

## POPULAR MUSIC IN MEXICO

### REGGAE COWBOYS AND THE HEADSTONES

In May 1996, the Canadian Embassy sponsored a Canada Friendship Festival in Mexico City showcasing two Toronto bands, the Reggae Cowboys and the Headstones. The arrangements were made by International Music Distributors (IMD), an independent Canadian music distributor.

Five live shows were presented for public audiences of about 800 people each. There were additional performances at the Hard Rock Café and *Casa Rasta*, which are Mexico City nightclubs. Dianne Brooks, of the Reggae Cowboys, recalls that, although their concerts were well received by fans, it was difficult to "plant anything to come back to." Brooks' impressions were that it was difficult to bring product into Mexico for sale, and that music retailing seemed to be closed to independents. "People there were really receptive to our music," she said. "The press was very gung-ho, we had coverage on television and in print and the people were really into it. But it was difficult to get product down there afterwards to support the fact that you were there." Ms. Brooks also expressed concern about recording piracy in Mexico. The distribution situation is likely to improve since the Reggae Cowboys recently signed with Mercury/PolyGram, a major multinational distributor and Mexico's second-largest record label.

The Headstones were invited back to Mexico with help from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) officials in Mexico in collaboration with their manager, Joe Bamford of Resort Music and Universal Music (formerly MCA Records) in Mexico. The group travelled to Guadalajara in December 1996, where they performed at the Guadalajara Book Fair, followed by a two-week tour of other venues. Mr. Bamford says that the most recent tour was an outcome of his encounter with a DFAIT official from Mexico at the 1996 Canadian Music Week, which focused on Mexico.

Ms. Summers says that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has not, as hoped, simplified the visa requirements for Mexican, American and Canadian managers and producers. "We are hoping to be able to enjoy the same situation as in the European Community," she says, "there are no work permits or frontiers. This means that people are able to move freely. They still pay taxes but there are no work permits, just reciprocal work agreements." She adds that within NAFTA this is far from a level playing field. In Mexico and the US, advance applications must be made by the local presenter. Foreign artists coming into Canada have a much easier time. "They can arrive at our border with their contract in-hand, pay a C \$150 fee and enter," she says. "It takes about 40 minutes at most and this puts Canadians at a disadvantage."

Since the classical music community is international in scope, many Canadian classical musicians are represented by agents in other countries. Ms. Summers, for example, also represents Mexican artists who perform internationally. Óscar López, a Chilean-born guitarist from Calgary, is another example. He is represented by an American agent, Susan Martínez. She says that Mr. López' potential in Mexico is "huge" but says that she has had problems breaking into this market. Since Mr. López is an instrumental performer who is fluent in Spanish, he does not face direct cultural barriers. But Ms. Martínez says that language and culture do present obstacles when negotiating bookings and arranging tours. "There are language and stylistic hurdles," she says, "but we are convinced it is an important market in the long run, although it's not a primary market."

Ms. Martínez has been more successful in distributing recorded music in Mexico than booking personal appearances. Óscar López recordings are available in Mexico through an arrangement between a large independent American label and a Mexican music distributor. Ms. Martínez says she will continue to work on booking personal performances in Mexico and sums up the prospects there as "difficult but promising."