

...from Buenos Aires

Our Argentinian correspondent reports on the recent elections and the ever-fluid boundaries between music and politics

WORDS & PHOTO ED STOCKER



Argentina is a land where politics seems to mingle with every facet of daily life. A country obsessed with football, politicised hooligans – known locally as *barra bravas* – are regularly dispatched to do their party's dirty work, while former Boca Juniors football team president, Mauricio Macri, was recently re-elected as mayor of Buenos Aires. So it should come as no surprise, then, that heated affiliations also penetrate the cultural sphere – and music in particular.

Macri, a candidate for the right-wing PRO (Propuesta Republicana) party, was re-elected as city mayor in July. Despite leftist parties enjoying a sustained period of popularity nationwide, Buenos Aires has always traditionally been a conservative bastion. Macri's victory, though, mobilised a host of musicians who were against his particular brand of politics as business, including Fito Páez – one of the country's most famous *rock nacional* artists – who penned a fervent diatribe against him in a national newspaper.

In the article he riled against the 60% plus who had voted for Macri. 'Half of porteños prefer to have their pockets full

– no matter what the cost [to the rest],' he said. He added that the other half of the population felt 'disgust,' causing a storm of protest from conservative commentators.

The Páez fiasco soon died down. But it demonstrated how fluid the boundaries are between music and politics in Latin America's third largest economy. With the presidential election campaigns unfurling just a few months later, even ministers were

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getting in on the act as Cristina Fernández de Kirchner looked for re-election in October's vote.

The first one to get involved was the Harley Davidson-riding economy minister and Fernández's running mate, Amado Boudou, who was pictured in a leather jacket at rallies and concerts with an electric guitar slung across his shoulder playing with a roster of well-known musicians. Fascinated by this, the newspaper *Página 12* ran a supplement on music and politics a few days prior to the elections.

The opposition scrambled to catch up; all this music seemed to be winning Boudou and Fernández the charisma battle. Opponents

tried to dismiss Boudou's antics as a media stunt and superficial. But as the campaign continued and they began to slip further in the opinion polls, the only option was to try and play catch up.

First of all Ricardo Alfonsín, bidding for the presidency with the Union for Social Development (UDESOS), was pictured in the last days of his campaign getting into the spirit, playing *zumba* and singing with a folklore group in Córdoba.

But it was Alberto Rodríguez Saa, another presidential candidate, who took it to another level. Aware that he was lagging in fourth or fifth spot, he thought he needed to do something to appeal to the *pibes* (kids). What better way than to team up with *cumbia* band of the moment, Los Wachiturros?

Except, the band that recorded a jingle for him – ripping off the hit 'Tirame un Paso' and replacing it with pro-Rodríguez Saa lyrics – turned out not to be the genuine Wachiturros.

To a thumping beat, they sang: 'El Alberto es una masa, te da una casa' (Alberto is a good man, he's giving you a house), a reference to his populist election slogan: 'My Compromise, Your House.' Later the song continues with: 'Pensá distinto, no te acostumbres, es otra Argentina la que vos podés tener' (Think differently, don't get used to the way things are, there's another Argentina you can have).

For Wachiturros' manager, Enzo Solar, the gamble flopped and Rodríguez Saa should have carried out more rigorous checks. "If it's a case that they knew they weren't using the Wachiturros [and did nothing] then it's worse for them because the people know who the real Wachiturros are," he tells *Songlines*. "I think the gains he wanted to make backfired."

These drastic attempts to gain votes proved how desperate the opposition were. But the force was clearly with Fernández who built on her August primaries victory and comfortably won the October 23 election with 54% of the vote, the largest margin of victory since the return to democracy in 1983.

This is a president that attracts such militant support, who even has her own *oficialista* cumbia band named Clase K, as well as a collective of artists called Musicians with Cristina who spread the word through music. With those sorts of tools at her disposal, the others were always going to be playing second fiddle. **N**

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