

# AUDIO FILES

## Los Lobos

### *The Neighborhood*

Los Lobos began as a small acoustic group specializing in ethnic tunes played on traditional instruments. They became a popular attraction at local weddings and eventually grew confident enough to mix original songs with familiar crowd-pleasers.

Slowly, electric guitars and saxophones worked their way into the music. It all came to a head on their full-length debut *How Will the Wolf Survive?*, a bracing declaration of talent and ambition.

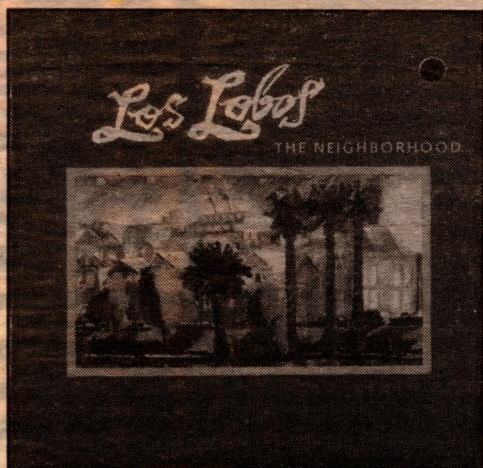
People like to think there is some inherent conflict in a band like this — the pull between modern rock 'n' roll and the "real" music of the members' ethnic roots. Nothing could be further from the truth, and the latest release from Los Lobos proves that.

The opening track "Down On The Riverbed" slips by with disarming ease. A young man asks his lover for her hand in an elliptical tune filled with mythic imagery. The man notices a red-tailed hawk that circles overhead and a monster cloud shaped like a big hand, but she seems to agree to marriage. Then a train whistle blows and the man realizes suddenly that, "It was time to go." The music, an ominous mix of fat guitar lines and an organ, drifts away and the whole affair seems like a warning or fable.

Not every song is as vivid as that one, but a fair number are. "Deep Dark Hole" has a simple groove and a striking image of a hole that can "Spin you around and keep you down/ Tie your feet right to the ground/ Cause it's got no soul — just a big black hole."

Even simpler songs like "Emily" — about a man looking forward to being in his lover's arms — have a dark twist to them. He talks of her eyes as bright as the sun and her sweet smile. But the ending is shadowed by his need to promise that, "Emily, we can hide/ Hide from them all/ Emily, they can't catch us/ They can't catch us now/ They can't catch us now."

On a less successful note, "The Giving Tree" is a song of thanks whose central metaphor never takes root. "Little John of God" is a soft, acoustic tune about



a physically challenged child that has nothing to offer but sentimentality. And it must frustrate the hell out of Los Lobos to realize that they still reach greatness only on rave-ups like "Georgia Slop" and the rollicking sing-along "Jenny's Got A Pony."

After the commercial success of *La Bamba* and the labor of love *La Pistola Y El Corazon*, they've attained a newfound confidence. The earnest social commentary of *By The Light of The Moon* has been dropped for a more subtle, natural approach.

On "The Neighborhood," a marvelous song that could serve as their anthem, Los Lobos puts it well. They sing, "They're just songs sung on a dirty street/ Echoes of hope lie beneath their feet." Those soft echoes get their message across better than ever.

BY MICHAEL GILTZ