

# Los Lobos celebrates 40 years with show at CL's Raue Center

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September 26, 2013

Steve Berlin found himself going out of his way to jam with Los Lobos as a saxophonist in the early 1980s.

He knew then what fans and critics have declared for the past four decades.

“They were pretty much the band they are now – amazing music, great songwriters, great singers,” said Berlin, who “joined up with the band somewhere along the way.”

“We’re not exactly sure when it was,” he said. (For the record, the band’s biography says 1984.) “It got to the point where I was spending so much time and money to get to where Los Lobos were.”

The band welcomed Berlin’s input, always creating music as a democracy, just as it does now, said Berlin, who also plays percussion, flute, midsax, harmonica and melodica.

To celebrate 40 years of music, as well as an upcoming album, “Disconnected in New York City,” the Grammy-award winning Los Lobos will perform at 8 p.m. Sept. 26 at the Raue Center for the Arts, 26 N. Williams St., Crystal Lake.

“Disconnected in New York City” is set for release Oct. 29 in three formats – a standard CD, a deluxe two-CD/DVD package and on vinyl. The band recorded the album at the City Winery, a small theater in New York City.

It features live versions of songs the band hasn’t often played as well as a few well-known songs, including the band’s hit, “La Bamba.”

The songs aren’t exactly unplugged, featuring drums and electric bass, but they’re recast a bit, Berlin said.

“I think it’s a pretty good mix of favorites and surprises,” Berlin said.

“The trouble is we sort of did our dream record (‘The Ride’) on our 30th anniversary,” he said. “We were really kind of stumped as to how to do something we’d never done before.”

The band decided to play with a stripped-down ensemble, offering a more close-knit intimacy.

Their influences vast, Los Lobos never has been defined by any traditional style of music. Its original four and current members came together straight out of high school in 1973 when, as best friends, they started performing in East L.A.

Spanish for “wolves,” the Lobos always have sort of defined themselves by the animal. And that, in part, is why they’re still together.

“A lot of it is the personalities of the people involved,” said Berlin, who first heard Los Lobos play when the band opened for his previous group, the rockabilly band The Blasters.

“We’re not flighty, bumble-bee like people,” he said. “Kind of like wolves, I guess, we’re in it for the long haul. Everybody’s always looking for better opportunities. We’re not like that. We’re all married to our first wives. It’s kind of the people we are.”

Members encourage each other’s musical input and outside projects, and they genuinely like the music they make, he said.

Sharing a love of rock ’n’ roll, it wasn’t long before the band incorporated traditional Mexican music into its repertoire. Influences of Tex-Mex, country, folk, R&B and blues also can be heard.

“It’s really so all over the place,” Berlin said of the band’s wide array of music. “It could be any one of four or five different bands. It would be not only impossible, but a waste of time to define it. It’s just Americana music.”

Los Lobos was catapulted into stardom in 1987 when it was tapped to cover “La Bamba” for the film of the same name, based on the biographical story of early rock ’n’ roll singer Ritchie Valens.

A 17-year-old Valens first recorded “La Bamba” in 1958 before dying the following year in the plane crash that also killed Buddy Holly and The Big Bopper.

Surprisingly, it’s not always the band’s most requested song, Berlin said.

“Some places, they’ve probably heard it enough,” he said, adding the band never tires of playing it. “It’s the closest thing we have to a real-life hit. It brought us a lot. There are other songs I get more tired of playing.”

Fans can expect more of an electric rock show in the upcoming live performance, Berlin said, as compared with the soon-to-be-released album. He encourages fans to make requests through the band’s website at [www.loslobos.org](http://www.loslobos.org) or [www.facebook.com/loslobosmusic](http://www.facebook.com/loslobosmusic).

“We’ll probably touch on every era of the band,” he said.

Looking forward to the concert, he called Chicago the band’s “second home.”

“We’ve always been better received in Chicago than anywhere in the world,” he said. “It’s always fun to come back and see our friends there.”