



# Understanding The Barriers and Opportunities of The **Latin** Music Community In **Canada**

# A letter from Speaking Non-English (SNE)

Dear industry leaders and stakeholders,

This research project aims to support the ongoing efforts to tackle the under-representation, misrepresentation, and under-recognition of Latin Canadians in the Canadian music industry.

The project captures testimonials and experiences lived by Latin Canadians. As valuable and unique as these testimonials are, they reflect broader issues affecting other underrepresented communities.

As leaders and stakeholders, we hope this report helps convey a compelling rationale to spearhead positive change in the domestic industry and activate tangible change that will benefit all Canadians from a cultural and economic standpoint.

A more inclusive industry is an industry that is aware of and actively develops its cultural diversity.

An inclusive and culturally diverse industry, is an industry that is able to identify and develop the full scope of its ever evolving talent domestically and globally, regardless of background, heritage, or language. An industry committed to creating new spaces, in lieu of maintaining outdated structures, mindsets and hierarchies.

In an ultra-globalized and rapidly changing music industry, let's not hesitate in challenging our own understanding of what it means to be Canadian.

Please join our efforts to build a more inclusive and forward-thinking domestic music industry that develops, celebrates and exports music from our growing diasporic cultures and creative communities.

Alongside our globally successful artists and genres who have paved the way, it's time for our homegrown Canadian Latin Music talent to take the stage, in Canada and around the world.

A stylized, handwritten signature in white ink, likely belonging to Martín Añón, the President of Speaking Non-English.

Martín Añón / Anxxon | President, Speaking Non-English



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## **Speaking Non-English**

Speaking Non-English is a non-profit dedicated to identifying, developing, and exporting Latin Canadian talent. By creating actionable and results-driven programs that integrate with the music industry at large, both nationally and globally, SNE aims to accelerate the growth of the Canadian music industry by fostering the development of businesses led by untapped Latin-Canadian music creators and entrepreneurs.

## **The Creative School at Toronto Metropolitan University**

The Creative School is a dynamic faculty that is making a difference in new, unexplored ways. Made up of Canada's top professional schools and transdisciplinary hubs in media, communication, design and cultural industries, The Creative School offers students an unparalleled global experience in the heart of downtown Toronto.

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Bruno Capinan at Folk on The Rocks Music  
Festival in Yellowknife (July 2024).  
Photo credit: Munya Visual Factory





OKAN

Photo credit: Luisa Maria Gonzalez







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# Introduction

Latin music in Canada has emerged as a significant market for growth, consistently topping national and international charts, streams, and live performances. Artists like Puerto Rico's Bad Bunny have achieved global success, following in the footsteps of international stars such as Shakira, Enrique Iglesias, Ricky Martin, and Jennifer Lopez<sup>1</sup>. Economically, supporting Latin Canadian artists holds immense potential by creating jobs, expanding markets, and boosting cultural tourism. Additionally, the Latin Canadian population has grown to over 1.1 million, representing a significant force that continues to grow<sup>2</sup>.

Beyond market share, Latin music also encompasses expansive cultural diversity, sharing different instruments, styles, genres, and sounds. Despite this, the Canadian music industry offers few opportunities for Latin Canadian musicians, sidelining their industry impact and growth potential. Using a critical ecological model lens, this report discusses the barriers and opportunities faced by Latin Canadian music professionals, offering important recommendations to address the existing systemic disparities. The aim is to create a case for recognition and support for Latin music in the Canadian music industry, and foster opportunities for economic growth.

Latin Canadian musicians face numerous challenges from the top down. From stereotypes to linguistic differences, Latin Canadians face marginalization broadly as well as within the music industry. This is evident in simplistic perceptions of Latin music, which affects events, artists, and the industry as a whole in creating and supporting Latin music. Our analysis shows that such misrepresentation is caused by a lack of support for Latin musicians in Canada, as well as a lack of representation at all levels. Regarding representation, few Latin music professionals hold C-level, executive-level, or decision-making positions. With this noticeable lack of representation of Latin Canadian people, the Canadian music industry generally fails to recognize and advocate the distinct and unique offerings of Latin music. As a result, Latin Canadian artists and music professionals tend to feel ignored and see a lack of opportunity for their music, few funding opportunities for Latin music, no

specific awards that recognize Latin music, and are excluded from other categories because they are pigeonholed.

Highlighting voices from the Latin Canadian music community, this report details the everyday and common barriers they face navigating, working, and living in the Canadian music industry. The report begins with an overview of the growth of Latin music in Canada, the United States, and globally before discussing the recognized barriers for Latin musicians in Canada. Based on this overview, the report suggests that Latin Canadian musicians are under-represented, misrepresented, and under-recognized. After providing a general overview, the report delves into the perspectives of Latin Canadian music professionals, highlighting their challenges, concerns, and recommendations for fostering the growth of Latin music in Canada, before exploring key implications and actionable steps.





JACE Carrillo at Fuego Fuego festival opening  
for Maluma, MTL 2024.  
Photo credit: Sarah Evangelista



# The Growth of Latin Music

Latin music has witnessed transformative growth in the past two decades, extending its influence from the Americas to the global stage. In the Latin American region, the music market experienced a 25.9% increase year-over-year in 2023, reaching US\$1.3 billion—a trend of significant growth which has been sustained for over a decade<sup>3</sup>. In Canada, Latin Canadian artists like Alex Cuba and Jessie Reyez have topped the charts and won numerous prestigious awards domestically and internationally. In 2022, Latin music ranked as the seventh-largest genre in the Canadian market<sup>4</sup>. The following year, Latin music was up 48% in terms of online streams, and up 2,100% in terms of airplay<sup>5</sup>. Looking at the United States, Latin music streams constituted the fourth-largest share, accounting for 8.3% of total streams, translating to 120.18 billion streams out of a total of 1.453 trillion—surpassing country music. The genre has also boomed here as the second-fastest growing music genre and for the first time, six Latin music artists have achieved over one billion On-Demand Audio streams.<sup>6,7</sup>

Despite these global achievements, Latin music in Canada faces significant infrastructure challenges and a gap between its widespread popularity and the recognition and representation it receives within the local industry. For one, Latin Canadian artists encounter insufficient funding and support, prompting many to seek opportunities abroad<sup>8</sup>. Such problems stem from a felt and demonstrated under-representation of Latin Canadians at decision-making and executive levels in the Canadian music industry<sup>9</sup>. Latin culture and music are defined by individuals outside of the culture, leading to misrepresentation and miscategorization<sup>10</sup>. Consequently, many Latin Canadian artists struggle to access the opportunities and resources they need. Fito Blanco, a Panamanian-Canadian tropical urban singer, addresses the disparity, stating, “If Latin artists in Canada had the same opportunities and were treated as artists despite the language, they would have incredible international success with the same investment that would require an Anglo artist.”<sup>11</sup>

Canada’s recent infrastructure advancements for Black and Indigenous artists, such as Ontario Creates’ AcceleratiON program and the Starmaker Orion program,

highlight the importance of developing infrastructure for growth. Integrating Latin Canadian expertise to build upon this framework to create music that resonates with domestic and Latin audiences would promise economic growth by strategically positioning the Latin American market as a dynamic hub for Canadian and Latin Canadian artists. Developing the necessary infrastructure will enhance the visibility and impact of Latin music and foster a deeper appreciation of Latin culture in Canada.

## **Economic Significance of Latin Music**

Growth of the Latin Canadian population is closely intertwined with the expansion of Latin music's popularity in Canada. Using revised criteria in the 2021 census, Canada's Latin American population surged to nearly 1.2 million, doubling from the initially identified 580,000 Canadians of Latin American origin.<sup>12</sup> This growth over two decades signifies that Hispanic-Latin Americans now constitute 3.3% of Canada's total population, a significant increase from 1.8% in 2001.<sup>13</sup>

As a result of this increased popularity, events like the Latin Fuego Fuego Festival have shown incredible success. This festival, which debuted in Montreal in 2022, initially started as a one-day event, expanding to a two-day festival in 2023. Combined with having sold out both times, these successes underscore the rising popularity of Latin music in Canada<sup>14</sup>. Latincoover's Carnaval del Sol in British Columbia has also shown success with attendees of more than 30,000 festival goers, as well as Toronto's multi-day Lula World Festival, created by LulaWorld Records, which brings international audiences and artists together in Canada.

Meanwhile, global industry figures show tremendous growth, with music revenues soaring 986% between 2014 to 2023. Now, one in five songs on Spotify's global top 100 streams is Latin as Spanish has become the second-most consumed language for music in the world.<sup>15 16</sup> In the United States, album consumption trends (Streaming, Radio, CDs, Vinyls, etc.) demonstrate Latin music's further growth, with a 55.29% increase in consumption between 2020 and 2022, surpassing other major genres such as R&B, hip-hop, rock, pop, and country.<sup>17</sup> In 2023, Latin music stood as the fifth-largest major genre in the US market standing right beside country music in the US.<sup>18 19</sup> Furthermore, US data reveals that Latin music superfans spend 30% more than

superfans of other genres and 120% more than the average music fan. This financial engagement reflects the genre's loyal and dedicated fan base and highlights how Latin music occupies a vital place in the music industry. This is further evidenced by a remarkable 15% revenue growth in the first half of 2023 alone.<sup>20 21 22</sup> The cultural aspect of Latin music is integral to this engagement, with nearly half of its fans discovering new music through friends and family as music listeners seek more and more foreign language music, illustrating how deeply embedded the genre is in community and cultural interactions.<sup>23 24 25</sup> Artists such as Bad Bunny have achieved significant commercial success, topping music industry charts and highlighting the wide appeal of Latin music.<sup>26</sup>

## Cultural Significance of Latin Music

The cultures behind Latin music are important reasons why it is so successful. Latin music and culture are deeply connected. On the question of why Latin music has been so successful globally, Sebastián Kryś, an award-winning American-Argentine Latin music producer, answers, "In popular Western music, most new artists have no idea where they came from, musically or culturally. That's not the case with many Latin artists."<sup>27</sup> Latin music holds profound significance for the Latin American community. It articulates the nuances of their migratory experiences, nurtures connections with their homeland cultures, and helps nurture trans-diasporic communities.<sup>28 29 30</sup> Latin musicians, viewed as cultural ambassadors, engage in cross-collaboration, reaching broad audiences while maintaining and evolving their cultural identities.<sup>31 32 33</sup> For Canada's diverse cultural mosaic, Latin music's universal and cross-collaborative nature is especially significant in developing the industry.

Aiona Santana during a performance in  
Ottawa opening for Blesd.  
Photo credit: Kery Morell



# Barriers to Growth

## Definition of “Latin”

Defining “Latin” involves complexities. Any definition must acknowledge a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and historical elements originating from Latin America and the Caribbean. It encompasses individuals and communities connected to these areas through heritage, language, and cultural practices, including diasporic communities. Latin music is equally diverse, integrating a variety of musical styles, indigenous traditions and artistic expressions native to these areas.

Attempting to define “Latin” risks oversimplifying a subcontinent that encompasses countless distinct cultures, races, and ethnicities across 20 different countries. Quique Escamilla, a Toronto-based musician of Mayan and Zapotecan descent, winner of the 2015 JUNO Award for “World Music Album of the Year,” and organizer of the Tlalli Festival that celebrates Indigenous cultures of Latin America, provides a critical perspective on these broad categorizations used to define Latin American identity.<sup>34</sup> He argues that the term “Latin America” is an oversimplification often propagated by English-speaking countries in North America that can alienate and even erase Indigenous identities. He asserts, “[‘Latin American’ is] not representative of the real history of who we are as people [...] Just because you imposed a language on me, that doesn’t mean that I’m of Spanish [origin].”<sup>35</sup> Through his perspective, Escamilla stresses the nuances and complexities of belonging to these communities and in the North American music industry.

“In 2023, the Canadian Hispanic Congress (CHC) requested Stats Can to do a custom tabulation that uses a definition of Latin American that would better reflect the demographic reality of the community using data from the 2021 Census. As a result, the new data increased from 580,000 identified Canadians of Latin American origin to 1,193,880.”<sup>36</sup>



The challenge here is how we define music, think of genres, and pigeonhole Latin American acts into one sound or another. This can restrict artists to certain expectations, stereotypes, and linguistic choices, potentially stifling creativity and innovation.<sup>37</sup> It also leads to misunderstanding what is popular and what is not, affecting how Latin acts are recognized for their talent. The industry overlooks the potential for new and diverse expressions within the genre and creates barriers for emerging artists. Jessie Reyez points out that she hopes that Latin music will reach widespread acceptance. She says, “It won’t even be something you notice, it will be part of culture now. When it gets to the point you don’t even have to acknowledge it, that’s success.”<sup>38</sup>

## **Under-Representation, Mis-Representation, and Under-Recognition**

“Why can’t we take the next step?” Fito Blanco asks, suggesting that Latin Canadian acts are unable to break out into the mainstream. He observes that with the right support, Latin Canadian talent should be able to become international successes. But importantly, he notes that “it takes an entire industry being able to want to champion their talent as well. There are massive opportunities there.”<sup>39</sup>

A key part of the problem is that few people in positions of power in the Canadian music industry can adequately assess Latin music and culture.<sup>40 41 42</sup> Colombian-Canadian singer-songwriter Jessie Reyez points out how this under-representation leads to misrepresentation by using the Black experience as an analogous example when she says, “If there are few Black employees and so many white people in power, how could it be expected that they would see the potential in Black artists.”<sup>43</sup> Speaking specifically about the Latin community in Canada, she states that “more presence in entertainment when it comes to Latino-owned, Latino-directed, Latino-produced” is needed. “There are people doing big shit, but the more we push that shit to the forefront, the better it will be, and the more that will come of it too.”<sup>44</sup>

A particularly illustrative case is the JUNO Awards, which has been criticized in the past for under-representation of Black, Indigenous, and Francophone music.<sup>45</sup> Despite the growth of Latin music, it remains conspicuously absent as a dedicated category



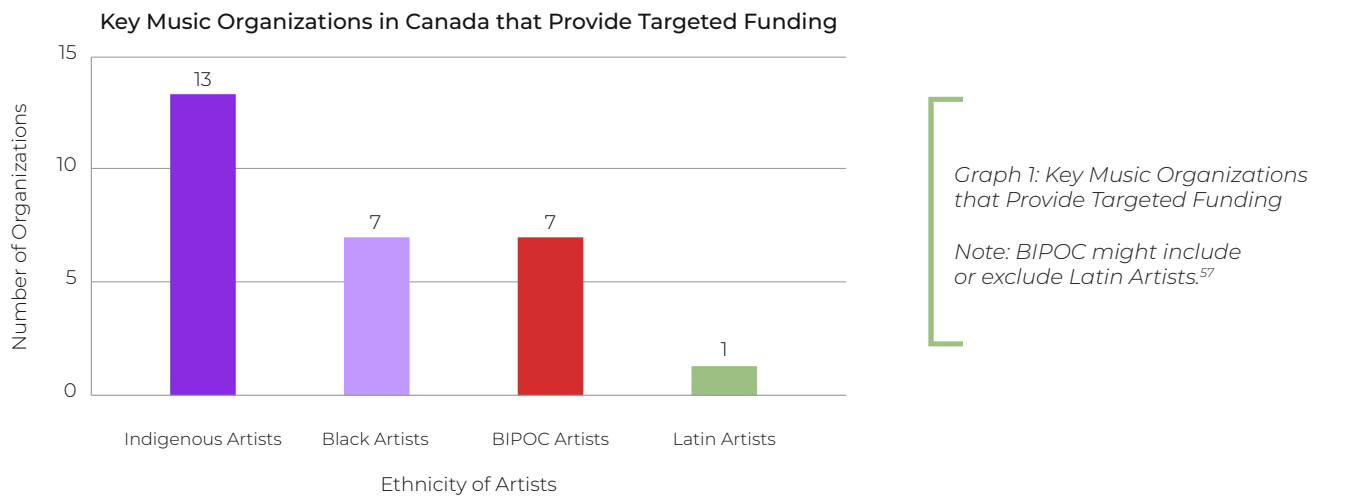
at the JUNOS. This is particularly striking when considering that top genres with a smaller market share in Canada, such as Christian, Jazz, Children's and Classical music, each have their own categories. Of the top 11 genres as denoted by Luminate, Latin music is the only one without a represented category.<sup>46</sup> Instead, Latin music is ambiguously grouped under the "Global Music Album of the Year" category. This not only creates a sense of otherness but also affects how Latin music is assessed and makes it difficult to grasp the nuances of what makes Latin music. The impact of this oversight is underscored by the fact that from 2018 to 2023, Latin music accounted for a substantial 20% of submissions and 40% of nominees.<sup>47 48</sup>

While the JUNO Awards can and do recognize Latin music and heritage by "Celebrating Latin American Heritage Month," the absence of a clear category for Latin music genres suggests a lack of understanding both the growth of Latin music and the importance of such designations.<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, this misrepresentation is a massive barrier that prevents Latin Canadian talent from being understood and recognized, which matters especially for smaller and independent artists who often rely on accolades.<sup>50</sup>

The establishment of the Latin Grammy Awards in 2000 bolstered the visibility of Latin artists, addressing a gap in representation not covered by traditional Grammy categories.<sup>51</sup> These platforms not only celebrate the diversity and richness of Latin music but also provide crucial exposure for Latin Canadian artists to reach audiences abroad.<sup>52</sup> Over the years, the Latin Grammy Awards have experienced notable growth in viewership, with significant increases in 2023. For instance, the viewership grew from 5.9 million in 2021 to a remarkable 18.9 million in 2023, highlighting the expanding global interest and broader accessibility of the event.

Latin Canadian artists who have received wins or nominations at the Latin Grammys and Grammys include Alex Cuba (one Grammy win and four nominations; four Latin Grammy wins and one nomination), Lido Pimienta (one Grammy nomination and one Latin Grammy nomination), Jesse Reyez (one Grammy nomination), and Fito Blanco (one Latin Grammy nomination); Alex Castillo, moreover, was nominated for two Latin Grammys.<sup>53 54 55 56</sup> It is notable that Fito Blanco is the only act of the four mentioned Grammy nominees who has not been nominated for a JUNO Award.

Furthermore, our analysis of 22 key Canadian music organizations reveals a significant gap in targeted funding for Latin artists, who receive considerably less attention. Among the organizations offering grants in our analysis, only one provided a specific grant to Latin artists. This data highlights broader issues of underrepresentation, insufficient resource allocation, and the need for accurate and intentional outreach within the industry. Additionally, Latin Canadians are often excluded from BIPOC descriptions, leading to feelings of disconnection and lack of integration from the demographic. These challenges underscore the need for improved infrastructure to support diverse communities within the music industry.







BEBEBOY alongside Pachy Flow performing  
at Fuego Fuego 2024 in MTL.  
Photo credit: Alexander Padilla



# Infrastructure Successes

LulaWorld Records exemplifies the essential infrastructure needed for Latin music to thrive in Canada, with a mission to globally showcase Toronto's Latin and global sounds to international audiences.<sup>58</sup> Inspired by Lula Lounge, which has been instrumental in introducing Latin artists to Canadian audiences and hosting prominent Latin artists like Alex Cuba, Canada's first Latin Grammy Award winner, LulaWorld extends beyond being a venue.<sup>59</sup> It offers workshops for musicians, organizes a music festival, and provides a platform for youth education.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, the annual Barrio Latin Music Festival in Toronto and the Canadian Creative Accelerator's cohort dedicated to managers of Latin-Canadian talent play crucial roles in funding and promoting Latin culture.<sup>61</sup>

Examining support structures in the Black, Indigenous and other People of Colour music communities offers valuable insights into how broader initiatives and investments could bolster third-party support for Latin Canadians in the music industry. Infrastructure initiatives have played a key role in providing necessary funding for emerging artists from Indigenous and Black communities. In British Columbia, The Indigenous Languages Act allotted an increase in federal funding to The First People's Cultural Council (FPCC), a crown corporation aimed at revitalizing languages, heritage, arts and culture in BC, announcing almost \$35 Million to support the FPCC over the next three years.<sup>62</sup> The emergence of advocacy organizations like Manitoba Music, the International Indigenous Music Summit, the Indigenous Music Alliance, the Indigenous Music Office, and similar organizations has significantly contributed to developing necessary indigenous infrastructure. The support helps artists and aspiring professionals to break into the Canadian and international music industry and demonstrates a positive shift in the industry's inclusion towards Indigenous artists and aspiring professionals.

Illustratively, Ishkōdé Records, an Indigenous, women-owned record label, has entered into a distribution agreement with Universal Music, exemplifying the tangible benefits derived from such structures.<sup>63</sup> This support has helped the

trajectory of artists' careers, like the Indigenous music duo Digging Roots, who have received international recognition at events like the Glastonbury Festival in the United Kingdom, transcending international barriers.<sup>64</sup>

Similarly, Canada's Black Music Business Collective, ADVANCE Music Canada, whose board consists of key industry professionals from all the major music labels, acts as a unified voice for prospective and current Black professionals working in Canadian music. ADVANCE hosts networking events for Black industry members and creatives, provides grants, and advocates to end anti-Black racism in the Canadian music industry. There are also the Legacy Awards by The Black Academy, which honour both established and emerging Black Canadian talent and showcase Black talent to share the remarkable achievements of their community with the entire country.<sup>65</sup>

The economic implications of this support become evident when considering the total amount of "missing" GDP contribution and wages of BIPOC individuals in the live music sector alone. In a 2022 study, it was estimated that if BIPOC workers and artists currently in the live music sector earned the same as their white counterparts, they would add \$202.2 million to the industry's annual contribution to the national GDP.<sup>66</sup> Recognizing how this support helps is essential in creating more success stories like Digging Roots.





Natasha Roldán - Album Release concert,  
Small World Music Centre



# Methodology

We conducted a survey to better understand the experiences and difficulties that Latin music artists, industry professionals, and entrepreneurs (both small entrepreneurs who manage their own music and those operating small businesses) in Canada's music industry face. The purpose of the survey was to collect information on various aspects of working in the Canadian music industry, including barriers experienced by the industry and obstacles encountered in the career development process. Participants (N=80) were given the opportunity to elaborate on their responses and indicate whether or not they would be interested in taking part in subsequent focus groups. The recruitment of respondents to the survey was mobilized by Speaking Non-English and other music industry associations.

Participants for the focus groups (N=31) were chosen randomly from respondents who indicated an interest in taking part in the survey, while also ensuring gender diversity was factored in the selection process. Five focus groups were carried out in total, with four of them being conducted in English and one being conducted in Portuguese and Spanish. The issues brought up in the survey were discussed in greater depth and with a more qualitative perspective during these sessions. Our research team transcribed and analyzed the focus groups to identify recurring themes and trends.

The survey findings, information gathered from the focus groups, and secondary data obtained from various online sources served as the foundation for the analysis and recommendations included in the final report. Thanks to this approach, we were able to develop recommendations that stakeholders can put into action to amplify the voices of Latin music artists and professionals in Canada. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the experiences that the Latin music community has had in Canada's music industry.

# Findings

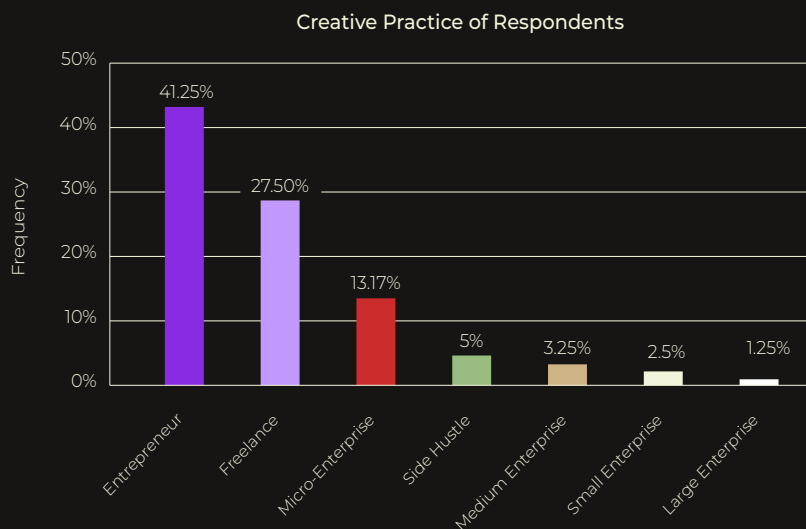
## Participants

The study used a survey and five focus groups to investigate the barriers and enablers for Latin Canadian music professionals working in the Canadian music industry. Among survey respondents, 57 were based in Ontario and 16 in Quebec. The other provinces had little representation, ranging from 0 to 3. Most respondents are actively engaged in music creation, with 55 unique respondents being artists, performers, songwriters, music producers, or holding a management role. The demographic breakdown included 50 men, 27 women, 2 non-binary individuals, and 1 other. Most respondents have significant industry experience, with the largest group (a majority) having 11-15 years of experience, followed by those with 0-5 years.

The study conducted five focus groups over one week, aiming for gender balance and a mix of industry professionals with artists and performers to foster diverse and insightful dialogues. These groups included 12 women, 19 men, and one non-binary individual, pairing 20 artists and performers with 11 industry professionals. Geographic diversity was also a priority, with participants coming from various locations across Canada—from the Northwest Territories to British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, and New Brunswick. The focus groups were structured to juxtapose newcomers with industry veterans, facilitating a dynamic exchange of perspectives.

## Findings on Income

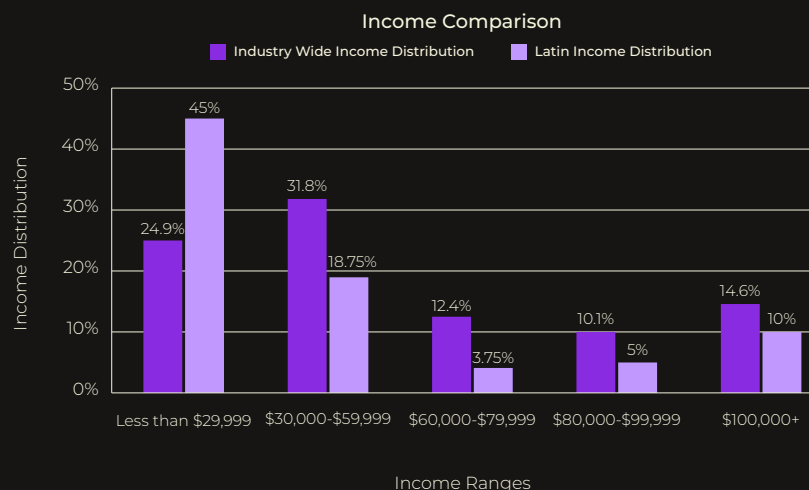
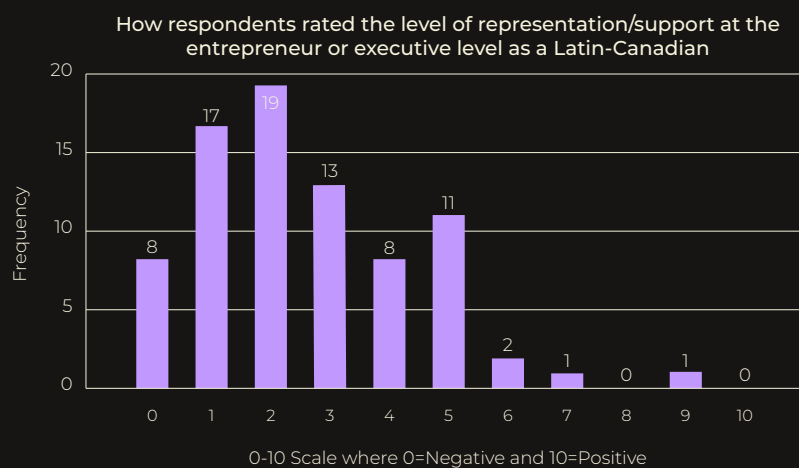
Income analysis from the survey revealed significant variability. The mean income was approximately \$46,343, with a median of \$25,000 and a standard deviation of \$49,578. Individuals whose primary income was not from work in the music industry had a mean income of \$32,667, whereas those who primarily earned from music reported a mean income of \$59,545. This highlights that stable and supported roles within the music industry are crucial in influencing income levels for Latin Canadians.



Graph 2: Distribution of Responses to Question: "How do you identify yourself/ your creative practice?"

Note: Respondents used both 'entrepreneur' and 'freelance' to describe themselves as artists who manage themselves

Graph 3: Distribution of Responses to Question: "How would you rate the level of representation/support at the entrepreneur or executive level as a Latin-Canadian music professional?"



Graph 4: Comparative graph between the "Enablers and Barriers to Success in Canada's Music Industry Diversity Research Report" conducted by Music Canada and the findings of our survey<sup>67</sup>



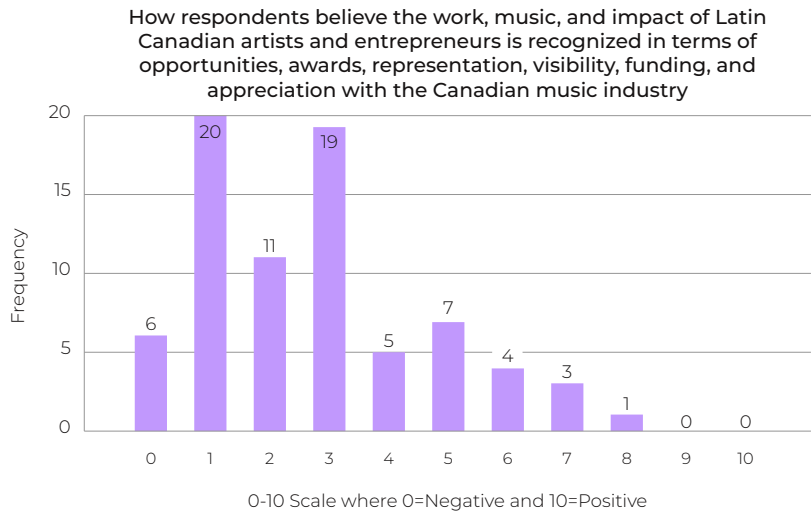
## The Lack of a Latin Music Category at Canadian Music Awards

A prominent issue among Latin Canadian artists and music professionals, as revealed by survey respondents and focus group participants, is the miscategorization of Latin music. According to the survey, 85% of respondents believe that the contributions and influence of Latin Canadian artists are insufficiently recognized. Particularly at Canadian music awards shows like the JUNO Awards, there is a significant gap in representation and categorization. Latin Canadian artists who perform in Spanish or Portuguese often find themselves inappropriately categorized as “world music” even as their music aligns with genres like pop or rock. A focus group participant explained the dilemma, stating that despite identifying as an alternative pop artist, singing in Spanish forces their music into a “global” or “world” music category, predominantly featuring traditional music from all over the world.

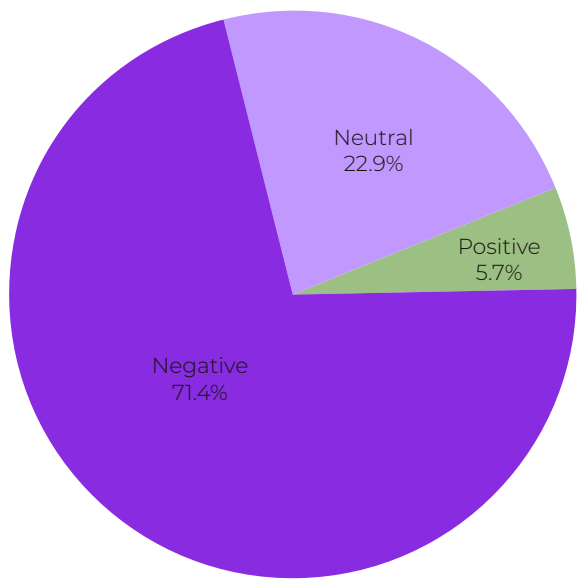
This is further underpinned by a common understanding highlighted by focus group participants—and evident in broader industry discussions—that a major Canadian awards organization is reluctant to create dedicated categories for Latin music because of the perceived notion that there are not enough Latin Canadian acts. A focus group participant shared that when they asked why there is an absence of a Latin music category, the response was “No, there is not enough quorum of albums coming out in Spanish or in Portuguese for us to create that category.” This reflects the sentiments shared by other Latin Canadian artists over the years, including Alex Cuba, who recounted in an April 2022 CBC interview receiving a similar response, “There is not enough music yet.”

In claiming that the impact of an emerging community is “not enough,” the organization essentially implies that there is a defined standard for what constitutes as “enough,” along with clear guidelines on how that group can meet or measure up to these specific eligibility criteria. It also implies that there is an ongoing process in place to consistently measure and track these metrics for various communities, including the Latin Canadian music community. However, in the absence of these clear criteria, asserting that a community’s impact is insufficient shifts the conversation to dismissal and further leads to an underrepresentation of Latin Canadians in the music industry—one that is intensely felt among participants in our research. This

marginalizes the Latin community and hinders their understanding of the path needed to build industry support for proper representation.



Graph 5: Distribution of Responses to Question: "How well do you believe the work, music, and impact of Latin Canadian artists and entrepreneurs is recognized in terms of opportunities, awards, representation, visibility, funding, and appreciation within the Canadian music industry?"



## Categorizing Latin Music as “World/Global Music”

As discussions around the JUNO Awards have demonstrated, the miscategorization of Latin music as “world/global music” is a significant point of contention for Latin Canadian artists. Survey respondents critiqued this as a stereotype of Latin music and showed deep frustration at this labelling. One respondent stated that Latin Canadian artists are often categorized as “world music” performers and pointed out, “It is really annoying since that categorization doesn’t mean anything. It’s just a melting pot of everything that’s too hard to label.” Others highlighted the marginalization inherent in the term and the reduction to a minority.

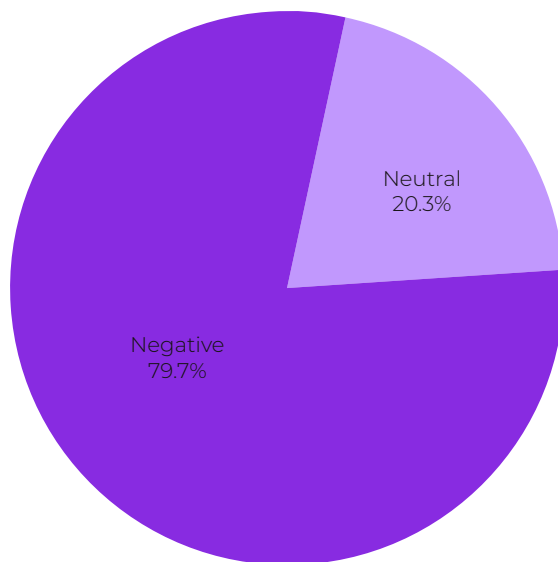
The survey revealed strong dissatisfaction with these categorizations, with the mode of responses about music categorization scoring notably low at 1 on a Likert scale, indicating widespread disagreement with how Latin music is categorized in Canada (See Graph 5).

This stereotyping puts Latin music into narrow genres, such as reggaeton and urban music, overlooking its rich diversity. Another survey respondent elaborated on the vagueness of the “world music” category, “Some of us are Latin do music that it’s [sic] not your quintessential expectation of Latin music (roots/traditional i.e. salsa, merengue, bachata, cumbia, etc.), yet because we sing in Spanish or Portuguese, we’re automatically classified as World or Global.” This vagueness in categorization, respondents highlighted, also stifles the emergence of new and innovative genres such as Latin Pop and Latin trap as Latin Canadian artists are put into a box—and only in that box do they feel they can receive recognition.

Beyond stifling creativity, this impacts visibility and recognition, as it overlooks characteristics and nuances of Latin music. For Latin Canadian artists, this ties into feelings of othering and alienation. “Global” or “World” labelling suggests that their music is foreign and does not belong. One participant remarked, “What bothers me about that label ‘world music’ is that it sounds a bit as if the people who give that label are saying ‘You don’t belong here,’ or ‘Your music doesn’t belong here,’ or ‘It wasn’t made here.’” As one survey respondent commented, “in Latin America my



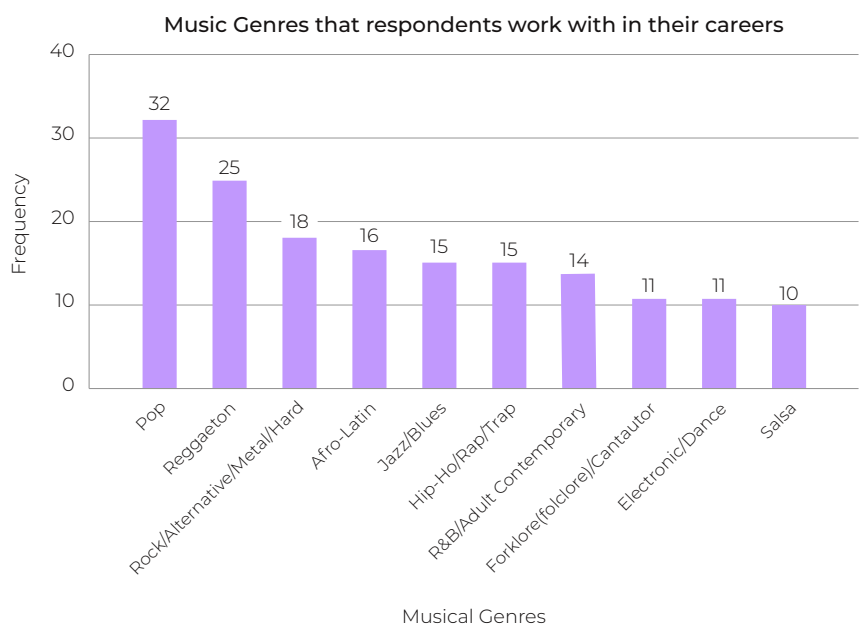
music would not be classified as World/Global, it'd be alternative pop, but in Canada, because it has Latin elements, it won't be classified as such." For respondents, this ties to fitting in to Canada. One respondent put this clearly, observing, "And us, we will be considered foreigners in the country that we live in."



*Graph 6: Distribution of Responses to Question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Latin Canadian music is well-represented in the Canadian music industry."*

# Self-Censorship and Market Fit

Latin Canadian artists often feel compelled to simplify their music due to a lack of understanding of Latin genres and sounds within the music industry. This simplification is seen as necessary to create opportunities for marketing themselves within the Canadian music industry and to appeal to broader markets and large labels. Despite a wide engagement with diverse genres—with 55% of survey respondents making music beyond the typical confines of reggaeton, urban music, and other genres that are stereotypically known to define what “Latin music” is to the general public—this trend persists (see graph 7 for the diversity of music genres of Latin musicians in Canada). The trend is driven by industry expectations of what music will be popular and profitable, leading to a self-censorship of artistic expression. This results in a distilled representation of Latin culture and diminishes the music’s artistic depth and cultural authenticity. Focus group participants express a tension between preserving cultural integrity and heritage and the demands for commercial visibility, especially given the North American—and global—growth in popularity of various Latin music genres.<sup>68 69</sup> Participants emphasized the importance of creating spaces where artists can remain true to their roots while achieving commercial success. They shared the need for more diverse commercial radio stations willing to play Latin music and pointed to the successes of Toronto’s Lula Lounge and BSMT 254 as venues that support a wide range of Latin music.

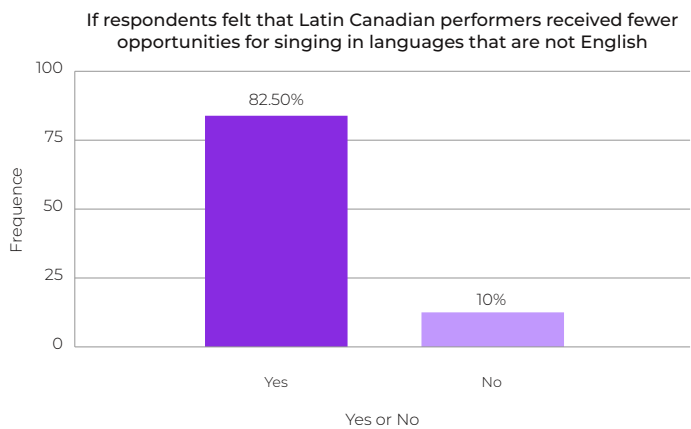


Graph 7: Distribution of Responses to Question: “What music genres do/have you worked with in your career?”

# Language Barriers for Latin Artists in Canada

Latin artists encounter significant challenges related to language. Survey respondents and focus group participants highlighted the prevailing institutional belief that non-English (or Francophone) music holds less significance in Canada. This perception compels Latin Canadian artists to produce music in English in order to gain recognition and achieve financial success. A significant majority of participants (82.5%) concurred that there are fewer opportunities for artists to perform in languages other than English despite Canada’s multicultural setting (see Graph 8). One focus group participant shared their experience with public relations in the music industry, recounting being told, “It’s going to be very difficult to get your music on actual radio because it’s in Spanish.” This artist went on to highlight the irony, “We’re a diverse country. Toronto, so proud to be diverse. But you put on the radio, and it’s mostly Anglo music, with the exception of the top top top top players like Bad Bunny, Karol G, J Balvin.”

Another telling story came from another focus group participant, who highlighted an experience in which they recorded an “English” album and a “Latin” album to achieve radio play on a commercial radio station. Recounting the experience, “We hired a radio plugger promoter ... and that amounted to getting a big booking agent ... It sucks that we had to do that. Literally, think about the process, the timing, how much more money had to go into that. The translations. It was just a lot, right.” These experiences demonstrate how the Canadian music industry perceives non-English speaking music and considers it risky, difficult, or non-viable economically—even as big players like Bad Bunny have successfully entered the Canadian market.



Graph 8: Distribution of Responses to Question: “Do you feel that Latin Canadian performers receive fewer opportunities for singing in languages that are not English?”

Note: Total does not equal 100% due to exclusion of the “other” category



## Lack of Targeted Investment

Latin Canadian artists note significant infrastructural barriers to the growth of Latin music in Canada. Income figures (see Graph 2) demonstrate the disparities between Latin and non-Latin Canadian musicians. Survey respondents overwhelmingly noted inadequate support structures for Latin Canadian artists, with most responses on the Likert scale on a question about support for Latin music in the Canadian music industry clustered around 2 and 3, with a median of 3 out of 10. In focus groups, participants discussed having to work multiple jobs to get by, citing support for up-and-coming artists as a way to grow and help out the Latin scene.

Minimal support for live music and touring for Latin artists in Canada poses significant challenges, particularly for emerging artists who find it difficult to secure venues willing to host non-English acts. In one example, a focus group participant described the scarcity of venues for touring along routes, such as between Toronto and Montreal, which inevitably leads Latin artists to skip local development for the vast opportunities in the United States. Smaller venues are hesitant to take financial risks on Latin musicians with language barriers, while a lack of diversity of Latin music genres in the mainstream further contributes to a general reluctance to accept Latin music at these venues.

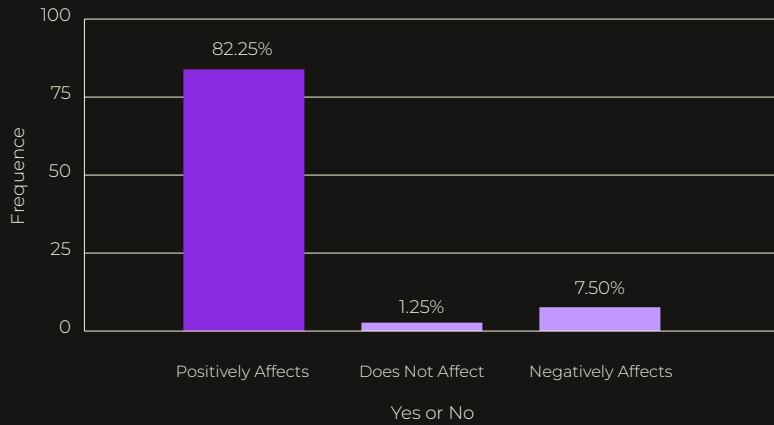
Targeted investment also includes education about Latin music. Respondents commented on the need for cultural education and the importance of cultural educators and connectors influencing and educating key decision-makers in the music industry. This ties into barriers such as self-censorship, language, and music categorization, with the goal of such education creating space for Latin musicians. Respondents compared the Canadian music industry to that of the United States. They emphasized that the reason for success in the United States can be attributed to the presence of “big power players”, major investors in Latin music like Sony Music Latin and Warner Latin which provide substantial financial resources and platforms for exposure. They noted that comprehensive investments by similar organizations in Canada would positively impact recognition for a diverse range of Latin Canadian produced music.

Respondents further expressed not aligning with current funding programs targeted towards BIPOC communities. While it may be argued that the 'Latin' identity is included within the broader BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and 'visible minorities' categories, there is a general hesitancy among Latin Canadians to identify with these groups. Participants generally viewed 'Latin' as separate from BIPOC, believing that associating with BIPOC might take space and opportunities away from those who they perceive as more fitting of these groups. Moreover, participants often identified as white or white-presenting, further distancing themselves from the BIPOC label. Consequently, they frequently questioned the lack of specific funding for Latin artists or Latin music compared to BIPOC funding. This indicates a need to better understand the experiences of Latin artists in funding decisions and the nuances of identity, such as language or cultural barriers for integration.

## **Lack of Visibility in Leadership Roles**

Our analysis underscores the barriers Latin Canadians face in attaining visibility and leadership roles within the Canadian music industry. Respondents highlighted the need for increased representation and advocacy efforts, with interested parties working on increasing visibility, attention, awareness and funding for Latin Canadian music professionals. As it stands, few Latin Canadians are able to exert pressure in the music industry to affect change. This ties into larger issues of race and racism for Latin Canadian artists navigating the industry. As one respondent notes, "Sometimes representation doesn't come with commitment to community, clear ethical principles or a grassroots orientation. Often, institutions will find a token Latinx and pat themselves on the back without the designation having any positive effect for the wider community. It depends on who is chosen and how far they are willing to push for change." This tokenism fails to address the broader need for authentic representation and active advocacy within the music industry and causes the prevailing stereotypical characterization of Latin.

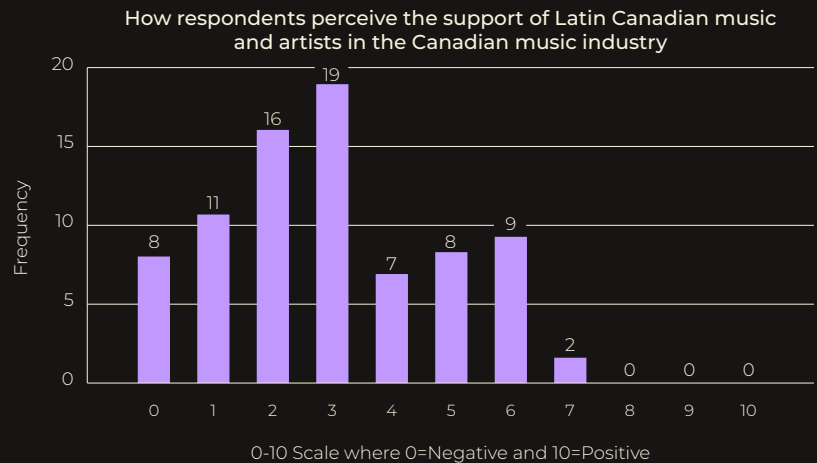
How respondents felt the inclusion of Latin-Canadians in decision-making roles in domestic industry affects the entire music industry's opportunities for global growth



Graph 9: Distribution of Responses to Question: "In your opinion, how does the inclusion of Latin Canadians in decision-making roles in the domestic industry (in organizations such as labels, publishers, agents, etc.) affect the entire Canadian music industry's opportunities for global growth?"

Note: Total does not equal 100% due to exclusion of the "other" category

Graph 10: Distribution of Responses to Question: "How do you perceive the support of Latin Canadian music and artists in the Canadian music industry?"





## Lack of Opportunities and Support for Artists

The findings suggest that Latin Canadian artists not only face barriers regarding financial support but also in terms of event promotion, public perception, and structural support from organizations. One key issue highlighted is the necessity for dedicated media platforms and radio support for Latin artists. Respondents suggest that while there is a capability to produce high-quality music, media recognition is lacking. Respondents suggested a more intentional investment in niche media outlets willing to incorporate Latin music as a solution to overcome the barrier of mainstream media's channels that are often inaccessible given their reluctance to feature Latin Music. Another strategic change proposed would be for Canadian labels to incorporate industry professionals and experts who understand the nuances of Latin Music.

Event promotion was also considered a barrier for artists. Event promoters face significant hurdles in obtaining sponsorship money, which is crucial for covering expenses. One participant discussed their experience hosting Latin music events in Mississauga, where efforts to engage sponsors consistently fell short. The participant commented, "It would always be difficult to just get these brands to jump on board and support."

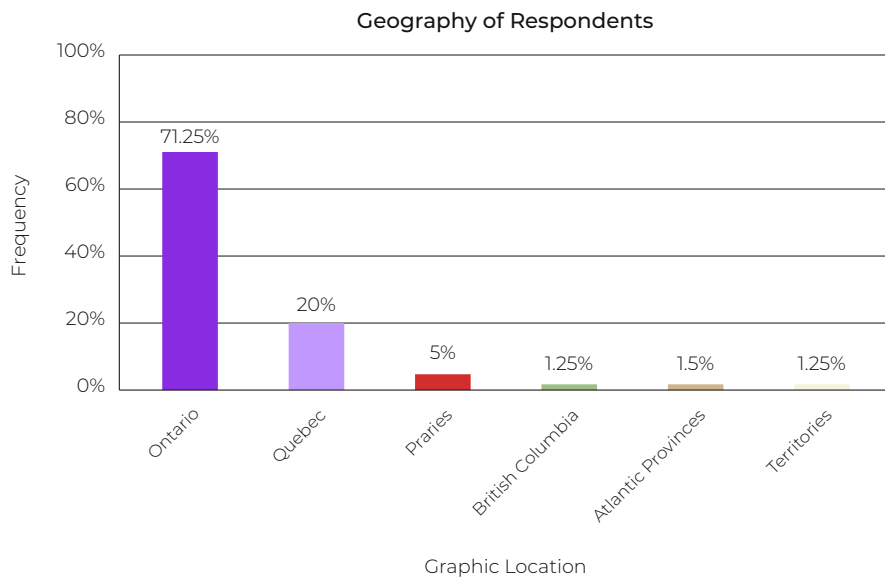
Overall, for respondents overcoming these barriers requires concerted efforts in financial support, the creation of specialized media platforms, sponsorship acquisition for events, and the establishment of a governing body dedicated to the advocacy and promotion of Latin Canadian music. All this demonstrates how the public perception of Latin music in Canada misrepresents Latin music and creates barriers to its growth.

## Isolated Communities and Networking Challenges

Geographical and cultural isolation also poses a unique challenge in Canada due to its vast area and the concentrated pockets of cultural activities in urban centers like Toronto and Montreal, emphasized by 91% of respondents living in Ontario or Quebec. The isolation limits the opportunities for community connection, which is critical for cultural and professional growth. One participant said, “In Edmonton, we don’t really have a big Latin scene. We’re very isolated here with all that kind of stuff and I’ve tried to put in grants to have travel grants so that I can go to different cities where the Latino scene is bigger, like Toronto, Montreal.”

In the survey, community and cultural promotion came up frequently when asked about ensuring Latin Canadian music can reach its full potential. Responses varied, but all agreed that grassroots, intercommunity, and media exposure were all important factors in the growth of the Latin community. Infrastructurally, this ties to building a community through physical spaces, partnerships, and support. One focus group participant noted, “Might be too dreamy, but maybe focusing on building community among ourselves.”

Participants also praised the successes of venues like Lula Lounge, which are crucial to fostering networking, performance, and visibility opportunities for the Latin music community in Canada. Respondents specifically mentioned Lula Lounge as providing significant benefits through networking opportunities, music events, awards for Latin music, dedicated spaces, advocacy, and promoting Latin music. With responses discussing the importance of live music to their communities, respondents championed supportive policies and venues that enhance the live music scene for Latin genres. They also spoke favourably about networking opportunities through songwriting sessions with support from music organizations to showcase talents from Latin Canadian artists, similar to what SOCAN is doing with developing a songwriting camp, organized with Latin producers and artists.



*Graph 11: Distribution of Responses to Question: "Province/Territory"*

## Racial and Gendered Disparities in the Music Industry

Focus groups highlighted skin colour as a significant barrier. Those perceived as ethnically ambiguous or lighter-skinned are more likely to receive greater access to opportunities. Beyond a lack of opportunities, racism was also seen as denying Latin identities. One example came from a focus group participant who commented on their experience as a Black Latin Canadian artist, sharing that “As a black artist, if I put a rap verse in a song, then the rest of the song remains rap, no matter what, even if I play all the instruments and do the composing...it’s almost like it diminishes all the other efforts.”

The denial of Latin identities, where individuals not fitting a stereotype face exclusion, further complicates the integration of Latin Canadians into the music industry, as noted by one participant: “They talk, they say ‘Latin,’ and they want to show a face that resembles the stereotype they have ... and so far people that are not presenting physically as the stereotype, a lot of their identity is denied.” In the survey, when asked about representation, tokenism was used to describe how Latin Canadians get used in the music industry to “pat themselves on the back” and without affecting real change for Latin Canadian musicians and music professionals. These forms of racism not only affect perceptions but also actual opportunities. The stereotypes and categorization of their music due to race combine with funding decisions, music



festivals, events, awards, and leadership roles. It also reflects how Latin Canadians often have to navigate their own identities to be considered “Latin” or fit into the perceived mould.

Intersectional issues for women and non-binary individuals create further barriers to growth for the Latin Canadian music community. Women and non-binary individuals, our analysis shows, are further underrepresented in leadership roles. Income disparities also suggest disparities in the professional roles Latin Canadian music professionals hold. While men show a wide distribution of incomes, women are highly concentrated towards the lower income categories. Choosing the midpoint of each income bracket, the survey shows that men have a mean income of approximately \$54,875 while women earn a mean income of \$38,125. Of the two non-binary individuals, the mean is \$17,500. This reflects both broader societal gender trends in the music industry and specific industry dynamics about who has a voice in what capacity.

## **Creating Music for International Markets, Export-Led Music, and Economic Bypass**

Latin Canadian artists discussed how the lack of infrastructure in Canada for Latin music creates a culture of export. The United States was frequently mentioned as an example of a local industry supporting Latin music and creating sufficient growth opportunities. Respondents mentioned how Canada follows US trends, which results in many talented Canadian artists (including Latin Canadian artists) moving abroad—often to Miami—to find better opportunities elsewhere. One Latin Canadian music industry professional highlighted this broader issue within Canada’s music scene:

*"The main thing that I've always seen in the music industry as a whole in Canada is that we've always been reactive. We've never been proactive. It takes for our big brothers in the States or somewhere else around the world to do something first in order for us to be like "Oh, let me jump on that." And it's sad because one thing that Canada has that nowhere else in the world has is that we're so multicultural that we can develop stuff before it's actually popular in the world. It's why the Drake's, the Weeknd's, the Justin Bieber's, the Alessia Caras' have to go sign with American labels in order to make it because, unfortunately, the whole industry here in Canada, when we talk about the whole Canadian record label system here, even outside of the Latin, it just not working. They're always reactive. They're not proactive."*

Asked about export opportunities, survey respondents noted that positive opportunities exist in the United States, Latin America, and Europe (i.e., Spain and France). One respondent noted that "with the surge of the Latin population in the US, Latin Canadian artists can find an audience there, along with Mexico and Latin America." One respondent compared the situation to France and noted that their promotion of Latin artists on radio and concert programming creates a strong foundation for Latin music to thrive. Miami was frequently mentioned as a spot for emerging Latin Canadian artists, with grievances tied to a lack of infrastructure.

For respondents and participants, Canada has great potential to be a global hub for domestic and international Latin artists. They mentioned networking and collaboration as ways to foster the growth of a scene and wider industry. One respondent wrote, "Get together, network, educate, and execute." Another respondent, in a similar vein, wrote, "Definitely partnering with bigger organizations and event labels/agencies ... to start building something akin to 88rising's Head In The Clouds would be incredible. And it's something I've always wanted to do to highlight the culture and movement being made here." Some respondents wrote about creating opportunities for Latin American artists to come to Canada, which would help grow the scene here and promote the import of Latin talent into Canada.

# Implications

Through the use of a comprehensive lens, the Critical Ecological Model<sup>70</sup> provides an opportunity to investigate the whole range of social, cultural, economic, and political environmental problems on various scales, including macro, meso, and micro. At a macro level, it examines systemic factors such as political structures, economic systems, and global power dynamics, taking into account how these factors influence ecological (macro, meso, micro) outcomes on a large scale. Meso level analysis delves into the dynamics of communities, the practices of organizations, and the cultural norms within them, acknowledging the role these factors play in shaping the local environmental realities and power relations. At the micro level, the model focuses on individual behaviours, social identities, and everyday practices to understand how these factors interact with larger ecological processes and contribute to patterns of environmental injustice. The Critical Ecological Model sheds light on the interconnectedness of social and ecological systems by incorporating these perspectives. Its goal is to advocate for transformative change that will lead to sustainability and equity at all levels of society.

Within the Canadian music industry context, the study sheds light on the societal implications of the barriers and enablers that Latin Canadian music professionals face. In doing so, it highlights the significance of cultural representation and recognition in shaping societal perceptions of diversity and inclusion. Not only does the incorrect classification of Latin music as “world music” contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes, but it also plays a role in the marginalization of Latin Canadian artists, which in turn hinders their visibility and recognition within Canadian society. In addition, the research reveals that there are substantial racial and gender disparities that exist within the industry. These disparities are a reflection of larger societal challenges that are associated with representation and equity.

The findings highlight the necessity of systemic changes within the Canadian music industry to address the structural barriers that Latin Canadian music professionals face. These changes are necessary at the organizational level. There is a clear need

for inclusive policies and programs that acknowledge and amplify the various voices within the industry, as the lack of targeted funding and support for Latin music initiatives drives this point home. In addition, the research highlights the significance of fostering inclusive leadership and decision-making processes to promote diversity and create opportunities for Latin Canadian artists to flourish.

On an individual level, the study sheds light on the personal and professional challenges that Latin Canadian music professionals face. These challenges include income disparities, self-censorship, and language barriers. By doing so, it highlights the significance of providing individuals with the ability to authentically express their cultural identities while simultaneously navigating the systemic barriers that exist within the industry. Additionally, the research highlights the significance of advocacy, community building, and networking as potential means of assisting Latin Canadian music professionals in developing their careers and maintaining their well-being.





# Recommended Calls to Action:

- 1. Awards and Recognition:** Not only would the establishment of a category for Latin music at the JUNO Awards provide much-required recognition and representation for Latin Canadian artists, but it would also serve as a catalyst for diversity and inclusivity within the Canadian music industry as a whole. It would be a demonstration of the JUNO Awards' commitment to celebrating the diversity of Canadian music and artists if they were to acknowledge the distinctive contributions that Latin music has made to the cultural landscape of Canada.

Validating the cultural identities and artistic expressions of the Latin Canadian music community would be accomplished by implementing this inclusive gesture, which would foster a sense of belonging and pride within the community. In addition, it would garner more attention and participation from Latin American audiences, thereby broadening the scope of the JUNO Awards and increasing their significance on a national and international scale.

While the JUNO Awards have established protocols for introducing new categories, there should be greater transparency around the processes, benchmarks, and consumption targets required to implement these opportunities.

- 2. Strategic Development Initiatives:** Establishing mid- and long-term strategic initiatives to support, develop, and amplify Latin-Canadian music creators and emerging industry professionals is pivotal to the longevity and success of the Latin-Canadian music community.

Educational initiatives such as mentorship and training opportunities benefit both Latin-Canadian music creators and emerging industry professionals. These initiatives empower artists to pursue innovative artistic expressions, collaborations, and cultural exchanges. They also promote the inclusion of industry professionals who understand the nuances and complexities of Latin music and its heritage in the domestic industry.

Artists development initiatives led by stakeholders from across the industry, from both non-profit and private sectors, provide essential infrastructure for the development, production, and promotion of Latin music projects. This supports their healthy integration into the domestic music industry and potential growth on a global stage.

Implementing these strategic initiatives strengthens Canada's reputation as a global hub for diverse musical talent, thereby attracting international attention and investment while reinforcing the nation's commitment to promoting cultural diversity and artistic excellence.

**3. Community Building:** To effectively address systemic challenges and advance the interests of Latin music artists and professionals in Canada, it is crucial to amplify Latin music voices. Speaking Non-English (SNE) holds immense potential to serve as a cornerstone for the Latin music community in Canada. Through dedicated community engagement initiatives and proactive membership development, SNE can amplify the voices of Latin music artists and professionals, fostering a sense of unity and belonging within the community.

Additionally, SNE can support networking and community building by facilitating collaborations, connecting individuals, and providing platforms for interaction and exchange. By leveraging the collective strength and influence of the industry through collaboration with other associations and stakeholders, SNE can drive positive change, promote inclusivity, and create equitable opportunities for Latin music artists in Canada.

Furthermore, SNE can focus on developing infrastructure and resources that support the recognition and growth of Latin music in Canada, ensuring that Latin music artists have access to the tools and networks they need to succeed.



Jorge Pineda (Just Ideas) while performing with Fito Blanco at Fuego Fuego festival in Montreal.  
Photo credit: TDot Cam





- 4. Market & Consumption Research:** Given the lack of data on Latin music in Canada and the widespread belief that there is no market for Latin music in Canada, thorough quantification of the volume of Latin music being produced in Canada can provide a strong case for music organizations to invest in Latin music. This involves collecting and analyzing comprehensive data on the number of Latin artists, music tracks, and albums emerging from various regions across Canada. By establishing a clear and detailed understanding of the production levels as well as consumption patterns, this market and consumption research can effectively address and counteract volume-related arguments that downplay the presence and impact of Latin music in the Canadian music industry.
- 5. Clear Guidelines for Community Representation:** Canadian award and grant organizations should establish and publicly share clear guidelines on how underrepresented communities can submit claims or build a business case to demand representation and support. These guidelines should outline specific processes, steps, and timelines, while also detailing the metrics and standards emerging communities need to meet. This transparency will ensure accountability for all parties involved and prevent constantly changing requirements for new communities.

To effectively address systemic challenges and advance the interests of Latin music artists and professionals in Canada, advocating for Latin music voices is crucial. Speaking Non-English (SNE) holds immense potential to serve as a powerful advocate for the Latin music community in Canada. Through dedicated community engagement initiatives and proactive membership development, SNE can amplify the voices of Latin music artists and professionals, fostering a sense of unity and belonging within the community. Additionally, SNE can support networking and community building by facilitating collaborations, connecting individuals, and providing platforms for interaction and exchange. By leveraging the collective strength and influence of the industry through collaboration with other associations and stakeholders, SNE can drive positive change, promote inclusivity, and create equitable opportunities for Latin music artists in Canada. Furthermore, strategic advocacy efforts by SNE can advocate for policies, programs, and initiatives that support the recognition and development of Latin music in Canada.





Alex Cuba  
Photo credit: Alvaro Nates

# Conclusion

In conclusion, the study's findings underscore the multifaceted nature of the barriers and enablers for Latin Canadian music professionals within the Canadian music industry. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses societal, organizational, and individual levels of intervention. By promoting cultural diversity, fostering inclusive practices, and empowering individuals, the Canadian music industry can create a more equitable and vibrant ecosystem that celebrates the rich contributions of Latin Canadian artists.

Despite the growing popularity and economic significance of Latin music globally, Latin Canadian artists face systemic under-representation, misrepresentation, and insufficient support within their domestic industry. The lack of dedicated funding, targeted recognition, and authentic representation at decision-making levels marginalizes these artists, forcing many to seek opportunities abroad.

A comprehensive approach is necessary to address these challenges. This includes the establishment of specific categories for Latin music in national awards to validate and celebrate the unique contributions of Latin Canadian artists. Strategic development initiatives, including mentorship, training, and dedicated funding, are pivotal in nurturing and amplifying the Latin Canadian music community.

Community-building efforts led by organizations like Speaking Non-English (SNE) can provide crucial support and advocacy, fostering a sense of unity and belonging within the Latin music community. Additionally, thorough market and consumption research can counteract misconceptions about the volume and impact of Latin music in Canada, encouraging investment and recognition from music organizations.

Ultimately, promoting cultural diversity, fostering inclusive practices, and empowering individuals at all levels—societal, organizational, and personal—will create a more equitable and vibrant ecosystem within the Canadian music industry. Recognizing and supporting the contributions of Latin Canadian artists will not only enhance the

industry's global standing but also reflect the true diversity and vitality of Canada's cultural landscape. This, in turn, will fundamentally empower Latin music in Canada to thrive in the global marketplace.



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João Leão live at Casa Forte in  
São Paulo, Brazil (2018)  
Photo credit: Dai Cavalcante





CHACÓN  
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