

A FEW WORDS ON HOW TO PROMOTE MARIACHI SOL DE MEXICO AT PAC'S **by Jose Delgado**

I have been managing the mariachi genre in the U.S. for 20 years. I began as a tour manager for Linda Ronstadt's CANCIONES DE MI PADRE tour. The show was a unique blend of Mexican music and mariachi concert. Following that I managed Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano for over fifteen years and with Mr. Cano refocused the company to be a concert mariachi that toured playing in performing art centers as well as concert halls as diverse as Chicago Symphony Hall, Davies Symphony Hall, Centennial Hall and Teatro de Gollado in Guadalajara. Currently, I am the manager of the internationally recognized, Mariachi Sol de Mexico de Jose Hernandez. Based on these expansive experiences in the American mariachi field, I have discovered a number of ways to engage and enhance local efforts to promote Sol de Mexico in performing arts centers wherever they might be presented.

First and foremost Sol de Mexico should be promoted to a mainstream audience as World Music. This will capture music aficionados and mainstream middle class Mexican-Americans as well as other segments of the local Latino community. The Mexican American audience will view this as an acceptance and respect for their cultural tradition and an acknowledgement of the genre as an art form, which it is.

A PAC that has an established history in their local community and is already branded but has never presented anything Latino in their season will have a different kind of a challenge than a PAC that is just opening their doors. The former may have to deal with the perception that the venue is not friendly to Latinos and exclusive. The later has an opportunity to set a precedent that will make the community feel that they are welcome.

Second, there should be an understanding that there is a difference between Latinos who have been here for several generations and the immigrant and migrant segments of the community. The fundamental difference is economic. The more established families have the means and disposable income to attend concert events. However, do not make the mistake of dismissing the immigrant population. This segment of the community will spend their money and attend an event if the program resonates with them.

Several years ago New York City supported a series of exhibits and shows celebrating Mexican art and culture. The promoters of the series were hoping that the burgeoning Mexican community would support the events. It was observed that there was a very light turn out for the exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and that the Mexican modern dance and theater shows were also lightly attended. The one event that was sold out was the performance of Alejandro Fernandez at Madison Square Garden. Tickets were priced near and above \$100. Arts patrons in the community might be interested in the modern dance company and perhaps the theater company. But the average blue collar Latino immigrant will most likely pass on the opportunity to see these shows. This is, by and large, a non-traditional audience. The lesson is to understand the prejudices of your audience. And this demographic in many parts of the country is enormous and offers an opportunity to develop a new audience for PAC'.

Third, all across the Southwest and beyond high schools and some middle schools offer mariachi as part of their music studies. The programs have become so ubiquitous that The National Association for Music Education (MENC) has established a special MENC Mariachi Committee to standardized curriculum and to offer support to mariachi educators. These programs and educators are a resource to assist in promoting a Sol de Mexico appearance. Time and schedule permitting, the ensemble is ready to offer a class and interact with local schools.

Fourth, I enjoy working the mariachi genre not only because of the diversity of the music but because it is cross generational. It is not unusual for Mom, Dad and the kids to attend a Sol de Mexico concert with at least one or both of the grand parents. If done effectively, you can cast the audience with a dynamic mix of blue hairs and blue collar workers.

Mariachi as a genre is part of what the music industry describes as Regional Mexican Music. This category includes other genres as well such as Banda, Norteño, Jarocho, and more. There is a network of Regional Mexican formatted radio stations who's listeners include all economic backgrounds. A colleague, Professor Josh Kun at USC has a great lecture that should be viewed by your marketing staff to get a deeper understanding of the profundity of Mexican Regional Music. He has a version of his lecture posted on YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SuwnjhjnIA&feature=player_embedded

I would fast forward 12 minutes into this 55 minute video even though the opening remarks are quite interesting. Josh highlights nontraditional ways that some of the big Norteño bands use to market their music to this huge community.

Fifth, a presenter can reach the African-American community through their network of churches. In a similar way, a method to reach the Latino community is through their network of fraternal organizations and clubs. This would include Hispanic or Latino Chambers of Commerce. In California the California Hispanic Chambers of Commerce boasts a membership of 700,000 and is made up of local Chambers based in municipalities throughout the state. Some, aside from promoting business and lobbying State government, have a commitment to raise money for scholarships and to promote culture. PAC' should reach out to these Chambers.

Another resource is to identify local immigrant social clubs. These clubs will often be named after their state of origin in Mexico. For example, the membership of Club Jalisciense would most likely consist of individuals who are from the Mexican state of Jalisco. These clubs promote culture, the welfare of their compatriots and often times raise money to support civic projects in their homeland such as orphanages and hospitals. The Jalisciense Club in Los Angeles organizes an annual beauty contest and for the past two years has rented Disney Concert Hall for this event. The clubs membership is large enough that the Governor of the State of Jalisco attends.

All of the resources that I have listed are accessible and can be executed in-house. If this is too much there are also outside marketing and public relations companies that can be helpful.

Finally, presenters should know that Sol De Mexico is always interested in being included in local efforts to promote their show. We are committed to our presenters and look at our engagements as a long term partnership and look forward over the years to being invited back to each venue. We like to view a booking in a new market as a commitment to the local community and the creation of a foundation for an encore appearance.

The ensemble realizes that there are a host of misperceptions about the genre that need to be addressed. It is sometimes a stretch for folks to understand that there is an enormous difference between the boutique concert mariachi ensembles and the groups that most people are exposed too in restaurants, piñata parties and street corners. Sol De Mexico is one of an elite group of fine concert musicians that are recognized internationally as one of the best mariachis in the world. Once people see and hear them they understand the depth and expanse of their talent.

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