

It's Mariachi Time ¡Si Señor!

By Cynthia Muñoz

Mariachis frequent the River Walk and are known to perform at churches, weddings, funerals, birthday celebrations and Mexican restaurants throughout the Alamo City. Hundreds of mariachi musicians live and work in San Antonio and contribute significantly to the city's cultural uniqueness.

That is why each year San Antonio serves as host to the Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza, known as the largest mariachi music festival of its kind in the U.S. This extraordinary music event celebrates more than 100 years of mariachi music tradition during seven days of entertaining, educational and culturally enriching concerts, art exhibits and mariachi serenades on the River Walk. The festival begins with a mariachi Mass at the historic San Jose Mission and continues throughout the week with nearly a dozen mariachi-related events. The extravaganza culminates with a concert featuring the best mariachis in the world performing with a symphony at the San Antonio Municipal Auditorium.

The Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza kicks off with a mariachi Mass at noon Sunday, Nov. 30, at San Jose Mission. The mission serves as home to the mariachi choir that has performed weekly Masses for more than 35 years. Participants of the Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza join the San Jose Mission mariachi choir during the official kick-off of the Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza.

The Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza continues with "Noche de Arte" on Tuesday, Dec. 2, at the Centro Cultural Aztlán. The mariachi-themed art exhibit features the works of Angel Rodríguez, Jose Segura, David Blancas, Diego Martínez Durón, Paul Castillanos, Angelica Gomez, Jacinto Guevara, Jose Lopez, Annie Marie Gomez and Feliciano Leon, among others. San Antonio's favorite all-female Mariachi Las Alteñas will provide entertainment during an opening reception at 5:30 p.m.

Two members of the world-renowned México City-based Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán will perform on Wednesday, Dec. 3, at the Instituto Cultural de México. This event gives local fans an opportunity to see members of Mariachi Vargas in an intimate setting. The presentation starts at 7 p.m.

More than 1,000 mariachi musicians representing nearly 50 student-based mariachi groups will be in San Antonio as part of the Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza. Get a glimpse of Texas' finest talent from Dallas, Houston, the Rio Grande Valley and San Antonio and watch the groups perform, with thousands of Christmas lights, the River Walk and a gigantic Christmas tree as the background setting starting at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 4, at the Rivercenter Mall lagoon.

Highlighting the seven-day Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza is a concert featuring Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán. Mariachi Vargas has performed for five generations and 111 years throughout the world. The group showcases 12 of the best artists in all of Latin America who perform traditional mariachi songs, huapangos, boleros, rancheras, romantic ballads and classical selections utilizing traditional mariachi instruments such as the violin, trumpet, harp, guitarrón, vihuela and guitar. Mariachi Vargas mesmerizes audiences throughout the world with their talent, musical arrangements, phenomenal voices and traditional performance style. They set the standard for what mariachi music is today with more than 75 CDs recorded. Mariachi Vargas has performed with numerous American and Mexican singers such as Linda Ronstadt, Vikki Carr, Plácido Domingo and Luis Miguel and will have performed in 20 U.S. cities by the end of 2008. Mariachi Vargas adds a whole new dimension to the mariachi musical genre by combining mariachi folklore music with symphony and opera styles.

The 70-piece UTSA Symphony Orchestra will accompany Mariachi Vargas during a few selections at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 6, at Municipal Auditorium. Tickets, available through Ticketmaster, start at \$20.

Go to mariachimusic.com for a complete schedule of events and ticket information, or call 225-3353.

Photo: Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán courtesy of MPR, LLC

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