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Far From Home, Mexicans Sing Age-Old Ballads of a New Life



Chad Case for The New York Times

José F. García and his son Benjamin at a benefit near Nampa, Idaho, for the Western Folklife Center.

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NAMPA, Idaho — Watching television coverage of immigration marches, José F. García got mad. He got frustrated. He got his button accordion. In short order, Mr. García squeezed out the beginnings of a corrido, a kind of Mexican folk ballad that tells a story, often with a moral, and sang out the lyrics that came to him.

“Now they are putting up
barriers in front of us
so we don’t return;
but that is not going to block us
from crossing into the United States,
We leap them like deer,
we go under them like moles.”

...Musicians and scholars debate what qualifies as a corrido. To purists, Mr. García’s immigration song, though sung in the style of a corrido and with instruments common to the form, does not make the cut.

“I believe somebody has to die,” said Juan Díes, an ethnomusicologist who is based in Chicago and is working with the center on the project.

“But some people don’t feel that way.”

“The community defines what a corrido is, not a scholar from Chicago,” added Mr. Díes, who specializes in Mexican music. “It is, basically, a musical news story.”



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Mr. García met with Juan Díes, an ethnomusicologist specializing in Mexican music, working with the center.