

Young performers vie to open for Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlan

By Natalia Montemayor

It is undeniable that every aspiring performer and musician dreams of performing alongside or opening for their idols in concert, whether it is AC/DC, Run DMC or Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlan.

"I think I would die from shock," exclaimed Andrea Neira, a vocalist in the Thomas Jefferson High School mariachi group, Mariachi Los Potrillos. "I really don't know what I would do, except I probably wouldn't speak for a while."

Neira was one of three mariachi vocalists who performed at the St. Anthony Hotel on Monday to kick off the 14th Annual Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza, a seven-day mariachi music festival that features over a dozen mariachi-related events including a vocal and group competition where a variety of talents will compete for

the chance to open for the Mexico City-based Mariachi Vargas when they perform Saturday at the Municipal Auditorium.

The music festival, which celebrates the Hispanic culture while promoting higher education among Hispanic youth, is expected to attract over 20,000 people.

Vocalists Nizhoni Begay, 10, of St. John Berchman's Catholic School and Angela Mendoza, 13, of Edgar Allen Poe Middle School, also displayed their talents and will be competing in hopes of opening for the mariachi super-group.

The dedication and commitment put forth by all the participants illustrates how mariachi isn't just a style of music, but a way of life.

"I've been doing this since I was in the sixth grade, and since then it has become a part of me and I can't leave it," Neira said.

Currently in her senior year,

Neira explained that during the first week of school the instructor for the Jefferson mariachi performing group resigned, leaving over 20 students to operate the

group on their own.

"After school we get help from Mr. Juan Ledesma, the mariachi teacher at Longfellow [Middle school], but for the most part



Andrea Neira belts out a serenade during the kick-off ceremony for the Mariachi Extravaganza music festival, which ends on Saturday, Dec. 6. (Photo, Natalia Montemayor)

we run everything on our own," Neira said.

Preceding Saturday's big concert will be Noche de Cultura, a concert with an intimate style setting featuring Andres Gonzalez and Steven Sandoval of the world-renowned Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlan.

Fans will have the rare opportunity to hear their favorite songs while hearing personal accounts directly from the musicians.

This special concert begins at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 3 at the Instituto Cultural de Mexico (600 Hemisfair Plaza) and will have limited seating.

For a complete listing of the official events for Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza call (210) 225-3353.

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“Dame entendimiento para seguir sus preceptos, pues quiero meditar en tus maravillas” Salmo 119:27