

‘Old Pueblo Ska’: Ska Music in the Southwest, 1992-1999¹

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¹ Tucson is called the Old Pueblo, and “Old Pueblo Ska” is a song by Dave’s Big Deluxe.

The idea for this study began as a general interest in an obscure music genre that I had a brief fascination with as a teenager, from about 1997 to 2000. I intended to make a broad interpretation that looked at the full view of ska music, from the late-1950s to the present, perhaps trying to explain why the music has seen periodic revivals or why it can never hold a mainstream status among popular music genres. What I had not expected was to find that the opportunity for historical study was not abroad, in 1960s Jamaica, 1970s England, or even on the national stage of America in the 1990s; that it was much closer to home and more intimate to my own experience. When I was a teenager in Durango, Colorado, in 1997, my mother became the co-owner of a small downtown bar, called the Loft, that catered to the college-aged crowd. The upstairs venue, inset to the corner of Durango's town center, was a great location to congregate. It was a rather dingy place, with wood floors that stank of stale beer, but it had a great submerged stage with a dance pit. It was here that I was introduced to the sounds of ska music by the bands that roved the Southwest and beyond, seeking autonomy and success as professional musicians, and simply having fun.

The Southwest region, an area that includes the expansive, unpopulated tracts of high deserts, canyons, and subalpine forests in Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Southwestern Colorado, bears little similarity to the central, proximal, urban hubs that characterized the national ska music scene. Yet ska music developed and thrived here as well. Tucson, Phoenix, Flagstaff, and Albuquerque fostered modest ska music scenes in the 1990s that produced high-quality ska musicians and developed a regional network of exchange that initially operated in isolation, but eventually interacted with the national ska movement. Although the niche ska scene in the Southwest corresponded to the concurrent national third-wave ska movement, it developed in its

own unique ways, which challenge generalized characterizations of third-wave ska. In the Southwest, a distinct region, physically and culturally separated from Southern California and any of the other major third-wave urban hubs, a small but discrete ska scene existed that is largely undocumented and has not been studied historically nor contextualized within the larger ska historiography.

The Wide Arc

The history of ska music is brief and global. It generally consists of three eras, or waves, when ska was a popular music genre, for a time in a place. Ska was innovated in Jamaica in 1959, on the eve of the island's independence from England, and blossomed into a popular music that formed the basis of the early music industry in the country.² Largely influenced by American R&B and jazz and combining the local folk sounds of calypso and mento, ska emerged as a uniquely Jamaican sound that emphasized the off-beat of the standard 4:4 blues rhythm with the guitar, had a walking bass line, typically had a horn section of no fewer than three (trumpet, trombone, and saxophone), and was played at a rapid tempo. An innovation of the urban poor Kingstonians, who lived in tenement housing, known as government yards, ska was popular among the rude boys, the dispossessed Kingston youth who had been supporting the local soundsystem operators and were known for their petty crime and violent encounters.³ Rude boys (and rude girls) were sharp dressers, sporting porkpie hats and wrap-around sunglasses; they came to be living symbols both

² Lloyd Bradley, *This Is Reggae Music: The Story of Jamaica's Music*, Groove Press, 2001, 100; David V. Moskowitz, *Caribbean Popular Music: An Encyclopedia of Reggae, Mento, Ska, Rock Steady & Dancehall*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005, XI.

³ Heather Augustyn, *Ska : The Rhythm of Liberation*, Tempo: A Scarecrow Press Music Series on Rock, Pop, and Culture, Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2013: 25.

of ska music, but also of the state of affairs in Kingston, as violence increased and rude boys became the subject of ska songs.⁴

By 1965, however, ska evolved into a slower-tempo sound that was called rocksteady, which further evolved into reggae by the end of the decade, as rude boys, influenced by Jamaican rastas, traded out their porkpie hats for dreadlocks and tri-color stocking caps, and the music became more spiritual and Afrocentric.⁵ Dandy Livingstone's 1967 "Rudy, A Message to You" is a prime example of a ska-rocksteady cross-over that features a slower tempo and explicitly prescribes reform within the rude boy community, imploring them to "Stop your runnin' about/ It's time you straighten right out/ Stop your runnin' around/ Making trouble in the town."⁶ Ska saw a brief time of limited popularity in England in the late 1960s among rowdy skinheads, a white working-class outgrowth of the mod subculture.⁷ The market for Jamaican music was sustained mostly by the large populations of Jamaican immigrants who had come to fill labor shortages in the 1950s after the Second World War.⁸

⁴ Joseph Heathcott, "Urban Spaces and Working-Class Expressions across the Black Atlantic: Tracing the Routes of Ska." *Radical History Review*, no. 87 (Fall 2003): 196-7.

⁵ Chris Potash, *Reggae, Rasta, Revolution: Jamaican Music from Ska to Dub*, Schirmer Books: New York 1997: 125.

⁶ Dandy Livingstone, "Rudy, A Message to You," 1967, *Spotify*, <https://open.spotify.com/track/4WKQHFv4KqlehRBb3V3a9p>.

⁷ Heather Augustyn, *Ska : The Rhythm of Liberation*, Tempo: A Scarecrow Press Music Series on Rock, Pop, and Culture. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2013, 69.

⁸ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic : Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Harvard University Press, 1993, 10; Carl Gayle, "The Reggae Underground," *Black Music: Vol. 1, No. 8.* (July 1974), Accessed 8 Nov. 2019, https://forum.speakerplans.com/reggae-sound-system-list-back-in-the-real-days_topic17036_page3.html; Augustyn, 59.

Ska's second wave came in the late 1970s in England during the punk rock movement, at a time of intense racial tension and economic recession. Known as the Two-tone era, named for the record label that published most of the music, the small list of bands featured biracial musician compositions and integrated traditional ska with punk rock and reggae, which were popular in England at the time.⁹ The Specials, whose leader Jerry Dammers intentionally decided on ska as the vehicle for a sound of racial unification combined with politically-conscious lyrics, also created the 2 Tone label to signify racial unity.¹⁰ Along with the music revival came a reintroduction of ska's associated rude boy culture, which was embellished with black-and-white checkered ("two-tone") jackets, wing-tip shoes, Doc Marten boots, and Vespa scooters. The Two-tone era lasted approximately from 1979-82 when the bands broke up after only barely breaking into the US market.

The influence of British Two-tone bands like the Specials, Madness, and the Selecter, though brief, created an American ska subculture that simmered in the 1980s in central hubs like New York and Los Angeles. Beginning in New York in 1981, British emigrant Robert "Bucket" Hingley created the band the Toasters and eventually began self-publishing records on his own Moon Ska record label. Moon became the clearinghouse for the New York ska scene in the mid-1980s, producing ska compilations, called "ska-mpilations," with bands such as the Boilers and the Beat Brigade.¹¹ Influenced directly from Two-tone ska, which was rooted in the British

⁹ Heathcott, 200.

¹⁰ Jon Stratton, "Skin Deep: Ska and Reggae on the Racial Faultline in Britain, 1968-1981." *Popular Music History* 5, no. 2 (August 2010): 192.

¹¹ Augustyn, 89-92; A recurring trope in ska subculture is the mashing up of words to include "ska" in them, like ska-mpilation, skarmageddon, 'ska'ed for life', etc.

punk culture, early East Coast ska bands likewise reflected the American punk culture that thrived in the States. Ska was also incubated on the West Coast in Los Angeles and San Francisco in the 1980s. Bands like Hepcat, Jump with Joey, and the Untouchables successfully synergized the diverse racial and political factions, merging punk, mod, rock, and Two-tone styles that appealed to many groups and blunted the more extreme elements of the youth subculture, seeking to build up rather than tear down.¹²

By the mid-1990s, breakout successes of bands like Sublime and No Doubt, which both hailed from Southern California, did not go unnoticed by major record labels, who saw the opportunity and began to harvest the stored potential of ska in the US and promoted a select few bands into the mainstream. This period in America from the mid-1990s until about 2000 is considered the third wave. Boston's The Mighty Mighty Bosstones was a seasoned east coast non-traditional ska band that played ska-core — ska with an emphasis on hardcore punk rock. The Bosstones placed six Billboard Top 200 hits in the decade between 1993-2002.¹³ Another was Orange County's Reel Big Fish, whose jestful, self-deprecating lyrics on their 1997 single "Sell Out" alleviated the shame of signing a deal with Columbia Records, inviting listeners to "sell out with me tonight", citing not wanting to "work in fast food all your life" while biting its thumb at an industry where the "radio plays what they want you to hear."¹⁴

¹² Augustyn, 106.

¹³ "The Mighty Mighty Bosstones Chart History," *Billboard*, n.d., accessed 6 Dec. 2019, <https://www.billboard.com/music/the-mighty-mighty-bosstones/chart-history>.

¹⁴ Reel Big Fish, "Sell Out," *Turn the Radio Off*, Mojo Records, 1996. *Spotify*, <https://open.spotify.com/track/6SJ1hWFVBlUgGgHKvwXCQ>.

By the end of the 1990s, ska was too big for its own good; it had grown too much, too fast. Mass culture and the music industry had adopted it, tinkered with it, over-saturated it in radio and television, then dropped it and moved on. Citing “distributor failure, massive product returns,” Moon Ska Records shuttered in December 1999, marking the decline of ska’s third wave.¹⁵ Ska’s brilliant moment in the spotlight was over, and some damage was done, but ska did not go away. Like a river in midwinter, it returned to its baseflow, or rather, like a dry creek, ska returned to the underground.

In the two decades since the end of the third wave, ska has persisted as a global music with major fan-bases in LA, New York, Chicago, Montreal, Toronto, Tokyo, Barcelona, Mexico City, São Paulo, Buenos Aires, and Santiago, and the genre itself has grown dynamically in its many interpretations and fusions with other genres and cultures. Ska’s living historical legacy of close contact to global subcultures including Jamaican Rastas, English skinheads and mods, American hardcore punks, and So-Cal skaters, to name a few, and the music’s ability to be blended integrally with diverse traditions like punk, jazz, rock, reggae, pop, and folk make ska a music of unity and cultural inclusivity.

Ska in the Southwest

In order to investigate the development of ska in the Southwest in the 1990s, one must look beyond the works that discuss third-wave ska in the 1990s in America that focus on a national movement and musical styles that were primarily generated in Southern California and, to some degree, from New York City. Bands from the Southwest and the region itself have no references given to them in the limited historiography of third-wave ska. There are a number of primary

¹⁵ Patrick Lejtenyi, “Ska-Boom and Ska-Bust,” *Exclaim! Magazine*, Feb. 02, 2000, Accessed 28 Oct. 2019, http://exclaim.ca/music/article/ska-boom_ska-bust.

sources from the Southwest ska scene in the 1990s. Several of the bands have published music that is readily available online at a number of streaming services and Youtube. Some of the bands have brief bios on music sites as well as partial discographies. Newspapers and magazines play a key role in documenting concerts that happened in the region, including the venues where they occurred. These periodicals provide some commentary about the bands and their music. Even more useful are the social media profiles that some of the bands have created in recent years. Here, band members have uploaded photos of their shows, the vans they travelled in, the venues they played at, playbills and posters promoting their shows, news clippings, as well as commentary around these images. Yet those sources only glimpse at the fuller story that can only be told by the people themselves. Most of these musicians, their fans, and others who were involved in the music scene are still alive, many still living in the region. Also, the venues that formed the physical foci are still standing (though in many cases have changed significantly). Given that opportunity, this study took the form of an oral history, including in-person and phone interviews with musicians and fans throughout the Southwest.

Early days, 1992-1995

The ska bands that were well-established in the Southwest prior to 1995 enjoyed the greatest success, produced more music, and were more musically distinguished than their late-coming peers. That was due, in part, to the isolation those bands had from the nascent national revival that was yet to take off. The foundational Southwest ska bands were without peers in the region which allowed them to develop independently, in a way that was not directly influenced by the national wave of popularity in the genre. This was especially true of Tucson's Dave's Big Deluxe, which published its first eponymous EP cassette in 1992, well before any other Southwest

act had published ska material.¹⁶ The band’s “relative isolation in the desert has [*sic*] the band develop a unique style that is not bound by East Coast or West Coast ska traditions,” stated a review by Stacia Proefrock of Rovi Music Discovery.¹⁷ Mike Silva of Albuquerque’s Giant Steps applied that idea to his band, too; “you’re kind of out here, doing your own thing, land-locked... there wasn’t this overwhelming presence of [mainstream ska bands] influencing what we were doing.”¹⁸

Giant Steps was Albuquerque’s biggest ska band in the 1990s, and probably ever. Operating between 1993 and 1999 and consisting of seven musicians, the band produced two full-length albums, *Technicolor* (1996) and *Feel the Thunder* (1998), following their initial eponymous cassette EP release in 1995.¹⁹ Giant Steps was the only ska band in Albuquerque before the mid-1990s. Two earlier bands fostered the relationships between the musicians that led to the band’s formation — Cool Runnin’s and Beat Fetish. Cool Runnin’s was an eleven-piece reggae outfit that instilled a Jamaican roots ethos into the future ska cohort. Future Giant Steps members that emerged from Cool Runnin’s were saxophonist Mike Silva, trumpeter Tom Siegel, and guitarist “Otto” Mike Barthel. Considered one of Albuquerque’s most popular bands from

¹⁶ “Dave’s Big Deluxe - Discography,” *Discogs*, n.d., accessed 8 Feb. 2020 <https://www.discogs.com/artist/1505514-Daves-Big-Deluxe>; Although some of the bands existed in 1992, only Dave’s had published; Warsaw existed, but had yet to settle on ska musically.

¹⁷ “Dave’s Big Deluxe,” *Spotify*, Accessed 15 Dec. <https://open.spotify.com/artist/2RG0nhz9dWssq3llyZWpck>.

¹⁸ Mike Silva. 2020, Interview by author, Albuquerque, 27 Jan. 2020.

¹⁹ Giant Steps, “About,” *Facebook*, n.d., accessed 3 Feb. 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/pg/Giant-Steps-ska-131846013546556/about/>; Giant Steps. *Technicolor*, Skaliente Records, 1996; Giant Steps. *Feel the Thunder*, Skaliente Records, 1998.

1989-92, Beat Fetish was Two-tone-inspired and contained future Giant Steps bassist Brad Spalding and Otto Barthel.²⁰

Silva, an African American who escaped a rough start in Los Angeles, moved to Albuquerque and gravitated to the saxophone in his fourth-grade school band. “By the time I got to middle school, the instrument was such a big part of my life that everything was no longer an issue, because I was so focused,” related Silva, “the music kind of changed me.”²¹ Trumpeter Tom Siegel grew up in the upscale Pacific Palisades region of North Los Angeles and was heavily influenced by its reggae music scene, where he could see live concerts of Jamaican greats like Barrington Levy, Anton Ellis, and Eek-A-Mouse. “In 1983 I went to see a Steel Pulse concert,” said Siegel, “I was just blown away; I couldn't believe it.” Although ska music pre-dated reggae chronologically, Siegel’s experience demonstrates how cultural traditions can morph linear sequencing. “My first love was really reggae,” he said, “I really grew to love ska out of my affection for reggae and rocksteady. Jamaican music is in my blood — I was supposed to be born Jamaican.”²² Siegel carried that feeling into Giant Steps, where, in between trumpet bursts he would go to the microphone and toast in the style of 1980s Jamaican dub artist Eek-A-Mouse.²³ Toasting is a rhythmic vocal accentuation that originated in 1950s Jamaican sound systems and was persistent in all Jamaican popular music to present and also played a formative role in the

²⁰ Kenn Rodriguez, "Band Steps Away From Beat Fetish Sound," *Albuquerque Journal* (NM), January 23, 1998: E17, *NewsBank: Access World News Research Collection*; Mike Silva, 2020, interview by author, Albuquerque, 27 Jan. 2020.

²¹ Ellen Marks, “One-on-one with Mike Silva,” *Albuquerque Journal*, 20 Jan. 2020, accessed 8 Feb. 2020, <https://www.abqjournal.com/1411386/of-cookies-ska-and-albuquerque.html>.

²² Tom Siegel, 2020, Interview by author, 22 Feb. 2020.

²³ Silva, interview.

development of hip-hop music in the US.²⁴ In addition to a rotating cast of drummers and trombonists, Giant Steps was rounded out by Rob Kerley, a keyboardist and multi-instrumentalist who provided much of the creative direction and original compositions for the band. Originally from Farmington, New Mexico, Kerley came to Albuquerque to attend the University of New Mexico (UNM), where he met Mike Silva in a jazz theory class. The two briefly played as a post-new-wave duo called Epilogue just as Giant Steps was being created in late-1993. “Musically, [Kerley’s] mind is on another level - he’s one of those kinds of cats,” said Silva.²⁵

In Phoenix, Kongo Shock led the charge for ska music in the 1990s. Active from 1993-1998, the band produced only two full-length albums, but, like other ska bands, made their name by playing live shows throughout Arizona and beyond. Kongo Shock established itself in the Phoenix music scene by holding down a weekly gig on Wednesday nights at a Tempe club called Boston’s. “We did a Wednesday night to make it a good night for touring bands. In Phoenix, you’d get all the major acts on a Thursday because they’ll be in L.A. on Friday and Saturday,” said bassist Barton Applewhite in a 2015 interview, “we had some good bands play with us at Boston’s[;] No Doubt, Rumbling Fish, Citizen Fish . . . all the fish bands.”²⁶

Stylistically, Kongo Shock was hard to define. “We’ve been called so many different things,” noted the Trinidad-born singer Shadrach Powell; “ska funk alternative, ska punk, ska reggae. Last year, [*Phoenix*] *New Times* named us best reggae band, and we don’t play anything

²⁴ Heathcott, 185.

²⁵ Silva, interview.

²⁶ Serene Dominic, “17 Years After Splitting, Phoenix Ska Band Kongo Shock Returns,” *Phoenix News Times*, 7 May 2015, accessed 6. Dec. 2019, <https://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/music/17-years-after-splitting-phoenix-ska-band-kongo-shock-returns-7317393>.

that sounds vaguely like Big Mountain."²⁷ In a promotional letter that accompanied the band's CD when sent to prospective concert venues and promoters, Kongo Shock waxed poetic in its bold pronouncements of sonic prowess, professing its "brave new sound, uniting the rage of Punk, Roots Rock, Rock-A-Billy and Metal with the raw sexuality of Ska, Dub, Reggae and Dance Hall", while creating a "New Earth Beat" that fused "Rock & Roll in all of its genres with the eclectic riddims of Africa, Latin America and Asia."²⁸

In 1994, less than six months after forming, Kongo Shock was selected out of four thousand entries to attend the New Music Seminar in New York City, where the members gained critical insights into how to market their band successfully. "We didn't know what we were getting ourselves into," recalled bassist Barton Applewhite; "it was an adventure... a bonding moment for the band."²⁹ The group formed a strategic partnership with Steve Naughton, a promoter in Phoenix who brought in national acts through his company Medical Productions, for which Kongo Shock played the opening act.³⁰ Naughton also collaborated with local radio station KUKQ, which played listeners' requests for Kongo Shock and hosted many concerts. In July 1995, KUKQ put on the "Punk vs. Ska!" concert at Party Gardens, a former wax museum and eclectic venue for all-age shows. Headlining the bill for punk was the Circle Jerks, a famous Los

²⁷ Serene Dominic, "Heritage Hump Day - Kongo Shock, 'Spy Vs. Spy'," *Phoenix News Times*, 6 May, 2015, Accessed 3 Feb. 2020
<https://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/music/heritage-hump-day-kongo-shock-spy-vs-spy-7317189>.

²⁸ Kongo Shock, "Promotional Letter," retrieved from
<https://www.facebook.com/kongoshock/photos/a.693132997461754/703673996407654/>.

²⁹ Barton, Applewhite, 2020, Interview by author, 9 April, 2020.

³⁰ Serene Dominic, "The Ska's The Limit, Phoenix's Kongo Shock Is Starting A Skank Line Out Of The Valley," *Phoenix News Times*, 22 June 1995, Accessed 3 Feb. 2020
<https://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/music/the-skas-the-limitphoenixs-kongo-shock-is-starting-a-skank-line-out-of-the-valley-6424849>.

Angeles hardcore outfit; notable ska visitors included San Jose's Skankin Pickle and Mudsharks from Reno, NV.³¹ Another Medical/ KUKQ collaboration was when Kongo Shock opened for Sublime and the Ziggens at the Nile Theatre in Mesa, on 12 December 1995, just six months before the death of Sublime's front man, Bradley Nowell.³²

Kongo Shock's most iconic songs were on its 1995 debut album *Dick Triple Flip*.³³ The infectiously grooving "Ska vs. Spy" was a ska adaptation of Henry Mancini's 1959 "Peter Gunn," the theme song to the television show with the same name, about a private detective.³⁴ Coincidentally, Mancini's release occurred the same year that the earliest ska songs were recorded in Jamaica. The song was also adapted by Bally Midway for the 1983 arcade game *Spy Hunter*.³⁵ *Spy vs Spy* was the name of a long-running *Mad Magazine* comic with iconic black and white (two-tone) cartoon spies dressed in overcoats with long pointy snouts. The song's references to American pop culture are consistent with historical ska tropes. The spy reference specifically relates to Jamaican rude boys in the 1960s who dressed to the nines and imitated the James Bond films they saw at the theatre. Desmond Dekker's 1967 hit "007" also played on the rude boy affinity for British spy films and cemented his success among Jamaican and British West Indian youth on both sides of the pond.³⁶

³¹ "Punk v Ska," concert poster, 1995, retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/kongoshock/photos/a.693132997461754/729213697187017/>.

³² "Sublime - Ziggens - Kongo Shock," concert poster, 1995, retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/kongoshock/posts/728667470574973:0>.

³³ Kongo Shock, *Dick Triple Flip*, NO Record Co. Phoenix, 1995.

³⁴ Henry Mancini, "Peter Gunn," *The Music from 'Peter Gunn,'* RCA Victor, 1959.

³⁵ "Spy Hunter," video game, Bally Midway, 1983.

³⁶ Augustyn, 64.

Warsaw Poland Bros. was one of the most nomadic and sonically diverse of the Southwestern ska cohort. Depending on when asked, the band may have said that home was Flagstaff, Tucson, Phoenix, or even Yucca Valley, California. It did not seem to matter much anyway since the group travelled frequently, claiming to have averaged 300 shows annually.³⁷ Formed in 1989 by Chris Poland attending Northern Arizona University (NAU) in Flagstaff, the band name developed as a play on his last name and associated itself with European industrial “dark wave” music.³⁸ The band’s 1993 CD, *The Kind*, had only slight leanings toward ska sounds, including “Nintribular,” a song about seeing a Desmond Dekker show in London, that has a mellow, soulful ska groove. Stylistically, Warsaw initially sought to play anything that was non-blues, experimenting with many styles. The ska sound was “vetted in public,” according to Chris Poland; “we played a ska song, they danced.”³⁹ Warsaw recorded *Warska* in 1994, as ska became more of a focus. Ironically, *Warska* was Warsaw’s only professionally produced album, but done poorly, due to the state of early digital methods. In 1995, the band lost its guitarist and Chris Poland enlisted his brother Aaron, who had recently moved to Tucson from San Bernardino. Although Aaron Poland was not a strong lead guitar, he was excellent at the skank guitar, which helped shape Warsaw’s style of ska. By this time, Chris Poland had mastered a lifestyle of being low-rent royalty in Flagstaff, content to dominate a small local scene and travel occasionally to Prescott or Phoenix. His brother Aaron, however, had larger ambitions, apparently stating “we

³⁷ Warsaw Poland Bros., "About." *Facebook*. n.d. Accessed 3 Feb. 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/pg/warsawpolandbros/about/>.

³⁸ Chris Poland, 2020, Interview by author, 25 March 2020.

³⁹ Poland, interview.

aren't shit unless we tour."⁴⁰ He pushed the band to "break national," citing that if it could gain supremacy in just fifteen local markets, they could make it big.⁴¹

Aaron Poland was also a natural music engineer and began producing the band's albums in Tucson on Otari 8-tracks, beginning with 1997's *Battle Ska Galactica*, Warsaw's *obra maestra* of Southwest ska.⁴² *Battle Ska Galactica*'s lead track, "Tap Nasty," won out over national hits for 15 weeks in a contest put on by Tucson's KFMA radio, where callers would pick between a national and local song.⁴³ Warsaw also played its original "Rude Girl" to a live studio audience while guest appearing on the Sony Network's Extreme Gong Show in 1998.⁴⁴ Another popular song, "Monkey Bone," is a tale about the band's beloved original trombonist, Jesse Ribyat. "Warsaw holds up, man," reflected fan Brendan Vlass of Durango, Colorado, "They, for many reasons, will sit in my top ten; *Battle Ska Galactica* sits firmly in my top ten."⁴⁵ The 1999 release *Hors G'lore* saw another shift away from harder edged, original tunes. Notable songs are the grooving "Love is Stronger than Pride" and "Gangster," which details the challenges of touring. As the song goes, "On the way up to Telluride, the truck did slip, the truck did slide, I stayed in and Jimmy H jumped the fuck out." That verse referenced the original tenor saxophonist Jimmy "H-Bomb" Hughens, who eventually decided to bow out of the band and the touring lifestyle.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Poland, interview.

⁴¹ Poland, interview.

⁴² Poland, interview.

⁴³ Poland, interview.

⁴⁴ Warsaw, "About us," *Facebook*.

⁴⁵ Brendan Vlass, 2020, Interview by author, Durango, 10 Feb. 2020.

⁴⁶ Warsaw Poland Bros., "Gangster," *Hors G'lore*, Invisible Mass Records, 1999; Poland, interview.

Supporting Acts

There were lesser-known ska bands that helped the local ska scenes develop, as well. In Albuquerque, there was the Concentrators and 3 Ball Combo. Whereas in earlier times, the lone ska bands played mixed-genre bills with indie-rock or rockabilly bands, as more ska bands showed up, it became possible to have all-ska shows with multiple bands. As national acts began to make stops in the Southwest region, having a deeper roster of local ska bands allowed more diversity for opening sets, so it was not always the same local band at every ska show.

The Concentrators were published on the Giant Steps-founded Skaliente record label and were a capable group of young adults that played from August 1996 to August 1999 and produced one 10-song CD release.⁴⁷ A group of former UNM colleagues and co-collaborators with Giant Steps, the members pulled together from various influences of reggae, ska, mod, and punk. As the band progressed, its sounds moved more toward a traditional ska sound, like Los Angeles's Hepcat, the Skatalites, and Madness. One of the Concentrators' songs, "Albuerqulosis," made fun of young Albuquerqueans who complained about moving away from Albuquerque, but ended moving back ultimately.⁴⁸ Andy Hawk, the band's trombonist, likened the "good-natured" competition among Albuquerque's ska bands in the late-1990s to the rival soundsystems in Jamaica in the 1950s and '60s.⁴⁹ Things were not completely neutral between the Concentrators and 3 Ball Combo, however. "We couldn't get along with them because our trombone used to date

⁴⁷ "The Concentrators - Discography," *Discogs*, n.d., accessed 8 Feb. 2020. <https://www.discogs.com/artist/6677066-The-Concentrators>; Andy Hawk, interview.

⁴⁸ Andy Hawk, 2020, Interview by author, 2 Mar. 2020; The Concentrators, "Albuerqulosis," *The Concentrators*, Skaliente, 1997.

⁴⁹ Hawk, interview.

their sax player,” recalled 3 Ball Combo’s lead singer Matt Angel about the two former UNM spirit band members.⁵⁰

3 Ball Combo was a seven-piece, punk-edged Albuquerque outfit that included a trombone, saxophone, and trumpet, plus the diversity of latinos and two female horn players and released one album, *Skabrones Locos*, in 1997. In that same year, the band took an ambitious tour across the country, playing 29 shows in nineteen states, including Florida and New York.⁵¹ Joe Anderson, who was then a show promoter, was keen to support the young acts and the youth who constituted their audience. One creative endeavor Anderson helped organize was the “KFC Tour ‘98,” a travelling concert where 3 Ball Combo and punk bands 3 Degrees and The Troma Kids attempted to play sets at all nine of Albuquerque’s Kentucky Fried Chicken locations in one evening. Anderson coordinated with the KFCs and promoted the free event to area youth. While pulling into one of the KFC locations, Matt Angel was pulled over in the band’s van, which had expired license plates and a keg of beer inside, after someone threw a Dixie cup out the window. Luckily, Jamie Trujillo, “a big ol’ loked-out gangster from LA... more-or-less recuse[d] my ass” by sneaking the keg out while the police were distracted, Angel recalled. The van was impounded but the show continued.⁵²

All-Age Access

⁵⁰ Matt Angel, 2020, interview by author, 17 Feb. 2020.

⁵¹ Michael Henningsen, “3 Ball Combo CD Release Party,” *Alibi*, 1997, retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/pg/3-Ball-Combo-254793021248150/photos/>.

⁵² Dan Mayfield, “Bands give ‘finger-lickin’ good show,” *Daily Lobo*, 1998, retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/pg/3-Ball-Combo-254793021248150/photos/>; Angel, interview, 17 Feb. 2020.

The local scenes began to take shape as more youngsters got into ska and venues responded by offering more all-age shows. The youthful ska bands played to throngs of kids who would skank the night away.⁵³ “The all ages scene was on fire,” asserted Mike Silva about Albuquerque; “our scene and our popularity was driven in large part by the all ages shows,” which were always sold out.⁵⁴ Giant Steps was uniquely situated to embrace third wave ska among youth. Both Tom Siegel and baritone saxophone player Paul Blakey taught at Albuquerque’s largest high school, Highland High. As the band increased in popularity among youth, students became “Giant Steps fanatics,” recalled Siegel; “when the third wave of ska hit Albuquerque, it hit big time, in part because we were playing so much and it was huge among high school youth.”⁵⁵ Siegel even enlisted “a small army of high school students” to promote shows by telling their friends and passing out handbills. One student, Adam Collingsworth, was essentially on staff for the band. Siegel remembered when he was getting his administrative license and was visiting with the principal at Del Norte, Albuquerque’s second largest high school; “kids were coming up to me, handing me Giant Steps CDs and asking for my autograph. The principal was like *‘Holy shit! Who are you?’*”⁵⁶ Instead of working with adult venues, which in Albuquerque had strict rules about liquor sales, Giant Steps would rent out venues, like the Hiland Theatre near Highland High School, for a flat fee. “For like \$300 they would give us the place, and it could hold like a

⁵³ “The skank” is the dance of ska music, originally created in Jamaica in the 1960s. It has evolved over the decades, but is still a key aspect of live ska shows.

⁵⁴ Silva, interview.

⁵⁵ Siegel, interview.

⁵⁶ Siegel, interview.

thousand people,” said Siegel, and the venues frequently filled to capacity. “Once we hit the all age crowds,” said Siegel, “we started to make a lot of money.”⁵⁷

Youth and college kids drove the ska scene in Tucson as well. Dave’s Big Deluxe made its name by regularly playing at the Downtown Performance Center, between 1992 and 1995, where it co-mingled with Tucson’s vibrant lo-fi punk scene. “Our draw was high school kids,” related guitarist and singer Dave Schuttenberg.⁵⁸ Dave’s Big Deluxe exemplified the connection to its youth audience by publishing *Live at University High Prom ‘97*, a live studio EP that claimed to have been played at an actual high school prom. The band did play the prom dance, but the recording was not of the actual concert.⁵⁹ Mike Silva recalled playing a show hosted by Dave’s Big Deluxe in Tucson on the lawn of a frat house to a crowd of over one thousand young adults.⁶⁰ Kongo Shock frequently played to all-age crowds at its Moonstomp Wednesdays gig at Boston’s, among other venues, such as Party Gardens.

Regional and National Collaboration

As the regional and national ska scenes intensified after 1995, more interaction between local, regional, and national acts became common. The national ska wave was penetrating popular media and kids became ska-aware as Southern Californian acts like No Doubt, Sublime, Goldfinger, and Reel Big Fish saw radio play and ska culture began to ooze around the country through fanzines and popular culture. Elevated by the broader popularity, successful bands like

⁵⁷ Siegel, interview.

⁵⁸ David Schuttenberg, 2020, interview with author, 4 April, 2020.

⁵⁹ Dave’s Big Deluxe, *Live At University High Prom ‘97*, Slimstyle Records, 1997, *Spotify*, <https://open.spotify.com/album/5X1PxcTShI5qTYSjNhbhVS>; Schuttenberg, interview.

⁶⁰ Silva, interview.

The Toasters, Skankin' Pickle, the Scofflaws, and many others began touring in larger zones and eventually brought their product to the Southwest. The local bands were there to play an opening set before the headliner took stage. In this way, ska bands in the Southwest scene, especially the established, mature acts, were able to strengthen their audience in their home city by playing alongside nationally-known acts in larger venues. Additionally, they were also able to make connections to the national acts and gain notoriety among their peers.

In the late 1990s, there were increasing opportunities for local bands to make a name for themselves. In Albuquerque, KTEG "The Edge" radio station produced Edgefest, a summer music festival at the Albuquerque Fairgrounds. Despite bringing in some of the biggest rock bands in the country, KTEG made sure to include the local bands as well. It was here in 1998 that Giant Steps played with the Mighty Mighty Bosstones. After receiving encouragement from one of the most successful ska acts, Silva "was like oh man, the dream is gonna happen. We're gonna play music for a living like the Bosstones."⁶¹ At the same time, The Edge was owned by national radio syndicate Clear Channel, now the massive conglomerate iHeart Media, which imposed a corporate, top-down policy to airplay. Tom Siegel reflected on the situation; "[The kids would] call Jordan while she was spinning records live [requesting Giant Steps] and she would never play us. But the truth was she couldn't... all of the playlists were dictated by [ClearChannel and the record companies]. It didn't matter what the kids in Albuquerque wanted to hear or what they liked; they were being told what to like... We realized it was just a big game; it was manufactured."⁶² That story was nothing new in corporate America, or even in the music industry,

⁶¹ Alex Macon, "Ranking 25 Years of Edgefest Lineups," *D Magazine* 28 March 2017, accessed 8 Feb. 2020 <https://www.dmagazine.com/arts-entertainment/2017/03/edgefest-2017/>; Silva, Interview.

⁶² Siegel, interview.

which had experienced commodification since Dick Clark and Alan Freed were on trial during the payola investigation in 1959 for monopolizing radio play and records sales of early rock & roll.⁶³ Yet, within the context of local ska scenes it bears particular weight. In the late 1990s, Clear Channel Radio was able to dramatically expand its marketshare to over 1200 local radio holdings, due to the relaxed regulations of the Telecommunications Act of 1996.⁶⁴ That consolidation of media control by a national company in local markets reinforced the challenges that local ska bands faced when trying to become successful. It also meant that only the bands that were selected and brought through the right channels would see larger success.

Orange County's No Doubt is the prime example of the music industry's involvement with ska music. No Doubt formed in 1987 and was propelled into mass stardom in the mid-1990s. The band, led by the fashionably iconic Gwen Stefani, lent appeal by trending to a pop sound and adopting the skater fashion rather than the traditional ska and rude boy (and rude girl) traditions. With ska hits peaking at #23 on the Billboard charts, the band certainly christened more young ears to ska sounds than nearly any of its peers.⁶⁵ As No Doubt's popularity increased, however, its sound drifted further away from ska norms, and more into pop. "[Gwen] was a force... No matter what you think of them; [No Doubt] helped put ska on the national scene," reflected Mike Silva.⁶⁶ However, while the band's 1995 hit record *Tragic Kingdom* may have represented archetypical ska music for the masses, it was seen as a sonic betrayal to established fans of the genre. For

⁶³ David P. Szatmary, *Rockin' in Time*, Pearson Education, 2014, 62-63.

⁶⁴ Alec Foege, *Right of the Dial: The Rise of Clear Channel and the Fall of Commercial Radio*, Faber and Faber, 2008.

⁶⁵ "No Doubt Chart History," *Billboard*, n.d., accessed 6 Dec. 2019, <https://www.billboard.com/music/no-doubt/chart-history>.

⁶⁶ Silva, interview.

musicians, No Doubt's trajectory became a cautionary tale. The question for prospective ska bands was "if you sound too 'pop-ska-y', are you a sell-out?" according to Mike Silva. "There was always an element lingering around the ska scene of — you can't get too 'No Doubty,'"⁶⁷

Giant Steps's peak, by one way of measure, was in 1998, when it traveled on the ESPN X-Games Experience Road Tour, a national tour of popular bands based around the annual extreme sports competition with the same name. Much like the Vans Warped Tour, the collaboration between big corporations, extreme sports, and ska and punk bands was no coincidence. Skateboarding and BMX biking were extremely popular among youth and ska-punk was the soundtrack to the sport. In 1999, when professional skater Tony Hawk helped create the hugely successful video game *Tony Hawk Pro Skater*, he contacted the bands that he listened to when selecting music for the game.⁶⁸

As the top regional bands in the Southwest began to gain popularity and travel, a natural partnership formed among the small class of elder ska acts in the Southwest. The bands began playing bills together and hosting each other in their respective cities. Giant Steps hosted Skank-O-Rama, an annual ska music festival that featured regional and national acts.⁶⁹ Eventually, Southwestern ska bands began touring together, although they competed at first. Initially, "we were infighting with these bands over who gets to open for national [acts] in Phoenix," recalled Warsaw's Chris Poland.⁷⁰ "We talked a lot of shit behind each other's backs," reflected Dave

⁶⁷ Silva, interview.

⁶⁸ John Longbottom, "An Oral History of the Tony Hawk's Pro Skater Soundtrack, with Tony Hawk & Goldfinger's John Feldmann," *Kerrang*, 31 August 2019, Accessed 8 Nov. 2019. <https://www.kerrang.com/features/20-years-of-tony-hawks-pro-skater-an-oral-history-of-the-soundtrack-with-tony-hawk-goldfingers-john-feldmann/>.

⁶⁹ Silva, interview.

⁷⁰ Poland, interview.

Schuttenberg, “but [we] genuinely liked each other as well...there was some healthy competition...”⁷¹ “At first there was a weird, fabricated rivalry between us and Warsaw,” recalled Barton Applewhite of Kongo Shock.⁷² Eventually, Poland’s mentor, Rich Ray of the Mudsharks, the Reno outfit that spawned the band Keyser Soze, suggested that “instead of fighting with these bands... just team up with them.”⁷³ In October 1997, Phoenix’s Kongo Shock, Flagstaff’s Warsaw, and Tucson’s Dave’s Big Deluxe embarked on the Arizona Ska Tour of the Western US, playing shows in Salt Lake, Boulder, Modesto, and Seattle, among other cities in the Mountain West. Chris Poland described “living life three times faster than anybody” during those days.⁷⁴ Diane Nelson, a columnist at the Modesto Bee, happened to show up at an under-attended triple bill on a Thursday night for her first taste of ska music. “Saxophones scream, guitars wail, drums reach a place down deep and primitive,” Nelson intimated, “[Kongo Shock’s Dave] Neil’s trumpet is clean and crisp, notes peeling [*sic*] like Ella’s scat. I squint and see Miles Davis, Louis Armstrong, Gabriel. I see the face of God.”⁷⁵

Being a regional ska band traveling long highway routes for low-paying gigs was a fragile existence, as Kongo Shock’s Applewhite attested. “At one point, we were a nine-piece [band]. We never made any money... But when it was down to a five-piece, it was like, hey, you come home

⁷¹ Schuttenberg, interview.

⁷² Barton Applewhite, interview.

⁷³ Poland, interview.

⁷⁴ Poland, interview.

⁷⁵ Diane Nelson, "It 's Cool, Corny -- It 's Ec-ska-cy," *Modesto Bee* (CA), October 26, 1997: 1, *NewsBank: Access World News Research Collection*.

from Santa Fe with some money in your pocket.”⁷⁶ Physically, touring takes a toll. Warsaw had to be strategic about its band composition, it learned, after losing a bass player to carpal tunnel syndrome. “Driving so much hurts,” said Chris Poland frankly, “it takes a big person to drive 8-10 hours and day... [while] partying every night.”⁷⁷ “I have all the horizons in the West memorized,” Poland emphatically stated, “we’re driving every day working our asses off, getting paid fucking pennies, to promote our band every day for 20 fucking years... I wouldn’t trade it all in, but...”⁷⁸

The Durango Connection

Ska Brewing, Durango, Colorado’s ska-themed beer company played an intrinsic role in drawing out Southwest ska bands. Founded by Dave Thibodeau and Bill Graham in 1995, the two sought to make beer because they were too young to buy it. Just out of college, the pair were avid ska fans and decided to build their brand image around ska music and rude boy culture. “When we were homebrewing in high school in the mid-1980s... we *had* to listen to ska music or that batch of beer wouldn’t turn out... [it was like] you can’t listen to anything else or the beer’s not going to turn out,” reflected Thibodeau on the company’s origin.⁷⁹ Ska’s product marketing is filled with playful, cartoonish imagery and product naming that references ska culture. A black-and-white checkered logo, characters in suits and porkpie hats, riding scooters, and product names like Pinstripe, Rue B. Soho, Buster Nut Brown Ale, Modus Hoperandi, and Hoperation Ivy are all

⁷⁶ Dominic Serene, “17 Years After Splitting, Phoenix Ska Band Kongo Shock Returns,” *Phoenix News Times*, 7 May 2015, accessed 6. Dec. 2019, <https://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/music/17-years-after-splitting-phoenix-ska-band-kongo-shock-returns-7317393>.

⁷⁷ Poland, interview.

⁷⁸ Poland, interview.

⁷⁹ Dave Thibodeau, 2020, interview by author, Durango, 21 Feb. 2020.

plays on ska-related themes. Ska Brewing makes use of the playful, fun, and vibrant imagery, and diversity in ska culture and plays it up, much like ska musicians and kids in the scene have found and reinterpreted its sounds and styles in creative and innovative ways.

Though not a musician, Thibodeau has contributed in his own ways to ska music and culture. In the mid-1990s, when the brewing company was operating out of a warehouse in Durango's Bodo industrial park, Thibodeau worked with local bars, like the Loft and the San Juan Room, to find venues for Southwestern ska bands to play in Durango. Initially, it was only New Mexico ska bands Giant Steps, the Concentrators, and 3 Ball Combo, who played shows in 1995. "There was a scooter rally that used to run from Tucson to Nogales, Mexico... We brought our three-wheeled 'Ska-mobile' down," said Thibodeau, referring to his vintage Piaggio scooter that doubled as a kegerator. It was there that Thibodeau met Dave Shuttenburg of Dave's Big Deluxe.⁸⁰ "In the late '80s early '90s, the music scene was totally 100% part of [the scooter scene;] ... mod and ska and soul...[we] were card-carrying members of that subculture," said Schuttenberg.⁸¹ That led to relationships with other Arizona bands, Warsaw and Kongo Shock. The brewer also hosted shows in its warehouse. Barbara Fleming, co-owner of the Loft bar in 1997 and 1998, remembers working with Ska Brewing to bring Kongo Shock, Warsaw, and Giant Steps to her bar, and the experience of participating in the Southwest ska scene. "Ska music brings something alive in me...it did then and it still does. Since I became aware of it while owning a bar and witnessing the excitement it brought to folks, I notice when thinking back there is a 'glow' around the Ska part of that bar experience."⁸²

⁸⁰ Thibodeau, interview.

⁸¹ Schuttenberg, interview.

⁸² Barbara Fleming, email to author, 16 Dec. 2019.

Ska Brewing did not follow the same arc as ska music in the 1990s. Instead of falling into obscurity in the new millenium, business boomed. Over the decades that have passed, Ska has become a powerhouse among microbrewers championing small, independent breweries over large corporations and growing its distribution internationally. Despite its success and the relative unpopularity of ska music, Ska Brewing has consistently supported ska music by hosting concerts in Durango and sponsoring acts abroad. In 2008, Ska opened a large facility in Durango, called its “world headquarters,” where it brings in national ska bands for its anniversary party every summer.⁸³ “It’s like a pilgrimage for ska fans around the country,” said Thibodeau of the visitors he frequently sees at the brewery, “We’ve had ska bands around the world reach out to us..[and] have tried to come here to play... it’s a little cowboy town!”

Ska music reached the ears of the youth in Durango, too, despite the obvious conflict between a brewery, bars, and underage listeners. “There was no place for underage kids to see [shows], except the Doghouse Thriftworld,” exclaimed Brendan Vlass, who was a teen in Durango in the 1990s.⁸⁴ The Doghouse was a thrift store that hosted all-age punk shows in its back storage room. Vlass had to get creative to see a live band show in town; “I would show up when [Warsaw or Dave’s Big Deluxe] were gonna play [at a bar] and help them load in and sell merc for them, so I could get in and watch them [play].” In 1998, an all-age show was organized at the Iron Horse

⁸³ Emily Hutto, “Ska Brewing Announces Anniversary Music Lineup feat. Mustard Plug, The Toasters, and The Aggrolites,” *CraftBeer.com*, 22 May, 2019, accessed 10 Feb. 2020 <https://www.craftbeer.com/news/brewery-news/ska-brewing-anniversary-invitational-music-lineup>; “Ska Brewing Co. ushers in a new era with its 24,000 square foot ‘world headquarters,’” *DurangoDowntown.com*, 6 Oct. 2008, accessed 10 Feb. 2020 <https://durangodowntown.com/news/business/ska-brewing-co-ushers-in-a-new-era-with-its-24-000-square-foot-world-headquarters/>.

⁸⁴ Vlass, interview.

Inn, a hotel on the north edge of Durango. Headlining were several acts, including Giant Steps, Warsaw, and nationally-renowned Venice Shoreline Chris (Murray). Vlass's high school ska band, Bamboozle, secured the opening slot for the concert. "That'll be the highlight of our career," reflected Vlass.⁸⁵

The Decline of Southwestern Ska

By 2000, Warsaw stood alone as the only remaining ska band in the region. After 1998, Giant Steps began to falter. "We aged out," summarized Mike Silva, "the guys started having wives... somebody had a baby... some of the guys were just not really down to get in the van and travel all across the Southwest..."⁸⁶ This coincided with the beginning of the decline of the intense popularity of ska nationwide. Key members moved out of the area as well, including creative lead Rob Kerley. Even by the time Kongo Shock released its final album *Ride the Bus*, in 1997, there were signs that the end was near. The song "Working Hands" chronicles the financial ruin of "living in a party while I'm charging up the gold card," having "spent my money now I'm cruising with the band." The somber final track of the album, "Dead by 24," evokes the tenuousness of a semi-professional ska band on the fringe. The album's title track, "Ride the Bus," alludes to the grind of constant travel. "I don't wanna ride the bus," they declare, since "now I know that things are never getting better and I'm only going places I've been."⁸⁷ Dave Shuttenger described getting out of the van in Sacramento, as Dave's Big Deluxe was traveling from Portland to Fresno, in 1998. "It was basically, 'we gotta quit now or our friendships are going to be ruined,'" recalled

⁸⁵ Vlass, interview.

⁸⁶ Silva, interview.

⁸⁷ Kongo Shock, *Ride the Bus*, Skill Shot Records, 1997. *Basecamp*, <https://kongoshock.bandcamp.com/album/ride-the-bus>.

Schuttenberg, “we were like ‘we gotta make something happen or get on with life;’ and life won.”

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In Conclusion

As with any topic, there are many ways to tell the story of ska music. The common view takes a top-down approach, examining third-wave ska as a homogenous, national movement, and focuses on how that movement operated on a macro scale, affecting the whole nation. This study of ska in the Southwest is not like that approach. The Southwest has always been about fringes, borders, and interactions with local and foreign. The development of ska in the Southwest followed suit by developing in relative isolation and only began to interact with the national elements of the ska revival later, when the tide of the movement swelled and carried acts from outside in and allowed some of the local bands to make moves on the national level. What is more, this study of ska in the Southwest is not a general survey or a look at a broad national movement, it is a focused look at local subcultures and niche developments in microhistory. Although, as on the national level, the ska scenes were short-lived and imperiled from their conception - perhaps even more in the Southwest, where populations were smaller and travelling bands of six or more had to go much further to play shows - this study does not endorse the “ska-bust” prerogative that views the end of the third wave as a failure.⁸⁹

For many of these bands and their fans it was an amazing era of music and experiences. Some of these virtually-forgotten acts embarked on national tours that, though of questionable financial value, now stand as important periods in their lives, even life-changing. “[I] just kind of put it in the plus column,” 3 Ball Combo’s Matt Angel concluded of his experience, “we never

⁸⁸ Schuttenberg, interview.

⁸⁹ Lejtenyi, “Ska-Boom and Ska-Bust.”

expected to make money.”⁹⁰ “The band has always been a part of us,” said Tom Siegel of Giant Steps on the eve of a reunion show in 2014; “we put so much of ourselves into the music.”⁹¹ “We all did it for the love of it,” imparted Barton Applewhite, “it was my dream to be a musician full-time...and I think we were on the right path.” Many fans feel the same way. “I’ve got nothing but appreciation for it,” concluded Kyle Rakowski, another music-savvy Durango youth in the 1990s; “some people look back at the pop/ska wave in the ‘90s with disdain because it felt like it was contrived or kind of forced... In Durango, it didn’t feel that way... People were just authentically really enjoying the music.”⁹²

Giant Steps has played three reunion shows since disbanding in 1999. Kongo Shock played at least one reunion concert in 2015 while Dave’s Big Deluxe came together for the 20th and 25th anniversaries of the Tucson scooter rally, in 2007 and 2012.⁹³ Several former members of these acts are now part of new ska bands and continue the tradition of ska in the Southwest. For Warsaw, the party has never stopped. The band has produced at least six albums since 1999 and has toured nearly uninterrupted for twenty-five years with the Poland brothers taking turns running the band for years at a time. Today, Warsaw features both Chris and Aaron Poland and plays frequent shows, recently opening for Two-tone greats The English Beat to packed venues in

⁹⁰ Angel, interview, 17 Feb. 2020.

⁹¹ Adrian Gomez, “Giant Steps reunion: The ska band that used to pack the house is back for one show,” *Albuquerque Journal* 4 April 2014, accessed 3 Feb. 2020. <https://www.abqjournal.com/378702/albuquerque-ska.html>.

⁹² Kyle Rakowski, 2020, interview by author, 23 Feb. 2020.

⁹³ Serene Dominic, “Heritage Hump Day - Kongo Shock, ‘py Vs. Spy’,” *Phoenix News Times*, 6 May, 2015, accessed 3 Feb. 2020 <https://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/music/heritage-hump-day-kongo-shock-spy-vs-spy-7317189>; David Schuttenberg, social media post, *Facebook*, 27 Aug. 2012, accessed 23 April 2020 <https://www.facebook.com/david.schuttenberg/posts/214817245313932>.

California. “I gotta give a lot of credit to Dave Wakeling because he... breathed life into our careers,” said Chris Poland of the English Beat’s front man.⁹⁴ The Launchpad, one of Albuquerque’s go-to small, downtown venues for ska in the 1990s, is still hosting ska shows (though not all-ages). Giant Steps’s Mike Silva, ever-proud of “being the band from the 505,” a reference to New Mexico’s area code, has combined his love for ska and his love for Albuquerque into a business model.⁹⁵ Rude Boy Cookies, opened by Silva in 2014 adjacent to the UNM campus, is a fully-ska-themed cookie and ice cream shop, decked out with sharp black-and-white pinstripe decor with rich scarlet accents while playing an eclectic mix of ska tunes all day long.⁹⁶

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⁹⁴ Poland, interview.

⁹⁵ Silva, interview.

⁹⁶ Marks, “One-on-one...”.

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