Mariachi Extravaganza concert galvanizes enthusiastic crowd

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The beauty and the versatility of mariachi music were amply displayed Saturday night at Municipal Auditorium.

Despite early evening showers, an enthusiastic audience roared approval at almost a dozen top amateur and professional mariachi troupes.

The concert capped the three-day Mariachi Extravaganza sponsored by Ford Lincoln Mercury.

"This is a concert that touches the heart through the songs about love," said Steve Hammond, Lincoln Mercury’s Southwest marketing manager. He called the event a "first-class concert experience ... and a beautiful celebration of family, culture and tradition."

The highlight, of course, was Mexico’s world famous Mariachi Vargas de Tecaliitlan, whose vocal power and superb musicianship never fails to ignite audience.

Yet, the various high school and university groups, which had won competitions earlier in the day created sparks of their own with an amazing musical dexterity and repertoire.

Laredo-based Mariachi Internacional de Texas A&M University and Edinburg-based UT Pan Am Mariachi tied for first place at the university level. It was easy to see why as both featured large groups of 18 members, each with six violins and a harp.

Mariachi Internacional galvanized the fans with a sizzling workout on a complicated medley that included "Mexico Rico," "Tres Huastecos" and "Villa Huapango."

UT Pan Am got the crowd on its feet with its on-fire rendition of the "Popurrí Huasteco" which featured "La Patera," "Almairia Manuelillas," and "El Panuelo."

From El Paso, the professional group Los Arrieros was no less impressive with inventive arrangements of popular tunes such as "Maria Greyer's "Jarana," performed as a tango, and Son by Porrín’s "A Puro Dolor," revolved as a ranchera with three-part vocal harmonies.

Saturday’s show included Mariachi Music Hall of Fame induction ceremonies for local mariachi pioneer Benjamin Valdez. He was honored for founding the local trio Los Conquistadores in the late 1940s, and for being among the first mariachi instructors in the area. He was presented with the Ruben Puentes Award.

Earlier Saturday and Friday several dozen high school and university groups participated in workshops and in vocal and group competitions.

The Extravaganza concludes at 8 a.m. today with a Mariachi Mass at San Fernando Cathedral.