chapter 8

So We Don’t Lose Memory: Jewish Musical Performance in Buenos Aires after the AMIA Bombing

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Introduction: Hearing the AMIA, Experiencing Music

The day after the AMIA Recital por la Reconstrucción (Concert for the Reconstruction of the AMIA) held on November 30, 1994, in the Estadio Obras Sanitarias—the “templo del rock porteño” (temple of Buenos Aires rock)—Argentine newspaper coverage widely applauded this benefit concert as a spectacle of solidarity in response to the attack on the Jewish community center and mutual aid organization, the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA).¹ With a musical lineup consisting of Fito Páez, Luis Alberto Spinetta, Ignacio Copani, Patricia Sosa, Sandra Mihanovich, Fabiana Cantilo, and Andrés Calamaro, the AMIA event hoped to raise money and awareness for the reconstruction of the AMIA building, which was destroyed in the shocking terrorist attack that took place just four and a half months earlier on July 18, 1994 (see Figure 8.1).² The participation of these popular musicians—who represented a mix of iconic legends of Argentine rock nacional (national rock) and

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popular artists whose fame would later be solidified throughout the 1990s—brought a critical visibility to the project, launching the cause for the AMIA into the realm of greater civic and national consciousness while elevating certain “musical labors of memory” to unify participants around familiar frames of political engagement linked to the discursive and performative practices of artistic resistance associated with the aesthetics of rock nacional. According to Pablo Viña and Paul Cammack, rock nacional played “an extremely important part in the socialisation and re-socialisation of broad sectors of Argentinian youth during the military period,” contending that rock nacional was responsible for “restoring truthful communication regarding the real country, salvaging the meaning of life in a context of lies and terror, consolidating a collective actor as a means of counteracting an individualistic model of life, [and] counterposing a supportive community of actions and interests to the primacy of the market.”

Likewise, the Concert for the Reconstruction of the AMIA shaped Jewish and non-Jewish perceptions about the AMIA cause by socializing the public through these style aesthetics. By spotlighting powerful political narratives of memory and forgetting invoked by these musicians and their songs, the benefit concert format created a public arena to address the AMIA attack in its aftermath, thus claiming and confirming memory as the “appropriate way” to unite support for the cause.

Under the banner of “Para Que No Perdamos la Memoria” (So We Don’t Lose Memory), this benefit, fund-raiser, and commemoration concert was advertised throughout Buenos Aires. As co-organizer Elio Kapszuk stated in an interview with the newspaper Página/12, “I know there are artistic factors that are undoubtedly involved in the show—that Spinetta hasn’t played in a long time, and that Páez attracts his own crowd—but I assure you that at the box office, people were asking for tickets to ‘the AMIA show,’ nothing else”—a statement spotlighting the centrality of the cause to the concert experience while anticipating criticism about the factors contributing to the program’s

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3 See Elizabeth Jelin, State Repression and Labors of Memory, trans. Judy Rein and Marcial Godoy-Anativia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 5. Jelin distinguishes between memory as a passive practice or unconscious intrusion and memory as a “labor” required to transform social worlds through intentional, active, and productive efforts “involved in the processes of symbolic transformation and elaboration of the meanings of the past.”
