



In this file photo Puerto Rican singer Ozuna performs during the 19th Annual Latin Grammy Awards in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP photos



In this file photo Mexican singer Alfredo Gonzalez plays accordion with the band Los Tucanes de Tijuana on stage at Coachella Music Festival in Indio, California.



In this file photo Puerto Rican singer Bad Bunny performs on stage at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in Indio, California.

Latin pop has US grooving more and more in Spanish

Just two years after the litting mega-hit "Despacito" captivated the globe, Latin stars are cementing their place in the US mainstream, moving beyond scoring a one-off smash to headline festivals and permeate the charts. An unprecedented number of Spanish-language acts are performing at this year's Coachella festival, where a second weekend of shows begins Friday—a sure-fire sign of their mounting influence in a country where 41 million people claim Spanish as their mother tongue.

They are not just guests of top-billed acts or appearing on lesser stages—stars like reggaeton revolutionary J Balvin and Puerto Rican trap artist Bad Bunny are winning key time slots on their own. And they are singing in Spanish, eschewing the "crossover" label often slapped on their A-list predecessors like Ricky Martin, Shakira and Gloria Estefan. Bad Bunny—the 25-year-old face of Latin trap, a genre that fuses reggaeton with elements of hip hop from the US south—lit up Coachella's top stage during week one and is set to perform again Sunday. "I'm very proud of what I represent, of the Latino community that has come far speaking the language they speak," he said in Spanish to the throng gathered to see him.

Streaming influence

Colombia's J Balvin brought his unique version of reggaeton—a massively popular Puerto Rican-born amalgam of Caribbean beats and hip-hop influences—to the California festival's main stage, the genre's first ever full showcase there. "It took 15 years for reggaeton to get to Coachella. We are here!" the boundary-pusher shouted to launch his history-making performance, as the crowd vibed and waved flags representing countries from throughout Latin America.

In another landmark moment, the 33-year-old Balvin will in August headline Chicago's Lollapalooza festival, becoming the first Spanish-language act to nab one of the coveted spots. Many experts attribute the US Latin music industry's rapid growth to a parallel streaming explosion. According to the Recording Industry Association of America, Latin music saw its second consecutive year of double-digit growth stateside in 2018, jumping 18 percent from the year prior to rake in \$413 million.

Paid subscription platforms like Spotify's premium service meanwhile saw nearly 50 percent growth in revenues. The trends are feeding off each other, according to RIAA chief operations officer Michele Ballantyne: "Any conversation about the Latin music market starts with one word: streaming." "Latin music's transformation from a physical-based business to a streaming-driven one is even faster than the overall US music market's turnaround," she said.

Indeed, YouTube said last December that in 2018, eight out of its top 10 most-viewed music videos worldwide belonged to Latino artists, Afro-Latino star Ozuna appearing in four of them. The Dominican-Puerto Rican recently vowed to continue performing in his native Spanish, telling Billboard that "all the time, it's 'English, English, English.'" "If I have the opportunity of having so many followers, and helping to take Latino artists and culture to the mainstream, I'm not going to selfishly throw it away because I learned English and can 'cross over.'"

Music a common language

The Latin music boom in the United States is noteworthy particularly in light of Donald Trump's hardline stance on the country's southern border, with the US president insisting the nation has been overrun by migrants. For Coachella attendee Andrea Castillo, the growing stateside presence of Spanish-speaking acts symbolizes that Latin culture has become more and more ingrained in US society. "Our generation is fighting for what we want, and that includes music," Castillo told AFP as Chilean



singer Mon Laferte shimmied through her primetime set.

Laferte went on after Los Tucanes de Tijuana—one of Mexico's most famous narco-ballad bands—got the crowd swaying to its accordion-heavy anthems. "When they went on, I got so happy, like, 'Where are all my Mexicans!' said the 25-year-old Castillo, who is from San Diego. "It was honestly pretty emotional." For balladeer Laferte, 35, the invitation to play on Coachella's top stage shows that "language is not something that's separating us anymore."

Speaking in Spanish to AFP, she called music a "common language that makes distances smaller." Laferte said the waves of negativity against Latinos—some of which can be traced back to Trump statements about immigrants—actually "generates a bigger opposition." "There are many people who... embrace us, and are very kind, and want to speak our language," she said.—AFP

In this file photo Spanish singer Rosalia and Colombian singer J Balvin perform on stage at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in Indio, California.



In this file photo Chilean singer Mon Laferte performs on stage at Coachella Music Festival in Indio, California.

"Where are all my Mexicans!"

K-pop phenomenon BTS first Korean act to top UK chart

K-pop sensation BTS scored another record on Friday, becoming the first Korean act to top Britain's album chart. The floppy-haired seven-piece's latest album "Map of the soul: Persona" went straight in at number one, days after their single "Boy With Luv" broke the YouTube record for the most

views in 24 hours with 74.6 million hits. The track is also the band's first ever British Top 15 single, charting at number 13 on Friday.

The band, known for their boyish good looks and meticulously choreographed dance moves, will play two sold out nights at London's iconic Wembley Stadium, on June 1 and 2. Earlier this year the septet, whose name is short for Bangtan Sonyeondan, which translates as Bulletproof Boy Scouts, became the first K-pop band to top the US album charts. Some 800,000 tourists were believed to have chosen South Korea as their destination last year because of BTS—more than seven percent of the total visitors to the country.—AFP

Rapper Kodak Black arrested in New York on drug, weapons charges

Rapper Kodak Black was released from custody by the New York State Police on Thursday after being arrested on drug and gun charges while coming across the Canada-US border near Niagara Falls, police said. Black, 21, was stopped on Wednesday evening by US Customs and Border Protection agents at the Lewiston-Queenston International Bridge headed back into the United States from Canada, the New York State Police said in a release.

Black's real name is Bill Kapri, and he is a resident of Miramar, Florida. Black, who was driving a Cadillac Escalade, and three other Florida men following in a Porsche were arrested on drug and weapons charges. Black was charged with second-degree criminal possession of a weapon, a Glock 9mm pistol, and unlawful possession of marijuana, police said.

The other three men face similar charges from weapons and drugs found in the Porsche. A representative for Black was not immediately available to talk to Reuters on Thursday evening. Black was released on Thursday afternoon from the Niagara County Jail on \$20,000 bail, multiple media accounts have reported,

including CNN. Video footage from local media outlets showed Black leaving the jail holding a fan-like spread of cash over his face.

CNN reported that he had been scheduled to perform at the House of Blues in Boston on Wednesday night and his lack of appearance angered waiting fans. TMZ reported that Black's show at the Foxwoods Resort Casino in Mashantucket, Connecticut, scheduled for Thursday night was also canceled. The rapper and songwriter, signed to Atlantic Records, has become one of the biggest artists of hip-hop. He is known for his hit singles "Zeze", "Roll in Peace", "Tunnel Vision", and "No Flockin".

Black has had a number of run-ins with the law over the last few years, mostly over weapons and drug charges, multiple media accounts say. He recently angered some fans by expressing a romantic interest in the girlfriend of late rapper Nipsey Hussle, who was shot to death outside a clothing store he owned in Los Angeles last month.—Reuters



Member of the hip-hop group Cypress Hill Senen Sen Dog Reyes, Lawrence DJ Muggs Muggerrud, Eric Bobo Correa and Louis B-Real Freese are honored with star on The Hollywood Walk of Fame in Hollywood, California. — AFP photos

Latin hip-hop group Cypress Hill unveil 'Walk of Fame' star

The Latin American hip-hop group Cypress Hill on Thursday unveiled a star on Hollywood's "Walk of Fame" in Los Angeles, the city where they formed more than three decades ago. "It's totally surreal," Lawrence Muggerrud, aka DJ Muggs, told AFP. "We walked here as kids, we looked at the stars. We never thought we'd have one. 'We represent hip-hop, Latinos, music, dreams. It's wonderful to celebrate with the family,'" he added, 30 years after the formation of the first Latin American group to have a record go platinum in the US, or sell more than one million copies.

"Before music I was in a gang, and there are not many ways out as you know—either prison or the graveyard,"

said Muggerrud, with bandmate Louis Freese, aka B-Real, at his side. "My brothers saw something in me and put on the path to music and we formed Cypress Hill." The band's name was inspired by a neighborhood street where the members grew up. They sold more than three million copies of their second album, "Black Sunday" in 1993, while their latest album, "Elephants on Acid", was released in September last year.—AFP



Cypress Hill's just unveiled Hollywood Walk of Fame Star is pictured during a ceremony in Hollywood, California.