

Version Galore: Rocksteady and Reggae from JA to L.A.

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Introduction

- The practice of versioning has long been a hallmark of Jamaican popular music, where classic rhythms are revived and reimagined in both live and recorded contexts.
- Versioning creates possibilities to bring another time and place into the here and now.
- Creative productions accrue meaning and shape aesthetics through lived and imagined histories and experiences.
- For many involved in Los Angeles's vintage Jamaican music scene, Angeleno life informs particular affinities for, and adaptations of, 1960s Jamaican ska, rocksteady, and reggae.

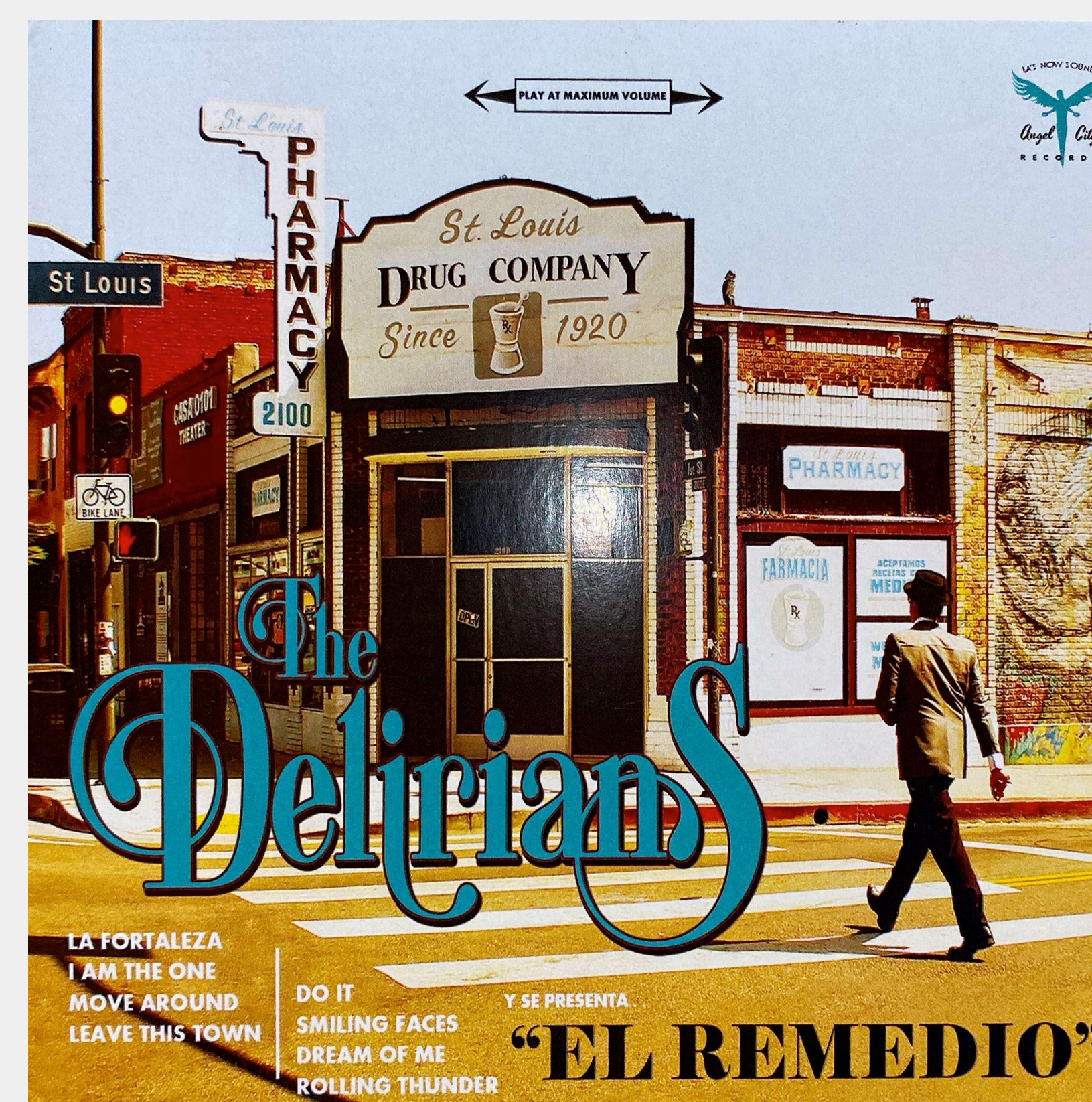
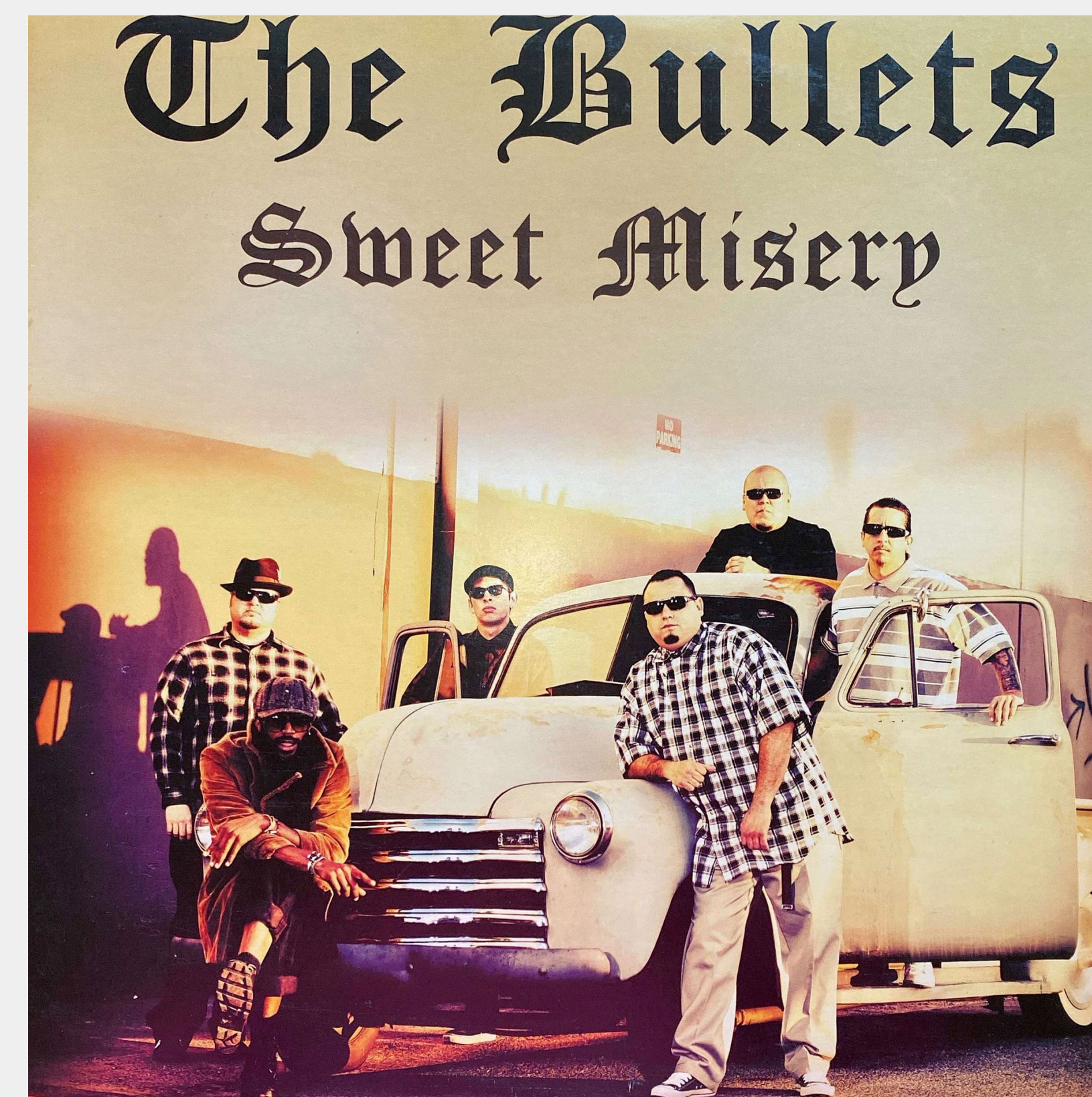
1960s Jamaican Popular Music

- **Ska: early 1960s**
 - Influences:
 - ❖ American rhythm and blues
 - ❖ Local/regional folk and religious music
 - ❖ African-descended Rastafari drumming practices
 - ❖ American jazz
 - ❖ Latin American genres
 - Stylistic Qualities:
 - ❖ Upbeat tempo
 - ❖ Emphasis on the off beat
 - ❖ Full band, typically featuring a sizeable horn section
 - Lyrics:
 - ❖ Love
 - ❖ Everyday life
 - ❖ Social struggles
 - ❖ Current events (e.g., Jamaican Independence)
 - ❖ Slackness (i.e., sexually suggestive content)
- **Rocksteady: mid-1960s**
 - Strong American soul influence
 - Slower tempo
 - Melodic lead from electric bass
 - Popularity of vocal trios
 - Lyrics:
 - ❖ Continuation of ska themes
 - ❖ More incisive social commentary
 - ❖ Rude boy phenomenon
- **Reggae: late 1960s**
 - The rhythm section (drum and bass) takes the lead
 - Brisk, bubbling "shuffle organ"
 - Popularity of instrumental cuts, allowing DJs to chat over tunes
 - Lyrics:
 - ❖ Ska and rocksteady themes continue
 - ❖ Black pride
 - ❖ Rastafari



Los Angeles's Vintage Jamaican Music Scene

- Multiracial (currently, predominantly Latinx)
- Intergenerational
- Crosses class divides
- Aesthetics infused with politics
- Collaborations with foundation artists
- Focus on the "roots" of stylistic influences
- Local music influences:
 - 1960s soul music, "souldies"
 - Motown
 - Chicano Soul/Lowrider Oldies
 - Latin genres
- Amalgamation of appearance styles:
 - 1960s Jamaican rude boy
 - 1960s British youth subcultures
 - Chola/o and Lowrider subcultures



Spotify Playlist:
NCPH 2020 -- Version Galore



Oral History Excerpts on Genre, Time, and Place

- Jeffrey Govan:** Born in South Gate (Southeast L.A.) in 1973. Bassist with numerous L.A. groups and backing bands. Ethnic studies scholar.
- "We can study whatever we want to study, and we can go to school and learn how to play jazz, but our place really matters. Where we *are* really matters. The environment, and how the things that we can't express with words but we can with music. ... So even if you live in an environment, it doesn't matter what color you are. It matters that...you have soundscapes. You have a deep soul music foundation, and then you have a deep Latin music foundation. And a deep Mexican, specifically in Los Angeles, Mexican music from Mexico foundation in that. Regardless of who you are, your environment, and because we're all mixed up like this, it's like, I'm going to mimic part and perform some element, an expression from that which I hear, whether I consume it or not. My ear's consuming it. So that's where I think you have people blasting Brenton Wood, 'I'm Your Puppet.' Like, you grow up with that. You have Al Green and different folks just playing this music out of their cars. It's that music that you might like, and it's music that you may not like. At all. But where your ears are most tuned to is your environment" (Govan 2016).
 - "Where I grew up in Huntington Park, it's like, the Southeast is connected to East L.A. too, and punk has been happening there for freaking ever. And all this stuff has been happening there for freaking ever. So it's almost like, what else are you going to do? Are you going to drop good music because something better replaced it? No! And in those communities, listening to oldies is a thing. It's a part of everyday culture. So it's like nah, this is what I'm listening to. It's oldies, but does it sound like oldies? All right, cool. I'm good with it. So your ears are kind of tuned differently, I think. Growing up there. And I think it might come from, I don't know, necessity. It makes more sense to keep up something that's old than to get something that's new" (Govan 2016).
- Mark Morales:** Born in East Los Angeles in 1974. Co-founder of Angel City Records (ACR).
- "We grew up in East L.A. and soul was *the* music. That's what you hear in the background all the time. There would be these parties always happening, and that was the music being played. It was predominantly soul music, sixties music, music my parents listened to" (Morales 2015).
 - "Reggae is soul music. ... You know that's what they [Jamaican artists] listened to—soul music. So that's why the connection was really simple. ... People that know nothing about this music, I'll play it to them [and] they'll tell me, 'Hey this rocksteady sounds like cholo music. It sounds like oldies but with a reggae upbeat,' which is really what it is" (Morales 2015).

- Mila Ruiz:** Born in East Los Angeles in 1976. Event organizer and record selector.
- "I was always into soul growing up...so when I discovered classic Jamaican music, in my mind, there was a whole other Motown that I didn't even know about, only it had the Jamaican vibe to it. And then when I discovered soul covers that these artists did, I was just blown away" (Ruiz 2015).
 - "We got a really good response for that mix [Lowrider Oldies vs. Skinhead Reggae]. I think it's an L.A. thing, you know? Lowrider Oldies, and the culture of that, plus skinhead reggae. So it's kind of like two cultures colliding, but that's how I grew up" (Ruiz 2015).

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