

# New Music From Alt.Latino

By FELIX CONTRERAS · SEP 30, 2018

[Weekend Edition Sunday](#)

LULU GARCIA-NAVARRO, HOST:

It's been quite the week. Many people have taken to social media to express not only their opinions of recent political news but also a sense of emotional exhaustion. Alt.Latino's Felix Contreras joins me now. Felix, welcome. And are you feeling exhausted?

FELIX CONTRERAS, BYLINE: I feel beat up.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Yeah.

CONTRERAS: Yeah.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: A lot of people do. It's been a week. And normally, you come here to share new music or tell us about a specific performer you recently discovered. But today, you have something different for us, a musical reaction to this past week's news. How does this work? I'm a little - I'm ambivalent (laughter).

CONTRERAS: OK. So the idea goes back to the 2016 election - OK? - that really brutal campaign. Now, that week I did an Alt.Latino podcast with very little talking, just soothing, meditative music. It was sort of an offering to listeners as a musical breather, a break from the intensity. And it was a very popular show. It was a lot more popular than I expected.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Well, if that's what's on offer, I am all for it. I am hoping that we are going to get another musical breather now.

CONTRERAS: I think we definitely need it. OK. So this music this week is music that I like to say is barely there - quiet, meditative, soft, acoustic from various genres and styles. And we're going to start with folkloric music from a band called Rio Mira.

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, "AGUACERITO")

RIO MIRA: (Singing in Spanish).

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Oh, I love this.

CONTRERAS: Right? Mira is the river that runs between southern Colombia and Ecuador into the Pacific Ocean. Now, this band is comprised of Afro-Colombians and Afro-Ecuadorians, descendants of Africans brought to those countries who held onto traditions through music and instrument. They use a lot of heavy marimba, lots of hand drums. But this track is called "Aguacerito," and showcases their amazing choral arrangements. Check it out.

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, "AGUACERITO")

RIO MIRA: (Singing in Spanish).

GARCIA-NAVARRO: I just want to sit here and close my eyes and listen to that. But I understand you also brought me some Cuban music.

CONTRERAS: But not what you expect.

(SOUNDBITE OF ANTONIO ITTURIOZ PERFORMANCE OF LOUIS MOREAU GOTTSCHALK'S "SYMPHONY NO. 1")

CONTRERAS: OK. Now, let me set this up. Now, this is Louis Moreau Gottschalk. He's an American composer and pianist. He was born in 1829 in New Orleans. He traveled and performed extensively in the Caribbean and got especially close to Cuban music in that piano tradition. This is a symphony he wrote about those experiences. And what we're going to hear is the andante from (speaking French), "The Night In The Tropics." I totally butchered that French, I'm sure.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: It was great.

CONTRERAS: OK. And this performance on solo piano is also considered historic. It's the first time that we hear how Gottschalk composed it on piano. The pianist is Antonio Iturrioz. He's Cuban-American - who came to the U.S. from Cuba in the 1960s.

(SOUNDBITE OF ANTONIO ITTURIOZ PERFORMANCE OF LOUIS MOREAU GOTTSCHALK'S "SYMPHONY NO. 1")

GARCIA-NAVARRO: I feel zen.

CONTRERAS: We're getting there. We're going to get there even more with this next vocalist, Magos Herrera from Mexico, who lives in the U.S. now. She's one of my favorite vocalists out there. She has a new album with an adventurous string quartet called "Brooklyn Rider." It's drop-dead gorgeous, the whole album. It's playful. It's serious. It's jazzy. Some tracks defy description. Check this out. This is "La Llorona." A lot of us know this song...

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Yeah.

CONTRERAS: ...A traditional folk song. But check out their version. It gives you a great idea of how they handle things in such a new and adventurous way.

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, "LA LLORONA")

MAGOS HERRERA: (Singing in Spanish).

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Oh, I love that. And I love that song. But this is a wonderful version of it.

CONTRERAS: They really take it to a...

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Yeah - another level.

CONTRERAS: ...A different place - yeah.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Yeah.

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, "LA LLORONA")

HERRERA: (Singing in Spanish).

CONTRERAS: OK. We're going to end with jazz. This is a band called the Yellowjackets.

(SOUNDBITE OF YELLOWJACKETS SONG, "SOLITUDE (FEATURING LUCIANA SOUZA)")

CONTRERAS: They've been around for a very, very long time. They're always so creative. They're musically impeccable, amazing musicians. Their new album is called "Raising Our Voice." And it features the brilliant Brazilian vocalist Luciana Souza. Her voice is like another instrument in an already established band sound on this album. It fits perfectly. I want to read a quote from Luciana Souza from the liner notes. She says, "Raising our voice is about art being an act of resistance." She says, "We didn't talk much in the studio about what's going on now, but we were aware of being bombarded

by the violence in social media and the disrespectful, amoral times we are living in." That's her quote from the album. This track is called "Solitude."

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, "SOLITUDE (FEATURING LUCIANA SOUZA)")

LUCIANA SOUZA: (Singing in foreign language).

GARCIA-NAVARRO: You have created a Spotify playlist for this musical meditation. I love it.

CONTRERAS: You can find it at our website at [npr.org/latino](http://npr.org/latino). I'm going to throw a few extra tracks in there, too, that fit this theme.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Felix Contreras is the host of NPR Music's Alt.Latino. He joins us once a month to update our Latin music playlists. And boy, do I feel better.

CONTRERAS: Good - good.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Thank you.

CONTRERAS: De nada.

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, "SOLITUDE (FEATURING LUCIANA SOUZA)")

SOUZA: (Singing in foreign language).

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