

Sunday, December 21, 2008, 3pm  
Zellerbach Hall

## *Fiesta Navidad*



*starring*

## Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano

Jesús “Chuy” Guzmán, *Musical Director*

Nati Cano, *Director*

*This evening’s program will be announced from the stage.*

*Cal Performances’ 2008–2009 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo Bank.*

### Mariachi Los Camperos

*Violin* Jesús “Chuy” Guzmán, Raúl Cuellar,  
Ismael Hernández, Jimmy Kyle Cuellar  
*Guitarrón* Juan Jiménez  
*Harp* Sergio Alonso  
*Vihuela* Nati Cano  
*Trumpet* Javier Rodríguez, Ariel de la Rosa

Dancers courtesy of Danza Teoctl, Miguel Díaz, *Artistic Director*.

### *Fiesta Navidad* Production Staff

*Lighting & Projection Design* Matt O’Donnell  
*Audio Design & House Engineer* Gilberto “Gil” Morales  
*Producer* José Delgado

*Pleiades Management manages Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano.  
Call (323) 665-8040 for more information.*

*Booking: Paul Bongiorno, Opus 3 Artists, tel. (212) 556-6804;  
PBongiorno@opus3artists.com, www.opus3artists.com.*

### Fiesta Navidad

In Mexico, the month of December is filled with a myriad of regional fiestas. Some trace their roots to the customs of native Indians celebrating their various winter feast days. Later, Christian deities replaced Indian deities and some celebrations evolved into popular traditions. The best known example is the Fiesta de La Posada, celebrated between December 16 and 24.

La Posada began in the 16th century as a liturgical event to celebrate the pilgrimage of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. Processions were added in the 17th century to involve more people. Participants begin the nine-day ceremony by asking for symbolic lodging. The involvement of communities serves to enrich the tradition, coloring the festivities with local and regional characteristics.

Organizing and preparing the celebration is passed from father to son. Families and friends decide on a schedule of homes to be visited. The hosts and guests recreate Joseph and Mary's search for lodging through song. The guests gather outside the home to request a place to stay and the host's answer, first by refusing and then welcoming them, signaling the start of the evening's fiesta.

*Mariachi Los Camperos opens with the traditional petition for lodging (Posada), but the real fiesta begins when the curtain raises and the journey is led by mariachi master Natividad Cano.*

### Mariachi Origins

In 1852, Cosme Santa Anna, a priest in Rosamorada parish of the west Mexican community of Santiago Ixcuintla, wrote to the archbishop in Guadalajara to complain of “mariachis”—entertainment with music, drinking, gambling and loud talk by “men on foot and on horseback”—that occurred on Holy Saturday in the town plaza in front of the church. This is the first known written record of the word “mariachi” connected to music and merrymaking. In 1859, the cleric Ignacio Aguilar wrote that in Tlalchapa, Guerrero he heard a music called “Mariache, comprised of large harps, violins and bass drum played without rest.” These historical references are important to historians, because

they disprove a popular myth that emerged decades later claiming that the word mariachi derived from the French *mariage*. The French occupied Mexico in the 1860s, and, as the story goes, the musicians performing for the French imperialists at weddings (*mariages*) were given the name “mariachi.” The term mariachi in all likelihood has its roots in one of the Indian languages of the region, possibly in the now extinct language of the Coca people. In his 1908 book *Paisajes de Occidente*, Enrique Barrios de los Ríos described festivities in the coastal region around Santiago Ixcuintla in the 1890s. He wrote of dance platforms (*tarimas*) called mariachis, about one yard wide, two yards long and one-and-a-half feet off the ground, placed between stands of the outdoor market in the town plaza: “All night long, and even during the day, people danced lively *jarabes* to the sound of the harp, or of violin and *vihuela* [guitar], or of violin, snare drum, cymbals and bass drum, in a deafening quartet.”

Twentieth-century Mexico was a time of enormous population growth and urbanization. From 1900 to 2000, Mexico's population increased eightfold to around 100 million people, and the population of greater Mexico City increased by a factor of 40, to over 20 million people, more than a fifth of Mexico's inhabitants. People from the rural areas, musicians included, flocked to the cities in search of opportunity and the conveniences of urban life. In 1905, the four-member mariachi led by Justo Villa of the town of Cocula outside of Guadalajara traveled to Mexico City to perform for the birthday of President Porfirio Díaz, considered to be the first performance by a mariachi in the capital. Many other mariachis followed. Growth of the electronic media and the commercialization of music also marked the 20th century. In the period 1908–1909, “all three major American phonograph companies—Columbia, Edison and Victor—recorded the Cuarteto Coclense in Mexico City.” Cuarteto Coclense was the name given to Villa's group. Thanks to Chris Strachwitz and his Arhoolie record label, many of these and other early mariachi recordings are available today.

Radio and cinema brought mariachi music into the lives of Mexicans in all corners of the nation. The powerful station XEW broadcast mariachi music throughout the Republic and beyond

beginning in the 1930s. Movies with *ranchero* (country) themes, like *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (1936), *Jalisco nunca pierde* (1937) and *Ay, Jalisco, no te rajes* (1941), featured mariachis, and *charro cantante* (singing cowboy) film superstars like Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante were accompanied by mariachis. Professional songwriters wrote new compositions in a *música típica*, pseudo folk music, vein, contributing in this way to shaping the media-driven images of rural people and themes. The era following the Revolution (1910–1917), particularly the nationalistic regime of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940), saw the crafting of images evoking national identity, with mariachi music being one of the most prominent of those images. The radio, recording and cinema industries continued their expansion in the 1940s, and the presence of the mariachi in national life increased. The advent of television in the 1950s further centralized the creation and diffusion of culture. The mariachi, through its adaptation to these revolutionary changes and its inclusion in the products of popular culture, was able to maintain an identity connected to its rural origins and to the joys, passions and problems of everyday people.

Over time, urban growth and the electronic media drove a transformation of the rural mariachi, evolving from ensembles of three to five musicians emanating from small towns in Jalisco and surrounding states, to larger groups of eight or more musicians based primarily in large cities. Local mariachi instrumentation, particularly the “lowlands” (Bajío) style with *guitarrón* (large bass guitar), *guitarra de golpe* (five-stringed, flat-backed guitar) or *vihuela* (five-stringed guitar with a round, spined back), and violins melded with the “highlands” style that preferred the large harp over the *guitarrón*. A single trumpet was added to the ensemble in the 1940s, and during the 1950s, two trumpets became more the standard. From the mid 1950s to the present, the preeminent model for modern mariachi groups has been Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán. Originating in 1898 in the town of Tecalitlán, Jalisco, the group relocated to Mexico City in the 1930s, and, under the leadership of the late Silvestre Vargas (1901–1985), achieved great success, appearing in over 200 films and making countless recordings with RCA Victor of Mexico.

Today, the typical mariachi ensemble consists of two trumpets, three violins, *guitarrón*, *vihuela* and six-stringed guitar. The *mariachi de lujo* (deluxe mariachi, like Mariachi Vargas and Los Camperos) would typically have two trumpets, four or more violins, harp, *guitarrón*, *vihuela* and six-string guitar. The latter half of the 20th century saw some further experimentation with other instruments, flutes, for example, by mariachi arrangers, but no further lasting innovations in instrumentation have occurred.

Mariachi repertoire also has evolved. The fast-paced, syncopated *son*, once the main staple of the mariachi repertoire, became relegated to one of many musical genres played by the mariachi. The *canción ranchera*, with its focus on the vocal expression of a solo singer, came to dominate the song repertoire in the 1950s. The suavely interpreted, romantic bolero, popular in Mexico since the 1920s, has been a major category of mariachi song since the late 1950s. The *huapango*, inspired by the distinctive rhythms, complex violin playing and falsetto vocal ornaments of the regional folk *huapango* of the Huastecan region in northeastern Mexico, also is an important vehicle of mariachi song. Polkas, *pasodobles*, waltzes, *schottisches*, melodies from regional Mexican and Latin American folk music traditions, *zarzuela* and opera overtures, and other forms have been arranged for mariachi. More recently, *cumbias* and *merengues* from the Latin Caribbean, as well as North American rap music, have been taken up by the mariachi.

*Daniel Sheehy, Director and Curator,  
Smithsonian Folkways Recordings*

### The Instruments of Mariachi

The original mariachi came from rural Western Mexico, primarily the states of Jalisco, Colima, Michoacan, Nayarit and Sinaloa. The first groups were string-based ensembles, making the term mariachi “band” inappropriate as bands, by definition, emphasize brass and woodwinds. The first mariachi instrumentation consisted primarily of violins and the diatonic harp—a non-pedal and therefore non-chromatic instrument. The harp

provided rhythmic and harmonic support while the violins played the melodic lines.

As the mariachi ensemble developed, a small, generally five-stringed flat-back guitar, called a *quinta* or *guitarra de golpe*, was added to support the rhythm. In the area around Cocula, for reasons not completely understood, a rounded-back set of instruments was used instead. The five-stringed *vihuela*, a rounded-back instrument, along with the more recent addition of the guitar, provides the underlying rhythm essential for the musical sound of every mariachi ensemble.

The *guitarrón*, a larger rounded-back instrument, plays the bass line. The original *guitarrón*

used four or five gut strings; eventually the instrument became standardized with six nylon strings, giving it sufficient volume to support the bass. Because it is capable of modulating to different keys (and easier to carry), the *guitarrón* eventually replaced the harp in most ensembles.

In the early 1930s, when the ensembles began to think in terms of arrangements and commercial possibilities, a trumpet was added, the rationale being that it would create a better, more penetrating sound for radio broadcasts. In later years, two trumpets have become a standard part of mariachi ensembles, although it is not uncommon to find three or more in some of today's groups.

**Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano** has existed for 47 years and is noted for demanding musical arrangements that highlight the individual skills and voices of the players. The ensemble employs the finest musicians from Mexico and the United States and has performed for audiences throughout the United States and Canada.

Mariachi Los Camperos was one of four mariachis that collaborated on Linda Ronstadt's album, *Canciones de Mi Padre* ("Songs of My Father"). In 1988–1989, the group worked on the promotion of the album, including national television appearances on programs including *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson and the Grammy Awards. They also appear on Linda Ronstadt's *Mas Canciones*. In 2005, they shared a Grammy with other artists that recorded a tribute album honoring Ella Jenkins, titled *cELLABration*.

Los Camperos have been featured in three PBS specials, including *Americanos*, *Mariachi*, *the Spirit of Mexico* and *Fiesta Mexicana*.

The ensemble has recorded 10 albums, including *Puro Mariachi* (Indigo, 1961), *North of the Border* (RCA/Carino, 1965), *El Super Mariachi*, *Los Camperos* (Latin International, 1968), *Valses de Amor* (La Fonda, 1973), *Canciones de Siempre* (PolyGram Latino, 1993), *Sounds of Mariachi* (Delfin, 1996), *Fiesta Navidad* (Delfin, 1997), *Viva el Mariachi* (Smithsonian Folkways, 2003) and *Llegaron Los Camperos* (Smithsonian Folkways, 2004). Their latest recording, *Amor, Dolor y Lagrimas* (Smithsonian Folkways, 2008), was released in May.

**Jesus "Chuy" Guzman** (*Musical Director*) joined Mariachi Los Camperos in 1989. Widely recognized as an arranger, director, instructor and musician in the genre, he is the musical director of the ensemble and master of numerous traditional mariachi instruments: trumpet, *vihuela*, *guitarrón*, guitar and violin. Over the last decade, Mr. Guzman has served as head instructor for over 55 international mariachi festivals in the United States and Mexico and continues as the instructor for Ethnomusicology 91K, Music of Mexico, at UCLA. His career highlights include collaboration on the orchestration and musical arrangements for the Symphony Orchestra of Jalisco and

a recording as a guest artist with the prestigious Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlan. Mr. Guzman also toured and recorded with Linda Ronstadt on her Grammy Award-winning album, *Canciones de Mi Padre*, and has appeared in several Hollywood films, including *Mi Familia*, starring Jimmy Smits and Edward James Olmos, *Jerry Maguire*, starring Tom Cruise, and *Sex and the City*.

Both a traditionalist and a visionary, **Natividad Cano** has both mirrored and shaped the history of mariachi music. He was born in 1933 into a family of mariachi musicians of Ahuiscolco, Jalisco, a small, rural town much like the many other west Mexican communities that gave life to mariachi tradition. His career took him first to nearby Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city, and then farther away to Los Angeles, one of the most populous and influential cities of "greater Mexico." In Los Angeles, he and the group he founded and directed nearly 45 years ago, Los Camperos, emerged as a major driving force of the mariachi music tradition in the United States and, to a certain extent, in Mexico as well.



Nati Cano

"I first heard Los Camperos in 1968 at La Fonda, the restaurant they had opened that same year at

## About the Artists

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2501 Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles. I was a student at UCLA, where I had joined the student mariachi ensemble, a 'world music' performance class of the Institute of Ethnomusicology. For me and my fellow student mariachi enthusiasts, a trip to La Fonda was akin to visiting a sacred temple of mariachi music, and Nati Cano was its Saint Peter. The repertoire Los Camperos played during the early years of La Fonda was a mix of older rhythms of the *son jalisciense*, songs from the 1950s and earlier, and contemporary pieces marked by the more complex harmonies of American and Mexican commercial popular music. For us young ethnomusicologists, the enduring, hard-driving *sones* and the emotion-packed *canciones* and *rancheras*

(country songs) held the greatest attraction. The pieces in the popular music vein seemed like an encroachment of commercial interests on the older repertoire that made mariachi music special. Little did we know that this blending of old and new mariachi sounds was part of Nati Cano's musical and social agenda. His life goal has been to bring greater acceptance, understanding, and respect to the mariachi tradition as a whole, and to reach the widest possible audience with his music. His uncompromising position has been to preserve the essential 'mariachi sound,' in his words, as the baseline of the tradition. I know that many would agree that in this, he has succeeded."

*Daniel Sheehy*