

Mexican music is more complex than most people think. It's much more than the three "Mariachi" guys standing in a row, wearing those undeniably Mexican uniforms with ruffles.

Though one of them is mariachi, there are at least twelve different sub-forms within the several types of regional music, each with a distinct and unique style from the other. The most common instruments that are heard in nearly all forms of Mexican music are plucked string instruments, percussion, woodwinds and then violin - in that order.

Located in Central America, the region has a lot of influence from the Aztec empire, with no exception when it comes to music. Going as far back as the 16th century, there are still forms of music from that period that are ingrained in Mexican music today. Other major influences include Spanish elements mixed with local aspects of music, as well as some Afro-Cuban touches too.

There are five basic types of music within the Mexican region:

Ranchera

A type of mariachi music most widely recognized around the world as Mexican music. This is traditional folk music typically performed in numbers with a polka or waltz style. Ranchera songs are thematic in nature and usually include the topics of nature, love and the love of Mexico.

Son

Described as "Mexican folk music from the countryside", son is defined as "sound" and is a very traditional form of Mexican music and was established in the 18th century. As many as ten styles of son were mainstream by the 20th century with clear differences between regions. Characterized as usually fast-paced, son often includes both bow and plucked string instruments.

Mariachi

Branching out into all forms of Mexican music, mariachi is part of ranchero, son and bolero as well. Mariachi features dance from Europe (polka, waltz and Spanish-influenced fandango) and rhythms from Africa. Most mariachi bands will consist of at least six violins, several trumpets, a guitar, one guitarrón (a six-string acoustic bass) and a vihuela (a five-string guitar). Mariachi bands sing about common folk of Mexico, often songs are about life from the perspective of farmers.



A Mexican Mariachi Band

Bolero

Mostly slow songs and ballads, bolero music is simple and natural. Sharing many characteristics of the son music from the Yucatan Peninsula there is debate as to whether bolero originates from Cuba as it is widely reported or if it has a Mexican origin. The instruments used to perform bolero music include the cymbals (platillos), trumpet and double bass.

Corrido

Used as a means to publicize political and social issues through music and song, corridos are usually ballads that address anything from war stories, heroes and tragedies of the Mexican revolution to current topics such as illegal immigration or drug trafficking. Performed solo or at most in small ensembles, corridos are very common in most regions of Mexico.