



ArtSmarts

2005-2006 Wells Fargo School Matinee Series

FIESTA NAVIDAD

Tuesday, December 6, 2005 11:00am
Jackson Hall, Mondavi Center

Dear Teacher:

We hope you find this CueSheet helpful in preparing your students for what they will experience at the Fiesta Navidad school matinee. This guide, which complements the Ethnic Dance and Multicultural Music curriculum guides, provides background information on the performance and the mariachi musical tradition as well as a review of audience etiquette. The Fiesta Navidad school matinee, which is specially designed for student audiences, stages a scene from the Christmas story, as celebrated in Mexico, in a pageant of music, song and dance.

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FIESTA NAVIDAD

A joyous and colorful Mexican celebration of Christmas, **Fiesta Navidad** features the music of Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano and the pageantry of Danza Teocult. Fiesta Navidad presents the traditional *Fiesta of La Posada* procession (the 400-year-old traditional reenactment of Joseph and Mary's pilgrimage to Bethlehem), as well as an exuberant sing-along celebration of holiday carols and Christmas favorites such as "Feliz Navidad" and "Noche de Paz" (Silent Night).

MARIACHI LOS CAMPEROS DE NATI CANO



Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano has existed for more than forty years. The ensemble employs the finest musicians from Mexico and the United States and has performed for audiences throughout the United States and Canada.

Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano has recorded nine albums: *Puro Mariachi* (Indigo Records, 1961); *North of the Border* (RCA/Carino Records, 1965); *El Super Mariachi, Los Camperos* (Latin International, 1968); *Valses de Amor* (La Fonda Records, 1973); *Canciones de Siempre* (Polygram Latino, 1993); *Sounds of Mariach* (Delfin Records, 1996); *Fiesta Navidad* (Delfin Records, 1997); *Viva el Mariachi* (Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2003); and *Llegaron Los Camperos* (Delfin Records, 2004).

NATIVIDAD CANO, Director



Natividad Cano, director of Mariachi Los Camperos, was born in Ahuisculco, Jalisco in 1933 to a family of *jornaleros*, or day laborers. His grandfather was a self-taught player of the guitarrón, the bass instrument of the mariachi, while his father played all the instruments of the ensemble except the trumpet. At the age of six, Cano started on the *vihuela*, a five-stringed instrument resembling a small guitar and unique to the Mexican state of Jalisco. At eight, he enrolled at the Academia de Musica in Guadalajara to study the violin. His studies continued for six years.

In 1945, at the age of twelve, Cano joined a fellow student from the Academia in a chamber orchestra. A six-month tour of the Mexican Republic broadened his understanding of the European roots of Mexican music. The experience gave him greater appreciation for the regional traditions that originated from those imported ideas.

In 1950, Cano traveled to Mexicali to join Mariachi Chapala. Their director, Leopoldo Sosa, once remarked that Cano was “full of illusions, ideas and good projects.” Although the youngest musician by at least ten years, he soon became the group’s musical arranger because of his talent and musical training. Cano remained with Mariachi Chapala for seven years.

In 1961, Cano joined the Tijuana-based Mariachi Aguila. He soon became musical director and proposed that the name of the group be changed to Los Camperos. When the mariachi was invited to come to Los Angeles, he and his fellow musicians took advantage of the opportunity. In 1969, they became permanently based in Los Angeles. Los Camperos has since become synonymous with the best in mariachi music.

In 1990, Cano was honored as a recipient of a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. He has been active as a lecturer, advisor, and performer at the Tucson International Mariachi Conference.

MARIACHI MUSIC



The musical form most typical of Mexico is the **mariachi**, which originated in the rural areas of western Mexico. Most mariachi musicians hone their musical talents in Guadalajara, in the state of Jalisco, before heading east to Mexico City or north to the border cities of Mexicali and Tijuana. From there, many musicians travel throughout the United States. Los Angeles, home of Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano, is where many of the finest mariachi ensembles and musicians outside of Mexico may be found.

The word “mariachi” is a term that can be used to describe the individual musician, the ensemble or the musical genre itself. A mariachi ensemble is typically string based, with guitars and violins, and a harp or guitarrón (a large bass guitar) featured. The accordion, trumpets, and other brass and woodwinds complete the ensemble. A definitive origin has never been established. Perhaps the most common misconception is that the term is derived from the French word for “marriage”—*mariage*—the theory being that these unnamed ensembles were often hired by the French court in Mexico during the Maximilian epoch (1861-1867) to play at fiestas and weddings. Presumably Mexicans began calling these groups of strolling musicians “mariachis”. Today there are many facts to support the idea that the term predates the French occupation. Many Mexican scholars are convinced that groups called “mariachi” were already in existence by 1830. A letter written by a cleric in 1852 refers to the diversions created by musical groups called “mariachis”. In 1849, a gentleman named Placido Rebolledo organized a musical group

he called a “mariachi” in Tecalitlan. This same group became Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlan in 1898 and is still in existence.

Scholarly investigations also support the possibility of indigenous roots. Evidence substantiates the existence of an Indian “mariachi” that used a single-head skin drum. One investigation suggests the term derives from the Yutonahuatl language group, signifying a hard floor or dance area called a “mariache” or “tarima”. Another hypothesis suggests the term comes from celebrations honoring the Virgin known as “Maria H”–“Maria Hache”–that evolved into the word “mariachi”.

Finally, many of the older rural mariachi musicians from the states of Jalisco and Colima have assumed that the name is somehow derived from the name “Maria”–either the Virgin Mary or, as one elderly musician once observed, “maybe the wife or girlfriend of some *mariachero* (mariachi musician)”.

LA POSADA

The month of December in Mexico is filled with a myriad of regional fiestas. Some of these trace their roots to the customs of native Indians celebrating their various winter feast days. Later, Indian deities were replaced by Christian ones and some celebrations have evolved into popular traditions. The best-known example, presented in this concert, is the Fiesta of La Posada.

The Posada began in the 16th century as a liturgical event to celebrate the pilgrimage of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. Processions were added in the 17th century to involve more people. Celebrated between December 16 and 24, people participate during the nine-day period by asking for symbolic lodging. The involvement of communities serves to enrich the tradition, coloring the celebration with local as well as regional characteristics.

Organizing and preparing the celebration is passed from father to son. Families and friends organize a schedule of homes to be visited. The host home or neighborhood is decorated and food and drink is prepared for the evening's visitors. The first Posada begins on the night of December 16th, with the participants divided into two groups: the guests, who ask for lodging, and the hosts, who provide it.

The hosts and guests recreate Joseph and Mary's search for lodging by singing a traditional song. The guests gather outside the home to request a place to stay, and the hosts answer, first by refusing and then receiving them, which signals the beginning of the evening's fiesta.

There are regional variations to the ceremony. In Vera Cruz, for example, the celebrants walk through the streets singing "La Rama" and carry a decorated branch, or "rama", from house to house requesting gifts through song.

The musical journey of Mariachi Los Camperos begins with the traditional petition for lodging (the Posada), but the real fiesta starts with the breaking of the traditional piñata. The first part of the journey begins in the state of Michoacan, where local popular songs such as "Juan Colorado" and "Caminos de Michoacan" are featured. It closes with a fiesta in Jalisco, where the mariachi tradition began. The traditional "rama" from the state of Vera Cruz begins the second half of the program, featuring popular *jarocho* music. Favorite songs include "Noche de Ronda," "El Pastor," and "Don Arbolitos." The journey ends with the mariachi version of traditional Christmas carols.

MEXICO

OFFICIAL NAME: Estados Unidos Mexicanos (United Mexican States)

POPULATION: 1.01 million

CAPITAL: Mexico City

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE: Spanish

ETHNIC COMPOSITION: Mestizo 60%; Amerindian (indigena) 30%; other 10%

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION: Roman Catholic 90%; Protestant 6%; other 4%

CURRENCY: Mexican peso

Sharing a common border throughout its northern extent with the United States of America, Mexico is bounded on the west and south by the Pacific Ocean, to the east by the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea, and on the southeast by the countries Guatemala and Belize. Roughly triangular in shape, Mexico covers an area of 756,066 square miles.

Mexico has a vast wealth of mineral resources, a limited amount of agricultural land and a rapidly growing population. More than half of the country's people live in the central core, while vast areas of the arid north and the tropical south are sparsely settled. Petroleum and tourism have come to dominate the economy, and industrialization is increasing in many parts of the country.

Internal migration has caused urban centers to grow dramatically and more than two-thirds of Mexicans now live in cities. In population, Mexico City, the capital, is the largest city in the world (though the Mexico City metropolitan area ranks third in population when compared to other metropolitan areas).

Mexico's population is composed of many ethnic groups. At the time of European arrival in the early 1500s, the country was inhabited by people who are thought to have migrated into the New World from Asia some 40,000 to 60,000 years ago by crossing a former land bridge in the Bering Strait. After their arrival into what is now Mexico, centuries of isolation allowed evolution of unique cultural traits among the many separate clusters. Highly organized civilizations occupied various regions for at least 2,000 years before European discovery.

At the time of European arrival, the greatest number of people lived in the Mesa Central under the general rule of the Aztec empire; still, many separate cultural groups thrived in this region, among them speakers of the Tarastec, Otomi and Hahuatl languages. Outside of the Mesa Central were numerous other cultural groups, such as the Maya of the Yucatan and the Mixtec

and Zapaotec of Oaxaca. The splendid Aztec cities of the Mesa Central were marvels of architectural design, irrigation technology and social organization. Spectacular Mayan ruins in the Yucatan give evidence of widespread urbanization and intense agricultural productivity dating back to well before the birth of Christ.

Because of its ethnic and regional diversity, as well as the socioeconomic divisions within the population, Mexico is culturally heterogeneous. Among rural peoples there are strong regional affinities and allegiances, often referred to as *patria chica* (“small homeland”), which help to perpetuate cultural diversity. The large number of Indian languages and customs still exist, especially in the south, and also accentuate cultural differences. In an attempt to unite the nation culturally, by identifying a uniquely Mexican culture, the government has supported indigenous folk arts and crafts as well as the European-inspired classical arts. Since the 1930s, *indigenismo*, or pride in the Indian heritage, has been a major unifying theme of the country.

–information taken from the *Britannica Encyclopedia*

MAP OF MEXICO



-map taken from <http://lonelyplanet.com>

THINK ABOUT IT!

Dear Students:

Talking with your teacher, friends, and family about a performance after attending the theater is part of the experience. When you share what you saw and felt, you learn more about the performance. You can now compare ideas, ask questions, and find out how to learn even more. Here are some questions to think about:

- 1) How would you describe the Fiesta Navidad performance to a friend? What feelings did you have while you listened to the music and watched the dancers?
- 2) Does your family or community celebrate certain holidays which draw their customs and foods from a specific tradition?
- 3) Describe or draw the costumes. What were the predominant colors?
- 4) What did you like best about the performance and why? Was the program different from what you expected? How?

This CueSheet was written by ANETT JESSOP, Graduate Student Researcher,
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ATTENDING THE THEATER

What is expected of student audiences at the matinee:

- * Enter the auditorium quietly and take seats immediately;
- * Show courtesy to the artist and other guests at all times;
- * Demonstrate appreciation for the artist's work by applauding at the appropriate times;
- * Refrain from making unnecessary noise or movements;
- * Please eat lunch before or after the performance to avoid disruption;
- * Please turn off cell phones and pagers;
- * Flash photography is strictly prohibited;
- * Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee.

What you can expect of your experience in a performing arts theater:

A theater is a charged space, full of energy and anticipation. When the house lights (the lights that illuminate the audience seating) go down, the excitement level goes up! Theaters are designed so that the voices of the singers and actors and the music of the musicians can be heard. But this also means that any sound in the audience: whispering, rustling of papers, speaking and moving about, can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. Distractions like these upset everyone's concentration and can spoil a performance.

The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best possible work. The audience shows respect for the performers by watching attentively. Applause is the best way for audience members to share their enthusiasm and to show their appreciation for the performers. Applaud at the end of a performance! Sometimes the audience will clap during a performance, such as after a featured solo. Audience members may feel like laughing if the action on stage is funny, crying if the action is sad, or sighing if something is seen or heard that is beautiful. Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form and the culture(s) of the people in the audience. While the audience at a dance performance will sit quietly, other types of performance invite audience participation.