

Mariachi fest wraps up with more competitions, concert

BY HECTOR SALDAÑA

hsaldana@express-news.net

As the eight-day Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza comes to a close this weekend, there are still plenty of performers and events to discover — and rediscover.

The 15th annual mariachi festival — which includes workshops, competitions and concerts — culminates with the Mariachi Vargas Concert at Municipal Auditorium on Saturday. Showtime is 7:30 p.m.

Mariachi expert Patricia Greathouse, author of "Mariachi," considers the elite Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán to be the greatest of them all.

"They are one of a kind," Greathouse said. But there's more to it.

Produced by Cynthia Muñoz, the annual concert is

famous for its festive costuming, dancing and special guest stars, including student competition winners.

Saturday's concert also marks the reunion of Tejano singer Ricardo Castillon of La Diferenzia and mariachi singer Nydia Rojas to perform the duet "Hay Unos Ojos."

It has been 10 years since they sang the number at the festival.

"It's going to be wonderful. It brings back so many wonderful memories," said Castillon, who is back after a long hiatus with a new album, "Siempre En Mi Mente." He covers his favorite artists.

Besides "Hay Unos Ojos," Castillon plans to sing the new single, "La Triadora."

Castillon walked away from the Grammy-winning La Diferenzia in 2001 to con-



COURTESY PHOTO

The eight-day Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza will end with a concert Saturday by the Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán at Municipal Auditorium.

centrate on his family. His return to Tejano is welcome news.

"This is something that I've been contemplating for a long time," he said. "All these songs are songs by

tremendous artists. I think this reuniting with Nydia is going to open up a lot of doors."

He praised the educational aspect of the festival that attracts more than 1,000 stu-

Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza

■ **WHAT:** Concert by Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán that wraps up the eight-day festival

■ **WHEN:** 7:30 p.m. Saturday

■ **WHERE:** Municipal Auditorium, 100 Auditorium Circle

■ **TICKETS:** \$20-\$200 at Ticketmaster outlets

dent and professional musicians and some 10,000 fans.

"It's very important," Castillon said. "It's something that we carry in our hearts."

Today's morning mariachi group competition at Municipal Auditorium marks the return of Mariachi Las Veritas de Harvard, featuring twin brothers Yen-

ing and Yelun Qin. The classical violinists were born in China but grew up in Boston.

"I got into it my freshman year," said Yening Qin, 21. "I just fell in love with the music immediately."

Qin said there is no counterpart to mariachi in China.

"It's very different," said the Harvard student. "What appeals to me the most is the passion and the energy."

On the extreme end of the cute and adorable spectrum is 6-year-old Angelica Vargas, a bubbly voiced singer among 41 students competing in Saturday's vocal competition. She'll be singing "El Herradero," with a Disney-esque twist.

A mariachi brunch and post-mortem takes place at Estela's Mexican Restaurant from 1-3 p.m. Sunday