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**MARIANO GONZALEZ Y SUS  
INVITADOS ESPECIALES**



**PARAGUAYAN  
FOLK HARP  
ENSEMBLE  
FROM NEVADA**

**MARIANO GONZALEZ, HARPIST  
DANI CORTAZA, GUITARIST  
JAVIER DI FRANCISCO, VOCALIST  
ILIANA BELEN GAUTO, DANCER**

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# MARIANO GONZALEZ Y SUS INVITADOS ESPECIALES

## Mariano Gonzalez

The Paraguayan folk harp is one of the most recognizable and beloved traditional instruments in South America. Las Vegas resident Mariano Gonzalez mesmerizes audiences with a delightful, sentimental and sometimes surprising repertoire on this hand-crafted instrument.

"I learned, first, to play by ear," he explained, recalling his childhood in the green fields of eastern Paraguay. His father was a harpist; his grandfather, a harp maker; and today Mariano counts more than twenty harpists in his family. He began playing at the age of five, went on to study at El Centro Cultural de Arte in Asunción, then joined concert tours representing the music of Paraguay in Japan, Portugal, Argentina, Switzerland, France, Italy and Spain. Mariano's solo performances have included concerts at prestigious venues including Carnegie Hall in New York and Suntory Hall in Tokyo, and with the National Symphony Orchestra in Paraguay.

"There is something interesting about the Paraguayan folk musician," Mariano said. "If you hear ten *harpistas* play the same song, each one is going to play it a different way. We feel the freedom to express ourselves, to show virtuosity, or to do something that is very simple but very nice...I like many different kinds of music so I push myself to do things that I have no possibility to do with this instrument, but I want to, and so I try...and I learn that it is possible to do it."

While he has expanded his repertoire to include lively Latin rhythms, free-spirited jazz, semi-classical, and original arrangements of popular standards, he remains enamored of the unique and exquisite *polca* and *guarania* folk music of his homeland. Providing harmonic and rhythmic accompaniment for vocal solos and filling the measures between with improvisational interludes, the harp is an essential element in the *conjuntos* (folk music ensembles) that have popularized these musical genres in Paraguay and around the world.

Introduced by Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth century, the Spanish harp evolved to become an evocative symbol of Paraguayan national identity, or *paraguayidad*. Local Guarani musicians and woodworkers were taught to make and play the instrument until the Jesuits were recalled to Spain in the mid-eighteenth century; then the *arpa india* began to develop its signature style and repertoire. In the nineteenth century it served as accompaniment for the *polca*, a highly syncopated and rhythmic style of music and dance named for the European polka which was popular at the time.

By the twentieth century the Paraguayan harp had attained the shape and form that is familiar today. Mariano has taken an active part in what he calls the "harp revolution," continuing to adapt and adjust the harp's design to accommodate his own artistic journey. Innovations have included adding sharpening levers to the instrument, enabling the harpist to quickly change the pitch of a single note or the key in which the harp is played. He has also experimented with redesigning the instrument to make it easier to carry when traveling and to achieve new and unusual effects.

Many pieces performed on the harp today were arranged or

composed in the early twentieth century by Félix Pérez Cardozo, one of the first to introduce the Paraguayan harp to the world. Some commemorate important aspects of Paraguayan heritage, such as *El Tren Lechero* (the first steam train in Paraguay) and *Pajaro Campana* (a folk song paying homage to the national bird). Another harpist, José Asunción Flores, was moved to create a new style of music – the *guarania* – "from my people, written for and by my people," as he explained. Flores collaborated with poet Manuel Ortiz Guerrero to write *India*, *Panambí Verá* and other classics of the genre.

Mariano's forty-five-year career as a professional harpist, composer, and harp maker has taken him around the world and into multiple musical genres. Since moving to Las Vegas in 2002 to tour with Tony Orlando, he has graciously shared his beloved harp music with local audiences by performing for community venues and nonprofit organizations. He is one of many Nevada artists – born and raised in other states, and other nations – who have followed their dreams to "The Entertainment Capital of the World" to find work and advance their careers. Their presence contributes greatly to the cultural diversity and artistic excellence of Nevada.

*Mariano Gonzales y Sus Invitados* will feature virtuoso guitarist Dani Cortaza, recipient of the Maryland State Arts Council's 2007 Artistic Excellence Award and director of the DC Latin Jazz Festival Project. He formed his first musical group in Paraguay in 1984 and went on to tour internationally with groups playing folk music from many countries in Latin America. He is now working on his own compositions and arrangements of Paraguayan and South American folk music combined with elements of jazz, with a new CD in the works for 2013.

To round out his musical trio, Mariano has also invited Javier Di Francisco, a tenor from Paraguay who is currently touring in the United States. Di Francesco is descended from some of Paraguay's best-known musicians and has been performing professionally since the age of sixteen. In addition, Iliana Belen Gauto will travel from New York to enliven the performance with traditional dances of Paraguay.

Rebecca Snetselaar, Folklife  
Program Associate  
Southern Nevada Office  
Nevada Arts Council

## Bibliography

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*The American Folklife Center was created by Congress in 1976 and placed at the Library of Congress to "preserve and present American folklife" through programs of research, documentation, archival preservation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, public programs, and training. The Center includes the American Folklife Center Archive of folk culture, which was established in 1928 and is now one of the largest collections of ethnographic material from the United States and around the world. Please visit our web site <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/>.*

