

PREFACE

Not Another ‘Why do Mexicans/Latinos Love Morrissey?’ Book (As If A Bunch of Them Exist)

I WROTE THIS BOOK BECAUSE I, ALONG WITH MANY other Latina/o fans, got tired of the same ol’ questions of ‘why’ we love Moz. The question of Latino (and more specifically, Mexican and Chicano) Morrissey fandom, and what have now become stock, if not clichéd, explanations, are useful starting points, and indeed they highlight important contexts for understanding this seemingly unlikely affinity. In this book, though, I am less interested in asking that question again and producing the same evidence to show that, yes, a lot of Mexicans, Latinos/as and Chicanos/as *do* (as do many other groups of people) love Morrissey. We know these fans and communities exist, and it’s not really so strange after all. Rather, I am interested in asking the ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions, new questions that provide us with nuance, complexity, insight, and new ways to see, hear, and understand these fan communities in ‘Moz Angeles’ and around the borderlands.

What do Morrissey fans do to express their fandom? How do these fan expressions take shape? What local, national, global histories and politics inform this fandom? What cultural icons, and creative forms do these fans’ expressions take? How do fans take up, appropriate, and relate to Morrissey as a pop culture icon? What can we learn from Morrissey fan cultures that we may not be able to learn from other, more ‘appropriate’ Chicana/o-Latina/a (sub)cultural expressions? What is unique about Morrissey fan expressions from Chicana/o, Latina/o,



“South of the 60.”

Illustration by Michael Robinson, based on a sketch by the author.

Mexican, and other groups who live in the US-Mexico borderlands? And why consider fandom at all? Anything but ‘why do Mexicans/why do Latinos love Morrissey?’ again.

The first wave of ‘why do Latinos love Morrissey’ questions and the curiosity around Mexican and Chicano/a fandom in particular began to attract the attention of curious writers and movie makers around the time of the turn of the millennium—1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, years significantly marked by Morrissey’s first forays into and encounters with his US Latino/a and Latin American fans. In those years, Morrissey left the UK, fed up with unfavorable treatment by the media in his native country (the ‘pernickety chickenshits,’ as he calls them) and a lost court case that saw his former band mates sue him for back royalties.

At the turn of the millennium, Morrissey was living in Los Angeles, up in the hills of West Hollywood above Sunset Boulevard. During that time,

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he made his first solo venture into Latin America on his ¡Oye, Esteban! ('Hey, Steven!') tour, which made stops in Mexico, Chile, Argentina and Brazil. He was the opening act for the Mexican rock group, Jaguares, for shows in Anaheim, Berkeley, and San Diego, California. As Morrissey writes in his *Autobiography*, 'There are no Caucasian faces... The new Morrissey audience is not white—not here, at least.'¹ For Morrissey to call his latest group of fans 'his new Latino hearts' meant that the singer not only acknowledged that brown people were buying tickets and showing up in droves to his concerts, but that he wholly and enthusiastically embraced this 'new' audience (not so new, as it turns out). Moz's love for his 'new Latino hearts' represented a turn away from those in the UK who were perhaps over him, as well as a pointed rejection of 'those self-appointed fusspots,' the London music editors, with whom he shared a mutual dislike.

In 2016, we are in the middle of second wave of media-produced Latino-fan themed questions, this time with more of an emphasis on why the 'Mexicans and Morrissey' connection. The Mexican-Morrissey love affair question has been shored up mainly by the splash made by Mexrrissey in April 2015. The Mexico City-based 'supergoup,' as the *Los Angeles Times* describes them, is comprised of musicians from several of Mexico's top rock/pop bands, led by Camilo Lara of Mexican Institute of Sound. Other members include Ceci Bastida (Tijuana No!), Chetes (Zurdok), Jay De La Cueva (Moderatto/Titán), Adan Jodorowsky (Adanowsky), Liber Teran (Los de Abajo), and Alejandro Flores (described as 'Café Tacuba's favourite violin player' on Mexrrissey's website).² Collectively, Mexrrissey have reimagined some of Morrissey's best known songs into Mexican-sounding tunes, meaning a fusion of mariachi, cumbia, samba, and other 'Latin beats,' accompanied by Spanish/English lyrical mashups.

Mexrrissey is less a cover or tribute band and more of a celebratory musical formation that honors and emerges out of a set of affinities between Mexicans and Morrissey that have been nearly three generations in the making. Their contributions to the 'Mexico-Morrissey' affair are there for the world to see and hear. They put on an exciting, endearing

live show, and their collective love and respect for Morrissey and his music comes through in their musical renderings of hits like *Every Day Is Like Sunday* (*Cada Día Es Domingo*), *Suedehead* (*Estuvo Bien*), and *Last Of The Famous International Playboys*—changed to *Playgirls* and sung by Ceci Bastida, the only woman in the group.³ The band received the highest endorsement by Morrissey himself when a screenshot of Mexrrissey’s album, playlist, and the link to purchase it appeared on Morrissey’s official website, *true-to-you.net*.

The title of Mexrrissey’s album *iNo Manchester!* is a play on a Mexican slang term, ‘no manches,’ a phrase that communicates disbelief, as in ‘no way!’ or ‘don’t mess with me!’ The exclamation itself plays on the spirit of disbelief that gives rise to the ‘what? Mexicans and Morrissey? no way!’ sentiments that influence a lot of the press attention on their project. When Mexrrissey took the world by storm last year, the band received generous media coverage in France, Spain, Australia, the US, and the UK, following tour dates and promotional appearances. Along with Mexrrissey came the usual set of questions about the Mexico-Morrissey connection. Yours truly was tapped for no less than five interviews with the likes of *BBC World*, *WNYC*, *NPR*, and *ABC 7* about the ‘Morrissey and Mexican fans’ question. And now that Mexrrissey’s album is out (I write this during the week of its release), as the band plans another tour in the Fall and Winter of 2016–2017—and while founder Camilo Lara’s Mexican Institute of Sound prepares to support Morrissey at his headline *Día de Muertos* concert in Santa Barbara, California, in November 2016—many more interviews with Mexrrissey, write-ups, reviews, and other coverage around the band’s Mexican take on Morrissey songs have appeared and will likely continue. Nearly all of these write-ups include that question or a variation of it: why is Morrissey so big in Mexico?

Heck, even Larry King wanted to know. In a landmark television interview with Morrissey in August 2015, the US news personality inquired about the singer’s popularity in Mexico. King: ‘Why Mexico?’; Morrissey: ‘I don’t know. It’s a beautiful thing.’ Morrissey continued, attributing his Mexican fans’ ardor to their ‘passion’ and love of music. I am well aware, and I would think so is Morrissey, of age-old stereotypes

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that brand Mexicans and other Latinos/as as ‘passionate’ and ‘emotional’ to a fault, as in the Latina spitfire and the fiery tempered macho. I don’t think this is what he means, though it is important to identify this risk and work against these stereotypes in our analyses of fan cultures without evacuating their critical worth, and I would think Morrissey would agree. And, while it is fair to say that most Morrissey fans are indeed passionate and emotional about their man and his music, not just the Mexican and Latino/a fans in the US and Mexico, King’s question to Morrissey about this particular fan base, and Morrissey’s response (‘I don’t know’), captures the ineffable nature of what is often referred to as ‘the Mexican-Latino/a Morrissey fan connection’ on both sides of the US-Mexico border.

Morrissey’s explanation (‘they’re passionate’) resonates with many of the answers which have now become stock responses to the question: Maybe Mexicans and Morrissey of Irish Blood and English Heart go together because of the shared Catholic thing; maybe it’s because we’re all very melancholy, emotional, and expressive of our fierce passions. Maybe it’s because Mexicans love sad songs about unrequited love sung by male crooners. For Mexicans in the US, perhaps it’s the shared histories of immigration, displacement, and living as an outsider in a colonial relationship to the country we call home.

Then I remember: there are definitely important contexts and points of connection between Chicana/os (first-, second-, third generation of Mexican descent born in the US), Mexicans on both sides of the border, and a first-generation Irish singer born in England like Morrissey that illuminate these mutual affinities. As Trisha Ziff, co-editor of the important 1995 volume *Distant Relations: Chicano Irish Mexican Art and Critical Writing* (a big inspiration for this book) states, ‘Irish people in Britain and Chicanos/ Latinos in the United States share a common experience of discrimination, politically, economically, culturally, and linguistically.’⁴ Morrissey and fan communities in the Chicano-Latino borderlands bear these traces.

The Morrissey and Mexican-Chicana/o-Latina/o fan connection is legitimate, though very often misrepresented. This brings me to another

reason why I was motivated to write this book. I was bothered by how the majority of existing media pieces (usually by white reporters not from LA) portrayed Morrissey fans, Chicana/o, Latina/o, and Mexican fans in particular. I saw characterizations of this fan base as inaccurate and pathologizing; words like ‘fanatic,’ ‘strange,’ ‘unusual,’ ‘cultish,’ ‘depressive,’ and ‘obsessed’ would creep up over and over again in articles that attempted to ‘explain’ the Mexican and Latino devotion to Morrissey. Or, fans were always objectified, exoticized, looked at as strange objects to be studied, like in the documentary *Is it Really So Strange?* (dir. William E Jones), or in Chuck Klosterman’s 2010 essay ‘¡Viva Morrissey!’⁵

In my experience, Morrissey fans are not all objects or passive, depressed, sad, stunted, developmentally arrested people. The majority of fans are active, joyful, creative, and uniquely expressive in their fandom. They make art, design T-shirts, stickers, and jewelry; they form bands; they organize and produce events for other fans. They build community. They are active agents in the production and consumption of a special fan culture. It is the kind of fan I am and the kinds of fans I want to write about and shine light on.

Which then begs the question, why these particular fans? Morrissey certainly has fans all over the world, all corners of the globe, and he has lived in other places besides Los Angeles. He is hugely popular from Italy to Istanbul, Serbia to Seoul. Over the last twenty-eight years as a solo artist, Morrissey has gained, and continues to gain, new and young fans with every concert tour, with every sellout in venues from South America to Australia to East Asia. But no other set of fans, no other region of fans, has received the kind of media attention than have Morrissey fans in the US-Mexican borderlands.

Therefore, I offer this book as a way to view Morrissey fandom, particularly as experienced in Latino Los Angeles, less as a mystery and more as an illuminating study in transcultural fandom.

Welcome to Mozlandia, the Land of Moz.