

TUBAS ON THE RISE:
THE TUBA AS A SIGNIFIER OF 21ST CENTURY MEXICAN-AMERICAN MUSIC
CULTURE IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Banda is traditionally a rural Mexican brass band genre from the state of Sinaloa that became popular among immigrant populations of Los Angeles in the 1990s.¹ Over the years, the tuba has become more prominent in contemporary *banda* and has acquired many traits of the advanced electric bass playing seen in *technobanda*.² The focus on tubas in modern incarnations of *banda* has made its way into other Mexican-American genres such as *música norteña* and *música sierrreña*, traditionally ensembles that use bass guitar. This rise in prominence of the tuba has helped create a black market for tubas and sousaphones, resulting in a rash of instrument thefts in southern California. While these thefts are of concern, they indicate on some level the desire for tuba playing in a variety of genres of Mexican-American music in southern California. This rise in popularity has allowed the tuba to shift from the traditional background harmonic and rhythmic function to a significant and new placement with the front line melodic instruments. Tubas now play both traditional supporting harmonic and rhythmic roles as well as melodic roles in *banda* ensembles.³

In addition to this change in function, the tuba is in such great demand that some groups have replaced their electric bass players with tuba players.⁴ In this new setting, the tuba has become a staple in acoustic and accordion-based genres such as *sierrreña* and *norteña* in southern California. *Sierreña*⁵, a genre that typically consists of acoustic guitar, electric bass, and

¹ Helena Simonett, "Loud and Proud: The social history and cultural power of Mexican banda music," (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1997), 19.

² J.D. Salas, "El Tubador: Part 2: The Sound Concept & Musical Styles of *Banda Sinaloense*," *ITEA Journal* 39 No. 1 (Fall 2011), <http://www.iteaonline.org/members/journal/39N1/39N1eltubador.php> (accessed January 20, 2014).

³ Jesse Tucker and Sam Quinones, Interview by Michel Martin," *Tell Me More*, NPR, January 4, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/2012/01/04/144678543/the-tuba-takes-its-spotlight-in-mexicanbandas> (accessed January 20, 2014).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Because *Sierreña* only started in the 1990s there is an absence of academic writing about it.

accordion, is one of the most recent Mexican-American regional genres to include tuba.⁶ In this genre, recent groups such as Los Hermanos Carrillo con Chikilin y su Tuba, use the tuba as the centerpiece of their ensemble. Additionally, mainstream *norteña* groups such as Los Tigres del Norte, have included a style of bass playing that shares many qualities with the tuba playing seen in *banda* music. This style of bass-line playing, regardless of instrument, in *norteña* is significant because *norteña* has always been considered more “Mexican” and associated with Mexican immigrants.⁷ In many Mexican-American regional ensembles, the prominence of the tuba and its placement within the group represents a shift in its cultural significance, a stronger connection to the Mexican history and cultural roots in the Mexican-American music community of southern California. This paper will uncover some of the motives and significance behind these recent changes in the role of the tuba in Mexican-American regional genres as well as the cultural connection that the tuba provides for Mexican-Americans in southern California to traditional Mexican music culture.

⁶ Jesse Tucker, interview by author, Pomona, CA, November 7, 2014.

⁷ Cathy Ragland, *Música Norteña: Mexican Migrants Creating a Nation between Nations*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 59-60.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF THE TUBA IN MEXICAN-AMERICAN MUSIC

Traditional *banda* music was performed by an ensemble of flexible instrumentation formed in northwestern Mexico from a wide variety of influences. The instrumentation varied from location to location and often included brass and woodwind instruments.⁸ In the late nineteenth century, many of the immigrants that moved to Mexico from central Europe brought their musical tastes with them, including a preference for brass band and European dance forms such as the polka and waltz.⁹ Before the start of the twentieth century, many of these European settlers introduced civilian brass bands called *bandas populares*.¹⁰ Through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *banda* was primarily a local or regional music performed by amateur musicians. When members of these local *bandas populares* returned from performing in military bands during the Mexican revolution in the early twentieth century, they brought back a new repertoire of music.¹¹ The military bands at this time performed in civic functions and public concerts that included classical music transcriptions, traditional and patriotic melodies, and popular dance styles, but were often limited to performing in urban Mexican environments.¹² Following the revolution, the Mexican government attempted to bolster nationalist sentiments in rural Mexico through the revitalization of *bandas populares* as *bandas municipales*.¹³ These *bandas municipales* functioned in a similar role to the military bands by performing at local civic functions in a variety of styles including popular dances, military, and classical pieces.¹⁴ The

⁸ Jorge Daví Salas, "El Tubador: the tuba's use in Banda Sinolense," (DMA diss., University of Kentucky, 2011), 11-14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-14.

¹⁰ Helena Simonett, *Banda: Mexican Musical Life across Borders*, (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 106-7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

combination of many local, amateur *bandas populares*, military bands, *bandas municipales*, and the geographic isolation of the region created an environment in northwest Mexico where many different varieties of *banda* ensembles could develop. Of the wide variety of *banda* styles that existed, *banda sinaloense* became one of the most successful and is the style of *banda* on which this paper will focus. *Banda sinaloense* became a standardized ensemble in Sinaloa by the 1920s and a typical ensemble contained nine to fifteen musicians and typically included three clarinets, three trumpets, two Eb alto horns, three valve-trombones, sousaphone (tuba), and percussion.¹⁵

Banda saw its next significant rise in popularity in the 1950s due to Cruz Lizárraga, bandleader of Banda El Recodo, and their collaborations that set the groundwork for the innovations seen in *banda* in the late twentieth century.¹⁶ Cruz Lizárraga and Banda El Recodo instigated three significant changes that helped make *banda* appeal to a broader audience. Banda El Recodo occasionally accompanied vocalists in live concerts, and eventually recorded with famous vocalists such as José Alfredo Jiménez. Two changes that were unusual for the time and caused controversy among musicians were Cruz Lizárraga's requirement that Banda el Recodo wear standardized uniforms, and that they include more popular dance tunes into their repertoire such as American big band charts.¹⁷ The uniforms that Lizárraga bought himself for the group started modestly with matching shirts and pants and eventually included matching suits and ties.¹⁸

As the violence and drug activity in northwestern Mexico and southwestern United States increased in the late twentieth century, *banda* music became associated with these activities

¹⁵ Jorge Daví Salas, "El Tubador: the tuba's use in Banda Sinaloense," (DMA diss., University of Kentucky, 2011), 13.

¹⁶ Helena Simonett, *Banda: Mexican Musical Life across Borders*, (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 168-9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 169-70.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

because of the lavish parties that cartels threw, often featuring *banda* ensembles, and through the *narcocorridos* that cartel leaders commissioned to glorify their illicit activities.¹⁹ As the notoriety and power of the cartels grew, so did the popularity of *banda* music. This was not what all *banda* ensembles desired and groups such as Banda El Recodo advertised that they were not associated with the cartels to clear their names.²⁰ However, for *banda* ensembles and singers who did embrace the *narcocorrido* style, there were significant financial rewards. In the late twentieth century, *narcocorridos* became very popular and many artists were commissioned to compose *narcocorridos* and used the style to gain international success.²¹

While the popularity and cultural significance of *banda* as a whole changed due to the popularity of groups like Banda El Recodo in the middle of the twentieth century, the role of the tuba within the ensemble did not change in any significant or meaningful ways. The role of the tuba in Mexican music has historically been that of rhythmic and harmonic support, primarily due to the influx of German brass bands in rural nineteenth century Mexico.²² This traditional style of harmonic, supporting role playing with sparse passages of melodic interest, continued into the late twentieth century.

Norteña is another Mexican-American regional genre with roots in northern Mexico. Early *norteña* ensembles shared musical influences with the Mexican military band tradition in the styles of dance songs that were part of their standard repertoires.²³ Typical early *norteña* groups, such as Los Montañeses, were much smaller than *banda* or other regional ensembles and

¹⁹ Ibid., 201-2.

²⁰ Ibid., 222-3.

²¹ Helena Simonett, "Narcocorridos: An Emerging Micromusic of Nuevo L.A.," *Ethnomusicology* 45 No. 2 (Spring – Summer 2001): 324, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/852677> (accessed April 20, 2015).

²² Helena Simonett, "Loud and Proud: The social history and cultural power of Mexican banda music," (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1997), 20.

²³ Cathy Ragland, *Música Norteña: Mexican Migrants Creating a Nation between Nations*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 73.

often performed for a working class migrant audience.²⁴ Their smaller size likely made them much more appealing and affordable for the modest scale of the typical celebrations in the migrant community. Another reason that the *norteña* genre resonated with the working class audience was the significance of the *corrido* storytelling popular in this genre. *Corridos* were essential to telling the stories of migrant workers and creating a unique identity through *norteña* music.²⁵ Los Alegres de Terán, one of the important *norteña* groups in the 1930s, helped modernize *norteña* by adding accordion, singing in thirds, and continuing the *corrido* tradition.²⁶

In the late twentieth century, Los Tigres del Norte revived popular interest in *norteña* music through their unique connection with Mexican-American immigrants and their style of music composition. The members of Los Tigres del Norte were also immigrants and because of this, they represented the hopes and dreams of many Mexican-Americans.²⁷ In addition, they focused on composing *corridos* that represented the working class immigrant identity that they embodied.²⁸ With the rise in cartel activity in the late twentieth century, Los Tigres del Norte gained international fame and reinvigorated *norteña* music for young Mexican-Americans when they began writing *narcocorridos* in 1974.²⁹ *Narcocorridos* became so successful for Los Tigres del Norte that they embraced the anti-establishment aspects of the style and used it to further promote their music.³⁰

While *banda* and *norteña* had different instrumentations and audiences, they did share a significant similarity in their style of bass line playing. This is clear in the examples below from

²⁴ Ibid., 74-5.

²⁵ Ibid., 60.

²⁶ Ibid., 87.

²⁷ Ibid., 142-3.

²⁸ Ibid., 143.

²⁹ Jonathan Saucedo, "Smuggling, Betrayal, and the Handle of a Gun: Death, Laughter, and the Narcocorrido," *Popular Music and Society* 37 No. 4 (July 2013): 427, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2013.816542> (accessed April 20, 2015).

³⁰ Cathy Ragland, *Música Norteña: Mexican Migrants Creating a Nation between Nations*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 159-61.

the 1970s and 80s, where there are abundant similarities in the technique and role within the ensemble of *norteña* bass and *banda* tuba playing. Examples 2.1 and 2.2, below, show rhythmic and a harmonic accompaniment-style playing that are very simple in nature. Example 2.1 was recorded in 1984 and shows a standard waltz style tuba accompaniment to a popular *banda* song.

Example 2.1: Measures 1-40 of *Que Se Me Acabe La Vida*.³¹

♩ = 194

The musical score is written in bass clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 3/4 time signature. It consists of six staves of music. The first staff begins with a tempo marking of ♩ = 194. The notation includes quarter notes, eighth notes, and rests, with a consistent rhythmic pattern of quarter notes followed by eighth notes and rests. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the sixth staff.

³¹ José Alfredo Jiménez and La Banda Sinaloense el Recodo de Cruz Lizarraga, *Que Se Me Acabe la Vida*, José Alfredo Jiménez Canta Sus Exitos Con La Banda Sinaloense el Recodo de Cruz Lizarraga, RCA, MP3, 1984, transcribed by the author.

This piece exemplifies the simplicity of the harmonic and rhythmic accompaniment role of the tuba in early *banda* ensembles by playing most often on the strong beats of the measure and outlining the tonic and dominant chords. When the part deviates from simple chord outlining, measures seven and eight as well as sixteen and seventeen, the passages are variations on the tonic scale. As was common with early *banda* recordings, this album features a famous vocalist with the instrumental group playing an accompaniment role.³²

Example 2.2: Measures 1-51 of *El Cheque*:³³

The musical score is written for tuba in 2/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 116. The score consists of five staves of music. The first staff begins with a 4-measure rest, indicated by a '4' above the staff. The music is primarily composed of quarter notes on the strong beats of each measure, with some eighth-note passages in measures 7-8 and 16-17. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the fifth staff.

³² Carlos Manuel Haro and Steven Loza, “The Evolution of Banda Music and the Current Banda Movement in Los Angeles,” in *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology: Musical Aesthetics and Multiculturalism in Los Angeles*, edited by Steven Loza, (Los Angeles: University of California, 1994), 63.

³³ Antonio Abreu and Los Tigres del Norte, *El Cheque*, El Cheque, Fonovisa, MP3, 2011, transcribed by the author.

Example 2.2 is a transcription of the electric bass part for *El Cheque*, originally recorded in 1972, one of the hit singles from Los Tigres Del Norte's earliest records. Like the tuba part in Example 2.1, the bass playing present in *El Cheque* is typical of the *norteña* style before the influence of *technobanda* and modern *banda*. The bass part below outlines the tonic and dominant chords with infrequent scalar passages. These scalar passages often connect one chord to another, as seen in measures eleven, twenty-seven, and forty-two, but also provide a deviation from the repetitive nature of the line in measures twenty-nine and thirty-two.

While both *banda* and *norteña* are genres that came from rural Mexico, they have had very different audiences and instrumentations. Historically *banda* has been associated with traditional rural Mexican culture, while *norteña* has been connected to the migrant working class culture. Despite these differences, both of the previous examples demonstrate the similarity of the role of tuba and electric bass playing in early *banda* and *norteña* styles. The music that was performed by the tuba and electric bass consisted of accompaniment material and stayed in the background of the musical texture. These genres also share a historic military ensemble influence and the trend of *narcocorrido* songwriting in the late twentieth century. Looking back, the similarities heard in the actual music played by the tuba and bass guitar, along with the historical influences that they share makes the suggestion of their interchangeability quite plausible. With the interchangeability of instrumentation comes the potential for the exchange of cultural significance of the music and instrument itself. Especially in modern *norteña*, where tuba is replacing electric bass at an unprecedented level, the cultural associations of the tuba and *banda* music have transferred on some level to *norteña*. Despite the fact that it would still be decades before these exchanges would come to fruition, the potential for this cultural transposition had always existed.

CHAPTER 3

TECHNOBANDA IN THE 1990S: THE DECLINE AND RESURGENCE OF TUBA IN *BANDA* MUSIC

In the early 1990s, a new style of *banda* music, *technobanda*, became incredibly popular in Los Angeles. This new music catapulted Spanish-language radio station KLAX-FM to the top of the Los Angeles radio charts.³⁴ This new style was driven by the club scene in Los Angeles and a new dance craze, *quebrelita*. This dance music and club scene greatly influenced the instrumentation and style of *banda*, eliminating traditional instruments and replacing them with electronic instruments.³⁵

The *technobanda* craze in Los Angeles and southern California changed the *banda* ensemble in important ways. *Technobanda* introduced a whole new audience, specifically young Mexican-Americans, to the traditional Mexican brass band or *banda* style. *Technobandas* emerged in the late 1980s in night-clubs and introduced different instruments to the *banda* genre. Electric keyboards substituted for traditional *banda* instruments such as the clarinets and Eb horns, and most noticeably the sousaphone (tuba) was replaced with the electric bass.³⁶ While *technobanda* was an incredibly popular style of *banda* music in the early 1990s, by the late nineties the *technobanda* craze had faded. This is likely due to the fact that many of the aspects of *technobanda* that made it so popular, such as the flashy stage performances, high production value music videos, and the upbeat *quebrelita* dance style were adopted by traditional *banda*

³⁴ Helena Simonett, *Banda: Mexican Musical Life across Borders*, (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 25.

³⁵ Carlos Manuel Haro and Steven Loza, "The Evolution of Banda Music and the Current Banda Movement in Los Angeles," in *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology: Musical Aesthetics and Multiculturalism in Los Angeles*, edited by Steven Loza, (Los Angeles: University of California, 1994), 63.

³⁶ For the purposes of this project, the tuba and sousaphone will be considered one in the same.

ensembles.³⁷ After the *technobanda* craze subsided, traditional *banda* ensembles such as Sinaloa's Banda el Recodo returned to the spotlight of a newly invigorated genre forever changed by the innovations and popularity of *technobanda*.³⁸

Example 3.1: Measures 1-30 of *Las Mañanitas*:³⁹

The image shows a musical score for an electric bass part in 3/4 time, with a tempo marking of ♩ = 198. The score is written in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of five staves of music, with measure numbers 1, 6, 13, 20, and 28 indicated at the beginning of each line. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, rests, and accidentals, characteristic of a *technobanda* style.

Example 3.1, above, is a transcription of a typical *technobanda* electric bass part. This part comes from one of the premier *technobanda* ensembles, Banda Macho. This part is very

³⁷ Helena Simonett, *Banda: Mexican Musical Life across Borders*, (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 270-1.

³⁸ Carlos Manuel Haro and Steven Loza, "The Evolution of Banda Music and the Current Banda Movement in Los Angeles," in *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology: Musical Aesthetics and Multiculturalism in Los Angeles*, edited by Steven Loza, (Los Angeles: University of California, 1994), 69.

³⁹ Banda Machos, *Las Mañanitas*, Los Machos También Lloran, Musical MCM, MP3, 1993, transcribed by the author.

similar in function to the *norteña* electric bass part in Example 4.2, below in Chapter 3. The level of rhythmic complexity is similar to Example 4.2, and there is a significant increase in scalar playing compared to the examples in Chapter 1. The scalar passages below, especially those in measures seven and eight, as well as eighteen and nineteen, are used to connect tonic and dominant chords exactly like the *norteña* bass part in Example 4.2. This increased level of rhythmic and scalar playing impacted the style of tuba playing in *banda*, as demonstrated in Example 4.1 (see Chapter 4).

After the decline of *technobanda* and the resurgence of traditional *banda* ensembles, tuba playing was never the same. The specific technical aspects of *technobanda* that influenced the resurgent *banda* style are the virtuosity and style of bass line (tuba) playing which began to resemble the melodic playing that was traditionally seen only in the high brass instruments.⁴⁰ When traditional *banda* ensembles regained popularity in the post-*technobanda* era, the tuba playing borrowed the enhanced rhythmic aspects of the *technobanda* example but also began to play a more prominent melodic role within the *banda* ensemble. In Example 3.2, seen below, the tuba bass line provides an active chromatic counterpoint to the higher melodic instruments in measures twenty-three through twenty-five and thirty-one through thirty-three. In this example the tuba plays a more standard supporting role with interesting chromatic inflections, when the trumpets and clarinets have the melody. Between the trumpet and clarinet melodic statements, and when the Eb horns have their melodic phrase, the tuba takes a much more prominent role. In measure twenty-seven, where the Eb horn response to the trumpet melody from measure twenty-three begins, the tuba starts with the same bass line that accompanied the trumpet melody. The interesting twist in the Eb horn melody enters in measure twenty-eight where the tuba part

⁴⁰ J.D. Salas, "El Tubador: Part 2: The Sound Concept & Musical Styles of *Banda Sinaloense*," *ITEA Journal* 39 No. 1 (Fall 2011), <http://www.iteaonline.org/members/journal/39N1/39N1eltubador.php> (accessed January 20, 2014).

deviates from the bass line role that it played earlier and takes over the melodic role with Eb horns playing accompaniment figures. In addition to this instance of the tuba part taking prominence in the melodic content, the tuba doubles the Eb horns and trumpets both rhythmically and melodically at key phrase ending points in measures seventeen through nineteen and thirty-six through thirty-seven.

Example 3.2: Measures 17-37 of *El Rosario de Oro*:⁴¹

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Faster' with a metronome marking of 176. Measure numbers 16, 21, 26, and 32 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. The Tuba part (measures 16-19) features a melodic line with triplets. The Eb Horns (measures 26-29) play a rhythmic accompaniment. The Trumpets (measures 21-25) play a melodic line with a final fermata. The Clarinets (measures 26-29) play a rhythmic accompaniment. The Trumpets and Eb Horns (measures 32-37) play a melodic line with a final fermata. The bass line (measures 16-37) provides a steady accompaniment.

16 $\text{♩} = 142$ Eb Horns 3 3 Faster $\text{♩} = 176$

21 Trumpets

26 Eb Horns Clarinets

32 Trumpets and Eb Horns

41
t

The increase in melodic content of post-*technobanda* tuba playing, traditionally the part reserved for simple bass line accompaniments as seen in Example 2.1, was likely influenced by the style of electric bass playing present in *technobanda* and *norteña* such as the parts represented by Examples 3.1 and 4.2. As will be shown in Chapter 3, the tuba playing in *banda* ensembles after the *technobanda* era became more advanced than either of the electric bass examples. Regardless of the role this style of playing encompassed - harmonic, rhythmic, or melodic - the sheer virtuosity of the style often made the tuba the center of attention in the rejuvenated *banda* ensemble.⁴² As the center of attention in modern *banda*, the tuba (sousaphone) has become the instrument that signifies this ensemble and a large portion of the Mexican-American music culture in southern California.

⁴² J.D. Salas, "El Tubador: Part 2: The Sound Concept & Musical Styles of *Banda Sinaloense*," *ITEA Journal* 39 No. 1 (Fall 2011), <http://www.iteaonline.org/members/journal/39N1/39N1eltubador.php> (accessed January 20, 2014).

CHAPTER 4

COMPARISON OF MODERN TUBA IN *BANDA* AND ELECTRIC BASS IN *NORTEÑA*

In recent *banda* and *norteña* tuba and bass playing, there has been a significant shift in the complexity of the parts. Examples in this chapter will show similarities and differences between current *banda* and *norteña* tuba and bass playing, especially in regards to the role of the instrument within the ensemble.

Example 4.1 comes from a recent Banda El Recodo album, released in 2013. This transcription of the tuba part shows the changes in style and virtuosity from the *banda* style seen in Example 2.1. While this piece is in a similar waltz style to the earlier Banda El Recodo example, the change in complexity of the tuba part is evident due to the more complex rhythms, large leaps, and melodic fragments seen in measures one through three and seventeen through nineteen. Technical aspects of the part are different from the early *banda* example, but as seen in Example 3.2 the tuba also takes a more prominent role in the melodic content of the ensemble. This higher level of prominence is highlighted by the fact that this piece opens with a two measure tuba solo. The solo in measures one through three is played in a very aggressive style, with strong attacks to each note and a high volume, which sets the mood for this entire piece. Additionally, the solo is clearly a melodic fragment rather than harmonic or rhythmic material that just happens to start the piece. The more complex style of tuba playing seen in Example 4.1 has become common in modern *banda*, *norteña*, and *sierreña* tuba playing, which will be demonstrated in the following chapters. These two transcriptions, examples 2.1 and 4.1, clearly show the significant changes in style and virtuosity of tuba playing as well as the flexibility and the realization of the melodic potential of the instrument over this period of time in *banda*.

Example 4.1: Measures 1-37 of *El Rosario de Oro*:⁴³

The musical score for Example 4.1 is written in bass clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. It consists of six staves of music. The first staff begins with a tempo marking of ♩ = 142. The second staff is marked with the number 7 above the first measure. The third staff is marked with the number 15 above the first measure and includes a tempo change to 'Faster' with a marking of ♩ = 176. This staff also features two triplet markings (indicated by a '3' above the notes) in measures 16 and 17. The fourth staff is marked with the number 22 above the first measure. The fifth staff is marked with the number 29 above the first measure. The sixth and final staff is marked with the number 36 above the first measure and ends with a double bar line.

Example 4.2, below, is a transcription of the bass part to the opening of *La Reina del Sur* by Los Tigres del Norte. This example from 2009 contrasts with the *norteña* transcription in Example 2.2 by containing moments of greater rhythmic interest in measures nine, thirteen, twenty, and twenty-nine. These moments of rhythmic complexity are similar in scope to the *banda* tuba part in Example 4.1. Many of the complex passages present in both examples are scalar in nature and are used to effectively connect the tonic and dominant chords in interesting

⁴³ Banda El Recodo de Cruz Lizarraga, *El Rosario de Oro*, Haciendo Historia, UMG Recordings, MP3, 2013, transcribed by the author.

and innovative ways. In Example 4.2, the bass part never deviates from the support role typical of traditional bass line playing instrument in Mexican-American regional music. The bass part supports the vocals and accordion throughout this example, never leaving this accompaniment role to participate in any of the melodic content. This leaves the role of the *norteña* bass as less prominent in the musical texture than the tuba in the *banda* playing seen in Example 4.1.

Example 4.2: Measures 1-34 of *La Reina del Sur*.⁴⁴

The image displays a musical score for the bass part of 'La Reina del Sur'. It is written in bass clef, 2/4 time, with a tempo marking of quarter note = 112. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The score is presented in four systems of staves. The first system contains measures 1-9. The second system, starting at measure 10, contains measures 10-19. The third system, starting at measure 20, contains measures 20-28. The fourth system, starting at measure 29, contains measures 29-34 and ends with a double bar line.

Through these examples, it is clear that a change in both melodic and rhythmic content has taken place in the bass and tuba parts of both *banda* and *norteña* music. Especially in the transcriptions seen above, the role of the tuba has moved beyond that of an advanced style of accompaniment with enhanced rhythmic content, as seen in the *norteña* Example 4.2, to a role

⁴⁴ Los Tigres del Norte, *La Reina del Sur*, Leyenda y Tradición – Los Mejores Corridos de los Jefes de Jefes, Fonovisa, MP3, 2009, transcribed by the author.

that fuses advanced accompaniment playing with moments of significant melodic content within the context of the modern *banda* ensemble. The fact that a *banda* piece would start with a melodic tuba solo and contain the level of interaction with other melodic instruments as can be seen in examples 3.2 and 4.1, indicates the change in role for the tuba from solely an accompaniment role to one of both accompaniment and melodic function. This change increases the visibility and recognition of tuba and therefore increases the prominence of the tuba within the ensemble. The combination of a heightened level of prominence, with the significant changes in style, increases the tuba's cultural significance, discussed further in Chapter 6, in Mexican-American regional music in southern California.

CHAPTER 5

CURRENT TRENDS IN MEXICAN-AMERICAN REGIONAL MUSIC IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Many southern California artists that specialize in traditional Mexican genres such as *norteña* and *sierreña*, which did not include tuba in the past, have replaced their bass players with tuba players. This replacement of the electric bass by the tuba in many ensembles has occurred for a variety of reasons. One of the primary reasons is because popular singers such as Gerardo Ortiz and El Tigrillo Palma pioneered this trend by hiring backing ensembles that featured tuba, causing patrons to demand the same of other groups.⁴⁵ Another for replacing the electric bass with tuba include the economic considerations in the Mexican-American immigrant community of hiring a smaller music ensemble, *norteña* or *sierreña*, while still including the party atmosphere that tuba brings to any Mexican-American regional performance through the playing style, audience interaction, and the impressive visual effect of the tuba.⁴⁶ The previously described changes in playing style and increased inclusion in new and traditional genres indicate that there is a deeper cultural connection with the tuba in Mexican-American regional genres.

Through my interviews and observations it was obvious that there are many factors that contribute to the inclusion of the tuba in genres such as *norteña* and *sierreña*. One major factor in the inclusion of tuba in these genres is the use of the tuba in backing ensembles for influential vocalists such as El Tigrillo Palma and Gerardo Ortiz. Since 2005, both of these artists have used tuba in their ensembles but have very rarely used a full *banda* ensemble. El Tigrillo Palma is a vocalist who typically performs with a *sierreña* ensemble and occasionally uses a *norteña* or *banda* ensemble, always with tuba. Gerardo Ortiz is a vocalist who is typically backed by a

⁴⁵ Sam Quinones, "Tubas become horns of plenty," *Los Angeles Times*, November 15, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/nov/15/local/la-me-tuba-20111115> (accessed January 20, 2014).

⁴⁶ Jesse Tucker, interview by author, Pomona, CA, November 7, 2014.

norteña ensemble with tuba, and has recorded a few songs in a *banda* style, where he borrows a number of instruments from the *banda* tradition.

El Tigrillo Palma is a famous *corrido* singer who has had many international hits since he began recording in 2005.⁴⁷ From his first recording, he has performed with a *sierreña* style accompaniment that uses tuba instead of bass guitar. When El Tigrillo Palma uses other styles of accompaniment, whether *norteña* or *banda*, he continues to use and feature the tuba in his songs. In the following examples, the tuba playing will show a clear resemblance to the virtuosity and varied functionality of the tuba playing seen in the Banda El Recodo excerpt in Example 4.1. These tuba parts are more advanced rhythmically and melodically than those present in any of the *norteña* bass guitar examples, and in some ways even more than the *banda* examples that have been discussed previously.

Example 5.1, below, is from one of El Tigrillo Palma's first recordings; it is a live version of a *corrido* with *sierreña* accompaniment. The tuba playing in this example uses a wide range, often encompassing two octaves, and imitates standard acoustic guitar figures with virtuosic extended techniques that evoked shouts in response to the tuba performance. The wide range present in this example was uncommon in early Mexican-American regional bass or tuba parts but has become more standard. Many of the tuba players performing today have had much better training and are more advanced tuba players than previous generations.⁴⁸ This significantly increased range allows the tuba to have an expanded role in *sierreña* and other Mexican-American regional genres. Some of the highest tessitura, measures twenty-two through twenty-three and twenty-seven in Example 5.1, are in the same register that the Eb horns and low trumpet parts utilize in traditional *banda* ensembles. The triplet figures in measures thirteen and

⁴⁷ Jason Birchmeier, "El Tigrillo Palma," *Billboard*. <http://www.billboard.com/artist/301561/el-tigrillo-palma/biography> (accessed April 18, 2015).

⁴⁸ Jesse Tucker, interview by author, Pomona, CA, November 7, 2014.

sixteen through seventeen, the ornamented scale in measures twenty-two through twenty-three, and the flutter tongue technique in measure twenty-seven are all examples of virtuosic tuba playing in the *sierreña* style that imitate typical acoustic guitar playing. The ornamented scale replicates a standard scalar guitar passage in *sierreña* music; while both the triplets and the flutter tonguing technique imitate the sound of strumming an acoustic guitar. By imitating one of the standard instruments in this genre, the tuba has secured a place of significance in the genre even though it may seem like an unusual fit.

One of the main reasons that the tuba can fit in a variety of Mexican-American regional genres is the versatility of ways in which the instrument can be performed.⁴⁹ As seen in the previous examples, the tuba has a wide range and is capable of virtuosic technical playing. The number and variety of different articulations and styles available to the advanced tuba player are only limited by the imagination of the players themselves. In addition to the versatility of the tuba, many of the tuba players that I interviewed thought that the visceral energy of the tuba playing itself has had a significant impact on the recent trend towards replacing electric bass with tuba.⁵⁰ The sudden and very physical affect when a tuba player plays incredibly loud is significantly different than the affect from an amplified electric bass. The tuba, especially when played at peak volumes, often has a much harsher and more intense attack at the onset of a given note that can cause the audience to literally feel the note.

⁴⁹ Jose Montalvo, interview by author, Facebook messages, April 6-19, 2015.

⁵⁰ Bryan Ordaz, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, November 6, 2014.

Example 5.1: Measures 1-32 of *El Cajoncito*:⁵¹

♩ = 240

Tuba

7

14

20

27

Flutter Tongue

Vocal Calls in response to tuba Flutter

In Example 5.2, below, there is a transcription of the tuba part for *Se Vale Soñar*, a 2010 recording by El Tigrillo Palma. The tuba part in Example 5.2 shows an increased interaction and blending of roles between the acoustic guitar and the tuba. In *Se Vale Soñar*, the tuba and guitar trade scalar passages, strumming, and chord articulation. In measures seven through ten both the guitar and tuba play scalar passages, although while the guitar plucks the scalar passages in quarter notes, the tuba ornaments this passage with an eighth note scale that descends in thirds. Later, in measures twenty-two through twenty-four and fifty through fifty-two, the tuba joins the guitar by imitating the sound of acoustic guitar strumming. While this is a common technique for the guitar, a virtuosic articulation technique is required to execute the triplets at this speed on the tuba. Finally, in measures twenty-seven through twenty-eight and thirty-two through thirty-four

⁵¹ El Tigrillo Palma, perf. *El Cajoncito (En Vivo)*, by Juan Villarreal Garcia, En Vivo Desde Culiacán, Gypsy Records, MP3, 2005, transcribed by the author.

the tuba arpeggiates chords, a standard technique for the guitar, yet a much more difficult one for tuba. The fact that the tuba has replaced the bass guitar in *sierreña* music as well as adopted a collaborative role with the acoustic guitar indicates that the tuba plays a significant role in this genre; it is more than just a stand-in for the bass part.

Example 5.2: Measures 1-54 of *Se Vale Soñar*:⁵²

Tuba $\text{♩} = 248$

7

13

19

25

32

38

45

51

⁵² El Tigrillo Palma, perf. *Se Vale Soñar*, by Rito Eras, 20 Corridos Poderosos, Fonovisa Records, MP3, 2010, transcribed by the author.

The trend of *norteña* groups replacing their electric bass players with tuba players has been accelerated by international singing sensations such as Gerardo Ortiz.⁵³ Ortiz is one of the most popular Mexican-American vocalists today; he has been nominated twice for Grammy awards and has won many *Premio Lo Nuestro* awards, one of the premier Latin American award ceremonies.⁵⁴ While his recognitions have been in a variety of genres, he performs with a *norteña* ensemble that uses tuba instead of electric bass. Similar to the previous examples of El Tigrillo de Palma, the role of the tuba within this ensemble, and the technique of the tuba part, compares much more favorably to the *banda* tuba playing from Example 4.1 than the *norteña* bass playing from Example 4.2.

Below, Example 5.3 contains an example from Gerardo Ortiz's 2010 album that shows some of the changes that tuba playing has had in the role of the bass line instrument for a *norteña* artist. On this album, Ortiz includes two songs in *banda* style. The rest of the album and the majority of Ortiz's other recordings are strictly *norteña* in style. *Me Emociones*, one of the tunes in *banda* style, opens with a tuba and clarinet duet where both parts share melodic responsibilities. In measure three, while the clarinet holds the long G, the tuba ornaments the Eb providing melodic interest before both parts resolve in measure four. In measure six as both parts descend, the tuba part enhances the melody by adding chromatic sixteenth notes to the phrase. These embellishments in the tuba part help make it an equal partner in this duet rather than just the bass line to a clarinet solo.

⁵³ Bryan Ordaz, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, November 6, 2014.

⁵⁴ Gerardo Ortiz, "Biografía," http://www.gerardoortiz.net/?page_id=15 (accessed April 18, 2015).

Example 5.3: Measures 1-12 of *Me Emociones*:⁵⁵

The musical score is written in 4/4 time with a tempo marking of quarter note = 80. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The score is divided into four systems, each with a Clarinet(s) staff on top and a Tuba staff on the bottom. Measure 1 starts with a whole rest for both instruments. In measure 2, the Clarinet(s) plays a half note G4, and the Tuba plays a quarter note G2. From measure 3 onwards, both instruments play more complex rhythmic patterns. Measure 4 is marked with a '4' above the staff. Measure 7 is marked with a '7' above the staff. Measure 11 is marked with an '11' above the staff and includes a triplet of eighth notes in the Tuba part. The piece concludes in measure 12 with the instruction 'Faster' above the Tuba staff.

Below in Example 5.4 is the tuba part to a more traditional *norteña* piece recorded by Gerardo Ortiz. From the beginning of this example the tuba and the accordion show a similar level of interaction to the tuba and acoustic guitar from examples 5.1 and 5.2. In measure one of Example 5.4, a significant transition phrase that is repeated numerous times throughout the piece

⁵⁵ Gerardo Ortíz, *Me Emociones (Versión Banda)*, Ni Hoy Ni Mañana, DEL Records, MP3, 2010, transcribed by the author.

is played in unison by the tuba and accordion. At the next point in the song where this figure returns, measure thirteen, the tuba solely handles the role that both instruments shared at the opening.

Example 5.4: Measures 1-18 of *A La Moda*.⁵⁶

♩ = 172

Measures 1-4: Accordion and Tuba play in unison.

Measures 5-8: Accordion plays a melodic line, Tuba plays a rhythmic pattern.

Measures 9-12: Accordion plays a melodic line, Tuba plays a triplet pattern.

Measures 13-18: Tuba plays a melodic line, Accordion plays a rhythmic pattern.

⁵⁶ Gerardo Ortíz, *A La Moda*, Ni Hoy Ni Mañana, DEL Records, MP3, 2010, transcribed by the author.

Throughout this piece the tuba and accordion alternate on these short transition phrases, phrases that would be handled primarily if not exclusively by the accordion in a more traditional *norteña* ensemble. In this example, along with many others in the *norteña* style, the tuba interacts in a very substantial and meaningful way with the accordion. This can be seen in measures four and five where the tuba finishes the melodic phrase that the accordion starts in measure four. A more intricate version of this exchanging of phrases can be seen in measures eight through eleven. Similar to measure four, the accordion starts a melodic idea, only to have the tuba take over and finish the phrase. This second phrase is different in measures nine through eleven where the tuba part is much more prominent than in measure five. The tuba also plays a melodic phrase in measure ten that is copied and expanded upon by the accordion in measure sixteen. Because the accordion is traditionally the most iconic instrument in *norteña* music, the tuba is able to maintain a significant and versatile role within the ensemble by sharing music and characteristics with such an iconic instrument.

Another factor in the inclusion of tuba in various Mexican-American regional genres is the matter of practicality and economics, a *norteña* or *sierreña* ensemble is much smaller and therefore much more affordable than a full *banda*. For a small house party there may not be the resources or the physical space to host a full *banda* ensemble. Because *banda* represents the most expensive and sought after genre of Mexican-American regional music, hiring a *norteña* or *sierreña* ensemble that uses tuba can be an economic compromise. The smaller ensemble is more affordable and can still incorporate the most visually and sonically important aspects of *banda*, the tuba.

When asked, many of the musicians and fans of Mexican-American regional music agreed that when an ensemble uses tuba the audience knows that it is party time. Some stated

that they thought this was because many fans were used to the energy of *banda* shows, which tend to be the largest parties. Others thought that the ability of the tuba to create energy through the sound that it makes—it has an inherently different quality than electric bass—indicates to the audience that it is time for a party. Some thought the popularity of the tuba had more to do with the impressive visual impact it can make. Below in Image 5.1 the level of detail put into decorating their instruments indicates the importance of the visual aspect of the tuba (sousaphone) in Mexican-American regional music. Through my observations of Mexican-American regional music in the Los Angeles area, it appears that all of these factors play a role in the significance of the tuba in Mexican-American regional music.

Image 5.1: Engraved Sousaphone.⁵⁷



In my observations of *banda* music, there was a significant difference in the crowd’s reaction when the tuba played interesting and difficult melodic passages. There was a demand

⁵⁷ Harvs Happy Horns, “Fancy Sousaphone Pictures,” Harvs Happy Horns Blog, <http://harvshappyhorns.blogspot.com/2011/01/fancy-sousaphones-pictures.html> (accessed April 18, 2015).

for the tuba to come into the crowd and play as loud as possible in the audience member's faces. The party atmosphere that was described to me many times seemed to be focused on the sonic effects of the tuba playing itself. Specific audience members would often request that the tuba play in their face, and as a result the tuba player would receive a significant tip; the audience members would throw cash into the tuba bell to thank the tuba player. Jesse Tucker, who says this happens to him often, has found hundreds of dollars of tips some nights when he empties out his tuba.

In an upscale dance club in Pomona, California, I observed Jesse Tucker play with a thrown together *sierreña* group. His *sierreña* group was the first act; they opened for a standard *norteña* ensemble with electric bass. When the *sierreña* group started playing there was a noticeable change in the level of excitement in the audience. Multiple times during their set, a wealthy patron who had reserved the booth right at the corner of the stage and next to the dance floor requested that Jesse play into the patron's head. Every time this happened the crowd would go crazy and the patron would pour liquor directly from a bottle into his mouth. It seemed as if he felt that the proximity of the tuba playing assisted his drinking. In addition to cash tips, this patron offered the bottle of liquor as thanks to Jesse for helping enhance the party atmosphere. After the show Jesse Tucker confirmed that many patrons like to have the focus of the audience on them while they binge drink and the effect of having the tuba play into their face achieves this focus as well as helping them feel the music.

In addition to enhancing the party atmosphere of a given performance, the tuba is used as a visual icon to help artists advertise their ensembles. Traditionally, *banda* ensembles such as Manuel Iturbide y su Banda Innolvidable Consentidora use the tuba as the main, or only, instrument present on their advertising and publications. This can be seen below in Image 5.2

where the tuba is the only instrument present and the name of the instrument is displayed at the bottom of the advertisement in the largest font.

Image 5.2: Tuba Advertising for *Banda*.⁵⁸



⁵⁸ Jose Manuel Iturbide, "Mobile Uploads," Jose Manuel Iturbide's Facebook Page, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=650927625017563&set=a.416882438422084.1073741828.100003009952173&type=3&theater> (accessed April 18, 2015).

Recently *norteña* and *sierreña* groups have been imitating this practice by using the tuba as the only instrument that they show on their advertisements.

Image 5.3: Tuba in Advertising for *Sierreña*:⁵⁹



⁵⁹ Los Fieles de Sinaloa, “Mobile Uploads,” Los Fieles de Sinaloa’s Facebook Page, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=621256124649066&set=t.100004892490698&type=3&theater> (accessed April 18, 2015).

Above in Image 5.3, Los Fieles, a *sierreña* ensemble presumably uses the image of the sousaphone to attract a larger audience to their shows. Not only is the image of the tuba a large part of their logo, it is larger than the scantily clad, suggestively dancing female figure that is also there to help boost attendance.

Finally, in performance the tuba player is often now placed at the front of the stage or even off stage in the audience in order to facilitate the audience interactions. This placement is a change from the back of the stage where tuba would be placed in a more traditional setting alongside the drums and other background instruments. This relocation is significant because in the vast majority of music ensembles, the instruments placed at the front, vocalists included, are the ones with the most significant melodic material and are often the most iconic instruments in the given ensemble.

CHAPTER 6

THE TUBA AS A CULTURAL SIGNIFIER

The recent change to a preference for tubas in Mexican-American regional music is significant for tuba players, aficionados of Mexican-American music, and the larger Mexican-American music culture. The tuba has become an iconic instrument in Mexican-American regional music because of its increased use in new and traditional genres, the significant melodic role it plays in these genres, the iconographic visual effect of the instrument, and the role it has in the party atmosphere that is desired by fans of Mexican-American regional music.

There have been several influential scholars who have written about the significance of instruments in Mexican-American genres, and their reasoning can be applied to recent trends in tuba playing. Carlos Flores used a historical approach to detail the functions of the accordion and accordion-based music genres as a factor in preserving traditional Mexican culture in twentieth-century Texas communities.⁶⁰ This same analytical framework can explain the significance of the tuba as a symbol of Mexican culture in southern California. Flores's approach can explain the cultural significance of the tuba through its use in traditional *banda* ensembles in northwest Mexico and its significance in modern incarnations in southern California. Since the tuba holds a similar role to the accordion, as an iconic instrument in traditional *banda* music, and *banda* music plays a significant role in historical rural northwestern Mexican culture, the proliferation of tuba in multiple Mexican-American genres today preserves a connection to traditional Mexican culture for fans of Mexican-American regional music.

Manuel Peña and Catherine Ragland both argue that the accordion operates as a cultural symbol that is vital to the construction of a *tejano* identity through its use in Texas-Mexican

⁶⁰ Carlos Jesus Gomez Flores, "The Accordion on Both Sides of the Border," in *Puro Conjunto: An Album in Words and Pictures*, edited by Juan Tejeda and Avelardo Valdez, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 71-74.

conjunto music.⁶¹ This theory, when adapted to the tuba in southern California and its relationship to Mexican-American cultural identity through its presence in regional genres such as *banda*, *norteña* and *sierreña*, shows another way that the tuba can be seen as an instrument of cultural significance in the Mexican-American music community. In his book, *Música Tejana*, Manuel Peña describes how musical instruments can achieve cultural significance through performance in culturally specific and significant events such as weddings and *quinceañeras*.⁶² Peña used this argument to describe the symbolic association of the accordion with a working class audience through the stylistic identity the instrument created in *tejano* music.⁶³ This argument can be applied to the tuba in Mexican-American regional genres to describe the significance of the tuba in Mexican-American culture in southern California. It is in culturally significant community events such as *quinceañera* parties and weddings that the tuba often replaces the bass guitar in *norteña* and *sierreña* ensembles. The tuba is also a culturally significant instrument to working-class Mexican-Americans because of the economic reality of using smaller ensembles and the significance that having a tuba in these ensembles represents. Working-class Mexican-Americans are able to afford a smaller *norteña* or *sierreña* style ensemble, and when they request one with tuba, they are able to achieve the atmosphere that they desire, the party atmosphere present at a large *banda* show. The use of tuba in these culturally significant events indicates that the tuba has achieved a high level of cultural relevance in the Mexican-American community in southern California.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Cathy Ragland, “La Voz del Pueblo Tejano: Conjunto Music and the Construction of Tejano Identity in Texas,” in *Puro Conjunto: An Album in Words and Pictures*, edited by Juan Tejeda and Avelardo Valdez, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 213-215.

⁶² Manuel H. Peña, *Música Tejana: The Cultural Economy of Artistic Transformation*, (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1999), 4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶⁴ Sam Quinones, “Tubas become horns of plenty,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 15, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/nov/15/local/la-me-tuba-20111115> (accessed January 20, 2014).

In addition to the party scene that is accessible to most people who are interested in Mexican-American regional music, there is a much more exclusive, and dangerous, narco-culture music scene that is driven by the popularity of *narcocorridos*.⁶⁵ Since the rise in popularity of *narcocorridos* in the 1970s, the style has grown in popularity and artists today often insert themselves into the *corrido* stories and subsequently into the narco-culture itself.⁶⁶ Many artists who have inserted themselves into this narco-culture have reaped the rewards of international fame because of their *narcocorridos* but have also dealt with the serious reality of the cartel world through assassinations, the most famous example being Chalino Sánchez.⁶⁷ The danger of participating in the cartel world of commissioned *narcocorridos* has increased in recent years as witnessed by the multiple killings of musicians and assassination attempts on famous vocalists like Gerardo Ortiz and Javier Rosas.⁶⁸ Because of violence directed not only towards the musicians, but also towards the fans at concerts, many of these artists have had to cancel or postpone concerts.⁶⁹ Even if many of the fans of these artists and *narcocorrido* songs do not agree with the values that the songs represent, they do admire the wealth and power that they represent.⁷⁰

The recent trends in *narcocorrido* songs are especially important to the tuba because many of the current artists writing music in this style, Gerardo Ortiz and Javier Rosas, use tuba in their ensembles. As discussed previously, the tuba plays a crucial role in these ensembles and

⁶⁵ Helena Simonett, "Narcocorridos: An Emerging Micromusic of Nuevo L.A.," *Ethnomusicology* 45 No. 2 (Spring – Summer 2001): 316, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/852677> (accessed April 20, 2015).

⁶⁶ Jonathan Saucedo, "Smuggling, Betrayal, and the Handle of a Gun: Death, Laughter, and the Narcocorrido," *Popular Music and Society* 37 No. 4 (July 2013): 430, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2013.816542> (accessed April 20, 2015).

⁶⁷ Helena Simonett, "Narcocorridos: An Emerging Micromusic of Nuevo L.A.," *Ethnomusicology* 45 No. 2 (Spring – Summer 2001): 321, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/852677> (accessed April 20, 2015).

⁶⁸ Jo Tuckman, "Mexican singer shot six times in latest attack on drug trafficking glorifiers," *The Guardian*, March 24, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/24/mexico-singer-shot-drug-trafficking> (accessed April 20, 2015).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Helena Simonett, "Narcocorridos: An Emerging Micromusic of Nuevo L.A.," *Ethnomusicology* 45 No. 2 (Spring – Summer 2001): 320-1, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/852677> (accessed April 20, 2015).

therefore a significant role in the narco-culture. *Narcocorridos* are so popular that they outsell every other style by a wide margin according to some music vendors.⁷¹ Even for fans who dislike the lyrics or the values that *narcocorridos* promote, the style of the music and the party atmosphere is enough to convince them to support *narcocorrido* artists by attending shows or purchasing recordings.⁷² Modern commissioned *narcocorridos* share a strong connection to traditional *corridos* in their formulaic storylines and characters. This helps draw a direct connection between modern Mexican-American regional music and fans to traditional Mexican music styles and culture.⁷³ In addition to the tuba playing a central role in modern *narcocorridos*, the connection of current *narcocorridos* to traditional *corridos* enhances the tuba's ability to connect current Mexican-American regional music fans to traditional Mexican culture.

In addition to an expanded presence in Mexican-American regional genres, the tuba has made its way into genres of music that may be even more influential with a larger youth population, Mexican-American rap. Akwid is a Mexican-American rap group that has pioneered the use of Mexican-American regional music style backing group that features tuba.⁷⁴ This innovate mixture of styles may be in its infancy, but it is a logical combination in many ways. The party atmosphere that tuba in Mexican-American regional music provides for many Mexican-American youth is exactly the same atmosphere that rap and hip-hop artists such as Akwid desire. This new combination of genres contains significant potential to further increase the visibility and cultural significance of the tuba in Mexican-American society.

⁷¹ Robin Denselow, "Narcocorrido, the sound of Los Angeles," *The Guardian*, March 28, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/mar/28/narcocorrido-sound-los-angeles> (accessed April 20, 2015).

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Helena Simonett, "Narcocorridos: An Emerging Micromusic of Nuevo L.A.," *Ethnomusicology* 45 No. 2 (Spring – Summer 2001): 324-5, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/852677> (accessed April 20, 2015).

⁷⁴ Akwid, "Biografía," <http://www.akwid.com/biografia.html> (accessed April 19, 2015).

In addition to the new genres in which tuba has found a presence, the location of these innovative changes has shifted. My research and most of the changes that have been discussed began with artists in Los Angeles and the surrounding southern California music scene.⁷⁵ According to Bryan Ordaz, one of the young tubists that I interviewed, tuba in Mexican-American regional music is actually more popular outside of southern California because there it is still relatively new. When he has gone on tour with famous vocalists, he feels like his playing and the tuba in *norteña* ensemble has received more admiration and recognition than they have in southern California. In addition to the tuba in other Mexican-American regional genres becoming a new phenomenon outside of southern California, he feels that the market in southern California is oversaturated with groups that have included tuba instead of bass guitar. Not surprisingly, the trend of tuba replacing bass guitar has spread to other areas of the country where Mexican-American regional music is popular. Jose Montalvo, one of the tubists that I interviewed is an undergraduate music student at the University of Texas-Pan American in Edinborough, Texas. While Edinborough is nowhere near the Mecca of Mexican-American regional music that southern California is, he performs regularly in a variety of Mexican-American regional genres as a way to help pay for college.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Jesse Tucker and Bryan Ordaz, interviewed by author, November 6-8, 2014.

⁷⁶ Jose Montalvo, interview by author, Facebook messages, April 6-19, 2015.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

This research has provided insight into the changing role of the tuba in Mexican-American regional music with a focus on genres such as *banda*, *norteña*, *sierreña*, and popular music such as Mexican-American rap. Tuba playing has undergone significant changes in technique and its role within the ensemble. The tuba now functions as a signifier of Mexican-American culture in southern California because of these changes. The tuba has become an iconic instrument in Mexican-American regional music because of its increased use in new and traditional genres, the significant melodic role it plays in these genres, the iconographic visual effect of the instrument, and the role it has in the party atmosphere that is desired by fans of Mexican-American regional music. Through the changes seen in tuba playing, the tuba has played and will continue to play a significant role in the sustainability and transmission of Mexican-American music culture.

While not entirely within the scope of this project, the tuba playing represented in Mexican-American regional music deserves more acknowledgement and recognition in the academic tuba world. Other than the work of J.D. Salas and the material presented here, Mexican-American regional music and musicians often remain absent from the academic conferences and journals of the International Tuba Euphonium Association. It is long past time that the academic tuba world embraces the newfound significance and cultural importance of the tuba in Mexican-American regional music. Not only does this trend provide more artistic and employment opportunities for tuba players, but it affords tuba players more opportunities to enhance the understanding and appreciation of the tuba in society, both of which are founding

principles of the International Tuba Euphonium Association, the main academic organization for the tuba.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ International Tuba Euphonium Association, "Bylaws of the International Tuba-Euphonium Association," TUBA/ITEA History, Last modified September 14, 2012, http://www.iteaonline.org/members/history/history_index.php?page=ITEA%202012%20By-Laws (accessed March 16, 2014).

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