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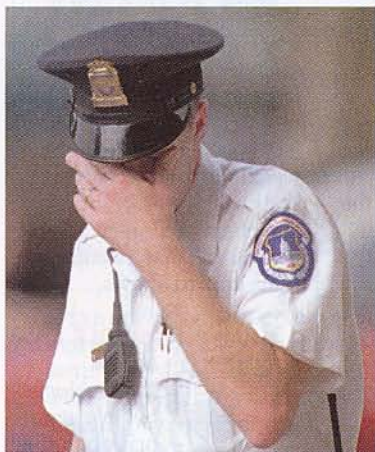
**SHAKIRA
MEBARAK**

ERA of the ROCKERA

**A sorority of tough-toned singers
is taking the lead in traditionally
macho Latin American rock**

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THE WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE



ROSS FRANKLIN JR.—WASHINGTON TIMES



ADRIANA PITTILLIANI



AFP

Capitol Crime: Two policemen die to stop a gunman (see THE U.S.)

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wide, put her poster on teenage boys' walls across Latin America and even prompted Pope John Paul II to grant her an audience this year.

His Holiness may get a shock if he slaps her next CD on the player. The still untitled work, due for release Sept. 1, leaves no doubt that Miss Wholesome wants to shed her sweet pop persona and move on—as a tough-talking female rocker. One tune puts down boyfriends who stare at other women's behinds; another skewers "thieves," like those inside Colombia's corruption-plagued political system.

The stylings are a long step away from rhythmic acoustical guitar, into the harsher environs of blues and hard rock. The numbers have a "real, organic sound," Shakira says, as she mimes a hollow-body electric-guitar solo at producer Emilio Estefan's Miami recording studio. "The whole core is rock, even the dance songs." Some fans may balk at the result, she adds, but "the most important thing is to be honest."

So honestly, why the risky change in direction? For one thing, because

that's where it's at for the growing number of young Latina pop singers who are stepping out of the mainstream to tap a grittier strain inside themselves. Shakira follows on the boot heels of fellow Colombian Andrea Echeverri, a quirky and vocally inventive female rocker, or *rockera*, whose band, Los Aterciopelados (the Velvets), won a Grammy nomination last year for the album *Pipa de la Paz* (Peace Pipe). A rebellious Bogotá society girl, Echeverri, 32, is hailed by critics as Latin America's best rock singer, male or female, whose multiple body piercings (rings in her nose, chin, eyebrow and navel) tell the world not to mess with her, since she is completely capable of messing with herself—a theme rarely raised before in Latin American women's music. "We don't consciously set out to write antimachismo songs," she insists, "but rather to write songs about valuing women as human beings."

Mexican *rockera* Julieta Venegas does the same in a more understated fashion. A classically trained pianist from Tijuana, she now bends notes on the accordion as if it were a Fender Stratocaster, in front of her all-male band. "I don't play a lot of major chords," says Venegas, 27, "because my songs are so often about trying to work out differences in human relationships."

If you want a more visceral sound,

Brazil's Cássia Eller, 34, has one to offer. Even while living hand-to-mouth 10 years ago, Eller walked away from her first big break—a recording session with Sony Music—when executives insisted that she sing standard pop love songs. She preferred to stick with the hard-edged, socially conscious rock that is her hallmark. Last spring the Rolling Stones picked Eller to open for them in Rio de Janeiro on the *Bridges to Babylon* tour. "If you do things the way you want to," says Eller, an out-of-the-closet lesbian, "people will eventually respect you."

The time for respect has come. A growing sorority of tough-toned *rockeras* is pushing its way to the leading edge of traditionally macho Latin American rock. The *rockeras* are "breaking the shackles of the television-packaged pabulum pop they've always had to adhere to," says John Lannert, *Billboard* magazine's chief Latin American music writer. CDs like Eller's *Veneno Vivo* (Live Poison) are selling in the hundreds of thousands; not so long ago tens of thousands for a *rockera* was a big deal. And it's not just female fans who are responding. "Machismo is dying here," says student Roberto Cruz, 19, dancing at a Venegas concert outside Mexico City. "I'd rather hear interesting songs like these

By TIM PADGETT

RISING STARS

WHO QUALIFIES AS A *ROCKERA*? Most Latin music critics say the term can mean almost any singer who departs from mainstream Latin American pop. Even pop-rock can qualify, so long as it's

written and performed artfully, intelligently and with a hint of nonconformity. The same goes for folk rock, glam rock, even Brazilian samba funk rock. Here's a sampling of the best of the rest of the region:

The Parra cousins, Javiera, 29, and Colombina, 23, are products of Chile's cultural aristocracy. Their grandmother Violeta Parra was one of the country's most renowned folk singers, while grandfather Nicanor is one of Chile's most revered poets. But the younger generation likes its culture louder. Javiera heads the band Los Imposibles, an exponent of more classic, '60s-style rock, which has scored such major hits as *Humedad* (Humidity) and *Alacran* (Scorpion). Colombina leads the more hard-rocking group Ex. She has cranked out such visceral CDs as *Caida Libre* (Free Fall) with the hit *Saca la Basura* (Take Out



NICOLE

Once a litting pop star, she has since made steamy *Sueños en Tránsito*

from a Mexican woman than pop garbage."

De Mis Pasos (From My Steps), a song from Venegas' 1996 debut album, *Aquí* (Here), was the first offering by the new *rockeras* to break into Mexico's Top 20 singles chart. "I'm learning from my own steps! I'm understanding my own walk," the song asserts. Venegas' disapproving middle-class father "used to cry every time he saw me doing this," she says. "Now, instead of calling me *la necia*—the foolish one—he calls me *la fuerte*—the strong one."

Just as women like Grace Slick and Joan Armatrading did a generation ago, the new *rockeras* are injecting a female per-

spective into a testosterone-fueled genre.

Part of that perspective is something that could be called subtlety. Venegas, for example, winds through rock songs as enigmatic as the imagery in a Frida Kahlo painting. *Aquí* has set cerebral new directions for Mexican rock with songs like *Como Sé* (How I Know). "What you don't remember doesn't matter to me anymore," she sings to her lover as a clarinet and drum weave desirously in the background.



FERNANDA ABREU

Her hit songs like *Veneno da Lata* fuse samba, funk and Latin rock

The rock ceiling hasn't been easy for these women to crack.

Rock-en-español itself won mainstream acceptance little more than a decade ago; Mexico actively discouraged the playing of rock on the radio as subversive

for much of the 1970s and '80s. After the clouds of censorship lifted, rock was dominated by male acts, such as Argentina's boisterous *Fabulosos* Cadillacs and Mexico's *Café Tacuba*. When Argentine rock pioneer Charly García brought an all-female group onstage in 1982, the crowd booed them right off. *Rockeras* who stood their ground in the early days, like Brazil's Rita Lee, were lonely exceptions. The dominance of Latin pop culture by giant broadcast conglomerates also helped to keep the music light and upbeat.

Meantime, today's female stars were working their way quietly up the demanding ladder of the music industry. Venegas gained experience playing keyboard for top Mexican bands like the punkish *Tijuna No*, while new Argentine star María Gabriela Epumer, 34, polished her craft as a guitarist-accompanist. Epumer's solo break came two years ago, when García's band taped an *Unplugged* session for MTV Latin America. A miniskirted Epumer left viewers entranced. "Suddenly, wherever we went to play, there were fans waiting just to see me," she recalls.

Fortunately, when music executives from Loutec and DBN came calling, Epumer had songs to record. Her album *Señorita Corazón* (Lady Heart) was released two

the Garbage), which rails at deadening female domestic routine: "I've lost half my life... / But of course I'm a Taoist monk and/ it's not convenient for me to die yet."

Like Colombia's Shakira, pop-rock star Nicole (real name Denise Laval Soza) is a makeover. A Chilean, Nicole, 21, is leaving a lucrative career as a pop sweetheart who recorded lilting hit albums such as *Esperando Nada* (Waiting for Nothing) when she was 16. New songs like the ironic *Todo Lo Que Quiero* (All I Want) from last year's smoldering rock album *Sueños en Tránsito* (Dreams in Transit) have hit the national Top 10.

Lima's Patricia Loaliza, 23, is one of the region's most touted pop-rock up-and-comers. Her album *Mil Lunas* (A Thousand Moons) earned critical acclaim this year with electric, bluesy hits like *Loca Ciudad* (Crazy City). Loaliza's mother was a ballad-style singer; the daughter turned to pop-rock after her family forbade her to travel to France at age 14 for music studies, a prize she had won in a talent contest. Loaliza writes her own elegantly harmonious songs.

The bittersweet songs of Soraya Lamilla, 28, the New

Jersey-born folk-rock chanteuse of Colombian parents, have made her just as popular in Europe (she outsells U2 in Germany) as in Colombia and in Miami, where she lives. A trained violinist, Soraya counts among her fans Carole King, with whom she co-wrote and sang last year's European and Latin American hit *Torre de Marfil* (Marble Tower). "I passionately believe that audiences can smell a preconceived, marketed song," she says. Another folk-rock talent, Argentina's Soledad Pastorutti, 17, was just signed by Emilio Estefan. Soledad's 1996 album, *Poncho al Viento* (Poncho in the Wind), and last year's *La Sole* (a nickname for Soledad), each infused with rich Argentine folkloric sounds, have together sold more than a million copies.

Mexico's Rita Guerrero, 28, and her band Santa Sabina have produced such spooky albums as *Simbolos* (Symbols), and they enliven performances with ghoulish makeup and dead-black outfits. In Brazil, Fernanda Abreu, 36, is the queen of samba funk rock, which combines ebullient samba with the pulse of rap and funk. Abreu's sultry voice and the infectious beat of songs like *Veneno da Lata* (Canned Poison) make the fusion irresistible.

—With reporting by

Elizabeth Love/Santiago



SORAYA

Carole King and *Torre de Marfil* boosted Lamilla to international celebrity

