

# Larry & Joe

## Teacher Resource Guide

### Lotus Blossoms 2025



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## About Larry & Joe

Larry & Joe were destined to make music together.

Larry Bellorín hails from Monagas, Venezuela and is a legend of Llanera music. Joe Troop is from North Carolina and is a GRAMMY-nominated bluegrass and oldtime musician. Larry was forced into exile and is an asylum seeker in North Carolina. Joe, after a decade in South America, got stranded back in his stomping grounds in the pandemic. Larry worked construction to make ends meet. Joe's acclaimed "latingrass" band, Che Apalache, was forced into hiatus, and he shifted into action working with asylum seeking migrants. Then Larry met Joe.

Currently based in the Triangle of North Carolina, both men are versatile multi-instrumentalists and singer-songwriters on a mission to show that music has no borders. As a duo they perform a fusion of Venezuelan and Appalachian folk music on harp, banjo, cuatro, fiddle, maracas, guitar, upright bass, and whatever else they decide to throw in the van. The program they offer features a distinct blend of their musical inheritances and traditions as well as storytelling about the ways that music and social movements coalesce.



## Venezuelan Folk Music

Larry Bellorín grew up in Punta de Mata in the state of Monagas, Venezuela. His mother, a poor farmworker, raised him. By age 6, he became a shoe shiner and built a faithful clientele by singing as he polished, taking requests for the popular Vallenatos of the day. He eventually caught the attention of a local music educator who invited him to study at the city's premiere music school, where Larry learned to play the cuatro.



The Venezuelan cuatro is a smaller, four-stringed instrument that belongs to the guitar family and is often used for strumming. It arrived in South America with Spanish settlers, and it is an essential part of Venezuelan folkloric music. While traditionally used for rhythmic and harmonic support, a recent evolution in playing technique has made it capable of handling solo parts. The cuatro is used in various genres of Venezuelan music, as well as in other countries like Colombia, Trinidad & Tobago, and Aruba.

The cuatro is an essential instrument that adds to the diverse genres and musical, traditional, artistic, and cultural

manifestations that typify Venezuelan heritage. The Venezuelan cuatro has evolved into a versatile instrument that is played in almost all of Venezuela's folk music genres, such as gaita and Zulian dance, calypso, carols, Christmas songs, parties, and entertainment.<sup>1</sup>

Larry most often performs on the Venezuelan harp, having trained under the prominent Venezuelan harpist Urbino Ruiz. The harp is a large string instrument that has been present in musical performances dating back to ancient Egypt. The harp stands upright, with up to 47 strings offering a different pitch. Larry uses the harp to showcase his musical talent, but also the beauty of the folk music of Venezuela.

## Appalachian Folk Music

The Appalachian region, defined broadly as the mountains of the Southeastern United States, ranges from Georgia all the way to New York and into Maine, stretching across nearly twenty states. Appalachian folk music evolved from a combination of cultures as the region became populated by European colonizers, namely Celtic (Irish and Scottish) tradition with heavy African influence. These musical influences come in different forms, ranging from folk songs, melodies, and lyrics to the instruments native to these respective areas.

Joe, a North Carolina Native, uses many of these traditional instruments. Two of the most notable Appalachian instruments are the banjo and the fiddle. In Southern Appalachia, where white and Black people often lived in close proximity, musicians

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<sup>1</sup> Romero, Angel. "The Venezuelan Cuatro, the Essential Guitar of Venezuela: World Music Central." *World Music Central | Your Connection to Traditional and Contemporary World Music, Including Folk, Roots, Global Music, Ethno and Crosscultural Fusions*, 7 May 2023, [worldmusiccentral.org/2023/05/07/the-venezuelan-cuatro/](https://worldmusiccentral.org/2023/05/07/the-venezuelan-cuatro/)

adopted music from each other. Many common fiddle tunes originated with African American fiddlers. The fiddle and banjo combination melded European American and African American musical traditions.<sup>2</sup>

The fiddle is, technically, exactly the same instrument as the violin. The only difference between the two is how they are used—the instrument is called a violin when used for classical music, while a fiddle is used for folk and bluegrass music.



The banjo, however, is its own instrument. The original banjo descends from similar African instruments that were built from dried hollowed gourds and animal skin stretched across the frame. It was brought to the Americas by enslaved Africans and their descendants in the Caribbean and colonial North America.<sup>3</sup> Similar to a guitar, the banjo is a stringed instrument with a long neck. Unlike the guitar, however, it has a thin membrane stretched over the frame to form a resonator, which can be used almost like a hand drum.

Both instruments were, and are, incredibly important to Appalachian heritage and the culture developed in the mountains. Today, the sounds of Appalachian music can be heard in a wide range of genres, including ballad singing, bluegrass, blues, early country music, gospel, mountain swing, and old-time music.

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<sup>2</sup> “Old-Time Appalachian Fiddle Tunes: About the Genre.” *Ballad of America*, 18 Mar. 2022, [balladofamerica.org/old-time-appalachian-fiddle-tune/](http://balladofamerica.org/old-time-appalachian-fiddle-tune/).

<sup>3</sup> “Banjos.” *Smithsonian Music*, [music.si.edu/spotlight/banjos-smithsonian](http://music.si.edu/spotlight/banjos-smithsonian).

## Helpful Links & References

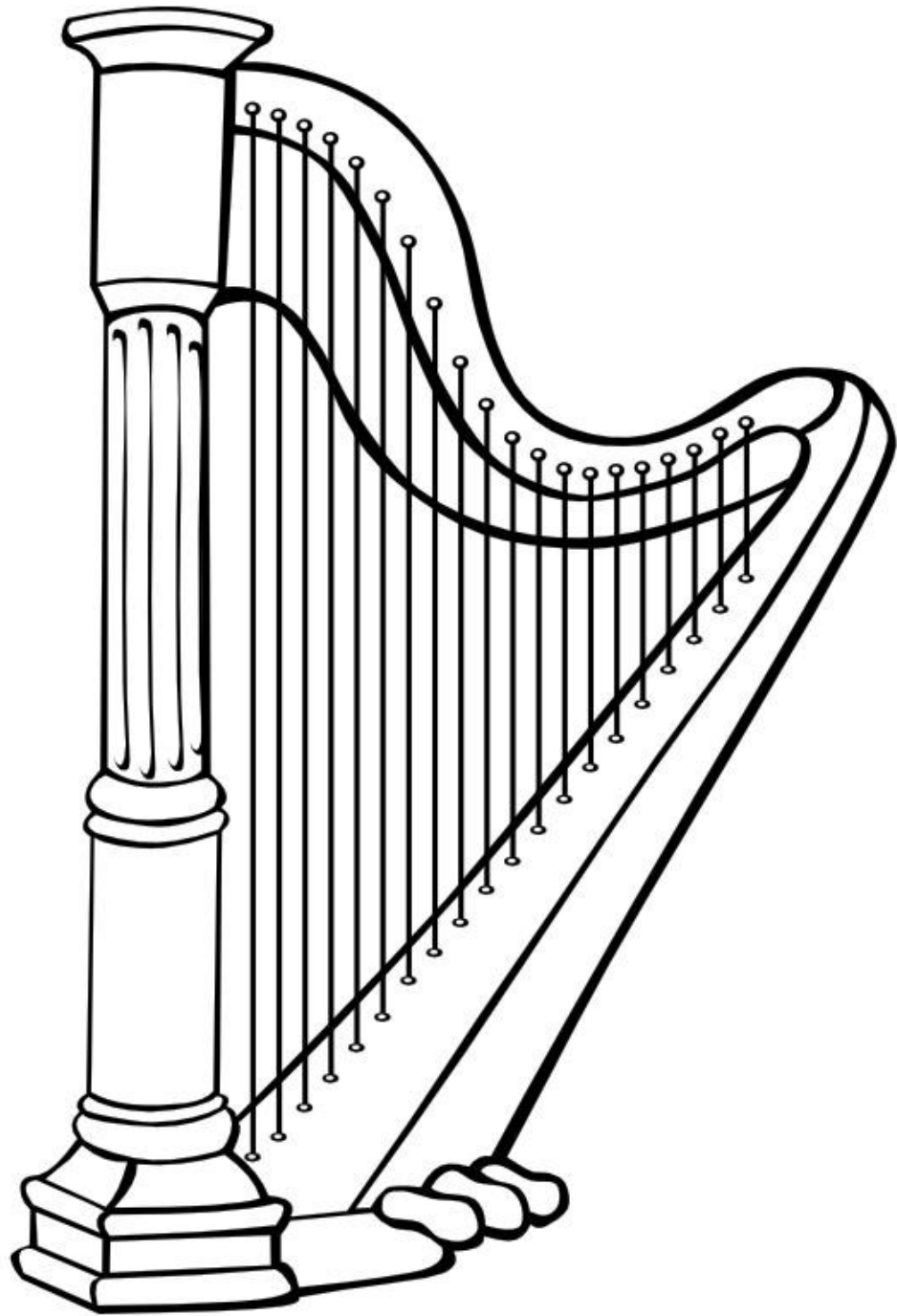
- <https://www.larryandjoe.com/>
- [Ya Volveré a la Sierra](#) - featuring fiddle and cuatro
- [Larry & Joe Perform “Cabello Viejo”](#) – featuring harp and banjo
- [Fiddle and Banjo Music of Appalachia](#)

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Written & Compiled by Maggie Ison

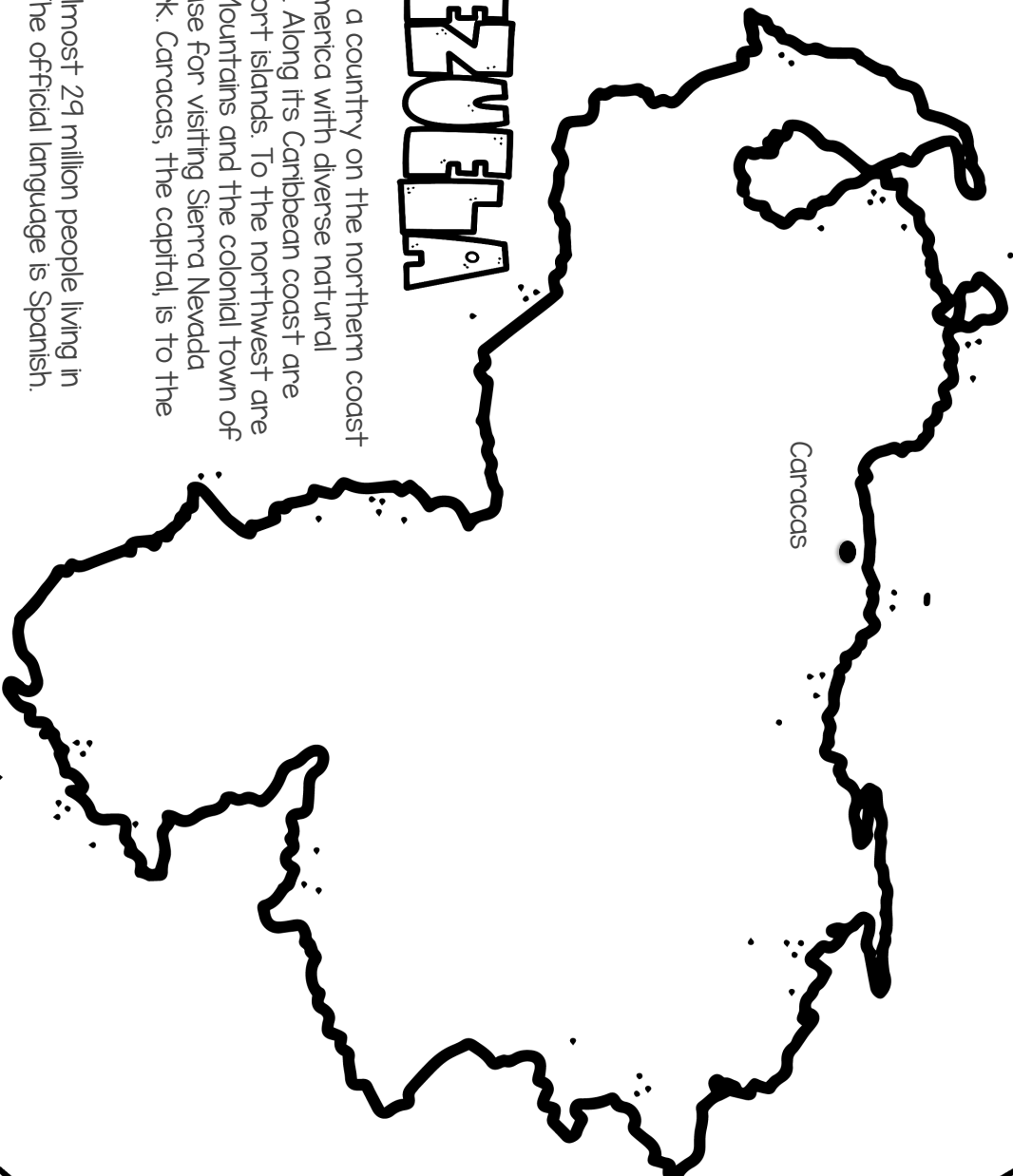
For more information regarding **Lotus Blossoms**, please contact Tamara Loewenthal, [artisticdirector@lotusfest.org](mailto:artisticdirector@lotusfest.org), 812-219-1890  
P.O. Box 1667, Bloomington, IN 47402  
[lotusfest.org](http://lotusfest.org)

See attached coloring sheets that may engage younger learners.









# VENEZUELA

Venezuela is a country on the northern coast of South America with diverse natural attractions. Along its Caribbean coast are tropical resort islands. To the northwest are the Andes Mountains and the colonial town of Mérida, a base for visiting Sierra Nevada National Park. Caracas, the capital, is to the north.

There are almost 29 million people living in Venezuela. The official language is Spanish.



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