

MUSIC

Thursday, Oct. 4, 2001

Houston Chronicle

★★

Mariachi concert looks to next generation

By **RAMIRO BURR**
Special to the Chronicle

When Mariachi Vargas en Concierto comes to Houston on Friday, the show will be about more than spotlighting one of Mexico's finest troupes. The concert also supports a young generation following those traditions.

Mariachi is the heartland music of Mexico and an integral part of Mexican-American culture. Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán headlines the concert at the Wortham Theater Center's Cullen Theater. Also performing will be Houston's Mariachi MECA youth troupe, made up of students from Sam Houston and Reagan high schools, and 9-year-old Victoria Acosta of San Antonio, a mariachi vocal competition winner.

"In our culture, we get to enjoy mariachi music in many forms, from family gatherings to birthdays and Mother's Day serenades," said Rudy "the Flash" Garza, a veteran radio personality who hosts the afternoon drive time on Houston's Tejano/norteño radio station KQQK (106.5 FM). "But if we don't get behind the kids that have an interest in our roots music, then

we won't have a future."

Acosta was inspired when she first saw Tejano singer Patsy Torres.

"I was only 3 years old, and she asked several children to get up on stage with her to sing and dance," Acosta recalled. "Ever since then, I got into the music. At home, I would stand by the fireplace and sing songs like *Little Mermaid* and *Over the Rainbow*."

After years of practicing rancheras, Acosta competed in the elementary category of San Antonio's Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza in November and won first place.

"When I grow up, I want to become a singer because I like to make people happy and help them forget about the moments that felt bad for them," she said. "I like to sing because when I listen to radio, the music and the singers sound so wonderful."

She lists Linda Ronstadt, Aida Cuevas, Lucero, Destiny's Child and Britney Spears as her musical influences.

When young singers such as Acosta show an interest in Latin music such as Tejano, norteño or mariachi, it bodes well for Mexican-American culture, said Garza.

"All this helps preserve our culture," he

said. "Whether we're Tejanos or norteño fans, it all starts with the music and our roots, and mariachi music is part of that. It's our original roots music, and having a mariachi concert at a prestigious place like the Cullen Theater should be a source of pride in how our music is presented."

George Lopez, Web master at elmariachi.com, one of the largest Web sites dedicated to mariachi music, thinks the passing on of cultural traditions is a key link to maintaining roots.

"It provides the intimate connection with our heritage and our traditions. For many young people growing up, it is a bridge to the lives of our parents, grandparents and forefathers. To preserve folkloric music is to preserve the bond with our ancestry."

Mariachi Vargas' latest CD is *Mariachi Vargas Sinfónico*, recorded with the Orquest. Filarmónica de Querétaro in Mexico.

The concert, originally scheduled in June, was postponed because of Tropical Storm Allison.

Mariachi Vargas en Concierto, 8 p.m. Friday, Wortham Theater Center's Cullen Theater, 501 Texas. \$21-\$101. 713-629-3700.

INSIDE



Music of Mexico

Singer Victoria Acosta of San Antonio will perform when Mariachi Vargas en Concierto comes to Houston on Friday.

Page 3D