

# DISCOVER TUCSON'S HERITAGE

## MUSIC

There are several traditional styles of music in southern Arizona, and some can be heard in few other places. These are the sounds of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and the American Southwest, and they are played on local radio stations, at annual festivals, at family celebrations, and in backyards. They celebrate the Native American, Mexican, and American heritages of the people who live here, and remind visitors that they are definitely not in "anywhere U.S.A." This regional music is unique because it is grounded in local history and the mixing of cultures that has taken place in Tucson and the Santa Cruz Valley. Many of the styles draw on each other for inspiration and instrumentation.



The annual Tucson International Mariachi Conference and Fiesta de Garibaldi bring together local artists with stars from Mexico and around the world.

Photo courtesy of Metropolitan Tucson Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Each listing below provides information about the traditional styles of music that can be experienced in our region, and related annual events that highlight that particular music style. (Details on the annual events included in this list can be found in the Discover Tucson's Heritage Events listings.) If there are specialty stores that sell CDs of local musicians playing local music, they are also included.

The Internet provides multiple opportunities for interested individuals to experience sound and video recordings of performances online and to purchase digital music. Two sites deserve mention in particular:

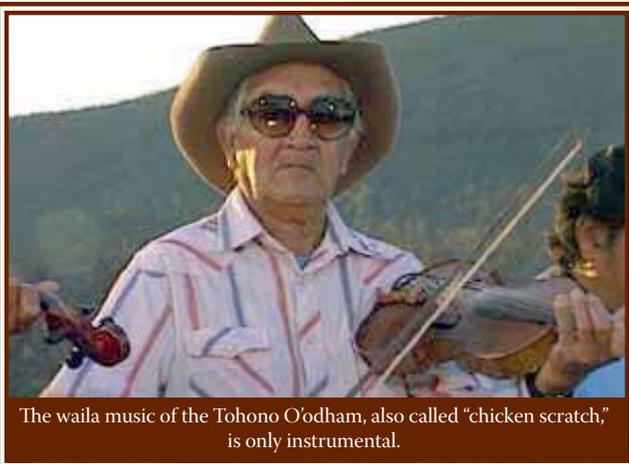
1) **Music of the Southwest Web Site** – <http://parentseyes.arizona.edu/msw>

Compiled and maintained by the University of Arizona's Learning Technologies Center, users gain access to extensive overviews of our local music styles, as well as audio and video archived recordings of local legends' performances.

2) **Metropolitan Tucson Convention and Visitors Bureau** – Tucson: Southern Arizona's Local Music Sanctuary  
[www.visittucson.org/articles/index.cfm?action=view&articleID=443](http://www.visittucson.org/articles/index.cfm?action=view&articleID=443)

This December, 2010 article provides a comprehensive list of popular music ambassadors for our region, music events, organizations, awards, and venues.

## TRADITIONAL STYLES OF MUSIC



The waila music of the Tohono O'odham, also called "chicken scratch," is only instrumental.

### NATIVE AMERICAN

**WAILA** – The waila music of the Tohono O'odham, the native people of the Sonoran Desert, developed from the music of 19th-century fiddle bands that adapted European and Mexican tunes heard in northern Sonora. Also called "chicken scratch," waila music is only instrumental. The most traditional forms of waila are played with a fiddle, guitar, and drums, but some bands now include a button accordion, alto saxophone, and electric six-string and bass guitars. The dances performed to this music include the waila (similar to a polka), the chote (based on a folk dance from Scotland or Germany), and the mazurka (based on a Polish folk dance). Regardless of the beat, all waila dances move around the floor in a counterclockwise direction.

**MEXICAN-AMERICAN**

**MARIACHI** – Mariachi music developed in western Mexico during the mid-19th century, and was originally played at weddings. In the 1920s and '30s, mariachi bands added cornets and then trumpets to the traditional violins, guitarras, vihuelas, and guitarrones. It became the most popular music in Mexico during the 1940s and '50s when it was spread by Mexican radio and charro films. Mariachi bands can be heard at many Mexican restaurants, private parties, and annual festivals in the region, and young Mexican-Americans learn to play in youth bands such as Los Changuitos Feos, and in the University of Arizona Mariachi Program. The Mexican-American role in the development of this style is firmly rooted in Tucson, where local groups such as Mariachi Cobre popularized the style for U.S. Hispanic and non-Hispanic audiences alike. The importance of mariachi music in the region is reflected in the annual Tucson International Mariachi Conference and Fiesta de Garibaldi that brings together local artists with stars from Mexico and around the world.



Mariachi bands can be heard at many Mexican restaurants, private parties, and annual festivals in Tucson.

**CORRIDOS** – Corridos are Spanish-derived ballads of northern Mexico that tell tales of the 1910 Mexican Revolution, the lives of heroes and outlaws, border crossings, horse races, disasters, and ill-fated loves. Corridos very often transmit important oral history. Corridos became popular on both sides of the border in the 1920s when musicians added the accordion, introduced by German and Czech immigrants to northern Mexico, southern Texas, and southern Arizona in the late 19th century. With the accordion were introduced polkas, waltzes, chotiches, and mazurkas, which mixed with corridos to form norteño music in the early 1950s. Traditional corridos are still composed and performed as a vital part of the region's cultural traditions. The Tucson Meet Yourself Festival's annual corrido composition contest perpetuates the tradition among audiences young and old.



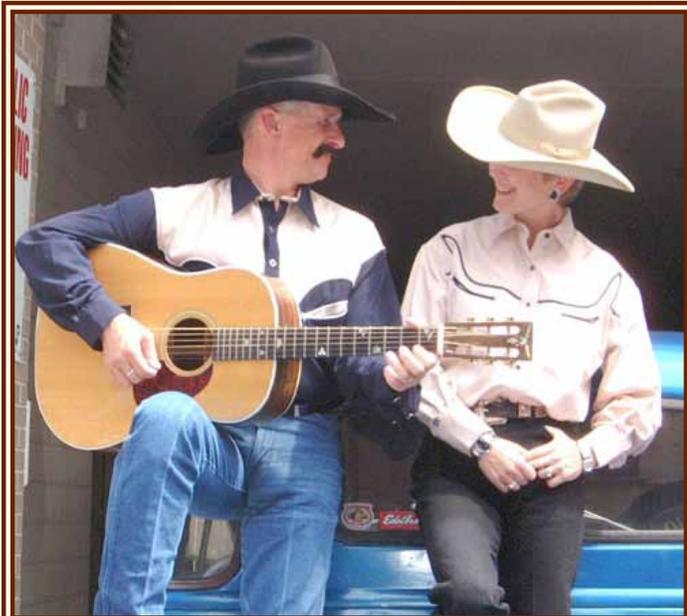
Norteño is a music style of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

**NORTEÑO** – Norteño music (also known as conjunto) is a music style of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands based around the accordion, drums, bajo sexto (12-string guitar), and string bass, and often includes vocals. Modern groups also use the electric bass, alto saxophone, and keyboards. During the later 20th century, norteño evolved with the influences of Columbian cumbia music, American rock music, and elements of brass bands (the latter called banda sinaloense).

**RANCHERA** – The dramatic ranchera style of music emerged during the 1910 Mexican Revolution. It is played at several different beats, and its lyrics traditionally celebrate rural life, tell of the struggles of ordinary people, and declare strong romantic feelings. Norteño bands favor rancheras with a polka beat, while mariachi bands play rancheras to the slower beats of boleros (Latin American romantic ballads) and waltzes. Ranchera music became popular on both sides of the border when it was featured in several American films in the 1950s.

On the U.S. side of the border, Mexican-Americans developed their own styles of folk music during the late 19th century, including ballads and orquesta music. During the 1940s, Tucson's Lalo Guerrero and other zootsuit-wearing "pachucos" fused swing jazz and boogie with rhumba and the slang of El Paso (caló) to create a unique Chicano sound played on radio stations and in dancehalls throughout the Southwest and in Los Angeles. Today there are a number of Tucson-area Mexican-American bands playing borderland styles of music.

Photo courtesy of Metropolitan Tucson Convention & Visitors Bureau.



Various types of Western music can be heard in local nightclubs and steakhouses, as well as at folk festivals throughout the region.

**WESTERN**

**WESTERN** – In addition to these Native American, Mexican, and Mexican-American styles of music can be heard several types of “Western music.” These range from late 19th-century Western folk ballads and cowboy songs played on guitars, sometimes accompanied by vocal harmonies and yodeling, to Western swing, an upbeat and eclectic mix of country, blues, polka, and swing jazz played on the fiddle, string bass, drums, saxophone, piano, and pedal steel guitar. Originating in the dance halls, roadhouses, and county fairs of west Texas in the 1920s and ‘30s, Western swing spread through the Southwest and gained a wide following through radio in the mid-1940s. All types of Western music can be heard in local nightclubs and steakhouses, as well as at folk festivals throughout the region.



July 2011

**ANNUAL EVENTS**

NATIVE AMERICAN

- Waila Festival (May)

SPECIALTY SHOPS

- Reservation Creations
- Wiwpu Duag – “The Coyote Store”

Both shops are located at:  
San Xavier Mission  
1959 W. San Xavier Rd.  
Tucson, AZ 85746

MEXICAN-AMERICAN

- International Mariachi Conference Espectacular (April)
- Fiesta de Garibaldi (April)

CORRIDOS

- Tucson Meet Yourself (October)

NORTEÑO

- Fiesta Grande Street Fair (March)

RANCHERA

- Fiesta Grande Street Fair (March)
- Tucson International Mariachi Conference Espectacular (April)
- Fiesta de Garibaldi (April)

WESTERN

- La Fiesta de los Vaqueros: Tucson Rodeo & Parade (February)
- Cowboy Music Festival (May)
- Tucson Folk Festival (May)
- Tucson Meet Yourself (October)



WWW.TUCSONAZ.GOV



Santa Cruz Valley  
HERITAGE ALLIANCE

WWW.SANTACRUZHERITAGE.ORG



WWW.VISITTUCSON.ORG