

Richard Oppenheim's *A Green Horn In A Red State*

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I was raised two blocks from the international bridge downtown Laredo, Texas. At night sometimes, you could hear sweet ballads float softly from a jukebox *cantina* “across the river”. I remember back then too, standing at the door watching my parents leave for a variety show at *El Capri* nightclub on the Mexican side to drink and dance, (and from what I hear) maybe even slip the stage manager a twenty to let my dad, a self-taught musician, get on stage to play guitar and croon Hank Williams, “I try so hard my dear to show / that you’re my every dream . . .” In some of my fondest memories, I sing “Cielito Lindo” with my grandmother Sofia on the long drive between Mexico City and Acapulco, or I sit on my grandmother Carlota’s couch and watch her cry as the lyrics to “Bye Bye Blackbird” scroll across the bottom of the old Zenith TV screen while we watch *Sing Along with Mitch*. Good memories. Sweet memories. The beautiful thing is this: Richard Oppenheim’s *A Green Horn In A Red State* took me right back to that place—that place where music knows no borders. But isn’t that what jazz is, a music that’s alive, transforming, adapting, morphing like languages at the border, any border? Oppenheim’s saxophone takes us from *The Green Mill* in Chicago to *The Blue Note* in the Village to *The Tropicana Club* in Havana, to the *Riverwalk* in San Antonio, across the border into Mexico, and right back to my back yard in downtown Laredo, where I imagine I’m once again listening to music breeze across the river (no papers needed) . . . and this is what I hear: I hear the New York mambos of Perez Prado and Tito Puente. I hear the boleros of Rafael Hernández and Agustín Lara. Dare I say I hear the soulful R & B of Marvin Gaye? In *A Green Horn*, Oppenheim has done extraordinarily well what many musicians attempt to do in a place where cultures collide. He has created a music that is truly *mestizo*, an amalgamation of culture and sound and feel, a metamorphosis of form—*mestizo jazz*. Listen to Richard Oppenheim’s saxophone; let it warm you—the music is hot, brutal-hot, like the sun in a Clint Eastwood western.

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