

LISTENING TO ROSITA

The Business of Tejana Music and Culture, 1930–1955

By Mary Ann Villarreal

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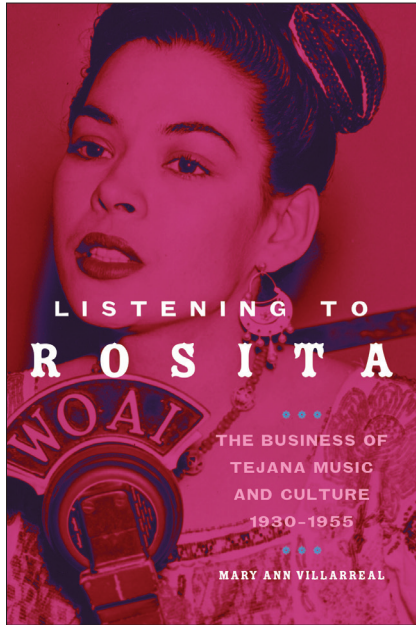
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The first oral history of the Mexican American women singers who performed in mid-twentieth-century Texas

Everybody in the bar had to drop a quarter in the jukebox or be shamed by “Momo” Villarreal. It wasn’t about the money, Mary Ann Villarreal’s grandmother insisted. It was about the music—more songs for all the patrons of the Pecan Lounge in Tivoli, Texas. But for Mary Ann, whose schoolbooks those quarters bought, the money didn’t hurt.

When as an adult Villarreal began to wonder how the few recordings of women singers made their way into that jukebox, questions about the money seemed inseparable from those about the music. In *Listening to Rosita*, Villarreal seeks answers by pursuing the story of a small group of Tejana singers and entrepreneurs in Corpus Christi, Houston, and San Antonio—the “Texas Triangle”—during the mid-twentieth century. Ultimately she recovers a social world and cultural landscape in central south Texas where Mexican American women negotiated the shifting boundaries of race and economics to assert a public presence.

Drawing on oral history, interviews, and insights from ethnic and gender studies, *Listening to Rosita* provides a counternarrative to previous research on *la música tejana*, which has focused almost solely on musicians or musical genres. Villarreal instead chronicles women’s roles and contributions to the music industry. In spotlighting the sixty-year singing career of San Antonian Rosita Fernandez, the author pulls the curtain back on all the women whose names and stories have been glaringly absent from the ethnic and economic history of Tejana music and culture.

In this oral history of the Tejana *cantantes* who performed and owned businesses in the Texas Triangle, *Listening to Rosita* shows how ethnic Mexican entrepreneurs developed a unique identity in striving for success in a society that demeaned and segregated them. In telling their story, this book supplies a critical chapter long missing from the history of the West.

Mary Ann Villarreal is Director of Strategic Initiatives and University Projects at California State University, Fullerton. Her articles on oral history and the formation of Texas Mexican identity have been published in *Oral History Review* and the *Journal of Women’s History*.

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