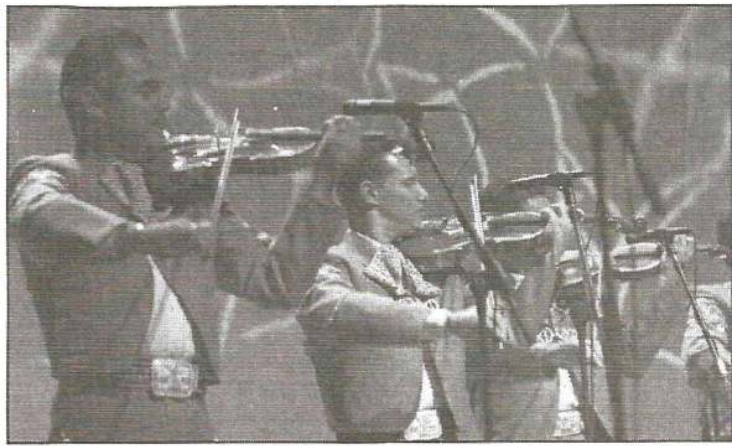


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COURTESY PHOTO

Mariachi Vargas

Mariachi Vargas returns to the Valley

BY DAVID L. TIJERINA
THE MONITOR

MARIACHI VARGAS
DE TECALITLÁN

Not many groups have the staying power and tradition of *El Mejor Mariachi Del Mundo*, Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán. The group is now in its 108th year, performing with a fifth generation of musicians who continue to bring *sones*, *huapangos*, *románticos* and *rancheras* to audiences worldwide.

Currently, the group is comprised of six violinists, two trumpeters and one player each for the vihuela, harp, guitar and guitarrón. It has been under the direction of Maestro Rubén Fuentes for 60 years and Jose "Pepe" Martínez.

"The tradition that Mariachi Vargas has is playing true mariachi," Martínez said.

On rare occasions the group will stray from performing or recording songs based on Mexican folklore, such as its recent adaptation of Italian opera tenor Andrea Bocelli's "*Por Ti Volaré*" ("I'll fly for You"), but the song is world renowned and was translated into Spanish.

That song and others it has adapted from Spain and interpreted into mariachi styles have enabled it to continue to be world renowned, Martínez said.

Mariachi Vargas has a cross-generational appeal. At the group's concerts it's normal to see a great-grandmother, grandmother, mother and child seated together, he said.

Aside from the enduring

WHEN: Doors open at 6 p.m. Saturday
WHERE: McAllen Civic Center, 1300 S. 10th St., McAllen
COST: \$24, \$36, \$46, \$57 and \$107
INFO: Call (956) 688-3400

influence of Fuentes, who became a member of the group when he was in his 20s, what helps it maintain the mariachi tradition and allows it to still appeal to younger audiences, is the wide age range of its members.

Frederico Torres, the group's trumpet player and coordinator is 67, and Martínez is 65. The youngest members of the group are violinists Steven Sandoval and Alberto Alfaro, both 30, Martínez said.

The group began performing with symphonies 22 years ago and audiences have begun to accept the merging of the two genres, said coordinator and trumpet player Frederico Torres.

Special guest performances at the concert include Gerardo Lopez and Vanessa del Fierro, finalists from the national television competition *Nuevas Voces de América*. The University of Texas Pan-American's Mariachi Femenil, Roma High School's Mariachi Nuevo Santander, Zapata High School's Mariachi Halcon, Edinburg High School's Primer Orgullo Mariachi, La Joya High School's Mariachi Los Coyotes and the Dancentre of Edinburg are also scheduled to perform.