

VIVA MARIACHI

How many of you have sipped away at a Tequila being lulled into that Mexican way of life by a Mariachi Band, strolling round the bars and restaurants of tourist resorts the length and breadth of Mexico ? Nice feeling eh ? as long as you don't swallow the caterpillar !

So what is Mariachi and how did it come about? I'm not talking about the Antonio Banderos pukekillers aka Tarrantino, when as a Mariachi musician, he exterminates dozens of drug dealing banditos using his guitar as a hive for his guns.

That's Hollywood anyway. But in a Mexican Town called Cocula, Jalisco, the term Mariachi is said to have originated and referred to a style of collective musical group. The early pioneers of Mariachi were akin to

Street Musicians, buskers if you like, but these days many earn a decent living from playing at Weddings, Birthdays, Festivals, Concerts and of course for the Tourists at a multitude of hotels, restaurants and bars. The groups usually have three violins, two trumpets, a guitar and a Vihuela (a five stringed guitar tuned to A D G B E).

It's true that there is a laid back romanticism in the way one can just relax the night away with some hot chicken faquitas washed down with a few large flaming Tequilas and in this hot atmosphere, you almost forget the cares of the world and bask in sublime pleasure of the music and atmosphere. But to the Mariachi's, like most musicians, it's a job that puts food on the table for their families. I suspect that the actual origins of Mariachi emanated from Spain, but over the years it has evolved into it's own

genre encompassing and digesting different musical influences including European and even African in some rhythmic styles.

Dress is also a feature for Mariachi's. In it's inception, Mariachis dressed mainly as peasants with large sombreros made of straw, a blanket draped over their shoulder and straight muslin pants whilst on the top part of their body they donned a cotton shirt. Sandals on their feet was the norm and the whole affair was offset by a red waist sash. As the style progressed and the musicians became more popular and wealthy, they dressed in much more designed finery. It wasn't until the 1930's however that Mariachi music began to establish itself as a mainstream art form. By the 1950's ensembles would include six to eight violins, a guitarron, a vihuela, a guitar, two trumpets and even a

harp. In juxtaposition with the advent of a wider media such as National Radio and Television,

Records, Mariachi Music extended it's charm to a much wider audience.

Apart from the obvious instruments used, the **Guitarron** is left field from the norm and it is a large bodied, deep guitar shaped beast that is to all intent and purpose, a six string acoustic bass. It's tuned ADGCEA with the strings often being plucked in



Antonio Banderos



pairs to provide octaves. It is often referred to as "the heartbeat" of a Mariachi Group. Other instruments that have been used are the Bajo Sexto, basically a 12 string guitar tuned in





Bajo Sexto

octaves Ee Aa Dd Gg Cc Ff. This instrument is definitely associated with the birth of the 12 string guitar as we know it today. There is also a lovely smaller bodied guitar called a Requinto. They are smaller in body than a normal guitar but deeper. They are tuned to A D G C E A. Although not that frequently used in Mariachi Bands, they are mainly used in a Trio Romantico (Romantic Trio) alongside two other guitars and vocals.

Most Mariachi instruments are still made in Mexico and there is a good selection of these available from Paracho Elite Guitars (see above)

<http://www.parachoelite.com> (formerly Lone Star Guitars). All the instruments are hand made in their own

requinto-zapata

factory and you can see the workings of this on their site also a wide range of stringed instruments for sale.



mariachi trumpets

It is in melody, introductions, bridges and codas that the Traditional genre of Mariachi Music is comprised.

Introductions or tropes are important because they allow an ensemble to play a piece without everyone needing to be familiar with it. Expert opinion says that " Much of the ensemble can play basic obligato parts for much of any given piece and still demonstrate virtuosity in the trope figures. Mariachi violin music is typically played in fixed positions, and the positions are generally limited to I and III. Most mariachi pieces are made up of collections of smaller pieces, and with respect to the violin, it's common to include some in the first and some in the fifth position. For example in the famous Jarabe Tapatio, the first two sections are in first position, followed by two section in third with a short bridge in first, after which the piece finishes in first. The nearly exclusive use of these two relatively stable positions facilitates playing together in tune"



Whilst many forms and styles of music can serve to enhance your mood and enlighten one's senses, Blues for example sets a great fundamental groove in life, Mariachi remains my favourite relaxant of all the styles because I don't have to think about life and it's many highs and lows when I'm simply enjoying a Tequila in the sun and listening to what is basically Mexican Music from the soul. Viva Mariachi !

Paul Brett



MEXTECA



Mariachi Mexteca is the UK's leading Mariachi band. Based in London, they are an authentic

ensemble of professional Mexican musicians and singers also bringing together artists from the Americas.

The Director of Mariachi Mexteca, Salvador Jimenez Hernandez was born in the large and bustling city of Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, the birth place of the Mariachi.

At the tender age of seven he started to learn the guitar and vihuela under the watchful eye of his father who was a composer and singer of Ranchero music. In 1980 he entered the School of Music at the University of Guadalajara, specialising in Mariachi instruments and vocals and has since played with various groups of Mariachis developing his skills as a singer and musician.

His music took him away from his roots to Asia where he lived for a few years in Hong Kong, playing with a Mariachi band there, in Macau and also China, however, in the year 2000 he moved to the UK taking his talent and music with him where he currently plays in his Mariachi band, MARIACHI MEXTECA which he formed in 2002 in London.

Salvador is the lead vocalist and plays several instruments including the guitarron, vihuela, guitar and accordion. The other band members are experienced professional musicians from Mexico and other Latino American countries, all of whom have strong Mariachi backgrounds coming from families of Mariachi Musicians.

They perform with a passion and an energy that never fades and they have had fantastic reviews from many including some celebrities, members of the UK government



and some members of the Royal family.

Devoted to their music, they carry

with them wherever they go, the vibrant, colourful and cheerful sound of the Mariachi music to all their audiences.

www.mariachimexteca.com