

SXSW review: The Krayolas at Little Steven's Underground Garage Party

John T. Davis

Austin-American Statesman, March 20, 2009

(1 p.m. Friday, Antone's)

If garages didn't exist, the Krayolas would have had to invent them. The '70s-era ensemble from San Antonio who minted a string of regional hits got a fresh wind under their collective tail with the release last year of a new album, "La Conquistadora." Now, with a new album ("Long Leaf Pine (No Smack Gum)") and a new generation of fans, the Krayolas are a force to contend with once more.

Appropriate then, that the group should have been chosen to kick off Little Steven Van Zandt's Underground Garage Party on Friday afternoon at Antone's. Joined by San Antonio compadres the West Side Horns, accordionist Michael Guerra and Sir Douglas Quintet keyboardist Augie Meyers, the band showed just how timeless and infectiously fun unbridled, old-school three-minute-single music can be.

Like the SDQ a decade earlier, the Krayolas mix classic garage band rock with the Tejano influences that surrounded them in South Texas. Thus, "11th Sunday In Ordinary Time" incorporates the horn line from "La Cucaracha," and "Chola Song" immortalizes a barrio princess who plucks her eyebrows and cruises the 'hood.

It's not all fun and games, though. In a chilling shift, "12 Heads In a Bag" used the traditional corrido form of border balladry to decry the horrifying drug-related violence in Mexico.

But for the most part, it was an upbeat set, with the West Side Horns punching through "A-Frame" like fighters working a speed bag, and Augie Meyers lending his roller-rink keyboard to a punkish take on the Kinks' "Who'll Be the Next In Line."

"We're legends in our own minds," said frontman Hector Saldaña. "That's the best place to be."

Well said, brother.