico, people don't believe in political institutions, as there is ever-growing unemployment and social inequality. On the other hand, civil rights movements and Zapatismo [the ideology of the Zapatista movement which is fighting for the rights of the indigenous people in Mexico's southern state of Chiapas] have renewed the people's hope. This is one of the most universally relevant struggles of these times, since it shows solidarity with Los De Abajo del mundo! [oppressed people everywhere].