

History and Evolution of the Mariachi

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I

Mariachi Origins:

Where does the word "Mariachi" come from?

Theory I:

Thomas Stanford published the article entitled "The Mexican Son" in 1969. In his article Thomas put forth the following theory. "In Mexico the Mariachi repertory is dominated by love songs to women. Since women are held in high regard (at times compared to the Virgin Mary) it can be said that the combination of the name María (Mary) and the Nahuatl language word suffix "chi" gives the following María + Chi = Mariachi. Thus the group's name." In recent years Thomas Stanford has recanted his theory. (This material is paraphrased from Thomas Stanford's article).

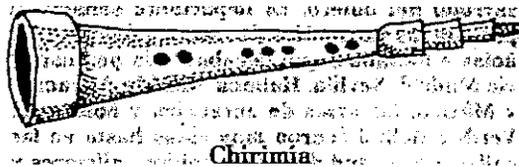
Theory II:

The word Mariachi comes from the French word for Marriage or "Mariage". This is by far the most popular theory. But, as with theory #1 it is also false. The French invasion of Mexico in the last half of the 1800's was not a popular event. The indigenous people they encountered in Mexico despised the French. It is this writer's belief that when French soldiers encountered Mexican weddings, Mariachi groups were performing at the ceremonies and or receptions. The soldiers would ask, "what are those groups?" and they would be told that the groups were "Mariachis". The French soldiers assumed that the word was taken from the word "Mariage". This theory is also false.

Where do we stand now in this debate?

- The Mariachi tree!
- The Mariachi tarima (a platform for dancing the zapateado)
- The Fandango street dance
- The use of the word "Mariachi" in the Coca Indian dialect

The Chirimía: What is it and where did it go?



The Chirimía is a woodwind instrument. It is made (typically) of mahogany. It has seven finger holes on top and a nipple mouthpiece. The mouthpiece has a double reed system much like the oboe. This instrument was at one time (along with the drum) a part of the Mariachi Band.

The Pioneers of Mariachi Music

Cuarteto Coculense

This group was also known as “Violines del Cerro” and “Mariachi de Justo Villa”. They are from the town of Cocula, Jalisco, Mexico (the town which is recognized as the birthplace of the Mariachi Band). This group was the first Mariachi to travel outside of Cocula. They were invited to Mexico City in 1905 to take part in the inauguration ceremonies of Porfirio Díaz. This marked the beginning of Mariachi travel outside of the state of Jalisco. The group was admired for its folkloric look (sombrosos, panchos and matching muslin pants and shirts). The original members of the group were: Justo Villa – vihuela, Cristóbal Figueroa – guitarrón, Chon García – violin and Mariano Cuenca – violin. They were also the first group to make a Mariachi recording using the old Edison wax cylinder acoustical method.

Mariachi Coculense de Cirilo Marmolejo

Mariachi Coculense may have made more significant contributions to the genre than any other group in early Mariachi history. This group was the first group to perform at the famous Temampa Bar in Plaza Garibaldi, first group to appear in a legitimate stage show at the Teatro Iris in Mexico City, first group to appear in a sound movie, first group to make an electric recording, first group to perform outside of Mexico at the 1930 Chicago World’s Fair, first group to record in the United States. Mariachi Coculense traveled to Mexico City in 1920 to add “color” to a gathering of important revolutionary politicians. They remained there and never returned to Cocula, Jalisco, Mexico. Cirilo Marmolejo was considered one of the finest teachers of string instruments in the town of Cocula. His nephew José would eventually join this group and go on to lead his own group.

Mariachi Tapatío de José Marmolejo

Was led by José Marmolejo (“El Hombre de la Eterna Sonrisa” “The Man With the Eternal Smile”). José was tutored on string instruments by his uncle Cirilo. José’s father was a brass instrument specialist in Cocula. José played in his uncle Cirilo’s group but left upon the group’s return to Mexico City after the World’s Fair performances. He formed his own group but insisted that the members be trained Maestros (musicians with the ability to read and write music). Mariachi Tapatío was not only the first group to have trained musicians but also the first group to have a full time trumpet player. Jesús Salazar is known as the “Father” of the Mariachi trumpet. This group would set very high standards in performance, which are still part of the tradition today. Mariachi Tapatío would hold regularly scheduled rehearsals, which was not a common thing in the mid-1930’s for Mariachi groups. Many of the musical elements, which were part of this group, would filter down to other groups and become the standard for Mariachi performance.

Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán

There is no question that the most famous Mariachi in the world is Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán (“El Mejor Mariachi del Mundo”). Mariachi Vargas is today the standard by which all groups are measured. Under the direction of Gaspar Vargas’ son Silvestre, Mariachi Vargas would become the epitome of ensemble performance and manners. Silvestre would expand the number of musicians in the group and exploit all of the recording possibilities for the Mariachi Band in Mexico. Mariachi Vargas has appeared in well over 250 films and recorded with such icons as José Alfredo Jiménez, Vicente Fernández and Lucha Villa.

II

Mariachi Song Forms

Son

Rhythmically the Son is based on the Sesquialtera. This rhythmic pattern is from Spain and is found throughout all of Mexico, Central and South America. The pattern is as follows:



2 groups of three notes

3 groups of 2 notes

The text of the Son can deal with almost any subject. And the structure of the text is typically Strophic in nature. Strophic form is a classical song form in which the text of each verse of a song may change but the accompanying music remains the same throughout.

Canción-Ranchera

Frequently referred to simply as Ranchera. This is the equivalent of the Country Western songs found in the United States. The term Ranchera refers to this type of song being accompanied/performed by the Mariachi Band. The Canción-Ranchera is based on the following rhythmic pattern:

Vihuela and Guitar
on beat two and three.

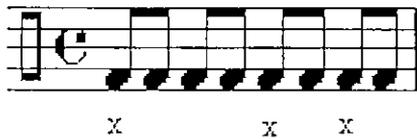


Guitarrón
on beat one.

The vocal melody is the dominant element of this song type and is generally rendered by a solo singer whose task it is to project the sentiment of texts that are usually highly charged with emotion.

Bolero-Ranchera

This form is not to be confused with other genres of the same name found in Spain and other parts of Latin America. The Mariachi Bolero is a romantic song type cast in a “pop” or “commercial” harmonic and melodic idiom based on 4/4 compás(measures) in which the vihuela maintains a steady eighth-note motion while the guitarrón(bass) plays on the first, third and fourth beats of the measure. The Bolero-Ranchera is accompanied by the Mariachi Band. The Bolero-Ranchera is based on the following rhythmic pattern:



The typical Bolero-Ranchera is characterized by a richer harmonic vocabulary than that found in the Son. It is normally performed by a solo voice with the violins and trumpets filling in the background, the poetic theme of most Boleros is amorous.

Huapango

The Huapango is a Mariachi adaptation of the Son Huasteco of Veracruz and is based on compas(measures) of 6/8 in which the first and fourth eighth-note pulses of the measure are stopped on the vihuela with a golpe(blow) of the closed fist or palm of the right hand. The major differences between the Huapango and the Son are as follows:

- The tempo of the Huapango is generally slower than the Son
- The golpe or stopping of the strings in the huapango strum actually weakens the strong beats of the measure and softens the machine-like drive characteristic of the Son compás.
- The Huapango is clearly a vocally dominated genre to be performed by a solo singer; the virtuoso vocal style of the Son Huasteco, which is characterized by frequent breaks into falsetto(high pitched singing), is preserved in the Mariachi rendition of the Huapango.
 - Violins dominate the instrumental forces and trumpets are of secondary importance in keeping with the elaborate violin improvisation found in the Son Huasteca.

The Huapango's three consistent elements are:

- 1.) Flamenco strumming pattern (Abanico)
- 2.) Harp (Arpa)
- 3.) Falsetto Vocals (High pitch singing)

III

Mariachi and the Mexican and American conscience!

- Documenting the history of the Mariachi in Mexico and the United States.

- The Mariachi's popularity in Mexico and the United States.

- The Mariachi music's impact on its performers.

Discography

- Rubén Fuentes 1944 – 1994, Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, Mercury

- 20 Éxitos del Mariachi Silvestre Vargas, Orfeón
- 20 Éxitos Mariachis, Mariachi Nuevo Tecalitlán, Mediterráneo
- Las Tres Señoras, Juan Gabriel, EMI Records
- Canciones de Siempre, Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano, Peer Southern Productions
- Canciones de mi Padre, Linda Ronstadt, Asylum Records
- 33 Éxitos "Lo Mejor de José Alfredo Jiménez, RCA
- 15 Éxitos Rancheras de Javier Solís, CBS International
- Huapangos de Rubén Fuentes, Miguel Aceves Mejía, RCA Mexicana

All recordings can be purchased or ordered from:

Yoly's Music Shop

5650 S. 12 Ave. 746-1877

2980 S. 6th Ave. 620-0830