
Mariachi Singers, Teachers, & Directors: Vocal History, Pedagogy, Conditions & Recommendations



*California Western Regional Conference Voice
Online Presentation (CWR-NATS)*



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Audio: “Rancho Alegre” sung by Juanita Ulloa

Sunday, January 16, 2022

Terms: What is Mexican Folk Song & Mariachi?

- Mexico: Many folk styles, one of which is mariachi, along with separate operatic and classical traditions. *Ranchera singing*, as called in Mexico, first documented 1830s and term refers to rural folk origins (“from the ranch”).
- Mariachi: Oral folk tradition. After 1900 (or before), mariachi goes urban and vocals take on classical influence (distinct from Zarzuela, a classical vocal music dramatic genre from Spain with folk elements).
- US: *Mariachi* term used but usually refers only to the ensemble but means more. It is a particular vocal style. Grammys use: “música regional mexicana” or Regional Mexican Music.
- *Charros*: Performers often dress in black charro outfits with gold or silver down the side and large sombreros linked to equestrian tradition. Female soloists also use regional costumes.



Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles



Mariachi Sol de Mexico

Ranchera Singing Style

- Ranchera singing includes powerful sound, rich tone, legato lines, and *falsete* breaks flipping into sustained flute-like long notes.
- 1805 onward- Imported Italian bel canto operas and earlier Spanish zarzuela funded by Mexican government in Mexico City; this is reflected in long legato lines in mariachi's folk songs. Ranchera oral tradition evolved rurally as a direct expression of the Mexican people but without the same prestige or support.
- Opera & Mariachi: Powerful Projected Sound, but ranchera singing varies with falsete (falsetto flips), as well as belting and crooning.
- The mariachi canon is over 80% vocally based. Every instrumentalist is expected to take vocal solos.

Steve Carrillo singing “Estrellita” by Manuel Ponce

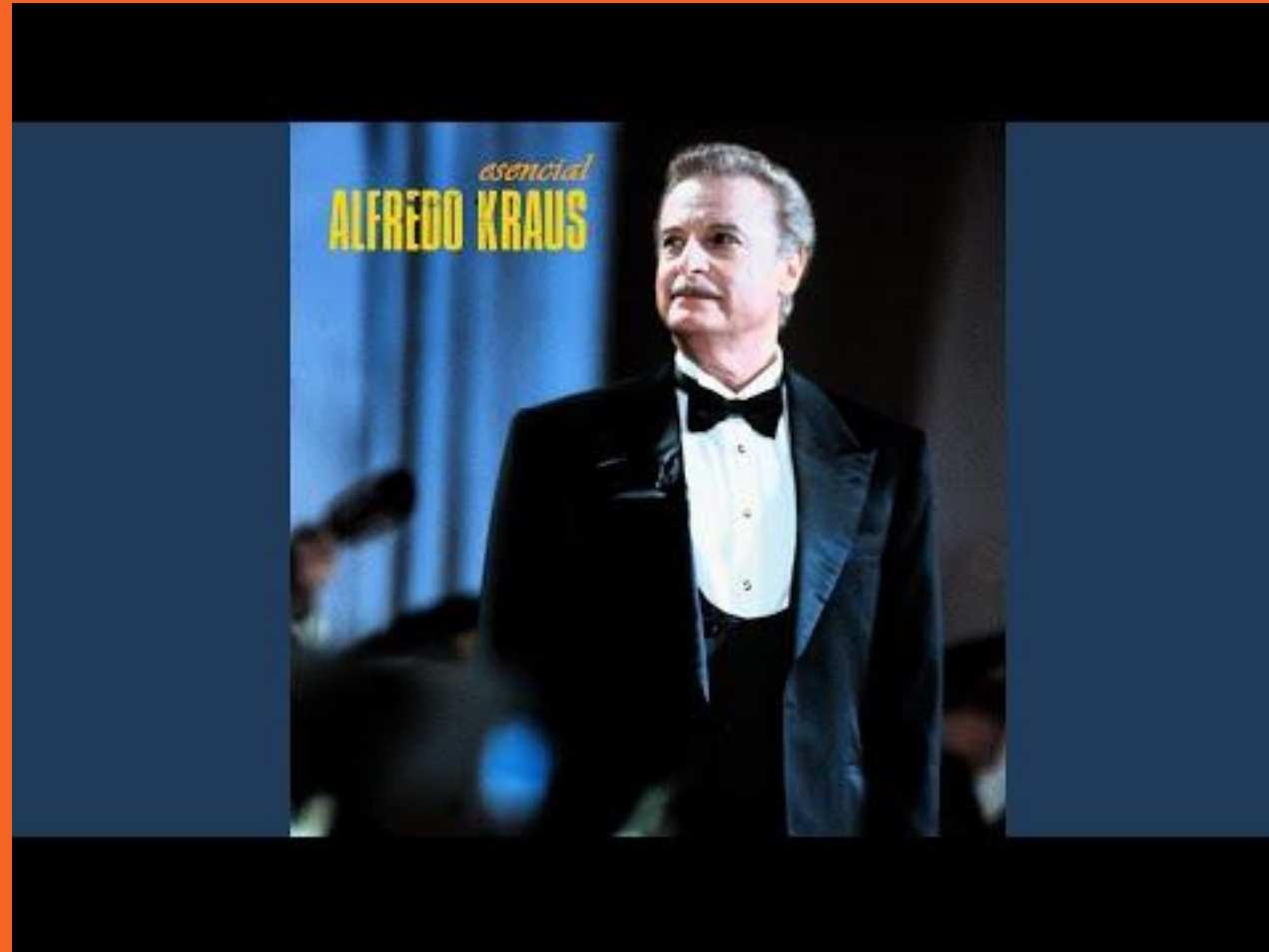


Start @ 2:50

Urban Influences in mariachi song in 1900s; Evolution of syncretic vocal style distinct history from instruments

- Mexican folk songs were collected by Manuel M. Ponce in early 1900s (“Father of Mexican song”). Today they are sung by both classical and folksingers.
- Influence of both classically trained Mexican film composers and operatic-mariachi singers in the 1900s (e.g. Composers: Grever, Ponce, Manuel Esperón, Emilio Uranga, Tata Nacho).
- Interchange and mix of folk and classical with singers and composers into a syncretic equal sharing mix. more so than Classical European music.

Alfredo Kraus singing “A la orilla de un palmar”
arranged by Manuel Ponce.



Start @ 1:00

José Mojica singing “Jurame” by María Grever: ca.1928



Start @ 2:33

Jorge Negrete, El Charro Cantor, sings
“El jinete” (Huapango)



Start @ 2:00

Is Mariachi male dominated?

Yes, although mainly in Mexico since the 1830s. Less so in USA.

Video: Funeral service of Vicente “Chente” Fernández (1940 – Dec. 2021). All soloists and groups performing last month were male.

Start @ 40:00

Stop @ 40:45



Machismo “Toughness”

- Laws- Women didn't earn the right to vote until 1954
 - Opportunity (Economic & Social)
 - Even today, few gender mixed groups. Many female US groups!
 - Mariachi Vargas-World's oldest mariachi. Strict rule no females
 - Male dominance persists in Mexico, but USA educational programs have shifted balance to 50-50 in many locations since 1960s.
 - General lack of pedagogical knowledge of female mariachi vocal training. New separate vocal style emerges with separate female range. Voice teachers could help change this!
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Two Genders -Two Vocal Styles

- MEN- Access to Classical Training- Mexico DF-Voice Teacher José Pierson, 1920 onward. Crossover classical & mariachi training for Jorge Negrete/Pedro Vargas. Full male range, extreme legato with less use of vibrato, falsete voice flips, and stylistic contrast between crooned boleros and son or other rancheras.
 - WOMEN- Little access to voice training. Evolution of Commercial Music style with independent history and pedagogy.
 - Lower half chest register TA muscle dominance. Some crooning, falsete as exception instead of rule, leanings on belt voice. CM, Classical & MARIACHI FACH.
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Lola Beltrán sings “Cucurrucucu Paloma”



Start @ 1:15

Stop @ 2:50

Juanita Ulloa sings “Crucifijo de piedra”



Start @ 2:25

Mariachi/Mexican Vocal Folk Music Survey

- Selective 2022 introductory survey for mariachi directors, singers and voice teachers. Goal: Initiate conversations and make connections to bridge the mariachi and voice educational fields. Examine connection between training and vocal lifespan.
- About 1000 were sent over 3 weeks/ 36 responses (Christmas). 3.6% response
- *Geography:* USA- 64% CA, 26% Tx; 6% New Mexico and Kentucky
- *Gender:* Responses 50% female vs. male (3 unspecified)
- *Mariachi Group Singers:* 47%
 - *Voice Teachers & Solo singers:* 47%, zarzuela (1%) and opera (5).
- 75% in a mariachi ensemble or connected to one
- 22% have classical background not involved in mariachi

Survey Responses

Warm-ups:

70% of mariachi singers warm up

100% of classical singer/teachers

Only 2 people (classical) warm down



Vocal Study:

56% mariachi singers not currently studying voice

Fewer crossovers in style in mariachi singers:

65% vs. 100% in general singers/voice teachers.

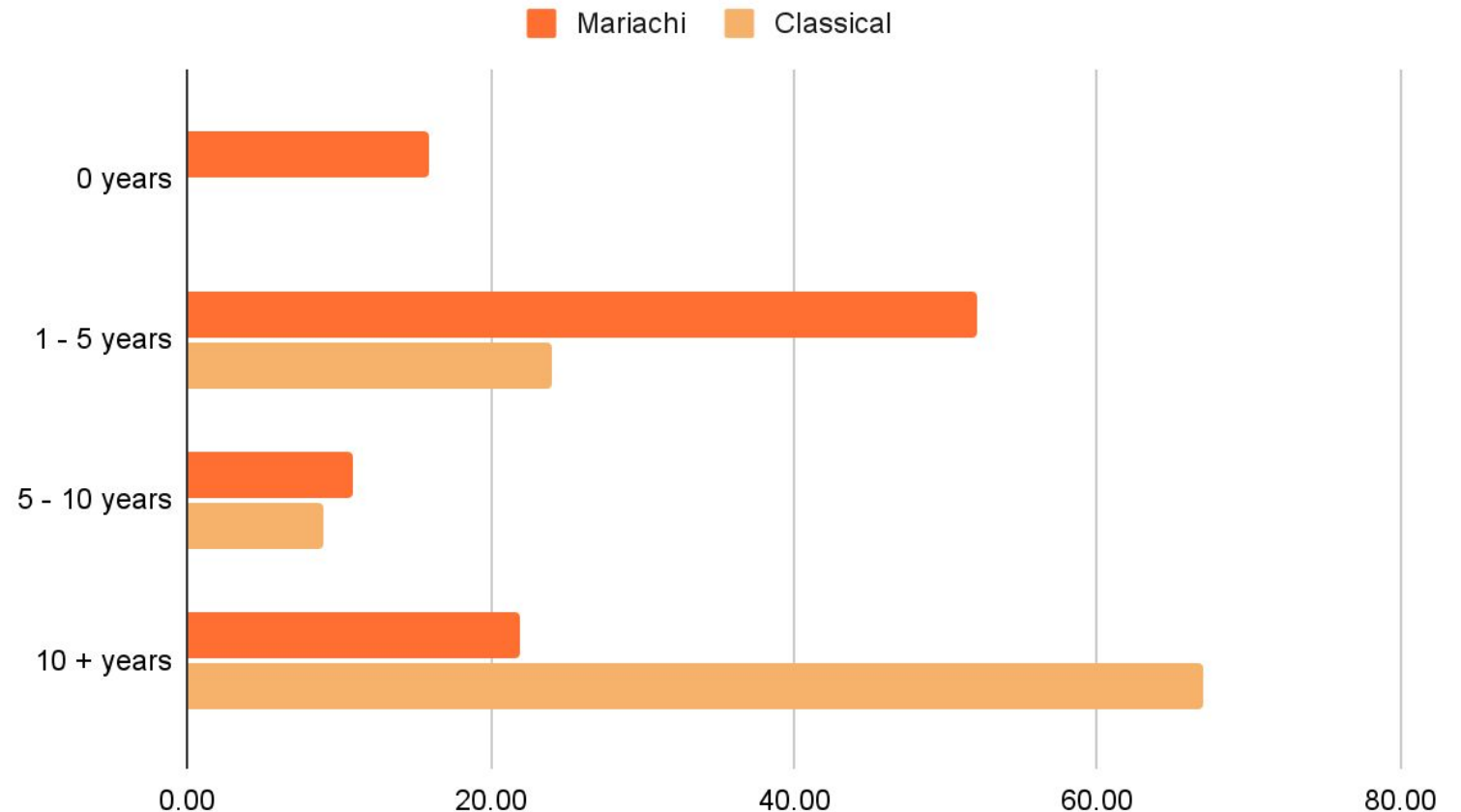
Who Studies and Why Sing Ranchera Music?

- 83% sing because they love the genre
- 43-52% sing to stay close to their culture
- 18% sing to practice Spanish Language
- 14% sing for other reasons (education, appreciation, etc...)

How Many Years of Vocal Study?

- Majority of Mariachi respondents have had 0-5 years of vocal study.
- Majority of NATS/classical respondents have had 10+ years of vocal study.

Years	Mariachi	Classical
0	16%	0%
0 - 5	52%	24%
5 - 10	11%	9%
10 +	22%	67%



Instrumental vs. Vocal

Years of Instrumental Study

Respondents	0 years	1 - 5 years	5 - 10 years	10 + years
Mariachi	0%	23%	23%	54%
NATS/Teachers	5%	33%	38%	24%

- Majority (54%) of Mariachi respondents had 10+ years of instrumental study (trumpet/violin etc.) while the majority (38%) NATS/classical respondents had 5-10 years of study (piano).

Technique: Can you sing this with ease? Falsete, Change Styles, Extremes of Vocal Range

Respondents	Falsetes/Falsettos	Change of Style	Extremes of Vocal Range
Mariachi	55%	48%	52%
NATS/Classical	72%	33%	72%

- Mariachi respondents had the highest rating for change of style.
- NATS/Classical respondents had the highest rating for falsettos and control of extreme range of their voice.

Assessment:

- We want to allow mariachi singers equal access to vocal technique specific to style

Vocal Fatigue: Do you frequently tire? Have you lost your voice or had symptoms (listed)

- For those studying voice less than 1 year
- 17% Yes 33% Sometimes 17% Not sure 33% No
- For those studying voice 10+ years
- 35% Sometimes 65% None

Observation:

- Despite 33% “young” singers reporting no fatigue, 59% of this same group reported having symptoms listed in survey (less control over voice, grainy sand feeling in cords, nodes, etc.)

Breathing & Style/Technique Balance

Breathing

- 68% reported breathing through both mouth and nose, the majority and this is the most efficient

Technique vs. Style

- Only 9% reported the style was the most important feature (a mariachi director and mariachi performer).
- About 91% preferred technique or a balance of technique & style as a goal.

Observation:

- 70% plan to sing for their entire life but few are studying voice. They may lose their voice sooner than expected.

Lifespan of Men Mariachi Singers

* Although Chente retired the stage in 2016, he still recorded albums in 2018, and 2020.

Name	Years of Life	Length of Career (Dates)	Length of Career (Total Years)	Cause of Death
Jorge Negrete	1911–1953	1930–1953	23 years	Hepatic cirrhosis Cause: hepatitis C
Pedro Infante	1917–1957	1939–1957	18 years	Airplane accident
Pedro Vargas	1906–1989	1928–1977	49 years	Heart Attack/ Diabetes
Javier Solis	1931–1966	1950–1966	16 years	Gallbladder surgery complications
Vicente Fernandez*	1940–2021	1952–2016	64 years	Guillain-Barre, pneumonia, previous surgeries



Lifespan of Women Mariachi Singers

Name	Years of Life	Length of Career (Dates)	Length of Career (Total Years)	Cause of Death
Lucha Reyes	1906–1944	1915 – 1943	28 years	Alcoholism
Irma Vila	1916–1993	1940 – 1951	11 years	Unsure
Amalia Mendoza	1923–2001	1938 – 1961	23 years	Pulmonary Illness
Lola Beltran	1932–1996	1946 – 1975	29 years	Pulmonary Embolism
Lucha Villa	1936–present	1960 – 1997	17 years	Liposuction surgery complications



Lifespan of Women Mariachi Singers

Name	Years of Life	Length of Career (Dates)	Length of Career (Total Years)	Cause of Death
Elena Sandoval	1940 – 2005	1960 – 2005	45 years	Unsure
Linda Ronstadt	1946 – present	1967 – 2011	44 years	(Suffers from Multiple Sclerosis)
Aida Cuevas	1963 – present	1975 – present	47 years	Continuing
Angela Aguilar	2003 – present	2012 – present	10 years	Continuing
Flor de Toloache (Mireya I. Ramos, Shae Fiol)	* Female mariachi duo	2008 – present	14 years	Continuing



Recommendations

- 1. More mariachi voice pedagogy in articles, workshops and webinars.
 - 2. Share vocal technique with mariachi directors. Also share Ranchera vocal style and pedagogy with voice teachers.
 - 3. Raise awareness of importance of voice training to protect the long-term careers of ranchera singers.
 - 4. Clarify confusion in terminology and create commonality of terms mariachi, ranchera, regional Mexican music, Mexican song.
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Recommendations

- 5. Masterclasses: Female Mariachi Fach & Information on Female Voice Pedagogy for mariachi.

Questions for the future:

- Two mariachi groups: Educational and Steady Gigging. How to reach?
 - How do we get Mexican Song on the radar of NATS/Classical voice teachers?
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Want to Learn More?

- Monday April 11, 2022 6pm Free Webinar!
 - Learn about MARIACHE: Primera Opera ranchera Mexicana, the world's first mariachi opera first written ca. 1928-1929 by pianist and composer, Maestro Antonio Gomezanda, along with upcoming webinar on Gomezanda art songs and rancheras.
 - Sign up here: <https://dr-juanita-ulloa.eventbrite.com>
 - Information: juanitavoicetrainer@gmail.com
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iGracias! Thank you

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