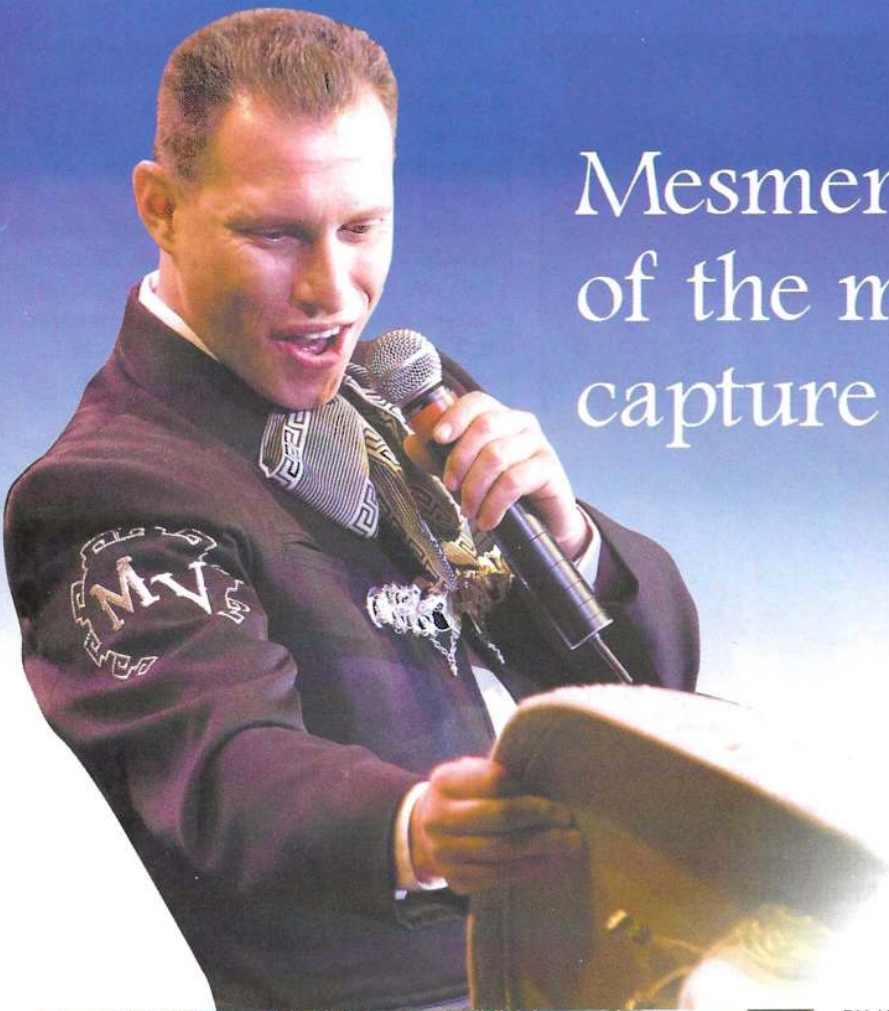


Mesmerizing melody of the mariachi to capture Alamo City



BY JOHN G. BLOODSWORTH

San Antonio will host nearly 15,000 mariachi musicians, vocalists and aficionados Nov. 15-22 for the 15th Annual Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza. The eight-day mariachi music festival, the largest and longest running event of its kind in Texas, celebrates over 100 years of mariachi music tradition and includes mariachi group and vocal competitions, art exhibits, workshops and a concert featuring “el mejor mariachi del mundo” Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, Nov. 21 at the Municipal Auditorium.

The melodic serenade of the mariachi is steeped in rich, cultural history. According to Sylvia Gonzalez’s book “Mexico, The Meeting of Two Cultures” (Higgins and Associates, 1991), “Prior to the arrival of Cortes, the music of Mexico, played with rattles, drums, reed and clay flutes, and conch-shell horns, was an integral part of religious celebrations. Quickly, however, as Christianity spread, these instruments gave way to instruments imported by the Spanish: violins, guitars and harps, brass horns, and woodwinds.”

The origin of the word “mariachi” is sometimes said to be a variation of the French word for marriage and comes from the time in the 19th century when Maximilian, a Frenchman, was Emperor of Mexico. According to this myth, the mariachi was named by



**Top: Steeven Sandoval, vocalist and violinist for Mariachi Vargas.
Bottom: The world-renowned Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán.**

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the French after the celebration with which it was most commonly associated.

Another theory is that it comes from the name of the wood used to make the platform on which the performers danced to the music of the village musicians.

But no matter what the source, mariachi delivers one of the most vibrant and engaging musical performances to be found south or north of the border.

Headlining this year's celebration will be Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, a 13-piece group comprised of the best musicians and vocalists from throughout the world. They have performed to sold-out audiences in 20 U.S. cities this year and recorded more than 75 CDs since 1987. The world-renowned Mexico City-based Mariachi Vargas celebrates 112 years of existence this year.

Beginning Sunday, Nov. 15, an opening Mariachi Mass will be held at the historic Mission San Jose. Known as the "Queen of the Missions," it is the largest of the Spanish colonial missions in San Antonio. The mass will be held at noon and is free and open to the public. Plan to arrive early as this is a very well attended event.



Steeven Sandoval (left) and Gustavo Alvarado of Mariachi Vargas at the 2008 Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza Concert at Municipal Auditorium.

That afternoon at 3 p.m., Serenade to San Antonio will be held at the Charlene McCombs Theatre featuring world-renowned Puerto Rican tenor Antonio Barasorda and San Antonio Mariachi Los Galleros, among others.

Spend an evening with two members of Mariachi Vargas as part of Noche de Cultural where two talented performers take the stage in an intimate showcase of extraordinary talent. Free and open to the public, it will be held on Wednesday, Nov. 18 at 7 p.m. in HemisFair Plaza's Instituto de Mexico.

Also free and open to the public, Serenata Del Rio takes place on Thursday, Nov. 17 at 5:30 p.m. on Rivercenter mall's lagoon stage. Ten to 15 mariachi groups will give an open-air concert on the banks of the beautiful San Antonio River.

Breakfast a la Mariachi, Sunday, Nov. 21 from 10 a.m.-noon, welcomes mariachi-music aficionados to Estela's Mexican Restaurant to enjoy live mariachi music over a traditional Mexican breakfast.

Visit www.mariachimusic.com for a complete schedule of events.

Tickets are available for purchase through Ticketmaster.com.

For more information, call (210) 225-3353.

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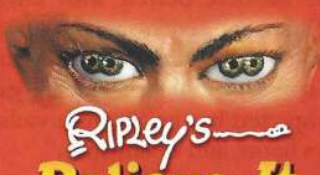
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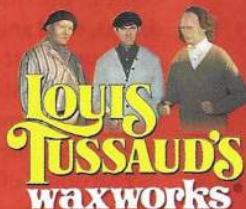
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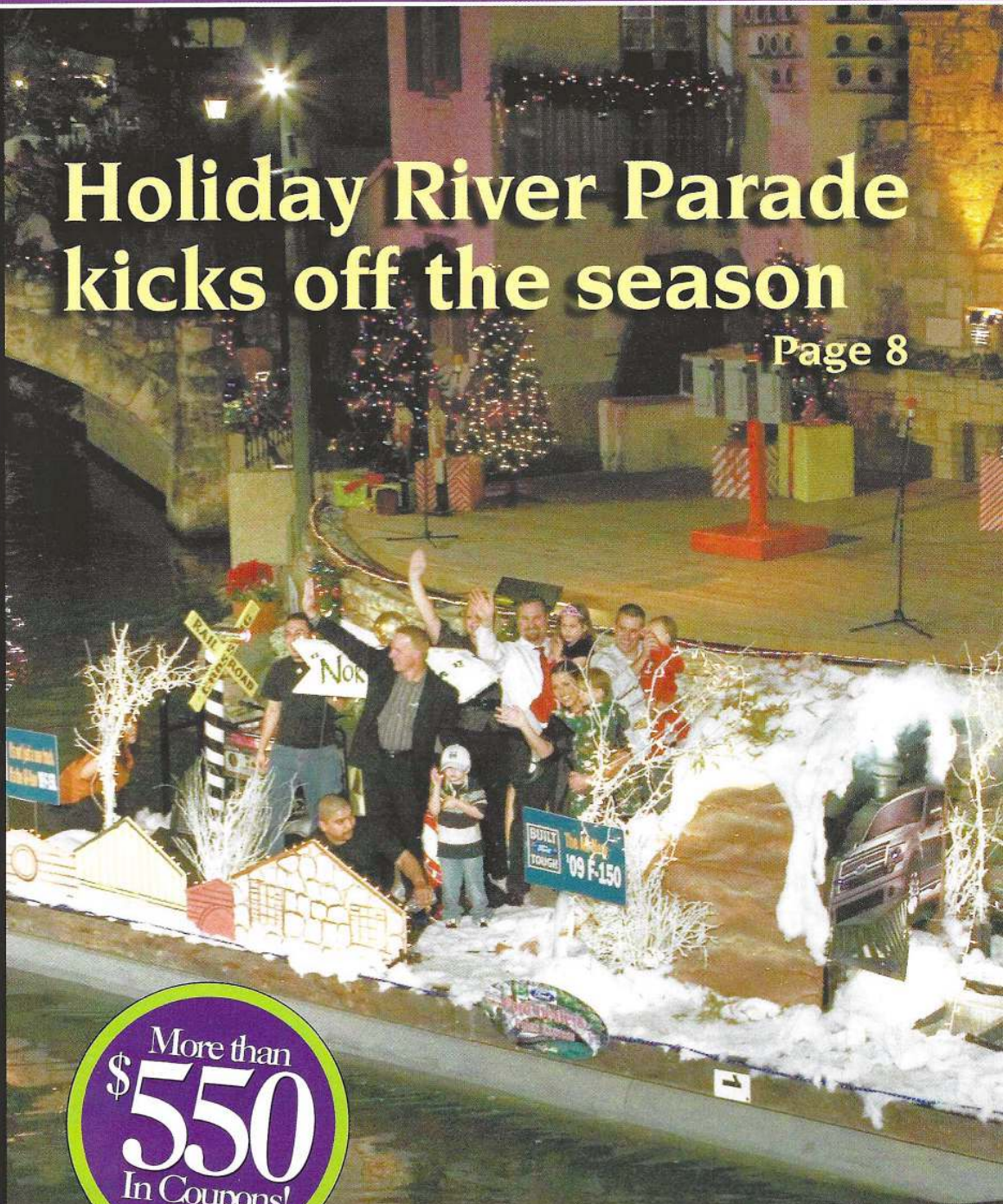
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