

CONEXIÓN

14 la onda

November 29, 2007 • CONEXIÓN



COURTESY PHOTOS

ABOVE: (front row, from left): Sonali Palchaudhuri, Lauren Yapp, Maryam Janani and Beatrice Viramontes. (Back row, from left): Adam Kundishora, Nathaniel Naddaff-Hafrey, David Garcia, Kevin McMullen and Yening Qin. Mariachi Veritas de Harvard is the mariachi group at Harvard University and will compete in the 13th annual Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza on Nov. 30 at the Municipal Auditorium.

'The more I understand the lyrics, the more I understand the meaning of some of the songs.'

MARYAM JANANI



Cultural identity

MELISSA RENTERÍA
Conexión

Maryam Janani credits mariachi music with helping her get in touch with her Mexican roots.

It took enrolling at Harvard University for the 20-year-old Janani, who was born and raised in San Antonio, to learn the music of her ancestors.

"Growing up in San Antonio, I took the Mexican culture for granted," said Janani, who is of Mexican and Iranian heritage. "The culture was around me in the city, but not so much in my home."

Janani is a violinist in Mariachi Veritas de Harvard, the student mariachi group at Harvard University, where the 2005 Madison High School graduate is a junior majoring in neurobiology and minoring in health policy and Spanish.

She and her fellow mariachi musicians will travel to San Antonio this month to compete in Ford Motor Company's 13th Annual Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza, at 5 p.m., Friday, Nov. 30 at Municipal Auditorium, where the winner of the college/university group competition has a chance to open for the world-renowned mariachis on Dec. 1.

"I love San Antonio. I'm really excited to play there," Janani said, adding it will be especially meaningful to perform in front of her family.

Janani, who has a background in classical music, came across mariachi music by accident after a classmate asked her to attend a meeting of the student mariachi group. Intrigued by the music and impressed with the group's racial and ethnic diversity, Janani auditioned for the group her first semester at Harvard and was asked to join.

"I was trying to find my cultural identity," Janani said, explaining her interest in joining the group she describes as "probably the most diverse mariachi group out there."

Harvard's mariachi group has Asian, black and white members. "There are only two Mexicans in the group, and then there's me," Janani said.

Some students on campus "don't always know what mariachi music is," Janani said, and that gives the student musician a chance to explain a part of her heritage.

"I've really learned a lot about the music, and the passion of some of the songs," she said. "The more I understand the lyrics, the more I understand the meaning of some of the songs."

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