

Stars band together to protest Arizona law; Controversial statute ignites fervor, activism among musicians

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Body

Four summers ago, a handful of Spanish-speaking radio disc jockeys helped bring hundreds of thousands of Latino marchers to the streets of Los Angeles and other cities to support immigration reform.

Now, in what is partly a sign of the growing clout of U.S. Latinos both as voters and cultural consumers, a number of prominent artists, both Latino and non-Latino, are urging a boycott of Arizona's controversial new statute that requires law enforcement officials to determine the status of people they suspect are illegal immigrants whom they've stopped or detained for other reasons.

Several musicians, including Carlos Santana, Willie Nelson and the Mexican pop-rock band Mana, are recording songs in support of the millions of immigrants, mainly from Mexico and other parts of Latin America, living in the United States, whatever their legal status.

"These folks are coming to us the way immigrants have always come to us. We really need to welcome these people," Nelson said in a phone interview, explaining why he took part in recording the song "Si Se Puede," colloquially translated as "Yes We Can."

Meanwhile, a growing number of other musical performers, including Colombian pop stars Shakira and Juanes, Zack de la Rocha of Rage Against the Machine, Los Tigres del Norte, Sonic Youth, Kanye West and Ozomatli have called for a boycott of Arizona to protest the new statute. So far few, if any, prominent musicians or artists have stepped forward publicly to support the Arizona law.

While opinion polls indicate that voters in the U.S. are deeply divided over the Arizona law, it's doubtful that groups like Ozomatli and Rage Against the Machine need worry about alienating members of their multicultural, politically progressive fan bases.

In a statement released this week, De la Rocha expressed concern that Arizona's SB 1070 could lead to fans of the group being "pulled over and harassed . . . because they are brown or black, or for the way they speak, or for the music they listen to."

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"Yes We Can" imparts a message largely of solidarity rather than protest. But other musical artists are recording songs with more politically pointed lyrics.

The U.S.-born, bilingual hip-hop performer known as Mexia has recorded a track called "Todos Somos Arizona (We Are All Arizona)," in which he declares, "we're Latinos on the rise like blood pressure, yeah, trying to control us with fear.

"We clean your home, cook your food while you sit on your [throne] without a clue," continues Mexia, who is the son of Hernan Hernandez, one of the founding members of the Mexican super-group Los Tigres Del Norte, which has an enormous stateside following and frequently sings about immigrants' struggles.

Alberto Kreimerman, producer of "Si Se Puede" and president of Fundacion Hermes Music, emphasized in an interview that the idea for the song originated several years ago and was not written specifically in response to the Arizona law.

The track's aim, he said, was to raise consciousness and empathy for immigrants in general.

"We think it's a problem of awareness," Kreimerman said. "It's not a problem of law."

The single, which includes contributions from Santana, Nelson, Ramon Ayala, Los Lonely Boys, Mana and the Tejano/Norteño group Intocable, is scheduled to be released on the Fourth of July. Sales proceeds will benefit Fundacion Hermes and another foundation that assists immigrants, run by longtime farmworkers-rights activist Dolores Huerta.

Pilar Diaz, formerly of the group Los Abandoned, approaches the subject of illegal immigration somewhat playfully in her song and accompanying music video "Illegal En Estyle." Speaking by phone, Diaz said she hopes that her Spanglish-titled tune and whimsical, partly animated video will encourage all immigrants to believe that they can rise above temporary hardships and "live in style," relatively speaking, while pursuing better lives.

"It's something that's very close to me because my parents immigrated here with me when I was a child," said Diaz, whose family is from Chile. "I know those struggles, and I know how hard that was for my parents."

-- Los Angeles Times

Graphic

IMAGE

IMAGE

IMAGE; Willie Nelson, Kanye West and Carlos Santana are among those urging a boycott.

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