



Los Lobos "**Good Morning Aztlan**" Mammoth Records

Mammoth has made a couple of versions of this album available. In the States there's a 2CD version that features, on the main disc, a couple of live cuts, "Can't Stop The Rain" and "Manny's Bones" plus, on disc two, a video that celebrates the [to date] almost thirty year history of Los Lobos. The single disc European version includes the video, an addition that occasionally causes PC software programmes to *lock up*. Neither the disc nor the liner, in Europe, mentions the *multimedia content*. In terms of content, the video is hardly essential.

Initially a quartet, in 1983 T-Bone Burnett and Steve Berlin [ex Blasters] co-produced the band's mini-album "**...And A Time To Dance**," following which the latter became a permanent member of *the wolves* from East L.A. Seven studio albums, a 2CD retrospective, a 4 CD box set spanning their career, [at least] a couple of soundtracks, plus a children's album and almost twenty years later, the line-up remains unchanged.

Where their initial albums were firmly founded on traditional Mexican folk songs or original material that interpreted the genre, an ancestral heritage shared by the original band members, by the early nineties Los Lobos had begun to experiment with other sounds and musical styles. In that regard, "**Good Morning Aztlan**" amounts to a smorgasbord of Mexican roots-rock music, blues and R&B. The album opens with the hard rocking rhythms of "Done Gone Blue," but then settles into the laid back soulful sounding love song "Heart Of Stone." A Latin American rhythm underpins "Luz Di Mi Vida" (which translates as "Light Of My Life"), and this lyric of love and remembrance merges Spanish and English words – Spanglish? - throughout the song, even on individual lines. Normally Los Lobos composed lyrics are entirely English or Spanish, which makes "Luz Di Mi Vida" something of a departure. The title cut increases the count of *beats per minute* once again, while the verses paint portraits of everyday events in the barrio.

At the heart of the album - "The Big Ranch" and "The Word" which follows, focus on America – as a nation - and, in particular, the erosion of innocence and freedom in city life. Towards the end of the former cut there's the telling line "*the city's now full of guns*," while the latter cut opens with "*The word's out on the streets 'round everyone you meet, Things are not the way they used to be*" and continues with the ominous "*There is a feeling in the air a dark cloud of despair*." While the lyric offers a solution in "*what if we could behave like sisters and brothers, like the good book says we should*" reversal of the loss of human innocence is, in my mind, a naïve solution and an impossible task. "Malaque," complete with the addition of a Veracruz harp explores a Latin American rhythm, while "Tony Y Maria" focuses upon the one hundred and fifty mile journey from Mexico to L.A.. It may be a *relatively short distance*, yet it separates nation's who - *socially and economically* - are *world's apart*.

There's a repetitious simplicity about the laid back closer "Round & Round," wherein the lyric poses questions about those times when "*we don't seem to see eye to eye*" or "*a house of cards comes tumbling down*" or "*a bird flies high in the sky*." Album co-producer John Leckie who has, in the past, worked with bands like Radiohead and XTC, has overseen in "**Good Morning Aztlan**" a collection that, though not entirely *back to basics*, exploits those areas where the band excel.

Folkwax Rating 6 out of 10

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