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Music for the Weekend: Los Auténticos Decadentes

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Los Auténticos Decadentes (Photograph: Diego Figueroa)

This year, Los Auténticos Decadentes celebrated 25 years together with a concert at Luna Park. Although it is a rare occurrence to have bands last longer than pan-fried cooking, the consistently rich sound of this Argentine ska-fusion band seems to have kept many souls fed for a long time.

Founded in Almagro when students from Colegio San Martín needed a band to play for a party, the group – then composed of Gustavo “Cuchi” Parisi, Nito Montecchia and Gastón “Francés” Bernardou – rose to the call and has since grown to include nine other contributors.

Recently, Jorge Serrano, guitar and vocals, referred to the band’s music as a “real socialist” project, a cooperative and “tremendously successful”. It makes you wonder how they have maintained the zest and kept it together for nearly three decades to rise into a national symbol.

A national band encapsulates the spirit, not of the time, but of a place. It becomes a treasure, something the people hold dear to their hearts as a source of pride; a branch of the nation’s cultural identity.

To be ‘authentically decadent’ in Argentina means something different than just material wealth. Throughout the past 100 years, the country has experienced not only a series of economic crises, but also military dictatorships and war. To remain authentically decadent is not in what one has, it’s in the attitude you walk away with. It makes the group’s title for their 2010 album, “Irrompibles” — or “unbreakable” — make sense.

The year was 1986 and change was in the air: the Cold War would soon end, the UN officially called for an “International Year of Peace”, and Argentina beat West-Germany in the FIFA World Cup final. Ska, a musical genre with a pronounced baseline, was inundating many parts of the world with its third wave. The genre was influencing the mainstream music industry by synthesising the original 1950s Jamaican vibe with good old rock-and-roll to create a new genre (some now associate with 1990s Gwen Stefani or the Mighty Mighty Bosstones): Rock Steady.

1986 was also the year that the neighbourhood friends in Almagro decided to get together to form a band, not knowing how it would progress, what it would do, or even what it would stand for.

After a few years of playing, Los Autenticos Decadentes released their first album, ‘Sonico’, in 1991. However, it wasn’t until the 2001 album, ‘Los reyes de la canción’ that the band’s identity would solidify with their first hit, ‘Veni Raquel’ (‘Come Here, Rachel’). The song addresses a singular sly woman, telling her:

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You will have a great night out with the boys/ ... you are going to have fun/... do not be afraid because you are going to be happy/... going out with the boys.

The horns, the brass, and the *bup-bup* of the base of the song are comical, whimsical, entertaining, like a circus show. It's goofy, it's catchy, and it makes the crowd bop.

Ultimately, it set the tone for what Los Auténticos Decadentes would bring to the industry's table, not only as a national sensation, but also as worldwide musical ambassadors.

"Happiness and entertainment" is the main driving force behind the band, Jorge Serrano explained to Pagina 12. Some see *alegría* – or happiness, the kind that makes you grin from ear-to-ear and get up and dance – as superficial. Serrano, however, does not agree; he sees it as something more profound, a statement to how people should live life to its fullest. This theme is the consistent line that has pulled this band through nearly three decades of entertaining masses.

Perhaps it's something about Argentina. People have written and spoken about the country's playful grace. Despite the history of tyranny and constant uncertainty, the people still hold their posture intact with smiles and laughter.

Recently, the band's popularity has ensured its invitation to a North American tour as part of the Latin American Music celebrations in NYC, rocking along with other names like Calle 13 and No Te Va a Gustar.

