



Mariachi Music in the String Orchestra

Bob Phillips

From Mariachi Philharmonic by John Nieto and Bob Phillips

Origins

One of the world's most instantly identifiable sounds is that of the Mariachi. This much beloved music of Mexico traces its roots back to the Coco and Otomi Indians in the 1500's. A variety of cultures were influential in the development of the Mariachi. Indigenous peoples as well as the Spanish, the French and African slaves all played a role at one time or another. Coco Indians were skilled at playing rhythmically based instruments such as conch shells, clay pipes, flutes and other monophonic instruments. When the Spanish arrived in 1518 they brought new influences into the region now known as the state of Jalisco. Quickly the Spaniards discovered that the indigenous peoples were very skilled at reproducing European music so the first school of learned music in the Americas was founded about 1536 at the request of the Spanish Friars. The College of Tlatelolco was formed and the Coco were taught Christian music in their native tongue, Nahuatl. As a result of the Spanish influence the Cocos became proficient at plucked and bowed stringed instruments. Their familiarity with the lute family gave rise to the invention of traditional Mariachi instruments such as the vihuela and guitarron. Arriving in 1861 the French contributed their own unique influences. Original Mariachi instruments included the vihuela and guitarron. Later the violin, the guitar and a guitar variant, the guitarra de golpe, were added. The trumpet was added as a regular part of the ensemble in the 1930's.

Early theories said the term Mariachi was derived from the name Maria. Another theory, that Mariachi might be a variation of the French word for marriage, comes from the French intervention period when musicians who played at weddings were referred to as the Mariachi. However, many scholars now believe that the term Mariachi is an indigenous word that existed at least by 1695 and maybe much earlier.

Modern Mariachi

The modern Mariachi had increasing exposure in the 1930's because of the Mexican film industry of the time. As a result cowboy pictures made in the United States borrowed the music and exposed a whole new audience to the Mariachi. A very influential figure in this time period was Siverstre Vargas and his band, Mariachi Vargas de Telcalitlan. Some of the musical forms of Mariachi include sones, jarabes, huapangos, pasodobles, polkas, vales, corridos, rancheras, boleros, danzones, and cumbias. The traditional Mariachi costume is called the traje de charro, an outfit worn by the aristocratic horsemen of Mexico. The Mariachi Reyes is considered one of the earliest groups to change from white shirts, pants, and sandals to the current colorful costumes. The modern Mariachi often plays at social functions such as baptisms, church, weddings, birthdays, dances and many other civic events. Mariachi music has continued to evolve throughout the twentieth century incorporating many new styles and sounds.

The Instruments of the Mariachi

Modern Mariachi ensembles often consist of six violins, guitar, guitarron, vihuela, singers and two or three trumpets. The violins normally play in harmony with the first violin playing the melody. Bowing patterns are always uniform as they would be in a classical orchestra. The guitar and vihuela often play synchronized rhythms. Sometimes the vihuela adds varied rhythmic patterns to create forward motion. Guitar and vihuela players serve both a harmonic and rhythmic function in the ensemble. The guitarron plays the bass line in octaves, most often on the beat but sometimes off. Guitarron, guitar and vihuela players make up the rhythm section known as the armonia. Trumpets can double the melody but often provide rhythmic and melodic fills to add color and interest to the music.

How to Use the Books

Mariachi Philharmonic is a collection of ten traditional and one original Mariachi pieces. The books are designed to allow string players to perform Mariachi music in a traditional string orchestra setting. They can also serve as arrangements for a Mariachi ensemble by itself or in combination with a string orchestra. All arrangements are in the flexible Fiddlers/Jazz Philharmonic three staff format. This allows students to mix and match parts to create their own arrangements. The recording of the arrangements played by professional Mariachi players will help students understand the various styles included in the books. Listening to the recordings is an important part of the learning process. The historical information included in this Teacher's Manual should be shared with students.

www.phillipsfiddlers.com

Alfred P.O. Box 10003 • Van Nuys, CA 91410-0003
www.alfred.com

There are six books in the series as well as a recording. The books are:

- Teacher's Manual
- Violin Book
- Viola Book
- Cello/Bass Book
- Trumpet Book
- Accompaniment Book

All of the arrangements include:

- melody line
- melodic harmony line
- accompaniment line
- bass line
- optional trumpet parts
- optional piano/harp parts
- optional slash chordal accompaniment parts for vihuela and guitar
- optional guitarron line in the bottom line of the Piano/Harp part
- optional vocal line lead sheet on the page preceding the arrangement

The instrumental parts are laid out as follows:

Violin and Viola Books

- Melody Line - matches the vocal lead sheet with added traditional fills.
- Melodic Harmony Line - contains melodic harmony parts as well as added traditional fills.
- Accompaniment Line - recreates the rhythms and harmonies played by the guitar and vihuela.

Cello/Bass Book

- Melody Line - matches the vocal lead sheet with added traditional fills.
- Accompaniment Line - recreates the rhythms and harmonies played by the guitar and vihuela. (Cello only plays this line.)
- Bass Line - recreates the traditional bass line played by the guitarron.

Trumpet Book

- Optional Trumpet Line - doubles the melodic harmony parts or fills.

Accompaniment Book

- Optional Vihuela/Guitar Line - allows a traditional vihuela/guitar player to play off chordal slash notation.
- Optional Piano/Harp Lines - two staff part may be played as added accompaniment.
- Optional Guitarron Line - allows a traditional guitarron player to play off a bass line that also serves as the left hand of the Piano/Harp Line.

Using the Recording