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G is for Gay.

M is for Mexico.

And everywhere you go there are gay "mariachis" to serenade you.

Music and singing in Mexico go together like tortillas and beans.

This touch is provided by the mariachis, who could best be termed strolling musicians and singers. Using a variety of instruments, they go into action at the drop of a sombrero.

Numbering anywhere from two to twelve, the mariachis are to be found on the highways and byways, in small cafes, or the plush night spots of Mexico City. With much gusto they sing the praises of their native land, which is only a matter of hours away from the United States via American Airlines.

Although found in all parts of the country, mariachis originated in the State of Jalisco. One of their most popular songs is "Guadalajara," which recounts the beauties of the capital city of Jalisco. Another favorite is "Tu Solo Tu," a song of love, while "Madrid" lends a nostalgic touch.

The well dressed mariachi is a symphony of color. He wears a large hat with the brim turned up. His jacket is short. He sports a brilliant-hued shirt and his pants are tight to the knee, then they flare out. The entire ensemble is heavily embroidered. Intricately carved boots complete the outfit.

(more)

His music reflects Mexico's battle for existence, the periods of unrest and finally the gaining of maturity as an independent nation, to say nothing of love. Romance, they say, flourishes to the strains of a strumming guitar. But whatever the flavor, mariachis produce a brand of music that belongs to Mexico and Mexico alone.

The favored instrument is the guitar. Even that has been given a Mexican touch. Instead of the usual six strings, it boasts seven. One was added when local musicians found they could obtain a greater range.

Its first cousin is the "jaranita," developed in Mexico. The instrument is about one quarter as large as a regular guitar, but the number of strings varies with the region. In the southern region of Veracruz the "jaranita" is played with five single strings. Other sectors prefer six double strings; in some cases five. It produces tones similar to that of a mandolin without shrillness.

The "salterio," somewhat reminiscent of a zither, has versatility to its credit. It may be soprano, tenor or baritone. Played with metal finger shields, it has a complicated series of strings crossing one over the other but not touching.

Light, rapid compositions bring out the best in the "bandolon," a type of lute with six double strings. It lends itself admirably to small combinations.

Violins and mandolins come in for their share of the spotlight. However, mandolins sometimes are hard to recognize in outlying spots, where they are homemade. The mandolin is liable to have a sound box made from the shell of an armadillo, and the number of strings will vary to suit the taste of the local artist.