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## **Breaking Down the Doors: Latin artist take advantage of SXSW in spite of underrepresentation**

“It'll be Texas today and then the rest of the country tomorrow.”

By Christina Lopez

South By Southwest's home state of Texas carries a robust and vibrant Latin music culture. Despite Texas' strong Latino history and the rising popularity of the genre, Latin music remains underrepresented at the festival. However, for some of these Latin artists, combating this underrepresentation starts at SXSW.

Less than 60 artists are featured in the festival's lineup. These numbers pale in comparison to other genres. SXSW's largest genre, Rock, is represented by almost 400 acts. As of March 4, only 56 acts are classified as 'Latin.'

“I do think that it's unintentional and that they're just not paying enough attention,” SXSW veteran Lesly Reynaga said. “You have to be paying attention to the fact that the genres that are popping are represented by Latinos. And so it usually goes downwards and also ends up getting overlooked.”

The latin pop singer said the biggest advantage of performing at SXSW as a Latin artist is the attention.

“If you put [SXSW] on your resume, that alone is an attention grabbing point. Just the fact that I get to say that I played a festival is something that will open doors for other opportunities,” Austin's Artist of the Month said.

SXSW opened that door for Reynaga, sending her to other festivals like Lollapalooza in 2023.

Bombasta, a cumbia and hip-hop fusion group from San Antonio, performed at SXSW many times before. Roberto Livar, the band's frontman, said although the Latin genre is still underrepresented at the festival, the band sees their opportunity for live performances at SXSW as “a gift.”

“We're at a point where there is more acceptance [of Latin music.]” Livar said. “But with the continued issue of under-representation being consistent out there, we really strive to do our best as performers and writers to just be unquestionably and unquestionably talented.”

Bombasta and Livar take pride in their activist roots. Livar said they perform at protests and promote political conversations among Latin artists. Livar said Bombasta sees the audience's

attention as a responsibility and sees the increased visibility at SXSW as a chance to share their advocacy for social change.

SXSW's first cumbia showcase will make its debut this year. Combo Cosmico, a psychedelic, "alien-music," cumbia fusion group, said they were invited to perform at the showcase and considered it "a golden ticket." They said that although there is less visibility for Latin artists, the band sees SXSW as an opportunity to transcend their given 'Latin' label.

"You know, we don't need Latin Grammys. How about just 'Grammys?'" the group's percussionist Arturo Barz said. "I think that we just need to stop putting people in boxes so much. So I'm hoping that an opportunity like this would just be like 'Hey, check up on these artists. They just happen to play cumbias.'"

Barz said he and the group are excited to be a "pioneering band," that increases Latin music representation at festivals like SXSW, and even visibility for themselves.

"It'll be Texas today and then the rest of the country tomorrow."