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Peruvian psychedelia will blow your mind

By **John E. Mitchell**

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North Adams Transcript

Music, various artists

The Roots of Chicha 2: Psychedelic Cumbias From Peru (Barbes)

It's not as if compiler Olivier Conan doesn't have enough on his plate -- he's a member of two bands, including Latin chamber musicians Las Rubias Del Norte, a co-owner of the club Barbes in Brooklyn, and also runs the label of the same name. In addition to the two volumes of Chicha music, Conan's second band, Chicha Libre, covers songs from the Chicha genre. With this second CD volume, he not only adds to his pile of projects, but also offers another level to the Chicha sound as America experiences it.

In the 1960s, Chicha bands were borrowing sounds and ideas from English and American music and melding these with Cumbia -- electric guitars and bass, Moog synthesizers and Farfisa organs all crept in.

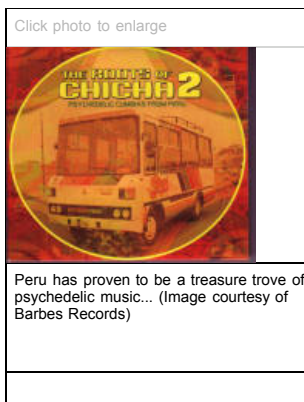
The first group of these bands came out of the Amazon -- bands such as Juaneco y Su Combo, and Los Tigres de Tarapoto. In the 1970s, large migrations to Lima saw the form reach a wider audience, with Lima-based bands including Los Destellos, Los Hijos del Sol and Los Diablos Rojos further popularizing -- and tinkering with -- the sounds.

These compilations are the result of a trip to Peru several years back -- some record buying excursions there that introduced Conan to the world of Chicha. He had never heard it before and was heartened to realize there were still untapped

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musical subcultures out there to be discovered.

That first compilation came out in 2007 -- also reviewed in this newspaper. Three years later,



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Conan presents a follow-up that he characterizes in the liner notes as making up for what he felt was lacking in the previous one. I can assure you and him that there was nothing wrong with Volume 1 in the slightest, but Conan has focused on improving a good thing, devoting his energy to more time in Peru, more research, more interviews and a wider

scope from which to choose the tracks.

Once again, he delivers a killer compilation with a superior accompanying booklet.

He also lets us know what's happened in Peru since the last volume -- a revival of the form, thanks to its legitimization by a "gringo" being so interested in it. This type of music was typically derided in its native country, seen as very low class, but Conan's involvement, coupled with the death of a Chicha star in a car accident, combined to draw mainstream media attention, and the floodgates opened.

In this volume, Conan opted for less commercial selections -- not that it matters much to the North American listener, since it all sounds obscure and exotic to these ears. Defined by twangy, relentless guitar work, coupled with driving percussive elements, the music makes a great argument for homegrown multiculturalism.

Some of the songs featured do mix Latino eclecticism with sounds that don't sound far removed from the middle section of The Doors' "Light My Fire," with the promised psychedelic jamming of the Chicha album's subtitle. Many others evoke the world of surf music from the 1960s -- as with the easy going exoticism of "Cumbia Del Desierto" by Los Destellos, the poppy warm-weather cheer of "El Aguajal" by Los Shapis, which is also noted for its strong Andean quality.

Equally, songs such as "Siboney" by Los Walkers and the rousing "La Danza Del Petrolero" by Los Wemblers De Iquitos don't sound the worlds away from the output of '60s bands like The Revels that they actually are.

The latter bands' "Lamento Del Yacuruna" brings this concept to a madcap level, mixing stronger Latin rhythm that drives the song with jungle hoots. Group Celeste's "Como Un Ave" at times resembles something by Kid Creole, with fuzzy '60s guitar piercing the funk.

There's plenty good in this collection, and I only hope there is room for Conan to unearth more and add to the richness of the sound he's already unleashed on the 21st century.

John Mitchell is the Transcript's arts and entertainment editor.

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