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

## **A RATIONALE FOR MARIACHI MUSIC EDUCATION**

By Jeff Nevin & Noé Sánchez

Mariachi is no longer just a “folk” music: its rich history and diverse repertoire of songs help establish it as a legitimate art form worthy of formal study. Until now, no systematic and comprehensive approach to teaching mariachi music has been available. Music teachers have had to scramble to find or create appropriate materials to share with their pupils. Illegible photocopies and substandard arrangements of mariachi music abound.

Mariachi music is currently at a point within its evolution where it is becoming widely recognized as a “parallel art music”—parallel to the other great art music of the world, such as European art music (“Classical Music”), East Indian Classical Music, Jazz and others—as opposed to its former designation as a so-called “folk” music. This distinction is important, since it implies a greater degree of sophistication, artistic merit, longevity, respect, and broader importance in this world.

Consider the analogy of jazz music: 100 years ago jazz was in its infancy, rooted in American negro spirituals, work songs and certain regional (i.e. isolated) popular musical forms. Through the first half of the 20th Century jazz grew in popularity and spread across the country, with a number of immensely popular performers and composers writing and performing in a number of different “styles” of jazz, such as swing, ragtime, be-bop. Classical composers including George Gershwin and Darius Milhaud borrowed from jazz rhythms, harmonies, melodic styles and created new classical music based on jazz.

And yet still, up until perhaps the 1970s, jazz music itself was widely considered by the musical establishment to be “informal” or un-structured, people quipped that much of it is “made up” (i.e. improvised), it is performed mainly in bars or night-clubs, many jazz musicians were not classically trained, etc. This was hardly a music considered worthy of “serious” study or being taught in school, but by the 1970s the academic community slowly did begin to recognize and appreciate that jazz had indeed become a musical art-form unto itself, with its own history, performance practices (jazz improvisation is a remarkably complex and involved skill to master), repertoire, major influences, a large

body of performers both professional and amateur (many widely recognized “virtuosos”), and a huge audience base that extended far beyond the United States’ borders. Today, most colleges and high schools with a strong music program offer jazz band in addition to the more “traditional” American music ensembles of concert band, orchestra, and choir, and many colleges have several full-time jazz faculty members and offer undergraduate and graduate degrees in various aspects of jazz music (instrumental or vocal performance, composition, education, etc.).

Mariachi music today is at a very similar point in its evolution to that of jazz music in the 1970s. While still generally regarded as purely “folk” music, many scholars, musicians, students and mariachi enthusiasts have grown to respect the rich and diverse history of mariachi. They have embraced the large number of musical forms and styles that are found within mariachi (huapango, son jarocho, son jalisciense, ranchera, etc.), they appreciate the unique musical style and performance practices that have developed into the modern mariachi, and they have recognized a large number of “virtuoso” performers and immensely important composers who have shaped this tradition. Many classical-music composers, as diverse as Aaron Copland and Silvestre Revueltas, have drawn upon mariachi music as inspiration for their new classical-music compositions for orchestral and chamber ensembles. A number of books have been written about mariachi in both English and Spanish, countless newspaper articles have appeared, and mariachi bands exist in countries on at least 4 continents.

Clearly mariachi is poised to take its place among the other great classical music of the world.

*Selected from **Mariachi Mastery – Score (Edition 112F)** by Jeff Nevin & Noé Sánchez*  
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