Mariachi Herencia de México

MARIACHI HERENCIA DE MÉXICO,

Latin GRAMMY-Nominated Students from Chicago’s Mexican-American Barrios,

Release Follow-up Album Herencia de la Tierra Mia (The Heritage of My Land) on May 25th

Featuring Special Guests LILA DOWNS and AIDA CUEVAS
And Mexican Harpist IVAN VELASCO

First Mariachi Production for Multi-GRAMMY Winner JAVIER LIMÓN,
Best Known for His Work with Paco de Lucía, Diego el Cigala, Alejandro Sanz, Mariza and Buika

Including a Brand-New Mariachi Original + Tributes to Four of their Musical Idols:
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The historic tradition of mariachi music has roots in cities like Guadalajara and Mexico City, places where the festive folk style lived its past glory days in the mid-1900s. Today, the future of the evolving genre may rest in the hands of a dynamic ensemble from the capital of the American Midwest: Chicago’s Mariachi Herencia de México.

The Latin GRAMMY-nominated group of young Mexican-American musicians have released three highly acclaimed studio albums with chart-topping debuts on both the Billboard and the iTunes Latin Albums charts, defying a music industry trend and pointing to a revival in recorded mariachi music.

The group recently released its third studio album titled *Esencia*. The stunning collection features some 18 musicians on 14 classic tracks plus two originals, with arrangements by one of the most revered and innovative figures in the field, composer and musical director Rigoberto Alfaro. “It’s a masterpiece,” says Jonathan Clark, a mariachi expert and historian. “This is mariachi music at its most sophisticated and most modernistic. It’s almost the antithesis of folklore, almost futuristic. Maybe 20 or 30 years from now, all groups will sound like this, I don’t know. But it is state-of-the-art.”

In 2017, Mariachi Herencia de México scored a Latin GRAMMY nomination in the “Best Ranchero/Mariachi Album” category for the group’s debut album titled *Nuestra Herencia*. The group’s follow up album, *Herencia De La Tierra Mía*, was released in 2018 and features guest vocals by two superstars of Mexican music, folkloric/fusion artist Lila Downs and veteran mariachi singer Aida Cuevas.

Mariachi Herencia de México has toured throughout the U.S., Mexico and Canada performing in some of the most prestigious performing arts centers across the continent, including Washington D.C.’s The Kennedy Center and Guadalajara’s Teatro Degollado. The group has performed alongside major artists like Lila Downs, Aida Cuevas, Los Lobos, Pedro Fernández, as well as some of the most respected mariachi groups from both sides of the border, including Mariachi Vargas de Tecatitlán, Los Camperos, Sol de Mexico, Cobre, and the all-female group Reyna de Los Angeles, demonstrating that this group of students have the talent, training and bravado to hold their own with the best in the world.
Nobody could have anticipated the success of the first album by Mariachi Herencia de México, an ensemble of student musicians from Chicago’s Mexican-American barrios. Released in 2017, their debut disk Nuestra Herencia (Our Heritage) received a Latin GRAMMY nomination, attracted local and national news coverage, and created new demand for appearances around the country.

But for Cesar Maldonado, founder of the education program that nurtured these young mariachi musicians, success meant much more than accolades and media attention. It meant new horizons and elevated ambitions for these 12- to 18-year-old children from working-class, immigrant households.

“Theyir lives have completely changed,” says Maldonado, an investment banker who runs the non-profit music program, the Mariachi Heritage Foundation. “They now view the world as a whole globe, as opposed to just the four-block radius where they live. The success of the first CD was amazing, but the true win is the transformative experience they get to live.”

Mariachi Herencia de México is ready to take off once again on May 25th with the release of their follow-up album, Herencia De La Tierra Mía (The Heritage Of My Land). The self-released 14-track disc features guest vocals by two superstars of Mexican music, folkloric/fusion artist Lila Downs and veteran mariachi singer Aida Cuevas.

Marking another first in mariachi music, the album was produced by multi-GRAMMY-award winner and world music figure Javier Limón. Born in Madrid, Limón’s credits include works by globally renowned artists such as Alejandro Sanz, Bebo Valdés, Diego El Cigala, Paco de Lucía, Mariza and Buika. But this is the first time he has worked in the mariachi milieu.

Asking an artist of Limon’s global stature to work with the students was a long shot, concedes Maldonado. But it was not a caprice or a conceit. It was a deliberate strategy designed to take the band, and mariachi music in general, to a new level of international acceptance.

“Mariachi music is an art form,” he says. “It belongs in world music with flamenco and Latin jazz. I wanted to work with a producer who agreed that mariachi music needed to reach new audiences.” To that end, the group will launch its first major tour, beginning May 27 at the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago and continuing through Spring 2019.

For album producer Limón, the mariachi’s mission sold itself.

“I had some doubts about whether I should do this project or not, but when I saw the faces of those kids – 12, 13, 14 years old – they just stole my heart,” says the producer, who is artistic director of the Mediterranean Music Institute at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, where he lives. “These are kids from very humble backgrounds who just as well could be thinking about their videogames or listening to hip hop or reggaeton. The fact that they work so hard to learn this music, and then use music to get ahead in life, for me, that was the vital element that convinced me to work with them.”
MARIACHÍ HERENCIA DE MÉXICO  cont.

For the students, gaining a global platform provides new opportunities to share their passion for the music.

“We were challenged during the recording process, but I learned so much,” says guitar player Melanie Juarez. “I hope people that never listened to mariachi music can enjoy the album. They’ll realize just how beautiful and diverse mariachi music is.”

The new album highlights the group’s artistic growth.

“When we recorded the first album, it was more of an experiment,” says Maldonado. “This album demonstrates these kids are serious about music and representing their culture.”

The song styles on the album range from spirited sones, to tender boleros and a thrilling jarocho medley. Four numbers are tributes to Latin music icons: Pedro Infante, Lucha Villa, Juan Gabriel, and Mexican-American Tejano singer Selena, a student favorite. Two other songs – “Que El Mundo Ruede” and “Siempre Estoy Pensando En Ti” – were also written by the late Juan Gabriel. On “Jarocho I,” a rousing medley of traditional sones from Veracruz, Mexico’s harp virtuoso Ivan Velasco contributed a stirring solo which, in the words of student guitarist Noe Uribe Jr., “took the track to a whole new level.”

Lila Downs, the world-famous Mexican American singer, lends her guest vocal on “El Viajero,” a paean to Mexico’s natural and cultural riches that entrance the traveler. And veteran Mexican singer Aida Cuevas, one of today’s most respected mariachi performers, appears as guest artist on the Lucha Villa tribute.

The collaborations, and the tribute tracks, reflect the students’ own musical interests, and their respect for Mexican artists, both contemporary and historic.

“It’s important for us to celebrate the great Mexican artists that inspired us,” says violinist Alejandra Aldaco, who considers Selena “my personal hero.”

The title track is the album’s original composition. Producer Limón insisted the album needed a new song, to distinguish it from most mariachi recordings nowadays that rely almost exclusively on covers of old standards. “The song has a heroic tone and sends a message of cultural pride,” says Maldonado.

“For me, the great challenge of mariachi is coming up with new material, so the music doesn’t stay stuck in the past,” says Limón, a talented songwriter in his own right. “That is the key for mariachi. It can’t all be repertoire; it has to refresh itself to survive. That is what flamenco did, that’s what fado and jazz have done. And that’s what mariachi music can do as well.”

Jimmy Cuellar, a veteran mariachi director and arranger from Southern California, served as the album’s musical director. He says his job was to “write mariachi arrangements that were still traditional, but that could also sound modern,” allowing a certain degree of innovation.

Cuellar describes his working relationship with Limón as a creative give-and-take: “both ways, it was very respectful.” He admired the producer’s discipline in the studio, his ability to keep the day’s work on track, and his drive to make the musicians excel.

For his part, Limón says he didn’t bring a new strategy to this project.
“I did absolutely nothing different,” says the producer, who also played flamenco guitar on the song “Carlos Arruza,” a pasodoble. “My approach has always remained the same: musical quality. And I’m telling you that these kids are on the same level as any professional musician. But they also have something else. They have a purity, a transparency, an innocence, which sometimes gets contaminated with professionalism. Sure, it’s true they’re young and still developing their technique, but that purity and innocence is worth a lot more than any technique. Because technique can be taught, but you can’t teach authenticity.”

At a time when immigrant communities are under increased stress, the mariachi experience has been a positive force for these students. “When they tell you their stories, it makes you want to cry,” says Limón.

“Mariachi music has helped these kids mature and evolve emotionally,” says Cesar Maldonado. “It’s not just about music, it’s also about learning discipline, time management and teamwork. There’s a compañerismo (friendship) these kids have built. They’re each other’s best friends, brothers and sisters.”

So this is the story of a musical ensemble that feels like a family: Sharing disappointments and triumphs, and moving forward together.

“Mariachi is my life,” says Daniel Bautista, who plays vihuela. “It’s an honor to play this beautiful music.”

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