



**Fig. 1:** The cover art for *Wild Tongue*, a 2018 compilation album, was contributed by visual artist Celeste de Luna. A portion of a larger piece, *Lotería Napatla*, the cover draws attention to a local legacy of creative risk, critical necessity, and decolonial thought.

## “*Wild Tongue: A New Record of Rio Grande Valley Expression*”

*Jonathan Leal*

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“Wild tongues can’t be tamed, they can only be cut out.”  
– *Gloria Anzaldúa*

For thirty years now, Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* has helped scores of people discover themselves through care and contradiction—through art that is culturally specific, vulnerable, opaque, and hybrid, reliant on intersecting forms, layered genres, multiple languages, and clashing registers. The present anniversary of Anzaldúa’s book, arriving amidst absurdist headlines and daily heartbreaks, has spurred

many to reflect on the increasingly surreal realities of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands: increased militarization and denigrating media coverage, increased displacement and hostile policies, routine dehumanizations and offensive caricatures, neglectful representatives and still-ailing constituencies. Our present tense is an unequal distribution of fear, its realities at once new and inherited, unforeseen and unsurprising: the gnarled legacy of colonial expansion. And as much as this present continues to overwhelm, it also, as Wild Tongue attests, is spurring many Valley natives to respond with forward-looking, reparative art.

Wild Tongue, a compilation record released on Bandcamp on June 1, 2018, emerged from the same soil and spirit as Anzaldúa's text: the Rio Grande Valley (RGV). A polyphonic collection of stories, reflections, and testimonios produced by Charlie Vela and contributed by nine active bands—Epi and Friends, Carmen Fria, DeZorah, Twin Tribes, Matt and the Herdsmen, Maria D'Luz, Pinky Swear, Jesika, and Arcanedisplay—the album articulates different yet complementary relationships to a complex region. Its braided goals: to amplify, excavate, and reimagine.

In this brief essay, adapted from the liner notes I wrote for the album's release, I aim to provide some insight into the album's context and logics. To that end, first, I provide a backstory of the project's development; second, I survey each of the tracks; and third, I relay a few lasting hopes for the record and the region it indexes.

## ***I. The Project***

Wild Tongue began in February 2018 as a cross-country conversation: on one side, Edinburg, TX; on the other, Stanford, CA. Charlie Vela—a musician, producer, local historian, cultural critic, and documentarian recently celebrated for his and Ronnie Garza's award-winning *As I Walk Through the Valley* (2017)—and I had each independently expressed desires to celebrate contemporary RGV musical creativity. Both of us products of the RGV's diverse musical settings, we had each recognized a concerning (and widening) gap between representations of and life in the RGV: the border region, in everything from mainstream media stories to indie and bestselling literary efforts, seemed to exist almost entirely as an abstraction, a mere figure to be mobilized and a discourse tapped into. In our own ways, Vela and I were working to draw attention to this gap by pursuing projects that dealt with the region as concept, physical space, and thriving community. And after working independently in the realms of music, writing, and academia, my participation in the Creativity in Research Scholars (CIRS) Program at Stanford University's Hasso Plattner Institute of Design enabled us to collaborate—not only with one another, but also with nine RGV bands, all of whom recorded new, locally focused material at Vela's Sound of Rain Studios.

Each of the nine bands we invited to contribute was to respond to a unifying prompt: "Think about a formative experience you've had in the Rio Grande Valley, and write a new song responding to that experience." Where some artists focused on loss and heartbreak, others reflected on growth and experimentation, and still others on injustice and political action. The result was a record lending new clarity not only to a largely misunderstood region, but also to established and emerging artists vivifying the RGV's local settings.

As the artists responded to the project's unifying prompt, they pursued what I understand to be a process of audiobiography: the (w)riting of self through sound. A process familiar to practicing musicians and avid listeners, audiobiography involves articulating a sense of oneself through sound in relation to a specific listening context; constructing a sense of oneself out of the moods, structures, legacies, and discourses afforded by musical genres; and merging one's own past experiences with future visions in the layered present of musical time. In its most lasting iterations, it requires, as Anzaldúa models in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, that artists attend to that porous border between inner and outer worlds in order to render private truths and social designs newly legible, communicable, and transformative. And "to have this transformative power," she writes, the "images, words, and stories" produced "must arise from the human body—flesh and bone—and from the Earth's body—stone, sky, liquid, soil."

This grounding—in flesh and surrounding—is indeed the promise of the emotional, existential, and excavational work of self-building and communal healing. Just as autobiography can be "an act or process

of simultaneous self-creation and self-emancipation” for communities so often denied the right of self-fashioning and presentation, as theorist Paul Gilroy puts it in his watershed *The Black Atlantic*, so too can audiobiography, itself part of a broader, multi-dimensional “project of self-liberation.” In the midst of such rending events, beneath the boots of so much heavy history, there is a rare magic in seeing oneself reflected in the material one consumes and creates; there is a vital empowerment in, at long last, finally hearing oneself.

The idea of “musical recognition” was an important part of the project, for one of our guiding axioms was that, indeed, representation matters. And as writer Jeff Chang has explored in a wide range of outlets, we each have ethical and political obligations to ask why and how: “Who has access to the means of production of culture? Who is represented in cultural production and the structure of cultural production? How does their representation, misrepresentation, or underrepresentation impact the notion of artistic quality and the reproduction of inequality? And, who has the power to shape culture and cultural production?” Thinking through issues of access, representation, and power at work in art practice, taste making, and community advocacy—and seeing how those issues entwine with the present-day complexities of border experience and media coverage—ultimately helped Vela and I leverage the opportunity created by the CIRS Program.

Our challenge was to design a project that was not only beneficial for all involved, but also cognizant of structural inequities, political polarization, and real hardship. And with the financial backing of CIRS, meeting this challenge was possible: each of the artists, whether solo acts or full bands, was able to record their songs free of charge, arguably enabling them to take new creative risks without fear of burning through personal funds. Vela lent his production expertise to each act, helping the artists realize their musical vision; I interviewed each group after their sessions, synthesizing our conversations into material for the liner notes and the project’s overall framing. After a brief “comment period,” during which the artists were invited to review the liner notes, the album was released free of charge online to enable its primary audience—RGV listeners—to enjoy the music without incurring financial strain. And because Vela and I are both musicians ourselves, ever aware of the need for artists to get paid for their labors, we equipped and encouraged each of the contributors to sell their tracks on their own after a one-month holding period, as well as to repackage them as part of future releases.

Additionally, because the voices of queer and women of color artists too often go unheard and uncelebrated in many cultural historical projects (and in the music industry writ large), Vela and I made a concerted effort to address their underrepresentation, inviting a majority of bands fronted by queer and women of color artists to contribute their work. Literally and figuratively, we sought to honor their vision and experience by handing over the mic.

Finally, following an “anthology” model of composition inspired by *This Bridge Called My Back*, a collection Anzaldúa co-edited with queer Chicana playwright Cherríe Moraga, we sought to assemble a collection composed not by one author, but instead by many from a wide range of experiential backgrounds, unified, again, by a very specific kind of self-writing—an aural “theory in the flesh.” And while *Wild Tongue* is definitely not comprehensive—missing are the hardcore punk bands, the heavy metal groups, the mariachis, the fusion experiments, the jazz combos, the newest solo artists making waves—the album’s gaps may indeed prove productive: every blank calls for more music, more festivals, more support.

## ***II. The Tracks***

As the artists on *Wild Tongue* demonstrate, to make music between worlds is to cultivate a “stereoscopic sensibility”—or, as author Josh Kun has argued, to hear more than one culture at once, and to find suitable aural form for their dialectics. In what follows, I offer short glimpses of the forms the artists settled on, highlighting select specificities and broader contributions of each of the tracks on the record.

### ***1. Epi and Friends, “Me ha tocado a mí sufrir”***

Epi and Friends open the album with a prayer—for all who have suffered, are suffering, may suffer.

Originally written by Epi's father, Epifanio, and revamped for Wild Tongue, "Me ha tocado a mí sufrir" celebrates the meek and the divine by way of conjunto, one of the most recognizable ensemble sounds of the region. In its composition and performance, the work is an intergenerational, family effort—the two vocalists, Cruz and Epi, not only sing close harmonies, but are also mother and son. And it underscores that Tejano music is not a relic of some antiquated past, but rather, as ethnomusicologists including Catherine Ragland and Manuel Peña have shown, a vibrant expression of contemporary effort.

## **2. Carmen Fría, "Agarra la onda"**

Carmen Fría's contribution is in no uncertain terms a call to action: a rallying cry for local artists and activists who have long been fighting to improve the lives of the RGV's most vulnerable community members. Carmen, a versatile multi-instrumentalist and MC active in a number of local bands—Blight Night, Monstruo, Bohemio, Rotary Waves—here fuses psychedelic techno-cumbia, old-school U.S. hip-hop, and extensions of her work with Jesus "Chuy" Reazola in Caldo Frío to deliver a message that highlights the urgency of fighting for social justice. The sentiments expressed—pushing through exhaustion, spreading a message, standing in solidarity with others—are delivered rapidly, bilingually, layered atop an intricate weave of instrumental parts recorded by Carmen herself. The range of techniques on display drives home the underlying message of "Agarra la onda": "You have the power to shift the power."

## **3. DeZorah, "Las Semillas"**

DeZorah's track takes growth as its core concern. Through ample polyrhythms and mixed meters—hallmarks of the band's post-progressive rock sound—"Las Semillas" channels the spirit of groups like At the Drive-In while playing to the strengths of each band member's specific range of talents. To wit: in Danica's soaring vocals, we can hear a simultaneous expression of joy and terror, a tension threaded throughout the band's recent work. As a whole, "Las Semillas" expresses the drama of growth—not an easy, tranquil, silent process, but rather one characterized by difficulty.

## **4. Twin Tribes "Still in Still"**

"Still in Still" is a darkwave exploration of the paranoia and melancholy that often accompanies migrancy and undocumented status in the United States. Through danceable rhythms, melodic synths, and infectious hooks, band members Luis Navarro and Joel Nino tip their hats to their musical influences—The Cure, Depeche Mode—stretching their creative muscles with an array of instruments: a Roland JX3P, a Korg Poly 800, as well as guitar, bass, and their own vocals. Lyrically, the song is characterized by withholding, by the need to keep secrets that, if released, would immediately threaten people's lives; it dramatizes this notion that it may be only a "matter of time" before one might be caught, detained, deported. It also demonstrates an appreciation for migrant sacrifice, a coming-to-terms with displacement, and ultimately, a private acceptance. In all, the song maps a vast emotional territory, reminding us that every day, many dance with darkness to find solace and security.

## **5. Matt and the Herdsmen, "Bordertown"**

Matt and the Herdsmen's song is a coming-of-age narrative rooted in RGV soil. In a style informed by years of participation in Texas country scenes, singer-songwriter Matt Castillo tells a story of yearning, division, even looming doom—"standing at the Rio Grande / I feared that I would drown"—that eventually transforms into acceptance, appreciation, and rootedness: "Cause your roots are what hold you up / Not what keep you down / Growing up, living in a border town." Matt, whose family and musical activities have taken him from

Edinburg to Austin, Houston, and beyond, here displays a commitment to recording his own growth as an RGV resident as well as his conception of what and where “home” might be. As a result, “Bordertown” draws attention to the complexities of belonging and aspiration in the RGV; somehow, by some alchemy, home is at once a small town, a borderlands, a metropolis, a memory.

## **6. *Maria D’Luz, “Productivo”***

“Productivo” is a celebration of grit, potential, and experimentation—a call to embrace creative risk. D’Luz, an accomplished songwriter, pianist, singer, businesswoman, and mentor, here draws on her broad palette of musical styles and techniques to get this across: the extended harmonies familiar to jazz circles, the pointed vocal delivery of many rock singers, the rhythmic structures of zapateado flamenco, and the smooth character of bossa nova. Through its musical fusions—including guitarist Mario Aleman’s impressive contribution—“Productivo” exemplifies mixtures familiar to RGV communities; through its lyrical insistence, it pushes for an embrace—even a pursuit—of new risks and combinations. In effect, the song argues for exploration and openness—virtues alive in the body of work D’Luz has produced to date.

## **7. *Pinky Swear, “Bring You Down”***

On their track, Pinky Swear reflects on departure and intimacy by dramatizing the meltdown of a relationship. Beginning with an ultimatum—“he said / you can stay or follow me, but I’m leaving”—and ending with an evaluation—“you didn’t have to if you didn’t want to”—the song moves through betrayal and bitterness with refreshing honesty. Sitting at the boundary between grunge and punk, the group’s sound here—marked by a gritty chord progression and Sarah Danger’s scorching vocal performance—brings the lyrics to life. In its transparencies and up-frontness, “Bring You Down” shows how larger pressures to stay or to leave—whether an individual or a place—drive wedges between people, breaking connections apart. The song sits with those pressures to take steps toward individual and communal healing.

## **8. *Jesika, “Party Is Over”***

Jesika’s “Party Is Over” is a reflection on the importance of refuge. In many ways a monument to the thriving RGV music scene via its invocation of Cine El Rey on “17th street,” the song follows the slow shed of anxiety that comes with settling in: “Yeah I think I found my peace / in the way the sun sets over 83 / with the way that these transplanted palm trees are just as native as me.” In its interiority and intimacy, “Party Is Over” outlines the very architecture of this album: a call to celebrate personal experience and discover unknown commonalities with others as a result.

## **9. *Arcanedisplay, “Split in Two”***

“Split in Two,” the album’s closer, is an intricate synthesis of many of this album’s major themes. A true infusion of lyrical content and musical structure, the song utilizes bilingual lyrics, mixed meters, interlocking polyrhythms, ambient electronic textures, and a nuanced arrangement to relay a personal story of division and reconstitution. It begins by exploring the pressures of assimilation, the suppression of language, manner, and gesture: “Don’t roll your R’s, they’ll look away / Take every chance you can to blend.” It then hones in on the heartbreak of seeing this pressure as part of a bigger picture, a historical inheritance, a colonial scar: “It broke my heart to learn the truth / We weren’t broken into two / We didn’t have to choose.” Finally, in its last moments, the song becomes anthemic: an embrace of self and home.

Each of these songs, in their specificities and engagements, speaks to the artistic diversity of a region consistently characterized as a space of wanting, absence, and criminality. As standalone works, each is a

unique and personal expression of what it's been like to live and work in the area. But taken together, as an anthology of honesties, they form a larger impression—incomplete yet rich, unfinished and promising.

### III. The Hope

It is our hope that Wild Tongue capture a small slice of the creativity of RGV musicians; something of the values of collaboration, even across thousands of miles; something of the richness of personal exploration through the arts; and something of the necessity of more numerous and nuanced representations of border communities in times of unrest, division, and uncertainty.

It is our hope as well, that Wild Tongue resonates with others who are striving to do the same. On that front: there is the work being done by the entire staff at Neta, a bilingual multimedia platform committed to creating “engaging, culturally relevant content” that addresses issues specific to local residents. There is the work being done by Sirheem “Seems” Fuentes, a musician in the band Future Wives and founder of Mujer RGV, to provide crucial support for women musicians in the region. And there is the work of the numerous activist groups, music promoters, documentarians, poets, painters, music producers, and small business owners striving to nourish local culture. Without question, these efforts are enriching the cultural ecosystem of the present and drafting visions for a more inclusive future. With this project, we offer our own contribution—a musical reminder that while present hardships might feel endless, wild tongues will not be tamed.

## WORKS CITED

1. *Gloría Anzaldúa, Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza. (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books 2012), 76.*
  2. *For more on Celeste de Luna's art, politics, and philosophy, see this recent interview: Magda García, "Interview with Celeste De Luna," in Camino Real, 10:13. Alcalá de Henares: Instituto FranklinUAH, 2018. Print.*
  3. *Charlie Vela and Ronnie Garza's documentary, well received across the Southwest, went on to win the Special Jury Award at the San Antonio's CineFestival in June 2018. As a follow-up to their film, they also released a documentary soundtrack spanning decades of RGV music history, which can be accessed here: <https://medium.com/@AIWTTV/soundtrack-as-i-walk-through-the-valley-d5dae3d73d7e>*
  4. *For a succinct overview of this notion of representation, see Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation" in Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices. Ed. Stuart Hall. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications 1997), 13–74.*
  5. *I'm also reminded of this quotation of critic Mike Kelley's: "When looking at something that purports to be you, all you can do is comment on whether you feel it is a good resemblance or not." Kelley, Foul Perfection: Essays and Criticism. Edited by John C. Welchman. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2003), 41.*
  6. *Anzaldúa, Borderlands / La Frontera, 97.*
  7. *Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1993), 69–70.*
- Gilroy also offers a related sentiment in that work's conclusion: "Both storytelling and musicmaking [have] contributed to an alternative public sphere, and this in turn provided the context in which the particular styles of autobiographical self-dramatisation and public self-construction have been formed and circulated as an integral component of insubordinate racial countercultures" (200).*
7. *In this respect, I'm inclined toward a more optimistic reading of Adorno's "The Curves of the Needle": "What the gramophone listener actually wants to hear is himself" (274). Adorno, Essays on Music. Edited by Richard Leppert, translated by Susan H. Gillespie. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 2009). See also "Strangers among Sounds" in Josh Kun's Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America. (Berkeley,*

CA: University of California Press 2005).

8. For more, see *Up from the Underground: Documentation of the Ford Foundation's Future Aesthetics Program, 2002–2014*. Eds. Jeff Chang, Jakeya Caruthers, and Kai Kane Aoki Izu. (Stanford, CA: Institute for Diversity in the Arts 2016). See also Bill Ivey, "Cultural Bill of Rights" in *Arts, Inc.: How Greed and Neglect Have Destroyed Our Cultural Rights*. <http://createequity.com/2011/07/arts-policylibrary-arts-inc/>

9. More work is always needed on this front, and indeed, more is on the way: One Scene Studios and Neta are hard at work on a new documentary of LGBTQ+ history in the Rio Grande Valley entitled *Pansy Pachanga*.

10. *This Bridge Called My Back* is itself unified by a very specific kind of self-writing: a "theory in the flesh," which, as Moraga defines it, is "one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity" (Moraga 19). In that 1981 volume—a historic text for women of color feminists—one encounters a number of these self and social excavations. Taken together, the pieces speak back to white, chromatic, and nationalist hetero-patriarchies and critique hypocrisies of white feminism; ultimately, they argue that it is only through comparison, compilation, and assemblage that certain truths become legible. See Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. (Albany, NY: SUNY Press 2015).

11. Additionally, to ensure a wide variety of RGV experiences came through, we experimented with some degree of early-stage anonymity: on the whole, none of the artists knew what the others had written before arriving at the studio to record their new songs. The common themes that emerged, then— appreciation for the region, aspirations to leave, struggles for personal and political restitution—feel especially significant, representative of personal experiences and suggestive of deeper issues, concerns, and aspirations.

12. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 196.

13. Josh Kun, "Allá in the Mix: Mexican Sonideros and the Musical Politics of Migrancy" in *Public Culture* 27:3 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2015), 533–555.

14. Catherine Ragland, *Música Norteña: Mexican Americans Creating a Nation between Nations*. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press 2009). See also Manuel Peña, *Música Tejana: The Cultural Economy of Artistic Transformation* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press 1999).

*Epi and Friends's "Me ha tocado a mi sufrir"* features Epifanio Martinez (Music and Lyrics), Epi Martinez, Jr. (Vocals / Bajo Sexto), Cruz Martinez (Vocals), Noel Hernandez (Bass), Javier Perez (Drums), Juan Antonio Tapia (Accordion), Charlie Vela (Production). For more on Epi and Friends, see: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/EpiandFriends>

15. Carmen Fria's "Agarra la onda" features Carmen Castillo (Music and Lyrics) and Charlie Vela (Additional Music and Production). For more on Carmen's work, visit: [www.themonitor.com/entertainment/article\\_26b03912-9b2c-11e7-9870-1b9b2b64733c.html](http://www.themonitor.com/entertainment/article_26b03912-9b2c-11e7-9870-1b9b2b64733c.html)

16. DeZorah's "Las Semillas" features Danica Salazar (Vocals), Eric Martinez (Guitar), Jonathan Garza (Guitar), Daven Martinez (Bass), Trey Puga (Drums), and Charlie Vela (Production). For more on DeZorah, visit: [www.netargy.com/2018/05/24/the-evolution-of-dezorah-in-the-rio-grande-valley](http://www.netargy.com/2018/05/24/the-evolution-of-dezorah-in-the-rio-grande-valley)

17. Twin Tribes's "Still in Still" features Luis Navarro (Music and Lyrics), Joel Nino (Music and Lyrics), and Charlie Vela (Production). For more on Twin Tribes, visit: [www.idieyoudie.com/2018/02/twin-tribes-shadows/](http://www.idieyoudie.com/2018/02/twin-tribes-shadows/)

18. Matt and the Herdsmen's "Bordertown" features Matt Castillo (Guitar, Vocals, Music, and Lyrics), Everto Cavazos (Electric Guitar), Omar Oyoque (Pedal Steel), and Charlie Vela (Bass, Drums, Music, Lyrics, and Production). For more on their work, visit: [www.themonitor.com/entertainment/article\\_2d5a0f8e-c30c-11e6-8962-07fbeb64b825.html](http://www.themonitor.com/entertainment/article_2d5a0f8e-c30c-11e6-8962-07fbeb64b825.html)

Additionally, see also the following excerpt from Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera*: "I had to leave home so I could find myself, find my own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that had been imposed on me . . . But I didn't leave all the parts of me: I kept the ground of my being. On it I walked away, taking with me the land, the Valley, Texas" (38).

19. María D'Luz's "Productivo" features Dulce Maria Gonzalez (Music, Lyrics, Vocals, and Piano), Mario

*Aleman (Guitar), Raul De Leon Jr. (Percussion), and Charlie Vela (Bass, Drums, and Production). Published through Maple Music Chords Publishing (BMI). For more on María D'Luz, visit: [www.mariadluz.com](http://www.mariadluz.com)*

20. *Pinky Swear's "Bring You Down" features Sarah Danger (Music, Lyrics, Vocals, and Rhythm Guitar), Christian Allen Hanks (Lead Guitar), Luther Mangrum (Bass), Maxwell Perkins (Drums), and Charlie Vela (Production). For more on Pinky Swear, visit:*

*<https://daily.bandcamp.com/2017/08/23/pinky-swear-texas-band-interview/>*

21. *Jesika's "Party is Over" features Jesika Espiricueta (Music, Lyrics, Vocals, Guitar, and Theremin), Trey Puga (Drums), Andrews Sanchez (Bass), and Charlie Vela (Production). For more on Jesika, visit: [www.themonitor.com/entertainment/article\\_05c7cc58-2a0e-11e8-898d-9b4e8a6c891e.html](http://www.themonitor.com/entertainment/article_05c7cc58-2a0e-11e8-898d-9b4e8a6c891e.html)*

22. *Arcanedisplay's "Split in Two" features Diana Tovar (Music, Lyrics, Lead Vocals, Guitar, Bass, and Production), Rudy Cerda (Music, Lyrics, Electronic Beat, Synths, Effects, Group Vocals, and Production), Joey Barrera (Drums and Group Vocals), Robert Barrera (Guitar and Group Vocals), Efrain Mungia (Cello), David Moreno (Trumpet), Sirheem Fuentes (Group Vocals), Sergio Trevino (Group Vocals), Victoria Alvarez (Group Vocals), and Charlie Vela (Additional Production). For more on Arcanedisplay, visit: <https://www.facebook.com/arcanedisplay/>*

23. *In follow-up interviews after their recording sessions, I asked the artists about their hopes for the region, and about how they see music fitting into that development. Their answers included the following. "And after many, many years of consistent battling (on the activist front), it's really easy to give up hope, to get tired. But music has consistently been that 'something' that gives people hope. Singing just makes people feel good. Through music, artists are able to remind people: 'This is why we're doing this. This is why we need to keep going.'" Carmen Castillo (Musician), interviewed by Jonathan Leal via phone on April 14, 2018.*

*"I want to see more women artists and queer artists on stages. A lot of these folks are not validated like they should be. We need more diverse lineups. We just need more. And you know . . . people always sing along to songs that, honestly, don't have much immediate relevance to them. Not that songs need to, but that's a different conversation. With my music, though, maybe even with this project, I want to offer people something different. I want to offer something to women in the Valley who are like me—women who feel very different and ostracized. I want to let them know that it's okay to be who you are. I want to empower people. When I get an opportunity, I want to spread it around." Jesika Espiricueta (Musician), interviewed by Jonathan Leal via phone on April 15, 2018.*