



DENVER CENTER FOR THE  
PERFORMING ARTS  
Theatre Company

# INSIDE OUT

A STUDY GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



# AMERICAN MARIACHI

# AMERICAN MARIACHI SYNOPSIS

“The violins soar and weep, the trumpets blare and caress; the armonia section beats a tight and intricate rhythm.”

Patricia Greathouse. *Mariachi*.  
Santa Fe: Gibbs Smith, 2009. p. 13.

It's the late 1970's somewhere in the West. Friends Lucha and Boli want to form an all-female mariachi band, but there are just a few things standing in their way. First, mariachi bands up to this point have been almost always a male bastion. Second, neither of them own any instruments and don't know how to play anything except a stereo. Third, there are family and parental stumbling blocks, such as Lucha's ailing mother, and the stringent objections of the men in their lives. Still, the two are determined to forge ahead as they hunt for bandmates, dodge disapproving relatives, and start learning to play mariachi instruments, they shoulder past the obstacles that stand in the way of their dream band's becoming a reality.



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### AMERICAN MARIACHI

By **José Cruz González**

Directed by **James Vásquez**

Produced in association with  
**The Old Globe**

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*American Mariachi* is the recipient of an  
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# THE PLAYWRIGHT — JOSÉ CRUZ GONZÁLEZ

José Cruz González's plays include *The Silk Serpent*, *Super Cow Girl and Mighty Miracle*, *Sunsets and Margaritas*, *The Heart's Desire*, *The Blue House*, *September Shoes*, *Harvest Moon*, *Salt and Pepper*, *Earth Songs*, *The Cloud Gatherer* and *Lily Plants a Garden*. His plays have been published by Dramatic Publishing, University of Texas Press, Smith and Kraus, Inc. and Playscripts, among others.

Mr. González has written for PAZ, the Emmy award nominated television series. He was a recipient of the 2004 TCG/Pew National Theatre Residency grant. In 1987 he was awarded a NEA/TCG Theatre Programs Residency for Playwrights.

He has served as a literary and theatre consultant for the National Endowment for the Arts Playwrights Residency, the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Conference, the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, California Arts Council and Wisconsin Arts Council.

Mr. González was awarded the 2012 Art Show

Fellowship by the Theatre for Young Americans/USA, 2010 Kennedy Center National Teaching Artist Grant, 2009 American Alliance for Theatre and Education Distinguished Book Award, and is a member of the College of Fellows of the American Theatre.

He earned an M.F.A. in Dance from the University of California, Irvine; an M.A. in Theatre from Arizona State University and a B.A. in U.S. History/Chicano studies from the University of California in San Diego.

He is a member of the Dramatist Guild of America and TYA/USA. He is an Associate Artist with the Cornerstone Theatre Company (CA) and Playwright in Residence with Childsplay (AZ).

<http://www.calstatethela.edu/academic/musictheatredance/josecruzgonzalez.php>

## INSTRUMENTS IN A MARIACHI ENSEMBLE

The instruments in a mariachi ensemble have changed through the years, but now the standard lineup includes one or more violins, guitars, vihuela, or tenor guitar, the bass Guitarrón, which is a large vihuela, and one or more trumpets. Ensembles once

included a small harp, but this is rarely used today since it can only play in a few keys .

Some contemporary mariachis have added a percussion section, which might include rattles, shakers, güiros and drums.

## MARIACHI SONG STYLES

Early mariachi music originated in eastern Mexico, but contemporary mariachi incorporates regional music from all over Mexico, Latin America, the Caribbean, the United States and Europe.

The most popular song styles performed by mariachis include Son, Jarabe, Ranchera, Corrido, Huapango, boleros, marches, waltzes, polkas, and *danzon*, a popular Cuban style.

"Son" is the most wide-spread folk music of Mexico. The roots of *son* are Andalusian Spanish gypsy songs, combined with Mexican indigenous elements, often with an African beat. The "Zapoteado" (foot stomping) is a popular dance associated with *son*. The song "La Negra", called the mariachi national anthem, is perhaps the most well known of the *sons*.

The "Jarabe" has been the official national dance of Mexico since 1924. The best known of these is the "Jarabe Tapatio", known in the U. S. as the Mexican

Hat Dance. The Jarabe is a medley of spirited courtship dances.

The "Ranchera" is a sentimental Mexican country-style song. An example is "Cielito Lindo", (Lovely Sweetheart). Ranchera songs have been popular in Mexican movies since the 1940s and are perhaps the most widely performed genre in the mariachi repertoire.

The "Corrido" is a musical way of passing along news and legends in a narrative, epic form. In the era before newspapers, these songs gave accounts of significant people and events. In Mexico, corridos told stories of heroes, bandits and regional doings — in short, anything newsworthy.

The Huapango is a dance with a complex syncopated, off-beat rhythm. Huapangos showcase improvisational and virtuosic violin playing.

Other song forms played by mariachis include boleros, marches, waltzes, polkas and the *danzon*.

# THE HISTORY OF MARIACHI MUSIC

Rural Mexican music grew out of Mesoamerican, European and African roots. It developed in the villages of western Mexico. Provincial musicians would travel from village to village, dressed in peasant clothing, sleeping on the ground and performing music for the villagers. Far-flung gatherings and festivals were a good place to meet other musicians, and learn new tunes and styles. In this way, songs passed from person to person and village to village across the country, acquiring distinct regional and individual flavors as it went along.

The European influence came with the Spanish invasion of Mexico in 1519 by Cortez. Musicians among the soldiers entertained the troops, singing and playing the harp and Spanish vihuela. As the army made its way to Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec empire, the musicians fascinated the indigenous folk in their path. This military music, along with songs of the Franciscan missionaries, mixed with indigenous ceremonies, became an integral part of life for the native peoples of New Spain.

The Spanish brought African and Portuguese slaves to work their mines and sugar fields in Mexico. As many as 6000 Africans arrived at the port of Vera Cruz on slave ships during the Colonial period,

and with them the rhythms and musical practices of western Africa. Mexican peoples began to adopt elements of African rhythms into their own musical melting pot.

Later, German music came into Mexico along with the German military and political presence, which introduced European forms such as marches, polkas, schottisches and other dances, which were quickly absorbed by Mexican musicians.

While mariachi music began as the music of country people, the music began to migrate into larger towns and cities, including the capitol, Mexico City, beginning in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1934, a popular group called Mariachi Vargas was invited to play at the inauguration of populist President Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, who was interested in fostering native cultures of Mexico. Catching the President's enthusiasm, urban sophisticates took the mariachi folk music to their hearts and made it the toast of the town. This was the beginning of mariachi's being embraced nationally, and led to the music becoming popular everywhere, on recordings, on the radio and in film, as well as cultural and popular events of all descriptions.

<http://www.Mariachi.org/history.html>

## THE MARIACHI UNIFORM

The *traje de charro de gala* (roughly, “fancy cowboy outfit”) typifies mariachi dress. In colorful matching outfits, today's *trajes* flaunt style and flash, modeled on clothing styles originally worn by well-to-do ranchers and cowboys.

A simple outfit might start at around \$100 for a factory made suit, yet can command thousands for a tailor-made three-piece suede or chamois suit with hand embroidery and silver buttons. The hats are outsized straw sombreros or, for the well-to-do, ones made of rabbit felt with sequins and embroidery. The belts are often custom engraved with the mariachi group's name. Public markets and venues such as the Libertad Market in Guadalajara are treasure troves of mariachi and folklore apparel.

The traditional mariachi outfit consists of straight cut pants adorned with silver buttons (botonaduras), matching chueco (vest), the chamarra (short jacket) and the mono (a fluffy bow tie). The boots are flat heeled designed to be more comfortable for standing in for a long concert, than the traditional two-to-three-inch heel. The complete mariachi outfit is known as the “traje de charro” or cowboy suit.

<http://www.sigale.com/travel/departures/article/The-hunt-for-a-mariachi-suit-in-East-L-A-723222.php>

Greathouse, Patricia. Mariachi. Santa Fe: Gibbs-Smith, 2009.

# FAMOUS MARIACHI ARTISTS

**Miguel Martinez** (1921—), known as the greatest Mariachi trumpeter, studied classical technique. He adored the music of Tommy Dorsey, Stan Kenton and Glenn Miller. Around 1936, he began playing trumpet with Mariachi Vargas. When he retired in 1960, he began composing, influenced by the works of John Phillip Sousa.

**Ruben Fuentes** (1925—) joined Mariachi Vargas in 1944 as a young violinist. He began arranging music found in traditional mariachi patterns, and experimented with adding instruments such as the flute, drums and the electric organ. He arranged the mariachi national anthem “Son de la Negra” for the group.

**Roberto Alfaro** (1934—) began playing guitar at age three. At 25, he joined Mariachi Vargas. In 1970, he left the group to become an arranger, a record producer, and a television producer.

**Mariachi Vargas** was formed in the 1930s, and developed the now-classic sound played by nearly all other mariachis. The Vargas family has played and promoted mariachi music for nearly five generations.

Although mariachis have been traditionally all-male, there have been a few female pioneers in the field. In 1972, **Rebecca Gonzales** became the first

woman to break into professional mariachi in the United States. She played the violin, and took voice lessons in order to become a vocalist. In 1983 she joined Mariachi Cobre and became a role model for all young Mexican women.

**Laura Sobrino** of Mariachi Sol de Mexico, learned violin in California public schools, and began playing mariachi in college in 1975. She performed with Sol de Mexico even while pregnant. In 1993 she became director of a mixed-gender group called Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles.

**Cindy Shea**, the founder and director of Mariachi Divas, is a blond, blue-eyed trumpeter. In 1999, she originated the idea of blending jazz with tropical rhythms.

Women who have succeeded in the mariachi field have said that they needed to be tougher, more determined, and possibly more talented than their male counterparts to compete for music jobs. The history of women’s success in mariachi appears to parallel to their progress toward equality in other areas.

Greathouse, Patricia. *Mariachi*. Santa Fe: Gibbs Smith, 2009.

# THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

BOLI: It's the 70's, man. Hello, news flash.  
Women's Lib!

*American Mariachi*, p. 9.

The women's liberation movement was a collective struggle arising originally in the 1960s and 1970s. The movement aimed to free women from oppression and male supremacy.

The movement comprised women's liberation groups, advocacy, protests, feminist theory and a variety of diverse individual and group actions on behalf of women and their freedom. Books, magazines, lectures and public media appearances advanced the ideas of the movement's leading voices. The term "Women's Liberation" was created as a nod to other liberation and freedom movements of the time.

The term "liberation" was intended to resonate not only with independence from oppression and

male supremacy, but to create greater solidarity among women seeking independence, and ending oppression for women collectively. It was often held in contrast to individualistic feminism. Individuals and groups were loosely tied together by shared ideas.

Even within the movement, women's groups held divergent beliefs about organizing tactics and whether working within the male-dominated establishment could effectively bring about desired change.

The term "women's lib" was a dismissive phrase used largely by those who opposed the movement, as a way of minimizing, belittling and making a joke of it.

<http://www.thoughts.com/womens-liberation—movement> 3526926

# ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Alzheimer's disease is type of dementia that causes problems with memory, thinking and behavior. Symptoms usually develop slowly and get worse over time, becoming severe enough to interfere with daily tasks. Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia, a general term for memory loss and other cognitive abilities serious enough to interfere with daily life.

The most common early symptom of the disease is difficulty remembering newly learned information. Just like the rest of our bodies, our brains change as we age. Most of us eventually notice some slowed thinking and occasional problems with remembering certain things. However, serious memory loss, confusion and major changes in the way our minds work may be a sign that brain cells are failing.

The most common early symptom of Alzheimer's is difficulty remembering newly learned information, since the disease changes parts of the brain that affect learning. Two abnormal structures called plaques and tangles, deposits of protein, build up

in the spaces between nerve cells and damage and kill them. As the disease advances through the brain, it can cause more severe symptoms such as disorientation, confusion, unfounded suspicions about family, friends or caregivers or difficulty speaking, swallowing or walking.

People with memory loss or other possible signs of Alzheimer's may find it hard to recognize that they have a problem. Signs of dementia may be more obvious to family members or friends. Anyone experiencing dementia-like symptoms should see a doctor as soon as possible. At present, there's no cure for Alzheimer's, but treatments for symptoms can temporarily slow the worsening of the disease and improve the quality of life. Today, there is a worldwide effort underway to find better ways to treat the disease and prevent it from developing.

<http://alz.org/alzheimers.disease-what-is-alzheimers-asap>

# ALZHEIMER'S: THE HEALING POWER OF MUSIC

Music therapists who work with Alzheimer's patients describe seeing them "wake up" when they hear the sounds of beloved and familiar music. Music can improve the mood of people with neurological diseases. It can boost cognitive skills and reduce the need for antipsychotic drugs. After months or even years of not speaking at all, patients exposed to music therapy may begin to talk again, become more social and seem more engaged with their surroundings. Some begin to remember names long forgotten. Some even do what Alzheimer's patients typically cannot do as their symptoms worsen — they remember who they are.

Neurologist Oliver Sacks writes in his book *Musicophilia* that for Alzheimer's patients, music can be very much like medicine. Music is no luxury to them, but a necessity, and it can have a power beyond anything else to restore them to themselves, and to others, at least for a while.

According to estimates, more than 5 million people in the U. S. have Alzheimer's, a disease for

which there is at present no cure. One in eight Baby Boomers will get the disease, according to estimates. About 15 million family members in the U.S. are locked into what can become a heartbreaking routine of caring for a loved one or family member with whom they can't communicate. For many patients, music can be an important part of easing their suffering. Researchers are finding new ways to use music as part of the treatment of dementia.

Hospitals around the country are using music therapy as a way to ease a patient's pain, lower blood pressure, and reduce anxiety and depression, allowing them to heal faster from these ancillary conditions. Hospitals are becoming more aware of the healing benefits of music.

(health/drugs-supplements/info-2014/antipsychotics-overprescribed.htm). <https://www.aarp.org/health/brain-health/info-2015/music-therapy-for-alzheimers.html>

<http://www.virtuesforlife-healing-power-of-music>

# STUDY QUESTIONS

## Pre-Performance Questions

1. What are the responsibilities of a child to their parents? Does this change as the child ages? Should the child's dreams be placed on hold to care for ailing family member?
2. Define "machismo." How does the patriarchal hierarchy manifest in different cultures? Where are we seeing "machismo" ideals showing up in modern day society?

## Post-Performance Questions

1. How does the live music accentuate the play?
2. How are familial relationships — Lucha's family, Boli's family and Soyla's family — depicted in the play?
3. Why does Lucha want to start a female mariachi band? Where do Lucha and Boli look for other members of the band? What are the qualifications to join their band?
4. What obstacles does Lucha's Mariachi band face? Is the band successful at overcoming these obstacles? If so, how do they do it?
5. How would you describe Amalia? What struggle is she facing? How do the other family members react to her struggle?
6. What is the purpose of the character Tia Carmen? How does this character inform the storytelling of the play?
7. How do the flashbacks help propel the play forward?
8. How would you describe the women's feelings about being in a mariachi band? How would you describe how the men feel about the women being in a mariachi band? Do any of these attitudes change by the end of the play?
9. How does Mino assist Lucha and the mariachi band? How does Mino fit into the lives of the characters in the play?
10. How does "machismo" show itself in the play? How do the characters react to it?



# ACTIVITIES

## Write a *Corrido*

Materials: pen and paper

A *corrido* is a type of song that tells a story. The stories within *corridos* can be historical, about everyday life, or based in imagination and fiction.

For this exercise, students will write their own *corrido*. The structure to be used will be 9 stanzas of 4 lines each. Each line will have between 7 to 10 syllables. The rhyming scheme will be ABCB.

1. Select a subject for the lyrics of your *corrido*. Will the lyrics tell the story about an event from your imagination, or an historical figure or event, or will the lyrics describe an everyday event?
2. The first stanza should provide the song's setting. Pay particular attention to when and where the story of the song takes place.
3. Write the next stanzas and continue writing the *corrido* until you reach the end of the story.
4. Share your *corrido* with the rest of the class.

Discuss the effectiveness of the *corridoes*. Were the lyricists able to establish a sense of place and then tell a story within the structure of the *corrido*? What was easy and what was difficult about composing your *corrido*?

Colorado PG: Demonstrate the processes of development of musical literature from rehearsal to performance, exhibiting appropriate interpersonal and expressive skills, both individually and within ensembles.

Colorado PG: Deliver organized and effective oral presentations for diverse audiences and varied purposes.

*continued on page 10*

## Magic Realistic Newspaper Writing

Materials: Newspapers, pen and paper

Magical Realism can be defined as a literary style associated especially with Latin America that incorporates fantastic or mythical elements into otherwise realistic fiction. In theatre, magic realism is only perceived as magic by the audience. The characters in the play have to treat the situation as real. For this exercise, students will take a newspaper article and reshape the article's events toward magical realism.

1. Select a newspaper article. The article can be from any section of the newspaper including the sports page. Read the article and make some notes about the event that has happened and the characters that were involved.
2. Paraphrase the article into three parts; a beginning, middle, and end.
3. To reshape the article:
  - a. Keep the opening paragraph of the article as written by the journalist.
  - b. Within the second paragraph, give the article's characters some magical powers or create a moment where something fantastical happens within the article's main event. Work to keep the article's integrity (or author's voice) within your rewrite.
4. Keep the ending paragraph of the article as written by the journalist.
5. Share the new article with your magic realistic moments. To the rest of the class.

Discuss how the events in the article changed. Did the characters and the situation stay believable even with your addition of magical realism elements? In what ways does magical realism provide a deeper or different kind of understanding about the original article's events or characters? How do fact and fiction merge to create a new landscape that speaks to different perceptions?

Colorado PG: Evaluate how an author uses words, to create mental imagery, suggest mood, and set tone.

Colorado PG: Effectively use content-specific language, style, tone and text structure to compose or adapt writing for different audiences and purposes.

# PERSPECTIVES

**Make your experience unforgettable when you join us for one of these insightful, educational events:**

## Creative Team Perspectives

**Jan 26 | 6:00pm | The Jones**

Get an exclusive insider's perspective before the show when you join us for a free, professionally-moderated discussion with the creative team.

## Cast Perspectives

**Feb 3 | 1:30pm**

Join a fun and engaging discussion with the actors after the matinee.

## Perspectives: Higher Education Advisory Council

**Feb 8 | 6:30pm**

Participate in a topical discussion led by members of our academic community after the performance.

## Perspectives: Theatre & Theology

**Feb 13 | 6:30pm**

Join Pastor Dan Bollman of the Rocky Mountain Evangelical Lutheran Synod after the performance to examine each show through a theological lens.

## Colorado New Play Summit

**Feb 17 - 18 & 23 - 25**

*American Mariachi* is a part of the 13th Annual Colorado New Play Summit, a two-weekend celebration and showcase of new plays and playwrights. To learn more about the Summit's four new play readings, three world premieres, Playwrights' Slam and other events, visit [denvercenter.org/summit](http://denvercenter.org/summit). Reading tickets start at just \$10 and discounted all-inclusive packages are available.

# WANT TO KNOW MORE?

## The Denver Public Library recommends: Read!

*This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa

*This Bridge Called My Back* is a potent collection of personal essays, interviews, poetry, and visual art created by women of color. Originally published in 1981, this anthology by Black, Latina, Asian, and Native American women was the first to express loudly and bilingually that not all women share the same experiences. Exploring the challenges at the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality, *This Bridge* is a rallying cry for all feminists, one which rebelliously redefines the meaning of sisterhood. The most recent edition of *This Bridge Called My Back* continues to be a visceral and powerful celebration of the varied lives of women of color.

## Watch!

*Romantico* (2007)

*Romantico* is Mark Becker's documentary portrait of Carmelo Muñoz, a professional mariachi musician struggling to balance his dreams with reality. Carmelo plays nightly for tips at local Mexican restaurants, traveling on foot with his guitar to get between gigs. An undocumented immigrant, Carmelo hasn't seen his family in more than a year but dutifully sends money back home to help support them. Hearing of his mother's deteriorating health, he returns to Mexico despite knowing that he may not survive a future border crossing back into America.

## Listen!

*A Mi Manera* by Mariachi Divas de Cindy Shea

Who said women can never be mariachis? Mariachi Divas, the all-lady mariachi band from Los Angeles have been proving themselves and expanding the scope of Mariachi music since 1999. Lead by trumpeter Cindy Shea, Mariachi Divas have been nominated for seven Grammy Awards, and serve as the official Mariachi band for the Disneyland resort. *A Mi Manera*, their 2014 Grammy Award winning album, is a true showcase of their talent, with original pieces, classic love songs, and a great cover of Sinatra's My Way, performed in both English and Spanish.

## Download!

*Still Alice* by Lisa Genova (eBook)

Where *American Mariachi* depicts the caretakers' heartbreak of looking after a family member who is forgetting their past and loved ones, Lisa Genova's novel, *Still Alice* details living with Alzheimer's from the perspective of a woman afflicted.

This is the devastating insider's view of what it's like to be the one losing memories and one's sense of self. *Still Alice* offers detailed descriptions of the neuroscience of Alzheimer's and treatment options balanced with the emotional and subjective life of someone living with the disease.



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