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Puro. mariachi

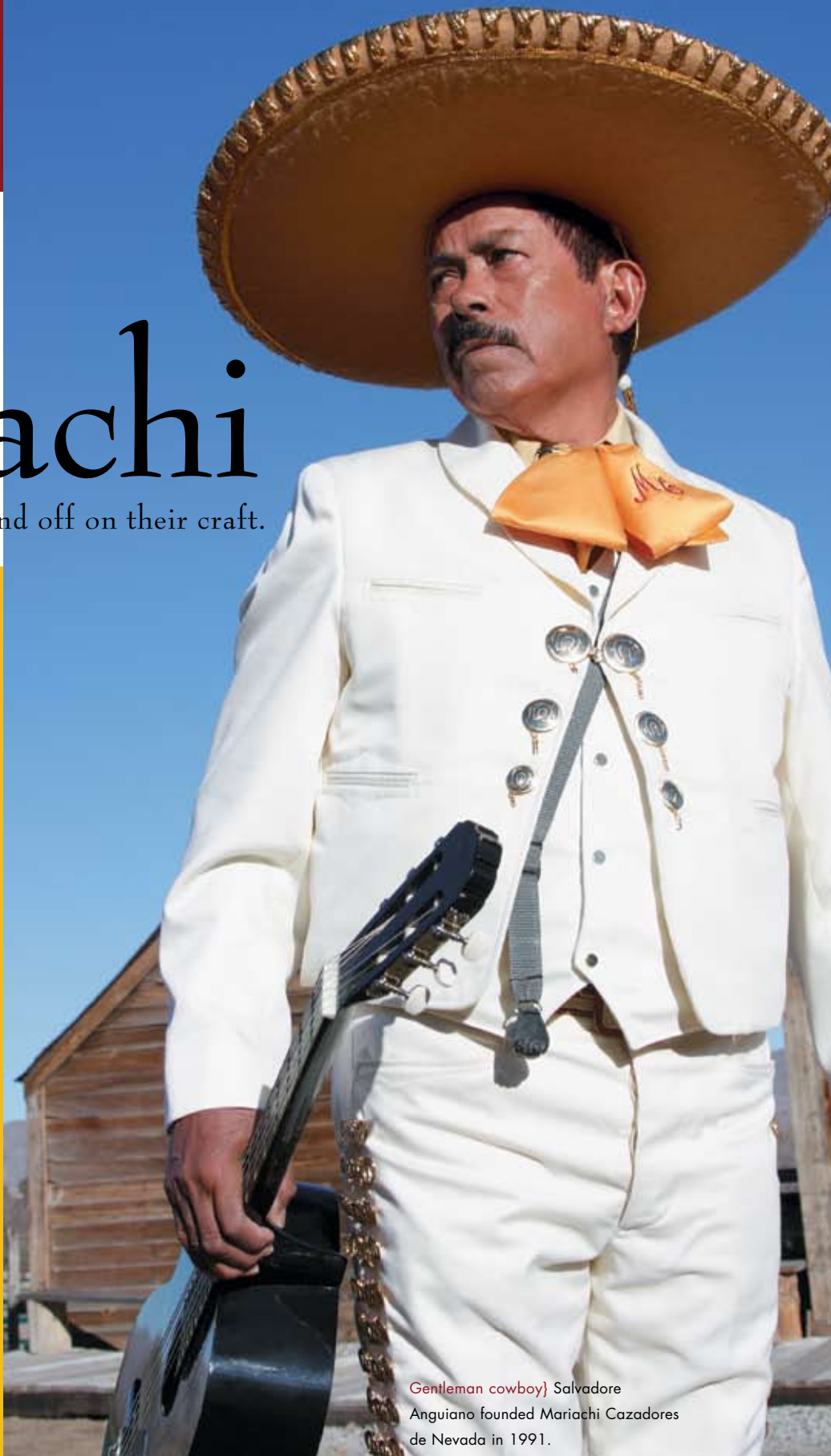
Reno's Mexican musicians sound off on their craft.

If you have an ear for mariachi music, then spring — with its attendant Cinco de Mayo celebrations — is the time to relish the festive sounds of trumpets and violins.

Mariachi's roots lie in Mexico, but the art form has flowered in Reno, with some bands dating back more than a decade. There even are efforts to teach the musical style in local schools.

"The instruments make it mariachi," says Salvadore Anguiano, a guitar player who founded Mariachi Cazadores de Nevada in Reno in 1991. "In my band, there are seven total — guitar; two trumpets; the guitarron, which is a big bass special to mariachi; two violins; and a vihuela, which is the little guitar."

Besides the singular musical sound, mariachi musicians often sport matching suits and sombreros. Called the traje de charro, which means "suit of the gentleman cowboy," the mariachi outfit includes a short jacket, fitted pants with ornate buttons along each side, a belt made of cactus fibers, a short tie called a moño, and an embroidered sombrero.



Gentleman cowboy} Salvadore Anguiano founded Mariachi Cazadores de Nevada in 1991.

"These outfits are very important for performances," says Jose Flores, who has taught mariachi to students at Vaughn Middle School in Reno, where he serves as instrumental music director. "The drawback is that they are extremely expensive, ranging in price from a couple hundred dollars to thousands for a single outfit."

Although funding for Vaughn's mariachi class was cut, Flores says he's applying for a grant to teach two hours of mariachi next year after school.

"Mariachi extends the musical vocabulary of the traditional student's Western European influences, which are taught in modern school music programs," he says. "It demonstrates to students that other cultures also have wonderful, rich traditions."

In addition, according to Reno mariachi Jeronimo "Sam" Ramirez, the music is full of joy — for both the musicians who play it and the crowds who hear it. Ramirez is a violinist who founded Reno's Mariachi Plata more than 16 years ago. The group comprises four violins, two trumpets, a guitarron, a vihuela, and a guitar.

Both Mariachi Plata and Mariachi Cazadores incorporate vocals, performing songs in English, Spanish, or both, depending on the occasion.

"People are so entertained by mariachi," Ramirez says, "and my greatest joy is to see people happy."

Catch Mariachi Plata from 11 a.m. to noon May 3 and 4 at the Nevada Hispanic Services' Cinco de Mayo celebration. Events take place at Victorian Square in Sparks and other Reno and Sparks locations. For details, see the Web site, nhsreno.com. If you miss the mariachi on Cinco de Mayo, keep an eye out for Mariachi Cazadores de Nevada and Mariachi Plata at casinos throughout Reno and Lake Tahoe. Aside from public performances, both groups regularly play private parties and weddings.

Brandi Schlossberg is a Reno freelance writer and mariachi fan.

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