

25
26



CENTER
FOR THE
ARTS
AT VIRGINIA TECH

LA SANTA CECILIA

Thursday, October 30, 2025, 7:30 PM

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LA SANTA CECILIA

La Marisoul, *vocals*

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Alex Bendaña, *bass*

Miguel Ramírez, *percussion*

This performance will last approximately 90 minutes with no intermission.

Co-sponsored by El Centro – Hispanic and Latinx Cultural Center

This performance is supported in part by a gift from
Mrs. Sally Schweitzer Cox and Mr. John W. Cox.

Additional funding is provided by the
Elizabeth McIntosh Mitchell Trauger Excellence Fund.

GUEST ESSAY

This essay is part of a series of writings by Virginia Tech faculty, staff, and community members that contextualize Center for the Arts visiting artist performances.

Singing from the Borderlands: La Santa Cecilia and My Journey Through Music, Memory, and Migration

Selene Diaz, visiting assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and Women's and Gender Studies at Virginia Tech

I first heard La Santa Cecilia while navigating the liminal space between two nations, two tongues, and multiple layers of identity. Their sound — a blend of *cumbia*, rock, *bolero*, and *norteña* — immediately resonated with the complexity of living between worlds. As a *fronteriza* from Mexico, and an academic working on Indigenous migration and gendered resistance, La Santa Cecilia's music is not just something I enjoy — it is a mirror and a memory of my daily life that helps me to feel at home even when I am far from the U.S./Mexico border.

Growing up in Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, I was deeply drawn to the vibrant presence of both Mexican and American cultures. This was especially true during the holidays, when schools and neighborhoods came alive with celebrations of both Halloween and Día de los Muertos. We blended the two traditions and celebrated as one — at night, we went trick-or-treating dressed as our favorite spooky, sweet, or funny characters, and the next day, we built altars to honor and remember our loved ones who had passed away. Even as a child, I understood that the two cultures were different in many ways, but I also learned that we can live together, respect one another, and celebrate our differences in harmony — because when we truly get to know each other, we realize we have more in common than we think. As Gloria Anzaldúa writes, “Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary.” Living

in the borderlands, I learned early on that this space, while marked by division, also gives birth to creativity, solidarity, and shared belonging.

La Santa Cecilia helps us listen to voices we have been taught to ignore, including our own. Their song *ICE El Hielo*, for example, does not speak for undocumented immigrants — it invites us to hear them. It urges us to tune into the everyday fear, sacrifice, and labor that sustain entire communities. In my own academic work, particularly in my research with the Rarámuri community in Ciudad Juárez, I also strive to create space for stories that are often dismissed or misrepresented. La Santa Cecilia does not give voice — they amplify the frequencies of lives already speaking, already resisting. Their lyrics become archives of struggle, and their harmonies a form of cultural testimony that reminds us to listen more deeply and more ethically.

As a sociologist and professor of Women's and Gender Studies, I often bring music into my classroom. It is one of the most accessible yet powerful pedagogical tools. Songs like *Mexico Americano* affirm bicultural pride, challenging the narrative that one must choose between identities. In classes like Migration, Identity, and Space, or Sociology of Latinx, I use similar cultural texts to engage students emotionally and politically. La Santa Cecilia becomes a bridge between theory and lived experience — between Anzaldúan border thinking and La Santa Cecilia's music.

Their music also affirms the power of joy. Even as they narrate trauma, deportation, racism, and economic hardship, La Santa Cecilia reminds us that survival is also about celebration. I see that in my own community work with the Rarámuri, where storytelling, food, and dancing persist despite displacement. I see it in my own family, in the resilience of my mother, and in the rebellious joy that led me to study hip-hop as resistance in my early scholarship.

In many ways, I feel that La Santa Cecilia has accompanied my journey — across cities, institutions, and personal transformations. Their songs play in the background of my writing days, their lyrics echo in my teaching, and their values resonate with my research on decoloniality, migration, and Indigenous resistance. Just as they blur genres and languages,

GUEST ESSAY, cont.

I too live between categories — researcher and participant, insider and outsider, borderlander and academic.

In a world that often demands assimilation or silence, La Santa Cecilia sings a different tune. One of defiance, dignity, and diasporic memory. Their music reminds me why I write, why I teach, and why I listen.

Selene Diaz is a visiting assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and Women's and Gender Studies at Virginia Tech, where her research focuses on Mexico/U.S. border issues, immigration, and Latinx and Indigenous communities in Mexico. Diaz' work explores how Indigenous communities navigate various borders, including those of ethnicity, language, culture, and gender, particularly within social and institutional interactions in Ciudad Juarez. Díaz earned a Ph.D. in sociology and a certificate in Mexican American and Latino/a studies from Texas A&M University. Diaz received master's and bachelor's degrees in sociology from the University of Texas at El Paso.

Cantando desde la Frontera: La Santa Cecilia y mi Trayectoria a través de la Música, la Memoria y la Migración

Selene Diaz, profesora asistente visitante, Departamento de Sociología y en el Programa de Estudios de la Mujer y de Género, Virginia Tech

Escuché por primera vez a La Santa Cecilia mientras transitaba el espacio liminal entre dos naciones, dos lenguas y múltiples capas de identidad. Su sonido — una mezcla de cumbia, rock, bolero y norteña — resonó de inmediato con la complejidad de vivir entre dos mundos. Como fronteriza de México, y académica que trabaja temas de migración indígena y resistencia de género, la música de La Santa Cecilia no es solo algo que disfruto: es un espejo y una memoria de mi vida cotidiana que me ayuda a sentirme en casa incluso cuando estoy lejos de mi querida frontera.

Creciendo en Ciudad Juárez y El Paso, me sentí profundamente atraída por la presencia vibrante de ambas culturas, la mexicana y la estadounidense. Esto era especialmente evidente durante los días festivos, cuando las escuelas y vecindarios se llenaban de celebraciones tanto de Halloween como del Día de los Muertos. Combinábamos ambas tradiciones y celebrábamos como una sola — por la noche salíamos a pedir dulces disfrazados de nuestros personajes espeluznantes, divertidos, tiernos, y al día siguiente construíamos altares para honrar y recordar a nuestros seres queridos que habían fallecido. Incluso siendo niña, entendía que ambas culturas eran diferentes en muchos aspectos, pero también aprendí que podemos convivir, respetarnos y celebrar nuestras diferencias en armonía — porque cuando realmente nos conocemos, nos damos cuenta de que tenemos más en común de lo que creemos. Como escribió Gloria Anzaldúa: “Las fronteras se establecen para definir los lugares seguros e inseguros, para distinguirnos de ellos. Una frontera es un lugar vago e indeterminado creado por el residuo emocional de un límite no natural.” Viviendo en la frontera, aprendí desde temprano que este espacio, aunque marcado por la división, también da origen a la creatividad, la solidaridad y el sentido compartido de pertenencia.

La Santa Cecilia nos ayuda a escuchar voces que nos enseñaron a ignorar, incluidas las nuestras. Su canción *ICE El Hielo*, por ejemplo, no habla por los inmigrantes indocumentados: nos invita a escucharlos. Nos urge a sintonizarnos con el miedo cotidiano, el sacrificio y el trabajo que sostienen comunidades enteras. En mi propio trabajo académico, especialmente en mi investigación con la comunidad Rarámuri en Ciudad Juárez, también busco crear espacios para historias que a menudo son ignoradas o mal representadas. La Santa Cecilia no, da voz — amplifica las frecuencias de vidas que ya están hablando, que ya están resistiendo. Sus letras se convierten en archivos de lucha, y sus armonías, en una forma de testimonio cultural que nos recuerda la importancia de escuchar con más profundidad y más ética.

Como socióloga y profesora de Estudios de Mujeres y Género, a menudo incorporo música en mis clases. Es una de las herramientas pedagógicas más accesibles y poderosas. Canciones como *México Americano* afirman el orgullo bicultural, desafiando la narrativa de que uno debe elegir entre

GUEST ESSAY, cont.

identidades. En clases como Migración, Identidad y Espacio, o Sociología Latinx, uso textos culturales similares para involucrar a los estudiantes emocional y políticamente. La Santa Cecilia se convierte en un puente entre la teoría y la experiencia vivida — entre el pensamiento fronterizo de Anzaldúa y la música de La Santa Cecilia.

Su música también afirma el poder de la alegría. Incluso cuando narran trauma, deportación, racismo y dificultades económicas, La Santa Cecilia nos recuerda que la supervivencia también se trata de celebrar. Lo veo en mi trabajo comunitario con los Rarámuri, donde la narración, la comida y el baile persisten a pesar del desplazamiento. Lo veo en mi propia familia, en la resiliencia de mi madre, y en la alegría rebelde que me llevó a estudiar el Hip Hop como forma de resistencia en mis primeras investigaciones.

De muchas maneras, siento que La Santa Cecilia ha acompañado mi trayecto — a través de ciudades, instituciones y transformaciones personales. Sus canciones suenan de fondo en mis días de escritura, sus letras resuenan en mi enseñanza, y sus valores vibran con mi investigación sobre decolonialidad, migración y resistencia indígena. Así como ellos desdibujan géneros e idiomas, yo también vivo entre categorías — investigadora y participante, de adentro y de afuera, fronteriza y académica.

En un mundo que a menudo exige asimilación o silencio, La Santa Cecilia canta una melodía distinta. Una de desafío, dignidad y memoria. Su música me recuerda por qué escribo, por qué enseño y por qué escucho.

Selene Diaz es profesora asistente visitante en el Departamento de Sociología y en el Programa de Estudios de la Mujer y de Género de Virginia Tech. Su investigación se centra en la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos, migración, y las comunidades Latine. Su trabajo examina cómo las comunidades indígenas navegan diversas fronteras — de etnicidad, idioma, cultura, y género, especialmente en el contexto de las interacciones sociales e institucionales en Ciudad Juárez. Díaz completó el doctorado en sociología y cuenta con un certificado en estudios México-Americanos y Latinos por Texas A&M University. Obtuvo la maestría y la licenciatura en sociología en la Universidad de Texas en El Paso.



BIOGRAPHY

La Santa Cecilia

La Santa Cecilia is a Mexican American band founded in 2007 in Los Angeles with musical influences like *bolero*, folk, *cumbia*, *ranchero*, *norteño*, and jazz, among others. Formed by La Marisoul (vocals), Pepe Carlos (guitar and accordion), Alex Bendaña (bass), and Miguel Ramírez (percussions), the group has a unique style that gives shine to its music. From Mexican parents, three of the members were born in the U.S., except Carlos, who migrated to the United States when he was a child. While they all grew up with traditional forms of Latin music at home, they were also exposed to the sounds of American pop culture: rock, soul, blues, jazz, funk, punk, ska, reggae, and other sounds of the world that were playing on the airwaves and in the neighborhoods. They performed at block parties, bars, coffee shops, and, from time to time, as opening acts for out-of-town artists and at festivals.



BIOGRAPHY, cont.

The group recorded its first EP in 2009. Aside from superb songwriting and performances, the CD revealed something else that was different about this band: a desire to be part of its community. La Santa Cecilia sponsored “paint parties” where the group performed and also designed and hand-painted CD covers with friends and fans, using materials ranging from recycled newsprint to wrapping paper, cardboard, and more. No two covers were alike, making them *objects d’art*. The band’s music spread throughout the city, and local listeners invited it to play more gigs and festivals. Incendiary live performances garnered a fanatical fan base, and music from the EP appeared on the cable TV series *Weeds*, in the documentary *Re-Encounters* (about Oaxacan artist Alejandro Santiago), and elsewhere.

La Santa Cecilia’s second EP, *Noche y Citas*, was released in 2010 and garnered more critical acclaim; the group began touring Mexico and eventually North America. Its third EP included four covers — ranging from Gloria Jones’ *Tainted Love* and U2’s *One*, to *Love Came Here* by the late Lhasa de Sela and *Viento* by Caifanes — and one original song, showing not only the group’s variety, but its commitment to a many genres of music.

With growing popularity at home and abroad, La Santa Cecilia signed with Universal and reduced the core group to La Marisoul, Bendaña, Carlos, and Ramirez. Its debut album, *Treinta Días*, was released in May 2013; it became the most played debut of the week on Billboard's Latin Pop Albums chart and won the Grammy Award for "Best Latin Rock, Urban or Alternative Album" in February 2014. The band hit the road, playing Bonnaroo, SXSW, and many other festivals and sharing the stage with Elvis Costello, Stevie Wonder, and Los Lobos. In March, less than a month after winning a Grammy, the band released *Someday New*. Another version of *Ice El Hielo* appeared on the album, and the song was used in the FX series *The Bridge*.

La Santa Cecilia worked on the road, teaching songwriting workshops, and was selected as one of two opening acts for Café Tacuba's 25th anniversary tour. It also became an international headliner in its own right before returning to the studio. In August 2015 the band released a pre-release single in English, *I Won't Cry for You*, and followed it up with *Nunca Mas (Never Again)* in December. The full *Buenaventura* album was released in February 2016 and featured appearances by Enrique Bunbury, Fito Páez, members of Los Lobos, and Milwaukee's Latino Arts Strings Program.

The band deepened its collaboration with producer Sebastian Kryz and signed to his Rebeleon Entertainment label. The result was the most ambitious recording of its career to date: an audiovisual album in Mexico City. La Santa Cecilia started out as a street band in Los Angeles, singing *rancheras* and *boleros*, as well as pop, soul, and rock songs in both Spanish and English. To reflect this across the border, the group recorded each song — 11 versions, one original — in the plazas, parks, bars, and theatres of the great metropolis. Each song was recorded live and accompanied by a video, and the material reflected the band's roots. There were versions of *rancheras*, *boleros*, and *mariachi* classics by some of Mexico's best composers, such as Violeta Parra, Consuelo Velázquez (composer of the song *Bésame Mucho*), and Tomás Méndez, as well as modern songs by Café Tacuba, Juan Gabriel, and Smokey



BIOGRAPHY, cont.

Robinson. La Santa Cecilia also collaborated with Mon Laferte (Chilean singer-songwriter), Noel Schajris (Argentine-Mexican singer), and Eugenia León and Rebel Cats (rockabilly). The band previewed *Amar y Vivir* with three videos, all released on the same day in April 2017, including a cover of the title track (written by Velázquez), featuring Mexican rock band Comisario Pantera. The full album was released in mid-May, reaching number 28 on the Top Latin Albums chart and receiving a Grammy nomination for "Best Latin Pop Album."

La Santa Cecilia returned in October 2019 with a full-length work, *Saint Cecilia*. Produced once again by Kryz, the album was written in the midst of loss and grief: three of the parents of the band's four members had passed away in the previous 18 months. Its first single and video, *Winning*, was released that July. Mixed by Grammy winner Dave Pensado, the track was an '80s-inspired surf rock that addressed the idea that, in the early 21st century, people were more likely to live online rather than to experience it, dulling and replacing our reactions to tragedy, disaster, and the struggle for justice with clickbait that would be easily replaced during the next "trending" news cycle. The recording also included a groundbreaking version of the Bessie Smith classic *Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out* to close the set.

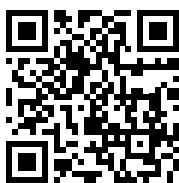
Although the band toured for the first few months of the new year, it was forced off the road and into quarantine due to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021. The group reappeared in October 2021 with the single *Quiero Verte Feliz*, recorded in a rare collaboration with singer Lila Downs. The cut served as the final (and title) track on the band's eight-track album, which appeared in November and was nominated for a Grammy and Latin Grammy for "Best Tropical Vallenato / Cumbia Album" in 2022 and 2023. During 2021 and 2022 La Santa Cecilia toured several cities throughout the United States and Mexico with its *Quiero Verte Feliz* tour, which consolidated its musical career. The group performed in venues such as The Goldfield in Sacramento, UC Theater in Berkeley, and Lunario del Auditorio Nacional in Mexico City, among others. Additionally, the band played two sold-out shows at the Regent California and its first sold-out show in Mexico City at the emblematic Teatro de la Ciudad Esperanza Iris. Likewise, 2022 served as a year of new music for the Mexican-American band, which produced its ninth album, *4 Copas: Bohemia en la Finca Altozano*, released in April 2023 and featuring titles such as *Dos Botellas de Mezcal*, *Copa Rota*, *El Andariego*, *Almohada*, and *Cuatro Copas*.

La Santa Cecilia has captivated audiences around the world, winning a Grammy Award in 2014, participating in iconic festivals such as the Festival Internacional Cervantino and Vive Latino (Mexico) and the New Orleans Jazz Festival (U.S.), and performing 100+ dates between 2023 and 2024 in major venues across Mexico and the U.S., including Teatro Metropolitan (Mexico City) and The Wiltern (Los Angeles). La Santa Cecilia's talent has led it to tour in Spain, Portugal, and Brazil, spreading its musical culture to other countries.

This is La Santa Cecilia's first performance at the Center for the Arts.



TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!



We'd love your feedback on this performance. If you complete the short survey, you can enter for a chance to win two tickets to Blacksburg Master Chorale, Handel's *Messiah*, on Sunday, December 14, 2025.

bit.ly/la-santa-cecilia-feedback

Please note, survey responses are anonymous. If you would like a response to your feedback, please email artscenter@vt.edu.

GO DEEPER

La Santa Cecilia's music is a powerful blend of Latin American rhythms and U.S. pop, rock, and jazz influences. How might this fusion encourage us to reflect on music from our own lived experiences and traditions, and what role do those songs play in shaping one's personal identity and sense of community?

ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

The Center for the Arts seeks to build diverse perspectives, foster creativity, and promote collaboration. We're dedicated to giving people of all ages access to creative experiences that can transform the way they see the world and the people in it.

While at Virginia Tech, members of La Santa Cecilia:

- Shared their passion for music during meet and greets at the El Centro – Hispanic and Latinx Cultural Center and Mozaiko Living Learning Community.
- Explored Hispanic culture with students in Hispanic Life, Literature, and Language.
- Performed for 1,000 students and educators in grades 6-12, from Montgomery, Patrick, Pulaski, Roanoke, Franklin, Craig, Floyd, Giles, and Carroll counties, as well as Radford, Roanoke, and Salem cities, during a matinee performance.

Additionally, VIP community members enjoyed a pre-show meal and complimentary tickets to tonight's performance, thanks to the work of students enrolled in the Spanish Studies course Community through Service and professor Elisabeth L. Austin.

Special thanks to Veronica Montes, El Centro – Hispanic and Latinx Cultural Center; Elisabeth L. Austin and Vinodh Venkatesh, Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures; and Carey Stewart, Mozaiko Living Learning Community



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Each year, wildly enthusiastic students — from PK through 12th grade — fill our theatre for free matinee performances by artists from all over the world. They explore our visual arts galleries during school tours and create and learn during hands-on workshops with artists. For many students, visiting the Center for the Arts is the first time they've ever been to a performing arts facility or gallery. Why do young people need access to the arts? Engaging in artistic activities offers a wide range of skills that they will use throughout their lives.

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Thanks to donor support, young people experience the transformative power of the arts through free programs like hands-on workshops, gallery tours, and special school-day matinee performances by professional touring artists. Open to public, private, and homeschool students, these opportunities spark creativity and connection.

One highlight was *Mapping My Story*, a collaborative art project for PK-5 students from across the region. Inspired by exhibiting artist Shaunté Gates, young artists used collage and drawing to explore how places — homes, parks, schools, and more — shape their feelings and memories. Their colorful, textured creations were displayed in the Center for the Arts Grand Lobby this spring for all to enjoy.

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FALL 2025
EXHIBITIONS



Through Sat., Nov. 22, 2025

Clare Grill and Margaux Ogden

Things I Had No Words For

Ruth C. Horton Gallery

Dana Frankfort and Josephine Halvorson

Seeing and Reading

Miles C. Horton Jr. Gallery and

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Through July 2026

Mural: Clare Grill and Margaux Ogden

Turner Street exterior wall

Through July 2028

Mural: Brian Dettmer

Memories of the Mountains

Grand Lobby

Free Related Event

Beyond the Frame Gallery Tour

Thurs., Nov. 13, 12 PM

Grand Lobby

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We are grateful for the generosity of our patrons and donors who sustain the Center for the Arts with their annual gifts. The impact of all contributions, no matter the amount, is significant in helping us transform lives through exploration and engagement with the arts and the creative process. We are honored to have received cash donations during the period of July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025, from the following:

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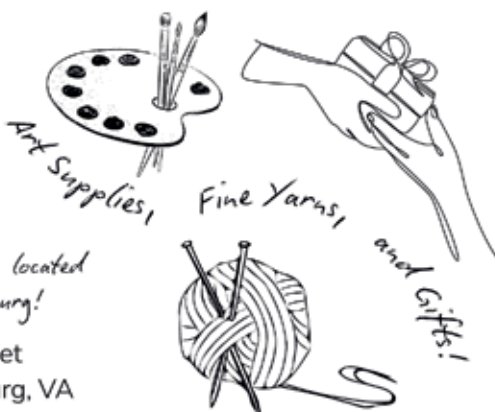
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Learn some dance moves from La Santa Cecilia and come show them off with Contra Dance at the Y!



Nov 16* - Warren Doyle with North Dixie Boom Chicks
Dec 13 - Valerie Helbert with The Morrison Brothers Band

Jan 17 - Brian Hamishar with Afton Crossing

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Lessons start at 7:00 Dance starts at 7:30

Students \$10 General \$12

*Nov. 16 will be an afternoon event



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