

Stage Presence: 9-year-old to sing in prestigious san Antonio mariachi competition

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Jared Janes

Third-grader Bianca Cortez's first musical performance came from behind a stage curtain.

The 4-year-old was too shy to sing in front of a crowd, so her grandmother helped break Bianca's stage fright by putting her behind a curtain.

"It was a stepping stone to help her break out of her shell," said Bianca's father, Eduardo Cortez. "It's not a problem for her anymore."

Bianca, now 9, is one of a dozen elementary and middle school students who will sing in the finals of a prestigious mariachi vocal competition this weekend in San Antonio.

The winner of the competition will open later that night in front of thousands at a concert by the world-renowned Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán.

Bianca's grandmother, Esmeralda Cortez, a music teacher, has been Bianca's vocal instructor for the past five years, but she said her granddaughter practices singing even when she has no scheduled lessons.

"She has talent but it wasn't only talent," Esmeralda Cortez said. "She devotes herself to practice."

For the competition, Bianca, a student at Canterbury Elementary School and the daughter of Blanca Cortez, said she will sing Linda Ronstadt's "La Cigarra."

Bianca said the song is one of her favorites to sing, but she also enjoys Broadway songs like "Tomorrow" and Christmas songs. "I play the piano, but I like singing the most," Bianca said. "I'll just be singing at the competition. I'm very excited."

Eduardo Cortez said he is often amazed at the singing prowess his daughter has developed in five years.

"When she sings, it's hard to believe this is coming out of a 9-year-old," he said. "It's very moving when she sings."

Jared Janes covers Hidalgo County government and general assignments for The Monitor. He can be reached at (956) 683-4424.



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Third-grader Bianca Cortez, right, one of 12 finalists in a Mariachi Vocal Competition, sits with her vocal instructor and grandmother, Esmeralda Cortez. Listen to Bianca's song at www.themonitor.com.

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