

Mexican-American music is focus of new digital archive

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 Listen

Eight years ago, UCLA began an effort to digitize Mexican-American music from California and Texas recorded on independent labels. Some of those 40,000 records are done and the university's unveiling them today. KPCC's Adolfo Guzman-Lopez has more.



Adolfo Guzman-Lopez: Arhoolie Records founder Chris Strachwitz bought the recordings over the last 50 years at old record shops and from border radio stations. He says they're important social documents for scholars.

Chris Strachwitz: Our blues records, our jazz records, our country, gospel, are all pretty much reissued, so they are available. There are copies of them here and there. This music, nobody had ever bothered to really gather them.

Web Resources

- [Frontera Collection of Mexican-American Music](#)
- [Arhoolie Records](#)

Guzman-Lopez: Strachwitz migrated from Germany as a teen. He doesn't speak Spanish. That didn't keep him from falling in love with the music.

Strachwitz: The feel of the music, the rhythm, the devotion that I felt, the intensity of the musicians.

Guzman-Lopez: And the humor – as in "Take it Easy, Take it Light" by Chuy Reyes and His Orchestra, recorded about 60 years ago. It's a parody of the way a Mexican speaks English.

["If you need a rest, then you want to go to a place called Baja Californi-o. Everybody sleeps, there's time to kill. The sun above is like a sleeping pill. (Chorus:) Take it easy, take it light/On a mellow tropic night."]

Guzman-Lopez: The popular San Jose-based norteño group Los Tigres del Norte donated half a million dollars to the digitizing effort. UCLA's looking for more money to place the rest of the songs online.

