



The Smithsonian Associates

Discovery Theater

presents

Mariachi Madness!



with
*Mariachi
Los Amigos*
and dancers from
Los Quetzales

A REPRODUCIBLE LEARNING GUIDE FOR TEACHERS.

This learning guide is designed to help you and your students prepare for, enjoy, and discuss *Mariachi Madness!* It contains background information, questions and activities. Appropriate for all ages.

Discovery Theater programs are made possible, in part, by gifts from

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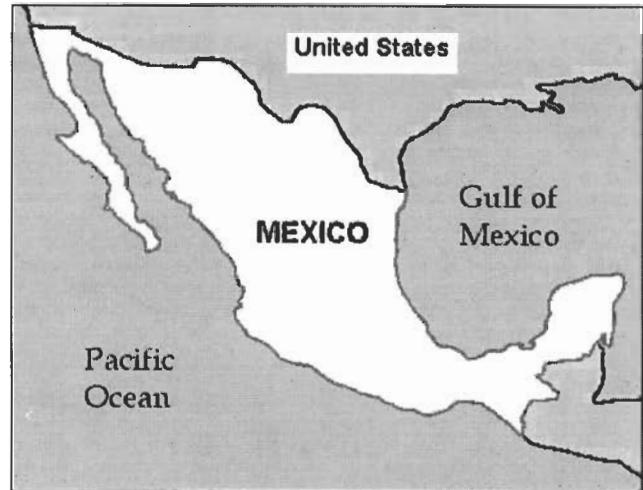
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MEXICO, Our Next Door Neighbor

Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos (The United States of Mexico, the country's official name) is a republic of southwestern North America that occupies 760,373 square miles. The country has 31 states that includes desert highlands, plains, forests, and jungles. The largest city in the world is the capital, Mexico City, with over **20 million people** living there.



The population of Mexico is a blend of **indigenous cultures** with some ancestry from the **Maya** and **Aztec**, and other roots coming from European origins. Some of the products that come from Mexico are automobiles, produce, ceramics, and furniture. With its miles of coastline, beautiful architecture, and the awe-inspiring ruins of ancient civilizations, Mexico is a popular destination for travelers.

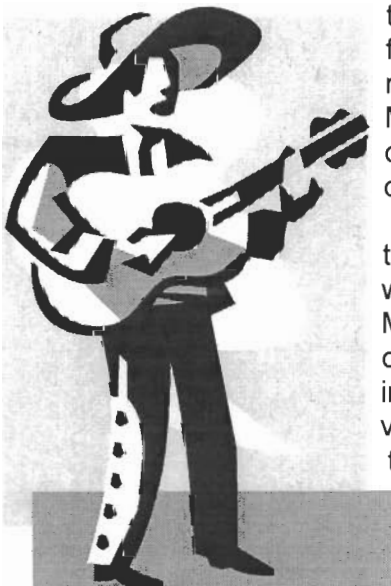
Folklore

Mexican **folklore** reflects a society as diverse and colorful as the landscape and climate from which it comes. The settings for music and dances are many. Community festivals, the life of cattlehands, the struggles of revolutionaries, and even satirical comments on society make the style rich and varied.

The Colorful Sounds of Mariachi

Born in the small villages of Jalisco and Guadalajara, Mexico, **Mariachi music** is vibrant with strings. Violins, **guitarrons**, **vihuelas**, and guitars make a warm, full rhythm section. On top of their rich sound are the singing trumpets and clear voices.

Like the traditional garment called the *serape*, which was often woven in stripes of contrasting colors—green next to orange, yellow next to blue—Mariachi is a music of sharp contrasts: the sweetness of the violins against the brilliance of the trumpets, the deep sound of the guitarron against the crisp, high voice of the vihuela; and the frequent shifting between syncopation and on-beat rhythm. The resulting sound is the heart and soul of Mexico. As one of the few Mexican musical styles that have remained basically unchanged over time, it still deeply reflects true Mexican artistic roots and culture.



There are many different theories regarding the true roots of the Mariachi. It is safe to say that it emerged in the 1900's in several western states of Mexico—including Jalisco, Nayarit, Colima, and Michoacán. At first, the simplest musical arrangements consisted only of a string ensemble, and now the present day adaptation includes trumpets. The typical Mariachi ensemble includes a guitar, violin, the guitarron (an acoustic bass), a vihuela (likened to a lute), trumpet, and singing. The 20th century brought Mariachi music to the commercial realm by means of radio, television, and film. The music's popularity grew rapidly and today is enjoyed throughout the entire world.

Nearly every Mariachi group is expected to know certain songs, such as *Cielito Lindo*, *Jalisco*, *El Son de la Negra*, and *El Rey*. The major song form is the **son**, which has several notable characteristics: heavy syncopation, rhythm that alternates between 3/4 and 6/8 time, extensive use of grace notes by trumpets and violins, and lyrics that are usually humorous or nonsensical.

Traditionally, Mariachi musicians clothed themselves with hats of straw (or palm) and **manta** (simple cotton). Present-day musicians fashion themselves after the **charro**, or Mexican "cowboy," wearing elaborate decorations and designs.

The Dances of the Mariachi Style

Like the colorfully-dressed musicians, Mexican traditional dancers also wear bright costumes—often a variety of them, depending on which pieces are being performed. The colors and intricate patterns of the outfits reflect the different regions they are taken from. Boots (with tiny nails hammered into the soles) are worn for **zapateado** or "footwork," which is the rhythmic stomping that makes the feet themselves into musical instruments. Some dances incorporate the use of candles, machetes, rope or bows. The repertoire of pieces includes polkas, son, mime and even modern styles.

Music and dance can be seen and heard all over Mexico—everywhere from cozy restaurants, to the grand spaces of glorious theaters. Folkloric dances come from many different times and places, with different styles of movement. Some display sadness and longing, some have a mystical message, and others are celebrations! When a dance gets exuberant, you'll often hear a dancer let out a **grito** (a joyful shout) to encourage the others--or just out of **enthusiasm!**



About the Performers

Mariachi Los Amigos

Founded in 1979, with the purpose of sharing the traditional and popular music of Mexico, Mariachi Los Amigos is the Washington DC area's longest existing mariachi ensemble. The company, led by Dan Sheehy, the Director of Folkways Records, was created by a group of friends who all loved and shared the passion for the energetic and varied sounds of Mariachi.



Los Quetzales Mexican Dance Ensemble

This group of dancers, led by Laura Ortiz of the Smithsonian's Center for Latino Initiative, was founded in 1997 and is the premier Mexican folkloric dance company in Northern Virginia. The mission of Los Quetzales is to promote the traditions and culture of Mexican folklore through research, preservation and presentation of art, music and dance. The exuberant colors of the honored Quetzal bird are represented in the traditional costumes, and reflect the cultural beauty and vitality.

Members from both of these groups are not just from Mexico! Like the people who live around Washington, DC, many of the artists are from other countries too!

The Green Lightning Bird

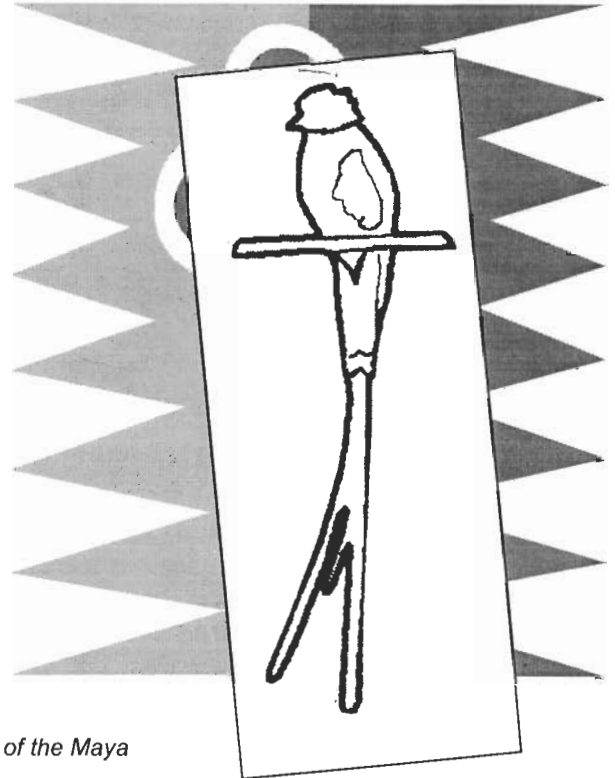
The dancers in *Mariachi Madness* are from a group called Los Quetzales, after the unforgettable Central American bird, **the Resplendent Quetzal** (pronounced ket-S AHL). The Resplendent Quetzal lives in dense mountain rain forests (or "cloud forests"). Called "the most spectacular bird in the New World," the male quetzal has intense emerald and light green feathers with a red belly. It is about the size of a pigeon, but with an incredible tail, bright blue and green above and white underneath, that can extend up to 3 feet long.

The quetzal was important to both the ancient **Mayan** and **Aztec** civilizations. Both cultures worshipped a god with the name Quetzalcoatl (also called Kukulcan), the "Feathered Serpent," who wore a headdress of quetzal feathers. The bird came to symbolize freedom and wealth—freedom because of a legend that the bird would die in captivity, and wealth, because jade and quetzal feathers were the ancient Mayas' most sought-after treasures. One poet wrote,

*Of emeralds and rubies you were formed
The Jewel of the Cloud Forest
A shimmering bolt of Green Lightning
The Resplendent Quetzal-Serpent.*

*Ancient sages named you Kukulcan
Their supreme symbol of Light and Freedom
The Heart of Heaven, the Herald of Tatixel
Huahop, Owner of the world, giver of Wisdom.*

—poet unknown, quoted in Thor Jansen's
In the Land of Green Lightning: The World of the Maya



Today, 80% of the inhabitants of Guatemala and the Mexican states of Yucatan, Quintano Roo, and Chiapas are descendants of the ancient Maya. The Quetzal still represents their proud way of life; in fact, the national currency of Guatemala is called the "quetzal," and the quetzal bird is pictured on the flag and on postage stamps. The future of the quetzal, however, is certain **extinction** unless something is done now to **habitat**. The rain forests are being cleared to plant crops for food. Poachers who sell quetzal feathers and skins also take a toll. Sadly, future generations may never know the living quetzal.

ACTIVITIES

Color the Quetzal

Use the coloring described above—or invent your own combination! If you want, staple or glue colorful ribbons to its Resplendent tail!

Listen to the music

(for older audiences)

While listening to a Mariachi tape or CD, draw a picture showing the feelings you get from the sounds.

- What colors match those feelings?
- What activities do the sounds seem to stand for?
- What picture do you get from a sweet, romantic tune? How about from wild percussion? Blaring trumpets? Marching music?

Mariachi and Me!

Mariachi music was born out of the lives and cultures of Mexico. The sights and sounds of that country vibrate in the tunes, rhythms, and dance steps.

Where are YOU from? What is your neighborhood like? Tell us about the culture of YOU!

Where do you live? What do you eat? What games do you play? Think of rhymes that go with your answers. Put the words to music—or not, it's up to you!

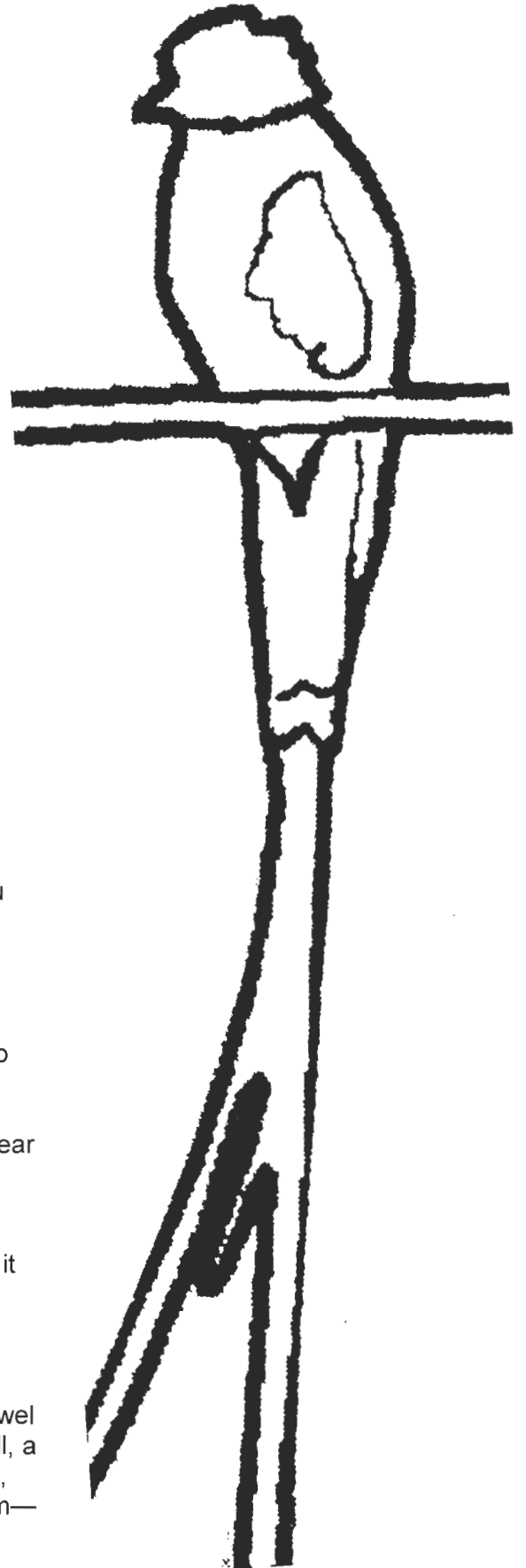
Create a Folk Dance

A folk dance is one that is special to a group of people who live together—a community.

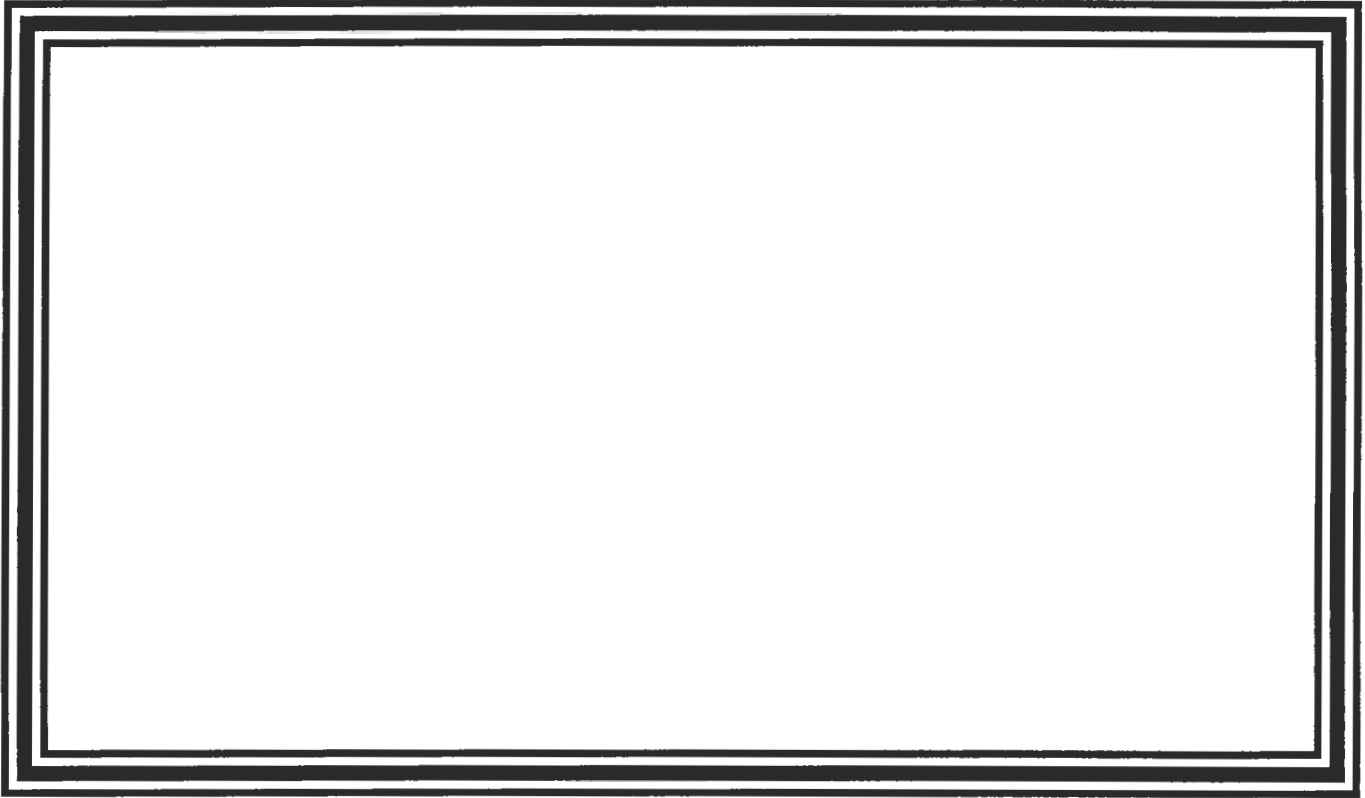
Your neighborhood is a community! What noises do you hear in your neighborhood? Now think of motions that might go with those noises. Put them together and make a dance!

Do you have a favorite animal or bird? Think of the noises it makes and the way it moves. Add it to your neighborhood dance! Design a costume to dance in that features your animal's colors and markings.

Think of words that describe your animal. Is it like some jewel or precious object? Is it like lightning, moonlight, a waterfall, a hurricane, snow? What personality does it have—is it wise, graceful, brave, tricky, loving? Put these words into a poem—like the one about the green lightning bird!



Design Your Own Costume. The dancers of Los Quetzales wear special costumes that reflect the places and times where different dances originated. Design YOUR own costume that reflects YOUR place and time! Draw a picture of it here!



Vocabulary

- **Aztecs**—the native people whose empire ruled central Mexico at the time of the Spanish conquest.
- **Culture**—1. a style of social and artistic expression peculiar to a society or class. 2. the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought characteristic of a community or population. 3. intellectual and artistic activity.
- **Extinction**—the dying off of every member of an animal or plant species
- **Folklore**—1. the traditional beliefs, practices, legends, and tales of the common people. 2. the comparative study of folk knowledge and culture.
- **Guitarron**—a six stringed bass like guitar, large in size, with a rounded back side.
- **Habitat**—the place where a plant or animal naturally lives and grows.
- **Indigenous**—occurring or living naturally in an area; not introduced; native.
- **Machete**—a large, heavy knife with a broad blade, used for cutting vegetation and as a weapon.
- **The Mariachi** - term used to describe a Mariachi ensemble, an individual musician in the ensemble, or the music played by the group.
- **Mayan**—having to do with the **Maya**, a group of native peoples of Central America.

Resources

www.mexonline.com – extensive online guide to Mexico—from history to current weather forecasts.

www.geocities.com/terryliu_99/Mariachi_Los_Amigos.html – more on Mariachi Los Amigos.

www.quetzales.org – the official Los Quetzales website.

www.cloudforestalive.org - weekly nature lessons, photos and more from the Cloud Forests of Central America. Home of the fabulous QuetzalCam!

Mariachi Music in America: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture, by Daniel Sheehy. Dan Sheehy's study of the Mariachi, accompanied by a 50-minute CD. Available from Oxford University Press (www.oup.com/us/catalog).

The Mexican Cultural Institute - one of the most important artistic and cultural centers established outside Mexico, offering dance, music, and other arts events year round for kids and adults. Contact 2829 16th St. NW, Washington, DC 20009, portal.sre.gob.mx/imw, or 202-728-1628.

The Garland Handbook of Latin American Music, by Dale A. Olsen & Daniel Edward Sheehy (Garland Publishing, 2000). Co-edited by the Artistic Director of Mariachi Los Amigos.

Ballet Folklorico de Mexico, by Amalia Hernandez (Institute of Fine Arts of Mexico, 1967). The founder of the legendary dance troupe tells how she rediscovered Mexican traditional dance.

Musics of Multicultural America: A Study of Twelve Musical Communities, by Kip Lornell & Anne K. Rasmussen (Schirmer Books, 1997).

Regional Dances of Mexico, by Edith Johnston & Louise Remund (NTC/Contemporary Publishing Company, 1982).

Discovery Theater is On the Move!

The Smithsonian's Arts and Industries Building, home to Discovery Theater since 1979, has been closed for renovation. DT has a sparkling new specially-designed space just across the garden in the S. Dillon Ripley Center—the Smithsonian's underground learning center with classrooms, lecture halls, artists' studios and more. Look for the glass-walled kiosk next to the Castle—you'll find us downstairs!



Some of our favorite programs are also going on tour, and new partnerships with Arena Stage in Washington, DC and Round House Theater in Silver Spring mean that DT's special brand of educational entertainment for kids is available at more venues than ever before. For details, call 202-357-1500 or see www.DiscoveryTheater.org.