

MARIACHI AGUILAS DE CHAPALA

Mariachi Music from the Mexican state of Jalisco, recorded in Chapala, Jalisco,
with notes on Mariachi Music by Charles M. Bogert and Martha R. Bogert
Folkways Records FW 8870

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1682
M332
M332
1960

MUSIC LP

MARIACHI AGUILAS DE CHAPALA

Atotonilco
Las Olas
La Negra
Jarabe Tapatío
La Bamba
Chapala
Tecalitlán
La Adelita
Las Bicicletas
Ojos Tapatíos
Ay, Jalisco No Te Rajes!
Las Mañanitas
El Carretero Se Va

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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MARIACHI AGUILAS DE CHAPALA

notes by Charles & Martha Bogert



The MARIACHI AGUILAS DE CHAPALA, with their instruments, two trumpets, three violins, one guitarron, one guitarra de golpe, and three guitarras.

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The mariachi band may be no more typical of Mexico than the sahuaro cactus is typical of the American deserts. Nevertheless, the mariachi is now as prominent in Mexican culture as the giant cactus is in the desert landscapes of Arizona and Sonora. Even those unacquainted with the term associate the music of the mariachi with Mexico much as they associate the bagpipe with the Scottish Highlander. Perhaps because the mariachis have become a symbol of Mexico, there is a tendency to take them for granted. Numerous excellent books describe Mexico, its breath-taking scenery, its economic problems, its politics, the charm of the Mexican people, or their contributions to literature and art. But few authors say anything about the music, a part of Mexican life as vital and as deeply rooted as its art, its architecture, or even the people themselves.

The origin of the word, mariachi, is obscure. Most authorities agree that it dates from the brief reign of Maximilian who started the practice of hiring the strolling folk orchestra, the Orquesta Típica, to perform at weddings. Quite plausibly the French word, mariage, given the Spanish pronunciation, could become mariachi. The correct use of the word is not so easily discovered. Authors writing in English use the word as an adjective ("mariachi band," for example) or as a noun, either in the singular or the plural, and with or without the "s" when they speak of more than one band or more than one of the musicians. The group may be referred to as a mariachi or as mariachis, and the individual player may be called a mariachi. According to Slonimsky it also refers to the music played by the mariachi. Members of a mariachi group may refer to other members as "chamacos mariachis," but the group itself is always spoken of in the singular, as the MARIACHI AGUILAS DE CHAPALA in the case of those on the accompanying record.

An Orquesta Típica gave a concert in Mexico City at least as early as 1884, and the first verified performance of a mariachi was in 1907, when an ensemble of eight played for Elihu Root. It is virtually impossible to ascertain when the Orquesta Típica came into being. Indian music with its flutes and drums was considered pagan and sinful by the Spaniards, who did their best to eliminate the indigenous music or replace it with music of their own culture. Mexican musicians, thus forcibly unemployed, were perhaps eager to learn how to use and to manufacture the Spanish stringed instruments, with which they later celebrated the festivals of the new religion.

By the 18th century melodies of greater variety that were also more secular in nature arrived from Europe. Local folk orchestras, which usually consisted of violins, guitars, and a harp, took these tunes and by some musical alchemy made them peculiarly their own--an ability shared by the modern mariachi. The concert of Mexican music, arranged and conducted by Carlos Chavez, at the Museum of Modern Art in May, 1940, was essentially a distillation of several centuries of this distinctive music. The introduction written by Carlos Chavez and the concert notes furnished by Herbert Weinstock stand as one of the better historical references.

Not so many years ago almost every village in Mexico supported a brass band or a small orchestra, sometimes both. Today much instrumental groups are largely confined to cities and

the more prosperous towns. In many villages the bandstand in the center of the plaza has the neglected air of an unused edifice, which leads one to suspect that the sole source of music is now the ubiquitous loud-speaker. Before the advent of these unfortunate but less expensive substitutes for the local musician, each region had its own folk-music rather than the homogenized product of the radio station.

Another contributor to the decline of Mexican folk-music is the tourist, especially the American. Too often he limits the musicians' repertoire by insisting on hearing only the pieces he already knows or has heard in the United States. Quintanilla observes that "Mexican songs have been so warmly received they are in danger of being naturalized." If this trend continues, songs purely local in character may fade from the scene. The recent upsurge of interest in folk-music in the United States can scarcely fail to aid in the salvation of Mexican songs as well as the musicians who spurn the regimentation of the radio and its exotic influences.

The mariachi originated in Jalisco as the strolling orchestra, but its popularity spread rapidly to the neighboring states of Colima and Nayarit. Instead of the harp, the mariachi preferred the louder trumpet or clarinet, usually the former, which they added to the usual violins and guitars, including the much larger instrument with the bulging back called a guitarrón, or its diminutive counterpart, the vihuela, and the guitarra de golpe. Frances Toor believes it was not until the early 1930's that a few mariachis went to Mexico City, where they fared so well that others inevitably followed.

In this relatively short time mariachis and their music have become as familiar as the broad-brimmed hat of the country Mexican or paisano, although the costume of the mariachi is patterned after that of the charro, the counterpart of the American rodeo cowboy. Motion pictures, and even television in recent years, have done to the mariachi what these media helped to do for the cowboy in the United States. Not unlike the cowboy, the typical mariachi wears his elaborate costume only for parades and big fiestas, sensibly preferring much plainer clothing for ordinary work days.

This recording of the MARIACHI AGUILAS DE CHAPALA was obtained in the open air, without benefit of studio or manufactured glamour. The men in the accompanying picture demonstrate, however, that they can be as resplendent as any mariachi. We never saw them dressed so elegantly during our two months in Chapala, but perhaps we missed the swankier affairs demanding the more formal attire.

The gaiety of mariachi music leads one to visualize a group of laughing, irresponsible musicians, singing with abandon and spontaneity. In reality, these musicians nearly always prove to be sober family men who take their work seriously. They rarely smile while playing and singing, and their repertoire is astonishing. Anyone near the butcher shop in Chapala during the morning could hear the mariachi practicing across the street. Despite the facetious comment of many Mexicans that the only thing in Mexico starting on time is the bullfight, the mariachi is extremely punctual. It is doubtless a matter of real importance for the mariachi to arrive at a fiesta (the term for a private party, as well as for larger public celebrations) at the specified time, and the members of

this group are prepared to meet their obligation. Musicians assemble promptly under the window of the fortunate person whom they have been hired to serenade---even at two or three o'clock in the morning.

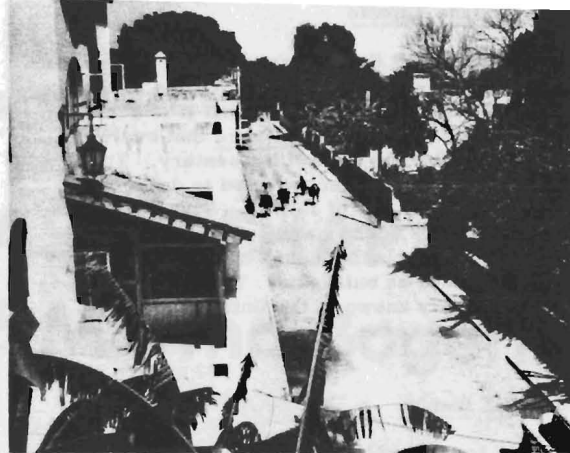
Either singly or in a group they are businesslike, able musicians. Two guitar players engaged in Tepic to accompany a friend who sang some particularly choice folk songs (Tarascan and other music of Mexico, Folkways FW 8867, 1958) carefully explained in advance that they could work only two hours, for at ten o'clock they were expected to perform with their mariachi. Even though unfamiliar with the songs, they required scarcely ten minutes to devise an appropriate accompaniment for the fast-moving songs Margarita sang.

We are indebted to Señor José Hernández Montoya, the young and gifted director of the NIÑOS CANTORES DE CHAPALA, who helped us obtain the services of the MARIACHI AGUILAS DE CHAPALA. All of the selections were taped in an hour's time, including short intervals between selections when we discussed what they should play next. The recordings were made on the third-story roof garden of the Country Club Arms, an ultra-modern apartment hotel in Chapala. Children attending a fiesta of their own in the patio of the house next door can be heard in the background of some selections.

Chapala, sometimes called the Lido of Mexico, has long been a weekend resort for Mexicans living in Guadalajara as well as for tourists. On Saturdays and Sundays the town is crowded with visitors who swarm around the beaches or hire the gay little sight-seeing boats that ply the waters of Lake Chapala, the largest lake in Mexico. These are the times when the mariachi gather, in one or several groups, waiting under the huge frescos in the middle of the main boulevard. When enough customers are on hand in the large open-air eating place at the lakeside, the mariachi move in. A meal may last two hours while the visitors watch and listen to the music. The musicians stop near a table and play as long as the diners voice their requests---and come up with the few pesos charged for their services. Then the mariachi moves on, pausing again as others request songs from their seemingly inexhaustible repertoire. The protocol is not readily fathomable. One afternoon the first mariachi had traveled almost the length of the restaurant when another group came in and started playing. The first mariachi group seemingly took the hint and departed, leaving the field to the newcomers.



View of the town of Jalisco, looking to the northwest and the hills beneath which the town is sheltered on the north side of Lake Chapala.



A street in Chapala, with the characteristic cobblestone streets and subtropical plants bordering the streets.

Needless to say, tourists are a good source of income for these peripatetic bands. When business is slow, one member of the orchestra, usually carrying only a violin, sometimes approaches an unwary tourist and asks if he would like some music. If the answer is yes, the tourist may find that instead of having hired one man to play a softly romantic violin, he is suddenly surrounded by ten musicians who burst forth with their loud music, sometimes in cheerful, cacophonous competition with a blaring radio. The tourist's discomfort rarely lasts, however, for he and his party are soon infected by the lilting melodies and foot-tapping rhythms of the mariachi. Whatever fee he pays will be small in comparison with the pleasure he derives from the memories he takes with him.

The mariachi is unlikely to suffer the fate of our street musicians, for he has become an integral part of Mexican life. More than anything else, his music captures the spirit of the country, the humor and the gaiety of the Mexican and his Indian heritage.

SIDE ONE

Band 1: Atotonilco

This is a regional son, describing the beauties and charms of the village of Atotonilco, which lies to the east of Guadalajara in the state of Jalisco. A Son, literally, is an "agreeable sound," but in Mexico the term designates the dance music, largely of Spanish origin, that accompanies many festivities.

Band 2: Las Olas

As suggested by the title (literally, "the waves") this son praises the waves and tells of the pleasure they give. The word heard in Chapala is modified to apply to the movements of waves on Lake Chapala.

Band 3: La Negra

La Negra is one the mariachi favorites, a traditional son, amorous in character. Negra, as used here, is a term of endearment such as "sweetheart" or similar terms used in the United States. The Mexican composer, Blas Galindo, used this music as part of a symphonic score entitled Sones Mariachi.

Band 4: Jarabe Tapatio

What is often called the Mexican national folk dance is believed to have its origins in the state of Jalisco. Frances Toor suggests that it is a stylized form of the old folk jarabes that evolves a decade or so after the turn of the century. The word "tapatio" is the adjective used to describe anything from the state of Jalisco. There are nine different melodies, culminating with the "Diana," widely used as "applause music" in Mexico, and hence often heard as bullfights. The tune is perhaps more widely known in the United States as "the Mexican hat dance."

Band 5: La Bamba

The music for this selection was devised for a dance that originated in Vera Cruz. It resembles a square dance or a reel, with the singers calling the various steps.

Band 6: Chapala

A slow waltz with unusually poetic lyrics. The Brazilian scientist and composer, Paulo Vanzolini, observes that "In a waltz the words are everything." The composer of the words to this song conveys the poet's reaction to the charm of the town of Chapala, the boats and the fishermen on the lake, and the beauty of the setting.

Band 7: Tecalitlán

Tecalitlán is one of several well known towns south of Guadalajara. This spirited tune praises both the town and its inhabitants, with all the fervor of the most nostalgic native who ever left the place of his birth.

SIDE TWO

Band 1: La Adelita

The words of this song refer to the mythical sweetheart, "little Adela," known to every soldier who fought in the twentieth century revolution. It was chosen by the followers of Emiliano Zapata as their marching song, although it is actually a corrido or narrative ballad that tells of the soldier's recollections of his sweetheart, and what he would endure to retain her love.

Band 2: Las Bicicletas

This polka with a swinging rhythm and beautiful melody is said to have been written for and dedicated to the Cyclists Club of Mexico in the days when cycling first became popular. Virtually every Mexican knows some or all of the innumerable verses, but no one appears to remember who was the composer.

Band 3: Ojos Tapatíos

A waltz of the sort is frequently used to serenade damsels. The mariachis who provide the music for midnight serenades assemble on the street or sidewalk outside the door of the person being honored, and the entire neighborhood awakes to enjoy their music and their singing.

Band 4: Ay, Jalisco No Te Rajes!

"Jalisco, don't back down," the title of this song,

has long been a rallying cry for all Tapatíos. The song is now so widely known and popular that the phrase is often used in other songs as an ad lib, even in South America. Dr. Paulo Vanzolini says the phrase is often heard in Brazil.

Band 5: Las Mañanitas

As a birthday, or Saint's Day, serenade, Las Mañanitas is usually sung very early in the morning, with the mariachis assembled in front of the house occupied by the chamaca whose birthday or saint's day is being celebrated.

Band 6: El Carretero Se Va

A very old traditional song, comic in character, El Carretero describes the trials and tribulations of the cart driver who could never take off because his oxen are lost or because some similar catastrophe always interferes with his good intentions.

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