

ABC Home

Radio

Television

News

More Subjects...

Shop

Search the ABC



MUSIC WITH DEPTH

dig PLAYER

dig TV

dig JAZZ

dig COUNTRY

JUST PLAYED

MY FAVOURITES

dig COMMUNITIES

MUSIC NEWS

REVIEWS

FEATURES

dig PRESENTS

PODCAST

WEB ARTICLES

ARCHIVES

SPECIALS

INTERACT

ABOUT + FAQ

CONTACT

ABC Music Sites

SEARCH

GO

BROWSE BY GENRE

- Blues-
- Country-
- Folk-
- Jazz-
- Pop-
- Soul-
- Industry-
- Hip-Hip-
- Rock-
- World-

BROWSE BY ARTIST

- A -
- B -
- C -
- D -
- E -
- G -
- H -
- J -
- L -
- M -
- N -
- O -
- P -
- R -
- S -
- T -
- U -
- V -
- W -
- X -
- Y -
- Z -

Home | Features | Album Preview: Ry Cooder's Chavez Ravine

Album Preview: Ry Cooder's Chavez Ravine by Brian Wise - 07/06/2005



Chavez Ravine album cover

poor but vibrant hillside Chicano community, which was bulldozed by developers in the 1950s in the interest of 'progress;' Dodgers Stadium ultimately was built on the site.

You can hear an excerpt of the music from the album at [PBS America's](#) website for the film *Chavez Ravine: A Los Angeles Story*. (The link will open in a new window.)

Cooder says, "Here is some music for a place you don't know, up a road you don't go. Chavez Ravine, where the sidewalk ends."

The musical strains of Los Angeles, including conjunto, corrido, R&B, Latin pop, and jazz, conjure the ghosts of Chavez Ravine and Los Angeles at midcentury. On this fifteen track album, sung in Spanish and English, Cooder is joined by East L.A. legends like Chicano music patriarch Lalo Guerrero, Pachuco boogie king Don Tosti, The Midneters front man Little Willie G, and Ersi Arvizu, of The Sisters and El Chicano.

A Los Angeles native, Cooder has been working in Cuba since 1998, producing The Buena Vista Social Club, Ibrahim Ferrer, Ferrer's Buenos Hermanos, and Mambo Sinuendo all Grammy winners. Three years in the making, *Chavez Ravine* marks his musical homecoming.

In the liner notes for *Chavez Ravine* Cooder writes about the subject of his latest album:

"I liked riding through Los Angeles when I was a kid. Going west was toward the future; east was definitely in the past. You could take a bus southeast from where we lived in Costa Mesa, for

PRINT STORY EMAIL STORY

VIDEO / AUDIO / PICS

- Chavez Ravine album cover

RELATED LINKS

Chavez Ravine: A Los Angeles Story

The film's website [More...](#)

Ry Cooder Fan Site

[More...](#)

CHÁVEZ RAVINE, 1949

An excerpt of the book [More...](#)

- W -

FEATURES ARCHIVE

- March 2007 -
- February 2007 -
- January 2007 -
- December 2006 -
- November 2006 -
- October 2006 -
- September 2006 -
- August 2006 -
- July 2006 -
- June 2006 -
- May 2006 -
- April 2006 -
- March 2006 -
- February 2006 -

Take a bus eastward from where we lived, in Santa Monica, for about fifteen miles, transfer to the street car, and get off in Downtown L.A. a world back fifty years in time, maybe more. Then you might take the little trolley up Bunker Hill to an even older and dilapidated miniature world of weird Victorian mansions, ancient trees, and old people who didn't always speak English. It was my favorite thing to do. But I never went to Chavez Ravine. I heard about it in the early '50s: the evictions, the power struggle in city hall a scant mile away, the Pachuco Scare, the Red Scare, and the greasy handoff of the ravine to the Dodgers ball club. Occasionally there would be photographs in the paper of some poor Mexican family from the ravine watching some bulldozer tear up their little house while being harassed by the LAPD or lectured to by some city politician. I didn't understand any of this until later, long after the deal had gone down. In those days, they called such things 'progress'."

"I never liked the grid of Santa Monica streets, the sidewalks and little lawns, or the tract houses we lived in that looked like they had all sprouted up in a day. It was too flat, it lacked history and mystery, and that bothered me. Smog appeared in Santa Monica in 1955, which was bad, and Johnny Cash appeared on Radio KXLA, which was good."

"I had a 78 record album by Roy Rogers, called Lore of the West. Roy and his buddies sang western songs and told western stories, all much more interesting than my life was at the time. The story had something to do with poor sheep ranchers struggling against a wicked outlaw gang that was backed up by a secret cartel of corrupt politicians, railroad interests, and greedy land speculators. The sheep ranchers lost, but the winners were contaminated and ugly. 'A hardboiled egg's always yellow inside,' Roy said."

"I think Chavez Ravine is the same story, something Roy would have understood."

"It was 1950 in Los Angeles. The powerseeking rightwing politicians and the powerseeking, 'bigness'-obsessed planners and developers were getting busy deciding the future of everything. They were also learning to use the techniques of redbaiting and character assassination (as advanced by Joe McCarthy, J. Edgar Hoover, and Richard Nixon), in their effort to topple the progressive city administration and the public housing program. This they did, and Los Angeles was paved over, malled up, highrised, and urbanrenewed, as fortunes were made, power was concentrated, and everything got faster and bigger."

"But there is a lot I miss now. The texture of certain older neighborhoods, like Bunker Hill, a rural feel in urban places, like Chavez Ravine and the timbre of life there, and just peace and quiet. You can see why a lonesome Space Vato, searching for El Monte Legion Stadium, would ask directions in Palo Verde instead of Santa Monica. Chavez Ravine, where the sidewalk ends. Nobody from Santa Monica ever went up there."

Music from the album is featured as the score for the the documentary *Chavez Ravine: A Los Angeles Story*, to be shown on the American Public Broadcasting network this week as part of its *Independent Lens* series, hosted by Susan Sarandon. The documentary is directed by Jordan Mechner and narrated by Cheech Marin of Cheech & Chong fame and was inspired by the photographs taken in 1949 by Don Normark, then a young freelance photographer and now one of the producers of the documentary.

Normark's remarkable photographs were published in the book *Chavez Ravine 1949: A Los Angeles Story* and an exhibition of the photographs will be staged at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art in coming months.

Search **dig** for more stories about;

[Ry Cooder](#)

The views of the contributor and/or linked articles do not represent the views of the ABC. We are completely objective on everything apart from Barry Manilow.

Got an opinion on 'Album Preview: Ry Cooder's Chavez Ravine'?

Name:

Email:

Remark:

Notify me when entry has been approved.

[Go to the Guestbook.](#)

Listen to dig Radio ... **LAUNCH the Player >>**

[dig PLAYER](#) | [JUST PLAYED](#) | [NEWS](#) | [REVIEWS](#) | [FEATURES](#) | [IN CONCERT](#) | [ARCHIVES](#) | [ABOUT + FAQ](#) | [CONTACT](#)



© 2007 ABC | [Privacy Policy](#)