

REVIEW | Demoler: El Rock en el Perú 1965-1975

Carlos Torres Rotondo

Lima: Planeta, 2018

ISBN: 9786123193362 (Paperback)

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In the last few years, the study of rock music in Peru is increasingly getting attention from academic inquiry. Most studies, however, have tended to focus on music practices from the 1980s onwards, with a special interest in what is locally known as *rock subterráneo* (“underground rock”). Carlos Torres Rotondo’s *Demoler: El Rock en el Perú 1965-1975* (“Demolish: Rock in Peru 1965-1975”) offers in this respect a valuable contribution to restart discussions about Peruvian rock history.

Although not an academic work, something the author is well aware of, *Demoler* utilizes useful methodological tools for the construction of rock history and provides a wealth of information that will surely become an essential resource for future research on rock music in Peru. The book’s main title (*Demoler*) recalls the chorus of a 1965 song from the short-lived Peruvian garage band Los Saicos, and the image of the book cover presents Peter “El Salvaje” (“The Wild”), the extroverted frontman of another sixties band: Los Honests (1). While the first is a reference most rock fans in Peru will be familiar with, the second sets the tone for innumerable lesser-known facts about Peruvian rock history that urgently need interdisciplinary exploration (El Salvaje’s eccentric stage performance, for example, would have offered a fruitful case study to Auslander (2021)’s most recent work on concert musical persona).

Torres Rotondo’s monograph is the result of extended primary research. This includes magazines and fanzines of the time period, but, most importantly, original interviews conducted by the author with musicians active during the period 1965-

1975. As such, the book provides unique first-hand accounts about music practices and the state of the music industry of an often-forgotten and clearly overlooked period of popular music in Peru. I will mention three of what I consider the most significant outcomes of the book.

First and foremost, *Demoler* provides compelling evidence of a lively Peruvian rock scene in the late 1960s. We learn about managers, promoters, agencies, venue owners and entrepreneurs looking for new commercial opportunities. Although not structured to allow a systematic understanding of the scene, the various testimonies of the book do permit generalizations about the emergence of rock practices. If many British rock musicians in the late 1960s and early 1970s were related to art schools (Frith and Horne, 1987), *Demoler* shows that early Peruvian rock musicians emerged from pre-university surroundings. As sites of socialization, secondary schools in Lima were favourable to the formation of rock bands and served as venues for music consumption. But high schools were also one of the main enablers of rock culture as a whole: although concerts were in fact most commonly held in other sites, they were often framed as fund-raising events to pay for leisure activities and trips of last year high-school students. The book stands therefore as an undisputable source to show that, similar to most places around the world, rock culture in Peru was primarily a result of youth culture.

Second, *Demoler* shows highly operational infrastructures that supported both the recording and live rock industries. These include media endorsement from both radio and television programs, but also a network of film theatres that served as concert venues. Indeed, one of the most interesting findings in the book is the well-established circuit of *matinales* (morning gigs) around the capital. *Matinales* were popular music events organised on Sunday mornings, usually until 3.00pm, and held in cinema theatres. Their importance remains to be studied further but in Torres Rotondo's book they appear as one of the most significant cultural institutions for the instauration of a rock live scene through the 1960s. The use of film theatres for rock concerts in the 1960s is in no way an isolated case. On the contrary, this seems to be part of broader transnational practices in popular music history that still need further analysis (see Frith 2021).

Third, the musicians' testimonies offer a detailed account of music technology in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The author quotes them talking about specific types of guitars, amplifiers and other backline equipment, as well as the different contexts in which they were acquired. As a whole, their anecdotes outline, if one is willing to pay attention to these details, an insightful picture of the Peruvian instruments industry in the late 1960s, as well as the technology used in the various studio facilities that served the rock industry. Within that 1965-1975 framework, we witness, for example, the evolution of studio technology from a 2-channel to a 36-channel console and quadraphonic recording equipment; and from 4-track to 16-track recording studios. Once again, the parallel with popular music developments in countries like the US and the UK is noteworthy.

Although the author summarises some of the previous points in his first chapter, the main text stands as a collection of dispersed testimonies, many of them autobiographical, that do not necessarily afford an easy systematization of music practices. The excessive length of some quotations, sometimes lasting up to ten pages and including different informants without the guidance of the author, does

not help the reader to overcome these difficulties. As such, the primary focus on musicians and bands (all of whom were male), represents both the value and the shortcoming of the book.

Indeed, if Torres Rotondo succeeds in presenting clear evidence of an active rock scene in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the reader is left with many unanswered questions regarding the boundaries of the selected chronological period. The book is in reality a revised edition of a previous work published in 2009: *Demoler: Un viaje personal por la primera escena del rock en el Perú 1957-1975* (Torres Rotondo 2009). Different from this first edition, Torres Rotondo highlights in this second and “definitive edition” a noteworthy rupture between the musical landscape of the late 1950 and the late 1960s, portraying the first as “merely an antecedent without any major continuity” (p. 21). However, the early presence of media infrastructures such as radio and television, along with an established network of cinemas used as rock venues since at least the early 1960s problematizes that assertion. Similarly, the role and the influence of jazz cultures (live music circuits, performance practices and institutions, discourses, etc.) in the formation of rock in Peru remains another key topic to be studied. On the other side of the interval, the author states that “1972 was one of the most important years for rock in Peru, but in 1973 everything went downhill” (p. 380), yet no contextual information is offered to back such claims. In general, more work could have been put to demarcate the period 1965-1975 more consistently and justify its relevance in the history of rock in Peru.

The general political context in which rock music developed in the late 1960s also requires a more extended discussion. Torres Rotondo does not fail to mention the military dictatorship that was established in 1968 in Peru and, considering the rather nationalistic foreign policies of the government, he provides interesting evidence of rather tolerant practices from the State towards singing in English (p. 197). However, a more profound consideration of this and other aspects of political history in Peru would have been necessary to understand the consequences of the dictatorship in the rock music industry of the early 1970s.

Finally, it should be mentioned that, contrary to the title’s suggestion, the book only focuses on Lima and the different scenes within the capital. Out of 396 pages, only 28 are dedicated to cities outside Lima, making *Rock en el Perú 1965-1975* a problematic subtitle, to say the least. Instead of oral history, the information gathered in these peripheral pages has been extracted from written sources; and, in contrast to the main content, the scarce information about each band outside Lima does not facilitate any compelling conclusions and readers are only left with uncontextualized anecdotes and disperse information. The bibliographical references of these pages, however, have been included at the end of the book, along with other invaluable references of 1960’s Peruvian rock. In the end, this is the main merit of *Demoler*: to provide a remarkable resource for anyone interested in the history of rock in Peru. For popular music scholars - and rock scholars, in particular - the many questions that are left unanswered should only be seen as encouragement for future endeavours.

Endnotes

(1) Corrigendum: since its original publication, this article now contains the following corrections. On page 1, previously "Pablo Luna" now reads, "Peter 'El Salvaje' ('The Wild')," previously "another mid-sixties garage band" now reads, "another sixties band," and previously "Los York's" now reads, "Los Honests." Also on page 1, previously "Luna's" now reads, "El Salvaje's." On page 3, previously "27" now reads, "28."

References

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