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Mariachi music, students show some magic

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Ramiro Burr
Express-News

For a few hours Saturday night, the Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza seemed to have it all from songs that stoked memories to music that lifted the spirits.

The music all came together at the Municipal Auditorium to provide a sonic experience that was beautiful, exuberant, poignant and provocative.

The renown masters of the genre, Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, provided the musical fireworks on Saturday to cap a solid week of performances, workshops, competition and more.

But especially impressive were the student mariachi troupes that impressed with their musical technique and love of the music.

One highlight was Mariachi Nueva Generación from Texas State University in San Marcos who won first place in college/ university category. The group performed "Del Altar a la Tumba," and "Popurrí Miguel Aceves Mejía," in tribute to the legendary singer who passed away Nov. 6 in Mexico City.

Known as Mexico's "Golden Falsetto," Mejía was a solid pioneer on par with the greats like Pedro Infante, Jorge Negrete and Javier Solis.

Soprano singer Christina Ortega, a Mexico City native who has resided in San Antonio for more than a decade, said Mejía was memorable for his voice:

"He had power and great control, and he could sing those high notes that few could sing," she said. "He was simply marvelous."

Express-News Multimedia
Video: At the Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza
CONTEST WINNERS
In vocal competition:
2006 Best Mariachi Vocalist in the U.S.: Fabiola Rivera, a high school student at Vidal M. Treviño School of Fine Arts in Laredo.
Elementary/Middle School
1st: Karenn Lazo, 13, student from Roma Middle School in Roma.
2nd: Miranda Vigil, 12, from Stinson Middle School in Helotes.
3rd: Enny Velasquez, 12, from Patti Welder Magnet Middle School in Victoria
High School

The students' zeal in performing Saturday was plainly obvious as the auditorium crowd repeatedly cheered them on.

"We bring the students here because here they get to meet the masters, learn technique and just absorb the experience," said Adrian Padilla, director of the Mariachi Halcon from Zapata High School in Zapata, who won their 1st place in the high school division for the second year in a row.

For 12 years, Ford Motor Company has sponsored the event, considered the biggest of its kind in the Southwest and the only one juried by members of Mariachi Vargas.

"Our sponsorship demonstrates good corporate stewardship," said Bill Sims Jr., Ford Customer Relations Manager. "This is like the superbowl of (student) mariachis. It keeps getting better every year."

For more than a decade mariachi instruction has increased in high schools and universities across the South west.

"We now have new programs at St. Mary's University and St. Edward's

1st: (a tie) Selina Elizondo from Madison High School in San Antonio. (tie) Fabiola Rivera from Laredo's Vidal M. Treviño School of Fine Arts.

2nd: Esteban Velasquez, 17, from Odessa High School in Odessa.

3rd: Peggy Wells, 16, from Taft High School in San Antonio.

College/University

1st: Stacey Mazuca of San Antonio's Palo Alto College

2nd: Cesar Galaviz from Texas A & M-Kingsville.

3rd: Marisa Christina Salinas from Texas A & M Kingsville.

In group competition: Elementary/Middle School

1st place: From Houston, Patrick Henry Middle School's Mariachi Los Patriotas.

2nd place: From Zapata, Zapata Middle School's Mariachi Juvenil Halcon.

3rd place: From Kyle, and competing for the first time, Mariachi del Campo from Wallace Middle School.

High School

1st place: Zapata High School's Mariachi Halcon from Zapata.

2nd place: From El Paso, Socorro High School's Mariachi Los Gavilanes.

3rd place: San Antonio's Jefferson High School Mariachi Los Potrillo

College/University Category

1st place: Texas State University-San Marcos, Mariachi Nueva Generacion

2nd place: From San Antonio, Our Lady of the Lake University's Mariachi OLLU.

3rd place: From Brownsville, University of Texas at Brownsville, Mariachi Luna Azteca

University in Austin," said festival promoter Cynthia Munoz. "What makes this year special is that for the first time, officials in Guadalajara have invited the winners in this year's competition to perform at the annual Mariachi Encuentro Internacional in Guadalajara.

"This is so important because the students get a chance to see the roots of this music in the city (Jalisco) known as the capital of mariachi music."

Also new this year is TV Azteca America's (Ch. 31) broad-casting a 30-minute recap of the Saturday concert on Dec. 10.

The late Geraldine Orta Charles was this year's recipient of the Ruben Fuentes Award for the Mariachi Music Hall of Fame. Orta Charles was the daughter of Josephine and Jesse Orta, who were both honored in the past. Orta Charles spent most of her life carrying on the traditions of her parents in teaching and playing mariachi music through the church.

The festival wraps up at 11:30 a.m. today with a Mariachi Mass at Sacred Heart Chapel at Our Lady of the Lake University.

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