

# How Chicago’s All-Women Mariachi Group Is Embracing Their Roots – And Bucking Tradition



Despite lukewarm feelings about the genre as a child, Mariachi Sirenas cofounder Ibet Herrera helped form Chicago’s first all-women mariachi band. The group has fostered a sisterhood of talented musicians while honoring their roots.



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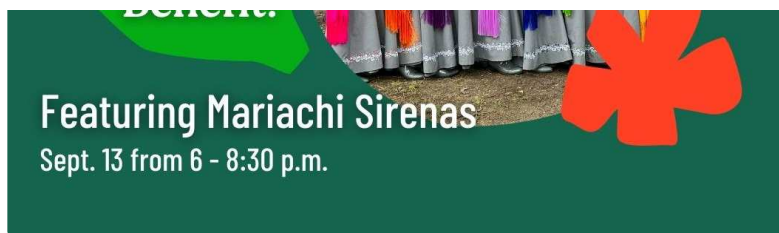
Mariachi Sirenas band members Jennifer Perez, Monique Guerrero and Ibet Herrera sing the chorus of “Las Ciudades” at Fiesta Del Sol in Pilsen, Chicago, Ill., July 30, 2023. Efrain Soriano/Borderless Magazine

By [Maia McDonald](#) | August 22, 2023 | [Arts & Culture](#)

Following a raucous feet-stomping performance at the annual Fiesta Del Sol in Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood, Mariachi Sirenas are greeted by a gaggle of excited festivalgoers backstage.

The all-women mariachi band had just wrapped up an hour-long set of well-known mariachi classics like “Las Ciudades,” “Cielito Lindo Huasteco,” and “La Sirenita Baila (Cumbia Popurri)” on a sunny July afternoon. Attendees swayed to the lilting voices and fast-paced tempos of the violins, trumpets and guitars – the group’s signature sound since it formed in 2017.





Even with a quinceañera after their festival set, several band members made time to speak with eager fans who praised their performance and feminine take on traditional mariachi songs.

Mariachi Sirenas has become a source of community, family and culture for the Sirenas themselves and their fans, who feel pride when seeing them perform.

“My goodness, they were amazing,” attendee Maria Waré gushed. “I just wanted to get up there and do some background with them.”



Audience members cheer on the all-women band, Mariachi Sirenas during their hour-long set at Fiesta Del Sol in Pilsen, Chicago, Ill., July 30, 2023.

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The Chicago band’s popularity has surged in recent years. And the performance at Fiesta del Sol, a festival organized by Pilsen Neighbors Community Council that celebrates Latino culture, only fueled more interest. Ibet Herrera, the band’s cofounder, said the set prompted several calls from people interested in booking the band for private events.

It is welcome news for the band, especially with these gigs serving as many members’ full-time jobs.

Over the past six years, the all-women mariachi band has worked tirelessly to defy stereotypes while honoring their Mexican roots. The band has dedicated hours rehearsing to perfect their public performances. They have cultivated a following and are leaving a mark on Chicago’s mariachi community.





Ibet Herrera is approached by fans to take photos and praise their performance after their hour-long set at Pilsen's Fiesta Del Sol in Chicago, Ill., July 30, 2023.

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"It's been very positive," Herrera said. "Everyone has been so supportive and so loving, and they've really taken us under their wing."

## The seeds of Chicago's only genre-defying mariachi band

Herrera started Mariachi Sirenas with fellow mariachi performer Eréndira Izguerra, who she met at a performance in 2017. The two had long searched for an all-women mariachi group in the Chicago area. When neither could find one, they teamed up to start their own group later that year.



The Mariachi Sirenas, Chicago's first all-women mariachi band, behind the main stage at Fiesta Del Sol in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago, Ill., July 30, 2023.

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Inspired by their dulcet tones and melodic harmonies akin to mermaids and sirens, the women named the band “Mariachi Sirenas.” They wanted to bring a “feminine visual to mariachi, [something] that is such a very masculine genre,” Herrera said. Izguerra later moved to Mexico in 2020 and Herrera has since lead the Mariachi Sirenas on her own.

Herrera now embraces mariachi music, but that wasn't always the case.

“I [had] this love and hate with my culture,” Herrera said. “Being first generation, [from] immigrant parents, you kind of want to be like everybody else and not have to do the adult thing. So, being Mexican, I knew I was Mexican, but I was kind of ashamed of it. I was embarrassed of it, and mariachi is very Mexican. So I just didn't like it.”



Ibet Herrera, center stage, introduces the Mariachi Sirenas as the crowd eagerly awaits for the performance to begin at Fiesta Del Sol in Chicago, Ill., July 30, 2023.

lessons.

She still looks fondly at that first summer being carpooled by her mother and taking mariachi lessons with her brother and cousins.

"I already had played the violin in orchestra in school," Herrera said. "So she says, 'You want to do it,' and I'm like, 'No,' and she's like, 'Well, we're gonna do it anyway,' and she got my cousins to do it, too. Then, every day that summer, we were doing mariachi lessons, and then through mariachi, I learned to love my culture again."

## A sisterhood of talented musicians honor their roots

To this day, Herrera's mariachi playing remains a family affair. Her teenage sister, Itzel, 16, and two cousins, Jeanette Nevarez, 32, and Laura Velazquez, 29, are all current members of Mariachi Sirenas.



Itzel Herrera when she was eleven years old on the day of her first mariachi recital in front of her and her sister, Ibet Herrera's, home in Stickney, Ill., June, 2018.

Photo courtesy of Ibet Herrera

Herrera also sees her other bandmates as honorary sisters — a bond that has grown with time and proximity. And like siblings, Herrera said the Sirenas know each other's moods. When a member is hungry, when they're "off their game," or in need of extra support, they are there to support each other. Recently, a member of the group lost their mother to brain cancer — an experience that brought the group closer together.

"It was touching to see that the group was there as friends and not just as coworkers," she said.

Looking back at the last six years, Herrera attributes the success of Mariachi Sirenas, in part, to her mother for bringing mariachi music to her life.

"I [credit] all the work that I've been doing, and anything that's come in the future or as far as we go — it's, for sure, because of my mom," Herrera said.



The Mariachi Sirenas quickly pack up their gear with the help of member Monique Guerrero's mother, Rosy Guerrero, known to the Sirenas as "Momma G," after their performance at Fiesta Del Sol in Pilsen, Chicago, Ill., July 30, 2023. The Sirenas had a private performance at a quinceañera after their set at the festival.

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For all the growing success, it has not come easy.

Mariachi Sirenas initially faced its share of criticism. Some detractors believed the band only gained traction because they were young women who wore skirts. But Herrera has taken those criticisms in stride, attributing their success to their hard work and a commitment to honor their roots.

"We do really respect our culture; we want to represent it as well as we can," Herrera said. "But with the understanding that we are also here from America."

The group is a fusion of their Mexican and American roots, Herrera said.

"Mariachi Sirenas is a group of strong, independent, hardheaded Mexican-American women who just want to be able to have a good time while we're performing, and hopefully, people also get that vibe when we're doing it," she said.

Despite their sometimes nontraditional approach to mariachi, Herrera is glad their music resonates with so many people. For her, performing with Mariachi Sirenas is a "blessing" she does not take for granted.

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