

# MARIACHI LOS CAMPEROS DE NATI CANO

**Art Form:** Music  
**Style:** traditional  
**Culture:** Mexico

## MEET THE ARTIST:

**Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano** has existed for more than 45 years under leader Natividad “Nati” Cano. A traditionalist and visionary, Cano has both mirrored and shaped the history of mariachi music. Cano began to play the *vihuela* at the age of six, and at age eight he began six years of violin lessons at the Academia de Musica in Guadalajara. He later joined the Tijuana-based Mariachi Aguila, and after becoming its musical director, changed the name to *Los Camperos*. In 1969 the group became permanently based in Los Angeles where it established a reputation for offering the best in mariachi music. In recognition of his outstanding musicianship, Cano received a National Heritage fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1990. The ensemble is comprised of talented musicians from Mexico and the United States, and has performed throughout the United States and Canada.

## ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

*Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano* performs a variety of mariachi song styles, from slow romantic *boleros*, to the quicker rhythms of the muscular *son jalisiense* and the intricate *huapango*, characterized by its use of falsetto and movement among musical registers. The instruments include the *guitarrón*, an acoustic bass guitar; a folk harp; two trumpets; and four violins. Finally there is Nati Cano’s *vihuela*, a large, round-backed high-pitched guitar which gives the mariachi its typical rhythmic vitality. In keeping with mariachi tradition, these versatile musicians sing as well as play instruments throughout the performance. As is the custom for mariachi performers, the ensemble wears the uniform of Jalisco horseman.



## PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

The word *mariachi* is a term that can be used to describe the individual musician, the ensemble or the musical genre itself. 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 is 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. But many Mexican scholars assure us that groups called mariachi were already in existence by 1830. Scholarly investigations also support possible indigenous roots. Evidence substantiates the existence of an Indian mariachi that used a single-head skin drum. One investigation suggests that the term derives from the *yutonahuatl* language group signifying a hard floor or dance area called a *mariache* or *tarima*. Another hypothesis suggests that the term comes from celebrations honoring the Virgin known as Maria H - Maria Hache - that evolved into mariachi. Finally, many older rural mariachi musicians in the states of Jalisco and Colima, assumed that the name somehow derived from the woman's name Maria.

Present-day Mexican music incorporates features from hundreds of years ago, particularly in the percussion instruments used to accompany dance. Little is known about the actual compositions, but music played a major cultural and religious role in the rituals and celebrations of the native peoples. After the Spanish colonization of Mexico, beginning in the 1500s, traditional songs and melodies from regions such as Jalisco, Veracruz, Oaxaca and Tehuantepec evolved from Spanish and Indian elements, as well as some Moorish, African and non-Spanish European influences. The Spanish conquistadors brought their instruments and their music (which was itself infused with Arab, African and various European flavors) to Mexico, and the Africans enslaved there during the Spanish colonial period introduced their musical rhythms and instruments. Additional musical influences came from the Caribbean Islands, South American countries, the southern states of the United States, and European countries such as France and Germany, which had a direct or indirect interaction in the early history of Mexico.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What most impressed you about the performance? What stands out in your mind?
- Was any of the music, or the songs, familiar to you? If so, where have you heard them?
- What is it about the Mariachi music that stands out for you? Be specific, for example, the instrumental sounds, the feelings it evokes, the way the musicians work together.
- Name the instruments that were played? What do they have in common? What are their differences? Were you surprised by any of the instruments?
- Describe how the musicians work together? Name the qualities they demonstrate (unity, strong focus, commitment to creating a strong sound, etc.)

## FRAMEWORK FOCUS - SCIENCE:

Natividad Cano, the Musical director of Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano, says, “Lose yourself in music and you will find beauty.” Think about whether you agree with this statement or not. If you do agree, write about the type of music that you like and listen to and what emotions and images find in the experience. Think about the images you see in your mind, but also the feelings (it can be sadness, anger, joy, peace or excitement) that it stimulates within you. Be specific as to what you like about the music you listen to and what makes it unique. Also, identify how it is different from music that you don’t usually listen to. If you don’t agree with Nati’s statement, then write about why you don’t agree and also identify where you personally find beauty. It might be in art, nature, relationships or a hobby. Write about what it is in the experience that makes you feel a sense of beauty and the emotions that arise within you when you are in the experience. These essays can be shared with partners or in small groups.

Legend:

- 🌀 Artistic perception
- ❖ Creative expression
- ▶ Historical & cultural context
- ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
- \* Connections, Relations, Applications

## ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- \* Mexico’s proximity to the United States has had a cultural impact on the southwestern states, in particular (Arizona, California, New Mexico and Texas). Give examples of this cultural overlap as seen in food, clothing, sports, celebrations, architecture, names (streets, cities, people, parks etc.) and the arts.
- ⇒ Discuss the instruments used by Mariachi musicians (violins, guitars, vihuelas, trumpets, harp and guitarron (a large rounded-back instrument that plays the base). How does the combination of these instruments make the sound unique from your point of view? How does the singing combine with the instrumental sounds? Does the singing change the feeling or style or enhance it?
- 🌀 In many areas of Mexico, people are often awakened by the sound of *Las Mañanitas*, the traditional song for saints days or birthdays. The mariachi band usually plays beneath the window of the person being celebrated. Learn a Mexican folk song which is sung on special occasions, such as *Las Mañanitas* (a morning greeting) and *Mañanitas Tapatia* (a birthday greeting). Sing the songs in Spanish and English.
- ❖ Most of the music played by Mariachi was created to accompany dance. Play some Mariachi music for the students and encourage them to stand in place and find the basic beat by easily bouncing, clapping, swaying, or stepping in place. Ask the students to tell the energy or feelings that they feel when moving to the music. Give students a chance to work with a partner and find two movement patterns that they can create together and perform to the music. Share ideas.
- ▶ *Día de los Muertos* is a Mexican holiday that is a celebration of life and reunion. It grew out of a ritual celebrated by the Aztecs over 3,000 years ago. They viewed death as a continuation of life and believed that life is only a dream. Research the historical background of this holiday and the traditions associated with it today. Mariachi music is usually played at these celebrations.

## SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Introduction to Mariachi Music:

<http://www.teachervision.fen.com/mexico/music/6757.html>

Mexican Mariachi Music and Instruments:

<http://www.sbgmusic.com/html/teacher/reference/cultures/mariachi.html>

Resource for links to mariachi and mariachi education sites:

<http://personal.Linkline.com/dserrano/infolinks.htm>

Mariachi Sheet Music: Mariachi Publishing Company:

<http://www.mariachipublishing.com/>

*Sounds of Mariachi* (Delfin Records, 19961)

*Fiesta Navidad* (Delfin Records, 1997)

*Viva el Mariachi* (Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2005)

*Llegaron Los Camperos!* (Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2005)

## INSTRUMENTS AND VOCABULARY: MARIACHI LOS CAMPEROS DE NATI CANO

<i>bolero</i>	A moderately slow dance in duple meter.
<i>botine</i>	An ankle-length boot
<i>botonaduras</i>	Shiny ornamental buttons on traditional Mariachi regalia
<i>cinto piteado</i>	A handmade belt made from cactus fiber threads
<i>guitarron:</i>	A very large bass guitar used in Michoacan, Jalisco and Colima, Mexico. It has a large convex back.
<i>harp:</i>	The harps used are variations of harps whose precursors were found in ancient Mediterranean, Egyptian and Irish civilizations. The 16th century form was brought to Latin America from Spain during the Colonial period.
<i>moño</i>	A tie that is often embroidered
<i>son jalisiense</i>	Traditional songs from Jalisco
<i>sombreros</i>	A large straw or felt hat with a broad brim and tall crown, usually with fancy embroidery.
<i>Spanish guitar:</i>	A standard six-string guitar.
<i>tambor Huacana:</i>	A large drum from northern Mexico.
<i>tamborita:</i>	A small military-style drum from Guerrero, Mexico.
<i>traje de charro</i>	Traje means "suit" and charro refers to a cowboy in Mexico
<i>trés Cubano:</i>	A standard size guitar with three courses of two steel strings. It is a lead melody instrument and national instrument of Cuba and is also played on the Gulf Coast of Mexico.
<i>trumpet</i>	The trumpet is a high-pitched musical instrument in the brass family.
<i>vihuela:</i>	A medium sized, five-string guitar-like instrument with a short neck and a convex back that is reminiscent of the lute. It is most often played in mariachi groups.
<i>violin:</i>	Of European origin, the standard instrument has four strings and is played by bowing or plucking.