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MARIACHI LOS GALLEROS DE SAN ANTONIO

Posted by Isa Fernandez | May 4, 2019 |

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Nearly every anniversary or birthday, my family and I go to Pico de Gallo expressly for the mariachi music. We take cash, sometimes a song list and actively remind ourselves to make sure others in the restaurant have time to request songs as well. My parents are passionate about music, as I am and we see it as an up-close concert that is worth every penny. Which is why I was more than excited to tell my parents that I was interviewing Mariachi Los Galleros De San Antonio, the 10-member mariachi band famous for including Ballet Folklorico and other wonderful "Tradiciones Mexicanas" in their performances. The band has received international attention by producing exemplary music recognized by heads of state and musical royalty alike.

With the demand for mariachi music ongoing,

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Mas Quiero in late 2018. I spoke with founding members Miguel Guzman, Musical Director of the band and Director Ismael Alatorre at length about the origins of their music and about their latest cd.

Both Miguel and Ismael trace their beginnings to public school music programs. Miguel, a third generation San Antonian from his father's side with maternal roots in Jalisco, Mexico, was raised on the Westside of San Antonio by his grandparents. He began his mariachi career at Rhodes Middle School, continuing onto Linear High School where he took part in the mariachi programs offered. The high school mariachi band was so great they made it to State competitions in the 1980s, an early indicator of Miguel's success.

Ismael Alatorre, who plays vihuela in the band, noted that mariachi music is in his family roots, mentioning that it was a cousin who taught him initial guitar chords before he began playing under the guidance of his first mariachi teacher, John Nieto at Poe Middle School. After, he went to Highlands High School where he continued playing the vihuela. He loved playing so much, that he "just kept on from there...I love the instrument so much, that every night I would go home and practice five or six hours." Both Ismael and Miguel attributed remaining safe from the gang violence of the day to belonging to a mariachi groups (an example of this success is the fact that Ismael is also a police officer with

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District Mariachi, a band consisting of hand selected students from the SAISD District. They shared the same passion for mariachi music, and "the importance of family, keeping our roots alive," which is what they "are trying to do now," says Ismael. They formed Mariachi Los Galleros de San Antonio in 2006. Both gentlemen have family members in the band – Ismael's brother Gabriel plays trompeta and Miguel has two adult children – son Miguel Jr. and Antonio who are part of the current line-up. Miguel's wife, also a singer, is listed in the songwriting credits for called "El Huerfano" (track five on their self-titled first album), a song about "People (who) come from Mexico to work in the United States and they are looked down upon. They just come to work and make a living and the people that are from here don't look at them in a good way, and the people from over there (feel the same way)... They're not from here or from there, that's why they call them el 'Huerfano sin pais' – the orphan without a land." Being a part of a group helped Miguel to solidify self-identify, noting that as Mexican Americans, we have a unique identity – "the Anglos look at us as Mexican or Hispanic and the Mexicans look at us as "pochos" or, they're not real Mexicans, they're from over there," a theme captured in the song. The band credits their influences as 3rd Generation Mariachi Vargas, Los Camperos de Nati Cano, Rigoberto Alfaro and Los Hermanos Calderon. "We're trying to create something for students,



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trumpets, you need violins. We can sing in three-part harmony, four-part harmonies. We have classically trained violinists. We have a beautiful thing to offer. The arrangements that we are playing are not just the common ranchera, we have a little bit more modern, complex."

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This level of professionalism paid off with the release of their self-titled first album in 2007, which they gave to "our friends and whoever would listen, before Spotify, ten-eleven years ago to have that. There was a friend of ours who somehow gave it to one of the producers that was bringing in Placido Domingo," which garnered attention and helped the band audition and be selected to play with world-renowned international opera tenor Placido Domingo at the Alamodome in 2007 and the AT&T Center in 2010, accompanied by the San Antonio Symphony. The Domingo concerts helped Mariachi Los Galleros de San Antonio garner another notable performance in 2008, when the band was selected to perform at former First Daughter Jenna Bush's wedding. The invitation was ultra-secrective, with just a place, date and time given initially. The band has also played nationally at the NBC Today Show and at Jazz at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City, where jazz legend Wynton Marsalis serves as the artistic director and band leader.

The new cd La Flor Que Mas Quiero (dedicated to

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Tejano music productions – Jay Perez, Chente Barrera, David Lee Garza, and owned by Gilbert “Gibby” Velasquez and was recorded in increments from March-Oct 2018. Mariachi Los Galleros de San Antonio’s ten members are Miguel J. Guzmán (violin), Miguel Guzmán (violin), Antonio Guzmán (violin), Arturo Pasalagua (violin), Patrick Molina (violin), Noel Gamez (guitarrón), Ismael Alatorre (vihuela), Gustavo Solis (guitarra), Gabriel Alatorre (trompeta) and Sergio Martinez (trompeta).

Beyond the studio and performance venues, the band is “trying to create something for students through education. “It’s important because a lot of people come to us who want to learn how to play the music,” says Miguel. This has fueled another arm of the Mariachi Los Galleros de San Antonio business and education model – outreach to the community about mariachi education through an upcoming life-size mariachi mascot that is sure to be a hit with the public. Miguel, a guest lecturer at Texas State University and founder of the Mariachi Conservatory noted that pursuing the field of mariachi music is a viable and joyful career path, adding that it is growing in education centers everywhere, such as in the Rio Grande Valley where a program beginning this semester. Mariachi Los Galleros de San Antonio recently performed at the San Antonio Zoo commemorating the second birthday of hippopotamus Timothy, garnering national



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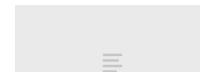
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Liz on May 6, 2019 at 6:09 pm

Article is good. My family loves Los Galleros.
Though the high school of Miguel was mis-spelled.
Correction Lanier full name Sidney Lanier High
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Jake on November 25, 2020 at 7:48 pm

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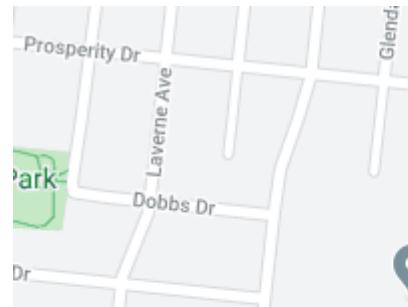
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