

Mariachitos

(Music playing)

Narrator: Mariachi, impossible to define, this vibrant and exciting music has become one of the most enduring and identifiable symbols of Mexican culture.

N: Whether referring to the music, the musicians, the songs, or the costumes, Mariachi is a complex art form that had radiated beyond class and regional boundaries.

N: With its roots in rural Mexico, Mariachi today is embraced by American youth, some celebrating their heritage, others simply drawn to this exhilarating form of musical expression.

Juanita Ulloa: One of the issues that first comes up is how do you define the word Mariachi and the second issue that comes up is when did it begin because nobody knows, and the word Mariachi is defined in many, many, many, many ways.

JU: It has five or six different uses.

JU: You know it's the repertoire, it's the certain instruments that have to be used like the vihuela and guitarrón, it's the name of the performer himself when he's wearing the costume, it's all kinds of things.

N: Early Mariachi ensembles consisted primarily of stringed instruments, including the vihuela, harp, guitarrón, and one or more violins.

N: The instrumentation of early Mariachi music was easily transportable and led to the development of mobile or strolling Mariachis, who played in streets and town squares as well as for gatherings and celebrations.

N: Soon the trumpet was introduced to the string Mariachi ensemble, and later some groups added the accordion.

N: It's believed that the earliest Mariachi ensembles developed in the Mexican state of Jalisco and the surrounding states of Central western Mexico.

JU: And we're guessing that somewhere near the state of Jalisco, and of course Guadalajara's the capital of Jalisco and that whole area of Jalisco, Nayarit, Aguascalientes, a little bit in Michoacán, had this genre growing and that's the rural kind of area where this ranchera music, music from the ranch, evolved from.

N: Mariachi includes different forms of music found in Mexico, such as bolero, ranchero, huapango, polka, and son.

JU: The most pronounced rhythm that is indigenous to the ranchera tradition is the son, s-o-n, the son jalisciense, meaning the song from Jalisco, as opposed to the son huasteco which could be from, you know, the other regions.

N: One of the first written mentions of the word Mariachi is from the mid nineteenth century.

N: In a letter dated over one hundred and fifty years ago, a priest in rural Mexico wrote to his superior that his parish had fallen into the spell of local musicians.

N: He described how the musicians would convene in the town square on Holy Saturday and, making music, playing cards, and generally carrying on, and he referred to this secular activity as Mariachi.

N: Although earlier rural Mariachis performed in peasant garb, the attire of Mariachis has become one of its most identifiable aspects.

N: Heavily influenced by the traje de charro, or the uniform of a Mexican horseman, parts of the Mariachi uniform include tightly ornamented pants or skirts, short jacket, embroidered belt, pointed boots, wide bowtie, and sombrero.

N: As Mariachi made its way out of rural areas and into cities, it emerged as a primary musical representation of Mexican nationalism in Mexico.

N: This association continued as Mexicans migrated to the United States.

N: Mariachi music has become an important tradition in the United States.

N: Perhaps not coincidentally, it's most embraced in the Southwestern states, territory that belonged to Mexico only a few years before the first documented use of the term.

N: Mariachi has assumed an important place in American music education.

N: By including classes that focus on Mariachi traditions, educators and students help perpetuate music that is vital to the identity of much of the Hispanic population.

Juan Ortiz: As early as the early 1960s, Mariachi has been taught in the public schools here in San Antonio through community groups as well as extracurricular activity groups.

JU: I think that the performance of and the participation in Mariachi culture helps young people connect to their heritage. I think it helps them connect to their family. They can hear their grandmother singing these songs that brings the whole family together to go out and see them perform the music that the whole family loves and there may be three generations there that are alive at the same time, maybe even four.

N: Students of all backgrounds benefit from learning about a culture linked so closely to others in the United States.

John Lopez: If we can get non-Hispanic students to learn more of the Hispanic culture through its music, I mean that's something we can all discuss; you don't have to speak Spanish to listen to music.

N: Being a part of meaningful instruction, practice, and performance builds a sense of pride in students and adds a powerful dimension to their education.

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Angie Garcia: I got a scholarship to come, and it wasn't a big scholarship, but it was something and my parents were like, "You need to go because they're giving to money to go and do what you do best."

AG: And it's really been a great, great environment for me because that Mariachi has been like a family.

AG: It's nice because we all look out for each other we're all kind of on the same boat, we're all like, "Well how is your classes, you know, how are you doing personally?" and being in the Mariachi has just, it's been great and its fun.

N: Many schools throughout Texas and the Southwest have Mariachi programs, many of which meet annually in a competition.

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N: From rural revelers to urban orquestas, Mariachi has grown and evolved for over one hundred and fifty years.

N: These young musicians, Mariachitos, will ensure that this celebration of culture, experience, and art will continue on for generations to come.

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