

The (Mis)adventures of La Reina del Mariachi: Lucha Reyes and Queer Mexican Cultural Nationalism

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Born María de la Luz Flores Aceves in Guadalajara, Jalisco, in 1906, Lucha Reyes transformed Mexican ranchera music on an international scale. She performed and traveled with mariachis and trios from Mexico City to Los Angeles to Europe. Delivering innovative gestures to the music's style and performativity, Reyes would create a sonic imprint for generations of ranchera singers to come. Most often recognized for the sexual agency and unique lyrical interpretation encompassed in her rendition of rancheras, Reyes embodied modes of desire, pain, and tragedy that transcended heteronormative sexual economies of the time. Reyes lived physically and psychologically, in both her work and in her personal life, the excessive contradictions of Mexican modernity as it affected "liberated women" and queer individuals.

With particular attention to the transnational-scapes of Mexican ranchera music and the comedia ranchera genre, this paper examines how Los Angeles and Mexico City shaped the career of 1920s-1940s Mexican ranchera performer Lucha Reyes. This historical recovery project more broadly documents how Mexican radio and film as well as cultural producers created a transnational circuit for the circulation of Mexican popular culture and for the creation of a greater Mexican national consciousness. My paper addresses how Reyes and other queer artists shaped Mexican cultural nationalism and how their cultural legacies are being consumed, re-interpreted and appropriated today.