

Bosque Music: A Timeless Song

Natural sounds, celebrations, ceremonies, personal reflections, artistic expression: these are some of the ways music can connect people to the Middle Rio Grande bosque.

1. A Cultural Connection

As long as people have lived here, music has flowed throughout the Middle Rio Grande Valley. From ancient Pueblo harvest celebrations, to Spanish fiestas, to Las Posadas Christmas plays, to barn raisings, to Friday night dances at the local community center, music has always been a thread in the cultural fabric of the valley.

"...[W]hen they had a wedding or a dance the musicians would get on top of the wagon, and they would go all over the neighboring town playing. That was the announcement that there was going to be a dance. You could hear the musicians going from one street to the other playing. It was like a parade—what is going on: dance tonight."

"...When I was growing up and—let's say my cousin had a birthday—my dad would put all of us in a horse and wagon, and he had a guitar and my brothers played guitar, and we had to go sing "Happy Birthday" . . . before you knew it there was a big table set and it was all ready for everybody to eat. Then after that we would just start singing different songs in English or in Spanish . . ."

"...right on Christmas day they would bring boxes of clothes, gifts and candy. Your eyes would pop out. As a kid; I was raised in poverty. I remember one year I stood in line three times just so I could get a harmonica—that was what started me in music . . ."

Excerpts from *Shining River, Precious Land* by Kit Sargeant and Mary Davis

Studying the local music of the past can teach students about the culture and events that helped shape some of the human connections to the Middle Rio Grande bosque.

2. A Natural Symphony

Besides creating a setting for music of all kinds, the bosque creates its own music as well. By walking through the bosque or sitting on the river's bank, you can hear one of the greatest orchestras around. Crows chattering from the cottonwood canopies, frogs bellowing from shallow pools, coyotes howling from a distance and river water splashing around a piece of driftwood—the bosque performs its own natural concerts and admission is always free!

"... and when the dawn wind stirs through the ancient cottonwoods, and the gray light steals down the hills over the old river sliding softly past its wide brown sand bars—what if there be no more goose music?"

Excerpt from Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*



Studying, recording and creating natural sounds can greatly enhance a visit to the bosque, deepening observation skills.

3. Inspired by Nature

The natural world has always inspired musicians and composers, and water has especially found a place in many types of music. Composers like Maurice Ravel, Antonio Vivaldi and Claude Debussy made the sounds and feelings of water come alive through several of their compositions.

Other more modern songs use some form of “rivers” in their lyrics or title. “Moon River,” “Bridge Over Troubled Water,” “Take Me to the River” and “The Water is Wide” are just a few songs that use rivers as their theme or setting.

Songwriters may also use music to communicate their political or social views on the use or management of the river. This form of expression can be very effective in communicating a personal thought or opinion.

By exploring music about water, students may gain an appreciation for this form of creative expression and be inspired to write their own songs about the river.

Almost everyone enjoys listening to or playing some form of music. Even if you can't carry a tune in a bucket, you can help broaden students' views of the Rio Grande by using music as an engaging way to appreciate and study the cultural and natural history of the Middle Rio Grande bosque.

- Resources:**
- Hart, Avery and Paul Mantell. 1993. *Kids Make Music: Clapping and Tapping from Bach to Rock*. Charlotte, VT: Williamson Publishing.
 - Cesare, Ruth De. 1992. *Myth, Music and Dance of the American Indian*.
 - Sargeant, Kathryn and Mary Davis. 1986. *Shining River, Precious Land: An Oral History of Albuquerque's North Valley*. The Albuquerque Museum.

Habitat Rap

By Gary M. Stolz

Oh, habitat is where it's at,
It's the home that all life needs,
It's food, water, shelter, space,
And it used to be all over the place,
But it's not the same, and it's not a game,
And we gotta do somethin' quick,
It's up to us, to make a fuss,
'Cause our world is growing sick.
Endangered species are a sign so strong,
That our ecosystem has something wrong,
It's biology's diversities. . .
Nature's universities,
That show us health of the world we share,
With every creature, common or rare.
Since dinosaurs we've never lost,
So many species at an unknown cost,
Cancer, AIDS and other disease,
Hidden cures in rainforest trees.
There's medicine and whole lot more,
To be discovered in nature's store,
But it's going fast and it won't last,
We must work quick with votes to cast,
Water flowing from the sink,
Is it really safe to drink?
To clean our air, everywhere,
Everybody's gotta care,
It's about our world, and the mess we're in,
What can we do? And where to begin?
Let's agree, just you and me,
To recycle more and plant a tree,
Conserve on fuel and share a ride,
Good stewardship will give us pride,
'Cause habitat is where it's at,
It's the home that all life needs,
It's food, water, shelter, space,
And it used to be all over the place,
But it's not the same, and it's not a game,
And we gotta do somethin' quick,
It's up to us, to make a fuss,
'Cause our world is growing sick.





Save the Rio Grande

To the tune of "Gilligan's Island"; new lyrics by Matt Schmader

Sit right back and you'll hear a tale
 A tale of the Rio Grande
 It starts up on the mountaintops
 And flows across the land
 The river was a mighty one
 It flooded far and near
 People farmed along its banks
 For three thousand years
 Three thousand years

The trees grew tall, proud and strong
 The birds and fish were free
 They were living on borrowed time
 As you will come to see
 For along came the engineers
 Said the river must be tamed
 It's now a shadow of its former self
 And many are to blame,
 Many are to blame

Dams, levees, and neighborhoods
 Changed the way we live
 The more people learned to take
 The river had less to give
 "Progress" now has finally come
 With environmental cost
 And if not for the courage of a fearless few
 The minnow will be lost,
 The minnow will be lost

The Rio dried and people fought
 Over every precious mile
 With the Army Corps
 Fish and Wildlife too
 Big cities
 And their thirst
 The Conservancy
 The farmers and you and me,
 Must save the Rio Grande
 Must save the Rio Grande
 Must save...the Rio...Grande!

Rio Grande Elementary School's Songs for the Bosque

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One fun way to play with music and the bosque is to create lyrics to popular tunes. When Cindy Kuchera taught music at Rio Grande Elementary School in Belen, she worked with students who participated in the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program (BEMP). They developed and performed these three songs at a BEMP Student Congress. Two of the songs are about BEMP sites: the Savannah Site at Bosque School in Albuquerque and the Belen Site at Willie Chavez Park in Belen. Can you make up some songs about the experiences you've had in the bosque?

The Bosque

(Sung to the tune "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean")

My bosque lies over the flood plain,
The Rio Grande runs right through it.
My bosque lies over the flood plain,
Oh, bring back the bosque to us.

Chorus: Bring back, bring back
Oh bring back the bosque to us, to us
Bring back, bring back
Oh bring back the bosque to us.

The pitfall collections are buggy,
With spiders, beetles and pillbugs.
Their numbers will help in our study
Of abundance of life in the bosque.

Chorus

Exotic and native forest foliage,
We count the woody stems,
To track the changes o'er the forest
Of trees, shrubs and vines.

Chorus

As students we must do our duty,
To help understand Mother Nature
As she controls the bosque,
This vital bosque eco-system

Chorus



Oh Savannah

(Sung to the tune “Oh Susanna”)

We come to Bosque School
Just to see what can be seen
And found a whole new world
Where we can learn what’s green

Chorus: Oh Savannah,
The mysteries you’ll unfold
You are a new BEMP site
And your story will be told.

Out behind the school is the river
The Rio Grande, ‘tis true
And in the maintained meadow
There’s a lot of work to do.

Chorus

The flicker, coyote and rock squirrel
Are some of the wildlife that’s here.
And in the forest we will find
Native plants, and exotics we fear.

Chorus

Along the river are the signs
Of abundant beaver life,
Tall cottonwoods are their target here
To what will end the strife?

Chorus



Belen

(Sung to the tune “This Land is Your Land”)

This land is your land,— this land is my land
From Willie Chavez—to the Rio Grande
From the ground below us—to the canopy high
This site belongs to you and me.

The Belen site is wild—the trail o’er grown,
The stakes were plotted—to help us find them.

And now exotics—have taken over,
This site was made for you and me.

Vegetation is plenty—as nature plans it
The kids come monthly—so they can find it
Pit fall and leaf litter—the tasks are taken
Rainfall and ground water are collected too.

The site floods often – along the river,
It breeds mosquitoes—and is home to beaver.

The trees are young here—they grow so wild.
This site is monitored by you and me.

(Repeat first verse)

El Río Grande

The song on the next page comes from *Musica del Rio Grande: Aguas Bravas*, an anthology of river music from the Upper Rio Grande compiled by University of New Mexico Spanish Professor Enrique R. Lamadrid.

The composer, a popular radio announcer on Spanish station KABQ in the 1970s, Juanito Lucero moved home to Torreon where he raised a family. He is a church deacon and has composed hundreds of sacred and secular songs, including “El Corrido del Rio Grande.” His daughter Lola Chavez documented his music for the John D. Robb Archive of Southwestern Music at the University of New Mexico.



El Río Grande

Por Juan S. Lucero

Este corrido, amigos míos,
es una fuente de puro amor,
como las aguas del Río Grande
que dan la vida y causan dolor.

Como en mi cuerpo corre mi sangre
por los veneros de mi corazón,
así es el agua del Río Grande
que va corriendo por la Nación.

El Río Bravo, río del Norte
en Colorado es donde nació,
sus aguas fluyen de las montañas
de Colorado hasta México.

En su corrida da nueva vida
a los paisanos de la región,
de Alamosa y Antonito
y el Norte de Nuevo México.

Por Española y Peña Blanca,
por Algodones sus aguas van,
por Bernalillo y Alameda
sigue corriendo sin descansar.

Va su corrida por Albuquerque
y por Atrisco pasa también,
de allí procede al sur su jornada
hasta Los Lunas, Tomé y Belén.

Cerca del Río corre un camino
que le llaman el Camino Real,
allí recuerdo como en un sueño
de aquel pueblito de San Marcial.

Allá en El Paso juntan sus aguas
las dos Naciones que quiero yo,
estas placitas son lagrimitas
que dejas en Nuevo México.

The Río Grande

By Juan S. Lucero

This corrido, my friends,
is a fountain of pure love,
like the waters of the Río Grande
which give life and cause pain.

Just as blood runs in my body
through the torrents of my heart,
thus is the water of the Río Grande
which flows through the Nation.

The Río Bravo, river of the North
in Colorado is where it was born,
its waters flow from the mountains
of Colorado to Mexico.

In its course it gives new life
to the inhabitants of the region,
of Alamosa and Antonito
and the North of Nuevo México.

Through Española and Peña Blanca,
through Algodones its waters flow,
through Bernalillo and Alameda
it keeps running without rest.

Its current goes through Albuquerque
and passes through Atrisco as well,
from there its journey flows south
until Los Lunas, Tomé, and Belén.

Along the River runs a road
that is called the Camino Real,
there I remember as in a dream
the village of San Marcial.

There in El Paso join the waters
the two Nations that I love,
these villages are tears
that you leave in New Mexico.