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CONEXIÓN

Selina Elizondo will sing
her heart out for a chance
to open for Mariachi Vargas

canción
en
el alma



VOLUME 3, ISSUE 30



EDMUND TIJERINA: We can like 'Apocalypto'
and not endorse Mel Gibson **P7**

LA ONDA: S.A. mom switches
families in 'Wife Swap' **P19**



HELEN L. MONTOYA/CONEXIÓN

Selina Elizondo, a senior at Madison High School, will compete in the voice competition during the 12th annual Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza.

VYING TO BE THE BEST

Mariachi Vargas opening spot at stake

MELISSA RENTERÍA
Conexión

As a young girl, Selina Elizondo was awed by the powerful voices of mariachi singers.

"Even though I couldn't understand everything, I could feel the passion," said Elizondo, 18, who started taking singing lessons at age 9 after seeing a mariachi performance at her school. "I would be mesmerized by their performing."

Now, Elizondo hopes to be the one

leaving audiences wowed.

On Saturday, Dec. 2, Elizondo will compete against dozens of other mariachi students from across the state for the title of "Best Mariachi Vocalist in the U.S." in Ford Motor Company's 12th Annual Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza.

It's a title that Elizondo, a senior at Madison High School, tied for last year and has competed for since 1999.

Top student vocalists in elementary school to college-age categories compete for the best vocalist title. The winner opens for the world-renowned Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlan on Dec. 2.

Other cities have similar competitions, but the San Antonio contest is the biggest of its kind and the only one judged by members of Mariachi Vargas, said Laura Cardenas, spokesperson for the event, which draws hundreds of students for its competitions and music workshops.

"It's done on a much grander scale here," she said. "It's a big spectacle."

Elizondo said mariachi music is her favorite music to perform because of its soulfulness and range.

"It talks about problems most people have," said Elizondo, who also sings pop and chorale in her school choir.

Elizondo would like to finish her

amateur singing career with the best-vocalist title. If she doesn't earn the title this year, Elizondo said, she'll compete again next year in the college category.

"I'm not nervous. I'm actually really excited," she said. "I'm looking forward to getting up onstage and really belting it out."

Elizondo, who plans to major in education and music at Texas State University, said she'll continue taking mariachi lessons and performing with local mariachi groups after high school.

"I can't imagine not performing," she said. "It's part of me."

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Ultimate mariachi music collection

If you're looking to expand (or start) your mariachi music collection, here are some favorite picks for the mariachi sound:



'Lo Mejor de Jose Alfredo Jimenez'

This 1990 two-disc collection from the Mexico-born singer features some of the artist's more famous songs, including 'Ella,' and 'Qué Suerte La Mía.'



'Canciones de Mi Padre'

Online reviewers give this 1987 album by rocker-turned-ranchera singer Linda Ronstadt top ratings for her powerful performance. Backed by the world-famous Mariachi Vargas, Ronstadt sings classics like, 'Tú Solo Tú,' and 'Los Laureles.'



'The Living Legend'

Mexican icon Vicente Fernandez got top reviews for this 2006 box collection that features songs handpicked by the 'Mexican Sinatra.' The 36-song collection includes 'Guadalajara,' and 'México Lindo Y Querido.'



'Todos los Romances'

Many younger mariachi singers list this 1998 three-disc album by Luis Miguel as one of their favorites. It features mariachi classics, 'Solamente Una Vez,' and 'Bésame Mucho.'

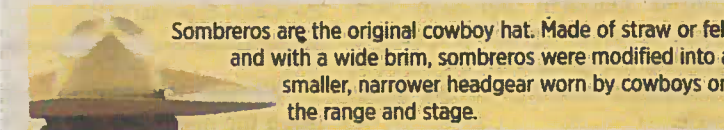


'The Best of Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlan: Ultimate Collection'

Known as the best mariachi group in the world, Mariachi Vargas stays true to tradition on this 2004 album that features classic rancheras.

Making of the mariachi

Known as the music of Mexico, mariachi songs date back to the 18th century. Here's a look at mariachi music's connection to other musical genres:



Sombreros are the original cowboy hat. Made of straw or felt and with a wide brim, sombreros were modified into a smaller, narrower headgear worn by cowboys on the range and stage.

Mariachi groups can number up to 20 members who play violin, trumpet, guitar and the signature guitarrón. Such large ensembles using a variety of string and horn instruments were popular in the '70s disco and R&B scene. Remember KC & The Sunshine Band and Earth, Wind & Fire?

Whether they know it or it, many musicians have been influenced by mariachi music. A trumpet riff in the Johnny Cash (right) classic 'Ring of Fire' is reminiscent of mariachi trumpet solos, and Linda Ronstadt belted out rock tunes years before she released her 1987 mariachi album, 'Canciones de Mi Padre.'



Like The Beach Boys and The Temptations (left) in the '60s, mariachi groups dress in matching outfits for a uniformed look. But mariachis have more flash with their elaborately ornamented waist-length jackets and tight-fitting pants.

The Eight Days of the Mariachi

Ford Motor Company's 12th Annual Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza

THURSDAY, NOV. 30

Serenata en el Río

Rivercenter Mall Lagoon 849 E. Commerce, 6 p.m.

Student mariachi groups from throughout U.S. will showcase their musical talent on the River Walk.

FRIDAY, DEC. 1

Mariachi Instrumental and Vocal Workshops

Municipal Auditorium, 100 Auditorium Circle

■ **8 a.m. - 1 p.m.:** Pre-registration required. Over 1,000 mariachi students will gather to take lessons in voice and instrumentation from members of Mariachi Vargas and other professional mariachis. Mariachi group competition

■ **5 - 10 p.m.:** Elementary/middle school, high school and college/university mariachi groups face off for first place and the opportunity to open for Mariachi Vargas on Saturday.

SATURDAY, DEC. 2

Mariachi Vocal Competition

Municipal Auditorium, 100 Auditorium Circle, 9 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Student vocalists from elementary school to college will showcase their talents to compete for the 'Best Mariachi Vocalist in the U.S.' title and a chance to open for Mariachi Vargas that night.

Mariachi Vargas

Concert Municipal Auditorium 100 Auditorium Circle, 7:30 p.m.

The concert will include performances by the 'Best Mariachi Vocalist in the U.S.' competition winner, first-place winners of the student mariachi group competitions and Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlan. Tickets through Ticketmaster, (210) 224-9600.

SUNDAY, DEC. 3

Mariachi Mass

Sacred Heart Chapel, Our Lady of the Lake University, 411 SW 24th St. At 11:30 a.m., the Mariachi Mass concludes the eight-day celebration. For information, www.mariachi-music.com



COURTESY PHOTO

The Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza has been expanded to eight days to include workshops and more.

Music festival boasts the very best

RAMIRO BURR
Special to Conexión

Thousands of area and regional students are busy tuning up for competition in the 12th annual Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza that unfolded this week.

Once again, the world-renowned Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlan headlines the main event on Saturday, Dec. 2, at the Municipal Auditorium. Tickets are available through Ticketmaster.

Another highlight takes place in the Serenata en el Río Thursday, Nov. 30, as a few dozen student mariachi groups serenade tourists along the River Walk.

Because of their long and storied past, impeccable musicianship and international influence, Mariachi Vargas retains its standing as the world's best mariachi. Part of that heritage is Ruben Fuentes, long considered one of the world's foremost authorities on mariachi and ranchera music.

Fuentes has worked as a musician, producer, arranger and music director with Mariachi Vargas since 1944.

In October, Fuentes was recognized for a lifetime of significant contributions during ceremonies at the prestigious Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. Fuentes, 82, was instrumental in developing what became known as the professional, or symphonic, mariachi troupe and led the way in helping mariachi become known internationally as the heartland music of Mexico.

To Cynthia Muñoz, promoter of the annual extravaganza, Fuentes is a pillar: "Maestro Ruben Fuentes is the backbone for what mariachi music is known for today. His contributions to the mariachi music industry have impacted music in gen-

eral around the world."

Meanwhile, Mariachi Vargas is touring behind a brand new CD, "Para Nuestros Amigos," a 17-track album.

Highlights include "Las Isabeles," "Mi Linda Chaparrita," and "Hermoso Cariño." The CD also includes "Popurri José Alfredo Jiménez" which includes the songs "Tu Recuerdo y Yo," "Yo," "Las Ciudades," "Cuando Sale la Luna," "Cuando Vivas Conmigo," "Declárate Inocente," "Que se Me Acabe la Vida," and "Canta Canta."

Mariachi Vargas also reworks Ramón Ayala's norteño nugget "Un Rinconcito en el Cielo" into a lively ranchera.

Mariachi Vargas vocalists and violinists Steeven Sandoval and Fernandez Martínez also make their arrangement debut with the songs, respectively, "Mi Linda Chaparrita" and "Después de Tanto Tiempo."

Dec. 2's concert caps a weeklong schedule of activities that kicked last week with a mariachi Mass at San José Mission. A series of community and in-school mariachi presentations also were held.

Normally a three-day affair with workshops, seminars and the gala concert, the festival was expanded to eight days for the second year in a row. The expansion is modeled after the annual Mariachi Encuentro Internacional in Guadalajara, Mexico, where mariachi groups are encouraged to perform in public venues.

The growth reflects mariachi music's growing popularity in the United States. Since the 1990s, there has been an increase in mariachi classes in high schools and universities.

Major mariachi conferences have been on the rise, particularly in the Southwest. news@conexionsa.com