



NEIL A. KJOS MUSIC COMPANY * PUBLISHER
4382 Jutland Drive, San Diego, California 92117 (858) 270-9800
www.kjos.com

FROM *MARIACHI MASTERY* - SCORE (ED. 112F)

THE MARIACHI EDUCATION MOVEMENT IN THE U.S.

By Jeff Nevin & Noé Sánchez

The following is a brief history of events that led to the current status of mariachi music education.

In 1964, in Tucson, Arizona, Father Charles Rourke founded a mariachi called Los Changitos Feos (“The Ugly Little Monkeys”). This mariachi was established to provide cultural musical experiences to Hispanic children in the area. Father Rourke (an Irish Catholic priest) had been introduced to mariachi music by Father Arsenio Carrillo. Father Carrillo had two nephews (Randy and Steve Carrillo) that had been playing mariachi music for a short time and needed some guidance. Los Changos (as they are affectionately called) were very successful and it didn’t take long before other places starting taking note. This priest had started a movement from which many programs began to emerge throughout the country. Since their inception, hundreds of Changos have graduated from the group, benefiting from the enrichment, encouragement and scholarships provided (funded by the group’s many performances) to attend college. Los Changitos Feos is still in existence and counts among its alumni members of some of the best mariachis in the world.

In 1971, several members of Los Changitos Feos, including Randy Carrillo and Mack Ruiz, graduated from high school and by rule had to leave the mariachi. Along with other Changos including Steve Carrillo, Gilbert Velez, Paul Romo, Wilfred Arvizu, George Corrales and Tony Saldivar they formed Mariachi Cobre. This became a turning point in mariachi education. This mariachi was to influence mariachi education in the years to come through their organization in teaching mariachi music at conferences nation-wide. Indirectly, their model of teaching infiltrated public schools around the country.

The first mariachi conference was held in San Antonio, Texas in 1979, another important moment in mariachi history, and continued until 1988. Isabella San Miguel and Juan Ortiz were responsible for organizing the conference and bringing Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán to perform and teach at it. This conference introduced mariachi education classes but, unfortunately, most of the music was for advanced mariachis, which did little to foster growth in mariachi music. However, this conference did open doors for other conferences.

The Tucson International Mariachi Conference (1983–present) became the model that other conferences would try to emulate. Mariachi Cobre was instrumental in creating the curriculum for the Tucson conference which includes separating classes into beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels (so that mariachi musicians of all levels of expertise could participate) and teaching each of the instruments separately before bringing everyone together in a “mass” mariachi—both of which became important aspects of this and other conferences. Mariachi Cobre and Los Changitos Feos became spokesmen for the importance of this educational component of the conference in order to promote the culture and awareness of the mariachi tradition.

In 1986, Linda Ronstadt sang with Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán at the Tucson conference. By this time, isolated school-based mariachi programs had been in existence for some time around the country, in part due to the influence of these conferences, but the release of Ronstadt’s album, *Canciones de mi Padre* (1987), created an explosion in awareness of mariachi music throughout the United States, helping to prime the country for the rapid growth of school-based mariachi programs that followed.

Today there are many important conferences across the US besides the Tucson conference, including Fresno, CA (1983–present), Las Cruces, NM (1994–), taught by Mariachi Cobre and widely regarded as one of, if not the most important educational conference in the country today; Albuquerque, NM (1990–); San Jose, CA (1991–); and San Antonio, TX (1994–). The only conference in Mexico as of this writing is in Guadalajara, Jalisco, (1994–).

The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) became the first university to offer a mariachi ensemble in 1961. Several prominent mariachis emerged from this group including Daniel Sheehy, Director and Curator of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, and long-time mariachi educator Mark Fogelquist. Many universities and community colleges have followed, too many to mention, but the University of Texas at Pan American in Edinburg, Texas (Rio Grande Valley), has long been considered to have one of the top university mariachi ensembles in the country.

While mariachi classes have become commonplace in colleges and universities across the US, in 2004 Southwestern College in Chula Vista, California, under the direction of Jeff Nevin, became the first in the world to offer a college degree specifically in mariachi music (Associate’s Degree in Music: Mariachi Specialization). Courses offered as part of the degree include Music Theory, beginning and advanced mariachi ensembles, Development of Mariachi: Style and Culture, and primary and secondary instrument instruction (guitar, vihuela, guitarrón, violin, trumpet, voice, harp). Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas, began offering a Bachelor of Arts in Music with an optional emphasis in Mariachi Performance and Pedagogy in 2005, and other colleges and universities are expected to continue this trend of offering higher education degrees in mariachi.

Today, school districts in many states, including California, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Washington, Colorado, Idaho, and Illinois, provide mariachi as an official class-for-credit during the school day. With this expansion of school-based mariachi programs comes the need for published materials to support them. *Mariachi Mastery* is the first complete mariachi method published by a major publisher. The Mariachi Connection is the first retail store and website to specialize in providing materials to the mariachi community. They not only sell printed music but also instruments, trajes (mariachi suits), supplies, and the only (as of this writing) widely available curriculum for mariachi, “The Current State of Mariachi Curriculum (2005),” by Noé Sánchez.

The first major book on mariachi music in English is Jeff Nevin’s *Virtuoso Mariachi*, published by University Press of America (2002). This book includes basic mariachi history, an in depth and sophisticated discussion of the mariachi style and how it has evolved, a close examination of the trumpet style including tonguing, vibrato and rubato, different song styles and the author’s thoughts on the future of mariachi music. Daniel Sheehy’s book *Mariachi Music in America*, published by Oxford University Press (2006) presents an overview and description of mariachi music’s evolution, a discussion of the cultural significance of mariachi to musicians and others in Mexico and the US, and details the changes that have occurred in mariachi as a result of its popularization in the US.

On December 13, 2005, MENC: The National Association for Music Education held a meeting at their headquarters in Reston, Virginia, where a group of mariachi educators from around the country met with their executive board to discuss creating a mariachi component to MENC. The fact that this, the largest and most important music education organization in the US, would consider placing mariachi alongside band, choir, orchestra and jazz in its list of standard American classroom ensembles is a testament to the extent of mariachi’s growth in the US, its future, and indeed the level of respect that mariachi music itself has attained.

Mariachi music has come a long way since the 1960s when Father Rourke started the movement that flourishes in American public schools today. The future of mariachi music education is dependent upon us providing music educators with training in mariachi music as well and the continued proliferation of high quality, standardized published materials for these teachers to utilize. There is every reason to expect that mariachi music will continue to be offered in more and more schools throughout the country in years to come.

*Selected from **Mariachi Mastery – Score (Edition 112F)** by Jeff Nevin & Noé Sánchez*
© 2006 Neil A. Kjos Music Company, 4382 Jutland Drive, San Diego, California 92117
International copyright secured. All rights reserved.

www.kjos.com